

seemed ready to accept them all and find them all but grades in the ladder of high ardors by which he climbs at different

stages of his growth into the ever-renewing presence of the good which is his God and Hers.

The American Sabbath

By J. R. Howard

MUCH mental inquietude would be spared to many good people if they could change their points of view. The old-time idea that a thing is "true because it is in the Bible" may be bettered by its converse, that the thing is "in the Bible because it is true." The Sabbath is a matter in point.

The Sabbatarian, whether Jewish or Christian, has found his sanction for observance of the day chiefly in the Mosaic law. Yet, even granting the Mosaic authorship of that, neither the law nor Moses instituted the Sabbath. The very Decalogue itself but refers to the day as one already distinct, and calls upon the people to "*Remember* the Sabbath day, and keep it holy"—separate, apart. But the day was not even a Hebrew institution. A thousand years before Abraham (the first Hebrew *emigrant*—"the man from beyond" the great river), Sabbatu, the rest-day, is found specified in the priestly calendars for cessation from all labor and the observance of religious services among the Chaldeans. Their chief deity was the moon-god, and the four changes of face every twenty-eight days gave a natural division of each lunar month into weeks, the seventh day of which, as completing a phase of change, was set apart for honor to the god. No labor, no fires, no horses; but even the king was to don his white robes and ascend on foot to the temple.

How much earlier than these star-students the wholesome institution of a seventh day of rest was discovered by man and ordained by law has not been ascertained. But the more primitive the people, the more surely do we find social regulations in the hands of the religious leaders, and the mysterious sanctions of divine authority invoked to enforce salutary restraints upon the disorderly or the thoughtless.

No one supposes that the great Hebrew law-giver first discovered the danger in

men's taking or wishing to take the lives, or wives, or property of other men; but he codified the experience of mankind in his terse "Ten Words," in such fashion that the shallowest mind cannot fail to receive and hold it. So with the rest-day. It was ancient and known; he bade them remember it, and keep it by itself. Its value has always been recognized by the thoughtful. Among the Jews—as very likely among the Chaldeans before and certainly the Christians after them—holding a religious sanction, it grew into an end instead of a means, and became oppressive. Its observance as a mere ritual evoked the scorn of the prophets; and the greatest of all prophets, despising the formalisms of the Pharisees, pierced to the heart of the matter, and declared "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." What the devout Jew understood by keeping the day "holy" may be judged by the passage in Nehemiah, where, after the people had heard the Law read to them, and had broken down in penitential tears, Nehemiah and Ezra "said to all the people, This day is holy unto Jehovah your God: mourn not nor weep. . . . Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto Jehovah. Neither be ye sorry; for in the joy of Jehovah is your strength." No buying or selling; no labor of field or shop; but rest, instruction in righteousness, kindness to the poor, and joyous social recreation: this was the Sabbath. And it was in much this fashion that Jesus observed it: the temple or the synagogue or the open fields, as occasion served; words of spiritual instruction; deeds of mercy; and a genial "sitting at meat," and enjoyment among his friends.

"What would Jesus do?" seems a simple and complete test for a Christian's use in judging for his own conduct; yet it is by no means of easy application.

We know what Jesus did do on the Sabbath day in that comparatively rude and primitive time, but what he would do in America, amid our complex civilization, is a very different question. The one thing that all the Hebrew prophets insisted on was *no labor*; but to-day a dweller in one of our great cities may find it difficult to seek the synagogue or congregation in the morning for instruction in righteousness, and will find it almost impossible to get to the open fields for recreative rest without utilizing some other man's labor on car or boat. This will illustrate a long train of similar perplexities. If those who do such labor on the rest-day are enabled to secure their own seventh portion of time on some other day, perhaps the law is essentially fulfilled, but the problems, to a conscientious person, are many.

The conclusion of the whole matter must be that this Sabbath question is to be regarded and settled not necessarily by the facts in the life of Jesus, but by the application of his spirit to our own circumstances. His example of morning instruction and afternoon recreation seems eminently reasonable and in the spirit of the meaning of the day, whether regarded from a sanitary or a religious point of view. Indeed, the two view-points should be one. But, in following this, each one should see to it that his own liberty be not an offense to other men's consciences, or his own conscience to their liberty. To compel others to do unnecessary labor for our rest or recreation; to disturb others in the pursuit of their own needs of quiet meditation or of mental rest through bodily activity; to insist

that all other people shall, in this matter, "follow the devices and desires of *our* own hearts"—none of these courses is either American or Christian. The "American Sabbath" is becoming as much of a medley as the American population; and that seems an irresistible change. But both law and public sentiment should steadily enforce public quiet on Sunday, permitting no noisy gatherings or games in public places or in private premises where they may interfere with the rights of individuals to a peaceable day of rest, however spent; and beyond that (which includes the regulation of such buying and selling as pertains to that public quiet), neither worldly nor religious wisdom calls for interference.

Unquestionably, not only Christian parents but intelligent parents should train their children to observe this universally beneficent rest-day, both for spiritual and physical refreshment. It is a duty because it is a privilege; and the young should be brought up in a knowledge of its sweet restfulness in this work-a-day world. But to make of it what Jesus called a "burden grievous to be borne," as the Pharisees did and as the Puritans did after them, is only to provoke such an extreme reaction as England saw under Charles the Second, tending to frivolity, and folly, and even vice. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, and then follow his own conscience—with due regard to the rights of others. And for guidance amid the perplexities of modern life, let him study, not commentaries, or even civil laws, but the sane counsels and the reasonable, humane conduct of Jesus.



Life

By Robert Haven Schauffler

Life is a cordial rich and rare,
 Distilled within a sky-blue cup,
 With just enough of bitter there
 To season it; but quaff with care,
 Nor stir the dregs of passion up!