

THE

CONTROVERSY

BETWEEN THE

“INQUIRER” AND “PHILIP”

ON

C H R I S T M A S ;

AS PUBLISHED IN THE

NEWBURYPORT HERALD.



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PREFATORY REMARKS.

IN bringing this controversy before the public in the form of a pamphlet, we act in compliance with the repeated solicitations of many friends, whose opinions we respect, and whose good wishes we would ever desire to conciliate. In doing it, we hope it is unnecessary to state, that we have no desire to keep alive, or perpetuate those unchristian and uncharitable feelings which have more than kept pace with the candid investigation of a subject, so deeply interesting to every rational and immortal mind. It is hoped this ferment has now, in some degree, subsided.

Every body knows, it is next to impossible, where there is a diversity of opinions, to fix upon any plan that would be entirely free from objections : and there is, perhaps, no subject about which mankind differ more than that of religion. But whatever weight might be given to subordinate considerations, public utility and religious improvement, we think, not only warrant, but demand the publicity of every fact which tends to dissipate the clouds of error and superstition and open the way for the peaceful march of the "genius of improvement," towards a happy immortality.

Let the impartial reader then re-peruse this controversy with those feelings of love and charity which actuated the "Inquirer" and "Philo," and it is *charitably* believed that few are so far blinded by prejudice, or swayed by passion as not to have their understandings improved and their hearts made better.

THE PUBLISHERS.

CHRISTMAS CONTROVERSY.

No. I.

THE INQUIRER.

HAVING recently heard the day called CHRISTMAS, represented as *holy time*, and the non-observance of it branded as a species of *profanity*, I am induced to propose the following questions relative to the subject, and to hope that some informed and candid writer will furnish a reply.

1. Is the observance of Christmas enjoined, either expressly, or by implication, in Scripture? If so, in what chapter and verse?

2. If no such injunction is found in Scripture, is not the setting apart of Christmas, as holy time, by any portion of the Christian Church, an exercise of *legislative* authority—an authority generally admitted among Protestants, to belong to Christ alone?

Should any one favor me with a reply, it will simplify his task to recollect, that the inquiry does not respect the propriety of Christians' devoutly commemorating the day on which, as they conceive, their Savior was born. The real question is this: Is the observance of Christmas a matter of divine appointment?

Should the advocates of the divine authority of Christmas, succeed in proving their point, it may be anticipated that those who have neglected to observe it as such, will confess and retract their error. Should they fail, perhaps their charge against their fellow-christians, as profaning a divine institution, will be candidly reconsidered and withdrawn.

AN INQUIRER.

No. II.

REPLY TO "AN INQUIRER."

THOSE who regard Christmas as *holy time*, do not shrink from an investigation of the grounds of their faith; in full confidence, that the more they are examined, the more they will meet the approbation of the serious and enlightened part of the community. The "Inquirer," who has called the attention of the public to this subject, is a little captious, in consequence of having somewhere heard it represented not only as *holy time*, but "the nonobservance of it," as he says, "branded, as a species of profanity." Perhaps he labors under some mistake. The friends to the observance of Christmas pass no sentence of condemnation on their dissenting brethren; unless the expression of their own convictions of truth and propriety be malignantly perverted to this effect. They have the same right of private judgment, and to express their opinions, with others; and are not to be silenced, because the expression of their peculiar sentiments may imply, that some of their brethren may be in an error. By judging it to be *holy time*, they do not impute the guilt of profanity to those, who are prevented by ignorance, prejudice or any other invincible obstacle from regarding it in the same light. To such however they would reply in the language of St. Paul, "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that regardeth *not* the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it." And by parallel sense, He that deemeth it holy, to him it is holy; "*but he that esteemeth it unclean, to him it is unclean.*"

Now if the Inquirer choose to rank himself among the latter, he is at liberty so to do; but he will not be envied either on account of his good sense, his temper, or his piety.

All time may be reputed *holy*, which is appropriated to religious exercises; and why are not individuals or portions of the Church at liberty to appropriate as much, as they please, to this object? The right appears to me so plain, that I should be loth to enter the lists with an adversary, who should question it. I should feel obliged to fancy myself transported back to the dark ages, and called upon to settle the first principles of Christian liberty. But I am still more perplexed to see, how the exercise of such a right interferes with the authority of Christ. Where has he restricted his followers on this head? Has he not rather required them to dedicate themselves, souls and bodies and their whole time to him, as their reasonable service? How then can the consecrating of particular days to him, be an interference with his authority? The more I reflect, the more I am astonished at the queries of this writer.

Besides, have not the legislatures of the several states set apart days of fasting &c. as holy time? Have not Presbyterians, and other denominations of Christians, appointed periodical fasts, to be observed as holy time? And has the propriety of their conduct ever been questioned? Why then have not the observers of Christmas the same right? Especially when they constitute the great body of the Christian world? and are sanctioned in this respect by the usage of the remotest antiquity? I cannot therefore but be surprised at the doctrine, advanced by the Inquirer, that "*the setting apart of Christmas, as holy time by any portion of the Christian Church is an exercise of legislative authority—an authority generally admitted among protestants to belong to Christ alone.*" The exercise of such a privilege was once denied by the Pope as an infringement of his authority; but it has seldom been refused by Protestants to each other. The present is a singular instance in the 19th century; and I hope it will continue to stand alone.

If then I should fail of success in satisfying a person of the Inquirer's description, I may perhaps ben-

eff a few others by laying before them the result of my own inquiries on this head.

It is not known with certainty, when Christmas was first observed as a religious festival. It may be traced back to the remotest antiquity ; to the age near the Apostles, of which no satisfactory records remain. After the New Testament, the earliest histories of the Church speak of the days of Christ's nativity and passion, as being devoutly observed among all Christians. Chrysostom, who flourished about A. D. 390 asserts, that "the custom of keeping this day was religious and of God ; and that it was antient, even from the first times." Other authorities might be adduced were it necessary—But it is not, because this distinguished Author may be regarded, as expressing the general sense of antiquity.

But this man of chapter and verse wishes for some warrant from holy writ—Let him turn then to Luke 2d Chap. from the 6th to the 15th verse inclusive ; where he will find a most interesting celebration of the birth of Christ, not by men, but by Angels, who descended from Heaven on this occasion ; and apparently for the purpose of exhibiting a suitable precedent for the future government of the Christian world. This, one would think, would be sufficient to satisfy the most sceptical and cavilling mind.

The custom is further sanctioned by the most respectable human authority. From Neal's history of the Puritans, a book highly commended by our Presbyterian and Congregational Clergy, it appears, that Christmas had the preeminence as *holy time*, even over the Christian Sabbath in the opinions of the Martyrs, Reformers and most eminent divines in England, from the beginning of the reformation down to the usurpation of Oliver Cromwell.—James I. the monarch, to whose piety we are indebted for our excellent version of the holy scriptures, appears to have been of the same opinion—It was the prevailing opinion of his Ecclesiastical and Civil courts, that some laxity should be allowed in regard to the observance of the sabbath,

lest it should otherwise be regarded by the people with the same reverence, as the great fasts and festivals of the Church.

Besides these, which are abroad, we have authorities at home, of similar aspect. The Congress of the U. States and other Legislatures of the several States usually adjourn their sessions over Christmas; thus appearing to regard it as *holy time*, and choosing not to profane it by secular concerns. But what will be deemed still more offensive by such persons as the Inquirer, is, that the twelve days following Christmas are called *holidays*—i. e. holy days, or holy time; and have been so considered for a great length of time, and throughout a large portion of the Christian world.

With such authority in its favour, backed by the evident propriety of the duty itself, and the general consent of Christians of all denominations, its friends will be justified in regarding Christmas as holy time. At least, it is to be hoped, that the right of any portion of the Christian church to observe it as such, with the explanation now given, will not be questioned.—No sight can be more gratifying to a devout and benevolent mind, than that of the great body of Christians, laying aside all *distinctions* and *animosities*, and uniting in the exercises of this day: and it must be an agreeable spectacle to the Great Head of the Church to behold his followers thus employed.—For one, I am happy in renouncing former prejudices against it, and derive great pleasure from beholding increased respect and attention, paid to it by Christians of all sects—Should the Inquirer however not be disposed to unite in the prevailing sentiment, it is to be hoped, that at least he will not continue in the ungrateful employment of damping the ardor of the occasion, or of throwing obstacles in the way of a service, at once so rational, becoming, profitable and delightful.

PHILO.

THE INQUIRER.

IF the questions proposed in a late Herald, respecting CHRISTMAS, were either trifling in their nature, or offensive in their form, they merit reprehension. On these points, let the reflecting and impartial decide.

To the writer, they seemed important. Indeed, what can be more interesting to human beings, than to know what religious observances the God of heaven has prescribed ; and what portion of their time he has consecrated to his own immediate service ?

It is an acknowledged Christian duty, to be ready to give an answer to those who ask the reasons of our faith and hope. If, in addition to this, “those who regard Christmas as *holy time*, do not shrink from an investigation of the grounds of their faith,” what is there to obstruct a free enquiry on the subject ?

My readers will likewise recollect the special *occasion* of my questions. I had recently heard Christmas represented as holy time, and secular employment, as a profanation of it ; and I felt myself, in common with thousands of my fellow Christians, involved in a very serious charge. Was it too much to ask the *authority* for such a charge ?

In a word ; if Christmas is in reality a divine institution, it follows that a great majority of the Christians of our country have reason to retrace their steps with tears, and return, with broken hearts, to a long neglected duty.

These things being considered, no one can deny that the subject is deeply interesting. It was under this impression, that I penned the inquiries to which Philo has furnished a reply.

It would be truly delightful to see a religious topic discussed with perfect coolness and candor, and decided upon its naked merits. In such a discussion, it scarce needs be said, sarcasms, personal allusions,

appeals to prejudice, would find no place. Truth disclaims such auxiliaries ; nor do her friends often condescend to employ them.

To the *personal severities* so liberally scattered through the communication of Philo, I shall make no reply. They have given me little pain. If they are merited and pertinent, I wish they may give as little to the writer. To his statements and reasonings, in direct reply to my inquiries, I feel myself called to pay some attention.

Let it be recollected, that I have not questioned the propriety of a devout celebration of the Savior's nativity. I have simply inquired whether the observance of Christmas is enjoined in Scripture ; and whether, if it is not, the setting apart of the day as *holy*, by any portion of the Christian Church, is not an exercise of *legislative* authority ?

To the *first* of these questions, Philo replies, if I understand him, in the affirmative ; and for proof, he refers us to the angelic celebration of the birth of Christ, recorded in the 2d chapter of Luke. "The angels," he thinks, "descended from heaven, on this occasion, apparently for the purpose of exhibiting a suitable precedent for the future government of the Christian world." But can he be serious in this suggestion ? Is there here any proof, or shadow of proof, of a divine institution, looking forward to distant ages ? Is it not one thing, to celebrate a great and joyous event, at its first occurrence ; and a very different thing, to appoint, or announce, an anniversary for its celebration in all future time ? When were angels commissioned to be our instructors and exemplars in regard to a standing Christian ordinance ? Is it not clear to a demonstration, that in order to form a divine institution, binding the consciences, and guiding the practice of Christians, there must be either an immediate injunction of the Deity ; or else the precept, or example, of *human beings* acting under his inspiration and authority ? Let evidence of this kind be produced, and it shall be admitted. But it cannot be produced. Nothing resembling it is to be found in all

Scripture, as the advocates for the sanctity of Christmas have generally confessed. This argument, which appears to its author "sufficient to satisfy the most sceptical and cavilling mind," has not satisfied Episcopalians themselves; most of whom have candidly admitted that their great religious festival wants the decisive stamp of Scripture authority.

I might add, that our Savior, in appointing an ordinance for the celebration of his *death*, took care that its institution should be explicitly recorded by three of the Evangelists; and still more particularly by St. Paul, in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. Thus effectually did he secure to his followers in every age, an ample and satisfying warrant for its observance. If it was his will that his *birth* should be celebrated with equal care, let the reason be given, why, from the beginning to the end of the New Testament, not a sentence, nor a syllable is to be found, relative to the subject.

If the sanctity of Christmas cannot be supported by the Scriptures, the question, one would think, is decided. Protestants acknowledge no other rule of faith and practice. But as Philo seems inclined to trace its observance to a very early period of the Christian Church, I must offer a few remarks on this point.

After admitting that "it is not known with certainty, when Christmas was first observed as a religious festival," he states that "it may be traced back to the remotest antiquity; to the age near the Apostles." In confirmation, he introduces Chrysostom, who flourished about A. D. 390, as declaring, that "the custom of keeping this day was religious, and of God; and that it was ancient; even from the first times." But has Philo forgotten that this "distinguished writer" has affirmed in one of his homilies, delivered in the Church of Antioch, that *it was not ten years, since Christmas began to be celebrated, in that Church, on the 25th of December?* It is the opinion of Dr. Cave, a respectable Episcopal writer, that in the Western Churches, Christmas was for a long time celebrated in the month of *January*. Clemens Alexandrinus de-

tails several different opinions which prevailed in his time, respecting the day of Christ's birth; but it is remarkable that not one of them referred it to the 25th of December. Indeed, it is generally admitted by candid and intelligent writers of all descriptions, that the precise day of our Redeemer's birth cannot now be ascertained. From this fact, two consequences follow. First, that to commemorate his nativity, in the confidence that we have selected the proper day, is impossible. Secondly, that the celebration of Christmas was not commenced so early as many have supposed: otherwise, the day proper to be thus solemnized, would never have become a subject of debate, or doubt. But upon this important point, we have evidence more direct and decisive. The venerable Father last mentioned, Clemens Alexandrinus, who is highly celebrated by Mosheim for his various learning, and who lived near the close of the second century, expresses himself thus: "We are commanded to worship and honor him who we are persuaded, is the **WORD**, and our Savior and Ruler, and through him, the Father; not upon certain *particular* or *select* days, as some others do; but constantly practising this all our life, and in every proper way."

On the whole, it appears highly probable that the observance of Christmas was introduced into the Church, not in its earliest and best age, but after it had lost a portion of its original purity and glory. What aspect this consideration has upon its *authority*, and what upon its *observance*, I leave others to judge.

Philo has endeavoured to strengthen the authority of Christmas, by adducing the opinions of those who have assigned it a pre-eminence, in point of *holiness*, over the Christian sabbath. This attempt will be regarded by most serious readers, with mingled astonishment and grief. Can the writer himself have considered the connexions and consequences of his procedure?

Surely, a *victory*, could it be gained in such a field, and by the employment of such auxiliaries, should draw tears from the eyes of the conqueror. If "Re-



formers," and " eminent divines in England," have actually entertained the opinions imputed to them, what does it prove? Nothing, except that they had but half emerged from the midnight of Popery, and needed much *reformation* still. If those men are gone to heaven, and grief could enter the blest abodes, their hearts must be wrung, to think of the unhappy use made of their example on earth.

The argument drawn from the practice adopted by the Congress of the U. States, and of the several State Legislatures, in adjourning their sessions over Christmas, proves undoubtedly, that those bodies treat the sentiments and wishes of Episcopalians with respect. This is confessedly proper, however *small* or *great* may be the proportion of Episcopalians composing them. But with all due deference to our civil Fathers, we do not consider them as Legislators of the *Church*. Nor do we suspect them of wishing to interfere improperly in its concerns. Is Philo really serious, in introducing the merriment and revelry of a Christmas day, as spent at Washington, in proof of the *sanctity* of Christmas? Is he serious in proposing the thoughtless levity (to say no more) in which the *Christmas holidays*, as they are called, are passed " throughout a large portion of the Christian world," as an argument that Christmas, with almost a fortnight succeeding it, is *holy time*? The writer who brings forward arguments which none can look at, without relaxed muscles, does indeed effectually escape refutation. But on a *religious* subject, such a procedure is, at least, questionable.

To my *second* question, Philo has likewise written a reply. Here he undertakes to prove that portions of the Church, and even individuals, possess the unlimited right of setting apart time as holy, at their own discretion. " All time," says he " may be reputed *holy*, which is appropriated to religious exercises; and why are not individuals or portions of the Church at liberty to appropriate as much as they please to this object?—Where has Christ restricted his followers on this head? Has he not rather required them to

dedicate themselves, souls and bodies, and their whole time to him, as their reasonable service? How then can the consecrating of particular days to him, be an interference with his authority?" This reasoning is plausible. Yet I cannot but think that, on the review, it will appear to the writer himself, utterly unsound and inconclusive; indeed, fraught with danger. It makes the holiness of time depend, not on *divine* appointment, but *human*; or rather, not on any appointment whatever, but on its *actual devotion* to religious uses. It allows mortals to make time holy; and so, by parity of reasoning, to *desecrate* it. It goes to prostrate the distinction between the sabbath and other days; and countenances the opinion of those religious disorganizers who deny that any part of the Sabbath is holy, except that which is actually spent in religious exercises. These tremendous conclusions, I do not charge Philo with adopting; but I entreat him to re-examine those principles from which they legitimately and directly result.

That time, and that alone is holy, which God, the great Lord of our lives, and Proprietor of our time, has solemnly separated from a common to a sacred use. This, unless I grossly mistake, is the Scripture definition of holy time. It will be to no purpose to object, that in this case, there may be different *degrees* of holiness; and that therefore festivals or fasts of human appointment, though not invested with all the sanctity of the Sabbath, may yet possess a partial and inferior holiness. The distinction is unknown to Scripture. Under the Christian dispensation, I affirm with confidence, there is no day holy, but one; and that is the Sabbath. If the Bible invests any other day with this character, let it be fairly shown. Men may reason plausibly of the fitness of *consecrating* other days. But *to the law, and the testimony.* In all the high concerns of religion, our opinions and practice ought to be governed, not by the reasonings of men, but the dictates of Heaven.

But Philo inquires: "Have not the Legislatures of the several States set apart days of fasting, &c. as

holy time? Have not Presbyterians, and other denominations of Christians, appointed periodical fasts, to be observed as holy time?" I answer without reserve. No; not at all. The bare suggestion of such enquiries, by a writer of Philo's acuteness, shews the danger of departing from first principles, and the vast importance of returning to them. Our periodical and other fasts and thanksgivings are indicated by the providence of God. Public bodies, civil or ecclesiastical, and public Magistrates, are but the organs of communication in the case. They select and recommend the day; and likewise recommend an abstinence from such labor and recreation, as are inconsistent with its solemnities. But all this neither implies that any proper holiness belongs to the day; nor imparts it. Should any Magistrate, Legislature, Synod, Assembly, or Convention borrow the style of the fourth commandment, and say to the people "Remember the day, and keep it holy," this would be the language, not of piety, but of arrogance and gross superstition.

Many may think, perhaps, that the question respecting the *holiness* of Christmas, is of little importance; and that the *Inquirer* has manifested a needless and improper zeal on the subject. The error, if an error, is, it may be conceived, on the safe side. Why then may it not be left undisturbed? To those who may adopt this view of things, and to the candid and serious at large, I beg leave to suggest the following thoughts, as claiming attention.

If Christmas is *holy time*, not to be profaned by secular employments; must it not directly follow, that the Bible is neither the only standard, nor a complete standard, of our belief and practice? In the opinion of an eminent British Prelate, Bishop Hurd, (an opinion in which he is nowise singular) the principle, that *the Scripture is the sole rule of the Christian faith*, was one of the two great principles on which the Reformation from Popery was founded. This principle has ever been dear to the hearts of reflecting Protestants. On this ground, it has been conceived that any

poor man, with the Bible in his hand, and an honest, humble heart, united with common sense, to read it, might be sure of finding his way to heaven; and not only so, but of understanding all the great duties of the present life. But on the supposition just made, the Bible would be insufficient. He must have access to the canons of some human Church. And even then, should he be “prevented by ignorance, or prejudice, or some other invincible obstacle,” from receiving a human ordinance as a conclusive rule of duty, he would be subjected to the reproach of esteeming that “*unclean*,” which his more enlightened brethren esteemed “*holy*.”

On the same supposition, the sole and exclusive right of Jesus Christ to make laws for his Church, is virtually denied.—*Consecrating time*, I repeat it, is an exercise of legislative authority; and it is not fit that fallible and sinful mortals should be partners in this momentous business, with the Church’s HEAD.

Thus, likewise, a door is opened for endless superstitions and abuses to enter. On this topic, we need not go far for evidence. Philo himself has furnished it. According to his statements, good and great men, in their ardent attachment to Christmas, have given it “the pre-eminence, as holy time, over the Christian Sabbath!” He likewise lets us know that “it was the prevailing opinion of the ecclesiastical and civil courts of James I. that *some laxity* should be allowed in regard to the observance of the sabbath; lest it should otherwise be regarded by the people with the same reverence as the *great fasts and festivals of the Church*!”—I do not charge Philo with adopting this sentiment. I sincerely hope he disclaims it with the same abhorrence which I feel myself. But from my inmost heart I regret that he has let it pass without the severest brand of his reprobation. What! Have venerable ministers and magistrates, fathers in church and state, actually, *dreaded it as an evil*, that the ordinances of God should be as much revered as the ordinances of man? Who is not struck dumb with astonishment? Who does not tremble at the close connexion between superstition and impiety?

But Episcopalians at large, I doubt not, have far other sentiments. Nor do I doubt that many pious persons of this description, *really apprehending that Christmas is a divine appointment*, have devoutly observed it as such ; and the ALL-GRACIOUS BEING who has seen and accepted their sincerity, has mercifully pardoned their error. I have no wish to “damp the ardor,” nor to interrupt the genuine delight of a Christmas celebration. But the ordinances of God are sacred things. On them all is written, in characters of fire, **THOU SHALT NOT ADD, NOR DIMINISH.** Every Christian is bound to guard their integrity, and their purity. In every Christian, the first symptoms of innovation should excite serious alarm.

If what I have written shall send a single reader to that neglected book, the BIBLE, to learn *what the Lord his God requires of him*, and what he will accept, I shall regret nothing which I have incurred, either of labor, or reproach. Let us then kindly give and receive mutual admonitions against those errors which are ever incident to our fallen nature. Let us agree where we can ; and where we cannot, let us differ in the sacred spirit of that CHARITY which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

INQUIRER.

[Herald, Jan. 16, 1816.]

No. IV.

PHILO in reply to the **INQUIRER.**

THE Inquirer has assumed a new character, and in a learned and peremptory manner decides questions, about which he lately seemed to be in doubt, and to be seeking information. His progress from pupil to Instructor has been rapid, and if his decisions should consequently prove unsound, and at war not only with the Episcopal Church, but with the well known usages of all Churches, and with the scriptures, it will only serve to show, how easily minds of clear and quick discernment in most respects may be perverted

by prejudice, or by the too eager pursuit of favourite objects, from discerning the most obvious truths.

It is much to be regretted, that a new topic of controversy should have been sought at the present moment, when civil and religious dissention appeared to be subsiding. But this is both novel, and arrayed in a garb of solemnity, much beyond what the subject seemed to demand ; while at the same time it is handled in a manner, calculated to awe and terrify, perplex and disturb those, who stand in most need of the consolations of pious instruction ; and better deserve to be edified and built up in the faith by the hand of meekness and charity.

The insinuation, that Christmas ought to be regarded, as one of those observances, which were introduced into the Church after the decay of its original purity and glory ; and that the regarding of it, as a divine appointment, may be pardoned, as an error, cannot be read without regret. The Inquirer ought not to have made these suggestions, without first demonstrating, that it was not of Apostolical origin, by showing precisely the time when it was first introduced ; by proving clearly, that it was not regarded by any portion of the Christian Church in the first century ; that it was not appointed by any authority, which Episcopalians were bound to regard.

Esteeming the observance of it, as a dictate of common sense, as followed by no possible disadvantage, but accompanied by great and important benefits ; as a delightful occasion of religious joy ; as having its origin in the best feelings of the renewed heart, and as established in the first and purest ages of the Church, Christians now read with grief and astonishment, that it wears the aspect of corruption ; and while supposing, that by commemorating the blessings of His birth, they were offering an acceptable tribute of homage to the Great Head of the Church, Christians are now told that, on certain conditions, He vouchsafes to pardon it, as an error ! Must not such suggestions, if at all regarded, tend to damp the ardor of this joyful anniversary ?

But had truth been the only object of his remarks, the Inquirer might, I think, have stated the testimony of Chrysostom in a less ambiguous manner. Prior to the time of this Father, the Churches were divided in their opinions, about the true day of the Nativity; some commemorating it in December, and some in January. But after careful investigation of the records at Rome, all parties were convinced, that the 25th day of December was the true time. The Church at Antioch then adopted this day, instead of the one, which they had before observed, in conformity with the Romish celebration; and this has prevailed from that day to the present time. But the objection arising from uncertainty in regard to the true time is altogether futile. The union of the christian world in this day is alone a sufficient consideration to perpetuate its observance.

The testimony of Clemens Alexandrinus tends only to prove, that the Nativity was an interesting object of inquiry in his day; and if it prove any thing else, it leaves the impression, that the first christians were not particular in the observance of any holy day.

Were it expedient, I might arrange a long list of Fathers in favor of the early observance of Christmas, as *holy time*. Nearly all the lights of antiquity, corroborate the truth, that the celebration of this day was one of the primitive institutions of Christianity. The Apostolical Canons and Constitutions, Origen, Cyprian, Austin, Ambrose, Justin Martyr and many others contribute strong and unequivocal testimony to this effect. With this respectable testimony, backed by the considerations before suggested, the propriety and lawfulness of observing Christmas, must be clearly established.

But the principal excitement to this controversy appears to be a supposed charge of profanation of holy time, made by some one, against those who do not observe Christmas. This odious and groundless insinuation has been indirectly repelled. But this is not deemed sufficient; and as an evident allusion is now made to the sermon, which was preached on the last

Christmas, and a public retraction is demanded, I will state the sentiment verbally, as it was then expressed; and leave the public to judge, whether it will bear the odious construction, which has been put upon it; and then let them determine, who ought to make a public recantation.

Addressing, as the Preacher verily believed, an assembly of Christian friends—friends to the observance of the festival, and those of different denominations, yet uniting with one heart and voice on an occasion, dear to all the friends of the Redeemer, he concluded his discourse by an exhortation, in which were these expressions.

“ Surely then, my brethren, the gospel deserves to be
 “ received with gratitude, and to be commemorated with
 “ liveliest demonstrations of joy. Such should be the
 “ emotions of this day—a day consecrated and observ-
 “ ed, as religious festival, in every part of the chris-
 “ tian world, as a day not to be profaned by secular
 “ concerns; but to be devoted to acts of solemn wor-
 “ ship, to songs of joy and praise, to demonstrations
 “ of *Christian love, friendship and harmony*, and to
 “ deeds of benevolence and charity.”

This is the offensive passage. Here then is not one word about holy time, or a divine institution; and not a single charge against any sect of Christians; but a simple declaration of the fact of the ancient and prevailing observance of Christmas, and of the *manner*, in which it has been observed by those, who have celebrated it. Had the Inquirer then applied to the proper source, instead of appealing to the public, he would, I think, (unless he had a strong desire for controversy,) have spared the public the pain of this needless disputation.

Who then ought now to recant, the preacher his assertion, or the Inquirer his groundless charge? Have not Episcopalians some occasion for feeling indignant at being thus unjustly dragged before the bar of the public? But they have been assailed in the least vulnerable quarter. They are happy in the belief, that they unite in opinion with a large majority of their fel-

low Christians in the propriety of observing this festival.

Here then I might dismiss the subject forever, in full confidence of the good will of my fellow Christians at large to the observance of Christmas.—But as the Inquirer appears to be offended, at Episcopalians for calling *Christmas* a *holy* day, I will bestow a little attention on this head.

The term *holy* appears by common usage to have a much greater latitude, than the Inquirer seems willing to admit. It is frequently applied to men and things, to objects animate and inanimate and to other days, than the Jewish or Christian Sabbath.—The dispute then is evidently about words and must be settled on this ground; for no one has ever asserted, that Christmas is holy in precisely the same sense, or to the same extent as the Sabbath. This point has been purposely avoided by Episcopalians. It is no part of the controversy to draw any comparison between this and the Sabbath; as this might eventuate in a very unprofitable and injurious contest; and I hope the Inquirer will not labor to involve this question in the present debate.

The term *holy* then is evidently applied in passages too numerous to be quoted, to Priests and their vestments, to the convocation of the children of Israel, to the feast of tabernacles, of trumpets, and of the pass-over, to the temple and all its furniture and sacrifices. Thus we read of *holy* garments, *holy* oil, *holy* field, &c.—Can it then be an improper or offensive use of the term, to apply it to a day expressly devoted to religious purposes?

Again, St. Paul, Rom. 14, expressly remonstrates against the folly of making religion to consist in meats and drinks, and in the observance or non-observance of holy days; and asserts it to be a matter of indifference, what days are termed *holy*, provided every man is fully persuaded in his own mind, and gives no unnecessary disturbance to others, who follow their own convictions of duty. See also Colos. 2, 16, where the observance of *holy* days, &c.

is ranked among the nonessentials of religion, and as things which ought not to be subjects of litigation among Christians.

The propriety of denominating that time *holy*, which is constantly appropriated to religious or holy acts, seems too self evident to admit of doubt.—Time keeps its uniform course; and as it respects individuals must receive its actual impressions, as to sanctity, by the *manner in which it is improved*.

I will now consider the *legislative* authority of the Church to consecrate or set apart holy time: which also the Inquirer deems an offensive point. This authority is implied in the great commission to preach and baptize, and to consecrate the elements of the Eucharist, which was imparted by Christ to the officers of the Church. If they have not authority to set apart times and seasons for these purposes, their commission is a perfect nullity: it is good for nothing. If the constituted authorities of the Church are not allowed to appoint times or seasons for the functions of their sacred office; or if the members of the Church are under no obligations to obey them, there can be no government, nor order in the Church; and all religious institutions must cease.

Again—the greater authority always includes the less. Christ has conveyed authority to the ministry to consecrate the elements of bread and wine, so as to render them striking and lively emblems of the body and blood of Christ; and the instruments of imparting comfort, hope, and growth in grace to the humble and worthy communicant. What act can be more holy, solemn, and dignified, than this? If then the ministers of Christ's Church have power to convert such otherwise unworthy elements into such sublime objects, as to be true memorials of Christ, representatives of his body and blood; is it not probable, that the whole authority of the Church combined is competent to consecrate and set apart a suitable portion of time to this holy purpose?

This argument can be evaded only by denying the authority of the Church to administer the holy sacra-

ments on any day, beside the Sabbath ; in which case he will be opposed by the universal usage of the Churches, and by the venerable Council, who ordained the Missionaries in this place during the last season.

Who does not see, then, that the positions of the Inquirer are at variance with the first principles of Church government, and tend to disorganization and all kinds of insubordination ?

I will now confront him by high authorities in the Christian Church of various denominations.

The 39 articles of the Church of England are deemed unexceptionable by most sects of Christians, as containing nothing repugnant to the word of God.—The 20th expressly asserts, that “the Church hath power to decree RITES and ceremonies.” Its power to decree Rites relates to its authority to set apart seasons for religious purposes, to be regarded by its members, as *holy time*.

The learned and pious Stackhouse also remarks,—“Since the Church by Christ’s own institution is a regular and well ordered society of men, either we must suppose, that its government is defective (which is a sad imputation upon our Savior’s wisdom,) or allow, that it has a *legislative power* inherent in it.” “Either therefore we may lawfully do something, which the scriptures do not expressly command ; or it is not lawful for us to worship God at any fixed time, and to say our prayers together in any appointed place ! because the scriptures have no where determined the hour of the day, when we should meet to worship God ; nor the precise place, where we should pray unto him ; and therefore in things of this nature, the constant custom has ever been, for Churches in all ages to be determined by the wisdom of their *Governors*.”

This stands as a sort of axiom in Church government ; and is adopted by Bishop Smallridge, Potter, Hooker, and most other writers on this subject.

But lest these authorities should be objected to, as Episcopal, I will adduce others of a different complexion.—The Westminster Confession of faith says, chap. 30, sect. 1. “The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of

this Church, hath therein appointed a *government* in the hands of *church officers*, distinct from the civil magistrate.

2. *To those officers the keys of the kingdom of Heaven are committed* ; by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins ; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent both by word and censures ; and to open it unto penitent sinners by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require."

Surely here is something like *legislative* authority. That government, which has power to retain and remit sins, and to open and shut the gates of the kingdom of heaven, must be competent to setting apart, and consecrating any season to religious purposes, as *holy time*. Now should such a government in their *legislative* capacity set apart a day of fasting and prayer, it would be incumbent on all, who acknowledge such a government to obey ; or else they would be false to their own covenant, and (as is said in another part of the same Confession,) **DISOBEDIENT TO GOD.**

Should a refractory member however refuse, I would refer him to the 20th Chap. and 4th section of this same Confession ; which declares, that "because the decrees, which God hath ordained, and the liberty, which Christ hath purchased are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another ; they, *who upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical* **RESIST THE ORDINANCE OF GOD.**"

I think, I may now feel confident of no opposition to the *legislative* authority of the Church, from any, who impose or receive the Westminster Confession of faith.

A few authorities in defence of the use of the term *holy*, as applied to other days than the Lord's day, shall conclude the argument.

The 13th Canon of the Church of England declares, "that all persons within it shall keep the Lord's day and other *Holy days*, according to God's will and the

orders of the Church of England." The French Protestant Church keeps the festivals of the Nativity &c. as Holy days, shutting up their shops and abstaining from secular concerns. But not to multiply names, I will conclude with the opinions of the famous Calvin.

He writes in a letter to Haller—"The same decree, that expelled me and Farel brought in the observation of the same HOLY DAYS, that are observed by you in the Helvetic Churches. Yet upon my return I observed this moderation, that, the festival of Christ's Nativity should be observed in the *same manner*, as with you." He afterward in another letter *expressed his surprize*, that the Helvetic Church had passed a decree, abolishing HOLY DAYS !!

"We have here, (says the learned Bingham,) Calvin's judgment upon this matter, as well as the practice of the Church of Geneva. *Every Church has power to appoint or abrogate Holy days,** as she thinks most expedient for edification; and *the rules and practice of one Church ought not to prejudice or prescribe to any other.* But the custom of every Church is to be observed by its own members; and they are pervincacious and stubborn, who refuse obedience to it. The first reformation at Geneva allowed of no Holy days but the Lord's day; and while that decree lasted, Calvin and the rest of the Ministers complied with it. Afterward the use of Holy days was brought in A. D. 1537 in compliance with the custom of the Helvetic Church. *And then Calvin freely consented to observe them.* This decree continued till the year 1551, during all which time they had sermons on *Christ's nativity*, and solemn prayers on the other HOLY days. Calvin in an Epistle to Farel, written A. D. 1551, speaks of *his own preaching on Christmas day.*"

More might be adduced from the same authority; but this is sufficient to my present purpose. I would

* The Author here refers to other holy days than the Lord's day; no Church, that I am acquainted with, affecting any authority over this, other than regulating the time and manner of public worship. I readily admit, that the Lord's day has more clearly the divine sanction, than any other holy day.—But there is no command, saying, "Thou shalt not observe any other day, as holy."

only express a wish, that more of this catholic spirit, which was exercised among christians, “who had but half emerged from the midnight of popery,” prevailed in this enlightened period.

But a far greater than Calvin, the blessed Saviour, observed holy days, and other religious institutions, which were evident additions to the Mosaical dispensation.

If after all this testimony, any private individual is disposed to cavil at Episcopalians for denominating days devoted to religious observances, *Holy days*, I shall consider it as savouring of a bigotry and superstition, deserving contempt, rather than serious refutation.

What then becomes of the strong position of the Inquirer, “*That time, and that only is holy, which God the great Lord of our lives and Proprietor of our time, has solemnly separated from a common to a sacred use?*” Should not chapter and verse have been quoted in support of so solemn and important an asseveration? Or should it not have been fortified by some powerful argument? Or at least should it not have had some more substantial prop to lean upon than “*If I mistake not?*” Will not the private christian condemn it, who is thus deprived of the privilege of sanctifying time to the Lord; and is debarred from regarding as holy time the moments which are devoted in his family, and in his closet, to close communion with a holy God? Will not those Clergymen condemn it, who on occasional weekly exercises, thank God for the privilege of turning aside from secular concerns to *consecrate* an hour to the worship of Jehovah in his holy temple?

But if the Inquirer, influenced by a good and tender conscience, is determined to prosecute his undertaking, and with his *scourge* to purify the whole temple of Christendom from its fancied corruptions in this particular, he has a great task to perform. The whole season of Lent, in commemoration of our Savior’s fasting forty days in the wilderness, has for many centuries been denominated *holy*; and the term has been peculiarly applied to Good Friday, and the holy week;

which are said to have been observed by the Apostles. The Quakers also, a very numerous and respectable body of christians, deem all time equally holy.

But why all this zeal for curtailing the Church of her public devotions? Is there too much piety prevailing in the world? Is any one uneasy at any increasing zeal for religion among Episcopalians? Or do people run too greedily after the exercises of Christmas day? Or is there any danger, that the Sabbath will be less respected, in consequence of extraordinary devotions on other days? Most people wish to see the end to be obtained by any contest, before they enter heartily into the merits of the cause, or take part with the parties concerned. If no valuable purpose is to be answered, why this debate? It is not one of my choosing, and I shall be exceedingly pleased to see its termination.

I will briefly touch on a few objectionable passages in the Inquirer's remarks, and then dismiss the subject, I hope forever.

He denies the example of the angels of Heaven to be a suitable precedent for the Church. I thought their example at least *safe* to be imitated: and that the greatest danger arose from a too great proneness in men to copy the example and imitate the conduct of spirits from an opposite quarter.

The Inquirer says, "that the ordinances of God are sacred things. On them is written in characters of fire—"*Thou shalt not add nor diminish.*" The bible is full of rich instruction, rational counsel, and heavenly consolation: and I find but one instance, where the disciples of Jesus wished to call down the fire of Heaven to consume their opposers; for which they received from him this severe rebuke. *Ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of.*

I have not found these "letters of fire;" at least in the connexion, in which they here stand. I can only say, however, that if they burn all who deviate from the Inquirer's rule, "who then can be saved?" For the bible informs us, that the first converts continued *daily* with one accord in the temple, and break-

ing bread from house to house—thus apparently regarding all time as holy ; and churches generally of the first and second centuries kept Saturday and Sunday both, as holy time—Either they added to the ordinances of God, and must be burnt by these “ letters of fire ;” or else we diminish, and therefore cannot escape ; and the sect of Quakers must be utterly excluded from the *pale* of christian charity.

The Inquirer says again “ Let it be recollected, that I *have not questioned* the *propriety* of a devout celebration of the Saviour’s nativity.” Why then does he oppose it ? Why not join in the celebration ? If the duty is *proper* to be discharged, is it not *improper* to be neglected ? Do Christians want a safer guide, than their own sober convictions of duty ; and must they not feel some compunction of conscience, when they omit a known and self evident duty ? Must they always wait for *chapter and verse*, when the course of duty is plain, discernible by reason, and evidently not opposed to the word of God ? And what must be thought of the piety of that Christian, who discerns what he ought to do, and yet refuses to perform it, until he receives a direct and explicit command from his father in Heaven ?

If days, set apart by the civil authority, are not *holy* time, and if there is no difference in this respect between them and other days, in what light are they to be regarded ? What are the obligations of citizens to observe them ? If these are not holy time, is there any obligation to devote them to holy purposes ? May they not with perfect propriety be regarded, as profane time ? The Inquirer has promptly asserted, that they are not *holy* ; but has not condescended to tell us, what they are. He indeed appears a little indefinite and embarrassed on this head. “ *To the law and testimony*” then ; and perhaps from this inexhaustible fountain, some light may be gathered on this obscure point. “ Let every soul, says St. Paul, be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power, but of God ; the powers, that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore *resisteth the power,*



resisteth the ORDINANCE OF GOD.”—Rom. 13, 1 and 2 verses. Are we not here plainly directed to regard the ordinance of civil and ecclesiastical authority, as being at least *mediately* the ORDINANCE OF GOD? I verily believe, that were that “much neglected book, the BIBLE,” examined with a little more attention, there would be much less confusion and controversy, and much more peace and harmony in the christian world.

The principles, which I have now defended have generally prevailed in the church of Christ for about 18 centuries; but the evils so feelingly and eloquently portrayed by the Inquirer have not yet been realized. Indeed the more these principles have prevailed, the less have the evils, he describes, been felt. Many a poor man, with the bible in his hand and an honest heart, has found the way to Church on the Sabbath, on Christmas, and on other *holy* days, and to heaven at last, without any of that perplexity which he apprehends. It ill becomes *him* then to caution us against superstition and innovations: and least of all to admonish us to return to first principles. Should we both start on such an expedition, I now willingly leave it to the public to determine, which of us would have the greatest distance to travel.

On the whole, I cannot but hope, that the Inquirer will be content to let Episcopalians enjoy their opinions without further molestation: while they, on the other hand, being now fairly acquitted of all offence against their christian brethren, will be happy to reciprocate with them the kind offices of love and charity.

PHILO.

[Herald of Jan. 16, 1816]

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No. V.

Remarks on PHILO's second Reply to the Inquirer.

WHETHER my remarks, already before the public, deserve the opprobrium attempted to be fastened on them by Philo, is a question for the impartial to decide.

They will likewise judge, to what purpose are his strong appeals to popular prejudice and passion, and his repeated attempts to expose an individual to public odium and obloquy.

That individual has dared ask a question or two, respecting the sanctity of Christmas. He has wished to know whether its observance is of divine appointment, or human.

These questions are serious, interesting, and practical. They come home to the bosoms of all Christians. They were decently proposed. Why might they not have received a dispassionate and candid reply?

Instead of this, the writer was reproached. Among other asperities, a charge was insinuated, that he esteemed Christmas *unclean*; and thus his "good sense," his "temper," and his "piety" were called into question.

The public know that none of these severities were retorted. Not a sentence escaped me, in reply, criminating the motives, the intentions, or the heart of Philo. When he stated principles which appeared to me dangerous, I simply suggested the consequences to which they led, and entreated him to reconsider them. When, without express disapprobation, he quoted opinions respecting the sabbath, wounding to every Christian ear and heart, I still hoped that he disclaimed them. I made free with his arguments; but his reputation I held sacred. I endeavoured to turn back the public attention from *persons* to *things*. I hoped, likewise that in this way, the spirit of Philo might be softened. His second reply has convinced me of my mistake.

I make these remarks with undissembled pain. But self-defence, and the cause of truth require them. I appeal to the conscience of Philo, and ask: Is the mode he has adopted, that in which it becomes Christians to treat one another? Must the minds of men, in order to discover truth, be first blinded by prejudice and passion? I put the question to every man of candor and reflection: Is this the proper mode of conducting a religious debate?

Whatever severities Philo might think proper to indulge, he should, at least, have given *correct representations* of my meaning. Instead of making me say, that "the observance of Christmas wears the aspect of corruption," he should have quoted my *words*, which were materially diverse. His charge against me as "*opposing*" a devout celebration of the Savior's nativity, is still more ungrounded. Nor have I declared, as he states, that when Christians commemorate the birth of the great Head of the Church, he vouchsafes to pardon it as an error. The error expressly mentioned, was that of *considering Christmas as a divine appointment*. Must a remark designed to soften and conciliate, be converted into an instrument of exasperation?

These *mistakes*, for so I wish to consider them, have already produced their pernicious effects, especially on the minds of Episcopalians. Toward that body of Christians, I have expressed no disrespect. I have felt none. Nor do the opinions I have advanced concerning Christmas, essentially differ from the sentiments of some of the most respectable divines of their own Church.

Hoping that the ferment of the public mind is somewhat subsided, and asking nothing but a candid hearing, I shall now offer some remarks on the leading points of Philo's last communication; remarks which I consider as due to the cause of truth, and of pure religion.

My first attention is paid, of course, to the Extract from the Christmas Sermon. This extract will enable the public to judge whether the sentiments I have ascribed to the advocates of the sanctity of Christmas, were mis-stated. The day is styled "a day consecrated and observed as a religious festival, in every part of the Christian world, as a day not to be profaned by secular concerns, but to be devoted to acts of solemn worship, &c." Here the preacher professedly declares his own views, and the views of other observers of Christmas. Philo remarks that the passage contains "not one word about holy time." But sure

ly, the Preacher, in declaring the day *consecrated as a religious festival, as a day not to be profaned by secular concerns*, has pronounced it *holy*, and in the highest degree. Nothing that is not *holy*, is capable of being *profaned*. As to its being a *divine institution*, I appeal to the sense of Christians at large, whether representing a day as “religious,” and “a day not to be profaned by secular concerns,” is not equivalent to representing it as divinely instituted. Philo himself, in answer to my enquiry for a *scriptural injunction* to observe Christmas, has referred me to the 2d chap. of Luke, as containing it. Will he deny that *scriptural injunction*, and *divine institution* mean, in this case, essentially the same thing?

Further; as, in the sentence above recited, attention to “secular concerns” was represented as a “profanation” of Christmas; and as it was known and notorious, that such was the habitual practice of a great part of the audience, it appeared to me that they were involved in a serious charge. But on this point, Philo himself shall be the commentator. After some remarks apparently more candid, he lets us know that the friends to the observance of Christmas “are not to be silenced, because the expression of their peculiar sentiments may imply that some of their brethren are in an error.” He adds. “By judging it to be holy time, they do not impute the guilt of profanity to those who are prevented by ignorance, prejudice, or any other invincible obstacle, from regarding it in the same light.” Is not this a virtual declaration that all the non-observers of Christmas, “excepting the ignorant, the prejudiced, and those invincibly prevented from regarding the day as holy, are in fact held guilty of profanity?”

Let this simple statement be considered; and let the public determine what reason Philo has for declaring that Episcopalians have been “unjustly dragged before the bar of the public;” and what reason for his strong expressions of resentment, and of triumph, in the case.

What he has advanced respecting the *antiquity and*

sanctity of Christmas, and respecting the *legislative authority* of the Church, is too important to be passed in silence. To his leading remarks on these topics, I shall pay a particular attention ; though with the utmost practicable brevity.

He confidently represents the celebration of Christmas as “one of the primitive institutions of Christianity.” He states it as my duty to “demonstrate that it was not of apostolic origin, by showing precisely the time when it was first instituted, and by proving clearly that it was not regarded by any portion of the Christian Church in the first century.” All this is surprising. To prove a *negative*, especially to *demonstrate* it, is a task rarely imposed. But in the present case, satisfactory evidence is not wanting. Has any writer of reputation pretended, or suspected, that the observance of Christmas was of Apostolic origin ? Have any respectable historians traced it to the first century ? Many believe that it commenced near the close of the *second* century, in the time of the Emperor Commodus. A few carry it back about forty years further, to the reign of Antoninus Pius. Beyond this, all is uncertainty, and vague conjecture. But there is a question much more interesting than either of those above stated. Is the institution of Christmas found in the Holy Oracles ? Here, Christians at large have entertained but one opinion. And I rejoice to find that on this point, Philo speaks much more cautiously in his second Reply, than in the first ?

As the propriety of denominating Christmas *holy time* is still strenuously asserted, this point must again receive a short discussion. Here I remark with pleasure, that Philo has receded from the ground which he had seemed to take ; and has explicitly admitted, that Christmas is not holy “precisely in the same sense, and to the same extent, as the sabbath.” But he insists on the fitness of denominating that time holy, which is appropriated to religious exercises. And he ridicules, though he does not refute, my definition of holy time ; that it is *that which God, the Lord of our lives, and Proprietor of our time, has solemnly separ-*

ated from a common, to a sacred use. The subject is too serious for ridicule. The *reasons* of my definition are found in the definition itself. Let me ask ; What constitutes the holiness of the sabbath ? Is it its actual devotion to religious duties ? Is it the general consent of the Christian world ? Is it long established usage ? Is it the ordinance of civil government ? Unquestionably, none of these. It is the authority of God, expressed in the fourth command of the decalogue, and solemnly separating it from a secular, to a sacred use. None but our Creator and Sovereign has a *right* to make such a separation.

Supposing then, for a moment, that this, as suggested, is, “ a dispute about words,” and “ to be settled on that ground ;” where, I ask, is the propriety of applying the same term to a *human*, and a *divine* ordinance ;—to a day separated by man, and a day claimed, “ blessed and hallowed,” by the living God ?

But let us pass from terms to things. Philo inquires : Why may not men consecrate as much time as they please ?—And why not, another may ask, as *little* as they please ? And why not, may a third say, none at all ? Where shall we find an effectual guard against these evils ? Nowhere, but in the declared will of the Sovereign ; in the determination of God, explicitly manifested. The principle that the holiness of time arises from its actual devotion to religious duties, and not from divine appointment, goes ultimately to banish the worship of God, and with it, all religion, and all morality, from the world. ♦

I grant that there is a sense in which every Christian, and every human being, is bound to devote every day and hour of life to God. And highly delightful are those hours in which Christians in their closets, and Christian assemblies in the sanctuary, have communion with their Father, and their Savior, though not on the Sabbath. These may be called *holy duties*, and *holy enjoyments*. But the holiness of *time* is a different thing. This implies a *previous obligation* imposed by God himself, to devote some particular

specified period, rather than another, to his immediate service. Time thus distinguished and separated, is holy. To alienate it, is profanity.

This honor belongs to the Sabbath ; and under the Christian dispensation, to the Sabbath alone. I have already stated this ; and Philo has been explicitly invited to show, from the Scripture, that any day is holy now, beside the Sabbath. He has not done it ; and for the best of reasons, that it is impossible. He has indeed gone back to the Jewish dispensation, under which the temple and its appendages, the feasts, the assemblies, and various objects beside, were denominated *holy*. But every common Christian knows that this holiness was merely ceremonial ; and that the term, as thus applied, pertains to a ritual long since abrogated.

Referring to Romans 14th, Philo remarks, that St. Paul remonstrates against the folly of making religion consist “ in the observance or non-observance of holy times.” This comment, being unlimited, is liable to be construed as having some reference to the christian sabbath. I sincerely believe that the author had no such intention ; and I have noted the passage, to guard it against so dangerous a construction. Undoubtedly, *much* of religion consists in a pious observance of the sabbath.—If, in a succeeding passage, quoted from the 2d of Colossians, the Apostle “ ranks the observance of holy days among the *non-essentials* of religion,” permit me to ask Philo why the non-observers of Christmas must, as he has represented, feel “ compunction of conscience.” And why, on this ground, is the Inquirer’s *piety* subjected to a second imputation ?

Philo ridicules the apprehension, that by treating Christmas as holy, our reverence for the Sabbath should be diminished. But surely, the “ pious monarch,” James I. and his “ civil and ecclesiastical courts,” have taught us a different lesson. Every attentive mind perceives a close affinity between placing our own appointments by the side of the divine, and



depressing the ordinances of God to the level of our own. Indeed, it is a prominent propensity of proud and fallen man, to *prefer* his own inventions to the truths and institutions of the Supreme Being.

I have asked for *scriptural* evidence in support of the holiness of Christmas ; and have asked in vain. But *human* authority, it is suggested, is not wanting. Little as is the comparative importance of human authority in the case, I will not pass the subject wholly unnoticed. Here Philo appeals to the Church of England, and to the French Protestant Church. His only remaining authority is Calvin ; concerning whose conduct on the subject of " holy days," he gives a detailed statement from Bingham, showing that the Reformer, in compliance with the church of Geneva, first declined their observance, and afterward consented to it. I may add, from his Life, that he complied with the wishes of that church a third time. In the year 1551, the church " decreed that the commemoration of the nativity of the Saviour should be referred to the next Lord's day, and that no day should be observed as holy, excepting the Lord's day ;" " and Calvin, though he judged the measure *inexpedient* at the time, laboured to conduct himself in the most accommodating manner, respecting the subject." From these facts, the unbiassed reader would naturally conclude that this great Reformer was neither decidedly hostile, nor strongly attached, to the observance of Christmas. The real fact however is, that it was Calvin's expressed desire, " that inasmuch as Christ our Judge has released us from stated *festival days*, we may not obey any mortal who shall go to oblige us thereunto." Luther's feelings were the same. He wished " there were no other festival days among christians, but only the Lord's day."

But Calvin, it is alleged, " *preached* on Christmas day." I reply, so have other ministers, who have not viewed it as holy, nor of divine appointment. I might instance in the pious and catholic President Davies, who, in a sermon preached on Christmas day, thus ex-

presses himself on the subject now in question: "All the ordinances which God has been pleased to appoint, and particularly that one day in seven, which he has set apart for his own immediate service, and the commemoration of the works of creation and redemption, I would honestly endeavour to observe in the most sacred manner. But when ignorant, presuming mortals take upon them to refine upon divine institutions, to make that a part of religion, which God has left indifferent, and consecrate more days than he has thought necessary; in short, when they would mingle something of their own with the pure religion of the Bible; then I must be excused from obedience, and beg leave to content myself with the old, plain, simple religion of the Bible."

On the subject of human authority, I would observe further, that Dr. Cotton Mather, in his "Discipline of the New-England Churches," published in 1726, declares it as their general belief, "that the Apostles have set the Churches free from the yoke of bondage to *holy days*." From their practice, we must conclude that the prevalent opinion is the same at the present time. The Presbyterians, in connexion with the "General Assembly," comprising near 1000 Congregations, declare in their Directory for worship, that "there is no day under the gospel, commanded to be kept holy, except the Lord's day." The same is the opinion of Presbyterians at large, and of the generality of Christians, except Episcopalians, throughout the United States. The same opinion prevails almost universally among the Scotch; a nation not inferior, in religious and universal knowledge, to any upon earth.

The assertion of Philo, that "the blessed Savior observed the holy days, and other religious institutions which were evident additions to the Mosaical dispensation," is truly astonishing. What holy days, what religious institutions, can the writer mean? Where is the passage in the New Testament which gives countenance to this assertion? Who does not know that

our Savior bore his solemn and repeated testimony against mingling the inventions and ordinances of men, with the worship of God? It is true, that in John 10, 22, 23, we are informed that, at the time of the feast of *Dedication*, our Lord was at Jerusalem, and walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. This feast was confessedly of human appointment; and is supposed to have been instituted by Judas Maccabeus, about a century and a half before Christ's incarnation. But that it was celebrated by our Savior, there is no intimation, and scarce a shadow of probability. The natural supposition is, that he embraced this opportunity to address an assembled multitude; just as his Apostles afterward went into the Synagogues on the seventh day, not to keep the Jewish sabbath, but to preach the gospel to those whom the occasion brought together.

Philo states the fact, that "the first converts continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house;" and he infers that they "regarded all time as holy." But this is taking for granted the point to be proved. He likewise asserts that "Churches generally of the first and second centuries kept Saturday and Sunday both, as holy time." In this assertion, however, he is not supported by Mosheim, who states that "the seventh day of the week was observed as a festival, *not by Christians in general*, but by such churches only, as were principally composed of Jewish converts." Let it likewise be remembered that the seventh-day sabbath had once received the sanction of divine authority. No argument can therefore be drawn from it, reaching the case of a festival which never possessed such a sanction.

Let the Christian reader now judge what success has attended the attempt to secure to Christmas the character of *holy time*.

To stamp it with this character, I had intimated, implies in the Church, an exercise of *legislative authority*. Philo does not deny it; but without reserve

undertakes to prove that the Church actually possesses this authority. Most deeply do I lament these repeated and alarming attempts to innovate upon great scriptural principles ; and I feel myself constrained to bear a solemn testimony against them.

With what semblance of propriety can it be said that this power is involved in the commission to preach, and baptize, and consecrate the sacramental elements ? Those offices are generally performed on the sabbath ; a day already hallowed by the Deity. When, for special reasons, they are performed on other occasions, this neither implies, nor requires any proper holiness in the *time*. No such idea is suggested, or countenanced, in any part of scripture. Our churches generally are strangers to it. And Philo greatly mistakes, if he imagines it entered the minds of the ordaining Council to whom he refers.

The quotation from Stackhouse falls far short of proving the point in question. Fixing the time and place for the worship of God, belongs to the mere *prudentials* and *circumstances* of religion ; and it is raising it into an unnatural importance, to term it *legislation*. Beside ; even these minor regulations are without authority, unless they proceed on the ground of some precept of Scripture, either particular or general. To establish them therefore, less resembles the making of new laws, than the *interpretation* of laws already existing.

As little support can Philo derive from that passage in the Westminster Confession of faith, which declares that “ the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a *government* in the hand of *church officers*, distinct from the civil magistrate.” No Christian will deny that Christ himself is the Supreme Legislator of his church. And surely the church is not such a monster as to have within itself two distinct legislative authorities. The officers of government whom Christ has appointed, are either judicial or executive.

“To these officers,” the Confession adds, “the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by word and censures: and to open it unto penitent sinners by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.” “Surely,” says Philo, “here is something like *legislative* authority.” But does he really suppose, that by these scriptural expressions, church officers are invested with power to *make laws* by which pardon and punishment are dispensed, and by which the gates of heaven, or of the church, are opened and closed. If so, he must place them far above the Apostles; for no such power was ever committed to them. But the opinion is too manifestly absurd, to require a serious refutation. All the power here conveyed is either declarative, judicial, or executive; and the exercise even of this power is then only valid, when it is conformed to the unerring standard of the word.

If Philo wishes to learn from the *Confession*, the proper extent and limitations of church power, he will find them in the 20th chapter. “GOD ALONE is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing *contrary to his word*, or *beside it*, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience.”

It is no new thing to be informed that the Church of England claims the “power to decree *rites and ceremonies*.” But is this one of the *excellencies*, or *errors* of that Church? Philo is no stranger to the *Canons*. Of course, he knows in what manner this legislative power has been exercised. One of these canons inflicts the punishment of *excommunication* for affirming that the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England are superstitious: and another is equally severe upon those who *own separate societies to be*

true churches. By a third, ministers are debarred the liberty of keeping private fasts, or being present at them, without license from the Bishop, under his hand and seal. This canon does but ill consist with the maxim of Philo, that individuals may consecrate as much time as they please.

It was for their refusal to submit to these, and other human ordinances, that, by the *Act of Uniformity*, in 1662, two thousand ministers, many of them bright ornaments of the church, and lights of the world, were banished from their pulpits, and consigned to obscurity and want. And it was to escape the pressure of these and other impositions on the conscience, that the Fathers of New-England nobly bade adieu to their native land, and brought the pure worship of God into the American wilderness.

It gives me no pleasure to lift the veil from the frailties of a venerable Church. My object is to show that the power of *legislation* in things sacred, is a tremendous thing. It is as dangerous in the hands of churches, as of individuals. It is a power which the glorious Head of the church has never alienated, and never will.

I will offer a few additional observations, and close the subject.

In order to illustrate the guilt and danger of innovating on divine institutions, I had declared, "The ordinances of God are sacred things. On them all, is written in characters of fire, THOU SHALT NOT ADD, NOR DIMINISH." On these expressions, Philo descants, through two paragraphs, with an extreme of levity, wounding to every pious mind. But I will not trust my pen to *characterize* these remarks. I will simply request the writer to *review* them in a cool and serious hour. If his reflections then should be comfortable, I would not attempt to disturb his comfort; nor if painful, to increase his pain.

From my not having chosen to *question the propriety of a devout celebration of Christmas*, Philo takes

occasion to ask, Why then does he not join in the celebration? And after some intermediate remarks, he adds, "What must be thought of the piety of that Christian, who discerns what he ought to do, and yet refuses to perform it, until he receives a direct and explicit command from his Father in Heaven?" Who does not see, that by such a mode of treatment, the non-observers of Christmas are placed in a *cruel* predicament indeed? If they question the propriety of celebrating the day, they are of course condemned as *ignorant*, or *prejudiced*, or perhaps *invincibly* stupid. If they are disposed to be candid to their Episcopalian brethren, who treat it as a *holy ordinance*, they themselves must celebrate it, and *in the same view*, or submit to be charged with impiety!

But the sentence just quoted from Philo, touches the very vitals of the present debate. Most Christians believe that nothing can claim to be a religious institution, which is not legibly instamped with the authority of God. They tremble at the thought of mingling *human* appointments with *divine*. Nor dare they adopt usages which seem to them to imply, that the King of Zion has alienated his authority to mortals, and that the Bible is an imperfect rule of faith and practice.

I now submit the whole subject to the decision of the serious and impartial.—And I humbly commend to the blessing of the great HEAD OF THE CHURCH, what I have written in defence of his truth, and the purity of his worship.

INQUIRER.

[Hera'd of Jan. 23, 1816.]

PHILO to the INQUIRER.

SEVERAL considerations combine to induce me to take my leave of the Christmas controversy. The question has not been materially affected by the last communication of the Inquirer. The parties concerned are generally known ; and the hostile aspect now assumed renders it improbable, that the cause of religion will be benefitted by further debate. This cause is paramount ; and preferring to suffer wrong, rather than to do wrong, I should be more willing to sustain the reputation of defeat, than to expose so good a cause to danger ; or keep the public mind any longer in its present ferment.

There is no prospect of terminating the controversy, unless one or other of the parties abandon the subject. New topics are constantly started, which require distinct consideration ; and thus the debate might be extended *ad infinitum*.

To his offensive contradictions, I reply, that my statements are grounded on the authority of Bingham, Hammond, and others ; divines of the greatest celebrity for learning, talents and piety.

On quitting the controversy I would observe, that Christmas has in no part of it been placed on a level with the Sabbath, in point of moral obligation ; and that no charges whatever have been made against any who decline its observance. It may be regarded as a free-will offering made by the holy church to its divine Head : and cannot be the less acceptable in consequence of being made, not by constraint, but *willingly*. *God loveth a cheerful giver.*

But it is still believed, that time expressly devoted to God cannot be *profane* time ; and ought not to be abused by secular concerns. The attempt to serve God and Mammon together must always prove abortive. Time devoted to the worship of a holy God

must be characterized by the manner, in which it is employed; and the more hotly it is regarded, the more acceptable we trust, it must be to Him, to whom it is dedicated.

Christians have not usually been taught to pay their adorations to any inherent holiness in the day itself. To form an image in the mind to this effect, and to worship or reverence this image, instead of the Lord of the Sabbath, is a step not far removed from superstition and idolatry.

The custom is general, and not improper, to regard as sacred or holy, whatever belongs immediately to religion. The priesthood and the temple, the worship and the sacraments are denominated holy. Christians themselves are called *Saints* or holy. Now if this be deemed *ceremonial* holiness, and in this sense admitted as proper to be applied to Christmas, we shall not be disposed to quarrel with our *ceremonious* brethren on this account. We deem the determination of this point not essential to salvation. We have a more sure source of hope and dependence, than what would arise from the adjustment of so nice a question—*the merits of a REDEEMER.*

PHILO.

[Herald, Jan. 26, 1816.]