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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 3

THE RUMINATIONS OF RANDOLPH.

MY DEAR DICK,—Oscar Wilde and Henry Irving were, by a curious and dramatic coincidence, the two people most talked about on the Queen's Birthday.

To each of them was given the opportunity of adorning their respective spheres in the theatrical universe. Our morning papers on Saturday announced that the long and honourable career of Henry Irving was crowned by the conspicuous honour of knighthood. In the "Extra Specials" of that night we read that Oscar Wilde had been condemned to pass two years in hard labour for having committed certain offences which came within the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

For myself, I turned into the Lyceum for half an hour, just to listen, when the performance was actually stopped by the great shout of congratulation that welcomed the first entrance of "Sir Henry." Yet, through all those cheers I seemed to hear the dull rumble of the prison van in which Oscar Wilde made his last exit—to Holloway. While the great actor-manager stood in the plenitude of position bowing, and bowing again, to countless friends and admirers, again there rose before my eyes the last ghastly scene at the Old Bailey—I heard the voice of the foreman in its low but steady answer, "Guilty," "Guilty," "Guilty," as count after count was rehearsed by the clerk—I heard again that last awful admonition from the judge. I remembered it was promptly said that he had fled from justice. It was hinted that the authorities were "afraid" of a night at the St. James's, the cigarette, and the to go on with the case for fear of the green carnation, as the prisoner, broken, beaten, tottering, tried to steady himself against the dock rail and whether the authorities heard of these things. I do not know. Then came the volley of hisses, the know that Wilde's last trial was conducted on new and prison warders, the rapid break-up of the Court, the different lines. "If names are written down," said the hurry into the blinding sunshine outside, where some half-Judge, "I will read them out." "Quite so," said Sir score garishly dressed, loose women of the town Frank Lockwood, "that is what I particularly desire. danced on the pavement a kind of carnagole of Let us have no secrecy." Taylor, concerning whom the rejoicing at the verdict. "He'll 'ave 'is 'air out reggar most extraordinary rumours were current, was put into now," says one of them; and the others laughed the box and invited to tell all he knew. He wriggled stridently. I came away. I did not laugh, for the matter is much too serious for laughter.

The more I think about the case of Oscar Wilde, my dear Dick, the more astounding does the whole thing seem to me. So far as the man himself is concerned, it would be charitable to assume that he is not quite sane. Without considering—for the moment—the moral aspect of the matter, here was a man who must have known that the commission of certain acts constituted in the eye of the Law a criminal offence. But no thought of wife or children, no regard, to put it selfishly, for his own brilliant prospects, could induce him to curb a depraved appetite which led him—a gentleman and a scholar—to consort with the vilest and most depraved scum of the town. Knowing, then, the sort of life he led, knowing the character of his companions, how could he feel surprise when the Marquis of Queensberry objected to his acquaintance with Lord Alfred Douglas? The most ordinary precaution for his own safety should have prompted him to do what the noble Marquis wanted, and drop his beloved "Bossey." Instead of this, he went flaring and flaunting about with that silly young man, until his father came to hear of the goings on at the Savoy Hotel, where the management had very plainly hinted to Lord Alfred that he was no longer a desirable patron.

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TO-DAY.

JUNE 1, 1895.

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That is the trouble. I sincerely hope that the authorities now see how fatally mistaken is the policy of treating these offences entirely apart from ordinary crimes. I admit that, as doctors tell us, some children are born with unfortunate instincts. I know that bad habits are acquired at school and college. I know that in after life the weed of evil, if unchecked, will grow until it stifles and chokes all the natural good in a man's life. But Society owes certain duties to itself. Some men are born kleptomaniacs, but still we punish the thief. Some men are born with homicidal inclinations, but still we hang the murderer. I do not ask for a red-hot iron wherewith to burn out a neglected cancer. But I do say this. I know, the police authorities know, to what a vast and terrible extent the horror in our midst has spread of recent years. Let the police boldly make one clean sweep of the panders and procurers, the tempters and blackmailers—they could almost do it in a single night. Then let our public school head masters consider whether some different method cannot be adopted with our boys—whether more candour, serious plain speaking, and less foolish secrecy will not be better for the rising generation. Finally, is it not time that our social leaders grasped the nettle as well, and excluded from their houses altogether the effeminate and emasculated youths, who by their every word and gesture justify the assumption that, like their lost leader, they delight in "posing as" creatures whom no decent man would care to touch with a barge-pole? Have not they, with their simpering and silliness, their impertinence and affectation, their mincing manners and performing-dog-like accomplishments, been tolerated long enough? Need there be any more secrecy? Need we hesitate any longer, in private or in public, to tell them what we think of them? I cannot help thinking that the thing could and should be done. In society, husbands should

mildly but firmly insist on revising the visiting lists of their wives. In less exalted spheres we all of us should set our faces against the manner and pretence that make for unrighteousness. There need be no mistake about it. Men—that is, real, live, clean, and decent men—know exactly what I mean.

I shall, of course, await with curiosity any promulgation that the "Queensberry Association" may desire to make, but meantime I hold that the question of the hour is not so much for leagues and associations as for the individual. Our duty is very simple and very clear. Let each one go straight forward and do it, rigorously refusing to have any truck with the "unclean thing," neither persecuting nor palliating, neither terrorising nor tolerating, but only insisting, in season and out, that there must be no more tampering with classically glorified dirtiness. A man must behave as a man. He can call himself a New Hedonist, or a Decadent Poet, or a Blithering Idiot, or anything else he likes, but directly, in word or deed, he commences to "pose" after the manner of the Eliminated One, the sooner he is taken in street or theatre and soundly kicked the better it will be for the English nation and the whole human race.—Your affectionate cousin, RANDOLPH.

THE Oscar Wilde case is discussed at some length by my friend Randolph, and so I will say little about it here. A brilliantly clever if not a great man has disappeared from our midst, and what is chiefly to be feared is that the manner of his going may prove an injury to literature. I dread the reaction that may undo some of the good work accomplished of late years by fearless and outspoken writers. The public is always apt to act a little blindly, and the Press generally encourages it to do so. Already we are talking as if Oscar Wilde and art were one and the same thing. There will be no proper understanding of the world until we acknowledge the fact that every man is simply a conglomeration of divergent components. Had George Stephenson been the vilest of creatures that ever lived the steam engine would still have been a benefit to humanity, and any future discovery to the effect that Galileo was not a moral man will never alter the fact that he was correct as to the movements of the earth. No student of human nature needs to be told how quite apart a man often stands from his labours. Nero could play symphonies upon the violin full of feeling and tenderness, and our sentimental friend Sterne, who cried in print over the death of his donkey, could, when he liked, be extremely hard to his own flesh and blood. Character and intellect are by no means dependent upon one another. It is much nicer to find genius associated with a gentleman, but history teaches us that it can often exist in the body of a blackguard.

It is a subtle thing—this human nature. The Creator does not draw his puppets with the clean-cut finish of an Adelphi dramatist. The villain and the hero, the high-souled gentleman and the low-minded beast, dwell together within the bones of every living man. According to the balance of their position so the man appears to his neighbours. Which ever side of himself he allows the greatest license to will grow to be the predominating partner. In the late Robert Louis Stevenson's wonderful picture, Hyde was at first unnoticed by Dr. Jekyll's companions, hidden as he was behind the respectable and more ample exterior of the doctor. I very much fear there is a Hyde—two or three Hydes—hidden away in most of us. The lesson that a man like Wilde teaches us is to keep them in subjection, to crush down, as Tennyson advised us, "the ape and the tiger" that we can never quite get rid of. The evil that is in us resembles the geni in the "Arabian Nights." It can be bottled up into a small compass, and then it will interfere with us but very slightly; but once, from carelessness or over-indulgence, let the cover off a little, and we are face to face with a monster before whom we are powerless. It is the old, old lesson of our fathers: *quod licet jubeat non licet seque*. We are not to follow the impulse of the moment, but to keep the monster in subjection, to crush down, as Tennyson advised us, "the ape and the tiger" that we can never quite get rid of. The evil that is in us resembles the geni in the "Arabian Nights." It can be bottled up into a small compass, and then it will interfere with us but very slightly; but once, from carelessness or over-indulgence, let the cover off a little, and we are face to face with a monster before whom we are powerless. It is the old, old lesson of our fathers: *quod licet jubeat non licet seque*.

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8 December, 1900

The Saturday Review.

The death of Mr. Oscar Wilde extinguishes a hope that the broken series of his plays might be resumed. The hope was never, indeed, very strong. Despite the number of his books and plays, Mr. Wilde was not, I think, what one calls a born writer. His writing

OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR

By J. M. STUART-YOUNG

THE art of leaving the stage of life at the appropos moment has yet to be taught. To those who knew him intimately the climax in the career of Oscar Wilde seemed a fitting one. It is one of my fondest recollections that I appreciated the work and the personality of Wilde in his hey-day. "Nerves" is a malady with which we are all familiar to-day. The horny-handed navvy seems to be no more immune than the dainty lady in her boudoir; and Oscar Wilde was the acquiescent slave of morbidity. He was diseased in the will: he lacked the desire to be strong and healthy-minded. Human nature is built upon two potential instincts—the predilection for the preservation of the ego, and the predilection for the propagation of the race. In Oscar Wilde these instincts were perverted, and the will diseased. So that the culminating point in the career of this genius was the inevitable one.

It has been suggested that health ought more fittingly to be "catching" than disease. In the world of letters health and saneness are catching; just as much as disease and moral leprosy can be disseminated by a suggestive book. Character is contagious, and pleasurable emotion is prevalent. And it is just because the books of Oscar Wilde are so terribly real in their delineation of his attributes that we value them so highly. The creed of Wilde is summed up in his own words from the witness-box at the Central Criminal Court of London, on Thursday, April 4th, 1895:—

"In writing, I do not consider in any degree the effect of creating or exciting either morality or immorality; I am neither at good nor evil. I simply endeavour to make a thing with some quality of beauty. There cannot be morality or immorality in art. Either a thing is done well or it is done ill. . . . To reach the reality of self is the principal aim in life, and to arrive at this state of consciousness through pleasure is finer than through pain. An individual truth ceases to be

truth when it is followed by a crowd. What is truth, you ask? It is something so personal as to be only a reality to the person who holds it. A man can never be judged by an accepted code of ethics. Each soul has its own laws. . . . I never gave adoration to anyone except myself."

It is a tremendous day in the history of a man when he realises the truth of the saying, "To the pure, all things are pure." Sin is individual, and morality a condition of the mind.

"I know not whether Laws be right. Or whether Laws be wrong: All that we know who lie in gaol Is that the wall is strong: And that each day is like a year, A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law That Men have made for Man, Since first Man took his brother's life, And the sad world began, But straws the wheat and saves the chaff With a most evil fan.

This too I know—and wise it were If each could know the same— That every prison that men built Is built with bricks of shame, And bound with bars lest Christ should see How mean their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon, And blind the goodly sun: And they do well to hide their Hell, For in it things are done That Son of God nor son of Man Ever should look upon."

What a cry from the depths! I saw him first in 1894. He was then acknowledged to be one of our most promising playwrights, and "Lady Windermere's Fan" had captivated the critics. I was budding fifteen, and worshipped him as I worshipped many of his contemporaries—poets of the younger generation: Richard Le Gallienne, Stephen Phillips, William Butler Yeats, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Symonds—but with this difference: there was something aroused within me, by the rhymes of Oscar Wilde, which savoured more of astheny than robustness. I was curious to meet him; but will not give

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Public Opinion. 13 Oct. 1905.

seated at the funeral of Heine. mentions that the unhappy number was also represented by the dead poet tells us that thirteen La Jeunesse, who was

last days. The poet ant a bar on the Boulevardiers were "sports." The dandy of "green aster went to instruct ance, who was so rich et in verse and prose, r days, now swaggered r-made suit from the ids were badly mani- is was unable to write; is only audience were ho paid his reckoning is left of him was his ue eyes, like those of ly in that place. He es, nor true friends." orted him. One day isher of the *Journal*, for him every week. the noise which the ure to score a success. p. "Thank you," he h my successes before the articles were never

nobler aspect of his "went his desire to seems to have increased y. . . . One evening waiter brings him a refuses to take them, ore favour. 'No, let ' The waiter goes to his return Mr. Wilde piece. Then the poet contemptuous 'Pah.' the change, he waves hole. . . . That may cigarettes are good!" and continues, "were who witnessed every-out tears in his eyes. , which lasted five from his suffering. holic. . . . The hotel those miserable places ar papers 'Houses of of a porter led me corridor. At last the uck my nostrils. An gular room. I stood ish, emaciated face, growth of a beard in profound contem- agony, still clutched is no one to watch by they sent him some reet pierced the thin odour filled the air. nd! I bethought me was wont to throng ong whom there were mes of the aristocracy He seemed then like all the treasures that nd now. . . ." M. the funeral. Ernest

p. 56.

Wilde (O.) THE WOMAN'S WORLD, edited by OSCAR WILDE, portions of two different volumes being bound together in one vol, being pp. 115-664 and 1-112 of the next volume, with hundreds of illustrations, imp. 8vo, half roan, 10s 6d. 1889. The contributions by O. W. are entitled "Literary Notes" of which there are six articles. — Intentions, 12mo, paper covers, sewn, 212pp., out of print, scarce, 8s 6d. Leipzig, 1891. — Salome, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT, translated from the French of OSCAR WILDE, pictorially illustrated by O. W., small 4to, cloth, nice clean copy, edges untrimmed, 25s. This is No. 32 of a limited edition of 350 copies. Is Oscar Wilde still alive? A reporter in circulation in America that Wilde is still alive; a writer to one of the American Journals repeats the words of a woman who said Wilde was living in a Spanish Monastery, and those of a clerk in a book shop in New York who declared he had lately seen Wilde in New York and conversed with him.

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I said that the consideration of this case astounds me. I repeat that it does. It is admitted that Wilde consorted with a gang of the filthiest beasts and vilest blackmailers that London can produce. The conviction of one of them, Taylor, was apparently effected with the utmost ease. Why, then, were the others at large? Why have not these predatory brutes not been hunted out of the fetid lairs before? Why have we had to wait for the fortuitous action of the Marquis of Queensberry, when we have got a highly paid police?

BECAUSE OF SECRECY.

That is the trouble. I sincerely hope that the authorities now see how fatally mistaken is the policy of treating these offences entirely apart from ordinary crimes. I admit that, as doctors tell us, some children are born with unfortunate instincts. I know that bad habits are acquired at school and college. I know that in after life the weed of evil, if unchecked, will grow until it stifles and chokes all the natural good in a man's life. But Society owes certain duties to itself. Some men are born kleptomaniacs, but still we punish the thief. Some men are born with homicidal inclinations, but still we hang the murderer. I do not ask for a red-hot iron wherewith to burn out a neglected cancer. But I do say this. I know, the police authorities know, to what a vast and terrible extent the horror in our midst has spread of recent years. Let the police boldly make one clean sweep of the panders and procurers, the tempters and blackmailers—they could almost do it in a single night. Then let our public school head masters consider whether some different method cannot be adopted with our boys—whether more candour, serious plain speaking, and less foolish secrecy will not be better for the rising generation. Finally, is it not time that our social leaders grasped the nettle as well, and excluded from their houses altogether the effeminate and emasculated youths, who by their every word and gesture justify the assumption that, like their lost leader, they delight in "posing as" creatures whom no decent man would care to touch with a barge-pole? Have not they, with their simperings and silliness, their impertinence and affectation, their mincing manners and performing-dog-like accomplishments, been tolerated long enough? Need there be any more secrecy? Need we hesitate any longer, in private or in public, to tell them what we think of them? I cannot help thinking that the thing could and should be done. In society, husbands should

mildly but firmly insist on revising the visiting lists of their wives. In less exalted spheres we all of us should set our faces against the manner and pretence that make for unrighteousness. There need be no mistake about it. Men—that is, real, live, clean, and decent men—know exactly what I mean.

I shall, of course, await with curiosity any promulgation that the "Queensberry Association" may desire to make, but meantime I hold that the question of the hour is not so much for leagues and associations as for the individual. Our duty is very simple and very clear. Let each one go straight forward and do it, rigorously refusing to have any truck with the "unclean thing," neither persecuting nor palliating, neither terrorising nor tolerating, but only insisting, in season and out, that there must be no more tampering with classically glorified dirtiness. A man must behave as a man. He can call himself a New Hedonist, or a Decadent Poet, or a Blithering Idiot, or anything else he likes, but directly, in word or deed, he commences to "pose" after the manner of the Eliminated One, the sooner he is taken in street or theatre and soundly kicked the better it will be for the English nation and the whole human race.—Your affectionate cousin, RANDOLPH.

THE Oscar Wilde case is discussed at some length by my friend Randolph, and so I will say little about it here. A brilliantly clever if not a great man has disappeared from our midst, and what is chiefly to be feared is that the manner of his going may prove an injury to literature. I dread the reaction that may undo some of the good work accomplished of late years by fearless and outspoken writers. The public is always apt to act a little blindly, and the Press generally encourages it to do so. Already we are talking as if Oscar Wilde and art were one and the same thing. There will be no proper understanding of the world until we acknowledge the fact that every man is simply a conglomeration of divergent components. Had George Stephenson been the vilest of creatures that ever lived the steam engine would still have been a benefit to humanity, and any future discovery to the effect that Galileo was not a moral man will never alter the fact that he was correct as to the movements of the earth. No student of human nature needs to be told how quite apart a man often stands from his labours. Nero could play symphonies upon the violin full of feeling and tenderness, and our sentimental friend Sterne, who cried in print over the death of his donkey, could, when he liked, be extremely hard to his own flesh and blood. Character and intellect are by no means dependent upon one another. It is much nicer to find genius associated with a gentleman, but history teaches us that it can often exist in the body of a blackguard.

It is a subtle thing—this human nature. The Creator does not draw his puppets with the clean-cut finish of an Adelphi dramatist. The villain and the hero, the high-souled gentleman and the low-minded beast, dwell together within the bones of every living man. According to the balance of their position so the man appears to his neighbours. Which ever side of himself he allows the greatest license to will grow to be the predominating partner. In the late Robert Louis Stevenson's wonderful picture, Hyde was at first unnoticed by Dr. Jekyll's companions, hidden as he was behind the respectable and more ample exterior of the doctor. I very much fear there is a Hyde—two or three Hydes—hidden away in most of us. The lesson that a man like Wilde teaches us is to keep them in subjection, to crush down, as Tennyson advised us, "the ape and the tiger" that we can never quite get rid of. The evil that is in us resembles the genie in the "Arabian Nights." It can be bottled up into a small compass, and then it will interfere with us but very slightly, but once, from carelessness or over-indulgence, let the cover off a little, and we are face to face with a monster before whom we are powerless. It is the old, old lesson of self-control, without which every man is a pitiable slave to his own devils.

MEANWHILE, the questions of art and literature had better be left out of the case. There are criminals among artists, there are criminals among priests. To blame any school of art for the production of an Oscar Wilde would be like blaming Christianity for the horrors of a fourteenth century nunnery, or tracing the cruelties of the Inquisition to the teachings of the New Testament. Nothing that a man professes shall ever save him or injure him. A man stands or falls, lives or dies, individually. To blame art for the crime of an artist is in keeping with the teaching of the day, which seeks to remove all responsibility from mankind and to place their souls into the keeping of a Parliament. It is the man Wilde, not art, that has sent a criminal to his punishment, and his downfall casts no slur upon the art to which he was a useful servant. Art offers no excuse for conduct, and conduct cannot condemn art. The two things are as wide apart as a man's body and a man's soul.

8 December, 1900

The Saturday Review.

The death of Mr. Oscar Wilde extinguishes a hope that the broken series of his plays might be resumed. The hope was never, indeed, very strong. Despite the number of his books and plays, Mr. Wilde was not, I think, what one calls a born writer. His writing

OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR

By J. M. STUART-YOUNG

THE art of leaving the stage of life at the apropos moment has yet to be taught. To those who knew him intimately the climax in the career of Oscar Wilde seemed a fitting one. It is one of my fondest recollections that I appreciated the work and the personality of Wilde in his hey-day. "Nerves" is a malady with which we are all familiar to-day. The horny-handed navy seems to be no more immune than the dainty lady in her boudoir; and Oscar Wilde was the acquiescent slave of morbidity. He was diseased in the will: he lacked the desire to be strong and healthy-minded. Human nature is built upon two potential instincts—the predilection for the preservation of the ego, and the predilection for the propagation of the race. In Oscar Wilde these instincts were perverted, and the will diseased. So that the culminating point in the career of this genius was the inevitable one.

It has been suggested that health ought more fittingly to be "catching" than disease. In the world of letters health and sanity are catching; just as much as disease and moral leprosy can be disseminated by a suggestive book. Character is contagious, and pleasurable emotion is prevalent. And it is just because the books of Oscar Wilde are so terribly real in their delineation of his attributes that we value them so highly. The creed of Wilde is summed up in his own words from the witness-box at the Central Criminal Court of London, on Thursday, April 4th, 1895:—

"In writing, I do not consider in any degree the effect of creating or exciting either morality or immorality; I aim neither at good nor evil. I simply endeavour to make a thing with some quality of beauty. There cannot be morality or immorality in art. Either a thing is done well or it is done ill. . . . To reach the reality of self is the principal aim in life, and to arrive at this state of consciousness through pleasure is finer than through pain. An individual truth ceases to be

truth when it is followed by a crowd. What is truth, you ask? It is something so personal as to be only a reality to the person who holds it. A man can never be judged by an accepted code of ethics. Each soul has its own laws. . . . I never gave adoration to anyone except myself."

It is a tremendous day in the history of a man when he realises the truth of the saying, "To the pure, all things are pure." Sin is individual, and morality a condition of the mind.

"I know not whether Laws be right.
Or whether Laws be wrong;
All that we know who lie in gaol
Is that the wall is strong;
And that each day is like a year,
A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law
That Men have made for Man,
Since first Man took his brother's life,
And the sad world began,
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan.

This too I know—and wise it were
If each could know the same—
That every prison that men built
Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
And blind the goodly sun;
And they do well to hide their Hell,
For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of Man
Ever should look upon."

What a cry from the depths! I saw him first in 1894. He was then acknowledged to be one of our most promising playwrights, and "Lady Windermere's Fan" had captivated the critics. I was budding fifteen, and worshipped him as I worshipped many of his contemporaries—poets of the younger generation: Richard Le Gallienne, Stephen Phillips, William Butler Yeats, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Symonds—but with this difference: there was something aroused within me, by the rhymes of Oscar Wilde, which savoured more of astheny than robustness. I was curious to meet him; but will not give

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confined his genius to the glorification of conventional drama, we should have had much reason to be grateful to him. His conventional comedies were as prior to the conventional comedies of other men as "The Importance of Being Earnest" to the every-day farces whose scheme was so frankly accepted in it. The moment of Mr. Wilde's downfall, it was natural at the public sentiment should be one of repulsion. It later, when he was released from prison, they remembered that he had at least suffered the full penalty. Now that he is dead, they will realise also, fully, that was for them involved in his downfall, how lamentable the loss to dramatic literature. MAX.

Wilde (O.) THE WOMAN'S WORLD, edited by OSCAR WILDE, portions of two different volumes being bound together in one vol., being pp. 115-664 and 1-112 of the next volume, with hundreds of illustrations, imp. 8vo, half roan, 10s 6d.
The contributions by O. W. are entitled "Literary Notes" of which there are six articles.
— Intentions, 12mo, paper covers, sewn, 212pp., out of print, scarce, 8s 6d. Leipzig, 1891
— Salome, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT, translated from the French of OSCAR WILDE, pictorial by A. BEARDSLEY, small 4to, cloth, nice clean copy, edges untrimmed, 25s.
This is No. 22 of a limited edition of 250 copies.
Is Oscar Wilde still alive? A report is in circulation in America that Wilde is still alive; a writer to one of the American Journals repeats the words of a woman, who said Wilde was living in a Spanish Monastery, and those of a clerk in a book shop in New York who declared he had lately seen Wilde in New York and conversed with him.

Public Opinion. 13 Oct 1905.

La Jemmesse, who was sent at the funeral of Helme. mentions that the unlucky number was also repeated the dead poet tells us that thirteen

Last days. The poet put a bar on the Boulevarders were "sports," The dandy of "green aster went to instruct ance, who was so rich et in verse and prose, r days, now swaggered -made suit from the ds were badly mani- was unable to write; his only audience were ho paid his reckoning is left of him was his ue eyes, like those of ly in that place. He es, nor true friends," erted him. One day isher of the Journal, for him every week. the noise which the ure to score a success. p. "Thank you," he h my successes before the articles were never

nobler aspect of his "went his desire to eems to have increased y. . . . One evening waiter brings him a refuses to take them, ore favour. "No, let ? The waiter goes to his return Mr. Wilde piece. Then the poet contemptuous 'Pah,' the change, he waves hole. . . . That may igarettes are good!" and continues, "were who witnessed every-out tears in his eyes. ", which lasted five from his suffering. holic. . . . The hotel hose miserable places ar papers 'Houses of ; of a porter led me corridor. At last the uck my nostrils. An gular room. I stood ish, emaciated face, growth of a beard in profound contem- agony, still clutched is no one to watch by they sent him some reet pierced the thin odour filled the air. nd! I bethought me was wont to throng ong whom there were nes of the aristocracy He seemed then like all the treasures that nd now. . . ." M. the funeral. Ernest

mildly but firmly insist on revising the visiting lists of their wives. In less exalted spheres we all of us should set our faces against the manner and pretence that make for unrighteousness. There need be no mistake about it. Men—that is, real, live, clean, and decent men—know exactly what I mean.

I shall, of course, await with curiosity any promulgation that the "Queensberry Association" may desire to make, but meantime I hold that the question of the hour is not so much for leagues and associations as for the individual. Our duty is very simple and very clear. Let each one go straight forward and do it, rigorously refusing to be deterred by any

afterwards explaining to the audience his motive. Failing this he left the now celebrated card at the Albemarle Club. I have every reason to believe that he did not through any deliberate forethought select the precise wording of the phrase he wrote on that card. Yet undoubtedly his accidental choice of the word "pose" was Oscar Wilde's undoing. All he had to prove when indicted for libel was—not that Wilde "was" undesirable, but that he "posed as" being undesirable. Now, even at this stage of the proceedings, had Wilde done nothing it is probable that he would have only had to fear a personal encounter with the Marquis. Sooner or later his head would have been punched. That was certain. But the evil day, with a little care, could have been indefinitely postponed. Knowing, however, the kind of life that Wilde led, and knowing that "posing" was all the Marquis had to prove, it was little short of insanity on Wilde's part to bring his first action. The collapse of his case was inevitable. On the advice of so eminent a lawyer as Sir Edward Clarke he had to consent to a verdict which in effect was an official confirmation of Lord Queensberry's assertion. Such a verdict meant social damnation. On the night before that verdict was given, when the end was perfectly clear, Wilde could have bolted, but he didn't. Next day he was arrested. He was tried, and the jury disagreed.

OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR

I am still able to think of our friendship with vigour and regret. He was a poet of the first water, exuberant, fantastic, tuneful. I was too young in 1895 to gauge the weighty import of the trial, nor do I wish to condemn him now. There was in him,

the most innocent of words, if the listener be but of immoral calibre. Art does not conceal—it reveals. One is inclined to think that modern wit (as demonstrated in our music-halls) has nothing to reveal, so simply makes a vulgar show of covering something which does not exist. The references to things sensual, in our modern plays and poems, are generally as stupid as the thoughts are gross. How we long for the refreshing avowal of a Wilde, instead of the inane evasion of an intricate situation. English ladies, who would look askance at a Palais Royal face, will shake their undraped shoulders in high glee at the suggestiveness of a problem play. The re-

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That he was poor I knew, and that he would have difficulty in continuing his

"Do not, I pray you," he cried. "Of what use to me was the namby-pamby stuff of Reading Gaol? During those first few weeks I lived in a Hell of thought. I have suffered almost all that a man can suffer—except that" (he pointed to the "Ballad" lines "The man had killed the thing he loved and so he had to die") "and I am inclined to the belief that we find our surest sense of life in poignant pain. The

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Renaud was unable to attend the funeral. Ernest

Wildes (O.) **THE WOMAN'S WORLD**, edited by OSCAR WILDE, portions of two different volumes being bound together in one vol., leather pp., 115-664 and 1-112 of the next volume, with hundreds of illustrations, imp. 8vo., half cloth, the 6d. 1889

— The contributions by O. W. are entitled "Literary Notes" of which there are six articles.

— **Intentions**, 12mo., paper covers, sewn, 212pp., out of print, scarce, 8s 6d Leipzig, 1891

— **Salomé, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT**, translated from the French of OSCAR WILDE, picture book, 20 pp., 12mo., cloth, 25c

— **THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**, small 4to., very nice clean copy, edges untrimmed, 25s

— This is the 2d. of a series of editions of 500 copies.

— **Is Oscar Wilde still alive?** A report is in circulation in America that Wilde is still alive; a writer to one of the American Journals repeats the words of a woman who said Wilde was living in a Paris restaurant; and a clerk in a book shop in New York who declared he had lately seen Wilde in New York and conversed with him.

THE RUMINATIONS OF RANDOLPH.

MY DEAR DICK,—Oscar Wilde and Henry Irving were, by a curious and dramatic coincidence, the two people most talked about on the Queen's Birthday.

To each of them was given the opportunity of adorning their respective spheres in the theatrical universe. Our morning papers on Saturday announced that the long and honourable career of Henry Irving was crowned by the conspicuous honour of knighthood. In the "Extra Specials" of that night we read that Oscar Wilde had been condemned to pass two years in hard labour for having committed certain offences which came within the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

For myself, I turned into the Lyceum for half an hour, just to listen, when the performance was actually stopped by the great shout of congratulation that welcomed the first entrance of "Sir Henry." Yet, through all those cheers I seemed to hear the dull rumble of the prison van in which Oscar Wilde made his last exit—to Holloway. While the great actor-manager stood in the plenitude of position bowing, and bowing again, to countless friends and admirers, again there rose before my eyes the last ghastly scene at the Old Bailey—I heard the voice of the foreman in its low but steady answer, "Guilty," "Guilty," "Guilty," as count after full count was rehearsed by the clerk—I heard again that last awful admonition from the judge. I remembered it how there had flitted through my mind the recollection of a night at the St. James's, the cigarette, and the to green carnation, as the prisoner, broken, beaten, tottering, tried to steady himself against the dock rail and when asked in a strange, dry, ghost-like voice if he might not address the judge. Then came the volley of hisses, the kn prison warders, the rapid break-up of the Court, the diff hurry into the blinding sunshine outside, where some half-Jude score garishly dressed, loose women of the town fr danced on the pavement a kind of carmagnole of Let rejoicing at the verdict. "He'll ave 'is air cut regglar mos now," says one of them; and the others laughed the stridently. I came away. I did not laugh, for the and matter is much too serious for laughter.

The more I think about the case of Oscar Wilde, out my dear Dick, the more astounding does the whole thing seem to me. So far as the man himself is concerned, was it would be charitable to assume that he is not quite Fra sane. Without considering—for the moment—the moral aspect of the matter, here was a man who must have known that the commission of certain acts constituted in the eye of the Law a criminal offence. But no thought of wife or children, no regard, to put it selfishly, for his own brilliant prospects, could induce him to curb a depraved appetite which led him—a gentleman and a scholar—to consort with the vilest and most depraved scum of the town. Knowing, then, the sort of life he led, knowing the character of his companions, how could he feel surprise when the Marquis of Queensberry objected to his acquaintance with Lord Alfred Douglas? The most ordinary precaution for his own safety should have prompted him to do what the noble Marquis wanted, and drop his beloved "Bosely." Instead of this, he went flaring and flaunting about with that silly young man, until his father came to hear of the goings on at the Savoy Hotel, where the management had very plainly hinted to Lord Alfred that he was no longer a desirable patron.

Lord Queensberry then set out on a definite crusade. On the first night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, George Alexander, fearing a public scandal, exerted his utmost endeavours to keep Lord Queensberry out of his theatre. And he succeeded. Had he not done so Lord Queensberry intended, when Oscar Wilde took his "call," to get on to the stage and thrash him there and then,

afterwards explaining to the audience his motive. Failing this he left the now celebrated card at the Albemarle Club. I have every reason to believe that he did not through any deliberate forethought select the precise wording of the phrase he wrote on that card. Yet undoubtedly his accidental choice of the word "pose" was Oscar Wilde's undoing. All he had to prove when indicted for libel was—not that Wilde "was" undesirable, but that he "posed as" being undesirable. Now, even at this stage of the proceedings, had Wilde done nothing it is probable that he would have only had to fear a personal encounter with the Marquis. Sooner or later his head would have been punched. That was certain. But the evil day, with a little care, could have been indefinitely postponed. Knowing, however, the kind of life that Wilde led, and knowing that "posing" was all the Marquis had to prove, it was little short of insanity on Wilde's part to bring his first action. The collapse of his case was inevitable. On the advice of so eminent a lawyer as Sir Edward Clarke he had to consent to a verdict which in effect was an official confirmation of Lord Queensberry's assertion. Such a verdict meant social damnation. On the night before that verdict was given, when the end was perfectly clear, Wilde could have bolted, but he didn't. Next day he was arrested. He was tried, and the jury disagreed.

TO-DAY.

At this time a curious development occurred. In many quarters a sort of sympathy arose for Wilde. It was felt that he had committed social suicide. He was no longer possible. He could not be admitted into decent houses. Respectable managers could not produce his plays. His name would be a bar to the publication of a book or article. No useful purpose would be served by insisting on the penalty of imprisonment. It was known that when he came out on bail he was refused admission at two hotels; he dared not show himself in the street—

hardly at about his tumbler of

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OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR

only real passions, whether they be pleasurable or tormenting, are frenzies of the brain. Feeling vanishes once it is realised. There are moments in the lives of all when we become conscious of being but idle dolls in the hands of some strange incomprehensible Force, and my imprisonment has been one long chain of such terrible moments of consciousness.

I doubt whether I should be right in giving expression to all his sentiments that night. When I left him he was crouching softly over the fire, a cigarette between his lips. We had been talking as of old, and I had quoted several of my favorite pieces of imagery. I looked back at him, noting again his clear-cut profile, the sunken forehead, the mobile mouth.

He glanced round, and shid musingly: "Good-bye, Jackie. Luck to you! Don't let my thoughts run away with you. Each soul is the centre of the universe, remember. High or low, rich or poor, each soul see faults in its contemporaries. And the hunchback, deformed, hideous, is right in declaring his lack of esteem when he views the plaster-cast of Apollo. Don't altogether forget me in England."

I did not see him again, nor do I know how he passed his last few days. Let us realise how much of infinite pain, how much soul-distraction, how much self-condemnation went to make up his books, and appreciate and sympathise—not avoid and reprove.

Even in declaring himself a decadent, Oscar Wilde was a man to be loved. As "Heart's Brother" he was known to the favoured few who were admitted into the inner circle of his life. The most precious poet is not he who brings the laughter bubbling to our lips; nor is it he who moves us to tears by his pathos. It is he who makes his sorrow, his pain, his passionate longings most beautiful and most musical to our ears. It is he into whose rhymes has crept that incommunicable something called "self": that element of aesthetic delight in one's own attributes which would render a dunghill full of sweet odours. What Keats calls the "sensual life of verse" must rule the fancy of every writer of poetry. Edgar Allan Poe was occasionally drunk. Oscar Wilde was occasionally a moral debauchee; but what

Then let our public school head masters consider whether some different method cannot be adopted with our boys—whether more candour, serious plain speaking, and less foolish secrecy will not be better for the rising generation. Finally, is it not time that our social leaders grasped the nettle as well, and excluded from their houses altogether the effeminate and emasculated youths, who by their every word and gesture justify the assumption that, like their lost leader, they delight in "posing as" creatures whom no decent man would care to touch with a barge-pole? Have not they, with their simpering and silliness, their impertinence and affectation, their mincing manners and performing-dog-like accomplishments, been tolerated long enough? Need there be any more secrecy? Need we hesitate any longer, in private or in public, to tell them what we think of them? I cannot help thinking that the thing could and should be done. In society, husbands should

JUNE 1, 1895.

mildly but firmly insist on revising the visiting lists their wives. In less exalted spheres we all of us should set our faces against the manner and pretence that make for unrighteousness. There need be no mistal about it. Men—that is, real, live, clean, and decent men—know exactly what I mean.

I shall, of course, await with curiosity any promulgation that the "Queensberry Association" may desire to make, but meantime I hold that the question of the hour is not so much for learners and associates

years of sober and restrained labour went to make "Tales of Romance and Fantasy," on the one hand, and the keen epigram of "Intentions" on the other! Which is the true Oscar Wilde—the moral leper, the gibe of the man in the street—or the strenuous artist, the man who cried:—

"Methinks no flower would ever bud in Spring,
But for the lover's lips that kiss, the poet's lips
that sing?"

The morals of the poet are always misrepresented, misunderstood. The most ascetic of our singers lay themselves open to condemnation if we read their lives too critically. The light that beats around every action of the man of note, the frank confession beaming from the thoughts of the poet, reveal the soul itself. I can vouch that the average morality of Oscar Wilde was superior to that of many of his contemporaries. For the poet's imagination must be fervid, and the aesthetic value of Oscar Wilde's work depends less upon the character of the man than upon the genius of the artist. Oscar Wilde is entitled to a niche in the world of letters, and I hope sincerely that the obloquy which has so long obscured his memory will ere long be lifted. In claiming his right to immortality I do not hesitate. The man who could write this Requiescat was not wholly bad:—

"Tread lightly, she is near,
Under the snow;
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.
All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust;
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.
Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew.
Coffin-board, heavy stone
Lie on her breast;
I vex my heart alone,
She is at rest.
Peace, peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet;
All my life's buried here,—
Heap earth upon it."

That God may rest his soul in peace, and give him that true love which he so madly sought, and so wrongly misconceived in this world, is my heart-felt prayer.

and then it will interfere with us but very slightly, but once, from carelessness or over-indulgence, let the cover off a little, and we are face to face with a monster before whom we are powerless. It is the old, old lesson of the

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8 December, 1900

The Saturday Review.

The death of Mr. Oscar Wilde extinguishes a hope that the broken series of his plays might be resumed. The hope was never, indeed, very strong. Despite the number of his books and plays, Mr. Wilde was not, I think, what one calls a born writer. His writing seemed always to be rather an overflow of intellectual and temperamental energy than an inevitable, absorbing function. That he never concentrated himself on any one form of literature is a proof that the art of writing never really took hold of him. He experimented in all forms, his natural genius winning for him, lightly, in every one of them, the success which for most men is won only by a reverent concentration. His native energy having been sapped by a long term of imprisonment, the chance that he would write again was very small. His main motive for writing was lost. He would not, as would the born writer, be likely to find consolation in his art. "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," though it showed that he had not lost his power of writing, was no presage of industry. Obviously, it was written by him with a definite external purpose, not from mere love and necessity of writing. Still, while he lived, there was always the off-chance that he might again essay that art-form which had been the latest to attract him. Somehow, the theatre seems to be fraught with a unique fascination. Modern dramaturgy is the most difficult of the arts, and its rewards (I do not mean its really commercial rewards) seem to be proportionate to its difficulties. To it, but for his downfall, even Mr. Wilde might have devoted himself. But for his death, he might possibly have returned to it. And thus his death is, in a lesser degree than his downfall, a great loss to the drama of our day. His work was distinct from that of most other playwrights in that he was a man who had achieved success

outside the theatre. He was not a mere maker of plays. Taking up dramaturgy when he was no longer a young man, taking it up as a kind of afterthought, he brought to it a knowledge of the world which the life-long playwright seldom possesses. But this was only one point in his advantage. He came as a thinker, a weaver of ideas, and as a wit, and as the master of a literary style. It was, I think, in respect of literary style that his plays were most remarkable. In his books this style was perhaps rather too facile, too rhetorical in its grace. Walter Pater, in one of his few book-reviews, said that in Mr. Wilde's work there was always "the quality of the good talker." This seems to me a very acute criticism. Mr. Wilde's writing suffered by too close a likeness to the flow of speech. But it was this very likeness that gave him in dramatic dialogue as great an advantage over more careful and finer literary stylists as he had over ordinary playwrights with no pretence to style. The dialogue in his plays struck the right mean between literary style and ordinary talk. It was at once beautiful and natural, as dialogue should always be. With this and other advantages, he brought to dramaturgy as keen a sense for the theatre as was possessed by any of his rivals, except Mr. Pinero. Theatrical construction, sense of theatrical effects, were his by instinct. I notice that one of the newspapers says that his plays were "devoid of consideration as drama," and suggests that he had little or no talent for construction. Such criticism as this merely shows that what Ben Jonson called "the dull ass's hoof" must have its backward fling. In point of fact, Mr. Wilde's instinct for construction was so strong as to be a disadvantage. The very ease of his manipulation tempted him to trickiness, tempted him to accept current conventions which, if he had had to puzzle things out laboriously and haltingly, he would surely have discarded, finding for himself a simpler and more honest technique. His three serious comedies were marred by staginess. In "An Ideal Husband" the staginess was most apparent, least so in "A Woman of No Importance." In the latter play, Mr. Wilde allowed the psychological idea to work itself out almost unmolested, and the play was, in my opinion, by far the most truly dramatic of his plays. It was along these lines that we, in the early 'nineties, hoped Mr. Wilde would ultimately work. But, even if he had confined his genius to the glorification of conventional drama, we should have had much reason to be grateful to him. His conventional comedies were as superior to the conventional comedies of other men as was "The Importance of Being Earnest" to the everyday farces whose scheme was so frankly accepted in it. At the moment of Mr. Wilde's downfall, it was natural that the public sentiment should be one of repulsion. But later, when he was released from prison, they remembered that he had at least suffered the full penalty. And now that he is dead, they will realise also, fully, what was for them involved in his downfall, how lamentable the loss to dramatic literature. MAX.

Public Opinion. 13 Oct. 1905.

La Jeunesse, who was one of the few who accompanied the dead poet to the graveyard at Bayeux, tells us that thirteen persons followed the funeral procession. The translator in *Current Literature* mentions that the unlucky number was also represented at the funeral of Heine.

details in regard to Wilde's last days. The poet, so we are told, used to frequent a bar on the Boulevard des Italiens, whose customers were "sports," rather than literary men: "The dandy of 'green carnation' memories, the master went to instruct duchesses in the rules of elegance, who was so rich and so beautiful, the great poet in verse and prose, the wonderful talker of former days, now swaggered grotesquely in an old, ready-made suit from the 'Belle Jardinière'." His hands were badly manicured, his cuffs celluloid. He was unable to write; his brain was tired out, and his only audience were the old habitués of the bar, who paid his reckoning out of curiosity. All that was left of him was his golden voice and his great blue eyes, like those of a child. I saw him frequently in that place. He had neither money, nor clothes, nor true friends. Yet his old pride had not deserted him. One day Fernand Xau, the late publisher of the *Journal*, asked him to write an article for him every week. He added brutally, that after the noise which the trial had made he would be sure to score a success. But here Mr. Wilde flashed up. "Thank you," he said, "I am quite satisfied with my successes before that event." And, of course, the articles were never written.

"Side by side with this nobler aspect of his nature," M. Renaud writes, "went his desire to impress people; which in fact seems to have increased in proportion with his misery. . . . One evening he asks for cigarettes. The waiter brings him a package of 'Maryland.' He refuses to take them, nor does another brand find more favour. 'No, let me have some with gold tips!' The waiter goes to get the brand desired, and on his return Mr. Wilde hands him a twenty-franc gold piece. Then the poet lights a cigarette and utters a contemptuous 'Pah.' When the waiter returns with the change, he waves his hand. 'Ah, keep the whole. . . . That may give me the illusion that the cigarettes are good!'"

"His last months," M. Renaud continues, "were terrible. One of my colleagues who witnessed everything cannot speak of it without tears in his eyes. A severe attack of influenza, which lasted five days, freed the great writer from his suffering. Before he died he became a Catholic. . . . The hotel in which he died was one of those miserable places which are called in the popular papers 'Houses of Crime.' A veritable Hercules of a porter led me through a long, evil-smelling corridor. At last the odour of some disinfectant struck my nostrils. An open door. A little quadrangular room. I stood before the corpse. His whitish, emaciated face, strangely altered through the growth of a beard after death, seemed to be lost in profound contemplation. A hand, cramped in agony, still clutched the dirty bed cloth. There was no one to watch by his body. Only much later they sent him some flowers. The noise of the street pierced the thin walls of the building. A stale odour filled the air. Ah, what loneliness, what an end! I bethought me of the army of courtiers that was wont to throng about him in London, and among whom there were always the most celebrated names of the aristocracy both of blood and of letters. He seemed then like a mighty monarch, lord over all the treasures that civilisation can bestow. And now. . . ." M. Renaud was unable to attend the funeral. Ernest

Wilde (O.) THE WOMAN'S WORLD, edited by OSCAR WILDE, portions of two different volumes being bound together in one vol., being pp. 115-664 and 1-112 of the next volume, with hundreds of illustrations, imp. 8vo, half roan, 10s 6d 1889

The contributions by O. W. are entitled "Literary Notes" of which there are six articles. — Intentions, 12mo, paper covers, sewn, 212pp., out of print, scarce, 8s 6d Leipzig, 1891 — Salome, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT, translated from the French of OSCAR WILDE, pictured by A. BEARDSLEY, small 4to, cloth, nice clean copy, edges untrimmed, 25s

This is No. 32 of a limited edition of 250 copies. — Is Oscar Wilde still Alive? A report is in circulation in America that Wilde is still alive; a writer to one of the American Journals repeats the words of a woman who said Wilde was living in a Spanish Monastery, and those of a clerk in a book shop in New York who declared he had lately seen Wilde in New York and conversed with him.

THE RUMINATIONS OF RANDOLPH.

MY DEAR DICK,—Oscar Wilde and Henry Irving were, by a curious and dramatic coincidence, the two people most talked about on the Queen's Birthday.

To each of them was given the opportunity of adorning their respective spheres in the theatrical universe. Our morning papers on Saturday announced that the long and honourable career of Henry Irving was crowned by the conspicuous honour of knighthood. In the "Extra Specials" of that night we read that Oscar Wilde had been condemned to pass two years in hard labour for having committed certain offences which came within the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

For myself, I turned into the Lyceum for half an hour, just to listen, when the performance was actually stopped by the great shout of congratulation that welcomed the first entrance of "Sir Henry." Yet, through all those cheers I seemed to hear the dull rumble of the prison van in which Oscar Wilde made his last exit—to Holloway. While the great actor-manager stood in the plenitude of position bowing and bowing again, to countless friends and admirers, again there rose before my eyes the last ghastly scene at the Old Bailey—I heard the voice of the foreman in its low but steady pulsation, "Guilty," "Guilty," "Guilty," as count after full count was rehearsed by the clerk—I heard again that last awful admonition from the judge. I remembered it how there had flitted through my mind the recollection of a night at the St. James's, the cigarette, and the too green carnation, as the prisoner, broken, beaten, tottering, tried to steady himself against the dock rail and when asked in a strange, dry, ghost-like voice if he might not address the judge. Then came the volley of hisses, the knifing into the blinding sunshine outside, wheresome-half-Jude score garishly dressed, loose women of the town France danced on the pavement a kind of carnagole of Let rejoicing at the verdict. "He'll have his air cut regular now," says one of them; and the others laughed the stridently. I came away. I did not laugh, for the matter is more too serious for laughter.

The more I think about the case of Oscar Wilde, out my dear Dick, the more astounding does the whole thing seem to me. So far as the man himself is concerned, was it would be charitable to assume that he is not quite sane. Without considering—for the moment—the moral aspect of the matter, here was a man who must have known that the commission of certain acts constituted in the eye of the Law a criminal offence. But no thought of wife or children, no regard, to put it selfishly, for his own brilliant prospects, could induce him to curb a depraved appetite which led him—a gentleman and a scholar—to consort with the vilest and most depraved scum of the town. Knowing, then, the sort of life he led, knowing the character of his companions, how could he feel surprise when the Marquis of Queensberry objected to his acquaintance with Lord Alfred Douglas? The most ordinary precaution for his own safety should have prompted him to do what the noble Marquis wanted, and drop his beloved "Boscy." Instead of this, he went flaring and flaunting about with that silly young man, until his father came to hear of the goings on at the Savoy Hotel, where the management had very plainly hinted to Lord Alfred that he was no longer a desirable patron.

Lord Queensberry then set out on a definite crusade. On the first night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, George Alexander, fearing a public scandal, exerted his utmost endeavours to keep Lord Queensberry out of his theatre. And he succeeded. Had he not done so Lord Queensberry intended, when Oscar Wilde took his "call," to get on to the stage and thrash him there and then,

afterwards explaining to the audience his motive. Failing this he left the now celebrated card at the Albemarle Club. I have every reason to believe that he did not through any deliberate forethought select the precise wording of the phrase he wrote on that card. Yet undoubtedly his accidental choice of the word "pose" was Oscar Wilde's undoing. All he had to prove when indicted for libel was—not that Wilde "was" undesirable, but that he "posed as" being undesirable. Now, even at this stage of the proceedings, had Wilde done nothing it is probable that he would have only had to fear a personal encounter with the Marquis. Sooner or later his head would have been punched. That was certain. But the evil day, with a little care, could have been indefinitely postponed. Knowing, however, the kind of life that Wilde led, and knowing that "posing" was all the Marquis had to prove, it was little short of insanity on Wilde's part to bring his first action. The collapse of his case was inevitable. On the advice of so eminent a lawyer as Sir Edward Clarke he had to consent to a verdict which in effect was an official confirmation of Lord Queensberry's assertion. Such a verdict meant social damnation. On the night before that verdict was given, when the end was perfectly clear, Wilde could have bolted, but he didn't. Next day he was arrested. He was tried, and the jury disagreed.

TO-DAY.

At this time a curious development occurred. In many quarters a sort of sympathy arose for Wilde. It was felt that he had committed social suicide. He was no longer possible. He could not be admitted into decent houses. Respectable managers could not produce his plays. His name would be a bar to the publication of a book or article. No useful purpose would be served by insisting on the penalty of imprisonment. It was known that when he came out on bail he was refused admission at two hotels; he dared not show himself in the streets. He was broken in health.

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OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR

only real passions, whether they be pleasurable or tormenting, are frenzies of the brain. Feeling vanishes once it is realised. There are moments in the lives of all when we become conscious of being but idle dolls in the hands of some strange incomprehensible Force, and my imprisonment has been one long chain of such terrible moments of consciousness.

I doubt whether I should be right in giving expression to all his sentiments that night. When I left him he was crouching softly over the fire, a cigarette between his lips. We had been talking as of old, and I had quoted several of my favorite pieces of imagery. I looked back at him, noting again his clear-cut profile, the sunken forehead, the mobile mouth.

He glanced round, and said musingly: "Good-bye, Jackie. Luck to you! Don't let my thoughts run away with you. Each soul is the centre of the universe, remember. High or low, rich or poor, each soul see faults in its contemporaries. And the hunchback, deformed, hideous, is right in declaring his lack of esteem when he views the plaster-cast of Apollo. Don't altogether forget me in England."

I did not see him again, nor do I know how he passed his last few days. Let us realise how much of infinite pain, how much soul-distraction, how much self-condemnation went to make up his books, and appreciate and sympathise—not avoid and reprove.

Even in declaring himself a decadent, Oscar Wilde was a man to be loved. As "Heart's Brother" he was known to the favoured few who were admitted into the inner circle of his life. The most precious poet is not he who brings the laughter bubbling to our lips; nor is it he who moves us to tears by his pathos. It is he who makes his sorrow, his pain, his passionate longings most beautiful and most musical to our ears. It is he into whose rhymes has crept that incommunicable something called "self": that element of aesthetic delight in one's own attributes which would render a dunghill full of sweet odours. What Keats calls the "sensitive life of verse" must rule the fancy of every writer of poetry. Edgar Allan Poe was occasionally drunk. Oscar Wilde was occasionally a moral debauchee; but what

mildly but firmly insist on revising the visiting lists of their wives. In less exalted spheres we all of us should set our faces against the manner and pretence that make for unrighteousness. There need be no mistake about it. Men—that is, real, live, clean, and decent men—know exactly what I mean.

I shall, of course, await with curiosity any promulgation that the "Queensberry Association" may desire to make, but meantime I hold that the question of the hour is not so much for leagues and associations

years of sober and restrained labour went to make "Tales of Romance and Fantasy," on the one hand, and the keen epigram of "Intentions" on the other! Which is the true Oscar Wilde—the moral leper, the gibe of the man in the street—or the strenuous artist, the man who cried:—

"Methinks no flower would ever bud in Spring,
But for the lover's lips that kiss, the poet's lips
that sing?"

The morals of the poet are always misrepresented, misunderstood. The most ascetic of our singers lay themselves out to condemnation if we read their lives too critically. The light that beats around every action of the man of note, the frank confession beaming from the thoughts of the poet, reveal the soul itself. I can vouch that the average morality of Oscar Wilde was superior to that of many of his contemporaries. For the poet's imagination must be fervid, and the aesthetic value of Oscar Wilde's work depends less upon the character of the man than upon the genius of the artist. Oscar Wilde is entitled to a niche in the world of letters, and I hope sincerely that the obloquy which has so long obscured his memory will ere long be lifted. In claiming his right to immortality I do not hesitate. The man who could write this Requiescat was not wholly bad:—

"Tread lightly, she is near,
Under the snow;
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.
All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust;
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.
Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew.
Coffin-board, heavy stone
Lie on her breast;
I vex my heart alone,
She is at rest.
Peace, peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet;
All my life's buried here,—
Heap earth upon it."

That God may rest his soul in peace, and give him that true love which he so madly sought, and so wrongly misconceived in this world, is my heart-felt prayer.

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The death of Mr. Oscar Wilde extinguishes a hope that the broken series of his plays might be resumed. The hope was never, indeed, very strong. Despite the number of his books and plays, Mr. Wilde was not, I think, what one calls a born writer. His writing seemed always to be rather an overflow of intellectual and temperamental energy than an inevitable, absorbing function. That he never concentrated himself on any one form of literature is a proof that the art of writing never really took hold of him. He experimented in all forms, his natural genius winning for him, lightly, in every one of them, the success which for most men is won only by a reverent concentration. His native energy having been sapped by a long term of imprisonment, the chance that he would write again was very small. His main motive for writing was lost. He would not, as would the born writer, be likely to find consolation in his art. "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," though it showed that he had not lost his power of writing, was no presage of industry. Obviously, it was written by him with a definite external purpose, not from mere love and necessity of writing. Still, while he lived, there was always the off-chance that he might again essay that art-form which had been the latest to attract him. Somehow, the theatre seems to be fraught with a unique fascination. Modern dramaturgy is the most difficult of the arts, and its rewards (I do not mean its really commercial rewards) seem to be proportionate to its difficulties. To it, but for his downfall, even Mr. Wilde might have devoted himself. But for his death, he might possibly have returned to it. And thus his death is, in a lesser degree than his downfall, a great loss to the drama of our day. His work was distinct from that of most other playwrights in that he was a man who had achieved success

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How Oscar Wilde Died.

THE report dealt with at length in the New York *Critic* for July that Oscar Wilde is living is emphatically denied. "Inasmuch as the Americans seem to have conceived the strange idea that Oscar Wilde is still alive," remarks the Paris correspondent of the *Berlin Tageblatt*, "it is perhaps well to state how he died." The *Tageblatt* correspondent (as quoted by the October *Current Literature*, New York), goes on to tell of a number of people in Paris who knew the poet after his downfall, some of whom saw him on his death-bed and followed his funeral train. The correspondent quotes M. Joseph Renaud, the French translator of "Intentions." The book is the one in which Wilde laid down his artistic creed, and in a new preface M. Renaud gives explicit details in regard to Wilde's last days. The poet, so we are told, used to frequent a bar on the Boulevard des Italiens, whose customers were "sports," rather than literary men: "The dandy of 'green carnation' memories, the master went to instruct duchesses in the rules of elegance, who was so rich and so beautiful, the great poet in verse and prose, the wonderful talker of former days, now swaggered grotesquely in an old, ready-made suit from the 'Belle Jardinière'! His hands were badly manicured, his cuffs celluloid. He was unable to write; his brain was tired out, and his only audience were the old habitués of the bar, who paid his reckoning out of curiosity. All that was left of him was his golden voice and his great blue eyes, like those of a child. I saw him frequently in that place. He had neither money, nor clothes, nor true friends." Yet his old pride had not deserted him. One day Fernand Xau, the late publisher of the *Journal*, asked him to write an article for him every week. He added brutally, that after the noise which the trial had made he would be sure to score a success. But here Mr. Wilde flashed up. "Thank you," he said, "I am quite satisfied with my successes before that event." And, of course, the articles were never written.

"Side by side with this nobler aspect of his nature," M. Renaud writes, "went his desire to impress people; which in fact seems to have increased in proportion with his misery. . . . One evening he asks for cigarettes. The waiter brings him a package of 'Maryland.' He refuses to take them, nor does another brand find more favour. 'No, let me have some with gold tips!' The waiter goes to get the brand desired, and on his return Mr. Wilde hands him a twenty-franc gold piece. Then the poet lights a cigarette and utters a contemptuous 'Pah.' When the waiter returns with the change, he waves his hand. 'Ah, keep the whole. . . . That may give me the illusion that the cigarettes are good!'"

"His last months," M. Renaud continues, "were terrible. One of my colleagues who witnessed everything cannot speak of it without tears in his eyes. A severe attack of influenza, which lasted five days, freed the great writer from his suffering. Before he died he became a Catholic. . . . The hotel in which he died was one of those miserable places which are called in the popular papers 'Houses of Crime.' A veritable Hercules of a porter led me through a long, evil-smelling corridor. At last the odour of some disinfectant struck my nostrils. An open door. A little quadrangular room. I stood before the corpse. His whitish, emaciated face, strangely altered through the growth of a beard after death, seemed to be lost in profound contemplation. A hand, cramped in agony, still clutched the dirty bed cloth. There was no one to watch by his body. Only much later they sent him some flowers. The noise of the street pierced the thin walls of the building. A stale odour filled the air. Ah, what loneliness, what an end! I bethought me of the army of courtiers that was wont to throng about him in London, and among whom there were always the most celebrated names of the aristocracy both of blood and of letters. He seemed then like a mighty monarch, lord over all the treasures that civilisation can bestow. And now. . . ." M. Renaud was unable to attend the funeral. Ernest

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For myself, I turned into the Lyceum for half an hour, just to listen, when the performance was actually stopped by the great shout of congratulation that welcomed the first entrance of "Sir Henry." Yet, through all those cheers I seemed to hear the dull rumble of the prison van in which Oscar Wilde made his last exit—to Holloway. While the great actor-manager stood in the plenitude of position bowing, and bowing again, to countless friends and admirers, again there rose before my eyes the last ghastly scene at the Old Bailey—I heard the voice of the foreman in its low but steady answer, "Guilty," "Guilty," "Guilty," as count after count was rehearsed by the clerk—I heard again that last awful admonition from the judge. I remembered it how there had flitted through my mind the recollection of a night at the St. James's, the cigarette, and the to green carnation, as the prisoner, broken, beaten, tottering, tried to steady himself against the dock rail and asked in a strange, dry, ghost-like voice if he might not address the judge. Then came the volley of hisses, the knock of prison warders, the rapid break-up of the Court, the hurry into the blinding sunshine outside, where some half-score garishly dressed, loose women of the town danced on the pavement a kind of carmagnole of Let rejoicing at the verdict. "He'll 'ave 'is 'air cut regglar mos now," says one of them; and the others laughed the stridently. I came away. I did not laugh, for the matter is much too serious for laughter.

The more I think about the case of Oscar Wilde, out my dear Dick, the more astounding does the whole thing seem to me. So far as the man himself is concerned, it would be charitable to assume that he is not quite sane. Without considering—for the moment—the moral aspect of the matter, here was a man who must have known that the commission of certain acts constituted in the eye of the Law a criminal offence. But no thought of wife or children, no regard, to put it selfishly, for his own brilliant prospects, could induce him to curb a depraved appetite which led him—a gentleman and a scholar—to consort with the vilest and most depraved scum of the town. Knowing, then, the sort of life he led, knowing the character of his companions, how could he feel surprise when the Marquis of Queensberry objected to his acquaintance with Lord Alfred Douglas? The most ordinary precaution for his own safety should have prompted him to do what the noble Marquis wanted, and drop his beloved "Bosey." Instead of this, he went flaring and flaunting about with that silly young man, until his father came to hear of the goings on at the Savoy Hotel, where the management had very plainly hinted to Lord Alfred that he was no longer a desirable patron.

Lord Queensberry then set out on a definite crusade. On the first night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, George Alexander, fearing a public scandal, exerted his utmost endeavours to keep Lord Queensberry out of his theatre. And he succeeded. Had he not done so Lord Queensberry intended, when Oscar Wilde took his "call," to get on to the stage and thrash him there and then, afterwards explaining to the audience his motive. Failing this he left the now celebrated card at the Albemarle Club. I have every reason to believe that he did not through any deliberate forethought select the precise wording of the phrase he wrote on that card. Yet undoubtedly his accidental choice of the word "pose" was Oscar Wilde's undoing. All he had to prove when indicted for libel was—not that Wilde "was" undesirable, but that he "posed as" being undesirable. Now, even at this stage of the proceedings, had Wilde done nothing it is probable that he would have only had to fear a personal encounter with the Marquis. Sooner or later his head would have been punched. That was certain. But the evil day, with a little care, could have been indefinitely postponed. Knowing, however, the kind of life that Wilde led, and knowing that "posing" was all the Marquis had to prove, it was little short of insanity on Wilde's part to bring his first action. The collapse of his case was inevitable. On the advice of so eminent a lawyer as Sir Edward Clarke he had to consent to a verdict which in effect was an official confirmation of Lord Queensberry's assertion. Such a verdict meant social damnation. On the night before that verdict was given, the mind was perfectly clear, Wilde could have bolted, but he didn't. Next day he was arrested. He was tried, and the jury disagreed.

At this time a curious development occurred. In many quarters a sort of sympathy arose for Wilde. It was felt that he had committed social suicide. He was no longer possible. He could not be admitted into decent houses. Respectable managers could not produce his plays. His name would be a bar to the publication of a book or article. No useful purpose would be served by insisting on the penalty of imprisonment. It was known that when he came out on bail he was refused admission at two hotels; he dared not show himself in the streets. He was broken in health. He slept hardly at all. He passed the nights pacing restlessly about his room, nervously drinking tumbler after tumbler of water—on one occasion emptying the contents of his washing jug. He had undergone the nervous agony of two trials. Had he fled the country and got safely away, many people would have been glad.

Then came a new wave of feeling due to causes I have already called your attention to. During the first two trials and the Police-court proceedings, there seemed to prevail amongst advocates and authorities alike one great conspiracy of silence. Names were mysteriously written on paper, read by judges, handed to juries, muttered about, but never spoken.

Everyone said, "No names must be mentioned." And what was the consequence? People began to ask why there was all this mystery. What was being hidden? Surely all this fuss must be about something important? Then scandal started, and the most disgraceful and discreditable rumours were circulated; nobody was spared. If illness or business took a man abroad, it was promptly said that he had fled from justice. It was hinted that the authorities were "afraid" to go on with the case for fear of the awful revelations that would follow. I do not know whether the authorities heard of these things. I do not know whether they were moved by them. But I do know that Wilde's last trial was conducted on new and different lines. "If names are written down," said the Judge, "I will read them out." "Quite so," said Sir Frank Lockwood, "that is what I particularly desire. Let us have no secrecy." Taylor, concerning whom the most extraordinary rumours were current, was put into the box and invited to tell all he knew. He wriggled and tried to keep up the "write it down" mystery, but it was of no avail. The Judge insisted on his speaking out; when, behold! the awful and dreaded revelation amounted absolutely to nothing. So far as Wilde was affected, however, the mischief had been done. Sir Frank Lockwood seemed to be saying, "We will show you whether we are afraid to go to the bitter end with this." He fought like a tiger. He out-generalled Sir Edward Clarke at every turn, and now Oscar Wilde is condemned to a punishment which is regarded as the limit that human nature can endure.

I said that the consideration of this case astounds me. I repeat that it does. It is admitted that Wilde consorted with a gang of the filthiest beasts and vilest blackmailers that London can produce. The conviction of one of them, Taylor, was apparently effected with the utmost ease. Why, then, were the others at large? Why have not these predatory brutes not been hunted out of the foetid lairs before? Why have we had to wait for the fortuitous action of the Marquis of Queensberry, when we have got a highly paid police?

BECAUSE OF SECRECY.

That is the trouble. I sincerely hope that the authorities now see how fatally mistaken is the policy of treating these offences entirely apart from ordinary crimes. I admit that, as doctors tell us, some children are born with unfortunate instincts. I know that bad habits are acquired at school and college. I know that in after life the weed of evil, if unchecked, will grow until it stifles and chokes all the natural good in a man's life. But Society owes certain duties to itself. Some men are born kleptomaniacs, but still we punish the thief. Some men are born with homicidal inclinations, but still we hang the murderer. I do not ask for a red-hot iron wherewith to burn out a neglected cancer. But I do say this. I know, the police authorities know, to what a vast and terrible extent the horror in our midst has spread of recent years. Let the police boldly make one clean sweep of the panders and procurers, the tempters and blackmailers—they could almost do it in a single night. Then let our public school head masters consider whether some different method cannot be adopted with our boys—whether more candour, serious plain speaking, and less foolish secrecy will not be better for the rising generation. Finally, is it not time that our social leaders grasped the nettle as well, and excluded from their houses altogether the effeminate and emasculated youths, who by their every word and gesture justify the assumption that, like their lost leader, they delight in "posing as" creatures whom no decent man would care to touch with a barge-pole? Have not they, with their simperings and silliness, their impertinence and affectation, their mincing manners and performing-dog-like accomplishments, been tolerated long enough? Need there be any more secrecy? Need we hesitate any longer, in private or in public, to tell them what we think of them? I cannot help thinking that the thing could and should be done. In society, husbands should

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mildly but firmly insist on revising the visiting lists of their wives. In less exalted spheres we all of us should set our faces against the manner and pretence that make for unrighteousness. There need be no mistake about it. Men—that is, real, live, clean, and decent men—know exactly what I mean.

I shall, of course, await with curiosity any promulgation that the “Queensberry Association” may desire to make, but meantime I hold that the question of the hour is not so much for leagues and associations as for the individual. Our duty is very simple and very clear. Let each one go straight forward and do it, rigorously refusing to have any truck with the “unclean thing,” neither persecuting nor palliating, neither terrorising nor tolerating, but only insisting, in season and out, that there must be no more tampering with classically glorified dirtiness. A man must behave as a man. He can call himself a New Hedonist, or a Decadent Poet, or a Blithering Idiot, or anything else he likes, but directly, in word or deed, he commences to “pose” after the manner of the Eliminated One, the sooner he is taken in street or theatre and soundly kicked the better it will be for the English nation and the whole human race.—Your affectionate cousin,
RANDOLPH.

THE Oscar Wilde case is discussed at some length by my friend Randolph, and so I will say little about it here. A brilliantly clever if not a great man has disappeared from our midst, and what is chiefly to be feared is that the manner of his going may prove an injury to literature. I dread the reaction that may undo some of the good work accomplished of late years by fearless and outspoken writers. The public is always apt to act a little blindly, and the Press generally encourages it to do so. Already we are talking as if Oscar Wilde and art were one and the same thing. There will be no proper understanding of the world until we acknowledge the fact that every man is simply a conglomeration of divergent components. Had George Stephenson been the vilest of creatures that ever lived the steam engine would still have been a benefit to humanity, and any future discovery to the effect that Galileo was not a moral man will never alter the fact that he was correct as to the movements of the earth. No student of human nature needs to be told how quite apart a man often stands from his labours. Nero could play symphonies upon the violin full of feeling and tenderness, and our sentimental friend Sterne, who cried in print over the death of his donkey, could, when he liked, be extremely hard to his own flesh and blood. Character and intellect are by no means dependent upon one another. It is much nicer to find genius associated with a gentleman, but history teaches us that it can often exist in the body of a blackguard.

It is a subtle thing—this human nature. The Creator does not draw his puppets with the clean-cut finish of an Adelphi dramatist. The villain and the hero, the high-souled gentleman and the low-minded beast, dwell together within the bones of every living man. According to the balance of their position so the man appears to his neighbours. Whichever side of himself he allows the greatest license to will grow to be the predominating partner. In the late Robert Louis Stevenson's wonderful picture, Hyde was at first unnoticed by Dr. Jekyll's companions, hidden as he was behind the respectable and more ample exterior of the doctor. I very much fear there is a Hyde—two or three Hydes—hidden away in most of us. The lesson that a man like Wilde teaches us is to keep them in subjection, to crush down, as Tennyson advised us, "the ape and the tiger" that we can never quite get rid of. The evil that is in us resembles the genii in the "Arabian Nights." It can be bottled up into a small compass, and then it will interfere with us but very slightly, but once, from carelessness or over-indulgence, let the cover off a little, and we are face to face with a monster before whom we are powerless. It is the old, old lesson of self-control, without which every man is a pitiable slave to his own devils.

MEANWHILE, the questions of art and literature had better be left out of the case. There are criminals among artists, there are criminals among priests. To blame any school of art for the production of an Oscar Wilde would be like blaming Christianity for the horrors of a fourteenth century nunnery, or tracing the cruelties of the Inquisition to the teachings of the New Testament. Nothing that a man professes shall ever save him or injure him. A man stands or falls, lives or dies, individually. To blame art for the crime of an artist is in keeping with the teaching of the day, which seeks to remove all responsibility from mankind and to place their souls into the keeping of a Parliament. It is the man Wilde, not art, that has sent a criminal to his punishment, and his downfall casts no slur upon the art to which he was a useful servant. Art offers no excuse for conduct, and conduct cannot condemn art. The two things are as wide apart as a man's body and a man's soul.

OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR

By J. M. STUART-YOUNG

THE art of leaving the stage of life at the apropos moment has yet to be taught. To those who knew him intimately the climax in the career of Oscar Wilde seemed a fitting one. It is one of my fondest recollections that I appreciated the work and the personality of Wilde in his hey-day. "Nerves" is a malady with which we are all familiar to-day. The horny-handed navvy seems to be no more immune than the dainty lady in her boudoir; and Oscar Wilde was the acquiescent slave of morbidity. He was diseased in the will: he lacked the desire to be strong and healthy-minded. Human nature is builded upon two potential instincts—the predilection for the preservation of the ego, and the predilection for the propagation of the race. In Oscar Wilde these instincts were perverted, and the will diseased. So that the culminating point in the career of this genius was the inevitable one.

It has been suggested that health ought more fittingly to be "catching" than disease. In the world of letters health and saneness *are* catching; just as much as disease and moral leprosy can be disseminated by a suggestive book. Character is contagious, and pleasurable emotion is prevalent. And it is just because the books of Oscar Wilde are so terribly real in their delineation of his attributes that we value them so highly. The creed of Wilde is summed up in his own words from the witness-box at the Central Criminal Court of London, on Thursday, April 4th, 1895:—

"In writing, I do not consider in any degree the effect of creating or exciting either morality or immorality; I aim neither at good nor evil. I simply endeavour to make a thing with some quality of beauty. There cannot be morality or immorality in art. Either a thing is done well or it is done ill. . . . To reach the reality of self is the principal aim in life, and to arrive at this state of consciousness through pleasure is finer than through pain. An individual truth ceases to be

truth when it is followed by a crowd. What is truth, you ask? It is something so personal as to be only a reality to the person who holds it. A man can never be judged by an accepted code of ethics. Each soul has its own laws. . . . I never gave adoration to anyone except myself."

It is a tremendous day in the history of a man when he realises the truth of the saying, "To the pure, all things are pure." Sin is individual, and morality a condition of the mind.

'I know not whether Laws be right.
Or whether Laws be wrong;
All that we know who lie in gaol
Is that the wall is strong;
And that each day is like a year,
A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law
That Men have made for Man,
Since first Man took his brother's life,
And the sad world began,
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan.

This too I know—and wise it were
If each could know the same—
That every prison that men built
Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
And blind the goodly sun:
And they do well to hide their Hell,
For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of Man
Ever should look upon."

What a cry from the depths! I saw him first in 1894. He was then acknowledged to be one of our most promising playwrights, and "Lady Windermere's Fan" had captivated the critics. I was budding fifteen, and worshipped him as I worshipped many of his contemporaries—poets of the younger generation: Richard Le Gallienne, Stephen Phillips, William Butler Yeats, Laurence Binyon and Arthur Symonds—but with this difference: there was something aroused within me, by the rhymes of Oscar Wilde, which savoured more of asheny than robustness. I was curious to meet him; but will not give

the boyish letter sent to him, in reply to the one in which he thanked me for my admiration. Unfortunately, I have only retained two of his epistles.

In June, 1894, I visited him in London, and had the privilege of listening to his conversation over dinner at the Savoy. There was present, besides myself and Wilde, a young man of about twenty, whom he introduced as "Freddy" Atkins. He seemed to be somewhat embarrassed by our conversation, for with my serious precociousness I insisted upon discussing art and literature. Wilde must have found me vastly amusing, and I was in the seventh heaven of delight. I remember the remark, "I am feeling quite refreshed by you, Jackie. If I only had a boy of your calibre near me oftener, I might be a better man," quite well.

In March, 1895—little did I dream how imminent was the end of Wilde's meteoric career—I saw him again, and we visited Little College Street in company. No breath of immorality had touched me through the friendship of Wilde; and I recall the æsthetic pleasure and luxury of the cosy room, hung with heavy green draperies, with something of the old thrill. I forget the names of those present, but Taylor and Scarfe are two out of the number.

The case is too well-known to be re-told.

Oscar Wilde was born on October 16th, 1856, and was the son of Sir William Wilde, the eminent surgeon and archæologist of Dublin. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and then sent to Oxford, Magdalen College, obtaining the Newdigate prize for English poetry, and taking his degree in 1878. He married in 1884 a daughter of Horace Lloyd, Q.C., and his first volume of poems was published in 1882, when a young man of 26. He had two sons, who still survive. His wife died five years ago.

Oscar Wilde expired in Paris, under the name of Sebastian Melmoth, on November 30th, 1900.

I am still able to think of our friendship with vigour and regret. He was a poet of the first water, exuberant, fantastic, tuneful. I was too young in 1895 to gauge the weighty import of the trial, nor do I wish to condemn him now. There was in him,

as in his work, a suggestion of the unusual, the strange. I cannot help but think that those two years of sordid imprisonment prematurely killed him, and England has lost one of her most gifted singers. The crowd is not capable of judging a man's temperament, and he should have had a jury of literary confreres. Our poets are losing the true ideal—the Beautiful. William Watson sings sweetly, but there is a clamorous note of political discontent in his songs, and his neat sense of epigram and his sudden satire are obscured by his unbelief. Kipling is hidden in the Imperialistic war-cloud, and will soon need to publish a glossary of his slang. Arthur Symonds becomes sickly sensuous. Yeats is shadowy and intangible. Swinbourne is our greatest living poet, but his music is often thin. Edmund Gosse has ceased to soar. And Richard Le Gallienne's passion is as unreal as it is assumed: he merely makes a pose. England is becoming the home of the middle-class.

The morbid life of Oscar Wilde appears to me as the result of our social Philistinism. We did not understand his aims, and misconceived his Art. In most dramatists we have the grossness without the vice—the vulgarity without the passion. Any lewdness may be suggested so long as open avowal is withheld. Many a music-hall song is impregnated with a sinister indecency which is revolting—and yet we sniff at "The Picture of Dorian Grey," or rather, should we say, that their suggestiveness is builded upon and panders to the public's love of the obscene? For who can deny that prurience comes from within? Evil can be found in the most innocent of words, if the listener be but of immoral calibre. Art does not conceal—it reveals. One is inclined to think that modern wit (as demonstrated in our music-halls) has nothing to reveal, so simply makes a vulgar show of covering something which does not exist. The references to things sensual, in our modern plays and poems, are generally as stupid as the thoughts are gross. How we long for the refreshing avowal of a Wilde, instead of the inane evasion of an intricate situation. English ladies, who would look askance at a Palais Royal farce, will shake their undraped shoulders in high glee at the suggestiveness of a problem play. The re-

spectable middle-classes would not be seen with a volume of Oscar Wilde's keen epigram in their hands, and yet laugh heartily at the tawdry and indecent anecdote of our weekly journals: generally of a pink colour, but decidedly blue in their tendencies. And if a writer's sense of morality takes an erratic turn, or is coalesced in any audacious disregard of social rule, he is condemned as a filthy fellow. The sensuous pursuit of any pet theory of morals is the sin unabsolvable. The only present-day plea for daintiness is to pretend to be coarse.

I have never gone about the world with the eyes of the critic, and when I hunted up the poet, whose wild fancies had filled my years of adolescence with dreams, at his rooms in the Rue des Beaux Arts, a year after his release, I found him still the gentlemanly man of letters he had always been. I had prepared myself not to see anything lurid or dreadful: sin is individually relative, and Oscar Wilde's erotic nature was not so revolting as some superficial thinkers imagine. I thought only of the hideous confinement endured during the Autumn of 1895, all 1896, and the Spring of 1897, and of the gross round of duties he had been compelled to perform in his prison cell:

"We tore the tarry rope to shreds
With blunt and bleeding nails;
We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors,
And cleaned the shining rails;
And rank by rank, we soaped the plank,
And clattered with the pails.

We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill;
We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns,
And sweated on the mill:
But in the heart of every man
'Terror was lying still."

—the living and sleeping in one small room, with white-washed walls, blank, hideous; the denial of God's blessed sunshine, the utensils that had to be polished daily, the solitariness of confinement, the enforced attention at service, the insolent arrogance of warders, with "souls beneath the ken of things divine," and the tears gathered thickly on my lashes as I ascended the stairs to his room.

That he was poor I knew, and that he would have difficulty in continuing his

literary career I guessed. At first I hesitated to knock. Then I heard him stirring within, and tapped gently. He opened the door himself, and at sight of his face—so piteous in its suffering, so anguished in its settled despair—I recoiled. The same stalwart figure, tall and commanding, but slightly bent, the hair tingling into grey, and the forehead wrinkled with premature age. But I held out my hand instantly, and said as steadily as I could, "May I shake your hand again, Mr. Wilde, as a token of my esteem and unchanged devotion?" He drew me within without a word, and looked at me keenly. There was a tigerish gleam in his eyes, and I felt vaguely frightened and abashed. I have wondered since whether he had suffered thoughts of mad anger and revenge to thrill him whilst in Reading Gaol, and when looking backward at his trial! But he had not forgotten me, and his welcome was as sincere as it was touching. So we sat beside the fire and talked.

His face grew more animated as we conversed, and throughout it was lit up by a pleasant smile. His old lightness had not forsaken him, and he quoted from his essays with all the enthusiasm of earlier years. The manuscript of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" lay upon his table, and I read several stanzas with growing appreciation. I asked him how he had fared, and he recounted the indignities to which he had been subjected. I spoke of the restfulness of his attaining the third stage, when lighter tasks would be apportioned to him, and he would become privileged to receive books. He stretched out a hand deprecatingly, and reminded me that his sentence had been one of "continuous" hard labour. "But the books," I protested. His voice was harsh when he replied:

"Do not, I pray you," he cried. "Of what use to me was the namby-pamby stuff of Reading Gaol? During those first few weeks I lived in a Hell of thought. I have suffered almost all that a man can suffer—except that" (he pointed to the "Ballad" lines 'The man had killed the thing he loved and so he had to die') "and I am inclined to the belief that we find our surest sense of life in poignant pain. The

only real passions, whether they be pleasurable or tormenting, are frenzies of the brain. Feeling vanishes once it is realised. There are moments in the lives of all when we become conscious of being but idle dolls in the hands of some strange incomprehensible Force, and my imprisonment has been one long chain of such terrible moments of consciousness."

I doubt whether I should be right in giving expression to all his sentiments that night. When I left him he was crooning softly over the fire, a cigarette between his lips. We had been talking as of old, and I had quoted several of my favorite pieces of imagery. I looked back at him, noting again his clear-cut profile, the sunken forehead, the mobile mouth.

He glanced round, and said musingly: "Good-bye, Jackie. Luck to you! Don't let my thoughts run away with you. Each soul is the centre of the universe, remember. High or low, rich or poor, each soul see faults in its contemporaries. And the hunchback, deformed, hideous, is right in declaring his lack of esteem when he views the plaster-cast of Apollo. Don't altogether forget me in England."

I did not see him again, nor do I know how he passed his last few days. Let us realise how much of infinite pain, how much soul-distraction, how much self-condemnation went to make up his books, and appreciate and sympathise—not avoid and reprove.

Even in declaring himself a decadent, Oscar Wilde was a man to be loved. As "Heart's Brother" he was known to the favoured few who were admitted into the inner circle of his life. The most precious poet is not he who brings the laughter bubbling to our lips; nor is it he who moves us to tears by his pathos. It is he who makes his sorrow, his pain, his passionate longings most beautiful and most musical to our ears. It is he into whose rhymes has crept that incommunicable something called "self": that element of æsthetic delight in one's own attributes which would render a dunghill full of sweet odours. What Keats calls the "sensuous life of verse" must rule the fancy of every writer of poetry. Edgar Allan Poe was occasionally drunk. Oscar Wilde was occasionally a moral debauchee; but what

years of sober and restrained labour went to make "Tales of Romance and Fantasy," on the one hand, and the keen epigram of "Intentions" on the other! Which is the true Oscar Wilde—the moral leper, the gibe of the man in the street—or the strenuous artist, the man who cried:—

"Methinks no flower would ever bud in Spring,
But for the lover's lips that kiss, the poet's lips
that sing?"

The morals of the poet are always misrepresented, misunderstood. The most ascetic of our singers lay themselves open to condemnation if we read their lives too critically. The light that beats around every action of the man of note, the frank confession beaming from the thoughts of the poet, reveal the soul itself. I can vouch that the average morality of Oscar Wilde was superior to that of many of his contemporaries. For the poet's imagination must be fervid, and the æsthetic value of Oscar Wilde's work depends less upon the character of the man than upon the genius of the artist. Oscar Wilde is entitled to a niche in the world of letters, and I hope sincerely that the obloquy which has so long obscured his memory will ere long be lifted. In claiming his right to immortality I do not hesitate. The man who could write this *Requiescat* was not wholly bad:—

"Tread lightly, she is near,
Under the snow;
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.

All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust;
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.

Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew.

Coffin-board, heavy stone
Lie on her breast;
I vex my heart alone,
She is at rest.

Peace, peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet;
All my life's buried here,—
Heap earth upon it."

That God may rest his soul in peace, and give him that true *love* which he so madly sought, and so wrongly misconceived in this world, is my heart-felt prayer.

The Saturday Review.

The death of Mr. Oscar Wilde extinguishes a hope that the broken series of his plays might be resumed. The hope was never, indeed, very strong. Despite the number of his books and plays, Mr. Wilde was not, I think, what one calls a born writer. His writing seemed always to be rather an overflow of intellectual and temperamental energy than an inevitable, absorbing function. That he never concentrated himself on any one form of literature is a proof that the art of writing never really took hold of him. He experimented in all forms, his natural genius winning for him, lightly, in every one of them, the success which for most men is won only by a reverent concentration. His native energy having been sapped by a long term of imprisonment, the chance that he would write again was very small. His main motive for writing was lost. He would not, as would the born writer, be likely to find consolation in his art. "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," though it showed that he had not lost his power of writing, was no presage of industry. Obviously, it was written by him with a definite external purpose, not from mere love and necessity of writing. Still, while he lived, there was always the off-chance that he might again essay that art-form which had been the latest to attract him. Somehow, the theatre seems to be fraught with a unique fascination. Modern dramaturgy is the most difficult of the arts, and its rewards (I do not mean its really commercial rewards) seem to be proportionate to its difficulties. To it, but for his downfall, even Mr. Wilde might have devoted himself. But for his death, he might possibly have returned to it. And thus his death is, in a lesser degree than his downfall, a great loss to the drama of our day. His work was distinct from that of most other playwrights in that he was a man who had achieved success

outside the theatre. He was not a mere maker of plays. Taking up dramaturgy when he was no longer a young man, taking it up as a kind of afterthought, he brought to it a knowledge of the world which the life-long playwright seldom possesses. But this was only one point in his advantage. He came as a thinker, a weaver of ideas, and as a wit, and as the master of a literary style. It was, I think, in respect of literary style that his plays were most remarkable. In his books this style was perhaps rather too facile, too rhetorical in its grace. Walter Pater, in one of his few book-reviews, said that in Mr. Wilde's work there was always "the quality of the good talker." This seems to me a very acute criticism. Mr. Wilde's writing suffered by too close a likeness to the flow of speech. But it was this very likeness that gave him in dramatic dialogue as great an advantage over more careful and finer literary stylists as he had over ordinary playwrights with no pretence to style. The dialogue in his plays struck the right mean between literary style and ordinary talk. It was at once beautiful and natural, as dialogue should always be. With this and other advantages, he brought to dramaturgy as keen a sense for the theatre as was possessed by any of his rivals, except Mr. Pinero. Theatrical construction, sense of theatrical effects, were his by instinct. I notice that one of the newspapers says that his plays were "devoid of consideration as drama," and suggests that he had little or no talent for construction. Such criticism as this merely shows that what Ben Jonson called "the dull ass's hoof" must have its backward fling. In point of fact, Mr. Wilde's instinct for construction was so strong as to be a disadvantage. The very ease of his manipulation tempted him to trickiness, tempted him to accept current conventions which, if he had had to puzzle things out laboriously and haltingly, he would surely have discarded, finding for himself a simpler and more honest technique. His three serious comedies were marred by staginess. In "An Ideal Husband" the staginess was most apparent, least so in "A Woman of No Importance." In the latter play, Mr. Wilde allowed the psychological idea to work itself out almost unmolested, and the play was, in my opinion, by far the most truly dramatic of his plays. It was along these lines that we, in the early 'nineties, hoped Mr. Wilde would ultimately work. But, even if he had confined his genius to the glorification of conventional drama, we should have had much reason to be grateful to him. His conventional comedies were as superior to the conventional comedies of other men as was "The Importance of Being Earnest" to the everyday farces whose scheme was so frankly accepted in it. At the moment of Mr. Wilde's downfall, it was natural that the public sentiment should be one of repulsion. But later, when he was released from prison, they remembered that he had at least suffered the full penalty. And now that he is dead, they will realise also, fully, what was for him involved in his downfall, how lamentable the loss to dramatic literature.

MAX.

How Oscar Wilde Died.

THE report dealt with at length in the *New York Critic* for July that Oscar Wilde is living is emphatically denied. "Inasmuch as the Americans seem to have conceived the strange idea that Oscar Wilde is still alive," remarks the Paris correspondent of the *Berlin Tageblatt*, "it is perhaps well to state how he died." The *Tageblatt* correspondent (as quoted by the *October Current Literature*, New York), goes on to tell of a number of people in Paris who knew the poet after his downfall, some of whom saw him on his death-bed and followed his funeral train. The correspondent quotes M. Joseph Renaud, the French translator of "Intentions." The book is the one in which Wilde laid down his artistic creed, and in a new preface M. Renaud gives explicit details in regard to Wilde's last days. The poet, so we are told, used to frequent a bar on the Boulevard des Italiens, whose customers were "sports," rather than literary men: "The dandy of 'green carnation' memories, the master went to instruct duchesses in the rules of elegance, who was so rich and so beautiful, the great poet in verse and prose, the wonderful talker of former days, now swaggered grotesquely in an old, ready-made suit from the 'Belle Jardinière'! His hands were badly manicured, his cuffs celluloid. He was unable to write; his brain was tired out, and his only audience were the old habitués of the bar, who paid his reckoning out of curiosity. All that was left of him was his golden voice and his great blue eyes, like those of a child. I saw him frequently in that place. He had neither money, nor clothes, nor true friends." Yet his old pride had not deserted him. One day Fernand Xau, the late publisher of the *Journal*, asked him to write an article for him every week. He added brutally, that after the noise which the trial had made he would be sure to score a success. But here Mr. Wilde flashed up. "Thank you," he said, "I am quite satisfied with my successes *before* that event." And, of course, the articles were never written.

"Side by side with this nobler aspect of his nature," M. Renaud writes, "went his desire to impress people; which in fact seems to have increased in proportion with his misery. . . . One evening he asks for cigarettes. The waiter brings him a package of 'Maryland.' He refuses to take them, nor does another brand find more favour. 'No, let me have some with gold tips!' The waiter goes to get the brand desired, and on his return Mr. Wilde hands him a twenty-franc gold piece. Then the poet lights a cigarette and utters a contemptuous 'Pah.' When the waiter returns with the change, he waves his hand. 'Ah, keep the whole. . . . That may give me the illusion that the cigarettes are good!'"

"His last months," M. Renaud continues, "were terrible. One of my colleagues who witnessed everything cannot speak of it without tears in his eyes. A severe attack of influenza, which lasted five days, freed the great writer from his suffering. Before he died he became a Catholic. . . . The hotel in which he died was one of those miserable places which are called in the popular papers 'Houses of Crime.' A veritable Hercules of a porter led me through a long, evil-smelling corridor. At last the odour of some disinfectant struck my nostrils. An open door. A little quadrangular room. I stood before the corpse. His whitish, emaciated face, strangely altered through the growth of a beard after death, seemed to be lost in profound contemplation. A hand, cramped in agony, still clutched the dirty bed cloth. There was no one to watch by his body. Only much later they sent him some flowers. The noise of the street pierced the thin walls of the building. A stale odour filled the air. Ah, what loneliness, what an end! I bethought me of the army of courtiers that was wont to throng about him in London, and among whom there were always the most celebrated names of the aristocracy both of blood and of letters. He seemed then like a mighty monarch, lord over all the treasures that civilisation can bestow. And now. . . ." M. Renaud was unable to attend the funeral. Ernest

p. 56.

Wilde (O.) THE WOMAN'S WORLD, edited by OSCAR WILDE, portions of two different volumes being bound together in one vol, being pp. 115-664 and 1-112 of the next volume, *with hundreds of illustrations*, imp. 8vo, half roan, 10s 6d 1889

The contributions by O. W. are entitled "Literary Notes" of which there are six articles.

— **Intentions**, 12mo, paper covers, sewn, 212pp., out of print, scarce, 8s 6d Leipzig, 1891

— **Salome, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT**, translated from the French of OSCAR WILDE, pictured by A. BEARDSLEY, small 4to, cloth, nice clean copy, edges untrimmed, 25s

This is No. 32 of a limited edition of 250 copies.

Is Oscar Wilde Still Alive? A report is in circulation in America that Wilde is still alive; a writer to one of the American Journals repeats the words of a woman who said Wilde was living in a Spanish Monastery, and those of a clerk in a book shop in New York who declared he had lately seen Wilde in New York and conversed with him.

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ET CÆTERA.

The announcement of Mr. Oscar Wilde's death, which took place in a small hotel in the Latin Quarter of Paris, is accompanied by tidings that tend to soften the regrets that such an event must awaken. Mr. Oscar Wilde, whose meteoric appearance in the world of *belles lettres* was succeeded by a moral oblivion, belonged to a group of young men, rebels born, whom conventional Protestantism could not hold back from a relapse into paganism. According to report, Mr. Wilde attributed his catastrophe to the fact that his father would not allow him, when he was a youth, to submit himself to the discipline of the Catholic Church. Be that as it may, Mr. Wilde's reception into the Church, during his last illness, by one of the Passionist Fathers in Paris, constitutes his own act of public and voluntary repentance.

A correspondent writes: "The first time I saw the name of Oscar Wilde was in a letter, written about a quarter of a century ago, by Father Matthew Russell, S.J., who was asking prayers for him as a brilliant young Irishman, then an undergraduate at Magdalen College, Oxford. Well, Father Russell has had to wait, and, perhaps, ere now to lose hope. But by strange ways the goal has been reached, and, as my first acquaintance with Mr. Wilde's name was in this connection, and as the last mention of it is associated with his death as a neophyte of the Catholic Church, I shall be pardoned if I draw the two threads together." In those early days Mr. Wilde even contributed to the pages of *The Irish Monthly*, and, in taking down a volume for 1876, we light on the following verses, dated from Oxford, and signed by his name:

THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE.

Thou knowest all—I seek in vain
What lands to till or sow with seed—
The land is black with briar and weed,
Nor cares for falling tears or rain.

Thou knowest all—I sit and wait
With blinded eyes, and hands that fail,
Till the last lifting of the veil,
And the first opening of the gate.

Thou knowest all—I cannot see.
I trust I shall not live in vain.
I know that we shall meet again
In one divine eternity.

Besides writing in a Catholic magazine, Mr. Wilde was in those days a considerable reader of Catholic books of all sorts—Cardinal Newman's among the rest. In a letter before us he says: "In what a fine temper Newman always wrote—the temper of the scholar! But how subtle was that simple mind!" Our correspondent, who notes the first and last association of Mr. Wilde's name with the subject of his conversion, mentions an answering literary coincidence: "The first time I met him, fresh from Oxford, he quoted to me a sonnet, beginning: 'We never meet, yet we meet day by day,' by a contemporary Catholic writer. The last time I saw him, comparatively late in life, he had just been reading 'Sister Songs,' by Mr. Francis Thompson. He was strangely moved. 'Why,' he asked, 'cannot I write poetry like that?'"

A PRISON AGONY.*

THE Salvation Army was among the first to raise its voice, both in this and other lands, against the cruelty and the folly of much in the present system of punishing criminals. That system is, to a large extent, we have contended, responsible for the existence of many of the very worst features in Criminal life. It hardens in vice; it corrupts the young; it destroys the will; it degrades all that is human in many of its victims. Instead of coming out of jail any better for their punishment, it is notorious that an immense proportion of prisoners are discharged more hopelessly criminal than they went in, and often more deliberately determined to prey upon society with a savage hatred which even the love of Christ fails to touch.

Why? A little poem has just been issued, written by an ex-prisoner, who signs himself "C 83," which, while throwing some light on the answer to that question, is also deeply interesting in other directions. We make a few extracts. It is called "A Ballad of Reading Jail," and is the story of the last few weeks of a man condemned to die for murder, and of the emotions of his fellow-prisoners when they look at him:—

"He walked among the Trial Men
In a suit of shabby grey;
A cricket cap was on his head,
And his step seemed light and gay;
But I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went,
With sails of silver, by.

I walked with other souls in pain
Within another ring,
And was wondering if the man had done
A great or little thing,
When a voice behind me whispered low,
'That fellow's got to swing.'

After a little while they see him no longer,
and it becomes known that he is to be hanged in the same prison. All thought and interest centres in him and his coming doom. Not one of them may speak to him. No one may utter a word of friendliness or pity. And, worse than that, no effort is made to reach or touch one single heart among all that dark crowd of anguish-stricken men with a word of sympathy or counsel in the presence of an event which might well open the doors of all hearts. And so they feel like doomed ships that meet and pass in a storm—outcast men indeed:—

"The world had thrust us from its heart,
And God from out His care;
And the iron gin that waits for sin
Had caught us in its snare.

With slouch and swing around the ring
We trod the Fool's Parade;
We did not care; we knew we were
The Devil's Own Brigade;
The shaven head and feet of lead
Made a merry masquerade."

The weary round of life goes on. Day by day they sew the sacks, tear up the ropes with bleeding hands, and bawl the hymns. But terror has hold of them, and at last one day they pass at exercise an open grave:—

"With yawning mouth the horrid hole
Gaped for a living thing;
The very mud cries out for blood
To the thirsty asphalt ring;
And we knew that ere one dawn grew fair
The fellow had to swing."

On the last night all the prisoners are thinking only of one prisoner, and—

"That night the empty corridors
Were full of forms of Fear,
And up and down the iron town
Stole feet we could not hear,
And through the bars that hide the stars
White faces seemed to peer."

Next morning every man is waiting for the stroke of eight, the time of the execution, to ring out—

"With sudden shock the prison clock
Smote on the shivering air,
And from all the jail rose up a wail
Of impotent despair,
Like the sound the frightened marshes hear
From some leper in his lair."

Yes, impotent, helpless despair—that is the keynote of the modern prison, and the result is a foregone conclusion. Hate begets hate, despair breeds desperate deeds. What ought to have been mere chastisement becomes moral—and sometimes physical—murder.

"The vilest deeds, like poison-weeds,
Bloom well in prison air;
It is only what is good in man
That wastes and withers there:
Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate,
And the Warder is Despair."

For they starve the little frightened child,
Till it weeps both night and day,
And they scourge the weak and flog the fool,
And gibe the old and grey;
And some grow mad, and all grow bad,
And none a word may say."

God help us to do what can be done to remedy a state of things which is not only a crying scandal on the Nation, but a blot on every Christian man and woman in the land!

W. B. E.

*"A Ballad of Reading Jail," by "C 83." (London Leonard Smithers. Price, 2s. 6d.)

He was a trooper in the Blues. He murdered his mistress, was tried, hanged as the law directs, and buried in prison. It was quite an ordinary case. There was no psychological interest in it, no dramatic complexity. These things happen and pass; we see them in the newspapers, we turn the leaf, and forget all about them. Yet on that common little tragedy a fellow-prisoner, who calls himself "C. 83," has founded an almost terrific indictment against our common dealings with the criminal. "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" is a poem whose authorship it is not difficult to detect, though the poet's style is simpler, more straightforward, and in this case more grim than it used to be. In form it is like certain verses of the "Ancient Mariner"; in subject, in the horror and pathos of the treatment, it reminds us only of a much shorter poem on Shrewsbury Gaol in that collection of true lyrics called "A Shropshire Lad." But the thought in the Reading Ballad is more mature, and the terror of it all is necessarily more personal and overwhelming.

The prisoners were walking round their dreary court. The man was with them, in a suit of shabby grey, a cricket cap on his head. He looked wistfully at "the little tent of blue which prisoners call the sky."

I walked, with other souls in pain,
Within another ring,
And was wondering if the man had done
A great or little thing,
When a voice behind me whispered low,
'That fellow's got to swing.'

He had received the due benefit of trial before judge and jury in a court of English justice, which we rightly regard with a certain pride.

The man in red who reads the Law,
Gave him three weeks of life,
Three little weeks in which to heal
His soul of his soul's strife,
And cleanse from every blot of blood,
The hand that held the knife.

For six weeks altogether he walked that yard among the rest, whilst they stared at him as the man who had to swing. Meantime he received his due share of prison superintendence and medical or spiritual relief and consolation.

The Governor was strong upon
The Regulations Act;
The Doctor said that Death was but
A scientific fact;
And twice a day the Chaplain called,
And left a little tract.

And twice a day he smoked his pipe,
And drank his quart of beer;
His soul was resolute, and held
No hiding-place for fear;
He often said that he was glad
The hangman's day was near.

The reason for that gladness was obscure; perhaps he was weary of the tracts. Anyhow, the day came soon enough for the others, who one morning in the yard found an open grave.

With yawning mouth the horrid hole
Gaped for a living thing;
The very mud cried out for blood
To the thirsty asphalt ring;
And we knew that ere one dawn grew fair
The fellow had to swing."

As they went back to their cells,
The hangman, with his little bag,
Went shuffling through the gloom.

Then terror settled down upon the gaol. The grey figures crouched in corners, or knelt and prayed. None slept but the man condemned. Evil spirits seemed to walk. They mopped and mowed and tripped about, and sang or sneered as the prisoners knelt in prayer. We have been told by a chaplain that these things happen every time we hang a man. The warders can hardly keep the gaol quiet in its horror of the thing we are doing. Then comes the end.

With sudden shock the prison clock
Smote on the shivering air,
And from the gaol rose up a wail
Of impotent despair,
Like the sound the frightened marshes hear
From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most dreadful things
In the crystal of a dream,
We saw the greasy hempen rope
Hooked to the blackened beam,
And heard the prayer the hangman's snare
Strangled into a scream.

How fine in simplicity and irony is the opening of the next canto:—

There is no chapel on the day
On which they hang a man.

The prisoners go their usual walk, unblest that day by the consolations of religion. Perhaps it is thought by the authorities that the event of the morning has been a sufficient ensample of godly life and an edifying object-lesson in the spirit of the New Testament. The prisoners went their haunted walk, and the warders wore their Sunday suits, but there was quicklime sticking to their feet. Then, turning from this particular case of simple human horror—a common case, as we said, with no points in it to stir public curiosity or sentiment—the poet speaks of the prison in itself, the prison as it exists for every single soul of the thousands who pass into our prisons day by day and year by year.

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That, told with a poet's brevity and power, is what we have persistently maintained about the evils of our prison system. But "C. 83" speaks with the added horror of the inhuman experience still upon him, and it would be hard for the greatest poet to imagine a more degrading and brutalising Inferno than he here depicts in a ballad of about a hundred verses.

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The War Cry

26 February 1898

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He was a trooper in the Blues. He murdered his mistress, was tried, hanged as the law directs, and buried in prison. It was quite an ordinary case. There was no psychological interest in it, no dramatic complexity. These things happen and pass; we see them in the newspapers, we turn the leaf, and forget all about them. Yet on that common little tragedy a fellow-prisoner, who calls himself "C. 3.3," has founded an almost terrific indictment against our common dealings with the criminal. "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" is a poem whose authorship it is not difficult to detect, though the poet's style is simpler, more straightforward, and in this case more grim than it used to be. In form it is like certain verses of the "Ancient Mariner"; in subject, in the horror and pathos of the treatment, it reminds us only of a much shorter poem on Shrewsbury Gaol in that collection of true lyrics called "A Shropshire Lad." But the thought in the Reading Ballad is more mature, and the terror of it all is necessarily more personal and overwhelming.

The prisoners were walking round their dreary court. The man was with them, in a suit of shabby grey, a cricket cap on his head. He looked wistfully at "the little tent of blue which prisoners call the sky."

I walked, with other souls in pain,
Within another ring,
And was wondering if the man had done
A great or little thing,
When a voice behind me whispered low,
"That fellow's got to swing."

He had received the due benefit of trial before judge and jury in a court of English justice, which we rightly regard with a certain pride.

The man in red who reads the Law,
Gave him three weeks of life,
Three little weeks in which to heal
His soul of his soul's strife,
And cleanse from every blot of blood,
The hand that held the knife.

For six weeks altogether he walked that yard among the rest, whilst they stared at him as the man who had to swing. Meantime he received his due share of prison superintendence and medical or spiritual relief and consolation.

The Governor was strong upon
The Regulations Act;
The Doctor said that Death was but
A scientific fact;
And twice a day the Chaplain called,
And left a little tract.

And twice a day he smoked his pipe,
And drank his quart of beer;
His soul was resolute, and held
No hiding-place for fear;
He often said that he was glad
The hangman's day was near.

The reason for that gladness was obscure; perhaps he was weary of the tracts. Anyhow, the day came soon enough for the others, who one morning in the yard found an open grave.

With yawning mouth the horrid hole
Gaped for a living thing;
The very mud cried out for blood
To the thirsty asphaltic ring:
And we knew that ere one dawn grew fair
The fellow had to swing.

As they went back to their cells,
The hangman, with his little bag,
Went shuffling through the gloom.

Then terror settled down upon the gaol. The grey figures crouched in corners, or knelt and prayed. None slept but the man condemned. Evil spirits seemed to walk. They mopped and mowed and tripped about, and sang or sneered as the prisoners knelt in prayer. We have been told by a chaplain that these things happen every time we hang a man. The warders can hardly keep the gaol quiet in its horror of the thing we are doing. Then comes the end.

With sudden shock the prison-clock
Smote on the shivering air,
And from the gaol rose up a wail
Of impotent despair,
Like the sound the frightened marshes hear
From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most dreadful things
In the crystal of a dream,
We saw the greasy hempen rope
Hooked to the blackened beam,
And heard the prayer the hangman's snare
Strangled into a scream.

How fine in simplicity and irony is the opening of the next canto:—

There is no chapel on the day
On which they hang a man.

The prisoners go their usual walk, unblest that day by the consolations of religion. Perhaps it is thought by the authorities that the event of the morning has been a sufficient ensample of godly life and an edifying object-lesson in the spirit of the New Testament. The prisoners went their haunted walk, and the warders wore their Sunday suits, but there was quicklime sticking to their feet. Then, turning from this particular case of simple human horror—a common case, as we said, with no points in it to stir public curiosity or sentiment—the poet speaks of the prison in itself, the prison as it exists for every single soul of the thousands who pass into our prisons day by day and year by year.

The vilest deeds like poison weeds
Bloom well in prison air;
It is only what is good in Man
That wastes and withers there;
Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate,
And the Warder is Despair.

For they starve the little frightened child
Till it weeps both night and day;
And they scourge the weak, and flog the fool,
And gibe the old and gray,
And some grew mad, and all grow bad,
And none a word may say.

That, told with a poet's brevity and power, is what we have persistently maintained about the evils of our prison system. But "C. 3.3." speaks with the added horror of the inhuman experience still upon him, and it would be hard for the greatest poet to imagine a more degrading and brutalising Inferno than he here depicts in a ballad of about a hundred verses.