

ARTICLE IV.

DO THE SCRIPTURES PROHIBIT THE USE OF
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES?

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A DIFFICULT subject to discuss, confessedly. A difficult question to answer, if we may judge from the different and opposite answers given to it by good men, men of learning, men having equal respect for the authority of the word of God, equal interest in the temperance reform.

Why so difficult? Is the legislation of God upon this subject yea and nay? We cannot believe it. It must be, taken as a whole, a unit. It must be the final and authoritative appeal.

Is there any want of testimony? No; for there is, perhaps, no other subject, if we except idolatry, respecting which the legislation of God is so voluminous. But its testimony is found in promises and in threatenings. The fruit of the vine is used as a symbol of the direst judgments of God, and of the richest blessings of his grace. It is represented as filling the cup of his indignation, and it filled the cup in the hand of our Lord at the last paschal supper. Now it is said to have "a blessing in it"; now we are forbidden "to look upon it." And in every conceivable relation it comes in by way of illustration, sometimes implying one characteristic, sometimes another exactly the opposite; while again it is referred to in a way that sheds no light upon its nature or the judgment of God respecting its use. It is not, perhaps, a matter of wonder that men are divided in their methods of interpreting these apparently contradictory statements.

It has resulted, therefore, that, notwithstanding all that has been written upon the subject, we are yet very much in

the condition of the ancient astronomers, who had a mass of material before them out of which to construct a theory of the universe, but had not yet discovered the law which was needed to reconcile its apparent contradictions and unify the whole.

What is that law in the case before us? What hypothesis will reconcile the entire legislation of God respecting "wine and strong drink," as the law of gravity did the phenomena of the heavenly bodies?

In presenting the results to which several years of thought and careful study of the subject have brought me, I do not assume to be a Newton, or venture to hope that I can solve the problem before us for all minds and all coming generations, as Newton did the problem of his age. But I wish to present some features of the subject in a new light, give increased emphasis to others, question some of the statements that pass current among the advocates of prohibition, and meet the arguments of its enemies — so far, at least, as they are drawn from the Scriptures — by a new classification and exegesis of all the terms found in the Bible designating the beverages and condiments of the Hebrews, and all the instances of their use. Let us consider:

I. The *nature* of the beverages referred to in the Scriptures.

They were, in their origin, *saccharine* substances, such as the product of the vine and the palm-tree. They were originally *nutritious* substances, and therefore adapted to be used as food. They satisfied the natural cravings of the human system for food and drink, and might be used for a lifetime with an equal relish, as often as the natural appetites craved them, without producing any unnatural state in the system, any abnormal desire for them.

But one of the most characteristic features of all saccharine substances is, *a tendency to ferment*. And fermentation changes their nutritive properties to alcohol, which, being *indigestible* and *innutritious*, at once removes them from the list of alimentary substances.

"If it be shown," says Dr. Edward Smith, "that alcohol

whilst in the system is not transformed, and does not enter into new combinations, but leaves the body as it entered it, its action cannot be that of food. Hence the proof is diligently sought as to the transformation or non-transformation of alcohol in the system."¹

This subject has for several years past enlisted the attention of the first physicians and chemists of Great Britain and France. And all writers upon the subject agree that after alcohol is taken into the stomach of men and animals it is found in its pure state in the blood and tissues of the body, and is eliminated from the system unchanged by every outlet. But as no one has been able to collect all the alcohol imbibed in any given case, some physicians contend that the remainder has been digested, and has performed the office of food. But, as Dr. Smith, whom I have quoted above, observes, "To collect all the products of respiration and perspiration for so long a period as thirty-six or forty-eight hours was a Herculean, if not impossible, task; and if collected it would be most difficult so to isolate it as to measure and weigh it. To ask for so much proof is scarcely reasonable; and may we not add, from the analogy of other foods, that any large portion passing off unchanged is a strong argument that all is unchanged, and particularly, when, after so long a period as nearly two days, some remains in the body unchanged?"²

Dr. Munroe,³ of Hull, puts this argument in a forcible form, when he asks: "Is it reasonable to suppose that the body will treat one portion of alcohol as a rogue and vagabond, or an inveterate foe, and retain the other portion as a welcome friend?"

If we define food, as Dr. Smith has done, "A substance which when introduced into the body supplies material which renews some structure, or maintains some vital action,"⁴ it will be difficult to show that alcohol answers either of the conditions of an alimentary substance. For

¹ International Scientific Series, "Foods," p. 419.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 420, 423.

³ "Is Alcohol Food?" p. 15.

⁴ "Foods," p. 1.

1. *We have no certain evidence that it is digested in the human stomach.*—Professors Lallemand and Perrin of Paris, at the close of a careful series of experiments, declared: “We have never found, in either the blood or tissues, any of the derivatives of alcohol. . . . Alcohol is rejected from the economy by different sources of elimination—by the lungs, by the skin, and by the kidneys, . . . not only after the ingestion of a considerable quantity of this substance, but even after the ingestion of very small doses of alcoholic liquors.”

In 1874 Drs. Anstie and Dupré conducted another series of experiments, which showed the impossibility of recovering all the alcohol after it had passed into the animal system; but they were not able to determine what had become of it, nor to “come to a decision as to its physiological value, or the precise nature of its influence within the body.” Said Dr. Anstie: “Alcohol is (theoretically) capable of generating an enormous amount of force. It is equally certain that that force does not show itself under the form of heat. If it does not disappear by oxidation, it must undergo some as yet quite unknown transformation, after which it must make its escape unrecognized in the excretions. I have heard various attempts to suggest such modes of disappearance, but nothing which wears even the air of plausibility.” Dr. Anstie was engaged in another series of experiments to throw light, if possible, upon this subject, when his life was cut short by death, on the 12th of September, 1874.

It is conceded, then, on every hand, that, so far as we yet know (whatever we may conjecture), alcohol undergoes no change in the animal system that enables it to perform the office of food. Whenever we come upon it in the system it is alcohol. When we capture it as it is expelled from the system by the vital forces, it is alcohol still. But so far as we can judge of its character from its effects, we find it to be, as expressed in the *British Medical Journal* for 1872, “the genius of disintegration.”

2. *It is not a source of heat.*—Dr. Anstie’s testimony on

this point, given above, is positive: "Alcohol is (theoretically) capable of generating an enormous amount of force. It is equally certain that that force does not show itself under the form of heat." It was formerly assumed by physiologists, and supposed to be proved by experience, that it was oxidized in the blood, or used as fuel in maintaining the temperature of the body. For did not the drinker feel the warmth and glow over the whole surface of the body, attended with heightened color? It is now known that these appearances and sensations are deceptive; that these phenomena are not due to a combustion of alcohol, and a creation of internal heat, but to a temporary derangement of the circulation; that, in fact, "the internal temperature is declining."

Says Dr. Benjamin W. Richardson:¹ "The progressive stages of change of animal function from alcohol are four in number. The first is a stage of excitement, when there exists a relaxation and injection of the blood vessels of the minute circulation. . . . In this stage the external temperature of the body is raised; . . . the internal is declining. . . . In the second stage the temperature first comes down to its natural standard, and then declines below what is natural. The fall is not considerable. In man it is confined to three fourths of a degree; and it lasts, even when the further supply of alcohol is cut off, for a long period, viz. from two and a half to three hours. It is much prolonged by absence of food. During the third degree the fall of the temperature rapidly increases; and as the fourth stage is approached it reaches a decline that becomes actually dangerous. There is always during this stage a profound sleep or coma; and while this lasts the temperature continues reduced. . . . Under favorable circumstances a long period is required before the body recovers its natural warmth after such a reduction of heat as follows the extreme stage of alcoholic intoxication. I have known as long a period as three days required in man to bring back a steady natural return of the full animal warmth."

¹ "On Alcohol, Cantor Lectures," pp. 112-115.

This evidence corresponds perfectly with "the experiences of the Arctic voyagers, of the leaders of the great Napoleonic campaign in Russia, and of the good monks of St. Bernard, — all of which testify that death from cold is accelerated by its ally alcohol."¹

Now, the first need of the body to be met by food is, the supply of animal heat; for it speedily dies if the sources of heat are removed or greatly lessened. But alcohol does not answer this need. In this respect, certainly, it is not a food.

3. *It does not supply power to the muscular fiber.* — Dr. Richardson conducted a series of experiments to ascertain the effect of alcohol upon muscular tissue with this result: "In man and in animals, during the period between the first and third stages of alcoholic disturbance, there is often muscular excitement which passes for increased muscular power. The muscles are then truly more rapidly stimulated into motion by the nervous tumult, but the muscular power is actually enfeebled. I would earnestly impress that the systematic administration of alcohol for the purpose of giving and sustaining strength is an entire delusion. I am not going to say that occasions do not arise when an enfeebled or fainting heart is temporarily relieved by the relaxation of the vessels which alcohol, on its diffusion through the blood, induces; but that this spirit gives any permanent increase of power, by which men are able to perform more sustained work, is a mistake as serious as it is universal."²

Now that men of science and the medical faculty have ascertained these facts by the most careful series of experiments, we need not wonder at the positiveness of the almost unanimous verdict against the claims of alcohol as a food. Said Dr. Richardson, at the meeting of the British Association in 1869: "Speaking honestly, I can no more accept the alcohols as foods than I can chloroform or ether."

Dr. Henry Munroe, an English lecturer on medical juris-

¹ Dr. Richardson, "Popular Science Review," April 1872.

² "Lectures on Alcohol," pp. 119, 121.