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THE NEGRO ON THE STAGE.

BY LAURENCE HUTTON.

Bottom. I have a reasonable good ear in music; let us have the tongs and the bones.
—Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act IV., Scene 1.

SHAKESPEARE’S Moor of Venice was one of the earliest of the stage negroes, as he is one of the best. If the Account of the Revels is not a forgery, he appeared before the court of the first English James in 1604, and he certainly was seen at the Globe Theatre, on Bankside, on the 30th of April, 1610. Othello is hardly the typical African of the modern drama, although Roderigo speaks of him as having thick lips, and notwithstanding the fact that he himself is made to regret, in the third act of the tragedy, that he is “black, and has not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have.” Shakespeare unquestionably believed that the Moors were negroes; and as he made Verges and Dogberry cockney watchmen, and altered history, geography, and chronology to suit himself and the requirements of the stage, so he meant to invest his Moorish hero with all of the personal attributes, as well as with all of the moral characteristics, of the negroes as they were known to Englishmen in Shakespeare’s day.

Othello was followed, in 1696, by Oroonoko, a tragedy in five acts, by Thomas Southerne. The real Oroonoko was an African prince stolen from his native kingdom of Angola during the reign of Charles the Second, and sold as a slave in
Charles Dibdin, first presented at Drury Lane in 1768. Mungo is the slave of Don Diego, a West Indian planter, and was written for, and at the suggestion of, John Moody, who had been in the Barbados, where he had studied the dialect and the manners of the blacks. He never played the part, however, which was originally assumed by Dibdin himself. Mungo sings:

"Dear heart, what a terrible life I am led!
A dog has a better, that's sheltered and fed.
Night and day 'tis the same;
My pain is deir game:
Me wish to de Lord me was dead!
What'er's to be done,
Poor black must run,
Mungo here, Mungo dere,
Mungo everywhere:
Above and below,
Sirrah, come; sirrah, go;
Do so, and do so.
Oh! oh!
Me wish to de Lord me was dead!"

This is a style of ballad which has been very popular with Mungo's descendants ever since. Mungo gets drunk in the second act, and is very profane throughout.

The great and original Mungo in America was Lewis Hallam, the younger, who first played the part in New York, and for his own benefit, on the 29th of May, 1769, at the theatre in John Street. Dunlap says, "In The Padlock Mr. Hallam was unrivalled to his death, giving Mungo with a truth, derived from the study of the negro slave character, which Dibdin, the writer, could not have conceived." Mungo is never seen in the present time. Ira Aldridge, the negro tragedian, played Othello and Mungo occasionally on the same night in his natural skin; but Mungo may be said to have died virtually with Hallam.

In 1781 a pantomime entitled Robinson Crusoe was presented at Drury Lane. Friday, in coffee-colored tights and blackened face, was naturally a prominent figure. The pantomime was produced at the Theatre Royal, Bath, during the next year, when Mr. Henry Siddons appeared as one of the Savages. This gentleman, who played Othello on the same boards a few seasons later, is only remembered now as having given his name to the greatest actress who ever spoke the English tongue. This same Robinson Crusoe and Harlequin Friday was seen at the John Street Theatre, New York, on the 11th of Jan-

an English settlement in the West Indies. Aphra Behn saw and became intimate with him at Surinam, when her father was Lieutenant-General of the islands, and made him the hero of the tale upon which the dramatist based his once famous play. With the more humble slaves by whom he is surrounded, the stage Oroonoko speaks in the stiled blank-verse of the dramatic literature of that period, and without any of the accent or phraseology of the original West Indian blacks. Mr. Pope was the creator of Oroonoko; and the part was a favorite one of the elder Kean in England and of the elder Booth in this country. It has not been seen upon either stage in many years. Oroonoko, of course, had a black skin and woolly hair. When Jack Bannister, who began his career as a tragic actor, said to Garrick that he proposed to attempt the hero of Southerne's drama, he was told by the great little man that in view of his extraordinarily thin person, he would "look as much like the character as a chimney-sweeper in consumption." It was to Bannister, on this same occasion, that Garrick uttered the well-known aphorism, "Comedy is a very serious thing!"

Mungo is a stage negro of a very different stamp, and the first of his race. He figures in The Padlock, a comic opera, words by Isaac Bickerstaffe, music by
January, 1786, while at the Park Theatre, on the 11th of September, 1817, Mr. Bancker played Friday in The Bold Buccaneers, or the Discovery of Robinson Crusoe, a melodrama which was very popular in its day.

Mr. Charles C. Moreau, of New York, possesses a very curious and almost unique bill of "The African Company," at "The Theatre in Mercer Street, in the rear of the 1 Mile Stone, Broadway." Tom and Jerry was presented by a number of gentlemen and ladies entirely unknown to dramatic fame, and the performance concluded with the pantomime of Obi: or, Three-fingered Jack. Unfortunately the bill is not dated. Mr. Ireland believes this to have been a company of negro amateurs who played in New York about 1820 or 1821, but who have left no other mark upon the history of the stage; and the historians know nothing of the "theatre" they occupied. Broadway at Prince Street is one mile from the City Hall, although the stone recording this fact has long since disappeared.

A number of stage negroes will be remembered by habitual theatre-goers and students of the drama—two very different things, by-the-way, for the man who sees plays rarely reads them, and vice versa: Zeke, in Mrs. Mowatt's Fashion; Pete, in The Octoowel; Uncle Tom; Topsy, whom Charles Reade called "idiopathic"; and the delightful band of "Full Moons," led for many seasons by "Johnny" Wild, at Harrigan and Hart's Theatre, who were so absolutely true to the life of Thompson Street and South Fifth Avenue.

In the absence of anything like a complete and satisfactory history of negro minstrelsy, it is not possible to discover its genesis, although it is the only branch of the dramatic art, if properly it can claim to be an art at all, which has had its origin in this country, while the melody it has inspired is certainly our own approach to a national music. Scattered throughout the theatrical literature of the early part of the century are to be found many different accounts of the rise and progress of the African on the stage, each author having his own particular father of negro song. Mr. Charles White, an old Ethiopian comedian and manager, gives the credit to a Mr. Graupner, who appeared in Boston in 1799, basing his statement upon a copy of Russell's
Sol" Smith, an eye-witness of this performance, gives still another and very different account of it. According to Smith's Autobiography, published by Messrs. Harper and Brothers in 1868, Andrew Jackson Allen produced at the Green Street Theatre in Albany in 1815 a drama called The Battle of Lake Champlain, the action taking place on real ships floating in real water. "In this piece," says Smith, "Allen played the character of a negro, and sang a song of many verses (the first negro song, I verily believe, ever heard on the American stage.)" Two verses of this ballad, quoted by Smith "from memory," will give a very fair idea of its claims to popularity:

"Backside Albany stan' Lake Champlain—
Little pond half full of water;
Plat-te-burg dar too, close 'pon de main:
Town small; he grow big, dough, here'a'ter.

"On Lake Champlain Uncle Sam set he boat,
An' Massa Macdonough he sail 'em;
While General Macomb make Plat-te-burg he home,
Wid de army whose courage nebber fail 'em."

Andrew Allen was a very quaint character, and he deserves a paragraph to himself. Born in the city of New York in 1776, he appeared, according to his own statement, as a page in Romeo and Juliet at the theatre in John Street in 1786, on the strength of which, as the oldest living actor, he assumed for a long time the title of "Father of the American Stage." He was more famous as a cook than as a player, however, and he is the subject of innumerable theatrical anecdotes, none of which are greatly to his credit. He was called "Dummy Allen" because he was very deaf and exceedingly loquacious; he adored the hero of New Orleans, whose name he appropriated when Jackson was elected President of the United States; and he was devoted to Edwin Forrest, whose costume, dresser, and personal slave he was for many years. He invented and patented a silver leather much used in the decoration of stage dresses; and he kept a restaurant in Dean Street, Albany, and later a similar establishment near the Bowery Theatre, New York, being a very familiar figure in the streets of both cities. Mr. Phelps, in his Players of a Century (Albany, New York, 1880), describes him in his later years as tall and erect in person, with firmly compressed features, an eye like a hawk's, nose slightly Romanesque, and hair mottled gray.
He wore a fuzzy white hat, a coat of blue with bright brass buttons, and carried a knobby cane. He spoke in a sharp, decisive manner, often giving wrong answers, and invariably mistaking the drift of the person with whom he was conversing. He died in New York in 1853, and Mr. Phelps preserves the inscription upon his monument at Cypress Hills Cemetery, which evidently was his own composition: "From his cradle he was a scholar; exceedingly wise, fair-spoken, and persuading; lofty and sour to them that loved him not, but to those men that sought him sweet as summer."

Apropos of Allen's association with Edwin Forrest, and of Smith's assertion that Allen sang the first negro song ever sung on the American stage, it may not be out of place here to quote W. R. Alger's Life of Forrest. Speaking of Forrest's early and checkered experiences as a strolling player in the far West, Mr. Alger says that perhaps the most surprising fact connected with this portion of his career is "that he was the first actor who ever represented on the stage the Southern plantation negro with all his peculiarities of dress, gait, accent, dialect, and manner." In 1823, at the Globe Theatre, Cincinnati, Ohio, under the management of "Sol" Smith, Forrest did play a negro in a farce by Smith, called The Tailor in Distress, singing and dancing, and winning the compliment from a veritable black in his audience that he was "nigger all ower!" Mr. Lawrence Barrett, in his Life of Forrest, quotes the bill of this evening, which shows Forrest as a modern dandy in the first play, as Cuffee, a Kentucky negro, in the second, and as Sancho Panza in the pantomime of Don Quixote, which closed the evening's entertainment.

Forrest was by no means the only eminent American actor who hid his light behind a black mask. "Sol" Smith himself relates how he became a supernumerary at the Green Street Theatre, in Albany, in his fourteenth year, playing one of the blood-thirsty associates of Three-fingered Jack, with a preternaturally smutty face, which he forgot to wash one eventful night, to the astonishment of his own family, who forced him to retire for a time to private life.

At Vauxhall Garden, in the Bowery, a little south of, and nearly opposite, the site of Cooper Institute, a young lad named Bernard Flaherty, born in Cork, Ireland, sang negro songs and danced negro dances in 1838 to help support a widowed mother, who lived to see him carried to an honored grave in 1876, mourned by the theatre-going population of the whole country. In 1840 he made a palpable hit in the character of Pat Rooney, in The Omnibus, at the Franklin Theatre, New York, as Barney Williams, and he is perhaps the one man upon the American stage with whom anything like negro minstrelsy will never be associated, not so much because of his high rank in his profession as on account of the Hibernian style of his later-day performances, and of the strong accent which always clung to him, and which suggested his native city rather than the cork he used to burn to color his face.

In 1850, when Mr. Edwin Booth was seventeen, and a year after his début as
Tressel at the Boston Museum, he gave an entertainment with Mr. John S. Clarke, a youth of the same age, at the courthouse in Belair, Maryland. They read selections from Richelieu, The Stranger, and the quarrel scene from Julius Cæsar, singing during the evening with blackened faces a number of negro melodies, "using appropriate dialogue," as Mrs. Asia Booth Clarke records in the memoirs of her brother, "and accompanying their vocal attempts with the somewhat inharmonious banjo and bones." Mrs. Clarke reprints the programme of this performance, and pictures the distress of the young tragedians when they discovered, on arriving in the town, that the Simon Pure negro they had employed as an advance agent had in every instance posted their bills upside down.

Among the stage negroes of later years, whom the world is not accustomed to associate with that profession, Ralph Keeler is one of the most prominent. His "Three Years a Negro Minstrel," first published in the Atlantic Monthly for July, 1869, and afterward elaborated in his Vagabond Adventures, is very entertaining and instructive reading, and gives an excellent idea of the wandering minstrel life of that period. He began his career at Toledo, Ohio, when he was not more than eleven years of age; and under the management of the celebrated Mr. Booker, author of the once famous song "Meet Johnny Booker on the Bowling-Green," he "danced 'Juba'" in small Canton flannel knee-breeches (familiarly known as pants), cheap lace, tarnished gold tinsel, a corked face, and a woolly wig, to the great gratification of the Toledans, who for several months, with pardonable pride, hailed him as their own particular infant phenomenon. At the close of his first engagement he received what was termed a "rousing benefit," the entire proceeds of which, as was the custom of the time, going into the pockets of his enterprising managers. During his short although distinguished professional life he was associated with such artists as "Frank" Lynch, "Mike" Mitchell, "Dave" Reed, and "Professor" Lowe, the balloonist, and he was even offered a position in E. P. Christy's company in New York—the highest compliment which could then be paid to budding talent. Keeler, a brilliant but eccentric writer, whose Vagabond Adventures is too good, in its way, to be forgotten so soon, was a man of decided mark as a journalist. He went to Cuba in 1873 as special correspondent of the New York Tribune, and suddenly and absolutely disappeared. He is supposed to have been murdered and thrown into the sea.

Lynch, when Keeler first knew him, had declined into the fat and slippered end man, too gross to dance, who ordinarily played the tambourine and the banjo, but who could, and not infrequently did, perform everything in the orchestra, from a solo on the penny trumpet to an obligato on the double-bass. He had been associated as a boy in 1839 or 1840, under Barnum's management, with "Jack" Diamond, who was the best representative of "Ethiopian break-downs" in his day, and, according to Mr. Barnum, the prototype of the many performers of that sort who have entertained the public ever since. Lynch asserted that he and Barnum had appeared together in black faces; and Barnum, in his Autobiography, called Lynch "an orphan vagabond" whom he had picked up on the road, neither statement seeming to be entirely true. Lynch was his own worst enemy, and, like so many of his kind, he died in poverty and obscurity, his most perfect "break-down" being his own!

It is a melancholy fact that George Holland joined Christy and Wood's minstrels in 1857, playing female characters in a blackened face, and dividing with George Christy the honors of a short season. He returned to Wallack's Theatre in 1858.
This is a page in dramatic history which old play-goers do not like to read.

Mr. Joseph Jefferson, the third and present bearer of that honored name, was unquestionably the youngest actor who ever made his mark with a piece of burnt cork. The story of his first appearance is told by Mr. William Winter in his volume entitled The Jeffersons. Coming from a family of actors, the boy, as was natural, was reared amidst theatrical surroundings, and when only four years of age—in 1833—he was brought upon the stage by Thomas D. Rice himself, on a benefit occasion at the Washington theatre. The little Joe, blackened and arrayed precisely like his senior, was carried on to the stage in a bag upon the shoulders of the shambling Ethiopian, and emptied from it with the appropriate couplet,

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'd have you for to know
I's got a little darky here to jump Jim Crow."

Mrs. John Drew, who was present, says that the boy instantly assumed the exact attitude of Jim Crow Rice, and sang and danced in imitation of his sable companion, a perfect miniature likeness of that long, ungainly, grotesque, and exceedingly droll comedian.

Thomas D. Rice is generally conceded to have been the founder of Ethiopian minstrelsy. Although, as has been seen, it did not originate with him, he made it popular on both sides of the Atlantic, and his image deserves an honored niche in its cathedral. The history of "Jim Crow Rice," as he was affectionately called for many years, has been written by many scribes and in many different ways, the most complete and most truthful account, perhaps, being that of Mr. Edmon S. Conner, who described in the columns of the New York Times, June 5, 1881, what he saw and remembered of its conception. Mr. Conner was a member of the company at the Columbia Street Theatre, Cincinnati, in 1828-9, when he first met Rice, "doing little negro bits" between the acts at that house, notably one sketch he had studied from life in Louisville the preceding summer. Back of the Louisville theatre was a livery-stable kept by a man named Crow. The actors could look into the stable-yard from the windows of their dressing-rooms, and were very fond of watching the movements of an old and decrepit slave who was employed by the proprietor to do all sorts of odd jobs. As was the custom among the negroes, he had assumed his master's name, and called himself Jim Crow. He was very much deformed—the right shoulder was drawn up high, and the left leg was stiff and crooked at the knee, which gave him a painful, but at the same time ludicrous, limp. He was in the habit of crooning a

queer old tune, to which he had applied words of his own. At the end of each verse he gave a peculiar step, "rocking de heel" in the manner since so general among the long generation of his delineators; and these were the words of his refrain:

"Wheel about, turn about,
Do jis so,
An' ebery time I wheel about
I jump Jim Crow."

Rice closely watched this unconscious performer, and recognized in him a character entirely new to the stage. He wrote a number of verses, quickened and slightly changed the air, made up exactly like the original, and appeared before a Louisville audience, which, as Mr. Conner says, went mad with delight, recalling him on the first night at least twenty times. And so Jim Crow jumped into fame, and something that looks almost like immortality. "Sol" Smith says that the character was first seen in a piece by Solon Robinson, called The Rifle, and that he, Smith, "helped Rice a little in fixing the tune."
Other cities besides Louisville claim Jim Crow. Francis Courteney Wemyss, in his Autobiography, says he was a native of Pittsburgh, whose name was Jim Cuff; while Mr. Robert P. Nevin, in the Atlantic Monthly for November, 1867, declares that the original was a negro stage-driver of Cincinnati, and that Pittsburgh was the scene of Rice's first appearance in the part, a local negro there, whose professional career was confined to holding his mouth open for pennies thrown to him on the docks and the streets, furnishing the wardrobe for the initial performance.

Rice was born in the Seventh Ward of New York in 1808. He was a supernumerary at the Park Theatre, where "Sam" Cowell remembered him in Bombastes Furioso, attracting so much attention by his eccentricities that Hilsen and Barnes, the leading characters in the cast, made a formal complaint, and had him dismissed from the company, Cowell adding that this man, whose name did not even appear in the bills, was the only actor on the stage whom the audience seemed to notice. Cowell also describes him in Cincinnati in 1829 as a very unassuming, modest young man, who wore "a very queer hat, very much pointed down before and behind, and very much cocked on one side." He went to England in 1836, where he met with great success, laid the foundation of a very comfortable fortune, and personally and professionally he was the Buffalo Bill of the London of half a century ago. Mr. Ireland, speaking of his popularity in this country, says that he drew more money to the Bowery Theatre than any other performer in the same period of time.

Rice was the author of many of his own farces, notably Bone Squash and The Virginia Mummy, and he was the veritable originator of the genus known to the stage as the "dandy darky," represented particularly in his creations of "Dandy Jim of Caroline" and "Spruce Pink." He died in 1860, never having forfeited the respect of the public or the good-will of his fellow-men.

There were many lithographed and a few engraved portraits of Rice made during the years of his great popularity, a number of which are still preserved. In...
THE NEGRO ON THE STAGE.

Mr. McKee's collection he is to be seen dancing "Jim Crow" in English as well as American prints, as "Gumbo Chaff" on a flat-boat, and in character singing the songs "A Long Time Ago" and "Such a Getting Upstairs." In the same collection is a portrait of Mr. John N. Smith as "Jim Along Josey" on a sheet of music published by Firth and Hall in 1840; and more curious and rare than any of these, upon a musical composition, "on which copyright was secured according to law, October 7, 1824," is a picture of Mr. Roberts singing "Massa George Washington and Massa Lafayette" in a Continental uniform and with a blackened face. This would make Mr. James Roberts, a Scottish vocalist who died in 1833, the senior of Jim Crow by a number of years.

George Washington Dixon, whose very name is now almost forgotten, also preceded Rice in this class of entertainment, but without Rice's talent, and with nothing like Rice's success. He sang "Coal Black Rose" and "The Long-tailed Blue" at the old amphitheatre in North Pearl Street, Albany, as early as 1827, and he claimed to have been the author of "Old Zip Coon," which he sang for Allen's benefit in Philadelphia in 1834. He became notorious as a "filibuster" at the time of the troubles in Yucatan, and made himself particularly offensive to a large portion of the community as the editor of a scurrilous paper called the Polyanthus, published in New York. He was cauned, shot at, imprisoned for libel, and finally forced to leave the city. He died in the Charity Hospital, New Orleans, in 1861.

Mr. White says that in early days negro songs were sung from the backs of horses in the sawdust ring, that Robert Farrell, a circus actor, was the original "Zip Coon," and that the first colored gentleman to wear "The Long-tailed Blue" was Barney Burns, who broke his neck on a vaulting board in Cincinnati in 1838. When the historians disagree in this confusing way who can possibly decide?

Rice naturally had many imitators, and "Jim Crow" wheeled about the country with considerable success, particularly when the original was in other lands. In the collection of Mr. Moreau is a bill of "The Theatre" (the Park), dated May 4, 1833, in which Mr. Blakeley was announced to sing the "Comic Extravaganza of Jim Crow" between the comedy of Laugh when You Can, in which he played Cosly, and the melodrama of The Floating Beacon, and preceded by "Signora Adelaide Ferrero in a new ballet dance..."
entitled 'The Festival of Bacchus,' the entertainments in those days being varied and long. Thomas H. Blakeley was a popular representative of what are called 'second old men,' Mr. Ireland pronouncing him the best Sulky, Rowley, and Humphrey Dobbin ever seen on the New York stage; and the fact that such a man should have appeared at a leading theatre, between the acts, in plantation dress and blackened face, shows perhaps better than anything else the respectable position held by the negro minstrel half a century ago.

Mr. White, so frequently quoted here, is an old minstrel who was part and parcel of what he has more than once described in the public press, and upon his authority the following account of the first band of negro minstrels is given. It was organized in the boarding-house of a Mrs. Brooks, in Catherine Street, New York, late in the winter of 1842, and it consisted of "Dan" Emmett, "Frank" Brower, "Billy" Whitlock, and "Dick" Pelham—the name of the really great negro minstrel being always shortened in this familiar way. According to Mr. White, they made their first appearance in public, for Pelham's benefit, at the Chatham Theatre, New York, on the 17th of February, 1843; later they went to other cities, and even to Europe. This statement was verified by a fragment of autobiography of William Whitlock, given to the New York Clipper by his daughter, Mrs. Edwin Adams, at the time of Whitlock's death. It is worth quoting here in full, although it contains no dates:

"The organization of the minstrels I claim to be my own idea, and it cannot be blotted out. One day I asked Dan Emmett, who was in New York at the time, to practise the fiddle and the banjo with me at his boarding-house in Catherine Street. We went down there, and when we had practised, Frank Brower called in by accident. He listened to our music, charmed to his soul [1]. I told him to join with the bones, which he did. Presently Dick Pelham came in, also by accident, and looked amazed. I asked him to procure a tambourine and make one of the party, and he went out and got one. After practising for a while we
went to the old resort of the circus crowd—the 'Branch,' in the Bowery—with our instruments, and in Bartlett's billiard-room performed for the first time as the Virginia Minstrels. A programme was made out, and the first time we appeared upon the stage before an audience was for the benefit of Pelham at the Chat-ham Theatre. The house was crammed—jammed with our friends; and Dick, of course, put ducats in his purse."

Emmett, describing this scene, places the time "in the spring of 1843," and says that they were all of them "end men, and all interlocutors." They sang songs, played their instruments, danced jigs, singly and doubly, and "did 'The Essence of Old Virginia' and the 'Lucy Long Walk Around.'" Emmett remained upon the minstrel stage for many years; he was a member of the Bryant troupe from 1838 to 1865, and he was the composer of many popular songs, including "Old Dan Tucker," "Boatman's Dance," "Walk Along, John," "Early in the Mornin'," and "Dixie," which afterward became the war-song of the South.

Mr. White, according to a biographical sketch published in the New York Clipper, was born in 1821. He played the accordion—when he was too young to be held responsible for the offence—at Thalian Hall, in Grand Street, New York, as long ago as 1843, and the next year organized what he called "The Kitchen Minstrels' on the second floor of the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street. The first floor was occupied by Tiffany, Young, and Ellis, jewelers; the third by the renowned Ottignon as a gymnasium. Here, where the venerable Palmo had introduced to delighted audiences the Italian opera and regaled them with fragrant Mocha coffee handed around by obsequious waiters, he first came most prominently before the public. . . . In 1846 he opened the Melodeon at 53 Bowery."

New York, and the second to give it an individual local habitation, was this season [1843−4] made by Ferdinand Palmo, on the site long previously occupied by Stop-pani's Arcade Baths, in Chambers Street (Nos. 39 and 41), and nearly opposite the centre of the building on the north end of the Park originally erected for the city almshouse, and afterward used for various public offices. . . . Signor Palmo had been a popular and successful restaurateur in Broadway between the hospital and Duane Street. . . . Palmo's Opera-house was first opened by its proprietor on the 3d of February, 1844;" while Mr. Charles T. Cook, of Tiffany and Co., who has been connected with that house for over forty years, shows by its records that Tiffany, Young, and Ellis did not move to 271 Broadway, on the southwest corner of Chambers Street, until 1847, when they occupied the second floor as well as the first. That Sir Walter Raleigh, losing all confidence in the infallibility of human testimony, should have thrown the second part of his History of the World into the flames is not to be wondered at!

Mr. White, nevertheless, was prominently before the public for many years as manager and performer; he was associated with the "Virginia Serenaders," "The Ethiopian Operatic Brothers"—Operatic Brother Barney Williams playing the tambourine at one end of the line—
with "The Sable Sisters and Ethiopian Minstrels," with "The New York Minstrels," etc. He introduced "Dan" Bryant to the public, and has done other good services in contributing to the healthful, harmless amusement of his fellow-men.

"Christy's Minstrels, organized in 1842," was the legend for a number of years upon the bills and advertisements of the company of E. P. Christy. This would give it precedence of the "Virginia Minstrels" by a few months at least. When the matter was called to the attention of Mr. Emmett, many years later, he wrote from Chicago on the 1st of May, 1877, that after his own band had gone to Europe, a number of similar entertainments were given in all parts of the country, and that Mr. Enam Dickinson, who had had some experience in that line in other companies, had trained Christy's troupe in Buffalo in all the business of the scenes, Mr. Emmett believing that Mr. Christy simply claimed, and with truth, that he was "the first to harmonize and originate the present style of negro minstrelsy," meaning the singing in concert and the introduction of the various acts, which were universally followed by other bands on both sides of the Atlantic, and which have led our English brethren to give to all Ethiopian entertainments the generic name of "Christy's Minstrels," as they call all top-boots "Wellingtons" and all policemen "Bobbies."

Christy's Minstrels proper began their metropolitan career at the hall of the Mechanics' Society, 472 Broadway, near Grand Street, early in 1846, and remained there until the summer of 1854, when Edwin P. Christy, the leader and founder of the company, retired from business. George Christy, who the year before had joined forces with Henry Wood at 444 Broadway, formerly Mitchell's Olympic, took both halls after the abdication of the elder Christy, and rattled the bones at one establishment, Mr. William Birch, afterward so popular in San Francisco and New York, cutting similar capers at the other, and each performer appearing at both houses on the same evening.

Edwin P. Christy died in May, 1862; George Harrington, known to the stage as George Christy, died in May, 1868; while in April of the latter year Mechanics' Hall, with which in the minds of so many old New-Yorkers they are both so pleasantly associated, was entirely destroyed by fire, never to be rebuilt for minstrel uses.

The contemporaries and successors of the Christys were numerous and various. The air was full of their music, and dozens of halls in the city of New York alone echoed the patter of their clogged soles for years. Among the more famous of them the following may briefly be mentioned: Buckley's "New Orleans Serenaders" were organized in 1843; they consisted of George Swayne, Frederick, and R. Bishop Buckley, and were very popular throughout the country. "White's Serenaders" were at the Melodeon, 53 Bowery, perhaps as early as 1846, and certainly at White's Athenaeum, 555 Broadway, opposite the Metropolitan Hotel, as late as 1872. Bryant's Minstrels, as their old play-bills show, were organized in 1857, when they occupied Mechanics' Hall; they went to the Tammany Building on Fourteenth Street in 1868, were at 730 Broadway the next year, and opened the hall on Twenty-third Street near Sixth Avenue in 1870, where they remained until Dan Bryant, the last of his race, died in 1875. Wood's Minstrels
were at 514 Broadway, opposite the St. Nicholas Hotel, in 1862 and later. "Sam" Sharpley's Minstrels were at 201 Bowery in 1864. "Tony" Pastor's troupe were in the same building in 1865, where they remained two years; they were upon the site of the Metropolitan Theatre, later Winter Garden, for a few seasons, and Broadway opposite the Sturtevant House, in 1874. Budworth's Minstrels opened the Fifth Avenue Hall, where the Madison Square Theatre now stands, in 1866. Kelly and Leon, who were on Broadway on the site of Hope Chapel in 1867, where they were credited with having "Africanized opéra bouffe," followed Budworth to the

GEORGE CHRISTY.—From the collection of J. H. V. Arnold, Esq.

until they removed to their present home near Tammany Hall. The San Francisco Minstrels were at 585 Broadway in 1865, and went to the more familiar hall, on Twenty-fourth Street house. Besides these were the companies of Morris Brothers, of Cotton and Murphy, and Cotton and Reed, of Hooley, of Haverly, of Dock
stader, of Pelham, of Pierce, of Campbell, of Thatcher, Primrose, and West, and very many more, to say nothing of the bands of veritable negroes who have endeavored to imitate themselves in imitation of their white brethren in all parts of the land. Mr. Brander Matthews, in an article on "Negro Minstrelsy" printed in the London Saturday Review in 1884, and afterward published as one of the chapters of a volume of Saturday Review essays, entitled The New Book of Sports (London, 1885), describes a "minstrel show" given by the negro waiters of one of the large summer hotels in Saratoga a few summers before, in which, "when the curtains were drawn aside, discovering a row of sable performers, it was perceived, to the great and abiding joy of the spectators, that the musicians were all of a uniform darkness of hue, and that they, genuine negroes as they were, had blackened up, the more closely to resemble the professional negro minstrel."


Nothing like a personal history of any of these men who have been so prominent upon the negro minstrel stage during the half-century of its existence can be given here. They have all done much to make the world happier and brighter for a time by their public careers, and they have left a pleasant and a cheerful memory behind them. Their giber, their gambols, their songs, their flashes of merriment, still linger in our eyes and in our ears; and before many readers scores of quaint figures with blackened faces will no doubt dance to half-forgotten tunes all over these pages, which are too crowded to contain more than the mere mention of their names.

How much of the wonderful success and popularity of the negro minstrel is due to the minstrel, how much to the negro melody he introduced, and how much to the characteristic bones, banjo, and tambourine upon which he accompanied himself, is an open question. It was certainly the song, not the singer, which moved Thackeray to write, many years ago: "I heard a humorous balladist not long since, a minstrel with wool on his head and an ultra Ethiopian complexion, who performed a negro ballad that I confess moistened these spectacles in a most unexpected manner. I have gazed at thousands of tragedy queens dying on the stage and expiring in appropriate blank-verse, and I never wanted to wipe them. They have looked up, be it said, at many scores of clergymen without being dimmed; and behold, a vagabond with a corked face and a banjo sings a little song, strikes a wild note, which sets the heart thrilling with happy pity."

This ballad perhaps was "Nelly Bly," or "Nelly was a Lady," or "Lucy Long," or "Oh, Susanna," or "Nancy Till," or, better than any of these, Stephen Foster's "Way Down upon the Swane River," a song that has touched more hearts than "Annie Laurie" itself; for, after all, "The Girl We Left Behind Us" is not more precious in our eyes than "The Old Folks at Home," and the American has sunk very low indeed of whom it cannot be said that "he never shook his mother." Foster is utterly unappreciated by his fellow-countrymen, who erect all their monuments to the men who make their
THE NEGRO ON THE STAGE.

"Dan" Bryant.

laws. He was the author of "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," "Old Dog Tray," "Old Uncle Ned," "Old Folks at Home," "Old Kentucky Home," "Willie, We Have Missed You," and "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming." He died as he had lived; in poverty and neglect, in 1864, when he was but thirty-seven years of age, and his "Hard Times Will Come Again No More."

Mr. Joel Chandler Harris, who is one of the best friends the plantation negro ever had, and who certainly knows him thoroughly, startled the whole community by writing to the Critic in the autumn of 1883 that he had never seen a banjo, or a tambourine, or a pair of bones, in the hands of the negroes on any of the plantations of middle Georgia, with which he is familiar; that they made sweet music with the quills, as Pan did; that they played passably well on the fiddle, the fife, the flute, and the bugle; that they beat enthusiastically on the triangle; but that they knew not at all the instruments tradition had given them. That Uncle Remus cannot "pick" the banjo, and never even heard it "picked," seems hardly credible; but Mr. Harris knows. Uncle Remus, however, is not a travelled darky, and the existence of the banjo in other parts of the South has been clearly proved. Mr. Cable quotes a creole negro ditty of before the war, in which "Musie Boinjo" is mentioned on every line; Mr. Maurice Thompson says the banjo is a common instrument among the field hands in North Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee; and he describes a rude banjo manufactured by its dusky performer out of a flat gourd, strung with horse-hair; while we find in Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, printed in 1784, the following statement: "In music they [the blacks] are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time, and they have been found capable of imagining a small catch." In a footnote Jefferson adds, "The instrument proper to them is the banjo, which they brought hither from Africa."

The negro minstrel will give up his tambourine, for it is as old as the days of the Exodus, when Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances; and he will give up the bones, for Miss Olive Logan, in Harper's Magazine for April, 1873, traces them back to the reign of Fou Hi, Emperor of China, 3468 B.C., while Shakespeare's King of the Fairies, who made an ass of the hard-handed man of Athens, also treated Bottom to the melody of the bones; he will hang up his fiddle and his bow, when the time comes, cheerfully enough, for Nero fiddled for the dancing of the flames that consumed Rome nineteen hundred years ago. None of these are exclusively his own; but it would be very cruel to take from him his banjo, which he evolved if he did not invent, and without which he can be, and can do, nothing.