

AVENGING THE MAINE,
A DRUNKEN A. B.,
AND OTHER POEMS.

BY
JAMES EPHRAIM McGIRT.

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PREFACE.

I do not deem it necessary to write a preface to these few poems, but, somehow, I have a tender feeling for this little book that is about to be sent out into the world, to bear such an humble burden as my feeble thought. I do not know, but I believe that if this book could speak it would sternly refuse to go on such an humble mission; but, since I have imposed upon it this duty, knowing the many censoring critics it may have to encounter, I believe it my duty to say a word, for the very book's sake, that may cause the censoring tongue of man to wag less swiftly

First, I must say that these poems were written under very unfavorable circumstances. Dignity may not allow me to explain, but I will say that they were composed during my leisure time, which has been limited. I say *leisure* time—no, I have none; I should have said *sacrificed* time, time when the body was almost exhausted from manual labor, when recreation was greatly needed; and you who know what a struggle the mind has battling with an exhausted body in trying to perform such a task as this can easily allow for this feeble result. The mind can not work when the body is exhausted, and I assure you that I would not have written one line had Nature not forced me to do so. Often at my work-bench, when I thought greater speed was needed to finish my daily task,

these poems—or whatever you may call them—would flash into my mind and I would be restless to sketch them upon paper that I might retain them until my day's work was done. Sometimes I could find it convenient to do so, sometimes I could not, and when I would fail to sketch them, at night the muse would not return. Thus you can understand why I have not written more.

I must also state that I am conscious of the fact that this work does not come up to the standard work of the mighty masters of poetry, but you need not censure me—it is not my fault. The muse has not yet taught me to sing as they. Had she given me the same power, do you not think I would have written?

Moreover, I am just beginning, and perhaps she does not care to intrust me with the whole art at once: she may have thought it best to give me one talent first that she might see how I would use it, and I assure you that I think I should have done better. Often I have thought of laying these few poems aside and not giving any to the public until I became able to write as good poems as other poets. I publish them because I do not wish the muse to find me with my one talent buried when she comes to make up her jewels and reward her servants. She might serve me as his lord did the other one-talented servant we read of in the Bible.

JAMES EPHRAIM MCGIRT.

*Greensboro, N. C.,
August 17, 1899*

EXPLAINING DIALECT POEMS.

You may wonder why the dialect words in my humorous poems are so few compared with those in other dialect poems, but if you will notice such characters as I have portrayed you will find, as I have, that the most illiterate persons, living now among so many who are cultured, do not speak the whole dialect but speak correctly one half of their words. So I have written just as the masses impressed me.

	PAGE.
About the Puty Gals.....	63
My Song.....	65
Our Picnic.....	66
Edith.....	67
Ode to Love.....	68
Herod's Slaughter of the Babes.....	69
Ambition.....	72
A View of Childhood.....	73
Reason, Sad World.....	75
The Wealthy Nigger.....	77
The Boy's Opportunity.....	80
"No Use in Signs".....	81
The Memory of Frances Willard.....	83
I'll Enter the Saloon no More.....	85
Unker Israel.....	87
Ode to Conscience.....	91
Two Spirits.....	92
The Parting Soldiers.....	93
My Lonely Homestead.....	95
An Appeal.....	97
Why Sneer at th' Errors Our Fathers Made.....	100
Virtue Alone Can Make Men Great.....	101
To Her That Weeps.....	102
Heathen Land.....	103
Blame Not The Poet.....	103
To the Memory of W. W. Browne.....	104, 106
De 'Scursion Dat Yer Rode.....	107
Why Should I Deplore.....	107
God Bless the Sailors.....	108
Gib ter me a Lock ob yer Hair.....	109
God Bless Our Country.....	109

AVENGING THE MAINE.

—

Sing, O Muse! the avenging of the Maine,
 The direful woes, the fate of Spain.
 A heinous deed to our ship they wrought,
 Untimely death to our crew they brought.
 Our soldiers' valor forever tell,
 Who for revenge both fought and fell;
 Volcanic boats over the water went,
 The burning revenge from them was sent.
 Shafter's army, pray tell me all
 Who died bravely rallying to the call?
 What of the Negroes in the band,
 Did they scatter or did they stand?

To this question I'll answer brief,
 They fought like demons without a chief.
 I'll ever sing of the memorable day
 When negro valor was brought into play;
 In the hottest battle their captain died,
 They did not scatter, "Onward they cried."
 Their eyes on victory intensely fixed,
 Negro and white blood that day flowed mixed.
 These are the first to embark on land,
 There were no cowards in this band;

When the story you shall hear
They to you will ever seem dear.

Hold of her harp the muse then takes,
A minor chord on it she makes;
All sit quietly curious to hear,
But from her eye there falls a tear;
Her voice was choked, her bosom with sorrow
did swell,

As from the strings her fingers fell.
Over her face there came a frown,
She took a seat upon the ground,
Then to her side they quickly went;
From her breast a groan she sent.
Within our arms we held her head
And to the muse we softly said:
"Tell us, O Muse! what gives thee grief,
And if we can, we'll give relief?"

From her breast again she sighed,
With throbbing voice to us replied,
"The story which you urge to hear
None can tell without a tear,
Grief to you this tale will bring
If I in poetry play and sing.
I can not sing the grievous woes
I'll tell the story to you in prose;
Now you all must listen with care

If the story you would hear;
From the beginning I'll now relate
That coming ages may know the fate.

In the land of Cuba there's a nation brave,
Whom the cruel Spaniards held as slaves.
One night their leaders in conference met
To see if their freedom they could get.
They the yoke of slavery bore
Till their shoulders had galded sore.
Maceo, the first to take the stand,
He was the leader of the band;
Unto them all he did declare
He could no longer slavery bear.
A bill to Spain he sent to see
If they would set the Cubans free;
And when the bill to Spain was sent
Becoming enraged the bill they rent.

To the soldiers she was heard to tell—
"Go! Murder the Cubans, if they rebel."
Unto them all she gave command
To bring the leaders of the band.
The Cuban leaders they could not get,
There was a skirmish when they met;
When they had driven the leaders away,
The women and children they would slay

They murdered th' babes that knew no harm—
 They stabbed them in their mothers' arms.
 While killing all by sword they could,
 From others they withheld the food,
 To utterly starve a Cuban race.
 To us it seemed a sad disgrace;
 The freedom of Cuba then was our plea.

We called upon our General Lee,
 Our beloved general to Cuba we sent
 To see what the cruel Spaniards meant.
 Over we sent our best ship "Maine."
 Spain to us had done the same;
 Both were sent in truce's name.
 Our ship in Havana's harbor stood;
 But Spain was eager for our blood.
 And in the secret of the night
 On us explodes a dynamite;
 And while her crew were fast asleep,
 Some were hurled to the mighty deep.
 The ship went down beneath the wave
 Before we could our sailors save.
 I can not picture the fearful sight,
 Nor bear to think of the dreadful night,
 When they performed the cruel deed;
 Unless my heart is made to bleed.

Now the story you may abhor;
 I've told the causes of the war.
 The news was sent by the swiftest speed,
 Announcing the Spaniard's cruel deed,
 Sorrow and anger to us it brought,
 To hear of the deed the Spaniards wrought.
 Over the world a clamor rose,
 And all the world that clamor knows;
 Some were counting up the cost,
 Others wailing over the lost.
 Revenge! Revenge! our voices rang;
 On to war was the song we sang.
 To the White House we quickly went
 To ask war of our President.
 In the Senate, war was the cry,
 Our President did not comply;

To all of us he would rise and say:
 "To go to war is more than play."
 The bill for war he would declare,
 He could not sign till he prepare.
 Soon his plans had been well made,
 The cry for war he at once obeyed.
 A number of men he first did ask.
 To get them did not seem a task,
 And every time a call was made,
 Our loyal sons at once obeyed.
 Of the brave heroes I now will tell,

Who for vengeance fought and fell:
 Dewey and Sampson first I'll sing,
 On my harp their names shall ring.
 They first for vengeance made their way;
 The woe of Spain began that day;
 It seemed as He, the God Supreme,—
 Down from His throne viewed all the scenes;—
 The deed of Spain He did abhor,

And lent us aid throughout the war.
 With every fleet a guard was sent
 To keep us safe where'r we went;
 Around the mines to show us a path,
 And manage the guns that hurled our wrath.
 The aid to us was beyond cost;
 Not a boat of ours was lost.
 Hobson's valor must not be untold;
 'Twas brave as any of the fold
 The deed that made for him a name,
 And I a muse must sing his fame,
 To block th' Spaniard's escaping way,
 He sank th' Merrimac into th' bay.
 The deed performed, his crew to save;
 Their names I've placed among the brave.
 The deed showed Sampson a safe way
 To reach the port, Santiago Bay
 He reached; the woe had begun,
 That would not cease 'till the victory was won.

THE MEMORY OF MACEO.

Ye men of Cuba, to you I call,
 Mourn for your leader, place crape on the wall;
 Tell the young children that play at your feet
 Of the wonderful General that has fallen to sleep.

Sleep! yes in the graveyard he lies;
 But his spirit's sweetly resting, beyond the skies.

We think of his work, we say he was grand;
 Why not let for him a monument stand;
 One that will reach to the ethereal blue,
 Bearing the name Maceo, will do.

Dear Maceo, our hearts pine for thee!
 For whom thou died, can say we are free.

ENVY.

In a flower garden beautiful and tall,
 Stood a bloomed lily above them all;
 The lily was slender made,
 Yet a humming bird stooped for shade.
 Evening came, it had its rest,
 Saying, "In this blossom I'll build my nest;
 In this blossom my love will lie,
 And I will dwell here till I die."
 Another bird saw him content;
 Asked to build, she gave consent.
 So on one blossom build them all;
 Blown by a zephyr it breaks and falls.
 The mother bird returned and found
 Her nest and blossom on the ground.
 To the heart of a maiden tender and sweet,
 The heart of a lover went forth to meet;
 To another lover the maid seemed sweet,
 By the maids consent he leaps to meet;
 To one sweetheart clings them all,
 They were too many and had to fall.
 The loving maid turned around
 And found the lovers upon the ground.

A LECTURE.

I was gointer make a speech;
 But yer all began to frown;
 Dats what I say about yer darkies
 Yer tri to hold each uder down.

I am glad you aint de master,
 De one dat sot beyond der skies,
 Ef I wasn't ouah boy or gal
 I am sure that I could never rise

Tom's scard Dick will get er ofis;
 Dick's scard Henry ul git er prize.
 Dats why we don't rise any faster,
 We've got ourselves to organize.

DON'T LAUGH, BOYS!

A colored, gray haired, feeble man
 Came tottering down the street;
 Was tackled by some happy youths
 That he by chance did meet.

His hands were trembling on his cane,
 He raised his hoary head;
 With them he was not angry,
 As with a trembling voice he said:

"Don't laugh, boys, at this old form,
 I think I am doing well;
 What I went through in slavery
 No tongue can ever tell.

"I had no chance when I was young,
 I was working for master then;
 But now my boys you're free,
 Make out of yourselves men.

"And when you meet an old grav-haired man
 Struggling along as I;
 Don't trouble him, for he loves you,
 Politely pass him by."

ABOUT DE PUTY GALS.

When I was a little feloah,
 A sprying around de gals,
 De yaloah gals wus all a guying din;
 Goodness dey was triffin,
 But uv course they didn't care,
 Dey were serten dey cud get de best uv men.

True dey were a rarity
 And we darkies didn't know,
 We thot it bes just'r take her in;
 She knew dat we'ers beholding
 And treated us as dey pleased;
 We poor fools wud sit en fold our arms en grin.

An' dat same old adage,
 Sum are clingin to it yet,
 An trien ter reason in de same old way,
 Because dey's kinder puty
 Dey can do just as dey pleased,
 Den wid de biggest darkies hold er sway.

I'll tell yer now, you're foolish,
 Dem kinder days has passed;
 Features wid us now don' cut no shine,

You've got to be a lady
 In de fullest uv de word—
 You have got to be de pure and genuine.

I'll tell yer puty darkeys
 Who's reasoning in dat way,
 I have a word wid you I'd like to give,
 You had better git sum knoledge
 In dat cocoanut uv yourn;
 Don't, by yoursef furever yur haf tir live;

Cos, honn'y, you need not prize your face,
 You ain't no rarity in de race;
 Der uster be a time
 When de yallar gal helt the line,
 But now, dere's plenty in de race.

MY SONG.

Why was I born if this ends all,
 All that I will ever be;
 To feel a spirit that seems divine
 And no chance to let it free?

Poor, unfortunate seems my part,
 Drifting on poverty's sea;
 The chains of need have bound me fast,
 Oh would that I were free!

Daily I'm struggling for the shore,
 But the sea is vast and wide;
 And when I stop to sing my lays,
 I'm threatened by the tide.

But if these rugged lays I've sung,
 Should cause some heart to move;
 And should bring to me sweet freedom,
 How could I them but love.

Accept these lays to you I've given
 As a token of my art;
 Jingling though they may seem to be,
 Remember 'tis but a start.

There's a half finished stocking she'd begun for me;
 Here are all the knitting needles where they used
 to be;

The spinning-wheel is standing where she sat for
 years

Spinning out the cotton, humming away her cares.

On the wall there hangs her picture—though solemn,
 not stern;

It seems to gaze upon me every way I turn;

But the kind and loving Savior, who knoweth best;

Hath freed her from her labor, called her home to
 rest.

AN APPEAL.

An old man living near his master
 Ever since he was made free,
 Saw in him an evil spirit
 That he thought should never be.

The old man's heart seemed to be breaking,
 He had seen it several years,
 It seemed he could not bear it longer,
 He speaks with eyes half filled with tears:

“Tell me, massa, why yer scorn me,
 Is it simply cose I'm free?
 I's nebber tried ter hom yer,
 Allas kind I's tried ter be.

“I'm same as I was when yer own me,
 Whateber yer ask I try ter do;
 Is it somethin' I's done?
 Yer don't treat me as do I's one ob yo.

“True, I's glad I's got mer freedom—
 Not semply do to 'scape yer rod—
 I's glad ob it down in mer buzom,
 Dis luv of freedom came from God.

“Truf, I know I’s little ignorent,
 But dis I make es er ernes’ plee—
 Sposen you ’ad been in my condition,
 How’d you do if you’s me ?

“Dis, O massa, I pra do tell me,
 I’ll do as yer would if I can,
 What I do is not fer spite work,
 I’s simply tryin’ ter be er man.

“Yer know I’s proven miself harmless,
 I wouldn’t hurt yer when I cud,
 When you lef’ your homestead wid me,
 Did I not prove myself as good ?

“Think when yer was off in battle,
 Fiten fer de cause yer thought was rite,
 How I toiled and fed yer fam’ly,
 How I guarded dem safe at nite.

“Fiten ter keep me from mi freedom—
 Dat, yer know, I noed full well—
 In all ob dis was I not faithful ?
 If dis aint so I pra de tell.

“Tell me, when de war was ober,
 What did my ole mistess say ?
 Did her say I tryed ter harm her ?
 Did I eber ’fuse ter oba ?

“Den wont yer fam’ly for protection
 Lef’ as young lam’s by mer side ?
 ’N ’fore I’d let the hole urth harm em,
 Massa, yer know I wud ’er died.

“I want yer ter think erbout dis madder,
 Look de case rite straight through,
 ’N se fer yoursef whi u’nt treat me
 De same as do I’s one ob yo.

“I wanter stay on dis farm wid yer,
 My arm dis great big fiel’ did clur ;
 More dan dat, hur’s my affection,
 My mudder an’ fader are buried hur.

“U’nt do less we kin in union,
 I luv ter lib where der is love ;
 I wont stan’ dis, do, much longer,
 I ’speck it’s best dat I would move.”

WHY SNEER AT TH' ERRORS OUR
FATHERS MADE?

Why sneer at th' errors our fathers made?
Of their mistakes why's so much said?
To scorn these men is no way to do,
Their faults have been much help to you.

We see the man that walked sin's path;
We find he met fate's cruel wrath,
And then we know what path to take,
Therefore we gained by his mistake.

For who, after reading the Holy Book,
Would take the path Ananias took?
We learn the path to take or shun,
From those who lost and those who won.

For what is history read to day,
If not that we may learn the way?
And when I read of the early gloom,
I am glad I was not born so soon.

Now, when one falls before your eyes,
Extend your hand, help him to rise,
His falling may a warning be—
Suppose it had been made of thee?

VIRTUE ALONE CAN MAKE MEN
GREAT.

In reading the history from Adam's time,
Studying the lives we call sublime,
So many I cross obscured by sin,
I find virtue alone can make great men.

We find so many once brilliant lights
To-day have vanished from our sight;
Tracing the cause, when I come to an end,
I find virtue alone can make great men.

I know a man whom no one feared,
Almost a sun his life appeared;
I see the sphere that he did own
Extremely darker for having shone.

When I see how clever the vice he did,
And finding that it could not be hid,
I say, as the Book with the holy seal:
Your sins, though covered, shall be revealed.

My son, I charge you from this very day,
Choose the path of virtue, it is the way;
Should you choose another, death is your fate,
For virtue alone can make men great.

TO HER THAT WEEPS.

Oh, beloved wife of the dear departed,
 To thee I sing: be not broken-hearted,
 The God that called thy loved one from thy side
 Hath sent an angel o'er thy path to guide.

I know it's hard to give up one so dear,
 To whom was trusted all thy love and care.
 Death, my friend, is the common lot of all,
 We must surrender freely to the call.

Weep no more, for thy loved one is at rest;
 Expel the sorrow from thy aching breast;
 Murmur not, for it is our Father's will,
 He in love and mercy will keep thee still.

Go forth, oh song, in a strain loud and clear,
 Soothe th' aching heart, dry up every tear,
 And with thy cloak of love securely fold,
 Pray that God her from all danger will hold.

HEATHEN LAND.

Across the ocean is a heathen land,
 Hasten, brothers, and lend a hand;
 Go as far as your feet can tread;
 Tell them of the living God.

Let love of home stay thee no more,
 Carry the Gospel from shore to shore,
 'Till idolatry from them will flee,
 'Till India and Africa will shout, "We are free."

Move on, my brothers, why stand you here?
 Our Savior is with thee, why should you fear?
 "Go preach my gospel, tell them of me,"
 Thus says the Savior, "I am with thee."

BLAME NOT THE POET.

Blame not the poet who daily seeks the woods;
 Call him not idle, thy verdict may be wrong,
 For there he meets with nature face to face,
 He hears her voice, to him it's song.