

## Sunday.

BY THE REV. J. HUDSON, M.A., F.R.S.L.

THERE are few more striking changes, even in an age of change, than the attitude which has come over society—classes and masses alike—in the observance, or rather non-observance, of Sunday.

It is in evidence on all sides—in the open shops, the crowded trains, the week-end parties, the Sunday newspaper and its noisy vendors, the thronged river, and the half-empty churches. It is quite certain that a much higher standard of duty and self-denial and discipline with regard to Sunday was held up before a past generation than is put before the present one.

Now, while few would desire to bring back the Puritanical Sunday, such as we may read of in old-fashioned books (was there not a special class of books termed “Sunday books,” so called from their title on their cover rather than their contents?), there is surely some *via media*, some golden mean, between superstitious dulness and the laxity that turns liberty into licence. A man may be a very strict Sabbatarian and a very indifferent Christian. It is possible to idolize, or idolatry, the day without doing much honour to the Deity, and we have probably all known individuals or communities where such a frame of mind has become a fetish. We may some of us remember the anecdote in *Punch*, where an English lady asked a Scotch Elder to whistle for her little dog which had gone trespassing in a wood: “Wumman,” replied the Scot, with virtuous indignation, “is this a day for whustlin?” And it is recorded of Professor Adam Sedgwick, the famous Cambridge geologist, that when on a walk in the Highlands one Sunday morning he passed an interesting rock, and the habit of research that was strong within him induced him to take out his little pocket-hammer and break off a piece for investigation, whereupon an angry Gaelic voice was heard to say, “Màn, do ye no ken that ye’re braakin the Sawbath as well as the stane?”

Now, extremists on either side would do well to remember Tennyson's words, and apply to Sunday what the poet says of freedom, and pray :

"That her fair form may stand and shine,  
Make bright our days and light our dreams,  
Turning to scorn with lips divine  
*The falsehood of extremes.*"

But is it not true that to-day the bugbear of many lives (that seek more and more to throw off all restraints and restrictions) is *being bored*? The fact that a thing is a bore is considered a quite good enough excuse for giving it a wide berth, and the idea of any Sunday observance at all is to many very boring indeed. And hence it has come to pass that to meet this state of things there has arisen a new class of pastors and teachers who, as they would say, from a desire to "become all things to all men," have inaugurated many curious innovations, such as "Pleasant Sunday afternoons" with orchestral bands, discussion of social questions, ethical debates, with just so much of a religious atmosphere thrown round it as to justify them in saying that if people will not seek religion in church, they will bring some religion, at any rate, to the people out of church. Now, no one would question the sincerity of these persons, or their genuine desire to reach a class that are unreached by more orthodox or conventional methods, and yet there is a grave danger of their losing their own and the Church's ideals, of lowering the Sunday to suit the people, instead of uplifting the people to suit the Sunday, of undermining the claims of public worship, and, of course, of minimizing the value of the Sacraments. It is certainly true that "fishers of men" should angle in all pools and use all kinds of bait, as Keble says :

"Cast after cast, by force or guile,  
All waters must be tried."

("Christian Year": *Fifth Sunday  
after Trinity.*)

But there is a serious possibility that these innovators may eventually "sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto

their drag" (Hab. i. 16), or even attempt the impossible feat of "casting out Beelzebub by means of Beelzebub."

Now the subject of Sunday and its observance is such a well-worn (though never worn-out) topic, that it is impossible to say anything very original about it, yet if we go to the very root of the matter, to its very *fons et origo* as it were, we may remind ourselves of the essential characteristics of the day, and take up such a firm position that smaller questions as to whether this or that is lawful or expedient, will be in the nature of details, and will settle themselves very simply in our minds, because we shall have gained an insight into the mind of the Master, Who was Himself called a Sabbath-breaker, and yet gave the impress of the divinest sanctity, and the seal of the most hallowed associations to the Christianized Sabbath—our English Sunday, our first day of the week.

Let us go back to the highest authority, and consider what the Bible tells us of the matter. To begin with, it is incorrect and misleading to speak of the consecration of one day in seven by a cessation from work, as if it were merely or mainly a part of Jewish legalism. *The Sabbath Day was instituted before the Mosaic Law.* The fourth commandment says, "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day," and that very significant *memento* bases its observance, not on the promulgation of a new law, but on God's own mysterious rest after the creation was completed, and recalls to the Jewish minds a principle with which they were already familiarized. For we must not forget that the Sabbath Day's rest—*e.g.*, from gathering the manna (Exod. xvi. 23)—was enforced before Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law. But when *He* came, Whose mission it was "not to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law," and found that the very rigidity of its observance had made it a day of bondage and bereft it of all spiritual value, He set Himself to reinvest it with its true meaning, to show both by His words and deeds that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Many of our Lord's most significant miracles were wrought on the Sabbath Day, as if He wished them to connect His

healing power with that day; and when He bade the healed man, "Take up thy bed and walk," it was a rebuke of the narrow literalism of observance that made it a day of slavery instead of a day of freedom. And so He gradually weaned them from their unprofitable ceremonialism till the greatest miracle of all, His own Resurrection on the first day of the week, invested that day with a special consecration, till it finally superseded the other, and, through the honour which our Lord Himself put upon it, was plainly meant to mark the dawning of a new era. To the disciples of Jesus the last Sabbath of the old dispensation was the day their Master lay in the grave. With His Resurrection on the morrow the "old order" had "changed." We are repeatedly told that our Lord appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week. His presence was especially manifested, and the Holy Spirit subsequently bestowed on that day.

"He draws near and goes with them" (Luke xxiv. 15); "He comes near and stands in the midst" (John xx. 26). And in the Acts of the Apostles we find the first day of the week, which had been thus marked with special honour by Christ Himself, had been set apart by the infant Church for prayer and the breaking of bread (Acts xx. 7; *cf.* 1 Cor. xvi. 2). The "Lord's Day" was established.

And we cannot doubt that this is the meaning of St. John's words in the Apocalypse, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day," and that expression, "the Lord's Day," common to many languages—*Dominica dies*, *Dimanche*—has now become part and parcel of the language of Christendom. If we cease to keep *one* day in *seven* holy, we are out of harmony both with the Patriarchal and the Apostolic custom, and with the whole Catholic Church and its Divine Head.

What, then, are the leading ideas that should shape our conception of Sunday? and make us feel that

"A Sunday well spent brings a week of content."

I think these *three*—(1) Rest, (2) Restoration, (3) Worship.

1. What, then, should our *rest* be? Clearly not indolence, nor laziness, nor frivolous idling, but a pause from secular things

to ponder on sacred ones. Sunday should be emphatically restful and tranquil. "When thou hast shut thy door," said our Lord when speaking of private prayer. Sunday should *shut the door*, as it were, on the roar and rabble of the week-day and the work-day world. It used to be the *quietude* of an English Sunday that impressed the traveller as marking such a contrast with Continental Sundays, say, at Rome or Paris. And, indeed, apart from all spiritual considerations altogether, the idea of a day of rest has a basis of necessity even from the view of physical requirements. Human nature is so constituted as to need rest and repose, and experience has proved that a seventh, or thereabouts, is a fair allotment of time for the invigoration of body, mind, and spirit for the resumption of labour. This is an age of restlessness, of nervous disorders, and neurasthenia. May not this often arise from a neglect of the divinely appointed day of rest, or from turning it into a day of such laborious pleasure as to be more exhausting than labour itself?

We sometimes hear of what are medically called "rest-cures." Would there be any need for them if we had gone to the Good Physician and taken the "cure" He has already provided in the soothing medicine of the Lord's Day? So, too, we hear of "quiet days" spent in retreats, whether beneficially or not may be a matter of opinion, but are they necessary when we have every week, if we will, "a quiet day," sanctified and blessed by God Himself, and consecrated by His own Incarnate Son?

2. When our Lord healed, as He constantly did, on the Sabbath Day, He was really *restoring* God's creation to its pristine health and beauty. He was bringing back that original state of things when God saw everything that He had made, and "behold it was very good." So Sunday should be a day of healing, of *re-creation*, of *restoration*. Even physically, as we have said, Sunday may be a great *healing* force, how much more so spiritually! It may be that the strain and stress of this modern age, which makes every day alike, and leads to the perpetual breakdown of public men, and an increase of insanity,

may *drive* our leaders and legislators to recognize the importance of Sunday, and, it may be, to acknowledge the power of Christianity, which is at once its foundation and coping stone. It is also instructive and interesting to reflect that the manna probably first fell on the first day of the week (Exod. xvi. 21, 22), and so our Sunday, the day specially set apart by the Church for the Holy Eucharist, and consecrated by our Lord in the breaking of bread, is meant to be a day of spiritual nourishment and refreshment, chiefly in the Sacrament of His love, but also in many other subsidiary ways as well.

3. And the foregoing considerations naturally lead up to and converge in the idea of worship. Bishop Welldon used to tell his Harrow boys that the highest aim and object of Sunday was, by the consecration of a part of the life, to raise the whole life a little nearer to God. It is only in the spirit of worship, which is the spirit of humility, that we shall feel the presence of the Lord on the Lord's Day—feel it on the same day and in the same way as Mary Magdalene in the quiet garden, as the other women in the early dawn, as the disciples when the doors were shut—yea, and as all the saints have felt it in every clime and time. For Sunday is the great link which unites all our sadly divided bodies—the Church and the Dissenter, the Roman and the Greek, the East and the West. Sunday is Sunday all the Christian world over. With such an ideal as that faintly sketched, the minor questions of what is right or wrong will settle themselves if considered in the right spirit, for though it may perhaps be true that nothing that is right on week-days can be *absolutely* wrong on Sundays, yet it may be *relatively* wrong in reference to our souls' highest interests, and wrong in reference to our regard for the welfare of others, and our influence upon them. Who, with such an ideal as we have faintly outlined, would ever care to secularize the day with loud and low-toned amusements, to over-work servants, to be selfish or exacting, or to make it hard for others to follow the dictates of their own conscience?

And for those who have no time for recreation in the week, who are hard-worked for six days, the Christian will feel nothing

but sympathy and charity. He will not judge harshly, like the Pharisees of old, nor grudge them their one holiday, which may yet be a holy day, and because holy, happy. Certainly, it is no desecration of the Lord's Day to spend a part of it in contemplating the beauties of Art and Nature; it may be that the appreciation of the holiness of beauty is one step at least towards the appreciation of the beauty of holiness. All the poetry that is in a man should come to life on this day. I knew one who said that he never really grasped the sublimity of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" till he read it one sorrowful Sunday when his own bereavement was still fresh. I am more and more convinced that there are many men to-day who are more readily influenced through their æsthetic side than through their moral side, and though it may sound paradoxical to say it in an age of *rationalism*, I believe it is true that when the heart is touched reason is reluctant to resist.

The historian Josephus in one of his works tells of a stream which failed for six days, leaving its channel dry, but on each seventh day flowed with a clear and copious current. People called it the Sabbatic River. Such in an allegory is Sunday, and the thought finds expression in one of our hymns on Sunday—

"Thou art a cooling fountain  
In life's dry dreary sand."

One word in conclusion. We often hear the cheap and cynical sneer that Sunday is for women, and that only women go to church nowadays. The sight of many congregations might give grounds for the sneer, and yet may give food for thought. For, remember that after the creation of woman came the Sabbath rest, and there may be a deep significance in this, not merely that woman was meant to symbolize peace, to exercise a gentle and soothing influence on the rougher life of man, but because these two final creations of God go very closely together. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. The deterioration of woman, and the desecration of the Sabbath, may be the surest signs of national decadence, and the most terrible symptoms of national decay.