

# CHAPTER 26

## ENGLISH SABBATH-KEEPERS

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**English Sabbatarians in the sixteenth century - Their doctrines - John Trask for these doctrines pilloried, whipt, and imprisoned - He recants - Character of Mrs. Trask - Her crime - Her indomitable courage - She suffers fifteen year's imprisonment, and dies in the prison - Principles of the Traskites - Brabourne writes in behalf of the seventh day - Appeals to King Charles I. to restore the ancient Sabbath - The king employs Dr. White to write against Brabourne, and Dr. Heylyn to write the History of the Sabbath - The king intimidates Brabourne and he recants - He returns again to the Sabbath - Philip Tandy - James Ockford writes "The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandment" - His book burned - Edward Stennett - Wm. Sellers - Cruel Treatment of Francis Bampfield - Thomas Bampfield - Martyrdom of John James - How the Sabbath cause was prostrated in England.**

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Chambers speaks thus of Sabbath-keepers in the sixteenth century:

"In the reign of Elizabeth, it occurred to many conscientious and independent thinkers (as it had previously done to some Protestants in Bohemia), that the fourth commandment required of them the observance, not of the first, but of the specified seventh day of the week, and a strict bodily rest, as a service then due to God; while others, though convinced that the day had been altered by divine authority, took up the same opinion as to the scriptural obligation to refrain from work. The former class became numerous enough to make a considerable figure for more than a century in England, under the title of `Sabbatarians' - a word now exchanged for the less ambiguous appellation of `Seventh-day Baptists.' "[1](#)

Gilfillan quotes an English writer of the year 1584, John Stockwood, who says that there were then

"A great diversity of opinion among the vulgar people and simple sort, concerning the Sabbath day, and the right use of the same."

And Gilfillan states one of the grounds of controversy thus:

"Some maintaining the unchanged and unchangeable obligation of the seventh-day Sabbath."[2](#)

In 1607, an English first-day writer, John Sprint, gave the views of the Sabbath-keepers of that time, which in truth have been substantially the same in all ages:

"They allege reasons drawn, 1. From the precedence of the Sabbath before the law, and before the fall; the laws of which nature are immutable. 2. From the perpetuity of the moral law. 3. And from the large extent thereof appertaining to [the Sabbath above] all [the other precepts]. 4. . . . And of the cause of [this precept of] the law which maketh it perpetual, which is the memorial and meditation of the works of God; which belong unto the Christians as well as to the Jews."[3](#)

John Trask began to speak and write in favor of the seventh day as the Sabbath of the Lord, about the time that

King James I., and the archbishop of Canterbury, published the famous "Book of Sports for Sunday," in 1618. His field of labor was London, and being a very zealous man, he was soon called to account by the persecuting authority of the church of England. He took high ground as to the sufficiency of the Scriptures to direct in all religious services, and that the civil authorities ought not to constrain men's consciences in matters of religion. He was brought before the infamous Star Chamber, where a long discussion was held respecting the Sabbath. It was on this occasion that Bishop Andrews first brought forward that now famous first-day argument, that the early martyrs were tested by the question, "Hast thou kept the Lord's day?"<sup>4</sup>

Gilfillan, quoting the words of contemporary writers, says of Trask's trial that,

"For `making of conventicles and factions, by that means which may tend to sedition and commotion, and for scandalizing the king, the bishops, and the clergy,' `he was censured in the Star Chamber to be set upon the pillory at Westminster, and from thence to be whipt to the fleet, there to remain a prisoner.' "<sup>5</sup>

This cruel sentence was carried into execution, and finally broke his spirit. After enduring the misery of his prison for one year, he recanted his doctrine.<sup>6</sup> The case of his wife is worthy of particular mention. Pagitt gives her character thus:

"She was a woman endued with many particular virtues, well worthy the imitation of all good Christians, had not error in other things, especially a spirit of strange unparalleled opinionativeness and obstinacy in her private conceits, spoiled her."<sup>7</sup>

Pagitt says that she was a school teacher of superior excellence. She was particularly careful in her dealings with the poor. He gives her reasons thus:

"This she professed to do out of conscience, as believing she must one day come to be judged for all things done in the flesh. Therefore she resolved to go by the safest rule, rather against than for her private interests."<sup>8</sup>

Pagitt gives her crime in the following words:

"At last for teaching only five days in the week, and resting upon Saturday, it being known upon what account she did it, she was carried to the new prison in Maiden lane, a place then appointed for the restraint of several other persons of different opinions from the church of England."<sup>9</sup>

Observe the crime: it was not what she did, for a first-day person might have done the same, but because she did it to obey the fourth commandment. Her motive exposed her to the vengeance of the authorities. She was a woman of indomitable courage, and would not purchase her liberty by renouncing the Lord's Sabbath. During her long imprisonment, Pagitt says that some one wrote her thus:

"Your constant suffering would be praiseworthy, were it for truth; but being for error, your recantation will be both more acceptable to God, and laudable before men."<sup>10</sup>

But her faith and patience held out till she was released by death.

"Mrs. Trask lay fifteen or sixteen years a prisoner for her opinion about the Saturday Sabbath; in all which time she would receive no relief from anybody, notwithstanding she wanted much: alleging that it was written, `It is more blessed . . . to give than to receive.' Neither would she borrow, because it was written, `Thou shalt lend to many nations, and shall not borrow.' So she deemed it a dishonor to her head, Christ, either to beg or borrow.

Her diet for the most part during her imprisonment, that is, till a little before her death, was bread and water, roots and herbs; no flesh, nor wine, nor brewed drink. All her means was an annuity of forty shillings a year; what she lacked more to live upon she had of such prisoners as did employ her sometimes to do business for them."[11](#)

Pagitt, who was the contemporary of Trask, thus states the principles of the Sabbatarians of that time, whom he calls Traskites:

"The positions concerning the Sabbath by them maintained were these:

"1. That the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy' [Ex. 20], is a divine precept, simply and entirely moral, containing nothing legally ceremonial in whole or in part, and therefore the weekly observation thereof ought to be perpetual, and to continue in force and virtue to the world's end.

"2. That the Saturday, or seventh day in every week, ought to be an everlasting holy day in the Christian church, and the religious observation of this day obligeth Christians under the gospel, as it did the Jews before the coming of Christ.

3. That the Sunday, or Lord's day, is an ordinary working day, and it is superstition and will-worship to make the same the Sabbath of the fourth commandment."[12](#)

It was for this noble confession of faith that Mrs. Trask was shut up in prison till the day of her death. For the same, Mr. Trask was compelled to stand in the pillory, and was whipped from thence to the fleet, and then shut up in a wretched prison, from which he escaped by recantation after enduring the miseries of more than a year.[13](#)

Mr. Utter mentions the next Sabbatarian minister as follows:

"Theophilus Brabourne, a learned minister of the gospel in the established church, wrote a book, which was printed at London in 1628, wherein he argued 'that the Lord's day is not the Sabbath day by divine institution,' but 'that the seventh-day Sabbath is now in force.' Mr. Brabourne published another book in 1632, entitled, 'A Defense of that most Ancient and Sacred Ordinance of God's, the Sabbath Day.'"[14](#)

Brabourne dedicated his book to King Charles I., requesting him to use his royal authority for the restoration of the ancient Sabbath. But those who put their trust in princes are sure to be disappointed. Dr. F. White, bishop of Ely, thus states the occasion of his own work against the Sabbath:

"Now because this Brabourne's treatise of the Sabbath was dedicated to his Royal Majesty, and the principles upon which he grounded all his arguments (being commonly preached, printed, and believed throughout the kingdom), might have poisoned and infected many people either with this Sabbatarian error, or with some other of like quality; it was the king, our gracious master, his will and pleasure, that a treatise should be set forth, to prevent further mischief, and to settle his good subjects (who have long time been distracted about Sabbatarian questions) in the old and good way of the ancient and orthodoxal Catholic church. Now that which his sacred Majesty commanded, I have by your Grace's direction [Archbishop Laud] obediently performed."[15](#)

The king not only wished by this appointment to overthrow those who kept the day enjoined in the commandment, but also those who by means of Dr. Bound's new theory pretended that Sunday was that day. He therefore joined Dr. Heylyn with Bishop White in this work:

"Which burden being held of too great weight for any one to undergo, and the necessity of the work requiring a quick dispatch, it was held fit to divide the employment betwixt two. The argumentative and scholastical part was referred to the right learned Dr. White, then bishop of Ely, who had given good proof of his ability in polemical matters in several books and disputations against the papists. The practical and historical [was to be written], by Heylyn of Westminster, who had gained some reputation for his studies in the ancient writers."[16](#)

The works of White and Heylyn were published simultaneously in 1635. Dr. White, in addressing himself to those who enforce Sunday observance by the fourth commandment, speaks thus of Brabourne's arguments, that not Sunday, but the ancient seventh day, is there enjoined:

"Maintaining your own principles that the fourth commandment is purely and simply moral and of the law of nature, it will be impossible for you either in English or in Latin, to solve Theophilus Brabourne's objections."[17](#)

But the king had something besides argument for Brabourne. He was brought before Archbishop Laud and the court of High Commission, and, moved by the fate of Mrs. Trask, he submitted for the time to the authority of the church of England, but sometime afterward wrote other books in behalf of the seventh day.[18](#) Dr. White's book has this pithy notice of the indefinite-time theory:

"Because an indefinite time must either bind to all moments of time, as a debt, when the day of payment is not expressly dated, is liable to payment every moment; or else it binds to no time at all."[19](#)

Mr. Utter, after the statement of Brabourne's case, continues thus:

"About this time Philip Tandy began to promulgate in the northern part of England the same doctrine concerning the Sabbath. He was educated in the established church, of which he became a minister. Having changed his views respecting the mode of baptism and the day of the Sabbath, he abandoned that church and `became a mark for many shots.' He held several public disputes about his peculiar sentiments, and did much to propagate them. James Ockford was another early advocate in England of the claims of the seventh day as the Sabbath. He appears to have been well acquainted with the discussions in which Trask and Brabourne had been engaged. Being dissatisfied with the pretended conviction of Brabourne, he wrote a book in defense of Sabbatarian views, entitled, `The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandment.' This book, published about the year 1642, was burnt by order of the authorities in the established church."[20](#)

The famous Stennett family furnished, for four generations, a succession of able Sabbatarian ministers. Mr. Edward Stennett, the first of these, was born about the beginning of the seventeenth century. His work entitled, "The Royal Law Contended For," was first published at London in 1658. "He was an able and devoted minister, but dissenting from the established church, he was deprived of the means of support." "He suffered much of the persecution which the Dissenters were exposed to at that time, and more especially for his faithful adherence to the cause of the Sabbath. For this truth he experienced tribulation, not only from those in power, by whom he was kept a long time in prison, but also much distress from unfriendly, dissenting brethren, who strove to destroy his influence, and ruin his cause." In 1664, he published a work entitled, "The Seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord."[21](#) In 1671, Wm. Sellers wrote a work in behalf of the seventh day in reply to Dr. Owen. Cox states its object thus:

"In opposition to the opinion that some one day in seven is all that the fourth commandment requires to be set apart, the writer maintains the obligation of the Saturday Sabbath on the ground that `God himself directly in the letter of the text calls the seventh day the Sabbath day, giving both the names to one and the self-same day, as all

men know that ever read the commandments.' "[22](#)

One of the most eminent Sabbatarian ministers of the last half of the seventeenth century was Francis Bampfield. He was originally a clergyman of the Church of England. The Baptist historian, Crosby, speaks of him thus:

"But being utterly unsatisfied in his conscience with the conditions of conformity, he took his leave of his sorrowful and weeping congregation in . . . 1662, and was quickly after imprisoned for worshiping God in his own family. So soon was his unshaken loyalty to the king forgotten, . . . that he was more frequently imprisoned and exposed to greater hardships for his nonconformity, than most other dissenters." [23](#)

Of his imprisonment, Neale says:

"After the act of uniformity, he continued preaching as he had opportunity in private, till he was imprisoned for five days and nights, with twenty-five of his hearers in one room . . . where they spent their time in religious exercises, but after some time he was released. Soon after, he was apprehended again and lay nine years in Dorchester jail, though he was a person of unshaken loyalty to the king." [24](#)

During his imprisonment, he preached almost every day, and gathered a church even under his confinement. And when he was at liberty, he ceased not to preach in the name of Jesus. After his release, he went to London, where he preached with much success. [25](#) Neale says of his labors in that city:

"When he resided in London he formed a church on the principles of the Sabbatarian Baptist, at Pinner's hall, of which principles he was a zealous asserter. He was a celebrated preacher, and a man of serious piety." [26](#)

On Feb. 17, 1682, he was arrested while preaching, and on March 28, was sentenced to forfeit all his goods and to be imprisoned in Newgate for life. In consequence of the hardships which he suffered in that prison, he died, Feb. 16, 1683. [27](#) "Bampfield," says Wood, "dying in the said prison of Newgate . . . aged seventy years, his body was . . . followed with a very great company of factious and schismatical people to his grave." [28](#) Crosby says of him:

"All that knew him will acknowledge that he was a man of great piety. And he would in all probability have preserved the same character, with respect to his learning and judgment, had it not been for his opinion in two points, viz., that infants ought not to be baptized, and that the Jewish Sabbath ought still to be kept." [29](#)

Mr. Bampfield published two works in behalf of the seventh day as the Sabbath, one in 1672, the other in 1677. In the first of these he thus sets forth the doctrine of the Sabbath:

"The law of the seventh-day Sabbath was given before the law was proclaimed at Sinai, even from the creation, given to Adam, . . . and in him to all the world. [30](#) . . . The Lord Christ's obedience unto this fourth word in observing in his lifetime the seventh day as a weekly Sabbath day, . . . and no other day of the week as such, is a part of that perfect righteousness which every sound believer doth apply to himself in order to his being justified in the sight of God; and every such person is to conform unto Christ in all the acts of his obedience to the ten words." [31](#)

His brother, Mr. Thomas Bampfield, who had been speaker in one of Cromwell's parliaments, wrote also in behalf of seventh-day observance, and was imprisoned for his religious principles in Ilchester jail. [32](#) About the time of Mr. Bampfield's first imprisonment, severe persecution arose against the Sabbath-keepers in London. Crosby thus bears testimony:

"It was about this time [A.D. 1661], that a congregation of Baptists holding the seventh day as a Sabbath, being assembled at their meeting-house in Bull-stake alley, the doors being open, about three o'clock P.M. [Oct. 19], whilst Mr. John James was preaching, one Justice Chard, with Mr. Wood, an headborough, came into the meeting-place. Wood commanded him in the king's name to be silent and come down, having spoken treason against the king. But Mr. James, taking little or no notice thereof, proceeded in his work. The headborough came nearer to him in the middle of the meeting-place and commanded him again in the king's name to come down or else he would pull him down; whereupon the disturbance grew so great that he could not proceed."[33](#)

The officer having pulled him down from the pulpit, led him away to the court under a strong guard. Mr. Utter continues this narrative as follows:

"Mr. James was himself examined and committed to Newgate, on the testimony of several profligate witnesses, who accused him of speaking treasonable words against the king. His trial took place about a month afterward, at which he conducted himself in such a manner as to create much sympathy. He was, however, sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered.[34](#) This awful sentence did not dismay him in the least. He calmly said, 'Blessed be God; whom man condemneth, God justifieth.' While he lay in prison, under sentence of death, many persons of distinction visited him, who were greatly affected by his piety and resignation, and offered to exert themselves to secure his pardon. But he seems to have had little hope of their success. Mrs. James, by advice of her friends, twice presented petitions to the king [Charles II.], setting forth the innocence of her husband, the character of the witnesses against him, and entreating His Majesty to grant a pardon. In both instances she was repulsed with scoffs and ridicule. At the scaffold, on the day of his execution, Mr. James addressed the assembly in a very noble and affecting manner. Having finished his address, and kneeling down, he thanked God for covenant mercies, and for conscious innocence; he prayed for the witnesses against him, for the executioner, for the people of God, for the removal of divisions, for the coming of Christ, for the spectators, and for himself, that he might enjoy a sense of God's favor and presence, and an entrance into glory. When he had ended, the executioner said, 'The Lord receive your soul;' to which Mr. James replied, 'I thank thee.' A friend observing to him, 'This is a happy day,' he answered, 'I bless God it is.' Then having thanked the sheriff for his courtesy, he said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.' . . . After he was dead his heart was taken out and burned, his quarters were affixed to the gates of the city, and his head was set up in White chapel on a pole opposite to the alley in which his meeting-house stood."[35](#)

Such was the experience of English Sabbath-keepers in the seventeenth century. It cost something to obey the fourth commandment in such times as those. The laws of England during that century were very oppressive to all Dissenters, and bore exceedingly hard upon the Sabbath-keepers. But God raised up able men, eminent for piety, to defend his truth during those troublous times, and, if need be, to seal their testimony with their blood. In the seventeenth century, eleven churches of Sabbatarians flourished in England, while many scattered Sabbath-keepers were to be found in various parts of that kingdom. Now, but three of these churches are in existence! And only remnants, even of these, remain!

To what cause shall we assign this painful fact? It is not because their adversaries were able to confute their doctrine; for the controversial works on both sides still remain, and speak for themselves. It is not that they lacked men of piety and of learning; for God gave them these, especially in the seventeenth century. Nor is it that fanaticism sprang up and disgraced the cause; for there is no record of anything of this kind. They were cruelly persecuted, but the period of their persecution was that of their greatest prosperity. Like Moses' bush, they stood unconsumed in the burning fire. The prostration of the Sabbath cause in England is due to none of these things.

The Sabbath was wounded in the house of its own friends. They took upon themselves the responsibility, after a time, of making the Sabbath of no practical importance, and of treating its violation as no very serious transgression of the law of God. Doubtless they hoped to win men to Christ and his truth by this course; but, instead of this, they simply lowered the standard of divine truth into the dust. The Sabbath-keeping ministers assumed the pastoral care of first-day churches, in some cases as their sole charge, in others, they did this in connection with the oversight of Sabbatarian churches. The result need surprise no one; as these Sabbath-keeping ministers and churches said to all men, in thus acting, that the fourth commandment might be broken with impunity, the people took them at their word. Mr. Crosby, a first-day historian, sets this matter in a clear light:

"If the seventh day ought to be observed as the Christian Sabbath, then all congregations that observe the first day as such must be Sabbath-breakers. . . . I must leave those gentlemen on the contrary side to their own sentiments; and to vindicate the practice of becoming pastors to a people whom in their conscience they must believe to be breakers of the Sabbath."<sup>36</sup>

Doubtless there have been noble exceptions to this course; but the body of English Sabbatarians for many years have failed to faithfully discharge the high trust committed to them.

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1 Chambers' Cyclopedia, article, Sabbath, vol. viii. p. 402, London, 1867. <[Return](#)>

2 Gilfillan's Sabbath, p. 60. <[Return](#)>

3 Observation of the Christian Sabbath, p. 2. <[Return](#)>

4 See the fifteenth chapter of this work. <[Return](#)>

5 Gilfillan's Sabbath, p. 88. <[Return](#)>

6 Id.Ib. <[Return](#)>

7 Pagitt's Heresiography, p. 209, London, 1661. <[Return](#)>

8 Pagitt's Heresiography, p. 209. <[Return](#)>

9 Id. p. 210. <[Return](#)>

10 Id. p. 164. <[Return](#)>

11 Pagitt's Heresiography, pp. 196, 197. <[Return](#)>

12 Id. p. 161. <[Return](#)>

13 Manual of the Seventh-day Baptists, pp. 17, 18; Heylyn's Hist. of the Sab. part ii. chap. viii. sect. 10; Gilfillan's Sabbath, pp. 88, 89; Cox's Sabbath Literature, vol. i. pp. 152, 153. <[Return](#)>

14 Manual of the S.D. Baptists, p. 18. <[Return](#)>

15 Dr. Francis White's Treatise of the Sabbath Day, quoted in Cox's Sab. Lit. vol. i. p. 167. <[Return](#)>

- 16 Heylyn's Cyprianus Anglicus, quoted in Cox, vol. i. p. 173. <[Return](#)>
- 17 Treatise of the Sabbath Day, p. 110. <[Return](#)>
- 18 Hessey,s Bampton Lectures, pp. 373, 374; Cox's Sab. Lit. vol. ii. p. 6; A.H. Lewis's Sabbath and Sunday, pp. 1978-184. This work contains much valuable information respecting English and American Sabbatarians. <[Return](#)>
- 19 Treatise of the Sabbath Day, p. 73. <[Return](#)>
- 20 Manual of the S.D. Baptists, pp. 19, 20. <[Return](#)>
- 21 Cox, vol. i. p. 268; vol. ii. p. 10. <[Return](#)>
- 22 Id. vol. ii. p. 35. <[Return](#)>
- 23 Hist. English Baptists, vol. i. pp. 365, 366. <[Return](#)>
- 24 Hist. Puritans, part 2. chap. x. <[Return](#)>
- 25 Crosby's Hist. Eng. Baptists, vol. i. pp. 366, 367. <[Return](#)>
- 26 Hist. Puritans, part 2, chap. x. <[Return](#)>
- 27 Calamy's Ejected Ministers, vol. ii. pp. 258, 259; Lewis' Sabbath and Sunday, pp. 188-193. <[Return](#)>
- 28 Wood's Athenae Oxonienses, vol. iv. p. 123. <[Return](#)>
- 29 Crosby, vol. i. p. 367. <[Return](#)>
- 30 Ex.16:23; Gen.2:3. <[Return](#)>
- 31 Judgment for the Observation of the Jewish or Seventh-day Sabbath, pp. 6-8, 1672. <[Return](#)>
- 32 Calamy, vol. 2, p. 260. <[Return](#)>
- 33 Crosby, vol. 2. pp. 165-171. <[Return](#)>
- 34 When asked what he had to say why sentence should not be pronounced, he said he would leave with them these scriptures: Jer.26:14,15; Ps.116:15. <[Return](#)>
- 35 Manual, &c. pp. 21-23. <[Return](#)>
- 36 Crosby's Hist. Eng. Bapt. vol. iii. pp. 138, 139. <[Return](#)>

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