

MANY YEARS IN MAN'S ATTIRE.

During Forty-three Years This Woman's Sex Was Not Revealed.

The strange story of a woman who for forty-three years dressed in man's attire without the identity of her sex being discovered has recently come to light in London. The name of this woman is Catherine Coombs and the fact that she is of the opposite sex has but recently been revealed in a workhouse in the great English metropolis. For many years she worked at the trade of painting, dressing all the while in masculine garments.

Mrs. Coombs is 63 years of age, though she does not look more than 50. Her voice is unusually deep for a woman's, but this is accounted for in the fact that she had cultivated the lowest registers until she had come to use them habitually. She was born the daughter of well-to-do parents and was educated at a ladies' college. She married a schoolmaster at an early age, but the union proved to be a disastrously unhappy one and she was compelled to leave him. In these days, forty-five years ago, there were few openings for women, and realizing this Mrs. Coombs saw that the choice lay between a man's clothes and labor and destitution. She chose the former and started in learning the painting trade at a small weekly allowance. She soon became an expert in the calling. For many years she was a ship's painter, a rather distinct branch of the painter's trade, requiring a more skillful hand. She never once betrayed her secret and probably would have carried it to her grave but for an accident.

While working near London this summer she fell from a scaffolding and fractured some ribs. The doctor who attended her even did not discover that she was a woman. Later she fractured her knee-cap, and although she recovered from these injuries she was left without a job and her savings had dwindled away. She walked the streets two days and two nights without food or shelter. Nature asserted itself, however, and she was obliged to seek the shelter of the workhouse. Here it was that her identity was revealed, her feminine modesty not allowing her to undergo the compulsory stripping.

During all the years that she masqueraded in male attire she never threw herself into the company of men outside of work hours and she was known as "the gentleman painter." She never forgot the fact that she was still a woman. To a reporter she said recently: "I can safely say I have never used a blasphemous word or an expression that would be jarring on a woman's lips. And, as far as talk about me went, I never hesitated to show that I disliked coarse and irreverent and vulgar conversation. Now that I look back, it does seem remarkable that I never once found it inevitable to sleep in the same room with a man. I used to go to cottages rather than to public houses, for, though I have never been a teetotaler, the accommodation of the village inn is often very objectionable."