Phillis Wheatley, â??To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouthâ?•

Description

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

â??To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majestyâ??s Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c.â?•

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:
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 *Freedomâ??s* charms unfold.
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies
She shines supreme, while hated *faction* dies:
Soon as appearâ??d the *Goddess* long desirâ??d,
Sick at the view, she languishâ??d and expirâ??d;
Thus from the splendors of the morning light
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.

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

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
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
Was snatchâ??d from *Africâ??s* fancyâ??d happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parentâ??s breast?
Steelâ??d was that soul and by no misery movâ??d
That from a father seizâ??d his babe belovâ??d:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
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 powâ??r, as in thy will before,
To sooth the griefs, which thou didâ??st once deplore.
May heavâ??nly 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 patriotâ??s name,
But to conduct to heavâ??ns refulgent fane,
May fiery coursers sweep thâ?? ethereal plain,
And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,
Where, like the prophet, thou shalt find thy God.

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 â??Libertas, in Roman religion, female personification of liberty and personal freedomâ?• (*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* â??Oppressive or unjustly severe governmentâ?• (*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, â??Fama, Greek Pheme, in Greco-Roman mythology, the personification of popular rumourâ?• (*Britannica*).

40 *refulgent* â??Bright; shining; glittering; splendidâ?• (*Johnson*); *fane* â??A temple; a place consecrated to religionâ?• (*Johnson*).

41 *coursers* â??A swift horse; a war horse: a word not used in proseâ?• (*Johnson*).

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

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

Edited by Kristine Van Dusen