

WILDE OSCAR

CHARMIDES,
AND OTHER
POEMS

Oscar Wilde
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Charmides, and Other Poems:

Содержание

CHARMIDES

5

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

21

Oscar Wilde

Charmides, and Other Poems

Wilde's Poems, a selection of which is given in this volume, were first published in volume form in 1881, and were reprinted four times before the end of 1882. A new Edition with additional poems, including Ravenna, The Sphinx, and The Ballad of Reading Goal, was first published (limited issues on hand-made paper and Japanese vellum) by Methuen & Co. in March 1908. A further Edition (making the seventh) with some omissions from the issue of 1908, but including two new poems, was published in September, 1909. Eighth Edition, November 1909. Ninth Edition, December 1909. Tenth Edition, December 1910. Eleventh Edition, December, 1911. Twelfth Edition, May, 1913.

A further selection of the poems, including The Ballad of Reading Gaol, is published uniform with this volume.

CHARMIDES

I

He was a Grecian lad, who coming home
With pulpy figs and wine from Sicily
Stood at his galley's prow, and let the foam
Blow through his crisp brown curls unconsciously,
And holding wave and wind in boy's despite
Peered from his dripping seat across the wet and stormy
night.

Till with the dawn he saw a burnished spear
Like a thin thread of gold against the sky,
And hoisted sail, and strained the creaking gear,
And bade the pilot head her lustily
Against the nor'west gale, and all day long
Held on his way, and marked the rowers' time with measured
song.

And when the faint Corinthian hills were red
Dropped anchor in a little sandy bay,
And with fresh boughs of olive crowned his head,
And brushed from cheek and throat the hoary spray,
And washed his limbs with oil, and from the hold

Brought out his linen tunic and his sandals brazen-soled,

And a rich robe stained with the fishers' juice

Which of some swarthy trader he had bought

Upon the sunny quay at Syracuse,

And was with Tyrian broideries inwrought,

And by the questioning merchants made his way

Up through the soft and silver woods, and when the labouring
day

Had spun its tangled web of crimson cloud,

Clomb the high hill, and with swift silent feet

Crept to the fane unnoticed by the crowd

Of busy priests, and from some dark retreat

Watched the young swains his frolic playmates bring

The firstling of their little flock, and the shy shepherd fling

The crackling salt upon the flame, or hang

His studded crook against the temple wall

To Her who keeps away the ravenous fang

Of the base wolf from homestead and from stall;

And then the clear-voiced maidens 'gan to sing,

And to the altar each man brought some goodly offering,

A beechen cup brimming with milky foam,

A fair cloth wrought with cunning imagery

Of hounds in chase, a waxen honey-comb

Dripping with oozy gold which scarce the bee

Had ceased from building, a black skin of oil

Meet for the wrestlers, a great boar the fierce and white-tusked spoil

Stolen from Artemis that jealous maid

To please Athena, and the dappled hide
Of a tall stag who in some mountain glade

Had met the shaft; and then the herald cried,
And from the pillared precinct one by one
Went the glad Greeks well pleased that they their simple vows
had done.

And the old priest put out the waning fires

Save that one lamp whose restless ruby glowed
For ever in the cell, and the shrill lyres

Came fainter on the wind, as down the road
In joyous dance these country folk did pass,
And with stout hands the warder closed the gates of polished
brass.

Long time he lay and hardly dared to breathe,

And heard the cadenced drip of spilt-out wine,
And the rose-petals falling from the wreath

As the night breezes wandered through the shrine,
And seemed to be in some entranced swoon
Till through the open roof above the full and brimming moon

Flooded with sheeny waves the marble floor,

When from his nook up leapt the venturous lad,
And flinging wide the cedar-carven door

Beheld an awful image saffron-clad
And armed for battle! the gaunt Griffin glared
From the huge helm, and the long lance of wreck and ruin
flared

Like a red rod of flame, stony and steeled
The Gorgon's head its leaden eyeballs rolled,
And writhed its snaky horrors through the shield,
And gaped aghast with bloodless lips and cold
In passion impotent, while with blind gaze
The blinking owl between the feet hooted in shrill amaze.

The lonely fisher as he trimmed his lamp
Far out at sea off Sunium, or cast
The net for tunnies, heard a brazen tramp
Of horses smite the waves, and a wild blast
Divide the folded curtains of the night,
And knelt upon the little poop, and prayed in holy fright.

And guilty lovers in their venery
Forgot a little while their stolen sweets,
Deeming they heard dread Dian's bitter cry;
And the grim watchmen on their lofty seats
Ran to their shields in haste precipitate,
Or strained black-bearded throats across the dusky parapet.

For round the temple rolled the clang of arms,
And the twelve Gods leapt up in marble fear,
And the air quaked with dissonant alarums

Till huge Poseidon shook his mighty spear,
And on the frieze the prancing horses neighed,
And the low tread of hurrying feet rang from the cavalcade.

Ready for death with parted lips he stood,
And well content at such a price to see
That calm wide brow, that terrible maidenhood,
The marvel of that pitiless chastity,
Ah! well content indeed, for never wight
Since Troy's young shepherd prince had seen so wonderful
a sight.

Ready for death he stood, but lo! the air
Grew silent, and the horses ceased to neigh,
And off his brow he tossed the clustering hair,
And from his limbs he throw the cloak away;
For whom would not such love make desperate?
And nigher came, and touched her throat, and with hands
violate

Undid the cuirass, and the crocus gown,
And bared the breasts of polished ivory,
Till from the waist the peplos falling down
Left visible the secret mystery
Which to no lover will Athena show,
The grand cool flanks, the crescent thighs, the bossy hills of
snow.

Those who have never known a lover's sin

Let them not read my ditty, it will be
To their dull ears so musicless and thin
That they will have no joy of it, but ye
To whose wan cheeks now creeps the lingering smile,
Ye who have learned who Eros is, – O listen yet awhile.

A little space he let his greedy eyes
Rest on the burnished image, till mere sight
Half swooned for surfeit of such luxuries,
And then his lips in hungering delight
Fed on her lips, and round the towered neck
He flung his arms, nor cared at all his passion's will to check.

Never I ween did lover hold such tryst,
For all night long he murmured honeyed word,
And saw her sweet unravished limbs, and kissed
Her pale and argent body undisturbed,
And paddled with the polished throat, and pressed
His hot and beating heart upon her chill and icy breast.

It was as if Numidian javelins
Pierced through and through his wild and whirling brain,
And his nerves thrilled like throbbing violins
In exquisite pulsation, and the pain
Was such sweet anguish that he never drew
His lips from hers till overhead the lark of warning flew.

They who have never seen the daylight peer
Into a darkened room, and drawn the curtain,

And with dull eyes and wearied from some dear
And worshipped body risen, they for certain
Will never know of what I try to sing,
How long the last kiss was, how fond and late his lingering.

The moon was girdled with a crystal rim,
The sign which shipmen say is ominous
Of wrath in heaven, the wan stars were dim,
And the low lightening east was tremulous
With the faint fluttering wings of flying dawn,
Ere from the silent sombre shrine his lover had withdrawn.

Down the steep rock with hurried feet and fast
Clomb the brave lad, and reached the cave of Pan,
And heard the goat-foot snoring as he passed,
And leapt upon a grassy knoll and ran
Like a young fawn unto an olive wood
Which in a shady valley by the well-built city stood;

And sought a little stream, which well he knew,
For oftentimes with boyish careless shout
The green and crested grebe he would pursue,
Or snare in woven net the silver trout,
And down amid the startled reeds he lay
Panting in breathless sweet affright, and waited for the day.

On the green bank he lay, and let one hand
Dip in the cool dark eddies listlessly,
And soon the breath of morning came and fanned

His hot flushed cheeks, or lifted wantonly
The tangled curls from off his forehead, while
He on the running water gazed with strange and secret smile.

And soon the shepherd in rough woollen cloak
With his long crook undid the wattled cotes,
And from the stack a thin blue wreath of smoke
Curled through the air across the ripening oats,
And on the hill the yellow house-dog bayed
As through the crisp and rustling fern the heavy cattle strayed.

And when the light-foot mower went afield
Across the meadows laced with threaded dew,
And the sheep bleated on the misty weald,
And from its nest the waking corncrake flew,
Some woodmen saw him lying by the stream
And marvelled much that any lad so beautiful could seem,

Nor deemed him born of mortals, and one said,
'It is young Hylas, that false runaway
Who with a Naiad now would make his bed
Forgetting Herakles,' but others, 'Nay,
It is Narcissus, his own paramour,
Those are the fond and crimson lips no woman can allure.'

And when they nearer came a third one cried,
'It is young Dionysos who has hid
His spear and fawnskin by the river side
Weary of hunting with the Bassarid,

And wise indeed were we away to fly:
They live not long who on the gods immortal come to spy.’

So turned they back, and feared to look behind,
And told the timid swain how they had seen
Amid the reeds some woodland god reclined,
And no man dared to cross the open green,
And on that day no olive-tree was slain,
Nor rushes cut, but all deserted was the fair domain,

Save when the neat-herd’s lad, his empty pail
Well slung upon his back, with leap and bound
Raced on the other side, and stopped to hail,
Hoping that he some comrade new had found,
And gat no answer, and then half afraid
Passed on his simple way, or down the still and silent glade

A little girl ran laughing from the farm,
Not thinking of love’s secret mysteries,
And when she saw the white and gleaming arm
And all his manlihood, with longing eyes
Whose passion mocked her sweet virginity
Watched him awhile, and then stole back sadly and wearily.

Far off he heard the city’s hum and noise,
And now and then the shriller laughter where
The passionate purity of brown-limbed boys
Wrestled or raced in the clear healthful air,
And now and then a little tinkling bell

As the shorn wether led the sheep down to the mossy well.

Through the grey willows danced the fretful gnat,
The grasshopper chirped idly from the tree,
In sleek and oily coat the water-rat
Breasting the little ripples manfully
Made for the wild-duck's nest, from bough to bough
Hopped the shy finch, and the huge tortoise crept across the
slough.

On the faint wind floated the silky seeds
As the bright scythe swept through the waving grass,
The ouzel-cock splashed circles in the reeds
And flecked with silver whorls the forest's glass,
Which scarce had caught again its imagery
Ere from its bed the dusky tench leapt at the dragon-fly.

But little care had he for any thing
Though up and down the beech the squirrel played,
And from the copse the linnet 'gan to sing
To its brown mate its sweetest serenade;
Ah! little care indeed, for he had seen
The breasts of Pallas and the naked wonder of the Queen.

But when the herdsman called his straggling goats
With whistling pipe across the rocky road,
And the shard-beetle with its trumpet-notes
Boomed through the darkening woods, and seemed to bode
Of coming storm, and the belated crane

Passed homeward like a shadow, and the dull big drops of rain

Fell on the pattering fig-leaves, up he rose,

And from the gloomy forest went his way

Past sombre homestead and wet orchard-close,

And came at last unto a little quay,

And called his mates aboard, and took his seat

On the high poop, and pushed from land, and loosed the
dripping sheet,

And steered across the bay, and when nine suns

Passed down the long and laddered way of gold,

And nine pale moons had breathed their orisons

To the chaste stars their confessors, or told

Their dearest secret to the downy moth

That will not fly at noonday, through the foam and surging
froth

Came a great owl with yellow sulphurous eyes

And lit upon the ship, whose timbers creaked

As though the lading of three argosies

Were in the hold, and flapped its wings and shrieked,

And darkness straightway stole across the deep,

Sheathed was Orion's sword, dread Mars himself fled down
the steep,

And the moon hid behind a tawny mask

Of drifting cloud, and from the ocean's marge

Rose the red plume, the huge and hornèd casque,

The seven-cubit spear, the brazen targe!
And clad in bright and burnished panoply
Athena strode across the stretch of sick and shivering sea!

To the dull sailors' sight her loosened looks
Seemed like the jagged storm-rack, and her feet
Only the spume that floats on hidden rocks,
And, marking how the rising waters beat
Against the rolling ship, the pilot cried
To the young helmsman at the stern to luff to windward side

But he, the overbold adulterer,
A dear profaner of great mysteries,
An ardent amorous idolater,
When he beheld those grand relentless eyes
Laughed loud for joy, and crying out 'I come'
Leapt from the lofty poop into the chill and churning foam.

Then fell from the high heaven one bright star,
One dancer left the circling galaxy,
And back to Athens on her clattering car
In all the pride of venged divinity
Pale Pallas swept with shrill and steely clank,
And a few gurgling bubbles rose where her boy lover sank.

And the mast shuddered as the gaunt owl flew
With mocking hoots after the wrathful Queen,
And the old pilot bade the trembling crew
Hoist the big sail, and told how he had seen

Close to the stern a dim and giant form,
And like a dipping swallow the stout ship dashed through the
storm.

And no man dared to speak of Charmides
Deeming that he some evil thing had wrought,
And when they reached the strait Symplegades
They beached their galley on the shore, and sought
The toll-gate of the city hastily,
And in the market showed their brown and pictured pottery.

II

But some good Triton-god had ruth, and bare
The boy's drowned body back to Grecian land,
And mermaids combed his dank and dripping hair
And smoothed his brow, and loosed his clenching hand;
Some brought sweet spices from far Araby,
And others bade the halcyon sing her softest lullaby.

And when he neared his old Athenian home,
A mighty billow rose up suddenly
Upon whose oily back the clotted foam
Lay diapered in some strange fantasy,
And clasping him unto its glassy breast
Swept landward, like a white-maned steed upon a venturous

quest!

Now where Colonos leans unto the sea
There lies a long and level stretch of lawn;
The rabbit knows it, and the mountain bee
For it deserts Hymettus, and the Faun
Is not afraid, for never through the day
Comes a cry ruder than the shout of shepherd lads at play.

But often from the thorny labyrinth
And tangled branches of the circling wood
The stealthy hunter sees young Hyacinth
Hurling the polished disk, and draws his hood
Over his guilty gaze, and creeps away,
Nor dares to wind his horn, or – else at the first break of day

The Dryads come and throw the leathern ball
Along the reedy shore, and circumvent
Some goat-eared Pan to be their seneschal
For fear of bold Poseidon's ravishment,
And loose their girdles, with shy timorous eyes,
Lest from the surf his azure arms and purple beard should
rise.

On this side and on that a rocky cave,
Hung with the yellow-belled laburnum, stands
Smooth is the beach, save where some ebbing wave
Leaves its faint outline etched upon the sands,
As though it feared to be too soon forgot

By the green rush, its playfellow, – and yet, it is a spot

So small, that the inconstant butterfly

 Could steal the hoarded money from each flower
Ere it was noon, and still not satisfy

 Its over-greedy love, – within an hour
A sailor boy, were he but rude enow
To land and pluck a garland for his galley's painted prow,

Would almost leave the little meadow bare,

 For it knows nothing of great pageantry,
Only a few narcissi here and there

 Stand separate in sweet austerity,
Dotting the unmown grass with silver stars,
And here and there a daffodil waves tiny scimitars.

Hither the billow brought him, and was glad

 Of such dear servitude, and where the land
Was virgin of all waters laid the lad

 Upon the golden margent of the strand,
And like a lingering lover oft returned
To kiss those pallid limbs which once with intense fire
burned,

Ere the wet seas had quenched that holocaust,

 That self-fed flame, that passionate lustihead,
Ere grisly death with chill and nipping frost

 Had withered up those lilies white and red
Which, while the boy would through the forest range,

Answered each other in a sweet antiphonal counter-change.

And when at dawn the wood-nymphs, hand-in-hand,
Threaded the bosky dell, their satyr spied
The boy's pale body stretched upon the sand,
And feared Poseidon's treachery, and cried,
And like bright sunbeams flitting through a glade
Each startled Dryad sought some safe and leafy ambushade.

Save one white girl, who deemed it would not be
So dread a thing to feel a sea-god's arms
Crushing her breasts in amorous tyranny,
And longed to listen to those subtle charms
Insidious lovers weave when they would win

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