

**POEMS ON
MISCELLANEOUS
SUBJECTS.
[PHILADELPHIA-1857]**

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Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. [Philadelphia-1857] by Frances Ellen Watkins

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FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS

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[PHILADELPHIA-1857]**

P O E M S
ON
MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS,

BY
FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS. *Harper*

TENTH THOUSAND.



PHILADELPHIA:
MERRIMAN & THOMPSON, PRINTERS
Lodge street, North side Pennsylvania Bank.
1857.

P R E F A C E .

Of the colored population of the United States, three millions are doomed to the horrible condition of chattel slavery. That condition is the annihilation of manhood, the extinction of genius, the burial of mind. In it, therefore, there can be no progress on the part of its victims; what they are capable of being and doing can be only a matter of supposition. It is unlawful to teach them the alphabet; they not only have no literature, but they know not the meaning of the word; for them there is no hope, and therefore no incentive to a higher development; in one word, they are property to be owned, not persons to be protected.

There are half a million free colored persons in our country. These are not admitted to equal rights and privileges with the whites. As a body, their means of education are extremely limited; they are oppressed on every hand; they are confined to the performance of the most menial acts; consequently, it is not surprising that their intellectual, moral and social advancement is not more rapid. Nay, it is surprising, in view of the injustice meted out to them, that they have done so well. Many bright

examples of intelligence, talent, genius and piety might be cited among their ranks, and these are constantly multiplying.

Every indication of ability, on the part of any of their number, is deserving of special encouragement. Whatever is attempted in poetry or prose, in art or science, in professional or mechanical life, should be viewed with a friendly eye, and criticised in a lenient spirit. To measure them by the same standard as we measure the productions of the favored white inhabitants of the land would be manifestly unjust. The varying circumstances and conditions of life are to be taken strictly into account.

Hence, in reviewing the following Poems, the critic will remember that they are written by one young in years, and identified in complexion and destiny with a depressed and outcast race, and who has had to contend with a thousand disadvantages from earliest life. They certainly are very creditable to her, both in a literary and moral point of view, and indicate the possession of a talent which, if carefully cultivated and properly encouraged, cannot fail to secure for herself a poetic reputation, and to deepen the interest already so extensively felt in the liberation and enfranchisement of the entire colored race. Though Miss WATKINS has never been a slave, she has always resided in a slave State, Baltimore being her native city. A specimen of her prose writings is also appended. A few slight alterations excepted, the work is entirely her own. W. L. G.

Boston, August 15, 1854.

P O E M S .

THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN.

Joy to my bosom ! rest to my fear !
Judea's prophet draweth near !
Joy to my bosom ! peace to my heart !
Sickness and sorrow before him depart !

Rack'd with agony and pain,
Writhing, long my child has lain ;
Now the prophet draweth near,
All our griefs shall disappear.

" Lord ! " she cried with mournful breath,
" Save ! Oh, save my child from death ! "
But as though she was unheard,
Jesus answered not a word.

With a purpose nought could move,
And the zeal of woman's love,
Down she knelt in anguish wild—
" Master ! save, Oh ! save my child ! "

“ ’Tis not meet,” the Saviour said,
 “ Thus to waste the children’s bread ;
 I am only sent to seek
 Israel’s lost and scattered sheep.”

“ True,” she said, “ Oh gracious Lord !
 True and faithful is thy word :
 But the humblest, meanest, may
 “ Eat the crumbs they cast away.”

“ Woman,” said th’ astonish’d Lord,
 “ Be it even as thy word !
 By thy faith that knows no fail,
 Thou hast ask’d, and shalt prevail.”

THE SLAVE MOTHER.

HEARD you that shriek ? It rose
 So wildly on the air,
 It seemed as if a burden’d heart
 Was breaking in despair.

Saw you those hands so sadly clasped—
 The bowed and feeble head—
 The shuddering of that fragile form—
 That look of grief and dread ?

Saw you the sad, imploring eye ?
Its every glance was pain,
As if a storm of agony
Were sweeping through the brain.

She is a mother, pale with fear,
Her boy clings to her side,
And in her kirtle vainly tries
His trembling form to hide.

He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother's pains ;
He is not hers, although her blood
Is coursing through his veins !

He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.

His love has been a joyous light
That o'er her pathway smiled,
A fountain gushing ever new,
Amid life's desert wild.

His lightest word has been a tone
Of music round her heart,
Their lives a streamlet blent in one—
Oh, Father ! must they part ?

They tear him from her circling arms,
 Her last and fond embrace :
 Oh ! never more may her sad eyes
 Gaze on his mournful face.

No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
 Disturb the listening air :
 She is a mother, and her heart
 Is breaking in despair.

BIBLE DEFENCE OF SLAVERY.

TAKE sackcloth of the darkest dye,
 And shroud the pulpits round !
 Servants of Him that cannot lie,
 Sit mourning on the ground.

Let holy horror blanch each cheek,
 Pale every brow with fears :
 And rocks and stones, if ye could speak,
 Ye well might melt to tears !

Let sorrow breathe in every tone,
 In every strain ye raise ;
 Insult not God's majestic throne
 With th' mockery of praise.