

## THE STREET MUSICIANS OF NEW YORK.

THE CRANK—THE ORGAN—THE MONKEY, AND THE MAN.



THE sun has kissed the steeple of Grace Church, has brushed the night dews from the cap of Trinity, the eastern side of Broadway is in shadow, the omnibuses have commenced their diurnal noise, the milkman's voice shouts its latest call, shutters from shop windows have been taken down, the dust has not been as yet aroused from its slumber, to which the twilight witched it with its cooling hand of dampness, and pretty maidens, hopefully hooped, to catch the early worms that wriggle down the street, are hurrying to the shrines of bonnets and artificial flowers, and an unseen monarch, hidden in a deep den, clothed in a velvet jacket, sitting on a hand-organ for a throne, with a monkey for his court jester, the Yorick of pantomime, has waved his baton, and ordered his fustian regiments to disperse to the center and the four corners of the metropolis—to all places where a crank can be turned and a penny with it, and whose music "Heavenly Maid," as Collins sang, can be ground into farthings.

The hand-organ men, women, children, and monkeys forthwith penetrate every nook and cranny of the town, and, though frequently rebuffed, keep up the everlasting strain, and remind us of little Tommy Moore's vase, of which he spoke in language somewhat like the following:

"You may kick, you may cuff, you may curse as you will,  
But the cent of the music will linger there still."

The rag picker has his rags ground into paper, but these gentry grind their music into copper. The rag pickers generally are well-to-do, and these velvet vagrants are not destitute in the main of an ample supply of the world's goods. Froggy about pennies, they look upon silver with reverence, and gold is a thing they worship. They do not differ much from their promiscuous auditory in that respect.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact census of the street organists in the city of New York, for the band is perpetually undergoing a process of augmentation or diminution.

Other cities offer them an asylum, and streets other than those of the metropolis are blessed or cursed, as the taste for music rules, with

the peripatetic peddlers of concord. Villages lying among the vales, or on the hilly slopes far in the interior, are ambitious enough to keep their wandering music, and many a hamlet politician, plathoric with his country's good, and "grinding an ax" for his own benefit, begrudges not his wife and daughter the extravagance of three cents, to have the opera airs ground for them by Signor Italiano, who has had his wonderful box instructed in the last gems of Rossini, and the other great masters of harmony.

With us, in this vast receptacle of human humanity, they are as common as omnibuses, and cheaper; six cents for a rumble up to the furthest limits of the city in the former; one cent, two cents, three! for "In Felice," by Donizetti, or "Pop goes the weasel," by the Americano, of Christy's.

Nightly, during the season, those whose curiosity, or equal taste, may draw to the Grand Opera-Houses in Fourteenth Street, will see the seats filled with exquisite femininity and feminine exquisites, brocaded, barricaded, white-gloved, japonica'd, and scented, lingering for three or four mortal hours, at the cost of three or four immortal dollars, and snapping—oh no, they seldom rise to that point of vulgar enthusiasm—touching their rose-scented hands, when a princess or priestess of the rôle chants the melody that Bellini, in his glory, drempt, and little thinking that in some dark cellar, or in some humble home, a wandering troubadour of the nineteenth century is trying his hand-organ to the wondrous music they are listening to in the amphitheater of rapture.

But truly it is a great "step made in the right direction," as the reformers say, to popularize those delicate symphonics and brilliant passages, and give to the maid of the area, for one penny, what the maid of the parlor has declared herself in diamonds to listen to the night before.

To be sure, the music grinder cannot give us the scenic associations and the gilded hues that assist so supremely to impart to the opera a large proportion of its charm, by creating the illusion. Don Giovanni, without the shade of the commandant, without his love-locks, without his beguiled lady before him, and in sight of the audience, could hardly worry through the dread task of that gigantic composition.

He has glitter and statue, and Spanish hat and plume, and night and bower, and balcony and beauty, and with their aid he rises into the sublime, and fills his pockets—the main object, after all, it seems, of those transcendental transatlantics.

No such auxiliaries has our poor gutter Mario. He stands with meek face, his organ perched upon his knee, with one foot in the gutter, lately picked clean by his brother rag exile, and up and down his dark eyes roam, from domestic-peopled basement to the crinoline-inhabited parlor, and thence to the upper windows, listening, with his anxious ears, for the raising of a window, that shall announce to him a boon, wrapped in paper, and to be dropped at his feet. How droll it is, that children—urchins, more properly speaking—ragged outcasts of elder outcastdom, who are always ready, in their ignorance and their want or wickedness, to beg or steal a penny from any one, never fail to pick up the

lucky fall of copper, and give it, with a sort of proud reverence, to the "man with the hand-organ!" he, meanwhile, continuing the mill of music, apparently determined to take no toll in produce, after having been paid in cash, but give the money's worth in full. Sometimes it happens that the donor from the upper window raises it again, and bawls out, "Go away!" and the three-cent opera-house closes for the season, and departs; but goes not away entirely, for as yet the copper mines of two houses three doors removed from the one he has just played to are to be bored, and made to yield their quota to his daily need.

These tuneful loafers are of many climes, but principally do they come from the same country that produced, and, by admitted assent, has only a right to produce, such people as Mario, La Blache, Fornisari, Rubini, Donizetti, and such a host of singers and composers that we cannot here mention, else would we have to extend this article to a volume, and make it nothing but a catalogue of the children of musical notes.

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There are Bohemians among these exiles, as well as among the rag-pickers; indeed, among the latter the Teuton element predominates. Scotland sends her red-haired hero, too, as you may see.

We have been in Scotland, and thank Heaven that we have; and right well do we know this fellow, who sits before you, tearing the air to pieces with his monstrous pipes. That bag beneath his arm is the bag of Æolus, and the purse of Fortunatus to him.

"There's not an air the wind doth blow" that he cannot summon from that satchel of hurricanes. Yes, there is an air he cannot call from its throbbing lung; for he cannot, for the life of him, evoke a gentle zephyr, soft and sweet; but toll him to give you the "Clans' Call," or the "Witches' Battle," or the scream of the eagle, or the screech of the owl, and, obedient to its nature, the pipe will blow it forth, rattling, discordant, and terrific, at least to all the world, Scotchmen excepted.



THE SCOTCH BAG-PIPER.

In the great town of Edinburgh, that looks toward the German Ocean and the limitless North Sea, crowned with the Castle on the Cliff, witched and spell-bound by objects of natural beauty—her Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags, in whose shadowy valley lived the gentle Jeannie Deans—many a time and oft has the writer met these windy pipers, strutting in tartan tunic and cap of the old clan pattern, bare-legged, and bow-legged at that, squeezing such minstrelsy from the laboring bag and reed as would have driven Rubini mad; and had certainly a similar effect upon our not half so musical temperament. And in that city of granite monuments, of ruined dwellings ten stories from the curb, of lordly equipages and tattered ragamuffins, the ballad holds, as yet, its place in the affections of the people. Straight up the slimy gutter, like a woodcock wandering, the stentorian ballad-roarer walks along, chanting the story of the long since "Massacre of Glencoe," or the murders of Burke the devil-knower; and while he sings, never stopping in the strain,

never coming down a peg lower in his loud telling of his story, selling for a penny the eager crowd printed copies of the thing he sings of; and then onward, still onward, like Longfellow's youth in the Alps, getting higher and higher, until all the pitches are pitched into an alto that could scale the sky. "Excellent!" but it was not excellent.

Here he is now, with pipes upon his knee, and an old haize-covered bag beneath his arm, making the street hideous in which he blows "his breath away." And yet that pipe at the head of the valiant regiments that went into the Peninsula under Wellington, did good service in the quarrel; and there lives not now

the Frenchman who would not "sacre," should the terrible clamor of its tones break upon his ear, and recall the loss of Spain to their great Emperor.

This fellow, that we look at now, is a saucy, bold, and agile Scot, and when he gets tired sitting on your door-sill, up he will bounce like a parched pea, and, in the middle of the street, give you a touch of his muscle, and trip the Highland fling; so that, if you have a Scotch maid of all work, or no work, in the house, she will think of many a rig upon the green, and many a dainty time among the "ricks of barley."

In that fearful time, some two years now



THE GERMAN BRASS BAND.

gone by, when Bond street was in all the glorious mystery of murder, and Bardell's ghost "walked unavenged among us," this penman here was passing in front of the haunted house wherein the deed was done, and wherein the "doers of it," as was then supposed, were lodging under police guard, when strains of music somewhere further on, eastward, in the street, broke on his "theory of the deed of blood"—for we all had theories then of how it was done, and who did it. Wandering on, the music grew more distinct in its dulcet utterance, and shortly we came upon it; and we saw five Germans, gronped as you see them in our sketch, "discoursing most eloquent music." No hand-organ was here, but instruments brazen and legitimate; and around them the crowd was gathered—a crowd that seemed

to love the strain they played; and well might they love it, for it was that sweet air, copied since by English borrowers, "Sounds from Home." Soft and low, lower and softer, the melody came from those deep shining throats of metal; and many a thought they conjured up of scenes among the mountains of the cunning players' homes. Each note was eloquent with utterances that painted to the listener's mind the chapel in the valley, and the vineyard on the hill-side, and the brooklets silvering among the dark crags, and leaping afterward from some tall precipice, to join the meadow where the red cows wandered and the rosy maidens milked. There is not a day now, when the weather will permit, that you cannot find this fine band of street musicians; and when you stumble upon them, pause and

listen to their well-timed instrumentation, and judge for yourself whether they do not give you a pleasure equal to what we have described as our experience. They are not of the opera orchestra, it is true, but Bohemian gad-about, sending up from the pavement, where they form their semicircle, a compact body of sound, upon whose vibrations and reverberations float, in homely garb, the misty mountain recollections and associations with pastoral life, that no man or woman can listen to without feeling better for the listening. Even these higher street troubadours are open to three cents; though we must confess that something like silver slipped from our hand into that of their financier. Let their silvery notes be changed into silvery coin.



THE WEE MUSICIANS.

Here are two wee Italians, and pleasant is the music they pull and draw from fiddle and guitar. Brother and sister they may be—all Italian children look so much alike, that no one can for a moment hesitate to think that they are all children of the same dark-eyed mother and black-haired father. The boy has some touches on that board, strung with cat-gut, that would please old Paganini, were he alive to hear them; and though Julien, the violin wonder, may be able to make a better bow to his patrons, and wear a bright diamond given him by a fond old Duchess of Dutchland, yet, to the simple taste—vulgar call it, ye of the upper realm of operaism, that rules our sympathetic soul—there is

a pathos in the absorbed and melancholy look the child wears upon his sweet exile face, that seems to be reflected in the worn surface of his instrument, and blending with the strings, and caught by his swaying bow, imparts a charm to the piece he plays for you, and an interest that is akin to tears.

The little woman by his side strums her guitar, and keeps the pleasant timing right, for people who are so young in life and music. She, too, has a sad looking out of those large eyes; and, as the glittering equipage rolls by, she mayhap catches a glancing face of some fair daughter of the rich, whose piano of a thousand gourds awaits her in her father's mansion higher up in the town, and higher up in life; and yet it may so be, that she who touches "the light guitar" in front of Wallack's Theater may have such harmonies in her heart, that would but the rich man stop and see to her further teaching, a woman of rare excellence might be brought up, and on the boards, in later days, a voice might sing whose faintest note would witch the palm from almost matchless Malibran.

Into restaurants go these children of stringed instruments; and from the frequenters there they lure pennies enough to buy them shoes for winter walking, and perhaps a little, but warm, cloak for the miniature Parodi.



MUSICAL MULTIPLICITY

This fellow, with his drum, and tinkling bells, and violin, should be a Greek; but he,

too, comes from the boot of Europe, in which the Pope has put his toe. Therefore, he is an Italian, Greekily costumed. That elbow of his has double duty to perform; and as the tune requires it, he beats the drum, and sounds his bells, and draws his violent bow across the violin's bridge. Merry and sweet are the airs he plays, and somewhat proud is he of his good looks, as you may see he has some right to be. Nursery maidens and young milliner

misses patronize this youth, and many a penny earns he by his artistic locks and cap; and when his fiddle fails, he draws upon his monnikin on his back serves as a thing to tickle children's fancies with; and that wriggling puppet has drawn down the applause of nurses, and lightened the good mother's purse of sums sometimes amounting to five-cent pieces.



THE MUSICAL FAMILY.

A pleasant family on a musical tour. The illustrious sire bears the burden of the song, and does the "heavy business." The mother, ruddy and cheerful, beats the jingling tambourine, while the "blessed baby" plays upon the triangle, and makes all straight. She is, as you see, catching in her little tin cover the penny, historic of their joint pursuit. This is not exactly begging—it is something stouter and more fearful. Perhaps you are sitting at your table playing chess with somebody who differs from you only in being of another sex; in all things else equal, and in all things else in unison. Mazeppa—you recall the tradition—won the old noble's young wife over a game such as you are playing, and why cannot you win your own wife that way too?

She is moving a bishop to you, and you are thinking of the marriage ceremony, and trying how you would feel if your bachelorship was being guillotined, and fancying a great many other things incidental to the ceremony and the state, when suddenly, at the window of your lady's father's parlor, a terrible sound comes rushing in, accompanied by a monkey;

a sound clothed in thunder, and pig squeals, and cat squalls; and a monkey decked in Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington's military coat, as commander-in-chief of her Majesty's forces; who chatters away at you, upsetting a favorite flower on the window-sill—favorite because you gave it—and upsetting the bishop who was to marry you, and the very church in which you were to be married. To appear annoyed would show temper; to be indifferent would be unnatural; to give money would prolong the agony; to give none would appear mean; to kick the monkey out of the room would not be respectful to the Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington; and to let him stay and bother you might make things ridiculous all round, and bring you into a foolish position. The best way is to go to the window, curse the monkey in a low tone, pinch his tail in a high pressure, give him five cents, tie your handkerchief around your head, and, as the monkey pops out, you pop your sick-headache out also; look as if you were ill, and the hand-organ will make a low bow, and leave you. He will make no comment on

your malady to his wife or child, but put the monkey on the coconut, and go to the next door, and grind and bore, and triangle and tambouronium, until, patience being exhausted, a red-faced man rushes to the door, and frowningly and no-cent-givingly drives them from his neighborhood. Your neighbor has shares in the opera-house, and does not like music. You will, if you listen, hear the trio hard at work before a fashionable boarding-house, where half the boarders have only paid half their dues, and they may play there forever, for the landlady will give nothing, and the servants have nothing to give, and the boarders have less to spare.



THE BLIND FIFER.

This sketch, like all the others, is from life—blind life at that, poor fifer. He has crape around his hat and crape around his eyes, and at his feet you see the wearied dog, whose instinct is the man's vision, and whose love is the only thing he has, except the fife, and its capacity to utter what he knows and feels. This man is a Swiss, and exactly such a pipe as he blows upon made Byron write these ten lines in "Manfred:"

"Hark! the note,

(*Shepherd's pipe in the distance.*)

The natural music of the mountain reed;  
For here the patriarchal days are not  
A pastoral fable—pipes in the liberal air,  
Mixed with the sweet bells of the sauntering herd;  
My soul would drink those echoes. Oh! that I were  
The viewless spirit of a lovely sound,  
A living voice, a breathing harmony,  
A bodiless enjoyment—born and dying  
With the blest tone which made me."

Very sweet, doubtless, among the hills, and echoed back and forth from Alp to Alp, it would not have been disagreeable to my Lord Byron to have been converted into a piping echo; but if he had heard our blind man's pipe, honestly intended to gain a penny, scratching, and snarling, and shrieking against the window-blinds of his house in a narrow street in this city, or in London, what a terrible uproar would not have been kicked up by the excitable and irritable bard! And if he could not see that the piper could not see, he would have kicked the echo back into the man's pipes, and bid him and his dog go about their business, as if it was not their business to play the pipe before his lordship's door.

Now, about this street-music business generally. It is seldom that they meet in their city rambles, and it is well known that many of them are governed by rules and regulations self-imposed, for better discipline, and more prosperous and regular results.

Some of them own the instruments upon which they work, but many hire them by the day from a large speculator in such traffic. At nightfall some return to the general rendezvous or to their homes, while others frequent the sitting-rooms of the large hotels and oyster saloons, and, without preface, give the tipplers a specimen or so of their quality. If there be a gentleman in the room who is somewhat fatigued by crooking his elbow a little oftener than was necessary for the welfare of his boots, the black-eyed Italian tambour-player pounces upon him, and never relinquishes her coquetry until she has relieved him of as much money as would enable him to crook his elbow twice more; and then she, with a roguish laugh, gives the money to her dark-haired *brother* (this is not the little party we have described), and the fuddled gent, leaning on the bar, driven to the slightest idea of having been bamboozled, swears vengeance against the "whole sex of organs, and won't believe a young, pretty Italian, who plays tunes on him and the tambourine." Exiles of education, and formerly, in better days, of position in their native land, have been known to don the velvet and assume the organ-handle, and try their fortunes at the trade of curb-stone minstrelsy. Seldom have these persons held on long enough to give the thing a fair trial, else they would find out, in time, that many of these gentry have acquired property, and own the houses in which their pleasant, well-dressed wives and well-cared-for children live.

The majority of the brotherhood take passage in a ship laden, from their little sea-port, with oil, and figs, and wine, and sundry arti-

cles that you will find mentioned in the tariff, and they agree to pay the captain so much, *on time*. He takes an obligation, signed before an Italian tribunal, by which they promise to give him their passage-money at a certain time after their arrival in this country. Here an association meets them, which takes cognizance of them, and they are enrolled and numbered, and forthwith, without delay, whether the monkey is sick or not, they start upon their tours of duty; and it is not long before they have acquired enough to pay the captain; and in a few years back they go to the old place, and upon the cool side of a hill, where there are vines and orange-trees, they buy a lot and build a cot, and all upon the pennies gathered in our generous streets.

Who ever saw an American organ-grinder? We would bet the price of our "Great Republic" against a fur cape for our lady's shoulders, that no Yankee ever turned his hand to turning a hand-organ. There is an organ at Washington—so the politicians say—and there is a whisper too, that an organ is ground at Albany; but do they grind for peace or patriotism? "Axes are ground," we know full well, by hosts of people who are not afraid to "face the music;" but will all their ax-grinding do as much good to us poor people outside of legislative halls, and legislative lobbies, and legislative jobs, as these humble, penny-seeking, patient grinders and borers, who, in fustian roundabouts, go round about the town, pleasing the lonely seamstress with their not always discordant efforts, or vowing to distraction a divinity of muslin, who, at the instant of their coming, with fastidious taste, has condescended to beguile a visitor with her superior touch and higher cultivation?

Poor devils, give them the price of an evening paper. To them it is so much soil and so much grape-vine in their distant land.

In fact, this street minstrelsy pleases us much. Noses may be upturned, and scorn may throw a penny to the vagabond, but when we know, as know we do, that the Greeks encouraged it, and had songs appropriate to the different existing trades, by which the laborer, at his hard labor, might be cheered, and the artisan soothed in the hours of his toil, we must admit that there is a virtue in the custom that sends on the street these hundred organs with their congregated airs, amounting to thousands, and which the people seem to love, despite the *exquisites'* (of both sexes) disgust.

If it be true that Amphion built Thebes with his lyre, what may we not hope for a city whose every street has its organ and every avenue its harp? Among the ancients, immense labors were performed—such as the

building of city walls—while pleasant melodies charmed the toil and beguiled the task. In the great old world, or rather the early world, each trade had its chant; the carpenter had his, the blacksmith his, and the reaper his; and has not Moore wedded his lines to music, and do not the voyageurs, gliding over the bosom of the St. Lawrence, sing the sweet "Canadian Boatman's Song?" Then give to each street its music, and let each street, out of its pennies saved, give a penny to its professors.

The lines of Tasso are chanted nightly by the gondoliers of Venice, and not unfrequently we have among these organ grinders here, those who have sung the song of the poets beneath the palaces of princes.

As you sail, even at this day, along the Ionian Isles, the sailors sing, in the purple twilight, fragments from Homer; and the Sicilian mariners, to the cadence of the swelling sea, proclaim their faith in the Virgin Mother when they salute her with their hymn so beautiful and so renowned.

A boat pauses on the untiding Mediterranean; the oars are lifted from the waves; the glittering shower falls from their shafts; the rowers' heads are uncovered; the fingers sign the Christian emblem on the breast; and, from the near shore, a sweet and solemn sound is borne upon the air of the roseate evening, and all who hear know that the convent bell proclaims that choir and priests are chanting the "Angelus" to "Mary, Mother of God."

Then let these people, who come from the lands that are so tuneful, where music is a whole of nature and a part of faith, stroll, and gather pennies as they grind the golden grain of song; for all music should be free and potent to all ears. The convent bell that chimes in the vales of Italy, on the slopes of the Guadarrama, or from cloistered church in populous towns, is for the people's ear, and in the latter case for the streets and alleys of the Christian cities.

The monkey and the man, the organ and its handle, the velvet jacket and the bearded face, the mantilla'd head and the glittering eye, Bellini, and Donizetti, and Mozart, Rossini, and the rest of them, now and for all time to come, the window in the area, the window in the parlor, the window in the attic, the blue sky, the gentle breeze, the odor of plants, the whisper of love, the sigh of distrust, the curse of jealousy—all save the rough rascal's bawl, "By any innians," that rattles sharp against the panes of kitchen windows—are things of music, and form in part the structure of feeling, of which the street organ grinder is at least a brick-bat, if not a brick.