

Oddities.

SHOEBLACKS.

THE shoeblacks of London are becoming a peculiar feature in our metropolitan thoroughfares. Here

are these active little fellows, with brushes and box, ready to polish up your boots for a penny, on the muddiest of muddy days. 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the wind that blows showers is propitious to the shoeblacks. The rain has washed off all your polish; the mud has settled in huge lumps all round your soles. This did not signify while it rained; but the sun shines out bright and clear, and you can no longer tolerate your condition. "Clean your boots, sir!" The yellow boy at the lamp-post pops this question, and you comply with satisfaction. He is sharp and clever at his work; rubs off the mud, lays on the blacking, applies the brush with right good will, and, lo! your boots are shining like patent leather. What's the cost? Only a penny! The shoeblack brigades are an offshoot from the ragged schools—an institution which has exercised a most beneficial effect upon the moral and physical

condition of the poor of the metropolis. The shoeblack movement was set on foot in the year 1851. There are now 319 boys so employed, and during the last year they earned £4,548. The various societies distinguish their brigades by different-coloured uniforms: thus the Ragged-school Shoeblack Society adopts red as its colour; the East London, blue; South London, yellow; North-west London, white; West Kent, green; West London, purple; Islington, brown, with red facings; Notting-hill, blue, with red facings; Union Dock, Limehouse, red, with blue facings. The shoeblack business presents an excellent field for temporary employment, enabling boys to obtain good characters, and so to be recommended to permanent situations. Many of these brigade boys who "stoop to conquer" will rise to be shining characters. They acquire habits of self-discipline, economy, civility, and activity. With their banners flying and their hands playing, they make a goodly show—brave little soldiers, taking the field against vice, misery, and crime.

We said that the shoeblack movement was started in 1851. This is true as affects the ragged schools. But one must look a long way back to find the beginning of the shoeblack business. Is it not written, "There is no new thing under the sun?" Shoeblacks are a very old institution. The accompanying picture—after Hogarth—shows us the shoeblack busy at work more than a century ago. And who does not remember the story of the boot-cleaner of the Pont Neuf, whose dog was trained to mud the boots of the passengers, so that they might be obliged to stop and have them cleaned? It is an odd thing to trace these recurrences of old practices, and these reappearances of old fashions. In this print of Hogarth we observe not only the familiar shoeblack, but the hooped ladies of those days, so well imitated by the crinolined ladies of our own. There is, however, a change for the better. In Hogarth's time there was no ragged school—no refuge for outcast boys—no noblemen and gentlemen planning out employment for these City Arabs—no earnest effort to remove the moral mud-stains from those who had been trodden in the mire, and to polish up the unpolished children of the streets!

AN ODD NOTICE.

Once upon a time, a parish clerk and barber, north of the Tweed, put up in his window the following

notice:—"Notice.—That I begin of shaving on Saturdays at 5 o'clock for one half-penny till 8 o'clock. After 8 o'clock, 1 penny, till 9 o'clock. After 9 o'clock I shall please myself whether I shave or not. Saturday Noon from 12 to 1 o'clock, 1 half-penny. Going out to shave, one penny; out of town, 2d. Now I shall



A SHOEBLACK OF THE LAST CENTURY.

be very glad to shave any person that feels it worth their pleasure to come and pay like men, and not get shaved and never come no more when they have got one penny or 1 1-2 on. If it is not worth one penny let your beard grow."

The Amateur Gardener.

BY GEORGE CLENT.

THE sowing season is now fairly on in both the flower and kitchen garden; and, as this is one of the most important of all garden operations, we shall this week devote a considerable space to it, and add but little to the general directions given in our last number.

The earth should be stirred on the surface between all the plants in beds, and round all those in pots; and all things in frames, houses, or the open air, should be divested of their dead and discoloured leaves. Pinks in beds will be stronger in their bloom and better coloured if about an inch in thickness of well-rotted dung be put all over the surface between the plants.

In selecting plants for the windows, whether at market—where great caution is necessary—or at a nursery—where you have a better chance of getting good flowers—be not tempted with anything in full bloom, because they have come to their best, and have only to get worse every day. Pick out those plants which have not been forced, but that are coming into flower.

Stocks and wallflowers that have been grown in cold frames, and are showing the flower-buds ready to burst, are good for their perfume as well as appearance; and if they have filled their pots with roots, get the nurseryman to shift them into larger ones and in good soil.

Many other plants that have been merely protected in cold frames are desirable. *Cheiranthus Marshallii*, a species of wallflower, is very pretty and dwarf, and just coming into flower. Perennial candytuft is also showy, and covered with its snow-white blooms. Many other subjects of this half-hardy kind may be had in the state best adapted for the buyer.

Annuals, that grow and bloom well in pots, may be sown now, especially *nemophila*, candytuft, larkspur, collinsia, sweet peas, and mignonette;

and the following hints upon this subject are worth attention.

SOWING.

How many thousands fail in their attempts to raise things from seed, and then lay all the blame on the poor seedsman! Not but that there are plenty who soil dead seeds. What else can be expected, when people want so much for their money? Who can suppose that good seed would be sold in penny packets?

However, setting all cheap things on one side, a vast number of people sow good seeds and see no produce. Now, the sowing of seed is one of the most simple operations imaginable; but there are many causes of failure.

It may be that some kinds will vegetate if they be only thrown on the ground; but others want the most careful watching. The following conditions are absolutely necessary:—

The earth should be turned up fresh, and then smoothed, so that the seed cannot go down between the lumps and be lost. When the surface has been levelled and smooth, the seed should be sprinkled thinly all over, and, with a moderately fine sieve, mould enough to cover the seed should be sifted over it.

Even this should be carefully done by moving the sieve to all parts of it, otherwise the soil would be too thick in some places. If dry weather ensue, the seed should be watered occasionally, for, if once it be allowed to get dry after it begins to swell, it will never germinate, and this has been one great cause of failure.

The smaller the seed the more certain it is to suffer from neglect. Another cause has been the covering too deep, for in that case the seed cannot get through the ground. Again, some soil is too stiff; and when the surface runs together, from rain or watering, forms a crust that no very small seed can penetrate.

When the soil is rough and in lumps, the seed runs down into the hollows, and a good deal is lost; hence it is, that all young gardeners succeed best with large seeds. Sweet peas, convolvulus, lupins, and such like, bear a good deal of ill usage.

They may be buried deeper and yet come up, and they may be on the top of the ground and still strike their roots into it; but we have known every patch of sweet peas in a large garden to fall through not being covered, for birds make very short work of it if a single pea is in sight. They seem to know that where there is one there are more, and they soon scratch them all up; then the seed is condemned instead of the sower.

Birds can see from an immense height; it is therefore of the greatest importance to cover completely, and, for the reasons before given, it should only be covered. A common failure arises from sowing too thick, for in that case they damp off. It is therefore fatal, unless they are thinned as soon as they are up.

When annuals are sown in patches they should be reduced to three or four; but it is better to sow few, and not leave too much to do in thinning—half a dozen, at the very most, should be left to grow, and they ought to be three or four inches apart.

In sowing these, first fork up the ground; next, press the bottom of a good sized flower-pot down on the loose soil, and that makes a level, circular space on which to drop the seed, which, of course, should be kept within the space; then, with a little sieve, or with your hand, cover with fine earth—you will rarely have a failure.

When they come up, and before they grow much, thin them out. Larkspurs, *erysimum*, collinsia, candytuft, may grow, if six are left. Sweet-peas may have eight or ten, because they grow upright and climb; but *nemophila*, convolvulus, *coreopsis*, and other branching or spreading things, make a goodly show with three.

Never neglect the watering until they are well up; they may then be fairly left to themselves. Attend to these things, and we shall hear fewer complaints of seed, unless it be from those who obtain packets which are only "made to sell."

PRICKING OUT.

This operation is applied to the removal of seedlings when very small, and is intended to give them the benefit of fresh soil and ample room. The little plants should be turned up with a wooden spud, or the handle of a budding knife, without breaking a fibre, and put into pots or pens some little distance from each other, giving them room to grow into strength. It is a very good plan to put them round the edge of a pot, an inch apart, making the hole close to the side, so that the roots may even touch it. The pot is of great assistance to the young plants, which are the more easily removed without damage when strong enough to pot out singly.