

**SUNDAY OBSERVANCE:
AN ARGUMENT
AND PLEA FOR THE
OLD ENGLISH SUNDAY**

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Sunday observance: an argument and plea for the old English Sunday by F. Meyrick

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F. MEYRICK

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SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

*AN ARGUMENT AND PLEA FOR THE
OLD ENGLISH SUNDAY*

BY THE REV.

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Formerly Fellow and Tutor of Trinity College, Oxford*

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PREFACE

EVERY day as it passes shows the great and greater need that there is to make a protest in behalf of the old English Sunday before it is too late. Its overthrow is part of a system which is attempting to bring back the mediæval doctrines and practices of the Church of Charlemagne, which originated in the ninth century, in place of the primitive doctrines and practices of the Church of Constantine and the ages before Constantine. The negative or Rationalistic critics, who profess that theirs is the Higher Criticism, have put a new weapon into the hands of the depravers of Sunday as our Christian Sabbath, which Mediævalists have not been slow to adopt.

Mr Gamble, a London clergyman, has lately published a book denying the obligation of the Sabbatical law, and representing Sunday as no more than an ecclesiastical holy day. On this hypothesis the argument from Gen. ii. 3, which declares the Sabbath to have been established at the beginning of the world, and therefore, presumably to be obligatory on all mankind, has to be

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obviated. And this is the way in which it is done. The passage is pronounced a "fiction" which "will not bear examination." But the serious side of this statement is the ground on which it is made, which is that "most modern scholars" (of the Rationalist or Critical School) regard the first chapter of Genesis and three verses and a half of the second chapter (these last containing the Sabbatical law), as belonging to the "Priests' Code," that is, to a supposed compilation made in Babylon about B.C. 500, and therefore "considerably later" than the Decalogue, which they say first appears in a supposed document to which the same critics attach the date of about B.C. 800. We are taught by Mr Gamble that the Sabbath was really instituted by Moses, and that the compilers of the supposed "Priests' Code" forged the words in Gen. ii. 3 in order to give greater prestige to the Sabbath and a wider application of the Sabbatical law than to the people of the Jews. Thus the Rationalist critics and those Mediævalists that deny the divine obligation of the Sabbatical law join hands. The principle on which the argument rests would equally justify us in rejecting as fictions or as unreliable the Deluge, the Covenants with Noah and Abraham, and the greater part of the lives of Ishmael, Isaac, Esau and Jacob, all of which are assigned by the same "modern scholars" to the hypothetical "Priests' Code."

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But perhaps it is not so much Rationalistic arguments as pure downright worldliness and pleasure-seeking that we have to dread, as robbing us of our Sunday. And it is the upper classes, as Archbishop Benson has pointed out, who are here most in fault. Men sprung from the labouring classes know the immense importance that it is to the labourer to preserve his weekly day of rest, and some of them at least are convinced that the only safeguard of that rest is the maintenance of the religious character of the day. The following is the testimony of John Burns, M.P., quoted by Mr Gamble in the work above referred to:—

"In all his experience of movements for the improvement of the condition of the People he knew of none which had been so universally popular and so unanimous as the British protest against the publication of the seven-day paper. The solidarity which the skilled and unskilled workmen of this country had shown on this question had been one of the most remarkable manifestations of modern times, and there was a very simple reason for that. Whenever labour representatives visited England, he found that there was one institution to which they attached the supremest importance, and that was the relative abstinence, one might say, the absolute immunity, of the British working classes from the Sunday labour that was so well known on the

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Continent and in America. He believed that the Sunday rest was physically good, mentally restful, and morally healthful, and that incidentally it had been commercially advantageous to the British people. He believed that the day of rest, commonly called Sunday, was the day which had done more than anything else to buttress and maintain that excellent institution called the Home. Without Sunday the Home would cease to have that advantage which it had previously enjoyed, and no man could say that merely providing one day's rest in seven was as good as the universally accepted Sunday. In a word, the Sunday, as the day of rest, was from nearly every point of view a national treasure and an industrial advantage."

BLICKLING RECTORY,

October 1902.