

AN OPIUM EATER'S CONFESSIONS.

Queer Experience of Ella Thatcher, Eva Hamilton's Former Chum.

A Morphine Victim's Descent from the Bright Visions of Bliss to the Depths of Dark Despair.

What She Knows About the Famous Baby Beatrice and Mrs. Robert Ray Hamilton.

"Yes, I am a victim of the opium habit, and came here in the hope of being cured," said Ella Thatcher, a comely young woman of twenty-two, in the hospital ward of the workhouse on Blackwall's Island yesterday afternoon.

Miss Thatcher, as she is usually called, or Mrs. Thatcher, as she prefers to be called, possesses a petite, graceful figure, which appeared to advantage in her close-fitting costume of gray cloth.

She has good features, with large, expressive, dark eyes, and her complexion is clear white, almost to transparency, the effect of her long-continued use of morphine and kindred drugs.

A morphine victim, an acquaintance of the

notorious Eva Hamilton, a queer woman with a queer history, she finds herself now in the workhouse on Blackwall's Island as the result of unusual and somewhat mysterious legal proceedings.

THE FACTS IN THE ODD CASE.

The records in her case show that she was originally arrested on a warrant obtained by Anthony Comstock. She was charged with exhibiting, at her apartments, No. 130 West Thirty-first street, photographs of women taken nude, or with such scant drapery as to bring the owner or possessor of them within the pale of the law prohibiting the exposure of immoral pictures. Mr. Comstock appeared against her, and, when

arraigned in Special Sessions, she was held for trial.

The first surprising development in her case appeared in the shape of a lawyer, who took an active interest in her, and volunteered his professional services in her behalf, much to her astonishment, as she imagined that she was to be vigorously prosecuted, by order of Mr. Comstock. The second surprise was an appeal from Comstock himself, addressed to the Court, in which, instead of prosecuting the accused, he asked that she be released.

He represented that Ella Thatcher had long been addicted to the opium habit and that her condition was such as to require immediate medical attention. He desired to have her committed to the workhouse, so that she might be treated at the Charity Hospital there, on her own admission that she had no means of support.

Upon this representation Justices Smith, Kilbreth and Ford, in the Court of Special Sessions, dismissed the charge, whereupon Mr. Comstock took her at once to the Tombs Police Court. Here she found the lawyer who had interested himself in her behalf, and he and Mr. Comstock urged her to make an affidavit acknowledging herself without means of support, so that she could be sent to the Charity Hospital for six months.

This was another surprise, and she asked in astonishment for an explanation of this change of tactics on the part of Mr. Comstock, who had caused her arrest and who had appeared at first so anxious to prosecute her. She got none, however, save the statement that they were taking a friendly interest in her. She at first refused to sign the affidavit, but finally yielded to the solicitations and was formally committed for a period of six months.

IS SHE TO BE A WITNESS AGAINST EVA? This action excited surprise and led to some gossip to the effect that Mrs. Thatcher was wanted as a witness in the Hamilton

case, and that she could give important testimony bearing upon the parentage of Baby Beatrice. If she had been sentenced in Special Sessions she would have gone to the penitentiary, whereas if she was committed to the Charity Hospital from the Tombs her release could be ordered by one of the police court magistrates.

This would enable those interested in the Hamilton case to produce the girl whenever she might be wanted. Whether or not there is any truth in these theories remains undetermined, but the facts have been established that Ella Thatcher and Eva Hamilton were at one time friendly occupants of the same flat, and that they parted on unfriendly terms. It is now apparent that Mrs. Thatcher will not give any evidence that would help the widow in a suit to claim a share of the Hamilton estate, or to prove that the child Beatrice is the daughter of Robert Ray Hamilton. Since she was removed to Blackwall's Island Hospital repeated efforts have been made to induce her to talk about her life, her relations with Mrs. Hamilton and her experience as an opium eater, but prior to the visit of THE WORLD reporter she had declined to speak on any of these subjects. She was in this frame of mind when the representative of THE WORLD met her, and it was only after some hesitation that she consented to speak.

At the beginning of the interview Mrs. Thatcher complained of having undergone intense sufferings, since she had begun to abstain from the use of opium. She spoke particularly of violent cramps, from which she had received little or no relief since she entered the institution, although she acknowledged that she believed her general condition was better than when she was received in the hospital.

"So you are what is termed an opium fiend?" asked the writer.

"YES, OPIUM HABIT CONTRACTED."

"I believe that's what you call it," she re-

plied, smiling. "I began the use of opium in the form of morphine a few years ago, and it has grown upon me so that it seems almost impossible to get rid of it without subjecting myself to a course of medical treatment such as I came here to undergo."

"How did you acquire the habit?"

"I began with the use of morphine, taking it in solution of quarter-grain doses to relieve violent pains with which I was suffering. The remedy acted so well that I continued its use until the pains left me."

"The effect of the drug was delightful, soothing and agreeable to an extent that cannot be realized by one who has never indulged in it. It was a revelation to me, and the dreams of bliss that followed its use were such as only opium-eaters have; but merely at first, remember. I did not understand the fatal consequences, however, and used it again and again, with no sense of the danger I was in."

"Suddenly, when it was too late, I awoke and found myself the slave of a habit which clings to me with a tenacity not to be described and hardly to be realized by any one except a victim. I tried to break off then, and I experienced to the full the horrors of reaction and the revenge which outraged nature takes upon us. My life was a waking nightmare. Everything was dark, all seemed hopeless, I was filled with anxiety and gloomy forebodings."

"Again and again I tried to break off, and again I fell into my old ways. When the horror seemed more than I could endure I would resort to the drug, and its use instantly changed the face of everything. All was rose-colored after those fatal doses, and although I now realized the danger and knew what the end would be, I could not stop. The sensation? Well, I do not want to say anything which would lead others to make the same horrible mistake I have made. But I can only describe the sensation by saying that it is one of most absolute happiness. The whole world

changes; one feels capable of accomplishing anything; nothing has power to trouble or annoy. One feels above everything earthly and seems to float off in a sea of rest and calm and peacefulness. That may seem poetical, but no words can describe the dreams and joys and fantasies of the opium-eater."

THE TERRIBLE REACTION.

"But don't forget the reaction which is sure to come and which plunges the soul into an abyss of misery and causes it to experience an eternity of agony in a few hours. That's the point of which men and women lose sight when they begin the opium habit. A whole lifetime of happiness would be dearly purchased by one such night as the opium-eater spends when she is abstaining from the drug and making a mighty struggle against a habit which has absolutely mastered her. Ah, yes, there is a reverse to the picture."

"My favorite form of using the drug was in a morphine solution, which I placed on my tongue, whence it was quickly absorbed into the system. Of course, like all 'fiends,' as you call us, I increased the dose from time to time until I could safely use three or four grains a day. I also used hypodermic injections, but the most agreeable manner of taking was in the form of the solution."

"Did it use render me unconscious?"

"When I first began it did, but after I became accustomed to it it produced only delightful dreams, from which I hoped I would never be aroused. All the world was mine. The most beautiful flowers sprang up at my feet, the brightest-tinted foliage surrounded me, the most delicious strains of music filled the air and the whole of nature was transfigured for me. If heaven is anything like those dreams it must be a charming place to live in."

"Did the use of opium affect my general health? Not that I am aware of, yet, although I know it is only a matter of time,

I am as stout as I wish to be and my appetite has been good."

"Of course my sufferings since I came here have been horrible. Just as I told you they are when one is trying to break away from the habit. All the rose-color has disappeared, and everything around me is black—black! Hopes, ambitions and desires have all departed. In their place came the most horrible, the most ghastly fantasies and forms. Death a thousand times seems preferable to such a horrible existence. Of course as soon as I resort again to the drug the creatures of my fancy vanish and I am again happy. Knowing what the change would be, can you wonder that one yields to the temptation?"

"Have you stopped taking the drug since you arrived here?"

"I have taken very little of it, and under the medical treatment I expect to receive I hope to be cured of the habit, but, as you can imagine after what I have said, it is a difficult thing to accomplish. If my sufferings become more severe they will, I understand, give me small doses, gradually lessening the amount, until the use of the drug is wholly discontinued. I am discouraged, of course, but in calmer moments I hope, before I leave the hospital, to be cured of the habit which has been the curse of my life, and which has placed me where I am. I can say no more on this subject now."

"A friend of mine," she continued, "has prepared a statement of my case, which is correct, and which you may publish if you care to do so. For the accuracy of it I am responsible."

HER RELATIONS WITH EVA HAMILTON.

"You say that Mrs. Hamilton lived in your flat in Forty-sixth street?" inquired the reporter after glancing over this document.

"Yes, she did, or rather Eva Mann did, as she was then known as the wife of Joshua Mann, though Hamilton visited her two or three times a week. Sometimes he re-

mained all night, and on the occasion of these visits Joshua Mann kept out of the way. She lived with me for three or four months and upon leaving my house went to May's Landing, where the attack was made on Nurse Donnelly."

"Did she have any children with her while she was at your home?"

"Yes, she had two babies there at different times. She said that they were children of a friend of hers and that she was very much attached to them."

"Whom did she represent herself to be at this time?"

"She represented herself to me as the wife of Joshua Mann, and so, I understood, told her expenses. She never claimed Hamilton as her husband."

"Do you know of her ever having had a child of her own?"

"No, I never heard her say that she had had a child, and I don't believe she ever did have one. Whose child Baby Beatrice is I don't know, but I don't believe she is the mother nor that Hamilton was its father. Where she got it from I don't know. I hope I won't be summoned as a witness in the case, but if I am compelled to go to court, I'll tell all I know."

"What was Eva Mann's reputation or character while she lived with you?"

"It was pretty bad. I don't claim to be a very good woman, but I am a better woman than she was. Before she left she 'beat' me out of a week's board—\$12—and has never since paid the money, and I don't expect that she ever will."

It was evident that Mrs. Thatcher knew more about the famous Hamilton baby mystery than she acknowledged, but the closest questioning failed to elicit anything more bearing on the case. When placed on the witness stand she may become more communicative.

Grand Lodge, I. O. F. A. L. Annual Ball.

The annual ball of Grand Lodge, No. 24, Independent Order Free Sons of Israel, will be held in the Tentative Assembly Rooms to-morrow evening. The arrangements are in the hands of Chairman Henry Siegel.