

Phillis Wheatley, "On Virtue"

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PHILLIS WHEATLEY

"On Virtue"

O Thou bright jewel in my aim I strive
To comprehend thee. Thine own words declare
Wisdom is higher than a fool can reach.
I cease to wonder, and no more attempt
Thine height t'explore, or fathom thy profound. 5
But, O my soul, sink not into despair,
Virtue is near thee, and with gentle hand
Would now embrace thee, hovers o'er thine head.
Fain would the heav'n-born soul with her converse,
Then seek, then court her for her promis'd bliss.

10

Auspicious queen, thine heav'nly pinions spread,
And lead celestial *Chastity* along;
Lo! Now her sacred retinue descends,
Array'd in glory from the orbs above.
Attend me, *Virtue*, thro' my youthful years! 15
O leave me not to the false joys of time!
But guide my steps to endless life and bliss.
Greatness, or *Goodness*, say what I shall call thee,
To give me an higher appellation still,
Teach me a better strain, a nobler lay 20
O thou, enthron'd with Cherubs in the realms of day!

NOTES

7 *Virtue* "A quality of people, divine beings" (*OED*).

9 *fain* "Glad, rejoiced, well-pleased" (*OED*).

11 *pinions* "The wing of a bird in flight" (*OED*).

12 *Chastity* "Purity from unlawful sexual intercourse; continence" (*OED*).

18 *Greatness* “Innate nobility or dignity,...grandeur” (*OED*); *Goodness* “The quality of being morally good; virtue; worthiness” (*OED*).

21 *Cherubs* Angels.

Source: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773), pp. 13-14. [Archive.org]

Edited by Joseph R. Adams

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