

-KANSAS CITY-

Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice

INCORPORATED

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MERCIALIZED VICE

THE SOCIETY FOR SUPPRESSION of COM

The Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice has been in existence since October, 1913. It has been waging war for Kansas City all the time. The Society from the beginning has been composed of men who believe commercialized immorality can be suppressed; and while conditions have been hard, the Society has never lost its courage, nor its vision, nor has it lagged in its efforts.

Let the reader of this leaflet note that none believes that people can be made moral by merely organizing a society. The members of this Society are not dreamers. They know that a high morality is a growth of years, of generations; and while the Society lends itself to the educational side of the work yet for its immediate object it has set itself to the suppression of commerce in that sort of thing; to the elimination of the system by which keepers of houses, owners of properties, leaders of the underworld and political "profiteers" make money out of such traffic. As one means of achieving that end the Society is keenly concerned that the men and women who share the belief that such a system is out of date in a self-respecting community shall make their influence felt in that direction; that they shall share in the striving for better things as we all share the inescapable responsibility for such evils. That you may know some of the citizens who through this Society are helping to carry your load we append the names of the present directors of the Society. You will recognize among them men and women whom you know to be forward looking citizens, men and women who are public spirited, practical and effective.

These citizens with others address themselves to you, a fellow citizen who has a public duty to perform which can be performed by none but you. It is fundamental in democracy that your part cannot be taken by another, otherwise, it is not democracy. In a national way we are beginning to make good, to meet the requirements of membership in the greatest political democracy. Our nation has a vision now of democracy not strictly as a form of government but as an ideal permeating our social and industrial life as well as our political life. Never have men been so willing to sacrifice; to sacrifice both in substance and in spirit as are Americans today. But we cannot achieve the larger things, we cannot play our dramatic role in the greatest drama of history, we cannot accomplish our lofty aims if in our own city we neglect or shrink from a strife that is less glorious but just as vital. Our pledge to lofty national aims, our proclamation of unselfish battle for humanity will remain mere pledge and proclamation, in large degree, if commercialized immorality in our own town with its moral and physical drain on humanity is too formidable for our stock of courage.

We assume that you will read this. We hope your conscience will tell you that brave talk will not take the place of action, that spectacular battling is sham battling if we are not willing to do hand to hand trench fighting. This plain talk is written possibly not for you as an individual but for the reason there are many who would shut their eyes, because the subject is distasteful, to as great a menace to the physical well-being of our people as the "white plague" or the "red trench" and in addition thereto carries with it a moral menace and deterioration that cannot be measured.

If you have doubts, if you want to get some inkling of the real truth about these forces that prey upon our manhood, visit the office of the Society. In the four years and more of its existence it has gathered page upon page, volume upon volume of written facts reeking with the loathsome detail; page after page of battles with the organized powers that profit by the traffic; the records of many defeats and not a few victories. The Society has instituted in our courts and maintained near a hundred suits civil and criminal against property owners and bawdy house keepers. By pressure upon owners, tenants or police authorities it has caused more than 150 places of ill repute to be vacated. This sort of work is not attractive as you may well know. None concerned in it but would rather be doing something else. It is a sordid, vulgar, mean story all the way through but we have been doing it for the sake of Kansas City and especially for her young people and now we are laying especial emphasis for the sake of her young soldiers. We have been handicapped by a supreme court decision and we are entering upon a special battle for a weapon to be forged by our state legislature. We have been able, heretofore, to maintain our action in the courts upon the theory that a bawdy house is a public nuisance. Nearly two years ago our supreme court in a divided and obscure opinion seemed to say that a bawdy house is not such a nuisance.

More than 30 states have in very recent years enacted statutes declaring in specific terms that a bawdy house of any kind or description is a public nuisance and making provisions for the closing by civil process all such places and by injunction of the court preventing both the tenant and the blind or willing owner forever from maintaining such a house again. It is the most logical and powerful and effective means of reaching such conditions that has yet been conceived. Twice the bill has been before our legislature. The Lower House in each case passed the bill promptly and overwhelmingly, the last time with only two dissenting votes. The Missouri Senate has been reluctant, has held the bill in committee until it was too late to get it through, our two senators from Kansas City being upon that committee and leading the opposition to our bill. The writer was informed by one member of that committee that our bill was purposely held in committee for fear it would pass the Senate if reported out either favorably or unfavorably. We want your backing to get this bill through next winter. Don't you believe it is just about as little as you could do to interest yourself in this? The bill is so worth while that it has been made law in thirty states as stated before and for the District of Columbia it passed both houses of Congress without a dissenting vote and was signed by President Wilson.

In this address to you we are not going to say anything about indifference and laxness in official circles concerning this evil, gambling and other evils that are a part of the life of the underworld. If that part of the world exerts more pressure toward neutralizing official determination and vigorous action than our part of the world we prefer to urge upon you and the rest of our fellow citizens that we from our side exert a pressure that will get earnest and ready enforcement and that will bring about all that can be obtained under our municipal and criminal statutes. Such pressure and the encouragement that all public officials of ours are entitled to for a proper fulfillment of their official duties is something that we owe to those whom we choose to represent us. If we allow all the pressure to be brought by the other side we can expect at least luke warmness. It is only the official that is willfully corrupt that should be wholly blamed, for all the rest of official inaction we should take our full share.

We are concerned for the good name abroad of our city. We do not want the military authorities to have to administer our laws as