

A PLEA FOR SUNDAY.

Bishop Potter Warns His Clergy that the Sabbath is for Rest and Worship.

AND NOT EXCLUSIVELY FOR PLEASURE.

Bishop Henry C. Potter, in his triennial charge to the clergy of his diocese in New York, laid special stress upon the necessity of rescuing our national Sunday for rest and worship instead of devoting it almost exclusively to pleasure. He said:

"It is of the close relations of high ideas and ideals of civilization with a pure and lofty estimate of Sunday that I propose to speak in this, my triennial charge, and I may as well frankly say, at the outset that I shall not be deterred from doing so by the very natural, and probably very general, comment of the secularists, that the minister of the Christian religion must, as one of them has lately said, 'take care to make a good fight for Sunday, or he will lose his job.'"

"Of course, there are, and always will be, people whose conception of the Christian ministry must needs be much like the one I have just mentioned, and who will, with the kindly serenity which a knowledge of its essential falsehood ought to enable him to maintain. Indeed, I am not sure that it may not be well for him to go a step further. The secularist says: 'You parsons are concerned to maintain a reverent observance of Sunday because it involves and especially conserves, your job.' Very well, my brother, did I ever occur to you that Sunday is quite as important to you, and the great majority of your fellows, because also it conserves your job?"

"From the bottom to the top, Nature has proclaimed the law of periodic rest in tones which cannot be mistaken. Whether it be a car-wheel or a human brain, something of absolute and supreme authority must give it pause. And there is no people on earth that so sorely needs to recognize this fact as we favored and overdriven Americans. Everything in the conditions of our life—the characteristics of our climate, more highly charged, I believe, with electricity than any other; the sharp competitions of our business, the national restlessness and passion for change, which make it so hard for us to live where we were born, or to work where our fathers worked before us—all these things conspire to produce a result which is at once menacing and melancholy. The strife of our unresting life reminds one of that athlete who, to outstrip another, runs swiftly up the steep hill, and drops dead with heart disease at the top of it."

"The question for us here in New York is the question: How are we going to conserve Sunday at all, and what is the line of action open to men who recognize the fundamental relation to our social order and our national life."

"There can be no question as to the drift of our national life today—it is to alternate between drudgery and amusement, for which it is true that culture is more diffused and the physical conditions of life, even in the case of the poorest wage-earner, better than they were, it is no less true that the conditions of our modern workday life, from the bottom to the top, in professions as truly acting and more exacting, are more and more exhausting."

"And so it has largely come to pass that with the great majority of people, at any rate in cities—and it is in these more and more that the majority of people are coming to live—the alternative of drudgery is recreation. There can be no doubt that these places of amusement—especially those places of cheap amusement—the night after night, are the most crowded, and places that make the smallest possible demand upon any serious attention, and provide the broadest and most bizarre appeal to the instincts of jesting and ridicule."

"It is very easy for my Puritan brother, whose conception of Sunday is at once sharp and precise, to insist upon recovering the Sunday, let us say, of our New England forefathers, and to that end to demand that legislation shall so safeguard one day in the week that it shall neither be polluted by traffic nor disfigured by pleasure, but the difficulty with us today is in securing some general concurrence as to the hours to be thus segregated and the ends for which they shall be guarded. A group of statistics lately published affords just here, food for reflection, the significance of which it would simply be grotesque to ignore. There were born, in the Borough of Manhattan, last year, in round numbers, seventy-five thousand infants, and of these not more than one-fifth were of American parentage. Still more suggestive is the fact that while more than 11,000 of these were of Italian parentage, twenty-three hundred of German and thirty-three hundred of Irish, nearly sixteen thousand were of Hebrew parentage—or, in other words, represented a race and a religion which do not hold to observing Sunday at all."

"It is plain from this that if the American citizen is to rescue his rest day, in any sense, he must recognize elements in the situation which are absolutely new, and which will demand, at any rate, first of all some such unification of effort as does not now anywhere exist in this land. Of course if we are determined to refuse to recognize facts as they are; if we are wedded to endeavors to reproduce the Sunday of our Puritan ancestry, we can expend our strength in a spectacular performance which will be as pathetic as it is impotent; and worst of all, we can

conspire with Sabbath committees and other organizations which shall labor to produce a legislation the final effort of which will simply be to contribute one more illustration of our American passion for enactments destined to be treated only with contempt."

"Man wants rest from labor; he wants recreation; he wants intellectual stimulus and nurture; he wants the guardianship of laws and customs which shall honor and maintain the home and family. Yes, my brother, but, most of all, he wants God; and the supreme tragedy of human life consists in this—that so often he is striving to live without Him."

"We have had some tragic instances lately of the facility with which what most of us believe to be, fundamental moral standards may be obscured. We have been taught, in our social life, in our business life, in our domestic life, by lessons as humiliating as they were unmistakable, that the very foundations of all our measurements of conduct may be slowly and unconsciously eaten away, unless, from time to time, we restore them at the feet of the Source of all standards. No more disastrous effect of that great reactionary movement, away from what many people have regarded as over-strictness, is to be found than any one may trace in that letting down of all standards of right-doing which has come to be the menace of our American civilization today. And therefore it is that it has become of paramount importance that we should recover our Lord's day."

"We are to strive with the humblest day-laborer, of whatever race and faith for a common rest day; but we are, most of all, to remember that for us the old Rest Day, the hallowed sabbath, have passed forever into the incomparably higher privilege and dignity and potentiality of the Lord's Day."

"The time has come when, by our common endeavor, the Christian people of this land must rise up and rescue its Lord's Day. Differ as we may as to what it stands for, or how wisely it may be improved, there are, in connection with our American Sunday, one or two fundamental facts which admit of no dispute. One of these is that of no dispute have, whether in the life of the individual, the home of the Republic, enduring or ennobling moral standards apart from Divine ideals. And the other is that Divine ideals can have no transformation in human character or conduct, unless there be opportunity for their appeal. And for this the law of our modern life must make a place."

"The tragedy of it, men and brethren, is not merely that some men and women must slave on the Lord's day that others may feast; but, most of all, that they who are answerable for such a use of Sunday are saying in effect to the man servant and the maid servant within their gates, 'Slave of my whim and pander to my appetite, Jesus called you my brother, my sister, but you are not! He told you that you were made in God's image, but you are not! He bade you believe that this life is but the vestibule and antechamber of another and diviner life, but it is not! You were made to toil for my indulgence. Work or starve and remember! Sunday is not for such as you.'"

"It will, perhaps, be urged that, in this discussion, I have said nothing of that which is one of its gravest aspects, and which is forced upon us by a disposition just now to utilize Sunday for the profit or amusement of those who are promoters of coarser pleasures—of baseball matches and the like—on the Lord's Day. Undoubtedly, concerning all such enterprises, it is time that a plain word should be said. It will be well to remind ourselves that that word cannot justly be merely a sweeping condemnation of a movement concerning which many of us know very little, and toward which our circumstances, it may easily be, incline us still less. It is only necessary that one should recognize how few—even though, thank God, they are more numerous than they were—are the opportunities in great, or even small, cities for an outing of any kind, in the case of wage earners, to enable us justly to estimate the impulse which welcome a Sunday afternoon's sport—and a gathering for the purpose of witnessing it—of whatever sort. But, all the same, the methods which are just now pushing to the front to this end are, most of them, diseased, and if not degrading, at least debilitating. They involve, often, the fiercest passions, brutal violence and reckless gambling. They compel to labor on our one rest day increasing numbers of people without whose services games and contests of whatever sort are impossible. The wildest enthusiasm of any devotee of them could not describe them as restful either to mind or body. Worst of all, they are essentially pagan, both in their origin and in their tendency. If one asks how far is the liberty of the individual to be restrained on a Sunday from devoting some part of it to mental or physical recreation and exercise, I answer, unhesitatingly, that must be a question for the individual. No state, no church, no household, can make laws for a Sunday observance which Christ has not made, but, in the exercise of our personal liberty, each one of us is bound to consider not alone his



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"My brother, remember that you have a soul! Almost all the aggressive forces of our modern life conspire to help you to forget it. The fierce competitions of the street, the office and the shop, the tremendous demands made by this twentieth century upon both brain and muscle tempt most of us to believe that if we can satisfy these we shall have done the one task which is alike imperative to our peace and our prosperity. But we are mistaken. For, when every secular want has been satisfied and every temporal triumph achieved there still remains that insistent and undying hunger of the soul which Jesus Christ can alone satisfy and for which He has built His house and ordained His sacraments and appointed His day to provide. Let us be slow to disesteem what He has given us."

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