ART MUSIC DRAMA LITERATURE SOCIETY FASHION SPORTS

THE SUNDAY WORLD MAGAZINE

EVERY SUNDAY THE WORLD CONTAINS MORE READING MATTER THAN ANY FOUR MAGAZINES.

PAGES 17 TO 32. NEW YORK, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1896.—COPYRIGHTED BY THE PRESS PUBLISHING CO., 1896. PAGES 17 TO 32.

HOMELESS, HOPELESS!

NELLIE BLY in a Night Haunt of the City's Wretchedest of Women

BOARDS THEIR BEDS

Happy to Sleep in a Station-House, but Roosevelt Says "Turn Them Out!"

THE LAST STEP BUT ONE.

AN old woman stood with her back tight against the side of a building. Over her head was a ragged shawl that had once been red. Around her knees hung a limp and shapeless calico skirt. The rain and sleet were falling steadily and lay thick and slushy upon the streets.

I shivered as I stopped to watch the woman, in spite of my ample protection against the cold and wet. But if the old woman felt the cold she gave no sign. She stood motionless, peeping around the corner. Her eyes were fixed upon the door of the Oak Street Station-House.

Just then three small boys, unmindful of the weather, came trudging down the street. The smallest one carried proudly a tin tomato can. His companions were industriously gathering every white spot that showed upon the pavement to add to the black snowballs they held in their wet red hands.

Turning the corner suddenly they came upon the old woman. For a second they paused and looked at her and she glared at them. It reminded me of the way dogs behave when they turn a corner and espy a cat. There seemed to be no need for an exchange of thought. The old woman started on a frantic hobble across the street, the boys after her. Their black snowballs landed squarely and soakingly against her bent back, and were quickly followed by handfuls of dirty slush grabbed from the pavement.

The old woman shouted things as she ran, things that do not sound well and are never by any chance reproduced in print, but they seemed to increase the delight of the fiendish boys. Although she shouted at them, the old woman never slackened her pace. As fast as she could hobble she made for the station-house and the boys pursued her, pelting her with wonderful rapidity until the door closed behind her.

Unable to follow further they turned away, when they saw two men walking down the street. One glance and the treasured tin can was flung away and the young rascals took to their heels. The men never even looked after them, but walked quietly into the station-house. I followed.

I was just in time to see the old woman disappearing through an inner door. I was in the station-house proper. The sergeant, very good-looking, sat in all the glory of uniform and command behind the bar. Acting Captain Thompson stood idly in a side door that led to his private office.

"I would like to see where the homeless women sleep," I explained to him and he bade me follow him.

We went by the same door through which the old woman passed. But she was not to be seen. Instead I saw some policemen sitting around a large stove upon whom a sudden silence fell at our appearance. The only business-looking part of the room was a stout old-style oak table on which a large ledger lay open.

"That is where we put the names of our free lodgers," Mr. Thompson said. "But you can see it later."

SORDID SURROUNDINGS.

Through this second door we stepped into a dark and dismal paved court. The sleet was coming down briskly on our heads and the slush lay thick beneath our feet.

When I grew accustomed to the gloom I saw by the light that struggled faintly through the windows a small two-story building with grated doors on the first floor and iron staircases, one on the right and one on the left, that led to the second story.

Had I not known it was a station-house I should have supposed from the noise that it was an asylum for insane. Some drunken men prisoners were shouting and howling and, amid it all, I could hear the voice of a woman in a maudlin tune singing.

Mr. Thompson led the way to the right staircase, so I knew without being told that the men prisoners went to the left. On a landing at the top of the staircase Mr. Thompson pushed open an unbolted door and I stepped inside.

The light from a single gas jet burned so dimly that it took me a few moments to see my surroundings. I had an indistinct impression of a number of shapeless forms huddled up on a board platform.

"Ladies!" Mr. Thompson addressed the queer, shapeless objects. "Here is a lady for an association. She wants to see what can be done to help you, so I want you to treat her nicely."

There was a movement among the bundles as if they heard and understood without any special feeling of delight.

"You are not afraid to stay alone?" Mr. Thompson asked me.

"No," I answered. "I prefer to."

As the door closed behind her the bundles came to life, and heads were lifted and I was surveyed curiously.

I looked on with much interest. I had never seen the way the city lodges its homeless women, and I was very much interested, especially as I knew that such places are to be abolished after Feb. 14.

The room was not large, and but for narrow passages at the three sides was filled with an iron structure that was built [illegible] one foot from the floor and adjacent to the side wall. This iron structure supports the board planks that constitute the beds for homeless women.

The planks are about six feet long and half a yard wide. They stand on end in the corner, near the door, and when a woman comes in she takes a board and places it on the iron brace. That is her bed.

The walls are plastered, and, judging by the dim light, are very dirty. The floor is cemented. The room is heated by a pipe that comes from a stove in the jail beneath. Near the door is a closet where the water dripped all the time, and though I am told disinfectants are used daily, the stench was terrible.

Adjoining this is another room exactly similar, so that I shall not repeat the description. The ventilation is poor and the odor indescribable.

As Mr. Thompson went out what had appeared to be mere bundles of rags assumed some shape.

On the extreme end nearest the door two women had placed their planks close together to form a double bed, as it were.

The first woman jumped to her feet. They were bare feet and very dirty ones. She wore a calico wrapper, and as it was open to the waist I saw that she wore nothing else. She had a broken nose, three teeth, a whiskey breath and uncombed brown hair.

Her companion had a ragged flannel petticoat wrapped around her head and shoulders. She sat with her feet under her, and tried patiently to put braid as laces in a pair of laborer's heavy shoes.

There was a space between her and the next woman, who sat on her board, her knees gathered up to her chin and her long, bony bare arms folded around them.

The woman was very ragged and very dirty. Her gray hair was matted, and as she lifted her thin, yellow face from between her knees to look at me, I saw a sharp nose that almost met an equally sharp chin. She had toothless, shrunken jaws and bleary, vicious eyes.

The next woman was the most fortunate one in the place. She had the half of a red cotton comforter wrapped around the lower part of her body. It wasn't long enough to reach her shoulders or to cover her horrible bare feet that stuck, dirty and spotted with sores, over the edge of the board.

But she had a ragged red handkerchief bound tightly around her head, which rested on a bundle of filthy rags.

The woman next to her was large and husky. Her hair was turning gray, and her face was red and dirty. She seemed to have more clothing than the others, and she wasn't sleeping in it, either. She had taken off all but a red flannel undershirt and a bulky gray flannel skirt. Her brown plaid shawl, folded, made a pillow, and her ragged clothing was used for bed covers.

Close beside her lay a little white-haired, white-faced, pudgy woman with all her clothing on and her arm folded under her head for a pillow.

The next and last woman sat facing the room, her feet down in the space left between her board and the other woman's. Her chin was buried in her breast, and she seemed asleep, so still and silent did she sit.

The woman that had jumped to her feet looked at me a moment and then, as if reassured, approached me, [illegible] ye forgit me, blissed lady," she whined in whiskey-laden tones. "I'm willin' to work if I kin only find a job."

"Indade, an' so air we all," declared the woman in the red flannel undershirt, rising to a sitting position. "But we're in God's hands."

"He's our only friend," groaned the woman with the red comforter, without altering her position.

"Hist! ye fools! Shet up!" cautioned a deep husky voice. It came from an ancient crone that sat huddled up with her head resting on her knees.

"Bliss His name!" murmured the woman in the red handkerchief. If he was not with us we'd a been ded long ago."

The little pudgy woman sat up and smiled silently at nothing in particular. The woman beyond her sat motionless, her head hanging forward. Around the the corner of the narrow passageway I saw a white head peep cautiously from the other room.

I began to think I had made a mistake and entered a mission instead of a station lodging-house. I felt somewhat abashed before all this goodness and faith, especially as the woman in the red undershirt began to mutter something like a prayer.

"I don't belong to a mission," I explained timidly.

"What air ye, thin?" demanded the first woman who spoke.

FROM PIETY TO CURSES.

The woman I had suspected of praying came to an abrupt pause and broke out into a string of picturesque and emphatic profanity. I can't tell you what she said, but the gist of it was that she knew I was no praying visitor, and that the woman who had whispered so to her had done her a deadly injury and me a deadly insult.

"Beware! Beware!" croaked the old dame from between her knees.

"Where are your underclothes?" I asked of woman No. 1, as she came close to me and stood watching me with an admiring and friendly smile.

"Me underclothes!" she repeated, with a yell of delight. "Oh, I've got underclothes—yes, an' another dress."

"Where are they?" I persisted.

"I put 'em away. I've got 'em, but they're pawned. Not for much though," with a gleam of hope. "If I get work I can soon get 'em out again."

"And do you mean to say you go out in the street with nothing else on?" I asked wonderingly.

"These are her shoes," spoke up the woman who was trying to get the braid into the round holes in the shoes. "I'm fixin' them for her."

"An' I've got that shaul," pointing to a ragged brown affair, "an this skirt." A ragged calico. "But we have to use our own dry goods here to keep us warm."

"Shut up, ye fool! Ye're a doin' fur yerself," croaked the old dame, but the woman paid no attention to her.

"Darlint, don't leave me behind," she pleaded, clinging to my arm. "I'm a good cook."

"Misfortune and whiskey," she answered.

"Whiskey! Ha! ha! Whiskey," repeated she of the aforesaid flannel undergarment.

"Anybody's got a home that'll work for it," observed the woman who was working with the shoes.

"What a cruiser! Listen to it preach!" shouted the emphatic woman in flannel. I had decided that it must be her flannel that made her so vicious. She was a homeless cynic.

"Do you think drinking helps your position any?" I asked my single-garment friend.

"It's cold in the streets. What can you do, darlint, when you have no work?" was her reply.

"I had a home," announced the woman in flannel. "A fine home it was, too. I was a lady. I wasn't brought up to live like these cruisers here. I had a boardin'-house at 62 Pell street, an' then me man died an' six o' me children. I've got one girl of fourteen in a home where she's bein' brought up properly to be a lady."

"And you drink?" I questioned.

"The divil, an' I do," she answered frankly. "It's small enough comfort."

By this time curiosity had brought the white head that had been peeping around the corner into full view.

"What are yer comin' out fur?" fiercely demanded the lady of one garment. "Stay in there an' mind yer own business."

A hand that belonged to the white head motioned entreatingly for me to come her way as she, in obedience to the rough command, vanished around the corner.

The woman who had all this time sat silent at the end of the room suddenly rose to her feet and began to remove her rags.

"Don't strip yerself before the lady or I'll knock yer head off," declared the woman of a single garment. "Have ye no shame er decency?"

The woman huddled down on her boards again.

"Beware! Beware! A nice mess yer a makin' fur yorselves!" croaked the old dame from the top of her knees.

"How old are you?" I asked her. She looked to be at least seventy years old.

"I'm thirty-eight," she replied with a snap.

"Get on to the old bum!" chuckled the woman in flannel.

"Shut up an' let me be or I'll lick yer!" shouted she of one garment.

"Come on, ye scunk. Let's see ye do it!" retorted the other.

They grew so loud, so profane and so fierce that I scarcely knew whether to run or to see it out.

"If there must be a fight," I said as soon as I could make myself heard, "let me be referee."

They laughed at me and peace was restored for the time.

"When this place is closed where will you women go at night?" I asked.

THEY TRUST TO FATE.

"If one place isn't open for us another place will be," said the woman with a handkerchief over her head.

"They can't let us freeze in the street," said the one in calico.

"Who cares?" demanded the cynic in flannel. "If ye starve it's only yer own stomach. It doesn't pain no one else. If ye call for a [illegible] ye got the door banged in yer face."

"What do you drink," I said, "Misfortune and whiskey," she answered.

"Whiskey! Ha! ha! Whiskey," repeated she of the aforesaid flannel undergarment.

"Anybody's got a home that'll work for it," observed the woman who was working with the shoes.

"What a cruiser! Listen to it preach!" shouted the emphatic woman in flannel. I had decided that it must be her flannel that made her so vicious. She was a homeless cynic.

"Do you think drinking helps your position any?" I asked my single-garment friend.

"It's cold in the streets. What can you do, darlint, when you have no work?" was her reply.

"I had a home," announced the woman in flannel. "A fine home it was, too. I was a lady. I wasn't brought up to live like these cruisers here. I had a boardin'-house at 62 Pell street, an' then me man died an' six o' me children. I've got one girl of fourteen in a home where she's bein' brought up properly to be a lady."

"And you drink?" I questioned.

"The divil, an' I do," she answered angrily. "We're put into the streets at 5 in the mornin' an' all day we have to keep out of the way of the street loafers and bad boys. They pelt us to death and call us old bums. Think of that? Old bums! There's nowhere to go or put in time until lis 5 o'clock, an' then we can come back here."

"How do you get your food?"

"We don't get much. Sometimes we get a day's washin' an' we'll get a plate of soup wid it. Or we get a few pennies for startin' fires. Well, if we get five cents it wouldn't buy us much food, but it'll buy us a drink o' whiskey that'll warm our insides an' cheer us up a bit."

"Why don't you get a place to work for some family?" I asked.

"I have a chance fur a place but I don't like the looks o' the lady," she replied.

"I could live out, but I don't like to live out," said my friend in the calico wrapper. "One thing, I can't eat the food of people I live with."

The door opened and a clean, very well clad woman entered. She went to the corner, got a board and laid it on the floor in the passageway at the end of the room. Then she began to remove her wet garments.

The matron came in to look around. She stopped before the woman with the red handkerchief over her head.

"This woman," she said to me, "has a home and children who would support her, but she prefers to get drunk and to sleep in the station-house. How often have I locked you up?" (to the woman.)

"I never seen you before in my life," the old woman vowed.

"Look at her lies!" chuckled Madam Flannel.

"I remember you very well. You've been coming here for four years to my positive knowledge," said the matron.

"You only locked me up once," answered the woman, when she saw no way out of it.

AN APHORISM REVISED.

"An open confession is good fur de truth," chuckled my cynic.

"I locked you up only a short time ago," said the matron.

"Was it here they brought me the second time?" asked the old woman, cornered again.

"Oh, yer only an' old bum!" sneered the cynic.

"If I am, I bum wid my own," retorted the woman.

"What are those sores on your feet?" asked the matron.

"That's nothing," answered the woman, trying vainly to conceal them beneath her bit of red comforter. "My feet feel the smart of the wet day."

"I suppose your shoes are thin," said the matron.

"She ain't got a rag that she didn't beg for," chimed in the cynic.

"I haven't enough on me to dust a fiddle," confessed the woman. She began to sing:

"I'll give a 'alf crown
To kill a fur down—

"I'm a far downer from Ireland," she broke off, "but divil a bit of a home or anything have I now."

"Isn't there a lodging-house where you women can go when this place is closed?" I inquired.

"There's one in Rivington street," replied the cynic, "but no lady would go there. Only common women go on Rivington street. We're ladies. We're no common women."

"What else is there to do?" she asked angrily. "We're put into the streets at 5 in the mornin' an' all day we have to keep out of the way of the street loafers and bad boys. They pelt us to death and call us old bums. Think of that? Old bums! There's nowhere to go or put in time until lis 5 o'clock, an' then we can come back here."

"How do you get your food?"

"We don't get much. Sometimes we get a day's washin' an' we'll get a plate of soup wid it. Or we get a few pennies for startin' fires. Well, if we get five cents it wouldn't buy us much food, but it'll buy us a drink o' whiskey that'll warm our insides an' cheer us up a bit."

"Why don't you get a place to work for some family?" I asked.

"I have a chance fur a place but I don't like the looks o' the lady," she replied.

"I could live out, but I don't like to live out," said my friend in the calico wrapper. "One thing, I can't eat the food of people I live with."

The door opened and a clean, very well clad woman entered. She went to the corner, got a board and laid it on the floor in the passageway at the end of the room. Then she began to remove her wet garments.

The matron came in to look around. She stopped before the woman with the red handkerchief over her head.

"This woman," she said to me, "has a home and children who would support her, but she prefers to get drunk and to sleep in the station-house. How often have I locked you up?" (to the woman.)

"I never seen you before in my life," the old woman vowed.

"Look at her lies!" chuckled Madam Flannel.

"I remember you very well. You've been coming here for four years to my positive knowledge," said the matron.

"You only locked me up once," answered the woman, when she saw no way out of it.

AN APHORISM REVISED.

"An open confession is good fur de truth," chuckled my cynic.

"I locked you up only a short time ago," said the matron.

"Was it here they brought me the second time?" asked the old woman, cornered again.

"Oh, yer only an' old bum!" sneered the cynic.

"If I am, I bum wid my own," retorted the woman.

"What are those sores on your feet?" asked the matron.

"That's nothing," answered the woman, trying vainly to conceal them beneath her bit of red comforter. "My feet feel the smart of the wet day."

"I suppose your shoes are thin," said the matron.

"She ain't got a rag that she didn't beg for," chimed in the cynic.

"I haven't enough on me to dust a fiddle," confessed the woman. She began to sing:

"I'll give a 'alf crown
To kill a far down—

"I'm a far downer from Ireland," she broke off, "but divil a bit of a home or anything have I now."

"Isn't there a lodging-house where you women can go when this place is closed?" I inquired.

"There's one in Rivington street," replied the cynic, "but no lady would go there. Only common women go on Rivington street. We're ladies. We're no common women."

"An' ye have to pay 20 cents for lodgings," said the one in the calico wrapper, "That'll buy four whiskeys. I'll take the whiskeys and the station-house."

The woman with white hair made her appearance at the corner of the passageway only to be met with shouts to go back where she belonged.

"You only shows the 'eight of ignorance," she observed mildly, waving frantically to me.

"Have you no home?" I asked the newcomer, who had placed her board upon the floor.

"No," she said, beginning to cry; "I earn my livin' by the sweat of me brow. I do anything I gets to do."

"Were you ever here before?"

"Never!" she vowed.

"You're a liar to say so!" shouted the cynic, who never missed a word.

A little later I caught the new woman taking a bottle from the folds of her skirt and giving it to the woman with the calico wrapper. The other woman had finished her labors on the shoes and was calmly puffing away at a big wooden pipe.

SAME STORY OVER AGAIN.

In the next room I found a number of women sitting or lying upon their board beds. One woman had taken off every garment and had made an attempt to cover herself with a bit of a faded black shawl. As it would cover only half her body at once, the result was painful.

I talked to every woman with the exception of the naked one, who slept soundly. It was all the same story. No home, no friends—drink.

"There's no use lying about it," said a sad-faced woman and the most intellectual one in the lot. "Whiskey is our curse. It robs us of everything and we get down to this, and then we drink to forget our misery.

"All we care for is to get enough pennies to buy our whiskey and to have a place to sleep in at night. I don't think we'd even look for shelter at night if the loafers didn't bent us.

"What will become of us when this place closes I can't say, but I suppose the city will take care of us somehow."

"I can't work," chimed in the woman with white hair as she exhibited a crooked wrist. "See! I broke this goin' over a banana peel."

"Do you drink?"

"There's no use lyin' about it; drink is me curse! If it hadn't been for that I'd a-never been here," she answered.

"Did you have a home?" I asked the first woman.

"Yes; and a family. My husband died twenty-five years ago, and all my children since then. I am glad, for one is enough to be in such misery. I can blame drink for everything. What I earn in six months I can lose in one night drinking."

HOPE ONLY TO FORGET.

"Do you want to reform?"

"No. What's the use? I only want enough drink to forget!"

"With a hempty stomache a wee bit o' whiskey will soon make you light in the 'ead," added the white-haired woman.

"And yet I suppose none of you want to die?" I suggested.

"What will we die for? This is bad enough. There are none of us so miserable that we want to die."

"And when you do die, what becomes of you?"

"Oh, the city kindly gives us the Potter's Field," she said, smiling.

The woman in the calico wrapper was getting very merry over her whiskey.

"Come here, darlint," she said to me, and pulling me towards her she jerked me down on her knee and began to sing:

I wish I was in yonder hill,
For there I sat and cried my fill;
For every tear will turn a mill;
Good laugh, Mavourneen!
For the lad of my heart from me has gone;
Time alone can heal my woe,
Since the lad of my heart from me did go;
Oh, Johnny's gone for a soldier.

"How old are you?" I asked to gain my release and stop her singing.

"Ninety-one! That's me, me darlint! I'll fight the divil in the dark. I'm ninety-one years of age, an' I'm only afraid of me own shadow."

The cynic jumped from her board and came to us.

"Ah!" she sneered, "she ain't that old. She's only ninety!"

"I'm ninety-one. I ain't afraid of the divil. I throwed dirty water in the face o' them that wished me well.

For there I sit, an' cry me fill;
Oh, Johnny's gone for a soldier!

I had to go out of the room after a while, because the foul air had given me a pain in my head. As I closed the door I heard the old croaker saying:

"Now yez have done it! She'll be a-puttin' us all in a home. Wboorah! woorah! An' what will ye be a-doin' for company thin! An' yer whiskey! Woorah! woorah!"

This was greeted with yells and oaths that completely drowned whatever else the old croaker said.

I sat with Mr. Thompson and Doorman Smith and admired Minnie, the Fourth Ward cat that has but one ear and the record of being the toughest inhabitant of the precinct. Dogs are her delight, and she makes friends with no one, though the officers are most attentive to her.

When Minnie bored us we went out and listened to the sergeant getting information out of the drunks as they came in.

A LATE COMER.

It was almost midnight when a little old woman slipped in the door. She was very comfortably dressed, but was frightfully wet.

"May I stay all night?" she pleaded timidly. "I have no money."

"Go back there," said the Sergeant.

Doorman Smith stopped her in the second room.

"What's your name?" he said, pen in hand.

"Elizabeth Taylor," she answered in a frightened tone.

"Where's your home?"

"Philadelphia."

"Your age?"

"Fifty-six."

"Ever been here before?"

"No, and, please Gov, if I get work I'll never have to come again."

"Do you have to support yourself?" I asked her.

"I have nothing in the world but what I get with the sweat of my brow," she answered brokenly "All I had have gone before me."

The doorman told her the way to the lodging-room. A little later I followed her to see what she was doing among the rough set. They were all asleep and snoring.

Elizabeth Taylor was sitting on the edge of her board. Her old hands covered her face, and her body was shaken with sobs that she tried to smother.

ONLY TWO AMERICANS.

I closed the door gently. Before went away I copied from the list the names of the women who slept that night, together with their ages and the places of their birth. Here are the names of the women:

Name.	Where Born.
Elizabeth Taylor	Philadelphia, Pa.
Kotia Blackwood	United States
Margaret Kent	England
Mary Voit	Ireland
Lizzie Brown	Ireland
Mary Ryan	Ireland
Ann Johnson	Ireland
Ellen Lally	Ireland
Ellen Conlin	Ireland
Kate O'Leary	Ireland
Mary Kidd	Ireland
Lizzie Murphy	Ireland
Mary Voit	Ireland
Mary Murphy	Ireland
Kate Maulan	Ireland

Only two Americans in the lot. I'm in that thought [illegible] comfort. [illegible]

NELLIE BLY WITH THE MOST MISERABLE WOMEN IN NEW YORK.