

tion, in light-coloured gowns, white, pale blue, Nile green, and pink, while over these costumes were thrown opera cloaks and capes of astonishing complexity and elaborateness. Nearly all were bare-headed, and nearly all wore aigrettes; a score of these, a hundred of them, nodded and vibrated with an incessant agitation over the heads of the crowd and flashed like mica flakes as the wearers moved. Everywhere the eye was arrested by the luxury of stuffs, the brilliance and delicacy of fabrics, laces as white and soft as froth, crisp, shining silks, suave satins, heavy gleaming velvets, and brocades and plushes, nearly all of them white—violently so—dazzling and splendid under the blaze of the electrics. The gentlemen, in long, black overcoats, and satin mufflers, and opera hats; their hands under the elbows of their women-folk, urged or guided them forward, distressed, preoccupied, adjuring their parties to keep together; in their white-gloved fingers they held their tickets ready. For all the icy blasts that burst occasionally through the storm doors, the vestibule was uncomfortably warm, and into this steam-heated atmosphere a multitude of heavy odours exhaled—the scent of crushed flowers, of perfume, of sachet, and even—occasionally—the strong smell of damp seal-skin.

Outside it was bitterly cold. All day a freezing wind had blown from off the Lake, and since five in the afternoon a fine powder of snow had been falling. The coachmen on the boxes of the carriages that succeeded one another in an interminable line before the entrance of the theatre, were swathed to the eyes in furs. The spume and froth froze on the bits of the horses, and the carriage wheels crunching through the dry, frozen snow gave off a shrill staccato whine.