Jissen Women's University Rare Books
Honma Hisao Collection

Digital Archives of Mason Library

Oscar Wilde Scrapbook

Vol. 6

through a period during which he was filled with a great rage at the fate that had befallen him and with the world that had punished him, to a deep and hopeless melancholy, changing at the last to a saner, healthier and more cheerful view of his situation—to a desire to live and as far as possible atone for his wasted life of the past and to yet do some of the work of the world along the lines his artist's temperament told him his calling lay.

There is always the danger in giving disconnected passages of this kind that the full tendency of the current of the writer's mind may not be accurately presented, so I preface the subjoined quotation with the assertion that it seems to me no really unbiased person, no matter how much he may differ at times from the writer's conclusions, his theology, or his presentment of philosophic propositions, can for a moment doubt his absolute candour and sincerity:

> While I was in Wandsworth Prison I longed to die. It was my one desire. When, after two months in the infirmary, I was transferred here [Reading], and found myself growing gradually better in physical health, I was filled with rage. 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: to teach them that melancholy is the true secret of life: to maim them with an alien sorrow: to mar them with my own pain. Now I feel quite differently. I see it would be both ungrateful and unkind of me to pull so long a face that when my friends came to see me they would have to make their faces still longer in order to show their sympathy; or, if I desired to entertain them, to invite them to sit down silently to bitter herbs and funeral-baked meats. I must learn how to be cheerful and happy. . . . . And that, in the views I am here shaping for myself, I am quite right is shown to me by the fact that now for the first time since my imprisonment I have a real desire for life.

Elsewhere, in different parts of the book, the writer elaborates these varying phases of his mental life and the ultimate point of thought concerning himself to which he attained. For instance, in one place he says:

> I will not say that prison is the best thing that could have happened to me; for that phrase would savour of too great bitterness towards myself. I would sooner say, or hear it said of me, that I was so typical a child of my age, that in my perversity, and for that perversity's sake, I turned the good things of my life to evil, and the evil things of my life to good.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

What is said, however, by myself or by others, matters little. The important thing, the thing that lies before me, the thing that I have to do, if the brief remainder of my days is not to be maimed, marred, and incomplete, is to absorb into my nature all that has been done to me, to make it part of me, to accept it without complaint, fear, or reluctance. The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right.

A Human Document.

It is impossible within the limited space at disposal to touch upon all phases of this many-sided human document, to indicate the bitterness of the agony of body and soul endured by the condemned man when, as he phrases it, he stood in the pillory a condemned and broken man, or to follow him in his explanations as to the kind of consolation he derived from the life and teachings of Christ, and as to the nature of the work he regarded as lying before him. So I have concerned myself chiefly with the general effect upon the man's mind and his attitude towards life of his period of tribulation and self-communing.

Oscar Wilde was undoubtedly a genius. He was confident of it himself, and few will dispute the fact. That he wasted his opportunities and plunged into dissipations of the coarsest kind he has practically himself confessed. Whether or not he did truly realise his own soul in the end, as at the moment of penning this moving epistle he believed he did, it is impossible for any man to say. But one is impelled to hope for the best when one remembers that, just before once more emerging into the outer world that had been at once so kind and so cruel to him, he wrote these words:

> 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.
>
> 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.

When the reading of the book has been completed, one feels that one has now, if ever, had a brief glimpse into the workings of a human soul, and echoes of the agonies of that soul still ring in the ears as one recalls how little time was left after this writing for the realisation of the growing hopes therein expressed.

W. T. A. B.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 241

Birmingham Gazette and Express

What is said, however, by myself or by others, matters little. The important thing, the thing that lies before me, the thing that I have to do, if the brief remainder of my days is not to be maimed, marred, and incomplete, is to absorb into my nature all that has been done to me, to make it part of me, to accept it without complaint, fear, or reluctance. The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right.

A Human Document.

It is impossible within the limited space at disposal to touch upon all phases of this many-sided human document, to indicate the bitterness of the agony of body and soul endured by the condemned man when, as he phrases it, he stood in the pillory a condemned and broken man, or to follow him in his explanations as to the kind of consolation he derived from the life and teachings of Christ, and as to the nature of the work he regarded as lying before him. So I have concerned myself chiefly with the general effect upon the man's mind and his attitude towards life of his period of tribulation and self-communing.

Oscar Wilde was undoubtedly a genius. He was confident of it himself, and few will dispute the fact. That he wasted his opportunities and plunged into dissipations of the coarsest kind he has practically himself confessed. Whether or not he did truly realise his own soul in the end, as at the moment of penning this moving epistle he believed he did, it is impossible for any man to say. But one is impelled to hope for the best when one remembers that, just before once more emerging into the outer world that had been at once so kind and so cruel to him, he wrote these words:

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.

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.

When the reading of the book has been completed, one feels that one has now, if ever, had a brief glimpse into the workings of a human soul, and echoes of the agonies of that soul still ring in the ears as one recalls how little time was left after this writing for the realisation of the growing hopes therein expressed.

W. T. A. B.

2019-03-16Jissen Women's University Library

Edited by Frank Harris

"DE PROFUNDIS."

A POSTHUMOUS WORK BY OSCAR WILDE.

IN A PAINFUL PASSAGE in this interesting posthumous book (it takes the form of a letter to an unnamed friend), Oscar Wilde relates how, on November the 13th, 1895, he stood for half an hour on the platform of Clapham Junction, handcuffed and in convict dress, surrounded by an amused and jeering mob. "For a year after that was done to me," he writes, "I wept every day at the same hour and for the same space of time." That was before he had discovered or thought he had discovered, that his terrible experiences in prison, his degradation and shame were a part, and a necessary part, of his artistic life, a completion of his incomplete soul. After he had learnt humility in the bitterest school that "man's inhumanity to man" provides for unwilling scholars, after he had drained the cup of sorrow to the dregs, after his spirit was broken —he wrote this book in which he tried to persuade himself and others that he had learnt by suffering and despair what life and pleasure had never taught him.

If Oscar Wilde's spirit, returning to this world in a malicious mood, had wished to devise a pleasant and insinuating trap for some of his old enemies of the press, he could scarcely have hit on a better one than this book. I am convinced it was written in passionate sincerity at the time, and yet it represents a mere mood and an unimportant one of the man who wrote it, a mood too which does not even last through the 150 pages of the book. "The English are very fond of a man who admits he has been wrong," he makes one of his characters in "The Ideal Husband" say, and elsewhere in this book he compares the advantages of pedestals and pillories in their relation to the public's attitude towards himself. Well here he is

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

Motorist and Traveller

Edited by Frank Harris

"DE PROFUNDIS."

A POSTHUMOUS WORK BY OSCAR WILDE.

In a painful passage in this interesting posthumous book (it takes the form of a letter to an unnamed friend), Oscar Wilde relates how, on November the 13th, 1895, he stood for half an hour on the platform of Clapham Junction, handcuffed and in convict dress, surrounded by an amused and jeering mob. "For a year after that was done to me," he writes, "I wept every day at the same hour and for the same space of time." That was before he had discovered or thought he had discovered, that his terrible experiences in prison, his degradation and shame were a part, and a necessary part, of his artistic life, a completion of his incomplete soul. After he had learnt humility in the bitterest school that "man's inhumanity to man" provides for unwilling scholars, after he had drained the cup of sorrow to the dregs, after his spirit was broken —he wrote this book in which he tried to persuade himself and others that he had learnt by suffering and despair what life and pleasure had never taught him.

If Oscar Wilde's spirit, returning to this world in a malicious mood, had wished to devise a pleasant and insinuating trap for some of his old enemies of the press, he could scarcely have hit on a better one than this book. I am convinced it was written in passionate sincerity at the time, and yet it represents a mere mood and an unimportant one of the man who wrote it, a mood too which does not even last through the 150 pages of the book. "The English are very fond of a man who admits he has been wrong," he makes one of his characters in "The Ideal Husband" say, and elsewhere in this book he compares the advantages of pedestals and pillories in their relation to the public's attitude towards himself. Well here he is

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 244

in the pillory, and here also is Mr. Courtney in the "Daily Telegraph" getting quite fond of him for the very first time. Here is Oscar Wilde, "a genius," "incontestibly one of the greatest dramatists of modern times" as he is now graciously allowed to be, turning up unexpectedly with an admission that he was in the wrong, and telling us that his life and his art would have been incomplete without his imprisonment, that he has learnt humility and found a new mode of expression in suffering. He is "purged by grief," "chastened by suffering," and everything, in short, that he should be, and Mr. Courtney is touched and pleased. What Mr. Courtney and others have failed to realise, and what Wilde himself did realise very soon after he wrote this interesting but rather pathetically ineffective book, is that the mood which produced it was no other than the first symptom of that mental and physical disease generated by suffering and confinement which culminated in the death of its gifted and unfortunate author a few years later. As long as the spirit of revolt was left in Oscar Wilde, so long was left the fire of creative genius. When the spirit of revolt died, the flame began to subside, and continued to subside gradually with spasmodic flickers till its ultimate extinction. "I have got to make everything that has happened good for me." He writes, "The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard rope shredded into oakum till one's finger tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins, 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, alas! plank beds, loathsome food, menial offices, and oakum picking do not spiritualise the soul; at any rate, they did not spiritualise Oscar Wilde's soul. The only effect they had was to destroy his magnificent intellect, and even, as some passages in this book show to temporarily cloud his superb sense of humour. The return of freedom gave him back the sense of humour, and the wreck of his magnificent intellect served him so well to the end of his life that, although he had hopelessly lost the power of concentration necessary to the production of literary work, he remained to the day of his death the most brilliant and the most intellectual talker in Europe.

It must not be supposed, however, that this book is not a remarkable book and one which is not worth careful reading. There are fine prose passages in it, and occasional felicities of phrase which recall the Oscar Wilde of "The House of Pomegranates" and the "Prose-Poems," and

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 245

in the pillory, and here also is Mr. Courtney in the "Daily Telegraph" getting quite fond of him for the very first time. Here is Oscar Wilde, "a genius," "incontestibly one of the greatest dramatists of modern times" as he is now graciously allowed to be, turning up unexpectedly with an admission that he was in the wrong, and telling us that his life and his art would have been incomplete without his imprisonment, that he has learnt humility and found a new mode of expression in suffering. He is "purged by grief," "chastened by suffering," and everything, in short, that he should be, and Mr. Courtney is touched and pleased. What Mr. Courtney and others have failed to realise, and what Wilde himself did realise very soon after he wrote this interesting but rather pathetically ineffective book, is that the mood which produced it was no other than the first symptom of that mental and physical disease generated by suffering and confinement which culminated in the death of its gifted and unfortunate author a few years later. As long as the spirit of revolt was left in Oscar Wilde, so long was left the fire of creative genius. When the spirit of revolt died, the flame began to subside, and continued to subside gradually with spasmodic flickers till its ultimate extinction. "I have got to make everything that has happened good for me." He writes, "The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard rope shredded into oakum till one's finger tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins, 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, alas! plank beds, loathsome food, menial offices, and oakum picking do not spiritualise the soul; at any rate, they did not spiritualise Oscar Wilde's soul. The only effect they had was to destroy his magnificent intellect, and even, as some passages in this book show to temporarily cloud his superb sense of humour. The return of freedom gave him back the sense of humour, and the wreck of his magnificent intellect served him so well to the end of his life that, although he had hopelessly lost the power of concentration necessary to the production of literary work, he remained to the day of his death the most brilliant and the most intellectual talker in Europe.

It must not be supposed, however, that this book is not a remarkable book and one which is not worth careful reading. There are fine prose passages in it, and occasional felicities of phrase which recall the Oscar Wilde of "The House of Pomegranates" and the "Prose-Poems," and

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 246

here and there rather unexpectedly comes an epigram like this for example: "There were Christians before Christ. For that we should be grateful. The unfortunate thing is that there have been none since." True, he spoils the epigram by adding, "I make one exception, St. Francis of Assisi." A concession to the tyranny of facts and the relative importance of sincerity to style, which is most uncharacteristic of the "old Oscar." Nevertheless, the trace of the master hand is still visible, and the book contains much that is profound and subtle on the philosophy of Christ as conceived by this modern evangelist of the gospel of Life and Literature. One does not travel further than the 33rd page of the book before finding glaring and startling inconsistencies in the mental attitude of the writer towards his fate, for whereas on page 18 in a rather rhetorical passage he speaks of the "eternal disgrace" he had brought on the "noble and honoured name" bequeathed him by his father and mother, on page 33 "Reason" tells him "that the laws under which he was convicted are wrong and unjust laws, and the system under which he has suffered a wrong and unjust system." But this is the spirit of revolt not quite crushed. He says that if he had been released a year sooner, as in fact he very nearly was, he would have left his prison full of rage and bitterness, and without the treasure of his new-found "Humility." I am unregenerate enough to wish that he had brought his rage and bitterness with him out of prison. True, he would never have written this book if he had come out of prison a year sooner, but he would almost certainly have written several more incomparable comedies, and we who reverenced him as a great artist in words, and mourned his downfall as an irreparable blow to English Literature would have been spared the rather painful experience of reading the posthumous praise now at last so lavishly given to what certainly cannot rank within measurable distance of his best work.

A. D. Lord Alfred Douglas.

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

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 247

here and there rather unexpectedly comes an epigram like this for example: "There were Christians before Christ. For that we should be grateful. The unfortunate thing is that there have been none since." True, he spoils the epigram by adding, "I make one exception, St. Francis of Assisi." A concession to the tyranny of facts and the relative importance of sincerity to style, which is most uncharacteristic of the "old Oscar." Nevertheless, the trace of the master hand is still visible, and the book contains much that is profound and subtle on the philosophy of Christ as conceived by this modern evangelist of the gospel of Life and Literature. One does not travel further than the 33rd page of the book before finding glaring and startling inconsistencies in the mental attitude of the writer towards his fate, for whereas on page 18 in a rather rhetorical passage he speaks of the "eternal disgrace" he had brought on the "noble and honoured name" bequeathed him by his father and mother, on page 33 "Reason" tells him "that the laws under which he was convicted are wrong and unjust laws, and the system under which he has suffered a wrong and unjust system." But this is the spirit of revolt not quite crushed. He says that if he had been released a year sooner, as in fact he very nearly was, he would have left his prison full of rage and bitterness, and without the treasure of his new-found "Humility." I am unregenerate enough to wish that he had brought his rage and bitterness with him out of prison. True, he would never have written this book if he had come out of prison a year sooner, but he would almost certainly have written several more incomparable comedies, and we who reverenced him as a great artist in words, and mourned his downfall as an irreparable blow to English Literature would have been spared the rather painful experience of reading the posthumous praise now at last so lavishly given to what certainly cannot rank within measurable distance of his best work.

A. D. Lord Alfred Douglas.

"De Profundis," by OSCAR WILDE. (Methuen).

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 248

March 2

BAPTIST

BOOKS OF THE TERM.

Wherever two or three Oxford men are gathered together, conversation is sure to turn on one of three books recently published—Mr. A. C. Bradley's "Shakesperian Tragedy," Mr. Walter Raleigh's "Wordsworth," and Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis." I had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Bradley—upon whose shoulders the mantle of Matthew Arnold has fallen—deliver some part of his book as lectures on Macbeth. It would be idle to add to the volume of praise which has been already poured forth. But it is patent that Mr. Bradley's immortality, as the most lucid and searching interpreter that Shakespeare has ever had, is abundantly assured. Then Mr. Raleigh's "Wordsworth" is fascinating beyond words. And wh[illegible] [illegible]ha[illegible] we say of Oscar Wilde's cry "out of the depths"? The *Times* last Friday dismissed the book with the cheapest criticism which has appeared in the literary supplement for some time. Oscar Wilde was artificial from first to last--too artificial, forsooth, to tell deeply on any question affecting himself or another. But Oxford does not share this feeling about him who was one of the most brilliant amongst all her sons. The pity of it, that a vessel so magnificently and richly equipped should have made such an utter shipwreck!

* * *

Pall Mall Gazette

Pall Mall Gazette.

CRIME AND ITS PUNISHMENT.

To the EDITOR of the PALL MALL GAZETTE.

SIR,—If the statements contained in Mr. Oscar Wilde's posthumous work, "De Profundis," are true, as there seems to be no reason to doubt, they certainly demand the serious consideration of the Home Secretary. To those who are not past feeling, a gang of convicts, with their cropped hair and hideous dress, which would make the best man look abandoned, is a sorry sight indeed. But for a person of education and refinement to be compelled to form one of such a company must be a more terrible punishment even than the loss of liberty or the hardships of a prison life.

If, then, we are to have prisoners—handcuffed and in prison garb—exposed to public view and mocked in their misery by crowds of grinning Yahoos, we had better return to the more merciful methods of the good old times, when men and women were hanged for larceny.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

8, Gray's Inn-place, March 1. A. KIPLING COMMON.

94

Baptist

march 2

BAPTIST

BOOKS OF THE TERM.

Wherever two or three Oxford men are gathered together, conversation is sure to turn on one of three books recently published—Mr. A. C. Bradley's "Shakesperian Tragedy," Mr. Walter Raleigh's "Wordsworth," and Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis." I had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Bradley—upon whose shoulders the mantle of Matthew Arnold has fallen—deliver some part of his book as lectures on Macbeth. It would be idle to add to the volume of praise which has been already poured forth. But it is patent that Mr. Bradley's immortality, as the most lucid and searching interpreter that Shakespeare has ever had, is abundantly assured. Then Mr. Raleigh's "Wordsworth" is fascinating beyond words. And wh[illegible] [illegible]ha[illegible] we say of Oscar Wilde's cry "out of the depths"? The *Times* last Friday dismissed the book with the cheapest criticism which has appeared in the literary supplement for some time. Oscar Wilde was artificial from first to last--too artificial, forsooth, to tell deeply on any question affecting himself or another. But Oxford does not share this feeling about him who was one of the most brilliant amongst all her sons. The pity of it, that a vessel so magnificently and richly equipped sho[illegible] ma[illegible] [illegible] an utter shipwreck!

* * *

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 250

Pall Mall Gazette.

Pall Mall Gazette

CRIME AND ITS PUNISHMENT.

To the EDITOR of the PALL MALL GAZETTE.

SIR,—If the statements contained in Mr. Oscar Wilde's posthumous work, "De Profundis," are true, as there seems to be no reason to doubt, they certainly demand the serious consideration of the Home Secretary. To those who are not past feeling, a gang of convicts, with their cropped hair and hideous dress, which would make the best man look abandoned, is a sorry sight indeed. But for a person of education and refinement to be compelled to form one of such a company must be a more terrible punishment even than the loss of liberty or the hardships of a prison life.

If, then, we are to have prisoners—handcuffed and in prison garb—exposed to public view and mocked in their misery by crowds of grinning Yahoos, we had better return to the more merciful methods of the good old times, when men and women were hanged for larceny.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

8, Gray's [illegible], March 1. [illegible] COMMON.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

Truth,
MARCH 2, 1905.

The man who lost his shadow was a tragic picture, but more tragic is the picture of a man who, through life-long posing, has become but a shadow of a shade—the shadow of the current idea or ideal in his imagination. Such at least is my impression of the author of that subtly and exquisitely written record "of my mental development in prison," "De Profundis" [2]. Even the horrors of Wandsworth and Reading gaols—and to such an æsthete and hedonist as Oscar Wilde these horrors must have seemed Dantesque—could not strip the poseur to the skin of his real self, if, indeed, there was any real self left. He even transfigures the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount into a shadow of himself, claiming that "He regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful holy things and modes of perfection. That this was Christ's creed admits of no doubt. That it is the true creed I don't doubt myself." Now and then you come upon a little bit of reality in this profoundly pathetic book, and I cannot resist quoting for you one such passage, in which you can hear a genuine ring in this cry *de profundis*:—

> 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 13, 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 jeering mobs. For a year after that was done to me I wept every day for the same hour and for the same space of time. That is not such a tragic thing as possibly it sounds to you. To those who are in prison, tears are a part of every day's experience. A day in prison on which one does not weep is a day on which one's heart is hard, not a day on which one's heart is happy.

[2] "De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. (London: Methuen & Co. 5s. net.)

95

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 252

Truth,
MARCH 2, 1905.

The man who lost his shadow was a tragic picture, but more tragic is the picture of a man who, through life-long posing, has become but a shadow of a shade—the shadow of the current idea or ideal in his imagination. Such at least is my impression of the author of that subtly and exquisitely written record "of my mental development in prison," "De Profundis" (2). Even the horrors of Wandsworth and Reading gaols—and to such an æsthete and hedonist as Oscar Wilde these horrors must have seemed Dantesque—could not strip the poseur to the skin of his real self, if, indeed, there was any real self left. He even transfigures the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount into a shadow of himself, claiming that "He regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful holy things and modes of perfection. That this was Christ's creed admits of no doubt. That it is the true creed I don't doubt myself." Now and then you come upon a little bit of reality in this profoundly pathetic book, and I cannot resist quoting for you one such passage, in which you can hear a genuine ring in this cry *de profundis*:—

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 13, 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 jeering mobs. For a year after that was done to me I wept every day for the same hour and for the same space of time. That is not such a tragic thing as possibly it sounds to you. To those who are in prison, tears are a part of every day's experience. A day in prison on which one does not weep is a day on which one's heart is hard, not a day on which one's heart is happy.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

(2) "De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. (London: Methuen & Co. 5s. net.)

VANITY FAIR

"A Lord of Language."

By Max Beerbohm.

THERE was a coincidence last week in London. An exhibition of Whistler's paintings was opened, and a book* by Oscar Wilde was published; and all the critics are writing, and the gossips gossiping, very glibly, about the greatness of Whistler, and about the greatness of Oscar Wilde. Whistler during the 'seventies and 'eighties, and Oscar Wilde during the 'eighties and early 'nineties, cut very prominent figures in London; and both were by the critics and the gossips regarded merely as clever *farceurs*. Both, apart from their prominence, were doing serious work; but neither was taken at all seriously. Neither was thanked. Whistler got a farthing damages, Oscar Wilde two years' hard labour. None of the critics or gossips took exception to either verdict. Time has rolled on. Both men are dead. A subtly apocalyptic thing, for critics and gossips (especially in England), is the tomb; and praises are by envious humanity sung the more easily when there is no chance that they will gratify the subjects of them. And so, very glibly, very blandly, we are all magnifying the two men whom we so lately belittled. M. Rodin was brought over to open the Whistler exhibition. Perhaps the nation will now commission him to do a statue of Oscar Wilde. *Il ne manque que ça.*

Some of the critics, wishing to reconcile present enthusiasm with past indifference, or with past obloquy, have been suggesting that "De Profundis" is quite unlike any previous work of Oscar Wilde—a quite sudden and unrelated phenomenon. Oscar Wilde, according to them, was gloriously transformed by incarceration. Their theory comprises two fallacies. The first fallacy is that Oscar Wilde had been mainly remarkable for his wit. In point of fact, wit was the least important of his gifts. Primarily, he was a poet, with a life-long passion for beauty; and a philosopher, with a life-long passion for thought. His wit, and his humour (which was of an even finer quality than his wit), sprang from a very solid basis of seriousness, as all good wit or humour must. They were not essential to his genius; and, had they happened not to have been there at all, possibly his genius would, even while he himself was flourishing, have been recognised in England, where wisdom's passport is dulness, and gaiety of manner damns. The right way of depreciating Oscar Wilde would have been to say that, beautiful and profound though his ideas were, he never was a real person in contact with realities. He created his poetry, created his philosophy: neither sprang from his own soul, or from his own experience. His ideas were for the sake of ideas, his emotions for the sake of emotions. This, I take it, is just what Mr. Robert Ross means, when, in his admirable introduction to "De Profundis," he speaks of Oscar Wilde as a man of "highly intellectual and artificial nature." Herein, too, I find the key to an old mystery; why Oscar Wilde, so saliently original a man, was so much influenced by the work of other writers; and why he, than

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 254

"A Lord of Language."

By Max Beerbohm.

THERE was a coincidence last week in London. An exhibition of Whistler's paintings was opened, and a book* by Oscar Wilde was published; and all the critics are writing, and the gossips gossiping, very glibly, about the greatness of Whistler, and about the greatness of Oscar Wilde. Whistler during the 'seventies and 'eighties, and Oscar Wilde during the 'eighties and early 'nineties, cut very prominent figures in London; and both were by the critics and the gossips regarded merely as clever *farceurs.* Both, apart from their prominence, were doing serious work; but neither was taken at all seriously. Neither was thanked. Whistler got a farthing damages, Oscar Wilde two years' hard labour. None of the critics or gossips took exception to either verdict. Time has rolled on. Both men are dead. A subtly apocalyptic thing, for critics and gossips (especially in England), is the tomb; and praises are by envious humanity sung the more easily when there is no chance that they will gratify the subjects of them. And so, very glibly, very blandly, we are all magnifying the two men whom we so lately belittled. M. Rodin was brought over to open the Whistler exhibition. Perhaps the nation will now commission him to do a statue of Oscar Wilde. *Il ne manque que ça.*

Some of the critics, wishing to reconcile present enthusiasm with past indifference, or with past obloquy, have been suggesting that "De Profundis" is quite unlike any previous work of Oscar Wilde—a quite sudden and unrelated phenomenon. Oscar Wilde, according to them, was gloriously transformed by incarceration. Their theory comprises two fallacies. The first fallacy is that Oscar Wilde had been mainly remarkable for his wit. In point of fact, wit was the least important of his gifts. Primarily, he was a poet, with a life-long passion for beauty; and a philosopher, with a life-long passion for thought. His wit, and his humour (which was of an even finer quality than his wit), sprang from a very solid basis of seriousness, as all good wit or humour must. They were not essential to his genius; and, had they happened not to have been there at all, possibly his genius would, even while he himself was flourishing, have been recognised in England, where wisdom's passport is dulness, and gaiety of manner damns. The right way of depreciating Oscar Wilde would have been to say that, beautiful and profound though his ideas were, he never was a real person in contact with realities. He created his poetry, created his philosophy: neither sprang from his own soul, or from his own experience. His ideas were for the sake of ideas, his emotions for the sake of emotions. This, I take it, is just what Mr. Robert Ross means, when, in his admirable introduction to "De Profundis," he speaks of Oscar Wilde as a man of "highly intellectual and artificial nature." Herein, too, I find the key to an old mystery; why Oscar Wilde, so saliently original a man, was so much influenced by the work of other writers; and why he, than

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 255

who none was more fertile in invention, did sometimes stoop to plagiarism. If an idea was beautiful or profound, he cared not what it was, nor whether it was his or another's. In "De Profundis" was he, at length, expressing something that he really and truly felt? Is the book indeed a heart-cry? It is pronounced so by the aforesaid critics. There we have the second fallacy.

I think no discerning reader can but regard the book as essentially the artistic essay of an artist. Nothing seemed more likely than that Oscar Wilde, smitten down from his rosy-clouded pinnacle, and dragged through the mire, and cast among the flints, would be *diablement changé en route*. Yet lo! he was unchanged. He was still precisely himself. He was still playing with ideas, playing with emotions. "There is only one thing left for me now," he writes, "absolute humility." And about humility he writes many beautiful and true things. And, doubtless, while he wrote them, he had the sensation of humility. Humble he was not. Emotion was not seeking outlet: emotion came through its own expression. The artist spoke, and the man obeyed. The attitude was struck, and the heart pulsated to it. Perhaps a Cardinal Archbishop, when he kneels to wash the feet of the beggars, is filled with humility, and revels in the experience. Such was Oscar Wilde's humility. It was the luxurious complement of pride. In "De Profundis," for the most part, he is frankly proud—proud with the natural pride of a man so richly endowed as he, and arrogant with all his old peculiar arrogance. Even "from the depths" he condescended. Nor merely to mankind was he condescending. He enjoyed the greater luxury of condescending to himself. Sometimes the condescension was from his present self to his old self; sometimes from his old self to his present self. Referring to the death of his mother, "I, once a lord of language," he says, "have no words in which to express my anguish and my shame." Straightway, he proceeds to revel in the survival of that lordship, and refutes in a fine passage his own dramatic plea of impotence. "She and my father had bequeathed to me a name they had made noble and honoured. . . . I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low byword among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to fools that they might turn it into folly. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record." Yet pen wrote it, and paper recorded it, even so. And sorrow was turned to joy by the "lord of language."

"A lord of language." Certainly that was no idle boast. Fine as are the ideas and emotions in "De Profundis," it is the actual writing—the mastery of prose—that most delights me. Except Ruskin in his prime, no modern writer has achieved through prose the limpid and lyrical effects that were achieved by Oscar Wilde. One does not seem to be reading a written thing. The words sing. There is nothing of that formality, that hard and cunning precision, which marks so much of the prose that we admire, and rightly admire. The meaning is artificial, but the expression is always magically natural and beautiful. The simple words seem to grow together like wild flowers. In his use of rhyme and metre, Oscar Wilde was academic—never at all decadent, by the way, as one critic has suggested.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

who none was more fertile in invention, did sometimes stoop to plagiarism. If an idea was beautiful or profound, he cared not what it was, nor whether it was his or another's. In "De Profundis" was he, at length, expressing something that he really and truly felt? Is the book indeed a heart-cry? It is pronounced so by the aforesaid critics. There we have the second fallacy.

I think no discerning reader can but regard the book as essentially the artistic essay of an artist. Nothing seemed more likely than that Oscar Wilde, smitten down from his rosy-clouded pinnacle, and dragged through the mire, and cast among the flints, would be *diablement changé en route.* Yet lo! he was unchanged. He was still precisely himself. He was still playing with ideas, playing with emotions. "There is only one thing left for me now," he writes, "absolute humility." And about humility he writes many beautiful and true things. And, doubtless, while he wrote them, he had the sensation of humility. Humble he was not. Emotion was not seeking outlet: emotion came through its own expression. The artist spoke, and the man obeyed. The attitude was struck, and the heart pulsated to it. Perhaps a Cardinal Archbishop, when he kneels to wash the feet of the beggars, is filled with humility, and revels in the experience. Such was Oscar Wilde's humility. It was the luxurious complement of pride. In "De Profundis," for the most part, he is frankly proud—proud with the natural pride of a man so richly endowed as he, and arrogant with all his old peculiar arrogance. Even "from the depths" he condescended. Nor merely to mankind was he condescending. He enjoyed the greater luxury of condescending to himself. Sometimes the condescension was from his present self to his old self; sometimes from his old self to his present self. Referring to the death of his mother, "I, once a lord of language," he says, "have no words in which to express my anguish and my shame." Straightway, he proceeds to revel in the survival of that lordship, and refutes in a fine passage his own dramatic plea of impotence. "She and my father had bequeathed to me a name they had made noble and honoured. . . . I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low byword among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to fools that they might turn it into folly. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record." Yet pen wrote it, and paper recorded it, even so. And sorrow was turned to joy by the "lord of language."

"A lord of language." Certainly that was no idle boast. Fine as are the ideas and emotions in "De Profundis," it is the actual writing—the mastery of prose—that most delights me. Except Ruskin in his prime, no modern writer has achieved through prose the limpid and lyrical effects that were achieved by Oscar Wilde. One does not seem to be reading a written thing. The words sing. There is nothing of that formality, that hard and cunning precision, which marks so much of the prose that we admire, and rightly admire. The meaning is artificial, but the expression is always magically natural and beautiful. The simple words seem to grow together like wild flowers. In his use of rhyme and metre, Oscar Wilde was academic—never at all decadent, by the way, as one critic has suggested.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

But the prose of "Intentions," and of his plays, and of his fairy-stories, was perfect in its lively and unstudied grace. It is a joy to find in this last prose of his the old power, all unmarred by the physical and mental torments that he had suffered.

Oscar Wilde was immutable. The fineness of the book as a personal document is in the revelation of a character so strong that no force of circumstance could change it, or even modify it. In prison Oscar Wilde was still himself—still with the same artistry in words, still with the same detachment from life. We see him here as the spectator of his own tragedy. His tragedy was great. It is one of the tragedies that will live always in romantic history. And the protagonist had an artist's joy in it. Be sure that in the dock of the Old Bailey, in his cell at Reading, on "the centre platform of Clapham Junction," where he stood "in convict dress, and handcuffed, for the world to look at," even while he suffered he was consoled by the realisation of his sufferings and of the magnitude of his tragedy. Looking joyously forward to his release, "I hope," he says, "to be able to recreate my creative faculty." It is a grim loss to our literature that the creative faculty, which prison-life had not yet extinguished in him, did not long survive his liberation. But, broken as he was thereafter, and powerless, and aimless, the invincible artist in him must have had pleasure in contemplation of himself draining the last bitter dregs of the cup that Fate had thrust on him.

* *De Profundis.* By Oscar Wilde. Methuen. 5s.

Vanity Fair

But the prose of "Intentions," and of his plays, and of his fairy-stories, was perfect in its lively and unstudied grace. It is a joy to find in this last prose of his the old power, all unmarred by the physical and mental torments that he had suffered.

Oscar Wilde was immutable. The fineness of the book as a personal document is in the revelation of a character so strong that no force of circumstance could change it, or even modify it. In prison Oscar Wilde was still himself—still with the same artistry in words, still with the same detachment from life. We see him here as the spectator of his own tragedy. His tragedy was great. It is one of the tragedies that will live always in romantic history. And the protagonist had an artist's joy in it. Be sure that in the dock of the Old Bailey, in his cell at Reading, on "the centre platform of Clapham Junction," where he stood "in convict dress, and handcuffed, for the world to look at," even while he suffered he was consoled by the realisation of his sufferings and of the magnitude of his tragedy. Looking joyously forward to his release, "I hope," he says, "to be able to recreate my creative faculty." It is a grim loss to our literature that the creative faculty, which prison-life had not yet extinguished in him, did not long survive his liberation. But, broken as he was thereafter, and powerless, and aimless, the invincible artist in him must have had pleasure in contemplation of himself draining the last bitter dregs of the cup that Fate had thrust on him.

De Profundis. By Oscar Wilde. Methuen. 5s.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 259

MARCH 2.

East Anglian Daily Times.

I have in my hands for review the late Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis," written during the last months of his confinement in Reading Gaol. It is the only work written by the apostle of æstheticism in prison, and the last work in prose he ever wrote. Those who remember the pitiful tragedy which made an end of what might have been a brilliant career can best appreciate this book.

It is well named. It is indeed a cry "from the depths." When the news was brought to Wilde in gaol that his mother was dead it quite unnerved him. "She and my father," he writes, "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. I had disgraced that name eternally, I had made it a low byword among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record."

Surely that is "De Profundis." The lesson of Wilde's disgrace is written here in letters of blood. This man had great gifts. I will not say that he was a genius. But at least he was highly intellectual, and he was a witty and delightful writer. Yet these gifts of intellect and expression were all thrown away because he was wanting in the moral sense. Even in this book he boasts of it. "Metaphysics," he says, "had but little real interest for me, and morality absolutely none." Well, then, it must be Reading Gaol and social ostracism!

MARCH 11

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY.

What is the most terrible tragedy that can befall a human soul? Each man, I suppose, will answer the question differently according to the quality of his imagination, and the habit of his mind. The unimaginative person looks for the highest expression of tragedy in external things—loss of fortune or position, physical suffering, starvation, or the like. Others, crushed for a time by death or treachery, think that there can be no sorrow like to theirs, and refuse to love or trust again. These are nearer the truth, without quite attaining to it. Death cannot be the greatest of human ills, for it is powerless to break, or even disturb, any perfect relationship; and if it appear that even worse than death is broken trust, or love betrayed, the survivor may at least feel that it is worth while to have been betrayed, so long as he has learnt how to forgive. The supreme tragedy comes, one must suppose, at that terrible moment of awakening when a man understands that he has deliberately betrayed himself, and wantonly lived below his best. Failure is honourable, provided that one can say that he has done his best;

East Anglian Daily Times

MARCH 2,

East Anglian Daily Times.

I have in my hands for review the late Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis," written during the last months of his confinement in Reading Gaol. It is the only work written by the apostle of æstheticism in prison, and the last work in prose he ever wrote. Those who remember the pitiful tragedy which made an end of what might have been a brilliant career can best appreciate this book.

It is well named. It is indeed a cry "from the depths." When the news was brought to Wilde in gaol that his mother was dead it quite unnerved him. "She and my father," he writes, "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. I had disgraced that name eternally, I had made it a low byword among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record."

Surely that is "De Profundis." The lesson of Wilde's disgrace is written here in letters of blood. This man had great gifts. I will not say that he was a genius. But at least he was highly intellectual, and he was a witty and delightful writer. Yet these gifts of intellect and expression were all thrown away because he was wanting in the moral sense. Even in this book he boasts of it. "Metaphysics," he says, "had but little real interest for me, and morality absolutely none." Well, then, it must be Reading Gaol and social ostracism!

MARCH 11

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY.

What is the most terrible tragedy that can befall a human soul? Each man, I suppose, will answer the question differently according to the quality of his imagination, and the habit of his mind. The unimaginative person looks for the highest expression of tragedy in external things—loss of fortune or position, physical suffering, starvation, or the like. Others, crushed for a time by death or treachery, think that there can be no sorrow like to theirs, and refuse to love or trust again. These are nearer the truth, without quite attaining to it. Death cannot be the greatest of human ills, for it is powerless to break, or even disturb, any perfect relationship; and if it appear that even worse than death is broken trust, or love betrayed, the survivor may at least feel that it is worth while to have been betrayed, so long as he has learnt how to forgive. The supreme tragedy comes, one must suppose, at that terrible moment of awakening when a man understands that he has deliberately betrayed himself, and wantonly lived below his [illegible] failure [illegible] that one can say that he has done his best;

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

and Death himself is but the wise and very tender alchemist, who has the secret which transmutes the common things of life into imperishable gold. But to know that one has, in broad day-light, and when the sign-boards were quite legible, chosen the wrong road; to be suddenly made aware that in art or in life one has followed a false god, knowing its falseness; this, surely, is the most terrible knowledge that a man can attain. "Video meliora, proboque; Deteriora sequor," said Ovid; and St. Paul himself made the same confession when he said, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." The Latin poet and the apostle would have subscribed to the saying of Swinburne's lover:—

> "At the door of life, at the gate of breath,
> There are worse things waiting for men
> than death."

I offer no apology for the seriousness of these initial reflections, to which I have been led by reading "De Profundis," the only work which, it is said, was written by the late Oscar Wilde during his imprisonment. The book has now been published by Messrs. Methuen, with a short introduction by Mr. Robert Ross, who explains, by the way, that the "Ballad of Reading Gaol" was neither planned nor written—"not planned or even composed," says Mr. Ross rather quaintly—until the tragic outcast had regained his liberty. "De Profundis" was written during the last months of his imprisonment, and is, if not an "apologia," a remarkable record of the emotions experienced by a man of the highest culture and the keenest perceptiveness who finds himself an outcast from society, a pariah of the world. It is a letter, an intimate apocalypse of self, penned by one who has been flung down from the lofty pedestal into the gutter, and is endeavouring to explain, to the few friends who have the courage to stand by him in his abasement, the causes that have contributed to his downfall, and to indicate the path by which he hopes to climb back to self-respect. Perhaps the greatest difficulty to be encountered by those readers who knew something of the writer's peculiarly exotic and artificial temperament is that of discriminating between the passages which are purely rhetorical, the outcome of his inveterate love of paradox and epigram, and those which are a genuine revelation of a finely-tempered mind which has at last realised its own possibilities. In the days of his fame, it was difficult enough, in listening to his conversation, to separate the wheat from the chaff; it is still more difficult, in reading "De Profundis," to feel quite sure of the sincerity of any particular passage.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

East Anglian Daily Times

and Death himself is but the wise and very tender alchemist, who has the secret which transmutes the common things of life into imperishable gold. But to know that one has, in broad day-light, and when the sign-boards were quite legible, chosen the wrong road; to be suddenly made aware that in art or in life one has followed a false god, knowing its falseness; this, surely, is the most terrible knowledge that a man can attain. "Video meliora, proboque; Deteriora sequor," said Ovid; and St. Paul himself made the same confession when he said, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." The Latin poet and the apostle would have subscribed to the saying of Swinburne's lover:—

> "At the door of life, at the gate of breath,
> There are worse things waiting for men
> than death."

I offer no apology for the seriousness of these initial reflections, to which I have been led by reading "De Profundis," the only work which, it is said, was written by the late Oscar Wilde during his imprisonment. The book has now been published by Messrs. Methuen, with a short introduction by Mr. Robert Ross, who explains, by the way, that the "Ballad of Reading Gaol" was neither planned nor written—"not planned or even composed," says Mr. Ross rather quaintly—until the tragic outcast had regained his liberty. "De Profundis" was written during the last months of his imprisonment, and is, if not an "apologia," a remarkable record of the emotions experienced by a man of the highest culture and the keenest perceptiveness who finds himself an outcast from society, a pariah of the world. It is a letter, an intimate apocalypse of self, penned by one who has been flung down from the lofty pedestal into the gutter, and is endeavouring to explain, to the few friends who have the courage to stand by him in his abasement, the causes that have contributed to his downfall, and to indicate the path by which he hopes to climb back to self-respect. Perhaps the greatest difficulty to be encountered by those readers who knew something of the writer's peculiarly exotic and artificial temperament is that of discriminating between the passages which are purely rhetorical, the outcome of his inveterate love of paradox and epigram, and those which are a genuine revelation of a finely-tempered mind which has at last realised its own possibilities. In the days of his fame, it was difficult enough, in listening to his conversation, to separate the wheat from the chaff; it is still more difficult, in reading "De Profundis," to feel quite sure of the sincerity of any particular passage.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 263

He loved to pose, even when the attitude assumed was undignified; he loved to shock the Philistines—who, after all, compose the majority of the human race. But, for my own part, remembering his astonishing brilliance, his intellectual mobility, his comprehensive knowledge of all that the greatest men have said or written, like to believe that beneath all his apparent charlatanry there lay a noble mind, and that this letter represents his real aspirations towards a higher life. In writing to Mr. Ross concerning the publication of this document, he said:—

> "From one point of view, I know that on the day of my release I shall be merely passing from one prison into another, and there are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell, and as full of terror for me. Still 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. Of course, I need not remind you how fluid a thing thought is with me—with us all—and of what an evanescent substance are our emotions made. Still, I do see a sort of possible good towards which, through art, I may progress."

I find no great difficulty, then, in accepting "De Profundis" as, on the whole, a genuine document, an authentic record of a brilliant mind broken by suffering, and chastened by such punishment as few hardened criminals endure without further induration. In the lowest depths, Oscar Wilde appears to have found the light for which he had not looked before.

> "I bore up against everything with some subbornness 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 had still my children left. Suddenly they were taken away from me by the law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, 'The body of a child is as the body of the Lord; I am not worthy of either.' That moment seemed to save me. I saw then that the only thing for me to do 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."

It will, I have no doubt, be a little startling, and even shocking, to people of narrow minds, to find how often the name of Christ appears on the pages of this book. Such people may well be asked, what name should be oftener on the lips of a man who fell so low? It is true enough that Wilde approached Christianity from a purely æsthetic point of view.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

He loved to pose, even when the attitude assumed was undignified; he loved to shock the Philistines—who, after all, compose the majority of the human race. But, for my own part, remembering his astonishing brilliance, his intellectual mobility, his comprehensive knowledge of all that the greatest men have said or written, like to believe that beneath all his apparent charlatanry there lay a noble mind, and that this letter represents his real aspirations towards a higher life. In writing to Mr. Ross concerning the publication of this document, he said:—

> "From one point of view, I know that on the day of my release I shall be merely passing from one prison into another, and there are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell, and as full of terror for me. Still 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. Of course, I need not remind you how fluid a thing thought is with me—with us all—and of what an evanescent substance are our emotions made. Still, I do see a sort of possible good towards which, through art, I may progress."

I find no great difficulty, then, in accepting "De Profundis" as, on the whole, a genuine document, an authentic record of a brilliant mind broken by suffering, and chastened by such punishment as few hardened criminals endure without further induration. In the lowest depths, Oscar Wilde appears to have found the light for which he had not looked before.

> "I bore up against everything with some subbornness 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 had still my children left. Suddenly they were taken away from me by the law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, 'The body of a child is as the body of the Lord; I am not worthy of either.' That moment seemed to save me. I saw then that the only thing for me to do 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."

It will, I have no doubt, be a little startling, and even shocking, to people of narrow minds, to find how often the name of Christ appears on the pages of this book. Such people may well be asked, what name should be oftener on the lips of a man who fell so low? It is true enough that Wilde approached Christianity from a purely æsthetic point of view.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 265

East Anglian Daily Times102

"There is nothing," he says, "that either Plato or Christ has said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of Art, and there find its complete fulfilment." Perhaps, in the last analysis, we may find that the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty are not two things, but one. Certainly a man of so peculiar a temperament as Wilde's could have approached the inmost shrine by no other way. He is here, naturally, at no pains to conceal his rejection of the religion of the phrase-makers; his attitude towards the genesis of Christianity resembles that of Emerson more closely than any other. He sees in Christ humanity profected upwards to divinity, rather than the divine brought down to the human. The first supreme individualist—so Christ is described by him; for "he saw that love was the first secret of the world for which the wise men had been looking, and that it was only through love that one could approach either the heart of the leper or the feet of God." Again: "To live for others as a definite self-conscious aim was not his creed when he says, 'Forgive your enemies,' it is not for the sake of the enemy, but for one's own sake that he says so, and because love is more beautiful than hate. In his own entreaty to the young man, 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor,' it is not of the state of the poor that he is thinking, but of the soul of the young man, the soul that wealth was marring." To fulfil one's highest possibilities, to enrich one's faculties of love and sympathy, to reach the fullest self-expression—this it is, in Wilde's view as in that of many others, to understand the true evangel, which has been so commonly distorted to mean a mere escape from punishment and entry into some material heaven. Later in the book there is a very significant passage which seems worth quoting at length, not because it is likely to meet with general acceptance, but because it is peculiarly illustrative of the writer's attitude:—

> To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not Christ's aim. He would have thought little of the Prisoners' Aid Society and other modern movements of the kind. The conversion of a publican into a Pharisee would not have seemed to him a great achievement. But 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. . . Of course, the sinner must repent. But why? Simply because otherwise he would be unable to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of initiation. More than that, it is the means by which one alters one's past. The Greeks thought that impossible. They often say in their Gnomic aphorisms, "Even the Gods cannot alter the past." Christ showed that the

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library

"There is nothing," he says, "that either Plato or Christ has said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of Art, and there find its complete fulfilment." Perhaps, in the last analysis, we may find that the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty are not two things, but one. Certainly a man of so peculiar a temperament as Wilde's could have approached the inmost shrine by no other way. He is here, naturally, at no pains to conceal his rejection of the religion of the phrase-makers; his attitude towards the genesis of Christianity resembles that of Emerson more closely than any other. He sees in Christ humanity profected upwards to divinity, rather than the divine brought down to the human. The first supreme individualist—so Christ is described by him; for "he saw that love was the first secret of the world for which the wise men had been looking, and that it was only through love that one could approach either the heart of the leper or the feet of God." Again: "To live for others as a definite self-conscious aim was not his creed when he says, 'Forgive your enemies,' it is not for the sake of the enemy, but for one's own sake that he says so, and because love is more beautiful than hate. In his own entreaty to the young man, 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor,' it is not of the state of the poor that he is thinking, but of the soul of the young man, the soul that wealth was marring." To fulfil one's highest possibilities, to enrich one's faculties of love and sympathy, to reach the fullest self-expression—this it is, in Wilde's view as in that of many others, to understand the true evangel, which has been so commonly distorted to mean a mere escape from punishment and entry into some material heaven. Later in the book there is a very significant passage which seems worth quoting at length, not because it is likely to meet with general acceptance, but because it is peculiarly illustrative of the writer's attitude:—

> To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not Christ's aim. He would have thought little of the Prisoners' Aid Society and other modern movements of the kind. The conversion of a publican into a Pharisee would not have seemed to him a great achievement. But 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. . . Of course, the sinner must repent. But why? Simply because otherwise he would be unable to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of initiation. More than that, it is the means by which one alters one's past. The Greeks thought that impossible. They often say in their Gnomic aphorisms, [illegible] alter the past." Christ showed that the

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 267

commonest sinner could do it, that it was the one thing he could do. Christ, had he been asked, would have said—I feel quite certain about it—that the moment the prodigal son fell on his knees and wept, he made his having wasted his substance with harlots, his swine-herding and hungering for the husks they ate, beautiful and holy moulded in his life. It is difficult for most people to grasp the idea. I dare say one has to go to prison to understand it. If so it may be worth while going to prison.

Of the causes which led to Oscar Wilde's downfall I do not propose to write at length. It is enough to note that he makes frank confession of the selfishness and the perversity of his early years; the rest may surely be buried with him—at least by those who profess the creed towards which in his misery and degradation he seems to have been tending. No others, it seems to me, have the right to sit in judgment on their fellows. The motives that led a man into even the most squalid sin are too involved with the threads of human destiny—threads that may, as I like to believe, "lead through darkness up to God"—to be disentangled by any finite intelligence. This, at least, is clear to me: that Oscar Wilde, the most brilliant and gifted man of his generation, having fallen into utter darkness and disgrace, found in that lowest pit some place for repentance, and formed for his future the desire of some lofty achievement and atonement. And the supreme tragedy of his life may well seem to reside in the fact that so little space was allotted him for the fulfilment of his high design. I well remember seeing him in Paris not long before his death, when he was but a wreck of his old brilliant self, and the shadows of the dark valley were already about his feet. But which of us shall dare to say that the accomplishment of his splendid possibilities was ultimately denied, though deferred from this life to some other at which we can scarcely guess? One dominant impression remains with me after reading this poignant and, in many ways, strangely beautiful book: that he who has to climb the steep hill of repentance may reach the top with stronger muscles and clearer vision than he who, through lack of imagination and courage, has kept to the lower level of a facile and dully acquiescent virtue. It was not, surely, in irony that Christ said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

LOUNGER.

* "De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. London: Methuen.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 268

East Anglian Daily Times

commonest sinner could do it, that it was the one thing he could do. Christ, had he been asked, would have said—I feel quite certain about it—that the moment the prodigal son fell on his knees and wept, he made his having wasted his substance with harlots, his swine-herding and hungering for the husks they ate, beautiful and holy moulded in his life. It is difficult for most people to grasp the idea. I dare say one has to go to prison to understand it. If so it may be worth while going to prison.

Of the causes which led to Oscar Wilde's downfall I do not propose to write at length. It is enough to note that he makes frank confession of the selfishness and the perversity of his early years; the rest may surely be buried with him—at least by those who profess the creed towards which in his misery and degradation he seems to have been tending. No others, it seems to me, have the right to sit in judgment on their fellows. The motives that led a man into even the most squalid sin are too involved with the threads of human destiny—threads that may, as I like to believe, "lead through darkness up to God"—to be disentangled by any finite intelligence. This, at least, is clear to me: that Oscar Wilde, the most brilliant and gifted man of his generation, having fallen into utter darkness and disgrace, found in that lowest pit some place for repentance, and formed for his future the desire of some lofty achievement and atonement. And the supreme tragedy of his life may well seem to reside in the fact that so little space was allotted him for the fulfilment of his high design. I well remember seeing him in Paris not long before his death, when he was but a wreck of his old brilliant self, and the shadows of the dark valley were already about his feet. But which of us shall dare to say that the accomplishment of his splendid possibilities was ultimately denied, though deferred from this life to some other at which we can scarcely guess? One dominant impression remains with me after reading this poignant and, in many ways, strangely beautiful book: that he who has to climb the steep hill of repentance may reach the top with stronger muscles and clearer vision than he who, through lack of imagination and courage, has kept to the lower level of a facile and dully acquiescent virtue. It was not, surely, in irony that Christ said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

LOUNGER.

* "De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. London: Methuen.

2019-03-16 Jissen Women's University Library 269