

THE BANJO.



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THE BANJO!

A DISSERTATION,

BY

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Author of "THE COMPLETE AMERICAN BANJO SCHOOL,"
"THE BANJO PHILOSOPHICALLY," ETC., ETC.



PHILADELPHIA, PENNA.

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in that city, there were some forty or more people of note who came purposely to hear the American Banjo, and that of this number, only one, a lady, had ever heard the Banjo played before—or in fact—ever seen a Banjo.

“Countess —,” he writes, “said: ‘What a lovely instrument you have. It sounds more like the harp than any other instrument I have ever heard.’ Baron — said the same thing. All were delighted.”

Now does all this look as though the Banjo was fitted only for the negro minstrels, or for the variety stage? No thinking man or woman will continue to maintain such a proposition after once becoming acquainted with the facts; and it is partly to make known such facts that I have given this work to the public.

The parlor, the drawing room, and the select musical entertainment being the proper places for the Banjo to be rightly heard; it then remains to be observed that even among the audiences of these entertainments will always at times be found those who are not prepared to accept the Banjo at once; as it deserves to be accepted, and take immediately to music such as Themes, with variations, sets of Waltzes, Fantasias, etc., but who, at the same time, will be immediately captivated, as it were, by the rendition of some simple air played upon the Banjo, with a like simple accompaniment on the piano. Performances of “swinging solos,” or “trick playing;” with the usual “juggling” of the instrument, seldom, if ever, fail to at once convert those persons to an appreciation of the merits of the Banjo.

Since the beginning of the world, history chronicles the fact that people have ever been attracted by anything like “wonders”—and by any and all things which appear to them to be out of the usual course of things. Hence, a performance, in which the Banjo is sent twirl-



J. D. Stewart.

DEDICATION.

To the Banjoists of America,
And to those who are learning ;
To those who aspire to the higher art—
To those within whom the Light is burning,
(That Light which lends to human beings the power of the Gods)
And to those who for greater knowledge are yearning.
To one and all, both rich and poor ;
To the man of gall,—the unconscious boor.
To the little ones—ofttimes called great ;
And also to those who the Banjo hate.
To the poor, because the book is cheap,
To the rich, because the volume's neat—
To him who reads and reading thinks ;
To him who presses onward—never sinks.
To every student who wishes to learn,
And to all who perchance would attention turn
To THE BANJO, this little volume is faithfully inscribed, by

THE AUTHOR.

Philadelphia, August, 1888.



"THE BANJO."



A DISSERTATION

BY

S. S. STEWART.



PRIMARY OBSERVATIONS.

"A spiral winds from the worlds to the suns,
And every star that shines
In the path of degrees forever runs,
And the spiral octave climbs."



"There is no new thing under the sun." The inventions of the present day and age are but the echoes of similar contrivances used in past generations and by-gone ages.

Ages before Columbus set foot on American soil—thousands of years before the untutored American Indian inhabited this Continent, there is little doubt that the land we now inhabit was the home of a vast civilization, and of a people that were, to say the least, as far advanced in many respects as we are to-day.

"History repeats itself." Sound moves in waves. Events are governed by cyclic laws. To-day is the tomorrow of yesterday. The future is linked with the past.

It is said that stringed instruments are almost "as old as the world." The Violin is traced by some writers as antedating the Christian Era many years, and doubtless the musicians of that age could have traced it backward many hundred years from thence.

With a few modifications, slight alterations and perhaps more or less brilliant variations, we are doing the same things over again which have been done long years ago.

"The new is old, the old is new,
The cycle of a change sublime,
Still sweeping through!"

The instrument known as the American Banjo to-day, is the result of an evolution from the primitive instruments used by the negroes of the South; as the far famed "three-string gourd" of Picaune Butler was the result of an involution from the more perfected musical instruments. For there can be no evolution without a parallel involution. "Light comes from the East" and returns again thereto.

The undeveloped mind of the negro received musical ideas from minds further advanced. He received them according to his developement and reflected them as his comprehension and mechanical skill permitted.

Hence, some have claimed that the instrument, now called the Banjo, is of negro origin.

And what if such were the case? Truth has often come into the world through lowly channels. The stone which the builder rejects to-day, is made the corner-stone of the temple to-morrow.

The much despised and tabooed Banjo of past generations has become to-day the popular musical favorite of many cultivated people of America. To become acquainted with it—to become familiar with its many

musical qualities—is to love it. And one has only to make himself acquainted with it to become its ardent admirer.

In spite of the adverse criticisms of bigoted and prejudiced minds, the Banjo has gone on gaining in popular favor. In spite of the many improperly constructed instruments of the Banjo class, forced upon the public notice, and often in the hands of unskilled performers, the instrument has made rapid progress and gained many new adherants. In spite of the fact that it has had to battle against the surging current of popular prejudice for many years, the Banjo stands before you to-day, reader, as demanding, yes, and commanding, notice from the advanced musical minds of the day.

It comes before you demanding the recognition it deserves. It will receive—it is receiving this recognition.

And now, as a past musical age gives up its dead to live again, the Banjo—one of which is said to have been discovered in the Egyptian Pyramids, blossoms again into life with the existing generation, and clothes itself in the form and garments of an American civilization.

It is with the present and future that we deal. We must therefore write of the Banjo of to-day, and of the American Banjo, as it is called; leaving the obscure and misty past to seek repose within the bosom of antiquity.

Those who find recompense only, and can delight in nothing else so much, may if they see fit continue to burrow in the earth and in the sea; in worm-eaten books, and more or less doubtful records of the past, for relics of the Banjo, as it was known to past ages, and extinct races; but it is with us now that the task of championing the Banjo of the present day and generation lies. This task has fallen, as a mantle, upon one who accepts it

gladly, perhaps ; but gladly only because he has made, through unceasing and untiring effort and application, himself familiar with the many inherent musical beauties of the instrument. He has delayed, from time to time, placing before a critical public the observations in the form herein displayed. He has waited only in the hope that someone more competent than himself would take up the subject, as outlined in his lecture, *The Banjo Philosophically*, and give to the world a dissertation upon the Banjo ; but these fond hopes have not been realized, nor does it appear that they are soon to be ; hence, he now offers to the reading public, and to the Banjoists of America, this little work ; at the same time making no claim to literary skill ; for how can one who is engaged in active business, and meeting daily and hourly all the annoyances that a person in mercantile life must put up with, have time for literary culture ? The reader is therefore asked to overlook any faults in style and expression, and to kindly accept the work for what it is intended, and to withhold judgment until the entire subject in hand has been attentively read and considered.

“ Docendo Dicimus.”

PREFACE.

Were it not for the literati, the Violin as a musical instrument would not hold the prominent place it holds to-day. Had there been no musical literature, the violin would doubtless have remained, to this day, a "fiddle" only, in the minds of the masses. Paganini might have drawn his bow in vain were it not for the musical press, which drew attention to the artist and his instrument. All great things have had small beginnings. The seed must be planted in the earth before the tree can come forth. "Out of the depths" have arisen much that is pure and good.

Shortly after publishing my lecture, called, for want of a more appropriate title, "*The Banjo Philosophically*," I received in my daily mail a letter from a gentleman whose name to-day is well and favorably known to many of my readers as the accomplished composer of some of the best music written for the banjo, and as the compiler and arranger of valuable musical works. The gentleman in question is no other than Mr. John H. Lee, and as his letter has been one of the principal causes which have led to the writing of this present work, I will, with the reader's permission, append a portion of it. The letter is dated on the 22d of September, 1886, and reads as follows:

"A perusal of your lecture entitled 'The Banjo Philosophically,' afforded me great pleasure. It is by far the best thing you have ever written on the Banjo,

and I know whereof I speak, because you have been kind enough to forward me at all times your publications as they were issued, and *I read them always*. I am not one of the kind that curry favor by a judicious application of 'taffy,' nor do I think you are gullible enough to be influenced by it, but I do believe in honest compliment; therefore I wish to convey to you my honest appreciation of this, your latest. The scientific portion of the work, you will admit, is of more interest to the would-be manufacturer of the Banjo than to the expert manipulator, who rarely cares to delve into its intricacies; but the latter portion of the lecture, devoted to advice and instruction regarding the care, playing and various remarks concerning the Banjo, are of great interest to ALL, student and professor alike. A little more of the same class of Banjo literature would elevate its standing and force recognition from the few remaining bigots who are prejudiced against the establishment of the Banjo as a legitimate instrument.*

The Banjo needs all the good things that can be written about it. There are few men with the requisite knowledge of the Banjo that are devoted to it. There are few with devotion that possess the requisite knowledge to aid its progress. Granting the requisite knowledge and devotion, the question of literary ability arises. Many have developed the musical resources of the banjo

* "The Banjo Philosophically" was written during the summer of 1886, and now during the summer of 1888, at the time when the young artist, Mr. D. C. Everest, who is studying music in Paris, France, is making such a wonderfully favorable impression upon musical minds in that city, with his Banjo, I have set myself again to the task of writing on the Banjo. What I may be doing a summer another two years hence I of course do not know, but hope that I shall not, at least, be regretting the few hours spent in writing this dissertation.

by their compositions, but in the literary sense you have the field to yourself. Volumes have been written about other instruments, but the Banjo, with the exception of such articles as you have written for the *Journal*, has been neglected."

As I consider Mr. Lee a gentleman well qualified to judge as to the wants of the banjo-playing public and the student of the banjo, as well as one having long experience as a player of the banjo and other instruments, I should not hesitate to act upon any suggestion that he, or another of like qualification, should offer; and as an experience of two years since the issuing of *The Banjo Philosophically*, has not passed without giving me some additional knowledge of the subject, I have thought best to follow the lecture with the present *Dissertation*.

That the last two years have witnessed a great increase in the interest manifested in the banjo and banjo-playing there is no doubt; and that this interest will continue to increase as the beauties of the instrument become better known, no one can doubt. Many of our colleges and schools now contain numerous banjo players. "Banjo clubs" have entertained many at musical concerts given by students during the past year. In an article published in a recent number of "*Woman*," a monthly magazine, in relation to the Seaside Institute, of Bridgeport, Conn., it is stated that the class in Banjo playing numbered forty-two members during the season of 1887-8. Other institutions have similar classes. Musicians, who a few years ago tabooed the instrument, now begin to admire it. All over the country it is making itself known and becoming loved.

Without wishing to incur the charge of egotism, I will append an extract from a recent letter received from a

Southern gentleman; warm-hearted and impulsive, as many Southerners are, he was pleased and delighted with his purchase of a banjo. The gentleman is a Tennessean, stockman and merchant—Will McMackin, by name. He writes as follows:

“I figure this way. The face is an index to the heart. Seventy-five per cent. of the poets I have seen, both men and women, are very handsome. Poetry is music—music is love. Love is a Heaven-born gift, engraved upon the heart with the fingers of God. Through your portrait in musical journals, the public have formed a very high appreciation of you. Your magnanimity in shipping a costly instrument minus C. O. D. bill, has made you the theme of much compliment and praise. In more ways than one I have cause to appreciate your letter.”

Now I do not flatter myself that I am extremely handsome, but then, the old saying, “Handsome is as handsome does,” may apply in my case. At any rate, the portraits of myself which have been published, have led many persons into the serious mistake of supposing me to be a large burly man—a veritable “slugger.” This I am led to believe on account of numerous visitors, who when meeting me for the first time, have frequently addressed me in some such language as this—“You are an entirely different man from what I expected to see. I had an idea that you were a great big man, weighing about two hundred and fifty pounds.”

I surely do not know where they could have gathered such an impression unless it was from the wood engravings representing my portrait. Therefore, that my readers may be better acquainted with me, I now make the remarks that I am rather small of stature and weigh about one hundred and thirty to one hundred and thirty-five pounds. I was born on the

eighth day of January, in the year 1855, and am therefore now a few months over thirty-three years of age. My experience with the banjo *as a business*, extends over a period of some ten years. Previous to this, I studied music and the banjo as an amateur only. This is about all I have to say concerning myself individually, and having said this, I shall now proceed with the DISSERTATION ON THE BANJO, only repeating the request, that the reader, if he is disposed to ridicule, may reserve his decision in the case in hand until after the trial; or, in other words, that he will first read the entire work, and then, *when familiar with the subject*, pass judgment—not before.



THE BANJO.

SECTION I.

“There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.”—*Shakspeare.*

Who would have thought, a generation ago, that the Banjo would have ever become the popular and pleasing instrument it is to-day?

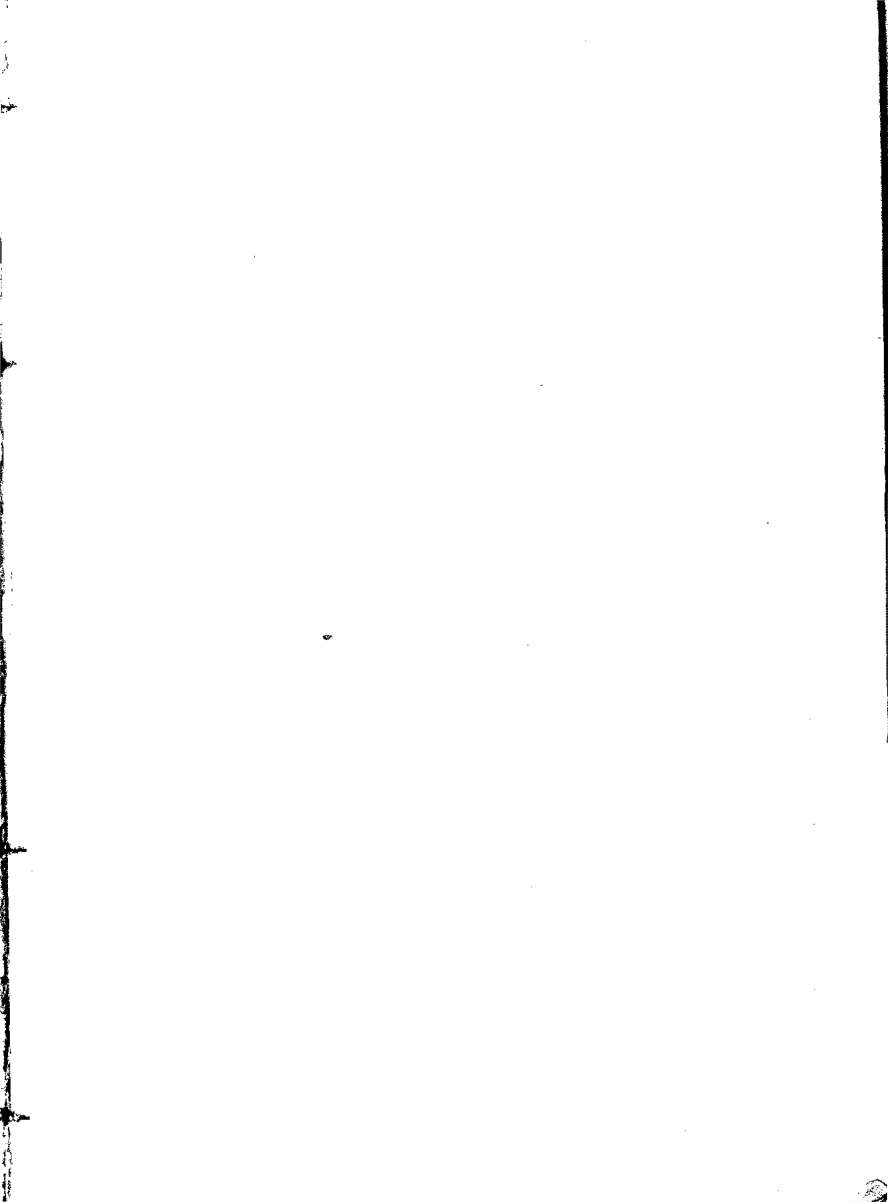
True science derives its conclusions from *facts*, and facts are said to be *stubborn things*; therefore the cynical observer may declare that a *mule* is a fact, and perhaps, according to this logic, he would be correct.

A fact is that which is self evident; that which is often termed *scientific*, proves frequently, upon investigation, to be very *unscientific*. In music, art is inter-linked with science; for music itself is an art, its basis a science.

The so called scientific musician often fails to please—“to carry his audience with him.” People listen, and there appears to them to have been something lacking. They have listened to the *science* without the true art; as some say, “the music lacks soul.”

Then whence really comes this power—this art of producing music? If from the brain and nervous system of man, the scalpel of science has never found it—never demonstrated it. The mind of man is truly a marvelous psychic indescribable something, which is far beyond the reach and grasp of so called science. Music as an art, is equally as far beyond the reach of the scalpel of the musical scientist, as is the mind, or as that subtle power





by the late Jas. W. Clarke, of New York city, and further improved upon by myself and other manufacturers of this day, is conceded to be *the Banjo*—the recognized Banjo of professional and amateur players alike.

This Banjo has a perfect right to the claim of being called a musical instrument. It is constructed upon scientific principles, although these principles may differ materially from those upon which the construction of the guitar or harp are based. Briefly speaking, I may describe it as follows: Its body consists of a circular frame which is termed the rim. This rim is composed of metal and wood, used in combination, as it were.

The metal used is the alloy commonly called German silver, which is also nickel-plated, and its polished surface presents an attractive appearance. On the inside of the metal rim is found the rim of wood; the wood rim and metal rim being so made and united as to form one rim.

Over this rim is stretched—tightly stretched—the head which is made of calf skin and may be called the sounding-board of the instrument. A system of brackets, screws and nuts present an attractive appearance; and with their aid we are enabled to stretch the head and always have it tense and firm. This is accomplished by having a narrow band or hoop, made very strong, neatly fit over the head which is tucked around a wire ring; and the hooks or screws, drawing upon this hoop, strain the head and hold it evenly in place.

Fitted to this rim is a neck, made of suitable wood, such as cherry, maple, walnut or rosewood, which must be accurately adjusted. The upper surface of this neck is called the *fingerboard*, and is veneered or covered with ebony, or other hard wood, to render it more durable, and also to give the neck greater strength, and cause it to resist the tension of the strings; for the strings with

which the instrument is strung, and which are vibrated to produce the musical tones, pass over this fingerboard, or face of the neck. The strings, five in number,* are stretched from the little appendage known as the tail-piece, over the surface of the head, four of them extending to the extreme end of the neck or fingerboard, to the scroll or "screw-head," where they are twisted around suitable pegs, by the turning of which the tension of the strings may be altered, and their pitch raised or lowered. The remaining string, called the fifth, or thumb-string, does not extend over the entire length of the fingerboard, but only about, generally speaking, two-thirds the distance, where a peg is fitted in the side of the neck to receive it. The strings pass over a bridge, which is made of maple wood, generally, and rests upon the surface of the head, in a manner similiar to the bridge of a violin. The bridge conducts the vibrations of the strings to the membraneous head, which is elastic, and acts as a sound board.

The "fifth string" of the Banjo is said to have been added to the instrument by one Joe Sweeney of Virginia,† several years ago; but whether this is true or not, I have no personal knowledge nor reliable information. But it is a fact nevertheless, that the fifth string has "stuck to" the Banjo, and a Banjo to-day would not be a Banjo without its short fifth, or thumb string, "octave string," or "little E," as some call it. And, although at various times players have made moves to do away with this string; such movements have not met with success, nor do I believe that they ever will. For it is this little string

*The American Banjo is strung with five strings generally; but occasionally an additional Bass string is added. The English Banjo is strung with six and seven strings.

†See The Banjo Philosophically.

which gives to the Banjo its "ring," and which completes the octave in tuning the four gut strings, and in short, makes the Banjo a Banjo.

The strings of the Banjo produce five notes only when played in their natural position, or "open." But by the use of the fingerboard, using the fingers of the left hand to "stop" the string—that is, to press them to the fingerboard, thus shortening their vibrating length, in a similar manner to those of the violin or guitar; we are enabled to produce on the five strings, but mainly upon four, all the notes of the chromatic scale within a compass of about three octaves. And the quality of the music produced by the manipulation of these three octaves of notes, depends of course, upon the skill of the player and upon the musical qualities of his particular Banjo. It does not follow, by any manner of means, that because many Banjos have a similar appearance, or are presumably constructed in one way, that their musical qualities will be the same; for this is not the case, as I shall explain before I am done with the subject.

When the strings of the Banjo are caused to vibrate; the vibration, through the medium of the bridge, is conducted to the head; and the head being in itself an elastic sonorous body and tightly strained over the rim, as has been said, conducts the vibration thereto. All vibration produces *sound waves*—motion in the air; unseen, but audible to the ear. The strings alone, not only of the Banjo, but of any musical instrument, produce little volume of tone in themselves—the sound waves produced by a string vibrating alone in the air, and not

conducted to any sonorous body—giving an almost inaudible sound.

This is a fact with which nearly every school boy is familiar, and is demonstrated so readily that little need be said regarding it.

The head of the Banjo, as I have said, is elastic. It is a sonorous body in itself. Where could you find a drum that would produce sound without it? The head then acts as a sounding-board; the strings produce vibration; this vibration is transmitted to the head; the head also, to a certain extent, vibrates—although on a different principle from the strings—for stretched strings vibrate in an oscillating movement between their fixed ends; whilst the head is stretched in the form of a circle, (the emblem of Creation) and has no ends; but is firmly fixed all round.

The vibrations of the head are conducted to the circular frame over which it is stretched, and although the head is perhaps the most important factor in the acoustical construction of the Banjo, it is useless alone—equally as useless as the strings, if used alone. As no one good action in life constitutes a perfect man; no one properly constructed *part* of a musical instrument constitutes a perfect instrument in the whole. All its parts have a bearing upon the whole. It is therefore of the highest importance that the rim structure of the instrument be made to harmonize with the head and strings in giving forth vibration, or musical sound. The head and rim being, as it were, united and parts of one whole, so far as mechanical construction is concerned; must likewise be united in affinity, so as to act as one in producing the necessary vibration. If this is not accomplished, we have an instrument, which, like “a house divided against itself,” cannot stand. Now the vibration of the strings

being conducted to the head by means of the bridge, and again to the rim by the means of the head, it follows that the rim should be so constituted as to respond to, and as far as possible mingle its vibration with that of the head and strings. The rim then, being the body and structure of the Banjo, is not far from being the most important part of its structure, and the most difficult part to make properly. The neck deserves also much consideration; for no matter how well the head is stretched, and how perfect the rim may be, if the neck is not properly made and properly adjusted to the rim, it is impossible to perform upon the instrument with accuracy or with any degree of satisfaction.

The sounding quality of any substance depends upon its hardness and elasticity. The rim must be sufficiently elastic for its purpose and yet of sufficient hardness or strength to remain firm and withstand the strain of the head.

The head must also be firm and elastic. A firm strong head without sufficient elasticity is useless; and one that is too elastic, and lacking firmness, is likewise useless. It is therefore necessary to secure these two important factors in the banjo head—firmness (or strength) and elasticity.

Now, when the head is damp or wet, it becomes, as it were, slack, and is then too elastic for producing a good musical tone, and that which is most desired in a Banjo is a bright, clear (or sharp) musical tone, with sufficient power to fill a good sized room or hall.

This "sharp" tone in the Banjo mainly depends:
Upon the tension of the strings.

Upon the musical quality, size, tension and elasticity of the head.

Upon the size, weight and sonorous qualities of the rim.

And also upon, in a great measure, the length of the neck (because of tension and length of vibrating strings).

A loose, flabby head is much like a loose flabby string, in producing vibration. A head that is damp, or loose and flabby, will not have sufficient tension upon the rim to cause it to properly respond to its vibrations; neither are the vibrations of such a head rapid enough to produce what is called a "sharp tone." It is similar to a string which is loosely stretched and therefore produces a slow vibration and consequently a low tone—only that the musical *pitch* of the instrument entirely depends upon the strings—the musical quality of that pitch upon the tension of the head, etc.

The neck of the Banjo, at first sight, appears to be a very simple part to construct, but this is quite far from being the real case; for to make an instrument with a neck that will perfectly retain its shape and not warp or change with the varying climate, and will withstand the manipulation of the pegs with all the various changes in tension, produced by various pitches in tuning and strings of various degrees of thickness is a matter which requires considerable skill and practical experience.

I have heard the remark passed by certain persons, whose knowledge of the subject was exceedingly limited, that the Banjo could not be a musical instrument because it was open inside—had no back—was not closed in, like the guitar or violin. The reasoning of such persons I hold to be very fallacious. Might as well assert that the

xylophone should not be used in an orchestra because it is only constructed of solid blocks of wood placed upon straw or cords. A flute is a musical instrument; yet it is constructed upon a different principle from a violin. You may reply that one is a wind instrument whilst the other is a stringed instrument, and there can therefore be no comparison between them. This I grant. But I likewise assert that two stringed instruments may be constructed upon different principles, so far as their sounding bodies are concerned, and yet have an equally just claim to being called musical instruments.

Comparing, for instance, the Banjo with the guitar, I would briefly say: The quality of the Banjo's tone is brilliant and enlivening, while that of the guitar is soft and soothing—more subdued than that of the Banjo. Now, how are they different; why are they so different in quality?

The guitar has a back to it; it is closed in with the exception of the "sound-hole." In this enclosure there is an air body. Nothing is empty—"Nature abhors a vacuum,"—therefore the inside of the guitar is filled with air. Now, when its strings are put in vibration, the agitation produced by this vibration compresses the air body within the instrument, and this air body instantly expands and the sound waves are sent forth.

The top of the guitar is constructed of soft wood; the back of harder wood. The air body within is connected directly with the air without by means of the sound-hole in the top. The character of the tone of this instrument then depends:

Upon its size and shape, and consequently upon the air-body within, its specific density and quantity or size.

Upon its strings—their tension and thickness.

Upon the bridge over which the strings pass.

Upon the sonorous qualities of the wood used in the construction of its top sides and back; and upon their thickness.

And finally, upon the perfect fitting and adjustment of all the parts and their harmonious blending and affinity.

The Banjo, as I have previously explained, has no air body within it that is enclosed, so to speak, and which sends forth sound-waves from a hole called the sound-hole, like the guitar, and its principle is therefore somewhat different from the guitar, as I have previously explained.

Not many years ago there was a Banjo gotten up and said to have been patented, called the "closed-back Banjo." This instrument was evidently placed upon the market with the idea of supplying the demand for a Banjo that was not a Banjo, but was an attempt at something else—purely a miscarriage of ideas. People did not understand the Banjo very well then, and one of the chief objections of musicians to the instrument was that it was *too open*, and therefore must give forth a hollow, flat sound.

If I remember rightly, the manufacturer of this particular Banjo, which for a time had a large sale, although I seldom find one of them in use now (proving that they were not as good as others), claimed that the Banjo was the only instrument made which was open in the back, and from which *all the tone proceeded from the back*, and consequently must either come out from behind the performer or else he must turn his back to his audience so that the tone should go directly to them, and not be swallowed up in the scenery of the theatre or by the screens, as the case may have been. To obviate this, and cause the tone to go directly out in front of the

player, he constructed a peculiar kind of narrow rim and boxed it in all round, leaving an inch or so margin for the tone to come out; which it was supposed to do, after going through the head and striking against the back, something like a ball thrown against the side of a house. But as sound-waves do not exactly act upon the principle of a bouncing ball, the closed back Banjo was not a success. It was loud, but the loudness was caused rather by compound and conflicting vibrations than by increased musical power of tone, and had therefore a certain lack of musical quality and carrying power, and therefore the Banjo of that character was soon tabooed by the Banjo-playing public—plenty of them soon being found for sale in pawnbrokers' establishments. The manufacturer, I understand, disposed of his patent, and a music firm lost money in it.

After the patent had been disposed of, the inventor lost no time in placing upon the market a "patent open-back" Banjo, constructed upon another principle, but equally as crude and fallacious as the "closed back" Banjo.

Such manufacturers being ignorant of the first principles of acoustics; or what is still worse, caring only to get money from an easily deceived and gullible public; are not the ones to lend a helping hand towards evolving and developing the higher possibilities of the Banjo as a musical instrument.

Banjoes constructed with rims of solid metal, such as bell metal rims, for instance, have been made with the erroneous supposition that the natural "ring" of the metal would be added to the vibrations of the head and strings and cause a clear, bell-like tone. Such ideas have been worked upon by persons not sufficiently acquainted with musical or acoustical laws to guide them in their

experiments, and by others who cared not what kind of a Banjo was manufactured so long as they could call it a "patent banjo," and give it an attractive name, so as to catch the eye and ear. Hence, such melodious titles as "Bell Rim Banjo," "Patent Bell Banjo," etc., have been used to advertise Banjos which were at best second or third rate instruments.

To construct an instrument with a legitimate *bell rim*, that would add its tone to the vibration of the strings, is not in accordance with any known law of acoustics. This I have explained fully in my former publication, previously alluded to, *The Banjo Philosophically*. A bell fixed in any way in the rim of a Banjo would add only to the tone of such notes or chords as were in harmony with the natural tone of the bell. And hence, were a Banjo so constructed that a bell was placed within or connected to it, and the strings tuned in unison (or in harmony) with the tone of the bell; the "open string" notes of the instrument might be greatly louder and more bell-like than without the bell; but when played upon in different positions and chords—chords which were not in harmony with the bell—the volume of tone would not be in any way augmented by reason of the bell.

Persons unfamiliar with music and unacquainted with natural philosophy, are the ones who purchase such Banjos; led on by the tempting sound of the name and unfamiliar with the tone of a Banjo. Experienced performers, who have had their "eye teeth cut," do not purchase such instruments; and the manufacturers of them must in time, and at no far distant day, be made familiar with the "Hand writing on the Wall"—their Kingdom numbered and finished.

No one can censure those who have been compelled to listen to the music produced from improperly con-

structed Banjos in the hands of unskilled players, for saying that "there is no music in a Banjo." No one can blame those who have never heard the violin played by a master—never heard it except as a harsh toned fiddle in the hands of a country dance scraper—for declaring that "a fiddle is the devil of an instrument." For there are violins that talk when the master plays them, and there are violins that squawk when the fiddler scrapes them. And there are Banjos that speak when an artist bids them, and Banjos that merely "plunk" when an unskilled performer handles them.

SECTION II.

“The thing (Banjo) has no musical merit whatever.”

Unknown Musical Bigot.

“It is claimed by those competent to judge, that the Banjo will some day rival the violin as a solo instrument, and it is a fact that the most cultured people of Europe and America have taken up the Banjo, and find in its study the most delightful recreation.”—*N. Y. Herald.*

“The concert made quite a new departure in Banjo playing, and proved that the instrument can be used with advantage in many combinations suited to the concert-hall.”—*Boston Herald.*

You have all heard of Paganini, whose name stands immortal and at the front rank of violinists. He was an Italian. In Gardiner's *Music of Nature* will be found an account of the marvelous sensation created by him in London in the year 1831. Later on I shall have something to say about a similar sensation created by an American Banjo player, E. M. Hall, in London, in the year 1880—fifty-one years later.

Musical and other encyclopædias, dictionaries and musical works give a very vague and meagre account of the Banjo. Who can blame them? The majority of such works in use to-day were published years ago; or at least the matter contained within their covers was written several years back. Webster states, in his dictionary, that the name, at least, “Banjo,” is not of negro origin, but was corrupted from *bandore*, which is an instrument of the guitar species. It matters little how it was named or from whence the name came—the name has a

musical sound, is short and easy to remember: It therefore answers the purpose. The statement contained in Stainer and Barretts' *Dictionary of Musical Terms*, that the Banjo is one of the most important musical instruments employed by minstrel troupes, is also incorrect, so far as the present day and generation is concerned; for many prominent minstrel companies employ no Banjo player at all. I have myself been present at such entertainments where there was no Banjo used, and the leading instruments were the usual orchestral instruments—violin, flutes, horns, etc. The statements published in other books of like character, that the Banjo is very limited in capability and only fit for simple times and accompaniments, is likewise incorrect when applied to the Banjo of the day (the properly constructed Banjo.) This I have dwelt upon at greater length in different issues of the *Banjo and Guitar Journal*, published by myself, which articles have doubtless been perused by many of my readers.

But, as I said before, these works are old, and applied, if they ever applied at all, to the early Banjo, and their statements are of slight import to the Banjo players of this generation, unless it is to show them what their favorite instrument was, some years ago, in a past generation.

Other encyclopædias will be published—new dictionaries must be compiled and printed to meet the requirements of an advancing civilization. Let us hope that when such books appear they will contain a better account of an instrument which America claims as her own, and of which Americans have just cause to be proud.

A few years backward I gaze and I see in this dim past that the Banjo was going along smoothly, making time at

a fair gait—making itself known, attracting admirers and among a large class of people gaining adherents. Thalberg, the well-known pianist, is said to have been infatuated with it, and to have become a player upon it. Books were published which began to give it a firmer footing. But, then, suddenly a dark cloud seemed to hover over it, shadowing its very existence. It was not unlike that great, black-winged creature, the Raven, written of by a gifted poet, which—

“Perched upon a bust of Pallas,
Just above my chamber-door.”

Seemed to say, “I will haunt you until I blacken your very existence, and I will not leave you until I have so shaken you that you will never—no, never, recover from the effects of my presence.”

This polluted creature appeared in the shape of a “catch-penny” system of learning to play the banjo, called by its projectors the “*simplified method*.” It was without method or system. It had not the slightest foundation to stand upon; therefore was it called the *simplified*, or *simple*, method.

It was so simple in its construction that musicians called it rightly named: *a simple method for the simple-minded*, and just the thing for such a miserable instrument as the Banjo. It was so easy and so simple a system of learning to play, that a person could, with the aid of one of its books, which cost all the way from one dollar to five dollars each, learn to pick out, with perhaps one finger and thumb, on the Banjo strings, such soul inspiring tunes as “Sho-fly, don't bodder me,” “Carry me back to Ole Virginny,” etc. The flies surely would cease to bother such manipulators of such tunes and also doubtless wish that some well-disposed person would indeed carry them (or the method) back to Old

Virginny. The students of this method rarely ever got any further. They had taken the express train for Banjo Botchtown; the journey was short, and few got any further. Some lived to return and start over again by another route, but their number was few indeed, and of the weak ones who had once partaken of a dose of the "method," many fainted by the wayside after starting upon the right track.

All this means, reader, that a set of unscrupulous individuals, possessing a very limited knowledge of music, and very little love for the science or art,—and therefore being ignorant and also disinclined to labor or effort—did not feel inclined to spend their valuable time in teaching pupils to play the Banjo properly. It was too hard work and did not agree with them. Besides, many who would gladly pay money to know how to play the Banjo, would not pay money for being taught a lot of rubbish about notes, rests, bars, etc. They wanted to learn to manipulate the strings "right off," without any waste of time. It was also frequently very difficult for these professors of the Banjo to instruct pupils in musical notation, for the reason that they themselves knew so very little about it; and pupils often had a habit of asking very troublesome questions about chords, time, &c., which made it quite unpleasant for the teacher, who did not want to be bothered. What he wanted most and only, was to secure a good fee for a "quarters' lessons" in advance and then let the pupils come in when he was out; or what was nearly as bad—come in and sit down to a beer drinking bout; picking on the Banjo at the same time, or between whiles.

Hence, a system by which a person could learn to pick a few tunes on the Banjo *without study*, and without

having to "learn music," was in demand. If such a thing could be gotten up, there was money in the scheme; it would sell well all over the country. This accounts for the origination of the so-called easy system, or simplified method. An ignorant pupil could not understand why the five lines of the musical staff should not represent the *five strings of the Banjo*. Demand caused supply; the five lines were made to represent five strings. An open string was noted as a round o (whole note). A stopped note was represented by a black note. This was termed the "open and closed note" method. Knowing ones dubbed it the "open and shut" method; which name still clings to it. It added greatly to ignorance, by closing for a time the door of knowledge. It never made one good player. It opened the door to ignorance, and it put back the Banjo for some time. It was a system that was not a system—a method that had no method whatever in it. It served its purpose; made money for its instigators and enabled many ignoramuses to set up as teachers,—teaching how *not* to become a Banjo player.

But there is no cloud, however dark, that has not a silver lining; and darkness in this case soon began to give place to light.

Gradually the star arose and the light brightened, and

"Through the gates of amethyst and amber
Shined the kindling glories of the morning."

To you reader,—to perhaps whom poetical language is a stranger, and liable to be misunderstood—I will speak in plainer words. I mean that as the powers of darkness were working to consume the very vitals of the Banjo, the powers of light were at the same time at work—working to elevate and raise it. The force of the "simplified method" systems having done so much to *pull down*, in

the minds of intelligent people, caused a limited number of ardent lovers of the instrument to set to work more vigorously to elevate and to *build up*. Thus it is that suitable books and sheet music publications were produced to gradually take the place of the worthless "easy methods." Those who had forsaken the instrument on account of not being able to obtain suitable music, began to renew their interest in it. Intelligent people and musicians, seeing musical works in good form for the Banjo, were compelled to notice it. Gradually it took upon itself renewed life. So that at the present time we have many good instruction books for the Banjo, and a great number of pieces of music, of various degrees of difficulty; which stock is being constantly added to; and although there is still some demand from a certain class of persons, for "tunes" written by the "simple method," yet the percentage of such demand is small in comparison to the constantly increasing demand for music (legitimate music) of a good character; and through the publication of good music, properly written and adapted to the instrument; and through a good class of Banjo books and literature, is the instrument to be finally raised to its proper place and position as a musical instrument.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF A "SOLO BANJO."

A Banjo to be used for an instrumental performance, or for playing solos with piano accompaniment, must possess the following characteristics:—

- Acuteness of tone, intensity, resonance.
- Musical purity, carrying power.
- Free vibration.
- Easy action.

Harmonious action, equalization of upper and lower registers.

Such a Banjo must possess a *musical tone*; for indeed there can be no carrying power without it, and, at the same time, the Banjo characteristic of the tone must not be relinquished nor its individuality lost.

This desideratum has not been accomplished by "closing the back," nor by what has been called the Patent Bell-rim Banjo, etc. For proof of this you have only to look about you and see that such Banjos are not used by players of note, and that professional players, as a rule, use entirely the *Silver Rim Banjo*, as I have previously stated.

Whilst it is not impossible to construct a good instrument without metal in the rim, it is yet exceedingly rare to find one so constructed that meets the requirements of a good player. And whilst I do not assert that only "*silver rim*" Banjos can be good, I do most emphatically say that the *silver rim Banjo* is, and has been for years* past, the *model Banjo*, and the Banjo used by the best players.

It is not altogether impossible that a Banjo can be constructed, having a closed back and sides, that will make good music—nor do I say that this has never been accomplished; but at the same time, any school-boy of average intelligence can see that such an instrument must be constructed upon, and must be governed by other principles than those found in the silver rim open-back Banjo. It is also possible that a Banjo may be constructed with a "bell," so that such a bell would act directly upon the tone of the open strings and thus make such a Banjo suitable to use for a "swinging act," or the "Bell Chimes" imitation; but such a Banjo would be useful for nothing else, and I am of the opinion that the

silver rim Banjo, when properly constructed, possesses all the requirements needed for any and every kind of Banjo-playing.



SECTION III.

“ Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast.”

“ If I were de President ob dese United States,
I'd lick molasses candy and swing upon de gates.”

Jim Crow.

THE ideal of the undeveloped and crude mind (if such mind can be said to have an ideal) is far different from that of the more advanced student and thinker. Thus the lines sung by the darkey in the past generation, expressing his highest ambition, and telling us what he would do were he the President of the United States, convey to us the idea that licking molasses candy and swinging upon gates were about the highest conceptions old Jim could form of the duties and requirements of the highest office attainable by any American citizen.

Some of the conceptions of people (and people who are old enough, big enough, and should be wise enough to know better) of the present day, concerning the Banjo and the Banjo-player, are equally as crude as the conceptions of the negro regarding the presidency.

I have met those who thought that the Banjo was a tambourine with a neck in it, and that the rim was to be jingled against the sides when played, in the fashion of a “tom-tom,” for instance. I have met others who thought that because a man was a Banjo-player, that he should never get tired of *playing*—should play in the morning, play at noon, and play again in the evening, and continue to play as the evening continued into night and night rolled around the circle to dawn. Such people must be taught better—those who will not feel for others should be made to feel.

Many beginners on the Banjo have no intention of making a *study* of the instrument. They take it up for recreation, and their ideas concerning it being at the beginning undeveloped, they like only simple tunes, such as are whistled by the boys in the streets; the ear capable of distinguishing *harmony* not yet being sufficiently developed. As such pupils advance, many of them desire to learn more of the instrument, and with each step of advancement comes further desire to progress. From step to step, then, the Banjo-player is made.

Nothing is accomplished all at once; little by little, knowledge of any kind is attained. A man cannot become a musician in a day, in a week, nor in a month. And yet this fact should deter no one—and will not deter anyone possessing average intelligence and pluck—from seeking to gain a knowledge of music and of Banjo playing. When once obtained, such knowledge can never be entirely lost; and even should the Banjo be laid aside and all musical exercise be suspended for months or years, should the person again take it up, he has a good foundation upon which to begin again.

It is a mistaken idea with many persons that one may acquire a knowledge of the Banjo or other instruments "by ear," and without a proper course of musical studies. I have, in my experience, met with very few really good performers upon the Banjo or guitar who had not, at some time or other, studied the rudiments of music. Here and there, but very occasionally, I have met with a really good Banjo-player who seemed to possess no knowledge whatever of musical notation; but it has invariably been the case that such performers have been associated for years with capable musicians, and with the possession of a very fine musical ear, have been enabled to develop a sense of hearing and a comprehension o

musical sounds and chords which enabled them to readily perform very difficult music. But it must be understood that such players have had the advantages of the constant association of musicians who were often adepts at musical science, so to speak, and who therefore possessed theoretical and practical knowledge of music in all its forms ; so that really those ear players, so-called, who played so well "by ear," had been compelled to spend a large portion of their time in studying in their own peculiar way, all that they played. Such a performer could perhaps play a certain piece after having heard it a few times, passably well, or exceedingly well, as the case may have been ; but an ordinary player, possessing the average knowledge of musical notation, could have played the same piece in the same manner, directly from the notes, not requiring to hear the piece played at all, and the same amount of time spent in training the ear to imitate, and the fingers to manipulate the strings that is necessitated in learning to play well "by ear," if spent in learning to play from music would place the performer in possession of valuable knowledge as well as develop his musical skill, and he would be something better than a mere parrot-like performer, who must first hear, or have played for him, everything he learns. Not only this, but it is a fact that very few of the small number of "ear players" upon either the guitar or Banjo, perform accurately. Even when they attain to the correct rendition of a musical composition, they soon forget, after not having played or heard it for a time, and then render it more and more inaccurately, or so changed and intermingled with passages of their own as to become sometimes unrecognizable to the musician who composed it. But with the majority of players upon any instrument who possess no theoretical musical knowledge, it is found

that they do not play any musical composition entirely correct, nor as the composer intended. It is true that with many of them conceit is so closely interwoven with ignorance that they suppose they are playing with great skill and musical effect, and where their audiences are of a musically-ignorant class, their performances please and are accounted sometimes wonderful. But when learned musicians chance to hear them play, they are at once made familiar with the fact that they are listening to an "ear-player," and not to a musician. A certain amount of musical knowledge can hurt no one, and it is better for all who attempt to learn to perform upon any instrument, whether it be Banjo, guitar, or what not; to place themselves under the instruction of a competent music-teacher, or at least possess themselves of suitable books of instruction, and devote a portion of their spare time daily to studying them. It may be said, "I have no spare time." I reply—every one has spare time. He who has the most to do often finds time for doing things that others who have nothing whatever to do but to eat, drink, sleep, dress and yawn, could not possibly spare the time to accomplish. A great deal of time is wasted during the day or week which might be well spent in going through a book, *a little at a time*. The little drops fill the bucket and the little grains of sand make up the seashore.

Do not be content to follow those who say, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." Nothing is accomplished without effort—nothing, absolutely nothing. No goal is reached—no journey ended, without a move; sitting still will not take you there. Had I sat down and waited for the Banjo to become a popular and recognized instrument, I should have had to wait so long that the time would never have come. I'm waiting yet,

perhaps, but I'm also *working* to bring about and to accomplish what I desire. Any rock can be moved if you have only a fulcrum and a sufficiently long lever. The rock I am moving is the people—musical people; my lever and fulcrum are *work* and *perseverance*. You, too, must take hold and help, and before long the musical tones of the Banjo will ring in the homes of the people—in the happy homes and light hearts of many—all over the land.

ON BANJO PLAYING.

In order to fully comprehend, the mind must be superior in development to the thing comprehended. I have met frequently, in my experience with persons who possessed no knowledge of music, were what is called "ear-players" on the Banjo, and who really believed that they could correctly accompany any piece of music or song after once hearing it. To call attention to the mistakes made by such players is often purely a waste of time; for they cannot see that they are not finished performers, or that their chords are often incorrect. There is an old saying—"Never argue with an ignorant man." It is simply a waste of time and nerve force to do so in most instances. Whilst I heartily recommend the reader to lend his aid and assistance to anyone who is endeavoring to learn; I cannot advise anyone to attempt to *force* knowledge, or his individual opinions, upon anyone whatever, for—

"He who's convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still."

Now, having advised the Banjoist in all cases to acquire a knowledge of his instrument philosophically, I am called upon to throw out some hints that will be of

service to him in this direction. Some suggestions which are the result of my own practical experience and extended observation may therefore not be out of place; although this present work is by no means to be considered a Banjo Instructor. My former books, comprising such well-known instructors as the *Complete American Banjo School*, *Thorough School for the Banjo*, etc., being all that is considered necessary, so far as learning to play the instrument properly, by note, is concerned. Yet there are other matters than notes and chords to be considered in acquiring a proper knowledge of Banjo-playing, and a portion of my lecture, *The Banjo Philosophically*, bearing upon this branch of the subject, having met with so much favor, I feel that a little further said upon the same subject may not be amiss. Of course, practical experience is the best, and sometimes the only teacher in many things, but no one can learn music properly from experience alone. Such an undertaking would require the time of many human existences. It is therefore necessary that there should be a ground-work, or foundation, to start from, and a certain set of rules, so to speak, from which to work.

It is true that "practice makes perfect." It is likewise true that "knowledge is the guide of practice," and without this knowledge one is often compelled to grope along in the dark, often wasting all his energies in misdirected effort.

"Lost motion" in machinery is avoided. So should lost energy be avoided in study and practice when possible. He who is rightly guided and directed, all things being equal, must reach his goal sooner than he who through misdirected effort is compelled to "begin over again" many times. The man who goes to sea with a compass and understands navigation, is almost sure to

reach port before the man who goes to sea without a compass and who does not understand navigation,—if he is ever fortunate enough to reach it at all. There are, of course, those who will not accept any suggestions from another. These are to be met with almost daily and in every known business and profession. These I will leave to themselves.

There are others who never care to rely upon themselves at all, but are ready always to follow the advice of others, however unreliable and unworthy such advice may be. To these I say, learn to think; weigh what is given as advice; learn to think for yourselves; "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" I do not set myself up as an infallible teacher of music or the art of Banjo-playing, and as I have said in *The Banjo Philosophically*, I do not expect to hold the same opinion one day that I hold another. "A wise man changes his opinion; a fool, never." I have ever sought to learn everything that pertains to my business. To accomplish this I must necessarily progress; and in progressing, when observation and experience teach me that I have been wrong in any preconceived opinion, I hope that I shall at least be manly enough to acknowledge it and relinquish it for a better.

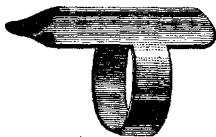
Such being my views, I cannot ask anyone to blindly relinquish their own opinions and customs for those which I may offer or suggest in their place. I aim simply to suggest what seems to me to be proper—nothing further. I desire no one to say at any time, "I did so and so because Stewart recommended it;" or "I have changed my Banjo because Stewart said in his book that it was not the kind for me to use."

The same liberty of action I demand for myself, I am ever willing that others should enjoy. More than this,

I am ever ready and willing to receive any suggestions which my readers may see fit to make that are of interest to the rising school of Banjo-players. With these brief remarks I will now proceed with the subject in hand.

There are two separate and distinct styles of Banjo-playing taught in the various books and schools of instruction. One is the old style—original style—called “stroke playing;” the other is the more finished and established style of the day, originally copied from the guitar, and therefore called guitar style, or “picking.” There are few good players of the stroke style. There are many good players of the other style.

In the stroke style the first finger and thumb of the right hand only are used to manipulate the strings, which are struck downwards with the finger and plucked with the thumb. The finger is covered with a “thimble,”



made of light and elastic metal. This thimble serves to strike the string a clear sharp blow, and the tone produced, so far as music is concerned, depends upon the skill of the performer.

Anyone can draw a violin bow over the strings of a violin and produce a harsh, rasping sound; but it lies with the *artist* to use the bow in such a manner as to produce clear musical tones. The Banjo thimble acts in almost the same way. Almost anyone can put on a thimble and pound on the strings of the Banjo; but to produce a musical tone and execute rapid and brilliant

passages, is a matter not so easy, and one which is accomplished only with the aid of proper instruction in the beginning, and continued, persevering practice afterwards. A few points on thimble playing, together with exercises for practice, are to be found in the *Complete American Banjo School*, part first, which may be had of the author or through responsible music dealers.

In the guitar style of Banjo-playing—which is the proper style to acquire first, at any rate; the little finger of the right-hand is rested upon the head, near the bridge; the bridge commonly used being of the size and appearance of the diagram here given :



The little finger resting upon the head* serves as a rest to the hand and a resistance to the movement of picking the strings, without which it is difficult to execute rapid or brilliant staccato passages. The forearm rests lightly upon the rim.

In the beginning it is best to acquire a knowledge of picking the strings with the use of the first and second fingers and thumb only, allowing the third finger to remain idle until the other fingers have become thoroughly accustomed to their work. Indeed, there are many brilliant pieces which may readily be executed with the two fingers and thumb as well as with three—and this is the case to such an extent that experienced players are called

* Some few performers play without the aid of the rest afforded by the little finger resting upon the head, but a good execution among such is unusual. Chords, however, may as readily be played in that manner with practice.

upon to exercise judgment as to the proper method of handling any particular composition. The three fingers are almost invariably used in playing chords and accompaniments to songs, &c.

There is a movement in Banjo-playing which is called the *tremolo*. This is the most beautiful and effective movement of which the instrument is capable. Some melodies may be played in tremolo upon the first string of the instrument and at the same time an accompaniment played to the melody, upon the remaining strings, rendering a beautiful effect. It was this movement, used in connection with variations upon the melody of *Home, Sweet Home*, which so took the audience by storm when E. M. Hall made his debut in England, in the year 1880.

The tremolo movement is executed with the first finger, oscillating over the string very rapidly, and causing a continuous trill, not unlike the movement of the plectrum upon the strings of the mandolin, only the tone produced is not so harsh and wirey. The hand being free and not compelled to hold a plectrum between the thumb and finger, allows the thumb to act upon the strings not in use for the tremolo, and permits the performer to manipulate the strings so as to play an accompaniment with the thumb, whilst the first finger is producing the tremolo. It is customary to rest the second finger upon the head, in tremolo playing, instead of the little finger, and to manipulate the strings somewhat further from the bridge, which renders the tone softer; the strings being more flexible than very near the bridge.

Most beautiful music may be produced from a good Banjo, properly regulated and strung, and in the hands of a good player, by the tremolo movement. It is capable of exquisite expression. But the movement alone, however expressive it may be, is not nearly so entrancing

when used alone as when used in connection with other movements. The various movements, slow and rapid, must be harmonized in the variations on a musical theme, in order to produce the very best effects. The artist in music studies this, as does the painter—the artist in colors. He knows that no one color alone produces a beautiful painting; the colors must be used discriminately; they must be harmoniously blended. And here is where science stops, and true art or genius begins. What rules can teach the blending of colors, so that *any person* can set to work and produce paintings possessing all the artistic merit of the Old Italian Masters?

Where are the rules by which the ordinary individual can acquire the power of handling the violin as did Paganini? Here again is where science becomes lost, and unless the individual has within himself that which may be termed a gift, he can get "just so far and no further." Then I say, that although rules are of the highest importance in learning to play upon the Banjo, and although a ground-work in the rudiments of music is almost absolutely essential, yet no amount of study will make a musical artist, or musical expert, of a man who has not music within himself. If the individual "has it in him," he will, by study and practice, step by step, mount the ladder.

I think I hear some one say: "How shall I know whether I have the talent to become a banjoist—a good one?" I reply; you, yourself perhaps know better than anyone can tell you, whether you have or have not the ability to acquire that which you desire. At all events, you can *try*. Nothing, worth having, is acquired without some effort.

The question may be asked—if resting the end of the finger upon the head does not interfere with the vibra-

tion. I reply that to the best of my knowledge it does not materially interfere with the tone of the instrument in any way. I have made experiments in this with several players of ability and known reputation, and the conclusion arrived at has been that the rest of the finger was essential to a brilliant execution—the tone produced being augmented by the rest, from the fact of thus acquiring a more vigorous and sure pluck of the strings.

TUNING THE BANJO TO ACCORD WITH THE PIANO.

The musical notation of the Banjo is not expressed in the actual key in which the instrument sounds. This has been a puzzling matter to some young players when first attempting to tune their Banjos in accord with the piano. The key noted as A on the Banjo sounds in accord with the key of C on the piano. That is, in the Banjos of ordinary dimensions, and when the piano stands at "concert pitch." Hence all piano accompaniments intended to be used with Banjo solos are written a *minor third* higher than the key in which the Banjo music is noted. Extra large Banjos are generally tuned a full tone lower, and their A is then B flat.

The fact that A on the Banjo is really C on the piano has led some few inexperienced and untutored professors to declare its notation incorrect. This, however, is not true; for any key may have been used as a basis from which to write music for the instrument, and any of the keys would have answered equally as well to him who was thoroughly accustomed to it. To have called A, C on the Banjo; that is, to have begun its scale in C., instead of A would have had the disadvantage of a large number of ledger lines used above the staff and but one line below, and the only real advantage such notation

would have had is that the pupil would naturally have been taught his rudimentary tunes and chords without the use of the signature with its three and four sharps, which often puzzles the beginner.

As to the key in which the Banjo music is written being different from the key in which the piano accompaniment is noted, is of no practical importance, save that it would be more simple and easy for the arranger of the music.

Many of our established orchestral instruments, such as the cornet, clarinet, etc., are noted in a different key from their actual pitch.

Were the logic of some professors of the Banjo to hold good, there would have to be a different notation for every different size of Banjo, exactly in accordance with its musical pitch. This would be sheer nonsense.

Even were the Banjo tuned, played and noted in the "key of C," it would nevertheless be a fact that its notation would still be wrong were we accept the theories and arguments of some of our London "American Banjo Tutors;" for at best the instrument would sound a full octave lower than its notes indicated. The guitar, for instance, is noted in the treble cleff, but sounds its tones in the bass cleff, an octave lower than written.

In tuning the ordinary Banjo with the piano, so as to play the music generally published for these instruments in combination; the strings of the Banjo must accord with the following notes on the piano:—



(These notes represent the actual pitch of each of the five strings when tuned with piano or organ.)

There is no mystery about this; it is readily acquired and is not easily forgotten.

As playing the Banjo in combination with other instruments became popular, and as Banjo trios, quartettes and various combinations of Banjos became attractive features of concerts and musical entertainments, I became interested in seeking to produce a better combination of Banjos than were in vogue. The "Piccolo Banjo," a small instrument made to tune an octave above the ordinary Banjo, was well known. Its effectiveness is recognized in the "Banjo Club" and orchestra of Banjos.

In the fall of the year 1885, I devised, in order to produce certain effects, a Banjo having a large rim and a neck shorter in length than the diameter of its rim. This instrument I named the "Banjeaurine." Those who have perused the *Banjo Philosophically*, are familiar with the description of this instrument, which was most successfully introduced to the public by William A. Huntley and John H. Lee, those excellent performers, who used it, together with the ordinary Banjo (a Banjo of the dimensions of 11½-inch rim and 19-inch neck) in combination.

As I predicted two years ago, the form of my Banjeaurine has been duly imitated by several manufacturers of Banjos. They have also copied the name I gave to it—one firm only asking permission, the others appropriating it without. The metallic neck-adjuster, however, they have so far left alone, that being protected by letters patent in the United States.

The Banjeaurine is tuned *a fourth* higher than the Banjos which are tuned in "C and G." Thus the music intended to be played upon it in the "Banjo Orchestra" must be written a fourth lower or a fifth higher than the notation for the "ordinary Banjo." What is noted as the key of E for the "Banjeaurine" corresponds with the key noted as A for the "Banjo."

The question has been asked why I did not cause the Banjeaurine to be tuned a *fifth* instead of a *fourth* higher than the eleven or eleven and a half-inch rim Banjo, the length of string between the tail-piece and nut, by measurement, seemingly permitting such a pitch, even indicating it as proper.

I will, therefore, now explain to the reader why the Banjeaurine is tuned a fourth instead of a fifth above the Banjo.

First, I advocate stringing the Banjeaurine with a little heavier strings than the Banjo, for use in the "Banjo Club." The rate of vibration of a string is in inverse proportion to its thickness; hence a slightly thicker string, on a short neck, is made to accord with a slightly thinner string on the same size neck. So that if the distance from the tail-piece to the nut on the Banjeaurine is about the same as the distance from the tail-piece to the 7th fret on the larger Banjo,* the difference between tuning a fourth and a fifth higher is allowed for by a slightly thicker string. In this tuning the *tension* of strings in the two instruments would be about the same.

Second, the Banjeaurine is, or was, originally intended for that class of music, in which the fourth string, called the bass string, is tuned a full tone higher than usual. Such music is generally marked "Bass to B," or "Elevate Bass." Now it is well known to Banjoists generally, that this pitch on the ordinary Banjo, when tuned in "C and G" is too high for the bass string, which is composed of silk, wrapped with wire. This pitch for the bass string being too high, and a great strain upon the string, causes it often to stretch so as to constantly lower in pitch until the strands of silk part. This being

*A string stopped at the 7th fret would sound a fifth above the open string.

the case, it were folly to establish a pitch for the Banjeaurine, which would leave it always open to this objection—the larger part of music being intended for it, necessitating this elevation of its bass string. So that, even when the Banjeaurine is strung with precisely the same strings as the ordinary Banjo, I concede the pitch I originally named for it the most applicable.

That excellent player, E. M. Hall, who rarely ever tunes the bass up to "B," played for some time on the stage, on a Banjeaurine of my manufacture, tuned a tone higher than I have advocated. But had he used the "elevated bass" he would not have been able to perform with pleasure, except in the clearest of weather. As it was, when summer came on, and murky weather appeared, he did, I believe, lower his tuning pitch* to that which I have advocated. Strings that will readily bear tuning high in a clear atmosphere, will not stand at the same pitch during murky or damp weather. It may be said that the Piccolo Banjo is open to objection on account of strings breaking; the pitch to which it is tuned—an octave higher than the C Banjo—being unnaturally high. This I will frankly admit. The Piccolo Banjo, as originally manufactured by myself, was made with a seven-inch rim, and a ten-inch neck, and was only intended for tuning an octave higher than the extra large B flat Banjo. Hence, I advocate a shorter string on the Piccolo Banjo, for to attempt a reconciliation by the use of a thinner string is almost folly—such thin strings, not resisting the necessary wear and tear of a musical performance in most cases. I have, in part, overcome the difficulty experienced in tuning, by shortening the necks one inch, and using a longer tail piece than formerly.

* Mr. Hall played the Banjeaurine with orchestral accompaniment.

THE BASS BANJO,

recently gotten up to furnish deeper tones for the Banjo orchestra, consists of a large rim (sixteen inches in diameter), with an eighteen-inch neck, and is strung with very thick strings, such as are used on the Violincello; the third and fourth strings being of gut, wrapped with wire.* The Bass Banjo is conceded by Mr. Thomas J. Armstrong, the well-known teacher, and other prominent professors, to be a great assistance, and a valuable acquisition to the Banjo orchestra. Indeed, I had the honor of being the recipient of a vote of thanks, tendered by Mr. Armstrong's Banjo Orchestra of some sixteen members, only a few months ago, for an instrument of this description, manufactured for the use of said orchestra.

The Banjo as a solo instrument is a success. When accompanied by the guitar or piano, it is a decided success.

When used as an accompaniment to the voice in singing, it is always attractive. It has ever been conceded an excellent accompaniment.

When combined in numbers and sizes, Banjos may be used with striking effect, formed into an orchestra or band. It also has other uses—uses which many have not yet even dreamed of. One of them is as a medium for psycho-physiological curative agency. This may sound very strange to many readers, but instances of its usefulness in such direction are a matter of record.

* Strings are wrapped with wire to increase their density without, at the same time, adding much to their thickness. Prof. Tyndall says of such strings: "They resemble horses heavily jockeyed, and move more slowly (vibrate more slowly), on account of the greater weight imposed upon the force of tension."

A few years ago I preserved an account of a case where the Banjo was a medium of curative power. I will here append it. It was clipped from a medical journal.

“A case is reported of a lady, supposed to be dying of nervous exhaustion, being kept alive till she was fed and restored, by the persistent efforts of her attendant village doctor; who, lacking any other musical instrument, performed unceasingly for twenty-four hours by her bed-side on his Banjo, with appropriate gestures, till his patient awoke not only to life, but to a sense of the ludicrous, and revived in a fit of laughter.

Physiologists who never rest till they discover the reason why for all phenomena, have proved that music has undoubted influence on the circulation of men and animals, and that it accelerates the action of the heart; the variations in circulation being dependent on the pitch and loudness of the tone, and also on the timbre (character of tone). Music is thus placed in the list of physiological agents, and it may be made either useful or injurious, in certain diseased conditions, to humanity. Experiments are now being made on man and animals which will determine its value and influence more certainly in the future.”

The writer of the foregoing evidently thought the Banjo only a second or third-rate instrument for use in such a case; judging from the language in which the article is expressed, but we will pass that by.

Here again, it is found that science goes just so far and there stops. Medical science knows little, if anything at all, about the nervous circulation of men or animals, and I believe that the Hindoos, centuries ago, knew as much, or more, about the psycho-physiological action of music on men and animals as any modern physician knows to day. The powers and action of vibration are little understood by science to-day.

Music and the Banjo have their uses and they have their abuses. There is no power in existence, however good, which may not be perverted—and so inverted as to be abused.

There have been times within my own experience when music and the Banjo have been soothing and strengthening, refreshing me after a trying day's work. There have been other times when I could only listen to it with the greatest annoyance, and when it became wearisome and fatiguing. Musicians are, as a rule, sensitive—those who are not sensitive are not musicians.

Let the Banjoist study these conditions, and be governed by them. He may, with his Banjo, entertain, or he may annoy. Let him therefore, if he desires to cultivate his art, seek congenial musical associations and cultivate harmony within himself; for without harmony within there can be no true harmony without.

Let him avoid, if possible, coming in contact with those who seek only to display their imaginary skill, by pounding the strings with more muscular vigor than he possesses, and who seek in that way to "down him." Such persons have no true sense of harmony—their lives are made up of discord, and they must, through the perversity of their natures, manifest it in their Banjo-playing.

The "rough and tumble" class of Banjo-players is giving way to the rising school of artists. Therefore permit it to ebb away in peace—gentlemen should meet as gentlemen—musicians and artists, as musicians and artists. Thus only will the Banjo find its true sphere and retain it. Because it has been lowly—because it has come up from the depths—is no reason why it should not be honored and respected. The great oak was once but the little acorn—the greatest man who walks the earth was once only a little, weak, suckling child. Should he be despised because of this?

Let us, each and all, look to ourselves before casting sneers at that which is, or once was, lowly.

Let the Banjo continue to progress. Aid if you can, but hinder its progress—never

"Non sum qualis eram." I am not what I was.

SECTION IV.

“The frets upon the viol were narrow ridges of wood, just raised above the finger-board, crossing it at right angles, and were so placed that the finger, casually falling between the frets, the string was stopped in tune. In the guitar they still remain as a guide to ignorance and an impediment to taste and expression.”
Gardiner's Music of Nature.

The foregoing lines are from *The Music of Nature* (a most valuable and highly-prized work), and have reference to the viol of the 16th century, of which the violin is an improvement.

The guitar, the mandolin and the zither are fretted instruments; they differ from the ancient viol inasmuch as the frets are of metal instead of wood. The violin, the 'cello, and the viola, are not fretted instruments, as is neither the double-bass. The guitarist or mandolinist who takes up the Banjo, most naturally desires frets, having been accustomed to them. The violinist, on the other hand, has been accustomed to the smooth finger-board, and therefore does not always take kindly to frets, perhaps considering them upon a Banjo, as Gardiner names them upon the guitar, “impediments,” rather than aids.

Thus there has been a great difference of opinion as to which was best—the Banjo with smooth board, or the Banjo with raised frets. This difference of opinion has led often to hard feelings among Banjo-players; to many arguments, and has always been a cause of much annoyance to the manufacturer of Banjos. It is therefore hoped that the matter may be adjusted and reconciled.

I have at various times, and in various publications, made known my views, or the views held at that particular time, upon the subject of frets on the Banjo. I have now something further to say, and, indeed, the work would be incomplete were I to pass by, what I consider a subject of importance to the Banjoist, without some remarks upon fretted and unfretted finger-boards.

All violins are nearly of the same length from the nut to the bridge, and consequently of uniform length of vibrating string.* This being the case, the distance between the stops of the fingers are almost uniform on the different violins. Hence, a violinist by practice can accustom himself to fingering true, by the sense of touch or feeling, assisted by his ear. On the other hand, Banjos are made of various sizes, not only as regards length of neck, but also as regards the rim or body ; which causes a great difference in the position of the frets and fingering. As nearly all advanced players possess more than one Banjo—that is, use different sizes of Banjos for different kinds of musical effects,—to finger them accurately without some guide for the eye, becomes very difficult. Hence, all Banjos have what is termed “position marks” in the finger-board, and where frets are not laid across the surface of the board, they are generally, in one form or another, fixed at the side or edge of the neck. Were it not for this, a performer would be obliged to feel his way, and would often finger very inaccurately. With raised frets upon the finger-board, one has only to press the string between the frets and it is brought down upon the fret, so as to produce the desired note.

In the smooth finger-board playing, the string is pressed to the board with the finger, and, of course, must vibrate

*This, of course, has reference only to violins of full size. There are half-size and three quarter violins made for boys.

between the bridge and the point at which it is stopped with the finger: the same when it is pressed upon the fret, but with this difference—the string in the one instance is stopped, as it were, with a soft pad (the end of the finger) and in the other instance is brought firmly upon a level metal surface; (the fret) which is claimed by many Banjo-players, to produce a *clearer* tone; and philosophically it should be so.

Now, applying Gardiner's theory to the Banjo,—that the frets on the guitar are a guide to ignorance and an impediment to taste and expression,—I assume that he would have included the Banjo with the guitar, provided there had been, in his day, any such instrument as our present Banjo. Assuming this, one naturally asks how correct such an opinion may be. Was the writer an authority? Was he a practical guitarist?

It is true that the smooth finger-board of the violin admits of wonderful effects, musical effects,—impossible with frets,—but these effects are possible only to the artist, and attainable only by constant study and incessant practice, assisted by a naturally correct musical ear.

The question is, is there sufficient musical power in the guitar to justify the immense amount of laborious practice necessary to enable one to finger it accurately without the aid of frets? It must also be remembered that to do so requires an unusual strength of the fingers of the left hand; for the fingering of chords and barrés upon the guitar is no easy matter, even with frets.

My own observation and experience leads me to assert that such an undertaking is extremely difficult and almost equal to waste of time. Now, on the Banjo, there is this difference: The strings used are thinner and more easily handled, and they are less in number, the four principal

* Raised frets are meant.

strings of the Banjo only being fingered with the left hand. Therefore it becomes much easier to perform upon a Banjo without frets* than upon a guitar without them; but it is, nevertheless, somewhat more difficult to learn to play without the use of frets than it is with them. The question then arises, is there any advantage in acquiring the power of playing on a Banjo without the raised frets? I must reply that this is a matter of opinion; some really good performers asserting that the fretted Banjo is preferable, and other equally good performers asserting the contrary. The frets, therefore, must have their advantages and disadvantages, or there could not be this difference of opinion among players. These advantages and disadvantages I have at different times commented upon in the columns of the *Banjo and Guitar Journal*. Suffice it to say here that with frets the bridge of the Banjo must always remain in one particular position upon the head of the Banjo; any alteration in its position altering the position of all the frets, for the reason that the distance from the nut to the bridge, being the full length of vibrating string, is divided upon known principles of acoustics, to determine the position for each fret. Setting the bridge further forward, by shortening the string, causes the frets to be placed nearer together; setting the bridge back, so as to lengthen the string, necessitates the frets being further apart. Hence, after the position of the bridge has once been determined and the instrument fretted, the position of the bridge cannot be changed.

This fact alone is of no moment to many players, and therefore will be counted as no objection; for only those who sing songs and sometimes wish to quickly raise or lower the pitch of their instrument by changing the position of the bridge, care about moving or changing

the bridge's position on the head at all. Another objection to the frets is that they produce a "clanky" tone, devoid of expression. This I consider a grave objection in Banjos of large size, or those having long necks; but on the smaller Banjos, where the strings are shorter and more tense, a great deal of this "clank" is removed and the tone produced is very clear—especially nowadays, with our improved fretting wire, which is smoother and narrower than that used some years ago. In regard to the expression, or non-expression, that lies a great deal with the performer. There are some players who could not possibly perform with expression on a Banjo without frets; not possessing a sufficiently accurate musical ear. Such performers do better to use the fretted instrument. There are others, naturally endowed musically, and with ample time to devote to practice, who can as readily play on the smooth finger-board as with frets, and produce a great variety of musical effects, such as the "slide," etc.—to whom frets would be useless—purely an impediment to execution. But it is to be observed, that to produce a clear, full tone without the use of frets, necessitates firm fingers, which must be *hard* at the ends; which hardness, although it may be obtained by constant practice, is not always to be relied upon, for the hot weather of our summers tends to cause the fingers to soon soften, unless constant practice is kept up; and this practice, especially in the summer months, is not always followed.

Then again, all amateurs do not have the time to devote to this constant practice, and not only do the fingers soften, but inaccurate fingering also is a result.

Again, where one performs upon various Banjos of different sizes, accurate fingering upon each of them is very difficult without the use of frets—even so when

“dots,” “smooth frets,” or “position-marks” are used as a guide to the eye; for the eye alone, or the ear alone, cannot sufficiently control the arm, the hand and the fingers to produce true stopping of the strings, unless sufficient practice is indulged in to make those members of the body act in harmony with the senses of sight and hearing.

In my own experience I have found that playing upon a guitar without frets was something too difficult to accomplish, to warrant the necessary practice. Playing the Banjo without frets, I have found much easier; not very difficult; not such a strain upon the fingers; not so tiresome. I have also found, that by practicing an hour or so a day, I could handle almost any piece of Banjo music as well on an unfretted Banjo, as upon a fretted Banjo; but when business made it impossible to keep up my practice, I found that it was much more difficult to play a new piece from the notes on an unfretted Banjo than it was to play the same upon a Banjo having raised frets.

Then again, in handling so many Banjos of different sizes, changing from one size to another—a matter not to be dispensed with in my business—I found made my fingering upon an instrument with smooth board very inaccurate, and accompanied by difficulties not experienced when playing constantly upon the one instrument.

These are the points, briefly given, which must be considered by the Banjoist; and he must, after considering, decide for himself which is best. But the beginner must bear in mind, that after acquiring a knowledge of Banjo-playing with the use of these mechanical helps, the raised frets, it will be a matter of great difficulty for him afterwards to learn to finger accurately without them, should he at any time desire so to do.

This is an age of labor-saving machinery ; and those who approve of the frets are becoming in the majority among the Banjo-players ; but this of course does not decide the question as to which is best.

FALSE STRINGS.

Strings which are not true in tone,—do not produce the proper notes when pressed upon the frets,—or which have an unclear and muffled tone,—are called “ false strings.” Such strings are one of the greatest impediments to playing upon fretted Banjos. (When the term “ fretted Banjo ” is used, *raised frets* are meant of course.)

The laws—natural laws in acoustics—which govern the divisions of vibrating strings, making it possible to divide the length of string into sections, and decide the positions for the frets, are only applicable to vibrating strings when they are of *equal thickness* and of even density throughout their entire vibrating length. When a string—either upon the Banjo, the guitar, or any other instrument—is of uneven thickness, it will not vibrate perfectly, and will not produce true tones. Hence it is that many young students of the Banjo or guitar, upon getting a false string on their instrument, are led to suppose that the frets have, in some strange and peculiar manner, got out of place. Or, if it is a new instrument, they will some times send it to the manufacturer to have him ascertain what is wrong with it. Sometimes one is wise enough to change the string, which is most offensive, for another. Sometimes the other string proves to be even worse than the first, and then the uninitiated beginner is more perplexed than ever, and is ready to swear that the frets are wrong.

When a string is stopped—pressed to the finger-board, or upon the frets—midway between the nut and the

bridge; (which will be at the *twelfth fret*) the half of the string should sound an octave higher than the open string; the harmonic note produced at this fret, should also sound an octave higher than the open string.* But it often happens that the string is "false," and the position at which it must be stopped, in order to produce the octave note, sometimes varies, one way or the other, from one-eighth to one-quarter of an inch, or more. With raised frets this difference in fingering cannot be accomplished; the nearest fret being the next possible stopping place.

Hence it is that many performers will not have raised frets on a Banjo—because, if a string is false, but not too false to be used—they can slightly change the position of the fingering so as to make playing in tune upon such a string possible.

Now some would say at once: Why not select only strings which are true, and discard false strings? I must reply that in the matter of Banjo-heads and Banjo-strings, there are no infallible judges—one cannot always tell what is true and what is false. If the unevenness in a string is so great as to be seen or felt, the string should be discarded; as there will be no use in taking the trouble to put such a string on an instrument. But when the unevenness is not perceptible, the string may yet be sufficiently false to cause trouble in playing. The only redress a performer can have is to buy the best strings he can get, and to select from them those which appear to his judgement to be of even thickness, and free from flaws.

There is one consolation which a performer of to-day has over those of ten years ago; that is, that he can ob-

* See *An Exposition of the Harmonic Tones, and their Philosophy*, by the author of this work. This treatise is bound in with *The Banjo Philosophically*, and may be had for 10 cents.

tain strings at a much less cost. In fact, when I was an amateur, some years ago, I was obliged to pay just twice as much for Banjo-strings as Banjoists have to pay today, and the strings were no better, either.

STRINGS TRUE AND STRINGS FALSE

Are manufactured in Germany. They are made from the intestines of young lambs. The manufacturers over there have a better climate for string-making than we have in America, and can also obtain suitable material; which cannot be obtained here, because lambs raised for the market are too fat and unsuitable for producing musical strings. It is an exceedingly difficult matter to manufacture, of gut, a string which is of perfectly even thickness throughout, and at the same time of sufficient strength and elasticity. Another thing, no two lots of material are alike, and it is therefore folly to suppose that any two lots of strings can be made alike. Moreover, a change in the weather frequently occurs and spoils strings before they are entirely finished—the manufacture of them being carried on mostly in the open-air. The hot weather of our summers is very hard on strings, and attempts have been made to invent something superior to the material now used for making them, which would not be so readily affected by the weather; but so far without success. Silk strings are too soft; and through lack of hardness and elasticity, have not been a success. (This has no reference to the bass string, which is of silk, wound with wire.) Strings of steel wire have been tried and found useless on a Banjo—as have also strings made of brass wire. Wire strings are an abomination to a Banjo, and none but the worst of “plunkers” would care to use such. It is to be hoped that some enlightened American will yet invent a string which will have all the advantages, and fewer of the disadvantages, of the time-honored gut string.

It sometimes happens that the tail-piece of a Banjo will cut, or tear, a string near to the knot. When this occurs,—as is sometimes the case when the article is made of bone or ivory;—a piece of “bass string” should be gently run through the holes in order to remove the sharp edge. A very soft string will frequently break at the tail-piece before it breaks elsewhere. A good ivory tail-piece, properly made, and having holes properly drilled, and all the sharp cutting edges removed, is as good a tail piece for all practical purposes as can be obtained.

Some years ago there was an improvement made in the fastening of piano strings, which are made of steel wire. In the old-fashioned way, a loop is made at the end of the string, which loops around a pin. In the new way, the loop goes around the pin and the string then makes a turn around another pin, the object being to divide the strain. This idea has of late been copied in the form of Banjo tail-pieces; but although their several inventors claim great improvement over the old style, I must confess that I have not found them any improvement whatever. Perhaps it is owing to the fact that I am careful to remove all the cutting edge from the holes in the tail-pieces I use. However that may be, I have certainly found that I could play about as long as anyone without having strings to break at the tail-piece, and, moreover, am able to adjust a new string about as quick, if not quicker, than can be done with the “patent tail-piece.”

In *The Banjo Philosophically* I made some remarks concerning the care of the Banjo. These remarks have had, I am pleased to say, a good effect; but it still remains a fact to my mind, that among the hundred thousand Banjo-players in this country to-day, there are not one hundred who understand how, or will take the trouble to keep their instrument in the best playing condition.

Unless the instrument is in proper condition, a good performance of the work intended for it cannot be expected.

Who would be fool enough to purchase a valuable race-horse and place him in the hands of an incompetent groom, or themselves neglect him, and then expect the animal to be in condition for the race-track?

And yet this is just about what many Banjo-players are doing to-day.

THE BANJO IN CONDITION.

Some players who possess a variety of instruments will keep their violin and guitar in a suitable case, and their zither in a properly-lined box; their mandolin in a lined bag or leather case, and their Banjo hanging on the wall—(heavy side upwards, of course.)

The Banjo is not protected from the changes in the weather, and moreover, it frequently falls down from the wall to the floor, striking on the peg-head and splitting the neck.

There is no instrument in existence that is more easily affected by atmospheric changes than a Banjo. It is true that there is no delicate pine top to split, as there is in the guitar or mandolin; but there is the head, an animal substance, and a ready absorbent of moisture, which may be so impaired for the time being, that the Banjo is changed from a brilliant sounding instrument, to the veriest plunker.

Then there is the neck. Did you ever consider what a strain that delicate neck is daily subjected to? Not only is the constant tension of the strings to be considered; but also the plucking of those strings, as well as the pounding upon them (in some cases.)

Then there is the clumsy way in which some unskilled performers handle the pegs—shoving them into the holes by main strength ; and in doing this, pushing the neck upwards with a force which is calculated to strain any neck that can be made, out of position. It is no wonder then that the strain of the strings, together with the rough handling of some performers, causes the neck to spring forward, leaving a hollow in the fingerboard, which renders the instrument very difficult to perform upon. The thin necks made with some Banjos, to suit the delicate hands of certain performers, are not calculated to resist the inhuman handling of many of those who use them ; and no skill in manufacture—no seasoning of woods,—no amount of veneering of ebony, will prove an absolute preventive of warped necks if the instrument is not properly handled. You may just as well suppose that you can daily transgress nature's laws without in time having to pay the penalty, as to suppose that you can subject your musical instrument to improper handling and keep it for any length of time in playing condition.

The Banjo should be kept in a dry place, protected from any great dampness as well as from any great heat or cold. Cold is an absence of heat—heat is vibration. The head should be kept tight. As it stretches, use the wrench, a little at a time. It should be kept well strung, and the strings never loosened after playing—but kept in tune as nearly as possible. It does not hurt to allow the bridge to remain in position unless you are carrying the instrument about ; in which case, I should advise the bridge being removed. A leather case, lined with flannel, is the best protector for a Banjo I can suggest ; the best to carry the instrument in, and the best to keep it in at all times. The bolt which holds the tail-piece should never be screwed down tightly with the wrench, so as to

cause the tail-piece to press, or lie upon the head. There should be sufficient space between it and the head to allow of a sheet of writing paper being passed under it, between it and the head. But, at the same time, if the tail-piece is so far up from the head that sufficient pressure is not brought to bear upon the bridge, the bridge will not stand in position upon the head in playing, nor will the tone be so good. Extremes in all things are to be avoided.

In regard to Banjo-necks, there never was a greater fallacy than to suppose that a neck made of walnut, rosewood, or other wood, and veneered with a thick strip of ebony, or other hard wood, will not warp. No one with any practical experience in making such necks, or in wood-working of similiar description, will attempt to maintain such an assertion. Walnut wood as well as rosewood, is porous, and of more or less open grain. Ebony is very hard and not at all porous. Walnut wood may be seasoned in the log, or in the plank, for many years, until it is "dry as a chip," and for all this, when it is sawed up into necks, or into pieces of suitable size for making necks, will begin to warp. Ebony, on the other hand, will not season, even if left to rest in the shape of logs for a generation or more. It must be sawed up into strips and allowed to dry out afterwards.

Now, when the hard ebony is glued upon the porous walnut, unless all the shrinkage has been got out of the wood, it is found that the necks will frequently warp, and the cause for this is found in the different shrinkage capacity of the two woods. Again, even when the woods have been, in both instances, seasoned for some time after being sawed out, unless the Banjo is taken proper care of and protected from dampness and changeable weather, there is a possibility of the neck warping. Few

players are sufficiently familiar with these facts—or if familiar, pay sufficient heed to them—to keep their Banjos properly.

Now take, for instance, wood engravings. Everybody knows that the box-wood is so prepared by wedging, etc., for the making of such cuts, that any warping or changing in the wood is seemingly next to impossible. And yet, for all this, I have had fine wood cuts to warp on my hands. I have found that a certain number of such cuts, when enclosed for a length of time in a fire-proof vault, have warped; this, too, in a place which was supposed to be entirely free from all dampness. Any place, however, which is for any length of time closed so as to shut out all light of the sun, will generate a dampness, which is not only dangerous to the health of persons and animals, but likewise injurious to all else so secluded. Plants which are shut up from the light become tender and weak and must soon wilt and die. Therefore it is apparent that ventilation and sun-light are necessary to the health of the Banjo. I do not mean that the sun is to shed its rays directly upon the Banjo, and by reason of its too great heat, produce a contrary effect to that desired; but that a fair share of light and air is always desirable.

When the wood in the Banjo-neck has been properly seasoned and worked under the processes now recognized and found by years of experience to be proper, it will rarely warp when given proper attention and care; but no neck can be made to withstand the rough usage inflicted upon it by some of our players.

Banjo-heads, newly put on, will dry more rapidly and become sooner ready for use, when exposed to the air on a clear day. The sunlight will then absorb all moisture

and carry it off. But heads will not properly dry on a wet day, or in very damp weather, even when placed near a stove. In fact, placing the rim with the new head upon it, near a stove, is never desirable at all—as the head will be caused to quickly contract, whilst the portion under the hoop and flesh-hoop remains wet or damp, and an unequal strain is thus brought to bear upon the head, which even if it does not break at once, will not last nearly so long as it otherwise would.

“All things were made for use, but none for abuse,” and whilst a Banjo and a Banjo-head should bear all the wear and tear necessary to it as an instrument made for the use of man, it should not be abused.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY TO A GOOD PERFORMANCE.

It has been my aim, for years, to bring the Banjo more into the parlor, and into the musical soiree; as I consider the conditions essential to a good performance more readily met with there, than in the theatre or concert hall.

It must be apparent to all observing minds, that the variety theatre, or even the minstrel hall, with their associations, are not the proper places for any musically inclined person to listen to an effective performance, musically, upon the Banjo. The majority of those who compose the audiences of such theatres, go there to be amused—to hear fun—and to laugh;—not to be entertained by music of a character such as those who attend more select musical entertainments, seek to hear and are desirous of listening to.

Hence it is that one rarely hears, on the minstrel or variety stage, a good rendition of instrumental Banjo music. There are some exceptions to this rule, but they are rare. Even when a really meritorious performer

attempts to render musical effects of a more or less high order, on his Banjo, before a variety or minstrel audience, there are few who appreciate such a performance, and the "gods of the gallery" are frequently not slow in giving direct evidence of their dislike to anything pertaining to what some term a "classical performance." Hence, the Banjoist who is so unfortunate as to be compelled to gain a livelihood by following the minstrel or variety business, must—compelled by a necessity which recognizes no law—cater to the tastes of the majority; however much it may be against the wishes of himself.

Therefore it is not surprising that frequenters of such places, having heard only comic songs, jigs, and perhaps a few marches, ("played in imitation of a brass band,") performed upon the Banjo, and frequently accompanied by the usual line of black-face "gags," etc., persist in declaring that the Banjo has no possibilities beyond those limited effects. Those who have heard the instrument under more favorable conditions are but a small number, compared with those who have never been permitted to enter within the "charmed circle," and listened to the instrument well played upon, accompanied by the piano.

It lies with the teacher,—who, by reason of being a teacher, must come in contact with many who desire to acquire a better knowledge of the capabilities and possibilities of the instrument,—to show to others (the friends and acquaintances of his pupils) that the Banjo has a higher sphere of usefulness and attractiveness. I have repeatedly pointed this out in my various writings, and am pleased here to record the fact that such work is being done in various parts of this country and in Europe.

Only a few days ago I received, direct from Paris, France, a letter from the young artist, Mr. De Witt C. Everest, in which he stated that at a private entertainment

in that city, there were some forty or more people of note who came purposely to hear the American Banjo, and that of this number, only one, a lady, had ever heard the Banjo played before—or in fact—ever seen a Banjo.

“Countess —,” he writes, “said: ‘What a lovely instrument you have. It sounds more like the harp than any other instrument I have ever heard.’ Baron — said the same thing. All were delighted.”

Now does all this look as though the Banjo was fitted only for the negro minstrels, or for the variety stage? No thinking man or woman will continue to maintain such a proposition after once becoming acquainted with the facts; and it is partly to make known such facts that I have given this work to the public.

The parlor, the drawing room, and the select musical entertainment being the proper places for the Banjo to be rightly heard; it then remains to be observed that even among the audiences of these entertainments will always at times be found those who are not prepared to accept the Banjo at once; as it deserves to be accepted, and take immediately to music such as Themes, with variations, sets of Waltzes, Fantasias, etc., but who, at the same time, will be immediately captivated, as it were, by the rendition of some simple air played upon the Banjo, with a like simple accompaniment on the piano. Performances of “swinging solos,” or “trick playing;” with the usual “juggling” of the instrument, seldom, if ever, fail to at once convert those persons to an appreciation of the merits of the Banjo.

Since the beginning of the world, history chronicles the fact that people have ever been attracted by anything like “wonders”—and by any and all things which appear to them to be out of the usual course of things. Hence, a performance, in which the Banjo is sent twirl-

ing around the head,—or is swung in the air whilst playing some melody like the “Bell chimes imitation,”—often is astonishing to many who are not familiar with the extreme simplicity of the performance. I, myself, have often been called upon for a performance of this kind when playing in private, and have never yet found it otherwise than as I have stated.

After people have become a little more accustomed to hearing the Banjo played, they, not unfrequently, delight to listen to musical renditions of a somewhat higher order.

But there is such a thing as carrying the “classical” style of Banjo-playing too far, and of rushing into extremes. This is apparent when some otherwise competent players of the Banjo undertake to render a style or class of music which is not, properly speaking, Banjo music; music which is in any way adapted to the characteristics or capabilities of the instrument. Melodies like “Home, Sweet Home,” for instance, with its variety of forms and styles of variations, is applicable to the Banjo—it is applicable to all instruments—and is effective; and so are many other musical compositions written for other instruments applicable to the Banjo. But there are some compositions, especially composed for the violin, the piano, or other instruments, which do not make the best selections to apply to the Banjo, and it is not always the question of *what can be done* on a Banjo, which can be hoped to entertain or attract an audience; but more frequently the question of bringing attractive music out of, or from the instrument, which is the desideratum to be accomplished.

Again, there is music—music especially composed for the Banjo—by competent players of that instrument, who, by reason of study and practice long in this one par-

ticular line of art, are competent to compose and construct that which is more effective, which can be played with an effect upon the Banjo, that is likewise out of the sphere and range of most other instruments. Each instrument must have its own independent sphere of music, and each has some characteristic that another has not. These points are to be considered by the Banjoist who hopes to make his way with success in the line of artistic Banjo-playing.

There are certain seasons of the year—such as our American summers, for instance—when the Banjo is often compelled to sound at its worst. No matter how finished a performer may be, there are certain times when surrounding or attending conditions make his performance unsatisfactory to himself and to his audience. When the air in summer is charged with a peculiar dampness, and the atmosphere is not only hot but humid, the strings of the Banjo, like those of the violin, guitar and harp, are caused to go out of tune easily, and what is worse, to break very frequently. Not only does the air itself act in a direct manner to cause this, but its action upon the human body tends to moisten and make soft the fingers, which, coming in constant contact with the strings, has a bad influence upon them. This is discussed more fully elsewhere.

It must also be remembered that no sound can travel without a medium for its conduction, and that this medium is the air, which is the vehicle of sound. The reader has doubtless many times observed, that a Banjo which sounds extremely loud and clear, when played upon in a large, empty room; fails to sound either so loud or so brilliant when the same room is filled with people.

This is even more apparent when the weather is damp,—by reason of the dampness carried into the room by the people.

Sound which moves uninterruptedly in a clear atmosphere has much advantage over the same sound when it is compelled to move in a dense atmosphere, or is impeded in its course by a mass of living bodies, or even of thick carpets, curtains, furniture, etc. This is a subject which belongs to acoustics, and as there are so many excellent works written upon it, and similar subjects; in which the reader can easily gain all the information desired, I will not go deeper into it here.

The humidity in the air in summer,—upon certain days,—renders a favorable performance upon the Banjo very uncertain, not to say impossible. But the winter seasons have altogether the opposite effect, furnishing a clear, cold atmosphere, not only favorable to the transmission of sound, but in every way favorable to this particular instrument, the Banjo. The head, in cool weather, remains more firm and hard, and the strings are not so liable to break, and are more likely to stand in tune. Not only is this the case, but the fingers of the performer, remaining free from perspiration, have not the tendency to break or soften the strings which they have in the hot, humid months. It is then, during the seasons of fall, winter, and spring, that the Banjoist finds the greatest satisfaction in his Banjo performances. These are the seasons favorable to Banjo performances of all kinds.

COMIC BANJO-PLAYING.

I do not wish it to be thought that I disparage Banjo-playing in a "black face," nor do I wish to cast any slurs at the performer who makes use of his Banjo for a "comic act,"—as an accompaniment to comic songs, etc.

Comic songs are often amusing, and a really comic Banjo act is often highly entertaining. But all things must change. A Banjo performer who years ago could—upon the minstrel stage,—entertain an audience and command a good salary, by singing negro songs; would not meet with much success to-day; nor could he command any salary to speak of. The people of to-day have wearied of the monotonous songs of the darkey; and when they listen to comic songs, they want, at the same time, to listen to “hits at the times,” political and otherwise. The ludicrous must be intermingled with other effects than musical, if the mass of frequenters of variety or minstrel halls are to be entertained. One cannot live always without fun in this world: there is an old saying, “Laugh and grow fat,” which may not be altogether bad advice for some of us to take, although we may not all desire to be corpulent. However,

“A little nonsense now and then,
Is relished by the best of men.”

Comic songs are very good in their place, and there are very many persons who delight to listen to a really good comic song, accompanied by the Banjo. But what would you have thought to have seen Ole Bull, Vieuxtemps, or any of our modern violin virtuosi, appear on the stage in black face and attempt to render their almost supernal music in that disguise?

The mask of cork, you would doubtless say, was not the proper thing to wear on such an occasion; nor in any way in affinity with the music produced.

Hence, I think that the higher grade of Banjo music is better performed in evening dress, or in plain citizens' clothes, with the face and hands in their natural color and condition; and that this class of Banjo music should be separated from the comic sort.

This may be only an opinion of my own, but I believe there are many excellent Banjo-players who entertain somewhat similar views.

“NUDIS VERBIS.”

SECTION V.

“Well, sir! Now I've heard what you had to say:—I would like to know what others have to say about it—I mean the Banjo.” Section V, then, will tell you a little of what others have said.

Now that I have given some of my own personal views concerning the Banjo, it may not be out of place to append the views and opinions of the *literati* of the day—the same clipped from various newspapers, published in different places and under various dates. I feel that my work without this would be very incomplete.

Extracts from the press, together with some comments upon them, I therefore utilize in this section of the work; trusting they may be of interest to such as are not familiar with the Banjo and its present stage of advancement in the sphere of music and art. Opinions are, of course, but *opinions*, and from whomsoever they may come must be considered as opinions only.

An article concerning the Banjo, from the *St. Louis Critic* of Sept. 5, 1886, reads as follows:

“Ten years ago the idea of discussing the Banjo in a serious article on music would have been laughed at by ninety-nine out of a hundred of our musical people. To-day it would be a serious oversight if one should take no account of this popular musical instrument. Dame Fashion has made it popular, and now its merry ‘twang’ is heard in many a parlor, from which but a short time ago it would have been flung out in disgrace. Like the fiddle, the Banjo got into disrepute because it was played by people whom the aristocracy do not usually associate with. Perhaps it will never cease to be frowned upon by the

puritanical till, like the fiddle, it gets a new and more aristocratic name. One curious feature of the growth in popularity of the Banjo is the way the ladies have fallen in love with it. Indeed it has so many devotees among the fair sex that Banjo clubs have been formed in many cities. Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago have clubs composed of ladies of the highest social position. In London, Lady Fanny Cowper, a grand-niece of Lord Palmerston, gave a very fashionable concert, in which she was assisted by eleven young ladies, all playing on the Banjo. When Christine Nillson came to this country, one of her first achievements was to learn how to play the Banjo. She 'picked' the Banjo with gusto in her leisure moments, and one of the prettiest sights was to see the great prima donna romping with little children and playing the Banjo for them with the skill of an expert. Clara Louise Kellogg is another of the prima donne who has a fondness for the Banjo, and during Miss Ellen Terry's visit to this country she became fascinated with its melody, and took lessons of a leading teacher until she became an adept in its use, and the tinkling of the Banjo is often heard in her apartment. E. L. Davenport was an enthusiastic Banjo-player, and his daughter Fanny is also an expert. Mary Anderson has caught the fever and Lawrence Barrett's daughter is a fine performer. No doubt it was Lotta's Banjo-playing that started the popularity of the instrument among 'professionals' and those connected with them. Now, however, there are many ladies playing the Banjo who know the stage only from the front side of the foot-lights, and there seems to be no reason why they should not, for the Banjo has many qualities that make it a delightful feature of the home. In the Eastern cities a gentleman's boudoir or music-room is not complete without a Banjo, and its study forms a part of the curriculum of almost every school-girl, and at the summer resorts you will hear its 'jingle' wafted out upon the air from the windows of the hotels and cottages. The fair sex, however, do not have an entire monopoly of the instrument, for stronger hands than theirs often

'pick' the strings, and society young gentlemen are most desirable when they can accompany their lady friends on the Banjo. The money expended in the purchase of Banjos would hardly be credited were the amount to be set down in cold figures."

I have already alluded to the success made by an American Banjo-player in London, England, in the year 1880, the celebrated Banjoist, E. M. Hall, who left America to fill an engagement with the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, at St. James' Hall.

Concerning his appearance there, the London *Era* had the following, by which it will appear that no artist in music since the time of the famous Paganini, has achieved a more striking success. In fact, the Banjo-playing of E. M. Hall was a revelation to the Britishers, and there can be but one possible plea of objection by the "holier than thou" class of musicians, which is, that his act was done in "black face," and among minstrels, instead of upon the legitimate concert stage.

"Mr. E. M. Hall has made an extraordinary hit with his Banjo-playing. He may be called the Paganini of the Banjo, for never before have we heard that instrument manipulated in such an artistic style. There is a kind of fantastic poetry in the way Mr. Hall plays the Banjo. He makes the instrument produce both pathetic and humorous effects of the most novel kind. In his principal solo, a sort of caricature of Thalberg's variations on the popular melody 'Home, Sweet Home,' Mr. Hall introduced some of the most original passages we have ever heard upon the Banjo or any other instrument. Keeping the melody all the time, he played an accompaniment on the other strings, and showing variations full of difficulties. Scales, chromatic passages, startling intervals extending over several octaves, chords, shakes—in fact, every kind of musical effect to be obtained by a skillful pianist or violinist can be produced by Mr. Hall; and

one of the most remarkable features of the solo was a variation, in which the air was played with a tremolo effect, whilst it was accompanied with chords. Mr. Hall has evidently decided genius for music, and we fancy he could easily become a master of almost any other instrument; but seeing what amusing, extraordinary and original playing he introduces on the Banjo, one could hardly wish him to change. The rule against encores was obliged to be set aside, so delighted were the visitors with his solo."

The following is another item clipped from the *St. Louis Critic* :

"E. M. Hall, the wonderful Banjoist, gave a private reception at the St. James Hotel last week, complimentary to Miss Ada McClelland of this city. Mr. Hall played 'Home, Sweet Home,' with variations, an arrangement that gave him his name, the 'King of the Banjo.' The theme was played in a low, sweet strain, and the variations with such exquisite precision and rapidity as to excite the wonder of his listeners. To Mr. Hall the Banjo, to a great extent, owes its growing popularity as a solo instrument. Not only has his wonderful performances been received with favor throughout this country and Europe, but his compositions are popular and in the library of every professional and amateur. They are easy of execution, brilliant in effect and perfect in harmony.

Miss McClelland has her class nearly full for the fall term, which begins in September. Many of our society ladies will begin practice on the Banjo, which appears to be the favorite instrument."

The *Critic*, as may be seen, speaks in the same language of Mr. Hall's playing of his famous *Home, Sweet Home*, as did the *London Era*, previously alluded to. There are many expert performers on other instruments who would be only too proud of similar press notices if they could but get them.

Another issue of the same paper says :

“ During the past three years the Banjo has become the favorite instrument among the young people of both sexes all over the country. Particularly is this true in the large cities and among the wealthy classes. No longer is it connected in the mind with negro minstrels and Southern plantation scenes, but holds rank equal with the violin and the guitar.”

Those who still assert that the Banjo possesses no musical merit, will be compelled now to face those of another opinion—and “ those of another opinion ” will prove to be largely in the majority.

The following is from the *N. Y. Morning Journal*, under date of November 27, 1887 :—

“ The Banjo has undergone many changes since its ‘ plunks ’ used to ring out on the moonlit air along Mississippi levees on summer nights befo’ de wah. The earliest recollections of the instrument, which have been handed down to us show it to have been originally made of a cheese box or a peck measure for a rim, while the head was of sheepskin, cemented or tacked to the rim, but much coarser than that which is at present in vogue, and the handle was of rough-hewn hickory. The strings were of catgut, and resembled small-sized ropes. Altogether it looked more like a heavy wedge mallet than a musical instrument.

The origin of the Banjo is somewhat doubtful. Those who know about all there is to know of it to-day are little informed as to its early history. By some it is said to have originated in Spain, being an evolution of the mandolin. Those in favor of this theory point to a Spanish painting of the sixteenth century, in which one of the figures holds a Banjo in his hand. But this theory is pooh-poohed by those who claim that the Banjo found its birthplace in Africa and was transplanted in this country by the natives who were brought here in slavery.

Whatever the truth may be in regard to its origin it has certainly always been an instrument in high favor with the negro,

and, in fact, an instrument for the playing of which the colored race has always shown a natural aptitude. Could some of the dusky plunkers of the old days see the handsome, symmetrical instrument called the modern Banjo, they would not believe it to be the same which once gave so much joy to their leisure hours.

The ordinary Banjo of to-day consists of a rim generally made of German silver, with wooden band inside. A steel or brass wire rests upon the same, and the head, which is either of sheep or calf-skin, is held in place by a band connected with brackets attached to the rim. The handle or neck, as it may be called, is made of rosewood or mahogany, while snakewood is sometimes employed. Most handles are fretted, but advanced players use the Banjo without frets, as practice brings an instinctive knowledge of the exact point at which to finger in order to produce a given tone.

It is only within the last few years that the Banjo has become a drawing-room instrument. In this respect it has gradually supplanted the guitar. Many prominent society ladies are numbered among the devotees of the Banjo. Ladies are said to be more apt pupils. The light touch, which is the modern method, and which produces the acute tones necessary to good playing, appears to be especially easy of accomplishment by the ladies. Besides this, teachers say they pay better attention to instructions and put heart into their work.

The Banjo is becoming such a general accomplishment that the young lady puts forth extra effort to master it. In a few years the young lady who can't plunk the Banjo will be as uninteresting as the one who formerly could not play the piano.

The Banjo is especially adapted to accompany the voice in song. It matters little what may be the character of the composition. It lends life and spirit to the rollicking ditty of the minstrel and adds pathos to the musical romance.

For purely instrumental effects its scope is unlimited. In the hands of a skilled player the most difficult compositions can be

faithfully rendered. The rage now among lady and gentlemen Banjoists is 'The Marriage Bells,' 'The Dead March,' from 'Marionette,' and selections from the light operas. 'Home, Sweet Home' admits of many variations, and some players can permeate the air with more wonderful intricacies than are possible on any other instrument.

The methods of the old minstrel performers, who wore a thimble on the index finger, and thumped with more or less vigor, has given way to the more delicate 'pick' with the bare fingers among modern players. Of course the old-timers disparage this 'dude' touch, as they term it, and say, with Horace Weston, the most prominent exponent of the 'tump,' that it is all wrong. But young ladies, who, with their delicate touch charm drawing-room auditors, know how much more efficacious is the modern 'pick' in charming their music-loving hearers."

The assertion of the writer of the foregoing, that the Banjo is especially adapted to accompany the voice in songs of whatever character, is well attested. But when he says that "for purely instrumental effects its scope is *unlimited*," he makes even a stronger plea for the Banjo than I myself do. However, it is well.

But I must differ with the writer regarding the playing of that famous colored artist, Horace Weston. Anyone who asserts that Weston declares against the guitar style, or "picking" of the Banjo, shows himself to be unfamiliar with the playing of that artist. I have heard Weston pick the Banjo in a manner that would astonish many. I have heard him pick with so delicate, and at the same time, so brilliant a touch that one would scarcely believe the instrument he was manipulating could possibly be a Banjo. Likewise I have heard him "strike," or thimble, in the same delicate and artistic manner, where most other players could produce only a hard

thumping noise. I do not doubt that he can "thump," and thump hard, when occasion requires,—and the occasion requiring such thumping is generally the bar-room and its associates,—where perhaps our worthy writer may have had the misfortune to hear him play. I who am familiar with the playing of Horace Weston in all its branches, must bear record to the fact that I have heard no one who can excel him in artistic execution when *he is permitted to perform under proper conditions.*

I must also take exception to the remarks of the *Morning Journal* correspondent, that "advanced players use the Banjo without frets, as *practice brings an instinctive knowledge of the exact point at which to finger in order to produce a given tone.*"

Practice produces no *instinct*, for instinct is something inborn in men and animals. In fact, not one player in a hundred ever plays without "frets" of some kind, even though concealed from the eye of the auditor.

Concerning a soiree musicale, given by Miss Everest, of Philadelphia, in March, 1888, where the Banjo Quartette of Mr. D. C. Everest took part, a musical journal had the following:

"While the style of music evolved from the Banjo was hardly up to the standard of the balance of the programme, it was evident that the rendition did not fail in amusing the audience."

What would the worthy reporter of that particular journal have to say about a cornet soloist's performances at such a concert? He would doubtless consider such tunes as Yankee Doodle, with variations, classical, provided they came from a horn instead of from the Banjo. At any rate, he states that the Banjo music *amused the audience*, which is doubtless more than he himself could have accomplished with any instrument.

Not far from here, about this time, there were other Banjo performances taking place. One of these was a grand concert, given in Boston, Mass., in Tremont Temple, on the evening of December 14, 1887.

Let me read you what the well-known paper, the *Boston Herald*, had to say concerning it: There were sixty Banjos on the stage in the Banjo Orchestra:—

“It was a festival night for Banjoists at Tremont Temple last evening, and the twang twang, twang twang, thumb thumb of the popular instrument of the day was heard by the immense audience present for two hours, varied only by occasional interruptions by a glee club and a humorist. The procession of Banjo-players that filed into the building singly, in couples and in crowds astonished and puzzled the ordinary passers through Tremont street, and created a great excitement among the favored ticket holders. The idea of massing all the available Banjo talent of the town and giving a concert with a Banjo ‘orchestra’ originated with the members of the Boston Ideal Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar Club, and the result attending the carrying out of their idea was certainly interesting to those who attended last evening. Mr. William A. Huntley was the star artist of the evening, and the solo talent, in the line of Banjo-playing, included Miss Vena Robinson, Miss Flossie Southward and Miss Marie Thresher. The Longwood club and the Freshmen Club from Harvard College also took part in the programme as well as a miscellaneous ‘orchestra’ of over three score players, the Lotus Glee Club and Mr. Edward T. Phelan, humorist, assisting. The great ‘act’ of the evening was the appearance of the ‘orchestra,’ which, under Mr. George L. Lansing’s direction, played Shattuck’s ‘Invincible Guard March,’ with splendid precision, creating the most novel and enjoyable effect. The Ideal Club, which has been heard frequently in and about the city this season, made another brilliant success, and both the Longwood and the Freshmen Clubs played with highly commendable skill. Mr. William A. Huntley again

showed himself an accomplished soloist, and was enthusiastically applauded for each and all of his selections. Miss Thresher, six years old, gave evidence of early talent, and the other soloists, also of tender years, acquitted themselves with credit. Mr. Phelan is a very clever imitator, and his contributions to the entertainment were greatly enjoyed, as were also the members introduced by the glee club. Altogether, the concert made quite a new departure in Banjo-playing, and proved that the instrument can be used with advantage in many combinations suited to the concert-hall."

It will be observed that this well-known and ably conducted paper, says, that the concert "*proved that the instrument can be used with advantage in many combinations suited to the concert-hall.*"

In the face of such testimony none but a blind musical bigot will continue to assert that the Banjo *has no music in it.*

"The American Banjo Club," led by Mr. T. J. Armstrong, gave a concert in Philadelphia on the evening of December 19, 1887. It was largely attended, being the first entertainment of the kind given in Philadelphia. There were sixteen Banjos in the Banjo Orchestra. Miss Edith E. Secor, an accomplished lady Banjoist, played solos, accompanied by her sister on the piano.

The Philadelphia *News* published the following notice concerning this concert:

"The Banjo concert at Association Hall last evening was a decided success. It was given to a large audience, who knew for the first the amount of music that could be knocked out of the plantation instrument."

The *Item* has the following:

"The performance of the Banjo Club, which appeared three times during the evening, was in every way admirable, showing careful and effective training, and a thorough mastery of the instruments used."

The *Sunday Times* had the following :

“ A REVELATION IN BANJO MUSIC.”

“ On last Monday evening at Association Hall a grand novelty concert was given by the American Banjo Club under the able direction of Thomas J. Armstrong. The concert, it is said, was the first of its kind ever given in this city, and was certainly a revelation in Banjo music.”

Concerning the playing of that wonderful man, Horace Weston, we have seen much in the papers, but none of the accounts go a step beyond what I have really heard him do. In fact, he is even a better player than any of the papers have ever stated. The only newspaper notice of him, or his playing, that I have by me at present, is the following, which I clipped from the *Yale News*, of December 8, 1881, a paper which is, I believe, published by the Yale College students :

“ There is so much interest taken in Banjo-playing in college that those who are really fond of fine playing would like to have a chance to hear the world-renowned ‘banjoist,’ Horace Weston who is now taking a rest in New Haven, after a two years’ trip around the world. We have heard several Banjo-players who were considered fine, but not one of them could compare with Weston. We would like very much to hear him again, and if the manager of the American Theatre were to engage him, he would be sure of a crowd of students to hear this really magnificent musician. Weston, though colored, can play the Banjo in a way no other man of any complexion whatsoever ever pretended to. We hope there will be an opportunity to hear some of his playing.”

The following brief notices taken from the papers to which they are credited, attest to the merits of the Banjo and guitar in the hands of John E. Henning and his accomplished wife :

"The seven hundred guests at the Long Beach Hotel, L. I., were delightfully entertained Monday evening by the J. E. Henning Banjo and Guitar Concert Co. It proved to be the great event of the season."—*N. Y. Tribune*.

"John and Meta Henning gave one of their delightful Banjo and guitar entertainments at Walton Place, Thursday evening, for the benefit of the Choir Fund of the Church of the Ascension. It was a great success, as it always is when those wonderful people are advertised."—*Chicago Tribune*.

Thousands of similar press notices could be given.

In Providence, R. I., on the evening of May 16, 1888, a concert was given before an audience of 2000 people. Fifty Banjo-players appeared on the stage in the Banjo Orchestra.

The *Evening Telegram* had the following:

"Mr. Huntley, of course, was the leading figure of the evening. He is a marvellous Banjo-player and seems to possess a certain power over the instrument that no other artist has ever shown here. He plays with good taste, his ideas are original, and he makes the instrument fairly speak. The encores were extremely hearty and he responded with some very choice selections. The Boston Club played magnificently and were received with enthusiasm."

The Banjo is all right. What we want is only a few more such players as Mr. Huntley, who is an artist in every sense of the word.

The Providence *Journal* of April 16, 1888, in speaking of a concert given by Reeves' Band at Low's Opera House, says: "The Banjo and guitar playing of the Boston Ideal Club was one of the gems of the concert." As Reeves' Band is one of the finest in this country, this is saying a good deal for the Banjo.

An English musician has the following to say concerning Banjo-playing:

LUSBY'S WINTER PALACE.

LONDON, ENG., NOV. 9, 1882.

"In the course of my professional duties I have often listened to performances on the Banjo, although I must confess on these occasions my sentiments were not always pleasurable, but after having heard Mr. Turner play, both in public and private, I must honestly say that in his hands the Banjo completely changes its nature; from an instrument of thin tone and limited capabilities it becomes a powerful solo instrument and rich in harmony.

His manipulation is marvelous and his memory inexhaustible; in fact, it is well worth the while of any musician to see Mr. Turner and hear how an artist can overcome the difficulties even of this instrument.

CHARLES BELL, Musical Director,
Royal Academy of Musicians."

All this goes to demonstrate that those who assert that the Banjo is not a musical instrument have spoken ignorantly. When two or three persons can testify under the law to having been witnesses of a certain transaction, their testimony goes further than that of thousands of others who can testify that they knew nothing of said transaction, not having been present.

The testimony of a few reliable and qualified witnesses that there is music,—and good music,—in the Banjo, is worth all the contrary opinions of those who have never heard the instrument properly played upon, and therefore assert to the contrary.

Although I am not, myself, "in the field" as a Banjo-player,—having my hands full of other matters and little time for practice,—yet I have had the pleasure on hundreds of occasions, of astonishing those who had never

before heard the Banjo properly played; or never heard it played at all with an accompaniment on the piano. I have never yet found a single person who was at all musically inclined that did not "fall in love" with the music produced by the Banjo and piano. Thus I can say truly that *it needs only to be heard*. There are thousands upon thousands who have never heard the Banjo properly played, or ever examined a good instrument in the shape of a Banjo.

"The Banjo is an older instrument than the violin. Long before the violin was thought of, the heathen on the banks of the Congo, civilized people on the banks of the Nile, and others more or less civilized, from China to the Atlantic, played the Banjo. The Egyptians were great Banjo players, and so were the people of Africa, and it was natural then that the African when brought to this country should introduce to us their time-honored instrument."—*St. Louis Critic*.

The following brief notice,—brief, but to the point,—is taken from a paper published in Arkansas, the *Judsonia Advance*, and relates to a telegraph operator in that locality, who has been playing the Banjo for some time.

"Our new night operator at this place, Mr. S. B. Fraser, is an accomplished Banjo-player. Many people think that the Banjo is an instrument for the negro or minstrel entertainment, but after listening to his rendition of difficult instrumental music on the Banjo they will change their minds very materially."

This is similar to the evidence I am constantly coming in contact with,—from the press and from musicians,—that the Banjo needs only to be properly heard in order to be appreciated. I am glad to be able to record the name of Mr. Fraser in this little work, and will be pleased to know, at all times, that others are handling the instrument with the same skill.

Mr. Wm. A. Huntley once remarked to me that he thought so much of a Banjo, that he wanted one carved upon his tomb-stone when he died. This is the secret of his (Mr. Huntley's) power over the instrument: Love—inherent love for his favorite instrument—inspiring him to practice and work.

Quite different is it with those who care only for the instrument as a means of making a livelihood, or getting money; they are never true artists in music, having no real love for it.

Said a "simple method" teacher to me once: "The Banjo has come up quick, and it will go down quick." There was not enough money in it to keep him longer in the business of teaching and selling inferior Banjos. He had never worked for its upward course; caring only to get money from ignorant persons in exchange for cheaply-made Banjos, and still worse music. He was therefore little qualified to predict or judge as to what the future had in store for the Banjo. The less number of such persons we have in the business, the better for all concerned.

"While some hypercritical persons are fond of pelting with saitre and obloquy those of their countrymen and women who carry their admiration of English customs and manners to the extremes of plagiarism, it is some slight satisfaction to know that more than one American institution has found its way across the Atlantic, and has made a home for itself among the inhabitants of 'perfidious Albion.' The very latest craze among the British aristocracy is the Banjo. The colored brothers Bohee are at home in many of the most high-class boudoirs and drawing-rooms in London. STEWART, OF PHILADELPHIA, Dobson of this city, besides many native professors, of whom perhaps Harry Spratt is the most popular, are all in large way of

business, teaching dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies, the mysteries of 'picking' and the use of the thimble. The craze received quite a fillip a short while since by an order to Harry Spratt direct from his Royal Highness Prince Albert Victor of Wales for a Banjo, and to wait upon him to give him lessons upon the instrument. The English are rapidly becoming Americanized."—*The Press*, New York, March 6th.

The foregoing may be of interest: Whilst we Americans imitate the English with our bob-tail saddle horses, etc., they are not slow to imitate us in many things. There are a number of teachers of the Banjo in London and other cities and towns in England, and many of them are liberally patronized. I, myself, have supplied hundreds of instruments to English ladies and gentlemen and am safe in asserting that the "English Banjo," with its six and seven strings, is rapidly being superseded by our American five-string Banjo. However, readers of my *Banjo and Guitar Journal* are well acquainted with all such facts.

The following is from *The Indicator*, Chicago, under date of August 11th, 1888. The *Indicator* is one of the best musical journals in America:

"We have received from S. S. Stewart, of Philadelphia, copies of his *Banjo and Guitar Journal* for several months of the present year; also a copy of a lecture by himself upon "The Banjo Philosophically;" also a price list of Stewart's Parlor, Concert and Orchestra Banjos, and a very full and complete list of musical publications—sheet music, instruction books, etc.—for students of the Banjo. The *Journal* contains a vast amount of information suitable to all who take an interest in this famous instrument, together with many choice musical exercises."

It will be seen that the Banjo, as an instrument, is not tabooed by the musical press as it was some years ago.

The following is from the *L. I. Times*, of Dec. 27, 1883. The gentleman referred to is well known as a writer of Banjo music :

“ Musicians all over the country have been greatly interested in Mr. A. Baur’s attempts to secure for the somewhat plebeian Banjo a place among the great musical instruments. Mr. Baur has contended that the power and scope of the Banjo has never been appreciated, and that it is capable of interpreting the finest music with as much effect not only upon the ear, but upon the heart and mind as any instrument invented. He has backed his theories by proofs which have won the regard and consideration of eminent artists and critics. He has arranged the most pretentious music for the Banjo, and has executed the most difficult chords and the most passionate strains with startling effect. It is being very generally conceded that his experiments are wonderfully successful. Certainly he has created a revolution in the kind of music now being played upon the Banjo, and has, at the same time, won for his commanding genius an esteem which will soon cause his name to be long remembered as an artist of rare and original ability.”

The following is an extract from the *Journal*, Flushing, L. I., under date of Dec. 22, 1883 :

“ When Mr. Baur, the Banjoist, appeared on the stage, he was greeted with vociferous applause, and as he moved his dexterous fingers over the strings, almost a death-like stillness pervaded the house. The music was exquisite, and Mr. Baur was encored three times.”

How different all this reads from the attacks of over-zealous persons who assert that the Banjo possesses no musical merit whatever, and is fit only for the accompaniment of simple songs.

“ The heretofore despised Banjo is to be elevated to the first rank as a musical instrument. Some one has discovered that it is of very ancient origin, and, of course, that is very much in

its favor, as many persons delight in anything that is associated with antiquity. A relic-hunter in Egypt found, or says he found, in the tomb of a royal family, in one of the oldest pyramids, a Banjo of the exact form of those played by plantation darkies. In his opinion the ancient Pharoahs delighted in the sweet sounds produced by the Banjo, which constituted the favorite music of the country which has been called the cradle of civilization."—From the Philadelphia *Evening Star*, Oct. 27, 1881.

That there is a great deal of truth in the foregoing item I do not deny. People nowadays love to copy after the antique, and as I myself have stated, in the language of another, "History repeats itself." and the Banjo will most surely find its way to the front. It appears to be the will of the gods of music, and of art, that this is to be accomplished.

And yet there are some persons who really do not know the difference between a Banjo and a tambourine.

"There is good reason for believing that the heretofore despised Banjo is to be elevated to the first rank as a musical instrument. Some one has discovered that it is of very ancient origin, and of course that is much in its favor, as many persons delight in anything associated with antiquity. A relic-hunter in Egypt found, or says that he found, in the tomb of a royal family, in one of the oldest pyramids, a Banjo of the exact form of those played by the plantation darkies. In his opinion the ancient Pharoahs delighted in the sweet sounds produced by the Banjo, which constituted the favorite music of the country which has been called the cradle of civilization. It is easy to account for the introduction of the Banjo into this country. It was brought by the negroes from Egypt by way of Ethiopia. Many people will now admire the Banjo who despised it when it was thought to be the invention of some negro barbarian. Indeed, it is stated, very aristocratic people, as well as many accomplished musicians, have long been pleased with the Banjo, and that the latter have

played it 'on the sly.' Lord Dunraven, of England, is said to be an accomplished Banjo-player. Thalberg, the pianist, Miss Nillsson and Clara Louise Kellogg, the opera singers, are also enthusiastic lovers of the ancient Egyptian instruments. A London musical instrument maker states that he cannot supply the demand for the fashionable rival to the piano."—*Washington Capitol*.

The foregoing is very good, although much like what has previously been said.

"A Banjo-player in Cincinnati killed a girl by striking her on the head with his Banjo. So even the Banjo has its uses. We have heard murders committed with it before."

The above is from *The Score*, August, 1880. We have heard murders committed with it also, and they would have greatly increased had such papers as the *Score* had control of the instrument.

The following, however, is somewhat of a different nature, being another account of the restoration to health of a sick person.

It is from a paper called the *Merrimac Valley Visitor*, published in Newburyport, Mass., under date of December 11, 1880.

"A queer case of awakening the mental powers occurred a time since in the Ipswich asylum for the insane. A boy was there who gave only the least possible indications of being above the brute creation, if indeed he was up to the highest standard of irrational animal life. He had no conversational powers, could not answer the simplest question, and took little or no notice of passing events. One day a Banjo-player came along, and Dr. Hurd, as his custom is, employed him to play a time for the amusement of his patients. To the sound of the first notes this idiotic lad gave attention; and shortly ran to the player's side and looked intently at every motion he made. He was perfectly fascinated; and there sprang into wakefulness powers

till then dormant, which grew beneath the doctor's care till he was restored to reason, discharged from the asylum, and able to support himself. The mere animal was aroused to human life; and a soul hidden under the grossest covering was revealed and started on the journey of eternal life."

Here we have the case of a child who was not merely physically diseased, but also mentally undeveloped. Probably, had it not been for the Banjo, he would have lived and died an idiot.

Some time ago a correspondent sent me the following, clipped from some paper to me unknown. It relates to the performance of Haverley's Mastodon Minstrels, of which company, E. M. Hall, was at the time a member :

* * * * *

"The only new features, were E. M. Hall, with his Banjo, and the Howe sextette, in place of the quartette of last season. Mr. Hall is one of the finest Banjo-players in the world, able to play much better music than he did last night, and we regret that he did not render some of the fine selections which have not only made him famous, but have elevated the musical status of the Banjo."

The fact is that no man who follows the minstrel business, and is compelled to "black up" from six to eight times per week, can always, upon every occasion, feel musically inclined, sufficiently to render with taste and expression, his best musical selections.

Then again, as has been previously stated, negro minstrelsy is a business which attracts persons of its own sphere, and not so many who care to hear really good music, as those who demand fun. Here you have the reasons why Mr. Hall does not always play his best selections.

I have said that there are some persons who do not know the difference between a Banjo and a tambourine. This is true. It is also true that there are others who do not know the difference between a Banjo and a guitar. The correspondent who wrote the following item was evidently of that kind; for he, or she, recorded the teacher as having formed a class on the guitar, or in guitar playing, when indeed it was the Banjo and not the guitar.

The item referred to is from the *Quiz*, a society journal, and reads as follows:

“Mr. De Witt C. Everest, of Spruce street, has formed a class of pupils for instruction in the guitar, which is being ‘taken up’ by society.”

There was a “Banjo Tournament” held at Association Hall, Newburgh, N. Y., on Tuesday evening, May 24th, 1887. The following is a condensed report, clipped from a local paper:

“The tournament at Newburgh, Tuesday night, under the direction of Mr. W. E. Pethingale, was a great success. Every seat was sold, and standing-room was at a premium. Mr. Ruby Brooks, the finest Banjo-player in the world, gave great pleasure by his masterly handling of this popular instrument. Encore after encore was demanded, and obligingly responded to by Mr. Brooks. Mr. Webber accompanied him in his usual happy manner.

There was a large number of entries for the single and double classes. Representatives from Newburgh, Hudson, Poughkeepsie and Middletown gave exhibitions of every variety of Banjo-playing. The winners were as follows:

Hudson River championship for single, 1st prize, Mr. Vess Ossman, of Hudson.

2d prize, Mr. W. J. Connolly, of Poughkeepsie.

3d prize, Mr. Wm. H. Knapp, of Middletown.

Jas. Gemmill and Wm. Ross, of Poughkeepsie, won the double championship of the Hudson River.’”

I have never held a very high opinion of "Banjo tournaments." A tournament is supposed to represent a mock-fight, and is out of place among Banjo-players.

There are many excellent players of the Banjo, who would not have anything to do with a "contest,"—nor play for a prize of any description. Such contests merely decide the question,—if they decide anything at all,—of who was the best player upon a *certain occasion*. As it may happen, at any time, that a good performer does not feel in the humor for playing; or may find the surroundings and conditions not to his liking, nor in harmony with him he cannot play his best; whilst another, having less musical ability, but more "nerve," may carry off the prize. I think that playing for prizes is out of the range of a display of musical ability, and tends to excite combativeness and inharmony, which is not in keeping with true music. As advertisements,—used to attract attention to some particular make of Banjo,—such entertainments may be a success, but they have no place in art.

Fancy a number of violinists or pianists holding such a contest!

From *The Telegram*, [New York.]

MR. REUBEN BROOKS THE EXTRAORDINARY
BANJOIST OF THE DAY.

"Last evening a party of club-men met in the rooms of Mr. Reuben Brooks, on Broadway, to hear a little music and to enjoy themselves generally. It was the good fortune of a representative of the *Telegram* to be one of the party. We say the good fortune, for certainly a more extraordinary and satisfactory performance on an instrument has not been heard in this city by anybody. Mr. Brooks' execution on the Banjo last night was perfect. It was equal to anything ever done here by Remenyi, Wienawski or Wilhemj on their violins.

It has been the custom to regard roulades, vamps, beats with thimbles, and a series of florid chords, as the highest part of the art of Banjo-playing. Jigs, reels, marches, hornpipes, and now and then a simple gavotte were performed by ambitious members of minstrel and variety bands. Here and there in society was found an amateur who had the temerity and good taste to attempt something more than what were generally described as 'studies for the Banjo.' Even the best players, and the most skillful of those persons never could more than give the general idea of some of the most complicated of these themes, slurring over the difficulties, and hiding their own inability to accomplish positions, transpositions and harmonic pyrotechnics in rolls and florid runs which meant nothing, and, though ornate, were merely Banjo-tricks, and in no sense part of the score of the number being played. Last evening Mr. Brooks set at rest forever the question of the Banjo as an instrument for which all music could be written and arranged. He played "La Gitana," "The Funeral March of a Marionette," Auditi's famous gavotte, overtures to operas, operatic medleys, classical selections, waltzes and popular airs, and intricate numbers never attempted on any instrument except by the very greatest of artists. All of these things he played as they are written and harmonized; not a passage was faultily executed; not a chromatic run or chord of 'accidentals' slighted or slurred; not a change of signatures altered for Banjo exigencies. Musicians who were auditors last night marvelled, and were delighted at his honesty, honor, fidelity and musical conscience. They could not comprehend his skill; they had never believed it possible for any man to do such work on the Banjo. They pronounced Mr. Reuben Brooks a veritable virtuoso, capable of playing on the Banjo any score that can be played upon the piano, or violin, or harp, and that they likewise declared Mr. Brooks to be as great in his line as Joseffy and others, who have been heard at Steinway Hall, heretofore, on the piano.

We have no hesitation in saying that his work was just as extraordinary in execution, and far more masterful and melodi-

ously harmonic, than Mr. Levy's on the cornet, and we are sure that the future of this young artist will justify this statement. Already he has been taken in hand and recognized by society and the clubs, from which he derives a fine income both as a teacher and a performer at private parties.

He is a thorough musician, and albeit only twenty-five years old, discreet, modest, and entirely devoted to his art. He loves his Banjo more than many men love their wives, and he has all the intensity of purpose and incandescent enthusiasm which beget industry, perseverance and boundless success.

'Ruby' Brooks, as he is called by his friends, is not simply a great artist, he is a wonder—the first man who ever really made the Banjo the peer of the other great string instruments."

The foregoing article would be very good for the Banjo,—were it not that it was evidently written by a person not at all familiar with the Banjo, or its musical capabilities,—and written entirely in the interests of one particular individual.

Had the correspondent made himself familiar with the Banjo and its players, previous to making the visit he speaks of, to Mr. Brooks,—he would not have been so liable to mistaken opinions, and so given to over-rate a musical performance.

Mr. Brooks, it is true, is an excellent Banjo-player; but there is nothing either wonderful or extraordinary about his playing. What he does can be done by any young man who possesses even an ordinary talent for music, and the same application to practice which Mr. Brooks has given to it.

More than this can be done by those who are willing to stick at practice so continuously as to develop the faculty to an abnormal extent; which, however, I do not advise nor think advantageous. No wonder that those

individuals who have all along supposed the Banjo to be a "tambourine with a handle," should open their eyes and ears upon hearing a good Banjo in the hands of a good player. What would such persons say upon hearing Weston at his best,—under the same conditions as they heard Brooks, I wonder?

After an observation of some fifteen years, and an extended acquaintance with all the Banjo-players of note, I must candidly say, in justice to the man with black skin,—that nothing is done on a Banjo by any other man that has not been done by him. The statements of those who have not had an opportunity to hear him are of little value here: I have heard them nearly all, and at their best.

I know that there are some persons so deformed in character, and so lacking in all sense of human feeling and honorable principle,—that they would give no credit whatever to a man who had not the same white skin as their own,—no matter how great his abilities. Such persons will now possibly cast aside this volume with the sneering remarks:—"Banjo! Nigger," etc., etc. But curses, like chickens, "Come home to roost;" and such remarks, have little effect.

"VERA PRO GRATIS."

(Truth before favor.)

SECTION VI.

All manufacturers of Banjos and of most other musical instruments, are constantly coming in contact with persons who think they are competent to make improvements in the construction of musical instruments. Many and varied are the devices which have been suggested to me by zealous amateurs, for improving the Banjo, during my experience as a manufacturer.

Many persons experiment *blindly*, not possessing any theoretical knowledge of music or of the science of acoustics. Theoretical knowledge is a great help to any one who desires to experiment. Yet there are others,—persons of scientific attainments, who, through lack of talent, and being unable to enter fully in harmony with the subjects experimented upon, utterly fail in accomplishing anything.

Fetis, in his valuable work, *Music Explained to the World*, says: "All the distinguished men, who have employed themselves in the construction of instruments, have sought to make improvements in them, by a more severe application of theoretical principles; but, in practice, the results have not been such as they expected, either from unknown causes, or from their not having taken the necessary precautions.

Theory is sometimes found in opposition to practice. For example, the principles of the sounding of vibrating surfaces, demonstrates that violins, violas, and basses are constructed on arbitrary, rather than scientific rules; but in the application of these principles, no one has yet been able to make instruments as good as those which were

made by rules, the foundation of which is unknown. The same thing may be remarked of pianos. Time alone will shed light on these mysterious circumstances."

These remarks fit the case of the Banjo. I was once asked the question why I did not secure the services of some distinguished expert—some professor of acoustics—some learned doctor of science, to assist me in improving the Banjo. Simply because I do not believe that such a person exists—I mean a learned professor, who, by applying his rules, could do anything for the Banjo. Such persons have done nothing for the violin, and it seems that I am not alone in my opinion upon this subject.

Where are the rules of science—and where are the scientific professors who can, by mathematical rules, explain to the painter just how he is to set to work to produce paintings of equal merit to those of the old Italian masters?

My theory upon this subject I have already given in my lecture, *The Banjo Philosophically*, and I have now to say that in the two years which have passed since I penned that article, I have found nothing to alter my opinion in any way, but many things to confirm and strengthen it.

There are many persons to whom a cheap chromo is as interesting as a fine painting; and such, I presume, do not care to learn anything about the superior qualities of the paintings of the old masters. There are likewise those to whom a cheap fiddle is as good as a fine violin; and others who are just as well pleased with a cheaply-made Banjo as with a finer instrument. Our art, however, does not depend, for its encouragement and support, upon persons of that character, and consequently I care little for either their censure or their praise. Where some of my

writings may be ridiculed and made the objects of adverse criticism by a certain class, I take it as part of the lot of all who attempt to instruct; and many such criticisms have just the weight of remarks sometimes passed by servant-maids, or hotel waiters, upon the guests they serve,—nothing more;—I am unaffected by reason of them.

An interesting article pertaining to the manufacture of bells, by the Rev. R. H. Haweis, in *Good Words*, contains the following:

* * * * *

“A certain tact or rule of thought, takes the place of science; rules there must be founded on principles, but the masters cannot explain their secrets. They produce the work of art; others are left to discover the laws they have obeyed. When we have analyzed their methods we may be able to make their bells. So thought the Germans when they measured and analyzed Raphael and Tintoret, and produced the correct but lifeless *banalites* of Ary Scheffer; so thought Vuillaume when he imitated the very wormholes in the Amatis; but for all that the French fiddles are not Amatis. It may turn out that in the making of rich musical bells like those of Van Aerschodt there is something which cannot be taught—the instinct, the incommunicable touch.”

Fetis says also, concerning the violin: “The violin was for a long time only a vulgar instrument, confined to the playing of popular airs and dances.”

Just so it has been with the Banjo. But the violin has now been so long recognized and established in public favor that all this is overlooked or forgotten; whilst with the Banjo it is different.

I will now append what this celebrated writer says concerning the guitar, as a musical instrument: *

* *Music Explained to the World*, page 252, American Edition.

“The limited resources of the guitar are well known. It seems calculated only to sustain the voice lightly in little vocal pieces, such as romances, couplets, boleros etc. Some artists, however, have not limited themselves to this small merit, but have sought to overcome the disadvantages of a meagre tone, the difficulties of the fingering, and the narrow compass of this instrument. Mr. Carulli was the first who undertook to perform difficult music on the guitar, and succeeded in it to such degree as to excite astonishment. Sor, Carcassi, Huerta, and Agnado, have carried the art to a higher degree of perfection; and if it were possible for the guitar to take a place in music, properly so-called, these artists would doubtless have effected that miracle; but to such a metamorphosis the obstacles are invincible.”

Probably in musical works hereafter published, similiar views may be expressed upon our American Banjo. However, that is not of much moment.

Guitarists find to-day in the American Guitar-neck-Banjo,—a Banjo with neck like guitar,—an instrument of much greater power than the guitar; for which due credit must be given to the Banjo.

Let us now read a portion of what Moore, in his Encyclopædia of Music, has about the guitar :

“About the middle of the last century, the guitar was so fashionable in England as to threaten the ruin of those persons engaged in the manufacture of other instruments. The use of the guitar is said to have been stopped by Kirkman, a harpsichord maker. Having bought a number of cheap guitars, he gave them to ballad singers, and persons in the lowest sphere of life, teaching them at the same time how to play a few popular songs.* As soon as it became common, those who had been most interested in it as a fashionable toy, threw it by in disgust, and commenced again the study of the piano-forte.

Thus it is that fashion governs the inventions of the wisest,

* Mark the similarity between these and the “simple method” Banjo-players.

and consigns to neglect, or raises into estimation, the talents, genius, and industry of the greatest men in all ages and countries.

The demand for this beautiful and graceful instrument has of late so increased, that several American houses have commenced the manufacture of them.* The guitar seems to be coming into very general use."

I have never placed much dependence upon fashionable "society people" for the elevation of the Banjo. About all that can be said for fashion and its votaries is that it has drawn the attention of inquiring minds to the instrument.

Fashion is as fickle as she is lazy, and as vacillating as she is proud. Many such persons would like to play the Banjo because it is "the rage,"—but are too indolent to study and practice, and having no real love for the instrument never become players. The real development of the musical status of the Banjo lies entirely with those who have a natural affection for the instrument, and the ability to practice and study.

Such as "look down" upon the Banjo when it is a "plebeian" instrument, but take to it as soon as some fashionable nabob takes up with it, are not qualified by nature to become anything but mediocre performers upon it. "Flowers grow best for those who love them best." The Banjo is mastered only by those who, by reason of a natural love for it and its music, are in affinity with it.

Who among the real lovers of the guitar gave it up when fashion forsook it, as it is said to have done when an evil disposed and envious person attempted to drag it down? Probably not one, for it remains to this day as much loved by its devotees as ever. Harmony lives

* This was prior to the year 1854, when the Encyclopædia was published.

when discord and wrangling die. The fittest survive; and the fittest is always that which is in harmony with nature,—that which is most fit to exist.

Some persons may ask: Don't you think the Banjo will "go down,"—decline?

I most positively answer, no, I do not think it ever will; not, at least, until the earth is peopled with entire new races, and our people have become, like Atlantis, the lost continent, submerged in the mighty deep and forgotten. In the language of another, when speaking upon a different subject, I will say,—“It has, indeed, and may hereafter, be violently assaulted by delusive opinions; but the opposition will be just as imbecile as that of the waves of the sea against a temple built on a rock, which majestically pours them back,

‘Broken and vanquished foaming to the main.’”

“FINIS CORONAT OPUS.”

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