

THE NEGRO-MOTHER

I thank my God and yours, my blessed ones,
That you were not born slaves; I'll tell you how
A little negro babe grew sick and died
Without its mother near it.

—She laid him down—and as a bird 5
Struck with a mortal dart, she reeled
Yet dared not look again,—she heard
The last, long summons to the field.
She laid him down,—the only one
Her hope, her love dwelt fondly on. 10
The only heart that hers had met
With joy, and turned from with regret.
A golden link in slavery's chain,
The manna on life's desert plain,
Which, through the weary day and night, 15
Made slumber bliss, and labour light.

All pain was hers the slave could know,
Hard toil and insult, taunt and blow;
Yet, had her bright-eyed negro child
Almost to slavery reconciled 20
Her spirit, for his smiles could bring
Lost pleasures to her soul, and bliss
From out his love burst, like a spring,
That gladdens the parched wilderness.
And, toiling 'neath the scorching sun, 25
She thought but how, when day was done,
Sitting beside the plantain tree,
Clasping his little playful hand,
Or joining in his thoughtless glee,
The mother's fondness might expand; 30
And, thrilling like a finer sense,
Be for all pain a recompense.
—A burning fever came at length,
And bowed his frame, consumed his strength;
And wild throbs of delirious pain 35
Filled with alarms his infant brain.
He clasped his mother's neck and prayed,
Madly and mournfully, for aid.
But vain his prayer,—she might not stay
To watch beside him thro' the day. 40

'Twas harvest-time, when she must bear
 Of toil and task, a heavier share.
 So, sleepless thro' the night, she sat
 Watching beside her infant's mat,
 And with untiring love, 45
 Bent o'er him—soothed and wiled away
 The fears that made his brain a prey;
 And bathed his brow, and strove
 To please him with each thing she knew
 He loved when he was strong; 50
 The tale that oft his wonder drew,
 His favorite sport and song.
 To lay his little cheek to hers,
 And his burning breath to feel,
 To hear the feeble plaint that stirs 55
 The heartstrings like love's last appeal.
 —But day was up—the toil begun—
 And she must go forth with her fettered race.
 What heeds the whiteman, tho' her son
 Be torn from her embrace, 60
 And left to die, of death the worst,
 In agonies of burning thirst?
 What is a negro-infant's sorrow
 To him—a mother's wild distress;
 Her groan of utter wretchedness 65
 Or look of frenzied horror?—
 She must away to till the bane
 Of her dark race, the blood-nursed cane.
 So she laid him down, and forth she went
 With a mother's outraged feelings wild; 70
 And as the fiery sunbeams spent
 Her frame, not of the scorching ray
 She thought, but only how the day,
 Hour after hour, might wear away
 With her poor abandon'd child. 75

All day she toiled—at night she sped
 To her hut, and there he lay—
 But cold and stiff, on his dreamless bed,
 Where—life had passed away!
 Alas! for that sad mother's wail 80
 When she saw his cheek all wet with tears;
 And thought what anguish would assail
 His soul when pangs and fears

Came o'er him, and he called in vain
 On the only one who was dear to him; 85
 Who could have soothed his dying pain,
 And blessed him ere his eyes grew dim.
 —At length she calmed her grief and laid
 Her infant in the plantain's shade;
 And, as if lulling him to rest, 90
 Began a lowly warbled strain;
 For she knew in death the child was blest,
 And freed from the white man's chain;
 —“My little one! my blessed one!
 Would I were laid with thee! 95
 Would that my limbs were fetterless
 In lands beyond the sea.
 Would I could burst life's long dark dream,
 And be where thou art now,
 Where cool gales from my native stream 100
 Are freshening o'er thy brow.

“Thou art there! thou art there! I see thee stand
 On our broad river's shore;
 Thy father clasps thy little hand, 105
 And you are slaves no more.
 Tell him, thou dear, thou happy one,
 Though I wear the whiteman's chain,
 My galling task will soon be done,
 And we all shall meet again. 110

“We all shall meet again, and see,
 In the towering solo's shade,
 Our children sporting joyfully
 Where we in childhood played.—
 My child, I will not mourn for thee; 115
 Your shouts are echoing wide,
 In the broad shade of the lilo tree,
 On our own river's side.”

MARY HOWITT.
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