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MONOGRAPH XXV

MINSTRELSY

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Editor

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NOTE

Although Negro minstrelsy (so-called) is a peculiarly autochthonous American product, and although it maintained a world-wide popularity for many years, there has never appeared any adequate history of the subject. Except for the book "Monarchs of Minstrelsy," which is largely biographical, and "Gentlemen Be Seated!" a brief,popular treatment, literature on the subject has been confined to single book chapters and articles. The present work makes an important regional contribution to this bibliography. It remains, however, for some future historian to write a definitive history of the rise and fall of Negro minstrelsy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MINSTRELSY

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Concluded)

ILLUSTRATIONS

T H O M A S D. R I C E

1808 - 1860

"DADDY" RICE

"DADDY OF AMERICAN MINSTRELS"

PHOTO FROM "MONARCHS OF MINSTRELSY"

MINSTRELSY

THE AMERICAN THEATRE OF BLACKFACE VARIETY

PART I (1849 - 1879)

ANTECEDENCE

The origin of Negro minstrelsy, as is true of other theatrical forms, is still a matter of speculation and dispute. It has been alleged that American minstrel shows derived from a precedent established in England where Othello was produced in 1610 with the protagonist disguised in blackface. But Othello, a Moor, can scarcely be regarded a Negro prototype; nor can legitimate drama such as Shakespeare's be considered a precursor of modern minstrel technique. Truer antecedents may be discovered in the Middle Ages when bards, troubadours, jongleurs (jugglers) and glee-men flourished throughout Europe. As free lance practitioners of a profession not then recognized, a clearer case can be made out for their performance than that which has been advanced in support of the Moor of Venice. As early as the eleventh century they were called "ministers" and long before the fourteenth century that term had been abbreviated to the generic one in

use today, "Minstrels."

These early minstrels traveled about singing ballads, celebrating the virtues of chivalric love, and in general preferred the entertainer's art, rather than prosaic toil, as a means to survival. They were itinerants and servitors, vassals of some king, prince, or petty potentate; else, Don Quixote fashion, they served the interests of some aristocratic lady. Their livelihood, as well as self-preservation, demanded of them a high order of versatility, inventiveness and theatrical skill. Thus in name and occupation, in manner of living, they anticipated by five hundred years the modern exponents of minstrelsy.

Beyond such superficial comparison it would be dangerous to proceed, for there is no evidence to show any relationship, (or any evolution whereby relationship could be claimed) between medieval minstrels and those who reached their pinnacle in America some thirty years ago. All attempts to find the prototype of Jim Crow, for example, would result in failure unless the search were confined to the United States and within the memory of perhaps two generations. Minstrel shows, as known today, are a curiously indigenous imitation of Negro characters transplanted in this country with the introduction of slavery. Consequently this form of entertainment became a manifestation native to the American theatre and none other. Its genesis, according to a Boston playbill, occurred in that city December 30, 1799, when Mr.

Grawpner, in the character of a Negro, sang plantation ballads during a performance of Oronoco, or the Royal Slave.

BEGINNINGS OF BLACKFACE

Mr. Grawpner, although otherwise undistinguished, is the first Negro impersonator to appear on the American stage. The second is presumed to be Edwin Forrest,* who played the role Darky Cuff in blackface, during one of the early presentations of the play Taylor in Distress. Therefore, when soon afterward appeared a genuine minstrel in the person of Thomas D. Rice, "daddy of them all," Negro impersonators were no novelty.

While visiting in Cincinnati, Rice chanced to overhear an old darky sing, to the accompaniment of shuffling feet:

> "Weel about and turn about and do jis' so
> Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow." **

And this was his inspiration for the famous character Jim Crow. He elaborated on the dance, improvised verses consistent with the refrain and formed an idea of the type he had decided to portray. Soon he was ready to try his act at a Pittsburgh theatre. While rehearsing there he encountered a grotesque colored man who habitually frequented the neighborhood of the stage door. This gave Rice a second inspiration; he persuaded the Negro to lend his clothes for the act, which

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* See Monograph on Edwin Forrest, Vol. XX, this series.
** Dailey Paskman and Sigmund Spaeth. Gentlemen, Be Seated. p. 11

was duly presented before a formal audience. The donor, meanwhile, was forced to wait outside in an alley, attired only in his underwear since he had no other clothing, and shivering with cold. Rice's act was prolonged beyond all expectation by repeated shouts of "encore" and only reached conclusion when the half-clad Negro crept into the wings, loudly clamoring for his apparel.

MINIATURE JIM CROW

A few years later, in 1832 at the Bowery Street Theatre, Washington, D. C., Rice scored another triumph with his miniature Jim Crow, who was none other than Joseph Jefferson (a small boy at the time), whom Rice carried on the stage in a valise. Thus, like so many actors after him, Jefferson may be said to have started his career as a minstrel, for on that occasion he joined Rice in a song and dance.

THE INITIATION OF TROUPES

After the success of Jim Crow, Negro songs began to achieve immediate popularity. Other innovators busied themselves, with the result that a whole crop of new airs came into being almost overnight: "Zip Coon," better known as "Turkey in the Straw"; "Clar de Kitchen, Lucy Long"; "Such a Gettin' Upstairs"; "Gumbo Chaff"; "Sittin' on a Rail" were but a few of them. Blackface performers, like the songs, became increasingly numerous. But they were individuals.

Nothing resembling an actual troupe appeared until 1843, when Billy Whitlock conceived his idea of the so-called "Big Four." Gathering in a New York boardinghouse with three companions, he then organized what later became the Virginia Minstrels. They opened at the Bowery Amphitheatre February 6 of that year and for the next three months delighted metropolitan audiences in America, then sailed to England and introduced minstrelsy there with notably pleasing results.

If further proof were needed that the Virginia Minstrels had instituted a new theatrical trend, it came soon afterward with the rise of Ring and Parker's Minstrels, the Kentucky Minstrels, and the Congo Melodists, who subsequently changed their title to Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders and made their debut at the Tremont Theatre in Boston. Within the short space of a year Edwin P. Christy made his appearance on the Albany stage in 1844.

TITLES AND SHOWMANSHIP

Once minstrelsy had gained a foothold, as it did with the accession of these troupes, impresarios assumed it would last. They vied with each other in selecting extravagant descriptive titles. The Sable Brothers, although stretching a point, sounded logical enough on posters, as did perhaps the Nightingale Serenaders. But there were others which bordered on fantasy, such as Ordway's Aeolians and the Washington Utopians." Most companies, following the example of Campbell's Minstrels, illogically adopted the adjective

"Original" and further dignified themselves by adding "Opera Troupe" or "Empire" somewhere in the advertisements.

This however was merely the commencement; before long, Gargantuan names paraded before the public. Duprez and Benedict named their organization the "New Gigantic Minstrels" and M. B. Leavitt outdid them with the word "Gigantean." Another aggregation, managed by Primrose and West, were called the "Mammoth Minstrels," a term which Barlow and Wilson promptly copied. But Carncross, as if to flaunt supremacy, capped them all with "Star Troupe of the World." Another pair of impresarios insisted on using both "Mammoth" and "Magnificent" in their posters, while still others compromised on "Big." But Colonel Jack Haverly, who later earned a reputation with his "Forty -- Count Em -- Forty" slogan, did not stop at mere commonplaces. He delved into archeology and unearthed the sonorous term "Mastodon."

PARADES, SMALL BOYS, AND DRUM MAJORS

Along with the acquisition of pretentious titles, minstrel troupes began to expand. The original Big Four increased tenfold. A semicircle comprising several score musicians and singers became traditional in those companies which considered themselves full-sized. Likewise costumes became more colorful, more ornate, more elaborate; repertoires became more extensive, instruments more costly, performances more pompous. Tom Christian, making his debut in Chicago in 1847, is credited with the introduction of a

yodeler. During a continuous run of seven years his high falsetto voice enchanted audiences of that city and the Tyrolean "broken reed" became a regular feature of the show. Without removing their blackface make-up, other innovators introduced Teutonic, Hebrew and even Irish dialect (along with Irish songs and jokes) into the Negro circle flanked by Bones and Tambo.

Street parades became a fashion. When a troupe arrived in some town where they intended to open an engagement they would march from the railroad station to their hotel. If sufficiently numerous the minstrels walked four abreast, otherwise by twos, each wearing a long-tailed coat with red lapels. A top hat usually completed the startling uniform. In front, led by the drum major in a short red coat adorned with gold braid, and crowned by a shako of imitation bearskin, went the band whose blaring music attracted all within hearing. The minstrel drum major, in the tradition of his kind, was adept at juggling a huge brass-knobbed baton, while envious small boys, marching abreast, eyed him with awe.

IN THE TRADITION

Although minstrelsy advanced in scope and pretension, the road shows which set forth from New York did not always prosper. During the season 1873-1874, more than a third of them were reduced to poverty before they could complete their circuit. They would then be forced to abandon

whatever wardrobe and properties the sheriff had not confiscated and tramp wearily home to New York, perhaps counting railroad ties over which they had so jauntily ridden on the outward journey. An advance agent of one such unfortunate troupe, patiently awaiting their arrival in the metropolis in the month of December, at last wired the manager, asking when he might expect them. The answer came, collect, from a small town up the Hudson: "On the next cake of ice."* For those were the days when a trouper's integrity was questioned even if his accomplishments were heralded with enthusiasm.

It is impossible to tell at what period the minstrel show coalesced into its most familiar form, but there is evidence that the initial part of the program (called the first part) and the intermediate olio developed quite early. The olio, it should be made clear, was merely a brief interlude between two strictly formal divisions of the entertainment. This time was commonly allotted to an individual, a star performer, or perhaps a team noted for witticism and the ability to sing and dance, while the stage was being made ready for the second half of the show which always remained less formal and thus permitted almost boundless innovations, including sketches or skits, parodies, songs, dances, and even burlesque, somewhat in the manner of reviews which came into existence at a much later date.

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* Dailey Paskman and Sigmund Spaeth. Gentlemen, Be Seated. p. 6

The first part, on the other hand, never deviated from its formalized conception, established probably by one of the early troupes. Its technique, although admittedly cumbersome, stilted, ceremonious, at least served to break the tension and gained for the minstrels (who had no dramatic device of the playwright to offer) a kind of en rapport with their audience. Essentially this was achieved through dialogue between the middleman or interlocutor who always began with "Gentlemen, be seated," and the two end men, Bones and Tambo -- so named because one wielded a pair of bones, the other a tambourine. These end men, seated to right and left of the stage and flanking the remainder of the troupe, were disposed to poke fun at the interlocutor, making a joke out of everything he addressed to them apparently in all seriousness. And during this humorous, often ludicrous interchange of words, other members of the semicircle found opportunity to introduce their songs, with everybody joining in the chorus, while Bones, Tambo, and the interlocutor collected their wits for the next sally. Besides being funny men, Bones and Tambo were gifted with an uncommon acrobatic dexterity and manipulated their instruments with gusto during the musical outbursts, tossing them into the air, catching and juggling them as they played.

NOISE MAKERS

Although the songs and other set numbers on the program appeared to come by chance, they were actually

prearranged,the comic dialogue being merely a means of introducing them in a way that to an audience seemed incidental -- just as in present day musical comedies the plot subserves a definite vocal and instrumental pattern. At the end of the first part, the whole troupe participated in a walk-around, chanting or singing some prime favorite of Negro balladry, after which a curtain was lowered, thus leaving a narrow strip of stage for the specialty acts between the first and second parts.

If the essential noise makers were bones and tambourine, the banjo carried an equally essential portion of the musical score. Ethnological evidence indicates that this instrument, first called the banjar, originated in Africa. In primitive form, made from a gourd to which was attached a wooden neck with four strings, it was probably brought into the United States with the first Negro slaves. But the banjo in its present form, although closely patterned after the original, is said to be the invention of Joe Sweeney, a member of the early Virginia Minstrels. Sweeney used a cheese box for his contrivance and soon demonstrated, despite its crudity, that such a combination of strings and resonant chamber was unsurpassed for the rendition of Negro ballads. Most troupes, however, boasted one or more fiddles, besides brass pieces which provided a touch of variety to the whining strings.

During its initial epoch, minstrelsy was restricted to the populous Eastern cities where the theatre has always

flourished. New York had its resident companies, as did Brooklyn, Philadelphia and Chicago. Nearly every season one or several of these took to the road, but their circuits were confined to relatively small areas until 1849, when discovery of gold in California occasioned a vast exodus to the West. Then San Francisco became a minstrel town and Tom Maguire began to loom significantly as a patron.

PART 2.

BONES AND TAMBO IN 1849

Certain observers, among whom is Jerome A. Hart,* contend that minstrelsy did not assume importance in the West until the seventies. Nevertheless there were notable performers in San Francisco during the first turbulent months of the gold rush, and at least one famous troupe, the Philadelphia Minstrels. An authentic record in McCabe's Journal dates their performance, which must have followed shortly after arrival:

> "Oct. 22 1849
> Opening performance 'Philadelphia Minstrels'
> Admission $2 Bella Union
> 1st appearance C. Calverd--Frank Richmond --
> afterward known as Frank Wheeler--Dick de
> Brough--R. De Meyer, Wm. H. Smith, W. Wallan,
> B. H. Brower, Collins & Harry Engles.
>
> Dec. 24
> Pacific Minstrels announced to play at Washington Hall, but did not on account of large fire in city."

There is no further record of this engagement, though one may conjecture as to its duration.

The Bella Union was a notorious gaming house on

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* Hart, Jerome A. In Our Second Century. p. 411

Portsmouth Square. It was frequented by wild spirits, men whose lives kept pace with the furious tempo around them. Everything was fluent, punctuated by gusts of wind which blew in through gaps between the hills; everywhere was color, rich, variegated, often bizarre. Those who lived by their wits demanded witty entertainment; those who had survived the rigors and nervous tension of faro, monte, roulette, with their inevitable accompaniment of quarrels frequently leading to bloodshed, demanded performers of robust stature. Neither troupes nor individuals could last at the Bella Union unless they offered what its patrons wanted: lively tunes, fast dances, sparkling witticism, variety.

Minstrel shows offered all of these in generous measure. The Philadelphia Minstrels were a highly trained organization with an extensive and impressive repertoire. It is probable therefore that they would have played a season of moderate length at the Bella Union -- distinguished throughout its heyday for such types of performance. Capricious but not perpetually attentive spectators may have flung gold to Bones and Tambo, to the banjo artist, to the fiddlers.

Undoubtedly, as in other fields of theatricals, news of such rich harvests trickled back to the East. Before winter was over another famous troupe, the Virginia Serenaders, appeared in San Francisco and obtained the Washington Hall, seating about 200 people, for its performance February 9, 1850. This indicates a considerable advance in prestige; the new minstrel men were deemed worthy successors

to those who had preceded them at the Bella Union.

At this time there were no specific playhouses in town; the theatre was still in its infancy. Even the one legitimate company which had appeared this early was forced to use Rowe's Amphitheatre for its performances; and since there were no advertisements in the newspapers, it would be unwarrantable to assume that the Serenaders obtained either their engagement or the hall through favoritism from the press.

But the outcome of their performance cannot be learned. Like the Pacific Minstrels, who had been announced to appear then did not because of the fire, the Virginia Serenaders shortly thereafter disappeared, possibly traveling into the interior where lucrative fields had already begun to lure foot-loose actors.

PARTICIPATION OF TOM MAGUIRE*

Meantime the silent Maguire had not been idle. He reconditioned a hall over the Parker House Saloon and called it his Jenny Lind Theatre, a structure designed to fill a public need and acquire instant prestige. Maguire was a gambler. He had been watching, waiting, looking at every new theatrical venture since the time of Steve Massett.** He was convinced that he knew what people wanted and he was determined to give it to them, cost what it might. Certainly he

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* See Monograph on Tom Maguire, Vol. II, this series.
**See Monograph on Stephen C. Massett, Vol. I, this series.

was not unaware of the minstrel men, nor of that peculiar tempo which rendered minstrelsy so congenial to the time and place. Either through scouts or personal observation, or perhaps both, he had decided the relative merits of those troupes which had already appeared. Although he did not immediately cast his lot with burnt-cork performers, he took a tentative step in that direction when he engaged the Sable Harmonists, "direct from the East," to perform between acts at the Jenny Lind from January 15 to 19, 1851. Towards the end of February, the next month, this accomplished group was made the attraction, giving full performances during a period of six successive nights. Thus, with obscure beginnings, minstrelsy had gained a hold in San Francisco and was soon to become traditionally native to the city.

CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF "JIM CROW"

All of these troupes, including the Philadelphia Minstrels, came to San Francisco with an established repertory. There is no available information as to what that repertory was, but one may hazard a guess that it varied little from the usual songs, dances, jokes, and afterpieces. First in importance was "Jim Crow," popularized by Thomas D. Rice, the "daddy of American Minstrels." Although, strictly considered, this was a song, it had in connection much stage business and occupied therefore a prominent place on minstrel programs. Pauline Jacobson in the San Francisco Bulletin, June 30, 1917 writes an interesting account of its origin

which is still a matter of some disputation:

> "Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, Memphis and Boston all claim that audiences first greeted Rice as Jim Crow in their respective cities. The character is said to have been a negro hostler, a negro stage driver, a negro dockhand, a negro porter.
>
> "Most authentic seems the story of Edmond S. Connor, member of the Columbia Street Theatre, Cincinnati, 1828-29, when he met Rice doing negro bits between acts. Reminiscing to L. Hutton, he told of how Rice had seen the original Jim Crow in Louisville the preceding summer.
>
> "A man named Crow ran a livery stable back of the theatre in which Rice played. Actors, leaning from the windows of the theatre, enjoyed watching the bustle and activity of the stable. The scene included a character which interested them immensely. This was an old slave whose name was Jim and who had adopted the family name of his master, thereafter being known as Jim Crow. Sadly deformed, his right knee was drawn high, his left leg stiff and crooked at the knee. The result was a painful and hideous limp. Dressed in ragged, ancient garments, he sang an old tune and at the end of each verse he forced his grotesque limbs into a step known as 'rockin' de wheel.' The words of the refrain were:
>
> 'Wheel about, turn about, do jis so,
> An' ebery time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow.'
>
> "In the old slave, Rice recognized that his was a character new to the stage. He began to write verses and assemble a costume similar to Jim Crow's. Shortly afterward he appeared on the stage in an old wretched coat, torn shoes (patched here and there), and a rough straw hat over a 'dense black wig of matted moss.' Immediately there was strong reaction to this extraordinary apparition. The orchestra opened with a short prelude, then Rice introduced himself to the following accompaniment:

'Oh, Jim Crow's come to town
As you all must know,
An' he wheel about, he turn about,
He do jis so,
An' ebery time he wheel about
He jump Jim Crow.'

"Like the slave, Rice 'rocked de heel' after each verse. There was great applause, Rice sang all the verses he was prepared with and then had to improvise. Connor said that he was recalled twenty times. Everyone, humming Jim Crow next day, tried to 'rock de heel.' Stage drivers carried the air from town to town. The most staid individuals found themselves impersonating the old rocker."

As may be seen from the infectious rhythm of the verse, the oddity of the character Jim Crow continued in popularity long after it was first presented and must have found a singular favoritism in the West during the gold rush period. Other creations of Rice were also staged by the better-known troupes. Songs soon acquired character through various innovations. A "dandy darky" by means of different interpretations could become "Dandy Jim of Carolina," "Spruce Pink" or "Bone Squash." Several types of Negro "dandies" were familiar to San Franciscans in the fifties and sixties. Edwin Booth impersonated such a character in Box and Cox, and it is a logical enough assumption that they were introduced by the first minstrel men, either at the Bella Union or Washington Hall.

EARLY MINSTREL SONGS

Such early songs as "Clar de Kitchen," "Long Tail Blue," "Zip Coon," and "Ole Virginny Nuber Tire" genuinely

defined the spirit of the southern plantation Negro; therefore all genuine minstrels included them in their repertoires. Both the Sable Harmonists and the Philadelphia Minstrels had established reputations in the East before coming to San Francisco, and it is difficult to believe that they would have neglected the traditional pieces on coming to a new field. Quite the reverse is true in all known cases, not only of minstrel shows but every form of theatre.

Dan Emmett, a member of the Virginia Minstrels, wrote that perennial favorite "Dixie" originally called "Dixie's Land." The song was composed, it is said, at the request of Jerry or Dan Bryant to provide a tune for the walk-around, which was characteristic business in each company. Although subsequent to the period now under consideration, having been composed September 10, 1859, the song had several antecedents from the pen of Stephen Foster which were sung in San Francisco during 1849. "Oh, Susanna," probably the most familiar of these, provided an accompaniment to the gold rush itself.

The Sable Harmonists, who played at Maguire's Parker House Saloon in 1851, received three separate notices in the Picayune, a paper which showed considerable interest in theatre news. At least two of these indicate that the harmonists were well received. The first was rather an optimistic announcement:

> "Feb. 20, 1851. Sable Harmonists.
> This excellent troupe of melodists have arrived

> in the city, and intend giving a series of concerts at the Parker House. They have, we understand, fitted up the room in handsome style at a heavy cost, and are resolved to eclipse anything in the way of similar concerts, that have ever appeared in the city. Those fond of fun, music, and social enjoyment, will find a perfect treat at these concerts."

But the optimism thus expressed was amply fulfilled apparently for, on February 24, 1851, the Picayune said:

> "The Sable Harmonists called out a large audience on Saturday evening. Their performances were very good in their line, but would have been improved had the tenpin alleys in the vicinity kept quiet."

Again the Picayune stated:

> "February 25, 1851.
> Sable Harmonists--This popular band continued their interesting concerts every evening at the Parker House Saloon, to large houses. The Lucy Long dance, alone, wi worth more than twice the admittance fee."

STROLLING MINSTRELS

The Sable Harmonists also disappeared after a few performances. For almost a year minstrelsy in San Francisco seems to have declined. Its manifestations continued in other parts of the state however, although somewhat sporadic and individual in character. It is said in McCabe's Journal that Dick Slater, Sam Wells, and Billy Birch came to California as early as 1851 and that Birch remained in the state six years. But there is no record of their performances until much later. Perhaps, like other wanderers, they made obscure appearances in the mining camps, playing the banjo, singing songs, receiving their rewards, then departing.

Likely enough they crossed the trail of Mart Taylor who, though not a minstrel, was certainly a troubadour and one of minstrelsy's chief exponents in those days. Johnny de Angelis is another famous minstrel who performed in this way during the early part of his career. Wandering through the camps he encountered Edwin Booth,* sadly and unprofitably playing the banjo. Later De Angelis met Taylor with whom he formed a song and dance team. Together they made the rounds of various interior settlements, often broke and hungry, sleeping out in the open. Charley Rhodes, author of that famous ballad, "The Days of '49," was also a familiar figure at the mines.

Unfortunately nothing is known of Rhodes save what can be gleaned from this paragraph in the Grizzly Bear of February 1909:

> "The minstrel Charley Rhodes was a native of New York and came to California in the days of 1849. He was a popular pioneer minstrel. His 'The Days of Old, the Days of Gold and the Days of '49' was a favorite song of the time. He also wrote the song of the Auburn Jail, probably while he was a prisoner. He began his minstrel career at the Sacramento Theatre. He died in Santa Clara, June 5, 1877, when he was forty-five years old."

His ballad tells its own tale and is worth repeating here, as it appeared in the Grizzly Bear of the above date, both because of its contemporary interest and that example it makes of those forces which sustained minstrelsy in the West prior to its palmy days:

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* See Monograph on Edwin Booth, Vol. IV, this series

"Here you are, Old Tom More, a relic of former days,
A bummer, too, they call me now, but what care I for praise?
For my heart is filled with the days of old, and often I repine
For the days of old, the days of gold, the days of '49.

"I had comrades then who loved me well, a jovial dandy crew;
There were some hard cases, I must confess, but still they were tried and true;
They would never flinch what'er the pinch, would never fret nor whine,
But like good old bricks would stand the kicks in the days of '49.

"There was Kentucky Bill, I knew him well, a fellow so full of tricks;
At a poker game he was always there, and heavy too as bricks;
He would play your draw, would ante a slug or play a hateful blind
But in a game of death Bill lost his breath in the days of '49.

"There was Racensac Ike, he could outrun a Buffalo Bill you bet;
He could roar all day and roar all night; I believe he's roaring yet.
One night he fell in a prospect hole, it was a roaring bad design,
For in that hole he found out his soul in the days of '49.

"There was New York Jake, a butcher boy, so fond of getting tight,
And whenever Jake was on a spree he was spoiling for a fight.
One night he ran against a knife in the hand of old Bob Kline,
And over Jake we held a wake in the days of '49.

"There was Monte Pete, I never forget for the luck he always had;
He'd play you out both day and night, as long as you had a scad.
One night a pistol shot laid him out, 'twas his last day out, in fine
It caught Pete sure, right in the door, in the days of '49.

"There was old lame Jess, that mean old cuss,
who never would repent;
He never missed a single meal and never paid a
cent.
But poor old Jess, like all the rest, to death
did at last resign;
For in his bloom he went up the flume in the
days of '49.

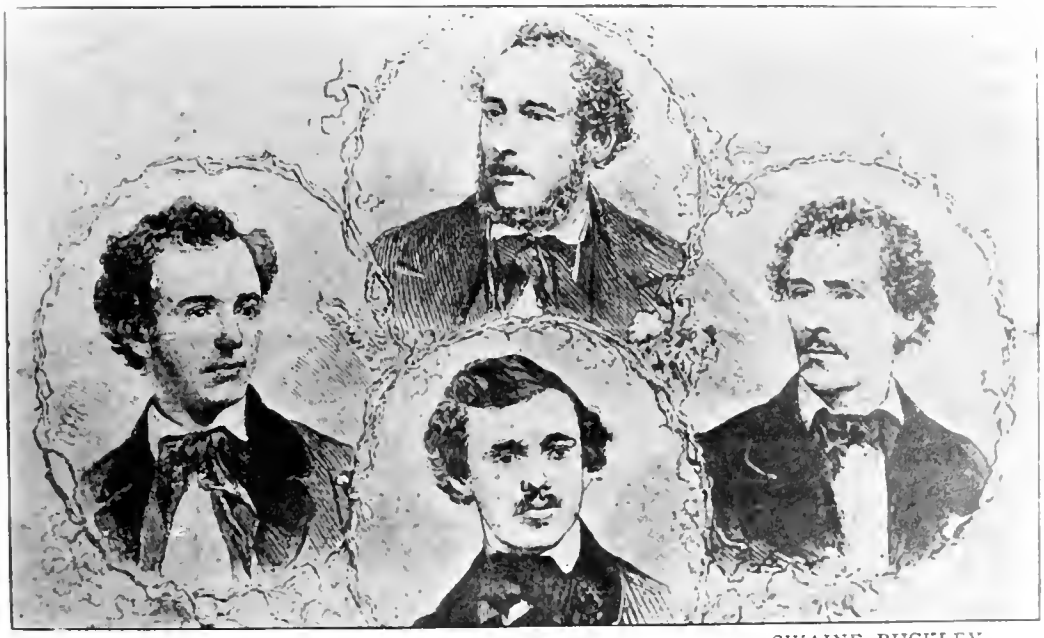
"Of all the comrades I had then, not one
remains to toast;
They've left me here in my misery, like some
poor wandering ghost;
And as I go from place to place, folks call me
a traveling sign,
Saying 'There's old Tom More, a bummer sure
from the days of '49.'"

ARRIVALS OF THE SERENADERS

Soon after completion of Maguire's third Jenny Lind Theatre, other playhouses were hastily erected in San Francisco. They were all continuously thronged. Miners swarmed into town, craving excitement, color, gaiety after long months of isolation at the camps. Since there was hardly enough accommodation for so numerous a public, gaming establishments, saloons and other such places began to absorb the overflow. Theatricals came into a full, robust life. King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, were presented at the Jenny Lind. Opera had been given in one other theatre, the Adelphi; farces still drew enormous audiences to Robinson and Evrard's Dramatic Museum; the Starks, at Maguire's Jenny Lind Theatre, were occupied with elaborate Shakespearean productions and shared the house with a troupe of minstrels, the Sable Harmonists. News of such happenings steadily drifted eastward, and with the return drift came numerous actors, singers and minstrels.

By the time the American Theatre had opened in October 1851 there arrived in San Francisco one of the largest and most skilled minstrel troupes that had ever performed west of the Mississippi: Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders, comprised of such versatile gentlemen as George Swayne Buckley, R. Bishop Buckley, F. B. Buckley, J. Burke Buckley, J. H. Collins, A. H. Barry, J. H. Mullen. This group disembarked at Long Wharf February 5, 1852. Four nights later they inaugurated a season at the Adelphi Theatre for which tickets sold at prices ranging from $1.00 to $3.00 each. Despite numerous other attractions, the house was well filled. Something in the spontaneity of the performance appealed at once to these exuberant spectators. Laughter of course was the prevalent mood and laughter proved an antidote to the "white elephant" memories of most California miners. After the first or second night it became apparent that Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders had come to stay. This troupe had already distinguished itself in the East with popular burlesques of opera. On the minute stage of the first Adelphi Theatre both French and Italian opera companies had ventured to produce La Sonnambula, Norma and Ernani, even though they had no chorus. Now the minstrel men, taking their cue from what had preceded, again took up their popular pastime, making travesties on the operas just mentioned. Moreover they introduced caricatures of local personages and the rising barometer of public approval vouchsafed them a successful

ORIGINAL BUCKLEY SERENADERS



R. BISHOP BUCKLEY JAS. BUCKLEY FRED. BUCKLEY SWAINE BUCKLEY

THE ORIGINAL BUCKLEY SERENADERS.

REPRODUCED FROM "GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED!"

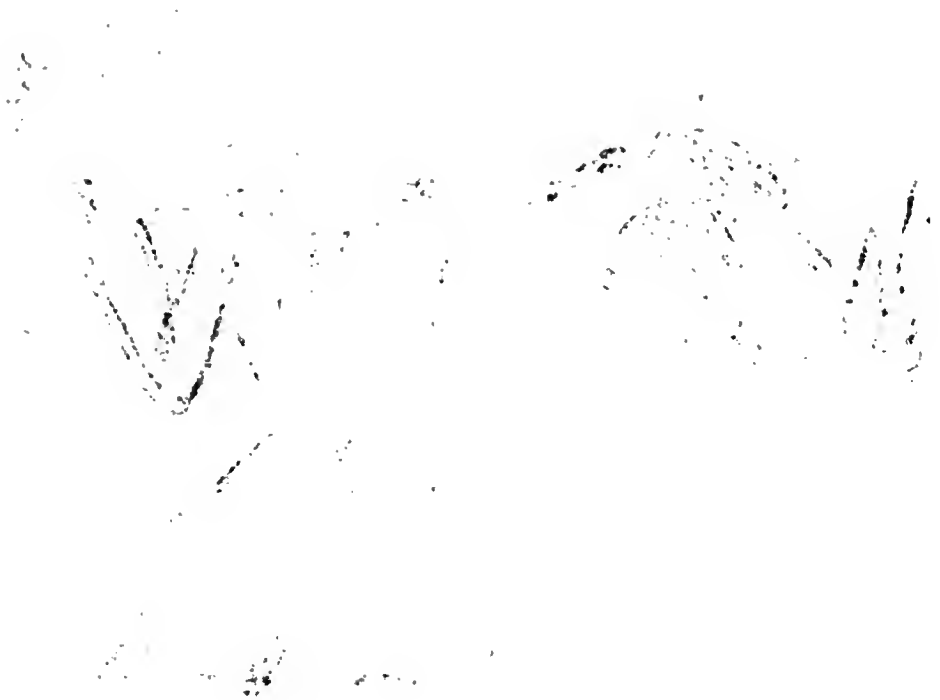
engagement which continued through three seasons. The fourth season which began January 15, 1853 they transferred to the Armory Hall, where they remained until February 28, of that year.

COMMENTARY

The performances of the New Orleans Serenaders contained several specialties which became the subject of commendation in the newspapers, particularly the Golden Era:

> "Jan. 23, 1853.
> Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders have made Armory Hall one of the most popular in the city. The troupe is the best that has ever visited our state. The burlesque on Kate Hayes' celebrated orchestra is alone worth the price of admission (front seats, $2.00; parquet, $1.00), while the laughable take-off on the 'Tin Horns that is Horns,' is thrown in gratis--to say nothing of the 'bones,' the 'bellows' and a liberal sprinkling of singing and dancing. Go to Armory Hall at 7 to-night.

> "Feb. 13, 1853.
> Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders are still performing at this establishment, where their inimitable, chaste and pleasing entertainments nightly attract large audiences, which are frequently composed of the elite of our city. Buckley's Serenaders have improved wonderfully in their singing, while their peculiar comicalities would almost provoke a grin from a statue. The beautiful ballad entitled 'Do They Miss Me At Home,' composed by T. Buckley and sung by Swayne Buckley, shows these gentlemen to possess superior musical talents. A great feature in the performance of this troupe is the exquisite sweetness with which Master F. Buckley performs on the violin. Indeed, he bids fair to 'divide the honors' with Ole Bull as a violinist. Last, though not least, is the dancing of Mr. Mullen, who, in his dashing bloomer costume, executed the lightest pas with a grace of which Blangy would be proud, while his heavy



> business would amaze 'the colored population' of Old Virginny. The Serenaders will give a concert this evening, and every evening during the week."

At the conclusion of their fourth season, which had lasted nearly two months, Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders went to Sacramento, Marysville, Stockton, then departed April 17, 1853 for the Atlantic Seaboard, where it was proposed to enlarge the company by the addition of dexterous and efficient performers. Meantime, in San Francisco a spacious hall was being constructed to accommodate them on their return, within the year.

PART 3.

RISE AND SPREAD OF MINSTRELSY IN THE WEST

Other troupes had followed the New Orleans Serenaders westward in 1858. On March 1 of that year Rainier and Donaldson's Minstrels opened at the American Theatre, but either through mismanagement or unreceptive audiences they were forced to retire after the third night. In June, however, they reappeared in combination with a dramatic troupe and played a week's engagement. Their organization as a whole was not a strong one. Competition was severe, theatres few. The city was filled with hostile elements struggling for supremacy. In July, unable to gain popular support, J. C. Rainier severed relations with his partner W. B. Donaldson and organized the Rainier Operatic Serenaders. The new company of five included Frank Brown, M. W. White, J. M. Foams, H. Donnelly and Rainier himself. They opened another season at the American Theatre July 11, with prices of admission greatly reduced, but after two weeks of only moderately filled houses they were forced to close. Thereafter,

emulating other luckless theatrical companies, Rainier's Operatic Serenaders sailed for Australia -- another land which held forth the lure of gold.

Several small troupes were also heard from during 1852: Campbell's Minstrels, Tracy's Minstrels, and Donnelly's Minstrels. Like the Rainier organization, however, they could not long survive the vicissitudes of frontier theatricals. They flashed for awhile across the stages of various San Francisco playhouses, then disappeared like fire suddenly extinguished, their subsequent whereabouts unknown.

DESPERATE VENTURES

To judge from the length of seasonal successes recorded in McCabe's Journal from 1849 to 1853, it would appear that minstrelsy had not yet gained a foothold in the West. Only the larger, more accomplished troupes were well received since there were hardly accommodations enough for all those who poured into San Francisco during the gold rush. Lesser organizations as well as free lance performers may have found profitable engagements at the mines, but the records are fragmentary and yield little to the scrutiny of present day chroniclers.

The autumn and winter of 1852 were unusually difficult, filled with personal tragedies, financial losses and desperate ventures. Obscure actors rose and fell; one, an Australian after a disheartening season, committed suicide. Others had been reduced to playing in gambling houses and

saloons. Even the elder Booth, then a nonpareil, had left San Francisco because there was no suitable theatre in which he could play. Edwin Booth and his practical brother, Junius, were unable to find an opening. Maguire had sold his Jenny Lind Theatre to the city for, gambler though he was, there seemed no other way in which he could pay his debts. This action, of course, had affected the fortunes of many theatrical people. The Chapmans had gone away into the interior, the first really proficient actors to make a tour of the mines. Since there was one less theatre in the field, the Bakers had begun an engagement at the Adelphi, distinguishing themselves by a succession of Shakespearean productions, English comedies, and plays adapted from Charles Dickens. The redoubtable Mrs. Judah had joined their company. At the American Theatre Kate Hayes had commenced a series of attractions which possessed an altogether different allure. Announced as "the willowy swan of Erin" her concerts nearly obliterated the memory of notable singers who had gone before.

OF EDWIN BOOTH, MINSTREL

Edwin Booth himself turned minstrel, in desperation, as a result of a hazardous trek northward through the Sacramento Valley which ended at Nevada City where he was stranded at last with a destitute theatrical troupe under the leadership of D. W. Waller. The story, told by an old-timer, a firsthand witness, was repeated by Marguerite Stabler in the

San Francisco Call, March 22, 1905:

The old man was hard of hearing and stiff from his "rheumatiz" but his memory, treacherous as to the things that happened yesterday, was keen on the happenings of 50 years ago. "He gimme it," he said, fondling a ring with a large bloodstone setting, "he gimme it for the lift I gave him, but Lord! pore, little peaked feller, anybody'd a helped him if they could. No siree," he began after the manner of ruminant age, "no siree, I wouldn't sell it, and I wouldn't give it away. Nohow, not to you," eyeing me, suspiciously, "I reckon I'll keep it till I'm dead and my jints is swelling so much from the rheumatiz then won't be nobody kin git it off'n my finger by that time."

Another long pause followed, humored by an unbroken silence on my part, until, in his own good time, he shifted his quid into his other cheek and said: "Yessir, that's who it was, peaked and tired and half sick. But Edwin Booth never forgot them days after he was rich and famous."

And so the old man told his story in his own inimitable way, which, without the trimmings of manner and speech, ran like this: It was winter in the early "fifties." The mountain trails were blocked by landslides and snowdrifts. Grass Valley and Nevada City, dependent for supplies upon wagon trains, were snowed in and frozen out by weeks of unremitting cold and snow. A theatrical troupe forming the company of D. W. Waller, a well-known actor in those days, finding themselves hemmed in by the snow, settled down good-naturedly to hibernate among the mountains until the weather should break. The third day of their involuntary stay, the pony express rider, hald dead from his trip, broke his way through the trail with the news from Marysville and the United States mail.

The players looking eagerly for advices from Sacramento in regard to their broken engagement there, were disappointed when the only letter for their company proved to be one for Edwin Booth. Young Booth, seeing a New York postmark on his letter snatched at it impetuously, then looked awkwardly from the carrier

to Mr. Waller finally. "My salary is back." he said to the carrier, "and I have not a cent." Waller, equally embarrassed at the financial distress of his company, quickly handed out the money and Booth took the letter. "God help me, my father is dead!" Booth cried upon opening the letter, shaking with emotion, the cold and the effect of the half rations to which the stranded company had been reduced.

To those of the company who had known the genial, kindly, elder Booth during his engagement at the Jenny Lind Theatre in San Francisco the news was sad; to Edwin it was a crushing blow. Father and son playing together, studying and rehearsing together, the father-teacher and son-student had become deeply knitted into each other's lives during Edwin's four years on the road in the elder Booth's company. "I must get down to Marysville somehow," Booth said to Waller. "You can't think of it, boy," Waller answered. "The express rider even isn't going to try to get out till the weather breaks." "I'm going to get out somehow," Booth persisted doggedly. That night there was a knifing affray in the back room of a saloon. Several turbulent characters were given "floaters." To them it was get out or the lockup. Booth, hearing their discussion as to the possibility of getting down to Marysville, eagerly joined them. "I think we can make it," he said. "I'm sure we can if we all stay together."

So the party was made up of Cornish miners, low caste greasers and Edwin Booth. The start was made at daybreak. A light snow was falling and the trail almost lost under the drifts and fallen trees. The burly miners looked with disfavor upon the slim young fellow, for nobody would have strength to help another as the day wore on, but Booth's energy and endurance left them all lagging. In this was his one outlet to his grief and impatience to get to his brother in San Francisco. The first night out the party spent at Smartsville in a roadhouse. The barroom was warm and bright and redolent of steaming rawhide from the boots ranged around the stove, as spent and half frozen the Grass Valley expedition entered.

The boots came down from the stove and the chairs from their hind legs with a bang as the "boys" around the bar heard that Grass Valley was facing a famine if the snow blockade was not raised soon. Someone in the crowd ordered drinks for the wayfarers and the landlord hustled up a hot supper. Then more drinks went around till the company around the bar began to feel pretty good. The young chap, shivering with the cold and almost fainting with fatigue, huddled behind the stove, neither joining in the conversation nor laughing at the rough jokes told until, thoroughly warmed and fed, his share of the expense of their entertainment confronted him. "I'm broke, Mr. Landlord," he said, "but I think I can earn the dinner I've eaten with your permission."

The boys thought the young fellow was up to some monkey shines, as any young fellow might be, and the barkeeper said: "All right, boy, go ahead," while the boys hitched their chairs around so as to face the bar. The nervous strain of the day was undoubtedly responsible for Booth's hysterical spirits--to shout, or laugh, or weep, anything to lessen the high pitch of a supersensitive temperament as a relief. With a few words to his host and after disappearing a moment the young fellow reappeared with his face blackened, his coat collar turned up, his cuffs drawn over his hands, and the whites of his eyes rolled back. "Oh my Gawd, we just busted our sides a laughin'," the old man told me, chuckling with delight at the mention of that wonderful night, "and him just a little squirt of a feller, too, mind ye, but just killin' us with his foolery." Tears were running down the furrows of the old man's face as he recalled that wonderful night 50 years ago--the snow and ice outside, the warmth within, the boys in their prime now called to their long home, the sudden descent in their midst of this young chap who left them something to laugh at all the rest of their lives.

His audience, caught at first by the negro minstrel, shouted and stamped and rolled on the floor at the jokes, the attitudes, the facial contortions of this funny fellow. Those who have known the ultra-exquisite soul in later

years can feel something of the pangs that night when, heartsick with grief, in a strange rough country, penniless, Edwin Booth strove to get away from himself by throwing heart and soul into his "Dandy Cox" which was in after years one of his successes. Heart aflame with emotion, nerves on end from the unwonted exertions of his journey, the actor, we can believe, found himself on this occasion for the first time in his life the artist; self sunk below his horizon and the negro the man of the moment. With his stage a clearing in front of the bar, his audience the boys in blue flannel shirts, Booth reached his highest register in comedy. Having his audience now on the hip, his mood changed from the negro minstrel to the humor of Falstaff, bringing the wit of the old English alehouse to the miners at O'Toole's. And so this wonderful night of jest and jollity spun around till it was almost morning.

Now it was Pickwick that was bending his audience double. The young fellow, his hair falling in limp locks on his forehead, his piercing glance and quivering nostrils showing how far his mirth was overshooting its mark, leaned against the bar or sat upon it from sheer exhaustion because the boys would not let him stop. "Wind up with the nigger," one of the boys urged, but the bartender, seeing the boy's fatigue, rang down the curtain, put out the lights and sent him to bed. The snow had ceased falling by morning, and after a night's rest of body and without the refreshment of sleep, Booth arose and was eager for the start. "You don't look equal to it," the boys objected, every man of them now his friend, "you'd better lay over a day or you'll be sick." But Booth spurned the idea. "I will be sick if I can't get on," he answered.

The night's stop was Yuba Dam, a few miles out of Marysville. Booth had been silent and taciturn all day. They were now however, below the snow line and the traveling easier. Two of the boys at O'Toole's had joined the party, but were disappointed by the young fellow's moody silence. At Yuba Dam however, the night's lodging had to be paid for in the only coin he had. But this time the warm fire and a square meal induced a reaction that left Booth sluggish and dull. "I

can't do it tonight," he answered Fish, one of the boys from Smartsville, who hovered near, anxious for the fun to begin. "There will be time enough in the morning." "Ye've still got the cold in ye, boy," the big fellow said. Hurrying to the bar he ordered something warranted to dispel cold and blue devils in double quick time and brought it to the chap huddled at the stove. "This is what you need to warm you up," he said. But it was not until several repetitions of Fish's prescription that Booth's spirits rose to the sticking point.

This time it was Fish who assumed the role of advance agent and manager, and who explained to the landlord that the young fellow was "strapped," but that he would pay his bill in his own way--the best thing that had ever come Yuba Dam's way, too. Booth, however, after his second day of unaccustomed tramping and grief for his father, was too spent to do more than a turn or two at Cox. Here Fish, shouldering the responsibility of the performance, called for Pickwick. The others, delighted with the negro part, joined in loudly, "Pickwick! Pickwick!" probably not knowing in the least what Pickwick meant. Booth, with that self-contained and gracious manner we all knew in later years, leaned toward the crowd and began! "Gentlemen, I must ask you to excuse me from further effort." Here Fish levelled his six shooter at the actor, bound to make good his advertising. The young fellow smiled good humoredly into the barrel and threw back his head to begin as ordered. But the strain had been too much and with this final effort he collapsed. "Bring some whiskey, open the window, take off his collar!" Fish commanded when he saw that the young fellow had fainted. And everything that big hearts and awkward hands could do was done for the young actor.

After another night's rest Booth insisted upon pushing on, although against the will of his newly made friends. A heavy coat and gloves and all his expenses to San Francisco were provided him and he was started off to join his brother, cheered and comforted by the boys at Yuba Dam. "Once when he was playing in Hamlet at the Baldwin," the old man finished, "I went to see him. 'Young feller,' I sez, 'my name

> is Fish; do you remember me?' 'Why Mr. Fish,' he sez, 'could I forget one of the best friends a man ever had?' But when he asked me to go with him to dinner I thought, maybe my clothes wasn't good enough for the Palace Hotel. But he sez to me: 'That's a great deal better coat than the one you gave me once, and I was mighty glad to get it.'" The old man raised his rheumatic hands with a flourish. "And that's when he gimme this," he said.

MAGUIRE ANTICIPATES A TREND

Early in '53, when he arrived in San Francisco, Edwin found the scene much changed. Maguire had not been defeated. By selling his Jenny Lind Theatre to the city he had acquired enough money to build the San Francisco Hall on Washington Street. It was a playhouse dedicated to mirth; ultimately it was to become the home of a native minstrel troupe. Junius Booth was installed as manager; the Chapmans, on their return, became members of the company, as did Edwin Booth.

Farces were inaugurated; comedies, extravaganzas, local burlesques followed in rapid succession. The whole tone of these, presentations received its dominant emphasis from variety and became instantly and lastingly popular. Since Maguire was later to become so thoroughly associated with minstrelsy, one is tempted to assume that this was his means of temporizing with himself before making the final decision. Caution had always been a noteworthy trait in his character, patience another. He could afford to wait, meantime scrutinizing every trend, measuring popular approval with an almost unbelievable accuracy.

In September 1853, while gaiety reigned at the San Francisco Hall and that place of entertainment was the theatrical center of the city, Maguire noted the re-emergence of a group which called themselves Donnelly's Minstrels. Whether they came directly from the interior, or the East, or Australia is not known; but they presented now a certain lustre that had been lacking in their previous visit.

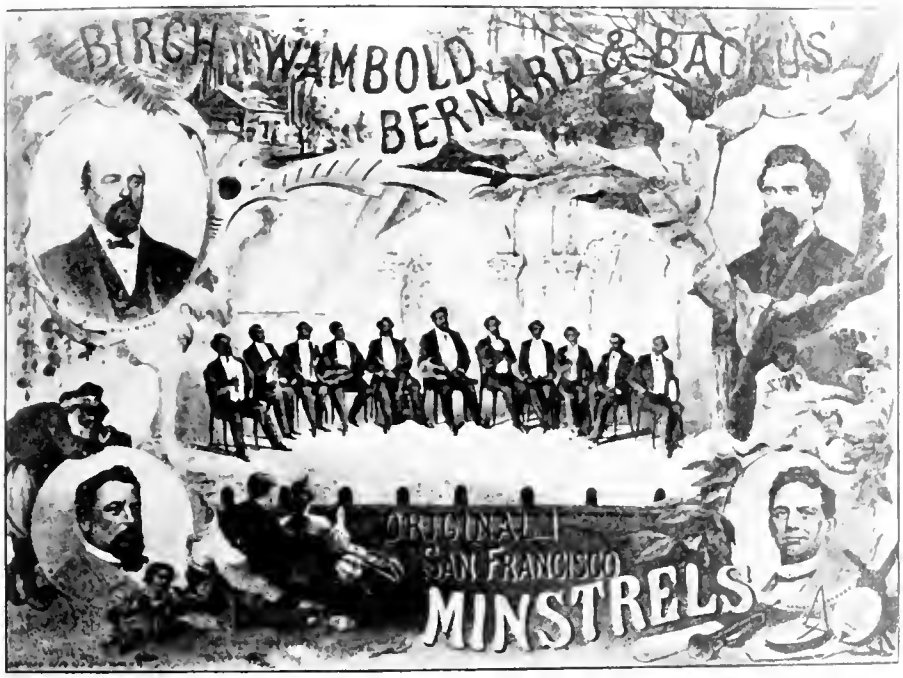
FAME OF CHARLES BACKUS

Now the name Charley Backus appeared on their bills. It is not to be supposed that they took the city by storm, but at least they added to the extravagant gaiety then prevailing when they opened at the Adelphi Theatre, September 21. From that date until October 3, they alternated between the Adelphi and American Theatres; then, according to McCabe's Journal, they changed their name to the San Francisco Minstrels, continuing with highly successful performances until December 12, 1853.

McCabe may have been in error with regard to this change in name, but in any case Donnelly's group was not identical with the later San Francisco Minstrels, organized by Birch, Wambold and Backus in 1864, nearly ten years afterward.

Maguire had not been waiting in vain. As soon as the success of Donnelly's Minstrels was assured, he proceeded to make arrangements of his own. Early in 1854 he persuaded Backus, who now headed a new company, to accept an engagement

BIRCH, WAMBOLD, BERNARD & BACKUS



A FAMOUS NEW YORK ORGANIZATION; 1865.

BILLY BIRCH
WM. H. BERNARD
DAVE WAMBOLD
CHARLEY BACKUS

ORIGINAL POSTER

at the San Francisco Hall. Reports in the newspapers of this time attest to the ingenuity, skill, and versatile character of the troupe, which was to remain in California a year, riding all the while a wave of enormous and unprecedented popularity.

> "Backus Minstrels. This popular corps of singers," said the Golden Era, Feb. 12, 1854, "will appear in a varied and entertaining programme at the San Francisco Hall this evening. The imitations by Backus are as wonderful as they are amusing, while he is the man plus ultra of delineators of negro characters. The company is made up of talented and deserving fellows."

On February 12, 1854 the same paper stated:

> "At the San Francisco the Backus Minstrels are as attractive as ever. The Classical movements of old 'Ephraim' (a character taken by Backus), and his burlesques on the different styles of acting, are highly amusing, while the vocal hits of 'Bones' are fresh and cutting."

February 19, 1854 (Golden Era)

> "Backus Minstrels continue on the tide of public favor. We predict for them a fame in the annals of 'niggerdom' of which the Christys might die proud."

One of the novelties of this long engagement at the San Francisco Hall was the introduction of a conundrum which became classic. Ephraim, with proper stage business, would ask Bones: "In what respect do the citizens of San Francisco disavow the spirit of the Declaration of Independence?" And Bones would answer, feigning a sudden attack of apoplexy: "By quartering a garrison in the City Hall, at an annual expense of $60,000." As the audience roared with laughter, some other member of the troupe would drag Bones

off the stage by one leg, while Ephraim played "Hail, Columbia," on a one-string banjo.

MINSTRELSY OR PROMENADE?

San Francisco, if not before, had now become minstrel-conscious. A new edition of Christy's Plantation Melodies had been published. In 1854 copies of it were offered for sale at the establishment of Bonestell & Williston, general merchants, 201 Clay Street, "opposite the Plaza." Most of the excitement attending the early days of the gold rush had subsided. Life appeared in some quarters a genuine desire for refinement in social activity -- the result, no doubt, of earlier operatic influence. In the autumn of '54, when opera had completely disappeared for a time, when burlesque and minstrelsy dominated the theatres, someone started what was then known as the "promenade concert."

It was supposed to be a nightly event. But on the first night, despite an excellent orchestra, a brilliantly lighted hall, an air of pleasantry and a large attendance, something went amiss. First a polka was played while two booted, picturesquely garbed miners began to dance. Others laughed, then joined them on the floor. The polka gave way to a cotillion, there being enough dancers by now to comprise four sets. The musicians, however, were displeased. After the cotillion they began packing up their instruments and the affair ended in a seemingly inevitable burlesque during which chairs and music stands were shattered and champagne was

passed around. Needless to say the series of promenade concerts was short-lived; citizens of the town had merely taken another means of showing their preference for the minstrel men.

ENTER TOM BRIGGS

So great indeed was this preference that neither Backus' Minstrels nor those individuals then performing in various gambling saloons could supply public demand. Eastward went the news. Perhaps Maguire had something to do with what resulted; if not, he at least appeared well pleased when George Christy, of the famous Christy Minstrels, dispatched part of his organization to the coast under the leadership of Tom Briggs. This troupe was the most celebrated, the most accomplished, that had hitherto appeared in San Francisco, surpassing even the talented Backus Minstrels in repertoire, costumes and personnel. It included such giants of burnt cork as Eph Horn, comedian and end man; Dan Bryant, the "essence of Old Virginny," whose dance and Negro characterization in Old Times Rocks had never been excelled; S. C. Campbell, baritone; L.Donniker, interlocutor; and, of course, Tom Briggs, wizard of the banjo and pupil of the inimitable Sweeny, the old Virginia Negro,whose fame had spread throughout the East.

On October 23, 1854, this group opened Christy's Musical Hall, which immediately resounded with the tunes of Stephen C. Foster's plantation songs. "Oh, Susanna" was

repeated again and again, followed by "Way Down South Whar de Corn Grows," "Uncle Ned," "Louisiana Belle," "Nelly Was a Lady," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Massa's in de Col', Col' Ground" and others. It has been said that these songs, so often heard in minstrel shows, were partially influential in awakening Northern sympathy for the Negro and gaining new recruits for the Union army. Whether or not this is true, they aroused in San Francisco a spontaneous outburst of applause. The trend towards minstrelsy had now become well defined -- so well in fact that it soon threatened to eclipse even the legitimate theatre.

POOR TOM BRIGGS

But Tom Briggs, handsome, dapper, admired for his modesty as much as for his talent, sought by managers and public alike, did not live to witness a San Francisco triumph. Next day, October 24, 1854 he succumbed either to tropical fever, contracted, some averred in the Isthmus of Panama, or to tuberculosis, which others contend he had before coming West. Although celebrated for his banjo performance, Briggs could also play the bell chimes and imitate a horse race better than any other person then on the stage. He had been the mainstay of the company, its star performer. Now, at his death, the others became demoralized, most of them leaving immediately for New York. Almost a year afterward George Wilkes revived the memory of the popular minstrel in a panegyric and epitaph published in the Pioneer Magazine, January 1855:

"Poor Tom Briggs! How well I recollect him as he used to enter between the first and second divisions of the performance, with his banjo on his shoulder and his cheerful--'Good evenin', white folks!'

"Black as he made himself, Tom Briggs could not help being handsome, while the special set of his vast red vest and the exquisite trim of his lower outline helped largely towards his title as the dark Apollo.

"There are some persons so resolutely handsome that no paint will disfigure them, no garb entirely disguise, and of this sort was poor Tom Briggs. Wisely appreciating his good gifts, he preferred the silent favor they insured in the minds of the audience to the cloak which is the reward of preposterous exaggeration. He was the dandy nigger; clean as a race-horse, fine as a star, and when his finger struck the banjo, you felt that he was filled with the spirit of an artist. Altogether, Tom Briggs was an extraordinary person, and had he chosen a less humble instrument, and subjected his tastes to the tutelage of science, he would have achieved an elevated and refined renown. As it was he distanced rivalry, elevated the banjo to the rank of the guitar, and rendered his performance not only the feature of a concert, but a by-word of surprise. This makes him a character worth notice. Whenever anyone played to ears that had once heard him, the comment invariably was,--'Ah, but you should have heard Tom Briggs!' This was fame; and day by day he played more famously because of it.

"Everyone conceded the superiority of Tom Briggs! All minstrel managers endeavored to secure him, and it is the misfortune of us here that he was forced to leave the band for the cemetery in the first week of his arrival on these shores.

"He possessed a kind and gentle spirit, he was shy, modest and reserved, and free from the hard habits which characterize many of his class.

"Elegance was his 'natural gait,' and I verily believe his comrades took as much pride as himself in his show kids; and perhaps felt that

> they were in some way associated with the dignity of the band. Certain it is, that his unassuming excellence had made a deep impression on their minds, and when he was lowered out of sight, many a tear dropped silently into the fresh sand that laid ready to be heaped into his grave!
>
> "The evening performance that succeeded his ceremony was a dutiful one. Friend Briggs speaking: 'He was different from most players. They seldom take any pride in their business, and are generally satisfied with any cheap instrument they can get; but Tom was very particular; he never stood upon the price of a banjo, and when he got a good one he was always studying some way to ornament and improve it. He had a light one and a heavy one for different kinds of work, and he played so strong that he had to get a piece of steel made for the end of his finger, as a sort of shield, like, to prevent his tearing off his nail. He was very fond of playing the heavy one.'"

THE SAGA OF EPH HORN

In this debacle of the Christy troupe there was more than one hint of personal crisis, more than one personality thrust towards the future of California theatricals. Among the few who elected to remain on the gold coast was Eph Horn. But certain qualities of character made his decision seem natural, rather than forced. Even as a boy Horn had evinced a decided relish for adventure. Born in Philadelphia in 1818, he had run away from home while still quite young and joined company with a New York "sporting fellow" named Phil Bush. For several months they traveled about the country; then Bush, tiring of the lad, abandoned him somewhere in the Middle West, and manifesting an odd resourcefulness the latter managed to become a cabin boy on a stern-wheeler which plied

E P H H O R N

1818 - 1877

FAMOUS COMEDIAN AND END MAN

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

the Ohio River. During these travels, Horn affirmed, he encountered many of the characters later to be revived in his impersonations.

His first contact with the stage he gained through a sister, the wife of a tenor engaged at the old Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia. Before long he began appearing in juvenile parts, one of them being The Rat in an operetta adapted from the fairy tale Cinderella. Meeting Miss Mary Ann Lee, a petite danseuse engaged in child fairy roles, Eph Horn first formed a liking for the theatre. But soon his interest dwindled. He saw little hope of advancement; he became ashamed of his profession and looked about in search of some trade he could learn.

He worked as a lamp maker, an engraver, a jockey, traveling all the while. Once a horse threw and severely injured him. It was during his period of convalescence that he first witnessed a minstrel show. On returning to Philadelphia he found Ethiopian troupes everywhere. The fever proved contagious. At the United States Hotel the boy rummaged through a barrel of beef bones, selected a suitable pair, paid the cook 50 cents for them and took up minstrelsy in earnest. It is said that by faithful practice he annoyed all within hearing to the point of frenzy.

But his initial efforts to obtain an engagement were in vain; so he started traveling again, going to Boston and Halifax with one Dr. Collier, magnetist and lecturer on

biology. The next year, when his brother organized a minstrel company, Eph Horn was engaged "to rattle the bones." After a brief tour of Pennsylvania they played for two years at Temperance Hall, Philadelphia; then, as their popularity increased, removed to the Chestnut Street Theatre and called themselves the Virginia Serenaders. Eph Horn appeared to be a favorite in the company which in turn was favored over every competitive troupe that came to Philadelphia, including Dumbolton's Ethiopian Serenaders, Christy's Minstrels, the Sable Harmonists, the Congo Melodists, Kinkle's Nightingales and Campbell's Minstrels.

When their lease expired Eph Horn, together with Rumsey and Clark of Campbell's Minstrels, J. Farrel of the Sable Harmonists, and two performers from Dumbolton's Serenaders, began a tour of the South, playing at Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, and Charleston. An epidemic had broken out in Charleston previous to their arrival, but they managed to attract profitable houses until the epidemic and bad weather rendered a continuance of the engagement impossible. After a successful tour of the state of Georgia they returned to Philadelphia. E. P. Christy was there and he at once engaged Horn, "on trial," for three weeks at Michell's Olympic Theatre in New York. This engagement, which proved that Horn had "arrived," led to an extended stay in the Metropolis and later obtained for him the San Francisco engagement under Tom Briggs.

ADVENTURERS IN CALIFORNIA

Like the other members of Christy's troupe, Eph Horn could have returned to New York where he would have been assured of lucrative and extensive engagements. On the other hand, he was sure of nothing in California! His funds had been depleted; Christy owed him money which it was impossible to collect without resorting to litigation. Although he was now thirty-one, something of his boyhood spirit still prevailed. In California he perceived adventurous opportunities which did not exist in the East. Therefore he chose to remain, and thus became one of that vital group who contributed so much to San Francisco minstrelsy, whose gusto has been exemplified in the words of "Old Dan Tucker," a prime favorite since the days of '49:

I come to town de udder night,
I hear de noise an saw de fight,
De watchman was a runnin roun,
Cryin Ole Dan Tucker's come to town,

Gran' Chorus

So get out de way!
Get out de way! Get out de way,
Ole Dan Tucker!
You're too late to come to supper.

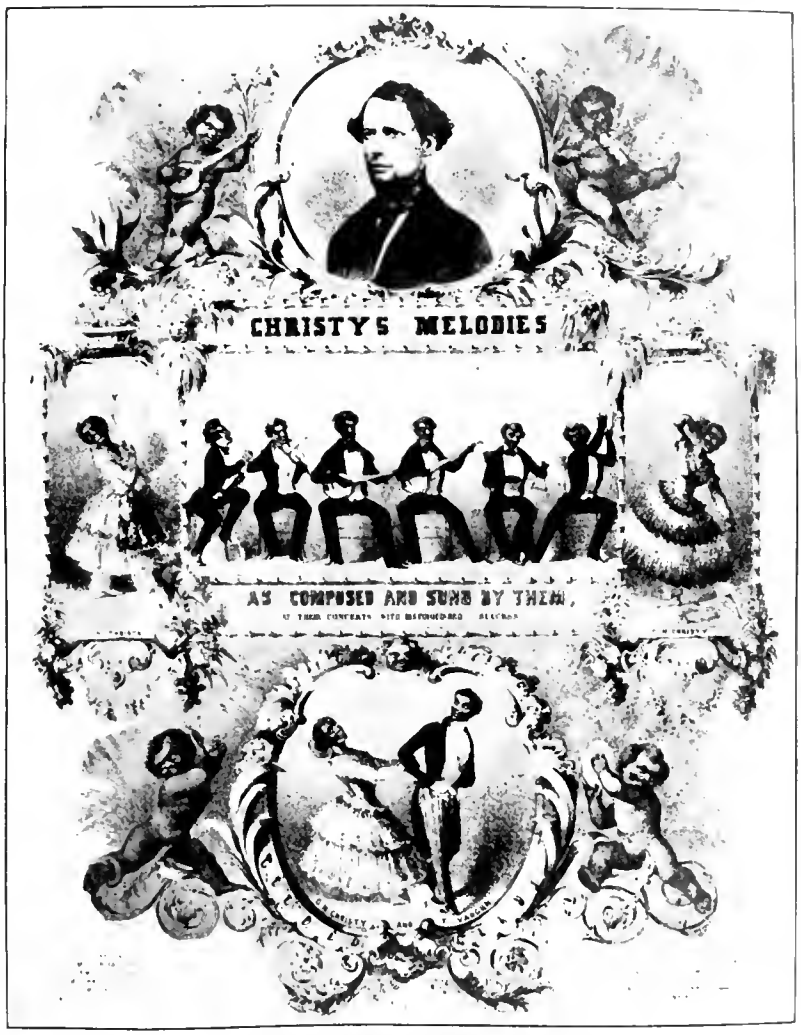
Tucker is a nice old man,
He use to ride our darby ram;
He sent him whizzen down de hill,
If he hadn't got up he'd lay dar still.

Here's my razor in good order
Magnum bonum, jis hab bought er;
Sheep shell oats, Tucker shell de corn,
I'll shabe you soon as de water gets warm.

Ole Dan Tucker an I got drunk,
He fell in de fire an kick up a chunk,
De charcoal got inside he shoe.
Lor bless you honey how de ashes flew.

Down de road foremost de stump,
Massa make me work de pump;
I pump so hard I broke de sucker,
Dar was work for ole Dan Tucker.

CHRISTY'S MELODIES



EDWIN P. CHRISTY HIMSELF
PRESIDING OVER HIS IDEALIZED TROUPERS

REPRODUCED FROM "GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED!"

PART 4.

MINSTRELSY -- 1850 - 1860

In San Francisco even minstrel men found plenty of chances for innovations. Although the traditional form of their shows was well fixed, within that form certain inventive troupers developed a new technique. It became the fashion in Christy-Backus performances to present in the first part the so-called Northern, or "dandy" Negroes. Not until the second part did they introduce the plantation Negroes dressed in wretched, tattered clothing; then followed a burlesque of some current play or operetta.

> "The minstrel show opened at 7:30," writes Pauline Jacobson in the San Francisco Bulletin, July 21, 1917. "When the curtain was drawn, men in blackface stood behind their chairs. In the early period the number of performers was invariably seven, later there were nine and, finally, ten. William Crane said that there were never thirteen.
>
> "In the 'latter day period' the regular theatre musicians in blackface swelled the band of the First Part, sitting behind the performers. In the second part they wore whiteface and played in the pit. In early minstrel shows the only songs sung were those definitely associated with the negro, such as those of Stephen Foster.

> Later, sentimental and popular songs, war songs and selections from operas were offered. The performers sang individually and all joined in the chorus which was sung at the end of each verse. It was sung twice as a finale, the last time drifting off to a whisper.
>
> "Part I was usually a doleful affair given over to songs concerning untimely deaths of lovely sweethearts, mournful willows, deep sad rivers, dark cypresses, and desolate graves--also much loss of and grief for mothers. There was, however, sometimes a comic song and after each ballad the interlocutor, middle man and end men had a gag-filled conversation to carry on.
>
> "In San Francisco the minstrel audience went to the show every night and the gags had to be amusing and not used too often. The gags of the First Part were double gags (between two end men, Bones or Tambourine) or single gags by Bones or Tambo. The double gags came after the first song and the single gags were after those that followed."

Negro dandies, however elaborately costumed elsewhere, appeared almost fantastic when viewed at the San Francisco Hall. They wore evening clothes, the end men prominently distinguished by white, frilled shirts. Everybody displayed diamond studs and stickpins; heavy gold watch chains were draped across waistcoats; a multitude of rings sparkled on the musicians' fingers. Such opulence was indicative of the time and place. In its own sphere it matched the elegance continuously evident in Portsmouth Square, as the performances themselves formed a counterpart of everyday pedestrian histrionics. An advertisement published in the Daily Herald, July 1, 1855, shows something of the repertoire on which the popularity of these minstrels at Maguire's theatre was based:

"This Sunday evening--July 1st, the entire troupe will appear in Songs, Duets, Glees, Trios, Quartettes, Choruses, New Scenes and Stage Business. The first night of the laughable burlesque of Domino Noir, or The Masquerade.

Jeems A-Long Joseph, a colored literary taking everything in a literal sense . . . . .John Smith
Jonathan Slick, a genuine Down-easter . . . .Jerry Bryant
Uncle Tom, an opulent pawnbroker . . . . . E. R. Earle
Mungo, a colored domestic. . . . . Mike Mitchell
Hairbrain, on the 2.40 principle . . . . . .S. C. Campbell
Belinda, a love-sick colored girl fond of music, singing, plays, etc. . . . . .N. Lothian
Sel Hartshorn, a servant of Belinda. . . . W. D. Corrister

The last scene will conclude with Actors in a Quandary, or Noisy and Barbarous Amusements.

Hamlet . . . . . .Lady Macbeth
Mose in California . . . . . .Bleeding Nun
Irish Woman. . . . . Othello

Incidental to the burlesque, Duet, "Old King Crow," "Polka Quadrille," the finale to "Domino Noir." A perpetual feast of nectared sweets, where no crude surfeit reigns.

Oh, Hush! or The Virginia Cupids
A Burlesque

Gumbo Cuff . . . . . .Eph Horn
Pete Williams. . . . . A. Morgan
Sam Johnson. . . . . .John Smith
Dinah Rose . . . . . .Jerry Bryant
Jim Saddleboys . . . . . .Mike Mitchell"

VARIATIONS OF OPERA

The Herald, July 7, 1855 again referred to Bryant's troupe, announcing a repetition of their burlesque Oh, Hush, which was based on one of the operas popularized by Piscaccianti. This piece, replete with characteristic plantation scenes, could not fail in its appeal. It was repeated many

times, always accompanied by variations, new dances, humor, original songs. Nevertheless other burlesques supplanted it on subsequent bills. Continuously, through summer, autumn, winter and spring, spectators at the San Francisco Hall witnessed such a variety of entertainment that even the newspapers found difficulty in reporting it. There were Plantation Reminiscences, Holiday Sports, Old Bob Ridley, with festive dances in character, Hungry Brothers, Child in the Regiment, a burlesque of the opera Ernani (in which Campbell distinguished himself by "a most extraordinary vocal feat"), a burlesque of the opera Norma (in which Eph Horn played the role Bologna), Domino Noir and innumerable other burlesques, farces, comedies -- all provided with incidental arrangements of the several operatic scores represented, with Negro ballads, dances, jokes, interspersed throughout.

BRYANT'S BLACKFACE CORPS

Scores of press notices appeared, but the record thus formed is fragmentary and sometimes confusing. Bryant's company of lusty blackface players acquired the title San Francisco Minstrels, probably due to the fact that they were established at the San Francisco Hall. Yet they, no more than Donnelly's group, had become legitimate possessors of the name later associated with Birch, Wambold, and Backus, as is proven by frequent references to them under their original distinction, the Christy-Backus Minstrels. Despite nominal confusions of this kind, some of the individual minstrels

were associated with both ventures and one must therefore conclude that Jerry Bryant, perhaps inadvertently, had gathered together a nucleus from which the celebrated trio built their organization in 1864. In any event constant changes in personnel occurred during the whole prelude of minstrelsy and throughout its heyday. Organization of a troupe would no sooner be accomplished than reorganization followed in its wake: troupes were always shifting from one showhouse to another, wandering away on long tours into the mining region, returning to the city. The movement was composed of multiple and complex patterns which it is difficult, if not impossible, to follow. But of Maguire's participation in its largest, most significant phases there can be no doubt. Even while the Christy-Backus Minstrels, enthroned at the San Francisco Hall, were riding a high tide of popularity, the monarch of impresarios planned yet other schemes of heroic magnitude. He knew what was wanted-- talent, particularly minstrel talent --since he visualized, traveling under his aegis, a number of road shows besides the companies maintained at home. Therefore he dispatched scouts to the East where talent abounded.

LOTTA CRABTREE, MINSTREL

Meanwhile, in '56 a host of minstrels had drifted into San Francisco, augmenting the number of those already there. With the late arrivals, towards autumn, came Mrs.

Crabtree, eager to secure an engagement for Lotta,* who had just concluded a successful tour of Sonoma Valley. The scene into which they stepped was one of reverberating mirth. Most of the theatres resounded to the thrum of the banjo, the clatter of bones, the interchange of blackface comedians. "Ham Fat Man" echoed in the streets, in Portsmouth Plaza, on Long Wharf. It was like a signal announcing the advent of some of the greatest figures in minstrelsy. Billy Birch had arrived, along with Bernard, several of the Buckley brothers, at least one of the Christys and Coes. Charles Backus had returned with a corps of minstrel troupers from the mines. These were sturdy, compelling, noisy players, versatile in impersonation, adept in burlesque. Also a populous and exuberant crowd of miners had streamed into town. They eagerly responded to such expansive entertainment, with its music of wide variety, plaintive, wild or gay, its vital dancing, its funny burlesque, its topical dialogue.

MAGUIRE'S DISINTEREST

Lotta Crabtree, both in fact and intention, was hardly more than a minstrel performer herself during these years. She had learned from a member of the Backus troupe, encountered somewhere in the Sierra, how to manipulate the banjo; she was an accomplished singer, a skilled dancer at the age of six. Once or twice she had applied burnt cork

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* See Monograph on Lotta Crabtree, Vol. VI, this series.

with encouraging success. Yet Mrs. Crabtree felt terrified at the theatrical appearances which now confronted them. The pandemonium of minstrelsy became like a nightmare to her as she scanned the theatres, hoping to find a place for Lotta. She regarded every company with disfavor, approached and retreated from a half dozen doors, then, reluctantly, sought out Maguire, the incommunicative. Everyone else in the profession, unless bitterly hostile, had done likewise. But Maguire had nothing to worry about. He was satisfied with his group at San Francisco Hall, he was toying with magnificent visions, he was awaiting reports from his scouts. Child stars, whether minstrel or actors, meant nothing to him. In polite but no uncertain terms he sent Mrs. Crabtree away and Lotta's mother was obliged to seek an opening for her child in lesser houses and finally in obscure auction halls along the bay. However, Lotta's engagements in these negligible, often drab establishments extended and paralleled, like the undercurrent of a river, the dominant business practiced by men minstrels in the theatres. Moreover the interlude marked progress for this amazing child, brought her at last to the time when she would be precipitated onto the boards with the most accomplished minstrels in California.

FEMALES IN BLACKFACE

By spring of the year 1857 minstrel shows had assumed enormous proportions and acquired characteristics heretofore unknown even on the Atlantic Seaboard. Most important,

perhaps, was the fact that a woman had received distinction as an exponent of blackface, first participating with Backus Minstrels as Norma in burlesque of the opera by that title. This may have been another "scoop" for Maguire, since she appeared at his theatre during the summer of 1855, again in 1856 and 1857. Minstrelsy, it had been conceded, was a man's game. If there were female parts in the repertoire they were taken by wench* players, of whom there were many notable ones on the New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago stages. The introduction of Mrs. Julia Collins into the Backus cast became therefore something of an advent and received notice from the press and enthusiastic acclaim from audiences.

> "Mrs. Julia Collins," stated the Daily Herald, Aug. 11, 1855, "takes her first benefit at the (San Francisco) Hall this evening. Mrs. Collins has succeeded beyond all expectations in adapting herself to the peculiarities of negro delineation--a line of character never before attempted by a female. Her accomplishments as an actress and vocalist lose nothing of attraction by the disguise of her person. The burlesque on the opera of The Bohemian Girl, which was received last night with torrents of applause, will be repeated on the occasion, with other performances."

FESTIVAL

Minstrel troupes began good-humoredly to vie with one another in the matter of innovation. While the San Francisco Hall enjoyed its long-lived reputation as the amusement center of the city and perhaps held the record for largest attendance over a period, other houses featuring minstrelsy did not suffer. Probably the first "jam session" (to borrow

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* A man playing a blackface female part.

a colloquialism of today) occurred at the Metropolitan Theatre in August of 1857 when Jerry Bryant and his blackface corps presented The Minstrels' Festival. People crowded into the theatre long before the curtain rose -- seats, aisles, vestibule, every available inch of space into which a human being could fit, being completely occupied. Applicants for tickets formed a line that extended several hundred yards along the street. When the box office had been sold out, countless disappointed would-be spectators had to be turned away. "It would have been a physical impossibility," according to one newspaperman, "to crowd more into the compass of the theatre."

The performance justified such large expectations. Jerry Bryant's imitation of local actors, the jokes of Bones and Tambo, the plantation music and songs (which would be described today as "real hot Southern music,") kept the house in a continuous uproar; and many a person went home with "aching sides," only to burst out with fresh laughter as some humorous memory overtook him.

MINSTRELSY HEY-DAY BEGINS

Both the Union and American Theatres had been given over to minstrelsy during the latter part of '56 and early '57. Having withdrawn from the Christy-Backus Minstrels, Eph Horn had formed a company of his own, called Eph Horn's Serenaders. They played at the American Theatre, sharing honors with another group, the California Minstrels, at the

Union. Other forms of entertainment received little support, since four of the most prominent showhouses in the city were now almost exclusively devoted to minstrel shows. Women made a large part of the audience, attracted perhaps by the sounds of catch music which could be heard outside in the streets. People who could not crowd into the theatres attended such blackface performances as they could find in lesser places of amusement. Profits were enormous, but probably accrued nowhere as consistently as at the San Francisco Hall. Maguire's theatre still remained the most popular. The music and witticism offered there, in addition to being original, were highly local in context. Innovation after innovation was introduced; first-class entertainers were constantly being brought from the East, among them Neil Bryant, an accordionist, and the celebrated trio Birch, Hooley and Wells. In a sense, the basis had been established for minstrelsy's Western hey-day.

SAGA OF JOHNNY DE ANGELIS

Individual destinies had contributed much to this striking trend in theatricals which was to influence the history of California for nearly half a century. One of the most significant as well as the most native personalities of the minstrel stage was Johnny de Angelis, who arrived in San Francisco prior to the gold rush. His saga, like the tale of minstrelsy itself, is one of romantic adventure, of travel and vicissitude.

Johnny's father, Benedict de Angelis, came to the United States with his brothers Hyacinthe and Joseph in 1831, from Corsica, where the three are said to have been soldiers, neighbors of Napoleon, and to have served in many battles during the time of the French Republic and First Empire. Although Hyacinthe and Joseph were content to settle in Brooklyn, Benedict, the tempestuous one, married an English girl, Miss Backhouse, and the couple moved to Philadelphia where Johnny de Angelis was born circa 1832.

Johnny's parents, however, shortly afterward died and the lad went to live with Captain Backhouse, his mother's brother, who owned and sailed a small sloop in the West Indies trade. When word reached the East that California had been seized by the United States, Captain Backhouse perceived an opportunity for more profitable trade; he would sell merchandise on the new frontier. Johnny, then about sixteen, persuaded the captain to take him along, and the two mariners sailed into San Francisco Bay January 24, 1848, after a long tiresome voyage around Cape Horn.

Life took on a different complexion at once. The little waterside community in which Johnny found himself seethed with excitement. Gold had been discovered in a millrace northeast of Sacramento and the gold fever permeated everybody. Young De Angelis, of course, immediately caught the contagion. Come what might, he determined not to accompany Backhouse on the return journey and concealed himself as

the sloop made ready to weigh anchor. After a few days' futile search, the captain had no alternative than to leave without him, nor did he see his nephew again for twenty-five years.

Performing odd jobs, the boy wandered about San Francisco and through the mining camps. Undoubtedly he joined the mad scramble for riches, but probably did not find enough gold, if any at all, to sustain his interest in that pursuit. Next he became a pony express rider in the employ of Adams and Company, bankers who operated a mail service similar to that of Wells Fargo before the establishment of regular government service. He is reputed to have been "one of the really fast riders," covering 20 miles in 55 minutes on one occasion, 64 miles in 2 hours on another.

Johnny de Angelis became a minstrel through his association with Mart Taylor, peripatetic songmaster, whom he had encountered in the Sierra. After a more or less vigorous training at several interior settlements, he went to San Francisco, joined a company at one of the theatres and soon rose to prominence, "a pert youngster growing up with the country." Johnny's son, Jefferson de Angelis, wrote of his father in A Vagabond Trouper:

> "He settled into the life of the community. He met Grant and Sherman when they were in the city during the '50s. As a member of the Vigilance Committee of 1856, he witnessed the hangings of the murderers, Casey and Cora, and later of Hetherington and Brace at Fort Gunnybags. He joined a volunteer fire company.

> Fire companies in those days were really clubs. After several years' service, Johnny received an elaborate certificate of exemption from further fire service in 1863. It is a huge diploma with a wide and elaborately copper-engraved border, picturing fire scenes and allegorical figures, including one of a bearded genius who is about to extinguish the flames of Hades by pouring water on them from a large jar, greatly to the discomfiture of the General Manager of the Underworld."

At nineteen, De Angelis secretly married a young Miss Loudenschlager, aged fifteen. The girl's grandmother guardian, an Irishwoman, had been known at New Orleans as a noted rebel, yet she strenuously opposed the marriage until Jefferson de Angelis was born. Advent of the child, however, ultimately reconciled the old lady to what she considered the inevitable; and thereafter Johnny, his wife, and Jefferson de Angelis lived amicably with Grandmother Loudenschlager Green, her second husband, and his three sons, the arrangement being called "a jovial hurly-burly."

> "Real clubs had not yet arrived," writes Jefferson again in his Vagabond Trouper, "and the saloon, like the few halls in this declassé San Francisco of those rollicking days, was a substitute for them in which all classes, from millionaire to mendicant, met and fraternized or made business deals. I visited many of them with my father who took me everywhere with him even when I was a toddler in dresses.
>
> "I used to sit at the ends of bars, drinking a rather wonderful sounding mixture called Cream Charlotte or lemonade. Once, in October of 1868, while I was walking with my father there was an earthquake shock, causing a building across the street to split open and crumble, throwing debris about our feet. Another time, I remember, the San Francisco Minstrels had been asked to become guests of honor at the opening of a new 'drinking emporium,' the

> Merchant's Exchange Saloon, an expensive place boasting heavy crystal chandeliers, a great mirror, and a solid mahogany bar, beautifully carved. They arrived about midnight to find a table heavy with food, flowers, fruits, jellies, game. An enormous turkey was the centerpiece.
>
> "Johnny de Angelis loved a joke more than most San Francisco gentlemen of the period. Next day would be Fourth of July. In his pockets were my two cannon firecrackers. One of these he lighted and put in the turkey while the company were going to the bar for a cocktail. A toast was being drunk when the explosion occurred; turkey and dressing shot into the air and flattened on mirror and ceiling. Thin, shining glasses and China cracked on the white tablecloth. Minstrels dropped their drinks or swallowed them the wrong way. No doubt the proprietor found it less easy to laugh than did the company. The incident was talked of for years."

SOMETHING ABOUT BACKUS AND BILLY BIRCH

Like Johnny de Angelis, nearly all the minstrel men of that period had been wanderers and most of them had lived checkered careers before coming to the Coast. Charles Backus, born in New York City, 1851, had traveled to almost every theatrical center in the East, Middle West, and South; and previous to his second San Francisco appearance in July 1856, had enjoyed triumph after triumph in Australia. Later he abandoned minstrelsy to become a blackface clown with Burton's circus in the British colonies. But, resuming his first profession, he organized a small troupe and proceeded to England by way of the Red Sea, playing at Calcutta, Bombay, Ceylon, Alexandria, Cairo; thence down the Mediterranean to Gibraltar and Malta. After several engagements in London he returned to the United States and ultimately to San Francisco,

for a third appearance.

William Birch, better known as Billy, born in Utica, New York, February 26, 1831, had made his start in the small town of New Hartford, N. Y. in 1844. From that time he came to be recognized as the ne plus ultra of "bone men." He was the celebrated Bones of Raymond's Minstrels and the Virginia Serenaders at Philadelphia. He made his New York debut in 1850 with Fellow's Minstrels at 444 Broadway, where he remained a year. The next season he traveled with Eph Horn, Wells, and Briggs. In New York again, he joined Wood and Christy's Minstrels. Finally he formed a co-partnership with Dick Slater and Sam Wells and came to California.

In 1856, while returning to the East, he was shipwrecked off the coast of South Carolina. The Norwegian bark, Ellen, found him floating days later on a piece of wreckage, exhausted and near starvation. From Norfolk, Virginia, where he was brought ashore, he went to Baltimore, doing Negro specialties between acts until he could secure an engagement at New York, the mecca of all theatrical pilgrims then as well as today. But his wanderings continued -- through the East and South, northward into Canada, and at last, in 1859, back to California.

MINSTRELS IN SAN FRANCISCO AND THE INTERIOR

Maguire had been singularly fortunate in casting his lot with a trend that was destined to endure. Although the name of his theatre had now been changed to Maguire's

Opera House, the minstrels remained its current attraction. Moreover they were now established in an atmosphere of hitherto unsurpassed elegance, in which the banjo, bones, tambourine, the jokes, comic dialogue, Negro songs, had begun to achieve complete local approbation. And more important still was the fact that a nucleus had been formed out of which later was to grow that famous company known as the San Francisco Minstrels.

During the years 1857 to 1859 minstrelsy pervaded not only San Francisco but the entire surrounding region. A troupe called Zorer's Ethiopian Minstrels had begun a tour of the camps, playing a special Fourth of July performance at Petaluma. The house was so jammed with excited spectators its floors broke through, precipitating them to the ground some twelve feet below; fortunately there were no serious injuries and only a few slight bruises among the whole crowd. Here was an example of the inadequate facilities encountered in most of the outlying settlements; yet scarcely a town was omitted from the itinerary of this and other minstrel troupes.

Upwards of a dozen of them were traveling at once, making their way by wagon, mule, horseback, or stagecoach from San Francisco to Marysville, Grass Valley, Nevada City, and even farther north. Minstrels as a rule were well liked at the camps, their performances vociferously appreciated. But occasionally some untoward incident would start a quarrel, which, like so many quarrels of that day, ended fatally. At

Virginia City a minstrel named Billy Sheppard became involved in such a quarrel with a miner named Ballan and killed him. Court was held on the spot, witnesses called, testimony taken. It was thus proved that Sheppard's act had been not only deliberately provoked, but taken in self-defense. A jury of miners acquitted him. When the company returned to San Francisco, however, there occurred a bitter and vindictive aftermath not at all in accord with the spontaneous justice meted out by the citizens of Virginia City. The Dramatic Chronicle, October 6, 1866, reported the event as follows:

> "Billy Sheppard, Ethiopian minstrel, killed a Mr. Ballan at Virginia City and was acquitted of the murder. His appearance at the reopening performance of Maguire's Academy of Music caused great antagonism among the audience who hooted and called him a murderer. A brick was thrown at him. Policemen finally restored order."

In the absence of further consequences the matter was dropped.

MINOR HOUSES

Evidence indicates a score of flourishing minstrel houses during these years, in addition to legitimate theatres. The Russ Gardens, Hayes Park, The Willows, offered variety entertainment, including minstrelsy. Gilbert's Melodeon presented Lew Rattler's Ethiopians, with a blackface band composed of the popular musicians: Frank Hussey, Johnson, Rattler, Faxon, Bernard and the Hamiltons. The Bella Union had now been given over to Negro songsters and burlesque artists. Even on Long Wharf there was a concession where blackface acts were performed daily. But Maguire's

Opera House, like his San Francisco Hall formerly, advertised companies unexcelled. Backus, Wells, Coes, Mitchell, Wambold and Birch played there. Special one-act plays never before seen in the West had their premier there. One, called The Magician, had received favorable comment in New York; it was succeeded by Turned Head or The Desperate Lunatic, which achieved an even greater success; and by The King of Haiti, which nearly brought the house down.

"BRUDDER BONES"

In many respects Billy Birch was the mainstay of this group above mentioned. Long practice had made him a versatile mimic. He spoke with a slow drawl which managed to convey the impression of limitless overtones; and when he laughed, softly, musically, the audience always laughed with him. Often he was compared with Backus, regarded as the nearest competitor genius whose wide mouth opened from ear to ear whenever he laughed or chuckled; who spoke with rapid-fire enunciation; who was "full of ginger." But Birch was an end man with few superiors, with equals fewer still. Affectionately, they called him "Brudder Bones" in San Francisco. Some idea of his enormous popularity may be gathered from an item appearing in The Wide West, June 21, 1857:

> "Maguire's Opera House--Notwithstanding the rumor which was afloat on the arrival of the last mail steamer, that 'Brudder Bones' Birch of this establishment had received news of a windfall, he continues to amuse the crowds who flock to this favorite house. In addition to

> the unusual attraction Messrs. Burbank and Mitchell, the celebrated dancers, and Hugh Donnelly, the celebrated accordionist, have appeared during the past week."

Seven years later, in 1864, showing how unfounded the rumor, the San Francisco Minstrels were organized. They comprised most of the group who had been playing continuously at Maguire's Opera House with Birch, Wambold, and Backus its chief exponents. For the next few seasons they dominated theatricals in the city. Whether Tom Maguire had a hand in the organization is not known; certainly, for part of the time at least, the San Francisco Minstrels were under his management, appearing not only at the Opera House but also at the Melodeon, Eureka Hall and elsewhere. During the decade 1860 to 1870, there were always four or five permanent blackface companies established in San Francisco, besides those which drifted in, played for a while, perhaps with changes in personnel, then departed for the interior or a tour of Australia. Ben Cotton and Joe Murphy had come to the Coast. They each had troupes of their own, although they appeared intermittently with various combinations, as did Wellington, Hussey, Talbot, and Jerry Bryant, who had returned from New York. Johnny de Angelis, since his first days at the Bella Union, had performed in several legitimate theatres, one of his notable impersonations being that of Uncle Toby in the farce, Sculptor's Studio.

VARIETY APES THE "CAKEWALK"

Variety shows at the lesser houses bore a close

similarity to the tradition established by minstrel men everywhere. They usually started at 8:00 p. m. and closed about midnight. The first part ended with a walk-around; then came an olio, presented before a curtain depicting some street scene, while the stage was being prepared for the farce or burlesque of the second part. Most often, as with larger troupes, the dramatics were original -- written by some member of the cast. The bills were changed each week. It was considered obligatory to each player that he make himself popular on the street as well as on the stage.

In the walk-around at Gilbert's Melodeon a semicircle of blackfaces would break into spirited song:

> "Sun's goin' down: take a little rest,
> Wake, hi, Daddy, in de mornin'."

after which the entire group would "cake-walk" before breaking into a dance. Each show would of course begin with the sonorous words, "Gentlemen, be seated!" uttered by the interlocutor. Among the famous individuals who appeared at the Melodeon during its ambitious lifetime were Joe Murphy and Lew Rattler. The last named was celebrated for his burlesque of Shakespeare, his imitations of Edwin Forrest, rendered appealingly in the disguise of burnt cork.

The whole aspect of minstrelsy had now acquired an unprecedented brilliance. It had been brought to the level of frontier life, an entertainment medium which, though not endemic itself, had acquired endemic characteristics at the hands of experts who invariably appealed to this volatile

public and influenced even their private lives. Certainly competition was severe. In the space of a few years there had gathered in this one community most of the minstrels whose names had been written with capitals denoting first rank. Many of them, indeed, had been celebrated in continental Europe, in London, as well as in the outposts of British Empire. Thus minstrel characters achieved a free design; the vagabond, the singing wanderer was afoot in California. If the miners themselves were wont to improvise songs, living vagrant lives, how could they resist the vagrant ballad-singing, the robust dancing of these men in humorous black-face?

With the growth of minstrelsy, changes in the theatre became ruthless. Minor actors had been swept into obscurity. Skillful players of the legitimate stage who had been on the Coast for years -- Junius Booth, Sophie Edwin, Sue Robinson, even Mrs. Judah -- were now taking unimportant roles in performances whose significance was negligible. Biscaccianti,* the first qualified opera star to appear in San Francisco, now sang in variety halls, saluted by sailors, her voice and personality dissipated in one small melodeon after another. Maguire, who gambled where he thought profits sure, still brought an occasional opera company out from the East (opera and minstrelsy had at first flourished together), but

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* See Monograph on History of Opera in San Francisco, Vol. VII, pp. 19-30, this series.

in the main that conspicuous influx of singers and actors which had electrified theatricals during the fifties had ceased. Joseph Jefferson had appeared in 1861, a year of signal failure, since theatre-goers were still uninterested in drama.

Western audiences were homogeneous; they made known their desires with unmistakable fervor, often with violence. Variety bills had once pleased them; now variety had been absorbed in the minstrel show. The standard formula of first and second parts, which allowed so much satirical innovation, combined with the olio and concluding burlesque, had grown in favor. Often Irish sketches, Yankee dialogues, and operatic scenes were introduced against a bold background of song and dance.

LOTTA CRABTREE AGAIN

In the early '60s, by one of those unexpected strokes of fortune so frequently encountered on the gold coast, Lotta Crabtree* had joined the ranks of true minstrelsy. She had returned with her mother from a tour of the southern mines and Maguire, despite his former disinterest and one incident which might have prejudiced him against the child, now took her into the minstrel company at his Opera House and also engaged her at the Eureka Theatre, which was under his control if not complete ownership. She played at the What

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* See Monograph on Lotta Crabtree, Vol. VI, of this series.

Cheer, the Bella Union, Gilbert's, the Apollo, the Willows. Everywhere an exacting public thronged to see her, for she gave them that odd diversity in performance which, more than anything else, they wanted. Her singing, dancing, mimicry, often though not always in blackface, compared favorably with the exuberant robustness of men minstrels. Not only could she perform Topsy, she could act the Irish tomboy, the cockney, and do a Highland fling. She had mastered the banjo, was an accomplished player on the snare-drum; she joined vocally in the medley of the walk-around, and danced to the rattle of the bones.

Many times she appeared on the same bill with versatile Billy Birch when he presented The Gay Gambolier, equaling his bone-rattling with her banjo-strumming. Young Ned Harrigan, who often turned up from nowhere, accompanied her in duets both at Gilbert's and the Bella Union. At the What Cheer she became the chief attraction, sharing honors with Johnny de Angelis. In the company at Maguire's Opera House she was constantly associated in star performances with such celebrities as Ben Cotton, W. H. Bernard (one of the great interlocutors of the mid-century) and Charles Backus. Indeed there were scarcely any minstrels of stature with whom she did not play. Then, too, she vied with the unknowns, set the pace and led them. In fine Lotta was in the forefront of that band which precipitated that roistering laughter, projected that emphatic delineation of character, which later were

ascribed to the Bowery of New York, but actually originated in the small melodeons of San Francisco.

INTO THE WASHOE

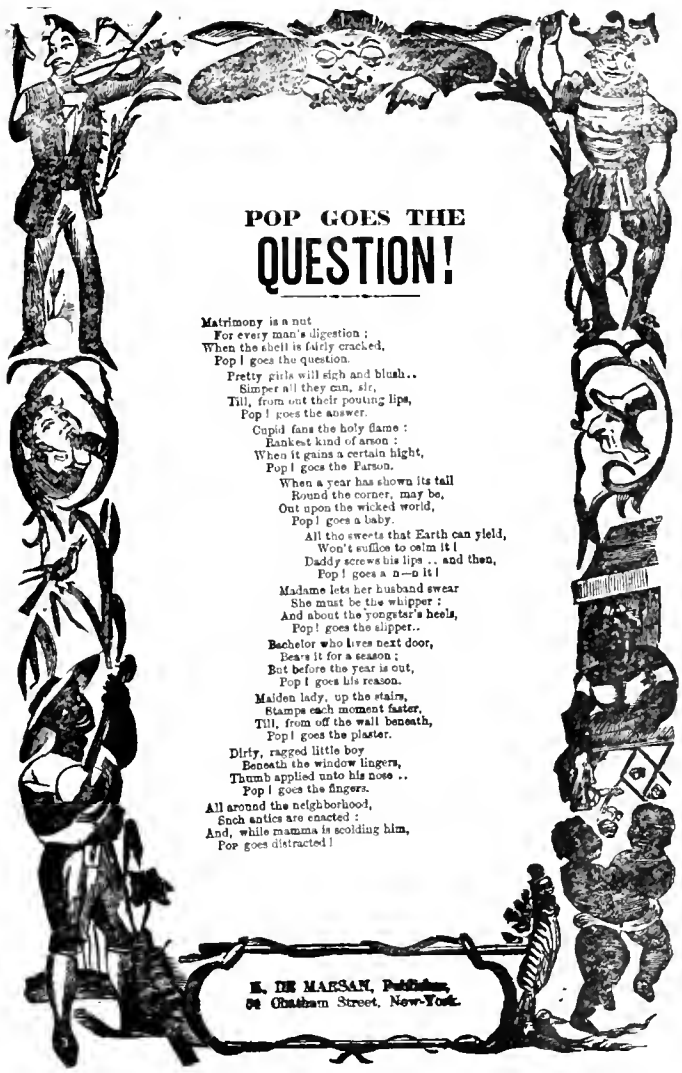
Suddenly, during the late sixties, the minstrel field began to expand. Some of Maguire's plans were coming to fruition and he began sending troupes into the Sierra, into the new fortune-earning camps of the Washoe, which had opened with discovery of large silver and gold deposits across the Nevada line. In these wild, tumultuous, overcrowded camps there arose the same demand for entertainment which had caused the influx of theatrical people during '49. Rewards were enormous for players who could capture the imagination, give release to the throttled inhabitants of the Silver Land, as this region was called.

One of Maguire's traveling companies, under the leadership of Jake Wallace, started from San Francisco in midwinter. They were a genial corps of minstrels, with coach and outrider. Lotta Crabtree; Tom LaFont, a comedian who played the trombone and made it both plaintive and funny; Jake Wallace, an expert with the banjo, tall, lazy, good-humored, his drawl somewhat similar to that of Billy Birch; and Mrs. Crabtree, turned minstrel, playing a quaint instrument called the triangle, singing an occasional song, giving an occasional impersonation: these were the leaders of the troupe.

WIT, BALLAD AND SONG

The company made a wide and profitable circuit of the camps at Washoe, the Sierra, and southern Oregon; then went on to Portland, whence they took a steamer back to San Francisco. Now C. Henry was in town with his popular songs "Jenny Gray" and "Willie, We Have Missed You." William Barker, whose high baritone had recently been heard in New York, was singing "Lizzie Died Tonight," "They Stole My Child Away," "Bonnie Eloise," "Shells of the Ocean," and "Nora McShane." These were sentimental ballads not altogether in the original minstrel tradition, but they had their counterpart at Maguire's Opera House and the Eureka, where the basso profundo, Sam Wells, sang "Old Black Joe" and "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," which in the second part was burlesqued by plantation Negroes as "Locked in the Stable with the Sheep." In her book Fantastic City, Amelia R. Neville remembered Wells, the witty and excellent punster and middleman:

> "We were all going to the minstrels in those days," she writes. "They were the most popular theatrical entertainment of the time, with programs changed weekly. Always I thrilled like a child when the curtain rose to show the line of blackfaces across the stage, and the urbane interlocutor said cautiously: 'Gentlemen, be seated.' Songs and patter followed. I can still hear the sonorous tones of one basso profundo (Sam Wells) going down to their bed in the ocean when he sang 'Rocked in the Cra-dell of the Deep.' Billy Brisk was a favorite end man who chanted a parody on a sentimental war song of which the chorus ran:
>
> 'Farewell, mother, you will never
> See my name among the slain,
> For when I can jump the bounty,
> I'll come back to you again.'"



POP GOES THE

QUESTION!

Matrimony is a nut
For every man's digestion;
When the shell is fairly cracked,
Pop! goes the question.

Pretty girls will sigh and blush..
Simper all they can, sir,
Till, from out their pouting lips,
Pop! goes the answer.

Cupid fans the holy flame:
Rankest kind of arson:
When it gains a certain hight,
Pop! goes the Parson.

When a year has shown its tail
Round the corner, may be,
Out upon the wicked world,
Pop! goes a baby.

All the sweets that Earth can yield,
Won't suffice to calm it!
Daddy screws his lips .. and then,
Pop! goes a n—n it!

Madame lets her husband swear
She must be the whipper:
And about the youngster's heels,
Pop! goes the slipper..

Bachelor who lives next door,
Bears it for a season;
But before the year is out,
Pop! goes his reason.

Maiden lady, up the stairs,
Stamps each moment faster,
Till, from off the wall beneath,
Pop! goes the plaster.

Dirty, ragged little boy
Beneath the window lingers,
Thumb applied unto his nose ..
Pop! goes the fingers.

All around the neighborhood,
Such antics are enacted:
And, while mamma is scolding him,
Pop goes distracted!

H. DE MARSAN, Publisher,
54 Chatham Street, New-York.

A TYPICAL MINSTREL SONG DESIGN

Another member of this troupe had been educated as a lawyer. He was Bernard, "the pioneer middleman," whose extensive vocabulary was unequaled for the purpose of providing "gags." Dave Wambold was the highest paid balladist of his day. He received, for singing one song a night, $600 per week, which was an extremely high rate even at a time of extreme monetary values. "Brother's Fainting at the Door," "Nelly was a Lady," and "Marfa's Wedding Day," were among his better-known elegiac ballads. And Billy Birch never failed to score a triumph with his "Marfa's Wedding Day" (as J. J. Clinton recalls the words), a typically humorous minstrel ballad which offered striking contrast to the foregoing:

On this yoah weddin day.
Marfa Jackson kiss your ma,
   Oola - ila - ila.
Sweetest gal I ever saw:
Yoah fadder's breff,
And yoah mudder's nose,
   Oola - ila - ila.
Don't you sile dem weddin clothes.
It's Marfa's weddin day.

<u>Chorus</u>

Hold yoah breff d'bride am commin
   Down de center, clar de way,
"Get out de way dar, niggers,"
   Whoah, you niggers, don't you hear dat music,
A-blance to your corners, hands all around,
   Marfa's weddin day.

Hang dat smilax on de wall,
   Oola - ila - ila.
Heah dat blessed baby bawl,
Marfa's weddin day.
Marcus Rufus tend dat chile
   Oola - ila - ila.
Whars its fadder all de while,
Marfa's wedding.

Mara Louise, whar yo been,
   Oola - ila - ila.
Cut dat cake wid de berries in;
Marfa's weddin day.
Tell yoah fadder slice dat ham,
   Oola - ila - ila.
Open up det pot of jam,
Marfa's weddin day.

Sal, go poke de hickry fire,
   Oola - ila - ila.
Make dese niggers all prespire,
Marfa's weddin day.
Now go fotch my low-neck shoes,
Got to dance, I can't refuse,
Marfa's weddin day.

In addition to these songs the San Francisco Minstrels had a "Grand Opening Chorus," composed by some members of the troupe, which carried in its swinging rhythm that bold spirit of the West. At the rise of the curtain it was rendered in concert by some fifteen or twenty voices, for not only the blackface circle, but the whole orchestra sang:

Agah! We come, we come!
Oh, clear de track, we come wid a whack;
   Agah!
Look dar! Look whar?
Dat bullgine smoke am flying in air!
In sight ob de ocean,
Wid speed and commotion,
   We come!
O darkies, mind your eye,
We're trabbling now by thunder lightnin,
   All by steam!
Get out, get out to right about!
Aboard a boat; we're now afloat!
   We're off; we're off away.

Full soon de lubly moon will shine
On eyes so bright dey shame de light ob day!
'Tis now upon de ribber's breast
We sail along and sink to rest;
A pleasant dream and soothin sleep,
   While on the deep!

Or if around by snag or storm,
Impending tossed each darky form,

The thought ob heart so true to cheer,
Would rise and drive away each fear;
Then darkies, away, we'll sing tonight;
Then darkies, away, we'll dance tonight,
And bones so madly shall rap-a-tap-tap,
And Lucy shall dance till your heart be entrapt;
We'll dance tonight.

THE FABULOUS GEORGE CHRISTY

But the San Francisco Minstrels, in spite of their tremendous success, remained only a year at Maguire's theatre, then went to New York. Almost coincidental with this event, the world-famous Christy Minstrels, led by none other than George Christy himself, came to Maguire's Opera House, opening about June 6, 1858. In England where several years earlier they had been warmly received, respectfully attended, loudly praised, all burnt-cork shows were now being called "Christy Minstrels" in honor of the lasting impression they had left. In New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and elsewhere in the United States, they were held to be supreme. It was natural enough, therefore, that San Francisco audiences should tax the Opera House to its capacity. The first night may have been a test, for many people came out of curiosity, desiring to judge for themselves whether such fame could be warranted. Expectation had been elevated to the highest plane. Before the curtain rose a solid mass of humanity filled the theatre, blocking aisles, exits, and entrance. One press observer estimated net receipts in the neighborhood of $1200, more than had been taken in at any previous performance since Maguire had launched his venture. "But the success

of the newcomers," he added, "was not equivocal in the least degree."

More than a dozen years had elapsed since Christy's elevation to the top rank, yet his integrity and good sense were such that he had not been spoiled by excessive praise nor overshadowed by ambitious rivals. He belonged to a category known then as "the quiet school of Negro humorists," to which Billy Birch, formerly his pupil, also belonged. Often he was contrasted to "the opposite brood" of roistering burlesquers, although each found its adherents amid the diversity of public tastes. Vain or pretentious impersonators, no matter how excellent in other respects, were seldom tolerated in California, where theatre-goers knew precisely what they wanted and made their demands plain. Had George Christy or any of his troupe been guilty of one of these cardinal offenses, no amount of Metropolitan prestige could have saved the offender from swift banishment.

CHRISTY'S TROUPE

As it was, this group quickly superceded their predecessors, the San Francisco Minstrels. Lew Rattler and Backus, by some inscrutable shift in the pattern, had become members of the Christy organization. They were end men whose humor never failed, and buttressed, as it were, the entire blackface circle which included Campbell, "the best ballad singer on the boards"; Barker and Henry "both sweet tenors"; and Master Eugene, "much the best dancer in crinoline we have

NOTABLES WHO SPECIALIZED IN WENCH PARTS

"EUGENE"
(1858)

"THE ONLY LEON"
(1860)

"RICARDO"

REPRODUCED FROM "MONARCHS OF MINSTRELSY"

ever seen in sable hue." The latter also attracted wild applause with his vocal burlesques. In "The Third Concert," an imitation of various opera airs taken from the leaf of Mme. Lagrange, his act was so novel that years afterward it was remembered in the reminiscences of commentators. Besides these accomplishments Master Eugene "turned about" and acted a wench part, Jenny, the lady's maid, in a riotous version of Stage Struck Barber, which was included on the first night's bill. Mr. Lewis, who sometimes supported Eugene, was scarcely less clever in his personations of wench characters and he could dance with impressionistic abandonment.

Christy's instrumentalists maintained the high standard of his impersonators, vocalists, and men. One of the most skillful flutists in the country, C. Koppitz, directed the orchestra and never failed to offer his solo specialty, with violins, violin-cello, trombone, and banjo joining in the chorus. Coes, as only he knew how, operated on the banjo.

BOX AND COX

George Christy was himself considered one of the "giants," a great character interpreter. During the late '40s, when minstrelsy came into prominence in New York and Philadelphia, he had presented the first "Africanization" of Box and Cox, adapted from an English comedy. The piece had been written in London and had been tried once or twice in America in its original context, with Christy playing the part of Cox opposite S. A. Welles as Box, but after the

revision, both taking the same parts, they had great success with it and later earned it world acclaim as the stock afterpiece of minstrel shows.

After the curtain had descended on their first night's triumph in San Francisco, the Christy Minstrels at a matinee performance given by popular request, June 12, 1858, delighted another packed house composed almost entirely of women and children, who marched to the theatre, through Portsmouth Square, in a grand parade which was only less colorful than the show itself. Once launched, they went merrily on to other hits, following the merry olio with several original burlesques of opera and the burlesque Weffo or The Sensible Monkey. Meanwhile Joe Murphy was added to the troupe. The San Francisco Minstrels were playing long-time engagements before fashionable New York audiences. Lew Rattler's Ethiopians at the Melodeon were presenting shows whose chief feature was "scenes unsurpassed." And in the interior an unknown band of wanderers had commenced entertaining the citizens of a town named Cachoville.

CHAPTER 5.

THE GRAND MANNER

So the second decade of minstrelsy came to its end, with the situation unchanged save in minor aspects, as if in the outlying halls and melodeons mirth had subsided into a quieter, more formalized tempo.

But physical changes had occurred. The far West had now become an empire, linked by a transcontinental railroad to the empire of the East. Expansion had begun on a nation-wide scale. With development of the rich Washoe mines, with better roads and transportation facilities, with speedier communication, there came a huge speculation boom. The pioneer towns had grown up; San Francisco had become their metropolitan center. Gambling in gold slugs, nuggets or dust, an obsession with the miners of '49, was now a paltry pastime not worth serious consideration. Men gambled still, but they gambled on a grand scale -- stocks, corporate securities, strange and often mystifying transactions connected with the big bonanza. One man's fabulous fortune, acquired overnight, precipitated

an equally fabulous bankruptcy on the part of another. At last had come the era of bankers, of mansions, of elegant extravagance.

This situation naturally gave rise to a theatre boom. The slow movement towards palatial "temples of the Muse," which Maguire had forseen, crystalized at this point into its final predestined shape. William C. Ralston, a gambler in modes, built the new California Theatre and acquired a competent stock company with which to people his stage. There can be no doubt that the California Theatre was a departure from everything that had gone before. It looked commodious from the outside; spacious within. Almost no theatre of the time had such a splendid greenroom, such comfortable dressing-rooms, such excellent stage facilities. It was, besides, well designed, with fine exterior arches and a wide lobby around three sides of the building. It had been built to supply a demand for almost fantastic luxury and fastidious tastes. Family boxes, ranged on each side, would accommodate a dozen people; the dress circle had legless chairs with high upholstered backs; pit and dress-circle, probably for the first time, merged one into the other. Vision and acoustics were far in advance of anything hitherto accomplished in those respects.

There was too a look of luxury in the attire, manner and equipage of those who night after night attended not only this but most of the other theatres. They arrived in

gleaming carriages, the women bejeweled, the men decked out in evening clothes now associated with worldliness and "first nights." But it was essentially the same audience which had made itself heard in '49 -- changed only in appearances: the rough nondescript clothes of the miners had given way to broadcloth; calico or gingham to laces, satins, brocades.

Plays were revived, new plays produced, and the drama began an efflorescence. Both stars and productions were to be found in considerable numbers. John McCullough and Lawrence Barrett had come to the Coast. Adelaide Neilson, Southern, John Brougham, Edwin Booth, and Modjeska added glory to an interlude whose solid accomplishment derived from the California stock company, unrivaled in its time. Like the minstrel men, the members of the company were versatile. They could step into almost any part and play it convincingly. Nearly all of them had been stars; some had been managers. With a free hand they broke traditions, for they had been nurtured in a school where indomitable persons had fought their way to control; and this mode they continued. Lotta Crabtree returned and played at the California Theatre; but her style was no longer that of unrelieved minstrelsy, although she had still retained certain features of minstrel technique.

"NO ROSES IN KANSAS"

With such determined competition one might suppose that minstrel shows would have suffered, yet they did not,

save perhaps in minor instances. Many minstrels who had earlier gone back to the East still remained there, but there was already beginning another, if less emphasized, influx from that quarter. David Wambold reappeared in 1874, as did Johnny de Angelis with his son Jefferson and daughter Sallie, both minstrels in their own right. Ben Brown and Al Bernard were also in the company. De Angelis and family started the trek out of sheer nostalgia for San Francisco, and the question of how to get there loomed large in their considerations. Johnny had never practiced thrift; he spent money as fast as he earned it; and now, stranded in Philadelphia after occasional successes, he had not the wherewithal to pay railroad fare even for himself, to say nothing of the son and daughter. Therefore, with Al Brown, he conceived the plan of "working their way back" by presenting shows in various towns through which they must pass en route. Early in '74 they set out on what was to prove a most difficult trip.

As Jefferson de Angelis described it in his Vagabond Trouper, "there were no roses for them in Kansas." The countryside had just been razed by a horde of grasshoppers. The agrarian audiences before whom they played were appreciative but impecunious. Rarely did the troupers receive more than $5 or $10 an evening for their arduous work; sometimes they accepted farm produce in lieu of money as the price of admission.

In nearly every town they were forced to exercise a

high degree of ingenuity in order to maintain themselves. Once, stranded in a country hotel, they persuaded a disgruntled proprietor to lend them funds so that they could proceed. The man complied but sent his son along in the capacity of watchdog and collector. The nineteen-year-old boy, however, became enamoured of a young girl in the company. Not only did he fail in his mission, but decided to join the company and wrote to his father of this intention. The irate father, now considering himself trebly defrauded, sent a sheriff in pursuit of the boy, who after a brief but glamorous experience was taken into custody.

MORE NONSENSE

Johnny de Angelis had always been considered one of the funniest "Ethiopian comedians on the American stage," according to members of the Olympic Theatre company with whom he played before going East. His return to San Francisco, after the long odyssey which had taken him across a continent, was reminiscent of the tremendous farewell tended him August 9, 1866, eight years previously, when Miss Charlotte Crampton appeared in a burlesque of Richard III called Richard Ye Third and Miss Jennie Briggs made her Western debut in a burlesque of Mazeppa, reminding San Francisco theatre-goers of the persuasive talent of Adah Isaacs Menken.* Both performances were considered extraordinary and the occasion itself

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* See Monograph on Adah Isaacs Menken, Vol. V, this series.

represents the second appearance of women minstrels on the Western stage. The beneficiary, in conjunction with Lew Rattler, performed a comic act, The Strolling Players, between the pieces. At its conclusion it is said that he expressed the hope that every one present would cast a vote for him in his campaign to become elected chief of police. He was supposed to have been the independent candidate for this office; but whether it was merely a publicity stunt or otherwise cannot be definitely learned from the available facts.

At any rate this episode had been forgotten by 1874. De Angelis was greeted as a minstrel man returned, and minstrel men were honored above chiefs of police in those days, if one may literally interpret the record. Soon after his arrival De Angelis began playing under Maguire's management at the Standard Theatre and later at Wood's Theatre, Mission and Montgomery streets.

Maguire meantime had brought to California most of the other minstrels whose names have been celebrated beyond their time, and now this impresario's participation in minstrelsy loomed large.

EMERSON AND MAGUIRE

With completion of the new California Theatre and resurrection of the drama, William C. Ralston had not by any means ousted his chief competitor from the field. Maguire had been in theatricals constantly since '49; trends alone could not defeat him. He met this one in characteristic

fashion by giving the public what he knew they still wanted. His Opera House received elegantly dressed patrons as graciously as did the California, and if minstrel productions were less dignified they were certainly not less attractive than the drama.

Chronologically the second most important minstrel event in Western history was the formation in 1870 of an alliance between Billy Emerson and Tom Maguire, out of which came Emerson's California Minstrels. This troupe probably exceeded any local organization of the kind which had ever appeared on the San Francisco stage, not excluding the San Francisco Minstrels whose major fame was gathered in New York. Many recollections of pioneers center on the period associated with Billy Emerson, his contemporaries or those who succeeded him.

Perhaps one of the most notable of these was Joe Murphy. His early career passed in Sacramento where he played the bones and sang in auction houses or such other places of casual entertainment as he could find. Acquiring a considerable reputation, he soon went to Australia, then came to San Francisco in the '60s. One of the old-time theatregoers, E. T. Sawyer, wrote his impressions of the event in the Overland Monthly, 1923:

> "Shortly after his (Murphy's) return to California he became a star performer at the Olympic Theatre. He was accounted the champion bone player of the coast. On the other end, with the tambourine, was Johnny de Angelis, father of Jeff de Angelis, the comedian and comic

opera favorite. Johnny was below the medium height, stocky and full of pep. He and tall Joe Murphy evoked roars of laughter whenever they appeared in the burnt cork travesties which formed part of each olio. Burlesques of popular plays were then in vogue and one of the most mirth-provoking of them was The Stranger, Murphy playing Mrs. Haller and De Angelis, Mr. Haller.

"The burlesque opens with the entrance of Haller, who starts business with the soliloquy: 'It is 16,000 years since I have gazed upon the scenes of my boyhood's early days. Old rummy noosances creep upon me. Me wife, me long sufferin' wife--hark! I hear the sound of fairy footsteps. I will conceal myself behind yon sagebrush.' (Disappears behind wing.) Now enters Joe Murphy as Mrs. Haller. Her shoes are number eleven and she clumps in with a noise that shakes the stage. Haller shows himself, whereupon Mrs. Haller rushes forward, lifts him up, and gives him a bear-like hug. More hugs and then she clutches her long absent husband by the coat collar and swings him around as if he were a bag of feathers. Follows more hugging and more swinging until De Angelis, his tongue hanging out of his mouth and gasping like a fish out of water, piteously exclaims: 'My God, Murphy, are you trying to kill me?'"

VERSATILE IMPERSONATORS

About this time William Horan Lingard and Charles Vivian, English comedians and vocalists, were also playing in San Francisco though not with Emerson's company. They popularized such ballads as "Ten Thousand Miles Away," "Champagne Charley," and "Captain Jinks," besides giving a then rare entertainment known as "quick change variety." Ever alert for something new, Joe Murphy began to imitate their style in his minstrel work and almost at once became pre-eminent in minstrelsy while at the same time he gained experience which made possible his later emergence upon the legitimate stage.

Even before he left the blackface ranks Murphy tried Irish characterization with notable success in a company with Shawn Rice, Shamus O'Brien and Kerry Gow. (In one play, Help, written especially for him, he impersonated a Chinaman, a Negro, an Irishman, and a German.) During his long stay in California Murphy appeared with various minstrel troupes, but in none did he win such instantaneous approval as when he sang "A Handful of Earth" with Emerson's company at Maguire's Opera House in San Francisco. "No one," says Sawyer in his memoirs, "could sing this song as Joe Murphy sang it."

Another member of the California Minstrels was Dan Bryant, who may have been related to Jerry Bryant and was certainly associated with him in several Eastern ventures. Dan was among those minstrels unearthed in the East and brought to San Francisco during the late sixties by Maguire's scouts. Like Joe Murphy, he acquired his largest acclaim in Irish comic parts. In the East he had already given up blackface, yet such variety prevailed within the established forms that there seemed no incongruity in his undisguised appearance with Emerson's troupe. On one occasion, a minstrel "session" at the American Theatre, he appeared with Murphy and Jake Wallace, these three forming a trio of tambourine, bones, and banjo. Despite predominant Irish characters, (Murphy, although still in blackface, elaborated his character with a decided brogue), one eyewitness declared "a finer burnt-cork was never given in San Francisco."

There were numerous others, each with some specialty for which he was particularly celebrated. Walter Bray is mentioned in E. T. Sawyer's memoir as "a one-time partner of Murphy," but whether he belonged to the California Minstrels or to another of the many groups with which the city was filled cannot be ascertained. Bray is described briefly: "He had a large Roman nose and the voice of a tragedian and might readily have passed as a brother of Johnny De Angelis." Reversing the procedure followed by Joe Murphy, he left the legitimate stage to become a minstrel. His comic imitations of the characters of Shakespeare had no equal on the California stage. They excited wild merriment among the men and pleased even the "genteel tastes of the ladies."

GENIAL FUNNY BUSINESS

"Clar de Kitchen," a plantation ballad of an older generation, still found favor during the seventies. It was hummed on the streets, sung loudly in saloons, and rendered with choric excellence behind the footlights at Maguire's Opera House and, indeed, at nearly every house devoted to minstrel shows. A verse or two will show the nature of its context:

A Jay bird sat on a hickory limb,
He winked at me and I winked at him,
I picked up a stone and hit his shin,
Says he, "you better not do dat agin."

Chorus

Oh, clar de kitchen, old folks, young folks,
Clar de kitchen, old folks, young folks,
Old Virginny nebber tire.

I hab a sweetheart in dis town,
She wears a yellow-striped gown,
An' when she walks de street aroun',
De hollow ob her foot make a hole in de groun'.

The minstrels in their genial atmosphere of mirth, held nothing sacred. Lew Rattler in particular, a tall, stoutly built man, heavy of voice and with uncommon facial expressions, was an adept at mimicry and burlesque. With Johnny de Angelis, he presented side-splitting travesties of opera and Shakespearean drama. Romeo and Juliet became (Roman Nose and Suet), Othello (Odd Fellow, the Boor of Vengeance), Macbeth (Bad Breath, the Grave of Chowder), Camile (Clameel, or The Feet of a Go-Getter). In the last, Rattler played the role of a frail Parisienne while De Angelis played Armand Duval.

> "Some of the lines," writes E. T. Sawyer in the Overland Monthly, October 1923, "have clung to my memory: When Armand comes in and says, 'Oh, Clameel, Clameel, how sadly you have changed!' the reply comes falteringly: 'Ah knows it, honey, Ah knows it. Ah knows mah change am gettin' short, so if you hab a few spendulicks in yo pants pocket, just poke 'em in mah stockin'. De doctah says dat if ah do not croak dis wintah, ah shall lib till spring.'
>
> "Later Armand enters carrying a big cabbage. 'I have brung you a rose, my dear,' he says, 'and I want you to wear it next to your heart.' 'Ah sho will,' Clameel responds, 'but Arr-mong, whar, Oh whar, is de co'n beef dat goes wid it?'"

SUPREMACY OF EMERSON'S MINSTRELS

Both the Alhambra and Olympic Theatres shared with Maguire's Opera House an enormous patronage during the late sixties and early seventies. While Joe Murphy, Lew Rattler,

and Johnny de Angelis were playing at the Alhambra, a number of white face farces were produced there under the management of John Woodward. But in the main Negro minstrelsy proved a constant attraction at all San Francisco playhouses. Sports on the Spar, a minstrel farce patterned after Shakespeare's Macbeth, proved an even greater attraction than Harry Courtaine, an Englishman whose special province was that of light comedy. Tall, straight, with polished manners and the advantages of education, Courtaine gained a large following and undoubtedly would have become a serious challenge to even the best minstrel men had it not been for his predilection for alcohol. A fortnight of abstinence generally would be his limit, despite the fact that, when sober, he swore never to touch another drop of intoxicating liquor. For two decades he was a familiar sight in the saloons on Washington, Kearny and Montgomery streets. His wife had separated from him during the early stages of his weakness, but afterwards relented, joined him in San Francisco and persuaded him, finally, to go with her to New York, where she had been living.

Harry Hawk, the man who often appeared professionally with Courtaine, was another such derelict who dropped out of sight in the seventies and another of those who contributed toward making the Olympic a popular theatre, as did also Maggie Moore, who could "sing like a bird and dance like a fairy." But such personages, colorful as they were, successful as they were within given limits, could not hope to overthrow the supremacy of Emerson's Minstrels.

Emerson himself was considered a premier minstrel of the United States. And Tom Maguire had scored a triumph when he brought these blackface comedians to the Coast. Those who might perhaps have exercised a rival claim to superiority -- Wambold, Billy Birch, Backus, and other outstanding members of the San Francisco Minstrels -- were in New York. Christy's Minstrels were traveling afar. George H. Coes, though he remained in California, had suffered a paralytic stroke and in retirement had been given a huge benefit, June 8, 1870, at the Alhambra Theatre.

"KING OF THEM ALL"

Thus Billy Emerson became "King of them all." True, he was associated with others who were close to that position, yet he consistently received the most prominent press notices. He was distinguished as an all-around end man and dancer, having the assets inherent in a remarkable tenor voice, a light, graceful step. It was he who introduced the songs that "brought enthusiasm into the Temple of the Muse and enthroned it there": "Love Among the Roses," "The Big Sunflower," "The Pretty Octoroon," "Mary Kelly's Beau," "Muldoon, the Solid Man," and "Pretty as a Picture." His admirers, among whom was E. T. Sawyer, twice quoted in reference to this era, spoke of him in extravagant terms. He was called "the one and only Billy," "King of them all," "chief among burnt-cork comedians," etc. Sawyer, in the Overland Monthly, 1923, remarks:

> "Throughout all his stage years his popularity never waned, in spite of the fact that he never tried to keep up with the times by learning new songs, new jokes and new specialities. To the day of his retirement from the minstrel stage he clung to the acts and songs that had won him praise in the days of his youth. As end man he sang negro songs, but when called upon, as he frequently was, to deliver 'straight goods,' he would sing 'Molly Bawn' with a spirit and expression that delighted all lovers of good music."

Associated with Emerson throughout most of the life of his California Minstrels were Billy Rice, Joe Murphy, Billy Sweatnam, Johnny Mack, Ben Cotton, Lew Rattler, Jake Wallace, and also, for a few months, Charles Vivian. There is little doubt, after the emergence of the San Francisco Minstrels, and the advent of Christy's Minstrels, that Emerson faced a critical public when he appeared at Maguire's Opera House. However he at once interested his audience in the first part and completely won them in the second part with his vocal and dance turns. After that first night his San Francisco success was assured, not only at Maguire's Opera House, but at those theatres where he subsequently appeared: the Standard, the Alhambra, the Bush Street, the Bijou, the California.

AN ODD CONTRAST

As in the case of other troupes, the personnel of this band constantly changed; and among the newcomers later added to it were Charley Reed with his "Tamale Song"; Chauncey Olcott, known for his renditions, "My Wild Irish Rose," "Mavourneen," and "Sweet Inniscara"; Pat Rooney, Burt Haverly;

the interlocutor Ainslie Scott, and the basso W. Frillman. Oddly contrasted with these was Charles Vivian, who participated in the second part, and "sang in one" -- that is, close to the footlights with a drop curtain behind him. He appeared in evening clothes, in white face with no make-up and generally sang sentimental ballads or songs with some moral lesson attached. One might suppose that he could not have succeeded under such circumstances, yet he became a great favorite owing to his personal magnetism, genial smile and pleasant manner. Jerome K. Hart* declared:

> "Vivian was an actor of merit, but his convivial habits interfered with his career on the dramatic stage. This apparently was not such a handicap in a minstrel company. The song most preferred by his audience was 'Ten Thousand Miles Away,' the ballad of a convict sailing from England for Botany Bay. After leaving Emerson's troupe, Vivian made a hit as Sir Joseph Porter in one of the many 'Pinafore' companies of 1878. According to Eddie Foy, Vivian founded a club in New York, 'The Jolly Corks,' the members of which subsequently changed the name to 'The Elks.' Foy was in Leadville in 1879, where (he says) an epidemic of deadly pneumonia raged and Vivian fell a victim."

OF THE SUN FLOWER AND QUEEN VICTORIA

Throughout the '70s and '80s no minstrel shows in San Francisco seemed complete without Billy Emerson. Others, perhaps, could do better things, though none could successfully emulate his versatility in all things. Billy Manning was regarded as funnier than he; Billy Sweatnam could do

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* Hart, Jerome K. In Our Second Century, p. 412.

better "stage work." His stump speeches could not favorably compare with those of Billy Rice or even Hugh Dougherty. But as an end man, dancer, singer, Emerson stood alone in the opinion of his judges: the public, critics, members of his own profession. Everybody joyfully laughed when he sang:

> "Oh, I feel just as happy as a big sunflower,
> That nods and bends in the breezes;
> For my heart is as light as the wind that blows
> The leaves from off the treeses."

Like most minstrels he drifted in and out of the city, making three trips to Australia, the first in 1873, and at least one visit to London in 1880, when he appeared with Haverly's celebrated troupe. On that occasion he is said to have charmed Queen Victoria with his singing for, among her other simple tastes, the queen evinced a fondness for minstrel shows, although she always attended incognito. There was no pomp, no national anthem, no parade. Usually her party would occupy a proscenium box from which they could obtain a good view of the stage; the rest of the audience, who could obtain a good view of royalty, would politely affect not to notice their presence.

A SCALPED RAILROAD TICKET

On his return to the United States, Emerson associated for a time with McNish, Johnson, and Slavin; then organized his own company. In 1888 he returned to San Francisco, re-opened the Standard Theatre and established therein a "permanent reign of minstrelsy," which lasted during the next three years. At this time Emerson had plenty of money. He

had already dissipated several fortunes gambling in poker, faro, the stock market, and horse racing. These habits of a lifetime could not be discontinued and, although he made another fortune, that too was eventually lost.

> "Once in the nineties," stated Jerome K.Hart in In Our Second Century, p. 413, "while crossing the continent, a man appeared in the Pullman smoker, just after leaving Chicago, whose voice was strangely familiar, but his face I did not recognize. After a time he was identified by some of the smokers as Billy Emerson. He seemed reluctant to admit his identity, the reason for which developed when the conductor came around. Emerson was traveling on a scalped ticket under the name of 'James Smith.' The conductor was merciful, and let him travel on, but warned him to beware of the conductors further west. Emerson got by two or three conductors, but they grew more hard-boiled.
>
> "Somewhere in Wyoming, I think it was, the conductor would not stand for the scalped ticket and demanded train fare. Emerson had little or no money. A group in the smoking car raised the amount in a few minutes for he had become extremely popular. But a man who looked like a shyster advised him to submit to being put off and then to bring suit. Emerson--who seemed to have a childlike complex--vacillated, and finally accepted the advice of the shyster; this person insisted that the job should be quite formal, and that the conductor should 'lay his hand' on Emerson. This was perfunctorily done, and the poor wandering minstrel was left on the platform of some tank station. I can see him now gazing wistfully at us as we urged him to get aboard and pay his fare.
>
> "Emerson had made a great deal of money in his time but this incident showed that he was no longer prosperous.
>
> "Some years afterward I picked up the Chronicle one morning, and read this brief obituary notice: 'Boston, February 2, 1902--Billy Emerson, the minstrel, died here today in destitute circumstances.' His widow, Mary Emerson, left $700,000 when she died in February 1930."

Emerson was as fond of San Francisco as its citizens were of him; thus, by his own request, his body was brought there for cremation. The ashes lie in Odd Fellows Cemetery marked with a brass plate on which is this inscription: "William Emerson Redmond, 1846 - 1902."

BRITISH BLONDES

With completion of the California Theatre in '69 the theatrical center had gradually shifted towards Bush street where four or five prosperous houses had been established. A concurrent shift in theatrical trends took place at about the same time, but did not fully materialize until the seventies, with the advent of the "Black Crook craze" which gave the first impetus towards "leg shows," and the appearance in San Francisco of Lydia Thompson's British Blondes* who personified the mode. Coming from Britain, more recently from the eastern United States, this troupe needed no press agent. Every scrap of news pertaining to them had been avidly printed by the newspapers. Every opening in every city had been an event, socially as well as theatrically. And so it was in San Francisco, where they played Robinson Crusoe, Oxygen, and The Forty Thieves. Lydia Thompson herself was rather buxom, but since the taste of that day verged towards opulence in the female figure, this constituted on the stage a presentable appearance. Off stage she was neither beautiful nor

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* See Monograph on Burlesque, Vol. XVII, this series.

remarkable. Nor, with a few exceptions, were the members of her troupe handsome by any standards one might apply. Yet they created a furor and, in fact, were considered better than their plays -- heavy English travesties interspersed with jokes.

For the most part they wore doublets, tights and long hose,a costume which attracted innumerable youths to the stage door and provoked scathing comment among certain "refined ladies" of the epoch. The Thompson troupe made so much money that some of the principals grew envious, withdrew, and formed a company of their own called The British Blondes. Playing simultaneously, these rival groups caused considerable confusion among theatre-goers and incited that interest in feminine variety players which shortly led to the formation of a minstrel troupe composed of women.

ASCENDANCY OF WOMEN MINSTRELS

This last event, however, had its harbinger in the increasing frequency with which women were being introduced into established minstrel troupes. When the California Minstrels took possession of the "Bijou Theatre,a long series of operatic burlesques was instigated, beginning with a travesty on La Boheme. This was a huge triumph and had to be repeated night after night before packed houses. It was followed by a burlesque of La Sonnambula, given in the second part of the program after the jokes and witticisms of Johnny de Angelis had already elicited gales of laughter. When the curtain

rose on the second part, revealing the assembled cast of La Sonnambula, two women were on the stage -- Miss Emma Howson and Mrs. Julia Coad.

A few nights later, when they made their second appearance with the minstrel men, they were adjudged "most excellent" by the press; and in public opinion seem to have shared honors equally with De Angelis, Leslie, and Raynor, "whose comicalities provided a fund for cachinatory exercises of the most violent description."

"FIGHT BETWEEN NIGGER SINGERS"

One may well believe that women were introduced into orthodox troupes for two reasons: first, to meet threatening rival organizations on their own grounds; second, because the innovation provided additional variety of entertainment. But if troupes thus earned distinction on the stage, individuals created sensations elsewhere whose ramifications were often violent. For years the theatre had been the special arena of violence; competition between various troupes and individuals fomented hatreds that reached denouement in the greenroom, or more frequently, in the streets and saloons.

The Daily Alta California of January 30, 1873, recounted a quarrel typical of the times which ended in fatal consequences. It was a front-page story captioned "Fight between Nigger Singers." Two minstrels otherwise obscure so far as the records are concerned, attempted to settle some difference in the Snug Saloon on Washington street. With

several friends, Charles Howard was standing in the doorway of the saloon when Johnny Tuers happened to pass by. Howard, at least, had been drinking, but Tuers is alleged to have provoked the fight. On seeing the former he approached and without apparent cause said: "You have been waiting for me, 'God ---- you,'" then dealt Howard a blow on the head with his fist. A short scuffle occurred during the course of which both combatants edged inside the saloon where Tuers was overpowered, thrown to the floor and held in the strong grasp of Howard.

Since he could not release himself, Tuers drew his pistol with the intention of wounding his antagonist, but his shot went wide of the mark. At this juncture bystanders interfered; the minstrels were separated. Tuers was taken outside and told to leave, which he did not do. Meantime James Dowling, a well-known stage-manager, had been seen going out of the place immediately after the shooting. In a short time, however, he returned and calling a friend to him said: "Johnny, I guess I got that," and there could be no doubt that he meant Tuers' bullet, for withdrawing a hand from his trouser pocket he exhibited blood.

Although a physician arrived shortly afterward, little could be done to relieve the manager. At the county hospital, where he was taken in a hack, it was learned that the bullet had lodged in his groin. Before the night was over he died, stating, "Tuers did not mean to kill me, as he has always been my friend."

Almost concomitant with Dowling's statement, Tuers, asked to give an account of his side of the affair, told a reporter from The Daily Alta California, January 30, 1873:

> "Yesterday morning Howard came to my room and knocked at the door; I answered by going there and asking him to come in; without any warning whatever he struck me a severe blow in the face, at the same time warning me to keep off the stage--the Bella Union, where I am employed--for unless I did there would be trouble. I tried to pay no attention to his remarks, but fearing trouble from him I went down to Liddle & Kaediny's gun store during the afternoon and purchased a pistol, not paying for it at the time however.
>
> "While on my way to settle for it, I was passing down Washington Street, and when I was passing Maguire's Opera House, Howard ran out of the entrance of the Snug Saloon adjoining and dragged me toward the door; we clinched and in that way we got into the saloon. After getting inside I was thrown, and in drawing my pistol out it was discharged, the bullet taking effect in poor Dowling's body. I am sorry on that account, for all who knew me will say that I would never harm poor Jim, as he was one of the best friends I ever had, and a man for whom I had the greatest respect, and one that I would do anything to assist.
>
> "Knowing that Howard is a stronger man than myself, I felt that I was obliged to carry a weapon of some kind. The assault upon me yesterday was unprovoked, nor can I account for it in any manner."

How the trouble between Tuers and Howard originated no one could tell. The Alta attributed it to "a couple of women," although it appears more likely, judging from Howard's alleged visit to Tuers' room and the threat he there uttered, that it arose from those sources vaguely defined as professional jealousy. Firearms seem to have been accorded special

preference in settling such disputes during the Gold Rush Era and the several decades immediately following; actors were as good at brandishing pistols on the streets as they were on the stage, and frequently someone was killed in the Bella Union during an embittered conflict.

THE RENTZ FEMALE MINSTRELS

In the year 1878 all San Francisco was startled by the appearance of the Rentz Female Minstrels who were a great deal in dress and manner like their predecessors, Lydia Thompson's British Blondes. For weeks in advance a controversy had raged in the press as to their merit or lack of it. An Argonaut critic described as "the sometimes flippant but rarely dull Betsy B." regarded the new troupe with skepticism:

> "A gentleman who ought to know," she wrote in the Argonaut January 19, 1878, "assures me they can make their entertainments of a calibre suited to the morals of any grade of audience, and now young San Francisco is agape with impatience to learn in what category we are to be placed--whether we are to be entranced with Boston or horrified with Devilwood."

Neither in this nor in subsequent notices does Betsy B. disclose the identity of her informant, but she soon had opportunity to shape her own judgments. In early February 1878, the Rentz Female Minstrels opened at the Bush Street Theatre an engagement which lasted several months.

The general order of their entertainments was patterned after that of the minstrel men: interlocutor, bones, tambo, the blackface circle with its banjoist, fiddler, jokesters and singers -- all in blackface. There was a first

part, an olio, a second part which culminated in the usual walk-around. "A willowy Miss Montague" sang "The Sweet Bye and Bye"; a female corps, after the proper interlude of jokes and repartee, presented a piece called The Forty Thieves, brandishing swords. Their audience was said to have been comprised almost entirely of elderly men happy in the thought that it was raining outside, a circumstance which provided them with an excuse for tarrying away from home. One could see row upon row of comfortable expressions "experiencing," as one wit put it, "the infernal delights of a reformed toper over his first shy taste of rum."

"NOT VERY NAUGHTY; NOT VERY NICE"

The viewpoint may be prejudiced; yet one cannot reject the fact that large audiences attended every performance. As the season advanced the Rentz troupe found it desirable to abandon blackface in some of their offerings, emulating perhaps a mode which had already achieved widespread practice -- for Irish, Dutch, German characters were appearing in ever greater numbers among the Negro comedians. The people applauded, continued to stand in line at the box office, appeared to enjoy each show, while Betsy B. continued writing a series of disparaging comments, in which the phrase "not very naughty and not very nice" frequently occurred. There was, she affirmed, just one well-rounded figure in the company, quiet and dignified in spite of her tights, remarkable for her rendition of the song "The Sweet Bye and Bye,"

referring of course to the "willowy Miss Montague." But even Betsy B. had to admit that the house was always full, with aisles blocked and standing room occupied.

However, morbid curiosity was assigned by the Argonaut critic to explain this phenomenon. When the Rentz Female Minstrels presented a burlesque called Ixion towards the middle of February, she declared:

> "For the most elaborate costume all that was required was a powder puff, rouge box, blond wig, slip and cestus."

Betsy B.'s husband, Jack, according to an unspecified Argonaut reporter, waxed enthusiastic over the bronze-colored slippers which the female minstrels wore. They were made of soft leather, revealing the toes, and had unusually high insteps; three straps across the arch kept them on the wearer's feet which all eyes followed through an intricate pattern as they danced. In this admission one can distinguish a masculine predisposition towards "leg-shows," and it may be that the critic was partially correct in asserting that "morbid curiosity" accounted for the large houses which the Rentz Minstrels attracted. Nevertheless during their engagement the Bush Street Theatre collected a larger sum in admissions than its nearest competitors, the California Theatre and Maguire's Opera House, together.

More significant still was the introduction of variety of a kind which foreshadowed later trends. Scarcely any competent judge would place female minstrels above the men in

that profession; yet their influence upon modern musical comedy, burlesque, vaudeville and present-day radio comedy cannot be dismissed. In 1878 they were a vogue which shortly passed; in 1928 their successors became a twentieth century institution known as the "follies."

"FORTY -- COUNT 'EM -- FORTY"

Towards the end of February 1873 another attraction replaced the Rentz Female Minstrels, who drifted away into some obscure part of the country and subsequently emerged in the East as the Rentz-Santley Burlesque Troupe. This was Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels, "the largest and most refined minstrel organization in the world." It had been organized in Chicago by Col. Jack Haverly, who was a showman with many characteristics of the Great Barnum. It was he who invented the slogan "Forty -- Count 'em -- Forty" and had it painted on a large bass drum. In Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, London, his troupe had garnered fame; they came to San Francisco with special accoutrements, with a huge advertising wagon, with fanfare and music and the boom of drums. Small boys followed them along the streets; women and girls, men too dignified to follow a boy's urge, stared after them; an enormous crowd gathered near the theatre, listened eagerly to Col. Haverly's speech. It was, in many respects, like a circus come to town.

HAVERLY'S SENSATION

For some months, apart from the furor created by

the Rentz Female Minstrels, San Franciscans had shown an apathy for most minstrel shows. Only the very best in the business, or the smartest innovators, could command patronage. But Haverly's Mastodons could be included in both these categories; they presented new faces, new songs, jokes, burlesques, a new style of dialogue. Now, for the first time, appeared the so-called jolly avoirdupois minstrels of whom Billy Rice was perhaps the most celebrated, although he had close seconds, both in name and character. In Col. Haverly's troupe there were two other Rices, a song and dance man, and an amusing burlesque "prima donna." There were besides Thatcher and Richmond, notable singers; Charles Diamond, harpist; and a California quartet.

The opening performance at the Bush Street Theatre, probably April 26, 1878, created a sensation. The house was packed, scores of people had to be turned away at the door, and still the "gallery gods struggled with pressure and perspiration." Repeatedly the crowd shouted for encores, well-pleased with bones and tambo, with Kimble, the middleman, with "Baby Mimi," a singer who showed annoyance when called out a third and fourth time. Haverly's rule, which allowed but a single encore, in the opinion of that minstrel (and also of Betsy B.), was an excellent one.

During succeeding performances their success continued unabated. They introduced a drill with clubs, members of the troupe being attired in regulation New York police

uniforms. This was followed by a lively chorus under the direction of Billy Rice. They gave much attention, Betsy B. declared, to all details and she cited an act, Scenes on the Levee (wherein clever mechanical effects were employed) to prove her point. But perhaps the most surprising innovation was a playlet, Epitaphs which burlesqued the effusiveness of obituary columns in the daily press.

TWO BOTTLES OF WINE

Occasionally a touch of acrobatics was injected into the performance and this found favor with all those who remembered the feat of Johnny Mack, a comedian who had entertained a Sunday throng assembled at Chiarini's Bay View Hippodrome about ten years earlier. It was an entirely impromptu affair, instigated by a sporting character well-known around the Hippodrome. A spring-board had been placed preparatory to introducing a stunt by circus performers and below the board a horse was standing. The sporting character urged Mack to do a somersault over the back of the horse for a bottle of wine:

> "I do it," (the Daily Dramatic Chronicle of June 27, 1868, reported the comedian as saying) and just as he was on the point of making an interrogation point of himself, another equine was placed in position. "See here, but there's two horses now!" he exclaimed, turning to his companion. "Well, I'll make it two bottles of wine," was the ready reply. "I'll do it," said Johnny, and up the "tramplein board" he ran and over the horses he somersaulted, with coat tails flying, cane in hand, cigar in mouth, stove-pipe hat on his head, and never sweat a hair. He

> achieved a sensation and it was presumed by those who saw him afterwards that he got his two bottles of wine--but perhaps it was the somersault that bewildered him.

Without doubt one of the most outstanding performers in Haverly's troupe was Billy Rice. Besides being a clever song and dance man he was also a famous stump speaker. Since the days of the Civil War, orators and lecturers had been traveling about the country. They were usually reformers or champions of some cause and it was not difficult to burlesque them. Local jokes could be woven into such speeches ad libitum, never failing to arouse bursts of laughter. Rice, somewhat in the manner of Sam Bernard, used an earnest, strenuous method of delivery, his chief aid in achieving the desired effect being an old cotton umbrella, which he would swing and bang upon the rostrum to emphasize his points.

HARRIGAN AND HART

In June 1878 the celebrated team Harrigan and Hart arrived in San Francisco. Individually, each had distinguished himself with various minstrel shows in New York; but their principal distinction began in 1871, when they first combined and abandoned Negro for Irish characters. Tony Hart, called the "best genteel wench that ever trod the boards" had appeared as Master Anthony Cannon, a ballad singer in New York. Ned Harrigan, who became the Pete of their later blackface acts, had been writing songs.

Once formed, their combination made an instantaneous hit, appearing with Arlington, Cotton, and Kimble's Minstrels in Chicago in 1872. In this city, where their popularity grew by tremendous bounds, Harrigan wrote the words of their satirical song, "The Mulligan Guard," which caused the near disruption of many a military company started subsequent to the Civil War. The tune, however, is mentioned in Kipling's Kim as the favorite band piece of British soldiers serving in India. Some years afterward the Mulligan Guard theme was developed into a musical play called The Skidmore Fancy Ball.

Other songs, characterizations, skits, plays, developed from the original until at length there was a whole crop of Mulligan Guard specialties loosely termed "Mulligan Guard Chowder," containing such titles as "The Skids are Out Today," "The Mulligan Nominee," "The Skidmore Masquerade," "The Mulligan Guard's Christmas," "The Pitcher of Beer," "The Mulligan Guard Picnic," "Mary Kelly's Beau," and "Sandy-Haired Mary in Our Area." A highly prized song included in the original skit, Mulligan Guard Ball was "Babies in Our Block," said to be a forerunner of "The Sidewalks of New York." Harrigan and Hart likewise originated that famous character, Major Gilfeather, a Mid-Victorian fop in a play which they titled The Major and produced in 1881 after the great success of their Squatter Sovereignty.

TEAM WORK

They began an engagement at the Bush Street Theatre June 7, 1878, replacing Haverly's Minstrels who took to the road and did not reappear until early in August. Their performance was brilliant and novel, consisting entirely of the Irish characterizations with which they had won fame in the East. Although the two principals appeared in white face, in the company were a group of Negro minstrels, comprising the Miniature 69th Band. This was an act in which sham English aristocrats were imitated. Betsy B. of the Argonaut considered Harrigan the most versatile and also the most slovenly of the combination. But the San Francisco public which thronged the theatre manifested no such preference; they applauded both comedians with equal enthusiasm.

Following a pattern of their earlier successes, Harrigan continued to improvise songs, jokes, playlets, dialogue. Hart, apparently, was the more accomplished actor of the two. He could take either male or female parts as the script called for them, possessing a smooth good humor, an amiable manner, and the faculty of drawing spontaneous laughter from his audience.

On the other hand Harrigan, whose education had been largely neglected, often mispronounced words, and occasionally received severe criticism for this fault. But any comparison of the two is idle; they were complementary, like

the parts of a machine. The talents of one gained extraordinary benefits only when coupled with the ingenuity of the other. They presented at subsequent performances a piece, Old Lavender, which Harrigan had written and in which he himself played the role of a broken-down bank clerk.

> "He has," wrote Betsy B. in the Argonaut, June 22, 1878, "the weakened frame, the broken voice, the half-maudlin, half-real pathos of the hopeless drunkard fallen from high estate."

Hart, playing "de Rat" in the same piece, was dubbed "the weed of society" on the bills. Betsy B. noted however that he was never coarse but merely rough and boyish. The remainder of the company she found a strange mixture of people who looked as though they were old and out of favor, or young, stage-struck and unreserved. "Mrs. Yeoman," she added, "played a deaf woman in Old Lavender very well."

A CRITIC'S APPRAISAL

Although Harrigan and Hart drew crowded houses until the end of their engagement, the final performance proved a disappointment to most of those in attendance. If one can accept the word of Betsy B. it consisted mostly of imitations of Charles Coghlan and Sarah Jewett.

> "In spite of excellent burlesque," she said (Argonaut, July 6, 1878), "the imitations were somewhat unsatisfactory because of being too close to the original. Harrigan had a weakness for melodrama. In his imitation of Coghlan he had little to offer but a few tricks of accent. Hart's Adrienne was amusing but a copy of

> nothing. People were disappointed with the too sketchy bill."

About a month later Haverly's Minstrels returned to San Francisco. Hugh Dougherty, Gus Williams, and Billy Sweatnam were now with the company. The Argonaut critic reported rather severely after their first performance:

> "Either Hughie Dougherty suffers from imitators or he is not very original. Either Billy Rice copies him or he copies Billy Rice. Either he has a bad cold or an extremely disagreeable voice."

Sweatnam's performance had deteriorated, she said. He offered nothing new; the old, in her opinion, had gone "flat."

"FORTY-NINE! FORTY-NINE!"

This may or may not have been true, for there is no other critical opinion to substantiate or contradict it. Nevertheless, minstrelsy in its large aspect had not deteriorated. In the early eighties resourceful Tom Maguire,* disturbed at the rise of the California Theatre, had resumed his role of gambler, borrowing enough money from a bartender friend of his to indulge his passion for blackface shows. He established a company under the direction of Billy Emerson at the Standard Theatre; he formed, several years later, an alliance with Hooley; he retained his interest in other troupes, notably the San Francisco Minstrels, who were then in New York.

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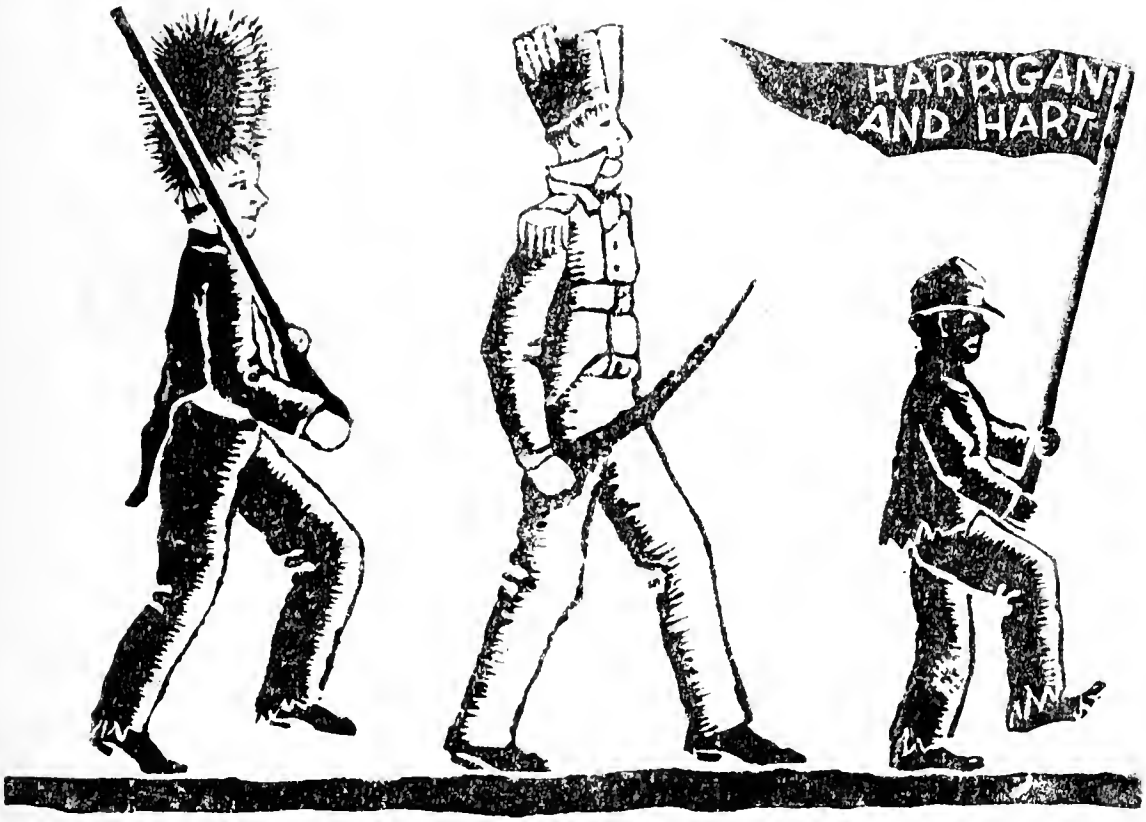
* See Monograph on Tom Maguire, Vol. II, this series.

Forging steadily ahead he opened the Baldwin Theatre where individual minstrels and variety players were given an equal showing with legitimate actors and opera stars. Perhaps during these years no single group can be said to have dominated the scene or to have represented the theatrical vogue of the growing metropolis. Indeed the entire state had begun to emerge from the first stages of its metamorphosis and alterations in its theatre were but a natural accompaniment.

Many a minor character who had begun his career thirty or forty years earlier now reappeared in different guise, like some ghost out of the legend of '49. Forced to give up theatricals because of too severe competition or disastrous quarrels, such characters had ultimately drifted away and found endless adventures in other parts of the world. They became soldiers of fortune, prisoners of war -- even potentates of forgotten peoples in the South Pacific. Some had become rooted in the California soil however, settling in the Sierra, giving an occasional entertainment. They, as well as the Argonauts who had made their homes in the West, could not be displaced and were to remain until the end of their lives, prospecting.

Jake Wallace had become a favorite in the variety halls; every time he made an entrance the shout went up: "Forty-nine! Forty-nine!" And he would have to recite that famous ballad at some point during his performance. Other

minstrel men came, played short engagements with this or that troupe, and left, going perhaps into the camps of the Washoe which were still lucrative, still boisterous and expanding. Haverly's Minstrels, Hooley's Minstrels, Harrigan and Hart, played intermittently in San Francisco and were to become more important, more a vital part of the city's life, as the century waned. For now a tradition was reaching forward into the future -- a tradition that was to influence directly the theatrical vogue of the present century.



MINSTRELSY

PART II (1879 - 1922)

THE AMERICAN THEATRE OF BLACKFACE VARIETY

THE PALMY DAYS

In that section of McCabe's Journal devoted to the recording of minstrel shows there appears, among other laconic and often ambiguous notations, one which reads: "Lapse from 1870-1879." Without knowing the circumstances in which it was written an inquisitive reader would naturally wonder at such a statement. Does it imply that the journalist absented himself from the California scene for almost a decade;or that he was merely lax in his self-imposed task; or that data, compiled largely from newspaper theatrical columns, advertisements and playbills, were somehow unavailable to him? Whether one chooses to accept any or all of these explanations or to adduce an alternative, namely that McCabe neglected minstrel shows during this period in favor of dramatic entertainment, this much at least

remains clear: the lapse is his own, not that of minstrel troupes, impresarios, or public.

Relevant facts defy any supposition to the contrary. Minstrel shows, a native and indispensable element in the American theatre at this time, continued to receive considerable patronage during the decade in question, as they had previously -- even though their chronological record appears incomplete and must therefore be summarily generalized. Other sources do not compare with McCabe's Journal for rigid exactitude. Newspaper accounts are often inaccurate or prejudiced; "reminiscences by old-timers," though quaintly picturesque, are at once vague, disgressive, undertain, and consequently disappointing to the historian.

Nevertheless, taken together, such sources yield evidence of continuous minstrel performances in San Francisco and elsewhere -- on a scale which may be described as robust rather than decadent -- until towards the close of the century.

Tom Maguire,* it appears, still remained in control of large theatrical enterprises throughout the seventies and eighties; likewise Maguire still smiled indulgently upon his minstrel men, who traveled shuttlecock fashion back and forth across the continent or made brief excursions into Alta California, returning after a time to one or another San Francisco playhouse. The great bonanza days, commemorated by the

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* See Monograph on Tom Maguire, Vol.II, this series.

erection of Ralston's California Theatre, were not far past. Groups of financiers, merchants, landowners, steadily enlarged the scope of their activities. Real estate and mining speculation, involving millions of dollars and many fraudulent schemes, became commonplace during the seventies. Palatial hotels, including the Palace itself, were built one after another. Mansions continued to rise on the slopes of Nob Hill and westward towards the Presidio. Owing to huge loans, available at the time, industrial expansion accompanied the formation of trusts, until San Francisco at length became a "big money town."

REMINISCENCES OF MR. SAWYER

The theatre flourished on a scale compatible with financial growth and the increase of wealth. And minstrel men, riding tides of popularity, came into the limelight. The whole of California was in fact literally invaded by them. Billy Emerson, the "king," made an alliance with Tom Maguire, "monarch of impresarios" -- to which event certain observers attributed the early decline of the California Theatre (with its incomparable stock company, magnificent productions, and visiting stars) until finally it achieved a second, though slight, prestige as a minstrel house.

Without chronological arrangement or undue stress upon its relation to the remainder of his narrative, Eugene T. Sawyer published a fairly comprehensive account of what occurred on the minstrel stage during the interlude about

which McCabe is so noncommittal. It leaps forward and backward as the writer's whims of memory dictated, and therefore is not a record of a decade but a supererogation thereof, as well as a contradiction of a journalist's succinct statement.

> "From Maguire's Opera House," stated Sawyer,* "Emerson went to the Standard Theatre on Bush Street, and for many years was San Francisco's greatest minstrel performer. Other blackface comedians who appeared at either the Bush Street or Standard Theatres, sometimes as opposites to Emerson, were Billy Manning, Billy Arlington, Charley Howard, Billy Courtright, Carroll Johnson and Charley Reed. Howard 'caught the town' in his old-time melodies,'Go Down Moses,' 'In the Morning by the Bright Light,' 'Old Black Joe.' They and others gave a sparkle to his acts. Reed was a San Franciscan and had a style all his own, though his voice was nothing to rave over. He was up to date in his methods and, as the boys say, never failed to put it across. Of Billy Manning in all truth it may be said that he was second only to Billy Emerson in all that pertained to blackface minstrelsy. He had a light voice, a seductive manner and a laugh so infectious that it was a joy to hear it. Johnny Allen, one of Emerson's partners at Maguire's Opera House, left minstrelsy to become a Dutch comedian, in which role he won success.
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> "One of the Bush Street favorites while minstrelsy was on the boards was Sam Rickey who sometimes was end man, but oftener an Irish comedian. He was, I think, the first to introduce the North of Ireland dialect to San Francisco. In one of his skits he appeared as an Irish policeman and he never failed to 'bring down the house' when he made his descent from the second story of a stage house to the stage floor. As he placed a foot on the top step of the stairs, the stairs collapsed and shot him swiftly to the stage. His surprise and disgust at the unlooked-for and ridiculous occurrence

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* Overland Monthly, October 1923.

was realistically pictured on his face which in its normal state was so ugly it would have stopped a clock. Collapsible stairs were a new contrivance then. Since the seventies it has been worked to death. When the regular stage discarded it the motion picture people took it up, and even today it is used in many of the 'slapstick comedies.' Rickey's favorite role was Owen Connelly in Bad Whiskey. Charles McCarthy was his partner. An overmastering desire for liquor ruined Rickey's life. In this respect he followed closely in the steps of the unfortunate Harry Courtaine. Once when he had resolved to cut out whiskey for good and all, he went to Father Prendergast, took the oath and obtained a paper which was given into my hands for safekeeping. The oath was kept for two days. Then came a relapse and a steady travel on the road that leads to ruin. Rickey died in New York in 1885.

"Scanlon and Cronin came after Rickey and McCarthy in a similar line of stage work. Scanlon was a fine singer and will be remembered as the author of those sweet songs, 'Peek-a-boo,' 'Gathering the Myrtle for Mary,' 'Mollie O,' and so on.

"Another Bush Street favorite was Billy Courtright, now a very popular film comedian. Billy's first stunt was a unique song and dance, 'Flewy-Flewy' and whenever he came on with his flimsily constructed valise, into which he thrust a foot at the conclusion of a dance, the house rocked with laughter.

"There were many sweet singers in the minstrel first parts of the early days, prominent among them Dave Wambold, Henri Herbert, Tom Casselli, J. G. Russell, and Tommy Bree. Russell's true name was Grant and he was a relative of Amelia Rives, the poet and novelist. In his youth he killed a man and though the deed was committed in self-defense he was forced to flee and take a new name. He possessed a powerful, ringing baritone, and in such old-time songs as 'You and I' and 'We Parted by the Riverside' his splendid voice, rolling and quivering, filled with musical sound whatever theatre he happened to be singing in. Casselli left minstrelsy for light opera. One of his favorite roles was The Marquis in the Chimes of Normandy, in which, I think, Emilie Melville won the 'Serpolette.'

"David Warfield, the eminent actor, was an usher at the Bush Street Theatre while Courtright and other minstrels were playing there. His imitations given both in public and in private, brought him to the notice of David Belasco, who soon had him launched as a comedy star. His great success during the past fifteen years is well known to the theatre-going public. It was while the minstrels were playing at the Bush Street Theatre and Warfield was acting as usher that Charles E. Bolles (Black Bart) became one of the sidewalk fixtures in front of the playhouse. He would stand for hours watching the actors as they passed in and out of Chris Buckley's saloon. Billy Courtright was the only man who ever spoke to him and the action was due not to acquaintanceship, but to Billy's innate courtesy. Frequently Bart would be missed for a week. Then periods would be devoted to stage robberies, very risky proceedings, for at last they landed the highwayman in San Quentin.

"The first clog dancers of note to shake their legs in San Francisco were Dick Sands and Billy Ashcroft. Sands was the champion clog dancer of America, but he was not a singer, while Ashcroft both sang and danced. They made a strong team and were never equaled though Primrose and West, who came after them, were very popular performers.

"Other minstrels who made flying trips to San Francisco in the sixties and seventies were Lew Benedick, Sam Sharpley, Cool Burgess, A. D. Ryman, Harry Leslie, Milt Barlow, J. E. Green, (the mocking bird singer), Haverly's company, J. Edward Taylow, George C. Thompson, and Charley White. There were actors, but I cannot bring them to memory.

COFFEE DAN'S

"A favorite 'hangout' for white-face actors and blackface minstrels was a cigar shop of Dan Davis, adjoining Maguire's Opera House. The shop floor was about three feet below the sidewalk where Davis lived, and after the closing of the theatres, many of the performers would gather in front of Dan's place to shake dice and smoke cigars until money gave out or dawn came. When Maguire's closed its doors on

account of the fierce opposition of the recently-built California Theatre, Dan shut up shop to become proprietor of an underground coffee house midway between the California and Bush Theatres on Bush street. Here he acquired the sobriquet of 'Coffee Dan' and was shot squarely into the limelight by Gelett Burgess and Will Irwin in their novel, The Picaroons. Dan was an Englishman with a strong cockney accent and his speech and peculiarities were entertainingly set forth in the Burgess-Irwin story. He died about three years ago.

"The champion flat-foot dancer of the Pacific Coast was Johnny Tuers. He generally appeared with Fred Sprung, Ned Buckley and Charles Rhodes, either at the Bella Union or the Metropolitan Theatres. In the late sixties he quarrelled with a man on Washington Street, pistols were drawn and an innocent bystander--James Cowling, a theatrical manager--stopped Tuer's bullet and ceased to live. Tuers was tried for murder and acquitted.

"Fred Sprung, bass singer and interlocutor, was a boy. Before his arrival in California he had been a member of a band of minstrels organized to give performances on the Mississippi River boats. The band was a small one and each member was advertised as an artist in his line. On these boats the gamblers, always in force before the opening of the Civil War, would frequently postpone a game to listen to a minstrel performance. On these occasions they would pick a favorite and the performers thus singled out would receive donations far in excess of the amount of their salaries. Sprung found it a happy, free and easy life and was sorry when the war put a stop to it. He died many years ago.

"Charley Rhodes, who died forty years ago, was the pioneer banjo player of the Coast; not long after the discovery of gold his banjo was heard on the streets of San Francisco and in the Northern and Eastern mining camps. In the early sixties he joined a minstrel company and was before the public for over twenty years. He was the reputed author of the old-time popular song, 'The Days of '49,' and up to his retirement it was the favorite song of his repertory."

"THE BIG BONANZA"

Late in the seventies when Augustin Daly brought his excellent dramatic troupe to the Pacific Coast and opened at Platt's Hall, he could not attract full houses. Thinking the fault lay in his accommodations, Daly moved farther up Bush Street to the Standard Theatre where he encountered a repetition of his first two nights' discouragement. His play happened to be an adaptation from the German called The Big Bonanza, which should have enticed throngs into the theatre. It was learned however that Hooley's Minstrels across the street had already introduced this play in burlesque form to the San Francisco public. Since it was still drawing enviable audiences, Daly could only accept the unenviable corollary. Minstrels had achieved preferment over dramatic actors, not excepting such notables in his own company as Fanny Davenport, Annie Graham, Owen Fawcett, and young John Drew who was later destined to a place among the famous. In a short time Daly gracefully retired from this uneven competition and made his way back to New York.

Here was an omen that any theatrical manager might well have brooded on, for it preceded by the briefest interval the palmy days of minstrelsy. Already the real invasion had started; soon the state was to be overrun by these hilarious bones and tambo troupes.

PLANTATION DARKIES AND "HAM FATTERS."

Despite the transfer of minstrels from one place to another and the different moods which they encountered, there

was a curious homogeneity of taste in Western audiences; plantation types at once gained lasting favor. For the greater part they attired themselves in tight garments, wearing on their woolly heads the smallest conceivable hats -- else, at the opposite extreme of comic affectation, the most enormous, tattered headgear it was possible to obtain. In the latter instances they completed their costume by adding numerous shirts, coats, and trousers of different colors, worn one over the other. If in this manner they appeared grotesque, their instruments began to assume an appearance of the bizarre, since now they adopted quills, jews-harps, combs, bagpipes, and even penny whistles.

As in '49 bones and tambo held forth at their respective ends of the semicircle, but now they increased numerically as did the entire assembly, some of whom led trained monkeys on the stage while others known as "hamfatters" poked ridicule at them and at everything else. Witticism, though still following a traditional pattern, became more expansive as the personnel increased; elaborations of original anecdotes and burlesques were practiced with such free rein that both comedy and pathos traveled an apparently indiscriminate gamut. Theatres resounded with vocal music; instruments created a not always melodious din which achieved sufficient and wilful echo in the streets.

SLAPSTICK AND VARIETY

Gradually blackface vaudeville, of a kind easily recognized by present generations, was introduced during the

olio before a painted drop curtain while the stage was being prepared for the burlesque of opera or drama to be performed in the second part. And now there also occurred a notable absence of stock pieces, such as Box and Cox, which formerly were considered essential to every minstrel show. Replacing them were novel skits written expressly for each occasion, imitations of classical, semi-classical or modern plays, usually penned on the cuff by some performer in the company and presented with vigorous emphasis on the "slapstick" side. One of these, which achieved distinction through repeated alterations, was Bone Squash, a burlesque of the opera Fra Diavolo which Jim Rice had popularized in New York. In the generally accepted version it told of a chimney-sweep who, because of alleged though never proven laziness, was sold by his master to the devil. Whereupon he rose in station, becoming through Satan's command a savior to all his lost brethern on earth; and ironically enough he conducted all the unfortunates into the kingdom of hell where they functioned like himself as servitors.

Oh Hush!, a burlesque taken from unspecified sources, was another public favorite wherein "high-toned Samuel Johnson and low nigger Cuff" rather ridiculously and often ungallantly quarreled because of their common affection for a wench named Lubly Rosa. The latter part was a favorite with Lotta Crabtree* during her days at Gilbert's Melodeon. It

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* See Monograph on Lotta Crabtree, Vol. VI, this series.

contained plenty of action interspersed with song, acrobatics, dances of a type well suited to her style of entertainment, and offered occasion for the repeated singing of that rollicksome ballad "Clar de Kitchen."

THE QUAKER

Allegorical playlets, sometimes with the aid of dioramas representing scenes from Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Napoleon crossing the Alps, also were offered. Then there were Bedouins, either spurious or genuine, who presented strange gymnastic acts; there were imitators of Shakespearean drama, among whom the best liked perhaps were Jerry Bryant and Eph Horn, the perennial. Some contemporaries of Horn held him in higher esteem than Billy Emerson or any other minstrel of the time -- which if accepted prima facie would establish the former as a serious contender for the crown held by the latter. Evidence on this point however is not too reliable and each must be treated with the respect which his own prominence earned.

It has been said that Horn's jokes were not always original, but so inimitably rendered that they seemed novel; and that his most famous act was a travesty of Anna Dickinson, suffragette and lecturer on women's rights. He would come upon the stage dressed like a Quaker, in skirts and bonnet, wearing his most severe expression. Glancing at a pitcher of water on the speaker's stand, he would begin his address by stating:

"Don't mistake this for gin. It is water, but I ginerally takes it when I want gin." Thus skirting his subject he would come at last to the real passage at arms: "Woman, who is she? Woman, to whom does she belong? She belongs to herself. If a woman gits married to a man and he ain't got anything, to whom does things belong? They belongs to a woman 'cause she wants everything she can git and she gits everything she wants." *

By imitating a locomotive with his feet, Horn originated the so-called "locomotive darky." A later improvement which greatly heightened the realism of this imitation was the addition of whistle sounds, the idea doubtless coming from a minstrel named Simon who lectured mockingly on the subject of steam.

BANJOS, BALLADS, AND CLOG DANCERS

Jig and clog dancing, which had pervaded the smaller variety halls with the rise of Lotta Crabtree, now found its way into almost every legitimate theatre, accompanied by the thrum of banjos. At the end of a notable contest with Otto Burbank, a plebiscite of the audience awarded Mike Mitchel the title of top jig man in California. Ben Cotton, almost as perennial as Horn, for two years during the seventies sang and danced to the strains of "Abraham's Daughter," a

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* Jacobson, Pauline. Article in San Francisco Bulletin, July 28, 1917.

ballad which derived from the Civil War and had become so tremendously favored over all other such ballads that even his audiences chanted it while leaving the theatre.

But perhaps the most overwhelming and long-lived of minstrel lays was that one whose authorship has been the subject of rather heated dispute, "The Days of '49." Many people contended they were its author, but Pauline Jacobson appears to have settled the matter conclusively by interviewing Mr. Cox, custodian of Sutter's Fort in 1917, who asserted that the ballad was actually composed by his brother-in-law, the minstrel Charley Rhodes. Jake Wallace may have been the first to sing it. According to Wallace he obtained the words from a man named Woodward, adapting the music from an old song. He said further that he hesitated a long while before introducing his find at the Olympic Theatre, because he feared it might prove unpopular.*

LEGEND OF BILLY, THE KING

Another highly controversial aspect of the sixties and seventies is revealed in debates which revolved around the subject of Billy Emerson, "King of them all." Even during his absence from the stage -- that is, his longest absence which occurred during the period roughly fixed between 1877 and 1879 -- people turned from current topics to speak enthusiastically of Emerson's appearances in '73. From the Alhambra Theatre, some averred, there still echoed the world's

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* San Francisco Bulletin, July 28, 1917.

"COLONEL JACK" HAVERLY

BILLY EMERSON

BERT WILLIAMS

LEW DOCKSTADER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MR. DONN HUBERTY

brightest laughter. "If ever a man was fitted for the profession he followed, Billy Emerson was that man." His most ardent admirers declared him an artist; but Emerson, others said, would smile to hear himself so described. The controversy was interminable.

THE RASCAL'S NONSENSE

Whether he impersonated a Negro (at which, according to some critics, he was unsurpassed), an Irishman, or a Dutchman, burnt cork could never effectively disguise Emerson's Celtic features. His skit That Rascally Billy nevertheless provoked laughter from an audience as few other minstrel pieces could. Many were the after-laughs which rang outside the theatre when some homeward-bound spectator recalled a particularly choice bit of "rascality" wherein the rascal asks the loan of a barrel, intending to use it for a bonfire, and giving the unwilling owner his most solemn assurance of the barrel's safe return as soon as the fire had burnt itself out. The point of this humor resides in the fact that the barrel was obviously combustible.

Some of the most fanatical of Emerson's worshippers alleged that no other minstrel could successfully fill an engagement in a city where the "king" had just appeared, affirming, to clinch the argument, Emerson's esthetic combination of artistry in both blackface farce and opera.

EMERSON'S ODDITIES

When Horn, Rice, Haverly and others of first rank are compared with Emerson, he appears the more versatile and popular favorite over the longest period. It was Emerson who introduced in San Francisco those riotous sketches Seven Out, Don't Give Dat Name a Bad Place, Carry the News to Marry, and A Trip to Paris. It was his company, playing at the California Theatre, which first presented Pygmelon and Gal-Eat-Er, a travesty of the celebrated story of Pygmalion and Galatea. Moreover Emerson could conjure up side-show oddities like the trickster who produces a rabbit from an empty hat. His presentation of Signor Denato, a one-legged Italian dancer of marvelous agility and skill, drew gasps of wonder and delighted handclaps from enthralled audiences. The same was true when Emerson introduced Little Mac, a dwarf minstrel whose like in California had never been seen until the "king" presented him in 1873.

Maguire's participation with Emerson in early ventures is firmly established by an advertisement appearing in The Figaro, January 1, 1873, which also indicates the nature of the entertainment which found such favor during this time:

NEW ALHAMBRA THEATRE

The Popular Emerson Minstrels
(Three Companies Consolidated)
Maguire and Emerson, Props.

Sam Wetherill . . . . . Bus. Mgr. and Treasurer
Bob Hard . . . . . Musical Director

This eve., Jan. 1. Every eve. during the week and Sat. aft. at 2.

First Part . . . . . Entertainment a La Salon
Overture, La Dame Blanche . . . . . .Emerson Minstrels
Beside the Grave of Jennie . . . . . .Clark & Rockafeller
Comic Dilly. . . . . Charles Sutton
Happy Moments with . . . . . .The Great Billy Emerson
When the Moon with Glory Brightens . . . . . .J. C. Russell

Concluding with Emerson's new finale entitled, The Old Kentucky Home

Uncle Steve . . . . . .Billy Emerson

Part Second -- Olio

Jennie Worrell and Lillie Hall in their songs and dances.

Finale: Third Act of Emain . . . . J. C. Russell and full vocal corps.

The Great Billy Emerson
in his album of specialties & Teutonic Eccentricities.

Baker and Farron
in a Heavy Fall.

Heavy as Lead . . . . . Bob Hart
Light as Cork . . . . . G. D. Rockafeller

Overture . . . . . .Orchestra

To conclude with Add Ryman's Sketch entitled Pompey's Patients.

Pompey . . . . . .Billy Emerson
Dr. Anathema . . . . . M. Ainsley Scott
Shady. . . . . Charles Sutton
Charles Squeezeferry . . . . . .J. Robinson
Cloudy . . . . . Sam Rickey

Grand New Year's Matinee Monday Eve. Jan. 20. First Appearance Johnny Allen, Miss Alice Harrison and Little Mac.

Although the exact date is uncertain, late in the seventies Maguire assumed complete charge of the troupe and the name was changed to Maguire's California Minstrels. There are three

possible explanations for this fact: first, Emerson may have gone into retirement or joined Haverly's Minstrels in Eastern or European engagements as he did intermittently at a later period while still appearing regularly in San Francisco with his own company; second, he may have formed an entirely new troupe and taken them to Australia; third, he may have begun a tour of the interior, starting perhaps at Sacramento and working his way with a small corps of followers either north or south according to what seemed the most profitable route.

MINSTREL KING -- THEATRICAL MONARCH

This last is the most attractive suggestion, both in view of Emerson's tendency to gamble away his finances and his association with Maguire, who may himself have proposed and sponsored such a project, since Emerson's success with a road show would have been taken for granted. Meantime a company under Maguire's aegis, especially one composed of late associates of Emerson, could hardly fail in San Francisco.

Here a tempting, though somewhat rhetorical inquiry offers itself. It should be borne in mind that Maguire had by no means lost his prestige in '73. His answer to Ralston's assumption of supremacy had been to borrow money and build another theatre, and since minstrels were swarming into California from every direction, his alliance with Billy Emerson could have been scarcely less than a coup d'état. Tom

Maguire, whatever people might say, was the longest reigning theatrical figure in the West. Bonanza gold proved quite as valuable as gold from the diggings; there were still huge profits to be made from entertaining people who were now becoming idly rich. Minstrelsy without doubt had become the vogue. Thus, by one stroke and another, Maguire was still able to regard himself the monarch of impresarios. Having fairly won his throne with shrewd generalship, having regained it time and again by desperate tenacity to a principle, having at last concluded an alliance which bore with it all the weight of conviction, one must believe that he intended holding it against all invaders. The monarch, therefore, and the king of minstrels held in common a stone whereby they could kill two or more birds at once. Is it a reasonable assumption that they would have neglected to use it if circumstances permitted?

In any case, putting aside assumptions and speculations, Maguire's California Minstrels held forth with overwhelming success at the Alhambra Theatre during Emerson's absence. Although many of the original company remained, there were, in addition, several sensational newcomers. Among the familiar faces were those of Bob Hart, Charles Sutton, J. G. Russell, W. G. Baker, Benjamin Clarke, G. W. Rockafeller. And at long last (five days after his announcement) there was Little Mac himself, a genuine dwarf strutting about the stage and performing, perhaps with some instrument, "his original

comicalities." Charles Vivian reappeared, still in white face, bringing with him a new sheaf of character songs. Then there was "the famous Leon, most polished and talented impersonator of female characters living," who enacted a piece called Courting in the Rain and supported Edwin Kelly, a "clever comedian," in the skit Lischen and Frischen. Miss Annie Adams, "world renowned comic singer," also made her initial appearance with this group as did Master Barney, "the great dancer." It may be doubted that all the newcomers were as spectacular as advertised, but nevertheless they caused a flurry of not unjustifiable excitement in the city.

COMMENT BY AN HISTORIAN

Since there is no record of the exact duration of Maguire's single-handed venture, it would be hazardous to guess when Emerson returned or whether they resumed joint control of that or another company. According to John P. Young:

> "Minstrelsy lingered throughout the eighties, but it had to be helped out by burlesque. The jokes of the end-men, and the ballads of the tenor, whose voice was usually a falsetto, and the clog and the statuesque dances of the fifties and sixties began to pall on public taste towards the end of the decade. The conservatism of the people, and the disposition to continue support of a favorite caused the burnt-cork artists to survive longer in San Francisco than in some Eastern cities. But Emerson's troupe which occupied the Standard Theatre on Bush Street for several years, began to find it difficult towards the eighties to compete with the attractions of light opera presented at the place across the way, even when the clever sketches of Charlie Reed were interpreted after a manner of his own, and the high spots of Italian Opera

were hit off. When Billy Emerson retired from the business, the minstrel show, like the circus, ceased to be a regular source of entertainment in San Francisco, and its inhabitants were content to put up with periodical visitations from troupes like those of Haverly, which were largely recruited from the ranks of old time favorites who always received a hearty welcome when they returned to the scene of their earlier success.

"Italian Opera had lost a great deal of its popularity and minstrelsy was in the decadent stage until it enjoyed a revival through the efforts of Billy Emerson who maintained an 'opera' house on Bush Street in the late seventies and early eighties. Much of the troupe's success was due to the wit of Charlie Reed, who perceived the waning inclination of audiences for the ordinary features produced by minstrels, and had the sagacity to introduce a new local burlesque every week, in which the foibles of the people were dealt with, sometimes without gloves. These gave the performance a vogue for awhile and when they ceased to please minstrelsy was no longer an institution in San Francisco. The Standard Theatre on Bush Street, run by Emerson, was the last house in the city in which minstrel performances were regularly given in the old days."*

THEY GO ON FOREVER

The historian, just cited, evidently did not consult all the available newspapers, for there are errors in his summary. Many of his statements contain half-truths, inaccurate references and contradictions of fact. It is however true that Emerson was the mainstay of blackface comedy as far as most San Franciscans were concerned and that "when he retired from the business, the minstrel show, like the circus,

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* Young, John P. History of San Francisco "The Last Lay of the Minstrel." Vol. II, p. 790.

ceased to be a regular source of entertainment"... Yet Emerson did not retire until 1895 and the first signs of decline came in the late eighties rather than in the seventies or early eighties. On this point the newspapers present sufficient affirmation, often in the form of commentaries provoked by public reaction. "As for the minstrels," said an Argonaut correspondent (April 23, 1883), "men may come and go, but they go on forever." Such a statement, although exaggerated, could not have been utterly false -- otherwise it hardly could have been printed.

HAVERLY'S FANFARE

Late in 1879 Col. Jack Haverly moved into San Francisco like a general marshalling his forces for a mass attack. He came with pomp, ceremony, the beating of drums, with even greater fanfare than that which had characterized his earlier appearances. He brought a company which, in his own words, consisted of "forty celebrated artists in the first part; twelve superior song and dance stars, all appearing at once in wonderful acts; twelve champion clog dancers, illustrating every style of dancing; eight eminent end-men, all appearing in new style dress and business; the Bar-Noric circus; Haverly's Artist Burlesque, the most successful burlesque ever produced on the minstrel stage; seven baby elephants; twelve beautiful horses; two principal riders; and four famous clowns." Haverly's description is of course

heavily overdone in the matter of adjectives, but quite correct numerically and factually. As implied in his title, people could "count 'em" and they did with great curiosity and wonder. Enormous sums had been expended transporting this corps of minstrels about the world, displaying it to best advantage, advertising it.

Such an attraction had not failed in London and New York; neither could it fail in San Francisco. Throngs poured into the Bush Street Theatre the night of August 25 (1879) to see the grand opening. They were enthusiastic spectators; they applauded, laughed, cheered, stamped their feet. Night after night attendance at the theatre filled it to capacity. In the Argonaut of August 30, the dramatic critic Betsy B. stated:

> "I am sure that half the crowded houses are all drawn to the Mastodon Minstrels by the advertising lithograph which depicts them sitting tiers upon tiers of minstrels, with a big drum at the top, and a most extraordinary picture of manager Haverly surmounting the pyramid in the most impressive manner. Truth to tell one finds this arrangement when one gets there; but there are eight end-men who have the most depressing effect. Hired mourners at a funeral could not be more gloomy. A ten year old almanac could not furnish staler jokes. A crew could not do wilder singing. The question arises, What are they for? Echo answers, To fill up. This seems to be the mastodonic policy--plenty of everything. It does not answer with the end-men, but in the ensemble it is good. Thus the Broadway squad is excellent. The militia should go and learn a lesson from their drill. In fact it is only where discipline is shown that the mastodons excel. Take the Broadway squad, the champion clog tournament, the picnic, and the burlesque circus, a

> succession of songs and dances, and you have the mastodonic gist. No one who does anything alone, does it well, excepting perhaps Kennedy the ventriloquist."

A BRIEF CRITIQUE

There may have been more than a modicum of truth in Betsy B's observations, the first of which is based upon the characteristic human behavior of curiosity response. Such an arresting lithograph as she describes would naturally attract crowds regardless of whether the performance itself had merit. For the rest, numbers alone would hold attention once people had been enticed into the theatre and impressed by the array they had seen. The excellent features of the show, which she emphasized by pertinent remarks, contrasts, and her admonition to the local militia, would likewise account for popular enthusiasm.

Betsy B.'s catalogue of contrasts particularly deserves attention since those features to which she objected belong in the true minstrel tradition, whereas the "mass effects" which so pleased her, do not. At this period, when Haverly introduced a small circus and gymnastic feats, to say nothing of his martial drills, true minstrelsy elsewhere had entered upon a full robust life that was highly appreciated.

But the Mastodons, though likewise appreciated, were a conglomeration of everything and their performances included many sensations which were extraneous, if not inimical,

to genuine minstrel technique. Haverly superimposed these things,one feels, in order to bolster up his show, but in the final analysis only succeeded in making it top-heavy.

Therefore the most curious implication of ultimate failure,stagnation, and demise inhered in Haverly's successes. By extention, since others began to emulate him later, the same is true of all minstrelsy. Brander Mathews presents a significant exposition of this fact:

> "And here we may find the real reason why Negro minstrelsy failed to establish itself. It neglected the opportunity to devote itself primarily to its own particular field--the humorous reproductions of the sayings and doings of the colored man in the United States. To represent the Negro in his comic aspects and in his sentimental moods was what the minstrels pretended to do; but the pretense was often only a hollow mockery."*

COLONEL JACK

Despite their uneven quality the "Forty--Count Em--Forty" troupe played in San Francisco three months, the engagement terminating September 28, 1879. At each performance, so far as is known, the theatre was filled with inquisitive, enthusiastic spectators. Perhaps the Mastodons only masqueraded as minstrels and were in fact a vaudeville company with many side-show wonders, but nevertheless they proved an important factor in advancing blackface comedy and

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* Mathews, Brander. Book About the Theatre. "The Decline and Fall of Negro Minstrelsy," Chap. XIII p. 228

were to reappear in San Francisco at regular intervals for over a decade.

In all probability the success of Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels was due to the manager himself, for Colonel Jack seems to have been something of a mountebank and certainly a shrewd showman who would never have undertaken such costly ventures unless there appeared beforehand reasonable assurance of profit. He not only engaged the best talent he could find, but at tremendous expense transported his extraordinary and numerous troupes all over the world year after year. It would be illogical, in view of this evidence, to assume that he paid seasonal visits to San Francisco out of mere sentiment, or that he would have remained there, at one or another theatre, from one to three months annually unless box-office receipts justified it.

There are facts which indicate a definite minstrel periodicity in the West, beginning about 1879 and continuing (though sporadic towards the end) until 1900. Perhaps the regular reappearances of such troupes as Haverly's and Emerson's, which alternated at the Bush Street Theatre for many years, could be compared to the seasonal advent of opera as it is practiced today. Indeed there is something highly suggestive and almost irresistible about the comparison when one considers how the San Francisco and Monte Carlo Opera companies follow a similar prodecure which is familiar to most contemporary San Franciscans.

HOOLEY, MORTON, AND HOMER

It must not be supposed, however, that during the absence of Haverly's and Emerson's Minstrels there was a complete dearth of minstrel shows. Theirs were but the major companies to which newspapers gave ample publicity; minor companies--less prosperous, not so well advertised, and individual blackface comedians entertaining in variety halls, small melodeons, gaming and drinking establishments--continued to hold public interest all year round. Of the lone minstrels there is virtually no record; but, with regard to the professional activities of some of the minor troupes, historians are again indebted to the Argonaut critic Betsy B. whose comments, though often naive, are explicit and full of interest.

In 1881 Hooley, Morton, and Homer's Minstrels opened at the Bush Street Theatre, which had the previous autumn been vacated by the Mastodons, now traveling abroad. The newcomers, "a dozen or more young men arrayed faultlessly in black and smeared artistically with burnt cork dipped in beer," received considerable space in the theatrical section of the Argonaut of February 26, five days after their opening. As if to add conclusive evidence de facto of her identity, the writer who signed herself Betsy B. now for the first time revealed her true name, Mrs. Joseph B. Austin. She told sentimentally how the minstrels were received with smiles of happiness as hundreds of theatre-goers pushed their way into

the house, filling the aisles and standing three-deep in the transverse passageway at the rear.

> "Anticipation thrilled in every heart," she wrote. "Hope gleamed in every eye. A smile wreathed every lip. Perspiration exuded from every pore. It was charming. As the fateful hour struck, the curtain rose....When the orchestra had blared for awhile, and the tumult of welcome had subsided, Mr. Burt Haverly (a brother of Colonel Jack Haverly) lifted his voice and sang a song. The burden of it was to the effect that
>
> 'The beautiful young love who could sing a tune
> He was going to marry very soon.'"

There followed various musical arrangements during which, the critic asserted, a young man (whom she does not name) dolefully looked forward to "The Day When You'll Forget Me" and responded to one or more encores:

> "After this," Betsy B. continues, "a young gentleman who is very dextrous with two tambourines, acquitted himself of a few witticisms which called forth shrieks of laughter. Yet another young man sang that tender little song 'Give My Chewing Gum to Sister,' with the first verse left out to make it seem a new song."

Observations of a like nature informed her readers that most minstrel troupes included several kinds of talent; therefore it was wholly in keeping with the event when Major Burt (advertised in capital letters as the "The American Military Sensation") went through a musket and bayonet drill. But the "three Rankin Brothers" she considered most clever of all. Relevant to these musicians to whom she had taken a liking, Betsy B. asked rhetorically:

> "What is there about a straight-haired Negro which appeals irresistibly to the risibilities?"

In other respects the performance received rather scornful criticism. But people laughed until their merriment seemed exhausted and roared with delight when one of the straight-haired, white-eyed Rankins sang "The Centennial" which began:

> "I'll sing you a nice little song,
> The name of it I cannot tell,
> 'Tis not very short nor yet very long,
> They call it the Centennial."

It might well have been so named, declared the critic, for "once in a hundred years is quite often enough for that sort of ballad to blossom." This statement of course implies a derogation of the audience no less than of the minstrels.

San Francisco playgoers, whose hypercritical judgments of the stage had steadily increased since '49, were evidently not expected to laugh at such a ballad--unless they laughed in derision. To make the matter even more specific, she declared that "the Centennial" was the only new song which Hooley, Morton, and Homer's Minstrels brought with them to the Coast. Their jokes, acts, skits, in short their entire repertory, proved "stale," but the troupe was considered clever at working over such creaking and anachronistic material. "Everybody laughed at the old jokes quite as heartily as they shake hands with an old friend," concluded Betsy B.

During the remainder of their season no other reference to Hooley, Morton, and Homer's Minstrels occurred, at least in the Argonaut. Other papers of the period have been lost or destroyed and those which are still extant, such as

the Daily Alta California, the Golden Era and the Evening Bulletin, have yielded no information whatever about the troupe. Therefore it is impossible to state when the season closed and whether they continued to draw large audiences.

HAVERLY AND EMERSON

Towards midsummer Colonel Jack Haverly brought his celebrated "Forty--Count Em--Forty Mastodon Minstrels" back to San Francisco. They had come, it was said, direct from Her Majesty's Theatre, London. Their triumphal entrance into the city heralded an even more spectacular entertainment than they had staged the pervious year. Billy Emerson, Billy Rice, Tom Sadler and other eminent minstrels were with the company when they opened at the Bush Street Theatre June 27, 1881. Bob Hooley, who had been prominent as a partner of Morton and Homer, vied with Emerson, Rice, Sadler, and Pete Mack in expert handling of the tambourine, while at the other end of the circle John Stiles, John and James Gorman skillfully wielded the bones. When the interlocutor, E. M. Kayne, had finished his salutation, those glib impersonators, just named, introduced their comical repartee which was followed by a "Grand Introduction: La Fille du Tambour Major," in which the whole company took part. Various soloists during the first part rendered such ballads as "I'm Gwine Home," "When the Leaves Begin to Turn," "Willie's Wish," "Scotch Lassie Jean" (which was not a plantation ballad); "A Hundred Fathoms Deep," "Medley La African," and "Plant Sweet Flowers."

A GRAND CLIMAX

Contrary to the procedure in general use, Haverly presented a burlesque, Operatic Finish, to conclude the first part, and judging by the program (a copy of which appeared in McCabe's Journal), omitted the olio altogether. The second part presented a curious combination,not all of which adhered to minstrel technique, although Mr. Sam Devere distinguished himself playing "original banjo songs," and Billy Emerson delighted everybody with his version of the catechism, called "Katty Kiss 'Em," and Billy Rice sonorously delivered his stump speech, "A New Lecture on Education." The rest was a business of gymnastics, statuesque dances, scenes depicting plantation life (in which clowns and darkies and tightrope performers took part) and a number of fairy-like tableaux, wherein Mr. Paul Vernon, Goddess of Liberty, drew particular attention to himself and was many times applauded.

The grand and thrilling climax of the spectacle, which included various other scenes, sketches, specialty acts and surprises, came when Zanfretta, Haverly's star acrobatic performer and gymnast, crossed Bush Street on a tightrope stretched from the roof of the theatre to the roof of a building opposite, carrying a man on his back. This extraordinary event had nothing whatever to do with blackface comedy, but it proved beyond all reasonable doubt that Colonel Jack, whether or not his title was justified, certainly was an astute showman.

On August 7, 1881 the Mastodons concluded their season at the Bush Street Theatre and went to Oakland and San Jose, where they had brief bookings of one or two nights before returning to San Francisco, August 12, and re-opening at the California Theatre, where a benefit was given next night, followed the night of August 14 by a joint benefit for John Rice and Pete Mack. The final performance occurred August 15, after which most of the company left for Sacramento en route to the East, playing at Virginia City, Nevada, August 20.

EMERSON REOPENS THE STANDARD THEATRE

Among those who remained in San Francisco after Haverly had taken his troupe to the East were Billy Emerson, Burt Haverly and Pete Mack. Within two months Emerson organized a company of his own, engaged the late Standard Theatre (which now he re-named Emerson's Theatre or Emerson's Standard Theatre) and prepared to open October 17, 1881. His company of course could not boast the numerical strength nor the flamboyance of its predecessor. From the evidence at hand there were less than a score of comedians associated with "the King of them all" in this venture, but each had shown himself to be a genuine Negro impersonator and each had been a fairly well established favorite before the season commenced. Moreover, unlike the Mastodons, Emerson's Minstrels presented new songs, jokes, and burlesques.

TOPICS OF THE DAY

One of the novelties which elicited widespread approval at the initial performance,and throughout the eleven weeks during which the show played, was A.D. Ryman's stump speech, "Topics of the Day," filled with current satirical gossip,with innuendo, with sly jokes anent the doings of local celebrities. Before long this feature assumed a few of the characteristics of Walter Winchell's "gossip," familiar to newspaper and radio audiences today. In that day, no less than at present, people enjoyed hearing the private affairs of their neighbors aired in public,and Ryman, in his capacity of commentator and informant, won for himself a pro tempore fame.

MORE SLAPSTICK COMICALITIES

Probably the next most agreeable appurtenance of Emerson's show (although secondary to his solo performances) was the burlesque Sarah Heartburn, many times repeated and engaging most of the troupe's best talent. It was a riotous piece of fun-making replete with slapstick effects which gained scope at each repetition. At first the characters were content to throw furniture and crockery about the stage, smashing everything breakable into minute fragments. Later, as the tempestuousness increased, clouds of flour would descend upon the whole blackface crew,making the climax utterly ludicrous and inconsonant with the original conception. But

the audience liked such farce, especially since it had to do with Camille, a grotesque lady of masculine proportions, who at the end of all this nonsense sometimes discreetly laid herself down to die and at other times suddenly died, as one eyewitness described it, "by measuring her length on the floor."

KING OF THEM ALL

But Billy Emerson, king in title and in fact, matched his own skill against the whole company and exceeded them, both collectively and individually. He gained immediate sufferance from his audience no matter what he did. Certain old songs of his were in constant demand; again and again he was called upon to render, for example, "Mary Kelly's Beau," "The Great Big Sunflower," and a peculiar medley which described Mrs. McFadden, a corpulent amiable Irish woman whose woes, none of them very serious, inspired a multitude of laughs. This song invariably brought the house to its feet with insistent shouts of "encore" and when the encore had been rendered it was greeted likewise with the same demand.

Sometime in December 1881, Emerson's season came to a triumphal conclusion. But this is not to say that minstrelsy suffered a relapse, for Charlie Reed, Joe Murphy, Billy Shepard and others were in and about San Francisco for several decades in the early eighties. Not all of these minstrels could attract such constant attention as Emerson and

Haverly; not every troupe which appeared could offer such scintillating and spectacular amusement as the Mastodons. Nevertheless they succeeded in drawing appreciable crowds to one or another of the theatres,and in keeping blackface shows before the public.

CALLENDER'S GENUINE NEGROES

During the next half-decade minstrels paraded across the boards of several theatres, simultaneously and perhaps unceasingly. There came from the East--direct from New York--early in 1882 an aggregation which aroused nearly as much interest as that occasioned by Colonel Jack Haverly and Billy Emerson. It was Charles Callender's Minstrels. Seeking something "different," though strictly traditional,with which to revive jaded metropolitan audiences, Callender had organized a troupe of genuine Negroes.

It may be assumed that while engaged upon this rather anomalous undertaking he encountered no little difficulty,for not merely did he have to cope with inexperience, but first had to seek through the East and South for suitable talent. Billy Kirsander, a bootblack, he found in New York's Bowery, and nearby a coachman named Sam Lucas whom he persuaded to desert his cab for the more lucrative career of minstrelsy. Callender selected Billy Banks from among a group of longshoremen on the levee of Wheeling, Virginia; and James Grace from among scores of waiters in restuarants of the same

city. He induced Lew Brown to leave his employment in a Philadelphia barber shop, and took Bob Mackenloch, a roustabout, from a Mississippi steamboat.

All of these, who may or may not have comprised the entire troupe, earned considerable reputations while traveling with Callender, and more money of course than had previously fallen to their lot. But they each required laborious schooling before being sent upon the stage.

> "In jubilee songs and plantation dances" Callender says, "they are superior to white men and have the advantage of a natural dialect; but they have scarcely any sense of humor...."*

Moreover one has the manager's word for it that these darkies manifested a propensity toward gross mannerisms, speech, and conduct; they had to be subjected to constant surveillance lest they should backslide into one of the many forms of "licentiousness" prevalent during the decline of the Victorian era. "No member of a company under my control," adds Callender, "is permitted to speak a single word before an audience until I have passed judgment on it." Much of this is sheer nonsense, or (perhaps more likely) a sentimental bid for publicity given to all the newspapers in the hope that they would print it and thus increase the box office receipts. As far as is known only the Argonaut printed it.

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* The Argonaut, "Flotsam and Jetsam" Column, Jan. 20, 1883.

OPENING NIGHT AT THE STANDARD

The opening performance of Callender's Minstrels, May 1, 1882 drew an enormous curious throng to the Standard Theatre which Emerson had vacated less than six months earlier. Although there can be no certainty about the matter, it is a safe conjecture that San Franciscans had never, until then, beheld a troupe of genuine Negro minstrels. True there had been individual Negroes scattered among blackface companies, and individual Negroes had possibly entertained in some of the variety halls; but here, for perhaps the first time at a legitimate theatre, was an aggregation of them. The event for this reason alone became momentous. Betsy B., the dramatic critic, attended with her husband and reported her reactions in the Argonaut of May 6, 1882:

> "'Are they real Negroes?' I asked innocently and Jack said they were, down to the last drummer. And yet there was the familiar burnt cork, when the curtain rose upon a pretty scene enough, for the stage was set in tiers under the reaching moss-hung trees, which suggested swamps, and malaria, and bloodhounds, and other cheerful things peculiar to Southern fiction. And there was a mossy foreground, with tree stumps for chairs, and the minstrels came sauntering in the lazy way peculiar to the race, and they were of all colors from pale mulatto to Guinea black. Of course they opened with the spurious music which has come to be known as Negro melody. And it was only now and then that they drifted into the swinging rhythm which characterizes their own. 'What a curious thing it is,' observed Jack, after he had been thoroughly bored for some twenty minutes--'what a curious thing it is that a white man makes a much better minstrel than a black one'...."

SUBSEQUENT APPEARANCES

Although she quite definitely implies that Callender's Minstrels were far from being all that was anticipated and that they bored her husband Jack and caused him to make the statement just recorded above, Betsy B. shows a strange reluctance (considering her earlier treatment of Haverly's Mastodons) to criticize their performance in detail or even to indicate its nature. More than a year afterward, in the Argonaut of September 22, 1883, there appeared this brief comment: "The Callender Minstrels have been appearing during the past week at the Grand Opera House in Uncle Tom's Cabin." One other allusion is made to them; they appeared during the week of August 18 that same year at the Baldwin Theatre "in their varied selections and character sketches. They will continue until further notice." Betsy B., whether or not she wrote the last two notices, does not tell when any of these engagements ended or whether the troupe remained in California in the interval between their first appearance at the Standard Theatre and their apparently second and third appearances at the Baldwin and Opera House respectively; or whether they played Uncle Tom's Cabin in the true manner of minstrel burlesque or presented it as melodrama.

CALLENDER'S MINSTRELS AND COL. HAVERLY

Certain questions do however obtrude themselves. About the time when Callender's Negroes were entertaining at the Standard Theatre (unless they retired after the opening

night) Haverly's Mastodons made their annual descent upon San Francisco with all the panoply of ostentation for which the Colonel was noted, and began a two-months' engagement at a rival theatre (the California) July 18, 1882. Now it will be remembered that Haverly's shows, however heterodox some of their features may have been, were in that day and place the most stupendous of any that had been offered. In such circumstances it is not at all unreasonable that Callender's Minstrels would have been accorded secondary consideration by both public and press. They probably played out their engagement though, and may afterward have toured Northern California en route East, following the precedent established by so many theatrical companies during the Gold Rush Era. Again, following a similar precedent, they may have gone to Australia.

"UNCLE TOM'S CABIN" OR BILLY EMERSON?

On the occasion of their recorded engagements in the fall of 1883 there is reason to suppose that Callender's Minstrels remained in San Francisco, or its environs, for at least a season. But whether they were able to draw profitable houses is another matter. Early that year Emerson had once more established himself at the Standard Theatre and played there continuously for one hundred and seven or eight weeks, commencing his one hundred and first week about the time Callender's Minstrels were rendering Uncle Tom's Cabin at the Grand Opera House, which had formerly been Wade's Opera House

and should not be confused with the theatre Maguire built and named Maguire's Opera House. Again, as in the previous year, Callender must have had to contend with powerful opposition and again must have come out second best, for thereafter his movements are shrouded in complete obscurity.

ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT WEEKS

Billy Emerson began what was probably his greatest single season sometime in February 1883. Shortly after the opening, attendance at most theatres began to dwindle, whereas the Standard Theatre was packed night after night. The reason for this is not far to seek. Emerson's popularity was so great that, in a minstrel-conscious town such as San Francisco had then become, he could always attract the crowds. His jokes, gags, witticisms, songs were repeated on the streets and among friends at private gatherings or in saloons. Some people indeed could not express themselves without referring to something Billy Emerson had said on the stage. Emerson had, besides, the good judgment to engage Charlie Reed and Billy Sweatnam, end men who might have become his bitter rivals under different circumstances. Both Reed and Emerson were canny in dealing with their public, ever mindful no doubt of the platitude "Absence makes the heart grow fonder"; thus they retired at intervals, just when popular enthusiasm for them had attained its height, in order to make their reappearance on the stage an occasion of great triumph -- which always was celebrated by full houses.

But along with regular triumphs Emerson and his troupe retained a continued, somewhat immoderate approbation throughout an engagement which was certainly immoderate in length when measured with other theatricals of the period. It might be argued that people would grow tired of endless stilted formalities that could never be quite done away with despite constant innovations; and there is evidence in the normal behavior of crowds (cited for their fickleness) that many people did, although their number was insufficient to materially affect the box office.

CHARLIE REED'S BURLESQUES

Despite Emerson's great popularity, much of the success of the troupe was due to Charlie Reed who instituted what was known as the "principal attraction." Usually this was a burlesque "written on the cuff" -- which means that it was spontaneous, impromptu, and subject to change at a moment's notice -- and sometimes it would not be a plotted piece at all, but simply a drill, statuesque dance, or skit. The first of these, mentioned in the Argonaut towards the commencement of the season, was called Reed's Jolly Wax Works. As to its genre or nature there is no suggestion except that contained in the title. It may have been a burlesque of some current play, allowing the minstrels to indulge their favorite pastime of smashing things to bits. If so, it no doubt proved successful.

ADDED NOVELTIES

Nearly every week Emerson added a new feature or talent to his show, bringing out early in February a celebrated song and dance team from New York, Johnson and Powers; and in April, Varney and De Ome who were described as "acrobats rather than song and dance men, but very clever in their line." The second pair were said to have possessed doleful voices, but when they stopped singing and began their gymnastic dance they aroused the whole audience to the point of vociferous acclamation.

On the strictly musical side however there was sufficient talent to counterpoint Varney and De Ome, namely the California Quartet. The unspecified individuals of this group sang their own arrangements of popular lullabies and were among the first to introduce waltz selections into minstrelsy. Emerson himself (at least in the public's opinion) could out-sing anybody then on the stage. As proof of his ability, a newspaper writer adduced the fact that a singing master whose name was not mentioned "had discovered a gold mine in Billy Emerson's throat." Emerson therefore immediately began to render operatic airs, including parts of Il Trovatore,"first darling of the tenor's (meaning Emerson's) heart." There is every likelihood that Emerson did prefer opera and to a certain extent his public approved the choice; nevertheless while serving as end-man opposite Charlie Reed,

Emerson participated in duets with the former burlesquing songs which Kate Carleton, at the Bush Street Theatre, had been singing in all seriousness, and he received a much more enthusiastic response.

GRECO-ROMAN BUSINESS

In fine, Emerson's Minstrels were a complete success. When Kate Carleton had completed her engagement at the Bush Street Theatre the blackface comedians took over that house and there proceeded to inaugurate a succession of pantomimes directed by Charlie Reed, in which Muldoon became the particular bright star. But their stay at the Bush Street Theatre, for reasons unknown, was short-lived. Towards autumn they were back at the Standard again. Here Reed produced his "Greco-Roman Clog Combat," which was one of the innumerable, incipient attempts to revive classicism on the minstrel stage. It was followed shortly by another sensation called "Classic Pictures of Roman Statuary," concerning which Betsy B. wrote in the Argonaut of November 24, 1883:

> "Muldoon himself must have studied very faithfully with the sculptor (Marion Wells, who arranged the pose), for he has caught the spirit of every pose thoroughly, especially that most difficult yet most simple one of them all, the 'Quoit Thrower' after he has thrown the quoit. The 'Gladiator' is a bolder piece, and 'Hercules at Rest' the most attractive of them all, for, if truth must be told, the young Lichias wobbles in his singularly uncomfortable position to such an extent as to rather destroy the statuesque effect of the second Hercules piece, though he bears the

strain right manfully. Muldoon brings to the representations, besides his famous physique, a classical head, and but for some few defects in the accessories, the effect is striking.

"Artistically,the classical representations are a success, and make a strange but pleasant break in the burnt cork programme. They seemed to clear the air of noxiousness which thickened it when two young men sang a terribly explicit song about a kiss, and two actors went through a scene of violent minstrel gymnastics, which only became amusing when they burlesqued the death of the late Ivan Ogareff, if that famous scene as enacted by Wessels (sic) can be said to be burlesqued.

"Charlie Reed's afterpiece, advertised as 'with a plot,' is really quite consecutive for an afterpiece; for an idea which appears in the first scene actually reappears in the third. But then, Charlie Reed is exceptionally a rational minstrel. He is not much of a dancer, and there are more mellifluous sounds than his high notes, but he keeps up with the lines and the news of the day, which no minstrel was ever known to do before, and he does not take his jokes out of an old cupboard where the mildew has gathered upon them.

"Billy Sweatnam, alarmed at the rapidly frowing popularity of Charlie Reed, has put on his thinking cap and become again what he once was, one of the best negro minstrels on the stage, and gives us in 'Little at Sin,' one of the best end songs in a long time."

COURTWRIGHT AND HAWKINS' MINSTRELS

Current with Emerson's engagement, Courtwright and Hawkins' Minstrels, an Eastern company, opened at the Bush Street Theatre (about October 27, 1883) and played for at least seven weeks. Like Callender's troupe they were given little attention by the press (no more than is stated above)

and probably received secondary consideration from the public who were pretty well engrossed paying homage to their "king."

EMERSON RECEIVES AN OFFER

Max Maretzek, who, from the context of Betsy B.'s remarks in the Argonaut October 13, 1883, appears to have been an enterprising and well-known opera impresario, urged Emerson to organize a company of minstrels for the purpose of establishing in New York or traveling through the South and East. Emerson however could not be convinced that such a venture would prove more lucrative than his San Francisco engagements. He had grown fond of San Francisco; its citizens idolized him and money was pouring into his coffers. He saw no reason why he should desert the city permanently -- at least not then. Therefore he rejected Maretzek's proposal as soon as it was made. Almost at once another promoter, Gus Frohman, broached a proposition whereby Emerson could earn $1,000 a week in Frohman's employ. But this offer the minstrel tenor likewise refused.

"CALIFORNIA"

As if to add significance to his double refusal, Emerson launched another series of triumphs with his own company right after the new year, engaging several stars who had just arrived from New York, where perhaps the minstrel business had not been flourishing for the past several months.

The biggest hit among these new additions to the troupe was Ben Clark, who late in January 1884 rendered a ballad called "California," written only a short time before by Ella Sterling Cummins, who was somewhat of a minor literatus among early San Francisco poets and prose writers. The song had already been published by the house of Gray, with an elaborate engraving reproduced in "vignette" from the Christmas number of the Argonaut. This of course lent considerable local interest to the affair, and Emerson's astute showmanship, Ben Clark's fine voice, the ballad itself -- all received hearty applause.

THE KING DEPARTS

Just prior to the introduction of "California" Charlie Reed had left for Los Angeles "to enjoy a vacation of two weeks." But it was announced that on his return he would present a special concert named "Mooneyville, or the Fate of a Seal," which did indeed claim widespread popular support along with a skit, Insanity, rendered by Messrs. Kelly and O'Brien until the season closed March 19, 1884. The Standard Theatre, with its doors locked, then became the house of Billy Emerson's ghost, while the king departed on a tour of Oregon, taking his whole entourage.

ENIGMA

During his Oregonian travels Emerson must have given rein to his penchant for gambling, and lost. Otherwise,

considering his refusal of Frohman's recent offer of $1000 per week, it is difficult to explain the second of the following notices published in the Argonaut, April 12 (while the minstrel was still in Oregon) and May 3, 1884:

> "Mr. William Emerson has received an offer from Haverly of five hundred dollars a week for ten weeks in London with the Mastodons, on condition that he appear (whether in San Francisco or New York is not stated) before sailing for England."
>
> "William Emerson left for England Thursday, where he is under engagement to Haverly."

A subsequent notice, largely conjectural, attempted to clarify the mystery surrounding Emerson's acceptance of Haverly's offer, his departure for England and, most surprising of all, his sudden unexpected return, alone, to the United States before the contract had expired.

> "Billy Emerson arrived here (New York) from London," said the Argonaut, July 5, 1884. "For reasons best known to himself he chooses to keep to himself the reasons for his coming back. They had certainly nothing to do with any row between him and the management of Haverly's American-European Mastodon Minstrels, for Emerson was one of the most honored bones in that lively fossil. Whatever the reasons were, he came and seems to be well satisfied with his coming, although he told our gossip the other day that he would join the combination again in the early part of August (probably when the Haverly troupe arrived in the United States). By or before November next he expects to be once more in San Francisco with an entirely new minstrel troupe, gathered from both hemispheres."

CHARLIE REED'S DILEMMA

Although no direct reference is made to the matter, it appears certain that Charlie Reed did not join his late

associate in what may have been a madcap London adventure. For in July 1884, the Argonaut announced that Reed had gone to New York with the intention of relinquishing his minstrel reputation for the more dubious business of white face comedy -- or vaudeville, in the theatrical parlance of today. Another former member of Emerson's Minstrels, H. W. Frillman, had abandoned burnt cork for opera, and succeeded to the extent of being engaged to sing basso parts by Madame Fabrizi, who was then organizing an operatic company in the East.

Whether Reed succeeded to a similar extent in his ambition, or could not ultimately persuade himself to attempt the transference to white face, is not known. In any event he did not follow his intention long, for he is next heard from (August 2, 1884) leaving New York with a full minstrel troupe and on his way apparently (the correspondent is vague in this regard) to San Francisco, where he did in fact open for a season at Emerson's Standard Theatre. But that occurred September 13, a month and a half later. Meanwhile another rumor had it that Reed intended founding his company to replace the then-defunct San Francisco Minstrels, who had spent the better part of their professional life in New York.

It may have been that Reed's motive was misunderstood. On the other hand his negotiations for a lease on The

Comedy Theatre in New York may have resulted in failure to secure the house at a reasonable figure. But whatever his plans were, he was able, when finally he arrived in San Francisco, to present some of the burlesques of popular plays which he had intended to introduce on the Atlantic seaboard.

LEON AND CUSHMAN PRESENT A NOVELTY

Three weeks prior to the arrival of Charlie Reed, Leon and Cushman's Minstrel Comedy Company opened at the Bush Street Theatre, August 2, 1884 and created a sensation "half-resented, half-liked." Now, for the first time in San Francisco, there was introduced with the appearance of this troupe an entirely different type of minstrel business.

The difference occurred specifically in the unique stage arrangement which Leon and Cushman devised. When the curtain rose there was no convention-honored minstrel circle, but only a cleared space with backdrops to represent a "settin' room" into which came the darkies, one at a time or in pairs or groups, to execute their songs and dances, jokes and byplay. As each act ended, the performers retired somewhat in the manner of vaudeville comedians today.

Moreover, if one may so interpret Betsy B.'s remarks, those minstrels who had speaking parts were obliged to memorize certain lines as actors in a play do; for she said: "A minstrel is never so stripped as when he studied lines to speak. It seems to knock all the real humor out of him." The

critic meant to imply no doubt that Leon and Cushman's Minstrel Comedians were stilted, self-conscious, disagreeably lacking in spontaneity and, by indulging in unqualified novelties, stultified. Among other offenses they were alleged to have interjected a travesty on Fedora which was "not bad to those who knew the plot."

In any case Leon and Cushman, for all the pains they took concocting and presenting novel shows, were rewarded thereafter with complete absence of attention from Betsy B. Rather she turned her active, sometimes ingenuous pen to the task of celebrating Charlie Reed's virtues, leaving the Minstrel Comedians in what she possibly considered a well-deserved limbo.

THE "PLAIN COMEDIAN"

Reed's opening at Emerson's Standard Theatre, on August 23, 1884 proved a welcome change from the "unwholesomeness" which had pervaded the Bush Street Theatre only a few weeks before. During his sojourn in New York, Reed had formed a capable company consisting of J. Carroll Johnson, comedian end-man; William Henry (Billy) Rice, female impersonator; John Robinson, interlocutor; Crandall and Eastwood, character comedians; Keegan and Wilson, song and dance artists; W. S. Mullaly, "author and conductor"; the California Quartet, Morant, Wilter, Holland, and Coyatt; and the Madrigal Boys, whose number and personnel were unspecified. The proud manager of this group now called himself "the Plain Comedian,"

after the title of a playlet he had either originated or adopted while in New York and which he presented with all manner of embellishments in San Francisco.

The occasion was one of unbridled enthusiasm that progressively mounted during the next few weeks until it reached its climacteric towards the end of the year with the introduction of two original songs: "Charlie Reed's 'Medley'" and Carroll's "Climbing the Golden Stairs"; the burlesque of a play then current at the Baldwin Theatre, Called Back, in which Reed showed himself an adept of the profession in his role, Pay Yolo Mulcahy, a tamale vendor (On the evening of October 25 every lady in the audience received a bon-bon souvenir tamale with Mulcahy's compliments); the farce: Out All Night; and last, on November 8, 1884 an afterpiece called The Two Tramps.

It was a rather exultant, if protracted, climax, culminating in January of the next year in an alliance whereby manager Stechhan took Reed into partnership with him, Emerson's possessive being dropped from the name of the Standard Theatre and Reed's being added to the name of the troupe which had been denominated (unless the Argonaut erred) by one less definitive.

THE WORLD FAIR MINSTREL COMPANY

But although these happenings apparently transpired to Reed's advantage, Billy Emerson, at the head of a new band

of crusaders (Emerson's World Fair Minstrel Company), decided not to visit New Orleans as had been his intention. Instead he came direct to San Francisco and reopened the old California Theatre right after Christmas for a two weeks' holiday engagement.

Certainly the arrival of Emerson, whose movements had now become somewhat unpredictable, offered a serious challenge to Reed's supremacy. Emerson had been expected to remain in New York for a season with Haverly. Thus when he descended out of the blue, so to speak, he was accorded the welcome of a "king come into his own." However, Charlie Reed appeared not the least disturbed by this fact.

> "The king has come into his own," stated the Argonaut of January 3, 1885, "and Charlie Reed, who has made the fortunes of the little Standard Theatre, has at last been admitted into partnership (with Stechhan). The chances are that Charlie Reed will celebrate the occasion by immediately breaking out in a role (sic) of new jerseys. Every time Charlie has a new idea he gets a new jersey, and as he gets one (idea) every time there is anything new in town, he will hereafter be able to read the history of the city by his line of jerseys, as they hang on the wall."

From this article one might conclude that there existed no bad blood between Emerson and Reed. It is possible, though by no means certain, that Reed conceded Emerson's greater popularity and sought to take whatever advantage of it he could -- if not by an entente, then by a contrast of their individual talents. Almost at once Reed capitalized

upon Emerson's choice of an unfortunate theatre, apparently the only available choice. Unleashing his facile pen, he wrote another burlesque on his shirt cuff around a subject of great local interest -- the disputed ownership of the California Theatre.

"WHO OWNS THE THEATRE?"

A vast amount of obfuscation surrounds this dispute despite the fact that various newspapers (notably the Morning Call, May 15, 1889) publicized it at length, and, it should be added, with pothers of verbiage (in the real sense of that expression) from which no details emerge except by guesswork or inference.

Roughly then the situation was this: Until 1877 the California Theatre had been leased to the actor John McCullough who at that time, unable to continue there on a profitable basis, relinquished his interests (either through a sublease or some less formal agreement) to Barton Hill, who in turn, after a fitful tenure, allowed the theatre to pass into the control of General W. B. Barton and Frank Lawlor, who finally transferred proprietorship, legally or otherwise, to McKee Rankin and Jay Rial of the Rankin Stock Company.

Another claimant in the person of Al Hyman, a speculator, appeared on the scene and "laid siege"* to the

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* According to the Daily Alta California of July 29, 1888 Barton and Lawlor were succeeded, after a season of mismanagement, by Asa Field and James T. Maguire. J. H.

Rankin Stock Company's proprietary rights. Rial however held out against Hyman for several weeks, during which tempestuous interlude the female Rentz-Santley Minstrels concluded an inglorious season under the management of M. B. Leavitt. After that the theatre remained closed until Emerson reopened it a few days prior to the emergence of Charlie Reed's clever burlesque, Who Owns the Theatre? which was duly performed as an afterpiece at the rival Standard Theatre late in January 1885.

BILLY SWEATNAM AND CARROLL JOHNSON

There are indications that Reed by this move achieved a coup de repos, for Emerson withdrew and the California Theatre, whose ownership still remained unsettled, consequently closed again, January 31, 1885. Towards the end of February, Emerson, who had been idle for nearly a month, determined to take a company to Australia. For this purpose he engaged Billy Courtwright, Walsh and King, Al Holland, and, in place of Carroll Johnson (who had announced his intention of going East), Billy Sweatnam. With regard to the respective merits of the two last named, the Argonaut (February 28, 1885) announced:

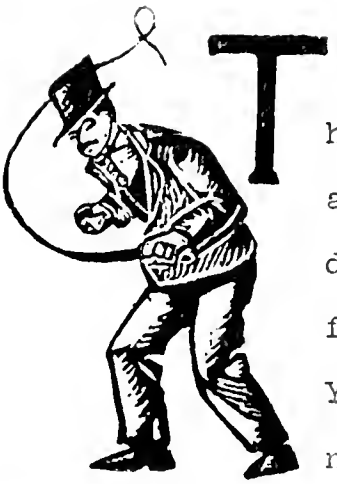
Haverly and Charles McConnell then became lessees, Fred Bert eventually relieving them of control in December 1884, at which time Al Hyman became the proprietor (or asserted his claim to proprietorship) of the California Theatre. It is impossible to decide which of these two differing newspaper accounts is correct, but there is no doubt that the theatre's ownership was a matter of question at the time Reed wrote his burlesque Who Owns The Theatre?"

> "Sweatnam is not so versatile as Johnson, but has a quaint form of humor all his own. Singularly enough he is the model whom many of the most successful minstrels in the profession have copied; but the fact is so little known that he is often accused of copying the very men who have imitated him. He was for a long time the popular favorite in Philadelphia,occupying much the same position that Charlie Reed does here, but often found in the course of his travels that Philadelphia wit did not bear transportation."

Thus,while Charlie Reed retained the throne formerly occupied by the king of them all, Emerson departed for Australia -- that other celebrated gold coast of the Pacific. Reed meantime held forth jovially at the head of his own troupe until early autumn when Colonel Haverly stormed into San Francisco, induced Reed to join his company and opened August 10, that same year, at the Baldwin Theatre.

CHAPTER 2

ADVENT OF THE DEBACLE



The robust days of minstrel shows now began a slow and at first imperceptible decline, dating perhaps (though not specifically) from the death of Charles Backus in New York, July 6 or 7, 1885. San Francisco newspapers undertook the publication of a series of "reminiscences" reprinted from the New York World and captioned: "The Dead Minstrel." Since Backus had been a popular minstrel hero of times past, these reminiscences became a focus of attention as well as a symbol of decline. Nearly every literate person in the city read them; garrulous oldsters retailed them on street corners until even the younger generation became ostensibly though vicariously awed by the twice-told exploits of the "nation's funny man."

TALE OF THE SCHOOLMASTER

Charles Backus, it became apparent, was already an accomplished practical humorist at the age of fourteen while a pupil in a village school on the outskirts of Rochester,

New York. A rumor went around one day (communicated to Backus by his brother) that the schoolmaster, an old, bent,feeble, and severe pedagogue of the type celebrated by Washington Irving in his Sleepy Hollow legend, had been taken suddenly ill with a complaint that left him bedridden. Since there was no way of corroborating the rumor save by a personal visit to the man's house,Charlie offered himself as emissary, promising if the rumor were true to return and tell his brother so that their classmates might absent themselves from school that day.

When he failed to return at the appointed hour the other pupils logically enough concluded that the rumor was false and, although mystified by Charlie's nonappearance, went to school. Charlie's brother, who had tarried in hope of a last minute reprieve, entered the class late. The teacher sat at his desk, more stern and forbidding than usual. He at once called master Backus to him and forthwith,in accord with time-respected discipline,administered a dozen raps on the offender's knuckles. During the first hour the schoolmaster continued to mete out the most severe punishment for the slightest offenses;but it was noticeable that he selected the largest boys, school bullies, as his victims.

Just before the class recessed however, the old man had occasion to write something on the blackboard. In performing this operation his white beard and white hair fell to

the floor, revealing to the astonished and chagrined pupils none other than Charlie Backus.

CHARLES BACKUS, CHAPERON

Another anecdote reveals Backus in the role of mother-duenna. At this time he was a young apprentice, or understudy, playing Jerry Clip in a farce called The Widow's Victim at a Cleveland theatre. Among the other players a young (and one may presume pretty and timid) actress called attention to herself inadvertently by the practice of driving home each night with her mother who called in a carriage at the stage door. One night the lady arrived earlier than usual. Seeing no one else to whom she could deliver a message she accosted Backus with the information that, owing to the illness of her husband, she would be unable to perform her office of chaperon, but would send the carriage around just the same and requested Backus to convey this information to her daughter, Rose Norton. Backus promised.

But when Rose left the theatre that evening, innocent of the information Backus was supposed to have given her, she was greeted as usual by her mother-apparent with a warm kiss and ushered into the carriage. Everything proceeded smoothly until Miss Norton's escort remembered that the actress lived at home with her parents. Evincing an altogether unladylike demeanor, the girl's supposed mother astonished her by attempting to escape from the vehicle while it was still in motion. Rose prevented the maneuver just in time

and in consequence discovered (probably by disarrangement of costume) how she had been deceived by her fellow-actor, Jerry Clip. Thereafter, if the anecdote can be credited, Charles Backus and Rose Norton became firm friends.

IMPERSONATIONS, INSURANCE, AND MIMICRY

Another New York paper, the Sun, stated that "his wink would have made a man laugh and his grin would convulse a packed house." An Argonaut correspondent elaborated the idea, borrowing largely from the New York paper:

> "Probably his most remarkable doings as he sat at the right (as to the audience) of the ebony oil arc in the first (part) of the performance were accomplished with his mouth. This extraordinary feature was a rare gift to one in his profession. By its unaided manipulation he could at any moment bring down the house. It was his especial delight to find a group of children in the box at his left elbow. He could turn his head and plunge them into paroxysms of laughter by simply causing his mouth to run in a wavy, cater-cornered way across his face. It was a large mouth by nature, and he added to its vast appearance by stopping the burnt cork an inch or so short of its confines, and filling in the interval with a beautiful vermillion. He could describe with his mouth a circle, a crescent, a triangle, a parallelogram, or a streak of lightning at pleasure. Everything he did with his mouth was full-grown, not to say inordinate. When he spoke Italian, after Salvini, or French after Bernhardt, the sounds of these languages were like thunder rolled through a bordering of St. Vitus. When he moved his mouth merely, the children screamed with merriment; when he spoke through it, they nearly died of terror.
>
> "Mr. Backus heard that a gentleman, insulted at something he said, was searching for him to shoot

him. He sent this message: "Kill Birch. He has no child. I have."*

One time, according to a different anecdote,** an insurance agent visited Backus and told him: "Mr. Backus, I would like to insure your wardrobe. It is valuable. I have insured Mr. Lester Wallach's wardrobe, which is also valuable." Backus seriously agreed with the agent's proposal and took the other to see his wardrobe. It consisted of a few wigs, some cotton aprons and trousers, and some stumps of burnt cork. Needless to say the insurance man left in a state of high discomfort, nor did anyone thereafter bother the minstrel about such trifles.

While in San Francisco (October 1864) the actor Charles Kean became the subject of Backus' satirical impersonations. Having witnessed one of his performances, Kean sent for Backus who presently arrived at the hotel where Kean was stopping. In the presence of three witnesses (Messrs. Cathcart and Everett, and Kean's wife, the actress Ellen Terry) Kean stated: "I saw your imitation of me last night, Mr. Backus; it was good but not perfect. I have sent for you to instruct you, so it will be perfect." Kean then requested Backus to repeat some lines after him. The latter did so, in his own voice. Kean said they would not do, whereupon Backus excellently imitated him. Mrs. Kean and the others (also

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* The Argonaut. July 7, 1885.
**Ibid.

actors) said "wonderful" and laughed. "Good God, Ellen," exclaimed Kean, "do I mouth like that?"*

> "I remember once going with him," says a correspondent of the Brooklyn Eagle, "to see McCullough play Virginius at the Fifth Avenue Theatre. Backus had come down to his theatre to play as usual, but had been seized with a slight vertigo and decided not to go on the stage. He started out for a short walk and I met him accidentally just in front of his door. When he found that I was going to see McCullough he joined me. The Fifth Avenue Theatre is just around the corner from the San Francisco Opera House (New York: probably so named because the San Francisco Minstrels were then playing there). We went in and took our seats, and all through the play Backus made comments on Mc Cullough's acting. He watched the tragedian closely and after he was done gave some spontaneous imitations of McCullough that made men who were standing in the lobby roar. He said that the next night he would give a lengthy imitation of McCullough and I went particularly to see him. His memory was extraordinary, and he mimicked every shade and expression of McCullough with marvelous accuracy.
>
> "The firm of Birch, Wambold, and Backus, or Birch, Wambold, Bernard, and Backus, as it was formerly (The San Francisco Minstrels), always had a great contempt for what they called middle men. Their business affairs were carried on in a simple but effective fashion. They employed no such men as treasurers, bookkeepers, accountants, or business managers, but every night after the performance they all gathered in the business office and sat down around a square table. The money as it was taken in at the door was dropped through a hole in a big iron box. The contents of this box were then dumped upon the table and Mr. Backus took the money in hand, and after paying the day's bills, distributed the balance, dollar by dollar to his partners. That ended the transaction for the day and for all days preceding it."**

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* Argonaut. July 7, 1885
**Ibid.

REED'S BOLERO

These anecdotes about Backus added much to his fame and started a kind of Backus cult among those who had ceased attending minstrel shows, for one reason or another considering them decadent. Towards the end of 1885 there were however at least three theatres devoted at various times to minstrelsy: the Bush Street, the Baldwin, the Standard. "Plain Comedian" Charlie Reed still continued to draw sizeable audiences,but the most anxious seekers, Betsy B. reveals in the Argonaut of August 15, failed to find anything very new in his humor. In New York, it was alleged, Reed had not unearthed the novelties expected of him, although he had acquired a bolero which he distinctively wore over his newest jersey. The bolero, a kind of Spanish jacket edged with multicolored pompons, was short enough to leave a portion of the jersey exposed, but "mildly obscured it" (because of the pompons) and rendered the name "Plain Comedian" an ironical misconstruction.

PERFORMANCE MILITARESQUE

Discussing Reed, Betsy B. in the same article (Argonaut, August 15, 1885) reported on Haverly's United American-European Minstrels who, having dropped the epithet "Mastodon" from their title, had arrived in San Francisco August 10 and opened at the Baldwin Theatre. Haverly had brought with him to the Coast a family of acrobats,the Craggs,

consisting of three children and their parents. They, together with a quartet (which did not on this occasion style themselves the California Quartet, the first exception of this kind on record), and clog soloist who danced without music, formed the only new features of the show. The clog dancer however was inclined to wander about the stage, clattering in a manner "which is highly lucid in his own mind, but is very mysterious to everyone else." As for the quartet, three of its members "sang atrociously"; the basso might be considered "fair," although the critic does not say as much. She merely excepts him from the general censure.

The remainder of Haverly's show had become through frequent repetition a stereotyped militaresque performance. People enjoyed its numerical array, the skillful precision of its drill, its pageantry, reviews, parades, and therefore patronized Haverly; overlooking perhaps such flaws as came to the attention of Betsy B. who deprecated a slight non-conformity when two or three of The Black Watch carried their muskets at the wrong angle and one unlucky fellow "got his upside down at a critical moment."

"THE PINAFORE BOOM"

Charlie Reed during this engagement was a member of Haverly's troupe, but he apparently did not assert his creative talents until September 1885, when he wrote and presented a burlesque of Gilbert and Sullivan's light opera The Mikado,

which was first produced at the Savoy, London, March 14, 1885, thirteen years after the so-called "Pinafore boom" had invaded the United States.

The history and development of this phase of light opera began in midsummer, 1878, after the success of Gilbert and Sullivan's H. M. S. Pinafore. But it was some months before American theatrical managers were able to obtain the music and words, owing no doubt to the difficulties which usually attend the piracy of literary and musical works. At first it was common belief that San Franciscans enjoyed the original pirated presentation of Pinafore. This however has been disproved. The opera was actually staged at the Boston Museum, November 25, 1878, where "books of the words were on sale by the ushers, price ten cents; the music for sale at the cloak room, price twenty-five cents."

This Boston performance possibly attracted the attention of Alice Oates (or Mrs. James A. Oates as she advertised herself), who at the time was appearing in comic opera at the Alhambra (later the Bush Street) Theatre in San Francisco. She or the manager, Mr. Locke, secured some librettos and copies of the music -- probably for ten and twenty-five cents -- and produced Pinafore at the Alhambra Theatre December 26, 1878, a month after the Boston performance.

The excitement which this opera had caused in England influenced numerous managers in the United States, many of whom (although this possibility cannot be absolutely

established) may have sent stenographers to the London theatres with instructions to write out the words as they were spoken on the stage. Musical scores could have been copied by bribing theatre employees.

PIRACY OF H. M. S. PINAFORE IN SAN FRANCISCO

However the piracy was accomplished, Pinafore began playing to enthusiastic audiences in every theatrical center in America. But it should be noted that when the curtain fell at the end of Alice Oates' production, people applauded with a dazed show of politeness which caused one critic to remark: "Pinafore was not exactly a success, but was enjoyed for its music, and disliked for its thoroughly English burlesque features."*

Manager Locke at once concluded the opera was a failure and abandoned it. Other managers would have nothing to do with Gilbert and Sullivan's "typically English opus." Thus until Emilie Melville, at the head of a semiprofessional group, had the courage to revive Pinafore a few months afterward, it remained unpopular. Many of Miss Melville's cast were Bohemian Club members. They secured the Standard Theatre for their performances, drawing such huge throngs that Locke perceived his error and on June 9, 1879 (while the Melville troupe was still playing) produced Pinafore with a rival company at his own theatre across the street.

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* Hart, Jerome A. In Our Second Century p. 422.

Miss Melville terminated her successful engagement that autumn; whereupon Locke engaged her as his prima donna and once more inaugurated a profitable season of Pinafore at the Bush Street Theatre in October 1879.

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN IN NEW YORK

The next month Gilbert and Sullivan had come to New York, anxiously hopeful of receiving at least part of the money their opera was earning. At the Fifth Avenue Theatre they therefore staged an authorized version of Pinafore December 1, 1879, appearing in person. Gilbert, in sailor's attire, went upon the stage to coach the chorus. But he was then unknown in New York and his appearance aroused the antagonism and defiance of American managers. Sullivan in a mood of deep reproach confided in his friend, Thomas Whiffen who was playing Sir Joseph in one of the rival pirate companies at another theatre: "Those pirates and thieves don't pay us a penny, Tom," he cried.*

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

His words had no effect on Whiffen but had an enormous effect upon the theatre in New York City and elsewhere, since they bore the kernel of an idea for the tremendously popular Pirates of Penzance, written and produced in New York, as a possible protection against further piracy.

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* Hart, Jerome A. In Our Second Century. p. 423

Although the authors kept their second opera in manuscript, the inevitable piracy again happened; stenographers were present at the Fifth Avenue Theatre when Gilbert and Sullivan produced the initial version of The Pirates of Penzance. Moreover, adding insult to injury, American Federal Courts held that both words and music could be "legally reproduced by memorizing them." A few weeks later even Locke in San Francisco had managed to get hold of a copy of the opera which he immediately produced at the Bush Street Theatre. There is some doubt about the matter, but Locke may have used an authorized version of The Pirates of Penzance, for it was quite well rendered and conformed faithfully to the original. Emelie Melville played the leading role, Mabel.

MORE LIGHT OPERAS IN SAN FRANCISCO

From this time Gilbert and Sullivan's light operas became an established mode at the Bush Street Theatre. Locke, whether or not he had established business relations with these popular authors, continued to produce their operas one after another. In 1881, soon after the London debut, Locke presented Patience with Emelie Melville in the title role. After this followed Iolanthe in 1882; Princess Ida, in 1884; and The Mikado in 1885.

It is not certain that the last two were produced by Locke at the Bush Street Theatre, for the Tivoli Opera House, exclusively devoted to light opera, opened in 1884 or

1885, and The Mikado, at least, was definitely produced at the latter playhouse in the fall of '85.

"MICKEY-DOO" -- A BURLESQUE

All of these events, significant enough in themselves, shed a kind of vicarious glory on the minstrel burlesque Mickey-Doo which Charlie Reed introduced opportunely at a performance just prior to the formal opening of The Mikado at the Tivoli Opera House. Reed seems to have had a gift for selecting pertinent subjects and launching his burlesques at a timely moment. Mickey-Doo aroused considerable public interest, coming as it did in the wake of a furore created by piracies of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Betsy B., always alert to such situations though she often ineptly expressed herself, wrote in the Argonaut of September 26, 1885:

> "It has been a red letter day at the minstrels. Charlie Reed has had one, or two, or three of his inspirations, for the good things always come together. The field of burlesque has always invited the minstrels but they rarely avail themselves of its unbounded opportunities. They are a trifle in advance with 'The Mikado' (Mickey-Doo) but through telegraph, letter and quarrel, we are all so familiar with the new opera that a little forestalling does not count."

Then in defense of Reed and in disparagement of one of the pirated New York versions of The Mikado she added:

> "Perhaps Charlie Reed is even a better burlesque artist than he realizes, for it was said of one of the New York productions that it was such a cross between Chinese and Japanese as to offend all true lovers of either. Charlie Reed is a cross between a mandarin and a samurai and intensely Reedish in either case."

In conclusion Betsy B. stated that the burlesque "sadly needs some legs to stand on," for although built upon sound ideas and excellently acted, the dialogue lacked that spontaneity which she felt it should have had. Only once in a while did it ascend to natural "Reedism." Despite the critic's remarks, however, Mickey-Doo continued at the Bush Street Theatre for two weeks, ending in a benefit performance early in October. Thereafter the company disbanded.

REED'S "PA-QUIT-HER"

Two weeks later the Standard Theatre was adorned with playbills announcing a new minstrel company and it soon became evident that Reed had merely shifted his ground. But he had also prepared another burlesque, Pa-Quit-Her, a travesty on Paquita. Opposite him at one end of the semi-circle appeared Billy Birch, one of the prime favorites of the old days. H. W. Frillman, among the best middlemen in the business, held forth as interlocutor; D. D. Bedell, J. W. Meyers, Joseph W. Woods, and Castle Brydge were soloists; and specialty acts were relegated to the talented quartet Mills, Clark, Colburn, and Clayton, aided by the "Six Madrigal Boys" whose patronyms were never mentioned in the dramatic columns of the Argonaut although they played numerous San Francisco engagements during the eighties with both Reed and Emerson. The cynosure of this accomplished group was Billy Birch who had not appeared on the Coast for something like twenty years.

BILLY BIRCH "IN THE YELLOW OF HIS LEAF"

Birch's skill with the bones, coupled with his versatility, had become a matter of acknowledged fact even to those who had never seen him. People frequently compared him to Emerson, Carroll Johnson,and Charlie Reed and held that he alone was the "prophet" of the great Christy. Nevertheless few of his own generation attended the theatre that night of October 23, 1885,when Birch made his autumn debut with Reed's Standard Minstrel Company, arriving from New York "like a prima donna in the yellow of his leaf and like the prodigal son shorn of his substance." But the youth of California, "the new California," had turned out in full force -- eager, anticipatory, critical. Birch received a warm tremendous burst of applause from the young bloods (for old time's sake). But an attentive quiet settled upon the audience as he pathetically smiled, peering about for the sight of familiar faces.

Evidently he was disappointed since, as Betsy B. declared, he found them not. His joviality had grown thin with age and he had lost during his New York sojourn that necessary local flavor which assures a minstrel's continued popularity. But for all that no one could forget that he was Billy Birch, looking as if he had just stepped forth from the frontispiece of an old Christy song "in the terrifying uprearing of his locks, the abnormal depth of his shirt collar

and the roll of his round eyes." Above everything he manipulated the bones with a cleverness which no later minstrel possessed. "There were thirty years of practice in the preliminary click."

CHARLIE REED, APOLOGIST

Charlie Reed on his end displayed a thoroughly up-to-date technique in playing the tambourine; he smiled benignantly at Birch, like a patriarch who in self-sufficiency can afford a lavish tolerance of the old school.

Later in the performance, though, he forgot Birch; the audience, it appears, had been overcome with gloom when the Madrigal Boys rose ambitiously to their highest note "while the orchestra was floundering helplessly down in the bass and the singers flew off at three tangents." Reed endured his agony (both as instigator and patron of such buffoonery) as long as he was able. Then, driven ultimately to speech, he arose and humbly apologized in behalf of the whole troupe and cast himself as well as the others on the mercy of an indulgent audience. He was quite successful in turning the sentiment from gloom to merriment and (if one may believe the Argonaut critic) convinced people that they were enjoying a performance of pandemonium intentionally staged.

Afterward a group of Japanese acrobats restored the entire audience to what was then considered "a normal minstrel mood," and Reed's travesty of Paquita, last on the program, created an atmosphere of genuine good humor.

"NAN-OFF," "MACBREATH," AND CONUNDRUMS

In rapid succession Reed wrote and produced two other popular burlesques: one of the opera Nanon (called Nan-Off); the other of Shakespeare's Macbeth (called Macbreath). It should be remembered that neither of these was entirely original; they had already been done by earlier minstrel troupes, but one may safely assume that Reed's versions, however imitative they may have been, were well received.

The small rotund minstrel had more than one trick up his sleeve as was demonstrated when he introduced "conundrum matinee" in which the audience participated by submitting word puzzles to be answered on the stage. Rarely did it prove difficult to decide which one deserved the capital prize (probably a cash award); but often no one could determine which of the lot was worst and in awarding a "consolation" prize much fun occurred. Naturally, with such an attraction, crowds flocked into the Standard Theatre. Reed's travesties were duly acclaimed and soon he acquired a reputation which argued for his talents as a legitimate comedian. He could almost forsake the minstrel stage for vaudeville or even some higher form of theatricals. In short Reed did everything possible to insure himself a long tenancy of the throne left vacant by the departure of Billy Emerson.

LABOR TROUBLE

Reed's position remained secure until January of 1886, when labor troubles began to plague him. One of his

quartets (whose names are not mentioned) decided that the manager was making altogether too much money, whereas they were being paid too little. They went to the Plain Comedian in a body, threatening a strike unless their wages were at once increased. However since they had little sympathy and virtually no support from the remainder of the troupe, Reed found no difficulty in suppressing their demand. He pointed out that the "conundrum mine" had now been exhausted, he had not yet had time to write a new burlesque; consequently the house was not always full. If, under these depressing conditions, they still meant to desert him -- well, that would be agreeable all around. There seemed no chance of getting an engagement elsewhere and the salary Reed had been paying them was obviously better than none. They stayed.

Meantime, although Reed had kept the fact concealed from his would-be strikers, Murphy and Mack had announced their intention of joining the Standard Minstrel Company. Ten years before this ingenious team had made a hit with the San Francisco public and when the news of their arrival became known a cloud of excitement pervaded the city. Attendance at the theatre revived. It became evident that the troupe, thus augmented, would soon launch another successful season. This however must have been small consolation to the quartet which had been underpaid. Unfortunately the labor trouble was accorded little and certainly biased publicity; otherwise it

might be discovered that Charlie Reed had been quite unfair to the minstrels in question -- perhaps unfair to the whole company.

MURPHY AND MACK

Concurrent with the appearance of Murphy and Mack, which took place about the middle of January 1886, Reed presented a new afterpiece called Warm Water, or White Labor Cigars. The end-man and interlocutor business carried on between Frillman and the Plain Comedian was said to have been the "best of its kind," with a noticeable absence of anything studied or prearranged. Murphy and Mack were as clever and intriguing a song and dance pair as they had been ten years earlier; the whole program in fact was highly satisfactory and continued until February 7, on which date the regular winter season ended.

"THE REFINED MINSTRELS"

On March 1, 1886, the show reopened with what was described as a perfect cast of burnt-cork performers. There is no indication that the company had changed, however. Birch and Reed still held their respective positions of Bones and Tambo;Frillman remained as interlocutor; and Sweatnam, though not previously mentioned, amused everybody with his peculiar dry humor in which awkwardness of movement played a large part.

But despite Reed's unchallenged winter season and his almost assured sovereignty, there appeared the next week a rival troupe under the banner of Messrs. McNish, Johnson, and Slavin, the Refined Minstrels, who began an engagement at the Baldwin Theatre March 8, 1886. These gentlemen, having adopted the tactics of Colonel Jack Haverly, actually invaded the theatre like a band of wild west cowboys. Their entertainment was of the "whoop-em-up" variety. They maintained excitement and sensationalism at a high peak, according to one journalist of the period; but it is difficult to understand how this could have been possible unless they exceeded the formal bounds of minstrelsy to an unheard-of extent. There must have been at least a few quiet moments, notwithstanding the critic's exuberance, for he informs his readers that "McNish's silent act is quaintly entertaining," and that "the statuesque poses of Charley Mitchell are admirably maintained."

At any rate the Refined Minstrels were sufficiently entertaining to attract crowds whose appearance at the Baldwin must have seriously affected attendance at the Standard Theatre where Reed was playing. The troupe contained a wench minstrel in the person of W. Henry Rice whose impersonations of female characters, unlike those of most of his kind, pleased rather than irritated people.

> "To most people, burlesque minstrel female impersonations are irritating. W. Henry Rice's

RICE ASSUMING A WENCH PART

WM. HENRY RICE
(1870)

REPRODUCED FROM "GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED!"

> methods do not qualify this statement. In Martin Hogan's voice a pleasant tenor is heard. Holmes is a good minstrel baritone, Frank Howard is too self-assertedly a singer to be agreeable to the better part of the audience. At the same time he is listened to with curiosity, as he is one of the popular song writers of certain classes in this country. Every Maude Matchin in this country has sung 'Only a Pansy Blossom' and told of 'When the Robins Nest Again.'"*

REED PERFORMS IN WHITE FACE

If the assertions and implications contained in the above are true, the relatively brief season of twenty days which McNish, Johnson, and Slavin's Minstrels played at the Baldwin Theatre might be explained by a discontinuance of public "curiosity." It is quite likely that Reed's performances were more substantial, for in April the Plain Comedian's shows drew capacity houses at the Standard Theatre and Reed is known to have given at least one performance in white face at the California Theatre, April 19, 1886, with the presentation of his burlesque Field of the Cloth of Gold.

BAND'S MINSTRELS

Late in July a small group called Band's Minstrels appeared for a few days at the Bush Street Theatre, but they signally failed in competition with established favorites at a period when minstrelsy had entered its decadence. Sensationalism in burnt-cork shows attracted attention, endured

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* San Francisco News Letter and Wasp, March 13, 1886.

for awhile and then died, to be replaced by some newer form of sensationalism.

BOYCOTT OF THE CALIFORNIA THEATRE

Thus, on November 6, 1886, Wood and Ryman's Female Minstrels made their debut at the Standard Theatre. There is reason to believe they appeared while Emerson was manager of the house, for in August "the king of them all" had returned to San Francisco, his coffers replenished, and reopened the Standard as a "permanent minstrel house."

Charlie Reed meantime had been playing at the California Theatre, where his attitude towards labor unions once again caused him discomfiture. Reed had been asked to take part in a variety performance given at a hall in Tar Flat for the benefit of the shoemakers' union. Whether or not he would have refused had he been unengaged that evening can never be known, but he did refuse on the grounds that he could not leave his part in a burlesque (probably his own creation) then performing at the California Theatre. The union, considering his refusal unjustified, declared a boycott against the theatre.

The news spread eastward and found its way into the Dramatic Times (New York) which forthwith attempted to prove that the failure of the California Theatre Syndicate accrued to McKee Rankin. Rankin, it was alleged, had insulted the Knights of Labor and brought ruin upon the syndicate.

FEMALE MINSTRELS

But whether this is true or not, the effects of Reed's action were widespread. He lost much of his popularity for a time, thus encouraging the initial success of Wood and Ryman's Female Minstrels, who had apparently nothing to recommend them apart from the fact that they were females.

> "At the Standard Theatre," said the San Francisco News Letter and Wasp of November 6, 1886, "an attempt is being made to present female minstrelsy with respect and decency. It is a laudable effort but one of doubtful success. Such an entertainment will be either dull, as this one is, for women with any talent will drift into a higher class of performers, or it will be vulgar, and in that case the theatre will be removed from first rank. At present the programme has nothing that offends but much that bores."

Female minstrels had appeared in San Francisco on several occasions previous to this, yet they were of sufficient novelty to attract a large audience the opening night, and especially since attendance at Reed's show in many quarters was still considered prohibitive. However, even with this in their favor, Wood and Ryman's Minstrels soon failed and disappeared into that limbo which had claimed so many of their predecessors.

Charlie Reed went to New York where he joined Lew Dockstader's Minstrels,but in December he was dismissed from the company "owing to jealousy of the manager who is also a minstrel."

CHAPTER 3

DECADENCE

The slow decline of minstrelsy, which had begun about 1885, now received acceleration. Emerson continued to appear off and on, as did Haverly and later Lew Dockstader, until the close of the century. But their performances were no longer in the tradition long associated with Negro minstrel shows. These individuals and those who succeeded them perpetuated minstrelsy in name while in fact they presented variety bills. In the spring of 1888, Haverly, then appearing at the Bush Street Theatre with his company, presented as his principal attraction the Herbert-Morello tumbling troupe which made no pretense to the burnt-cork profession. And the Metropolitan Quintette, Haverly's star songmasters, could hardly compete with Rice, Emerson, Reed, Manning -- all of the "Forty -- Count Em -- Forty" Mastodons. Only the interlocutor, the veteran Norcross, evoked hopeful reminiscences with his deep bass voice.

LEW DOCKSTADER

Lew Dockstader's arrival in midsummer 1886 caused a flurry of anticipation, but his troupe also disappointed expectant audiences -- and they were few indeed -- who still evinced a liking for the old time shows. Dockstader had come from New York, bringing with him Billy Sweatnam, Billy Rice, Arthur Moreland, H. W. Frillman, W. S. Mullaly, and other comedians, singers, musicians who were known to the San Francisco public. They opened at the Bush Street Theatre June 11, while Emerson was appearing with a company of his own at the Bijou Theatre, a newly erected playhouse at 729 Market Street. For a few days Dockstader's New York Minstrels failed to sustain the interest aroused by their arrival, although afterwards they drew larger crowds and a burst of somewhat forced enthusiasm from an Argonaut correspondent who declared in an issue of that paper dated June 20, 1888:

> "We have been growing away from minstrels. We have had so many fine things in the past three years that we are getting a little toploxtical (probably a colloquialism of the time). But when every man, woman and child of the sweltering masses at the Bush Street Theatre sat all a-grin on Monday night and enjoyed themselves just as hard as they could, we did not seem nearly so toploxtical as we had perhaps thought we were.
>
> "The old jokes were swallowed without a struggle; they even tasted well, with the familiar smack of childhood's dish that one comes across unexpectedly. To Dockstader, the stranger, was given only the welcome due a stranger. Minstrels, the most successful ones, for some abstruse reason never storm their way, but make it slowly and surely. Dockstader is a business-like

> kind of minstrel. He has not the genius of the calling, but a kind of commercial instinct at it which is new. Frillman and Maxwell were already known. And there was Sweatnam, as melancholy and as absorbed as ever, and apparently unconscious of ever having said anything funny in his life. And he still sings 'Forever' in his queer staccato style, and people go into convulsions over it, while Sweatnam is still unmoved. And there was Billy Rice, still blinking his tireless, quick-quirking eyelids and still 'trying his voices'."

EMERSON AND THE HAVERLY-CLEVELAND TROUPE

Nevertheless Dockstader's minstrels closed at the Bush Street Theatre at the end of three weeks, leaving Billy Emerson in undisputed possession of the field until early in November, when Colonel Jack Haverly arrived at the head of a huge company called the Haverly-Cleveland Minstrels. Emerson's performances, which managed to fill the little Bijou every night, were plentifully interspersed with acrobatics, jugglery, and statuesque dances, besides a number of peculiarly novel turns.

McIntyre and Heath, themselves an excellent comic team, had joined the troupe and played end-men in the first part, with Emerson and Jackson, for the sake of variety, replacing them in the second part. An original "eccentric burlesque" She in Black served to introduce the inimitable technique of Leon, one of the most extraordinary wench minstrels who had ever appeared on the Pacific Coast.

At one performance Emerson reproduced on the stage a three-hundred and fifty foot panorama,depicting the scenery

en route from San Francisco to Washington, D. C. At another Emerson was so warmly applauded that he sang the only role in Italian opera he knew, that of Manrico in Verdi's Il Trovatore.

CITY OF A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

It was a brave last stand which Emerson and Haverly jointly maintained early in 1889. The city had changed rapidly. Vaudeville had come into ascendancy because it met the requirements of a restless, adventurous population. Almost half the business establishments in town were restaurants and since there was then no closing law they remained open all hours, together with saloons and places of entertainment, which fact conduced to give San Francisco its Bagdad atmosphere of night life.

The influx of Chinese had led to the concentration of some 30,000 Orientals in a quarter six blocks long, two blocks wide, and as one writer humorously put it, "three cellars deep."

Italians had settled around the base of Telegraph Hill and Spanish-Mexican emigrants had formed a colony in the adjacent neighborhood, towards Russian Hill. Not far from where the old Bella Union still flourished, a district known as Barbary Coast had sprung up and entertainment there was as wild and lawless as its name implies, challenging all the legitimate theatres in a tremendous bid for patronage.

SAGA OF GUSTAV WALTER

Perhaps the most serious threat to minstrel shows came with the establishment of the Orpheum Theatre, which started as a kind of cabaret (although the word was then unknown to Americans) in 1874 with the opening of a place called the Fountain. The proprietor was a German named Gustav Walter who had emigrated to the United States in 1865 and arrived in San Francisco in 1874. On Eddy Street he observed the Tivoli, a profitable saloon dispensing drinks and music.

Walter opened a similar resort in the basement of a building at Sutter and Kearny Streets, calling it the Fountain,where drinks were served to the accompaniment of a small orchestra and a few variety acts. The price of admission was the purchase of a drink,but it was the business of waiters to see that their patrons bought more than one drink. Whenever an unwary hand strayed from a glass, it was snatched from the table whether full or empty. An unaccustomed temperance and complete indifference to insult were the requisites of those who sought entertainment at the nominal cost of one beer, intending to nurse it all evening. Needless to say few ever succeeded. Walter prospered to such an extent that soon he opened a larger place, the Vienna Gardens, in 1881, at Sutter and Stockton Streets; then the Wigwam at Geary and Stockton Streets, and finally the Orpheum, in 1887,on O'Farrell Street between Stockton and Powell.

RISE OF THE ORPHEUM

Unlike its predecessors the Orpheum was a theatre specifically designated as such. It had a bar detached from the auditorium and each seat back contained a shelf for the accommodation of steins,glasses,and tobacco. Waiters balancing trays aloft went about during the show soliciting drinks, a practice common enough at the time. Walter started in this playhouse his variety shows which by 1889 had assumed the general if not the exact characteristics of vaudeville.

In June 1889, when Weber and Fields were playing at the Orpheum before wildly enthusiastic audiences, Primrose, Thatcher, and West at the head of "an army of Minstrels" at the California Theatre inaugurated a kind of vaudeville-minstrelsy in which at least one of the acts had been copyrighted. It was said to be a great novelty, although its prototype could be found on the Orpheum stage almost any day of the week, billed as a specialty act. There were also a boy drum-major and a champion bicyclist.

SHADES OF SHAKESPEARE

When the curtain rose, however, revealing the minstrels attired in Shakespearean garb, the audience gasped with astonishment. The costumes were ill-fitting. Everybody in the troupe, having abandoned the conventional circle, stood about like a motley pirate crew preparing to instigate mutiny against their captain and scuttle the ship. The boy

drum-major came forward, went through a meaningless prestidigitation with his baton; Romeo sang the song "Sally in our Alley"; Hamlet followed with "Bell Buoy," a beautiful baritone ballad as King John alliteratively informed the spectators; two Touchstones rendered a double song and dance; and Frillman, easily recognizable in the guise of Othello, sang "The Arrow and the Song." Altogether it was a most extraordinary performance, but it could hardly compete with Weber and Fields, whose names were spread across every billboard in the city, who made a small fortune overnight although they had arrived from the East without a cent, and who restored Gustav Walter's fortune at a time when his creditors were threatening to dispossess him of everything, including the Orpheum Theatre.

Even Colonel Jack Haverly, probably one of the most successful minstrel showmen in the business, realized that decadence had at last enveloped his profession. In the Argonaut of June 24, 1889 a correspondent reported:

> "Colonel Jack Haverly, whose name is inseparably associated with negro minstrelsy, has been expressing his views with regard to the decadence of that form of entertainment. He attributes the decline in public interest to the fact that the genuine negro has become more common in the North, and the novelty of the entertainment is therefore lost."

Haverly too had been smitten by the new vogue for vaudeville, but with his usual bluster refused to admit the real cause of his defeat. The Argonaut writer however was either more honest or more perspicacious, for he added:

> "It would perhaps be more correct to say that the interest in negro minstrels has always been inspired only by its novelty and that the limit of the grotesque and startling in that direction has now been reached."

EDWARD HARRIGAN

During the remainder of 1889 and for the next several years little of importance, certainly nothing of more than temporary interest, distinguished the minstrel stage. Edward Harrigan, no longer of the team Harrigan and Hart, appeared at the Alcazar Theatre on O'Farrell Street during the first week of July 1889. Although he had selected a special company for this San Francisco appearance, his comedy Pete failed quite significantly except in one or two scenes. Harrigan indeed was more an Irish comedian than a minstrel, but in his Pete he attempted to portray Negro life in the cellars and attics of Baxter Street and other slums of New York. Bits of his plantation Negro characters (interspersed between Irish characterizations) were said to be good. His forte however could not encompass the more elaborate nuances of city Negroes.

A San Francisco critic writing in The News Letter and Wasp (July 6, 1889) declared that his voodoo scene, in the third act was "simply and absolutely great." For the rest Harrigan failed to capture the spirit of the piece which, moreover, had been conceived in abeyance of his first love -- Irish comedy. Nearly the whole company, according to the

press,were misfits "which could scarcely be discounted by the 'worst sheeny in the sheap clothing' trade."

In his second attempt the next week at the Alcazar Theatre the comedian-playwright presented Waddy Googan which conformed to the author's natural tendencies and the actor's abilities -- a comic production representing New York Irish and Italians. As a series of character studies Waddy Googan earned praise from several critics, but even these deplored its almost total absence of plot. Surely it was not a minstrel performance in any sense.

It would indeed be idle here even to mention Harrigan's production at the Alcazar were it not that he was once a minstrel, that Charlie Reed appeared with the company "having his inning at the first rise of the curtain and then dropping out of sight" (after he had rendered a few songs), and that the episode affords another example of how minstrelsy had begun to die "in the very arms of its practitioners."

DEARTH OF MINSTRELSY

Minstrel shows all but vanished from San Francisco during the half-decade from 1890 to 1895. The Cleveland Minstrels, without much success,attempted a revival in March of 1890, prominently billing such stars as Willis P. (no longer Billy) Sweatnam, Billy Rice, the Crawford Brothers, Harry McKisson, Fraser and Bunnel, Hanley and Jarvis, and Mark Schultz.

To complete this galaxy they added a Japanese troupe of acrobats, but the public would accept such entertainment only in medicinal doses. Burlesque and variety shows were too popular,and after a brief engagement that spring, another in December (at a theatre not even mentioned in the dramatic columns), the Cleveland Minstrels disappeared.

The next year, 1892, George Thatcher's Minstrels put in an appearance. None of the newspapers seem to have thought enough of the incident to publicize it. Haverly, the die-hard,made his annual descents upon San Francisco,although nothing ever came of them save bitter lamentations uttered by the colonel who had now grown old, petulant, and desperate, determined to hang on until the end.

Haverly and Emerson, the perennially popular, kept minstrelsy alive in fact against the democratic will of theatre-goers, although Emerson condescended to appear with the Hopkins Trans-Oceanic Vaudeville Troupe in the summer of '94, prior to his departure for England where he hoped to receive a still cordial reception as a minstrel.

HAVERLY STAGES A REVIVAL

Late in 1895 Haverly organized an entirely new company and sought to prove that the taste "for good Negro minstrelsy was not yet dead." He employed Bert Shepard, Lew Dockstader, Billy Rice and such other old-timers as he could

get, announcing his opening at the Columbia Theatre, one of the largest and finest then in existence, for Sunday afternoon, November 10. To open a minstrel show on Sunday afternoon was an unprecedented procedure, but Haverly hoped he would thereby draw large crowds. He partially succeeded, for the engagement extended into a second week, in celebration of which the Argonaut of November 18, 1895 stated:

> "It is a long time since we have had a minstrel show in San Francisco and negro minstrelsy is in a similar state of obsolescence in the East. The reason for this state of affairs lies in the fact that vaudeville companies, and then the farce-comedies, took up all the best people in the minstrel business, and left the latter with no backbone to hold itself up. But there were many good features in the black-face entertainment that could not be 'lifted' and now that farce-comedy is losing its hold on the fickle public, negro minstrelsy may come in for a second lease of popularity.
>
> "Such is the opinion of Colonel J. H. Haverly, and he is engaged in demonstrating the proposition at the Columbia Theatre. His minstrel company opened there last Sunday afternoon, and their efforts have been so well received that he is going to continue the engagement for another week."

AN INTERVIEW WITH BILLY RICE

Despite an obvious dearth of minstrel shows there were others besides Colonel Haverly who still retained their faith in minstrelsy. Among these was Billy Rice, a member of the company under Haverly's direction. Since the revival of

Negro comedy had attracted considerable attention, the San Francisco Bulletin sent one of its most distinguished journalists, Cora M. Older, wife of Fremont Older, celebrated editor of the Call for many years, to interview Rice at the Columbia Theatre. Mrs. Older met Rice in the "reception parlor" just before rehearsal. She had expected to find a mirth-provoking personality, but was disappointed to learn that Rice was one of the most serious persons off-stage that she had seen in an "age."

Like Reed, Billy Rice belonged to the old school, a short, fat, jolly-looking man attired in the conventional minstrel style, with an exposed shirt front, bright scarf and a huge diamond -- all of which would have betrayed his profession to any one of that time who had ever witnessed a burnt-cork performance. "I do not know what Billy Rice would do," the journalist declared, "if any one called him William; probably he would look about in a dazed way and say, 'Whom are you addressing?' He has been Billy Rice to the public for thirty years and he will be 'Billy' to the end."* From the interview with Rice it appears that Mrs. Older's specific mission was to learn what he considered responsible for the

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* This and the following quotes are taken from Mrs. Older's article in the San Francisco Evening Bulletin of Nov. 23, 1895.

obsolescence of his profession. She began by asking the comedian:

> "Mr. Rice, how do you account for the decline of minstrelsy?"
>
> "Don't account for it," he said, "because minstrels are just as much liked as ever. I went to St. Louis this spring for a week and stayed three months. Is that a decline?"

When the interviewer then inquired as to Rice's sentiments concerning the new school of minstrels, who seemed just then to be enjoying popular approbation, the comedian became somewhat indignant:

> "Why these young fellows!" said Mr. Rice. "They go into a show, see the old fellows, learn how to get a gay down (probably an obsolete expression), throw some burnt cork on their faces, talk Irish, Dutch or Hindoo, and call themselves minstrels. We studied the negroes; that is how we got our ideas. But these young fellows!"

Rice paused, apparently, the correspondent decided, because he could not find words with which to express his contempt of "these young fellows." After a moment he resumed.

> "If there is one thing though that has injured the minstrels, it is the disappearance of the negro. Most of the colored race, especially in the North, have lost their race characteristics. They are just like white people. The genuine 'coon' is an exception instead of a rule, and the people never tire of him."
>
> "What is the chief requirement of a comedian?" Mrs. Older asked.
>
> "He must be born funny," came the reply. "I don't say a man can't learn to be funny and make a pile of money, but to be genuine he should be a born comedian. Nat Goodwin is a

natural comedian of the highest type. Francis Wilson is a 'book comedian,' but an excellent one, and I laugh heartily at him. Thomas Q. Seabrook is another funny man. But as a rule an artifical comedian is like an artificial wit--a fraud. But Mr. Wilson is as funny a man as I know. Dan Bryant, the minstrel, I consider the funniest man I ever saw. He could make me laugh more, anyway."

WHAT BECAME OF "THE PIONEERS?"

Since Billy Rice had been acquainted with most of the pioneer minstrels, Mrs. Older next asked him what had become of them. Bob Hart, he answered, had died seven years earlier in New York; Billy Sweatnam was then with The Trilby Burlesque Troupe; Little Mac, at whom so many San Franciscans had laughed, had been dead nearly ten years, and Billy Manning nineteen. Of the original San Francisco Minstrels, Birch then lived in New York, old, decrepit, stricken with paralysis; Backus and Wambold were both dead, one leaving an estate of $350,000 and the other an estate of $150,000.

"This farce-comedy and comic opera that has had such a run for ten years," Rice continued, "has done the minstrels a great deal of harm, but that is wearing itself out, and then soon there will be a craze for our work, but it's an error to suppose that minstrelsy is on the decline."

CALL FOR BILLY SHEPARD

As Rice finished speaking he rose to attend rehearsal, but he called Billy Shepard so that Mrs. Older might get an additional "slant" on the subject. The second interview was conducted in the theatre proper, near the stage, from

which vantage point they could watch the rehearsal.

> "I asked Mr. Shepard a conundrum," wrote Mrs. Older. "Why are minstrels fat? Is part of their diet anti-lean?"
>
> "No," Shepard rejoined. "That is odd, isn't it; but we are all fat. It must be because we laugh at our jokes so much. However, I don't consider myself fat; I'm just plump," and he must have believed his own words.

Shepard, ten or fifteen years younger than Billy Rice, belonged to the "new school," and although he admired Rice he could not share the latter's convictions as to public preference, nor follow Rice's technique. He carefully refrained from wearing diamonds or gaudy scarfs; refused to adopt the Negro dialect.

> "People are tired of negro dialect," he told Mrs. Older. "There is nothing new about it, it's worn out. Negroes are no curiosity."
>
> "Why don't you study the negroes down South, the way Mr. Rice did?" she asked. "Why don't you go down there and laze and learn?"
>
> "Did he tell you that?" Shepard said, referring to his colleague. "Well, maybe they used to, I don't know."

As he spoke one of Shepard's eyes twitched a little. It may have been, consciously or unconsciously, a wink. Mrs. Older could not be certain.

> "Then," she said, "I asked Mr. Shepard if minstrelsy is on the decline and he said:
>
> "Why, of course it isn't. That's a curious idea. This farce-comedy has taken some of our best men, but minstrels are not waning in popularity. People say they are and the next minute go and pay their $1.50 to see 'em. It's like the circus. Everyone seems to enjoy it."

Shepard drew a breath and suddenly added:

> "Now here's an idea for a bright man. If he can think of something new for minstrels, he can make a fortune."

> "Oh, some new jokes?"

> "No, that's another error. The public does not want new jokes, it wants the old ones. Even if our wit isn't always of the highest, we do know a bright thing when we hear it. We have got some very clever things together and sprung them. They would fall absolutely dead when, if we would make such a bad pun that we would expect it to be greeted with groans, the audience would go into hysterics. It isn't fine wit that is necessary, so we return always to the dull, ancient jokes. What I mean is that some bright man should think of a new method for presenting the minstrels. That will make him a millionaire, and it should come within the next ten years."

When asked whom he considered the funniest man on the stage, Shepard replied:

> "Jeff de Angelis (son of Johnny de Angelis) who, by the way, is now with the Della Fox Opera Company. He can make me laugh more than any man I know."

For almost twenty years Billy Shepard had been on the minstrel stage, but at the time Mrs. Older interviewed him he had grown tired of his profession. He declared:

> "When a boy comes to me and wants to become an actor, I always discourage him. Our life is so monotonous that it would seem good to be settled in one place. Although, if a man is to go on the stage, he'd better be a minstrel than an actor, for it's easier to get a position. Every company that goes out from New York has a hundred applicants for each position and so the managers become very independent--while a good funny man among the minstrels is always in demand."

This speech ended the interview. It was time for Shepard's entrance and he left, saying he would ride a wheel (bicycle) in an effort to reduce his "plumpness." His intention had been that Rice should accompany him in this exercise (which was also part of the stage business) but the older minstrel had declined. Therefore when Shepard asked Mrs. Older on parting what additional news he could give the Bulletin, she said: "Induce Mr. Rice to ride a wheel."

LAST APPEARANCE OF THE KING

But for all the vehement denials uttered by Billy Rice, all the optimism expressed in the words of Billy Shepard and all the practical fervor of the revival staged by Haverly, minstrelsy as an American institution had indeed become defunct. Late in 1895 Billy Emerson returned to San Francisco and played an engagement at the California Theatre. But the king had grown old. He was no longer the Billy Emerson that people remembered. Nearly every device he had formerly employed had become worn, dull and wearisome through innumerable imitations. He could not impress a younger generation accustomed to more sophisticated comedy-farces and vaudeville. Audiences, at first attracted by his name, soon dwindled. There was no alternative save a graceful exit, and Emerson therefore departed from the city, making his way Eastward. The king had been dethroned; minstrelsy staggered on its last legs.

THE BLACK TROUBADOURS

About the middle of February 1898, Mme. Sissieretta Jones, heralded as "Black Patti," appeared at the California Theatre with her Colored Troubadours. An Argonaut critic (Feb. 14, 1898) described their performance "a distinctly novel one, not like that of a regular minstrel troupe and approaching somewhat the lines of a farce-comedy." These last two phrases significantly emphasized the irony and futility contained in statements of Rice, Shepard, Haverly and a few others who had contended that minstrel shows would not give way before the encroachments of a newer form of comedy. Quite substantial proof of these die-hards' error could be found in Mme. Jones's "method for presenting the minstrels." It did not make her a millionaire; on the contrary it further demonstrated the inevitable degeneration of minstrelsy and the efforts of its practitioners to infuse it with new life by borrowing from rival elements in the theatre.

The black troubadours were minstrels by virtue of their make-up and by the inclusion of an olio in a performance otherwise alien to the minstrel tradition. There appeared nothing startling in their opening sketch, At Gay Cooney Island. It was a piece without semblance of plot, composed mostly of vaudeville specialty acts, songs and dances. During the olio Ernest Hogan sang several amusing songs, among which "All Coons Look Alike to Me," one of his own compositions, and "Honey, You've made a Hit with Me" were the most

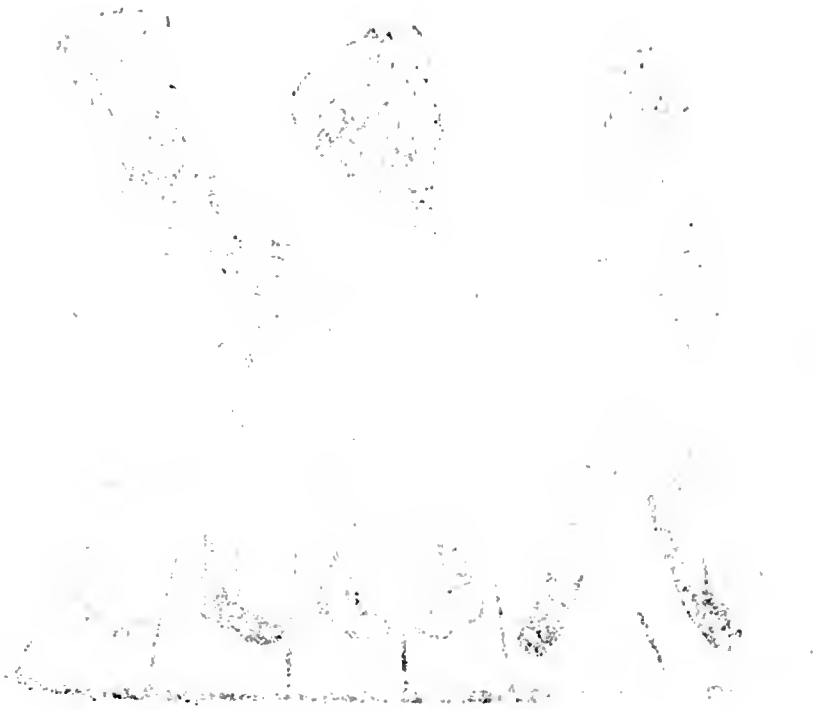
popular. The olio concluded with a cakewalk in which the whole troupe participated. In place of the orthodox second part, Mme. Jones deluged her audience with opera, "ranging from Sextet from Lucia to Ave Maria, and Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana."

WILLIAM WEST'S MINSTRELS

This sort of thing had been done hundreds of times before; nobody became particularly excited and no further notice of the fate of the troupe was given. They were however succeeded by William West's "newly organized" minstrel troupe which took over the Columbia Theatre in December of the same year (1898) and which transferred to the California Theatre on January 4, of the next year.

The only familiar persons in West's company were Carroll Johnson, popular during the seventies, who sang "I'm Sorry, Mr. Jackson, but I've Got to Throw You Down"; and Tom Lewis, another singer. The engagement at the California Theatre was short-lived, for in April 1900, William H. West's Minstrels appeared again at the Columbia, whereupon they attempted to relieve the monotony of their performance by introducing what was described as a "brilliant spectacle" of the Spanish-American war, The Charge of San Juan Hill; and a tableau entitled Admiral Dewey at Peace. But the monotony was actually relieved towards the end of the year, when Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels with George Wilson at their head

opened a two weeks' engagement at the California Theatre November 25, establishing a rival claim to the attention of those who had endured much decadent amusement in the repertoire of William H. West. Both these troupes disintegrated about the same time and nobody lamented the fact.



CHAPTER 4.

DEATH OF THE KING OF BLACKFACE

During the twentieth century Negro minstrel shows survived largely in reminiscences and in obituaries of the press which signified their demise as well as the death of some of the ablest minstrels in the profession. The Argonaut of March 17, 1902 announced:

"A strange coincidence is the death within a month of three of the most famous exponents of the old school of minstrels--Billy Emerson, Billy West, and Billy Rice.

"Billy Emerson," the article went on, "died in destitute circumstances in Boston and his body was taken charge of by the Elks and forwarded to this city, where it was interred with fitting ceremonies a fortnight ago. Billy Rice was buried at Hot Springs, Arkansas, on Monday, and according to the dispatches but two hacks followed his hearse to the burial grounds. In his palmiest days Rice was associated with J. H. Haverly. They toured the United States several times. Later he was associated with Billy Emerson, and still later with Charlie Reed. Rice made one of his greatest hits with his travesty

of Il Trovatore. He visited Europe, as chief end-man in the Haverly Mastodon European Minstrels.

"Billy West,, who passed away in Chicago last month, was for years associated with George Primrose, and was last seen here at the head of his own minstrel company. Unlike Emerson and Rice he died a wealthy man, leaving an estate valued at five hundred thousand dollars, which includes real estate in Philadelphia, Brooklyn and Chicago. Mr. West had been married three times. His first wife was Fay Templeton, the actress, with whom he lived only a short time. He permitted her to get a divorce from him, and then married Miss Lizette Morris of Philadelphia. When she died a few years ago, she left a large amount of property to West. His next wife was Miss Emma Hanley, who was known on the stage as one of the Hanley Sisters."

The San Francisco Examiner, March 8, 1902, devoted columns to a description of Billy Emerson's funeral, adding, as if to prove that minstrelsy was also dead:

"San Francisco has seldom given forth of its heterogeneous population as it did yesterday to pay a last tribute of grateful memory to one as deserving of grateful remembrance as was Billy Emerson. There were gray-haired men who sat in the gallery of Maguire's Opera House when the minstrel sang his first song to a crowded audience on whose applause he was wafted to fame and fortune. That was more than a quarter of a century ago--when minstrelsy was something more than mere vaudeville and when the humor and melody of the stage was something to lay by in the memory for future recollection--beside the still forms of the dead minstrels, it may be."

REMINISCENCES

At the age of 56 Emerson died, February 23, 1902 at the Dimans Hotel on Elliot street, Boston, due to a complication of diseases which resulted in consumption. Men who had enjoyed his singing and dancing were grown old now -- "sober

fellows, fathers and grandfathers with many responsibilities." Yet many of them, it was reported in the Examiner, could scarcely refrain from doing a reminiscent turn or two as they heard once more the tunes of Emerson's most beloved song, "I'm Happy as a Big Sunflower," played in San Francisco as news of his death came from the East. Women in the prime matronly respectability of marriage could remember when, as girls, they had tried to flirt with Emerson, waiting outside the old Standard Theatre after his Saturday matinees "in the hope of seeing the dashingest man in all the town come out and gather the sunshine as he walked." Many of these belles envied Mamie Ellis, Emerson's wife, for the smart gowns she wore and were jealous of her prior claim to the minstrel's affection. And others, both men and women, who had no such subjective feelings, admitted that Emerson had been one of the most colorful and graceful, as well as one of the most reckless, personalities of the stage. Men who loved gambling, with long odds and hard chances, liked to remember Emerson as the king of gamblers, the prince of good fellows who pressed his bounty upon all who were "down on their luck." The populace as a whole conceded that Emerson and his minstrels had been the greatest they had ever seen, the greatest in "the history of the world" -- which may have been exaggeration. But certainly it is no exaggeration to state that all San Francisco paid tribute to his memory in the spring of 1902.

AMATEUR MINSTRELS

From this time until 1906, when minstrelsy expired in outright farce though still masquerading under the name it had so long borne, the newspapers printed and reprinted much about various minstrels who had been famous, but had little to say about actual performing troupes -- for the reason, one must assume, that minstrel performances had become both scarce and utterly unimportant. An amateur group, Freeman and Lynn's Commercial Men's Mastodon Minstrels, staged a revival at the Alhambra Theatre in the spring of 1903, giving a farewell matinee on Saturday February 23, at which time the Argonaut declared:

> "Freeman and Lynn's Commercial Men's Mastodon Minstrels will give their last performance at the Alhambra this afternoon and evening. The company under the management of R. Richardson and A. G. Stoll, is composed entirely of traveling drummers. With Cassassa's band of twenty-five pieces and orchestra of sixteen men, they present a high-class entertainment that compares favorably with any professional organization that has been seen here in a long time. The comedians are all clever and the vocal corps is exceptionally strong."

"SHADE OF WAMBOLD"

The statements made above, except that they reveal a few unrelated facts, are almost entirely meaningless and serve to prepare for and illuminate the cataclysmic end which came three years later when George Thatcher, among the last of the old minstrels, made his small part in George Ade's political comedy The Country Gentleman (then playing at the

Columbia Theatre) a big one." Thatcher, who had once been an excellent manipulator of the bones, and part owner of several notable minstrel shows, proved in this comedy part (which he played in blackface) that, like Reed, Dockstader and Sweatnam he had left an obsolescent profession and with gratifying success had adopted a higher one on the so-called legitimate stage. But his appearance at the Alhambra was considered by Porter Garnett, an Argonaut critic, one of double significance. Concurrent with it there appeared a troupe of minstrels at the Grand Opera House whom Garnett rather obliquely named, and whose stage business he deplored, giving his readers the impression that it was worse than impossible.

> "The old minstrel" (George Thatcher), wrote Garnett in the Argonaut of February 17, 1906, "is also a link between the past and present--the past as it was in the days of Thatcher's manipulation of the bones, and the present of minstrels as they are being degraded at the Grand Opera House. Now here in San Francisco we can claim that we know our minstrels. Were we not brought up on minstrels by the best of the second and greatest period of negro minstrelsy--the period that was ornamented by such men as Emerson and Birch and Backus? One of my earliest recollections is that of being terrified by the trick wig of Fayette Welch, an end man of the old school. By means of a concealed string, he was able to make his hair stand erect 'like quills upon the fretful porcupine'--which sent me howling to the shelter of my nurse's lap, while she, poor woman, had to abridge her pleasure of the matinee and filled with embarrassment and indignation, drag me, vocal with dismay, from the theatre.
>
> "While I was being bored at the Grand Opera House, last Sunday, by the nondescript incompetents who have there been masquerading as minstrels, I could not but recall the glory of

> departed days when Billy Emerson was wont to sing 'Muldoon the Solid Man,' and 'Moriarity' and 'Pretty as a Picture,' which latter he taught to Aimee, the little French actress, who sang it when she had San Francisco by the ears. I recalled Emerson's really good tenor voice with which he astonished us in the last act of Trovatore, and his famous linen duster trimmed with fur, and his dancing, a specialty in which he had no rival for grace, except, perhaps, Carroll Johnson--that sole surviving representative of the old soft-shoe school."

The remainder of Garnett's column, save for an observation that these "handscript incompetents" were attired in colored satin like so many barrel-organ monkeys, prescribed an antidote for boredom in further reminiscences. He showed how, through Haverly and various of his emulators, the minstrel show had finally and unmistakably degenerated into mere vaudeville which reached its ridiculous peak in the late eighties when William H. West "led a succession of drags through the streets, himself driving tandem in a white dog cart."

"Shade of Manbold, what a sight it was!"

CRIP IN PORTER GARNETT

Garnett went on to praise Charlie Reed's travesties, particularly those he had written on Othello, Camille, and Macbeth and various songs which William Mullaly had composed for Reed and one, "Sweet Honeyville," which they had written together. Finally he mentioned Thatcher again, commending his fine performance as Sassafras Livingston in Ade's comedy.

> "And," he concluded, "this brings us to our nexus with the Grand Opera House and its third-rates. Taken all in all, the performance then

is made up of such acts as one might expect to see in one end of the tent of a second-class circus, while a star feat is being performed at the other end. If there is anything at all to remember it is a song of small humor called 'Nobody' and sung by George Van. But it is the song of a black swan, for minstrelsy is moribund.

"And now, Mister Reader, can yo'all tell me why de song ob Mister George Van is like an aig on a piano stool? 'No, Mister Writer, I'm afraid I cannot; now will you tell me why the song of Mr. George Van is like an aig on a piano stool?'

"Because it am de lay ob de las' minstrel. The audience will now sing 'I don't care if you never come back.' And who does care if Sanford B. Rickaby's Ye Bright and Merry William H. West Big Jubilee Minstrels never come back?

"Nobody."

CHAPTER 5.

THE LAST STAGE

Not only did these words contain the ring of truth, they constituted a veritable epitaph as well. The newspapers mentioned no further appearances of traditional Negro minstrel troupes and the sole survivor of any prominence in this profession was Bert Williams, who died March 4, 1922. Williams deserves mention here simply because he started his career in California -- a career which by its tragic limitations epitomizes the last days of minstrelsy. It has been said that Egbert Austin Williams became the foremost comedian of the American stage during his lifetime. But Williams' grandfather, a Danish shipmaster, married a quadroon and from this union the comedian inherited a strain of Negro blood which, although it enabled him to express the mystical humanitarianism of the colored race, at the same time prejudiced white people against him and thus prevented the achievements he otherwise might have attained in his profession.

FROM MOUNTEBANK TO STAR

Before Williams reached school age, his parents moved from Nassau in the West Indies, where Bert was born in 1876, to New York and thence to Riverside, California. Young Williams attended grammar and high school there. For a short time subsequent to his graduation he was a bellboy in the Hollenbeck Hotel in Los Angeles, then came to San Francisco, intending to study civil engineering. He never completed his studies. A company of mountebank minstrels came into town, induced him to join them, and soon began a tour of the lumber and mining camps. On their return Williams appeared for awhile at a cheap vaudeville house in San Francisco. But apart from this brief interlude his career was passed in various large cities in the East and abroad. While playing in Detroit in his greatest success, Under the Bamboo Tree, he was stricken with a fatal ailment which was later diagnosed as pneumonia. He died at his home in New York, a minstrel and fine comedian, whose stage ambitions were thwarted.

ENVOY

In recent times, through the efforts of such blackface comedians as Eddie Leonard, Al Jolson, and Eddie Cantor, the dead art of Negro minstrelsy has been revived by means of radio, which might be considered its last stage. The trend, if such it is, has not as yet been clearly defined. Despite

MODERN RADIO PERFORMANCE, MINSTRELSY'S LAST STAND

REPRODUCED FROM "GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED!"

a few actual minstrel shows, with the semicircle of burnt cork musicians and crooners, most radio presentations are still heterogeneous affairs, reflecting something of the moribund state in which minstrelsy lingered towards the beginning of the century, and it would hardly be safe to say that minstrelsy has been reborn at the microphone. Nevertheless, even though its radio vestiges likewise flare and die, this form of entertainment has remained typically American; other forms, also typically American, owe much of their technique to it. Modern plays, with their lengthy runs on Broadway, road shows, stock companies, and musical shows, have never possessed greater drawing power than the old minstrel troupes during their heyday.

Apart from the competition of vaudeville or variety performances, it is entirely probable that American minstrelsy died because of an over-elaboration of its prescribed forms. When acrobats, clowns, martial drill teams, were introduced, when minstrels began to dress like courtiers (to say nothing of the increasing tendency to substitute white faces for black and to speak in Irish, Dutch, and German dialects), minstrel shows degenerated; lost at least part of their natural and distinct flavor. At the same time, still retaining something of their stilted formality, they could not compete with the grandeur of more flexible musical comedies and revues. Had it not been for alien innovations which interfered with

its familiar formulas of wit and sentiment, all based on vital human experiences, minstrelsy might have survived.

On the other hand some kind of evolutionary disintegration may have been inevitable; perhaps no theatrical form, however robust in its day, can survive forever without perceptible change; and perhaps finally all forms of theatre are but a mirror of the palpable manifestations of life.

MINSTRELSY

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APPENDICES

*** Including death dates of many prominent minstrels, songs sung and owned by Billy Emerson, the popular ballads: "The Days of '49," "Jim Crow," "Susan Jane" and others, with comments by Pauline Jacobson, journalist-critic of the theatre, whose articles appeared in the San Francisco Evening Bulletin in the summer and autumn of 1917. Also a sidelight on the composition of "Dixie" and its author.

In addition, alphabetical and chronological lists of minstrels, other personalities, troupes, theatres, performances, songs, and bibliography of anthology ***

A P P E N D I C E S

MINSTRELSY

MINSTRELSY

DEATH DATES OF SOME NOTABLE MINSTRELS

(As recorded in McCabe's Journal and in various San Francisco newspapers)

1854

Oct. 24. Tom Briggs, in San Francisco.

1859

Dec. 5. Tom Raleigh, in San Francisco. Accidentally shot during a scuffle with Fred Ellmore, a visitor in the former's dressing room at the Bella Union.

1861

April 12. Jerry Bryant, in New York.

1863

Dec. 11. W. H. Barker, in San Francisco.

1864

Aug. 30. Sam Wells, in Virginia City, Nev. from injuries received in falling from a horse.

Sept. 16. Fred Buckley, in Boston, Mass.

1867

June 6. R. Bishop Buckley, in Quincy, Ill.

1871

April 5. A. Bamford, in San Francisco.

1872

July 8. Billy Shepard, in Fort Washington.

1873

Nov. 15. Max Zorer, in vicinity of New York.

1875

Sept. 7. Edward Hamilton, in San Francisco.

DEATH DATES OF MINSTRELS (Cont.)

1875

Nov. 4. Col. Mandeville, off Cape Flattery. Lost in the sinking of the steamer Pacific, bound from Victoria, B. C. to San Francisco, as the result of collision with a sailing vessel.

1876

Feb. 18. Johnny Edwards, in India. Reports reached San Francisco this date.

1877

Jan. 5. Eph Horn, in New York.

June 5. Charley Rhodes (author of the "Ballad of '49"), in Santa Clara, Cal.

Nov. Jake Hamilton (colored banjoist), in San Francisco.

Dec. 25. Johnny de Angelis, in San Francisco.

1878

Jan. 7. Chas. Reynold, in San Francisco.

June 18. Nat Kelly, in San Francisco.

1879

June 25. Geo. Buckley, in Philadelphia, Pa.

1883

June 21. Charley Backus.

1902

Feb. Billy West, in Chicago, Ill.

Feb. 22. Billy Emerson "king of them all," in Boston, Mass.

March Billy Rice, in Hot Springs, Ark.

1922

March 4. Bert Williams, in New York.

SONGS SUNG AND OWNED BY BILLY EMERSON *

Titles	Authors
Fourth Comic Song Annual	Francis and Day
Ballyhooley	Robert Martin
Dear Me!	Harry Randall
Hush! Mum's the Word!	J. S. Haydon
I'll Tell Them My Father's a Marquis	W. Bint
I'm Happy When She's By	Nate Olney
Previous Notice of the Question	H. B. Farnie
The Putney Bus	Augustus Martin
There's Another Jolly Row Downstairs	W. Bint & W. H. Phillips
Sweet May Bells	L. W. Fairfield
That's the Sort of Men We Want in England Here today	Vincent Davies
That Cheer 'Ria	Bessie Bellwood
Where Are You? There You Are!	Arthur Lloyd
Woman, Lovely Woman	Felix McGlennon

---

* These songs, along with national favorites (such as "Dixie"), were quite popular in San Francisco during Emerson's lifetime. Following are the words to those in the above list which are obtainable, with the addition of such famous minstrel ballads as "Jim Crow," "Abraham's Daughter," "Hush-a-Ding-Di-Yah," "Hot Corn," "Susan Jane" and "The Days of '49."

(Listed in the Music Department, San Francisco Public Library.)

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

BALLYHOOLEY *

1

There's a dashing sort of boy, who is called his mother's joy,
For his ructions and his elements they charm me,
He takes the chief command in a water-drinking band
Called the Ballyhooley blue ribbon army.
The ladies all declare, he's the pride of every fair,
And he bears the patriotic name of Dooley,
Then the temperance brigade, they go out upon parade,
There's not a sober man in Ballyhooley.

Chorus

Whillilloo hi ho, let us all enlist you know,
  For their ructions and their elements they charm me,
We don't care what we ate, if we drink our whiskey nate,
  In the Ballyhooley blue ribbon army.

2

When we're out upon patrol and we're under his control,
We take of course a most extended radius,
Although it's very clear we drink only ginger beer,
We find the drinking sometimes rather tadius;
The polis one fine day, faith they chanced to come our way,
And they said we were behaving most unruly,
When the serjent he did state that we were not walking straight,
Faith we stretched him for a corpse in Ballyhooley.

3

Then before the magistrate every one of us did state,
That we had taken nothing that could injure,
And as it's very clear we drink only ginger beer,
There must have been some stinge in the ginger.
Some of us did own we were drinking zoedone,
But the polis was behaving most unruly.
It was all of no avail and within the county jail,
Lies the temperance brigade of Ballyhooley.

---

* Sung by Mr. E. J. Lorden at the Gaiety Theatre.
The Words and Music by Robert Martin.
Charles Jeffreys (Publisher) 67, Berners Street W., London.

BALLYHOOLEY (Cont.)

4

There's a moral to my song and it won't detain yez long,
Give up strong drink of every description,
And as it's very clear yez may tire of ginger beer,
I'll give yez all a temperance prescription:
First the sugar yez have got then the water bilin' hot
And the limon, faith you'll find I'm spakin' truly,
And the way you'd sprinkle salt toss a glass or two of malt
Faith they call it limonade in Ballyhooley.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

HUSH! MUM'S THE WORD! *

1

A few little matters I wish to disclose
  Hush! mum's the word!
You can all keep a secret when asked I suppose,
  Hush! not a word!
The ladies I know may for once in a way
Give a hint to friend, with "Don't mention it pray,"
Then the friend in a whisper will cautiously say,
  Hush! not a word!

2

When young men at the door bid young ladies good night,
  Hush! mum's the word!
How is it the wind always blows out the light,
  Hush! not a word!
And when lovers think that the coast is all clear,
And find the stern face of the parent appear;
How is it in whispers we frequently hear?
  Hush! not a word!

3

My wife said to me, a sweet name is Papa!
  Hush! mum's the word!
Then she sent for the doctor, the nurse and mamma,
  Hush! not a word!
When I came home at night, as good husbands should do,
I heard a small voice and said that's something new;
But when the nurse smiling said, "Sir, there are two!"
  I gasped, mum's the word!

4

Why do ladies conceal little "puffs" in their dress?
  Hush! mum's the word!
But bless their dear faces, we can't love them less,
  Hush! not a word!

---

* Written by J. S. Haydon. Arranged by H. Fitter Ball.
Hopwood & Crew (Publisher) 42, New Bond Street W., London.

HUSH! MUM'S THE WORD! (Cont.)

The fashion aesthetic, demands I suppose,
That the cheek must be pale, which should blush like a rose,
But why do some blush at the tip of the nose?
  Hush! not a word!

5

I want to know this! Can you give me your aid?
  Hush! mum's the word!
And tell me of what German sausage is made?
  Hush! not a word!
At the makers dogs oft are heard howling I know,
Neighbors lose their Tom cats, a few kittens or so,
But where do dead horses in Germany go?
  Hush! not a word!

6

Of strong-minded females, we read every day,
  Hush! mum's the word!
Who wish that in Parliament they had a say,
  Hush! not a word!
At home they can show speaking powers so grand,
As most of us married men will understand,
But their aid we don't ask on affairs of the land.
  Hush! not a word!

7

A proof once again we have shone of our might,
  Hush! mum's the word!
We've British pluck left and demons to fight,
  Hush! not a word!
With our Fleet on the Ocean and our Army on Shore,
We can beat all the world as we have done before,
This will teach Foreign Powers, a lesson I'm sure,
  Hush! not a word!

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

I'M HAPPY WHEN SHE'S BY *

(Composed expressly for Billy Emerson.)

1

When the little birds have ceased to warble,
And the moon ascends the sky
I wander forth to meet my darling,
For I'm happy when she's by.
I expect her in a moment,
For she said when the clock struck eight,
She'd meet me at the foot of the garden
By the little rustic gate,
For she's my star of hope in life
And she some day will be my wife.

Chorus

When the little birds begin to warble
And the moon ascends the sky,
I wander forth to meet my darling,
For I'm happy when she's by!

2

Her bright blue eyes are ever smiling,
And her voice is always sweet,
Her time I cannot help beguiling
Whenever we chance to meet.
She's standing now in the clover
She's gazing at the stars above,
I see her fairy form in moonlight,
She's the only girl I love,
For she is waiting there for me.
The day will come when mine she'll be.

---

* Words and Music by Nate Olney. Arranged by H. S. Stedman. Sherman, Hyde & Co. (Publisher) San Francisco. MDCCCLXXVII.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

SWEET MAY BELLS

(The following song was dedicated to and sung by Billy Emerson.)*

1

There are roses by the river
And sweet lilies in the lake,
There are blossoms in the wild-wood
Hid away 'neath fern and brake;
But no flow'r more sweet or fairer
On earth's bosom ever dwells,
Than the little maid who meets me
With the sweet May bells.

Chorus

Sweet May bells,
  Sweet May bells.
Lightly tripping on the meadow,
  And a-dancing down the dells,
Comes the little maid who meets me
  With the sweet May bells.

2

There are merry birds that warble
All the golden summer day,
From the robin to the starling
As they flit from spray to spray;
But no bird o'er sang more sweeter
O'er the bloom of many dells,
Than the little maid who meets me
With the sweet May bells.

3

There are distant bells a-ringing
Sweet as music of a dream,
Floating o'er the rippling waters
Of the meadow's happy stream;
And my heart in joy is dreaming
As if touched by fairy spells,
For a little maid is coming
With the sweet May bells.

---

* Words by Arthur W. French. Music by Len W. Fairfield. Geo. D. Newhall & Co. Pitson & Co. (Publishers) Boston, New York, Philadelphia, 1880.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

JIM CROW

1

Come, listen all you gals and boys,
Ise just from Tuckyhoe;
I'm goin' to sing a little song,
My name's Jim Crow.

Chorus *

Weel about and turn about
And do jis' so,
Ev'ry time I weel about
I jump Jim Crow.

2

I went down to de river,
I didn't mean to stay;
But dere I see so many gals,
I couldn't get away.

3

And arter I been dere awhile,
I t'ought I push my boat;
But I tumbled in de river,
An' I find myself afloat.

4

I git upon a flatboat,
I cotch de Uncle Sam;
Den I went to see de place where
Dey killed de Pachenham.

5

And den I go to Orleans,
An' feel so full of fight;
Dey put me in de Calaboose,
An' keep me dere all night.

---

* The chorus is repeated after each verse.

JIM CROW (Cont.)

6

When I got out I hit a man,
His name I now forgot;
But dere was not'ing left of him
'Cept a little grease spot.

7

Anoder day I hit a man,
De man was mighty fat,
I hit so hard I knocked him in
To an old cockt hat.

8

I whipt my weight in wildcats,
I eat an alligator;
I drunk de Missessippy up!
Oh, I'm de very creature.

9

I sit upon a hornet's nest,
I dance upon my head;
I tie a viper round my neck;
An' den I go to bed.

10

I kneel to de buzzard,
An' I bow to de crow;
An' eb'ry time I weel about,
I jump jis' so.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

ABRAHAM'S DAUGHTER*

1

Oh, de soldiers here, both far and near, dey did
  git quite excited,
When from deir bredren from de Souf to war dey was
  invited;
But it was to be, it is to be, it can't be nothin'
  shorter,
An' if dey call upon dis chile, I'se bound to die a
  martyr.

Chorus

For I belong to de fire Zoo-Zoos,
An' don't you tink I orter?
An' I'm gwine down to Washington,
To fight for Abraham's daughter.

2

I'm tired of city life, an' I'm gwine to jine de
  Zoo-Zoos;
I'm gwine to try an' make a hit, down among de
  Southern foo-foos;
But I'm gwine to try an' make a hit, I'll show dem
  I'm a Tartar,
We are bound to save de Union yet, 'tis all dat
  we are arter.

3

Dere is one ting more dat I would state, before I
  close my ditty,
'Tis all about de volunteer dat's left our good old
  city;
Dey've gone to fight for de Stars an' Stripes, our
  Union now or neber,
So we'll gib three cheers for the Volunteers, and
  Washington, forever!

---

* (From a pamphlet in the Library of the University of California.)

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

MUSH-A-DING-DI-YAH *

1

As I was walkin' to Georgia's quay,
'Twas there that I saw two ships at bay
O ships, dear ships,
Will yer wait a little while,
Till I get some intelligence of Micky, my dear child.

Chorus

Mush-a-ding-di-yah,
Fol-de-diddl-da,
Ding-di-daddy,
Mush-a-ding-di-yah.

2

And when they had hauled him from the hold below,
It's down on the deck they did him throw,
And when they had given him a clinch or two,
Arrah gentha go adboul,
Mick-a-vicky, is at you?

3

O Micky, dear Micky, are yez drunk or are yez mad,
And phwat has become of the two legs ye had?
Did they sind yez home like a poor silly fool,
To be all yer loife like a "Billy-in-the-bowl?"

4

. . .
. . .
I was fighting in the Bay again' the cruel Queen
of Spain,
When a long chain shot both me legs clane.

---

* (Words printed in The Bulletin, 7/28/1917.) When Eph Horn sang "Mush-a-Ding-Di-Yah" in the years between 1860 and 1863, he presented an extraordinary appearance in egg-sized hat and clothes so tight that he might first have been melted, then poured into them.

MUSH-A-DING-DI-YAH (Cont.)

5

It's now I'll go and raise a war.
Troth I will do, I declare,
Wid the young King of France,
Likewise the Queen of Spain,
And I'll make them rue and repint the day
That they shot the two legs of me Micky boy away.*

---

* This ballad is reproduced from the San Francisco Bulletin as recollected by William Crane. He could not remember the first two lines of stanza 4.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

HOT CORN*

1

Yaller gal stood on de walk,
Green corn was all de talk,
Two cents, a penny an ear,
Who buys my hot corn?

Chorus

Hot corn, hot corn,
  Who buys my hot corn?
Yah, yah, my yaller gal,
  I meets you in de morning.

2

A hungry nigger passing by
He hit de yaller gal in de eye,
He made de salt and pepper fly,
And eat up all de hot corn.

---

* The Negro women peddled hot corn in the Old Bowery. The words are those recalled by Jake Wallace. "Hot Corn" the "first and most popular banjo song solo" was purchased by Wallace from Dan Emmett in New York in 1855. He also bought a banjo duet song from Emmett.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

ENCORE *

This morning I arose
From sweet repose,
Put on my clothes
And out I goes
In the street, you knows,
Meets one of my foes
His name is Mose,
He runs wid de hose,
A quarrel arose
Which comes to blows.
He hits me in de nose
And down I goes
In the gutter, you knows,
Where the water flows,
And up I goes
To my home, you knows,
To dream of my woes.
That's all I knows,
And what I knows
I knows I knows.

---

* An encore, sung in single breath to banjo, played in lively and vivacious manner, might follow. (Note of Pauline Jacobson in The Bulletin, 1917.)

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

ENCORE*

Eenie, meenie, monie, mike,
A bat's a loni, boni, thike,
A whar from whuch,
Abo ho ballico whee woe whack,
Eenie, meenie my fat hen,
She lays eggs for gentlemen,
Hep up sked a me ding,
Hup to do dum do.

---

* Insistence upon more singing might result in the verse below being rapidly sung and whistled. (Note of Pauline Jacobson in The Bulletin, 1917.)

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

SHUCKIN' OF THE CORN*

1

A. What's the matter Pompey? (sung)
B. What's the matter now? (spoken)
A. The hens they are a-cacklin',
B. An' so's the brindle cow.
A. The roosters am a-crowin'
B. The old cat does meow.
A. He Susie she is goin'
B. To milk the brindle cow.

Chorus

We're going to the shuckin',
We're going to the shuckin',
We're going to the shuckin' of the corn
And we'll stay all day tomorrow,
We'll stay all day tomorrow,
We'll stay until the breakin' of the dawn
As sure as you're born.

2

A. Her daddy was a surgeon. (sung)
B. I know he was. (spoken)
A. His name was Dandy Jim.
B. He cut down all the treeses
A. That' a surgeon's business,
B. To amputate the limb.
A. Her mother took in washin'.
B. And her name was Auntie Sims.
A. She had nineteen little children.
B. What did she do with them?
A. She used them for clothespins.

---

* (To the one line sung the other is spoken, while in the chorus both are sung together. Duet is between "high-toned" and "low nigger.") Wallace and Joe Murphy sang the words of the banjo duet "Shuckin' of the Corn" in San Francisco in 1855 after Wallace had brought it from New York. It made a hit for Emerson and Charley Rhodes in "Rascal Billy." Wallace believed it to be the best of the banjo duets.

SHUCKIN' OF THE CORN (Cont.)

3

A. Miss Lucy said she loved me. (sung)
B. She said she loved me, too. (spoken)
A. To me she gave her affection,
B. To me I know she's true.
A. You are a rhino-seer-ous. (they begin to quarrel)
B. You are a humpback camo-mile,
A. You're a giraffe, hip-on-to-mus,
B. You're a kangaroo, crocodile.

FAMOUS MINSTREL BALLADS

SUSAN JANE*

1

I went to see my Susan,
She met me at the door,
And told me that I needn't come
To see her any more.
Andrew Jackson Payne,
I looked her in the face and said
Good-bye, Susan Jane.

Chorus

Oh, Susan Jane, Oh, Susan Jane!
  Susan quit your foolin',
And give my heart to me;
  Oh, give me back my love again
And I will let you be.
  I used to love you dearly,
I cannot love again,
  I'm going away to leave you soon,
Good-bye, Susan Jane.

---

* A very popular end song at the Olympic Theatre.

HOW "DIXIE" WAS WRITTEN

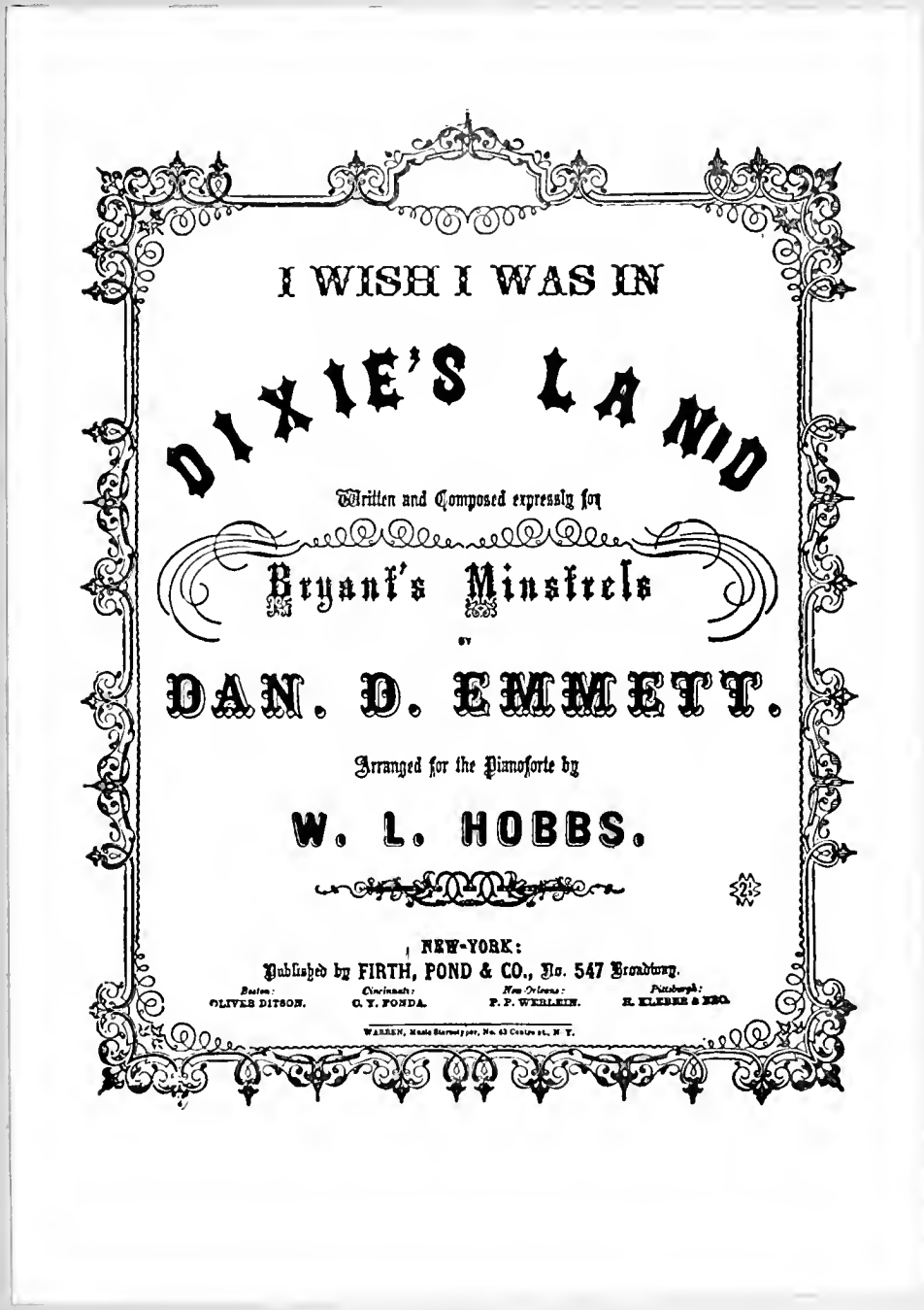
An illuminating account of the composition of "Dixie" is quoted from the San Francisco Argonaut of July 18, 1894:

> According to the New York Tribune, Daniel Decatur Emmett wrote "Dixie" under compulsion. He was a member of a minstrel company which was playing in New York City in the winter of 1859 at Bryant's Theatre at 472 Broadway. It was his duty not alone to sing and dance on the stage, but also to compose a song and set it to music whenever ordered to do so.
>
> One Saturday night after the performance when, tired from his horseplay before the footlights, he had cloaked himself for the cold wind without, the manager called after him: "Dan, we've got to have a new walk-around for next Monday night."

It was in vain that the minstrel remonstrated; in vain he said he must have more time. The manager insisted that the next week's programme must have a new feature, and "Dan" must fix it up.

> "The next day it rained," as Mr. Emmett once said in telling about his writing the song, "and I stayed indoors. At first when I went at it I couldn't get anything but a line. 'I wish I was in Dixie' kept repeating itself in my mind, and I finally took it for my start. The rest wasn't long in coming. I suppose that line came into my mind because the day was so dreary, and we minstrels used to say, when playing in the North in the bleak winter time, that we wished we were in Dixie Land."
>
> Next Monday Emmett handed the words and music to Mr. Bryant, and that night New York heard for the first time the melody which has become a part of American history.
>
> In spite of the hit which "Dixie" made in New

THE ORIGINAL TITLE PAGE OF "DIXIE"



I WISH I WAS IN

DIXIE'S LAND

Written and Composed expressly for

Bryant's Minstrels

BY

DAN. D. EMMETT.

Arranged for the Pianoforte by

W. L. HOBBS.

NEW-YORK:

Published by FIRTH, POND & CO., No. 547 Broadway.

Boston: OLIVER DITSON. Cincinnati: C. Y. FONDA. New Orleans: P. P. WERLEIN. Pittsburgh: H. KLEBER & BRO.

WARREN, Music Stereotyper, No. 63 Centre st., N. Y.

COURTESY OF THE M. H. de YOUNG MUSEUM

York, it might have gone the way of other ballads had it not been selected sometime afterward as the "feature" of a big performance in New Orleans. Each part of the show had been filled; all that was lacking was a national march and song for the grand chorus, a part the leader had omitted till the very last moment. A great many marches and songs were tried, but none could be decided upon. "Dixie" was suggested and tried, and all were so enthusiastic over it that it was at once adopted and given in the performance. Immediately it was taken up by the populace, sung in the streets, in homes and concert halls daily. It was taken to the battle-fields and there established as the Southern Confederacy's war song.

All that Emmett realized from "Dixie" was five hundred dollars, paid to him for its copyright. Dan Emmett died in the little Ohio town of Mount Vernon where he was born on October 29, 1815.

In the last years of his life Mr. Emmett lived alone in a little cottage. Though one of the Beau Brummels of other days, he was satisfied to go about with his coat fastened in at the waist with a piece of rope, and his head sheltered by a shabby-looking skullcap.

CONTRADICTION REGARDING COMPOSITION OF "DIXIE"

Eleven years after publication of the foregoing there appeared in The Lamp (Vol. XXIX, January 1905), a periodical then published by Scribner and Sons, New York, an article written by the minstrel, William D. Hill, which contradicts in part several statements relating to the composition of "Dixie" that were, apparently, recorded in good faith and alleged to be authentic by the Argonaut writer. In the interest of fairness and accuracy and to represent

"that other side of the truth" Mr. Hill's account is also reproduced here:

"Does it Pay to be Famous?"

Back in '96, the narrator of these lines was en route with one of the season's theatrical successes namely, "The South Before the War" Company. In the vernacular of showdom he had a number of one night stands booked in his itinerary, and Mount Vernon (birthplace of Daniel Decatur Emmett) was included in the list. We played there the night of November 25th, and shortly before the rise of the curtain a member of the company remarked in passing, while on his way to his dressing room, that the old minstrel, Dan Emmett, had asked for the courtesy of being passed in, that he might witness the performance; but the company's manager, a man more avaricious than amiable, pointed to a conspicuous placard that had been tacked above the box office window, which read "Free List Suspended," and Dan Emmett, once the equal of any man of Ethiopian prestige, was compelled to walk away, for his poverty at that time would not permit of his purchasing a ticket of admission.

The company in question carried four quartettes and during one of the plantation ensembles the quartettes consolidated and sang "Dixie" sixteen strong. It was used as a concluding number of one portion of the programme, and was nothing but what is termed a bit of business to dress the stage and give finish after the individual quartette work, but invariably it was a hit of each performance; no matter what preceded or followed, vociferous approbation was always in evidence.

Thinking it might afford the author of "Dixie" a pleasure to hear his celebrated ditty rendered by sixteen voices, any one of which was capable of doing solo work, I dispatched one of the stage crew with a request to bring the dejected Emmett back of the stage, provided he could be found, and just as the curtain was about to ascend on Act. I, the man who wrote "Dixie" came walking toward me, leaning upon the arm of the man who had been detailed to

bring him behind the scenes. The post of being stage-manager for the company gave me the power to make him my guest, an authority I was quick to take advantage of. I proffered the tottering pioneer of minstrelsy a seat in the first entrance, where he could see and hear all that was about to transpire. He took the seat, and with a voice as soft as a woman's said: "I'm grateful to you for your kindness." And he was grateful.

The dramatic elements of the first act seemed to please him immensely, and as the action progressed his enthusiasm increased. This act was followed by a spectacular levee scene in which plantation songs and buck and wing dancing were introduced. Then buck dancing was a style of terpsichore my guest was not overly familiar with and he was elated to such a pitch that he stood up throughout this scene, unmindful of his infirmities. The scene terminated with the landing of the Robert E. Lee, giving the audience a full view of the historical steamer.

I did not see him again until we had reached that portion of the programme where the four quartettes took their respective turns in singing their negro melodies, after which they all united and sang "Dixie."

By this time the entire company knew who the guest of honor was, and on the occasion, which will always be a memorable one to me, the delineators brought all of their vocal abilities into full play and sang as I had never heard it rendered before.

NOTE: (Mr. Hill went to see Emmett the following day. The old minstrel was living in small and dismal quarters. He replied, in answer to a question from Mr. Hill, that he had no plans for the future and that he was inclined to concern himself with the past. "I lean to the past, because the old times were the good times." At fourteen he had run away from the village blacksmith forge of his father and joined the army. After his release he worked in "Rogers' Cincinnati Circus" as a musician. There he began to specialize as a banjo player. With Frank Brewer, William Whitlock and Richard Pelham, Emmett formed the group called the

"Virginia Minstrels," which first performed at the Chatham Theatre in New York City. Striped calico shirts with huge sleeves and oversize collars were worn by the comedians, who called themselves "The Hickorys." The full dress suit had not yet been introduced. Seated in a semi-circle, the four comedians entertained. Emmett played the banjo, Brewer, the bones, Whitlock, the tambourine, while Pelham played the unmusical jaw-bone of an Ass.)

Of course the conversation naturally drifted to the origin of "Dixie," and anent the song the author enlightened me as follows: "The original title of my 'Dixie' song was 'I wish I was in Dixie's Land.' It was written, or rather finished, when I was a member of Dan Bryant's minstrels, then located at Mechanic's Hall, 470 Broadway, New York City. I went with Bryant in '59, and 'Dixie' was written a year later, but not on a rainy Sunday, as is generally supposed, and as certain Boswells have seen fit to put it. The idea for 'Dixie' was conceived long before my joining Bryant. 'I wish I was in Dixie' was a circus expression that I had heard up North while traveling with canvas shows. In those days all below the Mason and Dixon line was considered South, and it was a common occurrence of a cold day, when traveling through the North, to hear a shivering circusman remark, 'I wish I was in Dixie's Land.' 'Dixie' never impressed me as being as good a song as 'Old Dan Tucker,' which was one of my first compositions, but 'Dixie' caught on from the first, and before I knew it, it had taken the country by storm. We kept 'Dixie' on for six seasons. I always look upon the song as an accident. One Saturday night Dan Bryant requested me to write a walk-around for the following week. The time allotted me was unreasonably short, but notwithstanding, I went to my hotel and tried to think out something suitable, but my thinking apparatus was dormant, but rather than disappoint Bryant I searched through my trunk and resurrected the manuscript of 'I wish I was in Dixie's Land,' which I had written years before. I changed the tempo and rewrote some of the verses, and in all likelihood if Dan Bryant had not made that hurry up request, 'Dixie' never would have been brought out."

This is the true story of a song that is as sacred to a Southerner as the Holy Bible. It is the history of a composition that holds the same footing in the musical firmament that Uncle Tom's Cabin does in literature. It was the means of making an American famous, but fame is a mighty poor food to fall back on to appease one's hunger.

The song was arranged for the piano by C. S. Grafulla, and in 1860, Finch, Pond & Company, then located on Broadway, between the St. Nicholas and Metropolitan hotels, published it along with "Old Ky-Ky," "Billy Patterson," "Johnny Come Down the Hollow," "Dar's a Darky in de Tent," and "Go-Way-Boys." At the time referred to, there were four minstrel parties on Broadway, independent of Bryant's. They were known as Pierce & Fellow's, Kelly & Leon's, Christy & Wood's, and the San Francisco Minstrels. In addition to this, a man named Campbell had a music hall over on the East Side in the Bowery; and across town on the corner of Hudson and Morton Streets, a showman named Pierce conducted another place of amusement, which was devoted to minstrelsy. Pony Moore, who afterwards went to England and established Moore & Burgess's Minstrels in Piccadilly, London, got his minstrel tuition in Pierce's place. Moore gave up driving an omnibus on the Tenth Street "Yellow Bird" line to become a public entertainer. Moore never was considered an artistic negro delineator, but they took him to England, and he accumulated a large fortune.

Emmett remained with Bryant's Minstrels for six years and four months, and prior to joining Bryant's he had been associated with the famous Christy Minstrels. During the season of 1844, Emmett & Company, with Pelham, Brower and Joe Sweeney, toured England, Ireland and Scotland, but the trip from a financial standpoint was not to their liking. When the burnt cork fraternity abolished many of the earlier ideas of minstrelsy for such inappropriate stuff as Shakespearean first parts and other modern exaggerations, Emmett, with many others of the old school, was compelled to take a back seat, which subsequently led to his abjectness. He never was a high salaried performer, for in

his day exorbitant stipends were unknown, and he told me in confidence that all the songs he had ever written including "Dixie" did not net him six hundred dollars, and there was something about his candor that convinced me that he was truthful.

Mr. Emmett's last appearance before an audience was at a benefit given by the Elks in his native town four years ago. For a decade past, various newspapers in the country have come forward with the sugar-coated intelligence that his every want was being gratified. I read such an article a few days after my interview with him back in '96. He was then eighty-one years of age, and it is reasonable to suppose that any man of that age would not resort to the splitting of wood for a livelihood if he was being cared for, as some papers try to make it appear. Now that he has gone, there is already a constituency of amateur philanthropists making preparations to erect a monument as large as a church debt, over the lamented author's weary bones. Genius is rare, or it wouldn't be genius, and Emmett was a genius in his way; he made no pretensions at resting on his laurels; he did the best he could, and that's all that any man can do, genius or no genius. I can still feel the warmth of his emaciated hands as he stood upon the threshold of his hermitage, wishing me all manner of prosperity as I took leave of him.

Through the interest I took in the long ago and the entertaining conversation of my host, I nearly missed my train for Wooster, that being the next town we were to appear in. It was Thanksgiving Day, and while partaking of the one meal in a year that is more impressive to me than all others, I could not refrain from wondering what Daniel Decatur Emmett had to be thankful for.

D I X I E *

1

I wish I was in de land ob cotton,
Old times dar am not forgotten,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
In Dixie Land whar I was born in,
Early on one frosty mornin',
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

Chorus

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hooray! Hooray!
In Dixie Land I'll take my stand,
To lib and die in Dixie, Away, Away,
Away down south in Dixie, Away, Away,
Away down south in Dixie.

2

Old Missus marry "Will de Weaber,"
Willium was a gay deceaber;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
But when he put his arm around 'er,
He smiled as fierce as a forty pounder,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

3

His face was sharp as a butcher's cleaber,
But dat did not seem to greab 'er;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
Old Missus acted de foolish part,
And died for a man dat broke her heart,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

4

Now here's a health to the next old Missus,
An all de gals dat want to kiss us;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
But if you want to drive 'way sorrow,
Come and hear dis song to-morrow,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

---

* Words and Music by Daniel Decatur Emmett. Heart Songs (Boston: 1909) The Chapple Publishing Company, Ltd.

DIXIE (Cont.)

5

Dar's buckwheat cakes an' Ingun' batter,
Makes you fat or a little fatter;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
Den hoe it down and scratch your grabble,
To Dixie's land I'm bound to trabble,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

MINSTRELSY

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MINSTRELSY

MINSTRELS AND ACTORS MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

MINSTRELS AND ACTORS (Cont.)

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MINSTRELS AND ACTORS (Cont.)

MINSTRELS AND ACTORS (Concluded)

MINSTRELSY

FEMALE MINSTRELS AND ACTRESSES MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

FEMALE MINSTRELS AND ACTRESSES (Cont.)

MINSTRELSY

OTHER PERSONALITIES MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

Name	Occupation	Pages
Adams & Company	Bankers	58
Betsy B. (Mrs. Jos. Austin)	Critic for Argonaut	101, 102, 104 108, 109, 135 138, 148, 149 160, 161, 173 174, 179-181
Bolles, Chas. E. (Black Bart)	Notorious bandit	118
Bonestell	Merchant	37
Burgess, Gelett	Writer	119
Collier, Dr.	Magnetist, Lecturer	42
Cox	Custodian Sutter's Fort	125
Davis, Dan (Coffee Dan)	Owner of famous tavern	118, 119
Dickens, Charles	Author	28
Dickinson, Anna	Suffragette, Lecturer	123
Ellis, Mamie	Emerson's wife	212
Fargo	Mail service company	58
Foster, Stephen	Song writer	18, 38, 47
Garnett, Porter	Newspaper critic	214, 215
Gilbert	Composer	176-179
Grant	Civil War general	58
Irwin, Will	Writer	119
Jacobson, Pauline	Newspaper critic San Francisco Bulletin	15, 46, 47 124, 125
Kipling	Writer	107

OTHER PERSONALITIES (Cont.)

MINSTRELSY

OWNERS AND LESSEES OF THEATRES

THEATRICAL PRODUCERS AND MANAGERS

MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

		PAGES
Barton, Gen. W.B.	Lessee, California Theatre, late 1877 and early 1888	164
Belasco, David	Producer, Manager	118
Bert, Fred	Lessee, California Theatre, 1884	165
Booth, Junius	Manager, San Francisco Hall, circa 1853	34
Daly, Augustin	Producer, Manager, 1870s	120
Dowling, James	Stage-manager, 1873	98, 99, 119
Emerson, Billy cf. Minstrels	Part Proprietor, New Alhambra Theatre, 1873 Proprietor, Emerson's Standard Theatre, 1881. Also called Emerson's Theatre	143
Evrard	Proprietor, Dramatic Museum. Partner of Robinson	22
Field, Asa	Lessee, California Theatre. Possibly 1877 or 1878	164
Frohman, Gus	Promoter, Manager	156, 158
Gilbert	Proprietor, Melodeon, 1860s	69, 122
Haverly, Col. Jack cf. Minstrels	Lessee, California Theatre. Before Dec. 1884	165

OWNERS, LESSEES, PRODUCERS, MANAGERS (Cont.)

OWNERS, LESSEES, PRODUCERS, MANAGERS (Concluded)

MINSTRELSY

TROUPES MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

TROUPES (Cont.)

TROUPES (Concluded)

MINSTRELSY

THEATRES, HALLS, AND OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

THEATRES, HALLS, ETC. (Cont.)

THEATRES, HALLS, ETC. (Concluded)

MINSTRELSY

SONGS MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

SONGS MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH (Cont.)

SONGS MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH (Cont.)

SONGS MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH (Cont.)

SONGS MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH (Concluded)

MINSTRELSY

PERFORMANCES MENTIONED IN MONOGRAPH

Performance	Theatre	Year	Page
Admiral Dewey at Peace	Columbia	April 1900	208
Adrienne	Bush St. Theatre	1878	109
At Gay Cooney Island	California	Feb. 1898	207
Bad Breath, the Grave of Chowder (Burlesque of Macbeth)	Olympic	1866	88
Bad Whiskey			117
Big Bonanza, The	Standard	July 1875	120
Bohemian Girl, The Burlesque of opera	San Francisco Hall	Aug. 1855	54
Bone Squash Diablo Burlesque of Fra Diavolo	San Francisco Hall	March 1856	122
Box and Cox	San Francisco Hall	Sept. 1852	17
	New York	late 40s	76
	Maguire's Opera House	June 1858	77 122
Called Back	Baldwin	Oct. 1884	162
Crawled Back (Travesty of Called Back)	Standard	Oct. 1884	162
Camille (Travesty)	Standard	Nov. 1885	215
Carry the News to Mary	Alhambra	Jan. 1873	127
Cavalleria Rusticana Intermezzo	California	Feb. 1898	208
Charge of San Juan Hill, The	Columbia	April 1900	208

PERFORMANCES (Cont.)

Performance	Theatre	Year		Page
Child in the Regiment Burlesque of Ernani	San Francisco Hall		1856-7	50
Chimes of Normandy	Bush St. Theatre			117
Cinderella	Chestnut St. Theatre, Philadelphia			42
Clameel, or The Feet of a Go-Getter. Burlesque of Camille	Olympic		1866	88
County Chairman, The	Columbia	Feb.	1906	213
Courting in the Rain	Alhambra	May	1873	131
Domino Noir or The Masquerade	San Francisco Hall	July	1855	49, 50
Don't Give Dat Name a Bad Place	Alhambra	Jan.	1873	127
Epitaphs	Bush St. Theatre	May	1878	105
Ernani	Adelphi I	April	1851	23
Burlesque of opera	San Francisco Hall		1856-7	50
Field of the Cloth of Gold	California	April	1886	187
Forty Thieves, The			1871	95
	Bush St. Theatre	Feb.	1878	101
Gay Gambolier, The		early	1860	69
Hamlet	Jenny Lind	Aug.	1853	22
	Baldwin		1888	33
Help	Olympic		1860s	86
Holiday Sports	San Francisco Hall		1856-7	50
Hungry Brothers	San Francisco Hall		1856-7	50

PERFORMANCES (Cont.)

Performance	Theatre	Year		Page
Il Trovatore	Standard	April	1883	153
	Bijou		1886	193
				215
Travesty of opera				211
Insanity	Standard	Feb.	1884	157
Iolanthe	Bush St. Theatre		1882	178
Ixion	Bush St. Theatre	Feb.	1878	102
King Lear	Jenny Lind	Jan.	1851	22
King of Haiti, The	Maguire's Opera House	Sept.	1857	64
La Boheme (Travesty of opera)	Bijou	Dec.	1867	96
La Sonnambula	Adelphi I	Feb.	1851	23
Burlesque of opera	Bijou	Jan.	1868	96, 97
Lischen and Frischen	Alhambra	May	1873	131
Lucia (Sextette)	California	Feb.	1898	208
Macbeth (Travesty)	Standard	Nov.	1885	215
Macbreath (Burlesque of Macbeth)	Standard	Nov.	1885	183
Magicians, The	Maguire's Opera House	Sept.	1857	64
Major, The			1881	107
Mazeppa (Burlesque)	Olympic	Aug.	1866	82
Mickey-Doo (Burlesque of Mikado)	Bush St. Theatre	Sept.	1885	179-80
Mikado	Savoy, London	March	1885	174-75
	Tivoli Theatre	Sept.	1885	178-79
Minstrels' Festival, The	Metropolitan	Aug.	1857	55

PERFORMANCES (Cont.)

Performance	Theatre	Year		Page
Minstrel Performance Presented by three companies.	New Alhambra	Jan.	1873	127-29
Mulligan Guard Ball	Bush St. Theatre	June	1878	107
Nan-Off (Burlesque of Nanon)	Standard	Nov.	1885	183
Norma	Adelphi I	Feb.	1851	23
Mrs. Norma (Burlesque of Norma)	San Francisco Hall	Aug.	1856	50
Oh Hush! or The Viginia Cupids	San Francisco Hall	July	1855	49
Old Bob Ridley	San Francisco Hall		1856-57	50
Old Fellow, The Boor of Vengeance (Travesty of Othello)	Olympic		1866	88
Old Lavender	Bush St. Theatre	June	1878	109
Old Times Rocks	Musical Hall	Oct.	1854	38
Operatic Finish	Bush St. Theatre	June	1881	142
Orinoco, or The Royal Slave	Boston, Mass.	Dec.	1799	3
Othello	England		1610	1
	Jenny Lind	Aug.	1853	22
Travesty of drama	Standard	Nov.	1885	215
Out All Night	Standard	Nov.	1884	162
Oxygen			1871	95
Pa-Quit-Her (Burlesque of Paquita)	Standard	Oct.	1885	180
Paquita (Travesty)				182
Patience	Bush St. Theatre		1881	178

PERFORMANCES (Cont.)

Performance	Theatre	Year		Page
Pete	Alcazar	July	1889	197
Pinafore	Boston Museum	Nov.	1878	174-75
	Bush St. Theatre	Dec.	1878	175
	Standard	June	1879	176
	Bush St. Theatre	June	1879	176
	Bush St. Theatre	Oct.	1879	177
Pirates of Penzance	New York	Dec.	1879	177
	Bush St. Theatre	early	1880	178
Plantation Reminiscences	San Francisco Hall		1856-57	50
Princess Ida	Bush St. Theatre		1884	178
Pygmelon and Gal-Eat-Er (Travesty on Pygmalion and Galatea)	Alhambra	Feb.	1873	127
Reed's Jolly Wax Works	Standard	Jan.	1883	152
Richard Ye Third. Burlesque of Richard III	Olympic	Aug.	1866	82
Robinson Crusoe			1871	95
Roman Nose and Suet. Travesty on Romeo and Juliet	Olympic		1866	88
Sarah Heartburn	Standard	Jan.	1882	144
Sculptor's Studio	Olympic	July	1866	65
Seven Out	Alhambra	Jan.	1873	127
She in Black	Bijou	Sept.	1888	192
Skidmore Fancy Ball, The			1873	107
Sports on the Spar. Travesty on Macbeth	Olympic	Sept.	1866	89

PERFORMANCES (Concluded)

Performance	Theatre	Year		Page
Squatter Sovereignty			1881	107
Stage Struck Barber	Maguire's Opera House	June	1858	76
Stranger, The	Olympic		1860s	85
Strolling Actors, The	Olympic	Aug.	1866	83
Tailor in Distress, The	Globe Theatre, Cincinnati		1823	3
That Rascal Billy	Alhambra		1873	126
Trip to Paris, A	Alhambra	Jan.	1873	127
Turned Head or The Desperate Lunatic	Maguire's Opera House	Sept.	1857	64
Two Tramps, The	Standard	Nov.	1884	162
Uncle Tom's Cabin			1870s	123
	Grand Opera House	Sept.	1883	149-50
Under the Bamboo Tree	Detroit	Jan.	1922	218
Waddy Googan	Alcazar	July	1889	198
Warm Water or White Labor Cigars	Standard	Jan.	1886	185
Weffo or The Sensible Monkey	Maguire's Opera House	June	1858	77
Who Owns the Theatre?	Standard	Jan.	1885	165
Widow's Victim, The	Cleveland	before	1852	169

MINSTRELSY

CHRONOLOGY

11th Century	Troubadours, bards, jongleurs, glee-men of middle ages are called "ministers."
14th "	The term "minister" becomes "minstrel."
1799	Dec. 30, Mr. Grawpner, in Negro character, sings plantation ballads during performance of Orinoco or the Royal Slave.
1799-1832	Edwin Forrest presumed to be first minstrel performer. Thomas D. Rice considered first genuine minstrel. Rice scores triumph at Bowery Street Theatre, Washington, D. C. Negro songs achieve popularity.
1843	Billy Whitlock creates first minstrel troupe. Later he organizes Virginia Minstrels. Organization of Ring and Parker Minstrels, Kentucky Minstrels, Congo Melodists (later Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders).
1844	Edwin P. Christy appears on Albany stage. Titles of troupes become pretentious. Troupes expand but are restricted to eastern cities.
1847	Troupes initiate varied features. Tom Christian introduces yodelers. Street parades become the fashion.
1848	Johnny de Angelis comes to San Francisco.
1849	Notable performers arrive during gold rush. Bella Union probably the locale of first Minstrel performances in West. Charley Rhodes' arrival.
1850	Virginia Serenaders appear in Washington Hall, San Francisco.
1851	Maguire revamps hall over his Parker House Saloon and calls it Jenny Lind Theatre. He engages Sable Harmonists. Minstrelsy gains hold locally. American Theatre opens. Sable Harmonists leave but popularity of minstrelsy continues. Mart Taylor and Johnny de Angelis give wandering camp performances.

CHRONOLOGY (Cont.)

1852	Buckley's New Orleans Serenaders at Adelphi. Minstrels make travesties on operas and caricature local personages. Other troupes arrive, too many to survive. Autumn and winter of this year disastrous to performers. Edwin Booth turns wandering performer. Maguire sells Jenny Lind Theatre.
1853	Buckley's Serenaders at Armory Hall; thence to Sacramento, Marysville, Stockton. Maguire builds San Francisco Hall. Donnelly's Minstrels at Adelphi and American Theatres. Name changed to San Francisco Minstrels.
1854	Maguire engages Backus to appear at San Francisco Hall. Copies of Christy's Plantation Melodies go on sale. Promenade concerts started but are shortlived. Part of Christy's Troupe, under direction of Tom Briggs, comes West. Opens at Musical Hall. Noted minstrels in Christy Troupe (Eph Horn and Tom Briggs). Definate trend towards minstrelsy.
1855	Backus Troupe continues in public favor. Maguire casts his lot with Minstrelsy. Christy-Backus Minstrels open at San Francisco Hall and are enthusiastically received.
1856	Minstrels flock to San Francisco. Lotta Crabtree performs with minstrels, then for Maguire. Backus' second appearance in San Francisco.
1856-1857	Union and American Theatres given over to Minstrelsy. Eph Horn leaves Christy-Backus Minstrels to form Eph Horn Serenaders. California Minstrels at Union Theatre. Mrs. Collins creates furore as female minstrel. Jerry Bryant's Troupe gives The Minstrels' Festival at Metropolitan. San Francisco Hall becomes Maguire's Opera House.
1857-1859	Minstrelsy reigns supreme during these years. Zorer's Ethiopians tour camps.
1858	Rainier and Donaldson's Minstrels open at American Theatre. J. C. Rainier organizes Rainier Operatic Serenaders. Wilson, manager of Lyceum Theatre, inaugurates matinees. Maguire participates in minstrel movement. George Christy's Minstrels come to Maguire's theatre.

CHRONOLOGY (Cont.)

1859	Billy Birch returns. Dan Emmett composes the song "Dixie."
1860s	Maguire engages Lotta Crabtree for his Opera House, and for Eureka Theatre. She also plays at the What Cheer, Bella Union, Gilbert's, Apollo, and the Willows. Maguire sends troupes into Sierra. Rewards are enormous. Dave Wambold, highest paid balladist.
1860-1870	Four or five permanent blackface companies established in San Francisco. Growth of minstrelsy brings disastrous results to other performers.
1864	Birch, Wambold, and Backus organize San Francisco Minstrels.
1866	Sheppard kills miner during quarrel in Virginia City. Audience at Maguire's hoots him. Blackface rides the crest of popularity. Maguire puts on one-act plays. Farewell tendered Johnny de Angelis.
1869	California Theatre erected. Theatrical center shifts to Bush Street.
1870	Maguire and Billy Emerson organize Emerson's California Minstrels. Billy Emerson called "king of them all," introduces many song hits. "Black Crook" craze. The British Blondes join minstrel troupes. Minstrelsy assumes importance in West. Slapstick and blackface vaudeville enter minstrelsy; allegorical playlets, caricatures of operas are given. Emerson's troupe name changed to Maguire's California Minstrels.
1873	Emerson takes first trip to Australia. He introduces riotous sketches. Maguire carries on successfully. Sensational newcomers arrive. More than a third of troupes now reduced to poverty.
1874	De Angelis returns. Plays under Maguire's management given at Standard Theatre.
1878	Haverly's Mastodon Troupe arrives; opening performance a sensation. Billy Rice, member of company. Harrigan and Hart at Bush Street

CHRONOLOGY (Cont.)

1878 (Cont.) Theatre in whiteface; their troupe, blackface. Rentz Female Minstrels, forerunners of 20th Century Follies, open at Bush Street Theatre. Engagement lasts several months.

1879 Grand opening at Bush Street Theatre of Col. Jack Haverly's Troupe.

1880 Emerson goes to England and charms Queen Victoria. Returns to America and organizes his own company. Maguire establishes company at Standard under Emerson. Makes alliance with Hooley; retains interest in other troupes and opens Baldwin Theatre. "Ballad of '49" in constant demand.

1881 Hooley, Morton, and Homer's Minstrels at Bush Street Theatre. Return of Haverly's "Forty--Count Em--Forty" troupe from Her Majesty's Theatre, London, with Billy Emerson, Rice, Sadler in the company. Haverly makes more innovations. Zanfretta crosses over Bush St. on tightrope. Haverly troupe leaves town, playing at Sacramento and Virginia City en route East.

1882 Charles Callender's Negro Minstrels come from the East and open at Standard Theatre. Haverly at the California.

1883 Emerson, established at Standard Theatre, continues for about 108 weeks and brings out weekly novelties. Courtwright and Hawkins open at Bush Street Theatre. Emerson turns down Frohman's offer for $1,000 a week. Callender's Negroes perform at Grand Opera House in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

1884 Emerson launches new series of triumphs. Leon and Cushman Minstrel Comedy Company opens at Bush Street Theatre, introducing different type of minstrel business. Reed opens at Emerson's Standard Theatre and unbridled enthusiasm greets him. Emerson's World Fair Minstrel Company plays the California Theatre.

1885 Reed writes skit Who Owns the Theatre? concerning controversy over ownership of California Theatre. Emerson departs for Australia with troupe. Reed burlesques The Mikado which plays at Tivoli, and creates furore with his burlesque Mickey-Doo. Pa-Quit-Her (Paquita) opens at Standard.

CHRONOLOGY (Cont.)

1886 Labor troubles begin. Minstrels strike for better pay, Rival troupe, The Refined Minstrels, opens at Baldwin. Minstrelsy shows signs of decadence. Wood and Ryman's Female Minstrels make debut at Standard Theatre. Emerson returns; opens Standard. Union members boycott California Theatre. Reed loses popularity and goes East.

1887 Gustav Walter opens the Orpheum, constituting threat to minstrelsy.

1888 Haverly, at Bush Street Theatre, presents varied attractions. Lew Dockstader's New York Minstrels arrive. Emerson appears with his company at Bijou Theatre. Haverly Cleveland Minstrels arrive.

1889 Emerson and Haverly maintain last stand. The public is unreceptive to minstrelsy. Weber and Fields hold forth on Orpheum stage. Primrose, Thatcher, and West inaugurate vaudeville-minstrelsy at California Theatre but cannot compete with Weber and Fields. Harrigan appears in comedy on Alcazar stage. Minstrelsy faltering.

1890 Cleveland Minstrels unsuccessful in attempt to revive minstrelsy.

1892 George Thatcher's Minstrels appear. Haverly bitterly strives to maintain minstrelsy.

1894 Emerson appears with the Hopkins Trans-Oceanic Vaudeville Troupe.

1895 Haverly organizes new company at Columbia Theatre. Lasts two weeks. Emerson returns to San Francisco, but seems passé. Minstrelsy staggering.

1898 Mme. Sissieretta Jones brings Colored Troubadours to California Theatre. William West's Minstrels are at Columbia.

1899 West Minstrels transferred to California Theatre but are shortlived.

CHRONOLOGY (Concluded)

1900	William West's Minstrels appear at Columbia Theatre and Haverly's Minstrels open two week engagement at California Theatre.
1902	Billy Emerson and Billy West die. Billy Rice dies. San Francisco pays tribute to memory of Emerson.
1902-1906	Minstrelsy scarce and unimportant.
1903	Freeman and Lynn's Commercial Men's Mastodon Minstrels (amateurs) stage revival at Alhambra Theatre.
1906	George Thatcher takes part in comedy The County Chairman at Columbia Theatre. Minstrel performances at Grand Opera House described as "nondescript" and "third rate" by newspaper critic.
After 1906	The last stage. Bert Williams joins mountebank minstrels; then acts in vaudeville. Blackface comedians Eddie Leonard, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor (modern counterparts of old-time minstrels) act in vaudeville, movies, and on the radio.

ERRATA -- MINSTRELSY

PAGE	LINE	IN TEXT:	SHOULD READ:
3	2	Oronoco	Orinoco
3	8	Taylor in Distress	The Tailor in Distress
36	11	man plus ultra	ne plus ultra
80	11	Southern	Sothern
83	3	The Strolling Players	The Strolling Actors
88	11	Odd Fellow	Old Fellow
88	12	Camilo	Camille
89	1	Alhambra	Olympic
118	35	J. Edward Taylow	J. Edward Taylor
119	19	James Cowling	James Dowling
122	11	Bone Squash	Bone Squash Diablo
126	10	That Rascally Billy	That Rascal Billy
127	6	Carry the News to Marry	Carry the News to Mary
127	7	California	Alhambra
141	11	pervious	previous
145	24	early eighties	eighteen hundreds
162	14	on November 8, 1884	in November 1884
175		Alhambra Theatre	Bush Street Theatre
176	17	Emilie Melville	Emelie Melville
191	2	1886	1888
213	31	The Country Gentleman	The County Chairman
83	15)		
281	21)	Wood's Theatre	Wade's Theatre
145)			
199)			
203-7)			
226)		Shepard	Sheppard
85	31)		
263	14)		
286	3)	William Horan Lingard	William Horace Lingard

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(PART 3)
SPANISH
RUSSIAN

VOLUME XII.

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VOLUME XIII.

MINSTRELSY

VOLUME XIV.

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VOLUME XVI.

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STAGECRAFT

VOLUME XVII.

THE COURT AND THE STAGE

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