

OUR COUNTRYMEN IN CHAINS!

John Greenleaf Whittier

OUR FELLOW COUNTRYMEN IN CHAINS!

SLAVES—in a land of light and law !—
SLAVES—crouching on the very plains
Where rolled the storm of Freedom's war !
A groan from Eutaw's haunted wood—
A wail where Camden's martyr's fell—
By every shrine of patriot blood,
From Moultrie's wall and Jasper's well !

By storied hill and hallowed grot,
By mossy wood and marshy glen,
Whence rang of old the rifle shot,
And hurrying shout of Marion's men !—
The groan of breaking hearts is there—
The falling lash—the fetter's clank !—
Slaves—SLAVES are breathing in that air
Which old De Kalb and Sumpter drank !

What, ho !—*our* countrymen in chains !—
The whip on WOMAN'S shrinking flesh !
Our soil yet reddening with the stains,
Caught from her scourging, warm and fresh !
What ! mothers from their children riven !—
What ! God's own image bought and sold !—
AMERICANS to market driven,
And bartered as the brute for gold !

Speak !—shall their agony of prayer
Come thrilling to our hearts in vain !
To us—whose fathers scorned to bear
The paltry *menace* of a chain ;—
To us whose boast is loud and long
Of holy liberty and light—
Say, shall these writhing slaves of Wrong
Plead vainly for their plundered Right ?

What !—shall we send, with lavish breath,
Our sympathies across the wave,
Where manhood on the field of death
Strikes for his freedom, or a grave ?—
Shall prayers go up—and hymns be sung
For Greece, the Moslem fetter spurning—
And millions hail with pen and tongue
Our light on all her altars burning !

Shall Belgium feel, and gallant France,
By Vendome's pile and Schoenbrun's wall
And Poland, gasping on her lance,
The impulse of our cheering call ?
And shall the SLAVE, beneath our eye,
Clank o'er *our* fields his hateful chain ?
And toss his fettered arm on high,
And groan for freedom's gift, in vain ?

Oh say, shall Prussia's banner be
A refuge for the stricken slave ;—
And shall the Russian serf go free
By Baikal's lake and Neva's wave ;—
And shall the wintry-bosomed Dane
Relax the iron hand of pride,
And bid his bondmen cast the chain
From fettered soul and limb, aside ?

Shall every flap of England's flag*
Proclaim that all around are free,
From 'fartherst Ind' to each blue crag
That beetles o'er the Western Sea ?
And shall we scoff at Europe's kings,
When Freedom's fire is dim with us,
And round our country's altar clings
The damning shade of Slavery's curse ?

Go—let us ask of Constantine
To loose his grasp on Poland's throat—
And beg the lord of Mahmoud's line
To spare the struggling Suliote.
Will not the scorching answer come
From turbaned Turk, and fiery Russ—
'Go, loose your fettered slaves at home,
Then turn and ask the like of us !'

Just God ! and shall we calmly rest,
The christian's scorn—the heathen's mirth—
Content to live the lingering jest
And by word of a mocking earth ?
Shall our own glorious land retain
That curse which Europe seems to bear ?
Shall our own brethren drag the chain
Which not even Russia's menials wear ?

Up, then, in Freedom's manly part,
From gray-beard old to fiery youth,
And on the nation's naked heart
Scatter the living coals of Truth.
Up—while ye slumber, deeper yet
The shadow of our fame is growing—
Up—While ye pause, our sun may set
In blood, around our altars flowing !

Oh rouse ye, ere the storm comes forth—
The gathered wrath of God and man—
Like that which wasted Egypt's earth,
When hail and fire above it ran.
Hear ye no warnings in the air ?
Feel ye no earthquake underneath ?
Up—up—why will ye slumber where
The sleeper only wakes in death ?

Up NOW for Freedom !—not in strife
Like that your sterner fathers saw
The awful waste of human life—
The glory and the guilt of war :
But break the chain—the yoke remove
And smite to earth oppression's rod,
With those mild arms of Truth and Love,
Made mighty through the living God !

Prone let the shrine of Moloch sink,
And leave no traces where it stood
Nor longer let its idol drink
His daily cup of human blood :
But rear another altar there,
To truth and love and mercy given,
And Freedom's gift and Freedom's prayer
Shall call an answer down from Heaven !