

GOSPEL SABBATH-KEEPING,

OR

THE REST THAT REMAINS FOR
THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

BY SIR CHARLES BRENTON.

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."—John v. 17.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

R. THEOBALD, 26, PATERNOSTER ROW,

RYDE: BRIDDON.

M.DCCC.LV.

Price One Penny.

LONDON:
G. LITTLEWOOD, PRINTER,
93, LONDON WALL.

GOSPEL SABBATH-KEEPING.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

IN preparing a second edition of a tract which, unhappily, *could* give offence, I feel bound to remove whatever may needlessly offend. This object will be best attained by a few words of careful explanation. And a narrative of facts is often the most intelligible and the most satisfactory way of explaining what is obscure or offensive in doctrine.

In the summer of the year 1839, I went to sojourn for a while at Portsmouth, or in the neighbourhood. As my manner is, I met with friends for worship, communion, and scripture-reading, and soon heard that I had been denounced as a Sabbath-breaker, whether from the pulpit or not I do not now remember. I felt assured then, as I feel assured now, that many real Christians neither knew what the Sabbath was, nor what the Lord's Day was; and I endeavoured to compress within the limits of a short tract what I trusted I had learned from God and His word.

By way of introduction, I prefixed the following words:—

“ This little tract is designed for believers, rather than for the careless world, who might use their

liberty for a cloak of maliciousness. It is put forth with the earnest desire, that whatever may become of the author's sentiments, the reader may be led to search the Scriptures on the subject for himself. No honest mind can refuse compliance with this simple request. There must be a right way of thinking on the subject; and that is the scriptural way. Let the following passages be studied with prayer, as well as any others that bear upon the question:—Rom. xiv. 1—6, Col. ii. 16, 17, Acts xvii. 2, 3, Acts xx. 7, Acts xv. 5, 19—29, 1 Cor. xvi. 2, Gal. iv. 9, 10, 11.

“ If the Spirit and the Word of Jesus lead any to a different conclusion, let the doctrine of this tract, and every other human opinion, be entirely set aside.

“ *Southsea, Sept., 1839.*”

If the theory of the tract should lead some readers to suppose that I have been rightly named *Sabbath-breaker* in *practice*, I hope my accusers may be convinced that I merit that reproach, even according to their own interpretation of it, as little as themselves.

But, first, I would suggest a question, Whether the views of some in reference to Sabbath-keeping, and the right way of showing reverence for the fourth commandment, may not be far less consistent and far less distinct than they themselves imagine.

For instance, do not many who advocate entire, practical subjection to the fourth commandment, spare their servants (and rightly) the trouble of preparing a hot dinner on Sundays, but, *nevertheless*,

allow themselves the luxury of hot tea, coffee, or cocoa for breakfast on Sunday? I do not say this last-named indulgence is sinful, I only say it cannot be reconciled with the strict observance of the fourth commandment. To prevent obscurity and confusion in the discussion of the question, I would first of all carefully exclude the case of *all* invalids; and I would ask how, if it was as unlawful to kindle a fire as it was to gather sticks on the Jewish sabbath (and if the Jewish sabbath is the exact counterpart of the Christian Lord's Day)—how, I ask, can it be lawful for an Englishman in health to have a tea-kettle boiled on the Lord's Day? If you reply, as some probably will, there is a difference of *climate*, then, I say, take the English summer; and, as far as our question is practically concerned, there is an end of the difference of climate. I have known conscientious English people *write* a letter on Saturday, and *put it in the post* on a Sunday. This is far more than I should like to do, I mean as far as Sunday posting of letters is concerned. I cannot but think that many of our English religionists have invented a Sabbath of their own, the mongrel offspring of ignorance of scripture on the one hand, and latter-day expediency on the other—a Sabbath neither to be found in the Old Testament nor in the New, but, to employ the comparison a converted Jew used in reference to his own nation, resembling *the blank leaf between both*.

As to my own practice, on the one hand, I think it quite lawful to travel on Sunday in order to preach or

join in a religious meeting. What else would an evangelical clergyman do with a parish seven miles long? On the other hand, I rarely write or put a letter in on Sunday; nay, I rarely post one on *Saturday*. I *generally*, and save in those cases where some special cause leads me to give up my own rule, spend the Sunday alone (I am a widower without a family), and do not even visit near and Christian relatives, living close by. When not alone, I adopted and found the benefit of the principle of abstaining, not only from secular work, but from all mention of secular affairs on Sunday, all reading of what may called secular books, all forming of plans for journeys in the week, or even *naming* them; I do not say the rule was never broken through, but it was kept strictly enough to be lawfully called my rule, and I found the benefit of keeping it.

GOSPEL SABBATH-KEEPING.

FEW ideas are more prominently presented to us in the revealed Word of God than the familiar ones of working and resting. They are natural and obvious to every mind; and on that very account require the more careful explanation. A mistake on the question of what scriptural rest and scriptural labour are is a serious one indeed. The subject affords a striking illustration of the truth, that God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

However frequently we may find the mention of "rest" in Scripture, in reference to a wide variety of times and persons, it will be convenient, in the present instance, chiefly to enumerate three—

1. Creation rest.
2. The imperfect rest given to the Israelites, by means of Joshua in the land of Canaan.
3. Another rest remaining long after to the people of God.

The most appropriate questions on this subject for us, on whom the ends of the world are come, will readily present themselves in the following form:—

Is there any rest yet attainable by us in the present or following dispensation?

Are we in danger of forfeiting any such rest by unbelief, or any other disqualification?

What bearing have the typical Jewish and

earthly rests upon that which remains for the people of God?

These questions are, to say the least, practical. The Lord give us grace to entertain and answer them aright.

It is quite clear that the first rest is not literally ours. It may be so in type and anticipation, and thus explain the word "my" (Ps. xcv. 11); but we are reminded in the inspired comment on that very passage, that "the works were finished from the foundation of the world." (Heb. iv. 3). It would seem, then, after a very brief survey of the words in Gen. ii. 3, in connection with Psalm xcv. 11, that God worked and rested, and was pleased at a future period to promise certain of the human race, to associate them with Himself in rest, while the corresponding threat was held out to others, that they should not enter into His rest.

If we look merely at the type implied in God's creation rest, independently of the explanation afforded in a later part of scripture, we see the distinction very imperfectly developed between sin and holiness, working and believing, grace and debt, a rest freely given, and a rest earned by dint of laborious service. The import of rest *following* a perfect six days' labour, and the Maker resting in infinite complacency in the work of His own hands, is certainly in favour of working first and resting afterwards—of rest the reward of work—of the harvest following the ploughing and sowing time. But God's ways are not our ways, and God's order is not man's order.

In the course of time a second rest takes place. Israel, the elect *earthly* people of God, their shoulder eased from the burden of Egypt—their feet exempted from the toil of wandering in the wilderness, a terror in turn to the nations of the earth who had terrified them, attains a rest in the land of Canaan. Here then a question might very naturally arise in the mind of a pious Jew, Is there anything beyond this? Is not God's promise fulfilled? Happily for us, the possibility of this is completely set aside by the language both of the Old and New Testament. About five hundred years after the passage of Jordan under Joshua, the threat is held out "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." The emphasis is upon the word "to-day." To-day, not in the time of Joshua, 1450 years before Christ, but "to-day" in the time of David, 1050 years before Christ. And we are particularly warned in this epistle to the Hebrews not to persevere in this unscriptural mistake. The verses 7 and 8 of chapter iv. so frequently misunderstood, may be paraphrased thus:—

"Again, he limiteth a certain time, saying, in David, To-day, after so long a time, as it is said, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God."

"Again, the Holy Ghost limits a certain day, saying, in the ninety-fifth Psalm, 'To-day,' after a lapse of four hundred years, as it is said, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, for if Joshua had given them rest, then would not the Holy Ghost have spoken of another day. There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God."

The meaning of this last verse may be thus expressed, God rested, but "my rest" does not mean the first sabbath after creation. Israel rested, but the expression in the 95th Psalm, written about 500 years after the entrance into Canaan, does not mean Israel's rest. There is, therefore, something different remaining for the people of God.

It now remains for us to trace out, as accurately as we may, what this rest is, neither on the one hand confounding it with the foregoing rests, which would be to explain it away altogether, nor neglecting to avail ourselves of that light which a reference to them both may afford. It may be twofold, but most certainly there is even now a spiritual rest enjoyed by the people of God, of which the following verse presents a clear definition.

"He that is entered into his rest, he hath also ceased from his own works, as God did from his." Here then is the grand characteristic of Christian sabbath-keeping. Christian rest — ceasing from our own works, as God did from his. It matters not to say, God's works are good works, and ours are bad. This is not the question here. God will have rest from works *as* works, not merely from bad works, salvation by free grace without works, a holy noiseless sabbath, on which to work at all is to profane it. Working in its proper place may be right, and the saints are not idlers, but here all must be silence—the altar must be piled of unhewn stones, the temple built without noise of workmen within.

And this is humbling, as it should be, to the creature, especially to the fallen creature. What shall we do? is the question of self-righteous, self-sufficient man. What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? Our Lord meets the pharisaical question, not by flattering the pride of man, but presenting *Himself*. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent.” Again, the answer to the question, “What shall I *do* to be saved?” is (not to do anything, but) “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Here, then, is gospel work and gospel rest. A saint is always working and always resting. His perpetual work is labouring to enter into rest. His perpetual sabbath, resting by faith on the finished work of Jesus, having ceased from his own works as God did from his. Gospel sabbath-breaking is *unbelief*. Unbelief is discord in the ears of God, far worse than the din of axe or hammer would have been in the temple of Solomon. Not to believe is to bring *man* into the proper work of God—to pour holy oil upon *man's* flesh, and so to make a false Christ, i. e., anointed one. Exodus xxx. 32, to lift up the tool on the altar of God.

It is very profitable to observe how our Lord in the gospels convinces the Jews by their own scriptures; condemning, as it were, the unrighteous servant out of his own mouth. The sabbath was the glory of the Jewish nation, but it contained a mystery to which their eyes were effectually blinded. Had they known the sabbath aright,

they would have known the Lord of the sabbath also. And thus, in the very act of condemning the Lord for sabbath-breaking, they were guilty of the grossest breach of it themselves. To prefer the gift to the altar which sanctified the gift—the gold to the temple—the ceremonial sabbath to the Lord of all sabbaths and ceremonies, was not only a mistake, not only sin; but, in the evangelical sense of the term, direct sabbath-breaking. See John v. 17. “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” It seems as if the Lord had said, “Though you are zealous for the law, you do not understand the real principle of sabbath-keeping. It is true my Father rested after the six days’ work of creation, but sin has entered in, and defiled his rest, and broken his sabbath. A greater work than that of creation is now to be performed, in which the Father and the Son are continually engaged. And if the Jews knew what true rest was, or what was acceptable service to God, they would know that they could not afford for one single moment to have the operations of either the Father or the Son suspended.

But if the Jews were thus misguided in the interpretation of their very privileges, so that that which should have been for their welfare became a trap, and God seemed in judgment to “curse their blessings,” there is no reason why that ordinance which was darkness to them, should not be a light and encouragement to us. Let the question of the ordinance of the sabbath be considered (for argument’s sake) abrogated or binding, permanent or transitory, the ordinance is not valueless to us,

while the history of it forms a portion of the revealed word of God. To deny this, is well nigh to give up the value of the Old Testament altogether.

Whether I am required to observe the fourth commandment literally, or not, is one question; whether the fourth commandment still has a scriptural aspect, and demands my attention as the word of God, is another.

If then the question be asked, what is that feature of the Christian dispensation which the Jewish sabbath typifies? the answer is, *Rest*. Rest, as Jesus rested in the grave. Rest from sin. He that is dead is freed from sin (or rather as it might be translated, "He that died, has been, or is, justified from sin.") He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin. Whatever of toil might have belonged, or seemed to belong, to the Christian before, he hath now ceased from his *own works*. No Egyptian toils; but his hands delivered from making the pots. His shoulder eased from the burden. But the privileges of God's people are not negative, and their rest is never *mere* rest. Their rest is ultimately to rest not day or night. And this leads to another question of deep practical interest to the children of God. If the sabbath, the seventh-day rest, was a token of cessation from work, causing, as it were, a retrospective survey of six days' toil and bondage, from which the people were delivered, what is the scriptural import of *another* day, kept not by Jews, but by Christians, not the last day of the week, but the

first, not looking back to the Creator's rest, but to the Redeemer's resurrection.

Whatever difficulties there may be about the right observance of Sunday, one thing is very clear. The Jewish sabbath and the Christian Lord's-day are not to be confounded. In the one I get a seventh day's rest after six days' toil, in the other I get the pledge of resurrection-power, as the commencement of all holy service to the Lord. To confound these two is to confound law and gospel. It is remarkable how little there is in the New Testament of historical testimony to the way in which the early Christians observed the Lord's day. As to any *negative* sabbatical observance of it, there is a total silence about it. We read of what they *did*, rather than of what they did *not* do. They met together (as it would seem) to break bread, and, probably, at the same time to exhort one another. As for sabbath-keeping, if the apostles or other Christian Jews observed this ordinance at all, they probably observed it by limiting it to its proper day, the seventh, instead of keeping it on the first day of the week. On the seventh day the synagogues were open, and Paul, as his manner was, went in to expound the Jewish scriptures, "opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." (Acts xvii. 3). On the *first* day of the week the disciples met together to break bread, see Acts xx. 7.

As to the fourth commandment, in its *literal*

application, being a rule or any part of a rule of life to the Christian, it belongs to those who maintain it to bring forward some scriptural authority in support of their view. Till they do, the following considerations ought in fairness to be allowed some weight. Sabbath-keeping is *never* enjoined on Christians in the New Testament. Sabbath-breaking is *never* condemned as a sin among the saints. On the contrary, one man esteeming every day alike, is mentioned without the slightest censure being passed on such an opinion. A rule is laid down for the brother who holds this opinion, namely, that he should not despise the brother who differs from him; but he is never said to be in error. If the popular notion of the Sabbath is correct, we might most justly expect some such warning as the following: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, *Sabbath-breaking*," etc.; "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, nor fornicators, nor *Sabbath-breakers*," etc. Where do we find such language as this in the New Testament? *Nowhere*. Far be it from me to speak against one jot or tittle of the Law, whether found within or without the table of the ten commandments; all I plead for is, that the law, and the fourth commandment as part of it, should be used lawfully. In Rom. xiv., I learn that I am not to judge others who keep particular days, but in Col. ii. 16, 17, that I am not to allow others to *judge me*. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a

holy day, or of the new moon, or of the *Sabbath-days*." We cannot for a moment suppose that language such as this would have been applied to the sins of adultery or murder; abstinence from *them* would never have been classed with the observance of meats or drinks, or holy days, or termed "the shadow of things to come."

It would be a cheering thought to those who have spiritually entered into rest, could they feel that no external observance of days, or months, or years, was allowed to interfere with the spiritual Sabbath-keeping of the people of God. But strivings about the law are unprofitable, and vain, and hurtful. As they do no good, they do real harm. There was a state of mind to which Paul referred when he said, "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." Circumcision was nothing in itself, but it was a fatal mistake by anything outward to lose the inward circumcision of the heart. The keeping of a strictly Jewish Sabbath, as far as the outward observance was concerned, might be harmless; but it is hurtful for those whose rest is only outward, and who know nothing of ceasing from their own works as God did from His. "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

"God thus commanded Jacob's seed,
When from Egyptian bondage freed
He led them by the way;
Remember, with a mighty hand,
I brought thee forth from Pharaoh's land,
Then keep my Sabbath-day.

“ In six days God made heav’n and earth,
 Gave all the various creatures birth,
 And from His working ceased ;
 These days to labour He applied ;
 The seventh He blessed and sanctified,
 And called a day of rest.

“ To all God’s people now remains
 A Sabbathism, a rest from pains,
 And works of slavish kind.
 When tired with toil, and faint through fear,
 The child of God can enter here,
 And sweet refreshment find.

“ To this by faith he oft retreats,
 Bondage and labour quite forgets,
 And bids his cares adieu ;
 Slides softly into promised rest,
 Reclines his head on Jesu’s breast,
 And proves the Sabbath true.

“ This, and this only is the way,
 To rightly keep that Sabbath-day
 Which God has holy made ;
 All keepers that come short of this,
 The substance of the Sabbath miss,
 And grasp an empty shade.”—HART.

Here we might safely conclude, hoping that the foregoing simple exposition of spiritual rest might prove of service to some of the tried and tempted children of God. But it is the writer’s wish to put forward nothing but what is directly practical and profitable. He is well aware that even less than what he has advanced is capable of giving great offence to real Christians, and thus, rather

than evade it, he would enter fairly, boldly and plainly, on that interesting question—How are Christians bound to keep the Sunday? It is quite evident, that the ideas of many on this subject are very mixed, not to say, confused, a state of mind never the result of God's teaching. “We see very clearly,” say they, “that the Sunday is to be kept holy; we do not exactly know how, we do not exactly know why. We are not Jews, and not exactly under the fourth commandment. Our religion is better than mere national religion. We worship God and hear the gospel preached. We dread a national denial of God, and anything that savours of a French Revolution.”

It is surely desirable that the spiritual worshippers of God should know not only what they worship, but *why* they worship; that in matters of practice, as well as with regard to the hope that is in them, they should be ready to give an answer to every man who asks them.

The following brief sketch will perhaps convey the scriptural character of a Christian's observance of the first day of the week.

1. Cessation from work,—because, as it is impossible to do two things at the same time, the practice of the primitive church, *as detailed in Scripture*, and the injunctions to Christians to assemble themselves together, require a certain amount of leisure.

2. Cessation from work,—because where even human laws are concerned, prohibitory enactments may be safely complied with by Christians, so long

as they involve no compromise of scriptural principle.

3. Cessation from work — for conscience' sake (whatever my own impressions of the character of the day might be), if not my own, for the sake of the consciences of others—why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?

4. Cessation from work,—because where custom or law, no matter how capricious or unreasonable, or even profane in themselves, have set the population of any country free to attend the preaching of the gospel, believers will gladly avail themselves of this opening, in order to preach to the world.

Thus far in answer to what is negative or external, in reply to the question, "Do you then think yourself at liberty to break the Sabbath?" But no Christian would or could rightly stop here. The first day of the week is not to be trifled away in the mere observance of a carnal ordinance. To meet the saints—to recognise the saints—to look back to the death of Jesus, to look forward to the coming of Jesus—to show forth the Lord's death till He come—to take our stand far above dead forms, Sabbaths and ceremonies; these are things not only typified in the ceremonial import of a blank day in the history of man's toilsome life, but actually and experimentally realised in a day of spiritual service. The contrast, indeed, is most instructive, between a seventh-day Sabbath, giving nothing, providing nothing, allowing nothing, and a first-day pledge of resurrection-life, the very commencement and starting-point of all real and lively

service. A Sunday spent in mere rest, is a loathsome carcase before God. It possesses the slavish character of Jewish bondage without the sanction which the Jews had of a direct command. Nor will this, nor can this be a solitary evil. A Sunday of barren listlessness toward God is a day of busy devotedness to the service of Satan.

We need not go to Roman Catholic France (flattering as the comparison may be to England), to find out what use an unconverted man makes of Sunday liberty.

The letter of the fourth commandment may be kept at the expense of all the other commandments in the Bible. Without the grace of faith enabling us positively to enter into God's rest, mere outward observances will be found no security in bodies or individuals against irreligion in the heart, and every consequent accession of profligacy and crime.