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BARMAIDS.

FACTS REGARDING
WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT
IN
DRINKING BARS.

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BARMAIDS.

The information contained in these pages is largely derived from barmaids themselves, the rest from documentary sources. Use has also been made of "Women as Barmaids," recording the investigation into the barmaid's employment made at the instance of the Joint Committee on the Employment of Barmaids; and of "The Barmaid," the report of the enquiry carried out by the Women's Industrial Council.

See also "Thirteen Nights" and "The Soul Market," by the late Olive Christian Malvery, the well-known writer, who herself served for some time as a barmaid in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the life.

See also "The Employment of Women," lately issued by the Temperance Council of the Christian Churches, and "Should Women serve in Drinking Bars?" issued by the British Women's Total Abstinence Union.

See also the recent important work by Ernest Selley, "The English Public-House as it is," in which he describes from the standpoint of the man of the world what he has himself seen. From their very varied points of view, all these writers emphasise the evils to which this employment of women gives rise, both to the women themselves and to the men whom they serve.

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The total number of barmaids is small, which accounts for the small appearance the occupation makes in statistics. The number of barmaids in England and Wales, as returned in the census of 1921, was 24,747. Of these, 11,393 were under twenty-five, and 4,059 of this number were under twenty.

The wages of barmen and barmaids are now usually about a pound weekly with board and lodging. Barmaids are not employed because they are cheaper, or more "amenable," as a trade paper asserts. In



busy houses and in the cheaper bars, men may as often be seen serving as women. It is in the bars charging higher prices, where the attracting of custom becomes important, that women are utilised. "Barmaids are troublesome, but necessary," says an employer.

No doubt there have always been women working in public-houses. But as the "Licensing World" says: "The modern bar is an innovation, and it may be that the girl penned behind the counter, and entirely occupied with the duty of serving liquor and making herself agreeable to the customers" (note that!) "is no older than the Crimean War." However, the modern barmaid is really rather earlier than this. Already in 1845 we find in "Dolly's Chop House" in the City, a barmaid serving who was "chosen for her beauty and obliging disposition." From that time on, the barmaid became general. Her chief "raison d'être" lies in the fact that in certain parts of a licensed house the prices of drinks are much higher than in other parts. These higher prices are usually charged in the lounge, the saloon bar and the smoke-room, and the problem arises of how to attract customers into them—a problem best solved by putting an attractive girl there. "An old Publican of twenty years' experience" writes that in many cases publicans could not keep open if it were not for barmaids to draw custom. "There can be no two opinions on the question that a pretty girl sells more liquor than a man," an Attorney General for the Transvaal has said. "A plain barmaid would be a poor investment for a hotel-keeper" ("Cassell's Journal"). "If a stern-visaged potman were the sole dispenser of alcoholic refreshment, unregenerate males would feel no temptation to linger at the counter" ("Daily Express").

A barmaid herself says, "We are nothing but decoys."

"In 'A Second String,' by Anthony Hope, an old-fashioned publican rebukes his barmaid for certain 'carrying on' in the bar. The girl replies pertly, 'That wasn't nothing! The bar between us too! . . . Oh, very good! Only if you won't have that, you won't keep your takings up; that's all.'"

More than one case is on record where "the tone of trade being sluggish," the brewer or his agent has advised the publican to "put his girl in the bar." And in one instance the publican was spirited enough to reply, "And you have two girls, haven't you? Put them in the bar!" For there is nothing the better class publican is more solicitous about than to keep his own women folk from the contamination of the bar.

The employment of women in selling intoxicants has never had popular approval. As a working man has said, a girl "loses caste" by becoming a barmaid in a way she does not do by working in a match factory.

In 1540 the municipality of Chester made an order forbidding "females between the ages of fourteen and forty" from helping or serving in inns or taverns.

When in the seventeenth century Mr. John How, of Guildford, established the "Maids' Money" prize still awarded there, he stipulated that no women employed in a licensed house should be allowed to compete.

In Scotland this disapproval has always been strongly felt. Already in the seventeenth century there were bye-laws prohibiting the employment of barmaids, and barmaids have never been common there. At the present time the magistrates of Glasgow enforce the regulation that in bars used mainly for drinking, male attendants only shall be employed.

Coming down to recent times in England, a regulation now in force in the University of Oxford is that no undergraduate shall visit the bar or lounge of any licensed house. The authorities of Harrow School also forbid the pupils there to enter any licensed premises.

In 1903 the Theatres and Music Halls Committee of the London County Council resolved "That it would view with satisfaction the diminution of the employment of women in the bars of such places."

In 1903 the National Union of Women Workers, with but four dissentients, passed a resolution disapproving of the barmaid's employment.

In 1904 the Women's Liberal Federation passed a resolution that the barmaid's employment should be

prohibited, but that this should not affect the women already in employ.

In 1913 the Fifth International Congress against the White Slave Traffic expressed the desire that the legislature of every country should prohibit the employment of girls under twenty-one in serving alcohol unless in their parents' establishments.

The Temperance Council of the Christian Churches now includes among its "eight minor points," the abolition of the employment of women in the retail sale of liquor. These "minor points" have been approved by the Executives of all the constituent bodies of the Council. Its excellent pamphlet, "The Employment of Women," is a recent contribution to the subject.

This general public disapproval found a full opportunity of expression for the first time in 1904. In that year memorials, signed by householders only, were presented to the Licensing Justices throughout the country asking them "to take means to discountenance and discourage the employment of barmaids." These memorials were an astounding success. They were signed by thousands; in many places every householder signed; fourteen of them received over a thousand signatures each. They were presented to the different Benches by well-known local residents, of every class and creed. In reply, not one Bench approved of the employment, and no less than twenty-one expressed the desire that it should cease, but without displacing the women already at work.

However, the Licensing Bill of 1904 deprived the Licensing Justices of the power of making conditions when renewing an old licence; they can only now do so when granting a new one.

In 1907 an influentially signed memorial was presented to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Liberal Government then in power, asking that in the new Licensing Bill about to be prepared, a clause should be included for the gradual limitation of women's employment in drinking-bars. Among the forty-four signatories to this memorial, twenty were women dis-

tinguished in every department of public life. As a result of these expressions of the general feeling, the Government inserted in its Licensing Bill a clause giving Licensing Justices power, not indeed to dismiss barmaids wholesale, but to "make conditions" regarding their employment.

With the uproar that followed, barmaids themselves had practically nothing to do. Few joined the so-called "Barmaids' Defence League," which they did not form; few attended the protest meetings that were arranged, as the employers complained. At the much advertised "barmaids' protest meeting" in Holborn Town Hall, only two barmaids spoke, but the Chairman and officials of the Licensed Victuallers' Protection Association were there "in case of their being required." Indeed, a barmaid remarked that it was not true they did not need conditions to be made for them—they did need it.

It was the employers who were terrified at the bare prospect of losing their barmaids and the profits they made; not even the clause prescribing a time-limit for licences aroused such consternation. The leaders acted at once, and they found a convenient stalking-horse in a knot of women who with no knowledge of barmaids' lives, and quite without any mandate from them, undertook with the money and advice of the trade to engineer an agitation against the clause. The reports of the private trade meetings show that it was the employers, not the employees, who were behind the agitation. Mis-statements of all kinds were made; it was asserted that a hundred thousand women were to be dismissed at once, and so on.

The outcome of all this pother was that the Government consented to leave the retention or otherwise of the barmaids' clause to the decision of the House of Commons. Horatio Bottomley, then an M.P., moved its rejection, which was carried. Thus the deliberate opinion of the country was flouted by the power of the trade, aided by the folly of a few women who probably did not realise they were being made catspaws, and also

aided no doubt by the support of men whose so-called "defence of barmaids" merely meant their fear of losing an ignoble form of amusement for themselves. Certainly it was what the "Licensing World" called it, a great victory for the trade.

Probably the public opinion aroused of late years on the subject of barmaids' work, has tended to mitigate some of its worst abuses. Barmaids may now be treated rather more as if they were human beings; the intolerable conditions of the life revealed by the Labour Commission of 1899 may now be improved somewhat. Attacks on barmaids may be less frequent, although they do still occur, as witness a very recent instance. The shortening by law of the hours of opening of licensed premises is an immense boon to those working there. Also, the Shops' Bill of 1911 includes bar attendants in its scope, despite the opposition of the employers, who sent a deputation to the Home Secretary against it. Bar attendants, therefore, now get a weekly half-holiday by law.

Again, the Act which limits the working hours per week of young persons under eighteen to seventy-four hours including meal times, has made it, as a rule, unprofitable to engage barmaids under that age, and we seldom now hear of girls of fifteen and sixteen being so employed, as was formerly not uncommon. Witness the tragedy which shocked public opinion some years since, when a girl entered the bar at fifteen, speedily became a hopeless drunkard, and drowned herself at the age of eighteen.

A defect, however, exists in the Act which should be remedied. Since domestic service is not included in its scope, a girl under eighteen, who works in a public house as a domestic, may be pressed into service in the bar without limit of time as long as the house is open.

But while allowing for these things, the fact needs emphasising that the most serious evils of bar life still remain—evils which fully justify parents in their general

dislike of this calling for their daughters. One of these evils is the degrading treatment to which, by no fault of her own, a barmaid must submit as a condition of employment; another is the fact that of all the "blind alley" occupations which we now condemn, the barmaid's is by far the worst.

To take the first objection. Though few publicans are honest enough to demand, as one did lately, that his barmaid must be "able to maintain business," and though a "good-looking young barmaid" may not now be often asked for in words, yet every barmaid knows that this is the unexpressed stipulation always made. Witness the girl who boasted that her charms were "worth a fortune" to the house where she served. ("Thirteen Nights").

Most employers demand a barmaid under twenty-five, and many demand one of eighteen. "Honesty, sobriety, industry, are qualities that are asked for, but count for little when a woman has lost her looks, and are taken in youth for granted." ("The Barmaid").

Many a barmaid confirms this. "We have to be extremely tactful, of a bright, merry disposition and dress," writes one. "We have to put up with any fool or dirty-minded man, and smile and treat them tactfully when we would like to wring their necks. . . . Of all the shop assistants I do not know of one in any business who has to undergo the hardships and meet the temptations and responsibilities that are demanded from us."

"It is almost unbearable, the bad language and nasty remarks we have to put up with," writes another.

The working man usually respects the girl who serves him. It is the sensual man of the "better classes," to his shame be it said, who is without honour and chivalry to women. The girl must pretend to enjoy coarse talk and familiarities if she is to keep her place. "She has no protection from her employer; she is there to please the client" ("The Barmaid"). She is considered fair game by all the bar loafers, and she would lose her work if she ventured to show resentment.

Girls in tea-shops do not encounter these insults. Commenting on this, a barmaid said, "Of course not—

it is the alcohol that does it." "It may be argued that the sensualist is found elsewhere than in drinking-bars. True, but none who have studied the alcohol problem fail to recognise that . . . the bar is the place where among the sensually-inclined, sensuality is excited, and is the venue to which such naturally drift" ("The Employment of Women"). And the bar is absolutely the only place where women must submit to insult as a condition of employment.

To put a girl in the smoke room amid the unrestrained talk and behaviour that goes on there, and where she is not, as a rule, even defended by the bar which we are so often told is her protection, is condemned by some publicans themselves. Yet the custom is practically universal. The licensing justices of Colwyn Bay once suggested to a publican that it would be better if a barman rather than a barmaid served in his smoke-room. He at once objected that "a barman would not be desirable for the class of trade done in smoke-rooms." He added that he employed several barmen, but "it would be altogether against the character of the trade to have a barman in a bar of this kind. A waitress served the people in the first-class smoke-room" (that is, where prices being higher, it was especially desired to attract custom).

In "The English Public-House as it is,"* the writer describes what he saw in the lounge of a certain licensed house. It is typical, and deserves special notice. He says: "The lounge is patronised by middle-class men, solicitors, traders, accountants, etc. There is no bar in the lounge; all drinks are ordered by 'Maudie.' She is an asset to the management from the selling point of view. She greets each customer as though he were the apple of her eye. She sat on the knees of some of them and stroked their hair! Whenever she noticed that they were slacking down in the drinking, she said, 'Well, boys, I must go,' or words to that effect. This move invariably made some of them cry out, 'Don't go, Maudie, darling; bring us the

* Ernest Selley (Published by Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 5/-).

same as before.' She listened to filthy stories and told some herself. She allowed several of them to put their arms round her. . . . She acted the part of the bold, fast woman in a professional way, and the management expected her to do so. I have seen this sort of thing elsewhere in lounges principally used by tradesmen and professional men. This type of customer is very fond of lewd stories, and if the waitress does not reciprocate in kind, she joins in the laughter in a knowing way. These men enjoy salacious stories all the more because a woman is present, and usually the 'Maudies' are the only women in the room."

That this description is not too strong can be proved by many independent instances. The foreign observer was not without justification, who remarked that he had witnessed things in English licensed premises which he should have expected to see only in a house of ill-fame.

Imagine, too, the influence of this atmosphere of drink and sensuality on young lads entering it for the first time.

It is surprising that in Carlisle, where, it is understood the desire is to discourage drinking, Selley found a barmaid serving in a smoke-room, and witnessed an altercation between her and a noisy customer who refused to leave.

The demand for an attractive girl in these places is especially insistent. "Young, bright, lady-like, good-looking, refined," are among the qualities quite recently demanded for smoke-room barmaids. What would remain of the bright young girl's refinement after a few months in such surroundings does not concern the employer, whose only aim is to make money out of her. "The exploitation of the young girl, to which is attributed the degradation of women as barmaids. . . . The barmaid is at all times exposed to annoyance from the client, who sees in her an instrument only to amuse him" ("The Barmaid.").

Why do barmaids remain such when they realise what the life is? Because once in the trade they find it impossible to get other work. Mrs. Bramwell Booth

has testified that many girls known to her would gladly have left the bar if they could have done so. But who wants an ex-bar employee? "After six months' experience the barmaid often wishes to change her trade. But she cannot. That is the common tragedy of the bar. The barmaid of the majority . . . continues at her post in weariness and loathing, and with a great fear of what the future is to bring" ("The Barmaid").

The bar is an unskilled trade, and worse still, it is a "blind alley" one worse than all the others, because those who have been in it find all other decent callings closed to them. Canon Horsley, long Chaplain of Clerkenwell Prison, has testified to the bitter complaints of bar-tenders, male and female, of the impossibility of getting respectable work after they have served in a public-house.

Barmaids usually lose their work young. It is true that for the purpose of a deputation in 1908, the employers produced a few older women, but if they really were still barmaids they must have needed looking for. The well-known rule of the trade is "When you no longer attract custom you must go." Certainly many barmaids marry; chosen as they are for their good looks, this is natural. "They stake everything on marrying before it is too late" ("The Soul Market"). But what of the others? Only about one-half of the total number marry, according to a Trade estimate. The others "must return to their friends," a Trade paper euphemistically puts it; that is, they are driven out of work. "It went to my heart to see the early age at which girls I know engaged in this pernicious business, were discharged as worn out" ("The Soul Market"). "What chance have I against a girl?" said bitterly a barmaid of excellent character and references, whose unpardonable fault was that she was thirty-five.

What becomes of old barmaids? Some may have special parts, or may have relatives in the trade, and thus remain in work longer, but the end of many is very sad. Those who in 1908 so passionately protested

against a dismissal of barmaids which was never threatened, ignored the fact that just these cruel dismissals are going on daily under our present system. Witness the case of a barmaid of thirty-five who was told she "did not suit on account of her age." She was rebuffed in applying for fresh posts for the same reason, and finally, having come to the end of her resources, drowned herself.

And it is the "refined" girl of the lounge and smoke-room whose connection with the bar is the shortest and the most fatal. She reaches the stage of being considered less attractive sooner than does the rougher girl in the public bars. Lured into the bar before she has learned a trade, too old to learn one now, having learned nothing in the bar of any use to her afterwards, often with deteriorated health, her only reference one she cannot give, what is she to do? "From the great mass of women broken on the wheel of profit-making industry, comes no more tragic cry than that of the barmaid. Before it is too late, do, oh do, help me to find other work" ("The Barmaid"). It is no wonder that among a number of barmaids seen lately, every one said she would not advise a younger sister to enter the trade.

Barmaids tend to deteriorate in the bar, in health and in morals, too—who can wonder? "They go down a lot in six months," says one who knows the life. The physical unhealthiness of the bar is proved by the Registrar General's returns, which show the unusually high percentage of deaths among those working there. This is often due to alcoholism, the temptation of employer and employed alike. And the barmaid, expected to be always "bright" and "cheery," however she may feel, is tempted to take a glass to "keep herself going." But no fault in her is so severely punished as intoxication; if it is discovered she is almost always dismissed, and without a character.

Another grave disadvantage of bar life is the constant danger of attack from drunken or ill-disposed customers. How real is this danger is shown by the fact

that a leading Corporation which insures against accidents, charges for insuring bar tenders a rate nearly three times as high as that for waiters in boarding houses and similar places where the duties are almost the same, but where alcohol is not sold. The Chairman of the Licensed Victuallers' Central Protection Society of London has said, "There is no other trade like it that I am aware of. You have a class of customers that is very troublesome."

The barmaid, perhaps a girl in her teens, is often alone in the bar, has to decide the degree of drunkenness of an excited customer, has to coax or restrain a violent man, often has to face assault. And often she is in danger from her employer, who himself is not always sober, nor moral. Barmaids frequently refer to this danger from the employer. "There are no good public-houses, only bad, worse and worst," is a common saying among them.

Railway barmaids have a more certain tenure of employment than other barmaids, but otherwise the conditions are much the same. A girl who took work in a railway buffet left at the end of a month solely because of what she had experienced there.

The "Lancet," the leading medical journal, has said: "There can be no doubt that the vocation of a barmaid is attended by perils from which young women should be sheltered. The long hours and fatigue are likely to lead to alcoholic indulgence; the frequenters of drinking-bars are often persons of loose conversation and degraded character. If we add to this that the employment affords no prospects, that it uses up the majority of those engaged in it as soon as youth is past . . . we shall have stated a very strong case against permitting young women to be so employed. . . . There can be little doubt that legislation is required in the interests of the women concerned, or that such legislation would be favourably regarded by the public."

Meanwhile other countries, though not Great Britain, have been moving. In many countries, indeed, no

legislation was required, this abuse having been always unknown there, and in others legislation dates from some time back. As long ago as 1887 the municipality of La Rochelle, France, forbade the then novel practice of employing women to serve liquor.

In Bengal in 1903, as the result of a general public movement, women not belonging to the liquor-seller's family were forbidden to serve in the bar.

In Burma, women's service in bars was forbidden in 1904, as the result of a memorial to the Government signed by every European woman and almost all the leading Englishmen in Rangoon.

In Canada and throughout the United States, public opinion has always forbidden this employment of women, and scathing comments were made by Canadian soldiers who came here during the war, on the to them novel sight of girls employed in selling liquor.

But in general this now almost universal movement against promoting the sale of drink by the aid of women's charms, dates from about the time when the British House of Commons refused to move in the matter. It is more than likely that the agitation here, though it failed for the moment, did cause other nations to take the matter up. At all events, since 1908 no less than sixteen communities have enacted laws of one kind or another limiting the barmaid's employment, and the list lengthens constantly.

In 1908 the civic authorities of Ghent, Belgium, levied a special tax on publicans employing women in their bars, and thus securing extra profits by what were considered illegitimate means.

In the Canton of Basle, Switzerland, girls under twenty and boys under sixteen, may not now serve in licensed houses.

In Prag, the capital of Czecho-Slovakia, no woman may serve in a drinking-bar.

In Estonia, no person under twenty of either sex, may serve in licensed premises.

In France, girls under eighteen may not serve alcohol unless in their parents' establishments.

In Italy the law is the same.

In Northern Ireland no girl under eighteen may sell alcohol.

In Southern Ireland a girl under eighteen may not sell alcohol unless in her parents' establishment; there she may do so at the age of sixteen.

It is, however, in the British Dominions oversea that the most stringent laws have been enacted, and it may be noted that in almost all of them women have long had the vote.

In South Africa, by the Licensing Act which came in force in 1928, no woman other than the wife of the licensee, or the licensee herself if a woman, may sell alcohol; with, of course, the proviso everywhere made, that barmaids already such, may remain in the employment without limit of time.

In the State of New South Wales, Australia, no woman under twenty-one, unless the wife or daughter of the publican, may serve liquor.

The same law is in force in Tasmania.

In the State of Queensland, Australia, no woman under eighteen may sell liquor; a barmaid may not work more than eight hours a day—time worked beyond this must be paid for at overtime rates.

In the State of Western Australia no woman under twenty-one may serve alcohol; barmaids may not work more than forty-eight hours a week, nor after closing time, nor on Sunday.

It is, however, in the States of South Australia and Victoria, and in New Zealand, that the most stringent laws have been passed, and the best results achieved.

In South Australia no woman may serve alcohol except those so employed before the law was passed in 1908, these being permitted to continue in work as long as they pleased. By now, however, all these have left the trade through marriage, death, and so on. Public opinion entirely supports this abolition of the barmaid; no one regrets it but the liquor sellers, and persons of the stamp of one who complained bitterly in a trade journal that "Getting a drink here" (South Australia) "is a dreary business; a pert young man

... hands you out the liquor, with none of the grace or graciousness of the barmaid."

In New Zealand, by the law passed in 1911, no woman may serve alcohol except those already so engaged at that time. The benefit to them of this law is great; they are freed from the danger of losing their work with their good looks; and as their number gradually diminishes, their pay rises. It will not be long now, however, before the last barmaid passes out.

In the State of Victoria, Australia, whose capital is the great city of Melbourne, no woman may serve alcohol unless so employed in 1918. All those then in employment may continue in work as long as, and wherever, they please. The advantages to them of the law are the same as have accrued to barmaids in the other States.

The view of some women, mostly of the upper and middle classes, that legislation affecting women only is to be condemned, is not held by working women, who consider that such legislation has often been a great boon to those concerned.

The "Labour Woman," the official organ of the women's trade unions, comments on the resolution against protective legislation for women lately passed by the National Council of Women without consulting industrial workers themselves, and says: "Such a resolution aims not at equality in welfare, but at pushing women still further down in the scale of workers. It is protection against the employer that is aimed at in these laws, and releasing employers from these obligations will not better the position of women, but rather push them further down still. Industrial women do not accept these efforts of non-industrial women who pretend to assist them, while in reality, though, perhaps, unknowingly, assisting the employer."

(A striking example of this assisting the employer instead of the employed, was shown in the recent agitation carried on against legislation regarding barmaids).

Again, the "Labour Woman" said lately that it "could not admit the contention that men and women

are exactly on the same plane. It is time the theorists came down to earth. A paper equality is no good. To provide women with a real equality of opportunity it is necessary to compensate them for their initial handicaps. . . . Equality means oppression mostly."

In fact, special laws for women now exist in all advanced countries; night work is almost everywhere forbidden them; they are almost everywhere forbidden to work underground; in many countries working in lead industries is not allowed them; and many more examples could be given.

It has already been proved to be the case wherever it has been tried, that closing the barmaid's employment to all but the women already in it is an untold boon to the barmaids themselves. It frees them from the cruel dismissals for younger women which they otherwise suffer. Their wages steadily rise, and so do the wages of barmen, owing to the relief from competition, a thing which is all to the good.

And it is also certain that legislation to prevent unthinking boys and girls from entering this dangerous unskilled calling and thus wrecking their future lives, before they are twenty-one, would result in many of them never entering it at all, to their great future benefit.

Either one of these proposals would be warmly welcomed by bar employees. It is only too probable that the employers would fight either of them with all the astuteness and resourcefulness that they displayed in 1908.

Such laws would not "close a profession" to women. The bar is not a profession at all; it is a form of exploitation of the young girl—a snare into which she enters before she understands or realises that it will cast her adrift again when it is too late for her to take up any true profession. and, besides, will leave her with a stigma on her for life.

It will be noted that neither in this country nor in any other has the dismissal of any barmaids already in employment ever been proposed.

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