

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

Robert Merritt, an Ex-Soldier, Aged Thirty-two, Simply Drops Out of Sight Without Tangible Cause.

One of This Big Town's Innumerable Mysteries—Three Weeks Ago He Went Out for a Walk to the Corner and Never Came Back—No Money in His Pocket—No News of Him from Anywhere—Can "World" Readers Help the Heartbroken Mother Find Her Son?

Robert Merritt, a bachelor aged thirty-two years of age, living with his mother and sister at No. 97 Charles street in this city, told the latter about 5 o'clock in the afternoon of Feb. 10 that he was going to the corner and would be back very soon. They saw him go out the door and down the

steps. But from that moment to this he has never been seen again. If the earth had opened and swallowed him he could have no more completely disappeared from human ken. It would seem almost impossible that in a city like this, so thoroughly policed and

watched over as it is, a human being could slip away so quickly and so surely from the ties that bound him to his friends. Yet there is the case of little Katie Vannucci, who was lost in broad daylight between her school in Sullivan street and her home in Clinton place, the details of which were told in a former "story of the news" in these columns. She was seen by Sister Ursula skipping away from the school, and fifteen minutes later she was gone, lost, vanished like smoke. She has never come back, though every resource that ingenuity could devise has been attempted to solve the mystery. She was only eleven years old.

Robert Merritt was a grown man thirty-two years of age, who had served in the regular army and had done service in the West among the Indians. He had scars on his body that would make his identity unmistakable. He was well known in the neighborhood where he lived. But since his mother and sister watched him go out the door of his house and down the steps no one has ever been found who has laid eyes on him. No one in the street noticed him as he went away. No one about the corner whither he said he would direct his steps saw aught of him that afternoon, evening nor at any time since. It was daylight, too, just as when Katie Vannucci vanished like magic, and almost the same hour. Is it so easy a matter, then, to become

lost, stray away or be stolen, and in broad daylight, too, in New York City?

Merritt hadn't a penny in his pockets when he disappeared, so he could not have been robbed and laid away. He had never married, but had preferred to live as a bachelor with his mother and only sister, whom he adored. So there is nothing to do but scout the idea that he wished to leave home voluntarily. And even if so, he had no money with which to put his intention into action.

But he was ill, was subject to epileptic fits. In fact he was just recovering from a severe attack of the disease the day he went away. The only way in which Merritt's family can account for his strange disappearance is this, that he had a recurrence of the trouble soon after he left his home and so wandered away.

NO CLUES FROM ANYWHERE.

But this supposition only makes the case the more suggestive. As he had no money he could hardly have left the confines of the city. If he was found wandering about the streets penniless, erring in mind as he was in body, why was he not taken up by the police and cared for until his identity was established? No trace of him has yet been found in any of the charity hospitals or houses of refuge in New York City.

He may have been drowned, but his corpse has not been received at the Morgue. Notice

was given to Police Headquarters early of his going away, but no news came to the afflicted mother and sister from that quarter. And so the history of Robert Merritt's sudden, strange and sad disappearance is a history of simple nullity.

No policeman has reported finding him to the sergeant at any one of the police stations in New York City. No hospital, so far as can be learned, has received him within its doors. The waters of the river have not cast up his body at the Morgue. No newspaper has printed so much as even a city brief about him. Between the steps of No. 97 Charles street and the corner Robert Merritt was lost.

Mrs. Mary Merritt, his heartbroken mother, herself almost an invalid, walks the floor day and night in a state of suspense that borders upon agony. Merritt's sister Nellie has to work to she out the expenses of the household, and when she is not at her day's labor she is skurrying about the town trying to get some clue, ever so faint even, of the missing man that may possibly lead to his reclamation. Night after night when her work is over and her vigil for her lost brother ends in nothing, she comes home to soothe and comfort the poor mother, whose heart is slowly breaking under the strain. The doctors who have been called in to see her declare that she has heart failure. Perhaps what in the

dictionary of the doctors is called "heart failure" in this case be very much one and the same thing with a breaking heart.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE LOST MAN.

The description that Miss Nellie gives of her brother is copied, in so far as his physical characteristics are concerned, from his army papers. He is five feet seven inches in height, weighs about one hundred and fifty-five pounds, though he may be a little plumper now, and has rather light sandy hair, light complexion, with ruddy color, and light blue eyes. He wears a sandy mustache, chin's closely clipped, and there is a plainly marked scar on one cheek-bone. On each of his legs there is also a scar.

As he left the house he wore a dark derby hat, a double-breasted short dark-blue coat, plain black trousers, laced leather shoes, dark-colored woollen stockings, a blue flannel shirt and gray underclothes. He went out in haste, and did not even take a pocket-handkerchief. There was no name on any of his apparel. He had, however, a latch-key in his pocket. And another fact that may assist in the clue, he was quite bald from the forehead back.

Twice before Merritt has wandered away, but never for any great length of time. Once, two years ago, while living in Brooklyn, he crept out of the house late in the evening while in one of his ill turns, but was found by a patrolman, who shut him up

in the station-house, where he passed the remainder of the night. The next day he was taken home. A year ago, while in another fit, he disappeared again. That time Merritt was gone two days and a half. He turned up in a lodging-house in Jersey City, and, after coming to his senses, he wrote to his mother and sister, who went to his rescue.

THREE WEEKS GONE AND NO NEWS.

But this time everything is different. He had no money on his person, as he had each other time. In the one case he was brought home in twenty-four hours; in the other he wrote himself inside of sixty hours. Now he has been gone three weeks. His physician had warned his family that if he did not grow better he could only grow worse—and that was only a gentle way of expressing madness.

And this is the horrible event that Robert Merritt's faithful sister Nellie and his anguished mother fear as they sit together in the evening waiting to hear the rattle of a key in the lock of the street door. All day long the poor distracted mother sits alone, waiting for that same sound. Till it seems as if the very intensity of her expectancy must bring her only son back to her again, even if from the grave.

"And it would be better so," said Miss Nellie yesterday to a World reporter, "for this terrible, unspeakable suspense would

be lifted from her. That might kill my poor mother, but that manner of death would be less cruel than the slow torture she is undergoing now.

"Whenever I have 'short time,' " Miss Nellie said to him, "and whenever I have a spare evening or a holiday that I can leave my mother and devote to the search, I do so. But what can a young, helpless girl like I am, do? I feel so weak, so afraid."

She had "short time" yesterday afternoon, and tired as she was with her day's work, she had come down to THE WORLD to see if it could help her.

She said simply, "I have heard THE WORLD was the friend always of the poor and the unfortunate. I am both. I can't afford to hire detectives, to advertise all over the country and I can't leave my work to go out on the search myself, for what would my poor mother do? I am all she has to depend on now Robert is gone."

"I thought the man found off Governor's Island several days ago might be Robert and I went to see. But it wasn't. Then I looked up the corpse that was picked up off Christopher street, but that wasn't he. Now I don't know what to do nor where to turn. Could THE WORLD assist me?"

THE WORLD will gladly try, and so it prints this "Story of the News."

Will not its alert-eyed readers help in this case as they have so often done before?