

Thomas Moore, "Epistle of Condolence from a Slave-Lord to a Cotton-Lord" (1833)

EPISTLE OF CONDOLENCE FROM A SLAVE-LORD TO A COTTON-LORD.

Alas ! my dear friend, what a state of affairs !
How unjustly we both are despoil'd of our rights !
Not a pound of black flesh shall I leave to my heirs,
Nor must *you* any more work to death little whites.

Both forced to submit to that general controller
Of King, Lords, and cotton-mills – Public Opinion ;
No more shall *you* beat with a big billy-roller,
Nor *I* with the cart-whip assert my dominion.

Whereas, were we suffered to do as we please
With our Blacks and our Whites, as of yore we were let,
We might range them alternate, like harpsichord keys,
And between us thump out a good piebald duet.

But this fun is all over; – farewell to the zest
Which Slavery now lends to each cup we sip ;
Which makes still the cruellest coffee the best,
And that sugar the sweetest which smacks of the whip.

Farewell, too, the Factory's white pickaninnies, –
Small, living machines, which, if flogg'd to their tasks,
Mix so well with their namesakes, the billies and jennies,
That *which* have got souls in 'em nobody asks ; –

Little Maids of the Mill, who, themselves but ill fed,
Are oblig'd, 'mong their other benevolent cares,
To keep "feeding the scribblers*," – and better, 'tis said,
Than old Blackwood or Fraser have ever fed theirs.

All this is now o'er, and so dismal *my* loss is,
So hard 'tis to part from the smack of the thong,
That I mean (from pure love for the old whipping process)
To take to whipt syllabub all my life long.

* One of the operations in cotton-mills usually performed by children.

Line 7: A "billy-roller" is a part of a roving textile machine.

Line 17: A "pickaninnie" is a term for a small black or aboriginal child.

Line 19: "Jennies" is a reference to an early type of spinning frame with several spindles, invented by James Hargreaves in 1764.

Line 19: "Billies" refers to a roving machine used in the British textile industry.

Line 24: Blackwood and Fraser were English publishers.

Line 28: A "syllabub" is a cold dessert made from milk or cream, beaten with sugar, wine, and lemon juice.

Introduction

Thomas Moore was born on May 28, 1779 to Catholic parents in Dublin, Ireland. Although Catholic Penal Laws prevented the birth of Catholic children from being officially recorded, Moore's mother had a one-crown coin cast to commemorate the date. An early prodigy at school, Moore quickly surpassed even the talents of his professors in areas such as Latin, Greek, Italian, and French. The Catholic Penal Laws, implemented by the Protestant ascendancy class in Ireland, had originally prevented Catholics from attending university. This law was repealed in 1793 allowing Moore to enroll, in 1794, to Trinity College despite the fact that his religion still prevented him from receiving a scholarship. Moore's relationship with Roger Emmet and the United Irishmen (who staged a massive rebellion against British colonizers in 1798) nearly got him expelled from the University prior to his graduation. The first signs of Moore's politically charged writing abilities came with a letter published to his fellow students imploring them to resist the imminent union with Great Britain (The 1801 Act of Union formally joined Ireland with Great Britain).

After leaving Trinity in 1799, Moore first gained positive notice by translating Greek imitations of Anacreon's odes. Moore's first publication came in 1800 with *Odes of Anacreon*, facilitating his introduction to many influential people. Moore's quick wit and amazing social abilities made him much sought after for social gatherings. Moore's connections with the social elite led to the opportunity to be appointed to the Admiralty Registrar in Bermuda. Hoping that this would be the first step in receiving future posts, Moore accepted the offer and relocated to Bermuda. Moore did not enjoy his duties in Bermuda and quickly delegated them to a deputy, moving on to a voyage to the United States and Canada, later returning to London deeply affected by his experiences.

Upon returning to London, Moore began concentrating on his writing (interrupted only by a brief exile to France on account of a debt relating to Bermuda). Moore published several collections of poems, a history of Ireland, and biographies of his peers. Moore is best known for his melodies and songs. Even today, these songs and melodies are well known and enjoyed. In modern literary terms, Thomas Moore is most recognized for his biography of Lord Byron. Thomas Moore died on February 25, 1852.

Moore's satiric poem "Epistle from a Slave-Lord to a Cotton-Lord" first appeared anonymously in the editorial section of the *Times* in 1833. Its satiric and witty style is representative of Moore's personality and earlier works. In a time where Great Britain was struggling with questions on the slave trade and child labor, this poem overtly attacks the oppressive nature of opportunistic slave-holders and textile factory owners. Using multiple puns and his characteristic wit, Moore's poem is a humorous attack on both slave-lords and the employers of young children.