

WORK OF POLICE MATRON

Not a Job for a Woman Troubled with Nerves.

FEATURES OF NEW YORK LIFE

Higher Pay and New Rules Have Brought Women of Ability Into the Service—Standard Greatly Raised.

NEW YORK, Sept. 25.—Perhaps no women on the city payroll have fewer bouquets thrown at them than the matrons of the police department. When the department turns out for its annual parade there are no matrons in the procession. When periodical shake-ups take place there is never a mention of the matrons. This, it is said, is a point in their favor, showing as it does that the unsatisfactory or misbehaving matron is rare.

Unobtrusively, patiently it seems, without applause or thanks from any save perhaps the unfortunates who pass through their hands, the police matrons work week in and week out, eight, fourteen, sometimes twenty-four hours at a stretch, with merely brief vacations. Sundays and legal holidays even requiring their services. Therefore it is natural that comparatively few persons should be aware how much of late years the personnel of the police matrons has changed for the better, both physically and mentally.

This change was first remarked when the matrons became recognized members of the police force, eligible to the pension list. This occurred, an official at police headquarters said, ten or twelve years ago. Previous to that candidates who looked fairly healthy and seemed to have a good working knowledge of a matron's duties and were well recommended stood a good chance of getting the job which then carried with it a third less pay than it does now. At that time the age limit was elastic and examiners refrained from putting possibly embarrassing questions as to a candidate's schooling. The question of athletics was not raised at all.

As it became more and more evident that a competent matron was a valuable, indeed a very necessary, adjunct of the station houses of the more populous precincts of New York the commissioners discovered that only women with certain qualifications gave all round satisfaction in the role. That ended the old order of things and the days of pull where the matron was concerned. The new rules made it clear that women applying for the place of police matron must pass a civil examination similar to that required of policemen, that only women between the ages of 30 and 50 should be eligible for that examination, the mental part of which must be preceded by a thorough medical examination. Then pay of matrons was raised to \$1,000 a year.

In March, 1904, to show how desirable the post of police matron was considered, when the last but one civil service examination for police matrons was held, 866 applications were filed and 375 women passed the examinations. Included in this number were school teachers, trained nurses and women of mental attainments who had never worked for a living. Of the 375 perhaps thirty-five have since been engaged to fill vacancies in the police department. The names remaining on the 1904 list were cancelled in June of this year, when a civil service examination was advertised, or at least they will be cancelled so soon as the result of that examination is ascertained. Some of the women on the old list decided to take the examination again and sent in applications to that effect. For the June examination only 466 applications were filed, the falling off in numbers being explained by the difference in the new rules.

The new conditions are far more exacting than the old. For instance, the age limit was cut to between 30 and 40, and

a woman's word was not taken on this point, either. Further, the medical examination was more careful. Candidates were required to go through an unexpected course of exercises, including swinging thirty-pound dumbbells, lifting weights and running, jumping and stooping to show suppleness and agility. No woman under five feet in her stocking feet was admitted at all.

As a result 156 of the 466 failed to pass the medical and physical tests. Fourteen more backed out when the time approached for the mental examination, leaving 296 to take the final test.

"Judging from the looks of the women who entered this year it is more than likely that 40 per cent will pass the mental test," said a member of the examining board.

This test also was made more difficult this year. As usual, it included the ten questions which candidates must answer in writing in a given time, most of which are almost perversely to women unaccustomed to coping with situations such as they suggest. For example, at one of the tables at the last examination sat a young married woman who barely squeezed in on the age limit, being a few days under 30 when her application was mailed. She has two small children and a husband incapable of adequately supporting his family, and although her energy, strength and ambition are equal to attempting almost any task, so far her experience has been limited to home life and good social surroundings.

At the same table sat a school teacher of chubby rather than athletic proportions, nearer 40 than 30 years old, who, almost anyone would be willing to wager, had never seen the inside of a prisoner's cell in her life. But, as the examiner said, appearances are not always to be trusted, for here were these two writing down answers to such questions as these:

Explain clearly what means you would take to maintain discipline and quiet among women under the influence of liquor.

How would you proceed to search a woman accused of thieving?

A girl of 18, a drunken woman and an injured or helpless woman are brought in and turned over to your care. What will you do with each?

A woman of apparent refinement arrested charged with shoplifting, refuses to answer any question put to her and seems on the verge of nervous breakdown. Placed under your charge, how would you proceed to get from her all necessary information? Would you, in the treatment of this woman, make any exception to the treatment accorded the ordinary prisoner, and if so, give reasons in full.

Questions relating to threatened personal violence from prisoners, to prisoners under the influence of drugs and prisoners attempting suicide; to lost children, to remedies for emergency treatment, and so on, were also asked with little or no hesitation. So far as the ten questions weren't this year's test was not much harder than former tests.

The examination also tested the applicant's knowledge of other languages than English. After these matters had been disposed of candidates turned over sheet No. 1 and found on sheet No. 2 this surprise, introduced for the first time to the police matron examination:

Write a complaint of not less than 200 words to the captain of your precinct concerning a patrolman who persists in coming to your office on various pretexts, although you have warned him repeatedly that his action is a violation of the rules of the department and exceedingly annoying to you. Sign this report Jane Doe.

Strange to say, this piece of work, for which extra time was allowed, caused more trouble to at least 50 per cent of the candidates than all the ten questions put together; whether because letter writing is a more difficult feat than simply answering a set of questions or because the possibility of being ever called upon to make such a complaint had been quite unenforced, the examiners were not willing to say. They noticed that the younger and prettier women looked at one another out of the corners of their eyes to see how each was taking it before setting to work.

After an applicant had passed both the physical and mental tests she was required to submit certificates of good character from twenty women of good social

standing living in New York, none of whom was a relative.

After her appointment to a precinct the success or failure of a matron depends largely on how she spends herself during the three months she is on probation. Occasionally there is a resignation before the three months are up, or after a few years of service. Police matrons, especially the widows, have been known to give up their job to get married. Said an official at police headquarters:

"The New York police department now includes sixty-nine matrons, distributed among thirty-five precincts and Bellevue hospital, which has two all the time guarding prisoners under observation in the psychopathic ward. The number of police matrons is regulated by the appropriation allowed, and the present appropriation permits of only seventy."

"In the Tenderloin district, which is the busiest, perhaps, are three matrons, who have eight-hour shifts. In most of the other precincts there are two matrons. In 1908, when a good many changes took place in the department, twelve new matrons were installed, but that was an exception, the usual number taken on in any one year since 1901 being from two to five."

"The status of the police matron has changed so much in a decade that the old and the new type can hardly be compared. Greater proficiency is exacted now, and the rise in salary has encouraged women of good education and some executive ability to enter the field. The prospect of retirement at the end of twenty years on half pay is an inducement to some."

"Once the matron was a nondescript looking person because of her clothing, which was made in any old style and of any sort and color of fabric. For the last five years the police matrons when on duty have worn a uniform corresponding to that of a policeman, shield and all.

"The winter uniform is of dark blue heavy storm serge furnished by the department and comprises a perfectly plain skirt and close fitting blouse fastened straight up the front with a single row of brass buttons. With this is worn a plain white standing collar and black apron. The summer uniform is the same except that a dark blue lawn shirtwaist plainly made and with long sleeves may be substituted for the serge blouse."

One of the best liked of the police matrons, a widow, stationed at one of the busiest precincts, said that speaking merely from what she herself had seen, she thought there were more married than single police matrons, and that the married matrons were the more successful because of their larger experience.

"Intuition," she said, "is one of the principal aids in dealing with women unfortunates, and this is why a matron can often find out more about one of these in five minutes than a policeman can discover in a week. A dull witted woman lacking tact and strong intuitions can't do good work as a police matron, no matter how strong or athletic she may be. She may keep her position, but the work will be hard for her and she will probably have to keep up with a good deal of fault finding from headquarters."

"All women and children arrested and brought to the station house are put in the matron's care as soon as they leave the lieutenant's desk. Immediately one is brought in, in fact, the matron is sent for and goes through the form of searching her before the lieutenant. If the woman is arrested for larceny or attempted suicide a closer search is afterward made in the matron's room, and this is one of the times when physical strength and agility count for a good deal."

"As a precaution there is generally a policeman within call, and once, I remember, I barely had time to give one yell before the woman I was searching had me by the throat trying to choke the life out of me. But that sort of thing doesn't happen often, and it is not the most nerve racking experience of a matron's life. Keeping tabs on women determined to commit suicide is much more nerve wearing to my way of thinking and here is where intuition helps most."

"One night a woman was arrested for attempting suicide in the subway. She was a Swede, young and good looking. I did not reach the lieutenant's desk to take charge of her until after all the facts were submitted by the policeman who brought her in. I knew nothing whatever about her attempt to commit suicide. But no sooner had I looked in her eyes than I suspected she would commit it. I gave her the chance, so I searched her with extra care, finding nothing, though, which could be used for this purpose."

"I put the woman in a cell and turned to other prisoners, uneasily going back in less than five minutes to take a peep at her. I was barely in time to cut her down before she strangled to death in a halter made of a couple of pocket handkerchiefs. I laid the woman on a cot and went for remedies and when I got back she was trying it again, with her shoestrings for a rope. After that, of course, she was sent to Bellevue for observation."

"In spite of what the public may believe moral suasion is the principal means every conscientious matron takes and is expected to take to aid most of the prisoners, and a great deal of missionary work that never gets into religious papers is done by the police matrons. The police matron of today is not easily discouraged even though she does find that perhaps 90 per cent or so of the women put in her care are morally oblique and past help."

"I spent considerable time one night reasoning and pleading with a handsome young woman arrested for keeping a disorderly house. 'Why,' I asked, 'do you not marry and have a respectable home, or else engage in a reputable business? With your intelligence,' I told her, 'you could make good in almost any business.' 'I prefer the business I am in,' she answered coolly. 'My mother and my grandmother followed it, and I consider it perfectly legitimate.'"

"I could do nothing with the girl, she absolutely refused to admit that she was doing anything wrong. And she was perfectly sincere, I believe."

"A curious case was a timid, refined woman brought in for shoplifting. She had stolen about \$20 worth of goods from a department store and the reason she gave was that her own pocketbook containing \$25 had been stolen from her as she was looking at goods on a bargain counter. Afraid to tell her husband of her loss she decided to steal the goods she meant to have purchased, and being new at the game and clumsy she was detected at once. The unusual feature of the case was that she justified her act on the plea that her own pocketbook had been stolen in the same store and that nothing I could say altered that belief in the least."

"A matron gets very little encouragement in her missionary attempts with women arrested for intoxication, and after a few years' experience most of us agree that perhaps all of these, with the exception of 2 per cent, will go lower instead of reforming. The same is true of women rounded up as vagrants."

"Every police matron since the newer regulations went into effect alternates on day and night work. One week her hours are from 8 a. m. to 6 p. m., the next week from 6 p. m. to 8 a. m.—fourteen hours, every other week she serves from 8 o'clock Sunday morning to 6 o'clock Sunday evening morning without relief. This applies to all of the precincts except one or two of the very



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BANK BURGLARY A LOST ART

Persistent Activity of Bankers' Association Spots the Business.

There are small pickings these days for the professional bank burglars and other criminals who prey upon the banking interests. In days of old the field was a fruitful one, but now most of the prominent bankers of the country are members of the American Bankers' association and this association claims the protection of the Pinkertons.

The reason why the skilled bank craftsmen of old have gone to other parts, turned their attention to crooked channels where there is more prospect of getting away with the goods, to use a colloquialism, or retired altogether, is not hard to find. The American Bankers' association, with the aid of its detective ally, never lets up on a criminal.

Though the thief flee to Kamachacka, though he disguise himself, though he take every precaution to obliterate his tracks, the relentless power behind him keeps ever following.

The report which has been made to the Bankers' association by its detective police shows that the "yegg" burglar, a most desperate type of criminal, who first commenced operations in the east in 1886, has been driven beyond the Mississippi, which plays the part that Byrnes' dead line at Fulton street used to play years ago. The yeggs do not dare cross the river to the eastward.

Other facts stand out as an effect of this eternal vigilance of the American Bankers' association. The former professional bank sneak thief has deserted the banks as a bad and unprofitable job. He has now turned his attention to residences, hotels and sleeping cars.

The one-time professional bank "holdup" robbers are either in jail or making tracks out of the zone presided over by the association. Some of them have gone to the Argentine Republic.

In the fifteen years from December, 1894, to September of this year Justice has said don't mislead. More than five out of every six bank robbers arrested have been sent away for long terms of years. In that

time 611 forgers were arrested, 877 have been convicted and twenty-nine are awaiting trial, while fifty-nine were released. The aggregate number of years of those who have been sentenced is 1,277. Of 273 burglars 244 have been convicted, twenty

released and five are awaiting trial. Eleven out of sixteen sneak thieves have been punished, sixteen out of twenty-four holdup robbers and three out of eight who are classified as plain "robbers."—New York Sun.

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