

THE PROCTORS FIGHT AGAINST PROSTITUTION IN THE 18th and 19th CENTURY

By Enid Porter

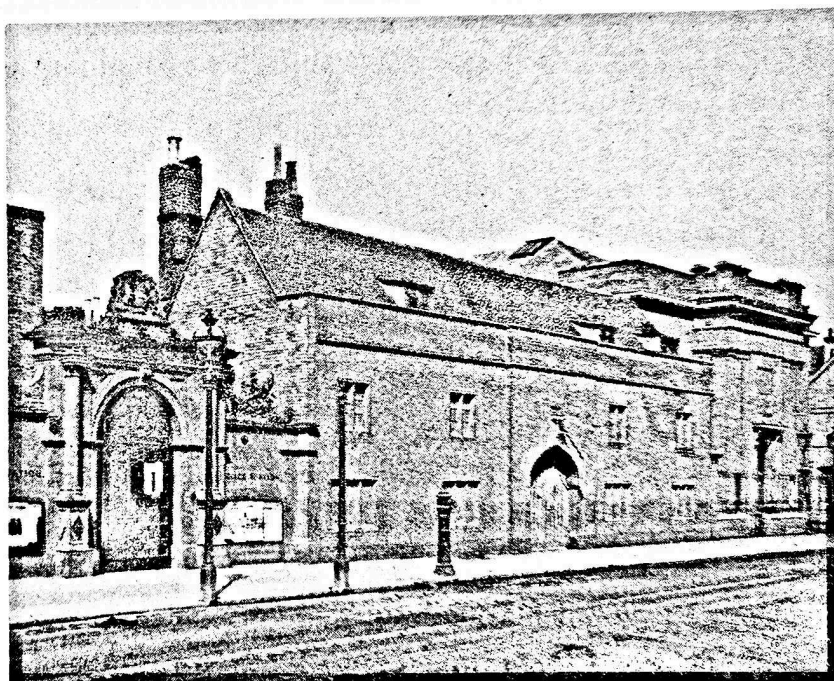
"IF you don't behave yourself you'll go to the Spinning House". With these words many a 19th century Cambridge mother threatened an unruly offspring, and certainly the grim appearance of the building in St. Andrew's Street, on the site of the present Police Station, must have struck terror into the hearts of disobedient children.

It was in about the year 1627 that the Town and University began to erect buildings destined to serve as a workhouse for the poor of Cambridge. These buildings stood on land belonging to Thomas Hobson, the local carrier and livery stable keeper whose name lives on in the phrase 'Hobson's choice' which is, in fact, no choice at all.

In 1628 he conveyed to twelve trustees, six of them townsmen and the remaining six appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, this land in what is now St. Andrew's Street, together with adjoining properties — farmhouses, cottages, a dovehouse and a barn, for this part of Cambridge was still at that date a rural area. The conveyance was made on condition that within four years a house or houses should be completed "as well for setting the poor people of the University and Town to work as for a house of correction for unruly and stubborn rogues, beggars and other poor persons who should refuse to work". And so the Spinning House or Hobson's Workhouse as it was often called came into being.

Hobson died in 1630 and in his will left a sum of £100 for his charity which, over the ensuing centuries, benefitted by other bequests of land and money, one of the largest being the

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The Spinning House

gift of £500 from the Cambridge book-binder, John Bowtell in 1813, for the placing of poor boys as apprentices to learn trades by which they might eventually earn a living.

The governors or masters of the Workhouse were usually worsted weavers or woolcombers who received a salary of £30 a year free of rates and taxes. In return for this they had to lay in stocks of wool, flax and other materials, provide work for poor woolcombers, spinners and weavers, and instruct the unemployed poor in spinning and weaving, making sure that all the men who came into their charge

were not exploited because of their poverty but received the correct wages for any work they did.

The area round the Workhouse became, therefore, a centre for the crafts of woolcombing, spinning and weaving and it is interesting that not far away, on part of the site of Tesco's Stores, stood the Bishop Blaize Inn. St. Blaise was the patron saint of weavers and woolcombers and until as late as the end of the 18th century February 3rd, which was the saint's day, was celebrated by Cambridge woolcombers parading through the

town with bands playing and flags flying.

The Workhouse masters also had to appoint deputies to look after the house of correction; they had to provide stocks of hemp for the inmates to beat and to carry out any punishments ordered by the justices of the peace on the "lewd and idle people" sent to the prison.

Throughout the 17th century the Spinning House seems to have fulfilled Hobson's aims, serving both as a prison for the unruly and the workshy and as a centre at which the poor and out-of-work could learn to spin and weave and so become useful members to the community. By the mid 18th century, however, its character deteriorated for it was by then being used mainly as a prison not only for petty offenders sent there by the town magistrates but also for prostitutes arrested by the University Proctors.

It was this use of the Spinning House by the University that aroused so much resentment among Cambridge townspeople. Even after 1852, when the Workhouse Charity was revised and the income ordered by the Chancery Court to be used, as Hobson's Charity funds still are, for educational purposes, the position between Town and Gown was not eased by the allotting of one part of the Spinning House to the University while the other was reserved for use as a town lock-up and police station.

From the 16th century the Proctors had, by Act of Parliament, had powers to arrest women "suspected of evil". From the 18th century such women were taken to the Spinning House for a night and then on to the Vice-Chancellor's court where the doors were locked against the public and where the women could have no witnesses or legal aid. A further period of imprisonment usually followed, in overcrowded cells in the Spinning House which were so insanitary and so cold that not a few deaths resulted.

In the year 1860 this state of affairs came to a head through two unfortunate incidents. In late January a party of young and respectable milliners were driving, in company with some undergraduates, to a party in Chester-ton when the Proctors stopped the vehicle and dragged the protesting girls to the Spinning House. Next day, in the Vice Chancellor's Court, they received sentences of further imprisonment varying from 7 to 14 days.

The incident aroused a storm of indignation not only locally but throughout the country. The *Daily Telegraph* of February 7th carried a long article in which the writer denounced the whole Proctorial system.

"Doors may be burst open if a proctor chooses to think that one of his lambs is in a fold of black sheep. Much worse than this, females of irreproachable character, who are imprudent enough to venture into the streets after nightfall, are liable to be assailed by . . . disgusting questions and perhaps brutal violence. A virtuous girl, a spotless matron may

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be dragged to the Spinning House, thrust into a dirty and unwholesome cell, half-starved and half-frozen during the night and next morning brought before the Vice-Chancellor and sentenced to a further term of loathsome incarceration."

Readers of the newspaper wrote letters in support of the article. 'Caustic' expressed the hope that the *Telegraph* would lend its aid "to obtain the suppression of a system which is a disgrace to the country and the age." "Paterfamilias" declared that he had known

"ladies belonging to the most respectable families in this town, daughters and wives of professional men . . . stopped and insulted in the most gross and offensive manner, purely and simply because they were walking unaccompanied in the street and did not happen to be known to the Proctors for the time being . . .

There were articles and angry letters in other journals, too, while in Cambridge a meeting was held at the Hoop Hotel to consider how the proctors' privileges might be ended. Not every-

one, however, wished to see them terminated, and 260 of these people, among them University members, lodging house keepers and some of the clergy, signed a petition for their continuance and presented it to the Vice-Chancellor. Large posters were promptly printed by their opponents and distributed about the town. These set out, on one side, the details of those who had signed the petition and, on the other, the far larger number, including the Mayor, the Town Council and 12,002 male inhabitants of the town, who, though pressed for four months to sign, had refused to do so.

Then, again in 1860, a woman was arrested by the Proctors in the mistaken belief that she was a prostitute. She brought a case against the University and although she lost it, it had the effect of making the University seek the advice of a solicitor. He advised among other things, that if a woman denied a charge then witnesses should be called and questioned on oath.

Things were a little better after that. The Proctors warned women rather than arresting them, and the number of Spinning House cases fell until, between 1880 and 1890, they averaged only four or five a year.

This did not please some in the University, though, who viewed the growing number of prostitutes with alarm. Dr. Butler of Trinity ordered the Proctors to be more severe, with the result that between October 1890 and September 1891, 13 women were arrested. One of these was a Jane Elsdon. Released from the Spinning House on 10th February, 1891 she was seen by the Proctor and Bull Dogs at 11 o'clock on the following night in Petty Cury; they immediately chased after her. She was caught up with in Sussex Street and, next morning, again convicted in the Vice-Chancellor's Court and sent back to the Spinning House. The same afternoon she managed to escape to Dullingham where her father lived. A warrant for her re-arrest was issued, and this meant that when she was re-taken, as she was on the following day, her case would be heard in public.

She duly appeared before the Borough Magistrates who sent her to the Assizes where she was found guilty of escaping from custody. Her case, as had the one in 1860, again caused a number of letters and articles to appear in local and national newspapers, and the Town and University tried to settle, once and for all, the vexed question of the Proctors' powers to

THE PROCTORIAL SYSTEM.

The following may be relied on as a correct ANALYSIS of the Signatures to the Memorial, recently presented to the Vice-Chancellor, in favour of the continuance of the Proctorial system:

The Memorial is signed by 360 persons; of these

54 are Members of the University.

50 are University or College Servants.

110 are University or College Tradesmen.

9 are University Lodging-house Keepers.

6 are related to Members of the University.

15 are employed by University Tradesmen.

3 are College Tenants.

11 are under the immediate influence of the Parochial Clergy.

1 does not reside in the Borough.

And 1 whose name appears in the Memorial did not sign it, or authorize any one to sign for him.

The total of these classes is 360, which leaves a residue of only 100 persons unconnected with the University.

On the other hand it should be stated that the following have NOT signed the Memorial, although every exertion has been made during the last 4 months to obtain signatures.

The Mayor.

4 Borough Justices

8 Aldermen.

22 Councillors.

The Town Clerk, the Clerk of the Peace, the Clerk to the Magistrates, the Coroner, and the Treasurer.

The Chairman of the Improvement Board and 20 Town Improvement Commissioners.

The Chairman and Junior Vice-Chairman of the Board of Guardians, and 21 Guardians.

And 12,002 Male inhabitants of the Town according to the Census of 1851.

"Look on this Picture and on this!!"

SHAKSPEARE.

This poster was issued in 1860 in opposition to those who had presented a petition to the Vice-Chancellor asking for the Proctorial system to be continued.

arrest prostitutes. Endless meetings were held during which time the Proctors acted cautiously, but the University refused to relinquish its long-established privileges.

Then came the notorious case of Daisy Hopkins. Born in Ely in 1874 she had come with her parents, when she was 13, to live in Cambridge. Many times she had been warned by the Proctors and on December 3rd, 1891 she was arrested when in the company of an undergraduate and sent to the Spinning House. A local solicitor defended her when she appeared in the Vice-Chancellor's Court but she received a 14-day sentence. Once more the London papers were full of the case, the majority of the letters championing Daisy's cause.

There followed a long battle in the Court of the Queen's Bench, the issue turning on the fact that Daisy had been charged with "walking with a member of the University in a public street of the Town of Cambridge. The Attorney General, acting for the University, had to admit that this, in itself, was not an offence; the charge, he argued, really was that she had been "walking for an immoral purpose." Counsel for the Town quickly replied that she had, therefore, been imprisoned on a

charge which had, in fact, never been made against her. So to Cambridge people Daisy Hopkins appeared as the victim of a serious miscarriage of justice and more than ever were they determined that a system under which such things could happen must come to an end.

A special meeting of the Borough Council voted for promoting a Bill in Parliament to end the University's powers not only to arrest women such as Daisy but — another sore point — to licence local theatres. After long delays caused by the unwillingness of both Town and University to give an inch one to the other, the Bill was at last given a third reading in the Lords on June 18th, 1893. In future the Borough magistrates and police would deal with the prostitution problem.

The Spinning House was pulled down and replaced in 1901 by the Police Station. The old building which had at first helped to provide employment for the poor had, in its later years, seen women dying of fever in overcrowded cells and 18th century women whipped, on the orders of the Vice-Chancellor, by the Town Crier. Today there remains of it little more than one of its iron staircases in Jesus Lane and one of its cell doors in the Folk Museum.

COINS WANTED

The prices below will be paid for British coins in mint condition, not damaged, cleaned or polished. Slightly lower grades are also acceptable at prices in proportion, but worn coins are not required

5/- PIECES:

Any date before 1935.....	£8
1935.....	25/-
1936.....	£10
1937.....	£3
1951, in box with leaflet.....	25/-
1953, in plastic case.....	12/6
1960.....	£2

4/- PIECES:

Any date from 1887 to 1914.....	£3
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Any date of Victoria or Edward VII of the following:

HALF-CROWNS £3	FLORINS £2
SHILLINGS £1	SIXPENCES 10/-
FOURPENCES 5/-	THREEPENCES 2/6

SILVER THREEPENCES, any date

from 1911 to 1944.....	1/-
PENNIES, any date before 1896.....	5/-
PENNY, 1951.....	£5
PENNY, 1950.....	£3
HALFPENNIES, any date before 1911.....	5/-
FARTHING, any date before 1896.....	5/-
FARTHING, any date from 1896 to 1956.....	1/-
SEALED PLASTIC SETS, 1953.....	£2

COIN SETS IN ORIGINAL CASES:

1950, 1951 or 1953.....	£14
1937.....	£25
1911 or 1927.....	£50
CASED MAUNDY SETS.....	Up to £10

Any of the above items may be sent to me for immediate payment in cash or by cheque according to your instructions.

MRS. B. GRAY

No. 1 The Drift, Elsworth,
Cambridge

Telephone Elsworth 260

Reference: Barclays Bank Ltd., St. Ives, Huntingdon, obtainable through your own bank.