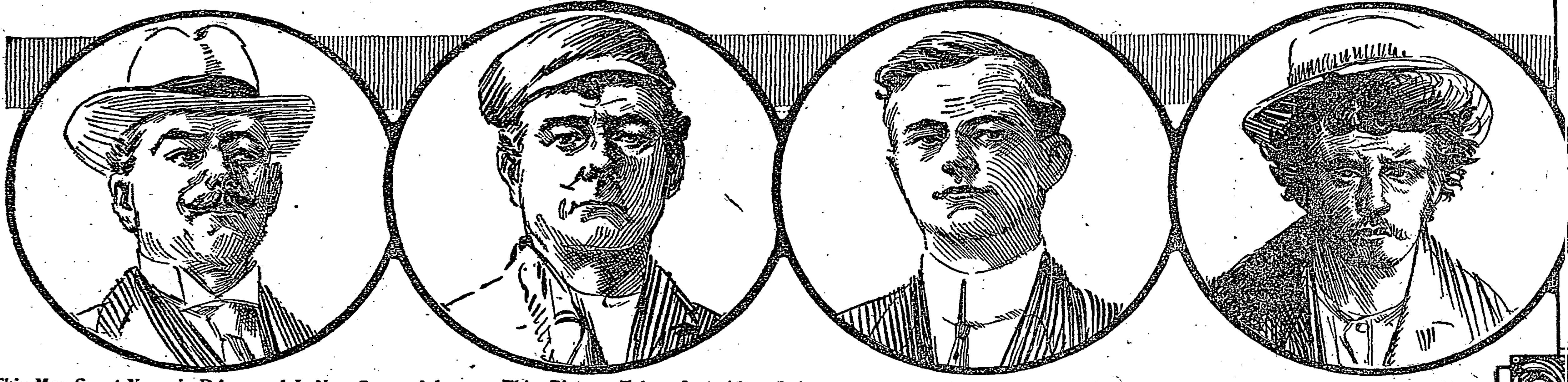


# FORMER CONVICTS WHO HAVE PROVED SUCCESSSES

When the World Gave them a Chance After Coming From Prison They "Made Good," and Are Now Respected Citizens.



This Man Spent Years in Prison and Is Now Successful. This Picture Taken Just After Release. A Reformed Convict. How He Looked When Sentenced to Long Term.

**A**FTER doing his best to find some work for an ex-convict, Chief Agent Rodgers of the Prison Association was rewarded in the following fashion: The ex-convict laid a crude, childish trap, into which, needless to say, the agent did not fall, and which he even affected not to see. He knew better than to get incensed over such a treacherous attempt. He waited, and presently a letter came from the seemingly hopeless wretch, which read as follows:

"I am glad you treated my request favorably the other day. I only made it to put your association in a bad position. I prefer to be perfectly frank about it." Then he proceeded to apologize.

Ingratitude? No. Insanity? Neither. Only, after a man has served several years in a State prison he is no longer a normal being; prison air and prison diet have considerably reduced his vitality; the cloistered silence, the monotony of the work, have prepared very badly his brain and his nerves for the bustle, the noise, and the rush of the city in which he suddenly finds himself.

Worse yet, the unexpressed bitterness of many years, which never found an outlet, an unavoidable grudge against society, which nothing silences any longer, are apt to translate themselves into deeds which only a psychologist can appreciate at their real value. In the case we just mentioned anger soon subsided and repentance followed the absurd attempt at wreaking vengeance upon a man who, of all men, should have been spared. Fortunately, the intended victim had observed such cases before.

It is society which will take into account an ex-convict's weakened physique, his oversensitive nerves, and his temporarily unbalanced mentality, and give him work suitable to his condition until he has readapted himself to the world from which he has been estranged several years, the man will generally make good. Of course, the mentally weak or the degenerate will suffer relapse after relapse until they join the willful phalanx of "ifers." But the average individual given a chance to reform, will reform.

Only years of unnatural prison life make the prisoner an unnatural individual. Society, which in self protection closed prison bars behind him, must be especially tactful in handling him during his physical and mental convalescence. And, also, we know how tenderly society handles the ex-convict or the reformatory boy.

When it does not refuse them employment with the tender remark "No jail-birds wanted" it gives them chores which would discourage healthier men; and the suspicious glance with which it follows every one of their movements would drive to crime the most righteous.

"Put a man on parole before the end of his term," said O. F. Lewis, President of the Prison Association, "give him a chance to work out the balance of his term in a natural way, in the proper environment, make him feel that in hours of discouragement he can grasp a friendly, sympathetic hand, and he will in the majority of cases make good."

This sounds optimistic, especially when you remember that in the little office on East Fifteenth Street five men sit as his brothers and advisers to some seven hundred reformatory boys on parole and a couple of hundred men released from State prison.

The most striking example of what can be done is illustrated by the case of B., who occupies at present the position of Chief of Police for a great Southern railroad system. Fifteen years ago he was released from the State prison, where he had served his third term. To the Chaplain of the prison, who had taken a particular interest in him, he explained, as every convict unfortunately does, that he "never had a chance." The Chaplain prevailed upon the President of a railroad to "give him a chance." B. was put at work in the yards.

He did not confine himself, however, to the strict discharge of his duties, but proceeded to acquire a technical education. Owing to his knowledge of the crooked tricks through which railroad supplies and equipment are looted, he presented to his superiors several suggestions for stopping up leaks, catching gangs at work, or detecting thieving employees.

His system having proved successful, he was promoted rapidly, given more and more important posts; his conduct, rigorously watched by the President and the Secretary of the company, never gave occasion for criticism, and at the present day he is drawing a comfortable salary of \$4,000 a year. Besides the prison authorities, the Chaplain who befriended him, the President and the Secretary of

the company, no one knows that B. ever served three terms. In fact B. never served three terms. It was only his old self, which died when the new man was really "given a chance."

Neither heredity nor environment can prevail in dragging a man down if he is treated with kindness. C. is now superintendent of a large chemical factory at a salary of \$2,500 a year, and yet let us see in what mire he had to flounder once. He lived in a shabby neighborhood with his drunken parents; his father never worked more than a couple of days every week, just long enough to keep himself provided with whisky and beer.

The mother died, and after that the boy and his young sister got food when they went out to get it; nor did any one care how or where they got it. After food they needed clothes, and after securing clothes they naturally wanted money. Drifting a little further every day the boy finally drifted into a reformatory.

A parole officer took him in charge; a position was found for the father, who finally made to realize his awful responsibility in his boy's fate, quit drinking then and there and has worked steadily ever since. The boy was placed in a chemical factory; a desire to rise prompted him to buy books on chemistry, to take night courses, and now, after seven years of hard, steady work, the youthful burglar has been placed in full charge of the factory which once employed him as an errand boy.

It may surprise many people to learn that reformatory boys often cause their benefactors more worry than older offenders. When a grown-up sees clearly the error of his ways and is given a "real chance" he seldom goes back to his former mode of life. Young boys, however, having tasted the tempting fruit of adventure are loath to give up "fun"

asked every patron to leave, closed the doors, emptied every bottle of liquor into the sink and telephoned to the brewers to call for their barrels of beer. A week after he had reinvested his money in real estate, employing in his office his son, who has led ever since an exemplary life.

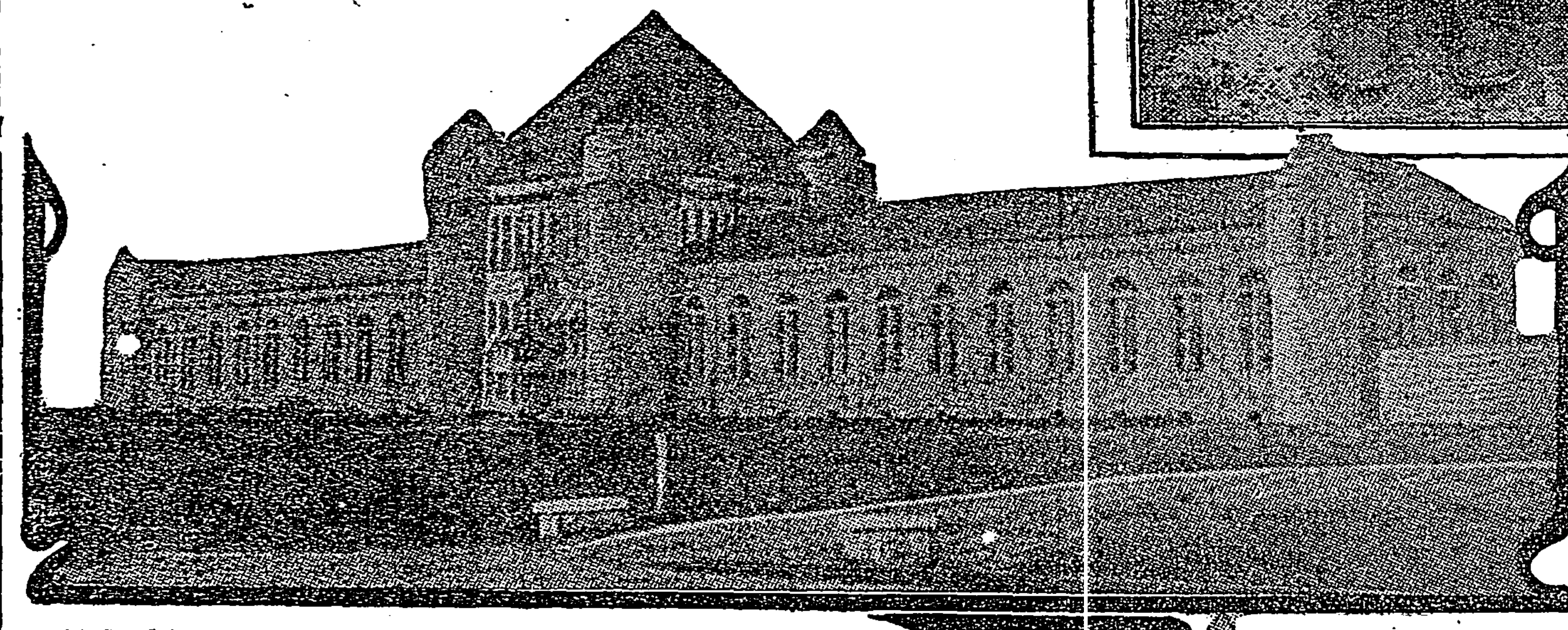
E— had been sent to State Prison on many charges, among others desertion and bigamy; his wife, who had supported herself and her two children on \$5 a week, which she earned by scrubbing floors in office buildings, died, leaving a little insurance policy worth \$187. Her brother, a drunkard, took charge of the funeral and presented a bill for expenses amounting to \$184; then he abandoned the children.

The death of his faithful wife, the plight of his children brought about an entire revulsion of feeling in the convict, who until then had professed a perfect indifference toward his family; he was released on parole, and has been employed ever since by one of the officers of the association, who never had a more faithful servant.

A fact which makes it particularly hard for the ex-convict to keep straight after his release is that "starting again at the bottom of the ladder" means scanty food, miserable lodgings, and other hardships, especially when the man is married.

F— came out of the State Prison with the usual \$10 in cash and what the State had accumulated for him at the rate of 2 cents a day. A position was secured for him at \$1 a day.

Had his guardian angel, the Prison Association, abandoned him then, how long would he and his wife have borne the privations entailed by "straight living" on \$1 a day? The hope to "find" something big would have sooner or later led him to commit burglary.



The Napanock Reformatory.

and to settle into a sedentary occupation. In one case while engaged in redeeming a youthful offender a parole officer brought the father to a full conception of his responsibilities. D—'s father kept a saloon whose back room was frequented by rather low characters of both sexes. The boy made regrettable acquaintances which one day led him into evil ways. A few days before he left the reformatory a parole officer called on the father, who was greatly attached to his son, and showed him that he was entirely to blame for the young man's disgrace, and that unless conditions changed radically in his saloon, the boy's career might have a tragic ending.

The father listened in anger, first, then in silence. Then an almost dramatic scene was enacted: The saloon keeper

A paltry two hundred dollars stood between that man and success. All his household effects and furniture had been stored away when he was sent up; the unpaid storage bills amounted to \$200. A kind friend of the association advanced the cash, and now man and wife are conducting a very prosperous boarding house in the suburbs.

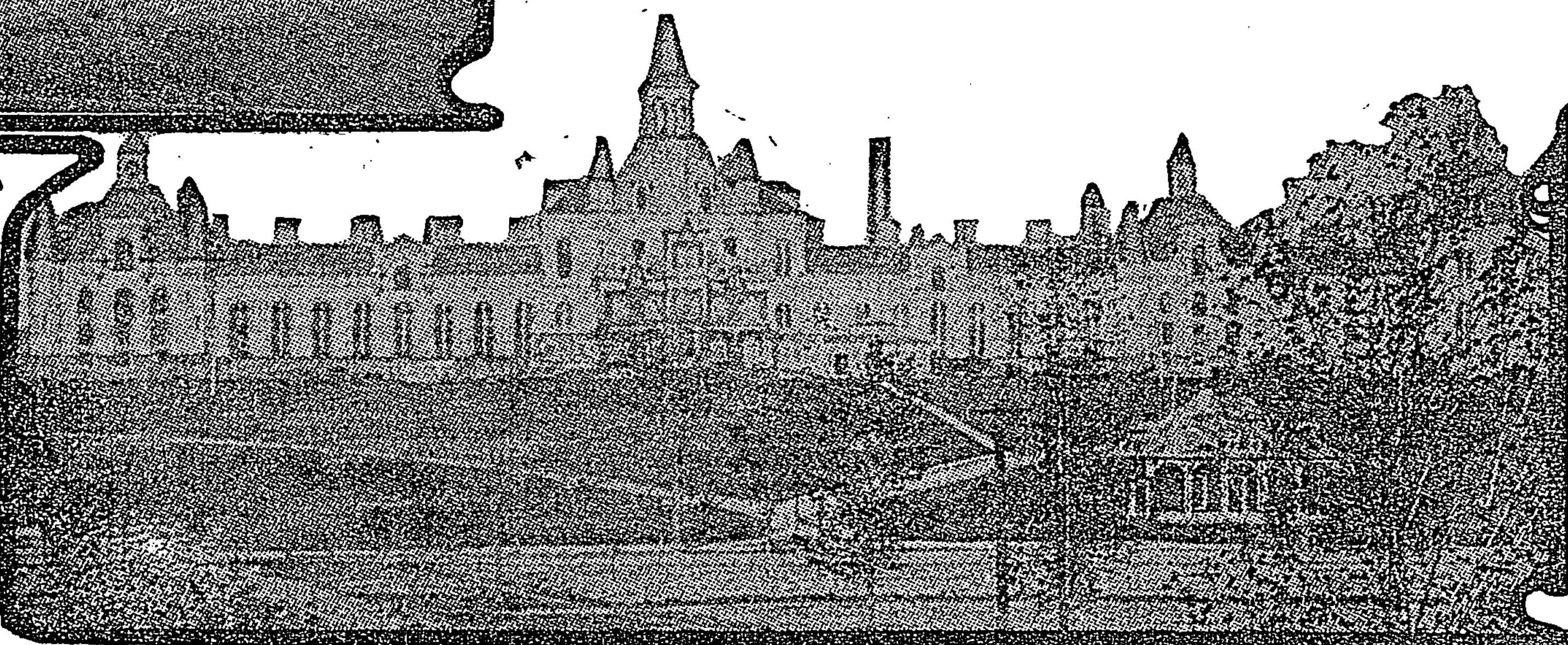
Many are the cases of ex-convicts who have made good; the majority of them are most uninteresting; there is no spectacular feature about them; a simple, homely tale of an error atoned for, and of hard, modest, obscure toil. A man's arrest makes a good news item; a man's victory over his old self, though more glorious than a great tactician's victory in war, very seldom thrills the reading public.



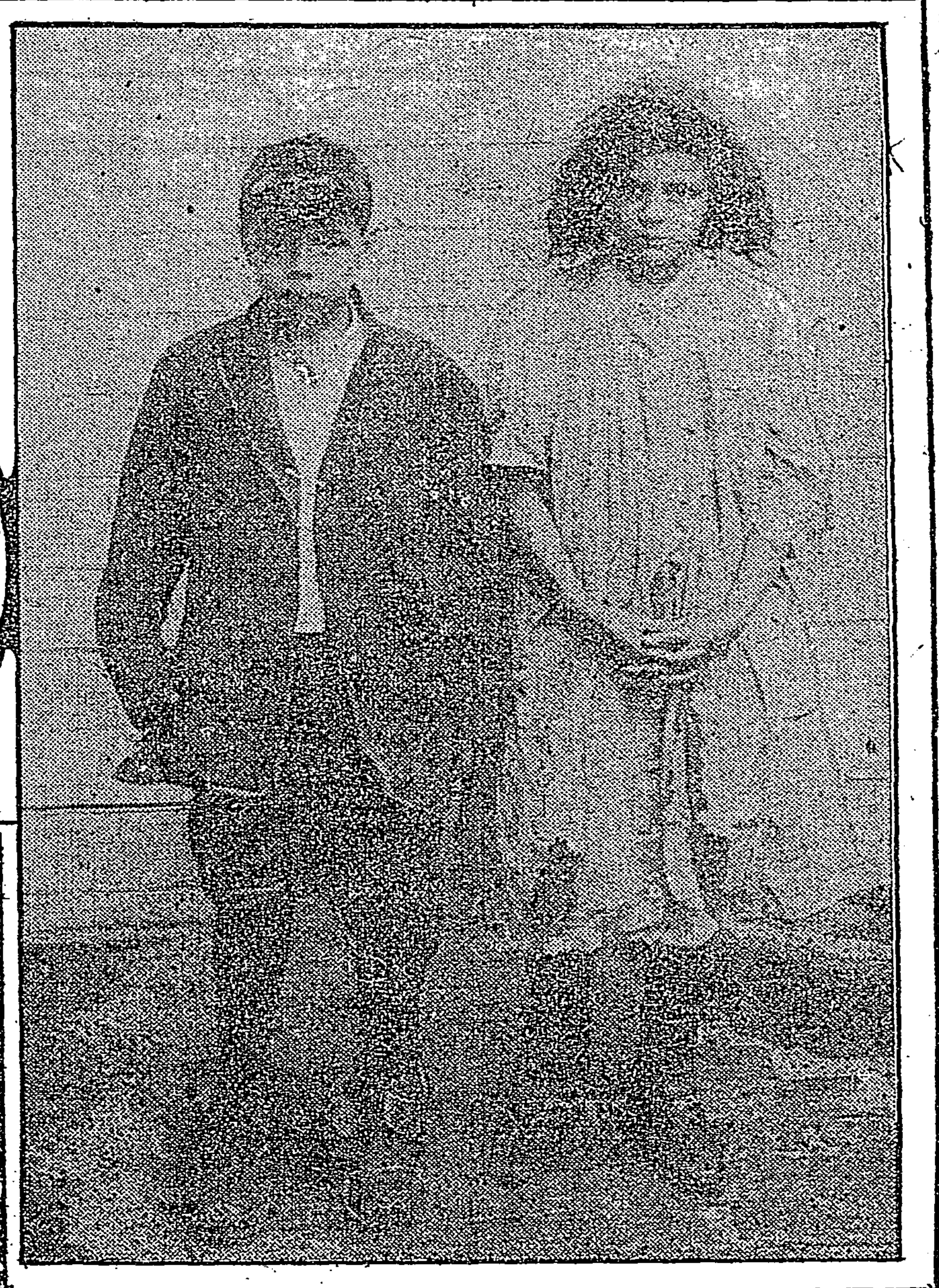
The Former Convict's Children After the Father Made Good.

As said at the beginning, many paroled or discharged convicts give during their first weeks of freedom the impression that their benefactors' efforts are being wasted.

The man who wrote to a parole officer the letter we quoted, pleaded to be granted an audience by the "Round Table,"



The New York State Reformatory at Elmira.



A Convict's Family.

a club of warm-hearted business men organized by O. F. Lewis, Secretary of the Prison Association, and which seconds his efforts in placing ex-convicts.

The man appeared before the Round Table "half-shot" and made an absurdly disconnected speech, chewing gum all the while. A member of the club in spite of all appearances gave him a position as accountant. He was discharged as incompetent. In another position as bookkeeper, however, he proved a faithful, systematic employe. His convalescence was over.

Another man softened and made lazy by fifteen years of low fare and little work in Sing Sing was, too soon after his release, placed at good wages in a machine shop. Neither his desire to succeed nor the liberal remuneration offered could enable him in his physical condition to keep the pace set in that shop.

After being removed frequently by the foreman, he threw up the job in despair. Later on, easier work was provided for him; his muscles became firmer, his nerves steadier, and he is now one of the hundreds of thousands of honest manual workers whose doings history does not record.

Very often society shows a criminal negligence in liberating men or boys without providing them with the essential requisites for making a living. An Elmira boy was paroled, though he was at the time unable to read or write; he went to work for an expressman; the tasks which an ordinary boy would have performed in seven or eight hours kept him out until sometimes as late as midnight; obliged as he was to rely on passers-by to read the address on every package, he wasted much time in wild driving about the city, overworking himself and almost killing the horse hitched to his wagon. In spite of his good will, he could not keep any position, and was returned to

Elmira, where he is now being taught to read and write.

There are many other evils in our prison system which defeat a convicted man's desire to reform. No words could describe them more vividly than the opening paragraph of the sixty-fourth report of the Prison Association:

"The experience of years has shown some of the manifest defects of our prison system. It is costly, antiquated, ineffective. We do not refer to those defects which are due to poor administration and which might be cured by a change of officers, but to those which inhere in the system itself, and which only can be remedied by legislative action.

"1. Several thousand boys, convicted of minor offenses, are shut up by the State and deprived of the very influences which they need to make them better.

"2. Several thousand persons are annually punished for crime who need to be treated for dysomania.

"3. Tramps and vagrants shifted from county to county and from jail to jail are encouraged in their wandering habits.

"4. Instead of sending prisoners to hard labor, we sentence several thousand of them to compulsory idleness, which is still harder on the prisoner, harder on the taxpayer, and harder on the free workman."

Criminologists seem to agree on the fact that prisons of the abhorrent sort where convicts are merely cooped up without any thought being given to their physical, moral, or intellectual improvement, breed more inveterate criminals than vice, drink, or poverty.

A large percentage of offenders sentenced for a definite term of years to such institutions upon regaining freedom are worse than they were upon entering, and more than ever likely to return to a criminal career. The influences and experiences of prison life are in many cases fatal to them. First offenders, for example, condemned to consort with habitual or professional criminals, (and this is true in detention prisons and county jails) become acquainted with phases and regions of criminality hitherto unsuspected.

Crime, from the narration of experts, becomes invested with a sort of glamour or fascination that often overcomes the repentant first offender, and enlists him as a recruit for life in the great army of criminals.

Besides the corruptibility, the petty fraudulencies and "grafting" of prison guards and keepers tend to make prisoners regard honesty as the worst policy.

The world is moving, however, and prison reform is going on at a swift pace. In his address before the National Conference of Charities and Corrections Henry Elsworth Gregory said:

"Instead of a great, gloomy building where prisoners of all grades of criminality, without classification, are assembled under one roof, with the ill-lighted, ill-ventilated cell blocks, and other features more or less abominable, the model prison will consist of a group of buildings situated upon a farm or tract of land sufficiently extensive to admit of agriculture on a large scale. (This system has given wonderful results in Germany, in Switzerland, and nearer us in the city of Cleveland.)

"The men should spend a large part of the day in the open air, engaged in farm work or road making. There should also be one or more buildings for instruction in the various trades and industries, in order to prepare the men for self-support after liberation. Provision should also be made for the simple education which many prisoners so greatly need.

"I am by no means without hope that prisons will eventually be reformatory institutions in the best sense; that in structure, location, management, the improvements demanded by an intelligent solicitude for the reformation of the criminal population, and so indirectly for society itself, will be adopted."

"When that day comes it will be an easy thing indeed for any ex-convict to 'make good.'"

## Her Forgiveness

**M**ARJORIE, age 5 years, had been suffering a painful but necessary treatment from the hands of a sympathetic family physician who had always been a great favorite with the little girl. After all was over the child presented the doctor with a cluster of sweet peas. Upon leaving the mother asked Marjorie if she could forgive the doctor for hurting her. She shyly whispered:

"My forgiveness was in those flowers, mother."