



## Quelle

Butler, Josephine: The International Council of Women and the fight against white slavery (1888)<sup>1</sup>

It would be impossible for me either to appear at or write to your Convention in the aim of furnishing a contribution to your deliberations, except in connection with my own life-work, and the deep convictions which instigated that life-work, and which have become even more and more profound as I continued in it.

The committee of our Ladies' National Association, strongly desired that a delegate should be selected from our midst who had been associated in that work from an early period, and such an one is Mrs. Steward, who has been indefatigable in her labors, not only in England, but in Belgium, for the saving of the English girls bought, stolen, and destroyed under this diabolical system of State-protected vice in that country. There is now a crowd of younger women who are bravely preaching the purity crusade and doing excellent vigilance work; but there are but few of the veterans left who in 1869 inaugurated the fierce contest with our government, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the medical boards, the press, and the upper classes generally, in order to gain the abolition of the vice-protecting laws, and to assert the equality of the moral law for the two sexes, as well as the dignity and sacredness of womanhood. [...]

In 1874 a „new departure“ was inaugurated. The battle was carried across the channel to France – where, under the First Napoleon, this abominable and impure tyranny had first been instituted in the end of the eighteenth century – to Italy, to Switzerland, to Germany, and to the Netherlands. It spread afterwards to Spain, Holland, Denmark, Austria, Hungary, and Sweden and Norway. We now have friends in Russia, but no association is yet formed there.

In the first report of the Continental work the movement was thus described by our financial secretary, Professor Stuart, M.P.: „It was indeed a wise intuition which led the women of England to carry into its original strongholds the campaign against the system of regulated vice, against whose encroachments we are contending in this country. Not only have we seen, during the year of work just concluded, refuges for the fallen established throughout many cities of Europe, and men and women of many languages joining to call for and work for the abolition of regulated prostitution, and to aim through that at the abolition finally of prostitution itself, but we have seen whole cities shaken as it were with the wind of a new revival, recognizing the crime that they have committed before God, in regulating and licensing the destruction of his image; we have seen through the length and breadth of nations, societies actively working in a cause which had before lain dormant, and we have seen the whole great nation of Italy, called as it were by the voice of God, through his poor and weak servants, recognizing that virtue and purity alone can be the basis of its future greatness.“

In a brief time we had won the public adhesion to our cause of many of the most distinguished persons on the Continent, among whom we counted Joseph Mazzini and Garibaldi, in Italy; Jules Favre, Jules Simon, and Victor Hugo, in France; the Count Agenore de Gasparin and the Countess de Gasparin, of Geneva; Baron de Bunsen and Count Ungern Sternberg, in Germany; M. Emile de Laveleye, the well-known writer and economist, of Belgium, and many others. But it is not so much to the adhesion of the great men that we hold, as to the active concurrence of the thousands of women on the Continent of Europe, who have been awakened on this question and who have formed numerous and ever-increasing associations for working out our aims, more especially in

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1 Auszüge aus Butler, Josephine, Bulletin letter to the International Conference of women at Washington (march 1888), zit. n. National Woman Suffrage Association, Report of the International Council of Women, Washington 1888, S. 257-263.

Switzerland, Holland, France, and the Scandinavian peninsula. Our Continental secretary, M. Humbert, writing on this subject after fourteen years' experience, says: „Happy are those nations in which women themselves have taken the initiative in this great movement, for in such cases it will never die, whereas in countries where the work is left entirely to men, although some reforms may be achieved, the movement never possesses the same life.“

This brings me to speak of our work in the Colonies and in India. It is in allusion to this new expansion that M. Humbert writes the letter just quoted. He continues: „How are we to proceed successfully for the emancipation of women from the hateful thralldom imposed on them by the civilization of conquering races (the thralldom of compulsory and state regulated prostitution), among Buddhists, Brahmins, Mahometans, or Pagans, where the fate of women, in this world at least, depends absolutely on the will of man, their master. This is a difficult question to answer. We see occasionally a spark kindled among those nations, but the light is short lived, and it requires to be continually rekindled.“ [...]

As an inevitable and necessary accompaniment of the establishment of licensed houses of ill-fame under government patronage all over the world, there exists, as you all know, the most extensive slave traffic in the interest of vice. This fact has become so fully acknowledged during the last few years as to have given rise to that admirable and much-needed society, the „International Association of Friends or Girls,“ originating in Switzerland and now spreading all over and far beyond Europe. That society has been greatly strengthened in England since the congress held in London in 1886; and this fact is brought home to us by the reassuring sight at various railway stations and landing places, of the warnings and friendly placards so diligently distributed and put up by the English branch of the society, informing all girls and women of where they may find friends, and of what dangers they must beware. Our Federation has collected carefully many facts and statistics concerning this world-wide slave traffic.

People in Europe speak with indignation of the traffic in negroes. It would be just as well if they would open their eyes to what is going on much nearer, throughout the whole of Europe, especially in Germany and Austria, where the exportation of white slaves is carried on on a large scale. A terrible picture is presented to us of the enforced movement to and fro upon the face of the earth, of these youthful victims of human cruelty. Numbers are embarked at Hamburg, whose destination is South America, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro. The greater number are probably engaged for Montevideo and Buenos Ayres; others are sent by the Straits of Magellan to Valparaiso. Other cargoes are sent to North America, some being forwarded through England, others direct. The competition which the traders meet with when they land, sometimes constraints them to go further ahead; they are found, therefore, descending the Mississippi with their cargoes, to New Orleans and Texas. Others are taken on to California.

In the market of California they are sorted, and thence taken to provision the different localities on the coast, as far as Panama. Others are sent from the New Orleans markets to Cuba, the Antilles, and Mexico. Others are taken from Bohemia, Germany, and Switzerland across the Alps to Italy, and thence further south to Alexandria and Suez, and eastward to Bombay, Calcutta, Singapore, Hong-Kong, and Shanghai. The Russian official houses of vice draw their slaves in a great measure from eastern Prussia, Pomerania, and Poland. The most important Russian station is Riga; it is there that the traders of St. Petersburg and Moscow sort and get ready their cargoes for Nijni-Novgorod, and from this latter place cargoes are sent on to the more distant towns of Siberia. At Tschita a young German was found who had been sold and resold in this manner. [...]

It may be that I am writing to some who have been accustomed to think of the poor outcasts of society as beings different from others, in some way tainted from their birth; creatures apart, without the tenderness and capacities for good possessed by your own cherished daughters. You may have imagined them to be for the most part reckless and willful sinners, or, if in the first instance betrayed or forced into sin, now, at least, so utterly destroyed and corrupted as to have become something unmentionable in polite society. Now, all who have had a practical acquaintance with the lives of poor and tempted women, know how mistaken is such a judgment, how cruelly false in most cases. But, granting for the moment that women who have fallen from virtue have

become so degraded as to be repulsive or uninteresting to you, what have you to say concerning outraged children? And thousands of these are but children in age and in knowledge.

This letter is sent forth with the earnest prayer that, while pardoning the imperfections of my poor appeal, God would make use of it, to fan the holy and purifying fire which, I feel sure, is already kindled in your hearts. When I kneel in my chamber to plead for the deliverance of these little ones for whom Christ died, I seem to see the childish faces gathering in crowds around me, filling the space on every side - the faces of the slaughtered dead as well as of the living. These victims, voiceless and unable to plead their own cause, seem to make their ceaseless, mute appeal from their scattered, unknown graves, and from out those dark habitations of cruelty where they are now helplessly imprisoned. But their weeping has been heard in Heaven, and judgment is at hand.

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Eine Druckversion dieser Quelle findet sich in Hohls, Rüdiger; Schröder, Iris; Siegrist, Hannes (Hg.), *Europa und die Europäer. Quellen und Essays zur modernen europäischen Geschichte*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2005, S. 152-154.

Auf diese Quelle bezieht sich ein einführender und erläuternder Essay von Stearns, Peter N., *Feminismus, Internationalismus und der Kampf um die Moral* im zuvor genannten Sammelband, S. 148-151.