

fane as well as sacred, and the superstitious use of the number has continued all over the world. For instance there is the Arabian Nights tale of the 40 thieves. Popular tradition says that if it rains on St. Swithin's day, July 15, or St. Gervais's day, June 19, it will rain for 40 days thereafter.

In old English law 40 days was the limit of payment of a fine for manslaughter and also the period of sanctuary; the widow was allowed to remain in the husband's house 40 days after his death; a knight could require 40 days' service from his tenant; a stranger had to pay taxes after 40 days' residence, etc., etc.

The term "quarantine" coming from the Latin word for 40, has been adopted to express this oft-recurring period. Thus we "quarantine" people who may have a contagious disease, though the period is not always 40 days, but may be any number of days. This shows that the term 40 is not used as a definite one necessarily.

In the Bible the number is frequently used. For instance Moses was 40 days on the mount; Elijah was fed 40 days by the ravens; the rain of the flood fell for 40 days, and Noah waited another 40 before opening the window of the ark; 40 days was the period of embalming; Nineveh had 40 days to repent; Christ fasted 40 days, and was seen 40 days after his resurrection. The children of Israel wandered 40 years, and this time or multiples of it is given as the length of various reigns and periods.

The ancient physicians also ascribed many strange properties to the number 40. The alchemists looked on 40 days as the charmed period at the end of which the philosopher's stone and elixir of life were to be revealed. The Jews were forbidden by the Mosaic law to give an offender over 40 stripes, and for fear of breaking the law by miscount they always stopped at 39.

People speak of "taking 40 winks" for a nap, not meaning of course any certain number. In several of Shakespeare's plays 40 or 40,000 is used in this loose sense. In "Othello" he says: "The slave had '40,000 lives.'" And Hamlet says that "40,000 brothers" could not have loved Ophelia as he did.

In short an interesting book could be written just about this number 40. But enough has been said here to show that the term was commonly used in an infinite sense, and might mean actually more or less than 40. It was not strange therefore that the Lenten period should have been lengthened and fixed at actually 40 days, seeing that this period was so strongly engraven on the minds of mankind and so revered.

But this spring fast, whether of greater or lesser length, was adapted and maintained primarily as a matter of hygiene. It was a kind of quarantine during which people would, by an enforced low diet, commanded