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Oscar Wilde  
Scrapbook

Vol. 8



## IN CARCERE ET VINCULIS.\*

"Epistola : in Carcere et Vinculis." So in a letter to Mr. Robert Ross, printed in this edition of Oscar Wilde's works, the author of the book renamed "De Profundis" speaks of that sad and astonishing piece of writing. It is a pity, to our mind, that Mr. Ross did not adopt Wilde's suggestion and name the book with the frank words that head this article. As a title they obviously suit the self-possessed genius of the work far better than the somewhat unreal "De Profundis." We do not wish to deny that Wilde went down into the depths ; but while he was there, he was silent or inarticulate ; speech came when he was struggling to the top again, and with speech the old conceit, the old insatiable intellectual curiosity, the old pride which his experience diverted but never broke. Nor is it altogether fancy that would make "In Carcere et Vinculis" a suitable motto for Wilde's life and works. With his life we are not here directly concerned. We would only say this : that we trust this collected edition of his writings will take attention away from the man to his books.

How, firstly, as applied to Wilde's writings, can we justify the legend "In Carcere et Vinculis" ? Let us recall the circumstances of his early poetical work. The Newdigate prize poem and the volume of 1881 (here reprinted with the subsequent poetical works of the author) are perhaps the least valuable of Wilde's writings. The verses of that early time are little more than echoes of better, and better-known, poets. Even the beautiful "Requiescat" recalls Matthew Arnold ; the Swinburnian sonnets are spoiled by such lamentable endings as "God knows it—I am with them in some

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\* "The Works of Oscar Wilde." (London : Methuen and Co.) 11 vols. 12s. 6d. net each.



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# Pall Mall Gazette

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teetotal intemperance and you proceed to hit the millionaire masher of malt shops in his tenderest and most vulnerable place. The millionaire masher, however, in these days, is merely the figure-head of a concatenation of shareholders, every shareholder representing another series of concatenations. You set every man and woman of them against your measure, and, in the name of temperance, you wonder why. For it never occurs to you to wonder what else you could expect.

The Punch drama of the streets, with the peripatetic theatre, has, I observe, gone the way of many other excellent institutions; it has pretty well been improved off the London landscape, and, in my walks abroad, I pass many an old "pitch," where the show was wont to do good business; and where I have many a time and oft been amongst the assistance. It always appealed to me, that show. It was just what an entertainment of the stage, and just what Lady Mary said a letter ought to be—"short, clear, and surprising." The stage just suited it. A bigger stage would have damaged the illusion, spoilt the intimacy of the cudgel-play, and ruined the effect of the catapultic exits and entrances on which the play so great depends. Coming from another Punch's show the other evening, I was inclined to wish that the exiguity of stage accommodation which obtains where this show comes from had continued to obtain for it on its temporary transfer to our metropolis. No doubt, the conditions which made such a transfer possible have to be considered; but, still, the smaller the space from which a shock is administered the more convincing is the administration. However, there were the shocks, and there was a British public that took them to the best of its ability. You might, indeed, have been inclined to fancy that there is room and verge enough—which is as who should say public enough—for a Punch's show of this calibre in London town. Everything by "turns," and nothing long, has been the device of our variety stage for long, and the making of many empires would appear to testify the soundness of the principle. Yet, somehow, when the British public that was so hard to wean from the three-volume

March  
"PUNCH"  
25-1908



things"; and the longer, sensuous poems are not a little firing. Yet the book sold as few modern books of verse sell; and young persons insufficiently acquainted with Rossetti and Swinburne, Verlaine and Baudelaire, may be yet found to acclaim its splendours. What is the explanation? Simply that the book was really an advertisement. We do not mean that Wilde was not genuinely moved to write verse; but that the passion to write verse was far inferior to his passion for being known, and for reforming the art-world. Odd as it may sound, Wilde's real rôle at this time was that of a reformer; how his efforts were received we can see from the pages of "Punch" or from "Patience." How his efforts succeeded may be told by any one who can compare, in his mind's eye, house decorations of the seventies and house decorations of to-day. This passion for reforming never quite deserted Wilde, at any rate till his imprisonment; and we get one of its most brilliant manifestations in the essay on "The Soul of Man under Socialism," here reprinted as an appendix to "Intentions." Of course we do not deny that at times Wilde in his art does break out of the prison-house of "writing with a purpose"; and when he does so he achieves his best work, the work we may regard as typical. But even when he is out of his prison, he still sometimes keeps his chains, and very beautiful chains they are, at any rate in the fairy-stories which he wrote for children. Even if this edition does nothing more than to bring new readers to "The House of Pomegranates" and "The Happy Prince" it will justify its existence; here in one volume are the best fairy-stories of their kind since Hans Andersen. And we hope this volume will soon be purchasable separately and at a lower price. Apart from the fairy-stories Wilde's best and most characteristic work is to be found in "The Sphinx," "The Picture of Dorian Gray" (which is to be issued uniform with this edition), "The Importance of Being Earnest," "Salomé," and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." What claims have these books on the lover of English literature, and what chance have they of survival?

Wilde is perhaps the supreme English example of the second-class artist; the man who has little originality, but who never borrows without improving, or without adding something individual and rare and distinctive. In "The Sphinx" he came as near being original as he ever did; but we cannot forget Flaubert's "Tentation de St. Antoine," while we admire the extraordinary felicity with which Wilde first makes his mosaic and then picks out his mosaic with jewels. The poem is hard and rhetorical no doubt; but it is an achievement in a class which may not be the highest, yet is a legitimate class of verse. "The Picture of Dorian Gray," while technically a poor novel, is an endless treasure-house of clever epigram, beautiful phrase, and ingenious thought—a treasure-house that Wilde himself rifled for his plays. Of these the chief place must be given to "The Importance of Being Earnest." Its sheer irresponsibility, its wonderful wit, its distorted logic all remind one that there was an Irish dramatist before Mr. Bernard Shaw; and that if Wilde owed something to "The Palace of Truth," Mr. Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" is in the true succession from Wilde's play. "Salomé," though it has been absurdly overpraised—we are not sure that "The Florentine Tragedy," were it complete, would not prove the better play—once more shows Wilde's amazing genius (it is more than talent) for imitative work. Here is a Maeterlinck play, carried to a point of actuality which Maeterlinck himself never attained (nor sought for) till later. In spite of its clumsy, theatrical ending the play is a brilliant *tour de force*. There remains "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." We believe the judgment of posterity will put this at the head of Wilde's work. It has a greater sincerity than "De Pro-



**Globe.**

March 28, 1908

On Thursday and Friday, Messrs. Hodgson will sell a collection of books from various sources, comprising Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, and other folio fine art books, ornithological works, rare first editions by Keats and others, library editions by Scott, Thackeray, Owen, Wilde, and other famous authors, also a few autograph letters of naval documents.

Jesse Norman's University Library







## A STUDY IN THE HALF SINCERE.\*

THE voice of sorrow is always full of significance, whether the note be one of pure regret, or whether it be mixed with shame, physical pain and discomfort, and, worst sting of all, with the remembrance of what might have been and can be no more. Mr. Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" is such a voice, and with the same writer's "Ballad of Reading Gaol" is an expression of anguish endured by an unusually sensitive nature, made to suffer almost everything, short of physical torture, that man, with a good or an evil end, can

inflict on his fellows. Neither work is quite original or quite sincere; both are as original and as sincere as it was in Wilde's nature to be. Both, again, are extremely eloquent, and there are, in particular, passages in the "De Profundis" so beautifully written, so musical and so melancholy, that it is hard to imagine a more delicate and yet unforced usage of the English tongue, even at the hands of its greatest masters.

In the present sumptuous edition of Mr. Wilde's works which lies before us some passages excluded from the earlier edition of "De Profundis" have been added to the text. They have no great artistic worth, but they do something to fix the moral value of the entire work. They show that this man of genius without character set himself too high in the world of art and letters. In "that beautiful unreal world," as he called it, he imagined himself "a king." He thought that he had "altered the minds of men and the colour of things," that he had taken the drama, "made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet," and at the same time "widened its range and enriched its characterisation," that he had "awakened the imagination of his century," and "summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram." He compares himself with Byron, who shook a world where he influenced a coterie, owning slight affinity with the large, general movement of thought and feeling.

We must take this pathetic egoism for what it is worth. As a creative artist, in spite of his wit and feeling, his intimate sense of beauty, and his gift of style, Wilde was as inferior to contemporaries or predecessors of the æsthetic school like Ruskin, Burne-Jones, and William Morris as he was lacking in the power of discipline and self-control, the capacity for prolonged, consecutive labour, which test the character and determine the achievement of the art-worker of all ages. In long intervals of his life, which preceded its disastrous close, he was, as he confesses, "a flâneur, a dandy, and a man of fashion," surrounding himself with smaller natures and meaner minds until he declined to the base. His contributions to the drama were full of wit and artifice; but, with the exception of the beautiful dramatic poem, "Salomé," they added nothing to its forms, and, in a period of abundant and varied growth, were singularly bare both of ideas and of characters. His poetic gift was much rarer, and it displayed itself even less freely in verse than in the rich and melancholy cadence of this astonishing prose-poem, written in the prison cell, where each sight and sound repelled his fastidious sense, and brought back to him the irrevocable horror of his fall. It says something for the persistence of the artistic spirit that he could write so wonderfully, even when one cannot be sure that he was quite capable of the emotion he seemed to express. Yet it cannot with fairness be said that "De Profundis" is a mere pose, or that the touching recourse of this weak and much erring man to the speech and personality of Jesus was not a veritable impulse of the heart. For, strange as it may seem, many saints of the Christian Church have written less feelingly of its Founder and his spirit than Mr. Oscar Wilde has written. His "De Profundis" professes to trace a slow dawn of light in the soul, a dim recovery from despair and hatred of his kind—the hatred which turns prisoners' hearts to stone. The end was not destined to be achieved; the human material was probably too slight to attain a purpose that could fairly be called heroic. He remained, as he said, "antinomian"; reason, morals, everyday religion, did not appeal to him. But in this unfulfilled pilgrimage Wilde fell upon the study of the four Gospels, and found that they opened to him the other side—not "the sunlit side"—of the garden of life, and yet satisfied his æsthetic consciousness. He found in Christ the image of artistic perfection. "The very basis of his nature was the same as that of the nature of the artist—an intense and flame-like imagination." He wanted sympathy, and he found it. Christ's "morality is all sympathy—just what morality should be." "His justice is all poetical justice—exactly what justice should be." "For him there were no laws; there were exceptions merely." "There were Christians before Christ," he said, wittily. . . . "The unfortunate thing is that there have been none since"—except St. Francis. "He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence, one becomes something."

"His miracles seem to me to be as exquisite as the coming of Spring, and quite as natural. I see no difficulty in believing that such was the charm of his personality, that his mere presence could bring peace to souls in anguish, and that those who touched his garments or his hands forgot their pain; or that as he passed by on the highway of life people who had seen nothing of life's mystery saw it clearly, and others who had been deaf to every voice but that of pleasure heard for the first time the voice of love and found it as 'musical as Apollo's lute'; or that evil passions fled at his approach, and men whose dull unimaginative lives had been but a mode of death rose as it were from the grave when he called them; or that when he taught on the hillside the multitude forgot their hunger and thirst and the cares of this world, and that to his friends who listened to him as he sat at meat the coarse food seemed delicate, and the water had the taste of good wine, and the whole house became full of the odour and sweetness of nard."

Beyond this touching sentimentalism, close to the attitude of the adoring saint, and yet divided from it by a certain self-conscious fastidiousness of feeling and expression, and an inevitable want of moral integrity and simplicity, Oscar Wilde did not go. He looked vaguely for the fortification of his spirit, not so much to Christianity, as to the healing processes of Nature:—

"Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole."

But Nature could not heal him, for he could not heal himself; he desired rather to be wept over and consoled. To so sick a soul the mighty Mother could only say, "Iusisti satis," and open to him the way of release.

## MR. OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

"COLLECTED WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE." Uniform Edition, First Eleven Volumes. (Methuen.)

For some years past the works of Mr. Oscar Wilde have attracted considerable attention on the Continent, particularly in Berlin and Paris, where, says their editor, "tolerance and literary enthusiasm are more widely distributed" than here. In fact, it would be difficult to name any modern English author whose reputation has grown more rapidly in unexpected quarters of Europe than has that of the writer of "Salomé" and "De Profundis." This fact in itself, of course, is ample justification for the successful effort which Messrs. Methuen are making to present Mr. Wilde's works in English in a uniform style. It is the first time, however, that this enterprise has been attempted, and it is not out of place to add a few words of hearty praise on the care and the skill that have gone to the making of this edition, which is, on its own merits, destined to be the delight of bookmen for many years to come.

It appears that the complete edition will probably consist of thirteen volumes, and of these eleven are already to hand. The remaining volumes will not be published for some little time, for they are to contain some miscellaneous prose works that have still to be brought together. The whole edition, however, is limited to 1000 copies for the United Kingdom and America, and in their way the binding, the cover, the type, the printing, and the hand-made paper employed suggest the high-water mark of the efforts of the modern book publisher. The particular volume which contains a good deal more matter than the original issue is that devoted to "De Profundis." There, for the first time in English, will be found "A Prefatory Dedication to Dr. Max Meyerfeld by the Editor," Mr. Robert Ross, who says that but for Dr. Meyerfeld he does not think that the book would have ever been published. He explains to the doctor:—

"When first you asked me about the manuscript which you heard Wilde wrote in prison, I explained to you vaguely that some day I hoped to issue portions of it, in accordance with the writer's wishes; though I thought it would be premature to do so at that moment. You begged, however, that Germany (which already held Wilde's plays in the highest esteem) should have the opportunity of seeing a new work by one of her favourite authors. I rather reluctantly consented to your proposal; and promised, at a leisure opportunity, to extract such portions of the work as might be considered of general public interest. I fear that I postponed what was to me a rather painful task; it was only your visits and more importunate correspondence (of which I frankly began to hate the sight) that brought about the fulfilment of your object. There was no idea of issuing the work in England; but after despatching to you a copy for translation in *Die Neue Rundschau*, it occurred to me that a simultaneous publication of the original might gratify Wilde's English friends and admirers who had expressed curiosity on the subject."

At the same time, Mr. Ross admits that in sending the copy for the English edition to Messrs. Methuen (to whom alone he submitted it), he anticipated refusal as though the work were his own. Happily, "a very distinguished man of letters," who acted as the firm's reader, advised its acceptance, but urged, in view of the uncertainty of its reception, the excision of certain passages, and to this Mr. Ross readily assented. Since then there has been a demand to see these passages, which have been, it seems, already issued in German, so they are here replaced, with the addition of four Wilde letters from Reading Prison to Mr. Ross, and two letters on prison life by Wilde, which, after his release, appeared in a London newspaper. The letters to Mr. Ross are not of great literary value. They give a certain number of domestic details that we think might profitably have been omitted. They also supply some swift and sudden judgments on Meredith, Rossetti, and Stevenson—not very deep, and not very novel. Perhaps the most poignant expressions in them are these:—"No man of my position (wrote Wilde) can fall into the mire of life without getting a great deal of pity from his inferiors, and I know that when the play lasts too long spectators tire. My tragedy has lasted far too long; its climax is over; its end is mean; and I am quite conscious of the fact that when the end does come I shall return an unwelcome visitant to a world that does not want me; a *revenant*, as the French say, and one whose face is grey with long imprisonment and crooked with pain. Horrible as are the dead when they rise from their tombs, the living who come out from tombs are more horrible still."

As for the omitted passages, we are inclined to agree with the judgment of the "very distinguished man of letters" who originally advised their excision. The majority of them are forced and artificial, and show Wilde manoeuvring for the limelight. Undoubtedly they are out of key with the general tenour of the book. The notes appended to the different volumes, however, are valuable, if unobtrusive. They give, in addition to the usual date of first publication of each work, the names of the persons to whom the literary or dramatic rights belong, and so in a curious way serve to bring home to the imagination the extent of Mr. Wilde's interests and ambitions. Separate volumes are devoted to "A Woman of No Importance"; "The Duchess of Padua"; "Salomé"; "A Florentine Tragedy" and "Vera"; "A House of Pomegranates"; and "The Happy Prince and other Fairy Tales"; "An Ideal Husband"; "Lady Windermere's Fan"; "The Importance of Being Earnest"; "Intentions" (which include "The Decay of Lying," "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," "The Critic as Artist," and "The Truth of Masks"); and "The Soul of Man"; "Lord Arthur Saville's Crime" and other prose pieces; and "Poems," including "Ravenna," which won the Newdigate Prize of 1878, and an unpublished Poem to "LL," which begins:—

Could we dig up this long-buried treasure,  
Were it worth the pleasure,  
We never could learn love's song,  
We are parted too long.

Could the passionate past that is fled  
Call back its dead,  
Could we live it all over again  
Were it worth the pain!

The final conclusion the poet reaches is:—

Well, if my heart must break,  
Dear love, for your sake,  
It will break in music; I know,  
Poets' hearts break so.

But strange that I was not told  
That the brain can hold  
In a tiny ivory cell  
God's heaven and hell.

The Duchess of Padua  
De Profundis. By O.  
(Methuen. 12s.)

THERE is a strange story in two volumes. One play—a tragedy written by a young and budding author of his days, embodied his own life. It is with a difference. It has been published. It was produced in New York, privately printed, and then to the public. It is exuberance and swiftness of the play is full, and literary gifts. The play is again and again of imagination and play young Guido. So full of the spirit of the Duke, but taken by the Duke. Guido learns that she, the old Duke. Guido her husband, she amazed, replies:—

How could we  
You have put  
And Murder

She reproaches  
innocent life, with

How diff

In the remaining  
under the Duchess  
prisoned, and finally  
their death together

Of the extreme  
of *De Profundis* was  
and on looking through  
moving. The address  
here and there  
not of very great  
characteristic passages  
Robert Ross from  
They are interested  
of the man in prison  
itself. As an appendix  
letters on prison life  
*The Daily Chronicle*  
and help to complete  
life on the writer

These two hands  
part of a uniform  
about fourteen  
complete sets.



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It appears that the complete edition will probably consist of thirteen volumes, and of these eleven are already to hand. The remaining volumes will not be published for some little time, for they are to contain some miscellaneous prose works that have still to be brought together. The whole edition, however, is limited to 1000 copies for the United Kingdom and America, and in their way the binding, the cover, the type, the printing, and the hand-made paper employed suggest the high-water mark of the efforts of the modern book publisher. The particular volume which contains a good deal more matter than the original issue is that devoted to "De Profundis." There, for the first time in English, will be found "A Prefatory Dedication to Dr. Max Meyerfeld by the Editor," Mr. Robert Ross, who says that but for Dr. Meyerfeld he does not think that the book would have even been published. He explains to the doctor:—

"When first you asked me about the manuscript which you heard Wilde wrote in prison, I explained to you vaguely that some day I hoped to issue portions of it, in accordance with the writer's wishes; though I thought it would be premature to do so at that moment. You begged, however, that Germany (which already held Wilde's plays in the highest esteem) should have the opportunity of seeing a new work by one of her favourite authors. I rather reluctantly consented to your proposal; and promised, at a leisureed opportunity, to extract such portions of the work as might be considered of general public interest. I fear that I postponed what was to me a rather painful task; it was only your visits and more importunate correspondence (of which I frankly began to hate the sight) that brought about the fulfilment of your object. There was no idea of issuing the work in England; but after despatching to you a copy for translation in *Die Neue Rundschau*, it occurred to me that a simultaneous publication of the original might gratify Wilde's English friends and admirers who had expressed curiosity on the subject."

At the same time, Mr. Ross admits that in sending the copy for the English edition to Messrs. Methuen (to whom alone he submitted it), he anticipated refusal as though the work were his own. Happily, "a very distinguished man of letters," who acted as the firm's reader, advised its acceptance, but urged, in view of the uncertainty of its reception, the excision of certain passages, and to this Mr. Ross readily assented. Since then there has been a demand to see these passages, which have been, it seems, already issued in German, so they are here replaced, with the addition of four Wilde letters from Reading Prison to Mr. Ross, and two letters on prison life by Wilde, which, after his release, appeared in a London newspaper. The letters to Mr. Ross are not of great literary value. They give a certain number of domestic details that we think might profitably have been omitted. They also supply some swift and sudden judgments on Meredith, Rossetti, and Stevenson—not very deep, and not very novel. Perhaps the most poignant expressions in them are these:—"No man of my position (wrote Wilde) can fall into the mire of life without getting a great deal of pity from his inferiors, and I know that when the play lasts too long spectators tire. My tragedy has lasted far too long; its climax is over; its end is mean; and I am quite conscious of the fact that when the end does come I shall return an unwelcome visitant to a world that does not want me; a *revenant*, as the French say, and one whose face is grey with long imprisonment and crooked with pain. Horrible as are the dead when they rise from their tombs, the living who come out from tombs are more horrible still."

As for the omitted passages, we are inclined to agree with the judgment of the "very distinguished man of letters" who originally advised their excision. The majority of them are forced and artificial, and show Wilde manoeuvring for the limelight. Undoubtedly they are out of key with the general tenour of the book. The notes appended to the different volumes, however, are valuable, if unobtrusive. They give, in addition to the usual date of first publication of each work, the names of the persons to whom the literary or dramatic rights belong, and so in a curious way serve to bring home to the imagination the extent of Mr. Wilde's interests and ambitions. Separate volumes are devoted to "A Woman of No Importance"; "The Duchess of Padua"; "Salomé"; "A Florentine Tragedy" and "Vera"; "A House of Pomegranates"; and "The Happy Prince and other Fairy Tales"; "An Ideal Husband"; "Lady Windermere's Fan"; "The Importance of Being Earnest"; "Intentions" (which include "The Decay of Lying," "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," "The Critic as Artist," and "The Truth of Masks"); and "The Soul of Man"; "Lord Arthur Saville's Crime" and other prose pieces; and "Poems," including "Ravenna," which won the Newdigate Prize of 1878, and an unpublished Poem to "LL," which begins:—

Could we dig up this long-buried treasure,  
Were it worth the pleasure,  
We never could learn love's song,  
We are parted too long.

Could the passionate past that is fled  
Call back its dead,  
Could we live it all over again  
Were it worth the pain!

The final conclusion the poet reaches is:—

Well, if my heart must break,  
Dear love, for your sake,  
It will break in music, I know,  
Poets' hearts break so.

But strange that I was not told  
That the brain can hold

In a *University Library*

God's heaven and hell.



## DRAMA AND LIFE.

**The Duchess of Padua.** By Oscar Wilde.

**De Profundis.** By Oscar Wilde. With Additional Matter.  
(Methuen. 12s. 6d. net each.)

THERE is a strange pathos in handling together these two volumes. One contains the brilliant author's first play—a tragedy written when he was in the heyday of youth and budding fame; the other, written at the end of his days, embodies the poignant and bitter tragedy of his own life. It is 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' again—with a difference. *The Duchess of Padua* has not before been published. It was written in 1882, and when it was produced in New York in 1891 twenty copies were privately printed, but it is now, for the first time, given to the public. It bears the marks of youth; the very exuberance and swing of the style are indications; but the play is full, also, of signs of the young writer's great literary gifts. The blank verse flows easily and musically, and again and again we come upon passages of real beauty of imagination and expression. In the beginning of the play young Guido Ferranti learns from old Count Moranzone how treacherously his father had been betrayed and sold to dishonour and death by the present Duke of Padua. Guido vows to submit wholly to Moranzone's guidance in taking his revenge, and meantime enters the service of the Duke. In the second act, we find love growing between Guido and the beautiful young Duchess, and when they have reached the point of declaration, in the midst of a pretty love scene, comes the dagger from Moranzone, and Guido, reminded of his vow, feels he must break with Beatrice. In the next act we see him in the palace at night on his way to the Duke's chamber. So full of the spirit of love is he that he will not murder the Duke, but take vengeance in a subtler way. He is met by the Duchess on the threshold, and after a while learns that she, thinking so to keep Guido, has killed the old Duke. Guido is horrified; she has not only killed her husband, she has murdered Love. The Duchess, amazed, replies: 'I did it all for you.' But he repels her:

How could we eat together at Love's table?  
You have poured poison in the sacred wine,  
And Murder dips his fingers in the sop.

She reproaches him for coming into and spoiling her innocent life, with the repeated exclamation:

How differently do we love from men!

In the remaining two acts we have, first, Guido charged, under the Duchess's accusation, of the murder, and imprisoned, and finally the reconciliation of two lovers and their death together.

Of the extreme interest and remarkable literary quality of *De Profundis* we spoke at length when it first appeared, and on looking through it again we find it as profoundly moving. The additional portions in the text—passages here and there excised in the first edition—though not of very great bulk altogether, include a number of characteristic passages. Four letters, written to Mr. Robert Ross from Reading gaol, are prefixed to the book. They are interesting and, so far as they go, a revelation of the man in prison, agreeing in spirit with *De Profundis* itself. As an appendix appear two trenchant and weighty letters on prison reform, which appeared originally in *The Daily Chronicle*. They were well worth reprinting, and help to complete our knowledge of the effect of prison life on the writer.

These two handsome volumes, it should be added, form part of a uniform edition of the works of Oscar Wilde in about fourteen volumes. The edition is sold only in complete sets.

Modernism and Romance. By R. A. Scott-James. (Lane.  
7s. 6d net.)

A short but very sympathetic exposition of Thomas Hardy's pessimism; an admirable, quiet, incisive exposure of Oscar Wilde, 'with his brilliant literary career and his contemptible philosophy,' and of George Moore, with his 'display of verbal elegance and brutal reflection'; a discussion of the psychological novel as illustrated in Mrs. Humphry Ward's 'William Ashe,' Mr. Vachell's 'Face of Clay,' and Mr. Hichens's 'Garden of Allah'; and discerning criticism of such poets as W. B. Yeats, Stephen Phillips, and John Davidson—these are only part of the contents of this stimulating book. Stevenson, W. J. Locke, and Joseph Conrad are chosen to illustrate the 'New Romance,' and high praise is given to John Galsworthy, though he should scarcely have been placed among 'The Borderlanders.' Maxim Gorky, Upton Sinclair and H. G. Wells, Lafcadio Hearn, Pierre Loti, and Jack London are among other writers about whom Mr. Scott-James has something significant to say. Though he is just a little too much absorbed in his fascinating pet theory, and therefore his judgments are often to be taken *cum grano salis*, yet his book as a whole is one of the most entertaining and suggestive essays in criticism that have appeared in recent years.



## Review of Reviews,

April 1908

## OSCAR WILDE'S SWAN SONG.

Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, with the addition of some unpublished matter and six letters, is now issued by Methuen and Co. in a seventh edition. It is a book of infinite pathos, and not less infinite tragedy. He writes, "My tragedy has lasted far too long; its climax is over; its end is mean"—alas! the last words were a fatally true prophecy.

## THE ITALIAN REVIEWS.

A NUMBER of literary articles of high merit appear in the *Nuova Antologia* for March. Students of d'Annunzio will specially appreciate S. Sighele's very lucid analysis of his latest drama, the "Nave," which, unlike any previous dramatic work of the poet's, has a definite moral and patriotic purpose. G. Barini contributes a sympathetic study of Oscar Wilde's works, maintaining that, in essentials, his teaching is thoroughly moral, and that the suspicion with which his work is often regarded is founded on misconception.



April 2, 1908

## AN ENGLISH RECORD.

Mr. G. Alexander, who assured the Gallery First Nighters the other evening that he was a thorough believer in the future of English dramatic art, certainly has good reason for the faith that is in him so far as his record as an actor-manager is concerned. He has produced no fewer than thirty-two English plays, and only seven by foreign authors. Four of the latter, as he himself admits, were conspicuous failures, although perhaps it would be fair to add that one at least, "Old Heidelberg," was an equally conspicuous success. His record at the St. James's has included such plays as "Lady Windermere's Fan," "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "Liberty Hall," "The Masqueraders," "The Princess and the Butterfly," "The Ambassador," "The Importance of Being Earnest," "Mollentrave or Women," and, of course, "His House in Order" and "John Glayde's Honour."



There has recently been a distinct revival of interest in Oscar Wilde, and no doubt it is this circumstance which has suggested the issue of a complete collected edition of his writings. This starts with the much-belauded *Duchess of Padua*, a play which shows Wilde at his weakest. For Wilde was neither an original writer nor an original thinker. The device of all his plays is singularly poor and threadbare. It is rather their freshness of expression which caused their success. To urge that they are borrowed from Sheridan by no means ends the story of their derivation. They owe quite as much to Sardou, Scribe, and the younger Dumas. *The Importance of Being Ernest*, however, is an exception which is universally admitted to be a little masterpiece. With *Salome* Wilde was fortunate enough to give a play to the repertoire of Europe.

Wilde incorporated the less pleasant manifestation of his talents in *Dorian Gray*. Pater, in his review, observed that it was the work of a clever talker. The tales of *The House of Pomegranates* are somewhat disappointing. Wilde's prose is Asiatic: it has none of Arnold's superb restraint, nor the elegance of Stevenson. There are, indeed, purple patches; but they are in no way superior to the heroics of Bulwer Lytton or Beaconsfield. That overloaded Oriental manner was, however, effective in *Salome*, though, of course, Flaubert and the Bible were drawn upon in every page.

By a strange paradox, Wilde considered his personality far more remarkable than anything that he had written. It was an amazing criticism to come from him, but we believe a truthful one.

Edinburgh Evening News - April 11

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

## OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS

A very handsome edition of the works of Oscar Wilde is being published by Messrs Methuen, London. In appearance the volumes are such as to delight the book-lover. Tastefully bound, with fine paper and large type, the volumes are at once agreeable to the reader and an ornament to the bookcase. The question is sometimes raised whether the works of a man who made such shipwreck of his life as Wilde should be republished. His plays suffered a temporary boycott. Ought all memorials of a man who fell so grievously to be blotted out of memory? The answer is decidedly in the negative. So far as Wilde's purely literary work has vitality in it, it will live on its merits. Time will assign it the level it deserves, for, as with other writers, the future will effect a selection, and some pieces will live and some lapse into deserved oblivion. One of Messrs Methuen's beautiful volumes, for instance, contains "The Duchess of Padua," a play in which an effort was made to combine the strong motives of the Elizabethan stage with the much more delicate psychology of the moderns. It is a weird compound of Marlowe and Maeterlinck. This could not expect to retain the popularity accorded to the society dramas, "*Lady Windermere's Fan*" and "*A Woman of no Importance*," which, however flippantly, did present a characterisation of actual life in a particular sphere. But the justification in reviving the memory of Wilde is obvious when one turns to the volume "*De Profundis*," written during his imprisonment. This is a book the terrible moral significance of which cannot be mistaken by any man of heart and feeling. It is at once the most illuminating document on the vanity and folly of Wilde as he was in his day of pride, and the most poignant confession of the change which he underwent when his soul passed through the great iron wheel of the law. The most conspicuous feature in the earlier passages is the man's overweening, almost insane, literary vanity. Extracts might be quoted in numbers showing how his whole being was obsessed by the craze for fame. He wanted to eclipse all his contemporaries in the art of expression. "It is by utterance that we live," he says. When he, a prisoner, hears of his mother's death, he exclaims: "Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my agony and shame. Never, even in the most perfect days of my development as an artist, could I have found words fit to bear so august a burden, or to move with sufficient stateliness of music through the purple pageant of my incommunicable woe." Such a passage is almost ghastly in its revelation of egregious vanity in such an hour. It is less of his mother that he is thinking than of himself, his failure as a lord of language. His fall, even, is lamented largely as forfeiting the fine name he had inherited and built up. But in the later phases of the book another note is struck. Nearly a hundred years before, a literary man whose mocking spirit and devotion to literary style closely resembled Wilde's—Heinrich Heine—found himself also a prisoner, though held only by a paralyzing disease. Heine announces in one of his essays that he has taken to reading the Bible, and finds it a wonderfully interesting book. Oscar Wilde in Reading Jail took to studying the New Testament in Greek. The reflections suggested to him are not orthodox—they are dominated by the artistic rather than the moral sense, but the reader cannot miss the fact that a profound illumination took place in the prisoner's mind. He got more than a glimmering of the true meaning of sorrow and suffering in the world. And it is because of that remarkable self-revelation, and the lesson it carries for all who reflect upon the meaning of life, that this record of a soul's agony vindicates a place beside some of the great "Confessions" in literature.

**Sunday Chronicle.**

Mr. Alexander has never made the least claim to authorship; but I believe he had to put heavy work on Oscar Wilde's manuscript, notably of "Lady Windermere's Fan," before production became possible.

SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' HELP  
SOCIETY

On Friday and Saturday afternoons, May 1 and 2, at 2.30 o'clock, Oscar Wilde's three-act comedy "The Importance of Being Earnest," will be produced at the Palace Theatre by amateurs, in aid of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society. The following ladies and gentlemen are taking part:—Mrs L W Parsons, Mrs E S Brook, Mrs Leigh-White, Miss Parsons, Mr Pascoe Stuart, Mr F W E Johnson, Mr H W Jackson, Mr K I Nicholl. Stage Manager—Brigadier-General Johnson. R G A. The string band of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers will play a selection during the afternoon of May 1st, and the string band of the Durham Light Infantry will play a selection during the afternoon of May 2nd. The booking for these interesting performances is proceeding briskly.

Sunday TIMES, APRIL 5, 1908.

## THE VATICAN.

THE POPE AND "SALOME."

(From Our Correspondent.)

ROME, Saturday.

The Pope is evidently displeased with Richard Strauss's opera, "Salome," as would appear from the following article in his official journal, "Osservatore".

"In Rome, the seat of the Head of the Church, and at a period of the year which is dedicated to penance, when every day relics of the saints and Christian martyrs are exposed to view in the churches in order to prepare the public for an intelligent and reverent conception of the memorial services of the passion of Our Saviour, representations are given on the stage which are forbidden by the State authorities in Catholic countries."

"In these representations the sacred legends are quite distorted and the revered figure of the Baptist is dragged on the stage in commemoration of a disgraceful deed, which the caprices of a foreign composer thought necessary to surround with music which borders on insanity. It is a scandal that the wickedness of the times has placed it beyond the power of the Pope to stop such sacrilege."

M.A.P.

April 4. 1908

A New Wilde Story.

At the annual dinner of the Gallery First Nighters' Club Mr. George Alexander told a good story about Oscar Wilde. "Oscar," said he, one day, "I believe you could write me a comedy." "How much do you believe?" said Oscar. "£100," said Mr. Alexander. "All right," said Oscar, "I'll call for it to-morrow morning." For some time Oscar looked the other way when he met Mr. Alexander; but at last Mr. Alexander confronted him. "What about that play?" "Do you still believe in it?" said Oscar. "I do," said Mr. Alexander. "Do you believe another £100?" "I do," said Mr. Alexander. A few months afterwards Oscar brought Mr. Alexander *Lady Windermere's Fan*. After reading it, he offered Oscar £1,000 for the entire rights. "Mr. Alexander," said Oscar, "I have known you for a good many years. I think I will take a percentage." Mr. Alexander told the story to show that authors are not always devoid of business capacity.

"THE PEOPLE  
IN FRONT."

IMPRESSIONS OF EUROPEAN  
AUDIENCES.

By Oswald R. Dawson.

On a tour through Europe I had occasion lately to visit the theatre in a number of its great cities. As I was frequently unable to understand more than a little, if anything, of the plays performed, I naturally had to occupy my thoughts by studying something that was more or less intelligible. So that if I have no very precise views obtained from first-hand experience about the state of the drama on the Continent, I have, at any rate, some fairly precise impressions of the spirit in which the drama is received.

## Drama and Dress.

The keynote of a German audience is a sort of fervid intellectualism. All fervid intellectualists prefer the abnormal to the normal. That is why in Berlin the two men who are singled out as the favoured representatives of British drama are Oscar Wilde and Mr. Bernard Shaw. This seems odd enough to an Englishman, for although both enjoy—or have enjoyed—a vogue, neither is in any sense representative of the British stage. For exceptions do not “represent” the rule. Both Wilde and Mr. Shaw dealt in that particular kind of tour d’esprit (if I may use a portmanteau idiom), which is most dear to the German. The Berliner loves to judge drama by the standard of the pure intelligence; the Parisian by that of the emotions; and the Londoner by the æsthetic canons which dominate his social life. That is why the German favours the element of critical psychology and ethics in his plays, while the Frenchman harps incessantly on studies in the highways and byways of love, and the Englishman stands firm by his Comedy of Manners. These national preferences are reflected with singular precision in the general demeanour of the playgoer in London, Paris, and Berlin. In the latter city attendance at the play has the minimum of that social ceremoniousness which is characteristic of English custom. In a London theatre, the appointments of the foyer are admittedly important. In Berlin even at the best playhouse they are rigorously simple, if not actually shabby. The patrons of the stalls, if they seek refreshment at all during an interval, are apt to consume brawn and pickles.

Irish Times, *Wkly*

Eleven of the thirteen volumes which are to comprise the collected works of Oscar Wilde have been issued by Messrs. Methuen. They are "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," "Intentions," "Poems," "House of Pomegranates," "De Profundis," "Salome," "A Florentine Tragedy," and "Vera," "A Woman of No Importance," "The Importance of Being Earnest," "Lady Windermere's Fan," "An Ideal Husband," "The Duchess of Padua." The edition, which is printed on hand-made paper, is limited to 1,000 copies for the United Kingdom and America.



There has recently been a distinct revival of interest in Oscar Wilde, and no doubt it is this circumstance which has suggested the issue of a complete collected edition of his writings. This starts with the much-belauded *Duchess of Padua*, a play which shows Wilde at his weakest. For Wilde was neither an original writer nor an original thinker. The device of all his plays is singularly poor and threadbare. It is rather their freshness of expression which caused their success. To urge that they are borrowed from Sheridan by no means ends the story of their derivation. They owe quite as much to Sardou, Scribe, and the younger Dumas. *The Importance of Being Ernest*, however, is an exception which is universally admitted to be a little masterpiece. With *Salome* Wilde was fortunate enough to give a play to the *répertoire* of Europe.

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## Glasgow News April 2. Reviews of Books.

### OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

We reviewed in these columns recently the first volume of the sumptuous new edition of the works of Oscar Wilde which Messrs Methuen are publishing—"The Duchess of Padua," a tragedy. The volume now before us is a tragedy of another sort. Whatever may be the judgment of posterity on the work of Wilde—we are not here directly concerned with his life-interest-to-day will be mainly directed towards this strangely beautiful product of the prison cell, first given to the world in response to the entreaties of Dr Max Meyerfeld, to whom the present edition of "De Profundis" is dedicated by the editor. Mr Robert Ross, who was Wilde's literary executor and staunch friend, made certain excisions before issuing the English text which has hitherto been before the public. In this, the seventh edition of the work, these censored passages have been restored, and, together with half-a-dozen letters written by Wilde, go to the making of a strangely fascinating human document. Some of the passages hitherto excluded are curiously characteristic. For example, after the sentence, "The gods had given me almost everything," the public was not permitted to read this instance of lofty self-appreciation:—

I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring; I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art; I altered the minds of men and the colours of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder. I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterisation. Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched, I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me. I summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram.

To those who knew the nature of the man, little stress will be laid on this example of his characteristic egoism, which is, after all, as natural as it is naturally pathetic. For though one has a vague feeling that the sincerity of "De Profundis" is not always spontaneously or that its originality comes at times perilously close to the artificial, it was at least as sincere and as original as a writer of Wilde's temperament could make it.

For the rest, though the mingling of sackcloth and ashes with the "purple pageant" of his woe is at times bizarre enough, the book has passages of astonishing power and beauty; so musical and so melancholy that they move one like the magic of the greatest masters. Despite the nobility and beauty of his conception of the character of Christ here set forth in many exquisite passages, he seemed to look for the strengthening of his spirit, not so much to Christianity as to the healing processes of Nature. "Society, as we have constituted it," he says in closing, "will have no place for me, has none to offer"; but

Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.

Whether or not he was capable of all the emotion he seemed to express—and it is difficult to see how emotion at least is to be denied him—it says much for the persistence of the indwelling artistic spirit that he could write so marvelously in an environment that never for one moment allowed him to forget the horror of his fall.

In addition to the main body of the work, many will be glad to have the letters on prison life sent to the "Daily Chronicle," and included appropriately enough in the present volume. These letters contain a terrible indictment of many of the aspects of prison life not generally considered by the law-abiding citizen. So far as paper, type, and format are concerned, the present edition of the collected works of Wilde is perfection, and forms a veritable "édition de luxe," which cannot fail to delight every book-lover.

DE PROFUNDIS. By Oscar Wilde. London: Methuen & Co. 12s 6d net.

### RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

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### Sunday Chronicle May 10

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There has recently been a distinct revival of interest in Oscar Wilde, and no doubt it is this circumstance which has suggested the issue of a complete collected edition of his writings. This starts with the much-belauded *Duchess of Padua*, a play which shows Wilde at his weakest. For Wilde was neither an original writer nor an original thinker. The device of all his plays is singularly poor and threadbare. It is rather their freshness of expression which caused their success. To urge that they are borrowed from Sheridan by no means ends the story of their derivation. They owe quite as much to Sardou, Scribe, and the younger Dumas. *The Importance of Being Ernest*, however, is an exception which is universally admitted to be a little masterpiece. With *Salome* Wilde was fortunate enough to give a play to the *répertoire* of Europe.

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Wilde incorporated the less pleasant manifestation of his talents in *Dorian Gray*. Pater, in his review, observed that it was the work of a clever talker. The tales of *The House of Pomegranates* are somewhat disappointing. Wilde's prose is Asiatic: it has none of Arnold's superb restraint, nor the elegance of Stevenson. There are, indeed, purple patches; but they are in no way superior to the heroics of Bulwer Lytton or Beaconsfield. That overloaded Oriental manner was, however, effective in *Salome*, though, of course, Flaubert and the Bible were drawn upon in every page.

\* \*

By a strange paradox, Wilde considered his personality far more remarkable than anything that he had written. It was an amazing criticism to come from him, but, we believe, a truthful one.

MIMNERMUS.



## Reviews of Books.

**OUT OF THE DEPTHS.**

We reviewed in these columns recently the first volume of the sumptuous new edition of the works of Oscar Wilde which Messrs Methuen are publishing—"The Duchess of Padua," a tragedy. The volume now before us is a tragedy of another sort. Whatever may be the judgment of posterity on the work of Wilde—we are not here directly concerned with his life—interest to-day will be mainly directed towards this strangely beautiful product of the prison cell, first given to the world in response to the entreaties of Dr Max Meyerfeld, to whom the present edition of "De Profundis" is dedicated by the editor. Mr Robert Ross, who was Wilde's literary executor and staunch friend, made certain excisions before issuing the English text which has hitherto been before the public. In this, the seventh edition of the work, these censored passages have been restored, and, together with half-a-dozen letters written by Wilde, go to the making of a strangely fascinating human document. Some of the passages hitherto excluded are curiously characteristic. For example, after the sentence, "The gods had given me almost everything," the public was not permitted to read this instance of lofty self-appreciation:—

I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring; I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colours of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder. I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterisation. Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched, I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me. I summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram.

To those who knew the nature of the man, little stress will be laid on this example of his characteristic egoism, which is, after all, as natural as it is naïvely pathetic. For though one has a vague feeling that the sincerity of "De Profundis" is not always spontaneous or that its originality comes at times perilously close to the artificial, it was at least as sincere and as original as a writer of Wilde's temperament could make it.

For the rest, though the mingling of sackcloth and ashes with the "purple pageant" of his woe is at times bizarre enough, the book has passages of astonishing power and beauty; so musical and so melancholy that they move one like the magic of the greatest masters. Despite the nobility and beauty of his conception of the character of Christ here set forth in many exquisite passages, he seemed to look for the strengthening of his spirit, not so much to Christianity as to the healing processes of Nature. "Society, as we have constituted it," he says in closing, "will have no place for me, has none to offer"; but

Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt; she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.

Whether or not he was capable of all the emotion he seemed to express—and it is difficult to see how emotion at least is to be denied him—it says much for the persistence of the indwelling artistic spirit that he could write so marvellously in an environment that never for one moment allowed him to forget the horror of his fall.

In addition to the main body of the work, many will be glad to have the letters on prison life sent to the "Daily Chronicle," and included appropriately enough in the present volume. These letters contain a terrible indictment of many of the aspects of prison life not generally considered by the law-abiding citizen. So far as paper, type, and format are concerned, the present edition of the collected works of Wilde is perfection, and forms a veritable "édition de luxe," which cannot fail to delight every book-lover.

*DE PROFUNDIS* By Oscar Wilde. London: Methuen



## RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

### OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

A very handsome edition of the works of Oscar Wilde is being published by Messrs Methuen, London. In appearance the volumes are such as to delight the book-lover. Tastefully bound, with fine paper and large type, the volumes are at once agreeable to the reader and an ornament to the bookcase. The question is sometimes raised whether the works of a man who made such shipwreck of his life as Wilde should be republished. His plays suffered a temporary boycott. Ought all memorials of a man who fell so grievously to be blotted out of memory? The answer is decidedly in the negative. So far as Wilde's purely literary work has vitality in it, it will live on its merits. Time will assign it the level it deserves, for, as with other writers, the future will effect a selection, and some pieces will live and some lapse into deserved oblivion. One of Messrs Methuen's beautiful volumes, for instance, contains "The Duchess of Padua," a play in which an effort is made to combine the strong motives of the Elizabethan stage with the much more delicate psychology of the moderns. It is a weird compound of Marlowe and Maeterlinck. This could not expect to retain the popularity accorded to the society dramas, "Lady Windermere's Fan" and "A Woman of no Importance," which, however flippantly, did present a characterisation of actual life in a particular sphere. But the justification in reviving the memory of Wilde is obvious when one turns to the volume "De Profundis," written during his imprisonment. This is a book the terrible moral significance of which cannot be mistaken by any man of heart and feeling. It is at once the most illuminating document on the vanity and folly of Wilde as he was in his day of pride, and the most poignant confession of the change which he underwent when his soul passed through the great iron wheels of the law. The most conspicuous feature in the earlier passages is the man's overweening, almost insane, literary vanity. Extracts might be quoted in numbers showing how his whole being was obsessed by the craze for fame. He wanted to eclipse all his contemporaries in the art of expression. "It is by utterance that we live," he says. When he, a prisoner, hears of his mother's death, he exclaims: "Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my agony and shame. Never, even in the most perfect days of my development as an artist, could I have found words fit to bear so august a burden, or to move with sufficient stateliness of music through the purple pageant of my incommunicable woe." Such a passage is almost ghastly in its revelation of egregious vanity in such an hour. It is less of his mother that he is thinking than of himself, his failure as a lord of language. His fall, even, is lamented largely as forfeiting the fine name he had inherited and built up. But in the later phases of the book another note is struck. Nearly a hundred years before, a literary man whose mocking spirit and devotion to literary style closely resembled Wilde's—Heinrich Heine—found himself also a prisoner, though held only by a paralysing disease. Heine announces in one of his essays that he has taken to reading the Bible, and finds it a wonderfully interesting book. Oscar Wilde in Reading Jail took to studying the New Testament in Greek. The reflections suggested to him are not orthodox—they are dominated by the artistic rather than the moral sense, but the reader cannot miss the fact that a profound illumination took place in the prisoner's mind. He got more than a glimmering of the true meaning of sorrow and suffering in the world. And it is because of that remarkable self-revelation, and the lesson it carries for all who reflect upon the meaning of life, that this record of a soul's agony vindicates a place beside some of the great "Confessions" in literature.



# Sunday Chronicle.

May  
10

Mr. Alexander has never made the least claim to authorship; but I believe he had to put heavy work on Oscar Wilde's shoulders of "Lady Windermere's Fan," before production became possible.

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Cork Constitution. April 24. 1908

**SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' HELP  
SOCIETY**

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On Friday and Saturday afternoons, May 1 and 2, at 2.30 o'clock, Oscar Wilde's three-act comedy "The Importance of Being Earnest," will be produced at the Palace Theatre by amateurs, in aid of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society. The following ladies and gentlemen are taking part:—Mrs L W Parsons, Mrs E S Brook, Mrs Leigh-White, Miss Parsons, Mr Pascoe Stuart, Mr F W E Johnson, Mr H W Jackson, Mr K I Nicholl. Stage Manager—Brigadier-General Johnson, R G A. The string band of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers will play a selection during the afternoon of May 1st, and the string band of the Durham Light Infantry will play a selection during the afternoon of May 2nd. The booking for these interesting performances is proceeding briskly.



Sunday TIMES. APRIL 5, 1908.

## THE VATICAN.

### THE POPE AND "SALOME."

(From Our Correspondent.)

ROME, Saturday.

The Pope is evidently displeased with Richard Strauss's opera, "Salome," as would appear from the following article in his official journal, "Osservatore":

"In Rome, the seat of the Head of the Church, and at a period of the year which is dedicated to penance, when every day relics of the saints and Christian martyrs are exposed to view in the churches in order to prepare the public for an intelligent and reverent conception of the memorial services of the passion of Our Saviour, representations are given on the stage which are forbidden by the State authorities in Catholic countries."

"In these representations the sacred legends are quite distorted and the revered figure of the Baptist is dragged on the stage in commemoration of a disgraceful deed, which the caprice of a foreign composer thought necessary to surround with music which borders on insanity. It is a scandal that the wickedness of Jis201940848s University Library beyond the power of the Pope to stop such sacrilege."

M.A.P.,

April 4-1908

## A New Wilde Story.

At the annual dinner of the Gallery First Nighters' Club Mr. George Alexander told a good story about Oscar Wilde. "Oscar," said he, one day, "I believe you could write me a comedy." "How much do you believe?" said Oscar. "£100," said Mr. Alexander. "All right," said Oscar, "I'll call for it to-morrow morning." For some time Oscar looked the other way when he met Mr. Alexander; but at last Mr. Alexander confronted him. "What about that play?" "Do you still believe in it?" said Oscar. "I do," said Mr. Alexander. "Do you believe another £100?" "I do," said Mr. Alexander. A few months afterwards Oscar brought Mr. Alexander *Lady Windermere's Fan*. After reading it, he offered Oscar £1,000 for the entire rights. "Mr. Alexander," said Oscar, "I have known you for a good many years. I think I will take a percentage." Mr. Alexander told the story to show that authors are not always devoid of business capacity.



## "THE PEOPLE IN FRONT."

### IMPRESSIONS OF EUROPEAN AUDIENCES.

By Oswald R. Dawson.

On a tour through Europe I had occasion lately to visit the theatre in a number of its great cities. As I was frequently unable to understand more than a little, if anything, of the plays performed, I naturally had to occupy my thoughts by studying something that was more or less intelligible. So that if I have no very precise views obtained from first-hand experience about the state of the drama on the Continent, I have, at any rate, some fairly precise impressions of the spirit in which the drama is received.

#### Drama and Dress.

The keynote of a German audience is a sort of fervid intellectualism. All fervid intellectualists prefer the abnormal to the normal. That is why in Berlin the two men who are singled out as the favoured representatives of British drama are Oscar Wilde and Mr. Bernard Shaw. This seems odd enough to an Englishman, for although both enjoy—or have enjoyed—a vogue, neither is in any sense representative of the British stage. For exceptions do not "represent" the rule. Both Wilde and Mr. Shaw dealt in that particular kind of tour d'esprit (if I may use a portmanteau idiom), which is most dear to the German. The Berliner loves to judge drama by the standard of the pure intelligence; the Parisian by that of the emotions; and the Londoner by the æsthetic canons which dominate his social life. That is why the German favours the element of critical psychology and ethics in his plays, while the Frenchman harps incessantly on studies in the highways and byways of love, and the Englishman stands firm by his Comedy of Manners. These national preferences are reflected with singular precision in the general demeanour of the playgoer in London, Paris, and Berlin. In the latter city attendance at the play has the minimum of that social ceremoniousness which is characteristic of English custom. In a London theatre the appointments of the foyer are admittedly important. In Berlin even at the best playhouse they are rigorously simple, if not actually shabby. The patrons of the stalls, if they seek refreshment at all during the interval, are apt to consume brawn and pickles.



# Irish Times.

*Wkly*

*April 4  
1908*

Eleven of the thirteen volumes which are to comprise the collected works of Oscar Wilde have been issued by Messrs. Methuen. They are "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," "Intentions," "Poems," "House of Pomegranates," "De Profundis," "Salome," "A Florentine Tragedy," and "Vera," "A Woman of No Importance," "The Importance of Being Earnest," "Lady Windermere's Fan," "An Ideal Husband," "The Duchess of Padua." The edition, which is printed on hand-made paper, is limited to 1,000 copies for the United Kingdom and America.

2019 Women's University Library



April 6, 1908

## Aberdeen Free Press Morning Advertiser

## AN AGNOSTIC'S CONSOLATION.

The following is an extract from an article on "An Agnostic's Consolation" in the "Hibbert Journal":—Reliance on mankind, on his justice, his pity, his mercy, is the one true and only consolation that philosophy can offer humanity. It is more, so much more, than we ever think. Consider—a dying widow is tortured by the thought of leaving her helpless children to the mercy of the world. There is no consolation whatever for her in the ultimate good or the divine nature of the human race as long as she knows that a cruel fate awaits her cherished darlings.

Above all, far above all, for the grief which admits of no remedy and no hope, there remains the consolation of loving sympathy, a look, a kind pressure of the hand, a hint of tears in the voice, are worth all the philosophy that ever was written. No more pathetic instance of the healing power of sympathy can be found than one in that strange record of a powerful but unbalanced mind, struggling in the meshes of insane egotism, Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis." He describes how, as he was led in the very extremity of shame and degradation between two policemen through a jeering crowd, a friend of his took off his hat to him and, with reverence, bowed before his sorrow.

We have reached the conclusion that the one consolation remaining to the unfortunate is the help and sympathy which we ourselves can extend to our fellow-creatures. What terrible pessimism, many will exclaim. Is it? Facts cannot be altered by an opprobrious epithet. Truth is truth, whether we call it optimism or pessimism. Pause awhile, reader, and reflect before you condemn truth as hopeless. There is the real pessimism, leading to the grave: pessimism which quenches that Promethean rage, without which evil cannot be overcome; pessimism which diverts the zeal of righteous men into the barren fields of emotional self-indulgence.

Northampton Mercury, April 11.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

Oscar Wilde called "The Importance of Being Earnest" a trivial comedy for serious people. But it is rather a farce than a comedy, and is quite the slightest of Wilde's plays. All the same it is delightfully entertaining, and is well worth seeing, particularly when as well acted as on Saturday night at St. Andrew's Hospital, Northampton. The performance on Saturday was decidedly good. Mr. Herbert Swears, under whose direction the play was produced, took the part of John Worthing in capital fashion. Worthing gets into difficulties by leaving his home in the country rather frequently on the pretext of seeing after the affairs of a younger brother, Ernest, who is supposed to lead a rakish life in London. But there is no such person as Ernest. In London, Worthing goes by that name, and becomes betrothed to the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax, whose affection for him is chiefly based on her partiality for the name "Ernest." In the meantime Worthing's young ward in the country, Cecily Cardew, is greatly interested in the non-existent Ernest. Worthing tells a friend of his, Algernon Moncrieff, of his double life, and Algernon promptly goes down to his friend's country home, in Worthing's absence, where he masquerades as Ernest. Cecily and he are not long before they fall in love. Then he discovers that Cecily idolises him chiefly because his name is Ernest. There are farcical developments, and the curtain falls on the touching scene of the uniting of three pairs of lovers. The third pair is the Rector, Canon Chasuble, and Cecily's governess, Mr. Harold Vasey played the rev. gentleman with a very comical exaggeration of clerical urbanity. Algernon's part was taken by Mr. Godfrey Washington in just the right vein of flippancy and breeziness. Talent was hardly less plentiful on the ladies' side of the cast. Miss Irene Long was a charming Gwendolen, with an imposing aunt in Mrs. Bruce-Smith as Lady Bracknell, the elderly, witty woman of the world, a type common to all Wilde's plays. Miss Joyce Francis acted with grace as Cecily, the ingénue. Minor parts were adequately played by Mr. R. H. Shelton, Miss Kate Hodgkinson, and Miss Effie Foster. Music during the entr'actes was played by a band under the direction of Mr. W. S. Brown. So ends the dramatic season at St. Andrew's.

April 4, 1908

## MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

## SALOME AND THE CENSOR.

## AN ALHAMBRA BURLESQUE.

[By B. W. FINDON.]

It is a pity that the distinguished body of literary men who formed the deputation to the Home Secretary on the question of the censorship of plays were a few weeks in advance of the appearance of Miss Maud Allan at the Palace Theatre, as otherwise they would have been provided with a strong and convincing proof of the anomaly which exists at the present time in the licence allowed the music-hall as compared with the legitimate theatre.

It has been a generally accepted article of faith that nothing which is based on Scripture shall be adapted to dramatic purposes in our theatre. I am not altogether in agreement with the rule, and I consider there are many dramatic

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Onlooker

## Opera Omnia.

By IRR R.

The publication of a uniform edition of the works of Oscar Wilde is, it seems to me, by way of being a landmark in contemporary literary history. That the times (as judged by men whose business it is to appreciate times and seasons correctly) should be deemed ripe for the publication of his works postulates an advance both in the judgment and critical faculty of the reader. It supposes that we have learnt to differentiate between man and the artist, between a life and its work, as just as well.

"And if his eyes were blurred  
With thick films, Silence! He is in his grave.  
Greatly he suffered, greatly too, he erred.

the man we are not concerned; we have no to be. His work remains, and claims the right praised by posterity for its intrinsic worth. It hat it should have found a publisher discerning o undertake the duty in so attractive a style. per, binding of the eleven volumes\* which form n are alike excellent. Every volume has been d restored (there are many mutilated and ed versions about) after the original manu- As they stand they form an attractive and ve addition to any library that claims to be ive of contemporary letters.

question is whether as the work of an artist of letters they are worthy of inclusion within y. For my own part, I have little doubt on Fortunately, the time has come when there any need to hide, for fear of giving offence, tion for the art of Oscar Wilde behind a amefacedness. One remembers when, on one of his most brilliant plays in an access sanctimoniousness which makes Europe used contempt, the author's name was itted from the playbill. His work now to be judged as literature distinct from of its author's personality.

it must rank high. We may still o near the author and the age for which lenge a permanent niche for his works f letters. For my own part, I believe of Reading Gaol" for sheer poignancy ve when a good deal of the work now d as classic is left severely undisturbed, lies between "The Duchess of Padua," w published for the first time, a rather ne drama, relieved only by one or two bus beauty and tricked out with many e throbbing misery, yet a misery, always conscious of the artistic value of the "De Profundis"—a title, by not Wilde's, and does not wholly ng. But through every volume, play, or prose, runs the golden mastery of language. One realises r reviving one's memories of his Wilde was the supreme "decorator words" of his generation. Instinct- artist in expression—even when fast and iron.

ories, "The House of Pomegranates" and "The Happy Prince," have all the beauty of finish that betrays the master workman no less surely than the glowing

\* "The Works of Oscar Wilde" (Methuen).

jewelled prose of "Intentions" and "The Picture of Dorian Gray"—a volume, by the way, which, I understand, will be issued uniform with and to complete this edition. The wit of "The Importance of Being Earnest" is as alive on the printed page as it is on the stage; Salomé is as brilliant and dazzling an abstraction, for it is difficult to conceive of her as human. Compare her, for example, with the Salomé of Sudermann's "Johannes," who, ghastly as she may be as the beautiful embodiment of sin, is from first to last essentially a woman. But this wonderful artistic instinct, revealed in its amazing flexibility in his collected works, makes everything Wilde wrote literature. "I need not remind you," he writes in one of the letters published with the "De Profundis," "that mere expression is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life."

And again.

"I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art. . . . Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty. . . . I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me."

Within its limits it is true enough. The gods had given him "almost everything."

Telegram (Portland, U.S.A.) April 11, 1908

Recollections of Oscar Wilde. John W. Luce & Co., Boston and London, and the J. K. Gill Company, Portland.

THE above is a brochure consisting of an introduction by Percival Polard, the translator, to "Recollections by Ernest La Jeunesse, Andre Gide and Franz Blei." Small as the book is, it gives one an idea of the tremendous influence now exerted by Wilde's works on the continent, especially in Germany, and of the man himself as he was mirrored in the minds of these gifted men, his friends. It is only the closing years of his life, however, that are touched upon—1891 to the end, and they were, perhaps, after all, the richest years of that strange life, even to himself, though the tragedy of inexorable narrowing cold and darkness that slowly closed about and at last hid him from earthly sight is too sad for words. Many of Wilde's brilliant sayings are recorded here, but none that shows the awakening humanity and righteousness of his last days like this:

These Russian writers are extraordinary; what makes their books so great is the pity they put into them. Formerly I adored "Madame Bovary," but Flaubert would have no pity in his books and the air in them is close; pity is the open door through which a book can shine eternally. . . . Do you know, it was pity that kept me from suicide? For the first six months I was so dreadfully unhappy that I longed to kill myself—but I saw the others. I saw their unhappiness; it was my pity for them that saved me. Oh, the wonder of pity! And once I did not know pity. He said this quite softly and without any exaltation. "Do you know that he made me acquainted with pity. For I entered the prison with a heart of stone and thought only of my own pleasure; but now my heart is quite broken; pity has entered in; I know that pity is the greatest and loveliest thing in the world. And that is why I can have nothing against those who condemned me, for without them I should not have experienced all this."

It is a little book that will make strong appeal to the lover of literature, also to the lover of his life, and to those who marvel at and whose radiant power one would say should have been strong, steady, undimmed to the end.



April 6, 1908

## Aberdeen Free Press

## AN AGNOSTIC'S CONSOLATION.

The following is an extract from an article on "An Agnostic's Consolation" in the "Hibbert Journal":—Reliance on mankind, on his justice, his pity, his mercy, is the one true and only consolation that philosophy can offer humanity. It is more, so much more, than we ever think. Consider—a dying widow is tortured by the thought of leaving her helpless children to the mercy of the world. There is no consolation whatever for her in the ultimate good or the divine nature of the human race as long as she knows that a cruel fate awaits her cherished darlings.

Above all, far above all, for the grief which admits of no remedy and no hope, there remains the consolation of loving sympathy, a look, a kind pressure of the hand, a hint of tears in the voice, are worth all the philosophy that ever was written. No more pathetic instance of the healing power of sympathy can be found than one in that strange record of a powerful but unbalanced mind, struggling in the meshes of insane egotism, Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis." He describes how, as he was led in the very extremity of shame and degradation between two policemen through a jeering crowd, a friend of his took off his hat to him and, with reverence, bowed before his sorrow.

We have reached the conclusion that the one consolation remaining to the unfortunate is the help and sympathy which we ourselves can extend to our fellow-creatures. What terrible pessimism, many will exclaim. Is it? Facts cannot be altered by an opprobrious epithet. Truth is truth, whether we call it optimism or pessimism. Pause awhile, reader, and reflect before you condemn truth as hopeless. There is the real pessimism, leading to the grave: pessimism which quenches that Promethean rage, without which evil cannot be overcome; pessimism which diverts the zeal of righteous men into the barren fields of emotional self-indulgence.

Northampton Mercury, April 11.

## "THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST."

Oscar Wilde called "The Importance of Being Earnest" "a trivial comedy for serious people." But it is rather a farce than a comedy, and is quite the slightest of Wilde's plays. All the same it is delightfully entertaining, and is well worth seeing, particularly when as well acted as on Saturday night at St. Andrew's Hospital, Northampton. The performance on Saturday was decidedly good. Mr. Herbert Swears, under whose direction the play was produced, took the part of John Worthing in capital fashion. Worthing gets into difficulties by leaving his home in the country rather frequently on the pretext of seeing after the affairs of a younger brother, Ernest, who is supposed to lead a rakish life in London. But there is no such person as Ernest. In London, Worthing goes by that name, and becomes betrothed to the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax, whose affection for him is chiefly based on her partiality for the name "Ernest." In the meantime Worthing's young ward in the country, Cecily Cardew, is greatly interested in the non-existent Ernest. Worthing tells a friend of his, Algernon Moncrieff, of his double life, and Algernon promptly goes down to his friend's country home, in Worthing's absence, where he masquerades as Ernest. Cecily and he are not long before they fall in love. Then he discovers that Cecily idolises him chiefly because his name is Ernest. There are farcical developments, and the curtain falls on the touching scene of the uniting of three pairs of lovers. The third pair is the Rector, Canon Chasuble, and Cecily's governess, Mr. Harold Veasey played the rev. gentleman with a very comical exaggeration of clerical urbanity. Algernon's part was taken by Mr. Godfrey Washington in just the right vein of flippancy and breeziness. Talent was hardly less plentiful on the ladies' side of the cast. Miss Irene Long was a charming Gwendolen, with an imposing aunt in Mrs. Bruce-Smith as Lady Bracknell, the elderly, witty woman of the world, a type common to all Wilde's plays. Miss Joyce Francis acted with grace as Cecily, the ingénue. Minor parts were adequately played by Mr. R. H. Shelton, Miss Kate Hodgkinson, and Miss Effie Foster. Music during the entr'actes was played by a band under the direction of Mr. W. S. Brown. So ends the dramatic season at St. Andrew's.

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## MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

## SALOME AND THE CENSOR.

## AN ALHAMBRA BURLESQUE.

[By B. W. FINDON.]

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It has been a generally accepted article of faith that nothing which is based on Scripture shall be adapted to dramatic purposes in our theatre. I am not altogether in agreement with the rule, and I consider there are many dramatic episodes in Holy Writ which lend themselves to stage treatment and which could be performed without offence to the most religious mind. But I do not consider the story of Salome and the Baptist one of these. The episode as it has been embellished by those who have taken the incident for dramatic treatment is repugnant, and can appeal only to the baser and less artistic side of our nature. Oscar Wilde wrote a play around it which was given a private performance, and, as all musicians know, Richard Strauss has composed an opera on the subject, which has been enjoying a tremendous vogue in Germany. But the opera cannot be given in this country, nor have we been allowed to see on the stage Saint-Saens' "Samson et Delila," which has no other drawback beyond the fact that the characters are Biblical. Call it "Stephen and Susan" and the opera could be licensed to-morrow. I believe there is also in existence a play on the subject of Joseph and his brethren, written by a clergyman, which met with considerable success in Australia.

## ROMANCE AND RELIGION.

But the name of John the Baptist is more sacred than the names of the historical characters of the Old Testament. John was described by the Master as "more than a prophet," and his mission was to herald the coming of the Messiah. His tragic death still further commends him to our reverence, and it is revolting that there should be written around him a fictitious story of abandoned love and passion.

Much as I admire the art of Miss Maud Allan, I was compelled in these columns to express my strong disapprobation of the introduction of the head of the Baptist, and more especially on the stage of a variety theatre, albeit it was a theatre of the high standard of the Palace. I was still more pained when I saw the Alhambra burlesque of Miss Allan's performance in which all the details were emphasised by what, apart from the sacred subject, would be described as legitimate buffoonery.

Mr. Alfred Moul has been taken to task in the Press for want of taste, and he has replied to his critics in an extremely clever letter in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*. Much as I dislike "Sal-Oh-My," I am less inclined to blame Mr. Moul for the parody than Mr. Butt for the original production. Indeed, if Mr. Moul had been the Archbishop of Canterbury, he could not have chosen a more effective manner in which to expose the inconsistency of the censorship.

The performance carries with it no reflection on the Lord Chamberlain, who has no control over the music-halls. But what can be said of those members of the London County Council who were invited (so I am told) to Miss Maud Allan's private view, and who saw nothing in "Salome" which transgressed the code of stage law. They are in a sense responsible for a performance which must wound the susceptibilities of all religious people.

## BIBLICAL PARODIES.

It would be interesting to get at the real motive that induced Mr. Moul to introduce the burlesque. Judging by certain passages in his letter it might fairly be assumed that he was posing for the nonce as a modern Rabelais, as he remarks, "Having seen these parodies at various times and places elsewhere, it never entered my head for one moment to present them to the English public. . . . for the very reason that a parody of Biblical tradition would have been universally condemned."

As this fictitious *amour* has been seen now in public it would therefore appear as if Mr. Moul has had recourse to the *reductio ad absurdum*, to correct the vitiated taste of the age by the potent influence of ridicule. But in any case he has provided a wonderfully effective weapon for those who are opposed to the religious drama. It will considerably weaken my advocacy of the cause, for it brings into evidence a possible danger that had not occurred to me, and it is also a strong argument in favour of the retention of the Censor. So long as we remain a Christian people in the aggregate we must preserve the things we reverence from profane treatment.

Why authors of the past and the present have made the Saint and Salome the leading figures in a love drama and have so perverted history it is difficult to understand. To so mix up the gruesome and the objectionable without the basis of truth must assuredly be bad art. It is not a combination that should appeal to the healthy mind, and if Mr. Moul's Alhambra burlesque puts a nail in the coffin for this craving for abnormal sensations then he will have rendered a good service to the community.

Onlooker

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# Opera Omnia.

April 14, 1908

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The publication of a uniform edition of the works of Oscar Wilde is, it seems to me, by way of being a landmark in contemporary literary history. That the times (as judged by men whose business it is to appreciate times and seasons correctly) should be deemed ripe for the publication of his works postulates an advance both in the judgment and critical faculty of the reader. It presupposes that we have learnt to differentiate between the man and the artist, between a life and its work. It is just as well.

"And if his eyes were blurred  
With thick films, Silence! He is in his grave.  
Greatly he suffered, greatly too, he erred.

With the man we are not concerned; we have no business to be. His work remains, and claims the right to be appraised by posterity for its intrinsic worth. It is well that it should have found a publisher discerning enough to undertake the duty in so attractive a style. Type, paper, binding of the eleven volumes\* which form this edition are alike excellent. Every volume has been edited and restored (there are many mutilated and emasculated versions about) after the original manuscripts. As they stand they form an attractive and authoritative addition to any library that claims to be representative of contemporary letters.

The only question is whether as the work of an artist and a man of letters they are worthy of inclusion within this category. For my own part, I have little doubt on this score. Fortunately, the time has come when there is no longer any need to hide, for fear of giving offence, one's admiration for the art of Oscar Wilde behind a bushel of shamefacedness. One remembers when, on the revival of one of his most brilliant plays in an access of that smug sanctimoniousness which makes Europe grin with amused contempt, the author's name was discreetly omitted from the playbill. His work now claims its right to be judged as literature distinct from the evil genius of its author's personality.

As literature it must rank high. We may still perhaps stand too near the author and the age for which he stood to challenge a permanent niche for his works in the history of letters. For my own part, I believe that "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" for sheer poignancy of its note will live when a good deal of the work now securely embalmed as classic is left severely undisturbed. A deal of ground lies between "The Duchess of Padua," his first work, now published for the first time, a rather flamboyant costume drama, relieved only by one or two lines of rich sensuous beauty and tricked out with many pilferings, and the throbbing misery, yet a misery, curiously enough, always conscious of the artistic value of its unhappiness, of the "De Profundis"—a title, by the way, which is not Wilde's, and does not wholly embody his meaning. But through every volume, whether it be verse, play, or prose, runs the golden thread of its author's mastery of language. One realises it perhaps best after reviving one's memories of his work as a whole. Wilde was the supreme "decorator and colourman in words" of his generation. Instinctively, he was an artist in expression—even when fast bound in misery and iron.

His stories, "The House of Pomegranates" and "The Happy Prince," have all the beauty of finish that betrays the master workman no less surely than the glowing

jewelled prose of "Intentions" and "The Picture of Dorian Gray"—a volume, by the way, which, I understand, will be issued uniform with and to complete this edition. The wit of "The Importance of Being Earnest" is as alive on the printed page as it is on the stage; Salomé is as brilliant and dazzling an abstraction, for it is difficult to conceive of her as human. Compare her, for example, with the Salomé of Sudermann's "Johannes," who, ghastly as she may be as the beautiful embodiment of sin, is from first to last essentially a woman. But this wonderful artistic instinct, revealed in its amazing flexibility in his collected works, makes everything Wilde wrote literature. "I need not remind you," he writes in one of the letters published with the "De Profundis," "that mere expression is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life."

And again.

"I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art. . . . Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty. . . . I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me."

Within its limits it is true enough. The gods had given him "almost everything."

Telegram (Portland, U.S.A.) April 14, 1908

Recollections of Oscar Wilde. John W. Luce & Co., Boston and London, and the J. K. Gill Company, Portland.

THE above is a brochure consisting of an introduction by Percival Pollard, the translator, to "Recollections by Ernest La Jeunesse, Andre Gide and Franz Blei." Small as the book is, it gives one an idea of the tremendous influence now exerted by Wilde's works on the continent, especially in Germany, and of the man himself as he was mirrored in the minds of these gifted men, his friends. It is only the closing years of his life, however, that are touched upon—1891 to the end, and they were, perhaps, after all, the richest years of that strange life, even to himself, though the tragedy of inexorable narrowing cold and darkness that slowly closed about and at last hid him from earthly sight is too sad for words. Many of Wilde's brilliant sayings are recorded here, but none that shows the awakening humanity and righteousness of his last days like this:

These Russian writers are extraordinary; what makes their books so great is the pity they put into them. Formerly I adored "Madame Bovary," but Flaubert would have no pity in his books and the air in them is close; pity is the open door through which a

book can shine eternally. . . . Do you know, it was pity that kept me from suicide? For the first six months I was so dreadfully unhappy that I longed to kill myself—but I saw the others. I saw their unhappiness; it was my pity for them that saved me. Oh, the wonder of pity! And once I did not know pity. He said this quite softly and without any exaltation: "Do you know that he made me acquainted with pity. For I entered the prison with a heart of stone and thought only of my own pleasure; but now my heart is quite broken; pity has entered in; I know that pity is the greatest and loveliest thing in the world."

And that is why I can have nothing against those who condemned me, for without them I should not have experienced all this.

It is a little book that will make strong appeal to the lover of literature, also to the lover of his life and to those who marvel at and adore the broken lights of a genius whose radiant power one would say should have been strong, steady, unclouded to the end.



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## OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

THE WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE. Edited by Robert Ross. London: Methuen and Co. Eleven vols. 12s. 6d. net each.

If you thought of Wilde's work before this edition came out as the sum of a great many very bright flashes, all separate—flashes of wit in the plays, of quickness in critical essays, of beauty in some of the verse, and of spiritual insight in parts of "De Profundis,"—you find here the impression was not accidental, nor due to your own way of dipping in books, but one that grows only the stronger the more you read Wilde in the mass. His was a genius that wanted the instinct for structure; he wrote like an architect scamping the main lines and masses of all that he built, caring only for details of curious and rich incrustation to light up the next space of wall. His verse is often beautiful with the beauty of a tangle of climbing flowers with no trellis to climb up, each trying to climb up the others till all are weighed down to the ground in a mess; images finely poetic are tumbled out one after another as richly as in "Lycidas," but no whole poem is backed and stiffened with the firm logical framework which Wilde's master, Pater, delighted to trace in "Lycidas" behind the ornament. In drama Wilde ran so short in architectural skill that he would hang whole panoplies of his brilliants upon an old clothes-horse of a plot like that of "An Ideal Husband." In criticism, especially in the absorbing "Criticism as Art," dialogue, he achieved a wonderful proportion of separate rightnesses of estimate for one whose critical system was a mere denial of system and almost of coherence. In "De Profundis" itself you are constantly amazed by the freshness of illumination cast for an instant on some theme so big and so staled by bad comment as the Gospel miracles by one who—as some other page shows—had not mastered the simplest conditions of an effectual, or even an unabridged, life. No one could well read a few volumes of this edition and not feel that Wilde had great powers, and that the old attempts to dismiss him as a literary mountebank, or a mere immoralist, or an adventurer trying to bluff his way to external success with nothing but a clever Irish undergraduate's turn for aping anything he pleased were mere blunders. But his powers had flaws that made these blunders natural. He seems to have had independence and originality of mind in the second degree, but not the first. He did not depend on people's assent, but he did partly depend on their dissent and astonishment. The passion to *épater le bourgeois*, to knock the stupid party all of a heap each time that you open your mouth, is itself a form of parasitism; for where would you be without the *bourgeois* to keep you going, with his horror? And this secondary form of parasitism is discernible in almost all that Wilde wrote; one feels it setting him against his own natural development; it almost seems as if the sovereign sanity attained through purest independence by a mind like Mr. Meredith's might have come to Wilde if he could have borne not to maintain his first maximum of offence to dull people. Perhaps, though, that is too sanguine. For Wilde, like Disraeli, showed perhaps an irremediable strain of second-rateness in the craving of his imagination for curious, rich, exotic, and even abnormal stuff to work on. Unlike the great imaginations—Fielding's, Scott's, Burns's, Hugo's—which are always making old and plain things new, Wilde's was always seeking refuge in strange places from its own inability to do this; and, as every step in this flight from the commonplace increases the trodden area, he was always driven further and further into paradox and perversity. But if the reading of this edition strengthens one's impression of Wilde's fixed limits, it also often renews admiration for his fine bursts of eloquence and his melody and the passionate ingenuity of his critical arguments, as well as for the curious two-deep wit of his comedies, in which the people are witty themselves and also are placed in a circumambient atmosphere of the author's own wit, his irony playing on them while theirs plays on each other. Mr. Robert Ross's editing of the set seems perfect, so far as we have read, and its form is immaculate. It is soon, we believe, to be made exhaustive by the issue of two uniform volumes of miscellaneous writings of Wilde's by Messrs. Methuen and the reissue of "Dorian Gray" by another publisher.

C. E. M.

## REVIEWS.

The Duchess of Padua. By Oscar Wilde. (Methuen)

"STANHOPE OF CHESTER."  
regretted and unmentioned by the fellaheen.  
Cromer never heeded this counsel, and he left Egypt un-  
governed men against whom we are prejudiced." Lord  
intercourse with them. We can never be qualified to  
and that is only to be acquired by an early and free  
thorough intimate knowledge of the common people,  
century ago: "Nothing is more essential than a  
Sir Thomas Munro knew his business when he said a  
dared to speak in a tongue which he could not learn.  
ing. No wonder he hated Egyptian democracy; it  
learn the language of the people whom he was govern-  
government, Lord Cromer had not condescended to  
dead languages at Oxford. After twenty-five years  
so that he might equal Lord Milner, who acquired the  
the defects of his education by learning Greek verse,  
know Arabic, though he was snob enough to correct  
end of an article. Lord Cromer states that he does not  
tragedy is too complicated a question to consider at the  
labia law is dealt with very inadequately. The Gordon  
passed over lightly or without reference. The Moukka-  
Pasha, the Montaza and fox shooting incidents are  
t shooting case at Ghizeh, the murder of Ismail Sadyk  
s Lord Cromer. The Lambert-Dunlop scandal, the qual-  
mourner, nor the Denshaw incident is mentioned by  
r followed to his grave by a concourse of 50,000  
u revenge. Neither Moustapha Kamel Pasha, who was  
t that the executions at Denshaw were his parting  
National Party knew he was their bitterest enemy, and  
s may really believe that he is a democrat. But the  
tional Parties. Lord Cromer pretended so well that we  
cracy, he had to pretend he liked democracy and Na-  
as the years rolled on. Still, as he represented a demo-  
peralism, and his nature of Egyptian democracy grew  
imitative, no doubt, but in this and various other  
The little birds sing sweeter for those vows.  
For they are part of Nature now; the air  
Is tremulous with their music, and outside  
Duchess: Alas, you cannot, Guido.  
passion, declares he will take his kisses back:—  
Or here, where Guido, stealing himself against his  
Spending its wealth, on what is nothing worth."  
And what I have is yours, and what I have not  
You are my lord.  
Duchess says to her lover Guido:—  
fo sphere of wit. Here, for instance (Act II), where the  
al- and happy fancies, which lift the play into a higher  
rity now and again there are touches of pleasant poetry,  
was are few of his merits to counterbalance them. But  
berd in his first work, they abound, only unfortunately there  
says ment, and as such must be recognised. Here, as  
a r But they are part and parcel of the man's tempera-  
ar a But these imitative affectations.  
in nism"; realise fully how well he could have dispensed  
and intellectual clarity of his "Soul of Man and Social-  
made full wit of "The Imp of the Perverse"; the  
sin- fine wisdom of his "The Imp of the Perverse"; the  
ed to the extraordinary p...  
was, the extraordinary p...  
ed to others curious antiq...  
The melodious words, a...  
phrases, but to sheer indo...  
Oscar Wilde's best work, however, needs no defence  
in the pages of THE NEW AGE. It is a pity the  
"Duchess of Padua" gives so slender a promise of  
what he could achieve.



# REVIEWS.

The Duchess of Padua. By Oscar Wilde. (Methuen and Co. 12s. 6d. net.)

Except to the complete collector of Oscar Wilde's work, the sumptuous volume under consideration offers few points of interest.

It is a specimen of Wilde's earliest work, being written in the early eighties, and belongs to his most imitative period. All that he wrote at this time, whether in verse or in prose, reminds one of the characteristic remark concerning Mrs. Cheveley in "The Ideal Husband." It "shows the influence of too many schools." The intrinsic merits of "The Duchess of Padua" are not remarkable. Presenting as it does a stirring dramatic tale in the framework of the Jacobean drama, we feel that the outcome should have been a vital and interesting piece of work. How is it, then, that the play possesses so little grip?

No doubt it is a dangerous thing for a writer to experiment with dramatic styles of a bygone age, but there are writers, such as Mr. Swinburne, who have so imbued themselves with the spirit of the Jacobean age as to impart a vigour and vitality to their experiments. Oscar Wilde had the true artist's affection for

the rich pageantry of words, but he cared too little for the concrete humanity which underlay the splendid rhetoric of Shakespeare and his immediate successors.

Mr. Robert Sherard, in his "Life of Wilde," has told us that Oscar Wilde was "agreeably taken with the sound of the words:

'Am I not Duchess here in Padua?'

from his play, and he often quoted them."

Had he paid more attention to the psychology of his personages and less attention to the sound of the lines, it would have been better for the play. As it is, the play at its best is like a clever imitation of that multi-coloured, flat-surfaced world which painters in an age which knew nothing of perspective brought into pictures. Certainly it is not Jacobean.

One has only to turn to Webster and Massinger, let alone Shakespeare, to realise how superficial a thing is this experiment in verse-drama. Oscar Wilde might have made of this stirring tale of love and vengeance—one of those violent and essentially southern tragedies which appealed so strongly to Wilde's sense of the theatre—a really dramatic drama. All that he has given us is a wordy play which never pierces beyond externals and is even at crucial moments theatrical rather than dramatic.

It is fortunate that never again did he return to this form of drama. His next experiment, some ten years later, "Lady Windermere's Fan," was a revelation of the true genius of the man. By the student, however, who is interested in the development of Wilde's powers as a writer, the present work should not be neglected. Its very faults are characteristic of the man: its audacious borrowing of Shakespearean phrases—its clever imitation of the Jacobean mannerisms—its predilection for violent colouring. He was ever a borrower, ever an imitator, though this was not due, as some have alleged, to poverty of thought and invention, but to sheer indolence. He collected fine phrases, melodious words, as some men collect rare butterflies, others curious antiques. And we who can remember the extraordinary power of his "Dorian Gray"; the fine wisdom of his "Intentions"; the fresh and delightful wit of "The Importance of Being Earnest"; the intellectual clarity of his "Soul of Man under Socialism"; realise fully how well he could have dispensed with these imitative affectations.

But they are part and parcel of the man's temperament, and as such must be recognised. Here, as in his first work, they abound, only unfortunately there are few of his merits to counterbalance them. But now and again there are touches of pleasant poetry, and happy fancies, which lift the play into a higher sphere of wit. Here, for instance (Act II), where the Duchess says to her lover Guido:—

"You are my lord,  
And what I have is yours, and what I have not  
Your fancy lends me, like a prodigal  
Spending its wealth, on what is nothing worth."

Or here, where Guido, steeling himself against his passion, declares he will take his kisses back:—

Duchess: Alas, you cannot, Guido,  
For they are part of Nature now; the air  
Is tremulous with their music, and outside  
The little birds sing sweeter for those vows.

Imitative, no doubt, but in this and various other passages—more particularly at the tragic close of the play—there is quite an agreeable Jacobean flavour about many of the lines. It is a pity that so often a speech is spoiled by the intrusion of some commonplace line or palpably borrowed conceit. It is only fair to add that in some of the more flagrant cases the lines have been bracketed by the author, and although, as Mr. Robert Ross, the editor, remarks in a short prefatory note, "there is no evidence to show" whether the passages "were omitted for stage representation or were intended to be omitted by the author altogether," one may reasonably infer that the latter was the more probable.

It is a pity that Oscar Wilde did not treat this Italian story as Browning treated his Florentine

tragedy in "The Ring and the Book," or as Rossetti treated his Lombardian tale, "A Last Confession." In these cases each poet expressed the drama in the form best suited to his own peculiar genius. Rossetti, perhaps, owed something to Browning's vivid, graphic manner of telling a story; but "A Last Confession" is full of distinctive Rossetti touches. But the wilfulness, the capriciousness which marked the development of Wilde's literary career lead him in many futile experiments. And such works as "The Duchess of Padua" afford further material for those who are always scoffing at this erratic genius for his insincerity and superficiality. At his best, we do not think he was

either insincere or superficial. He was a superb humorist as well as an artist; and there are always people who mistake a truth wittily expressed for a superficiality. Truth for them must always wear a surplice and stole—or it is a masquerader. Even in "De Profundis" the humorist peeps out at times, and this it is which has disturbed many readers and made them doubt the writer's sincerity. To us the sincerity seems indubitable. Moreover, no man who was merely the clever poser, as Wilde has ever seemed to the average dramatic critic, would have written "The Soul of Man under Socialism."

Oscar Wilde's best work, however, needs no defence in the pages of THE NEW AGE. It is a pity the "Duchess of Padua" gives so slender a promise of what he could achieve.

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## Manchester Guardian

### OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

THE WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE. Edited by Robert Ross. London: Methuen and Co. Eleven vols. 12s. 6d. net each.

If you thought of Wilde's work before this edition came out as the sum of a great many very bright flashes, all separate—flashes of wit in the plays, of quickness in critical essays, of beauty in some of the verse, and of spiritual insight in parts of "De Profundis,"—you find here the impression was not accidental, nor due to your own way of dipping in books, but one that grows only the stronger the more you read Wilde in the mass. His was a genius that wanted the instinct for structure; he wrote like an architect scamping the main lines and masses of all that he built, caring only for details of curious and rich incrustation to light up the next space of wall. His verse is often beautiful with the beauty of a tangle of climbing flowers with no trellis to climb up, each trying to climb up the others till all are weighed down to the ground in a mess; images finely poetic are tumbled out one after another as richly as in "Lycidas," but no whole poem is backed and stiffened with the firm logical framework which Wilde's master, Pater, delighted to trace in "Lycidas" behind the ornament. In drama Wilde ran so short in architectural skill that he would hang whole panoplies of his brilliant upon an old clothes-horse of a plot like that of "An Ideal Husband." In criticism, especially in the absorbing "Criticism as Art," dialogue, he achieved a wonderful proportion of separate rightnesses of estimate for one whose critical system was a mere denial of all that the Government's English Small Holdings Bill and policy, Mr. and labourers, is with Captain Murray and for a cultural opinion, both small farmers, cottons, p doubt that the overwhelming majority of agricultural opinion, is with Captain Murray and for a cultural opinion, both small farmers, cottons, p I do not think there is the smallest reason to that the misdeeds of the Lords. In regard to that u Small Holdings is the burning question, and o looking more friendly.

So far as the campaign in Kineathness has gone the Liberal candidate has decidedly the better of the fight, it one may judge by the tone and temper of the largely attended public meetings. Captain Murray has put both energy and brains into his candidature; he is a good speaker and well informed on public questions, and he preserves his coolness and good-humour in face of the most persistent heckling. Tory has the largest number of voters in one place, and there the Conservative candidate is getting noticeable support. The Aberdeen Conserva-five influence makes itself felt among the trawlers, who are strongly against the Mines (Eight Hours) Bill, believing that it will raise the price of coal. This Captain Murray, who is backing the bill, strenuously denies, but Mr. Gammell is trying to make a point here. Each of the candidates has spoken at Stonehaven, which has about 1,000 voters, coming next to J. Tory in numbers. Both here and at the vil-lages in the county where meetings have been held the "atmosphere" has been distinctly warmer to the Liberal than to the Tory and the "atmosphere" has been distinctly

## Daily Chronicle

### WIT AND DALLIANCE.

THE WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE, complete in 13 volumes. London, Methuen, 12s. 6d. net each.

By Edward Thomas.

This uniform edition of the prose and verse of Oscar Wilde is attractive in many ways. It is well printed on good paper; it is edited by Mr. Robert Ross; and it is altogether suited to the work it enshrines, though we miss the illustrations to "A House of Pomegranates." One of the volumes, already reviewed here, contains "The Duchess of Padua," practically a new work by Wilde. Another contains "De Profundis," with not only a score of pages omitted from the other English editions, but four letters from Wilde in Reading prison to Mr. Ross, and the two memorable letters on prison life printed in "The Daily Chronicle" in 1897 and 1898. In the further ten volumes before us the work is of an extraordinary variety. There are poems and prose poems; the four modern plays in prose, full of plot, epigram, and stagecraft, than which no one has written anything better fitted to make a perfect theatrical entertainer—altogether a catalogue of opulent or witty writings.

### The Versatile Man.

No writer of such reputation has in recent times equalled Wilde's versatility. But to connect one class of work with another there is little except the epigrams which he was so fond of repeating from book to book, instead of leaving them all in "Dorian Gray." It can hardly be said that they contain a body of ideas, a philosophy gradually completing itself. The books have the appearance of being too deliberate—done to satisfy a belief that he could do this or that exceedingly well. That is not how they came to be written; to think so would be to accuse the writer of a lack of spontaneity or to refuse. The quite free to volunteer or to refuse. The Education Committee they would be been asked. As they were of a for teachers; these teachers have already not violate the principle of "no credit test" take this teaching. Such volunteering would present post, being allowed to volunteer to "facility" schools, so long as he retains his against a teacher now in one of these tion, there should be no very strong reason to take the special denominational instruction of getting sufficient and efficient teachers changes, to relieve the strain on the trust. In order, at the commencement of these removed. attempt to proselytise would be effectively place in a Council school. The fear of any national instruction would be able to claim a did not wish his child to receive denomi-needed for a conscience clause, as a parent who given by the authority, there would be no schools, where no religious instruction was If this were done, then, in the transferred McKenna's Bill. parent desired it, as provided for in Mr. school should be made for any child whose it must be a time and non that the provision given in such schools. In all these areas "Temple" religious instruction should be condition of transfer that no "Copper-should be within their power to make it a were prepared to undertake such teaching. It nominal instruction, where the trustees named. In order to afford greater facilities for de-a week and under the conditions therein Asaph's Bill, for not less than two evenings purposes, as laid down in the Bishop of St. hours, when not required for educational the use of the school house outside school



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#### Decorator—Not Creator.

He decorated. He never created one thing in his life, "Salome," and that was in French, perhaps by way of tribute to Flaubert and M. Maeterlinck. "The Critic as Artist" is equal to almost anything that has been written about criticism by anyone since Coleridge; but then the writer's decorative instinct has actually made a sea of words to hide the pearls. Except "Salome" and "The Critic as Artist," his writings raise him, indeed, to the position of the greatest rhetorician since De Quincey. But it was a sad fate for one who thought so much of art and the artist that he should have been a signal example of the man who describes beautiful things, talks about beautiful things, as if that were the same as creating them. He used beautiful words about beautiful objects, and thought it art. It was a fitting punishment of one who could address Beauty as if she were a light woman:

Who for thy sake would give their manhood  
And consecrate their being: I at least  
Have done so, made thy lips my daily food,  
And in thy temples found a goodlier feast  
Than this starved age can give me, spite of all  
Its new-found creeds so sceptical and so  
dogmatical.

But with these limitations, how admirable he is; what exquisite patterns are his prose plays; how heavy and gorgeous and costly is "Dorian Gray," "The House of Pomegranates," and even the poems with all their wordiness, and their echoes of Arnold and Keats; what grace and abundance everywhere, what wit and dalliance! His writing can be like a dress wholly of jewels and fine gold, every part of it equally rich, but weighing the wearer to the ground and crushing her. Or it can be swift, sharp, and hard, logic and paradox, clad in complete steel. In either case it is on parade. It calls attention to itself. The words have a separate value from the things which they are meant to express. On paper, he seems often not affected, but incapable of sincerity. Thus, literature is made a craft rather than an art, related to wallpaper and carpets more than to life. It is a literature of the idle classes, for the idle, by the idle. Life flows past it, while it languidly watches the waves; only now and then there is a cry, and a watcher has fallen in and gone down; and still life flows past, regardless of the voice repeating "Experience, the name we give to our mistakes," or "I am dying beyond my means," or "Merely to look at the world will always be lovely."

#### \* THE WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE.

By the issue of this sumptuous edition the publishers and Mr. Robert Ross, Wilde's literary administrator and executor, have done much to redeem from undeserved neglect writings that deserve to live. Some of them probably will live as long as English literature is read and appreciated by a cultured world. These eleven volumes, out of an edition of fourteen to be completed later, comprise substantially the works of the author, except "Dorian Gray" and some miscellanies. His plays, poems, tales and shorter pieces in prose, the "De Profundis," and the much-discussed "Salomé" are included in what is a really representative collection of the writings of one of the most extraordinary men of letters who have wielded our tongue with consummate mastery and enriched our national store of wit, wisdom, and humour by their contributions thereto.

The remark of somebody (was it Byron?) that Scott's works were a library in themselves might, with some modification, be applied to those of Oscar Wilde. One meets with a bewildering profusion of intellectual output, some of it entitled to rank with the finest of its kind, all of it claiming, and making good its claim unmistakably, to the consideration due to a man who possessed the supreme gift of genius. It is difficult and perhaps unnecessary to attempt a discriminative estimate of Wilde's powers, to say in what direction lay his chief strength. The truth is he manifested abnormal mentality in several directions. The brilliant dialogue of his plays yet flings out a contemptuous challenge to the humdrum commonplace of the majority of living playwrights. Both in these and in his prose pieces his attainment of the incomparable virtue of style seems absolute, perhaps because style is so rare a thing in the slipshod compositions that burden the shelves of today. Here, indeed, Wilde seems unassailable. He trims and polishes his periods with the perfection of the art which conceals art until they stand out flawless, and yet to all appearance natural and inevitable. Among moderns he deserves place with the greatest masters of style for his opulence of phrase chastened by fine economy. He uses words like the old painters used their colours; he has all tints on his palette, and chooses the right one with an unerring sense of harmony.

Perhaps it is as a poet that Wilde strikes his most widely-recurrent note. One feels that a poet is at work behind the prose pieces almost as much as when reading those cast in strictly metrical form. This power of poetic vision is set forth beyond possibility of mistake in the amazing "De Profundis," where his analysis of the Christy character is depicted in a few strokes such as could never have come from any pen but one inspired by the divining power of lofty imagination. The following passage may serve as a keynote:—

Yet the whole life of Christ—so entirely may sorrow and beauty be made one in their meaning and manifestation—is really an idyll, though it ends with the veil of the temple being rent, and the darkness coming over the face of the earth, and the stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre. One always thinks of him as a young bridegroom with his companions, as indeed he somewhere describes himself; as a shepherd straying through a valley with his sheep in search of green meadow or cool stream; as a singer trying to build out of the music the walls of the City of God; or as a lover for whose love the whole world was too small. His miracles seem to me to be as exquisite as the coming of spring, and quite as natural. I see no difficulty at all in believing that such was the charm of his personality that his mere presence could bring peace to souls in anguish, and that those who touched his garments or his hands forgot their pain; or that as he passed by on the highway of life people who had seen nothing of life's mystery saw it clearly, and others who had been deaf to every voice but that of pleasure heard for the first time the voice of love and found it as "musical as Apollo's lute"; or that evil passions fled at his approach, and men whose dull unimaginative lives had been but a mode of death rose as it were from the grave when he called them; or that when he taught on the hillside the multitude forgot their hunger and thirst and the cares of this world, and that to his friends who sat and listened to him as he sat at meat the coarse food seemed delicate, and the water had the taste of good wine, and the whole house became full of the odour and sweetness of nard.

Nobody but a poet could have written that, and where is the pulpit who can sermonise half as well? Yet this is Wilde the outcast, who fell, and wrote these words after his fall.

Merely noting that this edition of "De Profundis" contains a good deal more matter than the original issue, let us turn to his purely metrical compositions. These are of varying merit, as could only be expected in works ranging from a Newdigate Prize poem to such a manifestation of power and beauty as "The Sphinx" or to a revelation of pathos and tragedy like "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." But between these there are some that touch notes that we are unaccustomed to associate with the usual bent of Wilde's extraordinary faculties. We catch echoes among them of the poets of an earlier day. Sometimes it is Keats who seems to be speaking. Presently there is a roll almost Miltonic, and again the philosophic restraint of Wordsworth comes suggestively to the front. Yet it is not these that surprise one. Few, probably, think of Wilde as one who, had the Fates spun differently the warp and weft of his life, might have become a noble and impassioned singer of Empire. Take a few stanzas from his "Ave Imperatrix," evidently inspired by some of our disastrous Asiatic campaigns:—

For southern wind and east wind meet  
Where, girt and crowned by sword and fire,  
England with bare and bloody feet  
Climbs the steep road of wide empire.

O lonely Himalayan height,  
Gray pillar of the Indian sky,  
Where saw'st thou last in clanging fight  
Our winged dogs of Victory?

For not in quiet English fields  
Are these, our brothers, lain to rest,  
Where we might deck their broken shields  
With all the flowers the dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls,  
And many in the Afghan land,  
And many where the Ganges falls  
Through seven months of shifting sand.

O wandering graves! O restless sleep!  
O silence of the smiless day!  
O still ravine! O stormy deep!  
Give up your prey! Give up your prey!

Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet?  
Where is our English chivalry?  
Wild grasses are their burial-sheep,  
And sobbing waves their threnody.

For an artistic study in the value of uncommon words "The Sphinx" must surely be unrivalled. Poe with his "Raven" is completely effaced. But over all there is the irrepressible glamour of the poetry of situation, the unflinching eye for scene, and the no less unflinching grasp of dramatic contrast in the light of history. There is no room for quotation from a poem that is a masterpiece of objective description, exalted by the subjective faculty that sees through and beyond the bare imposed by mere sensible limitations. In the "Ballad" the sense of awful tragedy that pervades and overhangs like a lurid pall is apt to blind the reader to Wilde's exquisite perception of phrase colour, in which he is at least the equal of Coleridge. Much of the poem, indeed, recalls the "Ancient Mariner" alike in word-painting and apprehension of the supernatural. But it has the great advantage of not being open to the criticism once passed upon Coleridge's poem—that it lacked a core of commonsense. All is lucid in the "Ballad," perhaps because it was written upon a subject of fact instead of upon one of phantasy. With all Coleridge's power of delineating the abnormal, however, he wanders perilously near the ludicrous occasionally. By way of comparison take this stanza from the "Ballad":—

It is sweet to dance to violins  
When Love and Life are fair:  
To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes,  
Is delicate and rare:  
But it is not sweet with nimble feet  
To dance upon the air!

There is a power of climax and contrast, a grip of the unexpected in the last two lines, that convey an impression of terror for which we may look in vain among modern English poets, not excepting even Mr. Swinburne. The dramatic sense of the poet stood him in good stead here. No one but a dramatist would have brought out the horror of the situation with equal directness. In the simplicity of the means employed we are taken back to some of the finest of the Elizabethans.

One would have liked to say something of "Salomé," that drama steeped in Oriental passion. Why the author chose to write it in French is not quite apparent, unless he thought it a dish too highly flavoured for the average English palate. Nevertheless, it is essentially English in cast of expression, though it wears a French dress, and it is vividly characteristic of Wilde in his intenser mood.

\* The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde. Eleven volumes. (Methuen.)



OSCAR WILDE'S WORKS.

THE WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE. Edited by Robert Ross. London: Methuen and Co. Eleven vols. 12s. 6d. net each.

If you thought of Wilde's work before this edition came out as the sum of a great many very bright flashes, all separate—flashes of wit in the plays, of quickness in critical essays, of beauty in some of the verse, and of spiritual insight in parts of "De Profundis,"—you find here the impression was not accidental, nor due to your own way of dipping in books, but one that grows only the stronger the more you read Wilde in the mass. His was a genius that wanted the instinct for structure; he wrote like an architect scamping the main lines and masses of all that he built, caring only for details of curious and rich incrustation to light up the next space of wall. His verse is often beautiful with the beauty of a tangle of climbing flowers with no trellis to climb up, each trying to climb up the others till all are weighed down to the ground in a mess; images finely poetic are tumbled out one after another as richly as in "Lycidas," but no whole poem is backed and stiffened with the firm logical framework which Wilde's master, Pater, delighted to trace in "Lycidas" behind the ornament. In drama Wilde ran so short in architectural skill that he would hang whole panoplies of his brilliants upon an old clothes-horse of a plot like that of "An Ideal Husband." In criticism, especially in the absorbing "Critic as Artist" dialogue, he achieved a wonderful proportion of separate rightnesses of estimate for one whose critical system was a mere denial of system and almost of coherence. In "De Profundis" itself you are constantly amazed by the freshness of illumination cast for an instant on some theme so big and so staled by bad comment as the Gospel miracles by one who—as some other page shows—had not mastered the simplest conditions of an effectual, or even an unabridged, life. No one could well read a few volumes of this edition and not feel that Wilde had great powers, and that the old attempts to dismiss him as a literary mountebank, or a mere immoralist, or an adventurer trying to bluff his way to external success with nothing but a clever Irish undergraduate's turn for aping anything he pleased were mere blunders. But his powers had flaws that made these blunders natural. He seems to have had independence and originality of mind in the second degree, but not the first. He did not depend on people's assent, but he did partly depend on their dissent and astonishment. The passion to *épater le bourgeois*, to knock the stupid party all of a heap each time that you open your mouth, is itself a form of parasitism; for where would you be without the *bourgeois* to keep you going, with his horror? And this secondary form of parasitism is discernible in almost all that Wilde wrote; one feels it setting him against his own natural development; it almost seems as if the sovereign sanity attained through purest independence by a mind like Mr. Meredith's might have come to Wilde if he could have borne not to maintain his first maximum of offence to dull people. Perhaps, though, that is too sanguine. For Wilde, like Disraeli, showed perhaps an irremediable strain of second-rateness in the craving of his imagination for curious, rich, exotic, and even abnormal stuff to work on. Unlike the great imaginations—Fielding's, Scott's, Burns's, Hugo's—which are always making old and plain things new, Wilde's was always seeking refuge in strange places from its own inability to do this; and, as every step in this flight from the commonplace increases the trodden area, he was always driven further and further into paradox and perversity. But if the reading of this edition strengthens one's impression of Wilde's fixed limits, it also often renews admiration for his fine bursts of eloquence and his melody and the passionate ingenuity of his critical arguments, as well as for the curious two-deep wit of his comedies, in which the people are witty themselves and also are placed in a circumambient atmosphere of the author's own wit, his irony playing on them while theirs plays on each other. Mr. Robert Ross's editing of the set seems perfect, so far as we have read, and its form is immaculate. It is soon, we believe, to be made exhaustive by the issue of two uniform volumes of miscellaneous writings of Wilde's by Messrs. Methuen and the reissue of "Dorian Gray" by another publisher.

C. E. M.

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