THE MOOD


THE POEM

You laugh— Because I’m poor and black and funny— Not the same as you— Because my mind is dull And dice instead of books will do For me to play with When the day is through.

I am the fool of the whole world. Laugh and push me down. Only in song and laughter I rise again—a black clown. Strike up the music. Let it be gay. Only in joy Can a clown have his day.

Three hundred years In the cotton and the cane, Plewing and reaping With no gain— Empty handed as I began.

A slave—under the whip, Beaten and sore. God! Give me laughter That I can stand more.

Freedom! Abe Lincoln done set me free— One little moment To dance with glee.

Then sadness again— No land, no house, no job, No place to go. Black—in a white world Where cold winds blow. The long struggle for life: No schools, no work— Not wanted here; not needed there— Black—you can die. Nobody will care—

Yet clinging to the ladder, Round by round, Trying to climb up. Forever pushed down.

Day after day White spit in my face— Worker and clown am I For the “civilized” race.

Nigger! Nigger! Nigger! Scorn crushing me down. Laugh at me! Laugh at me! Just a black clown!

Laugh at me then, All the world round— From Africa to Georgia I’m only a clown!

But no! Not forever Like this will I be: Here are my hands That can really make me free!

Suffer and struggle. Work, pray, and fight. Smash my way through To Manhood’s true right.

Say to all foemen: You can’t keep me down! Tear off the garments That make me a clown!

Rise from the bottom, Out of the slime! Look at the stars yonder Calling through time!

Cry to the world That all might understand: I was once a black clown But now— I’m a man!