

**COMMUNION WINE AND BIBLE  
TEMPERANCE, BEING A REVIEW  
OF DR. THOS. LAURIE'S ARTICLE  
IN THE BIBLIOTHECA SACRA, OF  
JANUARY, 1869**

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Communion Wine and Bible Temperance, being a review of Dr. Thos. Laurie's Article in the Bibliotheca Sacra, of January, 1869 by William M. Thayer

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**WILLIAM M. THAYER**

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1869.

# “WHAT WINE SHALL WE USE

AT THE

LORD'S SUPPER?” \*

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THAT difficulties should attach to the Bible view of temperance is not strange. Difficulties attach to the Bible view of almost every important subject, so that biblical scholars and eminent divines are divided in opinion. Hence, the church visible is divided into denominations, based on different interpretations of the Scriptures. Hence, too, slavery, polygamy, and other evils, have been defended from the Bible by distinguished theologians. Is it strange, then, that biblical scholars and divines differ, to some extent, in their interpretation of the Scriptures on the Wine Question? The sequel will show, however, that they are more harmonious on this subject than they are upon many theological tenets.

Nor is Dr. Laurie's view unusual. He represents a class of Christian temperance men, whose convictions and motives challenge respect. As Dr. L. says, they “agree that the use of intoxicating drinks is danger-

\* Article in the January number of the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1899.

ous," but "differ only as to the method of removal." Their object is the same.

#### HIS POSITION.

He aims to prove that the Saviour used intoxicating wine at the institution of the Supper, and maintains that we *cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper properly without intoxicating wine*. He says that the Bible "never requires the use of wine except at the communion table," etc., thus basing its use on a divine command.

He holds that the unfermented juice of the grape is *not wine*; therefore, the Saviour must have used intoxicating wine at the Supper. He endeavors to show that "wine is the fermented juice of the grape," (1) from "the established meaning of the word;" (2) from "the customs of Bible lands;" (3) from "the testimony of holy Scripture." He thus opens for discussion the whole subject of Bible temperance.

#### CONSEQUENCES OF HIS POSITION.

Before discussing the main question, consider several of the consequences that inevitably follow this view. Often the weakness or falsity of an argument is best exposed by seeing whither it leads us. From his position it follows, then,

1. If Christ commands us to use alcoholic wine at the communion, and we cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper properly without it, then *alcohol* is indispensable to the proper observance of this solemn rite. No matter how much of the Divine Spirit the communicant may possess, unless the table is furnished

with that other *spirit* which intoxicates, he cannot celebrate our Lord's dying love acceptably. The " mocker " (of which Shakespeare said, " I call thee *Devil* ") is " *required* " only " at the communion table."

2. If all the wines of Bible times were intoxicating, then the Bible sanctions the moderate use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, since wine is expressly commended several times in the Scriptures, as Dr. Laurie admits and proves. Of course, there is an end to all pleas and efforts against moderate drinking if the Bible sustains it. It is supported by the highest authority, — the Word of God. All uninspired arguments against a custom are flimsy as tow if the Scriptures support it. The Bible is our " rule of faith and practice." From its sanctions there can be no appeal.

3. It follows, also, that the moderate use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage is not " *morally wrong*," as the distinguished fathers of the temperance reform taught. The committee of the National Temperance Convention, in Philadelphia, May 24, 1833, of which Dr. Justin Edwards was the honored chairman, reported, among others, the following resolution, which was adopted : —

" *Resolved*, That, in the opinion of this Convention, the traffic in ardent spirit as a drink, and the use of it as such, are *morally wrong*, and ought to be abandoned throughout the world." (Per. Tem. Doc., p. 333.)

They regarded moderate drinking *sinful*, and total abstinence *virtuous*, — the first, *wrong*; the last, *right*. That this opinion was general in the ministry and churches may be learned from the fact that the Gen-



eral Association of Massachusetts, of that year, reported, "Many of our churches have become temperance churches. They admit none to their fellowship, *who do not avow the principle of total abstinence from both the consumption and the traffic.*" (Per. Tem. Doc., p. 338.) But if Dr. Laurie is right, then Edwards and his coadjutors were wrong. It is not "morally wrong" to do what the Bible sanctions.

4. If Dr. Laurie be correct, then his preaching and practice are in advance of the Bible. He says that he preaches and practises total abstinence, and insists upon requiring it of children. But if the Bible sanctions moderate drinking, directly or indirectly, it is an advance on that book to insist upon total abstinence. It is stepping upon a higher plane of morality than Christianity demands. But Dr. Laurie thinks that the Bible rule of "Expediency" requires it: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine," etc. But this rule applies "expediency" only to *good* things. It is *never* expedient to eat or drink *bad* things for food or beverage. Therefore it is never expedient to drink *alcohol* for a beverage, since science and experience both pronounce it *poison*. It is not always expedient to eat and drink *good* things — and here alone we are permitted to apply "expediency." "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient," — that is, it may not be expedient always to do *lawful* things; but the apostle nowhere intimates that it is over expedient to do what is *unlawful*; and we affirm that it is always unlawful to disregard the example of Christ or the sanctions of the Bible. Here unyielding right against wrong imposes a duty. Alcohol is an *evil* as a bever-

age, and therefore right, and not expediency, imposes the duty of total abstinence. His view of *necessity* in the case explodes his view of "expediency."

5. Dr. Laurie's view disturbs the harmony between science and revelation. If the Scriptures sanction wine-drinking as a beverage, they must do it as a *good*. Only that which is *good* for men can they endorse. But science declares that all alcoholic beverages are *bad* for men in health, and experience confirms the fact. The strongest man God ever made — Samson — was allowed no alcoholic drink. The fairest and healthiest youth reared in Babylon — Daniel and his friends — were total abstainers. And he whose character was fit to make him the "forerunner" of Christ — John the Baptist — drank "neither wine nor strong drink." **STRENGTH, BEAUTY, and GOODNESS**, are thus associated with abstinence in the Bible. Modern science and experience are equally emphatic for abstinence from all that can intoxicate. A total abstinence Bible alone can harmonize with science. Dr. F. R. Lees says, "When Christians are half as anxious to harmonize Bible teaching with temperance truth, as with geology or astronomy, they will find ready to their hands a much ampler and far simpler apparatus of conciliation." For this reason, total abstinence in the Bible furnishes additional proof of its inspiration. Professor Stuart said ("Essay on Temperance," 1830), "The use of intoxicating liquors is as evidently forbidden by God in his arrangement of our natures, as in the volume of his revelation."

Such are some of the consequences of Dr. Laurie's position; and they are sufficient to indicate whither

his argument leads, and to prepare the reader for what follows.

We rest the temperance cause on the Bible. With Dr. Laurie we believe that "it is much better for the cause to follow reverently the teachings of God's Word, than to wrest one Scripture in favor of what some might deem the most telling arguments." Our chief objection to Dr. Laurie's view is that it compromises Christianity by bringing the Bible to the support of the drinking customs, when all its instructions actually foster the highest and purest virtues.

#### HIS ARGUMENT.

1. "*Established Usage of the Word.*"—"None deny," he says, "that wine was the element originally used by our Saviour, and appointed by him to be the emblem of his blood in showing the Lord's death till he come. Some, however, would condemn the use of it if fermented. What if fermentation be essential to its becoming wine?"

He proceeds to show, from Webster's and Worcester's Dictionaries and Appleton's "American Cyclopædia," that the word "wine" means "the fermented juice of the grape." As if the modern and popular use of a term settled its use in ancient times! A modern dictionary may define "wine" as "the fermented juice of the grape;" but what of that? The question is, what did it mean in the Saviour's day? What does it mean in the Scriptures? We respectfully submit that Dr. Laurie has thus disregarded a fundamental rule of interpretation. Dr. Murphy says, in his Commentary recently published at Andover:—