

TOO LATE.

(From the Swedish of Carl Snoilsky.)

BY NED P. MAH.

A little beggar maid with many a shiver—
Outside a mansion as you hurry by—
Ragged and barefoot, prays of you to give her
A trifle, just a slice of bread to buy.

Cruel. O no! But purse and money in it
Two closely buttoned coats securely guard:
Delay, for this small pauper's sake, a minute
You cannot—it is blowing far too hard.

And at a board with plate and crystal weighted
Soon you are sitting, grateful, snug and warm:
But yet no soap may please your palate sated,
Even the wine has lost its ancient charm.

And with the ruby glass before you brimming
Which you each time abstractedly refuse,
Why gave I not? you ask—before you swimming
In empty air a small, thin hand which sues.

Half vexed to find so little has succeeded
To move you thus, you rise to make your bow
And take your leave, thinking—What more is needed?
The child's there yet. I'll give it something now.

Alas, too late! The little one has vanished—
Empty the corner where you hoped to find
The tiny bubble which your words had banished
Into the great, dark ocean of mankind.

As she came, so went she, sick and fasting,
On the dismissal she received from you:
Perhaps sent to seek the Mercy Everlasting
By heartless words which you must ever rue.

HARRY.

"Another train on in half an hour. Will any gentleman get out to oblige a lady?"

The station at Oxenholme Junction, "Change here for Windermere," was crowded with travellers hastening lakeward, and anxious to reach their various destinations in time for dinner or tea, as the case might be. The platform was still dotted with the different costumes, ultra-pretty or ultra-ugly, which delight the tourist eye, though the train now on the point of starting was already so full that distinction of class had been lost sight of in the rush for seats made by the famished and tired crowd. Mrs. Salway felt sure that such was the case as she sat in the corner of her first-class carriage, and alternately cast angry glances at the people who had scrambled in after her, and piteous ones at her youngest daughter who had not been so successful in the crush, and was now standing forlornly enough upon the platform.

"It is so like Mary," Mrs. Salway murmured to her eldest daughters; "really your father should have waited for us; this is the last time that we travel in two parties. I had no idea that first-class passengers were crowded out of their seats, and must get out, and all stay until the next train."

And indeed the other passengers, notwithstanding the guard's invitation and her black looks, showed no inclination to postpone their arrival for half an hour, and risk the chance of being late at *table d'hôte*.

There was one passenger, sitting in the opposite corner from the platform, who excited Mrs. Salway's more particular spleen. She was quite certain that the ticket in his pocket, if he had one at all (this was a mental reservation), was for the third class. His rough suit was shabby, and had seen much service, more especially the knickerbocker part of it, and in that service his soft gray hat had apparently shared to a very considerable extent. His boots were as innocent of blacking as his stick of varnish, and the small knapsack above his head would have failed to carry confidence to the mind of the least suspicious of hotel-keepers. But he had some redeeming points about him; his hands were gloved—in old gloves once yellow, it is true—and he "gave up his seat to oblige a lady," according to the guard's formula.

From his place in the corner of the carriage he could not see whom he was obliging, until having retired with the shamefaced confusion which nine out of ten Englishmen assume when they are being conspicuously courteous, he stole a glance at her face as she stepped in.

She gave him a little bow of thanks, and a smile of such evident gratitude as would have converted the many family friends who considered Mary Salway rather plain than otherwise. She had a small pale face, with shy brown eyes a size too large for it; a rather timid retiring face, which made one agree with her mother that giving way in a crush was 'just like Mary,' and very unlike Mrs. Salway. Our friend in knickerbockers saw the smile and would fain have become better acquainted with it; but the train was already moving off with the young lady, and as he remembered when too late, with his knapsack as well.

So it happened that when he did reach Windermere station his scanty baggage was not to be found. Knapsacks, large and small, are common things at the Lake, and inquiries were in vain. The Crown Hotel at Bowness reached, he was only just in time to get the last vacant room, a little one at the top of the house, much encumbered with spare baths, a baby's crib, and other odds and ends, but otherwise almost as ill provided with furniture as he was with luggage. However, he was lucky in not having to sleep under the billiard-table, as has happened to some wayfarers in those parts; and besides, the room had such a view of the head of Windermere, the Langdale Pike, and High

Street, as made up for some slight inconveniences.

Strict evening dress is not demanded by etiquette at the Lake hotels. Some of the company, as no doubt, are Americans, traveling with mountains of iron-bound trunks bearing the labels of half the hotels in Europe; many are honeymooning couples, arrayed in the newest of apparel from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. But many also carry their luggage in their hands or on their backs, and so swallow-tails and spotless shirt-fronts are out of the question. But the etiquette of the *table d'hôte* looks for one thing, and that is a black coat of some kind or other. Therefore Mrs. Salway, who for various reasons had not felt all her daughter's gratitude, was much aggrieved at the presence of our hero in his knickerbocker suit; not knowing that it was through his courtesy that he was compelled to appear in this (to Mrs. Salway, with whom form and ceremony were fetishes, from whose worship rank and wealth alone were free) disgraceful state. But she was more aggrieved at his proximity to her party, and most of all at her Mary to take the outside seat, so that the young fellow was next to her. The objectionable gentleman did not see the matter at all in the same light; but having attacked the young lady's reserve by the usual observation about the weather, rattled so pleasantly that Mary quite forgot that she had not been introduced to him, and was emboldened to say with a little blush.

"I am so much obliged to you for your kindness this afternoon; had you not given up your seat we should have all had to stay."

"I was very glad to be of service to you. Do you stop here long?"

"A week at least, I believe."

"I suppose you have private rooms here, and you will disappear after dinner?"

"Oh, no; my father likes to see strangers, and the coming and going; he thinks it a change after home life."

"Very true," answered the gentleman, with a look of content on his face which was not lost upon Mary. She begins to feel that the Lake holiday promises to be at least as agreeable as she had expected. Women are quick, very quick, to read men's thoughts when they are turned towards themselves—even such a shy little Hampstead maiden as Mary, just released from the governess's thralldom, and still suffering a good deal from repression at the hands of her mother and sisters. She steals a look at him while he is engaged with his *entree*. He is not handsome; she settles that at once. He is not tall, with a black moustache, flashing dark eyes and an imposing manner; only a keen, sun-burnt face is his, with small black whiskers, and with eyes bright enough but of no particular color. But if his clothes are old and shabby, he seems at home in them, and perfectly at ease with his company; she is certain that he is a gentleman, not because he gave up his seat to her, but by a hundred tiny proofs. And she enjoys her first hotel dinner very much, and wonders whether the same seats will be reserved for them every evening.

So when she rises and he bows, Mary is inclined to view the world through rose coloured spectacles. Not so her mother. Mrs. Salway has, during dinner, been talking to an old gentleman who chanced to sit next to her and whom she does not know from Adam; but nevertheless on the road to the drawing room she puts before Mary the enormity of talking to a gentleman to whom she had not been introduced, and begs her to behave herself like Agnes and Laura, who, having been walled in from such approaches by those heavy flanking parties, Mr. and Mrs. Salway, have had no chance of sinning in the same way. Her father is instructed to see that Mary is not allowed to outlie the party another evening; and when the objectionable young gentleman "actually has the audacity" to quote Mrs. Salway's words, to enter the drawing-room in his knickerbockers and looks inquiringly around as if for some particular person, he finds Mary penned in a corner by her mother and sisters, who regard him, and especially his nether garment, with looks in which wonder and scorn are finely blended. That richly dressed matron having set the example, he finds himself rather coolly received in other quarters, and soon retires from the scene in search, if I may make a guess, of the smoking-room.

But strict reserve in the club-like life of a tourist's hotel is difficult to maintain. I you do not meet your bugbear (or *vice versa*, for it is more polite to suppose that you, reader, stand in Mary's place than in her elders), upon the coach to Ullswater, you will do so most probably next day on that going to Coniston; if not in the drawing-room, then in that favourite resort the verandah; if not at breakfast, then at dinner, or lunch, or lighting a bedroom candle, or on the steamboat, you will be sure to find him or her opposite to you. So it was with our young friends, and Mary suffered in consequence. The sisters persisted, as sisters will in such a case that Mary encouraged him, but I believe that he needed small encouragement. Now and then too he suffered a little; Mrs. Salway would be rude to him, and the girls overlooked and alighted him with a haughty contempt that was certainly felt more by Mary than by the person for whom it was chiefly intended. Mrs. Salway had made up her mind that he was a commercial traveller, and was not chary of stating her belief; so that the young fellow without a black coat came quite unconsciously to be considered a rather objectionable member of the little community; a wolf—and worse, a low class of wolf.

This had gone on for more than a week, when the Salways went by coach to Coniston, with the intention, as far as the younger were concerned, of ascending the Old Man. It was a bright and glorious fine morning, one of those so sparingly granted amid this beautiful scenery. The party were in the highest spirits; the careful mother had begun to contemplate changing their plans, and running away from that vulgar young man, who had last evening crowned his other enormities by openly drinking beer out of a pewter at the *table d'hôte* dinner; but now she congratulated herself on his absence. It must be confessed, Mary was a little dull; no doubt the scenery was beautiful, and her sisters were prepared to join in any amount of loudly-expressed admiration of it as they swept past Esthwaite Water, and over Coniston Pass, and through the thickly wooded slope that, like a shrubbery, surrounds Coniston Water, and forms so rich a contrast to the bare gigantic sides of the Old Man. But she brightened up directly.

"I declare now," cried Mrs. Salway, as they came in sight of the village hotel, "If there's not that dreadful young man! Now Mary, remember what I told you."

"The child can't be rude to him," said her father, who had a sneaking preference for Mary, and had seen the faint blush which that figure lounging there at the porch had brought to her cheeks long before her mother had noted the gentleman's identity.

"We had better wait and let him go up the hill first," said Agnes, a dark, handsome girl, who had always attracted a circle of admirers, and had brought two or three with her on this expedition.

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Salway. "If we are to go up we must start at once; the coach will leave at six, and that does not give us any too much time. What will you and Laura do?" added he to his wife.

"Oh, we will walk a little around the lake, papa. I do not envy you your climb, especially if you will bring me a nice root of parsley fern."

Laura was the studious and learned member of the family, seldom visible without spectacles, and more attached to ferns and botany than to anyone outside her own circle.

It is a very long pull up hill from Coniston village to the top of the Old Man towering nearly three thousand feet above it, and so our party found it. They started five, but had not gone far when the objectionable young fellow joined them and seizing his opportunity, soon detached Mary from the rest. I believe that, on this occasion at any rate, she made some resistance. But Agnes had her hands too full of her swains to look after her sister; and as for Mr. Salway, who was stout and more at his ease upon the pavement of the Stock Exchange than the side of a Westmoreland fell, he had enough to do to mind his own business up the winding path, even though for a long distance that path cannot be called precipitous. Mary was far lighter and more nimble than her Juno-like sister; and so the pair, in no very long time, took the lead. That the young gentleman had not been wasting his time, may be inferred from a scrap of the conversation.

"I wonder if this week has been as pleasant to you as to me, Mary?"

"It has been very nice. The lakes are delightful."

"Ah, of course; you must have had a very pleasant drive this morning!" he answered with some haste.

"Oh yes, pretty well," assented Mary, but dubiously.

"I am going away to-morrow."

She turned her face the other way, and diligently rooted up a bit of parsley—a very scrubby bit, though there were plenty of splendid clusters not far off. Then she said frankly, though still with her face turned away.

"I am so sorry."

"Are you really, dear? Won't your mother be glad though? She doesn't like me much."

"No," said Mary candidly.

"Do you?"

"You have no right to ask me that."

"Have I not? And why not, Miss Mary?"

"Because—because you have not told me whether you like me."

"I think I called you something, Miss Mary Salway, a few minutes ago," glancing up and down the path; they were just in the centre of the gorge near the Low Water Turn, and there was no one in sight. Mary did not answer. "You've forgotten, perhaps, what it was, dear?" She shook her head.

"I meant it. You are very dear to me."

"You've only known me nine days."

His arm, which had been assisting her up the steep path, was now giving her much further support.

"And to know you a day, my darling, is to love you."

And Mary, her arms full of parsley fern, was kissed before she could escape. Then a little reaction of feeling took place on her part.

"I don't even know your name," she said, standing still.

"Of course not; Harry. It's rather a common name, isn't it?"

"Harry?" murmured the girl softly; "and—what else?"

"Oh, never mind that. You have not yet answered my question whether you liked me."

"Yes, I like you."

"That won't do, Mary. The question is now altered to—love me?"

"You have answered it for yourself, I think. Do you suppose I should let you do what you have, if I had not?"

And they went on up the hill.

When they reached the top it was unoccupied; and seldom, indeed, had it been gained by two more happy people. A sunny smiling world stretched round them from sea to sea, the lights and shadows fitting over the green sides of the Old Man's brethren; while below, lake beyond lake reflected the sky, and round them peak beyond peak, the mountains stretched as far as the eye could reach. Only Scawfell's summit was veiled in mist. They stood by the cairn, and for a moment almost forgot one another in the grandeur of the sight. No, not forgot one another; rather it was the thought of the other's presence which tinged with a brighter lustre the brightest sunbeam on the distant lakes. No wonder that they sat down by the cairn, taking no very careful note of the passage of time, and talked more of those sweet nothings than before. At length Harry looked at his watch, and discovered that they had but an hour to make the descent if they wished to catch the coach.

"The others must have given it up and turned back, Mary."

"I suppose so. We must come up with them, or mamma will be so angry."

"Poor little Mary!"

"Don't, sir! How misty it has become?"

"By Jove! so it has. I ought to have looked out. Have we not this world to ourselves? But I wish I were quite certain which is the side by which we came up. We must make a start anyhow."

Have you ever, when at the top of a Westmoreland hill, found yourself silently, as if by magic, surrounded by a mist, from which a London fog would, for a density and a power of confusing things, hardly bear off the palm! A moment ago a smiling plain, set with lakes, as if with jewels, and rimmed with purple hills, was before you; a little puff of thin mist almost transparent rises from some neighboring gorge, another, and another, and lo! your prospect is lowered to a few yards, perhaps a few feet, of turf and shale, a cold, ghastly cairn of stones, and beyond—nothing, nothing but mist surrounding your little island like a gray ocean. While all is clear, it is so hard for a novice in mountains to realize the difficulty of finding his way in such a state of things; but the difficulty is very real. Our hero, who had experience of it, was quite at fault, nevertheless; he had been too much occupied with his companion to notice the direction of the wind, or any land marks which might indicate the side on which they had come up. Once safely upon the path, the foot of the hill might, by patience and care, be gained; but the summit was stony, and on two sides precipitous. He remembered that a honeymooning couple had only a week before been caught upon Helvelyn and detained all night by the mist. Such an adventure would be much worse for himself and Mary; the latter would certainly suffer, so he made a resolute attempt to descend.

Mary trusted to him implicitly, and hand in hand they had successfully descended some distance; although the steepness of the hillside and its rocky nature made him feel pretty sure that this was not the side by which they had gained the top. Slip, stumble, slip, here a few yards of steep turf aiding them, there the stones giving way under foot, and warning him at least that they were on the border of a scree. The ground grew more and more treacherous and rocky; after a stumble worse than those which had preceded it, he stopped to try if their eyes could distinguish anything through the gulf of mist into which they had nearly plunged headlong. No, the curtain was as thick as ever, and the rain besides was falling heavily. Then he started a large stone, in order to judge by its descent what kind of ground lay in front of them; three yards, and it was hidden from sight; bound, bound, twice it struck the rocks, and then an interval of silence, and then a sullen, distant splash. He shuddered and drew the girl back against the rocks.

"Thank God!" he muttered, "a few more steps, and we should have gone over the scree into Low Water Tarn."

Mary's distress, as slowly and very carefully they retraced their steps, may well be imagined. Not only was she tired, worn out and frightened, but the thought of what would be said if they could not descend speedily, was tormenting her. The poor girl was feverishly anxious at any risk to get off the hill, and her companion had much work to prevent her from meeting with a mishap. Consequently, when they a second time reached the cairn at the top, they were in a different frame of mind. The young fellow groaned as he looked at his watch, and found it was nearly seven o'clock and the mists thicker than ever. But not a word of reproach did the brave little maid utter to him.

In the meantime the party assembled in the hotel at the foot of the hill were passing through quite a series of anxieties. When six o'clock came, and with it the returning coach, Mrs. Salway's anger at the absence of her younger daughter could hardly be concealed from the outside public. Of course they could not leave her, and the coach had to depart without them. Her husband present and Mary absent shared the mother's reproaches with the objectionable young man, while the sister was quite as much surprised as they expressed themselves to be, for this was "so unlike Mary." But when nine o'clock came, and no sign of the missing ones, and the mists grew thicker, the landlady expressed herself of the opinion that "the young lady and gentleman would have to stay upon the hill all night, and hoped they had some wraps."