

ROBERT S. ABBOTT SUED FOR DIVORCE

PRINCIPALS IN DIVORCE



MR. and MRS. ROBERT S. ABBOTT

DIVORCE SOUGHT BY MRS. ABBOTT

By ROGER DIDIER
(Special to The Pittsburgh Courier)

CHICAGO, June 2—After a 10-day search, sheriff's deputies were successful Friday in serving Robert Sengstacke Abbott, publisher of the Chicago Defender, with papers in suit brought by his wife for divorce and separate maintenance through the law firm of Cantwell & Cantwell.

Mrs. Abbott's action was taken, she stated to the Courier representative Monday morning, after her husband had left their sumptuous South Parkway residence without notifying her and had cut off all her credit and charge accounts, without leaving her any means of subsistence.

After the suit was filed it was learned that Mr. Abbott was making visits to his office, where he was served with the notice of divorce.

He has retained Former United States Senator Charles S. Deneen to defend him. Decoration Day neither Mr. Deneen nor Mr. Abbott could be reached.

When Mrs. Abbott was asked where her husband was, she stated that she did not know, although she thought he was in a sanitarium.

"He left home without saying anything to me," she added.

She welcomed the Courier correspondent into her home Monday morning, although she was reluctant to enter into the details of the

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case or of her disagreement with her distinguished husband. She acknowledged that Mr. Abbott will probably be charged with cruel and inhuman treatment.

"I would much prefer not to talk about the matter," she said quietly, as she reclined in black silk lounging pajamas, figured with yellow and burnt orange birds and flowers. "The action was only taken after I was forced to it. There is no bitterness in me toward him nor anyone else, although there is misunderstanding. It is only human that I should move to protect myself.

"My husband and I have done little talking about some of his actions which have embarrassed me. I do not know whether anyone else has influenced him. Always I have tried to treat him most kindly and his interests have been first with me, as they are today, but I know little of his interests.

"If I had not been unhappy, I would not have entered the action, but I should hate to have reports of our affairs circulated which would embarrass him or me or injure his influence with the public. All that I seek is a measure of happiness and security for myself."

If the suit of Mrs. Abbott is completed, it will break up one of the city's most socially prominent families. Abbott came to the city many years ago and labored at odd jobs, studying during that time, until 1905, when he founded The Defender. For ten years he labored without reward, but at the expiration of that time his paper began to grow, and by 1920 he had become one of the wealthiest Negroes in the city. He then married the former Helen Thornton of Athens, Ga., the present Mrs. Abbott.

Prior to his marriage Abbott had never made any pretensions to social position, but the establishment of a family immediately placed him in a position to be considered, and in less than a half dozen years the Abbotts had assumed practical leadership of the local social set. He was admitted into membership in all the clubs and Mrs. Abbott's parties were among the most brilliant in the city.

More social prestige came to him as a result of two foreign trips, one to South America and the other to Europe. His wife accompanied him both times.

In 1924 a big shakeup occurred among the staff of his paper. At that time Phil A. Jones, Alf Anderson, Tony Langston and Roscoe Simmons, known as "The Four Horsemen," were ousted from service with the institution and N. K. McGill, a Florida lawyer who had married Mrs. Abbott's sister, Ida Lee, was made general manager and counsel.

In the ensuing eight years Mr. McGill has extended the influence of the paper and he has grown wealthy. He owns three automobiles, two Pierce Arrows and a Hupmobile, and during the last year, since Mr. Abbott was taken ill in April of 1931, is reported to have purchased two six-flat buildings on swanky Michigan avenue and opened a real estate office.

"What is Mr. Abbott's income?" Mrs. Abbott was asked.

"I do not know, but I hope to find out in this suit," she replied.

She declined to discuss several incidents which the public in the last 18 months has seized upon as evidence of disagreement between her and her husband.

One of these was the publication in The Defender of a story of attempted burglary in the Abbott home. Mr. Abbott claims to have heard a noise on his first floor. Thinking burglars were in the house, he went to his wife's room and had her precede him down the steps to investigate. When they reached the parlor they saw that a lamp had been turned over. But no doors were open and all the windows were closed. It was concluded then that the house dog, Prince Koo Touvalou Houenou, had upset the lamp. But the public was inclined to believe there was a sinister import to the story and it is claimed that Mrs. Abbott's family

sought to have him explain why he had had the story published, but he refused to do so.