

**1881**

**ELEUTHERIA**

**Oscar Wilde**

***Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated "art for art's sake" and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Eleutheria (1881) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems which includes Sonnet to Liberty, Ave Imperatrix, To Milton, Louis Napoleon, Quantum Mutata, Libertatis Sacra Fames, and more.***

**SONNET TO LIBERTY**

Not that I love thy children, whose dull eyes See nothing save their  
own unlovely woe, Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to  
know, But that the roar of thy Democracies, Thy reigns of Terror,  
thy great Anarchies, Mirror my wildest passions like the sea, And  
give my rage a brother-! Liberty!

For his sake only do thy dissonant cries Delight my discreet soul,  
else might all kings By bloody knout or treacherous cannonades  
Rob nations of their rights inviolate And I remain unmoved- and  
yet, and yet, These Christs that die upon the barricades, God  
knows it I am with them, in some things.

## **AVE IMPERATRIX**

Set in this stormy Northern sea, Queen of these restless fields of  
tide, England! what shall men say of thee, Before whose feet the  
worlds divide?

The earth, a brittle globe of glass, Lies in the hollow of thy hand,  
And through its heart of crystal pass, Like shadows through a  
twilight land, The spears of crimson-suited war, The long white-  
crested waves of fight, And all the deadly fires which are The  
torches of the lords of Night.

The yellow leopards, strained and lean, The treacherous Russian  
knows so well, With gaping blackened jaws are seen Leap through  
the hail of screaming shell.

The strong sea-lion of England's wars Hath left his sapphire cave  
of sea, To battle with the storm that mars The star of England's  
chivalry.

The brazen-throated clarion blows Across the Pathan's reedy fen,  
And the high steeps of Indian snows Shake to the tread of armed  
men.

And many an Afghan chief, who lies Beneath his cool  
pomegranate-trees, Clutches his sword in fierce surmise When on  
the mountain-side he sees The fleet-foot Marri scout, who comes  
To tell how he hath heard afar The measured roll of English drums  
Beat at the gates of Kandahar.

For southern wind and east wind meet Where, girt and crowned by  
sword and fire, England with bare and bloody feet Climbs the  
steep road of wide empire.

O lonely Himalayan height, Gray pillar of the Indian sky, Where  
saw'st thou last in clanging fight, Our winged dogs of Victory?

The almond groves of Samarcand, Bokhara, where red lilies blow,  
And Oxus, by whose yellow sand The grave white-turbaned  
merchants go: And on from thence to Ispahan, The gilded garden  
of the sun, Whence the long dusty caravan Brings cedar and  
vermilion; And that dread city of Cabool Set at the mountain's  
scarp'd feet, Whose marble tanks are ever full With water for the  
noon-day heat: Where through the narrow straight Bazaar A little  
maid Circassian Is led, a present from the Czar Unto some old and  
bearded khan, Here have our wild war-eagles flown, And flapped

wide wings in fiery fight; But the sad dove, that sits alone In  
England- she hath no delight.

In vain the laughing girl will lean To greet her love with love-lit  
eyes: Down in some treacherous black ravine, Clutching his flag,  
the dead boy lies.

And many a moon and sun will see The lingering wistful children  
wait To climb upon their father's knee; And in each house made  
desolate Pale women who have lost their lord Will kiss the relics of  
the slain Some tarnished epaulet- some sword Poor toys to soothe  
such anguished pain.

For not in quiet English fields Are these, our brothers, laid to rest.

Where we might deck their broken shields With all the flowers the  
dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls, And many in the Afghan land,  
And many where the Ganges falls Through seven mouths of  
shifting sand.

And some in Russian waters lie, And others in the seas which are  
The portals to the East, or by The wind-swept heights of Trafalgar.

O wandering graves! O restless sleep!

O silence of the sunless day!

O still ravine! O stormy deep!

Give up your prey! Give up your prey!

And thou whose wounds are never healed, Whose weary race is  
never won, O Cromwell's England! must thou yield For every inch  
of ground a son?

Go! crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head, Change thy glad  
song to song of pain; Wind and wild wave have got thy dead, And  
will not yield them back again.

Wave and wild wind and foreign shore Possess the flower of  
English land Lips that thy lips shall kiss no more, Hands that shall  
never clasp thy hand.

What profit now that we have bound The whole round world with  
net of gold, If hidden in our heart is found The care that groweth  
never old?

What profit that our galleys ride, Pine-forest-like, on every main?  
Ruin and wreck are at our side, Grim warders of the House of  
pain.

Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet Where is our English  
chivalry? Wild grasses are their burial-sheet, And sobbing waves  
their threnody.

O loved ones lying far away, What word of love can dead lips  
send!

O wasted dust! O senseless clay!  
Is this the end! is this the end!

Peace, peace! we wrong the noble dead To vex their solemn  
slumber so: Though childless, and with thorn-crowned head, Up  
the steep road must England go, Yet when this fiery web is spun,  
Her watchmen shall decry from far The young Republic like a sun  
Rise from these crimson seas of war.

**TO MILTON**

Milton! I think thy spirit hath passed away From these white cliffs,  
and high embattled-towers; This gorgeous fiery-colored world of  
ours Seems fallen into ashes dull and gray, And the age changed  
unto a mimic play, Wherein we waste our else too-crowded hours:  
For all our pomp and pageantry and powers We are but fit to delve  
the common clay, Seeing this little isle on which we stand, This  
England, this sea-lion of the sea, By ignorant demagogues is held  
in fee, Who love her not: Dear God! is this the land Which bare a  
triple empire in her hand When Cromwell spake the word  
Democracy!

**LOUIS NAPOLEON**

Eagle of Austerlitz! where were thy wings When far away upon a  
barbarous strand, In fight unequal, by an obscure hand, Fell the  
last scion of thy brood of Kings!

Poor boy! thou wilt not flaunt thy cloak of red, Nor ride in state  
through Paris in the van Of thy returning legions, but instead Thy  
mother France, free and republican, Shall on thy dead and  
crownless forehead place The better laurels of a soldier's crown,  
That not dishonored should thy soul go down To tell the mighty  
Sire of thy race That France hath kissed the mouth of Liberty, And  
found it sweeter than his honeyed bees, And that the giant wave  
Democracy Breaks on the shores where Kings lay couched at ease.

SONNET On the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria.

Christ, dost Thou live indeed? or are Thy bones Still straightened  
in their rock-hewn sepulchre? And was Thy Rising only dreamed  
by her Whose love of Thee for all her sin atones? For here the air is  
horrid with men's groans, The priests who call upon Thy name are  
slain, Dost Thou not hear the bitter wail of pain From those whose  
children lie upon the stones? Come down, O Son of God!  
incestuous gloom Curtains the land, and through the starless night  
Over Thy Cross the Crescent moon I see!

If Thou in very truth didst burst the tomb Come down, O Son of  
Man! and show Thy might Lest Mahomet be crowned instead of  
Thee!

### **QUANTUM MUTATA**

There was a time in Europe long ago, When no man died for freedom anywhere, But England's lion leaping from its lair Laid hands on the oppressor! it was so While England could a great Republic show.

Witness the men of Piedmont, chiefest care Of Cromwell, when with impotent despair The Pontiff in his painted portico Trembled before our stern ambassadors.

How comes it then that from such high estate We have thus fallen, save that Luxury With barren merchandise piles up the gate Where nobler thoughts and deeds should enter by: Else might we still be Milton's heritors.

### **LIBERTATIS SACRA FAMES**

Albeit nurtured in democracy, And liking best that state republican Where every man is Kinglike and no man Is crowned above his fellows, yet I see Spite of this modern fret for Liberty, Better the rule of One, whom all obey, Than to let clamorous demagogues betray Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.

Wherefore I love them not whose hands profane Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honor, all things fade, Save Treason and the dagger of her trade, And Murder with his silent bloody feet.

### **THEORETIKOS**

This mighty empire hath but feet of clay; Of all its ancient chivalry and might Our little island is forsaken quite: Some enemy hath stolen its crown of bay, And from its hills that voice hath passed away Which spake of Freedom: O come out of it, Come out of it, my Soul, thou art not fit For this vile traffic-house, where day by day Wisdom and reverence are sold at mart, And the rude people rage with ignorant cries Against an heritage of centuries.

It mars my calm: wherefore in dreams of Art And loftiest culture I would stand apart, Neither for God, nor for His enemies.

**THE END**