

HAPPY SABBATHS, SERMON

PREACHED BY THE
REV. A. J. MOWATT,
At St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, on Sabbath
Evening, May 16th, 1886.

"And Call the Sabbath a Delight."
Isaiah 58, 13.

Just now there is considerable agitation throughout christendom on the Sabbath-question. And there is need of it, for the enemies of the Sabbath are doing all they can, either to do away with it altogether, or, if they cannot do that, to turn it from a sacred to a profane use. What with railroading, steam-boating, picnic-parties, Sunday-evening lectures, and concerts and socials and theatricals for the edification and amusement of the working-classes, and I do not know all what, the Sabbath nowadays, in certain quarters, more especially in the larger cities, is far from being well observed, according to our ideas of Sabbath-observance. It is made a delight with a vengeance. "Happy Sabbath!" men are crying out for; "let us have happy Sabbaths," they say, and so they go in strongly for what they call a good time.

Now to-night, with God's help, I want to tell you, as well as I can, how our Sabbaths are to be made truly happy Sabbaths. And our God wants us to have happy Sabbaths. "And call the Sabbath a delight." He claims a special propriety in the Sabbath. It is His day, and because His, He has the right to say how He wants it kept, and it is ours to keep it, not as we would like to keep it, but as He would like to have it kept. The Sabbath cannot be a delight, but in the way of His commandment.

First, then, there is to be no pleasure-seeking on that day, "Nor finding thine own pleasure."

Pleasure-seeking is perhaps the commonest form of Sabbath-desecration, and He puts it first, and lays special stress on it, just to show us how much He disapproves of all sorts of pleasuring on His day. There seems to be a strong tendency everywhere to turn that day into a day for pleasure. Men lounge about at home, or they promenade the streets, or they visit their friends and neighbors, or they go wandering up and down the fields, or they go driving or boating or picnicking. The devil and the world and the evil heart are ever inventing new methods of idling away the holy Sabbath.

In some of the great cities of the neighboring republic, and perhaps in the Dominion too, I am told, all through the summer season, they have steamboats fitted up for Sunday excursions. They have them painted in the grandest colors. Any amount of gilding and stage-decoration about them. Then they have a bar aboard where all sorts of drinks are to be had. There is usually a band in attendance to discourse sweet music, and the decks are cleared for dancing. Those who do not care to dance can play cards, or talk, or have some light reading. The fare, too, is put down to the lowest figure. This is so that they can catch all classes. Servant-girls, shop-girls, and the rougher elements of the male-sex, patronize these pleasure-boats very much. Of course the thing is a success. Every fine Sabbath they leave the wharf loaded down to the water's edge. But they are painted Hells, Circean enchantresses of the devil, luring silly souls to destruction.

Of course we cannot afford such luxuriant Sabbath-breaking in our small city, else we would try and have it; but such as we can afford, we have. Our young people go out boating or canoeing. And if they cannot afford that, they promenade the new bridge, which is the next best substitute for a sail on the river. Thus, we have our own methods of Sabbath pleasuring.

Now, my young friends, where is all this to end? There will be an end. Everything terrestrial has an end, and this too must end somewhere, sometime, somehow.

There was a story in an old school book that used to thrill me when a boy. It was something like this: A gay pleasure-party had gone out boating in the vicinity of Maelstrom, the celebrated whirlpool on the coast of Norway. I do not know but what it was a Sunday excursion. At all events it was a beautiful afternoon. Not a breath of air to ripple the surface of the sea. The sun shining, the world in holiday attire. The joyous-hearted excursionists never dreamed of danger amid such a scene. But without their knowing anything about it, their boat got into the outer currents of the dangerous whirlpool, and unconsciously to them, it began going round and round in wide-sweeping circles, at first very slowly and gently, but gradually faster and faster as they got farther into the currents. There were dear friends watching them from the shore, and those friends saw their danger, and began shouting and signalling to them to make their escape. But either they did not understand them, or they mocked their fears, for they answered back with sallies of wit

and peals of laughter. This went on for some little time longer. Then the sky suddenly grew dark, and the sea wrathful. Now they knew their danger, and dipped their oars, and tried to pull ashore. But they were too late. An influence was around them they could not break away from. How anxious and earnest they were now! No more sallies of wit! no more laughter! They shrieked for help, but there was no help for them. On they swept resistlessly, and soon were swamped, and swallowed up, in the bottomless woe.

Now I do not know whether there was any truth in the story. Perhaps there was, and perhaps there was not. I have not as much faith in such thrilling stories as I used to have. But this at all events is true, that Sabbath-day pleasuring will perish. Just now it may be very pleasant to go boating, or driving, or walking, over the sanctity of the Lord's Day. But He does not like it, and your sin will find you out. Pleasant as it is where you are, you are in the outer currents of a terrible Maelstrom. Perhaps you sneer when to-night I hold out to you the red-danger-flag. You smile incredulous when I speak to you of the Sabbath-breakers' doom. But there is such a thing. I do not say your boat will be swamped some day. It may, perhaps, I would not wonder much if it would. But there is a living doom. Around your poor soul are tightening the snake-coils of sin and woe, and they will make you shriek out in awful agony by and by. God is never in a hurry to punish evil-doers, Sabbath, pleasuring, but the woe comes slowly-surely, and when it comes it hurts, crushes, wrings all the pleasure of sin out of you. Beware, then, my young hearers, how you find your pleasure in the Lord's Day. Turn away your foot from it, as you would turn away your foot from a dangerous ruinous path.

Again, there must be no unnecessary work done on the Lord's day. The Lord gives us six days for our work, and one for His rest, and He expects us to do all our work during the six working-days of the week, and keep His holy rest. And indeed, if we work as hard as we ought to work six days, we will need a day of rest.

Men have been foolish enough and wicked enough to try if they could not work straight along without taking any Sabbath rest whatever. They have said that it was a great waste of time, and a most foolish and arbitrary arrangement, whenever Saturday night came, to stop all sorts of work, no matter how busy they were, and not resume till Monday morning. But those who have done so have had to acknowledge that a seventh day's cessation from labor was a necessity. Nothing is to be gained in the long run by working every day. I tried to show that a few Sabbaths ago in speaking of the manna, which fell only six days out of every week.

A distinguished merchant doing business in a large seaport says: "There is no need of breaking the Sabbath, and no benefit from it. We have not had a vessel leave the harbor on Sabbath for more than twenty years. It is about thirty years since I came to the city, and every man through this whole range, who came down to his store, or suffered his counting-room to be opened on the Sabbath, has lost his property."

An old Bostonian says: "Men do not gain anything by working on the Sabbath. I can recollect men, who, when I was a boy, used to load their vessels down on Long Wharf, and keep their men at work from morning till night on the Sabbath-day. But they have come to nothing. Their children have learned to nothing."

The learned and enterprising Captain Scoresby, in an account of one of his whaling expeditions says: "It is worthy of observation, that in no instance, when on fishing stations, was our refraining from the ordinary duties of our profession on the Sunday ever supposed eventually to have been a loss to us, for we in general found, that others who were less careful, or had not the same view of the obligatory nature of the command respecting the Sabbath day, succeeded in their endeavors to promote the success of the voyage, we seldom failed to procure a decided advantage in the succeeding week."

Lord Macaulay attributes much of the prosperity of Britain to her Sabbath-keeping. He says: "If the Sunday had not been observed as a day of rest, but the axe, the spade, the anvil, and the loom, had been at work every day, during the last three centuries, I have no doubt that we should have been at this moment a poorer people and a less civilized people than we are."

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the French revolutionists passed a law to the effect that every tenth day instead of every seventh be a day of rest. But it was soon found that such an arbitrary man-made arrangement would not work, and after a short trial it was abandoned, and the seventh-day rest resumed. During the short period the tenth-day arrangement lasted, it is said, that every sort of lawlessness and immorality prevailed to an alarming extent, and the results proved to be most disastrous to social order and national prosperity. I do not suppose that France to this day has altogether

recovered from the evil effects of her tenth-day enactment.

Now, how is the Sabbath kept among us as a day of rest? I do not suppose there is as much Sabbath-breaking among us by working as by pleasuring; but still there is reason to fear that not a little unnecessary work is being done. A good many take all out of Saturday night they can, more than they ought to, because the next day is Sabbath, and they can sleep all day, if need be, all the morning anyhow. Thus the Sabbath-rest is infringed upon at both ends, and so we give the Lord a mutilated day, a tired day, and that is not the way to serve Him.

We may not actually work, but we may talk. Sometimes a little business is transacted in the church-aisle or out at the door, some good bargains are made, some engagements entered into, some business speculations started under the shadow of the church-steeple. We meet a man, and we ask him sometimes when he will have that job of work done, or when he is coming to finish up that piece of fencing, or wall-building, or papering, or painting, as a sequel to the sermon.

A young carriage-maker, who was one of my members at Windsor, gave me a chapter from his own experience with regard to Sabbath-keeping. He made up his mind never to talk business on the Sabbath, but it was not so easy to carry out his resolution, he found, for people at the church door, either before or after the service, would say to him sometimes: "Well, George, when will you have that waggon you are building for me ready? or, can you mend a shaft for me tomorrow?" And they would sometimes take him so suddenly, that before he had time to think he would find himself replying to their question. But usually he answered them by saying, "I make a point never to talk business on the Lord's Day," and that would end the matter. One day, however, a man met him on the road, and stopped him to make a bargain about a hay-waggon. My young friend told him he would be happy to discuss the matter with him some other day. The man was disposed to be ugly, and insisted upon making the bargain there and then, else he would go to another builder. And so they parted. The man was as good as his word. He went to another builder, and made a bargain. After the waggon was ready for delivery, they quarreled over the price, and would not take it. Next year he came to my friend and got him to build his hay-waggon. Thus, my friend's experience was, that it was no loss to keep the Sabbath.

Then besides some business talk at the church door, or up and down the sidewalk as we come and go, we all like a first class Sunday dinner, and that means extra work for somebody. Perhaps, too, some of our busy business-men leave some important business-letters to read or write in the quiet of a Sabbath evening. And then there are the secular papers, with the latest telegrams, the last new political scandal, the shipping intelligence, the state of the markets, the big financial failures, and the ten-thousand other important news-items, and they have to be re-scanned. Then besides all that, how much secular talk there is, sometimes, round the tea-table, sometimes over the garden-fence, sometimes in whispers over the back of a pew. Thus, the Lord's Day, is dishonored.

Then again, there is still another way of breaking the Sabbath. We may neither play nor work, and yet we may break it. If we do not keep it holy; if the Sabbath is not a day of spiritual delight to us, and the holy of the Lord, and honorable; if we do not consecrate that day to the worship of God, and the service of the sanctuary, and the duties of religion, we are desecrating it quite as much as if we spent the day in pleasure or in work.

And as a people, while our Sabbath attendance has been improving somewhat, it is not yet up to the highest notch. You tell me perhaps, that there may be Sabbath-keeping at home as well as here. And I grant it. But not when we should be here. Jesus was a church-goer when on earth, and He is a church-goer still. I mean that He is very specially with his people when they are here for worship, and if you are here seeking Him, you will find Him; But if you are not here when you ought to be here, and might be here, He will not meet you in your own home. Speaking both from observation and experience, I have no faith in a religion that does not bring men with some regularity to the meeting-place of God's people. I am well aware there may be church-goers, and no Christians, but there are not likely to be Christians where there are no church-goers.

We need to go back to our Puritan ancestors to learn how to keep the Sabbath as a day of holy spiritual delight. What a blessed Sabbath used to be in Philip Henry's house! He was the father of Matthew Henry the Commentator, and Matthew Henry has left on record how his father observed the Sabbath. He called it the Queen of the days, the pearl of the week, and he kept it as such. He took care to have his family ready early on that day, and was larger in imposition and prayer on

that morning than on others. After dinner he always sang a psalm, and also after tea. In the evening the children and servants were questioned on the sermons of the day. And then he would talk so eloquently of Jesus, and for any so fervently. Such a Sabbath was not a weariness; it was a delight. The children looked back to their home with happy Sabbaths.

Now, cannot we have such Sabbaths in our home? and why not? Let us not sleep away the precious hours of the hallowed day, but let us rise early and consecrate the day with secret prayer and meditation on the sacred word. Let us make it a point to have as little necessary work to do as possible, and to get through with it as soon as we can, so that we may leave time for family worship, and get away in good season to the House of God. Let all who can, go to the sanctuary together, and sit together in the same pew if possible, and worship together, and when the service is over, go home together. Let the conversation be on what has been heard, and frank and free, the children taking part. Let there be plenty singing, and reading aloud, and talking. Parents should study how to make the Sabbath a happy home day, and it can be done; I tell you my hearers, if our religion is not giving us happy Sabbaths, it is not the Sabbath's fault, but the fault of our religion. Real religion is the sweetest and sunniest thing this side of Heaven, and the Sabbath of the man who has it, and the family who has it, is a Heavenly day, a blessed foretaste of the eternal Sabbath to come. Let us try and have happy Sabbaths.

Again, the blessedness of Sabbath keeping. The Lord says He will cause the Sabbath keeper to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed him with Jacob's heritage. The idea is, He will specially favor and honor the people or individual who will keep this day as He wants it kept. He will bless that man or that people with position, influence, power, and with prosperity He will crown them.

And it is seen every day. Show me one who keeps the Sabbath, and I will show you a man who is honored, beloved prospered. A well kept Sabbath has much to do in promoting men's happiness and prosperity. A holy Sabbath makes a happy week. Try it and you will find it so. I have often been told by persons who could not be said to have much superstition about them that when they kept the Lord's day in some measure as it should be kept, everything that week went better with them. Railroad conductors have told me, that they have noticed that when the Sabbath was broken needlessly, there was loss to the company afterwards, accidents, &c.

Let me give you for the testimony of Sir Matthew Hales, and he knows what he says. I quote his own words, "I have, by long and sound experience found, that the due observance of this day, and of the duties of it, have been of singular comfort and advantage to me, and I doubt not it will prove so to you. God Almighty is the Lord of our time, and lends it to us; and as it is but just that we should consecrate this part of that time to him, so I have found, by a strict and diligent observation, that a due observance of this day hath ever had joined to it a blessing upon the rest of my time, and the week that hath been so begun, hath been blessed and prosperous to me; and on the other side, when I have been negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week hath been unsuccessful and unhappy to my own secular employments; so that I could easily make an estimate of my successes in my own secular employments the week following, by the manner of my passing this day; and this I do not write lightly or inconsiderately, but upon a long and sound observation and experience."

A Mr. Bagnall (?) an extensive iron master, was led to discontinue the working of the blast furnaces on the Lord's day, and after a seven year's trial of the Sabbath-keeping mode of doing his work he made this statement before a committee of the House of Lords. "We have made a larger quantity of iron than ever, and gone on in all our six iron works much more free from accidents and interruptions than during any preceding seven years of our lives."

I might go on adding to these testimonies all night. But there is no time. In bringing what I have had to say on the subject to a close, therefore, I would say this further:

If you want to lead a cheerful happy life, remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy; if you want to prosper in your business-affairs, keep the Sabbath; if you want to enjoy the respect of your fellow-men, and better still, the favor of God, keep the Sabbath; if you want to be a blessing to your family, th community at large, yourself, keep the Sabbath; if you want to taste some of Heaven's purest joys, and have a foretaste of the blessed eternal salvation to come, keep the Sabbath. You may find it somewhat hard at first to break in upon old habits, to sunder yourself from old companionships, to cease from pleasure-seeking, and to put a bridle on your tongue with regard to wordly conversation. But with God's blessing,

and with earnest patient persevering trying you can do it; and I can assure you, it will be to your advantage in every way to do it, God will bless you, men will respect you, your life will be sweet and prosperous, your death when it comes late will be happy. Heaven will be your home.

TOUGH WORK.—Boston Traveller: A colored gentleman, formerly in the employ of a leading firm of book publishers in Boston, but who is now in the employ of the Unitarian Association, received as a Christmas present from his former employers. "Abbott on Scientific Theism." A short time afterwards his former employers asked him how he enjoyed the book. "Well," he said, "I haven't got far in it, but I showed it, to the Rev. Mr. — the other day, and he said he could easier believe in God than read that book."

HEADING HIM OFF.—"Mr. Featherly," said Bobby at the dinner table, "what's an average?" "An average?" "yes. Pa says you come to see my sister twice a week on an average." Featherly was very much amused. After explaining to Bobby the meaning of the word he said: "I suppose you thought it was some kind of a carriage Bobby?" "I thought perhaps it might be a bicycle, but I know it couldn't be a carriage, because ma says you're too mean to hire—" "Bobby," interrupt his mother, "will you have another piece of pie?"

THE ROBINS HAVE COME

The robins have come! the robins have come!
In trees on the hillside warm they sing,
And soon will be heard the drowsy hum
Of insect life in the genial spring.

The robin have come! and the pansies lift
Their soft, bright eyes to the golden light
While snowdrops close by the melting drift
Untold their petals of purest white.

The robin has come! and Farmer Lane
Is thinking of ground he soon will plow,
And waving fields of grass and grain
All gathered and safe on the highpiled mow.

The robin has come with his song and trill,
And grandmother's eyes are filled with tears
As she totters along to the window-sill
To gaze at the pet of her early years.

She's thinking of Philip, so noble and strong,
And the day he made her happy bride,
And she hears again the sad, sweet song
The morning that little Rachel died.

They come to our doors and tenderly bring
The sweet recollections of years that are gone,
When their vesper were chanted at twilight
In spring.
And their matins made vocal the earliest dawn.

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