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# "The Girl That Goes Wrong"

Reginald Wright Kauffman

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Author of "The House of Bondage"

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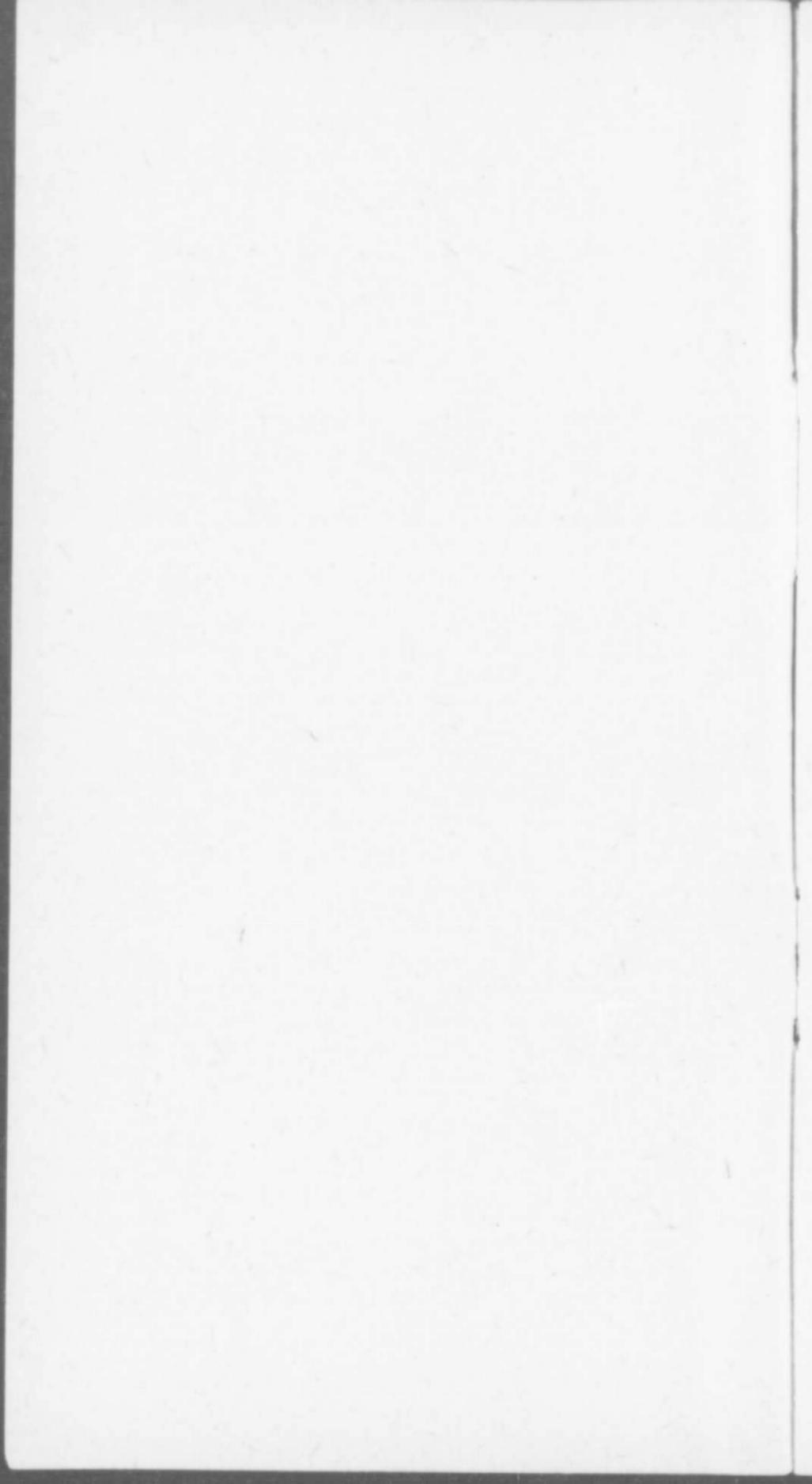
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Printed by WILLIAM BRIGGS, Toronto.



## The Girl that Goes Wrong

A Sketch of Personal Investigations that led to the Writing of "The House of Bondage" and of Conclusions Drawn Therefrom.

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

### Nothing But the Truth.

**T**HIS is not the sort of story that, until a few years ago, I used to try to write. It is not fiction at all. I wish it were. I wish with all my heart that these things which I have seen and these black biographies which I have verified were but the visions of a night of weeping, and that it might thus be true of this matter, as of some others, that "joy cometh in the morning." But the world—which means you and me—has not so decided. That which I testify is not "the whole truth," because the whole truth cannot, according to our present ideas, be set forth with impunity; the worst must be left to your imagination. And yet my testimony is, I assure you, "the truth, and nothing but the truth."

### The Numbers of the Fallen.

Why, if it be so terrible, should I ask you to read it? I shall make that clear in a few words. In the fairly typical city of Chicago there are, not counting those who err in secret, twenty-five thousand known public women. The life of such women in such a trade—it is as sure as insurance figures—is only five years long. This means that, for Chicago alone, there must be secured five

thousand new public women every year—and every year that number is secured. From the most conservative figures obtainable, it is a low estimate to say that, in all our large cities and most of our small ones, there is one public woman to every one hundred and sixty of the population—men, women and children; and it is a fact that one-half of these women come from the rural districts and that the vast majority are native-born.

### **This Directly Concerns You.**

Now do you see why I ask you to consider this problem? Putting aside all broad questions of the morality of the human race in general, putting aside all questions of what may happen to young girls in cities at a distance from the place in which you live, I ask you to consider this problem because, through the women of your own circle, through the men they marry or through the children they bear, it is bound, sooner or later, to come to your own door, to enter your own house. I ask you to consider it because it directly concerns your own daughters, your own sons-in-law and brothers-in-law, your own sisters, your own sweethearts, your own body and soul.

What I am now to tell you is a little of *what I myself have seen*, but I do not ask you to accept my unsupported testimony for it. I ask you to subpoena *three corroborating witnesses*. If you doubt the existence of the conditions I am to tell you about, if you doubt that those conditions extend from one end of the country to the other, then:

Write to the New York Probation Association for its first report, to read the statement concerning conditions in New York made by District Attorney Charles S. Whitman.

Write to your own congressman for a copy of Senate Document No. 196, issued at the second session of the Sixty-first Congress, and read the report of a large corps of experts in confirmation of my statement that what is true of our largest city is true of the length and breadth of the land.

You think it strange, of course, that, if all these things are so, the famous White Slave Grand Jury of New York did not find out about them. Naturally. Very strange, indeed! But there I am prepared to surprise you. The White Slave Grand Jury did find out! Why didn't it say so in its presentment? It did say so in its presentment. 'I hear you:

"Why, my goodness," you say, "we didn't see anything definite in our newspapers!"

No, my trustful friend, you did not. Not one line worth while. But just get a copy of that presentment—it is printed in the back of "The House of Bondage." Just read it. Just see what the newspapers did not print. Just reflect a little and put two and two together and see if you can't guess why the New York papers did not dare to publish and why the New York correspondents did not dare to send out the whole text of that important document.

There, at any rate, you have my list of corroborating witnesses: the district attorney of New York, the White Slave

Grand Jury and a special commission of the United States Senate. Can you ask for more?

### How My Interest Began.

My own interest in this problem began a good many years ago, and the story of it opens on a bitterly cold night—or, rather, early morning—in Philadelphia. I was at that time a reporter on a newspaper and I had been detained at my office until two o'clock. As I stepped into the street, I recall that I was nearly driven against the wall by the gale that was blowing. The sleet cut at my cheeks and the pavement was like the surface of a frozen pond. I noticed that the thoroughfare was practically deserted, and yet, just under a sputtering electric light, I was accosted by a lonely woman.

There was no mistaking her trade and there was nothing attractive about its practitioner. Her ringed eyes were hard, her rouged face was prematurely old and her red mouth was cruel.

I asked her why she was working so late and in such weather.

"I'm doin' it," she said—and I can still hear her hollow voice—"because I need some more money on my kid's boardin'-school bill. The bill's got to be paid to-morrow."

That woman told me her story, and I subsequently investigated it and found it true. She had been inveigled from a country town, taken to the city, and then, by the man that had said he loved her, turned upon the street. When her child was four years old, she had taken the little girl to a certain educational institution—not a charitable affair—and

the officials of that institution, with whom the woman was perfectly frank, had agreed to take the child and educate her on three conditions. The woman must consent never to see her daughter again, she must consent to having her daughter brought up in the belief that the mother was dead and she must pay the bills regularly.

That mother's love proved itself absolutely unselfish—*the woman kept her bargain.*

This was the incident that started me on my inquiries. For the first time in a commonplace and therefore self-centered life, I began to wonder whether the women of the abyss were not, in reality, only human beings, after all, and *from that day forward I studied them.*

With the idea of my white slave novel, "The House of Bondage," in mind, and with the conviction that the subject was worthy of such sacrifices as we could make, I *gave up the managing editorship of a New York magazine* and with my wife, who is a student of social problems, went to live in an East Side tenement house, on the island of Manhattan, on the outskirts of the district in which lived many of the people of whom I was to write and from which still more of their sort are daily recruited. Here we pursued our researches in a living medium.

### **Studied These People and Lived Among Them.**

I say that I studied these people and lived among them; but not as a patron, not as a customer, not as a slaver on the one hand, or a benefactor on the other; not as what they call a "reform

spotter." I went among them on the terms of simple human fellowship. I studied them in puritan Boston - and hypocritical Philadelphia, in Chicago, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Washington and Denver, as well as in New York. I came to know them in London and in Paris, in scores of our larger cities and smaller towns.

Our method in New York is a fair example of my general line of work. There we established a nominal residence, in which to see our former friends, near the field of our labors. At the same time we rented rooms in other sections, and it was mostly here, when not on the streets or in the dives, that, among our new friends, we passed our time.

Many persons have asked us whether we employed any disguise. We did not. I left my editorial position with a capital under seventy-five dollars, and, as we did only enough magazine writing to keep us alive, we found that the clothes with which we started were soon disguises sufficient for all practical purposes. Twice, because of arrears in rent, we were served with notices to quit. Several times, after a night in the darkest corners of some city, we returned to go to bed with no guess as to how we were to buy our breakfast.

### **A Model Tenement.**

I recollect one tenement in which we occupied a place on the top floor. It was called a model tenement, but a generous hole in the roof provided a constant pool of water for our floor, with results that have since kept my wife in the doctor's care for months. I protested. No repairs were made. I stopped paying

rent. The agent came to the house and sent up word that he wanted to see me. As it happened that I had been hurt in a little affair the night before, I returned a message to the effect that if he wanted to see me he could climb to the seventh story.

The agent climbed and arrived panting and furious. He was a thin, sleek man in a comfortable fur coat. When I explained my trouble, he laughed.

"Why," he said, "any roof is likely to leak. I have one even in my own home right now."

"All right," I answered. "I'll trade you residences."

He did not accept my offer.

### **We Knew the Women as Friends.**

Whenever we went about our work, we found that we quite soon came to know well the women whom we were studying. We knew them as friends. In one place, when we had, which was rarely, more money than we thought we ought to carry about with us into the dives, we gave it for safe-keeping to a woman that had served two terms as a pickpocket. In all the cities where I studied, when there was more cash than could be immediately used—which was less often—I could always lend it to the girls, with the absolute certainty of repayment. And, go where we would, when we were in need of more money than we had on hand—which was the most frequent situation of all—we could borrow small amounts from these women. From positions of such intimacy I studied the problem before me in all its phases—in houses, flats, tenements and in the darkened streets and doorways; from the

places patronized by clubmen to those patronized by sailors, peddlers and thugs—and although we found that conditions were in some degree worse in such cities as New York and Philadelphia than in certain other towns, that difference, when it existed, was always one of degree and never one of kind.

Of the stories that we heard—and not only heard, but saw—I shall, in future issues of Leslie's Weekly, tell a few of the more interesting—stories that will serve to show you how these girls and women come to be what they are, how sometimes a specific case can be cured and how sometimes many cases can be prevented; but here and now there is space to recall only a few. These present ones I give not to point a way out—that must come later—but to give you a more vivid idea of things as they are.

### **The First Real White Slave I Met.**

I remember well the first real prisoner—the first real white slave—to whom I talked. She was a girl from Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and I asked her whether the life was as bad as people said it was. I shall never forget the look that came into her face as she answered,

“I don't know what they say, but it's worse than they can say, because there's a lot in it that there ain't no words for.”

*In every city I found that many of the girls had been sold into slavery—in what manner and by what means I shall presently indicate. In several I found the old brass-check system of payment still in vogue. But in all, whether they are paid by cash or by credit, I found that—as the victims have to pay their masters or mistresses for clothes, food and lodg-*

ing, and as the rates charged for these things are beyond all reason—the girls are uniformly kept hopelessly in their owners' debt.

### **A Slave of the Street Scarcely Sixteen.**

One little Chicago slave of the street—she was scarcely sixteen years old—pointed out to me, what many another has since confirmed, the manner in which her kind are robbed.

"Room rents," as she puts it "is some-thin' awful, and the women that rents the rooms know we've got to pay them whatever they've a mind to ask."

"And how about your clothes?"

"Well, we need showy ones, and the second-hand stores where we get them—society ladies sells them there—spot us the minute we come in, and up go the prices accordin'."

"Where do you eat?"

"There's a slew o' restaurants that are really run just for the girls in our business. Ours is hard work and it needs hearty food, but those restaurants we've got to go to (they won't serve us in others) charge us Auditorium prices. Then there's all the time medicine, there's miles to walk every night, there's bad weather and hard times when there ain't a cent to be earned, and yet all the while there's your fellow waitin' round the corner, with his hand itchin' to take all you got and his fist shut to crack you one on the jaw if you don't give up."

### **Why They Don't Run Away.**

Why don't they run away—these girls—from their "fellows"? I used to wonder about that, and they all gave me the same answer. When I first put the question it was to a Philadelphia victim.

She looked at me with eyes full of amazement.

"Who? Me? Where'd I run to?" she replied. "If I ran to another man, it'd be the same thing over again. If I started out for myself, my fellow'd find me an' kill me—or, if he didn't quite finish the job, he'd have me 'pinched.' An' if I tried to get some other sort of work before I'm too broken down to do any other sort—well I never learned a trade, an', anyhow, who'd have me?"

You think of the reform schools—of the semi-prisons—to which, in most of our States, we send thousands of these offenders. What about them? I asked that question of nearly all the public women that I met, and once again I received always a uniform reply. I give it here in the words—they were not meant to be irreverent words—of a Boston street girl.

"Weren't you ever at a reform school?" I inquired.

"Yes," she answered; "an', honest to God, I learned more of my business there than I ever learned on the street."

### **The White Slave Traders.**

From the women that I knew I learned in what saloons the slave traders "hung out," and I hung out there, too. At first I was avoided. But at last, because I did not seem anxious to find out anything, I found out all that I wanted. The traders came to talk before me freely, and I have heard them, in one city and another, discuss their wares in much the same tones and terms as those in which horse dealers talk of horseflesh.

It is only too easy to learn to be a white-slave trader. The boy of sixteen, brought up with no advantages, taken

from school before the permitted age and put to work in a factory on a false affidavit, falls into some trifling trouble and loses his job. He gets the chance to act as a "lighthouse" or scout for a mature trader, who pays him well. Then he gets a girl of his own and by physical punishment forces her to go upon the street for him. Sometimes he becomes a waiter in a low saloon, and offers his personal chattel to his drunken customers; but generally he is unfitted by this time for any steady work. Occasionally he owns three or four slaves and "farms them out" to business acquaintances in other neighborhoods or other cities, and often he sells a girl into a house, either for a lump sum or for royalties on her earnings.

#### **Where They Find Their Victims.**

Wherever there is hard luck looking for better times, there you will find the white slaver looking for slaves. Wherever there is poverty longing for comfort, discontent sighing for relief, vanity whimpering for gewgaws, hunger gasping for food, there the white slaver comes to offer a descent down the Easiest Way. Sometimes he offers marriage, sometimes he offers only economic independence; but the thing is done, and, once done, blows and starvation perpetuate the slavery upon the ignorant, and threats of arrest and the certainty of public disgrace weld the shackles about the ankles of the more knowing.

There, in the briefest possible terms, is the situation. There is no word in my novel that is not the truth. The thing exists. It exists in your own city, your own town. It threatens your own flesh and blood. What are you going to do about it?

### The Chief Cause of the Evil.

For my own part, I am convinced that the chief cause of the evil is poverty, and that we shall not have ended the one until we have ended the other. I take at random a table of statistics compiled concerning three hundred girls cared for at Waverley House, New York institution, during one year. This shows that the previous occupations of the girls were as follows:

Housework . . . . .	95
Factory-work . . . . .	72
Waitresses . . . . .	29
Shop-clerks . . . . .	16
Chorus-girls . . . . .	13
Office-workers . . . . .	9
Nursemaids . . . . .	8
Dressmakers . . . . .	8
Cashiers . . . . .	7
Laundry-girls . . . . .	6
Trained-nurses . . . . .	3
Telephone-girls . . . . .	2
Milliners . . . . .	2
Manicures . . . . .	2
Miscellaneous . . . . .	2
No occupation . . . . .	26

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### Reformation, Agitation, Education.

But, besides doing away with poverty, what is to be done? Three excellent things—reformation, agitation and education.

*There is a chance for any girl that has not been in the business for more than one year and for many that have been there longer. All social and religious workers agree on this point. But it is not enough to "show a girl the error of her ways." Most of the victims of this*

abominable traffic know, better than you can know it, "the error of their ways." Few remain in the life because they like it. In the words of Miss Miner, to whom I have already referred, "only a negligible per cent. are naturally vicious."

Suppose, however, that such a girl really does not know that she is doing harm both to herself and to society; suppose you then open her eyes to the fact that she is hurting both herself and others—do you help her or do you help others if you stop there? You simply return her to the business with the added burden of a realization of her wrongdoing. No reformation can be accomplished until, in addition to making the girl see her fault, you supply her with a means of avoiding that fault in the future. You effectively reform no public woman until you have also given her the chance to earn a decent living in a decent trade.

### **The Havoc of Prudery.**

Agitation concerns itself, in this matter, rather with the class than with the individual. We have always been told that this evil is one that must not be discussed, and, precisely because we have failed to discuss it, the thing has grown to its present proportions. *It has thrived in the shadow of our silence.* You are mistaken when you say that because an evil is unclean we must not discuss it; if we want to be rid of it, we must shout it from the housetops. You are mistaken when you say that this particular evil we cannot stop; the Abolitionists were told that they could not stop negro slavery, but, by unremitting agitation, they stopped it, anyhow. Until the public is aroused by a campaign of pub-

licity, it will not try to end this evil; and until it has tried, I for one, will not admit that the evil cannot be ended.

### **The Value of Knowledge.**

Finally, as every student of the social problem well remembers, the bitterest cry of the girl that goes wrong is, "Until it was too late, I didn't know!" It is a fact that nearly all of our boys are left to discover the fundamental truths of life from the worst of teachers—their own ill-trained minds. It is a fact that nearly all of our girls are never told the full facts until, if they are not too unfortunate, they learn them from their husbands, or until, as is increasingly the case, they learn them, to their ruin, from a man whose sole purpose is seduction. Next to a satisfactory wage, there is *no guardian of a girl equal to a complete, clean knowledge of the truth*, and any girl may secure that knowledge—may be given that armor—in her own school or her own home.

To quote Charles W. Eliot, president emeritus of Harvard University:

"Does any one protest that such an educational process will abolish innocence in young manhood and womanhood? Let him consider that the only alternative for education in sex hygiene is the prolongation of the present awful wrongs and woes in the very vitals of civilization."

Have you a sister, a daughter? Is there any woman or girl dependent upon your care? Make, then, no mistake about it—ignorance is not innocence; ignorance is the worst enemy of innocence.

*What are you going to do about it?*