

BOTTLING WISDOM: THE MOTTO JUG

by Jack Sullivan
(Special to Bottles and Extras)

The idea seems to have started with the British. Beginning in the 19th Century and the reign of good Queen Victoria, the Brits made it a common practice to adorn bottles and jugs, usually of ceramic and holding some kind of whiskey, with wise sayings. The Doulton Company of England (see my article on Doulton in *Bottles and Extras*, Summer 2004) was a leader in putting slogans and sage mottoes on its stoneware.

Doulton Provides the Mottoes

Some of these Doulton items had a ginger jar shape with a brown body and cobalt top. One such [Figure 1] advises, "Heaven helps those who help themselves." A similar container [Figure 2] suggests, "If you can't be aisy [easy] be as aisy as you can." In other words, stop and smell the roses from time to time. A Doulton water jug for bar use [Figure 3] carries the following admonition: "Vessels large may venture more, but little boats should keep near shore."



Figure 1: Doulton whiskey jug — "Heaven helps, etc."



Figure 2: Doulton whiskey jug — "If you can't be aisy..."



Figure 3: Doulton water jug — "Vessels large...."



Figure 4: "Africa 1886"



Figure 5: John Mortlock whiskey jug

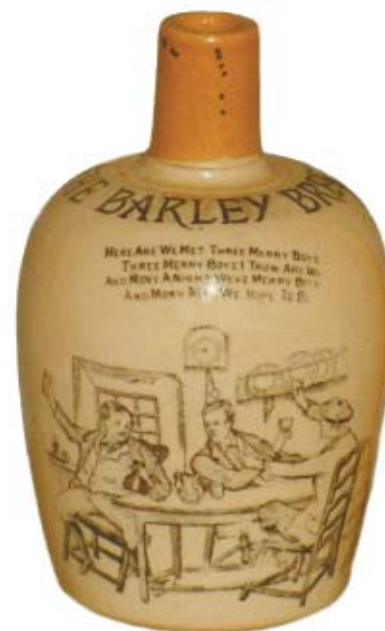


Figure 6: "The Barley Bree"

Other motto containers had a more political purpose. A Doulton whiskey jug, inscribed “Africa 1886,” shows Queen Victoria riding a camel as the Empress of Africa [Figure 4]. It sports on its backside a rousing patriotic slogan: “Sons be welded, each and all, into one imperial whole, one with Britain, heart and soul, one life, one flag, one fleet.... Britons hold your own and God guard all.” The Scotch distiller John Mortlock & Co. commissioned Doulton to produce him a jug [Figure 5] with a prominent “V.R.” — Victoria Regina — and a motto that seems to caution other British royalty to emulate the Queen’s rectitude if they were to merit the throne. It reads: “A pattern to all princes living with her and all that shall succeed.”

Not all the mottoes are so serious. Many relate to the joys of drinking. The Barley Bree whiskey jug [Figure 6] shows three men around a table having a rollicking time and drinking. It bears the rhyme:

“Here are we met, three merry boys,
 “Three merry boys trow are we,
 “And many a night we’ve merry been,
 “And many more we hope to be.”

The idea of mottoes on whiskey containers had expression in the New World on American historical and pictorial glass whiskey flasks of the 19th Century. “Success to the Railroad,” was a frequent slogan, along with “A Little More Grape [grapeshot], Captain Bragg,” lettered across a Gen. Zachary Taylor flask. One showing Benjamin Franklin quoted, in Latin, a statement about the Founding Father by the French economist Turgot. Freely translated

it says of Franklin: “He ripped lightning from the sky and power from tyrants.”

Detrick and the American Motto Jug

American motto jugs are epitomized by the Detrick Distilling Co. of Dayton, Ohio. Frank Detrick, the founder, clearly was interested in providing advice both about life and about drinking. Shown here is a Detrick marketing postcard [Figure 7] showing a camel carrying a bottle of whiskey and carrying this message: “A camel can go seven days without a drink...But who wants to be a camel?”

Detrick’s pre-Pro distillery issued a dozen different motto jugs. They are almost uniformly 4 ½ inches high and 2 ½ inches in diameter. The containers are heavy stoneware with Albany slip tops and Bristol white glaze bottoms. No mark identifies the pottery. As shown here, they come in two styles. Both say “motto jug” but the older has larger type, often in uneven lines. The new style keeps things within a rectangular label. They are part of a set of 11, which can be divided into three categories: downright philosophical, pep talks, and slogans keyed to the whiskey contents. In his own promotional literature, Detrick gave each different jug a number. By his own ordering system, they are:

1. “As I go up the hill of prosperity, may I never meet a friend.”
2. “Eat, drink and be merry” [Figure 8]
3. “While we live, let us live” [Figure 9]
4. “May fortune forever smile on you.”
5. “To err is human, to forgive divine” [Figure 10]
6. “There is always more where I come

from” [Figure 11]

7. “I am always welcome wherever I go”
8. “A friend in need is a friend indeed”
9. “When you see me you will always smile” [Figure 12]
10. “If you try me once, you will try me again”
11. “Drink, weary pilgrim, for tomorrow you die”
12. “Rye on toast (Try it - Its on the inside of our toast jug)”

“Toast jug” was another name Frank Dietrick gave to his small ceramics. In an era before “collectibles” was invented, he was promoting these jugs as souvenirs. In a company brochure he described them this way: “They make very acceptable ornaments for your library, den or dining room. Besides each jug is filled with the celebrated Detrick’s Special Selected Whiskey — enough for five or six good drinks.”

(Author’s note — not really.)

Detrick provided these stoneware containers to mail order customers for buying full-sized bottles of his whiskey, rock and rye, brandy and other alcoholic products. If a customer ordered one gallon of liquor he received one motto jug as a bonus; three gallons and he could choose four.

Detrick Markets the Motto

Frank Detrick began his business about 1885 life grinding wheat and corn under the name Detrick Milling Company in Tippacanoe City (now Tipp City), a town of about 6,000 a few miles north of Dayton. With excess grain able to be fermented, it was almost a natural move to distilling and by 1897, the company was renamed the Detrick Milling and Distilling Co. Frank the founder showed a real genius for marketing — with mottoes always in the fore.

A 1909 Detrick ad states: “Quality not quantity our motto.” Another slogan was “Fine old whiskey for medicinal use.” Detrick’s love of snappy sayings was also evident in a booklet he issued to advertise his products. Under the heading, “toasts worth knowing,” he served up, among others, the following:

“Here’s to our wives and sweethearts!
 May they never meet!”

“Here’s to the happiest hours of my life.
 Spent in the arms of another man’s wife.
 My mother!”

“He who loves not wine, women and

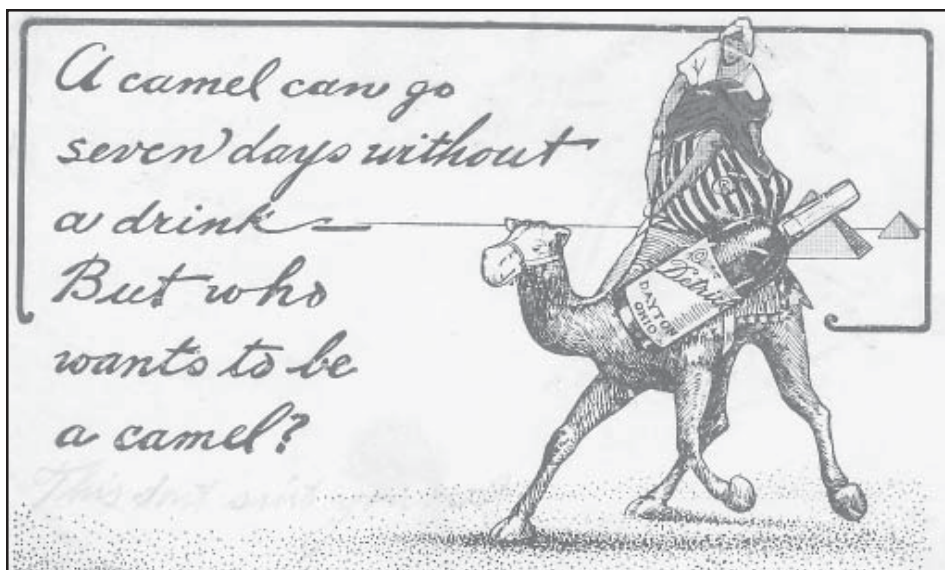


Figure 7: Detrick postcard



Figure 8: Dietrick jugs: “Eat, drink....”



Figure 11: Dietrick jug: “There is always...”



Figure 9: Dietrick jug: “While we live....”



Figure 12: Dietrick jug: “When you see me...”



Figure 10: Dietrick jug: “To err is....”

song, remains a fool his whole life long.”

“Let’s have wine and women, mirth and laughter; sermons and soda water the day after.”

Detrick’s distillery prospered during the first part of the 20th

Century as its products sold widely in the central United States. He eventually established a separate distribution depot in Chattanooga TN. City directories there list the firm in 1912 and 1913. Like most other such outfits, distilling ceased in 1919 with the coming of Prohibition. Subsequently the firm concentrated on the milling trade in Dayton under the name Detrick Grain and Mercantile.

A Kindred Soul in Washington, D.C.

Frank Detrick was not the only American whiskey man with a soft spot for snappy sayings. At the beginning of the 20th century, in a saloon in the heart of downtown Washington, D.C., dwelled a publican who also loved also mottoes. His name was Luke J. Kearney.

We know Kearney’s fondness for mottoes from the legacy he left of ceramic jugs that frequently are seen at regional bottle shows and at auction on Ebay. These were his Christmas “give always” to favored customers. Judging from the numbers around, the Irish saloonkeeper was generous in handing them out.

While other drinking establishments sometimes gave away whiskey at Yuletide, Kearney’s jugs are distinctive. Virtually all are two-toned stoneware with an Albany slip top and Bristol glaze body about 5 and ½ inches high. Most important, each has an individual slogan — something for the drinking public to ponder

while draining the contents of the jug.

The earliest seems to have been issued in 1900. Its underglaze label read: "You are not left..Not by a Jug Full'...Compliments of...Luke J. Kearney ... Christmas 1900." [Figure 13] Later ones would add his address at 1811 L Street in the District of Columbia. In 1901 Kearney gave away a jug labeled with "Another Jug Full...Compliments Of..." [Figure 14].

In 1902 Kearney borrowed a page from Detrick, using the slogan: "While we live - let's live." The next year the Washingtonian employed a personal motto: "Well I'll be Jugged...Here's Another Jug with Compliments of Luke J. Kearney" [Figure 15]. In 1904 and again in 1906, however, he reverted to Detrick-type slogans. The 1904 version was "If you try me once, you will try me again," and in 1906, the enigmatic, "As I go up the hill of prosperity, may I never meet a friend."

Although no one yet has identified a give-away for 1905, it appears that Luke issued a second version in both 1904 and 1906. The other 1904 jug contains a verse that says:

"To Be Healthy?
"That's the Question;
"Drink Arlington Club
"It Aids Digestion."

The second 1906 stoneware is unlike the others, appearing in a squared jug with the simple question: "Is Everybody Happy...Christmas 1906...Luke J. Kearney." [Figure 16]. After 1907 the jugs apparently ceased, although Kearney's saloon continued to be listed in local business directories.

Who Was Luke Kearney?

Details about Kearney life and tavern are sketchy. He at least brushed with celebrity in 1903 when he accepted a check drawn on a D.C. bank from Harry K. Thaw, the young socialite who murdered the famous architect Stanford White over love of the showgirl, Evelyn Nesbit, better known as "The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing." A sensation in its time, the scandal has since spawned dozens of books and articles, and at least two popular motion pictures. Harry Thaw may well have been a customer in Luke's saloon.

Sanborn fire maps of the time show Kearney's 1811 L Street address as a two-story brick building 25-feet wide and extending rearward almost one-half block



Figure 13: Kearney jug:
"You are not left..."

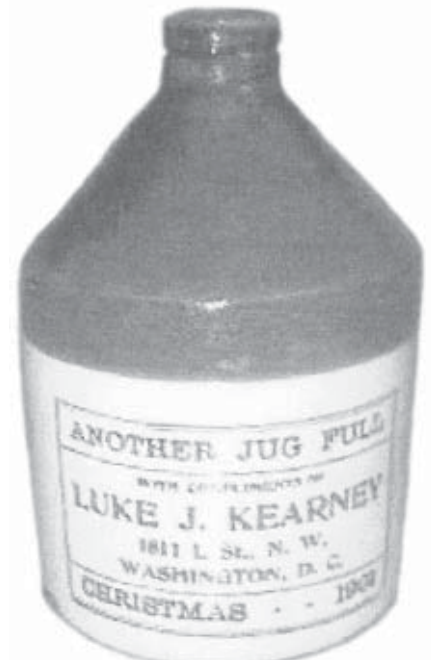


Figure 14: Kearney jug:
"Another jug full..."



Figure 15: Kearney jug:
"Well I'll be jugged..."



Figure 16: Kearney jug:
"Is everybody happy..."

to an alley. There was an empty lot on the east side, possibly for hitching horses. Today the address itself has vanished between two large buildings, one a large office at 1801 L St. and the other a restaurant and bakery at 1819. Although the address is gone, Luke Kearney's love of mottoes lives on in the series of whiskey ceramics that bear his name.

Adding up the British, Detrick and Kearney mottoes, we have accrued enough popular wisdom to live a life by. Their cumulative message seems to be" "Take it

easy, have fun and party as often as you can." I – for one — will drink to that!

This article is drawn from a wide number of sources, including the Internet. The British motto jugs appear in *Whiskey Ceramics* by Eric Eulenstein, published in Australia in 1990. The photos of the Detrick jugs are through the courtesy of Bill Wrenn of Watkinsville, Ga. Some of the text previously appeared in the *Potomac Pontil*, official newsletter of the Potomac Bottle Collectors Assn.