

AGENCY OF POLICE DEPARTMENT CRIPPLED BY ROLE OF VICE WORLD

Officers Afraid to Perform Their Sworn Duty Because of Power Wielded by Immunity Kings—Outlawry in the Suburbs.

(BY THOMAS E. FOWLER.)

The Rock Island police department, the agency to which the citizen looks for protection, is in a state of complete demoralization. You don't have to take my word for this. Ask the patrolman on your beat. If he knows you well enough so that he can confide in you he will tell you that what I have said is the absolute truth. He will tell you that he doesn't dare to perform his sworn duty because of possibility of offending some individual possessing privileges above the law, with reprimand, transfer or dismissal as thanks for his zeal.

This is the situation in your police department today. I don't wish to overdraw the picture. But I do want to send home to you its vital import to you as a citizen and one desirous of having the affairs of your community directed in the interest of the common welfare.

I am going to permit you to hear a few of the men who have taken oaths to impartially enforce the laws of your city. They are men in whom you have the fullest confidence. They are your fellow citizens, men with families and homes, men of clean personal habits, men who wish to do the right thing under any and all circumstances.

"Let the speed fiends go by," said one patrolman. "I'm holding a job, that's all. I might halt a speeder and take him to the station, and discover that I had arrested a privileged character. I would not be a case of trying to get even with somebody. I would be merely trying to make the streets safe for drivers who obey the laws. Well, I would probably be told to mind my own business thereafter. The case might reach the police court, and it might not. At any rate, I would discover that I had committed a blunder, and instead of being sustained for doing my duty I might be hauled out and I would be asked to defend my action. I might be sent into the woods. A policeman in Rock Island doesn't get any credit for doing what he is sworn to do. The only policeman that is in right in Rock Island is the one who doesn't see anything wrong and doesn't do anything when he does see something wrong. That's not an exaggeration, I assure you."

Officers intimidated. I asked another officer if he knew there were houses of prostitution, gambling and whisky selling on his beat, and he frankly confessed that he did. "But we are instructed to keep away from the houses of prostitution, the gambling resorts and the bars where liquor is sold. I could see all the police station with prostitutes, gamblers and hooch peddlers in one hour, if I were allowed to do so. But I know that the thing for me to do is to close my eyes and keep my mouth shut. Vice in Rock Island is not controlled from the city hall. Every officer in the department knows this, but he knows, too, that the individuals that handle the underworld operations are doing it with official authority. Who are the men who are controlling the vice privilege? I don't think it is necessary for me to mention their names. Almost everybody knows who they are. You can see them dashing through the streets daily in their big automobiles, bought with the tribute they collect from the houses of prostitution, gambling resorts and hooch bars. I am almost afraid to mention them. You know what happened to Bill Gabel. Well, that's the feeling among the men in the department. One night after 12 o'clock I innocently strolled into one of the resorts and observed that it was after closing time and that it was after closing if the lights were turned out and the doors locked. The person in charge promptly reminded me that my place was on the street and not hanging around saloons and houses of prostitution. I agree with him, for I realized that if I demanded respect for my suggestion it might cost me my scalp, for the reason that I know the owner of the place doesn't have to take orders from an ordinary patrolman."

"The trouble in the police department is that the patrolman is always up in the air, doesn't know what to do," remarked another officer. "There is that feeling of uncertainty, insecurity; you don't know whether you are doing right or wrong, and the only time you find out is when you run afoul of somebody that happens to have special permission to disregard all the laws of the city. So the wise policeman, and the one who is getting by with the least difficulty, is the one who sees nothing wrong. I hope the Gabel murderers are caught, and I am satisfied they will be in time, but I would have hated to have been a witness of that crime, under present conditions in Rock Island, for I am sure that I would have had a difficult time making my story stick. A policeman is human, and he tries to be honest and square with his fellows, but when he is obliged to work in the atmosphere that now hangs over the department his manhood is crushed and his efficiency destroyed."

Outside Commands. I have found in other cities conditions not dissimilar to those prevailing today in Rock Island, and I have seen them corrected, but heroic measures were required. Don't condemn a Rock Island policeman for winking at a law violation. Either he has had his orders to lay off or else he fears that he will blunder to his own sorrow if he makes an arrest. I was assigned to a police department investigation in an eastern city a few years ago. I discovered that the vice rulers held such power they

could call in a patrolman to manhandle a keeper of a house of prostitution when she refused to meet her assessment levied by the graft combine. I don't say that thing; I have reached that stage in Rock Island, but I don't say that they have if a halt had not been called on the brazenness of your underworld kings. They have been clothed with authority to command policemen on their beats to raid establishments whose keepers they were seeking to whip into line, and if an officer refused to take orders from them he was threatened with dismissal from his job. You can appreciate where such a position places an officer—when he is passing every hour houses of prostitution and hooch bars running openly, none of which he dares molest, when suddenly he is ordered by some one having no connection with the department to arrest the keeper of a resort where the same traffic is being carried on as is taking place in the establishments where he is supposed to keep hands off.

Do you suppose a Rock Island policeman would give any heed to you if you stopped him on his beat and told him you wanted him to arrest the occupants of a disorderly house? If you think he would I suggest that you experiment with this little sidelight on good citizenship. If the policeman is honest with you he will tell you that he is not supposed to know that there is anything wrong going on in the place, and that before he can act you will have to swear out a warrant in police court. The truth is that the policeman knows all about the place, the number of women that are employed, what kind of liquor is being sold over the bar and in the woman department, but he'll tell you, if he is honest with you, that the place is protected, and is not supposed to be disturbed. If you did decide to swear a warrant against the place before the warrant was served the women would be gone and the whisky would be removed from the bar, so that when the policeman called to serve the warrant he wouldn't find any of the things there against which you had complained. So you see, Mr. Citizen, you don't have much chance when the system is working as smoothly as it has been working in Rock Island. You may wonder why I have not been naming the addresses and owners of the places I have been visiting in the underworld. I don't do it for the very reason I have just referred to. I might right now write the name of a man who is the head of one of the biggest establishments of its kind in Rock Island. I couldn't say positively whether he is open or closed as I write this, but I do know he was running full blast the night I called at his resort. I might print his name and number here, and tell the number of women he has working for him, of the amount of whisky and beer he sells in his establishment, of the openness with which he carries on his business. Tomorrow or could bring suit against the newspaper for which I am employed to conduct this investigation for \$100,000 damages, and summon the police authorities to defend him against the printed charges to which I gave utterance. This has been done in other cities, of course not with the idea of recovering actual damages, but for the purpose of discouraging newspapers from taking up warfare against underworld operations. The Argus expected to be sued before it finished its present campaign. It knew that it would be impossible to escape such an action, considering the despicable characters posing as good citizens with whose tainted income it is obliged to interfere in attacking conditions prevalent in Rock Island.

Vice in the Outskirts. One night, shortly after 11 o'clock, accompanied by my wife, I hailed a taxi and asked the pilot if there wasn't some resort beyond the confines of the city where some real fun was to be had. He said that if I were willing to trust to his judgment he would steer me to a place where he knew that I would be fully satisfied. When we arrived at the resort there were eight couples there. Some were dancing. All had been drinking. A dissipated youth posing as an entertainer, was articulating with boresome nasal effect. He was tottering before a table at which two couples of young people, all somewhat worse for overindulgence in liquor, were seated. One of the girls was puffing away at a cigaret. The singer was telling about how the moonlight makes you funny when you're with your honey, or something. One of the girls suddenly was taken sick—perhaps the singing affected her—and her escort led her into a side room. After a time she returned and ordered a whisky. After she got it down she said she never felt finer in her life, grabbed her escort and dashed out on the floor and began a dance that would make Bee Palmer look like a piker. Some kind of food was served. We didn't care to eat. We ordered

the drinks of whisky, for which I paid 75 cents each. We ordered several rounds, but did not drink them. We had to show some indication to participate in the orgy or we might have been suspected of being not of the right caliber to participate in the orgies of the establishment. We remained until 3 o'clock. During the period we were there I estimated fully 20 couples came and went. Three young girls were in a pitiable state of intoxication. One of them, I learned, belonged to a good family. She was supposed to be a good girl, but had begun to go bad. She imagined she was safe from detection of her neighbors when she was out in this resort remote from the lights of the city. This place is so located that its orgies do not disturb others whose homes are in that locality, yet it has been an object of considerable complaint, but the authorities have never yet curbed its activities. It is managed by a man who has similar interests in the city of Rock Island, and the understanding is that he pays handsomely to insure him against molestation.

I have sought to show you here that there is a den running full blast within a short distance of your home where your son or daughter might be ruined tonight. I am telling you that it is running with the knowledge of your officials, at least they ought to know it is running, and if they don't know they can take this as notice that it is. It may not be operating tonight because of this publication, but it will be open tomorrow night, or the next night. If you don't believe there is such a place being operated by the connivance of all law and decency, interest yourself to the extent of driving to the resort and investigating for yourself. You will see some other mother's daughter being plied with liquor and reveling in an atmosphere that will spell her eventual ruin. You will find that the property is owned and being prostituted at large profit by a man who would have you believe that he is a public benefactor, when in fact he is the promoter and protector of a vicious institution that may be destroying the sweetness and happiness of your own family circle.

Plain Outlawry. You may accuse me of being a reformer. I am not, but I am a believer in law enforcement. I have been too much of a consequence of laxity in this direction to be a compromiser. I have been describing an outlaw establishment. It has no more right to exist than has an agency of safe-blowers. The people who patronize such a resort are assured that they may go to the limit, and they usually take full advantage of their privileges. Perhaps it is your wish that such a place be maintained as a temptation to your son or daughter. I don't know, but if human nature is the same in Rock Island as it is in other cities when sentiment has been aroused over just such a state of affairs, I believe that you would probably be in a somewhat belligerent frame of mind if you were told that your son or daughter had been inveigled into the contaminating environment of such a place tonight, and that you would initiate some measures to remove that temptation.

You may be asking me how your children are to be protected against such menacing influences. There is only one way: force your officials to do their sworn duty. Your officials probably have tolerated such a resort because they have not heard from you. Therefore, it is only fair to your officials for you to impress upon them that you don't want such a trap open for your son or daughter. Demand of them that they suppress it. If there are enough of you and your fellow citizens willing to make your feelings known to the officials they can't refuse to act. But if they do refuse to act you still have recourse in the ballot box, and can place in office men who you believe will respect your wishes in such vital matters.

The city and county governments are involved in this story. They are authorities are directly accountable to you for permitting the commercialization of lawlessness. I wouldn't want to do an injustice to any man who is serving your city in an official capacity, but I'm telling you that somebody down at your city hall is responsible for the free hand that has been wielded in this city by men from whom the law violators receive immunity, for which privilege they pay regular graft assessments. I don't wish to unduly condemn any man serving your county in an official role, but I do want to inform you that there is somebody in your county building who has afforded latitude to persons who are capitalizing their power by authorizing lawlessness, from which authority they are realizing cash profits.

Organized Power. The men who have been authorizing lawlessness in this community for a cash consideration have built an organization of whose dangerous proportions possibly you are not yet fully aware. They possess all of the known weapons of resistance, intimidation, exposure and defense. They have become so firmly entrenched that they fear neither the people, nor the officials, nor the courts. They are teaching your children disrespect of law and order. They are educating the ordinary decent citizen to be afraid to question their prac-

tice or their motives. They have, or they think they have, surmounted all difficulties ordinarily encountered by such operations at the hands of the people and officials. They have so completely conquered their underworld subjects that the latter respond to their every command no matter to what extremes they may be ordered to proceed, from delivering over their money to taking a human life. They have, or think they have, convinced the average decent citizen that their

rule is absolute and that any protest or agitation tending to its dislodgement is punishable in such fashion as they may elect to inflict without qualms of conscience or danger of accounting, either legal or individual. They have blasted reputations, broken up happy homes, smeared wives and mothers, shaken confidence in business institutions. In truth, they had so completely encompassed and overpowered the community, or thought they had, that they would not even

tolerate criticism of their rule or policies. I have been informed that even The Argus was included in this blanketing. And The Argus was, until it has awakened to its own unconscious guilt. The Argus was supposed to remain silent under any and all conditions. The Argus discovered its assumed alignment when it lightly drew the attention of city officials to the brazen conditions on Third Avenue between Twentieth and Twenty-third streets,

suggesting, in all kindness and in a complete eradication of the conditions under which Rock Island has for years been staggering, most of the time unrealized in their full seriousness by the mass of the citizenship. The Argus has nothing to gain from its fight other than the reward of acknowledgment to the decent people of Rock Island. It asks no reward other than the confidence of the people in the earnestness and sincerity of its effort.

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