

BY OUR SPECIAL COMMISSIONER.

SKETCHES BY OUR OWN ARTIST.

A few years ago, the late Vice-chancellor Bristowe heard a remarkable application for an injunction. Doubtless he heard many during the time he presided in the Chancery Court in the Assize buildings, but the one to which I am now referring was among the most remarkable of all. The applicants were owners and tenants of certain residential property in Rochdale, and they

have of furthering their musical education. Both Mr. Owen and Mr. Gladney detect the slightest deficiencies, and he who would know the result of their labours should attend a contest, and witness the energy and the skill they display in conducting. On Saturday afternoon I was one of a throng

of an English spring, following an English winter, and had gone where all monkeys—good, bad, and indifferent—go. His companion, the chimpanzee, which takes its meals like a Christian, using a knife and fork, a plate, a tumbler, and other instruments of civilisation, is also rather delicate at present. He was fast asleep on a box in the centre of his cage, so there was no opportunity of seeing him perform his remarkably clever tricks. In the big cage in the centre of the house was a large collection of vigorous young monkeys, newly imported, and thoroughly enjoying themselves. They seem quite reconciled to captivity so long as they have plenty of space to romp about, and full liberty to plague and tease their companions. In romping and in teasing they appear to spend the entire day, and their antics are so entertaining, and so full of interest, that the fact that they are honoured all day by the presence of a fair proportion of the visitors in the Gardens need cause no surprise.

The animals which live in the open air, even at Belle Vue, among them the bears, the buffalos, and the deer, are enjoying the warm summer weather. The bears especially seem to get along well. They bask and sleep in the sun nearly all day, and the white monsters, when they find that their shaggy coats are giving them too much warmth, gravely walk into the water tank with which their pit is equipped, and defy the heat of the sun. Bears are philosophers; of that there can be no doubt.

At this point one felt it to be one's duty to return to the band contest. On this occasion, however, there was no need to proceed farther than the barricade. Mixing amongst the crowd, I was able to see that the music was being conduced as earnestly as ever by the listening enthusiasts, and that many of the audience bore no outward sign of having moved from their seats since the first band mounted the rostrum. Devotion like this inspired one with profound admiration.

THE EXCITEMENT BECAME INTENSE.

As the last of the bands began to mount the platform the rush and crush round the ball-room door became greater than ever. Excited groups were to be seen in all quarters eagerly discussing the relative merits of the various performers, and foretelling, with more or less confidence, the verdict of the judges. After the 20th competitors had blown their best, the excitement became intense. The appearance of the judges was looked for anxiously, and it was noticeable that many who had been among the loudest and the most confident prophets a short time before were now silent as mutes at a funeral, the fearful thought having flashed across their minds that perhaps, after all, their prognostications would not be correct.

The wait was not a long one. The judges duly came into view, and announced that they had awarded the first prize to the Goodshaw Band. Then the Goodshaws, their admirers, and the bulk of the vast audience set up a cheer which could not fail to disturb, if it did not



A DAY AT BELLE VUE

asked for an injunction against the holding of a brass band contest in a field adjoining their houses. They contended that the contest would cause the gathering of an immense crowd and that the braying of brass instruments for several hours would prove a nuisance, if it did not seriously affect the health of the applicants. The Vice-chancellor took a very sensible view of the case. He said he knew from his own experience that the brass bands of Lancashire and Yorkshire discoursed much excellent music; he would do nothing to stop the particular contest in question, and his only regret was that he could not attend it himself, and have his ears charmed by the sweet swelling sounds. He dismissed the application with costs, the contest was triumphantly held, and no casualties were reported in the neighbourhood on the memorable day.

Since that time, there has not been, so far as I know, any attempt to call in the law or any other agency to stop the holding of a brass band carnival. On the contrary, every encouragement appears to be given, now, to the promoters of contests; the number of the contests has multiplied exceedingly, and the public flock to the grounds on which they are held in great and growing crowds.

BRASS BAND CENTRES.

Among the most famous contests in the north of England, and therefore in the world—for Lancashire and Yorkshire are the great brass band centres—are those annually held at Belle Vue Gardens. It is over 40 years since they were first instituted; all the most famous bands have competed there many a time and oft; and the height of the ambition of every conductor and his pupils is to win the first prize in Messrs. Jennison's tournament. Two contests are held annually, one in July and the other in September. The latter is the more important. It attracts all the best bands in the country. Very handsome prizes are offered, and the winning band on this occasion is the envy of all its competitors.

The July contest, which was held last Saturday, is important too, though it has not the prestige of its September rival. The earlier contest is reserved for bands that have not been successful at the later contest for several years. It enables bands that have not quite reached the first-class, and bands that have temporarily dropped out of the first-class, to make their bow before a Belle Vue audience and get, if they deserve it, encouragement in their efforts to blow as musically as their more skilful rivals.

FROM ALL PARTS OF LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE.

On Saturday there were 20 competitors who came from all parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and from distant places north and south. For weeks beforehand they had had in their possession the test piece, which they were called upon to play. It was a selection from Donizetti's opera, "Don Sebastiano," arranged by Mr. Charles Godfrey, one of the most distinguished band-masters of the day. The selection was a difficult one, and admirably adapted for testing the capacities not only of the principal players, who were called upon to display their considerable gifts as soloists, but of the entire band. The grand finale, in particular, made heavy demands upon the executive power of all.

ENTHUSIASTS: A LITTLE SARCASM.

Very considerable pains must have been taken in the preparation of the piece. The practice rooms of the 20 competitors have been very well attended for a long succession of evenings, and it should be remembered that the majority of the men who devote their leisure hours at the close of the day to the study of music as it is produced by the aid of brass follow laborious occupations during working hours. A considerable number of them are enthusiasts. They are never happier than when their cheeks are distended to the full limit, and they have their beloved instruments to their lips. Most of them are not content with practice in the bandroom. They work away, mastering the music and perfecting their tone, within their own dwellings, and this habit is responsible for the circulation of a rather good story, which takes the form of a question and an answer. The question is, "Can a man who is a member of a brass band be a Christian," and the answer is, "Yes; but the man who lives next door to one cannot be." The inventor of this gentle sarcasm evidently dwelt beside some man who was unfitted to compete at the Belle Vue contest, or may be his neighbour played the big drum.

It is this constant plodding which has enabled the bandmen to reach the high level of excellence which they have undoubtedly attained. They work away with the energy which only enthusiasts can command, and in due time they get their reward. Much of the success which attends their efforts is due undoubtedly to the excellence of the instruction they receive. Everybody who ever interested himself in cornets, euphoniums, double basses, or the like, has heard of Mr. Alec Owen and Mr. J. Gladney. They conduct I do not know how many bands each, and work them up to a pitch of excellence which is positively surprising, considering the limited opportunities which many of their pupils

of many thousands who visited the Gardens. A fair proportion of the arrivals had come long distances by train. Each band brought its contingent of admirers, and, of course, every Saturday afternoon in July, whether there be a band contest or whether there be not, Belle Vue is sure of its multitude of holiday-makers. The contest took place in the big ball-room on the high platform on which the band of the Gardens plays for dancing on those occasions when the eccentricities of the English climate render the pleasing pursuit of waltzing impossible out of doors. Who in this district does not know the room, with its ornate scenic decorations reflected in scores of huge mirrors. Here immense audiences have many a time hung on the lips of great statesmen, and have cheered the utterance of patriotic sentiments with a gusto which would drown the sound of even the most powerful of brass bands.

THE REPUBLIC OF MUSIC.

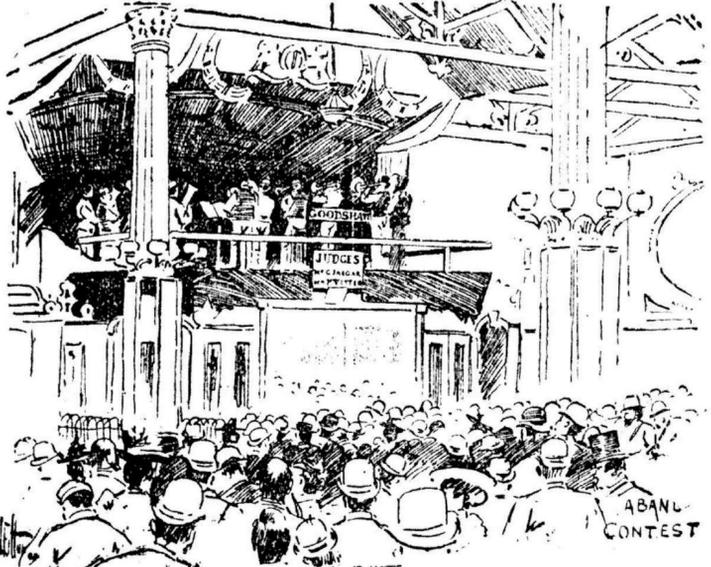
When the contest began the room was well filled, and a surprisingly large number of the audience were in possession of copies of the music. They followed the playing with the most careful attention, and some were almost as quick as Mr. Owen or Mr. Gladney in detecting a slip or a passage that was indifferently executed. Taking stock of the audience, as well as of the playing, one realised more than ever that in the republic of music there are ardent lovers of the art among those who find their tastes gratified at a brass band contest as among those who crowd Halle's concerts in the winter season. Each band on completing its performance was rewarded with applause, carefully regulated in accordance with its merits. A band that executed the piece in a highly meritorious fashion was very loudly cheered, a moderate performance called forth a less noisy demonstration, and the two or three bands that did their work indifferently got merely complimentary acknowledgments. One could gauge the popular verdict in this way, but of course the judges, hidden away behind the scene, out of sight of everybody, disclosed nothing until the end. On Saturday the judges were Mr. G. Jaeger, conductor of the Manchester Orchestra Association, and Mr. F. Velter, another well-known musical director in Manchester.

Not being a brass band enthusiast myself, I do not mind confessing that after I had heard Mr. Godfrey's arrangement of the opera played several times I found myself looking at the glass roof, noticing that the sun was shining brightly outside, and wondering if every one within the Gardens deemed it his duty to hear all the twenty bands play from beginning to end. Desiring to find out the truth on this important point, I ventured to manoeuvre quietly towards the door, casting admiring glances on the engrossed individuals who hardly lifted their heads from the music while the bands were playing, and who distributed their applause with such fine discrimination. I felt something like a boy attempting to sneak out of school unobserved by his teacher, and verily believe that if I had heard someone call out, "Come back, sir; where are you going?" I should have dropped into a seat with the dejected air of one found out

music. Others are maintaining the reputation of the English as a race that take their pleasures seriously. Their faces wear the sternest of looks, perspiration is oozing from their pores in copious streams, and their arduous struggles "to keep it up" are beyond all praise. One is rather surprised to see so many ladies dancing together, and might be led to suppose that the supply of dancing men is running short in humble as well as in aristocratic circles if it were not patent that gentlemen have developed a bad habit of dancing together also. Here is Liberty Hall. Each individual does as he likes within the limits of becoming mirth, and heartily they all seemed to enjoy it. There are plenty of "wall-flowers," however, and you can see, from the wistful expression on some of their faces, that they are not "wall-flowers" voluntarily. They got partners later on, let us hope, and "footed it" with the best of them.

THE OCEAN WAVE.

Not far from the dancing stage there was, to my inexperience, a new form of enjoyment. It is called "The Ocean Wave," and admirably the name describes it. A circular platform, equipped like the bridge of a ship, is set among



A BAND CONTEST

scenery painted to represent the waves of the ocean during a high wind. Round the edge of the platform is a line of small yachts. Powerful machinery makes the platform revolve, and at the same time rise and fall, giving to the yachts a motion not unlike the one they have at sea. This seems to be a very popular form of entertainment, judging by the numbers who patronised it, and their shrieks of laughter.

There were a hundred other ways of amusing oneself as the 20 bands repeated Donizetti's music in steady succession, but none of them comparable, in my opinion, to an inspection of

waken, the sleeping lions, and must have made the monkeys imagine that the fireworks rocket had begun before its time. South Derwent was second, Mossley third, Kettering fourth, and Dannemora fifth. The mention of each of the prize-winners was the signal for a renewed outburst of cheering, and when the full list was known, and some little time had been allowed to lapse, in order that the excitement might gradually die away, the proud victors mounted the platform once again. They were cheered as lustily as a conquering army, and for the 21st time that blessed afternoon Mr. Charles Godfrey's setting of Donizetti's opera "Don Sebastiano" was rendered. Goodshaw acquitted themselves well once again, and on their final retirement the applause was tremendous.

Then, and then only, did those ardent musicians in the body of the hall rise from their seats, and seek entertainment elsewhere. They may have stayed to watch the brilliant and magnificent display of fireworks which followed, they may have gone straight home, or they may have spent the evening in other ways, but one thing is certain—the performance of the afternoon and evening engrossed their thoughts, and provided them with material for conversation not only for the rest of that day, but for many subsequent days.



INTERESTED SPECTATORS

in the commission of a very reprehensible act. Fortunately no one called, and as I left the ball-room I found that there were hundreds—I should not be exaggerating if I said thousands—of people who were content to leave the blare of the brass, for a time at any rate, and see something of the manifold other attractions of the famous Gardens.

VARIETIES OF STYLE.

Out of the ball-room did not take one out of the reach of the sounds of music, for lo and behold another band was playing outside, a band not solely composed of brass instruments, and a merry dance was in progress on the extensive board fronting the fireworks picture. The jolly groups of people here did not seem to care two pins for the serious contest that was proceeding inside. They were dancing in the

the birds and the animals. I wonder if we in Manchester quite realise the magnificence and extent of this collection. It is by far the largest private collection in the world, containing many rare and valuable specimens, and affording delight and instruction to tens, nay hundreds of thousands of visitors every season.

THE DEATH OF A FRIEND.

The monkey-house is among the most popular of the departments, and on Saturday afternoon and evening it contained a constant succession of visitors until daylight passed. On entering the house I at once hurried to the cage in which the chimpanzee and the orang-outang passed their time on the occasion of my visit to the Gardens during the winter, when I described how the animals fare in cold weather. Alas! the orang had been unable to stand the rigours