

French Brandy at 24/- a gallon, Hoares' Stout in Champagne Quarts 4s 6d a dozen, Mixing Gin 10/6d a gallon...whatever your tipples it was cheap in the 1850s. It is not at all surprising that drunkenness was rife. A distressed clergyman even had to call the police to a funeral he was conducting because the mourners were 'drunk all drunk' at the graveside.

And no wonder really, when one considers the world in which so many lived, abject poverty, disease and early death, the pious rather than the practical looked to the one evil it was easiest to see on which to lay the blame, the demon drink, the glittering gin palaces with their flaring gas lamps and the drunken brawling customers, Drink was cheaper than food, beer was ninepence a gallon, sugar sixpence a pound and the former provided a quicker path to comfort than sweet tea.

In 'Sketches by Boz' Dickens described gin drinking as a 'great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are greater...Well disposed gentlemen and charitable ladies would alike turn with coldness and disgust from a description of the drunken besotted men and wretched broken down, miserable women who form no inconsiderable portion of the gin shops, forgetting, in the pleasant consciousness of their own rectitude, the poverty of the one and the temptation of the other. Until you improve the homes of the poor or persuade the half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery with the pittance which divided among his family would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin shops will increase in number and splendour'. In September 1854 the London Temperance League, with headquarters in Kensington Church Street only a few doors away from Strutt's printing shop, published an appeal for the appointment of a Temperance Missionary. The Missionary was to 'seek the recovery of the poor degraded and drunken population from so debasing a vice, particularly when it is known what deplorable scenes occur in Jennings Buildings, the Potteries Campden Place etc in which districts the worst evils arise from the habits of intoxication'.

It is hard to see the practical thought behind the pious hope expressed earlier in one of Strutt's leaders that the establishment of Sunday Schools in such places would cause 'the pestilence to retreat'. Just as he had when dealing with the notorious Rookeries of Jennings Buildings, Strutt saw the improvement of Notting Dale's noxious slums through the efforts of Christian evangelists rather than those of sanitary inspectors. Announcing the opening of the Notting Dale Schools in Walmer Road by Lord Shaftesbury he predicted that 'cleanliness and morality would now disinfect the Dead Sea by the infusion of the principles of Christianity by two hundred effective juvenile missionaries'.

who would be going back to bring happiness and virtue into homes of misery and immorality ! The Earl had already reported in the House of Lords that re inspection of Notting Dale by Medical Officers had revealed no abatement of the terrible consistent nuisances since the previous enquiry in 1849 , it was 'still one large slough of loathsome abomination, revolting alike in sight and smell and most fatally pernicious to health '.

The appeal to the Patriotic and Benevolent Residents of Kensington to support the campaign to appoint the Temperance Missionary told how even the Ladies of the District Visiting Society declared that their work was neutralised by the drunken and improvident habits of the people. Speaking at a meeting of the Society , at Silver Street Chapel, in July 1855, Mr Thomas Irving White said that although clothes were supplied as well as education to the children of the National Schools such was the 'lamentable improvidence of the parents that to prevent them from pawning their offspring's boots and shoes to buy drink, the scholars are enjoined to return their Sunday apparel in bags every Monday morning. The excesses are such that on the Sunday mornings, prior to the closing of public houses on the Lord's Day, there was seen to enter nearly 3,000 men , women and children . These Sabbath desecrating multitudes were met in numbers varying from 500 to 1000 '.

A Mr Hudson, inspired no doubt by this disclosure , had more to add for having described how his own forsaking of the demon drink had saved him £200 in twenty years , which he had spent on ' domestic conveniences and elegancies ' added ' The pot and the glass are deceitful sorcerers on the sloping path of penury, conducting thousands of their deluded ones to the workhouse, the prison cell and to the untimely and unhonoured grave. '.

Mr White, not to be outdone by rival rhetoric , concluded his address with a description of his experiences when a member of an enquiring party visiting the principal tea gardens in the metropolis on a Sunday (where stronger drink than tea was usually freely available) . ' In these haunts of inebriation and vicious pleasure ' , he said ' were gathered numbers of our population of both sexes from the ages of fourteen to twenty , in groups, inflaming their excitable passions with frequent potations of liquid fire and so augmenting the melancholy throng of abandoned females in our streets . '

Earlier Dr Pope, Minister of the Chapel, had told how he had been in the habit of taking brandy and water after dinner to remove ' his troublesome daily visitor, indigestion, ' but had given it up and the result had been highly beneficial.

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There was even a movement to bring complete abolition (the Maine Law) into Britain and this was opposed by the supporters of Temperance (as against Teetotalism) on the grounds that many thousands of brewers , distillers, publicans and all the rest of the trade, including even the farmers who grew barley and hops and their workers, would be thrown out of employment.

The Maine Liquor Law , which prohibited the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors except for medical or chemical purposes, became law for the State of New York on July 4 1855 (a splendid way to celebrate Independence !) . 'By this means 10,000 premises for the sale of liquors were closed . A fact which must be the cause of rejoicing to all friends of sobriety throughout the world ' said the ' Gazette ' .

Mr T.A. Smith , giving a lecture on the Chemistry of Drinks at the British Schoolroom in Hornton Street, Kensington in July 1855 startled his audience by showing them how alcohol could be ignited and burned with a blue flame , indicating that this could well happen to the drinker who imbibed too freely and lit a pipe ! A dissident wrote later to the paper ' Even the most ignorant would know that we do not have an internal boiler to heat the liquor to 200 degrees as he did . One of the most vociferous opponents of teetotalism and temperance a Mr Thomas Harriot aired his views at public meetings at places such as St Martins Hall and in pamphlets, one of which is reviewed by Charles Strutt with some disapproval .

Dr Harriot was among the audience when Mr Smith had given his dramatic fireworks display and proves to be more than a match for his critics . The lecturer, he said, had stated that milk and water were the only natural drinks for man . ' I maintain that milk is the natural drink for calves , were milk the natural drink for man the cow would have existed coeval with man , I have nowhere read ' and God created man and a cow , nay two cows, for one would ^{be} dry some months in the year ' . Mr Harriot objected equally to the teetotal beverage of ginger beer ' on account of its costliness and injurious gaseous properties ' . His solution to the drinking problem was an ingenious and palatable one, namely ' an agreeable and cheap wine which could be easily and adequately obtained from home grown fruits, produced by substituting lines of fruit trees for our present useless hedges and growing the same on every piece of waste land throughout the country . By their cultivation not only should we be sober people (?) with our social habits maintained and purified, but our common prosperity would derive a great impetus , a yearly revenue being raised sufficient to promptly pay off the National Debt . ' !

Despite this cheerful suggestion, the Kensington and Notting Hill Temperance Society still informed inhabitants of the district in the 'Gazette' in December 1855 that on Monday December 17th a meeting would be held at the National School Room in the High Street, Notting Hill, for working men to be addressed by Reformed Drunkards. Admission was free.

One of the most famous Temperance preachers at that time was John B. Gough who held regular meetings all over London as well as at the Temperance Society's Annual Demonstration and Fete at the Royal Surrey Zoological Gardens. No better description of Mr Gough's talents could be found than that printed in 'The Nonconformist'. He is the Paganini of Orators, they eulogised 'He plays on only one string but one capable of infinite response. 'The life of a drunkard! Oh Heavens and Earth! Oh Angels, Men and Devils! What a theme! Running from the cherub infant, through the wasted youth, blasted manhood days of alternate revelry and cursing, a home of unrelieved misery, a death of shame and anguish!

'It is this Mr Gough recites night after night. He paces up and down some 12 or 20 feet of platform, judiciously kept clear for him, like an inspired madman, with hands clenched in agony or pawing the air to keep out the ghosts of memory! Pouring out words with such spontaneity that they sometimes seem to tumble over one another in their fall, scarcely stopping at a cheer, never inviting one.

'He tells you how... he went from the home of a poor but pious and loving mother, wandered from the straight road, was whipped by demons over an arid desert, fed upon the hot sand in his burning thirst, felt a word of mercy like cool water on his tongue and saw a rainbow of hope over the abyss of seven years of sin and was restored to strength and purity, if not happiness.'

So great was Mr Gough's dramatic appeal that the doors of the halls where he spoke had to be opened at seven o'clock, half an hour before he began, to allow the crowds, who paid a shilling each for their tickets (the price of a bottle of gin) to pack into their seats. At Exeter Hall, one of his popular venues, separate meetings were organised for women only.

While they were waiting for the speaker the audience could buy and peruse books or pamphlets such as Mr Gough's autobiography (2s 6d — or a shilling according to the binding), tracts from the Band of Hope Library such as 'Cold Water Boy' price one penny, 'Temperance Tales for Youth' or 'Plain Facts from the Brewery'!

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His enthusiastic support for temperance did not come in the way of Charles Strutt's business acumen when it came to accepting advertisement in the 'Gazette' from brewers and wine merchants, such as Henry Brett & Co of the Old Furnival Distillery in Holborn, who would supply a case containing a dozen bottles of Eau de Vie to any part of the country on receipt of a Post Office order for 34/- . It was described as ' pure pale brandy peculiarly free from acidity and far superior to much that is marketed as the finest Cognac , from which not one person in a hundred could distinguish it , price per imperial gallon 16/- '

The same price per gallon was charged for Rum by William Lee, wine merchant , of 25 Sackville Street, Piccadilly established 30 years . They also advertised Hennessy's or Martell's Cognac at 26/- and 28/ - a gallon, Whiskey 18/6d Gin 10/6d . Their pure wines all of which are guaranteed included Sherries , the finest brands of Gordons Harveys or Paul y Dastis 24/- 30/- and 36/- a dozen bottles . Ports 24/- to 54/- Amontillados 48/-, Manzanilla (highly recommended for invalids) 48/-, St Julian Claret 28/- and Sillery Champagne 42/ -..

For those who preferred the more homely brews of beer and ales Henry Lovibond promised ' no more sour ale or porter ! ' from his Cannon Brewery, at Kings Road, Chelsea. He 'respectfully solicited the attention of heads of families to his superior Malt Liquors of finest quality which have been attested by extensive patronage'. Sold in 9 gallons casks, prices started at six shillings for X Table Beers up to Superior XXX Ale for 15/- or Double Stout for 12/ -.

No wonder the temperate citizens of St Mary Abbots Parish, Kensington , decided to petition the bench of magistrates not to allow the licensing of any more public houses or beer shops . In the Spring of 1854 this petition quoted the ' extraordinary number of such places already in existence in the parish? In Kensington alone there were a hundred public houses and beer shops and only 81 bakers fishmongers and butchers.

The highways, they said , were obstructed by crowds of dissolute characters who assemble round these moral pest houses and outrage public decency by their conduct and conversation. The number of houses now open for the sale of intoxicating drinks has the effect of degrading and demoralising our fellow parishioners .

In a recent statement Coroner Wakeley said Kensington used to be respectable but it ^{is} getting as drunken as any other neighbourhood.

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The petition concluded that the vice and crime to be found in our parish is fostered by these houses, is proved by the assertion of our respected local magistrate that no doubt three quarters of the cases brought before him were the result of drink.

The petition failed, much to the indignation of those who presented it, who accused the bench of uncourteous treatment having refused to even read it, contrary to the opinion of their Chairman and Clerk. One hardly likes to surmise that some of the magistrates may have had a personal interest in the hostelries which the temperate petitioners sought to remove !)

Another source of complaint by sober citizens (among them Editor Strutt who wrote an editorial on the subject) was the practice of billeting soldiers in pubs and beer houses which he described as 'a great evil'. 'Who is benefited ?' he asked. 'Not the soldier, whose comfort is insecured, discipline and health is endangered. Not the house or locality, where crime is soon introduced and the most debased habits indulged in. The monster evil of our land is drunkenness, yet the soldier is placed in the very midst of this temptation, in the very haunt of drunkards. '

On July 15 1855 the ' Gazette ' published a report of the Second Sitting of the Parliamentary Committee on the New Beer Act, which sought to restrict licensing hours and placed prohibitions on licensees from serving other than travellers on Sundays, although this was a more liberal measure than the Bill to promote complete Sunday closing which an evangelistic peer, Lord Robert Grosvenor, was seeking to get through Parliament and which inspired riotous scenes in Hyde Park of the kind which London had not seen since the days of the Charter.

Giving evidence at this committee on the New Beer Act, the Chairman of the Mammersmith Magistrates said the Act would interfere materially with the working classes, 'many have no home but the public house, no fire but the beer shop and to deprive them of this species of common-lodging house is cruel. Being thus shut out they spend a great deal of time in bed. They must either do this or walk about. The Act is calculated to set the lower classes against the upper classes'

He thought that drinking,
went on to a greater extent now than before the Act was passed. In many cases brought before him the offence consisted of carrying beer or spirits out of a public house during prohibited hours.

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This showed it was taken to be consumed elsewhere. "e had never known any information against the great hotels for receiving the wealthy, but he had known many cases where innkeepers were fined for entertaining the working class. He had looked on that man as a traveller who of necessity went out, however short the distance. If a man went from Shoreditch Church to "ackney he was a traveller, but if he went for pleasure he would not be and it would be the same if he went from Westminster to Hammersmith by boat. There were frequently one or more clubs of tradesmen held on Sunday at public houses and it was annoying to them to close as early as ten o'clock and no doubt it was annoying to the working class to go supperless to bed on Sundays, while their richer neighbours had all they required. It was easier for a poor man to be rejected by the Cat and Fiddle than a rich man to be rejected at the Star and Garter.

It had only been days before the Parliamentary committee met that the riotous scenes had occurred in Hyde Park, on three Sundays in a row crowds had assembled to jeer at the rich in their carriages, pelt them with stones or turfs, or the droppings of their horses, and on the final Sabbath demonstration, become so violent that a massive police presence was called in. Poverty they might endure, they had little hope of equality, fraternity they only understood in united protest for their only pleasure in life, so they roared to the tune of the Marseillaise

 ' Damn their eyes
 If they ever tries
 To rob a poor man of his beer....!'

The police gave a hiding and took one, and a few days later a Strutt editorial quoted from its contemporary 'The Examiner' on the 'Triumph of the Mob over the Legislature' as an example which was a very ugly one and one which might have grave consequences. Ministers did not foresee the hostile feelings which the proposed measure had roused. The Beer Act had filled the people with discontent and it was certain that another drop of gall would make the cup overflow. A Minister worthy of his position would have opposed Lord Robert Grosvenor's Bill as a dangerous provocation to the people whose comforts and pleasures it threatened and would have warned its officious author that the peace of the country would not bear such vexatious meddling with popular habits "Who would have thought it is the standing word with them from Sebastopol to Hyde Park, from the Crimean campaign to a Sunday Riot. When a man goes into high office he seems to take leave of all knowledge of the world

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and to become to a marvellous degree unprepared for the working of opinion, and as if to make up for the want of common foresight, much rigour, mis-called vigour, is then exercised. This had been the case in the suppression of the disturbances in Hyde Park. The police were probably out of humour at being put on extra duty of a Sunday and certainly did not display their usual forbearance and discrimination. Blackguards and ruffians of course there were, in so large an assemblage, and their outrages may have excited wrath which discharged itself not on the offenders but the first that came to hand.

The Examiner also considered that the punishment of the offenders at the subsequent police court hearings was severely disproportionate to the circumstances.

Journalists, one surmises in those days, ^{as now,} were not usually teetotallers and had a certain sympathy with the angry populace, and even Strutt, with his heart in temperance had the fairness to publish opinions which certainly would not have been in his own.

There may not be riots today over pub hours, but there is a chilling familiarity in The Examiner's observation on the obtuse mentality of politicians who are surprised by the public re-action to measures which portend trouble.
