

PAUL
LAURENCE
DUNBAR



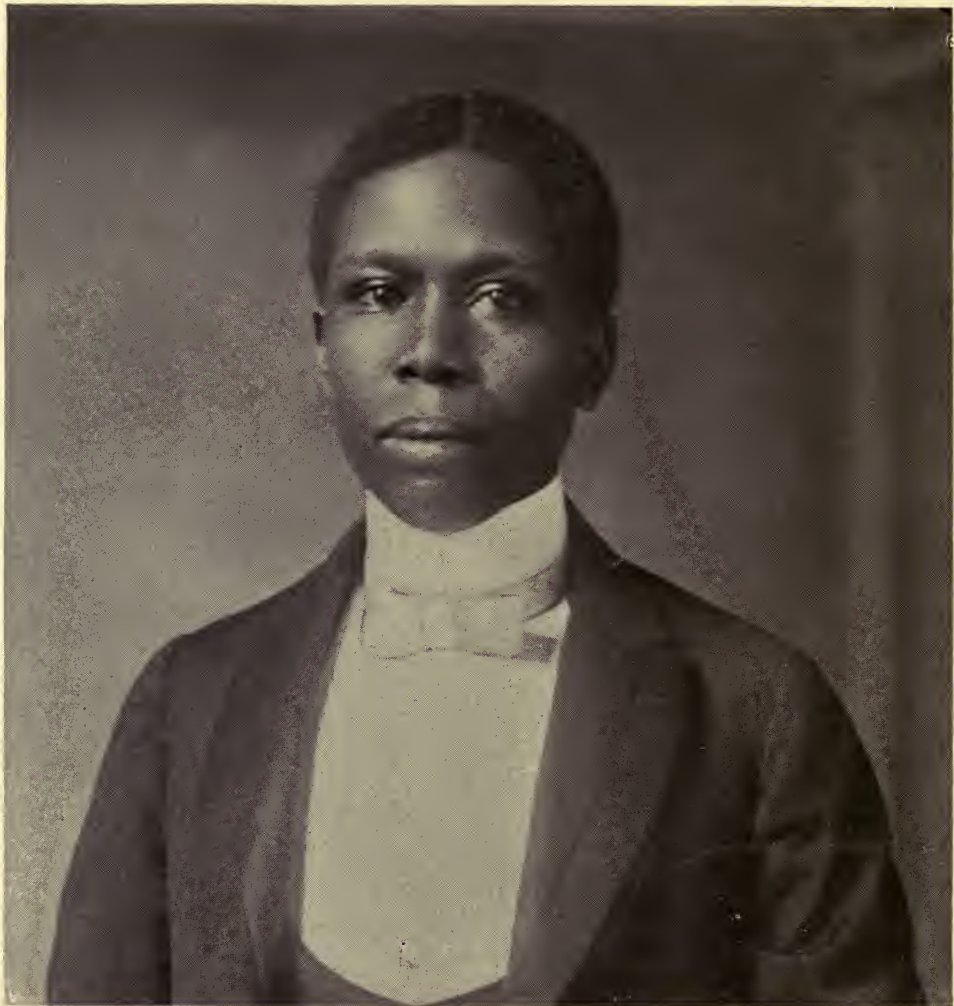
By PAUL M. PEARSON

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PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

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A Tribute

(Reprinted from TALENT, March, 1906.)

“ Because I had loved so deeply,
Because I had loved so long,
God in His great compassion
Gave me a gift of song.

“ Because I have loved so vainly,
And sung with such faltering breath,
The Master in infinite mercy,
Offers the boon of Death.”



URING the long years of suffering, when he stood facing the inevitable, Paul Laurence Dunbar rarely gave expression to any but hopeful, joyous sentiments. The philosophy of his last year seems to have been the lines quoted above. Eager to say what was in his heart before he was called from his labors, modestly denying that he had succeeded, struggling on to try just once more, he kept busily at work, singing his love songs to the world.

That he loved deeply no student of his poetry can doubt. He loved nature in all her common manifestations; he loved people

in all their moods. Life to him was joy. He seemed to look upon the world about him with the delight of one who has never seen it before, as one who took it for what it appeared to be, a joyous manifestation of eternal love.

His poetry is the expression of an awakened soul, that coming into a new possession finds it a sweet dream come true, a rare delight, a lasting pleasure. Thus he lived and sang. He was never physically strong, and during the last six or seven years he knew that death must come soon, but to the very last he sung his songs of good cheer. For him every night had a coming dawn, a light shone on every dangerous coast. He wrote about common things, common people, and the common God. Like a lark unconscious of the songs of others, he sang for the pure joy of singing, caring not that his themes had been written about before; these songs were his, were the expression of his own nature, and it was a delight to give them utterance.

Like Goldsmith, he had "the knack of hoping," and he inspired this virtue in others. This characteristic is well illustrated in "Life," one of his best poems:

"A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh but the moans come double.
And that is life!

“ A crust and a corner by love made precious,
With the smiles to warm and the tears to refresh us,
And joys are sweeter when sorrows come after,
And a moan is the best of foils for laughter ;
And that is life ! ”

PURE NEGRO BLOOD

From any point of view Dunbar's life was a success. If we measure him even by the financial standard, he has done well. Born in poverty, he worked his way through the high school, supporting himself and his widowed mother, whom he has left a little home and enough money to keep her the rest of her life. Born of slave parents, in whose veins there was no white blood, he has become one of the best-known men of his race, and one of the most widely-known literary men of our time. His father escaped from Kentucky to Canada by means of the underground railroad through Ohio, and afterward enlisted in the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, and served through the war. His mother was a house servant in one of the best families of Lexington, Ky. “After freedom ” she went to Dayton, where she married Joshua Dunbar. The one child of their marriage was Paul Laurence, who was born in Dayton, June 27th, 1872. His father taught himself to read, and became fond of history. To his mother the boy was indebted for much of his inspiration. She is passionately fond of poetry, and appreciated all that Paul wrote. Her

master was a cultured, educated man, and, remembering him, Matilda Dunbar became ambitious for her son, helping and encouraging him in every way possible. To her he is also indebted for much of his poetic material. As Dunbar once told me, it was the habit of the family to sit about the open fire at night while the story went round. The children, Paul and his mother's children by her first husband, sat silent and eager, while their elders told of slavery days before the war and the varied experiences during that struggle. It sometimes happened in later years that when Dunbar read his verses to his mother before sending them to the publishers, she would say, "Why, Paul, when did I tell you about that?"

"Did you tell me about it?"

"I must have, because it is an incident from my own life."

I recall one incident which he told me was from his mother's life; in "The Party" Scott Thomas playing one of the games:

"Kep' on blund'rin' roun' an' foolin' 'twell he giv' one
great big jump,
Broke de line an' lit head fo'most in de fiahplace right
plump."

HIS MOTHER

Several of his poems are written about his mother. "When Malindy Sings," certainly one of the best that he has done, is a tribute to her. During the last years of his life his mother was



MATILDA DUNBAR
Mother of the Poet



THE LATE HOME OF
PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

with him constantly, nursing him during the many weary months he could not leave the house. He relied on her for those ministering touches he liked best. Though a trained nurse was in attendance much of the time, there were many things he would do for nobody but his mother. She could quiet him when others failed. "He is just a baby again," she explained to me one day when she had been called in to give him medicine, though a nurse was in the room.

Matilda Dunbar is a typical negro "mammy," used to hard work, which she does uncomplainingly. She is loyal, faithful to every duty, kind, gentle, devout. To her this child with a gift of song was more than human. She loved him with a strong mother love; she was yet in awe of him as a spirit of heaven, which she hardly understood. How proud she was of him, yet she tried to conceal her pride. The home life of mother and son was beautiful, and to see it was a benediction. It was no easy matter to get her to talk about her boy, but when she did she talked most interestingly. She told me that he was a delicate child, unable to play with other children, and so was much about the house with her. He was always writing, but as she thought it was something in connection with his lessons, she paid no attention to it. He would say, "Ma, don't destroy these papers." As they accumulated she put them away. One day, when he was nearly twenty-one, he told her, "Ma, I am going to publish a book." She thought to herself, What have you to publish a book from? But she said nothing. He said to her again, some time later, "Ma, I am going to publish

a book." This time she asked him what he was to publish a book from. Then he asked her for the papers, which she produced from a box under the safe in the kitchen; from these he selected a roll, and started down town. What happened then Mr. Dunbar has related to me. He went to the United Brethren Publishing House of Dayton, where he was acquainted with one of the men in charge, and asked him to print the book on condition that Dunbar pay for it out of his savings (he was earning \$16 a month as an elevator boy) and from the sale of the book. Not a likely business proposition, certainly. When the proposition was rejected the boy turned away with a heavy heart, his disappointment doubtless showing in his face; but, as he was leaving the building, a friend called him in to ask what was the matter. When the situation was explained the friend undertook the publication of the book. "Oak and Ivy" appeared before Christmas (1892), and so many copies were sold to Dunbar's friends in the office building that the edition was paid for and the family had \$26 for their Christmas, more money than they had had at one time before.

THE FIRST BOOK

Copies of this book are rare. After several years I found a copy last summer in Dayton. Copies have sold recently for four dollars. His second book of verse, "Majors and Minors," published in 1895, sold readily. In 1900 Dunbar told me that he had no copy of this book, and that he could not find a copy at any of

the stores. I began to hunt for him, and finally, through Frank Morris, of Chicago, found a copy in Washington, which I had the pleasure of presenting on his birthday that year. It was an incident in connection with this second book of privately-printed verse that brought him national recognition. Dunbar was visiting Dr. H. A. Tobey, of Toledo, one of the best friends he had, when James A. Herne was playing "Shore Acres" in that city. Knowing Mr. Herne's literary judgment, Dr. Tobey urged Dunbar to take him a copy of "Majors and Minors." This he finally consented to do, but, as he confessed to me in relating the incident, he was relieved to find that Mr. Herne was not at his hotel, for he dreaded talking about himself. Dunbar left the book. Though he hardly thought he would hear anything from it, a few weeks later he had a cordial letter from Mr. Herne saying that he had taken the liberty of sending the book to his friend, William Dean Howells. Not long after, Dunbar received a card from Dr. Tobey, saying, "Dunbar's poems reviewed in this week's 'Harper's.'" He could hardly wait to get a copy of the paper. "And there, sure enough," he said in concluding the incident, "were my little poems reviewed favorably by the dean of American critics."

As a result of this review, letters came pouring into Dayton. He and his mother being away for a few days, the postman slipped letters through the slats of the window shutters. When these were opened down fluttered some two hundred letters, thirty-six of which contained money for the book. Three New York publishers then solicited an interview, and a fourth consented to bring

out a volume of his poems. So at twenty-four he had won recognition from the publishers. As Dodd, Mead & Company offered better returns, he made an arrangement with them to become his publishers, and all of his books are from their press.

He had published twenty-one volumes between 1892 and his death, February 8th, 1906. His books have always sold well; better, indeed, than any books of recent verse except those of Riley and of Field. Next to these two, his poems are oftener recited than the works of any other writer. His poems lend themselves especially to recitation because he had an ear for the spoken word. He was himself an excellent reader of his own verses, and he liked to present them from the platform. He had many misgivings concerning his ability in this direction, however, and though I had frequently told him how well he read his poems, he asked when last I saw him, "Do you think I really read them well?"

ABOUT A MISLEADING REPORT

It has been frequently reported in the public prints that Dunbar was a drunkard. Concerning that I want to tell how the report started. Though it was founded on truth, it was not the whole truth. With a friend, I had engaged Dunbar to give an evening of readings at Evanston, Ill. We had thoroughly advertised the event, and a large audience from the university and the city were present to hear him. At eight o'clock a messenger brought me word that he had broken a dinner engagement at the

woman's college, and that no word had been received from him. After an anxious delay he arrived a half hour late, and with him were a nurse, a physician, and his half brother, Mr. Murphey. The first number or two he gave could not be heard, but not until he had read one poem a second time did we suspect the true cause of his difficulty in speaking. His condition grew steadily worse, so that most of the people left in disgust. The report was passed about that he was intoxicated. The Chicago papers printed full accounts of the incident, and it was copied throughout the country. The following letter, which has not been published, explains the situation:

“ 321 Spruce St., Washington, D. C.

“ PROFESSOR P. M. PEARSON:—

“ Dear Sir:—Now that I am at home and settled, I feel that an explanation is due you from me. I could not see you as you asked, because I was ashamed to. My brother went, but you were gone.

“ The clipping you sent is too nearly true to be answered. I had been drinking. This had partially intoxicated me. The only injustice lies in the writer's not knowing that there was a cause behind it all, beyond mere inclination. On Friday afternoon I had a severe hemorrhage. This I was fool enough to try to conceal from my family, for, as I had had one the week before, I knew they would not want me to read. Well, I was nervously anxious not to disappoint you, and so I tried to bolster myself up on stimulants.

It was the only way that I could have stood up at all. But I feel now that I had rather have disappointed you wholly than to have disgraced myself and made you ashamed.

“As to the program, I had utterly forgotten that there was a printed one. I am very sorry and ashamed, because I do not think that the cause excuses the act.

“I have cancelled all my engagements and given up reading entirely. They are trying to force me back to Denver, but I am ill and discouraged, and don't care much what happens.

“Don't think that this as an attempt at vindication. It is not. Try to forgive me as far as forgiveness is possible.

“Sincerely yours, PAUL L. DUNBAR.”

“I have not told you that I was under the doctor's care and in bed up until the very day I left here for Chicago. There had been a similar flow, and I came against advice. I now see the result.”

Such an explanation silences criticism. But the report had been widely circulated, and afterward it was often revived, without cause.

In 1898 Dunbar was married to Alice Moore, a teacher and writer of ability. The marriage was unfortunate. His attitude in the matter may be inferred from these lines from “Parted” :

“We wed and parted on her complaint,
And both were a bit of barter,
Tho' I'll confess that I'm no saint,
I'll swear that she's no martyr.”

It is as a writer of dialect that he is widest known, and though he was pleased to have the distinction, he sometimes fretted that people did not give more attention to his conventional poems. In these lines from "The Poet" he confesses to it:

"He sang of life, serenely sweet
With, now and then, a deeper note;
From some high peak, nigh, yet remote,
He voiced the world's absorbing beat.

"He sang of love when earth was young;
And Love, itself, was in his lays.
But ah, the world, it turned to praise
A jingle in a broken tongue."

And again he writes "To a Captious Critic":

"Dear critic, who my lightness so deplores,
Would I might study to be prince of bores.
Right wisely would I rule that dull estate—
But, sir, I may not, till you abdicate."

But such irritation was only momentary. His message was a song, and he made it welcome. His ringing, jingling, merry lines will long linger in our minds, for they have sung themselves there, where they repeat themselves over and over.

His death was a tragedy. People asked why he stayed at Dayton when he might have gone to a climate more suited to one

suffering from tuberculosis. Why did he not go to a climate which would prolong his life? He tried to, but a black man traveling is subjected to such restrictions as Dunbar would not willingly undergo. One day last July a telegram was handed him, and, after reading it, he turned to me, saying: "Now you know why I don't go away." A friend had been trying to arrange a place for Dunbar at Harper's Ferry, but no hotel would take him as a guest, and the telegram was to say that no boarding house in a respectable part of town could be secured. Sick as he was, it became necessary to have conveniences such as are to be had only in the better boarding houses or hotels. In traveling he and his mother were frequently treated with such indignities as to make a trip from home to be dreaded.

His life was all too short, but he crowded into it all that was possible. He lived nobly and well.

A NEGRO

[Reprinted from TALENT, February, 1904.]



WHAT may we not expect of the negro race? We have known the negro oratory,—sympathetic, imaginative and eloquent,—and we have heard their songs, touchingly expressive of their joys and sorrows. But we are surprised that Booker T. Washington has shown himself a great educator and organizer. We are surprised, too, when we learn that a young American negro was recently honored by the French Academy, and we are surprised when we are told that S. Coleridge Taylor, whose dramatic cantata, “Hiawatha,” so pleased the musical world, is a black man. It is small wonder that the first book of a negro poet should have a large sale, but it is something more than vulgar curiosity or surprise that a kinky-haired, thick-lipped elevator boy could write verses which have brought his subsequent books into great demand.

Born of slave parents, securing a high school education under the most discouraging circumstances, composing many of his verses while doing duty as an elevator boy, his early recognition as a poet, his cordial reception in London—all this is interesting and gives him consideration as a man, but it in no way determines his place as a writer. A few people might read what he writes

because of a sympathetic interest, but we will all agree that he could not gain the constituency he has unless he exhibited rare gifts.

The distinction which Dunbar enjoys is that he has given us the negro life just as it is. As William Dean Howells says: "He describes the range between appetite and emotion, with certain lifts far beyond and above it, which is the range of the race." Though Dunbar shows this limitation of the race in a humorous way, yet it is with a tenderness which shows him filial and with a refined and delicate art which demonstrates his ability. He knows his people, as no white man can. Every picture he draws, every portrait he paints has the touch of the artist who brings to his work a perfect conception of it, and a great living heart with which to do it justice. And since he understands his people and represents them fairly, he is an inspiration to the race. An aged negro exclaimed, after reading Dunbar's "Lyrics of Lowly Life": "Thank God, he is black!" And a young negro woman, after hearing some of Dunbar's poems read at Chautauqua, N. Y., said: "I'll never be sorry again that I am colored." We may say of him what he has said of Frederick Douglass:

"Thou'st taught thy race how high her hopes may soar,
And bade them seek the heights, nor faint, nor fall."

Moreover, Dunbar helps the white race to a better knowledge of the negro. He never discusses the race problem, yet you close his books to think of it. He never tells you that he is black, nor

that his race has been wronged, yet you never forget it. He simply shows the picture, and says never a word. He seldom weeps, but his smile has more than mirth. Through all his writing you feel his sympathetic touch so much that with him you long for better things for his people.

THE LITERARY QUALITY

The great charm of Dunbar's poetry is its freshness and spontaneity. You do not count the feet nor pause to consider the scheme of rhyme; you simply drift with the song, measuring it by your own laughter and love. He seems not to care that his themes have been used before, for these songs are his, and he loves them and delights to give them utterance. The spirit of the poet seems to look out upon the world for the first time, and in ecstasy tells of the beauty and love it sees. What a fitting attitude for the first great singer of the black race in America!

This delight in his work is well expressed in "The Poet and His Song," Dunbar's favorite poem, written, as he says, "in the dark days," before recognition came to him.

"A song is but a little thing,
And yet what joy it is to sing; . . .
There are no ears to hear my lays,
No lips to lift a word of praise;
But still, with faith unfaltering,
I live and laugh, and love, and sing,
Since life is sweet, and love is long,
I sing my song and all is well."

Dunbar exalts the common things of life and brings happiness to the careworn. In all his verses there is a simple faith and homely love, a pervading sunshine, hope and happiness. He says:

“ Though I moan in the dark,
I wake in the morning and sing with the lark.”

For him every sorrow has its compensating joy, every night a coming dawn. The torturing doubt and the hopeless love have no place with him.

In his poetry there is also much homely philosophy. The following quotations are taken almost at random from a few pages of his last book of poems. These lines are from “ Limitations ” :

“ Ef you’s got de powah fo’ to blow a little whistle,
Keep ermong de people wid de whistles.
.
.
.
Tain’t no use a-goin’ now, ez sho’s you bo’n,
A-squeakin’ of yo’ whistle ’g’inst a great big ho’n.”

This and much more quite as sensible is found in “ Advice ” :

“ Des don pet yo’ worries,
Lay ’em on de she’f.
Ef de chillun pestahs,
An’ de baby’s bad,
Ef yo’ wife gits narvous,
An’ you’re gettin’ mad,

Des you grab yo' boot-strops,
Hol' yo' body down,
Stop a-tinkin' cuss-w'rds,
Chase away de frown,
Knock de haid o' worry,
Twell dey ain' none lef'."

The last stanza of "When a Feller's Itchin' to be Spanked" reads thus:

"Ol' folks know most ever'thing 'bout the world, I guess,
Gramma does, we wish she knowed thes a little less,
But I allus kind o' think it 'ud be as well
Ef they wouldn't allus have to up and tell;
We kids wish 'at they'd thes wait,
It's a-coming—soon or late,
W'en a feller's itchin' to be spanked."

There is a deep philosophy in the lines called "Compensation," written not long before he died. With unfinished work all about him, with his highest ambitions unrealized, knowing that the end must come soon he wrote the lines quoted on the first page of this booklet.

There is perhaps no more apparent characteristic in Dunbar's poetry than his humorous, but tender, treatment of the negro's faults. You will find examples in "Temptation," "How Lucy Backslid," "The Party," and many others. Here is an extract

from "Accountability," the conclusion of a soliloquy on the old question of responsibility:

"Nuthin's done er evah happens, 'thout hits somefin dat's intended;
Don't keer whut you does, you has to, an' hit sholy beats de dickens,—
Viney, go put on de kittle, I got one o' mastah's chickens."

The complex character of the negro is faithfully drawn in Dunbar's verses,—the love of fun, the love of religious sensation, the love of chicken and the delicate flesh of the 'possum. Here, too, you will find artistic negro dialect, a speech replete with imaginative flights, obsolete usage of words, old saws and sayings. And then there is a melody which is characteristic of the race. Read the following aloud and note its rhythmic swing:

"When de fiddle gits to singin' out a ol' Vaginy reel,
An' you 'mence to feel a ticklin' in yo' toe an' in yo' heel;
Ef you t'ink you got 'uligion an' you wants to keep it, too,
You jest' bettah tek a hint an' git yo'self clean out o' view,
Case de time is mighty temptin' when de chune is in de swing,
Fu' a darky, saint or sinner man to cut de pigeon-wing;
An' you couldn't he'p from dancin' ef yo' feet was boun' wif twine,
When Angelina Johnson comes a-swingin' down de line."

All these excellencies combine to make Dunbar's verses as wholesome and charming as any contemporary poetry.

WHEN MALINDY SINGS*

G'way an' quit dat noise, Miss Lucy—
Put dat music book away ;
What's de use to keep on tryin' ?
Ef you practice twell you're gray,
You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin'
Lak de ones dat rants and rings
F'om de kitchen to de big woods
When Malindy sings.

You ain't got de nachel o'gans
Fu' to make de soun' come right,
You ain't got de tu'ns an' twistin's
Fu' to make it sweet an' light.
Tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,
An' I'm tellin' you fu' true,
When hit comes to raal right singin',
'Tain't no easy thing to do.

Easy 'nough fu' folks to hollah,
Lookin' at de lines an' dots,
When dey ain't no one kin sence it,
An' de chune comes in, in spots ;
But fu' real melojous music,
Dat jes' strikes yo' hea't and clings,
Jes' you stan' an' listen wif me
When Malindy sings.

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Ain't you nevah hyeahd Malindy?
Blessed soul, tek up de cross!
Look hyeah, ain't you jokin', honey?
Well, you don't know whut you los'.
Y' ought to hyeah dat gal a-wa'blin',
Robins, la'ks, an' all dem things,
Heish dey moufs an' hides dey faces.
When Malindy sings.

Fiddlin' man jes' stop his fiddlin',
Lay his fiddle on de she'f;
Mockin'-bird quit tryin' to whistle,
'Cause he jes' so shamed hisse'f.
Folks a-playin' on de banjo
Draps dey fingahs on de strings—
Bless yo' soul—fu'gits to move 'em,
When Malindy sings.

She jes' spreads huh mouf and hollahs,
“Come to Jesus,” twell you hyeah
Sinnahs' tremblin' steps and voices,
Timid-lak a-drawin' neah;
Den she tu'ns to “Rock of Ages,”
Simply to de cross she clings,
An' you fin' yo' teahs a-drappin'
When Malindy sings.

Who dat says dat humble praises
Wif de Master nevah counts?
Heish yo' mouf, I hyeah dat music,
Ez hit rises up an' mounts—
Floatin' by de hills an' valleys,
Way above dis buryin' sod,
Ez hit makes its way in glory
To de very gates of God!

Oh, hit's sweetah dan de music
Of an edicated band;
An' hit's dearah dan de battle's
Song o' triumph in de lan'.
It seems holier dan evenin'
When de solemn chu'ch bell rings,
Ez I sit an' ca'mly listen
While Malindy sings.

Towsah, stop dat ba'kin', hyeah me!
Mandy, mek dat chile keep still;
Don't you hyeah de echoes callin'
F'om de valley to de hill?
Let me listen, I can hyeah it,
Th'oo de bresh of angel's wings,
Sof' an' sweet, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,"
Ez Malindy sings.

A CORN-SONG *

On the wide veranda white,
In the purple failing light,
Sits the master while the sun is slowly burning ;
And his dreamy thoughts are drowned
In the softly flowing sound
Of the corn-songs of the field-hands slow returning.

Oh, we hoe de co'n
Since de ehly mo'n ;
Now de sinkin' sun
Says de day is done.

O'er the fields with heavy tread,
Light of heart and high of head,
Though the halting steps be labored, slow, and weary ;
Still the spirits brave and strong
Find a comforter in song,
And their corn-song rises ever loud and cheery.

Oh, we hoe de co'n
Since de ehly mo'n ;
Now de sinkin' sun
Says de day is done.

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To the master in his seat,
Comes the burden, full and sweet,
Of the mellow minor music growing clearer,
As the toilers raise the hymn,
Thro' the silence dusk and dim,
To the cabin's restful shelter drawing nearer.

Oh, we hoe de co'n
Since de ehly mo'n ;
Now de sinkin' sun
Says de day is done.

And a tear is in the eye
Of the master sitting by,
As he listens to the echoes low-replying
To the music's fading calls
As it faints away and falls
Into silence, deep within the cabin dying.

Oh, we hoe de co'n
From de ehly mo'n ;
Now de sinkin' sun
Says de day is done.

ANGELINA *

“ When de fiddle gits to singin’ out a ol’ Vahginy reel,
An’ you ’mence to feel a ticklin’ in yo’ toe an’ in yo’ heel ;
Ef you t’ink you got ’uligion an’ you wants to keep it, too,
You jes’ bettah tek a hint an’ git yo’self clean out o’ view,
Case de time is mighty temptin’ when de chune is in de swing,
Fu’ a darky, saint or sinner man to cut de pigeon-wing ;
An’ you couldn’t he’p from dancin’ ef yo’ feet was boun’ wif twine,
When Angelina Johnson comes a-swingin’ down de line.

“ Don’t you know Miss Angelina? She’s de da’lin’ of de place.
W’y, dey ain’t no high-toned lady wif sich mannahs an’ sich grace.
She kin move across de cabin, wif its planks all rough an’ wo’ ;
Jes’ de same’s ef she was dancin’ on ol’ mistus’ ball-room flo’.
Fact is, you do’ see no cabin—evaht’ing you see look grand,
An’ dat one ol’ squeaky fiddle soun’ to you jes’ lak a ban’ ;
Cotton britches look lak broadcloy, an’ a linsey dress look fine,
When Angelina Johnson comes a-swingin’ down de line.

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“ Some folks say dat dancin’s sinful, an’ de blessed Lawd, dey say,
Gwine to purnish us fu’ steppin’ w’en we hyeah de music play.
But I tell you I don’t b’lieve it, fu’ de Lawd is wise and good,
An’ He made de banjo’s metal, an’ He made de fiddle’s wood,
An’ He made de music in dem, so I don’ quite t’ink he’ll keer
Ef our feet keeps time a little to de melodies we hyeah.
W’y, dey’s somep’n’ downright holy in de way our faces shine,
When Angelina Johnson comes a-swingin’ down de line.

“ Angelina steps so gentle, Angelina bows so low,
An’ she lif’ huh sku’t so dainty dat huh shoetop skacely show :
An’ dem teef o’ huh’n a-shinin’, ez she tek you by de han’—
Go ’way, people, d’ain’t anothah sich a lady in de lan’!
When she’s movin’ thoo de figgers or a-dancin’ by huse’f,
Folks jes’ stan’ stock-still a-sta’in’, an’ dey mos’ nigh hol’s dey bref ;
An’ de youn’ mens, dey’s a-sayin’, ‘ I’s gwine mek dat damsel mine,’
When Angelina Johnson comes a-swingin’ down de line.”

WHEN DE CO'N PONE'S HOT *

Dey is times in life when Nature
Seems to slip a cog an' go,
Jes' a-rattlin' down creation,
Lak an ocean's overflow;
When de worl' jes' stahts a-spinnin'
Lak a picaninny's top.
An' yo' cup o' joy is brimmin'
'Twell it seems about to slop,
An' you feel jes' lak a racah,
Dat is trainin' fu' to trot—
When yo' mammy says de blessin'
An' de co'n pone's hot.

When you set down at de table,
Kin' o' weary lak an' sad,
An' you'se jes' a little tiahed
An' purhaps a little mad;
How yo' gloom tu'ns into gladness,
How yo' joy drives out de doubt
When de oven do' is opened,
An' de smell comes po'in' out;
Why, de 'lectric light o' Heaven
Seems to settle on de spot,
When yo' mammy says de blessin'
An' de co'n pone's hot.

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When de cabbage pot is steamin'
 An' de bacon good an' fat,
When de chittlins is a-sputter'n'
 So's to show you whah dey's at;
Tek away yo' sody biscuit,
 Tek away yo' cake an' pie,
Fu' de glory time is comin',
 An' it's 'proachin' mighty nigh,
An' you want to jump an' hollah,
 Dough you know you'd bettah not,
When yo' mammy says de blessin',
 An' de co'n pone's hot.

I have hyeahd o' lots o' sermons,
 An' I've hyeahd o' lots o' prayers,
An' I've listened to some singin'
 Dat has tuck me up de stairs
Of de Glory-Lan' an' set me
 Jes' below de Mahstah's th'one,
An' have lef' my hea't a-singin'
 In a happy aftah tone;
But dem wu'ds so sweetly murmured
 Seem to tech de softes' spot,
When my mammy says de blessin',
 An' de co'n pone's hot.

THE POET AND HIS SONG *

A song is but a little thing,
And yet what joy it is to sing!
In hours of toil it gives me zest,
And when at eve I long for rest;
When cows come home along the bars,
 And in the fold I hear the bell,
As Night, the shepherd, herds his stars,
 I sing my song, and all is well.

There are no ears to hear my lays,
No lips to lift a word of praise;
But still, with faith unflinching,
I live and laugh and love and sing.
What matters yon unheeding throng?
 They cannot feel my spirit's spell,
Since life is sweet and love is long,
 I sing my song, and all is well.

My days are never days of ease;
I till my ground and prune my trees.
When ripened gold is all the plain,
I put my sickle to the grain.
I labor hard, and toil and sweat,
 While others dream within the dell;
But even while my brow is wet,
 I sing my song, and all is well.

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Sometimes the sun, unkindly hot,
My garden makes a desert spot;
Sometimes a blight upon the tree
Takes all my fruit away from me;
And then with throes of bitter pain
 Rebellious passions rise and swell;
But—life is more than fruit or grain,
 And so I sing, and all is well.

DAWN *

An angel, robed in spotless white,
Bent down and kissed the sleeping Night.
Night woke to blush ; the sprite was gone.
Men saw the blush and called it Dawn.

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