

# Summer Sabbath Keeping

MARGARET SANGSTER

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“Ye shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 19: 30.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Isaiah 58:13-14.



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Why there should be a special temptation to break the Sabbath in summer, rather than in winter, is one of those things that are puzzling on the surface. Winter brings its formidable storms, its rigors of cold, its hardships of many sorts; why should we not hug the fireside then, if ever, and forsake attendance on the sanctuary? Summer comes with skies of the blandest, with genial airs, with perfumed censors swinging from a thousand flowers, with more or less relaxation of business cares and burdens, yet in precisely these soft and agreeable conditions, in this charming environment, even Christian people with established principles, are apt to let down the bars. If at home they declare that the day is too hot, or too enervating to stir abroad, or they delay needful preparation until it is too late to start, so that the pastor must deliver his message to empty pews.

## An Accepted Fiction

On the part of the conscientious there is a fiction very generally believed as a verity that those who do not go to church spend the Sabbath at home in religious reading and devout contemplation. Honestly, a large portion of the remainder-contingent who have not energy to dress and go forth on Sunday, having been compelled to do so by peremptory week-day claims for six days, intend to devote themselves to the Bible and the sermon-books or missionary biographies in the home library. They read a chapter or two, perhaps four or five chapters, and they dip into the good book, but there are secular papers and enticing magazines close by, and insensibly these prove an alluring bait. In days when the rules were more stringent and the atmosphere more tonic than now, mothers used to lay aside the secular literature of the home on Saturday afternoon, and on the Sabbath morn-

ing it was not to be found by the most diligent seeker. Re-appearing on Monday, it brought with it the appropriate week-day dress and tone, but it did not invade the one sweet and hushed rest-day. On Saturday night, as the mother tucked it away on its shelf, she might have waved her hand and said, "Beyond these voices there is peace." Nobody puts it out of sight or mind now; the very children in a thousand homes of other and more sacred traditions, look for their own page in the big Sunday newspaper, and the air of sweet and sacred tranquillity has gone from our Lord's day. The people who do not go to church do not spend their hours in any specially religious or spiritually elevating exercises. If they fancy they do, they cheat themselves. After a little they cease to feel uneasiness on the subject, and quite readily yield up the hours that are not their own to the pursuits that are anything but in line with the purpose and meaning of the hallowed day.

## Summer Sundays in the Country

Away from home in an inn among strangers, or on beach or mountain top, people who in their own bailiwick permit no license to themselves or their families, seem often to feel at liberty to do as they please. There are rural neighborhoods where no sail whitens the waters, and no oar cuts the waves on the Sabbath, where men do not bicycle, nor drive, nor ride, nor take out their automobiles, and where a blessed quiet reigns profoundly through the sacred day. But these are rare. In many suburban places, a howling, shrieking, shouting crowd of the baser sort comes on trolley and by steam or boat every Sunday, making the pleasant places hideous and picnicking in sight of the sanctuary. This would never have become possible had those who revered the Sabbath not set an example of indifference first.

## Our Duty

What is the manifest obligation of the Christian, at home, or in absence, in town or in country, if in health, on the Sabbath day? First and foremost to attend public worship. By simply doing this, by taking a seat in a pew, by listening to the preacher, by joining in prayer and praise, he or she ranges as an individual on the right side; and as an individual without other spoken word, without ostentation or offensive righteousness in assumption, shows that recognition of God's authority is part of his or her very life and soul. Having attended church, the gain that comes from obedience, and from mingling with others who follow on to know the Lord, flows into the life.

## Summer Sabbath-Keeping in the Home

It is a fact that servants find the day that should bring them rest the hardest day of the whole seven. A more elaborate dinner than usual and a very general entertaining of guests on the Sabbath, has doubled and trebled the work of Mary and Bridget in the kitchen. By the time the many difficult dishes are prepared and served, and the ceremonious meal cleared away, the woman is weary, and she hastens, if it be her afternoon out, to imitate her employers, by a round of visiting and perhaps of entertaining in her own circle and her own home. A simpler menu, less formality and no formal visiting or receiving on the Sabbath would greatly improve our home Sabbaths, and this applies rather more to the present warm season than to colder weather, since the trend of the period is to make the Sabbath a day of worldly amusement. The golf-links are visited in the afternoon by those who go to church in the morning, the excuse being that physical recreation is a necessity, and on purely logical grounds it is difficult to see why there is more harm in playing golf or tennis on Sunday than in having friends in to purely social teas and suppers. If you suffer license on any point,

why not on all? The only real safety is to allow no letting down of the standard.

Our ideal of the Sabbath as a day of rest from worldly engagements does not permit us to draw a line perpendicularly through our practice, rigidly forbidding us to be occupied with work, and allowing us to work hard at play. The latter is right in its place, but its place is not on the one day set apart for the cultivation of our spiritual nature. Inertia and mere inactivity are not specially commendable either. What we should aim at rather is some employment of Sabbath time that is in its degree not only restful but also inspiring and stimulating.

Every household should, if possible have its service of song on the hallowed day. A daughter who can play the piano, may lead the rest, and either in the morning or the evening, all may gather and sing hymns and psalms to God's praise.

## The Children's Sunday

When by reason of mismanagement, the Sabbath is a gloomy and tedious day for children, a great wrong has been done them. And great is the pity of such a blunder. No day should be so happy, so welcome, so eagerly anticipated as this. For one thing, the father is at home, and that ought to make the day a festival. On other days the man of the house must hurry off to business, urged by the spur of necessity, bound by the severity of hours that have no elasticity. Blessedly the Lord's Day puts an arrest on commercial energy, and stops the law and the anvil, the buying and selling of the ordinary time. The father is at home. This should be the children's red-letter day in consequence. The mother's morning face should wear a most cherry smile. The house, keyed to melody, should seem brighter than on other days.

Every child in the world loves to hear stories, and on the Sabbath the best and dearest stories should be told, the Bible stories, so sweet, so

thrilling, so eternally fresh and so dramatic in their movement. Too many children have a very slight acquaintance with Bible stories now. Let the Sabbath bring a revived interest and a new opportunity.

At morning prayers the Sunday School lesson for the day may be very profitably read, verse about, and the father may, if he choose, either give a morning comment of his own, or read from some lesson paper or commentary. Several hymns may be sung, and the prayer, having been offered by father or mother, may be concluded by "Our Father," repeated by all.

Father and children, if in the country, may walk in the fields or gardens at some time on the Sabbath, worshipping God as they see His wonderful works.

Wise mothers do not forbid little children's play on God's day. They must play. The lambs do and the squirrels and the birds. Why not the babies? But there may be toys reserved for Sundays, blocks and puzzles, not used on other days. The little girl need not be forbidden to hold her doll, but children soon learn that the Sunday play may be of a quieter, less boisterous order, than the romping of the week.

### Sunday Visiting

All social visiting of a purely formal character is inappropriate on the Lord's day. Entertainment of friends which implies ceremony and dress, and the pageantry of fashion, is manifestly not in the fashion of worship, nor yet in the line of repose or of spiritual quickening and refreshment. There are other days when people may be asked to dinner and to the evening company. But the latch-string should be loose for friends who have no other day in which to come, for the young man away from home, for the young girl living among strangers, for the old lady whose life is behind her and who is spending her declining years in some asylum of charity. An extra plate and cup for these express Christian hospitality.

One's own visiting when it takes the form of a call on the aged, or the crippled, the convalescent or the bereaved, is in the true spirit of Sabbath-keeping.

Into our city life by little and little, and invading bit by bit, circles where other traditions have prevailed, has crept a habit of utilizing Sabbath evening leisure for social functions. This is altogether unfortunate, lowering the tone of those who are formally "At Home," and of those who attend receptions and fêtes, in which worldliness of an elegant and attractive kind is uppermost, and from which religion, formal or informal, is entirely absent.

### Sunday Travelling

Either in the cold season or the hot, the Sunday journey should be discouraged. The pressure of the times hurries men on at tremendous speed. The man who has business on Monday in a distant city uses the Sunday train, or leaves business late on Saturday, arriving at his home on the Sabbath. People start on pleasure jaunts on Sabbath evening. There are hostelries where no arrivals and no departures take place on the Sabbath, but they are exceptional. As a nation, we are fast getting into a habit of travelling on the Sabbath when doing so suits our convenience. Might we not here also, with great profit, show an example of strictness, never employing a Sabbath train unless the life or death of some one dear to us, or a legitimate Christian engagement, were our reasonable excuse. It is pleasure-seeking, not any other thing, that makes the enormous railway profit of Sunday, and, incidentally, the urgency of business, that challenges the Fourth Commandment and dares to fracture it, adds to this exchequer.

Finally let conscience rule—conscience, God's voice in the soul. Whoever loves his native land and fears God must be concerned in the question of Sabbath-keeping the whole year round.