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A NEW CONSCIENCE IN REGARD TO AN ANCIENT EVIL

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PREFACE

The following material, much of which has been published in *McClure's Magazine*, was written, not from the point of view of the expert, but because of my own need for a counter-knowledge to a bewildering mass of information which came to me through the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago. The reports which its twenty field officers daily brought to its main office adjoining Hull House became to me a revelation of the dangers implicit in city conditions and of the allurements which are designedly placed around many young girls in order to draw them into an evil life.

As head of the Publication Committee, I read the original documents in a series of special investigations made by the Association on dance halls, theatres, amusement parks, lake excursion boats, petty gambling, the home surroundings of one hundred Juvenile Court children and the records of four thousand parents who clearly contributed to the delinquency of their own families. The Association also collected the personal histories of two hundred department-store girls, of two hundred factory girls, of two hundred immigrant girls, of two hundred office girls, and of girls employed in one hundred hotels and restaurants.

While this experience was most distressing, I was, on the other hand, much impressed and at times fairly startled by the large and diversified number of people to whom the very existence of the white slave traffic had become unendurable and who promptly responded to any appeal made on behalf of its victims. City officials, policemen, judges, attorneys, employers, trades unionists, physicians, teachers, newly arrived immigrants, clergymen, railway officials, and newspaper men, as under a profound sense of compunction, were unsparing of time and effort when given an opportunity to assist an individual girl, to promote legislation designed for her protection, or to establish institutions for her rescue.

I therefore venture to hope that in serving my own need I may also serve the need of a rapidly growing public when I set down for rational consideration the temptations surrounding multitudes of young people and when I assemble, as best I may, the many indications of a new conscience, which in various directions is slowly

gathering strength and which we may soberly hope will at last successfully array itself against this incredible social wrong, ancient though it may be.

Hull House,
Chicago.

CHAPTER I

AN ANALOGY

In every large city throughout the world thousands of women are so set aside as outcasts from decent society that it is considered an impropriety to speak the very word which designates them. Lecky calls this type of woman "the most mournful and the most awful figure in history": he says that "she remains, while creeds and civilizations rise and fall, the eternal sacrifice of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people." But evils so old that they are imbedded in man's earliest history have been known to sway before an enlightened public opinion and in the end to give way to a growing conscience, which regards them first as a moral affront and at length as an utter impossibility. Thus the generation just before us, our own fathers, uprooted the enormous upas of slavery, "the tree that was literally as old as the race of man," although slavery doubtless had its beginnings in the captives of man's earliest warfare, even as this existing evil thus originated.

Those of us who think we discern the beginnings of a new conscience in regard to this twin of slavery, as old and outrageous as slavery itself and even more persistent, find a possible analogy between certain civic, philanthropic and educational efforts directed against the very existence of this social evil and similar organized efforts which preceded the overthrow of slavery in America. Thus, long before slavery was finally declared illegal, there were international regulations of its traffic, state and federal legislation concerning its extension, and many extra legal attempts to control its abuses; quite as we have the international regulations concerning the white slave traffic, the state and interstate legislation for its repression, and an extra legal power in connection with it so universally given to the municipal police that the possession of this power has become one of the great sources of corruption in every American city.

Before society was ready to proceed against the institution of slavery as such, groups of men and women by means of the under-

ground railroad cherished and educated individual slaves; it is scarcely necessary to point out the similarity to the rescue homes and preventive associations which every great city contains.

It is always easy to overwork an analogy, and yet the economist who for years insisted that slave labor continually and arbitrarily limited the wages of free labor and was therefore a detriment to national wealth was a forerunner of the economist of to-day who points out the economic basis of the social evil, the connection between low wages and despair, between over-fatigue and the demand for reckless pleasure.

Before the American nation agreed to regard slavery as unjustifiable from the standpoint of public morality, an army of reformers, lecturers, and writers set forth its enormity in a never-ceasing flow of invective, of appeal, and of portrayal concerning the human cruelty to which the system lent itself. We can discern the scouts and outposts of a similar army advancing against this existing evil: the physicians and sanitarians who are committed to the task of ridding the race from contagious diseases, the teachers and lecturers who are appealing to the higher morality of thousands of young people; the growing literature, not only biological and didactic, but of a popular type more closely approaching "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Throughout the agitation for the abolition of slavery in America, there were statesmen who gradually became convinced of the political and moral necessity of giving to the freedman the protection of the ballot. In this current agitation there are at least a few men and women who would extend a greater social and political freedom to all women if only because domestic control has proved so ineffectual.

We may certainly take courage from the fact that our contemporaries are fired by social compassions and enthusiasms, to which even our immediate predecessors were indifferent. Such compunctions have ever manifested themselves in varying degrees of ardor through different groups in the same community. Thus among those who are newly aroused to action in regard to the social evil are many who would endeavor to regulate it and believe they can minimize its dangers, still larger numbers who would eliminate all trafficking of unwilling victims in connection with it, and yet others

who believe that as a quasi-legal institution it may be absolutely abolished. Perhaps the analogy to the abolition of slavery is most striking in that these groups, in their varying points of view, are like those earlier associations which differed widely in regard to chattel slavery. Only the so-called extremists, in the first instance, stood for abolition and they were continually told that what they proposed was clearly impossible. The legal and commercial obstacles, bulked large, were placed before them and it was confidently asserted that the blame for the historic existence of slavery lay deep within human nature itself. Yet gradually all of these associations reached the point of view of the abolitionist and before the war was over even the most lukewarm unionist saw no other solution of the nation's difficulty. Some such gradual conversion to the point of view of abolition is the experience of every society or group of people who seriously face the difficulties and complications of the social evil. Certainly all the national organizations—the National Vigilance Committee, the American Purity Federation, the Alliance for the Suppression and Prevention of the White Slave Traffic and many others—stand for the final abolition of commercialized vice. Local vice commissions, such as the able one recently appointed in Chicago, although composed of members of varying beliefs in regard to the possibility of control and regulation, united in the end in recommending a law enforcement looking towards final abolition. Even the most sceptical of Chicago citizens, after reading the fearless document, shared the hope of the commission that “the city, when aroused to the truth, would instantly rebel against the social evil in all its phases.” A similar recommendation of ultimate abolition was recently made unanimous by the Minneapolis vice commission after the conversion of many of its members. Doubtless all of the national societies have before them a task only less gigantic than that faced by those earlier associations in America for the suppression of slavery, although it may be legitimate to remind them that the best-known anti-slavery society in America was organized by the New England abolitionists in 1836, and only thirty-six years later, in 1872, was formally disbanded because its object had been accomplished. The long struggle ahead of these newer associations will doubtless claim its martyrs and its heroes, has indeed already claimed them during the last thirty years. Few righteous causes have escaped baptism with blood; nevertheless, to paraphrase Lin-

coln's speech, if blood were exacted drop by drop in measure to the tears of anguished mothers and enslaved girls, the nation would still be obliged to go into the struggle.

Throughout this volume the phrase "social evil" is used to designate the sexual commerce permitted to exist in every large city, usually in a segregated district, wherein the chastity of women is bought and sold. Modifications of legal codes regarding marriage and divorce, moral judgments concerning the entire group of questions centring about illicit affection between men and women, are quite other questions which are not considered here. Such problems must always remain distinct from those of commercialized vice, as must the treatment of an irreducible minimum of prostitution, which will doubtless long exist, quite as society still retains an irreducible minimum of murders. This volume does not deal with the probable future of prostitution, and gives only such historical background as is necessary to understand the present situation. It endeavors to present the contributory causes, as they have become registered in my consciousness through a long residence in a crowded city quarter, and to state the indications, as I have seen them, of a new conscience with its many and varied manifestations.

Nothing is gained by making the situation better or worse than it is, nor in anywise different from what it is. This ancient evil is indeed social in the sense of community responsibility and can only be understood and at length remedied when we face the fact and measure the resources which may at length be massed against it. Perhaps the most striking indication that our generation has become the bearer of a new moral consciousness in regard to the existence of commercialized vice is the fact that the mere contemplation of it throws the more sensitive men and women among our contemporaries into a state of indignant revolt. It is doubtless an instinctive shrinking from this emotion and an unconscious dread that this modern sensitiveness will be outraged, which justifies to themselves so many moral men and women in their persistent ignorance of the subject. Yet one of the most obvious resources at our command, which might well be utilized at once, if it is to be utilized at all, is the overwhelming pity and sense of protection which the recent revelations in the white slave traffic have aroused for the thousands of young girls, many of them still children, who are yearly sacrificed

to the "sins of the people." All of this emotion ought to be made of value, for quite as a state of emotion is invariably the organic preparation for action, so it is certainly true that no profound spiritual transformation can take place without it.

After all, human progress is deeply indebted to a study of imperfections, and the counsels of despair, if not full of seasoned wisdom, are at least fertile in suggestion and a desperate spur to action. Sympathetic knowledge is the only way of approach to any human problem, and the line of least resistance into the jungle of human wretchedness must always be through that region which is most thoroughly explored, not only by the information of the statistician, but by sympathetic understanding. We are daily attaining the latter through such authors as Sudermann and Elsa Gerusalem, who have enabled their readers to comprehend the so-called "fallen" woman through a skilful portrayal of the reaction of experience upon personality. Their realism has rescued her from the sentimentality surrounding an impossible Camille quite as their fellow-craftsmen in realism have replaced the weeping Amelias of the Victorian period by reasonable women transcribed from actual life.

The treatment of this subject in American literature is at present in the pamphleteering stage, although an ever-increasing number of short stories and novels deal with it. On the other hand, the plays through which Bernard Shaw constantly places the truth before the public in England as Brieux is doing for the public in France, produce in the spectators a disquieting sense that society is involved in commercialized vice and must speedily find a way out. Such writing is like the roll of the drum which announces the approach of the troops ready for action.

Some of the writers who are performing this valiant service are related to those great artists who in every age enter into a long struggle with existing social conditions, until after many years they change the outlook upon life for at least a handful of their contemporaries. Their readers find themselves no longer mere bewildered spectators of a given social wrong, but have become conscious of their own hypocrisy in regard to it, and they realize that a veritable horror, simply because it was hidden, had come to seem to them inevitable and almost normal.

Many traces of this first uneasy consciousness regarding the social evil are found in contemporary literature, for while the business of literature is revelation and not reformation, it may yet perform for the men and women now living that purification of the imagination and intellect which the Greeks believed to come through pity and terror.

Secure in the knowledge of evolutionary processes, we have learned to talk glibly of the obligations of race progress and of the possibility of racial degeneration. In this respect certainly we have a wider outlook than that possessed by our fathers, who so valiantly grappled with chattel slavery and secured its overthrow. May the new conscience gather force until men and women, acting under its sway, shall be constrained to eradicate this ancient evil!

CHAPTER II

RECENT LEGAL ENACTMENTS

At the present moment even the least conscientious citizens agree that, first and foremost, the organized traffic in what has come to be called white slaves must be suppressed and that those traffickers who procure their victims for purely commercial purposes must be arrested and prosecuted. As it is impossible to rescue girls fraudulently and illegally detained, save through governmental agencies, it is naturally through the line of legal action that the most striking revelations of the white slave traffic have come. For the sake of convenience, we may divide this legal action into those cases dealing with the international trade, those with the state and interstate traffic, and the regulations with which the municipality alone is concerned.

First in value to the white slave commerce is the girl imported from abroad who from the nature of the case is most completely in the power of the trader. She is literally friendless and unable to speak the language and at last discouraged she makes no effort to escape. Many cases of the international traffic were recently tried in Chicago and the offenders convicted by the federal authorities. One of these cases, which attracted much attention throughout the country, was of Marie, a French girl, the daughter of a Breton stone mason, so old and poor that he was obliged to take her from her convent school at the age of twelve years. He sent her to Paris, where she became a little household drudge and nurse-maid, working from six in the morning until eight at night, and for three years sending her wages, which were about a franc a day, directly to her parents in the Breton village. One afternoon, as she was buying a bottle of milk at a tiny shop, she was engaged in conversation by a young man who invited her into a little patisserie where, after giving her some sweets, he introduced her to his friend, Monsieur Paret, who was gathering together a theatrical troupe to go to America. Paret showed her pictures of several young girls gorgeously arrayed and announcements of their coming tour, and Marie felt much flattered when it was intimated that she might join this bril-

liant company. After several clandestine meetings to perfect the plan, she left the city with Paret and a pretty French girl to sail for America with the rest of the so-called actors. Paret escaped detection by the immigration authorities in New York, through his ruse of the "Kinsella troupe," and took the girls directly to Chicago. Here they were placed in a disreputable house belonging to a man named Lair, who had advanced the money for their importation. The two French girls remained in this house for several months until it was raided by the police, when they were sent to separate houses. The records which were later brought into court show that at this time Marie was earning two hundred and fifty dollars a week, all of which she gave to her employers. In spite of this large monetary return she was often cruelly beaten, was made to do the household scrubbing, and was, of course, never allowed to leave the house. Furthermore, as one of the methods of retaining a reluctant girl is to put her hopelessly in debt and always to charge against her the expenses incurred in securing her, Marie as an imported girl had begun at once with the huge debt of the ocean journey for Paret and herself. In addition to this large sum she was charged, according to universal custom, with exorbitant prices for all the clothing she received and with any money which Paret chose to draw against her account. Later, when Marie contracted typhoid fever, she was sent for treatment to a public hospital and it was during her illness there, when a general investigation was made of the white slave traffic, that a federal officer visited her. Marie, who thought she was going to die, freely gave her testimony, which proved to be most valuable.

The federal authorities following up her statements at last located Paret in the city prison at Atlanta, Georgia, where he had been convicted on a similar charge. He was brought to Chicago and on his testimony Lair was also convicted and imprisoned.

Marie has since married a man who wishes to protect her from the influence of her old life, but although not yet twenty years old and making an honest effort, what she has undergone has apparently so far warped and weakened her will that she is only partially successful in keeping her resolutions, and she sends each month to her parents in France ten or twelve dollars, which she confesses to have earned illicitly. It is as if the shameful experiences to which

this little convent-bred Breton girl was forcibly subjected, had finally become registered in every fibre of her being until the forced demoralization has become genuine. She is as powerless now to save herself from her subjective temptations as she was helpless five years ago to save herself from her captors.

Such demoralization is, of course, most valuable to the white slave trader, for when a girl has become thoroughly accustomed to the life and testifies that she is in it of her own free will, she puts herself beyond the protection of the law. She belongs to a legally degraded class, without redress in courts of justice for personal outrages.

Marie, herself, at the end of her third year in America, wrote to the police appealing for help, but the lieutenant who in response to her letter visited the house, was convinced by Lair that she was there of her own volition and that therefore he could do nothing for her. It is easy to see why it thus becomes part of the business to break down a girl's moral nature by all those horrible devices which are constantly used by the owner of a white slave. Because life is so often shortened for these wretched girls, their owners degrade them morally as quickly as possible, lest death release them before their full profit has been secured. In addition to the quantity of sacrificed virtue, to the bulk of impotent suffering, which these white slaves represent, our civilization becomes permanently tainted with the vicious practices designed to accelerate the demoralization of unwilling victims in order to make them commercially valuable. Moreover, a girl thus rendered more useful to her owner, will thereafter fail to touch either the chivalry of men or the tenderness of women because good men and women have become convinced of her innate degeneracy, a word we have learned to use with the unction formerly placed upon original sin. The very revolt of society against such girls is used by their owners as a protection to the business.

The case against the captors of Marie, as well as twenty-four other cases, was ably and vigorously conducted by Edwin W. Sims, United States District Attorney in Chicago. He prosecuted under a clause of the immigration act of 1908, which was unfortunately declared unconstitutional early the next year, when for the moment

federal authorities found themselves unable to proceed directly against this international traffic. They could not act under the international white slave treaty signed by the contracting powers in Paris in 1904, and proclaimed by the President of the United States in 1908, because it was found impossible to carry out its provisions without federal police. The long consideration of this treaty by Congress made clear to the nation that it is in matters of this sort that navies are powerless and that as our international problems become more social, other agencies must be provided, a point which arbitration committees have long urged. The discussion of the international treaty brought the subject before the entire country as a matter for immediate legislation and for executive action, and the White Slave Traffic Act was finally passed by Congress in 1910, under which all later prosecutions have since been conducted. When the decision on the immigration clause rendered in 1909 threw the burden of prosecution back upon the states, Mr. Clifford Roe, then assistant State's Attorney, within one year investigated 348 such cases, domestic and foreign, and successfully prosecuted 91, carrying on the vigorous policy inaugurated by United States Attorney Sims. In 1908 Illinois passed the first pandering law in this country, changing the offence from disorderly conduct to a misdemeanor, and greatly increasing the penalty. In many states pandering is still so little defined as to make the crime merely a breach of manners and to put it in the same class of offences as selling a street-car transfer.

As a result of this vigorous action, Chicago became the first city to look the situation squarely in the face, and to make a determined business-like fight against the procuring of girls. An office was established by public-spirited citizens where Mr. Roe was placed in charge and empowered to follow up the clues of the traffic wherever found and to bring the traffickers to justice; in consequence the white slave traders have become so frightened that the foreign importation of girls to Chicago has markedly declined. It is estimated by Mr. Roe that since 1909 about one thousand white slave traders, of whom thirty or forty were importers of foreign girls, have been driven away from the city.

Throughout the Congressional discussions of the white slave traffic, beginning with the Howell-Bennett Act in 1907, it was evident

that the subject was closely allied to immigration, and when the immigration commission made a partial report to Congress in December, 1909, upon "the importation and harboring of women for immoral purposes," their finding only emphasized the report of the Commissioner General of Immigration made earlier in the year. His report had traced the international traffic directly to New York, Chicago, Boston, Buffalo, New Orleans, Denver, Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City, Ogden, and Butte. As the list of cities was comparatively small, it seemed not unreasonable to hope that the international traffic might be rigorously prosecuted, with the prospect of finally doing away with it in spite of its subtle methods, its multiplied ramifications, and its financial resources. Only officials of vigorous conscience can deal with this traffic; but certainly there can be no nobler service for federal and state officers to undertake than this protection of immigrant girls.

It is obvious that a foreign girl who speaks no English, who has not the remotest idea in what part of the city her fellow-countrymen live, who does not know the police station or any agency to which she may apply, is almost as valuable to a white slave trafficker as a girl imported directly for the trade. The trafficker makes every effort to intercept such a girl before she can communicate with her relations. Although great care is taken at Ellis Island, the girl's destination carefully indicated upon her ticket and her friends communicated with, after she boards the train the governmental protection is withdrawn and many untoward experiences may befall a girl between New York and her final destination. Only this year a Polish mother of the Hull House neighborhood failed to find her daughter on a New York train upon which she had been notified to expect her, because the girl had been induced to leave the New York train at South Chicago, where she was met by two young men, one of them well known to the police, and the other a young Pole, purporting to have been sent by the girl's mother.

The immigrant girl also encounters dangers upon the very moment of her arrival. The cab-men and expressmen are often unscrupulous. One of the latter was recently indicted in Chicago upon the charge of regularly procuring immigrant girls for a disreputable hotel. The non-English speaking girl handing her written address to a cabman has no means of knowing whither he will drive her, but is

obliged to place herself implicitly in his hands. The Immigrants' Protective League has brought about many changes in this respect, but has upon its records some piteous tales of girls who were thus easily deceived.

An immigrant girl is occasionally exploited by her own lover whom she has come to America to marry. I recall the case of a Russian girl thus decoyed into a disreputable life by a man deceiving her through a fake marriage ceremony. Although not found until a year later, the girl had never ceased to be distressed and rebellious. Many Slovak and Polish girls, coming to America without their relatives, board in houses already filled with their countrymen who have also preceded their own families to the land of promise, hoping to earn money enough to send for them later. The immigrant girl is thus exposed to dangers at the very moment when she is least able to defend herself. Such a girl, already bewildered by the change from an old world village to an American city, is unfortunately sometimes convinced that the new country freedom does away with the necessity for a marriage ceremony. Many others are told that judgment for a moral lapse is less severe in America than in the old country. The last month's records of the Municipal Court in Chicago, set aside to hear domestic relation cases, show sixteen unfortunate girls, of whom eight were immigrant girls representing eight different nationalities. These discouraged and deserted girls become an easy prey for the procurers who have sometimes been in league with their lovers.

Even those girls who immigrate with their families and sustain an affectionate relation with them are yet often curiously free from chaperonage. The immigrant mothers do not know where their daughters work, save that it is in a vague "over there" or "down town." They themselves were guarded by careful mothers and they would gladly give the same oversight to their daughters, but the entire situation is so unlike that of their own peasant girlhoods that, discouraged by their inability to judge it, they make no attempt to understand their daughters' lives. The girls, realizing this inability on the part of their mothers, elated by that sense of independence which the first taste of self-support always brings, sheltered from observation during certain hours, are almost as free from social control as is the traditional young man who comes up from the