



ADULTERATION OF LIQUORS.

The Perth "Morning Herald" has published at some length the half-yearly report of the chief inspector of liquors (Mr. J. B. Durham), who is of the opinion that much of the liquor now sold is impure. "On inspecting the various hotels," Mr. Durham says, "I was surprised to find (in my opinion, and afterwards confirmed by the Government analyst) the inferior quality of whisky in bottles of the most prominent brands in comparison to what it was when I was inspecting under the Act some five years ago. I at once purchased from a merchant eight bottles of the most popular brands of whisky, and two of Hennessy's brandy (one and three star), and gave them to the Government analyst, asking him to make a general analysis of same, and especially to find out if the spirits contained therein were true whiskies and brandies, or a blend of silent spirit. By the analysis it will be seen that 50 per cent. of the whiskies are not true whiskies, whilst two of them are nothing more than patent or silent spirit, flavoured and coloured. Silent or patent spirit is made from either corn, molasses, rice, or potatoes, etc. (which are devoid of all the essential characteristics of whisky) in a patent still, and produced at about one-third the cost of true malt whisky. This silent spirit is so highly rectified that most of the higher alcohols are abstracted from them. This process seems to make the silent spirit.

Mr. Durham remarks that during his inspection he has come in contact with a number of persons holding licenses that have no knowledge of spirits whatever. When their attention has been drawn to spirit of inferior quality, their defence has generally been that they sell the liquor as they get it from the merchant, and do not touch it.

For this he does not blame them, and adds that "it is pleasing to find that the hotelkeepers are always glad to assist me, and show anything I ask to see, and it is very evident that in the past they have been blamed for selling bad spirits when the blame should have been on the distiller."

From the opinion of the Government analyst it appears that as regards the direct and deliberate sophistication of spirits by noxious ingredients, such interference is now practically unknown. The difference of taste in various brands which to the man in the street is the one way of determining whether the spirit is adulterated or not, the analyst considers as due principally to the course of the spirit. Any substance containing starch or sugar can by fermentation be made to produce alcohol, but the names of the potable spirits in common use were, until recent years, confined to spirits derived from certain definite sources, thus—

Whisky used to mean a spirit derived from malted grain.

Brandy, a liquor prepared from grapes. Rum, spirit obtained from molasses and other product of sugar-cane.

Alcohol obtained by distillation from these particular sources contains slight traces of various substances characteristic of its source, and which give to it its peculiar approved flavour. Particularly is this so when the spirits are distilled in a "pot still." If, however, the distillation takes place in a "patent still," a much greater rectification results, these characteristic ingredients are arrested, and pure alcohol is obtained, which is always the same, from whatever source it may be derived.

Instead of using the materials above described for the preparation of spirits, it has of late years become a common practice to utilise other and cheaper sources of alcohol, viz., damaged grain, maize, potatoes, beet, etc., the use of patent stills enabling manufacturers to prepare from these just as pure alcohol as from other sources.

Pure alcohol prepared from a patent still is what is commonly known as "white" or "silent spirit." In comparing the spirit obtained from a pot still with this silent spirit, it is found that the former contains certain compounds,

found simultaneously, called Higher Alcohols (the "fusel oil" of tradition), Ether Aldehydes, etc., which are almost entirely absent, or present only in a slight degree, in the silent still.

Silent spirit does not, therefore, contain more "fusel oil" than whisky, as is popularly supposed, but considerably less, and its unpalatable and even nauseous taste is simply due to the absence of the substances mentioned above, and which in whisky serve as flavouring agents. And when such silent spirit is made up into whisky, the manufacturer blends with it certain flavouring materials which are intended to stimulate the taste of true whisky.

Thus, while the word whisky meant originally a liquor prepared in a pot still from malt, this definition no longer holds good. There is no legal definition of the term, and common practice has long since swept away its original meaning.

Chemists have for some time been devoting a considerable amount of thought and work to this subject, and the general conclusion arrived at so far is that the others, higher alcohols, etc., in whisky, far from being deleterious, are highly desirable, as giving it its particular flavour and bouquet, and that silent spirit, so far from containing more impurities than whisky, owes its nauseous taste to the absence of those by-products. An old whisky matured contains a notable quantity of those higher alcohols which used to be classed as "fusel oil," and derives its flavour from the presence of such by-products. It will thus be seen how far popular ideas are astray from the truth.

Chemists are also agreed that these by-products are not of that malignant character generally supposed. Nevertheless, now spirits are considered mere deleterious than old matured spirits, but the ingredients which cause the effect have yet to be identified. And chemists are universally agreed that no standards can be laid down as to the amount of "impurities" or "by-products" which should be permitted in potable spirits, since their physiological effects are not sufficiently vouched for. I have for some time held the view that it is impossible at present to say that a whisky containing a notable proportion of "fusel oil" is harmful, and when prosecutions were some three years ago being instituted here by a local board of health for selling such spirits, I found many brands of whisky upon the market containing quantities of "fusel oil" much above the standard which it was sought by the board to establish, and I therefore considered that these proceedings should not have been taken. Certain correspondence took place between myself and Dr. Thorpe, principal of the Government Laboratory in London, and my opinion was confirmed by this high authority.

After quoting this authority at length, Mr. Mann continues:—

"You will thus understand my opinion, which is almost universally supported by all authorities, that the chemical examination of liquors for so-called injurious ingredients ('fusel oil' and the like) is simply useless. No case could be won in the courts on such evidence as would be procurable. The analysis of liquors can, however, be of use in another way. A careful estimation of the by-products already referred to will in many cases enable a judgment to be given as to whether a liquor is a whisky (i.e., a malt distilled in a pot still) or whether it is made from silent spirit artificially flavoured and coloured. There is no legal definition of whisky which excludes these mixtures; however, and there is no evidence to show that such mixtures are harmful. Thus we are apparently at a standstill, as far as immediate practical results are concerned. Still, I think that the analysis of spirits along these lines will be of advantage for several reasons:—

"1. The analysis of spirits is attracting a good deal of attention, and we do not know when more definite results may be obtainable. It will be well, therefore, to keep abreast of progress being made elsewhere.

"2. If a definite classification of spirits becomes possible, the Health Act might provide for the publication of the analysis. This would be a very effective bar

to the sale of spirits which, though not harmful, are a cheap delusion, and constitute a fraud on the public."

Our Napier correspondent wires that Mrs. Ellingham, of the Pacific Hotel (Napier), entertained the members of the Rovers Football Club at a dinner on Saturday evening, when about 40 guests sat down to discuss a specially tempting menu. At the conclusion Mr. Walter Bowen, on behalf of the club, presented Mrs. Ellingham with a beautifully-finished Milanese gold strap bangle as a mark of their appreciation of her kindness to them and the interest she has always manifested in the club and its operations. Mrs. Ellingham having thanked them for their totally unexpected gift, the incident concluded with three cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Ellingham.

There was a Band of Hope entertainment at Belfast, near Christchurch, the other night (writes our Christchurch correspondent), and added interest was given to the proceedings by the fainting of one of the lady performers. "Brandy!" was then the cry, "give her some brandy." But the nearest pub. was a mile away. At last one of the Blue Ribbon young men volunteered to go in quest of the "liquid damnation," and by its aid the sufferer speedily recovered. This lady, it seems, is an enthusiastic disciple of the Never Touch It. There is a large-sized moral hanging onto the tail of this yarn which he who runs may read without the aid of spectacles!

Our Taranaki correspondent writes (September 23):—There is not much doing in the way of campaigning in this district, but I hear that the prohibition party have paid men going round from door to door canvassing for support. This system may defeat itself, and should, for it is a weak-minded man or woman who will be directed how to vote by another person. A voter who can be so influenced is not worthy of the franchise.

Sir Wilfrid Lawson, well-known for his temperance views, tells a story which has reference to Anglo-French relations. Two of the unemployed were occupying their enforced leisure in discussing public affairs. "I say, Bill, what's this verentent cordial they talk about?" "Don't know. I fancy it's one of them darned teetotal drinks."

The Hotel Commonwealth, New Plymouth, was the scene of a pleasing function last Saturday evening, when a large number of members of the local railway staff assembled for the purpose of bidding farewell to Mr. Thos. Scott, running shed foreman, who is retiring on superannuation after nearly 30 years' service. Among the toasts honoured were those of the host and hostess, whose assistance did much towards making the function a great success.

A gentleman who visited Ashburton recently narrates the following adventure:—"Feeling somewhat dry and not knowing where to appease my thirst, I accosted a gentleman in clerical garb and stated my predicament. 'Do you see that house over there?' he said, indicating one with his finger; 'well, don't go there; that's my house, and the only one in Ashburton where you can't get liquor.'"

Rumour has it that the Trade in Wellington will have to make a stout defence at the next elections, or else look out for squalls.

A well-known landmark of North Sydney, the old Fig Tree Hotel, a house with which no doubt many New Zealanders are acquainted, has just lost its license through old age. "The Australian Vigneron" remarks of it that it has kept its end up, if not its customers, for over half a century.

We are assured, says the "Taranaki Budget," that the squid on view at the Commonwealth Hotel is a pelagic squid, and its holiday name "Loligopsis." This will no doubt prove satisfactory news. ("Thanks! pass the beer along.")

MANAIA HOTELS.

HEALTH OFFICER'S REPORT.

Having been requested by the Hawera Licensing Committee to report on the sanitary and general condition of the hotels in Manaia, Dr. Valentine, writing from Wellington, pointed out that one was past repairing, but said he thought it would be only fair to postpone the condemnation till after the general election (says the "Hawera Star.") He mentioned that the septic tank in connection with another was working satisfactorily. As to a third he said: "This hotel is well kept. A septic tank or properly-constructed cesspit is required here."

SEPTIC TANKS.

Inspector Brownlie has recommended the septic tank system for two of the hotels. The septic tank system works very well when it is well looked after and when the effluent can get well away from the premises. After considerable experience of small septic tank installations I am loth to recommend them, unless I am confident (1) that the system will be intelligently supervised, and (2) that there is sufficient land adjoining the premises and the soil is suitable for receiving the effluent. . . . A good many people are under the impression that with the installation of the septic tank the drainage question of a house is settled. Such is far from being the case. An intelligent supervision is necessary not only with regard to the tank itself, but also as regards the distribution of the effluent over the filter beds. On the above grounds, and also owing to the fact that the area of the land adjoining the hotels is not sufficient, I will not recommend the septic tank system at the above hotels, but rather the construction of a concrete cesspit with walls 6in thick and backed with 9in of clay, over which might be erected a Douglas pump, whereby the contents of the tank could be periodically distributed by means of a flume into specially prepared grips in the garden adjoining. These cesspits could be emptied at night by the above means.

A DELICATE TASK.

George C. Boldt, the noted hotel man, said in an address to an audience of hotel clerks: "There are no perfect hotel clerks. We can only try, in our imperfect human way, to read our guests, and sometimes, naturally, we make mistakes, like Mr. Blank.

"Blank was the excellent clerk of an excellent hotel. There entered one day an elderly farmer. The man wore expensive clothes, but Blank knew him for a farmer at a glance. 'What are a farmer's tastes? What appeals most to a farmer?' he asked himself hurriedly. And then he said:

"'We can give you all the home comforts here, sir.'

"The farmer laid down the pen with which he had been entering his name and said in a disappointed voice:

"'I want more'n that when I come to a York hotel, young man. I kin get the home comforts at home.'"

YOU will NEED IT, It absolutely prevents the disastrous effects of impure Drinking Water.

WOLFE'S SCHNAPPS