



INSIDE HARRY HILL'S DANCE-HOUSE.

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No description of New York would be complete without a notice of the notorious Dance-House kept by Harry Hill. You can find dance-houses, drinking saloons, and places of resort for the high and low, the respectable and vile. But one house in New York comprises all classes and conditions. It is the pride of Harry Hill that judges, lawyers, merchants, politicians, members of Congress and of the Legislature, doctors, and other professional men, visit and patronize his place. And no public resort of any description in the city is better known.

WHO IS HARRY HILL?

He is a man about fifty years of age, small, stocky, muscular — a complete type of the pugilist. He keeps the peace of his own concern, and does not hesitate to knock any man down, or throw him out of the door, if he breaks any of the rules of the establish-

ment. Aside from his business, Mr. Hill is regarded as a fair and honorable trader, a man who keeps his word, is generous and noble in his impulses, kind to the poor, and large in his gifts to charity.

For twelve years he has kept one of the most noted dance-houses in the city. His rooms are constantly crowded, and the profits of his hall and bar are estimated at one thousand dollars a week over all expenses. He attends closely to all departments of his trade. He is at the bar; in the hall, where the dancers must be kept on the floor; at the stage, where the low comedies and broad farces are played. He keeps the roughs and bullies in order; he keeps jealous women from tearing out each other's eyes; he keeps the noisy drunkard quiet. With burly face and stocky form, he can be seen in all parts of the hall, shouting out, "Order! order!" — "Less noise there!" — "Attention!" — "Girls, be quiet!" — and these he shouts all the evening.

THE DANCE-HALL.

This is situated on Houston Street, near Broadway. The building is of wood, two stories high, and very low studded. A huge lantern, hanging over the door, with its red and blue glass, is a signal to all comers. In the lower part is a bar, with a counter for refreshments. Through a narrow lane, between the counters, the company pass into the hall up stairs. No one is allowed to go up unless the admission fee of twenty-five cents is paid. Usually a dish of oysters and something to drink are added to the fee. Most of this is clear gain to Mr. Hill. A private door admits the

women. They are allowed to go in free, as the dance would not amount to much without them.

INSIDE VIEW.

The hall is a curiosity. It is very low studded. It was originally composed of many quite small rooms. But partition after partition has been knocked away, and room added to room, till the hall is very large. The ceilings are of different heights, and remain as originally built. A more homely room cannot be found in New York. The walls are covered with pictures, and not one indecent or objectionable one can be seen. The rules of the house are hung up in conspicuous places, and are put in the form of poetry. The pith of these rules is, "No loud talking; no profanity; no obscene or indecent expression will be allowed; no one drunken, and no one violating decency, will be permitted to remain in the room; no man can sit and allow a woman to stand; all must call for refreshments as soon as they arrive; the call must be repeated after each dance; and if a man does not dance, he must leave." The profits of the concern are connected with the bar, and that must be liberally and constantly patronized. There is no bar in the hall, but a long counter occupies one side. After the dance, each man takes his partner to the counter. Here he orders what he will, and the refreshments are sent up from below. The rules are quite rigidly enforced, and the penalty for neglect is summarily inflicted.

THE COMPANY.

The crowd is at all times great. Benches range around the sides of the room. Out of one hundred girls and women present, not one can be found who has not started on the road to ruin. They occupy the benches, and by their side sit the partners whom they have chosen for the evening. Most of the women are young—most of them mere girls. The decay and degradation that are seen at the Water Street dance-houses are not seen at Harry Hill's. The women are of a superior class. Most of them have just begun their life of shame. The crimson hue has not left their cheeks. Some of them are very pretty. Their dresses are rich. They wear satin, silk, velvet, and many jewels. Some have on a full dress; some have on an opera attire. They would pass well in any station; they would not appear bad at church, or at a concert; they would attract attention at a soirée; they would appear well in a Sunday school. In less than two years not one of these gay and elegantly-dressed throng will be seen at Harry Hill's. They will drink, behave indecently, and the stern command of the proprietor will bid them "clear out." They will be found, if alive, in the stews and viler dance-houses of low New York. It is the capital of Harry Hill to keep a reputable vile house, and he will do it. None but well-dressed and well-behaved girls can walk his saloon. No matter who they are, where they come from, what appointments they make, where they go when they leave his place,—while there, they must behave. In that low, dingy room, on hard benches, sawdust floors,

and walls and ceilings that indicate the building to be no better than a cheap, wooden tenement-house, the élite of the women of the town gather nightly. The white patten, crimson and gaudy dress, rich velvets, cloaks, and genteel attires, make the dingy room look as if upper New York, in their best outfit, had taken possession of a low dwelling at Five Points for an evening.

A DARK PAGE TO READ.

A sadder story of New York life cannot be written than that connected with this place. Girls of great promise and education; girls accomplished, and fitted to adorn any station; girls from country homes, and from the city; missing maidens; wives who have run away from their husbands; girls who have eloped with lovers; girls from shops and factory, from trade and the saloon, can here be seen in the dance. The only child of a judge, the wife of an eminent lawyer, showy, flashy, and elegantly dressed, and women of a lower degree, all mingle. They come and go as they will. Women who have good homes and confiding husbands, girls whose mothers know not where they are, and would rather bury them than know that they went in such company, are at this hall. The quantity of liquor these women drink is astonishing. After each dance the company go to the bar and drink. They drink champagne when their partners can afford it. Strong liquors are in demand at all times. It is no uncommon thing to see a young miss take a half tumbler of undiluted liquor, and toss it off without winking. At midnight the doors close, and the company depart. It is the rule of Mr. Hill not to keep

open on the Sabbath, and he plumes himself greatly on his piety. But the dance is merry till midnight on Saturday.

The men who here meet are a sight to behold. They crowd the centre of the floor, and jostle each other for want of room. Men of all grades and all degrees — officers in uniform; sergeants and officers of police without uniform; judges of courts, and leading men of the bar; merchants, jewellers, book-men, and bankers; politicians, and candidates for the high honors in the state and nation; clerks, men, boys, with all classes and kinds. These men join in the dance, drink at the bar and flirt with the women, and pay the bills.

THE PASTIMES.

As the name indicates, dancing, with drinking, is the great pastime. This occupies the centre of the room, and is kept up at regular intervals. The girls are called up to dance by the stern command of the proprietor, and he must be obeyed. This tiresome business is carried on hour after hour. Men select their partners as they will. If they do not, partners are assigned to them. The dancers are free and loose. The music is made by a piano, violin, double bass, and other instruments. During the evening all the men present join in the dance. When that is over, and drinks taken, the girls move round the room among the company, and secure a companion for the next dance and for the night.

In one corner of the hall there is a small stage. Low actors, suited to the company, perform at intervals. Punch and Judy have a box to themselves, and enter-

tain the crowd. Broad songs are sung, and at each improper allusion, profane remark, the mention of the name of God, or anything that sneers at piety, or what the religious world calls sacred, are rapturously applauded. Thus, amid low acting, Punch and Judy, songs and drinking, the time passes. A low, vulgar performance, called Mrs. Partington, in which a poor ventriloquist and a dirty rag baby are the chief actors, is repeated several times in the evening.

THE MANAGER.

Under Mr. Hill is a manager. For many years he has been in charge of this hall. He is a doctor of medicine. He has a finished education, and is one of the best newspaper writers in the city. He has now, and long has had, a place on a leading city journal. He could earn a respectable livelihood anywhere. He is a fine-looking man, and though sixty-five years old, no one would take him to be over forty-five. He is erect, with dark hair, dresses genteelly in a black suit, and is one of the best informed men of the country. Yet he flings all his gifts away, and consents to be the manager of this dance-house, from night to night, and from year to year, pandering to the lowest vices, passions, and persons of the city. New York is full of such ruins.

WRECKS OF CHARACTER.

Harry Hill is quite free to converse about men and things pertaining to his concern. He keeps the names of prominent persons who patronize his establishment. He believes that men have fits of dissipation from too close attention to business; from ventures that are too

much for them, and losses or reverses. Prominent merchants, eminent men, representatives of trade in all its branches, men very regular in ordinary times, visit his rooms. Once a year, once a quarter, they come. The proprietor keeps a watch over them, and when he thinks they have drunk enough, either removes them or sends for their friends. From the stews of New York, heated and often maddened by poisoned liquor, men come for a dance with the gay throng in this hall. They bring with them money, from five thousand to fifty thousand dollars, which they are just drunk enough to show. If Mr. Hill knows the parties, he interposes and saves them from loss. If he does not know them, he lets things take their course. Only there must be no robbery within his walls. Whatever bargains are made, alliances formed, traps set, the victim must not be snared in the dance-room of Harry Hill. It is his boast that no person was ever robbed of watch, jewels, or money since he threw his doors open twelve years ago. Whatever crime is committed, it is done outside, and the police trace nothing to that establishment. The room is full of thieves, pick-pockets, prize-fighters, bullies, short-boys, and denizens of the bloody sixth; females of all grades, shoplifters, counterfeiterers, women just out of the State Prison, panel-thieves, and females whose trade it is to get employment in houses as domestics only to commit robbery, or admit robbers to the dwelling. By the side of a police sergeant sits a panel-thief. By the side of a Broadway jeweller sits a noted shoplifter. A confidential clerk of a down-town store is drinking with a miss who looks as if she had left her fashionable board-

ing-school just after tea. A lawyer of repute can be seen drinking with a prize-fighter, and respectable business men mingle cosily with desperate New York males and females. But few men with money reach their homes till they are plucked of the cash they vaunt so boastingly, lucky if watch and jewels, under the drug, are not also taken.

In such dens as these the ruin of well-to-do men is laid. Entering from curiosity, they become customers, and then victims. Ketchum and Jenkins took their first lesson in these respectable dance-houses. Bank clerks, and young men in confidential positions, go to laugh and have a jolly time of an evening. They are ensnared before they know it. In the lap of Delilah their locks are shorn, and their strength departs.

A STARTLING CASE.

A young man in this city represented a New England house of great wealth and high standing. He was considered one of the smartest and most promising young men in New York. The balance in the bank kept by the house was very large, and the young man used to boast that he could draw his check any day for two hundred thousand dollars and have it honored. The New England house used a great deal of paper, and it could command the names of the best capitalists to any extent. One gentleman, a member of Congress, was reputed to be worth over half a million of dollars. He was accustomed to sign notes in blank and leave them with the concern, so much confidence had he in its soundness and integrity. Yet, strange to say, these notes, with those of other wealthy men, with

nearly the whole financial business of the house, were in the hands of the young manager in New York, who, with none to check or control him, did as he pleased with the funds. Every one thought him honest. Every one confided in his integrity. All believed that he was doing the business of the concern squarely and with great ability.

In the mean while he took a turn at Harry Hill's "to relieve the pressure of business." Low amusements, and the respectable company he found, suited him. From a spectator he became a dancer. From dancing he took to drinking. From the bar he entered those paths to which Harry Hill's saloon is the entrance. He tried his hand at light play. He then went into gaming heavily, was stripped every night, drinking deeply all the while. He became enamoured with fancy women, clothed them in silks, velvets, and jewels, drove them in dashing teams through Central Park, secured them fine mansions, and paid the expenses of the establishments—all this while keeping the confidence of his business associates. His wan, jaded, and dissipated look went to his devotion to business. Men who met him daily had no idea that he was bankrupt in character, and had led the great house with which he was connected to the verge of ruin. The New England manager of the house was the father of the young man. His reputation was without a stain, and confidence in his integrity was unlimited. He had the management of many estates, and held large sums of trust money in his hands belonging to widows and orphans. In the midst of his business, in apparent health, the father dropped down dead. This brought

things to a crisis, and an exposure immediately followed. The great house was bankrupt, and everybody ruined that had anything to do with it. Those who supposed themselves millionnaires found themselves heavily in debt. Widows and orphans lost their all. Men suspended business on the right hand and on the left. In gambling, drinking, in female society, and in dissipation generally, this young fellow squandered the great sum of one million four hundred thousand dollars. He carried down with him hundreds of persons whom his vices and dissipation had ruined. And this is but a specimen of the reverses to which a fast New York life leads. He may be seen any day reeling about the street, lounging around bar-rooms, or attempting to steady his steps as he walks up and down the hotel entrances of the city. A sad wreck! a terrible warning!