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### ‘Sabbath Gnats and Camels.’

Prof. Alfred R. Wallace in a recent number of the *Nineteenth Century*, under the head of “A Suggestion to Sabbath Keepers,” discusses the Sabbath question from a novel point of view. He claims that the great majority of Christian people are breaking the Sabbath every week. The fourth commandment requires that each one’s work during the week, that work which is the duty of our lives, and by which we maintain ourselves, is to cease on the Sabbath; and the law applies to servants and domestic animals. Mr. Wallace asserts that many of those who are continually urging others to keep the Sabbath and putting human laws in force against Sabbath breakers are breaking it constantly themselves by requiring service from servants and horses, public and private. He charges such Sabbatarians also with the sin of Pharisaism because they condemn in others what is at worst a far less offence than their own; that is, they condemn those who are neither working nor causing others to work, but simply resting or amusing themselves.

The excuses for this inconsistent conduct in good and religious people are shown to be inadequate. They are, in short, that we keep a Christian, not a Jewish Sabbath, that we reduce work, and that we recognize works of necessity and mercy as justifiable on the Sabbath. But while Christ recognized and performed these works he never repealed the law of rest for the laborer. He declared that “the Sabbath was made for man,” by which he reiterated its essential principle, that it should be a day of rest for all who work six days, and the Christian dispensation does not dispense with this requirement.

What then is the essence of the Sabbath question? Professor Wallace finds it in “giving the proper meaning to the words ‘labor,’ ‘work,’ ‘thy work’ as used in the fourth commandment. These words do not, as the context shows, refer to any particular acts, but to the work done by each one in the business or profession by which we live.” According to this definition, one may do a great deal of work, provided it is not done in the business or profession by which he lives. He may climb an Alp on Sunday if he does it for recreation; but he must not take a guide, because it is the guide’s week-day work to climb mountains, and to make him do week-day work on Sunday would cause him to break the Sabbath. As to deeds of charity and mercy, they are never to be classed as work, and are to be done upon any day. By such an arrangement all that needs to be done for health, for enjoyment, or for charity may be done on Sunday without any one breaking the fourth commandment, argues Mr. Wallace. Hired servants could be allowed full and complete rest on the Sabbath day while their employers did all of their work which was necessary for the family well-being and for rational enjoyment; that is to say, by changing work, and calling it recreation and benevolence and charity and mutual helpfulness and altruism, the sin of Sabbath breaking could be avoided, and the fourth commandment could be kept in letter and in spirit.

This idea is worked out in the following naïve illustration: “In the ordinary middle-class household, where there are six or eight in the family and two or three servants, all that is necessary may be easily done and allow every member of the family to go to church or chapel once or oftener. In other cases there will, no doubt, be difficulties, but none which may not be overcome by a little arrangement and mutual

helpfulness. Where a household consists of aged or elderly people to whom the needful operations of housework would be painful or even impossible, there are always younger relatives or friends, or even acquaintances, who could either regularly or occasionally spend the Sunday with such old people; and there is probably not a single difficulty of this kind which could not be overcome by two or more households combining for the Sunday in such a way as to divide the work and thus render it as little irksome as possible. If it were once really felt that the thing must be done, that on no account must the commandment be broken by servants doing any of their usual work on Sunday and that the truest and most divine 'service' would thus be 'performed,' all difficulties would vanish and the day would become not in name only but truly, a holy one, inasmuch as it would witness in every household deeds of true charity and mercy, because in every case they would involve some amount of personal effort and self-sacrifice." In large establishments all the family, visitors and boarders would join and do the general housework under the name of recreation or charity, while the servants went a-visiting; in hospitals and asylums thousands of volunteers would take the place of nurses and keepers, and thus advance the great altruistic movement. National treasuries and museums could be thrown open without breaking the Sabbath, their regular custodians being off duty, and persons who would enjoy the service as a work of mercy acting for them. Nay, the very police could be relieved by special constables who would think it the highest sort of recreation to personate a policeman once a week! All of this seriously set forth as the result of twenty-five years of thought upon the Sabbath question, and as a solution of the difficulties which conscientious people find in practical Sabbath observance.

For my own part the old Puritan customs of my childhood seem much more simple and satisfactory. All work was ended at sunset on Saturday. Saturday evening was a time of preparation for the Sabbath. No work was done on Sunday, the meals had been prepared beforehand and were simple and appetizing. Sunday was by no means a day of feasting, but it was equally removed from fasting. The whole family, including servants, were free to go to church, to visit their friends, to attend upon the sick, or do any charitable or pious service. Animals were only used on errands of mercy or necessity, and the largest livery stable in the city let no horses out for other purposes. The Jewish

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rabbinical laws were not observed, but the Sabbath was a day of rest and was kept holy. There was no difficulty about it then, and there need be none now if only people desire to "keep the Sabbath day holy."

Augustus.

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.