

OSCAR WILDE, A STUDY

André Gide



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OSCAR WILDE, A STUDY ***

OSCAR WILDE

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HOW

'HOW UTTER.'

Oscar Wilde

A STUDY

FROM THE FRENCH OF

ANDRÉ GIDE

WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY

STUART MASON

Oxford
THE HOLYWELL PRESS
MCMV

To

Donald Bruce Wallace,

of New York,

in Memory of a Visit last Summer to
Bagneux Cemetery,
A Pilgrimage of Love when we
watered with our Tears the Roses and Lilies
with which we covered
The Poet's Grave.
Oxford,
September, 1905.

[The little poem on the opposite page first saw the light in the pages of the *Dublin University Magazine* for September, 1876. It has not been reprinted since. The Greek quotation is taken from the *Agamemnon* of Æschylos, l. 120.]

Αἴλινον, **α**ἴινον εἰπὲ,
Τὸ **δ**᾽ εὖ νικάτ**ω**

O well for him who lives at ease
With garnered gold in wide domain,
Nor heeds the plashing of the rain,
The crashing down of forest trees.

O well for him who ne'er hath known
The travail of the hungry years,
A father grey with grief and tears,
A mother weeping all alone.

But well for him whose feet hath trod
The weary road of toil and strife,
Yet from the sorrows of his life
Builds ladders to be nearer God.

Oscar F. O'F. Wills Wilde.

S. M. Magdalen College,

Oxford.

NOTE.

M. Gide's Study of Mr. Oscar Wilde (perhaps the best account yet written of the poet's latter days) appeared first in *L'Ermitage*, a monthly literary review, in June, 1902. It was afterwards reprinted with some few slight alterations in a volume of

critical essays, entitled *Prétextes*, by M. Gide. It is now published in English for the first time, by special arrangement with the author.

S. M.

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Oscar Wilde
Introductory.

Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born at 1 Merrion Square, North, Dublin, on October 16th, 1854. He was the second son of Sir William Robert Wilde, Knight, a celebrated surgeon who was President of the Irish Academy and Chairman of the Census Committee. Sir William Wilde was born in 1799, and died at the age of seventy-seven years.

Oscar Wilde's mother was Jane Francesca, daughter of Archdeacon Elgee. She was born in 1826, and

married in 1851. She became famous in literary circles under the pen-names of 'Speranza' and 'John Fenshawe Ellis,' among her published writings being *Driftwood from Scandinavia* (1884), *Legends of Ireland* (1886), and *Social Studies* (1893). Lady Wilde died at her residence in Chelsea on February 3rd, 1896[1].

Oscar Wilde received his early education at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, which he entered in 1864 at the age of nine years. Here he remained for seven years, and, winning a Royal scholarship, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, on October 19th, 1871, being then seventeen years of age. In the following year he obtained First Class Honours in Classics in Hilary, Trinity and Michaelmas Terms; he also won the Gold Medal for Greek[2] and other distinctions. The Trinity College Magazine *Kottabos*, for the years 1876–9, contains some of his earliest published poems. In 1874 he obtained a classical scholarship[3], and went up to Oxford, where, as a demy, he matriculated at Magdalen College on October 17th, the day after his twentieth birthday. His career at Oxford was one unbroken success. In Trinity Term (June), 1876, he obtained a First Class in the Honour School of Classical Moderations (*in literis Græcis et Latinis*), which he followed up two years later by a similar distinction in 'Greats' or 'Honour Finals' (*in literis humanioribus*). In this same Trinity Term[4], 1878, he further distinguished himself by gaining the Sir Roger Newdigate Prize for English Verse with his poem, 'Ravenna[5],' which he recited at the Encænia or Annual Commemoration of Benefactors in the Sheldonian Theatre on June 26th. He proceeded to the degree of B. A. in the following term[6]. He is described in Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses* as a 'Professor of Æsthetics and Art critic.'

He afterwards lectured on Art in America[7], 1882, and in the provinces on his return to England. About this time he wrote his poems, *The Sphinx* and *The Harlot's House* (1883), and his tragedy in blank verse, *The Duchess of Padua*. The latter was written specially for Miss Mary Anderson, but she did not produce it. This was, however, played in America by the late Lawrence Barrett in 1883, as was also another play in blank verse, entitled *Vera, or the Nihilists*, during the previous year. He had already published in America and England a volume of *Poems*, which went through several editions in a few months.

In 1884 Oscar Wilde married[8] Miss Constance Mary Lloyd, a daughter of the well-known Q. C., by whom he had two sons, born in June, 1885, and November, 1886, respectively. Mrs. Wilde died in 1898, and his only brother, William, in March of the following year.

During the next five or six years after his marriage, articles from his pen appeared in several of the leading reviews, notably 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for July, 1889, and those brilliant essays afterwards incorporated in *Intentions*, in *The Nineteenth Century* and *The Fortnightly Review*. In 1888 he was the editor of a monthly journal called *The Woman's World*. In July, 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. It was the only novel he ever wrote, and was published in book form with seven additional chapters in the following year, and is one of the most remarkable books in the English language.

With the production and immediate success of *Lady Windermere's Fan* early in 1892, he was at once recognised as a dramatist of the first rank. This was

followed a year later by *A Woman of No Importance*, and after brief intervals by *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*[9]. The two latter were being played in London at the time of the author's arrest and trial.

Into the melancholy story of his trial it is not proposed to enter here beyond mentioning the fact that he was condemned by the newspapers, and, consequently, by the vast majority of the British public, several weeks before a jury could be found to return a verdict of 'guilty.' On Saturday, May 25th, 1895, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour, most of which period was passed at Wandsworth and Reading.

On his release from Reading on Wednesday, May 19th, 1897, he at once crossed to France with friends, and a few days later penned that pathetic letter, pregnant with pity, in which he pleaded for the kindlier treatment of little children lying in our English gaols. This letter, with his own name attached, filled over two columns in *The Daily Chronicle* of May 28th. It created considerable sensation—a well-known Catholic weekly comparing it 'in its crushing power to the letter with which Stevenson shamed the shameless traducer of Father Damien.' A second letter on the subject of the cruelties of the English Prison system appeared in the same paper on March 24th, 1898. It was headed: 'Don't Read This if You Want to be Happy To-day,' and was signed 'The Author of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.' *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* was published early in this same year under the *nom de plume* 'C.3.3.,' Oscar Wilde's prison number. Its authorship was acknowledged shortly afterwards in an autograph edition. Since that time countless editions of this

famous work have been issued in England and America, and translations have appeared in French, German and Spanish. Of this poem a reviewer in a London journal said,—'The whole is awful as the pages of Sophocles. That he has rendered with his fine art so much of the essence of his life and the life of others in that *inferno* to the sensitive, is a memorable thing for the social scientist, but a much more memorable thing for literature. This is a simple, a poignant, a great ballad, one of the greatest in the English language.'

Of the sorrows and sufferings of the last few years of his life, his friend Mr. Robert Harborough Sherard has written in *The Story of an Unhappy Friendship*, and M. Gide refers to them in the following pages.

After several weeks of intense suffering 'Death the silent pilot' came at last, and the most brilliant writer of the nineteenth century passed away on the afternoon of November 30th, 1900, in poverty and almost alone. The little hotel in Paris—Hotel d'Alsace, 13 rue des Beaux Arts,—where he died, has become a place of pilgrimage from all parts of the world for those who admire his genius or pity his sorrows. He was buried, three days later, in the cemetery at Bagneux, about four miles out of Paris.

STUART MASON.

[1] In 1890 Lady Wilde received a pension of £50 from the Civil List.

[2] The subject for this year, 1874, was 'The Fragments of the Greek Comic Poets, as edited by Meineke.' The medal was presented annually, from a fund left for the purpose by Bishop Berkeley.

[3] The demyship was of the annual value of £95, and was tenable for five years. Oscar

Wilde's success was announced in the *University Gazette* (Oxford), July 11, 1874.

[4] On Wednesday, May 1st, Oscar Wilde, dressed as Prince Rupert, was present at a fancy dress ball given by Mrs. George Herbert Morrell at Headington Hill Hall.

[5] 'The Newdigate was listened to with rapt attention and frequently applauded.'—*Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduates' Journal*, June 27, 1878.

[6] The degree of B. A. was conferred upon him on Thursday, Novemher 28, 1878.

[7] Amongst the places he visited were New York, Louisville (Kentucky), Omaha City and California. In the autumn of this same year, 1882, after leaving the States, Mr. Wilde went to Canada and thence to Nova Scotia, arriving at Halifax about October 8th.

[8] The announcement in *The Times* of May 31, 1884, was as follows:—'May 29, at S. James's Church, Paddington, by the Rev. Walter Abbott, Vicar, Oscar, younger son of the late Sir William Wilde, M. D., of Dublin, to Constance Mary, only daughter of the late Horace Lloyd, Esq., Q. C.'

[9] Of *The Importance of Being Earnest* the author is reported to have said, 'The first act is ingenious, the second beautiful, the third abominably clever.' It was revived by Mr. George Alexander at the St. James's Theatre on January 7, 1902; and *Lady Windermere's Fan* on November 19, 1904.



Oscar Wilde

OCT. 16TH, 1854—NOV. 30TH, 1900.

VERBIS MEIS ADDERE NIHIL AUDEBANT ET SUPER ILLOS STILLABAT ELOQUIUM MEUM.

JOB XXIX, 22

R. I. P.

Inscription on Oscar Wilde's Tombstone.

Letters from M. André Gide.

I.

CHÂTEAU DE CUVERVILLE,
PAR CRIQUETOT L'ESNEVAL,
SNE. INFERIEURE.

Monsieur,

Quelque plaisir que j'aurai de voir mon étude sur Wilde traduite en anglais, je ne puis vous répondre avant d'avoir correspondu avec mon éditeur. L'article en question, après avoir paru dans 'l'Ermitage,' a été réunie à d'autres études dans un volume, *Prétextes*, que le *Mercure de France* édita l'an dernier. Un traité me lie à cette maison et je ne suis pas libre de décider seul.

Votre lettre a mis quelque temps à me parvenir ici, où pourtant j'habite. Dès que j'aurai la réponse du *Mercure de France* je m'empresserai de vous la faire savoir.

Veuillez croire, Monsieur, à l'assurance de mes meilleurs sentiments.

ANDRÉ GIDE.

Septembre 9, 1904.

II.

Monsieur,

Je laisse à mon éditeur le soin de vous écrire au sujet des conditions de la publication en anglais de mon étude..... Je désire, comme je vous le disais, que la traduction que vous proposez de faire se reporte au texte donné par le *Mercure de France* dans mon volume *Prétextes*, et non à celui, fautif, de 'l'Ermitage.'....

Le texte des contes de Wilde que je cite s'éloigne, ainsi que vous pouvez le voir, du texte anglais que Wilde lui-même en a donné. Il importe que ce *texte oral* reste différent du

texte écrit de ces 'poems in prose.' Je crois, si ridicule que cela puisse paraître d'abord, qu'il faut retraduire en anglais le texte francais que j'en donne (et que j'ai écrit presque sous la dictée de Wilde) et non pas citer simplement le texte anglais tel que Wilde le rédigea plus tard. L'effet en est très différent.

Veuillez croire, Monsieur, à l'assurance de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

ANDRÉ GIDE.

Septembre 14th, 1904.

Oscar Wilde

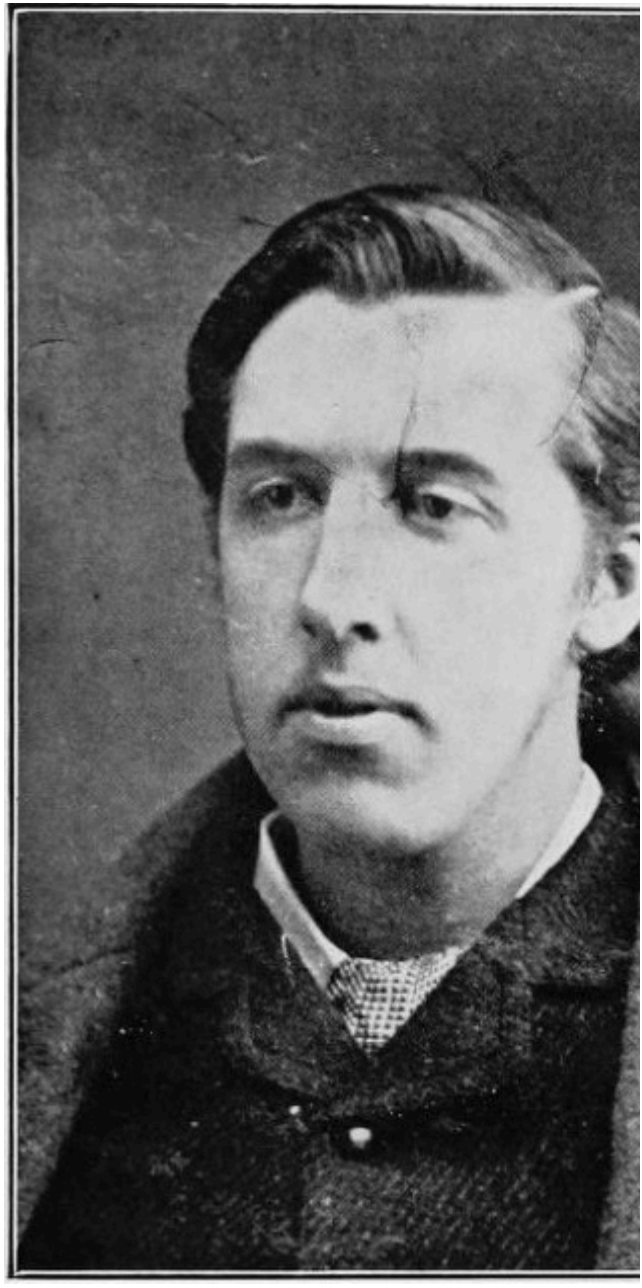
I was at Biskra in December, 1900, when I learned through the newspapers of the lamentable end of Oscar Wilde. Distance, alas! prevented me from joining in the meagre procession which followed his body to the cemetery at Bagneux. It was of no use reproaching myself that my absence would seem to diminish still further the small number of friends who remained faithful to him—at least I wanted to write these few pages at once, but for a considerable period Wilde's name seemed to become once more the property of the newspapers.

Now that every idle rumour connected with his name, so sadly famous, is hushed; now that the mob is at last wearied after having praised, wondered at, and then reviled him, perhaps, a friend may be

allowed to lay, like a wreath on a forsaken grave, these lines of affection, admiration, and respectful pity.

When the trial, with all its scandal, which so excited the public mind in England threatened to wreck his life, certain writers and artists attempted to carry out, in the name of literature and art, a kind of rescue. It was hoped that by praising the writer the man would be excused. Unfortunately, there was a misunderstanding here, for it must be acknowledged that Wilde was not a great writer. The leaden buoy which was thrown to him helped only to weigh him down; his works, far from keeping him up, seemed to sink with him. In vain were some hands stretched out: the torrent of the world overwhelmed him—all was over.

—



OSCAR WILDE AT OXFORD, 18

—

It was not possible at that time to think of defending him in any other way. Instead of trying to shelter the man behind his work, it was necessary to show forth first the man as an object of admiration—as I am going to try to do now—and then the work itself illuminated by his personality. 'I have put all my genius into my life; I have put only my talent into my works,' said Wilde once. Great writer, no, but great *viveur*, yes, if one may use the word in the fullest sense of the French term. Like certain Greek philosophers of old, Wilde did not write his wisdom, but spoke and lived it, entrusting it rashly to the fleeting memory of man, thereby writing it as it were on water.

Let those who knew him for a longer time than I did, tell the story of his life. One of those who listened to him the most eagerly relates here simply a few personal recollections.

I.

And the mighty nations would
have crowned me, who
am crownless now and
without name,
And some orient dawn had
found me kneeling on
the
threshold of the House of

Fame.

Those who became acquainted with Wilde only in the latter years of his life form a wrong conception of the wonderful creature he formerly was, if they judge from the enfeebled and crushed being given back to us from prison, as Ernest Lajeunesse paints him, for instance, in the best or rather the only passable article on the great reprobate which any one has had the talent or the courage to write[1].

It was in 1891 that I met him for the first time. Wilde had then what Thackeray calls 'one of the greatest of a great man's qualities'—success[2]. His manner and his appearance were triumphant. His success was so assured that it seemed to go in front of him, and he had only to advance. His books were causing wonder and delight. All London was soon to rush to see his plays[3]. He was rich, he was great, he was handsome, he was loaded with happiness and honours.

Some compared him to an Asiatic Bacchus, others to some Roman Emperor, and others again to Apollo himself,—in short, he was resplendent. In Paris his name passed from mouth to mouth as soon as he arrived. Several absurd sayings went round concerning him, as that after all he was only the man who smoked gold-tipped cigarettes, and walked about the streets with a sunflower in his hand. For, skilful in misleading those who are the heralds of earthly fame, Wilde knew how to hide his real personality behind an amusing phantom, with which he humorously deluded the public.

I had heard him talked about at Stéphane Mallarmé's house, where he was described as a brilliant conversationalist, and I expressed a wish to know him, little hoping that I should ever do so. A happy chance, or rather a friend, gave me the opportunity, and to him I made known my desire. Wilde was invited to dinner. It was at a restaurant. We were a party of four, but three of us were content to listen. Wilde did not converse—he told tales. During the whole meal he hardly stopped. He spoke in a slow, musical tone, and his very voice was wonderful. He knew French almost perfectly, but pretended, now and then, to hesitate a little for a word to which he wanted to call our attention. He had scarcely any accent, at least only what it pleased him to affect when it might give a somewhat new or strange appearance to a word—for instance, he used purposely to pronounce *scepticisme* as skepticisme. The stories he told us without a break that evening were not of his best. Uncertain of his audience he was testing us, for, in his wisdom, or perhaps in his folly, he never betrayed himself into saying anything which he thought would not be to the taste of his hearers; so he doled out food to each according to his appetite. Those who expected nothing from him got nothing, or only a little light froth, and as at first he used to give himself up to the task of amusing, many of those who thought they knew him will have known him only as the amuser.

When dinner was over we went out. My two friends walking together, Wilde took me aside and said quite suddenly, 'You hear with your eyes; that is why I am going to tell you this story.'

He began:—

'When Narcissus died, the Flowers of

> the Fields were plunged in grief, and asked the River for drops of water that they might mourn for him.
>
> "'Oh," replied the River, "if all my drops of water were tears, I should not have enough to weep for Narcissus myself—I loved him."
>
> "'How could you help loving Narcissus?" rejoined the Flowers, "so beautiful was he."
>
> "'Was he beautiful?" asked the River.
>
> "'And who should know that better than yourself?" said the Flowers, "for, every day, lying on your bank, he would mirror his own beauty in your waters.'"

Wilde stopped for a moment, and then went on:—

> "'If I loved him," replied the River, "it is because when he hung over my waters I saw the reflection of my waters in his eyes.'"

Then Wilde, drawing himself up, added with a strange outburst of laughter, 'That is called *The Disciple*.'

We had reached his door, and left him. He asked me to meet him again. During the course of that year and the next I saw him frequently and everywhere.

In the presence of others, as I have mentioned, Wilde

would put on an air of showing off in order to astonish, or amuse, or even exasperate people. He never listened to, and scarcely took any notice of an idea from the moment it was no longer purely his own. When he was no longer the only one to shine, he would shut himself up, and emerge again only when one found oneself alone with him once more. But as soon as we were alone again he would begin, 'Well, what have you been doing since yesterday?' Now, as at that time my life was passing uneventfully enough, the telling of what I had been doing was of no interest. So, to humour him, I began recounting some trifling incidents, and noticed while I was speaking that Wilde's face was growing gloomy.

'You really did that?' he said.

'Yes,' I answered.

'And you are speaking the truth?'

'Absolutely.'

'Then why repeat it? You must see that it is not of the slightest importance. You must understand that there are two worlds—the one exists and is never talked about; it is called the real world because there is no need to talk about it in order to see it. The other is the world of Art; one must talk about that, because otherwise it would not exist.'

Then he went on:—

> 'Once upon a time there was a man who was beloved in his village because he used to tell tales. Every morning he left the village, and when he returned in the evening all the labourers of the village who had been working all the day would

> crowd round him and say, "Come, now, tell us a tale. What have you seen to-day?"
>
> 'The man said, "I have seen in the forest a Faun playing on a flute and making a band of little wood-nymphs dance."
>
> '"Go on with your story; what did you see?" the men would say.
>
> '"When I reached the sea-shore, I saw three mermaids beside the waves, combing their green hair with golden combs."
>
> 'And the villagers loved him because he used to tell them tales.
>
> 'One morning he left his village as usual, and when he reached the sea-shore he saw three mermaids at the water's edge combing their green hair with golden combs. And as he passed on his way he saw, near a wood, a Faun playing a flute to a band of wood-nymphs.
>
> 'That evening when he returned to his village the people said to him as they did every evening, "Come, tell us a tale: what have you seen?"
>
> 'And the man answered, "I have seen nothing."'

Wilde stopped for a moment to allow the effect of the story to sink into me, and then he continued, 'I do not like your lips; they are quite straight, like the

lips of a man who has never told a lie. I want you to learn to lie so that your lips may become beautiful and curved like the lips of an antique mask.

'Do you know what makes the work of art, and what makes the work of nature? Do you know what the difference is? For the narcissus is as beautiful as a work of art, so what distinguishes them cannot be merely beauty. Do you know what it is that distinguishes them? A work of art is always unique. Nature, who makes nothing durable, is ever repeating herself, so that nothing she makes may be lost. A single narcissus produces many blooms—that is why each one lives but a day. Every time Nature invents a new form she at once makes a *replica*. A sea-monster in one sea knows that in another sea there is another monster like itself. When God creates in history a Nero, a Borgia or a Napoleon He puts another one on one side. No one knows it, but that does not matter; the important point is that *one* may be a success. For God makes man, and man makes the work of art.'

Forestalling what I was on the point of saying, he proceeded, 'Yes, I know ... one day a great restlessness fell upon the earth, as if, at last, Nature was going to create something unique, something quite unique, and Christ is born on earth. Yes, I know, quite well, but listen:—

> 'When Joseph of Arimathæa came down in the evening from Mount Calvary where Jesus had just died, he saw on a white stone a young man seated weeping. And Joseph went near to him and said, "I understand how great thy grief must be, for certainly that Man was a just

> Man." But the young man made answer, "Oh, it is not for that that I am weeping. I am weeping because I, too, have wrought miracles. I also have given sight to the blind, I have healed the palsied, and I have raised the dead; I, too, have caused the barren fig-tree to wither away, and I have turned water into wine. And yet they have not crucified me[4]."'

And that Oscar Wilde was convinced of his representative mission was made quite clear to me on more than one occasion.

The Gospel disturbed and troubled the pagan Wilde. He could not forgive it its miracles. The pagan miracle lies in the work of Art; Christianity encroached on it. Every strong departure from realism in art demands a realism which is convinced in life. His most ingenious fables, his most alarming ironies were uttered with a view to confront the two moralities—I mean, pagan naturalism and Christian idealism, and to put the latter out of countenance in every respect. This is another of his stories:—

> 'When Jesus was minded to return to Nazareth, Nazareth was so changed that He no longer recognised His own city. The Nazareth where He had lived was full of lamentations and tears; this city was filled with outbursts of laughter and song. And Christ entering into the city saw some slaves laden with flowers, hastening towards the marble staircase of a house of white marble.

Christ entered into the house, and at the back of a hall of jasper He saw, lying on a purple couch, a man whose disordered locks were mingled with red roses, and whose lips were red with wine. Christ drew near to him, and laying His hand on his shoulder said to him, "Why dost thou lead this life?" The man turned round, recognized Him and said, "I was a leper once; Thou didst heal me. Why should I live another life? "

Christ went out of the house, and behold! in the street He saw a woman whose face and raiment were painted and whose feet were shod with pearls. And behind her walked a man who wore a cloak of two colours, and whose eyes were bright with lust. And Christ went up to the man and laid His hand on his shoulder, and said to him, "Tell Me why art thou following this woman, and why dost thou look at her in such wise?" The man turning round recognized Him and said, "I was blind; Thou didst heal me; what else should I do with my sight?"

'And Christ drew near to the woman and said to her, "This road which thou art following is the pathway of sin; why follow it?" The woman recognized Him, and laughing said, "The way which I follow is a pleasant way, and Thou hast

> pardoned all my sins."
>
> 'Then Christ felt His heart filled with sadness, and He was minded to leave the city. But as He was going out of it He saw sitting by the bank of the moat of the city, a young man who was weeping. He drew near to him, and touching the locks of his hair, said to him, "Friend, why dost thou weep?" The young man raised his eyes, recognized Him and made answer, "I was dead and Thou hast raised me to life. What else should I do with my life?"'

Let me tell this one story more, illustrating one of the strangest pitfalls into which the imagination can mislead a man, and let any one, who is able, understand the strange paradox which Wilde here makes use of:—

> 'Then there was a great silence in the Judgment Hall of God. And the Soul of the sinner stood naked before God.
>
> 'And God opened the Book of the life of the sinner and said, "Surely thy life hath been very evil. Thou hast" (there followed a wonderful, a marvellous list of sins[5]). "Since thou hast done all this, surely I will send thee to Hell."
>
> 'And the man cried out, "Thou canst not send me to Hell."
>
> 'And God said to the man,

> "Wherefore can I not send thee to Hell?"
>
> 'And the man made answer and said, "Because in Hell I have always lived."
>
> 'And there was a great silence in the Judgment Hall of God.
>
> 'And God spake and said to the man, "Seeing that I may not send thee to Hell, I am going to send thee to Heaven."
>
> '"Thou canst not send me to Heaven."
>
> 'And God said to the man, "Wherefore can I not send thee to Heaven?"
>
> 'And the man said, "Because I have never been able to imagine it."
>
> 'And there was a great silence in the Judgment Hall of God[6].'

One morning Wilde handed me an article in which a sufficiently dense critic congratulated him on 'knowing how to write pretty stories in which the better to clothe his thoughts.'

'They think,' began Wilde, 'that all thoughts come naked to the birth. They do not understand that I *cannot* think otherwise than in stories. The sculptor does not try to reproduce his thoughts in marble; *he thinks in marble*, straight away. Listen:—

> 'There was once a man who could think only in bronze. And this man one day had an idea, an idea of *The*

> *Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment.* And he felt that he must give expression to it. But in the whole world there was but one single piece of bronze, for men had used it all up. And this man felt that he would go mad if he did not give expression to his idea. And he remembered a piece of bronze on the tomb of his wife, a statue which he had himself fashioned to set on the tomb of his wife, the only woman he had ever loved. It was the image of *The Sorrow that Endureth for Ever*. And the man felt that he was becoming mad, because he could not give expression to his idea. Then he took this image of Sorrow, of the *Sorrow that endureth for Ever*, and broke it up and melted it and fashioned of it an Image of Pleasure, of the *Pleasure that abideth for a Moment*.'

Wilde was a believer in a certain fatality besetting the path of the artist, and that the *Man* is at the mercy of the Idea. 'There are,' he used to say, 'artists of two kinds: some supply answers, and others ask questions. It is necessary to know if one belongs to those who answer or to those who ask questions; for the one who asks questions is never the one who answers them. There are certain works which wait for their interpretation for a long time. It is because they are giving answers to questions that have not yet been asked—for the question often comes a terribly long time after the answer.'

And he added further, 'The soul is born old in the

body; it is to rejuvenate the soul that the body becomes old. Plato is Socrates young again.'

Then it was three years before I saw him again.

[1] In *La Revue Blanche*.

[2] *Henry Esmond*, Book II, chap. XI. Thackeray puts these words into the mouth of the famous Mr. Joseph Addison, who continues:—"T is the result of all the others; 't is a latent power in him which compels the favour of the gods, and subjugates fortune.'

[3] Oscar Wilde's first play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, was produced at the St. James's Theatre on February 20, 1892. This was followed by *A Woman of No Importance*, April 19, 1893, and *An Ideal Husband*, January, 3, 1895, at Haymarket; and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, February 14, 1895, at the St. James's.

[4] This story appeared under the title of 'The Master' with other Poems in Prose in *The Fortnightly Review* for July, 1894. Two of them, 'The Disciple' and 'The House of Judgment,' were first published in *The Spirit Lamp* in 1893. This was a magazine published at Oxford under the editorship of Lord Alfred Douglas, who had recently bought it from the founder and changed its style and form. A complete set of the fifteen numbers is now exceedingly scarce.

[5] Henri Davray translated these 'Poems in Prose' in *La Revue Blanche*.

[6] Since Villiers de l'Isle-Adam has betrayed it, every one knows, alas! the great secret of the Church: *There is no Purgatory!*

II.

I have made my choice, have
lived my poems, and
though youth is gone in
wasted days,
I have found the lover's crown
of myrtle better than
the poet's crown of bays.

—

Here tragic reminiscences begin.

A persistent rumour, growing louder and louder with the fame of his successes (in London his plays were being acted in no less than three different theatres at the same time[1]), attributed to Wilde strange habits, on hearing of which, some people tempered their indignation with a smile, while others were not in the least indignant. It was claimed, moreover, as regards these alleged habits, that he concealed them little, and often on the other hand paraded them—some said courageously, others out of cynicism, and others for a pose. I was filled with astonishment when I heard these rumours. In no way, all the time that I had been intimate with him, had he given me the slightest ground for suspicion. But already out of prudence numbers of his old friends were deserting him. They did not yet actually cut him, but they no longer made a point of saying they had met him.

An extraordinary coincidence brought us together again. It was in January, 1895. I was travelling. A peevish disposition urged me on, and I sought solitude rather than novelty of scene. The weather

was frightful. I had fled from Algiers to Blidah, and I was about to quit Blidah for Biskra. Just as I was leaving my hotel, I glanced, through idle curiosity, at the slate on which visitors' names were inscribed. What did I see there? By the side of my own name, actually touching it, was Wilde's. I have said that I was thirsting to be alone, so I took the sponge and rubbed my name out. Before reaching the railway station, however, I was not quite sure that a little cowardice did not underlie that act, so at once retracing my steps I had my bag taken upstairs and wrote my name on the slate again.

In the three years since I had seen him—for I can hardly count a short meeting in Florence the year before—Wilde had certainly changed. One felt that there was less tenderness in his look, that there was something harsh in his laughter and a madness in his joy. He seemed, at the same time, to be more sure of pleasing and less ambitious to succeed therein. He had grown reckless, hardened, and conceited. Strangely enough, he no longer spoke in fables, and during several days that I tarried there I was not once able to draw the shortest tale from him. My first impression was one of astonishment at finding him in Algeria.

'Oh,' he said to me, 'just now I am fleeing from art. I want only to adore the sun. Have you ever noticed how the sun detests thought? The sun always causes thought to withdraw itself and take refuge in the shade. Thought dwelt in Egypt originally, but the sun conquered Egypt; then it lived for a long time in Greece, and the sun conquered Greece, then in Italy, and then in France. Nowadays all thought is driven back as far as Norway and Russia, places where the sun never goes. The sun is jealous of art.'

To adore the sun, ah! that was—for him—to adore life. Wilde's lyrical adoration was fast becoming a frenzied madness. A fatality led him on; he could not and would not withdraw himself from it. He seemed to devote all his zeal and all his worth to over-rating his destiny, and over-reaching himself. '*My* special duty,' he used to say, 'is to plunge madly into amusement.' He used to make a point of searching for pleasure as one faces an appointed duty. Nietzsche surprised me less, on a later occasion, because I had heard Wilde say, 'No, not happiness! Certainly not happiness! Pleasure. One must always set one's heart upon the most tragic.'

He would walk about the streets of Algiers preceded, escorted, and followed by an extraordinary mob of young ruffians. He talked to them all, regarded them all with equal delight, and threw them money recklessly. 'I hope to have thoroughly demoralized this town,' he told me. I thought of Flaubert's saying when he was asked what kind of reputation he most desired—'that of being a demoralizer,' he replied. In the face of all this I was filled with astonishment, admiration, and alarm. I knew of his shaky position, the enmities he had created, and the attacks which were being made upon him, and I knew what dark unrest lay hidden beneath his outward pretence of pleasure.

On one of those last evenings in Algiers, Wilde seemed to have made up his mind not to say a single serious word. At last I became somewhat annoyed at the exaggerated wit of his paradoxes, and I said to him, 'You have got something better to talk about than this nonsense; you are talking to me as if I were the public. You ought rather to talk to the public as you know so well how to talk to your friends. Why is

it your plays are not better? The best that is in you, you talk; why do you not write it?' 'Oh, well,' he cried immediately, 'my plays are not good, I know, and I don't trouble about that, but if you only knew how much amusement they afford! They are nearly all the results of a bet. So was *Dorian Gray*—I wrote that in a few days because a friend of mine declared that I could not write a novel. Writing bores me so.'

—



OSCAR WILDE, 1893.

—

Then, turning suddenly towards me, he said, 'Would you like to know the great drama of my life? It is that I have put my genius into my life—I have put only my talent into my works.'

It was only too true. The best of his writing is but a poor reflection of his brilliant conversation. Those who have heard him talk find him disappointing to read. *Dorian Gray* in its conception was a wonderful story, far superior to *La Peau de Chagrin*, and far more significant! Alas! when written, what a masterpiece spoiled. In his most delightful tales literary influence makes itself too much felt. However graceful they may be, one notices too much literary effort; affectation and delicacy of phrase[2] conceal the beauty of the first conception of them. One feels in them, and one cannot help feeling in them, the three periods of their generation. The first idea contained in them is very beautiful, simple, profound, and certain to make itself heard; a kind of latent necessity holds the parts firmly together, but from that point the gift stops. The development of the parts is done in an artificial manner; there is a lack of arrangement about them, and when Wilde elaborates his sentences and endeavours to give them their full value, he does so by overloading them prodigiously with tiny conceits and quaint and trifling fancies. The result is that one's emotion is held at bay, and the dazzling of the surface so blinds one's eyes and mind, that the deep central emotion is lost.

He spoke of returning to London, as a well-known peer was insulting him, challenging him, and taunting him with running away.

'But if you go back what will happen? 'I asked him. 'Do you know the risk you are running?'

'It is best never to know,' he answered. 'My friends are extraordinary—they beg me to be careful. Careful? but can I be careful? That would be a backward step. I must go on as far as possible. I cannot go much further. Something is bound to happen ... something else.'

Here he broke off, and the next day he left for England.

The rest of the story is well-known. That 'something else' was hard labour.

> [I have invented nothing, nor altered anything, in the last few sentences I have quoted. Wilde's words are fixed in my mind, and, I might almost say, in my ears. I do not say that Wilde clearly saw the prison opening to receive him, but I do assert that the great and unexpected event which astonished and upset London, suddenly changing Oscar Wilde from accuser into accused, did not cause him any surprise.
>
> The newspapers, which chose to see in him only a buffoon, misrepresented, as far as they could, the position taken up for his defence, even to the extent of wresting all meaning from it. Perhaps some day in the far future it will be seemly to lift this dreadful trial out of the mire —but not yet.]

[1] *An Ideal Husband* at the Haymarket and *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the St. James's. Possibly *Lady Windermere's Fan* or *A Woman of No Importance* was being played at a suburban theatre at the same time.

[2] M. Gide first wrote *euphuisme* but altered it to *euphémisme* on republishing his 'Study' in *Prétextes*. Euphuism or 'extreme nicety in language' seems to be more appropriate in the present case than euphemism or 'a softening of offensive expressions.'

III.

For the crimson flower of our
life is eaten by the
cankerworm
of truth.
And no hand can gather up the
fallen withered petals
of the rose of youth.

—

As soon as he came out of prison, Oscar Wilde went back to France. At Berneval, a quiet little village near Dieppe, a certain 'Sebastian Melmoth' took up his abode. It was he. As I had been the last of his French friends to see him, I wanted to be the first to greet him on his return to liberty, and as soon as I could find out his address I hastened to him.

I arrived about midday without having previously

announced my proposed visit. M. Melmoth, whom T ——[1] with warm cordiality invited to Dieppe fairly frequently, was not expected back till the evening. He did not return till midnight.

It was as cold as winter. The weather was atrocious. The whole day I wandered about the deserted beach in low spirits and bored to death. How could Wilde have chosen Berneval to live in, I wondered. It was positively mournful. Night came, and I went back to the hotel to engage a room, the same hotel where Melmoth was living—indeed it was the only one in the place. The hotel, which was clean and pleasantly situated, catered only for second-class boarders, inoffensive folk enough, with whom I had to dine. Rather poor company for Melmoth, I thought.

Fortunately I had a book to read, but it was a gloomy evening, and at eleven o'clock I was just going to abandon my intention of waiting up for him when I heard the rumbling of carriage wheels. M. Melmoth had arrived, benumbed with cold. He had lost his overcoat on the way. And, now that he came to think of it, he remembered that a peacock's feather which his servant had brought him the previous evening was a bad omen, and had clearly foretold some misfortune about to befall him; luckily it was no worse. But as he was shivering with cold, the hotel was set busy to warm some whiskey for him. He hardly said 'How do you do?' to me. In the presence of others, at least, he did not wish to appear to be at all moved. And my own emotion was almost immediately stilled on finding Sebastian Melmoth so plainly like the Oscar Wilde of old—no longer the frenzied poet of Algeria, but the sweet Wilde of the days before the crisis; and I found myself taken back not two years, but four or five. There was the same

dreamy look, the same amused smile, the same voice.

He occupied two rooms, the best in the hotel, and he had arranged them with great taste. Several books lay on the table, and among them he showed me my own *Nourritures Terrestres*, which had been published lately. A pretty Gothic Virgin stood on a high pedestal in a dark corner.

Presently we sat down near the lamp, Wilde drinking his grog in little sips. I noticed, now that the light was better, that the skin of his face had become red and common looking, and his hands even more so, though they still bore the same rings—one to which he was especially attached had in a reversible bezel an Egyptian scarabæus in lapis lazuli. His teeth were dreadfully decayed.

We began chatting, and I reminded him of our last meeting in Algiers, and asked him if he remembered that I had almost foretold the approaching catastrophe.

'Did you not know,' I said, 'almost for certain what was awaiting you in England? You saw the danger and rushed headlong into it, did you not?'

Here I think I cannot do better than copy out the pages on which I wrote shortly afterwards as much as I could remember of what he said.

'Oh, naturally,' he replied, 'of course I knew that there would be a catastrophe, either that or something else; I was expecting it. There was but one end possible. Just imagine—to go any further was impossible, and that state of things could not last. That is why there had to be some end to it, you see. Prison has completely changed me[2]. I was relying on it for that. —-is terrible. He cannot understand

that—he cannot understand that I am not taking up the same existence again. He accuses the others of having changed me—but one must never take up the same existence again. My life is like a work of art. An artist never begins the same work twice, or else it shows that he has not succeeded. My life before prison was as successful as possible. Now all that is finished and done with.'

He lighted a cigarette and went on: 'The public is so dreadful that it knows a man only by the last thing he has done. If I were to go back to Paris now, people would see in me only the convict. I do not want to show myself again before I have written a play. Till then I must be left alone and undisturbed.' And he added abruptly, 'Did I not do well to come here? My friends wanted me to go to the South to recruit, because at first I was quite worn out. But I asked them to find me, in the North of France, a very small place at the seaside, where I should see no one, where it was very cold and there was hardly ever any sun. Did I not do well to come and live at Berneval? [Outside the weather was frightful.] Here every one is most good to me—the Curé especially. I am so fond of the little church, and, would you believe it, it is called *Notre Dame de Liesse*[3]! Now, is not that charming? And now I know that I can never leave Berneval, because only this morning the Curé offered me a perpetual seat in the choir-stalls.

And the Custom-house men, poor fellows, are so bored here with nothing to do, that I asked them if they had not anything to read, and now I am giving them all the elder Dumas' novels. So I must stay here, you see. And the children, oh, the children they adore me. On the day of the Queen's Jubilee I gave a grand fête and a big dinner, when I had forty

children from the school, all of them, and the schoolmaster, to celebrate it. Is not that absolutely charming? You know that I admire the Queen very much. I always have her portrait with me.'

And he showed me her portrait by Nicholson, pinned on the wall. I got up to look at it. A small bookshelf was close to it, and I began glancing at the books. I wanted to lead Wilde on to talk to me in a more serious vein. I sat down again, and rather timidly asked him if he had read *Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts*.

He gave me no direct answer, but began:—'Russian writers are extraordinary. What makes their books so great is the pity they put into them. You know how fond I used to be of *Madame Bovary*, but Flaubert would not admit pity into his work, and that is why it has a petty and restrained character about it. It is sense of pity by means of which a work gains in expanse, and by which it opens up a boundless horizon. Do you know, my dear fellow, it was pity that prevented me from killing myself? During the first six months I was dreadfully unhappy, so utterly miserable that I wanted to kill myself, but what kept me from doing so was looking at *the others*, and seeing that they were as unhappy as I was, and feeling sorry for them. Oh, dear! what a wonderful thing pity is, and I never knew it.'

He was speaking in a low voice without any excitement.

'Have you ever learned how wonderful a thing pity is? For my part I thank God every night, yes, on my knees I thank God for having taught it to me. I went into prison with a heart of stone, thinking only of my own pleasure, but now my heart is utterly broken—pity has entered into my heart. I have learned now

that pity is the greatest and most beautiful thing in the world. And that is why I cannot bear ill-will towards those who caused my suffering and those who condemned me; no, nor to any one, because without them I should not have known all that. —— writes me terrible letters. He says he does not understand me, that he does not understand that I do not wish every one ill, and that every one has been horrid to me. No, he does not understand me. He cannot understand me any more. But I keep on telling him that in every letter: we cannot follow the same road. He has his, and it is beautiful—I have mine. His is that of Alcibiades; mine is now that of St. Francis of Assisi. Do you know St. Francis of Assisi? A wonderful man! Would you like to give me a great pleasure? Send me the best life of St. Francis you can find.'

I promised it to him. He went on:

'Yes, afterwards we had a charming prison Governor, oh, quite a charming man, but for the first six months I was dreadfully unhappy. There was a Governor of the prison, a Jew, who was very harsh, because he was entirely lacking in imagination.'

This last expression, spoken very quickly, was irresistibly funny; and, as I laughed heartily, he laughed too, repeated it, and then said:

'He did not know what to imagine in order to make us suffer. Now, you shall see what a lack of imagination he showed. You must know that in prison we are allowed to go out only one hour a day; then, we walk in a courtyard, round and round, one behind the other, and we are absolutely forbidden to say a word. Warders watch us, and there are terrible punishments for any one caught talking. Those who are in prison for the first time are spotted at once,

because they do not know how to speak without moving their lips. I had already been in prison six weeks and I had not spoken a word to anyone—not to a soul[4].

'One evening we were walking as usual, one behind the other, during the hour's exercise, when suddenly behind me I heard my name called. It was the prisoner who followed me, and he said, "Oscar Wilde, I pity you, because you must suffer more than we do." Then I made a great effort not to be noticed (I thought I was going to faint), and I said without turning round, "No, my friend, we all suffer alike." And from that day I no longer had a desire to kill myself. We talked in that way for several days. I knew his name and what he had done. His name was P——; he was such a good fellow; oh! so good. But I had not yet learned to speak without moving my lips, and one evening,—"C.3.3." (C.3.3. was myself), "C.3.3. and A.4.8. step out of the ranks."

'Then we stood out, and the warder said, "You will both have to go before the Governor." And as pity had already entered into my heart, my only fear was for him; in fact I was even glad that I might suffer for his sake. But the Governor was quite terrible. He had P—— in first; he was going to question us separately, because you must know that the punishment is not the same for the one who speaks first, and for the one who answers; the punishment of the one who speaks first is double that of the other. As a rule the first has fifteen days' solitary confinement, and the second has eight days only. Then the Governor wanted to know which of us had spoken first, and naturally P——, good fellow that he was, said it was he. And afterwards when the Governor had me in to question me, I, of course, said it was I. Then the

Governor got very red because he could not understand it. "But P—— also says that it was he who began it. I cannot understand it. I cannot understand it."

'Think of it, my dear fellow, he could **not** understand it. He became very much embarrassed and said, "But I have already given him fifteen days," and then he added, "Anyhow, if that is the case, I shall give you both fifteen days." Is not that extraordinary? That man had not a spark of imagination[5].'

Wilde was vastly amused at what he was saying, and laughed—he was happy telling stories. 'And, of course,' he continued, 'after the fifteen days we were much more anxious to speak to one another than before. You do not know how sweet that is, to feel that one is suffering for another. Gradually, as we did not go in the same order each day, I was able to talk to each of the others, to all of them, every one of them. I knew each one's name and each one's history, and when each was due to be released. And to each one I said, "When you get out of prison, the first thing you must do is to go to the Post Office, and there you will find a letter for you with some money." And so in that way I still know them, because I keep up my friendship with them. And there is something quite delightful in them. Would you believe it, already three of them have been to see me here? Is not that quite wonderful?'

'The successor of the harsh Governor was a very charming man—oh! remarkably so—and most considerate to me. You cannot imagine how much good it did me in prison that *Salomé*[6] was being played in Paris just at that time. In prison, it had been entirely forgotten that I was a literary person, but when they saw that my play was a success in

Paris, they said to one another, "Well, but that is strange; he has talent, then." And from that moment they let me have all the books I wanted to read[7]. I thought, at first, that what would please me most would be Greek literature, so I asked for Sophocles, but I could not get a relish for it. Then I thought of the Fathers of the Church, but I found them equally uninteresting. And suddenly I thought of Dante. Oh! Dante. I read Dante every day, in Italian, and all through, but neither the *Purgatorio* nor the *Paradiso* seemed written for me. It was his *Inferno* above all that I read; how could I help liking it? Cannot you guess? Hell, we were in it—Hell, that was prison!'[8]

That same evening he told me a clever story about Judas, and of his proposed drama on Pharaoh. Next day he took me to a charming little house[9], about two hundred yards from the hotel, which he had rented and was beginning to furnish. It was there that he wanted to write his plays—his *Pharoah* first, and then one called *Ahab and Jezebel* (he pronounced it 'Isabelle'), which he related to me admirably.

The carriage which was to take me away was waiting, and Wilde got into it to accompany me part of the way. He began talking to me again about my book, and praised it, though with some slight reserve, I thought. At last the carriage stopped; he bade me good-bye, and was just going to get out, when he suddenly said, 'Listen, my dear friend, you must promise me one thing. Your *Nourritures Terrestres* is good, very good, but promise me you will never write a capital "I" again.' And as I seemed scarcely to understand what he meant, he finished up by saying, 'In Art, you see, there is no first person.'

[1] A literary friend who, a few years later, in collaboration, with another, translated *Dorian*

Gray into French.

[2] 'No more beautiful life has any man lived, no more beautiful life could any man live than Oscar Wilde lived during the short period I knew him in prison. He wore upon his face an eternal smile; sunshine was on his face, sunshine of some sort must have been in his heart. People say he was not sincere: he was the very soul of sincerity when I knew him. If he did not continue that life after he left prison, then the forces of evil must have been too strong for him. But he tried, he honestly tried, and in prison he succeeded.'—*From a Letter written to the Translator*.

[3] An archaic French word from the Latin *laetitia*.

[4] Within the last few years the stringency of this regulation has been somewhat relaxed, and it is in the discretion of the Governor to allow conversation at certain times. The Governor of Reading Prison, in the appendix to the Report of the Commissioners for the year ending March 31, 1901, stated: 'The privilege of talking at exercise is much appreciated by the prisoners. They walk and talk in a quiet and orderly manner, and there have been no reports for misbehaviour.'

[5] Solitary confinement does not mean in a dark cell. The prisoner still remains in his own cell, but is debarred from exercising with the other prisoners, or accompanying them to Divine Service. The confinement is not consecutive, but applies to every alternate day only—thus, a prisoner sentenced to seven days' bread and water, or solitary confinement, does but four days.

[6] *Salome* was played in Paris early in 1896.

[7] Oscar Wilde found the prison library quite

unable to satisfy his wants, and he was allowed to receive books from outside. Such books are then added to the prison library. Magazines are forbidden, but novels allowed. In a letter written from prison early in 1897, Oscar Wilde said that he felt a horror of returning to the world without possessing a single volume of his own, and suggested that some of his friends might like to give him some books. 'You know what kind of books I want,' he says, 'Flaubert, Stevenson, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck, Dumas père, Keats, Marlowe, Chatterton, Coleridge, Anatole France, Théophile Gautier, Dante, and Goethe, and so on.'

[8] During the last three months or so of his imprisonment he did no work whatever beyond writing *De Profundis* and keeping his cell clean. He was allowed gas in his cell up to a late hour, when it was turned down but not turned out. As everything he wrote was examined by the Governor, naturally the prison system is not attacked with the same vehemence in *De Profundis* as it is in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

[9] This was the Chalet Bourbat where Wilde lived from July to October, 1897.

IV.

Ah! what else had I to do but
love you, God's own
mother was less dear to
me,
And less dear the Cytheræan
rising like an argent lily

from the sea.

—

On returning to Paris I went to give news of him to ——.

---- said to me: 'But all that is quite absurd. He is quite incapable of bearing the *ennui*. I know him so well. He writes to me every day. I also am of opinion that he ought to finish his play first, but after that he will come back here. He has never done anything good in solitude; he needs to be constantly drawn out of himself. It is by my side that he has written all his best work. Besides, just look at his last letter.'

He thereupon read it to me. In it Wilde begged —— to let him finish his *Pharaoh* in peace, but, in effect, the letter implied that as soon as his play was written he would come back, he would find him again; and it ended with these boastful words, 'and then I shall be once more the King of Life.'

V.

Rudderless, we drift athwart a
tempest, and when once
the storm of youth is past,
Without lyre, without lute or
chorus, Death the silent
pilot comes at last.

—



THE GRAVE AT BAGNEUX.

—

And a short time afterwards, Wilde went back to Paris.[1]

His play was not written—it will never be written

now. Society well knows what steps to take when it wants to crush a man, and it has means more subtle than death. Wilde had suffered too grievously for the last two years, and in too submissive a manner, and his will had been broken. For the first few months he might still have entertained illusions, but he soon gave them up. It was as though he had signed his abdication. Nothing remained in his shattered life but a mouldy ruin, painful to contemplate, of his former self. At times he seemed to wish to show that his brain was still active. Humour there was, but it was far-fetched, forced, and threadbare.

I met him again on two occasions only. One evening on the Boulevards, where I was walking with G——, I heard my name called. I turned round and saw Wilde. Ah! how changed he was. 'If I appear again before writing my play, the world will refuse to see in me anything except the felon,' he had once said to me. He had appeared again, without his play, and as he found certain doors closed in his face, he no longer sought admission anywhere. He prowled.

Friends, at different times, tried to save him[2]. They did all they could think of, and were for taking him to Italy, but he eluded their efforts, and began to drift back. Among those who had remained faithful for the longest time, some had often told me that Wilde was no longer to be seen, and I was somewhat uneasy, I admit, at seeing him again, and what is more, in a place where so many people might pass. Wilde was sitting at a table outside a café. He ordered two cock-tails for G—— and myself. I was going to sit opposite to him in such a way as to turn my back to the passers-by, but Wilde, noticed this movement, which he took as an impulse of absurd shame, (he was not entirely mistaken, I must admit),

and said, 'Oh, sit here, near me,' pointing to a chair at his side, 'I am so much alone just now.'

Wilde was still well-dressed, but his hat was not so glossy; his collar was of the same shape, but it was not so clean, and the sleeves of his coat were slightly frayed at the edges.

'When I used to meet Verlaine in days gone by,' he continued with an outburst of pride, 'I was never ashamed of being seen with him. I was rich, light-hearted, and covered with glory, but I felt that to be seen with him was an honour, even when Verlaine was drunk.' Then fearing to bore G——, I think, he suddenly changed his mood, tried to be witty and to make jokes. In the effort he became gloomy. My recollections here are dreadfully sad. At last my friend and I got up. Wilde insisted on paying for the drinks, and I was about to say good-bye, when he took me aside, and, with an air of great embarrassment, said in a low voice, 'I say, I must tell you, I am absolutely without a penny[3].

Some days afterwards I saw him again, and for the last time. I do not want to repeat more than one word of our conversation. He told me of his troubles, of the impossibility of carrying out, or even of beginning, a piece of work[4]. Sadly I reminded him of the promise he had made not to show himself in Paris without having finished one book. 'Ah!' I began, 'why did you leave Berneval so soon, when you ought to have stayed there so long? I cannot say that I am angry with you, but—'

He interrupted me, laid his hand on mine, looked at me with his most sorrowful look, and said, 'You must not be angry with *one who has been crushed*[5].'

Oscar Wilde died in a shabby little hotel in the Rue des Beaux Arts. Seven persons followed the hearse, and even they did not all accompany the funeral procession to the end. On the coffin were some flowers and some artificial wreaths, only one of which, I am told, bore any inscription. It was from the proprietor of the hotel, and on it were these words: 'A MON LOCATAIRE.'

[1] The representatives of his family were willing to guarantee Wilde a very good position if he would consent to certain stipulations, one of which was that he should never see —— again. He was either unable or unwilling to accept the conditions.

[2] In October, 1897, he stayed with friends at the Villa Gindice, Posillipo, and was in Naples till the end of the year, or the beginning of 1898, when he went to Paris. In the following year he went to the South of France (Nice) for the spring, but was back in June or July. He went also to Switzerland in 1899 and stayed some time at Gland.

[3] M. Gide says that Wilde's words were '*je suis absolument sans ressources*,' which, I think, need not mean more than a temporary embarrassment. I have been at some pains to find out what the actual circumstances were, and I am able to state the following facts on the authority of Lord Alfred Douglas. When Mr. Wilde came out of prison, the sum of £800 was subscribed for him by his friends. Lord Alfred Douglas gave or sent Mr. Wilde, in the last twelve months of his life, cheques for over £600, as he can show by his bank-book, in addition to ready money gifts, and several others gave him at various times amounts totalling up to several hundreds of pounds. 'It is true,' Lord Alfred Douglas writes, 'he was

always hard up and short of money, but that was because he was incurably extravagant and reckless. I think these facts ought to be known in justice to myself and many others of his friends, all poor men.' In another letter Lord Alfred Douglas says that Mr. Wilde, when he was well off, before his disaster, was the most generous of men. After 1897 received also large sums of money as advance fees for plays which he never finished. 'I hope,' Lord Alfred Douglas continues, 'you will not think that I blame him, or have any grievance against him on any account. What I gave him I considered I owed him, as he had often lent and given me money before he came to grief. I was delighted that he should have it, and I wish I had had time to give him more.' It was not, however, till after the death of his father, that Lord Alfred Douglas was in a position to help Mr. Wilde to the extent that he did, and Mr. Wilde died within a few months of the death of Lord Queensberry.

Lord Alfred Douglas adds that he thinks 'it is about time that some of the poisonous nonsense which has been written about Mr. Wilde should be qualified by a little fact.'

It must be remembered, however, that large as the sums of money were which Mr. Wilde received during the last few years of his life, they would not appear so to him, as in the days of his highest success he was receiving several thousands a year from his plays and other works.

It is since the first sheets of this book passed through the press that I have been favoured with the information that Lord Alfred Douglas has been good enough to give me, and I now wish to qualify the statement in my introductory remarks that Mr. Wilde died 'in

poverty.' It would be more accurate to say 'in comparative poverty.'

[4] Two plays produced in London shortly before his death have been attributed to Oscar Wilde. One of these, *The Tyranny of Tears*, does not contain a single line of his. The other is *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, the plot of which was originally Oscar Wilde's, and he sketched out the scenario. The play was then sold to Mr. Frank Harris, who has always acknowledged Wilde's share in it, but the piece was entirely transformed, and except one or two of the situations in it there was very little left of Wilde's idea.

Referring to such works as the translations of *Ce Qui ne Meurt pas* and the *Satyricon* which have heen issued under Oscar Wilde's name, Mr. Robert Ross (the editor of *De Profundis*), writes:—'No one can produce even a scrap of MS. in the author's handwriting of these so-called "last works."'

[5] 'Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man—now they crush him.'—*An Ideal Husband*, Act I.

TO OSCAR WILDE,

Author of 'Ravenna.'

BY AUGUSTUS M. MOORE.

No Marsyas am I, who singing
came

To challenge King Apollo
at a Test,
But a love-wearied singer
at the best.
The myrtle leaves are all that I
can claim,
While on thy brow there burns
a crown of flame,
Upon thy shield Italia's
eagle crest;
Content am I with Lesbian
leaves to rest,
Guard thou thy laurels and thy
mother's name.

I buried Love within the rose I
meant
To deck the fillet of thy
Muse's hair;
I take this wild-flower, grown
against her feet,
And kissing its half-open
lips I swear,
Frail though it be and widowed
of its scent,
I plucked it for your sake
and find it sweet.

MOORE HALL,

SEPTEMBER, 1878.

From *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. vi, No. 65.

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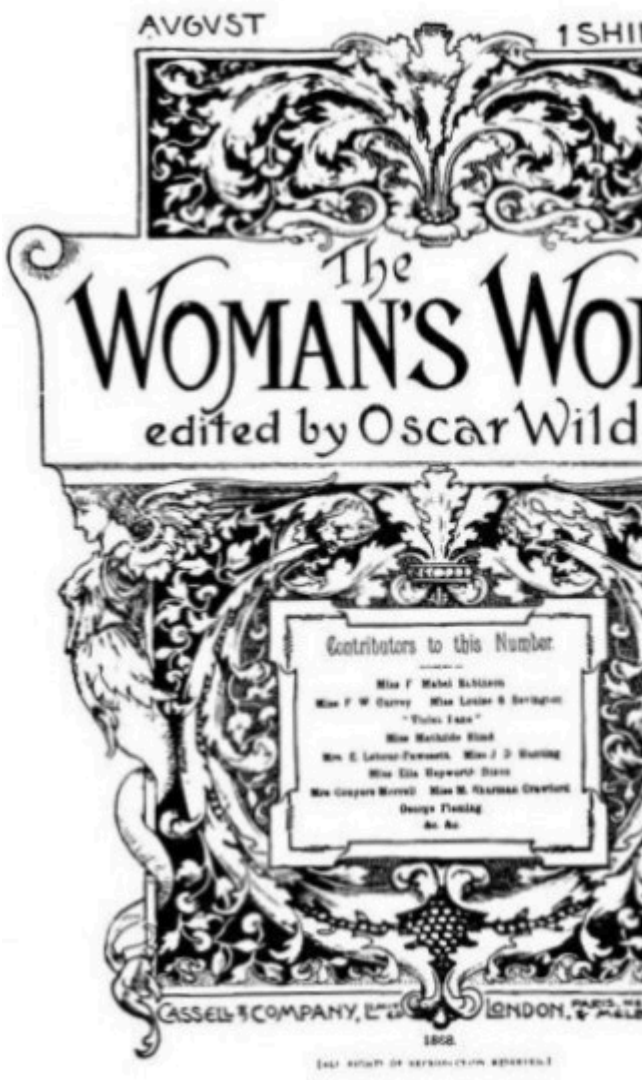
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[1] The title-page reads:—The Duchess of Padua A Tragedy of the XVI Century by Oscar Wilde Author of "Vera," etc. Written in Paris in the XIX Century. Privately printed as Manuscript. March 15, 1883 A. D.

The cover is inscribed 'Op. II.' Twenty copies were printed, of which one only is known to exist in England, the property of Mr. Robert Ross. It is in grey paper wrappers, 8vo., pp. 122. The play was acted in America in 1883 by the late Lawrence Barrett, shortly before his death. It is sometimes known as *Guido Ferranti*.

[2] The original publication of 'The Harlot's House' has not yet been traced. The approximate date is known by a parody on the poem, called 'The Public House, 'which appeared in *The Sporting Times* of June 13, 1885. In 1904 a privately printed edition, on folio paper, with five illustrations by Althea Gyles, was issued by 'The Mathurin Press,' London. In 1905 another edition was privately printed in London, pp. 8, wrappers.

[3] See *Notes and Queries*, Series ix., vol. xii., page 85.

[4] Continental Edition issued by Messrs. Heinemann and Balestier in 'The English Library,' No. 54. 1891.

[5] See *Sonnets of this Century*. Edited by William Sharp. Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1888 (March 22).

[6] Early in 1894, Messrs. Elkin Mathews and

John Lane announced as being in preparation, 'The incomparable and ingenious history of Mr. W. H., being the true secret of Shakespear's sonnets, now for the first time here fully set forth. With initial letters and cover design by Charles Ricketts.' On the evening of his arrest, April 5, 1895, the publishers returned the MS. to Mr. Wilde's house, and it is said to have been stolen from there a few hours later.

[7] See *Saturday Review*, July 2, 1892.

[8] The authenticity of this work is not vouched for.

[9] It was the author's wish that 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' should be known as 'The Soul of Man,' and by this title he himself refers to it in *De Profundis*. A privately printed edition was published by Mr. Arthur L. Humphreys under this title in 1895, and again in 1904 in 'Sebastian Melmoth.' It appeared also in *Wilshire's Magazine*, Toronto, Canada, for June, 1902; and, under its original title, in a pirated edition issued in London, 1904; and in a beautiful edition published by Mr. Thos. B. Mosher, of Portland, Maine, U.S.A., April, 1905.

[10] See *Literature*, December 8, 1900.

[11] Re-printed in *Dublin Verses*, 1895; and *The Tablet*, December 8, 1900.

NOTE.

In the foregoing list the following particulars are given:—

1. Titles of books with name of publisher and date of publication of each edition.
2. Contributions to magazines and periodicals whether re-printed in book-form later or not.
3. Poems which have been re-printed in collections of verse of later date than Bogue's edition of the 'Poems,' 1881. These will be found under their respective titles, but when a poem has been included in more than one such

collection the reference is given, as a rule, to the book of earliest date.

The publications of Messrs. Elkin Mathews and John Lane, and of Mr. John Lane, were issued simultaneously in America by Messrs. Copeland and Day, of Boston. *De Profundis* was published in America by Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons, of New York. Seven editions have been issued. *The Decay of Lying, The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, and *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, appeared in the 'Eclectic Magazine' of New York a few weeks after publication in this country.

No notice is taken in this Bibliography of many unauthorised and pirated reprints, and those works which have been falsely attributed to Mr. Wilde by unscrupulous publishers are all rejected. Of the latter 'The Priest and the Acolyte,' and translations of 'Ce Qui ne Meurt pas' and the 'Satyricon' of Petronius are examples.

Books containing Selections from the Works of Oscar Wilde.

BEST OF OSCAR WILDE, THE. (Collection of Poems and Prose Extracts). Collected by C. Herrmann. Brentano, New York, 1905 (March).

EPIGRAMS AND APHORISMS. Edited by G. H. Sargent. John W. Luce & Co., Boston, U.S.A., 1905 (July).

ESSAYS, CRITICISMS AND REVIEWS. Now first collected. (From *The Woman's World*). Privately printed. London, 1901.

OSCARIANA. EPIGRAMS. Arthur Humphreys, 1895[1].

SEBASTIAN MELMOTH (Selection from Prose Writings; and 'The Soul of Man'). Arthur L. Humphreys, 1904 (September).

[1] Only one copy bore the publisher's name. The rest were issued as 'privately printed.' The edition consisted of 25 copies only, but forged reprints are numerous. The selection of epigrams is said to have been made by Mrs. Wilde.

Bibliographical Notes on the English Editions.

A HOUSE OF POMEGRANATES.

The following is the author's own description of 'the decorative designs that make lovely' this book of 'beautiful tales,' and of 'the delicate dreams that separate and herald each story':—

'Mr. Shannon is the drawer of the dreams, and Mr. Ricketts is the subtle and fantastic decorator. Indeed, it is to Mr. Ricketts that the entire decorative design of the book is due, from the selection of the type and the placing of the ornamentation, to the completely beautiful cover that encloses the whole.... The artistic beauty of the cover resides in the delicate tracing,

arabesques, and massing of many coral-red lines on a ground of white ivory, the colour effect culminating in certain high gilt notes, and being made still more pleasurable by the overlapping band of moss-green cloth that holds the book together.'

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL.

1st edition, 8vo, pp. 31, 800 copies on hand-made paper, and 30 on Japan vellum, February, 1898. Before the 2nd edition was published, in March, the author made several alterations in the text. The 3rd edition was 99 copies only, each signed by the author; bound in purple cloth sides, 4to. Editions 4, 5, and 6 (1898) are similar to the 2nd edition and the number of each edition is printed on the back of title-page. The 7th edition (1899) bears the author's name on the title-page. It is the last of Smithers' editions on hand-made paper. All his subsequent editions are printed in a new type from stereotyped plates, on thick wove paper, and bear no number to distinguish the edition. They are all dated 1899.

DE PROFUNDIS.

Of the 1st edition 200 copies were printed on hand-made paper at 21/- and 50 on Japan vellum at 42/-. Of the ordinary 5/- edition four impressions were issued within a month of publication.

THE HAPPY PRINCE AND OTHER TALES.

Of the 1st edition 75 copies (65 for sale) were printed on large paper with the plates in two states. Of the small paper copies the 1st edition was published at 5/-, the 2nd and 3rd at 3/6 each.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

Each edition consists of 1000 copies, 7/6 net, and

100 on large paper, 21/- net. Twelve copies of each, signed by the author, were issued on Japan vellum. Of this edition No. 4 of each play is in the British Museum.

INTENTIONS.

1st edition, 1891, 7/6; new edition, 1894, 3/6.

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN AND A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE.

With a specially designed binding to each volume by Charles Shannon. 500 copies, sm. 4to, 7/6 net, and 50 copies large paper, 15/- net.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY.

Of the 1st edition 250 copies on hand-made paper, signed by the author, were issued at 21/-, dated 1891. The small paper editions are not dated. The 2nd (1894) can be distinguished from the 1st (1891) by the publisher's name, Ward, Lock and Bowden, Limited, on the title-page. The published price of each was 6/-.

POEMS.

Bogue's 1st, 2nd and 3rd editions are dated 1881, pp. 236. The 4th and 5th editions (1882) have several alterations made by the author in the text, and contain 234 pages only. The edition published by Elkin Mathews and John Lane in 1892 consisted of 220 copies (200 for sale), on hand-made paper, with cover design by Charles Ricketts, price 15/-. The text is a reprint of Bogue's 1882 editions.

RAVENNA.

Forged imitations of Messrs. Shrimpton and Son's edition are common. They can be distinguished from the originals by the omission of the Arras of Oxford

University on cover and title-page.

SALOMÉ.

The edition in French, limited to 600 copies (500 for sale), printed in Paris, was published by the Librairie de l'Art Indépendant, Paris, and Messrs. Matthews and Lane, London; pp. 84, purple wrappers lettered in silver, 5/- net. The English edition was translated by Lord Alfred Douglas and pictured by Aubrey Beardsley with 10 illustrations, title-page, tail-piece, and cover design. 500 copies, small 4to, 15/- net; 100 copies large paper, 30/- net.

THE SPHINX.

Decorated throughout in line and colour and bound in a design by Charles Ricketts. 250 copies at £2/2/- net, and 25 on large paper at £5/5/- net.

—

Translations of many of Oscar Wilde's works have appeared in French, German, Polish, Hungarian, Spanish, Italian, Russian, and other foreign languages. Full particulars of all editions will be included in 'A Bibliography of Oscar Wilde' by Walter Ledger and Stuart Mason, now in preparation.

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