

STREET CRIES OF LONDON

John Jones

The hand-coloured slide set *Street Cries of London* is copied from engravings which illustrated *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) by Henry Mayhew. Some of these engravings are themselves taken from photographs by Beard - the first person in England (apart from Claudet¹) to hold a licence to make Daguerreotypes.

The reading to accompany the slides turns out to be extracted from the text of Mayhew's book.

Henry Mayhew (b. 1812), when young, ran away to sea and made a voyage to India. On his return he studied law with his father but eventually became a journalist. In the 1830's he founded two journals, *Figaro-London* and *The Thief*, and he later helped to found *Punch*. His studies of poor and working class people entailed meeting them and writing down their own accounts of themselves. These provided the subject of his letters to the *London Morning Chronicle* and led to the

publication of the three volume *London Labour and the London Poor: the condition and earnings of those that work, cannot work, and will not work*.

In 1862 he published a fourth volume in the series entitled *Criminal Prisons*.

It is said that Charles Dickens was influenced by, and made use of, this material in his own writings.

Mayhew died in 1887 in obscurity.

1 *Apart from Claudet* needs an explanation. In 1839 the French government gave Daguerre a pension in return for the copyright of his process which they then made freely available to all the world except Britain. Beard bought the first British licence but Claudet had already obtained one from Daguerre **before** the French government had acquired the copyright. This may account for an error in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which mistakenly ascribes authorship of Beard's original photographs to Claudet.

6.—The Baked Potato Man.—"When I first took to it," he said, "I was very badly off. My master had no employment for me, and my brother was ill, and so was my wife's sister, and I had no way of keeping 'em, or myself either. The labouring men are mostly out of work in the winter time, so I spoke to a friend of mine, and he told me how he managed every winter, and advised me to do the same. I took to it, and have stuck to it ever since. I sell most to mechanics; and sometimes to gentlemen at private houses, when they've held the door half open as they've called me—aye, and ladies too—and they've said, 'Is that all for 2d.?' Some customers is very pleasant with me, and says I'm a blessing. One always says he'll give me a ton of taties when his ship comes home, 'cause he can always have a hot murphy to his cold saveloy, when tin's short. There's the Union Street and there's the Pearl Row, and there's the Market Street, now,—they're all off the Borough Road—if I go there at ten at night or so, I can sell 3s. worth, perhaps, 'cause they know me. They're women that's not reckoned the best in the world that buys there, but they pay me. I've trusted them s metimes. They've said to me, as modest as could be, 'Do give me credit, and 'pon my word you shall be paid; there's a dear!' I am paid mostly. I do best for the taps and the parlours. Perhaps I make 12s. or 15s. a week—I hardly know, for money goes one can't tell how, and specially if you drinks a drop, as I do sometimes. Foggy weather drives me to it, I'm so worried; that is, now and then, you'll understand—"



9.—The Groundsel Man.—"I sell chickweed and grunsell, and turfs for larks. That's all I sell, unless it's a few nettles that's ordered. I am a bed-sacking weaver by trade. When I worked at it I used to earn 15s. a week regularly. But I was struck with paralysis nearly nineteen years ago, and lost the use of all one side, so I was obliged to turn to summut else. Another grunseller told me on the business, and what he got, and I thought I couldn't do no better. I never was worse off than I am now. I pay 2s. a week rent, and we has, take one time with another, about 3s. for the four of us to subsist upon for the whole seven days; yes, that, take one time with another, is generally what I do have. We very seldom has any meat. This day week we got a pound of pieces. I gave 4d. for 'em. Everything that will pledge I've got in pawn. We strive to do the best we can, and may as well be contented over it. I think its God's will we should be as we are. Providence is kind to me, even badly off as we are. I know it's all for the best."

The sale of groundsel continues through the year, but "the season" extends from April to September. The capital required for groundsel-selling is 4d. for a brown wicket-basket; leather strap to sling it from the shoulder 6d.; in all, 10d.



11.—Long Song Seller.—this branch of "the profession" was confined solely to the summer; the hands in winter usually taking to the sale of song-books, it being impossible to exhibit "the three yards" in wet or foggy weather. The paper songs, as they fluttered from a pole, looked at a little distance like huge much-soiled white ribbons, used as streamers to celebrate some auspicious news. The cry of one man, in a sort of recitative, or, as I heard it called by street-patterers "sing-song" was, "Three yards a penny! Three yards a penny! Beautiful song! Newest songs! Popular songs! Three yards a penny! Song, song, songs!"—"Kate Kearney: Chu-karoo-choo, choo-choo-choot-lah; Chockala-roony-ninkaping-nang; 'Pagadaway-dusty-kanty-key; 'Hottypie-gunnypoc-chinaco' (that's a Chinese song, sir); 'I dreamed that I dwelt in marble halls; 'The standard bearer; 'The old English gentleman,' &c., &c., &c. I dares say they are all in the three yards, or was once, and if they're not, there's others as good"

The stock money required was 1s. or 2s.; which with 2d. for a pole, and a 1/2d for paste, was all the capital needed.

A most deserving object of our sympathy is—



15.—The Blind Boot-lace Seller.—The blind boot-lace seller lost his sight at five years of age from small-pox. "I only wish," said he, "that vaccination had been properly established, and I should not have lost my eyes. God bless the man who brought it up. People don't know what they have got to thank Him for." This man, after retailing his vicissitudes, stated: "I started off without a penny into the country; and at Stratford-le-Bow I began, for the first time, to say, 'Pity the poor blind.' Up to this time I had never axed no one—never spoke, indeed—the cadgers who had been with me had done this for me and glad to have the chance of sharing with me. A blind man can get a guide at any place, because they know he's sure to get something. I only took 5d. at Stratford-le-Bow, add then started on my way to Romford; and there, in the lodging-house, I met a blind man who took me in partnership with him, and larnt me my business complete—that he just did, and since then I've been following it, and that's about two or three and twenty years ago. Since I've been in London, and that's fourteen year, I've lived very regular, always had a place, and attended church."



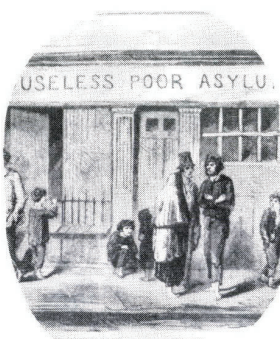
40.—Old Sarah, the well known Hurdy-Gurdy Grinder.—Old Sarah was one of the most deserving and peculiar of street musicians. She had been about the streets of London for upwards of forty years, and being blind, had had during that period four guides, and worn out three instruments. Her cheerfulness, considering her privation and precarious mode of life, was extraordinary. Her love of truth, and the extreme simplicity of her nature, were almost childlike. Like the generality of blind people, she had a deep sense of religion, and her charity for a woman in her station of life was something marvellous; for, though living on alms, she herself had, I was told, two or three little pensioners. Her attention to her guide was most marked. If a cup of tea was given to her after her day's rounds, she would be sure to turn to the poor creature who led her about and ask, "You comfortable; is your tea to your liking, Liza?"



It was during one of Old Sarah's journeys that an accident occurred, which ultimately deprived London of the well-known old hurdy-gurdy woman. In crossing Seymour Street, she and her guide Liza were knocked down by a cab, as it suddenly turned a corner. They were picked up and placed in the vehicle (the poor guide dead, and Sarah with her limbs broken), and carried to the University Hospital. The poor blind creature was ignorant of the fate of her guide. It was not until they were lifted from the cab that she knew, as she heard the people whisper to one another that her faithful attendant was dead.

When, after many long weeks, she left the medical asylum, she was unable to continue her playing on the hurdy-gurdy, her hand being now needed for the crutch that was requisite to bear her on her rounds. The shock, however, had been too much for the poor old creature's feeble nature, and though she continued to hobble round to the houses of the kind people who had for years allowed her a few pence per week, yet her little remaining strength at length failed her, and she took to her bed in a room in Bell Court, Gray's Inn Lane, never to rise from it again.

50.—The New Cut—Evening—We must now finish our Lecture of London Labour and the London Poor with our last illustration—the New Cut of an evening. It is then that the New Cut is almost impassible, and partakes more of the character of a fair than a market. There are hundreds of stalls, each with its one or two lights—these, with the showy lamps blazing at the gin-shops, the flaring gas-lights at the butchers, and the sparkling ground-glass globes at the tea dealers, pour forth such a flood of light that at a distance the atmosphere above the spot is as lurid as if the street was on fire. Everybody seems to be upon business bent, and every petty tradesman is exerting himself to do the largest amount of trade. Nor is pleasure forgotten, for, if at any period of the week the frequenters of the Cut have any money to spend, Saturday night is the time for it. Accordingly every species of amusement adapted to the locality, from the humble halfpenny peep-show to the more pretentious "Vic.," where the flaring announcement of the domestic drama attract a better class of customers. All the phases of low London life may be seen in this place. The showy swell, aping the gentleman; the loudly-dressed female, and that important personage, "the bobby," who, in the exercise of his duty, is ordering the coster-boy to "move on" with his barrow, are all represented. But the most roaring trade is done at the public-houses, for, unhappily, where the most vice, the most misery, and the greatest poverty abound, the trade in intoxicating liquors most flourishes. The New Cut is the best known, but is only one of many places in London where such phases of life are to be seen. This, however, is the shady side of the picture, and we cannot leave the subject without mentioning, with pleasure, that never were greater efforts made than at the present time for the cultivation of better tastes and habits among the people. Foremost as the result of such efforts is the opening on the Saturday evening of the South Kensington and the Bethnal Green Museums. Notably in the case of the latter one that, though situated in the midst of a neighbourhood such as we have depicted, the fruits of its purpose are exemplified in the quiet orderly manner of its frequenters, forming as it does a startling contrast to the vice and profligacy by which it is surrounded.



We have now brought our subject to a close, and, while thanking you for your attention, let us indulge the hope that the period is not far distant when such scenes as we have depicted will be no longer recognised as a fact of the time, but as an evil of the past, the fruits of ignorance and depravity, the day of which is gone never to return.