

WITH THE PRISON MATRONS.

THEY TELL NELLIE BLY THAT WOMEN NEVER REFORM.

An Interesting Visit to the Big City Prison and Talks with the Female Keepers—Matron Webb and Her Foundlings—Prisoners Who Return Again and Again—A Field Beyond the Reach of Charity.

"Seventeen years is a long time for an innocent woman to be in prison."

I answered the speaker with a sympathetic smile. I thought, as I glanced at the kindly face and the neatly dressed hair, which Time has touched with frosty fingers, what love of humanity, what patience she must possess to spend seventeen years in unceasing labor for the ill-fated outcast world. Almost everybody has streaks of charity in them, greater or less, but of all, surely the hard-worked, ill-paid prison matrons represent the truest charity. At least I believed it so, and because of that I decided to visit a few of them. Matron Webb, at Police Headquarters, whose little rooms furnish shelter for every deserted child, waited for me to continue the questioning process.

"Do you not tire of your work?" I asked at length.

"No. There is variety in it and I have grown so accustomed to that I should be miserable away from its cares."

"Do you only receive children here?"

"No, indeed. Very often women who are lost or homeless are brought here for a night's shelter." Then, with a smile, she continued:

"I used to wonder what disguise you would assume in, but I never thought I would see you as Nellie Bly."

"Tell me about yourself. How did you get this position?"

"My husband was appointed janitor when this building was first opened and I was given the position of matron. My husband has since died, but I still retain the place."

"Where are the babies brought from which you take charge of?"

"From all parts of the city. There is a law against children being kept in prison after 9 o'clock at night, so they are all sent here. We receive them at any hour. When the officers find the little deserted babies or lost children they take them to the nearest station-house, where a commitment is made out and they are brought to me. Lost children are always very dirty, and so the first thing we do is to give them a bath and put them in clean clothing, of which I keep a supply. If the foundlings are clean we put them to bed without bathing them. They make very little fuss. The foundlings find the warmth and a bottle of milk so comforting after exposure and hunger that they go to sleep in a very few moments. The lost children are so weary that after I give them food they drop off and do not wake until daylight."

THE CHILDREN TENDERLY CARED FOR.

"Do you ever have any deaths?"

"In seventeen years I have only had one child die while in my charge. Don't you think that a good record?" she asked. "But I was going to tell you about that. Some time in the night an officer brought a baby in. I took it and found that it was sleeping very nicely. I laid a bottle with it, and I once determined to take the bottle away; but then, as it was so quiet, I concluded not to disturb it, so I covered it up in the crib. In a few moments another officer came in with another baby. As we were putting it in a crib he remarked that it was one of the smallest he had ever seen. 'It's not as small as the one that came in a little while ago,' I said, and he went over to the crib to see it. I pulled the cover down softly, so as not to awaken the baby, and saw at once that it was in convul-

she and her one child were deserted. Both the mother and daughter are in very poor health. They make bad frames for a living. I have sent missionaries there, but they look about and they see everything clean and well-cared for, so they give no help. If they went into a house where everything was neglected and in a state of filth they would be very anxious to aid the people. Some missionaries caution themselves against such things as poverty and cleanliness. I did get one wealthy old maid to visit them, and then because they were not connected with some church—and really it costs too much to go to church for poor people—to induce in it—she would not do anything for them."

THE MATRON OF THE TOMBS.

I went down to the Tombs. The passageway was crowded with people who had come to visit their friends, and I stood aside to watch them. Some had tales of misery in their faces, and some had the misery in their apparel, while their faces were hardened as if it were an old story to them. They formed in a long line. The first, a man, handed a little dirty card in the window to an officer. He looked it over, then slowly opened the iron gate. The man entered and he came out the next minute. He was told to stand still. Then, with a rapidity which bespoke long experience, the officer slid his hands into the man's pocket, and in a second he knew everything the man had about him. He found something which led me to a distance like a knife. He handed it back to the man and pushed him out of the gate.

While this was going on I attempted to read the list of rules for prisoners, and then I noticed a smaller board beside it. This is what was written on it in chalk:

CENSUS CITY PRISON, JAN. 6.	
Men.....	343
Women.....	74
Boys.....	15
Total.....	452

A nice old gentleman in uniform came out then. He was surrounded by a number of cage visitors, and I waited. As he started to enter the prison again, I timidly caught his coat sleeve and said:

"If you please—"
He glanced and looked around. I handed him my card of admission, which he read carefully, and then asked me to follow him. Past the long line we went and to the iron gate. There he said some magic work to the keeper and I was allowed to enter. We came to a second gate.

"Is the young lady with you?" asked the keeper.

"I have her in charge," the Deputy Warden said, smiling at me. At the next door Matron McAniliffe met us, and the gentlemen, after saying a few pleasant words, left us together.

"I have three assistants and a night matron," said Mrs. McAniliffe as she took me into the dining-room, where they have three long tables, at each of which are seated the cage eaters, and we change of our work each week. I have been Matron twelve years. I was first at the Workhouse on the Island, and then I was transferred here. I like the work; my whole soul is in it. If you do it as it is, it does not get monotonous. Our hours are from 7 to 7, and by giving notice in advance we can get a day off every week."

Are any of the prisoners ever abusive to you?"

"I have very little trouble with him. They are most always obedient to me. We feed the prisoners three times a day. Then, they can also have what their friends send them."

"What is the life in the prison, where a colored woman and a white woman were talking through the bars to their visitors. We went inside and looked about at the poor, wretched prisoners."

"Each member of these are voluntary prisoners," explained Mrs. McAniliffe. "They are unable to work, owing to illness, hard times, and oftener laziness, so they come to the police court and ask to be sent to the Workhouse for shelter."

ADVENTURES STANTON'S VISITOR.

We had hard, reached the door when some one called out:

"A visitor for Addie Stanton. Addie Stanton."

A slender woman, wearing a light niter, whose hair was golden on top and brown at the roots, came rushing down to the upper tier.

"Addie, you can step outside," the Matron said to her. She did so, and a handsome man, well clad and with every appearance of respectability, stepped by the Matron and pressed a light kiss on her upturned lips.

"How does the conduct here?" I asked.

"She and Ella Hammond are about the best-behaved prisoners we have. They are quiet and attend to their work."

"Please, mamma, I'd like to bring the children to see their mother," a colored man said who left his wife at the gate to speak to the Matron.

"You cannot do that, because it is against the rules."

They want at saloons. If drink was not so cheap the police courts would not have so much to do. It leads to everything else. After these women serve a sentence for being drunk they go out, and probably the next day will find them in again. Why? Well, they say they need something to brace them, and they brace too much. I look on these women as diseased. They really cannot help themselves. The one that I saw in patience with the lazy woman who commit themselves in preference to working. I think a young, healthy woman who would rather go to the Island than to work cannot receive too severe a sentence."

Mrs. Stack, who is matron at the Essex Market Prison, has the most uncomfortable place of all. She has only one little corner at the foot of the iron stairs which lead to the upper tiers for herself, and the prison is damp, dark and ugly. The only heat which comes from the furnace beneath is so filled with gas that the inmates find freezing preferable to it. Mrs. Stack, who has been a helping friend to the unfortunate for eleven years, has some very good ideas of what the weak as well as the wicked need. It was 5 o'clock, the hour they serve supper, when I visited Essex Market Prison. One dim gasjet flickered faintly in the corridor, and a number of the women, on some benches against the whitewashed wall. One woman on the end, who still wore her shabby bonnet and shawl, was sobbing bitterly. She had been arrested while going to her dressmaker's the night before, she said, but the officer took different views. She was an old tender, and the officer was relieved, and she was sent to jail. A number of the other women were listening intently to the story of a young girl who alternately stood and cried before them. She said that she was not yet sixteen, but she was tall and slender as a stalk of wheat. Her dress and shoes were cheap, and her bustle had the pointed shape so usual to badly clad women. A strange story she told.

The morning she had left her home to go to the type-foundry where she was employed. On the way she met a young gent whom she knew, and he took her in some place and gave her drugged whiskey. How did she know it? She was mugged. He was soon at the lot, but she went a nearby street where she was employed. Two men came in carrying a large boiler, which they placed at the end of the table. Mrs. Stack went down and served the tea from the boiler to the prisoners. Each prisoner had a large tin pan at her side, as much bread and tea as she wanted. An old woman came out of a cell way down the corridor. She hobbled to a bench, but made no move to approach the table.

"What is she?" I asked, they scarcely knew. "She is seventy-six years old and blind for the Almshouse," replied the matron. "The result of a mispent life."

After dinner the women were all appointed to their cells, the young girl in company with them as proudly as she wore a model of good looks. Then they were locked in and Mrs. Stack returned to me.

THE SYSTEM OF PUNISHMENT A FAILURE.

"Drink is the root of all evil," she said. "Every crime, every wrong deed is the result of drink. And sending women to the Island does not promote more of anything else. No woman who serves time on the Island reforms. We have one woman here to-day who left the Island yesterday at 10 o'clock after serving a six months' term. Some of the keepers have her in their own cars in town. Instead of that she went into the first saloon, and at 6 o'clock we had her back again. Now she has another term to serve."

"Good night, Mrs. Stack, I am going," said a woman coming from one of the cells. "Won't you wish me luck?"

"I do," replied the matron, "and here is enough money to pay your carriage." And with a few kindly wishes she let the woman out and locked the door.

"Now, you see there is a woman who has served her sentence. She is going out at night, homeless and penniless. What is there for her so do? Who will take her in or trust her? A few days will bring her back, because there is nothing else for her."

"What of these Homes?"

"They are filled already with women who have not served time. If, instead of the Island, there was a place where they could work, while serving time, be taught to work, and for good work and conduct receive say 50 cents a month, when their time was up they would have enough to support them until they could find their way to the other tier. They have learned to do something. If arrested on the same complaint a second time they should get, instead of a few months, a year. Make the punishment severe, a third failing. The Island makes women worse inmates of there. It is the use of sending them there? It neither punishes them nor reforms them, so it is a failure."

I bade her and the Warden, who has served five years at this one post, good-by and went out into the night, where I saw a mass of misery and discouraged at the idea of reform.

NELLIE BLY.

smallest he had ever seen. It was not as small as the one that came in a little while ago," I said, and we went over to the crib to see it. I pulled the covers down softly, so as not to awaken the baby, and saw at once that it was in convulsions. We rang for the ambulance, but before the doctor got here the baby was dead. We found that its milk had been poisoned. Since then I am very careful to take bottles away from foundlings the moment they come in and give them everything fresh and clean.

"You would not think," she continued, "to see the condition of the lost children that their parents ever thought of them. Some children are so filthy that we have to take their rags off the first thing and burn them."

"And they look as if they never had a bath in their lives," interposed Mrs. Webb's son.

"They do, indeed," she assented, with a laugh. "You would think their parents did not care for them, yet the dirtier the child the tender their parents wait when they find them. We had a man come in here in search of his lost child. It had not been brought in yet, so he sat here wailing and moaning until the moment it was brought in. Then he doubled down before it and shook his fist in its face and yelled, 'Just wait until I get you home!'"

"There is no romance in it. I suppose we get hardened to anything. I recall one time a little girl was found and brought here. She was so filthy that I burned everything she wore. It just happened that I had nothing here, which would fit her except a very bright yellow dress. It was very yellow. Evidently it was made for a child's party dress, to be worn under lace, but having nothing else I had to dress her in it. After a while an Italian came in search of a lost child. After looking around at all the children he said his child was not among them. 'How old was she?' I asked, and he replied, 'Four years.' I thought that little girl was about four, so I told him to look again. He looked with a

scowl, and came in yellow. He shook his head and said, 'God bless the child who gave her dress.' He went over and knelt before her and only then did he recognize her, and he almost fainted. I don't think he ever saw her washed before, and as I always see only the bright yellow cases, such cases do not give the parents often fail to recognize their children because they never saw them clean before."

NAMING THE LITTLE TOTS.

"Do you ever have any foundlings that apparently were born of wealthy parents?"

"No. As I tell you, there is little romance about it. The findings are always cheaply clad, with sometimes a show of cheap lace, never have them here more than twenty-four hours, generally not a third of that time. So I do not become attached to them."

"Do they ever have a name pinned to them?"

"No, and you should see how they get their names," said Matron Webb's son. "Some one comes in and says, 'Is it named yet? I'll name it, and so they give it a name. Other times the place it was found or the time names it, such as in May a baby girl was found in a hallway and we named it 'May Hall.' Last year we had 174 foundlings. When parents abandon a baby they never want to know its fate."

"I can always tell an Italian baby from the regular way in which it is dressed," said Matron Webb. "A piece of linen, about five inches wide and two yards long, is wrapped about them from their arms down to their heels, and their bodies are rigid. I always take it off the moment they come in, for I think it must make them very uncomfortable and cramped."

"What results do you get from your work among women?" I asked of Matron Webb.

"The results are discouraging," she answered, sadly, "but yet, with the hope of some time saving the one woman, I am encouraged to persevere. In my seventeen years as matron I have never known a woman to reform or to have any gratitude for aid extended to her."

"Matron Webb has made her room in the top floor of Police headquarters very cosy and homelike. Her mother was a Quaker, so one can know how very neat the house is kept. In the cosy little parlor opening off a pretty little hall are many things of interest. The first thing which impresses one is Mrs. Webb's box of music. In one corner is a fine piano, in another a music-box, and in front of the pier glass, which separates the windows, is an organ-box and table containing Mrs. Webb's books, and any rest for her room, as they are meant for place for the matron as well as for her charges, who have comfortable beds and cribs and chairs in another part of the flat. But for all her work, of which one can form but little idea, she is only paid \$13 a month. Of that slender amount many a 50 cents goes to help those who have less."

"It is not the deserving poor that one ever hears of," said Matron Webb. "I know it is a family who are very much reduced. The mother receives a pension—her husband was in the army during the Mexican war—of some few dollars a year—about thirty, I think. The

behaved phisicians we have. They are quite kind and

"Please, ma'am, I'd like to bring the children to see their mother," a colored man said who left his wife at the gate to speak to the matron. "You cannot do that, because I believe the rules," the matron answered kindly, but firmly. "The Warden objects to children being brought here. He thinks the sight of their parents behind the bars is not a desirable thing to impress on their young minds and that the fact is hardening."

The colored man, with many a break in his voice, told his story to the matron, and she patiently listened, expressing quiet sympathy for his misery.

"These are the same stairs that were used when the old prison was here," said Mrs. McLaughlin, as we went up the winding staircase, which had been scrubbed thoroughly. We entered a small room in which were two altars and a number of benches. "This is the chapel. We have service here on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Sunday morning the Sisters of Charity are here, and in the afternoon the chapel is devoted to the Episcopal service. Prisoners can attend or not, just as they wish. Before a prisoner is hanged if he wishes he can come to service here. Poor Danny Lyons came here the day before he was hanged. When a hanging is to take place the prisoners are very sad and quiet. It affects the whole prison. This hall back of the chapel is called 'The Magdalen.' We confine women who have received their first sentence and children to it to keep them from coming in contact with hardened criminals. You see we have a nice stove fire and comfortable beds in the dormitory alongside. This window, which opens into the chapel, was to enable a crippled woman to hear the service. She could not get up and down stairs, so her chair was always wheeled to this window."

TRIFLING REFORM.

"Did you ever know of any women reforming?" I asked.

"No, I never did. I have known of hard drinkers keeping sober for several months at a time, but they can't control themselves, and a wild desire will return which brings them here again."

Out near the gate where visitors first enter is a small whitewashed room, lighted with a single gas jet and furnished only with a table and a chair. Here Mrs. McLaughlin dresses and dresses the prisoners and takes their hair, and in a very amiable manner.

"I was for some time a matron on Hart's Island and Blackwell's Island, and I read your experience in the Insane Asylum with pleasure," she said to me. "I always say the insane are my people, and I always get along so well with them. It is not to devote my life to reform I can afford to do so. We know the cruelty to the insane is dreadful, but what else can we expect? They cannot employ educated nurses for \$16 a month, and the ignorant are always cruel."

"How do you like the searching women?" I asked Mrs. McLaughlin.

"At first I was very much ashamed to do it, but now I don't mind it. They try sometimes to carry in drink and knives and such things. We find them in the fannies' places. Sometimes they make a pocket in their stockings; often they suspend a bottle by cords from the waist. They are very new visitors who try to smuggle things in now; others know it is impossible, they also know that if they send any reasonable thing here it is always given to the prisoners."

UNGRATEFUL FOR CHARITY.

Mrs. Byrnes, the matron at Jefferson Market, is a pretty, slender woman, who looks so girlish that one is astonished to be introduced to her son Edward, a bright, healthy lad of twelve, who rushes in at noon and kisses her on the cheek. Mrs. Byrnes was educated in a Montreal convent and is a French scholar and a musician. She made choice of this work because it is no so public as many things women have to do. Mrs. Byrnes receives the same salary as the matrons at the Tombs—\$37 a month. The head matron at the Tombs, Mrs. McLaughlin, receives about \$48 a month, and an old lady who was once matron, but is now past work, receives her salary as a pension, which lasts until she dies. I think this very just and considerate in the Commissioner. Mrs. Byrnes once worked at the Tombs, where she had charge of the boys. She liked that very much better than her present position, as she had some hope of good resulting from her work among the young.

"No, I do not find that very many reform."

Mrs. Byrnes said, "Indeed, I cannot recall any, but I do find them grateful. Why, one woman was brought in here feverish from long disipation. I gave her an orange, and many months after when she came back—for they always do—the recalled herself to me and thanked me for the orange. I always find them grateful for a kindness. I am watching a case now of a young woman who began drinking and ended here. She was very young, so I worked hard to get her sent to some home instead of to the island. After I had everything arranged with the Judge and the authorities of the home she refused to go, preferring the island, and so disappointed that it made me sick at heart. Since then I have heard from her, and she regrets that she did not take my advice, so I am waiting until she has served her term to see if she reforms or goes back to her old way."

THE CASE OF CHEAP LIQUOR.

"What is the chief cause of crime among women?" I asked.

"Cheap drink, undoubtedly. These women

forty years at this one post, good by and went out into the night sick at the sight of misery and discouraged at the idea of reform.