

HUMAN CURIOS

Mary East

"A young fellow courted Mary East and for him she conceived the greatest liking; but he, going upon the highway, was tried for robbery and cast, but was afterward transported."

So writes one of the contemporary historians of a remarkable woman, giving, in these few lines, the reason which lay behind the strange life of Mary East. The phrase, "going upon the highway," it should be remembered, meant that the man in question became a highway robber, and "cast" was the colloquialism then current for being condemned to death.

Shortly after the conviction of her lover, Mary East met another girl who had also suffered from a serious disappointment and the two of them deter-

mined to remain single the rest of their lives. But, in order to avoid the opprobrium attached to being "old maids," they decided to pose as man and wife—tossing a coin to see which should play the role of "husband." The male part fell to Mary East, and the couple settled in the neighborhood of Epping Forest, where, under the names of Mr. and Mrs. James How, they leased a small public house.

They later moved to London, and "James How" took part in the public life of his locality, filling every parish office with the exception of constable and churchwarden. "He" had been named for the latter office when a woman whom Mary East had known in her youthful days commenced a system of carefully calculated blackmail which finally resulted in a public discovery of "James How's" sex, but not until after Mary had kept up the deception for thirty-five years! Meanwhile, "Mrs. How" had died and Mary East, resuming her own name, retired to the north of England to enjoy the substantial fortune which she had made by posing as a man during the greater part of her life.