

## II.

ON THE USE OF WINE AMONG THE LOWER ORDERS IN SCOTLAND  
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. By JOSEPH ROBERTSON, Esq.,  
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The discussion on Mr Gladstone's Budget and the Commercial Treaty with France has raised this purely historical question,—How far at any time has Wine been in general use among the common people of this country?

I cannot pretend for myself to have had any doubt upon the point.

Everything which I have observed has gone to satisfy me that, at least in Scotland, wine was one of the staple drinks of our forefathers, until they became politically and commercially estranged from France at the Revolution in 1688. This I firmly believe; and I venture to think that I could give reasons for my belief which should satisfy every one possessed of patience enough to follow me through the multitude of necessary details and computations. The Society need not be alarmed. I am not about to put their forbearance to the proof of a long paper of statistics. I have no thought of asking their attention to more than one small fragment of the large mass of evidence; and I hope that I shall be able to say what I have to say in very few words, and without any arithmetic.

If I were to ask you to name any one province of Scotland or of Britain of which it could be affirmed that its inhabitants must, from all their circumstances, have had both less will and less power than their neighbours to indulge in the use of wine, I think I may say that you would at once name the Western Isles. The people were poor even beyond the measure of Scottish poverty. Their climate is proverbially raw and damp. And in the whisky of divers kinds which they made at home,—their *usquebaugh*, their *trestarig*, and their *usquebaugh-baul*,—they had a drink which might have been supposed to be the most congenial of all drinks, at once to their poverty, to their climate, and to their taste. If I can show, therefore, that wine was in general use among the common people in the Western Islands, I think you will agree with me in holding that it would be superfluous to adduce evidence of its general use among the wealthier common people of the more favoured mainland of Scotland.

Now, in the official registers of the time preserved among our national records, we have proof that the passion for wine among the Islesmen, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, was so strong that the Government of the day found themselves unable to control or restrain it, except by means which went far beyond what I believe to be the provisions of the so-called Maine Law of our own time. The following ordinance was passed by the Privy Council in the year 1616:—

*Act aganis the Drinking of Wynes in the Yllis.*

*Apud EDINBURGH xxvj of Julij 1616.*

Forsamekle as the grite and extraordinar excesse in drinking of wyne

commonlie vsit amangis the commonis and tennentis of the Yllis is not onlie ane occasioun of the beastlie and barbarous cruelties and inhumanities that fallis oute amangis thame to the offens and displeour of God and contempt of law and justice bot with that it drawis nvmberis of thame to miserable necessitie and powertie sua that thay ar constraynit quhen thay want of thair awne to tak from thair nichtbouris For remeid quhair of the Lordis of Secrete Counsell statutis and ordanis that nane of the tennentis and commonis of the Yllis sall at ony tyme heirefter buy or drink ony wyne in the Ylles or continent nixt adiacent vnder the pane of twenty pundis to be incurrit be euery contravenare *toties quoties* The ane half of the said pane to the Kingis Maiestie and the vther half to thair maisteris and landislordis and chiftanes Commanding heirby the maisteris landislordis and chiftanes to the saidis tennentis and commonis euery ane of thame within thair awine boundis to sie thir present act preceislie and inuolablie kept and the contravenaris to be accordinglie pvnist and to vplift the panes of the contravenaris and to mak reckning and payment of the ane half of the said panes in [his] Maiesteis exchequer yeirlie and to apply the vther half of the saidis panes to thair awne vse.

There is here, you will observe, a prohibition under high penalties, not only of the sale, but of the use of Wine in the Isles. To make the prohibition more effective, it was not only provided that one half of the penalty should go to the landlord or chief, but these landlords and chiefs were farther taken bound individually, by formal bonds fenced by good sureties and enormous forfeitures, to use only a certain limited quantity of wine themselves, and to take strict order that none of their tenants and country people should buy or drink any wines whatever.

The ordinance of 1616 which I have read was not the first piece of legislation on the subject. Seven years before, the Privy Council had prohibited the importation of wine and spirits from the mainland, without however prohibiting the use of either, and with a special declaration, that the prohibition should be "without prejudice always to any person within the Isles to brew aquavitæ and other drink to serve their own houses, and to the special barons and substantial gentlemen to send to the Lowlands, and there to buy wine and aquavitæ to serve their own houses."

The Act of 1616, then, was not the first of its kind. I need scarcely add that it was not the last; for it would seem to be fate of all such attempts to prevent mankind from gratifying the reasonable appetites of their nature, that as one law fails in its object, another and another, each more oppressive than its predecessor, is placed upon the statute-book, until at last either the accumulated mass proves more than human patience can bear, or the Legislature, gathering wisdom from experience, tacitly abandons an enterprise which it sees to be beyond its strength. In 1609, the Scottish Privy Council forbade the introduction of wine into the Isles from the mainland. In 1616, they forbade its use. And now in 1622, confessing the failure of their former attempts, they of new prohibit its importation from any quarter whatever, and its sale by any person whatever. The following ordinance was passed in July 1622:—

*Act that Nane send Wynis to the Ilis.*

*Apud EDINBURGH 23 Julij 1622.*

Forsamekle as it is vnderstand to the Lordis of Secreit Counsell that one of the cheiff caussis whilk procuris the continewance of the inhabitantis of the Ilis in thair barbarous and inciulle forme of leving is the grite quantitie of wyne yeirlye caryed to the Ilis with the vnsatiable desire quhairof the saidis inhabitantis ar so far possest that quhen thair arryvis ony ship or other veshell thair with wyne they spend bothe dayis and nightis in thair excesse of drinking and seldome do thay leave thair drinking so lang as thair is ony of the wyne restand sua that being ouercome with drink thair fallis oute mony inconvenientis amangis thame to the brek of his Maiestis peace And quhairas the chiftanes and principallis of the clannis in the Yllis ar actit to tak suche ordour with thair tennentis as nane of thame be sufferit to drink wyne yitt so lang as thair is ony wyne caryed to the Ilis thay will hardlie be withdrawne frome thair evill custome of drinking bot will follow the same and continew thairin whensoever thay may find the occasioun For remeid quhairof in tyme comeing The Lordis of Secreit Counsell ordanis lettres to be direct to command charge and inhibite all and sindrie marcheantis skipparis and awnaris of shippis and veshellis be oppin proclamatioun at all placeis neidfull that nane of thame presoume nor tak vpoun hand to carye and transporte ony wyne to the Ilis nor to sell the same to the

inhabitantis of the Ilis except so mekle as is allowed to the principall chiftanes and gentlemen of the Ilis vnder the pane of confiscatioun of the whole wyne so to be caryed and sauld in the Ilis aganis the tenour of this proclamatioun or els of the avail and pryceis of the same to his Maiesties vse.

Here, unfortunately, the register from which this information is derived fails us. Nor have I observed elsewhere any farther information about the use of wine in the West Isles during the seventeenth century. We may safely presume, however, that there, as in other parts of Scotland, it gradually fell into disuse among the mass of the people, as war and a false commercial policy destroyed our trade with France; as excessive import duties raised the price above the reach of all but the more opulent classes; and as our improved customs' police and a better tone of public feeling put an end to the smuggling by which these import duties were evaded. Wine has long ceased to be used among the common people of the Hebrides. Its place has been supplied by whisky; and of the extent to which that is consumed, Sir John M'Neill has given startling information in the Report on the West Highlands and Islands which he made to the Home Secretary in 1851.

We have seen that while wine was utterly prohibited to the common people, their chiefs were allowed to use it in certain limited quantities. The Society may perhaps wish to know what in those days was considered a reduced allowance of claret for a Highland gentleman. The smaller chiefs, then, such as Mackinnon in Skye, Maclean of Coll, and Maclean of Lochbuy, were restricted to one tun, or four hogsheads, each, in the twelvemonth. Chiefs of a higher rank, such as the Captain of Clanranald, had three tuns, or twelve hogsheads, a year. Potentates of still greater mark—Maclean of Duart, Macleod of Dunvegan, and Donald Gorme of Sleat—were permitted to have, each of them, four tuns, or sixteen hogsheads, yearly. Four Scottish tuns, I should explain, contain rather more than 876 imperial gallons. In other words, there were, in 1616, at least three houses in the West Isles where the consumption of wine, under the jealous regimen of the Privy Council, amounted to 438 dozen every year. May I ask if there be *one* house now in all the Hebrides which uses so much?