

DR. GOLDWIN SMITH ON SUNDAY OBSERVANCE.

SEVERAL members of the Golf Club are reported as having been brought up before the Magistrate for breaking the law respecting the observance of the Lord's day by playing golf on Sunday. Had they been taking a dull walk, riding on horseback, or driving in a carriage, without any religious thoughts in their minds; talking and smoking, perhaps talking scandal, in their club; reading French novels, or writing letters on worldly subjects, they would not have been offending against the law. The only thing apparently which the law condemns is a game; the only thing which it secures is gloom. Even the children must not play on Sunday, and they are apt accordingly to dread the day. This Sunday question is of the highest importance, and we ought to be able to discuss it without acrimony or imputations of wrong motives to either side. For my part I must heartily acknowledge the good intentions of those who desire to uphold the present system, and the correctness of their practical conclusions supposing their premises to be sound. If there is a divine command forbidding amusements, in themselves harmless, to be enjoyed on a Sunday we shall admit that we ought to obey it! If there is not a divine command, we are all free, and, if we are free, we should respect each other's freedom. It is a mistake, I venture to submit, to assume that a plea for a free Sunday is merely a plea for license. It is a plea for mental and moral health. An ordinary man cannot do without a certain amount of pleasure. The character of an ordinary man to whom pleasure was denied would soon become melancholy, morose, and liable to moral aberration. The only question is whether the pleasure shall be healthy, as that of golf or any other out-of-door game is, or unhealthy as are some of those modes of killing time to which a strict Sunday law condemns ordinary men. Hardly anybody, it may be presumed, now maintains that we are divinely commanded to keep the Jewish Sabbath. Nobody except a Jew does in fact keep or pretend to keep it. The reasons given for the institution of the Fourth Commandment show plainly that it was intended for a primitive people. We are under no more obligation to keep the Jewish Sabbath than we are to keep

the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Trumpets. On the words of St. Paul in Colossians ii: 16, Dean Alford, than whom there is no better or more orthodox authority, says that, "If the ordinance of the Sabbath, in any form, had been of lasting obligation on the Christian Church, it would have been quite impossible for the apostle to have spoken thus." The absences of other reference to the Sabbath has been noted as evidence of its disuse. If the Dean's remark is true and the Sabbath is no longer obligatory, why should we allow its shadow, any more than that of any other institution, to darken our life! Our ascetic Sunday is of Puritan origin, and the Puritan's was an Old Testament religion. He was, besides, animated by a desire of opposing what he thought a Scriptural ordinance to the unscriptural festivals and fasts of the Roman calendar. Bishop Morton, one of the best representatives of Christianity in the reign of James I., and a decided Protestant, the question being referred to him by the king, decided that nothing must be allowed which would disturb the congregation during the hours of church service; but that, on the other hand, it must be left to every one's conscience to decide whether he would or would not take part in the customary amusements, which included archery and dancing on the green, when the service was over. Of course, the good prelate would not have constrained or advised any persons to take part in the amusements whose spiritual nature called them to higher things. It seems to me that this is the compromise to which—and let us hope, without breach of social peace or Christian charity—we shall come. Some parishes in England, I believe, have come to it already. Proposals of a compromise unfortunately seldom are welcome, and with relation to the car question, they were at once thrust aside; but the result in that case will probably be that the opponents of Sunday cars will have reason to regret their determination to stand or fall by inexorable prohibition. It is needless and might not be becoming on my part, to warn the clergy against overbending the bow, and connecting Christianity in its hour of trial with a restraint on innocent enjoyment, and with a gloom, of which there is no appearance in the Gospel.—*Toronto Evening Telegram, 30th May.*