Nicknaming the Sabbath

A Protest against using other than the Scriptural names for the Lord's Day

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That discredit is cast upon the Sabbath by calling it "Sunday" is more than some will admit. Many Christians whose sincerity we cannot question, and whose worth we highly esteem, use this word conscientiously, and even defend its use, as a proper designation of the Lord's Day. Others do so thoughtlessly; and, believing that "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," regard this as a matter of no importance. To all who thus think and act the appeal is here made that the influence of this name, as commonly used, is one of the forces that make for the destruction of the Sabbath.

"Sunday" Unauthorized

Whatever may be said in defense of "Sunday," no one can claim for it divine appointment. No one, so far as known, attempts to justify its use from the Scriptures. God gave to the Sabbath its name. And the fact that at the beginning God gave to the Sabbath a name which he owned and blessed, distinguishing and doing for the Sabbath what he

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did for no other day—this in itself would imply that while He may not be particular what common days are called, He is particular what the Sabbath is called. If we admit the permanence of the Sabbath as an institution, that our Lord's day is the day which He now owns as the Sabbath, and that the name first given to it has never been revoked; then it follows that the name of the Sabbath partakes of the authority of the institution itself, and that disregard of the name is in some measure a disregard of the institution. For neither in his Word nor elsewhere has God given to man the liberty to set aside or to substitute for his own appointed ways others that have not his sanction.

God's Will Disregarded

In times when men are calling the Sabbath by some other name, is it not worth while to ask, "How does God still regard His Holy day? By what terms does it now come into the Divine Mind? If He were again to utter His voice regarding the Sabbath as He did at Sinai, how would He designate His day?" The proof that He would use other names than those given in the Scriptures must be found by those who make such claims. And if all friends of the Sabbath who call it "Sunday," and who in heart wish their words to agree with God's, could be persuaded that this is little else than a profane nickname for a blessed institution which, longer than any other has stood as a memorial of God in this world, we are sure they would need no further argument to dissuade them from its use. As a synonym, an equivalent expression, or an

alternate term for the divinely appointed names, it has no authority whatever. In so important a matter as the setting aside of a divine prescription, we need a "Thus saith the Lord." And until God leads the way, will not any attempt to saddle upon a holy institution a name for which we have no divine warrant savor too much of the presumption that would put the hand to the ark, or offer strange fire before the Lord?

"Sunday" of Heathen Origin

Nor can it be said on behalf of "Sunday" that it originated among the friends of the Sabbath. Nicknames are not usually gotten up by the friends of those to whom they are applied, and the history of this case is no exception. "Sunday" was originally the day used by the heathen for sun-worship.—"The wild solar holiday of all pagan times." That this heathen festival coincided with the day which the early Christians observed as the Sabbath, is evident from the testimony of Justin Martyr, A. D. 140, who speaks of their meeting for Christian worship "On the day called Sunday," (Apol. 1:67). And that their meeting on this heathen holiday was misconstrued by their enemies and used as a pretext for attacking the new Faith, is apparent from the testimony of Tertullian, A. D. 200, who says, "We devote Sunday to rejoicing from a far different reason from sun-worship," (Apol. sec. 16). And in those times of transition from the old order to the new; when Jews refused to recognize the authority of the "First day of the Week" as a day of worship, and when Gentiles refused to see any difference between Christian wor-

'ship and sun-worship; it is not hard to understand how readily all enemies of Christianity would unite, some contemptuously and other patronisingly, in calling the Sabbath of the Christians "Sunday"—a name perhaps as old as sun-worship, but never applied to God's day of worship, or used as a nickname for the Sabbath till after the beginning of the Christian era. No one can deny that "Sunday" is a word of unclean origin, or that it comes to us as the legacy, not of the friends, but of the foes of the Christian Sabbath.

The Paganising of Christianity

The exact date at which "Sunday" became current in Christian usage is not easily determined, nor is this a matter of any importance. We may be sure that, knowing the circumstnces out of which it arose and suffering on account of them, it was not a word to which the early Church took kindly, until Christians became more or less paganised. Not until the Christian religion partook of the corruptions of heathen religions did believers baptize in the name of a false god the day sacred to the memory of Jesus. Not until the true Faith had been infected with the influence of false faiths was our Lord thus "wounded in the house of His friends."

"Sunday" Popular with the World

Now, as at the beginning of its use, "Sunday" is the uniform non-Christian nickname for the Sabbath. Among all classes of errorists who deny the authority of the First day of the Week as a day of worship, it receives no other name. Witness the practice of mod-

ern Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, and others. Among the heathen who know no better religion than sun-worship, its use in some form is world-wide. Among the godless and profane of all lands its use is universal. It is of the world, worldly; universally used and honored by the sinful world. The fact that many professed Christians also use it, cannot save it from the odium of this charge. Its associations are not Christian, but pagan. It suggests not what is sacred, but sacrilegious. It breathes not the spirit of worship, but of worldliness. It befits not the holy, but the secular, and properly belongs only to those things that are a recognized caricature, or profanation of the Day of God — "Sunday sports," "Sunday labor," "Sunday newspapers," "Sunday concerts," and all else from which the spirit of the Sabbath is banished. We seldom, if ever, hear references made to "Sunday-breaking," or to "the desecration of Sunday," for the two ideas are incongruous. Our sense of the fitness of things forbids mixed associations. "Sabbath" means "rest," and carries with it the thought of worship and communion with God. "Sunday" stands for anything that would be in keeping with "the wild solar holiday of all pagan times."

Use by Christians Inconsistent

In view of all that this name represents, the place given it in Christian usage is, to say the least, surprising. If we believe in sun-worship, or disowned the Lord's day as the Sabbath, or discredited its religious character, the case might be different. The only charitable

explanation is to suppose that few ever think of the secular aspects of this word; or having done so, justify themselves on the ground that "Sunday" savors no more of heathenism than does "Wednesday," or "Thursday," or "Saturday;" and that in no case do they intend discredit to the Sabbath by its use. But the cases are not identical. Secular names may be given to secular days, but the Sabbath of the Lord is sanctified of Him, and its name divinely appointed.

A False Distinction

Nor can we escape censure by distinguishing, as some do, between the institution and the day. I have heard an advocate of the use of "Sunday" argue that while "Sabbath" is to be respected as the name of a divinely appointed institution, this coincides with, and falls within the limits of, the day called "Sunday," which is as distinctly a day of the week as any other day. The argument sounds plausible, but it overlooks some important principles. It admits that the day called "Sunday" has in itself no more sacredness than any other day, but that all its religious value is bound up with, and borrowed from, the institution whose spirit fills its hours. But can the Sabbath have any actual existence in time apart from the day that is consecrated to its observance? The Sabbath is in its very nature a portion of hallowed time, and it is impossible to honor this institution at all unless we "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Then the question presents itself: Of what importance is this institution, or to what extent will the spirit of the Sabbath fill its

hours, if it does not also impress upon the day its name?

The Institution Denominates the Day

The observance of other institutions involves this. For example, the American people observe "Independence Day" on the Fourth of July each year. This institution has its own purpose and spirit which makes the day upon which it falls distinct from all the other days of the year. No matter upon what day of the week it occurs, the spirit and purpose and exercises of that day require that it receive a distinctive name. No matter upon what day of the week it comes, we think of the day and speak of that day according to the ideals of the institution. No matter upon what day it falls, this is to us "The Fourth." It is so known and honored by all Americans. Foreigners, or those of sympathy with American institutions may not feel and speak in this way; but if "Independence Day" is a part of our national life, its spirit will pre-occupy our hearts on that day, and even the week-day name of that day will be displaced by that of the institution to whose observance we consecrate its hours. The same is true of every other institution to whose observance a day is set apart.

The Testimony of Speech

Why, then, does not the institution of the Holy Sabbath universally impress its name upon the day dedicated to its observance? Is it not worthy of such recognition? Or will the great multitude of professing Christians who habitually call it by the heathen nick-

name, and are contented with hearing it so called, admit that they came to this feeling through lack of sympathy with the institution? I cannot think of an American patriot speaking disrespectfully of any national institution, or tolerating insults with reference to the same from others; and should not the Holy Sabbath stand for infinitely more in our spiritual citizenship than "Independence Day" could ever mean to us politically? If we are willing to allow to a merely human institution a greater measure of honor than we accord to one that is appointed and sanctified by God himself, must we not fear lest we either be foreigners to the Kingdom of which the Sabbath is the universal witness; or that the fundamental elements of Sabbath-observance are largely absent from our Christian experience? For while no one will claim that the way in which we speak of the Sabbath is in itself an infallible test of our frendship for that institution, since not all who call it "Sabbath" are model Sabbath-keepers, nor do all who say "Sunday" belong to the world; yet, granting the many recognized exceptions, those words are in some sense determinative. Horace Greeley once said that if all the members of a certain political party were not horse-thieves, all horse-thieves belonged to that party. And by the same argument we are safe in saying that if all friends of the Sabbath do not habitually call it by the appointed names, all of its avowed enemies can be counted with those who give it the nickname. And so long as "Sunday" is the unexceptionable password of all who would make the Sabbath secular in character, as well as in name, surely the

friends of the Sabbath will wish to be found in better company, and to be known by some other sign. The ancient Jew, even when he failed to wear upon the border of his garment the prescribed ribband of blue, was perhaps none the less an Israelite at heart; but no one could recognize him by the appointed mark. We often judge men only by their words, and as regards the Sabbath no Christian can afford to be equivocal. If we speak of the Sabbath as God speaks of it, we are giving our testimony for God. Those with whom the name of the Sabbath is a matter of conscience recognize in all who give such testtimony a spiritual kinship; but they who speak of the Sabbath in the language of its foes must needs prove their friendship for it by some other token than the testimony of their speech.

Something in a Name

However, let us not suppose that this is a question merely of words and names. As already intimated, it has to do with our conceptions of what the Sabbath is, the esteem in which we hold it, and ultimately its relation to our spiritual life and to the Kingdom of God. All writers on the subject of language agree that some relation exists between thought and speech. Some hold that language is the "dress" of thought, others that it is the "vehicle" of thought. Both conceptions imply an outward and mechanical relation. The true idea is expressed by Wordsworth, who says: "Language is not so much the dress of thought, as its incarnation." The relation between them is that of body and soul. In

all ordinary cases, sound and sense are as inseparable, as dependent upon one another, and as perfectly adapted to one another's needs, as the material and spiritual elements within ourselves. If words were impersonal things; if language had an intrinsic existence apart from its meaning, then we could deal with names apart from ideas. But if "speech is the correlate of thought;" if "words are the coinage of conceptions;" if "thought is as really the living principle of language as the soul is the life of the body," and the relation between them is so vital that one is a part of the other, one the expression of the other, and one so identified with the other that we cannot in any ordinary use appropriate one without adopting the other: then two things follow with reference to the subject before us. First, the terms in which we choose to speak of the Sabbath will be the true index of our thought concerning it—Scriptural conceptions requiring Scriptural terms, and secular ideas adopting secular terms. And Second, our ideals themselves will be influenced, and moulded, and modified by the terms in which we choose to express them.

Speech the Correlate of Thought

Note the use here of the word "choose." We grant that many sincere Christians have always called the Lord's day "Sunday," not because they deliberatly adopted that name for the Sabbath, but because they have always heard it so called, and never knew any serious objection to its use. But if such persons will reflect that "Sunday" is not the name by

which God calls His day; that we have been given no authority to set aside His prescription; that this nickname originated among the foes of the Lord's day; that it was not adopted by Christians at all until pagan ideals invaded Christianity; that it has always been repudiated by a witnessing remnant of the friends of the Sabbath; and been favored by the advocates of a secular day—if a Christian who has a sincere desire to please God candidly weighs all that "Sunday" stands for, and over against that all that the Scriptural names stand for, he will without question choose to call the Holy Day by its holy name, to the exclusion of all others. For "speech is the correlate of thought."

On the other hand, if a popular vote were taken on the issue of which of these names should become law, who can doubt that all Sabbath-breakers and worldlings would cast the ballot for "Sunday?" They use it now, are perfectly satisfied with it, and will choose to use it henceforth; for "words are the coinage of conceptions." Is it not the rule that when a person loses his love for God and backslides into a life of worldliness, he almost invariably adopts the world's way of speaking of the day he no longer reverences? And while we are unwilling to sit in judgment upon, or to bring a railing accusation against any Christian who, after a prayerful consideration of this subject, persists in calling the Lord's day "Sunday;" we cannot but feel that, as expressing any thought a Christian should have regarding the Sabbath, "Sunday" is a misnomer; that nicknames are a

poor evidence of esteem; that professed loyalty to the Sabbath in other respects will hardly atone for abuse in this; that however popular the custom, or however sincere one may be in following it, they who do so have something yet to learn regarding the purpose, the spirit, and the delightsomeness of the Sabbath; and that when these mistaken brethren are more fully instructed in the way of God, Scriptural conceptions of the Sabbath will constrain them to speak of it in corresponding terms.

Educative Influence of Words

That our ideas of the Sabbath should themselves be modified by the terms in which we express them, is as natural as for the soul to be conditioned by the body in which it dwells. As well hope for true ideals of the Sabbath apart from its true names, as to find the spirit of an angel living in a beast. This is not saying that all advocates of "Sunday" are leading Sabbathless lives, or that they are destitute of all appreciation of the true character of the Lord's day. We simply affirm what is patent to all observers, that the true character of the Sabbath is made known, not through secular, but through Scriptural names; that where we have nothing but the secular name, we have nothing but a secular day; that all Scriptural conceptions of the day have been identified with and preserved in connection with its Scriptural names; that no one ever observed "Sunday" religiously who was not first indoctrinated in the duties of Sabbath-keeping; and that today all religious significance that may be attached to the word

"Sunday" is not suggested by the name itself, but by that name with which it is associated only as its avowed rival, and whose respectability it borrows. And simply because the inherent conceptions of "Sunday" are alien and opposed to the true idea of the Sabbath, no one can enter into the fullest appreciation of the institution, or reverence the day as he should who is ignorant of, or who rejects its proper names.

Necessity for Exact Terms

Suppose, for example, that a missionary withholds from his converts all knowledge of the word "Sabbath," teaching them merely the duty of "keeping Sunday." With what success would he be able to inculcate in their minds reverence for the Lord's day, or enable them to discriminate between the "Heathen Sunday," and the "Christian Sunday?" It is an experiment no one would attempt, any more than to teach concerning God, or Sin, or Salvation, without definite terms. "Nothing," as Professor Shedd remarks, "is in its very nature more fugacious and shifting than thought, and particularly thoughts upon the mysteries of Christianity." Therefore he argues that "the success and enduring influence of any systematic construction of truth depends as much upon an exact terminology, as upon close and deep thinking itself." In proof of the same thing John Stuart Mill has observed that thoughts and opinions on mental and social subjects hardly ever win their way with mankind, or command the absorbing interest of the world, "until aptly selected words or phrases have, as it were, nailed

them down and held them fast." This is because words are the guardians of ideas, or as Archbishop Trench beautifully expresses it, "The amber in which a thousand precious and subtle thoughts have been safely imbedded and preserved." The very word "Sabbath" is an educator. In it are enshrined all right conceptions of the institution as God first ordained it and as he commands us to observe it; and no advocate of a holy day can afford to keep in obscurity the sacred history of the Sabbath, the solemn sanctions with which God has honored it, or all the blessed hopes and promises recalled by its mention. Words are likewise windows through which we may look out upon the broad world of truth. Each one has a definite measurement and transparency of its own, and no one better knows than a missionary how impossible it is to impart to another any more or any other meaning than the words which both understand contain, or can be made to contain. And just because "Sunday" affords no vision of a Holy Day; because it preserves no hallowed memories, and inspires no blessed hopes; because as the incarnation of Sabbath thoughts it never lived, and no manipulation by a religious reference added can fully galvanize it into life: therefore, nothing would so effectually tend to keep the heathen in darkness regarding the true character of the Sabbath as to withhold from them its true illuminating name.

The Moral Element in Words

One great reason, humanly speaking, why all true ideals of the Sabbath have not been utterly lost in Christian lands is because its

true name has never been lost or gone into utter disuse. But that the popular conception of the Sabbath is darkened by the secular medium through which men view it, is only too apparent. Despite all sophistry to the contrary, words and names mean something. Speaking of the moral element in words a thoughtful writer has said: "They do not hold themselves neutral in the great conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, which is dividing the world. They are not satisfied to be the passive vehicles, now of the truth, and now of falsehood. On the contrary, they continually take their side. Some are the children of light; others are the children of this world, or even of darkness. They beat with the pulses of our life; they stir with our passions; we clothe them with light; we steep them in scorn. They receive from us the impressions of our good and of our evil, which again they are most active to further propagate and diffuse." They convey ideas, engender influences, and seal impressions, the strength of which we do not estimate, but which are all the more potent and pervasive because no one is concious of their operation. This unscriptural and unspiritual title for the Lord's day is doing more to destroy it than we can know. Besides putting a discount upon the holiness of the day, hanging a heathen sign upon a Christian institution, it debauches the public mind with reference to all for which the Sabbath stands. It is not surprising that so many preachers, teachers, and other Christian workers who in the pulpit, in the Sabbath School, in conventions and assemblies, and in the public print,

are continually speaking of "Sunday," should be found on closer acquaintance to hold loose views as to the sanctity of the Sabbath, and to show a corresponding loose practice in its observance. The two things are related. If God has a name by which he means the Sabbath to be known, and we are fully aware of His will, we can no more habitually nickname the Sabbath and think of it in those terms without deadening the finer sensibilities of the soul, than we can decorate our parents or dearest friends with opprobious titles and not suffer for it within ourselves. For while God may forgive the dishonor, and men may pity our mistake, and we ourselves may have done it sincerely, nothing will save us from the natural results of a broken law.

In Defense of Truth

When a battle is on, the opposing forces, after skirmishing backward and forward in a desultory way, or charging in different directions, may at last discover some critical position upon the taking or losing of which the whole struggle turns, and around this the fight will center. So in every moral conflict there is a critical position. More than once has this been represented in some single word, or well chosen phrase which contains, as both sides feel, the statement of all that one would affirm and the other deny. We are told that the whole struggle of the Early Church with the Arians gathered itself up in a single word, "Homoousian." A later dispute with the Nestorians was stated in the word, "Theotokos." Many of the great conflicts of the Reformation period centered around such words as

"Justification," "Transubstantiation," and "Infallibility." Unbelievers may sneer at these words as "The battle-cry of warring sects," but we who rejoice in the liberty of Truth know that God's cause is preserved only at the cost of conflict, and that in matters of right and wrong it is a blessing to get the issue sharply drawn, and the critical point clearly stated.

The Uplifted Ensign

And in this world-wide, age-long conflict between the friends and the foes of a Holy Day, where is the critical position? The enemy presses upon us more aggressively than ever, and the cause never seemed more imperiled than now. Secularism, infidelity, and every form of wickedness have united their forces in the determination to clear the field. We have reason to fear that this Sabbath battle will be the decisive struggle of the whole campaign; that the success of other reforms will depend upon how this is carried, since the opponents of the Sabbath will never be on the right side in the fight against drink, impurity, secrecy, and all forms of political and religious error that stand between Christ and this world's throne. Yet in this crisis hour of conflict the Sabbath's defenders are scarcely awake; they seem not to know of their peril, or where they are most exposed. With their eyes upon the high places of the field where other issues are being contested, it is hard to persuade many that "so obscure a point" as the name of the Sabbath is a critical position, or worthy even of a moment's thought. In face of the glaring evils

with which we will have to join battle, this may seem a trifling matter; but its importance lies in the fact that this is the word which is to go on our ensign, and the reading of the uplifted ensign has much to do with the zeal with which the soldiers follow it. No army can fight effectively without a clear understanding of the importance of the issue at stake, the principles for which they are contending, and what it means for them either to win or lose. Our defense of the Sabbath is half-hearted. It lacks vigor, courage, and self-sacrifice because the great body of God's army is marching under a banner that inspires no enthusiasm, that challenges no defense—which in fact is not our standard at all, but the enemy's, put up before us to lead us away from our true ensign and to weaken our forces. Therefore, the soldiers who insist that the whole army shall recognize and follow the appointed standard, inscribed with the only letters that can inspire devotion, are not to be charged with quibbling over words. For if the name of the Sabbath cannot be recognized as the critical point of attack, it is the critical point of our own organization, neglecting which we will surely meet defeat.

The Vital Issue

What, then, are we enlisted to defend—a secular "Sunday," or a Holy Sabbath? The Devil's Day, or the Lord's Day? A day of pleasure-seeking, self-indulgence, and toil; or a day of rest, worship, and religious service. There is no danger that the world will ever lose "Sunday"; but Dr. George C. Lorimer has ventured the prophecy that if during the

next fifty years we continue to lose the Sabbath at the same rate at which it has gone during the past fifty years, the Sabbath at that time will have become extinct. One thing is certain: just so soon as "Sabbath" becomes a lost word, the Sabbath itself will be a lost cause. With it are bound up the fortunes of all phases of the Sabbath question. There is a blessing promised to those who "Call the Sabbath a delight; the holy of the Lord, honorable." If the people of God everywhere, out of a true regard for the sacredness of this institution, will save it from the dishonor now heaped upon it through its secular nickname, a great reviving will come to the cause of the Sabbath. But how can Sabbath Reform have any success while we ourselves are dragging in the dust the ensign which should be our inspiration? Let us cherish the Sabbath's true name within our hearts, inscribe it upon our banners, make it the watchword of new effort, and the slogan of victory.