

THE LAW OF THE SABBATH, IN ITS BEARING
UPON NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

To those who believe in a God, and in a world to come; who believe that there is such a thing as sin, and that it will not go unpunished; it can never be a matter of small moment to know what God requires, what constitutes sin against God, and what will be the punishment of sin.

It is supposed that none will deny that as the aggregation of individuals constitutes nationalities, so the prevalence of any particular disposition or habit of good or evil in a greater part of the individuals composing a body politic, or in the constituted ruling or governing powers, gives a tone or character to that nation which they constitute, or over which they rule and preside: that is, that nations may be godly or ungodly, righteous or wicked; that there may be national sins and national punishments, national goodness and national blessings; or, in the language of Scripture, that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

It will also be conceded by all right thinking minds that, whatever else may constitute sin, If God has given to His rational creatures a law, any violation of that law, which, as it comes from God, must be holy and just and good, will be sin against God.

These things being granted—and the writer is sure that they will find a responsive affirmation in the great heart of the people of this Confederacy—it is proposed to apply these principles to one special form in which sin presents itself; and to show that if, on the one hand, we as a nation walk according to God's law, there is before us a future of great prosperity and great blessing; and if, on the other hand, we violate God's law, there is before us a future of national degradation and fearful retribution.

The question, then, which we are to discuss, is simply this: Is there any law of the Sabbath now binding on the nations and peoples of the earth? and if so, what are its sanctions, its nature, and its penalties?

That God has proclaimed a law concerning the observance of the Sabbath, is evident from many parts of His word; from which it is also clear that this is the substance of that law, viz.: That the seventh part of man's time is to be kept holy to God; that on one day in each week man is to abstain from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days, except for so much of the time as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy. Man is to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

It is not necessary for the purposes of the present argument, to show which one of the seven days of the week is thus to be kept holy to God. Undoubtedly, at the first promulgation of the great sabbatic law, the seventh day was thus set apart by God. "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." It is beyond question, also, that when the law was recast, and repeated to the Jewish nation in the Decalogue, the seventh was the day appointed for this holy resting and worship; and that this continued to be the Sabbath day until the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also a point settled beyond all controversy, that for good and sufficient reasons, into which it is not now necessary to enter, the Christian world has, since the resurrection, kept holy to God the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath.

The change in the day does not affect the principle of the law. That remains in all its original force. One-seventh of man's time is to be kept holy to God, and to be employed in His worship. What we are to show is this: that this principle is revealed to man by his Creator as a rule of moral duty; that it is not a mere police regulation of the Jewish economy, but that it is lifted into the sphere

of man's moral duty and obligation, and is, therefore, universally binding on all responsible creatures; and as such, is unrepealed and irrevocable.

Let it be remembered that a moral obligation is a perpetual obligation, binding on man as long as the constitution of his nature remains unchanged. If, therefore, the law of the Sabbath be of the nature of a moral law, it follows that the obligation to keep the law is for ever binding upon those to whom it is given. That the law of the Sabbath is of such a nature is clear, from the fact that it was given to man at his first creation, when in a state of innocence, before sin had come into the world, and before there were any indications of an atonement for sin. This law was given to man on a moral ground, without reference to a state of innocence more than to any other; therefore it is a moral law, and therefore its obligation is perpetual.

Moreover, this law was placed amongst the other moral precepts in the Decalogue, and is of the same nature or kind with them. It was with them proclaimed by the voice of God in the hearing of all the people; it was twice written by the finger of God upon the tables of stone, and lodged with them in the ark; which privileges were never conferred on any of the precepts of the ceremonial law. Hence it is plain that this law was considered by God to be a moral law, and to have the same binding force with the other moral precepts.

Besides, this law has never been repealed; it is over and over again repeated and referred to, in both the Old and New Testaments, as a law still in force; and it has, from the beginning to the present day, been recognized in some form by all christendom, and a large part of heathendom.

It follows, then, that if any precept of God's law be a moral law, the law of the Sabbath is such; and is, therefore, of perpetual obligation. Let it be remembered, therefore, that whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one, yea, in this one, he is guilty of all.

VOL. XV., NO. I.—4

Again: It might be urged that as, in the nature of things, man's so-called moral-natural constitution indicates that worship is one of the duties which he owes to God, his Creator, so it would also indicate that some special time should be set apart for that worship. But it is sufficient for us that we have the positive declaration of God Himself, setting forth this obligation; placing it on a moral ground, with a positive precept as to what and how much time shall be set apart for His worship. And we have the special and peculiar sanctions and penalties with which He accompanies the promulgation of this law.

The plea, then, which is so often set up, that the Sabbath was a mere Jewish or a mere ceremonial institution, and that therefore its observance is not now binding, will be seen to be utterly nugatory and worthless. The law of the Sabbath is a *moral* law, binding upon all people and nations, always and every where. The principles upon which its obligation is sought to be set aside will, when carried out to their legitimate results, suffice to set aside the precepts against murder, adultery, theft, or any other precept of the moral law, and would leave a lost and fallen race with no regulative principles save their own lusts, their own desires, or their own prejudices. Let this logic, which is so artfully used to excuse the violation of this law, have full sway, and the nations of the earth would be left without a law; the universe without a God.

There remain now to be considered, for a full apprehension of the dignity and magnitude of this subject, the special and peculiar sanctions and penalties with which the promulgation of the law of the Sabbath is accompanied.

First: When we consider the very words of the statute, "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God," we see that God allows us six days of the week for our worldly affairs and employments. What, then, can be more unreasonable and ungrateful than our grudging Him the seventh

part of our time for His more immediate service and worship; especially as He claims this day for His own, and it is our greatest privilege and happiness to have access to Him and communion with Him on it? For, observe what a precious promise God makes to those who faithfully keep it holy: “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”—Isa. 58: 13, 14.

Second: Observe, again, the words of the law in the reason which God gives for its being kept holy by us: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh. day.”

All these God could have completed, in all their beauty and perfection, in a moment, by a word; but He chose by His own example to fix the morality of six days for worldly labor, and of a seventh for holy rest: “Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

God has so ordered it in His providence that the right observance of the Sabbath is not only no hindrance to the proper business of the week, but fits us better for its duties and labors. That this has been the experience of men the world over, admits of proof and illustration the most satisfactory and irrefragable. It stands proclaimed by the clearest and most incontestible evidence, that no man or nation of men ever, in the end, gained by the violation of this law; but they have ever suffered loss and punishment when the Sabbath has been desecrated or disregarded. One of God’s servants has written it for our warning, and let not men forget his words: “In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses on the Sabbath, and

bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”—Neh. 13: 15-18.

Another prophet of God declared unto the people, in words of still more solemn warning: But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palace of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”—Jer. 17: 27.

Not to multiply evidence, of which there is much more, it is plain, from the dealings of God with His ancient people, and from His dealings with the nations of the earth ever since, that He looks with peculiar jealousy upon this law, and follows its violation with fearful retribution. It becomes us, then, as a Confederacy, in the infancy of our republic, already most signally blessed by marvellous interpositions of God in our behalf, to take heed unto ourselves, lest we provoke the righteous anger of our God; and it behoves our rulers that they see to it that “they bring not more wrath upon us by profaning the Sabbath.”

The application of the great principles set forth in this essay is plain and pointed. “The prosperity and success of a nation depend upon the general tone of public sentiment and morals; and these, again, upon the power of true, religion in the hearts of rulers and people.” The nations that forget God, and despise His law, will God forsake and

destroy. But He will maintain the cause of them that remember His commandments to do them.

This question is the more momentous, as involving the destiny of this Confederacy; and all good and true men are called upon to stand up the more boldly and manfully upon the Lord's side: because of the peculiar proneness of men to break the great law of the Sabbath; because the violation of it is so peculiarly ungrateful and inexcusable on our part; and because this is one of the sins which has, in a measure, come down to us by entail from the Federal Government.

It would be an insult to the public intellect, and to the common sense of the people of this Confederacy, to attempt to show that the transaction of ordinary official business, the carrying and delivering of the mails, and the running of railroad trains, upon the Sabbath day, are not works either of necessity or mercy; and are, therefore, violations of this law of God. What shall be said, then, of the weekly violation of both the law of the land and the law of God, in the desecration of the Sabbath by the traffic in city bar-rooms, and the opening of places of amusement, by which the dissolute are encouraged in vice; and by the glaring profanation of the day, seen in many of our country stores, where our negroes are in so many instances fleeced and swindled, or encouraged, directly or indirectly, in speculation and intemperance, to a degree which often throws whole communities into disorder?

The crimes of adultery, murder, and theft, each bears its own train of retributive consequences to the perpetrator; and should they prevail to such an extent as to become national crimes, it is easy to see to what a dreadful state of anarchy and ruin society would be brought. The crime of Sabbath-breaking, likewise, bears with it its own special punishment to him who is guilty of it; a punishment cumulative with the heaviest disasters to the State, when the crime grows to such a magnitude as to become national. Nations suffer the punishment of their sins in this world.

Individuals suffer both in this world and the world to come. Public sentiment is the aggregate of individual opinion. Public morals is the aggregate of individual morality.

Let thoughtful and sober men consider, and take hold of this matter, and endeavor by all lawful means, through the pulpit, the hustings, and the press, so to mould and control public opinion, that we may be saved, as a nation, from the crime of Sabbath-breaking, and thereby saved from God's righteous wrath and indignation.



ARTICLE III.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE CLASSICS.

Homer and Hesiod flourished, probably, near the time of the prophet Elijah. That was about nine hundred years before the Christian era. Sappho is placed by the chronologists three hundred years later. That was about six hundred years before Christ. Then come Anacreon, Æschylus, Pindar, and Herodotus, in the sixth and fifth centuries before our era. Then come Socrates and his successors, and with them the real commencement of the classic epoch, about four hundred years before the birth of Christ. This is just about the date of the prophet Malachi. The voice of prophecy ceased among the Hebrews just as the light of letters began fully to shine among the Greeks. At the time of the birth of Christ, when the light of the New Testament was about to dawn upon all nations, the classical epoch was approaching its sunset. Whatever is

