

Polite Masque of Pageantry and Prohibition

Prunes and Prisms Also Would Have Been Perfectly at Home at the First Bohemian Ball in the City of Dreadful Drought.

By HELEN BULLITT LOWRY.

NOBODY thought that he was having a good time, when he wasn't—which is ever prohibition's proud boast. The writer knows whether she was having a good time, for she traveled to the first dry-season masquerade ball of the Cercle des Artistes with a doctor, whose morals are particularly correct and whose flask of refreshments remained in the upper right hand pocket of his mediaeval doublet-and-hose.

"I will not be responsible for the arrest of a woman," he told her firmly. "I learn that the police will arrest any one discovered drinking, and how can you tell who's a policeman under all those clothes? They're wearing so many clothes this year," said the Doctor. He had been to some of last year's balls.

A Cardinal passed by—the same who had appeared at every masquerade from that one up at Eightieth Street down to Webster Hall. "I'm looking for Madeleine," he said. "You know Madeleine that used to wear orange colored mist." The Cardinal's voice was wistful.

The Doctor nodded. "In the circumstances, don't you—er—think it's just as well Madeleine's not here? It all strikes me as—er—like going behind the scenes at a Shakespeare play—Sothorn and Marlowe sort of a performance."

"And yet somebody might have brought along an Oriental slave or two," murmured the Cardinal. "There were crusades in those days." He passed on mournfully, ruminating on the history of England from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, where no mind should dwell after 6 P. M.

The Doctor and his partner danced. "It's fine having so much floor space, and the music is perfectly wonderful," she told him bravely. "And they are being awfully generous with dances, having two orchestras and all that."

"And it is something not having to look at queerly designed figures all silvered over like a steam radiator." He was playing the game, too. "I recall now that the morning after I'd find myself wondering if it were quite healthy to stop up the pores with metal paint."

"Hello, there!" An excited young voice sounded in their ears. It was he whom the Spring chickens of 1919 had come to know as the Long-Legged Gob. "I don't see any of the old faces or backs or anything. Aren't folks ever going to mix up and get acquainted? I wish to goodness I'd brought a girl like mother wanted me to. You bet I am next time, if mother'll give me the money for my ticket. Say, this is just like a ball back home in Akron, with all these folks in evening dress. Wish I knew some of them, because it's no end dull being out of things."

Yes, "society" had moved into the ballroom of the Hotel des Artistes and Bohemia had moved out, carrying its futurist costumes, its models arrayed here and there about their attractive persons, its interpretative dancing and its simple village ways. Successful illustrators—yes, and their wives with them, actors with "leads," writers with contracts, and New York debutantes with chaperons—these were the guests at the ball, and the highways and hedges had stayed at home, or wherever it is they play, now that loganberry juice is the skeleton at the feast from the Battery to the Bronx.

Some had brought cheer with them in paper bags. They sat them down at the tables. They ordered orange juice, and they poured in the cheer.

"Pardon," whispered a plainclothes gentleman of mediaeval pattern. "The hotel has us stuck around to warn guests. The police is with us! So I guess you'd

better let me check this here bottle with your hat and coat, where it won't get you or us into no trouble."

And it was so.

They did a large checking business—including the rain check variety. Studios abound in Sixty-seventh Street, and wherever two or three are gathered together in a studio a bona fide guest enjoys the protection of that sanctity of the home which—as yet—prohibition has no license to corrupt.

"I see them go out, and they come back smiling. Don't you think we could mix into one of those parties?" sighed the doctor's partner emotionally.

"People aren't doing that sort of thing tonight, you know, any more than you'd call on your neighbors in New York. It just doesn't seem to be the thing, and they might misunderstand you." The doctor gazed fixedly at the hateful glass of country cider which stood before him on the table.

Today, when the ball is over and the mediaeval decorations have been stripped from the walls, keg after keg of country cider lies spoiling in the cellar that once was a wine cellar. And beside them are yet more kegs of loganberry juice. For the guests of the masquerade ball would not drink soft drinks. You could lead them to it, but you could not make them drink anything but glasses of ice water. The restaurant returns were a total loss. The whole ball, in short, just did clear expenses—which run about \$3,000 for one of these elaborately staged affairs.

The pageant was put on as gorgeously as an Abbey mural decoration—the kind that is used on extra expensive public library walls. The ballroom was transformed into a Gothic feudal hall, until the very atmosphere of the mediaeval was among those present. For, like all hostesses, the Cercle des Artistes is having to work harder since prohibition. The costumes were in pastel shades—more nineteenth century French than barbaric. And not a futurist design was on the floor.

"You can't get away with futurist clothes on tea," suggested the Cardinal, who had wandered back for the pageant. "You're so apt to notice them on yourself. Also, you can't pick up beautiful young strangers, either, on the stuff that caused the American Revolution. Still, maybe, if it had been Italian mediaeval instead of English—the English are so

particular about introductions, you know."

The Long-Legged Gob hove in sight—he who had first learned, in this very hall, just eight short months before, that there was no Santa Claus. Gloom had departed from his brow.

"Hello, there! I'm having a perfectly ripping time. I'm just getting her a glass of water. She asked me to—picked me right out of the crowd. Say, you fellows had better come on over. Do you know that there are four movie queens acting as hostesses? And anybody can go right up to where they are sitting and say something original about 'always have been wanting to meet you,' and all that sort of thing. And then you can sit down and talk to her. That's what they're there for—so things won't be too formal. Say, I think this is a bully party."

To be perfectly fair and square to prohibition, most people thought it a "bully party"—only it was a different kind of a party from last year's kind.

"You see, it's this way," said the Doctor's partner, who had grown philosophical as the evening advanced and as the parcel in the doctor's early English pocket continued untouched. "Do you remember that Spaniard that used to come last year caparisoned as a Chinese mandarin? Well, he wasn't all Latin. Half of him was descended from Miles Standish,

only you didn't notice it at masquerades. He's here tonight in evening dress—no, I don't mean the Chinese kind—and he's all New England. Now, I'm not saying that New England parties aren't just as nice as Latin ones. But they're different. Listen now to what that chaperon over there is saying."

"My dear," was what she was saying. "I'm getting very tired, and so I am going to leave. I'll explain to your mother that this is the kind of a dance where a chaperon wasn't needed."

"Do you see? The wicked masquerade balls of Bohemia aren't even dangerous any more. But the poor little debutante is disappointed to death. I've been watching her all evening, and she almost wept when the wickedest costume here was pointed out to her, and it was just a page in tights—and not tight all the way up, either."

Yet there were six prostrated youths—quite like old times. Nobody knows how they got that way, because nobody noticed them in the intermediate stages. But at 2 A. M. they were laid out on the floor of the men's dressing room in neat little rows, where he that ran over them might read.

This is the way the Doctor read it: "This rotten stuff the Prohibitionists are ramming down our throats is poison



"I learn that the police will arrest any one discovered drinking, and how can you tell who's a policeman under all those clothes?"

—rank poison. It either leaves you flat in ten minutes or it drugs you. It's an outrage!"

But there was another reading, too. Even the parties that evaded the mighty hand of the law were afraid to act as if they were having too good a time, lest the gods see and envy and smite. As for those others who may have partied in neighborhood studios, perhaps their abandon was restrained by the Christian charity which gloats not over less favored mortals—perhaps by a sobering walk across the street in the night air. Be that as it may, a visitor from Mars would have seen only a few hundred well-bred Americans dancing waltzes and fox trots apparently with much enjoyment. Not one "interpretative dance" was improvised.

The ball closed at 4:30 A. M. instead of at the dear old bedraggled hour of 7. And those who still had those ready-to-wear parties in the neighborhood went there and did as they willed, while the others breakfasted in white-tiled scrambled egg emporiums, because

"The poor little debutante almost wept when the wickedest costume was pointed out to her."

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"Jack's" was closed. (They call it John's since July 1.)

Anyway, those who give masquerade balls have got their cue, and a bid will be made for a "society" attendance. It will be just as if Washington Square North moved over and occupied Washington Square South. The Hotel des Artistes is going to keep on giving balls this Winter, but at most of them only the actors in the pageant will be asked to come in costume. The rest of them will be getting their atmosphere and their Bohème vicariously. If the first of these balls may be taken as an index, handsome evening gowns and the "conventional black" will flourish where once scantily clad nymphs and hand-painted fauns disported themselves hilariously.

However, there are rumors that in Jersey—where people still vote against prohibition—things are different. A Hal-

loween party in a certain country club over the river dared to be a masquerade ball in which the thermos bottle was the only thing that did not wear a mask. It stood boldly on every table. Folks say that it was a nice party, and they're building another tube to Jersey from chastened New York.

As for Webster Hall, its ball license has not been renewed this season. The Fakirs are still undecided on whether to risk the desert. The Kit Kats are going to try it out once, and so are the Penguins.

For a time—for a few brief years—America had a spontaneous Bohemia, that threw off years and conventions and garments and social strata and played in masquerade balls. Now she has remembered that her ancestors came over in the Mayflower, with spinning wheels and things.

But they were good while they lasted.