Street Musicians.

By Gilbert Guerdon.

MUSIC "hath charms to soothe," we admit, but not all music, and not at all times; and it is this modification of the soothing effects of music that our street minstrels, both vocal and instrumental, seem to be unable, or unwilling, to comprehend.

Yet the street minstrelsy of to-day is nothing like so outrageously annoying and worrying as it was twenty years ago. Occasionally only do we hear one of those wretched old barrel-organs which helped to drive Parliament to pass the Act of 1863. That enactment was intended to minimise, or, at least, to modify, the annoyance caused by the so-called music of the streets, and it has succeeded.

Speaking generally, there are two kinds of street musicians—the tolerable and the intolerable. Amongst the former, we may include the poor fiddler who tells us that when he is "on the job," he manages to scrape together a decent livelihood. After ten years he has become weather hardened, and his long-tailed frock coat serves for winter or summer, with the only variation of being buttoned or unbuttoned. He has his regular patrons, who look out for him about once a week. One old spinster, who lives in a suburban villa, is always "good for a bob" when he plays "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls." Now and then you may hear the old girl warbling out the ballad with the window wide open, much to the amusement of the passers-by. A few doors off lives an old sea captain, whose grandson has always to dance a hornpipe when the fiddler comes round, and the old salt immediately sends out hot rum and water, whatever the time of year.

When the fiddler tries a new locality, he begins with, "The Heart Bowed Down," which scarcely ever fails to bring a sympathetic someone to the window. His average daily takings are from four to five shillings. In the autumn he plays himself down to Margate, and gets a mouthful of fresh air, and plenty of "recognition."

It was an accident that made him take to the tin whistle, or the "American flageolet," as he calls it. Bad luck had compelled him to pawn his fiddle, and, till he could raise the money to get it out again, he had recourse to the cheapest instrument he could think of, and that was the penny tin whistle. He certainly does get some capital tone out of it, and, at a distance, it may be mistaken for the piccolo. He did not, however, make much of his playing till he had the whistle soldered on to a tin coffee-pot, in place of the spout. This took immensely, and the coffee-pot brought in more pence than the fiddle, sometimes as much as eight or nine shillings a day.

Another penny whistler is a blind man, who morning, noon, and night tootles out "The Last Rose of Summer," alternated with a doleful hymn tune. What little money the poor fellow gets is given more out of compassion for his affliction than for any pleasure that his music affords.

Conscious perhaps that his bag-pipes

"THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER."

alone would not bring in the bawbees, Sandy MacTosh adds the attraction of a Scotch reel or pipe-dance. Dressed in full Highland costume, a little bit frowsy, the piper and his boy march along the quiet suburban roads, playing the pipes to attract attention, and stopping at a convenient spot to give the dance. He gets very little encouragement, however, except from his own country people ; but he has found out their homes, and to them he pays regular visits. There is one real old Mac who invariably celebrates his birthday with a feast of haggis and shepherd's pie, and Sandy MacTosh always attends with his pipes to "play in" the haggis. What is a haggis without the accompaniment of a Highland skreel? As food and music, the pudding and the pipes match each other admirably, and by the time the feast is finished, and the Athol Brose has been tipped off, both Mac and the piper are equally ready to sing, "We are na fou'." But for the Highland families—the Lowlanders do not like the pipes—Sandy MacTosh and his tribe would starve. There are in London, perhaps, half a dozen other Highland bag-pipers and a few frauds :—

> "These are Mile-enders,
> Dressed up as Highlanders,
> Shiv'ring in kilts."

"KILLIM KALLAM."

For the "Killim Kallam" two long "church warden" pipes are used instead of the crossed swords. The dancing is just as difficult over the clays as over the claymores, and there is no danger of cutting the toes. Saturday night is the most profitable, then Monday, and Friday is the least. Pipers do not often get molested, except by tipsy men, who always want to dance ; but Sandy then turns on the dreary-sounding drone and plays a doleful tune in extra slow time, so the drunken toper has to do an English instead of a Scotch reel.

The Italian tribe of street musicians may be dealt with as a group. There are the bag-pipers, the children with the accordion and triangle, the organ-man and the monkey, and the hurdy-gurdy grinder, all of whom hail from the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell, where there is an Italian colony. At the far

ITALIAN BAGPIPES.

"ACCORDION AND TRIANGLE."

end of Leather-lane, in Little Bath-street and Warner-street, they swarm, and there is quite the look and smell and noise of the back slums of an Italian city. The butchers' shops are stocked with the heads, trotters, and "innards" of bullocks, calves, sheep, and pigs, and there is the "Piggy-Wiggy pork-shop," and Italian barbers and cobblers. The Restaurant Italiano Milard is where many of the Italians spend their lazy day—which is Friday. There are also ice-cream makers, roast chestnut "merchants," and dealers in old clothes. Round the latter the Italian women congregate, and bargain for, and try on the gaudy-coloured garments—gowns, petticoats, and shawls, which must have been specially selected to suit the tastes of the Italians.

At the corner of Little Bath-street is the headquarters of the organ-grinders. There they congregate early in the morning before they start on their rounds, and distribute their monkeys, babies, and dancing children. The premises belong to one of the principal makers of piano-organs in London, and the whole of the ground floor is arranged as a depôt, where some hundreds of instruments are stored. Part of them may be hired, but most of them are owned by the people we see playing them in the streets. A small sum is charged for "shed room," and any alterations or repairs can be done on the premises. The proprietors are Italians, and are spoken of as very fair-dealing people. We found, on inquiry, that at least half of the owners of the piano-organs are English people, who have bought their instruments, paying £10 or £15 for them by instalments. The charge for hire is about 10s. per week. There is a choice of all the latest popular operatic and music-hall tunes, and generally all the tunes are changed every six months, though some tunes, like "The Lost Chord" and "The Village Blacksmith," are seldom taken off the barrels. A piano-organ, if taken care of and protected from the wet, will last ten or twelve years. A new tune, if not very florid, can be put in for 9s. or 10s.

The monkey organ-man with the old-fashioned discordant barrel-organ is an old stager—the original "organ-grinder." He looks out for the streets where straw is laid down, and begins to grind directly. An

"THE MONKEY ORGAN-MAN.

enraged *paterfamilias*, who has just carefully tied up the knocker with a white kid glove, and muffled all the bells, calls out to the man, "Go away, do. Don't you see the straw?" The organ-grinder touches his hat, grins, sends the monkey to climb up the water-pipe, and begins another tune. Ultimately he gets locked up, and then coolly tells the magistrate that he did not go away because he thought the straw was put down so that the noise of the carts should not drown the music!

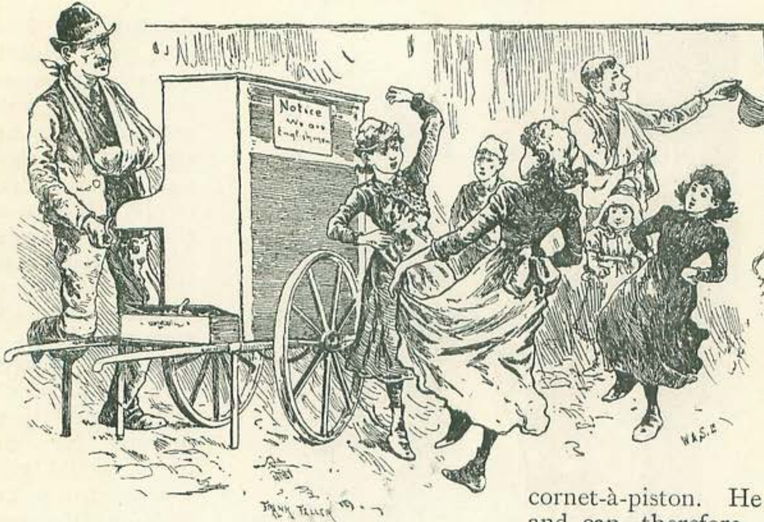
"HURDY-GURDY."

The Savoyard hurdy-gurdy player is almost extinct. The music is produced by the friction of a wheel on one or more strings, and the tone is regulated by pressure on keys. The men admit that they get more money for sitting as artists' models than from playing. The hurdy-gurdy is amongst stringed instruments what the bag-pipes are amongst the wind instruments, but yet no one ever hears them played together. Probably the players themselves could not stand the combined noise.

The Italians send out their wives with two babies—not always their own—and, when the children get big enough, they take the place of the almost obsolete monkey, and do the begging. Older Italian girls pick up a lot of money in the City, and their success has prompted several English and Irish girls to imitate them by colouring their skins with walnut juice, and rigging themselves out in the Italian style. Many of these girls in earlier life danced round the piano-organs in the streets, and were paid to do so by the organ-grinders, as people who would give nothing for the music would give a penny to see the little ones dancing. Such a juvenile "*Bal al fresco*" makes a pretty picture, not thought unworthy of the walls of the Royal Academy.

Amongst the intolerable street musicians must certainly be placed the Indian tom-tom player. His instrument is a drum of a very primitive kind, made out of a section of the hollow trunk of a tree, over each end of which a skin is tightly stretched. It is about the size of an oyster barrel, and the noise is produced by beating it with the hands. There are but two tones—one from each end—and the mournful monotony of the

"OUT WITH THE BABIES."



"A 'BAL AL FRESCO.'"

music is only varied by a few notes of a tuneless song which the player now and then puts in. The servant girls are his principal patrons, and some years since

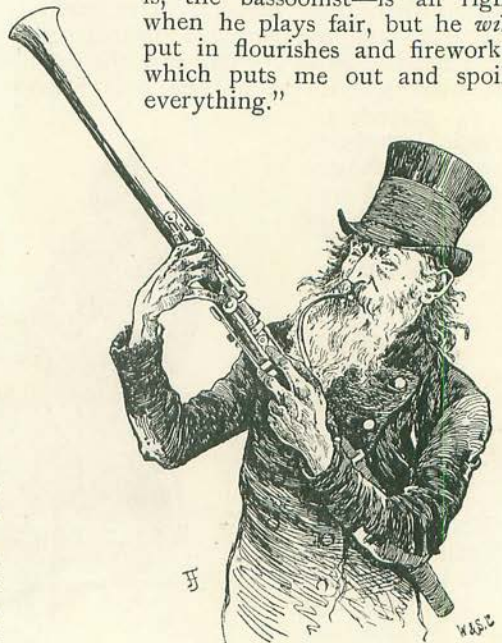
"TOM-TOM."

one of these tom-tomers completely captivated a young English cook-maid and married her.

The bassoonist admits that he has seen better days, but he enjoys playing his awkward-looking instrument, and, when in the humour, plays it remarkably well. He was once in a military band, then in an orchestra at a theatre, and now picks up a pretty penny by playing in the evening in the West-end squares. He don't care for permanent engagements, and prefers to be "on his own hook," though he occasionally chums up with another street musician—Old Blowhard, who plays the cornet-à-piston. He only plays by ear, and can, therefore, only manage a few tunes, to which the bassoonist extemporises a telling bass. According to the bassoonist, "Blowhard is a rattling old boy when in a good humour, but he's awful short-tempered; and often when in the middle of a duet—especially in 'All's Well'—he'll stop blowing, call me nasty names, and step it. But he soon comes round again, and soaps me over by playing very feelingly—

> 'I love new friends, but still give me
> The dear, dear friends of old.'"

According to Blowhard, "Pumper"—that is, the bassoonist—is all right when he plays fair, but he *will* put in flourishes and fireworks, which puts me out and spoils everything."



"THE BASSOONIST."

"OLD BLOWHARD."

Perhaps the oldest and least objectionable of the street musicians is the campanologist, or, as he styles himself, "The Royal Bell-Ringer." He makes a pitch in a quiet street or alley, and rigs up his ten bells on a tightened wire. With a short stick in each hand, he strikes his bells, and produces some pleasing melodies: the general favourites are "Home, Sweet Home" and "The Blue Bells of Scotland"; and he generally concludes with a wedding peal.

Scarcely anyone can object to the performer on the musical glasses. His "instrument" is simple enough, consisting, as it does, of glass tumblers sufficient in number to represent about two octaves of notes. They are arranged on a light table in two rows, like a harmonicon. The pitch of the notes is regulated by the quantity of water put into each tumbler. One glass is reserved for lemon-juice and water, into which the performer now and then dips his fingers. The sound is produced by rubbing the wet fingers on the rim of the glasses, and some very pleasing music is the result. According to your nationality you can have "Home, Sweet Home," "Ye Banks and Braes," "My Name's Edward Morgan," or "The Banks of Allan Water."

MUSICAL GLASSES.

"THE ROYAL BELL-RINGER."

The "One Man Band" is a well-known character. He began life with a Punch and Judy show, and then played the drum and pan-pipes,

The ballad singer seldom starts on his rounds before dusk, and he is careful to get a report whispered widely about that he is the "deputy leading tenor of the London Opera Company, and don't want to be seen by daylight, as it might injure his reputation." He is above being questioned, and tells you bluntly, "If you've got anything for the shell, why, shell out; if not, shut up. I'll sing you your favourite song, but there's no time for gabbing." He has a powerful and fairly good voice, and knows how to use it. He occasionally says he has a cold and then he puts in an execrable deputy, which further exalts his own powers and himself in the opinion of his admirers. He sings the latest and most popular songs, and evidently pockets plenty of money, especially in the autumn at seaside places like Margate and Ramsgate.

"ONE MAN BAND."

Being of an inventive turn of mind he added to his instruments the tambourine, triangle, and cymbals, which he played by leg movements. Then he added a concertina strapped to the left arm, a pair of clappers occupied his left hand, and with his right hand he played a hurdy-gurdy. The cap and jingling bells on his head completed "the band." All these instruments were carefully kept in tune with each other, and the performer produced some passable dance music of the country-fair type, while his boy took round the collecting shell. There are several similar performers about the country, but none with so many instruments.

"BALLAD SINGER."

"WACHT-AM-RHEIN."

Our German friends, who have so considerately left their "Happy Fatherland" to test the English taste for music, are happily getting less numerous every year, but there are still a few left—some tolerable, some otherwise. They are brought over from the agricultural parts of Germany by an enterprising bandmaster, who gives them four shillings a week, pays their fares, provides instruments, uniforms, board and lodging, and teaches them to play some instrument. Their pay increases according to the progress they make. Fulham is their headquarters and Sunday their practice day. The novices begin playing in the northern and eastern suburbs of London, and, as they improve, they are promoted to the south-west and west. A guide goes with them, and he does the collecting. Denmark Hill being a favourite residential locality for well-to-do Germans the best bands generally work—or rather play—that way.

"PETTICOAT QUARTETTE."

Dogs, especially singing dogs, take great delight in German bands, and may often be seen, with their noses skyward, lifting up their voices in grand chorus, and are no doubt supremely disgusted that their efforts to increase the harmony are not appreciated by the bandsmen.

The Petticoat Quartette comprises four girls, supposed to be sisters. But they are none of them communicative, and the answer of the eldest one to our first question was somewhat startling: "Ask my Pa," said the lady, to the innocent question, "Are you all sisters?" Where they picked up their playing powers, what they earn, and other cognate inquiries were answered by the equivalent of "What's that to you?" They appear to have been pestered a good deal with proposals from trousered street musicians, to join their band; as the eldest said emphatically, "We don't want no perfessional help from nobody." This reply, and an injunction from one of the crowd to "Let the gals alone," checked further inquiries.

With regard to the "Nigger Minstrels" there is nothing new to be said, and it has not yet been discovered why the singing of men with blackened hands and faces is liked, when the singing and playing of the same men with uncoloured skins would not be tolerated. Niggers—real niggers—never could either sing or play, but our "Nigger Minstrels" can do both.

Some street musicians at this time of the year—happily only a few—make a little overtime as waits, and keep us in mind of "The Mistletoe Bough."