

A Canadian Sunday.

II

BUT granting for the sake of argument that we object to Sunday labour for the sake of money-making or amusements, how far do we object to amusements which do not necessarily entail Sunday labour? Must we cut Sunday off, as it were, from the rest of the week? Must we concentrate our thought on Sunday on sacred things from morning to night? Is it not rational, is it not easier, like the Roman Catholics and Lutherans, to *give* part of the Sunday to God, and to *take* the remainder for ourselves?

The answer largely turns upon the right use of the words "give" and "take." We are not denying ourselves amusements, like a Hindoo torturing himself, for the sake of giving pleasure to God, but we are denying ourselves amusements for the sake of putting our time out at greater interest for our souls and for our bodies. We know that our bodies need a "sufficing arrest" on Sunday, and if we stop to think, we would know that our souls need still more urgently a "sufficing arrest," if not upon Sunday then upon some other day of the week. We take *Sunday*, when we put it into the best use whether that best use be for the urgent need of our body and of our soul, or for the urgent need of the souls and bodies of those around us, for Sunday is a day of great opportunity as certainly as a day of great necessity.

Dean Inge tells us that neither as individuals nor as a nation can we be spiritually great until we learn to avoid frivolous amusement, to resist the secularization of Sunday, until we set ourselves, in place of searching for amusements, to read our Bibles anew, and to seek out the immediate knowledge of God possible for the human soul.

But to take Sunday upon higher grounds. After all, the right spending of Sunday is not so much a question of necessity or opportunity as of the will of God. What are Christ's personal sayings as to Sunday? What is His personal example upon Sunday? First, *as to the sayings of Christ*. If we look carefully we shall see that Christ dealt with the question on broad lines and that He took no half measures in respect to the spirit at any rate, if

not to the letter of Old Testament injunctions as to the Sabbath. It is true He clears away idle, hair-splitting superstitions. He clears away prohibitions as against rubbing grains of corn in the hand on the Sabbath Day. He clears away scruples as against healing and acts of mercy on the same day. But those idle details once swept away Christ restores the Seventh Day and gives it back to us, and proclaims the royal Magna Charta of the Sabbath. "*The Sabbath is made for man,*" that is to say the Sabbath is necessary for the health of his body and for the health of his soul, is necessary for *man as man*, and for workman and master alike. The misuse of the Seventh Day, whether through folly, mistake or ignorance, is injury and loss. The first royal Magna Charta having been proclaimed Christ appends, as it were, the seal of His royal over-lordship in the second proclamation, "*The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.*"

The Seventh Day set free with Christ's own royal seal upon it is never again to be encumbered with superstitious detail. We are to remember that it is created for man, not man for the Sabbath. At the Crucifixion Christ goes one step further. He not only takes the first day of the week in place of the seventh into His own keeping, but He sheds the glory of His resurrection light upon it, thus showing that the value of Sunday lies in its intrinsic worth to us ourselves, to us as human beings physically and spiritually, and that the question as to whether the day of rest is kept on the seventh day or on the first day of the week is comparatively immaterial.

But how did Christ personally deal with the Seventh Day? Did He in action, if not in words, suggest compromise, or did He use the whole day as a great opportunity? You find no hint of compromise either in action or word. In the Synagogue in the morning, or on the road to Emmaus in the evening, Christ dealt with the Sabbath not as a restraint but as a great opportunity. The Seventh Day is even more fully occupied than the week day. He holds happy intercourse with friends, He walks in the fields, heals, teaches, but wherever He is, He is about His Father's business. At the Synagogue, at the Pharisee's feast, men's hearts burn with the consciousness of His Divine presence and teaching. He leads them past the shallow stream of amusement, past the water of which they will thirst again to the deep well-spring of holy joy and self-sacrifice "springing up into everlasting life."

If a Christian Sunday, therefore, is to be a Sunday as Christ spent

it, it must be spent in worship, kindly companionship, kindly acts of service and good will. Such a Sunday brings a quiet calm and joy which recreates in the highest sense of the word, body, soul and spirit for the work of the coming week. Furthermore, in such quiet reading, thought and prayer, there comes a foretaste of the joy hereafter in the more immediate presence of God.

Sunday exists for others as well as for ourselves. We influence others in two ways: First, by our example, that is to say, by our definite acts; and secondly, by the general atmosphere which we create, that is to say, by the unconscious trend of our own personal thought and feeling. In discussing any question, therefore, as to the spending of Sunday, let us ask ourselves how far our neighbours will be the better or the worse for our way of keeping or not keeping it. We have more influence than we suppose. So long as we Canadians as a nation and as individuals keep Sunday apart from other days, as long as we by our conduct set the seal, as it were, of God's holiness and rest upon it, even the most thoughtless in the land are reminded that there *is* a God and that there *are* men who fear God and obey Him.

But what about the men who are at work all the week; why cannot they take Sunday for a day of recreation? We should rather ask, why should they be at work all the week? Why should not employers and employed so regulate their relations with one another and so regulate their business that recreation can be taken out of the six days of the week rather than out of Sunday?

The *London Magazine* of 1825 commenting on Charles Lamb's difficulties over Sunday, tells us that "the noble old Puritans of Cromwell's day could distinguish between a day of religious rest and a day of recreation: and that while they exacted a rigorous abstinence from all amusements . . . upon the Sabbath . . . they humanely gave to the apprentices and poorer sort of people every alternate Thursday for a day of entire sport and recreation. A strain of piety and policy to be commended above the profane mockery of the Stuarts and their book of sports."

If an alternate Thursday as a day of entire sport and recreation is impossible, we can at least stand for a universal Saturday half-holiday, and on that half-holiday and Sunday give ourselves physical and moral fair play whether as individuals or as a nation. We shall have to content ourselves with less money, and take in place of money

greater opportunity for working out our physical, moral and spiritual well-being.

Then as to amusements. At the moment we are not discussing the question of amusements in themselves, but the effect which amusements, however innocent in themselves, may have upon us and upon our children. And first upon ourselves. There are only a limited number of hours on Sunday as on any other day of the week. How far will time taken from those hours and spent upon amusements crowd out what may be called the higher opportunities of life?

Take the question of motoring. The old objection against driving or motoring is gone. In old days we thought twice before using carriages or motors on Sunday because of the work involved in them, but to-day we motor freely on the ground that we are not giving labour to others and are getting fresh air and enjoyment for ourselves. So far good. But what about the loss of the opportunities crowded out of our lives by motoring? To say nothing of the effect of our influence upon others? As to our own personal loss. A young girl may boast of the 180 miles motored on Sunday and of the fresh air and amusement gained, but she omits the loss of time for reflection, omits the loss of influence of Church and home influence. How often during the coming week will she find time for the quiet reading and thought which is the essential privilege of Sunday?

Then as to example. The father of a family who motors Sunday after Sunday, defends himself on the ground of health and enjoyment. He omits the question of the loss of the Church Service for himself and for his wife, the loss of the Sunday School teaching to his children, the example to his servants, and the general lowering of the tone of his home life.

Then as to golf on Sunday. We are not dealing with the question of golf or of the right use of golf, but as to how far our personal and national life are the better or worse for golf on Sunday. In considering the question let us remember that the door once opened to self-indulgence, the particular measure of Sunday golf which we allow ourselves will no more stand still than the particular measure of any other amusement. Therefore, in discussing the question upon its rights, let us take the problem of golf on Sunday as we find it worked out in England and the States, where it has been in practice for several years, instead of discussing it where it is, as it were, still upon

trial in Canada. Wherever Sunday golf comes in the home life of children suffers, for it is not the careless or ungodly men who flock to the golf links, but the men who ten years ago would have been found with their households and children at home.

What is the effect upon the golfer himself? He tells you he plays for the sake of his health. But our soldiers at the Front, as they sacrifice their all for an ideal, reply that the gospel of health no longer holds good as the be all and end all of existence. Moreover, the golfer as he gains his fresh air and exercise, too often finds that a neglected Sunday leads the way to a neglected Bible, and that the neglected Bible leads to a neglected God.

"These hath God married and no man shall part,
Dust on the Bible and drought in the heart."

Then as to the effect upon the caddie. In Canada, thanks to public opinion, and the law, caddies cannot be used, but in the States, where boys are only too cruelly ignorant of the truths of religion and of the great principles of right and wrong, over one hundred thousand caddies are week by week kept away from Sunday School, and if the law is relaxed, Canadian boys who sorely need the teaching, in their turn will be kept away from Sunday School.

Thirdly, as to a man's own children. Any one who has to deal with children to-day knows that home life is the crying need of children in Canada and the States, that is to say, a closer understanding, a closer contact between fathers and children. In the light of the war it is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this contact, just as it is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the rising generation, and above all of the boys who to-morrow will be the coming power of the State.

Lastly, as to the effect of Sunday amusements generally. What right have we to be careless over ourselves? What is the benefit of our work or our ambition or our pleasure on Sunday if our higher self dies from inanition? What is the benefit to our country or to our God if, in the last analysis, with nerve-wrecked body and restless soul we stand in the midst of dollars and popularity, like the ancient mariner on the salt sea, with "throat unslaked," with "heart as dry as dust"? "Aliens, strangers, without hope, and without God in the world."

What right have we to be careless over our children? People who motor on Sunday naturally take their children with them, and

rarely take the trouble when they return home to give the children the Scripture lesson which they missed at Sunday School. It is not as if children could afford to miss that lesson or could afford to be taught to look lightly upon Sunday, for the whole religious question becomes year by year more difficult for boys and girls. They cannot endure being unpopular, they cannot endure being called sticklers and hypocrites and laughed at for being religious and keeping Sunday. Every influence is against them. Novels and plays jibe at long sermons and caricature the strictness of what is called a Scotch Sunday, and the boys and girls who come under their influence are not of an age to understand that the writers are caricaturing, are putting hand touches here and there rather than giving a true picture of facts.

If we were certain that the tendency to Sunday amusement would stop even where it is at the moment in Canada, it would be serious enough. But if we are not careful it will go farther. In the Western States the theatre door stands open and children stream so constantly into the theatres instead of going to the Sunday School that a small boy the other day said, "I'm about fed up with murders and men killing wives, let's skate."

Where the theatre takes the place of the Sunday School, children go to bed on Sunday evening with their minds filled with murder and suggestive love-making rather than the Scripture teaching which should have been theirs. Thomas à Kempis gives as a first secret of going wrong the coming into our minds of the "bare thought of evil." We shall fail if whilst striving at home to give our children the "bare thought of good," we permit Sunday careless companionship to suggest in place of higher things "the bare thought of evil," and leave that "bare thought" to germinate throughout the daily thinking and living of the week.

But apart from the fact that children are year by year becoming more ignorant of their Bibles, apart from the fact that the future of our country turns upon the moral tone of those children, there still remains the all important fact that if we miss the home life of Sunday we miss the great influence for linking parents and children together. Every mother knows the difficulty of keeping "the home fires burning" in the midst of to-day's swift inrush of work and pleasure. It takes all a mother's wisdom and kindness to prevent boys and girls, barely in their teens, from looking upon their homes

as a place to eat and sleep in, and yet home stands out these war days as the one centre of a boy or girl's life. Letter after letter tells how the vision of the home Church, the vision of the home fireside rises before their eyes and, how "far away, they dream of home," and in the thought of home and of God go forward to what too often may be the final moment of their lives.

But Sunday home life stands for the stranger as well as for our own boys and girls. From farthest times God knows and cares for "the heart of the stranger," and draws "the stranger within the gates," that is to say, into the sunshine of Sunday rest and love. What a different city Toronto might be if every home opened its door to young students, a stranger from the country, a boy or girl making his or her first start in life. How little trouble we take to discover a lonely boy, how rarely we think of the sharp transition which such a boy passes through in coming from the home in the country where he is the light of his mother's eyes to a boarding-house where he rarely counts beyond the dollars which he represents. How little we realize his home-sickness as at the end of a busy week's work he wanders through the streets looking wistfully at home gatherings and longing that one door, one fireside might be opened to him. We recognize the pathetic appeal of a lad at the Front who wrote back to his mother to write on scented paper, so that in reading it he and his comrades might get a whiff, as it were, of his mother and of his home. But how rarely we trouble ourselves to give a whiff of hospitality and kindness to the stranger at our gates. We forget that in holding out a hand of welcome to the possibly uninteresting boy, who accepts our hospitality, there stands behind him, though we are unconscious of it, the Form of the Master Himself, "I was a stranger and ye took Me in."

Our Sunday, therefore, is a day of rare opportunity in Church, in school and in home. We are free to choose in the spending of that day the type of service most congenial to us and to carry the Christ love into the hospital, the settlement, the bereaved home, wherever our opportunity or our particular bent may lead us. We may seem to succeed or fail in our work, but in reality we rarely know this side of the grave the issue of that work. A lady who had given up Sunday School teaching as a failure, got a message recently from a dying soldier, "Tell Miss R. I have never forgotten what she told me." Thankful, yet ashamed, she took up her class again.

We cannot tell the far-reaching character of our work. Mrs. Meredith, the old woman who held the first Sunday School for Robert Raikes, found the boys "terrible bad," and the girls "worse," but by dint of rewards (Bibles, combs and shoes) she managed, unknown to herself, to make a success out of an apparent failure. She little thought that in large measure the fate of Sunday Schools the world over was dependent upon her efforts. We cannot be worse fitted for Sunday School teaching than she was, nor can we be called upon to carry out that work under more impossible conditions than "Sooty Alley." Yet in the one case as in the other, Christ takes our effort, our two barley loaves and five small fishes, and breaks and transfuses them with the sunshine of His life-giving power. Our Sundays are unimportant in themselves, but as we place them in Christ's hand, as we devote them to His service, "threaded together on Time's string," we shall find their full purpose; we shall one day see them in their true perspective in the light of the hereafter.

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