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The Common Weal

vs.

The News-Stand,

by

JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

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# The Common Weal

vs.

## The News-Stand.

IN the autumn of 1892 the writer addressed a letter to the annual meeting of the National Association of Newsdealers and Booksellers, held in Philadelphia, calling their attention to the baneful influence of the dime-novel, detective library and police paper literature, in inciting to crime, and concluding with the appeal that they refuse to handle the supplies which equip "our free institutes for the promotion of brutality and burglary." The memorial was referred to the Executive Committee.

The following year the same Association held their annual meeting at Chicago. What they signally failed to do was thus aptly referred to in an editorial of the *Chicago Journal* :

"Now that the National Association of Newsdealers and Booksellers is holding its tenth annual convention in this city, its members have a chance to take a decided stand on a matter that is of more vital and far reaching import than any that has been announced as engrossing their attention. The

decent people of the country would like to see this association put its foot down squarely and firmly against the handling of impure books and periodicals.

“The association is protesting vigorously against the selling of books and magazines by the dry-goods stores and also against the return of unsold periodicals and the refunding of cash therefor by the publishers. Doubtless both these things are demoralizing to the trade, but the moral destruction wrought throughout the country by certain of these dealers themselves is an incomparably greater evil than both these combined. Before the dealers can consistently ask for any support from the Christian readers of the United States in their protests against encroachments upon their business, they are in duty bound to show that as a body they discountenance the vile stuff that is retailed from many of their stores and news-stands to fill the minds of our youth with obscene images and thoughts of murder.”

But this National Association declares that one of the objects of the organization is to “elevate the character of their business and those engaged in it.” This they are not doing, but quite the contrary. Now, as the Union News Company, supplying the station news-stands on some thousands of miles of railway, claims that it aims to supply its agents with reading matter not prejudicial to the public morals, I believed it well, in order to obtain an authoritative statement thereupon, to address the following amicably-categorical letter to the superintendent of the company at Philadelphia :

SEAL P. O., CHESTER CO., PA.

10th Month 23, 1893.

Superintendent of Union News Co.:

*Respected Friend*: A friend of mine, a teacher of classics, returning from his summer vacation some six weeks ago, wrote me that a paper-covered book was laid beside him on the car seat, which he looked into to the extent of reading two or three pages, and then laid it down in dismay at the thought that such impure printed suggestiveness should be allowed by the authorities to be exposed and sold, even for a day. The book was one of the "R. K. Fox Library." I inferred from what my informant wrote, that it was a traveler and not the train-boy who laid down the book. In writing reply, I stated that I did not think the Union News Company, supplying the Penna. R. R. system, permitted its agents to handle those publications. Am I not right as to this?

A wealthy property owner recently sold a valuable corner property in a central locality (Philadelphia), where for years there had been a side-walk news-stand. Just before the transfer, I had noticed two decidedly objectionable publications upon the stand, one of them———, the other———. The owner was written to and I believe had them removed, though I had also remarked in my letter that I doubted whether there was a book on the stand that was not morally pernicious. The new purchaser, a well known public-spirited, patriotic citizen, to whom I wrote immediately afterward, replied that he takes care that his properties "shall not be used for purposes contrary to the public good,"

having "always refused to take tenants for occupations that (he) deemed undesirable on that account." The building in question was torn down about the same time and the vender of printed poison moved away, not to return to the substantial structure on the corner, which has since taken the place of the old one. Does not the Union News Co. forbid its agents to handle the two books mentioned?

At a news-stand on a city property belonging to a railroad company, I observed that *Truth* was exposed for sale. (I had had the *Police Gazette* and the two other papers of like character removed from there two years before.) The representative of the proprietor was seen at once; I told him I did not believe the vender obtained the vicious sheet referred to from the Union News Co. He accompanied me to the stand, the question was put to the vender, and he replied, "No, he had gotten the papers from the ——— News Co." They were removed, and have been kept off. So also from another property belonging to the same company. Likewise from the City Hall stand, where the paper was exposed perhaps but a week or two. Having been successful after much effort, about seven years ago, [by direct appeal to the Public Buildings' Commissioners, the Board of Education and City Councils] in effecting the removal of the trash with which the stand was at that time loaded, and in having the fairly safe rule adopted that only the dailies should be kept there, I should strenuously object to any return to the old order of things. I am glad to say that I have not observed *Truth* exposed at the Penna. R. R. Co.'s stands. Am I not right in inferring that you do not handle that paper nor *Music*

*and Drama* and the like nastily illustrated papers ?

I am well assured that the *Police Gazette* and its two unsavory companion sheets, are not permitted to be supplied by your News Company. Do you not also prohibit the whole line of Dime Novels, the sensational "Lives" of the James Boys, and the Detective Libraries? Even from the point of view of good sense, I take it for granted that your Company and the railroad companies would not be found spreading the literature that educates thieves, train throwers and train robbers.

Some time last spring I called the attention of the police authorities to some particularly debasing publications on a news-stand, one of them being called \_\_\_\_\_, and published by \_\_\_\_\_, of Chicago. The Superintendent of Police (Phila.) found the agent for the sale of those books, and obtained from him a list of the names of dealers who had ordered copies. It appeared, meanwhile, that a prosecution of the publisher in Chicago had not been successful; yet the book is utterly bad, the very face of it condemning it without the need of reading a word. I cannot doubt that every Philadelphia judge would charge a jury against it, and it seems to me that all who deal in it and other books of the like sort, whether such dealers be high or low, should be held to their accountability in aiding to debase the people. I have not seen the book in question upon the stands which I know to be supplied by your news company. Do you not prohibit it?

One other inquiry of a generally comprehensive character I have to make. The decent, non-sensa-

tional character of the publications which a large number of the railroad companies are desirous of having supplied to their patrons, is guaranteed, I believe, by the news companies in many cases by a stipulation such as the following :

“It is further agreed that no obscene, profane, vulgar or improper literature, prints, pictures or publications of any kind, shall be kept, sold or offered for sale on the trains or premises of said company which is prohibited by the ————— or any other officer of said company in charge of this department.”

Now does not the Union News Company aim to furnish its supplies subject to the above just regulation, likewise forbidding the offering of any prize packages or other devices partaking of the nature of a lottery? And in serving a presumably self-respecting public, do they not invite any patron who may believe he has reasonable ground for complaint concerning any publication seen upon their stands or stalls, or obtained of their agents, to promptly notify the company thereabout? A reply to the several particulars hereinabove stated will much oblige thy correspondent, who has no other purpose in view than to serve the Commonwealth and his Maker. I have retained a copy of this letter and desire the privilege of using thy reply if such use may appear promotive of the public good.

Thy friend truly,

JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

The foregoing communication being forwarded by the Philadelphia Superintendent to the General Manager at New York, elicited the following reply :

THE UNION NEWS COMPANY,  
 Newsdealers and Booksellers on Railroads.  
 NEW YORK, November 2, 1893.

JOSIAH W. LEEDS, Philadelphia :

*My Dear Sir* :—Your personal lines of October 23d addressed to the Superintendent of this Company, were forwarded me for reply to this point. We have read your letter over carefully, and wish to say that we do not know what line of railroad the friend you referred to returned on from his summer vacation, but we do know that this Company has never bought or sold anything printed or published by R. K. Fox, and there is no doubt to my mind but what the book was laid there by some other than an agent of this Company, and you are correct in your conclusions.

As regards the stands you write of on street corners, [whether] on railroad property or otherwise, will say that we have nothing to do with them, as we supply no one but our own stands, and they are all located in the stations or on the platforms of stations.

We do not handle the *Truth, Music and Drama*, either on the Pennsylvania Railroad or on any other line on which we do business, and the same is true of the *Police Gazette*, and other papers of a like nature, and in a general way we aim to do all in our power to keep the class of literature you refer to out of the hands of the public by not affording them any opportunity to buy from us.

The terms of our contracts with railroad companies we view as a private matter between us and the railroads; but we can say this, that this Company and all the lines on which we do business are working in perfect harmony to the end of selling only what is good literature. Yours truly,

W. H. WILLIAMS,  
*General Manager.*

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There is perhaps no one so incredulous or non-observant as to now question the intimate connection between bad literature and crime, seeing that the proof of such connection is a matter of almost daily record. Those two young boys at the Glen Mills House of Refuge whom I talked to the other day concerning their theft of money, buying pistols and "holding up" people on the streets, acknowledged that for a year they had been diligent readers of dime novels, and that they would not have thought of starting off on such a career of bravado and attempted highway robbery but for the lessons obtained from the aforesaid reading matter. Over in New Jersey that gang of boy bandits, calling themselves "Red Rangers," who levied tribute on many residents of the surrounding country, and had for their headquarters a hut in the woods, confessed before the justice that they had taken lessons from five cent story-books, samples of which were found in "Nat Woods' Capture of Keno Clark,

King of the Diamond Lifters," "A Dangerous Case for Nat Woods; or, Yellow Dick's Last Treachery." The sixteen-year-old Poughkeepsie boy who stealthily entered a dwelling at night and undertook to commit a robbery by first chloroforming a woman as she lay sleeping with an infant at her side, confessed that dime novels and cigarettes had got the best of him. He had worked in the silk factory by day and spent his evenings reading cheap novels and had got the idea of committing this crime from one of "Nick Carter's" novels, in which a boy chloroformed another person. One of the Dalton gang desperadoes out in Kansas, admitted that they were bent on "lowering the record of the James boys."

The incitement to felonious assaults upon females undoubtedly owes its origin in many cases to vicious illustrated sheets, cigarette pictures and the like. I therefore reiterate this conviction concerning the heinousness of the offence of the manufacturers and venders of printed poison, expressed in a protest upon the subject a few months ago; "The manufacturers of and the dealers in so-called 'blood and thunder literature' need to be stood in the felon's cell right alongside of the thieves and murderers they have helped to make; the printers and the purveyors of indecency in the same manner should be banished from the society that they have so grossly outraged, to the same separated sort of

habitation as that which holds the overt outrager of female virtue."

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The following statements of fact and suggestions are offered :

On the statute books of quite a number of the States there is an act making it a penal offense to offer for sale or to expose within the view of any minor child (practically within the view of anyone) any publication " principally made up of criminal news, police reports, or accounts of criminal deeds, or pictures and stories of deeds of bloodshed, lust or crime."

The National Association of Newsdealers and Booksellers, various news companies, news agents and publishers, have shown that they do not recognize this reasonable safeguard of society as either morally or legally binding upon them.

The Union News Company, newsdealers and booksellers on railroads, and doing I suppose a business in the handling of newspapers and magazines second to none, have respect to the law (so far as appears) as morally and legally binding.

Many owners of property upon which newsstands are located, and where depraving or highly sensational papers such as hereinabove alluded to have been offered for sale, have forbidden the sale of such upon information that their exposure and

sale was in violation of the law. Similarly, various communities throughout the country have required or enforced a compliance with the law concerning this matter. As an exceptional case, but one altogether in the right direction, the principal news-dealers of a town in Indiana, a few days ago, agreed that they would deal no more in "Wild West" literature. Where indeed is the right, and what is the obligation on the part of any community to protect these founts of uncleanness and brutality, which simply wreck homes, prey upon society, and make business for the police courts?

In my tractate *Printed Poison*, published ten years ago, it was recommended that the news-stand owners on the public sidewalks be required to take out (uncharged) permits or licenses to carry on the business, and that a violation of the law should work a forfeiture of such license. Or, the following: A board of examiners or censors, both men and women, named by the judges from lists furnished by the representative bodies of the several religious denominations, and whose power to prohibit would extend only to the indecent and positively pernicious, and not at all to matters of religious belief or politics. "We will not say," observed the *Independent* at that time, in discussing the same subject, "that the world belongs to the saints, and that they have a commission to rule it. But we respond to as much of that opinion as is involved in the propo-

sition that the moralities and decencies are sovereign things, and that, in their name and by their authority, decent people ought to insist on ruling society. The streets must be made safe for boys and young women. Could the people know the full extent of this evil, it is not out of the probabilities that here, in democratic America, they would propose some kind of a censorship to stop it."

In the latter part of 1891, soon after the presidency of the Adams Express Company was placed in the hands of Henry Sanford, the latter was communicated with by the writer, upon the subject of his company carrying a line of publications, such as was forbidden by the laws of New York and Pennsylvania, as well as other States, and such as the Union News Company refused to handle. He was reminded of the truly neighborly act of the post-office authorities of the Dominion of Canada in denying the service of the mails to the *Police Gazette* and to fifteen other United States publications which admitted advertisements of a debasing character. It was therefore hoped that the Express Company might see their way clear to take prohibitory action in the premises, following out the line of their previous action (so understood) in pledging themselves, after the passage of the National Anti-Lottery Law, not to act as carriers, agents or collectors for the Louisiana Lottery and its patrons. It

was gratifying to receive President Sanford's prompt and courteous response that he would endeavor "at an early day to look into the matter suggested by you, believing in the propriety of doing what you refer to." It is to be hoped that a way may ere long open for such righteous action, and, further, that the subject may claim the attention of the Interstate Commerce Commission.

In the spring of the present year (1893) a Congressional bill intended to prevent the passage through the mails of publications principally made up of criminal news, police reports, or accounts of criminal deeds, or pictures and stories of deeds of bloodshed, lust or crime (as already forbidden by the laws of various States, and so to be in accord therewith), having been referred to the committee on post-offices and post-roads, was reported back adversely. The enactment of this bill would be greatly conducive to the promotion of the public morals. That dictum of the Supreme Court of the United States (*Stone vs. Mississippi*) that "No legislature can barter away the public health or the public morals," means conversely that it is the legislature's duty to protect or defend such public health or public morals, the same dictum already quoted further affirming, that "Government is organized with a view to their preservation, and cannot divest itself of the power to provide for them."

Now as to *train-robbing* as affected by the literature of the news-stand. I remember, years ago, that the dime novel and companion sheets were to be seen on the railway news-stands everywhere. They have been generally banished. It would be astounding folly to circulate the literature of train-robbing all along the line of the railroads, and then to complain that the express messengers, conductors and passengers were "held up." But the would be emulator of the James Boys, and of the like train-robbing braves, may go to the side-walk news-stand of a blindly indulgent municipality, and provide himself with all of such literature that he craves, despite the law; while a similarly blindly indulgent mail service will bring it to his hands in any remote corner of the land, thousands of miles away from the place of publication. The railroad companies, the government and the municipalities ought to be of one mind and one practice in this matter.

(Since the foregoing was written my attention has been called to an article in last month's *North American Review*, entitled "Highwaymen of the Railway," by W. A. Pinkerton, in which the latter confirmatively says: "The recent epidemic of train robberies is largely due in my opinion to the reading of yellow-covered novels.")

Following out the considerations just stated, I come to the matter of the recommendations made

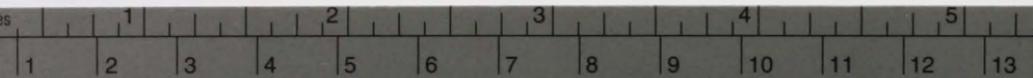
and the action taken, at a meeting of the Expressman's Aid Society in Cincinnati, last summer, all the great express companies of the country being represented thereat by prominent officials. The subject for special action, which was that of train-robbing and train wrecking, was introduced by the manager of the *Express Gazette*, of Cincinnati, who argued that the offence should be made punishable by life imprisonment or death, and, as it was one that the power of the State seemed unable to cope with, he favored action by Congress "on the principle that it can legislate not only regarding the regulation of interstate commerce, but the protection thereof." The thing to do with the train robber was to kill him. This seemed to echo the general sentiment of the gathering, and a committee was named to draft a memorial to Congress in behalf of such legislation as would insure safety to express and railroad men, and the prescribing of the punishment of life imprisonment or death for train robbing or wrecking, or for attempting the same. The *Locomotive Engineers' Journal* fully concurs in the recommendation, and gives some figures to show the extent to which the crime has grown.

And it does not diminish. The daily papers yesterday reported three cases of robbing of trains or train officials, and two are reported to-day. The Governor of Arkansas publishes an open letter to

the President, relative to the serious menace to the peace and safety of that State by the train robbers and other outlaws on its border. Now, let the express companies refuse to act as carriers of train robbing and like literature, and let them and all the affiliated railroad interests unite in asking from Congress a bill excluding the debasing and brutalizing stuff from the mails, and a wise and helpfully curative step will have been taken. If the manufacturers and purveyors of printed poison are justly dealt with, train robbing will cease to be held up as a heroic sort of enterprise, the graduates in this kind of education will fall off, and the extension of the death penalty in the direction indicated may be dispensed with.

JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

Philadelphia, 12th Mo. 26, 1893.



# Kodak Color Control Patches



# Kodak Gray Scale



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