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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 7

Bazaar Sep. 8

A somewhat interesting literary question has just been raised. Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" appeared in Berlin before it was published in London, and this German version contains many passages omitted from the English edition. The point is whether the latter is a complete reproduction of the manuscript, or whether some passages have been cut out, and, if so, for what reason. Probably no one but Jissen 2016-03-18 Universitätsbibliothek Bonn will be in a position to reply to this question.

Glasgow Evening News,

October 5, 1905

After the enormous sale enjoyed by "De Profundis," it is a little disconcerting to learn that the English Edition is not by any means complete. A correspondent to "Notes and Queries" has compared the English and German copies, and reports that the omissions in the former total up to about sixty pages of print in the same size of page. The German edition was issued before the English one, and asterisks in various places mark the places of omission. What the exact nature of these excisions are I have not heard, but, considering the very slight size of the volume, some explanation should have been made at the time of publication.

The Evening Standard and St. James's Gazette.

Sept. 2, 1905

Mr. Robert Ross explains in the "Daily Chronicle" the variations between the German and English versions of "De Profundis." Neither the German nor the English versions form a complete reproduction of the original manuscript. The arrangements for publication in Germany had already been made when Mr. Ross submitted his selection to Messrs. Methuen. Messrs. Methuen's reader suggested certain omissions which Mr. Ross felt to be an improvement in a work which, in any case, could only be issued as a fragment. He hopes to be able to make arrangements later on for issuing in their original English both the letters to himself and the passages appearing in the German edition. Mr. Ross begs English critics to remember that Germany has for the last ten years accorded Wilde a position in literature never yielded to him in England, except by a few young writers, whose views were regarded as illusions of youth; so that Mr. Ross has been agreeably surprised by the reception given to "De Profundis" in England.

Glasgow Evening Times

August 10, 1905

While "De Profundis" was a disappointing book in many respects, it may have helped to revive an interest in the earlier works of its author which had mostly gone out of print. In any case, time is the healer of all wounds, and by and by no doubt Oscar Wilde's work may be read, when the sins of the man are forgotten. Already publishers are evidently acting on this theory, and we notice that Mr. Mosher, of Portland, Maine, is issuing a complete edition on hard made paper of the "Poems," including several not hitherto published in book form. We hope that Wilde's plays will be made accessible in volume form at an early date.

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2019-06 Women's University Library

Free Lance.

9 September 1905

"DE PROFUNDIS."

Mr. Robert Ross, editor of Oscar Wilde's posthumous work, "De Profundis," has written a letter in which he explains the reason for expunging certain portions from the English version which were included in the earlier German edition. Mr. Ross says:—"Ragging editors, whether of newspapers or books, is one of the distractions of the silly season, and perhaps you will allow me to occupy space which is not quite so valuable now as it must be later on, in regard to the publication of Mr. Oscar Wilde's posthumous work. As I have explained elsewhere, neither the German nor the English versions form a complete reproduction of the original manuscript. The arrangements for publication in Germany had already been made when I submitted a type-written selection of those portions (to which I afterwards gave the name of 'De Profundis') to Messrs. Methuen.

"This was forwarded in ordinary course to their reader, a very distinguished man of letters, who expressed the opinion that certain passages might still be deleted without impairing the value of the book. I saw at once that so far from doing so, it greatly improved the work, which, in any case, could only have been issued as a fragment. The German version also contains some letters written by the author, while he was at Reading, to myself. These were never submitted to Messrs. Methuen. They appear in the French version by M. Henri Davray, and in the Italian, Swedish and Hungarian translations.

"I shall, no doubt, be able to make arrangements later on for issuing both the letters and the passages appearing in the German edition, in their original English. It must be remembered that when Dr. Meyerfield, the learned and enthusiastic translator of 'De Profundis,' prevailed on me to bring out the book, he was speaking for a German public, which, rightly or wrongly, had long acclaimed Mr. Oscar Wilde as one of the most distinguished English men of letters in the nineteenth century.

"To the English public, all Ruskinians at heart, and unable to separate the man and the writer, Wilde was the author of some clever plays and epigrams, whose conduct precluded the inclusion of his name, not only in English literature, but in polite conversation. . . . It was a knowledge of these circumstances and a grave uncertainty as to how 'De Profundis' would be received in England that necessitated the caution I exercised. . . ."

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On sait qu'Oscar Wilde, après avoir purgé sa peine de deux ans de prison avec *hard labour*, mourut le 30 novembre 1900, à Paris, où il avait presque constamment vécu depuis sa libération. Le silence se faisait autour de ce nom si fâcheusement notoire, quand parut un ouvrage posthume : *De profundis*, dans lequel Wilde explique sa conduite.

C'est à propos de cet ouvrage qu'un procès inattendu va s'engager. Oscar Wilde est mort *bankrupt*, c'est-à-dire failli, et c'est l'*official receiver in bankruptcy* qui a charge de percevoir tous les droits d'auteur et autres revenus appartenant à la succession Wilde, et cela pour rembourser les créanciers anglais de l'écrivain.

Les droits d'auteur de *De profundis* paraissaient devoir lui échapper, le manuscrit appartenant à M. Robert Ross, à qui Oscar Wilde le remit de son vivant. Or c'est un point de droit maintes fois fixé en Angleterre que tous les droits perçus pour un ouvrage dont l'auteur est mort reviennent au possesseur du manuscrit.

Les sommes produites par la vente du livre en Angleterre se montent à environ 22,500 francs. C'est elles que le receveur officiel des faillites réclame à l'éditeur, entre les mains de qui il a fait mettre opposition à leur paiement.

On nous assure que M. Robert Ross est décidé à plaider jusqu'au bout et qu'il ne désespère pas d'obtenir gain de cause.

Dans une lettre adressée au traducteur de l'édition française, M. Ross expliquait récemment les raisons pour lesquelles il s'était cru obligé de ne publier, à présent, qu'un tiers environ du manuscrit de son ami, les parties inédites « étant d'une nature trop personnelle et trop intime ». Or le bruit court à Londres que, révolté par la criante injustice qu'on commet envers la mémoire de l'auteur, envers les fils d'Oscar Wilde et aussi envers lui-même, M. Ross est décidé à publier *intégralement* le manuscrit de *De profundis* : d'où scandale retentissant, car il contient un récit complet et détaillé de la carrière de Wilde, de son procès et de son emprisonnement.

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Daily Telegraph.

It cannot be said that any great poem has been born during the last year. It is difficult to find a single work of creative power. But there are many, probably, who will recall that strange and most impressive memorial which Mr. Oscar Wilde has left us in his "De Profundis," a piece of work which does not ring altogether true, which has certain fantastic and artificial features depriving it of a high place in our regard, but which nevertheless echoes a very human voice, and, moreover, bears testimony, among a generation which often needs such a reminder, that the highest literature and poetry come from sane and healthy elements, and never from morbid elements in art or in thought.

Jan. 3. 1906.

Morning Post

In a class alone is the "De Profundis" of Oscar Wilde, full of beautiful language, expressing many fine thoughts, a book which, judged merely as an artistic achievement, would stand out prominently among the serious productions of its age, but which cannot truly be regarded by the present generation for its literary quality alone.

Dec. 26. 1905.

Evening Standard

and, in a class by itself, "De Profundis," the penitential psalm, to my mind painfully sophisticated, of Oscar Wilde.

Dec. 30. 1905.

Irish Independent.

Messrs. Methuen were responsible for Oscar Wilde's moving auto-biographical document most appropriately named "De Profundis."

Jan. 1. 1906.

Standard.

The late Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" is a veritable human document, which recalls the painful story of a restless and shadowed career—rich in unfulfilled possibilities in English literature.

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Dec. 26.
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February 26, 1906.

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THE ESTATE OF OSCAR WILDE.—Letters of administration have been granted of the estate of Mr. Oscar Wilde, described as Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, of Paris. The estate, so far as can be at present ascertained, does not exceed £100.

DAILY CHRONICLE,

February 27, 1906.

TRAGEDY OF GENIUS.

Oscar Wilde's Dying Wish
about his Debts.

DISPOSING OF RUMOURS.

We announced, a few days ago, that letters of administration of the estate of the late Mr. Oscar Wilde had been granted to Mr. R. Ross, and that it had been sworn at less than £100. With reference to this Mr. Ross has addressed a letter to us which throws a good deal of light on the end of a tragic career.

"May I be allowed," he writes, "to correct an erroneous deduction which has followed the granting of letters of administration to myself for the estate of the late Mr. Oscar Wilde? It is suggested that when the author died he was worth at least £100, and that this settles the various rumours with regard to his finances at the time.

"The facts are these:—In September, 1895 Wilde was adjudicated a bankrupt; the petitioning creditor being the late Marquis of Queensberry, who obtained a verdict against him with costs. The assets consisted mainly of literary and dramatic rights, and a reversionary interest in his brother's and his wife's estates. In November 1900 Wilde died, an undischarged bankrupt.

"During the three years following his release from prison (1897) he lived on a small annuity provided for him by his friends. Since his death there has been a steady and increasing demand for his works, due, I believe, to the great interest they have aroused on the Continent, particularly in Germany. The publication of 'De Profundis' stimulated this interest.

"The consequence was that, although unscrupulous English and American publishers have pirated most of the works, the English creditors have been paid 19s. in the pound. The remaining 1s. in the pound has been contributed by the seizure of the profits of 'De Profundis,' and about £400 which a friend has advanced in order to clear off the debt.

February 25. 1906.

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BANKRUPTCY ANNULLED.

"The bankruptcy, therefore, is annulled, in accordance with the wishes of the late author, and by the order of the Probate Court I have been appointed administrator of the wreck of the copyrights, literary and dramatic. I have resigned my claim to the profits of 'De Profundis,' out of which I had hoped to clear the Paris debts, all of which were incurred by the author after his release from prison while he was still an undischarged bankrupt.

"It was Wilde's last expressed wish that these should be paid, the creditors being people who knew while supplying him with the necessaries of life that they stood no legal chance of being paid at all.

"When Wilde died I gave the French creditors my personal assurance that all their claims would eventually be met, secure as I believed myself to be in the possession of the remarkable MS., 'De Profundis.' The Bankruptcy laws are, however, no less monstrous than all other laws. A bankrupt cannot give even his most intimate friend the work of his own brain for discharging what most of us would call a moral obligation.

"Wilde being a bankrupt his work, though written subsequent to the receiving order being made against him, became liable to seizure not by the French creditors, but by the English creditors, and others who figured so gracefully in his trial at the Old Bailey.

"The English bankruptcy has, however, been annulled, or will be in a few days. Arrangements have been made with Messrs. Methuen to bring out a uniform edition of Wilde's works, and out of the profits arising therefrom I shall be graciously permitted by the Court, I believe, to satisfy the French creditors."

Dundee Courier.

February 28, 1906.

An interesting statement is made to-day by Mr R. Ross, to whom letters of administration of the late Oscar Wilde were granted the other day. It was then stated that the poet's estate had been sworn at less than £100, but, according to Mr Ross, when he died in 1900 Wilde was an undischarged bankrupt. Since his death, however, there has been a steady and increasing demand for his works, and as a consequence the English creditors have been paid 19s in the £1, while the remaining shilling has been contributed by the seizure of the profits of "De Profundis," the tragic poem which Wilde wrote in Reading Gaol. His bankruptcy is, therefore, annulled, and that was in accordance with his wishes. Mr Ross had hoped to clear off the Paris debts of the poet from the profits of "De Profundis," and that also was Wilde's wish, but this has been rendered impossible in the meantime by the seizure of the profits. A complete edition of Wilde's works is shortly to be published, and out of the profits Mr Ross hopes to satisfy the French creditors.

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THE LAW TIMES

March 31, 1906.

SIR CHARLES DILKE, who is one of the greatest authorities in constitutional law and jurisprudence of the present generation and was Senior in the Law Tripos at Cambridge University, showed an accurate knowledge of juridical principles by the framing of a question put by him on Thursday in last week to the War Secretary, asking whether any reports as to recent "administration of so-called martial law by the British force in Crete towards insurgents" should be the subject of official inquiry. The law martial exercised in former times by the constable or marshal over troops in actual service, and especially on foreign service, has long been obsolete, and the code called martial, but more properly military, law can only be put into operation under the provisions of Army Discipline Acts, annually brought into force, providing express regulations for that purpose. The expression "martial law," however, has survived, and been applied, to use the words of Sir Fitzjames Stephen, to what Sir Charles Dilke calls "so-called martial law"—namely, "to the common right of the Crown and its representatives to repel force by force in the case of invasion or insurrection, and to act against rebels as it might act against invaders": (see Stephen's History of the Criminal Law of England, vol. 1, pp. 207-208).

The passive resister, in his turn, is doing something for the reform of prison. One of these gentlemen, confined in a large provincial prison, "found the place," as he says, "in a filthy condition and swarming with vermin. I caught some of the creatures and carefully laid them out on a page of the Prayer Book, then marked the book outside, so that it could easily be identified." On the resister's release, he addressed a complaint to the Home Secretary, and gave him undeniable proof of his statement by referring to the Prayer Book itself. The gentleman, it seems, returned to prison. "The next time I went there I found the entire inside of the prison had been cleaned and painted, every cell wall whitewashed, every floor scrubbed, so that I could have eaten my meals off it, brand-new utensils and books for my use, a hairbrush and comb which had never been used before, and which afterwards was kept for my special use; all the filthy bedding had been destroyed and new in its place; and before I was left in the cell two warders with a lamp looked into every corner and crevice in search of any dirt, and told me if I found anything not to my liking I was to ring the bell and it would be attended to. On the day of my release one of the chief officials came to me and asked me if I was satisfied, just as if I had been staying in a hotel." It is to be hoped that other passive resisters have since been as fortunate in their treatment. We may point out that prison is the one institution in the kingdom in which there is no conceivable excuse for the existence of "matter in the wrong place." Not only is every prisoner under strict orders to keep his cell spick and span (does not Oscar Wilde tell us in the De Profundis that he began the day by going down on his knees to scrub his floor), but there is at all times available in the prison population an army of cleaners for all imaginable purposes. Indeed, long-sentence prisoners have been known to complain that the spotless cleanliness of their whole surroundings became in time one of the pains of confinement.

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March 15, 1906.

PRISON REFORM.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE TRIBUNE."

Sir,—Mr. Stead, I think, has said that all editors and leader-writers should do a month's "time." If the writer of the very interesting article on "Prison Reform" honestly believes that the present state of English prisons may be learned by reference to the works of the Russian Dostoeffsky (1861) and the Italian Silvio Pellico (1832), you, Sir, should implore him to qualify for one month's "hard." The comparison which such a statement contemplates is almost petrifying. It would have been a good deal less wide of the mark to cite, as the penological authority up to date, John Howard himself, who has been dead but 116 years, and who did, anyhow, write on the prisons of this country.

There are for certain some tolerably fetid pages in the calendar of our gaols, and to any student of the matter Botany Bay is still a nightmare. But no English prison has ever remotely resembled any prison in Russia, or any dungeon of Italy under the Austrian despotism. We stand, indeed, almost at the polar opposites. Nor are we, as your critic (with whose main argument I venture entirely to agree) seems to think, so destitute of trustworthy literature on this subject. There is any reasonable amount of it. Thirty years ago the best book on prisons was the anonymous "Five Years' Penal Servitude." Twenty years ago the best was Mr. Michael Davitt's "Leaves from a Prison Diary"—still a most fascinating work. The best to-day is probably Lord William Nevill's "Penal Servitude"—a candid and straightforward, and, on the whole, a quite unbiassed record. Oscar Wilde and Mrs. Maybrick have had their say, from standpoints somewhat different. Mr. Beck has told us what penal servitude is like to one who ought never to have been condemned to it. I might stretch out the list, but will add merely that the annual report of the Prison Commissioners is, to my thinking, far and away the most interesting Blue Book that is issued.

Prison changes slowly—partly because we refuse to spend money on it in the most sensible ways, but chiefly because not one person in five hundred cares a pin about the question. None the less, the reforms of the past twelve years (traceable in all instances to the recommendations of a report framed largely by the present Home Secretary) have been, to patient observers, encouraging enough. I could very easily fill with them two columns of THE TRIBUNE.
TIGHE HOPKINS.
Frayne, Herne Bay, March 15th.

THE TRIBUNE

March 15, 1906.

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July 1905

THE BIRTH OF A SOUL.

(Oscar Wilde: the Closing Phase.)

PROFESSOR HUGH WALKER, M.A., LL.D.,
St David's College, Lampeter.

FORTY years ago Robert Browning declared that, besides "the incidents in the development of a soul," there was little that was worth study; and all his poetry proves that he not only said it with his lips but believed it in his heart. If he was right, how supereminent must be the interest of an incident, or a group of incidents, the effect of which is so great that it is best described, not as the development of a soul, but as its re-birth! Such is the supreme interest which belongs to the two books, *De Profundis* and *A Ballad of Reading Gaol*, written by Oscar Wilde after the awful overthrow of his disgrace, condemnation and imprisonment. Whoever compares these books with any of Wilde's earlier writings, whether in prose or in verse, must surely be driven to the conclusion that their author was the child of a second birth in a sense far deeper than that which is usually attached to the glibly-repeated phrases of traditional theology. He may even be led to question the propriety of speaking about the "ruin" of Wilde, though Wilde applies the word to himself. "I must," he says, "say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand." Yet the question suggested by the two books above named is whether the apparent ruin was not in reality salvation; and whether, in the eye of infinite wisdom, the whole

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process of sin, and degradation, and suffering, might not be just the process most to be desired for such a man as Wilde. His condemnation smirched Wilde for ever with the "bar sinister" of the prison, made his name a name of reproach, and himself an outcast from society; but it led to the production of two works which, in their moral depth and permanent significance, dwarf all he had before written, all that he gave promise of writing. The tree is known by its fruit. Could such a tree have borne such fruit unless it had been watered by the bloody sweat of those appalling sufferings? Would anything but the utter disgrace and infamy of the sentence have wrung from Wilde the indispensable bloody sweat? But if the sufferings were necessary, then the sins from which they sprang were necessary too; and in that case it would seem that we must modify the ordinary conception of the nature of sin and suffering. Carlyle in a noble figure reminds us that the rose is none the less a rose although it springs from a dungheap. The metaphor is flung at that realism which belittles the higher elements of humanity because they are inseparably associated with the animal part. We accept it as a fine expression of the truth; but we probably shrink from asking ourselves what may be the components of that heap from which the rose draws its life. Neither, fortunately, is there the least necessity of descending to details; but *De Profundis* irresistibly impels us to ask the question whether there is any form of evil which is absolutely, irredeemably and immutably evil. We are accustomed to think of certain forms of evil as being capable of transformation into good. The suffering which is brought upon us by the action of others, or that which is due to our own inadvertent transgression, may be matter for thanksgiving. The baser passions are, we know, no more identical with the family affections, which are the glory of humanity, than is the festering corruption at the roots identical with the beautiful flower. Both have undergone a transformation "into something rich and strange." But dare we apply this same conception to the

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sins which we are conscious of committing against our own higher nature, which we feel have degraded us? Is there any moral alchemy which can alter the character of lying, and slander, and covetousness, and the thousand forms of impurity? This is the question which *De Profundis* forces us to raise. Wilde was neither the first to ask it nor the first to answer it; but probably no one else has so vividly illustrated the answer by his own life and work.

We need not lift the curtain from Wilde's history farther than he has lifted it himself in *De Profundis*. There he tells us, sufficiently for the purpose, what he was before his life was cleft in twain by the closing of the prison doors behind him. "The gods had given me almost everything," he says. "But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a *flâneur*, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation." . . . "It was always springtime once in my heart. My temperament was akin to joy. I filled my life to the very brim with pleasure, as one might fill a cup to the very brim with wine." Nor must it be supposed that Wilde ever, even doing his imprisonment, turned his back completely upon his old life, or wholly renounced the principles which governed it. The new conception which filled his mind in prison was that they were, not so much false, as partial and one-sided. "I don't," he says, "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 mistake, then, in Wilde's opinion, was, not in living