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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. **7**

The essays called *Intentions* have received the added distinction of a translation into French by M. Joseph-Renaud with an interesting biographical preface; the description by M. Joseph-Renaud, in fact, of the last days of Mr. Oscar Wilde in Paris is far more realistic than anything that I have read:—

Certain soir, dans un bar du Boulevard des Italiens, un homme pauvrement vêtu me demanda la permission de s'asseoir à la table voisine de la mienne. C'était M. Wilde. Ou plutôt sa parodie tragique, impitoyable! Le dandy à l'oeillet vert, à l'habit pour le pauvre, le maître d'élégance des duchesses, si riche, si beau, le grand poète en prose et vers, le causeur surhumain, gonflait grotesquement un vieux complet de la Belle Jardinière. Ses mains étaient peu soignées et ses manchettes en celluloid. Incapable d'écrire, le cerveau las il n'avait plus pour l'entendre chaque soir que des habitués de bars qui, par curiosité, lui payaient sa consommation! Il ne restait de Lui que sa voix musicale et ses grands yeux bleus enfantins. Je le revis plusieurs fois en le même lieu. Il manquait d'argent, de vêtements, d'amis vrais.

I quote the least tragic passage from a heartrending story of crime and its punishments which appropriately ends with the words: "Si M. Wilde fut coupable, quelle expiation!"

I cannot agree, however, with M. Joseph-Renaud that the *Life of Oscar Wilde* by Mr. Robert Sherard which has just been published by Greening is "a noble work of art." It is interesting but there is too much in it of very maudlin sentimentality which can do Wilde no possible good and does not in the least help us to "place" him in the world of letters. There is too much about Mr. Sherard and not sufficient about Mr. Wilde as a creative artist. Years hence somebody may write a *Life of Oscar Wilde* which will do much to give him his proper position, which will almost ignore the whole of the sordid story of his downfall, which will leave that part of his life to the hack moralist of the pulpit and the press, but which will deal only with him as a writer of these books, *Sebastian Melmoth*, *Poems*, and *Intentions*. "Sebastian Melmoth," by the way, was a pseudonym assumed by Mr. Oscar Wilde during his last years in Paris; he derived it from a work by his grand-uncle, Charles Maturin, the well-known novelist and dramatist who wrote *Montorio*, *The Wild Irish Boy*, and *Melmoth*. *Melmoth* was a famous book in its day and had great influence in France as well as in England. Readers of Maturin's career will see how painfully his life was reflected in his grandnephew.

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Mr. Humphreys publishes the book bearing the simple title, *Sebastian Melmoth*. It contains all the aphorisms, the wise and witty sayings, of Wilde's life; many things here are flippant and frivolous, but that the book is a classic of a kind I have not the faintest doubt. It is nearly always futile to venture to suggest what a future age may read, but it is at least a harmless amusement to attempt to forecast it; and it seems to me quite possible that *Sebastian Melmoth* may be taken as one of the most lucid expressions of the point of view of the "intellectuals" in the last years of the Victorian era—the years which saw the reaction from the strenuous life under which those had lived whose favourite reading had been Carlyle and Ruskin, Tennyson and Browning.

Not enough has been said, I think, of Oscar Wilde's critical gifts as put before us in *Intentions*. They are full, it seems to me, of one kind of talent, while the *Poems* are full of yet another. The volume produced by Mr. Mosher contains the Newdigate Prize Poem, "Ravenna," the whole of the volume called "Poems," originally published by David Bogue in 1881; thirdly, we have "The Sphinx"; and fourthly, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." Needless to say, the first half of the book of verse is the best—the poems written in that early time of aspiration that might have made a great man:—

Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
 Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
 With idle songs for pipe and vielay,
 Which do but mar the secret of the whole.
 Surely there was a time I might have trod
 The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
 Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God.

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OXFORD MAGAZINE .22 February, 1905.

MISCELLANEOUS.

De Profundis. By Oscar Wilde. (London: Methuen & Co.) 5s. net.
A reflective and introspective essay written during imprisonment, now published by Mr. Robert Ross.

FEBRUARY 25, 1905.

The Academy,

Wilde, Oscar, *De Profundis*. Methuen, 5/0 net. (A long letter, written from prison, setting out the changes in the author's view of life, his new understanding of the meaning and use of sorrow, and his plans for the future. Edited, with a preface, by Mr. Robert Ross.)

The Speaker,

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Written by the author in prison, with a preface by Mr. Robert Ross containing a letter from the author on the book.

MARCH 11, 1905.

The Newsagent,

The first edition of "*De Profundis*," by Oscar Wilde, one of the most remarkable books of recent years, is already exhausted, and a second edition issued. 5s. net.

MARCH 18

A melancholy interest attaches to the publication of "*De Profundis*," by Oscar Wilde, which Messrs. Methuen have just published at 5s. net. A man of undoubted genius and of varied accomplishments, it is sad to remember that he made himself an outcast from society. This book was written during his two years' imprisonment, and gives expression to the philosophy which he evolved during that period. The large paper copies were all taken up before publication, and are already at a premium, and the first impression at 5s. looks like soon becoming a second or third.

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NINETEENTH CENTURY

May 1905

SOME NOTICEABLE BOOKS

Writing of the Son of Man, the author of *De Profundis*¹ says :

He could not stand stupid people, especially those who are made stupid by education ; people who are full of opinions, not one of which they even understand, a peculiarly modern type. . . . His chief war was against the Philistines. That is the war every child of light has to wage. Philistinism was the note of the age and community in which He lived. In their heavy inaccessibility to ideas, their dull respectability, their tedious orthodoxy, their worship of vulgar success, their entire preoccupation with the gross, materialistic side of life, and their ridiculous estimate of themselves and their importance, the Jews of Jerusalem in Christ's day were the exact counterpart of the British Philistines of our own. Christ mocked at the 'whited sepulchre' of respectability. . . . He pointed out that forms and ceremonies were made for man, not man for forms and ceremonies. . . . The cold philanthropies, the ostentatious public charities, the tedious formalisms so dear to the middle-class mind, He exposed with utter and relentless scorn. . . . He took a keen pleasure in pointing out to them that though they were always reading the Law and the Prophets, they had not really the smallest idea of what either of them meant.

Two or three lines on the much-used and much-abused word 'Philistine' will be in place ; and then we may perhaps consider whither these reflections lead us.

The Philistine element in life is not the failure to understand art. . . . Fishermen, shepherds, ploughboys, peasants, and the like, know nothing about art, and are the very salt of the earth. 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 in a man or a movement.

Ten years have elapsed. Well-nigh a generation of the world of thought has passed away since the author of *De Profundis* disappeared into the depth of ignominy, from which he could write :

Prosperity, pleasure, and success may be rough of grain and common in fibre, but sorrow is the most sensitive of all created things. . . . Where there is sorrow there is holy ground.

The book is written throughout in this exalted and purified strain. One reads with astonishment. Is it possible that the same hand wrote this, and also wrote some other things that we may remember ? It is possible ; it is the fact. We may even echo, without misgiving, the victim's cry at the discovery of his nascent spiritual life : 'What a wonderful beginning.'

¹ *De Profundis*, by Oscar Wilde (London : Methuen, 1905), p. 106.

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Daily Mirror.

March 3, 1905.

TRUTH AT LAST.

Oscar Wilde's Repentance Not a
Flash in the Pan.

HIS LAST DAYS.

Pathetic Picture of the Fallen Genius
Oppressed by Bitter Memories.

Gradually the true and pathetic story of Oscar Wilde's last days is coming out.

The publication of the book he composed in prison—the book in which he wrote his repentance large for all the world to know—has unloosed several pens. The heartless theory that his humility was merely a pose, and that his life, after he had been released, gave the lie to what he had written in such touching words, has been shown to be false, malicious, wicked.

It is a picture of pitiful import that we have of a "lord of language," as he rightly called himself, unable to follow his occupation of "writing beautiful phrases" because whenever he sat down quietly to write his mind was disturbed by recollections of the past, and his brain refused to do anything but dwell upon the opportunities he had thrown away.

But it is not a picture which in any way suggests hypocrisy, or any departure from the mental attitude which he described in his book.

A DREAM WHICH NEVER CAME TRUE.

At the end of "De Profundis" ("Out of the Depths") he said:—

Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed.

She will hang the night with stars, so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.

Alas! his dream was never to come true. He found he could not bear solitude. Thoughts pressed too hard in upon him. His spirits sank; his vital energies were paralysed. He could only find relief from the painful workings of his mind by "watching life."

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By far the best articles that have ever appeared on his life after release are now being published in the "St. James's Gazette." The writer was a close personal friend, one of the two who paid for his funeral, in fact. He disposes entirely of the idea that Wilde had a miserable, sordid, poverty-stricken life in Paris.

He had an income of £400 a year and numbers of friends. He talked better than ever after his two years' seclusion from the world. "His conversation was richer, more human, and generally on a higher intellectual level."

On the whole, he was fairly happy during the last years of his life.

He had an extraordinarily buoyant and happy temperament, a splendid sense of humour, and an unrivalled faculty for enjoyment of the present. Of course, he had his bad moments, moments of depression and sense of loss and defeat, but they were not of long duration.

He said he could not write, because, whenever he strove to compose his mind, his thoughts turned to his past, and he became wretched and downcast. He could keep his spirits up only by excluding memories of what had been, by becoming merely an observer of the spectacle of existence.

The writer of the article, however, thinks that he would have written if he had been more in the swim of the world of art and letters. He missed the inspiration of a sympathetic audience, and he deplored especially "the absence of the smart and pretty women, who, in the old days, sat at his feet" !

AN UNCONSCIOUS CATHOLIC.

By the way, the reception of this wayward genius into the Roman Catholic Church is explained to have been merely a reading of the service over his unconscious body. He died without knowing anything about it.

While he was in prison, however, he gave full proof of his Christian feelings, even if he was not formally a member of any Christian church.

"He took," says one of his warders, who has been contributing to the London "Evening News" some reminiscences of him, "a most sympathetic interest in the sorrows and troubles of other prisoners, and commented fiercely on what he called the brutality of the prison system when a warder was dismissed for putting biscuits in the cell of a young prisoner whom Wilde believed to have been crying from hunger."

He made friends of the warders, too, and did them many little kindnesses. He made no complaint of their discharge of their harsh duties towards him. He knew they were simply instruments of the system.

When his hair had to be cut he felt the indignity very keenly. "You don't know what it means to me," he cried piteously. It was the crowning symbol of his shame. Yet he showed no resentment whatever against the warder who had to cut it.

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A TRAGIC PARTING.

There was a very sad scene in Reading Gaol when Mrs. Wilde went there with her solicitor to take papers connected with the divorce suit which her friends forced her to bring against him.

She did not wish her husband to see her, but, while the solicitor was with him, she was gripped by an overwhelming desire to look for the last time on the face of the man she had loved, the father of her children.

She gazed through a grating into the cell, rested her eyes, still shining with deep affection and pity, on his altered face, and then drew back, sobbing bitterly.

Pitiful, too, is the story of the spider which a warder disturbed in cleaning his cell and killed with his foot.

"It brings bad luck to kill a spider," said Wilde in deep dejection. "I shall hear worse news than any I have heard yet."

Next day it was broken to him that his mother, whom he had deeply loved and honoured, had died, and that his disgrace had hastened her end.

MARCH 13, 1905.

The Daily Mail

Daily Mail

"DE PROFUNDIS."

To the Editor of the "Daily Mail."

Sir,—Mr. John Campbell, M.P., having announced a question in the House of Commons to-morrow afternoon which seems calculated to throw doubt upon this book having been written in prison, perhaps you will kindly allow me to say that I had yesterday an opportunity to see the whole MS., which is written on blue official foolscap bearing the Government prison stamp.

The MS. was handed by Mr. Wilde to Mr. Robert Ross on the day of his release, and has remained in Mr. Ross's possession ever since.

The reason why the prisoner was allowed the unusual privilege of writing as much as he pleased was the fear that his mind, accustomed to the constant exercise of writing, might be injured by enforced idleness extending over so long a period as two years.

He was further permitted to take away what he had written because it was felt that to enforce the ordinary rule in so exceptional a case would be harsh and vindictive. Strictly, the MS. of "De Profundis" ought to be in the archives of Reading Gaol; but I think that fair-minded people, even if they are not moved by ingenious thoughts expressed in phrases of rare beauty, will see no reason to blame the Home Office or the prison authorities for allowing it to be given to the world.

Chelsea, March 12. H. HAMILTON LYFE.

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H. H. Gurney, Esq.,
Chelsea, March 12.

2019-03-18

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Daily Mirror.**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 took 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.

Daily Mirror.

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.

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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, ^{then,} 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}:
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 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 by him, I fancy, also:—

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MARCH 30, 1905.

Christian World,

DR. AKED'S RETURN.

DR. C. E. AKED is back from Davos Platz, quite cured, he hopes, this time, and has taken up his residence again at 'The Schatzalp,' his cottage at New Brighton. He resumed his ministry at Pembroke Chapel on Sunday, preaching in the morning to a crowded congregation, which welcomed him to his pulpit again. He looks stout and vigorous (though the fast-greying hair tells its tale of recent suffering), and he preached in a strong voice, with much animation and without apparent fatigue. For the present Dr. Aked wisely restricts his engagements to his own church, where he will preach on Sunday mornings, and once a month at the popular evening service. This falls next Sunday, when his subject will be the late Oscar Wilde's 'De Profundis.'

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APRIL 3, 1905.

The Times.

Canon Beeching, in a sermon preached yesterday in Westminster Abbey, on "The Sinlessness of Christ," from the text "Why callest thou Me good?" (St. Mark x., 13), referred to Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis." He said:—One wonders sometimes if Englishmen have given up reading their Gospels. A book has lately appeared which presents a caricature of the portrait of Christ, and especially a travesty of His doctrine about sin, that is quite astonishing; and with one or two honourable exceptions the daily and weekly Press have praised the book enthusiastically, and especially the study it gives of the character of Christ; whereas, if that picture were true, the Pharisees were right when they said of Him that He cast out devils through Beelzebub, and the priests were right in sending Him to death as a perverter of the people. The writer of the book, who is dead, was a man of exceptional literary talent, who fell into disgrace; and whether it is pity for his sad fate or admiration of his style in writing that has cast a spell upon the reviewers and blinded them to his meaning, I cannot say; but I do say they have not done their duty to English society by lauding the book as they have done, without giving parents and guardians some hint that it preaches a doctrine of sin which, if taken into romantic and impressionable hearts, will send them quickly down the road to shame. The chief point on which the writer fixes is Christ's behaviour to the sinners; and his theory is that Christ consorted with them because He found them more interesting than the good people, who were stupid. "The world," he says, "had always loved the saint as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of God; Christ, through some Divine instinct in Him, seems to have always loved the sinner as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of man. To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not His aim. . . . But in a manner not yet understood of the world He regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful and holy things, and modes of perfection." It seems to have struck the writer at this point that our Lord had himself explained that He consorted with sinners, as a physician with the sick, to call them to repentance. For he goes on:—"Of course the sinner must repent; but why?—simply because otherwise he would be unable to realize what he had done." In other words, a man is the better for any sort of emotional experience, when it is past, because he is fertilized by it as by a crop of wild oats; a form of philosophy which Tennyson in "In Memoriam" well characterized as 'Procuress to the Lords of Hell.' But even this writer, absolutely shameless and unabashed as he is, does not hint that Christ Himself gained His moral beauty by sinning. The lowest depth of woe is theirs who call evil good and good evil, for that is a poisoning of the well of life. What is the use of calling Jesus "good" if we destroy the very meaning of goodness? May God have pardoned the sin of the man who put this stumbling-block in the way of the simple, and may He shield our boys and young men from that doctrine of devils that the way to perfection lies through sin.

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APRIL 4, 1905.

DAILY NEWS,

THE CHURCHES.

Canon Beeching on Oscar Wilde. —

Canon Beeching, in his sermon at the Abbey on Sunday, passed a severe condemnation on the late Oscar Wilde's book, "De Profundis." He said: "A book has lately appeared which presents a caricature of the portrait of Christ, and especially a travesty of His doctrine about sin, that is quite astonishing; and with one or two honourable exceptions the daily and weekly Press have praised the book enthusiastically, and especially the study it gives of the character of Christ; whereas, if that picture were true, the Pharisees were right when they said of Him that He cast out devils through Beelzebub, and the priests were right in sending Him to death as a perverter of the people."

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APRIL 4, 1905.

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**EVENING STANDARD
AND ST. JAMES'S GAZETTE.**

Evening Standard

"DE PROFUNDIS" CRITICISED.

The merits of Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" were discussed at St. Ann's Church, Manchester, by the Rev. Paul Bull, in the course of a sermon to men. The preacher did not know why the book was so named, for there was nothing deep in it except the author's profound egotism. It contained the last confessions of a shallow soul. The author said he had surrounded himself "with smaller natures and meaner minds." "I don't think he could," said Mr. Bull. "I cannot conceive how the poor fallen creature could ever speak of other natures and minds as smaller and meaner."

APRIL 3, 1905.

Manchester

Manchester Evening News, Evening News

DE PROFUNDIS.

"THE CONFESSIONS OF A SHALLOW SOUL."
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