



Complete Poems

CLAUDE MCKAY

Edited and with an Introduction by

WILLIAM J. MAXWELL

Complete Poems

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THE AMERICAN POETRY RECOVERY SERIES

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CLAUDE MCKAY

*Edited and with an Introduction
by William J. Maxwell*

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Ef you don't lub me as fus' time again,
 Tell me de trut' eben though it gives pain;
 For, oh, my darlin', I'd reder it so,
 More than to think I am forcin' on you. 20

Say dat, me Partie, you still hab a dread?
 How can you ever at all be afraid?
 Under dis bush we can never be seen.
 'Sides I'm a big gal now, over sixteen.

Ah! now me feel dat you lub me, my Part! 25
 Press me jes' tight, tighter yet to you' heart!
 Oh! could you know all de lub, all de bliss,
 Dat come to me t'rough your hug, t'rough your kiss!

While I sit here leanin' glad on your breast,
 Watchin' de grassy-bird fly to its nest, 30
 Look how de black shadows softly 'long creep,
 Silently passin' to deir well-earned sleep.

But me I would sit 'douten one t'ought o' bed,
 Long as I hab you to fingle me head:
 Ah! de sweet trimblin' dat runs t'rough me frame 35
 When you jes' kiss me an' whisper me name!

Partie, dear Partie, mumma wi' soon come,
 So then de last hug an' kiss gi' you' Jum:
 I wonder ef, when we're made one, we two
 Will to each udder for eber keep true. 40

1911

De Hailstorm

We sheltered from de rain, one night,
 Beneat' a spreadin' mango-tree;
 De lighnin' cut shone clear an' bright
 Aroun' me an' me Idalee.

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De darkenin' shadows gathered roun',
 De raindrops fallin' from the sky
 Made patt'rin' music in deir soun',
 While howlin' breezes hurtle by. 5

De night grew dark, de rain still poured,
 Our beatin' hearts were filled wid fears,
 An' down below de river roared,
 Her eyes were veiled with mist of tears. 10

De lightnin' cut, de t'under rolled,
 She trembled at de dazzling spark;
 Although so wet, we were not cold,—
 Love warmed us, though de night was dark. 15

Fiercer an' fiercer waxed the storm,
 I kissed de tears 'way from her face,
 I hugged de loved an' trimblin' form,
 She fluttered in me fond embrace. 20

We slid along de sloppy pass,
 De fordin' place was still up high;
 We tried it, but we could not cross,
 I heard her give a smothered cry.

I took her to some school-friends near,
 De mud-mud slidin' neat' our feet;
 She kissed me, smilin', an' said "Dear,
 We in de marnin' hope fe meet." 25

Then to me home near by I ran,
 An' silently crept into bed;
 I slept,—a happy, happy man,
 Wid love-dreams twirlin' in my head. 30

An' in de marnin' wakin' late,
 I wondered at de t'ings I saw;
 De place was in a woeful state,
 My mout' was hushed in silent awe. 35

Banana trees lay on de groun',
 An' water covered off de plain;
 Whole fields o' yam could not be foun',
 It was a fearful hurricane. 40

De mango-tree neat' which we'd stayed
 Was by de lightnin' rent an' torn;
 What might have been had we delayed!
 I shivered in de sultry morn.

De brilliant sun rose to its height, 45
 An' looked do'n on de desolate scene
 Half changing in de golden light
 To different shades of blue an' green.

Since then long years have slipped away,
 But still I look back on de past, 50
 An' t'ink upon de awful day
 We sheltered from de hail-storm's blast.

At times I wish de lightnin's stroke
 Had slain us neat' de mango-tree;
 It would be long-time better luck 55
 For me an' my poor Idalee.

1911

The Daily Gleaner

Year o' eighteen thirty-four,
 When the cullud folks be'n freed,
 In dis Island I appeared,
 Furnishin' a long-felt need.

Jes' a tiny bit o' thing, 5
 Jes' a tiny bit o' sheet,

But I'm in de forefront since,
 An' I neber can be beat:
 Read by white man, read by nigger,
 Every day I'm growin' bigger. 10

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Passive Resistance

There'll be no more riotin',
 Stonin' p'lice an' burnin' car;
 But we mean to gain our rights
 By a strong though bloodless war.

We will show an alien trust 5
 Dat Jamaicans too can fight
 An' dat while our blood is hot,
 They won't crush us wi' deir might.

Hawks may watch us as dey like,
 But we do not care a pin; 10
 We will hold "the boys" in check,
 There'll be no more riotin'.

We are sorry, sorry much
 For the worry given some;
 But it will not last for aye,— 15
 Our vict'ry day shall come.

There are aliens in our midst
 Who would slay us for our right;
 Yet though vipers block the way
 We will rally to the fight. 20

We'll keep up a bloodless war,
 We will pay the farthings-fare
 An' we send the challenge forth,
 "Only touch us if you dare!"

1912

My Eucharis

Come give to me a smile, a kiss,
 My dainty flow'r, my Eucharis:

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George William Gordon to the Oppressed Natives

O, you sons of Afric's soil,
 Dyin' in a foreign land,
 Crushed beneat' de moil and toil,
 Break, break de oppressors' hand!

Wake de lion in your veins, 5
 De gorilla in your blood;
 Show dem dat you ha' some brains,
 Though you may be coarse an' rude.

Wil'erforce has set your free,
 Sharpe an' Buxton worked for you; 10
 Trample on de tyranny
 Still continued by a few!

Keep before you Clarkson's name!
 Ef your groans caan' win de fight,
 Jes' to put do'n dis great shame 15
 Lawful 'tis to use our might.

England paid you' ransom down,
 Meant to save you from the pain;
 Now, freed men o' England's crown,
 Burst de cruel tyrant's chain! 20

Never would an English mind
 Bow beneat' such tyranny;
 Rise, O people of my kind!
 Struggle, struggle to be free!

Shake de burden off your backs, 25
 Show de tyrants dat you're strong;
 Fight for freedom's rights, you blacks,
 Ring de slaves' old battle-song!

Gordon's heart here bleeds for you,
 He will lead to victory; 30

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We will conquer every foe,
Or togeder gladly die.

1912

Snared!

Though, Johnnie, so sweetly you're singin',
Your life is jes' heng on a hinge;
Da next hour your doom will be bringin',
For Butty's a-settin' his springe.

De sun ridin' over de hillside, 5
Shines bright on the big mammee tree;
An' John-t'whit is eatin' de red fruit,
As happy as happy can be.
Though, Johnnie, etc.

Jew water lie do'n in de pasture, 10
Jes' rich beads o' silver an' gol';
An' Butty is 'teppin' long t'rough't,
Yet Johnnie is singin' so bol',
Though, Johnnie, etc.

See Butty a-climbin' de mammee, 15
Wid him springe heng under his arm
An' Johnnie is singin' an' eatin',
An' never a-dreamin' o' harm.
Though, Johnnie, etc.

An' as Butty climbe up an' climbe up, 20
He's watchin' mas' John wid one eye;
Yet Johnnie *will* sing on so gaily,
Not thinkin' dat he wi' soon die.
Though, Johnnie, etc.

SONGS OF JAMAICA (1912)

Quashie to Buccra

You tas'e petater an' you say it sweet,
But you no know how hard we wuk fe it;
You want a basketful fe quattiewut,
'Cause you no know how 'tiff de bush fe cut.

De cowitch under which we hab fe 'toop, 5
De shamar lynin' t'ick like pumpkin soup,
Is killin' somet'ing for a naygur man;
Much less de cutlass workin' in we han'.

De sun hot like when fire ketch a town; 10
Shade-tree look temptin', yet we caan' lie down,
Aldough we wouldn' eben ef we could,
Causen we job must finish soon an' good.

De bush cut done, de bank dem we deh dig,
But dem caan' 'tan' sake o' we naybor pig;
For so we moult' it up he root it do'n, 15
An' we caan' 'peak sake o' we naybor tongue.

Aldough de vine is little, it can bear;
It wantin' not'in' but a little care:
You see petater tear up groun', you run,
You laughin', sir, you must be t'ink a fun. 20

De fiel' pretty? It couldn't less 'an dat,
We wuk de bes', 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, 25
But you no know how hard we wuk fe it;

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

1912

Me Bannabees

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

De blossom draw de bees 5
 Same how de soup draw man;
 Some call it "broke-pot" peas,
 It caan' bruk we bu'n-pan.

Wha' sweet so when it t'ick? 10
 Though some call it goat-tud,
 Me all me finger lick,
 An' yet no chew me cud.

A mumma plant de root 15
 One day jes' out o' fun;
 But now look 'pon de fruit,
 See wha' de "mek fun" done.

I jam de 'tick dem 'traight 20
 Soon as it 'tart fe 'pread,
 An begin count de date
 Fe when de pod fe shed.

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

But so de day did come, 25
 I 'crub de bu'n-pan bright,

So, mumma, I come back
 Again to be your boy, 50
 An' ever as before
 To fill you' heart wid joy.

1912

Whe' fe Do?

Life will continue so for aye,
 Some people sad, some people gay,
 Some mockin' life while udders pray;
 But we mus' fashion-out we way
 An' sabe a mite fe rainy day— 5
 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 déspair drawin' nigh: 10
 Den we might conquer by an' by—
 Dat we might do.

We hab to batter in de sun,
 An' dat isn't a little fun,
 For Lard! 'tis hellish how it bu'n: 15
 Still dere's de big wul' to live do'n—
 So whe' fe do?

We nigger hab a tas' fe do,
 To conquer prejudice dat due
 To obeah, an' t'ings not a few 20
 Dat keep we progress back fe true—
 But whe' fe do?

We've got to wuk wid might an' main,
 To use we han' an' use we brain,
 To toil an' worry, 'cheme an' 'train 25
 Fe t'ings that bring more loss dan gain;

To stan' de sun an' bear de rain,
 An' suck we bellyful o' pain
 Widouten cry nor yet complain—
 For dat caan' do. 30

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; 35
 We happy when de rain deh fall;
 We happy though de baby bawl
 Fe food dat we no hab at all;
 We happy when Deat' angel call
 Fe full we cup of joy wid gall: 40
 Our fait' in this life is not small—
 De best to do.

An' da's de way we ought to live,
 For pain an' such we shouldn' grieve,
 But tek de best dat Nature give— 45
 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: 50
 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? 55

We'll try an' live as any man,
 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'; 60
 It's snap an' bite, an' haul an' pull,

An' we all get we bellyful—
 But whe' fe do?

1912

King Banana

Green mancha mek fe naygur man;
 Wha' sweet so when it roas'?
 Some boil it in a big black pan,
 It sweeter in a toas'.

A buccra fancy when it ripe, 5
 Dem use it ebery day;
 It scarcely give dem belly-gripe,
 Dem eat it diffran' way.

Out yonder see somoke a rise,
 An' see de fire wicket; 10
 Deh go'p to heaben wid de nize
 Of hundred t'ousan' cricket.

De black moul' lie do'n quite prepare'
 Fe feel de hoe an' rake;
 De fire bu'n, and it tek care 15
 Fe mek de wo'm dem wake.

Wha' lef' fe buccra teach again
 Dis time about plantation?
 Dere's not'in' dat can beat de plain
 Good ole-time cultibation. 20

Banana dem fat all de same
 From bunches big an' 'trong;
 Pure nine-han' bunch a car' de fame,—
 Ole met'od all along.

De cuttin' done same ole-time way, 25
 We wrap dem in a trash,

An' pack dem neatly in a dray
 So tight dat dem can't mash.

We re'ch: banana finish sell;
 Den we 'tart back fe home; 30
 Some hab money in t'read-bag well,
 Some spen' all in a rum.

Green mancha mek fe naygur man,
 It mek fe him all way;
 Our islan' is banana lan', 35
 Banana car' de sway.

1912

Pleading

If you lub me, Joanie, only tell me, dear,
 Do not be so cold
 When my lub is bold;
 Do not mek dis burnin' heart o' mine get drear,
 Tek it for your own, 5
 For 'tis yours alone.

I hab eber lub'd you from I saw your face
 On dat Monday morn
 'Mongst de peas an' corn:
 Lightly did you trip along wid yout'ful grace, 10
 Wid de kerchief red
 Wound about your head.

Durin' de revival we b'en use' fe pray,
 Spirit we b'en hab,
 How we use' fe sob! 15
 Yet how soon did all of it from we get 'way!
 Lub kiver de whole,
 We feget we "soul."

Roof strong enough to keep out season rain,
 Under whose eaves loved swallows will be fain 10
 To build deir nests, an' deir young birdlings rear
 Widouten have de least lee t'ought of fear.

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— 15
 Sad, yet contented in my lone retreat.

1912

Fetchin' Water

Watch how dem touris' like fe look
 Out 'pon me little daughter,
 Wheneber fe her tu'n to cook
 Or fetch a pan of water:
 De sight look gay; 5
 Dat is one way,
 But I can tell you say,
 'Nuff rock'tone in de sea, yet none
 But those 'pon lan' know 'bouten sun.

De pickny comin' up de hill, 10
 Fightin' wid heavy gou'd,
 Won't say it sweet him, but he will
 Complain about de load:
 Him feel de weight,
 Dem watch him gait; 15
 It's so some of de great
 High people fabour t'ink it sweet
 Fe batter in de boilin' heat.

Dat boy wid de karásene pan,
 Sulky down to him toe, 20
 His back was rollin' in a san',
 For him pa mek him crow:

Him feel it bad,
 Near mek him mad,
 But teach him he's a lad; 25
 Go disobey him fader wud,
 When he knows dat his back would sud!

But Sarah Jane she wus 'an all,
 For she t'row 'way de pan,
 An' jam her back agains' de wall 30
 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, 35
 Say dat she cook de bittle raw.

Dis water-fetchin' sweet dem though
 When day mek up dem min',
 An' 'nuff o' dem 'tart out fe go,
 An' de weader is fine: 40
 De pan might leak,
 Dem don't a 'peak,
 Nor eben try fe seek
 Some clay or so to mek it soun';
 Dem don't care ef dem wet all roun'. 45

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, 50
 Neider a care,
 For who can interfere?
 T'ree mile—five, six tu'n,—an' neber
 W'ary, but could do it for eber.

1912

Retribution

De mule dem in de pasture an' de donkey 'pon red groun',
 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-lice lie do'n set.

Grass-lice dat mek you trimble long time more dan when you meet 5
 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-follwin' de foolish ole jackass; 10
 But when you hea' we ketch dem, we wi' serve dem such a sauce
 By ridn' 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,"
 An' dat de night wi' come befo' we ketch dem is deir hope; 15
 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! 20

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

1912

To E. M. E.

You see me smile: but what is it?
 A sweetened pain—a laughin' fit—

Aldough de wul' soon en', I'll try
 My wutless best as time goes by, 25
 An' trust on in me Gahd.

1912

Cudjoe Fresh from de Lecture

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

You miss somet'ing fe true, but a wi' mek you know, 5
 As much as how a can, how de business a go:
 Him tell us 'bout we self, an' mek we fresh 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 plug an' dig; 10
 For ebery single man, no car' about dem rank,
 Him bring us ebery one an' put 'pon de same plank.

Say, parson do de same? Yes, in a diff'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 15
 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;
 How change cause eberyt'ing fe mix up 'pon de eart',
 An' dat most hardship come t'rough accident o' birt'. 20

Him show us all a sort o' funny 'keleton,
 Wid names I won't remember under dis ya sun;
 Animals queer to deat', 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, 25
 But fe all t'ings come 'quare, same so it was to go:
 Seems our lan' 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 f'go say we come from mud: 30
 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;
 But suppose eberyt'ing could tu'n right upside down, 35
 Den p'raps we'd be on top an' givin' some one houn'.

Yes, Cous' Jarge, slabery hot fe dem dat gone befo':
 We gettin' better times, for those days we no know;
 But I t'ink it do good, tek we from Africa
 An' lan' us in a blessed place as dis a ya. 40

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', an' neber comin' tame.

I lef' quite 'way from wha' we be'n deh talk about, 45
 Yet still a couldn' help—de wuds come to me mout';
 Just like how yeas' get strong an' sometimes fly de cark,
 Same way me feelings grow, so I was boun' fe talk.

Yet both horse partly runnin' in de selfsame gallop,
 For it is nearly so de way de buccra pull up: 50
 Him say, how de wul' stan', dat right will neber be,
 But wrong will eber gwon till dis wul' en' fe we.

Reveille Soun'in

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

You lazy ones can lay down still, 5
 We have no time fe dat;
 De wake-up comin' roun', an' you'll
 Jump as you feel de cat.

For soon de half pas' dress will blow
 Fe we to go a-drillin'; 10
 De time is bery short, an' so
 We mus' be quick an' willin'.

A marnin' bade is sweet fe true,
 But we mus' quick fe done;
 It col' dough, so it's only few 15
 Can stan' it how it bu'n.

'Tis quarter warnin' soun'in' now,
 Our arms mus' clean an' soun';
 We will ketch 'port ef we allow
 A speck fe lodge aroun'. 20

Tip 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'.

1912

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,

'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, 5
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'; 10
I would ope me mout' wid wonder at de massive organ soun',
An' would 'train me eyes to see de beauty lyin' 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, 15
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. 20

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, Victoria de Good.

An' dese places dat I sing of now shall afterwards impart 25
All deir solemn sacred beauty to a weary searchin' heart;
So I'll rest glad an' contented in me min' for evermore,
When I sail across de ocean back to my own native shore.

1912

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 about 5
 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, 10
 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 15
 An' cuss our teacher fool.

You cuss me too de se'fsame day
 Because a say you wrong,
 An' pawn you' books an' went away
 Widout anedder song. 20

Your parents' hearts within dem sink,
 When to your yout'ful lip
 Dey watch you raise de glass to drink,
 An' shameless tek each sip.

I see you in de dancing-booth, 25
 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, 30
 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" well;
 Aldough I do not use de weed, 35
 I'm fond o' de nice smell.

Dey see de red blood flowin';
 An' one chil' trimble an' hide 10
 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', 15
 An' clappin' his han's wid glee.

When dey had forgotten Nanny,
 Grown men I see dem again;
 An' de forehead of de laughter
 Was brand' wid de mark of Cain. 20

1912

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, 5
 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; 10
 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, 15
 Nor saddle you wid blame.

Though you may cas' me from your breas'
 An' trample me to deat',
 My heart will trus' you none de less,
 My land I won't feget. 20

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, 25
 An' all 'long keep dem please';
 De invalid come here fe cure,
 You heal all deir disease.

Your fertile soil grow all o' t'ings
 To full de naygur's wants, 30
 'Tis seamed wid neber-failing springs
 To give dew to de plants.

You hab all t'ings fe mek life bles',
 But buccra 'poil de whole
 Wid gove'mint an' all de res', 35
 Fe worry naygur soul.

Still all dem little chupidness
 Caan' tek away me lub;
 De time when I'll tu'n 'gains' you is
 When you can't give me grub. 40

1912

Two-an'-Six

Merry voices chatterin',
 Nimble feet dem patterin',
 Big an' little, faces gay,
 Happy day dis market day.

CONSTAB BALLADS (1912)

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, 5
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, 10
Keepin' time so 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, 15
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 20
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.

1912

Flat-Foot Drill

Fus' beginnin', flat-foot drill,
 Larnin' how fe mek right tu'n:
 "Tention! keep you' han's dem still,
 Can't you tek in dat a li'l?
 Hearin' all, but larnin' none. 5

"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. 10

"Right 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'? 15

"Shet you' mout'! A wan' no chat!
 Fabour say you pick up nong,
 Sence you nyamin' Depôt fat
 An' 'top sleep 'pon so-so mat,
 But A mean fe pull you' tongue. 20

"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." 25

1912

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 5
 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, 10
 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', 15
 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' 20
 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 25
 Brought a strange thrill to my soul,
 'Memberin' how his affection
 Gave joy in a barren wul':
 As I thought then, my mind goin' 30
 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 35
 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. 40

After little lazy leanin',
 Sittin' on de window-sill,
 Me would start our carbine-cleanin'
 For de eight o'clock big drill:
 'Fo' me he be'n always ready, 45
 An' as smart as smart could be;
 He was always quick, yet steady,
 Not of wav'rin' min' like me.

When de time was awful dull in
 De ole borin' Depôt-school, 50
 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 55
 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': 60
 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, 65
 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; 70
 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', 75
 Made my lovin' heart rejoice:
 Full of happiness we strolled on,
 In de closin' evenin' light,

- Where de stately Cobre rolled on
Gurglin', murm'rin' in de night; 80
- Where de rushin' cánal waters
Splashed t'rough fields of manchinic,
Wid deir younger tender daughters
Grow'n' togeder, lush an' t'ick,
Round' de mudder tall an' slimber 85
Wid her scalloped leaves o' blue,
In de evenin' light a-limber,
Or a-tossin' to an' fro.
- Back to barracks slowly strollin',
Leavin' de enticin' soun' 90
O' de Cobre proudly rollin'
T'rough de old deserted town;
Pas' de level well-kept meadows
O' de spacious prison-land,
Where de twilight's fallin' shadows 95
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; 100
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' 105
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, 110
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' 115
 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. 120

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' 125
 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 130
 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' 135
 O' de ways o' dis ya wul'.

'Fo' 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, 140
 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' 145
 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,— 150
 Arms an' bay'nets wanted tendin'
 'Fo' de soon-a-marnin' drill.

- So we spent five months togeder,
 He was ever staunch an' true
 In sunshine or rainy weader, 155
 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. 160
- 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 165
 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, 170
 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 175
 An' de flow o' life's dark tide.
- Gently fell the moonbeams, kissin'
 'Way de hot tears streamin' free,
 While de wind outside went hissinn'
 An' a-moanin' for poor me: 180
 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' 185
 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, 190
 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, 195
 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. 200

Gone he, de little sunshine o' my life,
 Leavin' me 'lone to de Depôt'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, 205
 We'd frolic togeder aroun' de big gun;
 Oft would he laughingly run after me,
 Chasin' me over de wide Depôt lea;
 Oft would he teach me de folly o' pride
 When, me half-vexed, he would sit by my side;— 210
 Now all is blackness t'rough night an' t'rough day,
 For my heart's weary now Bennie's away.

1912

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, 5
 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. 10