suppose if the 'Tom-"mies' of World War I could march off hap-
pily singing a song about some un-
known place called Tipperary, it should
come as no great surprise to learn that
seventy or so years previously a song
about Limerick had been a great Lon-
don music hall favourite.

The sudden mushrooming of music
hall entertainment brought overnight
fame and fortune to many unsus-
specting individuals. Initially the
music hall auditorium was a long line
of long tables where the customer sat,
 drank, and was entertained. 'Enter-
tainers' suddenly found themselves the
centre of competitive demands from
different 'music halls' to come and sing,
to come and entertain, to come and 'render their ditties'. And of course
as far as the drinkers were concerned,
the type of song which went down best
was a good narrative
song, or a comic song, or a song with a
join-in chorus.

Many a singer/song-writer struggl-
ing in some day-to-day menial job
became an overnight star via the new
music hall opportunities.

And just as nowadays we associate
particular singers with particular songs
so it was also in music hall days e.g.
George Laybourne/"Champagne
Charlie", Harry Clifton/"Pretty Polly
Perkins of Paddington Green", and
Sam Collins/"Limerick Races".

Collins had been a chimney sweep.
However his ability to sing and enter-
tain, ensured him a new highly paid
career - singing songs of an Irish
flavour to the music hall
people. Through fair weather and
foul, with many changes of ow-
nership, Collins' has kept the flag fly-
ing. Not an artiste of note did not ap-
pear there ....".

It appears that Collins began his
London career in the first of the music
halls, the Canterbury Hall in Lambeth,
managed by Charles Morton. Filstead
says "Sam Collins, otherwise Vagg,
was a man exceedingly clever, as
Harry Clifton was in the eighties, in
singing topical verses set to familiar
tunes. Poor old Ireland, the theme of
Sam's songs, was always a sound
trump in England, and Sam did the
downtown Hibernian with a gusto
born of the fact that nobody had ever
trodden on him".

In his book Man at Play John Ar-
mitage gave this explanation for the
remarkable popularity of the music
hall:
"In the years immediately preceding
World War I the music hall brought
the greatest pleasure to the greatest
number. It was peculiarly English,
bawdy, sentimental, pretty and
tuneful, as unsophisticated as it could
be; it pleased the audience; they sang
songs and it went well with the beer.

It is not known if Sam Collins ever
sang in Limerick. Though the city did
not have its own exclusive music hall,
the leading British and Irish
performers of the day appeared at the
Theatre Royal at Henry Street and The
Gaff at Charlotte Quay. And Limerick
could also lay claim to at least one
family of professional players, the
Fergusons. Carrie Ferguson was a ver-
satile and popular performer in the
earlier part of this century. Her son,
Harry Baily, was born (in Watergate),
bred and steeped in the tradition of the
strolling player, and inherited all his
mother's flair. His Limerick appren-
ticeship stood him in good stead, and
he took to the world of the music hall
as naturally as a duck to water. He
became a successful comedian in Bri-
tain and also played in Dublin.

'Limerick Races' was Sam Collins'
best known composition. It is a
measure of its author's achievement
in this typical music hall ditty that
Mannix Joyce in his book Portrait of
Limerick could describe a slightly
modified version of the song as "a
good traditional ballad".

Here are the words of "Limerick
Races" as composed by Sam Collins.

"I'm a simple country lad
And resolved to see some fun, sir
So to satisfy me mind
To Limerick faith I come, sir
(To Limerick faith I come, sir)
Oh what a glorious place
And what a charming city
Where the lads are all so gay
And the lassies they are pretty.

Chorus -
Oh musha whack fol la lah
Doolie dum di doodie oh
Oh musha whack fol la lah
Doolie dum di doodie oh.

Twas on the first of May
When I began me rambles
Sure everything was gay
With jaunting cars and gambols
(With jaunting cars and gambols)
I looked along the road
That was lined with smilin' faces
All drivin' off in style
To go and see the races.

Chorus.

There were fiddlers playin' jigs
And the lads and lasses dancin'
And chaps upon their nags
Around the course were prancin'
(Around the course were prancin').
Some were drinkin' whiskey punch
While others bawled out gaily
Hurrah for shamrock green
And the splinter of shillelagh.

Chorus.

There were bet-fish to and fro
To see who'd win the race, sir
And one of them knowin' chaps
With his book he came to me, sir
I'II hold your fifty pounds
And I'll put it down this minute
Arrah ten to one says I
But the foremost horse will win it".

Final Chorus.