

from the school opened by her oldest sister in Bristol, where she studied French, Italian, and Spanish and briefly taught. She became engaged, but the would-be groom balked at the marriage. As compensation for the broken-off engagement, More accepted an annual sum of £200 that gave her the means and determination to embark on an independent career in London; she had already written one drama, *The Search after Happiness* (1773), that found great success in girls' schools. As a member of a social circle that included the literary critic Dr. Johnson, the bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu, the painter Joshua Reynolds, and the actor David Garrick, More produced such sentimental plays as *The Inflexible Captive* (1774) and *Percy* (1778). After her removal from the London stage, either because she was charged with plagiarism or because she felt the theater inimical to her Christian values, she composed long poems about slavery and sentiment as well as best-selling tracts intended to reform the manners of the great and to edify the poor. Retired with her sisters, she devoted the rest of her life to educational, religious, and political publications that contributed to an extraordinary posthumous reputation during the Victorian period—a high regard that diminished considerably in the twentieth century.

From The Slave Trade

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- Strange pow'r of song! the strain that warms the heart
 Seems the same inspiration to impart;
 Touch'd by th' extrinsic energy alone,
 60 We think the flame which melts us is our own;
 Deceiv'd, for genius we mistake delight,
 Charm'd as we read, we fancy we can write.
 Tho' not to me, sweet Bard, thy pow'rs belong,
 The cause I plead shall sanctify my song.
 65 The Muse awakes no artificial¹ fire,
 For Truth rejects what Fancy wou'd inspire:
 Here Art wou'd weave her gayest flow'rs in vain,
 The bright invention Nature wou'd disdain.
 For no fictitious ills these numbers² flow,
 70 But living anguish, and substantial woe;
 No individual griefs my bosom melt,
 For millions feel what Oronoko³ felt:
 Fir'd by no single wrongs, the countless host
 I mourn, by rapine dragg'd from Afric's coast.
 75 Perish th' illiberal thought which wou'd debase
 The native genius of the sable race!
 Perish the proud philosophy, which sought
 To rob them of the pow'rs of equal thought!
 What! does th' immortal principle within
 80 Change with the casual colour of a skin?
 Does matter govern spirit? or is MIND
 Degraded by the form to which 'tis join'd?
 No: they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,

1. Fictitious. "Muse": one of the nine Greek goddesses of arts and learning, often invoked as a source of inspiration or knowledge.

2. Verses.

3. The enslaved hero of Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko* (1688; see p. 186, above).

- And souls to act, with firm, tho' erring zeal;
 85 For they have keen affections, soft desires,
 Love strong as death, and active patriot fires:
 All the rude energy, the fervid flame
 Of high-soul'd passion, and ingenuous⁴ shame:
 Strong, but luxuriant virtues, boldly shoot
 90 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;
 95 That self-same stuff which erst proud empires sway'd,
 Of which the conquerors of the world were made.
 Capricious fate of men! that very pride
 In Afric scourg'd, in Rome was deify'd.
 No Muse, O Qua-shi!⁵ shall thy deeds relate,
 100 No statue 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.
 105 Had Fortune plac'd thee on some happier coast,
 Where polish'd Pagans souls heroic boast,
 To thee, who sought'st a voluntary grave,
 Th' uninjur'd honours of thy name to save,
 Whose generous arm thy barbarous Master spar'd,
 110 Altars had smok'd, and temples had been rear'd.
 Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,
 Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;
 I see, by more than Fancy's mirror shewn,
 The burning village, and the blazing town:
 115 See the dire victim torn from social life,
 See the scar'd infant, hear the shrieking wife!
 She, wretch forlorn! is dragg'd by hostile hands,
 To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!
 Transmitted miseries, and successive chains,
 120 The sole sad heritage her child obtains!
 E'en this last wretched boon their foes deny,
 To weep together, or together die.
 By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,

4. High-minded; artless, frank.

5. 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]. *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784), by James Ramsay (1733–1789), Scottish-born naval surgeon who became an Anglican minister; his service in a church in the Caribbean strengthened his commitment to abolitionism.

See the fond vital links of Nature broke!
 125 The fibres twisting round a parent's heart,
 Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.

* * *

1788, 1836

From The Gin-Shop;¹ or, A Peep into Prison

Come, neighbour, take a walk with me
 Through many a London street,
 And see the cause of penury
 In hundreds we shall meet.

45 We shall not need to travel far—
 Behold that great man's door;
 He well discerns that idle crew
 From the deserving poor.

He will relieve with liberal hand
 50 The child of honest thrift;
 But where long scores at Gin-Shops stand
 He will withhold his gift.

Behold that shivering female there,
 Who plies her woeful trade!
 55 'Tis ten to one you'll find that Gin
 That hopeless wretch has made.

Look down these steps, and view below
 Yon cellar under ground;
 There every want and every woe,
 60 And every sin is found.

Those little wretches, trembling there
 With hunger and with cold,
 Were by their parents' love of Gin
 To sin and misery sold.

* * *

To prison dire misfortune oft
 The guiltless debtor brings;
 Yet oftener far it will be found
 From Gin the misery springs.

85 See the pale manufacturer there,
 How lank and lean he lies!

1. Gin became hugely popular in England in the 18th century; because it can be produced relatively simply and cheaply, it was a favorite drink of the urban poor.