

ORIGIN OF THE BANJO

Go' way, fiddle! folks is tired o' hearin' you a-squawkin';
Keep silence fur yo' betters!—don't you hear de banjo talkin' ?
About de 'possum's tail she gwine to lecter—ladies, listen!
About de ha'r whut isn't dar, an' why de ha'r is missin':

"Dar's gwine to be a' overflow," said Noah, looking solmen—
Fur Noah tuk The Herald, an' he read de ribber column—
An' so he sot his hands to wuk a-c'larin' timber patches,
An' 'lowed he's gwine to build a boat to beat the steamah Natchez.

Ol' Noah kep' a-nailin' an' a-chippin' an' a-sawin';
An' all de wicked neighbors kep' a-laughin' an' a-pshawin';
But Noah didn't min' 'em, knowin' whut wuz gwine to happen;
An' forty days an' forty nights de rain it kep' a-drappin'.

Now, Noah had done cotched a lot ob eb'ry sort o' beas'es—
Ob all de shows a-trabbelin', it beat 'em all to pieces!
He had a Morgan colt an' seb'ral head o' Jarsey cattle—
An' druv 'em board de Ark as soon's he heered de thunder rattle.

Den sech anoder fall ob rain!—it come so awful hebbly,
De ribber riz immejitly, an' busted troo de lebbes;
De people all wuz drowned out—'cep' Noah an' de critters,
An' men he'd hired to work de boat—an' one to mix de bitters.

De Ark she kep' a-sailin' an' a-sailin' an' a-sailin';
De lion got his dander up, an' like to bruk de palin';
De sarpints hissed; de painters yelled; tell, whut wid all de fussin',
You c'u'dn't hardly heah de mate a-bossin' 'roun' an' cussin'.

Now, Ham, de only nigger whut wuz runnin' on de packet,
Got lonesome in de barber-shop, an' c'u'dn't stan' de racket;
An' so, fur to amuse hese'f he steamed some wood an' bent it,
An' soon he had a banjo made—de fust dat wuz invented.

He wet de ledder, stretched it on; made bridge, an' screws an' aprin;
An' fitted in a proper neck—'twuz berry long an' tap'rin';
He tuk sume tin, an' twisted him a thimble fur to ring it;
An' den de mighty question riz, how wuz he gwine to string it?

De 'possum had as fine a tail as dis dat I's a-singin';
De ha'r's so long an' thick an' strong des fit fur banjo stringin';
Dat nigger shaved 'em off as short as washday-dinner graces;
An' sorted ob 'em by de size, f'om little E's to basses.

He strung her, tuned her, struck a jig—'twuz "Nebber min' de wedder,"—
She soun' like forty-lebben hands a-playin' all togedder;
Some went to pattin'; some to dancin'; Noah called de figgers:
An' Ham he sot an' knocked de tune, de happiest ob niggers!

Now, sence dat time—it's mighty strange—dere's not de slightest showin'
Ob any ha'r at all upon de 'possum's tail a-growin';
An' curi's, too, dat's nigger's ways; his people nebber los' 'em,—
Fur whar you finds de nigger—dar's de banjo an' de 'possum!