



## HOW TO SPEND SUNDAY.

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**W**HATEVER differences may exist as to the precise reasons for the observance of Sunday, or as to the particular methods which those reasons suggest, there is happily no question about the fact that Sunday is an institution which exercises a most blessed influence on the community. Here at any rate we are all agreed. No proposal would be more universally condemned and even execrated than a proposal to abolish Sunday as an institution, to let every day be alike, with no interruption of business and no pause in the restless struggle of competition. The Secularist who

limits his point of view to the life that now is would be as earnest in his opposition to such a proposal as the Christian who views this life as the preparation for a greater life beyond.

There is, then, a general consensus of opinion that Sunday, viewed simply as a day of rest from ordinary occupation, is a great blessing. Instituted, as it was primarily no doubt, for the good of man's soul, it has proved the greatest boon to his whole nature. Even those who do not realize that they have a soul would be among the first to exclaim, "We cannot do without it." That observance which the religious instinct wrested from the world by long and painful struggles—that rest from the dull grind of competition which nothing less strong than the religious motive would ever have succeeded in securing, is now universally recognized to be a great boon to mankind at large. But when we pass on to consider the question how Sunday is to be observed, we pass from the calm waters of universal assent, or, at any rate, of acquiescence, into a seething ocean of dispute and controversy.

It is to attempt to vindicate the real greatness and honour of Sunday, to vindicate it against mischievous attempts to identify it with the Jewish Sabbath on the one hand and against turning it into a day of nothing but amusement on the other, that we need a strong and enlightened public opinion.

It is of great importance in the formation of such an opinion not only to be quite clear that Sunday is not the Jewish Sabbath, but also to know why it is not. For a man will never get the full blessing out of his enlightened Sunday observance till he has got rid of a false conscience on the subject of the fourth commandment. The Christian is as free from the law of the Jewish Sabbath as he is from the law that prescribed Circumcision. A very little thought will enable us to see that Christian instinct from St. Paul's day has refused to identify Sunday with the Sabbath. For what was the rule of Sabbath observance? A Jew might not do any work, he might not sweep his room, or light his fire, or cook his food. He might not even go outside the camp to gather manna. A man was found collecting sticks for firewood on the Sabbath day and the whole congregation stoned him with stones till he died. Has anything like this ever been advocated as the law of Sunday? Did any one ever keep Sunday in this way? And yet those who maintain that Sunday is only a continuation of the Sabbath, ought, if they are consistent, to keep Sunday in this way. To what obvious absurdities it would lead a moment's reflection will tell us.

And we are strengthened in this conviction by observing Christ's attitude towards the Jewish Sabbath. That attitude is the more remarkable because He was generally

so careful to observe all Jewish practices. But He seems to make an exception in His protest against the rigidity of the Sabbath, "He healed those who were sick on the Sabbath day," when there was apparently no reason why He should not have put it off till the next day. He did not bid those who were healed to rest where they were till to-morrow, as the law would have bidden them, but He said, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." His obvious intention was to show that He was superior to the Jewish Sabbath, that it was made for man, and that its temporary and limited purpose was now fulfilled. And as regards Sunday it is needless to say that He said no word that could imply that there should be any continuation of the Jewish Sabbath under another name and on another day.

The Christian Sunday, then, is not a continuation of the Jewish Sabbath, it rests upon no Divine commandment. God gave His people laws in the olden time that they might be trained to give laws to themselves. He gave commandments which imposed prohibitions that His people might learn to restrain themselves. He claimed a portion of their time. He said, "That portion must be wholly Mine; it must be observed in a special fashion," such as was laid down. This was a necessary step in the training of mankind. One can easily see how without it a commercial nation like the Jews would have sunk into a state of money-making godlessness. They were pulled up sharply by finding every seventh day fenced round with observances which were meant to remind them of their relationship to God.

But the spiritual reality which underlay this observance of the Sabbath is the sanctification of the whole life by the consecration of stated portions of it to the direct worship of God. The Christian Church seized hold of this underlying reality from the first and connected it with that Resurrection Day which was to be a new spiritual departure for mankind. But she never dreamt of transferring to this the old rules and prohibitions which had served their time and done their work. That the first day of the week was a day on which the early Christians met for worship is abundantly clear from the Acts of the Apostles; but there is no hint there of any other kind of observance, nor was any such possible. The shops did their business, and the law courts were open on the first day as well as on any other day, and it was not till the time of Constantine that the religious forces were able to gain Sunday from the exigencies of worldly business. Even then there is no trace anywhere of any attempt to demand for Sunday observance the sanction of the fourth commandment.

Sunday was considered to be God's free gift to His people in this toiling world, a day of resurrection, a day of worship, a day of elevation above earthly things. Such is still the true idea of Sunday. The man who keeps it in the spirit of that idea will want no rules for its observance—he has entered into the spirit of the day. He has got hold of a great living principle, and so long as he is true to the one and the other he may very well be trusted as to their applications.

There is a saying of the great Saint Augustine which seems just to meet the case. "Ama et fac quod vis.—Love and then do what you like." Just so a man who has grasped the true idea of Sunday, who is alive to the great privilege of Sunday, may "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free." He will not want any rules for Sunday observance, he will remember that inasmuch as he is a follower of Christ, he has not rules to keep but a character to imitate. He will maintain his freedom and the only question that he will ask is how Christ would have him observe Sunday, and in the answer to that question, honestly faced, he will find the ideal of his life.

In the light of a great principle like this we may venture on a few details. The general interests of society obviously and clearly demand not only a weekly day of rest for physical reasons (though that is by no means an unimportant consideration), but a day of elevation for moral and spiritual reasons. Every busy man knows the tendency to become absorbed in his week-day occupations; every student knows the danger of being buried in his books; many feel the difficulty of the down-grade tendencies of their ordinary associations. They know that they might sink into being almost mere machines. But if Sunday is to be maintained as a day of elevation it will only be by according to worship its primary place. Worship is the first business of Sunday as work is the first business of week-days. Recreation holds the same place in both, and that is a subordinate one. It is necessary to insist on this however much we may sympathize with the quite reasonable desire for less restricted recreations on Sunday

than are now possible. If the true idea of Sunday as in the first place a day of worship is not preserved, and if schemes for recreation practically monopolize the whole day it is not too much to say that we shall soon lose Sunday altogether. Nothing but the religious motive would have gained it from the grasp of ceaseless competition and nothing but the religious motive will keep it.

It may safely be prophesied that Sunday would never be preserved as an institution merely for physical rest and amusement, especially as the amusement of less than half the social body would necessarily provide the greater portion with necessary work in supplying it. We need a strong protest at the present time from all who value Sunday as a great boon against the increase not of harmless amusements which occasion no work but of recreations which practically deprive railway servants and household servants of any Sunday at all. Granting that a morning given to worship may quite fitly be followed by an afternoon of some healthy out-door amusement in the case of real workers, yet nothing can excuse the selfishness of large parties on Sundays, or of a demand for special trains for excursions on the river. And for the most part it is not the weary brainworker or hard working mechanic who demands these additional opportunities. The 10 a.m. train which runs on Sunday from Paddington to Maidenhead is filled (I am told) by the class of people who spend their week-days in perpetual recreation, who go from race to race, from one party to another, from hanging over Hyde Park railings to idle gossiping in houses. That train is a type of the real peril which is ahead, viz. that Sunday should be retained only as a holiday for those who can afford to take one. That the health, the happiness, the home life of so deserving a body as the railway servants, should be sacrificed to the self indulgence of upper class idlers is a thing which makes one burn with indignation. For charity's sake, for the sake of society as a whole, above all for the sake of those who have such scanty leisure we are bound to abstain from any recreation however lawful and tempting which makes Sunday a hard day for other people. On the other hand much might be done to make Sunday a brighter day for the young. The perpetual "Thou shalt not" which forms too large a part of the dim and hazy instruction on the subject too often given in schools and families is not only wearisome and oppressive, but tends to promote inevitable reactions. The distinction between Sunday games and week-day ones, or Sunday tunes and week-day ones is a relic of that hateful system which cut life into two, and left the thought of God's service out of work and play alike. I should be glad to see a cricket-match on every village green on Sunday afternoons, and the games of every Institute as freely used as on week-days. There can be no better relaxations than our ordinary English games, and it is a thousand pities to proscribe them as unfit for Sundays.

Then again in relation to another much controverted matter, the opening of museums and picture galleries on Sunday afternoons, might we not hope to get rid of the real difficulty of keeping the ordinary attendants at work by enlisting volunteers from the leisured classes to act as guardians, and so to enable thousands of the more intelligent Londoners to visit the National Gallery and the Natural History Museum on Sunday afternoons? Nothing could be more elevating than such opportunities, and to thousands who have little choice on a wet Sunday save the limited one of the public-house or the street-corner, the boon would be an inestimable one. We ought as a matter of charity to guard jealously the opportunities for Sunday rest of the great working classes; and we ought to protest against any selfish employment of Sunday labour. But we are most Christlike when we are most human in our sympathies, and we shall insure a far more intelligent and health-giving use of Sunday by promoting all reasonable recreations in the after part of the day than by looking askance at them or by invoking against them an abrogated commandment of the Jewish law.

Nothing is absolutely wrong in itself on Sunday that is not wrong on week-days, for Sunday does not alter or modify the great laws of right and wrong. But every man who has a real purpose in life, will see things which for himself are wrong on Sunday because they hinder that purpose instead of setting it forward. And every man who has learnt to feel for others will feel that it is noble work for him to sacrifice even some of his liberty in order to stem the tide of that Sunday selfishness which is the only real Sunday desecration. And if this attitude be maintained and extended we shall preserve all that is essential in our English Sunday.