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Oscar Wilde Scrapbook

Vol. 6

Daily News 28 31

In the long hours he estimates the depth of his fall and the hopelessness of the future. "Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still." He is completely penniless and homeless. Morality does not help him. Religion does not help him. He "cannot believe." Reason does not help him. "Everywhere I turn my name is written on the rocks in lead." In Wandsworth Prison he longed to die. Finding himself growing better in the infirmary he was filled with rage. He determined to commit suicide on the very day he left prison. It is a soul in hell, turning again and again and finding no comfort anywhere at all.

Humility and Pity.

Afterwards, from the very depths of despair, falling, as it were, through the bottom of the world, there came a new experience of hope.

I bore up against everything with some stubbornness of will and much rebellion of nature, till I had absolutely nothing left in the world but one thing. I had lost my name, my position, my happiness, my freedom, my wealth. I was a prisoner and a pauper. But I still had my children left. Suddenly they were taken away from me by the law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, 'The body of a child is as the body of the Lord; I am not worthy of either.' That moment seemed to save me. I saw then that the only thing for me was to accept everything. Since then—curious as it will no doubt sound—I have been happier. It was, of course, my soul in its ultimate essence that I had reached. In many ways I had been its enemy, but I found it waiting for me as a friend. When one comes in contact with the soul it makes one simple as a child, as Christ said one should be.

"Where there is sorrow there is holy ground." Humility comes in like a great wave of healing. A single tiny action, "the raising of his hat to me by a friend as, handcuffed and with bowed head, I passed him by," is stored in the treasure-house of the heart. "The memory of that little, lovely, silent act of love, has unsealed for me all the wells of pity, brought me out of the bitterness of lonely exile into harmony with the wounded heart of the world."

He determines to free himself from any possible bitterness of feeling against the world. "Had I been released last May," he says, "I would have left this place loathing it and every official in it with a bitterness and hatred that would have poisoned my life." "I have had a year longer of imprisonment, but humanity has been in the prison along with us all."

The prison style is absolutely and entirely wrong. I would give anything to be able to alter it when I go out. I intend to try. But there is nothing in the world so wrong but that the spirit of humanity, which is the spirit of love, the spirit of the Christ who is not in churches, may make it, if not right, at least possible to be borne without too much bitterness of heart.

In the long hours he estimates the depth of his fall and the hopelessness of the future. "Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still." He is completely penniless and homeless. Morality does not help him. Religion does not help him. He "cannot believe." Reason does not help him. "Everywhere I turn my name is written on the rocks in lead." In Wandsworth Prison he longed to die. Finding himself growing better in the infirmary he was filled with rage. He determined to commit suicide on the very day he left prison. It is a soul in hell, turning again and again and finding no comfort anywhere at all.

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The Hope of the Future.

There are here long meditations on the life of Christ and the meaning of His message to the world. This strange and baffling personality, with emotion, but without will, endeavours to put itself into relation with a changed universe. "The only people I would care to be with now are artists and people who have suffered; those who know what beauty is and those who know what sorrow is."

At first he determined to "live henceforth in gloom as a king wears purple, never to smile again, to turn whatever house I entered into a house of mourning." It is the old, histrionic instinct playing its pitiful part. But these thoughts are put by. "I must learn how to be cheerful and happy," he decides.

At the end he is looking towards the escape and the taking up of the broken threads of life. All the passionate response remains to the beauty of the world. "The sea which washes away the stains and wounds of the world shall purify the soul." "We have forgotten that water can cleanse and fire purify, and that the earth is Mother to us all." A great longing turns from the raw ugliness of the prison cell to the clean world of out-of-doors, all the winds and seas to accomplish their work of healing, the loveliness of the spring flowers to bring comfort to the ruined soul.

All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death; and three times have I been tried. The first time I left the box to be arrested, the second time to be led back to the house of detention, the third time to pass into a prison for two years. Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.

So concludes this appealing cry from the soul's solitude. "The rest is silence." In a very little while the author was to be driven to face other, more awful, realities than imprisonment and pain.

Here is a magic of words which would make the book memorable were it the work of an imaginative creation. The actual history of its production ensures for it a permanent position in literature. "De Profundis" passes immediately to its place amongst those confessions in which men, through great bitterness and the experience of the raw edges of misery and shame, are able to testify to a meaning and purpose in it all.

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Evening News

PAGES FROM PRISON.

How Oscar Wilde "Circled the Centre of Pain."

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

Poignant Confessions of a Ruined Man of Genius.

There has been published to-day a wonderful book—the last piece of literature wrung from a soul that suffered.

It is the posthumous work of Oscar Wilde, and is entitled "De Profundis." It is the prison diary of that brilliant, but ill-fated, man of genius.

In it he tells, with a sincerity that can hardly be doubted, how he repented of his wasted life and found comfort at last in humility.

As an artist in words Oscar Wilde had few equals, and this book, written as its title tells, "Out of the Depths," breathes a pathos that is beyond tears.

Longed to Die.

He tells how at first his punishment of two years' imprisonment, the justice of which he did not dispute, filled him with bitter resentment:

I longed to die. . . . I determined to commit suicide on the very day on which I left prison. After a time that evil mood passed away, and I made up my mind to live, but to wear gloom as a king wears purple: never to smile again: to turn whatever house I entered into a house of mourning: to make my friends walk slowly in sadness with me.

Later he became more reconciled, and writes:

Now I feel quite differently. . . . I must learn how to be cheerful and happy.

In poignant phrase he describes the awful monotony of prison life.

With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one centre of pain. . . . It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always twilight in one's heart.

Terrible Indictment.

Then comes this terrible indictment of himself, ranking with the "Confessions of Rousseau":

The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a flaneur, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. . . . Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. . . . I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility.

Later he sums up his lot and the uses to which he can turn even prison routine and its iron discipline:—

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I have got to make everything that has happened to me good for me. The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard rope shredded into oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins and finishes, each and all of these things I have to transform into a spiritual experience. There is not a single degradation of the body which I must not try and make into a spiritualising of the soul.

He describes a moment of his deepest degradation, when he was jeered at in convict dress, as he who had been the literary and social lion stood one of a chain gang on Clapham Junction platform.

A Touching Incident.

When he was taken from prison to be examined in the Bankruptcy Court, one man who had known him in the days of his honourable estate raised his hat to him, and the whole scoffing crowd was hushed into silence by this simple action.

It is a sad, sad book, but it reveals the true man more than anything he ever wrote.

Of the dead nothing but good!

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THE DAILY GRAPHIC,

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

(Published To-day.)

["De Profundis," by Oscar Wilde. (Methuen and Co.) 5s.]

The man who wrote "De Profundis" wrote it in prison; he was an offender who suffered justly for his offences. But if he was a great sinner, he was near to being a great writer, and that is perhaps more to the point than that he purged his wrong-doing in suffering and penitence. For this book, as he himself would have said, is something other than a "cri de cœur"; it is the re-awakening of the artistic spirit, and the response to the need it felt of expression. "For nearly two years," he wrote to the friend, Mr. Robert Ross, to whom he entrusted this manuscript, "I have had within a growing burden of bitterness, of much of which I have now got rid. On the other side of the prison wall there are some poor, black, soot-besmirched trees which are just breaking out into buds of an almost shrill green. I know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression." That was what, out of the depths of his shame, the ignominy, the hopelessness, the dust and ashes, he was striving to do. He wrote, therefore, an essay, into which crept mentally the note of personal circumstances, for no bar of artistic determination could keep it out, but which is none the less a beautiful essay on the place of sorrow, of tragedy, of pain, of sacrifice, in Art. Much may be forgiven, more may be forgotten, of the man who wrote, in the presence of what he wrote. And if there be any who cannot wholly forget, they may find, sentimentally, a reason for forgiveness in the last words to which his art, and perhaps his emotions, gave utterance. "All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death; and three times have I been tried. The first time I left the box to be arrested, the second time to be led back to the house of detention, the third time to pass into a prison for two years. Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks, where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in the great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole."

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Manchester Courier.

DE PROFUNDIS.*

PUBLISHED TO-DAY.

It has always been difficult for British people to discriminate between a man and his work. Even to accept the theory of Montaigne, that a man's nature is diverse and undulatory, is hard. This was the case with Byron and Shelley; it is the same to-day in regard to Oscar Wilde. Yet it requires to be said, in all sincerity and soberness, that the real Oscar Wilde is unknown to all who do not read this prison confession; that their loss is irreparable who, from contempt or prejudice, refuse to listen to this cry out of the depths. It is not an apology. "I don't defend my conduct. I explain it." From the first page to the last we have the unconquered Individualist. There is no bitterness, no complaint. "I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand." But the prison gate which shut out so much was the entrance to a new world. The writer's own soul was revealed to him. His own sorrow, the depth and passion of which cannot be doubted, enabled him to realise and understand the mystery of the world's sorrow; a personal experience is the clue to the holy of holies in human nature.

In a letter to Mr. Robert Ross, who contributes a concise and sympathetic introduction to the book, the author wrote—"Prison life makes one see people and things as they really are." Here is the justification of the last prose work of Oscar Wilde. The reason of its success lies elsewhere. There is much mud in the world, but how rarely do beautiful flowers grow out of it. Of the myriad perverse or frail natures, or, for that matter, of the innocent yet sinned against, who have passed through the purgatory of prison, how few are the Bunyans or Dostoiefskies! Now, to the world's great prison literature, is added a supremely beautiful book. For nowhere else, not even in the wonderful foreshadowings of "Dorian Gray," is the author's mastery of the art of prose more apparent. Alike in its personal revelations of a singularly interesting and complex nature, and its measured utterances on humanity as revealed to him by his new experiences of sorrow and regret, the book is a masterpiece. Even in the "Confessions of St. Augustine" is there any more poignant utterance than this Twentieth Century grief for a mother's death?

> 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 my shame. She and my father had bequeathed to me a name they had made noble and honoured. I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low byword 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 a synonym for folly.

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Where, too, shall we look for a franker confession of sin, a truer comment on its action than in the following passage?

The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a "flâneur," a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for a new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the house top. I ceased to be a lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility.

Never, surely, has degradation of spirit, following as the result of a degraded body, been more lucidly set forth. And with all the heat and glow of passion there is no flame. The fire has refined, but has not consumed. The artist is still master in the brain that analyses so relentlessly, that refuses all subterfuge. Here is his reply to those who urged him to seek to forget that he had been to prison at all.

It would mean that I would always be haunted by an intolerable sense of disgrace, and that those things that are meant for me as much as for anybody else—the beauty of the sun and moon, the pageant of the seasons, the music of daybreak and the silence of great nights, the rain falling through the leaves, or the dew creeping over the grass and making it silver—would all be tainted to me, and lose their healing power and their power of communicating joy. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul.

In another direction, too, the artist saves him. Like Goethe, he will weave into the web of life every experience. "If I can produce only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its venom, and cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by its roots." So for all men he seeks to read the lesson which he has found in the "heart of pain"—the meaning of sorrow. "Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself; the outward rendered expression of the inward; the soul made incarnate; the body instinct with spirit. For this reason there is no truth comparable unto sorrow." For the first time in life its great issues confront him, and for the first time he discusses instead of ignoring them. The lesson comes home to him that "love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world." By a natural process of thought

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In another direction, too, the artist saves him. Like Goethe, he will weave into the web of life every experience. "If I can produce only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its venom, and cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by its roots." So for all men he seeks to read the lesson which he has found in the "heart of pain"—the meaning of sorrow. "Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself; the outward rendered expression of the inward; the soul made incarnate; the body instinct with spirit. For this reason there is no truth comparable unto sorrow." For the first time in life its great issues confront him, and for the first time he discusses instead of ignoring them. The lesson comes home to him that "love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary [illegible] the world." By a natural process of thought

he is led to consider the character of Christ—the man of sorrows. Here many will part company with him, but those who cavil with his conclusions will find no irreverence, and will enjoy the subtle and beautiful analysis, his comments on certain phases of Christ's life. Here is his appreciation of the Last Supper.

Nor in Æschylus nor Dante, those stern masters of tenderness, in Shakespeare, the most purely human of all the great artists, in the whole of Celtic myth and legend, where the loveliness of the world is shown through a mist of tears, and the life of man is no more than the life of a flower, is there anything that, for sheer simplicity of pathos wedded and made one with sublimity of tragic effect, can be said to equal or even approach the last act of Christ's passion.

It may be confessed that the book loses much of its hold on the reader in the closing portion. It lacks the harmony of noble thought and perfect expression characteristic of the earlier pages, and discusses side issues. Yet, as a whole, the work is unique. It appeals to the heart and to the brain. Never before has the beauty of sorrow and its purifying influences on the soul of man been revealed in words so absolutely felicitous. We have neither the mosaic-like construction of Pater, nor the perfervid eloquence of Ruskin. Suggestions there are of both these writers, as also of De Quincey and Mallock at their best. But it is because of the perfect correspondence between thought and phrase, because inspiration and expression are one, that Oscar Wilde's latest prose work is his greatest. Simple things are treated simply, beautiful things are garbed in loveliness; the great and terrible issues of life are set before us with a reverence and ordered solemnity that fascinate and command admiration even when they fail to convince.

*"De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. London: Methuen and Co. 5s. net.

MARCH 3,

OSCAR WILDE.
On Reading "De Profundis."

Too late! too late! O sorely-chastened shade—
Too late thy words of penitence and pain
Strike on our altered hearts like fiery rain;
Too late, alas! we mourn a soul betrayed
To sin, whilst, in self-righteousness arrayed,
We scourged thee with unchristian-like disdain,
And thanked our God again and yet again
That we of no such noisome clay were made.
But, raised by thine atonement up to God,
And cleansed of all that marred thee and defiled
Ere He had touched thee with transfiguring rod,
So high, indeed, thy merit towers above
Our own 'tis we, alas! who seem exiled
From Christ's true kingdom of redeeming love!

F. H. DE QUINCEY.

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Christian World,

Every minister will find it worth while to read and ponder the very striking and pathetic revelation of spiritual experience given in the just-published 'De Pro 'fundis,' written by the late OSCAR WILDE during the last months of his imprisonment. It tells how a man who drank the bitterest dregs of shame, humiliation and sorrow found his way to a new life. Whilst to the end he will have nothing to do with conventional religion (as he understands it), yet the lessons he takes to heart are those of Christianity — patient endurance, humility, and, above all, that he must cherish no bitterness towards a scornful and hostile world, but must unfailingly cherish the spirit of love. Sorrow, the writer discovers, is a revelation; it seems to him sometimes the only truth; it is the secret of life. Instead of being, as he once thought, the sure proof that GOD does not love man, the suffering of the world can only be explained by a love behind it. 'If the world has indeed been 'built of sorrow, it has been built by the 'hands of love, because in no other way 'could the soul of man reach the full 'stature of its perfection.'

The finest and most remarkable part of the book is that where the writer forgets himself entirely in the admiration and praise of JESUS CHRIST. 'He saw that 'love was the first secret of the world for 'which the wise men had been looking, 'and that it was only through love that 'one could approach either the heart of 'the leper or the feet of GOD.' Some very beautiful things are written about the influence of CHRIST, of His spirit of love, on others, making their lives like His own, and about His love for ignorant, simple, poor, unconventional people. 'Only CHRIST could have said that [*Take no 'thought*, &c.], and so summed up life per- 'fectly for us.' The writer began to read the Greek New Testament in prison— 'it is a delightful way of opening the 'day,' he says—and fell under the spell of the perfect beauty of CHRIST'S life. His testimony, written from an artist's point of view, is that perfect beauty is found only in Him who is perfect goodness. Some wild things are said in the book—things that show a strange limitation in the writer—but in the main it is the sincere utterance of one feeling his way blindly to true life and coming 'not far from the 'Kingdom of GOD.'

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OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

TO-DAY there is published by Messrs Methuen a posthumous volume, entitled "De Profundis," by Oscar Wilde. It bears on its cover a significant emblem—the picture of a bird that has only half-succeeded in its attempt to escape from a cage, and in that symbol seems, perhaps unwittingly of the decorator, to be indicated the state of Wilde's soul. Shame and sorrow almost cleansed him, but if this book may be accepted as true (for Wilde had a fluid mind that surged from this side to that as his gross body walked the earth, so that there was never any steadfast Truth in him), he died without seeing himself what he really was, and without repentance. He beat against his bars; his soul tried its best in this last apologia to escape into the free, clean air, but one wing remained fast in the cage. So pass the sons of Sycorax—"I'll be wise hereafter, and seek for grace." And yet the book has its pathos; it is the outcome of great mental struggle; it is often within touch of the Truth that children know and simple people, but complex minds compact of intellect, pride, egotism, selfishness, and lust are incapable of grasping. "Of course, the sinner must repent," he says. "But why? Simply because otherwise he would be unable to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of realisation. More than that, it is the means by which one alters one's past." And this is his admission:—"I don't regret for a single moment having lived for pleasure. I did it to the full, as one should do everything that one does. I threw the pearl of my soul into a cup of wine. I went down the primrose path to the sound of flutes. I lived on honeycomb." The unhappy man is so far from repentance, so much at his ease with his old sinful self that he picks words and chooses pretty figures to describe his own disgrace, as if he were criticising a picture.

OSCAR WILDE'S APOLOGIA..

"I don't defend my conduct," he says. "I explain it." He does neither, and perhaps it is as well for us. His apologia seems to me to have started with the best intentions, and have gone wrong half-way through, when Wilde's old irrestrainable vanity, conceit, and selfishness took possession of him again. At first you think he has seen himself at last as he really was, for he wrote after the death of his mother (which took place some months after his imprisonment). "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 my shame. She and my father had bequeathed to 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

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eternally. I had made it a low byeword 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 a synonym for folly. . . . . I was a man that stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. I had realised this for myself at the very dawn of manhood, and had forced my age to realise it afterwards. Few people hold such a position in their life-time and have it so acknowledged. It is usually descerned, if descerned at all, by the historian, or the critic, long after both the man and his age have passed away. With me it was different. I felt it myself, and made others feel it. Byron was a symbolic figure, but his relations were to the passions of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, of larger scope." In these latter sentences are revealed a conceit and exaggerated self-importance that would be laughable if they were not tragic. He died apparently without realising, as many really great men have done, that he was of no more importance to the divine scheme of things than the servant who brushed his boots; he never seems to have suspected that the Oscar Wilde "note" in the life of art and literature was just a passing eccentricity, that paradox and perversion and prattle about art and its aims do not qualify a man to pose as one of the serious symbols of his age.

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A DEBTOR TO WHISTLER.

Anyone who takes the trouble to re-read those few written works that Wilde left will find great cleverness in them and a ghost behind them all—the cynical laughing spirit of James M'Neill Whistler. I have just been reading Wilde's "Intentions," and that book alone would be sufficient to convince me that its author was invented by Whistler. It is true he could carry that particular kind of mordant wit further than Whistler, and make such momentarily amusing epigrams as "To be natural is to be obvious; to be obvious is to be inartistic," a dozen to the page, but it was a simple formula, and it has remained for Mr Chesterton to carry the wit of paradox far further than either Whistler or Wilde. At one time in his career it looked as if Wilde had been capable of finer things than the mere wit into which he degenerated, but he was spoiled by the crackling of thorns under a pot. "The gods," he writes, "had given me everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensuous ease. I amused myself with being a flaneur, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret

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chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetop. I ceased to be lord of myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility." But that essential humility was impossible to a man with the intellectual vanity of Wilde; there is no evidence of humility in his book.

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IN TEARS.

He could weep, but not in humility; it was really in chagrin. He was apparently more grieved at the meanness of his fall than at the fact of his falling anyhow. "Everything about my tragedy has been hideous, mean, repellant, lacking in style," he says in a sentence singularly revealing. "On November 13th, 1895, I was brought down here from London. From two o'clock till half-past two on that day I had to stand on the centre platform of Clapham Junction in convict dress, and handcuffed, for the world to look at. I had been taken out of the hospital ward without a moment's notice given to me. Of all possible objects I was the most grotesque. When people saw me they laughed. Each train as it came up swelled the audience. Nothing could exceed their amusement. That was, of course, before they knew who I was. As soon as they had been informed, they laughed still more. For half-an-hour I stood there in the grey November, surrounded by a jeering mob. For a year after that was done to me I wept every day at the same hour, and for the same space of time. . . . . Now I am really beginning to feel more regret for the people who laughed than for myself."

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A STUDENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Wilde's solitude in prison was relieved at times by the study of a Greek Testament he had managed to get hold of. "Every morning, after I had cleaned my cell and polished my tins," he wrote, "I read a little of the Gospels, a dozen verses taken by chance anywhere. It is a delightful way of opening the day. Everyone, even in a turbulent, ill-disciplined life, should do the same. Endless repetition, in and out of season, has spoiled for us the freshness, the naivete, the simple romantic charm of the Gospels. We hear them read far too often, and far too badly, and all repetition is anti-spiritual." His reflections on the nature of Christ are worth reading, though his conclusion may be futile.

While there were, he says, Christians before Christ, there have been none since, except St. Francis of Assisi. But Wilde knew two almost perfect lives—Verlaine, the French poet, of all people; and Prince Kropotkin, "both of them men who had passed years in prison; the first the one Christian poet since Dante, the other a man with a soul of that beautiful whole Christ which seems coming out of Russia."

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ESCAPE.

In the light of subsequent events, it is sad to read Wilde's anticipations of liberty. "In the very fact that people will recognise me wherever I go, and know all about my life, as far as its follies go, I can discern something good for me. It will force on me the necessity of again asserting myself as an artist, and as soon as I possibly can. If I can produce only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its renown, and cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by the roots. . . . I am to be released, if all goes well with me, in May, and hope to go at once to some little seaside village abroad with R—— and M——. The sea, as Euripides says in one of his plays about Iphigenia, washes away the stays and wounds of the world. . . . I have a strange longing for the great, simple, primeval things, such as the sea, to me no less of a mother than the Earth. . . . I tremble to think that on the very day of my leaving prison, both the laburnum and the lilac will be blooming in the gardens, and that I shall see the wind stir into restless beauty the swaying gold of the one, and make the other lose the pale purple of its plumes, so that all the air shall be Abaria for me . . . Society will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on the unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rock where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars, so that I may walk abroad in the darkness, without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole." Thus he concludes his cry, "De Profundis." The only work of art he produced after his release, "The Ballad of Reading Goal," created little public interest, and the remainder of his days was brief, for he died a year after being let out of prison.

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New York Herald.

DE PROFUNDIS. By Oscar Wilde. (Publishers: Methuen and Co., London.) Brentano's, and Galignani's, Paris.

Strangely bitter-sweet, this wistful apotheosis of Sorrow; a human document, complex and contradictory as humanity; steadfast and changeable, wayward and docile, simple and intricate; a book in which the exceptional and the commonplace rub shoulders as in Life itself. "What an end!" said the world when Wilde disappeared from view in the prison and whence arose this cry out of the depths: "What a beginning!" says Wilde, recovering in reclusion control of self and contemplating the vision of the future that should redeem the past. It remained a vision. The pity of it! The man had a message, though it remained inarticulate, he who wrote: "Society.... will have no place for me.... but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt: she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole." *De profundis ad te clamavi, Domine.*

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THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER.

Writing on the news of his mother's death, the author says:—"Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my anguish and my 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 byword 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 a synonym for folly. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record."

THE CHANGE.

The new hope came when the law took from him the custody of his children: "It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees and bowed my head, and wept, and said, 'The body of a child is as the body of the Lord; I am not worthy of either.' That moment seemed to save me. I saw then that the only thing for me was to accept everything. Since then—curious as it will no doubt sound—I have been happier. It was, of course, my soul in its ultimate essence that I had reached. In many ways I had been its enemy, but I found it waiting for me as a friend."

HUMILITY.

Later he wrote: "There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility. . . . Now I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole world is meaningless and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like a treasure in a field, is humility."

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