

The language to th' elect alone  
 Is, like the mason's mystery, known;  
 In vain th' unerring sign is made  
 To him who is not of the trade.  
 What lively pleasure to divine  
 The thought implied, the hinted line,  
 To feel allusion's artful force,  
 And trace the image to its source!  
 Quick Memory blends her scattered rays  
 Till Fancy kindles at the blaze;<sup>1</sup>  
 The works of ages start to view,  
 And ancient wit elicits new.  
 But wit and parts if thus we praise,  
 What nobler altars should we raise,  
 Those sacrifices could we see  
 Which wit, oh Virtue, makes to thee!  
 At once the rising thought to dash,  
 To quench at once the bursting flash!  
 The shining mischief to subdue,  
 And lose the praise and pleasure too!  
 This is high principle's control!  
 This is true continence of soul!  
 Blush, heroes, at your cheap renown,  
 A vanquished realm, a plundered town!  
 Your conquests were to gain a name;  
 This conquest triumphs over fame:  
 So pure its essence, 'twere destroyed  
 If known and, if commended, void.  
 Amidst the brightest truths believed,  
 Amidst the fairest deeds achieved,  
 Shall stand recorded and admired,  
 That Virtue sunk what Wit inspired!  
 But let the lettered and the fair,  
 And, chiefly, let the Wit beware;  
 You, whose warm spirits never fail,  
 Forgive the hint which ends my tale:  
 Though Science nursed you in her bow'rs,  
 Though Fancy crown your brow with flowers,  
 Each thought, though bright invention fill,  
 Though Artic bees each word distil,  
 Yet, if one gracious power refuse  
 Her gentle influence to infuse,  
 In vain shall listening crowds approve,  
 They'll praise you, but they will not love.  
 What is this power you're loath to mention,  
 This charm, this witchcraft? 'Tis Attention.  
 Mute angel, yes; thy looks dispense  
 The silence of intelligence;

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Thy graceful form I well discern,  
 In act to listen and to learn;  
 'Tis thou for talents shalt obtain  
 That pardon Wit would hope in vain;  
 Thy wondrous power, thy secret charm  
 Shall Envy of her sting disarm;  
 Thy silent flattery soothes our spirit,  
 And we forgive eclipsing merit,  
 The sweet atonement screens the fault,  
 And love and praise are cheaply bought.  
 With mild complacency to hear,  
 Though somewhat long the tale appear,  
 'Tis more than wit, 'tis moral beauty,  
 'Tis pleasure rising out of duty.

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## Slavery: A Poem (1788)

*Oh great design!*

*Ye sons of mercy! Oh complete your work;  
 Wrench from Oppression's hand the iron rod,  
 And bid the cruel feel the pains they give.*

Thomson's *Liberty*

If Heaven has into being deigned to call  
 Thy light, oh liberty, to shine on all,  
 Bright intellectual sun, why does thy ray  
 To earth distribute only partial day?  
 Since no resisting cause from spirit flows,  
 Thy penetrating essence to oppose,<sup>1</sup>  
 No obstacles by nature's hand impressed,  
 Thy subtle and ethereal beams arrest;  
 Nor motion's laws can speed thy active course,  
 Nor strong repulsion's pow'rs obstruct thy force —  
 Since there is no convexity in mind,  
 Why are thy genial beams to parts confined?  
 While the chill north with thy bright ray is blessed  
 Why should fell darkness half the south invest?  
 Was it decreed, fair Freedom, at thy birth,  
 That thou shouldst ne'er irradiate all the earth?  
 While Britain basks in thy full blaze of light,  
 Why lies sad Afric quenched in total night?  
 Thee only, sober goddess, I attest,  
 In smiles chastised, and decent graces dressed;  
 Not that unlicensed monster of the crowd

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SLAVERY

<sup>1</sup> The *European Magazine* found the first eighteen lines of the poem 'metaphysically abstruse', and asked:

'What is meant by a "resisting cause flowing from spirit to oppose a penetrating essence"? (*European Magazine* 13 (1788) 166-7, p. 166).

Whose roar terrific bursts in peals so loud,  
 Deaf'ning the ear of Peace; fierce Faction's tool  
 Of rash Sedition born, and mad Misrule,  
 Whose stubborn mouth, rejecting Reason's rein,  
 No strength can govern, and no skill restrain;  
 Whose magic cries the frantic vulgar draw,  
 To spurn at order, and to outrage law;  
 To tread on grave Authority and Pow'r,  
 And shake the work of ages in an hour.  
 Convulsed her voice, and pestilent her breath,  
 She raves of mercy while she deals out death -  
 Each blast is fate; she darts from either hand  
 Red conflagration o'er th' astonished land;  
 Clamouring for peace, she rends the air with noise,  
 And to reform a part, the whole destroys.  
 Oh plaintive Southerne,<sup>2</sup> whose impassioned strain  
 So oft has waked my languid muse in vain!  
 Now, when congenial themes her cares engage,  
 She burns to emulate thy glowing page;  
 Her failing efforts mock her fond desires,  
 She shares thy feelings, not partakes thy fires.  
 Strange pow'r of song - the strain that warms the heart  
 Seems the same inspiration to impart;  
 Touched by the kindling energy alone,  
 We think the flame which melts us is our own;  
 Deceived, for genius we mistake delight;  
 Charmed as we read, we fancy we can write.  
 Though not to me, sweet bard, thy pow'rs belong,  
 Fair Truth, a hallowed guide, inspires my song!  
 Here art would weave her gayest flow'rs in vain,  
 For Truth the bright invention would disdain.  
 For no fictitious ills these numbers flow,  
 But living anguish and substantial woe;  
 No individual griefs my bosom melt,  
 For millions feel what Oroonoko felt:<sup>3</sup>  
 Fired by no single wrongs, the countless host  
 I mourn, by rapine dragged from Afric's coast.  
 Perish th' illiberal thought which would debase  
 The native genius of the sable race!  
 Perish the proud philosophy which sought  
 To rob them of the pow'rs of equal thought!  
 Does then th' immortal principle within

<sup>2</sup> 'Author of the tragedy of Oroonoko' (More's note).

<sup>3</sup> The story of Oroonoko is essentially tragic. The Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko* (1695-6) was enormously popular during the eighteenth century, being adapted three times by 1788. It was itself an adaptation of Aphra Behn's anti-slavery novel (1688).

Change with the casual colour of a skin?  
 Does matter govern spirit, or is mind  
 Degraded by the form to which 'tis joined?  
 No; they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,  
 And souls to act, with firm though erring zeal;  
 For they have keen affections, kind desires,  
 Love strong as death, and active patriot fires;  
 All the rude energy, the fervid flame  
 Of high-souled passion and ingenuous shame -  
 Strong but luxuriant virtues boldly shoot  
 From the wild vigour of a savage root.  
 Nor weak their sense of honour's proud control,  
 For pride is virtue in a pagan soul;  
 A sense of worth, a conscience of desert,  
 A high, unbroken haughtiness of heart,  
 That self-same stuff which erst proud empires swayed,  
 Of which the conquerors of the world were made.  
 Capricious fate of man! That very pride  
 In Afric scourged, in Rome was deified.  
 No muse, oh Qua-shi,<sup>4</sup> shall thy deeds relate,  
 No statute snatch thee from oblivious fate!  
 For thou wast born where never gentle muse  
 On valour's grave the flow'rs of genius strews;  
 And thou wast born where no recording page  
 Plucks the fair deed from time's devouring rage.  
 Had fortune placed thee on some happier coast,  
 Where polished souls heroic virtue boast,  
 To thee, who sought'st a voluntary grave,  
 Th' uninjured honours of thy name to save,  
 Whose generous arm thy barbarous master spared,  
 Altars had smoked, and temples had been reared.  
 When'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,  
 Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;  
 I see, by more than fancy's mirror shown,  
 The burning village and the blazing town,  
 See the dire victim torn from social life,  
 The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife!

<sup>4</sup> "It is a point of honour among negroes of a high spirit to die, rather than to suffer their glossy skin to bear the mark of the whip. Qua-shi had somehow offended his master, a young planter with whom he had been bred up in the endearing intimacy of a play-fellow. His services had been faithful, his attachment affectionate. The master resolved to punish him, and pursued him for that purpose. In trying to escape, Qua-shi stumbled and fell; the master fell upon him. They wrestled long with doubtful victory. At length, Qua-shi got uppermost, and being firmly seated on his master's breast, he secured his legs with one hand, and

with the other drew a sharp knife; then said, 'Master I have been bred up with you from a child; I have loved you as myself; in return, you have condemned me to a punishment, of which I must ever have borne the marks - thus only I can avoid them.' So saying, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead, without a groan, on his master's body." Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment of African Slaves* (More's note). More refers to James Ramsay (1733-89), *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784).

She, wretch forlorn, is dragged by hostile hands,  
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!  
Transmitted miseries and successive chains

The sole sad heritage her child obtains!  
Ev'n this last wretched boon their foes deny:  
To weep together, or together die.

By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,  
See the fond links of feeling nature broke!

The fibres twisting round a parent's heart,  
Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.

Hold, murderers, hold! Nor aggravate distress;  
Respect the passions you yourselves possess!

Ev'n you, of ruffian heart and ruthless hand,  
Love your own offspring, love your native land.

Ah, leave them holy freedom's cheering smile,  
The Heav'n-taught fondness for the parent soil;

Revere affections mingled with our frame,  
In every nature, every clime the same;

In all, these feelings equal sway maintain;

In all, the love of home and freedom reign —  
And Tempe's vale<sup>5</sup> and parched Angola's sand

One equal fondness of their sons command.

Th' unconquered savage laughs at pain and toil,  
Basking in freedom's beams which gild his native soil.

Does thirst of empire, does desire of fame

(For these are specious crimes), our rage inflame?

No; sordid lust of gold their fate controls —

The basest appetite of basest souls;

Gold, better gained by what their ripening sky,

Their fertile fields, their arts<sup>6</sup> and mines supply.

What wrongs, what injuries does Oppression plead,

To smooth the horror of th' unnatural deed?

What strange offence, what aggravated sin?

They stand convicted of a darker sin!

Barbarians, hold! Th' opprobrious commerce spare,

Respect His sacred image which they bear.

Though dark and savage, ignorant and blind,

They claim the common privilege of kind;

Let malice strip them of each other plea,

They still are men, and men should still be free.

Insulted reason loathes th' inverted trade —

Dire change! The agent is the purchase made!

Perplexed, the baffled muse involves the tale;

Nature confounded, well may language fail!

<sup>5</sup> *Tempe's vale* idyllic valley in Thessaly, praised by Virgil, *Georgics* ii 469.

<sup>6</sup> 'Besides many valuable productions of the soil, cloths and carpets of exquisite manufacture are brought from the coast of Guinea' (More's note).

The outraged goddess, with abhorrent eyes,  
Sees man the traffic, souls the merchandise!

Plead not, in reason's palpable abuse,

Their sense of feeling callous and obtuse;<sup>7</sup>

From heads to hearts lies nature's plain appeal —

Though few can reason, all mankind can feel.

Though wit may boast a livelier dread of shame,

A loftier sense of wrong, refinement claim;

Though polished manners may fresh wants invent,

And nice<sup>8</sup> distinctions nicer souls torment —

Though these on finer spirits heavier fall,

Yet natural evils are the same to all.

Though wounds there are which reason's force may heal,

There needs no logic sure to make us feel.

The nerve, howe'er untutored, can sustain

A sharp, unutterable sense of pain,

As exquisitely fashioned in a slave

As where unequal fate a sceptre gave.

Sense is as keen where Congo's sons preside

As where proud Tiber rolls his classic tide.

Rhetoric or verse may point the feeling line —

They do not whet sensation, but define.

Did ever slave less feel the galling chain,

When Zeno<sup>9</sup> proved there was no ill in pain?

Their miseries philosophic quirks<sup>10</sup> deride;

Slaves groan in pangs disowned by Stoic pride.

When the fierce sun darts vertical his beams,

And thirst and hunger mix their wild extremes;

When the sharp iron wounds his inmost soul,<sup>11</sup>

And his strained eyes in burning anguish roll —

Will the parched negro find, ere he expire,

No pain in hunger, and no heat in fire?

For him, when fate his tortured frame destroys,

What hope of present fame or future joys?

For this have heroes shortened nature's date;

For that have martyrs gladly met their fate;

But him, forlorn, no hero's pride sustains,

No martyr's blissful visions soothe his pains;

Sullen, he mingles with his kindred dust,

<sup>7</sup> 'Nothing is more frequent than this cruel and stupid argument, that they do not *feel* the miseries inflicted on them as Europeans would do' (More's note). This was one of the arguments of the merchants who

claimed that regulation of the slave trade would put them out of business, when Sir William Dolben brought in a Bill to limit the number of slaves which could

be transported in 1788 (see headnote). <sup>8</sup> *nice* subtle.

<sup>9</sup> Zeno Zeno of Citium (c.335 BC-c.263), founded the Stoic school of philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> *quirks* quibbles, subtle or evasive arguments.

<sup>11</sup> 'This is not said figuratively. The writer of these lines has seen a complete set of chains, fitted to every separate limb of these unhappy, innocent men, together with instruments for wrenching open the jaws, contrived with such ingenious cruelty as would shock the humanity of an inquisitor' (More's notes).

For he has learned to dread the Christian's trust.  
To him what mercy can that pow'r display,  
Whose servants murder, and whose sons betray?  
Savage, thy venial error I deplore —  
They are *not* Christians who infest thy shore!

Oh thou sad spirit, whose preposterous yoke  
The great deliverer death at length has broke!  
Released from misery, and escaped from care,  
Go meet that mercy man denied thee here.  
In thy dark home, sure refuge of th' oppressed,  
The wicked vex not, and the weary rest.

And if some notions, vague and undefined,  
Of future terrors have assailed thy mind;

If such thy masters have presumed to teach,

As terrors only they are prone to preach

(For should they paint eternal mercy's reign,

Where were th' oppressor's rod, the captive's chain?);

If, then, thy troubled soul has learned to dread

The dark unknown thy trembling footsteps tread —

On Him, who made thee what thou art, depend:

He, who withholds the means, accepts the end.

Not *thine* the reckoning dire of light abused,

Knowledge disgraced, and liberty misused;

On *thee* no awful judge incensed shall sit

For parts perverted, and dishonour'd wit.

Where ignorance will be found the surest plea,

How many learned and wise shall envy *thee*!

And thou, white savage, whether lust of gold

Or lust of conquest ruled thee uncontrolled —

Hero or robber — by whatever name

Thou plead thy impious claim to wealth or fame;

Whether inferior mischiefs be thy boast,

A petty tyrant rifling Gambia's coast;

Or bolder carnage track thy crimson way,

Kings dispossessed, and provinces thy prey,

Panting to tame wide earth's remotest bound,

All Cortez<sup>12</sup> murdered, all Columbus found;

O'er plundered realms to reign, detested lord,

Make millions wretched, and thyself abhorred;

In reason's eye, in wisdom's fair account,

Your sum of glory boasts a like amount;

The means may differ, but the end's the same:

Conquest is pillage with a nobler name.

Who makes the sum of human blessings less,

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Or sinks the stock of general happiness,

No solid fame shall grace, no true renown,

His life shall blazon, or his memory crown.

Had those advent'rous spirits who explore

Through ocean's trackless wastes the far-sought shore;

Whether of wealth insatiate, or of pow'r,

Conquerors who waste, or ruffians who devour —

Had these possessed, oh Cook,<sup>13</sup> thy gentle mind,

Thy love of arts, thy love of humankind;

Had these pursued thy mild and liberal plan,

Discoverers had not been a curse to man!

Then, blessed philanthropy, thy social hands

Had linked dissevered worlds in brothers' bands,

Careless if colour or if clime divide;

Then, loved and loving, man had lived and died.

The purest wreaths which hang on glory's shrine,

For empires founded, peaceful Penn,<sup>14</sup> are thine;

No bloodstained laurels crowned thy virtuous toil,

No slaughtered natives drenched thy fair-earned soil.

Still thy meek spirit in thy flock survives,<sup>15</sup>

Consistent still, *their* doctrines rule their lives;

Thy followers only have effaced the shame

Inscribed by Slavery on the Christian name.

Shall Britain, where the soul of Freedom reigns,

Forge chains for others she herself disdains?

Forbid it, Heaven! Oh let the nations know

The liberty she loves she will bestow;

Not to herself the glorious gift confined,

She spreads the blessing wide as huankind;

And, scorning narrow views of time and place,

Bids all be free in earth's extended space.

What page of human annals can record

A deed so bright as human rights restored?

Oh may that godlike deed, that shining page,

Redeem *our* fame, and consecrate *our* age!

And see, the cherub Mercy from above,

Descending softly, quits the sphere of love!

On feeling hearts she sheds celestial dew,

And breathes her spirit o'er th' enlightened few;

From soul to soul the spreading influence steals,

Till every breast the soft contagion feels.

She bears, exulting, to the burning shore,

The loveliest office angel ever bore:

<sup>12</sup> Hernán Cortez (1485-1547), Spanish conquistador, who overthrew the Aztec empire and won Mexico for Spain.

<sup>13</sup> James Cook (1728-79) circumnavigated the world in the *Endeavour*, 1768-71.

<sup>14</sup> William Penn (1644-1718), Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania.

<sup>15</sup> The Quakers have emancipated all their slaves throughout America' (More's note).

To vindicate the pow'r in heaven adored;  
 To still the clank of chains, and sheathe the sword;  
 To cheer the mourner, and with soothing hands  
 From bursting hearts unbind th' oppressor's bands;  
 To raise the lustre of the Christian name,  
 And clear the foulest blot that dims its fame.  
 As the mild spirit hovers o'er the coast,  
 A fresher hue the withered landscapes boast;  
 Her healing smiles the ruined scenes repair,  
 And blasted Nature wears a joyous air.  
 She spreads her blest commission from above,  
 Stamped with the sacred characters of love;  
 She tears the banner stained with blood and tears,  
 And, Liberty, thy shining standard rears!  
 As the bright ensign's glory she displays,  
 See pale Oppression faints beneath the blaze!  
 The giant dies, no more his frown appals;  
 The chain, untouched, drops off; the fetter falls.  
 Astonished Echo tells the vocal shore,  
 'Oppression's fall'n, and Slavery is no more!  
 The dusky myriads crowd the sultry plain,  
 And hail that mercy long invoked in vain;  
 Victorious pow'r! She bursts their two-fold bands,  
 And Faith and Freedom spring from Mercy's hands.

### Cheap Repository: The Story of Sinful Sally. Told by Herself. (1796)

Showing how, from being Sally of the Green, she was first led to become Sinful Sally, and afterwards Drunken Sal, and how at last she came to a most melancholy and almost hopeless end, being therein a warning to all young women both in town and country. Price one halfpenny.<sup>1</sup>

Come each maiden lend an ear,  
 Country lass and London belle!  
 Come and drop a mournful tear  
 O'er the tale that I shall tell!

I that ask your tender pity,  
 Ruined now and all forlorn,  
 Once like you was young and pretty,  
 And as cheerful as the morn.

<sup>1</sup> THE STORY OF SINFUL SALLY

<sup>2</sup> As explained in the headnote above, this poem, and many others like it, were originally sold individually as

broad-sides; that is, printed on large pieces of paper which were sold by travelling pedlars (Chapmen).

In yon distant cottage sitting,  
 Far away from London town,  
 Once you might have seen me knitting  
 In my simple kersey<sup>2</sup> gown.

Where the little lambkins leap,  
 Where the meadow looks so gay,  
 Where the drooping willows weep,  
 Simple Sally used to stray.

Then I tasted many a blessing,  
 Then I had an honest fame;  
 Father, mother, me caressing,  
 Smiled and thought me free from blame.

Then amid my friends so dear,  
 Life it speeded fast away;  
 Oh, it moves a tender tear  
 To think how peaceful was the day!

From the villages surrounding,  
 Ere I well had reached eighteen,  
 Came the modest youths abounding,  
 All to Sally of the Green.

Courting days were thus beginning,  
 And I soon had proved a wife;  
 Oh, if I had kept from sinning,  
 Now how blessed had been my life!

Come each maiden, lend an ear,  
 Country lass and London belle!  
 Come ye now and deign to hear  
 How poor sinful Sally fell.

Where the hill begins inclining,  
 Half a furlong from the road,  
 O'er the village white and shining  
 Stands Sir William's great abode.

Near his meadow I was tripping,  
 Vainly<sup>3</sup> wishing to be seen,  
 When Sir William met me skipping,  
 And he spoke me on the Green;

<sup>2</sup> Kersey coarse cloth woven from wool.

<sup>3</sup> Vainly Sally's troubles begin with the sin of vanity.