

How Absinthe is Made.

On my return from Switzerland I was detained a few hours at the little frontier town of Pontarlier, in the northern part of the Jura. I was told that the people of the department (Doubs) for a radius of thirty miles about Pontarlier, including necessarily a portion of Switzerland, depend almost entirely for their support on the making of cheese and the cultivation and the sale of wormwood. The raising of wormwood, a bitter weed of American fields and gardens used by old women as a febrifuge and vermifuge, seems a curious industry, but all that can be produced finds a ready sale to the distillers of absinthe at Pontarlier, which is the centre of this extensive industry. Absinthe, it should be remembered, is the French for wormwood.

Absinthe is made of wormwood, with the addition of other aromatic herbs that give the green colour and render the taste more agreeable. When it is distilled with care (says a special plea by the distillers) and consumed in reasonable quantities it is a beverage tonic and refreshing. But too much of it should not be taken, even when it is good, for it contains a high percentage of alcohol. Many distillers simply macerate the wormwood, and other herbs and steep them cold in alcohol made of beets or of grain, by which means the poisonous oils are extracted from the herbs. These poisonous qualities and the bad alcohols necessarily have a bad effect and produce that rapid and dangerous state of intoxication that drinkers of absinthe have often noticed in regard to themselves. A beverage that operates on the nerves in such a manner as to produce instantaneous intoxication must necessarily be dangerous, first to the health, and ultimately to the reason. This effect itself shows that the liquor is of bad quality and should be condemned. A French physician says of wormwood: "Its bitterness is its principal merit. It is tonic, stimulating, febrifuge, and vermifuge. It is par excellence the herb of pale and feeble women. It is the quinine of the poor. A slight pinch is sufficient in a litre of boiling water," etc. It is evident to the most ordinary apprehension that a liquor made with a good alcohol from a herb that has been in use the world over as a common domestic remedy, and has formed a part of the medical pharmacopoeia from time immemorial, can-

induced generally as being too powerful on the nervous system. The qualities of caraway and anise are familiar to everyone one. The last is greatly used in medicine and in many other ways, for its flavour and perfume. The caraway used at Pontarlier comes from the south of France; the best anise from southwestern France and from Andalusia in Spain. The flowers of hyssop are regarded as stimulating and expectorant. All the plants used in the making of absinthe, it will be seen, have recognized medical qualities, and all, probably, as tea and coffee, a poisonous essence that should not be extracted in the process of distillation, and so become a part of the liquor.

As to its history, absinthe, though it has not been fashionable till within a few years past, was invented some hundred and fifty years ago at Couvet, a little city of Switzerland, a few miles beyond Pontarlier. The inventor could never have anticipated the fame it would achieve. After having passed through various hands it was purchased by the ancestor of the principal distillery of Pontarlier, to which place the industry was transferred near the close of the last century, since which epoch the use of the liquor has been gradually extending.

The principal distillery of Pontarlier, which has its patent from the inventor, is an immense establishment, covering several acres, admirably appointed in every respect, kept with extraordinary neatness, and, for the convenience of transportation, connected with the railroad station, some three-quarters of a mile distant, by a track of its own.

Some questions regarding the habits of the workmen were answered with a certain freedom. I desired to know how they were treated, and if, from daily contact with a liquor reported so dangerous, they did not acquire the habit of using it too often. My guide said that happened sometimes, but not as often as it happened in distilleries making no matter what kind of liquor. As a general thing, the workmen were satisfied with the odour with which the place was impregnated and which newcomers found somewhat intoxicating. Every employé was given a glass of absinthe every morning, with a half bottle of red wine, and they were all generally contented and contented.