

NIGHT IN A FASCINATING SQUARE THAT NEVER SLEEPS

By Adolph Klausner.

A Varied Panorama of Life Keeps Moving and Changing in Times Square from Early Evening Until the Small Hours of the Morning.

HOME, SWEET HOME," in the asthmatic wheezing of a broken-down concertina, that is to say, it is nearer "Home, Sweet Home" than any other tune you ever heard, though the missing notes leave the question open to some doubt if you insist upon being too much of a skeptic.

To the bundle of rags huddling there in the shadow of one of the newer buildings of Times Square, "Home, Sweet Home" by any other name would mean as little. To you the tune, or near-tune—whatever it is—would be as doleful and disjointed, no matter what it may have been before wreckage of the instrument, and worse wreckage in the execution, made it this thing of groans and grunts.

The time is 2 A. M., there is a slow fall of fine drizzling rain, a sort of imitation fog, the thing that aims to be what London dreads so much, and never realizes its ambition (which is fortunate for us), and through which the incandescents and the arc lights, on the signs, and in front of the big hotels, shine with a sort of discouraged lustre.

The day was fine, one of those early sweet-scented days with promises we have been having lately of a charming Spring, the kind of day that puts spirit into all of us. Now the air is cooler, in fact it has zip enough to make you glad you have your overcoat along.

Since 8 o'clock or before, building hope on the generosity of the theatre-going crowd the bundle of rags has been squatting in its corner, forcing out wheezy sounds from its wretched concertina. Before it, massing on the pavements, dashing across the street in front of whizzing motors and clattering cabs, the panorama of Broadway has been unfolded—that panorama of strange contrasts, with its luxury and pseudo luxury, to bring envy to the snapping point. But such a one as this, the bundle of rags aforesaid, has lost the spirit to be envious. At least a pallid hope, a sort of anemic longing, that an occasional nickel will be dropped into the cup, mistaken in the darkness for a penny. But pennies are welcome if there are enough of them chink-chinking in the tin cup, and hour after hour it sits, this bundle of ragged clothes, adding to its "bank account."

Long ago the last of the theatres sent its crowd into the street, and now the restaurants, all but the two or three of the garish all-night places, have been emptied of their guests. Occasionally from downtownward a hansom, rapidly driven, or a taxi, or a motor, comes whizzing.

The spaces are widening between the cars that clang up and down Broadway or into Forty-second Street, for their regular trips to and from the ferries, and the congestion of an hour or so ago, has given way to a comparative emptiness.

Three or four blocks up the street a string band is still playing away for a dozen or more couples who will not forsake the rather Bohemian restaurant until the gray of dawn, and who, under the inspiration of their wine, are whooping it up in songs, telling silly stories, or retailing unimportant gossip.

But in the big hotels, the Knickerbocker across the way, and the Astor, the fiddles have had time to get into a deep sleep, the lights in the grill are out, chairs are banked on the tables, and the sweepers are already busy in the lobby getting ready for another day.

Occasionally a belated traveler wanders in, has a word with the clerk, signs the register, piles into the elevator, and is whizzed up to floor eleven, sixteen, six, as the case may be, to go to bed and rest, and maybe dream of a quiet little home place hundred of miles away from the Great White Way.

But does Times Square ever sleep? It never really does.

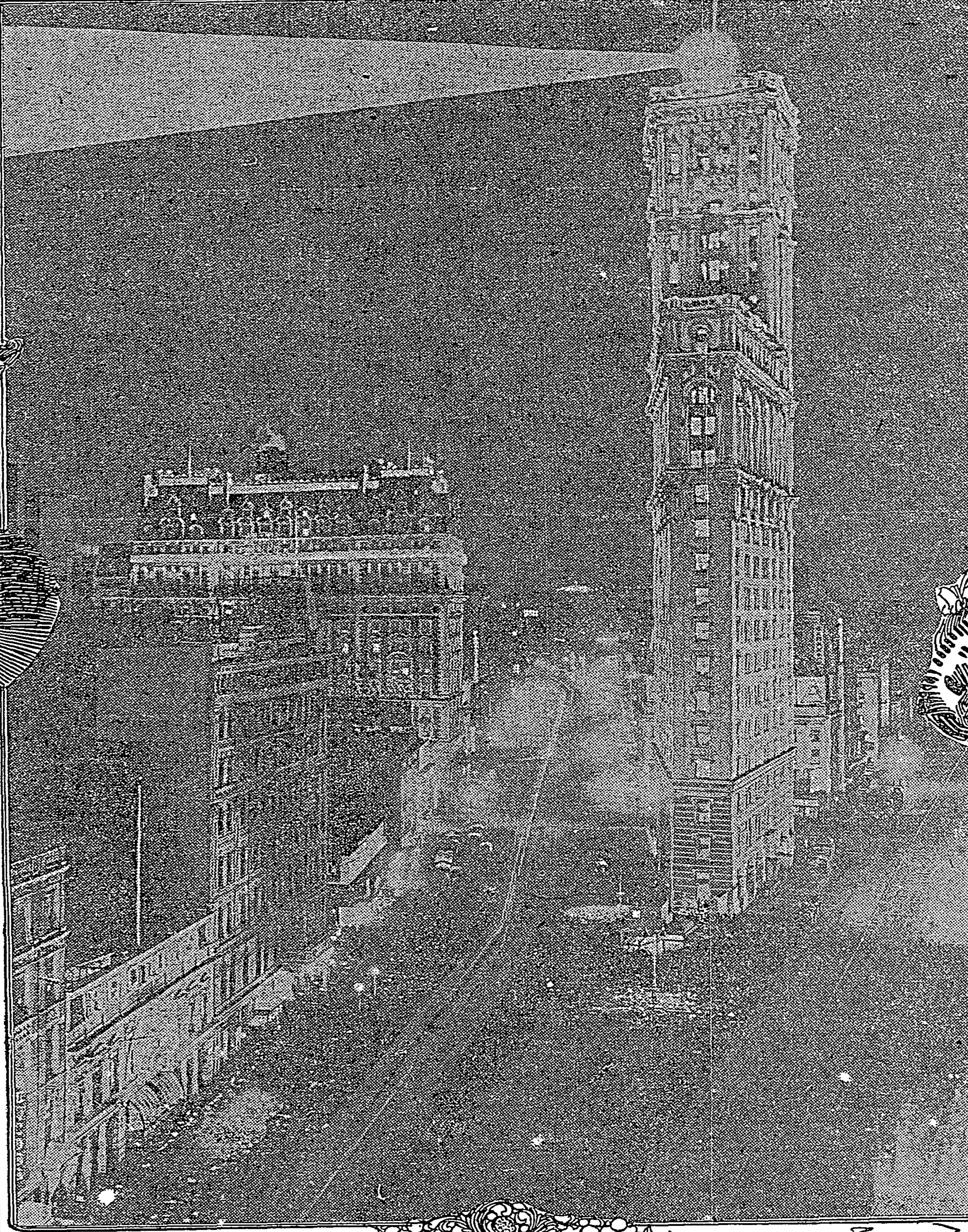
For a brief interval it may drowse, get somnolent, lose its chronic state of wearing, tearing, nervous energy, and pull up for a little rest. But wait here with me from 2 or 3 A. M., while there are still plenty of signs of active life, see the night lights flicker and go out, see the last of that line of waiting taxis there crawl away toward home, or wherever belated taxis go; see the gray of dawn giving place to the rose of morning, and you will still find through all these varied phases some signs of the big pulse of this big square.



Now, sometime after 2 o'clock, there is still more life than you might see on Main Street in the average city of the second class at 8 o'clock at night, yes, or at noonday. The big rush around the soda fountains, beginning when the first theatre crowd is out, is over, to be sure, but the prescription clerks are busy down below, and there at the toilet preparation counter, are buyers of rouge and powder and black pencils.

Over on the settee around the central pillar Patience on a monument sits and chews her gum. He—the inevitable he—is late in coming, and her eyes furtively seek the clock, then brighten as he finally trips along, apologetic, but able to make amends with a box of sweets, picked up from the counter there, and handed over with a smirk and some fool remark contrasting it—and to its disadvantage—with the receiver of the gift. Down into the Subway they go to join a dozen or more passengers who have been waiting for the Brooklyn train, just now rumbling into the station, with a clattering of opening gates and the familiar injunction of the guard to "Mind the steps."

Further down under the level of the Subway THE TIMES'S presses are clashing away, while up from the depths bundles upon bundles of the next edition are being raised, shoved on to trucks, passed through the gates, loaded into the cars, whirled uptown and downtown, and to the trains that carry "All the News That's Fit to Print" to the breakfast tables. For an hour more editors and reporters, composers, and the office staff will be busy up above giving way to the men who take the "lobster" trick, and



Times Square at Night.

finish up the composition that means early proofs for advertisers. But all this is a matter of course, the sort of thing to be expected where a great newspaper is being made ready for the reading public.

Get back to the sidewalk for more signs that Times Square is never quite asleep. The great troops of human ants that blacken Broadway by day and night have thinned into a broken line or two, but there is movement still up and down and east and west.

From a near-by actors' club half a dozen young men, disdaining the invitations of the taxi drivers, and some other invitations, come laughing down Broadway, breaking into groups of two and three as they reach the corner, so-longing to each other, then going their several ways toward home.

A trim, neatly dressed girl hurries by, looking neither to right nor left, but straight ahead, disappears in the darkness further up the street.

A cashier, perhaps, from one of the

humankind that filter through this highway at three-thirty in the morning. And a contrast to those others who amble along at a snail's pace, pause at every lighted corner, glance sharply up and down the street, inspecting, then go further along, repeating their hesitating progress of the regular promenade. Queen faces, those, not always without beauty of a sort, though the redness of their lips and the unnatural brightness of their eyes proclaim the work of art rather than of nature.

A rumbling sound from Forty-second Street and a heavy truck drawn by two huge horses passes by. It is loaded with milk cans, and is the advance guard of Jersey's supply, coming over now by wagon loads to the creameries and restaurants. Milk. And then another contrast. See that bent, slinking figure hobbling uneasily across the street, stopping every now and then—there, within an ace of that automobile that just flashed by—leaning wearily on his stick, then hobbling along again, and disappearing around the corner on the other side of the way. A cocaine wreck. Back from the island a month or so ago, straightened up and apparently in fair condition. To-morrow, or next day, maybe, another trip away, then the end, and for him no more of the Great White Way. It has tragedies, this early morning watching: tragedies for which that mournful concertina, still active among the rags, provides the dolorous dirge.

A sound of laughter, but not such laughter as you heard a little while ago. There is something terrible in this, a sort of agony of laughter, and you do not have to wonder why. She is, or might

laughing alternately, muttering a confused babble that might mean anything she is that most awful of all things—a drunk woman. A crowd quickly gathers. At midday a crowd would not surprise you. The wonder now is where those people all have sprung from, for it is well on toward 4 o'clock, and even this thin line of an hour ago has wavered down to an occasional human dot and dash.

The onlookers are mostly men, but there are half a dozen women in the circle, creatures in showy plumage, and they seem to vacillate between a sense of seeing something funny and a queer, half-sick, terrified expression. Little wonder, too, for this awful human signpost points the way that they are going—no mistake of that, once you have sized up the details, the wastrel's bedraggled skirt, which is of silk, though the color has gone out of it, and it is almost torn to shreds; the high-heeled (where the heel is left at all) slippers, and the bedraggled feather on her hat. A policeman hurrying up, a short struggle, the clang of a patrol wagon a few minutes later, and another dismal early morning chapter has been closed.

Then, almost without warning, a terrific clatter, a quick dash for the sidewalk by pedestrians, a violence of gongs, the beat of hoofs, the ring of steel, and a fire engine is disappearing up the street. There is something inspiring in the sight—something to stir the blood and the imagination in this exhibition of readiness and nerve and quickness of response. Five minutes ago the alarm ticked into Headquarters, three minutes later the big, white horses' heads were in their halters, the men were at their posts, the heavy fire-fighting machinery was on the go pell-mell. As it happens, the blaze is out before they reach the spot. It was a "false alarm," just another case of strain for nothing to which the fire-fighter gets accustomed. When the alarm sounds, "theirs not to reason why."

For two hours or more a boy at each Subway station has been crying out the morning papers; indeed, before midnight was half an hour old there were some early editions on the streets. Now, while the all-night workers from various near-by places are lining up on the stools in the all-night restaurants, laying a foundation of ham and eggs, but with an eye on the more enjoyable coconut, jelly, or chocolate cake to follow, the newsmen are beginning to open their stands and arrange their papers for the early morning trade.

From downtown and uptown, turning east and west, into the side streets of the forties, the butchers and the grocers' wagons are beginning to parade, the milk-carts rattle along, depositing their tin cans here and there, in preparation for the day. A baker's boy with a huge tray of hot rolls poised on his head turns the corner and disappears into a near-by doorway. Storm doors are beginning to be opened and sleepy housemaids come out, look up at the sky, seem satisfied with the prospect, yawn, and turn indoors again. A group of Italian laborers, with picks and shovels, clatter up the Subway stairs, pass into the street, ready to begin work. Almost at the same minute another group, dragging slowly along, their shoes thick with sticky clay and their faces grimy, halt a Broadway car, bound Mulberry Bendward. They have been working hard all night, under the flaming torches, on a bit of new track laying half a dozen blocks down the street.

A boy comes whistling along, suddenly stops, glances suspiciously to right and left, as if afraid of being seen, digs down into his pocket, and you hear a faint sound of metal striking metal. A penny has fallen into the beggar's cup. For it is still there, the bundle of rags, with its wheezing concertina, and the tune is still that something that may be "Home, Sweet Home."

Then two shopgirls, in neat black, with white collars and cuffs, come through a side street, turn into Broadway, brushing against the last of the midnight crew of harpies, who, finally discouraged, is plodding her way toward home, wherever that may be. Then, almost in an instant, clerks and shopgirls, the first of the marketers with their baskets—bound toward the Sixth or Eighth Avenue butchers and green grocers—mechanics and laboring men of this kind and of that. The regular procession is under way.

And in Times Square another busy day begins.

