THE SINGER

Because his speech was blunt and manner plain
Untaught in subtle phrases of the wise,
Because the years of slavery and pain
Ne'er dimmed the light of faith within his eyes;
Because of ebon skin and humble pride,
The world with hatred thrust the youth aside.

But fragrance wafts from every trodden flower,
And through our grief we rise to nobler things,
Within the heart in sorrow's darkest hour
A well of sweetness there unbidden springs;
Despised of men, discarded and alone--
The world of nature claimed him as her own.

She taught him truths that liberate the soul
From bonds more galling than the slaver's chain--
That manly natures, lily-wise, unfold
Amid the mire of hatred void of stain;
Thus in his manhood, clean, superbly strong,
To him was born the priceless gift of song.

The glory of the sun, the hush of morn,
Whisperings of tree-top faintly stirred,
The desert silence, wilderness forlorn,
Far ocean depths, the tender lilt of bird;
Of hope, despair, he sang, his melody,
The endless theme of life's brief symphony.

And nations marveled at the minstrel lad,
Who swayed emotions as his fancy led;
With him they wept, were melancholy, sad;
" 'Tis but a cunning jest of Fate," they said;
They did not dream in selfish sphere apart
That song is but the essence of the heart.
We will not hate. Law, custom, creed and caste,
All notwithstanding, here we hold us fast.
Down through the years the mighty ships of state
Have all been broken on the rocks of hate.

We will not cease to laugh and multiply.
We slough off trouble, and refuse to die.
The Indian stood unyielding, stark and grim;
We saw him perish, and we learned of him
To mix a grain of philosophic mirth
With all the crass injustices of earth.

We will not use the ancient carnal tools.
These never won, yet centuries of schools,
Of priests, and all the work of brush and pen
Have not availed to win the wisest men
From futile faith in battleship and shell:
We see them fall, and mark that folly well.

We will not waver in our loyalty.
No strange voice reaches us across the sea;
No crime at home shall stir us from this soil.
Ours is the guerdon, ours the blight of toil,
But raised above it by a faith sublime
We choose to suffer here and bide our time.

And if we hold to this, we dream some day
Our countrymen will follow in our way.

--Eva Jessye