

XXXIX.

NEW YEAR'S DAY IN NEW YORK.

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ITS ANTIQUITY.

NEW YORK without New Year's would be like Rome without Christmas. It is peculiarly Dutch, and is about the only institution which has survived the wreck of old New York. Christmas came in with Churchmen, Thanksgiving with the Yankees, but New Year's came with the first Dutchman that set his foot on the Island of Manhattan. It is a domestic festivity, in which sons and daughters, spiced rums and the old drinks of Holland, blend. The long-stemmed pipe is smoked, and the house is full of tobacco. With the genuine Knickerbockers, New Year's commences with the going down of the sun on the last day of the year. Families have the frolic to themselves. Gayety, song, story, glee, rule the hours till New Year's comes in, then the salutations of the season are exchanged, and the families retire to prepare for the callers of the next day. Outsiders, who "receive" or "call," know nothing of the exhilaration and exuberant mirth which marks New Year's eve among Dutchmen.

THE PREPARATION.

The day is better kept than the Sabbath. The Jews, Germans, and foreigners unite with the natives in this festival. Trade closes, the press is suspended, the doctor and apothecary enjoy the day, — the only day of leisure during the year. It is the day of social atonement. Neglected social duties are performed; acquaintances are kept up; a whole year's neglect is wiped out by a proper call on New Year's. All classes and conditions of men have the run of fine dwellings and tables loaded with luxury. Wine flows free as the Croton, and costly liquors are to be had for the taking. Elegant ladies, in their most gorgeous and costly attire, welcome all comers, and press the bottle, with their most winning smile, upon the visitor, and urge him to fill himself with the good things. The preparation is a toilsome and an expensive thing. To receive bears heavily on the lady; to do it in first-class style draws heavily on the family purse. A general house-cleaning, turning everything topsy-turvy, begins the operation. New furniture, carpets, curtains, constitute an upper-ten reception. No lady receives in style in any portion of dress that she has ever worn before, so the establishment is littered with dressmaking from basement to attic. This, with baking, brewing, and roasting, keeps the whole house in a stir.

THE TABLE.

Great rivalry exists among people of style about the table — how it shall be set, the plate to cover it, the expense, and many other considerations that make

the table the pride and plague of the season. To set well a New Year's table requires taste, patience, tact, and cash. It must contain ample provision for a hundred men. It must be loaded down with all the luxuries of the season, served up in the most costly and elegant style. Turkey, chickens, and game; cake, fruits, and oysters; lemonade, coffee, and whiskey; brandy, wines, and — more than all, and above all — punch. This mysterious beverage is a New York institution. To make it is a trade that few understand. Men go from house to house, on an engagement, to fill the punch bowl. Lemons, rum, cordials, honey, and mysterious mixtures, from mysterious bottles brought by the compounder, enter into this drink. So delicious is it, that for a man to be drunk on New Year's day from punch is not considered any disgrace.

DRESS OF THE LADIES.

This is the most vexatious and troublesome of all the preparations for New Year's. Taste and genius exhaust themselves in producing something fit to be worn. The mothers and daughters quarrel. Feathers, low-necked dresses, and gorgeous jewelry the matron takes to herself. The daughters are not to be shown off as country cousins, or sisters of the youthful mother, and intend to take care of their own array. The contest goes on step by step, mingled with tears of spite and sharp repartee till midnight, nor does the trouble then end. Few persons can be trusted to arrange the hair. Some parties keep an artist in the family. Those who do not, depend upon a fashionable hair-dresser, who, on New Year's, literally has his hands full. En-

gagements run along for weeks, beginning at the latest hour that full dressing will admit. These engagements run back to midnight on New Year's eve. Matron or maid must take the artist when he calls. As the peal of bells chimes out the Old Year, the doorbell rings in the hair-dresser. From twelve o'clock midnight till twelve o'clock noon, New Year's, the lady with the ornamented head-top maintains her upright position, like a sleepy traveller in a railroad car, because lying down under such circumstances is out of the question. The magnificent dresses of the ladies; diamonds owned, or hired for the occasion; the newly-furnished house, adorned at great expense; the table loaded with every luxury and elegance; the ladies in their places; the colored servant at the door in his clerical outfit, — show that all things are ready for

THE RECEPTION.

The commonalty begin their calls about ten. The élite do not begin till noon, and wind up at midnight. Men who keep carriages use them, the only day in the year in which many merchants see the inside of their own coaches. Exorbitant prices are charged for hacks. Fifty dollars a day is a common demand. Corporations send out immense wagons, in which are placed bands of music, and from ten to twenty persons are drawn from place to place to make calls. The express companies turn out in great style. The city is all alive with men. It is a rare thing to see a woman on the streets on New Year's day. It is not genteel, sometimes not safe. Elegantly-dressed men, in yellow kids, are seen hurrying in all directions. They walk singly

and in groups. Most every one has a list of calls in his hand. The great boast is to make many calls. From fifty to a hundred and fifty is considered a remarkable feat. Men drive up to the curbstone if they are in coaches, or run up the steps if they are on foot, give the bell a jerk, and walk in. The name of one of the callers may be slightly known. He is attended by half a dozen who are entirely unknown to the ladies, and whom they will probably never see again. A general introduction takes place; the ladies bow and invite to the table. A glass of wine or a mug of punch is poured down in haste, a few pickled oysters — the dish of dishes for New Year's — are bolted, and then the intellectual entertainment commences. "Fine day" — "Beautiful morning" — "Had many calls?" — "Oysters first rate" — "Great institution this New Year's" — "Can't stay but a moment" — "Fifty calls to make" — "Another glass of punch?" — "Don't care if I do" — "Good-morning." And this entertaining conversation is repeated from house to house by those who call, till the doors are closed on business. Standing on Murray Hill, and looking down Fifth Avenue, with its sidewalks crowded with finely-dressed men, its street thronged with the gayest and most sumptuous equipages the city can boast, the whole looks like a carnival.

NEW YEAR'S NIGHT.

The drunkenness and debauchery of a New Year's in this city is a disgrace to the people. As night approaches, callers rush into houses where the lights are brilliant, calling for strong drinks, while their flushed cheeks, swollen tongues, and unsteady gait tell what

whiskey and punch have done for them. From dark till midnight the streets are noisy with the shouts of revellers. Gangs of well-dressed but drunken young men fill the air with glees, songs, oaths, and ribaldry. Fair ladies blush as their callers come reeling into the room, too unsteady to walk, and too drunk to be decent. Omnibuses are filled with shouting youngsters, who cannot hand their change to the driver, and old fellows who do not know the street they live in. Joined with the loud laughter, and shout, and song of the night, the discharge of pistols, the snap of crackers, and illuminations from street corners, become general. At midnight the calls end; the doors are closed, the gas turned off, the ladies, wearied and disgusted, lay aside their gewgaws, very thankful that New Year's comes only once in the season.