



S. 12

Professor G. D. HALE CARPENTER, M.B.E., F.L.S., exhibited and read (1) An unpublished letter from Sir Joseph Hooker, dated 9 Aug. 1847; (2) An autograph note by Linnaeus on a prescription, written for him, dated 31 Jan. 1764. The President made some comments.

COPY OF LETTER FROM JOSEPH D. HOOKER  
TO W. B. CARPENTER.

Kew, August 9, 1847.

My dear Sir,

During the time I was out with Sir James Ross I paid some attention to the subject of employing ardent spirits, both as an occasional stimulant & as a daily beverage in the form of grog: & I further asked the opinion of many officers long connected with the service.

In all ordinary cases, where dependable men are employed, it may be entirely dispensed with; but I am not so clear about the propriety of abolishing it at once, in the present state of the service, or at all under peculiar circumstances.

Several of the men on board our ship, & amongst them some of the best, never touched grog during one or more of the antarctic cruises; they were not one whit the worse for their abstinence; they enjoyed the same perfect health that all the crew did, throughout the 4 years voyage.

That these & many others of the men would have preferred a pint of hot coffee on occasions of "splicing the main brace" I am quite sure, but when the circumstances called for (in the eyes of the service) the stimulus, there was no cooking, nor could there be. I had better however, answer your questions to the best of my knowledge seriatim.

1. May the habitual use of fermented liquor be safely dispensed with? I should say clearly so & with benefit too: *provided the water be good*. For the comfort of the men too the water should be palatable, & this is far from universally practicable. The *officer* can vary his viands and drink, so much that to have no spirits is no loss to him: but there is no substitute for grog to the sailor. Beer is too bulky.

Lemonade soon palls when daily used, & would not agree with all; cold tea is not palatable to every one, even if recommendable; and he gets hot tea once a day as it is, which in hot weather is almost once too often. You must not judge the Royal Navy by the Merchant Service where the sailor joins for immediate profit & is willing to go through the voyage with bad water and no spirits, for it only lasts a few months or years; in joining an abstinence ship he does not forswear grog for ever, & has opportunities of varying his beverage with his ship.

The good Navy sailor again, ships for 40 years, at least such are the men we want to prize, & for five or even seven years commission at a stretch, in a very hot climate, where the water is bad perhaps, he has but one diet and no prospect of its being altered. Perhaps the gravest objection to abolishing fermented liquors in the Navy allowance is, that you cannot do so with the officers: they are allowed to buy & lay in private & mess stock & the service allows them stowage; it is not so with the sailor; he is prohibited from laying in a sea-stock, both because no room is allowed him to store it, & because he could not afford it, or be trusted if he could afford.

In the Army where there is little communication between officers & men & no intimacy, this would not tell so heavily as on board-ship, where every one has a great fellow-feeling with his ship-mates and where partiality in the treatment of any class, with regard to the withholding of *what each in his station is accustomed to on shore*, could not fail to produce a very strong feeling. There are however sundry considerations.

Allowing the water to be palatable; I have no hesitation in saying that the habitual use of spirit may be beneficially dispensed with as far as the health of the crew is concerned.

2. Whether the abstinence in cold climates, is attended with positive benefit. I do think that the use of spirit in cold weather is prejudicial. I speak from my own experience: it is very pleasant, the glass of grog, warms the mouth the throat & the abdomen, & this when wet & cold with no fire & just before turning into damp blankets is very enticing; but it never did me one atom of good: the extremities are not warmed by it and when a continuance of exertion or endurance is called for, the spirit does harm: then you are colder or more fatigued  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$  hour after it, than you would have been without it. Many of our men laid in large stocks of coffee & when practicable had it made for them after the watch on deck; these men I believe would willingly have given up their spirits in exchange for coffee: but we could not ensure them the latter on the requisite occasions.



To the southward of the Ant. circle, or of Lat. 50' you may say, it blew a gale of wind 3 days out of 5, there was always a heavy swell running, the whole ship & bedding were damp, from condensation, where not from shipping seas; the atmosphere of the lower deck (with hatches battened down) such that you could not see from one mess table to another, & this for days together. There is neither standing, sitting or lying in comfort. All hands, officers & men up & ready, the one watch on deck the 2 others on the "qui vive" for any emergency.

In cruising among the ice it must be so, in the thick weather the ship is on a Berg or Pack before one can see it almost; & is several hundred miles from open ocean, even if she could turn tail & go back.

She is perhaps put about every  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour, and we have been for 16 hours in this state. Every time we go on deck we are drenched with cold salt water, which sometimes freezes as it falls, & when you go below there is really nothing to do but "lick your paws" as the men say. Nothing hot can be got. This is perhaps an extreme an instance as I could bring forward of the demand for spirits under yr. third query. Now I do not believe that to "splice the main brace"  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen times or even more in this 16 hours would do any good in the way of giving strength; but to refuse the men some grog would be a great hardship. I have seen grog given ( $\frac{1}{2}$  gill at a time) thrice (I think) under such circumstances, with no perceptible harm; but I do not suppose it did any good, & more would I am sure have [?] done] me mischief.

The fact of giving it did good in one way, it made the men joyful (not from excitement but as we all rejoice on cutting the Xmas pudding) & I quite believe that under such continued exertion the bad effects were dissipated; but this is a very different thing from doing any real physical good; I can well suppose the effect to have been, though inappreciably, the contrary. Of one thing I am sure, & that is, that no one was ["I was not", crossed out and replaced by "no one was"] the more ready for a repetition of the exertion from taking the stimulus:—the intervening time was more pleasantly & comfortably passed.

It may here be a question whether, granting the spirits to have done some good towards exhilarating; when no modern appliances could be available; it would be desirable to withdraw it on such occasions, it is a choice of evils perhaps.

I know of only one occasion on which the spirit appeared indispensable—that is when a little more exertion at the arousing of a mighty & long continued effort is demanded.

Thus—the ships when sailing in the Pack-Ice are sometimes beset, or fall to leeward into the lee-ice, this takes 2 or 3 minutes, but if there is much wind it takes many hours to get them out, not being in command the sails are no use, & the ice prevents her moving in any way but with it to lee-ward. Under these circumstances: the only way to get her out is by fastening ropes from the ship to the large masses of ice & warping her out by main force against the wind. Now I have seen every officer and man in the ship straining at the capstan for hours together, through snow & sleet, with the perspiration running down our faces & bodies like water. Towards the end of such a struggle, at the mighty crowning effort, I have seen a little grog work wonders, I could not have drunk hot coffee without stopping to cool; nor if I had do I think it would have supplied the temporary amount of strength, which was called for *on the spot* under circumstances like this. These are however cases which do not affect the sailor in his ordinary condition, & which any ship might be well prepared for.

The great practical difficulty on board ship is, that you have no available substitute for bad-water but good grog, as the sailor is at present situated.

I cannot but think however that with more attention to the comforts of the sailor, his own love of liquor w<sup>d</sup> diminish ; and that he might be weaned from it by the officers ; though the depriving him of it by the Govt would be a dangerous experiment.

I fear you will find this a very unsatisfactory answer : I wish it were otherwise but I often tried to cut the Gordian knot in my own mind. It is a good deal like that most repulsive of all punishments, flogging in the Navy ; for which no one can propose an immediate substitute.

If I can be of any use to you pray command me : I can hardly think this will be satisfactory. I can only honestly declare myself free from prejudice.

ever sincerely yours

(signed) JOS. D. HOOKER.

Passages from this letter were quoted in W. B. Carpenter's Prize Essay 'On the use and abuse of alcoholic liquors in health and disease' published in 1850 in London by Charles Gilpin.

