



The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of the Secret Commission

W. T. Stead

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Serialized in the *Pall Mall Gazette* during July, 1885, the **Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon** created a sensation in Victorian London with its shocking depiction of a rampant child sex trade thriving in the nation's capital. It related stories of girls as young as thirteen who had been inveigled into houses of ill repute by scheming abductresses, where they were pressured, manipulated, or even coerced into prostitution. There were rooms in London, the *Gazette* revealed, that had been specially padded to stifle their screams. In a zealous effort to demonstrate the horrifying ease with which these hapless young girls were being bought and sold by greedy flesh merchants, editor William T. Stead scandalized the public by successfully purchasing a thirteen year-old girl from her mother for the meager price of £5—a journalistic excess for which he served three months in prison.

A controversial milestone in modern journalism, the **Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon** generated sufficient public outrage to secure passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which raised the age of consent in the United Kingdom from thirteen to sixteen.

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