

A
P O E M
ON THE
I N H U M A N I T Y
OF THE
S L A V E - T R A D E.
H U M B L Y I N S C R I B E D
TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
F R E D E R I C K,
EARL OF BRISTOL, BISHOP OF DERRY, &c. &c.

BY ANN YEARSLEY.

Go seek the soul refin'd and strong:
Such aids my wildest pow'r of song:
For those I strike the rustic lyre
Who *share* the transports *they inspire*.

L O N D O N

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*To the Right Hon. and Right Rev. FREDERICK, Earl of Bristol,
Bishop of Derry, &c. &c.*

MY LORD,

BEING convinced that your Ideas of Justice and Humanity are not confined to *one* Race of Men, I have endeavoured to lead you to the Indian Coast. My Intention is not to cause that Anguish in your Bosom which powerless Compassion ever gives: yet, my Vanity is flattered, when I but *fancy* that Your Lordship feels as I do.

With the highest Reverence, I am,
My Lord
Your Lordship's much obliged,
And obedient Servant,

ANN YEARSLEY.

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BRISTOL, thine heart hath throbb'd to glory.—Slaves,
E'en Christian slaves, have shook their chains, and gaz'd
With wonder and amazement on thee. Hence

Ye grov'ling souls, who think the term I give,
Of Christian slave, a paradox! to *you*
I do not turn, but leave you to conception

[2]

Narrow; with that be blest, nor dare to stretch
Your shackled souls along the course of *Freedom*.

Yet, Bristol, list! nor deem Lactilla's soul
Lessen'd by distance; snatch her rustic thought,
Her crude ideas, from their panting state,
And let them fly in wide expansion; lend
Thine energy, so little understood
By the rude million, and I'll dare the strain
Of Heav'n-born Liberty till Nature moves
Obedient to her voice. Alas! my friend,
Strong rapture dies within the soul, while Pow'r
Drags on his bleeding victims. Custom, Law,
Ye blessings, and ye curses of mankind,
What evils do ye cause? We feel enslaved,
Yet move in your direction. Custom, thou

[3]

Wilt preach up filial piety; thy sons
Will groan, and stare with impudence at Heav'n,
As if they did abjure the act, where Sin
Sits full on Inhumanity; the church
They fill with mouthing, vap'rous sighs and tears,
Which, like the guileful crocodile's, oft fall,
Nor fall, but at the cost of human bliss.

Custom, thou hast undone us! led us far
From God-like probity, from truth, and heaven.

But come, ye souls who feel for human woe,
Tho' drest in savage guise! Approach, thou son,
Whose heart would shudder at a father's chains,
And melt o'er thy lov'd brother as he lies
Gasping in torment undeserv'd. Oh, sight

Horrid and insupportable! far worse
Than an immediate, an heroic death;
Yet to this sight I summon thee. Approach,
Thou slave of avarice, that canst see the maid
Weep o'er her inky sire! Spare me, thou God
Of all-indulgent Mercy, if I scorn
This gloomy wretch, and turn my tearful eye
To more enlighten'd beings. Yes, my tear
Shall hang on the green furze, like pearly dew
Upon the blossom of the morn. My song
Shall teach sad Philomel a louder note,
When Nature swells her woe. O'er suff'ring *man*
My soul with sorrow bends! Then come, ye few
Who feel a more than cold, material essence;
Here ye may vent your sighs, till the bleak North
Find its adherents aided. — Ah, no more!

The dingy youth comes on, sullen in chains;
He smiles on the rough sailor, who aloud
Strikes at the spacious heav'n, the earth, the sea,
In breath too blasphemous; yet not to *him*
Blasphemous, for *he* dreads not either: — lost
In dear internal imag'ry, the soul
Of Indian Luco rises to his eyes,
Silent, not inexpressive: the strong beams
With eager wildness yet drink in the view
Of his too humble home, where he had left
His mourning father, and his Incilanda.

Curse on the toils spread by a Christian hand
To rob the Indian of his freedom! Curse
On him who from a bending parent steals
His dear support of age, his darling child;

Perhaps a son, or a *more tender* daughter,
Who might have clos'd his eyelids, as the spark
Of life gently retired. Oh, thou poor world!
Thou fleeting good to individuals! see
How much for thee they care, how wide they ope
Their helpless arms to clasp thee; vapour thou!
More swift than passing wind! thou leav'st them nought
Amid th'unreal scene, but a *scant grave*.

I know the crafty merchant will oppose
The plea of nature to my strain, and urge
His toils are for his children: the soft plea
Dissolves my soul—*but when I sell a son,*
Thou God of nature, let it be my own!

Behold that Christian! see what horrid joy

[7]

Lights up his moody features, while he grasps
The wish'd-for gold, purchase of human blood!
Away, thou seller of mankind! Bring on
Thy daughter to this market! bring thy wife!
Thine aged mother, though of little worth,
With all thy ruddy boys! Sell them, thou wretch,
And swell the price of Luco! Why that start?
Why gaze as thou wouldst fright me from my challenge
With look of anguish? Is it *Nature* strains
Thine heart-strings at the image? Yes, my charge
Is full against her, and she rends thy soul,
While I but strike upon thy pityless ear,
Fearing her rights are violated. — Speak,
Astound the voice of *Justice!* bid thy tears
Melt the unpitying pow'r, while thus she claims
The pledges of thy love. Oh, throw thine arm

[8]

Around thy little ones, and loudly plead
Thou *canst not* sell thy children.— Yet, beware

Lest Luco's groan be heard; should *that* prevail,
Justice will scorn thee in her turn, and hold
Thine *act* against thy *pray'r*. Why clasp, she cries,
That blooming youth? Is it because thou lov'st him?
Why Luco was belov'd: then wilt thou feel,
Thou selfish Christian, for thy private woe,
Yet cause such pangs to him that is a father?
Whence comes thy right to barter for thy fellows?
Where are thy statutes? Whose the iron pen
That gave thee precedent? Give me the seal
Of virtue, or religion, for thy trade,
And I will ne'er upbraid thee; but if force
Superior, hard brutality alone

[9]

Become thy boast, hence to some savage haunt,
Nor claim protection from my social laws.

Luco is gone; his little brothers weep,
While his fond mother climbs the hoary rock
Whose point o'er-hangs the main. No Luco there,
No sound, save the hoarse billows. On she roves,
With love, fear, hope, holding alternate rage
In her too anxious bosom. Dreary main!
Thy murmurs now are riot, while she stands
List'ning to ev'ry breeze, waiting the step
Of gentle Luco. Ah, return! return!
Too hapless mother, thy indulgent arms
Shall never clasp thy fetter'd Luco more.
See Incilanda! artless maid, my soul
Keeps pace with thee, and mourns. Now o'er the hill

[10]

She creeps, with timid foot, while Sol embrowns
The bosom of the isle, to where she left
Her faithful lover: here the well-known cave,
By Nature form'd amid the rock, endears
The image of her Luco; here his pipe,

Form'd of the polish'd cane, neglected lies,
No more to vibrate; here the useless dart,
The twanging bow, and the fierce panther's skin,
Salute the virgin's eye. But where is Luco?
He comes not down the steep, tho' he had vow'd,
When the sun's beams at noon should sidelong gild
The cave's wide entrance, he would swift descend
To bless his Incilanda. Ten pale moons
Had glided by, since to his generous breast
He clasp'd the tender maid, and whisper'd love.

[11]

Oh, mutual sentiment! thou dang'rous bliss!
So exquisite, that Heav'n had been unjust
Had it bestow'd less exquisite of ill;
When thou art held no more, thy pangs are deep,
Thy joys convulsive to the soul; yet all
Are meant to smooth th'uneven road of life.

For Incilanda, Luco rang'd the wild,
Holding her image to his panting heart;
For her he strain'd the bow, for her he stript
The bird of beauteous plumage; happy hour,
When with these guiltless trophies he adorn'd
The brow of her he lov'd. Her gentle breast
With gratitude was fill'd, nor knew she aught
Of language strong enough to paint her soul,
Or ease the great emotion; whilst her eye

[12]

Pursued the gen'rous Luco to the field,
And glow'd with rapture at his wish'd return.

Ah, sweet suspense! betwixt the mingled cares
Of friendship, love, and gratitude, so mix'd,
That ev'n the soul may cheat herself.—Down, down,
Intruding Memory! bid thy struggles cease,
At this soft scene of innate war. What sounds

Break on her ear? She, starting, whispers "Luco."
Be still, fond maid; list to the tardy step
Of leaden-footed woe. A father comes,
But not to seek his son, who from the deck
Had breath'd a last adieu: no, he shuts out
The soft, fallacious gleam of hope, and turns
Within upon the mind: horrid and dark
Are his wild, unenlighten'd pow'rs: no ray

[13]

Of *forc'd* philosophy to calm his soul,
But all the anarchy of wounded nature.

Now he arraigns his country's gods, who sit,
In his bright fancy, far beyond the hills,
Unriveting the chains of slaves: his heart
Beats quick with stubborn fury, while he doubts
Their justice to his child. Weeping old man,
Hate not a Christian's God, whose record holds
Thine injured Luco's name. Frighted he starts,
Blasphemes the Deity, whose altars rise
Upon the Indian's helpless neck, and sinks,
Despising comfort, till by grief and age
His angry spirit is forced out. Oh, guide,
Ye angel-forms, this joyless shade to worlds
Where the poor *Indian*, with the *sage*, is prov'd

[14]

The work of a Creator. Pause not here,
Distracted maid! ah, leave the breathless form,
On whose cold cheek thy tears so swiftly fall,
Too unavailing! On this stone, she cries,
My Luco sat, and to the wand'ring stars
Pointed my eye, while from his gentle tongue
Fell old traditions of his country's woe.
Where now shall Incilanda seek him? Hence,
Defenceless mourner, ere the dreary night
Wrap thee in added horror. Oh, Despair,
How eagerly thou rend'st the heart! She pines

In anguish deep, and sullen: Luco's form
Pursues her, lives in restless thought, and chides
Soft consolation. Banish'd from his arms,
She seeks the cold embrace of death; her soul
Escapes in one sad sigh. Too hapless maid!

[15]

Yet happier far than he thou lov'dst; his tear,
His sigh, his groan avail not, for they plead
Most weakly with a Christian. Sink, thou wretch,
Whose act shall on the cheek of Albion's sons
Throw Shame's red blush: thou, who hast frightened far
Those simple wretches from thy God, and taught
Their erring minds to mourn his * partial love,
Profusely pour'd on thee, while they are left
Neglected to *thy* mercy. Thus deceiv'd,
How doubly dark must be *their* road to death!

Luco is borne around the neighb'ring isles,
Losing the knowledge of his native shore

* Indians have been often heard to say, in their complaining moments, "God Almighty no love us well; he be good to † buckera; he bid buckera burn us; he no burn buckera."

† White man

[16]

Amid the pathless wave; destin'd to plant
The sweet luxuriant cane. He strives to please,
Nor once complains, but greatly smothers grief.
His hands are blister'd, and his feet are worn,
Till ev'ry stroke dealt by his mattock gives
Keen agony to life; while from his breast
The sigh arises, burthen'd with the name
Of Incilanda. Time inures the youth,
His limbs grow nervous, strain'd by willing toil;
And resignation, or a calm despair,
(Most useful either) lulls him to repose.

A Christian renegade, that from his soul
Abjures the tenets of our schools, nor dreads
A future punishment, nor hopes for mercy,
Had fled from England, to avoid those laws

[17]

Which must have made his life a retribution
To violated justice, and had gain'd,
By fawning guile, the confidence (ill placed)
Of Luco's master. O'er the slave he stands
With knotted whip, lest fainting nature shun
The task too arduous, while his cruel soul,
Unnat'ral, ever feeds, with gross delight,
Upon his suff rings. Many slaves there were,
But none who could suppress the sigh, and bend,
So quietly as Luco: long he bore
The stripes, that from his manly bosom drew
The sanguine stream (too little priz'd); at length
Hope fled his soul, giving her struggles o'er,
And he resolv'd to die. The sun had reach'd
His zenith—pausing faintly, Luco stood,
Leaning upon his hoe, while mem'ry brought,

[18]

In piteous imag'ry, his aged father,
His poor fond mother, and his faithful maid:
The mental group in wildest motion set
Fruitless imagination; fury, grief,
Alternate shame, the sense of insult, all
Conspire to aid the inward storm; yet words
Were no relief, he stood in silent woe.

Gorgon, remorseless Christian, saw the slave
Stand musing, 'mid the ranks, and, stealing soft
Behind the studious Luco, struck his cheek
With a too-heavy whip, that reach'd his eye,
Making it dark for ever. Luco turn'd,
In strongest agony, and with his hoe

Struck the rude Christian on the forehead. Pride,
With hateful malice, seize on Gorgon's soul,

[19]

By nature fierce; while Luco sought the beach,
And plung'd beneath the wave; but near him lay
A planter's barge, whose seamen grasp'd his hair
Dragging to life a wretch who wish'd to die.

Rumour now spreads the tale, while Gorgon's breath
Envenom'd, aids her blast: imputed crimes
Oppose the plea of Luco, till he scorns
Even a just defence, and stands prepared.
The planters, conscious that to fear alone
They owe their cruel pow'r, resolve to blend
New torment with the pangs of death, and hold
Their victims high in dreadful view, to fright
The wretched number left. Luco is chain'd
To a huge tree, his fellow-slaves are ranged
To share the horrid sight; fuel is plac'd

[20]

In an increasing train, some paces back,
To kindle slowly, and approach the youth,
With more than native terror. See, it burns!
He gazes on the growing flame, and calls
For "water, water!" The small boon's deny'd.
E'en Christians throng each other, to behold
The different alterations of his face,
As the hot death approaches. (Oh, shame, shame
Upon the followers of Jesus! shame
On him that dares avow a God!) He writhes,
While down his breast glide the unpity'd tears,
And in their sockets strain their scorched balls.
"Burn, burn me quick! I cannot die!" he cries:
"Bring fire more close!" The planters heed him not,
But still prolonging Luco's torture, threat
Their trembling slaves around. His lips are dry,

His senses seem to quiver, e'er they quit
His frame for ever, rallying strong, then driv'n
From the tremendous conflict. Sight no more
Is Luco's, his parch'd tongue is ever mute;
Yet in his soul his Incilanda stays,
Till both escape together. Turn, my muse,
From this sad scene; lead Bristol's milder soul
To where the solitary spirit roves,
Wrapt in the robe of innocence, to shades
Where pity breathing in the gale, dissolves
The mind, when fancy paints such real woe.

Now speak, ye Christians (who for gain enslave
A soul like Luco's, tearing her from joy
In life's short vale; and if there be a hell,
As ye believe, to *that* ye thrust her down,

A blind, involuntary victim), where
Is your true essence of religion? where
Your proofs of righteousness, when ye conceal
The knowledge of the Deity from those
Who would adore him *fervently*? Your God
Ye rob of worshippers, his altars keep
Unhail'd, while driving from the sacred font
The eager slave, lest *he* should hope in *Jesus*.

Is this your piety? Are these your laws,
Whereby the glory of the Godhead spreads
O'er barb'rous climes? Ye hypocrites, disown
The Christian name, nor shame its cause: yet where
Shall souls like yours find welcome? Would the Turk,
Pagan, or wildest Arab, ope their arms
To gain such proselytes? No; he that owns

The name of * Mussulman would start, and shun
Your worse than serpent touch; *he* frees his slave
Who turns to Mahomet. The † Spaniard stands
Your brighter contrast; he condemns the youth
For ever to the mine; but ere the wretch
Sinks to the deep domain, the hand of Faith
Bathes his faint temples in the sacred stream,
Bidding his spirit hope. Briton, dost thou
Act up to this? If so, bring on thy slaves
To Calv'ry's mount, raise high their kindred souls
To him who died to save them: this alone
Will teach them calmly to obey thy rage,
And deem a life of misery but a day,

* The Turk gives freedom to his slave on condition that he embraces Mahometism.

† The Spaniard, immediately on purchasing an Indian, gives him baptism.

[24]

To long eternity. Ah, think how soon
Thine head shall on earth's dreary pillow lie,
With thy poor slaves, each silent, and unknown
To his once furious neighbour. Think how swift
The sands of time ebb out, for him and *thee*.
Why groans that Indian youth, in burning chains
Suspended o'er the beach? The lab'ring sun
Strikes from his full meridian on the slave
Whose arms are blister'd by the heated iron,
Which still corroding, seeks the bone. What crime
Merits so dire a death? * Another gasps

* A coromantin slave in Jamaica (who had frequently escaped to the mountains) was, a few years since, doomed to have his leg cut off. A young practitioner from England (after the surgeon of the estate had refused to be an executioner) undertook the operation, but after the removal of the limb, on the slave's exclaiming, You buckera! God Almighty made dat leg; you cut

[25]

With strongest agony, while life declines

From recent amputation. Gracious God!
Why thus in mercy let thy whirlwinds sleep
O'er a vile race of Christians, who profane
Thy glorious attributes? Sweep them from earth,
Or check their cruel pow'r: the savage tribes
Are angels when compared to brutes like these.

Advance, ye Christians, and oppose my strain:
Who dares condemn it? Prove from laws divine,
From deep philosophy, or social love,

it off! You put it on again? was so shocked, that the other surgeon was obliged to take up the vessals, apply the dressings, &c. The Negro suffered without a groan, called for his pipe, and calmly smoaked, till the absence of his attendant gave him an opportunity of tearing off his bandages, when he bled to death in an instant.

Many will call this act of the Negro's stubbornness; under *such* circumstances, I dare give it a more *glorious* epithet, and that is *fortitude*.

[26]

That ye derive your privilege. I scorn
The cry of Av'rice, or the trade that drains
A fellow-creature's blood: bid Commerce plead
Her publick good, her nation's many wants,
Her sons thrown idly on the beach, forbade
To seize the image of their God and sell it: —
I'll hear her voice, and Virtue's hundred tongues
Shall sound against her. Hath our public good
Fell rapine for its basis? Must our wants
Find their supply in murder? Shall the sons
Of Commerce shiv'ring stand, if not employ'd
Worse than the midnight robber? Curses fall
On the destructive system that shall need
Such base supports! Doth England need them? No;
Her laws, with prudence, hang the meagre thief
That from his neighbour steals a slender sum,

[27]

Tho' famine drove him on. O'er *him* the priest,

Beneath the fatal tree, laments the crime,
Approves the law, and bids him calmly die.
Say, doth this law, that dooms the thief, protect
The wretch who makes another's life his prey,
By hellish force to take it at his will?
Is this an English law, whose guidance fails
When crimes are swell'd to magnitude so vast,
That *Justice* dare not scan them? Or does *Law*
Bid *Justice* an eternal distance keep
From England's great tribunal, when the slave
Calls loud on *Justice only*? Speak, ye few
Who fill Britannia's senate, and are deem'd
The fathers of your country! Boast your laws,
Defend the *honour* of a land so fall'n,

[28]

That Fame from ev'ry battlement is flown,
And Heathens start, e'en at a Christian's name.

Hail, social love! true soul of *order*, hail!
Thy softest emanations, pity, grief,
Lively emotion, sudden joy, and pangs,
Too deep for language, are thy own: then rise,
Thou gentle angel! spread thy silken wings
O'er drowsy *man*, breathe in his *soul*, and give
Her God-like pow'rs thy animating force,
To banish Inhumanity. Oh, loose
The fetters of his mind, enlarge his views,
Break down for him the bound of avarice, lift
His feeble faculties beyond a world
To which he soon must prove a stranger! Spread
Before his ravish'd eye the varied tints

[29]

Of future glory; bid them live to *Fame*,
Whose banners wave for ever. Thus inspired,
All that is great, and good, and sweetly mild,
Shall fill his noble bosom. He shall melt,

Yea, by thy sympathy unseen, shall feel
Another's pang: for the lamenting maid
His heart shall heave a sigh; with the old slave
(Whose head is bent with sorrow) he shall cast
His eye back on the joys of youth, and say,
"Thou *once* couldst feel, as I do, love's pure bliss;
"Parental fondness, and the dear returns
"Of filial tenderness were thine, till torn
"From the dissolving scene." — Oh, social love,
Thou universal good, thou that canst fill
The vacuum of immensity, and live
In endless void! thou that in motion first

[30]

Set'st the long lazy atoms, by thy force
Quickly assimilating, and restrain'd
By strong attraction; touch the soul of man;
Subdue him; make a fellow-creature's woe
His own by heart-felt sympathy, whilst wealth
Is made subservient to his soft disease.

And when thou hast to high perfection wrought
This mighty work, say, "*such is Bristol's soul.*"

FINIS.
