[TITLE PAGE]

Forest Leaves.

By Frances Ellen Watkins.

[PAGE 1]

Forest Leaves.

By Frances Ellen Watkins.

[PAGE 2]

James Young, Printer,

Corner of Baltimore and Holliday streets

[PAGE 3]

FOREST LEAVES.

ETHIOPIA.[[1]](#footnote-0)

Yes, Ethiopia, yet shall stretch

Her bleeding hands abroad,[[2]](#footnote-1)

Her cry of agony shall reach

The burning throne of God.

The tyrant’s yoke from off her neck,

His fetters from her soul,

The mighty hand of God shall break,

And spurn their vile control.

Redeem’d from dust and freed from chains

Her sons shall lift their eyes,

From cloud capt hills and verdant[[3]](#footnote-2) plains

Shall shouts of triumph rise.

Upon her dark despairing brow

Shall play a smile of peace,

For God hath bent unto her woe

And bade her sorrows cease.

‘Neath sheltring vines and stately palms,

Shall laughing children play,

And aged sires with joyous psalms,

Shall gladden every day.

Secure by night, and blest by day

Shall pass her happy hours,

Nor human tigers hunt for prey

Within her peaceful bowers.

Then Ethiopia, stretch, Oh stretch

Thy bleeding hands abroad,

Thy cry of agony shall reach

And find redress from God.

[PAGE 4]

THE SOUL.[[4]](#footnote-3)

Bring forth the balance, let the weights be gold,

We’d know the worth of a deathless soul;

Bring rubies and jems from every mine,

With the wealth of ocean, land and clime.

Bring the joys of the glad green earth,

Its playful smiles and careless mirth;

The dews of youth, and flushes of health,

Bring! Oh bring! the wide world’s wealth.

Bring the rich radiant gems of thought

From the mines and deeps of knowledge brought;

Bring glowing words and ponderous lore,

Search heaven and earth’s arcana[[5]](#footnote-4) o’er.

Bring the fairest, brightest rolls of fame,

Unwritten with a deed of guilt or shame;

Bring honor’s guerdon,[[6]](#footnote-5) and victory’s crown,

Robes of pride, and laurels of renown.

We’ve brought the wealth of every mine,

We’ve ransack’d ocean, land clime,

And caught the joyous smiles away

From the prattling babe to the sire grey.

We’ve brought the names of the noble dead

With those who in their footsteps tread;

Here are wreaths of pride and gems of thought

From the battle field and study brought.

Heap high the gems, pile up the gold,

Heavy’s the weight of a deathless soul;

Make room for all the wealth of earth,

Its honors, joys, and careless mirth.

Leave me a niche for the rolls of fame

For precious indeed is a spotless name,

For the wreaths, the robes and gems of thought,

Let an empty place in the scale be sought.

[PAGE 5]

With care we’ve adjusted balance and scale,

Futile our efforts we’ve seen them fail;

Lighter than dust is the wealth of earth

Weigh’d in the scales with immortal worth.

Could we drag the sun from its golden car[[7]](#footnote-6)

To lay in this balance with ev’ry star,

T’would darken the day and obscure the night,

But the weight of the balance would still be light.

“HE KNOWETH NOT THAT THE DEAD ARE THERE.”[[8]](#footnote-7)

In yonder halls reclining

Are forms surpassing fair,

And brilliant lights are shining,

But, Oh! the dead are there.

There’s music, song and dance,

There is banishment of care,

And mirth in every glance,

But still the dead are there.

Like the asp’s[[9]](#footnote-8) seductive venom

Hid ‘neath flowerets fair,

This charnal house[[10]](#footnote-9) concealeth

The dead that slumber there.

‘Neath that flow of song and laughter

Runs the current of despair,

But the simple sons of pleasure

Know not the dead are there.

They’ll shudder, start and tremble,

They’ll weep in wild despair,

When the solemn truth breaks on them

That the dead, the dead are there.

[PAGE 6]

They who’ve scoff’d at ev’ry warning,

Who’ve turn’d from ev’ry prayer,

Shall learn in bitter anguish

That the dead, the dead are there.

“THAT BLESSED HOPE.”[[11]](#footnote-10)

Oh touch it not that hope so blest

Which cheers the fainting heart,

And points it to the coming rest

Where sorrow has no part.

Tear from heart each worldly prop,

Unbind each earthly string;

But to this blest and glorious hope,

Oh let my spirit cling.

It cheer’d amid the days of old

Each holy patriarch’s breast,

It was an anchor to their souls,

Upon it let me rest.

When wand’ring in the dens and caves,

In goat and sheep skins drest,

Apeel’d[[12]](#footnote-11) and scatter’d people learn’d

To know this hope was blest.

Help me to love this blessed hope;

My heart’s a fragile thing;

Will you not nerve and bear it up

Around this hope to cling.

Help amid this world of strife

To long for Christ to reign,

That when he brings the crown of life

I may that crown obtain.

[PAGE 7]

YEARNINGS FOR HOME.

Oh let me go I’m weary here

And fevers scorch my brain,

I long to feel my native air

Breathe o’er each burning vein.

I long once more to see

My home among the distant hills,

To breathe amid the melody

Of murmering brooks and rills.[[13]](#footnote-12)

My home is where eternal snow

Round threat’ning craters sleep,

Where streamlets murmer soft and low

And playful cascades leap.

Tis where glad scenes shall meet

My weary, longing eye;

Where rocks and Alpine forests greet

The bright cerulean[[14]](#footnote-13) sky.

Your scenes are bright I know,

But there my mother pray’d,

Her cot is lowly, but I go

To die beneath its shade.

For, Oh I know she’ll cling

‘Round me her treasur’d long,

My sisters too will sing

Each lov’d familiar song.

They’ll soothe my fever’d brow,

As in departed hours,

And spread around my dying couch

The brightest, fairest flowers.

Then let me go I’m weary here

And fevers scorch my brain,

I long to feel my native air,

Breathe o’er each burning vein.

[PAGE 8]

FAREWELL, MY HEART IS BEATING.

Farewell, my heart is beating

With feelings sad and wild,

I’ve strove to hide its heaving

And ‘mid my tears to smile.

This heart the lone and trusting,

Hath twin’d itself to thee;

And now when almost bursting,

Say, must it sever’d be.

When other brows for mine

Were alter’d, cold and strange,

I clasp’d my yearning heart to thine

And never found it chang’d.

This heart when almost breaking

Has leaned upon thy breast,

But when again ‘tis aching

On thine it may not rest.

Oh clasp me closely ere we part

But breathe no sad farewell;

We can’t be sever’d while thy heart

Retains o’er mine its spell.

HAMAN AND MORDECAI.[[15]](#footnote-14)

He stood at Persia’s Palace gate

And vassal[[16]](#footnote-15) round him bow’d,

Upon his brow was written hate

And he heeded not the crowd.

He heeded not the vassal throng

Whose praises rent the air,

His bosom shook with rage and scorn

For Mordecai stood there.

[PAGE 9]

When ev’ry satrap[[17]](#footnote-16) bow’d

To him of noble blood,

Amid that servile crowd

One form unbending stood.

And as he gaz’d upon that form,

Dark flash’d his angry eye,

‘Twas as the light’ning ere the storm

Hath swept in fury by.

On noble Mordecai alone,

He scorn’d to lay his hand;

But sought an edict from the throne

‘Gainst all the captive band.

For full of pride and wrath

To his fell purpose true,

He vow’d that from his path

Should perish ev’ry Jew.

Then woman’s voice arose

In deep impassion’d prayer,

Her fragile heart grew strong

‘Twas the nervings of despair.

The king in mercy heard

Her pleading and her prayer

His heart with pity stirr’d,

And he resolved to spare.

And Haman met the fate

He’d for Mordecai decreed,

And from his cruel hate

The captive Jews are freed.

[PAGE 10]

LET ME LOVE THEE.

Let me love thee I have known

The agony deception brings,

And tho’ my riven heart is lone

It fondly clasps and firmly clings.

Oh! let me love thee, I have seen

Hope’s fairest blossoms fail,

Have felt my life a mournful dream

And this world a tearful vale.[[18]](#footnote-17)

Oh! let me love thee, I have felt

Deep yearnings for a kindly heart,

When joy would thrill or sorrow melt

Some kindred soul to bear a part.

Let me love thee, yet Oh! yet

Breathe not distrust around my heart,

The lov’d, the cherish may forget

And act a cold and faithless part.

Let me love thee, I have press’d

Sadly my aching heart and brow,

But banish’d ne’er from each recess

The thirst of love that fills them now.

Let me love thee, let my breast

Closely round thee entwine,

And hide within its deep recess

True constant love like thine.

RUTH AND NAOMI.[[19]](#footnote-18)

Turn my daughters full of woe,

Is my heart so sad and lone,

Leave me, children, I would go

To my lov’d and distant home.

From my bosom death has torn,

Husband, children, all my stay;

Left me not a single one

For my life’s declining day.

[PAGE 11]

Want and wo surround my way,

Grief and famine where I tread;

In my native land they say

God is giving Jacob bread.

Naomi ceased, her daughters wept,

Their yearning hearts were fill’d,

Falling upon her wither’d neck

Their grief in tears distill’d.

Like rain upon a blighted tree

The tears of Orpah fell,

Kissing the pale and quiv’ring lip,

She breath’d her sad farewell.

But Ruth stood up, on her brow

There lay a heavenly calm,

And from her lips came soft and low

Words like a holy charm.

I will not leave thee, on thy brow

Are lines of sorrow, age and care,

Thy form is bent, thy step is slow,

Thy bosom stricken, lone and sear.

Thy failing lamp is growing dim,

It’s flame is flick’ring past,

I will not leave thee withering,

‘Neath stern affliction’s blast.

When thy heart and home were glad,

I freely shar’d thy joyous lot

And now that heart is lone and sad,

Cease to entreat I’ll leave thee not.

Oh if a lofty palace proud

Thy future home shall be,

Where sycophants[[20]](#footnote-19) around thee crowd

I’ll share that home with thee.

And if on earth the humblest spot

Thy future home shall prove,

I’ll bring into thy lowly cot

The wealth of woman’s love.

[PAGE 12]

However drear, earth has no lot

My spirit shrinks to share with thee,

Then mother, dear entreat me not

To turn from following after thee.

Go where thou wilt my steps are there,

Our path in life is one,

Thou hast no lot I will not share

Till life itself be done.

My country and home for thee

I freely, willingly resign;

Thy people shall my people be,

Thy God he shall be mine.

Then mother, dear, entreat me not

To turn from following thee,

My heart is mov’d to share thy lot

What e’er that lot may be.

“BIBLE DEFENCE OF SLAVERY.”[[21]](#footnote-20)

Take sackcloth[[22]](#footnote-21) of the darkest dye

And shroud the pulpits round,

Servants of him that cannot lie

Sit mourning on the ground.

Let holy horror blanche each cheek,

Pale ev’ry brow with fears,

And rocks and stones if ye could speak

Ye well might melt to tears.

Let sorrow breathe in ev’ry tone

And grief in ev’ry strain ye raise,

Insult not heaven’s majestic throne

With the mockery of praise.

A man whose light should be

The guide of age and youth,

[PAGE 13]

Brings to the shrine of slavery

The sacrifice of truth.

For the fiercest wrongs that ever rose

Since Sodom’s[[23]](#footnote-22) fearful cry,

The word of life has been unclos’d

To give your God the lie.

An infidel could do no more

To hide his country’s guilty blot,

Than spread God’s holy record o’er

The loathesome leprous[[24]](#footnote-23) spot.

Oh, when ye pray for heathen lands,

And plead for dark benighted shores,

Remember slavery’s cruel hands

Make heathens at your doors.

TO A MISSIONARY.

Joy, joy! unto the heathen,

Unfurl each snowy sail,

And waft the breath of prayer

On ev’ry breeze and gale.

Spread, spread your sails with mercy

As you plough the trackless,[[25]](#footnote-24)

And at your stern and helm

Shall God a vigil keep.

You’re freighted with rich blessings,

You’ve glorious things to tell,

Your tidings are salvation,

Your theme Immanuel.[[26]](#footnote-25)

Heathen minds by sin degraded,

Captives ‘neath the tempter’s sway,

Shall from their moral vision

Have the darkness chas’d away.

[PAGE 14]

‘Neath bamboo hut and palm tree

Shall prayer like incense rise,

An oblation[[27]](#footnote-26) pure and holy

To the God of earth and skies.

He who from the fiery pillar

Guided once a pilgrim train,

Shall protect you by his power

As you sweep across the main.

More faithful than the needle

Pointing constant to the pole,

Shall the God of love be with you

When the darkest tempests roll.

God speed you on your journey,

May his presence and his power

Be your stay in grief and trial

And the joy of every hour.

“I THIRST.”[[28]](#footnote-27)

I thirst, but earth cannot allay

The fever coursing thro’ my veins,

The healing stream is far away,

It flows thro’ Salem’s[[29]](#footnote-28) glorious plains

The murmers of its crystal flow

Break ever o’er this world of strife,

My heart is weary let me go

To bathe it in the stream of life.

For a worn and weary heart

Hath bath’d in this pure stream,

And felt its griefs and cares depart

Like some forgotten dream.

[PAGE 15]

THE DYING CHRISTIAN.[[30]](#footnote-29)

The light was faintly streaming

Within a darken’d room,

Where a woman, faint and feeble

Was sinking to the tomb.

“The silver cord”[[31]](#footnote-30) was loosened,

We knew that she must die,

We read the mournful token

In the dimness of her eye.

We read it in the radiance

That lit her pallid cheek,

And the quivering of the feeble lip

Too faint its joys to speak.

We read in the glorious flash

Of strange unearthy light,

That ever and non would dash

The dimness from her sight.

And in the thoughts of living fire

Learn’d from God’s encamping band,

Her words seem’d like a holy lyre

Tun’d in the spirit land.

Meet, oh meet me in the kingdom,

Said our lov’d and dying one,

I long to be with Jesus,

I am going, going home.

Like a child oppress’d with slumber

She calmly sank to rest,

With her trust in the Redeemer

And her head upon his breast.

She faded from our vision

Like a thing of love and light,

But we feel she lives forever

A spirit pure and bright.

[PAGE 16]

A DREAM.

I had a dream, a varied dream,[[32]](#footnote-31)

A dream of joy and dread;

Before me rose the judgement scene

For God had raised the dead.

Oh for an angel’s hand to paint

The glories of that day,

When God did gather home each saint

And wipe their tears away.

Each waiting one lifted his head

Rejoic’d to see him nigh,

And earth cast out her sainted dead

To meet him in the sky.

Before his white and burning throne

A countless throng did stand;

Whilst Christ confess’d his own,

Whose names were on his hand.

I had a dream, a varied dream,

A dream of joy and dread;

Before me rose the judgment scene

For God had rais’d the dead.

Oh for an angel’s hand to paint

The terrors of that day,

When God in vengeance for his saints

Girded[[33]](#footnote-32) himself with wrath to slay.

But, oh the terror, grief, and dread,

Tongue can’t describe or pen portray;

When from their graves arose the dead,

Guilty to meet the judgment day.

As sudden as the lightning’s flash

Across the sky doth sweep,

Earth’s kingdom’s were in pieces dash’d,

And waken’d from their guilty sleep.

[PAGE 17]

I heard the agonizing cry,

Ye rocks and mountains on us fall,

And hide us from the Judge’s eye,

But rocks and mounts fled from the call.

I saw the guilty ruin’d host

Standing before the burning throne,

The ruin’d, lost forever lost,

Whom God in wrath refus’d to own.

THE FELON’S DREAM.

He slept, but oh, it was not calm,

As in the days of infancy;

When sleep is nature’s tender balm

To hearts from sorrow free.

He dream’d that fetters bound him fast,

He pin’d for liberty;

It seem’d deliverance came at last

And he from bonds were free.

In thought he journey’d where

Familiar voices rose,

Where not a brow was dim with care,

Or bosom heav’d with woes.

Around him press’d a happy band;

His wife and child drew near;

He felt the pressure of the hand,

And dried each falling tear.

His tender mother cast aside

The tears that dim’d her eye;

His father saw him as the pride

Of brighter days gone by.

He saw his wife around him cling,

He heard her breathe his name;

[PAGE 18]

Oh! woman’s love ‘s a precious thing,

A pure undying flame.

His brethren wept for manly pride,

May bend to woman’s tears;

Then welcom’d round their fireside

The playmate of departed years.

His gentle sister fair and mild

Around him closely press’d,

She clasp’d his hand and smil’d

Then wept upon his breast.

All, all were glad around that hearth,

They hop’d his wanderings o’er;

That weary of the strange cold earth

He’d roam from them no more.

‘Twas but a dream, ‘twas fancy’s flight

It mock’d his yearning heart;

It made his bosom feel its blight,

It probed him like a dart.

A prison held his fettered limbs,

Confinement was his lot,

No kindred voice rose to cheer,

He seem’d by friends and all forgot.

A DIALOGUE.[[34]](#footnote-33)

*Enquirer.*

Who hath a balm that will impart,

Strength to the fainting heart and brow;

I’ve look’d upon earth, and many a heart

Weary and wasting with woe.

*Riches.*

I’ve heaps, I’ve heaps of shining dust,

I’ve gems from every mine;

[PAGE 19]

Bid the weary spirit learn to trust

In gold that glitters, and gems that shine.

*Enquirer.*

Oh! vain were the hopes of that heart,

Sighing its sorrows should cease,

That would search mid rubies and gems,

For the priceless pearl of peace.

*Fame.*

I’ve wreaths, I’ve w[r]eaths for the fever’d brow,

They’re bright, and my name is fame;

Will not the heart forget its woe,

When I write it a deathless name?

*Enquirer.*

No! your wreaths and laurels rare,

Would blanche and pale on a brow unblest;

While the heart, remindful of its care,

Would ache and throb with the same unrest.

*Pleasure.*

Oh! I am queen of a laughing train,

The lightsome,[[35]](#footnote-34) the gay and glad;

I’ve a nectar cup for every pain,

They drink and forget to be sad.

*Enquirer.*

But I have seen the cheek all pale,

When life was fading from the heart;

‘Twas then I saw thy nectar fail,

I watch’d and saw thy smiles depart.

*Religion.*

Oh! I am from the land of light,

My home is the world on high;

But I with the sons of night,

And bid their darkness fly.

[PAGE 20]

I have no heaps of shining dust,

No gems from every mine;

But gifts to beautify the just,

On the brow of the pure to shine.

I have no wreaths of fading fame;

No records of decaying worth;

But God’s remembrance and a name,

That can’t be written in the earth.

When pleasure’s smiles shall all depart,

Her nectar but increase the thirst,

I’ll point the fever’d brow and heart,

To crystal founts that freshly burst.

*Enquirer.*

Thy words do brigh[t]er hopes impart,

Than pleasure, wealth or fame;

Thou hast balm for the wounded heart,

Tell me, kind stranger, thy name.

My name and my nature is love;

God only wise, formed the plan

That mission’d me down from above,

As the guide and the solace of man.

Then I tell the fever’d brow and heart,

Thou’st balm for its wounds, and peace for its strife,

And the guerdon’s which thou dost impart,

Are the pearl of peace and the crown of life.

CRUCIFIXION.

The shadows of morning empurpled[[36]](#footnote-35) with light,

Bent o’er Judea,[[37]](#footnote-36) all lovely and bright;

The zephyr just risen, stole o’er the lea,[[38]](#footnote-37)

And dimpled the cheeks of river and sea.

[PAGE 21]

On that bright morn, a clamor was heard,

The footsteps of men whose passions were stirred;

The voice of wrath, of tumult and strife,

‘Twas the bloodthirsty cry of innocent life.

I gaz’d on their victim, on his pale brow,

‘Mid beamings of love, were shadows of woe;

And his eyes, mid reproach and with’ring scorn,

Seemed like a star bending o’er a dark storm.

Tho’ pale was his cheek, and ashy his brow,

By sorrow and anguish his spirit bent low;

Yet calm ‘mid the fierce and cruel he stood,

Who, like beasts of the forests were eager for blood.

And this was the multitude fickle and vain,

Who hail’d him in triumph, as coming to reign;

Incited by priests, insatiate[[39]](#footnote-38) they stood,

Their cry was his life, their clamor his blood.

When dying earth drew round her form,

A mantle as dark as the vest of a storm,

Nature grew sad, earth trembled and shrank,

Astonish’d as Jesus the dire cup drank.

AN ACROSTIC.[[40]](#footnote-39)

Angels bright that hover o’er thee,

Deem thee an object of their care;

Ever watchful they surround thee,

Lending aid when danger’s near.

May this life, thus guarded, sister,

Always feel thy Saviour near;

Render him thy heart’s devotion –

Trust his goodness, seek his care;

In these vales of grief and sorrow,

Nought shall harm while God is near.

[PAGE 22]

FOR SHE SAID IF I MAY BUT TOUCH OF HIS CLOTHES I SHALL BE WHOLE.[[41]](#footnote-40)

Life to her no brightness brought,

Pale and sorrow’d was her brow,

Till a bright and joyous thought,

Lit the darkness of her woe.

Long had sickness on her prayed;

Strength from every nerve had gone;

Skill and art could give no aid,

Thus her weary life passed on.

Like a sad and mornful dream,

Daily felt she life depart;

Hourly knew the vital stream,

Left the fountains of her heart.

He who’d lull’d the storm to rest,

Cleans’d the lepers, raised the dead;

Whilst a crowd around him prest

Near that suffering one did tread.

Nerv’d by blended hope and fear,

Reason’d thus her anxious heart, -

If to touch him I draw near,

All my suffering shall depart.

While the crowd around him stand,

I will touch, the sufferer said,

Forth she reach’d her timid hand,

As she touch’d, her sickness fled.

“Who hath touch’d me.” Jesus cried,

Virtue from my body’s gone;

From the crowd a voice replied,

Why inquire, thousands throng.

Faint with fear thro’ ev’ry limb,

Yet too grateful to deny;

Tremblingly, she knelt to him,

“Lord,” she answered, “It was I.”

[PAGE 23]

Kindly, gently, Jesus said,

Words like balm unto her soul,

Peace upon her life be shed,

Child, thy faith has made thee whole.

THE PRESENTIMENT.

There’s something strangely thrills my breast,

And fills it with a deep unrest,--

It is not grief, it is not pain,

Nor wish to live the past again.

‘Tis something which I scarce can tell,

And yet I know, and feel it well;

Thro’ ev’ry vein it seems to run,

And whispers life will soon be done.

It comes in accents soft and low,

Like bright streamlets crystal flow,

It whispers, lingers round my heart,

And tells me I must soon depart.

I felt it when the glow of life

Was warm upon my cheek,

In mornful cadence to my heart,

It solemnly did speak.

I felt it when a fearful strife

Was preying on my heart,

It told me from the cares of life,

I quickly must depart.

I felt it when my cheek grew pale,

By cares I could’nt repress;

It whisper’d to my wearried soul,

This earth is not your rest.

1. Harper revised this poem for her 1854 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. It was reprinted in the August 24, 1855 issue of *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Psalm 68:31. In the Old Testament, Ethiopia refers not to the modern kingdom of Ethiopia, but to ancient Nubia, the modern Sudan. In its nineteenth-century usage, the term “Ethiopian” referred more generally to people of African descent, rather than to the region or nation of Ethiopia more specifically. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the use of “Ethiop” to refer to “a black or dark-skinned person; a black African” dates to as early as the fourteenth century. This use was also prominent in other African American writing, as in that of Harper’s predecessor, Phillis Wheatley, who refers to herself as “An Ethiop” in “To the University of Cambridge, in New England” (1773). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. verdant: green with grass, rich vegetation [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. In his 1891 *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, Daniel A. Payne, the church’s sixth bishop and its first historiographer, recalls that two of Harper’s poetic “productions of 1853” were published in the *Christian Recorder*: “The Soul” and “The Dying Christian” (301-303). In addition to reproducing revised versions of each poem, Payne notes that Harper contributed essays on “Christianity” and “Women’s Rights” to the *Christian Recorder* between 1852 and 1853 (305). “Christianity” may be the essay of the same name that Harper printed in her 1854 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. arcana: secrets or mysteries [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. guerdon: reward [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. car: chariot [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Proverbs 9:18. Harper revised this poem for her 1854 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, where it is titled “The Revel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. asp: a small, venomous snake from Egypt [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. charnel house: a vault or building where skeletal remains are stored [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Titus 2:13. Watkins revised this poem for her 1854 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. peeled: without covering; beggarly, wretched. The line reads “A peel’d” in both editions of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. rills: small streams [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. cerulean: deep-blue in color [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Esther 3:1-7:10. Mordecai is a relative and guardian of Esther, who becomes queen when she marries King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I of Persia). Haman, the grand vizier, is infuriated that Mordecai, a Jew, refuses to bow to do him obeisance on religious grounds. Haman therefore plots not only to have Mordecai killed, but to exterminate all Jews in the Persian empire. Queen Esther, who is herself Jewish, i nforms the king of Mordecai’s service to him and Haman’s plot and petitions him to save the lives of her people. Haman throws himself upon Esther’s couch to plead with her for his own life, but the king takes this as an assault. Ahasuerus ultimately has Haman hanged on the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai. Mordecai is appointed grand vizier and the king gives the Jews permission to slaughter their enemies. This deliverance of Persian Jews from Haman’s plot establishes the Jewish feast of Purim. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. vassal: person(s) in a subordinate position [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. satrap: provincial governor in the ancient Persian empire; a subordinate ruler [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. vale: valley [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. Naomi moves from Bethlehem to Moab with her husband and sons, one of whom marries Ruth, a Moabite woman. Naomi’s husband and sons (including Ruth’s husband) die and Naomi prepares to return to Bethlehem. Ruth chooses to remain with her mother-in-law and works to support her, rather than returning to her own people. Ruth’s marriage to Mahlon is considered a “mixed” marriage because Ruth is a Moabite and Naomi and her family are Jewish. This makes Ruth’s decision to remain with her mother-in-law even more significant (Ruth 1:9-22). Ruth goes on to marry Boaz, a wealthy landowner and relation of Naomi’s late husband. King David is one of their descendants (Ruth 2:1-4:22). Watkins revised this poem for the 1857 edition of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. sycophant: a person who is flattering influential people in order to gain certain advantages [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. This poem references Josiah Priest’s 1851 proslavery work of the same name. Harper revises the poem for the 1854 edition of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. sackcloth: a coarse cloth made from various fabric such as goat hair or flax [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. In the book of Genesis, God destroys the city of Sodom, along with the city of Gomorrah, with a rain of fire and sulphur because of its sin and immorality. This story becomes a proverbial example of human depravity and God’s judgment and punishment. (Genesis 19:1-38). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. leprous: infected with leprosy [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. This line seems to be missing a word that would retain the rhyme and meter of the poem’s other stanzas. Perhaps “trackless deep” is intended, as many writers of the period used that formulation to refer to the sea. The American poet Lydia H. Sigourney, for example, uses the phrase in *Traits of the Aborigines of America* (1822), “To a Fragment of Cotton” (1841), and “Sorrow as on the Sea” (1854). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Immanuel, from the Hebrew, meaning "God is with us" or “may God be with us.” The prophet Isaiah announces the birth of a child with this name (Isaiah 7:10-17). Christians would later take the name to predict the virgin birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:22). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. oblation: making a religious offering to God or a god; a holy gift offered at an altar or shrine [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. This poem is reprinted in the October 9, 1858 issue of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Harper revised it for her 1872 *Sketches of Southern Life.* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Salem: another name for Jerusalem [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Harper revised this poem for her 1854 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. Ecclesiastes 12:6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. This line also opens one of Harper’s later poems, “Fishers of Men,” which was published in the 1886 edition of *Sketches of Southern Life*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. girded: to encircle a person or part of a body with a belt [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. This poem is reprinted in the July 31, 1873 issue of the *Christian Recorder*. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. lightsome: light-hearted, carefree [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. empurpled: to tinge or become purple [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Judea: ancient region of Southern Palestine, the site of Jesus Christ’s ministry and crucifixion. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. lea: pasture, grassy land [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. insatiate: never satisfied [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. An acrostic is a poem in which certain letters in each line (often the first letters) spell out a word or phrase. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:28. This story of Jesus’ healing powers appears in the three synoptic gospels, in which Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead and heals a woman who had suffered for twelve years with a hemorrhage (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43). In the gospel of Luke, the healed woman’s words are different than in the other two synoptic gospels (Luke 8:40-56). Harper revised this poem for her 1854 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, where it is titled “Saved by Faith.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)