BOOK V.

Standing public Fasts among the Jews.

“For they disfigure their faces that they might seem to men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

“When thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou seem not unto men to fast, but unto the Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly.” Our Lord and Saviour would not teach the manner of doing, much less propose a reward for doing, that which were not both holy and acceptable in God’s sight. The Pharisees weekly bound themselves unto double fasts, neither are they for this reproved. Often fasting which was a virtue in John’s disciples could not in them of itself be a vice, and therefore not the oftness of their fasting but their hypocrisy therein was blamed.

[5.] Of public enjoined fasts upon causes extraordinary the examples in Scripture are so frequent that they need no particular rehearsal. Public extraordinary fastings were sometimes for one only, sometimes for three, sometimes for seven. Touching fasts not appointed for any such extraordinary causes, but either yearly or monthly or weekly observed and kept, first upon the ninth day of that month the tenth whereof was the feast of expiation, they were commanded of God that every soul year by year should afflict itself. Their yearly fasts every fourth month in regard of the city of Jerusalem entered by the enemy, every fifth in memory of the overthrow of their temple, every seventh for the treacherous destruction and death of Godolias the very last stay which they had to lean unto in their greatest misery, every tenth in remembrance of the time when siege began first to be laid against them; all these not commanded of God himself but ordained by a public constitution of their own, the Prophet Zachary expressly toucheth. That St. Jerome

[3.] Albeit therefore concerning Jewish abstinence from certain kinds of meats as being unclean the Apostle doth teach that “the kingdom of heaven is not meat nor drink,” that “food commendeth us not unto God” whether we take it or abstain from it, that if we eat we are not thereby the more acceptable in his sight, nor the less if we eat not; his purpose notwithstanding was far from any intent to derogate from that fasting, which is no such scrupulous abstinence as only refused some kinds of meats and drinks lest they make him unclean that tasteth them, but an abstinence whereby we either interrupt or otherwise abridge the care of our bodily sustenance, to show by this kind of outward exercise the serious intention of our minds fixed on heavenlier and better desires, the earnest hunger and thirst whereof depriveth the body of those usual contentments, which otherwise are not denied unto it.

[4.] These being in nature the first causes that induce fasting, the next thing which followeth to be considered is the ancient practice thereof amongst the Jews. Touching whose private voluntary fasts the precept which our Saviour gave them was. “When ye fast look not sour as hypocrites.

1 [St. Luke xviii. 12.] 3 [St. Matth. ix. 14.] 4 [2 Chron. xx; Jer. xxxvi; Ezra viii; 1 Sam. vii.]
5 [Judges xx. 26.] 6 [2 Mac. xiii. 12.] 7 [1 Sam. xxx. 13; 1 Chron. x. 12.]
8 [Levit. xxiii. xvi. Philo (in vit. Mosis,) de hujus festi jejunio ita loquitur: Οὐ γενοίον, οὐ γενόμεν έξεστι προστενγκασθαι, καθαρεὶς δὲν διαι-
νολαις, μηδὲν ενοχλητωτος μηδὲ εμ-
πολείς τωσοτοιο πάθως, οποια
φιλει συμβάς έν πληρωμα πολεμο-
τωμα, διασφαλικα τον τατον τοι
παρτον αίσθει ευχαί. δι’ ένα δει
μεν τολμήτων εμμενα διαφορο-
κυπριαν την έν απόθεσι ανθρώπι
νοικατος. p. 447. [Paris, 1552.]
9 Zach. viii. 19.
10 [In loc. Zach. “Cogimur ad
Hebraos recurrere, et scientiae
How the Jews observed their Fasts.

BOOK V. Ch. xxxi. 6.

following the tradition of the Hebrews doth make the first a
memorial of the breaking of those two tables when Moyaies
descended from Mount Sina; the second a memorial as well of
God's indignation condemning them to forty years' travel
in the desert, as of his wrath in permitting Chaldeans
to waste, burn and destroy their city; the last a memorial of
heavy tidings brought out of Jewry to Ezechiel and the
rest which lived as captives in foreign parts, the difference
is not of any moment, considering that each of the sorrow
is naturally evermore a register of all such grievous events
as have happened either in or near about the same time. To
these I might add sundry other fasts above twenty in number
ordained amongst them by like occasions and observed in
like manner, besides their weekly abstinence Mondays and
Thursdays throughout the whole year.

[6.] When men fasted it was not always after one and the
same sort, but either by depriving themselves wholly of all
food during the time that their fasts continued, or by abating
both the quantity and kind of diet. We have of the one a
plain example in the Ninevites' fasting, and as plain a
precedent for the other in the Prophet Daniel, "I was,"
saith he, "in heaviness for three weeks of days; I ate no
pleasant bread, neither tasted flesh nor wine." Their
Tables when they gave themselves to fasting had not that
usual furniture of such dishes as do cherish blood with blood,
but for food they had bread, for suppance salt, and for sauce
herbs. Whereunto the Apostle may be thought to allude
saying, "One believeth he may eat all things, another
which is weak," (and maketh a conscience of keeping those
customs which the Jews observe) "eateth herbs." This
austere repast they took in the evening after abstinence the
whole day. For to forfeit a noon's meal and then to recom-
 pense themselves at night was not their use. Nor did they
ever accustom themselves on Sabbaths or festival days to
fast.

[7.] And yet it may be a question whether in some sort
they did not always fast the Sabbath. Their fastings were
partly in token of penitency, humiliation, grief and sorrow,
partly in sign of devotion and reverence towards God. Which
second consideration (I dare not peremptorily and boldly
affirm any thing) might induce to abstain till noon, as their
manner was on fasting days to do till night. May it not
very well be thought that hereunto the sacred Scripture
doth give some secret kind of testimony? Josephus is plain,
that the sixth hour (the day they divided into twelve) was wone on the Sabbath always to call them home unto meat. Neither is it improbable but that the heathens did therefore so often upbraid them with fasting on that day. Besides they which found so great fault with our Lord's discipies, for rubbing a few ears of corn in their hands on the Sabbath day, are not unlikely to have minded also at the same mark. For neither was the bodily pain so great that it should offend them in that respect, and the very manner of defence which our Saviour there useth is more direct and literal to justify the breach of the Jewish custom in fasting than in working at that time. Finally the Apostles afterwards themselves when God first gave them the gift of tongues, whereas some in disdain and spite termed grace drunkenness, it being then the day of Pentecost and but only a fourth part of the day spent, they use this as an argument against the other cavil. These men, saith Peter, "are not drunk as you suppose, "since as yet the third hour of the day is not pastover."

[8] Howbeit leaving this in suspense as a thing not altogether certainly known, and to come from Jews to Christians, we find that of private voluntary fastings the Apostle St. Paul speaketh more than once. And (saith Tertullian)6 they are sometime commanded throughout the Church "ex aliqua "sollicitudinis ecclesiasticæ causa," the care and fear of the Church so requiring. It doth not appear that the Apostles ordained any set and certain days to be generally kept of all. Notwithstanding, asasmuch as Christ had foresignified that when himself should be taken from them his absence would soon make them apt to fast, it seemeth that even as the first festival day appointed to be kept of the Church was the day of our Lord's return from the dead, so the first sorrowful and mourning day was that which we now observe in memory of his departure out of this world. And because there could be no abatement of grief, till they saw him raised whose death was the occasion of their heaviness, therefore the day he lay in the sepulchre hath been also kept and observed as a weeping day. The custom of fasting these two days before Easter is undoubtedly most ancient, insomuch that Ignatius not thinking him a Catholic Christian man which did not abhor and (as the state of the Church was then) avoid fasting on the Jews' Sabbath, doth notwithstanding except for ever that one Sabbath or Saturday which falleth out to be the Easter-eve, as with us it always doth and did sometimes also with them which kept at that time their Easter the fourteenth day of March as the custom of the Jews was. It came afterwards to be an order that even as the day of Christ's resurrection, so the other two in memory of his death and burial were weekly. But this when St. Ambrose lived had not as yet taken place throughout all churches, no not in Milan where himself was bishop. And for that cause he saith that although at Rome he observed the Saturday's fast, because such was then the custom in Rome, nevertheless in his own church at home he did otherwise. The churches

1 Ignat. [i.e. a writer in his name.] Ep. ad Phil. v. 13.
2 [The latter, or Saturday's fast, is supposed by Bingham (Antiq. xxii. 3. § 6.) to have grown out of the Friday's by superposition, i.e. by adding so many hours to the fast, as prolonged it into the following day. See Dr. Routh's note on a fragment of St. Victorinus, Reliq. Sacr. iii. 246. Bingham, ubi supr.]
3 says it was confined to the Western Church, and quotes no earlier authority than the 36th canon of the council of Elberius, A.D. 355. "Fiat "cuius . . . ut omni Sabbati die jejunium superpositionem celebrarem."
4 S. Aug. Ep. 36. oliv. 86. c. 32. t. ii. p. 81. "Quoniam non inveni "mus, ut supra commemoravi, in "evangelicos et apostolisctis literis, "quae ad Novi Testamenti revela- "tionem proprie pertinent, certis "diebus aliquibus evidenter pra- "ceptionem observanda esse jejunis, "et id duo quoque ista sicut alii "plurimus, quis enumere difficile "est, inventur in veste illius filiis "regis, hoc est varieta- "ticet, indicabo tibi quid mihi "respondetur erenandus Ambro- "sius, a quo baptizatus sum, Me- "diofanensis. Nimirum m."
5 in eadem civilitate mater mea mea "cum esset, et nobis adhuc cate- "chumenis parum ista curantibus, "illa-sollicitudinem gereret utrum "secondum morum nostrae eirenae- "sibi esset sabbato jejunandum, an "ecclesiae Mediofanensis more pra- "nandum; ut hac eam cunctatione "liberarem, interrogavi hoc supra- "dictum hominem Dei. At ille, "quid possum, inquit, 'hic do- "cere, amplius quam ipsa facio?' "Ubi ego putavem nihil eum ista "responsione praceipisse, nisi ut "Sabbato prandeumerum; hoc quippe "ipsum facere sciebam: sed illa "secundum auctorem. Quando hie sum- "non jejunum Sabbato; quando "Romae sum, jejunum Sabbato; et "ad, quamunque ecclesiam vene- "ritis, inquit, 'eje meum servatum, "si pati scandalum novuliis aut
which attainment unto any gracious benefit by him bestowed the phrase of antiquity useth to express by the name of merit; but if either St. Augustine or St. Ambrose have taught any wrong opinion, seeing they which reprove them are not altogether free from error, I hope they will think it no error in us so to censure men's smaller faults that their virtues be not thereby generally prejudiced. And if in churches abroad, where we are not subject to power or jurisdiction, discretion should teach us for peace and quietness' sake to frame ourselves to other men's example, is it meet that at home where our freedom is less our boldness should be more? Is it our duty to oppugn, in the churches whereof we are ministers, the rites and customs which in foreign churches piety and modesty did teach us as strangers not to oppugn, but to keep without shew of contradiction or dislike? Why oppose they the name of a minister in this case unto the state of a private man? Doth their order exempt them from obedience to laws? That which their office and place requireth is to show themselves patterns of reverent subjection, not authors and masters of contempt towards ordinances, the strength whereof when they seek to weaken they do but in truth discover to the world their own imbecilities, which a great deal wiserely they might conceal.

[10.] But the practice of the Church of Christ we shall by so much the better both understand and love, if to that which hitherto hath been spoken there be somewhat added for more particular declaration how heretics have partly abused fasts and partly bent themselves against the lawful use thereof in the Church of God. Whereas therefore Ignatius hath said, "if any keep Sundays' or Saturdays' fast ⁸ (one only Saturday in the year excepted) that man is no better than a murderer of Christ," the cause of such his earnestness at that time was the impert of certain heretics, which thought ¹

¹ [S. Amb. Ep. 63. 17. "Qui sunt "hi praeceptores novi, qui meritum "excludant jejuniis?"

² [Ep. 63. 16. "Quae "mob s salus esse potest, nisi jejunio "elenerimus peccata nostra?"

³ [Simon Magus, Manenader, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Cerinus, and the whole body of Gnostics: afterwards Marcion, the Valentinians, and Manes.] Vide Iren. iib. i. cap. 20-25. Epiph. Harres. 21. § 4; 22. § 1; 23. § 1; 24. § 2; 27. § 2; 28. § 1; 41. § 1; 42. § 2. Vide Cano. Apost. 55. [The following canons relate to this subject; they are numbered as in

[417] St. Ambrose and St. Augustine vindicated.
that this world being corruptible could not be made but by a very evil author. And therefore as the Jews did by the festival solemnity of their Sabbath rejoice in the God that created the world as in the author of all goodness, so those heretics in hatred of the Maker of the world sorrowed, wept, and fasted 1 on that day as being the birthday of all evil.

And as Christian men of sound belief did solemnize the Sunday, in joyful memory of Christ's resurrection, so likewise at the selfsame time such heretics as derided his resurrection did the contrary to them which held it, when the one sort rejoiced the other fasted.

Against those heretics which have urged perpetual abstinence from certain meats as being in their very nature unclean, the Church hath still bent herself as an enemy; St. Paul giving charge to take heed of them which under any such opinion should utterly forbid the use of meats or drinks. The Apostles themselves forbade some, as the order taken at Jerusalem declareth. But the cause of their so doing we all know.

[11] Again when Tertullian together with such as were his followers began to Montanize, and pretending to perfect the severity of Christian discipline brought in sundry unaccustomed days of fasting, continued their fasts a great deal longer; and made them more rigorous than the use of the Church had been, the minds of men being somewhat moved at so great and so sudden novelty, the cause was presently inquired into. After notice taken how the Montanists held

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1 [De Jefun. adversus Psychicos, c. 13. "Prescripta consistuit esse " "solennea huic fidei scripturas vel " "traditione majorum; nihilique ob " "servationis amplium adjunctum " "in isto gradu si potestis. Ecce " "et autem, ut tuo arbitrio permittas " "in Godos non dan? plus " "quidem libitum voluntati quam " "divine potentii? Ego me securo " "non Deo liberum memini."']

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