

KANSAS CITY

Society for Suppression OF Commercialized Vice

INCORPORATED

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**REPORT OF SECRETARY
OCTOBER 21, 1927.**

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FIGHTING VICE IN KANSAS CITY

During the past year, three kinds of work have occupied the attention of the Kansas City Society for Suppression of Commercialized Vice; namely, the suppression of prostitution, overcoming the sale of salacious literature and the repression of indecent shows.

The Suppression of Prostitution

Houses of prostitution are located either by some one who reports them to our Society, or by the field work of our investigator. When we are certain that a building is being used as a house of prostitution, or as an assignation house, the facts are reported to the chief of police. This is with the co-operation of the police commissioners who have assured our Society that the department will aid us in every way possible. The houses are raided by the police, and if the inmates cannot furnish bonds they are kept in the hold-over till the next morning when they are brought before the police court. Nearly all the vice cases go to Division Number One at the City Hall. Carlin P. Smith is judge of this court and is giving vice cases careful consideration.

The desirable plan of having the delinquent women sent to a health officer for physical examination, is only partly in operation due to inadequate, and some times inoperative, facilities. Some times the police do not bring in sufficient evidence and there is no conviction. At the request of our organization the police have raided the same places repeatedly and they have been broken up or subdued even without convictions of the inmates.

Judge Smith thinks he gets the best result by moderate fines. Small fines are usually paid and there is a moral effect of a conviction. The high fines are usually appealed to the criminal court where they are often dismissed and the culprit has won a moral, or rather immoral, victory. The judge soon hopes to have better arrangements for physical examinations and thus curb some of the ravages of venereal disease.

At the same time that the immoral houses are reported to the police, our attorney looks up the ownership of the property. The owner is advised by letter of the use of his property and he is requested to see that the immoral and illegal use of his property is discontinued. A leaflet is enclosed in the letter showing how injunctions have been placed on property used for such purposes.

We have had good co-operation with the owners of real estate in ridding their property of bad tenants. Some rental agencies have paid but little attention to the notices, but appeals to the owners over the heads of the agents have secured the desired results.

Vice conditions in Kansas City are not nearly so bad as they used to be, but the situation is still far from satisfactory. While there is no immediate prospect of stamping out vice, it can be held in check and the volume of prostitution can be greatly reduced.

During the past year our Society has been opposing two contributing agencies of prostitution, salacious literature and indecent shows. The magnitude of the evil influences of these two factors cannot be measured. They are direct feeders to moral degeneracy. Measures are now in progress through which we hope to curb these pernicious influences.

Overcoming the Sale of Salacious Literature

On the 18th of February formal complaint was made to Roscoe C. Patterson, U. S. District Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, that vile literature in considerable quantities was exhibited and sold at numerous news stands in Kansas City.

Many of the objectionable illustrations in these offensive magazines have been masqueraded under the guise of "Art"; but a superficial examination of these pictures is sufficient to condemn them as art. The appeal is not to the artistic, but to the sensual.

The district attorney was furnished with eleven sample copies of objectionable magazines, with dates and places of purchase. Mr. Patterson gave assurance that government action would be taken.

The U. S. law prohibits interstate shipments of indecent literature by any common carrier.

The parties shipping or receiving such literature are subject to a fine of \$5,000, or imprisonment for 5 years, or by both penalties. Local distributing agencies are also liable to punishment under state laws.

In response to an aroused public sentiment and in view of the prospective legal penalties the local distributing agency agreed to place no more "Art" magazines on the news stands in Kansas City and to collect at once those already distributed. The manager of the local agency and the representative of the eastern firm that supplied the objectionable literature have both agreed to co-operate with the Society in keeping "Art" magazines off the news stands.

A recent and thorough inspection of Kansas City news stands shows that the newspaper agency has kept its word. The magazines containing illustrations of nude or nearly nude women have disappeared from public display.

Repression of Indecent Shows

Last winter the shows presented at a Kansas City burlesque theatre were exceeding sensual and vulgar. An effort was made to clean them up. Punishment of individual actors and actresses is difficult. The cases may be postponed and the week's engagement may be over before a decision of the court is reached. In the meantime opposition to the show advertises it and the gate receipts increase. It is also true that punishment of individual performers is not so important as the punishment of the parties who produce and manage these vile exhibitions. Going to the root of trouble is more effective than plucking off leaves.

So we are proceeding against the managers of the plays and the owners of the property where the indecent exhibitions are presented. With the cooperation of other organizations the matter was presented to the prosecuting attorney who said he did not know any Missouri law that would reach the managers and owners, but that an injunction might be obtained. We secured evidence of the character of the show, found a Missouri court decision which defined such plays as nuisances and requested that the prosecuting attorney apply for an injunction.

The prosecuting attorney took the matter up with the theatre managers and the owners' agents. It was reported that the manager of the shows said that they would cut out the indecent parts. However, it was not done and the shows continued to be disreputable.

We again made protests to the prosecuting attorney. Pictures of nearly nude women were removed from the front of the theatre and some improvement was made in the character of the shows but no substantial change was secured. Then the prosecuting attorney said it was pretty near the end of the season and that he would guarantee that such shows would not be given there when the play house opened after the summer vacation. The reasons given by the prosecuting attorney for not applying for an injunction in this instance were that he was very busy with important matters, that he did not believe in government by injunction and that it was a police job anyway. Large signs during the summer announced

that the play house would reopen in August but the place is still closed. Although we were not successful in stopping the plays at the time our work seems to have prevented reopening of the theatre.

However, the 12th Street Theatre took on all that was bad in the play house just referred to, with additional unique specialties of its own. Strong affidavits by responsible citizens were secured against this theatre and presented to the prosecuting attorney, who ably supported our efforts and took the affidavits to Judge Ben Terte with the request that the place be padlocked. This the judge refused but instead issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting indecent show's. The judge also announced that any violation of the order would be severely dealt with. The trial to determine whether the temporary restraining order shall be made permanent has not yet taken place. The defendants have requested and have been granted continuances. In the meantime the temporary character of the restraining order does not diminish its force. Violation of the orders of the court is serious business.

Judges are jealous of their court orders and their violation may be punished by heavy fines, or imprisonment, or both.

Somewhat to our surprise the temporary restraining order is being violated; as we are now endeavoring to get a restraining order against the Gayety burlesque theatre, it is thought best to defer complaint on the Twelfth Street theatre until the Gayety restraining order is secured. We have reason to believe that Judge Terte will give the managers of violating theatres wholesome lessons on the dignity of the court and the effectiveness of its orders.

The Gayety burlesque theatre, is now putting on performances that are indescribably bad. Evidence on this show has been secured and affidavits have been prepared for presentation to the judge on Saturday morning, October 22, at 9:30 o'clock.

The fine social hygiene work of many organizations in Kansas City is largely counterbalanced by the pernicious influence of our play houses. Where not already calloused, the minds of thousands of people in Kansas City are daily contaminated by licentious exhibitions on the stage. Glenn Frank says that the impact of civilization on youth has more effect on the development of character than the instruction in the schools. While social agencies

are trying to develop the best that is in us, commercial agencies are overcoming much good work. A united determined opposition to indecent shows can put them out of business. Just now the outlook for suppression of indecency in shows is encouraging. However, eternal vigilance is necessary.

NAT SPENCER,
Secretary.

NOTE:—When the case against the Gayety came before Judge Terte, it was sent to Judge Ralph S. Latshaw, who decided that while he had authority to issue a temporary restraining order against a public nuisance, the case should be handled in the criminal court. He refused to grant the order. The campaign against indecent theatres will be vigorously continued.