

ON DRINKING USAGES

AS SOURCES OF INTEMPERANCE, WITH SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE PROPER MEANS OF HAVING THEM DISCONTINUED.

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A drinking usage may be defined—any artificial use of intoxicating liquor, which custom or etiquette has sanctioned and which is thereby interwoven with the habits, transactions, and courtesies of life. This definition includes what have been called “demi-usages.” It is, however, in our apprehension sufficiently accurate. What it wants in perspicuity, the reader’s observation and experience will readily supply.

So numerous are the drinking customs of Scotland, that with our narrow limits we must have recourse to great condensation to give even a bird’s-eye view of them. In furtherance of this, we will adopt the following classification:

1st. Drinking usages connected with particular trades. Each occupation has its own well understood drinking customs. A cottonspinner, on being provided with a pair of new wheels is charged 5s. for drink-money, which is augmented by a small contribution from his fellow-workmen, and all expended in one merry meeting. Again, when the spinner gets a new belt for his wheel, or appears at his work with a new dress, he must treat his flat-mate to a few quarts of ale. Farther, if he allow 21 summers to pass over his head without getting married, he subjects himself to a fine of five shillings, which is annually payable ever after till he give substantial proof of his dislike of single blessedness. Nay, even when he does marry, he must melt a crown in whisky to enable his companions to keep the marriage feast. Every addition to his family costs him so much. If a son is born, 5s. must be paid, and if a daughter, 3s. 6d.—Turn we now to the moulders. An apprentice is fined 5s. of entry-money, to be disposed of in drink by the workmen. On the expiry of his apprenticeship he is fined 10s. 6d. for the same unworthy purpose. At his marriage he has to pay 5s., at the birth of a son 3s. 6d., and at the birth of a daughter 2s. 6d., to be spent in intoxicating drinks. On leaving for another situation, he must give a parting treat, and on commencing labour among his new-fellows, he must propitiate their favour with at least one bottle of the best whisky.—A collier on going to a new pit, pays 5s. of entry-money, to which each of the pitmen adds a sixpence. On being reeled, that is, married, he is fined 5s., which is increased by the addition of sixpence a-piece by his fellow-miners. The birth of each child costs him 2s. When a new pit is opened, the owner allows the miners 20s., often more to drink to its future success, and when work is resumed after a strike, a similar sum is allowed them. Joiners, carpenters, masons, bricklayers, weavers, batters, and all other trades, as far as we can learn, have also certain usages. Our information has been derived from individuals who for years submitted to these demoralizing customs. We are glad, however, to learn, that in several factories and workshops many of them are on the decline, and that in others they are almost obsolete. The same observation applies to collieries. Still it is to be lamented that fines among the different trades very generally prevail, and that not in a few places they are levied with as much punctuality as the assessed taxes. Woe be to the workman who dares to infringe the rules of the shop, the pit, or the factory. He is instantly excluded from the fellowship of the others. An exemplary power-loom weaver told his minister the other day, that in refusing the usual fine for a pair of new shoes, his fellow-workmen never opened their lips to him for a whole year.

2d. Business drinking usages.—Many commercial travellers are in the habit of adjourning to the tavern with their customers, and of transacting their business over the gill-stoup. Farmers in disposing of their produce must ratify

the sale with a couple of gills. On selling their cattle, they must give a lucky-penny, part of which goes for whisky. When corn is roused, drink is plentifully distributed to all who choose to attend, by means of which a spirited competition is kept up, much to the advantage of the seller. Few sales, in short, are effected without drink. We are aware the most respectable merchants have nearly discontinued its use in all mercantile transactions. Still, as every man at all acquainted with the world knows, it is very commonly used in the way now mentioned. *Wet Bargains* are the order of the day. In doing the most trifling matter, there is always something done for the good of the public-house. An industrious man on being asked what he paid for the killing of his pig, replied without hesitation, “just a shilling and a gill.”

3d. Drinking usages connected with public events.—When a prince is born, a king crowned or married, all the conduits run wine, and the glass goes merrily round. Grave magistrates, and venerable ministers, vie with each other in quaffing the overflowing bumper. Similar rejoicings take place when a great victory is achieved, or some popular law enacted; as also, though on a smaller scale, when some auspicious event befalls a noble house, when an M.P. is elected, or when some distinguished stranger honours our land with a visit.

4th. Holiday drinking usages.—At the new-year, *first-footing* is in some places common. Every man, whether his debts be paid or not, must have his bottle, which he carries about from house to house, both giving and taking freely. The tasting begins on new-year’s day, fully earlier than the hour of prayer, and lasts with many for a whole week. Balls, dinners, and tea-parties, where liquor is liberally supplied, are very prevalent at this time. Every visitant on this high-holiday must of course be offered a dram. Anything short of this would be both uncivil and unlucky. The smitten swain at this joyous season must treat his sweetheart to a little drop of the mountain-dew. All the loving members of the scattered family convened beneath the ancient roof-trees, and happy in each other’s society, must make themselves still happier by drinking of healths and deep potations. Even those whom intemperance has fairly wrecked, must pawn their only shirt, that, as the ballad says, they “may keep their spirits up, by pouring spirits down.” What happens nationally on the first day of January is but a sample of what locally transpires on any local holiday. Fairs and races are jolly festive occasions.

5th. Pay drinking usages.—Workmen who continue their operations beyond regular hours, often receive a supply of spirits. Seamen get their grog daily as a part of their wages. Washerwomen are regaled with two, often three, glasses per day. Tailors in country houses are seldom paid their wages, especially if they have made a good fit, without being offered a glass, to which, in general, they do ample justice, &c.

6th. Miscellaneous drinking usages.—In many places there is a service at funerals. Reapers at harvest home are freely treated with ardent spirits. Females are offered whisky at markets, sacraments, &c. Women often assemble at each other’s houses for a carousal, and when they do get on the *tippie*, they are not easily restored to their sober senses. Not long ago, in visiting a house, we were informed by the husband that his wife had a few boon associates with whom she drank for whole days, and that he had not seen her for the last twenty-four hours. Drivers of public conveyances swallow their *caulk* at almost every stage. All kinds of liquors are freely used at our social entertainments. The evening cannot be whiled away without them. If the decanters are not forthcoming when a friend calls, the reception is regarded as somewhat cold and dry. But our space bids us stop. Of drinking customs it may be truly said, Their name is legion, for they are many. They possess the privilege of entering every abode, and of presiding on all