

Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines, Or Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath?

By Chris Coldwell

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Thus it is that history is falsified and good men slandered (David Hay Fleming)

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Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines

Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath?

by Chris Coldwell¹

Introduction

A remarkably durable anecdote about John Calvin, the great Protestant Reformer of Geneva, is often related by those critical of the Puritan view of the Sabbath.² The goal seems to be to demonstrate that the Reformers were not tainted with *that* ‘pharisaical’ of strictness in observance of the Lord’s day – particularly respecting abstinence from otherwise lawful sports and recreations on that day. One Lord’s Day, *it is said*, the Scottish Reformer John Knox, paid a visit to his friend Calvin in Geneva. The grave Scot

¹ The author can say with certainty, from a note he discovered, that he first read of this tale in a copy of David Hay Fleming’s *Critical Reviews*, which he purchased from David C. Lachman on January 30, 1984. It did not take long for him to run into the normal anti-Sabbatarian use of this tale. Later that year, after an evening worship service at the church that would become the First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett (FPCR), a fresh from seminary licentiate tried to use the tale as an excuse against strict confessional Sabbatarianism. Mr. Coldwell referred him to Hay Fleming no doubt an unheeded piece of advice, as the man had accepted the tale as fact on the word of his seminary professor (Hay Fleming was unknown to him). The author has had an abiding interest in the tale ever since. Mr. Coldwell’s normal interest and work has been in 17th Century Scottish Presbyterian books. Some of the more major works he has edited are: James Durham, *A Treatise Concerning Scandal* (Naphtali Press, 1990). George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (Naphtali Press, 1993). James Durham, *Lectures on Job* (Naphtali Press, 1995). *Anonymous Writings of George Gillespie* (Presbyterian Treasury, 1998). Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* (Presbyterian Treasury, 1998). From 1988 to 1992 he edited and published through Naphtali Press *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*. Since 1992, he has been editor of *The Blue Banner*, a newsletter published by FPCR, and he continues work editing 17th century Presbyterian books for publication (D.V.).

² This article is not a study of Sabbath views *per se*. See the following works for analysis of the Puritan and of Calvin’s view. James T. Dennison, *The Market Day of the Soul: the Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England 1532-1700* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983). James Gilfillan, *The Sabbath viewed in the light of Reason, Revelation, and History, with Sketches of its Literature* (New York, [1862]). Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962). See also the works by John Primus on page 5, footnote 9.

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found, to his surprise, as the telling would seem to indicate,³ the austere Reformer of Geneva engaged in a game of bowls.⁴

There appears to be no good reason for the tale's durability.⁵ It has been repeated and used uncritically by Seventh-day Adventist apologists,⁶ Calvin scholars who should know better, as well as by anti-Sabbatarian writers. Even when the tenuous origin of the tale is clearly evident to some of these authors, they still have boldly gone on to draw conclusions from it as if it were factual. Much of this no doubt is due to partisan bias against Calvin, or against strict views of Sabbath keeping, or both. However, surely those who hold to the Reformed faith, and hold the Reformer in esteem, would hesitate to assume as true a tale which runs counter to Calvin's published opinion? If the Reformer believed that sports and recreations on the Lord's day were permissible, then this tale would be merely a curiosity. Since that was not his belief, giving countenance to the tale leaves him vulnerable to the charge of inconsistency if not hypocrisy.

It is important to demonstrate the dubious nature of this tale as it clearly affects how some interpret Calvin's views. And while this article may not settle the issue once and for all, an attempt has been made to draw together as much material as possible to support this conclusion. No doubt some will think the amount of data gathered is excessive, but the tale's persistence calls for it. And, as one author cited later writes regarding another matter, "it is a shame not to know the whole of a small thing."

³ Whether Knox is portrayed as surprised seems to depend on whether the author repeating the tale is intent on not only casting Calvin as holding to much 'looser' Sabbath views than the Puritans, but the Scottish Reformer as well. The tale varies. One version relates that a chance visitor reported it. Others add that it was a Lord's day afternoon. One of the most recent and more cautious references to the tale is by Tom Schwanda in his article, "The Unforced Rhythms of Grace, A Reformed Perspective on Sabbath," *Perspectives*, vol. 11, no. 3 (March 1996), pp. 14-17. He writes:

While Calvin appears to see recreation as inappropriate for Sundays, a strong oral tradition often repeated insists his actual practice was less severe. I have endeavored to trace the authenticity of this reference to no avail. However, the most frequent references indicate that when John Knox visited Calvin in Geneva he finally found him lawn bowling that Sunday afternoon. Once again it must be acknowledged there are no footnotes to substantiate this possibility.

⁴ Bowls is an old game played on a smooth green lawn with a ball of wood (now made of a composite material). It is rolled with the attempt to make it stop as near as possible to another ball. Hence the term 'bowling on the green.' The point is not that the game was an immoral pastime, but unlawful on the Lord's day. The consensus of Puritan thinking on Sabbath recreations is represented by John Wells. Recreations on a Sabbath day "are impediments to duty. . . . Now how this should be otherwise, is not easily discernible; so do not recreations possess the mind, divert the intention, withdraw from spiritual duties, hinder the service of Christ, and fill the heart with froth and vanity?" John Wells, *The Practical Sabbatarian* (London, 1668), p. 28. Calvin's view is similar.

⁵ This is not the only Sabbath related tale that has persisted. Unfortunately, the bowling anecdote is not as easily dismissed as the false accusation that Calvin once had a consultation about changing the Lord's Day to Thursday. However, even the fact that Calvin's own words disprove this myth has not stopped it from being repeated as frequently as the bowling tale. See page 11.

⁶ J. N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week* (Steam Press of The Seventh Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1873).

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After briefly rehearsing Calvin's view of sports and pastimes on the Lord's day, this article will survey the relevant literature. The reasons for focusing mainly on English literature are practical ones. The author is not familiar enough with French or Latin to facilitate an easy compassing of that literature. While this may appear to be a significant oversight, as the main source for the bowling anecdote traces it to a local tradition in Geneva, this very fact also raises a strong probability that no evidence exists to be found that would substantiate the tale.

But the English literature is important to survey because the anecdote has spread and received currency since the 19th century in British and American works on the Sabbath. Also, the controversy over the Puritan Sabbath in England created an environment that produced events and literature that have more than a tangential bearing on determining the verity of the tale. The Puritans made appeals to Calvin's position against recreation on Lord's days. Those accused of breaking the Sabbath by bowling, made counter-appeals to the permissive practice of Geneva. And there is an apparent reference at the time of the Westminster Assembly to Calvin bowling on the Lord's day. So there is plenty of material in the English literature to cover. Moving primarily backward in time, this will require reviewing:

1. The 20th Century – Recent use of the bowling tale.
2. The 19th Century – The anecdote appears in literature.
3. The 17th Century – Searching for earlier references to this tale.
4. The 16th Century – Aylmer bowls, and Knox Visits Geneva.

Calvin's View of Sports and Pastimes on the Lord's Day

Calvin's view of the fourth commandment is well summarized by James T. Dennison:

On John Calvin's doctrine of the fourth commandment see especially *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, viii. 28-34. The three points of his Sabbath doctrine are: (1) Sabbath is a figure of spiritual rest in Christ; (2) Sabbath serves as a day for public worship; (3) Sabbath serves as a day of rest for servants and beasts. Perhaps the best study of Calvin's view is Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.'s unpublished Th. M. thesis, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962). Calvin's view may be called a

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'practical Sabbatarianism' – an evaluation supported by the recent investigation of John H. Primus . . . although Primus avoids the phrase.⁷

In his several writings on this topic, John Primus has probably done the most in recent times to set the record straight on Calvin and Lord's Day observance.⁸ He demonstrates clearly from Calvin's 34th Sermon on Deuteronomy that while Calvin's doctrine of the fourth commandment differs from that of the Puritans, the ethic of how one is to observe the day is similar.⁹ Primus writes, "Calvin calls for a literal, physical cessation of daily labor on the Lord's Day, not as an end in itself, but to provide time for worship of God. Recreational activity should also be suspended, for such activity interferes with worship as certainly as daily labor does. 'If we spend the Lord's day in making good cheer, and in playing and gaming, is that a good honouring of God? Nay, is it not a mockery, yea and a very unhallowing of his name?'"¹⁰ Calvin

argues that the Sabbath should be used not only for public worship and "hearing of sermons," but also that "we should apply the rest of the time to the praising of God." By "the rest of the time" he apparently means the rest of the day of worship, at least, the remainder of our waking hours. To use the Lord's Day to full advantage will aid us in the continued reflection on God's works, which is required throughout the week. It will "fashion and polish" us for the giving of thanks to God "upon the Monday and all the week after." Conversely, if men desecrate the Lord's Day they are likely to "play the beasts all the week after." So we should not only publicly hear the sermon, but privately reflect on it. We must digest it and "bend all our wits to consider the gracious things that God hath done for us." Calvin calls on God's people to "dedicate that day wholly unto the him so as we may be utterly withdrawn from the world." Even though we need not "keep the ceremony so straight as it was under the bondage of the law," it is important for us to "consider how our Lord requireth to have this day bestowed in nothing else, but in hearing of his

⁷ The Market Day of the Soul, p. 5.

⁸ Tom Schwanda refers to Primus as "perhaps the most articulate and scholarly Reformed historian writing on the Sabbath today." *Unforced Rhythms of Grace*, p. 15.

⁹ John H. Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," in *Exploring The Heritage Of John Calvin: Essays In Honor Of John Bratt*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 40-75. *Holy Time. Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989). Also, "Sunday: The Lord's day as a Sabbath – Protestant Perspectives on the Sabbath," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenezi, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., and William H. Sher (New York: Crossroads, 1991).

¹⁰ *Exploring the Heritage*, pp. 68-69.

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word, in making common prayer, in making confession of our faith, and in having the use of the Sacraments.”¹¹

According to Calvin’s 34th sermon from Deuteronomy, recreations and games are to be put away for the entire Lord’s day. If the bowling anecdote is true, we must wonder if Calvin practiced what he preached? However, it is hoped the following survey will show that little credit should be placed in this story, at least until some firm evidence surfaces that indicates the story is more than hearsay. It would be idle speculation to use the tale to form some opinion of Calvin’s character. Certainly it should not be used to demonstrate his view of Lord’s day observance, when he clearly has preached contrary to the looser practice the tale has been used to support. We must rely on Calvin’s own words, not on what amounts to an urban legend, which may merely be a very old lie.

1. The 20th Century – Recent use of the bowling tale

The “bowling story” has made its way into the Sabbath literature, often with the presumption that it is fact, and this not just in the less critical sort, but among the more scholarly as well. Some of the earlier writers at least give reference back to the 19th century authors who are the source for the use of the tale today. However, apparently a less careful approach is more common nowadays.

For instance, David Katz writes:¹² “Calvin made a point of playing at bowls on Sunday to demonstrate his own attitude to the question.” Katz’s support for this is Robert Cox’s *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin about the Sabbath* (Edinburgh, 1860), p. 91.¹³ However, Cox does not mention the bowling tale. Nor does he there refer to the general practice of Geneva alleged by some to infer this claim. As this paper hopefully will demonstrate, there is no strong evidence to support the event even occurred, let alone that Calvin was *consciously* condemning stricter observance in doing such a thing. This kind of bold appeal to the tale is unfortunately more common than one would expect among scholars and those who unquestioningly rely upon them.

¹¹ Ibid. See *The sermons of M. John Calvin upon the fifth booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*, translated out of the French by Arthur Golding (London, 1583), pp. 204-205.

¹² David S. Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth Century England* (E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 4.

¹³ Robert Cox, *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin about the Sabbath* (Edinburgh, 1860), p. 91. Cox’s three works on the Sabbath are discussed later in this article. See page 17.

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Christopher Hill and Gary North

An instance of this is found in an appendix Gary North authored for R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*. He writes, Calvin "went lawn bowling after church on Sunday, a fact which later sabbatarians [sic] have chosen to ignore."¹⁴ For support North cites Christopher Hill's *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*. Hill's exact statement is:

So when Bownde published his notorious book in 1595, he was only extending a thesis on which there had previously been considerable agreement. His position, like that of Greenham, was substantially that of Calvin. The fact that Calvin had played bowls on Sunday worried some of the more zealous Sabbatarians, who did not approve of bishops who in this followed Calvin's example."¹⁵

North accepts as gospel the latter statement that Calvin bowled on the Lord's day, but objects to the close association of Calvin with the Puritan view. He writes:¹⁶

Hill erroneously attributes the later Puritan sabbatarian position to Calvin, although he is forced to admit that Calvin's willingness to bowl on Sunday worried more zealous sabbatarians. Unlike Knappen, Hill shows little sign of having read Calvin's own writings on the sabbath. He writes in a footnote on the same page that "[Richard] Baxter was also a little uneasy in his attempts to explain away Calvin's and Beza's laxness." Hill, *ibid.*, p. 170. It is perhaps understandable that Hill, as a Marxist scholar specializing in 17th-century English history, would not be familiar with the details of Calvin's writings. There is no excuse for the statement by Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary, in a desperate attempt to avoid the thrust of Calvin's view of the sabbath, that Calvin's views have simply been misinterpreted. Murray's Scottish heritage just will not conform to Calvin's "lax" teachings, so he has chosen to rewrite Calvin. See Murray's letter to the editor, *The Presbyterian Guardian*, June, 1969.

¹⁴ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law. A Chalcedon study, with three appendices by Gary North* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), p. 825. Sabbatarians are by no means justified in ignoring "facts." But neither should anti-Sabbatarian authors rely on unsubstantiated rumor. It may be that there is ignorance on both sides of the Sabbath question regarding this tale. Or could it be that Sabbatarian scholars simply have not placed much weight in what amounts to hearsay? The very precise Scottish historian David Hay Fleming rejected it as fiction nearly 90 years ago (see page 13).

¹⁵ Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 170.

¹⁶ North, *ibid.* p. 827.

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North's anti-Sabbatarian bravado rings hollow, and demonstrates a shallow grasp of the relevant literature. This criticism of Murray is rather shameless.¹⁷ Unlike North, the professor knew something about the literature on this subject.¹⁸ Patrick Fairbairn and James Gilfillan were making the case that Calvin's view of the Sabbath had been misunderstood nearly 150 years ago. The position was long established when Murray made his comment, and has since received thorough attention by Calvin scholars such as John Primus.

North also places undo confidence in Knappen,¹⁹ who himself places too much confidence in the anti-Sabbatarian, Episcopalian authors such as Pocklington and Cooper (see footnote 45). As they should not be relied upon without great care, neither should Knappen, who blunders greatly in giving credit to Pocklington's easily refuted report, that Calvin once had a consultation about changing the Lord's day to Thursday. Hill makes this error as well (see below).²⁰

As far as Hill's statement, North has it exactly backwards! Actually, Hill is wrong in giving credit to the idea that Calvin bowled on the Lord's day, and right in connecting the similarities between Calvin's view and that of the Puritans.

If Hill is taken to mean that the Puritan view and Calvin's are in all points "substantially" the same, then he is obviously wrong. However, it is clear Hill is dealing with the notion of the Sabbath as a day set aside for worship, not to idleness or a mere carnal rest. In that regard, the two views *are* essentially the same. One need only read the quotations made from Calvin and Bownd to see this is what Hill is comparing.²¹

True, Hill may not have been as familiar as necessary with Calvin's writings to avoid some mistakes. He was obviously not familiar enough with Calvin's Deuteronomy sermons to see the inconsistency in assuming Calvin bowled on the Lord's day. This is

¹⁷ Murray's letter itself was not an apologetic for the position, but merely a passing expression of it. He was writing on the topic of subscription to the Westminster Standards, and on the doctrine of the Sabbath as it related to that question. In closing he wrote, "One more word, Mr. Editor. I am convinced that Calvin's view of the Sabbath has been seriously misrepresented for lack of care in examining the totality of his teaching and proper analysis in this light of his statements in the Institutes. But, in any case, one wonders what Calvin's view has to do with the adoption of standards in terms of a formula which he did not frame?" *The Presbyterian Guardian*, June 1969, p. 85-86.

¹⁸ *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 217-18. The reading list presented by Murray on these pages includes anti-Sabbatarian works, Sabbatarian works, and at least one book by a Seventh day Adventist.

¹⁹ M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 442-450.

²⁰ See below, page 11. Knappen also errs in accepting the anti-Sabbatarian spin put to the supper party Knox had with Randolph. *Ibid.* p. 447. See below, page 13.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 170-171.

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strange to say the least, as some of the authors Hill cites directly contradict the idea that Calvin allowed recreations on the Lord's day, citing these sermons as proof.²²

It is unclear whether Hill is extrapolating Calvin's bowling practice from the alleged general practice of Geneva, or was led to make that deduction by knowledge of the bowling anecdote. He does not reference the tale at all, or any of the usual sources that cite it, nor does he provide any direct evidence for proving the "fact" that Calvin bowled on Sundays. His references are to works by Laud, Heylyn and Cooper, which, again, only allege a general practice in Geneva.²³ Baxter is also noted, but there is nothing in his work on the Sabbath directly accusing Calvin himself of loose practices, but rather the opposite.²⁴

Hill refers to a quote in Marchant's, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York*, which reads, "One interesting attestation was that he had said that 'it is not lawful to do anything on the Sabbath day whatsoever Mr. Calvin had said to the contrary.'" This obviously has reference to Calvin's writings and not to some rumor of what he may have done on the Lord's day. The *he* is one John Crosse, who Marchant believed reflected a "more popular and slightly less decorous Puritanism, which sometimes came under mild criticism." "Crosse was a complete nonconformist." It was alleged against him (1617-18) that:

John Crosse hath publicly and privately taught and defended or maintained all or most of the erroneous opinions following, viz. that all unpreaching ministers are dumb dogs, and damned persons and whosoever goeth to hear them cannot be saved; Item that no preacher sanctifies the Sabbath unless he

²² In one instance, Hill cites within two pages of a very clear statement to this effect by George Hakewill. See page 82.

²³ Hill's footnote reads: "The practice of Geneva was quoted against excessive Sabbatarianism, e.g. by Laud (*Works*, II, pp. 252-5); by the translator of John Prideaux's *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (1634), in his Preface (Sig. B3); and of course by Heylyn,* *History of the Presbyterians*, p. 27. Cf. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York*, p. 37. Lady Brilliana Harley thought that it was because Calvin "was so earnest in opposing the popish holy days that he entrenched upon the holy Sabbath" (*Letters*, p. 63). Baxter was also a little uneasy in his attempts to explain away Calvin's and Beza's laxness (*Works*, XIII, p. 451). Aylmer played bowls on Sunday afternoons. The practice was defended by Bishop Cooper in his *Admonition*, pp. 43-4." *It is unclear why Hill phrased this as he did, as the translator of Prideaux and Heylyn are one and the same (Gillfillan, p. 120). The wording regarding the alleged Sabbath practices of Geneva are practically the same in the Prideaux preface and Heylyn's *History of the Sabbath*, his geographies, and his *History of the Presbyterians*.

²⁴ Hill is obviously referring to Baxter as one of those "wornied" by the practice of Geneva. But whether "wornied" is the proper term, the reader may judge from the quote provided later in this paper (see below, page 28). What the literature surveyed here actually demonstrates is that the Puritans were not worried about Calvin's practice, rather they used his teaching from Deuteronomy to refute the appeals made to the alleged looser practice of Geneva of the late 16th century.

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preach twice every Sabbath. Item, that it is not lawful to dress meat or do any such thing on the Sabbath day...²⁵

The earlier Puritans had distanced themselves from the similar excesses of language in the Martin Marprelate tracts. Most if not all the Puritans writing about the Sabbath, would have disagreed with the extreme view expressed here, including Nicholas Bownd.²⁶

The remaining reference Hill makes is to the *Letters* of Lady Brilliana Harley.²⁷ She writes to her son, ‘I am halfe of an opinion to put your brothers out to scoule. They continue still stife in theare opinions; and in my aprehention upon samale ground. My feare is least we should falle into the same error as Calluin did, whoo was so earnest in oposing the popisch hollydays that he intrenched upon the holy Saboth, so I feare we shall be so earnest in beateing downe theare to much villifyeing of the Common Prayer Booke, that we shall say more for it than euer we intended.’²⁸

This kind statement is not unique, that the Reformers overreacted against the Sabbath in their dislike for holy days.²⁹ However, even assuming that weight should be given the Lady’s opinion, it is unclear what is in view in this “entrenching.” There is really nothing in the statement that should lead one to conclude Calvin would have bowled on the Lord’s day contrary to his preaching from Deuteronomy.

It matters little whether Hill is merely concluding Calvin bowled on Lord’s days based upon the alleged general practice of Geneva, or whether he also was aware of the bowling anecdote. A knowledge of Calvin’s statements in the Deuteronomy sermons should have given as much pause to draw the inference from the alleged practice in general, as it should in attributing any truth to the myth itself.

²⁵ Ronald A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560-1642* (London, 1960), p. 35, 37.

²⁶ Nicholas Bownd, *Sabbatum Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (London, 1606), p. 202-204. Bownd allows for the appropriate dressing of meat, as does Twisse, *The Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641), p. 29.

²⁷ *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley . . . with introduction and notes by Thomas Taylor Lewis, A.M.* (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1854).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁹ Richard Baxter is one instance of this. See page 28.

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Did Calvin Want to Change the Lord's Day to Thursday or Friday?

As indicated earlier, Hill takes Pocklington's charge much too seriously that Calvin wanted to move the Lord's day to Thursday.³⁰ This is another tale often repeated that needs to be laid aside. In this case, Calvin actually has responded to a similar charge that he wanted to move the Lord's day to Friday. He writes, "But a more serious charge is involved in the rumor that they have diligently spread about, of my intentions to transfer the Lord's day to the Friday. The truth is, that, for my part, I have never shown the least sign of lusting after such innovations, but very much the contrary."³¹

John T. McNeill

It is truly disappointing to find a Calvinist scholar such as John T. McNeill, also making uncritical use of the bowling incident and drawing conclusions regarding Calvin's character from it. McNeill writes, "He not infrequently joined in a game of quoits; a chance visitor reported that John Knox, calling at his house once on a Sunday, found him playing bowls."³²

McNeill provides no clear reference for the tale in *The History and Character of Calvinism*. The manner of the book is to have little if any footnoting, referring the reader to a long list of sources in the back. A partial check of most all the works in English, and a few of the many French works (such as Doumerguer), did not turn up a reference to the bowling anecdote. Apparently, either Doumerguer³³ or Williston Walker³⁴ is McNeill's source for Calvin's playing quoits. Walker writes:

³⁰ Hill, p. 210. Gilfillan wrote regarding this accusation: "A charge, which was not even attempted to be sustained by a particle of evidence, and yet still figures in anti-Sabbatic works. . ." Gilfillan, p. 415.

³¹ "To the Segneurs of Beme, Lausanne, March 1555." *Letters of John Calvin*, edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), volume 3, p. 165. This was one of the lies spread by Jerome Bolesec in his "violently abusive" life of Calvin, *Histoire de la Vie, Moeurs, etc., de Jean Calvin* (Lyons, 1577). It is doubtful that Calvin had a desire to change the Lord's day to Thursday (rather than Friday) in light of this statement. See criticism of Pocklington's worth as an author below under 17th century. Heylyn also repeated this Sunday to Thursday accusation, spread by one John Barclay. Twisse seriously questioned the veracity of this man. *Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641), p. 35. Cox, perhaps disappointed that it had no firmer verification, and apparently ignorant of Calvin's letters, wrote: "A story has long been current that Calvin once had consultation about transferring the dominical solemnity to the Thursday. Quite consistently with his doctrine in the Institutes, this might well have happened under some provocation from the "false prophets" whom he there stigmatizes; but I find no earlier or weightier authority for the statement than that of John Barclay, a Roman Catholic writer in the reign of James I." *Whole Doctrine*, p. iv

³² John T. McNeill, *The History And Character Of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 233. Quoits is sort of like horseshoes.

³³ Emile Doumerguer, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps, 7 vols* (Lausanne, 1899-1927). It is a significant mark against this tale that Doumerguer does not mention it.

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Sometimes, chiefly when urged by his friends, he would play a simple game, quoits, in his garden, or “clef” on the table in his living room. . . . But his few recreations were briefly enjoyed.

For these facts Walker references the life of Calvin by Nicholas Colladon.³⁵ He then cites Emile Doumerguer, who references the same. “Doumerque, iii, 527-563, has made the utmost possible of this side of Calvin’s character. In the game of *clef* the keys were pushed on a table, the aim being to bring each contestant’s nearest to the further edge without falling off.” Doumerguer, who “has made the utmost possible of this side of Calvin’s character;” does not mention the bowling incident in the section referenced by Walker, dealing with “Calvin at Home.” Nor does he mention it under his comments on the fourth commandment in volume four of his monumental work. In the places cited in *Vie de Calvin par Nicolas Colladon*, there is no mention of bowls on the Lord’s day. Regarding Calvin playing games, Doumerguer writes:

And Beza adds a last trait, which completes the others: Calvin did not retreat before the familiarity of games. Without doubt, after his meals, most often he walked a quarter hour, a half-hour at most, in the room, chatting with whomever kept him company, then he retreated to his closet to study. But when his “familiar friends” incited him, when “it came to pass and in familiar company,” he recreated in playing “pallet, keys, or other sorts of lawful game by our laws and not proscribed in this republic.”³⁶

Unfortunately, McNeill has proved to be a perpetuator of this Calvin myth. His stature as a Calvin scholar evidently lends to an uncritical acceptance of the bowling anecdote as fact. Raymond Blacketer writes regarding Calvin’s view of recreation and the Sabbath:

John T. McNeill reports that Calvin was known to occasionally take some brief time for himself in order to engage in various forms of amusement, even on the Lord’s day! . . . Given the strict and too often legalistic Sabbatarian tendencies of Calvinism, John Calvin’s actual view of the Lord’s day stands in striking contrast. Later Calvinistic tradition and teaching with regard to the

³⁴ Williston Walker, *John Calvin, the Organizer of Reformed Protestantism, 1509-64* (New York, 1906), pp. 433, 434.

³⁵ *Joannis Calvinii Opera quae supersunt omnia*, eds. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, volume 23 (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1879). *Vie de Calvin par Théodore de Bèze et Nicolas Colladon*, pp. 109, 113.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 547. Doumerguer is referencing *Opera*, v. 21, p. 113. The author thanks Michael Dolberry for providing French translation for this article.

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“Christian Sabbath” does not at all reflect what the Reformer actually taught regarding the Lord’s Day. John Calvin was no Sabbatarian.³⁷

Blacketer cites John Primus for his contention that Calvin was no Sabbatarian. But in making the above statement, he clearly ignored the demonstration by Primus that Calvin’s ethic of Lord’s day observance amounted to a “practical” Sabbatarianism, to use Dennison’s phrase.

Clearly scholars such as McNeill and Hill have directly or indirectly given credibility to this anecdote, which has led lesser men to simply repeat it, who in turn are uncritically relied upon by others. In this way the tale lives from one generation to the next. This uncritical acceptance and reliance on the bowling story is what makes tracing its history so necessary.

2. The 19th Century – The anecdote appears in literature.

While it is possibly an old tale in some form or fashion, it is not till the 19th century that the bowling anecdote debuts in English literature, in Isaac Disraeli’s *Life of Charles the First*.³⁸ From there it found its way into the Sabbath literature of the mid-19th century, and as shown, has continued to be regularly referenced since that time.

David Hay Fleming

Early in the 20th century, David Hay Fleming pointed out some of the ways this doubtful tale was spread. In his *Knox in the Hands of the Philistines*, Hay Fleming reviewed William Law Mathieson’s *Politics and Religion: a Study in Scottish History from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Glasgow, 1902). It seems those who would put their hands to twist Calvin to support their bias toward a looser view of Sabbath-keeping were not bashful about attempting the same with the Scottish Reformer. Hay Fleming writes:³⁹

³⁷ Raymond Andrew Blacketer, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of Christian Liberty and Some Implications for Pastoral Care*. A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary for the Degree of Master of Theology, May, 1992, pp. 135-137.

³⁸ Isaac Disraeli (1766-1848) *Commentaries of the life and reign of Charles I* (London, 1828-31, 5 vols.).

³⁹ *Critical Reviews Relating Chiefly to Scotland*, “Knox in the Hands of the Philistines” (London, 1912), pp. 190-192.

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Mr. Mathieson has a strong antipathy to what he calls ‘grim Sabbatarianism;’ and, in attempting to show that Knox was not imbued with it, he has betrayed the superficial nature of his own acquaintance with the history of the period. He says: “Knox on Sunday evening visited Calvin during a game of bowls, and with several other guests enjoyed the hospitality of Randolph.” His authority for this statement is Dean Stanley’s *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland*, p. 99. On turning to Dean Stanley, it will be found that his words are: “He supped with Randolph on one Sunday evening, and visited Calvin during a game of bowls on another;” and that the Dean’s authority is *Hessey’s Bampton Lectures*, v. 269, 270.⁴⁰ On examining the passage in Hessey thus indicated, it will be found that Knox did not partake of Randolph’s hospitality, but that he and the Duke [of Chatelherault] partook of Knox’s. So far as the question of Sabbath observance is concerned, it is immaterial in whose house they met; but if Mr. Mathieson had been acquainted with Randolph’s letter, which has been printed *in extenso* both by Stevenson and Wright, he would have escaped this error, and would probably have hesitated before he adduced this little supper-party as a proof of Knox’s disregard for the Sabbath. Had he turned up Hessey he would have found that Dean Stanley has magnified the bowling incident. Hessey’s words are: “Knox was the intimate friend of Calvin – visited Calvin, and, *it is said*, on one occasion found him enjoying the recreation of bowls on Sunday.” As his authority Hessey quotes Disraeli as saying: “At Geneva a tradition exists, that when John Knox visited Calvin on a Sunday, he found his austere coadjutor bowling on a green.” Neither by Hessey nor Disraeli is it implied that Knox expected to find Calvin so engaged; and for the story there is no higher authority than late local tradition. Both Dean Stanley and Mr. Mathieson have been far outstripped by a learned Scotsman, who, in a recent article, introduced the statement that Knox occasionally took part in a round of golf on Sabbath afternoon. On being asked for his authority, the writer frankly acknowledged that he had none; but declined to delete the statement, because, as he thought, it helped to lighten an article which was too technical to be generally interesting! Thus it is that history is falsified and good men slandered.

Mathieson and Stanley opposed what Mathieson referred to as *grim Sabbatarianism*. To recast Knox to their point of view, they distort one historical account, the supper with Randolph, and overstate the verity of the bowling story, which the secondary source (Hessey) and the original source (Disraeli) clearly portrayed as hearsay, though they certainly did not treat it as such.

⁴⁰ Hay Fleming refers to James Augustus Hessey’s *Sunday, Its Origin, History, and Present obligations considered in eight lectures* (London, 1860), pp. 270.

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Isaac Disraeli

As noted, Isaac Disraeli receives the credit (or blame) for bringing this doubtful tale into anti-Sabbatarian literature. The following is Disraeli's comment in context:⁴¹

Calvin deemed the Sabbath to have been a Jewish ordinance, limited to that sacred people with their other ceremonial laws, and only typical of the spiritual repose of the advent of Christ, which abolished the grosser, rejected its rigours, and reproaches those whose Sabbatical superstitions were carnal and gross as the Jewish.⁴² At Geneva a tradition exists, that when John Knox visited Calvin on a Sunday, he found his austere coadjutor bowling on a green. At this day, and in that place, a Calvinist preacher after his Sunday sermon will take his seat at the card-table. Some of our early Puritans who had taken refuge in Holland, after ten years in vain pressing for the observance of the Sabbatic Sunday, resolved to leave the country where they had been kindly received and went "to the ends of earth" among the wildernesses of America, to observe "the Lord's day" with the Jewish rigours.⁴³ When Laud was charged on his trial for the revival of the Book of Sports allowed on that day, he thought it prudent to deny that he had been the suggester; he however professed his judgment in its favour, alleging the practice of their own favourite church of Geneva.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Disraeli, *Ibid.* v.3, pp. 354-355.

⁴² [Footnote from Disraeli] The passage is in the Institutes, lib. ii. c. viii. sect. 34. "Crassa, camaliue Sabbatismi Superstitione, Ter. Judeos superant," or as he has given it in his own translation of the Institute, "Ceux qui la suivent surmontent les Juifs en opinion chamelle du Sabbath." Calvin would observe Sunday, as a fixed day for assembling for religious communion, but divested of all Judaism; not that there is any distinction between days, but the appointment of a particular one is convenient, that all may meet together. After divine service all are free, and he reprobates those who have imbued the poor populace with Judaic opinions, and deprived the working classes of their recreations. ["And deprived the working classes of their recreations" is clearly an unwarranted extrapolation from this passage in the Institutes. Like many who mistake Calvin on this subject, Disraeli is ignorant of the statements in the Deuteronomy sermons.]

⁴³ [Footnote from Disraeli] Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, fol. 5.

⁴⁴ [Footnote from Disraeli] Thomas Warton in his first edition of Milton's juvenile poems observed in a note on the Lady's speech in *Comus*—verse 177, that "It is owing to the Puritans ever since Cromwell's time that *Sunday* has been made in England a day of gravity and severity; and many a staunch observer of the Rites of the Church of England little suspects that he is conforming to the *Calvinism of an English Sunday*." In Warton's second edition this note was wholly cancelled. It had probably given offence to heads unfurnished with their own national history; thus are popular errors fostered. There was too an error, and one our critic and poet, not versed probably in Ecclesiastical history, might have easily fallen into, when he ascribed to Calvin, the melancholy institution of Knox's Sabbath. Calvin himself was adverse to it. The Scottish Presbyterian who so eagerly embraced the horrible theology of Calvin, as if that were not sufficiently mortifying to man, dropped the only part which might soften the cares of human life, and added to the gloom of Calvinism the asceticism of the most rigorous Sabbath. Warton having discovered himself surrounded by so many difficulties, and having unintentionally offended the false delicacy of some, in despair seems to have given up the note altogether, which however only required a very minute correction.

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It may surprise us that two of the great friends of Calvin, closely connected with him, and with his system, should have espoused a very opposite doctrine. Knox in Scotland after Sunday having been for 1554 years classed among the festival days, both in the Greek and the Latin churches, as the Anti-sabbatarians maintain, Knox no longer calling this day *the Lord's-day*, but taking some Jew for its godfather, named it *the Sabbath*, and thus disguised its nature and custom.⁴⁵ Knox acquired many advocates in England. Whittingham the Puritan Dean of Durham, who had resided at Geneva ... likewise differed with his brother, and on his return home appears to have had his mind imbued with a full portion of the spirit of his Scottish friend. This redoubtable Puritan evinced his zeal by defacing the antique monuments in Durham Cathedral, and converting the stone coffins of the Priors of Durham into horse-troughs. Whittingham was a rigid Sabbatarian...

No unbiased historian here! Disraeli's work is firmly anti-Puritan, anti-Calvin, anti-Presbyterian and outspokenly anti-Sabbatarian. The author has three chapters on the Sabbath controversy in the third volume of his work.⁴⁶ Disraeli's distaste for Calvin and his "horrible theology" is exhibited in footnote 44. His anti-Calvinism is displayed fully in an earlier chapter, *Critical History of the Puritans: Of the Political Character of Calvin*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ [Footnote from Disraeli] Pocklington's Sermon *Sunday no Sabbath*, 1636. [Among the clear evidence for Disraeli's biased writing is his placing such weight on Pocklington. "In 1640, the Long Parliament committed a blunder, to say the least, when it condemned the Sermon, with the *Altare Christianum*, another product of the doctor's pen, to be publicly burnt ... a fate inappropriate to performances which otherwise would have found their way to their native obscurity." James Gilfillan, *The Sabbath viewed in the light of Reason, Revelation, and History, with Sketches of its Literature* (New York, [1862]), p. 133.]

⁴⁶ 15. On the Sabbatical Institutions. 16. Of the Observation of the Sabbath Upon Sundays. 17. The Cause of the Revival by Charles the First, of "the Book of Sports" for recreations on Sundays. Disraeli's relating of the bowling incident occurs in chapter sixteen.

⁴⁷ Disraeli, v. 3, pp. 252-268. "In the novel democracy of the Consistory of Calvin, Ministers and Laics sat together. Calvin flattered the weakness of human nature by the appearance of a political equality. But the whole system was a delusion, for the tyrannical genius of its inventor first deprived man of his free-will. The Apostle of Geneva by the bewitching terror of his dogmatic theology had enthralled his followers for ever, by a mysterious bondage of the mind; out of which no human argument could ever extricate them – an immutable necessity! The dark imagination of the subtilizing divine had presumed to scan the decree of Omnipotence, as if the Divinity had revealed to his solitary ear the secret of the Creation. He discovers in the holy scriptures, what he himself has called "a most horrible decree." Who has not shuddered at the fume of the distempered fancy of the atrabilious Calvin?" Ibid, pp. 257-258. "The exterior parity of this new Democracy, so seductive to the vulgar, was a no less cruel delusion. In Calvin's mingled Republic of Presbyters and Elders, the Elders, annually chosen, trembled before their sacred Peers, who being permanent residents had the Elders at all times under their eye and their inquisitorial office. When the Presbyterian government was set up in England, Clarendon observed that the Archbishop of Canterbury had never so great an influence as Dr. Burgess and Mr. Marshall, nor did all the Bishops in Scotland together so much meddle in temporal affairs as Mr. Henderson. ... The same fertile genius which had made "our Father in Heaven" a human tyrant, and raised the mortal criminal into beatitude, now invested his own Levites and his own "Rulers of the Synagogue" with supremacy. In this new Papacy, as in the old, they

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Disraeli's vehemence exceeds, if possible, that of the prelatial polemicist Peter Heylyn (see page 23), who seems to be his teacher in these things, as the vitriol they pour forth is very similar. In any event, he clearly states that the bowling tale is a local tradition. However, as others do after him, Disraeli failed to consider the Deuteronomy sermons, and uses this 'local legend' to bolster his anti-Sabbatarian sentiments. Thus the "bowling anecdote" had a less than auspicious entrance into the Sabbath literature.⁴⁸

Gilfillan and Cox

Some forty years before Mathieson and Hay Fleming wrote, two other men took sides on this issue of supposed lax Sabbath observance on the part of Knox and Calvin (and the Reformers in general). James Gilfillan and Robert Cox both wrote detailed surveys of the literature on the Sabbath controversy. Gilfillan's *The Sabbath viewed in the light of Reason, Revelation, and History, with Sketches of its Literature* (New York, [1862]), argued that the Reformers had a more strict practice than was commonly noted. Cox took the opposite view in his *The Literature of the Sabbath Question* (Edinburgh, 1865, 2 vols). These two surveys are very commonly cited in Sabbath and anti-Sabbath literature. Cox had previously written, *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin about the Sabbath* (Edinburgh, 1860) and *Sabbath Laws and Sabbath Duties considered in relation to their natural and scriptural grounds, and to the principles of religious liberty* (Edinburgh, 1853).

The title of Cox's first work, *Sabbath Laws and Sabbath Duties*, is a bit misleading. It is really a short article with some very long appendices. The article is titled "A Plea for Sunday Trains on the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway." Cox was a shareholder in this railway and acted as secretary for a group of Scottish and English shareholders who petitioned the company to follow other railroads in opening on Sundays. He was an anti-Sabbatarian in his views, and believed in a broad religious toleration.⁴⁹

inculcated passive obedience, armed as they were with the terrors of excommunication. The despotism of Rome was transferred to Geneva. All was reversed, but the nucleus of power had only removed its locality." Ibid, pp. 258-260. "The fervid diligence of this extraordinary man was commensurate with the vastness of his genius. His life was not protracted; he was a martyr to constant bodily pain, and the physical sufferings of the man are imagined to have shown themselves in the morose and vehement character of the legislator. The purity of doctrine, in some part at least, consisted in dethroning bishops; denuding ministers of the sacerdotal vestments, and banishing from the religious service, all the accessories of devotion. Calvin seems to have imagined that man becomes more spiritualized in the degree he ceases to be the creature of sensation and of sympathy, as if the senses were not the real source of our feelings. But as he who is reckless of his own life is master of every other man's, so the great hermit of reformation, who disdained all personal interests, seemed to think and to act only for the world." Ibid, pp.262-263.

⁴⁸ As said in the introduction, if Disraeli meant that the bowling tale was "merely" an oral tradition, there may be no traceable record of its origin.

⁴⁹ Cox believed the day was purely for rest and recreation. He writes, "As before observed, the sole purpose of the fourth commandment was the refreshment of labouring men and animals among the Jews and their proselytes. Cessation

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In his *Whole Doctrine* Cox compiled all the statements pertinent to Calvin's view on the Sabbath question from his *Commentaries*, *Institutes* and *Genevan Catechism*. Surely, it must have been of some embarrassment to Cox, after titling this book, *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin about the Sabbath*, to find (supposedly via Gilfillan's book⁵⁰) that he had made a serious omission in not including quotations from the Deuteronomy sermons. He tried to correct this oversight in his later book surveying the literature, but chose rather to complain that Gilfillan should have said the sermons were published after Calvin's death,⁵¹ than admit to the significance of the oversight.⁵²

Cox was decidedly partial in his reading of Calvin's statements in these sermons. In the appendix to volume one of his *Literature of the Sabbath Question*, he reproduces a

from work being in all cases indispensable for the end in view, while other means of refreshment could not be invariable, this cessation alone was prescribed; and the purpose of the institution having been clearly made known by the lawgiver, he left each Israelite to determine for himself how the day might be most suitably employed for the invigoration of the exhausted frame." *Sabbath Laws*, p. 420. Gilfillan closed out his survey of the Scottish Sabbath literature by referring to recent anti-Sabbatic writers. The "singular list of Scottish Anti-Sabbatic writers is closed with ... a voluminous publication [obviously referring to *Sabbath Laws*]... and *The Whole Doctrine*... by the already named Mr. Cox.

⁵⁰ "What a disciplinarian Calvin was, and how he laboured by unwearied preaching and writing to enlighten and reform the Genevese, while on him "came the care of all the churches," we need not say. But he has not received the credit due to him as a friend of the Sabbath. Partial extracts from his notices of the subject have been industriously circulated, while care has not been shown to set forth such passages as the following: 'It is for us to dedicate ourselves wholly to God, renouncing our feelings and all our affections; and then, since we have this external ordinance, to act as becomes us, that is, to lay aside our earthly affairs, so that we may be entirely free to meditate on the works of God' [Ser. 34, Deut 5] 'The Sabbath is the bark of a spiritual substance, the use of which is still in force, of denying ourselves, of renouncing all our own thoughts and affections, and of bidding farewell to one and all of our own employments, so that God may reign in us, then of employing ourselves in the worship of God.' ... And as he excludes secular labour, so also worldly recreations: 'If we employ the Lord's day to make good cheer, to sport ourselves, to go to games and pastimes, shall God in this be honoured? Is it not a mockery? Is not this an unhallowing of his name?'" Gilfillan, p. 408-409.

⁵¹ "Although Calvin's Sermons on Deuteronomy did not appear till 1567, three years after his death, and profess merely to have been "faithfully gathered word for word as he preached them in open pulpit," I see no reason to doubt the accuracy of the reporter, a French refugee named Dennis Ragueneau or Raguénier, who was employed by deacons of the church at Geneva to commit them to writing. The two sermons on the Fourth Commandment as given in Deut. 5:12-15, not only coincide perfectly in doctrine with Calvin's own writings, but are unmistakably Calvinian in their style and flavor. Nevertheless, Mr. Gilfillan ought to have mentioned that they were not published by the preacher himself, nor are included in the collective editions of his works."

⁵² *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, vol. 1., pp. 386-387. Not much time after this, a new standard collection of Calvin's works was begun which would eventually include the sermons. Much of Cox's statement here is merely an attempt to excuse himself from the omission in his previous book. He acknowledges the sermons are Calvin's, but then seems to imply they should have less standing, as they were not issued under Calvin's own hand. Since he recounts the employing of Raguénier, he must or should have known the level of importance attached to these sermons by Calvin's hearers. Calvin would certainly not have regarded his preaching as less important than his other productions. As Harold Dekker writes: "It is one of the anomalies of history that John Calvin has become best known as a systematic theologian in spite of the fact that he considered himself to be first of all a preacher. He believed that his sermons, not the Institutes, were his most important contribution. Although he did serve as a part-time lecturer in theology, this was for him always a secondary role. He looked upon himself primarily as a pastor." *Sermons on Job by John Calvin, selected and translated by Leroy Nixon*, Introductory Essay, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952)p. ix.

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“characteristic passage” from the 34th sermon (since the sermons were so rare). He quotes Calvin “. . . we must consider (as I said afore) how our Lord requires to have this day bestowed in nothing else but in hearing of his Word, in making common prayer, in making confession of our faith, and in having the use of the sacraments.” Cox not only refused to own the seriousness of his missing the sermons the first time around, he clearly was unwilling to grant the significance of these statements, particularly the phrase “in nothing else.” Indeed he is willing to overlook (evidently as *uncharacteristic*) the significant citation by Gilfillan which occurred a few pages earlier (see footnote 50), and apparently was unwilling to confront the implications it held for his view of Calvin.

A careful analysis and refutation of Cox’s work is way beyond the scope of this article. But more to the point at hand, it is significant to this survey that neither Cox nor Gilfillan mention the bowling anecdote. This may have been because they would not give cognizance to something so unsubstantiated.⁵³ Cox does chide those who ignorantly repeated another statement by Disraeli,⁵⁴ as he was strongly in disagreement with the idea that Knox was the father of the Puritan Sabbath, and he makes as much as Mathieson did of Knox’s supper party with Randolph.⁵⁵

While there is related literature that is of some interest to examine, the only other reference to directly link Calvin to lawn bowling on the Lord’s day prior to Disraeli, appears at the time of the Westminster Assembly. Except for one work noticed below, the entire 18th century is passed over.

3. The 17th Century – Searching for earlier references.

As was said previously, it appears the anecdote dates from an earlier time than it first appears in print in the English literature. The earliest *apparent* reference to the tale may be in the *Notes of Debates and Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster*, by George Gillespie.⁵⁶ Recorded there are Gillespie’s

⁵³ Cf. Cox’s statement regarding the myth that Calvin once had a consultation about changing Lord’s day observance from Sunday to Thursday. *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin*, p. iv. Cox, as determined as he is for Sabbath recreations, and for finding approval of them in the Reformers, does not recount the bowling tale in his three books on the subject. See *Literature of the Sabbath*, p. 127; *Sabbath Laws*, p. 124. It is not clear, whether this is from ignorance or from concern not to use something so lacking in documentation. The latter is likely.

⁵⁴ “I have already referred to the statement of D’Israeli, which has been ignorantly repeated by other English writers, that Knox was the father of the Sabbatarian doctrine. . .” *The Literature*, p. 469.

⁵⁵ *Sabbath Laws*, p. 124. *The Literature*, p. 466, 468. Cf. Gilfillan, p. 463-464.

⁵⁶ Works: Presbyterian’s Amoury. *Notes of Debates and Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster*, edited by David Meeks (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd: 1846), p. 102.

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notes of “Debates in the Sub-Committee Respecting the Directory” [of Worship]. Halfway under the notes for June 5, 1644, in a discussion of qualifications for admittance to the Lord’s Supper, Gillespie writes:

For qualification of those that are to be admitted [to the Lord’s Table], because there was nothing positively concerning their conversation, it was added, That they shall be of an approved conversation [i.e. *manner of life*].

Mr. Goodwin objected, Moral Christians have all that is here expressed, and that there ought [to be] somewhat more, which may be judged grace in the judgment of charity; and that he thinks the ordinance more profaned heretofore by persons than it hath been by all the superstitious; that a man is to be judged, according to his inward principle professed, rather than by any outward duty, else one should call in question whether Calvin were a godly man, because he played at the bowls on the Lord’s day; that the word gives us rules to judge, not only of ourselves, but of others.

He offered this clause, That they be such as profess a work of faith and regeneration.

I said, Many presumptuous sinners will profess this, and many weak believers will not profess it, and that it seems he hath no doubting Christians in his congregation.

Mr. Henderson offered this, That they be such as are conceived, in the judgment of charity, to be walking in the way of Christ.

Then he and Mr. Marshall offered thus, And who give just ground, in the judgment of charity, to conceive that there is wrought in them the work of faith and regeneration.

The particular discussion is not important to the scope of this article (the difference between the Independents and Presbyterians about basing church membership upon regeneration seemingly spilling over into this question on qualifications for coming to the Lord’s Table). As for the comment on Calvin, all that really can be said is that Goodwin may be building an argument upon the supposition that the story is true. But did he believe the tale to be true? Did he intend it as a real example or a fictitious one? Is this evidence of a strong oral tradition for the tale at this date? Who can say for sure? Unfortunately, Gillespie doesn’t make any comment on the tale, but sticks to briefly

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recording the main points in discussion. Note the tale does not include Knox, so it is not even clear if this is the same story. It may really be the case that Goodwin is making a sarcastic reference to the claims by Laud and others at the time, that they were merely following the alleged general practice of Geneva in allowing recreations on the Lord's day. It is a very interesting coincidence that on June 11th, a few days following this subcommittee meeting, Laud utters just such a justification in the session of his trial that took place on that day.⁵⁷

One may be tempted to posit that this could be the source for the tale. However, these minutes long remained in manuscript, and were not published until 1846, two hundred years after the fact. And this writer has found no reference to Goodwin's comment in what little in print there is of this controversy. As was said earlier, it appears to be the case, that aside from Goodwin's questionable reference, the tale did not enter into print until the 19th century via Disraeli. However, to try and verify this, other literature needs to be surveyed.

Sabbath Literature and Geography books

Pouring over every 17th century title would be like searching for a needle in a haystack, and would be a questionable use of one's time. However, limiting the search to two types of literature provided the best chance of uncovering any reference, or pertinent material related to this tale. This does not rule out the possibility the tale is repeated in other literature, but silence in these two groupings would be rather significant. The two types of literature are: 1. Books regarding the Sabbath. 2. Geographies of the period that discuss Geneva.

1. The Sabbath controversy exploded into the English literature in the late 16th century with the publication of Nicholas Bownd's works.⁵⁸ It is true the "Puritan" view had earlier proponents,⁵⁹ but Bownd's book proved to be the landmark work, and most

⁵⁷ Laud is following his defender Heylyn (who is examined later in this article), who first uttered this defense in his anti-Sabbath productions of the 1630s. It cannot be ruled out that Goodwin may simply be making the same kind of unjustified extrapolation from the general practice of Geneva that later men have made, perhaps being unfamiliar with Calvin's Sermons on Deuteronomy. However, this seems unlikely, as the appeal to the general practice of Geneva, as well as Calvin's sermons, were well known even before the time of the Westminster Assembly. Heylyn's comments were certainly known, as he appears to have been the main anti-Sabbatarian author to answer once the publishing ban was lifted.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Bownd, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath, plainly layde forth and soundly proved* (1595). Bownd published a second edition, *Sabbathum Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (London, 1606), "now by him a second time perused, and enlarged...".

⁵⁹ With a few exceptions such as Hooper, writings on the fourth commandment prior to 1583 were generally ambiguous, looking at them from a strictly Puritan perspective. Gilfillan traces the English literature back to expressions

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historians pinpoint the beginning of the “Sabbath controversies” in England with him. A minute and exhaustive review of the Puritan Sabbath literature would expand the length and work required for this article beyond reason. As it is, none of the major early works in favor of the Sabbath mention the bowling anecdote.⁶⁰ Additionally, it is not mentioned in any of the Sabbatarian books following the lifting of the press ban that began with the reissue of the *Books of Sports*.⁶¹ However, lest a Sabbatarian book was missed here or

that in seed form at least, forecast what was to develop into the Puritan view in the later part of the 16th century. *The Sabbath Viewed in the Light of Reason, Revelation, and History, with Sketches of its Literature* (New York: American Tract Society & New York Sabbath Committee, c. 1862). The Sketches were reprinted in *Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*, volume 5 (Naphtali Press, 1992), pp. 209 ff. Anti-Sabbath and Sabbath writers seem to both agree that Gervase Babington (1551-1610) is the first clearly unambiguous writer to express what became the “Puritan” view. *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1583). However, remarking on this earlier ambiguity, Dennison, echoing Gilfillan, writes “Yet, I ask, how did it happen that in 1583, Gervase Babington penned a statement on the fourth commandment which could have passed for a summary of Nicolas Bownd. In my opinion, the answer is contained in the underground development of Puritanism via prophesyings, lecturings and the universities. One must not neglect to weigh the almost certain effect of the biblical discussions in these Puritan gatherings – gatherings which undoubtedly touched on the Sabbath discussion. . . . Consider the fact that the following men, all of whom later expressed sentiments of a Puritan nature upon the fourth commandment, at one time attended Cambridge University – the ‘nursery’ of Puritanism: John Knewstubb, Edward Dering, William Perkins, Richard Stubbes, Gervase Babington, William Fulke, Andrew Willet.” *Market Day of the Soul*, p. 15-16.

⁶⁰ Nicolas Bownd, *ibid.* George Estey, *Certain and learned Expositions upon divers parts of Scripture* (London, 1603), which includes the earlier, *A Most Sweet and comfortable exposition upon the ten commandments* (London, 1602). John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1603, 19th edition, 1635). William Greenham, *Treatise of the Sabbath*, in *Works* (London, 1604); George Widley, *Doctrine of the Sabbath, handled in Four Severall Bookes or Treatises* (London, 1604); John Sprint, *Propositions tending to prove the necessary Use of the Christian Sabbath, or Lord’s Day* (London, 1607); Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis* (1608). Lewes Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*, third edition (1613). Lewes Thomas, *A Short Treatise upon the Commandments, in seven sermons or exercises of seven sabbaths* (London, 1615). Edward Elton, *An exposition of the ten commandments of God* (London, 1623), an update of *A plain and easy exposition of six of the commandments* (1619).

⁶¹ Hamon L’Estrange, *God’s Sabbath before, under the law and under the Gospel* (Cambridge, 1641). George Hakewill, *A short but cleare discovrse of the institution, dignity, and end of the Lords-day* (London, 1641). Richard Bernard, *A threefold treatise of the Sabbath* (London, 1641). William Twisse, *The Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641). William Gouge, *The sabbaths sanctification* (London, 1641). John Ley, *Sunday a Sabbath* (London, 1641). George Abbot, *Vindiciae sabbathi*, or, *An answer to two treatises of Master Broads* (London, 1641). John Lawson, *For the Sabbath* (London, 1644). Daniel Cawdrey, Herbert Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum: or the Christian Sabbath Vindicated in a full discourse concerning the Sabbath, and the Lord’s Day. Four Parts* (1645, 1652, 1652, 1652). John White, *A way to the tree of life . . . A digression, the morality and perpetuity of the Fourth Commandment* (London, 1647). Giles Collier, *Vindiciae thesium de Sabbato*, or, *A vindication of certain passages in a sermon . . . unjustly subjected by Edward Fisher* (London, 1653). William Prynne, *The works of William Prynne. . . a polemical desertation, of the inchoation and determination of the Lord’s day Sabbath* (London, 1655). Thomas Shepard, *Theses Sabbaticae*, or, *The doctrine of the Sabbath* (London, 1655). Thomas Chafie, *The seventh-day Sabbath* (London, 1657). James Ussher, *The judgment of the late Archbishop of Amagh . . . Of the Sabbath, and observation of the Lords day* (London, 1658). John Wells, *The practical Sabbatarian* (London, 1668). Richard Baxter, *The divine appointment of the Lords day* (London, 1671). John Owen, *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest* (London 2nd edition, 1671). This is part of Owens commentary on Hebrews. Thomas Young, *Dies dominica. The Lords-day . . .* (London, 1672). A Latin version was published anonymously in 1639. Nathanael Homes, *An essay concerning the Sabbath* (London, 1673). John Wallis, *A defense of the Christian Sabbath, part one* (Oxford, 1692). Benjamin Keach, *The Jewish Sabbath abrogated, or, The Saturday Sabbatarians confuted* (London, 1700).

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there, it is not as critical to search every one of these, as the likelihood of the tale being mentioned is greater in the anti-Sabbath literature. Of particular interest among the anti-Sabbatarian works are those published between 1633 and 1640, as they ostensibly are a defense of the *Second Book of Sports*. Significantly, none of the anti-Sabbatarian books printed between 1605 and 1667, mention the tale, including this important group.⁶²

Generally the focus of the Sabbath controversy in the latter half of the 17th century shifted away from the strictness of observance, to the day of observance. With the Saturday Sabbath writers coming more into prominence, the likelihood of the tale receiving notice diminishes.⁶³

Peter Heylyn and the Practice of Geneva

2. While the bowling tale is not mentioned in any of the works surveyed, one author defended Sabbath recreations by appealing to the general practice of Geneva. Peter Heylyn, a defender of the Book of Sports, does this in his preface to Prideaux's *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, and in his own work, *History of the Sabbath*. He also repeats it in his two geography books, and in his *History of the Presbyterians*.⁶⁴ In the preface to Prideaux he says:

Even in Geneva itself, according as it is related in the enlargement of Boterus by Robert Johnson, All honest exercises, shooting in pieces, long bows, crossbows, etc. are used on the Sabbath day and that both in the

⁶² Robertus Loeus, *Effigatio Veri Sabbathisimi* (1605). Thomas Rogers, "Preface" to *Catholic Doctrine of the Church* (1607, 1625). The Declaration for Sports on the Lord's Day (1618). Thomas Broad, *Three Questions on the Fourth Commandment* (1621). John Prideaux, *The doctrine of the Sabbath: Delivered in the act at Oxon, anno, 1622. Now translated into English for the benefit of the common people* [by Peter Heylyn] (London, 1622). Edward Breewood, *A learned treatise of the Sabbath ... written to Mr. Nicholas Byfield.. with Mr. Byfields answere and Mr. Breewoods reply.* (Oxford, 1630). Edward Breewood, *Treatise on the Sabbath* (1632). Second Declaration of Sports (1633). Peter Heylyn, *History of the Sabbath* (1635). Francis White, *Treatise of the Sabbath* (1635). John Pocklington, *Sunday no Sabbath* (1635). Robert Sanderson, *A Sovereign Antidote Against Sabbatarian Errors* (1636). David Primerose, *A Treatise of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day* (1636). Christopher Dow, *A Discourse of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day* (1636). Gilbert Ironside, *Seven Questions of the Sabbath* (1637). Peter Heylyn, *Brief and Moderate Answer ... of Henry Burton* (1637). Edward Fisher, *A Christian caveat to the old and new sabbatarians* (London, 1652). Thomas Grantham, *The seventh day Sabbath ceased as ceremonial* (London, 1667).

⁶³ For a general survey of the Sabbath and anti-Sabbath literature of the 17th century, see the books by Cox and Gillfillan previously mentioned. Also see Dennison's *Market Day of the Soul*. Dennison remarks (p. 119) "From mid-century, the Puritan treatises are, in the main, directed to their antagonists on the right, i.e. the Seventh-day Sabbatarians."

⁶⁴ Aeriis redivivus, or, *The History of the Presbyterians...* (Oxford, 1670).

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morning before and after sermon: neither do ministers find fault therewith, so that they hinder not from hearing of the word at the time appointed.⁶⁵

The source of Heylyn's comment about crossbows and shooting on the Lord's day is from a geography of the late 16th century by Giovanni Botero (translated by Robert Johnson, who added material, including that covering Geneva). The comment by Johnson is:⁶⁶

The town is very well peopled, especially with women; insomuch as they commonly say, that there are three women for one man, yielding this for a reason, that the wars have consumed their men, they reckon some 16,000 of all sorts. . . .

All honest exercises, as shooting pieces, crossbows, longbows, etc. are used on the Sabbath day, and that in the morning both before and after the sermon, neither do the ministers find any fault therewith, so that they hinder not from hearing the word at the appointed time.

Other geographies of the time do not mention this, but do point out, as does Johnson, the constant danger Geneva faced from her enemies.⁶⁷ Geneva survived some serious attacks, the most famous of which occurred in 1602. An attack that began on Saturday night and Sunday morning was successfully turned back, and the captured enemy were executed that Sunday afternoon. Geneva still celebrates this victory, the Escalade, as a major holiday. Duval in his geography remarks that "Geneva is the best fortified city of all [those in the area], keeping a very exact guard for the preservation of their liberty and that of religion which is reformed."⁶⁸ Clarke relates that the citizens of Geneva successfully repulsed an attack by quickly getting to their arms, and remarks,

⁶⁵ John Prideaux, *The doctrine of the Sabbath: Delivered in the act at Oxon, anno, 1622. Now translated into English for the benefit of the common people [by Peter Heylyn]* (London, 1622). Translator's preface, page 10-11 (unnumbered).

⁶⁶ *An historicall description of the most famous kingdomes and common-weales in the worlde : Relating their scituations, manners, customes, ciuill gouernment, and other memorable matters. / Translated into English and enlarged, with addition of the relation of the states of Saxony, Geneua, Hungary and Spaine; in no language euer before imprinted* (London, 1601; 2nd Edition, 1603). Translated by Robert Johnson from Giovanni Botero's *Le relationi universali* (first published in Rome, 1591), pp. 88-89.

⁶⁷ George Abbot, *A brief description of the whole world* (London, 1642). Samuel Clarke, *A geographical description of all the countries in the known world* (London, 1671). Pierre Duval, *Geographia universalis, The present state of the whole world* (London, 1685). George Meriton, *A geographical description of the world* (London, 1679). Meriton seems to have relied on Johnson, but does not make mention of the Lord's day practices in Geneva.

⁶⁸ Duval, *ibid*, p 273.

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and “this hot Camiscado hath made them of Geneva stay better upon their guard ever since.”⁶⁹

As indicated above, Peter Heylyn also authored two geographies, where he again repeated the claim by Johnson.⁷⁰ He writes: “They allow in this city all manner of honest recreations upon Sundays.”⁷¹ “In respect hereof though the ministers are very strict in forbidding dancing, and have writ many tracts against it; yet to give some content to the common people (who have not leisure to attend it at other times) they allow all manlike exercises on the Lord’s day, as shooting in pieces, long bows, crossbows, and the like, and that too in the morning both before and after sermon; so it be no impediment to them from coming to the church at the times appointed.”⁷²

Much like Disraeli, Heylyn wears his bias openly, and the characterization in his geography of the discipline and practice of Geneva is outrageous.⁷³ The Archbishop of Armaugh, James Ussher no less, had this heavy criticism of his geography.⁷⁴

... but that either that the Articles of Ireland were ever called in, or any articles or canons at all were ever here confirmed by Act of Parliament may well be reckoned among Dr. Hylin’s fancies which show what little credit he deserves in his Geography, when he brings us news of the remote parts of the world, that tells us so many untruths of things so lately, and so publicly acted in his neighbor nation.

⁶⁹ Clarke, *ibid.*, p. 210

⁷⁰ Microcosmus. *Cosmographie in four books* (London, 1657). *Microcosmos*, a little description of the great world (Oxford, 1631).

⁷¹ Heylyn, *A little description of the great world*, p. 134.

⁷² Heylyn, *Cosmographie in four bookes*, p. 140.

⁷³ “And so we have the true beginning of the Genevian discipline, begotten in Rebellion, bom in sedition, and nursed up by faction. ... Being bom into the world by the means aforesaid, some other helps it had to make it acceptable and approved of in other churches. As first, the great content it gave to the *common people*, to see themselves intrusted with the weightiest matters in religion, and thereby an *equality* with, if not (by reason of their number, being two for one) a *superiority* above their ministers. Next, the *great reputation* which Calvin for his diligence in writing and preaching had attained unto, made all his *dictates* as authentic amongst some divines, as ever the Pope’s *ipsi dedit* in the church of Rome. Whereby it came to pass, in a little time that only those churches which embraced the doctrines and discipline authorized by Calvin were called the Reformed churches.” *Cosmographie*, p. 139. After complaining that what Calvin recommended for polity, Beza made necessary upon all churches, he writes: “By means whereof their followers in most of the Reformed churches drove on so furiously, that rather than their discipline should not be admitted, and the Episcopal Government destroyed in all the churches of Christ, they were resolved to depose kings, ruin kingdoms, and to subvert the fundamental constitutions of all civil states.” *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷⁴ James Ussher, *The judgment of the late Archbishop of Armagh* (London, 1658).

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Much later, Andrew Le Mercier, pastor of the French church in Boston in his account of Geneva, writes regarding Heylyn:⁷⁵

I do not wonder at all that popish writers, when they treat of Geneva, are very partial and invent a multitude of falsehoods and absurdities; because they hate its religion . . . On the other hand I cannot but wonder that some Protestant English writers have writ with so much passion, ignorance and partiality against the church and the place, when in their geographie books they have mentioned it, as when a certain author, dead long ago, saith, that the people expelled the Bishop: and gives to understand, that they are hypocrites, when he says that their discipline is the fruit of faction . . .

Le Mercier wrote in 1732, and according to his preface, relied on Spon's geography.⁷⁶ But he had also been to Geneva earlier in his life. He does not mention the bowling anecdote, but affirms: "I have been more particular in this description because I think that it is a shame not to know the whole of a small thing; and that it may please some persons who can never find such circumstances in other books. I must add, that the peasants are trained upon the Sabbath day, which I leave the Reader to judge whether it be a laudable practice."⁷⁷

Heylyn Answered

Heylyn drew the attention of many of the Puritan authors who chose to write on the Sabbath after the freedom of the press was restored. In answer to his appeal to the practice of Geneva for Lord's day recreation, it was objected that it was very unseemly to plead the example of Geneva when they themselves saw the evil of such, since at the Synod of Dort such recreations were condemned.⁷⁸ Twisse believed Heylyn drew an

⁷⁵ Andrew Le Mercier, *The church history of Geneva, in five books. As also a political and geographical account of that republick* (Boston, 1732). Geographical Account, p. iv.

⁷⁶ Jacob Spon, *The history of the city and state of Geneva* (London, 1687). As far as a quick perusal allowed, Spon does not mention the training practices of Geneva. This would seem to be a personal account by LeMercier.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁸ Dort had taken some steps to correct abuses. "The delegates from Zealand raised the question by asking advice on the theology of the Sabbath. As a result of this request, the Synod issued what are sometimes known as the six points of Dort. These six points were issued by Dort as a provisional statement, but they remain the foundational position of Dutch Calvinism." "Basically Dort taught that Sunday has replaced Saturday as the day 'solemnly hallowed by Christians,' and that Sunday 'must be so consecrated to worship that on that day we rest from all servile works, except those which charity and present necessity require; and also from all such recreations as interfere with worship.'" W. Robert Godfrey, "No Time for Nostalgia," *The Outlook*, July/Aug. 1990. Cawdrey wrote: "And now for the Calvinian Churches, we think it very unreasonable that their practice should be produced against us, which cannot but be condemned by them that bring it. For first, whereas they have no public service in the afternoon in some places (which is false of Geneva, as we are credible informed) but leave it at large to labor or pleasure, we ask, do they do well in so doing?"

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unwarranted implication from the list of activities reported by Johnson,⁷⁹ and thought the activities mentioned were no more than might be pleaded as necessary for the defense of a city that was in constant peril.⁸⁰ The report that Twisse had was that only the youth practiced shooting in the evening, and no more.

Twisse's report brings out the partisan nature in the accounts regarding the practice of Geneva. A difficulty for the prelates, who depended upon Heylyn's account from Johnson, is that it is obvious that Geneva's practice did not remain static. The practice of the city apparently changed greatly between the time of Johnson's report, through the early 17th century via Dort, to the time of Twisse around 1640.

In addition to these faults found in Heylyn, the Puritans also appealed to Calvin's views in response to the alleged practice of Geneva. Twisse found it difficult to believe Heylyn's report, writing:

And I have cause to come but slowly to the believing hereof, because it is Calvin's doctrine concerning the Sabbath, that albeit under the gospel we are not bound to so rigorous a rest as the Jews were, yet that still we are obliged to abstain from all other works, as they are *Avocamenta à sacris studiis & meditationibus*, Avocations from holy studies and meditations; and their ministers, I should think do not well if they fail to mind them hereof, unless both they and the people are fallen from Calvin's doctrine in this point, in which case I see no just cause why any should choke us therewith, but give us as much liberty to dissent from him in the doctrine of the Sabbath, as they of Geneva take unto themselves.⁸¹

Did not themselves see the error, when at the last Synod at Dort, they set up Catechism, Lectures in the afternoon; and resolved to implore the civil magistrate, that they would restrain all servile work, games, drinking matches, and other profanations of the Sabbath?' *Sabbatum Redivivum*, part 3, p. 652-653.

⁷⁹ "And as for the exercises here mentioned, I find them to fall wondrously short, of that which the author avouches, as namely, that they esteem the Sabbath to lie open to *all honest exercises and lawful recreations*; for I make no question but in this Prefacer's opinion there are far more exercises and lawful recreations than that of shooting which alone is here mentioned. . ." Twisse, *Morality of the Fourth Commandment*, p. 147.

⁸⁰ "Neither do I find that the exercises here mentioned are so much accommodated to the refreshing of the mind and quickening of the spirit; as to make their bodies active and expedite in some functions which may be for the service of the commonwealth. And lately upon inquiry hereabout I have received information, that at Geneva, after evening prayer, only the youth do practice shooting in guns to make them more ready, and expert for the defense of the city, which is never out of danger." Ibid.

⁸¹ Twisse, Ibid, 147-148.

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George Hakewill,⁸² explicitly brings Calvin's Deuteronomy sermons into the argument against recreations on the Lord's day:

Some reformed Churches in other parts may perchance give way to the use of them on the Lord's day, which in them is somewhat the more excusable, because they have none other holy days, though for my own part I think it better if they had, yet that the very same Pastors of those churches who admitted or connived at the use of such manlike exercises, as severely cried down effeminate sports on that day, let one speak for all: "If we employ the Sunday," says Calvin, "to make good cheer, to sport ourselves, to go to games and pastimes, shall God in this be honored, is it not a mockery? Is this an unhallowing of his Name?" [In Deut. 5, Sermon 34].⁸³

Richard Baxter

Of all the Puritan authors answering Heylyn, Richard Baxter appears to assume the most fault to Calvin for supposedly allowing others to do more on the Lord's day than he should have. However, he provides no references to any statements by Calvin to substantiate this,⁸⁴ and more to the point, there seems an implicit denial that Calvin himself had a more lax observance of the Lord's day:

Obj: But by all this you seem to cast a great reproach on Calvin, Beza, and most of the great divines of the foreign churches, who have not been so strict for the observation of the Lord's day.

⁸² Hakewill is a more moderate Puritan when it comes to holy days. But he argues very strongly against labor and recreation on the Lord's day. "... That unlawful recreations may not be used on that day, no Christian, I think, will deny, since they may not be used on any days; so as all the doubt is touching lawful recreations, whereof some also there are, which I think no man will affirm to be lawfully used on the Lord's day, as hawking, hunting, and the like, which are not unlawful in themselves, but unlawful on that day because it is the Lord's day. And so other recreations; if bodily labor, which on other days is not only lawful, but necessary, be forbidden because it is the Lord's day, methinks by the same reason, even lawful recreations should be forbidden on the same day, as tending no less to the violating of that day than bodily labor. If on that day I may not sow or not reap, nor carry my corn, no, not in the most uncertain and catching weather, though it carries a fair show of keeping those precious fruits of the earth from spoiling which God of his goodness has sent me, shall I presume to use those recreations on that day, which commonly end in the abuse of those good blessings? Manlike exercises are, doubtless, very requisite, but considering the number of other holy days in our church (under favor spoken) I see no necessity of putting them in practice on the Lord's day, nor of ranking the Lord's day, with other holy days." George Hakewill, *A short but cleare discovrse of the institution, dignity, and end of the Lords-day* (London, 1641), p. 28-29.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 29.

⁸⁴ Richard Baxter, *The divine appointment of the Lord's day* (London, 1671), pp. 127-128.

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Answ. Let these things be observed by the impartial reader. 1. It cannot be proved to be most of them, that were so faulty herein as the objection intimates. Many of them have written much for the holy spending of the day. 2. It must be noted, that it is a superstitious ceremonious sabbatizing which many of them write against, who seem to the unobservant to mean more. 3. And you must remember that they come newly out of Popery, and had seen the Lord's day and a superabundance of other human holy days imposed on the church to be ceremoniously observed, and they did not all of them so clearly as they ought discern the difference between the Lord's day and those holy days or church festivals; and so did too promiscuously conjoin them in their reproofs of the burdens imposed on the church. And it being the Papists' ceremoniousness and their multitude of festivals that stood all together in their eye, it tempted them to too undistinguishing and inaccurate a reformation. 4. And for Calvin you must know that he spent every day so like to a Lord's day, in hard study, and Prayer, and numerous writings, and public preachings, or lecturings and disputings, either every day of the week, or very near it, scarce allowing himself time for his one only spare meal a day, that he might the easilier be tempted to make less difference in his judgment between the Lord's day and other days, than he should have done, and to plead for more recreation on that day for others, than he took any day himself.

Lacking any firm evidence to the contrary, it appears Baxter was being more apologetic for Calvin than was called for, and perhaps not opposing Heylyn as firmly as he should have on this point. It may be Baxter was extrapolating from Calvin's behavior in general.⁸⁵ Or this simply may be another point at which Baxter used poorer judgment than he ought to have in this work.⁸⁶

The Practice of Bowling

But what about bowling? Two incidents explicitly tie the recreation of lawn bowling to the practice of Geneva; one from the 17th century and one from the late 16th century.

⁸⁵ Doumerguer, vol. 3, pp. 539-540. "During his stay in Strasbourg, at the time of a sort of students' revolt, without wishing to sacrifice the rights of discipline, he says, 'Truly, I see, one must have some indulgence for human folly, and must not push rigor (rigidity) to the point of no longer allowing them here and there the right to make some mistakes.' Will we say, he spoke thus in 1539? Here then in 1546. It has to do with theater and representations which some pastors violently oppose. Spirits are very over excited. Calvin, personally, would be for tolerance (see below). But he does not separate from his colleagues, and asks that there be not an approbation of pastors. Nevertheless, he is not opposed to the Council using leniency: 'for, he says, one cannot refuse all diversions to the people.'" Translated from the French by Michael Dolberry.

⁸⁶ Gilfillan, p. 145. "If in the few pages, where he [Baxter] argues against the formal obligation on Christians of the law of Eden and Sinai, he becomes weak as other men, and exposes himself to defeat, as well as impairs the authority and practical rule of the institution. . ."

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Two famous prelates offered this excuse when they were charged with immorality for playing at bowls on the Lord's day: 'It was a common practice in Geneva.'

John Laud

The subject of bowls on the Lord's day and of Calvin's view of Sabbath recreations came up during the trial of John Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury. In the session of his trial that took place on June 11, 1644, Laud defends himself, and claims to have had a strict observance of the Lord's day, though he also defended the recreations as authorized by the *Second Book of Sports* from the practice of Geneva.⁸⁷ The Commons replied that his practice was not very strict, that the Book authorized even unlawful pastimes, and appealed to Calvin against the alleged practice of Geneva.⁸⁸ Prynne more fully brings this out both in his report of Laud's defense,⁸⁹ and of the Commons reply:

Moreover, some of the recreations mentioned in it [the book of Sports] are not very lawful upon any day, though the Archbishop affirms the contrary; but certainly unlawful on any part of the Lord's day, even after evening Prayer, as fathers, councils, Imperial laws, and both Protestant and Popish writers have

⁸⁷ Henry Wharton, *The history of the troubles and tryal of the Most Reverend Father in God and blessed martyr, William Laud* (London, 1695-1700), p. 343-344. "And for the day, I ever labored it might be kept holy, but yet free from a superstitious holiness. But first, there is no proof offered for this, Secondly, 'tis impossible: for till the afternoon service and sermon were done; no recreation is allowed by that book; nor than to any but such as have been at both. Therefore it could not be done to take it away. Thirdly, the book names none but lawful recreations. Therefore if unlawful be used, the book gives them no warrant. And that some are lawful after the public service of God is ended appears by the practice of Geneva, where after evening prayer, the elder men bowl, and the younger train."

⁸⁸ Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (London, 1837), vol. 2, pp. 313-314. "The commons replied, that it was evident, by the archbishop's letter to the bishop of Bath and Wells, that the declaration was printed by his procurement, the warrant for printing it being written all with his own hand, and without date, and therefore might probably be obtained afterward; moreover, some of the recreations mentioned in it are unlawful on the Lord's day, according to the opinion of fathers, councils, and imperial laws; and though Calvin differs from our Protestant writers about the morality of the sabbath, yet he expressly condemns dancing and pastimes on that day. As for his grace's own strict observation of the Lord's day, it is an avowment without truth, for he sat constantly at the council-table on that day; and it was his ordinary practice to go to bowls in the summer-time, and use other recreations upon it. . ."

⁸⁹ William Prynne, *Canterburies doom, or, the first part of a compleat history of the commitment, charge, tryall, condemnation, execution of William Laud, late Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1646), p. 504-505. "In Geneva itself (as I have been credibly informed by travelers) they use shooting in pieces, longbows, crossbows, muskets, and throwing of bowls too, on the Lord's day, as well as before as after sermons ended, and allow all honest recreations without reproof of their ministers; yea, Mr. Calvin the great professor there, Inst. l. 2. c. 8. sect. 34, blames those "who infected the people in former ages with a judaical opinion, that the morality of the fourth commandment, to wit, the keeping of one day in seven did still continue: which what else is it then in dishonor of the Jews to change the day, and to affix as great a sanctity to it, as the Jews ever did. And that those who adhered to their constitution who broached this doctrine, Crassa camalique superstitione Judeoster superant: men may be too strict as well as profane therein, yet I for my part have ever strictly observed the Lord's day in point of practice."

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resolved.⁹⁰ The pretended practice of Geneva which he alleges, is but a hearsay without proof, borrowed from Peter Heylyn's profane History of the (he should have said NO) Sabbath (part 2, c. 6, sect. 6, 8, 9), who yet informs us (sect. 9) that "Dancing hath been condemned by French synods and writers" (as well Protestant as Popish) which yet the Declaration for sports *in terminis* allows of on the Lord's day, contrary to the practice and judgment of Geneva. As for Mr. Calvin himself, though he differs in some particulars touching the morality of the fourth commandment from other of our divines, yet he in express words condemns dancing and pastimes on the Lord's day, not deeming it a Jewish superstition or rigidity to prohibit such sports thereon, especially dancing, as his 71 sermon upon Job proclaims to all the world, and other Geneva ministers since him, have done the like. . . .⁹¹

Laud added bowling to the list of items Heylyn reported; a report Prynne believed to be hearsay. Which party was the most correct as to the actual practice of Geneva is difficult to say for sure, though the veracity of Heylyn and Laud is more suspect. However, even if Laud's claim were true, it would not say anything directly to Calvin's view, which Prynne clearly adduced in answer to the appeal to Geneva's practice. The most that could be said is that Calvin may have had good reason to exhort to a stricter observance of the day, assuming Geneva's practice had remained the same from Calvin's day to the time of Laud (which seems doubtful).

4. The 16th Century – Alymer bowls and Knox visits Geneva.

John Alymer

The other prelate to offer Geneva as an excuse for lawn bowling on the Lord's day was John Alymer, bishop of London (1521-1594). Alymer was promoted to archdeacon of Stow but retired to Zurich under Mary's persecution. He thus was a contemporary of Calvin and the other Marian exiles like Knox. He wrote a "refutation" against the latter's *First Blast of the Trumpet*.⁹² He is highly eulogized by the

⁹⁰ A side note refers to *Sunday a Sabbath* by Ley, and Prynne's own *Histriomastix*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 506

⁹² John Alymer, *A Harbor for Faithful Subjects* (Strasburg, 1559). To the great embarrassment of Alymer, the Martin Marprelate tracts brought this work to the public eye again in 1589. "Alymer's defense of the 'regiment of women' was not of the sort to win favor with Elizabeth. His denunciation of the avarice and corruption of bishops, however, was so outspoken that on that account alone his preferment in Elizabeth's establishment was blocked for many

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Episcopalian side. After becoming Bishop of London, he persecuted Puritans as severely as he punished Romanists, and became a target of pamphlets by the infamous Martin Marprelate, which charged him with immorality and misconduct. Strype has recorded his answer to two of these charges:

They charged him further, that he was a defender of the breach of the Sabbath, and that he used to play at bowls on those days. And that he was a swearer, because he used to say sometimes, 'By my faith.' As to these last imputations, the Bishop thus either justified or excused himself: that he never withdrew himself from service or sermon on the Lord's Days. That Christ, the best expositor of the Sabbath, said, that 'the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.' That man might have his meat dressed for his health upon the Sabbath; and why might he not have some convenient exercise of his body for the health thereof on that day? Indeed it was the general custom in those days, both at Geneva, and in other places where Protestants inhabited, after the service of the Lord's day was over, to refresh themselves with bowling, walking abroad, or other innocent recreations. And the Bishop followed that which in his travels abroad he had seen ordinarily practiced among them.⁹³

Assuming that he is stating the truth, Aylmer does not claim that Calvin bowled on the Lord's day, but that many did. This is the significance of the statements of Aylmer and Laud. Neither appealed in a *coup de grâce* to Calvin's practice, when they already clearly were willing to appeal to the example of men in general. No doubt if the story were known in either's time, they would have used it in their defense. In particular, the whole silence of the Laudian anti-Sabbatarian party on this tale indicates they were not aware of it. Or if they were aware of it, they put no credence in it. If so, as ruthless and

years. He reached at least the Metropolitan see, and became one of the most money-loving ecclesiastics of his age. We can therefore easily comprehend his wrath against Marprelate for giving fresh and wide currency to the fierce reforming views which he entertained in the days of his poverty and exile." William Pierce, *The Marprelate tracts, 1588, 1589, edited with notes historical and explanatory* (James Clarke, 1911). Aylmer's bowling on the Sabbath figures prominently in the Marprelate tracts. In his reply to Marprelate, Thomas Cooper (T.C.) writes: "As for your jesting at the Bishop for bowling upon the Sabbath, you must understand that the best expositor of the Sabbath, which is Christ, has said, that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: and man may have his meat dressed for his health upon the Sabbath, and why may he not then have some convenient exercise of the body, for the health of the body?" (*An Admonition to the People of England*, 1589), p. 57. **No mention is made of Calvin.**

⁹³ John Strype, *Life of Bishop Aylmer* (Oxford, 1821), pp. 141-142. Lest it need pointing out, the parallel Aylmer/Cooper draw between proper fixing of food for health on the Sabbath, and exercise to fit one for the Sabbath is a false one. For instance, it may be true that a brief walk between services will help fit someone for the next service. However, playing a game or strenuous exercise, as both Calvin and the Puritans would stress, distract us from the proper activities of the Lord's day.

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underhanded as they were, what does that say of later authors who have used the tale uncritically in their writings against Sabbatarianism?

Knox in Geneva and Calvin's 34th Deuteronomy Sermon

But *could* the event have occurred as alleged? The key facts to contend with in the story are the act, the participants, and the time. For the participants, it is a matter of historical record that Knox and Calvin knew each other. For the time, they could have visited each other on many occasions, as Knox was in Geneva for extended stays more than once.

Knox first visited Geneva, August to October 1554. He went to the Frankfort pastorate and arrived there by the second week of November 1554. When the troubles in Frankfort got out of hand, he was forced to leave there and was back in Geneva between April and August 1555. He returned again in September, at which time he stayed two years before leaving for good for Scotland and the Reformation there.⁹⁴ So Knox easily could have visited Calvin on many Lord's days. Finding him engaged in the act of bowls on a Lord's day is the questionable part of the tale.

Bowls was a popular sport at the time, and it was not unheard of that Calvin would indulge in some small recreation on occasion, though only briefly and then at the behest of friends as said.⁹⁵ Other than the tale itself, no material surveyed for this article indicated that Calvin engaged in bowls for recreation. However, it is a skill game like quots, which he did play.

But, not only do the admonitions in Calvin's 34th sermon from Deuteronomy cast grave doubt on the truth of this tale, the time *when* he preached that sermon raises difficulties as well. It is certainly interesting to say the least that Calvin preached this sermon on June 20, 1555, in the middle of the time frame during which the incident could have taken place.

Pinpointing the tale after the preaching of that sermon is certainly problematic as there is zero evidence that Calvin softened or retracted his views as stated on that date. The *Harmony of the four last books of Moses*, was the labor of the last year of his life (1563), and there is nothing therein that appears contradictory of the earlier statement in the Deuteronomy sermon. While he doesn't make the same detailed application, the

⁹⁴ P. Hume Brown, *John Knox* (London, 1895, vol. 1, pp. 151-211).

⁹⁵ Williston Walker, *John Calvin, the Organizer of Reformed Protestantism, 1509-64* (New York, 1906), pp. 433, 434. "Sometimes, chiefly when urged by his friends, he would play a simple game, quots, in his garden, or "clef" on the table in his living room. . . . But his few recreations were briefly enjoyed."

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principle is still expressed: “On this ground He did not merely wish that people should rest at home, but that they should meet in the sanctuary, there to engage themselves in prayer and sacrifices, and to make progress in religious knowledge through the interpretation of the Law. In this respect we have equal necessity for the Sabbath with the ancient people, so that on one day we may be free, and thus better prepared to learn and to testify our faith.”⁹⁶

What about the supposition the bowling incident may have occurred before the Deuteronomy sermon? In this case it would simply show Calvin adopting a stricter practice and there is no appearance of hypocrisy. Maybe Calvin repented upon an admonition from Knox, as unappealing to some like Robert Cox as that thought might be? However, there is no clear evidence that Calvin’s statements in his Deuteronomy sermons are a progression over earlier views. There is nothing in the earlier writings that would seem any more incompatible with his strict observance of the day, than in his later writings.⁹⁷

Conclusion

In bringing this winding trail through the pertinent literature to a close, the question must be asked, is the story true or is this “strong oral tradition” merely a very old lie? Obviously the negative cannot be proved, that Calvin *did not* bowl on Sundays. The story *could* be true. Perhaps the story has some root in fact but is all out of proportion to what really occurred. Perhaps Calvin was simply careless one Lord’s day. Perhaps at the importunity of friends, he allowed himself to take part in an activity he would normally condemn. Many things are conceivably *possible*. But lacking any explicit verification, it really seems very unlikely that it *did* occur. Need it be said that in all justice the *accusation* must be proved that Calvin *did* bowl on the Sabbath? Or is Calvin guilty until proven innocent?

The origin of the tale may well rest in an unwarranted assumption that because many in Geneva may have recreated and even bowled on the Lord’s day, that Calvin himself did likewise. However, as has been demonstrated, Calvin’s opinion is clearly incompatible with such an assumption. The truth of the tale is very doubtful. It is not mentioned in any of the Sabbatarian literature surveyed from 1583 till the year 1824 when Disraeli issued it forth, and his statement that this tale was a tradition might indicate

⁹⁶ John Calvin, *Harmony of the four last books of Moses* (Calvin Translation Society edition), vol. 2, p. 437

⁹⁷ See the various studies of Calvin’s writings on this subject, particularly the previously cited material by Primus, Gaffin and Dennison. However, Gaffin did not have access to the Deuteronomy Sermons.

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that no firm evidence will be found to confirm the origin of the tale. Also, as useful as a direct appeal to the tale would have been, the story was not repeated by Laud or Aylmer, eager as they were to appeal to the general practice of Geneva in defense of their Sabbath recreations. The fact that the Puritans refuted this defense from the general practice of Geneva by referring to Calvin's opposition to Sabbath recreations, would seem to be a natural set up for an objection using this tale if it had been circulating at that time. Also, the story is not mentioned in the seven volume life of Calvin by Doumerguer, nor in those by contemporaries such as Colladon (or Beza⁹⁸). Even the seeming support from the comment by Goodwin raises more questions than answers.

Calvin should be afforded the courtesy to speak for himself, and the tendency some have toward using the bowling myth to reinterpret him should be abandoned. While some evidence may be found in future to verify the tale, it seems unlikely. But, until such evidence is found, let us take the Reformer at his word that we should "dedicate that day wholly unto him so as we may be utterly withdrawn from the world." "If we spend the Lord's day in making good cheer, and in playing and gaming, is that a good honouring of God? Nay, is it not a mockery, yea and a very unhallowing of his name?"⁹⁹

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⁹⁸ See Beza's *Life of Calvin* in *Selected Works of John Calvin*. Tracts and Letters Edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Baker Book House, 1983). Vol. 1.

⁹⁹ Exploring the Heritage, pp. 68-69.

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Postscript

After this paper was finalized, the author was referred to an anti-Sabbatarian site on the Internet that had the following quote from Winton Solberg's *Redem the Time – The Puritan Sabbath in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 19:

The Genevan, however, did not require observance every seventh day or only on Sunday. In this respect he offers a precedent for the present-day practice of conducting the main weekly worship service at a time (Thursday evening, for example) that permits Christians to attend church before the start of a long weekend. In Calvin's Geneva, citizens were free to amuse themselves after Sunday worship, and they did so with military drill and bowling. Calvin himself bowled on Sunday and was buried on a Lord's Day afternoon.

There are probably other examples of authors reciting the bowling tale, and postscripts to this paper are not needed as each turns up; however, Solberg provides a perfect example of how this tale lives by careless reference from one generation to the next. His support for the bowling anecdote is, Douglas Campbell, *The Puritan in Holland, England and America*, 4th ed. rev.; 2 vols. (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1902), 2:157. Campbell wrote: "Calvin permitted his young men to drill, and his old men to play at bowls, himself taking part at times. Knox, when at Geneva, visited Calvin one Sunday evening, finding him at his game, and on another occasion went to supper with a friend." One finds that Campbell is relying on Stanley's statement in his *History of the Church of Scotland* (London, 1872), p. 113, already thoroughly dealt with by David Hay Fleming. Campbell's assertion that the young men drilled and the old men bowled could have been uttered by Laud himself, yet Campbell provides no footnote reference for the statement.

As shown already, Stanley was relying on Hessey (see p. 13 above), who was relying on Disraeli. Thus the chain Hay Fleming first traced in Mathieson, stretches now well into the 20th century – Disraeli (1828) to Hessey (1860) to Stanley (1872) to Campbell (1902) to Solberg (1977). The problem of course is that everyone from Stanley forward has obscured the clear fact that Disraeli calls the tale a tradition. What Hay Fleming wrote regarding Knox can be applied to Calvin, "Thus it is that history is falsified and good men slandered."