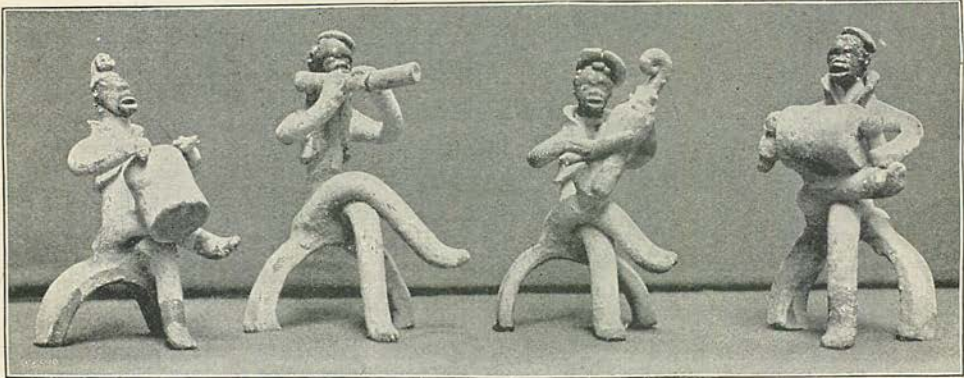


Picturesque People in Clay, Wood, and Shell.

BY GEORGE HARPER.

Illustrations from Photographs specially taken by George Newnes, Ltd.



NIGGER MINSTRELS FROM PARAGUAY.



WHO has not seen the nigger minstrels? Who has not at some time in his life laughed and cried with them—laughing at their noisy horse-play and their abundant jokes; and crying (in later years) when those moss-grown jokes, heavy with the weight of years, bobbed up again immortal? Who would not *be* a nigger minstrel?

But who ever heard of a nigger minstrel troupe in Paraguay? Tell us that such a thing is impossible and unknown in this South American land, and we will show you that there are many things in the world you know naught of. For here, at the top of this page, are four nigger minstrels, whose history has been connected with Paraguay since the inception, probably, of that ancient State. They bear the marks of time upon their ebon brows, and have the general appearance of decay that betrays the aged.

But if you ask us to tell you more about them, we cannot. You may see them for yourself in the Ethnographical Museum at

the Trocadero, in Paris, where they rest in a glass case on the stairs, trying, in vain, as it were, to make their plantation ditty heard outside the glass. Like us all, they are made of clay, but these are hard-baked clay niggers, and have been singing away for centuries in this stiff and stolid style. They are not up-to-date niggers, for, in the photograph, we miss the "tambo" and the bones; and find instead the drum, and fife, and gay guitar. But, for real long, lean, and wonderfully constructed niggers, they are evidently making a great volume of noise.

Note the fine, open countenances of the end men, and deny this, if you will. M. Creveillez, a French traveller, who found and presented them to the museum a few years ago, left no word as to who made them or when they were made. Their history, in short, is Sphinx-like in its obscurity. One fact alone we know—the potter who formed them was an expert, with a perfect knowledge of the negro face, and with a delightful sense of humour. He, too, must have loved the minstrels when a boy.



STATUETTE CARVED BY A FRENCH CHILD IN HARD CLAY.

Interesting as they are, however, we must leave the niggers and pass on to other interesting things. They are all in this wonderful Paris museum, and no trip to Paris ought to be completed without seeing them; but for the benefit of those who will never get to the gay city, we have taken photographs of some of the curious things on the shelves, by the kind permission of the Director. All except the negro orchestra were made by children, and the first of these, made by a little boy in Ille et Villaine, France, is shown at the foot of the first page. It is but a crude attempt to carve the human features in hard clay, and looked lonesome when we saw it on the shelves, but the little boy was happy over his toy, and he may now be one of the first sculptors of France. Small and insignificant as it is, the museum would not part with it for worlds.

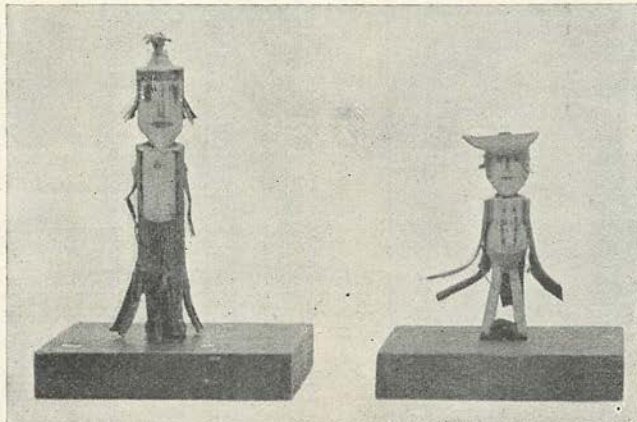
More curious and humorous are the

material, the expressions on the different faces are really remarkable. The eyes, noses, and buttons on several are made by the application of ink or a hot iron. With an aptitude wonderful for their years, the children have utilized the bark of hats, hair, arms, and coat-tails. Note the hood worn by the sister of mercy, the arms and frayed robe of the priest, the flapping tails of the gendarme, and the hair of the advocate. They are merely toys, but how many moments must have been spent in making them!

Near these brier-wood figures, in a special case, stand some very wonderful figures made of shells and pieces of cork by the children of fishermen in Prefailles, Loire Inférieure, France; and at the top of the next page we may note the first of this curious group, a seaweed-gatherer with the spear and seaweed in her hand. The trunk is made of cork taken from some old fishing-net, and the



SISTER OF MERCY AND PRIEST, CARVED BY CHILDREN OUT OF BRIER-WOOD.



ADVOCATE AND PROVINCIAL GENDARME, CARVED BY CHILDREN OUT OF BRIER-WOOD.

diminutive figures shown on this page, carved with knives by children out of brier-wood. The little men and women stand with dignity on one of the shelves, and, notwithstanding the limitations offered by the

skirt, collar, and hat are made of shells, probably picked up along the beach by these little toilers of the sea. Little is known about the figures. They were found, as the nigger orchestra was found, by another French



SEAWEED-GATHERER.



FISHERMAN.

traveller, M. P. Certeux, and deposited in the museum. It is but natural that some of the local types in the fishing district should be represented in the collection, which explains the little seaweed-gatherer on this page, as well as the fishermen and seaweed-pedar.

The heroes and heroines of childish imagination and tradition may also be sought for in such a collection; and, as we shall see, the celebrated Don Quixote figures in this childish gallery of portraits. But how to account for the presence of the



FISHERMAN HAULING HIS NET.



SEAWEED-PEDLAR.

unique representation of the Japanese coolie shown in the accompanying interesting illustration is a puzzling problem, unless it be that the child had somewhere seen a picture of this mortal and had decided to reproduce it in the material at hand.

Not the least surprising thing about these shell figures is the suggestion of movement which one gets as one watches them for a few moments. They are mute and rigid, yet they seem to feel the throb of life. The coolie is intent upon his business; the curious pedlar, with his basket full of weed, is on his industrious rounds. The fisherman hauls in his net with energy, and the seaweed-gatherer lifts her fork as if she had only just taken her dripping prize from the sea. They are, in fact, among the most remarkable things ever made by children, and the most wonderful of all is the man and



JAPANESE COOLIE.

horse shown in the tailpiece of this article. Note how formidable the knight's breastplate appears, with its pointed end, just as you may see it on some of the armour in armorial museums. Yet this effect was gained simply by means of an ordinary shell. No one who looks at this doughty figure can fail to see that it is Don Quixote to the life. With powerful arm and intrepid front, of which any Dulcinea might well be proud, the gallant knight bestrides his Rosinante for his famous tilt. Only, the

little modeller has omitted the Don's whiskers. "Don Quixote," writes Cervantes, "is a tall, meagre, lantern-jawed, hook-nosed, long-limbed, grizzled-haired man, with a pair of

large black whiskers, and he styles himself the 'Knight of the Woful Countenance.'" Rosinante, as we know, from the same delightful source, was "all skin and bone."



DON QUIXOTE AND HIS STEED ROSINANTE.