



Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

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Lyrics of Lowly Life

By

Paul Laurence Dunbar

With

An Introduction by W. D. Howells



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INTRODUCTION.

I THINK I should scarcely trouble the reader with a special appeal in behalf of this book, if it had not specially appealed to me for reasons apart from the author's race, origin, and condition. The world is too old now, and I find myself too much of its mood, to care for the work of a poet because he is black, because his father and mother were slaves, because he was, before and after he began to write poems, an elevator-boy. These facts would certainly attract me to him as a man, if I knew him to have a literary ambition, but when it came to his literary art, I must judge it irrespective of these facts, and enjoy or endure it for what it was in itself.

It seems to me that this was my experience with the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar when I

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found it in another form, and in justice to him I cannot wish that it should be otherwise with his readers here. Still, it will legitimately interest those who like to know the causes, or, if these may not be known, the sources, of things, to learn that the father and mother of the first poet of his race in our language were negroes without admixture of white blood. The father escaped from slavery in Kentucky to freedom in Canada, while there was still no hope of freedom otherwise; but the mother was freed by the events of the civil war, and came North to Ohio, where their son was born at Dayton, and grew up with such chances and mischances for mental training as everywhere befall the children of the poor. He has told me that his father picked up the trade of a plasterer, and when he had taught himself to read, loved chiefly to read history. The boy's mother shared his passion for literature, with a special love of poetry, and after the father died she struggled on in more than the poverty she had shared with him. She could value the

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faculty which her son showed first in prose sketches and attempts at fiction, and she was proud of the praise and kindness they won him among the people of the town, where he has never been without the warmest and kindest friends.

In fact, from every part of Ohio and from several cities of the adjoining States, there came letters in cordial appreciation of the critical recognition which it was my pleasure no less than my duty to offer Paul Dunbar's work in another place. It seemed to me a happy omen for him that so many people who had known him, or known of him, were glad of a stranger's good word ; and it was gratifying to see that at home he was esteemed for the things he had done rather than because as the son of negro slaves he had done them. If a prophet is often without honor in his own country, it surely is nothing against him when he has it. In this case it deprived me of the glory of a discoverer ; but that is sometimes a barren joy, and I am always willing to forego it.

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What struck me in reading Mr. Dunbar's poetry was what had already struck his friends in Ohio and Indiana, in Kentucky and Illinois. They had felt, as I felt, that however gifted his race had proven itself in music, in oratory, in several of the other arts, here was the first instance of an American negro who had evinced innate distinction in literature. In my criticism of his book I had alleged Dumas in France, and I had forgetfully failed to allege the far greater Pushkin in Russia ; but these were both mulattoes, who might have been supposed to derive their qualities from white blood vastly more artistic than ours, and who were the creatures of an environment more favorable to their literary development. So far as I could remember, Paul Dunbar was the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the negro life æsthetically and express it lyrically. It seemed to me that this had come to its most modern consciousness in him, and that his brilliant and unique achievement was to have studied the American

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negro objectively, and to have represented him as he found him to be, with humor, with sympathy, and yet with what the reader must instinctively feel to be entire truthfulness. I said that a race which had come to this effect in any member of it, had attained civilization in him, and I permitted myself the imaginative prophecy that the hostilities and the prejudices which had so long constrained his race were destined to vanish in the arts; that these were to be the final proof that God had made of one blood all nations of men. I thought his merits positive and not comparative; and I held that if his black poems had been written by a white man, I should not have found them less admirable. I accepted them as an evidence of the essential unity of the human race, which does not think or feel black in one and white in another, but humanly in all.

Yet it appeared to me then, and it appears to me now, that there is a precious difference of temperament between the races which it would be a great pity ever to lose, and that

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this is best preserved and most charmingly suggested by Mr. Dunbar in those pieces of his where he studies the moods and traits of his race in its own accent of our English. We call such pieces dialect pieces for want of some closer phrase, but they are really not dialect so much as delightful personal attempts and failures for the written and spoken language. In nothing is his essentially refined and delicate art so well shown as in these pieces, which, as I ventured to say, describe the range between appetite and emotion, with certain lifts far beyond and above it, which is the range of the race. He reveals in these a finely ironical perception of the negro's limitations, with a tenderness for them which I think so very rare as to be almost quite new. I should say, perhaps, that it was this humorous quality which Mr. Dunbar had added to our literature, and it would be this which would most distinguish him, now and hereafter. It is something that one feels in nearly all the dialect pieces; and I hope that in the present collection he has kept all

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of these in his earlier volume, and added others to them. But the contents of this book are wholly of his own choosing, and I do not know how much or little he may have preferred the poems in literary English. Some of these I thought very good, and even more than very good, but not distinctively his contribution to the body of American poetry. What I mean is that several people might have written them ; but I do not know any one else at present who could quite have written the dialect pieces. These are divinations and reports of what passes in the hearts and minds of a lowly people whose poetry had hitherto been inarticulately expressed in music, but now finds, for the first time in our tongue, literary interpretation of a very artistic completeness.

I say the event is interesting, but how important it shall be can be determined only by Mr. Dunbar's future performance. I cannot undertake to prophesy concerning this ; but if he should do nothing more than he has done, I should feel that he had made the strongest

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claim for the negro in English literature that the negro has yet made. He has at least produced something that, however we may critically disagree about it, we cannot well refuse to enjoy; in more than one piece he has produced a work of art.

W. D. HOWELLS.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.



ERE SLEEP COMES DOWN TO
SOOTHE THE WEARY EYES.

ERE sleep comes down to soothe the weary
eyes,

Which all the day with ceaseless care have
sought

The magic gold which from the seeker flies ;

Ere dreams put on the gown and cap of
thought,

And make the waking world a world of lies, —

Of lies most palpable, uncouth, forlorn,

That say life's full of aches and tears and sighs, —

Oh, how with more than dreams the soul is
torn,

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.

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Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes,
How all the griefs and heartaches we have
known

Come up like pois'nous vapors that arise
From some base witch's caldron, when the
crone,

To work some potent spell, her magic plies.
The past which held its share of bitter pain,
Whose ghost we prayed that Time might
exorcise,

Comes up, is lived and suffered o'er again,
Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes,
What phantoms fill the dimly lighted room ;
What ghostly shades in awe-creating guise
Are bodied forth within the teeming gloom.

What echoes faint of sad and soul-sick cries,
And pangs of vague inexplicable pain
That pay the spirit's ceaseless enterprise,
Come thronging through the chambers of the
brain,

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes,
Where ranges forth the spirit far and free?
Through what strange realms and unfamiliar
skies

Tends her far course to lands of mystery?
To lands unspeakable — beyond surmise,
Where shapes unknowable to being spring,
Till, faint of wing, the Fancy fails and dies
Much wearied with the spirit's journeying,
Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.

Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes,
How questioneth the soul that other soul, —
The inner sense which neither cheats nor lies,
But self exposes unto self, a scroll
Full writ with all life's acts unwise or wise,
In characters indelible and known ;
So, trembling with the shock of sad surprise,
The soul doth view its awful self alone,
Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes.

When sleep comes down to seal the weary eyes,
The last dear sleep whose soft embrace is balm,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

And whom sad sorrow teaches us to prize
For kissing all our passions into calm,
Ah, then, no more we heed the sad world's cries,
Or seek to probe th' eternal mystery,
Or fret our souls at long-withheld replies,
At glooms through which our visions cannot see,
When sleep comes down to seal the weary eyes.

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 unfaltering,
I live and laugh and love and sing.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

RETORT.

“**T**HOU art a fool,” said my head to my
heart,

“Indeed, the greatest of fools thou art,
To be led astray by the trick of a tress,
By a smiling face or a ribbon smart ;”
And my heart was in sore distress.

Then Phyllis came by, and her face was fair,
The light gleamed soft on her raven hair ;
And her lips were blooming a rosy red.
Then my heart spoke out with a right bold air :
“Thou art worse than a fool, O head !”

ACCOUNTABILITY.

FOLKS ain't got no right to cénsum' othah
folks about dey habits ;
Him dat giv' de squir'ls de bushtails made de
bobtails fu' de rabbits.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Him dat built de gread big mountains hollered
out de little valleys,
Him dat made de streets an' driveways was n't
shamed to make de alleys.

We is all constructed diff'ent, d'ain't no two of
us de same ;
We cain't he'p ouah likes an' dislikes, ef we 'se
bad we ain't to blame.
Ef we 'se good, we need n't show off, case you
bet it ain't ouah doin'
We gits into su'ttain channels dat we jes' cain't
he'p pu'suin'.

But we all fits into places dat no othah ones
could fill,
An' we does the things we has to, big er little,
good er ill.
John cain't tek de place o' Henry, Su an' Sally
ain't alike ;
Bass ain't nuthin' like a suckah, chub ain't
nuthin' like a pike.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

When you come to think about it, how it's all
planned out it's splendid.

Nuthin's done er evah happens, 'dout hit's
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.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS.

A HUSH is over all the teeming lists,
And there is pause, a breath-space in
the strife ;

A spirit brave has passed beyond the mists
And vapors that obscure the sun of life.
And Ethiopia, with bosom torn,
Laments the passing of her noblest born.

She weeps for him a mother's burning tears —
She loved him with a mother's deepest love.
He was her champion thro' direful years,
And held her weal all other ends above.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

AN ANTE-BELLUM SERMON.

WE is gathahed hyeah, my brothahs,
In dis howlin' wildaness,
Fu' to speak some words of comfo't
To each othah in distress.
An' we chooses fu' ouah subjec'
Dis — we 'll 'splain it by an' by ;
“An' de Lawd said, ‘Moses, Moses,’
An' de man said, ‘Hyeah am I.’”

Now ole Pher'oh, down in Egypt,
Was de wuss man evah bo'n,
An' he had de Hebrew chillun
Down dah wukin' in his co'n ;
'T well de Lawd got tiahed o' his foolin',
An' sez he : “I 'll let him know —
Look hyeah, Moses, go tell Pher'oh
Fu' to let dem chillun go.”

“An' ef he refuse to do it,
I will make him rue de houah,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Fu' I 'll empty down on Egypt
All de vials of my powah."
Yes, he did — an' Pher'oh's ahmy
Was n't wuth a ha'f a dime ;
Fu' de Lawd will he'p his chillun,
You kin trust him evah time.

An' yo' enemies may 'sail you
In de back an' in de front ;
But de Lawd is all aroun' you,
Fu' to ba' de battle's brunt.
Dey kin fo'ge yo' chains an' shackles
F'om de mountains to de sea ;
But de Lawd will sen' some Moses
Fu' to set his chillun free.

An' de lan' shall hyeah his thundah,
Lak a blas' f'om Gab'el's ho'n,
Fu' de Lawd of hosts is mighty
When he girds his ahmor on.
But fu' feah some one mistakes me,
I will pause right hyeah to say,
Dat I 'm still a-preachin' ancient,
I ain't talkin' 'bout to-day.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

But I tell you, fellah christuns,
Things 'll happen mighty strange ;
Now, de Lawd done dis fu' Isrul,
An' his ways don't nevah change,
An' de love he showed to Isrul
Was n't all on Isrul spent ;
Now don't run an' tell yo' mastahs
Dat I 's preachin' discontent.

'Cause I is n't ; I 'se a-judgin'
Bible people by deir ac's ;
I 'se a-givin' you de Scriptuah,
I 'se a-handin' you de fac's.
Cose ole Pher'oh b'lieved in slav'ry,
But de Lawd he let him see,
Dat de people he put bref in, —
Evah mothah's son was free.

An' dahs othahs thinks lak Pher'oh,
But dey calls de Scriptuah liar,
Fu' de Bible says " a servant
Is a-worthy of his hire."
An' you cain't git roun' nor thoo dat,
An' you cain't git ovah it,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Fu' whatevah place you git in,
Dis hyeah Bible too 'll fit.

So you see de Lawd's intention,
Evah sence de worl' began,
Was dat His almighty freedom
Should belong to evah man,
But I think it would be bettah,
Ef I'd pause agin to say,
Dat I'm talkin' 'bout ouah freedom
In a Bibleistic way.

But de Moses is a-comin',
An' he 's comin', suah and fas'
We kin hyeah his feet a-trompin',
We kin hyeah his trumpit blas'.
But I want to wa'n you people,
Don't you git too brigity ;
An' don't you git to braggin'
'Bout dese things, you wait an' see.

But when Moses wif his powah
Comes an' sets us chillun free,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

We will praise de gracious Mastah
Dat has gin us liberty ;
An' we 'll shout ouah halleluyahs,
On dat mighty reck'nin' day,
When we 'se reco'nised ez citiz' —
Huh uh ! Chillun, let us pray !

ODE TO ETHIOPIA.

O MOTHER Race ! to thee I bring
This pledge of faith unwavering,
This tribute to thy glory.
I know the pangs which thou didst feel,
When Slavery crushed thee with its heel,
With thy dear blood all gory.

Sad days were those — ah, sad indeed !
But through the land the fruitful seed
Of better times was growing.
The plant of freedom upward sprung,
And spread its leaves so fresh and young —
Its blossoms now are blowing.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

CURTAIN.

VILLAIN shows his indiscretion,
Villain's partner makes confession.
Juvenile, with golden tresses,
Finds her pa and dons long dresses.
Scapegrace comes home money-laden,
Hero comforts tearful maiden,
Soubrette marries loyal chappie,
Villain skips, and all are happy.

THE SPELLIN'-BEE.

I NEVER shall furgit that night when father
hitched up Dobbin,
An' all us youngsters clambered in an' down the
road went bobbin'
To school where we was kep' at work in every
kind o' weather,
But where that night a spellin'-bee was callin' us
together.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

'T was one o' Heaven's banner nights, the stars
was all a glitter,
The moon was shinin' like the hand o' God had
jest then lit her.
The ground was white with spotless snow, the
blast was sort o' stingin' ;
But underneath our round-about, you bet our
hearts was singin'.
That spellin'-bee had be'n the talk o' many a
precious moment,
The youngsters all was wild to see jes' what the
precious show meant,
An' we whose years was in their teens was little
less desirous
O' gittin' to the meetin' so 's our sweethearts
could admire us.
So on we went so anxious fur to satisfy our
mission
That father had to box our ears, to smother our
ambition.
But boxin' ears was too short work to hinder
our arrivin',

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

He jest turned roun' an' smacked us all, an' kep'
right on a-drivin'.

Well, soon the schoolhouse hove in sight, the
winders beamin' brightly ;

The sound o' talkin' reached our ears, and voices
laffin' lightly.

It puffed us up so full an' big 'at I'll jest bet a
dollar,

There wa'n't a feller there but felt the strain
upon his collar.

So down we jumped an' in we went ez sprightly
ez you make 'em,

But somethin' grabbed us by the knees an'
straight began to shake 'em.

Fur once within that lighted room, our feelin's
took a canter,

An' scurried to the zero mark ez quick ez Tam
O'Shanter.

'Cause there was crowds o' people there, both
sexes an' all stations ;

It looked like all the town had come an' brought
all their relations.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

The first I saw was Nettie Gray, I thought that
girl was dearer

'N' gold ; an' when I got a chance, you bet I
aidged up near her.

An' Farmer Dobbs's girl was there, the one 'at
Jim was sweet on,

An' Cyrus Jones an' Mandy Smith an' Faith an'
Patience Deaton.

Then Parson Brown an' Lawyer Jones were
present — all attention,

An' piles on piles of other folks too numerous
to mention.

The master rose an' briefly said : "Good friends,
dear brother Crawford,

To spur the pupils' minds along, a little prize
has offered.

To him who spells the best to-night — or 't may
be 'her' — no tellin' —

He offers ez a jest reward, this precious work on
spellin'."

A little blue-backed spellin'-book with fancy
scarlet trimmin' ;

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

We boys devoured it with our eyes — so did the
girls an' women.

He held it up where all could see, then on the
table set it,

An' ev'ry speller in the house felt mortal bound
to get it.

At his command we fell in line, prepared to do
our dooty,

Outspell the rest an' set 'em down, an' carry
home the booty.

'T was then the merry times began, the blunders,
an' the laffin',

The nudges an' the nods an' winks an' stale
good-natured chaffin'.

Ole Uncle Hiram Dane was there, the closest
man a-livin',

Whose only bugbear seemed to be the dreadful
fear o' givin'.

His beard was long, his hair uncut, his clothes
all bare an' dingy ;

It was n't 'cause the man was pore, but jest so
mortal stingy.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

An' there he sot by Sally Riggs a-smilin' an'
a-smirkin',
An' all his childern lef' to home a diggin' an'
a-workin'.
A widower he was, an' Sal was thinkin' 'at she 'd
wing him ;
I reckon he was wond'rin' what them rings o'
hern would bring him.
An' when the spellin'-test commenced, he up
an' took his station,
A-spellin' with the best o' them to beat the very
nation.
An' when he 'd spell some youngster down, he 'd
turn to look at Sally,
An' say: "The teachin' nowadays can't be o'
no great vally."
But true enough the adage says, "Pride walks
in slipp'ry places,"
Fur soon a thing occurred that put a smile on
all our faces.
The lafter jest kep' ripplin' 'roun' an' teacher
could n't quell it,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Fur when he give out "charity" ole Hiram
could n't spell it.

But laffin' 's ketchin' an' it throwed some others
off their bases,

An' folks 'u'd miss the very word that seemed
to fit their cases.

Why, fickle little Jessie Lee come near the
house upsettin'

By puttin' in a double "kay" to spell the word
"coquettin'."

An' when it come to Cyrus Jones, it tickled me
all over —

Him settin' up to Mandy Smith an' got sot
down on "lover."

But Lawyer Jones of all gone men did shorely
look the gonest,

When he found out that he 'd furgot to put the
"h" in "honest."

An' Parson Brown, whose sermons were too long
fur toleration,

Caused lots o' smiles by missin' when they give
out "condensation."

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

So one by one they giv' it up — the big words
 kep' a-landin',
Till me an' Nettie Gray was left, the only ones
 a-standin',
An' then my inward strife began — I guess my
 mind was petty —
I did so want that spellin'-book ; but then to
 spell down Nettie
Jest sort o' went ag'in my grain — I somehow
 could n't do it,
An' when I git a notion fixed, I'm great on
 stickin' to it.
So when they giv' the next word out — I had n't
 orter tell it,
But then 't was all fur Nettie's sake — I missed
 so 's she could spell it.
She spelt the word, then looked at me so lovin'-
 like an' mello',
I tell you 't sent a hunderd pins a-shootin'
 through a fello'.
O' course I had to stand the jokes an' chaffin'
 of the fello's,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

But when they handed her the book I vow I
was n't jealous.

We sung a hymn, an' Parson Brown dismissed us
like he orte,

Fur, la! he 'd learned a thing er two an' made
his blessin' shorter.

'T was late an' cold when we got out, but Nettie
liked cold weather,

An' so did I, so we agreed we 'd jest walk home
together.

We both wuz silent, fur of words we nuther had
a surplus,

'Till she spoke out quite sudden like, "You
missed that word on purpose."

Well, I declare it frightened me ; at first I tried
denyin',

But Nettie, she jest smiled an' smiled, she
knowed that I was lyin'.

Sez she : "That book is yourn by right ;" sez
I : "It never could be —

I — I — you — ah ——" an' there I stuck, an'
well she understood me.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

So we agreed that later on when age had giv'
us tether,
We 'd jine our lots an' settle down to own that
book together.

KEEP A-PLUGGIN' AWAY.

I 'VE a humble little motto
That is homely, though it 's true, —
Keep a-pluggin' away.

It's a thing when I 've an object
That I always try to do, —
Keep a-pluggin' away.

When you 've rising storms to quell,
When opposing waters swell,
It will never fail to tell, —
Keep a-pluggin' away.

If the hills are high before
And the paths are hard to climb,
Keep a-pluggin' away.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Do' want no boss a-standin' by
To see me work ; I allus try
To do my dooty right straight up,
An' earn what fills my plate an' cup.
An' ez fur boss, I 'll be my own,
I like to jest be let alone,
To plough my strip an' tend my bees,
An' do jest like I doggoned please.
My head 's all right, an' my heart 's meller,
But I 'm a easy-goin' feller.

A NEGRO LOVE SONG.

SEEN my lady home las' night,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Hel' huh han' an' sque'z it tight,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Hyeahd huh sigh a little sigh,
Seen a light gleam f'om huh eye,
An' a smile go flittin' by —
Jump back, honey, jump back.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Hyeahd de win' blow thoo de pine,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Mockin'-bird was singin' fine,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
An' my hea't was beatin' so,
When I reached my lady's do',
Dat I could n't ba' to go —
Jump back, honey, jump back.

Put my ahm aroun' huh wais',
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Raised huh lips an' took a tase,
Jump back, honey, jump back.
Love me, honey, love me true?
Love me well ez I love you?
An' she answe'd, "'Cose I do" —
Jump back, honey, jump back.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

Don't talk to me of solemn days
In autumn's time of splendor,
Because the sun shows fewer rays,
And these grow slant and slender.

Why, it's the climax of the year, —
The highest time of living! —
Till naturally its bursting cheer
Just melts into thanksgiving.

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,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

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.

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 ;

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

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.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

WE WEAR THE MASK.

WE wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our
eyes, —

This debt we pay to human guile ;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile ;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask !

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

LONESOME.

MOTHER's gone a-visitin' to spend a
month er two,

An', oh, the house is lonesome ez a nest whose
birds has flew

To other trees to build ag'in ; the rooms seem
jest so bare

That the echoes run like sperrits from the
kitchen to the stair.

The shetters flap more lazy-like 'n what they
used to do,

Sence mother's gone a-visitin' to spend a
month er two.

We've killed the fattest chicken an' we've
cooked her to a turn ;

We've made the richest gravy, but I jest don't
give a durn

Fur nothin' 'at I drink er eat, er nothin' 'at I
see.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

The food ain't got the pleasant taste it used to
have to me.

They's somep'n' stickin' in my throat ez tight
ez hardened glue,

Sence mother's gone a-visitin' to spend a
month er two.

The hollyhocks air jest ez pink, they're double
ones at that,

An' I wuz prouder of 'em than a baby of a cat.
But now I don't go near 'em, though they nod
an' blush at me,

Fur they's somep'n' seems to gall me in their
keerless sort o' glee

An' all their fren'ly noddin' an' their blushin'
seems to say :

"You're purty lonesome, John, old boy, sence
mother's gone away."

The neighbors ain't so fren'ly ez it seems
they'd ort to be ;

They seem to be a-lookin' kinder sideways like
at me,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

A-kinder feared they 'd tech me off ez ef I wuz
a match,

An' all because 'at mother's gone an' I'm
a-keepin' batch!

I'm shore I don't do nothin' worse 'n what I
used to do

'Fore mother went a-visitin' to spend a month
er two.

The sparrers ac's more fearsome like an' won't
hop quite so near,

The cricket's chirp is sadder, an' the sky ain't
ha'f so clear;

When ev'nin' comes, I set an' smoke tell my
eyes begin to swim,

An' things aroun' commence to look all blurred
an' faint an' dim.

Well, I guess I'll have to own up 'at I'm feelin'
purty blue

Sence mother's gone a-visitin' to spend a
month er two.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

We wonder at the early call,
And tears of sorrow can but fall
For her o'er whom we spread the pall ;
But faith, sweet faith, is over all.

The house is dust, the voice is dumb,
But through undying years to come,
The spark that glowed within her soul
Shall light our footsteps to the goal.
She went her way ; but oh, she trod
The path that led her straight to God.
Such lives as this put death to scorn ;
They lose our day to find God's morn.

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 practise twell you 're gray,

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

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',
'T ain'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.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

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 ;

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

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.

Lyrics of Lowly Life.

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.

THE PARTY.

DEY had a gread big pahty down to Tom's
de othah night ;
Was I dah? You bet ! I nevah in my life see
sich a sight ;
All de folks f'om fou' plantations was invited, an'
dey come,
Dey come troopin' thick ez chillun when dey
hyeahs a fife an' drum.
Evahbody dressed deir fines' — Heish yo' mouf
an' git away,