

Ten Years of Fighting Vice in Kansas City Missouri
A REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE SOCIETY FOR SUPPRESSION OF COMMERCIALIZED VICE
October Thirty-First - Nineteen Hundred Twenty-Three
Additional Copies of this Report furnished upon request.

KANSAS CITY

Society for Suppression OF Commercialized Vice
INCORPORATED

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ALFRED GREGORY, Vice-President

NAT SPENCER, Secretary

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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OCTOBER 31, 1923

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FOREWORD

The following pages reveal what this society has been doing in Kansas City during the last ten years in the way of combating vice. We hope we have impressed the friends who have contributed of their moral and financial support with our zeal and effectiveness in staying the invidious and deathly march of human lechery and moral degeneracy in our midst.

It is a great pleasure for the members of our society to render this account of our stewardship.

GEORGE E. BOWLING, President.

TEN YEARS OF FIGHTING VICE IN KANSAS CITY.

The Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice was organized in October, 1913. The moral sense of Kansas City had been shocked by the tragic death of a high school girl and the public demanded that the houses of prostitution should be banished from the city.

At this time there was in vogue a practical system of licensing immoral houses. Prostitution was not recognized as a legal institution but once a month the inmates were arrested, brought into court and fined. The moderate penalties were promptly paid and the houses were not usually interfered with for another month. Then came more arrests, more fines and immunity for another 30 days.

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But the sad occurrence referred to aroused public indignation. Meetings were held nearly every day. The co-operation of the police, the prosecuting attorney and the courts was secured. At a meeting of the police board attended by many representatives of the newly formed Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice, the chief of police was ordered to close all immoral resorts. Within one week from the organization of the Society there was not an open house of prostitution in Kansas City.

The Injunction and Abatement Law.

At the request of the new Society and with view of preventing the reopening of the immoral resorts, the courts granted injunctions against the places used as houses of prostitution. These injunctions were secured under the well established principle of common law that a house of prostitution is a nuisance. But the Supreme Court of Missouri in its wisdom decreed that "keeping a bawdy house is not a public nuisance in any sense of the term." This invalidated the injunctions and as vigilance relaxed some of the old places were re-opened.

In the meantime an effort was made to secure an Injunction and Abatement law. In the legislature our Society encountered effective opposition from real estate men who claimed that injunctions against using a house for an immoral resort would decrease the value of real estate. This argument prevailed and the bill was defeated.

A second attempt to secure an Injunction and Abatement law was made two years later, in 1917. Our Society was reinforced by similar organizations in St. Louis, St. Joseph and Springfield, but the same real estate argument prevailed and the bill was again defeated. A third attempt was made before the legislature of 1919 with the same result.

The fourth attempt in 1921 was successful. In the meantime, women had been granted the ballot and their influence was an important factor in securing the passage of the Injunction and Abatement bill. The important feature of the bill is that houses of prostitution are defined as nuisances. They can now be enjoined by judges of circuit courts.

The Annie Chambers Case.

Largely through the Law Enforcement Association an injunction was secured on the property of Annie Chambers, who had conducted an immoral resort at 201-3 West Third Street almost without interruption for more than 30 years. Through political influence and the leniency of the courts she managed to "get by" when other places had been closed. Annie Chambers did not take the injunction seriously and found herself in jail for disobeying the orders of the court. She appealed her case to the Supreme Court on the ground of the alleged unconstitutionality of the law. The case has been before the Supreme Court for about two years awaiting its turn. In the meantime the injunction is in operation. The Chambers woman has been allowed the use of the building under bond not to operate an immoral house.

So far as known the Chambers' case is the only instance in Missouri where an injunction has been secured under the Injunction and Abatement act. Ten cases are now before the prosecuting attorney with the request that injunctions be applied for if the immoral use of the ten buildings is not discontinued.

Injunction Law Efficacious.

However, the Injunction and Abatement law, with its constitutionality not yet passed on by the Supreme Court, exercises a salutary influence in the suppression of vice. When evidence of the immoral use of a building is secured, the owners are notified and requested to see that such use of their property is discontinued. The owners of buildings so used have in the main

given remarkably good co-operation in ridding their property of undesirable tenants. The ten cases above referred to are instances in which the owners of the property have failed to rid their property of persons using the places for prostitution.

Police Co-operation.

In general, the co-operation of the police commissioners in the enforcement of the laws against prostitution has been good. In only a few instances in the last ten years has there been any indication that the commissioners sided in with the underworld. It must be borne in mind, however, that policemen are not Sunday School superintendents and the character of work required of policemen does not attract many persons who might make good police officers. Then, too, policemen are human. They know that the police system is political. A new set of commissioners comes with every change of the state administration. Naturally, policemen wish to keep their jobs. They know from observation that the policeman who makes the most arrests lays up for himself the largest stores of grief. The average policeman is not out after trouble for himself. He tries to get along on his beat without stirring up any unnecessary trouble. He is not at all sure that the most efficient policeman receives the surest reward. The commissioners may promise permanency of position for faithful service, but the man on the beat has seen commissioners lose their own jobs and find themselves unable to establish a permanent tenure of office through efficiency. The remedy for this condition of things is to take the management of the police force out of partisan politics.

The Courts Lukewarm.

The support of the courts in the suppression of vice has not been uniformly satisfactory. Writs of habeas corpus have been issued where the effect has been to favor criminals at the injury of the public. Increase in the infractions of law has resulted from maudlin sentimentality for the perpetrators of crime. It seemingly takes an enormous preponderance of evidence to secure a conviction and the tendency is to give the minimum instead of the maximum penalties of the law. Delays of the courts are fruitful sources of continued crime. In one instance our Society had to appear with evidence six times before the case was tried; and then the court took the matter under advisement. That was eight years ago and the case is still "under advisement." Swift, certain and adequate penalties for crimes would vastly reduce their number.

Police and Courts at Outs.

At present, one of the most serious difficulties in the punishment of criminals is the lack of co-operation between the police and the municipal courts. The police claim that arrests are made at the rate of perhaps 50,000 a year and that the courts turn the culprits loose. The courts claim that the police bring in insufficient evidence and that they will not make convictions unless the evidence is conclusive. A spirit of antagonism rather than co-operation prevails and under such circumstances good results are impossible.

A Stubborn Case.

During the early part of this year the case of an unusually active house of prostitution was referred to the prosecuting attorney with the request that an injunction be applied for if the owners could not be made to cease such use of the property. The case dragged on for several months without any change for the better. In the meantime the owner who had been in the West, returned and dislodged the objectionable tenants. However, it is feared that the new tenants are of similar character.

Allied Evils.

Closely connected with prostitution are the allied evils of the liquor and drug habits. The present increased activity for the enforcement of prohibition is effective. Judge Albert L. Reeves is entitled to special commendation for the substantial penalties he assesses for the violation of law. Locking up buildings where law is violated will eventually secure respect for law and Kansas City is to be congratulated for having a judge that seriously assumes the responsibilities of his office.

The present increase in the use of "dope" has been attributed to prohibition, but since use of drugs had assumed an alarming aspect before prohibition came, prohibition is not the main cause. Difficulty in the enforcement of the laws against drugs sales arises from the fact that thousands of dollars' worth of drugs may be secreted on the person without attracting attention. Many addicts are sent to the municipal farm for treatment. The federal government has nearly 50 addicts in our reformatory. However, the secretary of the Board of Public Welfare states that the presence of the federal addicts does not at all interfere with the care of Kansas City's sufferers.

A movement is on foot to secure an institution for the treatment of drug addicts, but no one has yet shown how the funds for such a place may be secured. Judge Kilroy thinks that drugs are being sold in Kansas City every day to the extent of \$10,000 or \$15,000. The suppression of the drug traffic is of vital importance to all large cities and the present means of prevention have proved wholly inadequate. Both liquor and drug addicts are usually easy victims to the women of the street.

The Fine System.

The fine system of punishment for prostitution is a travesty. The fines do not deter the activity of lewd women.

Often they augment it. More money must be secured from some source to meet the additional expenses. The prostitute has only one method of raising funds and to meet the fines she often plies her trade more vigorously.

But, if the maximum penalty of \$500 were imposed it would be equivalent to a jail sentence and would at least keep the prostitute from polluting the public while she serves her time. The average fine ranges from \$5.00 to \$25.00 and has little effect in reducing the evil.

Our Society's original proposition to aid unchaste women who wish to reform still holds good. Unfortunately, however, most of them do not wish to reform. All they ask is to be let alone.

Immoral Shows.

One of the factors working against the suppression of vice is immoral shows. The public tolerates an increasing degree of absence of clothing on the stage. Not many years ago theatre goers were shocked if dancers appeared on the stage with uncovered limbs. Now, the exposure of the entire lower limbs awakens no surprise. This condition is by no means peculiar to second and third rate shows. It is common in the presumably best play houses.

A current review of a supposedly artistic theatrical production in New York City states that in a tableau women are to be seen on the stage without any clothing whatever; and further, this exhibition was attended and presumably approved by the elite of the city. When public opinion tolerates such immoral tendencies it is almost certain proof of the moral degeneracy of our times.

The character of the dancing permitted in many theatres is an appeal to licentiousness. Some combination motion picture and vaudeville shows appear to go as far as they dare to exhibit vulgarity. The day performances of some shows are tame enough but the later evening performances are of a vulgar character.

One of the worst offenders against decency has been the show in the old Gillis theatre. The character of the performances was brought to the attention of former Mayor Cowgill, who ordered the "Midnight Show" closed. A few months later after the police vigilance had somewhat relaxed, the same character of shows, of vilest description, was repeated. Our Society again sought the help of the police who put the manager on the carpet. He promised to run a decent show and for a time the performances were not so bad. In September, of this year, we again found exceedingly vile conditions prevailing at the Gillis "Midnight Show." The police were again appealed to and the worst parts of the performance were omitted. At the same time the midnight audience dwindled from 300 or 400 to about 40. The manager told a patron that if he were let alone he would put on a show that would fill the house and make the patrons jump out of their seats. How long the Gillis theatre will be kept comparatively decent remains to be seen. It goes without saying that large attendance on a "Midnight Show" can only be secured by exhibitions that would not be tolerated during the usual theatrical hours.

Third Class Hotels.

Cheap hotels in many instances are centers of gross immorality. Immoral women take rooms at these places at regular rates and when used to entertain their men visitors pay the proprietors an extra fee. This kind of business is encouraged rather than opposed by the proprietors of many of the cheap lodging houses. It is not customary for the landlord to require registration in such cases. It is vastly more difficult to secure evidence of prostitution in the lower class of hotels than it is from regular houses of prostitution.

Men are usually inveigled into these cheap hotels by solicitation on the streets. The police have done much good work in keeping street walkers off the streets but lack of conviction in the courts has prevented more thoroughly ridding the city of these human vultures.

The Social Diseases.

The Society has done much work for the enforcement of law; it has been successful in securing desired legislation; but it has not been able to do as much as should have been done in the way of public education against the perils of venereal diseases, or as much as ought to be done for the cure of the afflicted.

It therefore hails with much satisfaction the work of the social hygiene department of the Health Conservation Association. Not only is medical treatment available for those who need it but a carefully promoted course of education is given by competent persons for the prevention of venereal diseases. In this course of education the innocent acquirement of social diseases in many cases is conceded and the afflicted are urged to consider that they should no more conceal the full information from the attending physician than they would in a case of whooping-cough or diphtheria. Our Society is glad that this important phase of the subject is at last being adequately treated and with substantial results.

The Divorce Problems.

The severing of home relationships is a fruitful source of immorality. The rapid increase in the number of divorces is a cause for grave concern. The letting down of moral standards breeds discord in the home, causes separation of husband and wife and breaks up the

institution on which much of our civilization must rest—the home.

Salacious Literature.

Modern literature permits the portrayal of immorality to a degree that would have rudely shocked the sensibilities of readers a quarter of a century ago. Immoral scenes and suggestive descriptions now permissible in literature tend to lower moral sensibilities and to make immoral practices all the more common. An eminent authority has said that young people now have new and lower moral standards, brought about at least in some degree by lowering standards in current literature.

The Advent of the Automobile.

The automobile comes in for a distinct contribution to lowering of moral standards. It has been found necessary for the peace officers of the county to patrol the highways to prevent many youthful automobilists from leaving their machines in the roadways while they are elsewhere. There is no question but that the automobiles are a great source of moral delinquency.

Paternal Neglect.

There seems to be a growing tendency to laxity of supervision among parents in rearing children. Many young people are not subject to effective restraint. The father is away at his business. The mother is in society or attending her club meetings while the children go astray. This culpable negligence on the part of parents is the ruination of many a boy and girl. There are stages in the lives of young people when paternal advice and firm restraint are necessary to help youths over into maturity. Without question the failure of parents to properly function as guardians of youthful lives is the cause of much social grief.

Public Sentiment Governs.

An important factor in stimulating officials to enforce law is public opinion. In fact, it is the determining factor. During September and October of this year there was a period of unusually lax law enforcement of the prohibitory laws. The Police Commissioners have stated that the public was not interested in enforcing dry laws. Then came the conference of governors on law enforcement, the sharp remarks of Gov. Pinchot, the public utterances of President Coolidge, the law enforcement conference, the press notices of “dry” activity and the gradual crystallization of public sentiment for law enforcement. This was followed in Kansas City by an agreement of the federal Department of Justice with our police commissioners and the result is in the latter part of October that there is a noticeable activity by officials for law enforcement.

Believing that public sentiment should be appealed to for the enforcement of laws against prostitution our Society issued a call for men from the Bible Classes to assemble and hear the report of our investigations on the state of vice in Kansas City. The plain statement of present conditions aroused keen interest in the enforcement of law. Committees were sent to the North Side police court, to the South Side police court and to the police commissioners. The prosecuting attorney addressed a Bible Class meeting, told of the difficulties of law enforcement and gave the men to understand that he would do his part to clean up bad conditions. When the class committees called on the officials it was not in a spirit of criticism or fault finding but to assure the officials of their strong backing in the enforcement of law.

Federation of Men’s Classes.

As the movement for better enforcement of law progressed there came a demand for a permanent organization of Bible Class men to make manifest the sentiment among Christian

men for better civic and moral conditions in Kansas City. There is now in process of organization a virile federation of men's classes destined to become a strong factor in the civic and moral conditions of our city.

One of the first objectives of the Federation of Men's Bible Classes will be to make it plain to our officials that the public does care what goes on in Kansas City and that the full co-operation of our Christian manhood may be relied upon in the enforcement of law. Our Society has full confidence in the abiding support of these men's organizations.

Looking Forward.

As to the future moral conditions in Kansas City, the public can have anything it wants. We have fairly good laws covering the question of prostitution and if more are needed they can be secured. Kansas City can be as free from prostitution as it deserves for it will be kept as clean as we care to make it. It is believed that the moral force of the city is awakened to demand the enforcement of law. Our Society will do all in its power to keep the moral sentiment of the community on the alert.

Our officials are continually subject to the pressure of the underworld to let down the bars for an open town. In fact, there is still a feeling among some business men that too strict enforcement of law drives away trade, and they are not particularly interested in maintaining high moral standards. This tendency must be overcome by an impact of moral force that will not be satisfied with letting things slide, but will demand that laws be enforced and that evils be kept at a minimum.

Prostitution will not be immediately eradicated but commercialized vice can be measurably subdued by constant vigilance and unwearied fidelity to principle. Line upon line, precept upon precept, a continual hammering against wrong is the only program. To this combat the Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice invites all the moral elements of our citizenship.

Inadequate Funds.

Our Society could accomplish much more if adequate funds were available. The expenses include the cost of investigation, attorney's fees, and office expenses. No officer of the Society has ever received any compensation for his services. Naturally, the extent of our work and the thoroughness with which we can follow it up depends on the resources at our command. Those who have been sufficiently interested to follow through this report and who want to help make Kansas City a better place to live in are most cordially invited to aid financially in extending our service to Kansas City.

NAT SPENCER, Secretary.

Vice Cases in North Side Court October 29, 1923

Hazel Burton, charged with vagrancy, fined \$75 and referred to the Welfare Board.

Florence Jackson, charged with vagrancy, fined \$75 and referred to the Welfare Board.

Dixie Knight, charged with vagrancy, fined \$100.

C. G. Covington, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes, fined \$25.

Nora Kelley, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes, fined \$25.

Ethel Ackley, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes, fined \$5. Fine paid.

Bobby Hughes, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes, fined \$5. Fine paid.

Ernest Loscke, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes. Set aside by court.

Jack Johnney, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes. Set aside by court.

Evaline Bennett, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes, fined \$13. Fine paid.

Geo. Hess, charged with occupying rooms for immoral purposes, fined \$13. Fine paid.

AN APPROVED PROGRAM

Constant and persistent repression of Prostitution the immediate method: absolute annihilation the ultimate goal.

—Chicago Vice Commission