

Poems by Claude McKay

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TORONTO



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- Relevance to post-secondary courses taught in Ontario
- Frequency of appearance on syllabi listed in the [Open Syllabus Project](#)
- Proposed usage in open assignments in courses at Ryerson and Brock universities during the Fall 2021 semester
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Introduction to the Book

PUBLIC DOMAIN CORE COLLECTION TEAM

This Public Domain Core Collection book was created using the [1912 Aston W. Gardner & Co. edition](#) of *Songs of Jamaica*, the [1912 Watts & Co. edition](#) of *Constab Ballads*, the [1920 Grant Richards LTD edition](#) of *Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems*, and the [1922 Harcourt, Brace and Company edition](#) of *Harlem Shadows* all courtesy of [Claude McKay's Early Poetry \(1912-1922\): A Digital Collection](#).

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PUBLIC DOMAIN CORE COLLECTION TEAM

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Acknowledgements

PUBLIC DOMAIN CORE COLLECTION TEAM

The Public Domain Core Collection Project would not have been possible without the enthusiastic collaboration between staff, faculty members and students at Ryerson and Brock universities. We came together with a shared desire to make commonly used public domain texts more accessible to instructors and students in our institutions, Ontario and beyond. We also wanted to encourage instructors to use the texts as a basis for open pedagogy assignments with the aim of empowering students to become knowledge creators rather than just knowledge consumers.

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SONGS OF JAMAICA (1912)

Preface

What Italian is to Latin, that in regard to English is the negro variant thereof. It shortens, softens, rejects the harder sounds alike of consonants and vowels; I might almost say, refines. In its soft tones we have an expression of the languorous sweetness of the South: it is a feminine version of masculine English; pre-eminently a language of love, as all will feel who, setting prejudice aside, will allow the charmingly naïve love-songs of this volume to make their due impression upon them. But this can only happen when the verses are read aloud, and those unacquainted with the Jamaican tongue may therefore welcome a few hints as to pronunciation.

As a broad general direction, let it be observed that the vowels have rather the continental than the English sounds, while in the matter of the consonants the variation from English is of the nature of a pretty lisp.

The exact values of the vowels cannot, of course, be described, but they approximate on the whole more to those of Italy and France than to those of England. One sound, that of *aw*, is entirely rejected, and *ah* is substituted for it. Thus *bawl*, *law*, *call*, *daughter*, etc., become *bahl*, *lah*, *cahl*, *dahter*, etc.

In the word *whe'*, which sometimes means *where* and sometimes *which*, the *e* has the same sound as in the word *met*. *Deh* is similarly pronounced, and the *e* is quite a short one, the *h* being added merely to distinguish *deh* from *de* (*the*). This short *e* often takes the place of the close English *a*, as in *tek* (*take*), *mek* (*make*).

My is almost invariably pronounced with a short *y*, and, to remind the reader of this, it is constantly spelt *me*. *Fe* — generally meaning *to*, but sometimes *for* — matches this short *my* exactly. In *caan'* (*can't*) the *a* is doubled in order to ensure the pronunciation *cahn*.

It is difficult to convey the exact value of *do'n* (*down*), *groun'* (*ground*). There is a faint trace of *ng* at the end of these words, and

they rhyme to tongue pronounced very shortly and with a dumber vowel sound.

Vowels are sometimes changed out of mere caprice, as it seems. Thus we have ef for if, trimble for tremble, anedder for anudder (another), stimulent for stimulant, a — pronounced short — for I, sperit for spirit.

In ya, originally meaning d'you hear — but now thrown in just to fill up, like the don't you know of certain talkers — the a is a short ah.

We come now to the consonants. Bearing in mind what was said above of the pretty lisp, let the d so often — generally, we may say — substituted for th, be of the very softest, as it were a th turning towards d, or to put it in another way, a lazily pronounced th. The negro has no difficulty whatever in pronouncing it clearly: it is merely that he does not, as a rule, take the trouble to do so. In these poems the, they, there, with, etc., are not always written de, dey, dere, wid, etc.; and the reader is at liberty to turn any soft th into d, and any d into soft th. And here let me remark, in passing, that in one breath the black man will pronounce a word in his own way, and in the next will articulate it as purely as the most refined Englishman. Where the substitution of d makes the word unrecognisable, as in moder (mother), oders (others), the spelling mudder, udders is resorted to; and for fear of confusion with well-known words, though, those are always written thus, although generally pronounced, dough, dose.

As d supplants the soft th, so does a simple t supplant the hard one; as in t'ing, not'ing (or nuttin' , — for the g in words of two or more syllables is very commonly left out), t'ink, tick, t'rough, met'od, wutless (worthless).

V tends to pass into b, as in lub (love), hab, lib, ebery, neber, cultibation. Vex, though so written for the most part, is pronounced either with a decided b or with some compromise between that and v.

Of elisions, the commonest is that of the initial s when followed

by another consonant. Thus start, spread, stop, scrape, spoil, sting, skin, etc., become 'tart, 'pread, 'top, 'crape, 'poil, 'ting, 'kin, etc.

Final d's are often dropped, as in lan', t'ousan', please' (pleased) and other past participles, min', chil' — in these let care be taken to keep the long sound of the i' — wul' (world), wud (word), en'.

Final t's also; as in breas', cas', 'gains' (against), i' (it), las', wha', wus' (worst), tas'e (taste).

Present participles, passin', bruikin' (breaking), outpourin', etc., lose their g's; and final k's sometimes disappear, as in tas'. R's, too, as in you' for your, mo' for more, befo' or simply 'fo' for before: and they are even thrown out from the middle of words, as in wuk (work), tu'n (turn), wud (word). Will occasionally loses its l's and becomes wi'.

Initial vowels have also a habit of vanishing: as in 'bout (about), 'long (along), 'way (away), nuff (enough), 'pon (upon); but the elision of these and of longer first syllables is sometimes made up by tacking something to the end, and for about, without, because we get 'bouten, 'douten, 'causen.

On the construction of the language it is unnecessary to dwell, for it is fully explained in the notes, and the reader will soon master the mysteries of be'n with its various significations, is, was, were, have been, had been, did (as sign of the past tense); of deh, which may be either an adverb (there) or an auxiliary verb as in me deh beg (I am begging); of dem tacked close to its noun, to show it is plural; of tenses apparently past which are present, and apparently present which are past: for the unravelling of all which the needful help has, it is hoped, been supplied by the notes aforesaid.

Readers of this volume will be interested to know that they here have the thoughts and feelings of a Jamaican peasant of pure black blood. The young poet, aged twenty-two, spent his early years in the depths of the country, and though he has now moved to the more populous neighbourhood of Kingston, his heart remains in his Clarendon hills. He began life as a wheelwright, but the trade was not to his mind, and he left it and enlisted in the Constabulary.

WALTER JEKYLL.

Quashie to Buccra

You tas'e¹ petater² an' you say it sweet,
But you no know how hard we wuk³ fe it;
You want a basketful fe quattiewut,⁴
'Cause you no know how 'tiff de bush fe cut.⁵
De cowitch⁶ under which we hab fe 'toop,
De shamar⁷ lyin' t'ick like pumpkin soup,
Is killin' somet'ing⁸ for a naygur man;
Much less⁹ de cutlass workin' in we han'.
De sun hot like when fire ketch a town¹⁰;
Shade-tree look temptin', yet we ca-m' lie down,
Aldough we wouldn' eben ef we could,
Causen we job must finish soon an' good.¹¹
De bush cut done, de bank dem we deh dig,¹²

1. Taste
2. Sweet potato (Ipomaea Batatas)
3. Work
4. Quattieworth: quattie, a quarter of sixpence
5. Becanse you don't know how stiff the bush is to cut, i.e., what hard work it is to fell the trees and clear the land.
6. Mucuna Pruriens
7. Shamebush, the prickly sensitive plant (Mimosa Pudica)
8. Terrible stuff
9. More
10. In
11. Because our job must be quickly and thoroughly done
12. The clearing of the land done, we dig the banks-kind of terraces on the steep hill-side—but owing to our

But dem caan' 'tan' sake o' we naybor pig;
For so we mou' it up he root it do'n,¹³
An' we caan' 'peak sake o' we naybor tongue.¹⁴

Al dough de vine is little, it can bear;
It wantin' not'in' but a little care:
You see petater tear up groun', you run,¹⁵
You laughin', sir, you must be t'ink a fun.¹⁶
De fie!' pretty? It couldn't less 'an dat,¹⁷
We wuk de bes,¹⁸ an' den de lan' is fat;
We dig de row dem eben in a line,
An' keep it clean-den so it mus' look fine.

You tas'e petater an' you say it sweet,
But you no know how hard we wuk fe it;

neighbour's pig they cannot stand. "Bank dem " = banks.
This intrusive "dem" must be tacked closely to the
preceding word. It occurs again below—"row dem."

13. For no sooner do we mould it up, than he (the pig) roots it (the bank) down. "Down" is pronounced very short, and is a good rhyme to "tongue"
14. And we cannot complain, for this would 'bring confusion' i.e., cause a row.
15. A piece of humorous exaggeration: "When you see the potatoes tearing up the ground in their rapid growth you will run to save yourself from being caught and entangled in the vines"
16. You are laughing, sir—perhaps you think I am exaggerating
17. Less than that = be otherwise
18. We work as well as we possibly can

Yet still de hardship always melt away
Wheneber it come roun' to reapin' day.

Me Bannabees

RUN ober mango trees,
'Pread chock¹ to kitchen doo',
Watch de blue bannabees,
Look how it ben' down low!

De blossom draw de bees
Same how de soup draw man;²
Some call it "broke-pot" peas,
It caan' bruk we bu'n-pan.³

Wha' sweet so when it t'ick?⁴
Though some call it goat-tud,⁵
Me all me finger lick,
An' yet no chew me cud.⁶

A mumma plant⁷ de root
One day jes' out o' fun;⁸
But now look 'pon de fruit,
See wha' de "mek fun"⁹ done.

1. Right up
2. The blossom attracts bees, just as the soup made from the peas attracts man
3. It can't break our burn-pan—a tall saucepan
4. What is so good as this soup, when it is thick?
5. Goat droppings—the name of a poisonous plant, somewhat resembling bannabees
6. Because I haven't yet got my belly full: see below
7. It was mamma who planted
8. With no serious purpose
9. To make fun = to trifle

I jam de 'tick dem 'traight
Soon as it 'tart fe 'pread,¹⁰
An begin count de date
Fe when de pod fe shed.¹¹

Me watch de vine dem grow,
S'er¹² t'row dung a de root:
Crop time look fe me slow,
De bud tek long fe shoot.

But so de day did come,
I 'crub de bu'n-pan bright,
An' tu'n down 'pon it¹³ from
De marnin' till de night.

An' Lard I me belly swell,
No 'cause de peas no good,
But me be'n tek¹⁴ a 'pell
Mo' dan a giant would.

Yet eben after dat
Me nyam¹⁵ it wid a will,
'Causen it mek me fat;
So I wi' lub it still.

Caan' talk¹⁶ about gungu,¹⁷
Fe me it is no peas

10. As soon as it began to spread
11. When the pod will be formed
12. Sister
13. The soup
14. Did take
15. I ate
16. It's not the least use your talking
17. Congo peas

Cockstone¹⁸ might do fe you,
Me want me bannabees.

18. Red peas, French beans

Lub O' Mine

DARLIN', though you lub me still,
I feel it so,
To t'ink dat we neber will
Meet soon, you know;
 Eben when you tell me say¹
Dat your dear heart²
Did grow 'tronger ebery day
An' hate fe part.

 Feelin' all you' lub for me,
I t'ink³ you press
Your heart, as it use' to be,⁴
Upon me breas'.

 Lubin' you wid all me soul,
De lub is such
Dat it beat out blood,⁵ – de whole,⁶
An' dat is much.

 Lubin' you as you go 'long
In a you walk;⁷
Also when you chune⁸ a song,
An' as you talk.

1. Although you do tell me
2. Love
3. Imagine
4. As formerly
5. Beats out relations – i.e., makes relations nothing
6. Father and mother and all
7. In your walk
8. Tune = sing

An' a so I hate fe see⁹
You go astray
In those t'ings dat you and me
Can cast away.¹⁰

Lub, I dyin'¹¹ fe you' smile,
An' some sweet news
Dat can cheer me heart awhile
Fe wha' it lose.

Lub me, darlin' – lub, aldough
You are now gone:
You can never leave me so –
Friendless-alone.

9. An I so hate to see

10. Need not do

11. I am dying

Taken Aback

Let me go, Joe, for I want go¹ home:
Can't stan' wid you,²
For pa might go³ come;
An' if him only hab him rum,⁴
I don't know whatever I'll do.

I must go now, for it's gettin' night
I am afraid,
An' tis not moonlight:
Give me de last hug, an' do it tight;
Me pa gwin' go knock off me head.⁵

No, Joe, don't come!—you will keep me late,
An' pa might be
In him⁶ sober state;
Him might get vex⁷ an' lock up de gate,
Den what will becomin' of me?

Go wid you, Joe? — you don't lub me den!
I shame⁸ o' you—

1. To go
2. I can't stay with you
3. A redundant word, unaccented
4. If he chances to be in liquor
5. My papa is going to go (and) knock off my head. The o in "going" is pronounced very short, making it sound like a w
6. His
7. Vexed
8. Am ashamed

Gals caan'⁹ trust you men!
An' I b'en tekin' you fe me frien',¹⁰
Good-night, Joe, you've proven untrue.

9. Can't

10. And I've been taking you for my friend

Little Jim

Me lard! me caan' bear it no mo'
'Twill kill me dead, dis bad sore toe;
All day all night, 'tis de same,
Mek me a bawl out Massa name.¹
 O Lard o' me, a 'fraid² to tu'n,
De way de dreadful bluestone bu'n!³
A⁴ feel it movin' t'rough me j'int's,
Like million load o' needle-p'int's.
 An' oh! me schoolmates dem⁵ did laugh
De day I nearly knock'⁶ it off;
Me laugh meself fe sake o' shame,⁷
An' didn' know I'd go so lame.
 I didna' then t'ink what I'd got—⁸
Good Lard, mumma de bluestone hot!⁹

1. Making me bawl (pronounce bahl) out Massa's (God's) name
2. I am afraid
3. So dreadfully does the bluestone (sulphate of copper) burn
4. I
5. Redundant word. It is tacked closely to the preceding word
6. Knocked
7. I laughed myself, out of bravado
8. I did not then picture to myself the extent of the injury
9. Is painful

I tell you, a wi' lose me head;¹⁰
 You satisfy to kill me dead?¹¹
 An' oh! it is a double pain,
 For I caan' go to school again,
 To gellop over fyahn¹² an ditch,
 An' crew de j'int o' teacher switch.¹³
 No mo' roas' corn¹⁴ fe little Jim,
 Dem say dat it no good¹⁵ fe him:
 Me hide me face, for me caan' bear
 To see dem passin' wid de pear.¹⁶
 But me a don't gwin,¹⁷ to fret,
 De half a toe wi' better get:
 I'll go to school once more, go bad;¹⁸
 Ay it ease me a bit,¹⁹ t'ank God!

10. I shall go out of my mind, I tell you
11. Can it be that you don't care whether you kill me or not?
12. To gallop over fern
13. To screw the joint of teacher's switch, is to cut it so that it breaks when he uses it
14. Baked cob of green maize
15. They say it is not good
16. Alligator pear (*Persea gratissima*), not allowed to those suffering from wounds
17. The half toe will get well some day
18. Play the mischief; play tricks. The a sounds as in French la.
19. It is a bit easier

Jim at Sixteen

Corpy,¹ it pinch me so,
De bloomin' ole handcuff;
A dun no warra mek²
You put it on so rough.

Many a póliceman
Hab come to dis before;
Dem slip same like a³ me,
An' pass t'rough lock-up door.⁴

Mumma, no bodder⁵ cry,
It should an⁶ hotter be;
I wouldn' heed you when
You use⁷ fe talk to me.

I run⁸ away from you
Same as I tu'n out school,⁹
'Caus'n a didn' want
To stan' under no rule.¹⁰

1. From McKay's glossary: "corpy: corporal"
2. I don't know what made
3. This intrusive 'a' is common. 'Like' has the pronunciation of French lac
4. The door of the lock-up
5. Do not bother (trouble) to cry –i.e., do not cry
6. Intrusive again
7. Used
8. Ran
9. As soon as I left school
10. To be under discipline

An' though you send¹¹ fe me,
A wouldn' face de home;
Yet still dem¹² find you quick
Same as de trouble come.¹³

Mumma, I know quite well
You' lub fe me is 'trong;
Yet still you don't a go
Join wid me in a wrong.¹⁴

An' so I won't beg you
To pay fe¹⁵ me to-day;
I'll bear me punishment,¹⁶
'Twill teach me to obey

Mumma, you' Jim get 'way
An' come back home¹⁷ to you,
An' ask¹⁸ you to forgive
Him all o' whe' him do.¹⁹

I want you to feget
Dat I disgrace de name,
An' cause de ole fam'ly²⁰
To look 'pon me wid shame.

11. Sent
12. The police
13. When the trouble came
14. You are not going to back me up in wrongdoing
15. The fine
16. And go to prison
17. Has got off and comes home
18. Asks
19. All he has done. Whe' = what
20. Pronounce fahmly

You come an' beg de judge
Before dem call fe me,²¹
An' walk by de back gate,
T'inkin' I wouldn' see.

But 'fore him let me go,
Him lectur' me, mumma,
Tellin' me how I mus'
Try no fe bruk de law.²²

Mumma, I feel it, but
No eye-water caan' drop:
Yet I wish dat it could,
For me breat' partly 'top.²³

So, mumma, I come back
Again to be your boy,
An' ever as before
To fill you' heart wid joy.

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR. —On Friday I went to Court on duty for the third time since my enlistment. I happened to escort a prisoner, a stalwart young fellow, and as I was putting on the handcuff, which was rather small, it pinched him badly, making a raw wound. And yet he was so patient, saying he knew that I could not help it. Although it was accidentally done, I felt so sad and ashamed. The above poem grew out of this incident.

21. You came and begged the magistrate before my case was brought

22. Telling me I must take care not to break the law.

Pronounce lah

23. He means, that the lump in his throat is more painful than tears

Whe' Fe Do?

LIFE will continue so for aye,
Some people sad, some people gay,
Some mockin'¹ life while udders pray;
But we mus' fashion-out we way
An' sabe a mite fe rainy day-
All we can do.

We needn' fold we han' an' cry,
Nor vex we heart wid groan and sigh;
De best we can do is fe try
To fight de despair drawin' nigh:
Den we might conquer by an' by-
Dat we might do.

We hab to batter² in de sun,
An' dat isn't a little fun,
For Lard! 'tis hellish how it bu'n:
Still dere's de big wul' to live do'n-
So whe' fe do ?

We nigger hab a tas'³ fe do,
To conquer prejudice dat⁴ due
To obeah,⁵ an' t'ings not a few
Dat keep we progress back fe true,-⁶
But whe' fe do?

1. Making mock at
2. Labour and sweat; swink
3. Task
4. That's
5. Sorcery and magic
6. Very much

We've got to wuk wid might an' main,
To use we han' an' use we brain,
To toil an' worry, 'cheme an' 'train⁷
Fe t'ings that bring" more loss dan gain;
To stan' de sun an bear de rain,
An' suck we bellyful o' pain
Widouten cry⁸ nor yet complain-
For dat caan' do.

And though de wul' is full o' wrong,
Dat caan' prevent we sing we song
All de day as we wuk along-
Whe' else fe do?

We happy in de hospital;⁹
We happy when de rain deh fall;¹⁰
We happy though de baby bawl
Fe food dat we no hab at all;¹¹
We happy when Deat' angel call¹²
Fe full¹³ we cup of joy wid gall:
Our fait' in this life is not small-
De best to do.

An' da's de way we ought to live,
For pain an' such¹⁴ we shouldn' grieve,

7. Scheme and strain

8. Without crying

9. All the lines of this stanza end with the sound ahl

10. Is falling

11. Don't have at all = haven't got

12. Death's angel calls

13. Fill

14. The like

But tek de best dat Nature give-
Da's whe' fe do.

God mek de wul' fe black an' white;
We'll wuk on in de glad sunlight,
Keep toilin' on wid all our might,
An' sleep in peace when it is night:
We must strive on to gain de height,
Aldough it may not be in sight;
An' yet perhaps de blessed right
Will never conquer in de fight-
Still, whe' fe do?

We'll try an' live as any man,¹⁵
An' fight de wul' de best we can,
E'en though it hard fe understan'-
Whe' we mus' do.

For da's de way o' dis ya wul';¹⁶
It's snap an' bite, an' haul an' pull,
An' we all get we bellyful-
But whe' fe do?

15. As others do, who make a good fight

16. Of this (here) world

King Banana

GREEN mancha¹ mek² fe naygur man;
Wha' sweet so when it roas'?'
Some boil it in a big black pan,
It sweeter in a toas'.³
 A buccra fancy⁴ when it ripe,
Dem use it ebery day;
It scarcely give dem belly-gripe,
Dem eat it diffran' way.⁵
 Out yonder see somoke⁶ a rise,
An' see de fire wicket;⁷
Deh go'p to heaben wid de nize⁸
Of hundred t'ousan' cricket.
 De black moul' lie do'n quite prepare'
Fe feel de hoe an' rake;

1. Corruption of 'Martinique,' the best variety of banana in Jamaica
2. Is (or was) made
3. In a toast = toasted
4. It is buccra's fancy, i.e., the white man likes it
5. In a different way; not so much at a time as we we eat
6. This lengthening of a monosyllable into a dissyllable is common
7. Wicked
8. It goes up to heaven with the noise, etc. This is an excellent simile as those acquainted with tropical crickets will know

De fire bu'n, and it tek care
 Fe mek de wo'm⁹ dem wake.
 Wha' lef fe buccra teach again
 Dis time about plantation?
 Dere's not'in' dat can beat de plain
 Good ole-time cultivation.
 Banana dem fat all de same¹⁰
 From bunches big an' 'trong;
 Pure nine-han' bunch a car' de fame,—¹¹
 Ole met'od all along.
 De cuttin' done same ole-time way,
 We wrap dem in a trash,¹²
 An' pack dem neatly in a dray
 So tight dat dem can't mash.
 We re'ch:¹³ banana finish sell;¹⁴
 Den we 'tart back fe home:
 Some hab money in t'read-bag¹⁵ well,
 Some spen' all in a rum.
 Green mancha mek fe naygur man,

9. Worms. i.e., grubs

10. In spite of the primitive methods of cultivation the bananas are just as plump

11. The nine-hand and only (pure) nine-hand bunches -- none smaller, that is-grown by—this old method have a fine reputation

12. In trash. Any refuse is called 'trash.' Here dried banana leaves are meant

13. Reach

14. The selling of the bananas is over

15. Bag secured by a thread (string) round the mouth

It mek fe him all way;¹⁶
Our islan' is banana lan',
Banana car' de sway.¹⁷

16. In every way. He can eat it or sell it

17. Carries the sway, i.e., is Jamaica's mainstay

Pleading

If you lub me, Joanie, only tell me, dear,
Do not be so cold
When my lub is bold;
Do not mek dis burning heart o' mine get drear,
Tek it for your own,
For 'tis yours alone.

I hav ever lub'd you from I saw¹ your face
On dat Monday morn
'Mongst de peas an' corn:
Lightly did you trip along wid yout'ful grace,
Wid de kerchief red
Wound about your head.

Durin' de revival² we b'en use' fe pray,
Spirit we b'en hab,
How we use' fe sob!
Yet how soon did all of it from we get 'way!³
Lub kiver de whole,
We feget we "soul."

Though I could'n' see you when you younger b'en,
It was better so,
For we older grow,
An' I can protect you now from udder men,

1. From the moment that I saw
2. At revival meetings those who 'have the Spirit' give grunting sobs
3. Go away pass away

If you'll only be
Fe me one,⁴ Joanie.

How I saw you proudly draw up to your height—
As we strolled along
Gay in laugh an' song,
Passin' by de peenies⁵ sheddin' greenish light'—
Cos my lips did miss,⁶
Stealin' one lee⁷ kiss!

'Member you de days down by de river-side,
I prevented you
Your washin' to do,
Teasin' you at times till you got vex' an' cried,
An' I try de while
To coax you fe smile?

Joanie, when you were me own a⁸ true sweetheart,
I lived in de air
'Douten⁹ t'ought of care,
Thinkin', o me Joan, dat' nuttin' could we¹⁰ part,
Naught to mek me fear
Fe me own a dear.

When in church on Sunday days we use' fe sit,
You dressed in light pink,
How we used fe wink!

4. Mine alone

5. Fireflies

6. Make a mistake

7. Little

8. There is a delicious caressing sound about this intrusive
'a'

9. Without

10. Us

Wha' de parson say we cared for not a bit,
Nuttin' could remove
Our sweet t'oughts from love.

I am thinkin', Joanie, when de nights were lone,
An' you were afraid
Of each darkened shade,
An' I use' fe guide you over river-stone,¹¹
How you trusted me
Fe care¹² you, Joanie.

'Member you de time when many days passed by,
An' I didn' come
To your hill-side home,
How you wrote those sad, sad letters to know why,
Till I comfort gave
To my Joanie brave?

In those happy days, me Joan, you loved me then,
An' I t'ought dat you
Would be ever true;
Never dreamed you would forsake me for strange men,
Who caan' lub you so
Much as thrown-up Joe.

Joanie, fickle Joanie, give up Squire's son;
You wi' soon hate him
An' his silly whim,
An' your heart wi' yearn fe me when I am gone;
So, 'fo' 'tis too late,
Come back to your mate.

Joanie, when you're tired of dat worthless man,
You can come back still
Of your own free will:

11. The stepping stones in the river

12. Look after

Nummo girl dis true,¹³ true heart will understan';
I wi' live so-so,¹⁴
Broken-hearted Joe.

An', Joan, in de days fe come I know you'll grieve
For de foolishniss
Dat you now call bliss:
Dere's no wrong you done me I would not forgive;
But you choice¹⁵ your way,
So, me Joan, good-day!

13. No other girl can understand

14. Alone

15. Choose, have chosen

The Biter Bit

["Ole woman a swea' fe eat calalu: calalu¹ a swea' fe wuk him² gut."-
JAMAICA PROVERB.]

CORN an' peas growin' t'ick an' fas'
Wid nice blade peepin' t'rough de grass;
An' ratta³ a from dem hole a peep,
T'ink all de corn dem gwin' go reap.

Ole woman sit by kitchen doo'
Is watchin' calalu a grow,
An' all de time a t'inking dat
She gwin' go nyam dem when dem fat.⁴

But calalu, grow'n' by de hut,
Is swearin' too fe wuk him gut;
While she, like some, t'ink⁵ all is right
When dey are in some corner tight.

Peas time come roun'⁶ —de corn is lef;
An' ratta now deh train himse'f
Upon de cornstalk dem a' night
Fe when it fit to get him bite.⁷

1. Spinach, but not the English kind
2. His = her
3. The rats
4. Juicy
5. Thinks: but it also means 'think', and so equally applies to the plural subject
6. The time for harvesting the peas arrives
7. And (every) rat now practises climbing the cornstalks at night, so that he may get his bite when the corn is ripe

De corn-piece lie do'n all in blue,⁸
 An' all de beard dem floatin' too
 Amongst de yellow grain so gay,⁹
 Dat you would watch dem a whole day.
 An' ratta look at ebery one,
 Swea'in' dat dem not gwin' lef none;¹⁰
 But Quaco know a t'ing or two,
 An' swear say¹¹ dat dem won't go so.
 So him go get a little meal
 An' somet'ing good fe those dat steal,
 An' mix dem up an' 'pread dem out
 For people possess fas' fas' mout.¹²
 Now ratta, comin' from dem nes',
 See it an' say "Dis food is bes';"
 Dem nyam an' stop, an' nyam again,
 An' soon lie do'n, rollin' in pain.

8. This refers to the bluish leaf of the maize

9. Supply 'all this makes so pretty a picture'

10. They are not going to leave any

11. 'Say' is redundant: it is tacked closely to swear

12. For those who are too quick with their mouths

Out of Debt

DE Christmas is finish';
It was rather skinnish,¹
Yet still we are happy, an' so needn' fret,
For dinner is cookin',
An' baby is lookin'
An' laughin'; she knows dat her pa owe no debt.
De pas' hab de debtor,²
An' we cannot get her³
To come back an' grin at us as in time gone:
Dere's no wine fe breakfas,⁴
An' no one fe mek fuss,
We all is contented fe suck one dry bone.
No two bit o ' brater⁵
Wid shopkeeper Marter,
I feel me head light sittin' down by me wife;
No weight lef behin' me

1. The fare was rather meagre
2. We were in debt last Christmas, but now we are free
3. The past
4. The midday meal
5. Shopkeeper Marter and I are no longer two brothers: meaning, I am not always going into his shop, and so keeping in debt. Pronounce brahter

No gungu a line fe⁶
 De man who was usual⁷ to worry me life.
 We're now out o' season,⁸
 But dat is no reason
 Why we shan't be happy wid heart free and light:
 We feel we are better
 Dan many dat fetter
 Wid burden dey shoulder to mek Christmas bright.
 Some 'crape out de cupboard,
 Not 'memberin' no wud⁹
 Dat say about fegettin' when rainy day:
 It comes widout warning
 'Fo' daylight a marnin',¹⁰
 An', wakin', de blue cloud ta'n black dat was gay.
 De days dat gwin' follow
 No more will be hollow,
 Like some dat come after de Christmas before:
 We'll lay by some money

6. Friends plant their gungu (Congo peas) together, and, in picking the crop, are not particular about the line between their properties. When they cease to be friends, they have no gungu a line. The phrase is equivalent to 'to have no truck with.'
7. Pronounce without sounding the second u. Was usual = used
8. Past Christmas
9. Entirely oblivious of the proverb (word) which tells us not to forget to make provision for the rainy day
10. In the

An' lick at de honey,¹¹
An' neber will need to lock up our front door.¹²
 Jes¹³ look at de brightness
Of dat poor an' sightless
Old man on de barrel a playin' de flute:
Wha' mek him so joyful?
His lap is of toy full,
A pick'ninny play wid de patch on his suit.
 Ours too de same blessin',
An' we've learn' a lesson
We should have been learnin' from years long ago:
A Christmas 'dout pleasure¹⁴
Gave dat darlin' treasure,¹⁵
An' duty to Milly is all dat we owe.

11. Enjoy the pleasure it brings

12. Against the bailiff

13. Just

14. Without pleasure, i.e., a sober and quiet Christmas

15. Our little pickny

The Hermit

FAR in de country let me hide myself
From life's sad pleasures an' de greed of pelf,
Dwellin' wid Nature primitive an' rude,
Livin' a peaceful life of solitude.

Dere by de woodland let me build my home
Where tropic roses¹ ever are in bloom,
An' t'rough de wild cane² growin' thick and tall
Rushes in gleeful mood de waterfall.

Roof strong enough to keep out season rain,³
Under whose eaves loved swallows will be fain
To build deir nests, an' deir young birdlings rear
Widouten have de least lee t'ought of fear.⁴

An' in my study I shall view de wul',
An' learn of all its doin's to de full;
List to de woodland creatures' music sweet—
Sad, yet contented in my lone retreat.

1. In Jamaica any showy or sweet flower is called a rose
2. Armsdo Doltax
3. The heavy rains of May and October are called 'season rains'
4. Without having the smallest (least little) thought of fear

Fetchin' Water

Watch how dem touris' like fe look
Out 'pon me little daughter,
Whenever fe her tu'n¹ to cook
Or fetch a pan of water:
De sight look gay;
Dat is one way,
But I can tell you say,²
'Nuff rock'tone in de sea, yet none
But those 'pon lan' know 'bouten sun.³
 De pickny comin' up de hill,
Fightin' wid heavy gou'd,⁴
Won't say it sweet him, but he will
Complain about de load:
Him feel de weight,
Dem watch⁵ him gait;
It's so some of de great
High people fabour t'ink⁶ it sweet
Fe batter⁷ in de boilin' heat.

1. It is her turn
2. The 'say' is redundant
3. In allusion to the Jamaica proverb, 'Rock'tone (stone) a river bottom no feel sun hot'
4. Struggling under his head-load—a gourd (calabash) filled with water
5. The tourists watch his upright carriage
6. Favour think = seem to think
7. Labour and sweat; toil and moil

Dat boy wid de karásene pan,⁸
Sulky down to him toe,
His back was rollin' in a san,⁹
For him pa mek him crow:¹⁰
Him feel it bad,
Near mek him mad,
But teach him¹¹ he's a lad;
Go disobey him fader wud,¹²
When he knows dat his back would sud!¹³

But Sarah Jane she wus 'an all,
For she t'row 'way¹⁴ de pan,
An' jam her back agains' de wall
Fe fight her mumma Fan:
Feelin' de pinch,
She mek a wrinch
An' get 'way; but de wench
Try fe put shame upon her ma,
Say dat she cook de bittle raw.¹⁵

Dis water-fetchin' sweet dem though
When day mek up dem min',
An' 'nuff o' dem 'tart out fe go,

8. The favourite receptacle for water is a four-gallon kerosene tin (pan)
9. In the sand
10. Cry out
11. But it will teach him
12. What? —disobey his father's orders
13. Get a lathering
14. Threw down
15. Said that she cooked the victual raw, i.e., only half cooked it

An' de weader is fine:
De pan might leak,
Dem don't a 'peak,
Nor eben try fe seek
Some clay or so¹⁶ to mek it soun';
Dem don't care ef dem wet all roun'.

Dén all 'bout de road dem 'catter
Marchin' álong quite at ease;
Dat time listen to deir chatter,
Talkin' anyt'ing dem please:
Dem don't a fear,
Neider a care,
For who can interfere?
T'ree mile – five, six tu'n, – an' neber¹⁷
W'ary, but could do it¹⁸ for eber.

16. Or something

17. For rhythm, read thus: T'ree mile – five, six – tu'n, an –
neber

18. Pronounce dweet

School-Teacher Nell's Lub-Letter

IF you promise to lub me alway,
I will foreber be true,
An' you don't mek me sorry¹ I de day
Dat I give myself to you.

How I 'member de night when we meet,²
An' chat fe de first time of lub!
I go home, an' den neber could eat
None o' de plateful o' grub.

An' de day it was empty to me,
Wakin', but dreamin' of you,
While de school it was dull as could be,
An' me hate me wuk fe do.³

Oh, I knew of your lub long before
My school friends tell⁴ me of it,
And I watch at you from de school door,
When you pass to de cockpit.⁵

Den I hear too dat you use' fe talk,
Say,⁶ if you caan' ketch me dark night,

1. Make me regret
2. How well I remember the night we met
3. I hated the doing of my work
4. Told
5. A natural depression in the ground, in the vicinity of the author's home, bears this name
6. Used to (talk and) say

You would sure ketch me as me deh walk⁷
In a de⁸ open moonlight.

An' you' wud come to pass 4 very soon,
For scarcely a mont' did gone
When de light of de star an' de moon
Shine⁹ bright as we kiss all alone.

I can neber remember de times
Ma scolded her little Nell;¹⁰
All day her tongue wuks like de chimes
Dat come from de old school-bell.

I have given up school-life fe you:
Sweetheart, my all¹¹ is your own ;
Den say you will ever be true,
An' live fe you' Nellie alone.

7. You would be sure to catch me as I walked

8. In the

9. Shone

10. I cannot count the number of scoldings I have had from
mamma

11. Whole self

Nellie White

SWEETHEART, I have loved you well,
More than dis lee tongue can tell,
An' you need not hab no fear,
For I'll marry you, my dear.

What are you talkin' about?
Don't say that I'll play you out;¹
Swif' ole Time, me Nell, will prove
Dat 'tis you alone I love.

Cry not, except 'tis for joy;
Can't you trus' dis big-heart boy?
Nell, I hate fe see you weep;
Tek my heart, an' go to sleep.

How could I deceive you, Nell?
Don't I love you much too well?
Could I fool dat plump black cheek?
Don't cry, darlin' — look up — speak I

Nellie of the pretty feet
An' the palm-like shape so neat,
I have eyes to see but you;
Darling, trust me to be true!

Nell, me dear, you need not fret,
For you are my food, my breat' ;
Trust me, trust me, Nellie White,
Kiss me, lee sweetheart — good-night!

1. False

Retribution

DE mule dem in de pasture an' de donkey 'pon red groun,¹
An' we boys mus' ketch dem all befo' de evenin' sun go do'n;
De tas' it isn't easy for de whole o' dem can run,
An' grass-lice² lie do'n set.'

Grass-lice dat mek you trimble long time more dan when you meet

A man dat mean to fight you who you know you cannot beat;
Dem mek you feel you' blood crawl from you' head do'n to you' feet,
An' wish dat you b'en wet.

An', like a 'pite, see all de mule a 'ketter t'rough de grass,
So chupidly a-followin' de foolish ole jackass;
But when you hea' we ketch dem, we wi' serve dem such a sauce
By ridin' dem to deat'!

We breat' is partly givin' out as up de hill we go up;
De beast dem seem to understan' say "Day longer 'an rope,"³
An' dat de night wi' come befo' we ketch dem is deir hope;
But we shall conquer yet.

For though dem t'ink dem hab some sense, dem all run right between

De rocky road above de swamp, where it hab eber been
Our luck to nab dem in de trap dat neber can be seen
By dem — Dey're in de net!

We hab dem pullin' on de bit as we race mile 'pon mile,
An' grass-lice in we back a crawl an' 'ting us all de while;

1. Poor patchy land with open spaces of red earth
2. Small ticks
3. Ro-op, in two syllables. The proverb means, "I'll be even with you"

But blood is drippin' from dem mout', 'twill teach dem not fe vile,
We'll race dem out o' breat'.

To E. M. E.

You see me smile: but what is it?
A sweetened pain — a laughing fit —
A little honeyed dart,
That, passing, stabs my heart,
Yet mek me glad a bit.

You see me dance: 'twas but my feet,
You should have heard my heart a beat!
For non o' it was real:
It be'n a priceless sale
Of bitter for a sweet.

Dis laughin' face! — 'tis full o' joy
Because it is a baby's toy;
But when de child is gone
An' the darkness comes on,
'Twill be anudder boy.

You hear me sing: what is de tune?
De song of one that's dyin' soon,
A whirlin', tossin' life
Flung on de wul' of strife;
I call it 'debil's boon.'

De many pleasures?
Wha's de gain?
I'll tell you of a grindin' pain
Dat companies de birt',
An' runs wid vengeance mirt'
De life, till it is slain.

Why do I sleep?
My eyes know why,
Same how a life knows why it die:
Dey sleep on in distress,

Knowin' not why dey res',
But feelin' why dey cry.

I'm hungry now, so eat once mo',
E'en though I'll soon be like befo';
For, as in udder t'ings,
De seemin' pleasure clings,
De cravin' has no cure.

It always seem so strange to me,
Dat you can satisfy to be
A life whose daily food
Is pain: de only good,
Deat' dat will set it free.

Hard Times

DE mo' me wuk, de mo' time hard,
I don't know what fe do;
I ben' me knee an' pray to Gahd,
Yet t'ings same as befo'.

De taxes knockin' at me door,
I hear de bailiff's v'ice;
Me wife is sick, can't get no cure,
But gnawin' me like mice.¹

De picknies hab to go to school
Widout a bite fe taste;
And I am working like a mule,
While buccra, sittin' in de cool,
Hab 'nuff nenyam fe waste.²

De clodes is' tearin' off dem back
When money seems noa mek ;
A man can't eben ketch a mac,³
Care how him 'train him neck.⁴

De peas won't pop,⁵ de corn can't grow,
Poor people face look sad;
Dat Gahd would cuss de lan' I'd know,
For black naygur too bad.

1. Trying to get money from me
2. Food and to spare
3. From McKay's glossary: "mac : shilling, shillings ; short for macaroni."
4. However hard he may strain his neck. 'Care how'—I don't care how—no matter how
5. Spring

I won't gib up, I won't say die,
For all de time is hard;
Aldough de wul' soon en', I'll try
My wutless⁶ best as ti me goes by,
An' trust on in me Gahd.

6. Worthless : meaning, "I'll try my very best, poor as that may be."

Cudjoe Fresh From De Lecture

'Top one minute, Cous' Jarge, an' sit do'n 'pon de grass,
An' mek a¹ tell you 'bout de news I hear at las',
How de buccra te-day tek time an' begin teach
All of us dat was deh² in a clear open speech..

You miss somet'ing fe true, but a wi' mek you know,
As much as how a can, how de business a go:
Him tell us 'bout we self, an' mek we fresh³ again,
An' talk about de wul' from commencement to en'.

Me look 'pon me black 'kin, an' so me head grow big,
Aldough me heaby han' dem hab fe plug⁴ an' dig;
For ebery single man, no car⁵ about dem rank,
Him bring us ebery one an' put 'pon de same plank.

Say, parson do de same?⁶ Yes, in a'dift'ren' way,
For parson tell us how de whole o' we are clay;
An' lookin' close at t'ings, we hab to pray quite hard
Fe swaller wha' him say an' don't t'ink bad o' Gahd.

But dis man tell us 'traight 'bout how de whole t'ing came,
An' show us widout doubt how Gahd was not fe blame;

1. Make I = let me
2. There
3. Over: meaning, "He gave us a new view of our origin, and explained that we did not come from Adam and Eve, but by evolution."
4. Plough, i.e., pick up the ground with a pickaxe
5. Care
6. Do you say that parson does the same?

How change cause eberyt'ing fe mix up 'pon de eart',
An' dat most hardship come t'rough accident o' birt'.

Him show us all a sort⁷ o' funny 'keleton,
Wid names I won't remember under dis ya sun;
Animals queer to deat,⁸ dem bone, teet', an' head-skull,
All dem so dat did live in a de ole-time wul'.

No 'cos say we get cuss mek fe we 'kin come so,
But fe all t'ings come 'quare, same so it was to go:⁹
Seems our lan'¹⁰ must ha' been a bery low-do'n place, .
Mek it tek such long time in tu'ning out a race.

Yes, from monkey we spring: I believe ebery wud;
It long time better dan fgo say we come from mud:
No need me keep back part, me hab not'in' fe gain;
It's ebery man dat born — de buccra mek it plain.

It really strange how some o' de lan' dem advance;
Man power in some ways is nummo soso chance;¹¹
But suppose eberyt'ing could tu'n right upside down,
Den p'raps we'd be on top an' givin' some one houn'.¹²

Yes, Cous' Jarge, slabery hot fe dem dat gone befo':
We gettin' better times, for those days we no know;¹³

7. All sorts

8. The queerest animals

9. It is not because we were cursed (Gen. ix. 25) that our skin is dark; but so that things might come square, there had to be black and white

10. Africa

11. No more than pure chance

12. Hound: equivalent to the English slang phrase 'giving someone beans.'

13. Do not know: have no experience of

But I t'ink it do good, tek we from Africa
An' lan' us in a blessed place as dis a ya.¹⁴

Talk 'bouten Africa, we would be deh till now,
Maybe same half-naked-all day dribe buccra cow,
An' tearin' t'rough de bush wid all de monkey dem,
Wile an' uncibilise,¹⁵ an' neber comin' tame.

I Ief' quite 'way from wha' we be'n deh talk about,¹⁶
Yet still a couldn' help — de wuds come to me mout';
Just like how yeas' get strong an' sometimes fly de cark,¹⁷
Same way me feelings grow, so I was boun' fe talk.

Yet both horse partly¹⁸ runnin' in de selfsame gallop,
For it is nearly so de way de buccra pull up:
Him say, how de wul' stan', dat right will neber be,
But wrong will eber gwon¹⁹ till dis wul' en' fe we.

14. This here

15. Wild and uncivilized

16. I have run right away from what we were talking about

17. Makes the cork fly

18. Almost

19. Go on

De Days Dat Are Gone

I T'INK of childhood days again,
An' wish dat I was free
To res' me baby head once more
Upon me mudder's knee:
If we had power to change dis life
An' live it back again,
We would be children all de time
Nor fret at childhood's pain.

I look on my school life of old,
Dem sweet days dat are pas',
An' wonder how I'd wish¹ to see
Those dear times en' at las':
It was because I was a boy,
An' knew not what b'en good;
All time I tas'e de supple-jack,²
Bein' I was so rude.

An' o' de marnings when I woke,
'Fo' you can see you' han',
I mek me way on to de spring
Fe full³ me bucket-pan:
I t'ought oftentimes dat it was hard
For me to wake so soon;
Dere was no star fe light de way,
Much more⁴ de white roun ' moon.

Still, childhood pain could neber las',

1. I could wish
2. A cane
3. Fill
4. Less

An' I remem ber yet
De many sorrows 'cross me pat⁵
Dat neber mek me fret:
But now me joys are only few,
I live because I'm boun',
An' try fe mek my life of use
Though pain lie all aroun'.

5. Across my path

Reveille Soun'in'

REVEILLE! de reveille soun',
Depôt p'liceman mus' wake up;¹
Some mus' dress fe go to town,
Some to Parade fe shake-up.²

You lazy ones can lay down still,
We have no time fe dat;
De wake-ups³ comin' roun', an' you'll
Jump as you feel de cat.

For soon de half pas' dress⁴ will blow
Fe we to go a-drillin';
De time is bery short, an' so
We mus' be quick an' willin'.

A marnin' bade is sweet fe true,⁵
But we mus' quick fe done;
It col' dough,⁶ so it's only few
Can stan' it how it bu'n.⁷

'Tis quarter warnin'⁸ soun'in' now,
Our arms mus' clean an' soun';

1. Read thus: De-pilt p'lice – man mus' – wake up
2. Drill
3. The sergeant with his cane
4. The 5.30 bugle
5. A morning bathe is very, very delicious
6. It's cold though
7. Can stand the burning, i.e., the chill
8. The 5.45 bugle

We will ketch 'port⁹ ef we allow
A speck fe lodge aroun'.
Tip¹⁰ blow yet? good Lard! hear" fall in,"
Must double 'pon de grass;
I didn' know de las' call be'n
Deh blow on us so fas'.

9. Get reported

10. A short sharp bugle-call, to summon the men before the
'fall in.'

Old England

I'VE a longin' in me dept's of heart dat I can conquer not,
'Tis a wish dat I've been havin' from since I could form a t'o't,¹
'Tis to sail athwart the ocean an' to hear de billows roar,
When dem ride aroun' de steamer, when dem beat on England's
shore.

Just to view de homeland England, in de streets of London walk,
An' to see de famous sights dem 'bouten which dere's so much talk,
An' to watch de fact'ry chimneys pourin' smoke up to de sky, An' to
see de matches-children, dat I hear 'bout, passin' by.

I would see Saint Paul's Cathedral, an' would hear some of de great
Learnin' comin' from de bishops, preachin' relics of old fait';
I would ope me mout' wid wonder at de masslve organ soun', An'
would 'train me eyes to see de beauty Iyin' all aroun'.

I'd go to de City Temple, where de 'old fait' is a wreck,
An' de parson is a-preachin' views dat most folks will not tek; I'd go
where de men of science meet togeder in deir hall,
To give light unto de real truths, to obey king Reason's call.

I would view Westminster Abbey, where de great of England sleep,
An' de solemn marble statues o'er deir ashes vigil keep;
I would see immortal Milton an' de wul'-famous Shakespeare,
Past'ral Wordswort', gentle Gray, an' all de great souls buried dere.

I would see de ancient chair where England's kings deir crowns
put on,
Soon to lay dem by again when all de vanity is done;
An' I'd go to view de lone spot where in peaceful solitude Rests de
body of our Missis Queen,² Victoria de Good.

An' dese places dat I sing of now shall afterwards impart

1. thought
2. Always so called in Jamaica

All deir solemn sacred beauty to a weary searchin' heart;
So I'll rest glad an' contented in me min'³ for evermore,
When I sail across de ocean back to my own native shore.

Dat Dirty Rum

IF you *must* drink it, do not come
An' chat up in my face;
I hate to see de dirty rum,
Much more to know de tas'e.

What you find dere to care about¹
I never understand;
It only dutty up you mout',
An' mek you less a man.

I see it throw you 'pon de grass
An' mek you want no food,
While people scorn you as dey pass
An' see you vomit blood.

De fust beginnin' of it all,
You stood up calm an' cool,
An' put you' back agains' de wall
An' cuss our teacher fool.²

You cuss me too de se'fsame day
Because a say you wrong,³
An' pawn you' books an' went away
Widout anedder song.⁴

Your parents' hearts within dem sink,
When to your yout'ful lip

1. To like
2. Abused our schoolmaster and called him a fool. To" cuss" is to "abuse" : to "cuss bad word" is to "swear"
3. Because I said you were wrong
4. Without another song

Dey watch you raise de glass to drink,
An' shameless tek each sip.'

I see you in de dancing-booth,
But all your joy is vain,
For on your fresh an' glowin' youth
Is stamped dat ugly stain.

Dat ugly stain of drink, my frien',
Has cost you your best girl,
An' mek you fool 'mongst better men
When your brain's in a whirl.

You may smoke just a bit indeed,
I like de "white seal" a well;
Aldough I do not use de weed,
I'm fond o' de nice smell.

But wait until you're growin' old
An' gettin' weak an' bent,
An' feel your blood a-gettin' cold
'Fo' you tek stimulent.

Then it may mek you stronger feel
While on your livin' groun';⁵
But ole Time, creepin' on your heel,
Soon, soon will pull you down:

Soon, soon will pull you down, my frien',
De rum will help her⁶ too;
An' you'll give way to better men,
De best dat you can do.⁷

5. While in this life

6. Time

7. Which is the best thing you can do

Heart-Stirrings

You axe me as de bell begin fe 'trike,
Me Mikey, ef de wuk a didn' like;
De queshton, like de bell, soun' in me heart
Same how de anvil usual mek me 'tart.¹

You's a chil'² an' know naught 'bout de wul' yet,
But you'll grow an' larn t'ings you won't feget;
You lub you' life, an' t'ink dere's nuttin' better,
Yet all you' pickny dream dem soon will 'ketter.³

Tek me advice ya, chil', an' as you grow
Don't choose a wuk dat you no like: aldough
You might see money in o' it, at lengt'
You will get tired o' it an' repent.

A suffer, but I t'ink it mek me wise;
It wasn' fe de money 'trike me yeyes,⁴
But "water mo' 'an flour"⁵ is true wud,
An' eye-water run too long tu'n to blood.⁶

Hard life caan' kill me, but annoyance might,
Me lub me right, an' fe it me wi' fight:

1. Just as the sound of an anvil—the speaker was a blacksmith—makes me start and arouses disagreeable recollections, so does your question
2. Child
3. Scatter
4. It wasn't the attraction of the high wages
5. "Beggars can't be choosers." The reference is to dumplings made with too much water
6. This means that he (the speaker) was unhappy at home

Me wi' lef beef fe nyam an' choose cow-lung,
Fe sabe meself from an annoying tongue.⁷

But sometime', chil', you jump from fryin'-pan
'Traight in a fire; an', try as you can,
You caan' come out, but always wishin' den
Fe get back in de fryin'-pan again.

Ole Buccra Dabis, libing easy life,
One night get mad an' kill himself an' wife;
Den we hear t'ings we neber be'n know yet,
De b'uccra man was ears an' han's in debt.

Miss Laura lean back in her rockin'-chair
So sweet dat we might jes' t'ink she no care
'Bout naught; yet some say dat 'cos she caan' get
Mas' Charley fe him husban' she deh fret.

Dat's how life 'tan,⁸ me chil'; dere is somet'ing
Deep down in we dat you can neber bring
People, howeber wise, fe understan':
Caan' feel man heart same how you feel dem han'.

Fe lub, me chil', lub wha' you natur' hate!⁹ —
You'll live in misery, prayin' hard fe fait',
Which won't come eben ef you 'crub you' knees
In fifty quart o' corn an' lady-peas.¹⁰

Fe hate a t'ing you whole min' come in one:
You try fe keep it¹¹ back much as you can,

7. Prov xv. 17; xvii. I.

8. Stands=is

9. If you try to make yourself love what your nature hates.

This line is partly an exclamation, partly an interrogation

10. Black-eye peas

11. The hatred

But" flesh caan' conquer 'perit" Bible say,
You hab fe give it up,¹² an' den 'top pray.

Me carry hell, me chit', in a me ches',
Me laugh, me cry, me couldn' get no res' ;
Eat all de same an' neber fatter less¹³
Dan now, aldough me min' was so distress'.

An' though a feel it hard, a wouldn' fret;
Me min' don't mek so, but it eber set
Fe conquer, yet it couldn' wash away
De t'oughts dem dat come 'tronger ebery day.

You 'stan,¹⁴ me chil'? I caan' explain it mo' :
Life funny bad, so is de ways also;
For what we fink is right is often wrong,
We live in sorrow as we journey 'long.

12. Give up trying

13. Less fat

14. Do you understand?

De Dog-Rose

GROWIN' by de corner-stone,¹
See de pretty flow'r-tree blows,
Sendin' from de prickly branch
A lubly bunch o' red dog-rose.²

An' de bunch o' crimson red,
Boastin' on de dark blue tree,
Meks it pretty, prettier yet
Jes' as dat dog-rose can be.³

Young Miss Sal jes'⁴ come from school:
Freddy, fresh from groun' an' grub,
Pick de dog-rose off de tree,
Gib Miss Sal to prove his lub.

Then I watch on as dem kiss
Right aroun' de corner-stone,
An' my heart grow vex' fe see
How dem foolish when alone.

An' I listen to deir talk,
As dey say dey will be true;
"Eber true" I hear dem pledge,
An' dat naught can part dem two.

De petchary⁵ laugh an' jig,
Sittin' on a bamboo low;

1. Angle of the house
2. A dark red sweet-rose
3. Makes it pretty-as pretty as it is possible for a dog-rose to be
4. Just
5. Grey king-bird

Seems him guess, jes' like mese'f
How de whole t'ing gwin' fe go.
 Time gwon⁶, an' de rose is not:
I see Fred, wi' eyes all dim,
Huggin' up de corner-stone,
For his love has jilted him;
 Left him for anedder man
Wid a pile o' money,
Dat he carried from his land
O' de Injin coney.⁷
 Wonder whe' de petchary?
De rose-tree is dead an' gone;
Sal sit in de big great-house,⁸
Cooiin' to her baby son.

6. Goes on; passes away

7. England or Scotland, the home of the Indian coney
(common rabbit)—pronounced cunny

8. The principal house on a property is so called

A Midnight Woman to the Bobby

No palm me up,¹ you dutty brute,
You' jam mout' mash² like ripe bread-fruit;
You fas'n now, but wait lee ya,³
I'll see you grunt under de law.
 You t'ink you wise,⁴ but we wi' see;
You not de fus' one fas' wid me;
I'll lib fe see dem tu'n you out,
As sure as you got dat mash' mout'.
 I born right do'n beneat' de clack⁵
(You ugly brute, you tu'n you' back?)
Don' t'ink dat I'm a come-around,⁶
I born right 'way in 'panish Town.
 Care how you try,⁷ you caan' do mo'
Dan many dat was hyah befo';

1. Don't put your hands on me
2. Your d---d mouth is all awry
3. You are fast (meddling, officious) now, but wait a little, d'you hear?
4. You think you're wise
5. The clock on the public buildings at Spanish Town
6. Day-labourers, men and women, in Kingston streets and wharves, famous for the heavy weights they carry, are called come-arounds
7. No matter how you try, you can't do more than your predecessors (all that were here before)

Yet whe' dey all o' dem te-day?⁸
 De buccra dem no kick dem 'way?⁹
 Ko¹⁰ pon you' jam samplatta¹¹ nose:
 'Cos you wear Mis'r Koshaw clo'es¹²
 You fink say youts de only man,¹³
 Yet fus' time¹⁴ ko how you be'n 'tan'.¹⁵
 You big an' ugly ole tu'n-foot¹⁶
 Be'n neber know fe wear a boot;
 An' chigger nyam you' tumpa toe,¹⁷
 Till nit full i' like herrin' roe.
 You come from mountain naked-'kin,¹⁸
 An' Lard a mussy! you be'n thin,

8. Yet where are they all to-day?
9. Did not the buccra (white man) kick them away (dismiss them)?
10. Look
11. A piece of leather cut somewhat larger than the size of the foot, and tied sandal-wise to it : said of anything that is flat and broad
12. Mr Kershaw's clothes" i.e., police uniform. Col. Kershaw. Inspector-General of Police in 1911 (when this poem was written) and for many years before
13. A mighty fine fellow
14. When I knew you first
15. Look what sort of figure you cut
16. Turned-in foot
17. And chigoes (burrowing fleas) had eaten into your maimed toe, and nits (young chigoes) had filled it
18. Naked skin, i.e., with your shirt and trousers full of holes

For all de bread-fruit dem be'n done,
 Bein' 'poil' up by de tearin' sun.¹⁹
 De coco²⁰ couldn' bear at all,
 For, Lard! de groun' was pure white~marl;
 An' t'rough de rain part o' de year²¹
 De mango tree dem couldn' bear.
 An' when de pinch o' time you feel
 A 'pur you a you' chigger heel,²²
 You lef you' district, big an' coarse,
 An' come join²³ buccra Police Force.
 An' now you don't wait fe you' glass,²⁴
 But trouble me wid you' jam fas';²⁵
 But wait, me frien', you' day wi' come,
 I'll see you go same lak a some.²⁶
 Say wha'? – 'res' me?²⁷ – you go to hell!
 You t'ink Judge don't know unno well?²⁸

19. Having been spoiled by the hot sun. Pronounce 'bein' as a monosyllable
20. An editble root (*Colocasia antiquorum*)
21. During some months
22. And when you felt hard times spurring you in your chigger. eaten heel
23. Come and joined
24. You don't wait for the right and proper moment
25. With all your infernal forwardness and officiousness
26. Same like some = just as others before you did
27. What's that? – arrest me?
28. D'you think the magistrate doesn't know your tricks?
 Unno or Onnoo is an African word, meaning "you" collectively

You t'ink him gwin' go sentance²⁹ me
Widout a soul fe witness i'?

29. Pronounce the a 'ah,' but without accent

Mother Dear

“HUSBAN”, I am goin’ –
Though de brooklet is a-flowin’,
An’ de coolin’ breeze is blowin’
Softly by;
Hark, how strange de cow is moonin’,
An’ our Jennie’s pigeons cooin’,
While I feel de water¹ growin’
Climbing high.”
“Akee² trees are laden,
But de yellow leaves are fadin’
Like a young an’ bloomin’ maiden
Fallen low;
In de pond de ducks are wadin’
While my body longs for Eden,³
An’ my weary breat is gledin’
‘Way from you.
“See dem John-crows⁴ flyin’!
‘Tis a sign dat I am dyin’;
Oh, I’m wishful to be lyin’
All alone:
Fait’ful husban’, don’t go cryin’,

1. The water of dropsy rising from the legs towards the heart
2. Cupania sapida, bearing beautiful red fruits
3. To English readers this and the next (gledin' =gliding) would hardly seem to be rhymes, Nevertheless they are so
4. Turkey-buzzards

Life is one long self-denyin'
All-surrenderin' an' sighin'
Livin' moan."

"Wife, de parson's prayin',
Won't you listen what he's sayin',
Spend de endin' of your day in
Christ our Lord?"

But de sound of horses neighin',
Baain' goats an' donkeys brayin',
Twitt'rin' birds an' children playin'
Was all she heard.

Things she had been rearin',
Only those could claim her hearin',
When de end we had been fearin'
Now had come:
Now her last pain she is bearin',
Now de final scene is nearin',
An' her vacant eyes are starin'
On her home.⁵

Oh! it was heart-rendin'
As we watched de loved life endin',
Dat sweet sainted spirit bendin'
To de death:
Gone all further hope of mendin',
With de angel Death attendin',
An' his slayin' spirit blendin'
With her breath.

5. The spot in the garden she had chosen for her burial- place

Kite-Flying

HIGHER fly, my pretty kite,
Over distant towers;
Paper-made, red, blue an' white,
All my fav'rite colours.¹

As up an' up an' up you mount
On your way to heaven, Thoughts
come, which I cannot count,
Of the times I've striven

Just to soar away like you,
Rising to a happier sphere
Deep within yon skies of blue,
Far from all de strife an' care.

You have got you' singer² on,
Let me hear your singing,
Hear you' pleasant bee-like tone
On de breezes ringin'.

Wider dash your streamin' tail,
Keep it still a-dancin'!
As across de ditch you sail,
By the tree-tops glancin'.

Messengers³ I send along,
Lee round papers of bright red;

1. The 'l' is swallowed, and the rhyme is good.
2. A strip of paper shaped like a half moon, and stretched on a thread running from one top corner of the kite to the other
3. Round slips of paper, which go twirling up the kite-string

Up they go to swell you' song,
Climbin' on the slumber⁴ t'read.

Higher fiy, my pretty kite,
Higher, ever higher;
Draw me with you to your height
Out the earthly mire.

4. Slender

Ione

SAY if you lub me, do tell me truly,

Ione, Ione;

For, O me dearie, not'in' can part we,

Ione, Ione.

Under de bamboo, where de fox-tail¹ grew,

Ione, Ione.

While do cool breeze blew — sweet, I did pledge you,

Ione, Ione.

Where calalu² grows, an' yonder book flows,

Ione, Ione.

I held a dog-rose under your li'l³ nose,

Ione, Ione.

There where de lee stream plays wid de sunbeam

Ione, Ione.

True be'n de love-gleam as a sweet day-dream,

Ione, Ione.

Watchin' de bucktoe⁴ under de shadow

Ione, Ione.

Of a pear-tree low dat in de stream grow,

Ione, Ione.

Mek me t'ink how when we were lee children,

Ione, Ione.

1. A grass with heavy plumes
2. Spinach, but not the English kind
3. little
4. Small crawfish

We used to fishen⁵ in old Carew Pen,⁶
lone, lone.

Like tiny meshes, curl your black tresses,
lone, lone.

An' my caresses tek widout blushes,
lone, lone.

Kiss me, my airy winsome lee fairy,
lone, lone.

Are you now weary, little canary,
lone, lone.

Then we will go, pet, as it is sunset,
lone, lone.

Tek dis sweet vi'let, we will be one yet,
lone, lone.

5. Fish

6. The Jamaican equivalent for ranche

Killin' Nanny

Two little pickny is watchin',
While a goat is led to deat';
Dey are little ones of two years,
An' know naught of badness yet.

De goat is bawlin' fe mussy,¹
An' de children watch de sight
As de butcher re'ch² his sharp knife,
An' 'tab³ wid all his might.

Dey see de red blood flowin';
An' one chil' trimble an' hide
His face in de mudder's bosom,
While t'udder look on wide-eyed.

De tears is fallin' down hotly
From him on de mudder's knee;
De udder wid joy is starin',
An' clappin' his han's wid glee.

When dey had forgotten Nanny,
Grown men I see dem again;
An' de forehead of de laugher
Was brand'⁴ wid de mark of Cain.

1. Mercy
2. Reaches, lays hold of
3. Stabs
4. Branded

My Native Land, My Home

DERE is no land dat can compare
Wid you where'er I roam;
In all de wul' none like you fair,
My native land, my home.

Jamaica is de nigger's place,
No mind whe' some declare;
Although dem call we "no-land race,"
I know we home is here.

You give me life an' nourishment,
No udder land I know;
My lub I neber can repent,
For all to you I owe.

E'en ef you mek me beggar die,
I'll trust you all de same,
An' none de less on you rely,
Nor saddle you wid blame.

Though you may cas'¹ me from your breas'
An' trample me to deat',
My heart will trus' you none de less,
My land I won't feget.

An' I hope none o' your sons would
Refuse deir strengt' to lend,
An' drain de last drop o' deir blood
Their country to defend.

You draw de t'ousan' from deir shore,
An' all 'long keep dem please';²

1. Cast
2. And keep them amused and happy all along (all the time of their stay)

De invalid come here fe cure,
You heal all deir disease.
Your fertile soil grow all o 't'ings³
To full de naygur's wants,
'Tis seamed wid neber-failing springs⁴
To give dew to de plants.⁵
You hab all t'ings fe mek life bles',
But buccra 'pail de whole
Wid gove'mint⁶ an' all de res',
Fe worry naygur soul.
Still all dem little chupidness⁷
Caan' tek away me lub;
De time when I'll tu'n 'gains' you is
When you can't give me grub.

3. All of (the) things

4. Brooks

5. The dew falls heavily in the valley-bottoms

6. Government

7. Those little stupidnesses

Two-An'-Six

MERRY voices chatterin',
Nimble feet dem patterin',
Big an' little, faces gay,
Happy day dis market day.
 Sateday!¹ de marnin' break,
Soon, soon market-people wake;
An' de light shine from de moon
While dem boy, wid pantaloon
Roll up ober dem knee-pan,
'Tep² across de buccra lan'
To de pastur whe' de harse³
Feed along wid de jackass,
An' de mule cant' in de track⁴
Wid him tail up in him back,
All de ketchin' to defy,
No ca' how⁵ dem boy might try.
 In de early marnin' -tide,
When de cocks crow on de hill
An' de stars are shinin' still,
Mirrie by de fireside
Hots⁶ de coffee for de lads

1. Saturday
2. Step
3. Where the horse
4. Canters in the track. A Jamaican pasture is seamed with tracks made by the animals in walking
5. I don't care how; no matter how
6. Warms

Comin' ridin' on de pads
 T'rown across dem animul
 Donkey, harse too, an' de mule,
 Which at last had come do'n cool.⁷
 On de bit dem hol' dem full :
 Racin' ober pastur' lan',
 See dem comin' ebery man,
 Comin' fe de steamin' tea⁸
 Ober hilly track an' lea.

Hard-wuk'd donkey on de road
 Trottin' wid him ushal⁹ load, —
 Hamper¹⁰ pack' wi' yarn an' grain,
 Sour-sop,¹¹ an' Gub'nor cane.¹²

Cous' Sun¹³ sits in hired dray,
 Drivin' 'long de market way
 Whole week grindin' sugar-cane
 T'rough de boilin' sun an' rain,
 Now, a'ter¹⁴ de toilin' hard,
 He goes seekin' his reward,
 While he's thinkin' in him min'
 Of de dear ones Ief' behin',
 Of de loved though ailin' wife,
 Darlin' treasure of his life,

7. Given up his skittishness

8. Generic name for any non-alcoholic hot drink

9. Usual, pronounced without the second 'u'

10. Panniers

11. Anona muricate— a fruit

12. Governor cane; a yellow-striped sugar-cane

13. Cousin James. Sun is the regular nickname for James

14. After

An' de picknies, six in all,
 Whose 'nuff¹⁵ burdens 'pon him fall:
 Seben¹⁶ lovin' ones in need,
 Seben hungry mouths fe feed;
 On deir wants he thinks alone,
 Neber dreamin' of his own,
 But gwin' on wid joyful face
 Till him re'ch¹⁷ de market-place.
 Sugar bears no price te-day,
 Though it is de mont' o' May,
 When de time is hellish hot,
 An' de water-cocoanut¹⁸
 An' de cane bebridge¹⁹ is nice,
 Mix' up wid a lilly ice.²⁰
 Big an' little, great an' small,
 Afou yam is all de call;²¹
 Sugar tup an' gill²² a quart,
 Yet de people hab de heart

15. Enough = many

16. Seven

17. Till he reaches

18. Immature cocoanut, the milk of which is a delicious drink

19. Beverage

20. Mixed lip with a little ice

21. The variety of yam called "ahfoo" is the thing principally asked for by young and old

22. Tup (twopence of the old Jamaica coinage) is 1 1/2d : gill, 3/4d. So "tup and gill" is 2 1/4d

Wantin' brater²³ top o' i,
Want de sweatin' higgler fe
Ram de pan an' pile i' up,
Yet sell i' fe so-so tup.²⁴

Cousin Sun is lookin' sad,
As de market is so bad;
'Pon him han' him res' him chin,
Quietly sit do'o thinkin'
Of de loved wife sick in bed,
An' de children to be fed—
What de labourers would say
When dem know him couldn' pay;
Also what about de mill
Whe' him hire²⁵ from ole Bill;
So him think, an' think on so,
Till him t'oughts no more could go.

Then he got up an' began
Pickin' up him sugar-pan:²⁶
In his ears rang t'rough de din
"Only two-an'-six a tin!"
What a tale he'd got to tell,
How bad, bad de sugar sell!

Tekin' out de lee amount,
Him set do'n an' begin count;
All de time him min' deh doubt²⁷
How expenses would pay out;

23. Insist on having 'brahter,' a little extra on top of (over)
the quart

24. Sell it for a bare tup

25. Which he hires, or hired

26. His sugar pans (tins)

27. His mind is doubting

Ah, it gnawed him like de ticks,
Sugar sell fe two-an'-six!

So he journeys on de way,
Feelin' sad dis market day;
No e'en buy²⁸ a little cake
To gi'e baby when she wake, —
Passin' 'long de candy-shop
'Douten eben mek a stop
To buy drops fe las'y²⁹ son,
For de lilly cash nea' done.
So him re'ch him own a groun',
An' de children scamper roun',
Each one stretchin' out him han',
Lookin' to de poor sad man.

Oh, how much he felt de blow,
As he watched dem face fall low,
When dem wait an' nuttin' came
An' drew back deir han's wid shame!
But de sick wife kissed his brow:
"Sun, don't get down-hearted now;
Ef we only pay expense
We mus' wuk we common-sense,
Cut an' carve, an' carve an' cut,
Mek gill sarbe fe quattiewut";³⁰
We mus' try mek two ends meet
Neber mind how hard be it.
We won't mind de haul an' pull,
While dem pickny belly full."³¹

28. Doesn't even buy

29. Lasty (lahsty), pet name for the Benjamin of a family

30. Make 3/4d. serve for quattieworth, 11/2d

31. If only the children have enough to eat

An' de shadow lef' him face,
An' him felt an inward peace,
As he blessed his better part
For her sweet an' gentle heart :
“Dear one O' my heart, my breat',
Won't I lub you to de deat'?
When my heart is weak an' sad,
Who but you can mek it glad?”

So dey kissed an' kissed again,
An' deir t'oughts were not on pain,
But was 'way down in de sout'
Where dey'd wedded in deir yout',
In de marnin' of deir life
Free from all de grief an' strife,
Happy in de marnin' light,
Never thinkin' of de night.

So dey k'lated³² eberyting;
An' de profit it could bring,
A'ter all de business fix',
Was a princely two-an'-six.

32. After all the business was fixed, i.e., when the accounts were made up

Compensation

DERE is a rest-place for de weary feet,
An' for de bitter cup a conquering sweet:
For sore an' burdened hearts dere'll be a balm,
And after days of tempest comes a calm.

For every smallest wrong dere is a right,
An' t'rough de dark shall gleam a ray of light:
Oppression for a season may endure,
But 'tis true wud, "For ebery ill a cure."

Den let me not t'ink hard of those who use
Deir power tyrannously an' abuse:
Let me remember always while I live,
De noblest of all deeds is to forgive.

This, not revenge, is sweet: this lif's¹ de soul
An' meks it wort' while² in a empty wul':
Far better than an old an' outworn creed
'Tis each day to do one such noble deed.

1. Lifts
2. Something worth

Heartless Rhoda

KISS me, as you want it so ;
Lub me, ef it wort' de while;¹
Yet I feel it an' I know²
Dat, as t'rough de wul' you go,
You will oft look back an' smile
At de t'ings which you now do.
Tek me to de church te-day,
Call me wife as you go home;
Hard fate, smilin' at us, say³
Dat de whole is so-so play;
Soon de ushal en' will come,
An' we both will choice⁴ our way.

* * * *

Spare you' breat', me husban' true,
I be'n marry you fe fun:⁵
Lub dat las' long is a few,⁶
An' I hadn' much fe you.
I be'n tell you it would done,⁷
All whe' come is wha' you do.⁸

1. Love me, if it is worth while, i.e., if you think it worth while
2. Yet I feel and know
3. Says
4. Choose, i.e, go our several ways
5. I married you with no serious purpose
6. Seldom met with
7. I did tell (told) you it would soon come to an end.
8. All that has happened is your doing

Life I only care to see
In de way dat udders⁹ live;
I experiment to be
All dat fate can mek o' me:
Glad I tek all whe' she give,
For I'm hopin' to be free.¹⁰

9. Others

10. A free paraphrase will best explain the meaning of these six lines. Rhoda sees other girls marry, and out of pure curiosity she wants to find out what married life is like. So she makes the experiment, -- though this [marriage] is only one of the things that Fate has in store for her. And she takes gladly whatever Fate gives, always hoping (and meaning) to change the present experience for another.

A Dream

THE roosters give the signal for daybreak,
And through my window¹ pours the grey of morn;
Refreshing breezes fan me as I wake,
And down the valley sounds the wesly² horn.

Day broadens, and I ope the window wide,³
And brilliant sunbeams, mixing, rush between
The gaping blinds, while down at my bedside
I kneel to utter praise to the Unseen.

The torch-light glistens through the wattle-pane,⁴
And clouds of smoke wreath upward to the skies;
My brother at the squeezer juices cane,⁵
And visions of tea-hour before me rise.

Leaving the valley's cup the fleeting fog
Steals up the hill-sides decked with sunbeams rare,

1. The window is a jalousie, and its blinds (slats) are shut
2. Word of uncertain origin. The wesly horn sounds when any work in common is to be undertaken
3. Word of uncertain origin. The wesly horn sounds when any work in common is to be undertaken
4. The bedroom is separated from the kitchen by panes of undaubed wattle, through which is seen the glimmer of the burning torch-wood
5. At the squeezer (a rough borne-made machine) is extracting juice from sugar-canes

Which send their search-rays 'neath the time-worn log,
And drive the sleeping majoes⁶ from their lair.

But there are some that yest'reve was the last
For them to sleep into their watery bed;
For now my treacherous fish-pot has them fast,
Their cruel foe which they had so long dread.⁷

Right joyfully I hear the school-bell ring,
And by my sister's side away I trot;
I'm happy as the swee-swees⁸ on the wing,
And feel naught but contentment in my lot.

I lightly gambol on the school-yard green,
And where the damsels⁹ by the bamboo grove
In beautiful and stately growth are seen,
For tiny shiny star-apples I rove.

* * * * *

The morning wind blows softly past my door,
And we prepare for work with gladsome heart;
Sweetly the wesly horn resounds once more,
A warning that 'tis time for us to start.

I scamper quickly 'cross the fire-burnt soil,
And the coarse grass-tufts prick my tender feet;
I watch my father at his honest toil,
And wonder how he stands the sun's fierce heat.

A winding footpath down the woodland leads,
And through the tall fox-tails I wend my way

6. Pronounce the ma as in French-fresh-water shrimps,
which live in the hill-side brooklets
7. Whom for so long a time they had dreaded
8. Quits. The name imitates their chirping song
9. The damsel (corruption of damson, probably) is like a
small star-apple

Down to the brooklet where the pea-dove feeds,
And bucktoes¹⁰ in the water are at play.

And watching as the bubbles rise and fall,
I hear above the murmur of the dale
The tropic music dear to great and small,
The joyous outburst of the nightingale .

* * * * *

Gone now those happy days when all was blest,
For I have left my home and kindred dear;
In a strange place I am a stranger's guest,
The pains, the real in life, I've now to bear.

No more again I'll idle at my will,
Running the mongoose down upon the lea;
No more I'll jostle¹¹ Monty up the hill,
To pick the cashews¹² off the laden tree.

I feel the sweetness of those days again,
And hate, so hate, on the past scenes to look;
All night in dreaming comes the awful pain,
All day I groan beneath the iron yoke.

In mercy then, ye Gods, deal me swift death!
Ah! you refuse, and life instead you give;
You keep me here and still prolong my breath,
That I may suffer all the days I live.

* * * * *

'Tis home again, but not the home of yore;
Sadly the scenes of bygone days I view,
And as I walk the olden paths once more,
My heart grows chilly as the morning dew.

But see I to-day again my life is glad,

10. Small crawfish

11. Race and fowl

12. A fruit (*Anacarium occidentale*)

My heart no more is lone, nor will it pine;
A comfort comes, an earthly fairy clad
In white, who guides me with her hand in mine.

Her lustrous eyes gleam only tender love,
And viewing her, an angel form I see;
I feed my spirit on my gentle dove,
My sweetheart Lee, my darling Idalee.¹³

And where the peenies glow with greenish fire,
We kiss and kiss and pledge our hearts as true
Of sweet love-words and hugs we never tire,
But felt more sorry that they were so few .

* * * * *

I leave my home again, wand'ring afar,
But goes with me her true, her gentle heart,
Ever to be my hope, my guiding star,
And whisperings of comfort to impart.

Methinks we're strolling by the woodland stream,
And my frame thrills with joy to hear her sing:
But, O my God! 'tis all — 'tis all a dream;
This is the end, the rude awakening.

13. This tacking of a syllable on to well-known names is common in Jamaica

Rise and Fall

[Thoughts of Burns—with apologies to his immortal spirit for making him speak in Jamaican dialect.]

DEY read¹ 'em again an' again,
An' laugh an' cry² at 'em in turn ;
I felt I was gettin' quite vain,
But dere was a lesson fe learn.

My poverty quickly took wing,
Of life no experience had I;
I couldn' then want anyt'ing
Dat kindness or money could buy.

Dey tek me away from me lan',
De gay o' de wul' to behold,
An' roam me t'rough palaces gran',
An' show'red on me honour untold.

I went to de ballroom at night,
An' danced wid de belles of de hour;
Half dazed by de glitterin' light,
I lounged in de palm-covered bower.

I flirted wid beautiful girls,
An' drank O' de wine flowin' red;
I felt my brain movin' in whirls,
An' knew I was losin' my head.

But soon I was tired of it all,
My spirit was weary to roam;³
De life grew as bitter as gall,
I hungered again for my home.

1. Preterite
2. Laughed and cried
3. Sick of roaming

Te-day I am back in me lan',
Forgotten by all de gay throng,
A poorer but far wiser man,
An' knowin' de right from de wrong.

Beneath the Yampy Shade

[Footnote on title: “Yampy”¹]

WE sit beneat' de yampy shade,
My lee sweetheart an' I;
De gully² ripples 'cross de glade,
Tom Rafflins³ hurry by.

Her pa an' ma about de fiel'
Are bruikin'⁴ sugar-pine;
An' plenty, plenty is de yiel',
Dem look so pink⁵ an' fine.

We listen to a rapturous chune
Outpourin' from above;
De swee-swees, blithesome birds of June,
They sing to us of love.

She plays wid de triangle leaves,
Her hand within mine slips;
She murmurs love, her bosom heaves,
I kiss her ripe, ripe lips.

1. The Yampy, or Indian Yam, has very beautiful triangular leaves. Yams of all kinds climb, like hops, on sticks or trees
2. Brook. The word is more generally used in the sense of precipice
3. Mad ants, which run very quickly
4. Breaking. Pine-apples are gathered by bending down the stalk, which snaps cleanly off
5. Choice, nice. Cf. the phrase, Pink of perfection

De cockstones⁶ raise deir droopin' heads
To view her pretty feet;
De skellions⁷ trimble in deir beds,
Dey grudge our Iub so sweet —
Love sweeter than a bridal dream,
A mudder's fondest kiss
Love purer than a crystal stream,
De height of eart'ly bliss.
We hear again de swee-swees' song
Outpourin' on de air;
Dey sing for yout', an' we are young
An' know naught 'bouten care.
We sit beneat' de yampy shade,
We pledge our hearts anew;
De swee-swees droop, de bell-flowers⁸ fade
Before our love so true.

6. Red peas, French beans

7. Scallions—a non-bulbing onion

8. *Datura stramonium*, whose great white trumpets flag as
the sun gets hot

To Inspector W. E. Clark (On the Eve of His Departure for England)

FAREWELL, dear Sir, a sad farewell!

An' as across the deep you sail,

Bon voyage we wish you:

We love you deepest as we can,¹

As officer an' gentleman,

With love sincere an' true.

 Though often you have been our judge,

We never owed you one lee grudge,

For you were always fair:

So, as the sad farewell we say,

May Neptune guide you, Sir, we pray,

With ever watchful care.

 But as you travel to our home,²

Sad are the strange thoughts which will come,

Bringin' an aching pain;

That as this is a fitful life,

With disappointments ever rife,

We may not meet again.

 Yet while our hearts are filled with grief,

The god of hope brings sweet relief

An' bids us not despair:

Of all our thoughts we cannot tell,

1. With all our heart

2. England

But wish you, Sir, a fond farewell,
A farewell of good cheer. :
21st May, 1911.

To Clarendon Hills and H. A. H.

LOVED Clarendon hills,
Dear Clarendon hills,
Oh! I feel de chills,
Yes, I feel de chills
Coursin' t'rough me frame
When I call your name,¹
Dear Clarendon hills,
Loved Clarendon hills.

Wand'rin', wand'rin' far,
Weary, wan'drin' far
'Douten guidin' star,
Not a guidin' star,
Still my love's for you
Ever, ever true,
Though I wander far,
Weary wander far.

H. A. H., my frien',
Ever cherished frien',
I'll return again,
Yes, return again:
Think, O think of me
Tossed on life's dark sea,
H. A. H., my frien',
Dearest, fondest frien'.

Ah, dear frien' ' o' mine,
Love me, frien' o' mine,

1. Speak of you

Wid that love of thine
Passin' love of womenkin,²
More dan love of womenkin':
Clasp me to your breast,
Pillow me to rest,
Fait'ful frien' o' mine,
Truest frien' o' mine.

Though you may be sad,
Sorrowin' an' sad,
Never min' dat, lad,
Don't you min' dat, lad!
Live, O live your life,
Trample on de strife,
Though you may be sad,
Always, always sad.

Loved Clarendon hills,
Cherished frien' o' mine,
Oh, my bosom thrills,
Soul an' body pine:
Trough de wul' I rove,
Pinin' for your love,
Blest Clarendon hills,
Dearest frien' o' mine.

2. 2 Sam. i. 26

When You Want a Bellyful

WHEN you want a bellyful,
Tearin' piece o' one,¹
Mek up fire, wash you' pot,
Full i' wid cockstone.²

Nuttin' good as cockstone soup
For a bellyful;
Only, when you use i' hot,
You can sweat no bull.³

An' to mek you know de trut',
Dere's anedder flaw;
Ef you use too much o' i',
It wi' paunch you' maw.⁴

Growin' wid de fat blue corn,
Pretty cockstone peas —
Lilly blossom, vi'let-like,⁵
Drawin' wuker bees—

We look on dem growin' dere,
Pokin' up dem head,

1. This whole line is a single intensifying adjective; and the two lines together are equivalent to "When you want a tremendous bellyful."
2. Red peas, French beans
3. It makes you sweat like a ('no'—pronounced very short in this sense) bull
4. Make your belly swell
5. Violet coloured

Lilly, lilly, t'rough de corn,
Till de pod dem shed.⁶

An' we watch de all-green pods
Stripin' bit by bit;
Green leaves gettin' yellow coat,
Showin dey were fit.⁷

So we went an' pull dem up,⁸
Reaped a goodly lot,
Shell some o' de pinkish grain,
Put dem in a pot.⁹

But I tell you, Sir, again,
Cockstone soup no good;¹⁰
From experience I fink
'Tis de wus' o' food.¹¹

When de reapin'-time come roun',
I dry fe me part;¹²
Sellin i', when it get scarce,
For a bob a quart.¹³

When you need a bellyful,
Grip!n' piece o' one,
Shub up fire under pot,
Put in dry cockstone.

6. Until the pods are formed

7. Showing that the peas were fit to pick

8. These red peas are pulled up by the roots

9. In the pot

10. Is not good

11. The worst of foods

12. I dry my share

13. The usual price is 'bit,' i.e., 4 1/2d

Strokes of the Tamarind Switch

I DARED not look at him,
My eyes with tears were dim,
My spirit filled with hate
Of man's depravity,
I hurried through the gate.

I went but I returned,
While in my bosom burned
The monstrous wrong that we
Oft bring upon ourselves,
And yet we cannot see.

Poor little erring wretch!
The cutting tamarind switch
Had left its bloody mark,
And on his legs were streaks
That looked like boiling bark.¹

I spoke to him the while:
At first he tried to smile,
But the long pent-up tears
Came gushing-in a flood;
He was but of tender years.

With eyes bloodshot and red,
He told me of a father dead
And lads like himself rude,
Who goaded him to wrong:
He for the future promised to be good.

1. Floors are dyed with a blood-red decoction made from the bark of trees

The mother yesterday
Said she was sending him away,
Away across the seas:
She told of futile prayers
Said on her wearied knees.

I wished the lad good-bye,
And left him with a sigh:
Again I heard him talk—
His limbs, he said, were sore.
He could not walk.

I 'member when a smaller boy,
A mother's pride, a mother's joy,
I too was very rude:
They beat me too, though not the same,²
And has it done me good?

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR. —This was a lad of fifteen. No doubt he deserved the flogging administered by order of the Court: still, I could not bear to see him—my own flesh—stretched out over the bench, so I went away to the Post Office near by. When I returned, all was over. I saw his naked bleeding form, and through the terrible ordeal — so they told me — he never cried. But when I spoke to him he broke down, told me between his bursts of tears how he had been led astray by bad companions, and that his mother intended sending him over-sea. He could scarcely walk, so I gave him tickets for the tram. He had a trustful face. A few minutes after, my bitterness of spirit at the miserable necessity of such punishment came forth in song, which I leave rugged and unpolished as I wrote it at the moment.

2. Not so severely

My Pretty Dan

I HAVE a póliceman down at de Bay,¹
An' he is true to me though far away.
I love my pólice, and he loves me too,
An' he has promised he'll be ever true.
My little bobby is a darlin' one,
An' he's de prettiest you could set eyes 'pon.
When he be'n station' up de countryside,
Fus' time I shun him sake o' foolish pride.
But as I watched him patrolling his beat,
I got to find out he was nice an' neat.
More still I foun' out he was extra kin',
An' dat his precious heart was wholly mine.
Den I became his own a true sweetheart,
An' while life last we're hopin' not fe part.
He wears a truncheon an' a handcuff case,
An' pretty cap to match his pretty face.
Dear lilly p'liceman stationed down de sout',
I feel your kisses rainin' on my mout'.
I could not give against² a policeman;
For if I do, how could I lub my Dan?
Prettiest of naygur is my dear police,
We'll lub foreber, an' our lub won't cease.
I have a policeman down at de Bay,
An' he is true to me though far away.

1. Morant Bay and similarly named seaside towns are always called imply 'the Bay' by tbe people of the district
2. Revile, abuse, vilify

Ribber Come-Do'n

[Footnote on title: "Ribber Come-Do'n"¹]

From de top o' Clarendon hill
Chock down to Clarendon plain
De ribber is rushin' an' tearin'
'Count o' de showers o' rain.

An' a mudder, anxious an' sad,
Two whole days be'n gone away,
A-buyin' fresh fish fe tu'n han'²
Slap do'n at Old Harbour Bay.

But de dark ribber kept her back,
Dat night she couldn' get home,
While a six-week-old baby wailed,
An' wailed for a mudder to come.

An' a fader too was away
'Cross de Minha³ wukin' him groun',⁴
So him couldn' get home dat night
Sake o' de ribber come-do'n.

Dere were four udder little ones
'Sides de babe of six weeks old,
An' dey cried an' looked to no use,⁵
An' oh dey were hungry an' cold!

So de lee fourteen-year-old gal,
De eldest one o' de lot,

1. The river in flood
2. To peddle
3. The Rio Minho: pronounce 'miner'
4. Cultivating his ground or provision field
5. In vain

Was sad as she knelt by the babe
An' byaed⁶ her on de cot.

"Bya, bya, me baby,
Baby want go sleepy."

She look 'pan de Manchinic⁷ tree,
Not a piece of mancha fe eat;
De Jack-fruit dem bear well anuff,
But dere wasn't one o' dem fit.⁸

Nor puppa nor mumma could come,
Aldough it be'n now nightfall;
De rain pour do'n an' de wind blow,
An' de picknannies dem still bawl.

So de poo' Milly 'tarted out
To whe' a kin' neighbour lib,
Fe see ef a bite o' ' nenyam⁹
Dem couldn' p'raps manage fe gib.

"Ebenin', cousin Anna,
Me deh beg you couple banna,¹⁰
For dem tarra one¹¹ is berry hungry home;
We puppa ober May,¹² ma,
We mumma gone a Bay, ma,
An' we caan' tell warra' time dem gwin' go come."
The kind district mother thought

6. A verb formed from hushaby

7. Corruption of 'Martinique,' the best variety of banana in
Jamaica

8. Ripe

9. Food

10. I am begging a few bananas of you

11. Those other ones, i.e., the little children at home

12. Over at Mayfield

Of her own boy far away,
An' wondered much how he fared
In a foreign land that day.

She opened de cupboard door
An' took from it warra be'n sabe,
A few bits o' yam an' lee meal,
An' a pint o' milk fe de babe.

De parents dat night couldn' come,
De howlin' wind didn' lull,
But de picknaries went to bed
Wid a nuff nuff bellyful.

A Country Girl

“LELIA gal, why in this town do you stay?
Why, tell me, why did you wander away?
Why will you aimlessly foolishly roam,
Won't you come back to your old country home?”

“Country life, Fed, has no pleasures for me,
I wanted de gay o' de city to see,
To wear ebery Sunday a prettier gown,
Da's why I came to de beautiful town.”

“Well, have you gotten de joys dat you sought?
If so, were not all o' dem too dearly bought?
Yes, Liel, you do wear a prettier dress,
But have you not suffered, my girl, more or less?”

“Hold up your head! look not down, tell me truth,
Have you not bartered your innocent youth?
Are you de Lelia, true Lelia, of old,
Or have you swopped out your honour for gold?”

“Fed, it was horrid de lone country life!
I suffered—for sometimes e'en hunger was rife;
An' when I came, Fed, to try my chance here,
I thought there would be no more troubles to bear.

“But troubles there were an' in plenty, my lad,
Oh, dey were bitter, an' oh, I was sad!
Weary an' baffled an' hungry an' lone,
I gave up my spirit to sigh an' to moan.

“After dat?—O, Feddy, press me not so:
De truth?—well, I sank to de lowest of de low;
I gave up all honour, I took a new name
An' tried to be happy, deep sunk in de shame.

“Dere was no other way, Fed, I could live,
Dat was de gift dat a gay town could give;

I tried to be glad in de open daylight,
But sorrowed an' moaned in de deep o' de night.

“No, Fed, I never could go home again:
‘Worse than I left it? ‘ah, there was de pain,
To meet up wid some o’ my former schoolmates
An’ listen to all o’ deir taunts an’ deir hates.

“Dere now, you bound me to tell you o’ all,
Of all de sad suffrings dat led to my fall;
I’m gone past reclaiming, so what must I do
But live de bad life an’ mek de good go?”

“Lelia, I want you to come out de sin,
Come home an’ try a new life fe begin;
Mek up you min’, gal, fe wuk wid you’ han’,
Plant peas an’ corn in de fat country lan’.

“Dere is no life, gal, so pleasant, so good,
Contented and happy you’ll eat your lee food;
No one at home know ’bout wha’ you’ve jes’ said,
So, Liel, of exposure you needn’t be ‘fraid.”

“Don’t t’ink I care ’bout exposure, my boy!
Dat which you call sin is now fe me joy;
Country for Lelia will have no more charm,
I’ll live on de same way, ’twill do me no harm.

“And after all, many gals richer than me,
Pretty white girlies of better degree,
Live as I do, an’ are happy an’ gay,
Then why should not I be as happy as they?”

My Soldier-Lad

SEE yonder soldier-lad
In Zouave jacket clad?
His lovin' heart is mine,
His heart so bright an' glad;
My soul an' spirit combine
To love my soldier-lad.

O my dear lilly soldier-lad,
I am true an' so are you;
And oh, my lovin' heart is glad,
For I know that you are true.

My pretty soldier-boy,
He is my only joy:
He loves me with his might,
A love without alloy,
My one, my true delight,
My pretty soldier-boy.

O my dear lilly soldier-lad, etc.

My own lee soldier true,
He is a bandsman too;
An' when he's in the stand,
His sweet eyes playin' blue,
He carries off the band,
My handsome soldier true.

O my dear lilly soldier-lad, etc.

My precious lilly pet,
He plays a clarinet:
De gals dem envy me,
But him they cannot get;
Dem hate we both to see,
Me an' my precious pet.

O my dear lilly soldier-lad, etc.

Where coolin' breezes blow,
An' silvery gullies flow
Do'n t'rough de bamboo grove,
The amorous pea-doves coo:
They're cooin' of my love,
While freshenin' breezes blow.

O my dear lilly soldier-lad, etc.

My dear Bermudan lad
In baggy trousers clad,
I love you wid whole heart,
A heart that's true an' glad;
Our love can never part,
My darlin' bandsy lad.

O my dear lilly soldier-lad, etc.

My Mountain Home

De mango tree in yellow bloom,
De pretty akee seed,
De mammee where de John-to-whits¹ come
To have their daily feed,
 Show you de place where I was born,
Of which I am so proud,
'Mongst de banana-field an' corn
On a lone mountain-road.

 One Sunday marnin' 'fo' de hour
Fe service-time come on,
Ma say dat I be'n born to her
Her little las'y² son.

 Those early days be'n neber dull,
My heart was ebergreen;
How I did lub my little wul'
Surrounded by pingwin!³

 An' growin' up, with sweet freedom
About de yard I'd run;
An' tired out I'd hide me from
De fierce heat of de sun.

 So glad I was de fus' day when
Ma sent me to de spring;
I was so happy feelin' then
Dat I could do somet'ing.

 De early days pass quickly 'long,
Soon I became a man,

1. Pronounce in two syllables
2. Lasty, diminutive of "last"
3. The wild pineapple (Bromelia Pinguin)

An' one day found myself among
Strange folks in a strange lan'.

My little joys, my wholesome min',
Dey bullied out o' me,
And made me daily mourn an' pine
An' wish dat I was free.

Dey taught me to distrust my life,
Dey taught me what was grief;
For months I travailed in de strife,
'Fa' I could find relief.

But I'll return again, my Will,
An' where my wild ferns grow
An' weep for me on Dawkin's Hill,
Dere, Willie, I shall go.

An' dere is somet'ing near forgot,
Although I lub it best;
It is de loved, de hallowed spot
Where my dear mother rest.

Look good⁴ an' find it, Willie dear,
See dat from bush 'tis free;
Remember that my heart is near,
An' you say you lub me.

An' plant on it my fav'rite fern,
Which I be'n usual wear;
In days to come I shall return
To end my wand'rin's dere.

4. Carefully

To Bennie (In Answer to a Letter)

You say, dearest comrade, my love has grown cold,
But you are mistaken, it burns as of old;
And no power below, dearest lad, nor above,
Can ever lessen, frien' Bennie, my love.

 Could you but look in my eyes, you would see
That 'tis a wrong thought you have about me;
Could you but feel my hand laid on your head,
Never again would you say what you've said.

 Naught, o my Bennie, our friendship can sever,
Dearly I love you, shall love you for ever;
Moment by moment my thoughts are of you,
Trust me, oh, trust me, for aye to be true.

Hopping off the Tram

IT would not stop,
So I took a hop,
An', Lard oh, my foot a miss!¹
It sent me do'n
Slam on de groun',
An' I had a dusty kiss.
 The car went 'long
With its hummin' song,
An' I too went my way;
But the sudden fall I did recall,
And shall for many a day.

1. Tripped

To a Comrade

LITTLE comrade, never min'
Though another is unkin';
"Of de pain o' dis ya wul'
We must suck we bellyful."¹

Little comrade, moan not so,
Oh, you fill my heart with woe!
Sad I listen to your cries,
Can't you ope your burnin' eyes?

Little comrade, though 'tis hot,²
Say you will revenge him not:³
Talk not thus, you mek me grieve,
Promise me you will forgive.

Little comrade, never min'
Though a brother is unkin';
Treat him kindest as you can,
Show yourself the better man

1. See 'Whe' fe do', which the author and his little comrade had been reading together
2. Painful
3. Tell me you will not take vengeance on him

Jubba

[Footnote on the title: "Jubba"¹]

My Jubba waiting dere fe me;
Me, knowin', went out on de spree,
An' she, she wait deh till midnight,
Bleach-bleachin' in de cold moonlight:
An' when at last I did go home
I found out dat she had just come,
An' now she tu'n her back away,
An' won't listen a wud I say.

Forgive me, Jubba, Jubba dear,
As you are standing, standing there,
An' I will no more mek you grieve,
My Jubba, ef you'll but forgive.

I'll go to no more dancing booth,
I'll play no more wid flirty Ruth,
I didn' mean a t'ing, Jubba,
I didn' know you'd bex fe da';
I only took two set o' dance
An' at de bidding² tried me chance;
I buy de big crown-bread fe you,
An' won't you tek it, Jubba ? —do.

Forgive me, Jubba, Jubba dear, etc.

It was a nice tea-meeting though,
None o' de boy dem wasn' slow,
An' it was pack' wid pretty gal,

1. The 'u' has the value of the 'oo' in look
2. An auction of loaves of fine bread, profusely decorated by the baker's art, is a feature of rustic dances

So de young man was in dem sall;³
But when I 'member you a yard⁴
I know dat you would t'ink it hard,
Aldough, Jubba, 'twas sake o' spite
Mek say you wouldn' come te-night.⁵

Forgive me, Jubba, Jubba dear, etc.

I lef' you, Jub, in such a state,
I neber knew dat you would wait i
Yet all de while I couldn' res',
De t'ought o' you was in me breas';
So nummo time I couldn' was'e,
But me go get me pillow-case⁶
An' put in deh you bread an' cake
Forgive me, Jubba, fe God sake!

Forgive me, Jubba, Jubba dear, etc.

3. So the young men had a fine time of it
4. In the yard, i.e., at home
5. Out of caprice Jubba had refused to go to the dance; she was jealously watching outside the booth, while her young man imagined she was at home
6. The usual receptacle for bread

CONSTAB BALLADS (1912)

Preface

Let me confess it at once. I had not in me the stuff that goes to the making of a good constable; for I am so constituted that imagination outruns discretion, and it is my misfortune to have a most improper sympathy with wrong-doers. I therefore never “made cases,” but turning, like Nelson, a blind eye to what it was my manifest duty to see, tried to make peace, which seemed to me better.

Moreover, I am, by temperament, unadaptive; by which I mean that it is not in me to conform cheerfully to uncongenial usages. We blacks are all somewhat impatient of discipline, and to the natural impatience of my race there was added, in my particular case, a peculiar sensitiveness which made certain forms of discipline irksome, and a fierce hatred of injustice. Not that I ever openly rebelled; but the rebellion was in my heart, and it was fomented by the inevitable rubs of daily life trifles to most of my comrades, but to me calamities and tragedies. To relieve my feelings, I wrote poems, and into them I poured my heart in its various moods. This volume consists of a selection from these poems.

The life was, as it happened, unsuited to me, and I to it; but I do not regret my experiences. If I had enemies whom I hated, I also had close friends whom I loved.

One word in conclusion. As constituted by the authorities the Force is admirable, and it only remains for the men themselves, and especially the sub-officers, to make it what it should be, a harmonious band of brothers.

C. McK.

De Route March

IN de fus' squad an' de front rank,
'Side me dear Will on de right flank,
From de drill-groun' at the old camp
We went marchin' on a long tramp.

In de forefront was de gay band,
An' de music it was ring grand ;
O how jolly were we boys, oh,
As we marched 'long t'rough St. Jago!

As we tramped on out de dull town,
Keepin' time so¹ to de drum's soun',
All de folkses as dey ran out,
Started dancin' with a glad shout.

We went swingin' do'n de steep hill,
Me so happy by my dear Will,
Wid our carbines slung about we,
An' our glad hearts like de air free.

We drank a draught from a pure brook
Dat came windin' roun' a lee nook;
Then homeward turned from de cool spring,
Wid our good S. M. commanding.

To de music wid a good will
We went tramp-trampin' up de hill,
An' back to camp strode marchin' t'rough
De sad ruins of St. Jago.

1. Pointing to the feet

Flat-Foot Drill

Fus' beginnin', flat-foot drill,
Larnin' how fe mek right tu'n:
“Tention ! keep you' ban's dem still,
Can't you tek in dat a li'l?
Hearin' all, but larnin' none.

“But seems unno all do'n-ca',
Won't mek up you' min' fe larn;
Drill-instructor boun' fe swea',
Dealin' wid you' class all day,
Neber see such from A barn.

“Eight tu'n, you damn' bungo brut!
Do it so, you mountain man;
Car' behin' de bluff lef' foot,
Seems i' frighten fe de boot!
Why you won't keep do'n you' han'?

“Shet you' mout'! A wan' no chat!
Fabour say you pick up nong,¹
Sence you nyamin' Depot fat
An' 'top sleep 'pon so-so mat,
But A mean fe pull you' tongue.²

“Wonder when unno wi' fit
Fe move up in-a fus' squad,
Use carbine an' bayonet!
Wait dough, – unno wi' larn yet, –
Me wi' drill you ti' you mad.”

1. It seems you are getting 'beany' now
2. So that you can't talk

Bennie's Departure

ALL dat week was cold an' dreary,
An' I worked wid heavy heart;
All my limbs were weak an' weary,
When I knew that we would part;
An' I thought of our first meeting
On dat pleasant day o' June,
Of his kind an' modest greeting
When we met dat afternoon;
 Of de cáprice o' de weader,
How de harsh rain fell dat day,
How we kissed de book togeder,
An' our hearts were light an' gay;
How we started homewards drivin',
Last civilian drive in train;
How we half-feared de arrivin',
Knowin' we were not free again;
 How we feared do'n to de layin'
By of our loved old-time dress,
An' to each udder kept sayin'
All might be unhappiness;
How our lives be'n full o' gladness,
Drillin' wid hearts light an' free;
How for days all would be sadness
When we quarrelled foolishly.
 An' de sad, glad recollection
Brought a strange thrill to my soul,
'Memberin' how his affection
Gave joy in a barren wul':
As I thought then, my mind goin'
Back to mem'ries, oh! so dear,

As I felt de burden growin',
Jes' so shall I write it here.

We were once more on de drill-ground,
Me so happy by his side,
One in passion, one in will, bound
By a boundless love an' wide:
Daily you would see us drinkin'
Our tea by de mess-room door,
Every passin' moment linkin'
Us togeder more an' more.

After little lazy leanin',
Sittin' on de window-sill,
Me would start our carbine-cleanin'
For de eight o'clock big drill :
To' me he be'n always ready,
An' as smart as smart could be;
He was always quick, yet steady,
Not of way'r'in' min' like me.

When de time was awful dull in
De ole borin' Depot-school,
An' me face was changed an' sullen,
An' I kicked against de rule,
He would speak to me so sweetly,
Tellin' me to bear my fate,
An' his lovin' words completely
Helped me to forget de hate.

An' my heart would start a-pinin'
Ef, when one o'clock came roun',
He was not beside me dinin',
But be'n at some duty boun':
Not a t'ing could sweet me eatin',
Wid my Bennie 'way from me;
Strangely would my heart be beatin'
Tell I knew dat he was free.

When at last he came to table,

Neider one could ever bate
Tell in some way we were able
To eke out each udder plate:
All me t'oughts were of my frennie
Then an' in de after days;
Ne'er can I forget my Bennie
Wid him nice an' pleasant ways.

In de evenin' we went walkin',
An' de sweet sound of his voice,
As we laughed or kept a-talkin',
Made my lovin' heart rejoice:
Full of happiness we strolled on,
In de closin' evenin' light,
Where de stately Cobre¹ rolled on
Gurglin', murm'rin' in de night;

Where de rushin' canal waters
Splashed t'rough fields of manchinic,²
Wid deir younger tender daughters
Grow'n' togeder, lush an' t'ick,
Bound' de mudder tall an' slumber
Wid her scalloped leaves o' blue,
In de evenin' light a-limber,
Or a-tossin' to an' fro.

Back to barracks slowly strollin',³
Leavin' de enticin' soun'
O' de Cobre proudly rollin'
T'rough de old deserted town ;
Pas' de level well-kept meadows
O' de spacious prison-land,

1. The river at Spanish town
2. Martinique bananas
3. We slowly strolled

Where de twilight's fallin' shadows
Scattered at de moon's command.

So we passed 'long, half unwillin',
T'rough de yawnin' barrack-gate,
Our poo' hearts wid disdain fillin'
O' de life we'd larnt to hate;
Visions of a turgid ocean
Of our comrades' noise an' woes,
An' a ne'er-ceasin' commotion
Sorrowfully 'fo' us rose.

We mixed in de tumult, waitin'
Fe de moment o' release,
De disorder never 'batin',
Never 'batin' in de leas';
Wid de anger in us growin',
We grew vexed from black to blue,
All de hot blood t'rough us flowin',
As we hungered for tattoo.
While some o' de men were strong in
Rum o' Wray an' Nephew fame,
We sat do'n wid ceaseless longin'
Till at last de tattoo came:
Jes' then we were no more snappy,
But be'n even in fe fun ;
Once again we felt quite happy
After de roll-call was done.

Claspin' of our hands togeder,
Each to each we told good-night,
Dreamed soon o' life's broken ledder
An' de wul's perplexin' fight,
Of de many souls a-weepin'
Burdened do'n wid care an' strife,
While we sweetly lay a-sleepin',
Yet would grumble 'bout our life.

Once his cot was next beside me,

But dere came misfortune's day
When de pleasure was denied me,
For de sergeant moved him 'way:
I played not fe mind de movin'
Though me heart wid grief be'n full;
'Twas but one kin' o' de provin'
O' de ways o' dis ya wul'.⁴

To' we tu'n good, came de warnin'
O' de rousin' bugle-soun',
An' you'd see us soon a marnin'
To de bat'-house hurryin' down,
Leavin' udders yawnin', fumblin',
Wid deir limbs all stiff an' ole,
Or 'pon stretchin' out an' grumblin',
Say'n' de water be'n too col'.

In a jiffy we were washin',
Jeerin' dem, de lazy type,
All about us water dashin'
Out o' de ole-fashion' pipe:
In a lee while we were endin',
Dere was not much time to kill,
Arms an' bay'nets wanted tendin'
To' de soon-a-marnin' drill.

So we spent five months togeder,
He was ever staunch an' true
In sunshine or rainy weader,
No mind what wrong I would do:
But dere came de sad heart-rendin'
News dat he must part from me,
An' I nursed my sorrow, bendin'
To de grim necessity.

4. The reference is to "Whe' fe do?" one of the author's poems in Songs of Jamaica

All dat week was cold an' dreary,
An' I worked wid heavy heart;
All my limbs were weak an' weary
When I knew dat we would part;
All de fond hopes, all de gladness
Drooped an' faded from our sight,
An' an overwhelmin' sadness
Came do'n on de partin' night.

In de dim light I lay thinkin'
How dat sad night was our last,
My lone spirit weakly sinkin'
'Neat' de mem'ries o' de past:
As I thought in deepest sorrow,
He came, sat do'n by my side,
Speakin' o' de dreaded morrow
An' de flow o' life's dark tide.

Gently fell the moonbeams, kissin'
'Way de hot tears streamin' free,
While de wind outside went hiss'n'
An' a-moanin' for poor me:
Then he rose, but after bended,
Biddin' me a last good-bye;
To his cot his steps he wended,
An' I heard a deep-drawn sigh.

'Twas de same decisive warnin'
Wakin' us as in de past,
An' we both washed soon a marnin'
'Neat' de ole pipe fe de last;
We be'n filled wid hollow laughter,
Rather tryin' to take heart,
But de grief returned when after
Came de moment fe depart.

Hands gripped tight, but not a tear fell
As I looked into his face,
Said de final word o' farewell,

An' returned back to my place :
At my desk I sat me dry-eyed,
Sometimes gave a low-do'n moan,
An' at moments came a sigh sighed
For my Bennie dat was gone.

Gone he, de little sunshine o' my life,
Leavin' me 'lone to de Depót's black strife,
Dear little comrade o' lecture an' drill,
Loved comrade, like me of true stubborn will:
Oft, in de light o' de fast sinkin' sun,
We'd frolic togeder aroun' de big gun;
Oft would he laughingly run after me,
Chasin' me over de wide Depot lea;
Oft would he teach me de folly o' pride
When, me half-vexed, he would sit by my side;
Now all is blackness t'rough night an' t'rough day,
For my heart's weary now Bennie's away.

Consolation

I TOOK my marnin' bat' alone,
An' wept for Bennie dat was gone ;
An' after, sittin', weepin' long,
Some one came askin' wha' be'n wrong:
But only chokin' sobs he heard,
My mout' could never speak a word.
An' so for long days all was grief,
An' never could I get relief;
My heart be'n full of emptiness,
With naught to love an' naught to bless,

I 'member de familiar scene:
I sat out on de Depôt green,
Restin' agains' de big great gun:
De long rays o' de settin' sun
Were thrown upon the sombre wall;
I heard de rousin' bugle-call
In chorus¹ soundin' o' retreat ;
A ray o' light shone on my seat,
A soft dull shade of changin' gold,
So pleasant, lovely to behold :
A moment, an' I was alone,
De wanin' evenin' sun was gone.

I sat do'n still; de evenin' light
Passed on, an' it fell night, dark night.
'Twas autumn: feelin' rather chill,
I rose, led by my aimless will,
An' went up to the second floor,
Sat on a bench agains' de door.

1. Several bugles together

A comrade came an' sat by me,
Restin' a hand upon my knee;
De lantern old was burnin' dim,
But bright 'nough for me to see him:
One searchin' look into his face,
I gave him in my heart a place.

I never knew a nicer mind,
He was so pleasant an' so kind;
An' oh ! the sweetness of his voice
That made my lonely heart rejoice.
It all comes back so vividly,
The comfort that he brought to me;
The ray of hope, the pure pure joy
He gave a poor forsaken boy;
In walk or talk his tender care,
His deep concern for my welfare.
His comin' filled the larger part
Of de great void made in my heart
When on dat cruel awful day
My faithful Bennie went away.

'Tis not de way o' dis ya wul'
Dat any miserable soul
Should know a little lastin' peace,
Should taste endurin' happiness.
De harmless tabby o' de house
Plays kindly wid de frightened mouse,
Till, when it nearly loses dread,
Good Lard! de little thing is dead.
So wid de man, toy of a Will
E'er playin' with him to its fill,
To-day alive, to-morrow slain,
Thus all our pleasure ends in pain.

Where'er I roam, whate'er the clime,
I'll never know a happier time ;
I seemed as happy as could be,

When everything was torn from me.
De fateful day I 'member still,
De final breakin' o' my will,
Again de sayin' o' good-bye,
My poor heart's silent wailin' cry;
My life, my soul, my all be'n gone,
And ever since I am alone.

Fire Practice

PAM-PA-PAM, pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam,
Hea' de fire-bugle blow!

Pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam,
Depot boys, tu'n do'n below!

Kunnin' do'n out o' de big barrack-room,
Haulin' de two engine out o' de shed;
Formin' up into a long double line,
Wait tell de fus' wud o' command is said,

Soon as we hea' it we start t'rough de gate,
Wid buckets, ledder, an' engine an' key:
Joyously happy, with right cheery will
Tramp we away from de big Depôt lea.

Whole line in twos we go marchin' along,
List'nin' de tramp-trampin' tune of our feet,
Side winks a-givin' our gals as we pass
Merrily, nimbly along White Church Street.

At de shrill soun' o' de whistle we halt,
An' when de engine an' all is fixed square,
We start a-pumpin' wid might an' wid main,
Sendin' clear water chock up in de air.

Pumpin' an' pumpin' an' pumpin' away,
Pumpin' in earnest, yet pumpin' wid fun,
Once more again by de whistle we stop,
An' den de day's fire-practice is done.

Pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam,
Hea' de fire-bugle blow!

Pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam, pam-pa-pam,
Depôt boys, tu'n do'n below!

NOTE. —The first and last stanzas go to the following tune in F,

two-four time: 1st bar ; crotchet rest, quaver rest, 2 semiquavers C third space. 2nd bar; quaver C, 2 semiquavers A (the 3rd below), 2 semiquavers F (3rd below again). 3rd bar; crotchet F, quaver rest, 2 semiquavers C (middle C). 4th bar; 2 semiquavers F, 2 semiquavers middle C, crotchet F. 5th bar; same as 1st ; 6th, same as 2nd; 7th, same as 3rd. 8th bar; dotted quaver F, semiquaver F, dotted quaver middle C, semiquaver middle C. 9th bar; minim F.

Second-Class Constable Alston

I WATCHED him as his cheek grew pale,
He that once was strong and hale;
The red had faded all away,
And left it ashen, dull and gray.

One Monday night he came to me,
Rested his head upon my knee:
“Mac, me feel so sick,” he said,
“I t’ink me poor boy soon wi’ dead.”

I did my best to calm his fears,
He opened up his breast in tears;
I’ll ne’er forget the sight I saw,
His body strewn with bumps all raw.

That night we listened to his moans,
The hot fever was in his bones;
He tossed and tossed about until,
All his strength spent, he lay down still.

Many a weary weary day
In the hospital he lay,
Till one morn torture turned to peace,
For death had brought him his release.

The funeral, oh it was grand!
We honoured him with arms and band;
And not a man but turned away
Wet-eyed from where his comrade lay.

Last Words of the Dying Recruit

WHERE'S you' tender han', mumma,
Dat would fingle up me jaw
When de fever burned so deep,
An' A couldn' get no sleep?

Where's de voice me love' to hear
Whisp'rin' sweetest words o' cheer?—
Voice dat taught me A B C
As me leaned 'pon mumma's knee.

Look de 'panish-needle grass
Growin' by de gully pass!
Is dat fe me ducky hen
Cacklin' roun'-a rabbit pen?

Hea' de John-t'whits in-a glee
Singin' in de mammee tree!
Listen, comin' up de dale
Chirpin's o' de nightingale!

All de chune dem die away:—
Do you see de shinin' ray
On da' tiny buttercup ?
'Tis de sun a-comin' up.

Now's full time fe me to wake,
'Causen we ha' bread fe bake;
Git up, Sam, you lazy wretch,
For de beas' dem fe go ketch:

Et¹ you 'low de sun fe grow,

1. If you allow the sun to get hot, grass-lice (small ticks) will surely "make you know" (punish you),

Grass-lice wi' sure mek you know;
S'arch up to de ole-groun' side,
For de jack wi' 'tan' deh hide.

Mumma, me wan' go a school,
Te-day we gwin' play torn-fool :
Quick! Gi'e me my book an' slate,
For I doana want fe late.

Sister, wha' de doctor t'ink?
Say mumma a lower sink?
Lard! ef she gwin' go lef we,
Wha' de use o' life fe me?

Sister, sister, a no true,
Mumma caan' dis dead 'way so;
Sister, sister, leave me 'lone,
Me won' believe dat she gone.

Ah! no fe her own ban' now
Kestin' on me fevered brow?
Mumma, lay me 'pon you' breas',
Mek me get a drop o' res'.

Mumma! a whe' mumma deh?
Mumma! mumma gone away?
Gone, oh gone is eberyt'ing,
But de funny fancies cling.

Aye, t'enk God, me mumma come!
Ma, no lef me, tek me home;
Tek me from de awful strife
Of dis miserable life.

Bound Fe Duty

TRAMP, tramp, tramp, we go a-trampin',
Policemen on duty boun'
From de Depôt to de city,
For dere's racin'-time come roun'.

Wid our great cloaks buttoned round we,
Our best trampin' boots all strong,
Kit-bags, helmet-bags in each hand,
We go merrily along.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, we go a-trampin',
Stoutly marchin' t'rough de rain;
Soon we'll all be tucked quite snugly
In a corner o' de train.

Our light hearts are filled wid gladness,
As we're sweetly whirled away
From de station to de city,
For it means some extra pay.

Passin' cane-fields all a-racin',
Lush bananas coated blue,
We're whirled onward to de city,
Where dere's work for us to do.

Bumming

OF all de people I don't like,
A chief one is de bummer;¹
He bums around from morn to night
Trough winter an' t'rough summer.

Ef we should go aroun' John's shop,
An' he ketch scent o' rum's up,
You'll soon see'm pokin' up him nose
Wid him bare-face an' comes-up.

Ef we are smokin' cigarette,
He wants a part of it too;
An' ebery bluff you gi'e to him,
He's answer got to fit you.

Anedder thing I really hate
Is, when de touris' come in,
To see some people flockin' dem,
An' ebery one a-bummin'.

I think it is an ugly sight
To see a bummin' bobby;
Yet plenty o' dem tek it for
A precious piece of hobby.²

I proud 'nuff o' me uniform
Not ever to be rummy;
Much mo' fe lower do'n mese'f
An' mek my min' feel bummy.

If people like to see somet'ing,
It is a bobby quaffin'

1. Bumming: cadging, begging for gifts. The 'u' has the value of the oo in book
2. Many of them make it their favourite practice

A glass or two o' common rum,
Then drunk, dey start a-laughin'.

I tell you, all my comrades dear,
Dough your pay might be little,
Don't cringe an' fawn 'fore richer men,
Deir pelf's not wort' a tittle.

My pay is small, an' yet I live
An' feel proud as a lord too;
Ef you'll be men you soon will find
How much it can reward you.

De honest toil is pure as gold,
An' he who wuks a penny
Can mek his life as much wort' while
As he who earns a guinea.

Our trouble is dat those above
Do oftentimes oppress;
But we'll laugh at or pity dem,
Or hate dem mo' or less.

So we mus' mek de best o' t'ings,
An' never be too rummish;
'Twill help us many ways, an' 'top
Us all from bein' bummish.

De Dog-Driver's Frien'

STAY your hasty hands, my comrades,
I must speak to you again ;
For you beat de dog 'dout mussy,
An' dey are we night-time frien'.
Treat dem kindly, treat dem kindly,
For dey are God's creatures too ;
You have no more claim, dear comrades,
On de earth dan what dey do.

'Cos you locked him up in barracks
T'rough some failin' point o' his,
You mus' beatin' him so badly
For de little carelessness ?
Treat dem kindly, etc.

When de hours are cold an' dreary,
An' I'm posted on me beat,
An' me tired heavy body
Weighs upon me weary feet;

When I think of our oppressors
Wid mixed hatred an' don'-care,
An' de ugly miao of torn-puss
Rings out sharply on de air,

Oftentimes dem come aroun' me
Wid dem free an' trusting soul,
Lying do'n or gambolling near me
Wid a tender sort o' gro'l :

An' I snap my fingers at them,
While dey wag dem tail at me;
Can you wonder dat I love dem,
Dem, me night-time company?
Treat dem kindly, etc.

Sometimes dey're a bit too noisy

Wid deir long leave-taking bark;¹
But I tell you what, it cheers me
When de nights are extra dark.

So, dear comrades, don't ill-treat him,
You won't mek me talk in vain;
'Member, when de hours are dreary,
He's de poor dog-driver's frien'.
Treat dem kindly, etc.

1. This is a trick of the dogs when they want to leave their master's yard. They set up a great barking about 11 p.m., as if they were on the alert, and soon after they are all gone.

To Inspector W. E. Clark (On his Return)

[Note: This is a sequel of sorts to a poem in *Songs of Jamaica*, [“To Inspector W.E. Clark \(On the Eve of his Depature for England\)”](#)]

WE welcome you, dear Sir, again;
But oh! de comin' brings us pain,
For though we greet you glad to-day,
Once more you're bound to go away:
We grieve now deeper than before
To know you'll be wid us no more.

We fought o' meetin' you in gladness;
But no, our hearts are filled with sadness
To learn why we must part from you,
An officer so dear an' true:
Our prayer is dat de Fates will bless
You an' your kin wid health an' peace.

Farewell, dear Sir, farewell again! —
A farewell fraught wi' deepest pain:
De very ringin' o' de bell
Sounds like a wailin' of farewell;
We feel it deeply, to de core,
To know you'll be wid us no more.

Papine Corner

WHEN you want to meet a frien',
Ride up to Papine,
Where dere's people to no en',
Old, young, fat an' lean:
When you want nice gals fe court
An' to feel jus' booze',
Go'p to Papine as a sport
Dress' in ge'man clo'es.

When you want to be jus' broke,
Ride up wid your chum,
Buy de best cigars to smoke
An' Finzi¹ old rum:
Stagger roun' de sort o' square
On to Fong Kin bar ;
Keep as much strengt' dat can bear
You do'n in de car.

When you want know Sunday bright,
Tek a run up deh
When 'bout eight o'clock at night
Things are extra gay :
Ef you want to see it cram',
Wait tell night is dark,
An' beneat' your breat' you'll damn
Coney Island Park.

When you want see gals look fine,
You mus' go up dere,
An' you'll see them drinkin' wine
An' all sorts o' beer :

1. Finzi: rum

There you'll see them walkin' out,
Each wid a young man,
Watch them strollin' all about,
Flirtin' all dem can.

When you want hear coarsest jokes
Passin' rude an' vile,
Want to see de Kingston blokes,
Go up dere awhile:
When you want hear murderin'
On de piano,
An' all sorts o' drunken din,
Papine you mus' go.

Ef you want lost policeman,
Go dere Sunday night,
Where you'll see them, every one
Lookin' smart an' bright :
Policeman of every rank,
Rural ones an' all,
In de bar or on de bank,
Each one in them sail.

Policeman dat's in his beat,
Policeman widout,
Policeman wid him gold teet'
Shinin' in him mout';
Policeman in uniform
Made of English blue,
P'liceman gettin' rather warm,
Sleuth policeman too.

Policeman on plain clo'es pass,
Also dismissed ones;
See them standin' in a mass,
Talkin' 'bout them plans:
Policeman "struck off de strengt'
Physical unfit,"

Hear them chattin' dere at lengt'
'Bout a diffran' kit.²

When you want meet a surprise,
Tek de Papine track;
Dere some things will meet you' eyes
Mek you tu'n you' back:
When you want to see mankind
Of "class" family
In a way degra' them mind,
Go 'p deh, you will see.

When you want a pleasant drive,
Tek Hope Gardens line;
I can tell you, man alive,
It is jolly fine:
Ef you want to feel de fun,
You mus' only wait
Until when you're comin' do'n
An' de tram is late.

Disillusioned

[Note: This is a sequel to a poem in *Songs of Jamaica*, "[My Pretty Dan](#)"]

CAN you leave me so, my Dan,
Can you leave you' little Fan
'Ter all o' me lub fe you?–
An' my heart is still true, true.

Can you leave me, leave me so,
Full me heart wid grief an' woe,
Leave me to a bitter fate,
When I'm in dis awful state?

'Member you de days gone by
When for me you said you'd die?
How you let me see you' heart,
Vowing we could never part?

'Member you my foolish pride
When we be'n up mountain-side?
How you go do'n 'pon you' knee,
Sayin' you'd be true to me?

An' I followed you away
Do'n to dis ya dreary bay;
Fool to lef me mudder's home,
When she said me shouldn' come!

Now, sake ob a to'n-bred miss,
You mus' treat me laka dis!
Tramplin' me under you' feet,
Tu'nin' me out in de street.

Will she warm you when you're chill?
Will you get of lub you' fill ?
Will she starve herse'f fe you,
As I always use' fe do?

Will a to'n gal go bare-feet,

Jes' fe try mek two ends meet?

Will she car' water an' wash,

Jes' fe help out you' lee cash?

Is she sweet an' undefile'

As you took me, jes' a chil',

To' I knew about de wul',

Gave to you my pure pure soul?

Will you leave me all forlorn

To' de lilly baby's born?

Who wi' eber tek me in

Wid dis dreadful load o' sin?

Foolish, foolish young gals who

T'ink a constab could be true!

Foolish, foolish every one

Who will trus' a policeman!

Dem wi' ondly try fe rob

All de good you mighta hab;

An' 'fo' you can count de cost,

You wi' find you'se'f lost, lost.

Will you leave me, heartless Dan,

For a risky to'n woman?

When I'm burdened do'n wid woe,

Will you leave me, leave me so?

Cotch Donkey

Ko how de jackass
Lay do'n in de road;
An' him ondy car'
Little bit o' load.

Kue, jackass, git up!
'Tan' up 'pon you' foot
Dis ya load no load,
You's a lazy brut'.

Me no know wha' mek
Pa won' swop you too;
For dere's not a t'ing
Wut while you can do.

Ef you car' no load,
It is all de same;
Hamper on or no,
'Tis de ushal game.

Póliceman a come
Fe go mek a row,
All because o' you
Wid you' wutless now.

"See ya, Sah, no min',
Dis a fe me luck;
De jackass is bad,
Him no wan' fe wuk.

""Tek de hamper off?"
Him no hab no cut :
Me deh tell you say
De jackass no wut.

"Lard! me Gahd o' me!
Him got one lee 'cratch :

Dat is not'in', Sah,
For him always cotch.

Do, Sah, let me off,
Ef fe te-day one;¹
For a no de 'cratch
Cause him fe lay do'n."

Now because o' you
Dem gone bring me up;²
An' wha' hu't me mos',
You caan' wuk a tup.

Ef dem summons me,
Mek me pay few mac,
Dat caan' mek me 'top
Wuk you wid sore back.

1. Just this once
2. They have gone to get out a summons

Me Whoppin' Big-Tree Boy

I'M aweary weary standin', wid me heart chock-full o' grief,
An' a great lump in me bosom, an' A canna' get relief:
Walkin' up an' do'n de road, I see a whoppin' Syrian-boy,¹
An' I grudge him, yes I grudge him for his heart so full o' joy.

'Twas a hot, hot day o' brain-work, an' me heart was sick an' sad,
As I staggered 'long de car-line, but de boy's cheek made me glad:
Wid his han's dem set akimbo in a mannish sort o' way,
Said he "Do wha' it you like, but A wi' wuk no mo' te-day."

An' de Syrian grew astonished as he looked upon his load,
Which de whoppin' big-tree² boy had tumbled in de middle road:
He was boun' fe Lawrence Tavern, business called him dere to-
night,

An' he begged his ole-time carrier jes' to help him out his plight.

"Nummo wuk at all fe me is my determination still;
Me no care damn wha' you say, an' you can jes' do wha' you will:
Me deh go right back to to'n, yah, underneat' me old big-tree;
All dem boys wid eboe-light dem, dem is waitin' deh fe me.

"Now I'm free fe talk abouten all de people whe' you rob,
How you sell wha' no wut gill self to black naygur for a bob;
But me eboe-light wi' sure talk, of dat you can have no doubt,
Fe revenge de quantity o' poor poor people you play out.

"Jes' becausen say dem poo' so, an' t'rough poverty dem mus'
Tek a couple o' t'ings from you dat you're trick enough fe trus',
You robbin' dem so badly,³ but A sorry fe you dough,
How we boys beneat' de big-tree really mean fe mek you know."

1. Syrian-boy: negro working for a Syrian pedlar
2. Big-tree: A certain big tree in Kingston is the resort of idlers and vicious characters
3. This should be read almost as if it were a question

Then I roared, I roared with laughter, although posted on my beat,
Till I half forgot de sore pain in me bosom an' my feet:
Ah! I wish I knew a little, jes' a little of de joy
Dat Nature has bestowed on you, my whoppin' big-tree boy.

A Recruit on the Corpy

ME an' de corpy drink we rum,
An' corpy¹ larn me how fe bum ;
Last night me gie 'm de last-last tup,
Yet now him come an' bring me up.

He'll carry me 'fo' officer,
An' rake up' t'ings fe charge me for ;
An' all because dese couple days
Me couldn' gie 'm de usual raise.

Last night, when it come to roll-call,
Dis corpy couldn' 'ten' at all :
We didn' mek de S.M.² see 'm,
But only put things 'traight fe him.

An' we, like big fools, be'n deh fret
Ober de corpy drunk to deaf :
We all treat him so very kin',
Aldough him ha' such dutty min'.

We tek him drunken off de car,
We tek him drunken out de bar,
We wake him drunken 'pon him guard,
An' yet we neber claim reward.

All bad contrary things me do,
Corpy see me an' let me go ;
But 'causen me no ha' a tup,³
Fe not'in' 'tall him bring me up.

1. Corpy: corporal

2. S.M.: Sergeant Major

3. tup: twopence of the old Jamaica coinage ; three
halfpence of the new

Pay-Day

DERE'S a little anxious crowd
Jes' outside de barrack gate,
All a-t'inkin' deir own way
Dat de pay is kept back late:
Faces of all types an' shades,
Brown an' yaller, black an' gray,
Dey are waitin', waitin' dere,
For it's póliceman pay-day.

Clearly seen among dem all
Is a colourless white face
Anxious more dan every one,
Fine type of an alien race :
He is waitin' for some cash
On de goods trust' tarra¹ day,-
Our good frien' de Syrian,-
For it's policeman pay-day.

Wid a lee² piece of old clot'
Ton her curly glossy hair,
Print frock an' old bulldog boots
Tatters all t'rough wear an' tear,
She is waitin', ober-bex',³
Our mess-woman, mudder Mell,
An' 'twould grieve you' heart to hear
'Bouten wha' she's got to tell.

Six long fortnight come an' gone
Since some constab hol' her up,

1. Tarra: the other. Vowel-sound as in t'other.
2. Lee: little
3. Ober-bex': over-vexed

An', wid all de try she try,
She can neber get a tup:⁴
"Me wi' tell Inspector F—
'Bout de 'ole o' i' to-day,
An' den me wi' really see
Ef him caan' boun' dem fe pay.

"Man dem, wid dem hungry gut,
Six long fortnight nyam me rash;
Not a gill⁵ me caan' get when
Chiny dah dun fe him cash
Fe de plenty t'ings me trus',
Sal' fish, pork, an' flour, an' rice,
Onion an' ingredients,
Jes' fe mek de brukfus' nice."

See de waitin' midnight girl
Wid her saucy cock-up lips,
An' her strongly-built black hands
Pressed against her rounded hips :
She has passed de bound'ry line,
An' her womanhood is sold ;
Wonder not then, as you gaze,
Dat, though young, she looks so bold,
Once she roamed de country woods
Wid a free an' stainless soul,
But she left for Kingston's slums,
Gave herself up to de wul':
She has trod de downward course,
Never haltin' on de way;

4. Tup: twopence of the old Jamaica coinage; three halfpence of the new
5. Gill: three farthings. Gill bread-loaf costing three farthings

Dere's no better time for her
Dan a policeman pay-day.

Waits de slimber ball-pan man,
Waits de little ice-cream lad,
Waits our washerwoman Sue,
All deh chat how pólice bad;
Each one sayin' police vile,
Yet deir faces all betray
Dat for dem dere's no rag time
Laka policeman pay-day.

Inside in de ord'ly room
Things are movin' very fine;
Constab standin' in a row
Hea' de jinglin' o' de coin;
Constab wid a solemn face,
Constab only full o' fun,
Marchin' in de ord'ly room
As dem name call one by one.

Quick march! halt! a sharp right tu'n,
Wid de right han' smart salute,
All attention poker-stiff,
An' a-standin' grave an' mute :
Office-clerk calls out de name,
Officer hands de amount
To Sa'an' Major standin' by,
Who gives it a second count.

'Ter all de formalities,
Dis an' dat an' warra⁶ not,
Salute, 'tion, right about turn,
Den de precious pay is got :
Lee gone to de reward fund
Trough a blot' defaulter-sheet,

6. Warra: what. The value of the a is unchanged

Run do'n by sub-officers,
Or caught sleepin' on dem beat;
 Den dere's somet'ing gone fe kit;
Uniform mus' smart an' nice,
Else de officer won' t'ink
Dat a bobby's wutten price.
All dem way de money go ;
So de payin'-out fe some,
When de fortnight dem come roun',
in-a ord'ly room.

 Now comes payin' up de debts
To de miscellaneous crowd
Waitin' by de barrack-gate,
Chattin', chattin' very loud :
Payin', payin' all de time,
From a poun' do'n to a gill,
Whole fortnight-pay partly done,
Yet rum-money lef back still.

 Strollin' t'rough de gate at night,
Drinkin' Finzi⁷ tell dead drunk,
Barely standin' at tattoo,
After⁸ tumblin' in-a bunk ;
All de two-an'-four is done,
So-so trust nong⁹ ebery day
Tell de fortnight comes again
An' we get de little pay.

7. Finzi: rum

8. Afterwards

9. Nong: now. The vowel sound is very dumb and short

The Apple-Woman's Complaint

WHILE me deh walk 'long in de street,
Policeman's yawnin' on his beat ;
An' dis de wud him chief ta'n say—
Me mus'n' car' me apple-tray.

Ef me no wuk, me boun' fe tief;
S'pose dat will please de pólice chief!
De prison dem mus' be wan' full,¹
Mek dem's 'pon we like ravin' bull.

Black nigger wukin' laka cow
An' wipin' sweat-drops from him brow,
Dough him is dyin' sake o' need,
P'lice an' dem headman boun' fe feed.

P'lice an' dem headman gamble too,
Dey shuffle card an' bet fe true;
Yet ef me Charlie gamble, well,
Dem try fe 'queeze him laka hell.

De headman fe de town police
Mind² neber know a little peace,
'Cep' when him an' him heartless ban'
Hab sufferin' nigger in dem han'.

Ah son-son! dough you 're bastard, yah,
An' dere's no one you can call pa,

1. The prisons must want occupants, and that is why they are down upon us like angry bulls
2. The mind of the chief of the town police is never happy, except, etc.

Jes' try to ha' you' mudder's min'
An' Police Force you'll neber jine.

But how judge believe policemen,
Dem dutty mout' wid lyin' stain'?
While we go batterin' along
Dem doin' we all sort o' wrong.

We hab fe barter-out we soul
To lib t'rough dis ungodly wul';
massa Jesus! don't you see
How police is oppressin' we?

Dem wan' fe see we in de street
Dah foller dem all 'pon dem beat;
An' after, 'dout a drop o' shame,
Say we be'n dah solicit dem.

Ah massa Jesus! in you' love
Jes' look do'n from you' t'rone above,
An' show me how a poo' weak gal
Can lib good life in dis ya wul'.

Knutsford Park Races

BATCH o' p'licemen, lookin' fine,
Tramp away to de car line;
No more policemen can be
Smart as those from Half Way Tree
Happy, all have happy faces,
For 'tis Knutsford Park big races.

No room in de tram fe stan':
"Oh! de races will be gran',—
Wonder ef good luck we'll hab,
Get fe win a couple bob!"
Joyous, only joyous faces,
Goin' to de Knutsford races.

Motor buggy passin' by,
Sendin' dus' up to de sky;
P'licemen, posted diffran' place,
Buy dem ticket on de race:
Look now for de anxious faces
At de Knutsford Park big races!

Big-tree¹ boys a t'row dem dice:
"P'lice te-day no ha' no v'ice,
All like we,² so dem caan' mell,³—
Mek we gamble laka hell":
Bowdy, rowdy-looking faces
At de Knutsford Park big races.

Ladies white an' brown an' black,

1. Big-tree: A certain big tree in Kingston is the resort of idlers and vicious characters
2. All are doing as we do
3. Mell: meddle

Fine as fine in gala frock,
Wid dem race-card in dem han'
Pass 'long to de dollar stan':
Happy-lookin' lady faces
At de Knutsford Park big races.

Ge'men wid dem smart spy-glass,
Well equip' fe spot dem harse,
Dress' in Yankee-fashion clo'es,
Watch de flag as do'n it goes:
Oh! de eager, eager faces
At de Knutsford Park big races!

Faces of all types an' kinds,
Faces of all types an' kinds,
Faces showin' diffran' minds,
Faces from de udder seas
Right from de antipodes:
Oh! de many various faces
Seen at Knutsford Park big races

Jockeys lookin' quite dem bes',
In deir racin' clo'es all dress'
(Judge de feelin's how dem proud)
Show de harses to de crowd:
Now you'll see de knowin' faces
At de Knutsford Park big races.

Soldier ban', formed in a ring,
Strike up "God save our king";
Gub'nor come now by God's grace
To de Knutsford Park big race:
High faces among low faces
At de Knutsford Park big races.

Ladies, 'teppin' up quite cool,
Buy dem tickets at de pool;
Dough 'tis said he's got a jerk,
Dere's no harse like Billie Burke:

Look roun' at de cock-sure faces
At de Knutsford Park big races.

Hey! de flag is gone do'n, oh!
Off at grips de harses go!
Dainty's leadin' at a boun',
Stirrup-cup is gainin' ground':
Strainin', eager strainin' faces
At de Knutsford Park big races.

Last day o' de race — all's done,
An' de course is left alone;
Everybody's goin' home,
Some more light dan when dey'd come:
Oh! de sad, de bitter faces
After Knutsford Park big races!

The Heart of a Constab

'Tis hatred without an' 'tis hatred within,
An' I am so weary an' sad;
For all t'rough de tempest o' terrible strife
Dere's not'in' to make poor me glad.

Oh! where are de faces I loved in de past,
De Men's dat I used to hold dear?
Oh say, have dey all turned away from me now
Beausen de red seam I wear?

I foolishly wandered away from dem all
To dis life of anguish an' woe,
Where I mus' be hard on me own kith an' kin,
And even to frien' mus' prove foe.

Oh! what have I gained from my too too rash act
O' joinin' a hard Constab Force,
Save quenchin' me thirst from a vinegar cup,
De vinegar cup o' remorse?

I fought of a livin' o' pure honest toil,
To keep up dis slow-ebbin' breath;
But no, de life surely is bendin' me do'n,
Is bendin' me do'n to de death.

'Tis grievous to think dat, while toilin' on here,
My people won't love me again,
My people, my people, me owna black skin,
De wretched fought¹ gives me such pain.

But I'll leave it, my people, an' come back to you,
I'll flee from de grief an' turmoil;
I'll leave it, though flow'rs here should line my path yet,
An' come back to you an' de soil.

1. Fought: thought

For 'tis hatred without an' 'tis hatred within,
An' how can I live 'douten² heart?
Then oh for de country, de love o' me soul,
From which I shall nevermore part!

2. 'Dout, 'douten: without

Fe Me Sal

IN de blazin' midday heat, when I'm posted on me beat,
Who I t'inkin' of but fe me Sal?
She is eber in me mind, ne'er a better you will find,
She's me only lub, de best o' country gal.

When I started out fe roam from me treasured mountain-home,
All me wanderin's were for her good;
A be'n ondy fe her sake why dis job I undertake,
An' she cheer me when I'm sad an' out o' mood.

Any wuk I'm put to do, me jes' feel she's wid me too,
Biddin' me fe toil bedouten¹ fret;
An' when all de duty's done, an' me go to sleep alone,
'Tis but dreamin' o' me darlin' little pet.

When me deh 'pon station guard, dere is ondy one reward,
For I get fe write her sweet lub-wuds;
Den me finish up her name wid a pile o' flourish dem,
An' me seal de letter up wid jesmy² buds.

When me go patrol a day, she's me one lee bit o' stay
As A deh climb up Bardowie hill;
An' A somehow favour know dat, wherever I may go,
Her soul an' heart wi' eber be mine still.

Ef me goin' to de race I'm a-t'inkin' of her face,
An' A feel her shedah at me side;
Ef me eatin' me lee³ grub, I'm a-t'inkin' o' de lub
Dat me ha' fe her alone so free an' wide.

Udder p'liceman ha' dem gal, but dere's none like fe me Sal,
Dey can neber trus' fe dem like me;

1. 'Dout, 'douten: without
2. Jesmy: jasmine. The buds are put in with the letter
3. Lee: little

And I needn't eber fear, ef I'm transferred anywhere,
For me Sally is as true as true can be.

She's de darlin' o' me life, an' shall one day be me wife
Jes' as soon as ebery't'ing is ripe;
An' me hab a feelin' strong dat it will not be too long
'Fo' me get fe wear an Acting Corp'ral's stripe.

She's de darlin' o' me heart, an' we'll neber neber part,
She's de prettiest black gal in de wul';
An' whereber you may go you won't find anedder so,
Wid more tender min' an' better sort o' soul.

So de day shall soon arrive when de two o' we shall drive
To de parish church at Half Way Tree:
An' we'll stroll back t'rough de gate, me Sal a corpy's⁴ mate,
An' we'll be as happy-happy as can be.

4. Corpy: corporal

The Bobby to the Sneering Lady

You may sneer at us, madam,
But our work is beastly hard;
An' while toilin thus we scarce
Ever get a lee¹ reward.

Our soul's jes' like fe you,
If our work does make us rough;
Me won't 'res' you servant-gal
When you've beaten her enough.

You may say she is me frien',
We are used to all such prate;
Naught we meet on life's stern road
But de usual scorn an' hate.

Say dat you wi' 'port me, ma'am?
I was lookin' fe dat, well,
Our Inspector's flinty hard,
'Twill be few days' pay or cell.

Pains an' losses of such kind
To we p'licemen's not'in' new;
Still A'd really like fe hear
Wha' good it wi' do to you.

Last week, eatin' a gill² bread,
Me t'row piece out on de lea;

1. Lee: little
2. Gill: three farthings. Gill bread-loaf costing three farthings

An' A ketch a 'port fe dat
Which meant five roun' mac³ to me.

Constab-charge, civilian-charge,
Life's a burden every way;
But reward fund⁴ mus' kep' up
Out o' poo' policeman pay.

Ef our lot, then, is so hard,
I mus' ever bear in mind
Dat to fe me own black 'kin
I mus' not be too unkind.

An' p'r'aps you too will forgive
Ef I've spoken rather free,
An' will let me somet'ing ask
Which may soften you to me:

In de middle o' de night,
When de blackness lies do'n deep,
Who protects your homes an' stores
While de Island is asleep?

When de dead stars cannot shine
Sake o' rain an' cloud an' storm,
Who keeps watch out in de street
So dat not'in' comes to harm?

Ah! you turn away your head!
See! dere's pity in your face!
Don't, dear madam, bring on me
This unmerited disgrace.

3. Mac: shilling, shillings; short for macaroni.

4. A fund out of which rewards are given to constables for meritorious work

The Malingerer

ME mus' wukin overdue,
An' 'tis all because o' you;
Me mus' wuk hard laka dis
'Counten o' you' wutlessness.

'Tis a dutty sort o' trick,
Ebery duty-time you sick;
An' 'tis always my bad luck
Fe detail fe extra wuk.

Night off again me won' get,
Dese t'ings mek a poo' man fret,
An' feel him could not do worse
Dan fe go join Police Force.

Hospital a fe you bed;
God knows wha mek you won' dead
Doctor no know how fe do,
Else dem wouldan p'ison you.

An' me know man dyin' out,
Yet de doctor dem would doubt,
Dough he's weak in ebery limb,
Dat a t'ing was wrong wid him.

Yet you dih-ya¹ 'douten² use,
Only formin' like de juice;
An' dem caan' see, se'p me king,
Dat you 'pon malingerin'.

Ef a money you dah sabe,
Better min' de open grabe:³

1. Dih-ya: lengthened form of dere (there)
2. 'Dout, 'douten: without
3. Although you are saving messing expenses, etc., yet you

T'enk God! new rule come te-day,
Hospital bud gets no pay.
 Me wi' really beat de eight,
But you mark me wud an' wait!
Your time's comin' soon don't doubt
When you'll also be kicked out.

may catch "hospital sick" (sickness) and die of it ; and
then of what use is your money?

A Labourer's Life Give Me

I WAS never ashamed o' de soil,
So you needn't remind me of it;
I was born midst de moil an' de toil,
An' I'll never despise it a bit.

“Sen' me back to de cutliss an' hoe!”

I don't mind, Sir, a wud dat you say,
For little, it seems, you do know
Of de thing dat you sneer at to-day.

If I'd followed a peasant's career,
I would now be a happier lad;
You would not be abusing me here,
An' mekin' me sorry an' sad.

Fool! I hated my precious birthright,
Scornin' what made my father a man;
Now I grope in de pitchy dark night,
Hate de day when me poo' life began.

To de loved country life I'll return,
I don't mind at all, Sir, if you smile;
As a peasant my livin' I'll earn,
An' a labourer's life is worth while.

As a labourer livin' content,
Wid at night a rest-place for me head,
Oh! how gaily my life will be spent,
Wid de baneful ambition gone dead.

An' when, after a day's wukin' hard,
I go home to a fait'ful wifée,
For my toilin' dere'll be its reward,
A peaceful heart happy an' free.

An' me children shall grow strong an' true,
But I'll teach dem dat life is a farce,

An' de best in dis wul' dey can do
Is to bear with content its sad cross.

So I'll make meself happy at home,
An' my life will be pleasanter yet;
I will take de hard knocks as dey come,
But will conquer de worry an' fret.

Oh! a labourer's life's my desire
In de hot sun an' pure season rains,
When de glow o' de dark-red bush fire
Sends a new blood a-flow'n' t'rough me veins.

Free

SCARCE can I believe my eyes,
Yet before me there it lies,
Precious paper granting me
Quick release from misery.

So farewell to Half Way Tree,
And the plains I hate to see!
Soon will I forget my ills
In my loved Clarendon hills.

Comrades Four

DEAR comrades, my comrades,
My heart is always true;
An' ever an' ever
I shall remember you.

We all joined together,
Together joined we four;
An' I have been first to
Pass t'rough the open door.¹

We four drilled together,
Together drilled we all;
An' I've been the first to
Flee from the life o' gall.

We parted, dear comrades,
We parted all in tears,
An' each went his own way
To shoulder life's sad cares.

O comrades, my comrades,
What is de lasting gain,
But all t'rough de tempest
A heart of unmixed pain?

My comrades, loved comrades,
I hear your bitter cry;
But life's pain will end, boys,
Will end yet — by an' by.

1. In allusion to the writer's discharge.

To W. G. G.

COME, come wid me, my tired soul,
'Way from de miserable wul';
Come from de noise, de wild alarm,
To heights o' mountain peace an' calm.

Do you not hear de battle's roar,
De tumult ragin' on de shore?
Do you not see de poisonous bait
Man sets for man t'rough deadly hate?

Come flee de envy an' de strife,
Before dey ruin our life:
Come to de hills; dey may be drear,
But we can shun de evil here.

De northers now are blowin' chill,
De fog hangs dismal on de hill,
An' sometimes fe long dreary days
De sun is wrapt up in-a haze.

De season rain is on te-day,
De flowers all are fadin' 'way ;
But dere'll be sun upon de heights
After de gloomy Christmas nights.

Soon shall we feel de heartening charm
Of country life, de sunshine warm;
An' see, wherever we may roam,
Wild flowers burstin' into bloom.

We'll hear de murmur o' de rills,
We'll clearly see de verdant hills
Wid here an' dere de peasant's field
So lovely in its fruitful yield.

De helpless playt'ing of a Will,
We'll spend our short days here; an' still,

Though prisoners, feel somehow free
To live our lives o' misery.

Dear comrade o' de constab life,
I've gone an' left you in de strife;
But whether skies are dark or blue,
Dis true true heart remembers you.

Sukee River (1912 version)

I SHALL love you ever,
Dearest Sukee River:
Dash against my broken heart,
Nevermore from you I'll part,
But will stay forever,
Crystal Sukee River.¹

 Cool my fevered brow:
Ah ! 'tis better now,
As I serpent-like lance t'rough
Your broad pool o' deepest blue!
Dis once burnin' brow
Is more better now.

 All about me dashin',
H'is'in' up an' splashin',
Bubbles like de turtle-berries,
Jostlin' wid de yerry-yerries,
All about me dashin'
H'is'in' up an' splashin'.

 Oh! dis blissful swim,
Like a fairy dream!
Jumpin' off de time-worn plank,
Pupperlicks² from bank to bank,
Dis delightful swim
Is a fairy dream.

 Kiss my naked breast
In its black skin drest:

1. A river in Clarendon. Pronounce Sooky, with 'oo' as in look
2. Pupperlicks: head over heels; turning somersaults

Let your dainty silver bubbles
Ease it of its lifelong troubles,
Dis my naked breast
In its black skin drest.

 Floatin', floatin' down
On my back alone,
Kiss me on my upturned face,
Clasp me in your fond embrace,
As I'm floatin' down
Happy, yet alone.

 Wavelets laughin' hound me,
Ripples glad surround me:
Catchin' at dem light an' gay,
See dem scamper all away,
As dey playful hound me,
Or in love surround me.

 T'rough de twistin' dance
Onward do I lance:
Onward under yonder cave
Comes wid me a pantin' wave,
Speedin' from de dance
Wid me as I lance.

 'Neat' dis shadin' hedge
Growin' by your bridge,
I am thinkin' o' you' love,
Love dat not'in' can remove,
'Neat' dis shadin' hedge
Growin' by your bridge.

 Love more pure, I ken,
Dan de love o' men,
Knowin' not de fickle mind
Nor de hatred o' my kind;
Purer far, I ken,
Dan de love o' men.

 E'en when welcome deaf

Claims dis painful breať,
Of you I will ever think
Who first gave me crystal drink;
E'en when welcome deaf
Claims dis painful breať.

For a little while
I must leave your smile:
Raindrops fallin' from de sky
Force me now to say good-bye;
Jes' lee³ bit o' while
I must leave your smile.

Foamin' Sukee Eiver,
Dearer now dan ever,
I'll ne'er roam from you again
To a life o' so-so pain,
Crystal flowin' river,
Dearer now dan ever.

3. Lee: little

SPRING IN NEW
HAMPSHIRE AND OTHER
POEMS (1920)

Spring in New Hampshire

(To J. L. J. F. E.)

Too green the springing April grass,
Too blue the silver-speckled sky,
For me to linger here, alas,
While happy winds go laughing by,
Wasting the golden hours indoors,
Washing windows and scrubbing floors.
Too wonderful the April night,
Too faintly sweet the first May flowers,
The stars too gloriously bright,
For me to spend the evening hours,
When fields are fresh and streams are leaping,
Wearied, exhausted, dully sleeping.

The Spanish Needle

Lovely dainty Spanish needle
With your yellow flower and white,
Dew bedecked and softly sleeping,
Do you think of me to-night?

 Shadowed by the spreading mango,
Nodding o'er the rippling stream,
Tell me, dear plant of my childhood,
Do you of the exile dream?

 Do you see me by the brook's side
Catching crayfish 'neath the stone,
As you did the day you whispered:
Leave the harmless dears alone?

 Do you see me in the meadow
Coming from the woodland spring
With a bamboo on my shoulder
And a pail sling from a string?

 Do you see me all expectant
Lying in an orange grove,
While the swee-swees sing above me,
Waiting for my elf-eyed love?

 Lovely dainty Spanish needle,
Source to me of sweet delight,
In your far-off sunny southland
Do you dream of me to-night?

The Lynching

His Spirit in smoke ascended to high heaven.
His father, by the cruelest way of pain,
Had bidden him to his bosom once again;
The awful sin remained still unforgiven.
All night a bright and solitary star
(Perchance the one that ever guided him,
Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)
Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.
Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
The ghastly body swaying in the sun
The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

To O. E. A.

Your voice is the color of a robin's breast,
And there's a sweet sob in it like rain—still rain in the night.
Among the leaves of the trumpet-tree, close to his nest,
The pea-dove sings, and each note thrills me with strange delight
Like the words, wet with music, that well from your trembling
throat.

I'm afraid of your eyes, they're so bold,
Searching me through, reading my thoughts, shining like gold.
But sometimes they are gentle and soft like the dew on the lips of
the eucharis

Before the sun comes warm with his lover's kiss.
You are sea-foam, pure with the star's love-lines,
Not mortal, a flower, a fairy, too fair for the beauty-shorn earth.
All wonderful things, all beautiful things, gave of their wealth to your
birth.

Oh I love you so much, not recking of passion, that I feel it is wrong!
But men will love you, flower, fairy, non-mortal spirit burdened with
flesh,
Forever, life-long.

Alfonso, Dressing to Wait at Table

Alfonso is a handsome bronze-hued lad
Of subtly-changing and surprising parts;
His moods are storms that frighten and make glad,
His eyes were made to capture women's hearts.

Down in the glory-hole Alfonso sings
An olden song of wine and clinking glasses
And riotous rakes; magnificently flings
Gay kisses to imaginary lasses.

Alfonso's voice of mellow music thrills
Our swaying forms and steals our hearts with joy;
And when he soars, his fine falsetto trills
Are rarest notes of gold without alloy.

But, O Alfonso! wherefore do you sing
Dream-songs of carefree men and ancient places?
Soon we shall be beset by clamouring
Of hungry and importunate palefaces.

Flowers of Passion

The dancers have departed, dear,
And the last song has been sung—;
The red-stained glasses mock my gaze
And the fiddle lies unstrung.
And I'm alone, alone once more,
Save for your sweet brown face
That comes reproachfully to me
In this unholy place.
I've kissed a thousand flowers, my own,
Gone drunk with their perfume;
But found out, when the madness passed,
You were the one pure bloom.
I've come to realise at last
How awful it may be
To cut adrift from sacred ties
And be completely free.
But life grows many flowers, my love,
Within its garden wall,
And passions are the strangest
And the deadliest of all.

To Work

The Dawn! the Dawn, the crimson-tinted comes
Out of the low still skies, over the hills,
New York's fantastic spires and cheerless domes, -
The Dawn! my spirit to its spirit thrills.
Almost the mighty city is asleep,
No pushing-crowd, no tramping, tramping feet;
But here and there a few cars, groaning, creep
Along, above and underneath the street,
Bearing their strangely-ghostly burdens by,
The women and the men of garish nights,
Their eyes wine-weakened and their clothes awry,
Nodding under the strong electric lights.
On through the waning shadows of New York,
Before the Dawn, I wend my way to work.

Morning Joy

At night the wide and level stretch of wold,
Which at high noon had basked in quiet gold,
Far as the eye could see was ghostly white;
Dark was the night save for the snow's weird light.

I drew the shades far down, crept into bed;
Hearing the cold wind moaning overhead
Through the sad pines, my soul, catching its pain,
Went sorrowing with it across the plain.

At dawn, behold! the pall of night was gone,
Save where a few shrubs melancholy, lone,
Detained a fragile shadow. Golden-lipped
The laughing grasses heaven's sweet wine sipped.

The sun rose smiling o'er the river's breast,
And my soul, by his happy spirit blest,
Soared like a bird to greet him in the sky,
And drew out of his heart Eternity.

Reminiscences

When the day is at its dimmest
And the air is wild with snow,
And the city is at its grimmest In mine eyes there is a glow. . . .
When the day is at its brightest
And the city is a dream,
And my heart is at its lightest,
In mine eyes there is a gleam;
For I'm thinking, O I'm thinking,
Of an old worn sugar-mill
Where the southern sun is sinking
Gold and crimson o'er the hill;
And I hear the toilers talking
As they shoulder pick and hoe,
And I watch their steady walking
To the quiet plain below.
O! I see the white stream dashing
Gay and reckless through the brake,
O'er the root-entwined rocks washing
Swiftly, madly to the lake;
O! I hear the waters falling,
Flowing, falling, flowing free,
And the sound of voices calling
O'er the billows of the sea.

On Broadway

About me young and careless feet
Linger along the garish street;
Above, a hundred shouting signs
Shed down their bright fantastic glow
Upon the merry crowd and lines
Of moving carriages below.
Oh wonderful is Broadway — only
My heart, my heart is lonely.

Desire naked, linked with Passion,
Goes strutting by in brazen fashion;
From playhouse, cabaret and inn
The rainbow lights of Broadway blaze
All gay without, all glad within;
As in a dream I stand and gaze
At Broadway, shining Broadway — only
My heart, my heart is lonely.

Love Song

Heart of the saffron rose,
Lines of the lily red,
Gold of the buttercup,
Dew of the daisies bed,
Flight of the rising bird
Luring me to the skies,
Smile of an evening star
Playing before mine eyes,
Rime of the silver morn
Fair on the green of trees,
Scent of the coffee blooms
Waking the drowsy bees;
Charming and beautiful,
Rare are these sights to see;
But more than all and more
Is your fond heart to me.

North and South

O sweet are tropic lands for waking dreams!
There time and life move lazily along.
There by the banks of blue-and-silver streams
Grass-sheltered crickets chirp incessant song,
Gay-colored lizards loll all through the day,
Their tongues outstretched for careless little flies,
And swarthy children in the fields at play,
Look upward laughing at the smiling skies.
A breath of idleness is in the air
That casts a subtle spell upon all things,
And love and mating-time are everywhere,
And wonder to life's commonplaces clings.
The fluttering humming-bird darts through the trees
And dips his long beak in the big bell-flowers,
The leisured buzzard floats upon the breeze,
Riding a crescent cloud for endless hours,
The sea beats softly on the emerald strands—
O sweet for quiet dreams are tropic lands!

Rest in Peace

No more for you the city's thorny ways,
The ugly corners of the Negro belt;
The miseries and pains of these harsh days
By you will never, never again be felt.

No more, if still you wander, will you meet
With nights of unabating bitterness;
They cannot reach you in your safe retreat,
The city's hate, the city's prejudice!

'Twas sudden—but your menial task is done,
The dawn now breaks on you, the dark is over,
The sea is crossed, the longed-for port is won;
Farewell, oh, fare you well! my friend and lover.

A Memory of June

When June comes dancing o'er the death of May,
With scarlet roses tinting her green breast,
And mating thrushes ushering in her day,
And Earth on tiptoe for her golden guest,
 I always see the evening when we met—
The first of June baptized in tender rain—
And walked home through the wide streets, gleaming wet,
Arms locked, our warm flesh pulsing with love's pain.

 I always see the cheerful little room,
And in the corner, fresh and white, the bed,
Sweet scented with a delicate perfume,
Wherein for one night only we were wed;
 Where in the starlit stillness we lay mute,
And heard the whispering showers all night long,
And your brown burning body was a lute
Whereon my passion played his fevered song.

 When June comes dancing o'er the death of May,
With scarlet roses staining her fair feet,
My soul takes leave of me to sing all day
A love so fugitive and so complete.

To Winter

Stay, season of calm love and soulful snows!
There is a subtle sweetness in the sun,
The ripples on the stream's breast gaily run,
The wind more boisterously by me blows,
And each succeeding day now longer grows.
The birds a gladder music have begun,
The squirrel, full of mischief and of fun,
From maples' topmost branch the brown twig throws.
I read these pregnant signs, know what they mean:
I know that thou art making ready to go.
Oh stay! I fled a land where fields are green
Always, and palms wave gently to and fro,
And winds are balmy, blue brooks ever sheen,
To ease my heart of its impassioned woe.

Winter in the Country

Sweet life! how lovely to be here
And feel the soft sea-laden breeze
Strike my flushed face, the spruce's fair
Free limbs to see, the lesser trees'

Bare hands to touch, the sparrow's cheep
To heed, and watch his nimble flight
Above the short brown grass asleep.

Love glorious in his friendly might,

Music that every heart could bless,
And thoughts of life serene, divine,
Beyond my power to express,
Crowd round this lifted heart of mine!

But oh! to leave this paradise
For the city's dirty basement room,
Where, beauty hidden from the eyes,
A table, bed, bureau and broom

In corner set, two crippled chairs
All covered up with dust and grim
With hideousness and scars of years,
And gaslight burning weird and dim,

Will welcome me . . . And yet, and yet
This very wind, the winter birds,
The glory of the soft sunset,
Come there to me in words.

After the Winter

Some day, when trees have shed their leaves
And against the morning's white
The shivering birds beneath the eaves
Have sheltered for the night,
We'll turn our faces southward, love,
Toward the summer isle
Where bamboos spire to shafted grove
And wide-mouthed orchids smile.

And we will seek the quiet hill
Where towers the cotton tree,
And leaps the laughing crystal rill,
And works the droning bee.
And we will build a cottage there
Beside an open glade,
With black-ribbed blue-bells blowing near,
And ferns that never fade.

The Tropics in New York

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger-root,
Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

Set in the window, bringing memories
Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies
In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes grew dim, and I could no more gaze;
A wave of longing through my body swept,
And, hungry for the old, familiar ways,
I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

I Shall Return

I shall return again; I shall return
To laugh and love and watch with wonder-eyes
At golden noon the forest fires burn,
Wafting their blue-black smoke to sapphire skies.
I shall return to loiter by the streams
That bathe the brown blades of the bending grasses,
And realize once more my thousand dreams
Of waters rushing down the mountain passes.
I shall return to hear the fiddle and fife
Of village dances, dear delicious tunes
That stir the hidden depths of native life,
Stray melodies of dim remembered runes.
I shall return, I shall return again,
To ease my mind of long, long years of pain.

The Castaways

The vivid grass with visible delight
Springing triumphant from the pregnant earth,
The butterflies, and sparrows in brief flight
Chirping and dancing for the season's birth,
The dandelions and rare daffodils
That touch the deep-stirred heart with hands of gold,
The thrushes sending forth their joyous trills,—
Not these, not these did I at first behold!
But seated on the benches daubed with green,
The castaways of life, a few asleep,
Some withered women desolate and mean,
And over all, life's shadows dark and deep.
Moaning I turned away, for misery
I have the strength to bear but not to see.

December, 1919

Last night I heard your voice, mother,
The words you sang to me
When I, a little barefoot boy,
Knelt down against your knee.

And tears gushed from my heart, mother,
And passed beyond its wall,
But though the fountain reached my throat
The drops refused to fall.

'Tis ten years since you died, mother,
Just ten dark years of pain,
And oh, I only wish that I
Could weep just once again.

Flame-Heart

So much have I forgotten in ten years,
So much in ten brief years! I have forgot
What time the purple apples come to juice,
And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.
I have forgot the special, startling season
Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting;
What time of year the ground doves brown the fields
And fill the noonday with the curious fluting.
I have forgotten much, but still remember
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

I still recall the honey-fever grass,
But cannot recollect the high days when
We rooted them out of the ping-wing path
To stop the mad bees in the rabbit pen.
I often try to think in what sweet month
The languid painted ladies used to dapple
The yellow by-road mazing from the main,
Sweet with the golden threads of the rose-apple.
I have forgotten—strange—but quite remember
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

What weeks, what months, what time of the mild year
We cheated school to have our fling at tops?
What days our wine-thrilled bodies pulsed with joy
Feasting upon blackberries in the copse?
Oh some I know! I have embalmed the days,
All innocent of passion, uncorrupt,
At noon and evening in the flame-heart's shade.
We were so happy, happy, I remember,
Beneath the poinsettia's red in warm December.

In Bondage

I would be wandering in distant fields
Where man, and bird, and beast, lives leisurely,
And the old earth is kind, and ever yields
Her goodly gifts to all her children free;
Where life is fairer, lighter, less demanding,
And boys and girls have time and space for play
Before they come to years of understanding –
Somewhere I would be singing, far away.
For life is greater than the thousand wars
Men wage for it in their insatiate lust,
And will remain like the eternal stars,
When all that shines to-day is drift and dust
But I am bound with you in your mean graves,
O black men, simple slaves of ruthless slaves.

Harlem Shadows

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
To bend and barter at desire's call.
Ah, little dark girls who in slippered feet
Go prowling through the night from street to street!
 Through the long night until the silver break
Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's white breast,
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.
 Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

The Harlem Dancer

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,
The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;
But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
I knew her self was not in that strange place.

A Prayer

'Mid the discordant noises of the day I hear thee calling;
I stumble as I fare along Earth's way; keep me from falling.

Mine eyes are open but they cannot see for gloom of night;
I can no more than lift my heart to thee for inward light.

The wild and fiery passion of my youth consumes my soul;
In agony I turn to thee for truth and self-control.

For Passion and all the pleasures it can give will die the death;
But this of me eternally must live, thy borrowed breath.

'Mid the discordant noises of the day I hear thee calling;
I stumble as I fare along Earth's way; keep me from falling.

The Barrier

I must not gaze at them although
Your eyes are dawning day;
I must not watch you as you go
Your sun-illuminated way;
I hear but I must never heed
The fascinating note,
Which, fluting like a river reed,
Comes from your trembling throat;
I must not see upon your face
Love's softly glowing spark;
For there's the barrier of race,
You're fair and I am dark.

When Dawn Comes to the City

The tired cars go grumbling by,
The moaning, groaning cars,
And the old milk carts go rumbling by
Under the same dull stars.
Out of the tenements, cold as stone,
Dark figures start for work;
I watch them sadly shuffle on,
'Tis dawn, dawn in New York.

But I would be on the island of the sea,
In the heart of the island of the sea,
Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,
And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,
Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing
Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,
And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,
And dear old Ned is braying, braying, braying,
And the shaggy Nannie goat is calling, calling, calling
From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea
That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling
Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!
There, oh there! on the island of the sea,
There I would be at dawn.

The tired cars go grumbling by,
The crazy, lazy cars,
And the same milk carts go rumbling by
Under the dying stars.
A lonely newsboy hurries by,
Humming a recent ditty;

Red streaks strike through the gray of the sky,
The dawn comes to the city.

But I would be on the island of the sea,
In the heart of the island of the sea,
Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,
And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,
Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing
Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,
And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,
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And the shaggy Nannie goat is calling, calling, calling
From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea
That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling
Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!
There, oh there! on the island of the sea,
There I would be at dawn.

The Choice

O you would clothe me in silken frocks
And house me from the cold,
And bind with bright bands my glossy locks
And buy me chains of gold;
And give me meekly to do my will
The hapless sons of men:
But the wild goat bounding on the barren hill
Droops in the grassy pen.

Sukee River (1920 version)

Thou sweet-voiced stream that first gavest me drink,
Watched o'er me when I floated on thy breast,
What black-faced boy now gambols on thy brink,
Or finds beneath thy rocks a place of rest?
What naked lad doth linger long by thee,
And run and tumble in the sun-scorched sand,
Or heed the pea-dove in the wild fig tree,
While I am roaming in an alien land?
No wonder that my heart is happy never,
I have been faithless to thee, Sukee River.

When from my early wandering I returned,
Did I not promise to remain for aye?
Yet instantly for other regions yearned
And wearied of thee in a single day.
Thy murmurs sound now in my anguished ears,
Creating in my heart a world of pain;
I see thee wistful flowing down the years
And though I pine, afar I must remain:
No wonder that my feet are faltering ever,
I have been faithless to thee, Sukee River.

Though other boys may frolic by thy side,
I know their merry moods thou dost not heed
When I, O mother of my soul and bride,
Lie on strange breasts and on strange kisses feed.
Sometimes, kind fate permitting me, I dream
I am floating on thy bosom of deep blue,
A child again, beloved, unchanging stream;
But soon I wake to find it all untrue:
I vowed that never, never would we sever,
But I've been faithless to thee, Sukee River.

Exhortation: Summer 1919

Through the pregnant universe rumbles life's
terrific thunder,
And Earth's bowels quake with terror; strange
and terrible storms break,
Lightning-torches flame the heavens, kindling
souls of me, thereunder:
Africa! Long ages sleeping, O my motherland,
awake!

 In the East the clouds glow crimson with the new
dawn that is breaking,
And its golden glory fills the western skies.
O my brothers and my sisters, wake! Arise!
For the new birth rends the old earth and the
very dead are waking,
Ghosts are turned flesh, throwing off the grave's
disguise,
And the foolish, even children, are made wise;
For the big earth groans in travail for the strong,
new world in making—
O my brothers, dreaming for dim centuries,
Wake from sleeping; to the East turn, turn
your eyes!

 Oh the night is sweet for sleeping, but the shining
day's for working;
Sons of the seductive night, for your children's
children's sake,
From the deep primeval forests where the crouching
leopard's lurking
Lift your heavy-lidded eyes, Ethiopia! Awake!

 In the East the clouds glow crimson with the new
dawn that is breaking,

And its golden glory fills the western skies.
O my brothers and my sisters, wake! Arise!
For the new birth rends the old earth and the
very dead are waking,
Ghosts are turned flesh, throwing off the grave's disguise,
And the foolish, even children, are made wise;
For the big earth groans in travail for the strong,
new world in making—
O my brothers, dreaming for long centuries,
Wake from sleeping; to the East turn, turn
your eyes!

HARLEM SHADOWS (1922)

Max Eastman, Introduction to Harlem Shadows

These poems have a special interest for all the races of man because they are sung by a pure blooded Negro. They are the first significant expression of that race in poetry. We tried faithfully to give a position in our literature to Paul Laurence Dunbar. We have excessively welcomed other black poets of minor talent, seeking in their music some distinctive quality other than the fact that they wrote it. But here for the first time we find our literature vividly enriched by a voice from this most alien race among us. And it should be illuminating to observe that while these poems are characteristic of that race as we most admire it – they are gentle-simple, candid, brave and friendly, quick of laughter and of tears – yet they are still more characteristic of what is deep and universal in mankind. There is no special or exotic kind of merit in them, no quality that demands a transmutation of our own natures to perceive. Just as the sculptures and wood and ivory carvings of the vast forgotten African Empires of Ifé and Benin, although so wistful in their tranquillity, are tranquil in the possession of the qualities of all classic and great art, so these poems, the purest of them, move with a sovereignty that is never new to the lovers of the high music of human utterance.

It is the peculiarity of his experience, rather than of his nature, that makes this poet's race a fact to be remembered in the enjoyment of his songs. The subject of all poetry is the experience of the poet, and no man of any other race in the world can touch or imagine the experience of the children of African slaves in America.

Claude McKay was born in 1890 in a little thatched house of two rooms in a beautiful valley of the hilly middle-country of Jamaica. He was born to the genial, warm, patient, neighborly farmer's life of that island. It was a life rich in sun and sound and color and

emotion, as we can see in his poems which are forever homeward yearning – in the midst of their present passion and strong will into the future, forever vividly remembering. Like a blue-bird's note in a March wind, those sudden clear thoughts of the warm South ring out in the midst of his northern songs. They carry a thrill into the depth of our hearts. Perhaps in some sense they are thoughts of a mother. At least it seems inevitable that we should find among them those two sacred sonnets of a child's bereavement. It seems inevitable that a wonderful poet should have had a wise and beautiful mother.

We can only distantly imagine how the happy tropic life of play and affection, became shadowed and somber for this sensitive boy as he grew, by a sense of the subjection of his people, and the memory of their bondage to an alien race. Indeed the memory of Claude McKay's family goes back on his mother's side beyond the days of bondage, to a time in Madagascar when they were still free, and by the grace of God still "savage." He learned in early childhood the story of their violent abduction, and how they were freighted over the seas in ships, and sold at public auction in Jamaica. He learned another story, too, which must have kindled a fire that slept in his blood – a story of the rebellion of the members of his own family at the auction-block. A death-strike, we should call it now – for they agreed that if they were divided and sold away into different parts of the country they would all kill themselves. And this fact solemnly announced in the market by the oldest white-haired Negro among them, had such an effect upon prospective buyers that it was impossible to sell them as individuals, and so they were all taken away together to those hills at Clarendon which their descendants still cultivate. With the blood of these rebels in his veins, and their memory to stir it, we cannot wonder that Claude McKay's earliest boyish songs in the Jamaica dialect were full of heresy and the militant love of freedom, and that his first poem of political significance should have been a rally-call to the street-car men on strike in Kingston. He found himself by an instinctive gravitation singing in the forefront of the battle for human liberty. A wider

experience and a man's comprehension of the science of history has only strengthened his voice and his resolution.

Those early songs and the music he composed for them, were very popular in Jamaica. Claude McKay was quite the literary prince of the island for a time – a kind of Robert Burns among his own people, as we can imagine, with his physical beauty, his quick sympathy, and the magnetic wayward humor of his ways. He received in 1912 the medal of the Institute of Arts and Sciences in recognition of his preëminence. He was the first Negro to receive this medal, and he was the first poet who ever made songs in the quaint haunting dialect of the island. But nevertheless it was not until he came to the United States that Claude McKay began to confront the deepest feelings in his heart, and realize that a delicate syllabic music could not alone express them. Here his imagination awoke, and the colored imagery that is the language of all deep passion began to appear in his poetry. Here too he conceived and felt the history and position of his people with mature poetic force. He knew that his voice belonged not only to his own moods and the general experience of humanity, but to the hopes and sorrows of his race.

A great many foolish things are said even by wise people upon the subject of racial inferiority. They seem to think that if science could establish a certain difference of average ability as between the whites and blacks, that would justify them in placing the whole of one of these races in a position of inferior esteem. The same fallacy is committed in the discussions of sex-inferiority, and it is worth while to make clear the perfect folly of it. If any defined quantitative difference is ever established between the average abilities of such groups, it will be a relatively slight one. The difficulty of establishing it, is a proof of that. And a slight difference in the general average would have no application whatever as between any two individuals, or any minor groups of individuals. The enormous majority of both races, as of both sexes, would show the same degree of ability. And so great is the factor of individual variation that we could not even be sure an example of the highest

ability might not arise in the group whose average was “inferior.” This simple consideration of fact and good logic should suffice to silence those who think they can ever appeal to science in support of a general race or sex prejudice.

But in so far as the problem arises between a dominant and a subjected race, it is impossible for science to say anything even as to averages. For a fair general test is impossible. The children of the subjected race never have a chance. To be deprived at the very dawn of selfhood of a sense of possible superiority, is to be undernourished at the point of chief educative importance. And to be assailed in early childhood with a pervading intimation of inferiority is poison in the very centers of growth. Except for people of the highest force of character, therefore, to be born into a subjected race is to grow up inferior, not only to the other race, but to one’s own potential self. We see an example of this kind of growth in the bombastic locutions of the traditional “darkie” who has acquired a little culture. Those great big words and long sentences are the result of a feeling of inferiority. They are a pathetic over-correction of the very quality of simple-heartedness which is carried so high in these poems of Claude McKay. It is carried so high, and made so boldly beautiful, that we can not withhold a tribute to his will, as well as to his music and imagination. The naked force of character that we feel in those two recent sonnets, “Baptism” and “The White City,” is no mere verbal semblance. Its reality is certified by the very achievement of such commanding art in the face of a contemptuous or condescending civilization.

Claude McKay came to the United States in 1912, having been offered an education here by a friend in Jamaica who believed in his abilities. His intention was to learn scientific farming, and return to the island to offer practical wisdom as well as music to his people. He went at first to one of our established philanthropic institutions for the training of colored people. He stayed there a few months – long enough to weary of the almost military system of discipline. And then he went to the Agricultural College of Kansas, where he

had learned that a free life and a more elective system of education prevailed. He studied for two years there, thinking continually less about farming and more about literature, and gradually losing away altogether the idea of returning to live in Jamaica. He left the college in 1914, knowing that he was a poet – and imagining, I think, that he was a rather irresponsible and wayward character – to cast in his lot with the working-class Negroes of the north. Since then he has earned his living in every one of the ways that the northern Negroes do, from “pot-wrestling” in a boarding-house kitchen to dining car service on the New York and Philadelphia Express. But like all true poets, he failed to take the duty of “earning a living” very seriously. It was a matter of collecting enough money from each new job to quit for a while and live. And with each period of living a new and a more sure and beautiful song would come out of him.

The growth of beauty and sureness in these songs would be apparent if they were arranged in the order of their creation. As it is, the reader will observe occasional lapses of quality. One or two of the rhythms I confess I am not able to apprehend at all. Perhaps they will be picked up by receivers who are attuned to a different wave-length. But the quality is here in them all – the pure, clear arrow-like transference of his emotion into our breast, without any but the inevitable words – the quality that reminds us of Burns and Villon and Catullus, and all the poets that we call lyric because we love them so much. It is the quality that Keats sought to cherish when he said that “Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into the soul, and does not startle or amaze with itself but with its subject.” Poetry with this quality is not for those whose interest is mainly in the manufacture of poems. It will come rather to those whose interest is in the life of things. It is the poetry of life, and not of the poet’s chamber. It is the poetry that looks upon a thing, and sings. It is possessed by a feeling and sings. May it find its way a little quietly and softly, in this age of roar and advertising, to the hearts that love a true and unaffected song.

MAX EASTMAN.

Preface

In putting ideas and feelings into poetry, I have tried in each case to use the medium most adaptable to the specific purpose. I own allegiance to no master. I have never found it possible to accept in entirety any one poet. But I have loved and joyed in what I consider the finest in the poets of all ages.

The speech of my childhood and early youth was the Jamaica Negro dialect, the native variant of English, which still preserves a few words of African origin, and which is more difficult of understanding than the American Negro dialect. But the language we wrote and read in school was England's English. Our text books then, before the advent of the American and Jamaican readers and our teachers, too, were all English-made. The native teachers of the elementary schools were tutored by men and women of British import. I quite remember making up verses in the dialect and in English for our moonlight ring dances and for our school parties. Of our purely native song the jammias (field and road), shay-shays (yard and booth), wakes (post-mortem), Anancy tales (transplanted African folk lore), and revivals (religious) are all singularly punctuated by meter and rhyme. And nearly all my own poetic thought has always run naturally into these regular forms.

Consequently, although very conscious of the new criticisms and trends in poetry, to which I am keenly responsive and receptive, I have adhered to such of the older traditions as I find adequate for my most lawless and revolutionary passions and moods. I have not used patterns, images and words that would stamp me a classicist nor a modernist. My intellect is not scientific enough to range me on the side of either; nor is my knowledge wide enough for me to specialize in any school.

I have never studied poetics; but the forms I have used I am convinced are the ones I can work in with the highest degree of spontaneity and freedom.

I have chosen my melodies and rhythms by instinct, and I have favored words and figures which flow smoothly and harmoniously into my compositions. And in all my moods I have striven to achieve directness, truthfulness and naturalness of expression instead of an enameled originality. I have not hesitated to use words which are old, and in some circles considered poetically overworked and dead, when I thought I could make them glow alive by new manipulation. Nor have I stinted my senses of the pleasure of using the decorative metaphor where it is more truly and vividly beautiful than the exact phrase. But for me there is more quiet delight in “The golden moon of heaven” than in “The terra-cotta disc of cloud-land.”

Finally, while I have welcomed criticism, friendly and unfriendly, and listened with willing attention to many varying opinions concerning other poems and my own, I have always, in the summing up, fallen back on my own ear and taste as the arbiter.

Claude McKay.

The Easter Flower

Far from this foreign Easter damp and chilly
My soul steals to a pear-shaped plot of ground,
Where gleamed the lilac-tinted Easter lily
Soft-scented in the air for yards around;
 Alone, without a hint of guardian leaf!
Just like a fragile bell of silver rime,
It burst the tomb for freedom sweet and brief
In the young pregnant year at Eastertime;
 And many thought it was a sacred sign,
And some called it the resurrection flower;
And I, a pagan, worshiped at its shrine,
Yielding my heart unto its perfumed power.

To One Coming North

At first you'll joy to see the playful snow,
Like white moths trembling on the tropic air,
Or waters of the hills that softly flow
Gracefully falling down a shining stair.

And when the fields and streets are covered white
And the wind-worried void is chilly, raw,
Or underneath a spell of heat and light
The cheerless frozen spots begin to thaw,

Like me you'll long for home, where birds' glad song
Means flowering lanes and leas and spaces dry,
And tender thoughts and feelings fine and strong,
Beneath a vivid silver-flecked blue sky.

But oh! more than the changeless southern isles,
When Spring has shed upon the earth her charm,
You'll love the Northland wreathed in golden smiles
By the miraculous sun turned glad and warm.

America

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate.
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

Alfonso, Dressing to Wait at Table

Alfonso is a handsome bronze-hued lad
Of subtly-changing and surprising parts;
His moods are storms that frighten and make glad,
His eyes were made to capture women's hearts.

Down in the glory-hole Alfonso sings
An olden song of wine and clinking glasses
And riotous rakes; magnificently flings
Gay kisses to imaginary lasses.

Alfonso's voice of mellow music thrills
Our swaying forms and steals our hearts with joy;
And when he soars, his fine falsetto trills
Are rarest notes of gold without alloy.

But, O Alfonso! wherefore do you sing
Dream-songs of carefree men and ancient places?
Soon we shall be beset by clamouring
Of hungry and importunate palefaces.

The Tropics in New York

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger-root,
Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

Set in the window, bringing memories
Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies
In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes grew dim, and I could no more gaze;
A wave of longing through my body swept,
And, hungry for the old, familiar ways,
I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

Flame-Heart

So much have I forgotten in ten years,
So much in ten brief years! I have forgot
What time the purple apples come to juice,
And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.
I have forgot the special, startling season
Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting;
What time of year the ground doves brown the fields
And fill the noonday with the curious fluting.
I have forgotten much, but still remember
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

I still recall the honey-fever grass,
But cannot recollect the high days when
We rooted them out of the ping-wing path
To stop the mad bees in the rabbit pen.
I often try to think in what sweet month
The languid painted ladies used to dapple
The yellow by-road mazing from the main,
Sweet with the golden threads of the rose-apple.
I have forgotten—strange—but quite remember
The poinsettia's red, blood-red in warm December.

What weeks, what months, what time of the mild year
We cheated school to have our fling at tops?
What days our wine-thrilled bodies pulsed with joy
Feasting upon blackberries in the copse?
Oh some I know! I have embalmed the days,
All innocent of passion, uncorrupt,
At noon and evening in the flame-heart's shade.
We were so happy, happy, I remember,
Beneath the poinsettia's red in warm December.

Home Thoughts

Oh something just now must be happening there!
That suddenly and quiveringly here,
Amid the city's noises, I must think
Of mangoes leaning o'er the river's brink,
And dexterous Davie climbing high above,
The gold fruits ebon-speckled to remove,
And toss them quickly in the tangled mass
Of wis-wis twisted round the guinea grass;
And Cyril coming through the bramble-track
A prize bunch of bananas on his back;
And Georgie—none could ever dive like him—
Throwing his scanty clothes off for a swim;
And schoolboys, from Bridge-tunnel going home,
Watching the waters downward dash and foam.
This is no daytime dream, there's something in it,
Oh something's happening there this very minute!

On Broadway

About me young and careless feet
Linger along the garish street;
Above, a hundred shouting signs
Shed down their bright fantastic glow
Upon the merry crowd and lines
Of moving carriages below.
Oh wonderful is Broadway — only
My heart, my heart is lonely.

Desire naked, linked with Passion,
Goes strutting by in brazen fashion;
From playhouse, cabaret and inn
The rainbow lights of Broadway blaze
All gay without, all glad within;
As in a dream I stand and gaze
At Broadway, shining Broadway — only
My heart, my heart is lonely.

The Barrier

I must not gaze at them although
Your eyes are dawning day;
I must not watch you as you go
Your sun-illuminated way;
I hear but I must never heed
The fascinating note,
Which, fluting like a river reed,
Comes from your trembling throat;
I must not see upon your face
Love's softly glowing spark;
For there's the barrier of race,
You're fair and I am dark.

Adolescence

There was a time when in late afternoon
The four-o'clocks would fold up at day's close
Pink-white in prayer, and 'neath the floating moon
I lay with them in calm and sweet repose.

And in the open spaces I could sleep,
Half-naked to the shining worlds above;
Peace came with sleep and sleep was long and deep,
Gained without effort, sweet like early love.

But now no balm— nor drug nor weed nor wine—
Can bring true rest to cool my body's fever,
Nor sweeten in my mouth the acid brine,
That salts my choicest drink and will forever.

Homing Swallows

Swift swallows sailing from the Spanish main,
O rain-birds racing merrily away
From hill-tops parched with heat and sultry plain
Of wilting plants and fainting flowers, say—

When at the noon-hour from the chapel school
The children dash and scamper down the dale,
Scornful of teacher's rod and binding rule
Forever broken and without avail,

Do they still stop beneath the giant tree
To gather locusts in their childish greed,
And chuckle when they break the pods to see
The golden powder clustered round the seed?

The City's Love

For one brief golden moment rare like wine,
The gracious city swept across the line;
Oblivious of the color of my skin,
Forgetting that I was an alien guest,
She bent to me, my hostile heart to win,
Caught me in passion to her pillowy breast;
The great, proud city, seized with a strange love,
Bowed down for one flame hour my pride to prove.

North and South

O sweet are tropic lands for waking dreams!
There time and life move lazily along.
There by the banks of blue-and-silver streams
Grass-sheltered crickets chirp incessant song,
Gay-colored lizards loll all through the day,
Their tongues outstretched for careless little flies,
And swarthy children in the fields at play,
Look upward laughing at the smiling skies.
A breath of idleness is in the air
That casts a subtle spell upon all things,
And love and mating-time are everywhere,
And wonder to life's commonplaces clings.
The fluttering humming-bird darts through the trees
And dips his long beak in the big bell-flowers,
The leisured buzzard floats upon the breeze,
Riding a crescent cloud for endless hours,
The sea beats softly on the emerald strands—
O sweet for quiet dreams are tropic lands!

Wild May

Altea mentions in her tender letters,
Among a chain of quaint and touching things,
That you are feeble, weighted down with fetters,
And given to strange deeds and mutterings.
No longer without trace or thought of fear,
Do you leap to and ride the rebel roan;
But have become the victim of grim care,
With three brown beauties to support alone.
But none the less will you be in my mind,
Wild May that cantered by the risky ways,
With showy head-cloth flirting in the wind,
From market in the glad December days;
Wild May of whom even other girls could rave
Before sex tamed your spirit, made you slave.

The Plateau

It was the silver, heart-enveloping view
Of the mysterious sea-line far away,
Seen only on a gleaming gold-white day,
That made it dear and beautiful to you.

And Laura loved it for the little hill,
Where the quartz sparkled fire, barren and dun,
Whence in the shadow of the dying sun,
She contemplated Hallow's wooden mill.

While Danny liked the sheltering high grass,
In which he lay upon a clear dry night,
To hear and see, screened skilfully from sight,
The happy lovers of the valley pass.

But oh! I loved it for the big round moon
That swung out of the clouds and swooned aloft,
Burning with passion, gloriously soft,
Lighting the purple flowers of fragrant June.

After the Winter

Some day, when trees have shed their leaves
And against the morning's white
The shivering birds beneath the eaves
Have sheltered for the night,
We'll turn our faces southward, love,
Toward the summer isle
Where bamboos spire to shafted grove
And wide-mouthed orchids smile.

And we will seek the quiet hill
Where towers the cotton tree,
And leaps the laughing crystal rill,
And works the droning bee.
And we will build a cottage there
Beside an open glade,
With black-ribbed blue-bells blowing near,
And ferns that never fade.

The Wild Goat

O you would clothe me in silken frocks
And house me from the cold,
And bind with bright bands my glossy locks,
And buy me chains of gold;
 And give me—meekly to do my will—
The hapless sons of men:—
But the wild goat bounding on the barren hill
Droops in the grassy pen.

Harlem Shadows

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
To bend and barter at desire's call.
Ah, little dark girls who in slippered feet
Go prowling through the night from street to street!
 Through the long night until the silver break
Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's white breast,
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.
 Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

The White City

I will not toy with it nor bend an inch.
Deep in the secret chambers of my heart
I muse my life-long hate, and without flinch
I bear it nobly as I live my part.
My being would be a skeleton, a shell,
If this dark Passion that fills my every mood,
And makes my heaven in the white world's hell,
Did not forever feed me vital blood.
I see the mighty city through a mist-
The strident trains that speed the goaded mass,
The poles and spires and towers vapor-kissed,
The fortified port through which the great ships pass,
The tides, the wharves, the dens I contemplate,
Are sweet like wanton loves because I hate.

The Spanish Needle

Lovely dainty Spanish needle
With your yellow flower and white,
Dew bedecked and softly sleeping,
Do you think of me to-night?

 Shadowed by the spreading mango,
Nodding o'er the rippling stream,
Tell me, dear plant of my childhood,
Do you of the exile dream?

 Do you see me by the brook's side
Catching crayfish 'neath the stone,
As you did the day you whispered:
Leave the harmless dears alone?

 Do you see me in the meadow
Coming from the woodland spring
With a bamboo on my shoulder
And a pail sling from a string?

 Do you see me all expectant
Lying in an orange grove,
While the swee-swees sing above me,
Waiting for my elf-eyed love?

 Lovely dainty Spanish needle,
Source to me of sweet delight,
In your far-off sunny southland
Do you dream of me to-night?

My Mother

I

Reg wished me to go with him to the field,
I paused because I did not want to go;
But in her quiet way she made me yield
Reluctantly, for she was breathing low.
Her hand she slowly lifted from her lap
And, smiling sadly in the old sweet way,
She pointed to the nail where hung my cap.
Her eyes said: I shall last another day.
But scarcely had we reached the distant play,
When o'er the hills we heard a faint bell ringing;
A boy came running up with frightened face;
We knew the fatal news that he was bringing.
I heard him listlessly, without a moan,
Although the only one I loved was gone.

II

The dawn departs, the morning is begun,
The trades come whispering from off the seas,
The fields of corn are golden in the sun,
The dark-brown tassels fluttering in the breeze;
The bell is sounding and the children pass,
Frog-leaping, skipping, shouting, laughing shrill,
Down the red road, over the pasture-grass,
Up to the school-house crumbling on the hill.
The older folk are at their peaceful toil,
Some pulling up the weeds, some plucking corn,
And others breaking up the sun-baked soil.
Float, faintly-scented breeze, at early morn
Over the earth where mortals sow and reap—
Beneath its breast my mother lies asleep.

In Bondage

I would be wandering in distant fields
Where man, and bird, and beast, lives leisurely,
And the old earth is kind, and ever yields
Her goodly gifts to all her children free;
Where life is fairer, lighter, less demanding,
And boys and girls have time and space for play
Before they come to years of understanding –
Somewhere I would be singing, far away.
For life is greater than the thousand wars
Men wage for it in their insatiate lust,
And will remain like the eternal stars,
When all that shines to-day is drift and dust
But I am bound with you in your mean graves,
O black men, simple slaves of ruthless slaves.

December, 1919

Last night I heard your voice, mother,
The words you sang to me
When I, a little barefoot boy,
Knelt down against your knee.

And tears gushed from my heart, mother,
And passed beyond its wall,
But though the fountain reached my throat
The drops refused to fall.

'Tis ten years since you died, mother,
Just ten dark years of pain,
And oh, I only wish that I
Could weep just once again.

Heritage

Now the dead past seems vividly alive,
And in this shining moment I can trace,
Down through the vista of the vanished years,
Your faun-like form, your fond elusive face.

And suddenly some secret spring's released,
And unawares a riddle is revealed,
And I can read like large, black-lettered print,
What seemed before a thing forever sealed.

I know the magic word, the graceful thought,
The song that fills me in my lucid hours,
The spirit's wine that thrills my body through,
And makes me music-drunk, are yours, all yours.

I cannot praise, for you have passed from praise,
I have no tinted thoughts to paint you true;
But I can feel and I can write the word;
The best of me is but the least of you.

When I Have Passed Away

When I have passed away and am forgotten,
And no one living can recall my face,
When under alien sod my bones lie rotten
With not a tree or stone to mark the place;
 Perchance a pensive youth, with passion burning,
For olden verse that smacks of love and wine,
The musty pages of old volumes turning,
May light upon a little song of mine,
 And he may softly hum the tune and wonder
Who wrote the verses in the long ago;
Or he may sit him down awhile to ponder
Upon the simple words that touch him so.

Enslaved

Oh when I think of my long-suffering race,
For weary centuries despised, oppressed,
Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place
In the great life line of the Christian West;
And in the Black Land disinherited,
Robbed in the ancient country of its birth,
My heart grows sick with hate, becomes as lead,
For this my race that has no home on earth.
Then from the dark depths of my soul I cry
To the avenging angel to consume
The white man's world of wonders utterly:
Let it be swallowed up in earth's vast womb,
Or upward roll as sacrificial smoke
To liberate my people from its yoke!

I Shall Return

I shall return again; I shall return
To laugh and love and watch with wonder-eyes
At golden noon the forest fires burn,
Wafting their blue-black smoke to sapphire skies.
I shall return to loiter by the streams
That bathe the brown blades of the bending grasses,
And realize once more my thousand dreams
Of waters rushing down the mountain passes.
I shall return to hear the fiddle and fife
Of village dances, dear delicious tunes
That stir the hidden depths of native life,
Stray melodies of dim remembered runes.
I shall return, I shall return again,
To ease my mind of long, long years of pain.

Morning Joy

At night the wide and level stretch of wold,
Which at high noon had basked in quiet gold,
Far as the eye could see was ghostly white;
Dark was the night save for the snow's weird light.

I drew the shades far down, crept into bed;
Hearing the cold wind moaning overhead
Through the sad pines, my soul, catching its pain,
Went sorrowing with it across the plain.

At dawn, behold! the pall of night was gone,
Save where a few shrubs melancholy, lone,
Detained a fragile shadow. Golden-lipped
The laughing grasses heaven's sweet wine sipped.

The sun rose smiling o'er the river's breast,
And my soul, by his happy spirit blest,
Soared like a bird to greet him in the sky,
And drew out of his heart Eternity.

Africa

The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,
The sciences were sucklings at thy breast;
When all the world was young in pregnant night
Thy slaves toiled at thy monumental best.
Thou ancient treasure-land, thou modern prize,
New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!
The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes
Watches the mad world with immobile lids.
The Hebrews humbled them at Pharaoh's name.
Cradle of Power! Yet all things were in vain!
Honor and Glory, Arrogance and Fame!
They went. The darkness swallowed thee again.
Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done,
Of all the mighty nations of the sun.

On a Primitive Canoe

Here, passing lonely down this quiet lane,
Before a mud-splashed window long I pause
To gaze and gaze, while through my active brain
Still thoughts are stirred to wakefulness; because
Long, long ago in a dim unknown land,
A massive forest-tree, ax-felled, adze-hewn,
Was deftly done by cunning mortal hand
Into a symbol of the tender moon.
Why does it thrill more than the handsome boat
That bore me o'er the wild Atlantic ways,
And fill me with rare sense of things remote
From this harsh life of fretful nights and days?
I cannot answer but, whate'er it be,
An old wine has intoxicated me.

Winter in the Country

Sweet life! how lovely to be here
And feel the soft sea-laden breeze
Strike my flushed face, the spruce's fair
Free limbs to see, the lesser trees'
 Bare hands to touch, the sparrow's cheep
To heed, and watch his nimble flight
Above the short brown grass asleep.
Love glorious in his friendly might,
 Music that every heart could bless,
And thoughts of life serene, divine,
Beyond my power to express,
Crowd round this lifted heart of mine!
 But oh! to leave this paradise
For the city's dirty basement room,
Where, beauty hidden from the eyes,
A table, bed, bureau and broom
 In corner set, two crippled chairs
All covered up with dust and grim
With hideousness and scars of years,
And gaslight burning weird and dim,
 Will welcome me . . . And yet, and yet
This very wind, the winter birds,
The glory of the soft sunset,
Come there to me in words.

To Winter

Stay, season of calm love and soulful snows!
There is a subtle sweetness in the sun,
The ripples on the stream's breast gaily run,
The wind more boisterously by me blows,
And each succeeding day now longer grows.
The birds a gladder music have begun,
The squirrel, full of mischief and of fun,
From maples' topmost branch the brown twig throws.
I read these pregnant signs, know what they mean:
I know that thou art making ready to go.
Oh stay! I fled a land where fields are green
Always, and palms wave gently to and fro,
And winds are balmy, blue brooks ever sheen,
To ease my heart of its impassioned woe.

Spring in New Hampshire

(To J. L. J. F. E.)

Too green the springing April grass,
Too blue the silver-speckled sky,
For me to linger here, alas,
While happy winds go laughing by,
Wasting the golden hours indoors,
Washing windows and scrubbing floors.
Too wonderful the April night,
Too faintly sweet the first May flowers,
The stars too gloriously bright,
For me to spend the evening hours,
When fields are fresh and streams are leaping,
Wearied, exhausted, dully sleeping.

On the Road

Roar of the rushing train fearfully rocking,
Impatient people jammed in line for food,
The rasping noise of cars together knocking,
And worried waiters, some in ugly mood,
Crowding into the choking pantry hole
To call out dishes for each angry glutton
Exasperated grown beyond control,
From waiting for his soup or fish or mutton.
At last the station's reached, the engine stops;
For bags and wraps the red-caps circle round;
From off the step the passenger lightly hops,
And seeks his cab or tram-car homeward bound;
The waiters pass out weary, listless, glum,
To spend their tips on harlots, cards and rum.

The Harlem Dancer

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,
The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;
But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
I knew her self was not in that strange place.

Dawn in New York

The Dawn! The Dawn! The crimson-tinted, comes
Out of the low still skies, over the hills,
Manhattan's roofs and spires and cheerless domes!
The Dawn! My spirit to its spirit thrills.
Almost the mighty city is asleep,
No pushing crowd, no tramping, tramping feet.
But here and there a few cars groaning creep
Along, above, and underneath the street,
Bearing their strangely-ghostly burdens by,
The women and the men of garish nights,
Their eyes wine-weakened and their clothes awry,
Grotesques beneath the strong electric lights.
The shadows wane. The Dawn comes to New York.
And I go darkly-rebel to my work.

The Tired Worker

O whisper, O my soul! The afternoon
Is waning into evening, whisper soft!
Peace, O my rebel heart! for soon the moon
From out its misty veil will swing aloft!
Be patient, weary body, soon the night
Will wrap thee gently in her sable sheet,
And with a leaden sigh thou wilt invite
To rest thy tired hands and aching feet.
The wretched day was theirs, the night is mine;
Come tender sleep, and fold me to thy breast.
But what steals out the gray clouds red like wine?
O dawn! O dreaded dawn! O let me rest
Weary my veins, my brain, my life! Have pity!
No! Once again the harsh, the ugly city.

Outcast

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
My spirit, bondaged by the body, longs.
Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
I would go back to darkness and to peace,
But the great western world holds me in fee,
And I may never hope for full release
While to its alien gods I bend my knee.
Something in me is lost, forever lost,
Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
And I must walk the way of life a ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart;
For I was born, far from my native clime,
Under the white man's menace, out of time.

I Know My Soul

I plucked my soul out of its secret place,
And held it to the mirror of my eye,
To see it like a star against the sky,
A twitching body quivering in space,
A spark of passion shining on my face.
And I explored it to determine why
This awful key to my infinity
Conspires to rob me of sweet joy and grace.
And if the sign may not be fully read,
If I can comprehend but not control,
I need not gloom my days with futile dread,
Because I see a part and not the whole.
Contemplating the strange, I'm comforted
By this narcotic thought: I know my soul.

Birds of Prey (1922 version)

Their shadow dims the sunshine of our day,
As they go lumbering across the sky,
Squawking in joy of feeling safe on high,
Beating their heavy wings of owlsh gray.
They scare the singing birds of earth away
As, greed-impelled, they circle threateningly,
Watching the toilers with malignant eye,
From their exclusive haven—birds of prey.
They swoop down for the spoil in certain might,
And fasten in our bleeding flesh their claws.
They beat us to surrender weak with fright,
And tugging and tearing without let or pause,
They flap their hideous wings in grim delight,
And stuff our gory hearts into their maws.

The Castaways

The vivid grass with visible delight
Springing triumphant from the pregnant earth,
The butterflies, and sparrows in brief flight
Chirping and dancing for the season's birth,
The dandelions and rare daffodils
That touch the deep-stirred heart with hands of gold,
The thrushes sending forth their joyous trills,—
Not these, not these did I at first behold!
But seated on the benches daubed with green,
The castaways of life, a few asleep,
Some withered women desolate and mean,
And over all, life's shadows dark and deep.
Moaning I turned away, for misery
I have the strength to bear but not to see.

Exhortation: Summer 1919

Through the pregnant universe rumbles life's
terrific thunder,
And Earth's bowels quake with terror; strange
and terrible storms break,
Lightning-torches flame the heavens, kindling
souls of me, thereunder:
Africa! Long ages sleeping, O my motherland,
awake!

 In the East the clouds glow crimson with the new
dawn that is breaking,
And its golden glory fills the western skies.
O my brothers and my sisters, wake! Arise!
For the new birth rends the old earth and the
very dead are waking,
Ghosts are turned flesh, throwing off the grave's
disguise,
And the foolish, even children, are made wise;
For the big earth groans in travail for the strong,
new world in making—
O my brothers, dreaming for dim centuries,
Wake from sleeping; to the East turn, turn
your eyes!

 Oh the night is sweet for sleeping, but the shining
day's for working;
Sons of the seductive night, for your children's
children's sake,
From the deep primeval forests where the crouching
leopard's lurking
Lift your heavy-lidded eyes, Ethiopia! Awake!

 In the East the clouds glow crimson with the new
dawn that is breaking,

And its golden glory fills the western skies.
O my brothers and my sisters, wake! Arise!
For the new birth rends the old earth and the
very dead are waking,
Ghosts are turned flesh, throwing off the grave's disguise,
And the foolish, even children, are made wise;
For the big earth groans in travail for the strong,
new world in making—
O my brothers, dreaming for long centuries,
Wake from sleeping; to the East turn, turn
your eyes!

The Lynching

His Spirit in smoke ascended to high heaven.
His father, by the cruelest way of pain,
Had bidden him to his bosom once again;
The awful sin remained still unforgiven.
All night a bright and solitary star
(Perchance the one that ever guided him,
Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)
Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.
Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
The ghastly body swaying in the sun
The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

Baptism

Into the furnace let me go alone;
Stay you without in terror of the heat.
I will go naked in—for thus 'tis sweet—
Into the weird depths of the hottest zone.
I will not quiver in the frailest bone,
You will not note a flicker of defeat;
My heart shall tremble not its fate to meet,
My mouth give utterance to any moan.
The yawning oven spits forth fiery spears;
Red aspish tongues shout wordlessly my name.
Desire destroys, consumes my mortal fears,
Transforming me into a shape of flame.
I will come out, back to your world of tears,
A stronger soul within a finer frame.

If We Must Die

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe !
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Subway Wind

Far down, down through the city's great, gaunt gut
The gray train rushing bears the weary wind;
In the packed cars the fans the crowd's breath cut,
Leaving the sick and heavy air behind.
And pale-cheeked children seek the upper door
To give their summer jackets to the breeze;
Their laugh is swallowed in the deafening roar
Of captive wind that moans for fields and seas;
Seas cooling warm where native schooners drift
Through sleepy waters, while gulls wheel and sweep,
Waiting for windy waves the keels to lift
Lightly among the islands of the deep;
Islands of lofty palm trees blooming white
That lend their perfume to the tropic sea,
Where fields lie idle in the dew drenched night,
And the Trades float above them fresh and free.

The Night Fire

No engines shrieking rescue storm the night,
And hose and hydrant cannot here avail;
The flames laugh high and fling their challenging light,
And clouds turn gray and black from silver-pale.
The fire leaps out and licks the ancient walls,
And the big building bends and twists and groans.
A bar drops from its place; a rafter falls
Burning the flowers. The wind in frenzy moans.
The watchers gaze, held wondering by the fire,
The dwellers cry their sorrow to the crowd,
The flames beyond themselves rise higher, higher,
To lose their glory in the frowning cloud,
Yielding at length the last reluctant breath.
And where life lay asleep broods darkly death.

Poetry

Sometimes I tremble like a storm-swept flower,
And seek to hide my tortured soul from thee.
Bowing my head in deep humility
Before the silent thunder of thy power.
Sometimes I flee before thy blazing light,
As from the specter of pursuing death;
Intimidated lest thy might breath,
Windways, will sweep me into utter night.
For oh, I fear they will be swallowed up—
The loves which are to me of vital worth,
My passion and my pleasure in the earth—
And lost forever in thy magic cup!
I fear, I fear my truly human heart
Will perish on the altar-stone of art!

To a Poet

There is a lovely noise about your name,
Above the shoutings of the city clear,
More than a moment's merriment, whose claim
Will greater grow with every mellowed year.

The people will not bear you down the street,
Dancing to the strong rhythm of your words,
The modern kings will throttle you to greet
The piping voice of artificial birds.

But rare lonely spirits, even mine,
Who love the immortal music of all days,
Will see the glory of your trailing line,
The bedded beauty of your haunting lays.

A Prayer

'Mid the discordant noises of the day I hear thee calling;

I stumble as I fare along Earth's way; keep me from falling.

Mine eyes are open but they cannot see for gloom of night;

I can no more than lift my heart to thee for inward light.

The wild and fiery passion of my youth consumes my soul;

In agony I turn to thee for truth and self-control.

For Passion and all the pleasures it can give will die the death;

But this of me eternally must live, thy borrowed breath.

'Mid the discordant noises of the day I hear thee calling;

I stumble as I fare along Earth's way; keep me from falling.

When Dawn Comes to the City

The tired cars go grumbling by,
The moaning, groaning cars,
And the old milk carts go rumbling by
Under the same dull stars.
Out of the tenements, cold as stone,
Dark figures start for work;
I watch them sadly shuffle on,
'Tis dawn, dawn in New York.

But I would be on the island of the sea,
In the heart of the island of the sea,
Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,
And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,
Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing
Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,
And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,
And dear old Ned is braying, braying, braying,
And the shaggy Nannie goat is calling, calling, calling
From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea
That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling
Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!
There, oh there! on the island of the sea,
There I would be at dawn.

The tired cars go grumbling by,
The crazy, lazy cars,
And the same milk carts go rumbling by
Under the dying stars.
A lonely newsboy hurries by,
Humming a recent ditty;

Red streaks strike through the gray of the sky,
The dawn comes to the city.

But I would be on the island of the sea,
In the heart of the island of the sea,
Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,
And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,
Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing
Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,
And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,
And dear old Ned is braying, braying, braying,
And the shaggy Nannie goat is calling, calling, calling
From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea
That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling
Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!
There, oh there! on the island of the sea,
There I would be at dawn.

O Word I Love To Sing

O word I love to sing! thou art too tender
For all the passions agitating me;
For all my bitterness thou art too tender,
I cannot pour my red soul into thee.

O haunting melody! thou art too slender,
Too fragile like a globe of crystal glass;
For all my stormy thoughts thou art too slender,
The burden from my bosom will not pass.

O tender word! O melody so slender!
O tears of passion saturate with brine,
O words, unwilling words, ye can not render
My hatred for the foe of me and mine.

Absence

Your words dropped into my heart like pebbles into a pool,
Rippling around my breast and leaving it melting cool.
Your kisses fell sharp on my flesh like dawn-dews from the limb,
Of a fruit-filled lemon tree when the day is young and dim.
Like soft rain-christened sunshine, as fragile as rare gold lace,
Your breath, sweet-scented and warm, has kindled my tranquil face.
But a silence vasty-deep, oh deeper than all these ties
Now, through the menacing miles, brooding between us lies.
And more than the songs I sing, I await your written word,
To stir my fluent blood as never your presence stirred.

Summer Morn in New Hampshire (1922 version)

All yesterday it poured, and all night long
I could not sleep; the rain unceasing beat
Upon the shingled roof like a weird song,
Upon the grass like running children's feet.
And down the mountains by the dark cloud kissed,
Like a strange shape in filmy veiling dressed,
Slid slowly, silently, the wraith-like mist,
And nestled soft against the earth's wet breast.
But lo, there was a miracle at dawn!
The still air stirred at touch of the faint breeze,
The sun a sheet of gold bequeathed the lawn,
The songsters twittered in the rustling trees.
And all things were transfigured in the day,
But me whom radiant beauty could not move;
For you, more wonderful, were far away,
And I was blind with hunger for your love.

Rest in Peace

No more for you the city's thorny ways,
The ugly corners of the Negro belt;
The miseries and pains of these harsh days
By you will never, never again be felt.

No more, if still you wander, will you meet
With nights of unabating bitterness;
They cannot reach you in your safe retreat,
The city's hate, the city's prejudice!

'Twas sudden—but your menial task is done,
The dawn now breaks on you, the dark is over,
The sea is crossed, the longed-for port is won;
Farewell, oh, fare you well! my friend and lover.

A Red Flower

Your lips are like a southern lily red,
Wet with the soft rain-kisses of the night,
In which the brown bee buries deep its head,
When still the dawn's a silver sea of light.

Your lips betray the secret of your soul,
The dark delicious essence that is you,
A mystery of life, the flaming goal
I seek through mazy pathways strange and new.

Your lips are the red symbol of a dream.
What visions of warm lilies they impart,
That line the green bank of a fair blue stream,
With butterflies and bees close to each heart!

Brown bees that murmur sounds of music rare,
That softly fall upon the languorous breeze,
Wafting them gently on the quiet air
Among untended avenues of trees.

O were I hovering, a bee, to probe
Deep down within your scented heart, fair flower,
Enfolded by your soft vermillion robe,
Amorous of sweets, for but one perfect hour!

Courage

O lonely heart so timid of approach,
the shy tropic flower that shuts its lips
To the faint touch of tender finger tips:
What is your word? What question would you broach?

Your lustrous-warm eyes are too sadly kind
To mask the meaning of your dreamy tale,
Your guarded life too exquisitely frail
Against the daggers of my warring mind.

There is no part of the unyielding earth,
Even bare rocks where the eagles build their nest,
Will give us undisturbed and friendly rest.
No dewfall softens this vast belt of dearth.

But in the socket-chiseled teeth of strife,
That gleam in serried files in all the lands,
We may join hungry, understanding hands,
And drink our share of ardent love and life.

To O. E. A.

Your voice is the color of a robin's breast,
And there's a sweet sob in it like rain—still rain in the night.
Among the leaves of the trumpet-tree, close to his nest,
The pea-dove sings, and each note thrills me with strange delight
Like the words, wet with music, that well from your trembling
throat.

I'm afraid of your eyes, they're so bold,
Searching me through, reading my thoughts, shining like gold.
But sometimes they are gentle and soft like the dew on the lips of
the eucharis

Before the sun comes warm with his lover's kiss.
You are sea-foam, pure with the star's love-lines,
Not mortal, a flower, a fairy, too fair for the beauty-shorn earth.
All wonderful things, all beautiful things, gave of their wealth to your
birth.

Oh I love you so much, not recking of passion, that I feel it is wrong!
But men will love you, flower, fairy, non-mortal spirit burdened with
flesh,
Forever, life-long.

Romance

To clasp you now and feel your head close-pressed,
Scented and warm against my beating breast;
 To whisper soft and quivering your name,
And drink the passion burning in your frame;
 To lie at full length, taut, with cheek to cheek,
And tease your mouth with kisses till you speak
 Love words, mad words, dream words, sweet senseless words,
Melodious like notes of mating birds;
 To hear you ask if I shall love always,
And myself answer: Till the end of days;
 To feel your easeful sigh of happiness
When on your trembling lips I murmur: Yes;
 It is so sweet. We know it is not true.
What matters it? The night must shed her dew.
 We know it is not true, but it is sweet—
The poem with this music is complete.

Flower of Love

The perfume of your body dulls my sense.
I want nor wine nor weed; your breath alone
Suffices. In this moment rare and tense
I worship at your breast. The flower is blown,
The saffron petals tempt my amorous mouth,
The yellow heart is radiant now with dew
Soft-scented, redolent of my loved South;
O flower of love! I give myself to you.
Uncovered on your couch of figured green,
Here let us linger indivisible.
The portals of your sanctuary unseen
Receive my offering, yielding unto me.
Oh, with our love the night is warm and deep!
The air is sweet, my flower, and sweet the flute
Whose music lulls our burning brain to sleep,
While we lie loving, passionate and mute.

The Snow Fairy

I

Throughout the afternoon I watched them there,
Snow-fairies falling, falling from the sky,
Whirling fantastic in the misty air,
Contending fierce for space supremacy.
And they flew down a mightier force at night,
As though in heaven there was revolt and riot,
And they, frail things had taken panic flight
Down to the calm earth seeking peace and quiet.
I went to bed and rose at early dawn
To see them huddled together in a heap,
Each merged into the other upon the lawn,
Worn out by the sharp struggle, fast asleep.
The sun shone brightly on them half the day,
By night they stealthily had stol'n away.

II

And suddenly my thoughts then turned to you
Who came to me upon a winter's night,
When snow-sprites round my attic window flew,
Your hair disheveled, eyes aglow with light.
My heart was like the weather when you came,
The wanton winds were blowing loud and long;
But you, with joy and passion all aflame,
You danced and sang a lilting summer song.
I made room for you in my little bed,
Took covers from the closet fresh and warm,
A downful pillow for your scented head,
And lay down with you resting in my arm.
You went with Dawn. You left me ere the day,
The lonely actor of a dreamy play.

La Paloma in London

About Soho we went before the light;
We went, unresting six, craving new fun,
New scenes, new raptures for the fevered night
Of rollicking laughter, drink and song, was done.
The vault was void, but for the dawn's great star
That shed upon our path its silver flame,
When La Paloma on a low guitar
Abruptly from a darkened casement came—
Harlem! All else shut out, I saw the hall,
And you in your red shoulder sash come dancing
With Val against me languid by the wall,
Your burning coffee-colored eyes keen glancing
Aslant at mine, proud in your golden glory!
I loved you, Cuban girl, fond sweet Diory.

A Memory of June

When June comes dancing o'er the death of May,
With scarlet roses tinting her green breast,
And mating thrushes ushering in her day,
And Earth on tiptoe for her golden guest,
 I always see the evening when we met—
The first of June baptized in tender rain—
And walked home through the wide streets, gleaming wet,
Arms locked, our warm flesh pulsing with love's pain.
 I always see the cheerful little room,
And in the corner, fresh and white, the bed,
Sweet scented with a delicate perfume,
Wherein for one night only we were wed;
 Where in the starlit stillness we lay mute,
And heard the whispering showers all night long,
And your brown burning body was a lute
Whereon my passion played his fevered song.
 When June comes dancing o'er the death of May,
With scarlet roses staining her fair feet,
My soul takes leave of me to sing all day
A love so fugitive and so complete.

Flirtation

Upon thy purple mat thy body bare
Is fine and limber like a tender tree.
The motion of thy supple form is rare,
Like a lithe panther lolling languidly,
Toying and turning slowly in her lair.
Oh, I would never ask for more of thee,
Thou art so clean in passion and so fair.
Enough! if thou wilt ask no more of me!

Tormented

I will not reason, wrestle here with you,
Though you pursue and worry me about;
As well put forth my swarthy arm to stop
The wild wind howling, darkly mad without.

The night is yours for revels; day will light.
I will not fight you, bold and tigerish,
For I am weak, while you are gaining strength;
Peace! cease tormenting me to have your wish.

But when you're filled and sated with the flesh,
I shall go swiftly to the silver stream,
To cleanse my body for the spirit's sake,
And sun my limbs, and close my eyes to dream.

Polarity

Nay, why reproach each other, be unkind,
For there's no plane on which we two may meet?
Let's both forgive, forget, for both were blind,
And life is of a day, and time is fleet.

And I am fire, swift to flame and burn,
Melting with elements high overhead,
While you are water in an earthly urn,
All pure, but heavy, and of hue like lead.

One Year After

I

Not once in all our days of poignant love,
Did I a single instant give to thee
My undivided being wholly free.
Not all thy potent passion could remove
The barrier that loomed between to prove
The full supreme surrendering of me.
Oh, I was beaten, helpless utterly
Against the shadow-fact with which I strove.
For when a cruel power forced me to face
The truth which poisoned our illicit wine,
That even I was faithless to my race
Bleeding beneath the iron hand of thine,
Our union seemed a monstrous thing and base!
I was an outcast from thy world and mine.

II

Adventure-seasoned and storm-buffed,
I shun all signs of anchorage, because
The zest of life exceeds the bound of laws.
New gales of tropic fury round my head
Break lashing me through hours of soulful dread;
But when the terror thins and, spent, withdraws,
Leaving me wondering awhile, I pause—
But soon again the risky ways I tread!
No rigid road for me, no peace, no rest,
While molten elements run through my blood;
And beauty-burning bodies manifest
Their warm, heart-melting motions to be wooed;
And passion boldly rising in my breast,
Like rivers of the Spring, lets loose its flood.

French Leave

No servile little fear shall daunt my will
This morning. I have courage steeled to say
I will be lazy, conqueringly still,
I will not lose the hours in toil this day.
The roaring world without, careless of souls,
Shall leave me to my placid dream of rest,
My four walls shield me from its shouting ghoul,
And all its hates have fled my quiet breast.
And I will loll here resting, wide awake,
Dead to the world of work, the world of love,
I laze contented just for dreaming's sake
With not the slightest urge to think or move.
How tired unto death, how tired I was!
Now for a day I put my burdens by,
And like a child amidst the meadow grass
Under the southern sun, I languid lie
And feel the bed about me kindly deep,
My strength ooze gently from my hollow bones,
My worried brain drift aimlessly to sleep,
Like softening to a song of tuneful tones.

Jasmines

Your scent is in the room.
Swiftly it overwhelms and conquers me!
Jasmines, night jasmines, perfect of perfume,
Heavy with dew before the dawn of day!
Your face was in the mirror, I could see
You smile and vanish suddenly away,
Leaving behind the vestige of a tear.
Sad suffering face, from parting grown so dear!
Night jasmines cannot bloom in this cold place;
Without the street is wet and weird with snow;
The cold nude trees are tossing to and fro;
Too stormy is the night for your fond face;
For your low voice too loud the wind's mad roar.
But oh, your scent is here—jasmines that grow
Luxuriant, clustered round your cottage door!

Commemoration

When first your glory shone upon my face
My body kindled to a mighty flame,
And burnt you yielding in my hot embrace
Until you swooned to love, breathing my name.

And wonder came and filled our night of sleep,
Like a new comet crimsoning the sky;
And stillness like the stillness of the deep
Suspended lay as an unuttered sigh.

I never again shall feel your warm hearth flushed,
Panting with passion, naked unto mine,
Until the throbbing world around is hushed
To quiet worship at our scented shrine.

Nor will your glory seek my swarthy face,
To kindle and to change my jaded frame
Into a miracle of godlike grace,
Transfigured, bathed in your immortal flame.

Memorial

Your body was a sacred cell always,
A jewel that grew dull in garish light,
An opal which beneath my wondering gaze
Gleamed rarely, softly throbbing in the night.

I touched your flesh with reverential hands,
you were sweet and timid like a flower
That blossoms out of barren tropic sands,
Shedding its perfume in one golden hour.

You yielded to my touch with gentle grace,
And though my passion was a mighty wave
That buried you beneath its strong embrace,
You were yet happy in the moment's grave.

Still more than passion consummate to me,
More than the nuptials immemorial sung,
Was the warm thrill that melted me to see
Your clean brown body, beautiful and young;

The joy in your maturity at length,
The peace that filled my soul like cooling wine,
When you responded to my tender strength,
And pressed your heart exulting into mine.

How shall I with such memories of you
In coarser forms of love fruition find?
No, I would rather like a ghost pursue
The fairy phantoms of my lonely mind.

Thirst

My spirit wails for water, water now!
My tongue is aching dry, my throat is hot
For water, fresh rain shaken from a bough,
Or dawn dews heavy in some leafy spot.
My hungry body's burning for a swim
In sunlit water where the air is cool,
As in Trout Valley where upon a limb
The golden finch sings sweetly to the pool.
Oh water, water, when the night is done,
When day steals gray-white through the window-pane,
Clear silver water when I wake, alone,
All impotent of parts, of fevered brain;
Pure water from a forest fountain first,
To wash me, cleanse me, and to quench my thirst!

Futility

Oh, I have tried to laugh the pain away,
Let new flames brush my love-springs like a feather.
But the old fever seizes me to-day,
As sickness grips a soul in wretched weather.
I have given up myself to every urge,
With not a care of precious powers spent,
Have bared my body to the strangest scourge,
To soothe and deaden my heart's unhealing rent.
But you have torn a nerve out of my frame,
A gut that no physician can replace,
And reft my life of happiness and aim.
Oh what new purpose shall I now embrace?
What substance hold, what lovely form pursue,
When my thought burns through everything to you?

Through Agony

I

All night, through the eternity of night,
Pain was my portion though I could not feel.
Deep in my humbled heart you ground your heel,
Till I was reft of even my inner light,
Till reason from my mind had taken flight,
And all my world went whirling in a reel.
And all my swarthy strength turned cold like steel,
A passive mass beneath your puny might.
Last night I gave you triumph over me,
So I should be myself as once before,
I marveled at your shallow mystery,
And haunted hungrily your temple door.
I gave you sum and substance to be free,
Oh, you shall never triumph any more!

II

I do not fear to face the fact and say,
How darkly-dull my living hours have grown,
My wounded heart sinks heavier than stone,
Because I loved you longer than a day!
I do not shame to turn myself away
From beckoning flowers beautifully blown,
To mourn your vivid memory alone
In mountain fastnesses austere and gray.
The mists will shroud me on the utter height,
The salty, brimming waters of my breast
Will mingle with the fresh dews of the night
To bathe my spirit hankering to rest.
But after sleep I'll wake with greater might,
Once more to venture on the eternal quest.

Glossary

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