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OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

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THE

# CHURCHMAN

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MAY, 1885.

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ART. I.—SUNDAY MUSEUMS, PICTURE GALLERIES,  
LIBRARIES, AND BANDS.

PROPOSALS have frequently been made in Parliament, in Town Councils, at meetings of governing bodies of Societies connected with Literature, Science, or Art, and elsewhere, to bring about the adoption either locally or generally, or first locally and then generally, of the policy of giving to the public on Sundays facilities which do not at present exist for visiting museums, and art collections, and for consulting books in public libraries, and for listening to music in public places of resort, such as parks and piers. These proposals, though hitherto, in practice, found to be little in harmony with the instincts of the English nation, and to have been attended with but very slight experimental success where tried (except, perhaps, in the case of bands, the most mischievous and offensive form of innovation), are nevertheless justified by many whose motives are above suspicion. It is, however, to be feared that not a few persons occupying positions of rank and influence have lent their purses and names to the movement from sheer thoughtlessness as to the cardinal principles which underlie the controversy. Others have aided the agitation, honestly intending to go but a very short distance along the road and then to stop, desiring to be regarded as actuated (as no doubt many of them are) simply by Christian and philanthropic motives, without any *arrière pensée* whatever. A third class, with no very particular intentions, moral or immoral, are pushing on this movement for personal profit, and for money-getting. In this category I include those railway directors and managers, brewers, and traders of any class likely to profit by Sunday trading, whose regard for principles is very slight, and whose god is Money. But besides all these there is a fourth class,

who to my mind are the most dangerous and insidious of all. I hardly know any one word which adequately describes them collectively, but they are those—as a rule—who, being at heart infidels, see in a Lord's Day kept inviolate by national laws and customs, a great public barrier to the spread of their infidelity. These men are the wire-pullers of this movement in favour of Sunday Museums, Picture Galleries, Libraries, and Bands. The first three classes, as I have enumerated them,<sup>1</sup> are more or less tools in the hands of the fourth class, who, so far as *public* agitation in *high* London centres is concerned, conceal with much carefulness their own inmost thoughts, intentions, and hopes.

All those men and women of high degree—not a few of them eminent in Church and State (some, indeed, clergy), or in science or art—whose names now figure on the lists of the so-called “Sunday Society,” are, without the least doubt in the world, embarked on a course which many of them would in perfect good faith wish to repudiate did they understand what its inevitable extension must be in a few years if their present plausible and, as they intend, limited programme develops in the way that all experience shows it must develop.<sup>2</sup>

I pass on now to consider a few of the leading principles which underlie this Sunday Museums, etc., controversy. Many well-intentioned people, when you speak to them on it, exclaim sympathetically, “It is a very difficult question.” If such is the case to them, it is simply that, intentionally or unintentionally, they make it such.

In order to keep these observations within conveniently narrow limits, I may here state that I do not wish to argue the Sunday question as a whole, but only that branch of it which is strictly covered by the title prefixed to this paper, namely, Museums, Picture Galleries, Libraries, and Bands. Be it clearly understood, however, that the observance of a day of rest, after six days of work, is neither Puritanic, nor Jewish, nor even Mosaic, but dates from and in a sense commemorates the foundation of the world. It is therefore binding on the whole human race, and of perpetual and universal obligation for all time.

Premising that I wish to address in particular those who

<sup>1</sup> An eminent member of the Legislature, a high-principled Christian philanthropist, who has done many things in many places to promote the moral and material welfare of his neighbours, opens to the public by ticket his picture-gallery constantly on Sundays in the summer.

<sup>2</sup> I designedly limit the remark in the text to Lord Dunraven's Sunday Society, because the older National Sunday League is confessedly a more political and democratic body, and has never received the upper-class patronage which has been given to the newer Society.

“call themselves Christians,” and especially, members of the Church of England, I make bold to say, that it is extremely hard to comprehend how the Sunday Museums, etc., controversy can be called a “difficult” question. The fourth Commandment is one of the Ten Commandments; and often as the attempt has been made to show that whereas nine of the Commandments unquestionably lay down moral principles of justice of perpetual obligation, but that the fourth must be treated separately, the attempt has always been unsuccessful. Accordingly, the custom of the Church of England to recite the Commandments (including the fourth) every Sunday, and to have them conspicuously exhibited on the walls of her places of worship,<sup>1</sup> is the most convincing declaration possible of the mind of the Church of England. Now can any man in his senses read calmly the fourth Commandment and for one moment venture to deny that to open Museums, etc., and hire bands on Sunday, is a plain infraction both of the letter and of the spirit of the said Commandment? We are told to keep the Sabbath day “holy;” to do no “labour,” nor to cause others, including “servants,” “cattle,” and “strangers,” to labour; and all this for reasons plainly expressed, but which it is not necessary, for our present argument, here to dwell upon. Other statements of the teaching of the Church of England are to be found in the XIIIth Canon and the XXth Homily, in both in terms too plain to be misunderstood. Tried by any one of the tests thus suggested to members of the Church of England by their Church, the policy of Sunday Museums, etc., must, to any candid mind, be indefensible. Going with a crowd to stare at stuffed lions or oil paintings, or to listen to operatic or even to sacred music on a pier, can by no possible stretch of the imagination be regarded as a “holy” occupation, or “worship,” or “rest;” but it is the secondary consequences which result from such a perversion of Sunday which, if possible, intensify the primary objections to the movement. Some of these were admirably brought out in the House of Lords, on March 20th, 1885, in the speeches of Lords Cairns<sup>2</sup> and Harrowby, and may here be exhibited in brief.

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<sup>1</sup> The fashion that has sprung up of late years to neglect this legal duty is much to be deplored, and is very suggestive.

<sup>2</sup> Since the lines in the text were written Lord Cairns has been called away from the scene of his labours, and thereby has arisen a void in the political life of England which is absolutely irreparable. It is impossible to conceive what an appalling loss he is to the Church of England as a Christian leader and practical philanthropist; to the House of Lords as a high-minded judge; and to the Conservative party as a statesman of rare experience, acuteness, and eloquence. His career was a brilliant example of the success which always attends, in the case of English

The assertion is made that to spend an afternoon in a museum is better than spending it in a public-house. As an abstract proposition this is one which nobody will call in question, however strongly defined his Sabbatarian proclivities; but the particular proposition submitted to the House of Lords on the 20th of March, was to open the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, on Sundays, from 2 to 6 in the afternoon. Now, the London public-houses are closed from 3 to 6; therefore, except for the small space of one hour, there could be no competition between the Museum and the public-house, and the working-man, now debarred from going to the Museum, could not go to the public-house; so, how an open Museum is to draw away customers from a closed public-house is not at all clear. Naturally the Sunday Museum party have never tried to meet (they *cannot* meet) this flaw in their argument, which applies virtually to all England, and not alone to South Kensington. A curious and important result flows from these facts: whilst the law remains as it is as regards public-house hours just when the museums would be emptying preparatory to closing at 6 o'clock so the public-houses would be opening preparatory to filling. Thus well-meaning people, who know nothing of the practical details of the controversy to which they lend their names, are actually helping to bring about that which many of them loudly deprecate—a development of the Sunday drink traffic. No wonder that publicans do not profess any fear that they will suffer from the competition of Sunday museums. No wonder that the publicans in streets adjacent to the Regent's Park subscribe to the Regent's Park band.

Another matter of detail most carefully kept in the background by the advocates of Sunday museums, etc., is the question of the additional work which will be put on the officials in charge of the museums, etc., It is glibly asserted that a mere dozen or two of men will be made to work on Sundays, whilst thousands will derive pleasure and profit from the labour of those dozens. Letting alone the fact that we have no moral right to deprive even a dozen men of their birthright as Englishmen, even for the benefit, if so it be, of thousands (that benefit being secular, not religious), I desire to point out that this argument totally ignores and carefully conceals a difficulty of enormous intrinsic importance. South Kensington is, it is

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public men, industry and singleness of purpose, fortified by strong religious principle. I heard him in the House of Lords, on March 20th, speak as Lord Shaftesbury's substitute in taking the lead in opposing Lord Thurlow's motion as to Sunday museums, and noticed that he spoke with less than his customary physical vigour, albeit there was no falling-off in his array of closely reasoned arguments.

well known, an aristocratic quarter of London, occupied almost exclusively by rich people living in large houses. Now it is professed that the opening of the Museum there is advocated in the interests of the working-classes. Yet, the proposal submitted to the House of Lords in 1885 was the seemingly modest, at the same time obviously irrational one, of opening a museum for working-men in a locality where there are no working-men. What does that practically mean? It means, if the opening is to be a success from the promoters' point of view, that thousands of people are to be conveyed every Sunday to South Kensington from the poorer parts of East and South London, by railways, trams, omnibuses, steam-boats, or cabs. And what does *this* mean? That thousands of men and boys belonging to the passenger conveyance companies of the metropolis, deprived even now of nearly the whole of almost every Sunday during the summer months, are to be still further harassed and overworked in order that the imaginary working-man who loves pictures, but who lives at Bethnal Green or Lambeth, may be conveyed to the West End, to see that which he has not given the slightest real proof that he wishes to see.

If anybody doubts whether the London railway, omnibus, and tramcar men are overworked to a degree which reflects no credit on the Peers and Members of Parliament who, with others, are the directors of these companies, let him ask the next London General Omnibus Company's conductor, or Metropolitan Railway guard he meets, how many hours he was on duty last Sunday and the Sunday before. If the querist does not get an answer which will startle him I shall be much surprised.

I have used advisedly, in a preceding paragraph, words which cast doubt on the reality of the assertion that the working-classes of London, or indeed of our large towns at all, or any working-men anywhere, appreciate the aims of those agitators, titled and untitled, who are professing to labour on their behalf. All the available evidence goes distinctly to show that the working-classes of this country are more than indifferent—that they are hostile to the opening of museums, etc., on Sundays.

And moreover, the evidence to show this is singularly varied in character. It will not be questioned that the House of Commons represents the people, and the lower classes of the people, more than it does the upper classes. Now, what do we find to have been the votes in the House of Commons on the Sunday Opening of Museums? So utterly hopeless have been the chances of the movement in the House of Commons that of late years the attempts made to obtain the judgment of that House have been very few: the latest was in

May, 1882, when the Opening party mustered but 83 votes; 208 votes being recorded on the other side. The previous division took place in 1877, when in a House of a totally different political complexion the Opening party secured only 87 votes. These comparisons justify the statement that the political bearings of the question do not much affect Members of Parliament, and that an overwhelming majority of the representatives of the people are now, as they have been at any time during the last thirty years, dead against the Sunday opening of the national museums.<sup>1</sup>

Turning to the petitions to Parliament, which are a useful index of public opinion, the same tale is told, as will be seen by the following statement, which applies to the House of Commons from 1872 to August, 1882:

	Petitions.	Signatures.
Against the Sunday opening of museums	... 3,886	... 524,028
For the Sunday opening of museums	... 158	... 79,969
Majority against Sunday opening ...	3,728	444,059

The petitions to the House of Lords disclose results even more striking. From 1881 to 1883 the Lords' petitions were as follows:

	Petitions.	Signatures.
Against the Sunday opening of museums	... 783	... 161,000
For the Sunday opening of museums	... 12	... 528
Majority against Sunday opening ...	771	160,472

Turning from the records of Parliament to the information as to the opinions of the working-classes obtainable through the Trades Unions, Friendly Societies, and other working-class organizations of England, the results are, if possible, still more remarkable. When the subject was under discussion in the House of Commons in 1882, Mr. Broadhurst, the well-known Trades Unionist M.P., spoke out very strongly against the Sunday opening of museums. He was called to account sharply for his speech, and his title to act as the mouthpiece of the Trades Unions on this question was challenged by the various societies formed to promote Sunday Opening. In order to bring the controversy to a clear issue, the Working Men's

<sup>1</sup> I will here meet the retort, certain to be made, that in the House of Commons the nett majority against the Sunday opening of museums has recently been less than it was some years ago. For instance, in 1855, when the subject was discussed for the first time in that assembly, a motion to open museums was rejected by 245 to 57, showing a nett majority of 188, whereas in 1882 the nett majority was only 125. The answer to this simply is that when a cause is known to be hopeless, its opponents are more likely to be absent than its supporters. A party of attack is always more active than a party of defence. Witness the Church Disestablishment controversy.

Lord's Day Rest Association in February, 1883, made a direct appeal to the working-class organizations on this question; the result was that the managers of 2,412 societies, with 501,705 members, signed officially, on behalf of their societies, copies of a printed form approving of the amendment moved in the House of Commons by Mr. Broadhurst on the occasion in question against increasing Sunday labour by opening the national museums and picture-galleries on Sunday. Some 210 of those organizations belonged to the metropolis. On the other side, it appeared that only 62 London organizations, said to have 45,482 members, condemned Mr. Broadhurst's action.<sup>1</sup> Besides these, the officers of 116 societies, having 175,403 members, signed the form in their individual capacity, the rules of their societies not admitting of a corporate expression of opinion on political subjects.

Next after Parliament and the Trades Unions the Town Councils of the municipal boroughs of England may be ranked as the most completely representative bodies in England, chosen, as they are, by household suffrage on the broadest basis known to the constitution. Of these it has been calculated that 150 possess museums, picture-galleries, or libraries which would be suitable for opening on Sundays if their managers thought proper to do so. It appears that 4 only of the 150 local authorities open their institutions on Sundays, and that several (Chester, Maidstone, and Worcester) having once done so, have reversed their policy. The decision of Swansea had reference to a band in a park. This was sanctioned in June, 1884, but the vote was reversed in July by 13 against 8. Nottingham, however, presents the most remarkable illustration of our case. Nottingham is a municipal borough with a population of over 205,000. The question was first mooted in 1879, when the Sunday Opening party were only defeated by 3 votes, the numbers being 28 against, 25 for. Emboldened by this near approach to a victory, the party brought on another vote in 1880; on this occasion it was found that they had lost ground, for they were beaten by 32 to 24. The immediate result of the agitation was a special effort on the part of the friends of the Lord's Day to fight the question out at the municipal elections of November, 1881. So successful were they in returning candidates pledged against Sunday Opening, that when a third vote was taken in December, 1881, the Sunday Opening party were beaten by 26, the

<sup>1</sup> The names of all these societies, with the number of their members, etc., have been published in a shilling pamphlet by the Working Men's Lord's Day Rest Association, and forms the most important proof in existence of the opinions of the working-men on this subject. See also an article by C. Hill in the *Nineteenth Century*, April, 1884.

numbers being 8 for and 34 against. The Nottingham struggle supplies valuable matter for reflection and encouragement in two respects: it shows the feelings of the operative classes, Nottingham being chiefly a working-man's constituency; and secondly, it shows what may be done by the friends of the Lord's Day if they will only stick to their colours and patiently organize their forces.

It would not be difficult further to multiply proofs that the demand for Sunday museums comes from mere fractions of the community, largely recruited from the ranks of non-Christian men of science, who personally can have no practical knowledge of the working-men of England, whose mouthpieces they claim to be. For instance, at a conference of librarians held at Edinburgh in October, 1880, a proposal in favour of the Sunday opening of free public libraries was discussed and rejected by 38 votes against 8. This decision, arrived at as it was by men occupying the highest position in the management of existing public libraries, men who must be taken to know perfectly well the wants and tastes of the classes who frequent their institutions on week-days, is highly significant in every sense. Moreover, it may be taken to show that these officials are grateful for the Day of Rest, and are not likely to wish to be deprived of it.

What have we on the other side of the question? The experience of a very small number of museums, picture-galleries, and libraries opened on Sundays at Manchester, Birmingham, Wigan, and one or two other places. And what is this experience? That for the museums scarcely anybody cares; and that the libraries are chiefly appreciated for the newspapers, and are largely frequented by mere loungers, who, when they read anything, are girls and lads reading novels. The Birmingham picture-galleries seem to come nearest to a "success" from an attendance point of view, and even as to them the statistics yield figures relatively insignificant when one considers that the population of Birmingham is about half a million.

In order to render this review of the *pros* and *cons* of this important controversy as general, and as methodical in form, as possible, I have up to this point left entirely out of consideration the personality of the leaders on either side. It is, however, a fact that of our public men who have studied the controversy, and have made themselves familiar with its bearings, whether political, social, religious, or medical, an overwhelming preponderance of numbers and of weight will be found ranged on the side of keeping the national museums closed. I am quite prepared to admit that the preponderance of numbers is less marked than that of weight, and the reasons for this will readily appear. Those who have declared against

opening (I am speaking, of course, here of the upper, educated, and intellectual classes) are those mainly who have investigated the subject in all its bearings; on the other hand, it is an undoubted fact that a very large proportion (I feel almost inclined to say a majority) of the upper classes who have gone in for Sunday opening have given their adhesion to the movement *without having studied it thoroughly*, and have allowed themselves to be captivated by the plausible, sentimental idea, "how much better for the working-man that he should have the opportunity on Sunday afternoons of gazing at works of art than at rows of gin-bottles." This is no mere picture of fancy, but the actual result of numerous conversations which I have had during the last five years with Members of both Houses of Parliament, and with educated and independent people moving in good society. If any of my readers have doubts as to this, let them discuss the matter themselves on the first possible occasion with a few of the Peers and Members of Parliament who have voted for Sunday opening, and with some of the ladies and gentlemen eminent in science and art whose names appear amongst the subscribers to the so-called "Sunday Society."

This however, is a digression, and I wish to bring this paper to a close by giving a few citations from eminent men who understand what is involved in this controversy far better than sentimentalists like Lord Thurlow, or doctrinaire philosophers like Professors Tyndall and Huxley, *et id genus omne.*

Lord Beaconsfield, who twice voted in the House of Lords against Sunday museums, having I believe previously done the same thing in the Commons, said on May 5, 1879:—"Of all Divine institutions, the most Divine is that which secures a day of rest for man. I hold it to be the most valuable blessing ever conceded to man. It is the corner-stone of civilization, and its removal might even affect the health of the people. . . . It [the opening of museums on Sundays] is a great change, and those who suppose for a moment that it could be limited to the proposal of the noble Baron [Thurlow] to open Museums will find they are mistaken."

Mr. Gladstone has always voted against the Sunday opening of museums. In reply to a deputation in March, 1869, he said:—"The religious observance of Sunday is a main prop of the religious character of the country. . . . From a moral, social, and physical point of view, the observance of Sunday is a duty of absolute consequence." Mr. Gladstone has repeated these sentiments on subsequent occasions. In a letter to Mr. C. Hill, dated January 13, 1876, he said:—"I have myself, in the course of a laborious life signally experienced both its mental and physical benefits."

Mr. W. H. Smith, M.P., whose connection with the newspaper trade renders his opinion on such a subject of special value, said in the House of Commons, on June 8, 1877, in opposing the Sunday opening of museums:—"Taking the proposition as it stood, it involved very much more than stood on the paper of the House. He himself attached enormous value to the day of rest which had been preserved for many centuries. Whether working-men desired to go to church or not on Sunday was not the question. The question was whether they should have the day of rest preserved to them, which the practice of this country had established."

Citations of this kind might be presented *ad infinitum*. What is there on the other side? Absolutely nothing beyond a few sneers at the "Puritanical" character of the English Sunday, interspersed with silly platitudes about "freedom" for the working-man; which, by the way, if it means freedom for one class, means, as a matter of necessity, the loss of freedom and Sunday rest for a good many other classes.

Amidst all the excitement of controversy, it must never be forgotten that the advocates of Sunday museums are generally very eager to tell us that to introduce into England the "Continental Sunday," with all its toil and slavery, is the last thing they desire. Whilst willing to give them every credit for disclaimers of this kind, I cannot but suspect that they themselves often feel they are standing on slippery ground, and that if the seemingly restricted changes which they desire in the way of a "harmless" visit to a museum or a band are carried out, other organic changes must inevitably follow. Indeed, the impossibility of drawing a line between a band out-of-doors and a theatre in-doors, constitutes one of the most serious secondary dangers involved in Lord Thurlow's proposals. On the Continent, indeed, no pretence is made of drawing the line; and if it were drawn in England, it clearly could not be long maintained. Or, as the *Times* very well said on June 9, 1877:—"We should make a complete breach in the defences which now protect the Sunday as a day of rest, and should have definitely abandoned our general rule. Once throw open by resolution of the House of Commons, all national museums and picture galleries on Sundays, and it is hard to see what institutions, public or private, we could insist on closing." These are weighty and wise words. May they sink down deeply into the hearts of our legislators, and of the various well-meaning philanthropists now grievously led astray by sentiment and want of knowledge!

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