



Mr. President, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, Gentlemen & Haggis Eaters

I have good news to relate to you – this is the last speech tonight – after this you must only sing a song before you will be allowed to leave. First, however, I to complete the process of aiding your digestion and would like to further impose upon your patient good nature for the next 10 minutes or so in support of the Toast "HAIL CALEDONIA"

"HAIL CALEDONIA!" I sought inspiration in anagrams of the Toast. Most were nonsensical, but some seemed to fit the bill, such as: "OH I CALL AN IDEA" — I was encouraged, perhaps this was going to be a good approach, as I was seeking ideas. Anagram: "ONCE I AID ALLAH" — so, if I would resolve to do a work of charity, the ideas would flow. "I'D OIL EACH ALAN" — mmmm! This sounded like a challenging work of charity, I'd much prefer to help Alan to Address the Haggis. Final anagram: "I HAD COLA IN ALE" — a far better idea, although I prefer whiskey. So the Anagrams had it – my topic would be whisk(e)y.

Like the Scots, the Irish are very fond of whiskey, although spelt in the older fashion with an E, and triple-distilled for that elusive extra smoothness. Many a barroom conversation has revolved around whether the Irish or the Scottish invented whisk(e)y. Sweltering in the 35 degree heat in the Mai Tai Cocktail bar in Grand Bai on the island of Mauritius last week, I read the labels of the bottles behind the bar: Grants, Dewar's, Teachers, Clan Campbell. One could even order the dubiously-named Island Scotch Whisky-Flavored Drink. Strangely, there was not a single Irish whiskey in sight — no doubt, I hoped, because all the Irish had already been drunk and now there was only Scotch left! Remembering the saying: "GOD INVENTED WHISKEY TO PREVENT THE IRISH FROM CONQUERING THE WORLD", I wondered about the fantastic success of Scotch in comparison to the well-kept secret of Irish whiskey, and decided to research the ancient history of distillation. Sadly, I have found that whiskey was not invented in Ireland [pause] but before self-satisfaction should overwhelm you, and a chorus of "OCH AY! HOOTS MON! WE ALWAYS KNEW THAT, JIMMY!" should arise, I would add that my research also showed that neither was whiskey invented in Scotland. Here then is what I have discovered.

The consumption of alcohol has a long history - both the Old Testament and the Talmud make ample reference to the virtues of fermented drink: The Book of Psalms¹ tells us that it "GIVES COURAGE AND ENABLES THE POOR AND UNHAPPY TO FORGET THEIR TRIALS."

The first recorded human laws — the Code of Hammurabi² in Babylon around 1700 BC — contained some pretty strict rules for publicans — a seller of date-wine seasoned with sesame who overcharged, "SHALL BE PROSECUTED & THROWN INTO THE WATER." Worse still was the penalty for ex-priestesses who liked to tipple: "IF A PRIESTESS WHO HAS NOT REMAINED IN THE CONVENT SHALL OPEN A WINESHOP, OR ENTER A WINESHOP FOR DRINK, THAT WOMAN SHALL BE BURNED."

The Egyptians were known to have practiced the distillation of perfumes 3000 years before Christ, but while this had a wonderful bouquet and in all likelihood helped avoid the common problem of halitosis upon waking the following morning, it probably resulted in a leaden-headed feeling. The alchemist Jabir Ibn al-Hayyan (known as Geber^{3,4} in the West) lived in the 8th century in what is now modern Iraq. Interestingly, the English word GIBBERISH stems



from the dense and incomprehensible nature of his Arabic alchemy texts – a point evidently not lost upon the current leader of the War against Terror in his confused utterings about regime change in Geber’s homeland. Geber distilled strong acetic acid from vinegar. The Arabic word *AL-KOH’L*⁵ means a very fine dark powder of antimony or galena, used to paint the eyebrows. The word was applied to highly rectified spirits, in view of its similar impalpability. The modern Spanish word has both meanings. From a drinker’s perspective, distilled acetic acid was a step in the right direction from Egyptian perfume, but not yet suitable for timpling.

The 13th century Arnaldus de Villa Nova⁶, alchemist and medical professor at Montpellier is the first on record to have distilled a modern brandy. The word *ALCOHOL*, corrupted from the Arabic, was first used by the 16th century Swiss alchemist and founder of modern medicine Phillipus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, better and somewhat more shortly known as Paracelsus⁷⁸.

We’ll now have a short interlude from matters historical for a Burns Supper joke: A cannibal chief was guest of honor at a Burns Supper organized by the administrator of a British outpost in West Africa. The chief thoroughly enjoyed the ritual, the drink, but most of all, the food, of which he partook mightily. At one point, the company was asked to be upstanding. “What are we going to do now?” the chief inquired. “We’re going to toast the lassies”, his host told him. “No thanks, not for me,” the chief replied, “I couldn’t eat another thing.”

Returning to our story — on the misty fringes of Europe, probably drenched by the continually pouring rain, Irish monks reputedly^{9,10} got started distilling in the 5th century, having observed the Moorish process of perfume distillation using an alembic (or simple still). Upon returning to Ireland, they modified this process to improve upon the taste of their porridge and created a spirit from a mash of local cereals, which they called *UISCE BEATHA* — the Water of Life. The 11th-century soldiers of Henry II who invaded Ireland^{11,12} came to fight but also found time to drink! Their mispronunciation led to the English word *WHISKEY*. The first written record of whiskey in Ireland is to be found in the Annals of the Four Masters for Connaught¹³, in which it is recorded that Chieftain Risterd Mac Ragnail fell into a coma one evening in 1405¹⁴ "AFTER DRINKING ESCI BETHAD TO EXCESS, IT WAS A DEADLY WATER TO HIM"

*BRITANNIA*¹⁵ was the name used by the Romans for the bigger of the two islands to the northwest of Gaul (modern France). In the South lived people who would later be termed *THE AULD ENEMY, OR NA SASANAIG*. To the North of *BRITANNIA* lay *CALEDONIA* (modern Scotland). It was inhabited by the *PICTS* of *CELTIC* origin, the *BRITONS* OF *STRATHCLYDE* and the *ANGLO-SAXONS* in present-day *ARGYLL*. These tribes spent more time fighting each other than the common enemy in the South.

You will note, therefore, that there were no Scots in Scotland at the end of the Roman era — the Scots still lived at that time in Ireland (known as *SCOTIA* or *HIBERNIA*), although they had already occupied *KINTYRE* and neighboring islands. When the Romans withdrew their legions in the 5th century AD, the *SCOTTI* were invited by the *BRITONS* to help in their wars with the *PICTS*.



FERGUS MC ERC arrived to help with a Scottish army and ended up by seizing the entire Kingdom of DALRIADA. With them, the Scots brought the knowledge of distillation to Scotland from Ireland.

After a long period of untaxed whiskey production and consumption, the earliest written record of distilling whiskey in Scotland from cereals comes from an entry in the Exchequer Rolls in 1494 when one Friar John Cor obtained eight bolls of malt "WHEREWITH TO MAKE AQUA VITAE". That amount of malt (for those older amongst you tonight, this is equal to 48 Imperial bushels) would produce roughly 400 bottles of whiskey, and probably led to problems at Evensong! Later, in his poem *Scotch Drink*¹⁶, Robbie Burns would express his admiration for whiskey and parsimonious disdain for nasty foreign spirits:

Wae worth that brandy, burnin' trash!
Fell source o' mony a pain an' brash!
Twins mony a poor, doylt, drucken hash
O'half his days;
An' sends, beside, auld Scotland's cash
To her warst faes.

Only whiskey could help him propel the words from his imagination onto the page:

O Whisky! soul o' plays and pranks!
Accept a bardie's gratfu' thanks!
When wanting thee, what tuneless cranks
Are my poor verses.
Thou comes — they rattle in their ranks
At ither's a-s

The incomparable virtues of Uisge Beatha¹⁷ were described in 1577 as follows:

Being moderately taken,
it slows the age,
it cuts phlegm,
it lightens the mind,
it quickens the spirit,
it keeps .. the head from whirling, ...
the tongue from lispng, ...
the heart from swelling,
the guts from rumbling,
the hands from shivering, ...
the bones from aching, ...
and truly it is a sovereign liquor
if it be orderly taken."

Indeed! I could only add that I have found that whisky has also helped admirably tonight to cover the fascinating Caledonian taste of the Haggis.

There are many other reasons to toast Scotland: the invention of Bovril by James Lawson Johnson¹⁸, haggis — a cunning and thrifty way to use all those bits of a sheep which would



otherwise be thrown away. Cock-a-leeky soup, at whose ingredients one must simply wonder. The bagpipes, of which it is said that the best way to determine whether they are playing out of tune is to blow into them. There is the kilt and its associated bizarre hairy codpiece, the games of curling and golf. I leave the examination of these to another speaker, but would like to finish with a final joke¹⁹ which shows the awesome power of the kilted Scotsman after he has consumed a sufficient quantity of Scotch:

An Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman were in a bar drinking somewhere in South America. They noticed a pot of money in the corner and asked the barman why it was there. "Well" said the barman "that is there for the taking for anyone who can FIRST: drink a full bottle of Scotch in two minutes; SECOND: go into that box over there with a lion inside and pull a thorn from the lion's foot and FINALLY: go upstairs and make love to a 100 year old woman".

"What happens if we fail?" they inquired. "If ye fail and survive", the barman said, "ye'll be sold as sex-slaves to a local tribe". Despite the risks they said they would try it.

The Englishman goes first. After drinking half the Scotch he collapses drunk and is taken away to be sold.

The Irishman is next. He downs the Scotch and staggers to the lion's cage. The door is closed and there is a quick scream as he is eaten alive by the lion, unable to defend himself.

The Scotsman drinks the whisky and stumbles towards the lion's den. The door is closed behind him and almost immediately are to be heard the most spine-curdling screams and shouts coming from the cage, which last all of ten minutes. There is a banging up against the sides of the box and then silence. The Scotsman emerges battered, bleeding and torn. "Now!" he says "where is that lady with the thorn in her foot?"

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, please be upstanding as I give you the Toast to Scotland, home of Burns, source of Scotch and purveyor of pleasure to drinkers and lions the world over: Slainte and Hail Caledonia!



References

¹ Psalms 104:15, Proverbs 31:6-7

² <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/hammenu.htm>

³ <http://www.chemsoc.org/exemplarchem/entries/2002/crabb/famous.html>

⁴ http://www.alchemylab.com/cannabis_stone4.htm#_ftn24

⁵ <http://www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/alcohol>

⁶ <http://www.greydragon.org/library/cordials.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.hermetic.com/sabazius/paracelsus.htm>

⁸ <http://www.chemsoc.org/exemplarchem/entries/2002/crabb/famous.html>

⁹ http://www.local.ie/general/top_story/whiskey.shtml

¹⁰ <http://www.celtic-whisky.com/histrya.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.winexwired.com/4point1/rage41.htm>

¹² http://www.hoboes.com/html/Politics/Prohibition/Notes/Alcoholism_History.html

¹³ <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/G100011/text174.html>

¹⁴ The Whiskeys of Ireland, Peter Mulryan. The O'Brien Press. Dublin. ISBN 0-86278-751-3

¹⁵ http://www.britannia.com/celtic/scotland/history_scotland.html

¹⁶ <http://www.robertburns.org/works/84.shtml>

¹⁷ Holinshed, 1577, "Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland", <http://www.celtic-whisky.com/histrya.htm>

¹⁸ <http://www.medianet.ca/bovril/bvrlinfo/inventor.htm>

¹⁹ <http://www.fife.50megs.com/english-irish-scottish.htm>