

BOX

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FOLDER

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Theatres-Complaints

1910-1913

May 12, 1910.

Sir:

I am receiving many complaints concerning the play now on the stage of the Grand Opera House, the last one being by the Society for the Prevention of Crime, which makes specific complaint against it as indecent and immoral. I doubt if there would be so many complaints made against it unless it were unfit to be on the stage, but I do not wish to prejudge the matter. Be so good as to send stenographers and take down all passages which seem vulgar or indecent and report the same here. I trust to your good judgment. We do not need to bother the courts. We have ample power to enforce decency by revoking the license and closing the theatre, *but firmly and let us exercise it prudently*

I am glad to see that your conduct in the matter of the nasty play at the New York Theatre receives the commendation of everyone, except, of course, that of Hearst's newspapers, whose commendation we can never expect while we continue to try to do right.

Very truly yours,

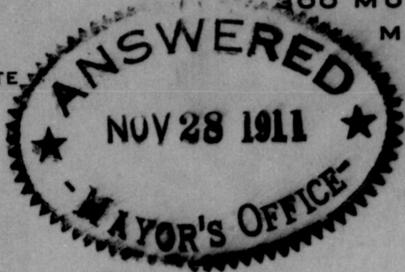

Mayor.

W. F. Baker, Esq.,

Police Commissioner.

OFFICE OF
THE CHIEF CITY MAGISTRATE
FIRST DIVISION, CITY OF NEW YORK
300 MULBERRY STREET
MANHATTAN

WILLIAM McADOO
CHIEF CITY MAGISTRATE



NEW YORK November 29, 1911.

My Dear Mayor Gaynor:

At your suggestion I attended ^{last evening} the performance of a play called, "The Play Boy of the Western World," written by the late J. M. Synge, and performed by a company of Irish players from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. I understand that complaint has been made to you that the play was salacious and endangered the public morals and therefore ought to be suppressed by law. The theatre was well filled, and I venture the opinion that a number of those present, especially in the orchestra, balcony and boxes, came there from the advertisement which the play got by those opposed to its presentation on the previous night and who wanted to protest by their presence that it was entitled to a hearing, without regard to its merits as a literary or dramatic production. Quite a number, no doubt, came expecting some sensational development in the way of disorder, and others to express their disapprobation of the play; the smallest number, I believe, to see the play as such.

I take it that what you want me to tell you is my impression as to whether or not the play is so immoral-- in the broad and general sense in which that word is used-- as to deserve suppression by law. It was evident that among

those present last night the play was regarded, by those who gave it any thought at all, from two points of view. One side looked at it as a work of art in dramatic form intended to show certain phases of human conduct under motives which appeal to human nature in general in all civilized countries, Ireland included. The other that it was a brutal piece of alleged realism intended to depict, to their disadvantage, social and moral conditions in a part of Ireland. It is not for me to express any opinion between these contentions. Of those who took the latter view, especially if in any way related to Ireland, their resentment is natural and easily understood.

A play may offend against good taste, ^{truth,} racial pride, national tradition and religious conviction, and yet not be of such an immoral character as to call for suppression. I confess that the frequent repetition, even in the mouths of peasants supposed to be especially reverential and devout, of the names of God, the Saints, flippant allusions to church dignitaries, Heaven and Hell, grated, and, when used ~~so~~ frequently as emphasis, became trite and wearisome. Some of those present claimed that there was a coarse suggestiveness in some of the acts as to the sexual relationship, but this was not greater, if as great, as in many plays that have held the stage for years. Some years ago, when Police Commissioner, I felt called upon to invoke the law to suppress a play which boldly taught, as I believed,

The Mayor.

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Nov. 29 '11..

through the lives of two young girls, that it was vastly more profitable and better in all things, under existing conditions, for a woman to lead a vicious, law-breaking life, rather than a virtuous one. I do not see any analogy between the plays. On the afternoon preceding the night of what was intended the second performance of that play, seats were being sold at fabulous prices. Later on, when the courts decided that the play was not endangering the public morals and it was reproduced without any attempt at restriction, it could not draw paying audiences.

Whether this play, which apparently offends a considerable portion of the community, is to be continued, is a matter appealing to the ~~good~~^{good} taste and faith of those producing it, but, in my opinion, it is not such an immoral or salacious play as would call for any action on the part of the public authorities, and its success or failure as a literary or dramatic production may well be left to the more or less intelligent public who judge such matters.

Very sincerely yours,

William M. [Signature]

To, Honorable Wm. J. Gaynor,
M a y o r ,
City Hall, Manh.

OFFICE OF
THE CHIEF CITY MAGISTRATE
FIRST DIVISION, CITY OF NEW YORK
300 MULBERRY STREET
MANHATTAN

WILLIAM McADOO
CHIEF CITY MAGISTRATE

NEW YORK

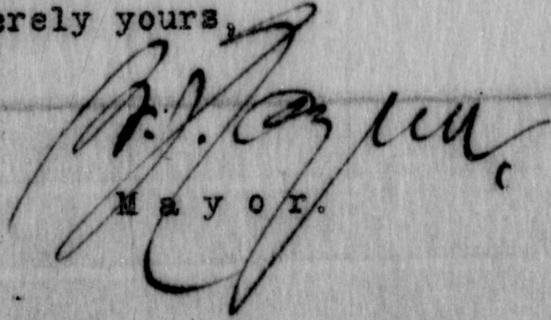
Nov 29/11
Rep on the Day
Boy of Western
Herald

Dec. 28, 1911. k

Dear Mr. Kahn:

Your letter of December 27th with regard to the standee ordinance is at hand. I had that ordinance amended so as to allow a large number of standees, and I think it will help you instead of hurting you, if the ordinance be applicable to your opera house. But I was shown the court decision which you mention and I understand that that will remain applicable. I suppose you are aware of the way in which the ordinance has been amended. It is very evident that your lawyers do not know of it, for they cite the proposed ordinance as it was before I had it amended. I agree with your lawyers that the ordinance is inapplicable to the opera house, because the circle which you mention is not a passageway within the meaning of that word in the ordinance.

Sincerely yours,



Mayor.

Otto H. Kahn, Esq.,
William & Pine Streets,
Manhattan.

RACE RELATIONS

December 17th, 1912. s

Sirs:

V I enclose to you a letter of B. G. Hull, a colored man, who claims to have been discriminated against in the theatre of Moss & Brill, in 86th Street. Please have the matter investigated, first summoning Mr. Hull, and then all concerned. If you find the fact to be as he states in his letter, let the case be followed up by an application to revoke the license.

Very truly yours,

H. J. Ayer
M a y o r.

Jeremiah T. Mahoney, Esq.,
Harry M. Rice, Esq.,
Commissioners of Accounts,
280, Broadway,
New York City.

Enc.

Fulton Theatre

46 St of Broadway

14th March

Friday afternoon
before 2.30 pm.

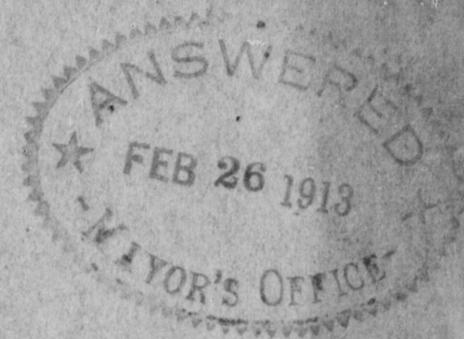
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FREDERIC H. ROBINSON
EDWARD L. BERNAYS

MEDICAL
REVIEW of REVIEWS

206 BROADWAY - NEW YORK



February 26th, 1913.

Honorable William J. Gaynor,
Mayor, City of New York,
New York.

Dear Sir:

You will probably be interested and pleased to learn that Brioux's "Damaged Goods" is soon to be produced in New York. There is to be one private production given under the auspices of the Medical Review of Reviews Sociological Fund and its Committee, the personnel of which is as follows:

Mrs. Richard M. Bent
Dr. Simon Flexner
Mr. Cosmo Hamilton
Rev. John Haynes Holmes
Mr. Frederic C. Howe
Mrs. Charles H. Israels
Miss Helen Marot

Dr. William J. Robinson
Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
Dr. Wm. Jay Schieffelin
Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes
Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Sr.
Dr. James P. Warbasse
Dr. Ira S. Wile, Chairman.

The performance may be witnessed only by those who become members of the Fund, and membership will be open only to physicians and sociologists, or those who may personally be known to a member of the Committee as being interested in educational work in the cause which led Brioux to write his play.

You will probably be somewhat surprised and grieved to learn that every manager in New York has refused to permit "Damaged Goods" to be produced in his theatre, for fear of interference by the police. The Astor Theatre which opened its doors to us, refused to permit the play to be produced there because of rumors that their license might be revoked. The same state of mind exists in the other managers whom we have approached. And Mr. Shubert of the 39th Street Theatre who had definitely agreed to permit "Damaged Goods" to be produced there will not do so unless we can show

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him written assurance from the Mayor that no trouble will follow, and that there will be no interference of any kind.

We wish to impress upon you that there is to be but one performance, open only to mature men and women who have devoted and are devoting their time to work along social, educational and economic lines. We have already received offers of cooperation from the American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, The Woman's Municipal League, The Educational Alliance, The People's Institute, The Greenwich Settlement, The East Side House Settlement, The Church Mission of Help, The Committee of Fourteen, The American Vigilance Association, The Laity League, The Committee on Amusement Resources of Working Girls, The Society of Instruction of Eugenics, The Church of the Messiah, The Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research, The Polytechnic Institute, The Barrows League, The Y. M. C. A., etc. Among the individuals who are taking an active interest, and who in addition to the Committee, have become members, we might mention Mrs. Anne Nathan Meyer, Miss May Harri- man, Mr. and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mr. and Mrs. N. W. Greenhut, Dr. Abraham Jacobi, Mr. Edward T. Devine, Dr. Henry M. Leipziger, Mr. Charles Klein, Mr. Robert Hilliard, Mr. and Mrs. Otis Skinner, Mr. William O. Demorest, Dr. Robert T. Morris, Mrs. Philip Lydig, Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, Dr. Seymour Oppenheimer, Mr. Marcus M. Marks, Henry Morgenthau, Mr. and Mrs. James Lees Laidlaw, Judge Julian Mack of Washington, D. C., Dr. and Mrs. Clement Cleveland, Mr. Abraham Flexner, Lee K. Frankel, and a few hundred other prominent men and women.

From your past work and public utterances we know that you will

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REVIEW of REVIEWS

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be deeply interested in this movement to produce "Damaged Goods", a movement which we hope will do a great deal along social and educational lines and we trust we may have an expression of your approval and your assurance that no harm will come to the manager who permits the play to take place within his theatre.

With assurances of esteem and respect,

Yours very respectfully,

MEDICAL REVIEW OF REVIEWS,

Sociological Fund,

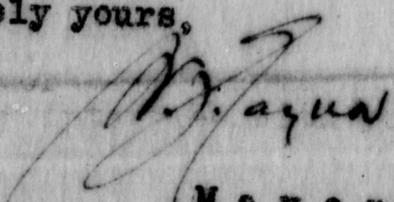
Frederic M. Robinson

June 19, 1913. d

Dear Sir:

I thank you for your letter of June 18th, complaining of a scene in the play, "Is Marriage a Failure". It seems to me you ought to get a warrant from a magistrate and have the offender arrested. That is the duty of every good citizen in respect of crime. But since you do not seem to want to do that, I will see what I can do. But of course you know I have no power to close theatres or even revoke their licenses. That is given to the Supreme Court. I think it should be taken away from the Court and vested in some city authority. If it was vested in the Mayor we could make these indecent theatres quit their evil ways in short order.

Sincerely yours,


M a y o r.

Anthony Comstock, Esq.,
140, Nassau Street,
New York.