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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. **5**

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MR. JUSTICE WILLS.

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his crushing reply to Sir Edward Clarke, the upshot of the Oscar Wilde case was inevitable. There was but one conclusion for the jury to come to, for the judge's summing up had made that tolerably plain. One point, which is a curious one, is that the judge himself lived within a few doors of Mr. Oscar Wilde, in Tite Street, Chelsea. Sir Alfred Wills is a Birmingham man, having been born at Edgbaston in 1828, and has been appointed judge since 1884. He is a bencher of the Middle Temple, and has been in the calling of the law forty-four years. In sentencing the prisoners Oscar Wilde and Taylor to two years' imprisonment with hard labour, Mr. Justice Wills said—"It has never been my lot to have tried a case of this kind before which has been so bad. One has to put stern constraint upon oneself to prevent oneself from describing in language I ought not to use the sentiments which must arise in the breast of every man who has any spark of decent feeling in him, and who has heard the details of these two terrible trials. That the jury have arrived at a correct verdict I cannot persuade myself to entertain a shadow of a doubt, and I hope that, at all events, those who sometimes imagine that a judge is half-hearted in the cause of decency and morality because he takes care that no prejudice shall enter into a case, may see that that is consistent, at least, with a stern sense of indignation at the horrible crimes which have been brought home to both of you. It is no use for me to address you. People who can do these things must be deaf to every sense of decency which can influence conduct. That you, Taylor, kept an immoral house it is impossible to doubt; and that you, Wilde, have been the centre of extensive corruption of young men of the most hideous kind it is equally impossible to doubt. I cannot, under such circumstances, do anything except pass the severest sentence which the law allows, and in my judgment it is totally

inadequate to such a case as this. The sentence on each of you is that you be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for two years."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BECAUSE OF SECRECY.

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

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

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THE AFFAIRS OF OSCAR WILDE.

Before Mr. Registrar Linklater, on Tuesday, there was a sitting for public examination in the case of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, described as a writer and dramatist. The receiving order was made upon the petition of the Marquis of Queensberry, who claims £877 in respect of costs in connexion with legal proceedings instituted by the debtor. The statement of affairs shows liabilities £3,591, of which £2,514 is for money lent and £233 for tobacco, wine, jewellery, flowers, &c., while the value of the assets, which consist of royalties on published literary works and plays and a life policy, is not given. It appears that the debtor's income has averaged about £2,000 per year, which, he states, has been derived chiefly, if not entirely, from royalties on plays and literary works written by him. These include the plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a novel entitled "Dorian Gray," and a book of poems called "The Sphinx."

The debtor was brought up from Wandsworth Prison in the custody of two warders. He stated, in reply to the Official Receiver, that he was 40 years of age. He kept no books of account. He estimated that his expenditure during the two or three years preceding the date of the receiving order had been about £2,500 per year. In July, 1893, his liabilities exceeded his assets by about £1,450. It was about the time of his conviction that he first became aware that he did not possess sufficient property to enable him to pay all his debts in full. On his marriage in May, 1884, a settlement was executed comprising property belonging to his wife, and the income deriving therefrom had amounted to about £800 per year. He had a life interest in the property comprised in the deed, subject to his surviving his wife, who was 35 years of age. The trustees of the settlement had made him an advance of £1,000 at 5 per cent. interest. He had also an interest in a small property under his father's will. It was situated in Ireland, and produced between £100 and £150 a year. In the absence of opposition by any creditor, the examination was concluded.

FINANCIAL NOTES.

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Under a receiving order made on July 25 last against Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, the petitioning creditor being the Marquis of Queensberry, accounts have been furnished showing liabilities of £3,591, with assets not stated. The debtor, lately of 10, Tite-street, Chelsea, S.W., and now of Her Majesty's prison, Wandsworth, states that he is a writer and dramatist, and that his income, which he estimates at £2,000 a year, has been chiefly, if not entirely, derived from royalties on plays and literary works. He states that he is at present interested in four dramatic works, viz., *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He is also interested in the novel "Dorian Gray," and a book of poems entitled, "The Sphinx." He had 10 per cent. of the gross weekly receipts from *The Importance of Being Earnest* up to £1,000, and 15 per cent. on anything over that amount; the royalties on *Lady Windermere's Fan* did not amount to so much. As to *A Woman of No Importance* and *The Ideal Husband*, the terms were as follows:—If the receipts were over £500 and under £800 per week, he was to receive 5 per cent.; over £800 and under £1,000, 7½ per cent.; and on anything over £1,000, 10 per cent. These royalties were all paid weekly, and, to the best of the debtor's belief, there was nothing outstanding in respect of them at the date of his arrest. He attributes his insolvency to the failure of the legal proceedings instituted by him against the Marquis of Queensberry, and to his arrest and conviction in the recent trial of "Regina v. Wilde." The Official Receiver says it would appear, however, that the debtor has been insolvent for at least two years, and that his expenditure has been considerably in excess of his income. Of the unsecured indebtedness, sums amounting to £2,514 appear to be for money lent; £277 for law costs; £233 for tobacco, wine, jewellery, flowers, &c., and £166 for household expenses. The creditors treated as partly secured (£114) are stated to hold a policy on the life of the debtor, and charges on the dramatic rights, &c., in certain plays. The household furniture and effects of the debtor appear to have been sold by the sheriff during April last.

The first meeting of creditors was held on Monday. Mr. HUMPHREYS stated that the debtor was not at present in a position to submit an offer to the creditors. The OFFICIAL RECEIVER said that the only course would be to pass a resolution that the debtor be adjudged bankrupt, and to elect a trustee. The resolution for bankruptcy having been agreed to, a proposal for the appointment of a trustee was made, but negatived by the vote of the Marquis of Queensberry, who was desirous that the matter should remain in the hands of the Official Receiver. The public examination of the debtor is fixed for September 24 next.

1895

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At the London Bankruptcy Court on Tuesday, Oscar Wilde was again brought up, in custody of two warders, from Wandsworth Prison for the purpose of his public examination. It will be remembered that immediately upon his conviction bankruptcy proceedings were instituted on behalf of the Marquis of Queensberry in respect of his costs of those proceedings, which amounted to over £600. Wilde says his income from his books and plays amounts to £2,000 a year. He attributed his insolvency to the failure of the legal proceedings against the petitioner and to his arrest and conviction, but the Official Receiver observes that it appears from the deficiency account that he had been insolvent for at least two years, and that his household and personal expenditure have been considerably in excess of his income. The debts are returned at £3,591, and there are no available assets. Of the debts, £2,514 5s. is due for money lent; £677 for law costs; £233 for tobacco, wine, jewellery, flowers, &c., and £166 for household expenses, &c. Upon the previous occasion it was stated that the bankrupt's friends were endeavouring to raise sufficient money to pay the debts and rescind the receiving order, and that a sum of £1,500 had been subscribed for the purpose. Reference was also made to the claim of the trustees under the marriage settlement, and the difficulties in the way of dealing with that claim, which it was hoped would be overcome. For this and other reasons the public examination was adjourned. The bankrupt said that his income was almost entirely derived from royalties on his plays. He never kept any books of account of any sort, but he lived up to his income. A few other questions having been asked, the inquiry, which lasted only a few minutes, was concluded, and the bankrupt was removed. Wilde looked somewhat worn and pulled down, but otherwise less altered than might have been expected. His manner was subdued, and apparently he had very little liking for the scrutiny of which he found himself the object at the hands of the large numbers of well-dressed loafers and sightseers who occupied the back of the court. The bankrupt was dressed as on the occasion of the Old Bailey trial.

THE AFFAIRS OF OSCAR WILDE.—At the London Bankruptcy Court, yesterday, the public examination of Oscar Wilde, under his bankruptcy, was held.—Mr. Grain, addressing the Registrar, said he applied for the adjournment of the public examination. The bankrupt had filed his accounts, showing debts £3,591, with substantially few or no assets. In the future assets might be recovered. Some friends of the bankrupt had already subscribed a large sum, and £1,000 was in hand. He believed, further, that it was almost certain, when other friends came back from their holidays, that a sufficient sum would be subscribed to pay the creditors 20s. in the £, all except the largest creditors, the trustees of the wife's marriage settlement, who had advanced £1,000 some years ago at 5 per cent. interest. They were now in a position to prove for £1,537, and it was proposed to secure these debts by the assignment of the bankrupt's royalties and rights in various plays. In that way it was proposed to get rid of the bankruptcy proceedings.—The Registrar pointed out that the Act laid certain obligations upon a bankrupt.—Mr. Grain said that no doubt the Court could get over any difficulty if it thought fit. He was now instructed to say that the subscriptions had reached £1,500, and an adjournment would probably result in the payment of the debts in full. The debtor had filed his accounts.—The Registrar asked if the debtor had been before the Official Receiver.—Mr. Pope, the Assistant Receiver: We have been to him. I do not wish to oppose this application. Having regard to the position of the bankrupt it will make no difference.—The Registrar said that the case was really allocated to Mr. Registrar Linklater. He would adjourn the examination until that gentleman resumed his sittings. The case was adjourned to the 17th of November.

Reynolds 13 September 1896

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TIMES WEEKLY EDITION
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J. G. Binns

Sir Edward Clarke L.C.

To face p. 16

IN MEMORIAM OSCAR WILDE.

DIED NOVEMBER 30. 1900

HE LIES IN THE SOIL OF FRANCE
WHOSE HEART ENGLAND HAS BROKEN,
HE SLEEPS FROM THAT NIGHTMARE TRANCE,
WHERE NO MORE WORDS ARE SPOKEN.

AND A WEIGHT OF GUILTY SHAME
SPREADS THROUGH THE COLD FOGGY AIR,
YET IT RESTS NOT ON HIS NAME,
BUT ON SOME WHO HONOURS BEAR.

FOR BETTER IN GRAVE TO LIE,
THAN BE ONE WHO HAD BETRAYED,
AND JOINED IN THAT COWARD CRY,
OF THOSE WHO WERE MUCH AFRAID

SOMEDAY, ON HISTORY'S PAGE,
SHALL HIS MOURNFUL FATE BE TOLD,
YOUNG EYES IN A BETTER AGE
SHALL WEEP AT THIS TALE OF OLD.

AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF CHAINS
IN REYNOLDS. 30 NOV 1900.



J. G. Binns

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OSCAR WILDE

A PBETS PROTEST.

"UNGRATEFUL ATHENS WRONGED HER MIGHTY SAGES
TO SOCRATES THE HEMLOCK DRAUGHT SHE GAVE;
SENT THE GREAT STAGIRITE TO AN ENILES GRAVE
(AND THE DEEP REPROACH OF AFTER AGES.)
DANTE'S EXPULSION SULLIES HISTORY'S PAGES;
THE IMMORTAL LUSIAN POET A PAUPER DIED;
CERVANTES FOOD AND FREEDOM WAS DENIED,
AND TASSO LANGUISHED IN CARRARA'S CAGES.
THUS BLINDED BY THE FASHION OF THE HOUR
NATIONS NEGLECT AND WRONG THEIR GIFTED SONS
(AND GAIN DISHONOUR FOR AN ENDLESS POWER.)
AND STILL TODAY THE DAMNING RECORD RUNS,
UNGRATEFUL ENGLAND BLIGHTS HER RISING STAR,
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PERCY T. INGRAM.

PROBABLY IN "REYNOLDS" MAY OR JUNE 1895.



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