

jure him, it may be, in those very respects in which the Sabbath was given to him to improve himself, or at least to set aside some principles of our nature for the sake of others, a thing which would never be consistent with the arrangements or appointments of a wise and beneficent God. But before the exception can be made; before we can allow ourselves in any work, it must clearly come within the case either of necessity or mercy. Every other work must be remitted. All ordinary employments either of business or amusement must be given up.—The exception in the instance of the miracle wrought by our Lord, and the cases which he supposed, proves the rule.—If action only in such or similar cases could be justified, then it could be justified in no other. And although “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;” still, it is the Sabbath, and while works of necessity and mercy are not reached by the law of the Sabbath, that law excludes every other work, and hence the very name Sabbath, or day of rest. A conscience scrupulous for God’s glory, and for the integrity and honor of his commands, will, in general, not find much difficulty in deciding what are works of necessity and mercy, and what are those which are to be regarded as excluded or forbidden by the law of the Sabbath. Let any man have a proper jealousy for God’s glory, and a regard to his authority, and that will for the most part keep him right: Let him but remember the authority of the law, its solemn sanctions, and its weighty penalties, and he will not regard as a trifle what God has pronounced to be sinful, or the law has represented as a transgression. The words of the prophet include not only our actions but our words, but much more our actions, if they are not such as are consistent with the character of God’s day: “not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.” And if our ordinary avocations and speech are inconsistent with that day, oh, how inconsistent must all unhallowed speech and behaviour be! How inconsistent must be all trafficking or trade, in which man is presumptuously employing time which God has claimed for himself for his own gains! The noise of any worldly occupation in that day is like a defiance to the creator, the Lord of the Sabbath: it is like an insult to the serenity of the heavens, or the peacefulness of the landscape, which God seems hushing into quiet, that

the day may appear, as it is, a holy day, a day of rest! How fearfully selfish appears the conduct of man, which will not remit on one day in seven the prosecution of his own objects, but must endeavor, on God’s day as well as employ the other six for his own purposes! No one would say to the sailor at sea, put down your sails, and let your ship rest upon the waters. That were gross folly. The mariner must obey the winds and the waves, and guide his vessel according to the laws of his art, as long as he is at sea, and he may ask God to send the winds which will be favourable, and to preserve him amid the billows, till the destined haven is reached. But must we have not merely the ship wooing the favourable breeze, and speeding her course over a measureless tract of ocean, laden with God’s bounties, and preserved by His goodness, but must we have our journeys by land, which no law or necessity demands, or principle can justify, and employ in these the mightiest discoveries for man’s convenience and prosperity ever allowed to science—must we seek our own pleasure, and do our own ways, regardless both of the Sabbath, and of the Lord of the Sabbath! Let such selfishness, and such sin become universally prevalent: let the principle in one case be carried out in all: let every man act for himself, and do his own ways, and find his own pleasure, and it requires no great spiritual discernment to see what this or any land so guilty would deserve, if it did not receive the swift judgments of the Almighty.

But pleasure, and vain and worldly conversation, form the most common profanation of the Lord’s day, and mode in which it is perverted from its proper character and purpose. And how many are involved in this guilt! Alas, here, who will say, “I am pure from my sin”?—How many vain words! What idle conversation! Our own ways, our own pleasures, our own words: these are all opposed to the character of God’s day, and the exercise suitable to his worship and his services.

But view the Sabbath now as having respect to man himself, having his improvement for its object: we refer, of course, to his spiritual improvement. Regarded as an institute for man, and intended for his benefit, the duties are the same as before—the worship of God, meditation upon his character and ways, all those exercises by which religion may be promoted in the soul. The Sabbath was given for these exercises, and these alone are con-