

The Truth About White Slavery

By Teresa Billington-Greig

THE Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1912 was carried by stories of the trapping of girls. The sudden clamour for legislation to which that Act was yielded was created almost entirely by the statement that unwilling, innocent girls were forcibly trapped; that by drugs, by false messages, by feigned sickness, by offers of or requests for help and assistance, girls were spirited away and never heard of again; that these missing girls, often quite young children, were carried off to flats and houses of ill-fame, there outraged and beaten, and finally transported abroad to foreign brothels under the control of large vice syndicates.

There have been so many of these stories, and in nature they have been so disturbing that thousands of simple souls have been filled with alarm and dismay, a fierce wave of anger has been evoked leading to a re-introduction of flogging, and Parliament, the pulpit, and the press, the three chief public agents of irrational emotion, have all responded to the sense of horror called forth. Without this campaign of terrible tales the public would not have been moved, without it the House of Commons would not have re-introduced the barbarity of flogging. For it served to drive out of the national mind the proved commonplace that the law is of very little value in the underworld of sexual trading. The law and the policeman have been shown by long experience to have no educative and little preventive power. It has been established that the more severe you make your deterrent punishment the more cunning and subtlety you develop in those who have to evade it.

Hence the ordinary citizen who detests exploited prostitution has no unbalanced desire for legislation at any price. He, or she, is prepared to face the inescapable

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truth that the causes of this evil cannot be touched by law, however perfectly conceived, however perfectly administered. Those who are obsessed by a frenzy for legislative measures achieve contentment—and futility. The slow way is the only way of advance here: education, a changed social outlook, a gradual reorganisation of economic conditions, these may remove such causes as are within our control. And not the wisest of us can prophesy but that we shall find the primary cause will baffle us at the end.

But for those of strong feeling these stories of trapping temporarily altered the appearance of the problem. By means of them it was made to appear as though neither education in sex matters, nor a rational teaching of morality, nor the exercise of circumspection, would avail the ordinary girl for the ordinary circumstances of life. She might be carried off against her will at any time. Before this revelation the forces of reason and experience were routed, and the cry went up for legislation, for a law of some kind, of any kind, at once. It is in the light of this fact that the statements as to such trapping must be examined.

To one who, like myself, has learned the value of evidence and the need for the verification of statements made in emotional movements, there were several remarkable features of this epidemic of terrible rumours. First came the element of number. The stories were so numerous and reported incidents which were said to have happened within so short a period that a strain was put upon the credulity of the most willing believer. In the second place the stories were of an extraordinary nature. Many of them were clearly incredible—unless the whole general public were in the conspiracy. Many suggested that the girls reported as trapped must be either limbless cripples or mental deficient, and others took it for granted that any man could control, govern, and dominate any woman wherever they might be. Then what was apparently the same story reappeared again and again in various forms. The detestable final tag, “The door opened. It was the girl’s father!” was varied by “Her own brother came into the room!” or “A young man friend stood before her flushed with shame. He got her

out." The hospital nurse of one tale became the Sister of Mercy or the Rescue Worker of its fellow. The fainting lady fainted in front of three separate West End establishments. The tales of drugged handkerchiefs, sweets, and flowers had so many variants as to create the impression that the homes of the country must be decimated of their daughters by drugging.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the stories was that they were all offered second or third hand, except in the cases in which an individual described what he or she regarded as a suspicious circumstance, which, being once reported, began to circulate as a certainty. There was never a first-hand statement signed, or sworn before a magistrate, or deposited with some responsible body. When a story was questioned it was repeated with emphasis; this was supposed to be proof enough. At most, the person challenged quoted the name of a more prominent person as a believer in the story, and clearly regarded this as fully satisfactory.

Generally, one would not think it necessary to point out how useless such personal guarantees are without evidence to support them. They prove nothing. When some lady or gentleman of position writes or states that such a tale of horror is true we must admit their honest conviction of its truth. But we cannot be expected to know the value of that conviction until we know by what methods the tale has been tested, and what are the characters and qualifications of those supplying the story or verifying it. All such requisite assurances as these have been utterly wanting, and instead of them we have had proof of flagrant carelessness in the use of figures and a persistent use of the most unjustified assumptions. The campaign has been conducted wholly upon such lines, in marked contrast with the course of action taken by the late W. T. Stead, whose revelations were supported by signed or sworn statements obtained from victims and their attendants and from fellow investigators.

A full twelve months ago I suggested to members of the Pass the Bill Committee the necessity for careful investigation as a preliminary to the campaign of urgency upon which they were just embarking. This suggestion was repeated and ignored, and later I learnt by an inadver-

tence that an inquirer applying to the Committee for one proved case of trapping could not be satisfied. In these circumstances I undertook an inquiry myself.

The objects I have kept in view have been to investigate alleged cases of trapping or attempted trapping of girls, to discover whether any large proportion of those publicly identified with the agitation had any personal experience of trapping, and to provide a collection of facts from which some approximate idea of the frequency of trapping could be deduced. The scope of the inquiry is defined by the employment of the word "trapping." If unwilling girls can be carried off in broad daylight by force, drugs, or false messages, I should call that trapping. I know that there is a broad, debatable ground between this type of case and seduction, occupied by false advertisement cases, beguilement and decoying cases, in which the victim is more or less a consenting party. But the new Act was not won upon these, and they form a subject too wide to be dealt with now.

All the letters, forms, and documents relative to this inquiry have been carefully preserved. They are now placed for three months in the hands of the Editor of THE ENGLISH REVIEW, where they may be examined by any social worker or public or society representative.

Speakers and writers prominent in the counsels of the various agitating societies may be first considered. They were approached and asked whether they were personally acquainted with any fully proved cases of trapping or attempted trapping. If they had made definite allegations they were asked for their authorities and full details, and a guarantee was given that no particulars likely to lead to the identification of victims or their relatives would be published.

Eighteen speakers received such letters. Of these, seven have not yet replied, although stamped addressed envelopes were enclosed with all inquiries; two women have supplied information; one member of Parliament has referred me to another, and that other to the police; two persons have referred me to the National Vigilance Association; and names and addresses for verification of statements given have been refused by four. A total of five assert that they know that trapping exists. The cases

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given by the two who supplied information include one case of suspicion of trapping and two of alleged attempted trapping by motor car. According to the first story, two girls were observed in charge of a woman dressed like a Rescue Worker on Sheffield station in October last, one of the girls appearing dazed, while the other was asleep. The lady responsible for the story spoke to the woman of the party and was answered curtly. This roused her suspicion, and she sought the stationmaster. Failing to find him, she pointed out the group to a ticket inspector from another platform. When she returned with this official the three were gone. Their luggage was marked both Pontefract and Liverpool. The story suggests to me some weary Irish travellers who had crossed the channel in disagreeable weather and were on their way to Pontefract. But all is too vague to prove or disprove anything. The girls were not spoken to, and the lady does not say whether any trains left that or an adjacent platform during her absence. Yet when I question her deductions, she asks me if it has never occurred to me "to investigate the truth of murder." But surely in the latter case there is a corpse!

The other cases are supplied by a lady who is a member of the Pass the Bill Committee, and a speaker, and are given in support of her statement that the motor-car was being increasingly used for the trapping of girls. She claims to have investigated two cases in Richmond district and to have heard of others, but she gives no names or addresses for verification, although she supplies information and references upon another point. One of the gentlemen written to, a knight, told a story of the trapping of an innocent girl by a man and a woman, who seized her in the public street, and walked her off between them. The girl appealed to a shopkeeper and a policeman, but by representing the girl to be insane the couple got off with their victim. In his speech the knight said the story was vouched for by an eminent barrister; in his letter he refuses to disclose this name. Another gentleman says that it is within his own personal knowledge that attempts have been made to abduct girls and women by motor-car and other vehicles, but refuses to supply either instances or proof, saying that he "is engaged in the verification of

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certain facts for certain definite ends," and "cannot give away information." Proof tardily sought is evidently to be reserved for the elect! This correspondent admits the existence of many myths, but claims that "there is a substratum of truth, and the truth is bad."

An application to a K.C., asking whether I could purchase or consult the report of a conjoint committee which he referred to in a speech as having "revealed and brought to light a condition of things that was very appalling and barely credible," was thought to be sufficiently answered by a reference to the reply of the secretary of the association to which he adhered, although it contained no single word bearing on this report.

Among writers, those obviously dealing in fiction or sensationalism were ignored unless the obvious fiction was presented as a fact. A number of those approached because of written statements were correspondents of *The Awakener* (a journal dealing wholly with the social evil, which was started in November of last year from the office of The Men's Society for Women's Rights); others had written independently. A series of important questions upon unsigned statements contained in this paper were put to the editor, a Mr. Jamrach, and he was asked to forward letters to certain correspondents who could not otherwise be traced. Up to the present time he has not only refrained from acknowledgment or reply, but he has returned the letters sent for forwarding with the statement that he does "not know the addresses"! As each of these correspondents reports a case or cases of trapping or attempted trapping, or retails stories of well-known procurers, this editorial statement is illuminating.

The cases covered in these letters or unsigned paragraphs include the story of the Hampstead hairdresser's daughter, also given in a letter to *The Standard*, two cases of the fainting lady device, a motor-car attempt at Shepherd's Bush, several cases of drugging, and the story of the sham hospital nurse.

The Hampstead hairdresser's daughter was alleged to have been carried off in a motor-car from her father's shop by a man who brought a false message purporting to be

Mrs. Bramwell Booth's cases are : one false advertisement case from France, one beautiful Italian beguiled to Australia by promises of employment and wealth, and one German girl "enticed" over to London and taken to a bad house from which she could not escape, although she was able to dispatch a post-card asking for help. It will be observed that all the victims are foreigners. Is this accidental, or because native victims are not available? But the only case supplied which appears to fall within the scope of the inquiry is the remaining one, which I quote almost in full :

"A young man went to *Holborn* station to meet his sister, who was coming from Germany to keep house for him. . . . On several occasions he had been late at business, and had been told by his manager that if it occurred again he would be dismissed. On the particular morning . . . he had not felt it necessary to say he would be late, as the train was due at the station at a much earlier hour than he needed to be at business. . . . However, the train was very late . . . the young man saw that . . . he must go off and leave his sister to go alone to the house. . . . A man on the station seemed to take in the position, and asked the young fellow if he had come to meet someone. He explained matters, whereupon the man offered to meet the sister upon arrival and take her to her destination. The young man thanked him, and thought that all would be well. But his sister has never been heard of since!"

I sought further enlightenment by asking at which *Holborn* station the girl from Germany was expected to arrive, whether she was coming willingly to keep house for her brother, what was his name and address, what evidence the Salvation Army had that his story was true, what was the date of the disappearance, and when the Army was last in touch with the young man?

I am now told that

"The young man . . . is not willing for his sister's case to be made public or details given further."*

As the latest reports of the National Vigilance Association supplied me by Mr. Coote, the secretary, did not contain any cases of forcible trapping, I wrote asking if any could be supplied to me direct. He replied :

"The reason why no reference is made to cases of that kind is that we have not had any such to deal with. . . . During the last twelve months many painful stories have been in circulation respecting the decoy-

* Mrs. Booth is responsible also for the story of the fifteen young English girls who were carried off to Buenos Ayres in November last. She informed me that this case had been "dealt with" from Scotland Yard, but the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis states that it was investigated and found to be "without foundation."

ing and drugging of young women. In each such case reported to this office endeavours have been made to get at the correct facts, but I was not successful in tracing any one of these rumours to its source."

Anxious, it may be, to save the credit of his colleagues and co-workers, he adds :

"It does not follow that the particular cases referred to did not happen. . . . I have little doubt that the stories told were based on actual facts. . . ."

Similar crushing testimony against the alarmists is supplied by Mrs. Hunter, secretary of the National Vigilance Association of Scotland, who states :

"We have not come across any cases of forcible trapping of unwilling girls for the White Slave Traffic. . . . We were not acquainted with White Slave Traffickers working from Glasgow before the passing of the Act of 1912, nor, so far as we and others who are keeping a careful watch know, are there any working from Glasgow. . . . I may add that we have heard of various cases of attempted trapping which have *invariably* been impossible of proof through those who profess to have knowledge of them saying the friend from whom they got the information does not want to be brought into it. Comment is unnecessary."

Thus it appears that the official vigilance societies do not countenance these terrible tales with which the country has been inundated. Their acting officers have no knowledge of this class of case. Yet outside of the police courts and the brothels themselves, no persons can claim to have more opportunity. If they have no proved cases to offer, what must be thought of the individuals who glibly quote stories which they cannot prove upon the authority of the associations that do not profess to have any to prove? The honour of the associations may come unscathed from this inquiry, but what about the honour of these individuals?

But this is not all. To the foregoing weighty pronouncements we must add the equally weighty opinion of Assistant Commissioner F. S. Bullock, the Central Authority in England for the Repression of the White Slave Traffic. I was referred to him by Mr. Arthur Lee, M.P., when I asked for authentication of statements made in the Commons. I am afraid that there is little support for Mr. Lee's views in Mr. Bullock's reply to my questions. He says :

"I cannot call to mind a single case of the forcible trapping of a girl or a woman by drugs, false messages, or physical force during the last ten years that has been authenticated or proved. I should say such cases were very rare indeed. . . . The average number of cases of procuration in London is about three per annum, and none of these are really cases of trapping."

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In reply to a definite question embodying a phrase used in the House of Commons by Mr. Lee, he replies :

"I do not agree that White Slave Traffickers swarmed in London before the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill."

And with scrupulous fairness he adds :

"A considerable number of men, chiefly foreigners, who live on the prostitution of women and are *suspected* of being procurers have certainly left their usual haunts in London since the passing of the Act."

But this surely may be due to their desire to escape the rigour of the new Act against those who live upon the immoral earnings of women. This offence is entered against them; the other is only suspected. Most of us would prefer a change of residence to the risk of flogging. Having answered my questions categorically, Mr. Bullock continues :

"I should like to say that, of course, I have heard of stories, especially since the agitation about the Act of 1912 began, about girls being trapped or decoyed away. I have made searching inquiries into every case in which any really tangible fact, capable of being tested, has been given, and I have never yet been satisfied of the truth of a single one of these stories. Every story has melted away at the application of any serious test. Most of the stories are the result of hysteria or nerves."

He concludes :

"There is no doubt great exaggeration upon the subject of the White Slave Traffic, though, of course, there are some such cases. . . ."

After these repudiations from the inside, those who desire the public to accept their stories will have to produce very conclusive evidence indeed.

To this evidence from specialists must be added the utter lack of personal acquaintance with the trade or any of its manifestations which is revealed by the returns from social and public workers. Sixty forms containing four questions were sent out, and thirty-nine returns received, of which three were blank for such reasons as the addressees being abroad. Of the rest there is only one, a magistrate, who does not give either a categorical negative or a reply of general negative significance to the two questions :

1. Have you in your public work or private life met with an instance of the trapping of a young girl for the White Slave traffic?

2. Have you met with any fully proved case of attempted trapping?

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The exception, a Glasgow Bailie, supplies full details of a case of seduction under promise of marriage, in which the girl was afterwards constrained by the man to earn money on the streets. This Bailie says :

"On the general question, from my experience I should say that for one that is decoyed into a life of this kind . . . one hundred are starved into it."

So that the solitary exception is really not an exception. He has no case of trapping to quote, and his evidence tends strongly against its frequency.

The remaining respondents include eight Wardens of Women's Settlements, London and provincial, of whom only one qualifies her reply by saying, "I have occasionally gone to the rescue of some girl who I felt sure was in danger of being trapped, but the danger has been too indefinite. . . ." She adds, "The danger to our girls is much more from a low standard of morality than from any attempts to entrap or kidnap them." The officials of girls' clubs are similarly unanimous. One states : "We have only recently come here." Two unqualified negatives come from the Chairman of the National Organisation of Girls' Clubs, and also from the Convener of the Preventive and Rescue Committee of the N.U.W.W., as well as from officials of the Women's Co-operative Guild, women's trade unions, employment bureaux, and emigration societies. Three magistrates, a man and woman city councillors, and two women Poor Law Guardians reply in the same terms, as do a miscellaneous group of others.

The two police court workers approached are entirely without knowledge of this phase of evil. Mr. Thomas Holmes, of the Howard Association, and twenty-three years a Police Court Missionary, replies with "Never" twice repeated. He writes :

"You will notice that I say that I have never known of a girl being trapped. I have never even heard of one, excepting through common report."

"I have had nearly thirty years' connection with the police courts, the prisons, and the sweated women of London, and my own conviction is that the matter is grossly exaggerated."

Mrs. Eleanor Carey, sixteen years Police Court Missionary and Probation Officer at Thames Police Court, is equally emphatic. She says :

	Edinburgh.	Glasgow.	Southampton.	Portsmouth.	Stoke-on-Trent.	Leeds.	Bath.
SECTION A.							
1. How many girls and women were reported missing during 1912? ...	50 & 88	90 & 143	13 & 22	50	4	—	—
2. How many were traced? ...	28 & 31	67 & 92	All	49	All	{ Invariably traced }	All
3. How many were proved to have fallen into the hands of procurers? ...	None	None	None	1 Abducted	None	None	—
4. Do responsible persons always inform police when relatives reported missing communicate with them or return home? ...	No	No	Generally	Yes	Generally	{ Asked to do so }	—
5. How many boys and men were reported missing during 1912? ...	129 & 69	256 & 239	52	72	—	—	—
6. How many were traced? ...	80 & 43	180 & 143	All	70	{ All except absconding husbands }	See 2	{ All except absconding offenders }
7. How many girls and women were reported missing during the first three months of (a) 1912? ...	11 & 26	26 & 33	6 & 3	13	None	—	—
(b) 1913? ...	23 & 31	33 & 50	5 & 5	7	None	—	—
SECTION B.							
1. Before the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1912, were the police authorities acquainted with any known or suspected procurers with whom they could not interfere because they did not then possess the power of arrest on suspicion? If so, how many?...	No	No	{ No residents, but suspected persons passed through }	No	No	No	No
2. Were these procurers known to carry on an organised traffic in trapped and deceived girls?	—	No	No	—	—	No	—
3. Have any of these persons been arrested since the passing of the Act? ...	—	—	No	No	—	—	—
4. Have any left the country? ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. What methods of trapping girls have been employed by procurers within the experience of the police? ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SECTION C.							
1. Please give the total number of prosecutions under the Act since it came into force ...	7	43	1	35	1	—	—
2. How many of these were for procuring? ...	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
3. How many for living upon the immoral earnings of women? ...	7	38	1	10	1	4	1
4. How many of the latter were instituted by the women themselves? ...	1	10	None	1	None	—	None

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"In every case known to me of a girl being dragged down to life in a brothel, she has been a willing though blind and misguided victim. . . . I have never found reason to believe that any girl is ever forcibly carried off."

The statistics kindly supplied by a number of Chief Constables complete the destruction of this campaign of sedulously cultivated sexual hysterics. Sixteen questions were submitted to the Chiefs of Police of twelve cities and towns. Five replied that the information was not yet available, or that it was contrary to custom to supply it. The authorities replying were Glasgow, Edinburgh, Portsmouth, Southampton, Leeds, Stoke-on-Trent, and Bath. The questions were arranged in three sections. Section A dealt with missing girls and women, and, for comparison, with missing boys and men; section B dealt with the police knowledge of procurers; and section C with the prosecutions under the new Act.

The replies show that, in 1912, 74 per cent. of missing girls and 64 per cent. of missing women were traced in Glasgow, as compared with 70 per cent. of missing boys and 59 per cent. of missing men. In Edinburgh 56 per cent. and 35 per cent. were the proportions of traced girls and women, against 62 per cent. of both men and boys. Portsmouth gives 98 per cent. for traced girls and women, and 97 per cent. for traced men and boys. The Southampton returns show 100 per cent. traced in all cases. For Leeds the actual figures are not given, but the Chief Constable states that "missing persons are invariably traced." Stoke and Bath reply in the same terms as to females and boys, but except absconding husbands and offenders among the men. All but one unite in saying that no missing girls have been found in the hands of procurers. Portsmouth reports one abducted.

These figures dispose of the suggestion that a disproportionate number of girls and women disappear and leave no trace. In every place except Edinburgh the actual number of men and boys missing and untraced exceeds the number of girls and women, and the percentage of traced females is equal to or greater than the percentage of traced males. One may fairly deduce that there is no abnormal cause of disappearance acting in the case of girls and women alone. I am seeking for an explanation of the Edinburgh figures of untraced women. The Chief Con-

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stable states that "the White Slave Traffic is unknown in Edinburgh."

Nor has the new Act made so marked a reduction in the number of missing girls and women as we were led to expect. In Glasgow and Edinburgh the numbers are greater for the first quarter of 1913 than for the same quarter of 1912, the actual rise being 12 and 5 for Edinburgh, and 7 and 17 for Glasgow. In Southampton there was one girl less reported missing, but two more women. In Stoke none were reported missing in the first quarter of either year. Portsmouth shows the only decrease, from 13 to 7. Bath and Leeds return no reply.

Under sections B and C all the Chiefs except one state that the police were not acquainted with any known or suspected procurers whom they could not arrest for lack of power before the passing of the 1912 Act. The exception is Southampton, from which the reply reads: "There were no known or suspected procurers living in the town, but suspected persons often passed through going abroad." This is qualified by "The police here knew of no organised traffic in trapping girls," and the statement that there have been no arrests of these suspects since the Act came into force. All the Chiefs unite in saying that the police know of no organised trapping; all state that there have been no procurers prosecuted under the Act; all but Bath and Leeds give the total number of prosecutions undertaken, which are shown to be chiefly for living on the immoral earnings of women. Thus in Edinburgh we get a total of 7 prosecutions, all in this class; in Glasgow 38 out of 43; in Portsmouth 10 out of 35; in Stoke and Southampton 1 out of 1; in Leeds 4, and Bath 1, out of totals not given.

To all the previous evidence we may add these statistics, the weight of which is entirely against the alarmist campaigners. Indeed, they are now left the choice of two unpleasant admissions: either the Act has failed to achieve the chief purpose for which it was passed, or there was no need to pass it! But they may prefer to argue that the police lacked knowledge of trapping before the Act because of the subtlety of the trappers, but now lack knowledge of it because it no longer exists. But such evasions are useless. The truth is that the structure erected by the

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neuropaths and prudes is reduced to ashes. They are convicted of getting legislation by false pretences.

These dabblers in debauchery by word of mouth have given us a shocking exhibition of unlicensed slander. They have slandered men only to slander women with the backward swing of the same blow. They have discredited themselves. That this exhibition has been possible is due in no small measure to the Pankhurst domination. It prepared the soil; it unbalanced the judgment; it set women on the rampage against evils they knew nothing of, for remedies they knew nothing about. It fed on flattery the silly notion of the perfection of woman and the dangerous fellow notion of the indescribable imperfection of man.

It is no exaggeration to say that these women range man as nearer the devil and the beast than woman. A solitary example will suffice. A letter signed with the initials M. I. appears in *The Awakener* of May 3rd, and contains the paragraph:

"Fortunately, there are still good decent men to keep us from utter despair, though I fear the greater majority are of the type of the man who boasted in his club—not many months ago—that he had ruined enough girls to extend in a line from Victoria Station to St. Paul's."

The italics are mine. Fed on such ridiculous scandal-mongering, these women have convinced themselves that a large number of men go regularly and deliberately to a safe and secret place of vice to engage in a pastime that is a life and death struggle to a trapped girl. They do not need evidence. The unspeakable depravity of man convicts him. They scorn questions as to why no such men are brained with fenders, or injured with chairs, pictures, or other articles of furniture; why doors are not barricaded, windows smashed, and the night rent with screams. For just as these neuropaths hold that man is vicious, so do they hold that women are impotent and imbecilic weaklings incapable of resisting him.

The cases of criminal assault upon children are quoted to give an air of credibility to this general condemnation. But there can be no fair comparison between the two classes of crime. In the one case an intemperate degenerate is passion-driven into the sudden commission of an atrocity; in the other, there is a cold-blooded, calculating delibera-

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tion which reduces the matter from bestiality to the worst possible devilishness.

We have achieved nothing for the victims of exploited prostitution by this panic and punitive Act. Those responsible for it may have obtained ease of mind, the selfish satisfaction of having accomplished something. But that is merely the measure of their folly. For the rest they have given emphatic justification to those who question the responsibility of women in public affairs; they have provided arms and ammunition for the enemy of women's emancipation. The Fathers of the old Church made a mess of the world by teaching the Adam story and classing women as unclean; the Mothers of the new Church are threatening the future by the whitewashing of women and the doctrine of the uncleanness of men.

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