Afric-American Picture Gallery.  

By ETHIOP.

The reader will remember, that we parted company in the upper chamber of a lone Hut, in the midst of the Black Forest at the dead of night to take rest and repose. Ere the dawn of the next day, both eyes were wide open and I started on a tour of observation.

Through a small window, so high, as to be beyond reach, the only aperture discernible to the outer world, came a grey streak of morning light to my pillow, and roused me from my bed. I up and hastily made my toilet such as it was, the best perhaps that could be made in a mountain fastness, and ascended by a ladder to the roof. I shall never forget the scene that burst upon my view. The peak of the Black Forest Mountain, for such it was upon which the solitary house stood, touched the very clouds, while the Ocean with here and there a massive ship upon its dark green bosom, though many miles distant, seemed to roll at its base. Crag on crag lay piled on every hand and vale outstretching vale; and beyond as it was early autumn, the sere and yellow leaf painted the otherwise vast green forest top with indescribable beauty. The morning breeze with a purity and freshness known only to mountain regions, sighed forth its soft music, so sweetly, that the feathered tribe, and they were legion—were constrained to join in with their unerring notes; while the clear, the squirrel, and the rabbit danced and skipped o'er steppe, crag and glen with laughing joy. A few moments, and the sun, like a mighty angel came hastening up, as it were, from out of the Ocean; and with his strong presence gilded the whole scene in an instant. So, impressed with what I saw, ere I was aware, a reverie stole over me; and I know not how long it would have held me, but for a voice from below, calling me away. It was the old man of the Forest summoning me to the morning repast; which to be brief, was all the most fastidious taste could have desired, and far beyond any thing I could have imagined.

Breakfast over, the old man Bernice, for such was his name, retired; but returned after a few moments, garbed in a red flannel gown, blue cap and black sandals; giving a grotesque, yet a most commanding appearance. Holding in his hand a lighted lantern, he advanced and mildly said; now my son, if you like, you may accompany me. So saying he led the way through a narrow passage to what appeared from the house top, a mere adjacent outbuilding. A stranger might have passed through this passage a thousand times without so much as imagining that the huge rough stone laying almost in his pathway covered the mouth of a famous cave.

At a slight touch from the old man's hand this stone rolled away as if by magic, and revealed a deep, dark Cavern. With a firm step he began to descend a ladder and I followed. Down, down, down; and long was it ere we reached the bottom; and when we did so, we were brought directly upon a massive door which like the stone above, yielded to the touch of the old man's magic hand. We entered a dark and spacious apartment through which old Bernice grouped to the centre and held the lighted lantern up to a large lamp which depended from the ceiling. What a transition!!! The dark and sandless cavern now revealed all surroundings of the most studied and life-long Artist. Bust, statues, statuettes; landscapes, portraits, fancy pieces; paints, pencils, pallets, mallets, chisels; half finished sketches, studies in plaster; all, all lay in profusion on every hand.

Prominent on a table near the lamp lay a fine duplicate portrait of our lit-
told Tom; our Gallery Boy, which I hung up just before I left for the Black Forest. The whole truth flashed upon my mind in an instant. Mine host was an Artist; and the executor of that beautiful likeness. “My son” said the old man as he perceived my astonishment, “though I have long since left the restless, busy crowd, I have not been unmindful of its jostlings. In this place, far from man’s baseness, and man’s vile injustice, have I labored; and it has been to me, a labor of love; a labor too, not without its reward. Much that I have done with pencil and chisel—(I say it not in a boastful spirit,) will yet not only see the light, but command the just approbation of even the enemies of my race. I shall be gone, but these,” said he, pointing to his works around him, “these shall live after me.”

He then seated himself before his Easel, stretched his canvass, and with brush and pallet commenced the labors of the day;—saying at the same time in a manner as bland as it was touching.—“Oblige me my son and amuse also yourself by an examination of some of these my much cherished creations trifles—many of them—still I regard them with the affection of children. Some of them recall to mind some of the dearest spots of earth to me; spots, which, if not for them, would long since have faded from my memory.” I soon entered upon my survey; and for the hours,—(and how swiftly did they fly,)—that the old man plied at his work I reveled and feasted my mind upon the splendors about me.

Here I found a statue or there a bust that might have done credit to the conception of a Canova or the hand of an Angelo. Here hung a landscape, or half concealed, there lay a portrait or a Scripture piece or fancy sketch, that might have excited the envy of a Raphael.

Among other things, my attention was arrested by a new curiosity. It was a Tablet of stone which mine host informed me was dug out of the mountain peak of the Black Forest, but disclaimed all further knowledge of it. It is of brown sand stone, thirty-six inches square, and three in thickness, engraved on one side only; and having when found the engraved side downward.

The words are curiously spelt by the aid of 41 singular, new and beautiful characters, or letters, each representing a distinct sound; and so many only are employed as are necessary to make up each word.

I have by dint of hard study, been enabled to make out its contents; but of its history or origin, or aught else of it, I leave for the learned in such matters. It certainly challenges the attention of the Historian, the Ethnologist, and the Antiquarian. Is it fiction, is it history, is it prophecy? Who can tell?

I herewith present a duplicate of the copy I made on the spot.

YEAR 4,000.

THE AMERICANS, OR MILK WHITE RACE

1. Now hear oh ye who dwell in this age of pure light and perfect liberty; and marvel not when I tell you that there were once such things as slaves in the land; since even the word slave is no more mentioned among the children of men.

2. And these same slaves were human beings held in bondage—yea cruel bondage, against their will, and against the dictates of common humanity; and were subject to purchase and sale, like unto beast of burden and like unto merchandise.

3. Nor marvel not that these slaves were whipped with great gads, and were driven to and fro in gangs and in chains, as we read of in our books, the beast of burden were in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; yea they were whipped often without offense even unto death.

4. And be ye not puffed up nor proud in spirit, oh ye sons of noble fathers because ye now possess the land; and oh ye beautiful and refined
daughters of virtuous mothers, be ye not vain overmuch because this land is now yours for an inheritance forever.

5. Nor be ye enraged, none of you, because ye hereby learn that your ancestors were these slaves, and subject to this hard bondage.

6. And give ye heed now while from this Tablet of stone, which your fathers made; [and other tablets have they made also] I speak to you, and tell you what manner of people possessed the land and bought and sold and held your ancestors and so despitely used them.

7. And lo and behold, as one appeared, so appeared all of them. They had milk white skins, and their faces were like the chalk of foreign hills, yea like unto the evil spirit; and their hair was long and straight and uncomely; and in hue as the yellow or red clay of our fields.

8. And their faces were long and narrow, and their noses sharp and angular, and their nostrils thin; so also were the lips of their sunken mouths,

9. They had sharp white teeth, like unto the teeth of the shark; and their eyes were blue as the cloudless sky, and sometimes leaden as when it is overcast; and their brows were large even unto the hiding of their eyes; and they were terrible to look upon, yea even fearful.

10. And these people, long ruled in the land, and their hand was the hand of iron, and their hearts as the stones of our valleys.

11. And though they had great energy, and their wills were like unto the oaks of our forest, their unscrupulousness was great, yea as huge as our mountains; and their consciences were less than a span and harder than the diamond.

12. They built them large cities, and made great attainments in science and art; and were cunning workmen, and wonderful tillers of the soil, making it yield its abundance.

13. And they made them great ships and many; so much so, that the seas were whitened with their sails; and they sent great burdens out of their land; and they got in return great riches.

14. And they builded also gorgeous temples in which they worshipped the Gods of their own making, while they professed to worship the true God; all of whose known laws they violated, and did but evil in his sight daily.

15. And your forefathers, they would not so much as permit them to enter the seats of their temples though they worshipped the true God, nor at their solemn feasts; but compelled them to stand afar off, because they had great hatred and prejudice against your forefathers.

16. And this people waxed fat and begat great pride, and clothed themselves in fine linen and black cloth every day; and their hearts became more and more filled with the world and the lust thereof.

17. And they said, who is like unto us? We are the great and the mighty ones of the Earth, and have a great mission to perform. We will level the hills and fill up the valleys; and will lay the mountains low, and make the path of the land straight, and they did so.

18. And we will lay on the path iron of our own workmanship and swift running vehicles will we put thereon, so that when the warm breath of the water puffeth at them they will run with swiftness and we will add to our cities and increase our comforts; and they did so.

19. And they wrapped themselves up in their ease and luxury in hopeful security; and their hand slackened; and great physical and mental weakness came over them; and many changes came in among them; so much so, that your forefathers looked upon them with much concern.

20. Yea their hair darkened, so also did their eyes and their skins; and they said unto your forefathers let us come in among you and be of you and partake of your substance lest before our time.
21. And your forefathers did so; for they had increased much in substance and in numbers; and much in strength and in wisdom also; and had gained great possessions, yea all the land.

22. And these people dwindled at last to leanness; and their bones became small, and thin, and so did their statues; and their minds became feeble, so much so, that they wist not what they did; and finally they disappeared from among the children of men.

23. They staid no longer than to accomplish their work and then vanished; yea as a cloud did they vanish from the face of the whole land; yea the land which your fathers have since possessed and enjoyed.

24. And it is a great grief unto this day that so little, beyond these tablets of stone, your fathers have left unto you that so little is now known of these Amecans or that a people once possessing so many peculiar traits, should have passed away without leaving to your fathers some greater memorial of their existence.

25. But wo was unto them; and their works with their evil deeds seem to have perished with them.

Simultaneous with my finishing this transcript, old Bernice rose from his labors. He lighted his lantern and saying 'come my son,' stepped to a side door hitherto unperceived by me but which like the first instantly yielded to his touch. We now turned into a narrow passage and continued in its subterraneous windings some fifty yards to another massive door, which like others swung back at the old man's bidding. But what a change!!!

From the artistic, the beautiful and the curious, we had just quitted, an object the most appalling my eyes ever beheld stood before us. Was it a man, was it even human?—When we entered he stood crouched in one corner of his cell. His figure was gaunt and tall; his head large and covered with long snow white hair, which hung in disordered masses over his pale and shriveled face; and through which his glaring eyes kept up a most terrible rolling; while his mouth was white with foam. He soon commenced an incoherent muttering the only words distinguishable was Bernice, Bernice!

Suddenly he made a fearful lunge for me. I started back. It was a useless start. A chain was there. He could go no further. Then he raved, he shrieked, he tore his hair; then he pronounced the most awful imprecations upon his captor, upon all mankind, upon his Maker; then he subsided into the same low and unintelligent murmur again, Bernice being the only distinguishable word.

Suddenly he knelt; then he prayed; then he sprang up, then he bounded the length of his chains, then he stamped them in the earth, then he gnawed at their links; then he begged, then he pled incoherently for something; I thought it was for deliverance and instinctively stepped forward as though to give it. Stay!! commanded Old Bernice in voice that I shall never forget. A stout heart only saved me from immediate petrification on the spot; and when my eyes met his I confess I had some misgivings as to my own safety. And wherefore this man, said I.

'This man! he is a murderer!' said he; and the old man's eyes kindled almost to a living flame. 'He is a murderer! ' exclaimed he again.

'The wretch once had wealth and all the influence it brings; he once hall power and he exercised it like a fiend. The oppressed and helpless were the victims of his fiendish spirit. Many, too many of God's poor have, alas, felt his diabolical hand. I was one of his victims, and dearly, dearly have I paid the cost. I had a wife and children.

'He held them as his property. Would you ask the fiend where they now are; or shall the sigh of the winds as they come up from the rice swamps answer? I had a son, a son dear to me, though he held him too as property. Despite oppression he had grown to beautiful manhood.
Would you ask him where that son now is? Shall I answer that? Listen! That chained hand the wretch now lifts toward heaven and you for undeserved mercy, that chained hand struck down that son to the earth; and with that other hand withered as you see it, the wretch blew out the brains of my child without provocation and without warning; and would not so much as allow his body burial.' The old man made a pause, and I took advantage of it and said something about the law, redress, justice &c. 'Laws!' exclaimed he almost frantic. 'Laws!! What laws except to oppress them harder? What laws except to pursue and rob them from the cradle to the grave, yea even beyond both. The wretch there,' said he pointing more significantly than ever at the miserable object before us, 'the wretch opulent in lands, opulent in human chattels, received the general approbation of his associate Tyrants for his acts.'

'But no matter,' continued he, 'I made my resolve and came hither. An interval was permitted to pass—a short one. He was brought hither, by what means I need not say. He was placed in my power. We confronted each other. It was a sore trial to him. We conversed much and freely. He spoke of the wrong done him; I spoke of mine. He spoke of his wife and children left behind. I reminded him of the sale and separation of mine. He spoke of his position in society and the wide difference between us. I told him that his superior advantage and position, so far from making him a wiser, and better man, had availed him little,—worse than little, since it had made him a robber of the helpless, an oppressor of the weak and a murderer of the innocent. He plead earnestly for his rights. I told him he had no rights that I was bound to respect. He then begged hard for his liberty. It was a strange sight;' said he, 'to see a man begging for liberty from one of a class of whom he had his whole life long deprived of not only liberty but all that makes life worth having. He made large promises for that liberty. I told him that they were useless that he had now nothing to give; that he no longer possessed even himself; that his pleadings were now as useless as mine once were; that I was now the master and he the slave. I then assigned him his fate, and bid him prepare to meet it.

Long years have since gone by. I yet have him in my possession. I will not harm a hair of his head; but so long as he lives that gloomy cell shall be his prison-house, and these chains he is now bearing with him in his sleeping moments and in his long waking hours, shall be his only earthly companions; and when he dies, as die he must, I will cast his carcass forth to gorge the Vultures that sit upon the mountain peaks of the Black Forest.'

'Bernice, Bernice,' imploringly murmured this white trembling Felix and his knees smote together with very fear, as he stood before his sable master and heard his words.

The huge drops of perspiration rolled down my face as I said to myself what a terrible fate for a once proud tyrannical, wealthy white man who regards the black man as but a poor imbecile ignorant feeble thing, not so much even as the beasts that perish. As the wretched fiend, for such I too now regarded him, commenced again his wild and loud imprecations, so loud that it seemed like a thousand voices, old Bernice drew himself up to his full height, and with a commanding gesture waved me to retire, and following said 'my son, thou hast as yet seen but little of this place;' and then turning round with one touch of his hand the heavy door sprang back to its place, and all sounds within that cell were hushed from the world.

(To be Continued.)