

THE HOLD-UP GAME AS NEW YORK'S TIP-HUNTING CORMORANTS PLAY IT

HAVE a light, Sir?" It is a small boy, smutty-faced and keen-eyed, who says it as he steps up with a flaming match in hand—a light for your cigar or cigarette when you come through the theatre entrance.

No, the youngster is not interested personally in your comfort. In fact, he doesn't care a rap whether you get the light or not—except that it comes from him. He expects a "tip" for his effort. It is simply one of the first steps in the "hold-up" game that runs riot in Manhattan.

Out West—in the olden days—even in the present at some points, they have the absolutely original, beware-of-imitation hold-ups, but conducted in a somewhat different manner. They are carried through by the aid of a gun. The "man behind" exclaims "Hands up!" Up go the hands and the operator goes down in the pockets—your pockets! Here in New York there exists the same general condition minus the gun accompaniment or any stereotyped form of salutation, yet the result is practically the same, for about everything one gets in "service," great or small, one pays for. Down go your hands—in your own pockets, instead of being elevated, as in the West, and the operation of giving up you perform yourself instead of having it done for you.

Yes, the public invariably pays in this game, the playing of which confronts it at almost every turn—pays with an insincere smile on its face and a cuss word lingering on the vocal chords.

The small boy who lights the match, or perhaps calls a taxicab without being asked to do so, doesn't remain a great while at this small play. He is simply laying the ground work for the future. Perhaps he becomes an attendant in the washroom of a small or large hotel; later he may be a "bell hop"; a year or so passes and it may find him an "omnibus" in the dining room; then a waiter; possibly he graduates to a captaincy of waiters, and eventually—if he is clever enough—he may reach that almost dictatorship position of headwaiter. It may be that his course in service will take another road. He may become a boothblack, then a porter, a headporter, or a barber, possibly a taxicab driver, or some one of the many other positions in the serving line, but in any event during the climb in doing for others he is forever learning and absorbing the gentle art of systematically separating the public from its loose change.

One small urchin—he wasn't over a dozen years old—told a TIMES reporter that he "pulled down" about \$10 a week at the apparently simple match-lighting stunt.

"Yep," he said, "I pulls down 'bout ten bucks at dat game. Sometimes I stacks up again a tight-wad bunch wot's at de shows but 'aint always so. Y'see I gen'ly strikes a gent wot's wid a lady an' if he ain't hitched to 'er—married I mean—he is good for a dime er more. He couldn't say nix on de mazuma when de skirt is wid 'im, now could he? She might tink he was a close 'un—eh, what? An' den sometimes I gits as much as a quarter outer some of 'em, but dey is gen'ly mummies wot's out fer a blow-out in dere open-faced clothes. Sure, it's a great game! Ten bucks a week fer a few ticks

of work each night ain't so worse, now be it?"

The incident illustrates that the spirit of hold-up, graft, tipping, pour-boire, or whatever you chose to term it, becomes an early and absorbing passion with many of the boys of the street in this big city. There are hundreds of youngsters at the same game, but in different ways.

Probably the major portion of the hold-up schemes are worked out in the big hotels and apartment houses and one hotel man estimated that tipping alone costs the people of New York and visitors who come here, much more than \$18,000,000 annually. He arrived at these figures by stating that there were about two hundred so-called high-class hotels and apartments houses where tipping averaged \$250 daily throughout the year. This he stated does not take into consideration the hundreds of smaller hosteleries and apartment houses where smaller amounts are given, and apparently it would not appear inconsistent to place the tipping figures at \$25,000,000 per annum.

The writer happened in the washroom of one of the larger hotels not long since. A peaceful, ministerial appearing man, ecclesiastically garber—there were the proverbial glasses and white lawn necktie—was washing his hands and face. When finished—even before he had time to lay aside the towel—two of the attendants carromed with each other in a wild effort to use a whisk broom on the man's coat. A third boy pranced about in front of the man and held out his hat to him as if presenting his best girl with a bouquet. The man grabbed the hat and then dodged the two whisk broom bearers.

"Durn it," he exclaimed, as the fire came into his blue eyes, "let me alone, won't you? That's four times I've been brushed off during the afternoon—twice in here, too. You'll wear the nap o' my suit!"

Then he went out. He gave no tip. The boys shrugged their shoulders deprecatingly, one muttered, "cheap skate," with an Italian accent and they all looked around for another prospective victim. No doubt they found him. This is only another incident, but similar ones occur hourly in each day.

The attendants in washrooms, as a rule, are under the supervision of the head porter. The boys, or men, just as they happen to be, rarely receive more than \$18 or \$20 a month in wages, and consequently depend to a great degree on tips. They are on the lookout for them every minute. If you don't believe it, make an optical note some time how oversolicitous they are and just what they do with their shoulders, eyes or face after a man has used a towel, or the comb and brush and departs without contributing at least a nickel.

The truth of the matter is, that about every man going into a washroom of almost any first or middle class New York hotel, whether he be a guest there or not, and uses the water, soap, towel, brush or comb—even looks into the mirror to see that his hair is properly combed—is regarded as legitimate prey, and, seemingly, is expected to give up to the attendants. They look for the tip—their eyes greedily watch the movement of the hand to see if it is toward the pocket, and, to repeat, the man who leaves with-

How People in This City Are Forced to Spend Money for Needless and Worthless Services.

out donating a coin, in nine cases out of ten, is the subject for a remark about tight-wad proclivities—the individual may not hear it, but it is generally forthcoming—sotto voce.

Many hotels still continue general supervision over their washrooms. Some do not, but put the proposition into the hands of others—that is, the hotel management obtain a so-much-per-annum rental for the privilege, and those who have the matter in hand furnish their own attendants and necessary articles for the room, and, of course, retain the tips. Under such a condition it readily can be seen that the public has got to pay for all this somehow or other.

Many of the hotels are said to get mighty good rentals for these privileges, too. Simeon Ford, the humorist and proprietor of the Grand Union, one of the oldest hosteleries in the city, told THE TIMES reporter the other day that only recently he had been offered \$2,500 a year for this privilege, and the party making the proposition had agreed to furnish his own help, towels, soap, etc. Mr. Ford said he turned down the offer, not because he didn't think it big enough, but because he didn't believe in the principle of the thing.

Then there is the hatack and coatroom bugaboos that the public is forced to put up with. Near the entrance to nearly every dining room in almost every hotel in New York a hatack stares one in the face; the coatroom may not be so close at hand, but it isn't very far away. It seems to be one of the unwritten laws of most hotels that hats and outer coats must be checked before entering the dining room or grill, even if the stay is only for a few minutes—and, of course, the dear, obliging public going in to spend its money must abide by all this red tape.

Like the washroom proposition, many of the hotels do not run these little miniature mints themselves, but are said to rent out the privilege. Yet they remain a sort of silent factor in the hold-up game because the guest is, apparently, forced to check hat or coat or both. If a man does succeed in getting by and takes his hat into the dining room or grill with him, it won't be but a few minutes before the news spreads and an attendant is soon before him to exchange a check for the hat—they will even go so far as to take a hat without a word and bring back the check before one realizes that the chapeau has vanished. The ultimate result of all this is—the tip.

According to some sources of information it is from this privilege that some hotels receive their highest concession rental, which is said to be often in the four-figure class. Dame Rumor even has it that when a certain palm room connected with one of the large hotels was opened a few years ago the revenue from the hatack and coatroom averaged over \$100,000 for two succeeding years, and one manager told the reporter that as high as \$10,000 a year rental has been received from those who hold the two privileges.

The afternoon tea-drinking habit that has so increased in Manhattan during the past three years has proved a tremendous sinecure for the hatack and coatroom people. Many of the larger hotel dining rooms during the Fall, Winter, and early Spring are crowded every afternoon with women and their male escorts. The women go to sip their tea and other liquids of like color but stronger, display their gowns, and to see what the "other woman" is wearing. Many of the men, too, drink tea—sometimes. At the door of the tea or dining room stands a boy—possibly two of them—who assist the women to remove their outer wraps, possibly take charge of them, together with the coats and hats of the men, and a tip is pretty sure to come later on. The tip averages anywhere from a ten-cent piece to a half dollar per person or party, and if a room serves 100 in the course of an afternoon it doesn't take an expert account to figure up what a large revenue comes from this source alone.

In one Broadway hotel, near the entrance to its grill room, is a rack for hats. It is made up of compartments, each one of which will hold at least three hats. Not so very long ago a party of six—three men and three women—went to this hotel for an after-the-theatre supper, and, of

course, the hatack boys were on the job as usual. The women didn't care to remove either hats or wraps. One of the men, as he handed his own hat and those of his friends to one of the boys, said: "Take these, please, and put them on one check." The boy stated that it was "contrary to rules" to do this and insisted that each hat should have a separate check.

The man demurred and repeated his demand for one check. "Do as I request" he added, "or I will call for the manager and report you." Only then did the boy take the three hats, place them in one compartment, and hand the man a solitary check. The youngster was simply trying to work three checks on the party, and when all come out it would be arranged that each one of three boys would probably receive a check calling for a tip for each. The game fell through—there was but one check and one tip given—10 cents—instead of 30 cents as the little brass-buttoned grafters had planned.

There are always two sides to any story. This applies to the tipping, too. In reply to a question put to a hotel manager by the reporter in regard to so-called hold-ups, he said:

"It's simply up to the public. People are not forced to tip at all if they do not want to. If a man or woman feels that the service as rendered is not worthy of the tip, or if they do not believe in the custom, let them forget it! If one lacks the moral courage to refuse giving a coin it doesn't quite seem right or consistent that the coatroom boy, the washroom attendant, the waiter or the hotel management should be criticised, now does it? At the same time I must insist that the management of most hotels demand courteous treatment toward those within its walls, and any sign of displeasure on the part of employes at not receiving a tip—well, that employe is generally discharged, and quickly; whether the he or she is a direct employe of the house or hired by one who has obtained a so-called privilege."

Unquestionably the stand of the manager in regard to the "moral courage" factor is all very well, and true to a degree, but the fact still remains that there is much discourtesy apparent, and there is not a manager on hand at all times to note just exactly how hold-ups are manipulated in different parts of a hotel.

Beyond a doubt one of the most remunerative positions in large houses is that of the head porter, and, as one manager put it, many of them are rich men, having become so from the tips received. "In fact," he continued, "the position of head porter in a first-class hotel is worth considerably more, from a money standpoint, than any other position in the house, barring possibly that of the manager, and in some instances he makes considerably more than the manager."

The head porter has almost absolute control of the under porters, who receive comparatively little in salary—about \$12 or \$15 a week—and depend upon the "incoming" baggage tips to increase their

remuneration, while the head porter, no matter who handles the baggage, receives all the "outgoing" baggage tips. When the guest upon departure seeks the head porter to get him to purchase tickets, possibly to give him instructions in regard to luggage, &c., he invariably tips—it may vary from 25 cents to a \$5 bill. Then, too, the guest probably hands the under porter something just as he did upon arrival, but in this case the tip invariably reaches the pocket of the head porter, and there are many of them in New York, according to this manager, making from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year.

And the doormen—those who open and close the doors of carriages arriving at entrances—they get in the game, too, and to no small degree. Some of the hotels, it is said, have rented out this privilege to others who hire their own help, pay a stated salary, but require them to hand over all tips collected. Still other hotels employ their own men, pay small wages, and permit them to retain all the tips they can get. It is claimed that as high as \$10,000 a year has been paid for a door privilege, and that many thousands over this amount find its way to those who have obtained this concession at some of the larger hotels.

The elevator men as well have come to look for their "little bit," especially from those who make the hotel a home and "transients" are not forgotten, either. It is really remarkable how some elevator men know when a guest is about to depart, even though his or her appearance may outwardly indicate no such intention.

"I wish you safe journey, Mr. Blank," said the elevator attendant with an accompanying smile to the passenger he was bringing down from the fifth floor.

"Er—er—oh, thank you very much," replied the man haltingly, as he tardily and a bit wildly—just as if he appreciated he was late in doing the "proper thing"—dove into his pocket for a coin which he handed the man who pocketed it with a "Thank you."

When Mr. Blank reached the foyer he spoke to his friend.

"I wish I knew," he said, "how that chap on the elevator got next to the fact that I was leaving this morning—I didn't tell him."

"That's easy," replied the friend. "They all know it by this time—you probably dropped some remark about going, paid your bill, or something like that. It was their cue. It's their business to know when guests depart. Why, I believe there is a regular secret service in operation among hotel employes, the object of which is to let those who feel they should come in for a bit of coin know that a guest is going—then it's up to the employe to strike on some plan to bring out the tip. Honest, I think it's worked just this way."

He may be right.

In some of the large apartment houses it is carried on to still further degree, and a family who does not give up as much as 50 cents or \$1 a month to the boys on the elevator is liable to hear the "lift" door slammed unnecessarily loud as the various members of the family step out at their floor.

The story is told of the marital troubles of a waiter and his wife, which finally,

reached the court. A separation resulted, and the waiter agreed to give \$15 to the wife for her weekly support. Apparently he did pay it for some time. Then she had him brought into court again on the charge that his alimony contribution had dropped to \$12 and that she simply couldn't get along on that. The waiter told the Judge that his salary was \$25 a week—which is much above the average—whereupon that officer of the court contended that he thought \$12 to the wife was sufficient. Then up spoke the wife, saying that while her husband's salary was quite as he stated, he neglected to inform the court that he was making about \$50 a week extra in tips. Naturally the Judge was astonished, told the serving man that he should pay the \$15, and incidentally remarked that he knew a lot of lawyers who were not making as much as the waiter.

These figures are the exception, however, and the reporter has yet to find a waiter who regularly makes \$75 a week, although there are many who come pretty close to it. At the same time it is not at all unusual that wages and tips of some serving men at the larger and more exclusive hotels will come close to \$50 weekly.

Beyond the very shadow of a doubt it is that class of New Yorkers known as "spenders" who have brought the tipping conditions to the present status, on account of which the ordinary individual has to suffer. Waiters are continually changing places—they are a migratory lot, and if one of them happens to get a position in a dining room or restaurant where the tips run smaller than in his previous place of employment he immediately endeavors to "educate" the guests to a larger tip—and they have their own little ways for doing it, too.

Some of the attendants—the ushers—at the theatres do not hesitate to take advantage of an opportunity to make a little extra money, but it isn't exactly in a tip-taking way. They do it differently. For example, you purchase a seat in the balcony which costs you \$1. The \$1.50 or \$2 seats are further down front, but the house has not sold well and there are many vacancies. About the middle of the first act, or after it, the usher notes you sitting back, silently approaches, leans over your shoulder, and suggests that he will "find a seat" for you that is better—for a quarter of a dollar. If you "fall" for his proposition, he shows you to one of the empty \$1.50 or \$2 chairs, possibly in A or B. In this case, however, you win and he wins—you have a \$2 seat for an expenditure of a total of \$1.25 and the usher is in 25 cents. It works out all right, but it's graft, just the same.

These are comparatively only a few of the hold-ups that face one at almost every turn; there are many more of them. The barber looks for his 10-cent tip on a 15-cent service; the taxicab driver scowls if he doesn't get a "pour-boire"; the bell-boys are always on the qui vive for an extra nickel or dime; the chambermaid is always in evidence just before the roomer leaves; the theatre-ticket speculators get the choice seats and hold you up for an advance of half a dollar on the regular price—all along the line it's graft, graft, graft, and the public pays, pays, pays.