WRINKLED CLAY

and other

RHYMES

By

ROSS D. BROWN
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MUNCIE, IND.
INTRODUCTORY
TO RHYMES OF REASON

THE author of these verses, Ross D. Brown, a young comrade, has won renown as an orator of the Socialist movement. He is widely known, this gifted young colored revolutionist, as a speaker and propagandist of rare versatility and remarkable power. He is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of loyalty to his race and to his class, and the earnestness and sincerity which animate him are so apparent, even to the most prejudiced, that he is listened to with respect, if not with admiration and approval, by the many thousands who gather to hear him.

The colored people have, in this eloquent young comrade, a champion worthy of their cause, and the same is true of the working class. Ross D. Brown knows by his own painful experience the wrongs suffered by his race and his class, and in voicing his protest against these wrongs and pleading for the rights to which they are justly entitled, he grows eloquent and convincing, and his message goes straight to the hearts of his hearers.

This book makes its appearance at an opportune time, and its passionate protest against the brutality and horror of war will strike a responsive chord in the breast of every class conscious workingman in the world.

The author lays no claim to poetic polish or to the mastery of technique. He is no graduate of a college where “pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed.” He is one of the innumerable children of poverty, and such education as he has was gained after the day’s work or while looking for a job.

But there is a heart-pulse in every line and a throbbing aspiration in every verse he has written. He sees clearly and feels keenly that which moves him to write and to speak for the struggling poor among whom he was born, with whom he toiled and suffered and to whom he has consecrated his services with all his heart.

EUGENE V. DEBS.

December, 1916.
WRINKLED CLAY

When my bloodless hands shall loose their grip,
And from the cup of health I cease to sip,
I'll meditate, as countless souls have done,
And go to watch the setting of the Sun.
Don't say of me at last that I am dead,
Because you heard the snapping of a thread.
I'll travel on, if travelers seek to know,
The great highway where countless millions go.
For peace and sleep a tired soul in quest,
Don't say I'm dead because I traveled west.
And there to be within those quiet walls
Where no pain comes that saddens or appals.
So sweet the rest, I'll sleep on day by day,
In perfect peace, me and my wrinkled clay.
Where quiet ever reigns both night and morn,
A bed of rest without a pricking thorn.
The warring world, with all its aching pores,
Shall not impede the flight of he who soars.
Their struggles and their battles born of hate
Shall not unlock my inner garden gate.
I'll sleep where mother earth has made my bed,
And only die when living things are dead.
With mental wings that used to rise and soar,
I fold them now to sleep for evermore,
A million years to thank my God and smile
I lived where hypocrites were out of style.
In spite of fear I walk erect to Thee,
Without a yoke, my wrinkled clay and me.

IF I WERE GOD

If I were God and had command
Of all the land and sea;
If I were God and had all power,
And God was only me,
I'd leave my throne up in the sky,
And make a downward flight.
Then see about this wicked world
Where people don't act right.
I'd leave the angels up above
To gauge the sun and rain;
I'd pack up everything I had
And catch an earthbound train.
If I were God and knew I was,
And see what I see now;
If robbers didn't keep my law,
I'd come and teach them how.
They'd either let my children go,
Or else I'd thunder loud,
And put my warning on the wall
Of every drifting cloud.
I'd grow it on each blade of grass
And paint it on the sun;
I'd send rain of meteors down
To warn the guilty one.
I'd chisel it across the moon
And print it on the stars.
I'd empty jails where innocence
Is kept behind the bars.
I'd stop these lawless hypocrites
Who lynch and burn and lie.
I'd dip a thunder-bolt in blood
And send it through the sky.
Instead of watching sparrows fall,
I'd watch the brutal mob.
If I were God I'd rule the earth
Or else I'd quit the job.

INSPIRATION

Always keep working on some noble plan;
Tackle the task and work like a man.
If it's digging ditches or rowing a boat,
Put your whole heart in what you promote.
But whether your task be fancy or plain,
You'll have to keep plugging with valor and main.
Don't think of quitting because you are sore;
You may only be a few miles from the shore.
Don't possess weakness and think you are strong;
Adjust and examine when matters go wrong.
Never stay down when you ought to stand up;
Don't drink the dregs from any man's cup.
Read good books and keep your mind clear;
Examine each one without mercy or fear.
Don't be foolish and think you are wise,
And take it for granted because you surmise.
Walk like a man every inch of the road;
March up ahead--don't hop like a toad.
Spread out your wings and take in the air;
Be up and doing and travel somewhere.
Stand on your feet, don't crawl in the dust;
Lubricate your mind and ward off the rust.
Don't be a giant and think you are small;
Greatness is built upon aim after all.
Have some great picture engraved on your mind
Of one who is noble and honest and kind.
Learn of that person as much as you can,
And then try to beat him at being a man.
**MY PEOPLE**

My people are happy people,
No matter what goes wrong;
They wear chains and trust in fate,
And sing emotion's song.

My people are working people—
They labor all their lives
To take care of rich parasites
And clothe their lazy wives.

My people are fearless people—
They fight and bleed and die,
And do not want a single thing
But mansions in the sky.

My people are noisy people—
They give to every quack,
And cherish every ancient lie
With moss upon its back.

My people are handsome people—
You'll find them everywhere,
Putting cobwebs in their brains
And pressing down their hair.

My people are leading people—
Their leaders get the gold;
They lead and keep the rest behind
With empty bags to hold.

**THE ACE**

A throttle to pull
And a motor to roar,
With wings like an eagle
To circle and soar.

A pilot to guide
The thing through the air,
While hanging his life
On the strand of a hair.

Two miles a minute
In blue, trackless space;
Daring and fearless,
The fast-flying Ace.

Swiftly he glides
With the motor that sings;
Playing with death
In a casket with wings.
THE NEGRO

Loyal to their Flag and Country,
    They the Nation's greatest moulders,
Working for their greedy masters,
    With the world upon their shoulders.
Bent two hundred years in bondage,
    While the world with strife was quaking;
Singing, dancing, laughing, joking—
    That's what kept their hearts from breaking.

First in war to fight and conquer,
    The last to get what valor gained;
Why they did not grow revengeful
    Is still a mystery unexplained.
Upon the auction block they staggered,
    Where men were buying, selling, taking;
Praying, shouting, telling stories—
    That's what kept their hearts from breaking.

Mobbed and lynched because of color,
    A fuel for the master's flame.
Amid it all they struggled upward
    Through the Nation's greatest shame.
Their belief that right will conquer
    Those who stoop to profit taking;
That's what kept their souls from sinking;
    That's what kept their hearts from breaking.

ALTRUISM

If when to earth I say farewell
    I find two separate paths to trod—
One that leads to literal hell
    And one that winds its way to God.
And in that Heaven up so high
    There is but flapping of glad wings,
No wretched souls to sweat and die
    Beneath the lash of heartless kings.

I shall not choose that quiet state
    Where all is laughter, joy and glee;
I'll go where fires are red with hate,
    And take my humane heart with me.

That I might ever serve and think
    Where men are shackled through the years,
And give the famished soul a drink,
    And wipe away his bitter tears.
If Heaven has no crime or wrong,
I would not care to quarter there;
I could not bathe my lips in song
While hell was raging everywhere.

Why should I go where all is tame,
When I can serve where strife is hot,
Where persecutors play their game,
And tortured victims are forgot?

WHAT WILL YOU SAY?

What will you say, what will you say
When night shall come to close the day?
No problems solved, no castles built,
How will you try to hide your guilt?
You only have a few more years
Until the snow will greet your tears.
Your brightest star is gliding down,
And soon the darkness will abound.
Was idle thought the cause of this,
Or too much pleasure, wine and bliss?
Too much nonsense, song and dance,
That put your soul into a trance?
When the world awaits a younger set,
Will you weep and frown and fret?
And vainly try to hold the stage
When youth shall come to conquer age?
Can you watch the curtain drop
And journey downward from the top,
And really feel you’ve done your best,
And watch the sun sink in the west?
Can you smile and quit the game,
As millions did before you came?
What can you say and tell the truth
When old age comes to welcome youth?
They’ll laugh and celebrate their birth,
And start to crowd you off the earth.
You once were young and had your day,
The night is here—what will you say?

JOE WALCOTT

When I was in Boston, a few years ago,
I met the mankiller they call little Joe.
I wondered why nature had made him so small
And give him such courage, defiance and gall.
About five feet and four inches high,
This short little demon made heavyweights fly.
Stout as an ox, and built like a top,  
A Barbados wonder nobody could stop.  
He fought for a living and relished the game,  
And ascended the ladder of fortune and fame;  
Beating all comers—some double his weight—  
With all kinds of punches—crooked and straight.  
At hitting and blocking his judgment was good;  
If he didn’t get them, no pugilist could.  
Jumping and swinging, a glutton at that;  
As strong as a lion, as quick as a cat.  
Sidestepping and ducking from the tap of the bell,  
The bigger they were the harder they fell.  
A jab to the stomach, a cross to the face,  
The more he was punished the faster his pace.  
A fast thunderbolt that traveled by rounds,  
And tackled all comers, regardless of pounds.  
He stood on the ladder and no man could pass—  
The welterweight champion, the king of his class.  
History may speak of the great and the small,  
But little Joe Walcott was king of them all.

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CIVILIZATION

When great rulers went to war  
They wore breastplates and shields  
To stop the bullets as they sped  
Across the battlefields.

But when the new guns came around  
That shot through armor tough,  
The rich took off the worthless plates—  
The game had got too rough.

He gave the workingman the gun,  
And stroked him on the back,  
And said, you go and fight for me;  
I’ll pray till you get back.

And that same foolish workingman,  
So stupid, meek and poor,  
Has spilt his blood in every war  
Where vultures thirst for gore.

The rulers stay at home and read  
How bullets kill and maim;  
But never rub elbows with death  
Where hell lets loose its flame.
The rich bring doughnuts to the train,
With coffee, cake and pie;
They tell the boys how grand it is
To famish, bleed and die.

They send the best blood to the front,
Where big guns rip and smash;
They get exempt and stay at home,
And count their bloody cash.

VOLTAIRE

Voltaire is dead, but I must write
About this fearless, gallant knight,
Who was despised throughout his day,
When kings and vandals held full sway,
And all free speech was out of date.
Where men were taught to serve and wait.
Voltaire wrote and mused and laughed
About these kingdoms and their craft.
His heart was kind, his head was cool;
He would not measure by their rule.
He pointed at their cheating scales,
And passed their gibbets and their jails.
France was dark as midnight then,
And every truth was called a sin.
The wings of fear were spread so wide
That science had no place to hide.
All honest men were doomed to die
Who dared to challenge some great lie.
And Voltaire, with his fearless soul,
So frank and dauntless, cool and bold,
Hurled his arrow like a flash,
With courage, common sense and dash,
And made the wound that always bled
Till inquisition days were dead.
He bore his cross both day and night,
And led his people to the light.

AT THE INGERSOLL HOME

I was in New York, and I shall not forget
One home where I called and the ladies I met.
Bob Ingersoll’s widow descended the stair—
About eighty years old, with silver-gray hair.
She showed me the room where the great soldier died,
I saw his volumes that laughed and defied.
I talked with the daughter of the great infidel,
Whose father, they say, is still burning in hell.
He wanted no creed for shelter or sham.
And would not wash in the blood of the lamb.
They were not tearing our Bible to shreds;
I did not see any horns on their heads.
They did not slight me because of my face,
But treated like I was one of their race.
Their love for my people had not ceased to grow
Since they sheltered Douglas a long time ago.
The home of a lawyer of fame and renown.
As eloquent as Phillips, as fearless as Brown.
The tall walls were covered from hallway to den
With letters and pictures from notable men.
A gift from Abe Lincoln, a saber from Grant,
A verse from Paul Dunbar, the picture of Kant.
The books of Walt Whitman, Voltaire and Blaine,
The statue of Haeckel, Charles Darwin and Paine.
A home of good people, but still out of style
For teaching a doctrine that Christians revile.

GENE DEBS
I saw Gene Debs, my friend Eugene,
The comrade I have known so long,
Where heartless guards are coarse and mean,
Behind the bars, so thick and strong.
He smiled and kissed me on the cheek,
And asked about the Hoosier lands,
Where live the wretched poor and meek,
With aching hearts and calloused hands.
So glad was I to meet my friend,
A man so fearless, kind and great,
A soul they could not bribe or bend
With all their systems born of hate.
In time of war, when cowards stood
Between the people and their aim,
He carried water instead of wood
And threw it on their ghastly flame.
Behind the bars, a rebel still,
Who will not crawl down on his knees,
Though they may throw away the keys.
My time was up, we had to part,
I looked as far as I could see;
The rebel with the noble heart
Was waving “farewells” back at me.
I looked up at Atlanta's sky,
And uttered one long dogged prayer—
I vowed to work until I die
To wreck the thing that put him there.
MISTREATING THE SOLDIER

The soldier is a big boy scout,
   Full grown, but still a boy,
Trained to fight his fellow-man,
   To plunder and destroy.

He is some honest mother's son,
   Taught like you and I,
To hate the brotherhood of man,
   And kill and crucify.

And often treated like a hound,
   Trained from a little pup
To watch the helpless under-dog
   And never let him up.

He's just a common workingman,
   Who fights and prays and sings,
And kills and curses as he goes
   For millionaires and kings.

He is a fearless, sturdy man,
   Taught to drill and hike,
And even shoot the union man
   When he goes out on strike.

He is the banker's bodyguard,
   But when the war is o'er
He may be found along the street
   Among the jobless poor.

He is the slave of millionaires;
   They coax and treat him kind
Until he totters on his cane,
   Shell-shocked, diseased and blind.

TO THE HARLEM COMMUNITY CHURCH

The Harlem Community Church,
   Where men dissect and weigh,
Where people have a right to think,
   As well as watch and pray;
Where you can sit and listen,
   Where you may rise and speak,
Where preachers do not soar high,
   With Latin mixed with Greek.
You'll hear a forceful sermon
   That you cannot deny;
You'll find it on each blade of grass
That grows beneath the sky.
Come, but leave your false face,
For shamming days are done.
They preach about a common God
Down here beneath the sun.
No lying in this unique church,
No ignorance on its knees,
No devil puts you in a hell
And throws away the keys.
This is the new church of the age;
Its doors are open wide
For ev'ry man and woman
Who has no schemes to hide.
It is the modern church of thought,
It gives you mental health;
A great cathedral uncontrolled
By worthless thieves of wealth.
A church for fearless people,
Where common sense is taught,
Where mental weakness cannot be
A substitute for thought.
Where logic soars to the skies,
And truth is ever near,
In every sentence so sublime,
So perfect, loud and clear.
No ghost to shock the little child
In this great church of art;
No lies of things to fight for you
When you don't take your part.
They read the Bible leaf by leaf,
Not bound in any book.
It smiles in ev'ry drop of rain,
It sings in every brook.
The open work of Nature's God,
Without a crack or flaw;
The ruler of the all that is,
The God of natural law.
I see them coming in this church
Through God's great open door;
No shelter for the greedy rich,
No handcuffs for the poor.
Ethelred Brown is speaking,
I hear his message ring
Through the one great Negro church
Where common sense is king.
THE COAL MINER

I see the miner, grim and plain,
With flaming torch upon his cap,
Digging coal down in the vein,
Beneath the risky steel death-trap.
He says good-bye to child and wife;
He knows that kiss may be the last,
As he goes forth to risk his life
Where men are smothered, crushed and gassed.
A deep half-mile down in the earth
He goes and gets his trusty tools,
Where barons have no sense of worth,
And men are valued less than mules.
Down in the damp coal dust and air
He must inhale at every breath.
Where grim consumption has its lair,
And speeds its arrow fraught with death.
The miner's home is but a shed,
Built on a hill of stone or clay.
There he prays and eats his bread,
And lingers while his lungs decay.
The white plague gets him soon or late;
His jaded muscles won't respond.
Among the dust of rock and slate
He journeys to the great beyond.

WAR

War is the God of mammon,
War is the outlaw of stealth,
War is the dream of a savage,
War is the glutton of wealth.

War is the dungeon keeper,
War is the forger of chains,
War is the cunning assassin,
War is the poisoner of brains.

War is the prayer of the looter,
War is the bottomless well,
War is the base of the baseless,
War is the foundation of hell.

AT THE SPEEDWAY

The first great Motor Speedway
Was packed from fence to fence;
They were lined upon the bleachers
Long before the race commenced.
It was on Decoration Day,
The hot sun was beaming down—
We could smell the scorching rubber
That was pounding on the ground.

Bill Endicott was in the race,
So was fearless Caleb Bragg;
Germany, France and England—
Every country had its flag.
Each driver cranked and started—
Hear their engines pop and bang,
Going, perhaps, to meet their doom,
Like Bruce Brown and Lewis Strang.

With nerves of iron and steel,
The fuel went through the feed.
Louis Disbrow set the pace
And sped with unknown speed.
Goux drove his Peugeot Special,
The Stutz bear-cat hugged the post.
Isotta, battling with the Mercer,
Passed the grandstand like a ghost.

Spencer Wishart and Ralph Mulford
Rode the saucer way up high.
Applause came from the bleachers
As Barney Oldfield thundered by.
Wild Bob Burman drove a Keeton
(Wind pressure broke his goggle lense),
He drove his car even faster
Than he drove old Blitzen Benz.

By this time the track was oily
And they skid when tires were cast.
Then the danger was so dazzling
Every moment seemed the last.
One car turned completely over,
A cloud rose up, thick and black;
I saw two unconscious pilots
Lying helpless on the track.

Dawson tried to dodge the wreckage,
But his Marmo would not halt—
Speeding like a mad tornado,
His car turned summersault.
Death seemed to hover near,
As the champion lay there alone,
Bleeding from his mouth and ears,
With a broken collar-bone.
The Sunbeam and Beaver Bullet,
   Faster still these cars were sent—
Drivers seemed to go speed mad
   After Joe Dawson's accident.
Mason chasing after Burman,
   Gray Fox fighting with the Case,
And the crowd cheered Ralph DePalma,
   Who was a hero in the race.
The dust rose again in anger
   As the dare-devils hit and spilled;
Then the word was circulated
   That Gill Anderson was killed.
Before Rene Thomas won the race
   He drove his car up to the pit,
Changed his tires in twenty seconds,
   Took on gas and out he lit.
On around the track they thundered
   With a burst of flame and power,
With their shirts torn to ribbons,
   A hundred nineteen miles an hour.
The speedway has its fascination,
   A grip that drivers can't resent;
They love the game of thrills and spills—
   They go the way Bob Burman went.

NATURAL LAW

Cyclones wreck and splinter,
   Typhoons wade across the seas;
The hurricane does not loiter
   For wet cheeks nor bended knees.
The earthquake still devours,
   The bad floods rip and roar;
They swallow up their victims—
   The rich go with the poor.

Production, then destruction—
   We see no great aim in view;
Conception, birth, and death—
   The old vacates for the new.

Natural law, immutable power,
   A King that collects his fees,
It sends death and sunshine,
   Famine, health, and disease.

You cannot bribe natural law—
   The penalty comes soon or late;
Beneath the flower of love
   We discover the thorn of hate.
THE BLACK SCAB

The master chased the slave
  With a hungry hound;
Now the slave gets up early
  To run the master down.
He stands outside the factory
  And pleads with all his vim,
And goes away sad and hungry
  When no one employs him.

Our attitude toward him
  Will make him friend or foe—
He will go with the capitalist
  If there's nowhere else to go.
And often barred from the Union,
  For being a Negro, dark and grim,
The reason why he scabs on you
  Is because you scab on him.

He don't want slow starvation—
  Don't get that in your head;
He wants equal opportunity
  In his fight for daily bread.
You'd better let him in the Union,
  Let him vote for delegate;
Let him help solve the problem,
  Let him work as well as wait.

He always laughs and whistles,
  Though in poverty to the brim,
But he only scabbed on you
  After you had scabbed on him.
He never messed with science,
  Because science seemed too deep.
He was satisfied with corn bread,
  And a trundle bed for sleep.

The white man layed the brick,
  The black man carried the hod—
Believing that his status
  Was so ordained by God.
Don't think you are immune
  Because he has a curly head—
His poverty breeds disease
  That germinate and spread.

His low wages breed consumption,
  And germs from his screenless doors
Are carried by the housefly
   To that little child of yours.
He wants class solidarity,
   With the many and the few.
As you measure to the Negro
   It will be measured back to you.

THE EDITOR AND THE NEGRO

If the police arrest a Negro
   In a dive or gambling den,
The newspapers always mention
   About the color of his skin.
But if he does something noble,
   In which we all take pride,
They will seldom say a word
   About the color of his hide.

When a white man gets drunk,
   And hunts someone to shoot,
The papers don't refer to him
   As a great big burly brute.
But just pick up the paper—
   In scare-type you will read
About some ignorant Negro
   Who has done some awful deed.

At the bottom of the paper
   They may print a little space
About some honorable Negro
   Who is a credit to his race.
Our thinkers and mechanics,
   Our athletes and patentees—
The newspapers have no space
   To mention such as these.

The editors like to mention
   The misfortunes that we rue,
But they seldom call attention
   To the noble things we do.
So some white people think
   We are heathens, more or less,
Because the story is one-sided
   As they read it in the press.
UNDER THE CROSS

Jesus carried His wooden cross
Up Mount Calvary's rugged brow—
Burdened like the workingman
With the cross he carries now.
Some slave has always carried the Cross
For all the system affords;
His cross was wood, but our cross
Is a cross of guns and swords.

Underneath this massive load
The worker is groaning still;
Whipped by some unseen hand,
We stagger on up the hill.
We sink into an early grave
With the cross for he who hoards.
His cross was wood, but our cross
Is a cross of guns and swords.

In all the ages of the world
We've bowed our heads in shame,
And carried a gold or wooden cross
To aid some gambler's game.
While Christ carried his heavy cross
The rulers drank wine from goards—
His cross was wood, but our cross
Is a cross of guns and swords.

THE REBEL

We visit the grave of the Rebel,
And repeat the harsh words he said—
We usually hate the live Rebel
And respect the one who is dead.

Yesterday we crucified Jesus;
To-day we emulate and shed tears;
The hypocrite will follow the rebel
If he has been dead a few years.

You read about Wendell Phillips,
And say he was fearless and true,
But Phillips was often assaulted
By just such a coward as you.

You think John Brown was a hero,
But had you lived then as did he,
You might have assisted the mob
That strung him up to a tree.
We murdered Elijah Lovejoy
Because he spoke and defied;
We hated him while he was living,
And honored him after he died.

Lloyd Garrison was a thinker;
Right, but they said he was wrong.
He fought for the freedom of slaves
And defied the wealthy and strong.

And while Gene Debs is living
They'll empty slops on his head—
Cowards never honor a Rebel
Until after the Rebel is dead.

THE MAN WHO FIGHTS THE FIRE

The firefighter, rough and ready,
Slides down through the trap
And grabs his coat and helmet
When the bell begins to tap.
Speeding through the streets,
While the number is being struck,
You hear the throbbing engine
Of the speed-mad motor truck.

They are eager for the battle—
With coats all buckled tight,
They swing upon the footboard
And thunder through the night.
Everybody admires a hero—
See the people look and sigh
And run out to the corner
When the long trucks thunder by.

The fireman climbs the ladder
Where death and danger calls,
And hunts for helpless victims
Beneath the bending walls.
With eyes suffused with smoke,
I've seen them choke and spit,
And stagger up the ladder—
Now that's what I call grit.

Above all heroes on record,
The fellow that I admire
Is the man who points the nozzle—
The laddie who fights the fire.
If your house gets on fire,
Just send these boys a bell,
And in a moment they'll be coming
Like a bat shot out of hell.
THE PROFITEER

Your philanthropy cannot outweigh
The many harmful deeds you do;
I'd rather be poor and as rich as I am
Than be rich and as poor as you.

You are the poorest of all poor men—
You are poor with all your loot;
You rob and starve the least of your kind—
A deed too base for the brute.

The beasts only kill in self-defense,
Or because they think they are right;
But you daily live by other men's sweat,
And bottle the air and the light.

You keep justice with tears in her eyes,
Then bribe the courts with your crew;
I'd rather be poor and as rich as I am
Than rich and as poor as you.

You're rich in pocket, but poor in heart,
You're a pauper despite what you own;
Beyond the depth to which you have gone
The distance will never be known.

Real riches mean the kindness of heart,
The spirit that dwells in the soul,
That makes a fellow find something to do
Besides coining sweat into gold.

Some day you'll start for the "needle's eye";
You'll stumble and never get through;
I'd rather be poor and as rich as I am
Than rich and as poor as you.

REVENGE

If I wanted to get revenge,
And do you bodily harm,
I would not poison you
Nor saw off your right arm.
I would not hang you up,
Nor make you go insane;
I would not hobble you,
Nor make you writhe in pain.
I would not stab you in the back,
Nor freeze you in the ice;
I would not win your money
With a pair of loaded dice.
I would not strangle you
Until you lost your breath,
Nor throw you in a furnace
And let you burn to death.
I would not kick in your ribs,
Nor pour lead in your ears;
Nor torture you with fagots
And then laugh at your tears.
I would not pull out your tongue,
Nor chop off all your toes;
I would not burn out your eyes,
Nor cut slits in your nose.

I wouldn't tie you on a track,
To be mangled by a train,
Nor would I stuff some creed
Into the pockets of your brain.
I would not make you wander
In a wilderness east and west,
Nor see your half-starved baby
Tugging at the milkless breast.

I would not stake you down
By the rising of the sea—
Revenge is sweet, but all of this
Would be 'most too tame for me.
I wouldn't kill you outright,
For I haven't that much cheek,
But I'd make you try to pastor
A Colored Church for just a week.

YOU AND YOUR GOD

You try to do so much for God,
Who has all power;
Why not help your brother here below
In his trying hour?
Your God dwells beyond the skies,
With hidden face;
He only helps the one who tries
To win the race.

God don't need your feeble strength
To guide him through;
If he is God he is immense,
So what of you?
Be a man, and tell the truth;
Hold up the light—
A God would not solicit your aid.
For he is might.
Don't say you've done what you cannot do,  
   So don't pretend.  
Why do you try to help a God,  
   And neglect a friend?  
You can help your fellowman,  
   Or do him dirt;  
But a God, omnipotent and allwise,  
   You cannot hurt.

You cannot help or hinder God,  
   Who is supreme;  
So we are beginning to understand  
   The Pagan scheme.  
We know a "first cause" rules the earth  
   And makes things grow,  
But just what that power is  
   We do not know.

We look above and pray and shout  
   Till we are hoarse,  
But nature laughs at human tears  
   And takes its course.  
This isn't a bad world, after all;  
   It's pretty fair.  
So let's not bother the other world  
   Until we get there.

Let's help our neighbors down below  
   Who are in distress,  
And don't hurry off to the other world  
   About which we guess.  
When we scatter sunshine and cheer  
   Along the way  
We can fold our arms and have no fear  
   Of judgment day.

You don't need to believe a lie  
   To pay the cost;  
If you are square, and tell the truth,  
   You can't be lost.  
A Heavenly Father would keep no hell  
   To burn his guest,  
So when your eyes are closed in death  
   You are at rest.
ORATORY

Oratory is the flow of speech—
A burst of thoughtful aim
That animates the silver tongue
With logic, wit and flame.

It is the current of the heart,
For which the soul may yearn;
The dynamo producing gems
That live, and breathe, and burn.

It does not stop to meditate,
Nor lose its growing theme;
The shuttle of wisdom vibrates
A constant, flowing stream.

Oratory is an endless chain,
Forged in the mill of thought,
Freighted down with truth or lies
Where opinion's forms are wrought.

It is a perfect spray of speech,
A servant, and not a guest;
It is the fruit of patient toil,
Of work, and not of rest.

Oratory is the earnest speech,
A polish the tongue can give;
It is the forge at which we weld
The golden thoughts that live.
"Every time I meet a Negro I feel like getting upon my knees to ask him pardon for crimes my race has inflicted on his."

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL