

SPEAKEASY NIGHTS

THE Musical Comedy Speakeasy is next door to a theatre and around the corner from a newspaper office. At four o'clock in the afternoon reporters come here for their lunches and chorus girls for their breakfasts. At this hour the place is noisy but dull. The conventionality of the setting—the long bar, the shuttered windows, the photographs of prizefighters and ballad-singers, is not redeemed until the arrival of certain regular patrons after the theatre hour, patrons with long hair and shabby clothes who look as if they might be barbers, waiters, or orchestra players. They are song writers.

They come here every evening. One by one they take their places at a large table reserved for them by custom near the piano. They order cigars and beer. Presently one of them sits down on the piano-stool. He smiles round at his colleagues, and laying his cigar on the lowest note in the bass, plays a few tentative chords.

"What's that, Harry?"

The player disregards the question. He merely tilts back his head and plays the chords over again. Suddenly he begins to sing. His voice, above the hum of talk, the clink of plates and glasses, is sonorous, nasal, and melancholy.

"Sister—brother—
Father—mother—
I left them all for you.

I bought you fichus
Rings and bijoux

In hopes that you'd come through—
You were my girl but now I see
Just what a boob you made of
me—"

None of the men at the table behind him evince the least interest. The singer of the mournful verse spins round on the stool to announce:

"A little number I worked out today. That's the verse; the chorus goes like this: Tum-tarada-ra-ra. . . . You get it? Tum tarada-ra tar. . . . It's a red-hot number. . . . Hello, Edna."

"Hello, Harry."

A tall girl in theatrical make-up passes to a table at the rear. The song writer beckons her to come back.

"Just sing it through once, Edna. It's a little number I'm going to play for Ziegfeld."

After due persuasion the girl comes over to the piano. Her strong,

throaty voice gives new life to the trite tune and its limping words. The door opens and closes. The beer-pump throbs. And now another professional is at the piano, a lean young Jew with red hair and the features of an American Indian. He says that he is writing a musical comedy with a song entitled "When the Choo-Choo Leaves for Dixie You'll Find Me on Broadway."

This is received with applause, but before long the first man is back at the piano. "Sister, brother, father, mother." As he keeps on playing, his companions, worn out by sheer repetition, become infected with the song. Their feet keep time under the table. They tell him it is a sure-fire hit. People begin to leave the barroom. He plays on. It is after closing time. But while the bartender locks the cash-register and the waiter turns up the chairs, Harry, the song-writer, plays over and over the song which he believes will make him rich and famous in the morning.

THE Eighth Avenue Speakeasy is filled with memories of the time when ladies rode bicycles and Theodore Roosevelt was a rising young police commissioner. The modern patrons in their Broadway clothes, spitting into the bright spittoons, seem like anachronisms. You turn to the pictures on the walls, Sarah Bernhardt and Lily Langtry, Arnold Daly in "Pudd'nhead Wilson," and the framed solemn apothegms:

Dishonesty Breeds Not an Over-classy Person and Surely an Unhappy One.

God Bless Our Fire and Police Department. Money Don't Repay Them for the Risks They Run.

This speakeasy is equipped with furnishings and decorations which were removed intact in 1919 from the barroom of a famous hotel. Old, weedy palms stand in the corners.



Over the bar is a framed copy of the *Sun* announcing the sinking of the battleship *Maine*, and near the free-lunch counter is a program of a musical comedy given in the Madison Square Roof Garden (dated June 25, 1906) across which somebody has written in a bold hand, "On this night Harry K. Thaw shot Stanford White—God damn him." Nothing could make the murder seem more unreal and far away than this yellow page with its ambiguous scrawl.

The only clients who do not clash with the atmosphere here are certain men who arrive in hansom cabs, broughams, and open four-wheelers. Any morning at one or two you can see the old carriages lined along the curb and the horses standing with bent heads; if it were not for the Orange Drink stand on the corner and the colored taxis passing you might suppose that some gay buck of the nineties was giving a party next door. Then you notice that none of the vehicles have drivers; the horses, unwatched, wait as only cab-horses know how to wait, patient and unmoving, with their hoofs spread wide apart. The drivers are inside at the bar. They wear curled toppers and glazed dickies. Some of them carry their whips inside with them. They drink rock and rye and

they tell roaring stories. Every round of drinks is somebody's treat.

These are the cabmen who have their stand by day outside a Fifth Avenue hotel. One of them is an old Englishman with plum-colored cheeks and a cast in his left eye. He was once coachman to a mayor of Boston. Another, a man who has all his money changed into fifty-cent pieces because he "likes the feel of it," used to run a livery stable; he acquired his horse and cab in payment of a bad debt. Older than either of these men is the genial and hairy Irishman who drives the brougham; he chews tobacco and wears in the band of his hat all year the little straw cross he gets in church on Palm Sunday. These are the sure-comers in this bar. They hold themselves superior to the barflies from Broadway who stand along the rail but, unlike the latter, they do not pretend to equality with the gentlemen who occasionally look in here. Bred in a lost tradition, the cabmen become this place as if they were part of its decorations, themselves souvenirs of the gaieties and fiascos of an age which, too recent to be interesting, sleeps in this shuttered room as in a crypt.

—NIVEN BUSCH, JR.

CITY EVENING

The light that burned me up by day
Decides a little while to stay,
And writes a long and golden scrawl
In tree-leaf shadows on my wall.
The bulbous sun has spilled his fire,
Impaled upon a Jersey spire;
And hard day-objects of the street
Grow soft, in the long light, and sweet.
Noon's hot fortissimo still clings
Muted in many murmurings,
And with the lingering light o'erspread
My thoughts are all new garmented.
Far down the block in yellow ease
Behind a row of gold-tipped trees
The "L," like some old dream, goes by
Betwixt the Avenue and sky.

—E. B. W.

President Coolidge in birthday suit. The shirt is cerise, the neckerchief is purple and green, the belt silver studded, the spurs ornately engraved, the chaps of finest buckskin, and the hat a real ten gallon type.—Caption in the *World*.

If that's his birthday suit, we want to see the sturdy little President really dressed up sometime.

EN ROUTE

"THE Heckscher Building," I said to the taxi driver. "It's on Fifty-seventh Street at the corner—"

"I know, madam, I know," said the taxi driver. "I've been driving here in New York for forty-two years. Yes'm, forty-two years. There ain't much I don't know about this city. I don't know how some of these fellers get away with it—there's drivers in this town who don't know where Central Park is.

"I know this town, though I don't know what good it ever done me. Why, lady, forty-five years ago I was a messenger boy and I was making as much money—and had as much

money—as I got right now. If I'd a knowed then—"

"Yes, it's hard to tell what will happen," I sympathized.

"You said it, lady. Money comes and money goes, and things change. Yes'm, things change. Women has changed most of all. Women is gettin' worse than they used to be."

"You think they are?"

"Yes'm, women is worse, but men is just the same. Look at my neighborhood. I live up at 110th Street and Manhattan Avenue. It's pretty fast up there. Some of them women—you ought to see the way they put things over their husbands. They come into the lunch room where I eat, every night with a different man, and I says to them, 'Ain't you afraid your old man will find out?' and they just laughs. Their old man ain't finding out nothin'. They're too slick for that. Women ain't what they used to be."

"Do you think it's because more women are working?" I wanted to know.

"I wouldn't be surprised. Women shouldn't work. That's one thing that's wrong. Women should get a good man and let him support her. That's what women should be—supported. If a woman gets a good man and he supports her, she ought to be satisfied and settle down. Some of 'em ain't willin' to. They get a good man and he gets them a nice flat to live in and even then they ain't satisfied. As soon as his back is turned they start lookin' around. And the men is just as bad, some of 'em. I'll say that. Nice little wives, and they cheat, too.

"AIN'T this traffic awful? There's one couple I know lives up near where I do. Nice-lookin' girl, pretty and young and all, married to a grand feller. I tell you, he's grand. Gives her the nicest kind of an apartment where she don't have to raise a finger. I know them for years. Then one day she found out he was cheatin', and you know what she did?"

"Left him, I suppose," I ventured.

"Naw! Why should she leave him? He was supportin' her, wasn't he? Anyhow, she had a four-year-old boy—nice child, too. Why should she leave him?"

"What did she do?" I asked.

"That's just it. That woman started cheatin' on the side! Yes, ma'am. And the man ain't near as



"Gor, pipe the johnny in a double-breasted oyster!"

"Whoops, don't say oyster t' me, dearie."