

THE PERILS OF THE TERRIBLE DRUG HABIT AND THE STORY OF TWO YOUNG BOYS

BY JANE WHITAKER

The first time it was brought home to me what a terrible thing the drug habit is for its victims, how merciless it is, how moral destroying it is, was about five years ago in the old Harrison street police station.

A girl, whose mother said she was 22, but who looked 40, stood like a senseless animal, grinning out of a mouth that sagged, her eyes utterly without a gleam of intelligence, and she was charged with robbing one negro of \$2 that she might give it to another negro for cocaine.

The judge looked at her with more or less disgust. "You are the lowest specimen of womanhood I have ever seen," he said. "You have dragged yourself through the mire of the gutter. I am going to send you to the House of Correction for six months."

For a few seconds it seemed that she didn't understand and then, so quickly that it brought some of us to our feet, startled, she screamed:

"No, no, for God's sake, don't send me there! Don't send me there. For God's sake!" and still shrieking she was led away to the Hell she feared because the House of Correction meant she would not get the drug and she would suffer tortures.

For months the scene haunted me, even in my sleep, and then it faded away until the other day.

In the Boys' Court were two mere boys charged with robbery. One was 20, the other 19. Both were well educated. Both had fine faces.

But their hands trembled pitifully and the voice of the one who told a very plausible story, shook.

They were both victims of drugs. The one who was 19 said he had fallen off a train and been hurt. Then he had been taken to a hospital where hypodermics were administered to him. And to quote his own words:

"When they let me out the bones

were mended and the bruises healed, but I was worse off, for I had the habit and it has clung to me. Once I broke away for three weeks and went through torture, and then I met some fellows who offered me cocaine and I was back again."

And the lad of 20 told how easy it is to procure drugs in this city. All he did was to write his own prescription, and for a few dollars each time for a thing worth perhaps a fifth of those few dollars druggists asked no questions, but pocketed money that was blackened with the corruption of promising manhood.

The boy of 20 tried to suicide the night before. The excitement of the arrest broke him down and he was strapped. The officer said he got the belt off and put it around his neck and hung himself to the cell. And if he had succeeded in that attempt at suicide the men who sell this thing that is devilish in its power would have been murderers.

And yet the pitiful weakness of these victims. They want to be helped. They stretch out their hands like children begging some one to save them, but always they shrink from the actual suffering that denial will bring to them and try to say that they can help themselves.

We read of drug fiends and it is exciting reading; we go to a moving picture show and we see the drug habit portrayed and it is exciting to look at; we see it enacted on the stage and it thrills us while we listen, but when you have once come into actual contact with a victim of the drug habit the rest seems but a sorry sham at portraying the real horror of it.

It destroys the moral sense, it makes weaklings and liars and cowards out of the most promising of men and women; it shortens the life and brings a disgraceful death, but when one is brought into close con-