

TOPICS OF THE STAGE AS REVEALED IN WASHINGTON

"Blackface" Actors

A Roll Which Includes Many Great Names—The Origin of "Jim Crow" and His Famous Dance.

In an article contributed to these columns several months ago William Norris defended his descent into musical comedy by citing the fact of Edwin Booth's career as a minstrel. It was a chance thought, but it struck fire. Many a reader of *The Times* raised his eyebrows, paused a moment, and then read on in a much more sympathetic frame of mind. The *Times* was moved to investigate, and the result has been that its estimate of black-face acting has been much raised, as the following will certify.

After some searching of old records in the Congressional Library it seems fair to say that the first black-face acting in America was that of Lewis Hallam, the younger—a most acceptable Hamlet in later days—who appeared in New York May 25, 1789, as "Mungo." This character is the first "black" figure in the figures in "The Paddock," a comic opera for which Isaac Bickerstaffe wrote the words and Charles Dibdin the music. Mungo is a slave of a planter in the West Indies, and the truth with which Dibdin, himself often undertaking the role, portrays the negroes of the drama may be guessed from the following ballad, which Mungo sang, and which Lawrence Hutton quotes:

Dear heart, what a terrible life I am led!
A dog has a better than this shivered and fed.
Night and day 'tis the same,
My pain is delirium.

Me wish to de Lord me was dead!
The first American negro for stage use died early. In fact, no one ever undertook to rival Hallam with any success, and Mungo stepped aside two years later for Friday, the black man in "Robinson Crusoe." The part was first done in America by a Mr. Bancker, who played it in New York. Then came half a dozen actors in many roles, including what one historian considers the "birth of minstrelsy"—a performance in Boston in 1799 when a Mr. Graupner appeared after the second act of "Oroonoko," sang "Gay Negro Boy," and accompanied himself on an instrument called a banjo.

Edwin Forrest a Minstrel.

About twenty years before the playbills give any great name opposite that of a negro character. The first of them was Edwin Forrest, according to W. R. Alger's life of that actor.

Forrest was long a strolling player in the far West—Cincinnati and thereabouts—and in 1823 at the Globe, under the management of Sol Smith, he played a negro in a farce by Smith called "The Tailor in Distress." This role required Forrest to sing and dance, and he seems to have succeeded. For the audience paid him the compliment of terming him "a nigger all over." Mr. Alger says that Forrest was the first actor who ever presented on the stage the Southern plantation negro with all his peculiarities of dress, gait, accent, dialect, and "manner." Lawrence Barrett, who also wrote a life of Forrest, quotes the playbill of that evening, showing Forrest as a modern dandy in the first play; Cuffee, a Kentucky negro, in the second, and Sancho Panza in the pantomime of "Don Quixote."

Sol Smith, himself, as "three-fingered Jack," and Bernard Flaherty, as a "Negro Singer and Dancer," succeeded Forrest in the public eye. Flaherty holds the peculiar position of acting the negro to the great delight of his audience, because of his utter inability to lose his Irish dialect.

Edwin Booth joins the company of black-face artists in 1850. A year after his debut in the Boston Museum he gave an entertainment with John S. Clarke, a youth like himself, only seventeen years old, at the courthouse in Elizabeth, Md. They read selections from "Richelieu," "The Stranger," and "Julius Caesar," and sang negro songs, interspersed according to Mrs. Asla Booth Clarke—with appropriate dialogue, and accompanying their vocal attempts with the somewhat inharmonious "banjo and bones." The program of this performance is reprinted by Mrs. Clarke, together with an account of their distress or discovering that the real negro they had employed to post their bills had put them up all over the town upside down.

"Jim Crow" and Joe Jefferson.

Minstrelsy had meanwhile risen to some position on the stage. It seems to owe its origin to the instrument known and supply, but the instrument through which it came into existence was the well-known and historic Thomas D. Rice. Some time after 1839 Rice jumped into the widest public favor by virtue of his "Jim Crow" dances. By 1833 Rice had become a contributor of much importance, for in that year he and Joe Jefferson, the latter being then at the ripe age of four years, appeared together in a benefit performance at the Washington Theater. Little Joe, blackened and costumed exactly like Rice, was carried on the stage in a bag and emptied from it with this couplet from Rice:

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd have you to know
I got a little dinky here to jump Jim Crow.
"Jumping Jim Crow" was the secret of Rice's success. Along about 1833 Rice presented on the stage of Louisville a sketch based upon the manners and song of a negro stable man he had seen behind the theater. This man was an old and decrepit slave, who was employed to do odd jobs, and had assumed his master's name, Jim Crow. He was much deformed, and his legs were being drawn up high and his left leg stiff and crooked at the knee—so that he had a ludicrous limp. While at work Jim would croon a queer old tune, to which he gave words of his own. At the end of each verse he made a peculiar stop, "rocking the heel," and then sang this refrain:

Wheel about, turn about,
The way to Jim Crow,
An' dere I jump Jim Crow,
An' dere I jump Jim Crow.

Rice copied the movement and dance as accurately as he could, brightened the old man's song a little, and then appeared before his audience in Louisville. He was recalled the first night at least twenty times. Thus came into existence, according to the weight of authority, a character which has lightened the burdens of countless Americans, and now bids fair to be immortal. Rice subsequently removed to London and became a sort of Buffalo Bill. Mr. Ireland, noting his popularity in this country, says that he drew more money



WILLIAM COLLIER, "The Dictator," in Richard Harding Davis' Play.

to the Bowery Theater than any other performer.

Old Companies Give Way to New.

With the coming of Rice came also the minstrel performances which grace our own day. Excepting alone Mr. Godwin—whose connection with minstrelsy is not certain—these performances have enticed the attention of few men known to our stage as legitimate actors. But there may be some interest in noting that the first "band" of negro minstrels seems to have been organized in the boarding house of Brown, in Catherine Street, New York, late in the winter of 1832, and that it consisted of Dan Emmet, Frank Brower, Billy Whitlock, and Dick Pelham, all powerful personalities in the history of their art.

Christy's famous minstrels gave their first regular performance in 1846 and remained at one theater until 1854. Then came Buckley's "New Orleans Serenaders," "White's Serenaders," "Dryden's Minstrel," "Woods' Minstrel," "Sam Sharpley's Minstrel," "Tony Pastor's Minstrel," "Morris Brothers, Cotton and Murphy," and the companies of Reed, Hooley, Haverly, Dockstader, Pelham, Pierce, Campbell, Barlow Brothers, and Wilson, Thatcher, Primrose and West, and many others.

The minstrel of today are no inconsiderable company. But their calling has been much changed. It still obtains a great deal of its fame from its early days, when Forrest, Booth, and Jefferson were not superior to it, and when "Jim Crow" hobbled laughter into thousands of lives. Maybe it was Rice, himself, whom Thackeray heard, and of whom he wrote:

"I heard a humorous balladist not long since, a minstrel with wool on his head and an ultra Ethiopian complexion, who performed a negro ballad that I confess moistened these spectacles in a most unexpected manner. I have seen at thousands of tragedy queens dying on the stage, and explaining appropriate blank verse, and I never wanted to wipe them. They have looked up, be it said, at many scores of delirium without being dimmed, and beheld a sagabond with a corked face and a bold singer, strike a wild and happy note, which sets the heart thrilling with happy pity!" —A. D. A.

Past and Future.

Forbes Robertson proved that all the reviewers of other cities pronounced him to be no wonder that his business in such of those cities has been in steady crescendo. In Washington his first audience numbered not more than 200 or 250 persons. Saturday it filled the theater. Such is the force of great ability properly expressed.

One element in Mr. Robertson's equipment which advances him beyond most of his American competitors is his admirable reading. It is a common saying these days, that actors do not learn to read. Mr. Robertson certainly did. Not a word in all Hamlet's part was not memorized excepting those which were recalled up in explanation. Another factor in his success is his great ability to intensify a scene with little apparent emphasis. There is, of course, much emphasis, but it is not the emphasis of raised tones or much shouting. Most of all Mr. Robertson owes his triumph to a rare union of much intelligence and much magnetism. Whether he played "Hamlet" or "McCarthy's Mishaps," he must have made a deep impression. As he chose "Hamlet," however, the impression is likely to prove of value to him in the future.

Miss Elliott is an actress of great promise. She is already one of the best Ophelias ever seen in Washington. Her Maids in "The Light That Failed" confirmed the faith aroused by her earlier performance. She is not so good to look upon singly, as when she is with very much the more successful actors.

"The Wizard of Oz" gave much pleasure. The first mission of the stage is to entertain, and the Wizard fills that mission. A general vote would establish, however, that neither Montgomery and the greatest popularity, that situation belongs to the cow and the lion. Alice in Wonderland had no better playmates than these two quadrupeds of our time.

Next week brings the Metropolitan Grand Opera Company, after an absence of five years. Only three operas are to be presented, and they are, at the most, desirable works in the company's repertoire. They are genuine operas, however; they are to be superlatively sung, and they are extremely popular. The engagement will almost certainly attract audiences of the utmost brilliance and limited in size only by the capacity of the National.

Two other theaters offer first-class attractions of exceptional interest—the Co-

wick, Harry Senton, Wallace McCutcheon, Louise Allen, Nanette Comstock and Lucille Watson.

Chase—Harry Gilfoil and Vaudeville

Harry Gilfoil will face an audience already prepossessed in his favor at Chase's Theater tomorrow at the matinee, as Washington is his home. For years he was one of the chief specialties employed to invigorate the Hoyt farces, recently he was with the "Mr. Blue Beard" company, and now in vaudeville his accomplishments have placed him at the top of his line. He will present an original creation entitled, "Baron Sands, After an Evening at the Madison Square Garden."

"The Great Thurston," described as the world's greatest illusionist, is said alone to be worth the price of admission to lovers of magic and mystery. Ethel Levy, the wife of George M. Cohan, farce writer and comedian, of "The Four Cohans," will occupy third place with a musical offering in which she is unrivaled.

Her voice is said to be a rich, powerful, dramatic alto, and she is said to use it with the same degree of effectiveness as the late Helene Mora.

Charles H. Burke and Grace La Rue, formerly of the amusing antics of the Inky boys, will present themselves for applause and laughter in "The Silver Moon." Albert Bellman and Lottie Moore will have "A Gallery Goddess" on view as a means of exciting merriment. Anna Caldwell will have a snappy musical offering in "The Trickling Juggler," which will furnish the number. Motion views of a trip through Ireland will conclude the bill.

Academy—"Her First False Step."

A picture of rural life among the hills of New Hampshire, "Her First False Step," is the attraction at the Academy tomorrow night. The play is said to tell a reasonable, connected story, the incidents are said to follow naturally, and the action is said to be swift and rapid. Another reason given in favor of "Her First False Step" is the fact that it contains plenty of light and shade, comedy and serious elements being blended in a happy way.

"The Minister's Son."

A distinct departure from the usual melodramatic offerings will be made at the Empire Theater this coming week, when "The Minister's Son" will have its first Washington presentation. The theme is new, and yet the well-drawn characters exploit the characteristics of the genre. The play is a quiet New England village, the character of Simon Ray, the minister's son, as portrayed by W. B. Patton, is described as one of the most original and lovable types the stage has yet given.

"Rush's Bon Tons."

"Rush's Bon Tons" will appear at the Lyceum Theater next week and present two burlesques, entitled "The Bon Tons in Sunny Spain" and "Lady Killer."

Good-Buy, Musical Comedy.

A Few Signs that Better Times Are at Hand.

The unexpected may happen occasionally in the drama, as elsewhere. The last man to put his foot down and proclaim, "No more silly musical comedies," is George C. Kerkor, a musician who did more to bring this species of entertainment into popularity than any other person.

Everybody who goes to the theater has heard Kerkor's music. He wrote the score for "The Belle of New York," "The Telephone Girl," and dozens of other "shows." His earliest effort, made when leader of an orchestra, was the score of DeWolf Hopper's first stellar exhibit, "Castles in the Air."

"Now, Kerkor says, 'I am not sure that it is ripe for some one to make predictions of real comic opera.' He says further that "musical comedy as it has existed for some time is simply a thing of shreds and patches. The public is certainly tired of it—the successive failures of the present season prove that beyond a doubt." Next he observes: "The manager won't have singers, and in their companies they want nothing but pretty faces and comedians with comic mugs." Finally comes this: "I believe that the high class of people who like good music to make a return to the more legitimate forms of musical entertainment extremely desirable."

Kerkor is neither the only man nor the first man connected with the stage who has discovered the rift in the sky, for example, Frank L. Perley, Fred C. Whitney, George R. White, and Henry W. Savage came to Kerkor's conclusions some months ago, only they acted on them in a different way.

When a manager hears a squeak in the orchestra he does not make a troubadour of it, he says, "He quicky turns his knowledge to profit."

Tonight's Symphony.

Second Request Program With Miss Burbage as Soloist.

The Washington Symphony Orchestra, under Mr. De Kovar, will tonight give its seventh popular concert at Chase's Theater. The soloist of the occasion will be the well-known pianist, Alice Burbage, of this city.

The entire program will be as follows: Overture, "Merry Wives of Windsor".....Niicola Piano solo. (a) "Stammering" (Moods).....Sjogren (b) Rhapsody for strings No. 12.....Liszt Miss Burbage. (c) "Prestidigit".....Wagner (d) "Dragon Fly".....Strauss First Movement.....Schubert Intermission. Overture, "Merry Wives of Windsor".....Niicola Piano solo. (a) "Stammering" (Moods).....Sjogren (b) Rhapsody for strings No. 12.....Liszt Miss Burbage. (c) Funeral March.....Chopin (d) "Magnolia Blossom".....Spindler Rhapsodie Hongroise, No. 2.....Liszt

Theatrical War Not Over.

Independents Still Fighting and Syndicate in Need of Companies.

All is not harmony in the theatrical syndicate after all, notwithstanding the announcement of a declaration of peace between Stair & Havlin and Klaw & Erlanger a few days ago. It now transpires that Stair & Havlin are having difficulty in whipping their theaters into

line because local managers do not see why they should be asked to give up such great money makers as Mrs. Fiske, Mr. Hackett, Henrietta Crossman, Mrs. Leslie Carter, Blanche Bates, David Warfield, Isabelle Irving, and others. Every one of these stars is able to play to capacity business on the road, and the managers argue that it is not just to ask them to give up these attractions.

It was also calculated that such managers as James K. Hackett, Harrison Grey Fiske, David Belasco, Weber & Fields, Sam Shubert, etc., would immediately make overtures of peace, but it seems that this has not been done, and the fight has centered to a finish combat. The independents now say that in spite of Stair & Havlin's promise to open their theaters to high-priced attractions, they have brought just the same, obtaining theaters to play independently so that they are not in such a bad way after all.

The result of this coalition of Stair & Havlin and Klaw & Erlanger has been that although Klaw & Erlanger have no more attractions than formerly, they are compelled to fill the time of about thirty additional first-class theaters in different cities. These theaters will all be open next fall, and time must now be filled. If the independent attractions had fallen into line, as it was supposed they would, the task would have been easy, but with these managers still holding out and the syndicate successes few this year, the question arises:

"How is the syndicate going to fill these theaters?"

A National Theater.

Advisable Only if Preceded by Training School for Young Actors.

By JAMES K. HACKETT.

I have been asked many times if I favored a national theater. I do, under certain circumstances; but first, I believe a national university of dramatic art is necessary. Without specially trained players, a national theater would make slow progress and would probably defeat its own ends through sheer inability to show sufficient actors qualified to present properly the class of drama done, for instance, in Paris at the Theatre Francaise.

It would be too much to expect established stars to leave their own interests in order to help establish a national theater, while the younger generation of players has not the opportunity for all-round training which would prepare its various members to appear with advantage in the higher drama.

It is argued sometimes, even now, by players who have risen to the apex of their ambition, that acting cannot be taught. This is erroneous. One might as well argue that painting, sculpture, or even law, cannot be taught. Of course, the seed of talent is required; but this seed may be cultivated to luxuriant growth by careful training, by merely showing to the scholar those things which will lighten his path and enable him to study as deep as all true actors should study.

In the days of the old stock companies stage aspirants were compelled to serve long apprenticeships, carrying spears, going on in crowds, joining the shouts outside, thus learning the very rudiments of the stage before they were entrusted with lines to speak. Meanwhile they had the opportunity to play with and study the methods of the leading stars who traveled from city to city and appeared in the local companies, supported by the local company.

Modern stock training does not achieve these results. It is too much a matter of mechanical drilling on the part of the stage manager and parrot-like imitation on the part of the player. If the stage manager be a good one, the training is valued for a time. But good stage managers are rare. Most of them are content to follow the lines laid down in the original manuscripts of the plays, and as the time for the development of character and ensemble work is limited, the general tendency of modern stock work is to make a player careless, slipshod, and of a hurrying nature instead of developing in him the characteristics of a careful student of character-drawing and coloring.

Such training is like the study of drawing and perspective to a painter. While it serves to ground him in the rudiments of his art it will never make him a great painter if not supplemented by the study of life, color and composition. All these things lead me to say that before a national theater can be



JAMES K. HACKETT AND CHARLOTTE WALKER, in "The Crown Prince."

successfully established there should be an endowed university of dramatic art where the young player can learn technically, by practice, by constant work, the very beginnings of the art. No man can know too much about his business. Yes, by all means, a national theater, but first a national university of dramatic art.

No Hole in the Wall.

William Collier Wanted to Be "Bounced" in the Open.

William Collier, who is now under the management of Charles Frohman, has had many diplomatic dealings with shrewd managers, and, priding himself upon his own sharpness of wit, has always striven to be fully as tactful as his adversaries.

In one of his earlier seasons on the road he was engaged by a manager, Mr. X., to play an ordinary part. Mr. X. seemed affable enough—more than affable—to such an extent that he would take a player out to a course dinner, and just as the "opportunity" of making a "hit" was being discussed, the actor's heart, Mr. X. would suavely tell the deluded thespian that though he was playing or rehearsing the part very well, a change would be made.

A Feast of Tantalus.

This mode of discharging members of his company was employed for many years, and an invitation to dinner meant dismissal. Player after player fell into the trap, knowing full well what the courtesy meant, each hoping against hope that, in his case, at least, it would never happen. While with the company Mr. Collier had heard the story going round, and though playing his part with satisfaction, and on apparently good terms with his manager, yet he feared the ax, and slightly refused invitations to walk with him to the hotel.

Months went by and the dreaded invitation had not come. The young actor himself, as during his own short stay he had seen three men "walk the plank." One night, however, it rained. Men bundled themselves up in their ulsters and hurried along streets, hardly looking where they were going. Two of the "currying" men were Mr. X. and William Collier, and they bumped into each other at a street crossing.

No Appetite for "Con."

"Hello, Mr. X.," came Mr. Collier's salutation.

"Hello, Willie. Will you come into this 'little hole in the wall' to have a bite with me?"

"No, thank you," came the quick reply.

"If you want to discharge me, do it right out here. I've heard of that dinner game before, but I don't want to be kind, Willie. I only wanted to offer you the leading juvenile part."

Ivan the Terrible.

Mansfield's New Impersonation Greeted as an Unqualified Triumph.

Richard Mansfield has entered upon a brief season of four weeks' duration at the New Amsterdam Theater, New York city, before he starts westward on a tour which will take him to the Pacific Coast, and extends his engagements to the 24 of July. This city is included in the tour. The last half of Mr. Mansfield's present season in New York is to be devoted to his highly successful "Old Heidelberg," which he has until this time played uninterruptedly for three years, and to a few evenings with revivals from his celebrated repertoire.

Mr. Mansfield's first two weeks in New York are devoted to his production of Count Alexis Tolstoy's historical Russian tragedy, "Ivan the Terrible," given for "the first in English" at the New Amsterdam Theater, last Tuesday evening, March 1. The unanimous opinion developed by the reviews of this event is that Mansfield's triumph was unequalled. The role is exactly what his public has longed to see him do. It seems to be a great acting role from beginning to end, and Mansfield has therein extended his artistic achievements beyond the limits heretofore set by his most devoted admirers. James Humecker, of the "Sun," writes: "After witnessing Mr. Mansfield's wonderful performance last night, one feels like posing the question: Is there any character he cannot enact?"

Even New York Is Serious.

The greatness of the role of Ivan as illuminated by Mansfield's genius is emotionally represented by the note of serious, spontaneous and hearty praise

it has drawn from the New York critical faculty. For once the note of criticism is missing. With dignity, courtesy, and emphasis the student leader of their rhetoric proclaims the marvelous impression created by Mansfield's Ivan.

"The Herald" reflects credit upon itself in saying:

"Mansfield has often been called the modern Garrick, but it is difficult to say that versatile genius had so many sides to his dramatic character, passed so easily from one role to another, as does this second Garrick. It is a question whether or no London's idol voluntarily developed his versatility, willingly undertook, as his American successor, the study and creation of a multitude of roles. In those days there was a demand for constant change of bill, but in the present day the reverse is the rule, and the actor whose ambition is not of the highest order can readily limit the characters he plays, and need not seldom add new canvases to his dramatic gallery. Garrick was spurred on to activity by the demands of the times, but Mansfield voluntarily undertakes the earnest study and enormous work of new productions, and contented to do so, he might rest content for long periods with plays that are established favorites."

Role Greater Than Play.

The dominant greatness of Mansfield's performance of Ivan seems to have made history repeat itself. It has risen far above and partly eclipsed Tolstoy's play. This was the office in a lesser degree with his Baron Chervin, and Irving's characterization of Louis XI similarly left the play far behind.

The accounts are interesting. "Never has his virtuosity seemed more absolute," says John Corbin, in the "Times," "for his imagination is more authentic with more pronounced. His make-up and his mimicry as the terrible monarch of the dark ages of sixteenth century Russia were wonderful. The imperial stature was shrunken in upon itself by age and weakness. The beard of the Russian had been reduced to a few straggling white hairs. The voice alternated between a reedlike, senile quaver and a 'rootless' mumble. The hand trembled with palsy, and the whole frame shuddered at times with ecstatic emotion. The very mind was stamped on the features in the lines of obvious imbecility.

"A fevered delirium, you would say, pure and simple. And then, in a flash, some gust of passion or superstition would sweep across the soul, a craving for the supernatural or a remorseless and terrible anger against man, and the form and the mind of the old Czar would stand erect with pristine force that clutched at your heart and made you tremble."

Home and Mother.

A Theme for Song Writers Which Never Wears Out.

A ballad singer herself, Ethel Levy (Mrs. George M. Cohan) in the *Class* bill this week, tells some interesting facts concerning the men who write these tear-drawing songs of home, mother, etc.

"There are not so many ballad writers as there are spring poets and would-be dramatists, but there are too many now for the demand, and the consequence is that there is a cheapening of composition prices all along the line. It's hardly believable, but it is a fact, that most of the best ballad writers cannot write a line of music. Some don't know one note from another when they pick up a piece of music. Yet they will compose songs, both serious and comic, that will go like prairie fire and country over."

"When they compose their get hold of a pianist, and then they hum the melody to him and he will play it after them, and then they write it out. Next they have to get the words written, although most of them can do that themselves.

Inspiration, Not Education.

"They are a luckless lot, all of them, and the majority are devil-may-care fellows living from hand to mouth. I can't say how they come to adopt the 'profession,' for it is one after all, nor can I tell much about their methods except in that their words are written, they are as much an inspiration as a book, and when they have such experiences they are unhappy until they have given vent in composition to the melodies singing in their inner ears.

"Few of them 'commit to them at the comic, that will go like prairie fire and country over."

Maudlin, But Touching.

"One of the most interesting of books could be written about these humble song writers, and though you may think many of their words are trite, they really exert a great influence upon the masses and help keep alive the love of home, of valor, of friendship, and of the other elementary virtues. Many a man has been stopped in a career of vice by one of these pathetic songs. Go into a theater where they are sung and watch for the tears that will be furiously wiped away.

"Some of the great hits have made fortunes for the composer, but in most cases the publishers got all the money and the song writer merely pittance. The wisest of them publish their own works."

Hackett a Busy Man.

Actor and Manager With Offices in His Trunk.

No man on the stage today is as busy as James K. Hackett. He is always at work. Compared to his working accommodations Diogenes's tub was a commodious suite with a bathroom attached. Mr. Hackett's actual working quarters are in his trunk.

From this trunk, it may be said, at least three of the most important attractions of the American stage are directed, while one in England has also received attention. Every facility for saving time and making speed are called into service—the cable, the telegraph, the telephone—to keep the young actor-manager working. Constant touch with his attractions. Playing, as he does, at the time himself, he shows the keenest interest in his other attractions, hence his business. A large executive staff is employed, but he prefers to give every