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Oscar Wilde  
Scrapbook

Vol. 3



WHEN man committed his first sin, he felt rather ashamed of himself, and in a moment of modesty tried to put the whole blame of it on somebody else. "The woman tempted me," he said. In a later stage of development, he began to see that this was neither a very glorious nor a very chivalrous explanation of his shortcomings. So, nowadays, if he finds himself engaged in a merry course of the vices, he declares, "I have the artistic temperament," and feels that he has said something unanswerable. For myself, I doubt if we have the right to sit as judges on the sins of any of our fellows. If we are to allow ourselves to condemn any breaches of morality at all, however, I do not see by what right the stupefied criminal of the slums should be punished and the man with the artistic temperament escape. The artistic temperament is only another name for a monstrous anti-social sort of egoism, and is seldom to be found in any of the great artists. Michael Angelo did not possess the artistic temperament, nor did Wordsworth or Browning, or, so far as we can discover, Shakespeare. If all the men of artistic temperament who have ever lived had been drowned, like kittens, at their birth, I doubt if the stock of the world's art would be appreciably lessened. For to be a great artist implies that one has terribly much in common with the ordinary man; to have the artistic temperament implies that one has as little in common with him as possible. What we call the sins of the great artists—of Hugo or Byron, for example—seem to be the results of a superabundant vitality. The sins of the artistic temperament, on the other hand—of the minor poets and those who are not even minor poets—are rather the products of weakness, of exhaustion. I am not, of course, pleading for their camp-followers. I only plead that if we are to pity them, we must hold out the same pity to all those other criminal classes that never made their sins beautiful with the glamour of art. In other words, the artist must be regarded as a citizen first and as an artist afterwards. Aeschylus recognised this when he told them to inscribe on his tomb the sentence, "I fought at Marathon."

#### Oscar Wilde as Hero

Recently, Frank Danby, the novelist, brought an indictment in the Press against a great living sculptor because he had accepted money from her and had failed afterwards to fulfil his contract. "Ah," cried a score of people, "this is cruel, this is unfair!" One ought to remember the limitations of the artistic temperament." With the facts of the case I am not here concerned. I only mention it because it shows that Frank Danby has herself realised that the artistic temperament is no excuse for failure in the ordinary duties of a citizen. I do not see, however, how she can logically put a public injury on the sculptor and, at the same time, wax very angry and pitiful at the public injury that was put during his lifetime on Oscar Wilde. For Oscar Wilde, under the name of Algernon Heselstine, is the real hero of *The Sphinx's Lawyer*. Algernon Heselstine is dead before the story begins, but the Sphinx, who is his widow, and the Sphinx's lawyer, Errington Welch-Kennard, who has been the friend of both, make it the chief end of their existence to keep his memory beautiful and alive. In their code of morals they seem to be living examples of the artistic temperament. When the Sphinx is dying, racked with pain and drugged with strychnine, she has a farewell scene with her lawyer.

She went on talking presently, but less coherently, less connectedly.

"I have so much more to say, it's unkind of God to interrupt me, isn't it?—or of the devil? Don't kneel there, don't hide your face from me. Am I hideous to look at, repulsive? People look beautiful when they are dead. How I wished Algernon would die when I first knew—understood. If he had only died then! But I have kept his name alive! Whatever they say about him, they will always talk about him; he hasn't been forgotten, I've been faithful to my vow, I've kept his name alive. They do his plays again now—hypocrites! what hypocrites they were! It wasn't of Algernon I sent for you to speak—was it?—I forget—I forget again." And she lay thinking of it for a little time, her dying strength reviving in the silence.

"Errington," she began again, presently, "how bad I have been! From the world's point of view, I mean. But, after all, how little the world knows! I hurt no one, to begin with. I was really only a girl, stupid too, for all I thought myself so clever. Everybody hurt me, on purpose, just because I had married him, not knowing. And afterwards, they hurt me always. I never let them know. I felt it—the ostracism—now I'm dying of it. I've had love, lovers. I'm glad of that, don't let anyone think I'm sorry about that. I've been so badly treated, stoned, but I've had something. The 'woman taken in adultery,' was she glad, in her stoning, I wonder? What had her husband taught her? How good you've been to me, the only one who ever was. Poor me! Even you don't quite know what it was at first."

"Oh! Sphinx, you hurt me, you hurt me. You were a child, a child when it all began. You never knew any better, they never gave you a chance, you never had a chance afterwards."

"Only because of what they did to him. How true, how eternally true, it is, that cruelty is the only crime. We women, even I, find it unbearable. Through him they tortured me; every day I broke my stones with bleeding hands, and every night my bed turned to wood, and I tossed bruised and sleepless; and his degradation was my degradation. Don't cry, don't cry, it shakes me—and there are things I want to say."

"You are going into the darkness, Sphinx; no one to help you. I'm afraid, I'm afraid for you."

#### Virtue in Limelight

Somehow, one never catches the true tragic note in *The Sphinx's Lawyer*. One seems to see many tears glistening in limelight, and to see vice turning into a sort of green-sick virtue, as it can only do in the unreal lights of the stage. Everybody seems to be redeemed by love in the end. The lawyer, who cannot see a pretty and emotional client of the other sex, without taking her in his arms and kissing her little ears, returns to the wife of his bosom, and Kenny du Gore, a follower of Heselstine's, who has

been very much the prodigal son and has even shot his own child dead at the end of a bout of drunkenness, returns into the fold of the domestic virtues. The characters are all a little vulgar, and they are not set forth in order entirely without vulgarity, as are the vulgar people in such a book as Mrs. Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. One feels that there is something symbolic in the manner in which the Sphinx's lawyer dressed.

He had always loved rare and beautiful things, now the pearls in his shirt-front were black, the buttons of his waist-coat were of the most delicate workmanship, serpentine in diamonds round blue enamel, his sleeve-links were pink pearls set *a jour*.

Somehow, we do not care very much for men who dress like this. Somehow, we do not care very much for novels dressed as Frank Danby has dressed *The Sphinx's Lawyer*.

#### Aberdeen Free Press.

"The Sphinx's Lawyer," by Frank Danby (London: William Heinemann).—The aim of Mrs. Frank's novel seems to be to defend at all hazards what is known as "the artistic temperament"; secondly, to show that punishment is the only crime. The thesis is not a novel one, and it is some years since it ceased to stir the body corporate of English letters. Knowing this, one might very well ask why the matter is raised at this time of day. Certainly a perusal of the story does not advance it one jot. To prove the proposition there is resuscitated under the name of Algernon Heselstine, a brilliant but perverse literary genius of the later nineteenth century, who shined against the laws of society, and paid the penalty with imprisonment and ostracism. The venture, it seems to us, is needless and unprofitable. The set of which he was the central figure is shattered, their influence in literature is dead, public taste is changed. Besides, when one of his last books was published a year or two ago, it was reviewed with dignity, with generosity, and even with the reverence given to what is past and done with; in the book and all it called forth was a finality which might fittingly have been left alone. Now that we are re-introduced into that faded, unhealthy atmosphere, and associate with exquisite, "cultured" decadents, we are glad to remember that it is old and impossible. The hero, a lawyer with a double-barrelled name, is a cad and bonoidr boulder; when he has curious "moments," showing him disinterestedly chivalrous, not disingenuously tender, trifling, not smirking, he is apparently held up to admiration: just as a vicious young rake with evil tendencies is blessed in the end. In many of its bearings the subject of the story is antiquated, so antiquated that retrospection brings back the first production of "Patience." It is true the lawyer's wife is a fine portrait of one "unspotted from the world." But she has to thank her child-like faith for it, and not all the subtle touches of characterisation and the eloquence of the writing can banish consciousness of the fact. It is charitable to assume that the wavering craftsmanship and prolixity of incident is due to the author's obsession of championing a cause, and it is a pity that such real novelistic talent is put to such a poor use.

#### Daily Graphic,

may 30. 1907.

"THE SPHINX'S LAWYER."  
One could wish that Frank Danby were not clever. Cleverness we must admit for her novel, "The Sphinx's Lawyer" (Heinemann); but it is so wrong-headed that even as cleverness it misses its mark. It aims at being something more than a story; it has several morals to preach. The first of them appears to be that human justice and human law may go exceedingly wrong if their clumsy attempt to make the punishment fit the crime; that, for example, the years which the late Oscar Wilde endured in gaol were a cruel injury inflicted on a person only half responsible for his actions; and, besides that, devastated the lives of several innocent people, which we can only respond that, whether this be or be not the case, it is a question which cannot be properly discussed in a novel; and we think that the evil and unhappy genius who caused Frank Danby's spouse had better have been left quiet in his grave. One of the characters in the story is the "Sphinx," the broken-down, neurotic, and semi-paralysed wife of an Algernon Heselstine who died in the shadow of some such infamy as that which surrounded the writer and dramatist of whom we have spoken. A friend of hers and of his who stood by them in the darkest hour of their disgrace and ignominy, is the hero of the novel—the Sphinx's lawyer. To compensate him for a good deal of obloquy which befell him on account of this act of generosity, Mrs. Heselstine determines to marry him to a very innocent and wealthy young widow. She succeeds, and though the Sphinx's lawyer is, to our way of thinking, a boulder of a peculiarly pernicious type, the woman he marries is so tamely good and innocent that at last she reforms him.

#### Manchester Guardian.

THE LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE. By R. H. Sherard. London: T. W. Laurie, Pp. xvi. 470. 12s. 6d. net.

The final biography of a man aroused so much enthusiasm, so much dislike, and so much abhorrence during his lifetime as Oscar Wilde is not to be written during the first decade after his death nor by intimate friends and champions of his own. Certainly it has not been written by Mr. Sherard. His book is frankly the work of a champion—a flamboyant appeal to the reading world in vindication of a much-maligned man of genius. Not, of course, that he affects to deny the offences which ruined Wilde's career. No apologist can efface them, or, indeed, make any phase of his life altogether agreeable to contemplation. But Mr. Sherard throws himself with fervour into the task of rendering the undeniable stains innocuous to his final fame. He has two principal lines of defence. He does his best to transfer the brunt of responsibility for Wilde's failings and collapse to an unhappy heritage of morbid impulse, to parents who were not all that they should be, to a home where Bohemians were frequently entertained to dinner, to the University of Oxford, where young men talked of undesirable subjects at their wines. Incidentally this line of defence has probably added to the interest of the book. In particular the vivid and admirably told memoirs of the eminent surgeon his father and the dilettante authoress ("Speranza") his mother would hardly have been permitted to detain the reader so long from the proper subject of the biography as, nowise to his discontent, they do, but for their value as documentary evidence to be put in, in mitigation of sentence, by the skilful counsel for the defence. And we are by no means suggesting that they are irrelevant, however their relevance may be over-urged. In the same way, the vindication of Wilde's literary genius is marred by an unmeasured, even blatant, extravagance of claim which largely undoes the effect of Mr. Sherard's just resentment at the unqualified and unrelenting repudiation which is still a frequent attitude in England towards Wilde and all his works. His reputation with serious critics is not promoted by such outbursts, for instance, as this in describing the success of "The Importance of Being Earnest":—

After that night at the St. James's Theatre London felt itself indeed the imperial city which is under tribute to no other nation for its enjoyments as for its wants. One may fancy what would have been the feelings of the Romans if one day a dramatist had risen up among them who rendered their arena free of Greece. Our pride was flattered; we could hurl back the reproach of national dullness; we foresaw with pleasurable and gratified anticipation the return to the English stage of the laurel-wreath that centuries ago had been wrested from us by the foreigner. We felt that we could close our front door and put out a notice to the Ibsens, the Strindbergs, the Sardous, and the rest that we . . . needed nothing that day or on any subsequent day. Or by this:—

The greatest philosophers, the men who gave new religions to the world, did not write; they talked. Did Christ write, did Mahomet write, did Socrates write? If Oscar Wilde had had the fortune to find among his associates a disciple who would have taken the trouble to record his teachings, . . . when he spoke, he would have been remembered in the world's history as one of the wisest of philosophers. In spite of these drawbacks, Mr. Sherard's book contains a great quantity of valuable material, and has the making of a better book than it is. Whoever makes that better book will inevitably owe much to it. There are numerous portraits and other illustrations including many of the Wilde caricatures, a little gallery in themselves. C. H. H.



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*Pelican . May 16. 1906.*

"The Sphinx's Lawyer," by "Frank Danby," is a remarkable book—certainly a very remarkable one for a lady to have written. The dedication of the novel to the brother of the gifted authoress, Mr. "Owen Hall," is also out of the common, seeing that it is dedicated to the author of most of our musical comedies, because on reading the book—presumably in manuscript—he "hated and loathed" both it and its subject. "Incidentally," says the authoress, referring to the opinions expressed by Mr. Hall, "your harsh criticism has intensified my conviction of the righteousness of the cause I plead, and revolt from your narrow judgment has strengthened me against any personal opprobrium that such pleading may bring upon me." Very well then. Algernon Heseltine, round whose memory the story circulates, is, of course, the late Oscar Wilde. So much the authoress tells us, but the wife and the disciples are happily quite imaginary. The wife is the "Sphinx," and a strange character she unquestionably is. The Sphinx's champion, the lawyer of the title, is a powerfully drawn character also, but I have the misfortune to dislike him very much indeed. The story is not a "nice" one, and is hardly likely to achieve any marked success among Sunday school young ladies, or old women of either sex, but it is unquestionably very clever, very interesting, rather irritating, and well worth reading. The publisher is Mr. William Heinemann.



# Aberdeen Free Press.

19  
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Daily Chronicle 30 May 1906

The Life of Oscar Wilde, which Mr. R. H. Sherard has been writing for Mr. Robert Harbrough, will be ready next month. The author and his subject were friends for many years, and so this book has a personal note all through. One strong purpose of it is to dispel a number of false reports which have associated themselves with Wilde's life, as, for instance, the weird recurring rumour that he is not dead. Mr. Sherard also discusses his writings, and the book is well illustrated.

Sunday Sun, 10 June 1906

#### SOME FORTHCOMING BOOKS.

Mr. Robert Harbrough Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready for publication. The renewed interest which, by the appearance of "De Profundis," has been universally awakened in the public mind, in the life and work of the late Mr. Oscar Wilde, has created on every side a demand for an authoritative book dealing with these two subjects. This volume, Mr. Sherard says, "gives the true facts of his career as a writer, his biography as far as that is consistent with the due observance of discretion, and an account of his literary work in the many fields in which he so greatly distinguished himself." One purpose of the book is "to dispel a number of false reports which have associated themselves with his life and work. It has recently been put about, for instance, that Mr. Wilde is still living. This book will give a full and detailed account of his death, gathered from the lips of the man who was holding him in his arms when he died.

For many years Oscar Wilde's one-act tragedy, "Salomé," has been out of print. Mr. John Lane announces a new edition in a cheap form, which will be published next week. This play has been translated into every European language, including Czech, and at the present time it is constantly acted in Germany, besides providing inspiration to Dr. Strauss.

#### TRIBUNE, 12 June 1906

We are informed by Mr. T. Werner Laurie, the publisher, that Mr. Robert Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready for publication. Mr. Sherard was acquainted with Wilde from 1884, and has a profound admiration for the genius of the man, which flashed with such astonishing brightness before his fall. One purpose of the book is to dispel the curious report, repeated recently, that Oscar Wilde is still living. Mr. Sherard gives a detailed account of his death, gathered from the lips of the man who was holding him in his arms when he died.

Robert Harbrough Sherard, who has written this biography, is the great-grandson of William Wordsworth. He has written several notable poems himself, but his literary work has mostly been in journalism, as foreign correspondent to English papers. He has lived for years in Paris, and his recent book of recollections is full of anecdotes about distinguished French men of letters, with whom he has been intimately acquainted.

#### Daily News, 6 June

"The Life of Oscar Wilde," to be issued on the 20th by Mr. Werner Laurie, is by Mr. Robert Harbrough Sherard, who has already written much on the subject. The author, I am told, institutes a comparison in his preface between the life of Wilde and the life of Richard Savage. The comparison is a striking one, to the disadvantage, however, of Savage. Both were men of genius and striking promise; both ended in a prison; both died without accomplishing anything worthy of their abilities. Perhaps we can scarcely hope that Wilde will be so fortunate in his biographer as Savage was in Dr. Johnson. Moreover, Savage was the subject of that delightful novel which Whitehead wrote around his story and personality: a classic which, by the way, has found its way to a larger circle of readers than it ever had before since it was issued in a thin-paper volume by Messrs. Newnes. R. A. S. J.

THE TATLER, DECEMBER 5, 1906

#### Whistler's Readiness of Retort.

Of course the great exponent of the gentle art of retort was *par excellence* Whistler. It used to be his greatest delight to effect a neat score off a fellow wit. One of these encounters took place at a dinner party where the redoubtable James McNeill of that ilk found as his *vis-à-vis* Oscar Wilde, who was then at the height of his prosperity. Truly a case of Greek meeting Greek, but a short passage of arms between the two early in the evening resulted in a decisive victory for the painter. The brilliancy of the remark which dealt the *coup de grace* led the defeated one to murmur wistfully, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler smothered a wicked smile as he made the quick retort, "Never mind, my dear Oscar. You will." A hit, a very palpable hit, which left the other in discomfited silence, for, to change the metaphor, the cap had fitted.

#### Wilde and Whistler.

It is seldom that an adoring mother allows any clever saying of her offspring to pass into oblivion, and still rarer were the occasions when Wilde permitted a *mot* to be lost to the world. If it were uttered by himself in the course of conversation it would be saved up for future use in his writings, while if it were evolved from the mind of someone else it stood a very good chance of being annexed as Whistler hinted.

Reynold's, 24 June 1906

#### OSCAR WILDE.

##### THE TRAGEDY OF A LIFE.

R. H. SHERARD'S NEW BOOK.

Few men are better qualified to undertake the difficult task of presenting to the English public an *apologia* for the life of the late Oscar Wilde than Mr. R. H. Sherard, the writer of this volume. In France there would be no difficulty, for the French have so much of the artistic spirit that they naturally, and without any mental questionings, dissociate the individual characteristics of the artist from the productions of his talent or genius.

Oscar Wilde's father was the distinguished Dublin surgeon, Sir William Wilde, a man of European reputation. His mother was a woman of extraordinary character, the daughter of an Irish Protestant clergyman, as literary and as erratic in her doings and instincts as her more distinguished son. For a time she was an ardent Nationalist, and her verses, signed "Speranza," which appeared in the *Nation*, under the editorship of Gavan Duffy, afterwards Sir Gavan Duffy, Premier of Victoria, were among the most brilliant literary outputs of the Young Ireland Party.

From such a parentage, it would be natural to expect an exceptional offspring. Young Wilde was the best classical scholar in Dublin University, and the traces of that influence are deeply impressed on all his subsequent writings. "I, the lord of language," he described himself in that heartrending book "De Profundis," written by him after his release from Reading Gaol. His father made much money, but he squandered it lavishly, and so Wilde, when he came to make his way in London, found himself in possession of about £200 a year, derived from Irish land, which he subsequently sold, to meet the pressing needs of everyday life. His income was eked out by anonymous contributions to the Press. Yet, at this time, he was astonishing London by his freaks of costume, his assumption of means, and his dazzling wit in conversation.

For a number of years before fame caught him, in the brilliant series of comedies which he produced, he had a very hard struggle to live. He edited for Cassell and Co. the *Woman's World*, and slaved at his work in the orthodox Fleet-street manner. His marriage brought him financial ease, and after that, until the *debacle*, he was in affluent circumstances, his plays producing an income of several thousands yearly.

#### The Downfall.

Into the circumstances of his trial we have no desire to enter. Wilde was no worse than his base associates. Mr. Sherard traces the sexual perversion, of which Wilde was accused, to heredity. His eminent father was a mixture of intelligence and animality, and from him was transmitted the coarseness of the lower part of Wilde's face. He indulged in good living. Probably, as the writer of this book suggests, the alcohol which he consumed, although he was never drunk, except during the last few weeks of his miserable existence in Paris, produced a kind of mental aberration, which left him irresponsible for his acts. In any case, his intimate acquaintance with classical literature—in which the behaviour of which he was charged, is treated as natural and commonplace—would deaden in his mind any suggestion of criminality in that regard.

Mr. Sherard's book is an exceedingly able study of one of the most extraordinary men of our own times. The picture he presents ought to do much to mitigate the harshness of the world-judgment upon Wilde's follies. At heart he was a kindly man; but intellectually he lived alone for art; socially, for pleasure. He adds one more figure to the bizarre gallery of the pathologist.

Here is a description of an incident in the prison life of Oscar Wilde, written by an ex-warder of Reading Gaol:—

#### A Humane Warder.

During the period of his incarceration the poet suffered in health, but he seldom complained to the doctor. He was afraid of doing so lest he should be sent to the sick ward. He preferred the seclusion of his cell. There he could think aloud without attracting the glances or the undertone comments of the less mobile-minded. There he could be alone—alone with the spectre of his past, alone with his books, alone with his God!

When I entered his cell on a certain bleak, raw morning in early March I found him still in bed. This was unusual, and so I expressed surprise. "I have had a bad night," he explained. "Pains in my inside, which I think must be cramp, and my head seems splitting." I asked whether he had better not report sick. "No," he said; "not for anything. I shall be better, perhaps, as the days advance. Come back in a few minutes, when I will be up."

I returned to his cell a few minutes afterwards, and found he was up, but looking so dreadfully ill that I again advised him to see the doctor. He declined, however, saying he would be all right when he had had something warm to drink.

I knew that in the ordinary course of events he would have nothing for at least another hour, so I resolved to find something to give him in the meanwhile myself. I hastened off, and warmed up some beef-tea, poured it into a bottle, placed the bottle inside my jacket, and returned towards his cell. While ascending the staircase the bottle slipped between my shirt and skin. It was very hot. I knew that there was an unoccupied cell on the next landing, and I determined to go there and withdraw the bottle from its painful position. But at that moment a voice called me from the central hall below. I looked down, and saw the Chief Warder. He beckoned me towards him. I went back. He wished to speak concerning a discrepancy in the previous night's Muster Report. I attempted to elucidate the mystery of two prisoners being in the prison who had no claim on his hospitality. I am afraid I threw but little light on the mystery. I was in a frightful agony. The hot bottle burped against my breast like molten lead. I have said "there are supreme moments in the lives of men." Those were supreme moments to me. I could have cried out in my agony, but dared not. The cold, damp beads of perspiration gathered on my brow. I writhed and twisted in all manners of ways to ease myself of the dreadful thing, but in vain. I could not shift that infernal bottle, try as I might. It lay there against my breast like a hot poultice, but hotter than any poultice that was ever made by a cantankerous mother or by a cantankerous nurse. And the strange thing about it was that the longer it lay the hotter it became. The Chief eyed me curiously. I believe he thought I had been drinking. I know I was incoherent enough for anything. At last he walked off and left me, for which I felt truly thankful. I hounded up the iron stairs, and entered the Poet's cell, and, pulling out the burning bottle, I related, amid gasps and imprecations, my awful experience. The Poet smiled while the tale was being told, then laughed—actually laughed. I had never seen him laugh *naturally* before, and, with the same qualification, I may add that I never saw him laugh again.

I felt angry because he laughed. I told him so. I said it was poor reward for all I had undergone to be laughed at, and, so saying, I came out, and closed the door. I closed it with a bang.

When I took him his breakfast, he looked the picture of contrition. He said he wouldn't touch it unless I promised to forgive him.

"Not even the cocoa?" I asked.

"Not even the cocoa," he replied; and he looked at it longingly.

"Well, rather than starve you, I'll forgive you."

The general impression left by this book is most painful. It is the record of a nearly useless life; the history of a literary *flameur*, eaten up with vanity, but immensely capable. Oscar Wilde was the Richard Savage of his day. Now that he has gone let us be tender to his foibles. Mr. Sherard, the writer of this human document, contributed a few articles to *Reynold's Newspaper* on Wilde's last days, at a time when a hypocritical Press and stage refused to mention his name. The book is published by T. Werner Laurie, London; price 12s. 6d.

ily Telegraph, 20 June 1906

#### KS OF THE DAY

By W. L. COURTNEY.

#### OSCAR WILDE.

(T. WERNER LAURIE.)

Mr. Sherard to write and publish Oscar Wilde? It is, of course, a very fine of friendship, indeed, of justice, time respects the time is opportune. "written originally for Madame ernhardt, and constantly played in has recently been played for the me in London. Messrs. Methuen are publishing a complete uniform edition's works in twelve volumes. It is long ago since "Lady Windermere's is revived at the St. James's Theatre, following that of "The Importance of nest." To these facts may be added

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But the book is undoubtedly interesting from many points of view. It is written with abundance of spirit by a man who knows what he is talking about, and it certainly ought to be read by all those who are inclined to pass hasty judgment. Mr. Sherard tells us a good deal that is important concerning Oscar Wilde's ancestry. His father, the Dublin surgeon, seems to have led a somewhat riotous life. His mother, the poetess, who wrote under the name of Speranza, for many months before Oscar Wilde was born, and married the

156

#### THE DIAL

[Sept. 16,

so-called dispatch of three words would have been empty, absurd, even silly; and Caesar never was silly.

Who started the story? Was it done by an ancient writer? I observe that Mommsen and most careful writers on Roman history do not speak of the words as a dispatch or official utterance. Canon Liddell says, "The victory gained by Caesar was announced at Rome in the famous dispatch," etc. Merivale rather discredits the story, saying, "The boastful phrase in which, according to the story, the victor announced it to the senate."

I turned to the ancients. Perhaps someone else may have found more than I. Naturally, I turned to the profuse anecdote of Valerius Maximus; but in vain. Suetonius, great gatherer of gossip, tells us that when Caesar had ended his wars he held five triumphs. He says, "Among the pageantry of the Pontic triumph, a tablet with this inscription was carried before him—*Veni, Vidi, Vici*," not signifying, as did other mottoes, what was done, but the speed of the victory."

Plutarch's story implies a time for the origin of the phrase later than any possible dispatch: perhaps it arose in the familiarity of a conversation. Plutarch says, "When he gave Amantius, a friend of his at Rome, an account of the action, to express the promptness and rapidity of it he used three words—I came and saw and conquered—which having in Latin all the same cadence, carry with them a very suitable air of brevity." This evidently was before the triumph.

Is this "thrasical brag" or gasconade? Plutarch speaks not of parade, but of an expression in friendly intercourse. Notice that whoever depreciates his adversary depreciates his victory, and removes his story from the realm of boasting. The booster tells of the strength and valor of his opponent: the greater he makes the difficulty of his achievement, the greater he makes the courage, power, and persistence of himself as conqueror. If Caesar had set out to brag of his success at Zela, he would have given as many details as in his story of the battle with Ariovistus, or have spread it out as Bunyan enlarges on Christian's sword-and-shield fight with Apollyon. The brevity of the historical account in the Alexandrian War and the contemptuous brevity of the three words show that Caesar thought the thing hardly worth speaking of.

But the passage from Suetonius—what of that? In that we see not Caesar the man as we know him elsewhere, Caesar the high-minded thinker and doer, but Caesar the politician and the head of the state. It was the duty of the general in a triumph to appear as the representative of the state and of its glory and power. He was officially a braggart, and must make the most of the occasion to please the populace. He was a theatrical character, with face painted red. I can well conceive of Caesar as riding up the Capitoline Hill in a chariot, to dismount and offer sacrifice to a god in whom he did not believe, while saying to himself, "What a bore this is! Five days of such vanity! What fools these Romans are! I prefer to be at my desk, but must yield to these throat-splitting, ear-rasping crowds!" Such a soliloquy represents to us the Caesar that we know everywhere else, the man of business, too clear-sighted and great in spirit to overvalue his accomplished deeds, pushing toward his ends, evading and avoiding crowns on the Lupercal, that he might be the foremost man of all the world and found the Empire.

SAMUEL WILLARD.

Harbor Springs, Michigan, September 5, 1906.

Tribune,

#### OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harbrough Sherard. London: T. Werner Laurie. 12s. 6d. net.

[PUBLISHED TO-DAY.]

Mr. Robert Sherard's qualifications for writing the life of Oscar Wilde are based on a friendship during a period of sixteen years preceding Wilde's death, on the fact that he was with him at a time when all others had withdrawn, and "that for the very reason that he was not in sympathy with any of the affectations which towards others Oscar Wilde used to assume, the man as he truly was, the man as God and nature had made him was perhaps better known to him than to most of his other associates."

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Daily Chronicle 30 May 1906

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Sunday Sun, 10 June 1906

#### SOME FORTHCOMING BOOKS.

Mr. Robert Harborough Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready for publication. The renewed interest which, by the appearance of "De Profundis," has been universally awakened in the public mind, in the life and work of the late Mr. Oscar Wilde, has created on every side a demand for an authoritative book dealing with the subject. This volume, Mr. Sherard says, "gives the career as a writer, his biography as far as that is due observance of discretion, and an account of his many fields in which he so greatly distinguished himself. The purpose of the book is "to dispel a number of false reports associated themselves with his life and work. It has put about, for instance, that Mr. Wilde is still living; will give a full and detailed account of his death, and lips of the man who was holding him in his arms when

For many years Oscar Wilde's one-act tragedy, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," has been out of print. Mr. John Lane announces a new edition, which will be published next week. This play has been translated into every European language, including Czech, and at the present time it is constantly acted in Germany, besides production to Dr. Strauss.

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R. A. S. J.

THE TATLER DECEMBER 5, 1906

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#### THE DIAL

155

1906.]

time, the problem that furnished Matthew Arnold with the theme of his best-known book, the problem that baffles us to-day and will continue to puzzle and fascinate the thinkers of the world for many a long age to come. But perhaps the best of all that Pascal has to offer us, and the most likely to prove fruitful, is the picture he presents of an earnest soul fired with the passion for perfection. The grandeur and the pathos of this hopeless aspiration move us deeply. Probably more need the stimulus than the warning of his example; for warning it unmistakably contains. "Aspiring to be angels, men rebel." Aiming to be divine, they become less than human. Losing sight of the golden mean, departing from the Greek sound-mindedness or temperance (*sophrosune*), to attempt a transliteration, they commit all sorts of wild and foolish extravagances. And, curiously enough, Pascal stands convicted out of his own mouth, as might be shown by more than one citation. For a single instance, in chapter eight of the *Pensées* we read, "C'est sortir de l'humanité que de sortir du milieu: la grandeur de l'âme humaine consiste à savoir s'y tenir."

PERCY F. BICKNELL.

#### COMMUNICATIONS.

##### "TAKING CHANCES WITH MILTON."

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

The leading article in your issue of September 1, on "The Edict of Oyster Bay," pleases me by the force and brilliancy of its presentation of the "stand pat" side of the spelling contest now raging. The writer quotes a passage from Milton which he assumes would be spoiled by changing his spelling of "Sulphur," and adds: "We must take no chances with Milton!" Mustn't we? Have n't we? I have before me a photographed facsimile of Milton's handwriting, dated "Jan'y 10, 1639," and it contains this famous sentence: "If virtue feeble were, Heaven it selfe would stoop to her." Would not THE DIAL "take chances with Milton" if it were called upon to quote this fine sentiment? I think it would take at least four chances.

SAMUEL T. PICKARD.

Amesbury, Mass., Sept. 8, 1906.

#### THE DUTY OF SCHOLARS TOWARD SPELLING REFORM.

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

Allow me to thank you for your thoroughly sensible words on the ill-considered entrance of the President into the field of "spelling reform." The five hundred most learned linguists and *littérateurs* of the English-speaking world, if it could be ascertained who they are and if they could agree among themselves, could not get the following of the masses of educated men in any extensive and abrupt alterations of the natural current of linguistic evolution. How much less is such a following to be expected for a self-constituted group of men only a small fraction of whom have any claim whatever to exceptionally high standing in either of the fields

of linguistics and literature? The attempt to influence school boards to foist their arbitrary lists upon helpless children should be resisted with the utmost energy by every means at hand. These self-constituted reformers are powerless to introduce anything save disorder and additional labor, and all who are interested in keeping the language in the true path of gradual evolution, where it may yield automatically to the stimulus of the slowly improving taste of successive generations, should set themselves firmly against this unauthorized and impertinent interference.

W. H. JOHNSON.

Granville, Ohio, September 6, 1906.

#### CÆSAR'S "THRASONICAL BRAG."

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

When I was a boy I read in one of those school histories that shape the juvenile mind that Julius Caesar announced to the Roman senate his victory over Pharnaces at Zela by the memorable concatenation of the alliterative phrase, "Veni! Vidi! Vici!" Richard Grant White got off a joke at the now current pronunciation of Latin, that it turns the majestic sonority of those high-sounding dissyllables into the faint utterance of "wany, weedy, weaky," which is a poor brag. But however "weaky" this may sound, the Romans may have done what the Spaniards do in their strongly Latinish language: in their regular conjugations, except the one corresponding to the Latin first, they accent in the first and third persons of the perfect tense the final syllable. Try it, and you restore the sonority.

Then I found in "As You Like It" sarcastic Rosalind dealt the conqueror a stroke, saying, "There was never anything so sudden but the fight of two rams, and Cæsar's thrasonical brag of 'I came, saw, and overcame.'" The great dramatist seems to have liked to refer to this phrase: not only is it in both Latin and English in the ridiculous letter of Armado in "Love's Labour Lost," but in "Cymbeline" the queen says proudly, "A kind of conquest Cæsar made here, but made not here his brag of 'came' and 'saw' and 'overcame.'"

De Quincey admires Julius Cæsar, but contributes a rather contemptuous kick when he says of a later emperor, "In one sentence of his dispatch, Aurelian aimed at a contest with the great Julian gasconade of *Veni-Vidi-Vici*. His words are, 'Fugavimus, obsedimus, cruciavimus, occidimus.'"

With such testimonies against the great founder of the Roman Empire, I let the imputation lie in mind without further thought, until one day when I suddenly said to myself, "I know Julius Cæsar too well to believe that story: brag was foreign to the habit and policy of the great soldier." I thought of his History of the Gallic War, in which he tells of his blunders, — for instance, the surprise by the Nervii, — as coolly as if he were telling of Cyrus or Lysander of bygone centuries. How easy it would have been to comment on his own promptitude in rallying his forces, and his personal valor in taking sword and shield to fight in the ranks! And in the treatise on the Alexandrian War, published now as coming from him (probably made from his notes by Aulus Hirtius), the battle of Zela, the one said to have been announced so laconically, is not spoken of with any flourish of gratulation. Indeed, Colonel Dodge, in giving a military elucidation of the manoeuvres of the battle, uses five times as many words as the historian does.

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#### ily Telegraph, KS OF THE DAY

By W. L. COURTNEY.

#### OSCAR WILDE.

(T. WERNER LAURIE.)

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For many years Oscar Wilde has been out of print. Mr. John Lane, who will be published in the next time it is constantly acted to Dr. Strauss.

#### TRIBUNE.

We are informed by Mr. T. W. publisher, that Mr. Robert Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready. Mr. Sherard was acquainted with Wilde in 1884, and has a profound admiration for the man, which he is now publishing. The purpose of the book is to dispel the many false reports which have associated themselves with Wilde's life, and to give a full and detailed account of the man who was holding him.

Robert Harborough Sherard, this biography, is the great-grandson of Wordsworth. He has written poems himself, but his literary career has been in journalism, as foreign correspondent to the English papers. He has lived in Paris, and his recent book is full of anecdotes about distinguished men of letters, with whom he was intimately acquainted.

#### Daily News

"The Life of Oscar Wilde," the 20th by Mr. Werner Laurie Harborough Sherard, who has written much on the subject. The book institutes a comparison in the life of Wilde and the life of the man who was holding him. The comparison is a striking one, and the book is a masterpiece of biography. The volume was promptly reprinted in America, where it had rather more of a literary success than in England; and this fact, and the hope of making money by lecturing, seem to have led Wilde to plan a trip to America, where he arrived late in the year 1881. He came here with a fairly good reputation as a poet, and a rather vague one as "the apostle of aestheticism," which Wilde himself probably did not take too seriously, his statement being that he came to expound "a philosophy of art," and that "aestheticism" was to be taken as a "study of truth in art." His first experience was in Chickering Hall, New York, where he lectured on "The Renaissance." Again he was successful "from a commercial point of view," as his biographer tells us; and his success led to an arrangement with the well-known manager and celebrity-hunter, Major Pond, for a series

THE TATLER DECEMBER 5, 1906

#### Whistler's Readiness of Retort.

Of course the great exponent of the gentle art of retort was *par excellence* Whistler. It used to be his greatest delight to effect a neat score off a fellow wit. One of these encounters took place at a dinner party where the redoubtable James McNeill that ilk found as his *vis-à-vis* Oscar Wilde, who was then at the height of his prosperity. Truly a case of Greek meeting Greek, but a short passage of arms between the two early in the evening resulted in a decisive victory for the painter. The brilliancy of the remark which dealt the *coup de grace* led the defeated one to murmur wistfully, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler smote a wicked smile as he made the quick retort, "Never mind, my dear Oscar. You will." A bit, a

For a number of years before fame came to him, in the brilliant series of comedies he produced, he had a very hard struggle to live. He edited for Cassell and Co. *Woman's World*, and slaved at his work the orthodox Fleet-street manner, marriage brought him financial ease, after that, until the *debacle*, he was in all circumstances, his plays producing a come of several thousands yearly.

#### The Downfall.

Into the circumstances of his trial we no desire to enter. Wilde was no more than his base associates. Mr. Sherard, the sexual perversion, of which Wilde accused, to heredit. His eminent was a mixture of intelligence and malice, and from him was transmitted coarseness of the lower part of Wilde. He indulged in good living. From as the writer of this book suggest alcohol which he consumed, although never drunk, except during the last weeks of his miserable existence in produced a kind of mental aberration, left him irresponsible for his acts. In case, his intimate acquaintance with cl

158

#### THE DIAL

[Sept. 15,

At Oxford, Wilde wrote poems that were published in various magazines, and thus entered upon that literary career which was to continue until his death. Going to London, he assumed that affectation of dress and manner, that stilted and absurd pose, which brought him into ridicule and contempt with the British public. But at the same time it brought him into notice; and this was what the young man most desired. We are told that

"Oscar Wilde has been heard to explain that the reason why he assumed that costume which it pleased him to describe as the 'aesthetic costume' was merely to attract attention to his personality. For months he had tried in vain to find a publisher for his collected poems, and having failed to do so because he was an unknown man, he determined to make himself known, and hit upon the device of appearing in public in an extraordinary dress. He adopted as the 'aesthetic costume' a velvet coat, knee-breeches, a loose shirt with a turn-down collar, and a floating tie of some unusual shade; and he not infrequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with expressions of the greatest admiration."

Whether or not as a result of this masquerading, Wilde did succeed in finding a publisher for his poems, which appeared in a volume "issued in the best style" in London in 1881. With all their faults, the marks of youth and immaturity, the poems showed unmistakable signs of originality and strength; it is seldom indeed that so much of merit is seen in a volume of poems by so young a man. The book was received with a curious mixture of jeers and praise by the reviewers, but was "commercially a great success," and this "pleased Wilde very much," as he appears now to have been in very straitened financial circumstances, which contrasted strangely with his early habits of reckless indulgence. The volume was promptly reprinted in America, where it had rather more of a literary success than in England; and this fact, and the hope of making money by lecturing, seem to have led Wilde to plan a trip to America, where he arrived late in the year 1881. He came here with a fairly good reputation as a poet, and a rather vague one as "the apostle of aestheticism," which Wilde himself probably did not take too seriously, his statement being that he came to expound "a philosophy of art," and that "aestheticism" was to be taken as a "study of truth in art." His first experience was in Chickering Hall, New York, where he lectured on "The Renaissance." Again he was successful "from a commercial point of view," as his biographer tells us; and his success led to an arrangement with the well-known manager and celebrity-hunter, Major Pond, for a series

of lectures in the larger cities of this country and Canada. Mr. Sherard's chapters on this episode in Wilde's life are full of interest, especially for American readers. In Boston, where he went directly from New York, he had an amusing encounter with some Harvard students, in which Wilde seems to have had decidedly the best of it. Just before the lecture opened, the students, to the number of sixty, appeared in the hall dressed in an extravagant burlesque of the "aesthetic" costume, each bearing a lily in his buttonhole and a huge sunflower in his hand, and paraded solemnly to the front seats that had been reserved for them in the crowded hall. The effect was of course ludicrous, but the joke lost something of its point when the lecturer appeared clad in conventional evening clothes, and proceeded with his lecture in apparent unconsciousness of the prank that had been attempted by the fun-loving students. From Boston, Wilde made a long jump to Omaha, where he lectured on "Decorative Art," startling his audience by denouncing American furniture as "not honestly made, and out of character." His visits to Denver and Louisville are briefly noted, but it is surprising to find no mention at all of his trip to California, although this afforded some of the most interesting of his American experiences, and a memorable evening of "high jinks" given him by the Bohemian Club in San Francisco is even yet spoken of as among the more notable entertainments in the history of that famous club. Returning from California, — bringing with him the characterization, which he used with considerable iteration, "California is beautiful, it is Italy without her art," — Wilde stopped in Chicago, in the spring of 1882. Of his stay here, one interesting incident, relating to a since famous but then obscure artist — the sculptor Donoghue — must be quoted from Mr. Sherard's narrative.

"On his arrival in Chicago, he received a letter at his hotel from a young Irish sculptor who told him of the misery in which he was living, and begged him to come to the garret which was his studio and look at his work. Wilde set out directly for the address given, and after a hazardous excursion into the slums of Chicago found John Donoghue's abode. He stayed with him a long time, he praised his work, he comforted him, he told him the great consolation of *l'art pour l'art*, and he did not leave him without commissioning him to do a piece of work. The next evening, John Donoghue, sitting in the audience in the crowded lecture hall, suddenly heard Oscar Wilde, in the course of his lecture, reproach the fashionable men and women who were listening to his words with the fact that a young sculptor of undoubted genius who was living in their midst was being allowed to die of hunger and neglect. He went on to describe his visit to Donoghue's studio; he

#### ily Telegraph, 20 June 1906 KS OF THE DAY

By W. L. COURTNEY.

#### OSCAR WILDE.

(T. WERNER LAURIE.)

Mr. Sherard to write and publish Oscar Wilde? It is, of course, a very fine of friendship, indeed, of justice, some respects the time is opportune. "written originally for Madame ernhardt, and constantly played in has recently been played for the me in London. Messrs. Methuen are publishing a complete uniform edition's works in twelve volumes. It is long ago since "Lady Windermere's is revived at the St. James's Theatre, following that of "The Importance of meet." To these facts must be added

And here and there the style is decidedly turgid. What are we to say, for instance, of the following sentence, except that it is one at which Oscar Wilde himself would have laughed? "There is much of the moping owl in a large section of our stolid Britishry, and people of that category dislike nothing more intensely than the man of radio-activity, who bustles into the stagnant area of their gelid dullness and interferes with their somnolent eupepsia." Philistinism is surely avenged when an advocate writes like this.

But the book is undoubtedly interesting from many points of view. It is written with abundance of spirit by a man who knows what he is talking about, and it certainly ought to be read by all those who are inclined to pass hasty judgment. Mr. Sherard tells us a good deal that is important concerning Oscar Wilde's ancestry. His father, the Dublin surgeon, seems to have led a somewhat riotous life. His mother, the poetess, who wrote under the name of Speranza, for many months before Oscar Wilde was born, and "graved the

#### Tribune,

#### OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. London: T. Werner Laurie. 12s. 6d. net.

[PUBLISHED TO-DAY.]

Mr. Robert Sherard's qualifications for writing the life of Oscar Wilde are based on a friendship during a period of sixteen years preceding Wilde's death, on the fact that he was with him at a time when all others had withdrawn, and "that for the very reason that he was not in sympathy with any of the affectations which towards others Oscar Wilde used to assume, the man as he truly was, the man as God and nature had made him was perhaps better known to him than to most of his associates."

tions, yet it must outset that Mr. de and the narra- unsatisfactory and e does he let us see of the man as Mr. seen beneath his tions. Never once of the philosophy oked upon the prob- n his genius, which suggested, and in se pages of hyster- interesting compila- no attempt even to rary achievements, his work in poetry are given extracts ms in morning and failing to find the story of his intel- al downfall, we are f foolish denuncia- a society which— d—hounded out a em too truly. opping owl in a large, tishry, and people nothing more in- radio-activity who area of their gelid th their somnolent think, to be forced ings—in one word, ! Not No! Away

Paris, although, as en like Alphonse suspicion of him. amazing gifts of extravagance of h circles, but de- who love words for d attention and

says a well-known st before had ap- reached with sim- expressive power order of humanity, to tears. One had words of such a splendour. n speech is more n to the English surprising that in s personal and pri- account than his have been idolized all circle.

29 Sept. 1906.

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with George Bernard Shaw! nted with the results of his they not given him enough uld be forced back for effect Messrs. Klaw and Erlanger, ho invited him to be present ar and Cleopatra in October

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self.

ifted with a short memory, or merican people impertinences far more gifted countryman, wit. But, even at his worst, ated anything so cheap as a

1906.]

#### THE DIAL

159

spoke of the beautiful things he had seen there, of the beautiful things this young man could do, of the honor he could bring to the city of Chicago if only people would encourage his efforts. The consequence was that the next day John Donoghue was everywhere discussed in Chicago; people flocked to his studio; commissions poured in. John Donoghue's artistic career was assured. He came to Europe, he studied, he prospered."

Another case in which Wilde endeavored to help a deserving friend had a less happy termination, though one not unusual, perhaps, in similar attempts to assist struggling but sometimes peevish children of genius. The reference in this case we take to be to the English poet Rennell Rodd. Wilde made great efforts to find an American publisher for this young man's poems, and at last succeeded, he himself writing a preface for the book. But when it appeared, it represented such astonishing ideas of "aesthetic decoration" in its make-up that the author felt himself aggrieved, and, holding Wilde responsible, wrote him a bitter letter putting an end to their friendship.

Wilde's visit to Walt Whitman is interestingly described.

"Wilde was distressed by the poverty of Walt Whitman's appearance, his shabby attire, and especially by the untidiness and squalor of the one room in which the American poet lived. The place was littered with great heaps of newspapers, strewn all over the room, and over them was so thick a coat of dust that it was impossible for the visitor to find a clean spot where he could sit down. Walt Whitman, primeval, natural, aboriginal, would feel little sympathy for the dandified Hellene."

Wilde's lecture-trip extended to the largest cities of Canada and Nova Scotia, from whence he returned to New York with a "substantial sum of money" as the result of his year's work in America. He soon went back to London, and not long after went to Paris, where considerable portions of his future life were passed, and where he died in poverty and obscurity, at the age of forty-six. Mr. Sherard's account of this strange and broken life is full and interesting, although it suffers from the extravagant tone of eulogy and admiration which colors it throughout. It is to be taken, as we said at the outset, as a reference and an apology; and taken thus, it well repays perusal. The volume is admirably printed, and is supplied with a good index; while the bibliography, showing a surprising number of titles in prose and verse, with translations into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Swedish, and Polish, gives a new sense of the brilliancy of Wilde's talents as a writer, mingled with regret and pity for his downfall as a man.

Paris.



The Life of Oscar Wilde, which Mr. R. H. Sherard has been writing for Mr. Werner Laurie, will be ready next month. The author and his subject were friends for many years, and so this book has a personal note all through. One strong purpose of it is to dispel a number of false reports which have associated themselves with Wilde's life, as, for instance, the weird recurring rumour that he is not dead. Mr. Sherard also discusses his writings, and the book is well illustrated.

## Sunday Sun, 10 June 1906

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## Whistler's Readiness of Retort.

Of course the great exponent of the gentle art of retort was *par excellence* Whistler. It used to be his greatest delight to effect a neat score off a fellow wit. One of these encounters took place at a dinner party where the redoubtable James McNeill of that ilk found as his *vis-à-vis* Oscar Wilde, who was then at the height of his prosperity. Truly a case of Greek meeting Greek, but a short passage of arms between the two early in the evening resulted in a decisive victory for the painter. The brilliancy of the remark which dealt the *coup de grace* led the defeated one to murmur wistfully, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler smole a wicked smile as he made the quick retort, "Never mind, my dear Oscar. You will." A hit, a

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veloped in the earlier volumes of this series. With "The Preliminaries of the Revolution," the solution of the second and third problems is taken up by Professor G. E. Howard. Professor Howard reviews first the educative and unifying effects of the French war, refers to the prophecies of independence made by foreign statesmen or by travellers in America, and then treats in considerable detail the topic about which there has been most disagreement among writers, that is, the influence as a cause of the Revolution of England's commercial policy toward the colonies. The course of two centuries had developed a large body of laws, which were designed to regulate the economic activities of all parts of the empire. Allowing full weight to the argument that England's course was more enlightened and her code less severe than those of other nations, Professor Howard nevertheless holds the view that "the primary cause of the American Revolution must be sought in the character of the old colonial system." The author is thus led to a review of the commercial legislation of England, which, if it involves a repetition, in part, of matter found in previous volumes, justifies this by the clearness of the treatment. As one might expect in such a work, the discussion is largely external. The history of the system as it actually worked is still to be quarried from the manuscript archives of the colonies and from the materials in the British Public Record Office; and these two classes of sources seem to have been little used by Professor Howard.

Worthy of special notice is Professor Howard's handling of the law of 1764, known as the "Sugar Act." This statute, which Mr. Fiske (for example) entirely neglected, links the parliamentary legislation of the Revolutionary period to the former code. A full realization of this reduces somewhat the cataclysmic importance usually ascribed to the Stamp Act, and shows that the latter aroused such violent opposition largely because its burdens were to fall upon a people already enraged and fearful of commercial ruin. The fall of Grenville's ministry, the author reminds us, was in no way due to the Stamp Act, nor did Rockingham himself at first consider it of prime importance. After discussing this topic and the unhappy inventions of Charles Townshend, Professor Howard turns aside to speak of the attempts to secure Anglican bishops in America. Another chapter tells of the settlement of the Western country, after which we are brought back to the narrative of constitutional and political development—the

Committees of Correspondence, and the coercive legislation of 1773-74. With chapters upon the meeting of the first Continental Congress, the appeal to arms, and the loyalist side of the argument, this volume comes to a close. The main causes of the Revolution, in the author's mind, were economic and political, working throughout a long period of time; but he stresses also the too much neglected side of social change. "The conditions were favorable to the rise of more united and a freer society in America; but this was hindered by the inertia of a colonial system which the American people had outgrown."

Hardly any book in the series is more attractively written than "The American Revolution" by Professor C. H. Van Tyne, which covers especially the years 1776-1783. To reconvert the campaigns of the Revolution demand either large space or very careful condensation, and the author has chosen and successfully cut the latter plan, reinforcing his text with maps and charts of peculiar excellence. Thus carefully compressing the story of battles and marches, Professor Van Tyne gains space for touches of personal description,—as in the simple and impressive sketches of Washington and Jefferson,—and for summaries of argument like that which he gives of Paine's "Common Sense." For his treatment of the loyalist question, Professor Van Tyne is able to draw the results of his own special researches in the field. The intensity of party strife is emphasized, as is also the importance of diplomatic activities of the Congress.

topic, it seems to us, is handled somewhat skilfully. In neither this nor the succeeding volume do we find a worthy explanation of establishment of the government under Articles of Confederation. Perhaps this is to faulty linking between books each of which has strong individuality. In contrast with only praise can be given to the thoroughness with which Professor Van Tyne has worked the story of the erection of the State governments. The result of this, in the author's view, is to establish the undoubted sovereignty of the States. He points out that the very federal activities of the Congress, so often brought forward to argue the residence of sovereignty in that body, on the contrary were so exercised as to show that the Congress itself made no such pretensions. This States-rights interpretation of Professor Van Tyne draws from the editor of the series the explanation that "it is no part of the scheme of the series to adjust the conclusions of individual writers to the editor's frame of mind."

By W. L. COURTNEY.

## OSCAR WILDE.

(T. WERNER LAURIE.)

rise of Mr. Sherard to write and publish "Oscar Wilde"? It is, of course, a very office of friendship, indeed, of justice, some respects the time is opportune. "Oscar Wilde," written originally for Madame Bernhardt, and constantly played in London, has recently been played for the time in London. Messrs. Methuen are publishing a complete uniform edition of Wilde's works in twelve volumes. It is very long ago since "Lady Windermere's Fan" was revived at the St. James's Theatre, and following that of "The Importance of Earnest." To these facts must be added the fact that has taken place in the public mind. The great mass of uninstructed readers always proceeds by a series of zig-zags, and after a vast amount of furious obloquy a truth has very naturally set in towards some more than toleration—even a modified form of praise. The book which began the change was undoubtedly that very remarkable piece of work, "De Profundis," which was written in Reading Gaol. For here there was a revelation of a quite new Oscar Wilde, something that was modest and humble, and essentially religious; the cry of an afflicted soul, who after all had found some consolation in the simple and eternal truths of the Christian faith. The discovery was so startling, so unexpected, so entirely subversive of all theories of the tyranny of habit, that men and women began to recast their views of the author—not very intelligently, it may be, but still with a kind of regret, perhaps even remorse, that their judgment had hitherto been so uncharitable. Here are reasons enough, no doubt, to justify Mr. R. H. Sherard, although Mr. Robert Ross's silent but sleepless advocacy of his dead friend in editing "De Profundis" produced far greater effect than any formal biography could possibly do.

Nevertheless, many will venture to think that the publication of a Life of Oscar Wilde is a mistake. The reasons are very obvious, and have nothing whatsoever to do with the merits or demerits of the biographer. The natural, kindly, human impulse is to let Oscar Wilde sleep in peace—at all events for the generation that knew him. In process of time another generation will arise who did not know him, and their judgment, which will be exercised on what the man did, quite uninfluenced by his peculiar personality, will be alike valuable and interesting. I doubt whether any definitive judgment can be passed by any of us in the present day on the author of "Lady Windermere's Fan," for in his case not only the old maxim applies, that one must not be too near an author to judge of his merits, but also the peculiar difficulty involved in the appalling contrast between his life and work. We may try as best we can to read Wilde's plays, and his fairy stories, and his novels, and his poems without any mental association with the lurid passages of his life, but the feat, I will venture to say, is beyond our power. It is not our fault, it is his. No lack of charity, no want of justice, is the cause, but merely the impossibility of the thing, the terribly insistent memory, which always haunts us in turning over his pages.

Besides, any book that is now dedicated to his life is sure to take the form either of an unwise advocacy or else an equally unwise repudiation. Mr. Sherard himself has not avoided some of the pitfalls which beset the path of one who, aware that he has to struggle against very justifiable prejudices, distributes his adjectives with a somewhat too lavish hand. He tells us, it is true, that in many respects he had no sympathy with Wilde's work or his general attitude towards art. Nevertheless, he invites us to regard him absolutely as a genius, as a man who could have done for England, both in literature and art, something that was epoch-making and of wholly incontestable value. Sometimes he allows himself to use expressions which strike one as absurd. He tells us, for instance, that Sir Henry Irving, acting the part of Lescaupes in "The Lyons Mail," looked like Oscar Wilde. There could hardly be a greater contrast in facial angles and contours than that between the great actor and the great aesthetic apostle. Or, again, he assures us that the only bitterness which Wilde showed was against affectation and pretentiousness—which sounds like a paradox in the case of a man whose besetting sin was precisely affectation and pretentiousness. Throughout the book the general impression must undoubtedly be that Mr. Sherard doth protest too much. It is, of course, natural enough, but it only illustrates the difficulty to which allusion has already been made—the problem how best to defend a man against well-founded prejudices felt by his contemporaries.

And here and there the style is decidedly turgid. What are we to say, for instance, of the following sentence, except that it is one at which Oscar Wilde himself would have laughed? "There is much of the moping owl in a large section of our stolid Britishry, and people of that category dislike nothing more intensely than the man of radio-activity, who bustles into the stagnant area of their gelid dullness and interferes with their somnolent eupesias." Philistinism is surely avenged when an advocate writes like this.

But the book is undoubtedly interesting from many points of view. It is written with abundance of spirit by a man who knows what he is talking about, and it certainly ought to be read by all those who are inclined to pass hasty judgment. Mr. Sherard tells us a good deal that is important concerning Oscar Wilde's ancestry. His father, the Dublin surgeon, seems to have led a somewhat riotous life. His mother, the poetess, who wrote under the name of Speranza, for many months before Oscar Wilde was born hoped and prayed that her child might be a girl. The great-uncle of Lady Wilde was that singular creature, Charles Maturin, who wrote "Melmoth the Wanderer." Maturin was undoubtedly eccentric, a mixture of talent and insanity, a mass of affectation, a man who, when he was writing, used to place a wafer on his forehead to let those who entered his study know that he was not to be disturbed. From most points of view he was a grotesque and melodramatic character. How profoundly he must have impressed Lady Wilde's son is clear when we remember that the name of Sebastian Melmoth was chosen by the unhappy prisoner after he had left Reading Gaol. It is useful to remember facts like these, for it is the scientific way of accounting for a man's peculiarities. In a certain sense Oscar Wilde had no chance. He came into the world marked and predestined to shock people by his eccentricity.

Whether, however, Mr. Sherard's further apology for him, that he was practically insane, helps the case is a more doubtful matter. It is a terribly facile way of excusing a man guilty of a crime, who also happens to be a poet and dramatist, if we say that he was quite sane when he wrote his good works and quite insane when he did his bad acts. Besides, the course of the narrative makes it perfectly clear that Oscar Wilde himself helped largely to complete his own degradation by the way in which he lived. Of this there can be no better proof than what happened to him under prison discipline. The old Oscar Wilde, the man of pretence and ostentation, the poseur of artifice and vanity, entirely fell away from him, and a new Oscar Wilde seemed veritably to be born, of a much simpler and sincerer shape. The fact rests on indubitable testimony, but if we need further evidence it can be found in the book "De Profundis." Nothing could well be more startling than the contrast between the author of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and the man who penned the pages describing the value of the discipline of sorrow and the persuasive charm of the Founder of Christianity. Wilde was certainly sane enough when he wrote "De Profundis." If he was insane before, no small part of the cause is to be found in the stupid extravagance and luxury of his London and Paris life. One thing is certainly true, that so far as his work was concerned he steadily developed. The folkies of the æsthetic craze disappeared after his visit to America and his experience of trans-Atlantic lecture-rooms. He was a hard-working student in Paris, albeit that he tried to represent himself as another Balzac and spoke of a "Neronian" period. Then came the prolific stage of his dramatic work, in which he literally took London by storm—dramatic work, I will venture to say, as sane and sound

as anything that has ever come out of an artistic and theatrical workshop. Quite apart from the extraordinary brilliance of his conversation and personality, those who knew him well were aware of his prodigal imagination in fairy-tales. If the world at large remembers "Lady Windermere's Fan," "A Woman of No Importance," "An Ideal Husband," and "The Importance of Being Earnest," his friends will not easily forget "The Happy Prince and Other Tales," which ran through four editions and had all the charm of Andersen and De la Motte Fouqué. And when, at the very crisis of his career and in the wreck of all his fortunes, he wrote "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and "De Profundis," it can at least be asserted with positive truth that nothing became him so well as the last efforts of his pen.

Alas! the few years that elapsed after Oscar Wilde came out of prison are not such as anyone would care to dwell upon. There is no question that he relapsed. But on whom should rest the blame? If a few sound-hearted friends had welcomed and safeguarded him, then, perhaps, there might have been final security and peace. No more dreadful irony of fate could be conceived than that the author of "De Profundis" should, after having so far achieved his own redemption, die in squalor and penury, a helpless, hopeless ruin, in a mean street in Paris.

## OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. London: T. Werner Laurie. 12s. 6d. net.

[PUBLISHED TO-DAY.]

Mr. Robert Sherard's qualifications for writing the life of Oscar Wilde are based on a friendship during a period of sixteen years preceding Wilde's death, on the fact that he was with him at a time when all others had withdrawn, and "that for the very reason that he was not in sympathy with any of the affectations which towards others Oscar Wilde used to assume, the man as he truly was, the man as God and nature had made him was perhaps better known to him than to most of his other associates."

They are high qualifications, yet it must be frankly said at the outset that Mr. Sherard's portrait of Wilde and the narrative of his life are both unsatisfactory and unconvincing. Never once does he let us see into the mysterious heart of the man as Mr. Sherard must surely have seen beneath his outward pose and affectations. Never once do we get an explanation of the philosophy with which Oscar Wilde looked upon the problems of modern life. Even his genius, which was undeniable, is hardly suggested, and in no way interpreted in these pages of hysterical enthusiasm and uninteresting compilation. Mr. Sherard makes no attempt even to analyze Oscar Wilde's literary achievements, nor to sum up the value of his work in poetry and drama. Instead, we are given extracts from contemporary criticisms in morning and weekly papers, and while failing to find the real man, and the true story of his intellectual evolution and moral downfall, we are expected to read pages of foolish denunciation against a Philistine society which—according to Mr. Sherard—hounded out a man who had satirized them too truly.

There is much of the moping owl in a large section of our stolid Britishry, and people of that category dislike nothing more intensely than the man of radio-activity who bustles into the stagnant area of their gelid dullness and interferes with their somnolent eupesias. To be forced to think, to be forced to laugh, to be taught things—in one word, to be interfered with. No! No! No! Away with him!

He was at his best in Paris, although, as Mr. Sherard admits, men like Alphonse Daudet had instinctive suspicion of him. But in literary salons his amazing gifts of conversation, his poetical extravagance of speech, jarring in English circles, but delightful among Parisians, who love words for their own sake, attracted attention and enthusiasm.

"This Englishman," says a well-known French writer, "who just before had appeared grotesque, reached, reached with simplicity, surpassed the expressive power of the most admirable order of humanity. Many of us were moved to tears. One had never thought that the words of such a man could attain to such splendour."

Such adulation of golden speech is more suited to the French than to the English temperament, and it is not surprising that in this country, where a man's personal and private character is of more account than his words, Wilde should never have been idolized outside a comparatively small circle.

## Free Lance, 29 Sept. 1906.

## What's the matter, G.B.S.?

What ever is the matter with George Bernard Shaw? Surely he is not disappointed with the results of his new photographs. Have they not given him enough advertisement, that he should be forced back for effect on a rude postcard sent to Messrs. Klaw and Erlanger, the American Impresarii who invited him to be present at a performance of "Cæsar and Cleopatra" in October next?

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Mr. Shaw thinks it funny to give his address as "The Coast of Cornwall," and to mention that he fears his coming would convulse America, cause huge crowds to gather, and lead to his being elected President of the United States. He also informs Messrs. Klaw and Erlanger that he is writing "an astonishingly good new play."

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Mr. Shaw is obviously gifted with a short memory, or he would not try on the American people impertinences that in the days of his far more gifted countryman, Oscar Wilde, passed for wit. But, even at his worst, Oscar Wilde never perpetrated anything so cheap as a rude postcard.



The Life of Oscar Wilde, which Mr. R. H. Sherard has been writing for Mr. Werner Laurie, will be ready next month. The author and his subject were friends for many years, and so this book has a personal note all through. One strong purpose of it is to dispel a number of false reports which have associated themselves with Wilde's life, as, for instance, the weird recurring rumour that he is not dead. Mr. Sherard also discusses his writings, and the book is well illustrated.

## Sunday Sun, 10 June 1906

## SOME FORTHCOMING BOOKS.

Mr. Robert Harborough Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready for publication. The renewed interest which, by the appearance of "De Profundis," has been universally awakened in the public mind, in the life and work of the late Mr. Oscar Wilde, has created on every side a demand for an authoritative biography. This volume, Mr. Sherard's career as a writer, his biography, due observance of discretion, the many fields in which he served the purpose of the book is "to dispel associated themselves with his put about, for instance, that will give a full and detailed account of the man who was holding

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## TRIBUNE.

We are informed by Mr. T. W. publisher, that Mr. Robert Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready. Mr. Sherard was acquainted with Wilde in 1884, and has a profound admiration of the man, which is astonishing brightness before his death, repeated recently, that still living. Mr. Sherard gives account of his death, gathered from the man who was holding him when he died.

Robert Harborough Sherard, this biography, is the great-grandson of Wordsworth. He has written poems himself, but his literary career has been in journalism, as foreign correspondent to English papers. He has lived in Paris, and his recent book is full of anecdotes about distinguished men of letters, with whom he is intimately acquainted.

## Daily News

"The Life of Oscar Wilde" is the 20th by Mr. Werner Laurie Harborough Sherard, who has written much on the subject. The book is a comparison in his life of Wilde and the life of the man who was holding him when he died. The comparison is a striking advantage, however, of Savage of genius and striking promise; both died without a prison; both died without a thing worthy of their abilities; scarcely hope that Wilde was in his biographer as Savage son. Moreover, Savage was a delightful novel which White his story and personality; a way, has found its way of readers than it ever had issued in a thin-paper volume

## Whistler's Readiness of Retort.

Of course the great exponent of the gentle art of retort was *par excellence* Whistler. It used to be his greatest delight to effect a neat score off a fellow wit. One of these encounters took place at a dinner party where the redoubtable James McNeill of that ilk found as his *vis-à-vis* Oscar Wilde, who was then at the height of his prosperity. Truly a case of Greek meeting Greek, but a short passage of arms between the two early in the evening resulted in a decisive victory for the painter. The brilliancy of the remark which dealt the *coup de grace* led the defeated one to murmur wistfully, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler smiled a quick smile as he made the quick retort, "Never mind, my dear Oscar. You will." A hit, a

For a number of years before fame came to him, in the brilliant series of comedies he produced, he had a very hard struggle to live. He edited for Cassell and Co. *Woman's World*, and slaved at his work the orthodox Fleet-street manner. Marriage brought him financial ease after that, until the *debacle*, he was in all circumstances, his plays producing a come of several thousands yearly.

## The Downfall.

Into the circumstances of his trial we do not desire to enter. Wilde was no more than his base associates. Mr. Sherard, the sexual perversion, of which Wilde accused, to heredit. His eminent was a mixture of intelligence and malice, and from him was transmitted coarseness of the lower part of Wilde. He indulged in good living. Pro as the writer of this book suggest alcohol which he consumed, although never drunk, except during the last weeks of his miserable existence in Reading Gaol. For here there was a revelation of a quite new Oscar Wilde, something that was modest and humble, and essentially religious; the cry of an afflicted soul, who after all had found some consolation in the simple and eternal truths of the Christian faith. The discovery was so startling, so unexpected, so entirely subversive of all theories of the tyranny of habit, that men and women began to recast their views of the author—not very intelligently, it may be, but still with a kind of regret, perhaps even remorse, that their judgment had hitherto been so uncharitable. Here are reasons enough, no doubt, to justify Mr. R. H. Sherard, although Mr. Robert Ross's silent but sleepless advocacy of his dead friend in editing "De Profundis" produced far greater effect than any formal biography could possibly do.

## THE DIAL

[Sept

160

veloped in the earlier volumes of this series. With "The Preliminaries of the Revolution," the solution of the second and third problems is taken up by Professor G. E. Howard. Professor Howard reviews first the educative and unifying effects of the French war, refers to the prophecies of independence made by foreign statesmen or by travellers in America, and then treats in considerable detail the topic about which there has been most disagreement among writers, that is, the influence as a cause of the Revolution of England's commercial policy toward the colonies. The course of two centuries had developed a large body of laws, which were designed to regulate the economic activities of all parts of the empire. Allowing full weight to the argument that England's course was more enlightened and her code less severe than those of other nations, Professor Howard nevertheless holds the view that "the primary cause of the American Revolution must be sought in the character of the old colonial system." The author is thus led to a review of the commercial legislation of England, which, if it involves a repetition, in part, of matter found in previous volumes, justifies this by the clearness of the treatment. As one might expect in such a work, the discussion is largely external. The history of the system as it actually worked is still to be quarried from the manuscript archives of the colonies and from the materials in the British Public Record Office; and these two classes of sources seem to have been little used by Professor Howard.

Worthy of special notice is Professor Howard's handling of the law of 1764, known as the "Sugar Act." This statute, which Mr. Fiske (for example) entirely neglected, links the parliamentary legislation of the Revolutionary period to the former code. A full realization of this reduces somewhat the cataclysmic importance usually ascribed to the Stamp Act, and shows that the latter aroused such violent opposition largely because its burdens were to fall upon a people already enraged and fearful of commercial ruin. The fall of Grenville's ministry, the author reminds us, was in no way due to the Stamp Act, nor did Rockingham himself at first consider it of prime importance. After discussing this topic and the unhappy inventions of Charles Townshend, Professor Howard turns aside to speak of the attempts to secure Anglican bishops in America. Another chapter tells of the settlement of the Western country, after which we are brought back to the narrative of constitutional and political development—the

Committees of Correspondence, and the legislation of 1773-74. With chapters the meeting of the first Continental Congress the appeal to arms, and the loyalist side of argument, this volume comes to a close. The main causes of the Revolution, in the author's mind, were economic and political, and throughout a long period of time; but he has also the too much neglected side of social change. "The conditions were favorable to the rise of a more united and a freer society in America; this was hindered by the inertia of a colonial system which the American people had outgrown."

Hardly any book in the series is more actively written than "The American Revolution" by Professor C. H. Van Tyne, which especially the years 1776-1783. To remember the campaigns of the Revolution demands either large space or very careful condensation, and the author has chosen and successfully executed the latter plan, reinforcing his text with maps and charts of peculiar excellence. Thus carefully compressing the story of battles and marches, Professor Van Tyne gains for touches of personal description, — as in the simple and impressive sketches of Washington and Jefferson, — and for summaries of argument like that which he gives of Paine's "Common Sense." For his treatment of the loyalist question, Professor Van Tyne is able to draw on results of his own special researches in the field. The intensity of party strife is emphasized, as is also the importance of diplomatic activities of the Congress. On this topic, it seems to us, is handled somewhat skilfully. In neither this nor the succeeding volume do we find a worthy explanation of the establishment of the government under the Articles of Confederation. Perhaps this is due to faulty linking between books each of which has strong individuality. In contrast with only praise can be given to the thoroughness with which Professor Van Tyne has worked the story of the erection of the State governments. The result of this, in the author's mind, is to establish the undoubted sovereignty of the States. He points out that the very federal acts of the Congress, so often brought forward to argue the residence of sovereignty in that body, on the contrary were so exercised as to show that the Congress itself made no such pretensions. This States-rights interpretation of the Van Tyne draws from the editor of the series the explanation that "it is no part of the scheme of the series to adjust the conclusions of individual writers to the editor's frame of mind."

## Daily Telegraph, BOOKS OF THE DAY

By W. L. COURTNEY.

## OSCAR WILDE.

(T. WERNER LAURIE.)

Is it wise of Mr. Sherard to write and publish a life of Oscar Wilde? It is, of course, a very natural office of friendship, indeed, of justice, and in some respects the time is opportune. "Salomé," written originally for Madame Sarah Bernhardt, and constantly played in Germany, has recently been played for the second time in London. Messrs. Methuen are shortly publishing a complete uniform edition of Wilde's works in twelve volumes. It is not very long ago since "Lady Windermere's Fan" was revived at the St. James's Theatre, a revival following that of "The Importance of Being Earnest." To these facts must be added a certain change that has taken place in the public mind. The great mass of uninstructed opinion always proceeds by a series of zig-zags, and after a vast amount of furious obloquy a reaction has very naturally set in towards something more than toleration—even a modified form of praise. The book which began the change was undoubtedly that very remarkable piece of work, "De Profundis," which was written in Reading Gaol. For here there was a revelation of a quite new Oscar Wilde, something that was modest and humble, and essentially religious; the cry of an afflicted soul, who after all had found some consolation in the simple and eternal truths of the Christian faith. The discovery was so startling, so unexpected, so entirely subversive of all theories of the tyranny of habit, that men and women began to recast their views of the author—not very intelligently, it may be, but still with a kind of regret, perhaps even remorse, that their judgment had hitherto been so uncharitable. Here are reasons enough, no doubt, to justify Mr. R. H. Sherard, although Mr. Robert Ross's silent but sleepless advocacy of his dead friend in editing "De Profundis" produced far greater effect than any formal biography could possibly do.

Nevertheless, many will venture to think that the publication of a Life of Oscar Wilde is a mistake. The reasons are very obvious, and have nothing whatsoever to do with the merits or demerits of the biographer. The natural, kindly, human impulse is to let Oscar Wilde sleep in peace—at all events for the generation that knew him. In process of time another generation will arise who did not know him, and their judgment, which will be exercised on what the man did, quite uninfluenced by his peculiar personality, will be alike valuable and interesting. I doubt whether any definitive judgment can be passed by any of us in the present day on the author of "Lady Windermere's Fan," for in his case not only the old maxim applies, that one must not be too near an author to judge of his merits, but also the peculiar difficulty involved in the appalling contrast between his life and work. We may try as best we can to read Wilde's plays, and his fairy stories, and his novels, and his poems without any mental association with the lurid passages of his life, but the feat, I will venture to say, is beyond our power. It is not our fault, it is his. No lack of charity, no want of justice, is the cause, but merely the impossibility of the thing, the terribly insistent memory, which always haunts us in turning over his pages.

Besides, any book that is now dedicated to his life is sure to take the form either of an unwise advocacy or else an equally unwise repudiation. Mr. Sherard himself has not avoided some of the pitfalls which beset the path of one who, aware that he has to struggle against very justifiable prejudices, distributes his adjectives with a somewhat too lavish hand. He tells us, it is true, that in many respects he had no sympathy with Wilde's work or his general attitude towards art. Nevertheless, he invites us to regard him absolutely as a genius, as a man who could have done for England, both in literature and art, something that was epoch-making and of wholly incontestable value. Sometimes he allows himself to use expressions which strike one as absurd. He tells us, for instance, that Sir Henry Irving, acting the part of Lescaques in "The Lyons Mail," looked like Oscar Wilde. There could hardly be a greater contrast in facial angles and contours than that between the great actor and the great aesthetic apostle. Or, again, he assures us that the only bitterness of Wilde's life was against affectation and pretentiousness—which sounds like a paradox in the case of a man whose besetting sin was precisely affectation and pretentiousness. Throughout the book the general impression must undoubtedly be that Mr. Sherard doth protest too much. It is, of course, natural enough, but it only illustrates the difficulty to which allusion has already been made—the problem how best to defend a man against well-founded prejudices felt by his contemporaries.

And here and there the style is decidedly turgid. What are we to say, for instance, of the following sentence, except that it is one at which Oscar Wilde himself would have laughed? "There is much of the moping owl in a large section of our stolid Britishry, and people of that category dislike nothing more intensely than the man of radio-activity, who bustles into the stagnant area of their gelid dullness and interferes with their somnolent eupesias." Philistinism is surely avenged when an advocate writes like this.

But the book is undoubtedly interesting from many points of view. It is written with abundance of spirit by a man who knows what he is talking about, and it certainly ought to be read by all those who are inclined to pass hasty judgment. Mr. Sherard tells us a good deal that is important concerning Oscar Wilde's ancestry. His father, the Dublin surgeon, seems to have led a somewhat riotous life. His mother, the poetess, who wrote under the name of Speranza, for many months before Oscar Wilde was born hoped and prayed that her child might be a girl. The great-uncle of Lady Wilde was that singular creature, Charles Maturin, who wrote "Melmoth the Wanderer." Maturin was undoubtedly eccentric, a mixture of talent and insanity, a mass of affectation, a man who, when he was writing, used to place a wafer on his forehead to let those who entered his study know that he was not to be disturbed. From most points of view he was a grotesque and melodramatic character. How profoundly he must have impressed Lady Wilde's son is clear when we remember that the name of Sebastian Melmoth was chosen by the unhappy prisoner after he had left Reading Gaol. It is useful to remember facts like these, for it is the scientific way of accounting for a man's peculiarities. In a certain sense Oscar Wilde had no chance. He came into the world marked and predestined to shock people by his eccentricity.

Whether, however, Mr. Sherard's further apology for him, that he was practically insane, helps the case is a more doubtful matter. It is a terribly facile way of excusing a man guilty of a crime, who also happens to be a poet and dramatist, if we say that he was quite sane when he wrote his good works and quite insane when he did his bad acts. Besides, the course of the narrative makes it perfectly clear that Oscar Wilde himself helped largely to complete his own degradation by the way in which he lived. Of this there can be no better proof than what happened to him under prison discipline. The old Oscar Wilde, the man of pretence and ostentation, the poseur of artifice and vanity, entirely fell away from him, and a new Oscar Wilde seemed veritably to be born, of a much simpler and sincerer shape. The fact rests on indubitable testimony, but if we need further evidence it can be found in the book "De Profundis." Nothing could well be more startling than the contrast between the author of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and the man who penned the pages describing the value of the discipline of sorrow and the persuasive charm of the Founder of Christianity. Wilde was certainly sane enough when he wrote "De Profundis." If he was insane before, no small part of the cause is to be found in the stupid extravagance and luxury of his London and Paris life. One thing is certainly true, that so far as his work was concerned he steadily developed. The follies of the aesthetic craze disappeared after his visit to America and his experience of trans-Atlantic lecture-rooms. He was a hard-working student in Paris, albeit that he tried to represent himself as another Balzac and spoke of a "Neronian" period. Then came the prolific stage of his dramatic work, in which he literally took London by storm—dramatic work, I will venture to say, as sane and sound

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## Tribune.

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Daily Chronicle 30 May 1956

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Sunday Sun,

10 June 1906

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For many years Oscar Wilde's one-act tragedy, "Salomé," has been out of print. Mr. John Lane announces a new edition in a cheap form, which will be published next week. This play has been translated into every European language, including Czech, and at the present time it is **2019-03-17 Jissen Women's University Library 630** providing inspiration to Dr. Strauss.

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Of course the great exponent of the gentle art of retort was *par excellence* Whistler. It used to be his greatest delight to effect a neat score off a fellow wit. One of these encounters took place at a dinner party where the redoubtable James M'Neill of that ilk found as his *vis-à-vis* Oscar Wilde, who was then at the height of his prosperity. Truly a case of Greek meeting Greek, but a short passage of arms between the two early in the evening resulted in a decisive victory for the painter. The brilliancy of the remark which dealt the *coup de grâce* led the defeated one to murmur wistfully, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler smole a wicked smile as he made the quick retort, "Never mind, my dear Oscar. You *will*." A hit, a very palpable hit, which left the other in discomfited silence, for, to change the metaphor, the cap had fitted.

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## Wilde and Whistler.

It is seldom that an adoring mother allows any clever saying of her offspring to pass into oblivion, and still rarer were the occasions when Wilde permitted a *mot* to be lost to the world. If it were uttered by himself in the course of conversation it would be saved up for future use in his writings, while if it were evolved from the mind of someone else it stood a very good chance of being annexed as Whistler hinted.



12 June 1906

We are informed by Mr. T. Werner Laurie, the publisher, that Mr. Robert Sherard's "Life of Oscar Wilde" is now ready for publication. Mr. Sherrard was acquainted with Wilde from 1884, and has a profound admiration for the genius of the man, which flashed with such astonishing brightness before his fall. One purpose of the book is to dispel the curious report, repeated recently, that Oscar Wilde is still living. Mr. Sherard gives a detailed account of his death, gathered from the lips of the man who was holding him in his arms when he died.

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Robert Harborough Sherard, who has written this biography, is the great-grandson of William Wordsworth. He has written several notable poems himself, but his literary work has mostly been in journalism, as foreign correspondent to English papers. He has lived for years in Paris, and his recent book of recollections is full of anecdotes about distinguished French men of letters, with whom he has been intimately acquainted.

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# Daily News

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"The Life of Oscar Wilde," to be issued on the 20th by Mr. Werner Laurie, is by Mr. Robert Harborough Sherard, who has already written much on the subject. The author, I am told, institutes a comparison in his preface between the life of Wilde and the life of Richard Savage. The comparison is a striking one, to the disadvantage, however, of Savage. Both were men of genius and striking promise; both ended in a prison; both died without accomplishing anything worthy of their abilities. Perhaps we can scarcely hope that Wilde will be so fortunate in his biographer as Savage was in Dr. Johnson. Moreover, Savage was the subject of that delightful novel which Whitehead wove around his story and personality; a classic which, by the way, has found its way to a larger circle of readers than it ever had before since it was issued in 1811.

Messrs. Newnes.  
R. A. S. J.

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## Whistler's Readiness of Retort.

Of course the great exponent of the gentle art of retort was *par excellence* Whistler. It used to be his greatest delight to effect a neat score off a fellow wit. One of these encounters took place at a dinner party where the redoubtable James McNeill of that ilk found as his *vis-à-vis* Oscar Wilde, who was then at the height of his prosperity. Truly a case of Greek meeting Greek, but a short passage of arms between the two early in the evening resulted in a decisive victory for the painter. The brilliancy of the remark which dealt the *coup de grace* led the defeated one to murmur wistfully, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler smole a wicked smile as he made the quick retort, "Never mind, my dear Oscar. You *will*." A hit, a very palpable hit, which left the other in discomfited silence, for, to change the metaphor, the cap had fitted.

## Wilde and Whistler.

It is seldom that an adoring mother allows any clever saying of her offspring to pass into oblivion, and still rarer were the occasions when Wilde permitted a *mot* to be lost to the world. If it were uttered by himself in the course of conversation it would be saved up for future use in his writings, while if it were evolved from the mind of someone else it stood a very good chance of being annexed as Whistler hinted.

For a number of years before fame caught him, in the brilliant series of comedies which he produced, he had a very hard struggle to live. He edited for Cassell and Co. the *Woman's World*, and slaved at his work in the orthodox Fleet-street manner. His marriage brought him financial ease, and after that, until the *débâcle*, he was in affluent circumstances, his plays producing an income of several thousands yearly.

## The Downfall.

Into the circumstances of his trial we have no desire to enter. Wilde was no worse than his base associates. Mr. Sherard traces the sexual perversion, of which Wilde was accused, to heredity. His eminent father was a mixture of intelligence and animality, and from him was transmitted the coarseness of the lower part of Wilde's face. He indulged in good living. Probably, as the writer of this book suggests, the alcohol which he consumed, although he was never drunk, except during the last few weeks of his miserable existence in Paris, produced a kind of mental aberration, which left him irresponsible for his acts. In any case, his intimate acquaintance with classical literature—in which the behaviour of which he was charged, is treated as natural and commonplace—would deaden in his mind any suggestion of criminality in that regard.

Mr. Sherard's book is an exceedingly able study of one of the most extraordinary men of our own times. The picture he presents ought to do much to mitigate the harshness of the world-judgment upon Wilde's follies. At heart he was a kindly man; but intellectually he lived alone for art; socially, for pleasure. He adds one more figure to the *bizarre* gallery of the pathologist.

Here is a description of an incident in the prison life of Oscar Wilde, written by an ex-warder of Reading Gaol:—

## A Humane Warder.

During the period of his incarceration the poet suffered in health, but he seldom complained to the doctor. He was afraid of doing so lest he should be sent to the sick ward. He preferred the seclusion of his cell. There he could think aloud without attracting the glances or the undertone comments of the less mobile-minded. There he could be alone—alone with the spectre of his past, alone with his books, alone with his God!

When I entered his cell on a certain bleak, raw morning in early March I found him still in bed. This was unusual, and so I expressed surprise. "I have had a bad night," he explained. "Pains in my inside, which I think must be cramp, and my head seems splitting." I asked whether he had better not report sick. "No," he said; "not for anything. I shall be better, perhaps, as the days advance. Come back in a few minutes, when I will be up."

I returned to his cell a few minutes afterwards, and found he was up, but looking so dreadfully ill that I again advised him to see the doctor. He declined, however, saying he would be all right when he had had something warm to drink.

I knew that in the ordinary course of events he would have nothing for at least another hour, so I resolved to find something to give him in the meanwhile myself. I hastened off, and warmed up some beef-tea, poured it into a bottle, placed the bottle inside my jacket, and returned towards his cell. While ascending the staircase the bottle slipped between my shirt and skin. It was very hot. I knew that there was an unoccupied cell on the next landing, and I determined to go there and withdraw the bottle from its painful position. But at that moment a voice called me from the central hall below. I looked down, and saw the Chief Warder. He beckoned me towards him. I went back. He wished to speak concerning a discrepancy in the previous night's Muster Report. I attempted to elucidate the mystery of two prisoners being in the prison who had no claim on its hospitality. I am afraid I threw but little light on the mystery. I was in frightful agony. The hot bottle burped against my breast like molten lead. I have said "there are supreme moments in the lives of men." Those were supreme moments to me. I could have cried out in my agony, but dared not. The cold, damp beads of perspiration gathered on my brow. I writhed and twisted in all manners of ways to ease myself of the dreadful thing, but in vain. I could not shift that infernal bottle, try as I might. It lay there against my breast like a hot poultice, but hotter than any poultice that was ever made by a cantankerous mother or by a cantankerous nurse. And the strange thing about it was that the longer it lay the hotter it became. The Chief eyed me curiously. I believe he thought I had been drinking. I know I was incoherent enough for anything. At last he walked off, and left me, for which I felt truly thankful. I bounded up the iron stairs, and entered the Poet's cell, and, pulling out the burning bottle, I related, amid gasps and imprecations, my awful experience. The Poet smiled while the tale was being told, then laughed—actually laughed. I had never seen him laugh *naturally* before, and, with the same qualification, I may add that I never saw him laugh again.

I felt angry because he laughed. I told him so. I said it was poor reward for all I had undergone to be laughed at, and, so saying, I came out, and closed the door—I closed it with a bang.

When I took him his breakfast, he looked the picture of contrition. He said he wouldn't touch it unless I promised to forgive him.

"Not even the cocoa?" I asked.

"Not even the cocoa," he replied; and he looked at it longingly.

"Well, rather than starve you, I'll forgive you."

The general impression left by this book is most painful. It is the record of a nearly useless life; the history of a literary *flâneur*, eaten up with vanity, but immensely capable. Oscar Wilde was the Richard Savage of his day. Now that he has gone let us be tender to his foibles. Mr. Sherard, the writer of this human document, contributed a few articles to *Reynold's Newspaper* on Wilde's last days, at a time when the poetical President and stage refused to mention his name. The book is published by T. Werner Laurie, London; price 12s. 6d.

Reynold's

26 June 1906

## OSCAR WILDE.

## THE TRAGEDY OF A LIFE.

## R. H. SHERARD'S NEW BOOK.

Few men are better qualified to undertake the difficult task of presenting to the English public an *apologia* for the life of the late Oscar Wilde than Mr. R. H. Sherard, the writer of this volume. In France there would be no difficulty, for the French have so much of the artistic spirit that they naturally, and without any mental questionings, dissociate the individual characteristics of the artist from the productions of his talent or genius.

Oscar Wilde's father was the distinguished Dublin surgeon, Sir William Wilde, a man of European reputation. His mother was a woman of extraordinary character, the daughter of an Irish Protestant clergyman, as literary and as erratic in her doings and instincts, as her more distinguished son. For a time she was an ardent Nationalist, and her verses, signed "Speranza," which appeared in the *Nation*, under the editorship of Gavan Duffy, afterwards Sir Gavan Duffy, Premier of Victoria, were among the most brilliant literary outputs of the Young Ireland Party.

From such a parentage, it would be natural to expect an exceptional offspring. Young Wilde was the best classical scholar in Dublin University, and the traces of that influence are deeply impressed on all his subsequent writings. "I, the lord of language," he described himself in that heartrending book "De Profundis," written by him after his release from Reading Gaol. His father made much money, but he squandered it lavishly, and so Wilde, when he came to make his way in London, found himself in possession of about £200 a year, derived from Irish land, which he subsequently sold, to meet the pressing needs of everyday life. His income was eked out by anonymous contributions to the press. Yet, at this time, he was astonishing London by his freaks of costume, his assumption of means, and his dazzling wit in conversation.



so-called dispatch of three words would have been empty, absurd, even silly; and Cæsar never was silly.

Who started the story? Was it done by an ancient writer? I observe that Mommsen and most careful writers on Roman history do not speak of the words as a dispatch or official utterance. Canon Liddell says, "The victory gained by Cæsar was announced at Rome in the famous dispatch," etc. Merivale rather discredits the story, saying, "The boastful phrase in which, according to the story, the victor announced it to the senate."

I turned to the ancients. Perhaps someone else may have found more than I. Naturally, I turned to the profuse anecdotalage of Valerius Maximus; but in vain. Suetonius, great gatherer of gossip, tells us that when Cæsar had ended his wars he held five triumphs. He says, "Among the pageantry of the Pontic triumph, a tablet with this inscription was carried before him—*Veni, Vidi, Vici*,—not signifying, as did other mottoes, what was done, but the speed of the victory."

Plutarch's story implies a time for the origin of the phrase later than any possible dispatch: perhaps it arose in the familiarity of a conversation. Plutarch says, "When he gave Amantius, a friend of his at Rome, an account of the action, to express the promptness and rapidity of it he used three words—I came and saw and conquered—which having in Latin all the same cadence, carry with them a very suitable air of brevity." This evidently was before the triumph.

Is this "thrasonical brag" or gasconade? Plutarch speaks not of parade, but of an expression in friendly intercourse. Notice that whoever depreciates his adversary depreciates his victory, and removes his story from the realm of boasting. The boaster tells of the strength and valor of his opponent: the greater he makes the difficulty of his achievement, the greater he makes the courage, power, and persistence of himself as conqueror. If Cæsar had set out to brag of his success at Zela, he would have given as many details as in his story of the battle with Ariovistus, or have spread it out as Bunyan enlarges on Christian's sword-and-shield fight with Apollyon. The brevity of the historical account in the Alexandrian War and the contemptuous brevity of the three words show that Cæsar thought the thing hardly worth speaking of.

But the passage from Suetonius—what of that? In that we see not Cæsar the man as we know him elsewhere, Cæsar the high-minded thinker and doer, but Cæsar the politician and the head of the state. It was the duty of the general in a triumph to appear as the representative of the state and of its glory and power. He was officially a braggart, and must make the most of the occasion to please the populace. He was a theatrical character, with face painted red. I can well conceive of Cæsar as riding up the Capitoline Hill in a chariot, to dismount and offer sacrifice to a god in whom he did not believe, while saying to himself, "What a bore this is! Five days of such vanity! What fools these Romans are! I prefer to be at my desk, but must yield to these throat-splitting, ear-rasping crowds!" Such a soliloquy represents to us the Cæsar that we know everywhere else, the man of business, too clear-sighted and great in spirit to overvalue his accomplished deeds, pushing toward his ends, evading and avoiding crowns on the Lupercal, that he might be the foremost man of all the world and found the Empire.

SAMUEL WILLARD.

Harbor Springs, Michigan, September 5, 1906.

## The New Books.

### THE STORY OF A BROKEN LIFE.\*

The life-story of that brilliant but erratic genius, Oscar Wilde, whose sun of promise rose so bright and had so dire a setting, is presented to us in a handsome and dignified volume by Mr. Robert Harborough Sherard, who, as he tells us, enjoyed the famous æsthete's intimate friendship for sixteen years before the gloomy end of the unfortunate man's meteoric course. Although the book is confessedly an apology or defense, and promises at the outset to refute many calumnies and to effect noteworthy results in clearing from the foul aspersions of malignity a name still dear to hundreds of faithful disciples, yet there is, fortunately, a wise avoidance of unsavory details regarding the events that clouded Wilde's closing years and led to his tragic end. His trial and imprisonment for an unnamable offense are, of course, involved in the narration, but are treated with commendable reserve, so that the merely prurient reader will find nothing in the book to pay for the trouble of perusal. Into this forbidding portion of Wilde's life, which we feel has been made too much of already, we do not propose to go, only noting briefly the biographer's contention that the unhappy man was dealt with with needless hardness and severity, owing in part to the popular clamor against him; and that an understanding of "the dismaying problem" of Wilde's conduct is to be sought in a study of his unfortunate heredity and in the occasional "epileptiform fits" which made him for the time being morally irresponsible and rendered him a more proper subject for restraint in an asylum than for the severities of a prison cell. In tracing Wilde's ancestry, and in noting therein the emergence of traits characteristic of the decadent poet, Mr. Sherard has been industrious and has labored not in vain. A Lombroso would welcome his findings as a contribution to pathological psychology.

Mr. Sherard's story of Wilde's prison life is full of pathetic interest. Its chief significance for many readers will be found in the fact that it gave rise to what are perhaps the best of Wilde's literary productions in prose and verse—"De Profundis" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." Of the latter, the biographer well says that it would be worth while to go to jail to write so great a poem. Of all Wilde's poems, this and

\*THE LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE. By Robert Harborough Sherard. Illustrated with Portraits, Facsimile Letters, and other Documents. New York: Mitchell Kennerley.



time, the problem that furnished Matthew Arnold with the theme of his best-known book, the problem that baffles us to-day and will continue to puzzle and fascinate the thinkers of the world for many a long age to come. But perhaps the best of all that Pascal has to offer us, and the most likely to prove fruitful, is the picture he presents of an earnest soul fired with the passion for perfection. The grandeur and the pathos of this hopeless aspiration move us deeply. Probably more need the stimulus than the warning of his example; for warning it unmistakably contains. "Aspiring to be angels, men rebel." Aiming to be divine, they become less than human. Losing sight of the golden mean, departing from the Greek sound-mindedness or temperance (*sophrosune*, to attempt a transliteration), they commit all sorts of wild and foolish extravagances. And, curiously enough, Pascal stands convicted out of his own mouth, as might be shown by more than one citation. For a single instance, in chapter eight of the *Pensées* we read, "C'est sortir de l'humanité que de sortir du milieu: la grandeur de l'âme humaine consiste à savoir s'y tenir."

PERCY F. BICKNELL.

### COMMUNICATIONS.

#### "TAKING CHANCES WITH MILTON."

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

The leading article in your issue of September 1, on "The Edict of Oyster Bay," pleases me by the force and brilliancy of its presentation of the "stand pat" side of the spelling contest now raging. The writer quotes a passage from Milton which he assumes would be spoiled by changing his spelling of "Sulphur," and adds: "We must take no chances with Milton!" Must n't we? Have n't we? I have before me a photographed facsimile of Milton's handwriting, dated "Jan'y 10, 1639," and it contains this famous sentence: "If vertue feeble were, Heaven it selfe would stoope to her." Would not THE DIAL "take chances with Milton" if it were called upon to quote this fine sentiment? I think it would take at least four chances.

SAMUEL T. PICKARD.

Amesbury, Mass., Sept. 8, 1906.

#### THE DUTY OF SCHOLARS TOWARD SPELLING REFORM.

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

Allow me to thank you for your thoroughly sensible words on the ill-considered entrance of the President into the field of "spelling reform." The five hundred most learned linguists and *littérateurs* of the English-speaking world, if it could be ascertained who they are and if they could agree among themselves, could not get the following of the masses of educated men in any extensive and abrupt alterations of the natural current of linguistic evolution. How much less is such a following to be expected for a self-constituted group of men only a small fraction of whom have any claim whatever to exceptionally high standing in either of the fields

of linguistics and literature? The attempt to influence school boards to foist their arbitrary lists upon helpless children should be resisted with the utmost energy by every means at hand. These self-constituted reformers are powerless to introduce anything save disorder and additional labor, and all who are interested in keeping the language in the true path of gradual evolution, where it may yield automatically to the stimulus of the slowly improving taste of successive generations, should set themselves firmly against this unauthorized and impertinent interference.

W. H. JOHNSON.

Granville, Ohio, September 6, 1906.

#### CÆSAR'S "THRASONICAL BRAG."

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

When I was a boy I read in one of those school histories that shape the juvenile mind that Julius Cæsar announced to the Roman senate his victory over Pharnaces at Zela by the memorable concatenation of the alliterative phrase, "Veni! Vidi! Vici!" Richard Grant White got off a joke at the now current pronunciation of Latin, that it turns the majestic sonority of those high-sounding dissyllables into the faint utterance of "wany, weedy, weaky," which is a poor brag. But however "weaky" this may sound, the Romans may have done what the Spaniards do in their strongly Latinish language: in their regular conjugations, except the one corresponding to the Latin first, they accent in the first and third persons of the perfect tense the final syllable. Try it, and you restore the sonority.

Then I found in "As You Like It" sarcastic Rosalind dealt the conqueror a stroke, saying, "There was never anything so sudden but the fight of two rams, and Cæsar's thrasonical brag of 'I came, saw, and overcame.'" The great dramatist seems to have liked to refer to this phrase: not only is it in both Latin and English in the ridiculous letter of Armado in "Love's Labour Lost," but in "Cymbeline" the queen says proudly, "A kind of conquest Cæsar made here, but made not here his brag of 'came' and 'saw' and 'overcame.'"

De Quincey admires Julius Cæsar, but contributes a rather contemptuous kick when he says of a later emperor, "In one sentence of his dispatch, Aurelian aimed at a contest with the great Julian gasconade of *Veni-Vidi-Vici*. His words are, '*Fugavimus, obsedimus, cruciavimus, occidimus*.'"

With such testimonies against the great founder of the Roman Empire, I let the imputation lie in mind without further thought, until one day when I suddenly said to myself, "I know Julius Cæsar too well to believe that story: brag was foreign to the habit and policy of the great soldier." I thought of his History of the Gallic War, in which he tells of his blunders,—for instance, the surprise by the Nervii,—as coolly as if he were telling of Cyrus or Lysander of bygone centuries. How easy it would have been to comment on his own promptitude in rallying his forces, and his personal valor in taking sword and shield to fight in the ranks! And in the treatise on the Alexandrian War, published now as coming from him (probably made from his notes by Aulus Hirtius), the battle of Zela, the one said to have been announced so laconically, is not spoken of with any flourish of gratulation. Indeed, Colonel Dodge, in giving a military elucidation of the manœuvres of the battle, uses five times as many words as the historian does.

Besides, considered as something to convey news, the



the noble ode to England, "Ave Imperatrix," seem most likely to give him a permanent place in English literature. Included in Mr. Sherard's account of the poet's prison-life is a curious chapter which, we are asked to believe, was "written by one of the warders in Reading Gaol"; and, to make it still more convincing, a footnote adds that the express condition on which the chapter was contributed "was that it should be printed exactly as it stood in the manuscript, with no alteration of a single phrase or word or expression." Suspicion of even a comparatively innocent literary fraud may be unworthy the high-minded critic, but surely never turnkey wrote like this turnkey. In general style and vocabulary, and even in the details of punctuation and the use of capitals, the warder's narrative approaches wonderfully near to Mr. Sherard's own high standard. Let us quote a single paragraph, and then, non-committally, leave the matter for those to puzzle over who choose.

"His gentle smile of sweet serenity was something to remember. It must have been a smile like this that Bunyan wore as he lay in Bedford Gaol dreaming his wonderful dreams. It must have been a similar smile that illumined the noble face of St. Francis of Assisi when he spoke of 'his brother the wind and his sister the rain.'"

Turning with relief from Wilde's later to his earlier life, we find in Mr. Sherard's pages rather full biographical and psychological sketches of his parents — the famous but somewhat coarse-natured Dublin surgeon Sir William Wilde, and the brilliant but ill-balanced Lady Jane Francesca Wilde, the "Speranza" of contemporaneous literary fame. Their second son, Oscar (whose full name has the high Celtic flavor of Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde, some of his college poems being signed with the startling array of initials "O. F. O. F. W. W.") was born in Dublin in October, 1854, and not, as stated in the "Dictionary of National Biography," in 1856. The child was, says Mr. Sherard, a disappointment to his eccentric mother because he was a boy, and "for a long time after his birth he was treated as a girl, talked to as a girl, dressed as a girl." This injudicious early training extended through his boyhood, which was passed amidst the most luxurious and indulgent surroundings in the fashionable life of Dublin. As an example of the boy's extravagant mode of life, his biographer says:

"He must, in his opulent days, have spent many hundred pounds a year in cabs. He used to take a cab by the day, and the first address he gave to the driver was a florist's shop, where he fetched for himself a buttonhole flower costing half a guinea, and another costing half a crown for his cabman."

It was probably this early fondness for buttonhole flowers which later led to the exaggerated descriptions of his use of the sunflower and the lily as parts of his personal adornment. At the age of eleven the lad was sent to school at Enniskillen, where, it is recorded, he made rapid progress in some branches, but was a "great dunce in the mathematical class." He already "showed that fondness for distinguished attire which ever marked him in life. . . . He was always very well dressed, and wore his hair long." At the age of seventeen he was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, where he remained but a year, going then to Oxford. Of his entrance into the great English university, he says in "De Profundis" that "the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison." The two events seem thus curiously related in Wilde's mind; and this may perhaps account in a measure for the antipathy with which he was regarded by a portion of the British public. His biographer has some extraordinary comments on this point, from which we will print a few sentences.

"It is possible that when he wrote those lines he was thinking that if he had never been sent to Oxford the extraordinary latent madness which had brought him to the terrible place where he sat might never have been roused into fatal activity. For there is no use denying it: Oxford, which is the finest school in the world for the highest culture, is also the worst training-ground for the lowest forms of debauchery. . . . Oxford produces side by side the saint, the sage, and the depraved libertine. She sends men to Parnassus or the public house. . . . It is very possible that if Sir William Wilde had not sent his second son to Oxford, but had left him in Ireland, where certain forms of perversion are unknown, Oscar would now be living in Dublin, one of the lights of Trinity College, one of the glories of Ireland, a scholar and a gentleman of universal reputation. . . . The man who approaches the study of this extraordinary degeneration of character in a scientific spirit, and without bias, cannot fail to feel the greatest suspicion that Oscar Wilde was to a very large extent a victim of the Oxford educational system, of the Oxford environment."

How much of exaggeration and how much of truth there may be in this biting arraignment is not for us to say. Passing quickly over the many interesting chapters regarding Wilde's Oxford life, we note the influence upon him of John Ruskin, whom he heard in a course of lectures on Art at the university. Wilde "soon began to show his taste for art and china, and his rooms were quite the show ones of the college. . . . It was here that he made his well-known remark, 'Oh, would that I could live up to my blue china,' " — a rather fatuous aspiration in the light of his subsequent disastrous failure to live up to any standards in his private life.



At Oxford, Wilde wrote poems that were published in various magazines, and thus entered upon that literary career which was to continue until his death. Going to London, he assumed that affectation of dress and manner, that stilted and absurd pose, which brought him into ridicule and contempt with the British public. But at the same time it brought him into notice; and this was what the young man most desired. We are told that

"Oscar Wilde has been heard to explain that the reason why he assumed that costume which it pleased him to describe as the 'æsthetic costume' was merely to attract attention to his personality. For months he had tried in vain to find a publisher for his collected poems, and having failed to do so because he was an unknown man, he determined to make himself known, and hit upon the device of appearing in public in an extraordinary dress. He adopted as the 'æsthetic costume' a velvet coat, knee-breeches, a loose shirt with a turn-down collar, and a floating tie of some unusual shade; and he not unfrequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with expressions of the greatest admiration."

Whether or not as a result of this masquerading, Wilde did succeed in finding a publisher for his poems, which appeared in a volume "issued in the best style" in London in 1881. With all their faults, the marks of youth and immaturity, the poems showed unmistakable signs of originality and strength; it is seldom indeed that so much of merit is seen in a volume of poems by so young a man. The book was received with a curious mixture of jeers and praise by the reviewers, but was "commercially a great success," and this "pleased Wilde very much," as he appears now to have been in very straitened financial circumstances, which contrasted strangely with his early habits of reckless indulgence. The volume was promptly reprinted in America, where it had rather more of a literary success than in England; and this fact, and the hope of making money by lecturing, seem to have led Wilde to plan a trip to America, where he arrived late in the year 1881. He came here with a fairly good reputation as a poet, and a rather vague one as "the apostle of æstheticism" which Wilde himself probably did not take too seriously, his statement being that he came to expound "a philosophy of art," and that "æstheticism" was to be taken as a "study of truth in art." His first experience was in Chickering Hall, New York, where he lectured on "The Renaissance." Again he was successful "from a commercial point of view," as his biographer tells us; and his success led to an arrangement with the well-known manager and celebrity-hunter, Major Pond, for a series

of lectures in the larger cities of this country and Canada. Mr. Sherard's chapters on this episode in Wilde's life are full of interest, especially for American readers. In Boston, where he went directly from New York, he had an amusing encounter with some Harvard students, in which Wilde seems to have had decidedly the best of it. Just before the lecture opened, the students, to the number of sixty, appeared in the hall dressed in an extravagant burlesque of the "æsthete's" costume, each bearing a lily in his buttonhole and a huge sunflower in his hand, and paraded solemnly to the front seats that had been reserved for them in the crowded hall. The effect was of course ludicrous, but the joke lost something of its point when the lecturer appeared clad in conventional evening clothes, and proceeded with his lecture in apparent unconsciousness of the prank that had been attempted by the fun-loving students. From Boston, Wilde made a long jump to Omaha, where he lectured on "Decorative Art," startling his audience by denouncing American furniture as "not honestly made, and out of character." His visits to Denver and Louisville are briefly noted, but it is surprising to find no mention at all of his trip to California, although this afforded some of the most interesting of his American experiences, and a memorable evening of "high jinks" given him by the Bohemian Club in San Francisco is even yet spoken of as among the more notable entertainments in the history of that famous club. Returning from California, — bringing with him the characterization, which he used with considerable iteration, "California is beautiful, it is Italy without her art," — Wilde stopped in Chicago, in the spring of 1882. Of his stay here, one interesting incident, relating to a since famous but then obscure artist — the sculptor Donoghue — must be quoted from Mr. Sherard's narrative.

"On his arrival in Chicago, he received a letter at his hotel from a young Irish sculptor who told him of the misery in which he was living, and begged him to come to the garret which was his studio and look at his work. Wilde set out directly for the address given, and after a hazardous excursion into the slums of Chicago found John Donoghue's abode. He stayed with him a long time, he praised his work, he comforted him, he told him the great consolation of *l'Art pour l'Art*, and he did not leave him without commissioning him to do a piece of work. The next evening, John Donoghue, sitting in the audience in the crowded lecture hall, suddenly heard Oscar Wilde, in the course of his lecture, reproach the fashionable men and women who were listening to his words with the fact that a young sculptor of undoubted genius who was living in their midst was being allowed to die of hunger and neglect. He went on to describe his visit to Donoghue's studio; he



spoke of the beautiful things he had seen there, of the beautiful things this young man could do, of the honor he could bring to the city of Chicago if only people would encourage his efforts. The consequence was that the next day John Donoghue was everywhere discussed in Chicago; people flocked to his studio; commissions poured in. John Donoghue's artistic career was assured. He came to Europe, he studied, he prospered."

Another case in which Wilde endeavored to help a deserving friend had a less happy termination, though one not unusual, perhaps, in similar attempts to assist struggling but sometimes peevish children of genius. The reference in this case we take to be to the English poet Rennell Rodd. Wilde made great efforts to find an American publisher for this young man's poems, and at last succeeded, he himself writing a preface for the book. But when it appeared, it represented such astonishing ideas of "aesthetic decoration" in its make-up that the author felt himself aggrieved, and, holding Wilde responsible, wrote him a bitter letter putting an end to their friendship.

Wilde's visit to Walt Whitman is interestingly described.

"Wilde was distressed by the poverty of Walt Whitman's appearance, his shabby attire, and especially by the untidiness and squalor of the one room in which the American poet lived. The place was littered with great heaps of newspapers, strewn all over the room, and over them was so thick a coat of dust that it was impossible for the visitor to find a clean spot where he could sit down. Walt Whitman, primeval, natural, aboriginal, would feel little sympathy for the dandified Hellene."

Wilde's lecture-trip extended to the largest cities of Canada and Nova Scotia, from whence he returned to New York with a "substantial sum of money" as the result of his year's work in America. He soon went back to London, and not long after went to Paris, where considerable portions of his future life were passed, and where he died in poverty and obscurity, at the age of forty-six. Mr. Sherard's account of this strange and broken life is full and interesting, although it suffers from the extravagant tone of eulogy and admiration which colors it throughout. It is to be taken, as we said at the outset, as a *lefer* and an apology; and taken thus, it well repays perusal. The volume is admirably printed, and is supplied with a good index; while the bibliography, showing a surprising number of titles in prose and verse, with translations into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Swedish, and Polish, gives a new sense of the brilliancy of Wilde's talents as a writer, mingled with regret and pity for his downfall as a man.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF OUR NATIONALITY.\*

Making a virtue of necessity, the earlier volumes of "The American Nation" series very successfully covered in short compass long periods of time: for the whole narrative history of the colonies, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, is contained in only six volumes. It is with joy that we now find, in what may be called the second quarter of this coöperative series, that to the same number of volumes is allotted the history of only those two generations which extended from the Peace of Paris in 1763 to the close of the War of 1812. In this way, each writer is allowed far greater opportunity for the elaboration of his subject, and those are pleased who regret to see anything overworked — even a good book.

There are certain general principles which one should always bear in mind when one wishes to understand and appreciate any work upon the Revolutionary epoch. The course of events indeed proved that separation from the mother country must be a condition precedent for the establishment of a national government. But for many years, in all the English colonies, there had been developing those habits of self-government and those principles of political action without which independence would have been vain and the document of 1787 a lifeless paper. At that time, moreover, the necessity of independence was by no means obvious. When we recall that in the early years all the colonists, and to the very end a large and respectable minority of them, professed their belief that colonial life might still find ample expression within the British Empire, we are always eager for any new light which may explain how words of loyalty changed into deeds of war. Finally, the degree to which the tendency towards unity, but little effective in the seventeenth century, had developed before 1787, and the relative weight of it as contrasted with the provincial or state feeling, were matters of dispute, and the discussion has yielded ground only through absorption into the larger question of State as against National sovereignty.

The first of these points — the growth of the colonies into self-government — has been de-

\* THE AMERICAN NATION. A History. From original sources by associated scholars. Edited by Albert Bushnell Hart, LL.D., Ph.D. Vol. VIII., The Preliminaries of the Revolution, by G. E. Howard. Vol. IX., The American Revolution, by Claude Halstead Van Tyne. Vol. X., The Confederation and the Constitution, by Andrew C. McLaughlin. Vol. XI., The Federalist System, by John Spencer Bassett. Vol. XII., The Jeffersonian System, by Edward Channing. Vol. XIII., The Rise of American Nationality, by Kendrick Charles Babcock. Illustrated. New York: Harper & Brothers.