Songs for the People

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Let me make the songs for the people,
   Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
   Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
   For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
   With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
   Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
   And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
   Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
   To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
   When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
   Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
   Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
   Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
   Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
   Girdle the world with peace.

Born in Baltimore, poet, fiction writer, journalist, and activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, was the only child of free African American parents. She became a traveling speaker on the abolitionist circuit and she also helped slaves escape through Underground Railroad and wrote frequently for anti-slavery newspapers, earning her reputation as the mother of African-American journalism. During Reconstruction, Harper was an activist for civil rights, women's rights, and educational
opportunity for all. She was superintendent of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, co-founder and vice-president of the National Association of Colored Women, and a member of the American Women's Suffrage Association. Harper was also the director of the American Association of Colored Youth.

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