

TO KEEP THE SABBATH HOLY.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT OF GOD.

Remember that You Keep Holy the Sabbath Day.

(Page 352)

278. *How the Jews Observed the Sabbath.* -

You know my good friends, that before the coming of Our Lord, the Jews sanctified the Saturday instead of the Sunday, in commemoration of the fact that God, after having created the world in six days, rested on the seventh. That day was called the Sabbath, and no work of any kind was permitted to be done on that day; they could neither travel, nor work, nor pick up wood in the fields, nor even kindle a fire to prepare their meals; all that was done on the evening, or rather the morning before. It is true this was easier for them to do than it would be for us, and for this reason. In our country the custom is to begin the Sabbath, like other days of the week, at midnight, and also to end it at midnight; whilst the Jews began theirs on Friday, at six o'clock in the evening or at sunset. In that way, it was easy for them to prepare before six o'clock the food for that evening and

(Page 353)

the next day. They were so strict in observing the repose of the Sabbath, that a man who dared to employ that holy day in gathering sticks in the fields, was condemned to be stoned to death by the people. But the most interesting fact which I can remember is this: Demetrius, king of Syria, being at war with the Jews, in the time of the brave Judas Maccabeus, sent against them his general, Nicanor, their most implacable enemy. The latter did not spare them in any way, and prepared to attack them on the very Sabbath day. Some Israelites, whom the calamities of the time kept in his army, represented to him that it was wrong for him to violate the Lord's Day "And who is this powerful God who commands the day to be respected?" - "My lord, he is the living God, the Master of heaven." - "Well! if the Master of heaven forbids you to fight, I, who am master here on earth, command you to take up arms, and march." What happened, my dear friends, to this blasphemer, I think I have already told you: he had to have his battle, and although he had an immense army, he was routed completely, and perished himself in the combat. (See Paragraph No 266.)

- *Numbers*, Ch. XV.; *II. Maccabees*, XV.

279. *The Martyr of Sunday.* -

It is no uncommon thing, my dear friends, to find persons who call themselves Christians, and who, nevertheless, on the slightest pretence, dispense with the sanctification of Sunday. They look for excuses to miss attending Sunday Mass. A journey, an occupation, sometimes, I am ashamed to say, even a walk, or a mere party of pleasure, are to them sufficient reasons for violating

(Page 354)

the most sacred of duties. The first Christians were of a different way of thinking, as you may see from the following incident: In 304, being the time of the famous persecution of the Emperor Diocletian, a young woman of Thessalonica, notwithstanding the severity with which the edict of persecution was carried out, prepared to sanctify the Sabbath, and left her home to repair to the house where the Christians assembled in secret. Just as she passed the gate of the city, called Cassandra Gate, she was stopped by one of the Emperor's soldiers, who said to her: "Whither go you? Remain here." The pious girl, whose name was Anysia, frightened at his brutality, and fearing to yield to any temptation, answered not a word, but made the sign of the cross on herself. The soldier treated her still more rudely, and asked her again: "Who are you? Whither go you?"

- "I am a Christian, a servant of Jesus Christ, and I am going to the assembly of the faithful." - "Ha! you are going to the assembly of the faithful - I shall see that you go not thither. Come with me, instead, and offer sacrifice to our gods; to-day we are just adoring the sun." So saying, the brutal fellow tore off the veil with which through modesty, she kept her face covered. But St. Anysia, being angry, said to him: "Go, wretch, but let me go to my Lord and God. Let me worship with the assembly of the Church, or Jesus Christ will punish you!" The soldier, in a rage, pierced her through with his sword, and she fell, bathed in her blood. She thus went to celebrate the Lord's Day with the angels in heaven. She is

(Page 355)

honoured on the 30th of December.

- D. GENEVAUX, *Histoires choisies*.

280. *A Woman who Forgets to Close her Door.* -

God grants us six days in the week to attend to our labours and our interests, it is only just that the seventh, which He has reserved for Himself, should be wholly consecrated to Him. Listen to the extent to which the Christians of the first ages acquitted themselves of that duty. Under the Emperor Valens, the protector of the Arians, there was in the city of Edessa, in Mesopotamia, a great number of Christians. The Emperor had decreed that all the Catholic churches should be closed, but the faithful assembled on Sunday, outside the city, to assist at the divine offices. The Emperor being informed of it, was very angry, and ordered that all the Catholics who still assembled should be put to death. Modestus, prefect of the city, less barbarous than Valens, secretly warned the Christians not to go to the place where they were accustomed to pray, because he had orders from the Emperor to massacre without mercy all who should go there. But see, dear friends, what duty is, the Christians were only the more eager to be at their place of meeting, and on the following Sunday, the assembly was more numerous than ever. The prefect knew not at first what part to take; but not to disobey the Emperor's orders, he marched with his soldiers against these generous Christians; but he took care to charge the people of his suite to make an extraordinary noise, so as to

(Page 356)

alarm the Christians and induce them to fly. On his way through the city, he saw a poor woman who was leaving her house in such haste that she did not take time to close the door; she held a child by the hand, allowing her long cloak to trail on the ground, instead of wrapping it round her after the manner of her country. She passed through the file of soldiers who were marching before the prefect, and then began to run as fast as she could. Modestus caused her to be stopped and asked her where she was going so fast. "I am hurrying," said she, "to the place where the Catholics are assembled." - "Do you not know, then, that the prefect is going there on purpose to put all those whom he finds in it to death?" - "I know it very well, and it is just for that reason I am hurrying, because I am afraid of losing the opportunity to suffer martyrdom for my religion." - "But why do you take the child thither?" - "In order that he may have a share in the same glory as his mother." The Prefect Modestus, amazed at the courage of this holy woman, returned immediately to the Emperor's palace, and, after relating what he had seen, prevailed upon him to renounce a project so cruel and so disgraceful. See, my dear friends, what an ascendancy virtue has, even over those who are base enough to persecute it.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, V., 39.

281. *What Befell a Peasant, Working on Sunday.* -

God does not always punish in this life Christians who outrage Him by the violation of the Sunday. Sometimes, nevertheless, he has visited them with

(Page 357)

temporal punishments, either to bring them to repentance, or to serve as a warning for those who might be tempted to imitate them. St. Gregory, a celebrated bishop of Tours in the sixth century, relates that a labourer of Auvergne, having yoked two oxen to his plough, feared not, to the great scandal of his neighbours, to go work in his field on the Sabbath day. Whilst employed at this forbidden work his plough-share broke. Instead of desisting from his criminal undertaking, he took his axe to mend it; it was then that God punished him in a most remarkable manner. He permitted that the labourer's hand should close convulsively on the handle of the axe. Notwithstanding all that could be done to take the axe from his hand, it remained the same, so that for two whole years the unhappy man bore that visible mark of the wrath of God. But at length, at the end of that time, he conceived the happy idea of going to pray in the church of the famous martyr, St. Julian, at Brionde, now in the Department of the Upper Loire in Central France. He passed in prayer the night between Saturday and Sunday, according to the custom of that time, and, on the following day, in presence of all the people, his hand was cured; it opened miraculously of itself and let fall the piece of the axe-handle which for two years had remained in its grasp. This striking example of Divine chastisement encouraged all those who knew of it to continue sanctifying the Lord's Day in the best way they could.

- ST. GREGORY OF TOURS, *Glory of the Martyrs*, Book II., Chap. 11.

(Page 358)

282. *Boats Burned on Sunday.* -

Let us beware, my dear friends, of violating the sanctity of the Sabbath by forbidden works; bad would come of it sooner or later. Let us remember, on the contrary, the words of *Father Bonaventure*: "Sunday work never made any one the richer." Here is a story about that. One Sunday, Father Christopher, a very zealous missionary, being in one of the Marianna Islands in Oceania, was passing along by the sea shore going to visit a sick person. He was astonished to find some savages who were already baptized, employed in mending their boats. "What are you about, my dear children?" said he, "are there no other days in the week for you to do this work? Tell me why it is that you thus transgress the law of the Great Spirit, who commands us to sanctify the Sunday by abstaining from all servile work, and employing it in the holy exercises of Christian piety?" They answered shortly that such was their will. The Father, seeing them ill disposed, and being in a hurry to go visit the sick person, went on his way; but, a few hours after, when on his return, he passed by the same place, he found there only a heap of smoking rubbish; fire had reduced to ashes the boats and the shed in which they were being repaired. He had no trouble then in making the refractory savages understand how wrong it was for them to despise the precept of the Lord. He left them covered with confusion, and exhibiting

(Page 359)

the greatest signs of true repentance.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, V., 21.

283. *The Master-BUILDER of Fontainebleau.* -

You sometimes see poor workmen, servants, or labourers, who are full of heart, who have good religious sentiments, and yet are obliged to work on Sunday, because of the barbarous requirements of their masters or employers. Oh! but these masters and employers will have a terrible account to render to God! I remember a fine anecdote on that subject, which is found in the life of the virtuous Mary Leczinska, wife of Louis XV., and Queen of France. One Sunday when she was at Fontainebleau, she learned that some men were at work on a public building, although positively forbidden to do so by the king, who had sent one of the gentlemen of the chamber to them with a message to that effect. The pious princess, quite scandalized, sent immediately for the master-builder, and asked him why he thus dared to disobey God and the king. The man stammered out something by way of excuse, and said that as soon as he received the king's message he ordered his men to work more privately. "Besides," added he in a low voice, "as it is a public building I have in hands, I

counted on having the men work on Sundays, as otherwise I should not be able to have my contract finished by the appointed time, and would, therefore, lose three thousand pounds." - "There, then," said the Queen, "is your three thousand pounds; go immediately and dismiss your men, and

(Page 360)

see that you do not again make engagements which you cannot fulfil without violating the law of God and that of the State." What generosity was there, my young friends! and also what piety and zeal for the sanctification of the Sabbath. How many others would have seen that violation of the Sabbath, and given themselves no trouble about it.

- REYRE, *Anec. Chret.*

284. *Thirty Thousand Francs' worth of Jewels.* -

Of two merchants, one of whom closes his shop on Sundays and goes to Mass, whilst the other buys and sells as on week-days, which is he who best deserves our confidence? My dear friends, I am going to tell you. When the Allies, that is to say the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians, invaded France in 1814, they made a considerable stay in the country, and especially in Paris; some of them availed themselves of the opportunity of purchasing some of those rare and costly works of art for which France is so famous. A wealthy Prussian officer, amongst others, wished to buy jewels for a large amount. He presents himself one Sunday to one of the first jewellers in the city. "Sir, I should like to see some of the finest ornaments you have in gold and jewels." - "I can let you see them, sir, but I cannot sell them to you to-day." - "You cannot? and why not, pray?" - "Because my stores and workshops are always closed on Sundays, and I would not, on any account, depart from that rule." - "Sir, I understand your Catholic scruples, but I leave the city tomorrow,

(Page 361)

and if you will not sell me the jewels, I must go elsewhere." - "I cannot help it." - "Well! sir, I have but one word to say, and perhaps it may help you to a decision: I intend to purchase jewels to the amount of twenty-five or thirty thousand francs." - "You do me wrong, sir, if you imagine that that sum will tempt me; it is, undoubtedly, a fine offer, but I confess I like better to remain faithful to my religious principles." - "In that case, sir, as my departure is fixed for to-morrow, I am forced, however much I may regret it, to purchase of some one else what you refuse to sell me." So saying, the officer bowed and withdrew. He had only gone a little way when a thought occurred to him: "Now here is a jeweller who is very strict in observing the Sabbath, and his strictness annoys me not a little; but if this man has firmly refused to sell me his jewels for any amount of money, I have good reason to believe that he would not deceive me in the price, weight, or value of his costly wares; whilst another that will not hesitate to sell on Sunday for the sake of making money, will not scruple to cheat me in his merchandise." Struck by this reflection the officer returns home, relates what had happened, puts off his journey for one day, and going on the morrow to the honest jeweller, with some others of his friends, they made purchases to the amount of forty or fifty thousand francs. What do you say to that, my young friends?

- G. S. G.

(Page 362)

285. *The Blast of God's Justice.* -

Yet another example of the justice of God on the profaners of His holy day; it happened only a few years since. A miller of the parish of St. John de Courcoue, in the Department of the Lower Loire, in France, being possessed by the demon of avarice, scarcely ever failed to work on Sunday, in order to make a trifle more money. Often during Grand Mass or Vespers he would set his wind-mill a-going. One holiday (holy day) of obligation, instead of going to church, he spent the whole morning working; and so on till noonday. Seeing that he did not go home to his dinner, his wife became uneasy and, late in the afternoon, went to seek him. She found him lying dead on the ground, one whole side of his body pierced by the wings of his mill. He left his house in the morning, complaining that there was no wind; he had even added: "Still I'll go and put the mill in order, so that I may be ready for the first breeze." He waited there several hours; he saw all the people going to church, but he hid himself, for he knew well that he was doing wrong. When they had all passed, he came down. Standing near the mound, he looked up at the clouds to see if the wind were going to rise.

Suddenly there came a gust which only turned the mill once; but that once was fatal to him, for the extremities of the wings struck the unhappy miller in the side, and the breath of wind died out as soon as the profaner of the Sabbath had been thrown in a dying state full twenty paces from the spot where he had stood. There it

(Page 363)

was that his poor wife found him, stiff dead.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, V., 21.

286. *The Seven Gold Pieces.* -

Nothing is more odious, my dear children, than the ingratitude and injustice of those who having received from God the six working days of the week, refuse to consecrate the seventh to Him. This we clearly see from the following little story which I read some time ago in a weekly paper: A peasant was ridiculing his neighbour because he would not, like himself, work occasionally in the fields on Sunday, but endeavoured, on the contrary, to sanctify the Lord's Day by assisting at the several offices of the Church. "Suppose," said the neighbour, with a view to enlighten and convince him, "suppose I have seven gold pieces in my pocket, and that, meeting a man on the road, I give him six of them, what would you say to that?" - "I would say that you were very generous, and that the man who was lucky enough to find you so would owe you a debt of gratitude." - "Very well; but suppose, instead of that, he knocked me down and robbed me of the one gold piece I had kept for myself, what would you say then?" - "The wretch! hanging would be too good for him!" - "Yet, my friend, it is your own story; you are that man: God has given you six days to work for your living. He has only reserved the seventh for Himself, and He commands us to keep it holy; but you, instead of being grateful for His gifts, and respecting His will, rob Him of the

(Page 364)

seventh day. Don't you think it is just the same case?" The peasant acknowledged his fault, and avoided it for the future.

- *Daily Rewards*, No. CXIX., p. 5