

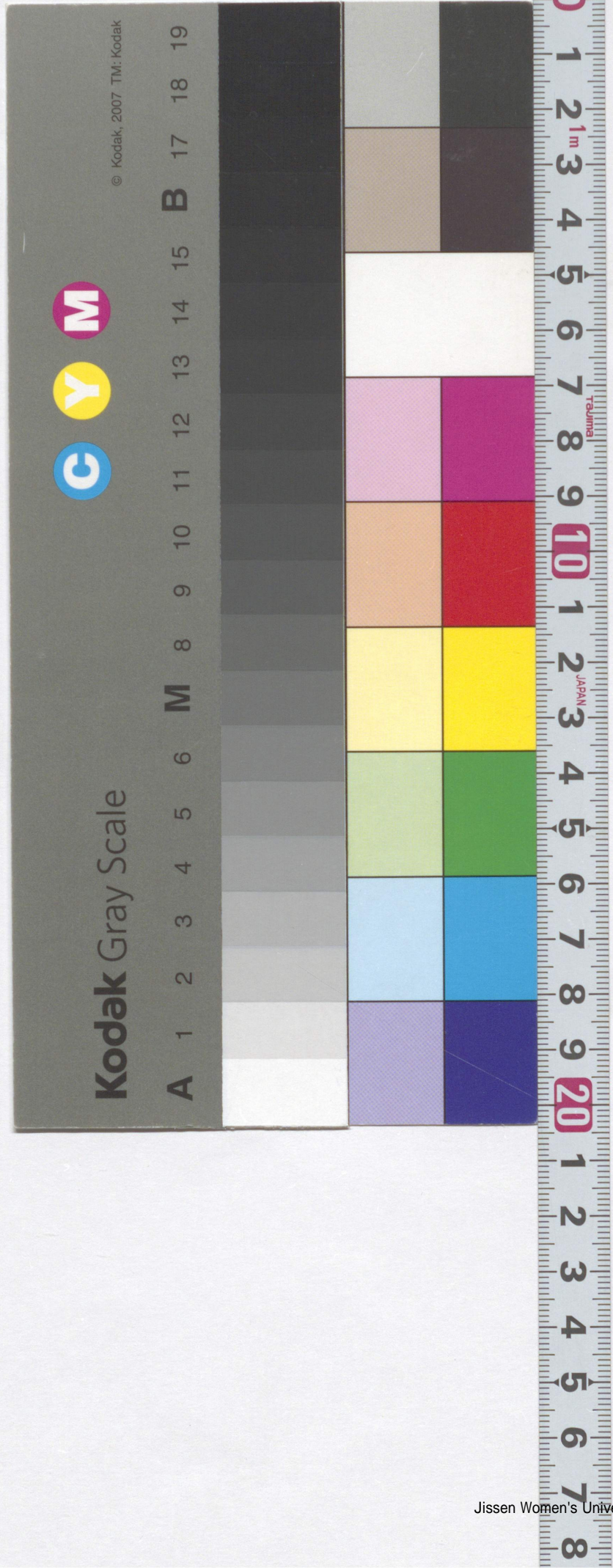


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Oscar Wilde
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Vol. 8



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L'ESTAFETTE

3 Déc^r 1900

MORT D'OSCAR WILDE

M. Oscar Wilde vient de mourir à Paris, dans un petit hôtel de la rue des Beaux-Arts où il résidait souvent. Il avait pris le nom de Melmoth, sans doute en souvenir de héros, jadis célèbre, maintenant oublié, d'un roman anglais du siècle dernier que traduisit jadis Charles Nodier, quelque chose comme un Manfred anglais, un damné ayant le prosélytisme de la damnation et l'amour de la beauté.

Il avait quarante-quatre ans. Son père, sir William Wilde, était médecin, antiquaire, homme de lettres. Sa mère, lady Wilde, était poétesse. A Oxford, il avait eu lui-même tous les prix de poésie. A vingt et un ans, il était à Londres, par la publication d'un volume de poèmes, par son action personnelle dans une société aristocratique qui lui ouvrait sa naissance, l'initiateur du mouvement « esthétique », dont on retrouve un reflet dans les études de M. Paul Bourget.

Ses conceptions d'art furent publiées dans un volume intitulé *Inventions*. On a de lui, un roman *Donan Gray*, un recueil de poèmes en prose, la *Maison des grenades*, un poème, le *Sphinx*, un volume de nouvelles, le *Crime de sir Arthur Saville*. Puis vinrent ses pièces de théâtre, *l'Éventail de lady Windermere*, *Une femme sans importance*, le *Mari idéal*, *Salomé*, etc. Après la première de ces pièces, lorsque le nom de l'auteur fut acclamé, il parut sur la scène portant à la boutonnière de son habit un boutonnet et en fumant une cigarette, improvisa une petite conférence. Ceci fut jugé d'une impertinence délicieuse. Il était alors le favori du public et de la société.

En 1895, une scandaleuse affaire de mœurs le précipita d'un coup du haut de ces sommets. Lord Queensberry l'accusa d'avoir détourné des bonnes mœurs son fils lord Douglas. M. Oscar Wilde répondit par un procès en diffamation, qui fut bientôt transformé en poursuites directes contre lui-même, car tout était vrai, et plus encore, dans les accusations de lord Queensberry. Le poète fut condamné à deux ans de *hard labour*. On sait le reste.

M. Oscar Wilde est décédé, à l'hôtel d'Albion, rue des Beaux-Arts, où il occupait depuis quatre ans un petit appartement de deux chambres. Il était gravement malade depuis plusieurs mois déjà. Une méningite s'étant subitement déclarée, il succomba.

M. Oscar Wilde, qui était protestant, était converti depuis peu de jours à la religion catholique. Il avait, il y a quelques jours, reçu le baptême.

Ses obsèques auront lieu à l'église Saint-Germain-des-Près, lundi, à neuf heures du matin. Il ne sera pas envoyé de lettres de faire part et seuls les amis intimes de M. Oscar Wilde y assisteront.

Déc^r 1900

Obsèques de M. Oscar Wilde

Hier matin, à neuf heures, ont eu lieu les obsèques du poète anglais Oscar Wilde, dont nous avons annoncé la mort il y a deux jours.

Le convoi funèbre s'est formé devant la maison mortuaire, 13, rue des Beaux-Arts, où Oscar Wilde habitait sous le nom de Sébastien Melmoth.

POLITIQUE COLONIALE

26, Rue Cambon, 26

Déc^r 1900

Obsèques d'Oscar Wilde

Ce matin ont eu lieu à 9 heures, à l'église St-Germain-des-Près, les obsèques de l'écrivain anglais Oscar Wilde. Elles ont été des plus simples. Une soixantaine de personnes environ y assistaient, qui appartenaient pour la plupart au monde littéraire. Le deuil était conduit par un homme jeune et d'assez belle mine, lord Douglas.

La messe a été dite dans la chapelle placée derrière le maître autel et l'absoute donnée par un prêtre anglais.

Une dizaine de couronnes en fleurs naturelles ornaient le char.

L'une d'elles portait la délicate *A mon locataire*. Ainsi, ce contempteur de la morale devait être un locataire ponctuel. Bizarrie et complexité de l'âme humaine.

A signaler la présence, dans la file, de deux superbes voitures de maître, les gens en petite livrée.

ECHO DE PARIS

2, Rue Taiteout

Déc^r 1900

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Voici dans quelles circonstances cette conversion aurait eu lieu :

Se trouvant malade, il y a un mois de cela, M. Oscar Wilde, raconte-t-on, fit appeler un médecin qui se rendit à son chevet et le soigna.

Ce docteur, apprenant à qui il avait à faire, demanda à M. Oscar Wilde s'il ne se repentait pas.

Et comme le poète s'étonnait, le docteur lui dit : « Ne vous êtes-vous jamais confessé?... »

M. Oscar Wilde déclara alors qu'il n'était pas catholique.

Depuis ce moment, le docteur, qui est très pieux, n'eut qu'une idée, convertir M. Oscar Wilde; tout en le soignant, il lui parlait des consolations de la religion; il lui faisait entrevoir la paix de l'âme après la confession...

Le docteur fut si éloquent qu'il persuada à M. Oscar Wilde d'appeler un prêtre; celui-ci vint et fut écouté...

Au moment où il reçut le baptême, M. Oscar Wilde avait toute sa connaissance mais on le savait et il se savait perdu.

A sale of books of more than ordinary value will take place at Messrs. Hodgson and Co.'s rooms, Chancery-lane, to-morrow, Thursday, and Friday, at one o'clock each day. Among the works to be sold are a fine copy of Gould's "Monograph of Humming Birds"; Hakluyt's famous "Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation"; Florio's "World of Words" (1611); Beckford's "Thoughts on Hunting" (1781); important books on art, history, and travel. There will also be autograph letters by Queen Victoria, Lord Nelson, Sir Walter Scott, W. M. Thackeray, Oscar Wilde, and others, as well as valuable volumes relating to law.

Morning Post. 1 Nov. 1900.

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11
Déc^{bre} 1900

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POLITIQUE COLONIALE
26, Rue Cambon, 26

Déc^{bre} 1900

4

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A signaler la présence, dans la file, de deux superbes ornements de marbre les gens en petite livrée.

ÉCHO DE PARIS

2, Rue Taitbout

6

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Morning

Post.

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L'AMITIÉ ANTIQUE

Le procès retentissant d'Oscar Wilde n'est pas terminé. Il faut que l'accusé attende en prison un jury unanime. La pudibonde Angleterre, désireuse de prouver l'exception, l'anomalie, la monstruosité, — elle oublie ses télégraphistes et les noms aristocratiques tus à l'audience, — s'acharne si rageusement sur cet esthète déséquilibré qu'elle finira par nous rendre indulgents à son égard. Le public français d'ailleurs, bien que ne pratiquant aucunement le vice reproché, n'a pas de ces fureurs protestantes. On a retiré toutes les pièces de l'accusé anglais du théâtre, avant qu'il fût convaincu, alors que les Parisiens assistaient sans remords au *Chilpéric* d'Hervé, un esthète du passé, condamné, lui, et qui devait se rendre sur la scène où on l'applaudissait, encadré de deux agents de la Sûreté, le prenant à Mazas, à l'heure où la rampe s'allumait, l'attendant dans les coulisses, et le réintégrant dans sa cellule, le rideau tombé.

Oscar Wilde comptait, paraît-il, sur un acquittement. Il avait attribué à sa défense hardiment présentée une force persuasive et une vertu absolutive qui n'ont produit d'effet que sur deux jurés. L'invocation aux traditions bibliques et païennes a paru toucher ces deux sages anglais, évidemment humanistes et qui volontiers ont confondu Oscar avec Alcibiade. L'esthète a affirmé que l'amour pur, insexué, idéalement chaste, pouvait exister entre personnes ayant même caractéristique physique. Il a cité des exemples. « C'est un amour, a-t-il dit avec emphase et conviction, que le siècle grossier ne comprend pas. C'est l'amour de David pour Jonathan. C'est l'amour que Platon, dans sa philosophie, décrit comme le commencement de la sagesse. » Les deux jurés ont été d'avis qu'Oscar avait été un sage. Ils ont certainement des idées particulières sur la philosophie.

Il est possible cependant que les deux jurés, ainsi qu'Oscar, aient raison et qu'on ait de fâcheux préjugés sur les mœurs antiques. Les anciens, maîtres si souvent vénérés, suivis, cités, nous deviennent suspects quand ils chantent leurs amitiés. Au lycée, on ne nous donnait point à traduire l'éplogue fameuse de Virgile, ce qui nous inspirait un désir vif de la connaître. A l'insu de mes vertueux professeurs, je l'ai, à coup de Quicherat, traduite. J'avoue n'avoir nullement compris alors l'intervention. Encore à l'heure actuelle, moins collégien, ayant lu le savant traité du docteur Moll, de Berlin, sur les perversions de l'instinct génital, je ne puis m'expliquer la réprobation qui frappe cette deuxième églogue. Il est même permis d'être stupéfait de l'interprétation qu'on en donne. Il s'agit, vous vous en souvenez, d'un certain Corydon, berger, qui éprouvait de l'affection *ardebit*, dit le texte, pour un nommé Alexis, domestique favori de Iolas, maître jaloux. Pour un homme de la campagne, Corydon exprimait ses sentiments en lettré digne de

l'estime de M. Gaston Boissier. Il usait de la métaphore et abusait de la périphrase. Pour indiquer qu'il était midi, Corydon disait à ce valet de charrue, qui devait être également un latiniste distingué: « Voici l'heure où les troupeaux eux-mêmes cherchent l'ombre et la fraîcheur; où le vert lézard se cache sous les buissons; où la ménagère broie pour les moissonneurs, las de la chaleur du jour, l'ail, le serpolet et les herbes odorantes ». Il lui faisait sonner, en hexamètres d'or pur, ses richesses aux oreilles: troupeaux aux étables, mille brebis errant sur les montagnes de Sicile, du laitage été comme hiver. Il ajoutait qu'il jouait agréablement du flageolet. Ce talent de société lui avait été enseigné par Pan lui-même, le grand Pan, qui alors n'était pas mort et protégeait les brebis et les pasteurs. Enfin il lui proposait des cadeaux, une belle flûte à sept tuyaux, deux jeunes chevreuils à la marmelle. La ménagère, Thestylis, les demandait. Elle les recevra, puisqu'Alexis est rétif à l'offre que lui fait Corydon de le prendre à son service.

Il a fallu des luxures intenses, résorbées dans les corveaux savants et des imaginations débordantes de vices à nos doctes pédagogues pour voir dans cette poésie champêtre une ode à la Vénus mâle. Tout tient dans l'interprétation du verbe *ardebit*, qui peut signifier aussi bien désirer, comme on souhaite avoir un jardin, un cheval, une bicyclette, que brûler d'amour. Ces traductions libres sont osées. Elles engendrent la diffamation historique. Parfois on s'aperçoit du contresens. C'est ainsi qu'on a reconnu après coup que les quelques odes conservées de cette pauvre Sapho s'adressaient non à une amante, mais à un beau guerrier, et qu'à tort on l'avait, durant des siècles universitaires, fait passer pour être de la garde nationale de Lesbos.

Trop aventureuses, trop malveillantes sont nos gloses. Horace a été indignement chargé d'un péché asphaltique qu'il ne commettait pas, qu'il n'a pas célébré dans ses vers. Il faut la curieuse investigation d'un casuiste espagnol et son intuition folichonne pour faire de l'amant de Lydie, de Lalagé, de Chloris, un ancêtre du Taylor londonien, parce qu'il a adressé ce compliment à son jeune esclave: « Le myrte sied bien à ton front, lorsque tu remplis ma coupe ». On n'est pas un justiciable de la cour anglaise parce qu'on aura dit à un *boy* sur le paquebot, vous apportant un grog: « John, vous avez une casquette qui vous va bien ». L'esprit en tout ceci est plus prompt que la chair. Est-ce que le *Banquet* de Platon n'a pas été commenté en dépit de la justice? L'amitié de disciple à maître doit-elle donc être imputée à crime? Les Grecs, plus délicatement pourvus que nous de sensations et de sentiments, admettaient et pratiquaient l'amour unisexuel, dégagé de toute visée charnelle. Il est impossible que tous ces grands esprits aient été des pourceaux. Qu'il y ait eu des hommes dépravés, des débauchés cherchant des raffinements, des complications, des interversions dans les plaisirs des sens, c'est certain. Les empereurs, les rois, les despotes orientaux, on peut les abandonner. Le commun des viveurs d'Athènes ou de

Rome pareillement. Il n'y a pas à se prendre sur les mœurs décrites par le seigneur Pétrone Arbitr. Mais de mœurs que dans nos romans, dans nos pièces, nous ne rencontrons des crimes, des attentats pour se reproduire ici et là dans la réalité ne sont cependant point l'ordinaire événement de notre existence, il est permis de croire que les vices décrits avec plus ou moins d'indulgence par les auteurs étaient exceptionnels, et non un état endémique. Encore moins faut-il accuser les écrivains de les avoir pratiqués. Un romancier peut enfasser dans ses conceptions les viols, les adultères, les incendies et les empoisonnements sans qu'il soit permis de lui attribuer une scélératesse susceptible d'exécuter ce qu'il narre. Le juge anglais a eu raison de déclarer qu'on avait trop parlé littérature au tribunal. C'est l'homme et non l'écrivain qu'on jugeait.

Toute la raison répugne à admettre que Socrate, contre lequel la postérité pédaïque a perpétré la calomnie qui lui valut la guêpe, qu'Epaminondas, le pur héros qui avait un certain Micytos, que les deux vaillants guerriers virgiliens Nisus et Euryale, que la légion thébaine tout entière, cette phalange d'immortels patriotes, n'aient été qu'une bande de drôles dépravés. L'amitié grecque n'était pas l'amour infâme des lords et des petits télégraphistes. L'Iliade, repose toute entière sur les relations chères qui unissaient Achille et Patrocle. C'est pour venger son ami que l'invincible Achée oublie son ressentiment rompt son serment, saute sur ses armes et va combattre Hector et ruiner Troie. Achille, un collègue de ces polissons effeminés qui font chanter les déséquilibrés de l'amour! Les trois cents superbes soldats qui formaient le bataillon sacré tombèrent à Chéronée pour la patrie, un ignoble harem d'êtres dégradés! Non, cela révolte et ne peut être vrai! Nos érudits se sont abusés. Ils ont imité, en commentant les classiques, ce personnage femelle de Zola, Mme Levrat, qui devina dans la phrase la plus simple un sous-entendu obscène. Oscar Wilde, pour sa défense, s'est recommandé de l'Ancien Testament. N'est-il pas dit, au livre des rois, que David aimait Jonathan comme l'on aime son âme? Et Saül, qui avait, lui aussi, le soupçon prompt, ne reprochait-il pas à son fils comme un crime cette amitié?

L'accusé aurait pu invoquer également le verset 23 du chap. 13 du Nouveau Testament où on nous montre « l'un des apôtres que Jésus aimait reposant sur son sein ».

On a été injuste envers cette lumineuse antiquité dont pas un des dieux, car l'épisode de Ganymède ne prouve rien, ne fut gratifié du vice pratiqué à Londres. Et les divinités de l'Olympe reflétaient l'humanité, partageaient ses passions, se mêlaient à ses combats, à ses amours.

Il n'est pas sûr du tout qu'Oscar Wilde soit accusé à tort, mais il est certain qu'on a calomnié Socrate, Platon, Achille, Patrocle, Nisus et Euryale, la légion des héros thébains et le plus mignon des apôtres.

EDMOND LEPLETTIER

OSCAR WILDE

Il n'est pas d'après sa réputation et sa prison qu'il faut juger Oscar Wilde, mais d'après son œuvre et surtout d'après son *De Profundis* que nous pouvons maintenant lire dans une traduction française. Son génie l'avait élevé au-dessus des préjugés et des tares de sa race. Qu'est-ce qui caractérise l'Anglais? Son insociabilité d'abord. En termes énergiques, Green a marqué le mépris et presque la haine que l'Anglais professe pour les autres peuples. Jamais il ne le voit se mêler à l'étranger. Grand angeur, il traverse les villes et les navires affectant, exagérant même sa tête. Son port, ses gestes, ses costumes nationaux. Il tient à ce qu'on le distingue d'une mille. A aucun prix, il ne veut paraître fusionner.

S'il se sépare des autres races, il est tellement individualiste qu'il se met en garde soigneusement à l'écart même de ses compatriotes. Chaque Anglais est comme une île isolée.

Son moi est si fort qu'il cherche à l'étendre, sans se soucier de blesser les droits de son voisin. L'intérêt personnel, l'extension de soi-même, voilà l'unique loi de l'Anglais, considéré comme individu et comme peuple. Résumant d'une façon lapidaire l'histoire de la Grande-Bretagne, lord Chatam a pu s'écrier: « Nous ne subsisterions pas, si nous avions été justes ». Cette phrase constitue-t-elle pas toute la politique actuelle du président Roosevelt et ne l'entend-on pas dans tous ses discours et dans tous ses messages?

Son climat a disposé l'Anglo-Saxon à ce farouche individualisme; à la lutte violente et sans merci contre tout ce qui semble le gêner dans ses desseins. De tous les *struggle-for-lifers* du globe, il est le plus terrible et il le restera, parce qu'il a pour nid une île à peine enveloppée d'une mer triste.

Oscar Wilde ne rappelait que de loin la férocité des insulaires, ses compatriotes. Il était de sa race par le visage mais y échappait par le corps plutôt gras et savonneux et par la liberté de l'esprit. J'ai tracé dans: *le Roi des Juifs*, ainsi que dans un volume de ma traduction de la Bible, un portrait du Juif, à la fois idéaliste et pratique, les mains et les pieds dans la boue et la tête dans le bleu du ciel.

L'Anglo-Saxon n'est-il pas le juif de l'Europe? Mais de ses origines Oscar Wilde n'avait retenu que l'idéalisme. C'était un demi-Anglais. Il était né tout anglais, est-ce une explication? à

A Londres, pendant des années, il fut un véritable enfant gâté; on le suivait avec enthousiasme; il était entouré d'une troupe d'adulateurs. Ses costumes recherchés faisaient de lui, une sorte d'*arbitrarius elegantiarum*; on écoutait religieusement ses paradoxes. Dans son livre: *Intentions*, traduit chez Stock, avec une belle préface de M. Joseph Renaud, on peut juger de sa conversation. Elle pétillait, elle attaquait les idées reçues, elle décapitait le bourgeois et cette quintessence de bourgeois qui qu'il appelle une vaste philistinerie. Peut-être dans ce genre, cet Anglais, si peu anglais et si ami de nos écrivains étrangers, rappelle-t-il Baudelaire. C'est un moqueur extraordinaire, c'est un pince-sans-rire génial. Il vise à l'effet, sans le vouloir et avec le plus merveilleux laisser-aller; aucun esprit pratique; aucune âme de marchand.

Mais cet homme, prôné de tous, applaudi des lettrés, salué par la foule, maître du théâtre, du roman, de la pensée, rencontra le précipice et y tomba. Comme il s'était singularisé par ses élégances, par ses habitudes extérieures et par ses causeries, il voulut un jour transporter dans la morale son humeur paradoxale, il fit de lui-même un être à rebours, ce qu'on appelle, dans le jargon nouveau, un inverti. Un riche lord demanda contre le prestigieux écrivain, l'application des lois anglaises.

Était-il coupable? Quelques-uns l'ont nié. Mais dans son *De Profundis* et dans ses lettres, Oscar Wilde fait l'aveu de sa faute. Du fond de sa prison, il élève la voix pour proclamer qu'il ne fut pas complètement innocent. Jamais, avec plus beau n'a jailli d'une poitrine humaine. Par ses accents d'humilité, par son acceptation du châtiement, Oscar Wilde se relève prodigieusement. Quelle âme il avait! Sous ses apparences de paradoxal intellectuel et moral, il avait gardé toute sa noblesse. Une curiosité malade, le souci de ne rien faire comme tout le monde et de goûter à tous les fruits du jardin, même les plus interdits, l'avaient poussé vers le mal. Il le reconnaît; mais il expie presque avec joie, et se résigne, pour se purifier, à toutes les souffrances et à tous les abaissements.

Rien du reste, ne manqua à son supplice, pas une épine à sa couronne. Pendant deux ans, il subit les travaux forcés et le plus strict internement.

LA COCARDE

16 AOÛT 1906

« Chaque prison que bâtissent les hommes, a-t-il écrit dans cette superbe *Balade de la Géologie de Reading* que publie avec le *De Profundis*, la *Société du Mercur de France*, est bâtie avec les briques de l'infamie et fermée de barreaux, de peur que le Christ ne voie comment les hommes mutilent leurs frères. Avec des barreaux, ils défigurent la lune gracieuse et ils aveuglent le bon soleil... Les actions les plus viles, ainsi que des herbes empoisonnées, s'épanouissent dans l'air de la prison, c'est seulement ce qui est bon dans l'homme qui s'épuise et se flétrit là... Chaque étroite cellule que nous habitons est une infecte et sombre latrine et l'haleine fétide de la Mort vivante étouffe chaque lucarne grillée... »

Enfermé dans le cachot, avec minuit toujours dans le cœur, abandonné de sa femme, séparé de ses deux fils, Cyril et Vivian, depuis entrés dans les ordres, affublé d'un costume grotesque, lui le fashionable, il a compris les leçons qui se cachent au fond de la douleur.

« Derrière la joie et le rire, il peut y avoir un tempérament grossier, dur et rugueux, mais derrière la douleur, il y a la douceur. C'est avec elle qu'on a bâti les mondes; elle préside à la naissance des enfants et des étoiles. » Pas encore chrétien, mais stoïque, sans aucune insensibilité toutefois et avec des coups d'aile vers les plus hauts points de la beauté morale, tel nous apparaît Oscar Wilde. Il sortit cependant de là, complètement brisé, traînant après lui, sur la planète, son habit de forçat, ne pouvant, aux yeux des Philistins, s'en défaire. Sous le nom de Sébastien Melmoth, il voyagea en France, en Italie, et, en 1900, à l'âge de quarante-quatre ans, mourut dans une chambre d'hôtel, rue des Beaux-Arts. La méningite avait terrassé ce malheureux et grand artiste qui dort maintenant dans le lamentable cimetière de Bagneux, sous une Bénédiction catholique, car il avait fini par entrer dans le christianisme romain.

L'AMITIÉ ANTIQUE

Le procès retentissant d'Oscar Wilde n'est pas terminé. Il faut que l'accusé attende en prison un jury unanime. La pudibonde Angleterre, désireuse de prouver l'exception, l'anomalie, la monstruosité, — elle oublie ses télégraphistes et les noms aristocratiques tus à l'audience, — s'acharne si rageusement sur cet esthète déséquilibré qu'elle finira par nous rendre indulgents à son égard. Le public français d'ailleurs, bien que ne pratiquant aucunement le vice reproché, n'a pas de ces fureurs protestantes. On a retiré toutes les pièces de l'accusé anglais du théâtre, avant qu'il fût convaincu, alors que les Parisiens assistaient sans remords au *Chilpéric* d'Hervé, un esthète du passé, condamné, lui, et qui devait se rendre sur la scène où on l'applaudissait, encadré de deux agents de la Sûreté, le prenant à Mazas, à l'heure où la rampe s'allumait, l'attendant dans les coulisses, et le réintégrant dans sa cellule, le rideau tombé.

Oscar Wilde comptait, paraît-il, sur un acquittement. Il avait attribué à sa défense hardiment présentée une force persuasive et une vertu absolutive qui n'ont produit d'effet que sur deux jurés. L'invocation aux traditions bibliques et païennes a paru toucher ces deux sages anglais, évidemment humanistes et qui volontiers ont confondu Oscar avec Alcibiade. L'esthète a affirmé que l'amour pur, insexué, idéalement chaste, pouvait exister entre personnes ayant même caractéristique physique. Il a cité des exemples. « C'est un amour, a-t-il dit avec emphase et conviction, que le siècle grossier ne comprend pas. C'est l'amour de David pour Jonathan. C'est l'amour que Platon, dans sa philosophie, décrit comme le commencement de la sagesse. » Les deux jurés ont été d'avis qu'Oscar avait été un sage. Ils ont certainement des idées particulières sur la philosophie.

Il est possible cependant que les deux jurés, ainsi qu'Oscar, aient raison et qu'on ait de fâcheux préjugés sur les mœurs antiques. Les anciens, maîtres si souvent vénérés, suivis, cités, nous deviennent suspects quand ils chantent leurs amitiés. Au lycée, on ne nous donnait point à traduire l'églogue fameuse de Virgile, ce qui nous inspirait un désir vif de la connaître. A l'insu de mes vertueux professeurs, je l'ai, à coup de Quicherat, traduite. J'avoue n'avoir nullement compris alors l'interversión. Encore à l'heure actuelle, moins collégien, ayant lu le savant traité du docteur Moll, de Berlin, sur les perversions de l'instinct génital, je ne puis m'expliquer la réprobation qui frappe cette deuxième églogue. Il est même permis d'être stupéfait de l'interprétation qu'on en donne. Il s'agit, vous vous en souvenez, d'un certain Corydon, berger, qui éprouvait de l'affection *ardebat*, dit le texte, pour un nommé Alexis, domestique favori de l'oligarche maître jaloux. Pour un homme de la campagne, Corydon exprimait ses sentiments en lettré digne de

l'estime de M. Gaston Boissier. Il usait de la métaphore et abusait de la périphrase. Pour indiquer qu'il était midi, Corydon disait à ce valet de charrue, qui devait être également un latiniste distingué : « Voici l'heure où les troupeaux eux-mêmes cherchent l'ombre et la fraîcheur ; où le vert lézard se cache sous les buissons ; où la ménagère broie pour les moissonneurs, las de la chaleur du jour, l'ail, le serpolet et les herbes odorantes ». Il lui faisait sonner, en hexamètres d'or pur, ses richesses aux oreilles : troupeaux aux étables, mille brebis errant sur les montagnes de Sicile, du laitage été comme hiver. Il ajoutait qu'il jouait agréablement du flageolet. Ce talent de société lui avait été enseigné par Pan lui-même, le grand Pan, qui alors n'était pas mort et protégeait les brebis et les pasteurs. Enfin il lui proposait des cadeaux, une belle flûte à sept tuyaux, deux jeunes chevreuils à la marmelle. La ménagère, Thestylis, les demandait. Elle les recevra, puisqu'Alexis est rétif à l'offre que lui fait Corydon de le prendre à son service.

Il a fallu des luxures intenses, résorbées dans les cerveaux savants et des imaginations débordantes de vices à nos doctes pédagogues pour voir dans cette poésie champêtre une ode à la Vénus mâle. Tout tient dans l'interprétation du verbe *ardebat*, qui peut signifier aussi bien désirer, comme on souhaite avoir un jardin, un cheval, une bicyclette, que brûler d'amour. Ces traductions libres sont osées. Elles engendrent la diffamation historique. Parfois on s'aperçoit du contresens. C'est ainsi qu'on a reconnu après coup que les quelques odes conservées de cette pauvre Sapho s'adressaient non à une amante, mais à un beau guerrier, et qu'à tort on l'avait, durant des siècles universitaires, fait passer pour être de la garde nationale de Lesbos.

Trop aventureuses, trop malveillantes sont nos gloses. Horace a été indignement chargé d'un péché asphaltique qu'il ne commettait pas, qu'il n'a pas célébré dans ses vers. Il faut la curieuse investigation d'un casuiste espagnol et son intuition folichonne pour faire de l'amant de Lydie, de Lalage, de Chloris, un ancêtre du Taylor londonien, parce qu'il a adressé ce compliment à son jeune esclave : « Le myrte sied bien à ton front, lorsque tu remplis ma coupe ». On n'est pas un justiciable de la cour anglaise parce qu'on aura dit à un *boy* sur le paquebot, vous apportant un grog : « John, vous avez une casquette qui vous va bien ». L'esprit en tout ceci est plus prompt que la chair. Est-ce que le *Banquet* de Platon n'a pas été commenté en dépit de la justice ? L'amitié de disciple à maître doit-elle donc être imputée à crime ? Les Grecs, plus délicatement pourvus que nous de sensations et de sentiments, admettaient et pratiquaient l'amour unisexual, dégagé de toute visée charnelle. Il est impossible que tous ces grands esprits aient été des pourceaux. Qu'il y ait eu des hommes dépravés, des débauchés cherchant des raffinements, des complications, des interversions dans les plaisirs des sens, c'est certain. Les despotes orientaux, on peut les abandonner. Le commun des viveurs d'Athènes ou de

Rome pareillement. Il n'y a pas à se prendre sur les mœurs décrites par le seignalleis Pétrone Arbitrator. Mais de même que dans nos romans, dans nos pièces, nous rencontrons des crimes, des attentats pour se reproduire ici et là dans la réalité ne sont cependant point l'ordinaire événement de notre existence, il est permis de croire que les vices décrits avec plus de moins d'indulgence par les auteurs étaient exceptionnels, et non un état endémique. Encore moins faut-il accuser les écrivains de les avoir pratiqués. Un romancier peut entasser dans ses conceptions les viols, les adultères, les incendies et les empoisonnements sans qu'il soit permis de lui attribuer une scélératesse susceptible d'exécuter ce qu'il narre. Le juge anglais a eu raison de déclarer qu'on avait trop parlé littérature au tribunal. C'est l'homme et non l'écrivain qu'on jugeait.

Toute la raison répugne à admettre que Socrate, contre lequel la postérité pédante a perpétué la calomnie qui lui valut la guêpe, qu'Epaminondas, le pur héros qui combattait un certain Mycitos, que les deux vaillants guerriers virgiliens Nisus et Euryale, que la légion thébaine tout entière, cette phalange d'immortels patriotes n'aient été qu'une bande de drôles dépravés. L'amitié grecque n'était pas l'amour infâme des lords et des petits télégraphistes. L'Illiade, repose toute entière sur les relations chères qui unissaient Achille et Patrocle. C'est pour venger son ami que l'invincible Achéen oublie son ressentiment, rompt son serment, saute sur ses armes et va combattre Hector et ruiner Troie. Achille, un collègue de ces polissons effeminés qui font chanter les déséquilibrés de l'amour ! Les trois cents superbes soldats qui formaient le bataillon sacré tombèrent à Chéronée pour la patrie, un ignoble harem d'êtres dégradés ! Non, cela révolte et ne peut être vrai ! Nos érudits se sont abusés. Ils ont imité, en commentant les classiques, ce personnage femelle de Zola, Mme Levrat, qui devinait dans la phrase la plus simple un sous-entendu obscène. Oscar Wilde, pour sa défense, s'est recommandé de l'Ancien Testament. N'est-il pas dit, au livre des rois, que David aimait Jonathan comme l'on aime son âme ? Et Saül, qui avait, lui aussi, le soupçon prompt, ne reprochait-il pas à son fils comme un crime cette amitié ?

L'accusé aurait pu invoquer également le verset 23 du chap. 13 du Nouveau Testament où on nous montre « l'un des apôtres que Jésus aimait reposant sur son sein ».

On a été injuste envers cette lumineuse antiquité dont pas un des dieux, car l'épisode de Ganymède ne prouve rien, ne fut gratifié du vice pratiqué à Londres. Et les divinités de l'Olympe reflétaient l'humanité, partageaient ses passions, se mêlaient à ses combats, à ses amours.

Il n'est pas sûr du tout qu'Oscar Wilde soit accusé à tort, mais il est certain qu'on a calomnié Socrate, Platon, Achille, Patrocle, Nisus et Euryale, la légion des héros thébains et le plus mignon des apôtres.

Il n'est pas d'après sa réputation et sa prison qu'il faut juger Oscar Wilde, mais d'après son œuvre et surtout d'après son *De Profundis* que nous pouvons maintenant lire dans une traduction française. Son génie l'avait élevé au-dessus des préjugés et des tares de sa race. Qu'est-ce qui caractérise l'Anglais ? Son insociabilité d'abord. En termes énergiques, Green a marqué le mépris et presque la haine que l'Anglais professe pour les autres peuples. Jamais il ne le voit se mêler à l'étranger. Grand voyageur, il traverse les villes et les nations affectant, exagérant même sa tête sur son port, ses gestes, ses costumes nationaux. Il tient à ce qu'on le distingue de mille. A aucun prix, il ne veut paraître fusionner.

Si il se sépare des autres races, il est tellement individualiste qu'il se met encore soigneusement à l'écart même de ses compatriotes. Chaque Anglais est comme une île isolée.

Son moi est si fort qu'il cherche à l'étranger, mais ne se soucier de blesser les droits de son voisin. L'intérêt personnel, l'extension de soi-même, voilà l'unique loi de l'Anglais, considéré comme individu et comme peuple. Résumant d'une façon lapidaire l'histoire de la Grande-Bretagne, lord Chatham a pu s'écrier : « Nous ne subsisterions pas, si nous avions été justes ». Cette phrase ne constitue-t-elle pas toute la politique actuelle du président Roosevelt et ne l'entend-on pas dans tous ses discours et dans tous ses messages ?

Son climat a disposé l'Anglo-Saxon à ce farouche individualisme, à la lutte violente et sans merci contre tout ce qui lui semble le gêner dans ses desseins. De tous les struggle-for-lifers du globe, il est le plus terrible et il le restera, parce qu'il a pour nid une île d'après enveloppée d'une mer triste.

Oscar Wilde ne rappelait que de loin la férocité des insulaires, ses compatriotes. Il était de sa race par le visage mais y échappait par le corps plutôt gras et savonneux et par la liberté de l'esprit. J'ai tracé dans : *le Roi des Juifs*, ainsi que dans un volume de ma traduction de la Bible, un portrait du Juif, à la fois idéaliste et pratique, les mains et les pieds dans la boue et la tête dans le bleu du ciel.

L'Anglo-Saxon n'est-il pas le Juif de l'Europe ? Mais de ses origines Oscar Wilde n'avait retenu que l'idéalisme. C'était un de ses défauts. Il était né tout Juif, est-ce une explication ? à l'origine

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OSCAR WILDE.

We now come to what is the rarest book mentioned in this article, since only one copy exists. It is in manuscript, and that manuscript is lost probably for ever. It is a quarto volume of ruled paper, bound in some sort of shining black cloth, and it contains the whole of Oscar Wilde's almost unknown play.

"THE WOMAN COVERED WITH JEWELS," written in English poetic prose, and entirely in the small neat holograph of Wilde.

Like his amazing study in the style of Flaubert, "Salomé," this equally amazing masterpiece is a tragedy of the ancient world, and is in one act.

The chief theme of "The Woman Covered with Jewels" is the simple elemental one of passion and temptation in the wilderness. Other themes stated and reiterated are those of self-renunciation, devotion, beauty and vanity, greed and murder.

This tragedy was written about ten years ago, and it is just possible that only ten people read it. It was presented by its author to a cultured literary lady well known in Society to-day, and a successful writer herself.

Like the many lost works of once famous writers bewailed by Lemprière, knowledge of this play must be entrusted to the memory of a commentator.

We think it to be the only work by the author of "Salomé" that he failed to publish in some way.

I feel bound to state emphatically my conviction that the very clear in the following lines :
understood, he makes his position in the literary world article, and in order that his motive may not be mis-view Professor Church takes in another part of the publisher suffered loss on the production. This is the this one memory, and ignores the instances when a reverse of the case. An author naturally treasures up uncommon experience, but far less common than the the sale of a book exceeding expectations is not an between authors and publishers. The other instance of least advisable of the various forms of agreement seldom does please both parties, and is certainly the former was not satisfactory. The half-profit system the two instances cited, we are not surprised that the Regarding A sentiment with which we fully agree. his testimony is, on the whole, highly favourable. very large experience can say of his treatment by publishers. it did earn. But if this is the worst that an author of that the book would earn the profit which, as a matter of fact, me. It is only fair to allow that the publisher did not suppose an inadequate offer was made to me which I was impropriet received in the ordinary course. The other grievance is that one, but it was much less than a half of what I should have at something like a "remainder" price. I got my share at disposing of the books at such a price as should seem good to him. What they did was to sell the stock in hand necessary, was that the publisher should have the right of the agreement, usual, and, indeed, I can readily believe books on the half-profit system. One of the stipulations of I arranged for the publication by a certain firm of two deal with these first. He says :
and is represented by more than sixty volumes. Yet, looking back over that period, he can only point to two transactions which did not fully satisfy him. Let us give. His literary career extends over forty-six years.

CORRESPONDENCE.

AN AMERICAN EDITION OF OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I shall be much obliged if you will grant me the courtesy of your columns for making certain observations in regard to an American publisher's prospectus which has been widely circulated in the United States, on the Continent, and in England. The prospectus announces the forthcoming publication of the "Complete Works of Oscar Wilde," with an introduction by Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. As the literary executor of the deceased writer, and as the administrator for his estate appointed by the English Courts, I would like to have it known by those sufficiently interested in the subject that the edition, if it fulfils its promise, is so complete that it contains two works which Wilde never wrote. One of them, "The Priest and the Acolyte," is a pornographic story which no one with any knowledge of the author's style—of any style—would dream of attributing to him; it is destitute of any literary form—I do not say merit, because hostile critics might not think that a very convincing argument. The attempted ascription of this work to Wilde during his trial in 1895 was abandoned by the prosecution, because the identity of the anonymous author was discovered. The other spurious work in Mr. Le Gallienne's edition is a translation from the French of Barbey D'Aurevilly, "What Never Dies"; this being originally issued by a Paris publisher shortly after Wilde's death, along with other spurious works supposed to have been written on commission between 1897 and 1900.

May I here take the opportunity of mentioning that, after leaving prison in 1897, with the exception of some letters to the Press and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," Wilde never wrote anything except a portion of the scenario of a play which he disposed of to Mr. Frank Harris? I have been shown many typewritten scripts of works ascribed to him, but on demanding to see the original manuscripts, or portions thereof, nothing was ever forthcoming. Apart from this, owing to circumstances into which it is unnecessary to enter, Wilde could not have written anything without my knowledge during the last three years of his life.

Mr. Le Gallienne, the American prospectus informs us, "aside from being a writer of national reputation, was a lifelong friend of Oscar Wilde and his college chum at Oxford." This will certainly be news to many people in England; it points to grave omissions in the pages of "Who's Who"; Liverpool and Fleet-street, to the compilers of that ingenious Temple of Fame, are dearer names than Athens or Thebes! Mr. Le Gallienne, however, must have lost some of his Oxford manner during his residence in America, for he can hardly claim ignorance on the vexed subject of "American rights"; it is amazing that he should lend his name and "his national reputation" to what he must know is a literary and financial offence, against the English publishers and the legal representatives "of his college chum at Oxford."

The authorized edition of Wilde's works is being prepared by Messrs. Methuen, who have spent a great deal of time and money in acquiring from other publishers those copyrights which had passed out of my control or that of my predecessor in administration, the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy. It will contain no introduction even by myself, and therefore cannot attempt to compete in the United States with the edition of Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. Yet I venture to think that there may be some of Wilde's American admirers who will prefer to purchase the authorized edition. I know there are many such in Germany from the number of letters I have received on the subject. The English admirers, I fear, will not be given any choice by

Your obedient servant,
15, Vicarage-gardens, Kensington, W. ROBERT ROSS.

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AN AMERICAN EDITION OF OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I have only just read a letter printed in your columns on June 28, signed "Robert Ross." In this letter Mr. Ross attributes to me the editorship of an American edition of Mr. Oscar Wilde's writings. He speaks of "Mr. Le Gallienne's edition."

Now, having extended to Mr. Ross the courtesy of publishing an error, you will not, of course, refuse to me the courtesy of publishing a correction of that error.

My sole connexion with Messrs. A. R. Keller and Co.'s edition of Mr. Wilde's writings is the writing of an introduction of 3,000 words. I have had absolutely nothing to do with the editing, and am entirely unresponsible for the contents of the edition. At this moment I am still ignorant of what they are. Nor had I seen any prospectus of the edition till after reading Mr. Ross's letter. In that prospectus it appears that the statement was made that I was Mr. Wilde's "college chum" at Oxford—a statement which gives Mr. Ross the opportunity of some cheap satire at my expense—as if I could possibly have been responsible for it. I need hardly say that I am still too young to have made such a mis-statement. Even the editor of the *Academy*, in no friendly comment upon Mr. Ross's letter, refers to "the fact that Wilde was twenty years older than Mr. Le Gallienne"—a statement which, I think, is, chronologically, a little unfair to his friend.

Mr. Ross also seems to have discovered the fact, which has never been made known widely enough to please me, that I was born in Liverpool.

I am proud to have been a friend of Mr. Wilde's; but, of course, I was never so near to him as Mr. Ross or the gentleman who, I am told, now edits that beautiful old *Academy* of many distinguished memories, not least that of another of its editors, a Fellow of one of the greatest colleges in the world (I am not referring to Liverpool College), a gentle scholar beloved by all who know him, and not least by Robert Louis Stevenson.

But, to return to Mr. Ross, I hope that I may be allowed to say how much I have admired his loyalty to a wonderful, disastrous friend; and I very well understand why he should still go on fighting for him. He is not the only man who has fought for his friend, but, certainly, no one has fought better. All the same, when a man is fighting, it is as well that he should know what he is fighting about. Mr. Ross does not seem to know.

Finally, I would say, in regard to the general ethics of this question of so-called American "piracy," that there are laws even in America—copyright laws—and that if English writers and publishers do not take advantage of those laws—well, it is but natural that American publishers will take advantage of their carelessness. I, too, I may add, have been in Arcady.

So far as I can see, Mr. Wilde does not seem to have been protected by any English publisher—except Mr. John Lane—till after he was dead.

Personally, I find no fault with Mr. Wilde's American publishers. They have published his books in good faith, and are just as anxious as Messrs. Methuen may be to do right by Mr. Wilde's memory and his heirs.

They—Messrs. A. R. Keller and Co., Brunswick-building, Fifth-avenue, New York City—would be glad to know to whom they can pay a royalty on their edition. Perhaps Mr. Ross would be kind enough to inform them in the interest of Mrs. Wilde's children, or, shall I say, his "executor"?

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.
21, Sherwood Studios, 57th Street and 6th Avenue, New York City, Sept. 14.

OSCAR WILDE.

We now come to what is the rarest book mentioned in this article, since only one copy exists. It is in manuscript, and that manuscript is lost probably for ever. It is a quarto volume of ruled paper, bound in some sort of shining black cloth, and it contains the whole of Oscar Wilde's almost unknown play.

"THE WOMAN COVERED WITH JEWELS,"

written in English poetic prose, and entirely in the small neat holograph of Wilde.

Like his amazing study in the style of Flaubert, "Salomé," this equally amazing masterpiece is a tragedy of the ancient world, and is in one act.

The chief theme of "The Woman Covered with Jewels" is the simple elemental one of passion and temptation in the wilderness. Other themes stated and reiterated are those of self-renunciation, devotion, beauty and vanity, greed and murder.

This tragedy was written about ten years ago, and it is just possible that only ten people read it. It was presented by its author to a cultured literary lady well known in Society to-day, and a successful writer herself.

Like the many lost works of once famous writers bewailed by Lemprière, knowledge of this play must be entrusted to the memory of a commentator.

We think it to be the only work by the author of "Salomé" that he failed to publish in some way.

He was pleased to publish, or rather to have his books published, even if the *format* was not of the finest. For instance, his tragedy of Nihilism, "Vera," was originally printed on wretched paper, and in galley-proof style. "The Picture of Dorian Gray," "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," "Ravenna," and "Salomé" were all originally (that is to say, in their first editions) produced in an inexpensive form quite antipolar to the later productions, "The Sphinx" and "The House of Pomegranates."

Truly, authorial pride often has a fall!

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"The Woman Covered with Jewels" is an outcome and one more expression of that literary movement that gave us "Salambo," "Thais," "Aphrodite," "Imperial Purple," and other remarkable works of a school or group of writers who, wearied of the *jeune*, the effete, and much else, have sought solace for their literary conscience in a penman's reconquest of antiquity. Probably the old-world story of Paphnutius and Thais inspired the tragedy, and Maeterlinck's plays suggested its technique. Who can know? Assuredly its picture of devotion, passion, cupidity, and murder would thrill and enthrall those who could know it better than in this imperfect portrayal. "The Woman Covered with Jewels" is worthy of the pen that wrote "Salomé" and "The Sphinx."

MAY 4, 1907. Publisher and Bookseller.

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The veteran author holds the balance evenly. He is no red-hot defender, and is therefore the more impressive. His literary career extends over forty-six years, and is represented by more than sixty volumes. Yet, looking back over that period, he can only point to two transactions which did not fully satisfy him. Let us deal with these first. He says:

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CORRESPONDENCE.

AN AMERICAN EDITION OF OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

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Sir,—I shall be much obliged if you will grant me the courtesy of your columns for making certain observations in regard to an American publisher's prospectus which has been widely circulated in the United States, on the Continent, and in England. The prospectus announces the forthcoming publication of the "Complete Works of Oscar Wilde," with an introduction by Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. As the literary executor of the deceased writer, and as the administrator for his estate appointed by the English Courts, I would like to have it known by those sufficiently interested in the subject that the edition, if it fulfils its promise, is so complete that it contains two works which Wilde never wrote. One of them, "The Priest and the Acolyte," is a pornographic story which no one with any knowledge of the author's style—of any style—would dream of attributing to him; it is destitute of any literary form—I do not say merit, because hostile critics might not think that a very convincing argument. The attempted ascription of this work to Wilde during his trial in 1895 was abandoned by the prosecution, because the identity of the anonymous author was discovered. The other spurious work in Mr. Le Gallienne's edition is a translation from the French of Barbey D'Aurevilly, "What Never Dies"; this being originally issued by a Paris publisher shortly after Wilde's death, along with other spurious works supposed to have been written on commission between 1897 and 1900.

May I here take the opportunity of mentioning that, after leaving prison in 1897, with the exception of some letters to the Press and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," Wilde never wrote anything except a portion of the scenario of a play which he disposed of to Mr. Frank Harris? I have been shown many typewritten scripts of works ascribed to him, but on demanding to see the original manuscripts, or portions thereof, nothing was ever forthcoming. Apart from this, owing to circumstances into which it is unnecessary to enter, Wilde could not have written anything without my knowledge during the last three years of his life.

Mr. Le Gallienne, the American prospectus informs us, "aside from being a writer of national reputation, was a lifelong friend of Oscar Wilde and his college chum at Oxford." This will certainly be news to many people in England; it points to grave omissions in the pages of "Who's Who"; Liverpool and Fleet-street, to the compilers of that ingenious Temple of Fame, are dearer names than Athens or Thebes! Mr. Le Gallienne, however, must have lost some of his Oxford manner during his residence in America, for he can hardly claim ignorance on the vexed subject of "American rights"; it is amazing that he should lend his name and "his national reputation" to what he must know is a literary and financial offence, against the English publishers and the legal representatives "of his college chum at Oxford."

The authorized edition of Wilde's works is being prepared by Messrs. Methuen, who have spent a great deal of time and money in acquiring from other publishers those copyrights which had passed out of my control or that of my predecessor in administration, the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy. It will contain no introduction even by myself, and therefore cannot attempt to compete in the United States with the edition of Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. Yet I venture to think that there may be some of Wilde's American admirers who will prefer to purchase the authorized edition. I know there are many such in Germany from the number of letters I have received on the subject. The English admirers, I fear, will not be given any choice by

2019-03-18

Your obedient servant,

15, Vicarage-gardens, Kensington, W.

ROBERT ROSS.

CORRESPONDENCE.

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They—Messrs. A. R. Keller and Co., Brunswick-building, Fifth-avenue, New York City—would be glad to know to whom they can pay a royalty on their edition. Perhaps Mr. Ross would be kind enough to inform them in the interest of Mrs. Wilde's children, or, shall I say, his "executor"?

Yours faithfully,

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

25, Sherwood Studios, 57th Street and 6th Avenue, New York City, Sept. 14.

May 1907

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE AMERICAN EDITION OF OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I gladly accept Mr. Le Gallienne's somewhat tardy disclaimer of responsibility for the contents of the circular issued by Messrs. A. R. Keller and Co., announcing their Complete Edition of Oscar Wilde's works. If I committed any error in speaking of "Mr. Le Gallienne's edition" I apologise. Whether my error was justified or not I leave the readers of The Times to decide, especially those who have also seen the prospectus in question. We speak of Malone's Shakespeare, Speight's Chaucer; though these old-fashioned editors took the precaution of reading what they were supposed to be introducing to the public; at least, they would hardly have pleaded ignorance as to the contents of the respective editions. To my perhaps Oriental views of literature the Occidental doctrine of irresponsibility seems to be carried rather far. In the prospectus we read:—

LETTERS.—For the first time a collection of the letters of Wilde is presented to the public, a number of them in facsimile. . . . Those who study character through chirography will be greatly interested in these reproductions, and all readers will value the contents of the letters for the light they throw on Wilde's personality. Wilde was most brilliant when most careless, and his letters comprise some of his finest epigrams.

Mine are the italics. May I ask to whom the letters are addressed? Was it unreasonable for me to assume that Mr. Le Gallienne had read letters which throw light on Wilde's personality, letters announced as one of the features of an edition to which he was writing the introduction? I know of only one instance in which a distinguished man took the precaution of copyrighting his private letters in his own lifetime; but Mr. Whistler knew the natural habits of his countrymen better than Wilde. English letter writers trust, perhaps unwisely, to the honour of their correspondents.

Messrs. Keller's edition is said to contain *The Duchess of Padua* and *Vera*; neither of these has been published except in German; they were privately printed for stage purposes in America, and therefore their publication without reference to the author's representative is, I should imagine, a breach even of American copyright law. A scrip of *A Florentine Tragedy* also announced can only have been obtained by questionable means in this country; it is also unpublished. Perhaps Messrs. Keller's edition of this play and *The Duchess of Padua* are merely prose translations from the German, in which case they are spurious and not by Oscar Wilde. I may be wronging them unintentionally.

Mr. Le Gallienne, who has now had ample time to discover these circumstances, has no fault to find with those who have conferred upon him the honour of a spurious Oxford education. "It is but natural," he thinks, that American publishers should take advantage of an author's carelessness. "You are certainly very natural in America," says Lord Canterville in one of Wilde's stories. I venture to think, however, that it is not so natural as he imagines. I have just read a book, *The Italian Nation*, which he had finished his book, "the Italian nation, a vastly less interesting and appealing work. In 1872, when he had finished his book, the journal would have been a minor detail. Had it been so, the journal would have been extraordinarily clear sight and acute anticipation even of the consummation he had long prophesied in his journal with the decline and fall of medieval Rome, would have rejoiced to see steady hatred of Austria and the Empire, the historian of the Protestant or free-thinker, with a sneer or a growl ready for every manifestation of "superstition," a Prussian with a come. It might naturally be supposed that Gregorovius, a fallen; the Middle Ages had passed, and the new era was

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been known to visit on account of its beauty. have no single place of worship which any one has ever not disfigured by their abortive erections; and the some of them, there is no town in England which parish council? In spite of the enormous wealth of Worse still, what is to be expected from county dalisms, what is to be expected from the municipalities than they have now. If the Church commits var never to have had much more taste for architecture

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CORRESPONDENCE.

THE AMERICAN EDITION OF OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I gladly accept Mr. Le Gallienne's somewhat tardy disclaimer of responsibility for the contents of the circular issued by Messrs. A. R. Keller and Co., announcing their Complete Edition of Oscar Wilde's works. If I committed any error in speaking of "Mr. Le Gallienne's edition" I apologise. Whether my error was justified or not I leave the readers of The Times to decide, especially those who have also seen the prospectus in question. We speak of Malone's Shakespeare, Speight's Chaucer; though these old-fashioned editors took the precaution of reading what they were supposed to be introducing to the public; at least, they would hardly have pleaded ignorance as to the contents of the respective editions. To my perhaps Oriental views of literature the Occidental doctrine of irresponsibility seems to be carried rather far. In the prospectus we read:—

LETTERS.—For the first time a collection of the letters of Wilde is presented to the public, a number of them in facsimile. . . . Those who study character through chirography will be greatly interested in these reproductions, and all readers will value the contents of the letters for the light they throw on Wilde's personality. Wilde was most brilliant when most careless, and his letters comprise some of his finest epigrams.

Mine are the italics. May I ask to whom the letters are addressed? Was it unreasonable for me to assume that Mr. Le Gallienne had read letters which throw light on Wilde's personality, letters announced as one of the features of an edition to which he was writing the introduction? I know of only one instance in which a distinguished man took the precaution of copyrighting his private letters in his own lifetime; but Mr. Whistler knew the natural habits of his countrymen better than Wilde. English letter writers trust, perhaps unwisely, to the honour of their correspondents.

Messrs. Keller's edition is said to contain The Duchess of Padua and Vera; neither of these has been published except in German; they were privately printed for stage purposes in America, and therefore their publication without reference to the author's representative is, I should imagine, a breach even of American copyright law. A scrip of A Florentine Tragedy also announced can only have been obtained by questionable means in this country; it is also unpublished. Perhaps Messrs. Keller's edition of this play and The Duchess of Padua are merely prose translations from the German, in which case they are spurious and not by Oscar Wilde. I may be wronging them unintentionally.

Mr. Le Gallienne, who has now had ample time to discover these circumstances, has no fault to find with those who have conferred upon him the honour of a spurious Oxford education. "It is but natural," he thinks, that American publishers should take advantage of an author's carelessness. "You are certainly very natural in America," says Lord Canterville in one of Wilde's stories. I venture to think, however, that it was rather careless of Mr. Le Gallienne not to have made himself acquainted with the publisher's intentions and rather flamboyant plans. In certain American States I am told life is insufficiently protected; that does not seem to me an excuse for murder.

Mr. Le Gallienne says truly that "when a man is fighting it is as well that he should know what he is fighting about." I am fighting, Sir, if that is the right expression for the feeling of indignant protest, against what is a violation of the rights of Wilde's family, a violation of the rights of Messrs. Methuen, the accredited literary agents for the Wilde estate. Still more, I am fighting for Wilde's literary reputation, which is being again jeopardized by the attribution to him of spurious works, one of which I can hardly imagine being published in the virtuous State of New York.

Mr. Le Gallienne's admirers, among whom I count myself, will note with regret his endorsement of a disreputable proceeding; and I scarcely think the late Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, or any former editor of the "beautiful old Academy," would have hesitated to condemn that which I believe is condemned by all honourable men of letters on both sides of the Atlantic; at all events, I ask them to judge.

Your obedient servant,

ROBERT ROSS.

15, Vicarage-gardens, Kensington, W., Oct. 4.

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With the separate sentences of his letter there is no call to deal. That he was ignorant of the statement made in the prospectus we can well believe; had he known of them, common prudence would have counselled him to contradict them at once, since not even the American public was likely to be gulled into believing Mr. Le Gallienne an Oxford man. But there is one quibble, contained in the last sentences of his letter which needs exposure. The American publishers, he writes, would be glad to know to whom they can pay a royalty on their editions. "Perhaps Mr. Ross would be kind enough to inform them in the interest of Mrs. Wilde's children, or, shall I say, his 'executor'?" The answer is, To no one. Mr. Le Gallienne, as his last sentence proves, knew perfectly well that Mr. Ross is Mr. Wilde's executor. Why did he not tell the pirates, whose booty he proposes to share, that he knew the owners of the property, and that the owners' consent must be obtained before that property was touched? Even if the offer were sincere, what other "freebooter" would have the impudence to consider himself cleared by an offer of a percentage on the value of the thing he had seized?

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