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Interviews 2nd book

see Life & Labour 1902-3.
Second Series, Vol. III. Part II.
Chap. II, Grocers [including Greenprocers],
Old and Coloursmen.



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From, from etc.

Continuation of Interview with Mr H. J.
Fisher:

Then to Question 16: -

"Certainly not. The so-called adulteration is generally either the mistake of an ~~set~~ analyst or the carelessness of some little known manufacturer."

Mr Fisher has a very poor opinion of analysts, who he says are in many cases grossly ignorant.

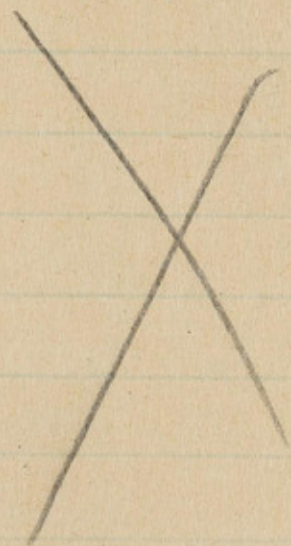
17. Opinion of trade on compulsory
early closing? "Strongly objected to in London,
where voluntary early closing is much favoured."

18. Is the trade generally in a prosperous
condition?

"Yes, when conducted on business basis."
Grooms as a whole are doing just as well
as other trades. Certainly there are none better off
from than any other trade, but of only few

the reason that white sheep sell more than
black - there are more of them. The percentage
of failure among grocers is not unusually high.
They probably fail to a larger extent than
drapers, but largely because they then are far
or more tied down in the grocery. That is
to say they are not bolstered up by wholesale
firms when they show signs of failing. If
a small draper is failing he almost always
applies to his chief creditor among wholesale
firms for assistance; the firm sends a man
to look into his affairs; if they are in such
a condition that he can be pulled out of the
mire, they put a man in to help him
through, and practically control the business.
This is sometimes done in grocery, but is not
common. The grocer's stock is much lighter
than the draper's and his downfall is less
serious to his creditors.

At the first advent of the stores the
grocer has certainly harder hit than any other
tradesman, but he has now more than doubled
his pound. The stores are beginning to show



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ships of decay: all except the Army and Navy and the Civil Service Supply are almost starving for existence: even those two have reached their zenith and are beginning to go down hill: their working expenses are increasing every year: they have started and are still controlled by men of great ability, but when those men are gone they will very probably have a bad time before them. Owing to their prestige and the nature of their character they still do an enormous trade, but the big profits are really understood their business are falling on them every year. As to the Co-operative Wholesale and other genuine Co-operative businesses they are financially in a rotten state, and their condition is likely soon or later to lead to a tremendous scandal. They will not pay for proper skilled men to control their business, with the result that they are constantly robbed by their officials. They habitually overvalue their stock and premises: they do seem to have a really independent valuation on assets, and altogether they are living in a fog.

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fool's paradise. From a whole do not
run blind to the competition of stores co-operating
or otherwise. The only premium which they have
against them, is that with few exceptions they
do not pay any income tax, and on that
point they feel very strongly.

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The cutting in the trade is certainly
very great. It is largely due to the ease with
which credit can be obtained for wholesale houses.
men can open with hardly any capital, and after
turning money for six months and about
missing their neighbors they fail. I have
known A. and B. to cut prices against
one another till they each found it cheaper
to buy sugar of one another rather than
to consume their own.

July 18th

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Letter from Mr J. J. Rogers:-

Mr Rogers is the Managing Director of Joseph Truitt and Son. I had heard from so many sources that he was the most representative man in the trade that I wrote to ask him for an interview. He replies:-

"I shall be glad to see you any day except Saturday - before 12: but I cannot answer a quarter of your questions. The 'grocery' trade in its widest sense is a very large one. Primarily, wholesale grocers are distributors of imported and manufactured produce: then to a certain degree they are manufacturers, and in a larger degree packers. Then there is the manufacturing branch: sugar refining, confectionery, cocoa making, starch, mackerel, glue, twine making, pea splitting, milling of many kinds, biscuits, jams, pickles, sauces, soaps etc. Then there are special coffee roasters and spice grinders, as well as all the makers of packing papers, tins, cans, bottles etc.

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The wholesale grocers are few in Dublin,
even after including among them importers, brokers,
agents etc.: but the retail grocers are as the sands
of the sea: and they are now almost universal
providers. Having in my own experience added the
trade of Italian workmen, provisions, baker,
tallow chandlers, oilmen, beer and spirits, and
in some cases druggs, ~~fruits~~ etc. and gunpowder.

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There is no general system of labour
in the trade that I know of. Each master is
a law to himself. So far as the wholesale
trade are concerned, probably 9/10^{ths} of the
manual labour has been done at the docks
and wharves: but this is undergoing a change
as the retail trade demand goods packed in
small packets and ready for sale over the
country."

July 22nd.

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Note on Intemperance with Mr J. J. Rogers:-

When Mr Rogers went into the Wholesale
grocery trade about 40 years ago it was the
invariable custom for the men to live on the
premises. Hours then were terribly long, every day
till 9 o'clock and on Saturdays till 11. Wages
too were lower than they are now. A holiday of
any sort was almost unknown.

The general improvement in manners and
morals since those days is enormous. The sole
amusements of the men were drinking, gambling,
and boxing, and they thought of nothing else.

Regularity. The extra work at Christmas
is not now anything like what it used to be.
Grocers now sell such a number of things
that the work is much more equal throughout
the year. Joseph Travers used to have to
dismiss about 12 men after Christmas. Now
sometimes they require no extra hands.

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of household
grocery

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Health. The trade is much healthier than it used to be, there is not so much dirt and dust in the food. Some had to suffer greatly from Gout, a disease which came from a parasite in inferior sugar; the disease is now unknown.

The Employer is a wholesale grocery firm and only clerks and warehousemen. The work of the warehousemen may be called entirely unskilled. There is a growing tendency now to employ women and boys for some of the work which used to be done by men, e.g. labelling.

Men look on to a good age, and in Joseph Thomas if they get too old for their work they are always pensioned. But the firm has never been conducted on strictly commercial principles.

Mr Rogers very much prefers country in the business, but has a large number of Londoners as he has always made a practice of taking in sons and grandsons of employees.

Among the second generation is always much inferior to the first, while the third generation is hopelessly deficient in stamina; they usually suffer from fits or some other form of degeneracy. Mr. Rogers finds that boys from Board Schools make much better clerks than those from a higher social scale; of the two the board school boys are much the better educated.

The groom in his power of annexing other trades is showing signs of shallowness, the presumption next. The presumption trade is very badly managed and organized. The presumption is a man as a rule of very inferior education to the groom, who would probably manage the business much better.

Cooperative stores threaten bankruptcy, so do not seem very on the best terms, as their officials and buyers almost without exception are corrupt and have to be tipped.

July 26th.

Note of Interview with Mr Ben Jones:-

Mr Ben Jones is the head of the Young Department in the Wholesale Co-operative Society, Limer St.

Wages:- Bankers are paid from 24/- to 42/- a week. There are no deductions from wages either for fines, dress, or in any other way. Lined lags are paid from 7/- up to men's wages.

Hours are 44 a week, from 9 to 6 or in some cases 10 to 7, Saturdays to 1 p.m. There is a little overtime, for which only refreshment money is paid. The hour is allowed for dinner which is provided at a little less than wholesale cost price of raw materials.

Holidays. All men are allowed 10 days a year.

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Regularity. Though some times are much
busier than others no men are ever dismissed.

Though many workmen get a
considerable knowledge of the goods they handle
it is in no sense necessary. All that is wanted
is experience of the way in which the firm
does its business.

The men have good & health, and do
not get thrown out early in life. They are
a sober and steady lot.

There is a steady increase in trade from
year to year.

July 29th.

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Note on Interview with Mr C. Fielding:-

Mr Fielding is the Manager of the Tea, Coffee and Cocoa Department of the Co-operative Wholesale Society. I wrote to him I find on July 1st, and saw at last succeeded in seeing him. He supposed "that the matter was not urgent."

As to wages he could not give me particulars straight off but asked me to call again in a week when he would supply them.

He showed me all over the three departments where I saw tea mixing, and packing, and labelling, coffee roasting, cocoa making etc. He gave me a small book which contains an account of the various processes more accurate than I could hope to give from my cursory inspection.

In the Tea Department there are besides Mr Fielding three tea tasters: the rest of the work is almost entirely unskilled.

In Coffee Roasting some skill is required to know the exact point at which the coffee is ~~done~~ sufficiently roasted.

In Tea the work is regular throughout the year: in coffee and cocoa fewer hands are required in the summer, but those not wanted are usually put on to something else.

July 25th.

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I called to day at the factory of James Epps and Co in the hope of seeing Mr H. Epps who has twice written to say that he would call and see me. Mr Epps was just off to catch a train, and will be out of town for three weeks. He apologised for not calling, but said that "business men make rash promises". He evidently takes an interest in the work, and as his firm are the largest Cocoa Manufacturers in London it is very desirable that I should talk to him. He has promised to see me on his return.

Lipton, to whom I have an introduction, and who is probably the largest Tea, Coffee and Cocoa Merchant in London ~~has~~ is abroad, and not likely to return for some weeks.

Aug. 1st

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Note of Interview with Mr. S. Fielding:-

I called again to-day on Mr. Fielding. He had not yet had time to go into the matter of wages, but promised to let me have a full statement soon. I however got a few facts from him as to tea, coffee, and cocoa employees.

Tea packing is paid at the rate of 2/1 for each 100 lbs. of this sum the packer takes 10^d, the folder 6^d, the labeller 5^d, and the weigher 4^d. They do from 2800 to 3000 lbs a week.

Coffee Roasting. A head roaster is paid from 30/- to 45/-; under roaster from 27/- to 35/-.

Cocoa. Wages range from 24/- to 37/-. The work requires little skill, but much care and attention.

Mr. Fielding says that he pays higher

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wages than those usual in the trade.
Lipton especially is a miser and it is not
likely that he will consent to see me.

Second Series

Vol. III. Part II.

Chap. VI: Grocers,
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