

# The Latch Key of New York

By KATHERINE POPE.

MANY tales had I heard of New York. That it abounded with thieves and crooks. That it was a suspicious place and a place to be suspicious of. That it was a cold, heartless, indifferent town. That extravagance ruled, life here was possible only for the very rich and the very poor. That courtesy was unknown, such hordes ever pushing on and being pushed on. It loomed a fearsome place to the stranger from the quiet purlieus of Chicago, but urgency impelled the adventure.

I felt like the veriest village tyro as I stood surrounded by my bags in the vastness of the Grand Central station. Whither should I turn, where could I find safe shelter? The guide book which I had assiduously studied on the train told on its advertising pages of a hotel near Columbia University, and the advertiser declared it to be a hotel patronized by "refined" people. University neighborhood and "refined" clientele seemed a combination where the proportion of thieves and crooks should be at their lowest terms, in all probability as safe a neighborhood as this wicked New York could boast, and I must start somewhere. I took my life in my hands, stepped into a taxi, ordered the driver to make for the said hotel, doubting if ever I reached there; but if so lucky, expecting on arrival to be obliged to turn over to the taxi man a goodly portion of my modest hoard.

Not so. Speedily and less expensively than in Chicago I covered the miles from station to hotel. The latter place proved average in quality, moderate in price and apparently not a den of thieves. From this anchorage the ignorant stranger tremblingly set forth in search of permanent quarters. In the streets she looked about apprehensively. Columbia spread out protecting wings, clucked a welcome and thither the stranger fled. Columbia told of a place approved of "unqualifiedly." And in a trice a home was found, adequate, attractive, costing no more than in a fair residence district in Chicago.

To be sure it was in one of New York's most canyonlike streets, but the location was to the front and high enough up for sunlight and play of breeze. While just one minute's walk and there was Morningside Park, with Riverside Park but a few minutes away.

## Always Room for One More!

It was very unlike the dread city of my fancy. It seemed as if there were room in New York for one more—although I had been assured there was not. Looking forward somewhat to my sojourn here—which I previously had not—I wandered forth to rest by the river and watch the sunset, planning to be on the alert meanwhile for suspicious characters. The good green grass on the parkway, the tree and shrubbery dotted slope leading to the river brought welcome country aspect into the town, though the river itself, with its borders given over to blatant industry, was undeniable city. Grant's Tomb uprose commandingly over all, and I halted to view it from a point below. Halted by the little railed in grave of the "Amiable Child." There forgetting the General's monument in the interest of the monument of a father's affection, I stood some time by the small one's resting place. When suddenly I became conscious that I was alone in New York, in a spot that at that hour had no other visitor, and that coming directly toward me was A Man. Of course a thief or a crook or a confidence man! Instinctively my hand went to my precious heirloom, an enameled, jeweled, hundred-year-old watch hanging from a ribbon about my neck. It was doomed, I knew; my heirloom was to be taken from me. The Man came closer.

He inquired the time. I clutched my heirloom, but I opened the case and gave him the hour. He lingered.

"It is a fine river," he remarked, looking up stream where the industries were less blatant.

"Lordy," I answered, as naturally as I could.

"Doesn't seem like New York to have saved this little grave, does it?" he said, standing with his hand on the railing and apparently indifferent to my heirloom.

"Redounds to her credit," I answered, again as naturally as I could.

He gazed across and up the river. "In the Old World they wouldn't spoil such a wonderful river," he declared, condemning the ugliness over the way. "But at this hour it is almost beautiful," and he looked off again up stream.

I was rightly ashamed of my mean suspicions. This was but another stranger, like myself, viewing the place, a stranger innocently desirous of sharing the sunset beauty with some one. I ceased to fear him.

Presently I strolled away—my heirloom intact—wandered across the roads to a row of benches placed facing river and rising hills. I sat down beside a woman. In her lap was a French grammar, the *Literary Digest* and the *Atlantic*. She looked safe. But presently she turned and asked me what time it was. Again I clutched my heirloom, but again I gave the hour. We sat awhile in silence. It was a May sunset and rarely beautiful. At length she spoke; of sunsets in general, of these on the river, of the river, of the neighborhood, and I waxed enthusiastic about the architectural beauty of a group of buildings near by.

"Union Theological," she told me, "as beautiful as any group in the city. And there is a lovely secluded green courtyard within which you should see. I live where my windows look down upon this green inclosure, and if you care for a view of the place come up to my rooms some day and look out of my windows. I am Mrs. Jerrems and live in that apartment building over there, No. 37."

How about that reputed indifference, coldness, suspiciousness marking the New Yorker? I had hit, then, upon a happy

"I MUST go and find out," I said, "what is the Voice of this city. Other cities have voices. It is an assignment. I must have it. New York," I continued, in a rising tone, "had better not hand me a cigar and say: 'Old man, I can't talk for publication.' No other city acts in that way. Chicago says, 'I will'; Philadelphia says, 'I should'; New Orleans says, 'I used to'; Louisville says, 'Don't care if I do'; St. Louis says, 'Excuse me'; Pittsburgh says, 'Smoke up.' Now New York."

—From O. Henry's "The Voice of the City."

exception. I never went to Mrs. Jerrems's—the more fool I—but I was glad I had the opportunity to go. It helped change the distorted picture.

## A Series of Wild Adventures.

Adventures of various sorts are sought, and found, in New York. My taste leads to the more colorless sort, far removed from the Pittsburgh millionaire type of speedy movement and rapid denouement. Incidents, episodes, vignettes, mine are, rather than movie films, but with a bit of novelty about them that allows of recording. On my early morning walk along the steep paths in Morningside Park I chanced once upon a picturesque figure that seemingly had stepped out of a picture frame of the 60's and from a region south of the Mason and Dixon line. Who she was, where she came from I know not. But there she stood, a tall, stately, slender lady gowned in a long skirted, tight waisted, voluminous black silk dress, a lace fichu over her breast, a lace mob cap atop an abundance of gray hair worn in prim ringlets that fell down over her shoulders. She was deliciously old fashioned but, above all, dainty. And what do you think she was doing? Cleaning up Morningside Park! With an umbrella in her hand she stepped daintily from step to step and gathered up a litter of paper with the point of her umbrella stick. She went at it in a most businesslike way, as though it were her morning task.

Another mild adventure with another picturesque lady of years and grace. This was on Riverside Drive and on a hot evening, when every bench was taken possession of. I was sitting there at the curve in the bank by the record of the "Amiable Child," looking up the river at the array of Sunday craft creeping home with their Sunday holiday makers. Silently a figure approached, and I heard a pleasant Southern voice asking if there was room on my bench for one more. Another apparition from the past, another picture. A lovely old lady with a wealth of high piled white hair, dark eyes all the darker for the white hair and classically regular features. A lady of an elder day, yet with a certain brisk, modern air. Her costume, however, was rather theatrical than modern—a light, flower strewn organdie frock, over this a black Chantilly lace shawl that came almost to the hem

of the dress. As she sat beside me I noted details—a large cameo pin fastening the shawl and that she wore quite wonderful rings of topaz, emerald and of diamonds, all in old fashioned settings.

Who was she, why was she out all alone, as old as she was, with all those jewels, that fine lace? The heat, she said, had brought her out, and unconcernedly she stayed there until a late hour.

In our talk we wandered far. She was born in Louisiana, had dwelt long in California, knew it and its history well, she had traveled the globe around, was now a New Yorker. An interesting, worth while chance acquaintance. I tried to place her. Presently she said, watching the illumination over at Palisades Park, the twinkle of lights as river craft came and went, the changing sky, "How theatrical it all is, isn't it?" Ah, that was it, she, too, belonged to the stage, that costume was the costume of a genteel old lady of the stage. Who was she? A somebody, I was sure. And later she spoke of things being a little different with her than with women in private life. But that was as far as she went, and I did not intrude.

"Up-On-The-Hill" I found a locality not only of good air and wide views, but also of no little informality and friendliness, and was told that here was the real Bohemia of New York—that the village posed, that here was the real. Here students, writers, newspaper folk, on the whole displayed a certain openness and response, there was among them as a whole a free place. One found real conversation among the diners at that "unqualifiedly approved" place, one found real conversation among

the strangers who came and went here. You did not know the name or habitat of the persons with whom you dined, but what matter? It was interesting to get their point of view and to swap experiences. You might never meet again. Or if you did, and found the repetitions pleasant, other meetings could be arranged easily.

## Better Than Main Street.

Main Street would not have done this, at table would have looked with suspicion and distaste upon the stranger to whom it passed the salt—though come to think of it Main Street would have troubled neither to address the stranger nor to pass the salt.

"Up-On-The-Hill" seemed a region aloof from the city, the city of crime and greed, of bitter contrasts, of artificial niceties, as well as of the lowest standards of living. "Up-On-The-Hill" there was a pleasing simplicity, a pleasing naturalness, but no noticeable disregard of the conventions that count. Sun burned college lads and lasses went the academic rounds bareheaded, lightly clad, and you were glad they looked no more bookish than they did. Sports clothes ruled, the observer was back in California, land of outdoor life and clothes designed for outdoor pleasuring.

Contrary to expectation people were very good natured about guiding the stranger, and the city children were not only kindly but also very clever in giving directions and defining locations. It all may have been a matter of self-preservation, the getting you started right so you would move on and give needed place to the next comer, but whatever the motive the resulting thing was good. You lost the feeling of awkwardness and strangeness, gained in confidence. Instead of nating the crowd, wholly condemning it, you rose to appreciation of it, acknowledged there was a communal feeling in it, and something stimulating, inspiring. And the grateful stranger pays this tribute of a word, goes back to the quiet purlieus of Chicago no longer regarding New York as universally suspicious and a place to be suspicious of universally; but rather as offering hospitality, and as providing possible simple living for those with simple tastes.

## Children's Books

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turkeys became so scarce that people began passing off almost anything for turkeys, "half-grown humming birds and even rocs out of the Arabian Nights." The supply of Christmas trees gave out and they had to make them out of rags, and stuff them with bran, like old fashioned rag dolls. In short, the plan of a daily Christmas proved such a colossal failure that at the end of the year the little girl begged the fairy not to have Christmas oftener than once in a thousand years; but finally, after some argument, she agreed that once a year would be all right, since that plan had proved a success for a good many centuries.

William Allen Butler, a veteran New York lawyer of an earlier generation, best remembered as the author of the satiric poem about "Miss Flora McFlimsey of Madison Square, . . . who really and truly had nothing to wear," once wrote a diverting Christmas extravaganza entitled "The Animal Book." It tells how a certain old gentleman rejoiced in the possession of thirteen grandchildren, whose greatest delight was a big book in the old gentleman's library, filled with fascinating pictures of elephants and camels and polar bears and every other creature known to Noah's Arks and menageries. But, while these children loved all the animals dearly, they never once suspected that the picture book animals loved the children just as much. In fact, on Christmas eve, when the lights had been put out and the library was all dark and silent, the picture book elephant nudged the giraffe with his tusk and said, "I wish we could buy those children some Christmas presents." The animals thought this a great idea, so the Big European Bear, the White Faced Monkey and the Orang-utan appointed themselves a committee of three, dressed themselves in some old clothes from the missionary box upstairs and quietly slipped out of the house, planning to dance in the streets and earn enough pennies to buy the presents. Their first adventure was with a postman, who was just taking the mail from the corner lamp post, and was so scared when he saw them that all the mail flew into the air in a regular snowstorm of Christmas cards and holiday greetings. A block further they came upon an Italian with a hand organ, and he, too, when he saw them gave a shriek and fled. When the orang-utan had put the hand organ strap over his shoulder and turned up his overcoat collar he looked pretty much like an Italian himself; and as it is nothing strange for a hand organ man to have a monkey and a dancing bear, they had no further trouble and the pennies simply rained in. All went smoothly until the presents were bought and they were nearing home, when suddenly the animals remembered that the only proper way to give Christmas presents is to take them down the chimney and this they decided they could none of them do. Luckily at this moment along came Santa Claus with sleigh and reindeer, who at once volunteered to take their packages down the chimney for them.

## IV.

Some of the best Christmas stories ever written are for grown-ups rather than for children and consequently do not strictly come within the scope of this article. And yet no survey of this type of story would be adequate without some reference to F. Hopkinson Smith's "Colonel Carter's Christmas." No one who has once made the acquaintance of Colonel Carter can ever forget that fine old exponent of the flower of Southern chivalry; and doubtless the author was right when he assured us that the Colonel had never been in better form than on this particular Christmas eve, "to him the occasion of the revival of the old Days of Plenty. Presently the faithful Chad appeared "bearing aloft the crowning glory of the evening and placed it with all its candles in the center of the table." And then it was, we are told, that the Colonel, gathering under his hand the little sheaf of lamplighters which Chad had twisted, "rose from his seat, picked up a slender glass that had once served his father," and offered the first toast of the evening: "to the happiness of the lady on my right, whose presence is always a benediction and whose loyal friendship is one of the sweetest treasures of my life."

In conclusion a word should be devoted to "A Christmas Eve in Exile," by Al-

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