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William Scoresby

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MEMORIALS OF THE SEA.

Sabbaths in the Arctic Regions;

OR

TESTIMONIES OF NATURE AND PROVIDENCE TO THE
DIVINE INSTITUTION AND PERPETUITY
OF THE SABBATH.

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SABBATHS IN THE ARCTIC REGIONS.

“THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN.”—MARK II. 27.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL TESTIMONIES OF NATURE AND PROVIDENCE TO
THE DIVINE INSTITUTION AND PERPETUITY
OF THE SABBATH.

SECTION I.—*Introduction.*

THOUGH the institution of the Sabbath is found recorded in the fore-front of the appointments of God, embodied among the ten precepts of the moral law, and repeatedly enforced by Moses and the Prophets; yet its perpetuity of obligation, is, with many persons amongst us, unhappily questioned. Whilst the nine other commandments of the Almighty are acknowledged to be of universal authority—as constituting the plain and undisputed rule of man’s obedience—this one, though given before any of the associated words, is now strangely held by some professing Christians, as an appointment binding

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only upon the Jews, but not upon them! And although our Lord, as himself declared, came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil; whilst he denounced those 'who should break one of the least commandments, and teach men so,'—yet this command, thus generally confirmed and guarded, is daringly asserted to be now annulled!

But it comports not with the object of this publication to controvert the question after the laborious and learned methods in which, in modern times, it has been taken up, and, in different instances, we regret to add, most perniciously pursued. For the obvious tendency and observable effects of the specious arguments of Dr. Paley, and his too numerous followers on this subject, may be perceived to be, not only to undermine and break down the authority of the fourth commandment, but to justify and encourage that lamentable desecration of the Lord's day so greatly and injuriously prevalent throughout the land. Considering the subtle and far-fetched reasonings of some of the impugners of the perpetuity of the Sabbath,—the masculine efforts of others in explaining away the common sense of the word of God, or in confounding the natural understanding of man,—one cannot but lament such prostitutions of learning as have too often produced an undue prejudice on the minds

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of sincere Christians, against those high attainments and superior powers of intellect which, when strictly directed to God's glory, stand forth as the most noble endowments of our species. Were such the necessary tendencies of superior attainments—though, happy are we in the knowledge of very numerous and distinguished examples to the contrary—then, indeed, one might envy rather the faculties of a little child, or be willing to “become a fool,” so as to “be wise” in the comprehension of the word of God in its simplicity and truth.

According to the simple tenor of the sacred Scriptures, if left unperplexed by the perversion of learning, and unprejudiced by human dogmas, the command assuredly remains with us of unabated obligation, to “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” But it is not merely an obligation; it is an appointment full of wisdom and mercy. Mankind, in their natural blindness and ignorance, are apt to suppose, that any of the commands of God, which present a bar to their carnal desires or unhallowed pleasures, are at once grievous and unnecessary; and are, therefore, disposed to deal with them, even by the most monstrous reasonings or subtleties, so that their consciences may find quiet in the imagined abrogation, or mitigation of strictness, of the ungenial precept. But in our consideration

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of the Divine government, it is most important to be borne in mind, that God neither appoints any observance, nor gives any command, without a special object. He lays no arbitrary demands upon his people; he denies them no real blessing which they are in a condition to receive; he vexes them by no useless burden, nor unnecessary restriction; but he requires them to keep his commandments and statutes *for their good*. And this is one of his blessed statutes, involving most essentially the good of mankind—"Keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God."

On this ground even, the seeking of good,—greatly inferior though it be as a motive of obedience, to that of a sense of obligation due to the command of the great God,—we may obtain a very powerful, and, we trust, a persuasive plea, for the consecration of a seventh part of our time, as a sabbath, *that it may be well with us, and that a blessing may rest upon the land in which we dwell*. In evidence of these effects being really derivable from a reverent observance of the sacred day of the Lord, it is only necessary, with a mind spiritually enlightened, to mark the frequent, and oftentimes manifest providential attestations which are occurring around us. For God doth bear continual witness to His own appointment, that the Sabbath is no peculiar law for the government of a peculiar people, but part and parcel of

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the constitution of nature, and of the order of Providence. And nature itself bears testimony that the Sabbath is an actual *law of Creation*; and if so, then must it be as perpetual in its obligation as the existence of nature in its general constitution.

Among the various arguments derivable from observation of nature and Providence, in relation to the law of the Sabbath, we may notice, briefly, the following:—the testimony borne to the law of the Sabbath by its influence on the physical condition of nature, and on the moral condition of man, with the testimony of Providence as to a curse on Sabbath desecration, and as to a blessing on its conscientious observance.

SECTION II.—*The testimony borne to the Law of the Sabbath, by its influence on the physical condition of nature.*

In the fruitfulness of the soil of the ground, and in the physical vigour of both the lower animals and man, we find the most manifest and beneficial influence from particular periods of rest, alternating with longer periods of labour.

For the refreshment and invigoration *of the earth*, periodical fallows are not only useful, but, if we would expect to elicit the best condition of fertility, essential. Of this experimental fact, the

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most eminent and intelligent agriculturists give the appropriate testimony, that where the practice of fallows prevails, “the farmer’s produce and profits are found to be far superior to where fallows are omitted.” And why? Because the constitution of the earth was made subject to the law thus experimentally elicited, being designed for a periodical portion of rest; and this portion was strictly defined when Jehovah issued the decree to Israel,—“Six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shall gather in the fruits thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still.”

In regard to the physical condition of the *animals* employed in domestic labour, experience bears witness to a similar law, requiring for their health and strength the rest of a Sabbath. “Take,” for example, “that fine animal, the *horse*, and work him to the full extent of his powers every day in the week, or give him rest one day in seven, and it will soon be perceived by the superior vigour with which he performs his functions on the other six days, that this rest is necessary to his well being.” Of this corroborative fact, the experience and observation of one of the most successful coach-proprietors in the kingdom, afford very striking evidence. Speaking with him on the management of his well regulated business, he made this remark in respect to the number and period of employment

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of his horses,—that he found it requisite to have a spare horse in every six, not only for supplying the place of any that might be sick, but, chiefly, for giving each horse a day's rest once every week! For he found, he added, 'that when the horses were worked continually, though employed only for an hour's stage to and fro daily, they were rapidly worn out; it was but economy, therefore, in horses, to give them a weekly rest!'

In the effect of continuous labour on the physical condition of *man*, the existence of the same law is clearly observable. The frame of the labourer who is without his sabbath of rest, either breaks down through the pressure of his unceasing toil, or sinks into premature decay; whilst the man of study, who applies closely every day of the week in continuance, discovers, sooner or later, by painful experience, that his laborious diligence has been but improvident draughts upon the resources of nature. Of this latter effect of continuous efforts of mind, we have numerous and obvious examples among the learned professions. 'The premature death of medical men from continued exertion, especially in warm climates and in active service, has been frequently observed; and among the more active of the Clergy, who have neglected the substitution of another day of rest in compensation for

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the sabbath, many have been seen to be destroyed by their duties on that day.' And it has been shown by some of the most eminent among Christian physicians, that, in a medical sense, as well as in a religious, the Sabbath, as a day of rest, is a most beneficial institution. It is held "as a day of compensation for the inadequate restorative power of the body under continued labour and excitement." And its rest, physiologically considered, has a "sustaining, repairing, and healing power."* The working of Providence, in respect to our bodily frame, therefore, attests to the present day, the declaration of our Lord, that "the Sabbath was made for man." It further attests, that the Sabbath is not an arbitrary institution, nor a mere judicial regulation, nor a ceremonial observance designed for the Jews only, but an "appointment necessary to man."

Thus, it appears, that Nature, in its physical constitution, bears a special and multifarious testimony to the perpetuity of obligation, and beneficence of character of the divine injunction,— "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest; that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed."

* This observation, with some other quotations in this Section, is derived from the very intelligent evidence of Dr. Farre, before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the observance of the Lord's Day.