

OUR BRASS BANDS.

WYKE.

["Telegraph" Special—No. 3.]

In no part of the country is the cult of the brass band followed with more enthusiasm than in the neighbourhood of Bradford, and it is therefore hardly surprising to find two bands of first-class excellence established in places so near to each other as Queensbury and Wyke. The Black Dike and Wyke bands—one refrains with some little difficulty from writing Wyke "Temperance," but, as our readers are aware, the word "Temperance" has recently been dropped from the title—have been rivals in a friendly way for many years. Now one has prevailed, and now the other, but taking a general review of the time during which the rivalry has existed the balance of excellence has been remarkably even.

A sketch of the history and achievements of the Black Dike Band appeared in these columns a short time ago; a few facts of a similar nature regarding the Wyke organisation will doubtless be of interest to our readers.

The Wyke Band dates from 1869. Before this time there had been in Wyke a flute band, and this was the nucleus round which the present organisation grew. The band owes its existence to the efforts of five men—all capable musicians, and full of enthusiasm for their art. Their names are worthy of being placed on record. They are Ephraim Pearson, Dan Helliwell, Edward Bentley, and George Taylor. Mr. Pearson was the first bandmaster, and at the beginning he had under him twenty instrumentalists. This is four less than the number of a band at competition strength, but it was not long before the full number was made up. Under the able guidance of Mr. Pearson, and after him of Mr. John Brook and Mr. Hugh Whitham, the band improved from year to year, and took part in many second-class contests with ever-increasing success. By 1886 it was strong enough to enter into competition with the best bands in the country, and as a preliminary to flying at higher game a professional conductor was engaged. This was Mr. Edwin Swift, of Milnebridge, Huddersfield, who has remained associated with the band in the same capacity down to the present time. An early success showed that ability was not incommensurate with ambition, for at Fleetwood, soon after the appointment of Mr. Swift, the Wyke men had the satisfaction of beating the Besses o' the Barn, then at the height of their fame. In the same year the Wyke Band took part for the first time in the great contest at Belle Vue, Manchester, but without success. No bid was made for Belle Vue honours in the following year, but in 1888 the band entered the lists once more, and carried off first prize in a memorable contest. The vanquished competitors included the Besses o' the Barn, Black Dike, Kingston Mills and sixteen other bands of lesser standing. The victory was repeated again next year, and though in 1890 the Wyke men dropped to third place, they restored their prestige somewhat in the following year by taking the second prize. Honours have been won at Manchester since, but most of these are too recent to need chronicling here. Belle Vue is, of course, the Mecca of all brass bandmen, but there are several other places where are held contests very little inferior in importance to those at Belle Vue. Among these is the Scotch town of Kirkcaldy, and here the Wyke Band has already managed to score. During the last eleven years the prizes taken at Kirkcaldy have comprised five firsts, four seconds, a third, and a fourth.

Were you to ask a Wyke bandman what was the most successful year his band ever had he would unhesitatingly name 1895. The record of that year is little short of marvellous. Meeting the Besses o' the Barn eleven times, the Wyke men beat them seven times, and out of five occasions on which the Black Dike Band was encountered the Wyke men emerged victorious on no fewer than four. These successes were all the more striking inasmuch as there was no other band at that time which had any chance against the three just named. They were absolutely unrivalled, and divided all the prizes between them. Thus in a contest at Keighley they were the only competitors, and the Wyke Band was awarded the two first prizes, the Black Dike the two seconds, and the Besses o' the Barn the two thirds. In the same year the Wyke Band was placed first in a contest at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, winning £50 in money and a euphonium worth 30 guineas. The total value of the prizes won in 1895 was about £450, and a rough estimate of the amount netted in prizes since the band began taking part in contests gives the remarkable figure of £7,000.

In addition to playing in competitions, the band fulfils a considerable number of public engagements, averaging about fifty a year. This brings in a revenue of between £500 and £600, of which 20 per cent. goes to the band fund, and the remainder is divided among the players as remuneration for their services. Nearly every town of importance in the country has been visited at one time or another in fulfilment of engagements, and there are several places which are visited regularly every year. Twice the band has played at exhibitions, viz., at that at Newcastle in 1887, and at the last Glasgow Exhibition. As regards finances, the position of the band has always been satisfactory. Besides the money derived from public engagements, as mentioned above, a substantial sum is netted by means of the Sunday concerts. About twelve of these are held every year, and the whole of the proceeds goes to the band fund. In addition to this a further sum of about £50 a year is received in subscriptions.

Having said so much about the band's history and achievements there is not space for anything but a brief mention of a few of the principal players. Of Mr. Swift, the conductor, we have already spoken. The band has won most of its successes under his guidance, and his services are greatly appreciated. Mr. Fred Berry, who acts as bandmaster, plays the solo euphonium. He started his career in the Honley Band, and came to Wyke from the Linthwaite Band, in 1898. In that year the Wyke men took the first prize at Belle Vue, and their success was largely due to Mr. Berry's magnificent rendering of the euphonium solo ("If with all your hearts" from "Enoch") in the test piece. This is Mr. Berry's first year as bandmaster, and he has already won golden opinions for the tact and efficiency with

which he discharges his duties. Mr. Alfred Allinson, the "soprano" player, came into the band about twelve years ago from Daisy Hill. There are few men to equal him on his particular instrument, and without him the band would be distinctly poorer. The solo cornet player is Mr. Percy Turner, who has been with the band about ten years, having been connected previously with the Dewsbury Old Band. He is a fine player, as his large collection of medals testifies.

At the present time the band is in a high state of efficiency, and a successful season is confidently expected. The first contest for which it is entered takes place at Lincoln a week to-day. The band is also entered for the contest at New Brighton on July 20th. At this contest last year the Wyke, Tranmere Gleam, and Black Dyke bands all competed, and their performances were so marvellously even that the judge ordered the first three prizes to be divided between them. The Wyke Band will also take part this year in the contests at Kirkcaldy and Belle Vue.