

*True religion is the natural
growth of the noblest part
of the human heart*



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The following is an extract from the *Daily Telegraph* of March 1st, [1888], and may speak for itself:

At yesterday's sitting of the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury, the Archbishop presiding, the Bishop of Exeter laid on the table a petition which sets forth:

“That there has been of late a very marked increase in the employment of the afternoon and evening of the Lord's Day in amusements of various kinds by the upper and fashionable classes of Society. That the Society papers (so-called) in particular, and occasionally the daily papers on Monday, give more or less full accounts of entertainments which have taken place. Those of recent date include formal dinner-parties, smoking concerts, theatrical and semi-theatrical performances, comic recitations, and amusing programmes of fun and frolic, exhibitions of jugglery, Sunday parade in Hyde Park, coach drives of clubs, the drags assembling at Hampton Court, Richmond, and other places of resort, the 'Sunday up the river,' boxing at the Pelican Club, lawn tennis, dances at clubs and private houses, exhibitions (once at least) of the Wild West Show, and Show Sunday in the studios of artists. Some of these are novelties in the way of Lord's Day profanation. That the long lists of those present at these Sunday amusements, which are given in the Society papers, embrace men of eminence in art, science, politics and commerce, as well as mere *dilettanti*, and of men and women whose prominence is only that of devotion to pleasure. That many of these amusements are public, that their prevalence testifies to very loose Sunday habits on the part of the rich, and great, and noble of the land. Such abuses of the Lord's Day evidence an insatiable desire for distraction and dissipation, a very low regard for the claims of the Word of God, and the determination to put away the restraints of religion.”

The petitioners, who numbered 104, asked counsel on the subject, and suggested a protest against Sunday excursion trains, and a remonstrance against Sunday amusements and entertainments. The signatories included members of

both Houses of Parliament, clergymen, and others. A discussion which arose on the question was adjourned till to-morrow, it being considered that the Bishop of London, who was absent yesterday, should be present, since it was in his diocese that the alleged Sunday desecration had been committed.

THE DEBATE WAS RESUMED ON THE FOLLOWING FRIDAY, when the Bishop of London was present. His Lordship at once addressed the House, and declared his conviction that the state of affairs was not very much exaggerated. But as regards the especial prevalence in his diocese of this “desecration,” he was of opinion that it was a consequence of the gathering together in London, during “the Season,” of people who carried similar practices into effect while in the country, and that greater attention was attracted to them by “the so-called Society papers.” His Lordship regarded the “pursuit of pleasure” on Sunday as much less excusable in the upper classes than in the lower, “where there is unremitting toil through the week, and where the other aspect of Sunday — namely, that it is a day of rest from toil — must necessarily take up a very much larger space in their thoughts than the character of it as a day of worship.” His Lordship was rather doubtful as to the efficacy of the protest, wisely considering that “protests of this kind, if they are allowed to be issued and fall flat, are likely to do rather more harm than good.”

The Bishop of Exeter — the spokesman of the petitioners — followed with a long extract from the pages of *The Bat*, a paper which, by the way, is now defunct. He considered that a simple statement that the Upper House had had its attention called to the state of affairs, and that it was of opinion that it “was derogatory to the spiritual and moral health of all ranks of the people of this country,” would “satisfy those who are anxious for the maintenance of the Lord’s Day.”

The Bishop of Winchester made remarks on the difference between the Sabbaths of the Jews and Christians and agreed with the dictum that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Further, he said that the relaxation of the strict Sabbath rule was, to some extent, justified by the New Testament. He also asserted that “the only form of civil government ever distinctly ordained by God was the government of the Jewish people, and that in this He ordained that the labours of the year should not be continuous, but that there should be one day’s rest in seven for every man.” The Bishop said that the memorial referred almost entirely to the Upper Classes, but that his experience in South London had shown him that a great amount of the neglect was originally caused by colonies of foreigners, and especially Germans, who had gathered in that part of London. Therefore, he thought that the neglect had penetrated every class of Society; and he agreed with his right reverend brother of London in thinking that the day of rest was necessary to the working man, but did not see what other time he had for observances of a religious nature. While he thought that over-strictness in Sabbatarianism had an injurious effect, as in Scotland, he was convinced that any further relaxation in this country would be still more injurious.

The House was in committee on the subject for an hour, at which the reporters were not present. Finally, the following resolution was moved, and agreed to unanimously:

That the attention of the Upper House of Convocation having been attracted to the relaxation of Sunday observance, which appears to have increased of late years, even among those who have the fullest leisure on other days, and to the great increase of Sunday labour, the House deems it to be its duty to appeal to the clergy, to all instructors of the young, and to all who exercise influence over their fellow-men, not to suffer this Church and country to lose the priceless benefit of the rest and sanctity of the Lord's Day.¹ Its reasonable and religious observance is for the physical, moral, and spiritual health of all ranks of the population, and to it our national well-being has been largely due.

The foregoing is an abstract of the report in the *Daily Telegraph* of the debate in the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury. One cannot help regretting that we do not have laid before us the various motives expressed in the hour of committee. Still, enough remains in the public speeches of their lordships to serve our purpose. We do not propose to criticise, for we wholly agree that the pursuit of pleasure at all times and seasons, and regardless of others, is no good thing, but a selfish one. But we do traverse one thing: the Sabbath was indeed ordained for man, but nothing was said, even in those statutes so especially "ordained by God for the Jews," as to the religious observances on that especial day. It was essentially a day of REST, ordained for man, as it was ordained that the land should lie fallow; that is to say, that there shall be no compulsory work for man, whether religious or secular. But granting that it is essentially a Day of Rest for overworked man, he is yet told by those who teach him religion that, instead of complete relaxation, he must follow "a religious observance."

We would ask whether this "religious observance" is to be a farce or a reality? If a reality, it is a labour more fatiguing than any ordinary work; for it is an unaccustomed toil, and one which all except the very pious willingly eschew. Clergymen, whose business in life it is to lead the services, and who should, therefore, get accustomed to the labour, are exhausted by the work they have to do on Sundays, and to "feel Mondayish," has become a recognised expression. As for children, who are taken to church regardless of their age and nature, many of them positively hate "church-going," and so learn a horror of religion itself. Thus there is a forced "education," in religion, instead of religion being the natural growth of the noblest part of the human heart. We thus offer to God not the things which are His, but "the things which are Caesar's" — the lip-service of humanity.

The whole Sunday-question resolves itself into the demand to know whether it is in any degree right, or in accordance with divine law, that man should be so devoted to selfish toil, during the week, as to have virtually no time or strength left for prayer (*i.e.*, meditation) during the six days, and whether, therefore, it is right that the seventh day or Sunday should be set apart for it. All depends upon whether doing one's duty in the state of life to which one is called, is "doing," or not doing, "all to the glory

¹ We would refer the reader to *The Land of Cant*, by Sidney Whitman, for a review of the results produced in England by the strict observance of the Lord's Day — in the letter, and not in the spirit.

[The title of this work may be wrong. The only title somewhat resembling it is *Conventional Cant, its Results and Remedy*, by Sidney Whitman. London: K. Paul, Trench & Co., 1887; xix, 235pp. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

of God.” We think that work is prayer; and if so, the devotion of Sunday to innocent pleasure is really making it a day of rest.

Why should England set forth its observance of Sunday as the only one sanctioned by God? The present observance of Sunday in England is founded on the practices of the later and degenerate Jews, who were not upheld by Jesus in their observances. Even the prophets¹ plainly show that the earlier usage was one of a day of rest, and that the idea of innocent pleasure, which is now represented as rather gross and sensual, was not then a forbidden thing. Reference to statistics in matters of drunkenness and crime does not show that England is, indeed, in possession of priceless benefits owing to the observance of Sunday, in which other nations, who do not share that observance, do not partake. Indeed it is by no means certain that in all those countries where there is indulgence in the class of pleasures so energetically condemned in the petition, there is not less crime and drunkenness than exists in England; and this, too, not merely during the week, but especially on the Sundays.

Without speaking of Catholic France, Spain, Italy, *etc., etc.*, Greek orthodox Russia and all the Slavonian lands, take for example Protestant Germany, where all places of amusement are, if anything, more freely open than on other days, and Sunday is considered the best day for theatres, balls, and popular festivities. Surely the other nations, especially the Germans, are not less religious than in England.

To many who are cooped up during the week, a day in the country is an education which brings them nearer to God than all the services they could attend in a church. Of course, we may be met with a reference to the “two or three gathered together,” but surely if God is omnipresent, He is with those who are truly grateful for the beauties of Nature.

No, my Lords, your protest may not fall flat, but it does not strike at the root of the evil: — the fact that you are unable to cope with the increasingly material conditions of life during the present age. The people are no longer ignorant, you have to meet men as clever as yourselves among those who pursue their pleasure in the way against which you protest. You will not get anyone to follow your religious observances among those who have broken free from them, unless you can convince them that you are right, and that religion must be made the vital factor in their lives. Many of them recognise no “hereafter,” and gaily follow the motto: — “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” They recognise no god save their own pleasure; and we are both agreed that they are endeavouring to execute a “valse à deux temps” to the tune of the “danse macabre.” Among the ranks of your church are many self-sacrificing men, who, from various motives, are endeavouring to help those of the working classes whose lives are lost in toil. Ask of them their opinion as to the “Lord’s Day Observance” of religious duties. They have to deal with the practical difficulties of the situation. You, in your Convocation, are protesting against an evil of which you are conscious, but against which you are powerless to act. Why? Because the form of religion you rely on has lost its hold upon the hearts of the people, and the “Service of Man,” according to the late Mr. James A. Cotter Morison, has replaced the “Service of God.”

¹ Vide *Nehemiah* viii, 9-12.

The reason of this is not very far to seek. The Church has lost the key to Wisdom and Truth, and has endeavoured to bolster itself upon authority. The people have educated themselves to ask “Why?” And they will have an answer, or they will reject the Church and its teachings, for they will not accept authority. Religion and its principles must be demonstrated as mathematically as a problem of Euclid.

But are you able to do so?

Are any of the Church’s dogmas worth any of the tenets of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, or the similar utterances to be found in all religions?

Do you carry them out in their entirety in your lives, as the Episcopoi of the Church?

Do you, as such, take care that all your clergy do so?

You may reply with a counter-question:

Do you, our critics, do so and set us an example?

Our answer is, that we do not claim to be the “elect” or the “anointed of the Lord.” We are unpretending men and women, endeavouring to carry out the Golden Rule, apart from the ordinances of any form of worship. But you — you occupy a position which makes you an example to all men, and in which you have taken a large responsibility. You stand before the world as exemplifying the effect of the dogmas of the Church you lead. That Church had and has its work to do, but that it has lost its power is plain, in that you are only able to protest, and that doubtfully, against an evil which you feel yourselves unable to check. In the language of your Scripture, how would it be if, as regards your trust, this night an account should be required of you?

