

A POETRY ANTHOLOGY FROM THE 1919 ORIGINAL

Poems from *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*

Twenty-three complete poems gathered from Delilah L. Beasley's history

Transcribed from the original printing
with biographical and textual notes in editorial red

Editorial introduction

Delilah L. Beasley's *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* is a history told partly through poems. Verse appears as civic argument, memorial, prayer, racial self-definition, wartime address, and domestic comedy. The poems also make visible the networks behind Beasley's book: Black newspapers, public commemorations, clubs, churches, lectures, and private manuscripts.

Three recurring themes can be followed through the internal links in this edition. The demand for full citizenship joins Priscilla Stewart's *A Voice from the Oppressed*, Cecilia Williams's *The Glory of the Coming Man*, and A. C. H. Bilbrew's *The Black Boys in Khaki*. Public memory animates James Madison Bell's Lincoln elegy, the tribute to Crispus Attucks, and William Nauns Ricks's *Do We Remember*. Cultural self-making runs from Eloise Bibb-Thompson's devotional *A Garland of Prayer* to Eva Carter Buckner's searching *What Constitutes a Negro?*.

Selection principle. This anthology includes every piece Beasley explicitly presents as a poem in the Literary Department, plus the three complete poems printed elsewhere in the volume. Brief quotations, fragments, chants, and repeated epigraphic stanzas are not treated as separate poems. The result is twenty-three complete poems in their order of appearance.

Textual principle. The transcriptions were checked against the page images rather than accepted from the OCR layer. Clear OCR corruption has been corrected. The source's historical spelling, diction, capitalization, and unusual readings are generally retained; obvious compositor slips have been normalized sparingly where the intended reading is unambiguous. All newly written material is printed in oxblood red.

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Just California

by John Steven McGroarty

ORIGINAL PAGE 140

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

John Steven McGroarty (1862-1944) was a California journalist, dramatist, historian, and public official. He served as California's poet laureate from 1933 until his death. Beasley calls this poem one of the most charming ever written about the state. [2]

"Twixt the sea and the deserts,
"Twixt the wastes and the waves,
Between the sands of buried lands
And ocean's coral caves.
It lies not East nor West
But like a scroll unfurled,
Where the hand of God hath hung it,
Down the middle of the world.

It lies where God hath spread it,
In the gladness of His eyes,
Like a flame of jeweled tapestry
Beneath the shining skies;
With the green of woven meadows
And the hills in golden chains,
The light of leaping rivers,
And the flash of poppied plains.

Days rise that gleam in glory,
Days die with sunset's breeze,
While from Cathay that was of old
Sail countless argosies;
Morn breaks again in splendor
O'er the giant, new-born West,
But of all the lands God fashioned,
"Tis this land is the best.

Just California stretching down
The middle of the world.

Sometimes amid the tumult and the throng

by Anonymous

ORIGINAL PAGE 206

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley prints this two-stanza lyric as the epigraph to her chapter on California's musical life and attributes it only to 'Anonymous.' No secure author has been identified; the title used here is the first line.

Sometimes amid the tumult and the throng,
We hear an old sweet song,
A broken strain from one we used to hear
Back in some yester year;
A melody borne through the drifting haze
Of life's forgotten days.
The tumult dies around us, strangely thrilled
With roar of traffic stilled;
Our eyes are dimmed -- our hearts turn back -- and then
We dream old dreams again.

Sometimes beneath Love's new-found, smiling skies
Remembered perfumes rise;
An incense from the violet or rose,
Where summer's south wind blows;
Lost fragrance from old lanes of mignonette,
That love cannot forget;
And in the twilight or the dawn we turn
To where old altars burn;
And new-found love must bide its moments; then
We dream old dreams again.

A Voice from the Oppressed to the Friends of Humanity

by Priscilla Stewart

ORIGINAL PAGE 263

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Priscilla Stewart was a Black teacher and civic worker associated with California and the 1858 Black migration to Vancouver Island. Beasley explains that this protest poem answered proposed exclusionary legislation in California and Britain's invitation to settle farther north. Stewart's birth and death dates remain uncertain. [3]

Look and behold our sad despair,
Our hopes and prospects fled.
The tyrant slavery entered here
And laid us all for dead.
Sweet home! When shall we find a home?
If the tyrant says that we must go
The love of gain the reason.
And if humanity dare say "No,"
Then they are tried for treason.

God bless the Queen's majesty,
Her sceptre and her throne,
She looked on us with sympathy
And offered us a home.
Far better breathe Canadian air
Where all are free and well,
Than live in slavery's atmosphere
And wear the chains of hell.

Farewell to our native land,
We must wave the parting hand,
Never to see thee any more,
But seek a foreign land.

Farewell to our true friends,
Who've suffered dungeon and death.
You have a claim upon our gratitude
Whilst God shall lend us breath.

May God inspire your hearts,
A Marion raise your hands;
Never desert your principles
Until you've redeemed your land.

Columbia

by William Ross Wallace

ORIGINAL PAGE 263

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

William Ross Wallace (1819-1881) was a Kentucky-born white American poet and lawyer who settled in New York and published patriotic verse. His presence immediately after Beasley's heading 'writings of Pioneer Negroes' is therefore an anomaly in the 1919 volume, not an identity this edition has silently reassigned. [4]

Columbia stands forth as the Queen of the Nation,
With the diadem of Freedom radiant with the stars flashing
From her spotless brow.
Look up with proud and solemn joy unto our Flag,
That for the deathless right of man
Blazed over Freedom's threatening crag
When slavery's bolts were hurled,
For a million heroes made its stars
The hope-lights of the world.

Oh, see we not amid the joy
Now where the battle's o'er,
Our dear, great country, greater yet
On shouting chainless sea and shore.
All state hates from us hurled,
For a million heroes made our stars
The hope-lights of the world.

The Glory of the Coming Man

by Cecilia Williams

ORIGINAL PAGE 264

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Cecilia Williams was a Black California lecturer, Shakespearean performer, and writer active in nineteenth-century civic and literary life. Beasley presents this poem as having been read at a celebration of the Fifteenth Amendment. Surviving biographical details are limited, and her dates are not securely established.

The one great act in Freedom's cause,
The act that now we celebrate,
That should uplift us man to man,
We still exist in name alone.
The iron hoofs of nations still oppress us.
I strove to penetrate the unknown future,
I look back on the dim and musty past,
And yet I feel it will not always last.
I rouse from apathy my sluggish self,
And shake the dust of bondage from my brow;
Until the Civil Rights in thundering tones be spoken
The task of freedom is but half-begun.

Let education fit us for the conflict
Let us be united both hand and heart together.
And then the sun will spread its rays before us
To cheer the glory of the coming man.

Those men that freedom has ennobled,
And men whose virtues are immortal.
So let our friend and statesman guide us,
Charles Sumner, from the spirit land.

And may his good deeds live within the Senate
Till with our fairer kindred
We shall be brothers hand in hand;
I see the future rise before me,
The glory of the coming man.

Poem

by James Madison Bell

ORIGINAL PAGES 264-265

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

James Madison Bell (1826-1902), often called the 'Bard of the Maumee,' was an abolitionist, poet, orator, and political activist. He lived in California during the Civil War and recited this Lincoln elegy at a Sacramento memorial meeting on April 18, 1865. [5]

Wherefore half-mast and waving sadly,
And seeming ill-disposed to move,
Are those bright emblems which so gladly
Were wont to wave our homes above!
And why is this all glorious nation
Thus in her hour of hope bowed low?

Wherefore those marks of grief and sorrow
So visible on every face!
To what foul deed of bloody horror
Do all those gloomy signs retrace?
Aback to the walls and lofty spire,
Back to your country's bleeding sire,
Back to your dying Magistrate.

We know not why God has permitted
This tragic scene, this bloody deed;
An act so seemingly unfitted
In this auspicious hour of need.
Though none perhaps may the intention
Or the wondrous purpose tell,
Of this direful life suspension
Yet God, the Lord, doeth all things well.

Our Nation's Father has been murdered;
Our Nation's Chieftain has been slain
By traitorous hands most basely ordered;
And we, his children, feel the pain.
Our pain is mixed with indignation,
Our sorrow is not purely grief,
And nothing short of a libation
From Treason's heart can bring relief.

And we, in spite of earth and heaven,
On bended knee with lifted hand,
Swear, as we hope to be forgiven,

To drive foul Treason from the land.
And that fair land so long polluted
By the sweat of unpaid toil,
Shall be by Liberty uprooted
And thickly spread with freedom's soil.

Thus we'll avenge the death of Lincoln,
His noble principles maintain,
Till every base, inhuman falcon
Is swept from freedom's broad domain;
Until from tower and from turret,
From mountain height and prairie wide,
One Flag shall wave and freedom's spirit
In peace and love o'er all preside.

The Coming Man

by William J. Wilson

ORIGINAL PAGE 265

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley identifies William J. Wilson as a pioneer poet whose work belonged to the campaign for Black testimony rights in California. A sufficiently secure fuller identification was not found; this note therefore follows the evidence supplied by Beasley rather than guessing at dates or occupations.

I break the chains that have been clanging
Down through the dim vault of ages.
I gird my strength, mind and arms
And prepare for the terrible conflict.
I am to war with principalities, powers, wrongs,
With oppressions -- with all that curse humanity.

I am resolved;
'Tis more than half my task;
'Twas the great need of all my past existence.
The gloom that has so long shrouded me
Recedes as vapor from the new presence.

And the light gleams. It must be life
So brightens and spreads its pure rays before
That I read my mission as 'twere a book.
It is life; life in which none but men,
Not those who only wear the form, can live
To give this life to the world;
To make men put off the thews and sinews of oppressed slaves.

Forget-Me-Not

by Edward Cain

ORIGINAL PAGES 265-266

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley's byline spells the poet's surname 'Cain,' while her surrounding prose calls him 'Edward Caine' and describes him as a philosopher, lecturer, and brother of Bishop Caine. No further identification has been made with enough confidence to settle the spelling or dates.

To flourish around my native bower
And blossom around my cot,
I cultivate a little flower
That's called forget-me-not.

The ocean may between us roll,
And distance be our lot,
I hope that we may meet again;
I pray, Forget-me-not.

So adieu! Some happy day,
When we shall meet again,
May the fragrant breeze of summer bear
The fragrance of the glen.
May every bright-winged, singing bird
Plume themselves in song;
So short would seem our summer's day,
We wish it still more long.
Adieu, adieu! your little stars
Are twinkling one by one,
When the moon comes out to take the place
Left vacant by the sun.

When all the stars grow dim
They cannot pierce her light;
How proud and beautiful she is,
My dearest friend, good-night.

Crispus Attucks

by 'Jeams' (Captain Ferguson)

ORIGINAL PAGE 266

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley states that the poems signed 'Jeams' came from an unpublished collection by Captain Ferguson of the Brannan Guards, given to her by his widow. The volume does not securely establish his full name. The pseudonym and the uncertainty are retained here.

Black, and a man of might,
He struck, and fell for the right;
Tho' he himself was 'neath Freedom's ban,
He struck and died for his fellow man --
Not the black man; but the white.
History with hesitating pen has writ his name
But stealthily, as though in fear that fame,
In seeking out her heroes for her prize,
Might through her less discriminating eyes
See Black names 'mongst the White.

I saw him (in thought) as he stood,
And his glance seemed to say that he should
Yield up his own life though in unequal strife,
If 'twas only for Liberty's good.
And he struck, and how mighty the blow.
Though the Britons laid many lives low,
The blood of the Black and the blood of the White fomented a
Baptismal font for Freedom.

My Razor

by 'Jeams' (Captain Ferguson)

ORIGINAL PAGE 266

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

For the identification of 'Jeams,' see the editorial note accompanying *Crispus Attucks*. The 1919 printing dates this poem 1878.

A thunderbolt from Heaven cast,
When Angels warred against their God,
Fell on the summit of Mount Atlas,
And Hercules tore it from the sod;
Vulcan, the mythological smith,
From a small spark this razor made,
And Venus, who'd admired the work,
Smiling sweetly, kissed the blade.

Le Boutonniere

by 'Jeams' (Captain Ferguson)

ORIGINAL PAGE 266

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

For the identification of 'Jeams,' see the editorial note accompanying *Crispus Attucks*. The 1919 printing dates this poem October 15, 1881.

Mignonette and Pansies, too,
Pansies and sweet Mignonette,
Tell me that your love is true;
Say that you will ne'er forget.
When Mignonette's sweet odor's lost
And Pansies' purple hue is gone,
Then will I feel that hope is past,
Your love forever from me flown.

Withered Flowers

by 'Jeams' (Captain Ferguson)

ORIGINAL PAGE 267

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

For the identification of 'Jeams,' see the editorial note accompanying *Crispus Attucks*. The 1919 printing dates this poem May 9, 1881.

I have pressed in a book a pretty red rose
That oft-times reminds of a love I once knew,
And whenever I gaze on its delicate form
The leaves seem to say that love is still true.
When this sign of love's freshness no longer appears,
And the red, too, that told of a warm love is gone,
'Twill be then, not till then, I'll regret the past years
And feel that the love I once cherished is flown.

A Garland of Prayer

by Eloise Bibb-Thompson

ORIGINAL PAGE 267

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Eloise A. Bibb-Thompson (1878-1928) was a poet, playwright, journalist, teacher, and social-settlement worker. Born in New Orleans, she studied at New Orleans University, Oberlin College, Howard University, and the New York School of Philanthropy before settling in Los Angeles. Beasley first encountered this poem in the Catholic journal *The Tidings*. [6]

Amid the stress of daily life,
Its cares, success, and its strife,
I would repair
To Thee, O God, and at Thy feet
I'd lay, with all its perfume sweet,
A wreath of prayer.

Today my only thought shall be
A zealousness in loving Thee --
The Elder flower.
And to this chaplet I shall bind
The energy of soul and mind,
Thus hour by hour.

Tomorrow, in my garland fair,
I'll twine Devotion deep and rare --
The Heliotrope.
Though oft the tempter hover near,
In Thee, so faithful and so dear,
Shall be my hope.

No virtue, Lord, is loved by Thee
More than a spotless Chastity --
The Orange flower.
I'll weave my thoughts while I shall live
Without a stain, if Thou wilt give
Thy grace and power.

And I would have my garland bear
The fragrant bloom of Meekness fair --
The Lilac wild.
My soul shall then receive from Thee
A perfect peace, for I shall be
Thy humble child.

And thus each day shall be my care
To add another flower of prayer,
Until complete.
When fairest are my flowers all
Then may my spirit hear Thy call
At Mercy's seat.

Do We Remember

by William Nauns Ricks

ORIGINAL PAGES 267-268

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

William Nauns Ricks (1876-1948) was a Virginia-born poet and Spanish-American War veteran who settled in the San Francisco Bay Area. He published widely in newspapers and issued *The Whistle Maker and Other Poems* in 1914. Beasley's byline omits the final 's' in his middle name; the established form is used here. [7]

Full fifty years have passed away.
Yea, fifty years have day by day
Fulfilled the laws of destiny
And passed into eternity.
Hear you the drum throughout the land?
Old drums, which know the master hand,
Whose fervent practice for this day
Has swept the fifty years away?
These souls, whose darkened chambers keep
The key where memories lie deep
And break all the bounds this day,
To live this thirtieth of May.
With tattered flags and dream-fired gait,
(Impatient if the line should wait),
Come men who fifty years ago
Were flushed with manhood's healthy glow.
Not less today; but fifty years
Have brought conditions fraught with tears,
For some are poor and all are old;
But hearts as true, as brave, as bold
Beat underneath those coats of blue,
As when in youth they dared to do
The bidding of their soul for right.
How bravely now they face the might.
Do we remember why they fought?
Have we from them their vision caught?
Does Liberty stand out as clear?
Is Freedom to our hearts as dear?
If not, this thinning line of blue
Proclaims to us to our trust untrue.
If we forget their sacrifice
We stand disgraced before their eyes.
Let Freedom true our land embrace,
That we, like them, the grave may face
In conscious pride of work well done,
To keep Old Glory in the sun.

A Greeting and a Wish for Easter

by William Nauns Ricks

ORIGINAL PAGE 268

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley introduces this poem as another work 'from the pen of Mr. Ricks.' See the fuller note accompanying *Do We Remember*.

I would that from out our lives
The winter of sorrow and sickness
And misunderstandings would pass;
That the marvel of the spring,
The resurrection of Light, perfect light,
And the sunshine of Love, perfect love,
For all God's creation would come
As the spring brings grass softly.

To an Old Friend

by William Nauns Ricks

ORIGINAL PAGE 268

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

See the fuller editorial note accompanying *Do We Remember*.

I did not know in long-past years
How full the way might be of tears,
How great the need before the end
Of one true heart like yours, my friend.
And joy of youth, all foolish, lies
Around our hearts to blind our eyes;
But time removes the gaudy veil
And shows the friend who will not fail.
Today I search the past years through,
Contrasting old things with the new,
And through each pathway to the end
I found your footprints, dear old friend.
And so, my friend, with faith secure,
What years may bring I can endure;
Because I know your loving heart
Of joy or pain will share a part.

It Matters Much

by Charles Alexander

ORIGINAL PAGE 269

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Charles Alexander (1868-1923) was an educator, journalist, publisher, lecturer, and poet. He taught at Alabama A&M; Tuskegee, and Wilberforce; published periodicals in Boston and Los Angeles; and became known for lectures interpreting Paul Laurence Dunbar. [8]

It matters little where I was born,
Or if my parents were rich or poor;
Whether they shrank at the cold world's scorn
Or walked in the pride of wealth secure.
But whether I live an honest man
And hold my integrity firm in my clutch,
I tell you, brother, plain as I am,
It matters much.

What Constitutes a Negro?

by Eva Carter Buckner

ORIGINAL PAGES 269-270

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Eva Carter Buckner (1861-1946) was a poet, songwriter, lecturer, clubwoman, and civil-rights advocate active in Los Angeles. Her writing addressed race, citizenship, and public memory; she also worked through the Los Angeles Forum and other civic organizations. [9]

When the first slave-ship was landed
With its cargo on this side,
There was then no vexing question
As to which race he's allied;
Just a Negro, pure and simple,
And as such might have remained,
But -- well, here we drop the subject,
For there is nothing to be gained.

Years have passed, and now we see him
On him's turned the strongest light;
Every race is represented --
Black, brown, yellow, red, and white;
And they call him now a problem,
For there's One not been consulted
And in it He is involved.

There's rise and fall of Nations,
But, dispute it if you can,
There is just one God and Father
And the brotherhood of man.
Ten-tenths blood of pure Caucasian,
This it takes to make you white,
But one drop of Negro blood is
Just the same, as black as night.

For this stamp was put upon him
And so let it thus remain,
For what is the use contending?
All contentions are in vain.
It is said ten million Negroes
On this firm free land doth stand,
God inspires him to mount upward
Though chains bind both foot and hand.

Read his crimes in boldest letters,
Negro, and no question then;
And we own him, our heads bowing,
Grieved to know we have such men.
On the other hand turning,
We can point with pride to those

Who thought it worth while in striving,
And to fame and honor rose.

Dumas, known as the French nov'list,
He his Negro blood could trace;
Tanner, artist known so widely,
Who has won himself a place.
Yes, and there is the "Black Napoleon,"
Brave Toussaint L'Ouverture,
And the great Edmonia Lewis,
Sculptress, whose work will endure.

And we claim S. Coleridge Taylor;
Dunbar, though he's dead still lives;
Booker Washington we all know,
For the race his best thoughts gives;
Bishop Grant, in sermons, lectures;
Dubois, John H. Jackson, true;
Chestnut, Vernon, trace 'em; Pushkin,
Browning, many others, too.

Great Rome had her gladiators,
And of them was very proud;
We care nothing for the prize-ring
But, since it has been allowed,
Why not then applaud the winner,
Whether white or dusky man?
The survival of the fittest
Is the rule, and it will stand.

Call him Ishmaelite or Arab,
Paraphrase him, if you will;
Say Egyptian, if more pleasing,
But he is a Negro still.
This would be a grander Nation
With the goodness that's innate,
It would be a perfect haven
But the prejudice -- too great.

But, there, friends,
Join us in life's great combat.
Though your skin be dark, what matter?
You're a man, e'en for all that;
And we are using every effort
To make good where e'er we trod,
One hand with the flag a-waving,
And the other stretched to God.

If Lincoln Could Return Today

by Eva Carter Buckner

ORIGINAL PAGES 270-271

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley calls this Buckner's favorite poem. See the fuller editorial note accompanying *What Constitutes a Negro?*.

If Lincoln could return today,
I wonder what he'd think and say
About this great and glorious land
O'er which he once had full command?
With all the progress he would see,
I know he would astonished be.

The lightning speed of which we boast,
A touch, a sound from coast to coast;
The clearly, distinct spoken words,
Ships sailing through the air like birds;
Numerous inventions, small and great,
Too many to enumerate.

With all these things so strange and new,
I'm sure he'd scarce know what to do.
And, like a wanderer on the strand,
A stranger in his own homeland
Until he'd look around and see
That same old flag of liberty.

I wonder then if he'd recall
The greatest deed he did for all,
And that if he would sorry be
That he had set the captives free?
Ah, yes, the world knows it was he.

But 'twas a mightier hand, you see,
Guided the pen. 'Twas so to be
That all his legacy might share
What you and I love best, free air;
And, too, his knowing eye could see
That, to advance, all must be free.

And Nature says, and it is true,
To crush the one we crush the two,
And all who love their country true
Love Lincoln's name, naught else to do.
And, O! could he take one survey --
I wonder what he'd think and say?

Only Be Strong

by John H. Allen

ORIGINAL PAGE 271

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley says this poem was reproduced from the Black newspaper *Pacific Appeal* and dates it Marysville, California, August 6, 1903. No biographical identification of John H. Allen has been confirmed securely enough for this edition.

In ancient days when Israel trod the way
To God's promised land,
Temptations, sin and death strove night and day
To cheat the band;
But God stood with them, 'gainst the heathen's ire;
His presence kept them as a wall of fire.

And when the mighty host from Jordan's shore
With rapturous gaze
Faintly beheld the promised land of yore,
Through the thickening haze,
Joshua, the Captain, stood gazing sad and long,
And silent voices whispered:
"Only be strong."

O! Ethiopia, my own beloved race,
Dispel thy fears,
Heed not the gathering mist, the dark disgrace,
The gloom of years;
'Tis true, 'tis true, tho' I cannot tell thee why,
But the battle's the hardest when the victory's nigh.

So, onward, upward to a higher plane,
O'ercome the foes;
Forget old Egypt, her ways disdain,
Her deadly throes;
And through the Jordan thou must go, O! valiant throng!
But go like men, God whispers:
"Only be thou strong."

Marysville, California, August 6, 1903.

My Kind of Man

by Charles Alexander

ORIGINAL PAGES 271-272

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

Beasley notes that this poem appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. See the fuller editorial note accompanying *It Matters Much*.

I like the man who will go to the bat,
And will take off his coat, and throw off his hat;
Who will roll up his sleeves, and spit on his hands,
And hit at the ball just as hard as he can.
Hit at it, I say, never mind if he miss;
Never mind if the crowd will hollow and hiss.

I like the man who will enter the race
Unwavering, resolve shining out of his face;
Who will shirk not, nor falter, but will strive for the goal,
Showing courage and patience when nearing the shoal;
For courage and patience are big bits of grace,
And the man who will claim them may yet win the race.

I like the man who will pick up his load,
Who will start with a rush on his way up the road;
Who will risk every peril he finds on the way,
And say in his heart: "Every debt I will pay."
For that sort of a man unheeds the world's lust,
But that sort of man is worthy of trust.

I like the man who is gentle and kind,
Who will show by example the true master mind;
Who knows of the feeling of poverty's pinch
And will stand out for right, every foot, every inch.
For that sort of man is the man of the hour;
He has in his soul God's fire and power.

My Mother's Custard Pie

by Charles Alexander

ORIGINAL PAGE 272

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

See the fuller editorial note accompanying *It Matters Much*. Beasley reports that this poem, too, appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.

You may talk about the cooking
They do in Italy;
And the kind the Frenchman
Sets before his company;
Of the German's toast and "weinies,"
Or the English mutton-chop,
But there is one thing to remember
That will start you on the hop;
It's delicious, it is luscious,
It will brighten up your eye;
It is like a view of heaven
That is mother's custard pie.

You have had poetic dreaming,
With its rapturous vision rare;
You have known the potent blessing
Of that swiftly-vanished care;
You have felt ecstatic heavings
In your big and noble heart,
And have felt the pangs of sorrow
When your dearest friend would part.
But your joys are without number,
You can stand the severing tie,
If you know you'll have a portion
Of my mother's custard pie.

It will take one slice, I tell you,
To dissipate the gloom,
And to start an agitation,
Like the buzzing of a loom.
It will bring delights and pleasures
You have never known before;
It will make you feel like hanging
Round about our kitchen door.
Yes, indeed, I know the feeling,
You'll be ready then to die,
If, for once, you get a-plenty
Of my mother's custard pie.

The Black Boys in Khaki

by A. C. H. Bilbrew

ORIGINAL PAGES 307-308

EDITORIAL NOTE ON THE POET

A. C. Bilbrew was a Los Angeles-area poet, musician, choral director, radio pioneer, and community leader. Beasley's byline includes the middle initial 'H.' The wartime poem honors Black soldiers while pressing the contradiction between fighting for democracy abroad and unequal citizenship at home. [10]

Black Boys in khaki,
We're mighty proud of you;
You started in to make the Allies win,
And you've seen the whole thing thru.
With your Anglo comrade by your side,
Fighting for liberty,
Like him you shed your blood and died
For a World Democracy.

No shot or shell nor swift shrapnel
Could make you quake or quail,
But always steady at your post,
You knew you dare not fail.

The monster cannon's mighty roar
Was music to your ear,
The sickening deadly poisonous gas,
You didn't dread nor fear.

You were a puzzle to the Hun,
He could not understand
How you fought with rifle, bayonet or gun,
And never missed your man.
The old 15th Infantry and 8th Illinois,
Are in a class all their own;
Needham Roberts, and Johnson who won the Croix de Guerre
For holding off twenty-four Boches alone.

Black Boys in khaki,
Your mothers are proud of you,
And they prayed to God to give you strength
To prove you were soldiers true.

Your sweethearts, wives and children
At home were staunch and true;

While you were out in No Man's Land,
Their thoughts were all for you.

Black Boys in khaki,
France is mighty proud of you,
For you fought like demons to save Paris,
From the hands of the Fritzie's, too.

When Alsace sighed and Lorraine cried,
Till her streets with tears were wet;
With your Anglo comrade by your side,
You helped America pay her debt.

Black Boys in khaki,
America is proud of you,
For you have proven once for all,
You're Americans thru and thru.

And if she could establish Democracy
Away across the sea,
There is no doubt she'll bring it about
In her own land of the free.

Then when she lifts her voice to sing
"My Country, 'tis of thee,"
Twelve million strong we'll catch the strain,
"Sweet Land of Liberty."

Black Boys in khaki,
We're mighty proud of you,
You started in to make the Allies win,
And you've seen the whole thing thru.

Sources and editorial apparatus

The 1919 volume is the controlling source for poem texts and for Beasley's statements about the poets. External sources below supplement those statements. Uncertain identities are described as uncertain; absence of a confident identification is not evidence that the poet left no other record.

1. Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919). All poem texts, original-page references, and Beasley's immediate contextual statements are collated from the original scan.
2. California Arts Council, California Poet Laureate history; San Diego History Center, John Steven McGroarty.
3. Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* / *Homespun Heroines* contextual material; University of Victoria scholarship on the 1858 migration and Stewart's poem.
4. Papers of Abraham Lincoln, William R. Wallace person record.
5. Academy of American Poets, James Madison Bell.
6. Lehigh University, African American Poetry: A Digital Anthology, Eloise A. Bibb author page.
7. The Bancroft Library, *Guide to the William Nauns Ricks Papers, 1899-1963*; see also the collection description cited in Beasley scholarship.
8. Delilah L. Beasley's extended biographical sketch in the 1919 volume; EBSCO Research Starters, Charles Alexander.
9. Alexander Street, Biographical Sketch of Eva Carter Buckner; SurveyLA, African American Historic Context Statement.
10. LA County Library, A C Billbrew Library history and Willowbrook local history.

Editorial colophon. This edition was prepared as a reading anthology, not as a facsimile. Georgia is used for the poems; navy and gold mark the book structure; oxblood identifies editorial matter. Every contents entry and cross-reference is a live internal link.