



THE
BATH
HOUR

After all, ugliness, as well as beauty is in the eyes of the beholder,—and the present *isn't* ugly at all, but full of a wonderful interest, as a few of us are beginning to find out. We are trying to find new bottles for new wine—Greek vases are about worn out.”

And so we may, as she asks, leave her work to make its own eloquent plea for what Emerson calls “the eternal picture that nature paints in the street, with moving men and children, beggars and fine ladies, . . . capped and based by heaven, earth and sea.”

“MY LITTLE SISTER”

HARRIET BURTON LAIDLAW

[Mrs. Laidlaw is chairman of Manhattan Borough of the Woman Suffrage Party. Her special interest in the subject of this review is due, among other things, to her friendship with Rose Livingston, the rescue worker in Chinatown whose unique experience gives her understanding sympathy with unfortunate girls, and who has suffered persecution, unchecked by the police, on account of her revelations in regard to the white slave trade.—Ed.]

IN *My Little Sister* Elizabeth Robins has let us hear a great cry out of the depths—an actual human cry.

True, many snug, comfortable people, shaken for a moment out of their apathy, dismiss it all carelessly, even contemptuously. Many who are

My Little Sister. By Elizabeth Robins. Dodd, Mead and Co. 344 pp. Price \$1.25. By mail of THE SURVEY \$1.37.

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gripped to the heart as they read brush away the tears with a sign of relief and say, “Well, it’s only a story.” But what a “story!”

It is told in a tense, staccato style which hurries the reader on—on even through the idealistic descriptions of the English country and the stretching moor, across which, in its little garden planted by loving hands, stands the “dear

home" of the officer's gentle widow and her two daughters, the Elder Sister in whose words the story is told and whose name is never mentioned, and the Little Sister, Bettina, all golden and bright, a creature so touchingly exquisite, so like a flower.

Through the sweet, lightly sketched scenes of the childhood, girlhood and dawning womanhood of these two fair young creatures there is woven a dark thread of fear, dread, tragedy. Some experience of brutality this dainty, tenderly devoted mother has had, an experience which is never more than darkly hinted at. She forgets the terror of it only in those happy memories that cluster about her lover-husband. His body was brought home to her from a fatal tiger hunt. Her only consolation in his loss, she tells the Elder Sister, was that she knew that there are worse dangers than those of the jungle! She had the joy of knowing that he died while all was "bright and untarnished."

The narrative hastens on, always with a hovering sense of doom. The innocent, tender love stories of the sisters develop. They are but seventeen and nineteen, but they are women. It is impossible to do justice to the telling of this story, so we will pass to the main event, the invitation of the London aunt, the failing health and fortune of the mother, which nerves her to accept an offer that will separate her from her children, and the almost happy bustle of preparation for the first visit from home, and for that wonder of wonders—a London season! The sinister part played by Madame Aurore, the little London dressmaker who, while working for them in their country home lays the plans that are to decoy them to their ruin in London, is worked out with sure, rapid touch. Then comes the arrival in London, the meeting of the girls by the pseudo "aunt," who has been dressed for the part by the aid of a photograph sent on to the procurers by Madame Aurore. Then follows the terrible scene in the house with the barred windows and the strange overwhelming scent, the escape of the Elder Sister, the heart-breaking search for the younger—the madness, the despair! One of the most pathetic things in the book is the heart-broken young lover who traces Bettina from London to "their house in Paris"—thence from one place to another "always too late." The merciful death of the mother, and the fixed conviction, the subliminal inspiration, that comes toward the end to the tortured brain of the elder sister that Bettina has found her release in death, alleviate and spiritualize the misery of it all.

Now as to the truth of this tremendous story. I suppose that having put the very soul of truth and reality into the narrative itself, having written it from the very depths of her own pitying heart, the author has not reckoned with the

callous incredulity which the book often meets, or she might well have added an introductory note in regard to the actual facts in this case from real life. The story, she told me subsequent to its publication, was absolutely true, but much softened at many points. In the true story, for instance, the mother is not dead, but is in a state of dementia on the continent, whither the family have moved, being unable to endure England and its memories.

Moreover, although Miss Robins' experience in working for women and the woman's cause in England had brought to her knowledge many life histories more unspeakable than this, after she had finished this book she said to herself, "Now here is a story that I know to be absolutely true, but how valuable is it to give to the world an individual instance of this kind; how far can it be generalized?" To test this she went, with that sincerity of spirit that characterizes all she does, to a noted police justice in London and laid the story before him, asking him what he would do if a person came to him with such a story. He answered sadly, with no show of being at all roused by anything unusual, that he would begin to take evidence immediately and see what he could do about it. He added that the story was really a commonplace.

Such is the reticence of the English press, and such is the stern family pride concerning the "blot on the scutcheon," and all those traditions which grow out of the double moral standard whereby the escapade of the son of the house can even be repeated lightly while the slightest shadow on the name of the daughter is an unspeakable disgrace, that no one knows how many tragedies of this kind are hidden from sight in the records of numerous respectable families.

To satisfy herself more completely that the story was susceptible of extensive application, Miss Robins took it to several London police inspectors. No one for a moment stopped to doubt or question the facts. The most horrible stories that the human mind can conceive are old stories to them. When the Home Secretary was asked a question on this subject in the House of Commons only a few weeks ago, he answered that in London city alone, to his knowledge, there had been reported fifty-three girls lost and never heard of within a few months. Such facts as this explain the tragic intensity with which the book is written.

Danger! Danger! Danger! That is the dominant note that sounds throughout the narrative. How pathetically the mother's poignant fears contrast with her ineffectiveness. Ever this haunting danger, whether mother and daughters are walking in the sunset, or planting in the garden, or sitting by the hearth. What a wonderful picture Miss Robins gives of the mother's desperate dependence on the four walls

of her home—"Soon home, now, little girl, soon safe in our dear home." The danger signal of the night-bird's note is introduced with inimitable art—a subtle suggestion, even in those early days, of the gray hawk whose shadow hovers over bright young lives.

The unutterable sadness of it all and the stern warning to mothers that children's homes are not just in four walls, but are in towns and cities and nations! How utterly ineffectual seem an individual mother's effort for the safety of her child. How evident is it that a mother's care must have back of it power—power in council and legislative hall. How strongly the lack of social sympathy is brought out; the mother's indifference to the great crying needs of the world. This mother's "place was the home," and to what did all her negative efforts avail in shutting the danger away from her cherished daughters, in a nation, in a world, which holds a traffic system of such Machiavellian adroitness, a system which can afford, so great are its profits, to reach into the inner recesses of a home, to work with endless patience and resourcefulness and which can enlist on its side such power that even the London police, perhaps the least corrupt in the world, can answer evasively to the frantic cry, "Do you know such a house?"—"We have a great many on the list, but not many such as you describe;" and follow this statement with the maddening inactivity which Miss Robins describes with vivid accuracy.

Her book is a terrific arraignment of the conditions which make such a tragedy possible. Respectability and indifference are personified scathingly in the monumental aunt, deaf to the world voices of agony. All society is arraigned as the Elder Sister storms at her aunt, "sitting massive, calm, with a power of inert resistance." Her bewildered answer to the mad cry for help,—"It isn't possible, this is England,"—sounds strangely natural to us. It is the burden of so many recent New York editorials, "such things don't happen"—and that in our land where the record of the Chicago Immigration League tells of 1,700 girls between the railroad terminals of New York and Chicago alone, reported lost in one year. Thus wails the Elder Sister,—“So old and unbelieving, I felt she had looked on unmoved at evil since the world began. . . . She rose, O! but slowly;—slow, stiff and ponderous. I felt in her all the heaviness of acquiescence since time began.”

Thus is the unbelievable apathy of society pictured! Thus Miss Robins touches lightly, pitifully on the problem of a girl's handicap in the lack of preparation for life. What a picture she gives of the sheltered girl—"Such a little thing, my not knowing how to telephone, yet it might cost my mother her life." Again this motive is sounded when the daughter is begging her mother for knowledge about her experiences, and the

great gray danger—"It is not the kind of thing you need ever know," answers the mother with fatuous finality.

Nor does she make our heart bleed for girlhood alone, but for manhood, as that blood-curdling conversation, unparalleled in literature, is gasped out between the Man and the Elder Sister as they crouch in the shadow in that ghastly room in what he himself tells her is "one of the most terrible houses in Europe." Here we see manhood disfigured, dragged beyond recognition, sitting in the dust and ashes of a charnel house. How sodden the words fall from his lips as depraved and perverted manhood defends itself. "This is a commonplace in the world, in every capital of every nation on earth. Bishops, old ladies, imagine you could alter these things." "Human nature—human nature," muses the Elder Sister, "like the tolling of a muffled bell." Thus are the wickedest, most deadly of the world's platitudes on this subject uttered in this glaring scene of abnormality, so that automatically they are given the lie.

The unbelieving will say, "But how is it possible that we do not hear oftener of such cases?" Two elements especially conspire to suppress such knowledge, both based on a false attitude towards women. First the double standard of morals which holds men's purity so much lower than woman's; second, the unjust attitude towards women reflected in the press which is more likely to seize upon a disappearance story in such a way as to make it reflect upon the girls' character rather than to acknowledge it a possible case of abduction or white slavery.

As I write, Miss Robins sends me letters which she has recently received from people interested in her book. One speaking of the "awful traffic that is going on" tells how two girls, daughters of a clergyman, have disappeared on their journey home from school and have never been heard of since.

A letter from Miss Robins herself adds the following to her remarks on her book. "Of all the official people I consulted, not one of these experts doubted my story, *and all had known similar cases*. We do not need to be told that the people to whom these things happen, if they are refined and sensitive, are not eager to make known their ruin. The natural impulse is to cover the horror from every eye, even to deny it."

"If you will consult the findings of your own commissions you will see that in America 'no girl of any class is safe.'"

I myself know at first hand an appalling number of cases—wives, women of standing, college girls on journeys, young girls on their way to boarding school, and working girls trapped and sold. In Rose Livingston's mail in the last few weeks have come heartrending letters from parents for help in finding their lost daughters. A

letter I read yesterday from a doctor's wife in Indiana was so terrible in the lingering pathos with which the mother dwelt on the beauty and sweetness of this lost daughter that I handed it back without reading to the end.

In connection with Miss Robins' letter, I offer the following quotation from a paper by Stanley Finch of the Federal Department of Justice where he speaks of the operation of the Federal White Slave Traffic Act. "The number of complaints and prosecutions is rapidly increasing. . . . Such crimes are more numerous than was first believed possible. . . . It has become evident that thousands of people in practically all parts of the country were violating the law. . . . [We found] girls were being transported in such interstate and foreign commerce solely for the purpose of prostitution and were being treated as mere articles of merchandise for the profit of those who handled them and who were willing for the profit involved to sacrifice both the bodies and the souls of their victims. . . . As we extend this work [of federal prosecution] throughout the country the awful interstate trade in women and girls for immoral purposes which for years has been going on almost without let or hindrance, has now become a very dangerous occupation. . . . The practices of people engaged in the white slave traffic involves in a considerable number of cases the actual physical detention of women and girls against their will in this vilest form of involuntary servitude."

Would that there were space to reinforce these remarks by New York newspaper headlines dealing with such cases for the month of March 15 to April 15.

How many fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and lovers throughout this coun-

¹Of 478 defendants, fifty-three women are involved or implicated. Of those, eighteen are not found guilty, are dismissed, or cases are pending.

try, have lived through the agony endured by the Elder Sister and the lover in Miss Robins' book? That which had been their greatest care and burden, the frail health of Bettina, becomes the Elder Sister's one comfort and hope. How many a bereft father and mother today not only cling in anguish to that hope, but desperately refuse to believe but that their girl is dead! And with reliable students estimating the life of the white slave in this country at five years, we know that many a flower-like highly organized Little Sister has met mercifully her release in a few weeks—a few months.

To those who know how considerable a factor in the whole problem of the white slave traffic is the girl who is taken, not the girl who goes, the girl who is under compulsion, not the girl who stays, this book is a great contribution. *THE SURVEY* printed some time since a poster that has been used in this country from ocean to ocean: "Danger! Mothers, beware! 60,000 innocent girls wanted to take the place of 60,000 white slaves who will die this year in the United States." If *My Little Sister* will only make the truth of this warning more real, more individual more poignant, then, in the pain-soothing words that close this book, "She will not have suffered in vain, and others will thank her too."

Such a book is not merely a literary production, an exquisite work of art; it is a high, sincere human service. From a literary point of view it is a great book. One is reminded of the Aeschylean definition of tragedy: "That which purifies the heart through pity and terror." But this book not only reaches great tragic and dramatic heights; but its subtle art is such that it blends with the tragedy in an almost eerie way a lyric chord which echoes throughout, an unbroken strain of hope and pity, of the essential dignity and sanity and rightness of life.

MOTHERHOOD

ISABEL KIMBALL WHITING

*I see them come crowding, crowding,
Children of want and pain,
Dark sorrow their eyes enshrouding
Where joy's touch should have lain.*

*They stand in silence beseeching,
Gaunt faces lifted up
And wan little hands outreaching
For Love's forbidden cup.*

*Their hearts are restless with yearning,
The hearts of my own are stilled,
Their lips are parched and burning
The cups of my own are filled!*

*I cry in love unsatisfied
For these without the fold,
My mother's arms are open wide
These weary ones to hold.*

*What though my arms are open wide,
Only mine own lie near.
Without still stand those long denied,
Compassed in want and fear.*

*Bowed with the crown of Motherhood,
I seek that Shepherd of old;
"How can mine own receive the good
With some left out of the fold?"*

May 3, 1913.