

Lost in the Streets

Operations of the Bureau for the Recovery of Lost Persons, Etc. Officer McWatters in Charge

DURING a considerable portion of his connection with the Metropolitan Police, Officer McWatters had charge of the department denominated "Bureau for the Recovery of Lost Persons;" a position which both his experience and active sympathies with sorrow peculiarly fitted him to fill. Its duties were very onerous, as will be seen by the following article copied from the World newspaper of December 12, 1868, and which cannot fail to greatly interest such of our readers as are not conversant with life and its mysteries in the great Babylon of America.

In a side room of the main hall of the Central Police Headquarters, on the second story, in Mulberry Street, is a desk, at which sits an old rosy-cheeked, white-headed police officer, named McWatters. Officer McWatters is famous in New York. He is a theatrical critic, and his opinions on music and the drama are greatly esteemed by artists; but, like most critics, he is a little dogmatic at times, perhaps.

Officer McWatters is detailed by Inspector George Dilks to take charge of a department organized in November, 1867, to supply a great want, and which is now in successful operation. This department is known as the "Bureau for the Recovery of Lost Persons." Officer McWatters was formerly in the City Hall Precinct, under Captains Thorne and Brackett, and is very well acquainted with the city, so his services have been made available in his new bureau.

MISSING MEN AND WOMEN

The manner of investigation in regard to a missing relative or friend is as follows: As soon as a person disappears from home, the nearest relative, on learning of the missing person, goes to police headquarters and makes application to the "Missing Bureau" for information. The age, height, build; whiskers, if any; color of eyes, dress, hair; the place where last seen, the habits and disposition of the person, are given to the inspectors, and Officer McWatters makes proper entries on his register, which he keeps for that purpose, of all these facts. The personal description of the missing one is compared with the returns made by the Morgue every twenty-four hours to the police inspectors. Should the description answer to the person and clothing of any one found at the Morgue, word is at once sent to the relatives of the joyful news. Besides this, another very necessary precaution is taken to find the person or persons missing. Cards are printed, five or six hundred in number, and sent to all the police offices on special duty in the different metropolitan precincts, with instructions to the captains to have his men make active and energetic search for the person.

TROUBLES ABOUT LOST PEOPLE

Over seven hundred people have been reported as missing, to police headquarters during the past twelve months. Of this number the majority have been found, it is believed, as no record can be kept of those who are not reported when found, by their relatives or friends, to headquarters. Occasionally, a person who reports some one missing belonging to them, will give all the details about him, but if found, will fail to notify the authorities, from a sense of shame where domestic

difficulties have occurred in families, or from laziness, or a sense of forgetfulness. Thus all track is lost of those who have been found unknown to the police, and accurate statistics are baffled in the matter of inquiry.

WHERE AND HOW PEOPLE ARE LOST

The manner in which missing men are advertised, is as follows: A card, of which the following are fair examples, is circulated among the police.

"MISSING.—Morton D. Gifford, about twenty-five years of age, light hazel eyes, brown hair, full beard and mustache same color, five feet six and three quarters inches; has lost two first joints of the middle fingers of right hand. Had on a light brown cloth suit bound with black, the vest cut without a collar, a black cloth overcoat made sack fashion, with black velvet buttons. Was last seen on board the steamer City of Norfolk, running between Norfolk and Crisfield, in connection with the Crisfield, Wilmington, and Philadelphia Railroad Annameric line, on the 3d of February, 1868. Had with him a black leather satchel, containing a full suit of black clothes, hat, linen, &c. Was a soldier in the Union army, and has recently been in business in Plymouth, North Carolina. Any person having any information regarding him will please communicate with Inspector Dilks, 300 Mulberry Street, New York."

"OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF METROPOLITAN POLICE, 300 MULBERRY STREET, NEW YORK, January 11, 1868.

"MISSING—since Thursday evening last, Mary Agnes Walsh, 23 years of age, residing at 28 1/2 Elizabeth Street, five feet high, medium size, slim built, dark complexion, dark-brown hair, dark eyes, had on a black alpaca dress, black plush coat (or cloak), black velvet hat. It is supposed she is wandering about the city in a temporary state of insanity, as she has just returned from the Lunatic Asylum, where she has been temporarily confined for the last three weeks. Any information of the above to be sent to her brother, Andrew Walsh, 281 1/2 Elizabeth Street, or to Inspector Dilks, 300 Mulberry Street."

"MISSING, since Thursday, November 14, John F. McCormick. When last seen, he was on board the steamtug Yankee, at the foot of Charlton Street; age 24 years, eyes and hair dark brown, height five feet four inches, heavy eyebrows. He was dressed in a brown sack coat and brown vest, black pants, flat-crowned black hat. Any person knowing his whereabouts, or having seen him since the above date, will please call at the residence of his uncle, Robert McCormick, No. 12 Talman Street, Brooklyn, or to Inspector Dilks, Police Headquarters, 300 Mulberry Street. November 30, 1867."

"FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD.—Missing from Bay Street, Stapleton, Staten Island, since Wednesday, November 25, 1868, Willy Hardgrove, a boy eight years of age, medium size, dark hair, dark, clear complexion, blue eyes; has a recent scar on his cheek, made by the scratch of a pin; dressed in a dark striped jacket and pants; the pants button on the jacket with light bone buttons; old, strong boots, no hat. He is rather an attractive boy, and very familiar with strangers. It is feared he has been abducted, from the fact of his musical abilities. He can sing, in a good tenor voice, any tune he may hear once played, but can't speak plain. The above reward will be paid by his

father, Terence M. Hardgrove, Stapleton, for such information as will lead to his recovery. Information may be sent to Inspector Dilks, Police Headquarters, 300 Mulberry Street.

"MISSING.—Annie Hearn left her home on Monday last. She is ten years of age, dark blue eyes, black hair cut short; has a slight scar on her left temple. Was dressed in a dark alpaca frock, black woollen santon with white border; black velvet hat, no trimming, high-laced boots, striped stockings. Any information relative to her will be gratefully received by Richard Burk, 217 Madison Street, or Inspector Dilks, 300 Mulberry Street."

"LEFT her home, at Hyde Park, Scranton City, Pa., on Monday, June 14, Sarah Hannaghan, aged 15, tall for her age, short brown hair, light eyes, and fair complexion. Had on a tan-colored dress, light cape, drab hat, trimmed with ribbon of the same color. Had with her a dress with a yellow stripe, made short. Information to be sent to Inspector Dilks, 300 Mulberry Street, New York, or to James Hannaghan, 152 Leonard Street."

"TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS REWARD will be paid for information that will lead to the arrest or recovery of Henrietta Voss, aged 10 years. She left Secausus, Hudson county, New Jersey, Tuesday, July 21, about 7 A. M. She is tall, slim built, and a little stooped; brown hair, blue eyes, long, thin, pale face. Dressed in a full suit of black. The gratitude of a father, who desires to save his daughter, will be added to the above reward. JOHN Voss."

"TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS REWARD.—Missing, an insane man, named Frederick Liebrich, native of Germany, speaks English, German, and French. Supposed to lodge at night in the police station houses about the lower part of the city; is very stupid looking, and clothed in rags. Was last seen in Washington Market, about the middle of last November. He is about 38 years of age, eyes and hair black, large, regular features, and very dark complexion; about five feet ten inches high, stout built, straight and well made. The above reward will be paid for his recovery, or direct evidence of his death, by Frederick Kummich, 82 Washington Street, Brooklyn. Information to be sent to Inspector Dilks, Police Headquarters, 300 Mulberry Street."

LOST CHILDREN

Hundreds of "lost children" bear testimony to the carelessness of mothers and nurses, who are more intent on other business, when their charges stray off, to be found afterwards, in out-of-the-way places, by stray policemen. Quite often a pedestrian will notice, on going along one of our side streets, a young child, its eyes bubbling over with tears, and red from irritation and inflammation, who has strayed from its parents' residence. Sometimes it will have a stick of candy in its infantile fist, or else an apple, or a slice of bread, butter, and molasses, to console it in its wanderings. It is very seldom, however, that these children do not find their way back to their parents, unless that there is foul play, in such instances where a child may be kidnapped by people who are childless, or through their agency, for the purpose of adoption in barren families. The practice of baby-farming has not as yet attained, in America, the height that it has reached in England, and therefore the lives of children are not yet so endangered as they are across the water. It is calculated that at least one thousand children are missing every year in this city, but they are nearly all returned before the close of the day on which they are first missed.

THE DENS OF MIDNIGHT

If the thousand and one noisome crannies, nooks, and dens of this great city could be exposed to view, day after day, the body of many a missing man and woman might be found festering and rotting, or their bones bleaching, for want of decent burial. Where do the bodies come from that are fished up, bloated and disfigured, night after night, by the Water Police, in haunts of the docks, and from the slimes of the Hudson? It is fearful to think of men, influenced by liquor, who, with their gold watches, pocket-books, and other valuables, exposed in the most foolish manner, are to be seen, night after night, in the dens and hells of this great, sinful city. Many of these men are from far-off country villages and happy homes, and when thrown into our streets at night, under the flare of the gas lamps, and among crowds of showily dressed women, whose feet are ever downward into the abyss, it becomes almost impossible for them to resist the thousand and one meretricious temptations that are placed before them.

THE HORROR OF A BREAKING DAWN

Instances may be related of how men disappear, and are never heard of to be recognized. A well-to-do person from Ohio, who had never visited New York before, pays a visit to this city, and stopping at a down-town hotel, sallies out in the evening in search of what he has been taught, by his limited course of reading to call "adventures." He believes, in his Ohio simplicity, that he will meet with a beautiful and rich young lady in New York, who, struck with his rural graces and charms, will at once accept his hand and farm. Well, he takes a look at the "Black Crook," or "White Fawn," or "Genevieve de Brabant," and, returning late to his down-town hotel, is struck by the beauty and grace of a female form that glides before him on his way thither. Pretty soon she makes a signal to him that cannot be mistaken, and our Ohio friend, rather astonished at the freedom of the aristocratic and well-bred ladies of the metropolis, but nothing loath, hastens to her side, and accompanies her to her richly voluptuous mansion in Bleecker, Green, Mercer, or Crosby Streets. In the watches of the night he awakens to find the aristocratic lady fastened on his throat, and a male friend of hers, with a villainous countenance, poisoning a knife for a plunge in his neck. The work is done quickly; a barrel well packed, or a furniture chest, placed in a carriage at night, can be taken up the Hudson River road, and there dropped in the river, and after a day or so the head of another dead man will be found eddying and floating around the rolling piers near the battery, his face a pulp, and no longer recognizable. The sun shines down on the plashing waters, but the eyes are sightless, and never another sun can dim their brilliancy or splendor. It is only another missing man without watch, pocket-book, or money on his person.

MISERY, SHAME, AND DEATH

Another missing instance. A beautiful girl, born in a village on the Sound, where the waters of that inland sea beat, and play around the sandy pebbles of a land-locked inlet, is reared in innocence and virtue, until she reaches her seventeenth year. She is as lovely as the dawn, has had no excitement—but the Sunday prayer-meeting, and her life, peaceful and happy, has never been tainted by the novelty of desire. At seventeen she visits New York for the first eventful time in her life. She is dazzled with its theatres, its balls, its Central Park; the Broadway confuses and intoxicates her, but opera has divine charms for her musical ear, and she is escorted, night after night, by a man with a pleasing face and a ready tongue. She is yet white as the unstained snow.

One night they take a midnight sleigh ride on the road, and stop at a fashionable-looking restaurant in Harlem Lane. She is persuaded to take a glass of champagne, and finally to drink an entire bottle of champagne. That night the world is torn from under her feet. She has tasted of the Apples of Death. She returns to her peaceful home, by the silken waves of the Sound, a dishonored woman. To hide her shame, she returns to New York; but her destroyer has gone—she knows not whither. Then the struggle begins for existence and bread. She is a seamstress, a dry-goods clerk, but her shame finds her out when an infant is born to her unnamed. One night, hungry, and torn with the struggle of a lost hope, she rushes into the streets and seeks the river. On a lone pier she seeks refuge from her "lost life." The night-watchman, anxious about the cotton and rosin confided to his charge, does not hear the cry of "Mother" from a despairing girl, or the plunge into the gloomy, silent river below. She is not found for days after, and then her once fair face is gnawed threadbare with the incisors of crabs, and the once white neck, rounded as a pillar of glory, is a mere greenish mass of festering corruption. She is not recognized, and thus fills the page devoted to missing people.

FINIS

Then there are the cases of girls who disappear from their homes outside of New York, and descend into her brothels, where they find rich raiment, rich food, a merry and unceasing round of gayety, champagne and lovers, which they could never hope for where they came from. These girls leave home very often through sensuality or laziness,—for girls are lazy as well as boys,—and when missing, are generally found in brothels, which, as a general thing, they will not leave for their parents. Then there are husbands and wives who quarrel foolishly, and separate to vex each other, and are missing for years, to finally be forced into other illegal ties. And there is a case of a young man, twenty, married and rich, who leaves his wife; is gone for twelve months, and is found in New Orleans, when he tells those who find him that he has been very sick, and was forced to leave his happy home.

There is also, as it is well known, a great number of infamous houses in this city where abortion is openly practised, and where whole hecatombs of innocent children are slaughtered, to hide the shame of their guilty mothers. How many wealthy and refined girls are to be found in these slaughter-houses, concealed there to hide the evidences of their indiscretion, by their parents or relatives, whose social position would be lost did the consequences of such indiscretion show themselves? The mothers are left to die in agony, again and again; and there is no coroner's inquest or public burial; for are there not scores of obliging physicians to hush the matter up?

And then, again, our private lunatic asylums. How many men and women are spirited away to those tombs of living men, where remonstrance or clamor is useless unless the public press tracks the injury, as in the case of a well-known naval officer, who was most unjustly confined, as the investigation proved, and was only released by the agitation made by *The World* newspaper.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied; or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Lives of American Detectives*. Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1871.