

HOLES IN THE BOWERY

THE CHATTY SUPPER ROOMS OF AN AGE LONG PAST.

SUBTERRANEAN HAUNTS THAT WERE TERRORS YIELD FINALLY TO A MORAL GROWTH.

The science of architectonics has never made much headway in old Peter Stuyvesant's broad lane. Improvement is regarded as an intrusion on a thoroughfare whose reality is either largely entailed or else anchored by a too sudden blast from the trumpet of the archangel. It is not often that a hole is visible in the Bowery, unless fire or the Building Department enforces it, or unless some of its rookeries be termed holes. There is just now a gap on the east side, near Delancey-street. It is due to the leveling of "The Custom House," a place whose duties, instead of being collected by some man who owed his position to civil service, were handed over to a barkeeper sometimes complained of as of rather uncivil service. In a day or two there will be another gap in the Bowery. One of "The Yellow Twins" is to come down. Their age is beyond guessing. They look as if they could easily have flaunted commemorative flags on the day that Lafayette, paying his ante-mortem visit of pleasure to this country, came down the Hudson River in great shape, a procession of gayly-decked steamboats and naval vessels escorting, and portholes booming him as if powder were sand—which costs almost as much in this city now as powder did then, load for load. The foundations disclose that 261 Bowery was built far ahead of 259, but it is believed that both dingy hulks are at least 60 or 70 years old. It is almost a generation since their counterpart, 263, was lifted two stories nearer the clouds. It is fully 40 years since a butcher and two hardware dealers bought 259, 261, and 263 for \$5,000 apiece. They intended to grasp the whole row up to Houston-street, but 265 was a bar in a double sense. The butcher moved into 261, where his children were born, and where he carried on a meat shop in the basement. While it was in his hands it was uneventful. After he left it it was leased by the energetic Frank Duffy. In spite of his vigilance it became extremely lively. With M. F. Lyons as a partner, Harry Cunningham, actor, manager, and dramatic agent, leased it and 259, ousted Duffy, and in the Spring of 1872 opened the dining room whose key was soon afterward lost, since which time it has never been closed. Duffy went down to Grand-street, where, by a judicious admixture of soda water and politics, he succeeded in maintaining an equilibrium between the proprietries of the Tenth and Fourteenth Wards, which there confront each other. Until after Harry Cunningham's death the dining room was confined to 259, but Mr Lyons enlarged it by adding 261. The place is a curiosity in its line, and the trade it does in a locality wherein nine out of every ten houses are dwellings, and one out of every seven is a lunch or eating house in some shape, is a marvel. In the number of meals it serves up every day it is ranked only by Smith & McNell's, but in the consistency and flavor of its strawberry shortcake it is doubtful if it is ranked at all.

It is not easy to buy property on the Bowery, and years ago Mr. Lyons was a minute late in buying the Archangel. Marriage had added 259 to what may be called the Lorillard estate. The butcher wanted \$36,000 for 261. One-sixth of it was in excess of a fair valuation at the time, but the tenant finally concluded that it was worth the premium to him, if to anybody. Making out a check for the full amount, he called upon the owner, who, having permitted himself to be annoyed by some other matter, sent word that he could not transact business that day, took to his bed and died, leaving in force a will forbidding the sale of the property during the lifetime of his youngest daughter, now a somewhat prominent church singer, with a beauty not wholly in her voice. The possibility of acquiring ownership of the property by laying civil siege to it was denied the restaurateur by an event that happened in his own family something like 20 years ago, and has since led to other events, and so he now takes a 15 years' lease of it as the best that fate offers, and will proceed to put up a new building on plans approved by the owners. The conservative architecture of the Bowery is proof that it has not many tradesmen willing to do likewise.

In spite of the dread trumpet, the thoroughfare might much earlier have felt the civilizing influence of new brick but for the bar to progress set up by No. 265 in its lease as a barroom. George Dean conducted it as a Masonic headquarters, and something like 30 years ago he transformed it into one of a class of houses in favor with the grandsires of the present generation, wherein they would sit and smoke and chat with their male friends, or, after the theatre was out or when briefly resting from the fatigues of the "light fantastic," would dispense ice cream to some girls and taffy to others, the cream usually going to the smaller. In practice it was long the correct thing among the eastsiders to take sweethearts or wives or whole families to these supper rooms, some of which had tables to seat but four, with no more privacy than a drawn curtain if needed, while others had scantling apartments large enough to seat a dozen, but so thin in their partitions that there was no privacy with respect to sounds of merriment or ordinarly loud conversation. Besides Dean's, there were three of these supper rooms popular among the eastsiders, without counting the Westchester House, corner Broome-street and the Bowery, drawn to and from the Harlem railroad, by four horses, had a turn-out and a station. One was in Odd Fellows Hall, erected about 1848, and of rare massiveness for that era. Situated at the corner of Grand and Centre, it was straight up from Tammany Hall, that old political headquarters, then at the corner of Frankfort and Nassau, under the management of Howard & Brown, having been the busiest of ballrooms. Odd Fellows was handy also to Apollo Hall, on Broadway near Hester-street, and early during the fifties it became even handier to the new Assembly Rooms, for they were on the site of Mitchell's Olympic Theatre, on Broadway, near Grand-street. This restaurant was chiefly in request for oysters, and among the hard-fisted democracy its stews acquired a repute not second to those of Taylor's or Thompson's Broadway saloons that served up the same grade of bivalves, but charged extra for smaller plates and nicer glassware. Its proprietor for many years was tall George Browne, now residing somewhere in one of the upper wards. Another supper room, also of note for the true democratic flavor of its oysters, was in Grand-street, just east of Forsyth. It, too, catered to Odd Fellows and like societies, with an occasional Son of Temperance, the Daughters of Temperance having their meeting room across the street. Its proprietor was dark-haired Harry Wooley, a roadster, and the first man to exhibit the famous "horse with a snake in his eye." Next came the more pretentious supper rooms of Gus Rätz, in a wooden building on the Bowery long ago absorbed by Nicol, the tailor. The great ice-cream centre was Hall's, in Chatham-square, which was a little too far down. Rätz's place and Dean's differed from Odd Fellows Hall and Wooley's in being wholly up at least one flight of stairs, and in offering rooms by way of measurable seclusion instead of stalls or open tables. It is a singular fact, illustrative of the unchanging character of this part of the town, so far as buildings go, that, though the businesses have vanished, the four houses (and with them Hall's and the Westchester under a new name) are still intact. Gus Rätz showed the way to retirement, but not voluntarily. He was an athlete and a member of the Eighth Regiment. Athletics led to his death, and the regiment gave him impressive interment one cloudy Tuesday afternoon about 1862. On the prior Sunday in Shrewsbury River, N. J., he had added his testimony in corroboration that ability to swim well drowns more men than it brings to shore, and very often, if there is a question of two lives, it drowns the wrong one. After his death his place went to the dogs, and 265 Bowery profited correspondingly. Dean eventually retiring from it, it assumed a new function in the world's economy by teaching the young the necessity of virtue and the old a fear of the law. In deference to the scrutiny of the police different names were from time to time given to a house that once quiet became as notorious as rum and debauchery could make it in a thoroughfare that had for many years been striving to emulate the Chatham-street of old in the villainousness of basement dens no longer offensively prominent on either highway, although two or three decades ago the Bowery became too small to hold them all, and they ramified into Rivington and Stanton streets and as far down Delancey as Eldridge. The horrible death of a female, and not long afterward a midnight brawl in which a member of a German militia regiment conceived the sanitary idea of washing out Chrystie-street by driving his sabre bayonet through the heart of a rising young English-American citizen as sharp as the sabre, but not much bigger than the bayonet, directed tardy religious attention to the fact that the Five Points had been purified to no purpose so long as missionaries were withheld from the Tenth Ward. Houses for periodical prayer were thereupon opened on both sides of the Bowery from Prince to Delancey street, and the underground dens began to give way. There was probably no connection between the two, but the "dives" disappeared altogether soon after the regimental armory at the corner of Chrystie-street and Delancey was vacated. Reform moves by inches, and the district is far from wholesome yet, but crime vanished by the square rod when those caverns along the Bowery and the streets leading east became tenantless. The building at 263 Bowery has superseded Dean's "Manhattan" as a meeting place for lodges or societies, and No. 265 is now a barber's shop on the main floor and a lodging house for males above.