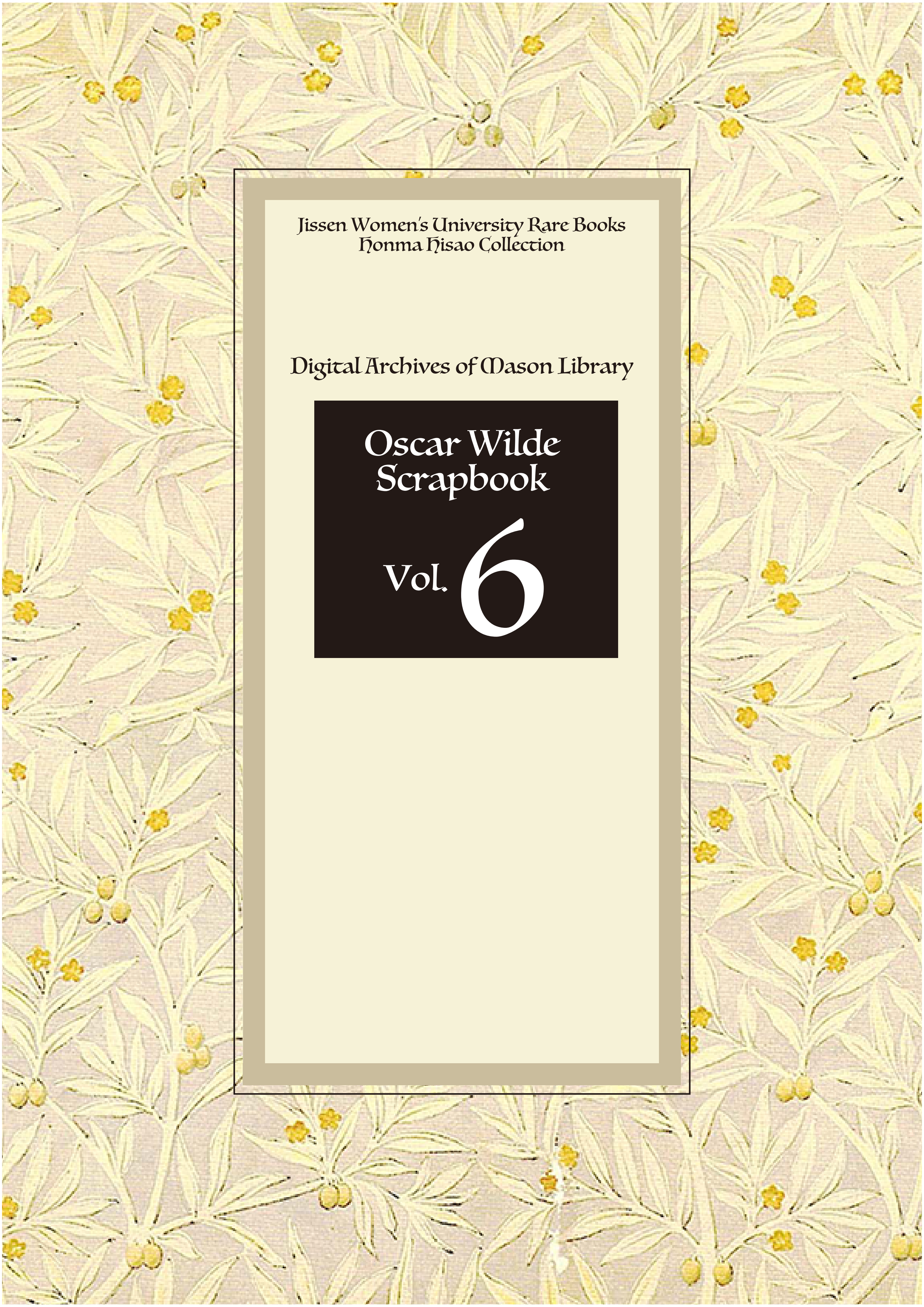

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Oscar Wilde Scrapbook

Vol. 6

Court Journal

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 Goal* 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.)

Yorkshire Daily Observer.

OSCAR WILDE'S APOLOGIA.

This is a pathetic book*, although not in the way that some of its appraisers have striven to maintain. Oscar Wilde must have been a fascinating personality in his primrose days, for he kept some devoted friends after he had provoked them to the uttermost. These prison communings of his start from the frank confession that he was justly condemned and righteously punished, of which fact his closest acquaintance must be presumed to have been aware. And yet they still proclaimed themselves his disciples, not only privately, but even n public. Such testimony to a faithful affection is admirable, but when they try to persuade us on the strength of this last act and deed that their friend was a hero at the end, those who read its pages without preconception can only sadly shake their heads. One of these devoted critics avers that here lies the palpitating human document of a man who, through sin and suffering, found his eyesight so purged that he looked into the heart of reality and testified simply of what he saw. No such thing. The most charitable verdict on the book would be to regard it as the literary exercise of an acute and restless brain to save itself from madness. In that aspect it is pathetic enough, but we think that most readers will at once detect in it a sadder note still, and say that this is the attempt of a soul smitten with incurable vanity to vindicate itself under circumstances of corrosive shame. We need not go so far as to affirm that no man who fully realised his case in such a plight would make it the subject of a lengthy and ornate essay. We may ascribe a good deal of the æsthetic manner of writing the essay to Mr. Wilde's lifelong cultivation of appearance; "mere expression," he declares, "is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life." What compels us to say that here, shut in upon himself, the actor is still treading the boards and listening for applause over the prison wall, is the very method and argument of his confessions. Virtually it comes to this. He was the choicest efflorescence of the age, the darling of the gods, and, having climbed Olympus and supped on nectar, there was nothing left for such a privileged mortal but to descend also to Tartarus, and thereafter to expound in his own refined manner a new "Divina Comedia" for the twentieth century. Lest we should be thought uncharitable, we must make a quotation from an early page, although it is not a pleasant one:—

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Yorkshire Daily Observer 62

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 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. 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. 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.

No moralist will attach very serious importance to the confessions of one who sets out from such a standpoint. It is not to be denied that Mr. Wilde utters some spiritual truths by the way, but it is for its passages of literary beauty, and not at all as an agonised cry out of the depths, that the book can alone be commended. The only incident in it which deserves to be valued in another coinage is a protest against the painful and wholly uncalled for exhibition of convicts in their motley livery:

Everything about my tragedy has been hideous, mean, repellent, lacking in style; our very dress makes us grotesque. We are the zanies of sorrow. We are clowns whose hearts are broken. We are specially designed to appeal to the sense of humour. 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 being 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 rain surrounded by a jeering mob.

Surely this is an injustice even to criminals, besides being highly inexpedient for the man in the street.

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* "De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. (Methuen & Co. 6s.)

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FEBRUARY 26 ,1905 .

SUNDAY TIMES .

THE WORLD OF BOOKS.

Mr. Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis."

"If," wrote Mr. Oscar Wilde during the last months of his incarceration, "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 the root." In one sense he was never permitted to gratify his wish, for that sombre and passionate poem of his, the "Ballad of Reading Gaol," though composed after the two years of his prison-martyrdom were ended, is plainly not the sort of art which he had in contemplation, and, save in this instance, his inspiration appears to have left him upon his release, mental collapse providing the truly piteous conclusion of his tragic career. But what he was not destined to accomplish when made free once more of the sunshine and the flowers and the glory of earth and sea, he had already completed while still in bonds. Not even the sordid monotony and humiliations of prison-life, though for a while they "turned" his "heart to stone," could destroy at once his wit, his grace of style, his ardour for self-expression, and within his narrow, dim-lit cell he fashioned—with what desperate travail may be imagined—a book wrung out of the very anguish of his soul, and therefore but too fittingly entitled by its editor, Mr. Robert Ross, "De Profundis," of which the least that can be said is that it is supremely beautiful—beautiful always in the rare felicity of its phrasing and the sincerity of its emotion, and often in the exaltation of its thought. The malice and sneers and scorn which hurt Oscar Wilde more than all his shame and punishment are dead long ago, and if they survived would be dumb before the gentle spirit of submissiveness which breathes through his posthumous and just published work (Methuen, 6s.). But, from the first, far more prevailing sentiments over his fate were compassion and regret—compassion over the ruin of a life so full of promise, regret for the loss of a dramatist who might have proved a second Sheridan for our stage. It is with such feelings that all right-minded readers will approach a volume containing his last recorded thoughts—these and a very natural curiosity. How, they will ask, did his imprisonment affect his pleasure-loving temperament, and did it really result in definite spiritual development?

To these questions it may be answered that the words most constantly employed in the first half of Mr. Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" are sorrow and humility. In his old days, he confesses, he had kept deliberately to the sunny side of life's garden and shunned the shadow and gloom which are the other half of existence. He had to learn that "sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and the test of all great art." On his own former conduct he passes no half-hearted condemnation:

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Sunday Times 64

> 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. 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 forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes a character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud on the housetop. I ceased to be lord over myself. . . . I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility.

A different Oscar Wilde, this, obviously from the decadent poet who wrote—

> Surely there was a time I might have trod
>   The sun-lit heights, and from life's dissonance
> Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God!
> Is that time dead? Lo! with a little rod
>   I did but touch the honey of romance—
>   And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

He is a man who is pathetically grateful to a friend who raised his hat to him in the prison corridor, who bears no resentment against the cruel crowd which mocked him for half an hour as he stood in convict dress on Clapham Junction platform and endured a veritable crucifixion of the spirit. He is quite assured that "love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world":

> I am convinced that if the world has indeed been built of sorrow, it has been built by the hands of love; because in no other way would the soul of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full stature of his perfection.

And then he adds a perfectly characteristic touch:

> Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul.

For the old Oscar Wilde was not extinct. His new-born humility could not eradicate that rather engaging vanity of his. He talks of himself as a "lord of language," which he certainly was, and as "a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of his age," as he certainly did not. Nor would the author of "Dorian Grey" allow himself to be accused of inconsistency; he still continues the paradoxical antinomianism, the non-moral neutrality of his "Intentions." Thus:

> 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. But to have continued the same life would have been wrong, because it would have been limiting.
>
> I need not tell you that reformations in morals are as meaningless and vulgar as Reformations in theology. But while to propose to be a better man is a piece of unscientific cant, to become a deeper man is the privilege of those who have suffered. And such I think I have become.
>
> While I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does, I see that there is something wrong in what one becomes.

But whether a pose or not, this attitude is absolutely sincere—it is all of a piece. Alike of his sins and of his punishment, Mr. Wilde asserts that "to regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development." Here, then, was to be his future task—to explore his new-found world of sorrow, to turn it to account in the ethical evolution of his character:

Sunday Times

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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 ropes shredded into oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins and finishes, the harsh orders that routine seems to necessitate, the dreadful dress that makes sorrow grotesque to look at, the silence, the solitude, the shame—each and all 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.

But it is curious how the self-consciousness of the artist is always intruding on these aspirations. It would be unfair to say that all the while the imprisoned man is thinking less of the beautiful life he means to lead than of the beautiful art which is to express that life; but certainly he can scarcely think of his life save as asserting itself in art. Even in these very confessions, worthy to stand beside those of Rousseau, we find that the mere reading of the four Gospels compels Oscar Wilde to set about inventing for himself a portrait of Christ. It is a portrait as fascinating as it is fantastic—a Christ who is the "precursor of the romantic movement in life," who is with the poets and was the first individualist in history, whose whole life was a poem and an idyll and a continual battle against the stupidity of the Philistines, whose morality was all sympathy, whose justice was all poetic justice, whose pardon was granted sinners for one beautiful moment in their lives—

> That is the charm about Christ, when all is said; he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once at least in life each man walks with Christ to Emmaus.

A paradox-monger, it will be seen, Oscar Wilde remained to the last, and yet, as the final sentence just quoted proves, a master of exquisite phrases and thoughts. An inveterate lover of beauty, but above all a lover of the beauty of language, who had all the actor's instinct for the appropriate speech of the moment, who even in this ultimate revelation of his soul must make his exit on what he thought the correct note of "a return to Nature." "Society," he remarks, in the concluding words of this book, "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.

And yet it was not in the arms of Nature that he died.

Sunday Times

> I have got to make everything that has happened to me good for me. The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes shredded into oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins and finishes, the harsh orders that routine seems to necessitate, the dreadful dress that makes sorrow grotesque to look at, the silence, the solitude, the shame—each and all 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.

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And yet it w[illegible] died.

REYNOLDS'S NEWSPAPER,

OSCAR WILDE'S PRISON CRY.

A MEMORABLE BOOK.

Reynolds's Newspaper was the only journal which had the courage and honesty to say a word for that brilliant and unhappy man Oscar Wilde, and the only journal in the Kingdom which was able to publish special information as to his career after leaving gaol. Other journals were too Christian-like to imitate Christ. Our readers will, therefore, turn with interest to the agonizing cry of despair in "DE PROFUNDIS," a little book written by Wilde while serving the last few months of his two years' confinement. The manuscript was confided to Mr. Robert Ross, one of the few men who did not abandon Wilde in his misfortune. It is now published by Messrs. Methuen and Co., price 5s. Herein we find the old magic of words, the haughty and embellished thought, the proud hope as to the future, and, through all, the wail of a soul lost in a self-hell, a man not big enough morally to take up the burden of life again with both hands. From what we published on previous occasions our readers are aware that Wilde went from prison to die in abject poverty in Paris, and that he now lies there in an almost unnoted grave. It is somewhat of a pity that these prison reflections were not published in the author's lifetime. They would have made the world—a world in no whit better than himself, taking it in the lump—look a little more kindlier on this disciple of the Greeks, ancients whose books are in the hands of every public schoolboy and University student.

"There are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell," he writes, "and is full of terror for me." "It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always twilight in one's heart."

> A week later, I am transferred here. Three more months go over, and my mother dies. 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 me a name they had made noble and honoured, not merely in literature, art, archæology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low by-word among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to foes that they might turn it into a synonym for folly. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record. My wife, always kind and gentle to me, rather than that I should hear the news from indifferent lips, travelled, ill as she was, all the way from Genoa to England to break to me herself the tidings of so irreparable, so irredeemable, a loss.

On November 13, 1895, he stood for half an hour in convict dress, and handcuffed, on the centre platform of Clapham Junction:—

Reynolds's Newspaper

REYNOLDS'S NEWSPAPER,

OSCAR WILDE'S PRISON CRY.

A MEMORABLE BOOK.

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The pity of it! The appalling tragedy of it all! And his hopes, too, were never to be fulfilled. Listen :—

> 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. I see new developments in art and life, each one of which is a fresh mode of perfection. . . . Sorrow, then, and all that it teaches one, is my new world.
>
> 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 the roots.
>
> I bore up against every thing 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 I 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.

And then the final note of resignation :—

> 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.

The man who can read these passages without emotion is not to be envied. Here is the soul of the most dazzling writer of his time laid on the dissecting-table for the consideration, or curiosity, of all. Well has he named his book "From the Deeps." We hear the low moan of everlasting pain in this twilighted existence; the expression of despair; the acknowledgment of defeat, the catastrophe, and doom.

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LLOYD'S WEEKLY NEWS.

OSCAR WILDE'S LAST BOOK.

"De Profundis," by Oscar Wilde.—London: Methuen and Co. (5s. net.)

"De Profundis" is the only work Oscar Wilde wrote when in prison. Many persons are under the impression that "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" was written during his incarceration. Mr. Robert Ross, who was Wilde's friend till death, to whom he gave the MS. of the present book, and who writes the introduction to it, says the ballad "was not planned or even composed until he had regained his liberty." The present volume is full of interest, as exhibiting Wilde's mental attitude in regard to his misdoings and their punishment. In a letter containing instructions with regard to "De Profundis" he says. "I don't defend my conduct. I explain it." In explanation he once again expresses his belief in Art and in Art only. He says:

> Neither religion, morality, nor reason can help me at all. Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws. But while I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does, I see that there is something wrong in what one becomes.

There is a distinct warp in a mind whose thoughts are such as these. This is shown still more in the following passage concerning Christ's attitude towards sin:—

> In a manner not yet understood of the world He regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful, Holy things and modes of perfection. It seems a very dangerous idea. It is—all great ideas are dangerous. That it was Christ's creed admits of no doubt.

Summed up, this book seems less a cry of sorrow from the depths than one against the restraint of law. Wilde believed that every man should be a law unto himself, and in this volume that belief is expressed to the full. Needless to say, it is a beautifully written book, and none can close it without a sigh of pity for the brilliant, but perverse, genius whose ruin called it forth.

Observer

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OBSERVER.

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De Profundis. By Oscar Wilde. (*Methuen.*)—Mr. Robert Ross contributes a brief preface to this book, in the course of which he says:—"I have only to record that it was written by my friend during the last months of his imprisonment, that it was the only work he wrote while in prison, and the last work in prose he ever wrote. (The 'Ballad of Reading Gaol' was not planned or even composed until he had regained his liberty)."

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Daily News.

FEBRUARY 27, 1905.

ON READING OSCAR WILDE'S "DE PROFUNDIS."

Out of the deep, out of the deep,
  With piteous moan,
The ruined soul and body weep
    Up to God's throne.

The price of sin, infamy's cost
    He came to know,
The utmost agony of the lost,
    Mad overthrow!

Now vanished down the silent stair
    Back to the deep;
Gone to eternal silence where
    The broken sleep.

Can any look himself within
    Without a groan?
Then let him that is without sin
    Cast the first stone!

S. C.

Hon Stephen Coleridge

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Morning Advertiser.

IN BOOKSELLERS' ROW.

A VOICE FROM THE TOMB.

Very seldom does such a book as the late Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" (Methuen, 5s.) make its appearance in the world. Human documents of its description are happily few and far between. When his plays, his poems, and his other works are dead, or only read by the curious, the cry of the heart which he penned from Reading gaol will be perused with engrossing interest. As the head of a select coterie he enjoyed a fashionable reputation in London society for some years, but it was not until he astonished the world with his talent as a playwright that he become known to the man in the street. His success as a dramatist was cut short by the events which consigned him to a living tomb and made his name a term of reproach to the general community. It was a terrible ending to a brilliant career, and these confessions, written during the last few months of his prison life, are a wonderful self revelation of the man and his peculiar temperament. The writing gives evidence of an unclouded intellect, with a perception of things strange and startling in its intensity and heart-searching analysis. The prose is faultless, and is and will continue to be a memorable example of the best qualities of the English language. Nearly every sentence is pregnant with meaning. Nearly every thought suggests the keenness of his reflective powers. The extraordinary thing is that he never accomplished anything after he quitted his gaol. And yet he hoped for much in that way.

> If I can produce only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its venom, cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by the roots. . . . 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. I see new developments in art and life, each one of which is a fresh mode of perfection.

But the surprising fact is there is no actual expression of profound regret for the offence which brought him to the depths. He writes:—"I don't defend my conduct. I explain it." The extraordinary self-assertion and egoism of the man is seen in the following:—

> 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. . . . 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 the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste 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 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. . . . 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.

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Morning Advertiser

How terrible to read! This vain, gifted creature, afire with self-consciousness; the hero of Belgravian drawing-rooms; the most calmly insolent man of his time, the *poseur* who was never satisfied unless he was the cynosure of all eyes, and who flaunted his personality before the world at large. With the picture of what he was, let us compare the picture of what he became:—

> Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even, the 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, no other food at all. I don't regret for a single moment having lived in pleasure for pleasure. 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 paths to the sound of flutes. I lived on honeycomb.

And then read this:—

> Everything about my tragedy has been hideous, mean, repellant, lacking in style; our very dress makes us grotesque. We are the zanies of sorrow. We are clowns whose hearts are broken. On November 13th, 1895, I was brought down here (Reading Gaol) 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 being given 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 rain, surrounded by a jeering mob.

Here is another graphic touch:—

> Some six weeks ago I was allowed by the doctor to have white bread to eat, instead of the coarse black or brown bread of ordinary prison fare. It is a great delicacy. It will sound strange that dry bread could possibly be a delicacy to any one. To me it is so much so that at the close of each meal I carefully eat whatever crumbs may be left on my tin plate, or have fallen on the rough towel that one uses as a cloth so as not to soil one's table.

We have chosen rather to dwell on these personal points than on the philosophy with which the book abounds. In many ways Oscar Wilde reminds us of those cultured Pagans of old, and he seems to consider himself in the same light. His thoughts lead him to indulge in a long homily on the personal attributes of Christ, whom he considers more in the light of a romantic poet than as the Divine founder of the Christian religion. But these are details which it would be futile to discuss, and which have only an abstract interest. What concerns us most is to read in these burning pages of a soul's confession the mental attitude of the most confirmed Sybarite of his time towards the world and the society which had banished him from their presence.

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MORNING LEADER.

A VOICE OUT OF DARKNESS.

OSCAR WILDE'S POSTHUMOUS APOLOGY.

By "John Oliver Hobbes."

If the present world doth go astray,
In you the cause is, be it sought in you.

If these lines, translated from Dante, were addressed by each man to himself (not to his neighbor) every morning and evening, we might hear of less brutality among the Philistines: we should not see the children of light fall so deeply and so often into the darkness. But most modern education is vigorously opposed to self-criticism in any form, and, just as lawyers warn a prisoner that every word he utters will be used against him, and that to plead guilty is to drive mercy from the court (mercy being reserved only for those who, being innocent, do not need it), so the person who attempts to be candid, either in his life or in his work, is regarded as the doomed conscience of all hypocrites. He is hunted down, not because he is an alien, but because he is only too familiar; not because he is misunderstood, but because he is only too comprehensible. He is detested, feared, spat upon, and punished, not for the strangeness of his crimes or for the newness of his ideas, but for the danger of his example and the eternity of his truths.

The Fallacy of Sensations.

Artists, whether virtuous or vicious, and prophets, whether false or inspired, are not persecuted for their art or for prophetic gifts; they are persecuted because they betray, by their work or by their warnings, a contempt for the terrified. And most people are secretly and perpetually terrified of something. The Scribes and the Pharisees of Jerusalem were terrified—and with cause, for the ruin came. The Philistines of the present day are terrified because a revolution is moving horribly, as a great shapeless monster, under their very feet. The Pharisees were not fools, and the Philistines are dreadfully intelligent. They shuddered at the destiny of Oscar Wilde, not because he was brilliant—for they applauded his wit; not because he was unfortunate—because they are not hard-hearted; but because he was an incarnate reproach to the national crimes in education, in social laws, in social customs,

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A VOICE OUT OF DARKNESS.

OSCAR WILDE'S POSTHUMOUS APOLOGY.

By "John Oliver Hobbes."

> If the present world doth go astray,
> In you the cause is, be it sought in you.

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and in social morality. In other words, his history ought to have been impossible—whether we regard the influences which surrounded him as an adolescent or the prison system which treated an acute, incurable perversity as a governable vice. Oscar Wilde was not sane; born with over-stimulated nerves and sympathies, his imagination intoxicated his judgment; when his imagination flagged, he had to call upon the arts; when his ideas failed, he had to seek experiences which wore away his mind without prolonging its dreams. He acted on that insidious and base modern doctrine which teaches that only by the accumulation of sensations can we hope to retain our æsthetic faculties. "Things," we are told, "must get more and more astonishing." They get, as a matter of fact, more and more gross.

A Triumph of the Philistines.

Wilde was almost a genius. He could almost create a world—almost believe in it—almost persuade others to believe in it. But he was never quite sure—the weakness of his will gave a weakness to all his conceptions. He moved uncertainly, as a child moves: he thought as a child thinks—without any conscious effort. He differed from a healthy child only in not wishing to grow up: he never did grow up, and, at the age when men are mature, he was merely abnormally precocious. To his best friends this was his charm. It gave fascination to his wit, grace to his literary style, irresponsibility to his paradoxes. When even, by chance, he made an observation which seemed to touch the pulse of life, it was thought that he uttered wisdom without knowing it. He admits himself that all his most serious remarks were to him but phrases. This childlikeness should be taken as the real cause of his faults, and, in the sorrowful volume before us, it should be accepted as an undying reproof to those who never pitied him, who classed him among murderers and felons, who saw no deeper lessons in his lamentable career than a lasting gibe at all lovers of what is called beauty, and all followers of what is called art. His ending was a triumph for the Philistines. He saw this, he speaks of it. "People point to Reading Gaol and say, 'That is where the artistic life leads a man.'" They said so for a short time, but the saying was not true enough to last. Those who were thoughtful said, "That is where modern civilisation, in spite of its culture and philanthropy, can take an afflicted soul."

Pain That Wears No Mask.

What is the striking quality in this extraordinary work? Is it pathos? Is it self-revelation? Is it despair? Is it penitence? Is it wisdom? Is it cynicism? Is it rage? It is sobbing—an exhausted sobbing, without anger and without fear and without hope. The sobbing of youth, tired and bewildered, observant but unreasoning. A youth loving the sweetness, but shunning the woes of Christ; youth, with enthusiasm for Baudelaire and the wish not to feel too much afraid of Isaiah.

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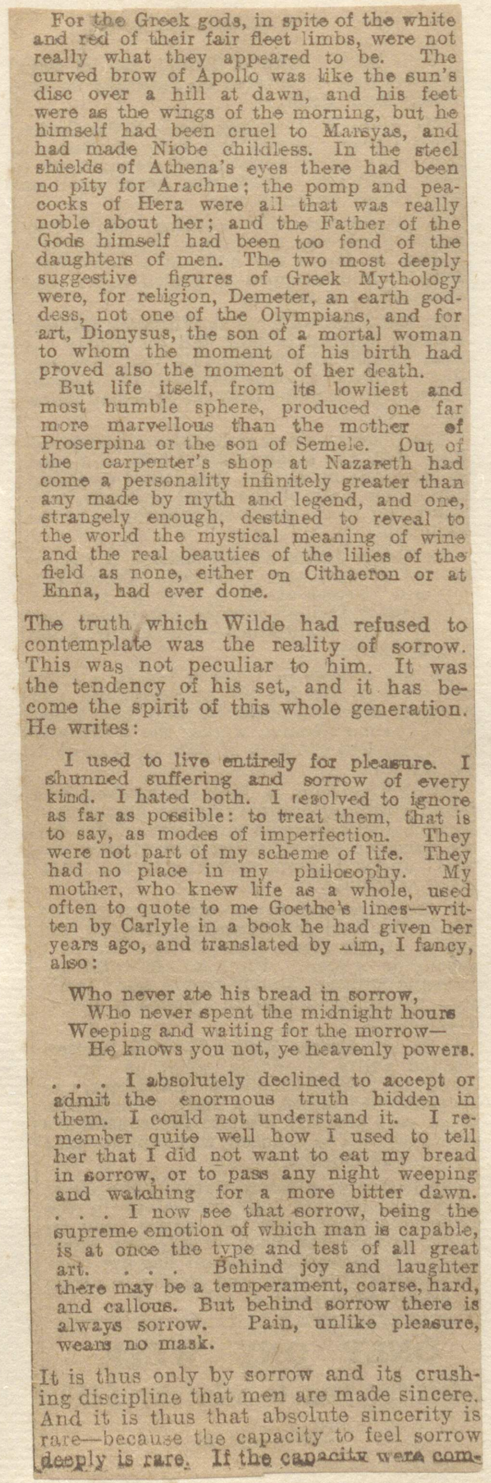

For the Greek gods, in spite of the white and red of their fair fleet limbs, were not really what they appeared to be. The curved brow of Apollo was like the sun's disc over a hill at dawn, and his feet were as the wings of the morning, but he himself had been cruel to Marsyas, and had made Niobe childless. In the steel shields of Athena's eyes there had been no pity for Arachne; the pomp and peacocks of Hera were all that was really noble about her; and the Father of the Gods himself had been too fond of the daughters of men. The two most deeply suggestive figures of Greek Mythology were, for religion, Demeter, an earth goddess, not one of the Olympians, and for art, Dionysus, the son of a mortal woman to whom the moment of his birth had proved also the moment of her death.

But life itself, from its lowliest and most humble sphere, produced one far more marvellous than the mother of Proserpina or the son of Semele. Out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth had come a personality infinitely greater than any made by myth and legend, and one, strangely enough, destined to reveal to the world the mystical meaning of wine and the real beauties of the lilies of the field as none, either on Cithaeron or at Enna, had ever done.

The truth which Wilde had refused to contemplate was the reality of sorrow. This was not peculiar to him. It was the tendency of his set, and it has become the spirit of this whole generation. He writes:

> I used to live entirely for pleasure. I shunned suffering and sorrow of every kind. I hated both. I resolved to ignore as far as possible: to treat them, that is to say, as modes of imperfection. They were not part of my scheme of life. They had no place in my philosophy. My mother, who knew life as a whole, used often to quote to me Goethe's lines—written by Carlyle in a book he had given her years ago, and translated by him, I fancy, also:
>
> Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
> Who never spent the midnight hours
> Weeping and waiting for the morrow—
> He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.
>
> . . . I absolutely declined to accept or admit the enormous truth hidden in them. I could not understand it. I remember quite well how I used to tell her that I did not want to eat my bread in sorrow, or to pass any night weeping and watching for a more bitter dawn. . . . I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art. . . . Behind joy and laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard, and callous. But behind sorrow there is always sorrow. Pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask.

It is thus only by sorrow and its crushing discipline that men are made sincere. And it is thus that absolute sincerity is rare—because the capacity to feel sorrow deeply is rare. If the capacity were com-

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