

We Wear the Mask

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

*African American poet born of formerly
enslaved parents in Dayton, Ohio.*

1872-1906

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks

and shades our eyes,—

This debt we pay to human guile;

With torn and bleeding hearts we

smile,

And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,

In counting all our tears and sighs?

Nay, let them only see us, while

We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries

To thee from tortured souls arise.

We sing, but oh the clay is vile

Beneath our feet, and long the mile;

But let the world dream otherwise,

We wear the mask!

Whilst Covid struts

A response for Covid Times to Paul Laurence

Dunbar's poem, 'We wear the mask'.

tune: Nearer my God to Thee

Whilst Covid struts the land,

we wear a mask;

with others close at hand,

we wear a mask.

Always, for safety's sake,

with life and health at stake,

do this, make no mistake:

we wear a mask.

When bullies mock and shame,

once more a mask;

to face their savage game,

we show a mask.

Though we may hurt inside,

our wounds and pain we'll hide;

outside, let calm reside,

our safety mask.

When we ourselves dislike,

once more a mask;

too scared to put things right,

we take a mask;

sadly, ourselves deceive,

despite what we believe,

hide, though it won't relieve;

we wear a mask.

Christ came to share our life,

wearing no mask;

true friend through all its strife,

wearing no mask.

Openly, for us all,

suff'ring, yet walking tall,

rescuing those who fall,

Christ wore no mask.

Then, when our God we meet,

we'll have no mask;

embraced, restored, complete,

we'll have no mask;

left with no hidden zone,

facing God's gaze alone,

knowing as we are known,

we'll need no mask.

John Campbell, 4/10/20