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141

"RIGHTEOUSNESS, TEMPERANCE, AND JUDGEMENT TO COME"

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TERMS.

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DR. SPRAGUE'S LETTER.

To the Rev. Prof. Stuart, of Andover, Mass.
Albany, August 21st, 1835.

MY DEAR SIR,—

In preaching, and especially in publishing, the sermon on the exclusion of wine from the Lord's Supper, which has given occasion to your letter addressed to me, in the last No. of the Temperance Intelligencer, I was well aware that I was making a step which could not escape observation and which, of course, be subject to a severe scrutiny. But I had determined to leave the sermon in the hands of the public, and let it take its chance, whether for good or evil, without vindicating it from any exceptions, or noticing any structures which it might call forth; and to this determination I should have adhered, so far as the sermon was concerned, if you had not thought proper to honor me with a public letter. Your right to address me in this way, I fully recognize; and especially, in view of my having made a distinct allusion in my sermon, to your Essay in the Temperance Intelligencer of June, as furnishing one of the reasons for bringing the subject before my congregation. I am induced to reply to your letter, partly from the respect which I bear for your character, and partly from other considerations; though I feel constrained to say, that I cannot commit myself to a protracted correspondence, or even hold myself pledged to reply to any future communications. I make this explicit statement the rather, as I infer from an intimation in your letter, that you have a goodly number of puzzling interrogatories still in store for me, when those which you have already put shall have been disposed of. I say then frankly that my professional duties are too numerous and urgent, to allow my attention to be diverted by a lengthened discussion of this subject; that I am happy to see that it is in a way to be thoroughly examined by other men who are more competent to do it justice, and have more leisure to discuss than myself; and that, in view of these circumstances, both you and the public must expect that this will be the first and the last of my communications.

I will take up the several queries suggested in your letter, and give to each the best answer that I can. My limits will require that I should be brief under each head, and should omit many things which seem to me to have an important bearing on the discussion; nevertheless I shall state those considerations which I deem most important; and if those which I do state have no weight, I freely acknowledge that those which I do not state, must pass for nothing.

After quoting from my sermon the following sentences—"There is no occasion for Hebrew learning, or Arabic learning, or any other learning than plain English, to settle this question. The Master himself hath settled it"—you say, "But what, I beseech you, are we to understand by this? Did the Master then speak English at the institution of the Lord's Supper? Did he make use of our word wine in the same sense in which we now employ it? I had always supposed in a dispute about the proper meaning of a word in the Scriptures, the only ultimate resort is to the original Hebrew or Greek of them. Do you mean to defend the doctrine that such an appeal in a controverted case is unnecessary and out of place? And is it a Protestant principle that such an appeal should not be made?"

No, my dear Sir, I did not mean to defend any such doctrine, and I am sure you have too much candor and good sense ever to have thought of seriously attributing to me any such intention. I meant to assume the fact, not that the translations of the Scriptures were infallible, but that the translation which they have given us, is, in this instance correct; and on this ground I said, and certainly should say again, under similar circumstances, that no other learning than plain English was necessary to settle this question.—You yourself acknowledge that wine (*oinos*) was used at the original institution of the Supper: then in order to show that our Saviour "did make use of our word wine in the same sense in which we employ it," I have only to show that the wine which was used on that occasion, was the juice of the grape in a fermented state. The proof of this would involve the answer to one of your main inquiries, which must be reserved for its appropriate place. At present I assume the fact that it was so; and on it I build the conclusion that our Saviour used the word wine in the same sense in which we use it, and of course that our translation is liable to no exceptions. If I fail of the proof in its proper place, my conclusion must, of necessity, be abandoned.

You may possibly think me somewhat of an anti-orientalist in expressing so much regard for the translation. But I assure you that it is not from any want of respect to Greek or Hebrew learning that I do this: I honor those who have devoted themselves to deep and laborious research into the original languages of scripture; and no one do I honor more than the man who has taken the lead in this department of study in our own country. But still I cannot think that the translation ought to be set aside, or even called in question, but for good reasons; especially as the great mass of people are obliged to rely upon it, and whatever serves to unsettle their faith in the translation, is adapted to diminish

their general confidence in the scriptures themselves. I know not in how many instances, since the discussion about *yayin* and *tyros*, has been going forward, I have heard intelligent men remark that, if these things were so, there was no Bible for them; as they could read neither Greek nor Hebrew. You will observe that I do not mention this as a reason for not appealing from the translation where the translation is really wrong or defective; but only as an argument for not appealing from it unnecessarily; especially where, as in your own case, there would seem to be a virtual acknowledgement that it is correct.

In your next paragraph you say, "But supposing now that you concede to us that such an appeal should be made" [i. e. an appeal to the original languages of scripture] "(which I may presume your candor will concede); then I ask how the fruit of the vine is to be understood? If the mere phraseology, or the mere English translation is to decide this, why then wine is out of the question. The fruit of the vine in its plainest, most obvious and literal sense, means neither more nor less than grapes. Grapes then and bread are to be the elements of the Lord's Supper, for in vain do we seek for the explicit declaration that wine was drunk there by the Saviour and his apostles."

But it is said explicitly that they drank the fruit of the vine; and did you ever hear of an individual drinking grapes? The truth is that this passage not only admits the construction that the fruit of the vine was the juice of the grapes, but it admits of no other; and hence I cannot see why you should have suggested it to me in the form of a difficulty; or how it bears more unfavorably upon my doctrine than yours. You go on to add, "But you will say, 'This is to be figuratively constructed. You put your construction upon it, and make it mean wine, i. e. the Greek *oinos*.'" I do indeed put my construction upon it; but it so happens that in doing so, I put yours upon it also; for in the very next sentence you proceed to say, "I will not complain now of the liberty which you here take with the words, fruit of the vine. I also believe that wine, i. e. *oinos*, was drunk at the sacrament in its origin; because I cannot see why the cup should be named, and drinking be spoken of unless such was the case." Here then we are brought to a very happy issue of this part of the controversy; that is, precisely to the same point. I only complain that you should have gravely put me to the proof of that of which you yourself had no doubt, in other words, that you should have imposed upon me the necessity of showing that men do not drink grapes, when, in the very next paragraph, you intended generously to concede what you had called upon me to prove.

After admonishing me that "the matter is not yet at an end," and mentioning the various Hebrew words which the Jews employed to designate different kinds of wine, you proceed as follows:—"Now here we have at least five different names in Hebrew, two of them for must or new wine, and three for different sorts or qualities of fermented wine, and all these are rendered by the Septuagint translators, by one and the same Greek word *oinos*; which also is the New Testament word to designate all sorts of wine. Instead then of its being ascertained by the English New Testament, what wine means, we are not definitely informed by the original Greek itself, which of all the five kinds of wine, or rather of "the fruit of the vine," was exhibited at the table of our Lord. If the word *oinos* itself had been used, i. e. wine instead of the fruit of the vine, it would have still left us in the same condition, viz. uncertain whether the first, second, third, fourth or fifth kind of wine, was used by our Saviour and his disciples. Will you show us, my dear sir, how this question is to be determined? We may then have a stand point, from which we can take a new survey of the subject. Until then we may well suppose that "the fruit of the vine" may be either of the five kinds of wine above noted, inasmuch as the Saviour has not been particular in his designation. You will allow us to insist on some specific proof here, before we can take it for granted that your position is certain. We wish to know how "the Master has settled it," and what is the proof that he has decided that such wine as we now employ was used by him at the sacramental table."

My first remark under this head is that, notwithstanding you have given us five words to designate as many different kinds of wine, the only distinction with which we are concerned, so far as I can see, is that which exists between fermented wine and the unfermented juice of the grape; for no position which I have taken in my sermon requires me to show what particular kind of fermented wine was used; as we admit that it is an unimportant matter now; that Port, Madeira, Teneriffe, Malaga, &c. may be used with equal propriety. Without expressing any opinion then as to the question whether the unfermented juice of the grape may not be used in the Lord's Supper at this day, I am going to attempt to prove that it was not used at its original institution; and that, in the example of Christ and his Apostles, we have our warrant for using on that occasion fermented wine.

My first argument is drawn from the fact that *yayin*, which you say means fermented wine, was not only allowed as a drink, but was spoken of as a blessing, under the old Testament dispensation. I shall not dwell much on the proof of this, as it has just been presented at length, and with great ability, by a correspondent (J. M.) of the New York Observer. I will only say that it was *yayin* which the Nazirite had an express permission to drink when the days of separation were ended. (Num. vi. 19, 20.) It was *yayin* which the Psalmist, in enumerating some of the blessings of Providence, mentioned in immediate connexion with bread and oil. (Psalm cix. 14, 15.) It was *yayin* which God by the prophet Amos, promised to the people of Israel, among various other blessings, on their being restored from captivity. (Amos ix. 14.) It was *yayin* by which the Holy Ghost was pleased to represent the blessings of the New Covenant, which all were invited to accept without money and without price. (Isaiah iv. 1.) I might multiply quotations al-

most indefinitely to the same point, but the passages to which I have already referred are enough to show, not only that fermented wine was actually used under the ancient dispensation, but that it was regarded both by God and man as a blessing. If this be so, may I not at least ask where is the improbability that it was used at the time of our Saviour, and in the sacramental supper?

2. It was exclusively *yayin*, or fermented wine, which was prescribed by divine authority to be used in the service of the temple. (Ex. xxix. 40; and Num. xxvii. 7.) Now I ask, if it was not a sin to use it for religious purposes under the ancient dispensation,—if the use of it was even expressly enjoined by God himself, where is the evidence that it is wrong to use it for similar purposes under the present dispensation? Nay, does not the fact that God prescribed it for the service of the temple, infer the probability that Christ used it in the institution of the supper, unless you have something to show to the contrary? That it had been used for ages in the daily offerings of the temple, you certainly will not question: that it was used in those services at the time of our Saviour's advent, I can see no reason to doubt; and as the Passover was kept in Jerusalem, there is every ground for believing that the same kind of wine was used as in the ordinary service of the temple. At any rate, whoever asserts the contrary, is most unquestionably bound to prove it.

3. My next argument is drawn from the celebrated case of the church at Corinth, of which we have an account in the latter part of the eleventh chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. It is readily conceded that there is nothing in the language which our Saviour used at the original institution of the supper, from which it can be determined whether it was fermented wine, or the unfermented juice of the grape, which was used on that occasion; as "the fruit of the vine" may legitimately mean either. But within a few years after our Lord's ascension, there was a church established through the instrumentality of the apostle Paul in the city of Corinth. Paul must have understood perfectly the proper manner of celebrating the ordinance of the supper; for he expressly declares that he "received it of the Lord." And it were a reflection upon his character as a minister and an apostle, to suppose that he should not have made the Corinthians acquainted with every thing essential to the right observance of it; and that if the unfermented juice of the grape were the article to be used, that he should not have distinctly told them so. But it is certain that the Corinthians drank intoxicating wine; for the apostle informs us that some of them actually became "drunken." Perhaps it may be said that this proves nothing more than that they perverted the ordinance by the use of an improper beverage. I reply that the whole strain of the Apostle's remarks proves the contrary. He reproves them for drunkenness and irregularity, but not an intimation does he give that they have fallen into any error in respect to the article to be used in the service. If their error had really consisted in drinking fermented wine, is it not passing strange that the apostle when he set himself formally to rebuke them on the occasion, did not even advert to that which, on the principle I am opposing, must have constituted the root of the whole evil? Especially is not this a most unaccountable omission, when it is remembered, that he wrote under divine inspiration, and for the benefit of the church in all coming ages? Is it to be supposed for a moment that an apostle, and especially the Holy Ghost who inspired him, should have witnessed such a dangerous innovation, without setting up a barrier against its progress, by a plain and pungent rebuke? Suppose it were a universally conceded point now that the unfermented juice of the grape was the only authorized beverage to be used in the communion and some church, in imitation of the example of the Corinthians, were so far to deviate from the right way, as to substitute fermented wine, and get drunk upon it; what kind of a rebuke should any of us be disposed to administer, especially what kind of a rebuke would a temperance man administer for such an irregularity? Would he be satisfied with reproving the drunkenness, or would he not look farther, to the cause of it?—Would he not say, "You have made an unhallowed invasion of the ordinance by setting aside the article which the Saviour prescribed, and which has been universally used in the church, and substituting an intoxicating drink; and it is no wonder that you have fallen into such criminal excesses?" Under such circumstances, this certainly would have been a natural rebuke; such as the occasion would obviously call for. But no such rebuke came from the Apostle. Could the occasion for it then have existed? Or was he not a temperance man?

4. I appeal to ecclesiastical history in support of my position. I have never seen an intimation in the history of the christian church, nor heard of an individual that had, that the unfermented juice of the grape was ever used in the sacrament of the supper. At any rate it has not been used in our day, not in the days of our fathers, or our forefathers, to any period of antiquity to which we can go back. Now I ask whether this is not a most speaking silence in ecclesiastical history, in favor of the conclusion that it was never used at all? If it had been the beverage with which Christ instituted the ordinance, and especially if it had been wrong to use any other, is it not marvellous indeed that fermented wine should have been introduced, and yet no record remain of the unhallowed innovation? Various other innovations in reference to this ordinance are distinctly marked, but to this no author that I have heard of even alludes. Could this have been so, if such an innovation had ever occurred? And if it did not occur, was not fermented wine originally used in the communion?

5. I have yet another authority to urge in proof of my doctrine which I hope you will not be disposed to gainsay, as it is one for which I have been accustomed to entertain a high respect:—Pardon me for saying it is the authority of PROFESSOR STUART himself. In your Essay published in the Temperance Intelligencer of June, 1835, two months before the publication of your

letter to me, you have the following exceedingly pertinent and judicious remarks:—"But here again, it will probably be said that the argument against alcoholic drinks of all kinds, must prove too much, because it will prove that Jesus and his disciples who drank wine, did partake of drink which was injurious, and which therefore should be prohibited, in case the principle that I am defending be allowed. The reader will observe, however, that my argument has all along and throughout been directed against the frequent and common use of alcoholic drinks. To say now that because such a use must be injurious, and therefore should be prohibited, is quite a different position from saying that an occasional use of wine and drink less strong is altogether prohibited." Again: "It is indeed only on sacramental occasions that a thorough disciple of Temperance at the present time, will feel disposed to taste of any liquor of this nature;" (including fermented wine.) "Here the example of Christ and his disciples, would seem to give a sanction to the use of wine, which may justly remove all scruples respecting it."

Now I insist upon it, if I have not proved my position, Professor Stuart is no authority. But really, my dear sir, I cannot express all the surprise that I feel, that you should have raised up this second man of straw for me to contend with, when, in your Essay published but two short months before, you had conceded the very thing which you now call upon me to prove as so clear, that you might take it for granted without any proof. If you have gained "new light," would it not be more fraternal that you should endeavor to impart it to me, and let me into the secret of your conversion from the error which you held two months ago, than that you should leave me to grope in the fog from which you have just emerged, and even challenge me to a defence of your recent error. If your views have undergone no change within this short period, then I must be permitted, notwithstanding the question you have proposed, and the earnestness with which you call for an answer, to claim you as a fellow-worker with me in proving that fermented wine was used at the communion; and in this case, I submit it to you whether the public should not do us the justice to acknowledge that we have together made out "a stand point from which we can take a new survey of the subject."

I am led next by the course of your remarks to consider the subject of diluting wine at the Lord's table. And here I am happy to find that the questions proposed in your letter are entirely consistent with the views contained in your Essay.

You say, "How can it be taken for granted that the wine was drunk unmixed with water, when all the sobermen of surrounding heathen nations, looked on such a practice as belonging only to drunkards or lovers of the cup?" The remarks you make on this subject seem to imply, that if a man were to mix water with his wine at the sacrament, it would be a profanation of that ordinance. Is it to be supposed then that an essential part of commemorating the Lord's death consists in swallowing a given portion of undiluted alcohol in wine? Is it—can it be this which gives efficacy to such an ordinance, or is it rational to suppose that pious Hebrews, like temperate Greeks and Romans, diluted their wine, when they drank it?

Now admitting the fact that it was the custom of surrounding heathen nations to drink their wine mixed with water, and without stopping to inquire whether the reason of this might not be that it would give them an opportunity of enjoying their cups the longer without intoxication,—I am constrained to say that your conclusion from this fact seems to me entirely unwarranted.—What! Is the fact that "temperate Greeks and Romans" diluted their wine, to be taken as evidence that the Hebrews did the same, when there is not the shadow of such an intimation in any of the writings either of the Old or New Testament? Especially, can we infer from any usage of the heathen on this subject, anything in respect to the mode in which Hebrews drank wine in their religious festivals? I see not why you might not with equal reason select any other indifferent custom of the heathen world, and infer that it prevailed among the Jews, though the supposition should not be sustained by the least particle of evidence. In respect to the question whether it is "to be supposed that an essential part of commemorating the Lord's death, consists in swallowing a given portion of undiluted alcohol in wine," I frankly confess that I do not comprehend your meaning. I will however undertake to answer the question, if not in public, yet in private, when you will show me that alcohol ever did, or ever can, exist undiluted in wine.

You proceed with your question—"Is it preposterous to call a man a brandy-drinker, or a spirit-drinker, who mingles half or two-thirds water with his brandy? Is not this almost exclusively the method in which these drinks are used? Yet common parlance never makes a man a brandy-drinker any the less, because he dilutes with water. How then are you going to show us that Christ and his disciples did not take their wine at the last supper diluted? And how can it be shown that this was not drinking wine?"

This argument from "common parlance" has certainly some plausibility; but I am greatly deceived if it will bear an examination. I admit that it is not "preposterous to call a man a brandy-drinker or spirit-drinker, who mingles half or two-thirds water with his brandy;" but I beg you to observe that this proposition is not analogous to the one in which the use of wine is spoken of in the institution of the supper. Christ says not a word about wine drinkers, but he says, "I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine," &c. He had the cup then before him,—perhaps in his hand, and he speaks of it as "the fruit of the vine." Now while I admit that "common parlance" allows a man to be called "a brandy-drinker, or a spirit-drinker, who mingles half or two-thirds water with his brandy," or if you please, allows a man to be called a wine drinker who mingles half or two-thirds wa-

ter with his wine, I ask you, my dear sir, whether "common parlance would justify you in taking into your hands a cup of brandy and water, or wine and water, and speaking of it in the same definite manner as our Saviour did, only as brandy or wine? I confess this would not accord with any usage that I have been accustomed to observe. And in view of it I am constrained to attach as little importance to the argument from the practice of the heathen.

These are the only arguments which I find in your letter to justify the practice of diluting wine; or rather the only difficulties which you have been pleased to propound for me to dispose of. I take it for granted you mean by the questions you have put to me, virtually to assert the opinion that the wine used in the Lord's Supper was diluted. I cannot but think, my dear Sir, that it yet devolves upon you to prove it. There is not an intimation in the bible that this was the case; and the arguments you have already advanced, are, I am sure, to say the least, altogether inconclusive. Pardon me then for saying to you on this subject as you have said to me in regard to fermented wine;—that it "is a question on which we expect you to throw more light; for more is needed."

But I will not dismiss this subject here. You shall have my reasons for believing that the wine used in the original institution of the supper was not diluted, and that it ought not to be diluted at the present day.

1. There is not the least intimation in scripture that the wine used in the temple service, and by the priests, was diluted. If it was right to use it undiluted for sacred purposes under the Jewish dispensation, can it be wrong to use it in a similar manner, and for similar purposes, under the Christian dispensation? If it was actually used undiluted in the former cases, is it not reasonable to presume, unless there is some evidence to the contrary, that it was originally used in the same way, in the latter? If our Saviour had made a change, and especially if he had considered that change important, would he not have distinctly marked it, so that the church might be effectually guarded against mistake?

2. In the only instance which I have been able to find in the scriptures in which the mixing of wine with water occurs, it is spoken of as a judgement. "Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water." (Isaiah i. 22.)—Is it likely that Jesus Christ would have enjoined that as part of his own ordinances, which God had inflicted as a judgement upon a guilty nation, and which is not even mentioned in scripture in any other connexion?

3. The example as the Corinthians is as much to my purpose in this case as in the other. You expressly say in your Essay, "It is highly probable they drank undiluted wine, for intoxication could scarcely be produced in most persons by drinking ancient wine diluted by half or two-thirds water." If it is highly probable that they drank undiluted wine, then I maintain that, as they received the ordinance from the Apostle who had received it "from the Lord" himself, it is reasonable to conclude that undiluted wine was used at its original institution. And besides, on any other principle, the failure of the Apostle to rebuke them for having profaned the ordinance by using an improper element becomes utterly unaccountable. It supposes as in the other case, that he undertook, to reprove them, and actually did reprove them with some degree of severity, and did not even allude to that which primarily constituted their offence.

4. I derive an argument under this head also from the history of the church. I am well aware, and I think I have alluded to the fact in my sermon,—that a sect arose before the close of the second century, who contended for diluting wine at the communion. But what else is this than evidence that it was originally drunk undiluted? What gives the authority of the early ages its importance in these matters, is their nearness to the period of the introduction of Christianity; and the nearer we can trace any practice to the time of the Apostles, provided we cannot fix its date, other things being equal, the greater the probability that it was actually an apostolic practice. But if we are able distinctly to date the origin of any custom at a period subsequent to the apostolic times, it were absurd to claim for it any divine authority on the ground that it arose only in the second century; for a real corruption in the second century is no better than the same corruption in the nineteenth. I say then that the fact that the second century is appealed to on this subject shows that the first cannot be; for as the authority of the first is better than that of the second, so no man would be satisfied to stop at the latter, who was not conscious that the former was against him.

5. The nature of the ordinance furnishes another argument in my favor. It is not designed as a repast for the purpose of sustenance, but as a ceremony for religious instruction. Wine, as used in this service, is merely a symbol of the blood of Christ, shed for the sins of men; and of course the smallest quantity of it is sufficient to answer the end of the institution. If it had been designed that it should be used on this occasion as in a common meal, for the sake of quenching thirst or gratifying appetite, there might have been some show of reason in its being diluted, with a view to prevent intoxication. The Corinthians indeed actually fell into this error; but I am not aware that the history of the christian church furnishes another example of it.

6. If the wine in the sacramental supper is to be diluted, who shall prescribe the measure?—One individual may be satisfied with having half water; another may require three-fourths, another five-sixths; and another still, perhaps may think that the cause of Temperance requires that the smallest possible quantity of wine should be used, and that a drop of wine to a gallon of water will fairly come up to the spirit of the Master's injunction; while yet another, more scrupulous for the cause of Temperance, and less scrupulous for the authority of Christ, than the preceding, concludes that that single drop