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The Civil Sabbath

— OR —

Disguised Religious Legislation.

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THE "CIVIL SABBATH;"

OR,

DISGUISED RELIGIOUS LEGISLATION.

RELIGIOUS legislation, which invariably results in religious persecution, is and ever has been so obnoxious to the fair-minded and the enlightened Christian, that when these classes have been in the majority, the promoters of religious legislation have been compelled to disguise their movements by giving them another name and urging them for other reasons. The charge made by the Jews that Christ was an "enemy of Cæsar" was not the reason why they sought his life. Their charges against him before the chief priests and the Jewish Sanhedrim were all of a religious character; but knowing that Pilate, the Roman procurator, would not listen to these, they accomplished their purpose by declaring that he was a civil offender, accusing him of "stirring up the people," of "refusing to pay tribute," and of saying that he was "a king."

The "civil" charge was the one finally resorted to by the emperor Justin to defend his persecution of dissenting religionists. It was the reason given by the state Church of England for the imprisonment and banishment of the Puritans, and the one which the Puritans of Massachusetts themselves in turn used to defend their cruel treatment of the Quakers and Baptists who came among them.

Thus Robert Baird, in his work, "Religion in America," page 94, clearly states the case:—

"The rulers of Massachusetts put the Quakers to death, and banished the 'Antinomians' and 'Anabaptists,' not because of their religious tenets,

but because of their violations of the civil laws. This is the justification which they pleaded, and it was the best they could make. Miserable excuse! But just so it is; wherever there is such a union of Church and State, heresy and heretical practices are apt to become violations of the civil code, and are punished no longer as errors in religion, but infractions of the laws of the land. So the defenders of the Inquisition have always spoken and written in justification of that awful and most iniquitous tribunal."

The same argument is being used to-day to secure the enactment and enforcement of Sunday laws. When addressing a class of religionists who favor the enforcement of religious practices by law, the promoters of Sunday laws argue that God wills it; but when arguing their cases before those who are opposed to religious legislation, or who are not religiously inclined, they resort to the old trick, and urge the enactment and enforcement of them for "civil" reasons, such as "sanitary measures," "physical necessity," and "for the public good." In corroboration of this, note the following statement made by a leading Sunday-law agitator: —

"We, the Sabbath Union, all the churches, and the Y. M. C. A., are laboring with all our might to carry the religious Sabbath with our right arm and the civil Sabbath with our left. Hundreds of thousands will receive it as a religious institution, all the rest will receive it as a civil institution, and thus we will sweep in the whole nation."¹

This "civil Sabbath" dodge would be unworthy of notice were it not for the fact that many are being deceived by it. In view of this fact, it becomes necessary to expose the fraud. Even Judge Hammond, in his recent decision in the King case, though deciding against the Sabbatarians, characterizes as "disingenuous [means unworthy, wanting in noble candor or frankness] the argument of his [King's] adversary sects; that it is the economic value of the day of rest, and not its religious character, that they would preserve by civil law."

We propose in this tract to show that this "civil" legislation in the interests of Sabbath observance, is simply relig-

¹ "Facts for the Times," p. 214.

ious legislation in disguise. We would not be understood by this as antagonizing religion or ignoring the importance of the Sabbath as a religious institution. But believing religious legislation to be contrary to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, destructive of good government, and in conflict with human rights, we are opposed to it, whether it be asked for in the name of religion or under some specious plea on other grounds.

"What's in a name?" Calling a thing that which it is not, does not change its nature. The Iowa liquor dealer who attempted to evade the prohibitory law by labeling his goods "medicine," was still dealing in spirituous liquors. Calling Sabbath laws "civil," does not make them civil, neither does the false name given to such laws affect their results. A man dying from mortal wounds received at the hands of a clergyman actuated by religious hate, would suffer no less and live no longer because the clergyman at the time of the assault was dressed in civil attire. The Christian citizen, R. M. King, has suffered no less religious persecution at the hands of the Tennessee Sunday law, because some of his persecutors may have called that law a civil law. So long as the law, its prohibitions, and its penalties are the same as if enacted avowedly in the name and interests of religion, a change in name cannot change its character.

The advocates of Sunday laws claim to have discovered in nature a basis for Sabbath laws. We are told by them that car wheels will crack if kept running seven days in the week! This and all similar claims are simply ingenious sophistries, invented to justify the existence and enforcement of Sunday laws. The facts are simply these: While the day, the month, and the year are indicated in nature, and the time for physical rest and recuperation by the regularly recurring daily periods of darkness, inducing sleep, there is nothing in nature indicating the division of time into weeks. The grass grows as fast, the waves dash as high, the sun shines as

bright, and the storm beats as loud on the Sabbath as on other days. The robin builds her nest and the beaver his dam as industriously on the day set apart by the Creator as holy time as on the other six days.

And the advocates of Sunday laws know this to be so. In the hearing before the Senate Committee on the Blair Sunday-rest bill, Dec. 13, 1888, Dr. Herrick Johnson of Chicago, who appeared in favor of the bill, said :—

"This appointment of one day in seven is arbitrary. There is nothing in nature to indicate that division of time. There is the day of twenty-four hours, there is the month, there is the year,—all these are natural divisions ; but there is nothing in nature to indicate the weekly division, the observance of one day in seven. It is arbitrary, and we regard that as an evidence of its divine origin."

The Sabbath was instituted primarily for worship, and not for physical rest. True, man may or may not derive physical rest from worship, but that this was not contemplated in the giving of the Sabbath, is shown by the fact that the Sabbath was instituted before man fell and became subject to physical weariness, while he had access to the tree of life, which perpetuated youthful vigor ; and from the fact that it will be kept in the redeemed state, when man is immortal and again permitted to eat of the tree of life, and is a stranger to physical weariness. Isa. 66 : 22, 23 ; Rev. 2 : 7 ; Isa. 40 : 31. We cannot measure the Sabbath by the little time covered by man's fallen state. Physical weariness was a direct result of the fall : "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, . . . cursed is the ground for thy sake ; . . . thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; . . . *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*, till thou return unto the ground," etc. In no case is man's need of physical rest given by God as a reason for observing the Sabbath. The only work forbidden in the commandment is "thy work," works of charity, worship, and necessity being permitted. "It is lawful to *do well* on the Sabbath

days," said Christ. The service of the tabernacle, which was commanded of God, required more labor on the Sabbath than on other days. The Saviour did more works of mercy on the Sabbath, which had a tendency to cause weariness, than on other days.

Man's need of rest was not, therefore, the object of the institution of the Sabbath. In his primitive condition he no more needed one day in seven for physical rest than the birds of the air or the beasts of the forest. He was commanded to cease from his labors, that he might keep the Sabbath holy by devoting it to the contemplation and worship of God. He was not commanded to cease from his work that he might rest, but to rest that he might worship. The ceasing from labor was a means to an object, and not one of the objects. The rest to be remembered was God's rest and not man's, and God's rest was spiritual and not physical. The Sabbath was instituted for religious devotion, to keep in mind the Creator, the true God, and the cessation from worldly toil (for that is the meaning of the Hebrew word for Sabbath, "cessation," and not rest) is only a necessary requirement for the carrying on of this devotion and the perpetuation of such a memorial. How much rest an individual requires depends upon the nature and the amount of work performed, and the constitution of the individual. No physician, scientist, or philosopher, ever has or ever can demonstrate that man needs just one day in seven for physical rest simply.

But were it true that man's physical nature demands one day's rest in seven, that fact would not constitute a proper basis for a law compelling all to avail themselves of that rest. All are agreed that man needs nightly rest; but who would admit the right of Congress or of the State legislature to pass a law that everybody should go to bed every night at a certain hour, and take just so many hours' sleep? The daily rest is of vastly more importance, physically, than weekly, monthly, or yearly holidays can possibly be. No one can

long go without daily rest and not break down. Consistency would demand that the advocates of the "civil" Sabbath-rest laws, should also advocate daily-rest laws.

There are other things that are necessary to man's well-being besides rest. He needs food, air, exercise, and frequent bathing ; but the government does not say when or how much he shall eat, the quantity of air he must inhale, the amount of exercise he shall take, or how often he must bathe. All have a right to rest one day in seven if they choose, but when the government assumes the right to compel men to exercise their rights, it thereby takes away their rights. Rest presupposes labor ; and the right to require all to rest, presupposes the right to require all to labor,—a right the government does not possess ; and as the labor must precede the rest, a demand for a universal labor law should of right precede the demand for the general law for rest. Sabbath laws have been declared to be "simply empty aisles between the work benches of toil, with no kneeling stools along the side." But no man, no set of men, Congress legislature, or municipality, has any right whatever to drive man into those aisles of idleness.

An incident which occurred in connection with the Sunday-closing of the World's Fair furnishes further proof, if such proof were necessary, that the "civil Sabbath" claim is a delusion and a snare. If there be no ecclesiasticism in this Sunday-closing movement, if one day in seven as a day of rest from toil be all that is asked, then one day will suffice as well as another ; but every unprejudiced, well-informed observer knows, and has known from the first, that this "civil Sabbath" plea is a dodge to escape criticism which would inevitably result from an attempt to secure Sunday legislation on an avowedly religious foundation. Again, every thoughtful person knows that the "one day in seven" theory is an invention to evade the plain command, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt

thou labor, and do all thy work : but the *seventh* day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God."

But that the Sunday-closing movement is a religious movement, and that rest from manual labor one day in seven is not all that is desired, except when that "one day in seven" comes on the day when church collections are usually taken, was demonstrated by the attitude which the Sunday-closing clergy took toward a proposition on the part of the Central Labor Union of Chicago, to request their employers to permit them to work Sundays when the Fair was closed, and rest on Saturday, and go to the Fair on that day. The resolution reported was as follows : —

"*Whereas*, The ministers of the gospel have insisted that the gates of the World's Fair be closed on Sunday, and —

"*Whereas*, The workingmen represented in this Union cannot afford to lose more than one day in the week for either rest or recreation, and —

"*Whereas*, In order to improve ourselves, we are anxious to take advantage of the great educational facilities which will be offered at the Exposition ; therefore, be it —

"*Resolved*, That we make a formal request upon our employers that we be allowed to begin work Sunday as the first day of the week, and take Saturday as a day of rest and recreation, in order to be able to visit the Fair grounds and obtain the instruction which will otherwise be denied us."

Certainly Saturday is "one day in seven," and if the claim of the Sunday-closers that there is no religion in the Sunday-closing movement were true, and that it is only physical rest one day in seven that is desired, then the Sunday-closing clergy ought not to have objected to the proposition of the workingmen. But they did object. The *Chicago Evening Journal* of April 8, 1893, published interviews with a number of the leaders of the Sunday-closing movement regarding the proposed action of the workingmen, and instead of favoring the scheme in accord with their "civil Sabbath" and "one day in seven" plea, they threatened to invoke the law should the workingmen undertake to act upon their proposition. For instance, Rev. Dr. Bolton,

of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, said:—

"If the Union is in earnest, let them try it. Then we will see if there is any law in this country."—*N. Y. Mail and Express*, April 4, 1893.

In treating the matter thus these ministers virtually said: "This 'civil Sabbath' theory and this 'one day in seven' theory of ours are not intended for practical use. Our 'civil Sabbath' idea is only intended to hide the real issue. And our 'one day in seven' argument is intended to be used only when combating seventh-day observers, who trouble our congregations with the doctrine that the fourth commandment means exactly what it says; and we hereby give notice that should any laboring man attempt to put our theories into actual practice, or use them for any other purpose than that for which they were invented, we will prosecute him to the full extent of the law." Reader, be not deceived.

That Sabbath laws are religious is evident from the following facts:—

1. They originated when the Church and the State were first united. The first Sunday law was enacted by Constantine, who is commonly known as the first Christian emperor.

2. The demand for them comes only from religious people, and those whom they succeed in enlisting with them in their cause. As Rev. W. F. Crafts says, "During nearly all our American history, the churches have influenced the State to make and improve Sabbath laws."—*Christian Statesman*, July 3, 1890.

3. The disregard of them is decried because it lessens church attendance; the enforcement of them, then, must be to increase church attendance.

4. The septenary order of days is not a natural division of time, but depends wholly upon divine revelation.

5. The Sabbath was instituted by God for religious reasons only.

6. The Fourth of July is a civil rest day in the true sense of the term. All can rest upon this day if they choose, but such a day is the farthest from the Sunday-law advocates' ideas of a "civil Sabbath," which betrays the motives of those who demand the laws. In one breath they declare for a civil Sabbath, and in the next deplore the sin of Sabbath-breaking and the tendency toward secularizing the day. A civil Sabbath is just what they do not want.

7. Sunday laws prohibit civil things, such as common labor, hunting, fishing, base-ball playing, the running of street-cars, the opening of libraries, museums, art galleries, etc., but civil laws do not make civility, but incivility, a crime. These things can be prohibited only upon religious grounds.

8. They countenance religious exercises only, permitting works of mercy and necessity,—a purely religious permission.

9. They exempt, if at all, only upon religious grounds. Those exempted must "*religiously*" and "*conscientiously*" observe another day..

10. They are enacted to protect the day as a religious institution, and not to protect the people.

11. The American Sabbath Union, organized to secure the enactment and enforcement of Sunday laws, is an ecclesiastical organization, and in its constitution declares it to be its object "to preserve the *Christian* Sabbath as a day of rest and *worship*."

12. The founder of this Union, in his "Sabbath for Man," p. 194, says: "At first thought, they would seem to be religious laws," to which it only needs to be added that this first thought is substantiated upon all subsequent reflection, and by all the facts in the case.

A modern writer has well said: "The Sunday movement is now making its way in darkness. The leaders are concealing the true issue, and many who unite in the movement do not themselves see whither the under-current is

tending. Its professions are mild, and apparently Christian, but when it shall speak, it will reveal the spirit of the dragon."

Reader! beware of religious laws in secular dress as you would of wolves in sheep's clothing. Not only are they deceptive, but there is persecution in their train. Their character is not changed by the change made in the name through which they are advocated. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Already persecution is in the land as the result of enforced Sunday laws. Witness cases in Arkansas, Tennessee, Georgia, and Maryland. Again we say, Be not deceived.

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