

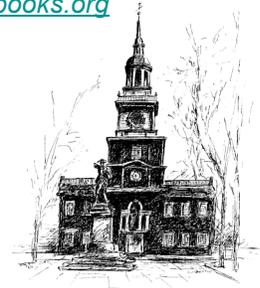


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# America's Founding Patriots



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## Remembering our Past

### **Special Interest Articles:**

- Remembering Our Past, an introduction by J. Smithies.
- **MEMOIR AND POEMS OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY**, compiled by Geo. W. Light, Boston, 1834.
- **THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN HISTORY** by John W. Cromwell, 1914.
- The Vocabulary of Moral Character, **NOAH WEBSTER'S 1828 DICTIONARY**.

With the American social structure coming under fire from many areas of the modern world, we need to pause and remember our past. Not only the noble deeds done, but the people who helped to form our nation.

In this series we will be reprinting the stories of our founding patriots regardless of nationality or gender. If you have a favorite one, please let us know so that we may be sure to include the individual.

The lives of these individuals should inspire us today and allow us to realize that each of us are unique and have the capacity to change the world around us. We each have the power to change our lives internally with our thoughts and externally with our actions and deeds.

We have the power to change our families through the choices we make.

We have the power to change our schools and business by living the principles that our Founding Patriots teach us.

We have the power to change our communities, states, and nation by accepting the great responsibilities that come with living in the greatest nation known. To those that much has been given, much is expected.

We hope you enjoy learning about our Founding Patriots.

## Phillis Wheatley

In this newsletter, we will be presenting a reprint of portions of the **MEMOIR AND POEMS OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY** as compiled by Geo. W. Light, Boston, 1834.

The second section will be a reprint of Chapter 18--Phillis Wheatley By John W. Cromwell, 1914, **THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN HISTORY**, The American Negro Academy, Washington D.C.



## Phillis Wheatley

**MEMOIR & POEMS OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY – A NATIVE AFRICAN & A SLAVE.**  
Dedicated to the Friends of Africans, Geo. W. Light, Boston, 1834.

PHILLIS WHEATLEY was a native of Africa; and was brought to this country in the year 1761, and sold as a slave.

She was purchased by Mr. John Wheatley, a respectable citizen of Boston. This gentleman, at the time of the purchase, was already the owner of several slaves; but the females in his possession were getting something beyond the active periods of life, and Mrs. Wheatley wished to obtain a young negro, with the view of training her up under her own eye, that she might, by gentle usage, secure to herself a faithful domestic in her old age. She visited the slave-market, that she might make a personal selection from the group of unfortunates offered for sale. There she found several robust, healthy females, exhibited at the same time with Phillis, who was of a slender frame, and evidently suffering from change of climate. She was, however, the choice of the lady, who acknowledged herself influenced to this decision by the humble and modest demeanor and the interesting features of the little stranger.

The poor, naked child, (for she had no other covering than a quantity of dirty carpet about her like a filibeg) was taken home in the chaise of her mistress, and comfortably attired. She is supposed to have been about seven years old, at this time, from the circumstance of shedding her front teeth. She soon gave indications of uncommon intelligence, and was frequently seen endeavoring to make letters upon the wall with a piece of chalk or charcoal.

A daughter\* of Mrs. Wheatley, not long after the child's first introduction to the family, undertook to learn her to read and write; and, while she astonished her instructress by her rapid progress; she won the good will of her kind mistress, by her amiable disposition and the propriety of her behavior. She was not devoted to menial occupations, as was at first intended; nor was she allowed to associate with the other domestics of the family, who were of her own color and condition, but was kept constantly about the person of her mistress.

She does not seem to have preserved any remembrance of the place of her nativity, or of her parents, excepting the simple circumstance that her mother poured out water before the sun at his rising reference, no doubt, to an ancient African custom. The memories of most children reach back to a much earlier period than their seventh year; but there are some circumstances (which will shortly appear) which would induce us to suppose, that in the case of Phillis, this faculty did not equal the other powers of her mind. Should we be mistaken in this inference, the faithlessness of memory, concerning the scenes of her childhood, may be otherwise accounted for.

We cannot know at how early a period she was beguiled from the hut of her mother; or how long a time elapsed between her abduction from her first home and her being transferred to the abode of her benevolent mistress, where she must have felt like one awaking from a fearful dream. This interval was, no doubt, a long one; and filled, as it must have been, with various degrees and kinds of suffering, might naturally enough obliterate the recollection of earlier and happier days. The solitary exception which held its place so tenaciously in her mind, was probably renewed from day to day through this "*long season of affliction*" for every morning, when the bereaved child saw the sun emerging from the wide waters, she must have thought of her mother, prostrating herself before the first golden beam that glanced across her native plains.

*"...she won the good will of her kind mistress, by her amiable disposition and the propriety of her behavior..."*



## Phillis Wheatley by Geo. W. Light, continues:

As Phillis increased in years, the development of her mind realized the promise of her childhood; and she soon attracted the attention of the literati of the day, many of whom furnished her with books. These enabled her to make considerable progress in belles-lettres; but such gratification seems only to have increased her thirst after knowledge, as is the case with most gifted minds, not misled by vanity; and we soon find her endeavoring to master the Latin tongue.

She was now frequently visited by clergymen, and other individuals of high standing in society; but notwithstanding the attention she received, and the distinction with which she was treated, she never for a moment lost sight of that modest, unassuming demeanor, which first won the heart of her mistress in the slave-market. Indeed, we consider the strongest proof of her worth to have been the earnest affection of this excellent woman, who admitted her to her own board. Phillis ate of her bread, and drank of her cup, and was to her as a daughter; for she returned her affection with unbounded gratitude, and was so devoted to her interests as to have no will in opposition to that of her benefactress.

We cannot ascertain that she ever received any formal manumission; but the chains which hound her to her master and mistress were the golden links of love, and the silken bands of gratitude. She had a child's place in their house and in the hearts. Nor did she, notwithstanding their magnanimity in setting aside the prejudices against color and condition, when they found these adventitious circumstances dignified by talents and worth, ever presume on their indulgence either at home or abroad. Whenever she was invited to the houses of individuals of wealth and distinction, (which frequently happened) she always declined the seat offered her at their-board, and, requesting that a side-table might be laid for her, dined modestly apart from the rest of the company.

We consider this conduct both dignified and judicious. A woman of so much mind as Phillis possessed, could not but be aware of the emptiness of many of the artificial distinctions of life. She could not, indeed, have felt so utterly unworthy to sit down among the guests, with those by whom she had been bidden to the banquet. But she must have been painfully conscious of the feelings with which her unfortunate race were regarded; and must have reflected that, in a mixed company, there might be many individuals who would, perhaps, think they honored her too far by dining with her at the same table. Therefore, by respecting even the prejudices of those who courteously waived them in her favor, she very delicately expressed her gratitude; and, following the counsels of those Scriptures to which she was not a stranger, and taking the lowest seat at the feast, she placed herself where she could certainly expect neither to give or receive offence.

It is related that, upon the occasion of one of these visits, the weather changed during the absence of Phillis; and her anxious mistress, fearful of the effects of cold and damp upon her already delicate health, ordered Prince (also an African and a slave) to take the chaise, and bring home her protégée. When the chaise returned, the good lady drew near the window, as it approached the house, and exclaimed—*“Do but look at the saucy varlet-if he hasn't the impudence to sit upon the same seat with my Phillis!”* And poor Prince received a severe reprimand for forgetting the dignity thus kindly, though perhaps to him unaccountably, attached to the sable person of *“my Phillis.”*

In 1770, at the age of sixteen, Phillis was received as a member of the church worshipping in the Old-South Meeting house, then under the pastoral charge of the Rev. Dr. Sewall. She became an ornament to her profession; for she possessed that meekness of spirit, which, in the language of inspiration, is said to be above all price. She was very gentle-tempered, extremely affectionate, and altogether free from that most despicable foible, which might naturally have been her besetting sin - literary vanity. The little poem commencing, *“T was mercy brought me from my heathen land,”* will be found to be a beautiful expression of her religious sentiments, and a noble vindication of the claims of her race. We can hardly suppose any one, reflecting by whom it was written--an African and a slave--to read it without emotions both of regret and admiration.



*Phillis Wheatley*

*“...she never lost sight of that modest, unassuming demeanor, which first won the heart of her mistress...”*



## Phillis Wheatley by Geo. W. Light, continues:

Phillis never indulged her muse in any fits of sullenness or caprice. She was at all times accessible. If anyone requested her to write upon any particular subject or event, she immediately set herself to the task, and produced something upon the given theme. This is probably the reason why so many of her pieces are funeral poems, many of them, no doubt, being written at the request of friends. Still, the variety of her compositions affords sufficient proof of the versatility of her genius. We find her at one time occupied in the contemplation of an event affecting the condition of a whole people, and pouring forth her thoughts in a lofty strain. Then the song sinks to the soft tones of sympathy in the affliction occasioned by domestic bereavement. Again, we observe her seeking inspiration from the sacred volume, or from the tomes of heathen lore; now excited by the beauties of art, and now, hymning the praises of nature to *"Nature's God."*

*"Phillis never indulged her muse in any fits of sullenness or caprice."*

On one occasion, we notice her--a girl of but fourteen years--recognizing a political event, and endeavoring to express the grateful loyalty of subjects to their rightful king--not as one, indeed, who had been trained to note the events of nations, by a course of historical studies, but one whose habits, taste and opinions, were peculiarly her own; for in Phillis we have an example of originality of no ordinary character. She was allowed, and even encouraged, to follow the leading of her own genius; but nothing was forced upon her, nothing suggested, or placed before her as a lure; her literary efforts were altogether the natural workings of her own mind.



There is another circumstance respecting her habits of composition, which peculiarly claims our attention. She did not seem to have the power of retaining the creations of her own fancy, for a long time, in her own mind. If, during the vigil of a wakeful night, she amused herself by weaving a tale, she knew nothing of it in the morning--it had vanished in the land of dreams. Her kind mistress indulged her with a light, and in the cold season with a fire, in her apartment, during the night. The light was placed upon a table at her bedside, with writing materials, that if any thing occurred to her after she had retired, she might, without rising or taking cold, secure the swift-winged fancy, ere it fled.

We have before remarked, that Mrs. Wheatley did not require or permit her services as a domestic; but she would sometimes allow her to polish a table or dust an apartment, (occupations which were not thought derogatory to the dignity of a lady in those days of primitive simplicity) or engage in some other trifling occupation that would break in upon her sedentary habits; but not infrequently, in these cases, the brush and the duster were soon dropped for the pen, that her meditated verse might not escape her.

It has been suggested that memory was in fault in this instance; but we have hesitated to account for this singular habit of mind in this manner; for, upon duly considering the point, we cannot suppose that Phillis could have made such rapid progress in various branches of knowledge, if she had not possessed a retentive memory and still less, that she could have succeeded in the attainment of one of the dead languages. We are rather inclined to refer the fact in question to some peculiar structure of mind--possibly to its activity--perhaps occasioned by lack of early discipline one fancy thrusting forth another, and occupying its place.

But the difficulty still remains, that she could not recall those fancies. Most persons are aware that, by a mental effort, (and there is no operation of the mind more wonderful) they can recall scenes and events long since forgotten; but Phillis does not seem to have possessed this power, as it respects her own productions, for we believe this singularity to have affected her own thoughts only, and not the impressions made upon her mind by the thoughts of others, communicated by books or conversation.

We consider this statement of the case corroborated by the poem on *"Recollection."* In this little effusion, referring so directly to the point in question, we find no intimation or acknowledgment of any deficiency, but rather the contrary; and when we remember Phillis's simplicity of character, we cannot suppose that an imperfection of the kind would have been thus passed un-noticed, had any such existed. But, however this singularity may be accounted for, we state the fact as we believe it to have existed, and leave our readers to draw their own inferences. Perhaps there may be many gifted minds conscious of the same peculiarity.

## Phillis Wheatley by Geo. W. Light, continues:

By comparing the accounts we have of Phillis's progress, with the dates of her earliest poems, we find that she must have commenced her career as an authoress, as soon as she could write a legible hand, and without being acquainted with the rules of composition. Indeed, we very much doubt if she ever had any grammatical instruction, or any knowledge of the structure or idiom of the English language, except what she imbibed from a perusal of the best English writers, and from mingling in polite circles, where, fortunately, she was encouraged to converse freely with the wise and the learned.

We gather from her writings, that she was acquainted with astronomy, ancient and modern geography and ancient and modern history; and that she was well versed in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. She discovered a decided taste for the stories of Heathen Mythology, and Pope's Homer seems to have been a great favorite with her.

Her time, when she was at home, was chiefly occupied with her books, her pen, and her needle; and when we consider the innocence of her life, the purity of her heart, and the modest pride which must have followed her, successful industry, joined to the ease and contentment of her domestic lot, we cannot but suppose these early years to have been years of great happiness.

The reader is already aware of the delicate constitution and frail health of Phillis. During the winter of 1773, the indications of disease had so much increased, that her physician advised a sea voyage. This was earnestly seconded by her friends; and a son of Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley being about to make a voyage to England to arrange a mercantile correspondence, it was settled that Phillis should accompany him, and she accordingly embarked in the summer of the same year.

She was at this time but nineteen years old, and was at the highest point of her short and brilliant career. It is with emotions of sorrow that we approach the strange and splendid scenes which were now about to open upon her--to be succeeded by grief and desolation.

Phillis was well received in England, and was presented to Lady Huntingdon, Lord Dartmouth, Mr. Thornton,<sup>#</sup> and many other individuals of distinction; but, says our informant, "*not all the attention she received, nor all the honors that were heaped upon her, had the slightest influence upon her temper or deportment. She was still the same single-hearted, unsophisticated being.*" During her stay in England, her poems were given to the world, dedicated to the Countess of Huntingdon, and embellished with an engraving which is said to have been a striking representation of the original. It is supposed that one of these impressions was forwarded to her mistress, as soon as they were struck off; for a grand niece of Mrs. Wheatley's informs us that, during the absence of Phillis, she one day called upon her relative, who immediately directed her attention to a picture over the fire-place, exclaiming—"See! Look at my Phillis! Does she not seem as though she would speak to me!"

Phillis arrived in London so late in the season, that the great mart of fashion was deserted. She was therefore urgently pressed by her distinguished friends to remain until the Court returned to St. James's, that she might be presented to the young monarch, George III. She would probably have consented to this arrangement, had not letters from America informed her of the declining health of her mistress, who entreated her to return, that she might once more behold her beloved protégée.

Phillis waited not a second bidding, but immediately re-embarked, and arrived in safety at that once happy home, which was so soon to be desolate. It will probably occur to the reader as singular, that Phillis has not borne a more decided testimony to the kindness of those excellent friends who so tenderly cherished her. Her farewell to America was inscribed to her mistress, indicated by the initials, S. W., but here she merely alludes to the pain of parting. If any other pieces were ever devoted to her, they were doubtless destroyed; for upon mentioning the singularity of her omitting to record a testimony of her gratitude to her benefactors, we were told, by one of the very few individuals who have any recollection of Mrs. Wheatley or Phillis, that the former was a woman distinguished for good sense and discretion; and that her Christian humility induced her to shrink from the thought of those good deeds being blazoned forth to the world, which were performed in the privacy of her own happy home. It appears, also, that on her death-bed she requested that nothing might be written upon her decease. Indeed, Phillis was forbidden this indulgence of her grief, and it was shortly after her mournful duty to close the eyes of her indulgent mistress and unwearied friend.

The decease of this excellent lady occurred in the year 1774. Her husband soon followed her to the house appointed for all living; and their daughter joined them in the chambers of death. The son had married and settled in England; and Phillis was now, therefore, left utterly desolate. She spent a short time with a friend of her departed mistress, and then took an apartment, and lived by herself. This was a strange change to one who had enjoyed the comforts and even luxuries of life, and the happiness of a fire-side where a well regulated family were accustomed to gather. Poverty, too, was drawing near with its countless afflictions. She could hope for little extraneous aid; the troubles with the mother country were thickening around; every home was darkened, and every heart was sad.

## Phillis Wheatley by Geo. W. Light, continues:

At this period of destitution, Phillis received an offer of marriage from a respectable colored man of Boston. The name of this individual was Peters. He kept a grocery in Court Street, and was a man of very handsome person and manners; wore a wig, carried a cane, and quite acted out "the gentleman." In an evil hour he was accepted; and he proved utterly unworthy of the distinguished woman who honored him by her alliance. He was unsuccessful in business, and failed soon after their marriage; and he is said to have been both too proud and too indolent to apply himself to any occupation below his fancied dignity. Hence his unfortunate wife suffered much from this ill-omened union.

The difficulties between the colonies and the mother country had by this time increased to open hostilities. Universal distress prevailed. The provincial army was scantily provided with clothing and food; and the families of those who were fighting for their country, most of whom had been cherished in the lap of plenty, were glad to obtain their daily bread. The inhabitants of Boston were fleeing in all directions; and Phillis accompanied her husband to Wilmington, in this state. In an obscure country village, the necessaries of life are always obtained with more difficulty than in a populous town, and in this season of scarcity, Phillis suffered much from privation--from absolute want--and from painful exertions to which she was unaccustomed, and for which her frail constitution unfitted her. We cannot be surprised that, under these distressing circumstances, her health, which had been much improved by her voyage to England, should have again declined. We rather wonder, that one who had been so tenderly reared, and so fondly nurtured, should have borne up, for so long a season, against such an increasing burthen of misfortune and affliction.

In the course of these years of suffering, she became the mother of three infants, who inherited the frail health of their parent; and thus to her other cares was added the anxiety of a mother, watching the flickering flame glowing in the bosom of her offspring, and trembling every moment lest the breath of adversity should extinguish a life so dear to her. We know little of Phillis in her relations of wife and mother; but we cannot suppose, that one who had been so faithful to her earliest friend, who was so meek and unassuming, and possessed of such an affectionate constitutional disposition, could have been unmindful, in any case, of her conjugal or matronly duties. Nor can we learn that a breath of complaint or reproach ever escaped her respecting her husband. There are some, however, not so tender of a name she was not allowed to bear, who speak of him as that man deserves to be spoken of, who beguiles a woman to confide in his protection, and betrays her trust and his own.

We have alluded above to the circumstance that we never heard Phillis named, or alluded to, by any other appellation than that of "*Phillis Wheatley*" - a name which she sustained with dignity and honor, not only in the vicinity of her own residence, but upon far distant shores.

After the evacuation of Boston by the British troops, Phillis returned thither. A niece of Mrs. Wheatley's, whose son had been slain in battle, received her beneath her own roof. This lady was a widow, and not wealthy. She kept a small day school to increase her narrow income. Her mansion had been much "injured by the enemy," but it afforded a shelter to herself and daughter, and they ministered to Phillis, and her three suffering children, for six weeks. At the end of that period, Peters came for his wife, and, having provided an apartment, took her thither with her little family.

It must be remembered that this was a season of general poverty. Phillis's friends of former days were scattered far and wide. Many of them; attached to the royal interest, had left the country. The successful patriots, during the seven years' contention, had not only lost the profits which would have arisen from their industry, but were obliged to strain every reserve to meet the exigencies of the war. The depreciation of the currency added greatly to the general distress.

Mr. Thatcher, for example, in his History of Plymouth, tells us of a man who sold a cow for forty dollars, and gave the same sum for a goose! We have ourselves heard an elderly lady\*\* relate, that her husband, serving in the army, forwarded her in a letter fifty dollars, which was of so little value when she received it, that she paid the whole for a quarter of mutton, so poor and "*so tough*" that it required great skill and patience, in the culinary department, to render it fit for the table. In this condition of things, observes the lady, whom we have more than once referred to, and to whom we expressed our surprise at the neglect and poverty into which Phillis was suffered to decline, "*people had other things to attend to than prose and poetry, and had little to bestow in charity, when their own children were clamorous for bread.*" Poor Phillis was left to the care of her negligent husband.

We now learn nothing of her for along interval. At length a relative of her lamented mistress heard of her illness, and sought her out. She was also visited by several other members of that family. They found her in a situation of extreme misery. Two of her children were dead, and the third was sick unto death. She was herself suffering for want of attention, for many comforts, and that greatest of all comforts in sickness, cleanliness. She was reduced to a condition too loathsome to describe. If a charitable individual, moved at the sight of so much distress, sent a load of wood, to render her more comfortable during the cold season, her husband was too much of a gentleman to prepare it for her use.

## Phillis Wheatley by Geo. W. Light, continues:

It is painful to dwell upon the closing scene. In a filthy apartment, in an obscure part of the metropolis, lay the dying mother, and the wasting child. The woman who had stood honored and respected in the presence of the wise and good of that country which was hers by adoption, or rather compulsion, who had graced the ancient halls of Old England, and rolled about in the splendid equipages of the proud nobles of Britain, was now numbering the last hours of life in a state of the most abject misery, surrounded by all the emblems of squalid poverty!

Little more remains to be told. It is probable, (as frequently happens when the constitution has long borne up against disease) that the thread of life, attenuated by suffering, at last snapped suddenly; for the friends of Phillis, who had visited her in her sickness, knew not of her death. Peters did not see fit to acquaint them with the event, or to notify them of her interment. A grand niece of Phillis's benefactress, passing up Court Street, met the funeral of an adult and a child: a bystander informed her they were bearing Phillis Wheatley to that silent mansion "*where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.*"

They laid her away in her solitary grave, without a stone to tell that one so good and so gifted sleeps beneath; and the waters of oblivion are rapidly erasing her name from the sands of time. We would that her memory were engraven upon the heart of the young, and the gifted, who are striving for a niche in the temple of fame. We think, gentle reader, she is a worthy of a place in your thoughts, as the heroines of the thousand tales dressed out to beguile your fancy. Remember, that though the children of men regard feature and complexion, there is One who looketh upon the heart.

Here and there we find a solitary pilgrim, belonging to the days of the years that are gone, treasuring Phillis's poems as a precious relic. But when they shall have passed away, who will remember her? May not this little record, though offered with diffidence, be allowed to perpetuate her name?

The poems now republished, are as they came from the hands of the author, without the alteration of a word or letter. Surely they lift an eloquent voice on behalf of her race.

Is it urged that Phillis is but a solitary instance of African genius? Even though this were the case (which we by no means grant) we reply that had Phillis fallen into less generous and affectionate hands, she would speedily have perished under the privations and exertions of common servitude. Or had she dragged out a few years of suffering, she would have been of much less value to her master, than the sturdy negroes of more obscure faculties, but whose stronger limbs could have borne heavier burdens. How then can it be known, among this unfortunate people, how often the light of genius is quenched in suffering and death?

The great difference between the colored man and his oppressors seems to us to be, that the great Ruler of the universe has appointed power unto the white man for a season; and verily they have bowed down their brethren with a rod of iron. From the luxuriant savannahs of America and the barren sands of Africa, the blood of their victims cries unto God from the ground. Friends of liberty! Friends of humanity! When will ye appoint a jubilee for the African, and let the oppressed go free?

We have named, in the course of the preceding Memoir, some of the remarkable privileges which fell to the lot of Phillis. We should allude also more distinctly to the general disadvantages of her condition. It must not be forgotten, that the opportunities of education allowed females, at this early period, were few and meager. Those who coveted superior advantages for their children, sent them home (as the mother country was fondly termed) for their education. Of course, this expensive method could be adopted only by a privileged few, chiefly belonging to old English families of rank and wealth. The great mass of American females could boast of few accomplishments save housewifery. They had few books beside their Bibles. They were not expected to read--far less to write. It was their province to guide the spindle and distaff, and work willingly with their hands.

Now, woman is allowed to establish her humble stool somewhat nearer the elbow-chair of her lord and master; to pore over the huge tome of science, hitherto considered as his exclusive property; to con the musty volumes of classic lore, written even in strange tongues; to form her own opinions, and give them forth to the world. But, in the days of Phillis, these things were not so. She was not stimulated to exertion by the successful cultivation of female talent. She had no brilliant exhibition of feminine genius before her, to excite her emulation; and we are at a loss to conjecture, how the first strivings of her mind after knowledge--her delight in literature, her success even in a dead language, the first bursting forth of her thoughts in song--can be accounted for, unless these efforts are allowed to have been the inspirations of that genius which is the gift of God. And who will dare to say, that the benevolent Sovereign of the universe has appointed her unfortunate race to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and given them no portion with their brethren?

## Phillis Wheatley by Geo. W. Light, continues:

The distinguished women of France were trained, as it were, in the very temple of science, to minister at its altars. Those of England stood, too, in the broad light of its wide-spreading beams; but at the time when Phillis lived, our own land was darkly overshadowed. We had no philosophers, no historians, no poets; and our statesmen--those wonderful men, who stood forth in the day of a nation's peril, the wonder and glory of the world--had not then breathed forth those mighty energies which girded the warrior for the battle, and nerved the hearts of a whole people as the heart of one man. All here was calm and passionless as the natural world upon the morning of, creation, ere the Spirit of God had moved upon the face of the waters. It passed, and the day--spring knew its place. Even thus with the spirit of Liberty. It breathed upon our sleeping nation, awakening the genius of the people to appear from time to time in a thousand new and multiplying forms of ever-varying beauty.

Since that day, our philosophers have stood in the courts of monarchs, more honored than he who held the scepter; and the recesses of the leafy forest, and the banks of the solitary stream and lonely lake, have been hallowed by the legends of the children of song. Nor has skill been wanting to embody the deeds of our fathers, or shadow forth the gentle and the brave, in tales that have stirred many hearts, even beyond the waters. But Phillis lived not amid these happy influences. True, she heard the alarm of Liberty, but it was in suffering and sorrow; and when the shout of triumph was raised, it fell upon a chilled heart and a closing ear. The pride of victory could scarce move the sympathies of one who had known the emptiness of glory, and proved the mockery of fame.

The evidences she has left us of her genius, were the<sup>##</sup> productions of early and happy days, before her mind was matured by experience, the depths of her soul fathomed by suffering, or her fine powers chastened by affliction. The blight was upon her in her spring-time, and she passed away.

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The reader may claim to be satisfied as to the authenticity of the facts stated in the preceding Memoir. They were derived from grand-nieces of Phillis's benefactress, who are still living, and have a distinct and vivid remembrance both of their excellent relative and her admired protégée.

Their statements are corroborated by a grand-daughter of that lady, now residing in Boston; who, though much younger than the individuals alluded to, recalls the circumstance of Phillis's visiting at the house of her father. Other company was probably present; for the lady in question relates; that the domestics observed, "*it was the first time they ever carried tea to a colored woman.*"

This lady communicates some particulars which we state with great pleasure, as they remove from Phillis the supposition of her having formed a matrimonial connection from unworthy or mercenary motives. She assures us that Peters was not only a very remarkable looking man, but a man of talents and information; and that he wrote with fluency and propriety, and at one period read law. It is admitted, however, that he was disagreeable in his manners, and that on account of his improper conduct, Phillis became entirely estranged from the immediate family of her mistress: they were not seasonably informed of her suffering condition, or of her death.

Lastly, the author of this Memoir is a collateral descendant of Mrs. Wheatley, and has been familiar with the name and fame of Phillis from her childhood.

### Footnotes:

\* This lady was better known subsequently as Mrs. Lothrop.

# Another of the benefactors of Dartmouth College.

\*\* The grandmother of the writer of this Memoir.

## Previous to Phillis's departure for Wilmington, she entrusted her papers to a daughter of the lady who received her on her return from that place. After her death, these papers were demanded by Peters, as the property of his deceased wife, and were, of course, yielded to him importunity. Some years after, he went to the South, and we have not been able to ascertain what eventually became of the manuscripts.

## Selected Poems by 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.  
 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.  
 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;  
 Oh, leave me not to the false joys of time,  
 But guide my steps to endless life and bliss.  
 Greatness, or Goodness, say what shall I call thee,  
 To give an higher appellation still:  
 Teach me a better strain, a nobler lay,  
 O thou, enthroned with cherubs in the realms of  
 day!

ON BEING BROUGHT FROM  
AFRICA TO AMERICA.

T'WAS mercy brought me from my pagan land,  
 Taught my benighted soul to understand  
 That there t's a God-that there t's a Savior too:  
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
 Some view our sable race with scornful eye  
 Their color 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.  
 'T was not long since, I left my native shore,  
 The land of errors and Egyptian gloom:  
 Father of mercy! 't was thy gracious hand  
 Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 't is 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 heaven,  
 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!  
 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 heaven.  
 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, 't is your greatest foe;  
 Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,  
 And in immense perdition sinks the soul.

**THOUGHTS ON THE WORKS  
OF PROVIDENCE.**

*ARISE, my soul; on wings enraptured, rise,  
To praise the Monarch of the earth and skies,  
Whose goodness and beneficence appear,  
As round its centre moves the rolling year;  
Or when the morning glows with rosy charm,  
Or the sun slumbers in the ocean's arms:  
Of light divine be a rich portion lent,  
To guide my soul and favor my intent.  
Celestial Muse, my arduous flight sustain,  
And raise my mind to a seraphic strain!*

*Adored forever be the God unseen,  
Which round the sun revolves this vast machine,  
Though to his eye its mass a point appears:  
Adored the God that whirls surrounding spheres,  
Which first ordained that mighty Sol should reign,  
The peerless monarch of the ethereal train:  
Of miles twice forty millions is his height,  
And yet his radiance dazzles mortal sight.  
So far beneath--from him the extended earth  
Vigor derives, and ev'ry flow'ry birth:  
Vast through her orb she moves with easy grace  
Around her Phoebus in unbounded space;  
True to her course, the impetuous storm derides,  
Triumphant o'er the winds, and surging tides.*

*Almighty, in these wondrous works of Thine,  
What Power, what Wisdom, and what.  
Goodness shine! And are thy wonders,  
Lord, by men explored,  
And yet creating glory un-adored?*

*Creation smiles in various beauty gay,  
While day to night, and night succeeds to day:  
That Wisdom which attends Jehovah's ways,  
Shines most conspicuous in the solar rays:  
Without them, destitute of heat and light,  
This world would be the reign of endless night.  
In their excess how would our race complain,  
Abhorring life! How hate its lengthened chain!  
From air, or dust, what numerous ills would rise!  
I what dire contagion taint the burning skies!  
What pestilential vapor, fraught with death,  
Would rise, and overspread the lands beneath!*

*Hail, smiling morn, that, from the orient main  
Ascending, dost adorn the heavenly plain!  
So rich, so various are thy beauteous dies  
That spread through all the circuit of the skies,  
That, full of thee, my soul in rapture soars,  
And thy great God, the cause of all, adores.  
O'er beings infinite his love extends,*

*His Wisdom rules them, and his Power defends.  
When tasks diurnal tire the human frame,  
The spirits faint, and dim the vital flame;  
Then, too, that ever-active bounty shines,  
Which not infinity of space confines.*

*The sable veil, that Night in silence draws,  
Conceals effects, but shows the Almighty Cause;  
Night seals in sleep the wide creation fair,  
And all is peaceful but the brow of care.  
Again, gay Phoebus, as the day before,  
Wakes ev'ry eye, but what shall wake no more;  
Again the face of nature is renewed,  
Which still appears harmonious, fair, and good.  
May grateful strains salute the smiling morn,  
Before its beams the eastern hills adorn!*

*Shall day today and night to night conspire?  
To show the goodness of the Almighty Sire?  
This mental voice shall man regardless hear,  
And never, never raise the filial prayer?  
To-day, oh hearken, nor your folly mourn  
For time misspent, that never will return.*

*But see the sons of vegetation rise,  
And spread their leafy banners to the skies.  
All-wise, Almighty Providence, we trace  
In trees and plants, and all the flowery race,  
As clear as in the noble frame of man,  
All lovely copies of the Maker's plan,  
The power the same that forms a ray of light,  
That called creation from eternal night.  
"Let there be light," he said: from his profound  
Old Chaos heard, and trembled at the sound:  
Swift as the word, inspired by power divine,  
Behold the light around its Maker shine,  
The first fair product of the omnificent God,  
And now through all his works diffused abroad.*

*As reason's powers by day our God disclose,  
So we may trace him in the night's repose:  
Say, what is sleep? And dreams how passing strange!  
When action ceases and ideas range  
Licentious and unbounded o'er the plains,  
Where Fancy's queen in giddy triumph reigns.  
Hear in soft strains the dreaming lover sigh  
To a kind fair, or rave in jealousy;  
On pleasure, now, and now on vengeance bent,  
The lab'ring passions struggle for a vent.  
What power, O man? Thy reason then restores,  
So long Suspended in nocturnal hours?  
What secret hand returns the mental train,  
And gives improved thine active powers again?  
From thee, O man, what gratitude should rise!  
And when from balmy sleep thou op'st thine eyes,  
Let thy first thoughts be praises to the skies.*

*How merciful our God, who thus imparts  
O'erflowing tides of joy to human hearts,  
Among the mental powers a question rose,  
What most the image of the Eternal shows;  
When thus to Reason (so let Fancy rove,)  
Her great companion spoke, immortal Love:*

*"Say, mighty power, how long shall strife prevail,  
And with its murmurs load the whispering gale?  
Refer the cause to Recollection's shrine,  
Who loud proclaims my origin divine?  
The cause whence heaven and earth began to be,  
And is not man immortalized by me?  
Reason, let this most causeless strife subside.  
Thus love pronounced, and Reason thus reply'd:*

*"Thy birth, celestial queen! T'is mine to own,  
In thee resplendent is the Godhead shown;  
Thy words persuade, my soul enraptured feels  
Resistless beauty which thy soul reveals.  
Ardent she spoke, and kindling at her charms,  
She clasped the blooming goddess in her arms.*

*Infinite Love, where'er we turn our eyes,  
Appears: this ev'ry creature's want supplies;  
This most is heard in Nature's constant voice;  
This makes the morn, and this the eve, rejoice;  
This bids the fostering rains and dews descend  
To nourish all, to serve one gen'ral end,  
The good of man: yet man ungrateful pays  
But little homage, and but little praise.  
To him whose works arrayed in mercy shine,  
What songs should rise, how constant, how divine!*

### **HYMN TO THE MORNING.**

*ATTEND my lays, ye ever honored Nine,  
Assist my labors, and my strains refine;  
In smoothest numbers pour the notes along,  
For bright Aurora now demands my song.*

*Aurora hail! and all the thousand die,  
Which deck thy progress through the vaulted skies:  
The morn awakes, and wide extends her rays,  
On ev'ry leaf the gentle zephyr plays;  
Harmonious lays the feathered race resume,  
Dart the bright eye, and shake the painted plume.*

*Ye shady groves, your verdant bloom display,  
To shield your poet from the burning day:  
Calliope, awake the sacred lyre,  
While thy fair sisters fan the pleasing fire.  
The bowers, the gales, the variegated skies,  
In all their pleasures in my bosom rise.*

*When wants and woes might be our righteous lot,  
Our God forgetting, by our God forgot!  
See in the east, the illustrious king of day!  
His rising radiance drives the shades away  
But oh! I, feel his fervid beams too strong,  
And scarce begun, concludes the abortive song.*

### **HYMN TO THE EVENING.**

*SOON as the sun forsook the eastern main,  
The pealing thunder shook the heavenly plain;  
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr's wing,  
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.  
Soft purl the streams; the birds renew their notes,  
And through the air their mingled music floats.*

*Through all the heavens what beautiful dyes are spread?  
But the west glories in the deepest red:  
So may our breasts with ev'ry virtue glow,  
The living temples of our God below!*

*Filled with the praise of him who gives the light,  
And draws the sable curtains of the night,  
Let placid slumbers soothe each weary mind,  
At morn to wake, more heavenly, more refined;  
So shall the labors of the day begin?  
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.  
Night's leaden scepter seals my drowsy eyes,  
Then cease my song, till fair Aurora rise.*

### **A HYMN TO HUMANITY.**

*To S. P.G., Esq.*

*Lo! For this dark terrestrial ball,  
Forsakes his azure paved hall,  
A prince of heavenly birth!  
Divine Humanity behold,  
What wonders rise, what charms unfold?  
At his descent to earth!*

*The bosoms of the great and good  
With wonder and delight he viewed,  
And fixed his empire there:  
Him close compressing to his breast,  
The sire of Gods and men addressed,  
My son, my heavenly fair!*

*Descend to earth, there place thy throne:  
To succor man's afflicted son,  
Each human heart inspire:  
To act in bounties unconfined,  
Enlarge the close contracted mind,  
And fill it with thy fire.*

*Quick as the word, with swift career,  
He wings his course from star to star,  
And leaves his bright abode,  
The Virtue did his charms impart;  
There G-y ! Then thy ruptured heart  
Perceiv'd the rushing God:*

*For then thy pitying eye did see  
The languid muse in low degree;  
Then, then at thy desire,  
Descended the celestial Nine;  
O'er me, my thought they deigned to shine,  
And deigned to string my lyre.*

*Can Afric's Muse forgetful prove?  
Or can such friendship fail to move  
A tender human heart?  
Immortal Friendship laurel-crowned,  
The smiling Graces all around,  
With ev'ry heavenly Art.*

### **Farewell to America:**

*To Mrs. S. W.*

*ADIEU, New England's smiling meads,  
Adieu, the flowery plain;  
I leave Thine opening charms; O spring!  
And tempt the roaring main.*

*In vain for me the flowers rise,  
And boast their gaudy pride,  
While here beneath the northern skies  
I mourn for health deny'd.*

*Celestial maid of rosy hue,  
Oh let me feel thy reign!  
I languish till thy face I view,  
Thy vanished joys regain.*

*Susannah mourns, nor can I bear  
To see the crystal shower,  
Or mark the tender falling tear,  
At sad departure's hour;*

*Not un-regarding can I see  
Her soul with grief oppress,  
But let no sighs, no groans for me,  
Steal from her pensive breast.*

*In vain the feathered warblers sing,  
In vain the garden blooms,  
And on the bosom of the spring  
Breathes out her sweet perfumes,*

*While for Britannia's distant shore  
We sweep the liquid plain,  
And with astonished eyes explore  
The wide extended main.*

*Lo! Health appears, celestial dame!  
Complacent and serene,  
With Hebe's mantle o'er her frame,  
With soul-delighting mein.*

*To mark the vale where London lies,  
With misty vapors crowned,  
Which cloud Aurora's thousand dyes,  
And veil her charms around,*

*Why, Phoebus, moves thy car so slow?  
So slow thy rising rays?  
Give us the famous town to view,  
Thou glorious king of day!*

*For thee, Britannia, I resign  
New England's smiling fields;  
To view again her charms divine;  
What joy the prospect yields!*

*But thou, Temptation, hence away!  
With all thy fatal train,  
Nor once seduce my soul away,  
By Thine enchanting strain.*

*Thrice happy they, whose heavenly shield  
Secures their souls from harms,  
And fell Temptation on the field  
Of all its power disarms!*

*--Boston May 7th, 1773.*

**PHILLIS WHEATLEY**, by John W. Cromwell, *The Negro in American History* 1914.

While the United States of America were subject to Great Britain the descendants of Africa in America were either slaves or the children of slaves, and, except in rare cases, were Negroes, that is, they had little or no traces of white blood in their veins. Only a few generations prior to the Revolutionary War a minister of the gospel of respectable ability (Morgan Godwyn), had actually written a book to prove that the Negro should not be used as a beast of burden without causing remorse of conscience.

It was at this period that the intellectual and social circles of both New and Old England had a revelation in the person of a native of Africa of pleasing personal appearance, of charming conversational qualities, an easy and accomplished correspondent, one who could write pleasing verses of poetry that were complimented for their grace and elegance, if not for their depth and profundity of thought.

This phenomenon was Phillis Wheatley who was brought to this country from Africa in 1761, when about seven years of age and sold in the streets of Boston as a slave to Mr. John Wheatley, a prosperous tailor and the owner of several other slaves. He desired her as a personal attendant of his wife, as a maid to wait on her in her old age. It was the humble and modest demeanor, especially the pleasing expression of the young child, that attracted Mr. Wheatley's attention. As she had been torn from her home, ten thousands of miles distant, it was not to be expected that she had a very elaborate wardrobe--in fact, she had the scantiest of clothing, an old piece of carpet forming her only dress.

When installed in Mr. Wheatley's home the uncommon intelligence of the slave girl was displayed in her frequent attempts to make letters upon the wall with pieces of chalk or charcoal. A daughter of Mrs. Wheatley observing her precocity undertook her education and was astonished by her intelligence, and by the ease and rapidity with which Phillis learned. She mastered the language in sixteen months; carried on with her friends and acquaintances an extensive and elegant correspondence while but twelve years of age; composed her first poem at fourteen, became a proficient Latin scholar at seventeen, and an authoress at nineteen, when we are told that she published her first collection of poems.

Although originally intended for menial pursuits, she was reared as a member of the family and not permitted to associate with the other family servants. With her growth in years her mind expanded and such was her progress in her studies that she drew the attention of a large circle of the most cultured people of Boston, who encouraged her by their association and their companionship.

At the early age of sixteen she was admitted by baptism into the membership of the Old South Church of which Rev. Samuel Sewall was pastor. Her record as a church member accorded with her reputation in society, in which her humility of character, her elevated tone of thought and her consistent life made her a shining light. Her devout Christian character displayed itself not only in some of her poems, but in her private correspondence. In one of her early poems she says<sup>1</sup>—

*"T'was Mercy brought me from my pagan land,  
Taught my benighted soul to understand*

*"That there's a God, that there's a Savior too;  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew,*

*"Some view our sable race with scornful eye--  
Their color is a diabolic dye.*

*"Remember, Christians, Negroes black as Cain,  
May be refined and join th' angelic train."*

Unlike very many persons who suddenly become famous in literary circles, she was not given to moods or sullenness. On the other hand, she was accommodating, ever ready and willing to receive all who called on her and to give an example of her marvelous gifts.

The subjects on which she wrote showed not only a wide range of reading, but an originality of treatment that established her right to be considered as one of the famous women of her time. The opinion is well supported that her knowledge of composition and the use of a correct style was the result of a familiarity with the best English writers and her association with the most cultivated people of the time, rather than as the result of any systematic instruction in English composition. Frequent classical allusions in her poems display fondness for early Roman and Grecian history. Readers of Virgil may note the influence of the Bard of Mantua in her *"Ode to Washington."*

In his COLORED PATRIOTS OF THE REVOLUTION, published more than fifty years ago, William O. Nell, himself a colored author, says:

*"There is another circumstance respecting her habits of composition. She did not seem to have the power of retaining the creations of her own fancy for a long time in her mind. If during the vigil of a wakeful night she amused herself by weaving a tale she knew nothing of it in the morning--it had vanished in the land of dreams. Her kind mistress indulged her with a light, and in the cold season with a fire in her apartment, during the night. The light was placed upon a table at her bedside, with writing materials so that, if anything occurred to her after she had retired, she might without rising or taking cold secure the swift-winged fancy ere it fled."*

In the winter of 1773, at the age of twenty, a sea voyage being advised, owing to her declining health, she accompanied a son of Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley to England. She was then at the height of her fame. Her reputation had preceded her. She was cordially received by Lady Huntingdon, George Whitefield, the great evangelist, Lord Dartmouth, after whom Dartmouth College is named, the Lord Mayor of London and other persons of the highest social position; but this popularity did not turn her head. During her stay in England the first bound volume of her poems was published and dedicated to the Countess of Huntingdon. A copper-plate engraving of the authoress appears, showing her in the attitude of meditation with her writing materials at her side. So true to life was this picture that when Mrs. Wheatley first saw a copy of the book she exclaimed: "See! Look at my Phillis! Does she not seem as though she would speak to me? Arrangements had been made for the formal presentation of Phillis to George III, the reigning monarch, on his return to his court at St. James, but she was hurried home from Europe because of the tidings of the declining health of her mistress and benefactor, whose eyes after the return of Phillis were soon closed in death. Mr. Wheatley survived his wife by nine days.

In the next month Phillis entered on another experience. Shortly after her return from Europe she had received an offer of marriage from John Peters, said to be a handsome and attractive gentleman of color who kept at one time a grocery, later was employed as a journeyman baker, and also tried to practice law and medicine, but who was utterly unworthy of so rare and precious a human jewel as Phillis *"Wheatley. The marriage seems to have proven, it is written, an unfortunate if not an unhappy one."* Another source thus speaks of John Peters: *"He was a man of talents and information; that he wrote with fluency and propriety, and at one period read law. It is admitted, however, that he was disagreeable in his manners, and that on account of his improper conduct Phillis became entirely estranged from the immediate family of the Wheatleys. They were not seasonably informed of her suffering condition or of her death."*

Regarding these two estimates, it is a most reasonable inference that the devotion of his wife to him and the death of both Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley, as well as the personal pride which Mr. Peters as a freeman of color naturally possessed, may have had not a little to do with these opinions.

Three children were born to the young family, and all of them died in infancy. Unknown to her large circle of friends Phillis passed quietly away December 5, 1784. The Independent Chronicle gave the news to the world in the following paragraph;

*"Last Lord's Day died Mrs. Phillis Peters (formerly Phillis Wheatley) age 31, known to the literary world by her celebrated miscellaneous poems. Her funeral is to be this afternoon at four o'clock from the house lately improved by Mr. Todd nearly opposite Dr. Bulfinch's at West Boston, where her friends are desired to attend."*

The house thus referred to was situated on or near the present site of the Revere House on Bowdoin Square, formerly known at times as a portion of Cambridge Street and sometimes as the westerly end of Court Street.

As an early American poet Phillis Wheatley has been sneered at these later years; but in her time her name was on every tongue and her merits freely acknowledged by competent judges. In the edition of her poems published in Boston in 1774 the following card, issued to silence criticism and objectors, speaks for itself:

*"We whose names are underwritten do assure the world that the poems specified in the following pages were as we*

*readily believe, written by Phillis, a young Negro girl who was, but a few years since, brought an uncultivated barbarian from Africa, and has ever since been and now is under the disadvantage of sewing as a slave in a family in this town. She has been examined by some of the best judges and is thought qualified to write them."*

Among the signatures are those of Thomas Hutchinson, then Governor of Massachusetts, Andrew Oliver, Lieutenant-Governor, John Hancock, of Revolutionary fame, and John Wheatley, her master. The influence of her name and fame upon the rapidly growing anti-slavery sentiment in America was considerable, for the friends of the people of color took pleasure in pointing to her career as an illustration of the possibilities of the Negro under kind and considerate treatment and a fair opportunity for education. She was the very first, of her race in America to attract attention because of her intellectual and moral character. Benjamin Banneker, who was twenty years her senior, had not compiled and published the almanac which brought him to general notice until nearly ten years after Phillis had died. Richard Allen who laid the foundation of the great A. M. E. Church and Absalom Jones, the founder of the first African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia, as well as George Liele, the colored Baptist revivalist to whose activities the colored Baptist Churches at Savannah and Augusta, Georgia, owe their origin, were all later than Phillis Wheatley to be singled out as examples of the possibilities of the African in America. James Durham, the celebrated Negro physician, a native of Philadelphia, and whose fame was established by his professional success in New Orleans, though about the same age as Phillis Wheatley did not rise to eminence there until after her death. The most notable fact is that she was a native of Africa and a woman. As woman is the mother of the race, Phillis Wheatley's preeminence among the representatives of her race stands un-assailed and un-assailable, suggestive and significant, a fact both pregnant and prophetic.

Though she had received marked attention while in England, at a time when the two countries, America and England, were on the eve of war, Phillis Wheatley was loyal to the colonies. That she shared in their general admiration for George Washington this correspondence abundantly proves. In a letter written to him from Providence, Rhode Island, under date of October 26, 1775, she says:

*Sir:*

*I have taken the freedom to address Your Excellency in the enclosed poem, and I entreat your acceptance, though I am not insensible of its inaccuracies. Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to be generalissimo of the Armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues excite sensations not easy to suppress. Your generosity, therefore, I presume, will pardon the attempt.*

*Wishing Your Excellency all possible success in the great cause you are so generously engaged in, I am Your Excellency's*

*Most Obedient Humble Servant,  
Phillis Wheatley.*

Washington's reply was characteristic of the man. He writes as follows:

*Cambridge, February 2, 1778.*

*Miss Phillis:*

*Your favor of the 26th of October did not reach my hand 'till the middle of December. Time enough, you say, to have given an answer ere this. Granted. But a variety of important occurrences continually interposing to distract the mind and to withdraw the attention, I hope, will apologize for the delay and plead my excuse for the seeming, but not real neglect. I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me, in the elegant lines you enclosed, and however undeserving I may be of such encomium and panegyric, the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your poetical talents, in honor of which, and as a tribute justly due to you, I would have published the poem, had I not have been apprehensive that while, I only meant to give the world this new instance of your genius, I might have incurred the imputation of vanity. This and nothing else determined me not to give it place in the public prints.*

*If you should ever come to Cambridge or near headquarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favored by the muses, and to whom Nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations.*

*I am, with great respect,*

*Your obedient humble servant,  
George Washington.*

Jared Sparks, the biographer of Washington, thought that this poem was lost, and George W. Williams, the Negro historian, author of the History of the Negro in America, being unable to produce it arrived at the same conclusion. Fortunately, however, Washington's modesty in refusing it publicity lest his enemies might charge him with vanity did not succeed in concealing the poem from the world; for it appeared in the Pennsylvania Magazine or American Monthly for April, 1776, a publication of which there are very few copies extant. Thus runs the poem:

***“Ode to Washington.”***

*Celestial choir, enthroned in realms of light,  
Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write,  
While Freedom's cause her anxious breast  
alarms,  
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.*

*See Mother Earth her offspring's fate  
bemoan,  
And Nations gaze at scenes before unknown;  
See the bright beams of heaven's revolving  
light  
Involved in sorrows and the veil of night!*

*The goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,  
Olive and laurel binds her golden hair;  
Wherever shines this native of the skies,  
Unnumbered charms and recent graces rise.*

*Muse! bow propitious while my pen relates  
How pour her armies through a thousand  
gates;  
As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms  
Enwrapped in tempest and a night of storms;*

*Astonished ocean feels the wild uproar,  
The refluent surges beat the sounding shore;  
Or thick as leaves in autumn's golden reign,  
Such, and so many, moves the warrior's train.*

*In bright array they seek the work of war,  
Where high unfurled the ensign waves in air.  
Shall I to Washington their praise recite!  
Enough thou know'st them in the fields of  
fight*

*Thee, first in peace and honors, we demand  
The grace and glory of thy martial band.  
Famed for thy valor, for thy virtues more.  
Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!*

*One century scarce performed its destined  
round,  
When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found;  
And so may you, whoever dares disgrace  
The land of Freedom's heaven-defended race!*

*Fixed are the eyes of nations on the scales,  
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails,  
Anon Britannia droops the pensive head,  
While round increase the rising hills of dead.*

*Ah! Cruel blindness to Columbia's state;  
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.  
Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side  
Thy every action let the goddess guide,*

*A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine  
With gold unfading, Washington, be Thine!*

FINIS



The definitions of moral character are from Noah Webster's 1828 DICTIONARY:

character — a mark made by cutting or engraving, as on stone, metal or other hard material...a mark or figure made by stamping or impression...the peculiar qualities, impressed by nature or habit on a person, which distinguish him from others.

charity — love, benevolence, good will.

chastity — purity of the body,...freedom from obscenity, as in language or conversation.

civility — the state of being civilized; refinement of manners; good breeding; politeness; complaisance; courtesy,...civilities denote acts of politeness.

complaisance — a pleasing deportment; courtesy; that manner of address and behavior in social intercourse which gives pleasure; civility.

complaisant — pleasing in manners; courteous; obliging.

courtesy — elegance or politeness of manners; especially, politeness connected with kindness; civility...to treat with civility.

ethics — the doctrines of morality or social manners...a system of moral principles.

evil — having bad qualities of a moral kind; wicked; corrupt; perverse; wrong...moral evil is any deviation of a moral agent from the rules of conduct prescribed to him by God, or by legitimate human authority.

felicity — happiness; blessedness.

fidelity — faithfulness; careful and exact observance of duty,...honesty; veracity.

humble — lowly, modest; meek.

humility — in ethics, freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind.

industry — habitual diligence in any employment, either bodily or mental.

justice — the virtue which consists in giving everyone what is his due...honesty and integrity in commerce or mutual intercourse.

manner — form; method; way of performing or executing; custom; habitual practice.

mannerly — with civility; respectfully; without rudeness.

manners — deportment; carriage; behavior; conduct; course of life; in a moral sense.

modesty — that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one's own worth and importance.

moral — relating to the practice, manners or conduct of men as social beings in relation to each other, and with reference to right and wrong. The word moral is applicable to actions that are good or evil, virtuous, or vicious, and has reference to the law of God as the standard by which their character is to be determined.

morality — the doctrine or system of moral duties, or duties of men in their social character; ethics.

polite — literally, smooth, glossy, and used in this sense till within a century. Being polished or elegant in manners; refined in behavior; well bred; courteous; complaisant; obliging.

precept — in a general sense, any commandment or order intended as an authoritative rule of action; but applied particularly to commands respecting moral conduct. The Ten Commandments are so many precepts for the regulation of our moral conduct.

principle — in a general sense, the cause, source or origin of anything; that from which a thing proceeds; as the principle of motion; the principles of actions;...ground; foundation; that which supports an assertion, an action, or a series of actions or of reasoning....a general truth; a law comprehending many subordinate truths; as the principles of morality, of law, of government, etc.

quality — property; that which belongs to a body or substance, or can be predicated of it...virtue or particular power of producing certain effects...disposition; temper...virtue or vice as good qualities, or bad qualities...character.

refinement — the act of purifying by separating from a substance all extraneous matter;...polish of language; elegance; purity,...purity of heart; the state of the heart purified from sensual and evil affections.

rule — government,...control; supreme command or authority;...that which is established as a principle, standard or directory; that by which anything is to be adjusted or regulated, or to which it is to be conformed...established mode or course of proceeding prescribed in private life. Every man should have some fixed rules for managing his own affairs.

strength — firmness; solidity or toughness...power of resisting attacks; fastness.

temperance — moderation; particularly, habitual, moderation in regard to the indulgence of the natural appetites and passions.

truth — conformity to fact or reality; true state of facts.

valor — strength of mind in regard to danger; that quality which enables a man to encounter danger with firmness; person bravery.

veracity — habitual observance of truth.

vice — properly, a spot or defect; a fault; a blemish...in ethics, any voluntary action or course of conduct which deviates from the rules of moral rectitude, or from the plain rules of propriety...corruption of manners.

virtue — strength, the practice of moral duties and abstaining from vice...the practice of moral duties from sincere love to God and His laws, is virtue and religion.

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