

PASSED OFF AS A MAN

Mustached Woman Wore Male Garb Fifteen Years.

DID IT TO GET WORK

Says She Had to Live Up to Her Face to Earn Living.

MADE MONEY AS BOOK AGENT

Ellis Island Immigrant Inspectors Puzzled What to Do With

Mary Johnson.

NEW YORK, October 5.—In the steerage of the American liner New York, which arrived Saturday, was a slight, middle-aged passenger with a rather delicate face made masculine by an aquiline nose and a black silken moustache turned up at the ends, in Emperor William style, so as to reveal lips thin, firm and sensitive. The passenger occupied a compartment with two men and was known to them as Frank Woodhull.

They did not form a warm friendship for Woodhull, who seemed to want to be left alone and did not encourage questions about the Woodhull pedigree.

An immigration boarding officer who questioned Woodhull learned that that individual had lived in the United States thirty years, but was not a citizen, was born in Canada and was bound for New Orleans. Woodhull had made a living as a book canvasser in New Orleans for several years and had plenty of money to get there.

At Ellis Island Woodhull was asked the usual questions and answered among others age fifty and health perfect. The clerk doubted the last declaration because Woodhull's cheeks were a little sunken. The clerk suspected tuberculosis and Woodhull was sent to the doctor.

"I'm a woman," said Woodhull, demurring to a physical examination.

The doctor looked at the full black moustache and doubted.

Becomes Plain "Mary Johnson."

A matron was called and thereafter Frank Woodhull became known as Mary Johnson. To Commissioner Watchorn she said that she had been compelled to put on man's clothing because she could not earn a living as a woman. She had been compelled to live up to her mustache, a disfigurement to her as a woman that prevented her from obtaining work except of the hardest kind on ranches in the west or farms elsewhere:

"At my age," she said in a soft contralto voice and with some purely manish gesticulations, "there is nothing that I can do in woman's clothes. Employers want young and good looking girls or women nowadays. By adopting man's dress I have been able to live a clean, respectable and independent life, asking favors of no body, man or woman. I do not know what I shall do now that I have been found out. For fifteen years nobody has ever suspected that I was not a man. I have lived with men on ranches, sold them many books, slept in the same berth with them when I sailed from New York for England in July and did the same thing coming back, and none of my companions has ever thought that I was not a man."

Ellis Island Officials Puzzled.

It was a puzzle to Commissioner Watchorn what to do with Miss Johnson. She has no woman's clothing and she refused to give up her male dress. If he put her among the women in the detention ward they would object to the mustache and the attire. He could not put her with the men, either. Finally he declined to give her a room by herself in the hospital. Before doing so he called up the hospital and announced that he had a patient. An attendant at the phone wanted to know whether it was a man or a woman, and the commissioner answered that it was Mary Johnson. The attendant came over and seeing no signs of a woman asked where Mary Johnson was. He was told that he might find Miss Johnson in an adjoining room. He went in and came out in a hurry, saying that there was only a man there. He was told that the man was Miss Johnson and he passed on the mystification by telephoning to the chief of the hospital staff that he was bringing Mary Johnson over. The chief when he saw Miss Johnson wanted to know why the deuce the attendant could not have said he had a man instead of a woman.

Before Miss Johnson went to her room she talked with the reporters. She looked a man to perfection, one of Napoleonic proportions, perhaps 5 feet 2, and her voice, which was very low, but distinct, was not unlike that of a quiet-natured man. She wore a dark soft hat, a heavy black overcoat and a black tie. Her clothing is of good material and fits her well. In pauses in her talk she stuffed her hands in her pockets, American style, and at times thrust her hands out and toward her questioners very much in the way of the book agent in earnest entreaty. It could readily be seen that she could plead the cause of a book with some eloquence. She said she had been successful because she had been in earnest. She spoke as one who had been in the habit of convincing people.

Assistant Commissioner Murray told Miss Johnson that she had, he thought, violated a law of New York by coming into the state posing as a man. She said that if she had known it she certainly would not have done so, as she had never intentionally violated any law in her life. She had been urged to become a citizen by some of her male acquaintances, who never suspected her sex, and she had refused because she did not want to tell a lie or break the law. Never, she declared, with arm upraised in so masculine a way that it was hard to believe that she was a woman, had she ever been guilty of anything that could reflect upon her character.

Compelled to Pose as Man.

When she was thrown on her own resources thirty years ago she found it hard to get a job of a sort that she could do because of the plainness of her face and that incipient mustache. She drifted from her home in Canada to the west and became a worker in the fields, wearing, as some of the western woman ranch workers do, outfits resembling the men's.

This suggested to her the idea of beginning life over again as a man. It took her some time to make up her mind, but she had not succeeded as a woman, and handicapped with her mustache and her plainness she did not see how she ever could. She was fond of books and thought she had enough knowledge of human nature to make other people take an interest in them, so she got a job as a book canvasser in San Francisco after investing her savings of years in a suit of man's clothes. She says she was surprised to find how easy, comparatively, it was for a man of energy to make money as a canvasser.

Did Well as Book Canvasser.

She found a better field for her work in New Orleans and went there, living, as men of moderate means do, in boarding houses or lodgings and, when business was very good, in hotels. She put some money in the bank in New Orleans, and last July, when business was slack, she decided she could go abroad and see some of the places she had read about and talked about to prospective customers.

She came to this city and took passage in the steerage of an American liner, landing at Southampton. She spent nearly two months rambling around Europe, chiefly England, and still had enough money left to bring her back and take her to New Orleans, where, she says, she is pretty well known among the canvassers. She regrets that she will have to give up their acquaintance and wonders what they will think of her fooling them.

Commissioner Watchorn, the doctors and everybody else at Ellis Island, including the inspector who was the unconscious means of finding her out, are sorry they did. She accepts the situation, as

one of the officials remarked, like a man, tearlessly, even with a smile.

No Statute Covering Her Case.

There is no statute of this state that says that a woman must wear petticoats when she walks abroad, and the Constitution is silent on the subject. If a woman, half disguised as a man, appears in public she is likely to be arrested, either for collecting a crowd or on an imputation of disorderly intent. The police also rely on paragraph 7 of section 887 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which, under the heading "Who are vagrants," says:

"A person who, having his face painted, discolored, covered or concealed or being otherwise disguised in a manner calculated to prevent his being identified, appears on a road or public highway or in a field lot, wood or inclosure."

But if the woman's disguise as a man is perfect and she is not a vagrant the police hardly see where they come in.