

CHRISTMAS EVE WITH UNCLE ENOS.

BY DANIEL C. BEARD.



TOM, Dick, and Harry were sitting around a big, blazing wood fire in a log farmhouse one Christmas morning, when their attention was attracted by the shuffling of feet and the thumping of a banjo.

"I thought Uncle Enos had broken his banjo," said one of the boys, after all three had listened for some time to the jollity going on among the colored people.

"That he did," answered another; "or, rather, it all went to pieces, like the one-horse chaise."

"You know," he continued, "the instrument was made of a big bottle-gourd, and the dry weather last summer cracked it all apart."

"Harry," exclaimed Tom, "listen! That's no gourd instrument; no sir-ree! it has much too fine a tone. I tell you, fellers, I'm going out to take a look."

As Tom arose and opened the door a blast of cold air and a rush of driving snow entered the room. "Shut that door!" shouted the other two boys, as they drew closer to the crackling fire.

Tom closed the door all but a crack; then, placing his mouth to the opening, he shouted: "Oh, Uncle Enos!"

There was no answer.

"Hew-alo! Hew-alo!" cried Tom, giv-

ing a call peculiar to the boys in that section of the country. "Hew-alo-h-h! Uncle E-e-e-nos!" he again shouted.

The music ceased, then the door to the building used as a kitchen opened, and a gray woolly head peered out.

"Dat you, Massa Tom?" queried the old man.

"Yes, you old rascal; come over here and bring your banjo," answered the boy.

A moment later the old darkey shuffled in, his dark, home-spun clothes dusted over with the wintry snow, matching the gray woolly head that Father Time had frosted with the snows of years.

"Bress my soul, honeys, it am a right smart snow-storm, shure 'nough," said the old man, closing the door behind him and shaking the glistening crystals of ice from his back. "I reck'n I looks like a black Santy Claus," he chuckled, as he removed an object from beneath his coat.

"He'a my banjo, Massa Tom," said the old man, displaying the musical instrument.

"Give us a tune, uncle, please," cried all the boys together, "and we will look at the banjo afterward."

Modestly seating himself upon the end of a log of wood in the chimney-corner, after many preliminary touches and tuning, during which process he would strike the string,

then hold the instrument up to his ear, Uncle Enos at last began to play.

First, he threw his head back and rolled up his eyes in an ecstatic manner; next, his foot commenced to move in time with the swaying of his body: gently the black fingers picked the strings, producing notes hardly audible at first, but gradually swelling to the well-known irresistibly contagious negro melody, and the three boys were all unconsciously patting with their hands and keeping time with their feet to an original American Christmas carol. As the song ended, Dick arose, and with a wink at Tom and Harry, quietly left the room.

"Dar now, honeys, how's dat for a banjo?" exclaimed the dusky musician, after the music had ceased, as he held out the quaint-looking object for the boys to examine.

"Well, I do declare!" cried Harry, "if uncle has not made it of a cigar-box, a broomstick, a bit of an old shoe, and a piece of clapboard!"

While Tom and Harry were examining into the mechanism of his home-made banjo, Uncle Enos was peering curiously around.

"Mars Tom, I don't see Miss Toe wid your log and de plum-pudding nowhar," broke in Uncle Enos, after he had surveyed the room and made sure that no mysterious lady with a log under one arm and a plum-pudding under the other was concealed in any of the corners.

"Who is Miss Toe?" asked Harry.

"Why, de lady you dun tole us 'bout," replied uncle, with an injured air.

"Oh, I see! You refer to the yule log, the mistletoe, and the Christmas plum-pudding," laughed the boy.

"To be suah I dos! Dat's what I sed," was the indignant retort.

Here Dick entered, and after muttering to the boys in a low voice that "things were about ready," he turned to their aged friend with, "Uncle, please present our compliments to the rest of the colored people, wish them a Merry Christmas, and invite them up to the house."

"Dat I will, Mars Tom;" and stowing his banjo under his coat, the petted old servant disappeared in the snow storm.

It was not long before the colored people came trooping in. There was George Washington Haze, Snowball Haze, his sister, Cassius, Aunt Annie, Andrew Jackson, Rose, and Black Kitty.

They ranged themselves against the wall, and gazed at the white-covered table and the Christmas greens. An immense hickory yule log blazed and spluttered in the ample fireplace. There was a toot on the dinner-horn without, the door flew open, and in came Tom and Dick, staggering under the weight of a plum-pudding. And *such* a pudding!

It was larger round than a wash-tub. A regular young Christmas tree grew from its top, while the combined wafts of spices and sweets that floated from its smoking sides caused a perceptible stir along the row of black faces, bright eyes, and shining teeth.

Andrew Jackson took one long look, as the object was carefully placed upon the table; then, turning his back to every one, he gave vent to his feelings by doing a double shuffle in the corner.

Suddenly appeared from the middle of the fire, but really from behind a quilt, a curious little old man all dressed in fur, a coon-skin cap on his head, a jolly red nose, and a long gray beard.

"De dev—! De Lor'! De Lor'!" cried Uncle Enos and Aunt Annie.

"Jimminy!" said Andrew Jackson.

"Golly!" cried Miss Snowball.

"Voodoo!" exclaimed Black Kitty, covering her head with her apron; when she ventured to put down her apron it was just in time to see Santa Claus flourish a big knife over the monster plum-pudding and cut out a slice, and sing out, in a jolly voice:

Fee, fi, fo, fum,
Cut the pudding, cut the plum;
Uncle Enos, come and see
What the pudding has for thee.

Uncle Enos came grinning up, for the sharp old darkey had detected something very familiar about the funny little Santa Claus, and he "wa'n't 'fraid of Mars Harry, nohow."

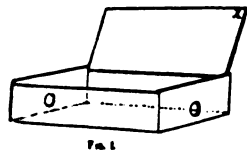
"Put your hand inside the pudding, uncle, and pull out the first thing you touch," said

Tom. In went the hand ; the arm followed, and disappeared inside that wondrous pastry. Slowly it was withdrawn : something was in the hand—something that took a great deal of pulling and tugging to bring forth. At last it came—a pair of gum shoes, all lined with red wool, and a cold-baked opossum, whose ears and tail were gayly decked with ribbons and rosettes. What a shout there was ! for Uncle Enos had a far-famed appetite for baked 'possum, and constantly complained that "rumactiz" made "miser-y" in his feet.

Aunt Annie came next, and drew out a mince-pie, smoking hot, and a bundle containing a brilliant bandana handkerchief and a pair of great hoop earrings, which pleased her greatly. One by one each of the company thrust their black hands into the cavernous depths of the monstrous pudding, and each was greeted with a shout as he or she displayed the prize secured. After the famous Christmas plum-pudding was emptied of its last present, the colored folks gathered together, each carefully holding their Christmas gift, and before departing gave three hearty cheers for Tom, Dick and Harry.

After these festive performances, the boys called Uncle Enos again to examine the wonderful banjo. Harry was right : there was not only a sweet tone to the instrument, but real melody when the hard fingers of the good old "darkey" picked the strings.

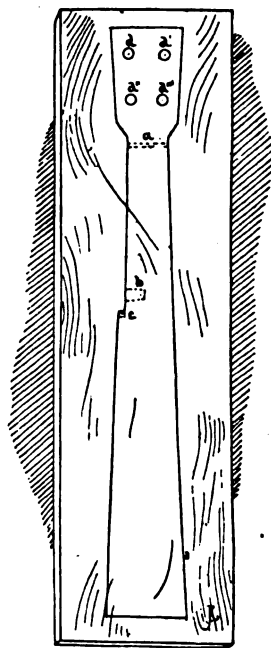
Fig. No. 1 shows the cigar-box, with holes bored through the ends for the stick, that supports the neck, to pass through. The bottom of the box is used for the top to the banjo. The lid



of the box may be left on, so that it can be closed or opened, as the taste or ear of the banjoist may direct.

Fig. No. 2 represents a pine board with a plan of the neck drawn upon it, ready to be sawed out. *D, d', d'', d'''* mark the spots where holes are to be bored through for the key to turn in. The place for the low bridge that separates the strings before

they enter the keys is marked by the dotted lines at *a* ; a rectangular slot should be cut here to fit the bridge (Fig. 5) into, as shown by the side-view of the neck (Fig. 9) ; *b*



(Fig. 2) is a key-hole in the side of the neck for the short string. See side-view (Fig. 9).

The slot for a small bridge for the short string of the banjo is marked by the dotted lines at *c* (Fig. 2). This little bridge is fitted in the slot, as shown in the side-view (Fig. 9).

Fig. 3 shows the broomstick, whittled down at one end, so as to fit the holes bored in the cigar-box, through which it must pass and protrude about

one-half inch at the butt. The top to the upper part of the broomstick is smoothed off flat, so that the neck (Fig. 2) may be securely screwed on to it, as is more clearly shown by the side-view (Fig. 9).

Fig. 4 shows what shape to make the keys. The latter must have holes (just large enough for the banjo strings to pass through) bored near the ends, as shown by the diagram. The keys may be made of any kind of wood—hard wood is the best.

Fig. 5 shows the bridge that fits into the slot *a* (Fig. 2) already described.

Fig. 6 is simply a piece of tin bent into the shape shown in the diagram, and made to fit over the butt-end of the banjo for the wires of Fig. 7 to pass over when the latter is put in place (see Fig. 10).

Fig. 7 is a piece of hard wood (Uncle Enos used leather), with five small holes bored through it for the attachment of the banjo strings, and a wire loop at the end that passes

over the piece of tin (Fig. 6) and is held in place by the tension of the strings and the protruding end of the broomstick at the butt of the banjo (Fig. 10).

The bridge proper is shown by Fig. 8. It

banjo is the 5th. And now we have reached the part where the boy who wants to make an Uncle Enos banjo will have to expend a few cents. Go to a dealer, and for the 1st and 5th ask for E strings. Let the first be a little

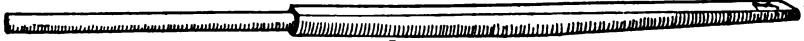


FIG. 3.

may be cut from a piece of soft pine in a few moments with a pocket-knife. Its place is in front of Fig. 7, where it spreads the five strings before they pass over the head and neck of the instrument.

heavier than the 5th. The 2d should also be an E string, but much heavier than the 1st. For the 3d, ask for a guitar B string. The 4th, or bass string, is manufactured especially for the now popular banjo, and care must be taken *not* to purchase the

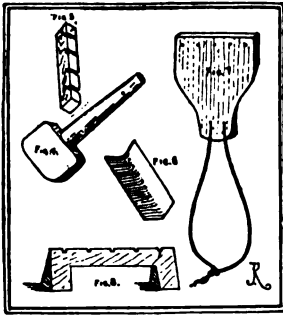
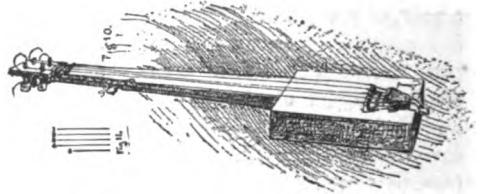


Fig. 9 shows the neck finished and all ready to be fitted to the box. The neck is fastened to its broomstick support by two screws, as may be seen in the diagram.



guitar D for the banjo A. or bass; both strings are silver, wound on silk, but the latter is much finer wound than the guitar D.

Harry, who is said by Tom and Dick to have a musical ear, made a banjo under

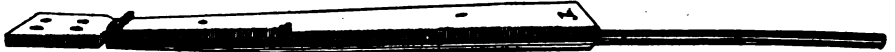


FIG. 9

Fig. 10 shows the finished instrument, all strung and ready for use.

Fig. 11 shows the arrangement of the banjo strings. The shortest string on a

the direction of his old friend Uncle Enos, and he says the whole thing cost him but half a day's labor and forty cents for strings.

