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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. **7**

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The great question before the reader in such a book as this is its sincerity. Throughout the book one reads promise of regeneration when the prison days should be over, and in reading these there is the tragic story of the writer's last years which rises up at least to show how futile were such hopes. Yet artist as he was, with all the artist's regard for mere expression as the supreme and only mode of life, he was perhaps fully satisfied to have written down such passages as these. Speaking of his release from prison, he says :

"Society as we have constituted it will have no place for me, has none to offer ; but nature, whose sweet rains fall on just and unjust 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."

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THE BOOKMAN.

Wholesale Reports of the Bookselling Trade.

(1) ENGLAND.

FEBRUARY 20TH TO MARCH 20TH, 1905.

"De Profundis," a posthumous volume from the pen of that gifted but wayward genius, Oscar Wilde, has attracted, both in the press and elsewhere, a considerable amount of attention, and the sales justify its being classed as probably the leading item of the month.

The following is a list of the books which have been most in demand throughout the past month:—

De Profundis. By Oscar Wilde. 5s. net. (Methuen.)

The following is our list of best selling books:—

Miscellaneous.

The Truth about the Czar. By C. Joubert. 7s. 6d. (Nash.)

Russia as it Really is. By C. Joubert. 7s. 6d. (Nash.)

Three of Them. By Maxim Gorky. 1s. net. (Unwin.)

When it was Dark. By Guy Thorne. 1s. (Greening.)

De Profundis. By Oscar Wilde 5s. net. (Methuen.)

New Books of the Month.

FEBRUARY 10TH TO MARCH 10TH.

HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY, AND TRAVEL.

WILDE, OSCAR.—De Profundis, 5s. net (Methuen)

A BOOK OF PENITENCE.*

BY WILLIAM BARRY.

THERE will be those who feel that "De Profundis" ought never to have been written; and, for my part, I shall not agree with them. Others will say that it was not for the public, and should have been kept among friends as a memorial, very sad though touched with beautiful colours; and these, I think, might be justified. But on the ways of a crowd which reads and passes, the leaves come fluttering down. They are caught up, wondered at, turned in many lights. Forgotten they will not be until, at least, the generation which knew Oscar Wilde has gone into the unknown where he abides.

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It is literature, if not great (which another age will determine) surely pathetic, in ways given to few that have expressed their sorrow and shame before the world. Severe critics have taken offence at moments when the attitudinising of the decadent comes back; but how should it not, in one so little trained to the life he was feeling after—the *Vita Nuova*, he calls it rightly—while his old self was on its deathbed? He could not fail for want of striking, paradoxical, often exquisite phrases; but in religion he was a novice. Always the artist in him had an eye upon form; as soon as he found permission to write in his cell at Reading, the man of letters dominated the convict. And in a situation so dreadful, as the wings of genius strove to lift themselves from the mire, we know not which is more piercingly impressive, the thing of dust or the “angelical” child of air, rising toward a new dawn.

As regards the unhappy prisoner, how far he changed, what were his doings afterwards in the brief season of liberty, and whether he might have been helped otherwise than it came to pass, much could be said, but not here. For in literature books have a value, irrespective of their author's personal fate or private qualities. Many readers will never learn more about Oscar Wilde than he tells them in these pages wet with tears, humble, proud, confiding, but after the manner of outcasts and the excommunicate likewise defiant. For what worse could be done to him than he had undergone? By a terrible path, lonely as among tombs, he was driven from the garden of Epicurus into the wilderness; and there to his amazement he saw far off the shining heights of a Paradise hitherto unimagined in his philosophy. The decadent, the criminal, now grasped what had been to him an utter secret, the message of Christian hope, drawn from the heart of sorrow. With an “intense and flamelike imagination” he did now apprehend, or lay hold of, the Christ to whom all stricken creatures flee. But he came to the resting-place of souls an artist evermore, noting the path, grieving yet observant, stripped bare of all but his very self. It is the confession of one that did not seek but was sought; that was made to learn his lesson in the pillory at Clapham Junction; amid the forlorn of the lower deeps over whom Society tramples. He lost

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everything, and found the Master of Masters. In his book that discovery flashes and kindles to clear day with a warning in its light, a power, a sweetness, a new charm, but, above all, with a conviction for those who look steadily into it, which no after events, no side issues, can weaken. So it appears to more than one who loathe decadent works under every shape. They are not to be moved from that assurance by any failure of the man later on; for it is the inspired moment that counts, the illumination, not the dark, though it came back tenfold. Here is an argument for the one philosophy we need. It is pointed by circumstance, edged and keen from suffering that was the penalty of an evil choice. The book offers it complete. And who can mistake its drift or deny its force?

"Wherever there is a romantic movement in art, there somehow, and under some form, is Christ, or the soul of Christ." He is the "palpitating centre of romance." No doubt, sentences of this temper and make would be in their degree condemnable, as putting the greater thing, which is religion, below the lesser, which is art, if we did not call to mind who it is that writes them. We must, however, grant or insist that romantic art and literature do borrow their unearthly gleams from the New Testament; why, then, should we not say so? Is there any quality more lacking to the religion of these latter days than beauty as the Gospel sheds it over common things? If we will not be precisians and sticklers for words where it is rather the suggestion that we should make our own, this novel way of approaching the Sermon on the Mount will do us good and not harm. "Once at least in his life," says the book, "each man walks with Christ to Emmaus." Strange walk on Easter Day of the condemned with Christ, but here it is surely painted for us, in colours grave and beautiful, with sincerity of heart, with such tears as fall from the eyes of a prisoner, who has but that single hour in his friend's company.

The truest judgment on this volume and its apology, are contained in its last words, if we understand by "Nature" the Power we dare not name. Let us read and understand. "All trials," it says, "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

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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 rock where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole." Fiat!

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THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW

207

APRIL, 1905

“DE PROFUNDIS”¹

TO Heine it seemed an unintelligible caprice in Shakespeare to have been born an Englishman. But Shakespeare, after all, has in him much that is English, and much that the English can genuinely admire. It is otherwise with some of our men of genius—with William Blake, for example, with Shelley, and, later, with Oscar Wilde. Of them we could make nothing, except martyrs. Blake, it is true, we ignored, as a lunatic; but Shelley we excommunicated; and Oscar Wilde we slowly murdered in prison. Why? What does it mean? Who is wrong? Is it we or they? It is time we asked ourselves these questions, and tried to answer them candidly, without sentimentality and without illusion.

The trouble between these men and us is, that they are artists and we are not. By which I do not mean that they were members of what has now become a “respectable” profession, “in the ordinary sense of that extraordinary word.” I mean that they had, by nature, a certain attitude towards life, one which, of all attitudes, it is hardest for us, who are English, to understand. I will not attempt to describe it; I will let the artist speak for himself.

“ . . . By the inevitable law of self-perfection, the poet must sing, and the sculptor think in bronze, and the painter make the world a mirror for his moods, as surely and as certainly as the hawthorn must blossom in spring, and the corn turn to gold at harvest-time, and the moon in her ordered wanderings change from shield to sickle, and from sickle to shield.”

The artist is the man who lives by impulse, as we like to believe that Nature does. He is an individualist, though he has perhaps never heard of individualism. He develops himself, though perhaps he does not believe in self-development. By instinct, rather than conviction, he neglects conventions, rules, and forecasts. Above all, he ignores morality. “Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws.” “I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does.” But then, on the other hand: “I see that there is something wrong in what one becomes.” To become the right thing, that is, the thing his impulses drive him to be, that is the artist’s aim, or rather his instinct. Whatever happens to him he will accept, so only he can grow by it. And, among other things, he will accept sin, even though he repent of it. The *De Profundis*, in essence, is a confession of repentance; but the repentance involves no regret.

¹ *De Profundis*. By Oscar Wilde. London: Methuen & Co., 1905.

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A CATALOGUE OF
MESSRS. METHUEN'S
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Guinea each; 6 extra Prizes of Half Guinea each; 6
extra Prizes of 7/6 each; 6 extra Prizes of 5/- each.

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£2 12s. 6d.; 6 extra Prizes of One Guinea each; 6 extra



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FAC-SIMILE PAGE OF OSCAR WILDE'S BOOK, "DE PROFUNDIS."

All Doubts as to Its Authorship, and as to Its Being Written in Prison, Finally Cleared Up.



12

Sorrow, ^{than} and all that it teaches one, is ^{my} new world. I used to live entirely for pleasure I shunned sorrow and suffering of every kind. I hated both. I resolved to ignore them 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 ^{I fancy} by him ~~also~~ also:

Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the midnight hours
Weeping and waiting for the morrow,
He knows you not of Heavenly Powers.

The passage above reads as follows:—"Sorrow, then, and all that it teaches one, is my new world. I shunned suffering and sorrow of every kind. I hated both. I resolved to ignore them 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:—

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Weeping and waiting for the morrow—
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers."

WHY THE PRISON REGULATIONS WERE RELAXED.

To-day a question is to be asked in the House of Commons with the object of eliciting from the Home Secretary whether Oscar Wilde's last work, "De Profundis," was really written in prison or not.

Whether this question, which will be put by Mr. John Campbell, M.P., is part of the movement which, from the moment of the book's publication, has aimed at casting doubt upon the authorship, I cannot say. If so, it can very easily be disposed of.

I saw on Saturday the whole manuscript of "De Profundis." It is written on large blue foolscap paper, with the prison stamp on the top. There are about 60,000 words of it altogether: not much more than one-third has been published.

Oscar Wilde handed this roll of paper to Mr. Robert Ross on the day of his release, and gave him absolute discretion as to printing it. He had written most of it during the last three months of

his two years' sentence. It was during the last half-year of his term that Wilde was allowed the special privilege of writing as much as he pleased. His friends represented to the Home Office that a man who had been accustomed to use his brain so continually was in danger of having his mind injured by being unable to write for so long a time as two years.

Dr. Nicholson, of Broadmoor, who was consulted on the point, said he thought this danger was quite a real one. So the necessary permission was given, and Wilde could write whatever he liked.

Later on the prison regulations were relaxed again. As a rule, prisoners are not allowed to take away with them what they have written in their cells. Strictly, the MS. of "De Profundis" ought to have remained among the archives of Reading Gaol.

The authorities realised, however, that to enforce this rule in Wilde's case would have been harsh and unreasonable, so when (in order to defeat the intentions of the late Lord Queensberry and his hired bullies) he was removed from Reading to Wandsworth Prison, on the evening before his release, he was allowed to take the MS. with him; and he had it

under his arm when he left the gloomy place next morning a free man.

This statement, and the fac-simile printed above, should make it impossible henceforward for anyone to suggest, as many have been suggesting during the past fortnight, that there is any doubt about the whole of the book having been written by Oscar Wilde during the time he was in prison.

H. H. F.

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so that other illness does
 not follow—

then you are cured!

surely vanish.

Nurse Walter's experience is typi-
 cal. On 5th August last she wrote
 us from 7, Waterloo Terrace, New-
 ent, Gloucestershire:—"I had a
 severe attack of influenza and
 owing to my calling as Parish
 Nurse I could not possibly take a
 rest. I felt so giddy and weak that
 I was scarcely able to mount my
 bicycle. I started taking Scott's
 Emulsion and by the end of the
 week I could mount my cycle and
 ride for miles without feeling the
 least exhausted. By the time I had
 finished the second bottle I felt
 quite strong again. Yours truly,
 Nurse J. A. Walter."

Send at once for a free sample
 bottle (enclosing 4d. for postage
 and mentioning this paper) to
 SCOTT & BOWNE, Ltd., 10-11, Stone-
 cutter St., London, E.C.

12



Handwritten: Sonny, and see the 22 teacher
 Thom!

All Doubts as to its Authorship, and as to its Being Written in Prison, Finally Cleared Up.

FAC-SIMILE PAGE OF OSCAR WILDE'S BOOK, "DE PROFUNDIS."

THE DAILY MIRROR.

MARCH 13, 1905.

P
 A

"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. There was no pleasure I did not experience. I threw the pearl of my soul into a cup of wine. I went down the primrose path to the sound of flutes. I lived on honey-comb. But to have continued the same life would have been wrong, because it would have been limiting. I had to pass on. The other half of the garden had its secrets for me also."

Such an attitude, by its mere existence, is a challenge to every law and every convention of society. The artist may or may not break these laws and conventions; that depends upon the character of his impulses. But he is a standing menace to them; he will always break them if he wants to. And it is this that society cannot forgive. Is society right or wrong?

Society represents morality; from which it does not follow that it represents virtue. Morality means rule, calculation, subordination, self-suppression. Every impulse it arrests with the questions: Whither do you tend? What are your consequences? Are you safe? Shan't I be sorry afterwards? Won't society suffer by my act? And morality is right to ask these questions. The pity is, that it should answer them so badly. Its answer is embodied in the whole fabric of our laws and conventions. And this fabric we are not simply wrong in declining to set aside, on the plea of some sudden cry of somebody's inmost self. Yet the cry is none the less imperative, none the less legitimate. The tragedy lies in the conflict between the soul and the soul's dead products. But in this conflict all the right is not on either side. The artist sins, and society sins; but society is the stronger, and the artist is crushed. The artist sins, because impulses are not necessarily good, either in themselves or in what they lead to. He has to sin if he is to grow, and, in proportion as he is a great artist, he turns to account his sin and its punishment. Society sins, because it has no impulses but only rules; and its rules at best are mere makeshifts. Society is at once the cause and the effect of Philistinism; for "he is the Philistine who upholds and aids the heavy, cumbrous, blind, mechanical forces of society, and who does not recognise dynamic force when he meets it, either in a man or a movement."

Thus it is that both the artist and society are always right and always wrong. The artist is the deliverer, and the only possible deliverer. But mankind can only be redeemed by crucifying its redeemer; and there is a sense in which the redeemer deserves to be crucified.

It follows from this, that the artist's life must be a tragedy. But tragedy, in a world like this, is not necessarily to be regretted. So, at least, it is deliberately affirmed by this latest of our victims. This pagan, this lover of beauty and joy, this subtlest, finest, and not least profound intelligence of our age, is suddenly blasted from the blue, hurled into a pit of infamy, shut out from the colour and light he loved as few have loved them, condemned to the most lingering of deaths, and a death, as it proved, not only of body, but of mind. And what has he to say about it? Only that he would not choose to have missed it; that suffering has crowned his life; and that the fact of suffering is itself a proof of love.

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"It seems to me that love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world. I cannot conceive of any other explanation. I am convinced that there is no other, and that if the world has indeed, as I have said, been built of sorrow, it has been built by the hands of love, because in no other way could the soul of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full stature of its perfection. Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul."

Never has the Christian religion been more triumphantly vindicated than by this pagan whom Christians have abhorred.

But, even though it be true that there are cases where suffering may redeem, that does not excuse those who inflict the suffering. On this point, too, let us endeavour to "clear our minds of cant." Let it be admitted that there are matters in which the conduct of Oscar Wilde was such as every society, even the most enlightened and humane, would legitimately and reasonably condemn. Every society has a duty to protect the immature. Every society has a duty, and one more extensive than any society has ever yet admitted, to control sexual relations in the interest of the children to be born of them. But everything beyond that is a question of private morals and taste. Now the private morals and taste of our society are not such that it has a right to throw the first stone at any man. And our law, on the matter in question, is a mere survival of barbarism, supported, not by reason, but by sheer prejudice. It rests on no knowledge, no principle, no common sense; it rests on our instinct to persecute what we cannot understand. Oscar Wilde may have sinned, not only, as he admits, against himself, but against society. But who shall measure the moral gulf by which he is removed from the crowd of fallen women and sensual men who mobbed him at the gates of the court, who jeered at him on the platform of the railway station, and pointed at this man of genius, no word of whose message they could comprehend, the index of their gross and prurient scorn? It is of such elements, among others, that the society that condemns the artist is composed. Is the account clear between him and them?

And there is another point. Let us ignore the iniquities of opinion and of the law. Let us suppose that Oscar Wilde was as great a criminal as he was judged to be by all the basest and some of the finer elements of our society. Even so, was it right or, let us say, was it wise, to treat him as we did? This is a question which touches our whole system of punishment, and affects the case, not only of this isolated man of genius, but of hundreds and thousands of dumb and obscure offenders.

G. LOWES DICKINSON

April 7, 1905

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We cannot leave unnoticed a review, by Mr. Lowes Dickinson, of that unhappy book, *De Profundis*. The purport of this review seems to be that any sin is excusable in a literary artist, and the reviewer makes the amazing remark that "our law, on the matter in question, is a mere survival of barbarism, supported, not by reason, but by sheer prejudice. It rests on no knowledge, no common-sense; it rests on our instinct to persecute what we cannot understand."

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"DE PROFUNDIS".....By M. D. Petre

*"De Profundis."*¹

"STILL I believe that at the beginning God made a world for each separate man : " in these words we have the theme which is developed throughout these new *Confessions*. This man believed in his right to live in a world created for the fulfilment of his own needs and desires. He would not, as we take it, have pretended that his was any special and peculiar privilege ; that the welfare of the rest of mankind, or of any personal unit thereof, was to be subordinated to his own. But his philosophy of life and morals was geocentric, that is to say, he placed himself at the centre of the universe, and would have advised every one else to do the same.

Nor is this such an utter paradox as it may at first sight appear. Any point of the world, at which we stand, might be chosen as a centre in regard to the rest, every individual actually must, in the conduct of his life, act as though from the middle of all things. Supposing no mountain or other object to intervene, we stand inevitably at the centre of our own horizon, and that horizon material or spiritual, is, for each one of us, the boundary of the universe. This is an illusion, but it is also a truth ; it is an illusion if we forget that there is a countless number of other horizons and a countless number of other centres ; it is a truth in so far as this multiplicity in no way lessens the central force of each one, in the spiritual as in the material order.

In the artistic temperament there will usually be a predominance of the fallacious element in this impression. Because the artist has a more vivid impression of his life at the heart of all creation, he is more subject to the illusion of forgetfulness in regard to other factors, and he is also liable to make the mistake of imagining himself a centre there where he is not, as well as there where he is. Hence the delusive sense of his own fame which filled the writer of the little volume before us. In fantasy he was the centre, not only from the point at which he stood, but from a thousand other points likewise. Perhaps

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such a sentiment is almost necessary to artistic production. The poet's universe is more fluid and undetermined than that of other men, his horizon less defined. Hence, from this uncertainty as to his limitations, he rather easily passes on to a forgetfulness of the very existence of such limitations, and to a sense of world-wide importance which is often exaggerated.

I was a man [he writes] who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. . . . Few men held such a position in their own lifetime and had it so acknowledged. . . . The gods had given me almost everything.

These are not probably, the utterances of vanity, but of that illusion we have described, an illusion to which he, more even than other artists, must have been peculiarly subject.

But nothing so well refutes the falsehoods which are incident to any theory as pushing that theory to its most extreme conclusions. Oscar Wilde was individualistic to such an extent, he forced so much into his theory, that the bottle was burst and its contents scattered. And in his own life the same process was exemplified. To be truly a world-centre, we must accept the world such as it is; he attempted more and other than this. He ignored the actual universe that existed around him, and framed one out of his own inner conceptions. Those conceptions were shattered by the brutality of outer facts, he lost his fancied world, and found his real horizon narrowed, and its contents impoverished.

But now it was that, at any rate in thought and theory, he rose triumphant over his circumstances, and gave to his doctrine, a justification it had never before received—at least from him. Brought at last in contact with the inevitableness of outer creation, while the prison walls confined his sight, and the outraged laws of humanity stood between his soul and that space and freedom in which he had rejoiced, he saw that, if he was to triumph now, it could be by no fictitious representation of the world and his own circumstances, but by the acceptance and mastery of them.

My only mistake was [he says] that I confined myself so exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sun-lit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and gloom. 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

Pp. 21, 22.

that puts ashes on its head, the anguish that chooses sackcloth for its raiment and into its own drink puts gall—all these were things of which I was afraid. And as I had determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to taste each of them in turn, to feed on them, to have for a season, indeed, no other food at all.¹

But does he express here the full truth of his change of experience? It was not only a change from pleasure to pain, from joy to grief, but it was still more, a change from a world undefined and plastic, a world of which he had the continuous making and moulding, to a world which God and man and his own deeds had fixed for him; from a world which he could fashion according to his likings, inspired by his artistic and creative instincts, to a world in which he had simply to take a place and endure the inevitable.

We are all of us partly creative and partly passive in regard to our circumstances. The state of passivity easily and often passes on into one of suffering but it is not identical with it, any more than the creative function of life is altogether joyful. But in the life of Oscar Wilde, as he describes it, *necessity* only made itself known in suffering and misery and anguish; he had fashioned his own joys, in artistic freedom; his sorrows were imposed upon him from without.

But, however we may differ from the philosophy he evolved out of his prison life, we can hardly restrain an exclamation of sympathy and admiration at the irrepressible life and courage with which the artist within him rose up to deal with his new circumstances. He is, at last, brought irrevocably face to face with the laws of moral and physical necessity. Will he twist his nature, and falsify his philosophy, by a hopeless struggle out of which he can never emerge victorious? Not at all. With his rare intuition he sees that here his individualism can only be saved at the cost of endurance and submission. He cannot, this time, make a world for himself and just as he wishes it; but he can re-create the world in which he finds himself. The artist in him shall triumph though the man suffer and perish. He had not chosen suffering, but when it comes to him, he will invent it for himself, and it shall flow from his own heart, and from no external source. Humility and loving forgiveness were not the virtues he had cultivated in his self-made life; but when his existence had become such that these were the fruits to be expected of it, then he took care to

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bring them forth from his own creative soul, and not have them forced upon him by the hands of fortune or of other men. He passed through his period of helplessness and despair, but came forth once more to the exercise of his creative faculties; this time, owing to his circumstances, in a totally new moral order.

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; . . . But while there were times when I rejoiced in the idea that my sufferings were to be endless, I could not bear them to be without meaning. Now I find hidden away somewhere 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.¹

He turns to Christ and claims to find in Him "the precursor of the romantic movement in life," and also that He "was not merely the supreme individualist, but He was the first individualist in history." But we must put these words, alongside of others, in which he shows us what, in his mind, an individualist may be.

While Christ did not say to men "live for others," He pointed out that there was no difference at all between the lives of others and one's own life.

Here again the contents have burst the bottle, individualism has enlarged its boundaries until it has lost its shape. And yet, even so, he has missed, in the character of Christ, that note which would have been perceptible enough had anything more fully responded to it in his own; the note of meek endurance of a world "which knew Him not."

Thus, in spite of our sympathy with that courageous exercise of the artistic and creative faculty in circumstances so adverse, we still feel that something is lacking; that the humility which he found hidden in his field was too confident and self-possessed to be truly human. He fully understood neither what it is to do an injury nor what it is to receive a benefit; he could neither forgive nor thank. He had learnt his lesson up to a certain point, but much was yet to be acquired. It was, perhaps, impossible for "his highly intellectual and artificial nature," as his editor calls it, to go much further than he went; only in eternity could the work be completed.

But, in spite of these deficiencies, his artistic force and instincts served him in noble stead in the handling of his circumstances. Just because of his individualism he saw how

¹ Pp. 24, 25.

terrible, how suicidal it is to cut out of our lives any tract of experience however painful it may be. Even though we cannot wholly succeed as regards our fundamental being, the very attempt to do so must impoverish and lessen us. Is it not simply appalling to see people tear pages out of their lives without endeavouring to preserve the lesson that should be learned from them? We are poor enough, God knows, and yet we cast away continually fragments of the little we possess. And our effort is often rather to get through certain experiences with as little impression as possible, than to drink in all they can teach us. We have no regard to the continuity of our own lives. But our poet was wiser. He says: "When first I was put into prison, people advised me to try and forget who I was. It was ruinous advice."¹ And he blames society for shrinking from the impression of its own acts: "It shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay."² And again:

Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong of society that it should force them to do so.³

Thanks to his artistic genius he found the way to work even this lurid patch of colour into the tissue of his life; he knew that those two years must leave him richer or poorer, and he was resolved that it should be the former. Having nothing else within his prison walls on which his heart and soul might feed, he made them live on sorrow, and thus sorrow became his life. There is a sense in which disease is physical life, pain is sensitive life, madness is mental life. In this way he made of sorrow his sustenance, his occupation, the very creative exercise of his genius. "Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul."⁴

What more can we say of this strange, wayward soul except once more to thank God that judgment is in His hands and not in ours, and that we are not called on to weigh the virtues and the vices, to measure the excuses and mete out the blame? We can criticize him from without, but not from within. But it is better to give our last look at the best, and not at the worst, and this much at least we may say—he was courageous and consistent in a very dark hour, and he left us at least an example of how a man may make his fate his own.

M. D. PETRE.

¹ P. 36. ² P. 41. ³ P. 40. ⁴ P. 59.

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¹ Pp. 24, 25.

"De Profundis."

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terrible, how suicidal it is to cut out of our lives any tract of experience however painful it may be. Even though we cannot wholly succeed as regards our fundamental being, the very attempt to do so must impoverish and lessen us. Is it not simply appalling to see people tear pages out of their lives without endeavouring to preserve the lesson that should be learned from them? We are poor enough, God knows, and yet we cast away continually fragments of the little we possess. And our effort is often rather to get through certain experiences with as little impression as possible, than to drink in all they can teach us. We have no regard to the continuity of our own lives. But our poet was wiser. He says: "When first I was put into prison, people advised me to try and forget who I was. It was ruinous advice."¹ And he blames society for shrinking from the impression of its own acts: "It shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay."² And again:

Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong of society that it should force them to do so.³

Thanks to his artistic genius he found the way to work even this lurid patch of colour into the tissue of his life; he knew that those two years must leave him richer or poorer, and he was resolved that it should be the former. Having nothing else within his prison walls on which his heart and soul might feed, he made them live on sorrow, and thus sorrow became his life. There is a sense in which disease is physical life, pain is sensitive life, madness is mental life. In this way he made of sorrow his sustenance, his occupation, the very creative exercise of his genius. "Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul."⁴

What more can we say of this strange, wayward soul except once more to thank God that judgment is in His hands and not in ours, and that we are not called on to weigh the virtues and the vices, to measure the excuses and mete out the blame? We can criticize him from without, but not from within. But it is better to give our last look at the best, and not at the worst, and this much at least we may say—he was courageous and consistent in a very dark hour, and he left us at least an example of how a man may make his fate his own.

M. D. PETRE.

¹ P. 36. ² P. 41. ³ P. 40. ⁴ P. 59.

APRIL 15, 1905.

Sphere,

There has undoubtedly been a great renewal of interest in Oscar Wilde during the past few months. It is exemplified in the number of books before me, the most recent of which is *De Profundis*, a book which I am assured by more than one bookseller has had a larger sale than most of the novels of the season. Here is a list of the books, which shows that the interest is extended beyond one volume :—

DE PROFUNDIS. By Oscar Wilde. (Methuen.)
 SEBASTIAN MELMOTH. By Oscar Wilde. (Humphreys.)
 INTENTIONS. By Oscar Wilde. Traduction, Préface, et Notes de J. Joseph-Renaud. (Stock, Rue St. Honoré, Paris.)
 POEMS. By Oscar Wilde. (Mosher, Portland, Maine.)
 OSCAR WILDE. By Robert H. Sherard. (Greening.)

This book, *De Profundis*, has given rise to a great deal of controversy, but to me one of the most interesting aspects of the matter is that the friends of Mr. Wilde's earlier years have now become more potent; they were very young men with very little influence in the newspaper world at the time of his death. They are now men of very much greater standing, and they have been championing Mr. Wilde and his undoubted talents with great zest and ability. This book, however, is not a great book, although it is undoubtedly a well-written one. There are passages in it of matchless style, the tribute to his mother, the once-famous Speranza, being not the least of these :—

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, archaeology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally.

Even recalling the fact that the phrase, "lord of language," is Tennyson's, there is something undeniably touching in this tribute and in many another passage throughout the volume; but through all the self-pity there is a vein of artificiality, something which makes one question the sincerity of the writer, who seems to me to have assumed a pose equally in the hour of his greatest triumph and prosperity and in the hour of his misery and humiliation. It is not by a book of this kind, however popular for the moment, that Wilde will maintain his place in literature, but rather by such a volume as *Intentions* or by *Sebastian Melmoth*.

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