

Jissen Women's University Rare Books
Honma Hisao Collection

Digital Archives of Mason Library

Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 6

THE TEACHING OF SORROW.

Read the new Wilde on the teaching of sorrow:—"I long to live so that I can explore what is no less than a new world to me. Do you want to know what this new world is? I think you can guess what it is. It is the world in which I have been living. Sorrow, then, and all that it teaches one, is my new world. There are times when sorrow seems to me to be the only truth. Other things may be the illusions of the eye or the appetite, made to blind the one and cloy the other, but out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain."

IN THE GARDEN OF THE WORLD.

He discusses his past thus:—"I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world. . . . My only mistake was that I confined myself exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sunlit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom. Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even, and broken words that come from lips in pain, remorse that makes one walk on thorns, conscience that condemns, self-abasement that punishes, the misery that puts ashes on its head, the anguish that chooses sackcloth for its raiment and into its own drink puts gall—all these were things of which I was afraid. And as I had determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to taste each of them in turn, to feed on them, to have for a season, indeed, no other food at all."

WHERE HE MIGHT HIDE.

The future he discusses in the following words:—"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."

THE TEACHING OF SORROW,

Read the new Wilde on the teaching of sorrow:—"I long to live so that I can explore what is no less than a new world to me. Do you want to know what this new world is? I think you can guess what it is. It is the world in which I have been living. Sorrow, then, and all that it teaches one, is my new world. There are times when sorrow seems to me to be the only truth. Other things may be the illusions of the eye or the appetite, made to blind the one and cloy the other, but out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain."

IN THE GARDEN OF THE WORLD,

He discusses his past thus:—"I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world. . . . My only mistake was that I confined myself exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sunlit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom. Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even, and broken words that come from lips in pain, remorse that makes one walk on thorns, conscience that condemns, self-abasement that punishes, the misery that puts ashes on its head, the anguish that chooses sackcloth for its raiment and into its own drink puts gall—all these were things of which I was afraid. And as I had determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to taste each of them in turn, to feed on them, to have for a season, indeed, no other food at all."

WHERE HE MIGHT HIDE,

The future he discusses in the following words:—"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 in bitter herbs make me whole."

North Mail.

Newcastle-on-Tyne.

**BOOKS TO BE READ
AND NOTED.****"De Profundis,"** Written by Oscar
Wilde in Reading Gaol.

"De Profundis," from the depths of Reading Gaol, comes the last book of Oscar Wilde, the man who was. They act his plays to-day, and laughing audiences wonder at the wit that cannot find its peer among living dramatists.

The construction of "Lady Windermere's Fan," the humour of "The Importance of Being Earnest" still excite our admiration. The tarnished name of their author was fading into the haze with which good Father Time discreetly covers both honour and shame, both success and failure. Almost does it seem a matter for regret that his ghost should be raised once more.

Yet here "De Profundis," the book, is; and those who believe that "the proper study of mankind is man" can read and analyse, finding therein genius, eccentricity, apt phrases, emotional cloud-bursts of sorrow, and perhaps no little artificiality. Such a book indeed as might have been expected from Wilde—in Reading Gaol.

Mr Robert Ross explains the publication. The book was placed in his possession when the author was released. It was the only work that Wilde wrote in prison, and the last in prose that he ever penned. The famous "Ballad of Reading Gaol" was composed after he had regained his liberty.

It is a book of reflections and mental analysis without any definite plan. He deals with his development under the prison rules, and explains the mood in which he intends to face the world. He knows that on the day of his release he will be merely passing from one prison to another, "and there are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell and as full of terrors for me. Still," he continues, "I believe that at the beginning God made a world for each separate man, and in that world which is within us one should seek to live." Self-destruction he considered and threw aside.

Prison life he found to make for the realisation of things as they are. "That is why it turns one to stone," he explains. "It is the people outside who are deceived by the illusions of a life in constant motion. They revolve with life and contribute to its unreality. We who are immobile both see and know."

Eternal Hope.

Hope, that blessing of the gods upon suffering humanity, was not denied even to him. Remembering his deserted death-bed, it stirs an infinite pity to read, "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 tender green. I know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression. He hoped to do great things.

North Mail.

Newcastle-on-Tyne.

BOOKS TO BE READ AND NOTED.

"De Profundis," Written by Oscar Wilde in Reading Gaol.

"De Profundis," from the depths of Reading Gaol, comes the last book of Oscar Wilde, the man who was. They act his plays to-day, and laughing audiences wonder at the wit that cannot find its peer among living dramatists.

The construction of "Lady Windermere's Fan," the humour of "The Importance of Being Earnest" still excite our admiration. The tarnished name of their author was fading into the haze with which good Father Time discreetly covers both honour and shame, both success and failure. Almost does it seem a matter for regret that his ghost should be raised once more.

Yet here "De Profundis," the book, is; and those who believe that "the proper study of mankind is man" can read and analyse, finding therein genius, eccentricity, apt phrases, emotional cloud-bursts of sorrow, and perhaps no little artificiality. Such a book indeed as might have been expected from Wilde—in Reading Gaol.

Mr Robert Ross explains the publication. The book was placed in his possession when the author was released. It was the only work that Wilde wrote in prison, and the last in prose that he ever penned. The famous "Ballad of Reading Gaol" was composed after he had regained his liberty.

It is a book of reflections and mental analysis without any definite plan. He deals with his development under the prison rules, and explains the mood in which he intends to face the world. He knows that on the day of his release he will be merely passing from one prison to another, "and there are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell and as full of terrors for me. Still," he continues, "I believe that at the beginning God made a world for each separate man, and in that world which is within us one should seek to live." Self-destruction he considered and threw aside.

Prison life he found to make for the realisation of things as they are. "That is why it turns one to stone," he explains. "It is the people outside who are deceived by the illusions of a life in constant motion. They revolve with life and contribute to its unreality. We who are immobile both see and know."

Eternal Hope.

Hope, that blessing of the gods upon suffering humanity, was not denied even to him. Remembering his deserted death-bed, it stirs an infinite pity to read, "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 tender green. I know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression. He hoped to do great things.

"I believe I am to have enough to live on for about eighteen months at any rate, so that if I may not write beautiful books, I may at least read beautiful books; and what joy can be greater? After that I hope to be able to re-create my creative faculty."

Of his life in prison he writes, "For us there is only one season, the season of sorrow. The very sun and moon seem taken from us. Outside, the day may be blue and gold, but the light that creeps down through the thick muffled glass of the small iron-barred window beneath which one sits is grey and haggard. It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always twilight in one's heart."

Now and again he revels in phrases after his own cynical fashion. He talks of the "mechanical people to whom life is a shrewd speculation." "They start with the idea of being the parish beadle, and in whatever sphere they are placed they succeed in being the parish beadle and no more. A man whose desire is to be something separate from himself, to be a member of Parliament, or a successful grocer, or a prominent solicitor, or a judge, or something equally tedious, invariably succeeds in being what he wants to be. That is his punishment. Those who want a mask have to wear it."

Dreadful Experience.

Of all his sufferings one stands out most prominently in his miserable recollection. Convicts are the "zarnies of sorrow," the clowns whose hearts are broken. You can see it in their dress, especially designed to appeal to the sense of humour. When he was removed from London to Reading "I had to stand on the centre platform of Clapham Junction in convict dress and handcuffed, for the world to look at. . . . 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 rain, surrounded by a jeering mob."

So much, then, for this strange work, partly defence, partly appeal, partly a posture in prose. It will harm no one to read it, for the Nemesis of wrong-doing shadows every page.

One last quotation let me make from the words with which it ends. A curiously pathetic picture can imagination form of this broken genius, bankrupt, dishonoured, his children taken from him, his name a thing of scorn, sitting in his base prison cell, the floor of which he has lately scrubbed, and writing thus of the future: "Society will have no place for me; but nature, whose sweet rains fall on the 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."

Whether these imaginings ring false or true, whether they mirror the artificiality of self-deception, or are the prayer of a contrite heart, the scene in the prison cell remains equally surprising.

B. FLETCHER ROBINSON.

"Do Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. (Methuen, 5s.)

"I believe I am to have enough to live on for about eighteen months at any rate, so that if I may not write beautiful books I may at least read beautiful books; and what joy can be greater? After that I hope to be able to re-create my creative faculty."

Of his life in prison he writes, "For us there is only one season, the season of sorrow. The very sun and moon seem taken from us. Outside, the day may be blue and gold, but the light that creeps down through the thick muffled glass of the small iron-barred window beneath which one sits is grey and haggard. It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always twilight in one's heart."

Now and again he revels in phrases after his own cynical fashion. He talks of the "mechanical people to whom life is a shrewd speculation." "They start with the ideal desire of being the parish beadle, and in whatever sphere they are placed they succeed in being the parish beadle and no more. A man whose desire is to be something separate from himself, to be a member of Parliament, or a successful grocer, or a prominent solicitor, or a judge, or something equally tedious, invariably succeeds in being what he wants to be. That is his punishment. Those who want a mask have to wear it."

Dreadful Experience.

Of all his sufferings one stands out most prominently in his miserable recollection. Convicts are the "zarnies of sorrow," the clowns whose hearts are broken. You can see it in their dress, especially designed to appeal to the sense of humour. When he was removed from London to Reading "I had to stand on the centre platform of Clapham Junction in convict dress and handcuffed, for the world to look at. . . . 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 rain, surrounded by a jeering mob."

So much, then, for this strange work, partly defence, partly appeal, partly a posture in prose. It will harm no one to read it, for the Nemesis of wrong-doing shadows every page.

One last quotation let me make from the words with which it ends. A curiously pathetic picture can imagination form of this broken genius, bankrupt, dishonoured, his children taken from him, his name a thing of scorn, sitting in his base prison cell, the floor of which he has lately scrubbed, and writing thus of the future: "Society will have no place for me; but nature, whose sweet rains fall on the 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."

Whether these imaginings ring false or true, whether they mirror the artificiality of self-deception, or are the prayer of a contrite heart, the scene in the prison cell remains equally surprising.

B. FLETCHER ROBINSON.

Dundee Advertiser.**"DE PROFUNDIS."**

(PUBLISHED TO-DAY.)

This astonishing book, written by Oscar Wilde in prison, emphasises more than anything the greatness of the downfall which overtook the leader of the aesthetic school and really brought about his death. It is one long pain to read it, a pain which sometimes becomes intolerable, as when its writer tells how, after cleaning his cell and polishing the simple utensils, he would get hold of his Greek Testament and linger over the simple romantic charm of the Gospels, feeling the while like one who goes out from a narrow and dark house into a garden of lilies. Was ever anything more poignantly pathetic—a man of the finest intellectual fibre, perfectly tuned to all that was lovely, deeply and wisely read, and lapped in luxury, fulfilling the most menial of offices amidst the bald unloveliness of a convict's cell? One shudders at the awful possibilities that lie open before the most delicate natures, the pitfalls that endanger the way even of the most highly gifted. And what a book to come from such a place!—a flower of literature smelling of oakum. Its style is as discreet as Pater's, only with more warmth—a rose-tinted instead of a snow-white marble; its thought as limpid as Henry Drummond's, its verbal music unlike that of any other. There are passages that sing themselves into remembrance, as where, at the close, it is written—"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." Yet the man who penned these lyric sentences was not worthy to consort with some animals. Still his vileness was associated with much that was mentally noble and morally sincere. If one is to believe all that is written here, the tragedy that overwhelmed his social position was a blessing in that it gave him the opportunity of studying himself. He was snatched from a soul-destroying riot of gaiety and set apart in silence, and in the solitariness of his cell he came to see himself as he was, to read his soul as men too rarely read, and to read just his thoughts and desires in accordance with what was revealed to him. And this is his

Dundee Advertiser.

"DE PROFUNDIS."

(PUBLISHED TO-DAY.)

This astonishing book, written by Oscar Wilde in prison, emphasises more than anything the greatness of the downfall which overtook the leader of the æsthetic school and really brought about his death. It is one long pain to read it, a pain which sometimes becomes intolerable, as when its writer tells how, after cleaning his cell and polishing the simple utensils, he would get hold of his Greek Testament and linger over the simple romantic charm of the Gospels, feeling the while like one who goes out from a narrow and dark house into a garden of lilies. Was ever anything more poignantly pathetic—a man of the finest intellectual fibre, perfectly tuned to all that was lovely, deeply and wisely read, and lapped in luxury, fulfilling the most menial of offices amidst the bald unloveliness of a convict's cell? One shudders at the awful possibilities that lie open before the most delicate natures, the pitfalls that endanger the way even of the most highly gifted. And what a book to come from such a place!—a flower of literature smelling of oakum. Its style is as discreet as Pater's, only with more warmth—a rose-tinted instead of a snow-white marble; its thought as limpid as Henry Drummond's, its verbal music unlike that of any other. There are passages that sing themselves into remembrance, as where, at the close, it is written—"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." Yet the man who penned these lyric sentences was not worthy to consort with some animals. Still his vileness was associated with much that was mentally noble and morally sincere. If one is to believe all that is written here, the tragedy that overwhelmed his social position was a blessing in that it gave him the opportunity of studying himself. He was snatched from a soul-destroying riot of gaiety and set apart in silence, and in the solitariness of his cell he came to see himself as he was, to read his soul as men too rarely read, and to read just his thought. And this is his

diary—the journal of an awakened, penitent spirit. It discloses his fresh views of society in its relation to the condemned; his new insight into the significance of suffering; his perception of the final beauty of humility; his interpretation of Christ; and his lately reached ideas of the inner things of life. In short, it lays bare his very self so that one can see the terrible diseases by which he was stricken side by side with the healing processes established by the very means that shut him out from the world. If Oscar Wilde was remarkable before, he is doubly so now, for here he is shown as not only the poet and dramatist and the voice of a cult, but the theologian and tractarian who, with Greek tragedy in his mind's eye and Verlaine's poetry on his tongue, comes crying out the surpassing excellences of the Christ, the spacious grandeur of the creed of humanity, and the reviving grace of repentance. And all this in a language and with a verbal music whose beauty intoxicates the receptive sense. (London: Methuen & Co. 5s net.)

March 3, 1905

Oscar Wilde's Religion.
 It was stated the other day that before his death the late Mr Oscar Wilde was admitted into the Roman Catholic Church. A friend who was much with him during the last few weeks of his life states that he did not consciously become a Roman Catholic. He was, however, at the instance of a friend, who was himself a devout Catholic, "received into the Church," but he was not conscious at the time that this took place, and never knew that he had been admitted into the Catholic Communion. It seems also that the story to the effect that he was in great straits before he died is not true. He did not enjoy, of course, the large income which he derived from his works before the tragic event which practically ended his career, but he had at least an income of £400 a year. Even in Paris a single man can live, if not luxuriously, at least comfortably, on that sum.

diary—the journal of an awakened, penitent spirit. It discloses his fresh views of society in its relation to the condemned; his new insight into the significance of suffering; his perception of the final beauty of humility; his interpretation of Christ; and his lately reached ideas of the inner things of life. In short, it lays bare his very self so that one can see the terrible diseases by which he was stricken side by side with the healing processes established by the very means that shut him out from the world. If Oscar Wilde was remarkable before, he is doubly so now, for here he is shown as not only the poet and dramatist and the voice of a cult, but the theologian and tractarian who, with Greek tragedy in his mind's eye and Verlaine's poetry on his tongue, comes crying out the surpassing excellences of the Christ, the spacious grandeur of the creed of humanity, and the reviving grace of repentance. And all this in a language and with a verbal music whose beauty intoxicates the receptive sense. (London: Methuen & Co. 5s net.)

March 3, 1905

Oscar Wilde's Religion.

It was stated the other day that before his death the late Mr Oscar Wilde was admitted into the Roman Catholic Church. A friend who was much with him during the last few weeks of his life states that he did not consciously become a Roman Catholic. He was, however, at the instance of a friend, who was himself a devout Catholic, "received into the Church," but he was not conscious at the time that this took place, and never knew that he had been admitted into the Catholic Communion. It seems also that the story to the effect that he was in great straits before he died is not true. He did not enjoy, of course, the large income which he derived from his works before the tragic event which practically ended his career, but he had at least an income of £400 a year. Even in Paris a single man can live, if not luxuriously, at least comfortably, on that sum.

Manchester Guardian.**DE PROFUNDIS.***

This book is a piece of writing masterly in detail and ornament, though not in structure, by a man whose imbecility of character wrecked one of the most remarkable talents seen in our time. It deals in outline with two subjects—the relation of the artistic life to conduct, and the possibility of regarding Christ mainly as an individualist and as “the precursor of the Romantic movement in life.” This latter view is presented with wonderful ingenuity and sympathy, and with occasional strokes of really luminous and—as far as we know—original interpretation. On conduct and the artist, again, there are a great number of things shrewdly or beautifully said, and some that are both, but the writer's capacity for fruitful observation of life strikes us, here as in his brilliantly written plays, as incorrigibly fragmentary and almost incoherent. For a man who drew so much from Greek sources, Wilde had little of the Greek sense of the need of the “architectural” qualities in thought and writing. He was a paragraphist of genius. In this book, for instance, there is no coherent view of his own failure; he seems to oscillate between the point of view of the ordinary contrite penitent and of the man who denies society's jurisdiction; he nowhere gets behind the superficial apparatus of external punishment, nor fully grasps the distinction between artistic experience and experience in the vulgar sense, nor perceives that the artist has an adequate rule of conduct in the avoidance of all that incapacitates him for his art, either by leading to bodily death, disease, or weakness, or by the coarsening and sterilising of perception, which Burns acutely diagnosed as the normal consequence of misconduct. Probably Wilde illustrated more aptly than he knew the truth of a passage in this book:—

It is tragic how few people ever “possess their souls” before they die. “Nothing is more rare in any man,” says Emerson, “than an act of his own.” It is quite true. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

Constantly, in reading this as in reading other writings of Wilde's, one feels that his thoughts are those of Pater, aped and applied without being understood, and that the tragic ineffectiveness of Wilde's career as a whole may have been partly due to a fatal facility for half living the lives of many others, chiefly Platonic Greeks and Renaissance Florentines, whose lives as wholes he was no more successful in comprehending than he was in living a life really his own. But if this last book of his is without much value as a treatise on life and conduct, it is curious and enchainingly with the subtle eloquence of a rare temperament's passion of self-pity and hunger for continued self-love.

Manchester Guardian.

DE PROFUNDIS.*

This book is a piece of writing masterly in detail and ornament, though not in structure, by a man whose imbecility of character wrecked one of the most remarkable talents seen in our time. It deals in outline with two subjects—the relation of the artistic life to conduct, and the possibility of regarding Christ mainly as an individualist and as “the precursor of the Romantic movement in life.” This latter view is presented with wonderful ingenuity and sympathy, and with occasional strokes of really luminous and—as far as we know—original interpretation. On conduct and the artist, again, there are a great number of things shrewdly or beautifully said, and some that are both, but the writer’s capacity for fruitful observation of life strikes us, here as in his brilliantly written plays, as incorrigibly fragmentary and almost incoherent. For a man who drew so much from Greek sources, Wilde had little of the Greek sense of the need of the “architectural” qualities in thought and writing. He was a paragraphist of genius. In this book, for instance, there is no coherent view of his own failure; he seems to oscillate between the point of view of the ordinary contrite penitent and of the man who denies society’s jurisdiction; he nowhere gets behind the superficial apparatus of external punishment, nor fully grasps the distinction between artistic experience and experience in the vulgar sense, nor perceives that the artist has an adequate rule of conduct in the avoidance of all that incapacitates him for his art, either by leading to bodily death, disease, or weakness, or by the coarsening and sterilising of perception, which Burns acutely diagnosed as the normal consequence of misconduct. Probably Wilde illustrated more aptly than he knew the truth of a passage in this book:—

It is tragic how few people ever “possess their souls” before they die. “Nothing is more rare in any man,” says Emerson, “than an act of his own.” It is quite true. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

Constantly, in reading this as in reading other writings of Wilde’s, one feels that his thoughts are those of Pater, aped and applied without being understood, and that the tragic ineffectiveness of Wilde’s career as a whole may have been partly due to a fatal facility for half living the lives of many others, chiefly Platonic Greeks and Renaissance Florentines, whose lives as wholes he was no more successful in comprehending than he was in living a life really his own. But if this last book of his is without much value as a treatise on life and conduct, it is curious and enchanting with the subtle eloquence of a rare temperament’s passion of self-hatred and hunger for continued self-love.

THE 'VARSITY.

REVIEW.

We have just received an advance copy from Messrs Methuen & Co., of '**DE PROFUNDIS**,' by the late Oscar Wilde. This extraordinary book is published *to-day*, and we wish to call particular attention to it. A fore-word by Robert Ross, in whose possession the MSS. has been for some time, tells us that it was the only work written in prison by its brilliant author, and the last work in prose he ever wrote.

It is almost impossible to express in words the beauty of this piece of writing; it is quite impossible to paraphrase, even if one wished to do so, the *motif* underlying this sad, and yet hopeful analysis of self-introspection. The vivid, one might almost say lurid, effect of degrading imprisonment on a mind which was a curious mixture of sensuality and refinement of intellect finds expression in the pages of *De Profundis* in a truly marvellous manner. The constant references to the author's imprisonment are very intense:—'The plank 'bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes shredded into 'oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain. . . . 'the silence, the solitude, the shame—each and all of 'these things I have to transform into spiritual experience. There is not a single degradation of the body 'which I must not try and make into a spiritualising of 'the soul.'

Such is the standpoint from which the writer views his condition, and his words, if sincere, throw fresh light on a wonderfully complex nature.

'The two great turning-points in my life,' he says, 'were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison.' One may reasonably hope that a third turning-point arose when, on the author's release, he turned, as he writes that he would turn, to the solace afforded by Nature to one who has sinned and forfeited his right to hold up his head among his fellow-men. '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 is one of the saddest, most forcible and vivid pieces of English prose ever written.

THE 'VARISITY.

REVIEW.

We have just received an advance copy from Messrs Methuen & Co., of '**DE PROFUNDIS**,' by the late Oscar Wilde. This extraordinary book is published *to-day*, and we wish to call particular attention to it, A fore-word by Robert Ross, in whose possession the MSS. has been for some time, tells us that it was the only work written in prison by its brilliant author, and the last work in prose he ever wrote.

It is almost impossible to express in words the beauty of this piece of writing ; it is quite impossible to paraphrase, even if one wished to do so, the *motif* underlying this sad, and yet hopeful analysis of self-introspection. The vivid, one might almost say lurid, effect of degrading imprisonment on a mind which was a curious mixture of sensuality and refinement of intellect finds expression in the pages of *De Profundis* in a truly marvellous manner: The constant references to the author's imprisonment are very intense :—'The plank 'bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes shredded into 'oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain. . . . 'the silence, the solitude, the shame—each and all of 'these things I have to transform into spiritual experience. There is not a single degradation of the body 'which I must not try and make into a spiritualising of 'the soul.'

Such is the standpoint from which the writer views his condition, and his words, if sincere, throw fresh light on a wonderfully complex nature.

'The two great turning-points in my life,' he says, 'were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison.' One may reasonably hope that a third turning-point arose when, on the author's release, he turned, as he writes that he would turn, to the solace afforded by Nature to one who has sinned and forfeited his right to hold up his head among his fellow-men. '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 is one of the saddest, most forcible and vivid pieces of English prose ever written.

The Times. *Supp*
 Printing House Square, E.C.

"DE PROFUNDIS."

DE PROFUNDIS. By OSCAR WILDE. (Methuen. 5s. net.)

This is an unfailingly and now and then poignantly interesting work; it contains some beautiful prose, some confessions that cannot leave the reader unmoved and may even touch him a little with shame at his own fortunate rectitude; and a passage of theological conjecture that is most engaging in its ingenuity and of a very delicate texture. The book contains all this and more, and yet while realizing the terrible conditions under which it was written, and possessed by every wish to understand the author and feel with him in the utter wreck of his career, it is impossible, except very occasionally, to look upon his testament as more than a literary feat. Not so, we find ourselves saying, are souls laid bare. This is not sorrow, but its dexterously constructed counterfeit.

Yet when we ask ourselves in what other way we would have had Oscar Wilde's cry from the depths we are unable to reply; for the bitter truth is that he was probably unable to cry from the depths at all; perhaps, paradoxical as it may sound, was unable really to be in the depths. For this book might be held to fortify the conviction that there is an armour of egotism which no arrow of fate can pierce. How Wilde felt in the watches of the night in that squalid cell we can only conjecture; this book gives little clue. In this book he is as much as ever the bland and plausible artist in phrase, except that for the most part he is advocating a new creed of humility in place of earlier gospels. Even in prison, even at the end of everything he most valued, his artifice was too much for him; his poses were too insistent—had become too much a part of the man—to be abandoned. If the heart of a broken man shows at all in this book, it must be looked for between the lines. It is rarely in them.

That a man who had travelled by Wilde's courses to Wilde's end should write, in prison, an analysis of his temperament, and a history of his ruin, coming therein to such conclusions as are here set forth, and during his task should pen no word that bore the mark of sincerity unadorned, is in its way a considerable feat. But it vitiates the book; or rather takes the book from the category of genuine emotion and places it among the *tours de force*. But it enables us now to know absolutely—what we had perhaps before guessed—that Oscar Wilde, however he may have begun life, grew to be incapable of deliberately telling the truth about himself or anything else. Being a man of genius, he often stumbled on it; but he could not say, "I will be truthful," and be truthful; he lost that power. We doubt if he was truthful even to himself towards the end. But the real tragic failure of this book lies, not so much in itself and its too obviously adroit special pleading, as in the fact that its author lived for two years after it was written. It is that knowledge which will move many readers to something very like tears:—

The Times. *Supp*

Printing House Square, E.C.

“DE PROFUNDIS.”

DE PROFUNDIS. By OSCAR WILDE. (Methuen. 5s. net.)

This is an unfailingly and now and then poignantly interesting work; it contains some beautiful prose, some confessions that cannot leave the reader unmoved and may even touch him a little with shame at his own fortunate rectitude; and a passage of theological conjecture that is most engaging in its ingenuity and of a very delicate texture. The book contains all this and more, and yet while realizing the terrible conditions under which it was written, and possessed by every wish to understand the author and feel with him in the utter wreck of his career, it is impossible, except very occasionally, to look upon his testament as more than a literary feat. Not so, we find ourselves saying, are souls laid bare. This is not sorrow, but its dexterously constructed counterfeit.

Yet when we ask ourselves in what other way we would have had Oscar Wilde's cry from the depths we are unable to reply; for the bitter truth is that he was probably unable to cry from the depths at all; perhaps, paradoxical as it may sound, was unable really to be in the depths. For this book might be held to fortify the conviction that there is an armour of egotism which no arrow of fate can pierce. How Wilde felt in the watches of the night in that squalid cell we can only conjecture; this book gives little clue. In this book he is as much as ever the bland and plausible artist in phrase, except that for the most part he is advocating a new creed of humility in place of earlier gospels. Even in prison, even at the end of everything he most valued, his artifice was too much for him; his poses were too insistent—had become too much a part of the man—to be abandoned. If the heart of a broken man shows at all in this book, it must be looked for between the lines. It is rarely in them.

That a man who had travelled by Wilde's courses to Wilde's end should write, in prison, an analysis of his temperament, and a history of his ruin, coming therein to such conclusions as are here set forth, and during his task should pen no word that bore the mark of sincerity unadorned, is in its way a considerable feat. But it vitiates the book; or rather takes the book from the category of genuine emotion and places it among the *tours de force*. But it enables us now to know absolutely—what we had perhaps before guessed—that Oscar Wilde, however he may have begun life, grew to be incapable of deliberately telling the truth about himself or anything else. Being a man of genius, he often stumbled on it; but he could not say, “I will be truthful,” and be truthful; he lost that power. We doubt if he was truthful even to himself towards the end. But the real tragic failure of this book lies, not so much in itself and its too obviously adroit special pleading, as in the fact that its author lived for two years after it was written. It is that knowledge which will move many readers to something very like tears:—

I have lain in prison for nearly two years. Out of my nature has come wild despair; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at; terrible and impotent rage; bitterness and scorn; anguish that wept aloud, misery that could find no voice, sorrow that was dumb. I have passed through every possible mood of suffering. Better than Wordsworth himself I know what Wordsworth meant when he said:—

“Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark,
And has the nature of infinity.”

But while there were times when I rejoiced in the idea that my sufferings were to be endless, I could not bear them to be without meaning. 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.

It is the last thing left in me, and the best; the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived, the starting point for a fresh development. It has come to me right out of myself, so I know that it has come at the proper time. It could not have come before, nor later. Had any one told me of it, I would have rejected it. Had it been brought to me I would have refused it. As I found it, I want to keep it.

There is a tragedy there, if you will. To criticize coldly such a passage, written in a prison cell by the author of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is no congenial task. But if one does so, it is because the task is forced on one by the writer.

Wilde speaks in this little book of his artistic creed, his teaching, his philosophy of life; but it is very doubtful if he had ever really formulated one and made any sustained effort to understand it and conform to it. For his genius lay in lawlessness. He was essentially lawless, and his work is of value only when the author has forgotten that he is the exponent of a system. Every writer has somewhere an intimate personal gift which distinguishes him from every other writer—although it is often so minute as to escape detection. Wilde's particular and precise gift was lawless irresponsibility—humorous inconsistency is perhaps as good a description of it. If all his work could be spread out like an extinct river bed in the Klondike, a tiny thread of gold would be seen to break out here and there fitfully and freakishly within it. That vein of gold would represent those moments in Wilde's literary career when he forgot who he was and what he thought he stood for and allowed his native self to frolic and turn somersaults amid verities and conventions. Essentially an improviser and of hand-to-mouth intellect, he allowed himself to believe himself

a constructive philosopher; essentially a mocker he was weak enough to affect to be a high priest of reverence. The result is that, although he essayed almost every variety of literary expression, in none except sheer irresponsibility did he come near perfection. We have always considered *The Importance of Being Earnest* his high-water mark of completed achievement; and we should associate with it those passages in his other writings where the same mood has play. Of Wilde's other work it is conceivable that industrious disciples might have produced it with more or less—perhaps sufficient—success. In any case it does not really matter. The failure of Wilde's life and the failure of his work have the same root; he could not resist temptation. We would not say that as a writer he was tempted in the same degree as a pleasure-loving man; his artistic conscience was made of better stuff than his civic conscience; but he was tempted often, and he always fell. His real destiny was to be an improviser, an inconsistent but often inspired commentator,

I have lain in prison for nearly two years. Out of my nature has come wild despair ; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at ; terrible and impotent rage ; bitterness and scorn ; anguish that wept aloud, misery that could find no voice, sorrow that was dumb. I have passed through every possible mood of suffering. Better than Wordsworth himself I know what Wordsworth meant when he said :—

“ Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark,
And has the nature of infinity.”

But while there were times when I rejoiced in the idea that my sufferings were to be endless, I could not bear them to be without meaning. 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.

It is the last thing left in me, and the best ; the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived, the starting point for a fresh development. It has come to me right out of myself, so I know that it has come at the proper time. It could not have come before, nor later. Had any one told me of it, I would have rejected it. Had it been brought to me I would have refused it. As I found it, I want to keep it.

There is a tragedy there, if you will. To criticize coldly such a passage, written in a prison cell by the author of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is no congenial task. But if one does so, it is because the task is forced on one by the writer.

Wilde speaks in this little book of his artistic creed, his teaching, his philosophy of life ; but it is very doubtful if he had ever really formulated one and made any sustained effort to understand it and conform to it. For his genius lay in lawlessness. He was essentially lawless, and his work is of value only when the author has forgotten that he is the exponent of a system. Every writer has somewhere an intimate personal gift which distinguishes him from every other writer—although it is often so minute as to escape detection. Wilde's particular and precise gift was lawless irresponsibility—humorous inconsistency is perhaps as good a description of it. If all his work could be spread out like an extinct river bed in the Klondike, a tiny thread of gold would be seen to break out here and there fitfully and freakishly within it. That vein of gold would represent those moments in Wilde's literary career when he forgot who he was and what he thought he stood for and allowed his native self to frolic and turn somersaults amid verities and conventions. Essentially an improviser and of hand-to-mouth intellect, he allowed himself to believe himself

a constructive philosopher ; essentially a mocker he was weak enough to affect to be a high priest of reverence. The result is that, although he essayed almost every variety of literary expression, in none except sheer irresponsibility did he come near perfection. We have always considered *The Importance of Being Earnest* his high-water mark of completed achievement ; and we should associate with it those passages in his other writings where the same mood has play. Of Wilde's other work it is conceivable that industrious disciples might have produced it with more or less—perhaps sufficient—success. In any case it does not really matter. The failure of Wilde's life and the failure of his work have the same root ; he could not resist temptation. We would not say that as a writer he was tempted in the same degree as a pleasure-loving man ; his artistic conscience was made of better stuff than his civic conscience ; but he was tempted often, and he always fell. His real destiny was to be an improviser, an inconsistent but often inspired commentator,

a deviser of paradoxes, an exponent of the unfamiliar side of things; instead, he thought himself a leader of men, a prophet, a great writer of prose, a serious dramatic poet. By nature a witty and irresponsible Irishman, he grew to believe himself a responsible neo-Hellene. Born to be a lawless wit he was often something very like a pedant. Had he possessed a sense of humour he might have been saved—another illustration of the total independence of humour and wit.

Only in one part of this book does the author show his true self at all. The main part, we are convinced, is artifice; but we seem to see this most delightfully ingenious, if unscrupulous, improviser of our day at work again in the essay on "Christ as the Precursor of the Romantic Movement in Art." Wilde introduces the fantasy by remarking that it is one of the things he had always desired to write; but we would wager he thought of it only that morning. It bears every trace of his old gift of whimsical invention and embroidery. The rest of the book is studied and over-studied; but this is fresh and spontaneous:—

I see in Christ not merely the essentials of the supreme romantic type, but all the accidents, the wilfulnesses even, of the romantic temperament also. He was the first person who ever said to people that they should live "flower-like lives." He fixed the phrase. He took children as the type of what people should try to become. He held them up as examples to their elders, which I myself have always thought the chief use of children, if what is perfect should have a use. Dante describes the soul of a man as coming from the hand of God "weeping and laughing like a little child," and Christ also saw that the soul of each one should be a *guisa di fanciulla che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia*. He felt that life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped into any form was death. He saw that people should not be too serious over material, common interests: that to be unpractical was to be a great thing: that one should not bother too much over affairs. The birds didn't, why should man? He is charming when he says, "Take no thought for the morrow; is not the soul more than meat? Is not the body more than raiment?" A Greek might have used the latter phrase. It is full of Greek feeling. But only Christ could have said both, and so summed up life perfectly for us.

His morality is all sympathy, just what morality should be. If the only thing that he had ever said had been, "Her sins are forgiven her because she loved much" it would have been worth while dying to have said it. His justice is all poetical justice, exactly what justice should be. The beggar goes to Heaven because he has been unhappy. I cannot conceive a better reason for his being sent there.

And so on. We do not say that this is great criticism; but it is the true and the best Wilde. It is the kind of happy, swift, inverted commentary of which he had the secret and which we hold is his chief gift. And, right or wrong, it is very gay and charming, and it makes the reader think. Indeed, everything which Wilde says of Christ in this little book is worth reading and considering and reading again.

What, then, is the value of "De Profundis"? Its value is this—that it is an example of the triumph of the literary temperament over the most disadvantageous conditions; it is further documentary evidence as to one of the most artificial natures produced by the nineteenth century in England; and here and there it makes a sweet and reasonable contribution to the gospel of humanity.

a deviser of paradoxes, an exponent of the unfamiliar side of things ; instead, he thought himself a leader of men, a prophet, a great writer of prose, a serious dramatic poet. By nature a witty and irresponsible Irishman, he grew to believe himself a responsible neo-Hellene. Born to be a lawless wit he was often something very like a pedant. Had he possessed a sense of humour he might have been saved—another illustration of the total independence of humour and wit.

Only in one part of this book does the author show his true self at all. The main part, we are convinced, is artifice ; but we seem to see this most delightfully ingenious, if unscrupulous, improviser of our day at work again in the essay on "Christ as the Precursor of the Romantic Movement in Art." Wilde introduces the fantasy by remarking that it is one of the things he had always desired to write ; but we would wager he thought of it only that morning. It bears every trace of his old gift of whimsical invention and embroidery. The rest of the book is studied and over-studied ; but this is fresh and spontaneous :—

I see in Christ not merely the essentials of the supreme romantic type, but all the accidents, the wilfulnesses even, of the romantic temperament also. He was the first person who ever said to people that they should live "flower-like lives." He fixed the phrase. He took children as the type of what people should try to become. He held them up as examples to their elders, which I myself have always thought the chief use of children, if what is perfect should have a use. Dante describes the soul of God as coming from the hand of God "weeping and laughing like a little child," and Christ also saw that the soul of each one should be a *gutsa di fanciulla che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia*. He felt that life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped into any form was death. He saw that people should not be too serious over material, common interests : that to be unpractical was to be a great thing : that one should not bother too much over affairs. The birds didn't, why should man ? He is charming when he says, "Take no thought for the morrow ; is not the soul more than meat ? Is not the body more than raiment ?" A Greek might have used the latter phrase. It is full of Greek feeling. But only Christ could have said both, and so summed up life perfectly for us.

His morality is all sympathy, just what morality should be. If the only thing that he had ever said had been, "Her sins are forgiven her because she loved much" it would have been worth while dying to have said it. His justice is all poetical justice, exactly what justice should be. The beggar goes to Heaven because he has been unhappy. I cannot conceive a better reason for his being sent there.

And so on. We do not say that this is great criticism ; but it is the true and the best Wilde. It is the kind of happy, swift, inverted commentary of which he had the secret and which we hold is his chief gift. And, right or wrong, it is very gay and charming, and it makes the reader think. Indeed, everything which Wilde says of Christ in this little book is worth reading and considering and reading again.

What, then, is the value of "De Profundis" ? Its value is this—that it is an example of the triumph of the literary temperament over the most disadvantageous conditions ; it is further documentary evidence as to one of the most artificial natures produced by the nineteenth century in England ; and here and there it makes a sweet and reasonable contribution to the gospel

"DE PROFUNDIS."

It has been known very generally for some years past that Oscar Wilde, during the period of his imprisonment at Reading, had endeavoured to put into words the thoughts and feelings belonging to the self-development which he believed he recognised as the outcome of his captivity. It had been expected confidently that this, the last prose utterance of a brilliantly-gifted mind, would, sooner or later, be given to the world. That part of the world which treasures the memory of his erratic genius, and is willing to forget the nature of its eclipse, may now learn after what fashion Oscar Wilde wrote out of the depths of his most intimate communion with sorrow the intensely egoistic monody that was to prove (save his "Ballad of Reading Gaol") his final word to his fellow-men. Of the glimpses it affords into his private life this is not the place to take note: we are concerned only with what he chooses to tell us of his personal experience in a situation where the monotony of existence was a torture to one who had sucked deep at every fount of pleasure and pride; and where the sordid ugliness of every surrounding and every penal duty must have made their own Inferno for the most spoiled of the spoiled children of modern art.

"De Profundis" (Methuen and Co.) is the name that has been given to the little book sent out by the friendly hand, and prefaced by the friendly introduction of Mr. Robert Ross. "Apologia pro Vita Sua" it is not; for to Oscar Wilde not the thing that he did, but the thing that he became, deserved the accusation of guilt. He had no use for morality, as the word was interpreted into law by his countrymen. He was, he wrote, "a born antinomian . . . one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws." A dangerous faith: but he who professed it has claimed for himself a place apart:—

"I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand. . . . Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still. I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. I had realised this for myself at the very dawn of my manhood, and had forced my age to realise it afterwards. Few men hold such a position in their own lifetime, and have it so acknowledged. It is usually discerned, if discerned 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 passion of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, of larger scope. The gods had given me almost everything."

“DE PROFUNDIS.”

It has been known very generally for some years past that Oscar Wilde, during the period of his imprisonment at Reading, had endeavoured to put into words the thoughts and feelings belonging to the self-development which he believed he recognised as the outcome of his captivity. It had been expected confidently that this, the last prose utterance of a brilliantly-gifted mind, would, sooner or later, be given to the world. That part of the world which treasures the memory of his erratic genius, and is willing to forget the nature of its eclipse, may now learn after what fashion Oscar Wilde wrote out of the depths of his most intimate communion with sorrow the intensely egoistic monody that was to prove (save his “Ballad of Reading Gaol”) his final word to his fellow-men. Of the glimpses it affords into his private life this is not the place to take note: we are concerned only with what he chooses to tell us of his personal experience in a situation where the monotony of existence was a torture to one who had sucked deep at every fount of pleasure and pride; and where the sordid ugliness of every surrounding and every penal duty must have made their own Inferno for the most spoiled of the spoiled children of modern art.

“De Profundis” (Methuen and Co.) is the name that has been given to the little book sent out by the friendly hand, and prefaced by the friendly introduction of Mr. Robert Ross. “Apologia pro Vita Sua” it is not; for to Oscar Wilde not the thing that he did, but the thing that he became, deserved the accusation of guilt. He had no use for morality, as the word was interpreted into law by his countrymen. He was, he wrote, “a born antinomian . . . one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws.” A dangerous faith: but he who professed it has claimed for himself a place apart:—

“I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand. . . . Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still. I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. I had realised this for myself at the very dawn of my manhood, and had forced my age to realise it afterwards. Few men hold such a position in their own lifetime, and have it so acknowledged. It is usually discerned, if discerned 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 passion of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, of larger scope. The gods had given me almost everything.”

How he used the gift of the gods, he epitomised in few words:—

"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. . . . I ceased to be 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."

The means by which the spendthrift reached the depths are abundantly made manifest in these pages. The writer, if he desired to lay bare his soul, had not far to seek for the sources of conduct. His confession of a theory of life, at once strangely clear and strangely distorted, is in its way a human document; but it is one written on sand. It is a sort of ecstasy of self-revelation, instinct with what we know as a Gallic method of passionate rather than reflective probing; yet holding in but a vague grasp the most real evidences of character. In some far-off way, the theorist seems to wish to leave theory and sincerely to approach fact; but the very soul of sincerity was surely out of Oscar Wilde's reach; or else the habit of years had allowed a perpetual posing to leave behind its deadly effects, and to defraud truth of her value at the end.

The writer of "De Profundis" stood, he wished us to suppose, in a region apart; but his study was not of a world that passed him by on the other side, it was a concentrated regard of himself. It used to be said of him, he knew, that he was "an individualist": the individuality that absorbed his gaze was his own. His perception of beauty in art, in letters, in music, in character, was all subjective to his personal needs. Not "what is proven good, is good," but "what I admire, is good," was, we must suppose, his creed of creeds. He went into the world, and paced only its sunlit alleys; because he "shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom"—

"There was no pleasure I did not experience. 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."

He moved among men and the things of men, and took from them what he desired. He was, he believed, so great an artist that he could defy the temptations that tested weaker wills. He could dwell among mean souls and not be mean. Life revenged itself on him; and he passed "not from obscurity into the momentary notoriety of crime, but from a sort of eternity of fame to a sort of eternity of infamy."

That yet he trusted the infamy might not be eternal is proved by the frequent references in his latest effort at self-expression to the new life he hoped to lead:—

How he used the gift of the gods, he epitomised in few words:—

"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. . . . I ceased to be 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."

The means by which the spendthrift reached the depths are abundantly made manifest in these pages. The writer, if he desired to lay bare his soul, had not far to seek for the sources of conduct. His confession of a theory of life, at once strangely clear and strangely distorted, is in its way a human document; but it is one written on sand. It is a sort of ecstasy of self-revelation, instinct with what we know as a Gallic method of passionate rather than reflective probing; yet holding in but a vague grasp the most real evidences of character. In some far-off way, the theorist seems to wish to leave theory and sincerely to approach fact; but the very soul of sincerity was surely out of Oscar Wilde's reach; or else the habit of years had allowed a perpetual posing to leave behind its deadly effects, and to defraud truth of her value at the end.

The writer of "De Profundis" stood, he wished us to suppose, in a region apart; but his study was not of a world that passed him by on the other side, it was a concentrated regard of himself. It used to be said of him, he knew, that he was "an individualist": the individuality that absorbed his gaze was his own. His perception of beauty in art, in letters, in music, in character, was all subjective to his personal needs. Not "what is proven good, is good," but "what I admire, is good," was, we must suppose, his creed of creeds. He went into the world, and paced only its sunlit alleys; because he "shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom"—

"There was no pleasure I did not experience. 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."

He moved among men and the things of men, and took from them what he desired. He was, he believed, so great an artist that he could defy the temptations that tested weaker wills. He could dwell among mean souls and not be mean. Life revenged itself on him; and he passed "not from obscurity into the momentary notoriety of crime, but from a sort of eternity of fame to a sort of eternity of infamy."

That yet he trusted the infamy might not be eternal is proved by the frequent references in his latest effort at self-expression to the new life he hoped to lead:—

"There is before me so much to do that I would regard it as a terrible tragedy if I died before I was allowed to complete at any rate a little of it. . . . People point to Reading Gaol and say, 'That is where the artistic life leads a man.' . . . I hope to live long enough, and to produce work of such a character that I shall be able at the end of my days to say, 'Yes! This is just where the artistic life leads a man!' . . . If ever I write again, in the sense of producing artistic work, there are just two subjects on which and through which I desire to express myself: one is 'Christ as the precursor of the romantic movement in life'; the other is 'The artistic life considered in its relation to conduct.'"

The "terrible tragedy" occurred; and Oscar Wilde died without carrying out his plan of work. But fully one-third of the present book is devoted to the expounding of what the writer would have called an artist's view of the life and teaching of Christ. And in this

outpouring of a vivid imagination there is much that, if it is surface beauty, is very beautifully expressed. It is the most that the author was to do towards the critical discussion of a "romantic" Christ; but it illustrates the power of reaching towards an ideal that made the exceeding charm of "The Happy Prince" and its companion fables. The author of those exquisite bits of imaginative literature was an artist in truth, and never could have been incapable of purity of thought and deed. Steeped in an intense, perhaps degraded classicism, and absorbed in a profounder egoism, he lost sight of the only way in which "the soul of man, for whom the world was made," could reach "the full stature of its perfection"—

"Far off, like a perfect pearl, one can see the city of God. It is so wonderful that it seems as if a child could reach it in a summer's day. And so a child could. But with me and such as me it is different."

Few of those who read this little book and recall the drama of its evolution will care to cast a stone at the memory of the dead writer. Should any do so, let us trust that it may fall far wide of its mark. Let us be content to acknowledge in what brilliant sort Oscar Wilde contributed not only to the artistic but to the witty forms of literature; and so added to the innocent pleasure of his day and generation, and earned a right to be forgiven.

"There is before me so much to do that I would regard it as a terrible tragedy if I died before I was allowed to complete at any rate a little of it. . . . People point to Reading Gaol and say, 'That is where the artistic life leads a man.' . . . I hope to live long enough, and to produce work of such a character that I shall be able at the end of my days to say, 'Yes! This is just where the artistic life leads a man!' . . . If ever I write again, in the sense of producing artistic work, there are just two subjects on which and through which I desire to express myself: one is 'Christ as the precursor of the romantic movement in life'; the other is 'The artistic life considered in its relation to conduct.'"

The "terrible tragedy" occurred; and Oscar Wilde died without carrying out his plan of work. But fully one-third of the present book is devoted to the expounding of what the writer would have called an artist's view of the life and teaching of Christ. And in this

outpouring of a vivid imagination there is much that, if it is surface beauty, is very beautifully expressed. It is the most that the author was to do towards the critical discussion of a "romantic" Christ; but it illustrates the power of reaching towards an ideal that made the exceeding charm of "The Happy Prince" and its companion fables. The author of those exquisite bits of imaginative literature was an artist in truth, and never could have been incapable of purity of thought and deed. Steeped in an intense, perhaps degraded classicism, and absorbed in a profounder egoism, he lost sight of the only way in which "the soul of man, for whom the world was made," could reach "the full stature of its perfection"—

"Far off, like a perfect pearl, one can see the city of God. It is so wonderful that it seems as if a child could reach it in a summer's day. And so a child could. But with me and such as me it is different."

Few of those who read this little book and recall the drama of its evolution will care to cast a stone at the memory of the dead writer. Should any do so, let us trust that it may fall far wide of its mark. Let us be content to acknowledge in what brilliant sort Oscar Wilde contributed not only to the artistic but to the witty forms of literature; and so added to the innocent pleasure of his day and generation, and earned a right to be forgiven.

South Wales Daily News.

Oscar Wilde's Book.

CONFESSION OF A RUINED GENIUS:
"OUT OF THE DEPTHS."

There was published yesterday 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. 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."

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:—

"I have got to make everything that has happened to me good for me. The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes sbreaded 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 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. 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.

South Wales Daily News.

Oscar Wilde's Book.

CONFESSION OF A RUINED GENIUS.

"OUT OF THE DEPTHS."

There was published yesterday 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. 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."

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:—

"I have got to make everything that has happened to me good for me. The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes threaded 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. 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.

Court Journal,*"OUT OF THE DEPTHS."**

There is always an atmosphere of melancholy about any posthumous work, but when the writer has been cut off in the prime of life and what should be the plenitude of his creative power it has the air of that most mournful of all symbols, the broken marble column. No such monument may mark the resting place of Oscar Wilde in the great city where his exile ended some four years ago, but he is not, nor will he be soon, forgotten by those who admired his many-sided genius. Indeed, all who love our literature will turn to the book which Messrs. Methuen have just issued in a tasteful binding and fair print with the feeling that a buried treasure has been given into their hands. *De Profundis* will be widely read, and its contents even more widely discussed, for nowadays people have no time to wait until they have read a book before they discuss its merits. The talk of luncheon tables and the labours of certain literary scavengers help them to form these anticipatory judgments, though of what value their opinion is to themselves or anyone else can best be estimated by the fact that they seldom buy the works they so glibly recommend to their friends.

One, however, who has read the long letter from Reading Gaol, to which the appropriate name of *De Profundis* has been given, will scarcely be so ready to tell others to do likewise. Not that the thing is without merit, nor that it would not be a very creditable performance for an ordinary writer; but Wilde was no ordinary writer, and the attitude of mind here assumed towards the most vital problems is not that of the author of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Prison must, therefore, have had a more narrowing effect upon Wilde's mental outlook than even his extreme sensitiveness to its physical limitations would have led one to believe possible. The whole of the letter to Mr. Ross is impregnated with the commonplace ideas of common men about the purifying influence and sacred character of sorrow, so that, short of saying that to be put in prison is a blessing in disguise, the writer appears to have done the thing which Wilde held to be the greatest of literary crimes, to wit, exhausted the obvious.

Perhaps there would be nothing very strange about this marked deterioration in style and thought if one had any evidence that the ordeal of his long-dragged-out trial and the degrading nature of his punishment has destroyed Wilde's moral fibre. Then he might well have come under the hypnotic influence of the gaol chaplain, and for the time at least have become a luke-warm convert to formal Christianity. Yet, far from this being the case, striking proof is afforded by *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* that Wilde, if he ever wavered, soon regained his confidence in himself and boldly condemned the hideous cruelty of man's justice. In the poem, however, there is a magnificent indignation at the wrongs of another, with a plea, doubtless, that it is not right that one should be made to suffer the death-agony of a fellow creature, but with none of that self-pity which is the dominant note of *De Profundis*. If Oscar Wilde called thus upon his Lord from out of the depths, he cried in the voice of another man; there are passages, no doubt, in the book which remind one of the author of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, but there is much besides which can only cause one to reflect, with C 33, that "he who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one, must die."

**De Profundis, by Oscar Wilde. (Methuen.)*