Harper, Frances E.W.,


Orphaned at an early age, Harper was educated in Baltimore, where she worked as a seamstress and published *Forest Leaves* (c. 1845), her first volume of verse. She taught school from 1850 to 1852 in Columbus, Ohio, and from 1852 to 1853 in Little York, Pa., before becoming a traveling lecturer for abolition and other reform movements. Her lyrical poetry, which she often recited during her lectures, echoed her reformist ideals. Generally written in conventional rhymed quatrains, it was noted for its simple rhythm and biblical imagery. Its narrative voice reflected the storytelling style of the oral tradition.

Harper's most popular verse collection, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854; enlarged 1855 and 1871), addresses the themes of motherhood, separation and death, and politics. It contains the antislavery poem "Bury Me in a Free Land." *Moses: A Story of the Nile* (1869) is a blank-verse allegory of the aspirations of black Americans during Reconstruction. *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872) is a series of poems told in black vernacular by Aunt Chloe, a mother and former slave.