

From a Lecture delivered at London, Canada, on the 31st Jan. 1842.
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I propose in the following Lecture to trace, in the first place, the origin and growth of modern drunkenness.

2nd. To sketch the rise and history of Temperance Societies.

3rd. To endeavour to show the superiority and efficacy of Total Abstinence from all intoxicating liquors compared with the principles of the former Temperance Association.

4th. To notice one or two objections, and conclude with a few observations on what may be advanced.

I return to the first of these, namely to trace the origin and growth of drunkenness.

Towards the end of the ninth century, there arose an order of men, characterised more for their extravagancies and follies than for any thing else, and continued to flourish until the sixteenth century, who assumed to themselves by way of distinction the name of "Alchemists," that is, *the Chemists*, because they considered themselves as more highly favoured than the rest of mankind by the knowledge they possessed.

It was one of the first principles of the Alchemists, that all metals are composed of the same ingredients, or that the substances which enter into the composition of gold are found in all other metals, but mixed with many impurities, from which by certain processes they might be separated.

The great and constant object of all their labours and researches was the discovery of a substance possessed of the wonderful properties of converting the baser metals into gold. It was during the dark ages, about seven hundred years ago, that one of these deluded Alchemists, a native of Arabia, while endeavouring to extract from the good gifts of the God of Nature, a universal solvent by which he might be enabled to drag gold from its hidden recesses—it was while engaged in this unhallowed search after riches, that he in evil hour discovered distilled spirit or alcohol. It however continued to be employed for several centuries by the Alchemists and their initiated disciples in their mysterious and absurd researches, whose flattering hopes, as may well be supposed, were never realized. The rich prospect fled before them, and the golden prize, which they often supposed within their reach, like *ignis fatuus* eluded their eager grasp.

Distilled spirits are said to have been first suggested as a remedy in disease by a physician in Spain about the 13th century, and were sold in *drams* accordingly from the shelf of the apothecary, but they were not used as a beverage in health until the 16th century.

The earliest application of ardent spirits to the purposes of ordinary life is supposed to have been as a preservative from cold and damp to the labourers in the mines of Hungary; and they are said to have been used for the first time by the English soldiers in the year 1551, when assisting the Dutch in the Netherlands. It however appears that distilled spirits began to be prepared on a large scale on the Continent of Europe, about the commencement of the 17th century, but they were not so much as known in Scotland until the year 1673, in the reign of Charles II. 163 years ago, when the importation of a spirituous liquor from the Continent was permitted by Act of Parliament on payment of a trifling ex-

cise duty. Till the reign of William and Mary it is well known that ale had been the common beverage of the labouring classes in England, but no sooner was distilled spirit ingrafted in their habits by an act of parliament for the encouragement of distillation, than its employment became so excessive as to call for the interference of the legislature.

About the beginning of last century, distillation was in its infancy, and was then quite unknown in many parts of Scotland. About the middle of that century a few private distillers had commenced the manufacture, but there was little demand for ardent spirits, as they had not even at that recent period become the favourite beverage of either rich or poor. The spirit trade was then so very trifling that it had scarcely become an object of finance.

An erroneous opinion exists at the present day, that distillation was carried on in the Highlands of Scotland from a very remote antiquity. This opinion however is an egregious popular error, for distilled spirits were not known in these remote districts until about the period of the Revolution, in the year 1688, 154 years ago. Previous to this period, the Highlander had lived in a happy simplicity of manners, his simple food and manner of living being well adapted to his necessities and wants. Instead of ardent spirits being the beverage used in the Highlands of Scotland from the earliest ages, we have been enabled to trace not only that the natives were strangers to the use of ardent spirits, but also that they were ignorant of the elementary process of distillation. Nevertheless it is believed that the art of distilling malt spirits was known and practised in the Highlands of Scotland for a few years, *but not more*, before the art found its way into the Lowlands; this circumstance may have been the means to lead many persons to draw the erroneous conclusion, that distillation was practised in the Highlands from remote ages, the reverse of all which is now fully established.

It appears that about the year 1690, stills first began to be erected in the Lowlands of Scotland, owing to the demand for their produce, the thirst for the new liquor gradually increased, and at last spread like the devouring flame, so much so that during the comparative short period which has elapsed since the origin of distillation in Great Britain, its consumption in the United Kingdom rapidly increased to the fearful annual amount of 40 million of gallons. To give an idea of the vast quantity, it is only necessary to state that it would fill a canal 16½ miles long, 12 feet broad, and five feet deep.

Thus we have seen that distilled spirits from being used only in the mysterious processes of the Alchemists, found their way to the medicine chest, afterwards used as a preservative against cold and damp, the fatal error gradually prevailed that they were useful for men in health. At last like the plague of frogs that covered the land of Egypt, they found their way into almost every habitation.

Having thus given a rapid sketch of the origin and progress of distillation, which has in a great measure been the cause of the fearful drunkenness that prevails, we shall now give the testimony of a few individuals who raised their voices against the manufacture and use of distilled spirits long before the existence of Temperance Societies.