

## EXTRA FACILITIES FOR DRINKING

**A** MISLEADING title. It is, I believe, the title of an Act of Parliament; but let it not be supposed that it stands for the convenience of thirsty citizens; on the contrary, it heralds danger for those who, licensed by law to trade in liquor, venture to make their premises more comfortable for their clients. Only recently a publican suffered under the Act because he had the temerity to remove wooden partitions so as to make a wall straight instead of alcoved; he suffered, not by being imprisoned or fined, but only by being prosecuted and forced to employ King's Counsel to save his means of livelihood; for the Act ordains that structural alterations to a licensed house are illegal unless specially sanctioned by law.

The fact that the publican in question was not more drastically punished must have perturbed many of the decorous who read of his acquittal; but let them rest secure; the Law leaves little undone that may embarrass the publican in his nefarious trade.

For instance, should he have a garden wherein his customers choose to sit on a hot day, and should he have omitted to mark it on the plan of his premises presented to the Magistrates, it is unlicensed, and he may not carry or cause to be carried thereto any intoxicating liquor that his customers wish to drink; if they insist on fresh air they must wait on themselves, a practice calculated to peeve those who take the trouble to go abroad for refreshment, and so to curtail trade and, of course, to diminish drunkenness.

It might be thought, moreover, that a publican could evade the law relating to hours for drinking by inviting friends to a party after ten o'clock; but he can't! At least he is not allowed to provide them with Extra Facilities for Drinking his beer (bought more cheaply,

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be it remembered, than they themselves could obtain it) so long as they sit in his bar-parlour : if he insists on entertaining his friends after he has done his work, he may hold his party in his bedroom, and, naturally, his morality and theirs is of little consequence.

It may seem as though a great many men are licensed to ruin the constitutions of Britons by selling alcoholic drinks to them, but in reality a careful vigilance is maintained. Anyone may lodge a complaint with the police against any publican, and any policeman may do the same, and continued complaints secure the cancellation of a license. In this respect it may be noted that should a member of the Impeccable Force choose to do so, he might approach a publican by way of the back door after drinking hours, and ask for beer, as a favour ; then, if the publican be of a canting disposition and pretends to a strict observance of the Law, the Constable will know how to humble him out of his self-righteousness ; and if the publican be so lawless as to disregard the Law and give drink out of hours to an officer of the Law himself, he may very rightly be suspected of indiscriminate evasion.

Another method of hindering Extra Facilities for Drinking is that of insisting on special 'Occasional Licences' for providing beer, for example, at a supper in the village hall. Proof of the care with which this Law is maintained has recently been afforded by certain Magistrates' refusal to grant an occasional licence for a choirmen's dinner over which the misguided Vicar was to preside ; the Magistrates very properly declared that the right place for choirmen was in the choir. They are vigilant, too, our Magistrates, in the matter of frivolous amusements, but when a publican appears respectfully before them and craves an occasional licence to provide intoxicating refreshments for a dance that is given in aid of a charity, they will usually grant it. But precautions even then are taken :

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the publican pays his court fee for making the application; he pays ten shillings a day for the privilege of selling spirits off his premises; he has to have his occasional licence ratified by H.M. Collector of Customs and Excise; he has to receive a special permit to carry the liquor to the scene of the festivity; it is illegal for him to leave what is unsold on the premises after the dance, but he must obtain another permit to remove from the premises the exact quantity left over; and he must file the permits for the inspection of visiting officials.

A further effect of the vigilance of the Law is noticeable in the closing down of undesirable or superfluous public-houses. The inn-keepers thus deprived of a living are in all fairness granted compensation, and it is a salutary reminder to the unmolested publicans, of the power and tolerance of the Law, that the sum granted in compensation must be raised between themselves.

Indeed, so far from enjoying that unrestricted licence to tamper with the physical welfare of the race that the publican is often supposed to enjoy, he is, admirably enough, treated as a suspected person, whether he has committed an offence or is only still liable to commit one; but by a nice distinction, the discharged convict reports once a month to the Police, and the publican must submit himself to the Magistrates' scrutiny only once a year; of course, if he is then considered less desirable than the Law could wish, although he is not technically guilty of an offence, his licence to sell liquor can be withdrawn, and if he has been foolish enough to take his premises on a twenty-years' lease, so much the worse for him.

The Law, furthermore, limits the monetary advantages accruing to the sale of alcoholic poison. A licence for a moderately-sized country inn costs between thirty or forty pounds a year. Approximately half the price

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of a bottle of whiskey is paid to the Government. And, apart from duties, the Government makes annual charges in Brewers' licences, which, of course, are eventually covered by the publican, so that, having paid his ordinary rates and taxes he is not able to gratify his avarice to any large extent by supplying customers with liquor.

Finally, a reassuring word must be given on the matter of influencing children by bad example. Most sternly the Law forbids the presence of children on any licensed premises, either indoors or out of doors; parents and publicans are prosecuted and punished for any breach of this Law, and so much are they encouraged to observe it that, should thirsty parents enter a public-house to seek refreshment and leave their children playing outside in the road, and should the children be knocked down and killed by passing traffic, neither the publican, nor the parents, nor the Police are prosecuted for manslaughter.

With these restrictions on Extra Facilities for Drinking, it seems unlikely that drunkenness will increase; anyway, the Law has done all it can, until we hear the final result of the Drink Commission.

RONALD RICHINGS.