

THE UNDER WORLD AND ITS WOMEN

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THE UNDERWORLD AND ITS WOMEN.

There are many problems facing civilization today, and one of the apparently impossible ones is that of fallen women. From the standpoint of the community and its welfare, it is fully as difficult to solve, as from that of the unfortunate persons involved.

The district of the tenderloin is an evil tolerated to avoid a still greater one. The confining of these women to a prescribed locality is a condonation permitted to prevent the plague from spreading. The unmastered animalism of a portion of humanity being a fact, like a wild beast it must be prescribed and confined within certain limits, that the other part of the world of mankind may be safeguarded. But this is not a solution of the problem; it is instead a harboring of the evil under the least dangerous conditions. Suppose instead of trying to confine our wild beast we make an effort to tame him,—what then? Failure possibly. The animalism in mankind is rampant and tyrannic, ever encouraged by liquor and rich food, and the process of reform is comparatively hopeless, while custom and habit hold sway. Exceptions there are in large numbers, but a portion of the mass wallow in vulgarity

to enjoy it. A great spiritual revival sometimes uplifts the lower class to a different plane of being, but this again is an exception and but proves the rule that the dead-weight of the earthy holds it to earth and the lusts thereof.

Yes, it is a problem which, turn it as you will, seems insolvable. The nature of animal passion, backed by cunning, resource and reason, is cumulative, and were it not for shame (a strange sensation, by the way) and the upperworld, which has the whip hand, the **underworld** and its women would transform our earth to hell. There is but one key to the situation, it seems to me, and that lies in the cupidity of the culprits. The denizens of the human pit are physically afraid. Disease and short life are inevitable, unless they modify their orgies. Death of the body prevents its physical gratification and is therefore deplorable. This fact has kept many a debauchee within bounds, or transformed him into an epicure whose indulgences stop this side of a breakdown out of consideration for his nerves. The contagions spreading among members of the underworld are modifiers also, and prevent many a man from degrading himself. Senility and general physical weakness are a horror to one who depends upon animal power for his happiness. As bodily passion requires a good frame and nerves well-toned, in order that it may get pleasurable sensation, any hint of impotence or disease is a horror to the animal man. Imagine a person addicted to strong coffee or tobacco; alarming symptoms appear and

he flies to his doctor, who tells him that he must give up his habit or be sick and die. The patient becomes thoroughly frightened, and feeling that all his physical delights are in jeopardy, he abandons the most dangerous to save the rest. And this is the way to reform the sex fiend. Frighten him, reveal him to himself as a paralytic, a victim of locomotor ataxia, a prey to vile and fiendish diseases, a thing worse than a leper, an outcast, and through fright and to save his capacity for animalism he may possibly modify his abnormalities.

It is hard to reach a debauchee through the spiritual attributes, because it is the nature of sexuality to drown the loftier emotions. Patriotism, honor, beauty, noble ambition, go down before the reign of lust and hide their faces in shame. That reformer who hits hard at the brothels and the saloons, preaching fire and brimstone, showing pitfalls and depths of horror, working with all his might upon the selfish instincts of the sinner, pleading with him to fly from the wrath to come, is really a philosopher, for he has adopted the one and only way of rousing the devil from his bed of slime, or driving the human pig from the sty. Even those debauched individuals who have fine intellects and powerful imaginations are reached in exactly the same manner. Intellectual though they are, their lives prove that their dominant trait is animal, using the higher faculties to find means for physical gratification. This class, however, are sometimes reformed through their better natures, or a

strong excitation leading to an exultation of feeling that reveals itself as a far greater factor for happiness than is physical emotion. Once discovering this they are liable to choose the upper rather than the under world for their home thereafter.

Society realizes in dealing with this subject that to probe it to the bottom and open and cleanse the ulcer, it must through peril or otherwise scare the degraded into coming of **their own accord** into better conditions, all save those **far gone**, who must be treated as if insane and kept out of harm's way. As before said, penning them in and holding them to some prescribed quarter, where they may wallow as beasts, is not a solution of the problem; it is but a temporary makeshift to protect the decencies of honest people. The tiger of mankind is simply behind bars, he is not reformed. "But can this be done?" you ask; "Can some method be concocted by which the sinner can be made afraid to sin, and by refraining, in time be forced to evolve a decent individual out of himself?" That is a question that can only be answered by experiments. It is not likely that the social evil will be altogether uprooted even by the most strenuous efforts along this line. It is a cancer, and though you cut it away, tiny rootlets remain and flourish in spite of the social surgeon. But there is no use in pampering this danger nor winking at it. The case is too revolting for human petting. The community must "be cruel to be kind." Young women should be shown

the horror and degradation, the shame and appalling suffering sure to be theirs if they enter on a life of debauchery. The picture should be painted before their eyes in almost fiendish colors. Their loss of beauty, their shortness of life, the ostracism and desertion awaiting girls traveling the primrose path should be forced upon them, with the intent to alarm and subdue. In no other way can you throttle the budding passion of those whose intellect has not taken the command.

The underworld should not only be raided periodically by policemen, but also by "terrorists," who blowing a veritable Gabriel's trumpet into the ears of its inhabitants, prophesy a judgment day of supreme horror, when the skeleton of Death shall rattle his bones and the bloated figure of disease exude its breath, when impotent desire shall limp and totter, and the thunderbolt of Fate strike without mercy. Then, as a last resort, those who are not frightened into decency should be **forced** there by the rigid hand of law,—housed in prisons or insane wards where they cannot ply their deadly trade.

There is an accursed teaching going abroad, sent forth by members of the medical profession, that an occasional visit to the underworld is quite essential to the health of mankind as such. That is, "do evil that good may come." This may be medical wisdom, but it is certainly not philosophic. There is a good in every evil to be sure, but the evil as such is not good,

nor does the good **come** out of it. There is a great difference between a revelation of good through its **contrast** with evil, and the legitimate offspring of evil itself. The child of an evil act is bigger than its mother and blacker. The good within that same act is the contrasting possibility lying potential in the act itself. There is now and then a "fallen woman or man," intellectual and subtle enough to reason himself out of a vile life by this law of opposites and principle of compensation, but they are so rare and passion is so powerful, that instead of one lost sheep there would be ninety and nine if this method were the only one applied.

The permanent inhabitants of the underworld are mostly women, as men are permitted to inhabit both localities at stated intervals. Now this seems essentially unfair, and stands as a problem all by itself. Keeping to my first postulate, that of the state's relation to its degraded underworld, I must nevertheless refer to sporadic instances where reforms are induced through individual effort. It is often the case that a man of lofty character, wakes up and stimulates the sleeping love nature of an evil woman, and wins her away through adoration for him into a different walk in life. Appeals to the occult and superstitious often have the same effect. Emotional religion or the maternal passion may be elements strong enough to produce reform. A regenerated courtesan, returning to her fallen sisters and showing them a better life, is another strong factor. Knowing

them and their needs and passions, she is better qualified for the work than the unsympathetic.

Not all the inhabitants of the underworld are there for the sake of abnormal indulgence. Many, both men and women, are after money and that alone, trading on the degradation of others speculatively and therefore financially. The white slave is a victim of the money-maker, be he Jew or Gentile, and women often, finding themselves down and out for some cause or other, remain in bondage for the sake of support, seeing no other method by which existence can be maintained. All this I admit, and assert in face of it that the problem of obscenity and debauchery in a community is nevertheless in no way solved.

As before said, confining the depraved to certain restricted quarters may seem a partial solution,—but is it? Suppose we set apart certain streets for the special use of our thieves and highwaymen, and admonish them that **if they must** ply their trade, to be careful and not get out of the corral when the police are about. Suppose another restricted quarter is put aside for professional murderers, and they are warned to do their killing under cover, skulking to their houses of refuge before the law has them handcuffed. You laugh, and rightly. “It is absurd,” you say; “the public would license the means for its own destruction.” Yes, certainly,—but allowing prostitutes and rouses to get out of sight in the pens of the tenderloin set apart for them for the purpose of sinning, is encouraging a

menace as great if not greater than that of the safe housing of our criminals of other stripe. Were the danger confined to those who revel, perhaps the less said and done the better, but the peril is not confined; it is insidious and therefore far-reaching, contaminating the innocent through contracted disease, wrecking homes, brutalizing offspring, and degrading decency. The serpent of a protected underworld steals slyly and slimily into the salons and living rooms of the upperworld, and poisons all that it touches. No, the community cannot protect and condone debauchery and lewdness and be safe. If the fallen cannot be frightened or persuaded out of their sties, they must be forced out and doctored, washed and made physically clean whether or no. Of course there are innumerable undiscovered cases, but the discovered should be treated like smallpox patients and thrust into the moral pesthouse at once. Thus we treat our lepers, whose souls perhaps are white; thus we are beginning to treat victims of other contagious diseases; but the victim of the malady of lust and immoral barter plies his trade and goes about his business with but few restrictions in the underworld where he laughs and lives.

The problem is not solved,—no; for right here an exceedingly difficult aspect of it appears. Suppose that by some miracle all prostitutes should become Magdalens, that is, reformed. I verily believe the upperworld would be thrown into panic. Why? The sharp line of demarca-

tion between so-called respectable sexuality and obscenity has been legally and ethically drawn. "Once down, always down," is the unwritten code of the virtuous world—that is, in the case of women. Men are supposed to be made of different clay, and if not too degraded are often rather admired because of their "fast" tendencies. "Sow your wild oats my boy," says the doting father or grandfather; "then marry a **pure, good** woman, make a home, serve your country and live as I do." This settles the case of the majority of men, who stop in their orgies just short of actual ruin, saving their money and health "by the skin of their teeth." But the women! No puzzle in state craft is harder to decipher than this. If women remain down, death gets them in a few years, but if by a miracle they resolve to rise, who will have them? Not the upperworld. Why should they? Even though reformed they are contaminating; they **know things**. A courtesan though she walk as straight as a virgin—even straighter—if she has achieved innocence has certainly not acquired ignorance also. She has explored the vile depths, and the pitch sticks, not only to her but to others with whom she associates. She cannot help "thinking things," and thought being contagious must of necessity set others to thinking also. What mother who has young sons and daughters will harbor a reformed prostitute, as maid or governess? I am referring now to one genuinely regenerated. But there are so **many** backsliders among them that the upperworld is ever sus-

precious, though the victim of its doubts gives no cause. The women of the underworld know this. Together down there they have some comforts, but above they would starve. "Cure a leper," they say, "and he is welcomed by society with open arms. Cure us and we are kicked out; even the church throws stones, though surely there are some guilty like ourselves among its members." Is it any wonder then that the "down" stay down, for should they try to rise, they are pretty sure to be trodden back into the mire by their necessarily cruel sisters, who walk with virtue and the gods.

Nor can we altogether blame the upperworld. It has **not** sown the seed of such an evil, and why in justice should it reap the fruit. Innocence in the form of youth must be kept from contamination, the home in its cleanness **must** be preserved, it is the foundation of the state. So here we are with a vital problem in hand, and apparently no just way of solution. The upperworld is not heartless, the better class of any respectable community would like to help and uplift its fallen sisters if it could so do with safety; but knowing the degraded and their fickleness, also the influence their past has upon them physically and mentally, they say "Hands off; they have sown, let them reap."

"If this problem is insolvable, "you say, "why debate it? Would it not be better taste to let it severely alone?" Wait! Possibly it can be solved from the standpoint of criminology and the system of probation. Treat the lewd as

criminals, house them—yes, in prison, letting out on probation those who give genuine evidence of a reformation; make the sin of prostitution as great as that of theft or forgery; show a debauched man no quarter, class him with a debauched woman, and give him the same medicine; make exceptions for cases obviously unfortunate, where the victim at the inception of her evil life was in no way to blame. All white slaves seduced through ignorance and striving to clear themselves should be upheld and exonerated; only the willful prostitute and those who traffic in her shame should be put on a par with the criminal class. This method might serve to reduce the evil as capital punishment reduces murder, but again the second puzzle stares us in the face. Should wholesale reforms take place, and the inhabitants of the underworld make a raid on the upper, so to speak, asking recognition as brothers and sisters, crowding our churches and public halls, calling upon us in our homes, demanding social and economic acknowledgement, requesting places in our offices as public servants, opening up places of business, merging into us, so to speak,—what then? Perhaps we are making a man of straw to knock him down. In the first place it is not likely that any such wholesale reform will take place. Nothing short of an overwhelming religious revival, or a panic when the world is supposed to be coming to an end, when the veil of the temple is rent and the rocks fall asunder and darkness broods over earth,—nothing less will be

powerful enough to cause such wholesale reformation.

This second aspect of the problem I think should be met individually, case by case. It is well known that denizens of the underworld hate the "upper crust," as they call it, and try to persuade themselves that "respectable people," are in reality no more virtuous than themselves. "You folks up there," they say, "are **conventional, not good**; you are too cowardly to break the law, so you sin inside it; you marry without love and degrade yourselves as much as we do; you sell your daughter to the highest bidder, and, hypocrite that you are, see to it that she is married in church and 'joined to her husband by God.' You even come down to our world and cohabit with us, irrespective of your wives and children. You buy obscene novels, you study the old classics, and their supreme vulgarisms, under all sorts of respectable guises. You dabble with impurity,—whited sepulchres that you are!"

This is the sentiment of the fallen regarding those who carry their heads high, and not without some shade of reason. Hatred for each other is alive and active between the presumptively virtuous and those who are not; and this fact makes it all the more difficult to reach an understanding and consequently a solution of the problem.

"What has philosophy to do with all this?" you ask. Philosophy means the love of wisdom, and wisdom is based on fact and law. Philos-

ophy in striving to read this riddle of the Sphinx would first get data and then deal with them by the fundamental principle of life itself. The underworld is the reverse of the upper; they are opposite poles of the same thing; one prates of its virtue and the other glories in its vice, but both are based on the fact of **life as life**. That is, each is striving to extract from the days and nights the greatest possible amount of satisfaction, pleasure and ecstatic emotion. The "respectable" claim that they find all these in law, order and decency; the fallen assert boldly that a short life and a merry one, minus monotony, is the most enjoyable. In the upperworld intellect commands, in the lower, shrewdness and sensation. Yet it is one world, after all, showing its dual aspects. In the upperworld the women are proportionately mothers, in the lower they are hetaerae. Possibly a certain betterment might be reached if the Magdalen could be persuaded to become a Madonna and the Madonna, for a time be reasoned out of her frantic motherliness into a cultivation of some of the charms of the Magdalen, in order to enamor her husband into love of herself as woman pure and simple, irrespective of race suicide and the needs of a home. Philosophically speaking, we are dinging the doctrine of home and motherhood into the ears of our women, so continually that they forget that they are individuals and as women have a reason to fascinate and charm. Reverse, we are condemning the right of the prostitute to the saving grace of a child, and

ostracizing the illegitimate to the infernal regions. Of course it is emphatically the duty of the upperworld to crush out vice by the hand of the law, if possible, and to protect itself in every way from the insidious poison it disseminates, but as was hinted before, as people are taken into church on trial before obtaining full membership, or as they are allowed freedom by the state on probation till they have proved their right to liberty, so might it not be possible for the two aspects of the one world to come to a meeting place, where the good in each can be exchanged and the past evils ignored, until sufficient time has passed to prove whether a reform were possible or not. As before said, this could not possibly be the method by which the world could deal with its criminals en masse, but it might likely be the way by which individuals could reform each other, reaching here and there after those who truly desire to reclothe themselves in decency

The fallen woman is a pitiful creature from every possible aspect. Unprotected by law she cannot, like the married, when her lover forsakes her, fall back upon the court and demand her rights with alimony thrown in. Ostracized by society she cannot, like her more fortunate sister, find sympathy among reliable friends when stranded for want of funds. Her assets are youth, health and beauty, and these command a high price while they last, but no agent would insure them because of the self-destroying nature of the life she leads. If by some miracle she does save her

health and some capital, her only hope is to establish a disorderly house and become a procuress for the downfall of others to the level of herself. Failing in this and making no headway in saving capital, it is but a question of a short time that her health fails and her beauty departs. Then her fate looms before her, vile, horrible. To live even in rottenness, she must earn the right, and as she sinks lower and lower, she is kicked and cursed and spit upon. At last, diseased throughout, she is hid underground and gladly "got rid of" Her opposite, the male, escapes the prodigious enormity of her fate on earth, but how it fares with himself hereafter, God alone knows. He is presumed to have a soul. If this is so, and it finds itself bodiless, what will it do? Evil desires still burning within him, but with no means of expression. But this is presumption. Whatever his fate, by nature of himself it cannot be happy. He will reap the crop of the seeds he sowed.

Philosophy has a great work ahead of it in its efforts to solve the problem of the underworld and its women. If the philosopher under the mask of the statesman fail in his attempt, it will at least prove that he has struggled with an enigma that no Oedipus has as yet deciphered.