



1890

HUMANITAD

by Oscar Wilde

HUMANITAD

It is full winter now: the trees are bare,  
Save where the cattle huddle from the cold  
Beneath the pine, for it doth never wear  
The Autumn's gaudy livery whose gold  
Her jealous brother pilfers, but is true  
To the green doublet; bitter is the wind, as  
though it blew

From Saturn's cave; a few thin wisps of hay  
Lie on the sharp black hedges, where the wain  
Dragged the sweet pillage of a summer's day  
From the low meadows up the narrow lane;  
Upon the half-thawed snow the bleating sheep  
Press close against the hurdles, and the shivering  
housedogs creep

From the shut stable to the frozen stream  
And back again disconsolate, and miss  
The bawling shepherds and the noisy team;  
And overhead in circling listlessness  
The cawing rooks whirl round the frosted stack,  
Or crowd the dripping boughs; and in the fen the  
ice-pools crack

Where the gaunt bittern stalks among the reeds  
And flaps his wings, and stretches back his neck,  
And hoots to see the moon; across the meads  
Limps the poor frightened hare, a little speck;  
And a stray seamew with its fretful cry  
Flits like a sudden drift of snow against the dull  
gray sky.

Full winter: and a lusty goodman brings  
His load of faggots from the chilly byre,  
And stamps his feet upon the hearth, and flings  
The sappy billets on the waning fire,  
And laughs to see the sudden lightning scare  
His children at their play; and yet,- the Spring  
is in the air,

Already the slim crocus stirs the snow,  
And soon yon blanched fields will bloom again  
With nodding cowslips for some lad to mow,  
For with the first warm kisses of the rain  
The winter's icy, sorrow breaks to tears,  
And the brown thrushes mate, and with bright eyes  
the rabbit peers

From the dark warren where the fir-cones lie,  
And treads one snowdrop under foot and runs  
Over the mossy knoll, and blackbirds fly  
Across our path at evening, and the suns

Stay longer with us; ah! how good to see  
Grass-girdled Spring in all her joy of laughing  
greenery

Dance through the hedges till the early rose,  
(That sweet repentance of the thorny briar!)  
Burst from its sheathed emerald and disclose  
The little quivering disk of golden fire  
Which the bees know so well, for with it come  
Pale boy's love, sops-in-wine, and daffodillies  
all in bloom.

Then up and down the field the sower goes,  
While close behind the laughing younker scares,  
With shrilly whoop the black and thievish crows.  
And then the chestnut-tree its glory wears,  
And on the grass the creamy blossom falls  
In odorous excess, and faint half-whispered madrigals

Steal from the bluebells' nodding carillons  
Each breezy morn, and then white jessamine,  
That star of its own heaven, snap-dragons  
With lolling crimson tongues, and eglantine  
In dusty velvets clad usurp the bed  
And woodland empery, and when the lingering rose  
hath shed

Red leaf by leaf its folded panoply,  
And pansies closed their purple-lidded eyes,  
Chrysanthemums from gilded argosy  
Unload their gaudy scentless merchandise  
And violets getting overbold withdraw  
From their shy nooks, and scarlet berries dot  
the leafless haw.

O happy field! and O thrice happy tree!  
Soon will your queen in daisy-flowered smock,  
And crown of flower-de-luce trip down the lea,  
Soon will the lazy shepherds drive their flock  
Back to the pasture by the pool, and soon  
Through the green leaves will float the hum of  
murmuring bees at noon.

Soon will the glade be bright with bellamour,  
The flower which wantons love, and those sweet nuns  
Vale-lilies in their snowy vestiture  
Will tell their bearded pearls, and carnations  
With mitred dusky leaves will scent the wind,  
And straggling traveller's joy each hedge with yellow  
stars will bind.

Dear Bride of Nature and most bounteous Spring!  
That can'st give increase to the sweet-breath'd kine,  
And to the kid its little horns, and bring  
The soft and silky blossoms to the vine,  
Where is that old nepenthe which of yore  
Man got from poppy root and glossy-berried mandragore!

There was a time when any common bird  
Could make me sing in unison, a time

When all the strings of boyish life were stirred  
To quick response or more melodious rhyme  
By every forest idyll;- do I change?  
Or rather doth some evil thing through thy fair  
pleasaunce range?

Nay, nay, thou art the same: 'tis I who seek  
To vex with sighs thy simple solitude,  
And because fruitless tears bedew my cheek  
Would have thee weep with me in brotherhood;  
Fool! shall each wronged and restless spirit dare  
To taint such wine with the salt poison of his  
own despair!

Thou art the same: 'tis I whose wretched soul  
Takes discontent to be its paramour,  
And gives its kingdom to the rude control  
Of what should be its servitor,- for sure  
Wisdom is somewhere, though the stormy sea  
Contain it not, and the huge deep answer  
" 'Tis not in me."

To burn with one clear flame, to stand erect  
In natural honor, not to bend the knee  
In profitless prostrations whose effect  
Is by, itself condemned, what alchemy  
Can teach me this? what herb Medea brewed  
Will bring the unexultant peace of essence  
not subdued?

The minor chord which ends the harmony,  
And for its answering brother waits in vain,  
Sobbing for incompleated melody  
Dies a swan's death; but I the heir of pain  
A silent Memnon with blank lidless eyes  
Wait for the light and music of those suns which  
never rise.

The quanned-out torch, the lonely cypress-gloom,  
The little dust stored in the narrow urn,  
The gentle XAIPE of the Attic tomb,-  
Were not these better far than to return  
To my old fitful restless malady,  
Or spend my days within the voiceless cave of misery?

Nay! for perchance that poppy-crowned God  
Is like the watcher by a sick man's bed  
Who talks of sleep but gives it not; his rod  
Hath lost its virtue, and, when all is said,  
Death is too rude, too obvious a key  
To solve one single secret in a life's philosophy.

And love! that noble madness, whose august  
And inextinguishable might can slay  
The soul with honeyed drugs,- alas! I must  
From such sweet ruin play the runaway,  
Although too constant memory never can  
Forget the arched splendor of those brows Olympian

Which for a little season made my youth

So soft a swoon of exquisite indolence  
That all the chiding of more prudent Truth  
Seemed the thin voice of jealousy,- O Hence  
Thou huntress deadlier than Artemis!  
Go seek some other quarry! for of thy too perilous  
bliss

My lips have drunk enough,- no more, no more,-  
Though Love himself should turn his gilded prow  
Back to the troubled waters of this shore  
Where I am wrecked and stranded, even now  
The chariot wheels of passion sweep too near,  
Hence! Hence! I pass unto a life more barren,  
more austere.

More barren- ay, those arms will never lean  
Down through the trellised vines and draw my soul  
In sweet reluctance through the tangled green;  
Some other head must wear that aureole,  
For I am Hers who loves not any man  
Whose white and stainless bosom bears the sign  
Gorgonian.

Let Venus go and chuck her dainty page,  
And kiss his mouth, and toss his curly hair,  
With net and spear and hunting equipage  
Let young Adonis to his tryst repair,  
But me her fond and subtle-fashioned spell  
Delights no more, though I could win her  
dearest citadel.

Ay, though I were that laughing shepherd boy  
Who from Mount Ida saw the little cloud  
Pass over Tenedos and lofty Troy  
And knew the coming of the Queen, and bowed  
In wonder at her feet, not for the sake  
Of a new Helen would I bid her hand the apple take.

Then rise supreme Athena argent-limbed!  
And, if my lips be musicless, inspire  
At least my life: was not thy glory hymned  
By one who gave to thee his sword and lyre  
Like Aeschylus at well-fought Marathon,  
And died to show that Milton's England still  
could bear a son!

And yet I cannot tread the portico  
And live without desire, fear and pain,  
Or nurture that wise calm which long ago  
The grave Athenian master taught to men,  
Self-poised, self-centered, and self-comforted,  
To watch the world's vain phantasies go by with  
unbowed head.

Alas! that serene brow, those eloquent lips,  
Those eyes that mirrored all eternity,  
Rest in their own Colonos, an eclipse  
Hath come on Wisdom, and Mnemosyne  
Is childless; in the night which she had made  
For lofty secure flight Athena's owl itself

hath strayed.

Nor much with Science do I care to climb,  
Although by strange and subtle witchery  
She draw the moon from heaven: the Muse of Time  
Unrolls her gorgeous-colored tapestry  
To no less eager eyes; often indeed  
In the great epic of Polymnia's scroll I love  
to read

How Asia sent her myriad hosts to war  
Against a little town, and panoplied  
In gilded mail with jewelled scimeter,  
White-shielded, purple-crested, rode the Mede  
Between the waving poplars and the sea  
Which men call Artemisium, till he saw Thermopylae

Its steep ravine spanned by a narrow wall,  
And on the nearer side a little brood  
Of careless lions holding festival!  
And stood amazed at such hardihood,  
And pitched his tent upon the reedy shore,  
And stayed two days to wonder, and then crept  
at midnight o'er

Some unfrequented height, and coming down  
The autumn forests treacherously slew  
What Sparta held most dear and was the crown  
Of far Eurotas, and passed on, nor knew  
How God had staked an evil net for him  
In the small bay of Salamis,- and yet,  
the page grows dim.

Its cadenced Greek delights me not, I feel  
With such a goodly time too out of tune  
To love it much: for like the Dial's wheel  
That from its blinded darkness strikes the noon  
Yet never sees the sun, so do my eyes  
Restlessly follow that which from my cheated  
vision flies.

O for one grand unselfish simple life  
To teach us what is Wisdom! speak ye hills  
Of lone Helvellyn, for this note of strife  
Shunned your untroubled crags and crystal rills,  
Where is that Spirit which living blamelessly  
Yet dared to kiss the smitten mouth of his own century!

Speak ye Ridalian laurels! where is He  
Whose gentle head ye sheltered, that pure soul  
Whose gracious days of uncrowned majesty  
Through lowliest conduct touched the lofty goal  
Where Love and Duty mingle! Him at least  
The most high Laws were glad of, he had sat at  
Wisdom's feast,

But we are Learning's changelings, known by rote  
The clarion watchword of each Grecian school  
And follow none, the flawless sword which smote  
The pagan Hydra is an effete tool

Which we ourselves have blunted, what man now  
Shall scale the august ancient heights and to  
old Reverence bow?

One such indeed I saw, but, Ichabod!  
Gone is that last dear son of Italy,  
Who being man died for the sake of God,  
And whose unrisen bones sleep peacefully.  
O guard him, guard him well, my Giotto's tower,  
Thou marble lily of the lily town! let not the lower

Of the rude tempest vex his slumber, or  
The Arno with its tawny troubled gold  
O'erleap its marge, no mightier conqueror  
Clomb the high Capitol in the days of old  
When Rome was indeed Rome, for Liberty  
Walked like a Bride beside him, at which  
sight pale Mystery

Fled shrieking to her furthest somberest cell  
With an old man who grabbed rusty keys,  
Fled shuddering for that immemorial knell  
With which oblivion buries dynasties  
Swept like a wounded eagle on the blast,  
As to the holy heart of Rome the great triumvir passed.

He knew the holiest heart and heights of Rome,  
He drove the base wolf from the lion's lair,  
And now lies dead by that empyreal dome  
Which overtops Valdarno hung in air  
By Brunelleschi- O Melpomene  
Breathe through thy melancholy pipe thy  
sweetest threnody!

Breathe through the tragic stops such melodies  
That Joy's self may grow jealous, and the Nine  
Forget a-while their discreet emperies,  
Mourning for him who on Rome's lordliest shrine  
Lit for men's lives the light of Marathon,  
And bare to sun-forgotten fields the fire of the sun!

O guard him, guard him well, my Giotto's tower,  
Let some young Florentine each eventide  
Bring coronals of that enchanted flower  
Which the dim woods of Vallombrosa hide,  
And deck the marble tomb wherein he lies  
Whose soul is as some mighty orb unseen of  
mortal eyes.

Some mighty orb whose cycled wanderings,  
Being tempest-driven to the furthest rim  
Where Chaos meets Creation and the wings  
Of the eternal chanting Cherubim  
Are pavilioned on Nothing, passed away  
Into a moonless void- and yet, though he is  
dust and clay,

He is not dead, the immemorial Fates  
Forbid it, and the closing shears refrain,  
Lift up your heads ye everlasting gates!

Ye argent clarions sound a loftier strain!  
For the vile thing he hated lurks within  
Its sombre house, alone with God and memories of sin.

Still what avails it that she sought her cave  
That murderous mother of red harlotries?  
At Munich on the marble architrave  
The Grecian boys die smiling, but the seas  
Which wash Aegina fret in loneliness  
Not mirroring their beauty, so our lives grow  
colourless

For lack of our ideals, if one star  
Flame torch-like in the heavens the unjust  
Swift daylight kills it, and no trump of war  
Can wake to passionate voice the silent dust  
Which was Mazzini once! rich Niobe  
For all her stony sorrows hath her sons, but Italy!

What Easter Day shall make her children rise,  
Who were not Gods yet suffered, what sure feet  
Shall find their graveclothes folded? what clear eyes  
Shall see them bodily? O it were meet  
To roll the stone from off the sepulchre  
And kiss the bleeding roses of their wounds,  
in love of Her

Our Italy! our mother visible!  
Most blessed among nations and most sad,  
For whose dear sake the young Calabrian fell  
That day at Aspromonte and was glad  
That in an age when God was bought and sold  
One man could die for Liberty! but we, burnt  
out and cold,

See Honour smitten on the cheek and gyves  
Bind the sweet feet of Mercy: Poverty  
Creeps through our sunless lanes and with sharp knives  
Cuts the warm throats of children stealthily,  
And no word said:- O we are wretched men  
Unworthy of our great inheritance! where is the pen

Of austere Milton? where the mighty sword  
Which slew its master righteously? the years  
Have lost their ancient leader, and no word  
Breaks from the voiceless tripod on our ears;  
While as a ruined mother in some spasm  
Bears a base child and loathes it, so our best  
enthusiasm

Genders unlawful children, Anarchy  
Freedom's own Judas, the vile prodigal  
License who steals the gold of Liberty  
And yet nothing, Ignorance the real  
One Fratricide since Cain, Envy the asp  
That stings itself to anguish, Avarice whose  
palsied grasp

Is in its extent stiffened, moneyed Greed  
For whose dull appetite men waste away

Amid the whirr of wheels and are the seed  
Of things which slay their sower, these each day  
Sees rife in England, and the gentle feet  
Of Beauty tread no more the stones of each unlovely  
street.

What even Cromwell spared is desecrated  
By weed and worm, left to the stormy play  
Of wind and beating snow, or renovated  
By more destructful hands: Time's worst decay  
Will wreath its ruins with some loveliness,  
But these new Vandals can but make a rainproof  
barrenness.

Where is that Art which bade the Angels sing  
Through Lincoln's lofty choir, till the air  
Seems from such marble harmonies to ring  
With sweeter song than common lips can dare  
To draw from actual reed? ah! where is now  
The cunning hand which made the flowering  
hawthorn branches bow

For Southwell's arch, and carved the House of One  
Who loved the lilies of the field with all  
Our dearest English flowers? the same sun  
Rises for us: the season's natural  
Weave the same tapestry of green and gray:  
The unchanged hills are with us: but that  
Spirit hath passed away.

And yet perchance it may be better so,  
For Tyranny is an incestuous Queen,  
Murder her brother is her bedfellow,  
And the Plague chambers with her: in obscene  
And bloody paths her treacherous feet are set;  
Better the empty desert and a soul inviolate!

For gentle brotherhood, the harmony  
Of living in the healthful air, the swift  
Clean beauty of strong limbs when men are free  
And women chaste, these are the things which lift  
Our souls up more than even Agnolo's  
Gaunt blinded Sibyl poring o'er the scroll of human woes,

Or Titian's little maiden on the stair  
White as her own sweet lily and as tall,  
Or Mona Lisa smiling through her hair,-  
Ah! somehow life is bigger after all  
Than any painted angel could we see  
The God that is within us! The old Greek serenity

Which curbs the passion of that level line  
Of marble youths, who with untroubled eyes  
And chastened limbs ride round Athena's shrine  
And mirror her divine economies,  
And balanced symmetry of what in man  
Would else wage ceaseless warfare,- this at least  
within the span

Between our mother's kisses and the grave



Might so inform our lives, that we could win  
Such mighty empires that from her cave  
Temptation would grow hoarse, and pallid Sin  
Would walk ashamed of his adulteries,  
And Passion creep from out the House of Lust  
with startled eyes.

To make the Body and the Spirit one  
With all right things, till no thing live in vain  
From morn to noon, but in sweet unison  
With every pulse of flesh and throb of pain  
The Soul in flawless essence high enthroned,  
Against all outer vain attack invincibly bastioned,

Mark with serene impartiality  
The strife of things, and yet be comforted,  
Knowing that by the chain causality  
All separate existences are wed  
Into one supreme whole, whose utterance  
Is joy, or holier praise! ah! surely this  
were governance

Of life in most august omnipresence,  
Through which the rational intellect would find  
In passion its expression, and mere sense  
Ignoble else, lend fire to the mind,  
And being joined with it in harmony  
More mystical than that which binds the stars planetary

Strike from their several tones one octave chord  
Whose cadence being measureless would fly  
Through all the circling spheres, then to its Lord  
Return refreshed with its new empery  
And more exultant power,- this indeed  
Could we but reach it were to find the last,  
the perfect creed.

Ah! it was easy when the world was young  
To keep one's life free and inviolate,  
From our sad lips another song is rung,  
By our own hands our heads are desecrate,  
Wanderers in drear exile and dispossessed  
Of what should be our own, we can but feed  
on wild unrest.

Somehow the grace, the bloom of things has flown,  
And of all men we are most wretched who  
Must live each other's lives and not our own  
For very pity's sake and then undo  
All that we live for- it was otherwise  
When soul and body seemed to blend in mystic  
symphonies.

But we have left those gentle haunts to pass  
With weary feet to the new Calvary,  
Where we behold, as one who in a glass  
Sees his own face, self-slain Humanity,  
And in the dumb reproach of that sad gaze  
Learn what an awful phantom the red hand of  
man can raise.

O smitten mouth! O forehead crowned with thorn!  
O chalice of all common miseries!  
Thou for our sakes that loved thee not hast borne  
An agony of endless centuries,  
And we were vain and ignorant nor knew  
That when we stabbed thy heart it was our own real  
hearts we slew.

Being ourselves the sowers and the seeds,  
The night that covers and the lights that fade,  
The spear that pierces and the side that bleeds,  
The lips betraying and the life betrayed;  
The deep hath calm: the moon hath rest: but we  
Lords of the natural world are yet our own dread enemy.

Is this the end of all that primal force  
Which, in its changes being still the same,  
From eyeless Chaos cleft its upward course,  
Through ravenous seas and whirling rocks and flame,  
Till the suns met in heaven and began  
Their cycles, and the morning stars sang, and the  
Word was Man!

Nay, nay, we are but crucified, and though  
The bloody sweat falls from our brows like rain,  
Loosen the nails- we shall come down I know,  
Stanch the red wounds- we shall be whole again,  
No need have we of hyssop-laden rod,  
That which is purely human that is Godlike that is God.

THE END