

William Hamilton, A Day Labourer, "Address to Humanity"

Description

WILLIAM HAMILTON, A DAY LABOURER

"Address to Humanity"

What discordant strains I hear,
Rudely bursting on my ear!
Sure they speak the God of War,
Rolling in his iron car.

Thrills the sound in every vein; 5
Language pregnant, big with pain.
All the grief that mortals know,
All the anguish, all the woe,
Each deluded subject feels,
Echoes to his thundering wheels. 10

Fairest daughter of the sky,
Dove-eyed, soft HUMANITY!
Sweetest of celestial race,
Tears shall veil thy beauteous face;
Grief shall heave thy snowy breast, 15
Grief that cannot be expressed:
Vain thy soft, persuasive power
In the passion-clouded hour.

Hear, ah hear the clarion's note,
Louder through expansion float; 20
This declares the coming God;
Desolation marks his road;
Fury drives his foaming steeds,
Where the glowing battle bleeds,
Panting with disorder'd breath, 25
Breathing anguish, breathing death.

See the din and clank of arms
Wide diffuse the dread alarms;
Now they rally, now they fly;
Here they languish, there they die. 30
Wider still the victor's hand
Spreads destruction o'er the land.
Driven from their long-loved home,
See the wretched wanderers roam,

Despairing, o'er the ravag'd plains; 35
 Gleams the town behind in flames.
 Night increasing horrors sheds,
 Tempests rattle o'er their heads.
 Now forlorn, expos'd they lie
 Spent, in vain they wish to die. 40
 Orphans importune for bread;
 Rous'd at this, the waste they tread;
 Long in vain till friendly Death
 Seals their gladly-yielded breath.
 Lo! the wretches that remain, 45
 Still reserv'd for future pain;
 Mangled limbs and fractur'd bones
 Waste the tedious hours in groans.
 Drop the veil—enough—no more—
 Pity bleeds at every pore. 50

Goddess of the melting eye,
 Cease the deep, heart-rending sigh;
 See, Reflection lends her aid,
 Wing'd with thought, in white array'd:
 From her lily hand behold 55
 Waves the sacred key of gold.
 Truth proclaims, 'tis only this
 Mortals bring to lasting bliss.

Oh, improve the happy hour,
 Discord then shall feel thy power, 60
 And with thunder's mimic sound
 Cease to shake the vaulted ground;
 Cease the wild alarm to keep,
 Cease to feed the yawning deep;
 Cease to stain with human gore 65
 Where the roses blush'd before.
 All shall own thy blissful sway,
 And ev'n Bellona thy behests obey.

NOTES:

3 *God of war*—iron car A reference to the Roman god Mars, often depicted as riding in a chariot.

19 *clarion*—A shrill-sounding trumpet with a narrow tube, formerly much used as a signal in war. (OED).

27 *din*—A loud noise; particularly a continued confused or resonant sound, which stuns or distresses the ear. (OED).

38 *tempest*—A violent storm of wind, usually accompanied by a downfall of rain, hail, or snow, or by thunder. (OED).

41 *importune* • To ask or request something of (a person) persistently or pressingly; to accost with questions or requests; to beg, beseech • (OED).

51 *Goddess of the melting eye* That is, • Humanity •; see lines 9-15 above.

55 *Lily hand* White hand.

69 *Bellona* • Bellona, original name Duellona, in Roman religion, goddess of war • Sometimes known as the sister or wife of Mars, she has also been identified with his female cult partner Nerio. Her temple at Rome stood in the Campus Martius, outside the city's gates near the Circus Flaminius and the temple of Apollo. There the Senate met to discuss generals' claims to triumphs and to receive foreign ambassadors. In front of it was the *columna bellica*, where the ceremony of declaring war by the *fetiales* (a group of priestly officials) took place • (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Source: *The Gentleman's Magazine* (July 1786), p. 601.

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