

# RESPECT HOLY DAYS.

## CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

### CHAPTER XII.

## FIRST COMMANDMENT OF THE CHURCH.

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388. *Profaners of Holy-days do the Devil's Work.* -

Is it not a deplorable thing, my good friends, to see how lightly the festivals commanded by the Church are sometimes profaned? It often happens that God punishes even in this life those who are guilty of this sin, so grievous to His heart. St. Etienne, Bishop of Die, in France, visiting one of the villages of his diocese, on the patronal feast of the parish, which had attracted thither a multitude of people from all the country round, perceived that devotion was not the principal motive of this gathering. Then he employed prayers and remonstrances to turn them from their evil ways, from debauchery, from public lewd dances and from profane and cruel sports such as bear-baiting and cock-fights; but it was all of no use. The insolence of this unbelieving people animated the zeal of the holy prelate; making an extraordinary use of his episcopal authority and full of confidence in God, he commanded the devils who were exciting these evil doings to become visible to the eyes of those who were committing them. Scarcely had he made this injunction in the name of

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Almighty God, when those infernal spirits appeared mingling with the gamblers, the dancers, and those who were giving themselves up to the excesses of the table. They had faces so frightful, they belched forth so much fire, that those poor people, more dead than alive, began to cry "Mercy! mercy!" turning their suppliant eyes on their holy bishop. St. Etienne, touched by their repentance, had only to say one word and all those hideous spectres disappeared; he profited by the occasion to represent to his rebellious flock the enormity of their fault, and to exhort them to repair it by penance. Although we may not see the devil every time we thus do wrong, my dear friends, yet we cannot doubt but he is there, and rejoices in our unhappy willingness to hear him.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VI., 38.

389. *The Man with the Crooked Neck.* -

In former times, my friends, the patronal feast of each parish was not postponed till the following Sunday, as it is now; it was celebrated on the very day it fell on in the week. It was, of course, a feast of obligation, so that, on that day, all labour was suspended. St. Gregory of Tours relates the following story of a man who was punished by God for having worked on a holy-day of this kind. St. Avit, an abbot of the diocese of Chartres, who lived in the sixth century having died on the very day he had foretold by revelation, was honourably interred in the city of Orleans. The Christians built a church over his tomb, and his festival was celebrated every year with great pomp

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on the very day of his death, which was the 7th of June. But, some years after, it happened that on that day a certain man of the same city of Orleans, despising the precept of the Church, took his spade and went to work in his vineyard, whilst others went to church to assist at the office celebrated in honour of the Saint. Several persons even having rebuked him for not keeping the festival as he ought, he would not turn back, and contented himself with saying jestingly: "Was not he that you honour an artisan and a labourer like myself?"

But he had scarcely set foot in his vineyard, and raised the earth with his spade, when his neck being twisted round, his face was immediately turned the opposite way. Then, seized with fright, he came, weeping to the church of the holy abbot, asking pardon for the profanation he had committed. You may judge, dear friends, the effect produced by the sight of that poor deformed man.

However, his repentance was so sincere, and his prayers so fervent, that he was cured some days after, his neck returned to its natural position, and he might thank the Saint who had wrought this double miracle.

- ST. GREGORY OF TOURS, *Gloire des Confesseurs*, (*Glory of the Confessors*), Ch. 99.

390. *Sermon of a Judge.* -

Nothing so brutalizes a workman, a tradesman, or any man whatever, children, as the profanation of days consecrated to the Lord. Take away the sanctification of Sundays and holy-days, and the labourer is nothing mote than a working machine, or a toiling beast of burden. It requires no great reasoning to demonstrate this.

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An English judge named Holt, a just and upright man as it was possible to meet, had the misfortune, during his youth, to form bad connections, which inspired him with a contempt for religion, so that he turned into derision the sanctification of Sundays and festivals, spending those days in the very worst company. Happily for him, he was withdrawn by circumstances from these evil courses; by degrees he became more regular in his life, and failed not to recover the esteem of his fellow-townsmen. He was invested with the dignity of judge. One day, whilst discharging the duties of his office, he was forced to pass sentence of death on a man whom he recognized as one of his former associates. The sight of this criminal impressed him strongly and made him reflect on the danger to which he had exposed himself, by leading a life similar to his. He could not help asking the wretch what had become of the other companions of their youth. "Alas!" answered the criminal, "there is not one of them alive, except you and myself; some fell under the sword of justice, others died a violent death." The judge, unable longer to repress his emotion, sighed deeply and addressed to those present a touching and most edifying discourse, to show them that the profanation of the Lord's Day makes man a wild beast, deprived of any noble or generous feeling, and with nothing to restrain him from plunging into the lowest depths of turpitude and vice. I know not whether his discourse made any impression on the hearers, children, but let us, at

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least, turn it to account for ourselves.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, II., 210.

391. *Pass That to Your Neighbour.* -

Regarding the sanctification of festivals, I will tell you a rather amusing anecdote which I read in the *Magazin Pittoresque*. The Duke of Brunswick, Charles William, who lived some threescore years ago, around 1780, very properly attached great importance to the religious observance of Sundays and holy-days.

One day, he learns that some villagers had the bad habit of assembling at the time of divine service, in a tavern, and spending in drinking all the time they should have passed hearing Mass and instructions, or assisting at Vespers. The exhortations of the priests, even the remonstrances of the magistrates, had not been able to break these toppers off their evil habit. The duke, attired in a coarse overcoat, buttoned up to the chin, repairs one Sunday to the inn pointed out to him. Just as the bell was calling the faithful to church, arrives the troop of tipplers, preceded by a large heavy personage who, by his rubicund nose and flaming red face, might easily be recognized as the president of the jolly band. He sits down at the upper end of the table, and without a word said, places the duke beside him, not, however, without throwing a look of distrust on this guest, whom no one remembered having seen there before. Meanwhile the innkeeper sets before the president an enormous pitcher of brandy. The latter takes it in his two hands, swallows a good draught and gives it to the duke, saying: "Pass that

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to your neighbour!" The pitcher thus makes the circuit of the table, then returns to the president, who, after having given it a cordial embrace, puts it again into circulation. Each guest lays hold of it in turn with right good will, and hands it to the next, saying: "Pass that to your neighbour." At the third round of the blessed pitcher, the duke rises in a fury, and, unbuttoning his overcoat, so as to let all present see his well-known uniform and the insignia of royalty, then strikes the president with all his might, saying: "Pass that to your neighbour!" As the latter hesitated, the duke seizes his sword and cries out so loud that no one could possibly be mistaken: "Let any of you that strikes too light or too slowly beware of me, for I will make an example of him!" At these words, every arm rises, blows fall like rain from one end of the table to the other, five or six times in succession, till at length the duke, satisfied with the punishment he had inflicted on this incorrigible set of toppers, leaves them to themselves and retires to his palace. They say, and I can easily believe it, that on the following Sunday, not one of them was tempted to go to the tavern; on the contrary, they were amongst the first to go to church both at Mass and Vespers.

- *Magazin Pittoresque*, year 1844, p. 208.