

for my own part, I should seriously object to eating New Zealand rabbits, considering that the cure now in vogue is wholesale poisoning by means of grain saturated with phosphorus. (Perhaps phosphorus in this form may prove beneficial to human beings, but one would like some certain information on this point.)

How the sheep can be prevented from eating the poisoned grain is to me a mystery. It seems, however, to be practicable, and the sheep-owners are now beginning to take heart again.

How one man's poison may be another man's meat has been abundantly shown in Australia, where several enterprising colonists have established rabbit-preserving factories on so large a scale that they may well be described as rabbit-exterminators. In Western Victoria there are two such factories—one at Colac, and another at Camperdown. The returns of the former for one week were 18,000 pairs of rabbits, while in the same time the latter received 10,000. Thus nearly 60,000 rabbits were disposed of in one week by these two establishments, and one carter alone received from the Colac factory a cheque for £128 16s. 8d. for six days' work. This establishment employs about 300 hands in out-door work and about ninety in-doors. Camperdown gives work to as many more. The trappers employed by these two firms range over an area of ground about seventy miles in length by

twenty in width. Yet this only covers one little spot of the vast region where the irrepressible rabbits mock at the combined wisdom of all the legislative powers.

A very important ally has, however, now been secured, and great hopes are entertained that it may prove a more successful rabbit-destroyer than any hitherto thought of. This is the Indian mongoose (*Herpestes griseus*), which in the last ten years has done such good service in Jamaica as a wholesale rat-killer. The rats, attracted by the sugar-fields, had increased in such multitudes as to threaten the desolation of that fertile isle. It occurred to one of the planters to introduce this notorious ratter, and the results have surpassed his highest hopes. These active little creatures, resembling large ferrets, multiplied with extraordinary velocity, and waged a deadly war of extermination against the rats.

It is hoped that they may prove equally efficacious in the destruction of rabbits, so the New Zealand and Australian Governments have applied to the Government of India for a supply of mongooses. These are accordingly being collected in Bengal and sent to the Zoological Gardens at Calcutta, whence, when a hundred couples have been secured, they will be despatched to their new homes, where we may well wish them success.

THE WAY SOME FOLKS LIVE : THE LONDON ORGAN-GRINDER.



HERE is no more familiar figure in the streets of London and its suburbs than the peripatetic organ-grinder. The old hurdy-gurdy is, it is true, to a great extent a thing of the past, but in its stead we have a multitude of piano-organs, which are to be seen in almost too plentiful abundance north, south, east, and west of us. So numerous

indeed are they, that it is difficult to believe that so many people can earn a livelihood in this way. The musical tastes of the masses are certainly catered for on a sufficiently extensive scale; and it says much for their prosperity that a whole army of itinerant musicians are content to rely for a living upon their gratuitous liberality. So far as the organ-grinders are concerned, however, other influences than the mere love of music are at work. For instance, most of them are foreigners, and the English people are very generous to those natives of other countries who are

led hither by accident or choice. Numerous as are the organ-grinders of London, there is probably no class of men of whose manner of life and social and moral condition less is known. Living much to themselves, and resenting inquisitive intrusion, they preserve their nationality in the heart of the English capital.

It is only necessary to visit the organ-grinders' quarter to appreciate this very fully. There is scarcely a district to be found in the whole of London which is more suggestive of commercial prosperity than the Clerkenwell Road at the point where it crosses Farringdon Street. On all sides rise towering warehouses and massive buildings, which suggest the magnificent proportions of the businesses which need to be so finely housed.

A few yards on the north side of the Clerkenwell Road, however, a very different sight is to be seen. If you descend one of the narrow hilly streets, for all the world like those little back streets leading to the quay which are to be found in every old English sea-port, you will find yourself transferred, as if by magic, into a strangely unfamiliar region. It is not the houses that will seem so unusual. They are small enough, it is true, since they are obviously intended for human habitation; and the forlorn appearance of broken window-panes always suggests that a glazier might find plenty to do at a low price. The streets and alleys, too, are narrow—sometimes so narrow that

opposite neighbours can carry on a conversation, friendly or otherwise, without the exertion of paying one another a visit. Nor is the general appearance of the district clean, but far from it. Indeed, the inhabitants might be influenced by the kindest good-will towards the dust-men, if these worthies ever visit them; for, with easy good-nature and primitive simplicity, they apparently convert the streets into ash-pits, so that the heterogeneous refuse usually deposited in those receptacles is here in a chronic condition of readiness for removal. But to the dweller in London, unless his lines are cast in a more than usually favoured district, neither small nor dilapidated houses, nor narrow and dirty streets, are unfamiliar. We all know the characteristics of the London slums. It is not difficult, however, to find the cause for this sudden sense of strangeness here. A group standing at the corner of the kerb at once solves the problem. Their appearance is strikingly picturesque: they are tall, lithe, dark-skinned, black-eyed, with long raven locks, falling in natural profusion and unkempt luxuriance over their shoulders. It is easy to see that these are all foreigners; and as the sound of their voices reaches you, the melodious cadence of their language proves that they come from sunny Italy. They speak a patois which, for want of a better name, may be called Roman, and possesses the characteristic of being intelligible to few except their countrymen of the same class to which they belong.

It may naturally be asked whether these men are able to earn a living, and the question may be answered strongly in the affirmative. Few, if any, artisans, or even skilled workmen, can earn as much day by day as the Italian organ-grinder. Their takings, it is true, vary much according to the districts they work in, and the time of year. Some organs, too, set to new and popular tunes, are very liberally patronised. But £1 a day is said to be the most that an organ-grinder ever takes, while, with some exceptions, five shillings



is about the least, so that a London organ-grinder may be regarded as a fairly prosperous man. An organ can be hired from the makers for eighteenpence a day, while the price of a new organ is £25. The cost of setting an organ to new tunes is about £4, and since novelty is essential this is a frequent source of expense.

They moreover possess habits that tend to enhance their prosperity. Content to live on plain and scanty fare, their expenses are infinitesimal compared with those of the English artisan. Many of them live in gangs, with board and lodging at a fixed charge a head per diem. The lodging-houses they frequent are, for the most part, kept by men of their own nationality; and the fare provided is of the very simplest description, often consisting of little more than bread and milk for breakfast, and maccaroni soup for supper; the whole, including bed, being provided at a charge of about sixpence a day. Their occupation is by no means such easy work as it seems, the piano or opera organs, as they are called, weighing from seventy to a hundred pounds—no light weight to drag about all day long. Vegetarians might, indeed, do worse than collect and publish statistics of the diet and health of the Italian organ-grinders, for it is not a little remarkable that they are able to stand the wear and tear of such a life on such scanty fare. It was formerly the general custom among them to leave their wives and families in Italy, and to send them money regularly, going home themselves for three months out of the twelve. This practice is still common among the ice-men, who regularly spend the winter in Italy. But the organ-grinders now, to a large extent, settle in the country with their families. Some of them save enough to buy their own organs, and eventually to become proprietors of others. Others, again, realise their hopes of returning to their native country, and settling down on their own little farms for the remainder of their days.





In religion they are Roman Catholics, and they attend the Italian Church, Hatton Garden; while schools exist in the same neighbourhood. They are naturally very reserved, and are jealous of the intrusion of strangers; but they are a peaceable and well-disposed class, the occasions upon which there is a *fracas* amongst them being very rare, although often serious, from their fatal fondness for the knife as an offensive and defensive weapon.

The one striking want in the economy of the Italians in London is cleanliness. They seem to have no appreciation of the need for that virtue. It is, indeed, not a little to be wondered at that they should be comparatively free from epidemics, so absolutely are they without the slightest sanitary knowledge. But this fortunate state of things is probably due to periodical visits of inspection on the part of the authorities, for were an epidemic to break out in this crowded part of London the consequences could not fail to be very

serious. Saffron Hill itself, which is commonly spoken of as the "Organ-Grinders' Quarter," is inhabited by few, if any; but Eyre Street Hill, Little Baths, and many of the crowded streets adjoining Coldbath Fields Prison, are chiefly occupied by this singular and interesting class. A few of them, too, are to be found in some of the courts off Drury Lane, and a large colony have recently taken up their abode at Hammersmith.

On the whole, the social condition of these men seems to have somewhat improved of late years. In thrift alone they have much to teach us, and a day might be worse spent than in wandering among the haunts of these industrious foreigners, who have taken London by storm, and, heedless of the remonstrances of those who do not appreciate the melody of street-organs, have hitherto managed to keep a firm foothold in "the City of the Golden Pavement," and yet to preserve all their national habits and prejudices.