

A FEMALE USURER'S TRICK.

NELLIE BLY EXPOSES ONE OF THE SECRETS OF A DIAMOND SHOP.

LOANING MONEY WITHOUT A LICENSE TO ACTRESSES AND RICH WOMEN.

Very Glad to Advance \$175 on Miss Bly's \$600 Bracelet, if Assured that She Was a Safe Customer—After a Satisfactory Identification the Loan is Made—Something of Mrs. Theresa Lynch's Past History—Sixty Per Cent. Per Annum on Loans—A Branch of Her Broadway Business Which Has Made Mrs. Lynch Rich.

Everybody who strolls up the west side of Broadway to the theatres knows the brightly-lighted windows of Mrs. Theresa Lynch, with the strings of diamonds sparkling under the electric lights. Nobody knows exactly just what Mrs. Lynch does in her little back office except those who have her confidence.

She hangs out no sign of the three gilded balls and she has no pawnbroker's license. Yet Mrs. Lynch is a pawnbroker. I know this because she loaned me \$175 on a \$600 diamond bracelet, and I paid her \$8.75 for the loan.

She conducts her business cautiously and has never been caught by the police. Her customers are actresses, rich but temporarily embarrassed married women, and now and then a gay and extravagant Bohemian who needs a few hundred dollars to pacify a dressmaker. Such are Mrs. Lynch's customers in the pawnbroking part of her business. Whether the other reports of mysterious transactions in her establishment are true I have not yet been able to ascertain.

There are many phases of city life that are as interesting as they are pitiful. I think the most deplorable thing in a city is this system of pawnbroking and money-lending. Almost everybody knows the day when money is needed and the purse is empty. Then in the majority of cases they go to the pawn-shops and deposit some article for a quarter of its price. Then they are undone, for if they do get enough to pay the principal loan the interest in six months will exceed the original price of the article pawned. This pawning business has become such a large thing in New York that it is time to call a halt somewhere, or to make more stringent laws for the pawnbrokers.

In the City of Mexico there is one, and only one, pawnshop—the Monte do Piedad. It is a National pawn-shop, and those who pawn articles or sell them get the right prices, and, instead of being a money-making scheme, it is run for the benefit of the people. New York City could have and manage a city pawnshop and have the demerit of rapacity closed, but it won't. This city rarely does anything for its citizens. All the things meant for the pleasure and good of the people are the outcome of the generosity of private persons.

The ordinary pawnshops which hang out their gilded balls have little romance about them. It is the quiet shops, like Mrs. Lynch's, which do business under other names and a little different method that attract people who are not in the poorest walks in life. Well-known wealthy women who are tempted to speculate are often compelled to pawn their jewelry at these places to tide over a period of misfortune.

It is almost entirely women who trade with the quiet money-lenders, and women of some standing, too. Women, unknown to their husbands, pawn their jewelry; widows pawn their jewelry; actresses, when out of an engagement, pawn their jewelry, and so on down the list until you reach poor women who have no jewelry. They go where the three balls hang out and pawn their clothing.

One of the best known characters in this business is this same Mrs. Theresa Lynch, of Broadway. Mrs. Lynch, by the way, has quite a history. Her husband had a stand in the Washington Market, and after she had gained some experience by helping him to make a living for herself and four or five children, she branched out for herself as a merchant in jewelry. She had so much natural ability for the business, and was so successful, that in a short time she opened a pawnshop and hung out the regular pawnbroker's sign. Her success was marvelous and shortly she gave up her license as a pawnbroker and moved to her present place on Broadway. Mr. Lynch was a notably bad character and was three times arrested on some very serious charges, but owing to a mysterious influence his case never came to trial. Where he is now, or what he does, I cannot say.

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the money and go with you to your boarding-house, just to have the people identify you. It is not necessary that they should know what for. Then he will pay you the money."

"What arrangements do we have then? Can I get the bracelet at any time I feel able to pay the money back?"

"Certainly. We charge \$5 a month interest on \$100. My son has charge of that part of the business, but he is not here this morning. A clerk will go with you, though. Mr. Reise," she called to a clerk, "attend to this lady's business."

I followed Mr. Reise to a desk in the back part of the store.

"How much is it?" he asked, as he took the bracelet.

"One hundred dollars," she said, "I explained, but I would like to have more."

"How much did you want?" he asked.

"Well, I expected to get \$200 anyway."

"I will ask her if she will give you more," and away he went in search of Mrs. Lynch, first giving me a pen with which to write my name in the book that he had placed before me. I glanced through the book. It was well filled with names, most all of which had the "Mrs." added. I read the check-shaped agreement which all must sign before they get the money. It said something about hereby and unconditionally selling to George W. Lynch—and that the sale is entire and full and I have no further claims in the article.

"Will \$175 do?" asked Mr. Reise, after his talk with Mrs. Lynch.

"Yes; that is better than \$100," I said, with a smile. "I don't understand this agreement; I am not selling my bracelet."

"That is merely a matter of form," he replied, with a smile. "We don't say we lend money here; we say we buy. We have no license, you know, to do this business, so we do it in this way."

"Indeed," I said, simply. "I did not know a license was necessary, and this is the first time I have pawned anything and I am very ignorant about it. I never knew one had to give reference before pawning articles."

"We can't afford to take things unless we know the persons selling, because we are liable to get the police down on us and give the place a bad name."

"Really?" Why, in what way?"

"Well, we would get stolen articles in here and then they would say we knew they weren't all right because we got them for a third their value. But we do a big business in giving money. Some of the best women in New York often get money here. Of course nobody ever knows it. Where will we go to have you identified?"

"I am a stranger and I don't care about taking my business affairs to my boarding-house, but I know a gentleman downtown who could identify me."

He got his hat and we started out, going through Twenty-second street to Sixth avenue. All this time I was wondering who I would decide to call upon for identification. I was a little bit amused at my own position, for I knew of no one I could see who would not address me as Nellie Bly and need an explanation before they would understand what I wanted.

I changed my mind once and decided to go to my dress-maker's, thinking I would have more chance to warn her, but after we had walked a block in the boiling sun, I decided that it was far too risky to go there, so pleading a dress bill, which I feared I would have to pay, I told him we would face about and again start downtown.

I had determined to walk in to the gentleman we were going to see and before he had time to say a word I intended to say:

"Good morning. Won't you please tell this man that my name is Kennedy?"

But I walked in and the gentleman was out. His stenographer was in, however, and as I started out she said:

"Miss Bly, won't you come in and wait?"

I turned and looked quietly at the man; see what effect her words would have on him; he made no move to tell me I was detected quietly invited him in. We sat down and waited and I talked very calmly, but meanwhile I had whispered to the stenographer to call me Miss Kennedy.

"I think I will go," Mr. Reise said at last. "I trust you and if it had depended on me I would have given you the money at first without a question. I could tell from your face that you were honest."

"You are very good," I said, and I smiled, "but if you prefer waiting it is all the same to me."

"Will I give you the money here?" he asked. I said "Yes," and he handed me two rolls of bills. Then he showed me his name in his hat, so I would remember it, and we parted.

Two days afterwards I called at Mrs. Lynch's

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Mrs. Lynch is considered the best judge of diamonds in New York. She has by her own work become independently rich, buying and selling diamonds and antique and unique articles, and now and then turning a penny in other and more mysterious ways.

In appearance she is a thorough woman of the world. Her manners are quiet but very decided. She is of medium height and of plump proportions, dresses well, has a fairly good complexion, dark eyes and snowy-white hair, which gives her rather a distinguished look. She is at her store all day and keeps a firm hand on the management.

I went in to see her one day last week. She was quietly arranging some little silver articles on a tray in the showcase. There were three young men behind the counter on the other side of the store doing nothing.

"Mrs. Lynch, may I speak to you a moment?" I asked, as I stopped before her.

"Yes; what do you want?" she asked, raising her eyes and giving me one look, but continuing at her work.

"I want to borrow some money on a bracelet I have here," I said quietly.

"Yes. Let me see the bracelet." I handed it to her and she examined it as I told her it cost \$600 not a great while ago, but as I needed money more than I did a diamond bracelet I wanted to pawn it.

"How much do you want?" she asked shortly. I noticed that she wasted no words.

"How much can I get on it?"

"I never set a price, you must do that."

"Well, I did want \$200, but I might get along with less."

"Would \$100 do?"

"Well, I suppose so," I replied, and then she handed the bracelet back and began to re-arrange the articles on the tray.

"I never lend money to people I don't know unless they furnish references," she said slowly.

"Can you give us any reference?"

"I don't know," I hesitated. I had never thought of such a thing and was not prepared to go to anyone for indorsement. "I haven't been in New York long and I do not know many people."

"Don't the people where you board know you?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered. "What would I have to do?"

"I will take the bracelet and a man will take

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I said "Yes," and he handed me two rolls of bills. Then he showed me his name in his hat, so I would remember it, and we parted.

Two days afterwards I called at Mrs. Lynch's and paid back the \$175, and in addition I paid her \$4.75 interest for the loan, making in all \$183.75, and she returned me my bracelet. So ended my experience with a swell money lender, who defies the law and has grown rich.

But wouldn't it be well if good people could borrow money on pledges in this city at a less rate than 60 per cent. per annum?

NELLIE BLY.

MY NEIGHBOR'S SECRET.