

BEGGING AS AN AVOCATION.

AN ADVENTUROUS WOMAN GOES OUT ASKING ALMS IN THE STREET.

She borrows some old clothes, sneaks out of the house and faces the world—thirty-three cents for a half-day's toll—Not a very hard business—Men didn't contribute, but women were victims.

I went begging. I don't mean I got contributions to buy red flannels for the wild Africans, or sold tickets for a benefit to be given in aid of the widows and orphans of deceased messenger boys, but that I went begging on the street in rags. I did it to find out what begging as a profession is like. The first thing was to get my rags. One would hardly believe how hard it is to get beggar's rags. One's clothes all at once appear indignantly swell and atrociously new. I found I possessed a jersey and a pair of shoes that were available. The jersey was too good, but then it would be covered up with a shawl, and as I am too thin for a jersey it looked woebegone on me. The shoes were great.

I appealed to a few trusted friends for other old clothes. Andromachs said she had a bonnet that was a beggar's dream. She got it out, and it looked as if it had just come from a Fifth avenue milliner's window. It was greeted with groans and hisses. Determined to redeem her artistic reputation she declared she had a shawl that would not hang together, and that if it was not bad enough I could tear holes in it and rub whitewash on it. She advanced the theory that the two things that conferred most character on a beggar were the suppression of her bustle and the presence of whitewash on her back. Heaven was kind and sent a bonnet that would in itself be a fortune to any beggar. The fox brought it forth from a sacred store of odds and ends, the extent and character of which is unknown to living man. It was poor, oh, so poor looking, especially after we cut the strings off, but its poverty was of a gentle, appealing, Cotter's-Saturday-night sort. It was becoming, too, in a downcast way, when I got my hair parted in the middle and combed down plain.



EEK FIRST ALMS. I much desired to add to my effects by trying a little make-up, but a sick make-up, as the actors would call it, is a difficult thing to represent to the acrobacy of the alms-giving public on the street in broad daylight. I found on trial that I could safely darken circles under my eyes, and even when my cheeks a very little. This last was unnecessary however, for I know I kept pale enough with the terrors of the situation.

All the difficulties finally removed, my heart began to sink. What a fearful thing it would be to go out in those clothes and stop strange people and ask them for money!

I managed to get out of the house without meeting any one on the stairs, and then—there I was, on the street, in the pitiless glare of light, my shabby gown, friends, country, home gone with it, a beggar dependent for life on the cold, rushing, unfeeling masses! I fully believed and knew that I was as I struck the pavement.

...on a miserable ground I started... I let the first people stand Twenty-third street at all. I was afraid of meeting some one I knew, and I found, and if you notice the professionals you will see they and the same things that a rushing crowd is a poor place for business. Your victims can escape you too easily in the throng, and people really bleed the way and feel themselves dreadfully conspicuous and awkward if they do try to get at their small change for you. I got only one tribute in a crowd and that was from a lady on Broadway, near Third street. The sidewalk was full of people, and it took uncommon courage to attack any one there, but I made a dash with my usual appeal for help, and she gave me a coin. I was so glad that I could get well. Madame was a handsomely dressed middle-aged matron, evidently very well acquainted with the city, and she was equal to the task.

Before I had gone far I saw a policeman, and the sight of him struck cold to my heart. When I first thought of going begging I was full of the notion that I wanted a policeman to say something to me. I thought I might, and there considerably enrich my experience, but when he dawned upon me in all his awful reality I felt as if he had already seen me in the police courts scores of times and would bring me down on me in some manner and formal form for just the turn of an eyelash. I didn't beg while he was in sight; I couldn't. I turned up Seventh avenue and I saw coming towards me a block away a good-looking middle-aged woman, whose social status is perhaps unconsciously indicated when I tell that she was tramped in a big, crocheted red shawl. I let several people go by waiting to come to her. I stepped in front of her and said, in accents of simple sincerity and much feeling: "Madam, can you tell me where I can get anything to do, or can you give me a few cents to help keep me and my child till I can find work?" I am sorry I can't make the type tell just the way I said it, for I really did feel that my heart would break if she did not give me something.

"She said, with just a touch of Irish brogue in her speech: "Oh, isn't it a shame, an' I haven't a cent with me!" The voice was so kind and human it brought the tears to my eyes, and I said: "Thank you for speaking so kindly to me, anyway."

"She let me pass on for a few steps and then called after me: "Wait a minute; where do you live?" "Twenty-two Cannon street," I said. I had no more idea than the dead where Cannon street is, but I am pretty sure I had a washerwoman once who lived there. "Oh, that's way downtown."

"I thought it safe to ascend, but it gave me a mean sort of impostor feeling that I did not have at all when I was getting a chance to throw myself into the park. "Well, come back here a little way; it's only a few steps." She went back to a butcher's shop and came out with five cents for me. "My first alms!" I felt like saying, with the accents of the wish in the "two epithets," where she tells that whopper about having just told her first falsehood. I don't believe it is left to any grown person to tell his or her first falsehood. But this is pretentious. My heart wanted to that dear woman and does now. I thanked her without the usual professional bias.

Of all the people I met I cared for only one other as much as for this first victim of my wiles. She was another Irish woman and I met her, too, on Seventh avenue. She was comfortably dressed, with the beloved Paisley shawl around her, and I approached her also first on the subject of work. "No, I don't know where you can get it," she said, and I just came from an office myself. I wish I did, but the heartiest sympathetic tone I could not have said anything more about money to save my life. I did not want her to give me any, but she said: "An' I suppose every little helps, you're such a nice-looking decent young gal, it's only a couple of pennies change I can spare; there they are, all welcome."

I added in every case with the men. I will tell the truth and say that my pleadings had no effect on them. I did not speak more than half a dozen, but there was no "I go" in my acting. It was like the begging of a wooden image, and I did not get a cent from one of them. I think they are, as a rule, both harder-hearted and better disciplined in the beggar question than women, but then of course I could have obtained something from them if I had stuck to it better. Begging is like every other profession in the rewards it offers to well-placed cheek and persistence.

I went up Seventh avenue to Seventeenth street and then walked across to Fifth avenue and up to

Twenty-second street. It was on Fifth avenue that two children, prompted by a very small and pretty mamma, gave me some change. The only one who was in vain of a big woman in a certain respect. She looked past me with much indignation. I was better off than the only ones I did not beg from. I was not afraid of them, as I was of the grown people, and, moreover, their mother was a pretty young thing who was prompting the good gallery for her own enjoyment. She thought it was no pretty to see the children exercising charity, you know.



THE CHILDREN'S OFFERING. I could not stand Fifth avenue long, and I couldn't stand Twenty-third street at all. I was afraid of meeting some one I knew, and I found, and if you notice the professionals you will see they and the same things that a rushing crowd is a poor place for business. Your victims can escape you too easily in the throng, and people really bleed the way and feel themselves dreadfully conspicuous and awkward if they do try to get at their small change for you. I got only one tribute in a crowd and that was from a lady on Broadway, near Third street. The sidewalk was full of people, and it took uncommon courage to attack any one there, but I made a dash with my usual appeal for help, and she gave me a coin. I was so glad that I could get well. Madame was a handsomely dressed middle-aged matron, evidently very well acquainted with the city, and she was equal to the task.



TIED OUT. I developed a real maternal passion for that commercially imagined child that afternoon. I had done much walking back and forth in the cross streets on my way up town, and in one of them, I forgot which, I had a long pow-wow with a kind lady, who would not give me anything because, she said, her son was a minister and gave away so much in regular charities, but she was very kind and good and really anxious for me to get out of my dreadful position. "Dear, dear," she exclaimed, "I'm a stranger here, I come from Canada, and haven't been here a week, yet I met another respectable-looking woman begging the other day. I almost exclaimed that, for though I was of course doing the respectable working woman act, I had gotten myself up in the most deplorable duds that three householders would furnish."

"What chance do you belong to?" went on the old lady. "I was born a Roman Catholic, ma'am," said I. "Well, then, they are the people for you to go to. Where do you go to church?" "I haven't gone since I've been here." "Why, where did you come from?" I was in for it and my story was unprepared for such extended investigation, but I manufactured it as I went along. "Philadelphia; we had not been here long when my husband was taken ill and died."

"Well, who was the priest that buried him; he's the person for you to go to. I thought I'd best to thank her and say I'd try to find out and pass on." She was so dreadfully sensible and practical, that nice old lady.

My goal was now Bryant Park, for with my crossings and turnings I had walked a great distance, and I wanted to rest on one of the benches. I was fainting tired when I got there, and I utilized the situation to make a dramatic effect as I crept along by the fence. I met a pretty woman there whom I appealed to and who in a lovely, impulsive way and with no words but "Poor girl, so sorry spoken," sweetly put all-given gains with a quarter. This was my largest windfall.

I went into the park and sat down. I did not intend to try to beg there, for I wanted to rest, and did not propose to run any risk of being tied out. With that conclusion a great weight seemed to roll off me; I wasn't so cold as I had been. My mind turned a sort of somersault, and there I was my own old, familiar self. I had no queer ideas, but that was rather the reverse. I had started out soon after noon. I had picked up cents from a too credulous public. Though I knew I did not intend to keep it, I felt mean when I touched it in my pocket, or rather Buddy's pocket.

By the way, about that pocket I remained to the last hopelessly amateurish and inartistic. The very minute any one would give me anything I'd run it in that pocket. It was such bad form. To possess a pocket seemed indicative of fraud. I was disgusted with myself every time I did it, but I was unable to stay my hand; it would go for the pocket. Another inartistic touch was my handkerchief. I'd forgotten to supply myself with the proper article, though to tell the truth I am not very clear as to what a beggar's handkerchief should be. It was 4:30 o'clock when I got to the park. It was 5 before I felt like moving. By that time I was very much chilled, for I had neglected to supplement my leggar wrags with warm underclothing, as I should have done. I got up determined to make one last spurt at business. It was harder than it was at first, but I made a dash without stopping to think about it at the first person I saw.

He was an admirably dressed man whom I have seen very often at theatrical frat nights and whose name is familiar to people about town. He showed his good sense by passing on without turning an eyelash. I plunged at a woman, for I had no more to myself that with one more contribution I should be let off, and I was eager to get it, the woman said: "O Lord, you people make my life a burden," and gave me one penny. Very few people had given me a single penny. I had often been coldly passed by, but only once or twice harshly spoken to, even if you call this last harsh speaking. I hardly do. I felt like saying to her, "That's just the way I feel about being passed by. Many people had shown sympathy and solicitude for me. I felt really grateful to them, and whether right or wrong in their attitude towards beggars, their course certainly speaks well for human nature."

Ex-Senator Ecclesine, hearing of my project before he was carried out, had sent me a letter, signed by himself, saying that I was myself and that any Police Justice who said he'd seen me in his car before was mistaken, or words to that effect. I did not mind it. No one molested me in my search after material and pennies. After I got that last penny I rushed over and took a Seventh avenue car (I did not dare go down in those clothes in any other), and how relieved I was! All the way home I found myself looking at everybody with a beggar's eye, reading the faces with a view to the softness of their own and it was twenty-four hours before that pain entirely wore out. The worst thing about it all is that everybody was highly influenced by a little thing, and I am convinced that it is generally passed on, not given and unfamiliar need, that gives a command of dramatic effects. I think I could make a better living begging than standing in a shop or sewing, and physically it would be easier. I was a little puzzled to know what to do with the 35 cents collected on my expedition. Of course I would give it to some charity, but I hesitated about a church, for some of the people who gave me money may not have been friendly to churches, and some were probably Protestants and some Roman Catholics. Others again may have institutional tendencies. I expended a good deal of business tact in going on that scheme. Finally I decided to give it to the Red Cross.