

vicinity of so many cattle. We were a good deal interrupted by visits from the Sûkr Arabs, who have possession of the Ghôr. The village was full of them. Our servants said there were not less than fifty horsemen there, living for the time upon the inhabitants. Several of them called upon us, and sat long beneath our tent. I had been using my pocket-knife, and laid it for a moment by my side, on the foot of the bed near the door. It disappeared; and has probably served a Bedawy as a memorial of his visit to the Franks.

In the course of the day we strolled out in various directions. I tried to trace the upward course of some of the streams; and in the afternoon we visited the Tell and adjacent ruins, half a mile north of the village.

ARTICLE VI.

CHRISTMAS AND THE SATURNALIA.

By Rev. Joseph P. Thompson, New York.

In a former Article, we intimated the resemblance of the Christmas festival at Rome to the Saturnalia of the old Pagan city.¹ The recent recurrence of Christmas, and the growing consideration of this festival among communions of the Reformed and Puritan families, may give interest to the inquiry: how far that resemblance can be traced in authentic history. We would not be understood to object to a religious observance of even the conjectural anniversary of the birth of Christ, by any who regard such observance as a means of edification; though to exalt the birth-day of Christ, seems rather to degrade Christ himself to the level of heroes and benefactors whose memory mankind are accustomed to honor upon their natal days. In comparison with the spirit of Christ, with his life, his doctrine, his works, his sufferings, his death — which should be had in daily remembrance — the special remembrance of the day of his birth, is of the least

¹ Vol. XI. p. 825.

possible moment as an expression of fidelity to Him. And, if the observance of this day is made prominent as a religious duty; if there is attached to it any peculiar sanctity or any putative merit; then it comes under the denomination of those "days, and months, and times, and years," observed "after the commandments and doctrines of men," which are the "weak and beggarly elements" of form and tradition, in contrast with the spirit and life of the Gospel.

The religious and festive observance of the twenty-fifth of December as the anniversary of the birth of Christ, is wholly of human appointment. The New Testament contains no injunction for the observance of such a day, and no record of its having been observed by the first disciples. The day of the Saviour's crucifixion may be ascertained with definiteness from the well-known time of the Jewish passover. But there is nothing in the New Testament to fix the date of his birth, even within a month or a season of the year. This omission of a fact that might have been well ascertained, and that could have been recorded in a single line, shows conclusively that it was not the design of Christ or the mind of the Spirit, that the day of the Saviour's birth should be magnified above any other day of the year. The day cannot even be fixed proximately by a reference to any of the great Jewish feasts; for the occasion of Joseph's going to Bethlehem was not a religious festival, but an enrolment of the inhabitants of the land, each in his native town, for the purpose of taxation.

Sir Isaac Newton, who has given an historical and astronomical calculation of the time of the Saviour's passion, observes, that "the times of the birth and passion of Christ, with such like niceties, being not material to religion, were little regarded by the Christians of the first age. They who began first to celebrate them, placed them in the cardinal periods of the year." Of this he gives several examples, then adds: "all which shows that these days were fixed in the first Christian calendars by mathematicians at pleasure, without any ground in tradition; and that the Christians afterwards took up with what they found in the calendars."¹

Lightfoot places the time of Christ's birth "in the month Tisri, which answers to part of our September, and about the feast of tabernacles;" and then, with a fancy that verges upon

¹ Observations on Daniel, pp. 144, 145.

credulity, he adds : " That month was remarkable for very many things. In it the world was created; the tabernacle begun; and the temple consecrated."¹ With the same credulous fancy, he represents that Christ was nailed to the cross at the same time that our first parents fell; and yielded up the ghost at the hour when Adam received the promise.

Later and better authorities differ widely as to the date of the birth of Christ; and we know of no writer of any respectability who pretends that the festival of Christmas was observed to any extent even in the third century; or that, in the beginning of its observance, there was any such unanimity with respect to the day as a well-ascertained tradition would have secured. We must seek its origin, therefore, in other causes than the alleged propriety of the festival, either spontaneously recognized or traditionally held in the early church.

Neither the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, belonging almost to the Apostolic age, nor the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, in the second century, nor those venerable memorials of the early church, the seven epistles of Ignatius, contain the remotest allusion to such a festival. Yet these discuss various points of faith, order and worship; and the epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians, makes special mention of the nativity of Christ, and of the phenomena that attended the manifestation of God in the form of man.² The Apology of Justin Martyr describes minutely the celebration of the Eucharist, and the various religious services of the Christians, and justifies the assembling of Christians on the first day of the week to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord;³ the Apology of Tertullian gives a minute account of the Sabbath-day assemblies of Christians, of their love-feasts, and other services and rites;⁴ yet neither of these elaborate documents, designed to vindicate the entire faith, worship, order and customs of the Christians, alludes in any way to a festival of the nativity. Tertullian elsewhere reproves Christians for participating in the pagan custom of interchanging gifts toward the close of the year; but there is no evidence from his writings, that the festival of Christmas was instituted prior to the year 220, the commonly received year of his death. Clement of Alexandria notes the observance of Epiphany by the Gnostics of his day,

¹ Works, Vol. III. p. 26.

² Chap. LXXXIX.

³ Chap. XIX.

⁴ Chap. XXXIX.

and speaks disparagingly of some who were endeavoring to fix the day of Christ's birth.

The language of Clement is: "There are some who *over-curiously* assign not only the year, but also the *day* of our Saviour's nativity, which they say was in the 28th year of Augustus, on the (25th of Pachon) 20th of May. . . . Some say he was born in (Pharmuthi) April, the (24th or 25th) 20th or 21st day."¹ Dr. J. Murdock,² whose intimate acquaintance with the early Fathers entitles his opinion to great respect, regards this as "almost the only genuine passage of an *Antenicene* writer, which can be supposed to allude at all to such a festival;" and this only "manifests the indifference with which even the learned treated any attempt to ascertain the day of the Saviour's birth."

A late writer on church history, who has been accused of symbolizing too nearly with the church of Rome for the reputation of a Protestant historian,³ and who contends for the inherent propriety and the traditional authority of the festivals of Easter, and of Pentecost or Whitsuntide, expressly puts Christmas into another category. "Easter and Pentecost are the only feasts which can be traced back to the Apostolic age. Of the observance of other festivals, Christmas, for instance, we find not the least hint in the New Testament. It was only at a *later* period that the church went back from the centre of her faith, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, to the beginning of his theanthropic life, and appointed a special feast for the mystery of the incarnation."⁴

The evidence is conclusive, that the Apostolic age and the two centuries immediately succeeding, had no festival of the nativity among the recognized festivals of the Christian church. Christ enjoined it upon his disciples to commemorate his *death*; and for this he instituted the Supper. But in this solemn and perpetual ordinance, they were to commemorate, not the day of his death, as the antitype of the Jewish passover, but the event itself, at any time and in any place. Of the day of his *birth* he says nothing; and the Evangelists, who must have known the whole story from the shepherds, are silent as to the time of the vision of angels on the fields of Bethlehem, though they are full upon the incidents of that memorable night.

¹ Stromata, Lib. 1, p. 340.

² Mosheim, 1, 279. New York edition.

³ Dr. Philip Schaff.

⁴ History of the Apostolic Church, p. 560.

In this silence we see the genius of the Christian dispensation; which is to make religion a matter of heart-experience, of every-day faith and love, instead of a matter of ordinances, of days, and times, and seasons. But, at the introduction of Christianity, the whole religious habit of the world was in the opposite direction. The Jews, for whom were appointed certain yearly festivals as a means of public religious instruction and of national union, and also as a help to faith, when books and teachers were wanting, had come to magnify these outward institutions as the substance of religion, and the signs of the favor of God toward them as a people; while the heathen abounded in religious festivals in honor of their divinities. Hence it was natural that the early converts to Christianity, under the pressure of old and familiar systems of religion, and by the force of early education, aided by that fondness for ceremonial pomp which is common to the uneducated, should seek to harmonize the spirit of Christianity with their previous religious forms and sentiments; and should borrow the rites of Judaism or of Paganism to represent Christian ideas.

Sir Isaac Newton gives several examples of this, in his analysis of the early Christian calendars. The two equinoxes and the two solstices, which had long marked Pagan festivals, were appropriated to some of the principal Christian feasts. A saints-day was assigned to the entrance of the sun into each sign successively of the Julian calendar; "and if there were any other remarkable days in that calendar, they placed the saints upon them; as St. Barnabas on June 11th, where Ovid seems to place the feast of *Vesta* and *Fortuna*, and the goddess *Matuta*; and St. Philip and James on the first of May, a day dedicated both to the *Bona Dea*, or *Magna Mater*, and to the goddess *Flora*, and still celebrated with her rites."¹ Similar to these was the origin of the festival of Christmas, coincident in time, and in many important features, with the Roman *Saturnalia*.

The festival of Christmas was hardly known in the Eastern churches until near the close of the fourth century. If the testimony of Nicephorus is to be received, there is an incidental proof of its occasional observance in the East, about a century earlier; for he narrates that the emperor Diocletian, whose era is marked in the oriental churches as the "era of martyrs," while residing at Nicomedia, ordered his troops to barricade, and

¹ Observations on Daniel, London edition, p. 145.

then to fire a church, in which great numbers of Christians had assembled on the day of Christ's nativity. But even *Cave*, a learned high-church authority, who makes much of this incident, remarks in the same connection: "it seems probable that, for a long time, in the East, the nativity was kept in January, under the name, and at the general time of *Epiphania*, till, receiving more light in the case, from the churches of the West, they changed it to this day,"¹ December 25th. But the *Epiphania* was entirely a distinct festival, having reference to the manifestation of Christ in his Divine character and mission made at his baptism in the Jordan. This feast was observed throughout the Eastern churches upon the fifth of January; but it was not introduced into the Western church till after the middle of the fourth century. Of the attempt to identify these two festivals, Neander well observes: "If, in the region where this feast [the *Epiphania*] originated, another festival, having reference to the first appearance of the Logos in human nature, a feast of Christ's nativity, was already existing, the latter would hardly have become so entirely lost sight of, and a name which belonged to it transferred to the feast of Christ's baptism. More probably this was the only festival which in that district had reference to the first appearance of Christ. Accordingly Chrysostom actually denominates it, in the discourse which he pronounced at the feast of Pentecost in Antioch, the festival of Epiphany, the first among the principal feasts, and the only one which had reference to the appearance of Christ among men. He speaks here according to the views of Christian antiquity which prevailed in those countries where a Christmas festival was as yet wholly unknown."²

Dr. Cave further says: "The first footsteps I find of this festival are in the second century." But since he gives no positive authority for this assertion, we may infer that the "footsteps" which he thinks he has discovered in this early period, are not very legible. It cannot be affirmed that the festival of the nativity had then taken its position in the Calendar. Lest any should imagine that, in a period so near the time of Christ, the day of his nativity *must* have been ascertained by calculation or by tradition, we would here remark that, in the second century after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, their descendants

¹ "Primitive Christianity," Oxford edition, p. 94.

² B. III. Sec. 3, Yearly Festivals.

began to commemorate that event by a yearly festival; but it is now proved that those who first calculated and fixed the time, made an error of one day; so that we do not now commemorate, and probably posterity never will commemorate, the true anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims.

Epiphanius affirms that the birth of Christ occurred on the sixth day of January; but Jerome, who lived for many years in Bethlehem, and who carefully gathered up the Palestinian traditions respecting our Lord, denies this to be the true date. Augustine recognizes the partial observance of Christmas in his time, and recommends a suitable remembrance of the day, but does not honor it as an ancient festival, of equal authority with Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Whitsuntide. Chrysostom, in his homily *in diem natal. Christi*, delivered at Antioch, December 25th, A. D. 386, says that the festival *had first become known there less than ten years before*. In other homilies he argues the propriety and the importance of this festival, in a way that shows that not only the *day* of the nativity, but the *festival* itself was a subject of controversy as an innovation in the churches of the East.

Thus far we have established these several points: (1) that Christmas was not a festival of the Apostolic age; and that it derives no sanction from the New Testament, but is rather condemned by the silence of the Evangelists and the Apostles upon a point where it were so easy to have spoken; (2) that there are no certain traces of the observance of this festival, nor any traces at all of its general observance, in the writings of any of the Fathers prior to the *fourth* century; but that their silence or indifference as to the commemoration of the nativity of Christ, and the great diversity of conjectures as to the day of his birth, show conclusively that no such festival was recognized in the universal church for the first three centuries; (3) that the festival did not originate in Palestine, nor in the Eastern churches, which were more immediately under the influence of Palestinian usages and traditions.

The festivals of *Easter* and *Whitsuntide*, corresponding with the *Passover* and the *Pentecost*, by a natural law of association, originated in that quarter, and at an early period. The same is true of the *Epiphania*. And it is worthy of note that the Eastern church in its earlier festivals, commemorated that which was spiritual and divine in the manifestation of Christ, rather

than that which was human. Not the incarnation, which was an idea familiar to Pagan mythology, but the Divine Sonship declared at his baptism, the resurrection, the ascension, the descent of the Holy Ghost; these were the ground-work of their festivals. It remained for Rome, the centre of Paganism and of carnality, of hero-worship and materialism, to appropriate the more sensuous idea of the incarnation for a new festival of the *birth-day* of the founder of Christianity.

The time of this festival, we have seen, could not have been determined by any historical data, nor by uniform and reliable tradition. The day now uniformly observed (26th of December), was first designated at Rome so late as the middle of the fourth century. The reasons for fixing the day at that period, were, to avoid the multiplication of festivals about the vernal equinox; to appropriate to a Christian use the existing festival of the winter solstice — the returning sun being made symbolical of the visit of Christ to our earth; and to withdraw Christian converts from those Pagan observances with which the closing year was crowded. In this, however, the influence of Christianity and Paganism was reciprocal. The attempt to supplant the *Saturnalia* resulted in Paganizing Christmas. The slightest comparison of the two festivals will verify this assertion.

The festival of the *Saturnalia* dates from the remotest settlement of *Latium*, whose people revered *Saturnus* as the author of husbandry and the arts of life. It was originally a harvest festival, a Pagan "Feast of Tabernacles," or "Thanksgiving," and was celebrated toward the close of the natural year, when the products of the earth were fully gathered. During this holiday all public business was suspended, and the decrees of war and of justice alike waited upon the universal merry-making. The utmost freedom of social intercourse was permitted to all classes; even slaves were allowed to come to the tables of their masters, clothed in their apparel, and attended by those whom they were accustomed to serve. Horace frames one of his satires upon this license given to slaves, which he styles the freedom of December.¹ Davus, his slave, using the license of the *Saturnalia*, reads Horace a serio-comic lecture upon the follies of his life, representing him to be the real slave. In another satire the poet represents himself as

¹ "Age, *libertate Decembri*,
Quando ita majores voluerunt, utere." — *Liber II. Sat. VII. 4.*

having retreated to his Sabine farm, from the uproarious excesses of the Saturnalia in the capital.¹ Other classic writers abound in similar references to the unrestrained freedom of this festival of the "Golden Age."

All social order was inverted in the licentious hilarity of this festival; feasting, gaming and revelry were the occupations of all classes, without discrimination of age, or sex, or rank. Processions crowded the streets, boisterous with mirth; these illuminated the night with lighted tapers of wax (*cerei*), which were also used as gifts between friends in the humbler walks of life. The season was one for the exchange of gifts of friendship, and especially of gifts to children. The latter was originally another festival (the *Sigillaria*), when images were given to children; but this, with other feasts that clustered about this season, was at length included in the grand period of the *Saturnalia*, which, beginning on the XIV. Kal. Jan. or the 17th of December, extended virtually to the commencement of the new year.

The most complete account of the *Saturnalia* is that given by Macrobius; *Conviviorum Saturnaliorum*, in seven books, each book treating of a separate day of the festival. Of the antiquity of the festival, Macrobius writes as follows: "Excogitavit Janus honorum ejus augmenta. ac primum terram omnem ditioni suae parentem Saturniam nominavit: aram deinde cum sacris tamquam deo condidit, quae Saturnalia nominavit. *tot saeculis Saturnalia praecedunt Romanae urbis aetatem.*"² Concerning the license of the occasion, he says: "Saturnalibus *totā servis licentia* permittitur." Of the usages and the duration of the festival, he thus speaks: "Pelagos, postquam felicior interpretatio capita non viventium sed fictilia, et *φωρός* aestimationem non solum hominem sed etiam lumen significare docuisset, coepisse Saturno *cereos* potius accendere, et in sacellum Ditis arae Saturni cohaerens oscilla quaedam pro suis capitibus ferre; ex illo traditum ut *cerei* Saturnalibus missitarentur, et *sigilla* arte fictili fingerentur ac venalia pararentur; quae homines pro se atque suis piaculum pro Dite Saturno facerent. Ideo Saturnalibus talium commerciorum coepta celebritas *septem* occupat dies."³

¹ "At ipsis

Saturnalibus huc fugisti. *Sobrius* ergo," etc. — *Liber II. Sat. III. 4.*

² *Opera*, London, 1694, p. 152, Lib. 1, Cap. 7. ³ *Ib.* p. 168, Lib. 1, Cap. 11.

In comparing this festival with that of Christmas, as the latter was kept for centuries at Rome, and also in "merrie old England," we find the following marked resemblances :

(a) The season itself, the winter solstice, when the sun begins to turn his face again northward, corresponds in both, and is suggestive of life and joyousness. Even Roman Catholic authorities, such as *Hardwin* and others, give prominence to this idea in the Christmas festival ; and one of the early Popes said of the day, that it commemorated rather the return of the sun than the birth of Christ. The spiritual analogy here is so obvious, that it was easy to transfer the existing festival to the Christian calendar, by giving to it this higher significance. Yet, in the association of the masses, it would remain the old yearly rejoicing at the turning back of the sun.

(b) Christmas, like the *Saturnalia*, has ever been a season of riotous indulgence, high feasting, and universal license ; its characteristic, not a solemn religious joy, but unbridled mirth. Gross, sensual entertainments and boisterous sports are features of both festivals. Ben Jonson, in his *Masque of Christmas*, which was presented at Court in 1616, introduces *Misrule* and *Wassel* as principal characters ; and parades before the royal family, cobblers, bugle-makers, smiths, and grooms, from Fish-street, Pudding-lane, and like localities, to indulge their coarse wit and vulgar sports according to the license of the season.¹ The following bill of fare of King Arthur's Christmas table, will show to what extent the Christmas feasting was carried in those good old times :

" They served up salmon, venison, and wild boars,
By hundreds, and by dozens, and by scores.
Hogsheads of honey, kilderkins of mustard,
Muttons, and fatted beeves, and bacon swine ;
Herons and bitterns, peacocks, swan, and bustard,
Teal, mallard, pigeons, widgeons, and in fine,
Plum-puddings, pancakes, apple-pies, and custard.
And therewithal they drank good Gascon wine,
With mead, and ale, and cider of our own ;
For porter, punch, and negus were not known."

The inns of Court, those famous societies of the barristers of London, vied with the Court itself in low masquerades and other devices for celebrating this festival. But the point of

¹ Works, Boston edition, p. 717.

nearest resemblance to the Saturnalia is thus given by Hervey:¹ "The peasant, and even the pauper, were made, as it were, once a year, sharers in the mirth of their immediate lord, and even of the monarch himself. The laboring classes had enlarged privileges, during this season, not only by custom, but by positive enactment; and restrictive acts of parliament, by which they were prohibited from certain games at other periods, contained exceptions in favor of the Christmas-tide. Nay, folly was, as it were, crowned, and disorder had a license." He then quotes a proclamation, perhaps satirical, from a sheriff of York; wherein it is declared that "all thieves, dice-players, carders, etc., and all other unthrifty folke, be welcome to the towne whether they came late or early, att the reverence of the high feast of Youle, till the twelve dayes be passed." In this unbridled revelry of all classes, the Christmas and the Saturnalia festivals agree. Both represent a golden age of liberty.

(c) The hymn of the nativity sung through the streets of Rome, and the Christmas carol of old England, correspond exactly to the hymn sung in praise of Saturn at his festival.

(d) The interchange of presents between friends is alike characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia; and must have been adopted by Christians from the Pagans, as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows.

(e) Christmas is everywhere a festival for children. It is to them a day of gifts and merry-making; and, in this respect, it answers exactly to the festival of infants, which occupied one day of the Saturnalia.

(f) The special use of candles and wax tapers, is another feature of the two festivals in common. We have seen that these were employed during the Saturnalia, both for purposes of illumination, and as gifts of friendship. The same usage has prevailed at Christmas, which was formerly called at Rome the "Feast of Lights."

(g) A famous feature of Christmas anciently, was the choice of a "twelfth night" king, or a king of misrule, to direct the sports. He was chosen by a ring, or by a choice of beans or of straws, and did his utmost to promote lawless sports, whether in the house of king, noble, or peasant. Precisely in this manner a "king of sports" was chosen in the Saturnalia, even to

¹ Book of Christmas.

the election by beans. The one must have been taken from the other.

In short, "Christmas succeeds the Saturnalia; the same time, the same number of holydays. Then the master waited upon the servant, like the Lord of Misrule."¹ We may well imagine how these resemblances moved the holy indignation of the Puritan Prynne to say: "Our Christmas lords of Misrule, together with dancing, masques, mummeries, stage-players, and such other Christmas disorders, now in use with Christians, were derived from these Roman Saturnalia and Bacchanalian festivals; which should cause all pious Christians eternally to abominate them."²

The more genial Neander, who is prone to recognize a Christian spirit wherever this is possible, says of the analogy of Christmas to the Saturnalia: "That Christian festival which could be so easily connected with the feelings and presentiments lying at the ground of the whole series of Pagan festivals belonging to this season, was to be opposed to these latter; and hence the celebration of Christmas was transferred to the 25th of December, for the purpose of drawing away the Christian people from all participation in the heathen festivals, and of gradually drawing even the Pagans themselves from their heathen customs to the Christian celebration. This view of the matter seems to be particularly favored in a New Year's discourse by Maximus, bishop of Turin, near the close of the fourth century, where he recognizes a special Divine providence in appointing the birth of Christ to take place in the midst of Pagan festivals; so that men might be led to feel ashamed of Pagan superstition and Pagan excesses."

In summing up the evidences of history, we find that the festival of Christmas is of Roman origin; that it grew out of the practice, common to Jews and Gentiles, of commemorating great moral and historical events by religious ceremonies; that it was prompted by the natural regard paid by ignorant and superstitious minds to the marvellous incidents of an event, rather than to the moral lesson of the event itself; and that toward the close of the fourth century, with a view to keeping Christians aloof from the current Pagan festivals, and to alluring Pagans from their *Saturnalia*, the Christmas festival was

¹ Selden, quoted by Hervey.

² *Histrio-Mastix*. See in Hervey.

fixed in the midst of the Pagan festivals of the closing year, and gradually incorporated their usages with its own idea. While, therefore, we would not say with Prynne, that all pious Christians should abominate this festival, we do say that it has neither the historic dignity, the moral significance, nor the sacred associations, that every such institution should possess to command the approval of the Christian world.

ARTICLE VII.

THE PRÆEXISTENCE OF THE SOUL.

Translated from Keil's *Opuscula Academica*.

INTIMATELY connected with the notion of the three parts of man, is that which admits a certain præexistence of the human soul. And since those teachers of the early church who favored this opinion, are said to have borrowed it from the Platonic philosophy, we propose to inquire not only which of them defended, and how they defined the same, but also from what fountains it was imbibed.

It cannot then be denied that this belief that the souls of men had existed before they were united to the body, was common, especially in the East. Thus JEROME says:¹ "As to the origin of the soul, I remember your question, or rather, the question of the whole church: Whether it be fallen from heaven as Pythagoras, the Platonists, and Origen believe, or be of the proper substance of God, as the Stoics, Manichæans and Priscillian heretics of Spain imagine; or whether they are kept in a repository formerly built by God, as some ecclesiastics foolishly believe; or whether they are daily made by God and sent into bodies, according to that which is written in the Gospel: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" or whether by traduction, as Tertullian, Apollinarius, and the greater part of the Westerns

¹ *Epist. ad Marcell. et Anapsych. Opp. T. I. p. 963. edit. Vallars. Epist. ad Demetriad, T. I. p. 987.*