

LECTURE III.

THE PREVALENT FORMS AND CAUSES
OF SABBATH DESECRATION;

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The prevalent Forms and Causes of Sabbath desecration

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Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work : but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God : in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger, that is within thy gates : for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day : wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.—Exodus xx. 8—11.

THE perpetual authority of this commandment having been established in the first of these Lectures, and the duty which it enjoins fully explained in the second, we are now to consider the sin which it forbids. In the present Lecture, accordingly, your attention will be directed to the prevalent forms and causes of sabbath desecration.

In enquiring into the causes of sabbath desecration we shall regard it as known and admitted that of this as of every other sin the primary cause is the depravity of our nature—that, universally and, therefore, in this case, it is because “the tree is corrupt, that it bringeth forth evil fruit ;”* and, accordingly, we shall only endeavour to ascertain those special causes which so modify and direct the operation of this first and common cause of all sin that the particular sin in question is the effect which it produces:

I. The first of these causes which we shall bring under your notice is connected with the fact—that the Sabbath is a *positive* institution, or derives its obligation from a positive law.

There are no natural principles, at least our minds can discover none, which impose upon us the duty of keeping holy one day in every seven. To our view, there is nothing in the nature of things or in their constituted relations to which violence would have been done though the sabbath institution had been different, in various respects, from what it actually is, though, for example, the portion of our time allotted for sacred rest had, instead of one-seventh, been one-sixth or one-eighth. The obligation of the Sabbath, accordingly,—of the Sabbath as we have it—rests entirely on the divine authority; it is simply and solely because God has commanded us to observe it, that it is our duty to do so—and this is what we mean when we speak of it as a *positive* institution.

From this peculiarity in the character of the Sabbath; it must obviously arise that we shall regard the obligation of it no further than we regard the authority of God. It has no claim upon us—no claim that implies moral obligation, but what it has derived from the divine authority; and, accordingly, if we do not feel and practically acknowledge that this is a source from which it could derive a valid claim, we shall naturally, and, indeed, necessarily treat it as having no claim upon us at all. If peremptory orders were conveyed to us, from an individual in whom we recognised no authority and for whom we entertained no respect, to pursue in some matter of great importance a particular course which did not suggest or commend itself to our own minds, we should utterly disregard them, and, in all probability, from the tendency of our nature to resist every invasion of our independence, go further in an opposite direction than we would otherwise be inclined to do; and, if we do not acknowledge the authority of God, if it is not the unconstrained and decided language of our heart, “the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord

is our king,”* we shall act in exactly the same manner with respect to the Sabbath. We may be influenced by custom or prompted by inclination to keep it as a holiday, but we shall not keep it as “the Holy of the Lord,”† a day which the Lord has hallowed, and of which the observance must be regulated as it has been imposed by his commandment.‡

Now, man as a fallen creature does not acknowledge the authority of God; “there is no fear of God before his eyes”*; whatever the decision of his reason and his avowed creed may be, “he says in his heart, there is no God,”† and, now, as in the days of Job, acts uniformly in the spirit of the inquiry, “What is the Almighty that I should serve him?”‡ He cannot, therefore, feel himself under any obligation—for he is under none but what is imposed by the authority which he thus rejects—to “rest on the Sabbath-day and to sanctify it.”

That the force of this reasoning may be more fully appreciated and felt, it is necessary to observe, that God has given a two-fold revelation of his will. One of these is engraven upon nature, the other is supernaturally communicated and contained in the Holy Scriptures. The former revelation, from the manner in which it is made, independently altogether of every other enforcing circumstance or accompaniment, can scarcely be overlooked or wholly disregarded. It announcements are conveyed to us in those laws of our nature which give to us the character of moral agents and adapt us to the circumstances of probation in which we are placed, in the numerous corresponding laws of external nature, and in the various and vastly important results of these two classes of laws, whether acting separately or in combination, which we constantly experience and observe; and announcements thus conveyed must necessarily come to us not only

* Isaiah xxxiii. 22. † L. iii. 13. ‡ Luke xxiii. 56.

* Rom. iii. 18. † Ps. xiv. 1. ‡ Job xxi. 15.

with a clearness that leaves no room for ignorance or misapprehension as to their import, but with a power to affect us as sentient beings, with a power, in other words, over our happiness, which is so great, while it is constantly exercised, that we can neither withhold for any length of time nor withdraw our attention from them, and that to act deliberately and systematically in opposition to them would be equivalent to the deliberate choice and systematic pursuit of misery. There is thus, to a certain extent, necessarily connected with this *natural* revelation, a present and often an immediate exercise of retributive justice, and because "sentence against the evil works" which it condemns is, to that extent, "executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men" is not so "fully set in them to do evil" in the face of its prohibition as in those cases of which it does not take cognizance. We accordingly find that to the rule of duty which it prescribes a very considerable amount of obedience is rendered, when there is no reference at all to the will of God, and when the character of actions as well-pleasing and glorifying to him is not so much as thought of.

As far as natural revelation goes supernatural revelation coincides with it; it teaches the same truths and commands the same duties, and in regard to these truths and duties, it possesses, on account of this coincidence, the same authority. Its proper and distinctive authority is the authority which belongs to it as a revelation of what *God* teaches and requires; but, while it only re-publishes the laws of natural revelation, though there may be no recognition of *this* authority, obedience will be rendered on the same grounds on which it would have been rendered to these laws though they had not been thus re-published. But when it carries its requirements beyond the limits of natural revelation, and promulgates laws, as it does in the case of the Sabbath, which are peculiarly and altogether its own, its authority is no longer sup-

ported by natural principles, and the obedience, therefore, which was yielded while it enjoyed their support, if procured for it wholly by their operation, will now be withheld.

There are, thus, two classes of laws, those which lie within the field of natural revelation, and those which lie beyond that field and are made known and enforced by supernatural revelation alone. The former of these may be obeyed, externally, and indeed can scarcely fail to be thus obeyed to a considerable extent, though there is no recognition of the divine authority; but the latter will be no further obeyed than the divine authority is recognised. There is, indeed, a certain degree of influence which is exercised by the one class of laws in promoting obedience to the other; but, when we consider them apart and estimate the amount of obedience which each of them can gain for itself by its own peculiar and independent authority, we at once perceive that while, in the absence altogether of "the fear of God," much external obedience will be given to those of the former class, those of the latter will be no further obeyed than the fear of God is present and operative. And, accordingly, as we should expect when we bear in mind that "enmity against God" and alienation of heart from him* form the distinguishing aspect of the natural character of man in his fallen state, there is comparatively very little in what passes for religion and morality in the world of that obedience to the peculiar laws of supernatural revelation which is given to them in their distinctive character, and forms a practical acknowledgment of the authority of God from which their claims to obedience are derived.

These remarks may suffice to shew, and this is the point which we sought to illustrate, that in the fact, that the Sabbath is a positive institution, a principal cause of its desecration is to be found, or, in other

* Rom. viii. 7. Col. i. 21. Eph. iv. 18.

words, that it is desecrated to a far greater extent than it would be, other things remaining the same, if the law which requires its observance were one of the laws which lie within the field of natural revelation. And, at the same time, they serve to discover the exact position in which we are placed when the command is addressed to us, "remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy;" and it is one to which we would seriously request the attention of the Sabbath breaker. By giving to us this law, God presents himself as our Lord and demands from us a distinct and unequivocal acknowledgment of his supreme and absolute authority. He prescribes to us a duty for the performance of which we can discover no reason but that *He has* prescribed it, and, thus, places us in circumstances in which we must either acknowledge or deny his right to rule over us. If we perform the duty prescribed, we perform it, not in obedience to the voice of nature, for nature is silent in regard to it, but in obedience solely to the command of God; and if we decline or neglect to perform it, our conduct can be regarded in no other light than as rebellion against the divine authority. There is only one channel through which the command comes to us, the channel of supernatural revelation, and there is no room therefore for the palliating supposition that when we disobey it we view it only as the dictate of nature or in some other light that does not immediately connect it with the divine will. It is only as a declaration of the divine will that it at all exists, and the question, therefore, whether or not we will obey it, is necessarily a question whether or not we will obey God. It, in this respect, resembles the prohibition in regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which formed so prominent and important a part of the constitution under which Adam was placed before the fall. In the same, or, at least, a similar manner, it puts it to the test, whether it is enough to

secure our acting and continuing to act in a particular way, *that the Lord commands us to do so*. Let us reflect upon this as from week to week we enter upon the Sabbath; let us inquire of our own hearts if we are prepared to say with Pharaoh, "who is the Lord that we should obey his voice;" and, if we are not, let us be careful not to desecrate the day which he has authoritatively set apart for sacred rest and commanded us to keep holy. And, as it was against the *positive* ordinance in regard to the forbidden fruit that Satan directed the temptation which issued in the ruin of our race, is it not reasonable to conclude that his efforts to destroy the souls of men are now made to bear with peculiar frequency and success on the similar ordinance of the Sabbath? It was altogether the *positive* character of the former ordinance that afforded him the advantage on account of which we may suppose he selected it, and the *positive* character of the latter ordinance affords him a similar and equal advantage. Alas, that men would but think of this, and be peculiarly on their guard where they are peculiarly in danger! But, if a conclusion which rests upon a mere analogy does not appear to you entitled to confidence or consideration, mark the melancholy confirmation which it receives from the annals of crime and moral turpitude. Has not Sabbath desecration been, almost uniformly, the first step in the career of vice? Has the due observance of the Sabbath been ever associated with loose principles and profligate conduct? Has it not been always confined to communities and individuals whose virtue gained for them the respect even of those who could not appreciate their piety? Whatever reason, therefore, we have to think that the temptations of our great adversary will be most assiduously exercised where victory may be achieved with least difficulty, and, when achieved, will be of the greatest service to his cause, we have the same reason to believe that a principal aim of his malignant activity, while

he "walks about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,"* is to seduce men into the paths and confirm them in the practice of sabbath profanation. Let your vigilance, therefore, be directed specially to this point, and "*remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.*"

2. Having thus considered the influence which the *character* of the Sabbath as a positive institution has upon the prevalence of sabbath desecration, we now request your attention to the influence of its *design* on the prevalence of this sin.

In the work of creation, God, to a certain extent, afforded a manifestation of his own perfections; "for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead,"†—"the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work."‡ And, as he always and necessarily delights in the perfections of his own nature and character, he regarded this manifestation of them with complacency and satisfaction. Having "ended his work which he had made, he rested on the seventh-day and was refreshed."§ When each successive part of creation, in obedience to the word of his power, rose into being, "he saw it, and, behold, it was very good;" the whole was now before him—not only the qualities, powers, and susceptibilities of the separate parts, but the mutual relations of all the parts, their various adaptations to each other and to the purposes which they were to serve, the fitness of each of them for its place in the general system, the sufficiency of all of them taken together to form that system and of the system itself to answer the end for which it was framed—the whole was before him, and he as it were prolonged the survey of it and dwelt upon it with

complacency during the whole of the seventh-day. Here, then, we see the design with which the Sabbath was originally instituted. It was instituted for the purpose for which God thus set the example of observing it. It was as a day on which man should "rest from his own works," from all secular employment, "as God did from his," and should contemplate, admire, and delight in the divine attributes, as they are made known "by the things that are made," that it was set apart and sanctified. While he was habitually and always to see God in his works, and as he saw him to regard him with those affections which form the just acknowledgment of his character and his acts, he was to devote the seventh-day to this recognition of him as an instituted service. His circumstances as an inhabitant of this earth rendered it necessary for him to bestow much of his attention and efforts upon objects, which, apart from these circumstances, and, therefore, in the state of being towards which he was proceeding, would possess to him no value; and on the Sabbath he was to withdraw from all those objects, to depress them to the position which they should thus ultimately occupy, and to rise to converse with God and to something of that acquiescence and delight in him as the portion of the soul, to the exclusion of all besides, which form the blessedness of heaven. The Sabbath was to be to him, at least if we carry our view of it forward to the period which succeeded the fall, a day of rest from the pursuit of objects of which the pursuit was painful and the possession did not satisfy—a day of rest in God who will do all things for those who commit themselves unto him, and will communicate to them from his own infinite fulness perfect and perpetual blessedness, or, rather, bring them to the enjoyment of this blessedness in himself.

In the work of redemption the exercise and manifestation of the divine perfections were greatly

* 1 Peter v. 8. † Rom, i. 20. ‡ Psalm xix. 1. § Gen. ii. 2, 3,—Ex. xxxi. 17.

heightened and extended. Attributes which had been manifested before were manifested more adequately and under new aspects, and attributes of which nothing had before been made known and which, indeed, it would have been concluded could not exist, shone forth in all their brightness. He, who had declared that the soul that sinned should die, was revealed in this work as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." The just God was revealed as the Saviour, and as maintaining this character, not only in perfect harmony with his justice, but so as to secure, as a thing implied and included in the very maintainance of it, the most glorious display of this attribute. When God "set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," he thus "declared his righteousness for the remission of sins;" when "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," he furnished, at once, the strongest and most impressive evidence of his hatred of sin and of his love to sinful man, of his justice and of his mercy; "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embraced each other." And, while the work of redemption carries us in the knowledge of God far beyond the limits which the work of creation enabled us to reach, it sheds even within these limits much additional light. Though the wisdom and power of God "are clearly seen," when we look abroad upon "the things that are made," they are seen still more clearly and a far higher idea of them is conveyed in the gospel of Christ.

Now, the nature and intention of the Sabbath require that in observing it we should view God according to the fullest revelation of himself with which he has favoured us, that so far as the observance of it consists in the due acknowledgment of the perfections of God, and the principle and spirit of its

observance consist wholly in this—it should be the acknowledgment not merely of some of his manifested perfections, but the acknowledgment of them all, and an acknowledgment of them every way commensurate with the manifestation of them which had been given. Accordingly, immediately after the fall and the first announcement of mercy, the Sabbath, as regarded the light in which the divine character was to be viewed in the observance of it, became the *Christian Sabbath*; it was no longer the Sabbath of creation alone, it was also at the same time the Sabbath of redemption. Along with this change, a corresponding change took place in the character of the sabbath rest. It was still to retain all that formerly belonged to it, to be the rest of the creature in his Creator and his God; but, now, it was further to be the rest of the sinner in his Saviour; and this feature in its character was to take precedence of the other, for a sinner cannot rest in God at all, until he is reconciled unto him by the blood of the cross, and rests in him as the God of his salvation. In addition to all that entered before into its character, it was now to be a rest from the fear of God's wrath and from all the painful and unavailing efforts of self-righteousness to appease it; rest in the love, the mercy, and the power of God as a source of perfect and permanent security; in one word, rest in Christ as "all the salvation and all the desire" of the soul, "its wisdom, its righteousness, its sanctification, its redemption." The observance of it was to be a withdrawing, an escape, from the poverty of the creature and the wretchedness of the sinner, and a resting in the mercy and the fulness of God. It is with the view of attaining this rest, and of making preparation for the consummation of it in heaven, that the appropriate religious services of the Sabbath are to be performed. The ultimate object of the observance cannot be reached at once and immediately; the use of means is necessary; and the religious ser-

vices to which we have referred are the means to be employed. The Sabbath, therefore, is not sanctified if these services are neglected, or if, in performing them, there is no reference to or desire after that rest which is the great end to be gained.

If we now again advert to the character of man in his unregenerate state we shall discover a second cause of Sabbath desecration. Unregenerate man cannot sympathise with what we have just seen to be the design of the institution. He has no relish for the rest to which it is intended to conduct; nay, that rest is the very thing which of all others is the most offensive to him because of all things the most opposed to the spirit of self-dependence, the belief of a power of his own to procure happiness without the least recourse or reference to God, the purpose and expectation to be a god to himself, which give to his character under every form it assumes its distinctive aspect and constitute the very principle and essence of the rebellion in which he is engaged. It is only when we regard the favour of God as life, and his loving-kindness as better than life, when, if we do not already enjoy, we earnestly desire that rest in God which Christ bestows upon his people, that we shall "keep the Sabbath according to the commandment;" and by the great bulk of men, therefore, because they are "otherwise minded" and instead of desiring loathe this rest, it is not thus kept.

3. Another cause of the desecration of the Sabbath is, that the blessings connected with the observance of it are not duly appreciated. One of these blessings and, indeed, the blessing to which all the others are subservient, is the attainment and actual possession of that rest which, as we have already seen, it is the design of the sabbath to promote and establish; and so far as this blessing is concerned the cause of sabbath desecration to which we seek now to direct attention is identical with that which we have last considered.

But the blessings which we now intend are those which prepare for and conduct to the enjoyment of this rest. The rest itself is not reached at once. It is arrived at by successive steps, each consisting in the attainment of some antecedent and preparatory blessing; and it is to the attainment of these blessings that, for the most part, the religious exercises of the sabbath are in the first place directed. It is sought, in the first place, to communicate religious knowledge, to impress divine truth upon the heart, to awaken the soul to a believing recognition of the facts and realities which divine truth discloses, and, by these and such means, to conduct, ultimately, to that rest which Christ gives to all who come unto him. Thus, in order that the sabbath may be kept according to the commandment, it is not only necessary that the rest, which is the end to be gained by the observance of it, should be duly appreciated, but also that there should be a due appreciation of the blessings which are connected with the observance of it as means to this end. But on the part of the great bulk of men there is not such an appreciation of these blessings; they either fail altogether to engage any serious attention, or are regarded with positive aversion and treated with active hostility, and thus, instead of operating as a motive to the observance of the sabbath, have in many cases the contrary effect. They not only fail to recommend, but even render offensive the duty of which they are the fruits. All who "do not like" to admit into their minds, and to admit to that place of importance and influence which they perceive is claimed for them, those views of divine things to which they are aware the devout observance of the sabbath would lead them, are of course careful to avoid such an observance of it. Regarding the effect with dislike they watchfully guard against the operation of the cause.

The causes which we have now enumerated, viewed apart from every concurring influence, produce only

the *negative* desecration of the sabbath, the sin of *omission* which the fourth commandment forbids. The effect of their operation is that the sabbath is *not* observed *at all*, even *outwardly*, or that it is *not* observed "*in spirit and in truth*," that is, that it is observed only nominally and in appearance. For it is not enough that you observe the sabbath by a merely *outward*, you must observe it "by a *holy* resting all that day even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship."* While we are careful to attend to every thing external that enters into the observance of it, we must at the same time observe it "with the heart,"—recognising the authority by which it has been instituted and desiring earnestly the accomplishment of its design in our own character and experience and in the character and experience of all others.

4. We now proceed to consider very briefly a few of the causes of particular forms of sabbath desecration; and here we shall be guided in the selection which we make by the forms of sabbath desecration which we find to be most prevalent. Of the causes to which we now advert the profanation of the Lord's day is not the *direct* effect. Their operation bears *directly* on the accomplishment of objects which have no reference to the sabbath, and it is only *indirectly* that it produces sabbath desecration as a means of accomplishing those objects. Of these causes the most powerful and extensively operating, at least in this Colony, "is the love of the world and the things of the world." We need not prove to you the great prevalence of the love of the world in our community. From what you see and hear you are well aware that it is almost universal, and is everywhere characterised by unusual power and activity. Indeed, most admit without

hesitation or reserve its dominion over themselves. They came, they say, to this country "to get rich," and they make this statement for the very purpose of leading you to conclude, if, indeed, they do not further expressly inform you, that, during their residence in it, or, at least in the meantime, they intend to make this their sole aim. Mammon is the god whom at present they avowedly worship, and they seem to look upon the Colony as so much his temple that they cannot conceive for what other object than to engage in his worship it could be resorted to.

Where the love of the world is thus general and powerful, the sabbath, it will easily be seen, cannot fail to be desecrated. The period set apart for sacred rest is looked upon by the worldling as so much time taken away from his favourite pursuits; he considers, therefore, that to observe it is to forego every week the fruits of one day's exertion—one-seventh of the whole amount of success that might be realised; and, if his establishment is large and his servants numerous, or if, while he must suffer the most serious disadvantage unless a certain amount of work is finished within a given time, he perceives that if the sabbath is kept as a day of rest it cannot be overtaken, this loss will appear proportionally greater. It may also frequently happen, particularly in the circumstances of this Colony, that those who are released from labour on the sabbath convert the season of rest into a season of dissipation, and thus unfit themselves for labour on the following day or for a longer period. By this interruption the work in which they were engaged may be greatly thrown back, and much property may be destroyed.

Entertaining such short-sighted and erroneous views of the bearing of the sabbath rest on their temporal interests, while they regard neither the authority nor the favour of God, men of worldly minds systematically desecrate the sabbath. From

the position assigned to it by the divine law as a day of sacred rest they bring it down to the level of the other days, and devote it to the same or similar occupations. During its hallowed hours, they do all manner of work, and transact all manner of business—they till their fields, reap their crops, convey their produce to their stores or to market, commence or continue their journies, weigh out rations, correspond and converse on matters of business, buy and sell, write out accounts; and when they are not engaged in these outward acts their minds are often occupied with worldly thoughts, forming new projects, or surveying the progress and calculating the prospects of those in which they are already engaged. In other cases in which the sanctification of the sabbath has not been so fully abolished, it is often, we understand, arranged, at least virtually, that on this day servants shall grind their own ration wheat for the week, wash their clothes, and perform for themselves other necessary services of this nature for which time ought to be allowed them on an other day.

In defence of some of these practices, if not of all of them under certain circumstances, it is argued that they are unavoidable, and that any evils which may attend them are not so great as those which would result from their discontinuance.

From the character of the sabbath as a positive institution, all our views in regard to it, must be derived from divine revelation. Now, divine revelation, in describing the rest from worldly labour which enters into the observance of it, says expressly “in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates;” and if we cannot shew that the relaxation or withdrawal of this prohibition for which we contend has been enacted by the same authority, it is plain we have no alternative but either to “do no work” on the

sabbath, or to disobey God. When we compare the evils with which a rigid adherence to the rule which God has prescribed is supposed to be attended with the evils which result from the violation of that rule, we adopt a principle of judgment which is altogether inapplicable to a positive institution. The only useful purpose which such a comparison could serve would be to discover the will of God; and it must of course proceed upon the supposition that this can be done by natural means; but this supposition is incompatible with the nature of a positive institution, of which all our knowledge must be derived from divine, or what we formerly distinguished as *supernatural* revelation. And, besides, it is not for the legitimate object of ascertaining the will of God that the comparison in question is made, but for the purpose of discovering reasons for not obeying it. What God requires is well known—that we do no work on his holy day, and, in comparing the evils which are supposed to result from obedience with those which result from disobedience, the real design is, to make it appear that the former are so much greater that to secure exemption from them we are justified in disobeying! But, even though it were impiously admitted, agreeably to the principle against which we are now contending, that on the supposition of advantage to ourselves we may disobey God, disobedience would not be warranted in the case before us, nor, indeed, in any case. If we take one community by which the sabbath is kept holy, and another by which it is profaned, we shall find in the statistics of the former a far greater amount of all that constitutes true prosperity and happiness than in those of the latter. In the one case we shall find at least a moral character which secures happiness in almost every outward condition, while in the other we shall find a moral character which, in the most favoured outward circumstances, renders the enjoyment of happiness impossible. And it ought also to be re-

membered that the same great being, who, as our moral governor, requires the observance of the sabbath, rules also in the kingdom of nature. It is by him that every ingredient of our outward lot is determined and dispensed, and surely, therefore, whatever offends him must be unfavourable to our welfare. And if he places us in circumstances in which we cannot obey him without painful sacrifice, the moral value of the obedience which we render will be proportionably heightened, and, if we persevere in rendering it, the amount of blessedness which we shall enjoy in the end will be proportionably greater; while, on the other hand, nothing can be more inconsistent with the nature of moral obligation and with all that is great in the character and exalted in the prospects of man, than the favourite principle of the *worldling* class of sabbath-breakers, that when obedience is attended with temporal disadvantages it is not to be rendered. At the very moment at which the character of Abraham, almost always great, rose to its highest excellence, we find him acting upon the very opposite principle—proceeding to sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac, at the command of God.

In determining what constitutes the due observance of the sabbath, the only admissible inquiry is—"what saith the law—how readeest thou?"

5. The prevalence of sabbath desecration under some of its forms is accounted for by the fact that many are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." When persons of this character are on other days engaged in official duties or devote themselves with unremitting and earnest assiduity to the pursuit of gain, they conceive they are entitled to make the sabbath a day of pleasure. If pleasure, they reason, is not to be denied them altogether, they must enjoy it on the sabbath, for this is their only day of leisure. The rest of their time is wholly occupied. The obligations of office, or re-

gard to their own interests and the demands of a business which they cannot contract without loss or neglect without ruin, do not leave them a single moment except the sabbath to relax and seek recreation. That is, in other words, pleasure must give place to business, but religion must give place to pleasure; all the demands of the world upon their time must be satisfied at any sacrifice, but at the call of pleasure the demands of God upon it may be set aside.

Under the operation of this cause the sabbath is desecrated by excursions of pleasure, by such visits, whether of civility or friendship, as serve no higher purpose than to secure the gratification of social intercourse and to manifest respect good-will visits, in other words, which are not paid at the call of humanity or religion, by feasting and conviviality, by worldly or frivolous conversation, by various kinds of games, sports, and amusements, and by listlessness and inactivity. Thus, while the language of God to each individual is, "if thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father;"* men despise the promised blessing and pursue the very opposite course to what is here prescribed—they do their own ways, find their own pleasure, and speak their own words; and, instead of calling the sabbath a delight, they strive to relieve themselves from its restraint and irksomeness by business or amusement.

The various forms of sabbath desecration having once become prevalent, the influence of example comes

* Is. lviii, 13, 14.

into operation. In virtue of this influence every open sin possesses the power of self-propagation, and the fact that it already prevails tends to increase its prevalence. When the practice of sin does not entail in the judgment of the world any degradation or loss of standing, and, still more, when it is looked upon as the evidence of a manly and independent spirit which refuses to be enslaved by the prejudices of bigotry or the fears of superstition, this power of self-propagation is greatly increased; and it attains its utmost height when, further, the example from which it is derived is set by the *great* and the *many*, embracing at once what is *fashionable* and what is *customary*. It is but too obvious, on the most cursory attention to the subject, that, in promoting the prevalence of sabbath desecration, example operates with all these advantages; and it operates, therefore, with a baneful efficacy. To form an estimate of its power you need only observe the process which generally takes place in regard to the observance of the sabbath in those who, from time to time, arrive among us. They were in the habit, in the mother country, of rendering an outward obedience to the divine command—"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy;" and here they set out in the same course. But, in the meantime, example begins its work upon their character. The "multitude"—the great bulk of those around them—"do the evil" of violating the rest and sacredness of the sabbath. The current runs, and runs strongly in this direction. They are placed in the midst of a moving mass, and its motion is in the opposite direction to that in which their previous habits and even their present inclination would carry them. It requires in these circumstances a vigorous resistance to the force which acts upon them, a vigorous counteracting effort, to maintain their position, and, still more, to go forward and make progress in the practice of sabbath observance. This effort they fail to make. The pressure, therefore, to

which they are subjected takes effect. At first the corrupting process is slow; every step they take in the downward course on which they have entered is taken apparently with hesitation and reluctance; as they advance this hesitation and reluctance disappear, and in the end they fall rapidly into an active conformity to the prevailing custom. And if they come in contact with the possessors of wealth and the occupants of elevated stations, or have the opportunity of observing their mode of spending the sabbath, they will too often perceive that they shall resemble them most by desecrating this holy day, and of this resemblance many are so weak and servile as to be ambitious. To bear it is, forsooth, to be a man fashion! The sabbath is the only day which the poor and those of contracted means can make a day of leisure; and on this day, therefore, they must imitate those who make every day a day of leisure, and by this imitation affect to be of the same class, if they do so at all. Accordingly, they not only adopt so far as they can the peculiar modes of desecrating the sabbath to which the idle rich are addicted, but crowd into their conduct on this day all the vices of which *they* are guilty throughout the week. They endeavour to be on the sabbath all that men of leisure are on this and on other days. We shall only mention one other cause of the prevalent desecration of the sabbath—that the observance of this holy day does not receive sufficient support and protection from the law and the civil magistrate. But as the discussion of this important and delicate subject belongs more properly to a following lecture, we shall not enter upon it; we shall only remark, that while sabbath legislation, like legislation on any other subject, may be carried to an unjustifiable and injurious excess, it does not appear to be open, when kept within its proper limits, to any objection that does not lie equally against legislation of every kind. The observance of the sabbath bears most beneficially

and almost directly on the prosperity and peace of the community; and the advancement of these is the very object to which legislation ought to be directed. Great and permanent prosperity cannot be enjoyed where sabbath desecration is *universal*—and it is from its effects when universal, and not when prevalent in any inferior degree, that our estimate of its tendency and our purposes in regard to it must be derived—and if, therefore, it is the duty of the civil magistrate to promote the former, it is equally his duty, with a view to its promotion, to discountenance the latter, and to banish, if possible, every vestige of it from the conduct of his subjects.

Without sabbath legislation and a vigorous administration of sabbath laws, the religion which requires the observance of the sabbath does not really enjoy a full and efficient toleration. In the circumstances of many the sabbath cannot be kept according to the commandment without the most serious and even ruinous temporal disadvantage, unless the law protects them in keeping it. Without this protection, while they are engaged in the services of the sabbath, sabbath profaners will seize upon their business and deprive them as effectually of the means of subsistence, as if they entered their premises and by stealth or violence carried away the whole of their property. A religion, surely, is not fully tolerated when any of its observances is thus persecuted and punished without protection or redress from the law.

