

# IN THE GUISE OF A BEGGAR.

## A YOUNG WOMAN'S NERVOUS EXPLOIT FOR THE SUNDAY WORLD.

### BE POOR WHO BEFRIEND THE POOR.

Only Twenty-four Cents from an Evening's Begging on the Streets and Most of That Contributed by Four People—A Dress-Coated Friend Who Threatened the Island.

She is my walk through Forty-second street during the evening I had noticed the substance there under their different feet, and in so many different ways setting them, and had wondered pitifully whether the poor things did not receive more than pennies, and whether the give was really worth the candle.

"I try it," I said to myself, "and learn by actual experience whether a poor person can sufficiently touch the hearts of the passers to raise enough in one evening to purchase even bread for the morrow's work. And I'll write my experience for the *Sunday World*."

I required some nerve, but I was determined to carry out my intention, albeit when the next evening came it was with some rather sickly feelings in the region of my heart but I should be recognized that I found a shabby coin, and with an old coat over my head prepared to rally forth, but during the show well around my feet, which the children of the evening passed.

I had bought up a very much worn pair of canvas gloves which had been used for sweeping and dusting purposes, so I feared my hands might possibly betray me, and then peeping into the hall to see whether my case was screened, locked the door of my apartment and demanded the stairs.

I had just opened the front door when I started back. A poor, but honest Irishwoman, Mary McCarthy, who occasionally came for me, and was coming in to see whether I needed her services, had just climbed the steps. I made no sign and after awaiting an hour or two she stopped in the vestibule:

"You poor creature, an' is it upstairs you've been to see if you could get anything. Faith an' I'm afeard you didn't do much; take this, an' the blamin' of God be with you."

#### A WASHINGTONIAN'S TWO CENTS.

She first two cents into my unwilling hand and with as low a "Thank you" as I could make. I passed on congratulating myself on the success of my disguise.

At the corner of the street another chance for testing charity met me. A young gentleman who occasionally comes to see me and has been for years an intimate friend, but was in evening dress. I knew he was just upon calling at my room, and as I had not seen him for some time, I felt for a moment a little sorry that I had chosen this particular evening for my adventure. I was nearly tempted to put out my hand and ask an alms of him, but before I could make up my mind he had passed on, without even looking at me.

I walked to Forty-second street, and having found myself in a shabby coat close to the sidewalk, wondered what would happen next. Two or three young girls, belonging evidently to the better-off classes, passed me. They looked at me curiously, made some lighter remark among themselves and passed on. Young, light-haired and pretentious, what had they to do with some shabby and distress?

#### HEARTY OR HINDRANCE OUT.

There were several others like myself looking about that evening. The ever-present woman, crouched upon the ground with her musical instrument, of such it can be called, and aimed the cup, was multiplied by dozens in many places. One of these sat out for some time I was standing, and looked at me. I thought a little suspiciously and anxiously while trying to attract notice by her low-toned musical wail.

Fifty feet away coming heavily down from Fifth avenue a gentleman I knew well, a lawyer and a very wealthy man. I was determined to try him, and stood forward as he approached.

"Pence, sir," I said, with a professional whine, holding out my hand.

He looked harshly towards me.

"I never give to beggars," he said curtly as he passed on.

I sighed—a real sigh, for that man is a prominent light in one of the churches, and I had heard him often advance benevolence and charity towards those who are poor and

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content; but possibly he meant the application for others.

The next who passed was a poor laborer. He came towards me. I was standing back and had not asked him for anything. He put five cents in my hand.

"God help you!" he said, in a low, sympathizing voice, as he passed on.

#### A TRACT FOR THE HUNGER.

A good woman followed him. She looked kindly at me, and then coming forward placed a tract in my extended hand.

"Read that," she said, as she too went on. I hastily put it in my pocket, and upon my return home found it was "A Call to the Unconverted." I wondered how that would help supply to-morrow's need.

Some mischievous boys now came up, and looking at me in pretended friendly warning said hurriedly:

"Look out, the cop's a-comin'."

I looked up started, and examined the street east and west, but could see no sign of a policeman. However, as I did not wish to run any risk of a night in the station-house, I moved on.

I passed again, a little further up, and an old lady with a kindly face placed two cents in my hand. She looked poor herself and as if she had known trouble, and I hated to deprive her of even that trifle. Two little girls and their mother followed next, and both little ones after a hasty consultation with their mother came back and gave me two cents each. They looked so sweet and trusting I longed to clasp them in my arms.

#### A SUGGESTION OF "THE ISLAND."

Looking after them I saw my young friend, who, disappointed in finding no one at home, consoled to call somewhere else and was heading his way to Fifth avenue. Having grown somewhat bolder from previous experiences, I held out my hand to him, saying some inaudible words. He looked cross and walked on, muttering something about the "Island." I knew he had a great dislike to professional beggars.

Some of my own craft made advances towards a friendly recognition. The woman I spoke of before, with the musical instrument and the tin cup, asked if I had been "long at it," and upon my reply in the negative, gave a sign of pity for me, or of satisfaction, I do not know which.

A man with one leg informed me he had been run over by a truck and so lost his limb, and said he found it hard work since to make out a living. I believed him, knowing that even with all one's limbs and the advantages they give, life at the best is a hard struggle for the unfortunate majority. I walked away from them. I should have liked to hear their histories at length and learned the cause of some of the destitution I saw around me, and how the poor things really managed to exist, but that was not my work for this particular evening, so I staided myself next in quite an obscure spot, and with none of my professional brethren near.

Several gentlemen passed, but poverty was not in their line; they did not know anything about it and therefore had no wish to relieve it. But one young man walking alone, with a thoughtful and somewhat sad face, placed a dime in my hand. It was the largest "big" of the evening and I began to be hopeful. Two little boys with a dog looked curiously at me and the dog sniffed suspiciously at my dress as though, with the instinct of his kind, he detected something not quite what it seemed; but the children called him. "Come away Fido, you won't be her, she's poor," and then one of the little fellows returned and gave me a penny.

It was growing very cold, and even to my own consciousness I must have looked a sad, lone figure shivering under that thin shawl, and a sort of pity for myself came into my heart, as if I were in reality what I seemed.

#### THE WORLD'S COLD SHOULDER.

The figure of a lady hurrying home attracted me. I recognized her as one I knew well, and when she came near, looking upon my disguise, I held out my hand saying: "For the love of God," as I have heard some of the others say. She looked at me coldly, un sympathetically. I knew that she could count her dollars to a million at least, and that she professed great pity for the unfortunate, but not one penny did she give to one who, for aught she knew, was starving and homeless. The tears sprang to my eyes at the heartlessness. I had heard of it before, but had hoped that a case of real, or seemingly real, distress might move her.

The rain had been for some time falling softly, and I saw my brethren in misfortune with disconsolate faces preparing to return homeward, wherever their respective homes might be. Perhaps the figure of a policeman loomed in the distance may have accelerated their movements—it certainly did mine. I took a last look around. There was no more hope of pennies, and with a sigh I left the fold of my new labor. A sigh for the poor things, who, I fear did not glean much from that evening's harvest.

On my way home I overtook a poor man led by a shivering little dog. The poor animal looked wistfully at me, and stopping the man I put my evening's gains in his hand. The little dog thanked me with a glad bark, seeming to fully understand what I had done and perhaps realizing that now there might be supper for two. The man gave me a trembling "God bless you," not knowing but that I was rich and happy, and passed on his way. Twenty-four cents I had collected and had spent nearly three hours in the cold and rain. It was 10:30 that evening when I reached home, so thankful that I had a home, and so glad that I would not be obliged to go out on a similar tramp the following evening.

E. H. B.