

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:

Elate with hope her race no longer  
mourns, 5

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

She shines supreme, while hated faction dies: 10

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  
Was snatch'd from Africa's fancy'd happy seat: 25

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  
 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 did'st 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 heaven's refulgent fane,  
 May fiery coursers sweep th' ethereal plain,  
 And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,  
 Where, like the prophet, thou shalt find thy God.

**NOTES:**

**1** *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 (*QED*).

**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 Peme, in Greco-Roman mythology, the personification of popular rumour (*Britannica*).

**40** *refulgent* Â â€œBright; shining; glittering; splendidâ€•(Johnson); *fane* â€œA temple; a place consecrated to religionâ€•(Johnson).

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

**43** *the prophet*Â Lines 41-43 allude to the prophet Elijah who in 2 Kings â€œwent up by a whirlwind intoÂ heavenâ€• by â€œchariot of fire and horses of fireâ€•(Kings 2:11).

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

Â *Edited by Kristine Van Dusen*

Â

Â