

Pastor and People.

HE KNOWS.

Blest Saviour! Had'st Thou known
How dark the way would be,
How strong the waves and angry wind,
When I put out to sea.

Thou had'st not bid me sail
Where cruel surf makes moan,
Where trembling barks all restless toss
Amid the seething foam.

Oh, soul, had I not known,
I had not bid thee go;
I knew it all and loved thee still
Beyond what heart can know!

—M. Grant Graser, Mhow, Central India.

THE PERMANENCE OF THE SABBATH IN RELATION TO THE MOSAIC LAW AND THE GOSPEL ECONOMY.*

It seems undeniable that in Christian lands the general regard for the sanctity of the Lord's day is in some way linked with the popular conviction that the Fourth Commandment is binding; and it appears very certain that any weakening of this belief would necessarily tend to undermine the sense of obligation to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. We propose to examine some of the grounds which lead us to believe that this general opinion is well founded, and to show why we regard the Sabbath law, embodied in the Fourth Commandment, as binding under the Gospel.

In this connection, two outstanding facts arrest attention, viz.: First—All Christendom avowedly recognizes the Fourth Commandment as still binding; and, second—all Christendom, with trifling exceptions, observes its day of sacred rest on the first day of the week. That the entire Christian world, east and west, openly acknowledge the authority of the Fourth Commandment, is evident from the treatment accorded to the Decalogue as a whole. It is constantly held forth and taught as a summary of all the duties enjoined by the divine law.

No Christian Church has ever eliminated any one of its precepts, or taught its people to think of all duty as embodied in nine commandments. The Ten Commandments are recited in Church services. They are often printed conspicuously on the walls of the house of God. They are taught to the children in the family, in the Sabbath school, and even in public schools, where only a minimum of religion is allowed. When we take part in the most solemn service of a Christian Church we may hear the minister rehearse distinctly all the Ten Commandments, and after each of them in succession, the entire congregation devoutly responds, "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law," and we feel assured that no one can unite in that act of worship, who does not see something in the Fourth Commandment which still binds the Christian conscience.

If the Christian world does not believe that the Fourth Commandment is of permanent obligation, it should revise its customs.

But while Christendom does homage to the abiding authority of the Sabbath law in the Decalogue, it is equally certain that it does not observe its day of rest and worship on the seventh day.

With comparatively small exceptions, it rests on the first day of the week. But those who believe in the permanent authority of the Fourth Commandment, can follow this course consistently, only upon the supposition that while the law, in all that is essential to it, remains, the day of the week upon which it is observed has been changed by competent authority. The Sabbath law in the Decalogue is, however, part of a much larger body of laws, found in the Books of Moses, the major portion of which is regarded as no longer obligatory on Christians. It is scarcely possible to deal intelligently with the

permanence of the Sabbath, without, at least, glancing at the general structure of the Mosaic law, and the relation its parts sustain to each other.

Our subject branches into three parts; the evidence for the permanence of the Sabbath law; its relation to the Mosaic codes; and the change of the day on which it is observed under the Gospel.

I. The evidence for the permanence of the Sabbath law. In claiming permanence for the Sabbath law, we distinguish, for reasons which will hereafter appear, between the essential features of the law as embodied in the Fourth Commandment, and the detailed enactments with their penalties, which are found elsewhere in the Mosaic codes. Intelligent Christians believe that these have served their purpose and passed away, but that the Sabbath law, engraved by the finger of God on the tables of stone, has not ceased to bind the Christian conscience.

In sketching the argument for the permanence of the Sabbath law, we begin with a point, which though not strictly essential to the argument, adds greatly to its force, viz.:

1. The Sabbath was established long prior to the Mosaic economy, and has an independent origin. Although incorporated in the Mosaic system, it comes down to us, like the law of marriage from Eden. It was given originally, not to Israel, but to the representatives of the whole human race. In Gen. ii., 2-3, we read that God rested the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. Paley, F. W. Robertson and others, following earlier continental authors, tell us that the record here is made in anticipation of what was afterwards done in the wilderness. They suppose that "the order of connection, and not of time, introduces the mention of the Sabbath in the history of the subject it was ordained to commemorate." Robertson informs us, "It is not said that God at the creation gave the Sabbath to man, but that God rested at the close of the six days of creation: whereupon He blessed and sanctified the seventh day to the Israelites." It must be obvious to almost every reader, that there is nothing in the context to suggest this view; and it is difficult to understand how any one who had not a preconceived hypothesis to support, could have thought of this mode of handling what seems a plain historical record. Moreover, if the reason alleged was valid for establishing the Sabbath at Sinai, it was equally valid from the beginning; and there is really no reason why we should give this passage such a severe wrench in order to make it appear that God had denied this beneficent institution for three thousand years to the human race.

It has been urged that the entire silence of Scripture respecting the Sabbath, in the period intervening between Adam and Moses, is inconsistent with its early date. When the fragmentary and brief character of the history in Genesis is taken into account, no great weight can be attached to this objection. There are, moreover, traces all down through the history in Genesis of the division of time into weeks, of which the primeval institution of the Sabbath is the natural explanation. Passing by less definite references in the earlier portions of the book, when we come down to the time of Noah, we read, "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain." "And it came to pass after seven days the waters of the flood were upon the earth." Again we read, "And Noah stayed yet another seven days and sent forth the dove out of the ark." And after that week had run its course, the history goes on, "And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more." From the history of Jacob we find that the division of time into "weeks" was familiar in Padan-Aram, and the "week" is mentioned twice in successive verses. And when Jacob died, we are informed that "Joseph made a mourning for his father seven days." Why this constant reference to seven days, and to weeks, if the Sabbath was unknown until the days of Moses?

It is also noteworthy, that when the manna was first given to the Israelites two weeks before they came to Sinai, the Sabbath is spoken of as already known; and the first definite reference to the Sabbath in Exodus is given, not in the form of the enactment of a new law, but in the observance of a day already known. Were the silence of Genesis much more decisive than it is, it would prove nothing; for there is no notice of the observance of the Sabbath from the time of Moses until the end of the government of the Judges, some four hundred and fifty years. It adds force to all these considerations to find that the Fourth Commandment itself is

given at Sinai in language which does not suggest a new law so much as the recalling and sanctioning one already known, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

The primeval institution of the Sabbath is strongly corroborated by the widespread division of time into weeks in the heathen world. Nations widely separated from each other, on all the three continents of the ancient world, so reckon time, and they very generally regard the seventh day as partaking of a sacred character. Hesiod and Homer both tell us that the seventh day is holy. The cuneiform inscriptions have in modern times led nearly all authorities to admit that the ancient Assyrians had weeks of seven days. George Smith and Prof. Sayce have gone farther. The former says, "In the year eighteen and sixty-nine, I discovered, among other things, a curious religious calendar of the Assyrians, in which every month is divided into four weeks, and the seventh days or 'Sabbaths' are marked as days on which no work should be undertaken."

In view of these facts, it seems difficult to resist the conclusion that we have in Gen. ii. 2, the record of a primeval institution, which has left its impress deeply on widely-scattered races, and which, in later ages, was engraven by the divine hand on the tables of stone.

2. Turning now to the Fourth Commandment itself, we discover that the reasons assigned for the law bespeak its permanence. They are all as enduring as the human race. When the reasons why a law is given, are purely temporary, and these have passed away, the law, if it is not expressly repealed, will fall into disuse and become a dead letter. In the reasons given for the Sabbath law, there is nothing temporary, local or Jewish. The presence of such a reason would not indeed prove the law temporary provided there were either in the precept itself or in the nature of things, permanent reasons for its observance. This is seen in the case of the Fifth Commandment, which has such a local reference, and yet is expressly recognized in the New Testament as obligatory on Gentile Christians. But there are no reasons assigned for the Fourth Commandment, in which all mankind are not as much concerned as the Israelites. The reasons are found in the ends, it is specially intended to serve, which are three, viz.: First—It commemorates the work of creation, and is thereby a standing testimony to the existence and perfections of a living personal God. Second—It provides one day in each week to be specially devoted to God, and employed in holy services, such as worship, religious instruction, and deeds of charity. Third—It secures to man and beast a season of rest after toil to recuperate the wearied body. These are the reasons which lie on the surface of this commandment for remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy. None of them is peculiar to any land or to any age. If there is any difference, it is merely one of emphasis, and never certainly was the quiet and elevating influence of the day of sacred rest more essential to all the best interests of mankind, than amid the bustle, worry, excitement and rush of modern life.

3. The place assigned by God to the Fourth Commandment in the Decalogue, a permanent moral code, is indicative of its perpetual obligation. A temporary or ceremonial law, would be strangely out of place in such a position. It is all but universally admitted that the other nine commandments are without exception, binding still. They spring out of the unchanging relations which man sustains to God, and to his fellow-men. It is certainly almost incredible that a precept merely transient or ceremonial should find a place in such a code.

4. Our Lord's declaration that, "the Sabbath was made for man," involves the universality and permanence of the Sabbath law.

If it is a local or temporary appointment, we must gather our information from some other source than the teaching of Christ.

F. W. Robertson, with a confidence which rests on no tangible support, intimates that the Sabbath was designed purely for one people. "God," he says, "blessed and sanctified the seventh day to the Israelites." Over against this narrow and unworthy view of the day of rest, we set the explicit words of Christ, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." According to the Great Teacher, it was instituted for the human race. With this view his entire attitude towards the Sabbath agrees. He is careful by His instructions and example, to set aside the perverse interpretations of the scribes and pharisees, but He drops no hint of the approaching abrogation of the

Sabbath. He does for this commandment, what he did in the Sermon on the Mount for the sixth, the seventh and the third. He sweeps away the glosses of the Rabbis and brings out the original import and true meaning of the Sabbath law. And the care taken by our divine Master to vindicate and expound the real bearing of this law, is itself convincing evidence that He did not regard the Sabbath as a mere shadow about to vanish away.

II. The relation of the Fourth Commandment to the Mosaic law.

It is a portion of a much larger body of laws which have passed away, and many believe that the Sabbath also has passed away with them, so that it no longer binds the Christian conscience. This objection assumes various forms.

1. A distinguished literary man among us, recently wrote, "That the Fourth Commandment was intended only for a single nation is clear from the fact, that it takes no notice of difference of meridian, which makes it impossible to keep the same day in more than one part of the earth. The Mosaic law altogether is evidently the law of a particular country, of a particular race, of a particular stage in the religious education of mankind."

This statement suggests two remarks: First—The true religion never can be rightfully the religion of merely one race. Local religions, and local deities, belong to the conceptions of heathenism, but are foreign both to Judaism and Christianity. The true religion may, as a matter of fact, be confined to one race, but it is entitled to the homage of all; and its revelations of the divine will must concern all. The Mosaic law itself in its historical connection, was avowedly linked with blessing for all the families of the earth. Second—The Fourth Commandment says nothing about the necessity of keeping "the same day" at precisely the same instances of time, "in more than one part of the earth." It is quite true, it takes no notice of "difference of meridian," from which it might be inferred it was intended for men who had sufficient wisdom to take no notice of difference of meridian in observing it. Nations, however widespread, when they proclaim holidays are not wont to take notice of difference of meridian, and we fail to discover any reason why God should burden His Sabbath law with any such needless trivialities.

If difference of meridian is insisted on as essential, then it is just as impossible for all the people of Palestine as for all the nations of the world to observe the day a textually the same time. The objection is purely rabbinic in spirit. It surpasses the Rabbis, however, in its disregard of the spirit and the letter of the law. For even those trained in "the strictest sect of the Jew's religion" do not appear to have found any difficulty in carrying their Sabbath with them, wherever they wander, and they may now be found devoutly observing it in the meridian of Toronto.

2. The Sabbath is on several occasions spoken of in the Old Testament as a sign given between God and Israel and the deliverance from Egypt is assigned as a reason why they should keep the Sabbath (Ex. xxxi. 13, and Deut. v. 15); and this is supposed to prove that it was instituted at the Exodus, and was appointed peculiarly for the Israelites, so that other nations are under no obligation to observe it.

But why may not the Sabbath serve more than one end, and be enforced by more than one set of reasons? Christ says to the Jews, "Moses gave you circumcision," and circumcision as enjoined by him, served important ends connected with the Mosaic economy, yet circumcision existed for centuries before Moses. God gave Noah the rainbow as a sign of His covenant, but as a natural phenomenon the rainbow existed from the beginning. And if the deliverance from Egypt is urged as a reason for observing the Sabbath, it is in the preface to the Decalogue given as a reason for keeping all the Ten Commandments.

An added reason for obeying a law does not invalidate the reasons which existed before the new one was given. Creation does not cease to bind us to obey God, because redemption has added new reasons for obedience, and has enhanced our obligations.

3. Another class who think the Sabbath has passed away with the Mosaic law, content themselves with saying that it is a Jewish institution, which has shared the fate of the system to which it belonged. It was part and parcel of the Mosaic economy and has passed away with the rites, ceremonies and civil regulations of that dispensation, and it cannot "bind the Christian conscience."

* Lectar by the Rev. Dr. McLaren, Professor of Systematic Theology, at the opening of Knox College, Oct. 4th.