'Slavery Would Have Died of That Music': The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Rise of Popular-Culture Abolitionism in Early Antebellum-Era America, 1842–1850

BRIAN ROBERTS

In the mid-1840s, it may have been difficult for northeastern Americans to avoid hearing the song 'The Old Granite State,' and thus learning something of the quartet who made it their signature tune, the Hutchinson Family Singers. The song appeared in numerous sheet-music editions beginning with its first publication in 1843. By 1845 it may have seemed everywhere, wafting through the air from assorted parlors in cities and towns, closing the Hutchinsons' concerts and providing the singers with a carefully crafted image. As the lyrics declared, the singers were simple folk with rural roots, having 'come from the mountains' of New Hampshire; they were native-born and patriotic, 'all good Yankees'; they had close family ties, with parents who 'blessed' their careers, and there were another

Brian Roberts is associate professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He held a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship at AAS in 1998–99, during which he began the research that resulted in this essay.

Fig. 1. Sheet music cover describing 'The Old Granite State' as 'a song composed, arranged and sung, by The Hutchinson Family.' (New York: Firth and Hall, 1843). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

eight brothers and a sister back home, all of whom were 'good old fashioned singers.' Finally, the song proclaimed their difference from the usual theater-types: they were really more like farmers than show-business troupers, sincere, plainspoken, without artifice. Above all they were reformers, committed to temperance and antislavery.[1]

By this time the Hutchinsons themselves seemed everywhere, at least everywhere in the Northeast, their style appealing to an emerging middle-class audience, their concerts filling large and respectable theaters from Boston to Washington, D. C. 'They have become great favorites with the public,' wrote one of their audience members during this period, owing to 'their fine voices' along with 'their pleasant and modest manners—the perfect sense of propriety which they exhibit in all their demeanor.' 'Oh, it was beautiful!' exclaimed another after attending one of the family's concerts, adding that the 'three boys and one girl' of the group were 'all of them very pretty' and 'quite young.'[2]

Attractive and charismatic as a group, they were equally well known as individuals (fig. 2). Behind the singers or hovering close by was Jesse Hutchinson, the thirty-two-year-old poet, musician, and successful merchant who managed the group and sometimes joined his siblings onstage. Of the quartet, twenty-eight-year-old Judson was celebrated as a temperamental and eccentric genius. The author of melodramatic ballads and comic songs, he took the lead vocal part in many melodies, singing in a 'clear and sweet' voice that ranged from tenor to soprano. John, twenty-four, provided stagy histrionics, tenor, and theatrical baritone; critics called him the 'personification of the majestic and sublime.' Asa,

1. *The Old Granite State, A Song, Composed, Arranged and Sung by the Hutchinson Family*, sheet music with lithograph cover published simultaneously in Boston by Oliver Ditson, and in New York by Firth, Hall, and Pond, 1843. Collections of the American Antiquarian Society (AAS).

2. Harriet Farley, 'Letters from Susan,' in Benita Eisler, ed., *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Women, 1840–1845* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 58; Eliza E. Chase to Lucy Chase [in Philadelphia], Worcester, September 28, 1843, Chase Family Papers, AAS.

Fig. 2. The Hutchinson Family Singers, c. 1846. Milford Historical Society.

at age twenty-two, was base-toned and barrel-shaped, the image of bourgeois respectability and confident idealism. Finally there was sixteen-year-old Abby. A picture of childlike innocence with a 'pure and simple nature,' she was the audience favorite, singing in a rich contralto while 'her sweet manners won all hearts.' Audience members, both male and female, were prompted to write love poems to Abby by the family's performances.[3]

3. The ages of the singers are taken from *History of Milford, Family Registers* (n.p., n.d.), New Hampshire Room, Wadleigh Library—Milford Public Library Collections (MPL); descriptions of the singers are taken from: *Book of Words of the Hutchinson Family: To Which is Added the Book of Brothers* (Boston: J. S. Potter, 1855), 14; 'The Hutchinson Family,' *Hallowell Gazette*, June 16, 1849, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; Frank B. Carpenter, 'Abby Hutchinson Patton: In Memoriam,' *New York Home Journal*, December 7, 1892, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; John Wallace Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons (Tribe of Jesse)*, 2 vols. (1896; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1: 63–64.

Their concerts were marked by palpable anticipation, an excited 'buzz of voices and the rapid motions of fans and rustling of dresses,' according to a typical observer, followed by wild applause as the singers rushed to the stage, the brothers in 'old fashioned' black coats and high collars and Abby in a silk dress, a 'vision of loveliness.'[4] They would begin their concerts with a simple glee, a 'New England Sleighing Song' or 'We Are Happy and Free.' From here their songs covered a host of characteristic middle-class themes: the nostalgic yearning-for-a-lost-home of 'The Cot Where We Were Born,' the philanthropic imagery of 'The Pauper's Funeral,' the gothic melodrama of Judson's 'The Vulture of the Alps' or the Christian perfectionism of his 'Excelsior,' and finally, the temperance anthem 'King Alcohol' or the sentimental antislavery message of 'The Slave Mother's Appeal.' Judson and John accompanied their singing with violins and Asa played cello, while Abby swayed in the center of the stage; their voices blended perfectly in well-rehearsed harmony. [5]

The whole effect transported 'youthful hearts' and left 'indelible impressions.' During their 1844 tour, the Hutchinson Family Singers drew twelve hundred spectators at Manchester one night and 'twice that many' in Nashua on the next. That summer they sang before a crowd of twenty thousand at a temperance rally on Boston Common. By 1845, as one observer put it, word of a Hutchinson performance could cause entire communities of respectable people to talk of 'little else but the coming concert . . . for several days.'[6]

And yet in the spring of that year, the singers seemed on the verge of making a career-threatening mistake. On March 17, 1845, they arrived in New York City for a concert date at Niblo's Garden. Immediately, agents posted their broadsides in lower

4. Rowena Granice Steele, 'Abby Hutchinson Patton,' *San Joaquin Valley Argus* [Merced, California], March 10, 1883, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

5. *Programme of the Concert by the Hutchinson Family, This (Saturday) Evening, December 27th, 1845* (Manchester, N. H. : T. Sowler, 1845), MPL.

6. Steele, 'Abby Hutchinson Patton'; Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 127, 116.

Manhattan, listing the planned program of songs for the March 19 entertainment. Then the trouble started. Many Americans knew the Hutchinsons were abolitionists, as they regularly performed at antislavery meetings and conventions. Always before, they avoided the issue in their public concerts—wisely, according to even their friendly critics—for fear of offending paying audiences. Or they downplayed their commitment to the cause, giving voice to soft antislavery sentiments rather than statements of full-fledged abolitionism. Now they decided to include on the Niblo's program their most notorious abolitionist anthem, the incendiary 'Get Off the Track.' More than a few critics were outraged. For them the song was the worst kind of Garrisonian radicalism, a harsh denouncement of compromise, a clear call for immediate and unconditional emancipation. Even more alarming, it was quite catchy, just the thing to stick with audiences for weeks, perhaps months.[7]

Immediately, two of the city's leading Democratic and Whig newspapers, the *New York Herald* and the *New York Express*, warned the singers not to perform the song. By the day of the concert, the papers were hinting at calls for mob action. The Hutchinsons, meanwhile, retreated to a boardinghouse near the theater. Throughout the day, anxious friends stopped by to warn them about the risks they were taking. Someone came with the rumor that 'sixty young New York rowdies' had purchased tickets for the concert and that they planned to greet the first notes of the song with hail of 'brickbats and other missiles.' Later, news arrived that Niblo's two thousand seats had sold out. The ruffians could be anywhere in the hall. As the time of the concert approached, the singers remained unsure of what to do. Had they

7. *Get Off the Track! A Song for Emancipation, Sung by The Hutchinsons, Respectfully Dedicated to Nath'l. P. Rogers* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1844). A typical criticism of the song may be found in 'New Song,' *Boston Atlas*, April 18, 1844; here as elsewhere, the paper's editors expressed outrage at the song's criticism of Henry Clay and asked the singers to avoid abolition sentiments in their public concerts, while admitting that the song, or at least the tune, was catchy.

misread their own popularity, along with Manhattan's openness to reform? 'Even our most warm and enthusiastic friends among the abolitionists took alarm,' recalled Abby Hutchinson; they 'begged that we might omit the song, as they did not wish to see us get killed.'[8]

At first glance, there would seem to be nothing odd in this story. After all, abolitionism was a radical cause and the middle-class antebellum theater would hardly seem the place to find radical politics. As the British abolitionist Harriet Martineau wrote in the 1830s, this was the 'martyr age' of the antislavery movement, a time when mobs could stir up a 'reign of terror' on supporters of abolition, destroying careers along with property and lives.[9] For historians of the antebellum American theater the bourgeois stage was a site of reform but not radical reform. Accordingly, the rise of respectable middle-class entertainment, while it opened an overwhelmingly masculine domain to women and families, imposed an ethos of 'social control' on amusements, transforming the theater from a space of folk culture and democratic participation to one of passive spectatorship and banal commercialism. Within the bourgeois theater, one would expect to find much pandering to middle-class values of respectability and nostalgia, or later, the sentiment-laden antislavery imagery of a play such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In 1845 one would not expect to find incendiary statements of immediate abolitionism, particularly from performers desirous of commercial success.[10]

8. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 138; 'Story of the Song "Get Off the Track," as written by Mrs. Abby [Hutchinson] Patton,' undated ms., probably written by Ludlow Patton from a recalled conversation, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; John's account differed from Abby's only in the dates.

9. Harriet Martineau, *The Martyr Age of the United States* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan and Company; Otis Broaders and Company, 1839), 20–21.

10. For background on the rise of the middle-class theater, see David Grimstead, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theater and Society, 1820–1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 158–59, 165–85, 195–97; Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 61–62, 146.

In the vast historical literature on antebellum-era abolitionism, meanwhile, one basic point is clear: the problem with the movement was that it challenged traditions of American slavery and racism. Some historians have depicted the movement's early pioneers as heroes ahead of their time, hated but essentially right. Others have portrayed them as fanatics, zealots, or bourgeois hypocrites. Many have depicted the cause as hopelessly split between various factions, between recolonization movements and integrationists, between Free Soilers and 'come-outers,' between a 'New York wing' of moderates who favored using politics to end or limit slavery and a 'Garrisonian wing' of extremists who eschewed politics in favor of moral appeals for immediate emancipation. Others have focused on the early movement as a grass-roots reform that gained widespread local support, at least in some places, but that remained marginal to national politics until just before the Civil War.[11] Yet nearly all arrive at the same general conclusion: the cause was unpopular. As one of the most recent of these historians, Julie Roy Jeffrey, has put it: 'Abolitionism was never a popular cause before the Civil War,' for 'to embrace abolitionism was to embrace radicalism.'[12] The implication

11. For one of the latest examples of abolitionists as heroes ahead of their time, see Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); for treatments of them as fanatics and zealots, see Avery Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 117–50; as zealots and nativists, see James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 88–89; as sexually repressed hypocrites, see Ronald Walters, 'The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism,' *American Quarterly* 25 (1973): 177–201; as hopelessly split, see Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 94–95; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). According to historian William Gienapp the distinction between 'anti-slavery' and 'abolition' movements made true abolitionists simply too few and far between, resulting in an estimate that they comprised no more than one percent of the nation's population, a paltry twenty thousand out of a total of twenty-million Americans by 1860; see William E. Gienapp, 'Abolition and the Nature of Antebellum Reform,' in Donald M. Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 36; on the movement as a grass-roots social phenomenon with widespread support, see Edward Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

12. Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 3, 6; Jeffrey's evidence suggests that the antislavery movement had extremely widespread support. Thus, the fact that she con-

goes without saying: slavery was traditional; radicalism had no place in America.

Given these interpretations, perhaps the last place one would expect to find abolitionism would be at the heart of American popular culture. And yet, there are some details in the above story that question these assumptions. For one thing, why would newspaper writers and editors have been so concerned with a group of singing radicals? For another, how did Niblo's manage to sell two thousand seats when the singers' program included a notorious abolitionist anthem? But the largest problem for these views may be the existence of the Hutchinsons themselves.

The Hutchinsons were abolitionists. They were also extremely popular. To be sure, the content of some of their songs made them unwelcome south of the Potomac River. But they were the favorites of a northern middle class. In fact, a close look at the singers within the context of popular music and the theater in the antebellum Northeast reveals that their success came not despite their beliefs but instead as a direct result of their involvement with increasingly 'radical' reforms.[13] The focus here is on how the

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sistently refers to the movement as 'unpopular' and radical indicates the enormous power of this assumption. To a large extent, the interpretation stems from Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); the 'Elkins Thesis' may reflect the consensus of recent progressive history, the idea, that is, that antebellum abolitionists could not have been popular, since this would challenge the assumption American society has improved over time.

13. For early biographies of the Hutchinsons, see Carol Brink's anecdotal *Harps in the Wind: The Story of the Singing Hutchinsons* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), along with Philip D. Jordan's semi-fictional *Singin' Yankees* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1946). In '"If I Were a Voice": or, The Hutchinson Family and Popular Song as Political and Social Protest,' Charles Hamm depicts the Hutchinsons as forerunners of the protest singers of the 1960s; this is chapter seven of *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 141–61; Dale Cockrell's heavily annotated version of their diaries places quite a bit of emphasis on the singers as middle-class hypocrites, implying that they were willing to use reform for success, but were primarily careful not to offend their audiences; see Dale Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior: Journals of the Hutchinson Family Singers, 1842–1846* (Stuyvesant, N. Y.: Pendragon Press, 1986); Caroline Mosely argues that the Hutchinsons' appeal came primarily from their use of sentimentality and nostalgia, that the singers had limited popularity, and that their abolition songs were not popular at all; see Caroline Mosely, 'The Hutchinson Family: The Function of Their Song in Ante-Bellum America,' in *American Popular Music* Volume 1: *The Nineteenth Century and Tin Pan Alley*, Timothy E. Scheurer, ed. (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 63–74.

Hutchinsons came to be huddled in a Manhattan boarding-house room in the spring of 1845, tremendously popular yet facing the threat of an antiabolitionist mob, and on how they escaped from this predicament. This story argues for a new approach to abolitionism, one that places it not on the 'radical' margins of American politics or society but at the very center of American popular culture.

'Will You Come and Hear Native Born Singers?'

Some three years earlier, the Hutchinsons could only dream about Manhattan theaters or the possibility of mobs attending their concerts. They started out on their first serious tour in 1842, travelling in a used carryall pulled by two forty-dollar horses, with violins hung from inside stays, a cello lashed on top, and Abby's small hair trunk tied to a rear rack. Their 'tour' was open-ended, based on a hazy plan to travel and 'concertize' as long as profits met expenses. Starting from their hometown in New Hampshire, they went north, then west to Vermont, then into eastern upstate New York. In the evenings, they sang in hamlets, towns, and cities as they came to them, charging twelve-and-a-half cents for a ticket to an evening's entertainment, hoping that their broadsides sent in advance would attract a paying audience. By day, they spent their time haggling over the cost of hall rentals, hotel boarding, horse feed, and printers' bills. Or they creaked along in the carryall, passing open country, carefully avoiding costly toll roads, literally singing for suppers of milk and cheese from farmers along the way. In remote villages, where amusements were few and travelling performers rare, they drew small audiences; in larger towns with more worldly citizens they did much worse.[14]

Much of their problem was that little in their pasts had equipped them for the mysteries of self-marketing or finding a

14. 'Hutchinson Family's First Public Singing Tour,' extracts from the Hutchinson Diary, handwritten from the original, most likely by Ludlow Patton, entries for July 11, 1842-July 30, 1842, Hutchinson Collection, MPL. See also Cockrell, *Excelsior: Journals of the Hutchinson Family Singers*, 30–60.

paying audience. In fact, for would-be performers who lacked a reputation on the urban stage or the cachet of 'success in Europe,' a career as serious commercial entertainers, particularly in the American interior, may have only become possible with what were then recent developments. These included the rise of dispersed audiences, people in towns and cities who had leisure time, disposable income, and appreciation for the arts; improvements in the means of travel, the expansion and building of roads, restaurants, and hotels; and finally, the creation of legitimate sites for public amusements. Most of these developments were results of the great social and economic transitions of the 1820s through the 1850s, the period known as the 'Market Revolution' in America. The rise of the singers corresponded with these changes, from the first stirring of large-scale industry, to the abandonment of rural callings in favor of urban professions, to the emergence of bourgeois audiences and a commercial popular culture.[15]

The Hutchinson Family Singers hailed from Milford, a village located in southern New Hampshire's Hillsborough County, about fifty miles northwest of Boston, a small town known locally for its farms, granite quarries, and Hutchinsons. According to census figures, more than two-thirds of New Hampshire's Hutchinson households were in Hillsborough County, twenty-seven in Milford alone. Most of these families were small farmers connected through blood or marriage. Among the largest was the 'tribe,' as its members called themselves, of Jesse Hutchinson, Sr., and Mary (called Polly) Leavitt. Together the couple produced sixteen children between 1802 and 1829, eleven sons and two

15. On the market revolution, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); see also the essays in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political and Religious Expressions, 1800–1880* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); for the social effects of these changes, see Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

daughters surviving into adulthood. The future singers were among the youngest of these siblings, born between 1817 and 1829 on a 150-acre farm two miles out of the village center, raised in a large wood-frame house that had formerly been a tavern. Growing up Hutchinson during the 1820s and 1830s meant a deep sense of belonging: father Jesse was a town selectman, a Hutchinson was the village constable, the homestead was crowded, and kin relations were everywhere.[16]

Their early influences were local and isolated, marked by village traditions and intricate kinship relations. Like most of the other Hutchinsons in the village, the siblings belonged by tradition to the Milford Baptist Church. Worshiping in a meetinghouse built by their father, they dominated its choir and acquired its teachings, memorizing many of the hymns of Isaac Watts and learning the tenets of Baptist theology, its liberal ideal that even the 'greatest of sinners' could receive salvation by grace, and its more conservative position that public magistrates were of 'divine appointment' and needed to be 'prayed for, honored, and obeyed.'[17] The hymnody took hold, and in later years the Hutchinsons' singing would be inflected with an old-fashioned Sabbath-school style. The more liberal elements of the teachings were also influential and by the 1820s, at least one of the older brothers had converted to the more liberal Unitarian Church. Meanwhile, as John Hutchinson later recalled, some of the younger siblings found their minister to be 'quite dogmatic and very severe in all his utterances.'[18]

There were reasons the younger Hutchinsons chafed under certain strictures of the past. For in the 1820s and 1830s the

16. *The Milford Hand-Book. What Every Man, Woman and Child Ought to Know About Milford* (Milford, N. H.: W. W. Hemenway, 1879), 3; *New Hampshire 1840 Census Index* (Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1976), 63; *History of Milford, Family Registers*, 783; 'Hutchinson Homestead Is Designated as a Landmark of American Music,' *Milford Cabinet and Wilton Journal*, August 19, 1976; *Report of the Selectmen of Milford, for the Year Ending March 11, 1839* (n.p., n.d.), Milford Historical Society; *Milford Township Records*, New Hampshire State Archives, Concord, New Hampshire.

17. *Book of Words of the Hutchinson Family* (1855), 10; *Declaration of Faith, Church Covenant, and Catalogue of Members of the Baptist Church in Milford, New Hampshire, August 1859* (Milford: Boutwell's Print and Job Office, 1859), 9.

18. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 21, 14; 2: 239–40.

world broke in on Milford. New roads increasingly opened the town to outside influences. Rising industrial centers boxed the compass around the village: the shoemaking city of Lynn, Massachusetts to the east; the factory towns springing up along the Erie Canal to the west; Lowell and Boston to the south; Concord and Manchester to the north. Suddenly, according to a curmudgeonly Milford resident, a host of new 'isms' hit the town. Young people especially became 'so independent as to be able to think and judge for themselves.' Strangers began appearing on the town's streets, along with passing reform lecturers. Arguments developed between neighbors, and conflicts between generations.[19]

These changes had their effects. As a town selectman, Jesse Hutchinson, Sr., saw an increase in expenditures for the village's poor relief farm. His sons saw a widening horizon of commercial opportunity. Jesse's two oldest surviving sons, David and Noah, following their father's calling, established farms for themselves near the family homestead. But in the 1820s, the third oldest son, Andrew, left the homestead for Boston, where he opened a dry-goods store on Purchase Street. A few years later, Jesse, Jr., left to open a hardware shop in Lynn. The older Jesse tried to stem the tide, eventually dashing off a letter to his namesake, reminding him of Biblical admonitions against greed, hinting that he was a 'fool' to abandon the family farm. Still, just as it did in countless other northeastern small towns, the exodus of many sons and some daughters to rising cities continued. Soon Judson and Zephaniah had followed their brother Jesse to Lynn, where they went into business as merchant grocers.[20]

In 1831 and again in 1835, Milford's Baptist church held revivals for its wayward sons and daughters. In the case of the Hutchinsons, as undoubtedly for other families, the sons returned for a

19. David Goodwin, *Historical Sketch of the Town of Milford, New Hampshire* (1846; reprint, Milford: Milford Historical Society, 1987), 10–11.

20. *Report of the Selectmen of Milford*, 1839; Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 2: 234–69; Jesse Hutchinson, Sr., to Jesse Hutchinson, Jr., [in Lynn, Massachusetts], Milford, June 6, 1841, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

Fig. 3. 'Ten of the Hutchinsons, 1844,' in John W. Hutchinson, *The Story of the Hutchinsons, Tribe of Jesse*, 2 vols. (Boston: Lea and Shepard), 1: 136. Asa, at far left, is not identified. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

quick dunking and perhaps a weeping visit to the guilty bench. They then headed back to their shops, offices, and ledgers.[21] During this time, the old hymns took on more passion and feeling as camp-meeting songs. But they also faced competition from secular quarters. About the same time as the first revival, a Milford village shoemaker began offering lessons in modern styles of singing, immediately attracting several of the younger Hutchinson brothers as students. One of the brothers, Joshua, soon after taking a ten-day course in Boston on the latest methods of instruction, opened his own singing school.[22]

Meanwhile, back on the family farm, only the two youngest brothers of Jesse's tribe remained without trade or profession. By

21. Revivals and conversions recorded in *Declaration of Faith*, 15–22.

22. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 30–31; Joshua Hutchinson, *A Brief Narrative of the Hutchinson Family, Sixteen Sons and Daughters of the 'Tribe of Jesse'* (Boston: Lea and Shepard, 1874), 22.

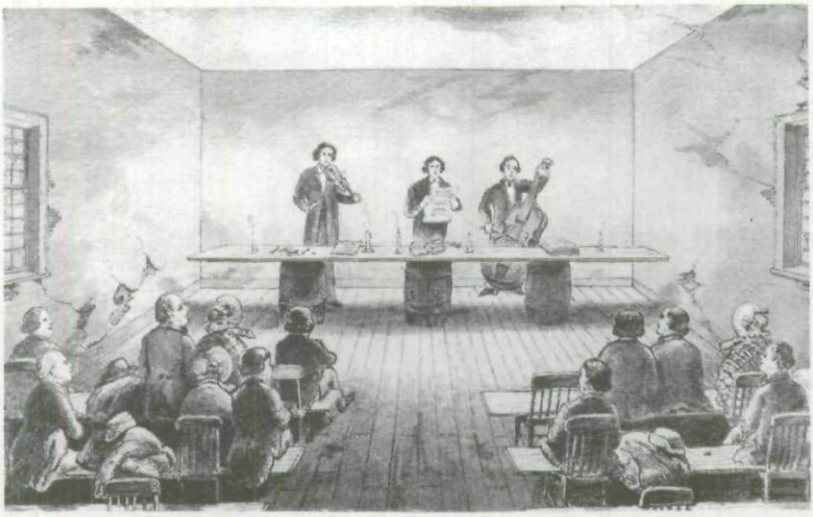
1839, John and Asa had finished their schooling and were unsure of what to do with themselves. After Joshua organized a family concert at the Baptist meetinghouse on Thanksgiving Day, they knew one thing: they did not want to be farmers. 'I wanted to go out in the world and see what it was made of,' recalled John later, adding that he envisioned himself singing 'to numerous audiences . . . and witnessed the gathering in of piles of money—gold, silver, and quantities of paper.'[23]

By the mid-1830s, then, the younger members of the tribe of Jesse practiced with the Baptist choir and attended secular singing school. Their style, accordingly, would combine elements of tradition and modernity, the emotive, folk elements of camp-meeting songs and shape-note singing with the more sophisticated parlor style stressed by newly trained singing masters. By 1839, they could envision the possibility of becoming professional entertainers. For the next two years John and Asa, joined by Judson and Jesse, prepared for a singing career. They practiced their harmonies in a room above Andrew's store. They looked to refine their style, buying the latest songsters and sheet music that Boston had to offer and performing in villages around Milford under the highbrow name of the 'Aeolian Vocalists' (fig. 4). They made contact with members of Boston's 'Handel and Haydn Society' and sought advice from Lowell Mason, the city's famed professor of music and proponent of the new 'Italian' or 'do-re-mi' style of singing classes.[24]

Most of these efforts came to nothing. Mason showed them the door after suggesting they buy one of his instruction books. Their

23. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 35; 'An Old Time Vocalist; Reminiscences of the Famous Hutchinson Family,' *Boston Herald*, January 18, 1891, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

24. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1:36–44; 'John W. Hutchinson, The Patriotic Singer of Old High Rock is 72 To-day,' *New York Home Journal*, January 4, 1893, Hutchinson Collection, MPL. For Mason's influence on singing, see Lowell Mason, *The Sacred Harp: or, Beauties of Church Music, New Edition, With Important Improvements*, 2 vols. (Boston: Shepley and Wright, 1841), 1: 4–9; Lowell Mason, *Address on Church Music* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1851).



THE EAST WILTON CONCERT (p. 44)

Fig. 4. Judson, John, and Asa Hutchinson, the three original Aeolian singers (minus Jesse) performing in a school room in East Wilton, New Hampshire, ca. 1840–41. The cracked and broken plaster on the walls of the building is emblematic of the singers' lack of success at that point in their career. Note how the bench seating is created by setting planks across chairs. 'The East Wilton Concert,' in Hutchinson, *The Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 44. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

singing became more refined, but the hat they passed after their entertainments came up nearly empty. By the end of 1840, they were on the verge of giving up. Asa had joined Jesse as a clerk at the hardware store. John had gone into the grocery business with Judson. The *Lynn Directory* for this period reveals no fewer than six of the Hutchinson brothers living in the town, all seemingly on their way to becoming petty bourgeois merchants, their businesses lining one side of a city block on Exchange Street.[25]

25. *The Lynn Directory and Register for the Year 1841. Containing a General Description of the Town, a List of the Town Officers, Public Institutions, the Names and Occupations of the Residents, and Other Useful Information* (Lynn: Benjamin F. Roberts, 1841), 1: 47–48 (Lynn Historical Society).

If one person can be credited with reviving their aspirations, it was most likely Jesse Hutchinson, Jr. Jesse had the guile and creativity to thrive in the new market economy. As a teen, he apprenticed as a printer for a Milford paper, *The Farmer's Cabinet*, where he gained a local reputation as a poet.[26] Later, after a short stint as a music teacher in Milford, he left for Lynn. There he made the most of his opportunities: first opening his hardware store and then tinkering with and making improvements to parlor stoves that he sold, eventually proclaiming himself the inventor of the 'Hutchinson Air Tight Stove.' The stove sold well, in part as a result of Jesse's skill at marketing. Soon he was printing circulars extolling its qualities in poetic form, in stanzas praising its 'oval form,' its economical 'air-tightness' that saved wood, its 'splendid base,' its 'symmetry and grace,' and finally declaring: 'This wond'rous Stove doth well combine, / All that's desirable; and must shine / Throughout this region: / I'm confident 'twill have a run, / Demands already have begun / Almost a legion!'[27]

By 1841, Jesse was one of Lynn's rising young businessmen and a member of several reform associations, an idealist with a pragmatic sense of what sold. Through the year, he performed with the 'Aeolian Vocalists.' But clearly his primary talents lay elsewhere. In the fall, he decided to leave the group, offering his services as advisor and part-time manager. He then began making arrangements for a new version of the vocalists to perform in Lynn, engaging the town's Lyceum Hall for what would perhaps be a make-or-break effort.

For this performance Jesse and his brothers would try something different. At the time, a quintet calling itself the 'Ranier Family Singers' was touring the Northeast, their broadsides and

26. Hutchinson, *A Brief Narrative of the Hutchinson Family*, 27; 'Citizens Advertising Directory,' *Lynn Directory and Register for the Year 1841*, 12.

27. Hutchinson, *A Brief Narrative of the Hutchinson Family*, 5; *Parlor Air Tight Stove* (Lynn, Mass.: Jesse Hutchinson, Jr., 1844), a circular advertisement from the collections of the Essex Peabody Museum Library.

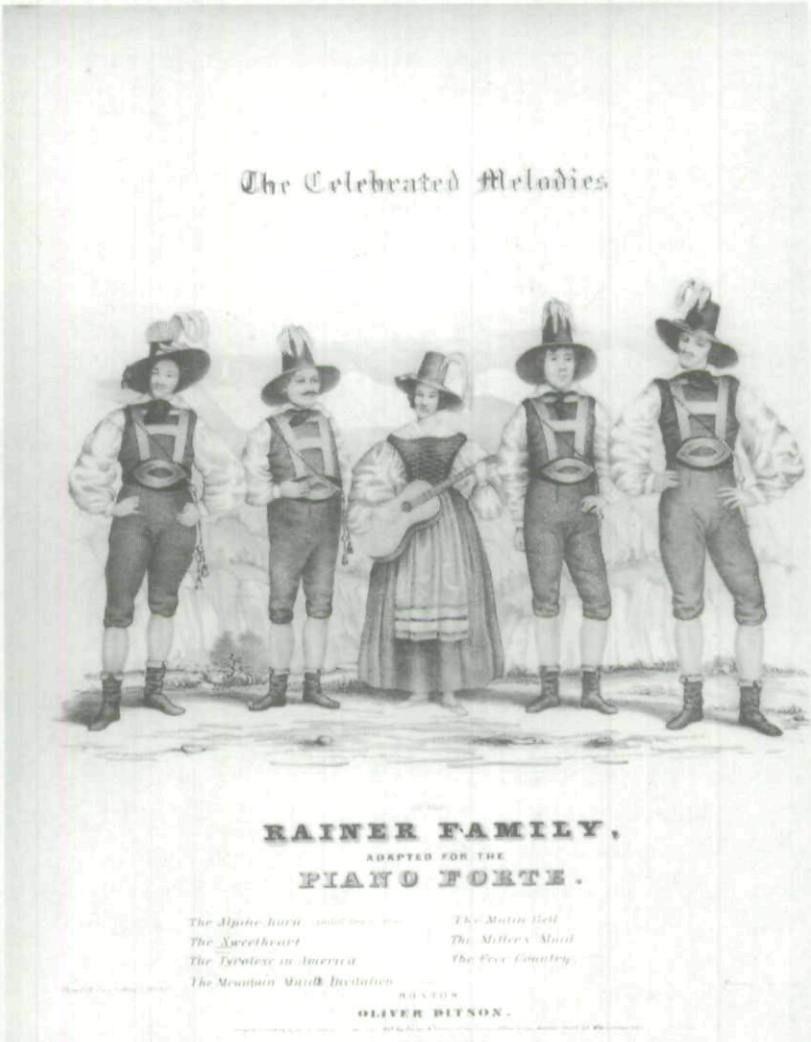


Fig. 5. The success of the singing Ranier family from the Swiss Alps helped the Hutchinsons develop a workable formula for their performances. 'The Celebrated Melodies,' sheet music for songs made popular by the Rainer (Ranier) family published in Boston by Oliver Ditson. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

sheet music billing the group as having come from the Tyrolean Alps. Performing in full regalia of lederhosen, suspenders, and feathered hats, the four brothers and a sister played the romantic image for all it was worth, generating an Alpine song craze that would last through the Jenny Lind-mania a decade later, perhaps, as well, providing a gender dynamic that attracted the proper women who formed the basis for a respectable audience (fig. 5).[28]

John seems to have been the only brother who actually saw the group perform, yet he quickly communicated his impressions: here, he clearly believed, was a rural style that might win public favor and that his family could easily copy. Jesse and his brothers went to Milford and returned to Lynn with their twelve-year-old sister, Abigail. Outfitted in a 'Swiss bodice or Tyrolean Costume,' she joined her brothers on the stage. The performance drew a crowd. Charged by the success, the brothers immediately began thinking about an extended tour for the next year. They planned to take Abby with them, promising their worried mother and stern father that they would return her within a few weeks. They never kept the promise.[29]

On February 9, 1842, broadsides announcing a performance of 'The Aeolian Vocalists–The Hutchinson Family (3 brothers and sister)' were posted in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The announcements suggest the extent to which the singers were desperately looking for an audience. For the local rustics, perhaps, they offered a gimmick: 'Not the least interesting of the Evening's entertainment will be the performance of 3 men on two instruments, and the playing on the Violin and Violincello . . . with their Feet!' Elsewhere, the text appealed to patriotism and respectability:

> It is with some degree of confidence that this family appeals to the patronage of the citizens of Portsmouth, being themselves NATIVES

28. *'The Alpine Horn,' The Celebrated Melodies of the Ranier Family* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1841), sheet music. As stated in her advance material, Lind also performed several Alpine songs, including 'The Alpine Horn,' *The Life and Genius of Jenny Lind* (New York: W. F. Burgess, 1850).

29. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 46.

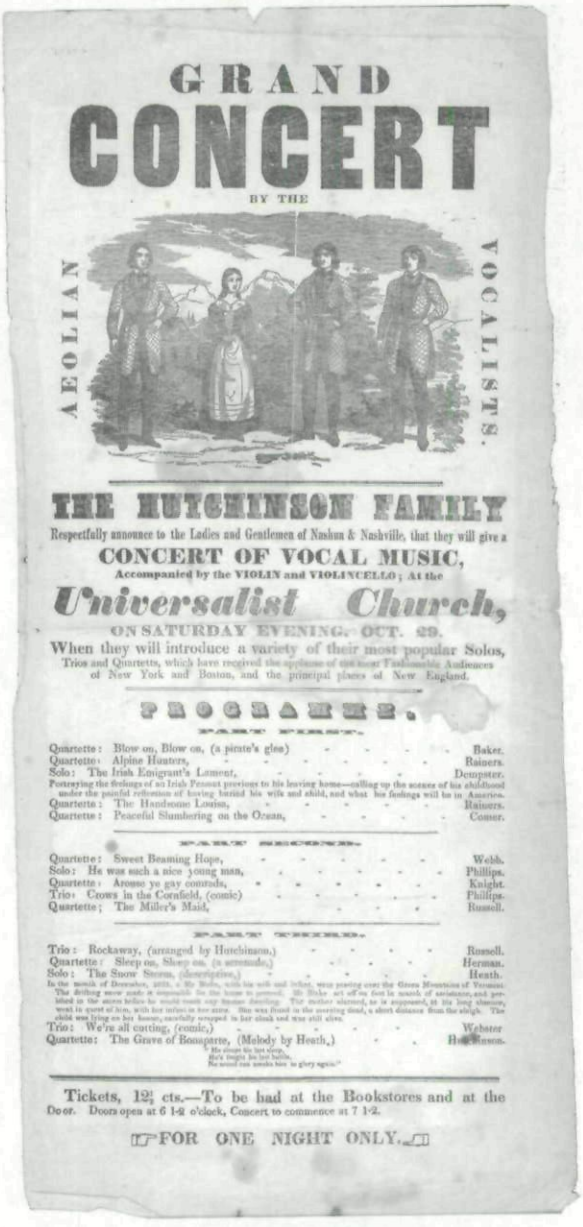
> of the GRANITE STATE, and only claiming a PORTION of that patronage which is often lavished upon foreigners of inferior merit. . . . [T]heir Concerts have been highly approved by all classes, being patronized by the best judges and most respected citizens.

The broadside's program, meanwhile, attested to the singers' artistic and class ambitions. Rather than following the then-popular formula of listing a host of patriotic standards, they loaded it with instrumental pieces, glees, and catches—a mixture of songs, some comic, many sentimental, nearly all of recent minting and popular with the more sophisticated audiences of eastern cities. Finally, after listing the ticket price of twelve and one-half cents, the broadside asked the all-important question: 'Now, Citizens of Portsmouth, will you come and hear the Native Born Yankee Singers?'[30]

Through much of their 1842 tour, they would find no real answer to this question. They travelled from Milford, to Hookset, Franklin, and Hanover, New Hampshire, drawing small audiences, frequently billing themselves as 'The New Hampshire Raniers,' appealing for support as native-born singers yet highlighting the Ranier Family songs on their programs and continuing to dress Abby in her Swiss outfit (fig. 6). In Hanover only the men of the town came to see them, a tradition in rural areas where public spaces were often segregated by gender, but one that embarrassed Abby and made for a small audience.[31] From Woodstock, Vermont, to Saratoga Springs, New York, they barely broke even. Occasionally, they seemed to crack under the pressures of touring. In Rutland, Vermont, an argument between the brothers led to a 'scuffle.' Meanwhile, Judson had several attacks of what he

30. *Grand Family Concert at the Cameneum. Positively the Last Night of the Aeolian Vocalists—The Hutchinson Family (3 Brothers and Sister)*, February 9, 1842, Hutchinson Collection, MPL. The Cameneum was in Portsmouth, N. H.

31. See, for example, Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832; reprint, New York: Knopf, 1949), 74–75, 155–57.



GRAND

CONCERT

BY THE

AEOLIAN VOCALISTS.

THE HUTCHINSON FAMILY

Respectfully announce to the Ladies and Gentlemen of Nashua & Nashville, that they will give a

CONCERT OF VOCAL MUSIC,

Accompanied by the VIOLIN and VIOLINCELLO; At the

Universalist Church,

ON SATURDAY EVENING, OCT. 29.

When they will introduce a variety of their most popular Solos, Trios and Quartetts, which have received the applause of the most Fashionable Audiences of New York and Boston, and the principal places of New England.

PROGRAMME.

PART FIRST.

Quartette: Blow on, Blow on, (a pirate's glee) - - - - - Baker.
Quartette: Alpine Hunters, - - - - - - - Rainers.
Solo: The Irish Emigrant's Lament, - - - - - - Dempster.
Portraying the feelings of an Irish Peasant previous to his leaving home—calling up the scenes of his childhood under the painful reflection of leaving behind his wife and child, and what his feelings will be in America.
Quartette: The Handsome Louisa, - - - - - - Rainers.
Quartette: Peaceful Slumbering on the Ocean, - - - - - - Comer.

PART SECOND.

Quartette: Sweet Beaming Hope, - - - - - - Webb.
Solo: He was such a nice young man, - - - - - - Phillips.
Quartette: Arouse ye gay comrads, - - - - - - Knight.
Trio: Crows in the Cornfield, (comic) - - - - - - Phillips.
Quartette; The Miller's Maid, - - - - - - Russell.

PART THIRD.

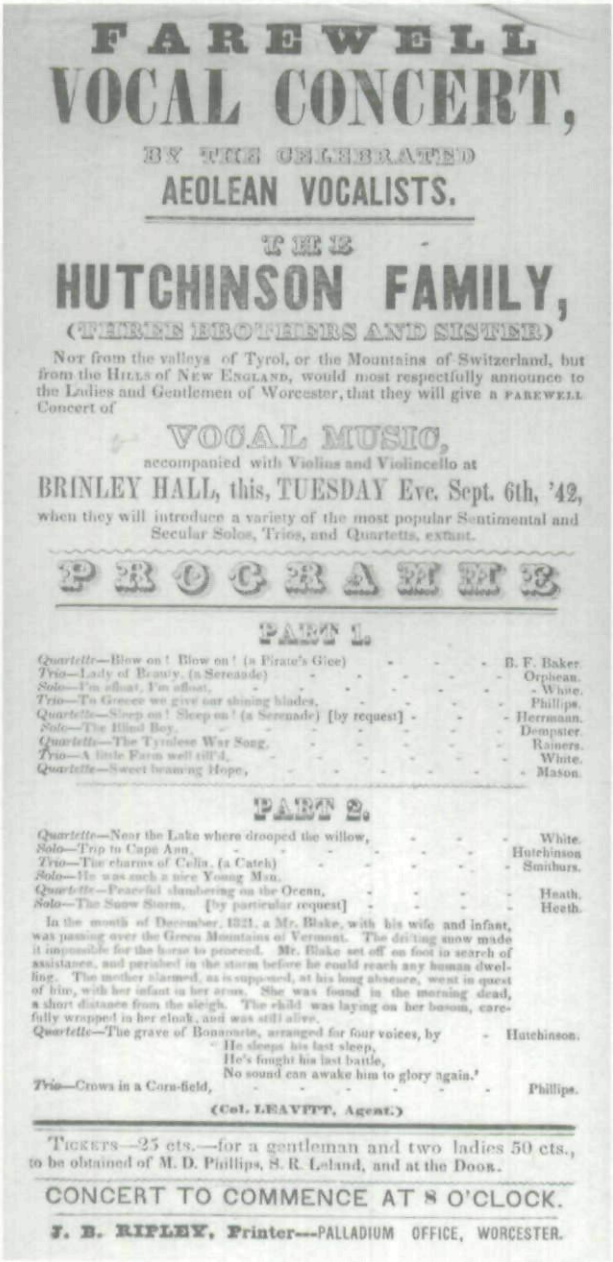
Trio: Rockaway, (arranged by Hutchinson,) - - - - - Russell.
Quartette: Sleep on, Sleep on, (a serenade,) - - - - - Herman.
Solo: The Snow Storm, (descriptive,) - - - - - Heath.
In the month of December, 1808, a Mr Blake, with his wife and infant, were passing over the Green Mountains of Vermont. The drifting snow made it impossible for the horse to proceed. Mr Blake set off on foot in search of assistance, and perished in the storm before he could reach any human dwelling. The mother sheltered, as is supposed, at his long absence, went in quest of him, with her infant in her arms. She was found in the morning dead, a short distance from the sleigh. The child was lying on her bosom, carefully wrapped in her cloak and was still alive.
Trio: We're all cutting, (comic,) - - - - - - Webster
Quartette: The Grave of Bonaparte, (Melody by Heath,) - - - Hutchinson.

"He sleeps his last sleep,
He's fought his last battle,
No sound can awake him to glory again."

Tickets, 12½ cts.—To be had at the Bookstores and at the Door. Doors open at 6 1-2 o'clock, Concert to commence at 7 1-2.

☞FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY.☜

Fig. 6. An illustration showing the influence of the Ranier singers on the Hutchinsons. They are wearing 'Tyrolean' garb in front of snow-capped peaks in this announcement for a 'Grand Concert by the Aeolian Vocalists.' New Hampshire Historical Society collections.



FAREWELL

VOCAL CONCERT,

BY THE CELEBRATED

AEOLEAN VOCALISTS.

THE

HUTCHINSON FAMILY,

(THREE BROTHERS AND SISTER)

Not from the valleys of Tyrol, or the Mountains of Switzerland, but from the Hills of New England, would most respectfully announce to the Ladies and Gentlemen of Worcester, that they will give a FAREWELL Concert of

VOCAL MUSIC,

accompanied with Violins and Violincello at

BRINLEY HALL, this, TUESDAY Eve. Sept. 6th, '42,

when they will introduce a variety of the most popular Sentimental and Secular Solos, Trios, and Quartetts, extant.

PROGRAMME.

PART 1.

Quartette—Blow on! Blow on! (a Pirate's Glee) - - - B. F. Baker.
Trio—Lady of Beauty, (a Serenade) - - - - - Orpheau.
Solo—I'm afloat, I'm afloat, - - - - - - White.
Trio—To Greece we give our shining blades, - - - - Phillips.
Quartette—Sleep on! Sleep on! (a Serenade) [by request] - - Herrmann.
Solo—The Blind Boy, - - - - - - Dempster.
Quartette—The Tyrolese War Song, - - - - - Rainers.
Trio—A little Farm well till'd, - - - - - - White.
Quartette—Sweet beaming Hope, - - - - - - Mason.

PART 2.

Quartette—Near the Lake where drooped the willow, - - - White.
Solo—Trip to Cape Ann, - - - - - Hutchinson
Trio—The charms of Celia, (a Catch) - - - - - Smiburs.
Solo—He was such a nice Young Man.
Quartette—Peaceful slumbering on the Ocean, - - - - Heath.
Solo—The Snow Storm, [by particular request] - - - - Heeth.

In the month of December, 1821, a Mr. Blake, with his wife and infant, was passing over the Green Mountains of Vermont. The drifting snow made it impossible for the horse to proceed. Mr. Blake set off on foot in search of assistance, and perished in the storm before he could reach any human dwelling. The mother alarmed, as is supposed, at his long absence, went in quest of him, with her infant in her arms. She was found in the morning dead, a short distance from the sleigh. The child was laying on her bosom, carefully wrapped in her cloak, and was still alive.

Quartette—The grave of Bonaparte, arranged for four voices, by - Hutchinson.
"He sleeps his last sleep,
He's fought his last battle,
No sound can awake him to glory again."
Trio—Crows in a Corn-field, - - - - - - Phillips.

(Col. LEAVITT, Agent.)

TICKETS—25 cts.—for a gentleman and two ladies 50 cts., to be obtained of M. D. Phillips, S. R. Leland, and at the Door.

CONCERT TO COMMENCE AT 8 O'CLOCK.

J. B. RIPLEY, Printer—PALLADIUM OFFICE, WORCESTER.

Fig. 7. A broadside announcing a 'Farewell Vocal Concert, by the Celebrated Aeolian Vocalists. The Hutchinson Family (three brothers and sister) September 6, 1842.' Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

termed 'the horrors,' his frequent bouts of depression, during which he saw visions and contemplated suicide. Occasionally he grabbed the family diary to record seeing 'a hog as big as an elephant, 12,000 pounds,' or lament the 'wooden world' and the 'skinflints' among the towns they passed.[32]

Still they carried on, always looking for an audience, continuously making changes to improve their fortunes. Early on their concerts included up to twenty numbers. They opened with an audience-pleasing glee—usually 'We Hail Thee, Mirth,' or 'Hail, Smiling Morn.' But then they proceeded through a meandering list of instrumental pieces and melodramatic numbers, operatic narratives such as 'The Ship-Wreck' or John's flailing performance of 'The Maniac,' another lengthy story-song lifted from the English performer Henry Russell. Hours later, as the candles that served as their stage lights burned low and their audience fidgeted, they closed with a bit of rural imagery—usually 'Crows in a Corn Field' or 'A Little Farm, Well Tilled.' At some point the evening's energy lagged.

By the end of the year, they shortened their programs to twelve or fifteen selections and dropped most of their instrumental pieces.[33] Meanwhile they worked on adding 'original' material, which, in a period of lax or nonexistent copyright laws, typically meant penning new lyrics to older tunes or setting a well-known poem to music. Eventually they added two songs they could claim as partly their own: 'The Grave of Bonaparte' and 'A Trip to Cape Ann' (fig. 7). Finally, they honed their skills, further refining

32. On the tour from Hookset to Saratoga Springs, see Asa Hutchinson's diary entries, July 12, 1842- August 2, 1842; on the 'scuffle,' July 23, 1842, see Judson Hutchinson's diary entries, July 25, 1842, August 10, 1842, 'Hutchinson Family's First Public Singing Tour,' Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

33. Two early programs: *Aeolian Vocalists' Concert* (n. p.,1841); *Family Concert, by Aeolian Vocalists* (n. p., 1842) each include some seventeen or eighteen selections. The printing is also quite primitive, without much effort at marketing; later programs are much superior for their eye appeal, have fewer songs, no listed instrumental pieces, and include credits for writers and lyricists: *Farewell Vocal Concert, By the Celebrated Aeolian Vocalists. The Hutchinson Family (Three Brothers and Sister), Brinley Hall, September 6, 1842* (Worcester: J. B. Ripley, 1842); *Second & Last Concert by the Aeolians!* [Universalist Church, Boston] November 8, 1842.

their harmonies and increasingly dropping their references to the Ranier Family Singers in favor of a more consciously 'natural' American style.[34]

These changes were improvements. By the end of the year, critics—at least the few who saw them—commended the singers for their 'fine woodland tone' along with their 'clear enunciation' of lyrics and 'their perfect freedom from affectation or stage grimace.'[35] But while their audiences grew, the crowds remained small compared to those of the Ranier Family or the enormously popular Henry Russell. As John later recalled, the singers remained frustrated over their tour's 'indifferent results,' particularly since 'foreign artists were coming here and setting the public wild.' There had to be some way to overcome what they saw as a 'lack of appreciation for home talent.'[36] Indeed, there was. Ultimately, the key to the quartet's first real success would be the convergence of two seemingly disparate developments of the market revolution: commercial popular culture and moral reform.

'The Devil Has Been in Possession of All the Good Tunes Long Enough'

In 1840, while staying above Andrew's grocery store in Boston, the Hutchinson brothers attended a temperance rally at Marlboro Chapel. There they signed the 'cold water pledge,' vowing total abstention from the temptations of alcohol. Early in their 1842 tour, the Aeolian Vocalists began to include a number of temperance songs in their programs, songs such as 'Oh, That's the Drink for Me!' and 'Shun the Wine Cup.'[37] By mid-tour, they

34. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 63–64.

35. 'The Hutchinson Singers,' *Herald of Freedom*, December 9, 1842, *A Collection from the Newspapers Writings of Nathaniel Peabody Rogers* (Concord, N. H.: John R. French, 1847), 245.

36. 'An Old Time Vocalist. Reminiscences of the Famous Hutchinson Family,' *Boston Herald*, January 18, 1891, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

37. *Book of Words of the Hutchinson Family*, 17. The temperance songs appear on the following and certainly other broadside programs: *Family Concert by the Aeolian Vocalists; Sacred and Secular Concert by the Aeolian Vocalists. At the Universal Church* (Newburyport, Mass., February 10, 1842), Hutchinson Collection, MPL; *Muster Night! Grand Concert of*

promised themselves that they would only stay in temperance hotels and eat in temperance houses. By tour's end, they had become full-fledged cold-water singers. 'At this time,' as John would later put it, 'there was a great temperance wave rolling over the New England States, and we concluded to identify ourselves with this reform movement.'[38] The decision was a career move as well as a moral statement. For in aligning themselves with reform, the Hutchinsons would find themselves on the crest of a popular and extremely lively phenomenon, one that would eventually take them from singing for temperance to taking a stance as public abolitionists.

Through much of the 1830s, the styles of the reform meeting and the popular theater probably were at opposite extremes. Reform, after all, had come out of the Christian revivals of the 1820s and was the domain of the newly rising urban middle class. An equally rising working class, meanwhile, stayed loyal to vernacular tradition, drinking, carousing, and enjoying the rough music and earthy comedy of popular blackface shows. The result was the appearance, at least, of an increasing cultural divide, a split between the music of reform, rooted as it was in the controlled traditions of Christian hymnody, and the liveliness and creative ferment that marked the secular songs and blackface entertainments of the popular stage.[39]

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the Aeolian Vocalists. The Hutchinson Family, (Lynn, Mass., September 15, 1842), Lynn Historical Society.

38. Diary entry, John Hutchinson, Balston, New York, August 4, 1842, 'The Hutchinson Family's First Public Singing Tour'; 'An Old Time Vocalist.'

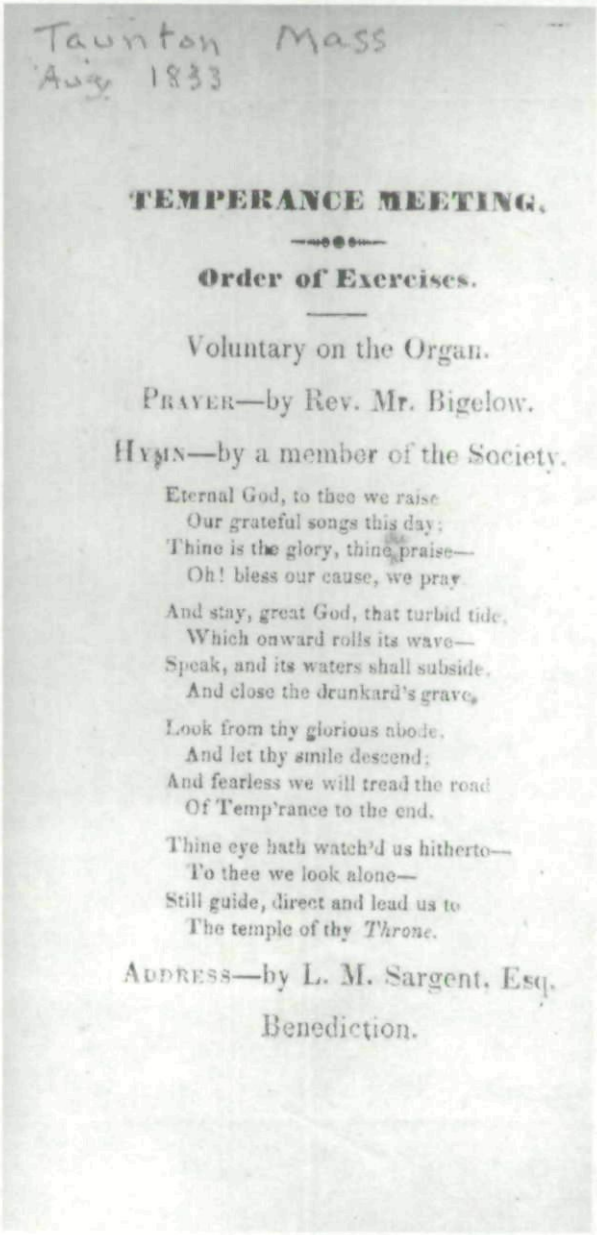
39. See Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*; Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*; on the early instability this created and the fears of unregulated youth, see Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Knopf, 1998); on this splitting of cultures, see Lawrence A. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Levine does not say that this process was complete by the 1840s, but implies that it was well under way; on the split between middle-class music and blackface, see Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32–54.

This is not to say that reform was unpopular. Temperance meetings were often very well attended, for by the end of the 1830s practically every village, town, and city ward in the northeast had its 'cold-water army' and temperance association. Many of their planners made attempts at enlivening the occasions, bringing in church choirs and printing up broadsides to facilitate the communal singing of hymns. With most of these hymns having been set generations earlier to popular tunes, and all of them well known to meeting-goers, undoubtedly some joined *con brio* in the singing (fig. 8).[40] And yet there is little to suggest that early temperance meetings could be enjoyed as popular amusements. Typically held in churches and conducted by ministers, such meetings were a lot like church services, a bit rote in their cadences, dull or at least somewhat dry. An organ voluntary announced the start of the proceedings, as a crowd of teetotalers filed in and found seats. Then came the standard 'order of exercises': an opening prayer, a hymn, a sermon on the evils of drink, a passing of the collection plate, more hymns, more prayers, and finally, a benediction followed by a rush to the doors or the pledge table.[41] The whole of these occasions had an air of dusty routine, the musical parts a stress on 'taming the passions' and dryness. The teetotalers sang in a typical temperance hymn,

> Eternal God to thee we raise,
> Our grateful songs this day;
> Thine is the glory, thine is the praise—
> Oh! bless our cause, we pray.

40. This tradition of setting hymns to older popular tunes or folk music can be seen in D. H. Mansfield, *The American Vocalist. Tunes, Anthems, Sentences and Hymns, Old and New, Designed for the Church, the Vestry, or the Parlor* (Boston: William Reynolds, 1849).

41. *Anniversary Meeting of the St. Albans Temperance Society, Tuesday, February 23, 1836* (St. Albans, Vt., 1836); *Order of Exercises for the Anniversary Meeting of the Ward Four Temperance Society, In the Church on Green Street, Sabbath Evening, March 15, 1835* (Boston, 1835).



Taunton Mass
Aug 1833

TEMPERANCE MEETING.

Order of Exercises.

Voluntary on the Organ.

PRAYER—by Rev. Mr. Bigelow.

HYMN—by a member of the Society.

Eternal God, to thee we raise
Our grateful songs this day;
Thine is the glory, thine the praise—
Oh! bless our cause, we pray.

And stay, great God, that turbid tide,
Which onward rolls its wave—
Speak, and its waters shall subside,
And close the drunkard's grave.

Look from thy glorious abode,
And let thy smile descend;
And fearless we will tread the road
Of Temp'rance to the end.

Thine eye hath watch'd us hitherto—
To thee we look alone—
Still guide, direct and lead us to
The temple of thy *Throne*.

ADDRESS—by L. M. Sargent, Esq.

Benediction.

Fig. 8. The program for a temperance meeting held in Taunton, Massachusetts, in August 1833, includes the text of a hymn with references to temperance in the second and third verses. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

And stay, great God, that turbid tide,
Which onward rolls its wave—
Speak, and its waters shall subside,
And close the drunkard's grave.[42]

Through much of the 1830s, the lyrical tone of temperance meetings remained ensconced in traditions of hymnody and the old jeremiad style of the Puritans. By the end of the decade, however, there was a growing sense that the movement's moral didacticism along with its shopworn sermons and hymns were having little effect on reducing drunkenness or increasing temperance association membership. The result was a great change in the music and style of the movement.

The prime movers in this transition were the 'Washingtonians.' Formed in 1840, the Washingtonian Total Abstinence Society was a national temperance association composed primarily, at least in its earliest incarnation, of reformed drunkards. Among its founders were John Hawkins and John Gough, the 'poet of the delerium tremens,' both former drunkards with plenty of experiences to relate to audiences and translate into song. On occasion they would slip back into their old vices and Gough could admit to many a 'fiery trial . . . of the most abominable wickedness.' In 1845, for example, Gough was discovered passed out drunk in a New York City whorehouse. Far from ruining his career, the scandal added to his popularity, apparently giving him some enticing new material for his lectures.[43]

42. *'Temperance Meeting, Order of Exercises'* [Taunton, Mass., 1833].

43. See the pamphlets: *The New Impulse: or, Hawkins and Reform. A Brief History of the Origin, Progress, and Effects of the Present Astonishing Temperance Movements, and of the Life and Reformation of John W. Hawkins, The Distinguished Leader, By A Teetotaler* (Boston: Samuel Dickinson, 1841); James L. Baker, *The Washingtonian Reform: An Address, Delivered Before the Hingham Total Abstinence Society, June 16, 1844* (Hingham, Mass.: Jedidiah Farmer, 1844); John Bartholomew Gough Diary, entry for October 19, 1846, Gough Papers, Octavo Volume 10, AAS; on the Washingtonians and Gough's New York scandal, see David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 67–68.

As men who had tasted life's pleasures, the Washingtonians infused temperance meetings with new energy, transforming their style from the didactic to the experiential, drawing increasing numbers of young people into the teetotaler fold. Within a short time, the old temperance meeting 'order of exercises' had been replaced by a rollicking good time, the sharing of experiences of temptation and a grand communal sing-along. Its older hymns, meanwhile, had been supplanted by temperance lyrics set to current and popular airs, tunes such as 'Yankee Doodle,' 'John Anderson, My Jo,' and 'The Old Oaken Bucket.'[44] According to one Washingtonian broadside, everything would now be done to make the 'temperance jubilee . . . an occasion of innocent and profitable amusement,' including the mass performance of 'SONGS of a new and interesting kind.' As one songster preface had it: 'It is a new era—Temperance songs will now be sung in low as well as high places. The Hymns and songs in this work are adapted to the most popular airs, . . . by which the Teetotaller can enjoy himself with delight.'[45]

The tone of such songs was ardently experiential, inviting play-acting and participatory theatrics. One, set to the tune of 'All on Hobbies,' called for meeting-goers to picture themselves as a real army:

> We have entered the field and are ready to fight,
> Against the rum demon from morning till night;
> The groggeries too, we're determined to crush,
> And we'll drink good cold water to nerve for the rush.[46]

44. See, for example, T. D. Bonner, *The Temperance Harp; A Collection of Songs, Suitable for Washingtonian and Other Total Abstinence Societies in the United States, And Respectfully Dedicated to Them* (Northampton, Mass.: Gazette Office, 1842); *Temperance Song Book of the Massachusetts Temperance Union* (Boston: Kidder and Wright, 1842).

45. *Grand Temperance Festival: Hymns for the Temperance Jubilee at the (late) Tremont Theatre, July 4, 1843* (Boston: Tuttle and Dennett, 1843; Joseph Waugh, *The Temperance Muse, A Collection of Hymns, Songs, &c. &c. for Temperance Meetings, Cold Water Celebrations, Festivals, &c.* (Providence, R. I.: H. H. Brown, 1842).

46. Waugh, *The Temperance Muse*.

Another, John Gough's 'Inebriate's Lament,' took meeting-goers directly into the drunkard's degradation—first taste of rum, loss of friends, poverty, imprisonment, and the death of the broken-hearted wife—and then allowed them to experience the joy of redemption through total abstinence.[47]

Other new temperance songs offered similar joys. The 'Ode to Rum,' set to the tune of 'The Roving Sailor,' began soberly enough: 'Let thy devotees extol thee / and thy wondrous virtues sum; / But the worst of names I'll call thee, / O, thou Hydra-monster RUM!' But then it moved into a long string of earthy epithets describing the effects of alcohol:

> Pimple-maker—visage bloater, / Health corrupter—idler's mate;
> Mischief-breeder—vice promoter, / Credit spoiler—devil's bait.
> Utterance-boggler—stench-emitter, / Strong-man sprawler—
> fatal drop;
> Tumult-raiser—venom spitter, / Wrath-inspirer—coward's prop.
> Virtue-blaster—base deceiver, / Spite displayer—sot's delight;
> Noise-exciter—stomach heaver, / Falsehood-spreader—
> scorpion's bite.[48]

By the time the singers had reached the end of this list, which must have produced its share of hilarity, being drunk on rum may have seemed tame in comparison.

Hymns had long been set to popular folk tunes. But somehow, the temperance phenomenon seemed different to observers, perhaps because the tunes were both popular and commercial, their appeal overtly linked with the market and with mass desires. Indeed, within a few years Washingtonians had so converged the uplift of reform with the appetites of the marketplace that it may

47. *Covert and Dodge's Collection of Songs, Duetts, Glees, Choruses, &c. as Sung by Them and J. B. Gough, at Their Temperance Concerts throughout the Union* (Boston: Keith's Music Publishing House, 1844).

48. *The Cold Water Melodies, and Washingtonian Songster* (Boston: Theodore Abbot, 1842).

have become difficult to tell where one began and the other ended. Published in 1844, the *Boston Temperance Songster* had what appears to be a drunken gnome on its cover (fig. 9). Its songs, lively to say the least, were set to blackface tunes such as 'Lovely Fan,' 'Lucy Neal,' and 'Dandy Jim of Caroline.' Meanwhile, its editors placed lyrics to these tunes between advertisements for patent medicines (which typically had alcohol as a key ingredient), balsam of wild cherry, and oxygenated bitters. The preface justified this interweaving of the popular with the moral:

> Some have thought, and perhaps honestly too, that many of the tunes were too lively, or the associations connected with them were such that they should be excluded from every thing that makes any pretensions to religion or morality. We recognize the truthful saying of the celebrated Whitefield, when a similar charge was brought against many of the tunes used by his denomination—that 'the devil has been in possession of all the good tunes long enough.' We think that Bacchus has had possession of these tunes too long altogether, and feel determined to press what we can of them into the Temperance Reform.[49]

By this time, the determination to make this link seemed to be paying off. 'It must be admitted,' claimed the editors of another songster, 'that the introduction of the Song and Glee into the Temperance meetings, has been of incalculable benefit to the cause; in fact, it has created greater interest and excitement, where other means would probably have failed.'[50]

Surrounded by this interest and excitement, the Hutchinsons hopped aboard the temperance bandwagon in the middle of their first tour. In the next two years the cause would go a long way toward making them famous. Near the end of 1842, Jesse penned new lyrics to a catchy Millerite hymn called 'The Old Church Yard,' coming up with what would become the Hutchinsons' signature song. 'The Old Granite State' provided the singers a

49. R. K. Potter. *The Boston Temperance Songster; A Collection of Songs and Hymns for Temperance Societies, Original and Selected* (Boston: William White, 1844).

50. *Covert and Dodge's Collection of Songs.*

Fig. 9. *Boston Temperance Songster*, 1844. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

chance to demonstrate their well-rehearsed harmonies while giving their audience a tour of their rural background, familial connections, and beliefs. We are 'all Washingtonians of the Old Granite State,' they sang in one version, declaring that they were all 'teetotalers' who had 'signed the pledge.'[51]

At about the same time, the brothers collaborated on 'King Alcohol,' a song set to the tune of 'King Andrew' and inspired by the story of 'Deacon Giles Distillery.' A cautionary tale about making deals with demon rum, the story concerned a deacon in Salem, Massachusetts, who ran a combination Bible manufactory and distillery. He was supposed to have made a deal with Satan to hire devils to make his alcoholic concoctions on the cheap, only to have his business destroyed when his mischievous workers burned his factory. 'King Alcohol,' warned the singers,

> . . . has many forms, / By which he catches men,
> He is a beast of many horns. / And ever thus has been.
> For there's rum, and gin, and beer, and wine, / And brandy, of logwood hue,
> And hock, and port, and flip combine, / To make a man look blue.
> He says be merry, for here's good sherry,
> And Tom and Jerry, champaigne and perry, / And spirits of every hue.
> And are not these a fiendish crew, / As ever a mortal knew?
> And are not these a fiendish crew, / As ever a mortal knew?[52]

Meanwhile, Judson finished work on a song that widened the group's reform repertoire. The result was 'Call the Doctor, or,

51. *The Granite Songster: Containing the Poetry as Sung by the Hutchinson Family, at Their Concerts* (Boston: A. B. Hutchinson, 1847).

52. [Miles St. John], 'Deacon Giles Distillery,' (n.p.) ca. 1835; 'King Alcohol,' in Sam Slocum, *The Cold Water Melodies, A New Selection Designed for Social Temperance Meetings, and the Family Circle* (Providence: I. Amesbury, Jr., 1851). The story of the song's origins comes from 'Of the Tribe of Jesse; A Once Famous Family of Composers and Singers; Their Stirring Ballads of the Old Granite State; Interesting Incidents in the Life of the Hutchinsons,' *Manchester Union* [New Hampshire], June 6, 1896, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

Anti-Calomel.' Set to the tune of the psalm 'Old Hundred'—even then more than two hundred years old—the song was a mixture of tradition, comedy, and reform, an amusing satire of modern doctors, a social protest against their constant use of the poisonous and mercury-laced calomel as a cure-all.[53]

By the time they reached Albany, New York, in August of 1842, the singers' alignment with reform began to change their fortunes. There, they met music store proprietor and sheet music publisher Luke Newland. Impressed with their reform repertory, Newland arranged for a local minister to lend his church to the singers for a performance, saving them the cost of hall rental. He then convinced the editor of the *Albany Evening Journal* to write a favorable review, or 'puff,' for the concert, while lining up twelve city businessmen to write complimentary endorsements. That night, the singers cleared a hundred dollars in profit. From this point they adopted Newland's formula, performing whenever they could in local churches and lining up the support of clergy, press, and prominent citizens. Soon they were confident enough to enter Boston for a concert at the Melodeon, shocking members of the Handel and Haydn Society by listing on their broadsides the outrageous price of fifty cents per ticket. To their critics' surprise they drew a large crowd. After all, they had a new reputation as singing reformers, and just as important, as John put it, 'the press was in our favor.'[54]

The years 1843 and 1844 marked the breakthrough period for the Hutchinsons. Following their success in Boston, in May of 1843 they made their first appearance in New York City. There they established their 'reputation' as John later recalled, drawing a crowd of three thousand to Manhattan's Concert Hall. Afterward, they received what would become the holy grail of American popular culture: P. T. Barnum himself wrote soliciting a deal

53. 'King Alcohol.'
54. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 61–64, 65.

to manage one of their tours.[55] While no deal with Barnum materialized, their days of performing in small churches were over. Their 1844 tour took them from Boston to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, where in each city they filled the immense two- to three-thousand-seat theaters of the antebellum stage, averaging as much as five hundred dollars in nightly profits. At the same time, sheet music for their songs sold well. 'The Old Granite State' along with Judson's comic songs and his more serious melodramatic pieces such as 'The Vulture of the Alps,' became parlor favorites.[56]

They also expanded their involvement in reform. In May of 1843, the singers made an extended visit to the Brook Farm commune in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, perhaps the most famous community dedicated to a moral life in America. 'The distinguished communists gave us a most hearty reception,' recalled John. 'We understood the company to be formed with the purpose of inaugurating a thorough reform in our civil and social society . . . . Every heart seemed bounding with hope, delightful to the soul; cheerfulness seemed to pervade every individual, man or woman; . . . all evidently converts to the great idea of human brotherhood. . . . All of the principles advocated we fully endorsed . . . for we earnestly believed in this manner of life.'[57]

During the following two years, the singers pooled their earnings in a 'common treasury.' They put two thousand dollars into improvements on the family homestead, which they renamed 'The Community.' They invested five thousand dollars to build what they called 'The Community Block,' a four-story structure on Milford's town square that would serve as a concert hall and meeting place for reformers and local socialists. Having committed to

55. George C. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 15 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 4:684–85; 'An Old Time Vocalist'; Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1:87–88.

56. See Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior*, 151–238.

57. George P. Bradford, 'Reminiscences of Brook Farm: By a Member of the Community' in *Century Magazine* 45 (November 1892): 141–48; Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 83, 84, 86.

one cause, as John put it, it was 'practically impossible' to avoid 'being under the influence of and affected by, several other related reforms.'[58] Between late 1842 and 1844, these included temperance, natural medicine, communism, prison reform, and vegetarianism. None of these causes would generate much controversy for the singers. In fact, they had recognized the temperance cause as a clear way to win popular favor. The same could not be said of their early involvement with antislavery.

'Slavery Would Have Died of That Music'

While slavery and heavy drinking both had long histories in America, slavery has long seemed more overtly linked to American 'tradition.' After all, by the time of the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, five of the first seven United States presidents had been slaveholders. From at least the 1820s onward, proslavery writers would do much to shore up this linkage, tying slavery to Biblical verse, classical antiquity, the timelessness of 'science,' and the supposed universality of American racism. All one had to do to understand the radicalism of abolition, according to many proslavery writers, was to witness the treatment of free African Americans in the North, where even abolitionists 'shrink from them as if the touch was pollution.'[59]

In effect, abolitionists found themselves in what might be best called a 'culture war.' Here they faced at least two sets of enemies. One seized the mantle of tradition, proclaiming the timelessness of slavery and the universality of racism in America, working hard to transform interpretations that could not be proved into facts that supposedly could, working equally hard to

58. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 80–81, 116, 136.

59. Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 25; see, for example, John C. Calhoun, 'Speech on the Reception of Abolitionist Petitions' (1837), in Eric L. McKitrick, ed., *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), 12–13; Michel Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America by Michel Chevalier* (1836; reprint, New York: Doubleday, 1961), 349; William Chambers, *Things as They Are in America* (1857), cited in David Brion Davis, *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1979), 278–82.

stamp the abolitionist movement with the brand of 'radicalism.' The other set took the voice of the authentic people, portraying abolition as nothing more than a middle-class movement, depicting the American middle class as lily-white and repressed, composed of artificial people who were hostile to the genuine expressions of African Americans, the common folk, and the 'real' popular culture of the streets. By 1842, the Hutchinsons found themselves entered into this struggle to define tradition, radicalism, and popular culture in America.

Early abolitionists appear to have acquiesced in seeing themselves as unpopular radicals. As Harriet Martineau admitted, in its early days the movement was little more than 'a subject for taunts.' 'We were right, and all the world about us was wrong,' recalled John Greenleaf Whittier, admitting that 'to onlookers our endeavor . . . must have seemed absurd. We could look for no response but laughs of derision or the missiles of a mob.'[60] At the same time, the movement's leaders seem to have recognized the importance of culture to their struggle. As the American Anti-Slavery Society's 'Declaration of Sentiments' expressed it, one of the key goals of the movement was to 'reject the use of all carnal weapons,' to meet violent attacks with passive nonviolence and 'moral suasion.' The result was a street theater of martyrdom: with every attack on a nonviolent abolitionist the American public would grow more sympathetic to the cause. Another goal was to 'send forth' lecturers and agents, to 'circulate, unsparingly and extensively, antislavery tracts and periodicals.'[61] This information and literature would do cultural work, laying the foundations for the movement, educating people on the evils of slavery, and making them feel, even at a distance, the sufferings of the slave.

60. Martineau, *Martyr Age of the United States*, 45; John Greenleaf Whittier, 'Read at the Semi-Centennial Celebration of the American Anti-Slavery Society at Philadelphia on the 3rd December, 1883,' in *The Anti-Slavery Convention of 1833: Old South Leaflet Number 81*, (n.p., n.d.).

61. *Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention* (n. p. , 1833).

As much as historians have stressed the movement's lack of popularity, these strategies worked exceedingly well. From forty-seven local societies in 1833, the movement swelled to well over one thousand by 1839. In 1836 members of these societies found some thirty-four thousand Americans willing to sign antislavery petitions to be sent on to the United States Congress. The House of Representatives responded by passing its infamous 'gag resolutions,' agreeing to receive the petitions but immediately tabling them and refusing to discuss their subject. By 1838, with the gag renewed for a third year, agents collected more signatures, three hundred thousand this time. By the time the House lifted the resolutions in 1844, agents had sent some two million names. As it turned out, the gag order contributed to the growth of the movement, linking it with freedom of expression and generating public sympathy along with a willingness to sign petitions.[62] Meanwhile, society members gathered regularly for antislavery meetings, picnics, and annual Christmas fairs. These provided more literature, along with, as one fair broadside put it, 'an effectual channel, through which your sympathy may unite with that of others, to swell the flood of effort by which high principle shall be diffused and right feeling excited, till the horrible institution of slavery shall be swept away.'[63] By 1838, the Lynn Female Anti-Slavery Society, like others that were springing up throughout New England and the Northeast, attributed its 'considerable accession of numbers' directly to the influence of publications and lectures. By 1839, one of the officers of a nearby association, the Anti-Slavery Society of Greater Lynn, was Jesse Hutchinson, Jr.[64] A

62. Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 136–37; Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 49–66.

63. William A. Koelsch, 'Grass-Roots Garrisonians in Central Massachusetts: The Case of Hubbardston's Jonas and Susan Clark,' *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 31 (Winter 2003): 73–89; *Fair . . . Fair!!!* (Syracuse, New York, 1837), broadside, AAS; *The Eleventh Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Fair* (Boston, 1844), circular, AAS.

64. 'Second Annual Report of the Lynn Female Anti-Slavery Society–Read June 21st, 1837, by Abbey Kelly,' Lynn Female Anti-Slavery Society, Record Book 1836–38, LHS; May 13, 1839, Anti-Slavery Society of Greater Lynn, 1832–1839 Record Book, LHS.

short time later, Jesse began making regular trips to Milford to organize a village 'come-outer' movement—no doubt contributing to the many 'isms' infecting the village—calling on the members of local churches to leave—or 'come out' of—their congregations if their ministers did not immediately denounce slavery.[65]

By the middle of 1842, as Judson, John, Asa, and Abby toured, Jesse had become friends with a recently arrived inhabitant of Lynn who lived 'a few rods down the street.' This was Frederick Douglass. Later in the year, at least according to John's recollection, Douglass, Jesse, and John went to Boston to take part in a demonstration for George Latimer, a fugitive slave arrested and claimed by his former master. By this time the brothers were clearly dwelling on the antislavery cause and the effects it might have on their careers. As John remembered it, while singing 'O, Liberate the Bondsman' at the head of a march to Marlboro Chapel, he was thinking about 'the contrast between singing before a popular audience two nights before and the somewhat unpopular mission in which I was now engaged.'[66]

Whatever the Hutchinsons' worries about the presumed unpopularity of the issue, by the end of 1842 the word was out: they were abolitionists. The information came from Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, the abolitionist editor of a Concord, New Hampshire, newspaper, the *Herald of Freedom*. 'Perhaps I am partial to the Hutchinsons for they are abolitionists,' Rogers wrote after the quartet performed in Concord. 'It need not affright them to have it announced.' He encouraged them to take the next step along the trajectory of reform, writing that he wished the quartet 'had a series of Anti-Slavery Melodies to sing at their Concerts,' adding that 'the time is coming, if it has not come already, when the public conscience will feel quieted at the thought of having heard music from the friends of the slave, and patronized it.'[67]

65. George A. Ramsdell, *History of Milford, 1738–1901* (Concord, N.H., 1901), 108–10.

66. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 70, 71.

67. 'The Hutchinson Singers,' *Herald of Freedom*, 244.

The singers were not so sure. They remained wary, as John later recalled, of an 'intense, bitter spirit' against anything 'that might be said or sung that should appear tinctured with the unpopular movement towards emancipation.'[68] Still they found themselves drawn into the movement. By the middle of 1842, American Anti-Slavery Society organizer John A. Collins had determined that abolition should follow the same populist path as temperance, writing an associate that in order to increase meeting attendance 'we should deviate from the ordinary and stereotyped plan of oratory . . . and adopt some novel method, in which all can participate.' Later in the year, Collins invited the Hutchinsons to perform at the society's large annual meeting to be held at Boston's Faneuil Hall in January of 1843. To his delight, the singers accepted. As he wrote in a circular letter: 'The happy influence which these singers will produce upon an audience must be witnessed, it can't be described.'[69]

Indeed, even though Jesse replaced Abby for the performance, the Hutchinsons made a splash at the convention, and the Boston meeting turned out to be the Anti-Slavery Society's liveliest to date. Following a speech by Wendell Phillips, the brothers rushed to the stage and burst into 'The Old Granite State,' adding a few new verses toward the song's end:

> Yes, we're friends of Emancipation
> And we'll sing a proclamation,
> Till it echoes through the nation,
> From the Old Granite State,
> That the tribe of Jesse
> Are the friends of Equal Rights.[70]

Lucretia Mott found the performance too festive and emotional. Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, along with most of the crowd, was

68. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 95–96.

69. John A. Collins to Isaiah C. Ray, May 25, 1842; John A. Collins to H. B. Cowing[?], [in Weymouth, Massachusetts], January 18, 1843; John A. Collins, et al., lithographed circular, January 18, 1843, Slavery in the United States Collection, Box 1, Folder 16, AAS.

70. *The Old Granite State*.

ecstatic. 'Oh, it was glorious!' wrote Rogers a few days later. 'I wish the whole city, and the entire country could have been there . . . Slavery would have died of that music and the response of the multitude.'[71]

With this popular response, the singers began to include the new verses in some of their public concerts. At the same time, they remained fearful of giving offense and losing public favor. For the next two years they mostly confined themselves to 'a general program of glees, sentimental and harmonious pieces.' They grudgingly left the verses out of their 1844 concerts in Baltimore and Washington, D. C., even as their visits to the slave markets of these cities outraged their sensibilities and tugged at their consciences. 'I feel determined to do something for the poor slave,' wrote Asa in the family diary after the visits. Yet always, it seems, they pulled back from direct statements of abolitionism. 'These were trying times,' John recalled, 'and the effort to make an artistic success without doing violence to our consciences was no very easy matter.'[72]

For at least one scholar, such reticence reveals 'more than a suggestion of mild hypocrisy.'[73] Certainly, this may have been the case. But the larger question may be this: given the fact that they had some evidence to the contrary, why did the singers insist on believing that any statement they made on behalf of direct abolition would destroy their popularity? Aside from simple hypocrisy—which seems a bit of a catch-all charge—the reason may have centered on the cultural struggles of the time. By 1843, there seem to have been two problems involved in the transformation of antislavery into a populist cause. The first came from the cultural equation of abolition with radicalism. The second lay in the messages of blackface entertainments.

The numberless blackface acts of northeastern urban theaters that crested into popularity during the 1830s contained a host of

71. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 321; Rogers cited in Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1:77.
72. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 106.
73. Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior*, 223.

often contradictory images: effervescent black dandies, happy slaves, runaways denouncing cruel masters, fearsome black brawlers and wily ex-slaves engaging in clever political commentary. Only the general style was consistent. For here, actor-musicians in burnt-cork or grease paint expressed all of these images—including the most egregiously racist—in a largely standardized 'black' dialect, in rough, rhythmic, and perceptually authentic 'black' music. The style was consciously vulgar, for blackface was a common man's culture, a way of making distinctions between two emerging identities: that of the working class and that of the bourgeoisie.[74] From Jim Crow to Zip Coon and Dandy Jim from Carolina, early blackface performers created a host of characters, all at the very bedrock of authentic identity. In doing so, they pioneered a modern variant of racism; along with their audiences of urban laborers, they loved this version of the African American, for his virile masculinity, for his freedom to give in to any and all appetites or urges, and for his readiness, at all times, to break into spirited song and dance.

The problem, and the comedy, came when they pictured this character as trying to rise above his station, put on airs, or more to the point: adopt middle-class standards of behavior (fig. 10). Education was one example. Abolition was another. Thus, parodies of 'ejumcated' black dandies spouting hilarious malapropisms and black 'bobolition' meetings in which the attendees quickly became drunk and broke into song and dance soon became staples of the genre. For blackface performers and audiences, in

74. This interpretation of blackface is a distillation of several works, notably: Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 66; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3–12; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), see especially 116–20; W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*. The difference between these arguments and the one here is that for the most part these scholars see the split between working-class authenticity as rooted in fact; the argument here sees it as a result of culture, in effect, blackface created an image of the authentic working class, along with an image of an artificial middle class.

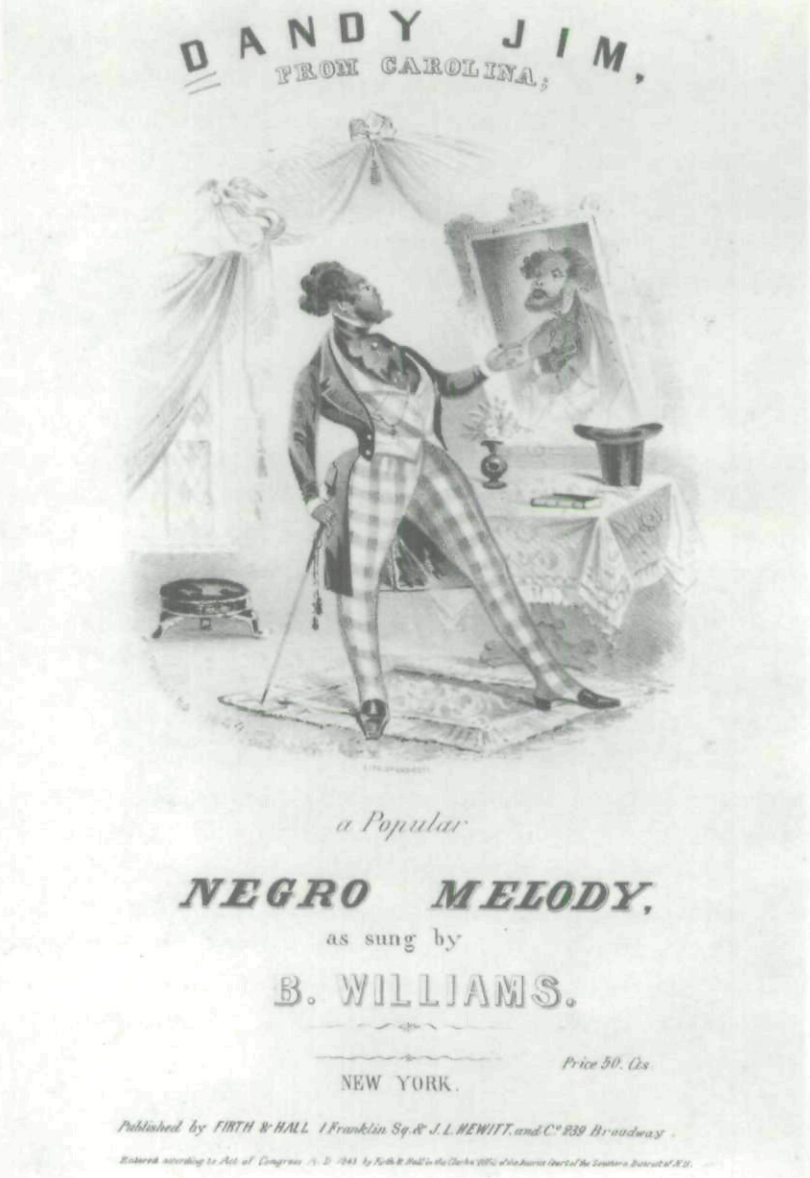


Fig. 10. 'Dandy Jim' was one of a number of blackface characters who stressed the comedy of free African Americans attempting to adopt standards of middle-class style and behavior. 'Dandy Jim from Carolina; a Popular Negro Melody' (New York: Firth and Hall, 1843). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

other words, middle-class uplift was the ruination of black nature. Abolition, meanwhile, might lead to the destruction of African Americans themselves. If, as one song had it, abolitionists were motivated primarily by a desire for interracial sex or 'amalgamation' and African Americans fell for their message, they would be ruined, beaten, perhaps killed by their white 'defenders' in the working class. The song lyric claimed, 'De fault was de bobolitionist, De niggers warn't to blame.'[75] Thus, along with racism the message of blackface was overt class hostility: blackness was the bedrock of authenticity; genuine and fun-loving black people could be appreciated only by unrepressed working-class men; the white bourgeois was an artificial person and the enemy of authentic blackness. The result was a powerful and lasting perception that the abolition movement was entirely limited to the white middle class.[76]

Middle-class northeasterners knew that much of this was nonsense. They knew there were laborers in the abolitionist movement; that there were African American abolitionist societies, and that middle-class individuals attended blackface entertainments and enjoyed them. Still, the messages of blackface had enormous staying power, lasting long after blackface could be defined as a working-class genre. The tunes, meanwhile, were undeniably popular. As the temperance movement had discovered, these songs were just the thing to widen the influence of reform.

In fact, by early 1843, the most popular tune in the northeast was 'Old Dan Tucker,' a blackface song by Dan Emmit of the Virginia Minstrels. Originating in Manhattan, the Virginia Minstrels had consciously set out to widen the audience for blackface,

75. The educated black would become a staple of the stump speech; an early example is 'Larned Nigger,' *Jasper Jack's Bran New Collection of the Musicalist Nigger Melodies as Eber Whar* (New York: T. W. Strong, 1840s); *The Pick Nack, or, Adventures of the Heroes of the Salt River Bulletin. A Poem, In Two Parts, Delivered by Josephus, before the Bobolition Society, and Published by Their Request*, (n. p. [1835]); *Dinah Crow's Abolition, or, the Grand Rumpus at the Bowery Theater, Chatham Chapel, 5 Points, Tappans, &c.* (New York, L. Demming, ca. 1840s).

76. For a recent example, see Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 64, 44–45.

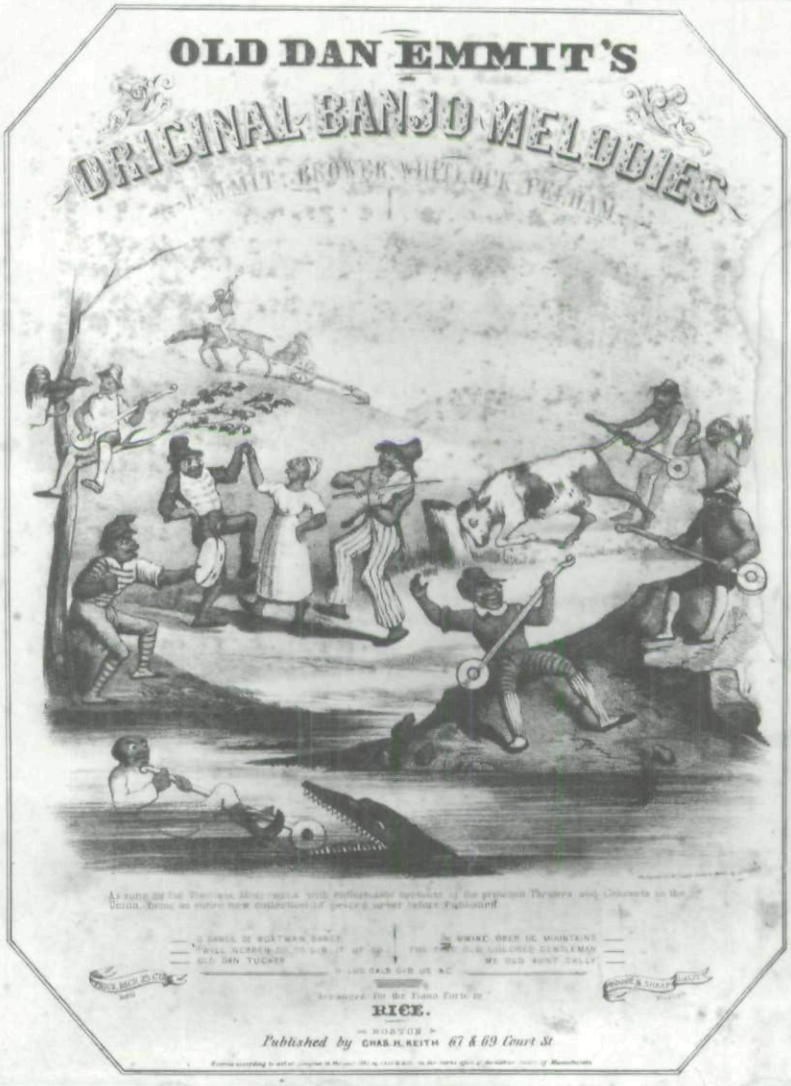


Fig. 11. An exuberant comic scene of music and dance on the cover of piano arrangements of six of 'Old Dan Emmit's Original Banjo Melodies' sung by the Virginia Minstrels. (Boston: Charles H. Keith, 1843). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

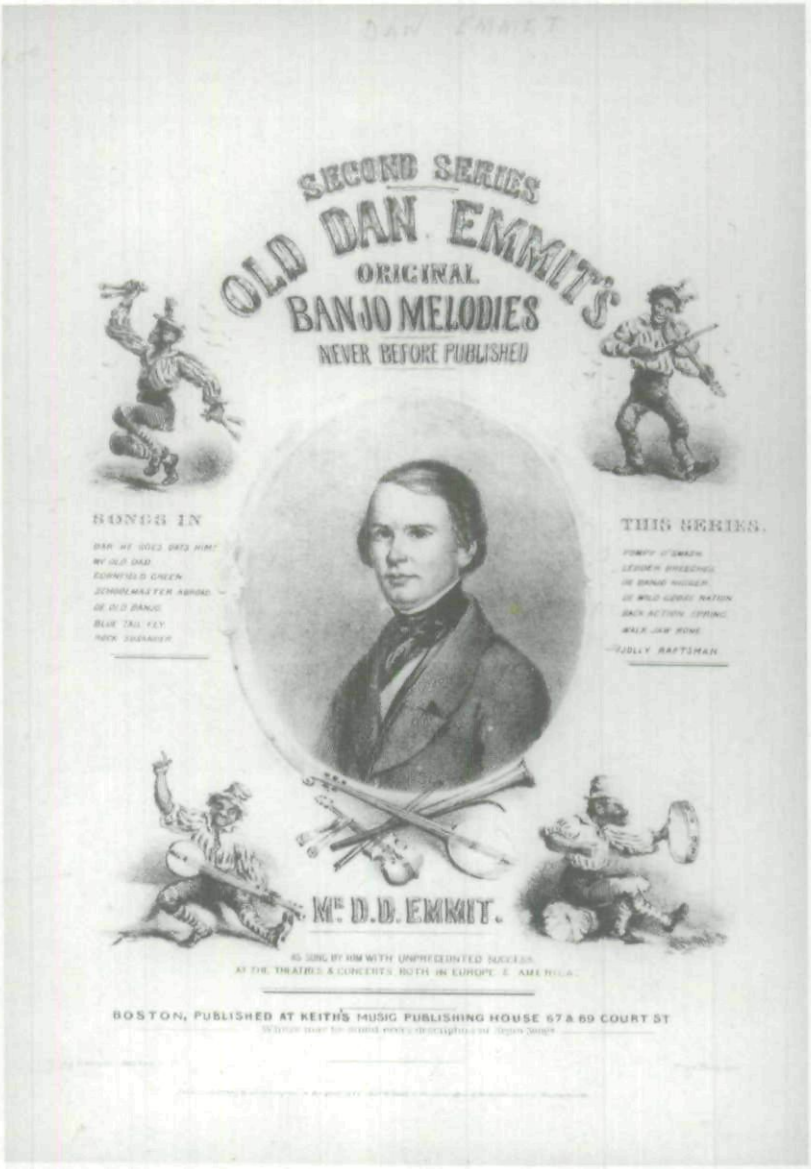


Fig. 12. The more restrained illustrated cover of the second series of 'Old Dan Emmit's Original Banjo Melodies Never Before Published' features a portrait of Mr. D. D. Emmit above an arrangement of instruments surrounded by figures playing bones, fiddle, banjo, and tambourine. (Boston: Keith's Music Publishing House, 1844). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

adding the respectable term *minstrelsy* to the mix, stressing that their performances were free of vulgarity.[77] Commercially, at least, they succeeded, and for a time the song was everywhere:

> I come to town de udder night,
> I hear de noise den saw de fight,
> De watchman was a runnin' roun',
> Crying Old Dan Tucker's come to town!
> So get out de way! Get out de way!
> Get out de way, Old Dan Tucker,
> You're too late to get your supper.[78]

Despite its broad appeal, 'Old Dan Tucker' maintained many of the images and messages of earlier blackface acts (figs. 11 and 12). Here was another standard blackface character, the authentic African American, the black brawler, yet another statement that uplift went against the nature of blackness. The problem was how to transform this sort of thing into an abolition song. The Washingtonians had clearly enjoyed blackface and had brought some of its tunes into the temperance movement. The Hutchinsons, like other abolitionists, remained suspicious of the genre, hostile to its vulgarity along with its racist stereotypes. After all, for many of their middle-class supporters, blackface was 'moral slime.' To their friend Frederick Douglass, its performers were 'filthy scum.'[79]

The singers apparently made their decision on blackface in April 1844, while they were staying in New Haven, Connecticut.

77. Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 149–52. Interestingly, Cockrell implies that the Virginia Minstrels took the idea of marketing themselves to middle-class audiences from the Hutchinsons; on the Virginia Minstrels, see also Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962).

78. *Old Dan Tucker. Written and Arranged for the Pianoforte by Dan. Tucker, Jr.* (New York: Atwill's, 1843).

79. 'The Late Judson J. Hutchinson,' G. W. P., Peterboro, New York, to the editor of the *New York Tribune*, January 16, 1859, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; 'The Hutchinson Family—Hunkerism,' *The North Star*, October 27, 1848.

There, John wrote in his diary that Asa 'wanted to go and hear the Virginia Minstrels to-night.' He was certainly wrong about the performers, for the troupe had departed America for England some time earlier. But he was sure about his reaction: 'I persuaded him not to,' he wrote. 'So we had a family meeting, sang 'Old Hundred,' and talked about heaven. How happy we shall be when we get home!'[80]

This little vignette would seem to confirm the message of blackface: the Hutchinsons as middle-class reformers were hopelessly repressed, willfully cut off from the genuine people of the streets; abolitionism was a movement of the white middle class. Accordingly, neither the singers nor the antislavery movement could ever hope to reach the 'real folk' or the standards of an 'authentic' popular culture. And yet something else was happening in April 1844. At about the same time that the singers locked themselves away from the vibrant blackface culture of New Haven, Jesse Hutchinson was writing 'Get Off the Track.' The song would mark a transition point in the abolition movement.

The Hutchinsons debuted the song at the May 1844 meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston. Held in the Tremont Temple, the meeting was crowded, as abolitionists gathered from all over the Northeast, massing under the Society's enormous new banners proclaiming 'Immediate and Unconditional Emancipation,' and 'No Union with Slaveholders.' On the night of May 31, William Lloyd Garrison spoke, taking on the charge that abolitionists were 'radicals,' declaring that in fact 'our principles are the only ones on which a free government can stand.' The Hutchinsons then rushed to the stage. This time, it appears that Abby was there, along with Jesse, giving them a richer sound, filling out their harmonies. 'Ho! the car emancipation,' they began in curiously rhythmic fashion, almost chanting,

80. Cited from John's diary in Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior*, 259.

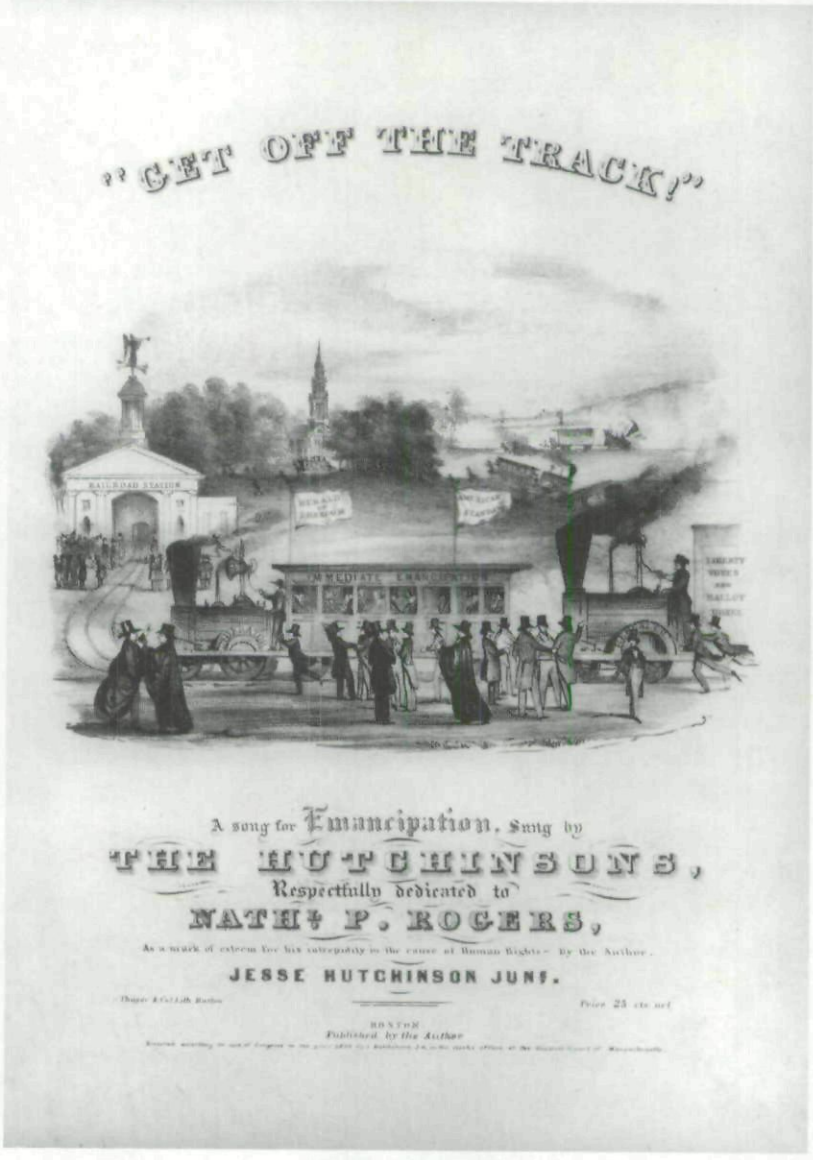


Fig. 13. The theme of human rights is illustrated in the banners and names of the engine and carriages in the railroad vignette illustrating the sheet music cover for the Hutchinsons' popular song, 'Get Off the Track.' Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

Rides Majestic through our nation.
Bearing on its train the glory,
LIBERTY! a nation's glory.
Roll it along! Roll it along!
Roll it along! through the nation,
Freedom's car, Emancipation.[81]

From here the song moved through verses lauding Garrison and the *Liberator*, criticizing the northern church and clergy, and attacking Henry Clay's politics of compromise. As they reached its crescendo, the singers abandoned all sense of 'timing and rule,' according to Nathaniel Rogers, instead giving way to an increasing tempo, conjuring forth images of abolition as a runaway train rushing toward a multitude of apathetic or proslavery Americans 'stupidly lingering' on the tracks, with 'terrible enginery and speed and danger.' By song's end, recalled Rogers, they were almost shouting, crying panicked warnings of 'get out of the way!' just as if they really were 'about to witness a terrible railroad tragedy.' They then settled back into the melody, finishing with a series of 'hurrahs' as the multitude boarded 'Freedom's car.'[82]

The effect was stunning. Undoubtedly, some in the audience, like Rogers, simply stared, awed at the singers' theatrical power. Others stomped and clapped in time. Several, including Garrison himself, seem to have literally danced in the aisles, rhythmically punching the air with their fists.[83] Even apart from the Hutchinsons' dramatics, there was something irresistible about the song. The tune, after all, was 'Old Dan Tucker.' The Hutchinsons had lifted a blackface tune for what would soon be widely recognized as the most blatant and radical abolitionist anthem of the era.

81. 'Get Off the Track!,' *The Granite Songster*; in this songster, 'Get Off the Track' is listed as a 'Railway Song' with 'words composed and adapted to a slave melody, advocating the emancipation of the slaves, and illustrating the onward progress of the anti slavery cause in the United States.'

82. 'The Hutchinsons,' *Herald of Freedom*, June 14,1844, in Rogers, *Collection from the Newspaper Writings*, 272.

83. 'The Hutchinsons,' *Herald of Freedom*; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 329.

Thus, much like the temperance movement, abolition entered the realm of popular culture. As early as 1842, the American Antislavery Society had published *The Anti-Slavery Pick-Nick*, a songster 'designed to interest the young in the anti-slavery cause' and a how-to guide for 'public celebrations.' As John Collins suggested in the *Pick-Nick's* preface, even by this time the populist message of abolitionism was effecting a change. 'Public opinion,' he wrote, 'is now so modified on the question of slavery, that common and other schools will tolerate the rehearsal of pieces which embody the principles of freedom.'[84] A year later, the editors of another antislavery songster looked forward to even greater popularity for the movement. As one wrote in its preface:

> The influence of Temperance Songs is no longer to be questioned as a powerful means of carrying forward our cause. If the progress of *that* reform is indebted, in any degree, to the aid of *music*, will not the *Anti-Slavery cause* be advanced by the same means? Let our Anti-Slavery friends turn their attention to this subject, and organize in every town *an Anti-Slavery choir*. There are many who have not the gift of *speech-making*, but who can, by *song-singing*, make strong appeals, in behalf of the slave, to every community and to every heart.[85]

Especially after 1844, these visions increasingly became realities. Within a short time the choirs had been organized and it was not uncommon to find broadsides, sheet music, and songsters with antislavery lyrics set to lively blackface tunes.[86] During this time as well, antislavery meetings and fairs became festive occasions. At the time, at least, it may have become more difficult to paint abolitionists as repressed sourbellies, as enemies of all

84. John A. Collins, *The Anti-Slavery Picknick: A Collection of Speeches, Poems, Dialogues and Songs; Intended for Use in Schools and Anti-Slavery Meetings* (Boston: H. W. Williams, 1842): 3–4, 98–99, 141–42.

85. Jairus Lincoln, *Anti-Slavery Melodies: For The Friends of Freedom. Prepared by the Hingham Anti-Slavery Society* (Hingham, Mass.: Elijah B. Gill, 1843).

86. See, for example, George W. Clark, *The Liberty Minstrel* (New York: Leavitt and Alden, 1845); William W[ells] Brown, *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs for Anti-Slavery Meetings* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1849).

popular amusements. As one attendee of an '*Abolition* frolic' put it, these gatherings could easily become lively social evenings as well as political occasions, where the movement's supporters 'tead [*sic*], danced and made noisy fun until early morning.'[87]

Certainly, the Hutchinsons' audiences grew more noisy and numerous. Soon they began hearing shouted calls for 'Get Off the Track' while they were onstage. At a fall 1844 concert in Bath, Maine, they obliged, and 'received cheers such as we seldom heard.' By the time they arrived in New York City on March 17, 1845, for a concert at Niblo's Garden, they were convinced, as John put it, 'that people would take in song what they would not in any other way.'[88] Despite the fact that this would be a public concert, when the broadsides with their printed programs went up, they included 'Get Off the Track.'

'We Are Going to Sing If We Have to Die For It'

Two days later the singers were holed up in a boardinghouse near the theater, surrounded by fretting abolitionist friends, anxiously awaiting the time of their concert and the arrival of sixty antiabolitionist rowdies. Manhattan, they realized, perhaps even the whole country, was still 'very tender' when it came to the issue of slavery. The papers had delivered their warnings, saying that the family should not be allowed to sing 'Get Off the Track,' that if they dared sing it, 'they deserve to be mobbed.' At last, after hearing the day's talk of warnings, threats, and rowdies with brickbats, the landlady of the house offered her services to the singers. She would go to Niblo's with them. 'Boys,' she said, according to Abby's recollections, 'if any disturbance occurs in the concert you look out for yourselves. I shall rush to the stage and take Abby bodily, and carry her off in my arms.'[89] This may have

87. Eliza E. Chase to Lucy Chase [in Philadelphia], Worcester, November 17,1843; Lucy Chase to Sarah Chase [undated, mid-1840s], Salem or Lynn, Massachusetts, Chase Family Papers, AAS.

88. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 128.

89. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 138; 'Story of "Get Off the Track," as written by Mrs. Abby Patton.'

been the most ominous turn of events yet. Living near Niblo's Garden, the landlady would have been in the best position to know about the great struggles over the theater in the years leading up to 1845 and to take seriously the rumor that rowdies were coming to the performance.

In some ways this struggle dated back centuries. For years, attitudes toward the theater in the Northeast echoed the old antitheatricalism of Puritans, ideas equating actors with liars and actresses with prostitutes. Accordingly, the 'legitimate'—meaning widely acceptable—theater emerged only in the 1820s, and even then, it had to be justified with a rhetoric of social improvement. In 1826, at a celebration to mark the beginning of construction on the Bowery Theater in New York City, Mayor Philip Hone claimed that it would 'improve the taste, correct the morals, and soften the manners of the people.'[90]

The rationale seemed to work, at least for a time. By the late 1820s, along with a wide array of music halls, small theatrical venues, and saloons offering entertainment, there were at least six large theaters in Manhattan, a few, such as the Bowery, the Park Theatre, and Niblo's Garden, capable of holding between two and four thousand spectators. These large theaters had ideals of social control and hierarchy built into their architecture. From their positions in the upper tiers of box seats, the city's elite dominated; below them, in the pit, stood what were then called the 'middling classes,' a mixture of artisans, small merchants, and clerks; elevated behind the pit and boxes were the cheap seats of the gallery, an area filled with the 'lower orders,' journeymen, artisans' apprentices, and even some African Americans.[91] While it still attracted much moral criticism, and while its audience members remained almost entirely male, the theater had become an accepted

90. See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 51.

91. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 7–8, 22; Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 16–17.

and controlled urban institution, a place of entertainment, uplift, and social hierarchy.

During this time, however, new urban geographies emerged along with a return of struggles over who would control the theater. Rural youth, such as the Hutchinson brothers, rushed to cities seeking opportunities as merchants and clerks. Master artisans embraced new modes of factory production, transforming journeymen and apprentices into waged employees, expelling former live-in laborers from their household shops. In better neighborhoods, young men-on-the-make crowded into boardinghouses. In poorer areas, teeming masses of unconnected working men and newly arriving immigrants created crowded neighborhoods renowned for violence, vice, and vibrant street cultures: Boston's North End, Philadelphia's South Side, and New York's Sixth Ward, which included the area soon to become America's most famous slum, the 'Five Points.'[92]

Here were the early stirrings of a visible class split. By 1832, the Sixth Ward's Bowery Theater had become distinctly working class, catering to laborers and competing with smaller Five Points saloons and theaters with a nightly fare of burlesque, comedy, and blackface. In the city's other large theaters, the old elite maintained a semblance of control. Yet working-class men and unregulated young clerks invaded the pit and gallery.

They brought along a style of active spectatorship, a traditional idea that the action of the theater extended from the stage into the audience. At the core of this idea was the male audience's 'democratic right' to participate in the action, by immediately applauding what they liked; by stopping a drama or musical comedy to demand instant encores; by hissing acts or actors that met their disapproval; by talking during performances, or yelling to their

92. Perhaps the best glimpse of this transition is Cohen, *Murder of Helen Jewett*; See also Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*; Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

friends; by throwing trash onto the stage or upon the unsuspecting heads of their fellows in the pit. As well, they demanded the services of the 'third tier,' the traditional lobby area characterized by loud meetings, crowded theater bars, and processions of large numbers of prostitutes. Soon the struggle over the theater had been reentered: in the words of one historian, 'reformers regarded the theater as a highly dangerous place, a threat to morals.'[93]

By the time of the Hutchinsons' planned concert at Niblo's, to a large extent these struggles pitted middle-class reformers against 'the rowdies' of the Sixth Ward and the Five Points. In July 1834, a hostile reaction to a perceptually 'unpatriotic' performance at a Sixth Ward theater got out of hand, moving from a simple trashing of the theater to a full-scale riot, a three-day attack on abolitionists and African Americans. Middle-class reformers responded by sponsoring several outposts of moral reform in the Five Points. One of the most famous was Charles Finney's Chatham Street Chapel, an abolitionist and temperance stronghold that had earlier been the working-class Chatham Theater. In 1839 P. T. Barnum began a transformation of lower Broadway by opening his famous American Museum. Barnum banished the third tier from his museum's theater, placed seats in the pit to control its rowdies, and began courting families and women with sentimental reform melodramas.[94]

Within a few years, the theater had been marked by a distinct middle-class presence, at least in certain neighborhoods. By the

93. Cohen, *Murder of Helen Jewett*, 68–69; Claudia Johnson, 'That Guilty Third Tier: Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century American Theaters,' *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 575–84; McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 16–21; Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 45–50, 55–58.

94. The best recent account of the 1834 riot may be in Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth- Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Penguin–Putnam, 2002), 7–13; Cohen, *Murder of Helen Jewett*, 277; on Barnum's transformation of lower Broadway, see James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); 24–25; Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Richard Butsch, 'Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences,' *American Quarterly* 46 (1994):374–405; McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 164, 168, 173–75.

time of the Hutchinsons' arrival in New York, America's most popular middle-class play was *The Drunkard*, a maudlin tale of alcoholism and redemption that ran for over one hundred nights at Moses Kimball's Boston Museum, and which Barnum soon featured at his American Museum. The play, as its broadsides shouted, featured a triumph over alcohol effected by 'TEMPERANCE, PURITY, and LOVE,' all enacted within the syrupy strains of 'Home! Sweet Home!'[95] Meanwhile, gangs of Sixth Ward young men roamed the Five Points, attending blackface parodies of bourgeois affectation at the Bowery Theater and protecting their turfs from middle-class 'dandies.' They battled the police along with one another, and sometimes ventured to the better streets near Broadway to vandalize the saloons of the respectable.[96]

From 1845 to 1850, the Hutchinsons would find themselves at the center of this conflict. During this time, as their popularity increased, so grew the number of their critics. Many of these criticisms reflected clear class hostility. Many would be articulated in the style of the masculine rowdies. One hostile reviewer, for example, summed up a typical Hutchinson audience as a crowd of 'well dressed people' listening to a 'selection of namby pamby ballads' performed with an 'awkward stiffness of manner, and studied affectation of rusticity.' As the writer concluded: 'How much better would it be if they would sing good manly songs?' Others debunked the singers' popularity. One claimed that they paid for their positive reviews at a rate of 'ten cents a line,' adding that their audiences were large because free tickets were sent to 'clergy, heads of schools, abolition, tract, temperance and moral reform societies.' Another maintained that despite their 'paid puffs,' which depicted them as 'the most wonderful

95. *Boston Museum, Corner of Tremont and Bromfield Streets. Revival, the Great Moral Play, The Drunkard! Or, The Fallen Saved!* (Boston, William Marden, 1845).

96. Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 31–32, 57–61, 80, 99; Anbinder, *Five Points*, 176–91; see also Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underworld* (1927; reprint, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), 1–41, 92–107.

artists of the age,' their singing was worthless: 'The Negro melodies at southern corn shuckings are infinitely superior.'[97]

Just as often, these criticisms appear not to have come from below but from above, from the old elites, the old Whig and Democrat 'gentlemen of property and standing' who continued to see themselves as the defenders of the people against the reformist agenda of the rising urban middle class. Immediately after the sheet-music publication of 'Get Off the Track' in 1844, for example, writers for the *Boston Atlas* expressed outrage at the song's lack of good taste, particularly its criticism of Henry Clay. 'When the vocalists known by the name of the "Hutchinson Family" first made their appearance in Boston,' they wrote, 'we felt some interest for them, for their nativity, their simplicity of manners, and their unadorned music.' Yet, they went on to say, 'if audiences can be entertained with the trashy words of this song, their poetical tastes must be of a very low order.'[98]

Other newspapers upbraided the singers for their 'contemptible spirit of gain,' along with their pretensions to the higher standards of European artists. They needed to be told, claimed a writer, that they were 'only a company of common song-singers, whose performances sound very pleasingly to the great mass of people, ignorant of real music.' Still others faulted them for their vision of middle-class inclusiveness, for allowing 'Guinea Negroes' to attend their concerts, and for lowering musical standards by making 'Ethiopian Serenaders' of themselves. Similarly, for writers of an editorial in the *New York Sunday Era*, the Hutchinsons were little more than 'Garrison's band of whitewashed nigger minstrels.'[99]

97. 'The Hutchinsons,' *New York Courier and Inquirer*, undated clipping [1847]; 'The Hutchinson Family,' *New York Day Book*, April 12, 1850; 'A Few More Squints. The Hutchinsons,' unidentified newspaper clipping [ca. April 1850], Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

98. 'New Song,' *Boston Atlas*, April 18, 1844.

99. 'A Word of Advice,' *Philadelphia Daily Sun*, April 3, 1848; 'Southern Opinion of the Hutchinson Family,' unidentified newspaper clipping, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; 'Garrison's Nigger Minstrels,' *New York Sunday Era*, [April 1850], undated clipping, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

Eventually most critics returned to the issue of abolitionism. On this subject, even Hutchinson audiences expressed reservations. As John later recalled overhearing after a concert about this time: 'They sing the sweetest harmony I have heard, but—their politics!' Other critics would be far more threatening. Hutchinson concerts offended the very 'nostrils of propriety,' claimed one, citing their 'fiery abolitionism—their pretended love for the colored race—their rank association with the 'niggers'—their bloated philanthropy—[and] their bepuffed, *ad nauseam*, sympathy with all the isms of the day.' Their songs were not songs at all but 'abolition lectures,' claimed another. Or they were the stuff of long-haired radicals, maintained still another, who 'have set out to make their jack by playing upon the Harp of one wooly string—abolitionism.' If they 'had more brains and less hair,' he added, 'they would, no doubt, be sent out as itinerant lecturers to retail abolition cant at half-price. But, being too shallow for orators, they "go-a-singing" which requires nothing but wind and bellows power.' The conclusions to these attacks were often simple: the Hutchinsons should be 'hissed tremendously'; 'respectable men and women should shun them'; and they needed to be stopped, for they were 'engaged in a singing crusade against the peace and fraternal respect of the people of the Union.'[100]

On the evening of March 19, 1845, these were the hostile voices surrounding the singers. On this night, the threat of violence seemed real. Later they would remember the evening as perhaps the crucial moment of their career, as filled with chances for heroism but also fraught with anxiety. All day they met with their friends and supporters, some debating whether they should stay with the program that included 'Get Off the Track,' many urging them to return to their previous caution. At last, recalled Abby, she stood with her brothers and together they gestured to the program,

100. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1: 92; 'The Hutchinson Family, by Joe Linchpin,' unidentified newspaper clipping, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; 'The Hutchinson Family,' *New York Day Book*, April 12, 1850; 'The Hutchinsons,' unidentified newspaper clipping, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

saying 'Gentlemen, we are going to sing this tonight, if we have to die for it.' They then made their way to Niblo's, their landlady marching beside them, where they finally took the stage.

Again even in recollections made years later, a sense of palpable anxiety comes through. As they began the concert, most likely with 'Blow On! Blow On!'—a 'pirate's glee' according to their broadsides—they recalled singing with a kind of manic energy that could have been caused only by an enormous fear. At last, after some nine or ten numbers and two intermissions, they came to 'Get Off the Track.' Jesse ran out from the wings to join his brothers and sister. Perhaps by this time they had read their audience and felt safe; perhaps, as Abby put it, they felt the 'stirring' of a 'martyr spirit' and were 'ready to die.' They started in on the song 'with a fervor and enthusiasm greater then was our wont.'[101]

According to Abby, 'we were heartily cheered between all the verses, and when we sat down, the applause was tremendously overwhelming.' For John, the situation was more in flux: at first, he recalled, 'the audience hissed; then some began to cheer, and there was a tug of war; finally the cheers prevailed.'[102] The 'rowdies' remained silent; or they had never been in the hall in the first place. What did happen, at least as John remembered it, revealed a new sense of militancy within the abolitionist movement. After the performance of 'Get Off the Track,' one of the singers' friends, Henry Dennison, hastily scribbled a request for a song on a small piece of paper, wrapped the paper around a penny, and threw it toward the stage. The missile struck John's violin. Instantly there were outcries from the audience: was this one of the dreaded brickbats? Had the rowdies at last made their appearance? A near fight broke out, with Dennison frantically trying to explain himself in the middle of an angry knot of shouting and shoving men. The singers left the stage during the commotion, shortly

101. 'Story of the Song "Get Off the Track," as written by Mrs. Abby [Hutchinson] Patton,' undated manuscript, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

102. 'Story of the Song "Get Off the Track"'; Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1:138.

returning when everyone realized what had happened. But for John, as it likely was for many in attendance, the scene revealed something important: as he put it, 'the blows of the abolitionists were beginning to tell.'[103] Here, in addition to the positive reception received by 'Get Off the Track,' was a sign of a new militancy, a sign that abolition had reached new popular heights.

The Hutchinsons enjoyed their peak popularity between 1845 and 1850. In August 1845, the singers, along with Jesse, made a hasty decision to travel to Great Britain, joining up with Frederick Douglass and James Buffum for a series of concerts and abolitionist lectures in Ireland, Scotland, and England. They stayed nearly a year, finding wide success particularly in the working-class industrial cities of the English Midlands, adding to their popularity the cachet of having been accepted by the presumably more sophisticated European audiences.[104] They returned in July of 1846, performing soon thereafter to an audience of three thousand people at the Tabernacle in Manhattan. Throughout this time, they made 'Get Off the Track' a regular part of their concert program. They also remained at the center of American popular culture, attracting new audiences and supporters, encountering threats from critics, and always, it seems, generating coverage in the press.

In December 1846, at a series of concerts in Philadelphia, they again faced the threat of an antiabolitionist mob. This time the threat came from the office of the mayor of Philadelphia, along with the police department, and focused on the Hutchinsons' policy of forcing theater owners to integrate their halls. Given the ultimatum of closing their concert to African Americans or facing a mob supported by the local magistrates, the singers cancelled the performance. Once again, the controversy revealed the struggles within the theater. Philadelphia's 'Rotten Egg Volunteers,' according to one paper, regretted the mayor's interference, claiming that

103. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1:138.
104. Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, 1:142, 145–216.

they were ready to treat the Hutchinsons in 'such a manner as they deserve,' adding the warning: 'When people carry their Negro feelings beyond Massachusetts they carry their "wool" to a market that won't pay.'[105] At the same time, the incident again evinced the growing militancy of the singers' abolitionist supporters. For as a correspondent for the *Anti-Slavery Standard* put it, they too regretted the cancellation:

> We are inclined to think that a mob, had there been one, would have found their match. There are quite a number of stout people about in this city, who don't mind a knock-down for a good cause, and would have esteemed this one; . . . though we by no means approve of violence, yet when there is no other law but mob-law, we believe in the principle of rotation in office. The pro-slavery party have [*sic*] been in the ascendancy quite long enough.[106]

Clearly the movement had moved some distance since the old moral suasion days of the early abolitionists.

After 1845, abolition was only one of several controversial issues surrounding the singers. From 1846 to 1848, they sang in protest against the United States war with Mexico. Meanwhile, they expanded their list of causes in their songs. 'Uncle Sam's Farm' was an invitation to the immigrants of the world to come to America, to partake in Western free lands, a promise that the government was 'rich enough to give us all a farm.' 'If I Were a Voice' proclaimed a world-wide agenda of human rights and socialist reform.[107] Eventually, they would begin performing at women's rights and female suffrage meetings. In 1845, they sold

105. 'A Word of Advice,' *Philadelphia Daily Sun*, April 3, 1848; 'Most Base and Disgraceful,' unidentified newspaper clipping, Hutchinson Collection; quotation from an article in the *Albany Knickerbocker* in 'Shame on the Craven Presses of Philadelphia,' *Pennsylvannia Freeman*, January 11, 1847, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

106. 'The Hutchinsons,' *Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 1847; other examples of outrage at the cancellation from abolitionists who were ready to fight appeared in 'Interdict Against the Freedom of Speech,' *Philadelphia Sun*, December 31, 1846; 'The Daily Sun,' *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 1848, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

107. 'Uncle Sam's Farm,' *The Hutchinson Family's Book of Words* (New York: Baker, Godwin & Co., 1851), 11; sheet music: *If I Were a Voice, Sung by Abby Hutchinson at the*

their stake in their Milford 'Community' and quickly invested in a tract of land at 'High Rock' in Lynn, as a home and communal center for reformers and assorted other non-conformists. In their own words, they remained 'communists,' supporters of 'socialism,' 'municipal ownership,' and the 'equality of man.'[108]

More than a few times some or all of these causes would land them in trouble. As Asa put it in the family's first official biography, 'during three years they gave scarcely a concert when they were not hissed on account of their liberal opinions.' 'Oh yes, indeed they gave us trouble,' said John in a later interview, recalling occasions when they had to stop singing and simply wait, standing 'five to ten minutes at a time, to let our opponents get tired of hissing.'[109]

Still, they continued to draw packed houses. In fact, it appears that many if not all of these causes tied the singers and the American theater more closely to an ethos of middle-class reform. And each drew new audiences to the theater. Anna Thaxter was typical in this regard. Orphaned as a teen and left with a small estate, Thaxter had settled into a life of charitable activities and social rounds by the mid-1840s. In October 1846, she recorded in her diary the results of a 'parlor talk' on 'the propriety of going to the theatre.' She was interested in going, she admitted, for she was passionate about music and longed to hear the opera. But in the end she decided against it, concluding that the theater's 'effect upon the actors and actresses themselves cannot be very good.' Two days later a young man invited her to attend a play. She again declined, writing that she was 'still somewhat undecided about the

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Concerts of the Hutchinson Family. Music by Judson Hutchinson (Boston: G.P. Reed and Company, 1850).

108. *The Seventieth Birthday Anniversary of John W. Hutchinson (Tribe of John and Jesse) at The Cottage, High Rock, Lynn, Mass. January Fifth, 1891* (Lynn: Thos. P. Nichols, 1891); 'Bard Talks Love—Tells Post Reporter All About His Numerous Affairs of the Heart—Pets Bride and Dances to Show that He Still Defies Age,' *Boston Post*, August 26, 1905, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

109. *Book of Words of the Hutchinson Family* [1855], 38; 'John W. Hutchinson, The Patriotic Singer of Old High Rock is 72 To-Day.'

Fig. 14. An owner of this copy of *The Old Granite State*, presumably an enthusiastic fan of the Hutchinsons', wrote the name of each family member on his or her forehead: from left, Judson, Abby, John, Asa. Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

theatre.' To this entry she added: 'Mr. Peters invited me to go and hear the Hutchinsons, the next time they sing.' The opportunity for her first night at the theater came a week later. When Anna Thaxter returned home that evening, she wrote in her diary: 'The music was delightful.' To this she added the usual post script: 'Abby Hutchinson is as simple and natural as possible.'[110]

Conclusion: 'Exactly What Americans Ought to Be'

For people such as Anna Thaxter it seems that the Hutchinsons broke down long-held suspicions about the immorality of the theater, transforming it into a space of middle-class entertainment. The effect of this transformation will undoubtedly remain a subject for debate. For many historians it seems little more than the imposition of 'social control' on the common folk, a successful effort to tame the theater's rough and democratic culture of the 1830s and 1840s, to replace it with middle-class ideals of domesticity, banal sentimentality, and passive spectatorship.[111]

Yet if this was the case, the transformation also generated a new theatrical style that was not without its own share of energy and passion. To call this style banal, in fact, misses its political content, for it appears to have resulted in a version of popular-culture abolitionism. According to an 1861 article in the *Saint Louis Democrat*, the Hutchinsons 'doubtless converted thousands whom arguments less inspired could not have reached.' William Lloyd Garrison concurred, indicating that their singing 'made thousands of converts.'[112] Indeed, as one Lowell mill girl wrote in 1844, 'they are not less popular *here* because they sing the wrongs of the slave.' As Frederick Douglass wrote in a letter to John

110. October 24, October 26, and November 3, 1846, Anna Quincy Thaxter Cushing diary, Cushing Papers, Octavo Volume 4, AAS.

111. McConachie calls it a 'retreat from the possibilities of democracy to the haven of repressed, commodified respectability.' *Melodramatic Formations*, 195; Allen refers to it as 'the exclusion of the popular as that which was not respectable, tasteful, or clean.' *Horrible Prettiness*, 146.

112. *Saint Louis Democrat* article cited in *Our Paper: Thirty Years Singing! Concert in this Place! Over a Quarter of a Century's Career of the Hutchinson Family*, undated pamphlet, (n. p., ca.1870), 2, LHS; Garrison testimonial, April 3, 1874, in *The Originial Hutchinson Family*

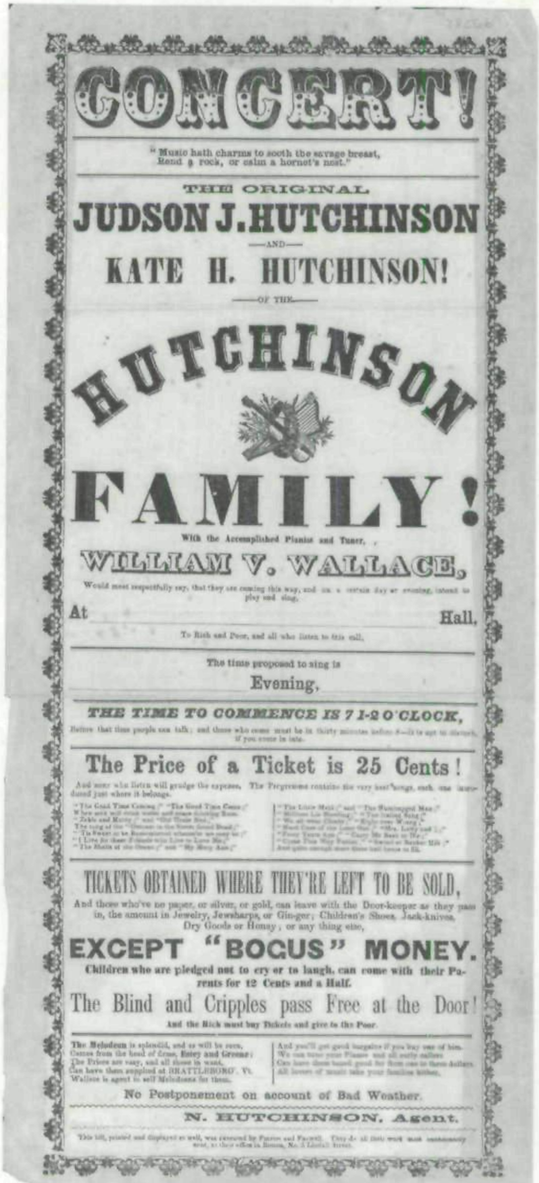

Fig. 15. After 1850, the Hutchinson brothers toured separately with their own families or 'tribes.' Poster for a 'Concert by the Original Judson J. Hutchinson and Kate H. Hutchinson of the Hutchinson Family!' designed with spaces for the location, date, and time of the event to be filled in as appropriate. New Hampshire Historical Society collections.

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

AT

CHICKERING HALL,

Fifth Ave. and 18th St., New York City,

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, JANUARY 5th, 1896, AT 3 P.M.,

TO COMMEMORATE THE

SEVENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY of the Noble Veteran of Song,

JOHN W. HUTCHINSON, of Lynn, Mass.

Fig. 16. Notice of a celebration for John W. Hutchinson's seventy-fifth birthday, January 5, 1896. New Hampshire Historical Society collections.

Hutchinson in 1874, the family 'sung the yokes from the necks & fetters from the limbs of my race.' For one old abolitionist, their sheet music and concerts 'started in me the first anti-slavery sentiment and conviction that I can now recall.' For another, they revealed 'the *moral influence* of music.' As yet another summed up their influence: 'Nothing that was said or done contributed more to the final conflagration than [their] anti-slavery songs.'[113]

Through the nineteenth century the singers generated thousands of such testimonials. Even as their popularity declined after 1850, with Abby's marriage and retirement, with the rise of more 'modern' singing styles, and with the separation of the brothers into their own singing 'tribes' and subsequent appearance, in the 1850s, of at least four groups calling themselves the 'Hutchinson Family Singers,' the original quartet still evoked overwhelming admiration from old abolitionists.

At the same time, they may have also had an effect on those who were not so actively 'converted.' During the years of their greatest popularity, they seemed everywhere, in concert halls, sheet music, pocket songsters, and in press reports of their various causes and controversies. By current standards they might undoubtedly be considered 'radicals,' as critical of such 'traditional' American institutions as slavery, racism, and competitive individualism. And yet, throughout their careers they seem to have been considered as representative Americans. Their music was wholly 'American in character,' claimed one typical review in 1848, and their songs were those of the 'most lofty and patriotic sentiments.' The key to their success was their 'unaffected simplicity,' claimed another a

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(Lynn, C. A. Shaw and H.J. Hutchinson, 1881); William Lloyd Garrison to John Hutchinson, Boston, March 15, 1859, ms. in Hutchinson Scrapbook, LHS.

113. Harriet Farley, 'Letters From Susan,' *Lowell Offering* [1844], in Eisler, *The Lowell Offering*, 58; Frederick Douglass to John W. Hutchinson, Biddeford, November 18, 1874, ms. in Hutchinson Scrapbook, LHS; Frank B. Carpenter to John Wallace Hutchinson (1890), reprinted as a testimonial in *The Seventieth Birthday Anniversary of John W. Hutchinson;* Mrs. S. T. Martyn, 'The Hutchinson Family,' unidentified newspaper clipping, Hutchinson scrapbook, LHS; 'His Music is Stilled. Another Good Man Called Home. Death of Asa Hutchinson,' *Hutchinson* [Minnesota] *Leader*, November 27, 1883, Hutchinson Collection, MPL.

year later, adding that as 'Yankees' and 'world philanthropists,' they sang 'the songs of patriotism; of man and humanity—the songs of boundless benevolence, of fearless well-doing.' They were the 'best representatives . . . of the music of the heart,' claimed one critic at the height of their success. Another declared that Americans would 'rather hear Abby sing, than listen to the music of all the Donnas and Signoras in Christendom. She sings; they attitudinise and scream.' In the words of another critic, by the mid-1840s, they were 'exactly what Americans—the children of a young, bold republic—ought to be.'[114]

They were abolitionists and they were popular, 'more popular than any company of singers ever heard in the United States,' claimed one writer for a California newspaper in 1879. Indeed, for a time in the American Northeast, it would have been difficult to avoid hearing of them, or hearing their songs, or listening to their lyrics and perhaps even thinking about their meanings and social agendas. Certainly, they were not the favorites of all Americans. Undoubtedly, their abolitionist messages would not have been supported by a majority. But as Joshua Hutchinson summed it up, by the time of the Civil War, the songs of the Hutchinsons had left Americans of the Northeast 'more abolitionized than they were aware of.'[115]

This assessment does not sound like what historians mean by 'social control.' Nor does it sound like the typical workings of politics. But it does have a certain ring of accuracy about it. For in the end, it seems a pretty good assessment of how a cause might advance if its messages and proponents, no matter how controversial, no matter how hated and criticized, no matter how apparently 'radical,' were at the heart of a mainstream popular culture.

114. 'The Hutchinson Family,' *Syracuse Daily Journal*, October 12, 1848; 'Music That is Music,' *Bangor Ensign*, undated clipping [1849], Mrs. Love M. Willis, 'Things Worth Recording,' *The Banner of Light*, March 18, 1893, Hutchinson Collection, MPL; 'Fashionable Music,' *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 14, 1846; *People's Journal* (London), cited in *Book of Words of the Hutchinson Family*, back cover.

115. Hutchinson, *Brief Narrative of the Hutchinson Family*, 38.