



ISSUE NUMBER 175 - MAY 21, 2022
GREETINGS FROM THE VERY HUB OF HELL
SCENES INSIDE THE LOWER EAST SIDE IN
APRIL 1891

Two days after the murder of Carrie Brown, this lengthy article appeared in the New York World going into detail concerning the 'hell holes' of the Lower East Side.

THE WORLD: SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 1891.

DARKEST GOTHAM.

GREEN FIELDS FOR BLOODY RIPPERS' WORK.

WHERE VICE FLOURISHES.

Human Pitfalls in the Form of Dance-Houses and Saloons.

THE VERY "HUB OF HELL."

Catherine Slip the Scene of the Late Butchery—Where Women Are Used as Decoys—Visitors Rubbed and Beaten—Sailors the Principal Victims—"World" Men Witness the Brutal Beating of a Girl—Children's Morals Menaced—Wickedest Part of Town.

Have you ever gone on a "slumming" expedition in the toughest part of New York City, and if so, did you visit the "Centre of Hell" and the "Hub of Hell" where the bloody butchery of Thursday night took place? If you did, your moral feelings most probably received a severe shock, for in those detestable places the lowest phases of city life may be seen.

They do not stand alone in their wickedness, however. Within the district bounded by Cherry, Water and James streets and Catherine slip are located as vile and debased places, where evil people congregate, as may be found in the United States. Saloons of the lowest class, with dance-hall attachments, where women act as decoys to draw in the unwary, and other houses of bad repute may be counted by the dozen. For instance, these dens rely chiefly upon sailors, whose tastes, especially after arriving from a long sea voyage, are not particularly fastidious. When poor Jack, drunk as a lord, and with his wares in his pocket, once gets inside their doors, there is but little chance of his leaving there with a cent, especially if he displays his money. Should he make a practical objection to being robbed by resorting to physical force, he may consider himself fortunate if he does not find himself lying in the street gutter a few moments later.

TAKE THE PALM.
To Cherry street, between James and Oliver streets, must be given the palm as being the toughest part of this very tough district. Including both sides of the street, there may be counted thirteen saloons, of which eight have dance halls attached. Each of the latter places has an "orchestra," consisting in one instance of a collection of brass instruments dignified by the name of "band," while others less pretentious content themselves with a piano top and sides of which have been removed for the purpose of gaining a greater volume of sound, a wherry sign, a cracked corner or a consumptive piccolo. But little attention is paid by individual performers in each

at the left of the entrance is the bar, a small, cheap-looking affair. Signs bearing the words "All Drinks 10 Cents" and "Ladies' Drinks 10 Cents" are conspicuously displayed. Last night a most unlovely female officiated as barmaid. This Amazon, it was learned, acted as an auxiliary "bouncer" when occasion arose. For the sum of 10 cents she sold cigars which it is positively asserted cost only \$1 per hundred. The purchaser did not receive the bottle of chloride of lime and the stroud which in the fitness of things should have been presented with each weed.

Opposite the bar the orchestra was stationed. This usually consists of several brass instruments, but last night the brasses were resting, it was explained, and the music was furnished by a piano, the top and sides of which had been removed; a violin and a cornet. The floor was sparsely sprinkled with sawdust, while on either side of the room, along its entire length, were placed small tables and chairs. About forty men, chiefly sailors, and a few "heelers" employed by the house to subdue and elect boisterous customers were scattered about the room. Young women, and others who were not so young, but all showing evidences of dissipation, sat around with the men drinking or waited with them in the centre of the room. But few of the women wore short dresses. At the end of each dance the etiquette of the place demanded that every "gentleman" should "treat" his partner, and any one refusing to do so met with protests couched in language peculiar to the place. Forceful remonstrances usually end with the objector finding himself lying in the street with a bloody head. As is customary with many other resorts of

prover, making 13 in all on the block. None of these displays licenses to sell liquor. On the east side of Cherry street, north of Oliver street is a notorious dance-house, run by one Burke, who formerly kept a saloon in New Orleans. His place was, at one time known as "Wilde a Old Corner," but is now referred to as the "Hub of Hell." For lawlessness and general depravity it fully equals the "Starlight." It would be difficult to surpass it in viciousness. Disreputable women of the lowest class hang around these almost continually, looking for men who have money. Music is furnished by a superannated piano, and loafers and "plug-uglies," many of whom are supported by the unfortunate women, sing indecent songs. This sort of thing continues until 1 o'clock in the morning, making sleep and rest for those in the neighborhood an impossibility.

The Hergen House, at No. 102 1/2 Cherry street, kept by Henry Brown, is another resort where foolish men spend their hard-earned wages in drink and other forms of dissipation and where women sell their souls for gain.

At the moment when THE WORLD men were passing the doors last night, the shrieks of a woman were heard proceeding from the interior of the place. Pushing through the swinging screens a girl, about twenty years old, and said to be a Norwegian, was seen lying on the floor near the end of the room. A large man, fully six feet tall, wearing a heavy blond mustache, was standing over her alternately kicking and beating her. Whenever she made an attempt to regain her feet the brute would knock her down. The woman, who was drunk, fought viciously, but without much avail. While the tall man was beating her, the barkeeper, a short, heavy-set man, ran from behind the bar and joined in the assault. He struck her with all his strength a number of times and the noise made by his blows could be heard on the sidewalk. Together these men beat the woman for fully five minutes; the

take up positions where they can accost passers-by. Last night they were all on post. In some houses as many as fifteen women were counted, while others contained but three or four. All were bedecked in tawdry finery calculated to attract the eyes of men easily impressed. Meaning gestures were made to induce THE WORLD men to enter the different places as they walked by, and alluring invitations to tarry extended in language which would have been sufficient to cause even a cast-iron statue to blush. A number of the women wore gaudy dresses which extended only to the knees, while the cut of the corsage was as low as the bottom of the dress was short. No policeman was seen in the neighborhood.



A WAITRESS AND HER VICTIM.

On Water street, near James, is Collins's saloon, which has on several occasions figured as the scene of brutal fights and which is well known to the police. Collins is a member of the Business Men's Republican Club and is credited with possessing a "pull," which has on several occasions enabled him to extricate himself from difficulties brought about by rows which have taken place in his establishment.

The "Flag of the Union" is another dance-house and saloon in James street, near B'way, where women are employed to allure tavia, where women are employed to allure men. A brass band was at one time used as an orchestra, but of late business has not been brisk, and the music is now furnished by a piano, violin and banjo.

EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE, especially during Mayor Hewitt's administration, to close up many of these disreputable resorts, and with a certain amount of success, but these repressive measures were spasmodic. Today they are as bad as ever, made bold and defiant by the knowledge that "pulls" can accomplish much in the way of securing freedom from interference. The Society for the Suppression of Crime has on several occasions taken steps to improve the condition of affairs in the district, but has been unable to accomplish much. It succeeded in forcing Long Tom, who has a family, including several children, to move from the quarters they occupied over the blarney saloon, where the children were brought into contact with the most contaminating influences. To No. 79 Oliver street, under threat of taking the children from his custody. Many respectable people living in the neighborhood of the dance-house are unable to move to more desirable quarters through want of money. In the meantime their children are constant witnesses of the lowest forms of vice. Last evening dozens of children living but a few doors away were seen playing in front of the dance-house, while drunken men using the foulest language passed in and out, and the fifty songs sung by the men and women in the dives could be plainly heard from the street.

The Rev. John J. Keen, pastor of the James Street Church, has taken much interest in the moral purification of the neighborhood. He lives at No. 25 Oliver street. The premises at Nos. 11 and 13 are reputed to be used for immoral purposes, while on James street, between Park Row and New Bowery, are seven houses of bad reputation which children and others living in the neighborhood are obliged to pass by. In many schools Nos. 14 is at No. 73 Oliver street, and the children who attend it are also forced to hear the indecent expressions and witness the demoralizing sights peculiar to the neighborhood.



A WOMAN KNOCKED DOWN AND BEATEN.

the kind in the district, if a half-drunk man tenders a \$1 bill or more in payment for a couple of drinks, the chances are that no change will be forthcoming. And if objection is made in this way of doing business, the objector will be quickly thrown out.

LONG TOM.

Until last Winter Long Tom was restricted



ROOF SKYLIGHTS.

orchestra to the tune observed by the others, and harmony is quite a secondary consideration. It is a musical free-for-all, where each "artist" follows his own peculiar ideas about melody. When the eight bands on the short block perform at the same time the effect is positively awful, and not only sufficient to awaken the dead, but is reported to have on one or two occasions scared the Brooklyn Bridge grip cars, not far away.

Last night a representative of THE WORLD and an artist were instructed to visit this section of darkest New York and report on the situation in that benighted part of the city.

Beginning on the west side of Cherry street, near James, the first dance-house is the "Starlight," at No. 86. This is conceded to be the "finest" place of the sort in the district, and that implies being the grandest and worst of its kind. It is owned by a man known as "Long Tom," a notorious individual, who is credited with possessing a political pull. Tom is feared because he is a "scrapper" of acknowledged ability and respect by the toughs of the district because he is known to be wealthy and has influence of a certain sort. He wears a gold watch chain said to have cost \$300 and a watch reputed to be worth \$200. Envious persons say that a miner from the West once visited the "Starlight" and, running short of money, left his watch and chain with Tom as collateral for a loan. Whether the miner ever endeavored to regain possession of his property is not known, but, be this as it may, Tom holds the jewelry. He also owns two racehorses, one of which is said to have won several prizes.

WOKED STARLIGHT.

The "Starlight" dance-house is in a three-story brick building, the two upper floors being occupied by the fifteen women who live on the premises and who are each charged \$14 per week by Tom for board and lodging. It is unnecessary to explain that Tom contrives to keep these women continually in the debt, so that to leave the place is practically impossible, even if the women desire to do so, their trunks and other effects being kept where the girls cannot remove them without Tom's knowledge. The women are of the lowest class, ignorant and deluded, and whatever good looks they may have are thoroughly possessed have long ago disappeared under the effects of continual dissipation.

The "Starlight" saloon occupies the entire first floor of the building. Approaching the front entrance, one sees a number of white and red electric lamps arranged over the door in such a way as to attract the attention of passers-by. A side entrance leads to the upper floors which are jointly used for immoral purposes and as living quarters by the women. Passing through a pair of swinging screens the visitor finds himself at the head of a room 25 feet wide and about 120 feet long, and immediately

for room, but he overcame the difficulty by building a one-story frame extension, sixty feet long, in the yard behind the main building. This set in itself was a clear violation of the building laws, but the work was done secretly, the workmen not beginning their labor until after 1 o'clock in the morning, when the dance-house was supposed to be closed, and stopping soon after daylight. The addition has a tin roof and is provided with three large glass skylights, the four sides of which can be opened for ventilation. They are usually kept open and the sound of the music and the songs of the frequenters of the place can be heard with distinctness by persons living in the neighborhood. This is particularly objectionable to respectable people, many of whom have families, and to men and women who have worked hard during the day.

No. 88, adjoining the "Starlight" saloon, is known as the "Sailors' Garden," and is kept by Brown & Olsen, the best-named member of the firm being a woman. Direct rivalry exists between these two places. "Long Tom" a few months ago embellished his place by covering its walls and front entrance with stamped tin gaudily painted with bright colors which reflected the sunlight at night, thereby catching the eyes of people passing. Brown & Olsen evened things up by putting in a new front door last night there were seven women in the place and about twenty men. A piano, violin and accordion furnished the alleged music, making up in noise what they lacked in harmony. Drinks were served by the women with great regularity, and while the men cried "whiskey or beer the woman invariably drank what they termed "sonaparilla,

any more than she deserved." THE WORLD men recognized the fact that to interfere in the woman's behalf would not only involve them in a row with the "keepers" lazing about the place, but would bring further punishment upon the woman subsequently, if not at that time.

FINALLY CEASED.

The brutes finally ceased their attack upon the unfortunate wretch, after she had picked up a chair with which to strike the barkeeper and had been disarmed. When she staggered to another part of the room blood was flowing from cuts on her face and a torrent of profanity and obscenity came from her lips.

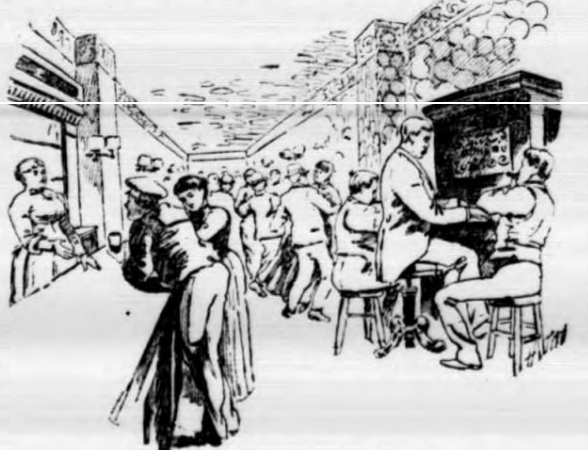
The tall man and the barkeeper explained that in a drunken fit she had struck the man on the nose with an iron fire shovel and had also thrown the murder behind the bar with a beer glass. Then her "stunning" followed. The barkeeper added in an explanatory way that he wants to run the place. No policeman made his appearance during the fight.

"The Lighthouse," another establishment where women are kept and drinks served, is at No. 103 Cherry street. Fifteen women were present when THE WORLD men called, while a number of drunken sailors were "pacing" while waiting for the women, or were sitting about drinking. It was said that one of the women had lost both feet through disease, but being possibly good-looking, was made use of as a "walk-behind" to attract the attention of visitors. A dastard in increasing the bar receipts, to give "The Lighthouse" whatever credit it may be entitled to, it is said by those familiar with such resorts that it is the only place of the kind in the neighborhood where a visitor may expect to be given his



A LIVE ENTRANCE.

So profitable is their business that the keepers of the dance-houses and saloons in this ungodly section of the city have cheerfully paid the constant increase in rents which the owners of the buildings where they are located have levied. Stores and houses on Cherry, James, Water and Oliver streets which were formerly rented for \$7 per month, at present command \$25 and \$50 per month. Men engaged in reputable business cannot afford to pay such prices for premises in that locality. Consequently the live-keepers are preferred as tenants by landlords who are moved solely by considerations of gain and with whom morality is at a discount.



"LONG TOM'S" STARLIGHT DANCE-HOUSE.

but which investigation proved to be water colored with molasses. For each drink of this kind the visitor was made to pay 10 cents. As in the other resorts the orchestra played but short intervals between dances, so that the bar receipts might be increased.

Henry Brown is the proprietor of the dance-house at No. 92 Cherry street; A. H. Acvill of that at No. 94, and M. Olsen of No. 96. The latter is no relative of the woman who is a partner of Brown at No. 88. All of these places are conducted in the same manner as is the "Starlight" saloon, but on a less extensive scale. The number of women kept in each house depends greatly upon the condition of business, there being much more custom about the beginning of each month, when sailors are paid off, than at any other time, although Saturday and Sunday nights are looked upon as being quite fair for business, many men who are paid by the week coming in then. No music is permitted on Sunday, but access may be had to the saloons by side doors. If business should become unexpectedly brisk some night and the supply of women in any one establishment prove insufficient, girls are "borrowed" for the night from some rival house, this system of assisting each other being quite common.

correct change. The alleged music was last night furnished by a piano which should long ago have been pensioned, a banjo, a piccolo, cornet and violin.

If you should go "slimming" and care to see the "centre of Hell," step around to the southeast corner of Water and Catherine streets. This place, not so loudly named as might be supposed, was formerly known as the "Fourth Ward Hotel." The first floor is occupied as a saloon, while the upper floors contain cheap and poorly furnished rooms, rented transiently for immoral purposes. It is alleged, respectable people living near by say that the sights sometimes witnessed at night at the door leading to the upper floors are disgraceful. Abandoned women and girls of the lowest class are taken into the building, sometimes willingly and frequently by force when they are drunk enough to offer resistance. One respectable resident of the vicinity declares that women have been taken into the place whose clothes were almost entirely torn off in the attempt to make them enter. THE WORLD men last night saw a boy of about eighteen years enter the side entrance with a woman whose face was partially marked by her gray hairs.

FIFTY-FIVE HELL HOUSES.

VERY RARE.
On the east side of Cherry street is a saloon and dance-house which is particularly bad. Six or seven women are kept there, and when business is so good they often stand about near the sidewalk and drag men in from the street. Adjoining this is a double building also occupied as a dance-house, and next to that is the "Nova Scotia House," run as a dance hall by two women, believed to be sisters. These places are truly as bad as the others. This completes the list of dance-houses on that block, but there are five more saloons

Along the west side of Water street, from Catherine to James street, fully fifteen respectable houses have established themselves, while six or seven places of a similar character are on the east side of the street. Several unoccupied houses are leased by Chinamen who refuse to rent their premises for immoral purposes, but what else they are actuated by principles of morality or because they cannot get the rents they demand is not known. The fronts of the houses occupied by these women adjoin the sidewalk. In pleasant weather the front doors and windows are kept open, and here the women

