

THE SABBATH QUESTION

IN THE DOMINION PARLIAMENT.

WEIGHTY SPEECHES BY HON. G. AMYOT IN THE HOUSE OF
COMMONS AGAINST "AN ACT TO SECURE THE BETTER
OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S DAY COMMONLY CALLED
SUNDAY."

¹THE honorable gentleman (Mr. Charlton, mover of the bill) says: "The State should protect the rights of conscience." This is a very important principle. I want to know where the honorable gentleman wants to apply it. It is a very true principle applied generally, and I wish it were printed in the honorable gentleman's heart as well as in the hearts of all the people of the Dominion,—the state should protect the rights of conscience. . . . But we are not alone in this Dominion. There are not only Protestants and Catholics in this country; there are some other subjects of Her Majesty; the honorable gentleman knows it. There are some Jews. In England, in France, in Germany, in all the civilized nations of the world, they are a respected set of individuals. They have consciences, too; and though not believing in their faith, I am not ashamed to show their way of thinking. They rely upon the Bible, upon the Old Testament, and what do they find there?

¹ Delivered in the House of Commons, Wednesday, 30th May, 1894, by Hon. G. Amyot, Member from Bellechasse, P. Q.; and printed in the unrevised "Hansard" No. 49, and in the revised edition, columns 3503-3507.

They find the words of God himself. The honorable mover of the bill himself believes that what I will read there is the word of God. Take Genesis—some honorable gentlemen laugh, but perhaps it will do them good to hear again what they learned by heart when young. Take paragraph two, which reads:—

“And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”¹

There it is the seventh day which God made holy; and then, if you look to Exodus, paragraph twenty—I am told that in English we should say verses—verse 20, subsection 8. I may be more correct, perhaps, in saying chapter 20 and verses 8, 9, 10, 11:—

“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: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

The Jews take those texts among others—there are hundreds of them—and say that the law that God gave to his creatures is to keep holy the seventh day. And they ask by what authority we change the law of God and celebrate the eighth day instead of the seventh. This is a very important point, and I am sure that the honorable mover of the bill (Mr. Charlton) is ready to give his authority.

Now, there is another sect or religion which says: We do not rely upon the Old Testament, but upon the New Testament, and according to the New Testament it is ordered that we should go on celebrating the seventh day and not the eighth day. These people rely upon the New Testament, and have even suffered death to prove their belief. I hold in my hand a book entitled “The Faiths of the People,” by

¹ Gen. 2:2, 3.

Malloy, and I will draw the attention of the honorable gentleman to page 209 at the end of the chapter. He will see there the reasons these people give for going on celebrating the seventh day. I shall not trespass upon the time of the House by giving quotations, but I ask the honorable gentleman to show us one word in the New Testament where the Son of God took it upon himself to change the day ordered by his Father to be kept holy. The Seventh-day Baptists or Adventists, who celebrate the seventh day, say to the mover of this bill: To whom do you submit when you keep holy the eighth day? And they accuse him of submitting to the Catholic Church. They say to him: In celebrating the eighth day of the week, you admit the authority of the Catholic Church and its right to impose discipline. You admit that the Catholic Church has received from God the power to dictate to the people its law as to the doctrine to be followed. That is the charge which the Seventh-day Adventists make against the honorable gentleman. The honorable gentleman knows, and he will find it in his own authorities, that Sunday is of apostolic tradition. In the first centuries, as shown in the book I have here, in many parts of Christendom, Sabbath was celebrated, but the Catholic Church changed the day, pretending that it had the right so to change it, pretending that it [the church] was established by the Son of God and intrusted with all powers. And it is in virtue of that belief that the church changed the day, and that is why the Seventh-day Adventists say to the honorable mover of the bill: You believe, like us, in the New Testament, why do you give up your belief in the Sabbath celebration? Why do you submit to the Romish Church? Why do you admit the traditions of the apostles? If you admit one, you admit them all. You admit the absolution given by the priest, you admit the sacraments of that church. But they say: We believe in the word of God the Father in the Old Testament, and in the word of God the Son in the New

Testament, and we stand by that, and will not submit to the dictation of any other church, which is only assuming powers it has not received.

As for us Catholics, Mr. Speaker, we shall celebrate our Sundays as we please, provided we do not interfere with your civil rights, and if we do, go to the provinces and you will receive protection. When we joined Confederation, we joined it as a commercial partnership, and not as a salvation army. We do not believe in this Parliament turning itself into a salvation army, and with drums and fifes trying to force us into heaven. The honorable mover of this bill says he wishes to protect the rights of conscience. Is he doing that when he wants to impose upon the Jews the obligation of keeping the eighth day instead of the seventh? Does he protect the rights of conscience when he seeks to impose upon the Jews to keep the first day of the week instead of the seventh? Does he protect the rights of conscience when he wants to compel the Seventh-day Adventists to celebrate the first day of the creation instead of the seventh? Does he protect the rights of conscience when he seeks to compel a great number of his fellow-citizens to disobey the word of God and to obey the words of a church of which they do not approve? The honorable gentleman must remember that in proposing his bill he acts not only contrary to the constitution which I read a moment ago, but also contrary to the general understanding which prevails in this country and which was summed up in a proclamation by Her Majesty the Queen in 1858, which is as follows :—

“Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity, and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favored, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observance, but that they shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority un-

der us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects, on pain of our highest displeasure."

These are the words not only of the Queen, but of the Parliament of Great Britain. This is the rule which should be recognized in this country. We should not interfere with the religious belief of our neighbors. Everybody should enjoy complete liberty, provided that liberty does not interfere with the liberty and civil rights of others. But the honorable gentleman wants to force those who are not of the same belief with himself to observe as the Sabbath some other day than that which they believe to be the Sabbath, and even to force those who, like himself, desire to observe Sunday, to observe it in the way he believes in, and not in the way they believe in themselves. That is not protection of civil rights; it is interference with civil rights. Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to take up too much of the time of this House, but I have given briefly the reasons why I oppose this bill: First, because the bill is unconstitutional;¹ secondly, because it is useless if it were constitutional, because the provinces take charge of these matters; and thirdly, because the bill is an undue interference with the belief of others.

² By this bill we claim jurisdiction in religious matters. I have objected to that already, but being in the minority, I can do nothing but submit for the moment. In the second place, by this bill we assert that Sunday is the Lord's day. I quoted the Old and the New Testament against the honor-

¹ Mr. Amyot contended in the first part of his speech that the proposed legislation was unconstitutional because the British North American Act, clause 92, subsection 13, says:—

"Property and *civil rights* in the provinces will be the exclusive right of the Provincial Legislature."

Since the honorable mover of the bill had declared in a speech at the introduction of the bill that the measure was "designed to secure for the people of this country their *civil rights*," Mr. Amyot argued that therefore, the Dominion Parliament was forbidden by its constitution to legislate concerning the matter.

² Delivered in the House of Commons, 4th of June, 1894, by the Hon. G. Amyot; published in the unrevised "Hansard," No. 52, and in the revised edition, columns 3640 and 3641.

able gentleman's contention. Will he allow this opportunity of answering the challenge to pass — he who is the champion in this House, the athlete, fighting in favor of a principle? Will it be said all over the Dominion and the world, that a member of the Legislature in this House could not find in the Bible any text to authorize his assertion that Sunday, or the first day of the week, is the day chosen by our Lord for a day of rest? It is all very well for the honorable gentleman to remain silent, but he thus gives a victory to his adversaries. The Seventh-day Adventists will cast up at him, wherever he may be, that he was not able to defend himself against one who is not a member of his religion. I have proved by the Old Testament that the Sabbath is on Saturday, and not on Sunday, that God did not rest before his work was done, but after it was done, and I have challenged him to find any passage in the New Testament where the Son of God gave orders to celebrate the first day of the week instead of the one chosen by his Father. I challenge the honorable gentleman, in the name of the Seventh-day Adventists and of the Jews, to reply. Is he impotent? It is all very well for the honorable gentleman to laugh, but there is the weak point, and if he is not able to answer, it must be said that the champion of this House, advocating the keeping of the Lord's Day, could not furnish any good ground for his advocacy.

As I have said, by this bill we are assuming to have jurisdiction in religious matters. I contend that it is the provinces, and not the Parliament, which have such jurisdiction. In the second place, while the honorable gentleman asserts that the work on the Lord's Day is against the law, by this amendment,¹ to which he consents, he says: "The law of God is all very well, but we will not follow it whenever we think it is not in our interest to do so. God said: 'You

¹ No canal belonging to the government of Canada shall be operated for traffic on Sunday, except between the hours of midnight on Saturday, and six o'clock in the morning of Sunday, and from and after the hour of nine o'clock at night on Sunday.

must observe the whole of Sunday.' That is all right, but we will cut the day short, and take from the Sunday the amount of time required for our business; and the Governor in council¹ will have the power, four weeks in advance, to say that three weeks hence there will be such a press of business that we will have to disobey the law of God and let prevail the law of man." For my part, I am against all this legislation. I believe it is not our duty here to occupy ourselves with religious legislation. That has been left to each individual. Each individual has the right to worship his God as he thinks proper, provided he does not interfere with the liberty of any one else.

¹ In the case of urgent necessity arising from the pressure of business caused by an interruption of traffic, or by the approach of the close of navigation, the foregoing provision may, from time to time, be suspended or varied by order of the Governor in council; but such order in council shall only continue in force for four weeks at most, from the making thereof, and may be made applicable to any one or more of the canals.

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