

But I think it would be bettah,
 Ef I 'd pause agin to say,
 Dat I 'm talkin' 'bout ouah freedom
 In a Bibleistic way.

70

But de Moses is a-comin',
 An' he 's comin', suah and fas'
 We kin hyeah his feet a-trompin',
 We kin hyeah his trumpit blas'.
 But I want to wa'n you people,
 Don't you git too brigity;⁴
 An' don't you git to braggin'
 'Bout dese things, you wait an' see.

75

80

But when Moses wif his powah
 Comes an' sets us chillun free,
 We will praise de gracious Mastah
 Dat has gin us liberty;
 An' we 'll shout ouah halleluyahs,
 On dat mighty reck'nin' day,
 When we 'se reco'nised ez citiz'—
 Huh uh! Chillun, let us pray!

85

1897

We Wear the Mask¹

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
 It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
 This debt we pay to human guile;
 With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
 And mouth with myriad subtleties.

5

Why should the world be overwise,
 In counting all our tears and sighs?
 Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
 To thee from tortured souls arise.
 We sing, but oh the clay is vile
 Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
 But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

10

15

1897

4. Brazen, presumptuous, or insolent.

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the Lowly Life* (1897) and then in his *Complete Poems*

(1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken.