



The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon

William Thomas Stead, William McGlashan

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"The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" was necessary horror. With it, William T. Stead opened doors, threw back shutters, drew curtains and let pitying Christian eyes see the sights over which voluptuous Londoners were nightly gloating. He showed gins and snares in which simple country girls were nightly caught, to leap and shriek like a hare with the feel of the wire on its foot; he showed the girl-poacher mad with joy in this damnable sport. Stead allowed us to see the stinging, girlish tears, and hear girlish voices full of wild, pitiful despair; which makes us revolt at the cruelty.

Upon publication, this noble work was the talk of every home in all England.

The appearance of this little known newspaper, Pall Mall Gazette, with "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," articles, amazed, staggered and stupefied Londoners.

And England shrieked, "Indecent!" As if topics like these could ever be made decent. Unerring excellence of taste, which makes topics like these "decent," belongs to the novelists whom languid voluptuaries of clubs and drawing-rooms adore. Stead did not want to make such things decent: it would secure their sale on bookstalls—but what of that? To make them decent would be a horrible lie to the facts as they had been burned into his own brain. Revolting reading, reading to harrow and madden its readers—that was his aim.

"But it is illegal," said Cavendish Bentinck (a mouthpiece for hosts whose God is 'The Law.')

"He has outraged the law!"

Cool critics and legal authorities who pace law courts, and study statutes, do not understand such men; how could they understand the anguished author of the "Maiden Tribute?"

"All lies; excogitated from his own brain," said many others who were able to bear very sweeping personal testimony to the excellent conduct of London brothels.

True enough, maybe, the coloring of horror, and shame, and rage, which he had given his facts were projected into them by "his own brain" and true enough, his burning disdain, without bounds, without qualification, without mercy, of the offender, who at a weak moment of nervous, silly girlhood, dared to spoil a woman's life, all for a momentary pleasure. Does this seem to be "all lies?"

But behind the lurid personal coloring of Stead's glaring scorn was fact-substance, and from the brothel-keepers came loud denials.

So, in the interest of the public, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, agreed to examine Mr. Stead's evidence and after five days of investigation, they certified the substantial truth of all his statements, and published their decision to the world.

Laws in England changed. The Queen's practically unprotected subjects were now protected.

William T. Stead's method of correcting a wrong, landed him in jail...

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