

**SUNDAY
OBSERVANCE: ITS
ORIGIN AND MEANING**

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Sunday Observance: Its Origin and Meaning by W. W. Hardwicke

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BY

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PROEM

THERE are few subjects upon which the general public hold such vague and indefinite ideas as the manner of keeping Sunday. Many labour under the superstitious fear that certain acts are sinful on that day which are not so on other days of the week ; and, when asked for a reason, their only answer is, " Because it is Sunday ! " Sunday has thus become a fetish with them. If the clergy are appealed to, they are equally vague and indefinite, no two expressing the same opinion.

Some there are, chiefly those known as " Dissenters," who believe that that portion of the old Mosaic Law relating to Sabbath observance was not abrogated at the advent of the New Dispensation, but was retained, and that the Sabbath ought to be as rigidly observed by Christians as it was by the Jews. One section of this school of thought holds that the first day of the week was substituted for the seventh ; another—though not actually committing itself to the theory of substitution—holds that the Sabbath was intended to be kept on *any* seventh day, though not necessarily on *the* seventh. One or other of these views is also held by a certain section within the Established Church known as the " Evangelical " or " Low Church " party, who very possibly have been assisted in their opinion by the presence in the Book of Common Prayer of the Mosaic Decalogue, by which all members of that Church—

nolens volens—are committed to Sabbath-keeping. Others there are who hold that Sunday is “the Lord’s Day,” on which it is wrong to do anything but attend the services of their Church, and perform other religious functions, such as Bible-reading, attendance at Bible classes, etc.; solemnly promenading the streets, eating meals, and sleeping being the only exceptions recognised. Others, again, there are—Roman Catholics and some of the “High Church” section of the Established Church—who recognise Sunday as a festival—the festival of the Resurrection—and a holiday only. After attendance at Divine service, the rest of the day is treated as a holiday, and given up to recreation and amusement. The Catholic Church requires, as an *ecclesiastical* obligation, attendance at “Mass”—always in the morning—on each Sunday and “Holy Day of Obligation”; while, as regards the Established Church, during the Stuart period a similar obligation, though a *civil* one only, was attached by it to attendance at “morning and evening prayer”—at ten and four o’clock respectively—before recreation was permitted to be participated in. In later years, however, all attendance at church has, with the introduction of freedom and liberty in religion, become voluntary only. The curious anomaly of the Catholic view of Sunday being held by a section of the Established Church, side by side with the Judaic Decalogue in the Prayer Book, will be commented upon in Chapter I.

The object of this booklet will be to examine these different views and opinions carefully. The two first chapters will be devoted to the discussion of the subject from a theological point of view; Chapters III. and IV.

to the same from a purely historical point of view; while the last chapter will be devoted to the sociological aspect of the question. Every argument of any value which can be produced in favour of Sunday observance will be fully considered, and evidence for and against—from the practice of the early Church, the writings of the early Fathers, the opinions of the chief Reformers, historians, and other persons of literary eminence—will be carefully sifted and weighed.

The Biblical quotations are taken from the "Authorised Version" unless otherwise specified, those from the "Revised Version" being noted by the letters "R.V."

I.

THE "CHRISTIAN SABBATH" THEORY — THE CHRISTIAN HEXALOGUE — THE SUBSTITUTION THEORY — THE ONE-DAY - IN - EVERY - SEVEN THEORY—THE PRAYER-BOOK AND THE DECA- LOGUE.

THOUGH great pretence was made by the Puritans under the Stuarts to strict Sabbath observance, no section of Sabbatarians has ever kept, and in our day either keeps or intends to keep, the Sabbath with all the stringency required by the Mosaic Law. Nor could they, if they wished, subject themselves to the penal consequences attached thereto—under which even picking up a stick (Numb. xv. 35) or kindling a fire (Ex. xxxv. 3) was punishable with death—for there is no authority over them with power to execute the extreme penalty of such a drastic Law. Their own authority being themselves, they modify the Law to suit their own convenience, omitting what is inconvenient. Nor do they keep the Sabbath on the day upon which it was ordered to be kept.

The day ordered to be kept as a Sabbath by the Jews was the seventh day—Saturday: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work" (Ex. xx. 10).

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying: Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying: Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep; for it is a *sign between me and you* throughout your generations.....Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore.....everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord; whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a *sign between me and the children of Israel for ever*" (Ex. xxxi. 12-17). The command here is both explicit and peremptory, and the breach of it was met by nothing less than death. It is perfectly clear that there were to be no exceptions in kind as to work, the word *any* allowing of none; also that this command was given to the Jews and *to them only*—those who were brought "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. xx. 2), and who were specially and repeatedly mentioned by name as "the children of Israel." But not only was the observance of the Sabbath confined to the Israelites in the same manner as was the rite of circumcision and the rest of the Law, but it was to be a sign of recognition between their God and them. In the story of the seduction of Dinah by