

Cow Gangsters, Says Coe

The Closing Chapters of the Life of 'Black Patti'

Sissieretta Joyner Jones Climbed the Heights of Fame, But She Gave It All Up to Come Back and Stay Here in Providence When Her Relatives Needed Her Aid.

BY F. C. TERRY

QUIETLY and unassumingly she lived here in the city where her parents had brought her as a small girl. And when she died here this month there were few who paid much attention to the brief obituary that told of the passing of Matilda Sissieretta Joyner.

But this was "Black Patti" who had died—the little lady of color who had had her start in Sunday school entertainments here and then gone on to fame on the concert stage as one of the greatest artists of her race.

In one week she sang to 75,000 people in Madison Square Garden, and she appeared before 300,000 at the Buffalo Exposition. She sang before several Presidents and was a White House guest. Dame Nellie Melba and other famous men and women were her friends, as autographed photographs attest. How her race looked up to her can be imagined from the fact that the "Green Pastures" company asked to be allowed to visit her in a body when they were in Providence for a week.

Many of the greatest colored actors, musicians and composers started in her companies, including Williams and Walker; Rosamond Johnson, the great composer; Richard B. Harrison, the "Lord God" of "Green Pastures"; Whitney Brothers, stars in that same play; Ernest Hogan, comedian and composer; Harry Burleigh, composer; Bob Cole, composer, and a long list of others.

All of the acclaim that was hers in her public career, however, she gave up years ago when she returned to this city to see that her grandmother and mother, ill, were cared for. After international concert tours she settled here quietly. "Black Patti" became again just Sissieretta Joyner.

WHERE SHE GOT HER SOBRIQUET

Although Providence had been her home since early childhood, she was born in Portsmouth, Va., Jan. 5, 1868, coming here when a small child with her father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Joyner.

In the schools here she was known as "Sissy" and "Tilly", and the children were very fond of her. One schoolmate said the other day, "I used to love singing teacher day, Sissy's voice could be heard above

the rest." According to another life-long friend, she really started public singing in the Sunday school of the Pond Street Baptist Church when we had entertainments and little affairs.

When 15 she began to actually study singing at the Providence Academy of Music under the direction of M. Mouros and Baroness Lacombe. At 18 she went to Boston to continue her lessons at the New England Conservatory of Music. Later she studied in New York city, one teacher being Madame Louise Capiani.

The name of "Black Patti" was given to her by the New York Clipper after she had sung with the great Levy's band at Wallick's Theatre in New York. It was said "She sings like Patti, without the slightest visible effort."

"BOY, KEEP IT FOR POCKET CHANGE"

When very young she married Richard Jones. The one child born to them did not live long. This was a terrific sorrow to Madame Jones. She was fond of children and in her later days took in homeless children to board.

Richard Jones simply could not stand prosperity and a divorce was secured. Madame Jones was granted the right to resume her maiden name. A story is told which is said to be typical of Mr. Jones. In a hall where a concert was being given he stationed a young man to collect the money at one door and he at another, where "Black Patti" was singing. After the concert, the youth sought him out saying "You didn't take the money!"

"How much is it?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Nearly twenty dollars!"

"All right," answered Mr. Jones, "keep it for pocket change, boy."

Major Pond who piloted Henry Ward Beecher, H. M. Stanley, George Kenman, Sir Edwin Arnold, Bill Nye, Mark Twain and George W. Cable and other notables was Madame Jones's manager for a long time. It was he who presented her at Madison Square Garden.

"Black Patti" sang to 7000 on Feb. 22, 1893, in Talmadges Tabernacle in Brooklyn, N. Y.; and one day in August to 12,000 in Congress Hall Park. Her singing was one of the big attractions at the World's Fair

in Chicago in 1893 and at the Great Actor's Fund Benefit in New York.

INVITED BY HARRISON TO THE WHITE HOUSE

President Harrison in February, 1882, invited Madame Jones to appear at the luncheon in the blue room of the White House. Mrs. Harrison presented her with a bouquet of White House orchids. Later she appeared at the houses of Chief Justice Fuller, Senator Andrews and other dignitaries. She sang before President McKinley and President Roosevelt.

Her first foreign appearances were made at Berlin, the many cities to follow were Paris, Cologne, Munich and Milan. She was received with great enthusiasm and applause in Europe. Under Charles Matthews she toured South America. Voelckel and Nolan formed the world famous "Black Patti Troubadours" in 1895 which toured the United States, Canada, Mexico and Cuba.

When Madame Jones came to Providence to care for her relatives she intended to return to the stage but she would not leave them ill. Her grandmother passed away and later her mother, but she had given them every comfort and devotion, her friends say. Naturally reserved, she became more so as the years passed on and she never made but one more stage appearance and that was at Grand Theatre, Chicago.

A smile would wreath her face when one discovered her identity, but she positively would not talk of her glory. A friend who spent years in the family says her disposition was wonderful. She was always the same. In face of adversity she would smilingly say, "The sun is shining." Even during her suffering it was the same.

PROVIDENCE GAVE HER A MEDALLION

She lived a retired life at her home on Wheaton street, scarcely ever going out. The homeless children and a parrot brought by her from Argentina 28 years ago, were her companions.

Recently when Green Pastures played here, Madame Joyner refused to allow them to visit her in a body, but at the personal appeal of "Tutt" Whitney and Mr. Harrison, who had toured with her, she did attend a performance, the whole company according her worshipful courtesy.

Once she remarked "I woke up famous after singing in Madison Square Garden and didn't know it." In later years she knew she was

famous but certainly did not want others to know it.

To one seeing, occasionally, a sweet faced, modestly dressed, unassuming lady of color walking along the city streets—one would not dream that here walked one who had sung before presidents, kings and queens by command, who had been presented with countless medals and scrolls of appreciation from nobility, from various countries and to whom the citizens of Providence gave a medal.