

# Phillis Wheatley, "On Virtue"

## Description

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 to 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 heaven-born soul with her converse,  
Then seek, then court her for her promised  
bliss. 10

Auspicious queen, thine heavenly pinions spread,  
And lead celestial *Chastity* along;  
Lo! Now her sacred retinue descends,  
Arrayed in glory from the orbs above.  
Attend me, *Virtue*, through 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, enthroned 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*