

LLANELLY TOWN BAND (SOUTH WALES.)

LLANELLY, whose name is the Welshman's "Shibboleth" and the despair of all others,—lies on the eastern margin of Carmarthenshire, and is a manufacturing town of some 30,000 inhabitants, who are noted throughout Wales for their unswerving loyalty to their native town. No matter where or how they may wander into other towns or lands, Llanelly is always to them the hub of the universe, and the centre point of their constant thoughts. It is said that a Llanellyite when travelling abroad and explaining to strangers the relative geographical positions of London, Liverpool, Manchester, &c., always speaks of them as being so many miles distant from Llanelly. If his listeners fail to appreciate the lucidity of his information his contempt is great indeed, and is only equalled by his disgust at their abortive attempts to pronounce the magic name of his home.

Llanelly (the proper name Ellyw, with the prefix Llan(church), simply means the Church of Ellyw, and is a name handed down from remote ages, but it is only of late years that it has risen to its present important position.

Had this sketch been written some 20 years ago we might have given our readers a definite idea of its locality, and stated,—after the manner of our schooldays' geography—that it stands on the banks of the river Lledl. But the exigencies of civilisation have long ago drained the water sheds of this once noble river; and to the present generation it is but a legend of the past. The "banks," fortunately, still remain; but the once majestic river is, alas! gone for ever.

Our readers must therefore content themselves with the information that it is a seaport situated on Carmarthen Bay, and is as we have said, also a manufacturing town. Its staple produce is tinplates, and although it also possesses copper, lead, and silver works, and various other minor industries, the former predominates to such an extent that throughout Wales it is known as "The tinplate town" and its denizens as "The tinplaters"—and right proud they are of their designation. If ever you see a man cock up his ears at the bare mention of tinplates, you may safely set him down for a Llanellyite.

But they have also won fame in matters other than the above. The average Llanellyite is an ardent devotee of one of two other things; or both:—football and music. Cast three Llanellyites down upon a desert island, and forthwith they would commence to discourse of music, football, and tinplates; and especially in music are they prepared to lick all creation.

For years they have in choral singing held a position envied by all, but equalled by very few, and latterly their enthusiasm has been kindled anew by the manner in which their Town Band has swept all before them.

Perhaps we should say that in Llanelly mediocrity is not tolerated. You must either be able to shed lustre on the name you bear or go and sit down. But provided you are able to add to its fair fame, then we venture to say that in all Wales there is no town that will so loyally and generously support you.

The position now held by the Llanelly Town Band in the forefront of Welsh Bands is one they may justly feel proud of, and which has been won by sheer hard word and perseverance. It is their pride and boast that they have built up their band from home talent, almost every man having been taught and trained in their own band. Rather than import the ready-made bandsman they have taken and worked up the raw material found

at home, and the result proves that their policy has been a wise one, and one which other bands would do well to more closely follow.

The band was formed as recently as 1885, and resulted from an abortive attempt to form a Rechabite Band. This latter proving a failure, owing to the very narrow circle from which members might be recruited, a few of the members resolved upon forming a band upon more open lines, and the result was that the Town Band was formed.

The history of the band for the first few years is one of constant struggle. Brass Bands had long been looked upon as being hardly respectable, and public support was very scant indeed. So small a measure of support was accorded that the band had to content itself with a start of about 10 instruments, which were augmented as opportunity offered.

But the promoters had foreseen and calculated upon these difficulties, and being lads of mettle were not in the least discouraged. They had started with the determination of making a good band, and in spite of all difficulties a good band they would have.

Their first conductor was Mr. R. T. Jenkins, who had been leader of the collapsed Temperance band. He, however, resigned after a few months, and after considerable persuasion the Secretary, Mr. T. C. Edwards, undertook the duties of teacher on the express condition that as soon as practicable the band would secure the services of an abler man.

The result showed that the band had made a very wise choice. Mr. Edwards was evidently determined that what lay in his power should be thoroughly done, and the band flourished under his hands. Gradually he collected around him the right class of material and imparted to all a thorough grounding in the rudiments of music and the elements of brass band playing.

Mr. Edwards is now well known as a strong upholder of band contesting as an educational institution, and therefore it is not surprising that he missed no opportunity of thus gaining experience and knowledge.

Ere many months had passed they entered a contest at the local flower show and came off victorious. Thus stimulated they ventured further afield, but being a very young and small band they were not for a long time very successful. But they were evidently determined to succeed, and after each successive reverse worked harder than ever.

The Llanelly Band may justly claim for Mr. Edwards that he established for South Wales a better style of band playing than was then generally in vogue.

From the very first he resolutely set his face against the prevailing method, and the Llanelly Band became known for a style of playing that was peculiarly their own, and even during the time when unable to secure prizes, their intelligent reading and sympathetic rendering was generally noted.

Mr. Edwards held the position of conductor for something over 3 years. The Band had then achieved a most creditable position, and its future success was ensured. Then in the summer of 1889 seeing an opportunity of securing a first-class man, he held the Band to the condition under which he had accepted the office, and Mr. Jas. Samuel, an old Llanelly boy, who was returning home after a long absence, was engaged for the position.

The selection proved a very fortunate one, for having had a wide and varied experience Mr. Samuel's abilities have proved of immense service to the band.

In the summer of 1890 it was evident that the Llanelly boys had reached what was then high-water mark in Wales, for entering into 3 contests they twice secured first prizes, defeating the leading Welsh bands.

Early in 1891, they—in concert with the principal Welsh bands—took part in the formation of the Sth. W. and Mon. Band Association, the object of which is to improve the status of Welsh bands.

As a result of the Association's influence contests have greatly multiplied and improved in South Wales. The first contest under the auspices of the Association was held at Merthyr on July 6th, 1891, and the Llanelly boys swept the boards, securing first prize.

Of their performance on that occasion the judge, Mr. Alnsworth wrote: "Andante Religioso, finest I have yet heard at any contest. . . . Evidently a musician at the head."

Since then their progress has been a triumphal procession. Under the Association rules they have attended 9 contests and have secured 8 first and 1 second prizes; and have also won the Association medals in 1892 for the best solo-cornet and solo-euphonium players.

Like Alexander of old, sighing for fresh worlds to conquer—they in 1892 entered for the Belle Vue July contest. Their enterprise did them credit and their temerity was rewarded, for they succeeded in securing the 4th prize; being, as far as we are aware, the first Welsh band to figure in the Belle Vue prize list.

In the following September they entered for the Championship Contest, but on this occasion their performance was unaccountably disappointing, and they returned home empty-handed, but not daunted.

The experience gained was not lost, and their record for 1893 bids fair to eclipse all their previous efforts, for since Christmas last they have attended the three great contests which have been held, and on each occasion have come off victorious.

Referring to their performance at Neath on Easter Monday last, one of England's ablest brass band judges, Mr. R. Stead, said: "Unison fine, intonation perfect. Basses, trombones, and all concerned built up the band splendidly, giving the true colour to a performance excelling in every particular all that I have previously heard from any Welsh brass band."

So much for the Band's musical successes. Just a word as to its organisation. When the band had been established a couple of years the bandsmen thought it prudent, with the view of ensuring the permanency of the Band as a town institution, to invite the co-operation of a Committee of townsmen. This was done, and Mr. Tom Hughes, the present Chairman of the Local Board of Health, and an accomplished amateur musician, was elected President.

Since its formation the *personnel* of the Committee has periodically varied, but the President and also Mr. J. F. Jones, Station-road—a gentleman whose exertions and enthusiasm know no bounds—have never ceased their labours on behalf of the band.

All band property is vested in the Committee, on which the band has a representation of one-third. Twice weekly during the summer months the band gives public performances in the People's Park, where the authorities have erected a band-stand for their convenience. They are also always ready to assist deserving causes, and individually and collectively they often figure on local concert programmes.

A sketch of the Llanelly Band would not be complete without due acknowledgement of the steadfast service rendered by the following who may be looked upon, in addition to the gentlemen whose portraits are appended, as "fathers of the band," viz.:—Messrs. Isaac Davies (Treasurer of the Band since its for-

mation), T. Pugh, J. C. Jones, David Williams, W. Arnold, and Hy. Griffiths. They were original members and founders of the Band, and in and out of season have worked hard for its success. The position they now occupy is one of which each and all are justly proud, and we have no doubt but that a still more brilliant future awaits them. One thing is certain,—that whatever difficulties arise, so long as the Band retains men of the above stamp, they are sure to be surmounted.

The constitution of the band is at present as follows:—

Conductor—Mr. Jas. Samuel; Eb Soprano (and hon. sec.), Thos. C. Edwards; Solo Cornets, Tom Morgan, J. C. Jones, W. Saunders, W. G. Morgan; 2nd Cornets, Isaac Davies (and treasurer), and D. G. Downing; 3rd Cornets, David John and W. T. Ware; 1st Flugel Horn, D. Hughes; 2nd, T. Stephens; Solo Tenor Horn, D. Williams; 1st, W. Morgan; 2nd, J. Edwards; 3rd, S. Hughes; 1st Baritone, Jno. John; 2nd, E. Stephens; Solo Euphonium, W. H. Williams; 2nd, E. Jenkins; 1st Trombone, W. Arnold; 2nd, T. Thomas; Bass, T. Phillips; Eb Bombardons, J. Thomas and D. Hughes; Bbb do., T. Pugh and S. Evans; Drums, H. Griffiths.

MR. T. C. EDWARDS,

EB SOPRANO AND HON. SEC., LLANELLY TOWN BAND.

The Hon. Sec. and Deputy Conductor of the Llanelly Town Band is, on account of his energetic labours in the cause of Brass Bands in general, one of the best known and respected bandsmen in Wales. Born on Christmas Day, 1860, he is now 32 years of age, and bears the name of his natal day in honour of that interesting event.

His first attempts in a brass band were made in the Llanelly Vol. Band as 3rd cornet player, but after a few months he left them to join the Temperance band, which was the progenitor of the present band. His talent for organisation made him an acquisition, and throughout the existence of the band he has been kept unremittingly in harness. Shortly after the formation of the Town Band, the duties of teacher and conductor fell upon him, and to the ability and untiring zeal he brought to bear upon his pupils, is largely due the success which has attended them.

Resigning this position in 1889, in favour of Mr. Jas. Samuel, the bandsmen and townspeople showed their appreciation of his services by presenting him with a handsome portrait of himself, an illuminated address, and a purse of money.

Retaining the position of solo cornet for some time, he ultimately accepted the Eb Soprano, an instrument for which his admirable taste and good judgment well fit him, and contest judges invariably compliment him upon the discretion he shows in that delicate position.

Despite the fact that for some years he was, of necessity, engaged in the rather dreary work of "teaching the young idea" how to play, he yet found time for self-improvement, and won several prizes at solo contests.

Since resigning the conductorship of the Town Band, several local bands have endeavoured to secure his services, but his devotion to his "own" band has withstood all temptation, and he still remains true to his first love.

He has been Hon. Sec. of the South Wales and Monmouth Band Association since its formation in 1891, a position requiring considerable tact, and entailing immense labour. The success which has attended his efforts in this direction has won for him the sincere thanks of all Welsh bandsmen, and indubi-