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Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Sabbath and the Lord's day.

LETTER II.

DEAR BROTHER,

Having shown, I hope to the satisfaction of your readers, that the sabbath was originally God's gift to man—to all men—and that the consecration of the first day of the week to Sabbath purposes took place under apostolic direction, I proceed to offer some additional observations, illustrating and confirming the position.

I begin by remarking that the original institute is now in full force—six days of labour and one day of rest—the seventh part of our time yielded up to the special service of God. It was befitting, under former dispensations, that the power, wisdom, and goodness of God the Creator should be celebrated on the day set apart for rest. It is befitting, now, that the triumphs of grace and righteousness in the redemption should be the subjects of devout contemplation and thanksgiving, and that the first day of the week, the Lord's day, should be devoted to those holy purposes.

But if, as some few affirm, Christianity teaches that there is no distinction of days, and no obligation to spend one day in seven for God, then such must have been the primitive practice, and the religious observance of one day must be regarded as a corruption, an unauthorized addition to the divine code. If such be the case, we shall be able to point out how and when the original freedom was infringed on by the enactment of a new and binding law. But this cannot be done. No man can put his finger on any period in the history of the church, after the days of the apostles, and say, *there was the beginning—then the first day began to be observed as the christian sabbath.* And why cannot he do this? Because the observance of the Lord's day was coeval with Christianity itself. There is no break in the evidence. All historians agree in stating that the primitive christians universally observed from the beginning the first day of the week, dedicating it to Christ. We trace it back, and back, from the present time, and we do not stop till we come to the New Testament. Whether there be an express command recorded, or not, is altogether irrelevant to the question. The historical deduction is sufficient. As we believe that the congregational mode of church government is of divine authority, because it harmonises with the spirit and tenor of the New Testament, and the instructions given by the apostles, as therein detailed, better than any other mode—so we believe that the observance of the Lord's day is of divine authority, because it harmonises with the practice of the earliest churches, as far as the same is recorded. Assuming our theory, we can understand the New Testament and the history of the church. Assuming Mr. Lithgow's theory, we find ourselves altogether at fault. In science, if any phenomena are sufficiently explained by the assumption of a given theory, that theory is admitted to be the right one. So it is in this case.

If any object, that the christian life is a continual act of joyous celebration and devotedness, and that therefore set times for worship are no more needed, it may be observed, in the first place, that on this ground all exercises or meetings at stated periods may be abstained from, and God's service may be dependent on uncertain and irregular impulses; even morning and evening prayer may cease to be regarded, and the Lord's supper may be in danger of falling wholly into disuse. How contrary all this would be to the teachings of the New Testament and the examples of primitive christians, I need not stop to prove. But in the second place all experience shows the desirableness, nay, the necessity, of frequently-recurring seasons of abstinence from worldly occupations, in order to renew our spiritual strength by waiting on God, and thus illustrates the wisdom and goodness of the divine appointment. Even such objectors as Mr. Lithgow admit the utility of christian gatherings, when they maintain that the servants of God will of themselves associate for mutual edifica-

tion, though without any express command. Now, would it not be better, more conducive to the growth of piety, and likely to be followed by much more beneficial results, that certain seasons for religious exercises, obligatory on all, should be specified, still giving scope for the manifestations of voluntary fervour in addition—than that the whole should be left to the decisions of a spiritual willingness? This is just what the Lord has done, as is believed and held by the vast majority of christian people. I know not why a servant of Christ should desire an absolute freedom in this respect, or shrink from the pressure of obligation. It strikes me that a soberminded, loving disciple would rather that the Lord should indicate his will, and thus bind him to duty, than suffer him to adjust and regulate service by his own will, prone as it is to be weak and wayward.

But it is affirmed that there is no express command of our Lord or his Apostles, enjoining the religious observance of one day in seven, as a day of rest and worship. It would be more modest to say that no command is recorded. Nor is there any recorded command, regulating the establishment of christian churches, and the mode in which they shall be governed. Yet it is generally held, and rightly, as I think, that apostolic practice is equivalent to a command, being the exponent of the Saviour's will; and so the advocates of the congregational, presbyterian, and episcopalian polities plead for the divine right of their respective systems. Besides this, I have already referred to the fact that in the interval between his resurrection and ascension the Saviour instructed the Apostles in the "things pertaining to the kingdom of God." His instructions were carried into effect by them, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and in the exercise of the authority with which they had been entrusted. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

I may remark further, that the objection now under consideration is usually met by showing that Jewish believers needed no command, as they were already in the habit of observing the sabbath of their nation, and only required to be directed in regard to the transfer from the seventh to the first day of the week; and that since Jews were found in nearly all christian churches, and were tenacious of their sabbath practices, their brethren of the Gentiles partially united with them in the observance for a time. There was the more reason for it inasmuch as the Mosaic institute, though abrogated by the introduction of the new dispensation, lingered on till the destruction of Jerusalem, when it was *de facto* abolished, it being thenceforth impossible to observe the rites enjoined by the law. Up to that period, then, some christians worshipped on the Jewish sabbath, while all met on the first day of the week to rejoice in the risen Saviour. Thus the Gentile members of the Church were gradually instructed and trained, and at length the whole body united in one and the same observance.

But there were some difficulties, arising from the preposterous notions of certain Jewish believers. Although the light shone all around them, they only saw "men as trees walking." Not content with claiming for the sabbath the reverential regards of their brethren, they sought to enforce the then existing observance of it, including all traditional appendages to the divine law; nor did they stop there, for they were fain to treat the gospel as a supplement to the law rather than its fulfilment, and hence required obedience to Moses as well as submission to Christ. Self-righteous views were mingled with their demands; they held obedience to be the price of salvation, and thus nullified, as far as in them lay, the grace of God. Exclusiveness and intolerance distinguished them; an uncircumcised christian was no christian in their esteem; conformity to Jewish practices was a term of communion. The Apostle Paul strenuously opposed these men. He denounced the self-righteousness of their system as thoroughly antichristian, and declared that those who embraced it were in danger of losing their souls. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace," Gal. v. 4. He taught believers that while, in that transition-state of things, they might

comply with certain Jewish observances, so that they placed no dependence on them, they were equally at liberty to abstain. As there was no merit in the compliance so there was no sin in the neglect. They might "eat herbs" only, or "eat all things." They might fast one day and feast another, if they chose. But there was no compulsion. No christian or christian church had the right or the power to impose laws on the brethren in these matters. They were not to "judge one another." The weak-minded were to be borne with, and not "set at nought." But that freedom did not affect divine arrangements. Christians had liberty of action, and each one might be "fully persuaded in his own mind" in regard to things in themselves indifferent—but no further. Mutual forbearance does not extend to God's laws. They are to be obeyed. We may not bear with one another in disobedience. When persons, for instance, plead for the admission of unbaptized persons to the Lord's supper, on the ground that we are to "receive one another," and to "bear the infirmities of the weak," they take an untenable position, baptism being a divine command which must not be dispensed with. And so, when certain Jews demanded of Gentile converts the adoption of the laws of Moses; and required them to observe their festivals and fasts, they were indignantly repelled. "Let no man judge you," said the Apostle Paul, "in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days," Col. ii. 16. Some kinds of food were permitted by the law; others were disallowed. There were monthly and yearly observances of days set apart for special celebrations, and some of the sabbaths were "high days," distinguished by peculiar services; while the ordinary sabbath duties, as then observed, comprised a variety of exercises and restrictions superadded to the injunctions of the Jewish lawgiver. This yoke was not to be borne by believers in Christ. But exemption from the Jewish yoke did not free them from christian obligation. They had nothing to do with the holy days, and the new moons, and the various sabbaths of the law. Nevertheless, they were "under law to Christ," and were bound to "observe all things whatsoever he had commanded," either personally or by his Apostles. I have endeavoured to show that among these "all things" was the setting apart of the first day of the week for the joyful celebration of the resurrection of the Saviour, and the communion of believers with their Lord and with one another. That obligation was not temporary or partial. The Jewish sabbath, with its double sacrifices and numerous rites, belonged to Jews only, and could be lawfully and completely observed only in Palestine. The Lord's day, or christian sabbath, as it may be not improperly called, is the privilege of believers in all nations. It is emphatically the sabbath "made for man," giving him the resting-time, the one day in seven, granted at first to the whole race, and gladdening his heart by the recognition of those glorious events on which all our hopes depend.

The Saviour once said to the people, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light," Mat. xi. 30. How true is this of the services of his church! The Jewish ritual, so complicated and burdensome, was a yoke, the apostle Peter affirmed, which neither they nor their fathers "were able to bear," Acts xv. 10. But the ceremonial of christianity is simplicity itself. The rites of worship are few and easy of performance. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the positive institutes. The Lord's day is the only festival of the church. There are no fasts. In conducting religious exercises no forms are enjoined, no order prescribed. Let the word of God be read. Let prayer and praise be offered. Let the church be instructed. Let christian ordinances be observed. Let the gospel be preached. It matters not which is first, nor under what arrangement the exercises shall succeed each other. Churches may vary in their plans. All they have to do is to take care that due provision be made for apostolic worship and service, and that the day of the Lord be spent in conformity with the earliest precedents.

Yet even this, light as it is, is too much for the Neologists of this age, and some others. They assert an entire freedom from obligation, maintaining that there is now no dis-

inction of days. Admitting the propriety of meeting on some part of the first day of the week, in imitation of primitive christians, they are very careful to give practical proof of their belief that the day is not a holy day, any more than other days, because, as they hold, all days are alike. All days are holy, they say; every day is a sabbath to a christian! This is very specious talk, and has a religious sound. But how does it work? Let the state of the European continent, even of its Protestant portions, furnish the answer. In Germany, the same notions respecting the Lord's day as those put forth by Mr. Lithgow, are everywhere prevalent. There is worship in the churches in the morning, but the remainder of the day is given up to all kinds of pleasure. Theatres are open, and places of amusement are crowded. The professedly pious see no evil in it. Neander, the ecclesiastical historian, having remarked to Dr. Sprague that he had no doubt the king of Prussia was "a truly pious man"—"I expressed some astonishment at that," says Dr. S., "from having seen it stated in a French newspaper that he attended the theatre on the Sabbath." "But," says Neander, "I suppose you know that the same views of the Sabbath are not entertained in Germany as in England and America—I do not entertain the same myself! I replied that I was aware of that; but that I did not suppose that those who professed to be evangelical christians would attend the theatre on the sabbath. To which he replied, 'I would not go to the theatre any day of the week; but *there is nothing that I would do at any time, that I would not do on Sunday, if convenience required it!*'" He illustrated his views by asking Dr. Sprague to dinner the following Lord's day, to meet Dr. Twisten, an eminent theologian. The invitation was accepted, in the expectation of spending a profitable afternoon with Dr. T.; but to his surprise and annoyance he found a large party assembled, and the conversation turned upon ordinary topics, as on any common day of the week. ("European Celebrities," pp. 131-136.) This shows that the standard of piety is very low. It is seen, too, in the smallness of the congregations in most of the places of worship. Buildings which will accommodate many hundreds, or even thousands, are occupied by a few scores. The rareness of personal religion, the overflow of destructive errors, and the predominance of infidelity, attest the truth and force of Matthew Henry's remark, quoted in my introductory note.

Another letter, I think, will close this discussion.

Yours truly,

J. M. CRAMP.

Acadia College, Nov. 5, 1860.

For the Christian Messenger.

MR. EDITOR,—

I have read Dr. Cramp's letter in to-day's Messenger and am surprised he should so misrepresent my view of the first day of the week. The following extracts from my third article published in the *Acadian Recorder* of the 27th ult. will give your readers, my views in regard to the observance of that day:—

Counsel.—Now did or did not the Lord Jesus, after the resurrection command the first instead of the seventh day to be observed as the Sabbath?

Luke.—Can you imagine that if He had given any such commandment I, or my old companion Paul, would have omitted mentioning it? Can you not perceive that in my second treatise, the Acts, I make the same distinction between "the Sabbath" and "the first day of the week" as in my Gospel? Refer to Acts xiii. 14-27; xvii. 1, 2; xviii. 4. In all these places the Sabbath is mentioned as usual, without qualification: it is not distinguished as the Jewish Sabbath, as would have been the case had I known of any such day as the Christian Sabbath. I speak of it simply as the Sabbath, and if you read the portions referred to you will see the Jewish Sabbath is meant. Paul took advantage of that day wherever he went, to gain the ear of the Jews and Proselytes, when they met in their synagogue for worship,—for in those days there was liberty of speech in the synagogues on the Sabbath, (see Acts xiii. 15) which is not the case in your day. I regret to learn. Now in regard to the first day of the week, although we christians did not observe it as the Sabbath, yet we always endeavoured to come together sometime on that day—morning or evening, as cir-