

THE NEW YEAR IN OLD MANHATTAN

EARLY in the eighteenth century, that is, about two hundred years ago, the streets of New York, according to John Fiske, were "gorgeous with costumes. One eminent citizen is described as clad in a long-skirted coat and knee-breeches of cinnamon cloth trimmed with silver lace; the coat is lined with sky-blue silk, the hose are of dove-colored silk, and the shoes have large silver buckles." This gentleman adorned his head with an enormous wig; pictures of a similar wig elaborately curled we remember as worn by judges and courtiers in the days of the Georges, and even earlier, in the Stuart days. His hat was a broad-brimmed beaver, finished with a band of gold lace. His shirt was ruffled, his vest was of red satin, embroidered with gold.

The ladies of that period were exceedingly fine, and their raiment was as elegant and as sumptuous as that worn by the dames and demoiselles of our present New York. Blue and silver gowns opened over petticoats of black velvet trimmed with silver, while their little feet were incased in high-heeled shoes with huge rosettes.

In that leisurely time, when people lived in detached houses amid green fields, and for many a year afterward, down to perhaps thirty years ago, or forty to be accurate, New Year's Day was the *fête* day of the year.

Every Knickerbocker family of the least pretensions kept open house on that day, and it was the rule, the thing imperatively required by good form, for the gentlemen to call on the ladies and wish them the compliments of the season.

There was a superstition about the first foot over the threshold, and people were immensely relieved if the earliest caller of the year were of a kind likely to bring luck to the house.

Old people remember the tables spread with pickled oysters and salads, cold turkey, and the blackest of plum-cake with frothy eggnog and decanters of fragrant wine. The women offered and the men accepted a generous hospitality; matrons urged their guests to eat and drink; maidens looked their sweetest; many an engagement was announced on New Year's Day.

Carriages rattled along the streets, and the promenades were wholly given to the sterner sex. One never saw a woman abroad on the first of January. Her turn came on the second, which was known as Ladies' Day, when friends called on one another, refreshments were served, and the ravelled ends of social intercourse were securely rebound and fastened by the exchange of visiting cards.

A dance usually concluded New Year's Day, and balls or parties were in vogue during the week. The hours for evening recreation were much earlier than now. People assembled by eight or shortly after, and eleven or twelve witnessed their leave-taking. If, by any beneficent chance, we might now introduce the custom of earlier hours in society the result would be, for men at least, most fortunate. So insistent are the demands of business, and so closely confined to their desks are professional and business men, that the late hours which are inevitable in our present-century entertainments play havoc with all but the strongest, and tell on the nerves of our belles and their chaperones.

As New York has grown from the Battery to the Bronx, and, becoming cosmopolitan, has lost the quaint Dutch characteristics with which it began, the simple-hearted primitive neighborliness has naturally vanished. We do not now run in upon our friends for a morning call at any time, and New Year's Day, except by the unfashionable stratum of people who have no acquaintance with society, is not signalized by visits. For home dinners and family gatherings, for jaunts out of town, for house-parties in the country, it still affords a convenient opportunity, but it is not now the day which the Schuylers and the Hoffmans, the Livingstons and the Van Cortlandts kept with wassail and festivity. It is ushered in with the booming of can-