

MUSIC.

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NEGRO MUSIC.

To one who has passed his childhood in the South, no music in the world is so tenderly pathetic, so wildly, uncouthly melancholy, so fraught with an overpowering *heimweh*, as that of the negroes. When he hears one of these quaint old airs, he needs but to close his eyes and the potent spell of the music revivifies the past. Old memories, that he had deemed forgotten, rise as if obedient to the voice of enchantment. He is again a child in the cradle, and his faithful old "mammy," as she rocks him, bends over him in the fire-light and croons:



Again he sees the dark river, lit up by the flare of burning pitch, and the dusky figures of the roustabouts, their white eyeballs gleaming, singing with stentorian voices while they load the boat with cotton, solo alternating with chorus:



O, far' you well old mistis.	Wa-a-aw.
I ai'n' come home tel Christmus.	Wa-a-aw.
I'm gwine fer ter bring some money.	Ya-a-as.

Or it may be that he is sitting upon the broad piazza in the moonlight, and there is borne to him by the evening breeze a distant chorus, rising and falling in unearthly,

NOTE: The following words may be sung to this air:

"O, de mugwump roosts on de hollow log,
And de snagwap sits in de tree;
And when I hear dat mlgfunk sng,
My heart is sad in me."

plaintive cadences, like the moaning of the wind or the cry of a lost spirit.



Genuine negro music is invariably in a peculiar minor, which differs from the civilized scale in two particulars; the sixth note of the gamut is omitted and the seventh is half a tone lower. Try over the specimen given above, making the F sharp, as it would be in modern music, and notice how completely the peculiar, plaintive charm vanishes. There are some other differences which cannot be represented in musical notation. For instance, the A in the fourth bar of the passage above is neither A nor yet A flat, but between the two. This scale is said to be that of the primitive races—of the Esquimaux, the Egyptians, the South Sea islanders. Traces of it may be found in Meyerbeer, Chopin and Grieg, composers who have made free use of *volkslieder*. I have no doubt that this music, like Voodooism, is a remnant of former idolatry. Doubtless many of these hymns have been sung for centuries before the shrines of fetishes in the dark jungles of Africa.

As to rhythm, a certain syncopation, represented by an eight and dotted quarter is common.

When the blacks came into contact with the major scale of the whites, they adopted it, preserving still the syncopated rhythm and the omission of one note of the scale (the seventh in the major.) For example:

“Swing low, sweet chariot.”



There is the same omission of the seventh in Scotch music.

Much of the so-called negro music is as little like what it is intended to represent as the words are like negro dialect.

It is quite a common thing for the negro women to im-

proviser words and music while they are at work, a sort of Wagnerian "melos," or endless melody, as it were. I have often heard them drone softly thus all through the livelong, bright summer day.

The music is an important factor in their religious (?) revivals. I shall never forget my experience at one of these meetings. The negroes had been wrought up almost to a pitch of frenzy by the fervid declamation of a "colored brother." They were all standing; the women kept up a continuous, subdued droning—their emotional state required some outlet: a huge stalwart darkey began a hymn in which all speedily joined; about fifty of them crowded about a young girl whom they wished to "bring through," singing at the top of their voices and swaying their bodies rhythmically to and fro. The object of their solicitude sat for a time in a sort of stupor. Everywhere she looked there were gaping throats and fierce eyes glaring at her like those of wild beasts. She was the center of attraction. Gradually she joined in the song and ended by falling into a convulsion of such violence that five of the men could with difficulty hold her. This "new birth" was received with many pious ejaculations of "Praise the Lord!"

"Previous condition of servitude" in certain reformatory institutions of the state, or porcine or other petty speculation does not in the least debar a brother from active participation in these exercises.

Various attempts have been made at collecting these our only *volkslieder* but they have not been very successful, for the reason that the tunes are usually arranged in four parts by the collector. Now, in the first place, these airs are always sung in unison, and in the second place the flattening of the seventh, as every musician will immediately perceive, renders it well-nigh impossible to harmonize them. As it is, the melody is usually sacrificed to the harmony. The melodies, pure and simple, with no attempt at improving them, should be collected and preserved; for, like Caucasian church music, they are rapidly disappearing before the triumphant march of "Gospel Hymns!"

When our American musical Messiah sees fit to be born

he will then find ready to his hand a mass of lyrical and dramatic themes with which to construct a distinctively American music.

I have said nothing of Gottschalk, since his music, so far as my limited acquaintance with it extends, seems to be rather that of the Cubans than that of the negroes.

In conclusion, I give two tunes, one of them almost purely African, the other evidently composed in the transition period between the old and new schools.

“I would not live always.”



“I will arise and go to Jesus.”



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