

Catholic Holy Days and Puritan Sabbaths.

WHEN the Invincible Armada was scattered by the winds, England was freed from the Spanish nightmare that had troubled her for a generation. Fear of the Roman Catholics died down rapidly, and in church matters Elizabeth and the Puritans were now face to face, with no third party of whom both were afraid, to force them into unwilling partnership. The steady fining of Catholic recusants had reduced the number of people worth attention to only 8,500, of whom a third lived in Lancashire. So the Star Chamber turned its attention to Puritan Nonconformists.

It was high time from the standpoint of the government, which wished to control all the machinery of the church. For in 1592 some trials failed to convict, Parliament betrayed great sympathy with the Puritans; while across the border the Scotch abolished bishops, and set up a system of church government which was speedily to become a Puritan republic, with no room for any sovereign to take part in its management.

The inspiration of the Puritans was in the Bible, and since 1560 there had been a popular version, executed at Geneva, and furnished with abundant notes reflecting the stern Genevan doctrine as worked out by Calvin and Beza. This was in Scotland the authorized version; every Church and every substantial householder was obliged by law to own a copy.¹ And although no such law held in England, the size and price made it popular everywhere.

Now it is in connection with this version that there arose in the Puritan mind an identification of the Sabbath and the Sunday. When Whittingham, Knox and others wrote to Calvin a criticism of the English Prayer Book, while they often speak of Sunday, yet twice over they use the term "Saboth daie" as an alternative, therein following an occasional phrase of Hooper and Latimer.² And this usage quickly became general, as may be seen by the fact that in 1563 Archbishop Parker, writing about the Dutch and Walloons at Sandwich, testified that they were "very godly in the

¹ Darlow and Moule: *Hist. Cat. of Printed Bibles*, I, 89.

² Hesse: *Bampton Lectures*, 461.

Sabbath-day, and busy in their work on the week-day."³ From this application of the name Sabbath to the first day of the week, two results followed. First, a polemic by the Puritans against the word Sunday, as heathen; second, a desire to apply to the first day of the week, the customs of the Jews.

It should be remembered that the cessation of work on Sunday was no new thing, nor was it desired only by clergy and puritans. The guilds of Beverley in the fifteenth century had strictly forbidden smiths, shoe-makers and bakers to ply their crafts then, with a curious exception that in harvest time the shoemakers might work outside church-doors in the country.⁴ A hundred years later, butchers were forbidden to ride on Sunday for buying, unless a fair was on. And at Aldeburgh the town council obliged all fishermen to come in at eight on Saturday till noon on Sunday.

The whole subject was brought up as part of the Puritan plea to get rid of the relics of the papal system. They regarded the plans of Elizabeth as an illogical compromise between the old system and a true reformed system, such as was well illustrated at Geneva. In 1572 Thomas Cartwright, professor of Divinity at Cambridge, began publishing Puritan manifestos and programmes; and they met with such general sympathy that no mere legal measures of deprivation and punishment availed; books had to be issued to break the force of Cartwright's arguments.

Cartwright attacked the general observing of holy days, and on this point as on others he was answered by Whitgift in a tractate covering pages 565-595 in the second volume of the Oxford reprint of his works. Cartwright claimed that one day after another had been labelled Holy by the Medieval Church, and so many of these were still regarded holy by the Church of England, that in the end a man was compelled to abstain from work twice as many days as the Jews had been: he pleaded that all these days of mere ecclesiastical appointment be abandoned, even Easter, and that the Lord's day only be observed as a day of rest and worship. To this Whitgift objected. But in the controversy they cite modern foreign divines like Bullinger and Flacius Illyricus, all using the word Sabbath to signify The Lord's day. This was evidently the meaning of all the passages cited, and the word Sabbath was used by Whitgift himself in the same way, even as Parker had done.

It may be noted that Calvinists on the continent were all precise on the observance of the first day. Even in 1589, when an important embassy from Elizabeth was conferring daily with the States General of the Netherlands, the daily register records re-

³ Works, Oxford Edition, 189.

⁴ Hist. MSS Commission, 79.

gularly, "Jan. 15. Sunday.—This day was spent, as usual, in prayers."⁵

Whitgift once or twice pointed out that Cartwright was confusing together the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord's Day in his quotations from ancient writers.

"The Sabbath day mentioned by Ambrose and Augustine is not the Lord's Day, which we call the Sunday, and whereof both Ignatius and Tertullian speak; but it is the Saturday which is called *Sabbatum*."⁶ This he proves by quotations from Augustine expressly distinguishing the two. It is to be remembered that there were no Jews in England, nor had been for two centuries; so there was nothing visible to remind anybody that Jews still worshipped on the Saturday, keeping that and not Sunday as their Sabbath.

Whitgift gave his view that on every Holy day, and not on the Sabbath alone, men might justly be debarred from all work that was not urgent, so that they might instruct their households in God's word. Cartwright took his stand on the words, "Six days shalt thou work," and insisted that Holy days were absolutely wrong in principle.

But both Cartwright and Whitgift in their prolonged debate, stretching over three or four books, suppose that while the Jewish Sabbath is abolished, the Lord's Day is fitly termed the Sabbath, and that it is to be observed on the lines indicated in the Old Testament. And this was generally in the minds of all earnest men then.

After the earthquake of 1580, there was published a Godly admonition in which the official view of how the Lord's Day ought to be spent is contrasted with the frequent practices.⁷ "The Sabbath days and holy days ordained for the hearing of God's word to the reformation of our lives, for the administration and receiving of the Sacraments to our comfort, for the seeking of all things behooveful for body or soul at God's hand by prayer, for the minding of his benefits, and to yield praise and thanks unto Him for the same, and finally, for the special occupying of ourselves in all spiritual exercises, is spent full heathenishly, in taverning, tippling, gaming, playing and beholding of Bear-baiting and Stage plays, to the utter dishonour of God." &c.

Three years later Whitgift was made Archbishop of Canterbury, and he at once issued a circular to his suffragan bishops, telling them how to attend to children.⁸ Amongst other points he ordered them to execute the provision for catechizing and instruct-

⁵ Earls of Ancaster's MSS, page 251.

⁶ Works, I, 228, 578.

⁷ Lit. Eliz., 573.

⁸ Works: III, 610.

ing in churches, of youths of both sexes, "on the sabbath-days and holydays in afternoons."

The whole subject was one that deeply interested the nation, and was not a mere theological quarrel. Several bills were introduced into Parliament to enforce the Puritan ideal.⁹ In 1585 there was a long struggle over this, and with "much dispute and great difficulty" such a bill passed both houses.¹⁰ But when the Queen came down, and was asked to give force to the bills awaiting her, she replied very sharply about their attempted interference with matters of religion "the ground on which all other matters ought to take root and being corrupted may mar all the tree—the presumption is so great as I may not suffer it—nor tolerate new-fangledness. I mean to guide them both by God's holy true rule." Therefore she vetoed that bill, and in the list of thirty which passed into acts that year, this does not appear. It is important to notice this, because in 1620 a member of Parliament referred to it under the impression that the bill had become law; and his mistake has been repeated in recent years. The incident is, however, excellent evidence of the popular interest in applying rules about the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Lord's Day.

After 1588 there opened a more serious gulf between the authorities and the Puritans. Elizabeth confiscated Puritan books, and set Bancroft on exposing their plans. They in return concentrated their forces on two points, the establishment of Discipline on the Genevan-Scottish model, and the observance of the Lord's day in strict Jewish-Sabbath form. The former point we may neglect. It was in 1595 that a volume of 286 quarto pages was issued by Nicholas Bound of Norton in Suffolk, on the *True Doctrine of the Sabbath*. It called into the lists one Thomas Rogers, who was horrified at its rigour.¹¹ He mentions how it was preached in Somersetshire, that to throw a bowl on the Sabbath-day is as great a sin as to kill a man. Nor was this a mere clerical extravagance; the justices of the peace at Bridgewater applied to the Judges of Assize for an order to abolish Church-ales, Clerk-ales, Bid-ales; and chief justice Popham did sign this in 1596.¹² Next year the justices of Cornwall ordered wardens and constables to note absentees from service "on the Sabbath day," and to punish them according to the statute; also they ordered householders to keep their servants and youths from unlawful games and alehouses "on the Sabbath days."

Meantime Richard Hooker was maturing his *Laws of*

⁹ Cobbett's Parly. History, I. 824.

¹⁰ D'Ewes' Journals, 328; in Prothero, 222.

¹¹ Works: Oxford Edition, 19.

¹² Hist. MSS. Com. C 9246, page 161.

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Ecclesiastical Polity, with constant reference to the teachings of Cartwright. In 1597 he dedicated the fifth book of Whitgift, and had occasion to deal briefly with this question.¹³ His language is careful, he restricts the word Sabbath to the Jewish festival; he criticizes Cartwright on many details and shows that the Christian festival is of ecclesiastical appointment, not divine, "their sabbath the Church hath changed into our Lord's day." But on the main point even Hooker agrees with the Puritan that the gospel of Christ requires the perpetuity of religious duties, and he quotes with approval the edict of the emperor Leo, "that on the sacred day, wherein our own integrity was restored, all do rest and surcease labour."

Hooker's judicious reasoning was not vigorous enough for Rogers, who invited the interference of the government.¹⁴ Whitgift called in Bound's book during 1599, and Popham next year forbade it to be reprinted. None the less the subject had attracted attention, and Sabbath-keeping became a test question as between Puritans and the Government.

The death of Whitgift gave renewed opportunity to publish. George Widley handled anew the doctrine of the Sabbath in 1604, a second edition of Bound's book followed, and a much enlarged third edition in 1606.

The death of Elizabeth and the accession of James led to several measures completing the reconstruction of the English Church. He was a Calvinist in doctrine, but irritated by the Presbyterian discipline of Scotland, and he rejoiced in being legally the Governor of the Church; his chief agent was Bancroft, who was no Puritan and no Calvinist. Yet the ripening of public opinion can be clearly traced by comparing an official homily of 1563 with the thirteenth canon of 1604. When Elizabeth succeeded to the rule of Mary, the people were told that "God was more dishonoured, and the Devil better served on the Sunday, than upon all the days in the week beside."¹⁵ And illustrations are not far to seek; Strype tells how in 1582 Sunday continued to be the favourite day for the Londoners to row over to the theatres at Bankside, or sports in Southwark, and that this was upheld by the Government against the expostulation of the lord mayor.¹⁶ Martin Marprelate was fond of twitting Bishop Aylmer with his habit of playing bowls seven days a week; and the reply admitted that he did so even "upon the Sabboth." But Convocation in the first year of James enacted, with government assent, that "all manner of persons within the Church of England shall henceforth

¹³ Works: II. 34, 37, 46.

¹⁴ Rogers, Oxford Edition, 20.

¹⁵ Hessey, Sunday, 277.

¹⁶ Hessey: 463.

celebrate and keep the Lord's day, commonly called Sunday, and other Holy Days, according to God's will and pleasure, and the orders of the Church of England prescribed on that behalf, e.g., worship, visiting the sick, godly conversation."

And popular opinion agreed; when in a great frost five unfortunate persons were drowned in their drunkenness in crossing the Thames one Sunday night in October, a doleful dittye was published "for an example to all such prophaners of the Lord's Sabaoth daye."¹⁷

The Puritan view therefore had gained much ground, and as Hooker had passed away, Rogers rose to the occasion to set forth the official position. Greatly enlarging a former book on the Thirty-nine Articles, he argued against the Sabbatarian doctrine as Bound had elaborated it. A typical sentence of that pioneer is:—"The Lord hath commanded so precise a rest unto all sorts of men that it may not by any fraud, deceit, or circumvention whatsoever, be broken."¹⁸ To this Rogers responded:—"The apostles changed the time and places of their assembling together; the people of God meeting, and the apostle preaching, sometimes on the week, sometimes on the Sabbath-days." But the current was flowing strong against him: George Sprint published on the question this same year. He praised himself for his *via media* in upholding the Christian Sabbath, pointing to the Familists and Anabaptists who esteemed all days alike, and to the "Sabbatary Christians" who held that the Jewish Sabbath of the seventh day in the week from the creation was never to be abolished. This last class, however, he had only read about in the pages of a German, a Frenchman, and an Italian; of such people in England he has nothing to say.¹⁹

When Bancroft was succeeded by the Calvinist Abbot, the Sabbatarian doctrine, as applied to the Lord's day, soon held the field. But this depended less on central authority than on local; and in towns there are many signs of a rigid spirit increasing. Thus at Southampton in 1608 the barbers welcomed an order "that none of them shall hereafter tryme anie person or persons upon the Sabothe daye, &c"; and similar bye-laws were made and enforced down to the outbreak of civil war.²⁰ Details abound in all municipal records, from places as widely apart as Hanley Castle and Longdon in Worcestershire, Salisbury, Canterbury, London, Shrewsbury. A sarcastic English knight in the train of James, wrote about Edinburgh that "their Sabboth daies

¹⁷ Shirburn Ballads, page 68, quoted in R.H.S. Trans. 1911, page 42.

¹⁸ Rogers, 319.

¹⁹ Musculus I. 145-7. Beza, 39 15. Gryaldus Perusinus, De Hereticorum nominibus.

²⁰ Con. Hist. Soc. Trans. 8, 151.

exercise is preaching in the morninge, and persecutinge their backbiters after dinner (as they walk on) the craggess and mountaines."²¹

While religious men felt thus, others were annoyed, and occasional protests were made. One of the most ingenious was by Edward Brerewood, Professor at Gresham College, who was attracted to the question by Nicholas Byfield, preacher at Chester about 1611. In a learned treatise of the Sabbath, he called attention to the literal wording of the Fourth Commandment, and insisted that those who would adopt the Jewish method must equally adopt the Jewish day—the same *reductio ad absurdum* that Frith had propounded. Brerewood's own conclusion apparently was that the Jewish Law was totally fulfilled, and that the observance of the Lord's day was a matter of human convenience. His two treatises were not given to the world till about 1630, when other champions were to the fore.

Meanwhile the Puritan view had been more emphatically endorsed in Ireland, which was being colonized from Scotland and by English Puritans. When the canons of 1615 were adopted under the influence of Ussher, the fifty-sixth declared that the Lord's Day was to be wholly dedicated to God's service, all leisure being bestowed on holy exercises.

Both Cheshire and Ireland were strongholds of the Roman Catholics, with very pronounced views as to the desirability of making Sunday a happy day, an ideal widely different from the Puritan, in method, at least. In all England, Lancashire was the district where they were most numerous; even under Charles II a tax-farmer offered £12,000 a year for the privilege of collecting the £20 a month levied on rich Papal recusants. Therefore, it may well be imagined that under Elizabeth and James, the conflict of ideas as to the Sabbath came to a head in this county. Some illustrations may be taken from correspondence of the clerks of the peace, preserved among the manuscripts of Lord Kenyon, calendared in 1894 for the Historical MSS Commission.²² It will be noticed that the name Sunday was all but displaced by the title Sabbath.

On 15th April, 1588, a presentment was made in the parish of Rochdale that "Adam Stolte, gentleman, uppon the Sabbothe daye, in the eveninges, being eyther the last Sundaye in December or the fyrste in Januarie, had a minstrell which plaied uppon a gythorne a his howse, with a greate number of men and women dauncinge." Orders were given that the jurors in all the townes in the district were to present people who kept "wakes, fayres, markettes, beare-baites, bull-baites, greenes, alles, maye games,

²¹ Hist. MSS. Com. Cd. 5567, page 187

²² Pages 582, 590, 606, 16.

pying and dancing, huntinge and gaminge, uppon the Sabothe daye."

Such habits were so common in Lancashire, that the lord-lieutenant, Henry the fourth Earl of Derby, and Sir Francis Walsingham drew up suggestions for reforming the "Enormities of the Saobothe"; and throughout the lengthy document with its stringent orders to all mayors, bailiffs, constables and other civil officers, the churchwardens and other officers of the Church, the name Saobothe is consistently used. Edmund Hopwood about 1591 was deeply concerned about these practices on the Saboathe, and wrote several letters to the Archbishop of York: his positive suggestions are that two preachers should be continually resident in Lancashire, one at Liverpool and one at Preston, because "your honour doeth know how destitute Lancashire is of preachers."

The towns were to some extent supplied, but in the country villages the conservative reaction was strong. In 1609 a letter from Standish to Hopwood proposed that on "Sondaie come sennet" they should confer on the "increase of Papistes' profaning of the Sabboath and other enormityes." The result was that next year a code of eight rules on the point was drawn up and signed by Judge Edward Bromley, to be enforced by the justices. They stopped all selling on the Sunday except of flesh till the second peal stopped, and of ale outside the hours of service; all ale-house keepers to go to service with all the family; every private home to be empty in service-time; every loiterer out of doors to be fined 12d.; while piping, dancing, bowling, baiting of bear or bull, or any other profanation of the Sabbath day was forbidden.

These orders were reiterated often, so that they evidently were not obeyed. At last the Bishop of Chester proposed to drop coercion and try conciliation. He pointed out to King James the peculiar character of Lancashire with its thousands of Recusants, and suggested an attempt to win them over. He was invited to draft a declaration, which the King adopted in 1617, when it was ordered that this Declaration of Sports be read in every parish church of Lancashire.

It fell back on the laws of 1388 and 1409 which enjoined archery on the Sunday, a practice commended by Elizabeth as recently as 1580 in her Admonition. It applied to Protestants only, who had been to service in the morning. They were then encouraged to lawful recreations, such as dancing, archery, leaping, vaulting, May-games, May-poles, Whitsun-ales, Morris-dances and rush-bearing: interludes and baiting were forbidden; bowls were reserved for the gentry.

Next year the Declaration was amended and issued to all England. So from specific local conditions the whole matter in

1618 became a burning national question. And as James ordered this on his sole authority, the subject received renewed attention in Parliament.

Thus on 15 February, 1620, a bill for "The keeping of the Sabbath, otherwise called Sunday" was up for second reading.²³ Thomas Sheppard poked fun at the title, pointing out that as *Dies Sabbati* was the time-honoured name for Saturday, the bill announced that Saturday was otherwise called Sunday. His real objection was that the bill was in the teeth of the Declaration of Sports. He was therefore silenced, and after debate was expelled the House, on the motion of Pym. In the course of the debate the misleading statement was made that a bill even more severe had been passed in 1585: we have pointed out that while indeed both houses did pass it, the Queen disallowed it. Nothing came of this bill, and when in 1623 and 1624 two similar bills were passed by both Houses, King James vetoed both, and addressed a smart rebuke to Parliament for daring to meddle with what he declared to be within his absolute prerogative, and had already dealt with in his Declaration, to the opposite purpose.

Such a position was impossible to maintain. The question continued to excite discussion. Thomas Broad, rector of Rendcombe in Gloucester, published three questions and discussed what it meant to use the Fourth Commandment, whether any sense but the literal could be accepted, and whether there were any law of nature to sanctify one day in seven. Prideaux, divinity professor at Oxford, answered discreetly in Latin, holding strongly that the Lord's Day owed its pre-eminence to the authority of the Apostles.

So far as Parliament was concerned, a settlement was arrived at in the first year of King Charles, by a Sunday Observance Act, apparently the first which was devoted wholly to this one point, and the first time that Parliament was permitted any voice on any detail of church administration. On the whole, the Puritan view gained ground, for it was now forbidden to go out of the parish for any sports or pastimes; and within the parish, it was forbidden to bait bears and bulls or to enact stage-plays.

Here the matter rested for awhile, the same conflict being renewed when Laud attained supreme power in 1633, when another deluge of books rained from the presses. But we turn from the mere to-and-fro movements of Puritan and Government, to note an evolution of doctrine into a new phase, when not only the Jewish customs were pleaded for, but the Jewish day, and the Saturday found its adherents.

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²³ Cobbett: Parly. Hist. I. 1190.