

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving  
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse  
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott  
Swift Chekhov Newton



tredition was established in 2006 by Sandra Latusseck and Soenke Schulz. Based in Hamburg, Germany, tredition offers publishing solutions to authors and publishing houses, combined with worldwide distribution of printed and digital book content. tredition is uniquely positioned to enable authors and publishing houses to create books on their own terms and without conventional manufacturing risks.

For more information please visit: [www.tredition.com](http://www.tredition.com)

## TREDITION CLASSICS

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series. The creators of this series are united by passion for literature and driven by the intention of making all public domain books available in printed format again - worldwide. Most TREDITION CLASSICS titles have been out of print and off the bookstore shelves for decades. At tredition we believe that a great book never goes out of style and that its value is eternal. Several mostly non-profit literature projects provide content to tredition. To support their good work, tredition donates a portion of the proceeds from each sold copy. As a reader of a TREDITION CLASSICS book, you support our mission to save many of the amazing works of world literature from oblivion. See all available books at [www.tredition.com](http://www.tredition.com).



The content for this book has been graciously provided by Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg is a non-profit organization founded by Michael Hart in 1971 at the University of Illinois. The mission of Project Gutenberg is simple: To encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks. Project Gutenberg is the first and largest collection of public domain eBooks.

# **White Slaves, or, the Oppression of the Worthy Poor**

Louis Albert Banks

# Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Louis Albert Banks

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-6465-0

[www.tredition.com](http://www.tredition.com)

[www.tredition.de](http://www.tredition.de)

Copyright:

The content of this book is sourced from the public domain.

The intention of the TREDITION CLASSICS series is to make world literature in the public domain available in printed format. Literary enthusiasts and organizations, such as Project Gutenberg, worldwide have scanned and digitally edited the original texts. tredition has subsequently formatted and redesigned the content into a modern reading layout. Therefore, we cannot guarantee the exact reproduction of the original format of a particular historic edition. Please also note that no modifications have been made to the spelling, therefore it may differ from the orthography used today.

# **WHITE SLAVES**

**OR**

**THE OPPRESSIONS OF THE WORTHY POOR**

**BY REV. LOUIS ALBERT BANKS, D.D.**

To My Father and Mother,

Who instilled into my mind and heart, in the days of a happy boyhood, their own love for liberty and hatred of oppression, this volume is gratefully dedicated.



## TO THE MERCY AND HELP DEPARTMENT OF THE EPWORTH LEAGUE

Mr. Edison tells us that ninety per cent of the energy that there is in coal is lost in the present method of converting it into a usable force. May I, without being considered a croaker, say that almost the same amount of spiritual power goes to waste in our average church life? One is startled at times as he notes the manifestations of fervor and warmth in the devotional meetings of the present day, and the meagre results that follow in the transformation of society into the likeness of the kingdom of heaven. Exactly what we have to do, however, is to help hasten the answer to the prayer our Lord taught us, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and not to be forever seeking to build tabernacles on some Mount of Transfiguration.

This book of Dr. Banks's is a positive stimulus to this work of social transformation. The young men and women of our Epworth League could not do better than to carefully and thoughtfully study its vivid pictures of every-day scenes in our great, and even in our lesser, cities.

Such study will open their eyes to sad deformities in their own communities, to which too many have become strangely indifferent through custom and wont. True, it is not pleasant to consider these distressing matters; but is it the business of the Christian to avoid that which is unpleasant? Consideration leads to sympathy, and sympathy wonderfully quickens the inventive faculties; and the aroused intellect and active affection are leavening forces that alter social conditions always for the better.

I take great pleasure, therefore, in commending this work, because it stirs all who read it. It may make you indignant. What of it? Would that more were alive enough to be indignant with the indignation of our Lord at the forces of unbrotherliness at work in our midst! It will do more than rouse your indignation; it will help you to utter the prayer that gave the accent to the life of Paul: "Lord,

what wilt thou have *me* to do?" When in works of Mercy and Help our tens of thousands of Epworth Leaguers are loyally living this prayer, the problem of Edison, as applied to spiritual dynamics, will be solved, and the latent forces of spiritual energy used to their utmost. Then, as slavery has passed away, war and tyranny and idleness and poverty will be no more, and the end to which Christ leads us, and for which He died, will be attained.

**WILLIAM INGRAHAM HAVEN,**

*Vice-President for Mercy and Help Department.*

INWOOD LODGE, PINE ISLAND N.H. August 1893

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This volume had its origin in experiences which came to me in the daily duties of a city pastorate. The inadequate wages received by some of the members of my own congregation, and the impoverished and unhealthy surroundings of many of the poor people who came for me to christen their children, pray with their sick, or bury their dead, so aroused my sympathy for the victims, and my indignation against the cruel or indifferent causes of their misery, that I determined upon a thorough and systematic investigation of the conditions of life among the worthy Boston poor. By the word "worthy" I do not mean to indicate a class of saints, but the poor people of the city who are willing and anxious to exchange honest hard work for their support. I have not, in the series of studies here presented, entered into a discussion of the vicious and criminal classes. I have tried to perform, as it seemed to me, a far more important task—to make a plea for justice on behalf of the crushed, and often forgotten, victims of greed, who work and starve in their cellars and garrets rather than beg or steal.

The larger part of the matter contained in these pages was originally delivered in a series of discourses from the pulpit of St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church, South Boston, and retains here the direct form of the spoken address.

I desire to make a personal acknowledgment to some who have given me great assistance in making the investigations, the results of which are here recorded. I am greatly indebted to Mr. B. O. Flower, Editor of *The Arena*, for many kindnesses, and especially for the use of several interesting illustrations originally prepared for the magazine over which he so ably and gracefully presides. The Rev. Walter J. Swaffield, of the Boston Baptist Bethel, the Rev. C. L. D. Younkin, of the North End Mission, the Rev. Geo. L. Small, of the Mariners' House, the Rev. John G. May, of the Italian Mission, and that indefatigable reformer, Mrs. Alice N. Lincoln, have each put me under great obligations by their unwearying kindness and willing assistance. I am also greatly indebted to Mr. Sears Gallagher, the

brilliant young South Boston artist, and to the veteran photographer of Boston Highlands, Mr. W. H. Partridge, for many courtesies in connection with the illustrations which illumine these chapters.

LOUIS ALBERT BANKS. BOSTON, *September 15, 1891.*

## CONTENTS

I. THE WHITE SLAVES OF THE BOSTON "SWEATERS"

II. LETTER OF CRITICISM

III. REPLY TO A CRITICISM ON "THE WHITE SLAVES OF THE BOSTON SWEATERS"

IV. THE PLAGUE OF THE SWEAT-SHOP

V. THE RELATION OF WAGES TO MORALS

VI. THE WAGES AND TEMPTATIONS OF WORKING-PEOPLE

VII. BOSTON'S UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

VIII. SOCIAL MICROBES IN BOSTON TENEMENT HOUSES,  
AND HOW TO DESTROY THEM

IX. OLD WORLD TIDES IN BOSTON

X. OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THE BOSTON PAUPERS

XI. COMMENT ON "OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THE  
BOSTON PAUPERS"

XII. THE GOLD GOD OF MODERN SOCIETY



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PORTRAIT OF AUTHOR PORTUGUESE WIDOW IN ATTIC  
PORTUGUESE WIDOW AND CHILDREN LITTLE CHILDREN  
FINISHING PANTS INVALID IN CHAIR POSTAL UNIFORMS  
A TENEMENT-HOUSE COURT SUNDAY ON NORTH STREET  
CLARK'S MISSION NORTH END JUNK SHOP HOME OF THE  
MATHERS THE PEANUTTER INSIDE A SWEAT-SHOP PAUL  
REVERE HOUSE, NORTH SQUARE REAR OF NORTH END  
TENEMENT HOUSE COMMONWEALTH AVENUE DRYING  
"THE FIND" THE NORTH END MISSION A BOSTON "BRIDGE  
OF SIGHS" COURT OFF NORTH STREET CELLARWAY LEAD-  
ING TO UNDERGROUND APARTMENTS SICK MAN IN UN-  
DERGROUND APARTMENT AN ANCIENT TENEMENT ITAL-  
IAN FRUIT-VENDERS AT HOME COCKROACHES BY FLASH-  
LIGHT BANANA SELLER UNDERGROUND TENEMENT  
WITH TWO BEDS TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING EXTE-  
RIOR OF A NORTH END TENEMENT HOUSE WIDOW AND  
TWO CHILDREN IN UNDERGROUND TENEMENT THE  
BANK OF THE UNFORTUNATE OUT OF WORK A CHEAP  
LODGING-HOUSE THE "GOOD LUCK" TENEMENT HOUSE  
THE SAND GARDEN CHRIST CHURCH TOWER ON THE  
CUNARDER ON THE WAY TO THE RABBI PASSING THE  
QUARANTINE DOCTOR SURGICAL THEOLOGY BUILDING  
USED BY THE BRITISH AS A HOSPITAL VICTORIA SQUARE  
OAK DOOR AT ENTRANCE READING-ROOM AT FACTORY  
FERRIS BROTHERS' CORSET FACTORY QUARTER SECTION  
OF ONE OF THE WORK ROOMS THE QUEEN OF THE DUMP  
TRAMPS WOMEN'S HOSPITAL WARD AT LONG ISLAND  
GETTING A BREATH OF FRESH AIR ATTIC AT RAINSFORD  
ISLAND MARINERS' HOME CHILDREN PLAYING IN COPP'S  
HILL BURYING-GROUND DIGGING IN THE ASH-BARRELS  
IN WINTER FOUR SHINERS SOUTH BOSTON RAG-PICKERS



## I.

### THE WHITE SLAVES OF THE BOSTON "SWEATERS".

"Hard work is good an' wholesome, past all doubt;  
But 'tain't so, ef the mind gits tuckered out."

—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL: *Biglow Papers*.

A wise man of the old time, after a tour of observation, came home to say, "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such, as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter." If this report had been written by one who had been climbing with me through the tenement houses of not less than a score of Boston streets, conversing with the sewing-women, looking on their poverty-lined faces and their ragged children, breathing the poisonous air of the quarters where they work, and listening to their heart-rending stories of cruelty and oppression, it would be an appropriate summary of our observation. It is my purpose, at this time, to take you with me on a tour of observation. As well-lighted streets are better than policemen to insure safety and good order, so I believe that the best possible service I can render the public is to turn on the light, and tell, as plainly and simply as I can, the story of what I have seen and heard and smelled in the white slave-quarters, which are a disgrace to our fair city. I shall confine myself at this time entirely to the work of women and children in their own homes. Most of this work is parcelled out to them by middlemen who are known as "sweaters." That word sweater is not in the old dictionaries. It is a foul word, born of the greed and infernal lust for gold which pervade the most reckless and wicked financial circles of our time. The sweater takes large contracts and divides it out among the very poor, reducing the price to starvation limits, and reserving the profits for himself.

Some of the women whose story I shall tell do not work for sweaters, but are treated almost as badly by the powerful and wealthy firms who employ them. In these cases the firm itself has learned the sweater's secret, and through an agent of its own is sweating the life-blood out of these half-starved victims.

Let us begin near at home with a South Boston case, which came to my notice through the dispensary doctor for the district. It is a widow with one child—a little boy scarcely three years old. The child is just recovering from a troublesome sickness, through which the doctor became acquainted with her. She has been sewing for a good while for one of the largest and most respectable dry-goods houses on Washington Street—a firm whose name is a household word throughout New England. Her sewing has been confined to two lines—cloaks and aprons. For some time she has been making white aprons—a good long apron, requiring a yard, perhaps, of material; it is hemmed across the bottom and on both sides, the band or "apron string" is hemmed on both sides, and then sewed on to the apron, making six long seams. For these she is paid fifteen cents *a dozen!* And besides that, this great, rich firm, whose members are rolling in wealth and luxury, charges this poor widow fifteen cents expressage on her package of ten dozen aprons, so that for making one hundred and twenty aprons, such as I have described, she receives, net, one hundred and thirty-five cents! If she works from seven o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night, she can make four dozen; but, with the care of her child, she is unable to average more than three dozen, for which, after the expressage is taken out, she receives forty cents a day for the support of herself and child.

Her rent for the one little room is one dollar per week. It is idle to say that this firm is compelled to do this by competition, for the material and making of these aprons cost less than ten cents, and the firm retails them ordinarily at *twenty-five cents apiece*. On cloaks she did better, receiving from fifty to seventy-five cents apiece, she furnishing her own sewing-silk and cotton. On these she could make, by working from seven A.M. till eleven P.M., nearly a dollar a day, but she could never get more than six cloaks a week, so that the income for the week was about the same.

## [ILLUSTRATION: PORTUGUESE WIDOW IN ATTIC.]

Now come with me a little farther around the harbor. Let us climb up three flights, to a little attic suite of two rooms, so low at the side that, with my length of anatomy, I have to keep well to the middle of the room in order to stand upright. Here live a Portuguese mother and five children, the oldest thirteen, the youngest not yet three, a poor, deformed, little thing that has consumption of the bowels, brought on by scanty and irregular food. Its tiny legs are scarcely thicker than my thumb, and you cannot look at its patient, wasted, little face, that looks old enough to have endured twenty-five years of misery, instead of three, without the heartache. I ask the mother how she earns her living, and she points to a package that has just come in. Picking it up, and untying the strings, I find there six pairs of pants, cut out and basted up, ready for making. Looking at the card, we are astonished to find that it bears the name of one of the largest firms in the city of Boston, a firm known, perhaps, as widely as any. Three pairs of these pants are *custom-made*; they are fashionable summer trousers, with the names and addresses of the men for whom they are made tacked on them. The other three pairs are stamped with "New York" as customer, from which we infer that they are made for a New York house, the Boston firm acting as sweater. This woman and her little children must finish these pants by the same hour to-morrow, when the messenger from the store will bring a new lot and take these away. She receives *ten cents a pair*—three pairs being *custom-made* pants! In order to finish the six pairs in the twenty-four hours, she must get to work at six in the morning, and improve every available moment until eleven or twelve in the evening, and sometimes, if the sick child is fretful, until one o'clock in the morning. Her wages for this tremendous strain that is wearing her very life away, until she looks almost as frail as her dying child, is *sixty cents*! Her rent for these two small attic pockets is one dollar and fifty cents per week. She has one bed for herself and five children. Only through the aid of the Boston Baptist Bethel is she able to keep up the struggle. And yet, O my brothers! this is in sight of the old North Church, and the tower where they hung the lanterns for a signal to Paul Revere, when he rode through the darkness to arouse the Fathers to fight against

oppression. God help us to hang another light for liberty in the midst of this cruel slavery!

Perhaps you are tired now, and want to rest, but I am insatiable, and will go on. Let me give you the record of six families found in the same tenement.

Family No. 1. They are Italians. The wife and mother is finishing cheap overcoats at four cents apiece. She can finish from eight to ten in a day. She has two finer coats, lined with handsome satin; of these she can complete only five a day, and receives eight cents apiece. There are three in the family, and they pay a dollar and a half per week for their one room. I asked about the husband, and a neighbor woman from the next room remarked contemptuously, "He is no good."

No. 2. These are Poles. The woman makes knee pants of grammar-schoolboy size; she receives sixteen cents a dozen pairs. Two dozen are as many as she ever gets done in a day.

No. 3. They are Italians here, and are at work on knee pants. This woman receives sixteen cents a dozen pairs for most of them, but for some extra nice ones she gets eighteen cents a dozen. She has two dozen brought to her from the sweater's shop every day about two o'clock. She works from two in the afternoon until ten at night, and from six in the morning until noon the next day, to complete her allowance, for which she receives from thirty-two to thirty-six cents. The rent is a dollar and seventy-five cents per week; she has two children.

No. 4. This woman makes men's pants at twelve cents a pair. Formerly, when she was stronger, she could drive herself through six pairs a day; but now, with a little babe to look after, she can get only four pairs done. The room is intolerably dirty; but how can you have the heart to blame her?

No. 5. Polish Jews. The woman makes knee pants, working from seven in the morning till ten o'clock at night, and nets from twenty-seven to forty-four cents a day.

No. 6. Italians. This woman is an expert seamstress. She is finishing men's coats at six cents apiece; and with nothing to bother her, working sixteen hours a day, she makes fifty-four cents. The rent for

the narrow little back room is one dollar and thirty-five cents per week.

If you want variety, we will climb four flights of stairs, with half the plastering knocked off the walls, and talk with an English woman. She is working on fine cloth pants; she gets thirteen cents a pair; by working till very late in the evening, she can complete four pairs a day, and thinks it would be almost a paradise if she could make her fifty-two cents every day; but it is one of the characteristics of a sweater to systematically keep all his people hungry for work, and she seldom is able to get more than twelve pairs a week. She lives alone in a little sweat-box under the roof, for which she pays a dollar and a quarter per week.

Not far away, up two flights, we find a Portuguese widow, with four little girls, the eldest fifteen, the next thirteen, and the younger ones three and six, respectively; they are all dwarfed by hardship and insufficient food, so that the one who is fifteen is not larger than an average girl of twelve. The mother is sick, and the girls are trying to keep the wolf from the door by carrying on the sewing. They are all hard at work; they carry the pants back and forth themselves, and so for the most of their work receive twelve cents, though for some they get only ten cents a pair. They have only two little rooms with the most meagre furniture; the rent is one dollar and a half per week, and the sick mother and four girls huddle together in the one bed at night. They are pretty, bright-faced, intelligent girls, and with a fair chance would grow into strong, noble women; but one shudders when he takes into consideration the fearful odds against which they will have to struggle in this poverty-stricken, crime-cursed alley.

[Illustration: PORTUGUESE WIDOW AND CHILDREN.]

[Illustration: LITTLE CHILDREN FINISHING PANTS.]

Here is another case of a similar description only a few blocks away. We go up three narrow flights, steep and dark, for space is as important in a low-class Boston tenement house as in a sardine box. The stairway is slippery from filth on the last flight, for on a small bench at the top, in a dry-goods box, a little boy is raising squabs for the market, and the pigeon business, however much it may help to pay the rent, is not conducive to cleanliness. We find here a suite of

three little rooms, the largest of which is not more than 10x10; the others are much smaller. In these three little pigeon boxes eight people live, at least sleep—five men and boys, and a mother and two girls. The men are off most of the day, and work at such jobs as they find; the mother and little girls make pants for another leading Boston clothing house. The two little girls, the younger only three years, are both overcasting seams. The three make on an average sixteen pairs of pants a week, for which they get thirteen cents a pair; the young pigeon fancier, already spoken of, carrying the goods to and fro. The rent of these crowded quarters is two dollars and a quarter per week. In the same building, down-stairs, we went into a room which could not have been more than 10x12, where an American woman, with seven young women helping her, was at work dressmaking. We could not discover whether they were working for the stores or not, but the air was poisonous, and the workers had that deadly pallor which comes from habitually breathing bad air and from lack of sufficient food.

[Illustration: INVALID IN CHAIR.]

Sickness, to be dreaded anywhere, is especially pitiful among these sweaters' slaves in the city. In the country the fresh air, fragrant with the breath of new-mown hay, or sweetened from ten thousand clover blossoms, is free to the poorest, but to be sick in a tenement house is something terrible. Yet crowded quarters, poisonous air, and filthy clothing make sickness a common guest in such places. I climbed one day up two flights into a dirty little room, the smell of which was sickening to me in three minutes, and yet there I found a man on a little cot (that had been given by the charitable missionary who guided me) who has been lying there for more than three years. For two years and more he had not even a cot, but lay on the floor in his dirt and pain. There are two children, too young to be of much assistance; the wife and mother sews, finishing pants for a rich Washington Street firm. She gets twelve, and sometimes, on fine, custom-made pants, thirteen cents a pair. She has worked so hard and continuously on poor food and with insufficient clothing, that rheumatism has settled in the joints of her fingers and stiffened them, till she is only able to turn off nine or ten pairs a week. Last week she could only make a dollar and fifteen cents; the rent was a dollar and a quarter. They have absolutely none of the ordinary