

## ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

BY REV. T. T. WATERMAN.

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.  
—Gal. iv. 10.

There are themes on which the truth, if told, is extremely unpleasant, especially to all such as are indisposed to hear and admit it.

Truth, however, like gold, is valuable according to the degree of its purity. Like gold, too, it is the most brilliant where the light is the most perfect. It loses nothing by free and open discussion.

All principles and ceremonies, and most certainly those of the church of God, should be based on reason. In this day of searching after knowledge, Zion should open wide the portals of her temples and court investigation. The shades of mental night are fleeing away—the day dawns. All that cannot be rationally and scripturally maintained, must be abandoned. The trammels of early education, and of sectarian prejudice, as binding without knowledge or reason to any one system of doctrine and rite, must be broken off, and thrown to the moles and the bats.

Efforts, it is known, have been made to extend the observance of this festival in this country. The plea is, innocent and pious regard to the Saviour. Many nonconformists in the land are conniving at such observance; some are conforming to it! To such an extent is this true, that by some it appears to be thought a marked disrespect or neglect of the blessed Redeemer for any minister or church not to conform so far at least as to hold a Christmas service. All this being as it is, there are some who are so scrupulous as to duty and authority for the same, that before they can conscientiously consent to own this festival as obligatory or as innocently optional, they wish to know its origin and design. They are honest and anxious to do right, and wish to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The festival claims the sanctity of ecclesiastical, if not divine authority. Christmas is ecclesiastically binding, and ecclesiastically enforced, if binding and enforced at all. The Church assumes the claim, and in the name of Him who has died to redeem, calls upon us to fulfil the duty of observance. Here we demur—and thus demurring, we are frank and unreserved in stating our reasons. If these reasons are false; if there be historical evidence to show that the hundreds and thousands in this land who dissent, and by dissenting disown the festival in its authority and appropriateness as a Christian rite, are mistaken, we are ready when such evidence is adduced, to acknowledge our error and repent of our sin. If on the contrary these reasons are true, we claim the right of promulgating them.

Our reasons against this festival are:

1. *The day of the Saviour's nativity is not known.* The authority on this point is abundant. Dr. Adam Clarke, in his commentary on the advent as recorded in Luke, remarks—"As the Shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that consequently our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when the flocks were out in the field. On this very ground the nativity should be given up."

Again he says—"The time in which Christ was born, has been considered of great importance among Christians. However, the matter has been considered of no moment by Him who inspired the Evangelist, as not one hint is dropped except the chronological fact."

And again—for the mind of such a man as Doctor Clarke, was not to be awed by the aristocracy of Lords and Bishops—he adds: "Learned and pious men have trifled egregiously on this subject, making that of importance which the Holy Spirit, by his silence, has plainly informed them is of none. Fabricius gives a catalogue of no less than one hundred and thirty-six different opinions as to the year of Christ's birth; and as to his birth-day, that has been placed by Christian sects and learned men, in every month of the year. The Egyptians placed it in January. Wagenseel in February, Bochart in March; others in April and May: Lightfoot in September, Scaliger in October, and others in November. But the Latin or Roman Church, supreme in power and infallible in judgment, placed it on the 25th December, the very day on which the ancient Romans celebrated the feast of their Goddess Bruma!"

This testimony of Doctor Clarke is certified by the unanimous voice of history. Let this be confuted, and we will adduce more. As, then, the day of Christ's birth is not known, it is evidence to demonstration, that God never commanded or sanctioned its observance. It is assuming an undelegated and dangerous, if not impious right, to affirm that such a day is the day, when the day is not known. Children, and multitudes of others, are led to believe that this is the day. Thus it is affirmed in the Almanacs, from year to year; and thus the may be falsehood is perpetuated. It is said, that the time is a matter of indifference!—It is the thing the Church wants. But is that *want*, which leads the Church and others to tell a probable lie, a matter of indifference? Will God accept, or is he honored by services which are purchased at such a price? Judge ye.

II. *There is no warrant in the Bible for the observance of such a festival.* The celebrated Doctor Donne, who in 1619 was elected Dean of St. Paul's, London, in a discourse on this festival, is candid enough to admit that the scriptures record the celebration of but two birth-days, these of Pharaoh and Herod, both of which were of heathen origin, and were attended with bloodshed and murder.

Among all the Jewish festivals, or days of sacred service as instituted by God, there are no birth-day celebrations. The announcement of the birth or advent of the Saviour, by the angels to the shepherds, was in the night; and the celebration of the event was confined to the angels. There was no festival and no services performed by the shepherds. The babe was found by them, wrapped in swaddling bands, lying in a manger—facts evidently designed of God to reprove all parade, and pomp, and feasting, as connected with the coming of the meek and lowly Jesus. The act of the angels was merely an official announcement, a sealing testimony to the fact. There is not a word, nor has any rational man ever pretended to the contrary, which warrants the observance of a Christmas festival. Scott, a rector in the established Church, in his remarks upon the passages in their place, says—"Most happy for us, the hour in which we believe in Christ. Without such belief, we can have no reason to celebrate the nativity of Jesus with rejoicings; for that event will but enhance the guilt and condemnation of unbelievers. And if real Christians deem it proper to commemorate it, at a season set apart for that purpose, they will not do it with bacchanalian revels or luxurious feasting." What a pointed and deserved reproof this, against such as, being impenitent, riot and sport in professed honor of Jesus Christ. Nay, what an argument against the observance of the day. The "*bacchanalian revels and luxurious feasting*,"—what does Doctor Scott mean? whom does he reprove?

In all this, there is not a syllable to sanction the festival called Christmas, but every thing to oppose it. It is a festival which has not the shadow of a warrant from the Bible. If there be proof to the contrary, let us have it.

III. *There is nothing in the observance of such a festival, which is not more emphatically signified in the divinely sanctioned sacrament of the Lord's Supper.* The birth of the Saviour, though essential, was not the consummation of his atonement and his triumph. It was but a part; the whole was perfected in his death. It is the death of Jesus that gives him the crown of Redeemer and Saviour. To commemorate anything distinct from, and inferior to this, is to set at nought the high and holy command, *this do in remembrance of me*. Here in this celebration of the Supper, is all, all of glory. Of course, an assumed and unauthorized rite which commemorates merely a part is not only unnecessary but derogatory to the honor of our Lord and our God. The plea of expediency is, by this one consideration, rendered little less than presumptuous. This festival pays no respect to Christ, which is not paid by the regularly repeated and expressly enjoined ordinance of the Supper. Can Christ be honored by gratuitously adding to his ordinances? How far is the assumption of such a prerogative removed from what is dangerous and criminal? We call for light and for argument on such a momentous subject. If any one benefit is secured by such a feast, which is not and cannot be better secured by the regular ordinances of the church, let us know it, that we may find one instance in which the great Head of the Church has failed in wisdom and in justice. A child can see that

if the Church may appoint and urge the observance of one ecclesiastical festival or rite, and by special attention to seek to render it attractive to the gaze of an idle world, it may add another and another, until it becomes the mother of abominations.—Here we tread on holy ground, and it becomes us to step surely and safely. God is not mocked. At any rate, there are some who remember what has been, and are afraid—they want light before they presume to run at random within the hallowed enclosures of Zion, and teach for doctrines the commandments of men.

IV. *The observance of this festival is attended with a fearful amount of reckless mirth and impious feasting.* In proof, we might simply ask each one to call to mind the scenes he witnesses or knows of being transacted on this day. We will save ourselves the painful task of a special reckoning, and refer to history. In 1644, the Lords and Commons of England passed the following order:—"Whereas some doubts have been raised whether the next fast shall be celebrated, because it falls on the day which heretofore was usually called the feast of the nativity of our Saviour; the Lords and Commons in Parliament assembled, do order and ordain that public notice be given, that the fast appointed to be kept the last Wednesday of every month, ought to be observed, and that *this day in particular* is to be kept with the more solemn humiliation, because it may call to remembrance our sins and the sins of our forefathers, who have turned this feast, pretending the memory of Christ, into an extreme forgetfulness of him, by giving liberty to carnal and sensual delights being contrary to the life which Christ led here on earth, and to the spiritual life of Christ in our souls."

This was done on the ground, says the historian, that this, as well as other festivals, is of ecclesiastical appointment; that there is no mention of the observance of Christmas in the first or second age of Christianity; that the church of Scotland never observed it since the reformation, except during the short reign of the Bishops, and do not regard it at this day.

Mr. Edward Calamy, in his sermon before the House of Lords, has these expressions: "This day is commonly called Christmas-day—a day that has heretofore been much abused to superstition and profaneness. I have known some that have preferred Christmas day before the Lord's day. Some that would be sure to receive the sacrament on Christmas day, though they did not receive it all the year after. Some thought, though they did not play at cards all the year long, yet they must play at Christmas, thereby it seems to keep in memory the birth of Christ!" This testimony may be jeered at, as antiquated and puritanical; but who will attempt to prove it false? Who will say, that in modern times there is not all and more of this on Christmas? Who does not know the greeting of the day? I wish you a merry Christmas! A merry Christmas! What does this mean, as passed from the impenitent, and the debauched, and the profane; nay, what does it mean, in the lips of an ambassador of God, or a professed follower of Jesus? What does it mean? Why, it means, what all will admit, a day of cake and pies, and sumptuous dinners, and presents, and all that is "of earth, earthy!"

If rites and feasts, good in design, are and will be abused, it is proof to demonstration that they should not be unwarrantably multiplied.—The very fact that this festival is called religious, and is to honour Christ, is the fact of all others, which militates against this observance. Under the pretence of honouring Christ, they eat, and drink, and sport, and feel above reproof or reproach, for it is Christmas, and what they do is for religion.

There is a sufficiency of perversion and abuse of the ordinances which are of God, without adding to all this, by self-imposed rites of man. The good secured by all human ordinances, as embodied in the rites and services or canon law of Zion, is purchased at too dear a rate. Who would dare endorse the bill of Christmas sins for the judgment day—we mean of sins *specifically* occasioned by this unnecessary and unauthorized festival? Some few well meaning, godly persons, may be, and no doubt are, devout on that day; they draw near to God; but even with them the blessing is in the word and in the ordinances of the supper, all of which they have without this feast. Where few or many are benefited and made more holy, and less conformed

to the world, multitudes, there is reason to fear, are hardened and hurried on in sin. We know that this is a melancholy comment upon human nature, but so it is; facts, abundant and lamentable, and which need not be disclosed, proclaim it. If men will not regard the institutions of God, much less will they reverence the ordinances of men.

V. *This festival is claimed to be of human or Popish origin.* The first footsteps we find of the observance of this day, says Buck, in his dictionary, are in the second century, about the time of the Emperor Commodus. Very definite authority truly—first footsteps! about the time, &c. He also alludes to Telesphorus, as quoted in the Decretal or forged epistles, and whom Dr. Rees calls a Pope, as the assumed father of this festival. This same Decretal Telesphorus lived, if he ever had a being, of which there is much doubt, in the second century. Mason, in his Compend of Ecclesiastical History, which is recommended by the "Rt. Rev. Bishop Hobart," and by the "Right Rev. Bishop T. C. Brownwell," and other distinguished men of the Church, says, under the second century: "The principal annual festivals observed in the Church, were as yet but two, one to commemorate the resurrection, and the other the descent of the Holy Ghost." Here, then, is express testimony of the highest dignitaries of the Church to prove that Christmas was not observed in the second century. Mason further says: "It is not to be questioned that many unnecessary rites were added, in this century, to the simplicity of Christian worship. The introduction of which was extremely offensive to good men!" The occasion of these changes, he adds, may be traced to an injudicious desire of accommodating the public services to the habits of the Jews and Pagans!—(See Mason's compend, chap. 4, p. 61.) Here is indubitable authority, and what does it prove? Why, that Christmas was not observed in the second century, and that Popery or human rites were being introduced to the church.

Chrysostom, who lived at the close of the fourth, and commencement of the fifth centuries, and is quoted as the earliest and best authority, says that is but a little time that Christmas has been celebrated at Antioch on the 25th of December, as a distinct feast, it having been the same as Epiphany; the use of it came from the West. Now, if this feast was of Apostolic origin, how happens it that at Antioch, the very place where the disciples were first called Christians, all this change and interchange, according to Chrysostom, should have happened? How is it, that its observance on the 25th of December, came from the West, if it were already, and had been from the days of Christ, in the East? Will those who quote Chrysostom, in defence of Christmas, tell us?

From this testimony, which is the most favourable which distinguished and accredited authors give, we prove that Christmas is of human or Popish origin. The name marks the descent—Christ and Mass; and Mass, every body knows, or might know, is defined a service of the Romish Church, or of Popery.

Has it been said that this must be a mistake, as Boniface III., in 606, first assumed the title of universal Bishop, Pontiff, or Pope, and that Christmas was observed before this? Strange that men are so blinded. Popery, or the mystery of iniquity, was working secretly in the days of Paul. It was the corruptions of Popery, of which the Christmas festival was a part, that made the Pope. Popery came first, and the Pope last.

Besides, as soon as the master corruption, denial of the Gospel equality of ministers, was established, the title of Pope was given to Bishops, who had what were called 'Apostolic Sees.' The Valentinian Law, 372, empowered the Bishop of Rome to examine and judge other Bishops. What was this but Popery?

But Christmas is termed a festival. And who does not know that festival is defined, ecclesiastically, a Church solemnity, or days enjoined by the Church? "The prodigious increase of feast days in the Christian Church, commenced towards the close of the fourth century.—These, instead of being set apart for pious exercises, were abused in indolence, voluptuousness, and criminal practices. Many of them were instituted on a Pagan model, and perverted to similar purposes."

How evident the parentage of Christmas. On