

NO PLAYS EXCHANGED

Bugbee's Popular Plays



The Darktown
Social Betterment
Society

By

W. T. NEWTON

PRICE 25 CENTS



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SYRACUSE, N. Y.

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Bugbee's Popular Plays

The Darktown Social Betterment Society

By W. T. NEWTON

*Author of "Uncle Eben's S'prise Party" and "Uncle Peter's
Proposal."*

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THE WILLIS N. BUGBEE CO.

SYRACUSE, N. Y.

PS 635
Z9 N 589

The Darktown Social Betterment S'ciety

CHARACTERS

- EBENEZER GOODFELLOW, *President of the Society.*
 - RASTUS BLINKERS, *Secretary of the Society.*
 - EPHRAIM SNODGRASS, *Afflicted with boils.*
 - PETE SIMMONS, *Leader of the Quartet.*
 - JULIUS CAESAR SHINBONE, *the Village Doctor.*
 - SAMUEL ADAMS JACKSON, *the Village Postmaster.*
 - ELIJAH ELIHU SASAFRAS
 - RUFUS BIGGERS
 - JEREMIAH JOSEPH HARDKNUCKLE
- } *Other Members.*

TIME OF PLAYING—Thirty Minutes.

COSTUMES.

Some of the members may wear old, patched clothing, others ill-fitting or ridiculous appearing garments. High standing collars with bright colored ties may be worn.

SCENE: *A plain room with wooden bottom chairs or benches. A common table is at rear center at which the president and secretary are seated. All members except DR. SHINBONE are present.*

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The Darktown Social Betterment S'ciety

EBENEZER. De meetin' ob de Darktown Social Betterment S'ciety will now come to ordah. Yo' gemmans will all fin' seats as soon as possible or a little sooner.

SEVERAL. Yes, sah, we'se findin' 'em quick as we can.

RASTUS. Heah, yo' Rufus Biggers, you can't hab two chairs.

RUFUS. Wat's de reason I can't?

RASTUS. Case dar ain't more'n enuff to go round as 'tis.

EBENEZER. You gemmans will please restrain yo'selves from further exhortation. Does yo' heah?

SEVERAL. Yes, sah, yes, sah!

ELIJAH. I tink we is already fo' de show, Mr. President.

EPHRAIM. Mistah President, if it don't make no diff'rence I'd rather do my sittin' down a standin' up.

EBENEZER. Wat fool idea is dat? Yo' know de rules of de society, don't you?

EPH. Yes, sah, I knows de rules all right, but "dar's a reason."

EBEN. Well, wat am de reason?

EPH. I'll answer dat question by axin' anudder one. Hab yo' ebber read de Bible, Mistah President?

EBEN. I—I—I reckon I hab perused it once or twice.

EPH. Well, den mebbe yo' has read ob a man by de name of Job?

EBEN. Yes, sah, I'se heard of Job.

EPH. An' yo'se heard 'bout his great affliction, habn't yo'?

EBEN. I reckon I has.

EPH. Well, den yo' knows jes' wat's de matter wif me. I'se de proud possessor ob fourteen—

JEREMIAH. Chilluns?

EPH. Lawd no, not chilluns. I'se de proud possessor ob fohteen biles an' I begs to be 'scused from settin'.

EBEN. I reckon under de circumstances dat we'll hab to dispense wif de rules dis time and allow yo' to remain standin'. Now I'd lak to know if de membahs am all present.

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RASTUS. I reckon dey am all heah ceptin de ones wat am absent.

EBEN. Dat suah was a mos' brilliant remark. Ob co'se dey am all heah 'ceptin' de ones wat am absent. Eb'rybody wat am in dere right minds knows dat. Wat I wants to know is, who am not present.

RUFUS. Den why don't yo' say wat yo' mean? How's we gwine to guess at yo' meanin'? Dey am mostly all heah 'ceptin' Moses Peachblow and Brudder Jones.

EBEN. An' wat am de reason fo' dere absentation, I lak to know? Can anybody splain de reason?

PETE. Yes, sah, I reckon I can.

EBEN. Well, den, proceed wif de splainin'.

PETE. Yo' see, it am jes' dis way: Mistah Peachblow he done hab a mos' important errand to perform ober to Coonville Corners dis ebenin'.

EBEN. I should say dis am a mighty poor night fo' Mr. Peachblow's errand. De moon am shinin' too brightly.

PETE. Huh! Wat diff'rence does dat make? Dis am no spring chicken deal.

RUFUS. Mebbe it am an old rooster or a turkey gobbler wat he am after.

PETE. I should say not. It am an insult to de lady.

RASTUS. To de lady! Wat lady?

PETE. To de lady wat he am gwine to marry—Miss Dinah Carolina Lilybud.

SEVERAL. Haw! haw! haw! Moses Peachblow gwinter marry Miss Dinah Carolina Lilybud. Haw! haw! haw!

PETE. Yes, sah, dat's a fac'. He got de license dis mornin'.

RUFUS. Whar'd he get money fo' de license?

PETE. I dunno, anyway he an' Elder Jones started ober dar afoot long 'bout fibe o'clock. De elder am gwinter perform de ceremony.

RUFUS. Golly, yo' wouldn't cotch me walkin' fohteen miles to marry Miss Lilybud. I wouldn't walk fohteen inches. She has got a form like a haystack an' a face like a crocodile.

PETE. 'Taint anyways likely she'd look at yo' if yo' did walk ober dar.

SAM. I reckon we all done get a chicken dinnah on de strength ob dat.

EPH. If de membahs am all heah wat am comin' why not begin de meetin'?

SEVERAL. Dat's wat I say.

RUFUS. Dey *ain't* all heah. Ol' Doc Shinbone ain't got heah yet.

RASTUS. Suah nuff, we done fo'got de ol' Doc.

LIGE. Well, heah he comes now. Talk erbout de debbil an' he's suah to be aroun'.

(*Enter DR. SHINBONE.*)

DOC. Wat's dat? Who yo callin' de debbil?

LIZE. N—n—nobody—er—dat is—I—I meant to say dat—er—yo' can allers heah de angels' wings a flutterin' when de angels am a comin'.

DOC. Dat's different. Dat's a mighty nice way to put it.

SAM. I say—does yo' feel anyt'ing ob yo' wings a sproutin', Doc?

DOC. Dey ain't got big enuff so's yo'd notice 'em yet.

RUFUS. I wondah how dey'd look if de doctor had wings.

RASTUS. Why, suah, dey'd look like chicken wings.

RUFUS. Wat kin' of chickens?

RASTUS. I dunno—mebbe Plymouth Rock or Brahma rooster or—wat kin' was dem de jedge had tooken las' week?

DOC. Huh! Yo' fool! How dey would look—white leghorn wings on a coal black niggah.

EBEN. If yo' folks am gwinter hab a meetin' heah dis ebenin' yo'll hab to come to ordah right away. Does yo' understand?

SEVERAL. Yes, sah, we'se ready.

RUFUS. Proceed wif de business, Mr. President.

EBEN. Befo' we proceed wif de reg'lar business ob de meetin' we will listen to a song by one ob our illustrious townsmen, Mr. Rufus Johnson Biggers.

RUFUS (*rising*). I jes' wants to say dat if my song gets too pathetic an' any ob yo' feels like sheddin' tears dat yo' will fin'

de cuspidors in de cornah, or mebbe de pres'dent will excuse yo' from de room till yo' gets froo weepin'. De las' time I sung it my mother-in-law mos' cried herself to death. We had to hab a doctor four times a day fo' a week.

RASTUS. Say, I'll gib yo' ten dollahs to come ober to my house an' sing dat song.

RUFUS. Jes' wait till yo' heah it. De title ob it is, "De Las' Time Dat I Saw Her Was in Watermelon Time." (*Sings a comic negro song. Applause may be given.*)

EBEN. De nex' on de program is an article by Mr. Jeremiah Joseph Hardknuckle. It am entitled, "Our Village an' What It Needs," an' I expects Mr. Hardknuckle am gwine to tell us some mighty plain trufs. Mr. Hardknuckle will proceed.

JEREMIAH (*rises and unrolls a huge sheet of brown paper.*) Ladies an' gemman—or ruther, I mean de gemman of dis s'ciety:

De Village ob Darktown am a bery fine place to lib in, It am bounded on de norf by de mill pond, on de east by Rattlesnake Creek, on the souf by the one-hoss railroad, an' on de wes' by de graveyard. Dere am leben houses in de village. We hab one church wif de Rev. Deuteronomy Jones fo' de pastor; one blacksmith shop conducted by our esteemed pres'dent, Mr. Ebenezer Goodfellow (*cheers*); a lil' red schoolhouse nex' to de church, where Miss Priscilla Simmons teaches de young pick-aninny ideas how to shoot, an' den we has a grocery store an' pos' office under de skillful operation of Mr. Samuel Adams Jackson (*cheers*). Besides dese we mustn't fo'get our good doctor, Julius Caesar Shinbone, M. D., who has cured de people ob dis village of de stomachache, an' de backache, an' de toofache an' de lumbago, an' de rheumatiz, an' all de odder aches an' pains fo'—how long, Doctor?

DOC. Thirty-seben yeahs nex' April.

JERRY. Tink ob dat! He hab been dosin' out de ipecac an' de castor ile an' de calomel fo' thirty-seben' yeahs come nex' April. All honah to ol' Doctor Shinbone (*cheers*).

Now I come to de second part of my discourse. Our pres'dent has axed me to make a tower of inspectification an' to note down

wat am de mos' urgent needs of dis village. I hab done so an' I herewith gibb yo' de result ob my spectifyin'.

EBEN. An' I wants yo' all to take heed an' remedy de evils wat he tells about.

JERRY. In de first place I fin's dat de weeds in mos' ob our front yards am gettin' so tall dat dey are hidin' de fences. Dey am lak de faces ob some ob de membahs present heah tonight—dey needs de vigorous use of de bush scythe. (*Several feel of faces.*) De only place whar de weeds am not flourishin' am de school yard. Anudder ting dat I notice is dat mos' ob de front fences needs fixin' up an' dat all ob dem needs a fresh coat ob whitewash, an' while yo'se about it yo' might whitewash de hitchin' posts also. If some ob de church membahs would chip in an buy a new pane ob glass fo' de window dat am broken 'stead ob habbin' it stuffed wif a pair of de elder's old pants it would look bettah fo' de village. Den I notice dat some ob de barn doors hab broken hinges an' are hangin' kinder promiscuously. It look lak de owners hab got plumb discouraged an' moved away. All ob de grabel sidewalks needs a new layer ob ashes. Den all de ol' tin cans an' de chicken bones an' de rubbish ob all kin's oughter be taken out ob de road an' dumped into de creek. If some ob yo' membahs wat spen's yo' time settin' roun' on nail kegs an' cracker barrels would tend' to de chores once in a while 'stead ob leabin' 'em fo' yo' wives to do de looks ob dis village could be mightily improved. Dar's a lot mo' could be said on de subject, but dat's all fo' dis ebenin'.

EBEN. Yo' hab all heard de speech ob Mr. Hardknuckle an' I hopes yo' will apply his remarks to yo'selves. When yo' get up in de mronin' jes' see if de weeds need cuttin' in yo' front yard; if de fence an' de hitchin' post needs whitewashin'; if de hinges need fixin' an' de ol' rubbish needs cleanin' up an' dumpin' in de creek. It am de business ob dis s'ciety to make Darktown de bes' village in de state.

PETE. Mistah Pres'dent, I reckon dar ain't nobody sets roun' de grocery sto' no mo' dan Mr. Jeremiah Hardknuckle. He has set on dat same ol' soap box so much he has worn a hole right froo de top board.

RASTUS. I reckon dar ain't no mo' weeds in my front yard dan dar be in Mr. Hardknuckle's, an' dar ain't no mo' whiskers on my face dan on his'n. I leab it to de s'ciety.

EBEN. We ain't got no time to examin' yo' folks' whiskers.

RUFUS. An' I jes' wanter say dat my ol' woman don't hab to do no mo' work dan his ol' woman.

JERRY. All I gotter say is, if de coat fits put it on. I ain't mentioned no names, hab I?

RUFUS. No, sah, but yo'se insinuatn'.

JERRY. Insinuatn' or not, long's I don't mention no names yo' can't say nuffin'.

RUFUS. Can't, hey? Reckon I can say much as I wante.

EBEN. Ordah! ordah! De membahs will come to ordah or I shall feel obligated to throw several ob yo' out ob de do'.

DOC. Dat's right, Ebenezer. Make 'em toe de chalk line.

ELIJAH. Hadn't we bettah hab anudder song? Dey say dat music hab charms to soothe de wild beastes.

EBEN. Bery well, we'll hab to call on de new quartet. Mistah Simmons, I heah yo' am de leader.

PETE. Yessah, I am de leader.

EBEN. Well, den, will yo' be so kin' as to render us some music?

PETE. I reckon we might. Wat does yo' say, boys?

OTHERS. Suah, we'll gib 'em a song.

EBEN. Mebbe you'd better 'splain to 'em de object ob de quartet first.

PETE. Yes, sah, I will. Yo' see, we hab disorganized ourselves into a company ob singers fo' de pu'pose ob circumnavigatin' de towns an' villages in dis vicinity in de interests ob good music an'—

DOC. Wat am de name ob yo' comp'ny?

PETE. We ain't xactly named it yet. We might call it de Darktown Jubilee Singers.

EPH. Or de Big Four Quartet.

ELIJAH. Well, nebber min' de name. Go no wif de song. As Jeff Davis uster say, "Wat's in a name?"

PETE. All right. Am yo' ready, boys?

QUARTET. Yes, sah, go ahead.

PETE. Well, den we'll sing dat new song we learned last week.

(PETE, EPHRAIM, RUFUS and RASTUS form in line and sing any good quartet. Applause by others.)

SAM. Dat suah was a mighty fine sample.

EBEN. De nex' ting am a proposition to be considered by dis s'ciety, whedder or not we shall hab a street lamp on de cornah by de pos' office. Dar hab been some diff'rences ob opinion among, de membahs an' we hab got to settle it tonight. Am dar any discussions on de subject?

RASTUS. I reckon I can do some cussin' on de subject.

EBEN. I didn't say "cussin'"—I said *discussin'*.

RASTUS. Well, I reckon I can do bof.

EBEN. Pos'pone de first an' proceed wif de second.

RASTUS. Yes, sah. I'll proceed wif my reasons fo' not wantin' de street lamp. Dar won't be no privacy fo' nobody. De night will be jes' lak de day. De young men can't hang roun' de cornah wif dere gals 'count ob de publicity ob de street lamp. An' if anybody happen to come home in de ebenin' wif a chicken or a water milyun undah his arm folks would say he done steal 'em an' dey wouldn't see him if 'twan't fo' de street lamp.

SAM. Dey shouldn't be totin' home chickens or watermilyuns under dere arms in de ebenin'. Dey should bring such tings home in broad daylight, den nobody don't suspect 'em.

RUFUS. An' any young gemman wat am ashamed ob his best gal don't deserve to hab no gal at all. Dat's my opinion. His gal oughter gib him de mitten.

RASTUS. I jes' lak to ax Mr. Biggers if he done his co'tin' in de bright rays ob a street lamp?

RUFUS. No sah, but de times am changin'. Dis am a progressive age an' all progressive towns hab street lamps now'days.

DOC. Mr. Pres'dent, de street lamp am a gran' t'ing if any ob yo' gets sick in de night an' hab to call fo' de doctor. De doctor don't hab to grope roun' in de dark to fin' yo' house, while all de time yo'se suff'rin' an' waitin' fo' de medicine. Yes, sah, de street lamp am all right.

EPH. Mr. Pres'dent, I has an objection to dat street lamp. I is s'prised dat nobody ain't made de same objection befo'.

EBEN. Well, wat am yo' objection?

EPH. It am gwinter raise de taxes like ebryting, an' as yo' all knows de taxes am mighty high in dis town already.

DOC. How high am yo' taxes, Mr. Snodgras?

EPH. Well, sah, befo' dey put in dat new waterin' trough my taxes was thirty-free cents an' now dey's gone up to thirty-seben cents. It am suttinly outrageous.

RUFUS. Huh! Dey ain't so much as mine. I paid fohty-fibe cents las' time.

EPH. If yo' votes fo' de street lamp dey's boun' to be mo' nex' time.

RUFUS. Wat does I care fo' a nickel mo' on my taxes? I wouldn't a skinned my nose las' summah fallin' ober dat hoss block if dar had been a street lamp anywhar roun'.

EBEN. Am dar any mo' remarks on de subject?

JERRY. I jes' lak to ax who's gwinter pay fo' de juice to run it?

EBEN. I am pleased to state dat our esteemed pos' master, Mr. Jackson, hab agreed to furnish de ile if we puts it in front ob de pos' office.

DOC. Dat suttinly am fair enuff. We can't fin' no fault about dat.

EBEN. But ob co'se we won't use it when de moon am shinin' lak it am tonight.

DOC. Suttinly not.

EBEN. If dar am no mo' pros and cons we'll proceed at once to de votin'. De question befo' de s'ciety am dis: "Shall we buy a street lamp fo' de village ob Darktown, or shan't we?" All in favor ob it will please stan' up and all those not in favor of it will keep their seats. (*All stand except RASTUS*). It am unanimous 'ceptin' one vote.

EPH. Mr. Pres'dent, I objects to de manner ob votin'. 'Tain't a fair shake. How's I gwinter set down wif my biles?

EBEN. We can't help yo' habin' biles, can we? Dat vote am gwinter stand.

SEVERAL. Good fo' you, Eben. Don't gib in.

EBEN. Is dar any odder business to come befo' de s'ciety?

ELIJAH. Mr. President, I jes' lak to ax yo' one question.

EBEN. Well, wat am de question yo' wants to ax?

ELIJAH. It am about de school. Does a teacher hab de right to ax fool questions of her chilluns?

JERRY. How's de pres'dent gwinter answer dat less he knows some ob de questions?

EBEN. Dat's right. Proceed wif de questions.

ELIJAH. Heah am one: "If a man hab a hen an' a rooster an' dey lays one egg ebry day fo' a yeah an' a half 'ceptin' Sunday, how much does de owner make if eggs are worth four dollars a dozen?"

EBEN. Le's see how dat goes. A man hab a hen an' a rooster an' dey lays one egg ebry day fo' a yeah an' a half—

ELIJAH. 'Ceptin' Sundays.

EBEN. 'Ceptin' Sundays, an' he sells dem fo' four dollars a dozen—am dat it?

ELIJAH. Yes, sah, fo' four dollars a dozen.

EBEN. I reckon dat man mus' be a millionaire by dis time.

RUFUS. Say, was dat de goose wat laid de golden eggs?

EBEN. Didn't I tole yo' 'twas a hen—jes' a common, ebry day sort ob hen?

RASTUS. Say, does yo' know who owns dat hen?

ELIJAH. No sah, I doesn't, case dar ain't nobody owns it. It am jus' an arithmetic zample, dat's all.

EBEN. Well, den I tinks it am a fool question. Who ebber heard ob a rooster layin' eggs?

EPH. An' gettin' four dollars a dozen fo' 'em. Haw! haw! haw!

ELIJAH. Well, heah's anudder one: "If dar was fohteen nice big juicy watermilyuns alayin' long in a row an' a li'l' niggah boy come along an' eat up one, how many would be left?"

DOC. Huh! Dat ain't sensible. Dar ain't no niggah boy dat would take jes' *one* melon an' leab all de res', no sah.

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SAM.—I reckon we'd bettah ax de school committee to look into de mattah an' see wat am de trubble wif dat teacher.

ELIJAH. Dat am my 'pinion zactly.

PETE. Well, all I'se gotter say on de subject is dat if somebody would show me fohteen nice juicy watermilyuns dar wouldn't be enuff left to feed a mosquiter fo' one meal.

EBEN. Well, if yo' is all done wid de business ob de meetin' we will hab anudder song by de Jubilee Quartet an' den adjourn sine or die twill nex' week Monday ebenin'.

(A plantation or darkey quartet may be given by same singers as before.)

CURTAIN.



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