

**THE EUROPEAN
SLAVE TRADE IN
ENGLISH GIRLS**

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The European slave trade in English girls by Alfred S. Dyer

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312.

THE
EUROPEAN SLAVE TRADE
IN
ENGLISH GIRLS.

A NARRATIVE OF FACTS.

BY

ALFRED S. DYER.

To which is appended a copy of a Memorial to Earl Granville, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, from the Committee formed in London for the purpose of exposing and suppressing the existing traffic in English, Scotch and Irish girls for the purpose of foreign prostitution.

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IN

ENGLISH GIRLS.

IN order properly to understand the subject of the foreign slave traffic in English girls, it is necessary to know something of the system of slavery, which this traffic exists to supply with victims.

In nearly every country on the Continent of Europe, prostitution is licensed by the public authorities: The pleas for this action are principally these: that prostitution being a necessary evil, it is right that Government should regulate it, so as to make it the cause of as little public scandal as possible; and, that it is desirable that women leading a life of prostitution should be periodically subjected to surgical examination, and if found diseased, to imprisonment in hospital till cured, in order to protect the public health. The first plea is one of order, the second is one of hygiene. Prostitution is authorised so long as it does not outrage public decency; and the public health is sought to be promoted by the sequestration of women when in a condition to infect the immoral men who consort with them. On the grounds of morality and religion such a system is indefensible. It is equally indefensible on the ground of common justice between two equally guilty parties, one of whom is treated as a criminal that the other may be protected from the natural consequence of his vices. But recent investigations have also proved the sanitary failure of this system. It is not possible to permanently lessen disease by a method that increases the vice by which the disease is caused.

In Continental countries, under this system of regulated vice, houses devoted to prostitution are licensed, and publicly and conspicuously distinguished; and their inmates are forbidden to appear alone in the streets. Other fallen women are licensed to live in private apartments. It is not surprising that such an unblushing recognition by the authorities of the necessity of prostitution demoralises the population. In Brussels, where the system is said to have reached its highest degree of perfection, the Chief of the Police advises that licensed houses be situated at convenient places, because "men, for whom houses of debauchery are a necessity, seldom care to take long journeys to find them," and failing to find licensed houses would resort to unregulated prostitution. Immorality, indeed, becomes so general under this system that it loses its shame. A cynicism is induced which refuses to believe in the possibility of virtue. The women in families reputed respectable become familiar with the immoral practices of their male relatives, which practices they are led to regard as universal among men. Instead of chastity being inculcated, boys are early introduced to dens of sin, with the knowledge and consent of their parents, and grow up under the unrestrained influence of their passions. Thus society is corrupted, and the patrons of houses of debauchery are to be found everywhere, in high official as well as in non-official circles.

The female inmates of houses of prostitution are in a state of veritable slavery. Whatever may be the varying official ordinances in regard to the regulation of debauchery, the women and children who are its victims are practically without rights and protection, either of person or property. From the day they enter these houses they are not allowed to wear their own clothing, but are forced to accept garments of a disgusting nature, for the hire of which, and also for everything they require, they are charged exorbitant prices. They are thus kept deeply in debt and terrified with the threat of imprisonment if they dare to attempt to leave without paying. They are frequently brutally treated and

beaten if they show any signs of insubordination, or resist the wishes of the profligates who frequent the houses. Moreover, as the letter of the law forbids the reception of girls who are minors, such girls are registered by their buyers or betrayers under false names with false certificates of birth, with or without the connivance of the officials, for which registration the girls are liable to imprisonment for forgery—a penalty which the keepers of the houses hold over them as a means of maintaining them in subjection.

If suspected of an intention to escape, they are re-sold to keepers of similar houses in other towns, sometimes hundreds of miles distant. Hired bullies, frequently ex-convicts, are at hand to frustrate any attempt at their rescue. In order to make escape or rescue more difficult, the street doors are so constructed that while entrance is easy, exit is impossible without the door being unlocked by the person in charge within. The windows of the houses in most cities are fitted with venetian blinds on the outside, which are kept always closed, so that the inmates are unable to see into the street, and, in many cases, daylight is never visible from one month's end to another. In some houses, where the inmates are treated with exceptional violence and brutality, the walls of the rooms and the outer doors are padded, to prevent the cries of the victims and the sounds of drunken orgies reaching the street.

It is well known on the Continent that the patrons of these places soon become satiated with the ordinary forms of immorality, and, in the craving of their lust for novelty, the poor inmates are made the subjects of the most inhuman, unnatural, and diabolical outrages, the nature of which it is impossible to mention in print, and difficult to allude to even in private conversation. To pander to this craving for novelty, the keepers of the houses provide a constant succession of fresh victims, including sometimes a negress, and in a recent case in Brussels, a Zulu girl. The more childish and innocent the victims, the more profitable they are. The wealthy Continental debauchee, reared under the influence of the moral blight of licensed debauchery, whose respect

for womanhood has dwindled to an outward politeness of behaviour, but whose unrestrained and now uncontrollable passions have sunk him to a position in which, notwithstanding his outward politeness, he is morally half brute and half devil, will pay an amount equal to a poor man's annual income for the opportunity of violating a betrayed, terrified and helpless virgin. Hence, as the head of the police of Brussels acknowledges, the keepers of licensed houses of prostitution enter into costly researches for new, and if possible, perfectly innocent victims; and hence also, English-speaking girls, who are perhaps the most valuable because the most in request by Continental debauchees, are systematically sought after, entrapped, and sold into a condition of slavery infinitely more cruel and revolting than negro servitude, because it is slavery not for labour but for lust; and more cowardly than negro slavery, because it falls on the young and helpless of one sex only. The public have been known to be informed of the arrival of an English girl by an advertisement in a newspaper; and the keepers of licensed dens of infamy have their cards like ordinary tradesmen, which are widely circulated, some of them being handsomely printed, and in the preparation of which, Art is prostituted to produce figures designed to excite the passions.

The beginning of my personal knowledge of the condition of the things I have described was towards the close of last year, (1879). On leaving the Friends' Meeting House, Clerkenwell, London, one Sabbath evening, one of my friends told me he had heard that a young English girl was confined in a licensed house of prostitution in Brussels, and was contemplating suicide as the only means of escape from her awful condition. I found on enquiry that his informant, a man of some position in London, had actually visited the house a few weeks previously, and although this girl implored him with tears to aid her to escape, he left her to her fate, probably fearing that any attempt at her rescue would end in publicity, and thus compromise his reputation. On hearing this, I said that an effort must be made to save this girl. I went to my friend's informant. He said the girl

told him in substance that she was courted in London by a man of gentlemanly exterior, who promised her marriage if she would accompany him for that purpose to Brussels. Inexperienced in the world, only nineteen years of age, and away from the home of her parents, she was induced to accept the offer. On their arrival at Calais, she was introduced to another individual of gentlemanly appearance, who spoke French only. She was then told by her "lover" that he had spent all his money, and would have to pawn his watch to enable him to return to England to obtain more, but he would meet her, he said, at Brussels, to which place his friend would accompany her. She protested that she would not go with this man. Her "lover," however, pushed her into the railway carriage, slammed the door, and the train started. She was alone with a stranger. Worse still, she was on her way to a city where she knew no one, and where a language was spoken of which she was unable to understand a single word. Arrived in Brussels, she was taken straight to a licensed house of ill-fame, where the slave trader received his reward and left. Under a false name, without her consent, she was placed on the official register of infamy. The man who courted her in London never came—as of course he never intended to come—to fulfil his promise. Not allowed to go outside the house, forced continually to submit her person to the last indignity that can be inflicted on a woman, here she was as much a slave as was ever any negro upon Virginian soil.

On receiving this information, friends in Brussels were at once communicated with, and with some difficulty the girl was found in hospital suffering from a disease with which she had been infected, but was being cured, preparatory to being returned, under the authorization of the *police des mœurs*, to the licensed den from which she came. Through the persevering agency of Pastor Leonard Anet, of Brussels, she was eventually returned to London, where I met her and received a corroboration of the foregoing story from her own lips. To test the truth of her story I had already visited her parents and seen persons who had employed her

in domestic service, and received satisfactory replies to my enquiries regarding her character before she was betrayed and sold into slavery in Belgium.

On the second day of the new year (1880), a week after I met this poor girl in London, I published the facts of her case in a letter to several London daily newspapers, together with the statement of another case that I had recently received from Brussels. This latter was as follows, and came to light during the search for the other girl.

"On Thursday 16th October, Mr. ———, a lieutenant of Artillery, just having finished his service at the barracks of St. Elizabeth, was walking along the Rue ———, which is at right angles with the Rue ———. He saw a gathering of people, among whom were several honourable citizens. In the midst of them was a young girl weeping bitterly and declaring aloud that she had that moment made her escape from the house of prostitution, No. 28, Rue ———, into which she had been decoyed and retained against her will. The girl, who did not speak a word of French, affirmed that she was deceived in London by a Belgian agent who engaged to bring her to Holland, where he had found a place for her, he said, as governess in a good family. She added that she came of respectable parents who had willingly consented to her accepting this engagement. Instead of keeping his promise, this agent had brought her straight to that house, where she had been forcibly detained till that hour. Mr. ———, and some of the other gentlemen, whose names and addresses I can give you, moved by pity, subscribed on the spot a little sum of money to place her in a safe shelter, because the keeper of the house was already loudly claiming her back. To this end they took her to a neighbouring hotel of good character, confiding her to the care of the master. Shortly afterwards an individual appeared, openly declaring himself to have been sent there by the *police judiciaire*, and politely invited the young girl to accompany him to the police office to give her evidence on the sad affair. This individual proved to be another of the gentlemanly