

## STREET TOY SELLERS AND THEIR WARES.

BY C. ERNEST FINCHAM.

THE exigencies of modern civilisation and the ceaseless struggle for existence among the poorer classes of the community in London, have created

a class of itinerant hawkers, known as "gutter-merchants."

These folk sell their wares, literally, *in the gutter*, as the stern majesty of the law, embodied in the person of the policeman, frowns upon any hardy hawker who may have the temerity to trespass upon the pavement.

Many of these men have seen better days. Of our own experience we can cite an example of a man who could converse fluently in French and German, and could read Spanish and Italian without much

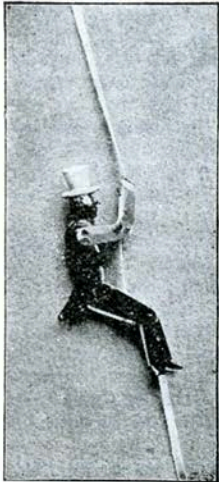


ALLY SLOPER PUZZLE.

help from a dictionary. And there are others, well educated, plying their trade in the gutter. How these men sank so low in the social scale it boots not to inquire.

So keen is competition nowadays, that even in this lowly method of earning a livelihood the Englishman is jostled by the German Jew and his Polish brother.

Not all who sell toys, etc., in the streets are *bond-fide* "gutter-merchants." For when any special novelty is brought out, newsboys, cab "glimmers," loafers, and "hangers-on" at Covent Garden Market rush to swell the already too full ranks of the street-hawkers. Most of these men display their wares on a small wooden tray, which is suspended from their shoulders by means of a strap.



CLIMBING NIGGER.

A reserve stock of goods is sometimes carried in an old satchel, but more usually tied up in a gaudy handkerchief.

The places where these "men most do congreg-

ate" are the Strand (near Charing Cross), Ludgate Hill, St. Paul's Churchyard, and Cheap-side.

At Christmas time this latter thoroughfare is crowded (as far as the gutter is concerned) with these street-merchants, standing at intervals of about ten feet from one another: some crying their wares with a raucous-voiced persistence that compels the passer-by to stop and make a purchase: others, half-frozen with cold, scarcely retain enough energy to work "the climbing monkey" or the "little masher," who gravely raises his hat with the air of a Lord Chesterfield when the requisite string is pulled.

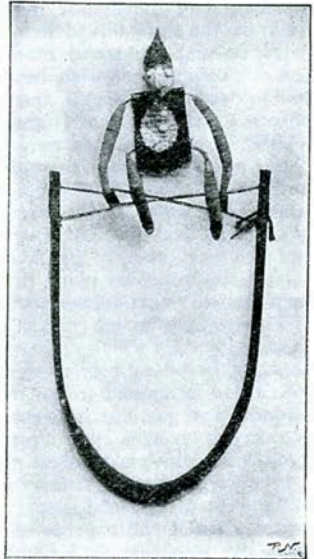
It is no easy matter to get these men to talk about themselves, or to give any particulars as to where they obtain their stock-in-trade, or to say what they pay wholesale for the toys and articles they vend, and only by an acquaintanceship of some months' standing was it possible to glean the particulars required.

The majority of the men are very honest—at least, as far as we had any dealings with them. On several occasions we wished to get a certain toy. They were always pleased to procure a specimen, and invariably refused to take an extra payment for their trouble.

On an average, their earnings range from fifteen-pence to eighteen-pence per diem. With few exceptions the toys and curiosities are retailed to the public *for a penny each!* In enumerating some of these wares later on it will be seen how absurdly cheap they are.

The "gutter-merchant" buys them wholesale at eight shillings a gross. He is obliged to take not less than a quarter or a half-gross, as the case may be. No guarantee is given with them, and the toys are often damaged in transit, imperfect, or perhaps broken—"Dudds," as they are called in the street-slang. Any such mishap is, of course, a dead loss to the street-seller.

As the toys are sold at a penny apiece, it is obvious that there is a profit of  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. on all sales—less deductions for damaged goods. So that to earn eighteen-pence in a day it is necessary to sell 54 toys; and remember that



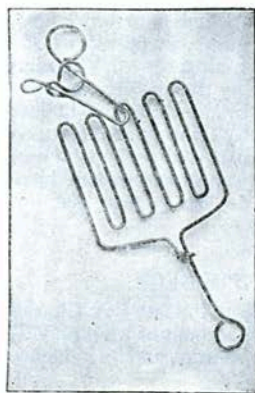
ACROBAT.



competition is very keen and you have many rivals.

In the face of these facts it may seem astounding, but it is none the less true, that purchasers, especially women, will sometimes demand 13 or 14 articles for a shilling, and haggle till they get them!

The goods are obtained through the medium of merchants and importers of foreign goods. They exact the highest price they can from the street-sellers; if the supply be limited and the article or toy in question "catches on," the price is raised.



GRIDIRON PUZZLE.

Sometimes the casual street-hawkers mentioned above run counter to their own interests. A case in point will perhaps serve to make this clearer. Four winters ago, at the time when Mrs. Ormiston

Chant essayed to control the destinies of the "Empire," a new toy, imported from Paris, was placed on the London streets. It was the figure of a woman wearing a poke-bonnet. This and the dress were made of paper.

The face and head were painted upon an india-rubber bag, which, when distended with air, presented a very grotesque appearance.

These little figures were very much in request, and the supply fell far short of the demand.

Some of these street sellers happened to know that the importer of these particular goods (who held a monopoly) had received an invoice for several gross. One

Monday morning a crowd blocked up his doorway, awaiting the arrival of the consignment.

They offered the importer two shillings a gross *in excess of the selling price* if he would supply them, and them alone, with all he could obtain from the manufacturer.

He refused to sell the goods to this clique

exclusively, but raised the price two shillings per gross to everybody. Thus the attempt to form a "corner" signally failed, but they succeeded in

running up the price, with the result that the general public refused to buy at the enhanced price and the market was glutted.

In the East end of London the alien Jews combine to keep all they can out of the hands of their Gentile competitors.

Many of the wholesale importers are of Jewish origin.

When any especially striking novelty is imported, they give this information to their co-religionists (following the profession of "gutter merchant") whom they chance to meet at the synagogue.

Then ten, twenty, or perhaps as many as thirty of these men will club together and buy up the 30, 50, or 100 gross which form the whole consignment.

It often happens that in a fortnight or three weeks the novelty attaching to the article has worn off, so that when at last the Gentile gutter-merchant obtains possession of the toy the public no longer cares to buy it. He must then sell at a heavy loss to get rid of his

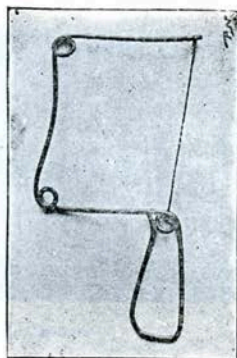
stock and obtain the money to invest in something else.

Should it happen, as sometimes occurs, that the Jewish gutter-merchants cannot muster sufficient capital to buy the consignment, their co-religionists and compatriots—the merchants to wit—will allow them to take the goods on credit. This is indeed an object lesson in racial hatred.

The toys come from all parts of the world, but chiefly from France and Japan; they are also imported from Germany, the Austrian Tyrol, and America.

Could the toys speak they would tell us of many a winter's night in a Tyrolean peasant's hut, the mountaineer's family sitting round the blazing peat-wood fire fashioning toys for children of other lands; they would tell us of the rag-pickers of Paris searching in rubbish heaps for sardine tins and for tins which

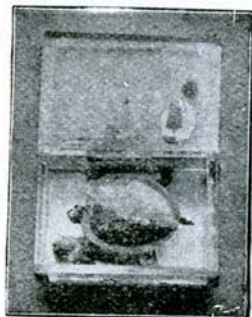
have contained preserved fruit; how these tins are then steeped and cleansed from dirt, labels, and japan; how deft fingers cut them into shapes,



FRET SAW.



JAPANESE EGG.



TORTOISE.



LORD'S PRAYER ON THREE-PENNY PIECE.



paint, and finally transform them into a toy which finds a ready mart in the streets of Greater Babylon.

The most wonderful thing in connection with



MOUSE AND MATCHBOX.

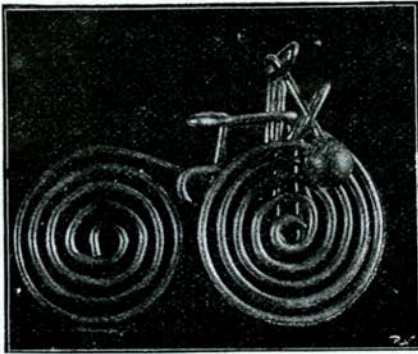
these toys is that they can be sold for a penny, and that *three* profits are made out of them, viz., the manufacturer's, the importer's, and the "gutter-merchant's."

Other outlets for the sale of these goods are to be found in the "markets" in and around London.

The "markets" are held in the streets, and generally on a Saturday night. A few of the sites are Hampstead Road; Edgware Road; High Street, Camden Town; Chapel Street, Islington; Highgate; Holloway; Berwick Street, Soho; Great Tichfield Street, Tottenham Court Road; Seven Sisters' Road; and on the South side of the Thames the "New Cut"; Lambeth Walk; High Street, Bermondsey; Walworth Road; Walham Green; Clapham Common; and Camberwell Green.

Some of these "gutter-merchants" even go so far afield as Croydon, Kingston, and Richmond.

The prototype of these men seems to have



BICYCLE PUZZLE.

been Autolycus, mentioned in the *Winter's Tale*, who says: "I have sold all my trumpery; not a counterfeit stone, not a ribbon, glass, pomander, brooch, table-book, ballad, knife, tape,

glove, shoe-tie, horn-ring to keep my pack from fasting."

He was probably, however, what was known under the old English law as a "petty chapman."

Their life is one of perpetual hardship, standing for hours in the gutter, exposed to the scorching heat of summer, nipped by the freezing cold of winter, drenched by the showers of early spring, and half choked by the thick fogs of late autumn; subjected to petty tyranny at the hands of an over-zealous constable, and perhaps driven from their "pitch" (for these street-hawkers have no legal right to stand in the gutter), their lot "is not a happy one."

### BRIBING SPURGEON.

THE recent autobiography of the late Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon contains an account of what may be termed an early business venture, and its influence on his character.

Spurgeon was brought up on Watts' hymns, but not altogether willingly. His grandmother coaxed him with money to learn them. At first she gave him a penny, but when she saw how easily it was earned, the old lady reduced the prize to a halfpenny, and then to a farthing. There is no telling how low the amount per hymn might have fallen, but just at this time his grandfather made a discovery which seemed more desirable to Spurgeon.

He discovered that his house was overrun with rats, and offered his grandson a shilling a dozen for all he could kill.

The occupation of rat-killing gave him more money than learning hymns. "But," Mr. Spurgeon characteristically says, "I know which employment has been the more permanently profitable to me."

### ONCE IN A WHILE.

ONCE in a while the sun shines out,  
And the arching skies are a perfect blue;  
Once in a while, 'mid clouds of doubt,  
Faith's fairest stars come peeping through;  
Our paths lead down by the meadows fair,  
Where the sweetest blossoms nod and smile,  
And we lay aside our cross of care,  
Once in a while.

Once in a while within our own  
We feel the hand of a steadfast friend;  
Once in a while we feel the tone  
Of love, with the heart's own voice to blend;  
And the dearest of all our dreams come true,  
And on life's way is a golden smile,  
Each thirsting flower is kissed with dew,  
Once in a while.

Once in a while in the desert sand  
We find a spot of the fairest green;  
Once in a while from where we stand  
The hills of Paradise are seen,  
And a perfect joy in our hearts we hold,  
A joy that the world can not defile;  
We trade earth's dross for the purest gold,  
Once in a while.