

SUNDAY.

BY THE EDITOR.

It is not my object in this paper to discuss what is termed "The Sabbath question." I leave all the arguments which have been adduced in so many treatises and tracts to prove its divine origin, whether derived from the Decalogue, from apostolic example, or from any other source, to exercise their legitimate influence.

There are, however, certain undisputed facts connected with this very remarkable day which force themselves on our notice.

It cannot, for example, be denied that one day in seven is more or less marked throughout universal Christendom by rest from bodily labour, and by social worship. We who are alive did not certainly originate this day, with its peculiar customs, but found it among the other days of the week when capable of distinguishing one day from another. Our Christian ancestors did the same during the last eighteen centuries, back to the glorious morning when Christ rose from the dead. It is equally certain, moreover, that the Church of God, from the days of Moses until the coming of Christ, had a similar custom of keeping one day in seven holy; for these words were "written by the finger of God," and were embodied in the institution of the Sabbath: "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it."

Considering these undisputed facts, the question naturally arises, Whether there is any valid reason for our now abrogating such a day as this which has floated down on the stream of the Church along so many teeming centuries? Or, to put our question in another form, Whether this institution is not so manifestly adapted in its spirit to meet the wants of man's whole being, as to commend itself to conscience in the sight of God as a most precious boon to be received with thanksgiving and preserved with care?

Let me briefly notice some of those adaptations of the Sabbath to our wants as men.

The Christian Sabbath, as a day of rest from bodily labour, is suited to meet the wants of man's *physical* being. This fact of rest from labour upon one day of the week is a very remark-

able one, especially in an industrious, busy, money-making, commercial country, where "time is gold." Some invisible power, then, lays an arrest upon busy traffic. The noisy Exchange is silent; the rich warehouses are shut; the crowded mart is quiet as a churchyard; the wharfs along the harbour are deserted; and something has more or less changed the whole aspect of the active world. I once lived in an elevated part of Glasgow overlooking the Clyde, and was much impressed by the contrast presented between the early morn of working days and the day of sacred rest. Shortly before the hour of labour struck, everything was still as during the silent watches of the night, except the birds whose chirping was heard from the stunted shrubberies, as they gathered their morning meal. But no sooner did six o'clock strike, than suddenly, as if so many batteries were opened on a fortress, or a great army began to move, the swinging hammers were heard thundering out of the dusky atmosphere that hovered over the river, and one knew that boilers and steam-engines were being fashioned for the proud navy of Britain, or for the merchant navy of the world. A roar of carts and waggons poured along the streets, and the city, like a waking giant, began to stir for another day of toil. But on Sunday morning, the birds sang on, and the silence was unbroken until the bells rang for worship, and then the streets were crowded by thousands of men and women in their best attire proceeding to the house of God; and when worship began in God's temple of the church within, all was silent as before in the world without, while the sun's rays were no longer, as on other days, clouded by dark smoke hanging like a funeral pall over the city, but poured down their uninterrupted glory on street and square, as on rural field and hamlet, and all looked pure and glad some on the day of the Lord!

If, according to the judgment of God, this day was needed for the Jew when on his wilderness journey, and while pasturing his flocks amidst the valleys of Sinai, or when settled in the rich land of Palestine, surely it is at least as equally required by the toiling and over-wrought millions in our busy cities and towns, by the labourer in our fields, and by the mechanic in London, Glasgow, or Birmingham, as much as by those who once worked in Jericho, Nazareth, or Jerusalem!* God who cares for every living thing, so considered the necessities of

*Some time ago I had occasion to make inquiries in Paris as to the practical working of Co-operative Societies. I found their members highly intelligent, and both morally

the beasts that perish, as that, in the days of Moses, he added this as one of the reasons for appointing the Sabbath, "that thine ox and thine ass may have rest as well as thee." But has He, I ask, changed in his benevolent wishes towards those dumb sharers of our toil, or have their burdens been so much lightened in our day as to make a day of rest for them unnecessary?

It is impossible to estimate the blessed effect produced upon a nation's health and happiness when, on the return of each Sunday, millions are thus set free from toil; when the ledger is closed on the desk; when the hammer rests upon the anvil, and the wheel in the factory; when the mine sends forth its crowds into the light and glory of this new-born day; and when men can rest their wearied frames, or tread the green earth or hoary mountain and breathe the fresh air, and look calmly upon the blue sky overhead, or listen to the sounding stream or beating sea-wave; and when the very dumb cattle partake of the universal blessing, though as unconscious as many of their masters of the loving Hand which has bestowed it. On this day that Saviour, who was himself so often wearied, who as a man knows what is in man, and who sympathizeth with his every want, seems yet to address all his brethren with the gracious invitation, "Come here, and rest a while."

The Christian Sabbath is adapted to man's *social wants*. This is seen more especially in the case of those who are compelled to labour in the sweat of their brow during the other six days of the week. The want of social intercourse among the members of a working man's family is a great trial, and entails upon them greater loss of good and happiness than is generally thought of. The early morning (for many months in the year long before break of day) summons each to his or her scene of toil, and scatters them in different directions. One goes to the field, another to the factory;

and socially far superior to anything I had expected to find among the working classes in that great capital. Their testimony, which came out incidentally in conversation, regarding labour upon Sunday, is worth recording. It was to the following effect: "We used to work on Sunday, but we found it too much for our strength, and that we could produce the same results, in the long-run, by abstaining from work, or at all events doing very little on the first day of the week." These men, let me add, were professed Deists. They had rejected Popery, as represented by the priesthood, with contempt, but had as yet found nothing better. They did not possess a Bible; yet they seemed to me, from their whole spirit and character, to be the most likely men of all I had met in France to receive the truth, if rightly presented to them. Their testimony as to the Sunday is of some value, from its being unbiassed by any "religious" system.

one to build as a mason, another to work as a mechanic. In very many cases their meals are taken with them, or taken to them, so that there is no meeting till late at night, and then all are wearied and longing for early rest to prepare for the early start, in order to pursue the same round of incessant toil. It not unfrequently happens that the nature of their employment obliges some of the family to be absent all the week until Saturday evening. Neither are these necessities of labour confined to what are termed the lower classes, but, in a greater or less degree, are rigidly imposed upon men of every trade and profession. The tendency of this state of things is to make the hard-wrought "strangers at their own firesides," and thus weaken the ties between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and hinder the growth of those tender, social affections among near kindred which soften the heart, and are a constant sunshine in our lives. The day of rest is therefore an unspeakable blessing, as re-uniting the scattered members of the household, when the distracting cares of the week are, to some extent, banished, its heavy burdens laid aside, and when, in the peace and quiet of home, its members can cultivate the religion of domestic love. Many other opportunities are also afforded by the Sunday rest for cultivating the social affections. This, for example, is almost the only day when the working man can visit a sick or aged neighbour, who is confined to his home, and to whom the journey from the bed to the large arm-chair beside the fire is fatiguing. The kind personal inquiry; the brotherly intercourse of good-will and sympathy; the news conveyed from the outer world to the invalid about the doings of mutual friends; and often, too, the reading of what may refresh the soul of the pained, the weary, and the solitary one;—all this kind intercourse does good to the hearts of both, and is blessed to him who gives, and to him who receives.

The Christian Sabbath is calculated to meet the wants of man's *intellectual being*. It is a great means of educating all who avail themselves of its peculiar exercises. In Protestant countries especially, a vast amount of instruction is given upon this day from the pulpit to assembled thousands. For, after making full allowance for what is called "bad preaching,"—the "dry," the "dull," the "prosy," the "uninteresting," the "mystical," or the "unintelligible," there still remains an incalculable amount of good preaching on every Lord's day, which cannot but aid in moulding and strengthening the mental, as well as the moral faculties of the hearers. No subject of human study presents such a range and inexhaustible variety of mighty thoughts, fitted to stir our whole being to its lowest depths, and to affect the imagination, the in-

tellect, the affections and conscience, as the revelation of God's will to man. The Bible, with its condensed history of the human race, of nations, of cities, and of the Christian Church, with its truthful biographies of remarkable men and women, its sublime poetry, far-seeing prophecies, pure moral precepts, and glorious doctrines,—above all, with its life and history of Jesus Christ, furnishes the grandest conceivable topics for public instruction; and these, when combined with their practical application to our ever-changing circumstances, give an advantage to the pulpit, above every other existing institution, as a means of educating the masses. One of our greatest gains from the Reformation is this preaching of the Word to the people. To this must be added the reading of useful books at home on Sundays: for we have no hesitation in saying, that more pages are read on this day tending to enlighten the mind, purify the heart, and elevate the spirit of man, than during all the other days of the week put together! This is assuredly the case among the middle and working classes. Sunday is, in truth, almost the only day in which thousands can open a book at all, so engrossed are they with the demands of labour for their daily bread. Neither must we overlook, as a means of educating the people, the amount of teaching given upon this day by parents to their children—the most impressive of all—and by tens of thousands of ministers, missionaries, and Sunday-school teachers, to millions of children from among the poor and the outcast, who are wholly dependent upon this instrumentality for any knowledge they possess of their duties to God or man. To accomplish such ends, it is absolutely necessary that there shall be a day consecrated to rest and worship.

But the Christian Sabbath is most of all loved by the Christian Church as an institution which is peculiarly adapted to meet the *wants of man's spiritual nature*. The physical rest which it secures is to be valued, not for its own sake only, but chiefly as affording the time necessarily required for so cultivating our spirit that we may obtain true rest for our whole being in God. Let us never forget the glorious truth, that man, who was made by God after his own image, is made *for God*, and must be renewed after that image: in the words of the Catechism of the Church of Scotland, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." The Sunday rest thus becomes a witness of the spiritual "rest that remains for the people of God," and an invitation to all on whom the day dawns to enter into this rest *now*. The great fundamental fact of Christianity, our Lord's resurrection from the dead, of which this day is the standing memorial, is to us an

assurance that our living Head has "entered into his rest" in the full enjoyment of God; and also that he, the resurrection and the life, has obtained for us that living Spirit through whom he rose, that he might dwell in us, and so enable us to rise to newness of life, and share with him his own rest in the knowledge and love of our Father and his Father. Would that men heard the sermon which is so eloquently preached by the very silence of every day of the Lord, from this blessed text, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" This holy day is accordingly recognised by the whole Christian Church as one hallowed for social worship. It is very true that the Christian esteems it to be his duty and privilege to worship in private, to enter into his closet, and there to pray to his Father who seeth in secret; but it is also Christ's will that individual Christians should "assemble themselves together" as members of the holy brotherhood of the Christian Church; that in their corporate and social capacity they should worship, and together confess their common faith, express their common joy in knowing God by the singing of psalms and hymns of praise, and pour out their prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for themselves and for all men.

This characteristic feature of the first day of the week is one of the most remarkable in the history of the world. In mountain recesses, in rural hamlets, in hoary cathedrals and humble chapels, in ships far off on the sea, in the distant wilderness settlement, amidst the most civilized nations and amongst the rudest barbarians, wherever the Christian community exists, there, as a rule, is found Christian worship upon this day. From the snows of Labrador in the north to the Coral Islands in the south, from the plains of India in the east, across Africa and Europe, and on to the rocky mountains of the far west, when the sun ushers in this day of the Lord, it ushers in a day of worship for all ranks and conditions of men. On this day tens of thousands of Christian ministers read from the Bible, and offer up prayer in the midst of millions who gather around them, listening to their words or joining in their devotions, while angels bear the mighty hallelujah chorus of praise rising from the earth to the throne of God. It is not too much to say, that without the Sunday, the Church of Christ could not as a visible society exist on earth.

But our thus claiming one day as "holy" does not surely involve the condemnation of the other days of the week as profane. Nor do the peculiar duties which specially become us on Sunday imply that our week-day work is worldly in the sense of its being "irreligious." "Six days shalt thou labour" is as much God's command as that on the seventh we

should rest and worship. He who works as a Christian on Monday, is fulfilling the end of his being as well as when he worships as a Christian on Sunday. Jesus Christ was God's own Son, with whom he was as well pleased in the workshop of Nazareth when engaged at his trade, as in the synagogue of Nazareth when he expounded the Scriptures. But it by no means follows that every man who works six days is necessarily actuated by any sense whatever of his responsibility to God, any more than the animal who pursues its prey to satisfy its own cravings, or those of its young, for food. Nay, more, the tendency of severe and constant daily toil is to engross the thoughts with the transitory only—to withdraw them from the invisible God—to make men forget their high calling as immortal beings—to make them seek their life only "in the abundance of the things which they possess," and to "lay up treasure for themselves" without being "rich toward God." Now, it is just in order to dignify labour, to transform it into real "worship," to accept it as God's will, and to perform it as in his sight; in one word, to bring the spirit of the Sunday into every day of the week, that we feel the immense and paramount importance of not bringing the work of every day of the week into the Sunday. It is in perfect harmony with this view that a holy day of rest seems to have been appointed for man's good before the fall as well as after it. For Adam was made for labour, "to keep the garden and dress it," and hence he too, as a man, required a special day to be set apart for the cultivation of his spiritual being, and for enjoying more undisturbed communion with his God.

After this very brief review of the Christian Sabbath, I am the more emboldened to ask again every man who loves his Father in heaven and his brethren on earth, and who wishes to increase in the love of both through Jesus Christ, what conceivable motive could induce him to wish this day either abrogated, or altered in its spirit and design? Let any one endeavour to realize, if he can, the good which has been accomplished in the sight of God and in the souls of men on this holy day during the last 3000 years—the triumphs which the truth of God has won—the advances which his kingdom has made—the light, strength, comfort, and peace, which the Church has obtained from its holy services, and then say whether it could have originated in any other mind than that of the holy, and loving, and wise God, who knew the wants of man, whom he made to glorify Him, and to enjoy Him for ever! One thing is certain, that the Christian Church will never part with so precious a boon. So long as a church exists on earth, her ministers and members will rest from labour, and assemble for worship on the Christian Sabbath—until the Sabbaths of earth end in the enjoyment of the social, intellectual, and spiritual rest of the Church of the redeemed in glory.

There is much about the Christian Sabbath which I have left unsaid for want of space. But I cannot conclude this article without replying to some questions, and noticing certain observations regarding the Sunday, which have been from time to time addressed to me, both as a minister and as

an editor, by known and unknown correspondents.

"What rules can be laid down for keeping the Sabbath holy?" None, I reply, beyond what are necessarily suggested by good common sense, and honest Christian principle. He who really sympathizes with the good which God designs to bestow on this day, will have no difficulty in obtaining it. But if he dislikes the good he will dislike the day, and then rules would be as useless to him as spectacles to the blind.

"The Lord's day is a weariness to me." Very possibly it is. So also may be the Bible, and prayer, and public worship, and everything which makes a demand upon conscience, and is thought to come to you from the living God, and interfere with your own self-will. But no blame to those heaven-sent privileges, but only to the spirit that does not relish them.

"What advice can you give as to Sunday reading?" One thing is clear, that any rule which applies to reading applies equally to talking. Whatever we may converse about, we may read about. Let both be in harmony with the chief end of the day, which is to make us more Christian men.

"What say you about cabs, railways, travelling, etc.?" I say this: do to others as you would have them do to you. Lay no burdens upon other men to which you would not submit if in like circumstances they were laid upon yourself by them. Love to your neighbour will solve this difficulty in so far as your own personal acts are concerned.

"What restrictions would you lay on children?" None, except those with which they can, as well principled children, sympathize. "When I was a child," said Paul, "I spake as a child, I thought as a child." Do not lay the burdens of men on such shoulders. Let all your teaching tend to make the Sunday helpful to their growth, not as strong men but as children in Christ. Beware of training them to hypocrisy by making them false and unreal, to hatred of religion and of Sunday by moroseness and severity, or to self-indulgence and unprincipled selfishness, by unchecked self-will. Good sense and sympathy will supply the rules.

"I hate a Scotch Sabbath." Only? yet possibly you never saw one, and are but repeating what I must call a stereotyped myth upon this subject. If you did see one, I hardly know what any Christian man can see in it to hate. I have seen the keeping of the Sabbath, east and west, and in most parts of Christendom, and I do not think Scotland has any cause to be ashamed of her Sundays, but to thank God for them. We have, no doubt, weaknesses and evils mingled with our strength and our good. So have "religious people" south, as well as north, of the Tweed. I am free also to confess that when men, for example, needing air and exercise, are condemned for enjoying both on this day; when "not working" is pushed to the extent of not drawing water from a well, nor shaving (!), and the like absurdities; or when we deny ourselves the good of instrumental sacred music, in public and private worship on Sunday, we certainly lay ourselves open to rebuke as being both Judaical and Pharisical. But it would be a miserable reform to fly from such ex-

tremes to the thoughtlessness, the dissipation, the mere amnusement, and utter worldliness of a Continental Sabbath. Nay more, the error, arising from false judgment, which induces a Scotchman of the extreme school, or an Englishman either, to make the Lord's day one of formal dulness and senseless punctilios, is less blameworthy than the error of religious indifference, which induces thousands to make the Sunday a holiday, but not a *holy* day, and to mark it only by idleness and excitement, without any thoughts of even religious worship. But instead of exposing the evils of any country, let Christians in every country strive together by their example to keep the Sabbath in a right spirit, as the day specially designed for

the good of *man*—the *whole* man—soul, spirit, and body.

One word more. The working classes ought, above all, to value and to preserve this blessed day. To them it is especially precious as securing for them the physical rest they so much require ; as helping them to enjoy those social blessings which the necessities of labour tend to deprive them of ; as providing for them information and instruction which the hard work of other days render it almost impossible for them to obtain ; and, above all, as affording them an opportunity of assembling in the House of God, and realizing their position and dignity as children of God, brothers of Jesus Christ, members of His church, and heirs of immortality.