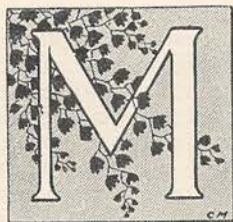


## WHISTLING AS A PROFESSION.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. CHARLES CAPPER.

"Can you whistle?"  
 "Whistle, ma'am?"  
 "Yes, whistle tunes."



R. CHARLES CAPPER can whistle tunes much better than ever poor Tess of the D'Urbervilles did; and that, not for piping bullfinches, but to please intelligent human beings.

A short time back he was performing with Barrington Foote, Esther Pallisser, Marian Mackenzie, and other well-known artistes at the Portman Rooms, where 2,500 of the "best" people in town were present at an At Home in aid of the Gordon Boys' Home; and the writer was fortunate enough to get Mr. Capper to talk about his career, and to give some hints for the benefit of those anxious to learn to whistle.

"I was only four or five when I first began to make a noise in the world after this fashion," he said, "and my people used to be very fond of trotting me out as a little whistling prodigy among our friends. But it was through mere chance that a few years ago I decided to do what the sailors are fond of doing—to raise the wind by whistling. I was playing the piccolo one evening at an At Home at the Bedford Park Club, when one of the brass keys came off my instrument, and abruptly terminated the performance. A friend who knew of my fondness for whistling was equal to the emergency, and promptly rose to say that Mr. Capper would whistle the remainder of the piece. 'Mr. Capper will do nothing of the sort,' I said; but my objections were overruled, and the reception I met with was so very gratifying that I decided then and there to follow up my success by appearing as a professional whistler. Since my first appearance, at the Lyric Club, I have whistled at all sorts and conditions of places; mansions and madhouses, *soirées* and 'smokers,' clubs and churches; theatres, bazaars, schools, dinners, regimental messes, and the like; and now frequently have to attend four or five functions in different parts of town or country in one evening. I have whistled at At Homes at the homes of most of the aristocracy, and have appeared several times before royalty—on one occasion, at Bury St. Edmunds, before the Duke

of York, who sent for me and shook hands after the entertainment. The life is an immensely enjoyable one, for there is plenty of variety, and one mixes with nice people, and people whose names are household words, both in one's hosts and one's fellow artistes; having in addition the satisfaction of knowing, as one buzzes like a bee from one place to another, that honey is being made in the shape of fees of five guineas or so for one's services."

Mr. Capper's glowing account of a whistler's life generated sincerest flattery, in the shape of a desire to imitate; and the writer asked whether any "tips" likely to be of service to a would-be whistler were forthcoming.

"Well," was the reply, "you know what Josh Billings' instructions to people who want to whistle are—screw up your mouth and make a noise through the hole. I don't know if I can be much more explicit than that, but I will try and give some hints. Really, the two or three people I have tried to teach have turned out so badly that I am almost beginning to think that the good whistler must be, like the poet, 'born, not made.' One gentleman, however, a major who could already whistle fairly well, took six lessons from me, and could certainly whistle much better at the end of them—with the aid of fruit salt, a beverage he found more suitable than any other for wetting his whistle, and imbibed freely during every lesson. I usually like a glass of champagne before performing; it makes the notes ever so much more mellow, especially, curiously enough, when washing down a good dinner. I have to thank good teeth, a high roof to my mouth, and a slight peculiarity in my upper lip, for much of my success. As an illustration of the use of the latter item, just listen to this," said Mr. Capper, whistling a few bars of a little staccato air which set the feet instinctively dancing. "Pretty, isn't it? That's a Dutch air, brought across the water for me by a friend; I really don't know its name. The majority of people would find some difficulty in whistling that as quickly and correctly as I do; simply because for each staccato note they force up a fresh supply of air from the lungs, while I check a continuous current of breath by the rapid use of my

upper lip, shutting off and releasing the sound as quickly and as often as I like. Whistling therefore very rarely tires me, and is absolutely no strain upon the lungs, because articulation is obtained without frequently checking their deflation. One thing I should like to say to those anxious to whistle: never attempt anything in too high a key, for both notes and expression are better within an easy range. I should also advise beginners not to obtain notes by in-drawing of the breath; I have never made use of that method, as it appears to me that it affects the purity of the notes. Of course, that is only my opinion. Mrs. Shaw, whom I followed at the Promenade Concerts at the old Her Majesty's Theatre, where I had a nightly engagement for several weeks before it was pulled down, evidently thinks differently, for she whistles both while deflating and inflating the lungs. In whistling

I always throw my head back to its full extent, in order that the sound may fill the hall. A little while ago, to decide a bet between a couple of gentlemen, I whistled in the Albert Hall, and succeeded in proving that the sound filled every part of the empty building—a far more difficult feat than making one'sself heard in a well-filled hall. To sum up my rules to novices, I should recommend them to whistle always while *expiring*, and not *inspiring*; to choose an easy range; to utilise the upper lip as much as possible; to keep the head thrown back; and, above all, to practise with the piano: though personally I get as much practice as I can stand while actually performing. Of course, they can adapt my champagne tip to their pockets and their principles; that is simply my personal experience."

"Can you recommend any particular kind of music suitable for whistlers? If I were taking up the art, for instance, I should probably have no little trouble in deciding what to whistle."

"It is certainly very difficult to select suitable music," said Mr. Capper, "though I have now about forty pieces in my *répertoire*. Sir Henry Bishop's pieces 'Should he Upbraid,' 'Bid me Discourse,' 'Tell me, my Heart,' and the like, have proved more useful to me than any others. On one occasion, at an At Home at Lord Aberdeen's, where the late Lord Granville and several other prominent men were present, Sir William Harcourt was so pleased with 'Bid me Discourse' that I was encored three times. I had a very lucky find some little time ago. In turning over some of my mother's music, I came across an almost unknown piece of Bishop's, 'Oh, Light Bounds my Heart,' splendidly adapted for whistling, and so rare that I believe there are only two or three copies of it in existence. Echo effects go down well with most audiences; though I think the 'Harmonious Blacksmith,' with variations, which constant repetition has made me thoroughly tired of, is about my best selection. Cornet solos are very suitable for whistlers, and my power of double and



MR. CHARLES CAPPER.

(From a photograph by C. J. Schmidt, New Southgate, N.)

triple tongueing—I believe, by the way, that I am the only whistler before the public who *can* triple-tongue—enables me to render them very effectively. How is triple-tongueing managed? Well, it's almost as difficult to explain by voice as on paper; of course it is done entirely with the lips and tongue: somehow like this," he continued, illustrating his method by whistling a bar or two of a cornet solo. "Really, I can't describe the method; it's almost like softly spitting out the notes. The teeth do not come into use at all."

"I suppose you have had no end of queer experiences, Mr. Capper?"

"Oh, no end. You know I've been to several lunatic asylums—only professionally, you understand—to Bedlam, Ticehurst, and others. Ticehurst is a very aristocratic place; the inmates live in most magnificent style; and when I was there, an English countess was among my audience. I shall never forget my sensations on whistling before my first audience of lunatics. There was not a murmur of approval; not a hand raised to applaud; and all the time I was whistling, my audience sat making such curious, and in some cases such horrible grimaces at me, that even the pathos of their condition could hardly keep me from laughing. And laughing, let me tell you, is a very serious difficulty on the stage. Time after time my puckered-up lips have spread out into a smile, and the smile become a broad laugh, while doing my turn. Once, for instance, this occurred at an *At Home* at the Hon. Mrs. Evelyn Ashley's. I was in the midst of a piece, and, with my eyes almost shut, my mouth puckered-up, and my head thrown back, I've no doubt I looked fairly ludicrous, when a child in front, who had been regarding me very attentively, suddenly burst out quite audibly, 'Oh, mamma, look at that funny man: what a funny face he's making!' That collapsed me altogether."

"A little while ago I went down to Wellington College to whistle, and had a very amusing experience. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Upton preceded me to the school; I had another engagement, but was to get down there by six o'clock. I started, and got to Wokingham, where, possibly through a misunderstanding, a railway man told me it was only two miles to the college. At a quarter to six, after a walk of three miles, I arrived at a large country house, and was horrified to find that private people lived there, and that Wellington was three miles further on. I had a quarter of an hour to do the distance in; and, clad as I was in frock coat, silk hat and patents, with rain just beginning to fall, I set off at racing speed. Well, I arrived at length,

but was unable for a long time to find my way into the school, until a small boy whom I managed to unearth, and who was kept out of the concert room for his misdemeanours, volunteered to pilot me to the door of the gymnasium in which the affair was being held. Whether that small boy was playing me a trick or no I know not; but when, after no end of knocking, peering through key-holes, and the like, the door was opened by Mrs. Fred Upton, I found to my horror that I was actually on the stage itself; that I had interrupted Mr. and Mrs. Upton in their piece; and that an audience of some four hundred boys and their visitors were roaring with laughter at the ludicrous appearance which, with my hat at the back of my head, my face streaming with perspiration, my frock-coat wet and my patents muddy, I must undoubtedly have made. Later on in the evening a young lady insisted on playing a polka accompaniment in waltz time, with the result that after a time I burst out laughing, she burst out laughing, and the whole of the audience followed us with peal after peal; and the Uptons and I finished the adventures of the evening by walking arm in arm through Egyptian darkness to Wokingham, and losing ourselves by the way.

"Is there anything else personal I can tell you?" Mr. Capper asked finally, before saying good-bye. "I am twenty-seven years old; am fond of fishing and gardening; go in for all kinds of athletics under the sun—though I prefer them out of the sun if possible; have, as I can fortunately say without egotism, a charming wife and equally charming son; and live at Hampton on Thames. You can examine me in all lights to see what I look like: I am fair, have a curiously shaped head, and am very much like my brother, Alfred Capper, the thought-reader, a fact that has led to some amusing mistakes; I wear sixteen inch collars; I wash myself with——"

"Thank you, Mr. Capper, that will do. But how on earth do you make that noise?"

With his lips parted, he was making a curious, hollow, ventriloquial whistle, not unlike the note of an ocarina.

"That's my trick whistle," he explained, "done by sending the breath round the roof of the mouth between the cheeks and the teeth. Is there anything else I can tell you? No? Then I suppose I must be going."

And so Mr. Capper, having good-naturedly divulged all his trade-secrets for the benefit of possible rivals, rushed off, whistling his sepulchral trick-whistle, to amuse another London audience before returning to his Hampton home.

LUCIAN SORREL.