

HISTORY AND THE SABBATH

It seems timely to outline the history of one-day-in-seven observance in order:

I.—That those who are seeking to preserve Sunday as a day of worship may know its basis in history.

II.—That Christians, especially Protestants, may know what the relation is between the rest day of the Jews (the seventh) and the worship day of Christianity (the first day of the week).

III.—That by presenting the history as embedded in the literature of our Bible one may help those who are in danger from that literalism that sees in all texts of Scripture equal value and authority.

The origin of Sabbath observance is lost in the obscure beginnings of Semitic civilization. So far as Assyro-Babylonian texts throw light upon it, their "shabattu" seems to refer to a "taboo," a "dies nefas" of the calendar on which if any work were begun it would issue in disaster. All indications point to the observance having begun in days when men worshipped "the heavenly host," and Sabbath keeping was connected with moon worship. In texts from the pre-exilic written prophets, Sabbaths are connected with "new moons" and are evidently observed in the way of feasting with deity. Ex. 16:22-23 relates how the Israelites in gathering manna, gathered enough, on the sixth day, to last over the seventh, or Sabbath. This incident coming before the Sinai legislation indicates that the Sabbath did not originate in such legislation but only received fresh commendation. The commandment as given by Moses was then the simple, "Remember the Sabbath Day," and up until the Babylonian exile it was celebrated as a feast day. It was a rest day only that it might be this ceremonial eating with deity.

With the higher moral and religious insight that expressed itself in the revival under Hosea, Amos, Micah, etc., and which occurred in the century immediately preceding the exile, the Sabbath came in for criticism and re-interpretation. Isaiah points out the flagrant abuse of feasts (28:8). Hosea (2:11) predicts the abolition of the Sabbath because of such corruption. The humanitarian emphasis of the revival showed itself in new editions of the commandment, (Ex. 23:12 and Deut. 5:14.) That progress in education and culture which the revival accompanied is shown also in the literature which came into existence, i.e., the earlier written prophets, Deuteronomy and the first editions of the history of Israel. In this literature is shown beyond cavil that the Hebrew (pre-exilic) Sabbath was a feast day and that the moral revival under the prophets was its critic and reformer. The moon-worship significance of early Semitic days was being displaced by a higher ethical and humanitarian interpretation.

Then to Judah came the exile in Babylon and exile conditions. The revival force had spent itself and that form of organization which arose to preserve and perpetuate its spirit was ritualistic, legalistic or sacerdotal. Sabbath keeping was given by the teaching of the synagogues a very exalted place among "works of righteousness." Rabbinical casuistry has replaced the humanitarian interpretation. The Sabbath was a day of rest and man was made for the Sabbath. This is the Jewish period of Israelitish history and as a day of

rest the Sabbath was the typical Pharisaic observance. New editions (consolidated) were made of Israelitish history and the Priestly Code edition of 450 B.C. gives us the ritualistic edition of the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:8-11).

Sabbath keeping, "according to the commandment," as interpreted by the scribes, had become a yoke, resting lightly on the well-to-do leisure classes, but a burden to the poor. Such it was at the opening of the Christian era.

The movement under John the Baptist, taken up and carried to its ultimate issue by Jesus, was from the outset a revival of prophetism with a fresh emphasis on ethical and humanitarian principles. Jesus appears everywhere as the critic and opponent of Pharisaic Sabbatarianism. He sat very loose in his relation to all Jewish laws, subordinating ritual observance always to kindness and humanity and while opposing mere laxity was ever found ignoring Sabbatarian tyranny.

Paul's attitude towards Sabbath-keeping is what we might expect from the great anti-legalist. In Galatians (4:10) and Colossians (2:16) he opposes the Jewish propaganda of legalism among his Gentile converts. In Romans 14:5 he advises toleration of special days for the sake of the "weak." This attitude of tolerance lasted only so long as the relation between Jewish and Gentile converts was a vital one. When the Jews became embittered against the new churches, no longer now in danger of being a reformed Judaism, converts from Judaism were few if any. Then Sabbath keeping, a Jewish observance, ceased in the great Gentile Christian churches.

Alongside, in these earlier Christian days and years, of this half-union, half-break with that Judaism from which Jesus and his immediate disciples had sprung, we find an observance of the "first day of the week." In Rev. 1:10 (A.D. 80) this day is already designated "The Lord's Day." It commemorated the resurrection of Jesus from the dead "on the third day according to the Scriptures." This day (the first day of the week) with all its indelible associations, is enshrined in the customs of worship and edification at home and in the sanctuary which our religion takes over from its Jewish ancestry. It adds to them the message of the resurrection. So long as there is a Christian church, its Sunday will signify the Sabbath of Jesus and the Lord's "Day" of those who proclaimed His gospel. The resurrection brought in the new and divine "reign of grace." A break greater than any other in human life and history had occurred. New observances characteristic of the new era came into existence through reverence and enlightened religious vision. The Jewish Sabbath (the seventh day) was dropped—or not carried over into the great Gentile Christian churches which became the Church of Europe and Christendom. The Lord's Day (Sunday—the first day of the week) came into Christian observance as a Day of Worship. This is the Sunday of all true Protestants.

The history of one-day-in-seven, embedded in Jewish and Christian literature, is a story of developing moral and religious life passing from a Sabbath of Feasting to one of Rest and then to a new and more precious day a Sunday which ever recalls that Christ has brought life and immortality to light. Sunday is then an invitation—Come let us worship—J. H. Philp, M.A. Ph. D.

The Lord's Day, Alliance 633 Confederation Life Bdg., Toronto.