The cup that cheers can be the cup that kills. Not only alcohol addiction itself but many disabling, and some fatal, physical and psychological conditions can be attributed to excessive drinking.

In addition, alcohol-related traffic accidents account for a significant proportion of deaths in many countries, especially among young people. Accidents at work or in the home are more frequently related to over-drinking than is widely recognised. Excessive drinking disrupts family life and can often result in violence and neglect.

Despite these known health hazards, the production of alcoholic drinks is increasing all over the world, and the consumption of alcohol per person is soaring on a global scale.

Particularly in some of the developing countries, the rapid growth in consumption is likely, after some lapse of time, to be reflected in a higher incidence of alcohol-related problems. These in turn will represent a very substantial drain on scarce economic and social resources.

As the January-February issue of World Health reported, Dr Samuel W. Hynd, chairman of Swaziland’s National Council on Smoking, Alcohol and Drug Dependence, believes that “alcohol is destroying millions more than the famine in the Sahel, and in some countries the numbers of known alcoholics equals the population of the largest cities.”

And Professor Robert E. Kendell, of the University of Edinburgh, UK, said of the steadily increasing production of and trade in alcoholic drinks: “These are activities with inevitable public health implications that will have to be faced both by governments and by the world’s alcohol industries.”
Facing page: Blending whiskies in a Scottish distillery. But the dosser sleeping off his hangover will never figure in the glamorous liquor advertisements.
Photos L. Sirman © and WHO/H. Christoph

This page: The contrasting view in Africa. In moderation, alcohol helps to make a party go; for the lone drinker, it can be a false friend, an untrustworthy crutch.
Photos WHO/P. Almasy

Inset left: This postage stamp from the Soviet Union warns: “Sobriety—the normal way of life.”

Above: Norway’s Minister of Health and Social Affairs, Leif Arne Helge, invites his countrymen to drink water.
Photo Norwegian Directorate for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems ©