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W H I
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
SUNDAY HARVESTING.

To the Editor of the "Free Sunday Advocate."

SIR,

October, 1881.

I am glad to see that in your paper for this month you have copied the letter of a South Oxfordshire "Landlord and Farmer," inserted in the *Times* of the 1st Sept., in which he forcibly points out how much better the Clergy would have been employed on Sunday, the 28th August, if, instead of offering up the weak prayer of their well-meaning, amiable Primate, they had given their parishioners words of encouragement, bidding them gather in the harvest while yet it could be saved. To those who like myself believe that no divine commandment has ever been laid upon man to abstain from work on *any* day; that neither Jesus of Nazareth nor any of his Apostles ever said a word to enforce the Sabbath which Moses, the lawgiver of the Jews, promulgated as a command emanating from their God; and more particularly believing that no God "answers prayer" in the ordinary sense of these words, and which if they mean anything, mean this,—that an almighty, all-wise, all-beneficent Being is to be stirred up by a few of us puny mortals, (a mere handful out of the teeming millions of the inhabitants of this earth) into altering at their dictation or persuasion, the fixed laws of this Universe,—Sunday harvest work in seasons like the present would be a matter of course. But that this 'Christian liberty' may be accepted universally we must first break down that rigid Sabbatarianism so naturally engendered and kept alive by the reading out in solemn form, in all our churches Sunday after Sunday, the Fourth Commandment of the Jewish Decalogue.

It may help to this end if I summarize the grounds upon which Christians should hold themselves unfettered by that commandment, as well as the grounds for my assertion that it was no divine commandment but a mere piece of human legislation, by Moses or some other Jewish Legislator.

The introduction to the Ten Commandments 'I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt'—the reason given to the Jews in the Fourth Commandment, as written in Deut. V. 15, 'remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt'—and 'It is a sign between

me and the people of Israel for ever' (Exod. 31, 17) prove conclusively that it was not designed for observance by any other people.

Next, note how little respect Jesus had for Moses' Sabbath law. He went out of his way on many occasions to offend the Jews by needlessly "breaking" it and never denied that his acts *were* breaches. (See Mark II. 23, allowing his disciples to pluck corn on the Jewish Sabbath—Mark III. 5—Luke XIII. 14—Luke XIV. 4—John IX. 16) while as above stated, not one word is to be found in the New Testament, attributed to him or to his Apostles, in favor of or urging its observance. On the contrary, what an opportunity was lost by Jesus of enforcing a Sabbath had he so intended—when asked (Mark X. 17) what we should do to inherit the kingdom of God and he repeated only the fifth and other *moral* commandments of the Decalogue; and again St. Paul in well known passages in his Epistles, while unwilling to interfere with his disciples' liberty, as nearly as possible *forbids* sabbatizing and the observance of days. 'One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind.' (Romans XIV. 5) 'Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day' (Colos. II. 16) 'O foolish Galatians . . . Ye observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid of you lest by any means I have bestowed labour upon you in vain' (Gal. III., 1 and IV. 10-11)

When Jesus, healing a man of a long standing infirmity and telling him to *take up his bed and walk*, was properly accused of sabbath-breaking, he replied 'My Father *worketh* hitherto and I work,' and thus used words in express contradiction to the reason assigned in the Fourth Commandment for keeping a Sabbath, namely, that God had 'rested the seventh day.' This singular and absurd suggestion of a God Almighty *taking rest* after the labor of creating our little globe, put forward as a ground for human beings keeping a Sabbath, ought to satisfy both Jews and Christians that the Sabbath of Moses was a mere human institution. Some later lawgiver of the Jews, probably seeing this absurdity, rewrote the Fourth Commandment and substituted the other reason for the Jew keeping it, that 'thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt.' But thus with two varying

versions, it is impossible to say we even know what the Fourth Commandment was, for both versions cannot be correct and we know not which to choose.

I conclude with words of St. Augustine's, '*Qui laborat orat.*' 'He who *works* prays.' Your obedient Servant,

W. HENRY DOMVILLE.

It is also interesting to note that the Roman Emperor Constantine, the first recorded lawgiver to the Christians who ordered any abstinence from ordinary work on the first day of the week—"the venerable day of the sun," as he terms it—in his Edict (A.D. 321) expressly reserved to the dwellers in the country the free use of the day for agriculture, lest haply the crops "bestowed by heavenly provision, should perish," in this respect showing greater wisdom than those "foolish Galatians," and, let me add, greater reverence, than those modern Sabbatarians who would rather see the whole harvest perish than lift up a hand to save it on a Sunday. The Act of 29 Charles 2nd c. 7 in more general terms excepts "works of necessity and charity" from its penal clauses.

The letter above quoted of "A Landlord and Farmer" on the subject of Sunday harvesting, is as follows:—

"Many country congregations who last Sunday on their way to church passed acres of cut corn, which through the last three weeks of bad weather has been ready for carrying, must have thought of the second lesson (Mark II. 23) they would hear read in their churches, and have wondered why the saying of Jesus 'the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath' was not applicable to the present time. As the precious hours of sunshine—sunshine for which the Archbishop had ordered a prayer to be offered up in all congregations—passed by, how many in the congregations must have thought of the proverb 'God helps those who help themselves,' and have longed for words of encouragement from their clergy, bidding them gather in the harvest while it could yet be saved. No such words of practical religion came, I fear, from any pulpit in the country; and the rain, which recommenced on Monday, has injured and destroyed thousands of quarters of corn which, but for the

bitter observance of the Sabbath, might have been saved. In the face of the bad seasons we have now had for so many years, is it not a question for the country to decide whether or not the superstitious, and I might add un-Christlike, views entertained with regard to Sunday labour should be allowed to endanger the capital and industry of our country? During the present season could the fine Sundays that have come between days of rain have been utilized, a large portion of our crops would have been saved, and the harvest thanksgivings, which have become a general institution in the Church, would have had more of genuineness in them than they can have had of late years. In this county finer crops of wheat and oats have seldom been grown, and the peas and beans have been fairly good. Of the former crops only a small part is housed in any condition, the remainder, still lying in the fields, is day by day becoming less fit for food. The crops of peas and beans still out will serve only as food for the pigs, which will be turned into the fields to pick up the seeds shed abroad through the wet weather. That landlords, farmers, and labourers must suffer in consequence of this needless waste of their capital and labour every one will see at a glance; but all do not recognize the fact that an insufficient or bad harvest means depression to every trade and industry in England. It is for the press to point this out; and if you, Sir, will use your powerful influence in teaching that it is no more a sin to save the hay and corn crops from needless destruction on a Sunday than to lift an ass or an ox from a pit they may have fallen into, you will confer a material and moral benefit on this country."

Copies of the above will be forwarded on receipt of a ready directed pre-paid wrapper, enclosed to W. HENRY DOMVILLE, 15, Gloucester Crescent, Hyde Park, W.

The Second Volume of the late Sir Wm. Domville's work on 'the Sabbath,' (now out of print) is entitled 'An inquiry into the supposed Obligation of the Sabbaths of the Old Testament' and comprises an elaborate statement of all the arguments on this subject.