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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 3

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 a 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 recount merely 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 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 on 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. 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 the only praise can be given to the thoroughness with which Professor Van Tyne has worked out 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 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 pretense. 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."

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 Lesurques 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 write a man whose work is founded on 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 dulness 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 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 "Neronic" 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 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 dulness and interferes with their somnolent eupepsia. 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.

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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 "Caesar and Cleopatra" in October next?

* * * *

His Opinion about Himself.

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."

* * * *

Somewhat Forgetful.

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.

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"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. Illustrated with portraits, facsimile letters, and other documents. London: T. Werner Laurie, Clifford's Inn, 12s. 6d. net.

Mr. Sherard was prompted to write this biography by the same reason that prompted Dr. Johnson to write the life of Richard Savage. "The heroes of literary as well as civil history," says Johnson, "have been very often no less remarkable for what they have suffered than for what they have achieved, and volumes have been written only to enumerate the miseries of the learned, and relate their unhappy lives and untimely deaths. To these mournful narratives I am about to add the life of . . . a man whose writings entitle him to an eminent rank in the classes of learning, and whose misfortunes claim a degree of compassion not always due to the unhappy, as they were often the consequences of the crimes of others rather than his own." The pearl in the oyster is said to be the result of disease. Oscar Wilde's genius was certainly allied to mental and moral disease. He ought never to have been sent to Reading Gaol. He should have been sent to an asylum. He came of an abnormally clever and eccentric stock. His mother was a grandchild of the once famous Charles Maturin, author of "Melmoth, the Wanderer," of which Balzac spoke in terms of the highest praise. Scott and Byron thought so highly of Maturin's works (though his novels and plays afford evidence of his madness) that Scott offered to edit them after their author's death, and Byron used his influence to get some of the plays put upon the stage. Lady Wilde, Oscar's mother, was a poet, and a remarkable woman, alternately a furious Irish revolutionist and loyalist. In "De Profundis" Oscar Wilde refers to her and to his father, Sir William Wilde, in terms of profound affection and remorse. He said:

No one knew how deeply I loved and honoured her. Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my anguish and shame. She and my father had bequeathed me a name they had made noble and honoured not merely in literature, art, archaeology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low by-word among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to foes that they might turn it into folly. What I suffered then is not for pen to write or paper to record. My wife, always kind and gentle to me, rather than I should hear the news from indifferent lips, travelled, ill as she was, all the way from Genoa to England to break to me herself the tidings of so irreparable, so irredeemable, a loss.

Oscar Wilde's genius manifested itself at a very early age. He acquired languages with the greatest ease, and at Oxford distinguished himself by taking a First Class. He was also a Newdegate prizeman. "Ravenna," the poem by which he won this distinction, contains lines prophetic of his own downfall:

Discrowned by man, deserted by the sea
Thou sleepest, rocked in lonely misery!
No longer now upon the swelling tide,
Pine-forest like, thy myriad galleys ride!
For where the brass-peaked ships were wont
To float.

The weary shepherd pipes his mournful note,
And the white sheep are free to come and go
Where Adria's purple waters used to flow.

Though Oscar Wilde was generous and careless of money, he was vain. His vanity, in fact, was another form of his madness. He masqueraded through London streets in a most extraordinary uniform. When he became a victim of the esthetic craze

he wore a velvet coat, knee-breeches, a loose shirt with a turn-down collar, and a floating tie of some unusual shade, fastened in a Lavallière knot, and he frequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with an expression of the greatest admiration. He also wore his hair long, and was clean-shaven. His conduct to all outward appearance was exemplary. The author of "The Story of an Unhappy Friendship" says: "The example of Oscar Wilde's purity of life in such a city as Paris, of his absolute decency of language, of his conversation, in which never an improper suggestion intruded, the elegance and refinement which endowed him, would have compelled even the most perverse and dissolute to some restraint. The companionship of Oscar Wilde, in the days in which I lived in his intimacy, would have made a gentleman, at least outwardly, of a man of bad morals and unclean tongue." Apart from his poems and plays and novels, he often uttered words of wisdom. His views on education were quite sound, and are worth recording now that we are all weary of Mr. Birrell's Education Bill. "A school," he said, "should be the most beautiful place in every town and village—so beautiful that the punishment for undutiful children should be that they should be debarred from going to school the following day. In all schools there should be a constant succession of new and delightful things, so that children could not weary or become indifferent to anything beautiful." He thought that it would be a very good thing if some of the specimens of decorative art stored up at South Kensington and similar museums were lent to the schools throughout the country for the edification and delight of the children. There was no place, he declared, so absolutely depressing as a museum. There was a better use of art, he urged, than looking at it on a rainy day. Give a child something to make, and he will be happy—and a perfectly happy child would be a perfectly good child." Children might be taught to do something in wood, something in leather, in pottery, in furniture, in decorative art, and in metal-working. The artistic power of every child, he contended, was great. "The problem of the age was the noisy boy who would not go to school nor learn his lessons, but spent his time in throwing stones at windows. What was the matter with him? He had simply discovered that he had hands and that they were given him for something. Many people do nothing with their hands but cover them with kid gloves." Mr. Sherard's biography is written with great care, good taste, and judgment, and the student of psychology will especially thank him for it. Mr. Sherard reprints the famous revolutionary article "Jacta alea est," contributed to the "Nation" by Lady Wilde in 1848 which is a stirring appeal to arms.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde."

One may recognise Mr. R. H. Sherard's loyalty to an unhappy friend and yet doubt his wisdom in bringing out a new "Life of Oscar Wilde" (Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net); for any fresh biography of the brilliant man of letters who wrote the "Ballad of Reading Gaol" and "De Profundis" must inevitably be recalling his career recall also his crime. And society to-day, if it were allowed, would gladly forget the decadent and remember the artist, and only his masterly achievements in drama, in poetry, and in the prose in which he expressed his remorse. But his friends, with feelings that no doubt do them credit, will insist on regarding the man, and the man cannot be made a pretty picture. Here is Mr. Sherard, for instance, who might be supposed to have fulfilled in his earlier tribute to Mr. Wilde any duty of friendship, bringing out a larger work which is less compact and, in some matters, perhaps, less detailed than his former volume, and has decided faults of discursiveness and lack of connection. Of course, its tone is perfectly sound—Mr. Sherard was always conscious of Oscar Wilde's curious obliquity of vision. Of course, it contains a mass of interesting matter—reported conversations of Mr. Wilde's, stories of his last days and his death, as well as his prisoner-warder's account of his life, behaviour, and talk in prison. Moreover, Mr. Sherard furnishes us with two extraordinary pieces of information which cannot be ignored in any future estimate of his friend's pathology. One is that at the time of Oscar Wilde's birth his mother was hoping for a girl-child, and for a long time after his birth treated him, talked to him, and addressed him as a girl. The other statement is that all Mr. Wilde's offences against morality were committed when he was under the influence of intoxicants, which were "sheer poison to him" and left him after each epileptic crisis "totally unconscious of having done anything bad, detestable, shameful, or even unusual." This latter announcement is of considerable scientific interest, but it touches too closely matters that were best allowed to pass into oblivion.

Abroad in Evening Gazette.
Literary Society.

This society met in the Debating Hall, Marlborough College—Mr. I. A. K. Bennett presiding. Mr. Hugh Robertson, M.A., gave a paper on "Oscar Wilde," dealing particularly with his play "Salome." Mr. Robertson began by showing how Oscar Wilde had failed to take a hold on Englishmen. The chief reason was simply that the man himself was un-British, while such things as his ideas formulated in his paradoxes, also contributed to his lack of success in English society. Mr. Robertson gave a short comparison between Oscar Wilde and G. K. Chesterton, disapproving that either was a "peasant," and proving this by the fact that both acted according to their consciences and not according to custom. Oscar Wilde always was extremely sensitive to impression, which was amply reflected in all his work. Mr. Robertson gave a minute examination of Wilde's idea of art, judging especially from "The Preface to Dorian Gray" and "Salome." Generally speaking, Wilde saw only the "sunny side of nature." Too much suffering failed to appeal to him. He saw only grotesqueness and uselessness in suffering. To Wilde the artist's duty was the interminable search for beauty, and beauty alone. Mr. Robertson ended by saying that Wilde was a true artist—the highest praise we could ascribe to any. Mr. A. C. Hay added a few appropriate remarks, dwelling in particular on the ugliness of Salome's character. Mr. Littlejohn also spoke, and the meeting ended by a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Robertson, proposed by the president.

DAILY NEWS, A BOOK OF THE DAY, LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE.

Published To-day. "The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. T. Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net. To Oscar Wilde, unfortunate in his life, it was not yet fallen to be fortunate in his biographer. There are many who would prefer that the history of his life should remain untold; and that his writings should be left to speak for themselves. But Oscar Wilde was not destined to be saved from the fate of the artist, and Mr. Sherard, with qualifications not equal to his zeal, has strung together a thin collection of facts, backed up by a prodigious quantity of discussion. There are many features in the varied life of Wilde which might have made fascinating material for the biographer. But Mr. Sherard has not made the most of them. He does not seem to have had access to his correspondence. Where he might with profit have quoted typical letters or remarks, he prefers to discuss ethical or artistic points not always relevant. All through there is too much of Mr. Sherard and too little of his hero. He is continually venting himself in untrue or obvious generalisations, such as: "One has to remember that England is a commercial country where worth, merit, character, quality, genius are estimated only by the amount of money which a man earns or possesses." He alludes to a novelist of some repute with the explanatory phrase, "the great caricaturist Dickens"; and is apt to drop into such expressions as "boozey and boisterous Bohemians."

Mainly Pathological. Mr. Sherard does not state that he is writing mainly for surgeons and pathologists, so it is not easy to see why he should devote four lengthy chapters to an account of Wilde's parents, and the manner in which they transmitted hereditary qualities. He sums up these inquiries: "Under direct inheritance," or "transmission by blood," may, perhaps, be placed his literary capacity, his gifts of poetry, languages, of ready mastery of difficult studies, his love of the beautiful, the sound common sense of his normal periods, his family and personal pride, and his moral courage in the face of danger, but also an indifference to the dangers of alcoholism, an aversion from failure, physical, social, and mental, an exaggerated esteem, on the other hand, for wealth, titles, and social success, a tolerance for moral laxness.

The Aesthetic Period. On page 83 Mr. Sherard reaches the birth of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, who was born in Dublin in 1854. There is not much of interest recorded till he reached Oxford. There he went with enthusiasm to listen to lectures by Ruskin, and became an extreme example of the "aesthetic" type of undergraduate which Oxford had just evolved. Mr. Wilde occupied some fine old wainscoted rooms over the river in that college which is thought by many to be the most beautiful in Oxford. These rooms he had decorated with painted ceilings and handsome dados, and they were filled with treasures of art picked up at home and abroad; and here he held social meetings, which were attended by numbers of the men who were interested in art, or music, or poetry, and who for the most part practised some one of these in addition to the ordinary collegiate studies.

An adequate biography is impossible, because eminent contemporaries naturally shrink from letting the world know the degree of intimacy which existed between Wilde and themselves, either at Oxford in the seventies or in London during the eighties. Reminiscence or correspondence might easily be misunderstood, and the recital of causes which led them to sever their association with a brilliant and remarkable writer, long before his downfall, would be ungracious and ungrateful readings. Wilde, moreover, was never a great letter-writer, except during his imprisonment and for a few months after his release. His letters are seldom dated, and even if they were accessible they would not throw much light on the extraordinary man who must always remain an unsolved riddle in the by-ways of literature.

Character and Temperament. Indeed, Mr. Sherard is a singularly unsympathetic biographer. He dwells morbidly upon the ultimate catastrophe as if that were the really interesting feature in his subject's life. He talks much about his outward habits, his social ambitions, his dress, etc., without hinting at any real significance in his intellectual life. When informing us that Wilde adopted mannerisms for purposes of self-advertisement, he assures us that self-advertisement is a good thing. We are told that "social success always impressed Oscar Wilde," and that is taken as a sort of ultimate fact about him. We hear that he was an

DAILY NEWS, A BOOK OF THE DAY, LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE.

astonishingly brilliant talker, but are given few examples of his conversation. Mr. Sherard every now and again sums up his character: "He was one of those artists who write for fame; for whom the money consideration is nothing. He could not constrain himself to hack-work; anonymously's black cloak enshrouded his personal triumph—those were essential factors in his artistic temperament. So though he never spoke more brilliantly than during the last years of his life, because there the reward was immediate in the applause of the marvelling listeners, he wrote nothing, all stimulus being lacking." Mr. Sherard has done scant justice to Oscar Wilde. While he dismisses his moral failure as the outcome of madness and inherited tendencies, he gives a picture of his life in which, quite unintentionally, he represents him as little better than a buffoon. But Oscar Wilde was not a buffoon. An actor he was, a man posing perpetually before the footlights, loving applause. But he loved the applause also in order that he might scoff. Convictions about life probably he had few. But he had artistic convictions, he had intellect, and a sense for the beauty of words and sounds that made him, as he says himself, "a lord of language." That is, perhaps, what he was first and foremost. He had no mission to preach beyond that of eschewing missions. There is no dominating note in his writings, no directing spirit. There is brilliance, wit, cleverness, feeling, but little which was worthy of so much talent. His was a life frittered, a genius wasted, a fine sensibility dulled and perverted. He might have written sublimely, but he knew nothing worth writing about. And so his life was effort without direction, promise without fulfilment, a magnificent possibility which ended in horrible and sordid catastrophe. The noble and inspiring ideal of a Ruskin is watered down to the flippant cult of "decorative art" and "get up," mingled with the despairing cry against the vanity of vanities and the waste of life.

DAILY CHRONICLE, A TRAGEDY OF GENIUS.

LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE, by Robert Harborough Sherard. London, Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net. Published To-day. A life of the late Oscar Wilde was by no means a necessity, but it was inevitable. Such tempting material does not lie neglected very long, especially when a certain temerity for handling difficult subjects is a requisite equipment for the biographer. In the present case Mr. Robert Sherard, a racy and delightful writer, has elected to carry out a rather perilous literary enterprise, and he may be congratulated on his success.

It is needless to say that an adequate life of Wilde, in the present generation, is an absolute impossibility. Of the darker side of his life everyone knows too much, remembers too much. There can be no further revelations to nauseate either his enemies or his admirers. If the literary executor is to be believed, even the unpublished portions of "De Profundis" would not add to our knowledge of the man nor his malady, however interesting those portions might be to psychologists. The Reasons Why. An adequate biography is impossible, because eminent contemporaries naturally shrink from letting the world know the degree of intimacy which existed between Wilde and themselves, either at Oxford in the seventies or in London during the eighties. Reminiscence or correspondence might easily be misunderstood, and the recital of causes which led them to sever their association with a brilliant and remarkable writer, long before his downfall, would be ungracious and ungrateful readings. Wilde, moreover, was never a great letter-writer, except during his imprisonment and for a few months after his release. His letters are seldom dated, and even if they were accessible they would not throw much light on the extraordinary man who must always remain an unsolved riddle in the by-ways of literature.

Wilde's works present several points for consideration, and a small study of the author, from a literary point of view, in the hands of a judicious critic, might have considerable interest. Not that Mr. Sherard lacks critical ability—indeed, his praise is always tempered by acute perception of Wilde's literary and dramatic defects; but he is biased, and rightly hypnotised by the personality of his hero. That personality, though undoubtedly a dazzling one, was to many unattractive and repellent. Long before the downfall of 1895, as Mr. Sherard points out, Wilde started his artistic career amidst the suspicion of his contemporaries; only those who knew him at Dublin or Oxford, and were cognisant of his academic distinction, ever took him seriously for an entity in literature.

Artist and Man. By a strange paradox, many who admired his brains or were amused by his conversation never thought very highly either of his plays, his stories, or his essays; while a few who sincerely admired him as dramatist or man of letters endorsed the opinion of the majority in detesting Wilde himself; and there were the few others, intimate friends, who could never regard any of his works as an adequate expression of his great intellectual endowment, or anything more than the pastime of one of the most extraordinary characters of our time. These points of view are still held by such English people who consider Wilde at all, because you must put aside for the moment the artificial and sentimental interest aroused by the publication of his posthumous work. Another view is that of the Continent, particularly Germany, which regards Wilde as the most distinguished figure in English literature during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Wilde, however, is neither an original writer nor an original thinker. The device of his dramas is singularly poor and threadbare. It is rather their freshness of expression which caused their success and explains their hold on the stage at the present day. To urge that they are borrowed from Sheridan by no means ends the story of their derivation. They owe quite as much to Sardou, Scribe, and Dumas Fils, with whom English playwrights are more familiar than English dramatic critics. "Ernest," however, is an exception, and at the recent revival of the play by Mr. George Alexander it was universally admitted to be a little masterpiece of the English stage. With our barren drama that is not saying very much, but it says something for those who praised it without prejudice; while, whatever the opinions on "Salome" may be, and without accepting the high German appreciation as final, it is a remarkable feat for an English writer to have been the only dramatist among his countrymen who has given a play to the repertoire of Europe—to be the only English poet for whose work a German master has written an operatic score.

DAILY NEWS, A BOOK OF THE DAY, LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE.

Into "Ernest" Wilde put all of himself that was charming and amiable, witty or original, and though it would be difficult to discover actual corruption in his works, which were other than critical, he incorporated the less pleasant manifestation of his talent in "Dorian Gray." The story, though morbid, is a moral one, and there is something to be said for the remark of a contemporary critic, that it contained "heaps of morality, but no art." Wilde once told an inquisitive friend that the real secret of the book—readers will remember there is a secret—was that Dorian Gray dropped his hat. Pater, in his review, observed that it was the work of a clever talker; but, as he knew the author fairly well, the value of this is somewhat discounted, true enough though it may be. It is true, indeed, of all Wilde's books, and his actual stories he spoils when he came to write them down. To those who heard the tales of "The House of Pomegranates" related after dinner, in that marvellous voice which a poet said "conjured wonder out of emptiness," the reading of them must have been a terrible disappointment. Wilde's prose is overloaded and Asiatic; it has none of Pater's superb restraint—none of the conciseness of Matthew Arnold, nor the elegance distinguishing Robert Louis Stevenson; it rides for the epigram, and tilts for the paradox. There are, indeed, purple patches; but they are so many that they resemble the quilts contrived out of old brocade waistcoats—the waistcoats of Bulwer Lytton and Lord Beaconsfield. That Asiatic power—for it is a power—was, however, singularly effective in "Salome"; it is only the convention of form which he borrowed from Maeterlinck; the language and the realisation of the characters being entirely his own, though, of course, Flaubert and Holy Writ are both pressed into service.

Before and After. Oscar Wilde, who—in the pages of "De Profundis"—over-estimated to an almost ludicrous extent his former literary position, was never tired of regretting, after his release from prison, that his personality was

FOR REASON than several pounds

"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. Illustrated with portraits, facsimile letters, and other documents. London: T. Werner Laurie, Clifford's Inn, 12s. 6d. net.

Mr. Sherard was prompted to write this biography by the same reason that prompted Dr. Johnson to write the life of Richard Savage. "The heroes of literary as well as civil history," says Johnson, "have been very often no less remarkable for what they have suffered than for what they have achieved, and volumes have been written only to enumerate the miseries of the learned, and relate their unhappy lives and untimely deaths. To these mournful narratives I am about to add the life of . . . a man whose writings entitle him to an eminent rank in the classes of learning, and whose misfortunes claim a degree of compassion not always due to the unhappy, as they were often the consequences of the crimes of others rather than his own." The pearl in the oyster is said to be the result of disease. Oscar Wilde's genius was certainly allied to mental and moral disease. He ought never to have been sent to Reading Gaol. He should have been sent to an asylum. He came of an abnormally clever and eccentric stock. His mother was a grand-niece of the once famous Charles Maturin, author of "Melmoth, the Wanderer," of which Balzac spoke in terms of the highest praise. Scott and Byron thought so highly of Maturin's works (though his novels and plays afford evidence of his madness) that Scott offered to edit them after their author's death, and Byron used his influence to get some of the plays put upon the stage. Lady Wilde, Oscar's mother, was a poet, and a remarkable woman, alternately a furious Irish revolutionist and loyalist. In "De Profundis" Oscar Wilde refers to her and to his father, Sir William Wilde, in terms of profound affection and remorse. He said:

No one knew how deeply I loved and honoured her. Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my anguish and shame. She and my father had bequeathed me a name they had made noble and honoured not merely in literature, art, archaeology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low by-word among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to foes that they might turn it into folly. What I suffered then is not for pen to write or paper to record. My wife, always kind and gentle to me, rather than I should hear the news from indifferent lips, travelled, ill as she was, all the way from Genoa to England to break to me herself the tidings of so irremediable, so irredeemable, a loss.

Oscar Wilde's genius manifested itself at a very early age. He acquired languages with the greatest ease, and at Oxford distinguished himself by taking a First Class. He was also a Newdegate prizeman. "Ravenna," the poem by which he won this distinction, contains lines prophetic of his own downfall:

Discrowned by man, deserted by the sea
Thou sleepest, rocked in lonely misery!
No longer now upon the swelling tide,
Fine-forest like, thy myriad galleys ride!
For where the brass-peaked ships were wont
to float.

The weary shepherd pipes his mournful note;
And the white sheep are free to come and go
Where Adria's purple waters used to flow.

Though Oscar Wilde was generous and careless of money, he was vain. His vanity, in fact, was another form of his madness. He masqueraded through London streets in a most extraordinary uniform. When he became a victim of the aesthetic craze

he wore a velvet coat, knee-breeches, a loose shirt with a turn-down collar, and a floating tie of some unusual shade, fastened in a Lavallière knot, and he frequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with an expression of the greatest admiration. He also wore his hair long, and was clean-shaven. His conduct to all outward appearance was exemplary. The author of "The Story of an Unhappy Friendship" says: "The example of Oscar Wilde's purity of life in such a city as Paris, of his absolute decency of language, of his conversation, in which never an improper suggestion intruded, the elegance and refinement which endowed him, would have compelled even the most perverse and dissolute to some restraint. The companionship of Oscar Wilde, in the days in which I lived in his intimacy, would have made a gentleman, at least outwardly, of a man of bad morals and unclean tongue." Apart from his poems and plays and novels, he often uttered words of wisdom. His views on education were quite sound, and are worth recording now that we are all weary of Mr. Birrell's Education Bill. "A school," he said, "should be the most beautiful place in every town and village—so beautiful that the punishment for undutiful children should be that they should be debarred from going to school the following day. In all schools there should be a constant succession of new and delightful things, so that children could not weary or become indifferent to anything beautiful." He thought that it would be a very good thing if some of the specimens of decorative art stored up at South Kensington and similar museums were lent to the schools throughout the country for the edification and delight of the children. There was no place, he declared, so absolutely depressing as a museum. There was a better use of art, he urged, than looking at it on a rainy day. Give a child something to make, and he will be happy—and a perfectly happy child would be a perfectly good child." Children might be taught to do something in wood, something in leather, in pottery, in furniture, in decorative art, and in metal-working. The artistic power of every child, he contended, was great. "The problem of the age was the noisy boy who would not go to school nor learn his lessons, but spent his time in throwing stones at windows. What was the matter with him? He had simply discovered that he had hands and that they were given him for something. Many people do nothing with their hands but cover them with kid gloves." Mr. Sherard's biography is written with great care, good taste, and judgment, and the student of psychology will especially thank him for it. Mr. Sherard reprints the famous revolutionary article "Jacta aen est," contributed to the "Nation" by Lady Wilde in 1843 which is a stirring appeal to arms.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde."

One may recognise Mr. R. H. Sherard's loyalty to an unhappy friend and yet doubt his wisdom in bringing out a new "Life of Oscar Wilde" (Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net); for any fresh biography of the brilliant and of letters who wrote the "Ballad of Reading Gaol" and "De Profundis" must inevitably in recalling his career recall also his crime. And society to-day, if it were allowed, would gladly forget the decadent and remember the artist, forget his depraved aesthetics and remember only his masterly achievements in drama, in poetry, and in the prose in which he expressed his remorse. But his friends, with feelings that no doubt do them credit, will insist on regarding the man, and the man cannot be made a pretty picture. Here is Mr. Sherard, for instance, who might be supposed to have fulfilled in his earlier tribute to Mr. Wilde any duty of friendship, bringing out a larger work which is less compact and, in some matters, perhaps, less detailed than his former volume, and has decided faults of discursiveness and lack of connection. Of course, its tone is perfectly sound—Mr. Sherard was always conscious of Oscar Wilde's curious obliquity of vision. Of course, it contains a mass of interesting matter—reported conversations of Mr. Wilde's, stories of his last days and his death, as well as his prisoner-warder's account of his life, behaviour, and talk in prison. Moreover, Mr. Sherard furnishes us with two extraordinary pieces of information which cannot be ignored in any future estimate of his friend's pathology. One is that at the time of Oscar Wilde's birth his mother was hoping for a girl-child, and for a long time after his birth treated him, talked to him, and addressed him as a girl. The other statement is that all Mr. Wilde's offences against morality were committed when he was under the influence of intoxicants, which were "sheer poison to him" and left him after each epileptic crisis "totally unconscious of having done anything bad, detestable, shameful, or even unusual." This latter announcement is of considerable scientific interest, but it touches too closely matters that were best allowed to pass into oblivion.

Abend des Evening Gazette.

(Dsc 1906)

Literary Society.

This society met in the Debating Hall, Marichal College—Mr. L. A. K. Bennett presiding. Mr. Hugh Robertson, M.A., gave a paper on "Oscar Wilde," dealing particularly with his play "Salome." Mr. Robertson began by showing how Oscar Wilde had failed to take a hold on Englishmen. The chief reason was simply that the man himself was un-English, while such things as his ideas formulated in his paradoxes, also contributed to his lack of success in English society. Mr. Robertson gave a short comparison between Oscar Wilde and G. K. Chesterton, dispraising that either was a "poor," and proving this by the fact that both acted according to their consciences and not according to custom. Oscar Wilde always was extremely sensitive to impression, which was amply reflected in all his work. Mr. Robertson gave a minute examination of Wilde's idea of art, judging especially from "The Preface to Dorian Gray" and "Salome." Generally speaking, Wilde saw only the "sunny side of nature." Too much suffering failed to appeal to him. He saw only grotesqueness and ugliness in suffering. To Wilde the artist's duty was the interminable search for beauty, and beauty alone. Mr. Robertson ended by saying that Wilde was a true artist—the highest praise we could ascribe to any. Mr. A. C. Hay added a few appropriate remarks, dwelling in particular on the ugliness of Salome's character. Mr. Littlejohn also spoke and the meeting ended by a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Robertson, proposed by the president.

A BOOK OF THE DAY.

LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE.

(Published To-day.)

"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. T. Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net. To Oscar Wilde, unfortunate in his life, it has not yet fallen to be fortunate in his biographer. There are many who would prefer that the history of his life should remain untold; and that his writings should be left to speak for themselves. But Oscar Wilde was not destined to be saved from his friends. Mr. Robert Sherard, with qualifications not equal to his zeal, has strung together a thin collection of facts, backed up by a prodigious quantity of discussion. There are many features in the varied life of Wilde which might have made fascinating material for the biographer. But Mr. Sherard has not made the most of them. He does not seem to have had access to his correspondence. Where he might with profit have quoted typical letters or remarks, he prefers to discuss ethical or artistic points not always relevant. All through there is too much of Mr. Sherard and too little of his hero. He is continually venting himself in untrue or obvious generalisations, such as: "One has to remember that England is a commercial country where worth, merit, character, quality, genius are estimated only by the amount of money which a man earns or possesses." He alludes to a novelist's some repute with the explanatory phrase, "the great caricaturist Dickens"; and is apt to drop into such expressions as "boozey and boisterous Bohemians."

Mainly Pathological.

Mr. Sherard does not state that he is writing mainly for surgeons and pathologists, so it is not easy to see why he should devote four lengthy chapters to an account of Wilde's parents, and the manner in which they transmitted hereditary qualities. He sums up these inquiries:

Under "direct inheritance," or "transmission by blood," may, perhaps, be classed his literary capacity, his gifts of poetry, languages, of ready mastery of difficult studies, his love of the beautiful, the sound common sense of his normal periods, his family and personal pride, and his moral courage in the face of danger. It is also an inheritance to the dangers of alcoholism, an aversion from failure, physical, social, and mental, an exaggerated esteem, on the other hand, for wealth, titles, and social success, a tolerance for moral laxness.

The Aesthetic Period.

On page 89 Mr. Sherard reaches the birth of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, who was born in Dublin in 1854. There is not much of interest recorded till he reached Oxford. There he went with enthusiasm to listen to lectures by Ruskin, and became an extreme example of the "aesthetic" type of undergraduate which Oxford had just evolved.

Mr. Wilde occupied some fine old wainscoted rooms over the river in that college which is thought by many to be the most beautiful in Oxford. These rooms he had decorated with painted ceilings and handsome dados, and they were filled with treasures of art picked up at home and abroad; and here he held social meetings, which were attended by numbers of the men who were interested in art, or music, or poetry, and who for the most part practised some one of these in addition to the ordinary collegiate studies.

We are told it was "from these reunions in Magdalen that dated that virtuosity in music and painting and the decorative arts which he was forced to assume by the hazards of life, his own necessities and the folly of his contemporaries." He talked about music though, says Mr. Sherard, he could scarcely distinguish tunes; he talked fluently about painting, without betraying any knowledge of the subject; he wore eccentric clothes and long hair; and adopted peculiarities of manner calculated to attract attention. By volume of poems, Oscar Wilde, arrived in London, soon attained considerable notoriety. "The ordinary run of English Society" did not hate this fantastic young man so much as Mr. Sherard supposes. It was rather amused, and no doubt a little contemptuous. But Mr. Sherard will not be content to recognise any lesser emotion than love or hatred, and he seems to believe that at various times in his life there was a sort of conspiracy of offended persons banded together to take vengeance on Wilde.

Character and Temperament.

Indeed, Mr. Sherard is a singularly unsympathetic biographer. He dwells morbidly upon the ultimate catastrophe as if that were the really interesting feature in his subject's life. He talks much about his outward habits, his social ambitions, his dress, etc., without hinting at any real significance in his intellectual life. What informing us that Wilde adopted mannerisms for purposes of self-advertisement, he assures us that self-advertisement is a good thing. We are told that "social success always impressed Oscar Wilde," and that is taken as a sort of ultimate fact about him. We hear that he was an

astonishingly brilliant talker, but are given few examples of his conversation. Mr. Sherard every now and again sums up his character:

He was one of those artists who write for fame; for whom the money consideration is nothing. He could not constrain himself to hack-work; anonymity's black cloak enshrouded his brain. He needed applause; he thirsted after personal triumph—these were essential factors in his artistic temperament. So though he never spoke more brilliantly than during the last years of his life, because there the reward was immediate in the applause of the marvelling listeners, he wrote nothing all stimulus being lacking.

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DAILY CHRONICLE

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The Reasons Why.

An adequate biography is impossible, because eminent contemporaries naturally shrink from letting the world know the degree of intimacy which existed between Wilde and themselves either at Oxford or in London during the eighties. Reminiscence or correspondence might easily be misunderstood, and the recital of causes which led them to sever their association with a brilliant and remarkable writer, long before his downfall, would be ungracious and ungrateful reading. Wilde, moreover, was never a great letter-writer, except during his imprisonment and for a few months after his release. His letters are seldom dated, and even if they were accessible they would not throw much light on the extraordinary man who must always remain an unsolved riddle in the by-ways of literature.

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That personality, though undoubtedly a dazzling one, was to many unattractive and repellent. Long before the downfall of 1895, as Mr. Sherard points out, Wilde started his artistic career amidst the suspicion of his contemporaries; only those who knew him at Dublin or Oxford, and were cognisant of his academic distinction, ever took him seriously for an entity in literature.

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The Importance of It.

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Before and After.

Oscar Wilde, who—in the pages of "De Profundis"—over-estimated to an almost ludicrous extent his former literary position, was never tired of regretting, after his release from prison, that his personality was far more remarkable than anything he had written. It was an amazing criticism to come from him, but, for those who knew him intimately, a truthful one. It should be recalled by people who are inclined to exaggerate his literary and dramatic works, just as those who undervalue them should read them in the first instance, and then try to dissociate the man and the writer, if that is possible to the fellow-countrymen of Ruskin.

Too much praise cannot be given to Mr. Sherard for the industry with which he has collected facts and dates connected with Wilde's early life. For circumstances which came under his own observation he may be accepted as the canon of authority by all interested in the subject; but where he has to rely on second-hand information, even when Wilde is his informant, he is less trustworthy. Certain inaccuracies and a certain amount of legend are recorded by him in perfect good faith; subsequent editions will no doubt correct these unimportant errors. Few biographers could have made bricks out of the straws at which he clutches for incidents and events in Wilde's very early days and in the last year of his life. An example will suffice. Wilde's well-known remark, "I am dying above my means," was made, after his operation, by his literary executor about six weeks before his death, to be precise, on October 17th, 1900. He was in very good spirits at the time, and was so immoderately amused with his own jest that he repeated it to everyone who came to see him for the next few days.

various 13 July 1906

GENIUS AND MADNESS.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. Illustrated with portraits, facsimile letters, and other documents. London: T. Werner Laurie, Clifford's Inn. 12s. 6d. net.

Mr. Sherard was prompted to write this biography by the same reason that prompted Dr. Johnson to write the life of Richard Savage. "The heroes of literary as well as civil history," says Johnson, "have been very often no less remarkable for what they have suffered than for what they have achieved, and volumes have been written only to enumerate the miseries of the learned, and relate their unhappy lives and untimely deaths. To these mournful narratives I am about to add the life of . . . a man whose writings entitle him to an eminent rank in the classes of learning, and whose misfortunes claim a degree of compassion not always due to the unhappy, as they were often the consequences of the crimes of others rather than his own." The pearl in the oyster is said to be the result of disease. Oscar Wilde's genius was certainly allied to mental and moral disease. He ought never to have been sent to Reading Gaol. He should have been sent to an asylum. He came of an abnormally clever and eccentric stock. His mother was a grand-niece of the once famous Charles Maturin, author of "Melmoth, the Wanderer," of which Balzac spoke in terms of the highest praise. Scott and Byron thought so highly of Maturin's works (though his novels and plays afford evidence of his madness) that Scott offered to edit them after their author's death, and Byron used his influence to get some of the plays put upon the stage. Lady Wilde, Oscar's mother, was a poet, and a remarkable woman, alternately a furious Irish revolutionist and loyalist. In "De Profundis" Oscar Wilde refers to her and to his father, Sir William Wilde, in terms of profound affection and remorse. He said:

No one knew how deeply I loved and honoured her. Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my anguish and shame. She and my father had bequeathed me a name they had made noble and honoured not merely in literature, art, archæology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low by-word among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to foes that they might turn it into folly. What I suffered then is not for pen to write or paper to record. My wife, always kind and gentle to me, rather than I should hear the news from indifferent lips, travelled, ill as she was, all the way from Genoa to England to break to me herself the tidings of so irreparable, so irredeemable, a loss.

Oscar Wilde's genius manifested itself at a very early age. He acquired languages with the greatest ease, and at Oxford distinguished himself by taking a First Class. He was also a Newdegate prizeman. "Ravenna," the poem by which he won this distinction, contains lines prophetic of his own downfall:

Discrowned by man, deserted by the sea
Thou sleepest, rocked in lonely misery!
No longer now upon the swelling tide,
Pine-forest like, thy myriad galleys ride!
For where the brass-peaked ships were wont
to float,
The weary sheep
And the white sheep are free to come and go
Where Adria's purple waters used to flow.

Though Oscar Wilde was generous and careless of money, he was vain. His vanity, in fact, was another form of his madness. He masqueraded through London streets in a most extraordinary uniform. When he became a victim of the æsthetic craze

he wore a velvet coat, knee-breeches, a loose shirt with a turn-down collar, and a floating tie of some unusual shade, fastened in a Lavallière knot, and he frequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with an expression of the greatest admiration. He also wore his hair long, and was clean-shaven. His conduct to all outward appearance was exemplary. The author of "The Story of an Unhappy Friendship" says: "The example of Oscar Wilde's purity of life in such a city as Paris, of his absolute decency of language, of his conversation, in which never an improper suggestion intruded, the elegance and refinement which endowed him, would have compelled even the most perverse and dissolute to some restraint. The companionship of Oscar Wilde, in the days in which I lived in his intimacy, would have made a gentleman, at least outwardly, of a man of bad morals and unclean tongue." Apart from his poems and plays and novels, he often uttered words of wisdom. His views on education were quite sound, and are worth recording now that we are all weary of Mr. Birrell's Education Bill. "A school," he said, "should be the most beautiful place in every town and village—so beautiful that the punishment for undutiful children should be that they should be debarred from going to school the following day. In all schools there should be a constant succession of new and delightful things, so that children could not weary or become indifferent to anything beautiful." He thought that it would be a very good thing if some of the specimens of decorative art stored up at South Kensington and similar museums were lent to the schools throughout the country for the edification and delight of the children. There was no place, he declared, so absolutely depressing as a museum. There was a better use of art, he urged, than looking at it on a rainy day. Give a child something to make, and he will be happy—"and a perfectly happy child would be a perfectly good child." Children might be taught to do something in wood, something in leather, in pottery, in furniture, in decorative art, and in metal-working. The artistic power of every child, he contended, was great. "The problem of the age was the noisy boy who would not go to school nor learn his lessons, but spent his time in throwing stones at windows. What was the matter with him? He had simply discovered that he had hands and that they were given him for something. Many people do nothing with their hands but cover them with kid gloves." Mr. Sherard's biography is written with great care, good taste, and judgment, and the student of psychology will especially thank him for it. Mr. Sherard reprints the famous revolutionary article "Jacta alea est," contributed to the "Nation" by Lady Wilde in 1848 which is a stirring appeal to arms.

"The Life of Oscar Wilde."

One may recognise Mr. R. H. Sherard's loyalty to an unhappy friend and yet doubt his wisdom in bringing out a new "Life of Oscar Wilde" (Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net); for any fresh biography of the brilliant man of letters who wrote the "Ballad of Reading Gaol" and "De Profundis" must inevitably in recalling his career recall also his crime. And society to-day, if it were allowed, would gladly forget the decadent and remember the artist, forget his depraved æsthetics and remember only his masterly achievements in drama, in poetry, and in the prose in which he expressed his remorse. But his friends, with feelings that no doubt do them credit, will insist on regarding the man, and the man cannot be made a pretty picture. Here is Mr. Sherard, for instance, who might be supposed to have fulfilled in his earlier tribute to Mr. Wilde any duty of friendship, bringing out a larger work which is less compact and, in some matters, perhaps, less detailed than his former volume, and has decided faults of discursiveness and lack of connection. Of course, its tone is perfectly sound—Mr. Sherard was always conscious of Oscar Wilde's curious obliquity of vision. Of course, it contains a mass of interesting matter—reported conversations of Mr. Wilde's, stories of his last days and his death, as well as his prisoner-warder's account of his life, behaviour, and talk in prison. Moreover, Mr. Sherard furnishes us with two extraordinary pieces of information which cannot be ignored in any future estimate of his friend's pathology. One is that at the time of Oscar Wilde's birth his mother was hoping for a girl-child, and for a long time after his birth treated him, talked to him, and addressed him as a girl. The other statement is that all Mr. Wilde's offences against morality were committed when he was under the influence of intoxicants, which were "sheer poison to him" and left him after each epileptic crisis "totally unconscious of having done anything bad, detestable, shameful, or even unusual." This latter announcement is of considerable scientific interest, but it touches the heart of the matter which were best allowed to pass into oblivion.

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about the Evening Gazette.

Literary Society.

This society met in the Debating Hall, Marischal College—Mr I. A. K. Barnett presiding. Mr Hugh Robertson, M.A., gave a paper on "Oscar Wilde," dealing particularly with his play "Salome."

Mr Robertson began by showing how Oscar Wilde had failed to take a hold on Englishmen. The chief reason was simply that the man himself was un-British, while such things as his ideas formulated in his paradoxes, also contributed to his lack of success in English society. Mr Robertson gave a short comparison between Oscar Wilde and G. K. Chesterton, disproving that either was a "poseur," and proving this by the fact that both acted according to their consciences and not according to custom. Oscar Wilde always was extremely sensitive to impression, which was amply reflected in all his work. Mr Robertson gave a minute examination of Wilde's idea of art, judging especially from "The Preface to Dorian Grey" and "Salome." Generally speaking, Wilde saw only the "sunny side of nature." Too much suffering failed to appeal to him. He saw only grotesqueness and uselessness in suffering. To Wilde the artist's duty was the interminable search for beauty, and beauty alone. Mr Robertson ended by saying that Wilde was a true artist—the highest praise we could ascribe to any.

Mr A. C. Hay added a few appropriate remarks, dwelling in particular on the ugliness of Salome's character. Mr Littlejohn also spoke, and the meeting ended by a hearty vote of thanks to Mr Robertson, proposed by the president.

A BOOK OF THE DAY.

LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE.

(Published To-day.)

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

To Oscar Wilde, unfortunate in his life, it has not yet fallen to be fortunate in his biographer. There are many who would prefer that the history of his life should remain untold; and that his writings should be left to speak for themselves. But Oscar Wilde was not destined to be saved from his friends. Mr. Robert Sherard, with qualifications not equal to his zeal, has strung together a thin collection of facts, backed up by a prodigious quantity of discussion. There are many features in the varied life of Wilde which might have made fascinating material for the biographer. But Mr. Sherard has not made the most of them. He does not seem to have had access to his correspondence. Where he might with profit have quoted typical letters or remarks, he prefers to discuss ethical or artistic points not always relevant. All through there is too much of Mr. Sherard and too little of his hero. He is continually venting himself in untrue or obvious generalisations, such as: "One has to remember that England is a commercial country where worth, merit, character, quality, genius are estimated only by the amount of money which a man earns or possesses." He alludes to a novelist of some repute with the explanatory phrase, "the great caricaturist Dickens"; and is apt to drop into such expressions as "boozy and boisterous Bohemians."

Mainly Pathological.

Mr. Sherard does not state that he is writing mainly for surgeons and pathologists, so it is not easy to see why he should devote four lengthy chapters to an account of Wilde's parents, and the manner in which they transmitted hereditary qualities. He sums up these inquiries:

Under "direct inheritance," or "transmission by blood," may, perhaps, be classed his literary capacity, his gifts of poetry, languages, of ready mastery of difficult studies, his love of the beautiful, the sound common sense of his normal periods, his family and personal pride, and his moral courage in the face of danger, but also an indifference to the dangers of alcoholism, an aversion from failure, physical, social, and mental, an exaggerated esteem, on the other hand, for wealth, titles, and social success, a tolerance for moral laxness.

The Æsthetic Period.

On page 83 Mr. Sherard reaches the birth of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, who was born in Dublin in 1854. There is not much of interest recorded till he reached Oxford. There he went with enthusiasm to listen to lectures by Ruskin, and became an extreme example of the "æsthetic" type of undergraduate which Oxford had just evolved:

Mr. Wilde occupied some fine old wainscoted rooms over the river in that college which is thought by many to be the most beautiful in Oxford. These rooms he had decorated with painted ceilings and handsome dados, and they were filled with treasures of art picked up at home and abroad; and here he held social meetings, which were attended by numbers of the men who were interested in art, or music, or poetry, and who for the most part practised some one of these in addition to the ordinary collegiate studies.

We are told it was "from these reunions in Magdalen that dated that virtuosity in music and painting and the decorative arts which he was forced to assume by the hazards of life, his own necessities and the folly of his contemporaries." He talked about music though, says Mr. Sherard, he could scarcely distinguish tunes; he talked fluently about painting, without betraying any knowledge of the subject; he wore eccentric clothes and long hair; and adopted peculiarities of manner calculated to attract attention. By affectations of this kind, together with a little volume of poems, Oscar Wilde, arrived in London, soon attained considerable notoriety. "The ordinary run of English Society" did not hate this fantastic young man so much as Mr. Sherard supposes. It was rather amused, and no doubt a little contemptuous. But Mr. Sherard will not be content to recognise any lesser emotion than love or hatred, and he seems to believe that at various times in his life there was a sort of conspiracy of offended persons banded together to take vengeance on Wilde.

Character and Temperament.

Indeed, Mr. Sherard is a singularly unsympathetic biographer. He dwells morbidly upon the ultimate catastrophe as if that were the really interesting feature in his subject's life. He talks much about his outward habits, his social ambitions, his dress, etc., without hinting at any real significance in his intellectual life. When informing us that Wilde adopted mannerisms for purposes of self-advertisement, he assures us that self-advertisement is a good thing. We are told that "social success always impressed Oscar Wilde," and that it is taken as a sort of ultimate fact about him. We hear that he was an

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astonishingly brilliant talker, but are given few examples of his conversation. Mr. Sherard every now and again sums up his character:

He was one of those artists who write for fame; for whom the money consideration is nothing. He could not constrain himself to hack-work; anonymity's black cloak enshrouded his brain. He needed applause; he thirsted after personal triumph—those were essential factors in his artistic temperament. So though he never spoke more brilliantly than during the last years of his life, because there the reward was immediate in the applause of the marvelling listeners, he wrote nothing, all stimulus being lacking.

Mr. Sherard has done scant justice to Oscar Wilde. While he dismisses his moral failure as the outcome of madness and inherited tendencies, he gives a picture of his life in which, quite unintentionally, he represents him as little better than a buffoon. But Oscar Wilde was not a buffoon. An actor he was, a man posing perpetually before the footlights, loving applause. But he loved the applause also in order that he might scoff. Convictions about life probably he had few. But he had artistic convictions, he had intellect, and a sense for the beauty of words and sounds that made him, as he says himself, "a lord of language." That is, perhaps, what he was first and foremost. He had no mission to preach beyond that of eschewing missions. There is no dominating note in his writings, no directing spirit. There is brilliance, wit, cleverness, feeling, but little which was worthy of so much talent. His was a life frittered, a genius wasted, a fine sensibility dulled and perverted. He might have written sublimely, but he knew nothing worth writing about. And so his life was effort without direction, promise without fulfilment, a magnificent possibility which ended in horrible and sordid catastrophe. The noble and inspiring ideal of a Ruskin is watered down to the flippant cult of "decorative art" and "get up," mingled with the despairing cry against the vanity of vanities and the waste of life.

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DAILY CHRONICLE

A TRAGEDY OF GENIUS.

LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE, by Robert Harborough Sherard. London, Werner Laurie, 12s. 6d. net.

Published To-day.

A life of the late Oscar Wilde was by no means a necessity, but it was inevitable. Such tempting material does not lie neglected very long, especially when a certain temerity for handling difficult subjects is a requisite equipment for the biographer. In the present case Mr. Robert Sherard, a racy and delightful writer, has elected to carry out a rather perilous literary enterprise, and he may be congratulated on his success.

It is needless to say that an adequate life of Wilde, in the present generation, is an absolute impossibility. Of the darker side of his life everyone knows too much, remembers too much. There can be no further revelations to nauseate either his enemies or his admirers. If the literary executor is to be believed, even the unpublished portions of "De Profundis" would not add to our knowledge of the man nor his malady, however interesting those portions might be to psychologists.

The Reasons Why.

An adequate biography is impossible, because eminent contemporaries naturally shrink from letting the world know the degree of intimacy which existed between Wilde and themselves, either at Oxford in the seventies or in London during the eighties. Reminiscence or correspondence might easily be misunderstood, and the recital of causes which led them to sever their association with a brilliant and remarkable writer, long before his downfall, would be ungracious and ungrateful reading. Wilde, moreover, was never a great letter-writer, except during his imprisonment and for a few months after his release. His letters are seldom dated, and even if they were accessible they would not throw much light on the extraordinary man who must always remain an unsolved riddle in the by-ways of literature.

Wilde's works present several points for consideration, and a small study of the author, from a literary point of view, in the hands of a judicious critic, might have considerable interest. Not that Mr. Sherard lacks critical ability—indeed, his praise is always tempered by acute perception of Wilde's literary and dramatic defects; but he is biased, and rightly biased, by personal friendship, and he is hypnotised by the personality of his hero.

That personality, though undoubtedly a dazzling one, was to many unattractive and repellent. Long before the downfall of 1895, as Mr. Sherard points out, Wilde started his artistic career amidst the suspicion of his contemporaries; only those who knew him at Dublin or Oxford, and were cognisant of his academic distinction, ever took him seriously for an entity in literature.

Artist and Man.

By a strange paradox, many who admired his brains or were amused by his conversation never thought very highly either of his plays, his stories, or his essays; while a few who sincerely admired him as dramatist or man of letters endorsed the opinion of the majority in detesting Wilde himself; and there were the few others, intimate friends, who could never regard any of his works as an adequate expression of his great intellectual endowment, or anything more than the pastime of one of the most extraordinary characters of our time. These points of view are still held by such English people who consider Wilde at all, because you must put aside for the moment the artificial and sentimental interest aroused by the publication of his posthumous work. Another view is that of the Continent, particularly Germany, which regards Wilde as the most distinguished figure in English literature during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century.

Wilde, however, is neither an original writer nor an original thinker. The device of his dramas is singularly poor and threadbare. It is rather their freshness of expression which caused their success and explains their hold on the stage at the present day. To urge that they are borrowed from Sheridan by no means ends the story of their derivation. They owe quite as much to Sardou, Scribe, and Dumas Fils, with whom English playwrights are more familiar than English dramatic critics. "Ernest," however, is an exception, and at the recent revival of the play by Mr. George Alexander it was universally admitted to be a little masterpiece of the English stage. With our barren drama that is not saying very much, but it says something for those who praised it without prejudice; while, whatever the opinions on "Salome" may be, and without accepting the high German appreciation as final, it is a remarkable feat for an English writer to have been the only dramatist among his countrymen who has given a play to the repertoire of Europe—to be the only English poet for whose work a German master has written an operatic score.

The Importance of It.

Into "Ernest" Wilde put all of himself that was charming and amiable, witty or original, and though it would be difficult to discover actual corruption in his works, which were other than critical, he incorporated the less pleasant manifestation of his talent in "Dorian Gray." The story, though morbid, is a moral one, and there is something to be said for the remark of a contemporary critic, that it contained "heaps of morality, but no art." Wilde once told an inquisitive friend that the real secret of the book—readers will remember there is a secret—was that Dorian Gray dropped his h's. Pater, in his review, observed that it was the work of a clever talker; but, as he knew the author fairly well, the value of this is somewhat discounted, true enough though it may be. It is true, indeed, of all Wilde's books, and his actual stories he spoilt when he came to write them down.

To those who heard the tales of "The House of Pomegranates" related after dinner, in that marvellous voice which a poet said "conjured wonder out of emptiness," the reading of them must have been a terrible disappointment. Wilde's prose is overloaded and Asiatic; it has none of Pater's superb restraint—none of the conciseness of Matthew Arnold, nor the elegance distinguishing Robert Louis Stevenson; it rides for the epigram, and tilts for the paradox. There are, indeed, purple patches; but they are so many that they resemble the quilts contrived out of old brocaded waistcoats—the waistcoats of Bulwer Lytton and Lord Beaconsfield. That Asiatic power—for it is a power—was, however, singularly effective in "Salome"; it is only the convention of form which he borrowed from Maeterlinck; the language and the realisation of the characters being entirely his own, though, of course, Flaubert and Holy Writ are both pressed into service.

Before and After.

Oscar Wilde, who—in the pages of "De Profundis"—over-estimated to an almost ludicrous extent his former literary position, was never tired of regretting, after his release from prison, that his personality was far more remarkable than anything he had written. It was an amazing criticism to come from him, but, for those who knew him intimately, a truthful one. It should be recalled by people who are inclined to exaggerate his literary and dramatic works, just as those who underestimate them should read them in the first instance, and then try to dissociate the man and the writer, if that is possible to the fellow-countrymen of Ruskin.

Too much praise cannot be given to Mr. Sherard for the industry with which he has collected facts and dates connected with Wilde's early life. For circumstances which came under his own observation he may be accepted as the canon of authority by all interested in the subject; but where he has to rely on second-hand information, even when Wilde is his informant, he is less trustworthy. Certain inaccuracies and a certain amount of legend are recorded by him in perfect good faith; a subsequent edition will no doubt correct these unimportant errors. Few biographers could have made bricks out of the straws at which he clutches for incidents and events in Wilde's very early days and in the last year of his life.

An example will suffice. Wilde's well-known remark, "I am dying above my means," was made, after his operation, to his literary executor about six weeks before his death, to be precise, on October 17th, 1900. He was in very good spirits at the time, and was so immoderately amused with his own jest that he repeated it to everyone who came to see him for the next few days.

MISERRIMUS.*

... the world is wide, But fettered feet go lame; And once or twice to throw the dice Is a gentlemanly game, But he does not win who plays with Sin In the secret house of Shame.

—“BALLAD OF READING GAOL.”

Among the many epigrammatically-expressed half-truths the world owes to Oscar Wilde there is one to the effect that, of all a teacher's disciples, it is generally Judas who writes his biography. Mr. Sherard quotes this maxim, disputes it, and—I am certain, quite unwittingly—illustrates it. I doubt very much if Oscar Wilde will stand one jot higher in the estimation of any living man because of this book: in the minds of a good many men it may do his memory wrong. I doubt also if there is anybody now alive competent to handle such a theme—to rise to the height, or to sink to the depth, of that "great argument."

The case was different with poor Wilde. Even the genius which distinguished him was of a queer and uncanny order, and the eccentricities which accompanied it were far from lovable. Shakespeare or Balzac might have moulded his characteristic traits into the

the greatest admiration. Let it be added to this that he wore his hair long, and was clean-shaven as to his face; and when it is remembered how striking a form and what memorable features were his already by Nature, it will be understood what attention his appearance must have attracted. One might find other and more charitable explanations for this self-travesty; perhaps with all the more justification that commercial instinct does not appear to have been very strong in Oscar Wilde. He was a young man at the time; he was by nature and atavism inclined to Schwärmererei; he may have thought that the costume suited him; he may have wished to set Society at defiance at the prompting of that Anarchist spirit which was within him, as it is within all men who are really great. For the rest, whatever the man's motives were, that he gave effect to this plan shows that he possessed great moral courage. It is by no means every man who has the strength of mind to make a laughing-stock of himself in the eyes of London. The London gamins are pitiless; and on each of his walks abroad the young "aesthete" must have veritably run the gauntlet. It may further be noted that many men and women of approved capacity have shown and do show this curious love of self-advertisement. It has always been the malady of the great; in recent years it has grown into an epidemic. The advance of commercialism may account for it. Commercialism has made it clear that the only method by which a man can call attention to the excellence of his wares is by persistent puffery. Artists, actors, writers, philosophers and politicians have equally wares to sell—in this age every man who is not independent is a tradesman of sorts—and one can hardly blame them if they adopt the means for selling these wares which succeed in other branches of trade. The public, moreover, is gradually becoming so accustomed to these methods that far from regarding with suspicion the man of letters who by the eccentricity of his costume, the length of his hair, the frequency or the rarity of personal mentions and portraits of him which appear in the papers, is the carrier of his own advertising boards, the impudent distributor of personal leaflets, it gives more and more its exclusive attention to the person who most loudly shouts his wares. This is the case in England and America. In the Latin countries and in Germany where art is still regarded in much the same light as religion, these tricks would fail of their desired effect. But in England we are a commercial nation, and as Doctor Johnson never tired of pointing out to Boswell, we must be dealt with by commercial methods.

These passages are illuminative in more respects than one. Having little talent and less disposition to appear as a dogmatist, I will not lay it down as a law that a gentleman does not pose. But I will venture on the milder statement that to pose is not a distinguishing attribute of a gentleman. And it seems to me that Mr. Sherard gets a little mixed when he speaks of the "good taste" which made the "wish to do something different from others" "eminently reprehensible," in Wilde's opinion, and then goes on to remind us that Wilde won his first hearing from the public by deliberately playing the buffoon. And I meet with a dead "negator" the statement that self-advertisement "has always been the malady of the great." Such genuinely great men as have stooped to so sorry a trick have been the exceptions which have gone to prove the rule. Mr. Sherard complains bitterly—and most justly—of much that has been written and said concerning Wilde. But did Wilde's bitterest enemy ever do him a worse disservice than to proclaim him a "gentleman," and then to state of him in cold type that, "the man who made money and got on in life enjoyed his regard; for the failure he had nothing but abhorrence"? One can pity and pardon the aberrations which ruined Wilde's career, but for the living epitome of snobbery portrayed in that one branding phrase the epithet "gentleman" seems a little out of place.

1 1/2 millions sterling, and its total net profits reach nearly a million. pertes has been worked, has produced gold of the value of over the same line of lead as on the Victorian Deep Lead property. The Madam Betty, royalties have amounted to 2 1/2 millions sterling, and the dividends and bonour has realised 4 1/2 millions sterling, and the dividends and be gathered from the fact that the gold won from leads in the night Leads group at an early date. The possibilities of this group may dicted that an active revival will be witnessed in the Victorian Deep While the Mining Market generally remains very quiet, it is pre- Promised Victorian Revival. of its ending, desirable though a satisfactory arrangement is. committee in sufficient numbers it will not be possible to see indica- protracted business, and unless the debenture holders rally round the to decide on the further steps necessary for their protection. It is a trusts requiring them to convene a meeting of debenture holders coupons in arrears." Hence the committee served a requisition on the the last twelve months had been more than sufficient to pay both the statements were correct, and that the earnings of the company during report, the debenture holders were entitled to assume that these Company, to answer the statements contained in our fifth interim made, "the same document continues to urge, "by the directors of admitted, the company has in hand. "No attempt having been of the debenture interest, notwithstanding the large sum which, it is it is pointed out that another default has been made in the payment the committee will not plead for this majority in vain. In the report to what directions my own sympathies incline, and I therefore hope the forthcoming meeting. I have already indicated in past comments its laid on the necessity of the committee having a voting majority at holders' committee, together with a letter in which strong emphasis headed men. A sixth interim report has been issued by the debenture of counsel tendered, then they must be exceptionally cool and great

Table with financial data including sections for WEST AUSTRALIANS AND M.S., WEST AFRICAN MINES, AMERICAN SECURITIES, CANADIAN RAILWAYS, MISCELLANEOUS, and WEST AFRICAN MINES.

MR. SHERARD AND OSCAR WILDE.

SIR,—I have just read the review of my book on Oscar Wilde, which is contributed to your paper by Mr. Henry Murray. I am so accustomed to receiving blows, which, because my friend is dead, are levelled at me (though intended to attack his fallen body) that I read with no personal concern the article in question. I regretted, however, to see that Mr. Murray did not hesitate to adopt a method of attack which is not, well, shall we say, noble and good. He puts into my mouth as my words, a passage which in my book is quoted from another writer, and thereupon proceeds to demonstrate my muddleheadedness. And I am afraid this thing which is neither noble nor good was done wilfully. It is sad to see that a poor dead man like Wilde can excite in a competent publicist like Henry Murray an animus which does not hesitate to stoop to such practices.

A word with regard to Mr. Murray's exordium and mine. None of the poets, none of the artists amongst the authors named by Mr. Murray as having "decorated" our literature in Oscar Wilde's day, succeeded in arresting the attention of the world. England is a small island, and the world is a big place. These are facts which are often forgotten by publicists like Henry Murray, who are essentially insular and "de leur village."

My concerns are not with Landerneau and I look beyond the "Gazette de Hollande." It is a fact that since Shakespeare no English poet, except my late friend, and Lord Byron in a lesser degree, has produced a "Welt-Stück," and I have the right to say that if Philistinism "more Calvino" had not killed him, he would have done—well, the things which I have said he would have done.

And he most certainly was not a prig; and most certainly there were no contemporaries of his who were his intellectual equals, yet Mr. Murray speaks of men of his day who were "vastly his intellectual superiors."

On the whole, I consider that Mr. Murray has missed an excellent "occasion de se taire."—Yours, etc., ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

Guilborough Hall, Northampton.

"LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME"

To the Editor of THE ACADEMY SIR,—In Mr. Sherard's recent Life of Oscar Wilde pages 316-319, allusion is made to a particular copy of "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" which is inscribed "Constance from Oscar July '91." Mr. Sherard says that certain passages, which he quotes, have been underlined by the author "to call attention to them"; and on this theory he writes a good deal of malapropos moralising. May I say the little book was once mine, and that I underlined the passages because I admired them, and that another twinge is added to my regret at having parted with it? J. M. F. COOKE.

July 3. July 14, 1906.

"LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME"

To the Editor of THE ACADEMY SIR,—I was interested in the letter from a Mr. Cooke, which, under the above heading, you publish in this week's ACADEMY. The possibility had never occurred to me that any friend of Mr. Wilde's having come into possession of a relic so precious as the book referred to, would sell it. Hence my error. I have communicated the letter to the two gentlemen who are translating my book into German and French, and in the new edition of my biography I will make the necessary correction. ROBERT H. SHERARD.

Guilborough Hall, Northampton. July 7.

Musical News. 15 Dec. 1906

Strauss' "Salomé" has just been produced in Berlin with extraordinary success. It will be remembered that the Kaiser once said that he would never permit the work to be performed in the German capital, but a reconciliation has taken place between the Emperor and the composer, and the production of the banned opera is the result. The chief parts were sustained by Fraulein Destinn, Herr Krauss, and Herr Berger. The work created a profound impression, and it is generally believed that it will share with "Madama Butterfly" the honour of being the most successful of modern operas.

The Daily Telegraph tells a good story in connection with a rehearsal of Strauss' "Salomé." The chorus, in their efforts to sing the chord of G against the persistent F sharp of a prominent part of the orchestra, failed so completely as to necessitate many repetitions. On the conductor apologising to the composer, the latter replied, "I noticed nothing."

Free Lance, 15 Dec. 1906

Hashed Oscar! Mr. F. Church, the American painter, who has been trying to say smart things about European art galleries and the Old Masters, is cheap, very cheap. I suppose he has just heard of Oscar Wilde's remarks on the Atlantic and the Falls of Niagara, and thinks the time has come to dish up the same style of thing again. But Oscar Wilde has not been dead long enough to permit of a rechauffé of his criticisms. I can only conclude that Mr. Church is not as "celebrated" as the American papers make out, and that he is seeking a short cut to fame.

Musical Standard. Dec. 8, 1906.

Says the well-informed critic of the "Leader": The most recent important occurrence on the Continent was the production of Strauss' "Salomé" in Berlin on Tuesday, with Fräulein Destinn, Herr Kraus and Herr Berger in the chief parts. Owing to the reports of the opposition to the production in the highest quarters and the rumours that the Emperor and the Empress had protested that they would never permit the work to be produced in Berlin, the public appetite has been whetted to an extraordinary degree. The production is the result of the reconciliation between the Emperor and the composer, which was signalled by the acceptance of the dedication of a Parade March by Strauss by His Majesty during the summer. Nothing has been more surprising in a way than the extraordinary popularity achieved all over Germany by "Salomé." Those who, like myself, witnessed the first production at Dresden a year ago were prepared to find that musicians and persons of esoteric literary tastes would be keenly interested in it, but no one expected it to prove the greatest financial success (except, possibly, "Madama Butterfly") of recent years. The latest place to welcome it with open arms has been Munich; it is soon to be heard in Milan, with Signora Bellini in the title part, and in April it will be produced in Paris. For this production the versatile composer is preparing a French version, and he will conduct the two first performances. His latest composition, "Bardengesänge" for chorus and orchestra, will be produced at Frankfort on Monday, and he has just published a book of six songs—Op. 66.

Star. Dec. 6, 1906.

"SALOME."

STRIKING TRIUMPH OF OSCAR WILDE'S OPERA.

Richard Strauss's opera "Salomé," set to Oscar Wilde's text, was produced at the Royal Opera, Berlin, last night before a brilliant audience. The composer conducted in person. The demand for tickets was so great that the house could have been filled 20 times over on the first night, and the advertisements in the papers this morning announced that a few tickets would be given up by their fortunate owners for £4 each. A serious complaint is made that the price of seats in the Opera House has been raised for the occasion 50 per cent., the objection being that musical art will soon be enjoyed only by the rich. The opera, which has no overture and no chorus, and is in one continuous act, was splendidly performed. At the conclusion Herr Strauss and the principals had a tremendous reception, countless calls being given.

WAGNER ECLIPSED!

What the Critics Think of Richard Strauss's "Salomé."

[From Our Correspondent] BERLIN, Thursday. Last night's performance of Richard Strauss's "Salomé" appears to have been an unqualified success, if one may judge from the comments of the critics in this morning's newspapers. Both as drama and as opera, Oscar Wilde's strange story has come to stay. It is exactly a year since the opera was first given in Dresden, but its appearance in Berlin, in spite of violent opposition to it in court circles, stamps it authoritatively as an opera which is to live in musical history. The opera houses of Turin, Milan, Paris, and New York are to follow in quick succession with representations of this phenomenal opera. If we are to accept the judgment of this morning's enthusiastic critics Strauss is the greatest of living musicians, not only in Germany, but throughout the world, and "Salomé" represents the form which the opera of the future is to take. In a word, Wagner and his school have been superseded by Strauss. The reception given to "Salomé" last night was certainly magnificent. The entire distinguished audience rose to their feet, applauding wildly. Strauss and Emmy Destinn, who sang the title role, appeared over twenty times. Their last appearance was hand in hand, their free hands bearing laurel wreaths. One hundred and two musicians took part in the orchestra, and to all save those who are preparing to accept the new musical gospel the din was deafening, and the one long act of nearly two hours a time of exceeding torment.

Morning Leader. Dec. 6, 1906.

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CRITICISMS ON "SALOME."

SOME SAY A MASTERPIECE OTHERS A PERVERSE PRODUCTION.

[From Our Own Correspondent] BERLIN, Thursday. The first production of Dr. Richard Strauss's "Salomé" at the Royal Opera House, Berlin, last evening has made various impressions on the minds of the public. The musical critics admit that the reception given to the piece was extremely satisfactory, and that the performance was brilliant; but some regard as significant the fact that the composer was recalled only eight times. The majority of the critics acknowledge that "Salomé" is a masterpiece and the musical event of the season, and that Strauss has proved himself to be the musical genius of the age; while others describe it as a perverse production written by a perverse author and set to perverse music by Richard Strauss. That Strauss is a master of orchestration is also generally admitted, while on the other hand the conviction is expressed that although Strauss has achieved a present triumph, his accessionist art will not long continue to hold sway over the public.

Star. 17 Dec. 1906

"Salomé" has now been definitely prohibited at the Imperial Opera House in Vienna, and the projected production at Buda-Pesth was stopped shortly before the date fixed for the first performance. It will, however, be played in Vienna at one of the other theatres, probably by the Breslau company. CRESCENDO.

Daily Chronicle. Dec. 7, 1906.

MISERRIMUS.*

... the world is wide, But fettered feet go lame; And once or twice to throw the dice Is a gentlemanly game, But he does not win who plays with Sin In the secret house of Shame.

—“BALLAD OF READING GAOL.”

Among the many epigrammatically-expressed half-truths the world owes to Oscar Wilde there is one to the effect that, of all a teacher's disciples, it is generally Judas who writes his biography. Mr. Sherard quotes this maxim, disputes it, and—I am certain, quite unwittingly—illustrates it. I doubt very much if Oscar Wilde will stand one jot higher in the estimation of any living man because of this book: in the minds of a good many men it may do his memory wrong. I doubt also if there is anybody now alive competent to handle such a theme—to rise to the height, or to sink to the depth, of that "great argument." In such a case it is not enough to have known, it is not enough to have loved, the subject of your book. For a considerable time Mr. Sherard seems to have known Oscar Wilde as intimately as Boswell knew Johnson. He has used the material accumulated during his period of intimacy as freely as Boswell used his knowledge of Johnson, but with how much poorer a result! He is not to be blamed, either for his outspokenness, nor for the effect, or lack of effect, his method produces. The Boswellian method could not apply here. Johnson, after all, was not violently differentiated from the crowd of ordinary men. It was only in intellectual ability that he was peculiarly eminent. That he was at once the kindest and the most cross-grained of men; that he united the inner tenderness of the finest type of woman with the apparent rudeness of the least cultured savage; that he was profoundly learned and densely ignorant, at once constitutionally sceptical and constitutionally superstitious, that he could be, in the same breath, pragmatically logical and superhumanly unreasonable, that "with sun-clear intellect, he dwelt perpetually on the margin of madness"—these are contradictions which, in milder form, we recognise as traits of our everyday acquaintances. Indiscretion personified set all Johnson's oddities on paper with a blockheaded fidelity which would have roused the object of Boswell's admiration to madness, but we love the man thus pitilessly revealed. He is near to us, he appeals to us, by the very crudity of his humanity. We can say of each of his queer twists of character, "How like Jones, or Smith, or Tomkins"—we may say, in rare moments of insight—"How like me."

The case was different with poor Wilde. Even the genius which distinguished him was of a queer and uncanny order, and the eccentricities which accompanied it were far from lovable. Shakespeare or Balzac might have moulded his characteristic traits into the semblance of a coherent and homogeneous man, but presented in the Boswellian fashion adopted by Mr. Sherard he is an unsolvable enigma. Instead of a recognisable portrait we get a big canvas covered with dots and dashes and smudges of paint.

I.

Thackeray remarked, with his own easy and delightful cynicism—"Our friends and our enemies both paint our portraits, and both portraits are like us." Mr. Sherard seems in the present volume to have made up his mind to double the rôles of friend and enemy. The facts he cites, and the comments he makes on them, are curiously at variance. He reminds me of a South Sea Islander I have somewhere read of, who with one hand poured tribute at the feet of his idol, while belabouring it with the other. He insists, with a reiteration which becomes a little tedious, that Wilde was above all things "a gentleman." "Gentleman" is a word notoriously difficult of definition, and Mr. Sherard has a good right to his own private reading of its significance as anybody else. But he must not be surprised if he comes across people who dissent—on evidence furnished by himself—from that classification. Take, for instance, an illuminating passage beginning on page 133:—

... a rôle was forced upon the young man, which he had no natural qualifications to play; it was here that the curtain rose on that tragedy-comedy in which his fine intellect was to lend itself to grotesque performances until, just before a period was put to his existence, he really found himself. It was from these reunions in Magdalen that dated that virtuosity in music and painting and the decorative arts which he was forced to assume by the hazards of life, his own necessities and the folly of his contemporaries. He knew little about music and little about painting, and in the matter of furniture, tapestries, wall-papers, and architecture he was no more of a connoisseur than is any man who can assimilate the current modes and the chatter of the arbiters. During a long period of his life, this pose which had been forced upon him must have galled his native rectitude. Face to face with himself, he must have felt that it was an unworthy part for a man of his great intellect and wonderful gifts to play. Perhaps it was from this feeling that in some respects he was playing a double-faced rôle that proceeded that curious self-accusing manner, which all his intimates noticed in him, and which filled them with astonishment. It is a fact that music bored him; it is a fact that he had no knowledge of any instrument; it is probable that he could with difficulty distinguish one tune from another. Yet he was forced to posture as a connoisseur, and to speak and write about musicians and music with the air of one who was profoundly versed in all the technique of the art. A friend of his relates that the rare occasion on which he saw Oscar Wilde angry with him was once when he had frequently repeated in his presence a phrase from one of Oscar's essays, a phrase which had struck him by its effectiveness so that he had the pleasure in repeating it that actors have in mouthing a "gag" which has caught the popular ear. This phrase was: "a splendid scarlet thing by Dvorak." At the third repetition of these words, Oscar Wilde flew into a veritable passion and rebuked the friend for wishing to ridicule him. It has always been held by the man who relates this story that Oscar's anger was caused by the suspicion that his friend knew that his claim to write about Dvorak or any other composer was a mere pretence, and that he cleverly veiled his ignorance by the use of sonorous and effective phrases.

Ten pages later we are told that one of the reasons why Wilde did not, in his earlier days, join the Church of Rome was that "those reversions were much too common amongst Oxford undergraduates, and that the suspicion lurked in the minds of worldly men that in many cases they were simply caused by a desire for personal advertisement, a wish to do something different from others, to 'epater les contemporains': various motives which to a man of Oscar Wilde's good taste would appear eminently reprehensible." Yet a little further on we come across another passage, to the effect that, "Having tried to find a publisher for his collected poems, and having failed to do so, because he was an unknown man, Wilde 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, fastened in a *Lavallière* knot, and he not unfrequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with an expression of

* "The Life of Oscar Wilde." By Robert Harborough Sherard. (London: T. Werner Laurie.)

the greatest admiration. Let it be added to this that he wore his hair long, and was clean-shaven as to his face; and when it is remembered how striking a form and what memorable features were his already by Nature, it will be understood what attention his appearance must have attracted. One might find other and more charitable explanations for this self-travesty; perhaps with all the more justification that commercial instinct does not appear to have been very strong in Oscar Wilde. He was a young man at the time; he was by nature and avocation inclined to *Schœnheit*; he may have thought that the costume suited him; he may have wished to set Society at defiance at the prompting of that Anarchist spirit which was within him, as it is within all men who are really great. For the rest, whatever the man's motives were, that he gave effect to this plan shows that he possessed great moral courage. It is by no means every man who has the strength of mind to make a laughing-stock of himself in the eyes of London. The London gamins are pitiless; and on each of his walks abroad the young "aesthete" must have veritably run the gauntlet. It may further be noted that many men and women of approved capacity have shown and do show this curious love of self-advertisement. It has always been the malady of the great; in recent years it has grown into an epidemic. The advance of commercialism may account for it. Commercialism has made it clear that the only method by which a man can call attention to the excellence of his wares is by persistent puffery. Artists, actors, writers, philosophers and politicians have equity wares to sell—in this age every man who is not independent is a tradesman of sorts—and one can hardly blame them if they adopt the means for selling these wares which succeed in other branches of trade. The public, moreover, is gradually becoming so accustomed to these methods that far from regarding with suspicion the man of letters who by the eccentricity of his costume, the length of his hair, the frequency or the rarity of personal mentions and portraits of him which appear in the papers, is the carrier of his own advertising boards, the importunate distributor of personal leaflets, it gives more and more its exclusive attention to the person who most loudly shouts his wares. This is the case in England and America. In the Latin countries and in Germany where art is still regarded in much the same light as religion, these tricks would fall of their desired effect. But in England we are a commercial nation, and as Doctor Johnson never tired of pointing out to Boswell, we must be dealt with by commercial methods.

These passages are illuminative in more respects than one. Having little talent and less disposition to appear as a dogmatist, I will not lay it down as a law that a gentleman does not pose. But I will venture on the milder statement that to pose is not a distinguishing attribute of a gentleman. And it seems to me that Mr. Sherard gets a little mixed when he speaks of the "good taste" which made the "wish to do something different from others" "eminently reprehensible," in Wilde's opinion, and then goes on to remind us that Wilde won his first hearing from the public by deliberately playing the buffoon. And I meet with a dead "negator" the statement that self-advertisement "has always been the malady of the great." Such genuinely great men as have stooped to so sorry a trick have been the exceptions which have gone to prove the rule. Mr. Sherard complains bitterly—and most justly—of much that has been written and said concerning Wilde. But did Wilde's bitterest enemy ever do him a worse disservice than to proclaim him a "gentleman," and then to state of him in cold type that, "the man who made money and 'got on' in life enjoyed his regard; for the failure he had nothing but abhorrence"? One can pity and pardon the aberrations which ruined Wilde's career, but for the living epitome of snobbery portrayed in that one branding phrase the epithet "gentleman" seems a little out of place.

II.

It is never pleasant to play the part of devil's advocate, and I find no exhilaration in calling Mr. Sherard to task for the extravagances which render all but useless a book which, written in a more moderate spirit, might, from its author's personal knowledge of his subject, have formed a really valuable addition to our stock of biographical literature. It was a case in which moderation was even more particularly demanded than is usually the case in writing biography. Thousands of people would be glad to do their best to atone to Wilde's memory for the savagery of the persecution from which he suffered during his life, and would have welcomed a well-considered and well-balanced plea in his favour. But, in his desire to eulogise Wilde, Mr. Sherard makes for him claims he himself would have repudiated, and one claim which Mr. Sherard should know he did actually repudiate. Here is Mr. Sherard's explanation of the silly "cigarette episode" at the St. James's Theatre, on the first night of "Lady Windermere's Fan":—

He was a bulky, full-blooded man; the blood rushed to his head, and he was unconscious of what he was doing. As to the cigarette, well, it was half-smoked. It had not been lighted for the purpose of the entry. He was such a habitual smoker that probably he did not even know that he had a cigarette in his hand. Such smokers notice nothing except when they are not smoking. As to his remarks, it was the *bajouillage* of a man who was not master of himself. Possibly he remembered vaguely in his confusion that the Latin dramatists used to put into the mouths of the actor who spoke last a message to the audience to applaud. Poor Oscar's classical training played him unconsciously a nasty trick. His "Vos Plaudite" was taken as an offence. The thing is so obvious. Is it probable that a man who had been struggling for years for success, popularity, and money from his profession would deliberately insult his audience and ruin the prospects which had shown themselves so easy? The man was not a fool, and it seems as unlikely—unless we are to consider him suffering that night from one of the attacks of his epileptiform malady—that he would have acted as he did from a deliberate and calculated wish to treat his patrons with insistent arrogance, as that he purposely made a corrupt and immoral book of his novel.

The plea is ingenious, but it will not serve. A day or two after the occurrence of the incident a letter from Wilde appeared in one of the London papers, in which he spoke of himself having made, "cigarette in hand, a delightful and memorable speech." Mr. Sherard should remember the old proverb: "Il ne faut pas être plus royaliste que le roi."

III.

Indeed, eulogy strained beyond the verge of absurdity is the keynote of but too many of the pages of this book. Wilde, says Mr. Sherard, "was never popular in society; he was mistrusted and misunderstood, and, in the end, he was disliked. His superiority was too crushing." Society, it may be safely said, never yet disliked any man on account of any amount of "superiority." It intensely dislikes men who air their superiority, even when their superiority is real, men who, as Mr. Kipling would put it, "throw their brains about"; and that was the case with Wilde, who, with all his great talent, was a prig of the purest water. Society loved and welcomed several of Wilde's contemporaries, who were vastly his intellectual superiors. And when Mr. Sherard—in the final sentence of his book—speaks of Wilde as "a genius who . . . could have restored . . . our literature and our stage to the rank of supremacy from which, for centuries past, they have been degraded," he succeeds only in packing an amazing amount of variegated nonsense into a surprisingly small number of words, and in forcing the most long-suffering and credulous of his readers finally to abandon him as a literary guide. The thesis that a literature which, in Wilde's own day, was decorated by such men as Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson, Swinburne, Browning, Buchanan, Meredith, Reade, Ruskin, Rossetti, Carlyle, Froude, and a host of others, required Wilde, or any other single personality, to raise it from "degradation" is too absurd for discussion, and should have been held too absurd for statement.

HENRY MURRAY.

MR. SHERARD AND OSCAR WILDE.

Sir,—I have just read the review of my book on Oscar Wilde, which is contributed to your paper by Mr. Henry Murray. I am so accustomed to receiving blows, which, because my friend is dead, are levelled at me (though intended to attack his fallen body) that I read with no personal concern the article in question. I regretted, however, to see that Mr. Murray did not hesitate to adopt a method of attack which is not, well, shall we say, noble and good. He puts into my mouth as my words, a passage which in my book is quoted from another writer, and thereupon proceeds to demonstrate my middle-headedness. And I am afraid this thing which is neither noble nor good was done wilfully. It is sad to see that a poor dead man like Wilde can excite in a competent publicist like Henry Murray an animus which does not hesitate to stoop to such practices. A word with regard to Mr. Murray's exordium and mine. None of the poets, none of the artists amongst the authors named by Mr. Murray as having "decorated" our literature in Oscar Wilde's day, succeeded in arresting the attention of the world. England is a small island, and the world is a big place. These are facts which are often forgotten by publicists like Henry Murray, who are essentially insular and "de leur village."

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On the whole, I consider that Mr. Murray has missed an excellent "occasion de se taire."—Yours, etc., ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD. Guilsborough Hall, Northampton.

Star, Dec. 6, 1906.

"SALOME." STRIKING TRIUMPH OF OSCAR WILDE'S OPERA.

Richard Strauss's opera "Salome," set to Oscar Wilde's text, was produced at the Royal Opera, Berlin, last night before a brilliant audience. The composer conducted in person. This Berlin premiere being the most important event of the musical season (says Reuters), the house was packed. As much as 80 marks were offered for stalls, and 20,000 legations for seats were received when the booking began. The opera, which has no overture and no chorus, and is in one continuous act, was splendidly performed. At the conclusion Herr Strauss and the principals had a tremendous reception, countless calls being given.

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The Daily Telegraph tells a good story in connection with a rehearsal of Strauss's "Salome." The chorus, in their efforts to sing the chord of G against the persistent F sharp of a prominent part of the orchestra, failed so completely as to necessitate many repetitions. On the conductor apologising to the composer, the latter replied, "I noticed nothing."

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Hashed Oscar! Mr. F. Church, the American painter, who has been trying to say smart things about European art galleries and the Old Masters, is cheap, very cheap. I suppose he has just heard of Oscar Wilde's remarks on the Atlantic and the Falls of Niagara, and thinks the time has come to dish up the same style of thing again. But Oscar Wilde has not been dead long enough to permit of a rehash of his criticisms. I can only conclude that Mr. Church is not as "celebrated" as the American papers make out, and that he is seeking a short cut to fame.

Musical Standard, Dec. 8, 1906.

Says the well-informed critic of the "Leader": "The most recent important occurrence on the Continent was the production of Strauss' "Salome" in Berlin on Tuesday, with Fräulein Destinn, Herr Kraus and Herr Berger in the chief parts. Owing to the reports of the opposition to the production in the highest quarters and the rumours that the Emperor and the Empress had protested that they would never permit the work to be produced in Berlin, the public appetite has been whetted to an extraordinary degree. The production is the result of the reconciliation between the Emperor and the composer, which was signalled by the acceptance of the dedication of a Parade March by Strauss by His Majesty during the summer. Nothing has been more surprising in a way than the extraordinary popularity achieved all over Germany by "Salome." Those who, like myself, witnessed the first production at Dresden a year ago were prepared to find that musicians and persons of esoteric literary tastes would be keenly interested in it, but no one expected it to prove the greatest financial success (except, possibly, "Madama Butterfly") of recent years. The latest place to welcome it with open arms has been Munich; it is soon to be heard in Milan, with Signora Bellincioni in the title part, and in April it will be produced in Paris. For this production the versatile composer is preparing a French version, and he will conduct the two first performances. His latest composition, "Bardengesänge," for chorus and orchestra, will be produced at Frankfurt on Monday, and he has just published a book of six songs—Op. 58.

MISERRIMUS.*

... the world is wide,
But fettered feet go lame;
And once or twice to throw the dice
Is a gentlemanly game,
But he does not win who plays with Sin
In the secret house of Shame.

—“BALLAD OF READING GAOL.”

Among the many epigrammatically-expressed half-truths the world owes to Oscar Wilde there is one to the effect that, of all a teacher's disciples, it is generally Judas who writes his biography. Mr. Sherard quotes this maxim, disputes it, and—I am certain, quite unwittingly—illustrates it. I doubt very much if Oscar Wilde will stand one jot higher in the estimation of any living man because of this book: in the minds of a good many men it may do his memory wrong. I doubt also if there is anybody now alive competent to handle such a theme—to rise to the height, or to sink to the depth, of that “great argument.” In such a case it is not enough to have known, it is not enough to have loved, the subject of your book. For a considerable time Mr. Sherard seems to have known Oscar Wilde as intimately as Boswell knew Johnson. He has used the material accumulated during his period of intimacy as freely as Boswell used his knowledge of Johnson, but with how much poorer a result! He is not to be blamed, either for his outspokenness, nor for the effect, or lack of effect, his method produces. The Boswellian method could not apply here. Johnson, after all, was not violently differentiated from the crowd of ordinary men. It was only in intellectual ability that he was peculiarly eminent. That he was at once the kindest and the most cross-grained of men; that he united the inner tenderness of the finest type of woman with the apparent rudeness of the least cultured savage; that he was profoundly learned and densely ignorant, at once constitutionally sceptical and constitutionally superstitious, that he could be, in the same breath, pragmatically logical and superhumanly unreasonable, that “with sun-clear intellect, he dwelt perpetually on the margin of madness”—these are contradictions which, in milder form, we recognise as traits of our everyday acquaintances. Indiscretion personified set all Johnson's oddities on paper with a blockheaded fidelity which would have roused the object of Boswell's admiration to madness, but we love the man thus pitilessly revealed. He is near to us, he appeals to us, by the very crudity of his humanity. We can say of each of his queer twists of character, “How like Jones, or Smith, or Tomkins”—we may say, in rare moments of insight—“How like me.”

The case was different with poor Wilde. Even the genius which distinguished him was of a queer and uncanny order, and the eccentricities which accompanied it were far from lovable. Shakespeare or Balzac might have moulded his characteristic traits into the semblance of a coherent and homogeneous man, but presented in the Boswellian fashion adopted by Mr. Sherard he is an unsolvable enigma. Instead of a recognisable portrait we get a big canvas covered with dots and dashes and smudges of paint.

I.

Thackeray remarked, with his own easy and delightful cynicism—“Our friends and our enemies both paint our portraits, and both portraits are like us.” Mr. Sherard seems in the present volume to have made up his mind to double the rôles of friend and enemy. The facts he cites, and the comments he makes on them, are curiously at variance. He reminds me of a South Sea Islander I have somewhere read of, who with one hand poured tribute at the feet of his idol, while belabouring it with the other. He insists, with a reiteration which becomes a little tedious, that Wilde was above all things “a gentleman.” “Gentleman” is a word notoriously difficult of definition, and Mr. Sherard has as good a right to his own private reading of its significance as anybody else. But he must not be surprised if he comes across people who dissent—on evidence furnished by himself—from that classification. Take, for instance, an illuminating passage beginning on page 133:—

... a rôle was forced upon the young man, which he had no natural qualifications to play; it was here that the curtain rose on that tragi-comedy in which his fine intellect was to lend itself to grotesque performances until, just before a period was put to his existence, he really found himself. It was from these reunions in Magdalene that dated that virtuosity in music and painting and the decorative arts which he was forced to assume by the hazards of life, his own necessities and the folly of his contemporaries. He knew little about music and little about painting, and in the matter of furniture, tapestries, wall-papers, and architecture he was no more of a *connoisseur* than is any man who can assimilate the current modes and the chatter of the arbiters. During a long period of his life, this pose which had been forced upon him must have galled his native rectitude. Face to face with himself, he must have felt that it was an unworthy part for a man of his great intellect and wonderful gifts to play. Perhaps it was from this feeling that in some respects he was playing a double-faced rôle that proceeded that curious self-accusing manner, which all his intimates noticed in him, and which filled them with astonishment. It is a fact that music bored him; it is a fact that he had no knowledge of any instrument; it is probable that he could with difficulty distinguish one tune from another. Yet he was forced to posture as a *connoisseur*, and to speak and write about musicians and music with the air of one who was profoundly versed in all the technique of the art. A friend of his relatés that the rare occasion on which he saw Oscar Wilde angry with him was once when he had frequently repeated in his presence a phrase from one of Oscar's essays, a phrase which had struck him by its effectiveness so that he had the pleasure in repeating it that actors have in mouthing a “gag” which has caught the popular ear. This phrase was: “a splendid scarlet thing by Dvorak.” At the third repetition of these words, Oscar Wilde flew into a veritable passion and rebuked the friend for wishing to ridicule him. It has always been held by the man who relates this story that Oscar's anger was caused by the suspicion that his friend knew that his claim to write about Dvorak or any other composer was a mere pretence, and that he cleverly veiled his ignorance by the use of sonorous and effective phrases.

Ten pages later we are told that one of the reasons why Wilde did not, in his earlier days, join the Church of Rome was that “those reversions were much too common amongst Oxford undergraduates, and that the suspicion lurked in the minds of worldly men that in many cases they were simply caused by a desire for personal advertisement, a wish to do something different from others, to ‘épater les contemporains’: various motives which to a man of Oscar Wilde's good taste would appear eminently reprehensible.” Yet a little further on we come across another passage, to the effect that, “Having tried to find a publisher for his collected poems, and having failed to do so, because he was an unknown man, Wilde 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, fastened in a *Lavallière* knot, and he not unfrequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower, which he used to contemplate with an expression of

the greatest admiration. Let it be added to this that he wore his hair long, and was clean-shaven as to his face; and when it is remembered how striking a form and what memorable features were his already by Nature, it will be understood what attention his appearance must have attracted. One might find other and more charitable explanations for this self-travesty; perhaps with all the more justification that commercial instinct does not appear to have been very strong in Oscar Wilde. He was a young man at the time; he was by nature and atavism inclined to *Schwärmerei*; he may have thought that the costume suited him; he may have wished to set Society at defiance at the prompting of that Anarchist spirit which was within him, as it is within all men who are really great. For the rest, whatever the man's motives were, that he gave effect to this plan shows that he possessed great moral courage. It is by no means every man who has the strength of mind to make a laughing-stock of himself in the eyes of London. The London gamins are pitiless; and on each of his walks abroad the young “æsthete” must have veritably run the gauntlet. It may further be noted that many men and women of approved capacity have shown and do show this curious love of self-advertisement. It has always been the malady of the great; in recent years it has grown into an epidemic. The advance of commercialism may account for it. Commercialism has made it clear that the only method by which a man can call attention to the excellence of his wares is by persistent puffery. Artists, actors, writers, philosophers and politicians have equally wares to sell—in this age every man who is not independent is a tradesman of sorts—and one can hardly blame them if they adopt the means for selling these wares which succeed in other branches of trade. The public, moreover, is gradually becoming so accustomed to these methods that far from regarding with suspicion the man of letters who by the eccentricity of his costume, the length of his hair, the frequency or the rarity of personal mentions and portraits of him which appear in the papers, is the carrier of his own advertising boards, the importunate distributor of personal leaflets, it gives more and more its exclusive attention to the person who most loudly shouts his wares. This is the case in England and America. In the Latin countries and in Germany where art is still regarded in much the same light as religion, these tricks would fail of their desired effect. But in England we are a commercial nation, and as Doctor Johnson never tired of pointing out to Boswell, we must be dealt with by commercial methods.

These passages are illuminative in more respects than one. Having little talent and less disposition to appear as a dogmatist, I will not lay it down as a law that a gentleman does not pose. But I will venture on the milder statement that to pose is not a distinguishing attribute of a gentleman. And it seems to me that Mr. Sherard gets a little mixed when he speaks of the “good taste” which made the “wish to do something different from others” “eminently reprehensible,” in Wilde's opinion, and then goes on to remind us that Wilde won his first hearing from the public by deliberately playing the buffoon. And I meet with a dead “negatur” the statement that self-advertisement “has always been the malady of the great.” Such genuinely great men as have stooped to so sorry a trick have been the exceptions which have gone to prove the rule. Mr. Sherard complains bitterly—and most justly—of much that has been written and said concerning Wilde. But did Wilde's bitterest enemy ever do him a worse disservice than to proclaim him a “gentleman,” and then to state of him in cold type that, “the man who made money and ‘got on’ in life enjoyed his regard; for the failure he had nothing but abhorrence”? One can pity and pardon the aberrations which ruined Wilde's career, but for the living epitome of snobbery portrayed in that one branding phrase the epithet “gentleman” seems a little out of place.

II.

It is never pleasant to play the part of devil's advocate, and I find no exhilaration in calling Mr. Sherard to task for the extravagances which render all but useless a book which, written in a more moderate spirit, might, from its author's personal knowledge of his subject, have formed a really valuable addition to our stock of biographical literature. It was a case in which moderation was even more particularly demanded than is usually the case in writing biography. Thousands of people would be glad to do their best to atone to Wilde's memory for the savagery of the persecution from which he suffered during his life, and would have welcomed a well-considered and well-balanced plea in his favour. But, in his desire to eulogise Wilde, Mr. Sherard makes for him claims he himself would have repudiated, and one claim which Mr. Sherard should know he did actually repudiate. Here is Mr. Sherard's explanation of the silly “cigarette episode” at the St. James's Theatre, on the first night of “Lady Windermere's Fan”:

He was a bulky, full-blooded man; the blood rushed to his head, and he was unconscious of what he was doing. As to the cigarette, well, it was half-smoked. It had not been lighted for the purpose of the entry. He was such a habitual smoker that probably he did not even know that he had a cigarette in his hand. Such smokers notice nothing except when they are not smoking. As to his remarks, it was the *bafoillage* of a man who was not master of himself. Possibly he remembered vaguely in his confusion that the Latin dramatists used to put into the mouths of the actor who spoke last a message to the audience to applaud. Poor Oscar's classical training played him unconsciously a nasty trick. His “Vos Plaudite” was taken as an offence. The thing is so obvious. Is it probable that a man who had been struggling for years for success, popularity, and money from his profession would deliberately insult his audience and ruin the prospects which had shown themselves so rosy? The man was not a fool, and it seems as unlikely—unless we are to consider him suffering that night from one of the attacks of his epileptiform malady—that he would have acted as he did from a deliberate and calculated wish to treat his patrons with insolent arrogance, as that he purposely made a corrupt and immoral book of his novel.

The plea is ingenious, but it will not serve. A day or two after the occurrence of the incident a letter from Wilde appeared in one of the London papers, in which he spoke of himself having made, “cigarette in hand, a delightful and memorable speech.” Mr. Sherard should remember the old proverb: “Il ne faut pas être plus royaliste que le roi.”

III.

Indeed, eulogy strained beyond the verge of absurdity is the keynote of but too many of the pages of this book. Wilde, says Mr. Sherard, “was never popular in society; he was mistrusted and misunderstood, and, in the end, he was disliked. His superiority was too crushing.” Society, it may be safely said, never yet disliked any man on account of any amount of “superiority.” It intensely dislikes men who air their superiority, even when their superiority is real, men who, as Mr. Kipling would put it, “throw their brains about”; and that was the case with Wilde, who, with all his great talent, was a prig of the purest water. Society loved and welcomed several of Wilde's contemporaries, who were vastly his intellectual superiors. And when Mr. Sherard—in the final sentence of his book—speaks of Wilde as “a genius who . . . could have restored . . . our literature and our stage to the rank of supremacy from which, for centuries past, they have been degraded,” he succeeds only in packing an amazing amount of variegated nonsense into a surprisingly small number of words, and in forcing the most long-suffering and credulous of his readers finally to abandon him as a literary guide. The thesis that a literature which, in Wilde's own day, was decorated by such men as Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson, Swinburne, Browning, Buchanan, Meredith, Reade, Ruskin, Rossetti, Carlyle, Froude, and a host of others, required Wilde, or any other single personality, to raise it from “degradation” is too absurd for discussion, and should have been held too absurd for statement.

HENRY MURRAY.

* “The Life of Oscar Wilde.” By Robert Harborough Sherard. (London: T. Werner Laurie.)

Sunday Sun,

July 15, 1906.

MR. SHERARD AND OSCAR WILDE.

SIR,—I have just read the review of my book on Oscar Wilde, which is contributed to your paper by Mr. Henry Murray. I am so accustomed to receiving blows, which, because my friend is dead, are levelled at me (though intended to attack his fallen body) that I read with no personal concern the article in question. I regretted, however, to see that Mr. Murray did not hesitate to adopt a method of attack which is not, well, shall we say, noble and good. He puts into my mouth as my words, a passage which in my book is quoted from another writer, and thereupon proceeds to demonstrate my muddleheadedness. And I am afraid this thing which is neither noble nor good was done wilfully. It is sad to see that a poor dead man like Wilde can excite in a competent publicist like Henry Murray an animus which does not hesitate to stoop to such practices.

A word with regard to Mr. Murray's exordium and mine. None of the poets, none of the artists amongst the authors named by Mr. Murray as having "decorated" our literature in Oscar Wilde's day, succeeded in arresting the attention of the world. England is a small island, and the world is a big place. These are facts which are often forgotten by publicists like Henry Murray, who are essentially insular and "de leur village."

My concerns are not with Lanterneau and I look beyond the "Gazette de Hollande."

It is a fact that since Shakespeare no English poet, except my late friend, and Lord Byron in a lesser degree, has produced a "Welt-Stuck," and I have the right to say that if Philistinism "more Calvino" had not killed him, he would have done—well, the things which I have said he would have done.

And he most certainly was not a prig; and most certainly there were no contemporaries of his who were his intellectual equals, yet Mr. Murray speaks of men of his day who were "vastly his intellectual superiors."

On the whole, I consider that Mr. Murray has missed an excellent "occasion de se taire."—Yours, etc.,

ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

Academy.

July 7. 1906.

"LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME"

To the Editor of the ACADEMY

SIR,—In Mr. Sherard's recent Life of Oscar Wilde pages 316-319, allusion is made to a particular copy of "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime"

which is inscribed "Constance from Oscar. July '91." Mr. Sherard says that certain passages, which he quotes, have been underlined by the author "to call attention to them"; and on this theory he writes a good deal of malapropos moralising. May I say the little book was once mine, and that I underlined the passages because I admired them, and that another copy is available to me for reference? I am, Sir, very respectfully,
2019-03-27 Women's University Library 656

J. M. F. COOKE.

July 3.

July 14. 1906.

"LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME"

To the Editor of THE ACADEMY

SIR,—I was interested in the letter from a Mr. Cooke, which, under the above heading, you publish in this week's ACADEMY. The possibility had never occurred to me that any friend of Mr. Wilde's having come into possession of a relic so precious as the book referred to, would sell it. Hence my error.

I have communicated the letter to the two gentlemen who are translating my book into German and French, and in the new edition of my biography I will make the necessary correction.

Guiltsborough Hall, Northampton.

July 7.

ROBERT H. SHERARD.

Star.

Dec. 6. 1906.

“SALOME.”

STRIKING TRIUMPH OF
OSCAR WILDE'S OPERA.

Richard Strauss's opera "Salome," set to Oscar Wilde's text, was produced at the Royal Opera, Berlin, last night before a brilliant audience. The composer conducted in person.

This Berlin première being the most important event of the musical season (says Reuter), the house was packed. As much as 80 marks were offered for stalls, and 20,000 applications for seats were received when the booking began.

The opera, which has no overture and no chorus, and is in one continuous act, was splendidly performed.

At the conclusion Herr Strauss and the principals had an enthusiastic reception, countless calls being given.

Morning Leader.

Dec. 6. 1906.

STRAUSS'S "SALOME" IN BERLIN.

From Our Own Correspondent.

BERLIN, Wednesday.

Strauss's opera, "Salome," is being given for the first time at the Royal Opera House this evening.

The demand for tickets was so great that the house could have been filled 20 times over on the first night, and the advertisements in the papers this morning announced that a few tickets would be given up by their fortunate owners for £4 each.

A serious complaint is made that the price of seats in the Opera House has been raised for the occasion 50 per cent., the objection being that musical art will soon be enjoyed only by the rich.

Musical News.

15 Dec. 1906

Strauss' "Salomé" has just been produced in Berlin with extraordinary success. It will be remembered that the Kaiser once said that he would never permit the work to be performed in the German capital, but a reconciliation has taken place between the Emperor and the composer, and the production of the banned opera is the result. The chief parts were sustained by Fraulein Destinn, Herr Krauss, and Herr Berger. The work created a profound impression, and it is generally believed that it will share with "Madama Butterfly" the honour of being the most successful of modern operas.

The Daily Telegraph tells a good story in connection with a rehearsal of Strauss's "Salome." The chorus, in their efforts to sing the chord of G against the persistent F sharp of a prominent part of the orchestra, failed so completely as to necessitate many repetitions. On the conductor apologising to the composer, the latter replied, "I noticed nothing."

WAGNER ECLIPSED!

What the Critics Think of Richard Strauss's "Salome."

[From Our Correspondent.]

BERLIN, Thursday.

Last night's performance of Richard Strauss's "Salomé" appears to have been an unqualified success, if one may judge from the comments of the critics in this morning's newspapers. Both as drama and as opera, Oscar Wilde's strange story has come to stay.

It is exactly a year since the opera was first given in Dresden, but its appearance in Berlin, in spite of violent opposition to it in court circles, stamps it authoritatively as an opera which is to live in musical history. The opera houses of Turin, Milan, Paris, and New York are to follow in quick succession with representations of this phenomenal opera.

If we are to accept the judgment of this morning's enthusiastic critics Strauss is the greatest of living musicians, not only in Germany, but throughout the world, and "Salomé" represents the form which the opera of the future is to take. In a word, Wagner and his school have been superseded by Strauss. The reception given to "Salomé" last night was certainly magnificent. The entire distinguished audience rose to their feet, applauding wildly. Strauss and Emmy Destinn, who sang the title role, appeared over twenty times. Their last appearance was hand in hand, their free hands bearing laurel wreaths.

One hundred and two musicians took part in the orchestra, and to all save those who are preparing to accept the new musical gospel the din was deafening, and the one long act of nearly two hours a time of exceeding torment.

Dec.
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Dec. 7. 1906.

CRITICISMS ON "SALOME."

SOME SAY A MASTERPIECE, OTHERS A
PERVERSE PRODUCTION.

From Our Own Correspondent.

BERLIN, Thursday.

The first production of Dr. Richard Strauss's "Salome" at the Royal Opera House, Berlin, last evening has made various impressions on the minds of the public.

The musical critics admit that the reception given to the piece was extremely satisfactory, and that the performance was brilliant; but some regard as significant the fact that the composer was recalled only eight times.

The majority of the critics acknowledge that "Salome" is a masterpiece and the musical event of the season, and that Strauss has proved himself to be the musical genius of the age; while others describe it as a perverse production written by a perverse author and set to perverse music by Richard Strauss.

That Strauss is a master of orchestration is also generally admitted, while on the other hand the conviction is expressed that although Strauss has achieved a present triumph, his secessionist art will not long continue to hold sway over the public.

Free Lance,

15 Dec. 1906

Hashed Oscar!

Mr. F. Church, the American painter, who has been trying to say smart things about European art galleries and the Old Masters, is cheap, very cheap. I suppose he has just heard of Oscar Wilde's remarks on the Atlantic and the Falls of Niagara, and thinks the time has come to dish up the same style of thing again. But Oscar Wilde has not been dead long enough to permit of a rechauffé of his criticisms. I can only conclude that Mr. Church is not as "celebrated" as the American papers make out, and the only way to a short cut to fame.

* * * *

continue to hold sway over the public.

Star.

17 Dec. 1906

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"Salome" has now been definitely prohibited at the Imperial Opera House in Vienna, and the projected production at Buda-Pesth was stopped shortly before the date fixed for the first performance. It will, however, be played in Vienna at one of the other theatres, probably by the

Breslau University Library

CRESCENDO.

Musical Standard.

Dec. 8, 1906.

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SAYS the well-informed critic of the "Leader": The most recent important occurrence on the Continent was the production of Strauss' "Salome" in Berlin on Tuesday, with Fräulein Destinn, Herr Kraus and Herr Berger in the chief parts. Owing to the reports of the opposition to the production in the highest quarters and the rumours that the Emperor and the Empress had protested that they would never permit the work to be produced in Berlin, the public appetite has been whetted to an extraordinary degree. The production is the result of the reconciliation between the Emperor and the composer, which was signalled by the acceptance of the dedication of a Parade March by Strauss by His Majesty during the summer. Nothing has been more surprising in a way than the extraordinary popularity achieved all over Germany by "Salome." Those who, like myself, witnessed the first production at Dresden a year ago were prepared to find that musicians and persons of esoteric literary tastes would be keenly interested in it, but no one expected it to prove the greatest financial success (except, possibly, "Madama Butterfly") of recent years. The latest place to welcome it with open arms has been Munich; it is soon to be heard in Milan, with Signora Bellincioni in the title part, and in April it will be produced in Paris. For this production the versatile composer is preparing a French version, and he will conduct the two first performances. His latest composition, "Barden-gesänge," for choir and orchestra, was first produced at Frankfurt on Monday, and he has just published a book of six songs—Op. 56.

"Salome." Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde. John Lane, pp. xxiv, 68. 10s. 6d. net.

Mr John Lane sends out in English translation Oscar Wilde's Salome, a play in one act, which, written in French in 1892, had the distinction of being prohibited by the Censor when Madame Bernhardt proposed to produce it at the Palace Theatre.

"SALOME." Mr. John Lane has published in a beautifully-decorated cover, reproducing the title-design, the English translation of Oscar Wilde's "Salome," with the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley.

OSCAR WILDE'S "SALOME."

At the risk of incurring the charge of Philistinism, one must protest against the republication of Oscar Wilde's drama "Salome," with Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations. When the play was first written in French and published in 1892 it raised a storm amongst the critics.

A good story, ben trovato perhaps, is being told that at a rehearsal of Strauss's opera, "Salome," the chorus, in their efforts to sing the chord of G against the persistent F sharp of a prominent part of the orchestra, failed to completely as to necessitate many repetitions.

DRAMA. Wilde, Oscar. Salome: A tragedy in one act: translated from the French of Oscar Wilde, with sixteen drawings by Aubrey Beardsley. 89 x 69. (Contains a "Note on Salome," by Mr. Robert Ross; cast of the first performance in London and facsimile cast of the operatic version by Richard Strauss.)

THE BOOKSHELF

MR. JOHN LANE sends us a new edition of the English translation of Oscar Wilde's Salome (ros. 6d. net) with the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley and "a note on 'Salome'" by Mr. Robert Ross.

Oscar Wilde's one-act tragedy SALOME, of which Mr. John Lane publishes a text with the extraordinarily irrelevant illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley (pp. xviii, 66, 10s. 6d. net), has been much acted in nearly every country of Europe, except England, since Sarah Bernhardt produced it in 1893.

The library of the late Mr. Clement Scott contains nothing of great importance. There are many first editions of works by his contemporaries, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Meredith, Edwin Arnold, R. L. Stevenson, Buchanan, Lewis Carroll, Frederick Locker, Percy Fitzgerald, Oscar Wilde, and others.

Bizarre in all respects is "Salome: A Tragedy in One Act," translated from the French of Oscar Wilde, with sixteen illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley (Lane, 10s. 6d. net).

THE ENGLISH MAETERLINCK.

We welcome this reprint of one of Mr. Wilde's best works, a pleasant relief after the stream of foolish, sentimental books that has been gushing out since the issue of "De Profundis." As an acting play the merits of "Salome" have long been recognised on the Continent, particularly in Bavaria; and its importance has been enhanced by the operatic version of Richard Strauss.

"Salome." By O. Wilde. 10s. 6d. net. (London: John Lane.)

The most important occurrence on the Continent will be the production of Strauss' "Salome" in Berlin to-night, with Phil Destinn, Herz Krauss, and Herr Berger in the chief parts.

in an absolutely different genre is the edition of Oscar Wilde's "Salome," with sixteen drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, which is published by Mr. John Lane.

"The endeavour to convert the New Yorkers to the intense drama has, I fear, not met with that success anticipated by the experimenters, for Browning's Pippa Passes was not hailed with that frantic enthusiasm usually demanded by that poet's apostles; while Oscar Wilde's Salome has met with general disapproval.

way, and the entire dialogue in which they occurred could scarcely be surpassed for simplicity and vividness. So also in respect to man, otherwise John the Baptist, his words, if not his art, are marked by power.

Illy Chronicle.

THE AUTHOR IN LONDON.

EARLY LONDON, by Elsie M. Lang, with an introduction by G. K. Chesterton, and illustrations from photographs by W. J. Roberts. London, Werner Laurie, 6s.

"Paris," said Mr. Henry James, "is divine, London is adorable." He would have said at the word "divine," but fierce London (a lady's eyes) were on him, and he rounded off his round sentence as only an author can.

POPULARITY OF "SALOME."

"Salome" has made the author's name a household word wherever the English language is not spoken. So writes Mr. Robert Ross cynically in his introductory notes to a new edition of Oscar Wilde's one-act tragedy—a performance of which, by the way, was recently given by the Literary Theatre Club.

Richard Strauss's "Salome" is to be given in Paris at the Grand Opéra next February. M. Gailhard, the manager of the Opéra, having written to the composer to ask him whether he could come to Paris to discuss the details of the production, he has received an answer in which Dr. Strauss expresses his regret not to be able to go to Paris until the end of January, and says: "Now until the 3rd of December (the date of the production of 'Salome' at Berlin) I am occupied night and day in preparing this difficult work."

LYRICS OF LOVE.

"Songs to Desideria, and Other Poems." By the Hon. Stephen Coleridge. London: John Lane, 3s. 6d. net.

All lovers of poetry will be grateful for Mr. Stephen Coleridge's volume. Dainty and finished in execution, and instinct with a genuine human sympathy, these lyrics betray the hand of a craftsman in verse.

Fashions change, but human nature remains very much the same, in spite of all, and the modern poet celebrates the beauties of his Desideria as—five hundred years ago and more—the troubadours sang in rondel and canzonet of their ladies.

Soon we shall meet, and then will come to me Sense of your presence, turning the heart faint With sick desire: the little diamond Sparkling his passionless eye, close nestling warm

In rapturous couch where I adventure not, Will mock me with each tender taken breath; And I shall marvel at the glories given To stocks and stones, while I who live and long May never touch those lily sanctities— My throne and kingdom in a world profane! And will you look above my lowly head? Ah, most Adorable! the Saints in Heaven Need not the benediction of your eyes So much as I; and the long nights and days Are not enough for me to celebrate All the sweet reasons of my jealousy Till you look down with pity where I lie.

The second part of Mr. Coleridge's book is dedicated to Gloria and Desideria. Mr. Coleridge has experimented in many forms of verse, and in each with success, but the theme remains the same. It is a tribute, glowing, ardent, and impulsive to the fresh beauty of English girlhood.

The sea-voiced in the dim-lit cave Awaits the sure returning water; The rustling corn beneath the stars Awaits the crimson Eastern bars; When Gloria is gone I must Secure my peace in perfect trust.

The earlier poems in the volume cover a wide field. In the lyric on Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" there is a note of wistful pity that is constantly recurring throughout the book. The first two songs of Sir Thomas More's fool are conceived in a spirit of merriment which gives place to tragedy in the third song where the subject is the execution of the great Chancellor. In "An Epitaph" we find Mr. Coleridge perhaps at his best:—

Too beautiful for our dull praise, A child of Heaven's birth She whom we love; But lest we should lose Paradise By finding it on earth She went above.

Verse of this quality should secure for "Songs to Desideria" a sincere welcome.

A contemporary relates a story, which it is rather difficult to believe, concerning Strauss's "Salome," which, by the way, was produced on Wednesday night at Berlin with enormous success. The tale runs thus—that the chorus, having to sing the chord of G, against the orchestra's F sharp, failed utterly. It is said that the conductor made apologies to Strauss, who is also reported to have answered, "I did not observe anything." There may be a certain humour in the repetition of such a story, but that such a master of harmony, discord, and orchestra as Richard Strauss should have failed to notice what any ordinary listener who might be none of these things, would detect, is entirely unthinkable.