

AMERICAN MUSIC BORN OF THE NEGRO RACE

"Slave Spirituals" of the Bondsmen Were God's Way of Claiming Kin to Him—Origination of Plantation Melodies Finds Its Basis in Equation of Higher Laws.

NEGROES LEAD MUSIC WORLD

American Negroes Were Famed for Their Musical Learning Before the Emancipation, and Were Received Then as Now in the World's Greatest Musical Culture.

In Omaha, Neb., there is a newspaper called the World-Herald, and what purports to be a sheet with considerable influence. Its readers were treated with a rare bit of ignorance by one of its writers December 22. We believe in sincerity he did the best he could, and for the benefit of our readers we are reproducing the article referred to. It reads as follows:

"One of the great myths, believed by nearly all mankind both in this country and across the ocean, is what has been called Negro music. It is white man's music, and not Negro at all. The educated Negroes are repudiating it. It was mainly created by Stephen C. Foster. He may have caught some of the themes from the wild chants of the Negroes, but it is a white man's creation. He wrote 'Old Uncle Ned,' 'Old Black Joe,' 'Suwanee River,' 'Old Folks at Home,' 'Old Dog Tray,' 'My Old Kentucky Home,' and many other songs that are called Negro melodies.

It is also asserted that the Negro campmeeting songs and music were the work of white men. The Negro race is a musical race, and quick to catch a theme if it is of the rollicking or pathetic sort, and they added words and phrases without limit when under excitement; but the educated Negroes repudiate the whole thing. They have reacted against everything that reminds them of the condition of their race while they were in servitude. They will not sing one of Foster's songs, and as for the campmeeting melodies they will have nothing to do with them. In their churches they keep up a kind of rhythmic joy. The lively tunes that they sing are sung in all the evangelical churches and the words are the same. These songs are all the productions of white hymn writers and composers. The race since emancipation has produced one genuine poet whose ability is everywhere acknowledged, and it may in the future produce composers of music, but none has so far appeared."

The songs of Stephen C. Foster, who wrote "Old Uncle Ned," "Old Black Joe," "Suwanee River," "Old Folks at Home," "Old Dog Tray," and "My Old Kentucky Home," are not considered musical classics and have never been claimed by musical critics or composers as plantation melodies or musical compositions of the race.

In music the world speaks with "golden tongue," and all is alike innately acquainted; eg a heart beats in sympathy, absorbing tones of melody, and the nations are one. The soul of any race is its music. To say that we have no soul to give to the world the version of the infinite creation of which we are a part would be more than an error. We need not go far to prove that the spirit that moves the mortal man is akin to us. Mr. Henry F. Williams and Mr. F. E. Lowe played at the Boston Coliseum in July, 1872. There were 2,000 musicians and 20,000 voices who participated in that musical festival. Mr. Williams was then one of the world's greatest musicians. He was born August 13, 1813. Some of his compositions were "Laurlette," published by Firth & Pond, New York, 1840; "Come, Love, and List Awhile," published by Pond & Hall; "It Was a Chance We Met," published by O. Ditson & Co., Boston, 1866; "I Would I'd Never Met Thee," published by O. Ditson & Co., Boston, 1876. O. Ditson & Co. in 1854 published "Parisian Waltzes" and eight or ten polka redowas and several mazurkas and quadrilles. Mr. Joseph White, born in Mantanza, Cuba, played before all of the courts of Europe while we were yet in the chains of slavery. He appeared before Napoleon III in 1863, and was a favorite of European capitals. John T. Douglass and the "Pilgrim" are known to the cultured in music. Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the "Black Swan," was born in 1803 at Natchez, Miss. For music the world has never failed to sing praises to her. The Luca family, Justin Holland, Thomas J. Bowes (the American Mariner), James Gloucester Demarest, Thomas Green Betheme ("Blind Tom"), the Myers sisters, Frederick Elliot Lewis, Nellie Brown, Samuel W. Jamieson, Joseph White and the Fisk jubilee singers are other musical celebrities of the race who gave to America its only original music and song. "Slave spirituals" were sung by the bondsmen in the past, originated there, and are the only native American music. Add to this short and incomplete list some of the well-known writers of our day: Justin Holland, Samuel Lucas, George Mebburn's "Listen to the Mocking Bird," and James Bland's "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" are familiar. Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Will Marion Cook, Lucie R. Hill, D. Rosmond Johnson, Scott Joplin, Christ Smith. Then again we might mention "Anthem for Christmas," by William Brady; "The Pilgrim" (overture) by J. T. Douglass; "Le Serment De L'Arbe" (dramatic chant), by Edmond Dede; "Au Clair De La Lune," by Luciaen Lambert; "Les Clochettes" (fantasie mazurka), by Sidney Lambert; "Scenes of Youth," by F. E. Lewis; "The Rain Storm," "The Battle of Manassas," by Blind Tom. To say that the wealth of American music is resplendent in the fullest possibilities of a great future is but to pay just tribute to the Negro. From the humble and lowly the world may find her footsteps upward.