

**THE POEMS OF
PHILLIS WHEATLEY**

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The poems of Phillis Wheatley by Phillis Wheatley

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As they were originally published in London, 1773

Re-published by R. R. and C. C. Wright
Philadelphia, Pa.

1909

Publishers' Note

Our purpose in republishing this little book of poems, a century and a quarter after the death of the author, is to acquaint the present generation more thoroughly with her remarkable genius. She was born in Africa, and at the age of eight years was brought to America and sold into slavery to a Mrs. John Wheatley in Boston. Within a year of her arrival she could read and write English, of which she was previously in entire ignorance. She also acquired a knowledge of the classics, and developed a pleasing poetic style. Before she was twenty her writings had attracted the attention of many literary people of England, and in 1773 a volume of her poems was published in London. Since then there have been many editions published; one in 1784 in Boston, another in Albany, 1793; another in 1802, another in 1805, another 1816. *Memoirs and Poems of Phillis Wheatley* in 1834, 1835 and 1838. Her poems constituted the second volume of Abbie Joseph La Valle's book, "The Negro Equalled by few Europeans," in 1801. Besides these, many separate poems have been published, perhaps the earliest being in memory of George Whitefield, printed in 1770. Many of her poems were not published. She wrote a poem to George Washington, which the general highly complimented, but which he was too modest to publish.

Phillis Wheatley was married to a Mr. Peters, in Boston, but died soon after in 1784, at about the age of thirty-one years. Her poems were written and published before her marriage, and she was known as Phillis Wheatley rather than Phillis W. Peters.

☞ 'The Poems of Phillis Wheatley' ☞

Phillis Wheatley served as no one of her day could—to prove conclusively the capacity for the highest culture on the part of the Negro race. The day of contentions on this subject has passed and there is no need for any defence along this line. But her name and works should never perish; they should always be cherished most warmly by the members of her race, and the lovers of literature generally. Her poems stand for themselves. They show a mind of refinement, highly religious with strong convictions as to the life after death and the felicity of the departed good.

Her language shows the grade of her reading, and its wide range. She was surprisingly familiar with the Bible and with the classics, while her poems show that she was also a careful observer of Nature.

We have adhered, as closely as possible, to the quaint forms and usages which occur in the earliest edition, thinking that these may possess something of interest and charm for the student of literature, while they can scarcely prove of material disadvantage to the casual reader.

RICHARD R. WRIGHT, JR.,
CHARLOTTE CROGMAN WRIGHT.

✂ The Poems of Phillis Wheatley ✂

First Publisher's Preface. 1773

The following Poems were written originally for the Amusement of the Author, as they were the Products of her leisure Moments. She had no Intention ever to have published them; nor would they now have made their Appearance, but at the Importunity of many of her best and most generous Friends, to whom she considers herself, as under the greatest Obligations.

As her Attempts in Poetry are now sent into the World, it is hoped the Critic will not severely censure their Defects; and we presume they have too much Merit to be cast aside with Contempt, as worthless and trifling Effusions.

As to the Disadvantages she has labored under, with regard to Learning, nothing needs to be offered, as her Master's Letter in the following Page will sufficiently show the Difficulties in this Respect she had to encounter.

With all their Imperfections, the Poems are now humbly submitted to the Perusal of the Public.

Mr. Wheatley's Letter

The following is a copy of a Letter sent by the Author's Master to the Publisher:

Phillis was brought from *Africa* to *America*, in the year 1761, between seven and eight Years of age, without any assistance from School Education, and by only what she was taught in the Family, she in sixteen Months' Time from her arrival, attained the English Language, to which she was an utter Stranger before; to such a Degree, as to read any, the most difficult parts of the Sacred Writings, to the great Astonishment of all who heard her.

As to her Writing, her own Curiosity led her to it; and this she learned in so short a Time, that in the year 1765, she wrote a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Occom, the *Indian* Minister, while in *England*.

She has a great Inclination to learn the Latin Tongue, and has made some Progress in it. This Relation is given by her Master, who brought her, and with whom she now lives.

JOHN WHEATLEY.

Boston, November 14, 1772.

✻ The Poems of Phillis Wheatley ✻

To the Public

As it has been Repeatedly suggested to the Publisher by Persons who have seen the Manuscript, that Numbers would be ready to suspect that they were not really the Writings of PHILLIS, he has procured the following Attestations from the most respectable Characters in Boston, that none might have the least Ground for disputing their Originality:

We, whose Names are Underwritten, do assure the World, that the POEMS specified in the following Page* (the words "following Page," allude to the Contents of the Manuscript Copy, which are wrote at the back of the above Attestation), were (as we verily 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 serving 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.

His Excellency, Thomas Hutchinson, Governor	
The Hon. Andrew Oliver, Lieutenant-Governor	
The Hon. Thomas Hubbard	Mr. John Wheatley, her Master
The Hon. John Erving	The Rev. Charles Channey, D.D.
The Hon. James Pitts	The Rev. Mather Boyles, D.D.
The Hon. Harrison Gray	The Rev. Ed. Pemberton, D.D.
The Hon. James Bowdoin	The Rev. Andrew Elliot, D.D.
John Hancock, Esq.	The Rev. Samuel Cooper, D.D.
Joseph Green, Esq.	The Rev. Mr. Samuel Mather
Richard Carey, Esq.	The Rev. Mr. John Moorhead

N. B.—The original Attestation, signed by the above Gentlemen, may be seen by applying to Archibald Bell, Bookseller, No. 8 Aldgate Street.

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