

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE SYNOD OF TORONTO AND KINGSTON ON SABBATH OBSERVANCE.

The following is the report of the Committee on Sabbath Observance submitted by the convener, the Rev. A. Wilson, to the Synod of Toronto and Kingston, at its recent meeting at Belleville:

For lack, apparently of right views of the nature of the Sabbath, its obligations, in too many cases and in too many quarters, are not sufficiently recognized and felt. Hence it may be well to direct attention, in the beginning of this report, to this important point which lies at the foundation of all proper Sabbath observance.

On examination it will be found that the Sabbath institution is partly positive and partly moral in its nature. It is positive in so far as it respects the proportion of time and the particular day to be devoted to God's special service. He, to whom all time belongs, might have required, had it pleased Him, a fourth or fifth, instead of a seventh portion of our time for His special service. It is of His sovereign will that a seventh only is to be devoted to this object. And it is equally of His sovereign will that from the creation of the world till the commencement of this New Testament dispensation that the seventh day of the week was to be observed, and since then the first day of the week is to be observed till the end of the world. In this change there was no alteration in either its nature or its obligation; for whether it be the seventh or the first day of the week, the Sabbath, so far as time is concerned, consists in spending regularly a seventh portion of our time in God's special service.

It is moral in its nature, and not ceremonial, in so far as that a certain portion of our time should be set apart and should be devoted to the special service of Him, whose we are and to whom we are indebted for all our time and all other things which we enjoy. Out of the very nature of things and our relation to Him as our Creator, Preserver and Benefactor, this obligation arises. All that we are and all that we have and all that we enjoy are His. Hence it is our most reasonable service to devote some portion of the time He Himself has given us to His special service. This still further appears from our moral nature by which we have a sense of the existence of a Supreme Being, and a conscious feeling that He ought to be feared and worshipped, and hence some portion of our time should be given to this object (from the place the Sabbath law occupies in the moral decalogue, being neither at the end nor at the beginning, but in its very centre where no one would expect to find the law of a ceremonial institution) from the time at which it was instituted. That it was not instituted for the first time at Mount Sinai is evident from the first words of the fourth commandment, viz. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," and from its having been observed by the Jews in the wilderness about one month before they came to Sinai. No satisfactory account of its institution except that contained in the second chapter of the book of Genesis can be found: "On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. 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." But if instituted then, it was instituted, not for the Jews, not for any one portion of the human family or any one age or dispensation, but for man—for men of all nations and all ages and under every dispensation. "The Sabbath" says the faithful and true Witness, "was made for man"—for man physically, socially, morally and spiritually. In all these respects His well-being is wrapt up in the due recognition of its obligations and its proper observance.

Being moral as well as positive in its nature, it is perpetual and universal in its obligation. Its obligation, as does that of all the precepts of the moral law, and equally with that of all the others, lies directly, not only on the individual, but on families, on societies, on corporations as such, and on nations in their corporative capacity. "In it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son nor thy daughter," and the paternal authority must be exercised to prevent them from doing any work but such as is of necessity or mercy. "Nor thy man-servant nor thy maid servant." Then all employers, be they individuals, cor-

porations or nations, must see that their employes abstain from work on this holy day. "Nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle;" so that all owners of beasts, whosoever they may be, are bound by the commandment to give them rest on the Sabbath. It is a merciful provision for them, made by Him to whom the cattle upon a thousand hills belong, and which cannot be taken from them without violating this precept of the moral law, and incurring the displeasure of the great Lawgiver. Companies, corporations and nations, as such may employ servants and possess beasts which may be employed in their service. If so, then they are bound by the law of the Sabbath, not only to permit them to rest, but to see that they do not work on this holy day. If families, and companies, and corporations, and nations may suffer as such—and it will not be denied that they may—it must be because they may sin as such and thus violate as such, moral obligations. These existing as such only in this life, it is only here as such they can be punished for the violation of moral obligations. Hence, sooner or later, during the time of their existence, Sabbath-breaking will bring down upon them the displeasure of Him who has said: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," and subject them to that punishment that is due to the violation of His righteous law. For no two sins did the Jews, as a nation, suffer more than for those of Sabbath-breaking and idolatry. And God has said that "the nation and kingdom that will not serve Him shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted away." Isa. lx. 12.

Further, the Sabbath is an institution of Theism. It was instituted, as we have seen, before the fall and before man actually needed a Saviour. It is, therefore, however incorporated in a former and present dispensation of the Gospel, an institution of no one dispensation, age, people, or nation; but an institution for all men, in all ages, nations, and under all dispensations. But Theism is essential to every state or nation—essential to its existence, its well-being and prosperity. Atheism is destructive to any nation—destructive of its peace, its prosperity, and of its very existence. On two occasions, France saw attempts made to found a civil government on Atheistic principles. But in what did they result? It two reigns of terror. And there now exists in Russia an atheistic sect trying to establish a new commonwealth. But what is its favourite means? Assassination. We repeat it: Theism is essential to any nation. But no less essential is the Sabbath to Theism. Where there is no Sabbath, there the obligations under which men are to God will soon cease to be felt and acknowledged, if not the very knowledge of God as the Supreme Ruler over all men and all things, ceases to be retained. Hence, it becomes one of the first duties of a State—a duty which it owes to itself, alike for its own continued existence, well-being and prosperity, as well as a duty which it owes to the God of nations—not only to recognize the Sabbath, but to respect it, and protect it from all unnecessary infringements as an institution, essential to its best interests, its peace, its stability, and its prosperity.

In view of the solemn obligations of the Sabbath, and the happy effects which flow from its proper observance, both to the individual, the family and the State, there is reason for thankfulness that it is as well protected and observed as it is. While we rejoice to make this statement, we are sorry to be constrained to say, there exists in the land a very large amount of Sabbath profanation, and that in flagrant forms. There is a large amount of social visiting of neighbours and friends, instead of spending the "whole day in the public and private exercise of God's worship"—pleasure-taking by excursions, and in other ways—numerous unnecessary funerals, thus calling out many horses and their drivers, bringing together large numbers of people whose conversation is generally of a worldly character, and interfering in various ways with the proper duties of the day—processions with bands of music on the public streets of our towns and cities, and that in the name of religion—volunteer parades, not for the purpose of telling off the men to different squads, as is the case in the regular army, to be marched at the usual hour of worship to the different churches to which they may profess to belong; but to march in a body with bands of music playing, to one place of worship, thus making a sad instead of a grand display, attracting crowds of people to the drill-shed and to the public streets, to the disturbance of that peace and quietude which should prevail—in connec-

tion with religious camps and places of summer resort, though under the management of professing Christians—unnecessary running of boats on our waters—the unnecessary running of trains on our railways, and unnecessary work in our post-offices.

It is to be feared there is much Sabbath-breaking in connection with livery stables. Horses that should have the rest which God has given them are hired out on the Lord's day to persons who use them only for their own recreation and not for works of necessity. And it is to be regretted that in our towns and cities places of business are kept open to a very late hour on Saturday night, thus, oftentimes, unfitting employes for the happy and profitable enjoyment of the Sabbath and its appropriate services. Business is too often run into the very last hours of the week, if not sometimes, into the early hours of the Sabbath morning. And your committee think it is to be regretted that the unscriptural name, "Sunday," is employed so often by Presbyterians and even ministers of the Presbyterian Church to designate God's holy Sabbath day. Is there not good reason for abstaining from this, and using only the name of Sabbath or Lord's day?

We would call special attention to a new departure made by the Grand Trunk and the Post-office Department last July, by the former starting a special passenger train on Sabbath evening, both from Toronto and Montreal, and the latter ordering mails to be made up for and despatched by these trains. Earnest protests from the pulpit, in the newspapers, and by petitions against these new infringements of the Sabbath were made, which resulted only in abating a little the work performed in the post-offices. These trains still run, and these mails are still made up and despatched on the Lord's day. It is worthy of special notice that since the time these trains were started, there has been one disaster after another on the Grand Trunk, involving the loss of many lives and the destruction of a very large amount of property. In some instances it was stated to be as much as \$50,000, and the second day of this year will be ever memorable for the loss of life and property by the Humbler disaster that desolated so many homes in the city of Toronto. We believe in a Special Omnipotent Providence that will sooner or later in this life overtake corporations, companies, and nations with that punishment that is due to the profanation of the Sabbath, as well as the violation of other precepts of God's moral law.

There is more than enough, then, of Sabbath-breaking to arouse all those who value and love this pearl of days to vigorous action for its defence, protection and observance. A circular agent further legislation for its better observance, was issued last year by the ministerial Association of Toronto, to the various bodies of Christians. In response to this, most of these appointed persons to represent them, with a view to united action. A meeting of these was held last November, when it was considered advisable to apply by petition to the Dominion Parliament for additional legislation. Petitions have been prepared and extensively circulated, many of them largely signed, and sent to both the Senate and House of Commons. A Bill has been introduced into the latter with the view of amending the present Sabbath law, of whose provisions we cannot now definitely speak. But your committee are deeply impressed with the importance and necessity of obtaining, as soon as possible, a Dominion Sabbath law embracing the various Provincial Sabbath Acts with such amendments as may be found necessary to secure the better protection and observance of the Lord's Day.

In conclusion, and in the words of a good man and an able divine, who is now in the enjoyment of that rest of which our Sabbaths here are at once the earnest and the type: "The Sabbath and religion stand or fall together. Man's highest good prospers, while, on the Sabbath, the Bible is open, and the mind fixed on its truth; while Sabbath schools and churches meet, and holy rites are dispensed; while saving grace, through faith, commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God; but defile the Sabbath by a flood of folly or of toil, bring in a continental Sunday, instead of the Christian Sabbath, and Icha-bod is written on our glory; put down the Sacred Day, and it falls like the strong man, bringing with it the living, precious, and fair, and leaving behind hopeless ruin." Let us then give all due heed: let all under the watch and care of this Synod give due heed to the words of God as recorded in Deut. v. 12-14: "Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God