

KANSAS CITY

**Society for Suppression
of
Commercialized Vice**

INCORPORATED

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REPORT OF SECRETARY

OCTOBER 17, 1930

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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE
SOCIETY FOR SUPPRESSION OF COMMERCIALIZED VICE FOR THE YEAR ENDING
OCTOBER 31, 1930

To the Directors:

One year ago my report stated that "Gratifying progress has been made in the suppression of prostitution in Kansas City during the past year." Unfortunately, the same statement cannot now be made. Investigations during the closing months of last year disclosed fewer than twenty active houses of prostitution. These reports did not cover all the houses by any means; only those in limited areas where they were the most active. Our most recent report covering nearly the same areas, in a two days' investigation, revealed forty-two houses of prostitution and seventy-two prostitutes. It is probable that there are now many times that number of houses and inmates in Kansas City.

Official Co-operation Needed

Copies of our last report were sent to the chief of police, to the commissioners, to the governor, to the members of our Society and to a considerable number of others. The suggestion was made that letters be sent to the governor and to the commissioners with view to getting prostitution under better control. Evidently many such letters were written to the officials.

The request now comes from the commissioners to this Society that we do what we can to get better co-operation of the law enforcing agencies. I think this request should be complied with. My suggestion is that a committee of three or more be appointed, of which the president of the Society shall be chairman, to take such steps as may be found wise to secure the co-operation desired.

Arrests and Convictions During September, up to the last day of the month, there were three hundred and sixteen arrests of prostitutes. There were ninety-five convictions. Fines were assessed to the amount of \$3,988. There were sentences of ninety days at the farm. Usually only a small portion of the fines are collected.

Modified Quarantine Plan

A system of modified quarantine is in operation. Arrested prostitutes are sent to the city hospital for physical examination. If found diseased they are allowed to take free treatment at the hospital or from their own physician who must certify to the treatments. Women so treated must report regularly. The agreement is that if convicted of plying their trade while taking treatment that they are to be sent to the farm. About one hundred of such women are under the modified treatment and less than a dozen are at the farm. If the numbers on the streets and at the farm were reversed the effect would be better.

Law Enforcement and Elections The prostitution situation is unfortunately affected by the approaching election. Elections are usually preceded by a period of lax enforcement of the laws against the social evil.

New York Ordinance Failed

Early this year an earnest attempt was made to secure the passage of the New York ordinance against indecent shows. The ordinance provided that the manager of each show should secure a permit to operate a playhouse; and that if convicted in court of running an indecent show the permit would be revoked, the show stopped, and the theatre not to be opened again for a year. The city council decided that the bill was too drastic and refused to pass the measure.

Indecent Amusements Somewhat Checked

The opposition of the Wholesome Amusement Committee of the Society has had a beneficial effect on the character of amusements in the play houses. Repeated arrests were made, heavy fines were assessed in the North Side Court. The cases were appealed to the criminal court where juries uniformly refused to sustain the convictions. It has been said that the decision of the juries fairly represents the sentiment of the community on the character of permissible shows. This might be true if a majority of the jury could convict. But unfortunately conviction by a jury requires a unanimous vote; and a unanimous decision in such cases by twelve good men and true is almost impossible to get. It would seem that a decision of nine out of twelve jurors should be sufficient to bring a verdict, the same as it is in civil cases. Although, defeated in the courts, moral victories were secured in toning down excessive vulgarities on the stage. Two of the three burlesque theatres closed their doors and the third changed hands. The management of the two burlesque shows now in operation give evidence of some restraint in presenting obnoxious amusements.

The Menace of the Movies

The Committee on Wholesome Amusement has given much attention to motion pictures. The vast amount of good of which the motion pictures are capable is readily conceded; but along with the good has crept into motion pictures an almost incredible amount of evil. Portrayals of the details of crime; disrespect for our laws and the constitution; making heroes of criminals and heroines of immoral women. All these have wrought havoc in the minds of many young people.

It is reported that the Chicago censorship board in one year made the following named eliminations from 788 pictures:

1811 scenes of assault with guns with intent to kill.

175 scenes of assault with knives with intent to kill.
129 scenes of assault with other weapons.
231 scenes of hanging.
173 scenes of horror (as clawing out eyes, biting off ears, etc.)
757 scenes of attacks on women for immoral purposes.
929 scenes of nudity and semi nudity.
31 scenes of jail breaking.

By far the greater portion of the motion pictures that are exhibited abroad are produced in America. They give foreigners a distorted and unreal idea of American life.

Probably the worst feature in distribution is the system of "block-booking," by which the exhibitor must purchase blocks of pictures without having the right to choose the ones he wishes to use. The United States Federal Trade commission has declared that "if the exhibitors were not compelled to take the bad pictures with the good pictures, the bad pictures would soon be eliminated."

In July, 1922, Mr. Will Hays assumed responsibility for the moral quality of the motion pictures. "They will be proof," he prophesied, "either of our ability to correct evils ourselves or of our inability to run our own business."

The public took Mr. Hays at his own word and has given the industry eight years to correct its evils from within. How well the evils were corrected is shown by the report just given. An aroused and indignant public now demands that the movies shall clean house.

New promises are now made and new standards proposed. Whether the new pledges will amount to any more than the old ones remains to be seen. So far greater efforts appear to be made in trying to get the public to think that the pictures are all right than to correct the evils in the pictures and in motion picture advertising.

Federal Council of Churches Acts

The Federal Council of Churches is making a survey of the motion picture industry and its influence on the young. A representative of the Council spent two days in Kansas City collecting motion picture information. He met with our motion picture committee and secured some facts of the situation here. Doubtless the results of the Kansas City investigation will considerably influence his report.

Against Indecent Literature

As stated in my last report the distributors of indecent magazines were induced to take the objectionable literature from the news stands; but the publishers had them replaced and told the distributor they would stand back of him in case of trouble. Our United States District Attorney, W. L. Vandeventer, has not yet seen his way clear to proceed against the publishers for the interstate commerce in indecent literature. An appeal was made to the department of Justice at Washington. Still no results. Mr. Vandeventer referred us to the prosecuting attorney who would doubtless be glad to take care of the matter for us.

Federal Action Anticipated

However, a personal appeal to the federal bureau of investigation here produced better results. The necessary evidence from this end of the line has been secured. The next step is to secure the evidence from the shipping points, mainly from New York City. With the chain of evidence complete, and in the hands of the United States Bureau of Investigation the matter will again be placed before Attorney Vandeventer for action. It is desired to secure a conviction in the federal courts because its effect would be felt over the whole country.

This also happened: When the investigation was in progress the worst magazines disappeared from the news stands. Evidently the publishers do not like the prospect in store for them.

Youth and Crime

Mr. A. B. MacDonald in the Kansas City Star has rendered invaluable service by calling attention to the baneful effects of bad movies and bad literature in producing youthful criminals.

Mr. T. A. J. Mastin, assistant county prosecutor told Mr. MacDonald: "If you want to clamp down on this increase in juvenile crime you must start in to wipe out the schools that teach boys to be criminals, and those are: first, the flood of magazines devoted to lechery and crime; second, the moving pictures that glorify crime and immoralities."

Mr. MacDonald writes: "Cigarettes and picture shows may or may not be a prime cause of boy delinquency, but it is a fact that just about all of the boy criminals are cigarette fiends and all have the moving picture habit."

Judge E. E. Porterfield's idea is that "Home has become a place in which to sleep and change clothes, to powder and paint the face and to fuss. Parents have no time to teach their children morals and the sacredness of law and the rights of others."

Unwholesome Tendencies

"The time is out of joint." Standards of conduct seem slipping away. Disregard for law is popular. Many assume that it is their privilege to select the laws they will obey. The dress and make up of some ladies would be a severe shock to the average citizen of twenty years ago, and in many instances would classify them as women of the street. In many cases boys and girls exercise an unwholesome familiarity with each other. A popular magazine of wide circulation says chastity is uncommon among boys and girls and that upright moral conduct is the exception rather than the rule.

Persistent Opposition to Continue

Probably there is enough truth in these statements to warrant gravest concern. Moral sentiment travels in waves and not in a steady flow. We may be in a wave trough ready to rise to a more wholesome atmosphere. We should be on guard to resist with all our might every unwholesome tendency. We should do all in our power to raise moral standards of living. Scientific biological information needs to be supplemented with high moral principles. The present conditions should not bring discouragement but should be met with renewed determination to overcome evil with good; and when the tide turns we will be in position, to achieve victories over things that ought not to be.

NAT SPENCER, Secretary.

Note—Our Society recognizes that prevention is more important than cure. Education for right living is of greater value than the suppression of vice. Both are necessary. Educational work against vice is promoted in Kansas City by the Health Conservation Association.

Our work against vice is supported by voluntary contributions. No salaries are paid. Interested persons are invited to assist the Society financially.