

HARD SAYINGS OF CHRIST.

VII.

So that the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. Mark ii., 28.

THIS saying forms part of Christ's vindication of his disciples from the accusation brought against them by the Pharisees of breaking the Sabbath in rubbing out the ears of grain to satisfy their hunger, as they passed through the fields. According to their exposition of the law, this was forbidden as a species of threshing, which, of course, was labour. His vindication was based upon the principle that the Sabbath was an institution appointed wholly in man's interest, and therefore man's needs are always paramount to it, availing to set aside the prohibition when the two come into conflict. The normal idea of the Sabbath was certainly the exclusion of labour of any kind, but when the enforcement of it would entail suffering or loss that might be prevented, the prohibition ought to give way. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

This limitation of the Sabbath law in favour of works of necessity and mercy is universally admitted by Christians. Even the Jews recognize it practically, though they have not formally changed any of their traditional precepts regarding it. There is, of course, a good deal of difference of opinion as to what are works of necessity and mercy. Some understand them in a very narrow sense, while others interpret them much more generously. But the principle itself is so obviously reasonable that it is never seriously questioned even by the most thorough-going Sabbatarians, and it has been so often discussed that there is no need to dwell upon it further here.

Not so much attention, however, has been given to the claim of authority over the Sabbath which Christ makes for Himself in the words with which He closes the subject: "So that the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." The force of it is not entirely obvious, and it will stand a little elucidation.

Some are disposed to regard this as being merely a personal conclusion from the principle that man is entitled to hold the Sabbath in subordination to his own needs. Seeing that the right belonged to all men, He, as a Son of Man, was justified in setting the Sabbath aside for such emergencies as that which was under discussion, if He saw fit to do so.

Now, undoubtedly this expresses a principle which is true in itself, whether that is what is meant here or not. Within reasonable limits every individual man has a right to exercise his own judgment in determining