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Oscar Wilde  
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Vol. **7**



### A Study in Moral Bankruptcy.

*De Profundis.* By OSCAR WILDE. London: Methuen & Co.

IN his day of fame, Oscar Wilde was certainly anything but a sympathetic character. There was nothing noble or deep or human about him. His life was artificial, his outlook was artificial, his writing was artificial. A child of phrase and pose at his best, he remained, as this book reveals, a child of phrase and pose to the last. He was always thinking of himself and of the figure he cut before other people, and this vanity was of course in the end his undoing. Yet the tragedy of that end was, surely, enough to evoke the sympathy of the most austere. All thought of his snobbery and conceit was swallowed up in pity for this unfortunate victim of his own diseased organism left to rot in a prison cell.

As a natural result the mind was centred upon itself, and we have indirectly a lurid proof of the supreme folly of the ordinary criminal method. To lock a man up with his own thoughts for years is not to reform him; it is to brutalise him. Oscar Wilde, it is true, may not have been further brutalised, but he was certainly not reformed, and all the mush of this artistic "repentance" shows it. Much of these musings would be repulsive in their raw egotism if we did not understand the circumstances in which they were written. "I" and "my" and "me" recur with such frequency as to be ultimately monotonous. Take this passage:—

"I want to get to the point when I shall be able to say quite simply, and without affectation, that the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford and when society sent me to prison."

Or this:—

"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."

These are samples of whole pages. In addition to the vanity and self-importance of it all (natural in the abnormal conditions of its composition) we see also the springs of that art of word-mongering of which Oscar Wilde was a supreme exponent, and which, if we are to judge by some recent developments, is destined to be the last pillar of the Faith. When reason and sense and justice are gone the verbal acrobat will still remain. At the same time, Wilde was more sprightly and more clever than his imitators. For instance he is romancing about Christ. Here is one passage:—

"There is something so unique about Christ. Of course just as there are false dawns before the dawn itself, and winter days so full of sudden sunlight that they will cheat the wise crocus into squandering its gold before its time, and make some foolish bird call to its mate to build on barren boughs, so there were Christians before Christ. For that we should be grateful. The unfortunate thing is that there have been none since. I make one exception, St. Francis of Assisi."



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From "Andria & other Poems" by Gascoigne Mackie

[Blackwell, Oxford, 1908; 63 pp. boards; 4/- net.]

p. 44.

At Clapham Junction  
(Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1895)

Ah — as the Cretan stag might trail  
The hunter's cruel arrow —

Αἰὼν εἰπέ — echo wail —  
They pierce my bones and marrow.

The hounds are loose upon my track,  
The rabble hoot and holla!  
Have they not branded on my back  
Thine arrows, O Apollo?

Yet perfect, none the less, will pees  
The flowers in Magdalen meadow,  
And every daffodil next year  
Will cast an oval shadow.

The crocus, gold and gray will flame;  
The blond and streak'd fortillary,  
Though I stand bowed with bitter shame  
And handcuff'd in the pillory

I shall survive the mob's malign  
Mean "digitis moustrari";  
One must be damned to be divine —  
Hurl me to hell — what care I?

Though Time's dark banks, as Time runs by  
Tomorrow and to-morrow,  
Re-echo "Oscut" to the cry  
Of outraged love and sorrow —

Out of the ashes of my best  
A Phoenix re-arisen  
I shall emerge, spurning the dust  
And infamy of prison.

The poets will be on my side  
And they shall tell my story —  
The legend of my sin and pride  
Shall last till Time be hoary.



In another passage he bursts out:—

“Indeed there is the charm about Christ when all is said: he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something.”

Wilde, being an artist and very conscious of the fact and determined to let it be known, mixes up Christ and Art and poetry and what-not-else until one is not clear which is which. Not many of the *dicta* in this volume are likely to satisfy those good people who in these matters are in the confidence of Omniscience. At the same time much of the writing bears a family resemblance to some current journalism that is supposed to be the very height of cleverness. Yet to adapt the method, we have here only the emptiness of the fluent and the fluency of the vain. There are evidently minds that can pour out this sort of thing like an everflowing fountain. Its very ease is its snare. And most of this book consists of elegant epigrams, paradoxes, verbal graces, climax and anti-climax. It is all very exquisite and very precious, but it has as much relation to the

serious things of life as a juggler at a county fair. Nay, even the poor juggler, behind the scenes, has his hopes and fears, his sorrows and his joys, about which he might be sincere and serious. In this book, however, I confess I find no sincerity, only posing and posturing as of old. And for that reason I doubt if its publication was really a service to the memory of the man who wrote it. Some one, I think Mr. Holyoake, has pointed out that there is no word of regret, from beginning to end, for the fate of those whom the writer degraded or helped to degrade. All the pity and all the pose is purely personal. That of course is true and it spells much. But then such a criticism seems to imply that *De Profundis* is a true revelation of the author's inmost thoughts and emotions; it certainly treats the book too seriously. The man who penned these polished paragraphs was thinking, from first to last how this phrase would look, how that epigram would seem so clever, and how people would say “What a consummate word-artist!” In the thought, apart from the setting, there is not much. Cant about Art, cant about Christ, cant about Individualism. If we may discern a consistent point of view through the cant, it is that Wilde's ideal was “self-realisation,” which really seems to be only another synonym for selfishness. In one paragraph he declares:—

“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 honeycomb. 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.”



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In which case, of course, there should be nothing to complain of, society not having done a man any injustice or wrong whom she has only shown a part of the garden he might otherwise have overlooked. If the gaining of "experience" be all-in-all, then the people who put us in prison do us a service, even as the pick-pocket who robs us, or the hangman who hangs us. These people may all be helping our "self-development" by introducing us to new and delightful emotions. And there is, indeed, some reason to think that the special risk of the artistic temperament is just this self-absorption, this egotistic revelling in emotion, this fallacy that the world is a subject for the individual to gather experiences, regardless of the effect of such "gathering" on anybody or anything else. A man who sets out merely to get "experiences," apparently with no other object, is likely to run amuck, and Oscar Wilde's career was not, to say the least, a brilliant recommendation for his method. If one sets the conventions at defiance it must be in the interests of a nobler ideal, and the only true way to "realise" oneself is by the service of humanity. Such truths may seem trite and commonplace, as in fact many truths are, and they may be sneered at as Philistine by the smart cynics who advertise the principle of selfishness as a new discovery. But by our refusal or our readiness to be laughed or bluffed out of such truths we are registering, as the case may be, our moral stamina or the lack of it.

As for Wilde himself, apart from his theory, one can of course, as I said before, only have intense compassion. Nothing could possibly be more wretched than the end of this *flaneur*, who in his time probably gave pleasure to others and with his plays and jokes passed an idle hour. In the prefatory letter to this book there is something about God sending to each the experiences necessary for his development, and such of course must be essentially the theistic position. Yet what an odious and disgusting mockery! Imagine the "development" that needed to be accomplished by such orgies and such sufferings as Wilde's! There is a report that before he died Oscar Wilde was received into the bosom of the Catholic Church. Perhaps it was a fitting end. Assuredly no humanist would begrudge to the bankrupt and broken mind any "consolation" which it might thus experience.      FREDE. RYAN.



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Handwritten notes on a torn piece of aged paper, including the number 22 and other illegible markings.

Handwritten notes on a piece of aged paper, including the number 11 and other illegible markings.

Handwritten notes on a piece of aged paper, including the number 6 and other illegible markings.



*THE INQUIRER.*

AUGUST 12, 1905.

LITERATURE.

A SOUL'S AWAKENING.

HARD to receive is the dogma, whatever is, is best. Yet nothing can more effectively wrest from us a recognition of its truth than to see how things ignoble, by attracting retribution, perform their own purification. The last prose work\* written while in prison by that perverse and aberrant genius Oscar Wilde, bears witness to the power of punishment in making clean the foul places of a man's life. A convict's cell does not usually bring the thought, "This is none other but the house of God, and this the gate of heaven. Rather do the indignant lines of Coleridge's "Dungeon" recur to the mind:—

"And this the place our forefathers made  
for man!  
This is the process of our love and  
wisdom,  
To each poor brother who offends against  
us—

Is this the only cure? Merciful God!"

The author of "De Profundis" knew by experience how the prison turns the hearts of men, like its own cold, bare walls, into stone. And he looks, like Coleridge, to the great simple primeval things of air and sky and earth and sea, for the healing of his own wounds as of other wandering and distempered children of nature.

"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 foot-prints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole."

This passage will serve to show that the craft of weaving beautiful words, the magic of style that distinguish his poems, dramas, and prose essays have not been lost; it will also illustrate the fact that a different man is uttering this agonised cry out of depths, from the inordinately clever, witty, and brilliant writer who promulgated a new standard of values in accordance with which art must shun the true and the natural. As declared in his *Intentions*, "all bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic."

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The painful charm of "De Profundis" is the pitiful naturalness of its intense humanity. Every mask is torn off, the soul in uttermost anguish laid bare. "I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility."

And this change came by way of the convict's narrow dungeon. "Prison life makes one see people and things as they really are." In that lonely silence of the darkened cell, in the hours of reflection wherein is no whirr of the wheels of time to drive away the vultures of remorse, the treasures men waste through a too familiar use, grow dear after a season of deprivation; the fame and honour they too easily win, and too lightly hold, assume a nobler worth let fallen in the mire as things of naught.

Wilde did not and could not regard his sins in the light that St. Augustine or John Bunyan viewed their more slender faults. But in what he calls the "ethical evolution" of his character, they wrought upon him a similar psychological effect. The book is a confession, yet a confession in which the necessity of his sin is seen. His aim had always been to seek self-realisation and the road of sensuality had brought him into self-abasement. It was a bitter experience, but carried with it its own repudiation.

With perfect candour he unmasks the heinousness of the wrong he had done himself. There is no more pathetic passage than one in which he relates how a friend came to see him, avowing belief in his utter innocence, only to receive the shock of disillusion from his hero's own lips.

In time, the cleansing fires burnt out his shame. The chastisement of suffering made clean his heart. "People who use phrases without wisdom sometimes talk of sufferings as a mystery. It is really a revelation." With the falling of the scales from his eyes came a new courage to accept his punishment; to submit to his lot; and with that acceptance a new energy rose within the soul which brought a new spirit and began for him a new life.

That new spirit, though somewhat too eloquently set forth to be so named, he calls humility. There are periods that savour a little of the megalomania of the Decadents, but one must charitably suppose them to be inspired by a sense of the greatness of the height from which their author deemed he had fallen so low.



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He had, moreover, to teach himself not to be ashamed of his imprisonment, for "if one is ashamed of having been punished, one might just as well never have been punished at all." Then he had to learn to be cheerful, the duty of happiness. From this lesson a longing to do fresh and better work is engendered, but death prevented its realisation. With a recognition that suffering has its use in the world, came a great sympathy for those whom sorrow hath marked out for her own, and an understanding of one who became the mouthpiece of those who are "dumb under oppression, and whose silence is heard only of God."

Each monotonous day is by him begun by reading in the Greek Testament a portion of the "four prose poems" in which the life of Christ is chronicled. "He understood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich." In very tender and gracious words that are as a sweet incense offered in reverence on a ruined shrine, he speaks of the Man of Sorrows, with whom "all who come in contact, in some way find that the ugliness of their sin is taken away and the beauty of their sorrow revealed to them."

Of the morality of society and the religion of the churches he does not conceal his contempt. "Neither religion, morality, nor reason can help me at all. I am a born antinomian." Nevertheless, the morality of Jesus, which is sympathy, constrains him. When he gives frank expression to the new mode of self-realisation he proposes, the first aim of which

is "to free myself from any bitterness of feeling against the world;" and adds that though completely penniless, and absolutely homeless, he will not mind, provided he has love in his heart, we acknowledge that he has not missed the secret of Jesus.

Professing to be of those who cannot believe, the Confraternity of the Faithless, he comes as near to belief as it is possible without believing. Surely the limits of Agnosticism have been overstepped when the agnostic can say that "love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world," and that he cannot conceive of any other explanation because in no other way could the soul of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full stature of its perfection.



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The perusal of "De Profundis" as a chapter of self-revelation won through suffering, helps us to understand the remark sometimes made to young unbelievers by aged folk, "you have not yet suffered enough."

"The fact that God loves man (says Oscar Wilde) shows us that in the divine order of ideal things it is written that eternal love is to be given to what is eternally unworthy" (p. 103).

"I am conscious now that behind all this beauty, satisfying though it may be, there is some spirit hidden of which the painted forms and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this spirit that I desire to become in harmony" (p. 149).

To this anchorage, which is in essence the anchorage of religious faith, after many vagaries in weird waters and visits to forbidden lands, after slothful ease in becalmed seas and facing of wild tempests, did this strange ship of a soul come at last to rest. But only for a while, for the one clear call came from across the bar, to put out to another sea, whereon, we may hope, the fires of sense flare not at all, and a benigner sun gleams, unsetting.

J. TYSSUL DAVIS.

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J. TYSSUL DAVIS.



**OUT OF THE DEEP.**

**H**E who can read that saddest of books *De Profundis*, and be unmoved by it, must have a callous heart,—a stagnant and torpid soul. How is it possible that anyone can read it, and condemn it as posing? Surely to those who have understanding every sentence is possessed with the dignity of naked truth. The author must have written it with his heart's blood; his very soul is laid bare; soul answers to soul, and those who have in their nature the power of sympathy, or capacity for suffering, will vibrate in quick and full response. One feels for the writer intense pity, sympathy, and love.

It was his destiny to be always prominent, heights and depths were his lot; the safe and level road of mediocrity was not for him; he was always marked out for observation, either in dreadful conspicuousness or enviable distinction. His enemies were bitter and malignant, but happily he had also true and staunch friends, whose loyalty was the one oasis in the desert of his later years; one envies them their privilege in helping one who sorely needed help.

The book is a prose poem, almost biblical in its simple directness, reality, and rhythm; it is a book that stands alone. Fate singled him out for a strange destiny,—brilliant success was his, he was sought after, lauded, feted; then the scene changed, as he himself says—from fame to infamy, from prosperity to direst disgrace. The coarse fare, the hideous dress, the utter repression of prison life must have been to him a veritable hell; and these were only externals; within his heart remorse gnawed ceaselessly, and bitter, unavailing regret. And in the throes of this physical and moral torment his inner soul awoke, he realised to the uttermost that his own worst enemy had been



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himself, that he had actually sided with his enemies against himself, forging the weapon with which they slew him. To a sensitive soul, it is dreadful to realise that he has been his own undoing, it is the most poignant of all agonies; but this is a mental attitude into which the smugly satisfied cannot enter,—to them the shallows, to him the depths. He had worshipped the body, yielded to its lowest instincts, and the soul within him was apparently dead: but it was really in its essence a great soul; in one passage he tells us how difficult it was for him to get anything out of his prison life but bitterness and despair. The insolent pride of his prosperous days left him, and from apparent humiliation he rose to heights of humility. Only a beautiful and noble nature would have survived the ordeal so well; adversity was to him the touchstone that led to greatness. One hates to think of what his sufferings must have been, but to some natures, and his seemingly was one, crushing is necessary to bring out their sweetness.

He sank to "mere maleness," rose again to manhood, and finally all sex was eliminated, he stood a naked soul, humbled and purified. Of him it might truly be said that he lost the whole world to gain his own soul; he discovered that in this world suffering is the one great reality; "at the birth of a star and of a child there is pain," and one might also add—at the birth of a soul. "Thought, true labour of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of Pain? Born as out of the black whirlwind;—true effort, in fact as of a captive struggling to free himself: that is Thought. In all ways we are 'to become perfect through suffering.'"<sup>1</sup>

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commented on, but the strongest will on earth has only a limited amount of force, and if that force is used exclusively for evil, it becomes weak for good, but is not necessarily in its essence weak. His mind must have been phenomenally strong, or he could not have kept his reason under the strain of those two terrible years. For he did not put this thing under his foot and crush it, as a harder nature would have done, nor was he callous under it; on the contrary, with bowed head and humble spirit he felt it to the uttermost. At the time of his degradation he must have seemed dead to all good, awake and responsive only to evil; the love of his mother seemed wasted and lost, yet her death was one of the bitterest of his many sorrows, it made him realise what her love had meant to him; her disgrace had killed her—had broken her heart, and why? because she loved him. But the love was not lost, it bore fruit in its own good time, and "after many days."

In thinking over the tragedy of his life, one feels that human justice, even at its best, is a poor and inadequate thing. To those who breathe the air of freedom, two years seem nothing, but to the one condemned to an existence of routine and drudgery, gloom and privation, it is an eternity; as he said, time with those in prison does not progress, it revolves. His life, once all sunshine, ended in darkest shadow; he died in terrible agony, in great poverty, an exile in a strange land. The very dregs of the cup of bitterness were his portion, yet even in this apparent cruelty there may have been mercy hidden; we do not see the whole.

Canon Beeching, an obscure Anglican priest, states that Christ's doctrine about sin as presented in *De Profundis* is a travesty, which he severely condemns;

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but Christ's own words are that He "came not to call the righteous (like Canon Beeching) but sinners (like Oscar Wilde) to repentance." The "travesty" is therefore to be found in the sermon which distorts the book it presumes to criticise,—a book that teaches a far higher lesson than the majority of sermons. Pity, sympathy, and charity, are the lessons therein contained, and that harsh judgment recoils on the head of the accuser. Redemption comes to the human soul at different times, in different ways, to some quickly, to others late, to some in this life, to some hereafter. To one like him it was a great thing that he *did* awaken here, and was thereby spared the anguish of futile contrition; the influence of his life is now good and not evil, as it would otherwise have been.

"God is not simple, God is not theatrical, the summons comes to each man at his due time for him, with an infinite subtlety of variety."<sup>1</sup>

To Oscar Wilde it was absolutely needful that he should of his own will and evil choosing experience the depths and wallows of degradation,—no other person can degrade one, degradation comes from within. His humiliation was made public, it was dragged out into the light of day, all the world knew it and rightly condemned, and now all the world knows how great and deep was his abasement, his humbling before God and man; and that section of the world which comprehends has also pardoned, has even felt regret that it ever condemned. Those who judge from the surface, from the outer crust of things, are not worthy to pass an opinion, which is as a rushlight or farthing dip compared with the sun at noon. They have no power to see the truth, when they foully misrepresent.

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To say that the author advocates a "doctrine of devils" or to do evil that good may come, is a wilful distortion of fact. If English society took the view which Canon Beeching tries to enforce upon it, we might indeed more than ever be called a nation of hypocrites, and *De Profundis* in its beauty and truth would be a pearl cast before swine. The author takes us into his confidence, and by misjudging him we violate that confidence, and are self-condemned as unworthy of it. To describe as "absolutely shameless and unabashed" one who suffered such intensity of abasement, such abandonment of soul-stricken grief, is the pettiest of unworthy slanders.

The vituperation does not in the least detract from the book's inherent value, but one regrets that it should be desecrated by such handling—"evil to him that evil thinks."

Towards Christ and His teaching Oscar Wilde looks in a manner that is deep and inward, but eminently un-theological. His Christ does not dwell in churches, but in the wounded heart of erring humanity. At his worst he was never a hypocrite; he never pretended; dogma and ritual were nothing to him either in prosperous or unprosperous days.

It is a mean thing for a so-called spiritual guide to stand up and revile the character of a dead man, and to do it in such a way that discussion, argument, and refutation are impossible. Judged from the narrow standpoint of bigoted prejudice and orthodoxy the book no doubt is dangerous; but impartially and justly viewed, it is beautiful and good, worthy of an abiding place in English literature; and in spite of

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Canon Beeching's harangue it will probably retain that place. Many persons whose temperament is opposed to ecclesiasticism, and to whom the *Imitation of Christ*, with its wormlike attitude towards Deity, is the driest of dry bones, will find in *De Profundis* much that will soften and elevate their nature, and deepen their power of sympathy.

Oscar Wilde's death was a distinct loss,—the lump of "collective mediocrity" is improved by the leaven of genius; but the world is hard, and men are cruel, and the only thing left for him was to die. It is ungenerous, unworthy, inhuman, to cling to a stigma which has been expiated by suffering, repentance, and death. As Carlyle says, "Of all acts is not for a man *repentance* the most divine? The deadliest sin, I say, were that same supercilious consciousness of no sin;—that is death; the heart so conscious is divorced from sincerity, humility, and fact; is dead."<sup>1</sup>

On a fair page of writing, must one look only at the blot? Viewed wholly as it should be, the lesson of his life is good; but how seldom any public life is viewed as a whole; as Arnold says, the majority are always wrong, they pass hasty and ill-considered judgments, having no means of arriving at the truth. To the understanding few, "the fit, though few," his genius will live, the verdict of the common herd will not influence them. His degradation was a phase, not a permanent attitude of mind; the desire to experience everything is not in itself strange and inexplicable. In St. Augustine we also have one who grovelled and repented, yet we think now only of his saintship, which came tardily. Oscar Wilde too was a sinner, he also wallowed in the mire, he too repented; are we to remember only the saintship of Augustine,

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**Chester Warren.**

**INDEFINITENESS.<sup>1</sup>**

**I** HAVE been accused of indefiniteness. Probably the accusation was partly just; but partly perhaps I may have been right to refuse to be definite about indefinite things. When you happen to be on the spot, and to see that it is impossible to predict definitely on the state of affairs, it is right not to predict definitely. I have known one who deprecated the same indefiniteness who himself promised definitely, and failed to fulfil his promise. One of the reasons against the making of promises is the fear that they may not be fulfilled. Settled society does not surely depend on promises, but on the fulfilment of moral or social obligations. Why make a sort of fetish of definiteness? Is not this a pity? Let me illustrate by a tale. Once upon a time there were two friends, A and B. A lent B a sum of money, which B was to repay in yearly instalments. As is usual among friends, no

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OSCAR WILDE'S  
"DE PROFUNDIS."\*

Our notice of this remarkable "human document" is, to our own regret, all too tardy; but this fact gives us the advantage of taking into account the estimate of it formed by several other reviewers. To two of these reference may profitably be made on matters of principle, which go to the root of the pathetic experience depicted in the book itself.

It is the *journal intime* of an essentially artistic nature, but one of a morbidly self-conscious type. Consciousness of being in the eye of men, and the thirst so to be, stamp even this self-revelation, simple and sincere in manner as it is, compared with its author's previous productions. So painfully conscious, indeed, does he appear of his own artistic quality and its preciousness to his age, "in symbolic relations" with which he declares himself to have stood, that some have found it hard not to view the whole thing as but a new and more daring form of posing, on the part of a recognised master in the art, and so as devoid of true sincerity. Was he ever really "in the depths"? they ask incredulously. Here "Viator," in the second of two striking and just papers in the "Church Times," gives the true answer, when he replies, "Yea, verily; nor did he ever really emerge, though he fondly imagined the contrary." Oscar Wilde did descend to the depths of acutely-felt degradation and suffering, and there learnt things which he refused even to consider in the days when he shunned all but "the sunny side of the garden" of life; it was, moreover, under the inspiration of that illumination that he penned these pages abounding in poignant sentences of agonized sensibility, and lit up with flashes of rare insight, expressed in language of wonderful force and beauty. But the radical egoism of the man and of the artist remained intact; he thought eagerly of his new insight into another and deeper side of the soul's experience, mainly as fresh artistic material which would enable him to produce a *magnum opus*, that should go far to rehabilitate its author with the world whose harsh judgment touched him so keenly, and to wring from it by sheer force that homage to his "genius" which was ever present to his thoughts. On this dreadful egoism "Viator" lays his unerring finger, and points out that it of itself invalidated Wilde's claim to the title he valued most, that of a supreme artist. For supreme art ever absorbs its subjects with a disinterested devotion such as leaves no leisure for the constant self-preoccupation which was this artist's most distinctive note among his contemporaries. Artist he was, indeed; for he had gifts such as even he could not entirely squander or unmake. But supreme artist, no. He was not enough of a man, a personality—not a personage—for that; and he had too little human sympathy; for in all his self-revelations there is not

\* "De Profundis." By Oscar Wilde. Methuen.

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