Phillis Wheatley, â??To the University of Cambridge, in New-Englandâ?•

Description

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

â??To the University of CAMBRIDGE, in NEW-ENGLAND.â?•

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,
The muses promise to assist my pen;
â??Twas not long since I left my native shore,
The land of errors, and *Egyptian* gloom:
Father of mercy, twas thy gracious hand
Brought me to safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you â??tis givâ??n to scan the heights
Above, to traverse the ethereal space,
And mark the systems of revolving worlds.
Still more, ye sons of science ye receive
The blissful news by messengers from heavâ??n,
How *Jesus* blood for your redemption flows.
See him with hands out-stretcht upon the cross;
Immense compassion in his bosom glows;
He hears revilers, nor resents their scorn:
What matchless mercy in the Son of God!
When the whole human race by sin had fallâ??n,
He deignâ??d to die, that they might rise again,
And share with him in the sublimest skies,
Life without death, and glory without end.

Improve your privileges while they stay,
Ye pupils, and each hour redeem, that bears
Or good or bad report of you to heavâ??n.
Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,
By you be shunnâ??d, nor once remit your guard;
Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.
Ye blooming plants of human race divine,
An *Ethiop* tells you â??tis your greatest foe;
Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,
And in immense perdition sinks the soul.

NOTES:

Title Harvard University, named after benefactor John Harvard (1607-1638), was established in 1637 in Newetowne, MA, renamed â??Cambridgeâ?• in 1638 (harvard.edu).

1 *ardor* â??Enthusiasm or passionâ?• (*OED).*

2 *muses* â??The nine goddesses regarded as presiding over and inspiring learning and the arts, esp. poetry and music,â?• daughters of the Greek god Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory (*OED*).

18 *deigned* â??Beneath oneâ??s dignityâ?• (*OED*).

21 *improve* â??Profit fromâ?• (*OED*).

24 *baneful* â??Harmful, destructiveâ?• (*OED*).

26 *deadly serpent* Alluding to the serpent in The Garden of Eden, from the book of Genesis (*Genesis 3:14, King James Bible).*

28 *Ethiop* â??From Latin Aethiops, Ethiopian, negroâ?• (*OED*).

30 *perdition* Eternal damnation, hell (*OED*).

Source: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773), pp. 15-16. [*archive.org*]

Edited by Vivian Barbulescu