

CORRESPONDENCE, &c.

BETWEEN

E. C. DELAVAN AND THE REV. DR. SPRAGUE.

ALBANY, January 10, 1837.

To the Friends of Temperance in the State of New-York.

The following documents, my individual judgment would have induced me to publish long ago, but for the many friends who have thought time would develop the truth in the best manner. I yielded to that decision in view of my liability to be much excited by a local and limited injury, to form a just estimate of the necessity of such a publication in other parts of the country. But calmer reflection, and a knowledge of the extent to which I have been personally misrepresented, and especially to the extent to which the cause has been injured, through the attack on me, have induced me to lay before the public the following correspondence.

It may not be out of place to state, that the public mind has been exceedingly abused by a stroke of sophistry, decidedly disingenuous if intentional, and most unfortunate if unintentional. The American Temperance Intelligencer was commenced for the express purpose of discussing the broad question of the use of fermented drinks as beverages. It was soon said, "In attacking the moderate use of fermented drinks, you are laying a sacrilegious hand on the institution of the Lord's Supper." This caused the friends of thorough reform to inquire whether the substance required in the sacred use, might not be the "fruit of the vine" in an unfermented state, consequently free from the intoxicating quality; but by some means or other, an impression has been partially made upon the public mind, that our efforts were directed to the destruction of the sacred rite altogether. The discussion in the Intelligencer as to the *kind of wine* proper for the ordinance, was permitted in order to elicit truth, there being a diversity of opinion in the minds of many good men, on the subject. Its admission in the first place was entirely accidental. I never had the least concern for the result, provided truth was attained. In repeated editorials, the committee urged the friends of the cause not to connect the question with the temperance organizations, and to my knowledge it never has been in a single case. My honest and earnest desire, was to see the sacred ordinance, if abused, relieved from such abuse; but never to interfere with its rightful observance. I knew the fact, that much of the wine sold in the country for communion purposes, *was not the*

"fruit of the vine," but an odious compound of whiskey and drugs, and frequently *currant wine*. I felt compelled, by a sense of duty, to expose the facts, and then leave it to the churches to take their own course on the subject. If I have done wrong, I should be glad to be corrected; but I have yet too see my error. I have never intimated or felt a desire to see the ordinance of the Lord's Supper suspended, in consequence of the absence of the unfermented fruit of the vine; I have supposed the facts, with regard to the impositions practised on the churches, would induce them to look to the matter, procure the purest wine that could be had, and perhaps in the end, secure the "fruit of the vine," in a state free from alcohol, to which, I conclude, no professing christian could have the least objection.

On retiring from the office of chairman of the executive committee of the New-York State Temperance Society, I placed at the disposal of the members of the committee, the following letters and statements:

To the Ex. Com. of the N. Y. State Tem. Society:

You are doubtless aware that about one year since the public mind was much excited, and the friends of temperance much alarmed, in consequence of a report becoming prevalent that I was opposed to the use of wine at the Lord's Supper. The rumor once set on foot, spread throughout the Union, and has caused me much trouble. I came out, some time after the report became current, with a disclaimer, but I have discovered that very many warm friends of temperance were not satisfied with it, and were still under an impression that there were grounds for the charge. Now that I am about retiring from the station of Chairman of the Ex. Com. of the N. Y. S. Temp. Society, I feel it due to the society, the cause, and myself, that a statement of the case, as a part of the history of the temperance cause, should be laid before you, to be used at your discretion.

On my return to Albany, from attending the Buffalo Convention, I found that it was almost universally believed, that I was opposed to the use of wine at the Lord's Supper.—Knowing that I had never given the least ground for such a belief, I concluded it best to leave it to time to correct the unfounded report. My silence appeared to give strength to the charge, until I felt compelled to inquire into the origin of it. I soon ascertained that Joseph Alexander, Esq., president of the trustees of the Rev. Dr. Sprague's church, and of which I was a member, was circulating the report under the entire

conviction of its truth, and giving the Rev. Dr. Sprague as his authority; who gave as his, the Rev. Dr. Snodgrass, of Troy. Recollecting that I had had a conversation with the latter gentleman, and fearing that I might have been misunderstood, I addressed him the following letter.

"Saturday morning, July 18, 1835.

"DEAR SIR—It is reported in this city, and your name has been handed me as the author, that I had expressed an opinion to you against the use of wine at the Lord's Supper. I feel confident that there is some mistake in this, as you never could have sanctioned such an unfounded charge. If I recollect right, our whole conversation on the subject, was with regard to the *kind of wine*. I gave it as my opinion, that unfermented wine was the proper kind. I urged you to examine the subject: you said you would, although you had no confidence in this view of the case.

"Yours with great respect,

"EDWARD C. DELAVAN."

The Rev. Dr. Snodgrass replied as follows:

"Troy, July 20, 1835.

"DEAR SIR—I have this moment received your letter from the office. You are right in supposing that there must be some mistake in relation to the matter to which it refers. I *did* say in a circle of friends, consisting I believe of three clergymen, that you had expressed to me the conviction that *fermented wine* is 'a mocker,' and ought not to be used.—But I recollect distinctly, that the question was then asked, 'What would be proper as a substitute?' and that I replied, 'The *unfermented* juice of the grape.' This was my understanding of your opinion, and I feel confident that I have not represented it differently.

"I feel interested in the discussion of this subject, and have taken part in many conversations concerning it; but aware of the state of the public mind, I have endeavored to be *very* careful in repeating the opinions and expressions of others. I have paid some attention to the subject you pointed out to me as discussed in the *Intelligencer*, and think that the line which the writer endeavors to draw between the two Hebrew words which are translated 'wine,' will not answer in *all* cases.—Since the discussion has commenced, however, we shall, no doubt, arrive at the truth on this point eventually.

"Very sincerely, your friend,

"W. D. SNODGRASS."

I called on Mr. Alexander; he at once acknowledged that he had circulated the report, under a conviction of its truth; for Dr. Sprague had said at a tea party at his own house, "that I was opposed to the use of wine at the Lord's Supper, and never would rest until I had got it off the table of the Lord." I quote the exact words. I stated to Mr. Alexander that there was no truth in the charge, and asked him to walk with me to Dr. Sprague's, and have the matter settled. He did so, and the Dr. being absent, but learning the object of my call, I received from him the following letter.

"Albany, July 23, 1835.

"DEAR SIR—As I was not at home when you called yesterday, and as Mr. Alexander has stated to me the object of your call, I cheerfully make the explanation you desire. Some two or three weeks ago, Dr. Snodgrass called upon me, and in conversation with him I incidentally mentioned that I had no doubt the tendency of the present movement was to exclude wine from the Communion; to which he replied, that Mr. Delavan had told him an hour before, that he was prepared to go for the exclusion of all but unfermented wine; that he had not always been of that opinion, but had now come to it fully; and if I mistake not, Dr. S. remarked, that Mr. Delavan added, that he had no doubt there would be a resolution to that effect at the approaching convention at Buffalo. The first remark, viz. that you went for the exclusion of all but unfermented wine from the Communion, I repeated in the hearing of Mr. Alexander simply as a matter of fact; not dreaming that I was saying any thing which could possibly be offensive to you, or which you would not yourself be willing to proclaim from the house top. Mr. Alexander, it seems, in repeating the remark to Mr. Norton or Mr. Bacon, varied from the original statement so far as to speak of wine without any qualification; and though I have no doubt the omission was unintentional, yet I would suggest whether it might not be defended, or at least palliated, on the ground that the expression he actually used would be understood to imply every thing which we have been accustomed to speak of—may I not say, which you yourself, up to a very recent period, have been accustomed to speak of—as wine; and yet nothing but what you would be disposed to reject from the Lord's Supper. Whether Mr. Alexander's version of the matter, that you had declared for the exclusion of wine from the Communion, using the word without explanation, in the sense in which it has always been understood, at least in this community, or your version of it to Mr.

Alexander, that you do not wish to exclude wine from the Communion; meaning, by wine, something which the word has not been generally understood to imply, and which few, if any, individuals among us have ever even seen—which of these two versions is more likely to convey to the public a correct impression of your real views on the subject, I will not take it upon myself to determine. What I have had in view in writing this note, has been to answer the inquiry which I understood you wished to make, that I may assist you to judge how far I have been guilty of uttering an 'untruth.'

"Yours truly,

"W. B. SPRAGUE.

"E. C. DELAVAN, Esq."

To which I returned the following answer.

"To the Rev. Dr. SPRAGUE."

"DEAR SIR—I have yours 23d. I am always willing to have my real opinions proclaimed from the 'house top,' while it may not be so agreeable to have them misrepresented. In the present case, the whole public mind has been abused, and my feelings outraged. It rests with you and Mr. A. as christian brothers, to take such a course to disabuse the public mind with regard to this matter, as your sense of justice and your christian principles may dictate.

Yours truly,

"E. C. DELAVAN.

"There is an allusion to the Buffalo Convention in Dr. Sprague's letter. I dare say that I stated to Dr. Snodgrass, that as it was pretty well understood that the fruit of the still, rather than the 'fruit of the vine,' was in general use in the churches in the land, there might be some action at Buffalo as to the kind of wine that should be used at the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper. But to shew you what my real views on the question, as connected with the temperance organization, were, the resolutions which I drew up in Albany to be submitted to the business committee at Buffalo, were headed with a strong one, disavowing on the part of the temperance organization any intention of interfering with the communion question. This was approved by the Ex. Com. at Albany, but was not brought before the convention, for the reason that the chairman of the business committee thought it was not called for. As I had to admit that I had prepared it to silence a rumor that had recently commenced circulating in Albany, it was thought inadvisable to come out before the

nation, with a disclaimer to put down an unfounded report, confined, as it was at that time, to a single locality.

"I remain, gentlemen,

"Truly and affectionately yours,

"EDWARD C. DELAVAN."

The Committee resolved to place these documents upon the permanent records of the society, in consequence of which, I understood that Dr. Sprague considered himself aggrieved—which led to the following correspondence.

"Albany, Nov. 29th, 1836.

"To the Rev. Dr. SPRAGUE,

"Dear Sir—I hear, frequently, that you consider yourself aggrieved by what you have termed my 'ex parte' statement, made to the Executive Committee of the New-York State Temperance Society, on my retiring from it, relative to the report that became almost universal, that I was opposed to the use of wine at the Lord's Supper. That you may judge whether I have made an uncandid statement, I enclose it to you. My object was to make it and leave it with the Committee, to do with it as they thought best. They decided that it was due to me and the cause that it should be placed on the records of the society. If you discover any thing in the document of a one-sided character, I wish to give you an opportunity to expose it; as I desire truth to be made manifest, even if I am to be placed in the wrong by it. I am willing that any reply you may make should also be recorded on the books of the society, or that the document, with your reply, be published in the next Intelligencer.

"Permit me to make one or two remarks in addition to yours of 23d July. You there state that Mr. Alexander had misunderstood you; but still strongly intimate that I was *really* opposed to the use of wine at the Lord's Supper, because I had expressed an opinion to Dr. Snodgrass in favor of the use of the unfermented fruit of the vine, which you admit to be a proper substance for that sacred ordinance; for in your letter to Professor Stuart you say: '*It is readily admitted that there is nothing in the language which our Saviour used in the original institution of the Lord's 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.*'

"Previous to my conversation with Dr. Snodgrass, I had been informed by one of the most respectable physicians in the

city of New-York, that the *must*, or the unfermented fruit of the vine, was regularly imported by the wine fabricators for the purpose of mixing it in small quantities with their home-made article, to give it the flavor of wine. I was also informed by one of the Executive Committee of the New-York City Temperance Society, that a wine importer had sent him a demijohn of unfermented wine—of course, free from alcohol; and more recently, as I have been assured, Messrs. Pomeroy & Bull have imported a small quantity on trial, which has been tested by Professor Silliman, and found to be free from alcohol. I state to you these facts, with the hope of convincing you what my real views were. I felt, as I have no doubt you have felt, that we were using, as you once stated to me, 'horrible stuff' at the Lord's Table for wine. I thought it would be a great matter to procure the fruit of the vine in a form that no one could reasonably object to—in a form which you approved of—and *that was all*. And to show you how entirely unfounded were your fears with regard to the tendency of the temperance movement to abolish wine from the Lord's Supper, I can assure you, that in all my intercourse with temperance men, I never heard an individual express such a desire, although I have heard many express their detestation of the substance frequently used at the communion, from a conviction that it was not the fruit of the vine, and also their ardent desire to obtain the unfermented wine, as soon as it could be had. In your fears for the communion, which, I have no doubt, you thought well founded, you have, I am sure, mistaken the wishes of the friends of temperance or of those who have expressed themselves as I have stated. Their aim never has been to substitute any thing for the 'Fruit of the Vine,' but to introduce the pure article in an unfermented state. Is it not a matter of astonishment that so little horror has been expressed at the facts developed, which have shown beyond a doubt, that throughout the country generally, the sacrament has been administered without a drop of the 'Fruit of the Vine,' while such an amount of excitement has been manifested in consequence of the discussion as to the kind of wine proper for the ordinance!

"You are aware, that not only before, but after the report was circulated, as a communicant in your church, *I received, through your own hands, the cup*, thus practically illustrating my real views.

"In closing, permit me, in the spirit of kindness, to ask a single question; and that is, whether it would not have been

kinder to me, as one of your people, to have inquired of me, and ascertained my real views from my own lips, and if wrong, to have tried to set me right. I feel assured, had you reflected a little more, and taken counsel from the natural kindness of your *own* heart, this would have been your course; and in this wise, you would have saved a world of difficulty.

"I am, truly, yours,

"EDWARD C. DELAVAN."

"Albany, December 2d, 1836.

"E. C. DELAVAN, Esq.

"Dear Sir—I certainly was *surprised* to learn that *any* *ex-parte* statement in which I was concerned, and especially one which the New-York Evangelist represented the Chancellor as saying could not be made public, 'without producing crimination and recrimination,' &c. should have been spread upon the public record of a society, without my being even informed of it, except through the newspaper. But I think you have overrated my *anxiety* on the subject; for however strongly I may at first have expressed my sense of the injustice of the act, I do not remember to have thought of it for the last month or two, unless it has been mentioned to me. I thank you for your courtesy in sending me the document, and I am free to say, that I have no apprehension that it can do me any harm; and if it will be of the least use to *you*, I am quite willing it should stand 'without note or comment.'

"I am truly yours,

"W. B. SPRAGUE."

"Albany, Dec. 3, 1836."

"DEAR SIR—I am not aware that I said any thing about your '*anxiety*' on the subject of my communication; nor did I say how much or how little you had thought or spoken on the subject for the last month or two. I knew, however, that you had complained; and it was with a desire to give you an opportunity to defend yourself if unjustly assailed, that I sent you a copy. That you are willing that it should 'stand without note or comment,' clears it from the charge brought against it. The motive of the Committee for recording it, was not to do you harm or me good, but to give a plain statement of facts on a subject which had been misunderstood. Now that the public mind is free from excitement, it is due to the cause of truth that the statements and correspondence be published.

"Truly yours,

"EDWARD C. DELAVAN."