

bench as though quite unable to restrain her risibilities. I was altogether taken aback by this unexpected treatment, when one of the other women, seeing my discomfiture, hastened to explain that the laugher was a poor idiot, placed there not for crime but for safety, until room could be found for her in the insane asylum. In spite of remonstrances, and even by no means tender slaps from the others, the poor creature continued her noise until at last, by the matron's command, she was hustled off to the dark cell at the farther end of the corridor, from which cheerless place her pitiful laughter issued at intervals so long as I remained.

Order having thus been restored, I had opportunity to scan more closely the five faces now looking expectantly into mine. There was not a really unprepossessing countenance among them. Looking at them casually, save for the prison uniform, they might well have been respectable wives and mothers. But the same sad story of drink and degradation belonged to each, modified only by the differences in the crimes to which it had led. They made a pathetic picture as, ranged on their long hard bench against the whitewashed wall, clad in the unlovely prison garb, they listened, with down-cast eyes but open ears, to the singing and speaking. None of them seemed able to sing, and I was therefore spared the ear-piercing discord which had characterized that part of the service among the men. And it need hardly be said their conduct during the speaking was unexceptionable. They did not often raise their eyes, but when they did, their sorrowful, almost despairing, expression was inexpressibly touching. Fall as low as she may, there is ever a chord in woman's heart that readily responds to the touch of tenderness and sympathy. While among the men a determination not to be impressed by the speaker's words was clearly manifest, among the women it seemed as though each listener sought to appropriate them to herself. In conversation with them afterward I was much struck by the unquestioning submission to their fate they evidenced. No querulous complainings, no hintings as to injured innocence, but, on the other hand, a ready promise to reform, whose sincerity it was hard to doubt.

Coming away from the jail, and meeting group after group of well-dressed, cheerful, chatty people returning to their comfortable homes from the morning service, the sombre impressions made by the scenes just witnessed were pleasantly conjured away. Yet this question remained—and it is with me still—Do