

Sympathy¹

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
 When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
 I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting—
 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
 When he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
 I know why the caged bird sings!

1899

Harriet Beecher Stowe¹

She told the story, and the whole world wept
 At wrongs and cruelties it had not known
 But for this fearless woman's voice alone.
 She spoke to consciences that long had slept:
 Her message, Freedom's clear reveille, swept
 From heedless hovel to complacent throne.
 Command and prophecy were in the tone
 And from its sheath the sword of justice leapt.
 Around two peoples swelled a fiery wave,
 But both came forth transfigured from the flame.
 Blest be the hand that dared be strong to save,
 And blest be she who in our weakness came—

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (1899) and then in his *Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken.

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Hearthside (1899) and then in his *Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), abolitionist and author of many books, the most famous being *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).