

in the race of life against those who can see. With it 90 per cent. of the pupils have completed their course, obtained certificates, and occupy respectable—some of them lucrative—positions in society. In the last year's report it is stated that fifty-nine of the old pupils earned £6,111 during that year. One had won by open competition against the sighted an excellent appointment as organist at Glasgow. Five young women were making from £70 to £80 a year each as teachers in London, and another was working successfully as a missionary at Huddersfield. One, who had been for a time employed as a governess in a private family, had become a successful teacher under the London School Board, the fifth ex-pupil of the College thus employed by the Board.

One feature of this noble institution—the most important of all—must not be omitted. We are thankful to know that the highest welfare of the pupils is not lost sight of. There is daily family worship, and on Sunday mornings special mission services are held in the College, mainly choral and led by the students. The working classes of the neighbourhood attend in

large numbers, and addresses are given by ministers of various denominations. The great aim of the College was stated by Canon Fleming, in his speech at the Guildhall in 1881, to be “the harmonious development of the moral faculties in earnest Christian character, as exemplified in the two great commandments of love to God and love to man.” Dr. Campbell himself, in his last report, announced it to be his aim “to send out Christian men and women of cultured minds, correct habits, and good manners.”

It should be added that this is in the truest sense a charitable institution, which the founder earnestly hopes will become a national university for the blind. Of the 176 pupils most are unable to pay for their own education. There is no endowment, and a too limited subscription list. The interest on a mortgage on the freehold property of £12,000 is a heavy annual burden on the funds. Will not some of our numerous readers whose hearts sympathise with this good work, and who have means at their disposal, send the principal a thank-offering for the priceless blessing of sight?

WILLIAM BURNET, M.A.

PEDDLERS AND HAWKERS.



HE itinerant vendor of varied wares has played for ages a distinguished part in the economy of country life. In the days before railways and the penny postage system, he was a valued link of intercommunication, and an esteemed disseminator of news. To-day

his rôle in these respects has been greatly modified; but his place is not vacant, and his trade still thrives. A brief sketch (from life) of his work, and his many amusing idiosyncrasies, will have its interest for many students of English provincial character.

The large and exceedingly miscellaneous class of travelling country salesmen is arbitrarily divided by Act of Parliament into two sections—peddlers and hawkers. These terms are not synonyms, interchangeable at will, although, by the well-known law of the greater including the less, the hawker may if he chooses style himself a peddler. The peddler is restricted to journeys on foot, and to personal carriage of his own goods. The regulations to which he is subject—of police supervision, &c.—are set down on the certificate which is his lawful permission to exercise his trade, and for which he pays annually the sum of five shillings. The hawker may travel either with cart or van, as may best suit his convenience; his character has to be approved; for his licence he is mulcted in the fee of £4 yearly. Naturally, the hawker is the aristocrat, and the peddler the plebeian of the profession.

To start in business as a hawker of the class who patrol the country with vans, carrying carpets, brushes, or earthenware, is an undertaking that requires capital. The cost of a van, with its necessary appointments, will vary from fifty to a hundred pounds. The stock-in-trade may represent another twenty or thirty pounds. These figures, with their consequent risk, operate on the one hand to deter fresh beginners, and on the other to keep in the ranks veterans who grow weary of the continual change. They constitute one of the factors which maintain these hawkers as a self-centred, isolated community—a race apart from those with whom they deal and temporarily sojourn.

Peddlers, again, fall into several distinct categories. There are those who may be spoken of as locally attached, who have a habitation and a name, and in most cases take, week in and week out, a regular and unvarying route. And there are those whose ambition is wider and more restless, who journey from county to county, and are seldom seen twice in the same locality within a long term of years. Beyond and beneath these are the occasional and, so to speak, amateur peddlers, who more properly belong to the formidable hordes of vagrancy, and who are genuine Ishmaels, with their hand against every man, and every man's hand against them. Many legitimate and recognised peddlers travel with some single speciality—brushes, combs, ornaments, spectacles, or even clothes-lines. These have often a pride in their profession which would vie with that of the flourishing town tradesman. The rounds taken are long and, with their interminable calls, very wearisome. To

walk on an average twenty miles a day, and visit several hundreds, it may be, of cottages and farms, is a severe test of physical endurance.

It is to be feared that the commercial morality of the country hawker is not yet above suspicion. These men are determined by hook or by crook to dispose of their wares, and they are masters of the arts of cajolery and *finesse*. Scores of entertaining and authentic anecdotes might be given to bear out this statement. We subjoin a few :—

A vendor of cheap spectacles called on an ancient maiden lady and displayed his glittering stock. The lady remarked that she had recently purchased a pair in a neighbouring town.

“Do they suit you, ma’am?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“It’s a serious thing to have spectacles that don’t suit; very harmful, very. I’ve travelled for years with glasses of all descriptions, and I’ve known a lot of mischief done by glasses bought permiscus-like. They don’t mind a bit what they sell over counters, not they; they never look to see the customer again, likely. Now, I’m on this round reg’lar, an’ it stands to reason as I have to be wonderful careful. Might I have a glance at these spectacles, ma’am?”

Impressed by the tone of respectful sympathy, the lady fetched them, and the hawker, with an assumption of much knowledge, turned them round and round and tested both glasses and frames. His verdict soon came :—

“I’m sorry, real sorry for ye, ma’am; ye’ve been deceived. These spectacles are really dangerous; blue steel frames o’ this pattern and temper ’ll be sure to *injure the temples*.”

He began to gather up his pack.

“Then, what do you recommend?”

“Well, ma’am, ’tis a sacrifice; but, to oblige ye, I’ll exchange a pair for these, if ye please; you’ll be safe then.”

With a little more persuasion the bargain was effected. A week later the lady reappeared at the shop from whence had come the discarded pair of glasses. The new ones had proved utterly useless. She had to return, considerably poorer in pocket if richer in experience, to those certain, in the hawker’s words, to “injure her temples.”

A hawker of brushes (fancy ones) laboured, without success, to dispose of a third-rate hair-brush at a wayside cottage. He was told it was “not good enough.” He retreated to his van :—

“Bess, a piece of tissue paper, quick!”

It was provided; the self-same brush carefully swathed therein, and the man returned to the conflict.

“This ’ll suit ye, miss; and only ninepence more.”

The brush in its soft white wrapping, presented thus unblushingly, was approved and actually purchased. The hawker’s triumph was complete.

An almost parallel case to this latter concerned some imitation tortoise-shell combs, and, being also a fact, affords equally striking evidence not only of fertility of resource on the part of the vendors, but well-nigh astounding credulity on the side of the victim.

A man and his wife were hawking these combs on different rounds of the same town. Jasper called at a brewery cottage, and argued long and well in defence of his goods. But he was taken off his guard (rare instance) at the outset by a direct question. Were these combs genuine tortoise-shell? No-o, they weren’t, he confessed. Then the lady absolutely declined to buy. Jasper departed crestfallen, met his wife, and recounted with his other adventures this last and least satisfactory one. Mrs. Jasper was unwilling to admit defeat. She walked off at once to the designated house, and something like the following dialogue took place :—

“Any tortoise-combs to-day, ma’am, if ye please? Beautiful articles they are.”

“But not real, I fancy?”

“Real? Dear me, yes, ma’am; look for yourself. Wouldn’t carry any that weren’t, and that makes ’em a little bit high in price.”

And the cunning dame seized the opportunity of naming a figure that should properly have bought half a score of her trumpery wares.

Her adversary fell into the trap and purchased a comb.

But audacity in swindling (there is no other word sufficiently accurate) occasionally reaches a loftier pitch yet, and has almost the force of genius. A hawker called at a large general store, say in 1884, and wanted a stock of the current year’s almanacs.

“It’s late in the season, I know, end o’ January, but I’ve got orders for some, and I guess I could sell a lot.”

“We have none left,” responded the storekeeper.

“None! Why, what are these?”

“Old ones, rubbish, date of 1881.”

“For sale at waste-paper price, I suppose?”

“Yes, but they’re useless.”

“I’ll take ’em.”

And he did. It transpired afterwards that the astute “commercial” had revised the date on each copy, transforming with the pen the “1” into a “4,” and had cleared out the whole at published prices, making thus a large but dishonest profit on his bargain. How and under what circumstances the unfortunate rustics found out their blunder and the trick that had been played upon them is a tempting subject for imagination.

A country hawker about whom very many hard things have been said and written is the travelling draper, or “tally-man.” He is accused of encouraging undue love of dress and finery in the bosoms of his fair clients, of inveigling them into ways of debt and danger, and then, when once they are at his mercy, of extorting the last farthing in satisfaction of his demands, at the cost sometimes of household peace or even of individual honesty. He may not be altogether acquitted; but there is another side to the picture. It is largely the convenience of “credit” which is at the root of the censures so freely passed. The system and not the man is chiefly at fault.

The tally-man sees much of the seamy side of English village life, and the sights he witnesses and the treatment to which he is subjected make him a



“THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.”

humorist in spite of his devotion to “business.” The villagers are not infrequently adepts at tiding off the evil day of payment for the articles they have bought. On the traveller’s calls they will fasten the door, and be, apparently, out of both sight and hearing, or they will instruct their children to return the society answer—

“Mother’s not at home, sir.”

There are many stories current of passionate hawkers who have resented by forced doors or terrified children this contemptuous behaviour on the part of their patrons. About one such adventure that recurs to memory, as told by a “tally-man,” there is a spice of grim humour that would have commended it to either Scott or Dickens, as a fragment of realism suitable for incorporation in a work of fiction mirroring life and character.

A cottage was entered, but the owner was not visible.

“Mrs. Smith !”

No answer.

“Mrs. Smith ! Mrs. Smith !! Mrs. Smith !!!” in tones reaching a crescendo, and still no answer.

The “gudewife” could not be far away, for on the fire were cooking some cutlets, evidently in preparation for the mid-day meal.

Mrs. Smith was deeply in debt, and this was not the first time she had proved a defaulter. The soul of the draper was stirred within him, and he waited ; waited until the contents of the woman’s frying-pan were a charred, useless mass, and a penalty had at least been inflicted for the monetary wrong.

Then he departed, and Mrs. Smith, it may be presumed, came down once more from the regions above, a sadder if not a wiser woman.

With this true narrative we conclude our sketch of a country man of mark, with whose province even the multiplication of railroads interferes but little, who is a distinct and noteworthy link between the past and the present, and whose character and calling offer many opportunities for amused comment.