

Phillis Wheatley, "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth"

Description

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

"To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c."

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,
Fair *Freedom* rose *New-England* to adorn:
The northern clime beneath her genial ray,
Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway: 5
Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,
While in thine hand with pleasure we behold
The silken reins, and *Freedom*'s charms unfold.
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies 10
She shines supreme, while hated *faction* dies:
Soon as appear'd the *Goddess* long desir'd,
Sick at the view, she languish'd and expir'd;
Thus from the splendors of the morning light
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.

No more, *America*, in mournful strain 15
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
No longer shall thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton *Tyranny* with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant to enslave the land.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song, 20
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate 25
Was snatch'd from *Africa*'s fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe lov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray 30
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

For favours past, great Sir, our thanks are due,
 And thee we ask thy favours to renew,
 Since in thy power, as in thy will before,
 To sooth the griefs, which thou didst once deplore.
 May heavenly grace the sacred sanction give
 To all thy works, and thou for ever live
 Not only on the wings of fleeting *Fame*,
 Though praise immortal crowns the patriot's name,
 But to conduct to heavens refulgent fane,
 May fiery coursers sweep the ethereal plain,
 And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,
 Where, like the prophet, thou shalt find thy God.

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NOTES:

Title *Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH* William Legge, 2nd earl of Dartmouth (1731-1801), played a significant role in the events leading to the American Revolution by opposing the Stamp Act (which imposed direct taxation on the colonies). As Secretary of State for North America (1772-1775) he initially took a conciliatory approach, but following the Boston Tea Party in December 1773 he attempted to regain control of the colonies, eventually calling for overwhelming use of force to quell the rebellion. However, he was against calling for an all-out war and resigned in 1775 (*Britannica*).

2 Freedom Allusion to the goddess Libertas, in Roman religion, female personification of liberty and personal freedom (*Britannica*); *New-England* In this period New England comprised four colonies: Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Providence, and Connecticut (*World History Encyclopedia*).

15 America Colonial America or the thirteen colonies of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia (*Britannica*).

18 Tyranny Oppressive or unjustly severe government (*OED*).

25 Afric Archaic or obsolete name for Africa (*OED*). Wheatley was born in West Africa and at the age of seven was kidnapped and transported to Boston aboard the slave ship *The Phillis* (Jeffers, *Age of Phillis*, p. 41).

38 Fame Frequently figured as a winged goddess, Fama, Greek Pheme, in Greco-Roman mythology, the personification of popular rumour (*Britannica*).

40 refulgent Bright; shining; glittering; splendid (*Johnson*); *fane* A temple; a place consecrated to religion (*Johnson*).

41 coursers A swift horse; a war horse: a word not used in prose (*Johnson*).

43 the prophet Lines 41-43 allude to the prophet Elijah who in 2 Kings went up by a whirlwind into heaven by chariot of fire and horses of fire (2 Kings 2:11).

Source: *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral*, (London, 1773), pp. 73-75. [Hathi Trust]

Edited by Kristine Van Dusen

