

Phillis Wheatley

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773)

On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land,
 Taught my benighted soul to understand
 That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
 Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
 "Their colour is a diabolic dye."
 Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
 May be refined, and join the angelic train.

To the University of Cambridge, in New England

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,
 The muses promise to assist my pen;
 '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 in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 'tis given 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 Heav'n,
 How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows.
 See Him with hands outstretched 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 has fall'n,
 He deigned 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 Heav'n.
 Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,
 By you be shunned, nor once remit your guard;
 Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.
 Ye blooming plants of human race divine,
 An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe;
 Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,
 And in immense perdition sinks the soul.

Letter to the Reverend Samson Occom (February 11, 1774)

Reverend and honored sir,

I have this day received your obliging kind epistle, and am greatly satisfied with your reasons respecting the negroes, and think highly reasonable what you offer in vindication of their natural rights: Those that invade them cannot be insensible that the divine light is chasing away the thick darkness which broods over the land of Africa; and the chaos which has reigned so long, is converting into beautiful order, and reveals more and more clearly the glorious dispensation of civil and religious liberty, which are so inseparably united, that there is little or no enjoyment of one without the other: Otherwise, perhaps, the Israelites had been less solicitous for their freedom from Egyptian slavery; I do not say they would have been contented without it, by no means; for in every human breast God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom; it is impatient of oppression, and pants for deliverance; and by the leave of our modern Egyptians I will assert, that the same principle lives in us. God grant deliverance in his own way and time, and get him honor upon all those whose avarice impels them to countenance and help forward the calamities of their fellow creatures. This I desire not for their hurt, but to convince them of the

strange absurdity of their conduct, whose words and actions are so diametrically opposite. How well the cry for liberty, and the reverse disposition for the exercise of oppressive power over others agree—I humbly think it does not require the penetration of a philosopher to determine.—