

*An Oration, Delivered Before the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association, at their Triennial Celebration, July 4, 1829 Neal S Dow*

The influence which the mechanic Associations can exert in the promotion of temperance, is greater than that which any other societies possess; because if we look abroad through our whole country, we shall see, that though this vice has not confined its ruinous effects to any particular body of men, yet our mechanics, our yeomanry, and all laboring classes of the community, are the principle sufferers.

And that they are so is not strange, when we become acquainted with the custom of taking spirit regularly and frequently, which has universally prevailed among them . . . .

We are struck with horror, when we are told of the contests of the gladiators, to witness which [P. 21] was the pastime of the Romans; we melt with compassion, when we hear that Hindu widows offer themselves a sacrifice to the manes of their husbands; and we are roused into action by the tales which we hear from the western isles, of infants, who are sacrificed to the gods of their fathers. But, Brethren, why does not our blood chill, when we look upon scenes of misery, and suffering, and wretchedness, which exist every where around us, and which intemperate men bring upon themselves; why do we shed no tear when we look upon the desolate situation of the inebriate's wife, who is infinitely more forlorn than if she were a widow -- and who looks toward the end of life with impatience, as the termination of suffering, worse than that of death; why are we not roused into more vigorous and effectual exertion, when we see infants, in our own neighborhoods, perhaps, offered up body and soul to the Demon, worshipped by their parents!

Facts will support us in asserting that the practice of drinking ardent spirits "temperately" results in greater misery and suffering to more individuals than any other custom, which has ever existed . . . . The gladiatorial contests, which have procured for the Romans the name of cruel barbarians, were the cause of but little comparative misery, especially as the combatants were generally [P. 22] criminals who had forfeited their lives to the laws of their country -- or were prisoners of war whom common usage authorized the captors to put to death. And the other customs to which I have alluded as being the most shocking to Christians of the present day, occasion indeed a momentary pang to the victims, and that is all -- for the friends through mistaken notions of duty, rejoice that their gods consider them worthy to contribute to their glory -- and except on the very pyre, the Hindu widow herself anticipates with joy the happy meeting with her husband, to which she is hastening. But not so trifling are the consequences of intemperance, which is arrived at only through temperate drinking -- for it destroys its unhappy victims as effectually as the flames -- and like the gibbet withholds their disgusting carcasses from the grave, to harrow up the feelings of those, who were the friends of the minds which once inhabited them.