

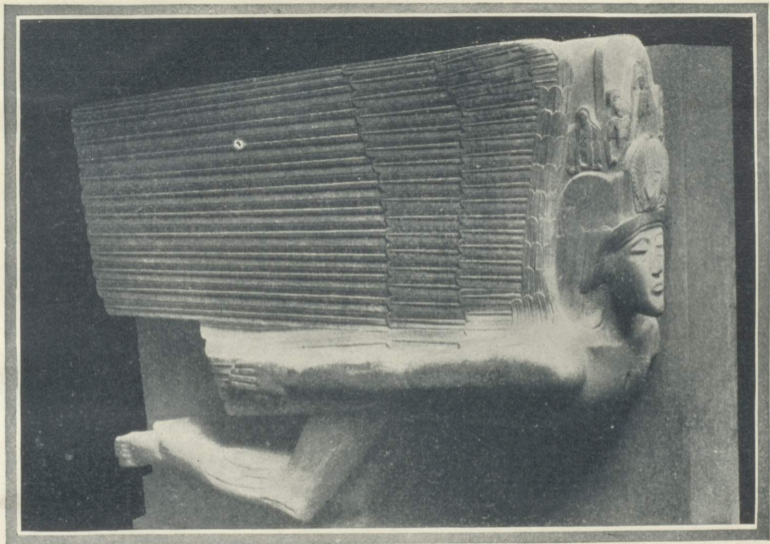


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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. **13**



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Oscar Wilde's Much-discussed Tomb

Which has been quietly unveiled in a Paris cemetery

A TALK WITH MR. OSCAR WILDE.

On the morning following the production of "An Ideal Husband" I met Mr. Oscar Wilde as he came down the steps of a club at the top of St. James's Street, and I took advantage of the occasion to ask him what he thought of the attitude of the critics towards his play. "Well," he replied, as we walked slowly down the street, "for a man to be a dramatic critic is as foolish and as inartistic as it would be for a man to be a critic of epics, or a pastoral critic, or a critic of lyrics. All modes of art are one, and the modes of the art that employs words as its medium are quite indivisible. The result of the vulgar specialisation of criticism is an elaborate scientific knowledge of the stage—almost as elaborate as that of the stage-carpenter, and quite on a par with that of the call-boy—combined with an entire incapacity to realise that a play is a work of art, or to receive any artistic impressions at all."

"You are rather severe upon dramatic criticism, Mr. Wilde."

"English dramatic criticism of our own day has never had a single success, in spite of the fact that it goes to all the first nights."

"But," I suggested, "it is influential."

"Certainly; that is why it is so bad."

"I don't think I quite—"

"The moment criticism exercises any influence it ceases to be criticism. The aim of the true critic is to try and chronicle his own moods, not to try and correct the masterpieces of others."

"Real critics would be charming in your eyes, then?"

"Real critics? Ah, how perfectly charming they would be! I am always waiting for their arrival. An inaudible school would be nice. Why do you not found it?"

I was momentarily dazed at the broad vista that had been opened for me, but I retained my presence of mind, and asked—

"Are there absolutely no real critics in London?"

"There are just two."

"Who are they?" I asked eagerly.

Mr. Wilde, with the elaborate courtesy for which he has always been famous, replied, "I think I had better not mention their names; it might make the others so jealous."

"What do the literary cliques think of your plays?"

"I don't write to please cliques; I write to please myself. Besides, I have always had grave suspicions that the basis of all literary cliques is a morbid love of meat-teas. That makes them sadly uncivilised."

"Still, if your critics offend you, why don't you reply to them?"

"I have far too much time. But I think some day I will give a general answer, in the form of a lecture in a public hall, which I shall call 'Straight Talks to Old Men.'"

"What is your feeling towards your audiences—towards the public?"

"Which public? There are as many publics as there are personalities."

"Are you nervous on the night that you are producing a new play?"

"Oh, no, I am exquisitely indifferent. My nervousness ends at the last dress rehearsal; I know then what effect my play, as presented upon the stage, has produced upon me. My interest in the play ends there, and I feel curiously envious of the public—they have such wonderful fresh emotions in store for them."

I laughed, but Mr. Wilde rebuked me with a look of surprise.

"It is the public, not the play, that I desire to make a success," he said.

"But I'm afraid I don't quite understand—"

"The public makes a success when it realises that a play is a work of art. On the three first nights I have had in London the public has been most successful, and had the dimensions of the stage admitted of it, I would have called them before the curtain. Most managers, I believe, call them behind."

"I imagine, then, that you don't hold with the opinion that the public is the patron of the dramatist?"

"The artist is always the munificent patron of the public. I am very fond of the public, and, personally, I always patronise the public very much."

"What are your views upon the much-vexed question of subject-matter in art?"

"Everything matters in art, except the subject."

When I recovered I said, "Several plays have been written lately that deal with the monstrous injustice of the social code of morality at the present time."

"Ah," answered Mr. Wilde, with an air of earnest conviction, "it is indeed a burning shame that there should be one law for men and another law for women. I think"—he hesitated, and a smile as swift as Sterne's "hectic of a moment" flitted across his face—"I think that there should be no law for anybody."

"In writing, do you think that real life or real people should ever give one inspiration?"

"The colour of a flower may suggest to one the plot of a tragedy: a passage in music may give one the sestett of a sonnet; but whatever actually occurs gives the artist no suggestion. Every romance that one has in one's life is a romance lost to one's art. To introduce real people into a novel or a play is a sign of an unimaginative mind, a coarse, untutored observation, and an entire absence of style."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you, Mr. Wilde. I frequently see types and people who suggest ideas to me."

"Everything is of use to the artist except an idea."

After this I was silent, until Mr. Wilde pointed to the bottom of the street and drew my attention to the "apricot-coloured palace" which we were approaching. So I continued my questioning.

"The enemy has said that your plays lack action."

"Yes; English critics always confuse the action of a play with the incidents of a melodrama. I wrote the first act of 'A Woman of No Importance' in answer to the critics who said that 'Lady Windermere's Fan' lacked action. In the act in question there was absolutely no action at all. It was a perfect act."

"What do you think is the chief point the critics have missed in your new play?"

"Its entire psychology—the difference in the way in which a man loves a woman from that in which a woman loves a man, the passion that women have for making ideals (which is their weakness) and the weakness of a man who dare not show his imperfections to the thing he loves. The end of Act I., the end of Act II., and the scene in the last act, when Lord Goring points out the higher importance of a man's life over a woman's—to take three prominent instances—seem to have been quite missed by most of the critics. They failed to see their meaning; they really thought it was a play about a bracelet. We must educate our critics—we must really educate them," said Mr. Wilde, half to himself.

"The critics subordinate the psychological interest of a play to its mere technique. As soon as a dramatist invents an ingenious situation they compare him with Sardou. But Sardou is an artist not because of his marvellous instinct of stage-craft, but in spite of it: in the third act of 'La Tosca,' the scene of the torture, he moved us by a terrible human tragedy, not by his knowledge of stage-methods. Sardou is not understood in England because he is only known through a rather ordinary travesty of his play 'Dora,' which was brought out here under the title of 'Diplomacy.' I have been considerably amused by so many of the critics suggesting that the incident of the diamond bracelet in Act III. of my new play was suggested by Sardou. It does not occur in any of Sardou's plays, and it was not in my play until less than ten days before production. Nobody else's work gives me any suggestion. It is only by entire isolation from everything that one can do any work. Idleness gives one the mood in which to write, isolation the conditions. Concentration on oneself reveals the new and wonderful world that one presents in the colour and cadence of words in movement."

"And yet we want something more than literature in a play," said I.

"That is merely because the critics have always propounded the degrading dogma that the duty of the dramatist is to please the public. Rossetti did not weave words into sonnets to please the public, and Corot did not paint silver and gray twilights to please the public. The mere fact of telling an artist to adopt any particular form of art, in order to please the public, makes him shun it. We shall never have a real drama in England until it is recognised that a play is as personal and

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"I'm afraid you don't like journalists?" I remarked nervously.

"The journalist is always reminding the public of the existence of the artist. That is unnecessary of him. He is always reminding the artist of the existence of the public. That is indecent of him."

"But we must have journalists, Mr. Wilde."

"Why? They only record what happens. What does it matter what happens? It is only the abiding things that are interesting, not the horrid incidents of everyday life. Creation, for the joy of creation, is the aim of the artist, and that is why the artist is a more divine type than the saint. The artist arrives at his own moment, with his own mood. He may come with terrible purple tragedies, he may come with dainty rose-coloured comedies—What a charming title!" added Mr. Wilde, with a smile. "I must write a play and call it 'A Rose-Coloured Comedy.'"

"What are the exact relations between literature and the drama?"

"Exquisitely accidental. That is why I think them so necessary."

"And the exact relations between the actor and the dramatist?"

Mr. Wilde looked at me with a serious expression which changed almost immediately into a smile, as he replied, "Usually a little strained."

"But surely you regard the actor as a creative artist?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Wilde, with a touch of pathos in his voice; "terribly creative—terribly creative!"

"Do you consider the future outlook of the English stage is hopeful?"

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We were nearing the sentries at Marlborough House, and I said—

"Won't you tell me a little more, please? Let us walk down Pall Mall—exercise is such a good thing."

"Exercise!" he ejaculated, with an emphasis that almost warrants italics, "the only possible form of exercise is to talk, not to walk."

And as he spoke he motioned to a passing hansom. We shook hands, and Mr. Wilde, giving me a glance of approval, said—

"I am sure that you must have a great future in literature before you."

"What makes you think so?" I asked, as I flushed with pleasure at the prediction.

"Because you seem to me such a very bad interviewer. I feel sure that you must write poetry. I certainly like the colour of your necktie very much. Good-bye."

GILBERT BURGESS,

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING OSCAR.

It cannot be made a reproach against English people (writes a correspondent) that they are unduly influenced by the Press. In theatrical matters especially they show a resolute determination to judge for themselves. Vainly, in various instances, have the critics endeavoured to silence, by their whispers, wild shouts of applause, or to scold the Public into going to see a play it does not fancy. But the Public is a very curious thing; it is sometimes perverse, and even obstinate, and it has evidently made up its mind to like the plays of Mr. Oscar Wilde.

The play at present being given at the Haymarket is a great success, notwithstanding the fact that its point and object have not been entirely understood: I mean the overthrowing of the contemporary fad about the disproportionate value of woman in modern life. "A man's life," says Lord Goring, in "An Ideal Husband," "is more important than a woman's; it has a wider scope, larger issues, higher ambitions. A woman's life revolves in curves of emotion: it is on the straight lines of the intellect that a man's life progresses. . . . If you can keep a man's love, and love him in return, you have done all that we ask of woman." Thus Mr. Wilde places the newest woman in a very charming atmosphere of softness, of gentleness, of forgiveness. And are these not her *raison d'être*? He has shown that, as a man can love, knowing every fault and folly of a woman—loving her, it may be, for these faults and follies the better—so might she also love without idealising him, without trying so vainly to deprive him of his natural sins. After the first shock of knowing her husband doomed to disgrace and exposure, we see Lady Chiltern by his side in sympathising fellowship, ready to mourn with his sorrow, but not to reproach him with his fault. "The Importance of being Earnest," again, is deliciously, airily irresponsible: an extraordinary sustained effort of wit and humour. In brilliant dialogue Mr. Wilde is without a rival; and how versatile an artist he is! Not only a poet, an essayist, a novelist, "an amateur of beautiful things and a *dilettante* of things delightful," but one of the most brilliant playwrights of modern times. Why carp at "improbability" in what is confessedly the merest delicate bubble of fancy? Why not acknowledge, honestly, a debt of gratitude to one who adds so unmistakably to the gaiety of the nation?

When called before the curtain, with almost uproarious applause, at the St. James's on Thursday night, Mr. Wilde must assuredly have felt, with a subtle enjoyment, all the Importance of being Oscar.

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A PAGE FROM AN OSCAR WILDE LETTER TO WALT WHITMAN

seems a heartless, dull person of no quality at all. The husband is the mere puppet of the dramatist—a peg to hang phrases upon; a thing to do this and that, whenever needed.

The third of the quartet, Mrs. Cheveley the adventuress, seemed more hopeful. Surely this disreputable woman, a thief and liar at school, a woman with many "pasts," who comes blackmailing armed with an incriminating letter written years before by Sir Robert, should be fascinating? Really, she is not a bit less clumsy and wearisome than the ordinary female villain of the Adelphi. She says a few smart things to atone for doing stupid things, and that is all one can find in her favour.

No doubt, the last of the four is fairly entertaining, and, indeed, by dint of the brilliant acting of Mr. Charles Hawtrey, the only member of a strong company who really made a hit, Lord Goring went down very well. There is something entertaining in the picture of the rather elderly young fop, who makes one doubt whether he is a fool with some cleverness and good sense, or a clever fellow who affects folly. Had it not been for the fact that he and Miss Maude Millett, as the customary pair of comic lovers, caused some amusement in the last act, it would have been very dull.

Speaking, then, of the piece as a whole, for the other characters are mere conversation-machines, I am bound to say that it is rather tedious. This is surprising, for, as a rule, the works of clever people are rarely tedious, however irritating they may be. However, the memory of long scenes of empty cackle, in which all the people made jokes, of which not more than ten per cent. were amusing, is hard to bear. To listen to lines such as "Society is composed of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics," "Men can be analysed, women only adored"; "I don't call them clever, I call them stupid—the same thing often," &c., is very hard upon those who do not like shoddy epigrams.

No better proof of my remarks can there be than the fact that such a powerful company distinguished itself so little. If anyone had told me I should ever be glad to see such a brilliant actress as Miss Fanny Brough make her exit, I should have been incredulous; but I was, for even her skill proved unavailing. Not all the beauty of Miss Julia

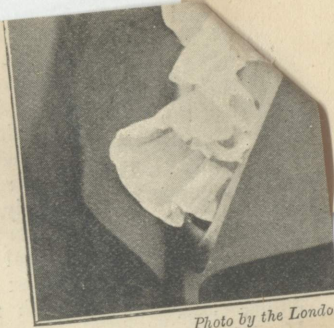


Photo by the London

MR. WALLER AS CAVAR

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It cannot be made a reproach against English people (writes a correspondent) that they are unduly influenced by the Press. In theatrical matters especially they show a resolute determination to judge for themselves. Vainly, in various instances, have the critics endeavoured to silence, by their whispers, wild shouts of applause, or to scold the Public into going to see a play it does not fancy. But the Public is a very curious thing; it is sometimes perverse, and even obstinate, and it has evidently made up its mind to like the plays of Mr. Oscar Wilde.

The play at present being given at the Haymarket is a great success, notwithstanding the fact that its point and object have not been entirely understood: I mean the overthrowing of the contemporary fad about the disproportionate value of woman in modern life. "A man's life," says Lord Goring, in "An Ideal Husband," "is more important than a woman's; it has a wider scope, larger issues, higher ambitions. A woman's life revolves in curves of emotion: it is on the straight lines of the intellect that a man's life progresses. . . . If you can keep a man's love, and love him in return, you have done all that we ask of woman." Thus Mr. Wilde places the newest woman in a very charming atmosphere of softness, of gentleness, of forgiveness. And are these not her *raison d'être*? He has shown that, as a man can love, knowing every fault and folly of a woman—loving her, it may be, for these faults and follies the better—so might she also love without idealising him, without trying so vainly to deprive him of his natural sins. After the first shock of knowing her husband doomed to disgrace and exposure, we see Lady Chiltern by his side in sympathising fellowship, ready to mourn with his sorrow, but not to reproach him with his fault. "The Importance of being Earnest," again, is deliciously, airily irresponsible: an extraordinary sustained effort of wit and humour. In brilliant dialogue Mr. Wilde is without a rival; and how versatile an artist he is! Not only a poet, an essayist, a novelist, "an amateur of beautiful things and a *dilettante* of things delightful," but one of the most brilliant playwrights of modern times. Why carp at "improbability" in what is confessedly the merest delicate bubble of fancy? Why not acknowledge, honestly, a debt of gratitude to one who adds so unmistakably to the gaiety of the nation?

When called before the curtain, with almost uproarious applause, at the St. James's Theatre, Mr. Wilde has not assiduously have felt, with a subtle enjoyment, all the Importance of being Oscar.

seems a heartless, dull person of no quality at all. The husband is the mere puppet of the dramatist—a peg to hang phrases upon; a thing to do this and that, whenever needed.

The third of the quartet, Mrs. Cheveley the adventuress, seemed more hopeful. Surely this disreputable woman, a thief and liar at school, a woman with many "pasts," who comes blackmailing armed with an incriminating letter written years before by Sir Robert, should be fascinating? Really, she is not a bit less clumsy and wearisome than the ordinary female villain of the Adelphi. She says a few smart things to atone for doing stupid things, and that is all one can find in her favour.

No doubt, the last of the four is fairly entertaining, and, indeed, by dint of the brilliant acting of Mr. Charles Hawtrey, the only member of a strong company who really made a hit, Lord Goring went down very well. There is something entertaining in the picture of the rather elderly young fop, who makes one doubt whether he is a fool with some cleverness and good sense, or a clever fellow who affects folly. Had it not been for the fact that he and Miss Maude Millett, as the customary pair of comic lovers, caused some amusement in the last act, it would have been very dull.

Speaking, then, of the piece as a whole, for the other characters are mere conversation-machines, I am bound to say that it is rather tedious. This is surprising, for, as a rule, the works of clever people are rarely tedious, however irritating they may be. However, the memory of long scenes of empty cackle, in which all the people made jokes, of which not more than ten per cent. were amusing, is hard to bear. To listen to lines such as "Society is composed of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics," "Men can be analysed, women only adored"; "I don't call them clever, I call them stupid—the same thing often," &c., is very hard upon those who do not like shoddy epigrams.

No better proof of my remarks can there be than the fact that such a powerful company distinguished itself so little. If anyone had told me I should have had to see such a brilliant actress as Miss Fanny Brough make her exit, I should have been incredulous; but I was, for even her skill proved unavailing. Not all the beauty of Miss Julia

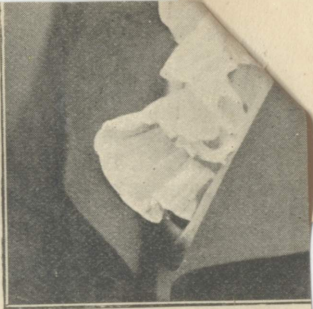


Photo by the London

MR. WALLER AS CAVAR

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"The vilest deeds like prison weeds
Bloom well in prison air;
It is only what is good in Man
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Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate,
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"And thus we rust Life's iron chain,
Degraded and alone;
And some men curse, and some men weep,
And some men make no moan:
But God's eternal laws are kind
And break the heart of stone.

"And every human heart that breaks,
In prison-cell or yard,
Is as that broken box that gave
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And filled the unclean leper's house
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"Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
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How else may man make straight his plan
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This edition of Wilde's works is a cheap one in the best way; the books are as well printed and as tastefully bound as if they cost double the money. The remaining five volumes are, we gather, to be published at short intervals between now and the end of the year.

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"Herod.—Ah! I have slipped! I have slipped in blood! It is an ill omen. It is a very ill omen. Wherefore is there blood here? . . . And this body, what does this body here? Think you I am like the King of Egypt, who gives no feast to his guests but that he shows them a corpse? Whose is it? I will not look on it.

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And so "the tragedy in one act" goes on, enlivened dully with the jealousy of Herodias, who tells Herod he looks too much at Salome. At intervals throughout the play somebody or other is moonstruck. Says Herod, "The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange

Ollendorffian method). Then in another place (p. 11) Salome says, "How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin." Again, (p. 17), the page says, "Oh! how strange the moon looks! Like the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud.

Of Mr. Beardsley's illustrations little need be said. They are good enough for Mr. Wilde's "tragedy," but that is about all the commendation which can be given them. They are neither artistic (except, perhaps, in Mr. Beardsley's own conception of what is artistic), nor are they altogether in good taste. Nay, further, even such as they are, they are not altogether original. Such types of face as Mr. Beardsley can picture, he pictures to death; after that, he apparently has to rely upon utilizing what has appeared before. Unless memory deceives, the picture which suggested the face of the left-hand figure of the plate, "Enter Herodias," appeared some time ago in the pages of *The Strand*, in a series of pictures devoted to the facial contortions of a Japanese. Of course, the similarity may be accidental, but none the less the coincidence is remarkable. The face and pose of the satyr in the tail-piece remind almost irresistibly of the Satyr and the Goat in the Naples Museum. Apart from these considerations, however, what artistic purpose can be served by illustrations which are a cross between those on Japanese screens and some of those which appeared in the now defunct "Butterfly"? It is easy to see that such work can cloak a lack of anatomical knowledge, but beyond that it is difficult to imagine any explanation of the deformities which Mr. Beardsley "pictures." Such illustrations as "Salome" contains will add no more to Mr. Beardsley's reputation as an artist than will the play itself to Mr. Wilde's renown as a "tragic" poet.

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The scene is in the dressing-room of the theatre. Sybil Vane plays badly that night, and the worst side of the character of Dorian Gray, who is now dominated by the influence of Lord Harry, begins to develop. In direct contrast to the beauty of the love scene he throws the girl aside. "Kill yourself, if you like," he says, brutally, when she tells him that this must be her end if he should leave her. In a rage he goes off, and as the curtain falls she is seen alone on the stage.

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C. I.
to it as to that of Oxford and Cambridge. This is as it should be, and I hope our new correspondent, having begun a good work, will carry it on (and hand it on), and thus let readers of the *Guardian* and other Church papers know of the existence and life of the Northern University. Referring to the said paragraph, it is pleasing to learn, *inter alia*, that our good old friend, Dean Lake, is back again in improved health; and this information, I think, is worth knowing. I was under the impression that the worthy Warden was altogether laid aside, owing to increasing years and infirmities, and therefore the more rejoice to hear of his return, and that we have found a correspondent to tell us of it. Although I receive the *Journal* regularly, I trust we may all have the further and more satisfactory benefit of reading a weekly contribution in a few of the leading Church papers.

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And so "the tragedy in one act" goes on, enlivened dully with the jealousy of Herodias, who tells Herod he looks too much at Salome. At intervals throughout the play somebody or other is moonstruck. Says Herod, "The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked, too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them." She shows herself naked in the sky," &c. (This is a good example of Mr. Wilde's

...party somebody ... to-night. Has she not a strange
Ollendorffian method). Then in another place (p. 11) Salome
says, "How good to see the moon! She is like a little
piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste.
I am sure she is a virgin." Again, (p. 17), the page says,
"Oh! how strange the moon looks! Like the hand of
a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a
shroud.

Of Mr. Beardsley's illustrations little need be said.
They are good enough for Mr. Wilde's "tragedy," but
that is about all the commendation which can be given
them. They are neither artistic (except, *perhaps*, in Mr.
Beardsley's own conception of what is artistic), nor are
they altogether in good taste. Nay, further, even such as
they are, they are not altogether original. Such types of
face as Mr. Beardsley can picture, he pictures to death;
after that, he apparently has to rely upon utilizing what has
appeared before. Unless memory deceives, the picture
which suggested the face of the left-hand figure of the plate,
"Enter Herodias," appeared some time ago in the pages
of *The Strand*, in a series of pictures devoted to the facial
contortions of a Japanese. Of course, the similarity may be
accidental, but none the less the coincidence is remarkable.
The face and pose of the satyr in the tail-piece remind
almost irresistibly of the Satyr and the Goat in the Naples
Museum. Apart from these considerations, however, what
artistic purpose can be served by illustrations which are a
cross between those on Japanese screens and some of those
which appeared in the now defunct "Butterfly?" It is easy
to see that such work can cloak a lack of anatomical
knowledge, but beyond that it is difficult to imagine any
explanation of the deformities which Mr. Beardsley
"pictures." Such illustrations as "Salome" contains will
add no more to the reputation of the artist as an artist
than will the play itself to Mr. Wilde's renown as a
"tragic" poet.

to it as to that of Oxford and Cambridge. This is as it should be, and I hope our new correspondent, having begun a good work, will carry it on (and hand it on), and thus let readers of the *Guardian* and other Church papers know of the existence and life of the Northern University.

Referring to the said paragraph, it is pleasing to learn, *inter alia*, that our good old friend, Dean Lake, is back again in improved health; and this information, I think, is worth knowing. I was under the impression that the worthy Warden was altogether laid aside, owing to increasing years and infirmities, and therefore the more rejoice to hear of his return, and that we have found a correspondent to tell us of it.

Although I receive the *Journal* regularly, I trust we may all have the further and more satisfactory benefit of reading a *weekly* contribution in a few of the leading Church papers.

C. T.

"THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY."

1919
STAGE VERSION DESCRIBED
BY M. LOU-TELLEGEN.

"The Picture of Dorian Gray," which is to be produced at the Vaudeville Theatre on Thursday week, will follow closely in its principal situations, M. Lou-Tellegen said yesterday in an interview with a representative of THE OBSERVER, the novel by Oscar Wilde, on which it is founded.

Actor, author, poet and sculptor, M. Lou-Tellegen, who is only twenty-eight, has been for some time Mme. Sarah Bernhardt's leading actor. Miss Constant Lounsbery, an American authoress, adapted Oscar Wilde's novel for him two years ago. Its psychological power and its wonderful range of emotions specially appealed to him, and he was anxious that it should be first produced in London before taking it on his forthcoming tour in America.

In the first act of the play, which takes place in the studio of Basil Hallward, Dorian Gray, he said, appears as a young boy. Charming, sympathetic and natural at first, he begins to be, towards the end of the act, the reflection of Lord Harry's cynical and worldly intellect.

In the second act is the love scene between Dorian Gray and Sybil Vane. "This love scene," he said, "is the poetry of the whole play. It is a beautiful scene and reminds me very much of 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

The scene is in the dressing-room of the theatre. Sybil Vane plays badly that night, and the worst side of the character of Dorian Gray, who is now dominated by the influence of Lord Harry, begins to develop. In direct contrast to the beauty of the love scene he throws the girl aside. "Kill yourself, if you like," he says, brutally, when she tells him that this must be her end if he should leave her. In a rage he goes off, and as the curtain falls she is seen alone on the stage.

In the third act, which takes place in his room, Dorian Gray notices some change in the picture. "Is it possible," he asks, "that it can be the mirror of my soul?" He does not know yet that Sybil Vane has killed herself. "At this point," M. Lou-Tellegen said, "the real play begins for me." Dorian Gray, before he learns what has happened, declares that he will marry Sybil. There is a very dramatic situation when the story is told, and afterwards Dorian Gray comes more and more under the influence of Lord Harry.

The fourth act takes place in the same room twenty years later. By this time he has become thoroughly vicious. The picture is there, and he sees in it the man he has become, though he himself retains his youth and good looks. It is in this act that, in a fit of frenzy, he turns on Hallward, the artist, and kills him. Instantly another change takes place in the picture. When the body has been removed and Dorian Gray is left alone with it, he exclaims that he is free and intends to start life afresh. But for the sake of the picture. He dashes a knife into its heart and falls back dead himself, the picture becoming that of a young man again.

WHAT A DRESS REHEARSAL IS LIKE.

SOME FRIVOLOUS GOSSIP.

Many people are curious to know what a dress rehearsal is like. Here is a letter which came to THE WESTMINSTER BUDGET Office the other day, describing one of those interesting functions—at the Haymarket.

NEW YEAR'S NIGHT.

THE night was bitter; quite cold. So was Oscar. Throughout the night the only part of him that apparently rose above freezing point was the lighted end of his cigarette.

Our stalwart souls were summoned to the Haymarket at six o'clock. When the invitation came I really wished the time of year had been the middle of the dog days, and not a frosty January night. You know that punctuality is invariably a virtue in the City. Well, still as innocents in such undertakings, we arrived at the door of the Haymarket at the appointed hour—six. And this is what happened.



ONE OF HIS OWN JOKES.

A sprinkling of the select few—some thirty—are in the stalls. The scene is very incomplete. The carpenters are busy putting the lamps and the shades on the chandeliers for the electric light, and altogether the stage is in a state of *deshabille*—really at all corners things are at sixes and sevens. Mr. Oscar Wilde is on the stage, gossiping, for the serious business of the night—the play—has not yet begun. Your neighbours to the right of you, to the left of you, in front of and behind you, are chiefly of the confraternity of artists in pen and in pencil, with a sprinkling of actors and actresses thrown in. Time hangs heavily, and everybody begins to speculate. The monotony is broken by a lady—poor little thing!—who has agreed to describe the millinery for a penny-a-line, minus the editor's cuts, exclaiming in *sotto voce*, "Do you think it's a draw?" whilst somebody whispers at the nape of your neck, "What's up—do you know?" But a matron—a person of comely mien and mellowness directly in front of you—puts matters on a more sure footing. "Now, my dears," she says in the sweetest contralto, "it's only a telegram"—alluding to a wire which had just been handed to Oscar. "If anybody is ill it does not matter an iota; they are sure to have an understudy, and what a chance for her if it's a girl!" But such ideas are all prognostical, though to give them weight down comes the curtain. Fortunately I had in my overcoat pocket that delicious morsel of travel, Stevenson's "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes," to while

away the time with. And this I found to my advantage, for, although at intervals hammering can be heard from behind the drop, the curtain does not rise for about an hour and a quarter. 7.15—the gas jets in front of the curtain jump up, an electric bell rings, and up goes the Donkey—no, the curtain. In this brief space of an hour and a quarter the author has aired his irresistible sable-lined coat, smoked countless cigarettes, enjoyed a two-minutes' conversation with



ALTERATION.

Mr. Beerbohm Tree, said "How do you do? How are you?" to this and that bowing acquaintance, and held a council with his bosom friends, selecting the O.P. stage-box for his open parliament. But the play has begun. The author (still believing in the antidote of a cigarette, the thread of smoke from which curls and flows here, there, and everywhere as he walks, like the magic web which the fair Lady of Shalot weaves night and day) is now at the back of the dress circle—a giant Cupid posed against a pillar. But he is a Sphinx. Has the vivacious Oscar's soul sunk within him? No, he approaches nearer to the edge of the circle. All the pen and pencil folk begin to twitter like a bevy of sparrows. But the Sphinx still has a fancy

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By the bye, the Miss Morell Mackenzies designed the dresses. The Miss Mackenzies are certainly adepts at the art of millinery. Many of the costumes are even beyond the wildest conceptions of the great Parisian master of the art of dressing. Certainly in not a few of them Worth's outshone. OCTAVIA.

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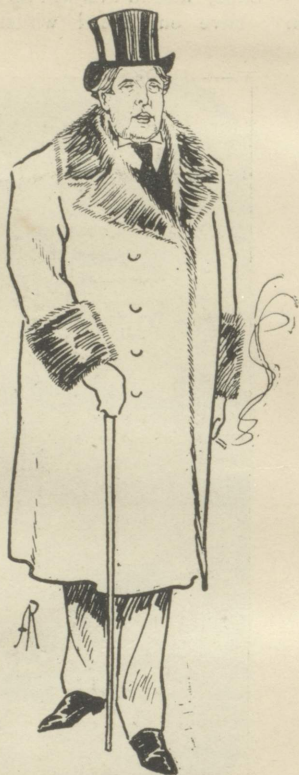
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3 Pall Mall
Gazette

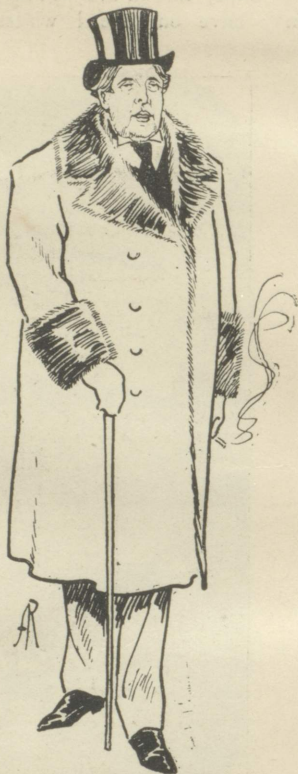
MR. OSCAR WILDE'S "DORIAN GRAY." *

MR. OSCAR WILDE'S new novelette (it fills a hundred large pages of *Lippincott's Magazine*) is compounded of three elements in equal proportions. It is one part Stevenson, one part Huysmans, one part Wilde. But for "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" it would probably not have been written. We do not mean that Mr. Wilde has imitated Mr. Stevenson in such a way as to impair his claim to originality. There is a certain inverted analogy between the "strange cases" of Dr. Jekyll and Dorian Gray, but the one might have been, and probably was, conceived without any reference to the other. What Mr. Wilde has borrowed from Mr. Stevenson is simply the idea of infusing a moral lesson into a fantastic tale. Had not Mr. Stevenson brought the sensational apologue (if we may call it so) into fashion, it is doubtful whether Mr. Wilde would have had the courage to be moral. One never knows; Mr. Wilde is so enamoured of the Unexpected that he might even have taken, of his own motive, to narrative sermon-writing; indeed his charming fairy tales might be regarded as preliminary studies to that end. But on the whole it seems probable that, had not Mr. Stevenson led the way, Mr. Wilde would not have ventured along a path which skirts so perilously near the verge of literary vulgarity.

"Dorian Gray," then, is to be classed with "Dr. Jekyll" as a moral tale; that is no doubt why the Editor of *Lippincott's Magazine* holds himself justified in presenting it to his confiding readers. But its morality is only skin deep, or rather it is a mere conventional garment designed to secure Mr. Wilde's fantasy an entrance into decent Anglo-American society. The true source of the writer's inspiration is not the half-emancipated Puritanism of Mr. Stevenson but the æsthetic paganism of the French "Decadents." It is the picturesque, not the ethical, aspects of virtue and vice that interest Mr. Wilde. Purity has its artistic value, if only as a contrast to its opposite; corruption is scintillant, iridescent, full of alluring effects. To dally with beauty and horror, luxury and cruelty; to peer into the Unholy of Unholies in human nature, and bring back vaguely sinister yet fascinating reports of the gorgons and hydras and chimæras dire that there inhabit; to pass languid hours in the hothouse of over-civilization, amid exotic and perverted forms, intoxicating colours, and steamy aromas, now luscious now acidulous; these are the true objects which Mr. Wilde has proposed to himself. He has set forth on a timid tour of exploration "près de ces confins où séjournent les aberrations et les maladies, le tétanos mystique, la fièvre chaude de la luxure, les typhoïdes et les vomitos du crime." From the very outset he plunges us in a sickly atmosphere. The way in which Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward talk of, and to, Dorian Gray in the opening scene convinced us, for the moment, that the beautiful Dorian must be a woman in male attire. We were wrong; Dorian Gray with his "finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes and his crisp gold hair," is of the same sex as his admirers; but that does not make their worship of him, and the forms of its expression, seem any the less nauseous. And the atmosphere does not freshen as the story proceeds. The very vagueness of Mr. Wilde's allusions to his hero's vices is exceedingly effective from the Baudelairian point of view. We are conscious of a penetrating poison in the air, yet cannot see clearly whence it proceeds. The literature of perversion in France is apt to repel by its brutality; Mr. Wilde, governed rather by the necessities of the market than by artistic choice, makes it subtle and insinuating. But his story is none the less an essay in the said literature of perversion. He does not even take the trouble to make his moral logically cohere with his subject-matter. The magic picture has in reality nothing whatever to do with the corruption of Dorian Gray. On the contrary the first change which he notes in it is on the point of driving him, panic-stricken, into the path of self-renunciation, and nothing but a fatal chance defeats this better impulse. In other words the apparent moral is not a moral at all—it is meaningless. Mr. Wilde may perhaps take refuge in denying that he makes any pretence at morality; but why, then, drag in the supernatural? In such a tale as this, the supernatural has no right of entrance except in the guise of symbolism; and Mr. Wilde's symbolism symbolizes nothing.

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MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY AT THE ST. JAMES'S.



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THE great frost has played havoc with the play-houses. Mr. Wilde's vivacious comedy, "The Importance of Being Earnest," has been produced with great success—a lively farce, accompanied by roars of laughter.

The Plot.

John Worthing is a wealthy man, with a house in the country, and a young, pretty ward with whom he is not in love. In order to find an excuse for his frequent visits to London—no reason why he should give any excuses is suggested—he pretends to

Cecily Cardew, the ward, that he is visiting his young ne'er-do-well brother Ernest. In town, for reasons undivulged, he passes under the name of Ernest. He has a friend named Algernon Moncrieff, a fashionable young "masher," whose

chief humour—like that of many characters in farce—is his gluttony. Algy discovers John's secret, and tries to get an invitation to the country house, but fails: why Worthing will not let him come is a mystery. Now John—passing as Ernest—has fallen in love with the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax, daughter of Lady Brockwell, and at Algernon's rooms he proposes to her. The proposal is a complicated piece of "marivaudage," which leads up to her statement that she loves him because his name is Ernest, "a vibrating name" that fascinates her: he has not the courage to confess that he is John. Lady Brockwell refuses her consent to an engagement because she learns from him that, though eligible in every other respect, he is a foundling. From a remark made by Worthing to Gwendolen, Algernon learns his address; how, seeing the intimacy between them, he could have remained till then ignorant of it, one can hardly say. The second act passes in the garden of Worthing's country place. As the most unsophisticated playgoer guessed, Algernon arrives, calling himself Ernest, and pretending to be Worthing's imaginary brother. He falls in love with Cecily at once, and proposes without delay; she, to his surprise, says she has been engaged to him for three months, through hearing what her guardian said of him. There is a heavily-handled scene in the style of Marivaux between them, ending by her saying that she loves him because his name is Ernest. For Mr. Wilde, if lavish with verbal quips, is excessively economical!

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The Performance.

Mr. Alexander as John Worthing showed that he is as brilliant an actor in the comic as in the sentimental. Miss Rose Leclercq played excellently as Lady Brockwell. The Algernon of Mr. Allan Aynesworth was a clever piece of work; whilst Miss Evelyn Millard and Miss Irene Vanbrugh acted charmingly as Cecily and Gwendolen. Mr. Oscar Wilde did not make a speech.

Gems from the Dialogue.

Here are some samples of Mr. Wilde's dialogue—good, bad, and indifferent:—

To be advanced in years is no guarantee of respectability. Born in the purple of commerce, or raised from the ranks of the aristocracy.

To wish to be buried in Paris hardly points to a serious state of mind at the last.

To have lost one parent is a misfortune, to have lost both looks like carelessness.

Only such people as stockbrokers talk "business," and then only at dinner.

It is much cleverer to talk nonsense than to listen to it.

Divorces are made in heaven.

I hate people who are not serious about meals.

Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit. Touch it, and the bloom is gone.

The old-fashioned respect for the young is rapidly dying out.

Nobody ever does talk anything but nonsense.

It is always painful to part from people one has only known a brief time.

I did not know you had flowers in the country.

If it was my business, I should not talk about it.

I am only serious about my amusements.

The truth is rarely pure, and never simple.

I never saw a woman so altered, she looks quite twenty years younger.

No married man is ever attractive to his wife.

The amount of women who flirt with their husbands in London simply scandalous. It is washing one's clean linen in public.

MR. OSCAR WILDE'S NEW PLAY AT THE ST. JAMES'S.



MR. OSCAR WILDE.

THE great frost has played havoc with the play-houses. Mr. Wilde's vivacious comedy, "The Importance of Being Earnest," has been produced with great success—a lively farce, accompanied by roars of laughter.

The Plot.

John Worthing is a wealthy man, with a house in the country, and a young, pretty ward with whom he is not in love. In order to find an excuse for his frequent visits to London—no reason why he should give any excuses is suggested—he pretends to Cecily Cardew, the ward, that he is visiting his young ne'er-do-well brother Ernest. In town, for reasons undivulged, he passes under the name of Ernest. He has a friend named Algernon Moncrieff, a fashionable young "masher," whose

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to pretend a thorough understanding and repose, for no one knows how they were produced; and regards a Greek drama. Congreve far more vividly to my imagination than Pericles."

ern novel and a set of illustrations suits me admirably; and then

DECIDE.

ester-eve
in love,
th Sally King;
happy as well,
ow could I tell
ay would bring?
h! this morn
Sally came
kin' of the hay,
brought a friend
heart to rend,
called—Susie Rae.
sie, dear!
y fear
ot my heart in thrall;
can I be choosin'
t Sally and Susan?

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gentlemen of the Press, was, in
ical illustrations, and represents
ation. In the previous number of
my drawings, the one a Head of
the other, a pastel, I attributed to
into the trap, especially he of the
ng a few lines of contemptuous
commended the work of Philip

with those who object to the stupid
novelists have lately flooded the
e tolerated in order to give elbow
ist should be given every liberty

ject, Mr. Beardsley, do you make

d, no; but each time I go into a

THE S
PASTO

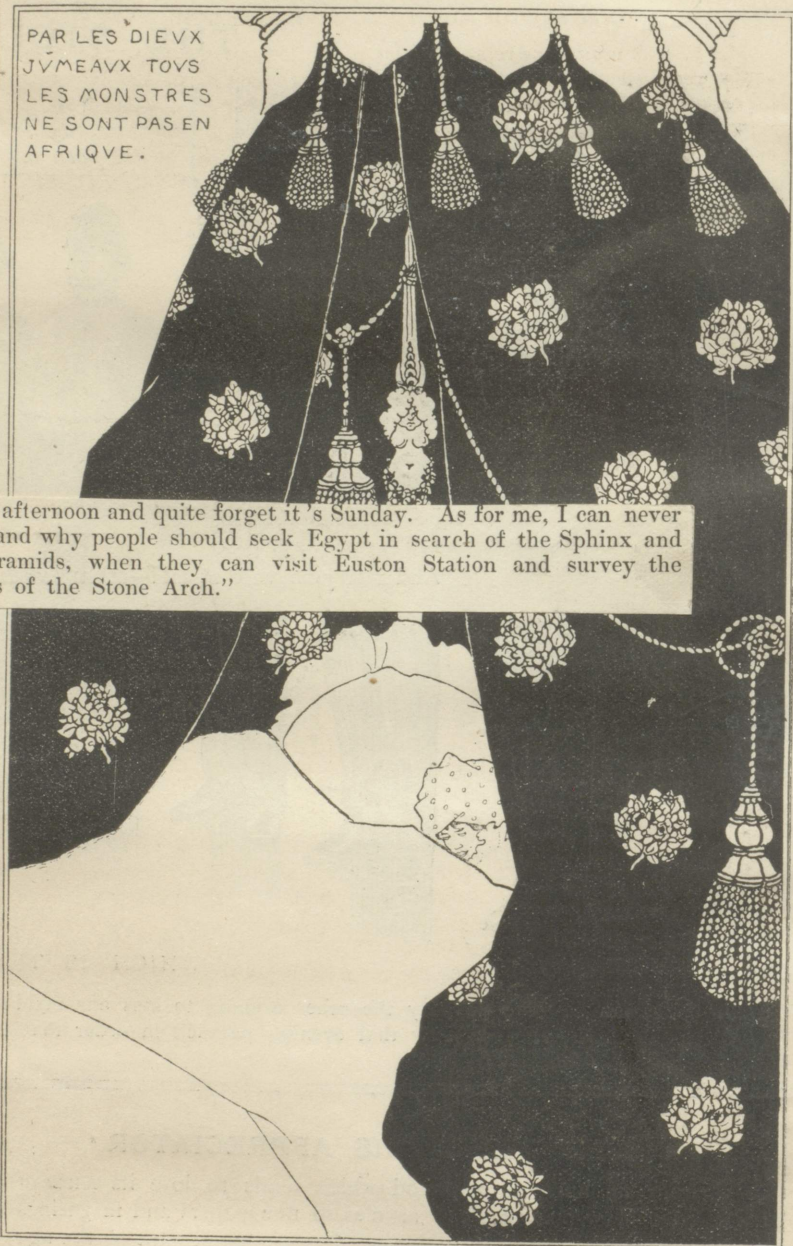
men lend themselves more than
ress, especially when it comes
et the English sadly lack style,
ture and art. Set a Londoner
s, each beautified by the little
n abroad, and he will," cries
"roar with laughter! It takes
on."

modern man's lack of lovely

answer, "I consider the average
tiful a sight as you will see
ess. He should be a far more
eye than, for example, one of

"THE YELLOW BOOK."

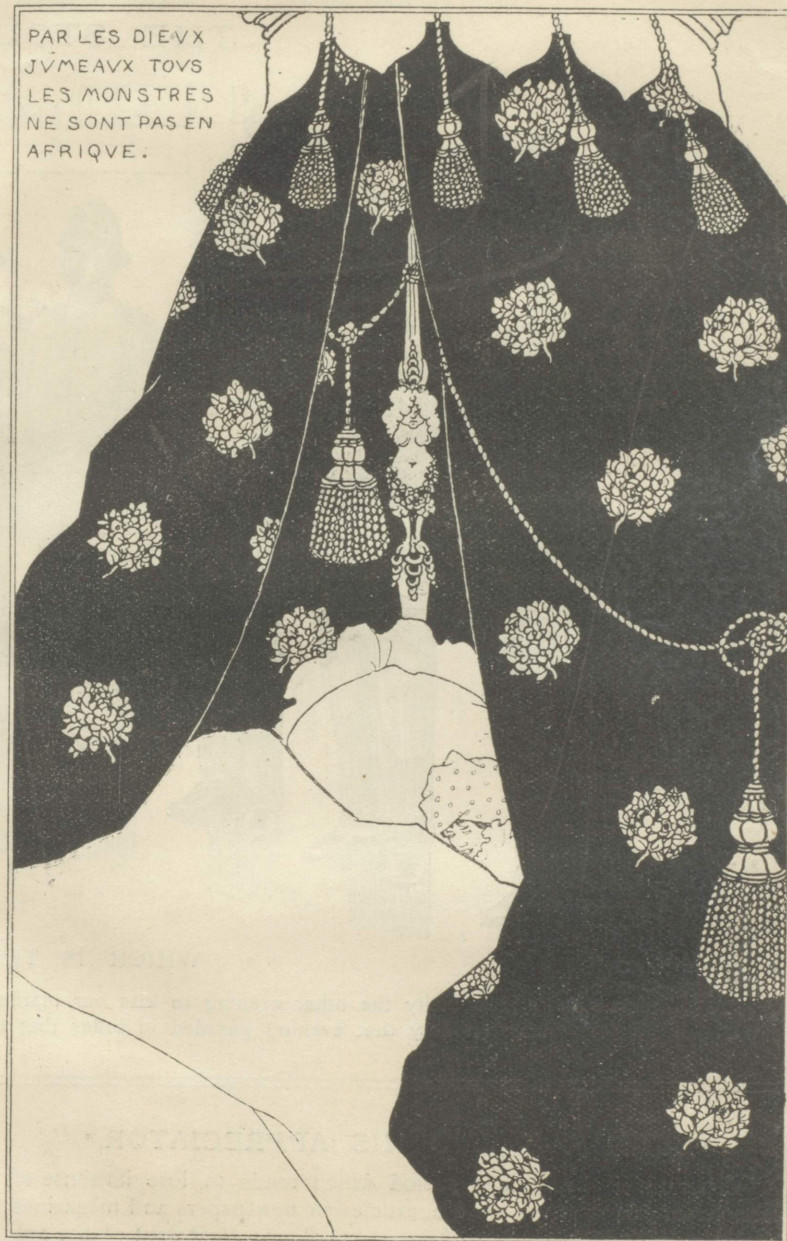
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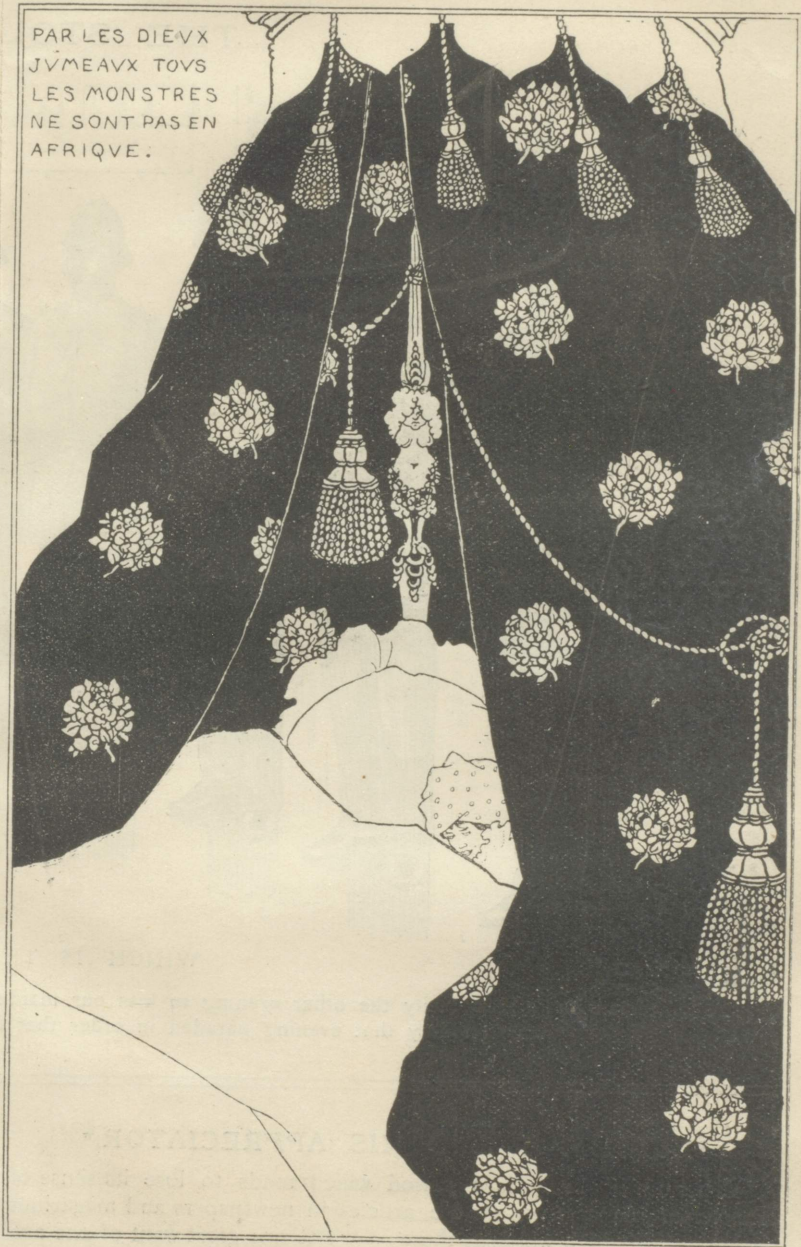
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Photograph AUBREY BEARDSLEY F. H. Evans

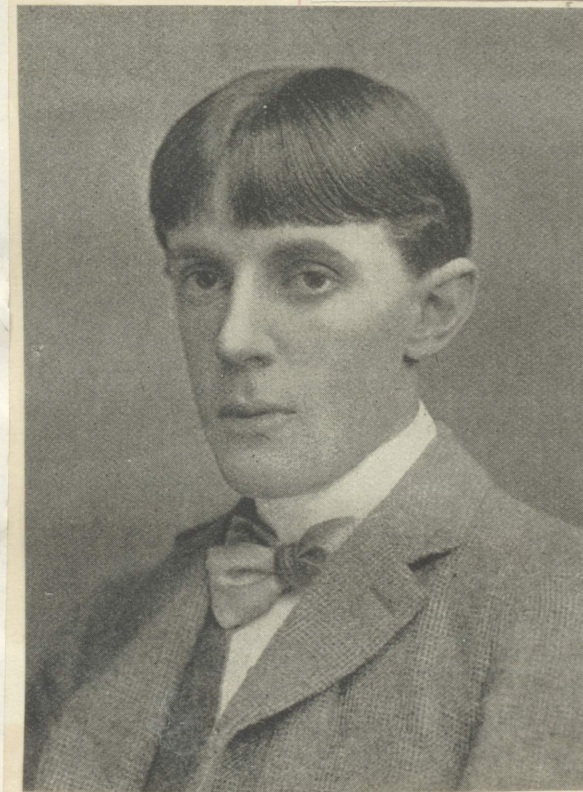
Whose meteoric genius startled the "eighteen-nineties" with the now world-famous drawings in pen and ink. (Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Grant Richards)

IN his book, *The Eighteen-Nineties** (Grant Richards), which everybody must read, Mr. Holbrook Jackson gives all proper credit to the so-called Decade of Decadence and its productive pervers in "art and ideas," and his record of the activities of the so-called Decadents is valuable as fact and as criticism. Having thoroughly enjoyed the book, it seems ungracious to appear to attack it, but as a Decadent myself, and proud of living in what I regard as the most super-decadent age in which a man could have breath, I protest against the giving to the 'nineties of a glamour to which they are not entitled. I admit, as one who passed ten more or less pleasant years among them, that the 'nineties had much merit.

Being *fin de siècle* they provided those who were tired and *blasé* with a charming chronological excuse for expressing those sentiments. The writers and artists of the period were free from all pretence about reform and progress. They just wanted, as Mr. Jackson says, "to traffic in the strange, the uncanny, or anything which savoured of freak or perversity." The extravagant people—Wilde, Beardsley, Le Gallienne, George Moore, Francis Thomson, John Davidson—the dandies of the æsthetic movement, the producers of the Yellow Book, the makers of "purple patches and fine phrases," just went their wanton way feeling that the end of the century gave them a sort of license to be, as they thought, daring, bizarre, exotic. Some of them (whom Mr. Jackson tells us fully about) weakly met *débâcles* against the rock of forcible Philistinism; others survived the arrival of the new century, to be snuffed out, not because Decadence was dead, but because it was far too much alive to have room in the ranks for mere weaklings in the cause.

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I wish to protest against the inference that Decadence died with the Beardsley-Wilde school. The 'nineties have no claim to be other than the uncomfortable and clumsily rocked cradle of the art and ideas of true Decadence. They did not even know what sort of babies they were rocking, and two at least of them they allowed to tumble out and be killed, leaving it to the next two decades to appraise them at their proper value. The Wilde of the 'nineties was known chiefly to Piccadilly, the Old Bailey, and to Reading Gaol. It is to us of the 'teens that he is a living



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The 'nineties a period of Paradox? But who says the paradox died with them? What of Mr. Shaw and Mr.

Chesterton? What more appreciated in book or play than a penetrating aphorism? Whatever was good in the art-world of the 'nineties is infinitely more vital now, than then: what was bad about its personalities is kindly forgotten. That the 'nineties were any more alive to the absurd, the sensational, the bizarre, than the nineteen-tens and 'teens, I dispute. What of Post-Impressionism, and Cubism, and Futurism—cults as "decadent," surely, as any that were favoured by the "Yellow" period. The poet, Francis Thomson, is only known to the generality to-day, and extravagance in fiction, which



Photograph

F. H. Evans

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

1869-1908
Jesse Womb's University Library

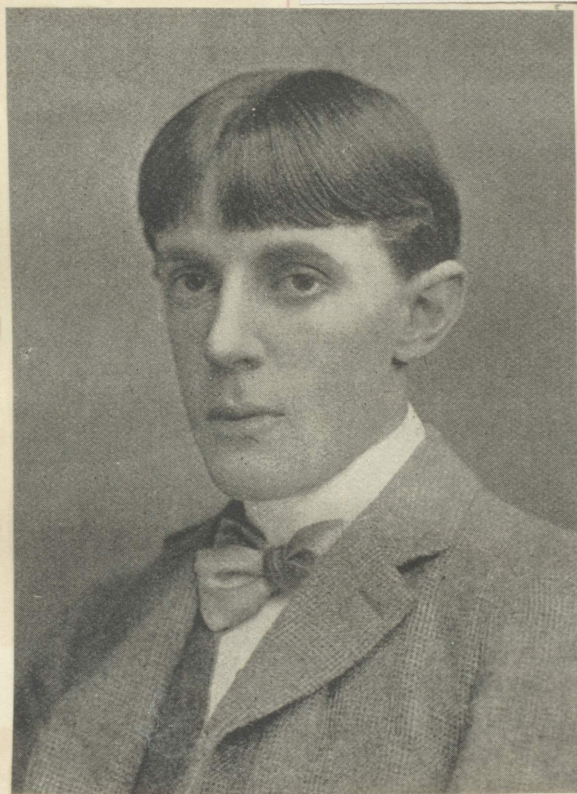
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Chesterton? What more appreciated in book or play than a penetrating aphorism? Whatever was good in the art-world of the 'nineties is infinitely more vital now than then: what was bad about its personalities is kindly forgotten. That the 'nineties were any more alive to the absurd, the sensational, the bizarre, than the nineteen-tens and 'teens, I dispute. What of Post-Impressionism, and Cubism, and Futurism—cults as "decadent," surely, as any that were favoured by the "Yellow" period. The poet, Francis Thomson, is only known to the generality to-day, and extravagance in fiction, which

the 'nineties only allowed in exquisite publications, is now accepted in periodicals of general circulation. Had the 'nineties anything of Decadence to approach classical dancing, the Russian Ballet, Reinhardt, Bakst, Craig? The music of Debussy, Strauss, Cyril Scott? The "religion" of Mr. Shaw? The Militant Suffragettes? Rag-time? The Tango-tea?

The 'nineties had their Dandy. Have we not our Nut? Is the one any more or less "consciously absurd" than the other? If it was then the male of the species who *épate les bourgeois*, to-day it is the female, whose extravagances of temperament and attire put the earlier attempts of the "stronger sex" to the blush. The 'nineties are singled out by Mr. Jackson as a period of excitability and hunger for sensation. If, in that respect, they differ from our own decade, it is only in this—that ours is infinitely more sensation-seeking, and sensation-finding.

On the balance, I am not at all sure that in a Court of Inquiry the 'nineties would sustain a claim to Decadence at all. To their credit they might point to the dead bodies of Wilde and Beardsley, to the rising Max, to the poet Thomson in rags, and John Davidson in despair, to *Yellow Books* in bankruptcy and "*Savoys*" in liquidation, to Henley in grey hairs and other worthy exponents of "decadent" ideas in Queer Street. Against them, however, we should bring unanswerable charges of moral virtue. We should hurl Gladstone at them, Chamberlain, Salisbury, Rhodes, Kitchener, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Jerome K. Jerome, and should pointedly remind them that H.M. Queen Victoria was still the power at Court. We should demand of them how, with so many vigorous forces of orthodoxy, they dared to claim themselves as decadent at all.

In public affairs, the "decadent" 'nineties were paragons of active intelligence compared with

ourselves. What knew they of the Art of Apathy, discovered and practised with consummate skill not by a *coterie*, but by the whole British nation? Would the 'nineties have performed so splendid a feat as our failure in the Olympic Games? I remember theirs as a period of patriotism, and that Britain should be to the fore in this, that, and the other was noisily and alcoholically insisted upon by the man in the street, train, public-house and music-hall.

The distinction of the Decadents of the 'nineties is a despicable one—they *tried* to be decadent, but were beaten by Public Opinion. We, the splendid 'teens, *are* decadent, and Public Opinion is with us, not spitting in our faces, but urging us forward to new and unheard of feats of folly and perversity. We are cleverer, too, more humorous in our Decadence than the 'nineties, for—we make the gods laugh by masquerading as an Age of Progress! V. C.



I canna decide at all!
No!

I canna decide at all, at all,
I canna decide at all,
Which to mak' my bride
I canna decide,
I canna decide at all!

My Sal is true,
For her eyes are blue,
Her friend's are black as jet;
But oh! they dart
Right thro' your heart
In a manner ye canna forget.
My Sal's sedate,
And walks in state,
Every inch a queen!

But Sue's so cosy,
Chubby and rosy,
And—she's but sixteen.
A gipsy wee,
In truth is she,
While Sally's fair,
But a bit of a flirt, I'm told;
Wi' golden hair,
And I'm *rerra* fond o' gold!

Oh!
I canna decide at all, at all,
I canna decide at all—
'Twixt Sal and Sue,
What *can* I do?
I canna decide at all!

I'd like to woo
And wed the two,
I canna see the harm;
But the priest would squeal
If he saw me kneel
Wi' a bride on either arm.
And maybe Sue,
And Sally too,
Would both object to that;
Each should they tear
They'd rumple my cravat!
So there's but one
Thing to be done,
Lest 'twixt two stools I fall,
I've made up my mind,
I'm quite resigned,
I will not wed at all—
No!
I'll marry no wife at all, at all.



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'Twixt Sally and Susan,
I canna decide at all!

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As I read the book, its author appears as two things—(1) As Wilde's steadfast and unwavering friend and defender during life, and (2) as his bitterest enemy and vilifier twenty years after death. Nothing worse has been said of the man by his wildest detractor than is said of Wilde in the book. Wilde is shown to have hardly one redeeming quality save his talent (which is belittled) and his wit (which is said to be mostly other people's). Pecksniff himself could not have condemned his vices more unctuously than, in the rectitude of twenty years after, does Wilde's whilom associate. The reason for Douglas's attack is that, only lately, he has become aware of the act of "cowardly and abominable treachery" of *De Profundis*. Wilde "played the Judas" on Douglas, so now Douglas plays the—er—well, now Douglas writes this book about Wilde.



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**A POET WHO WEDDED A POET:
LADY ALFRED DOUGLAS.**

Photograph by Lallie Charles.

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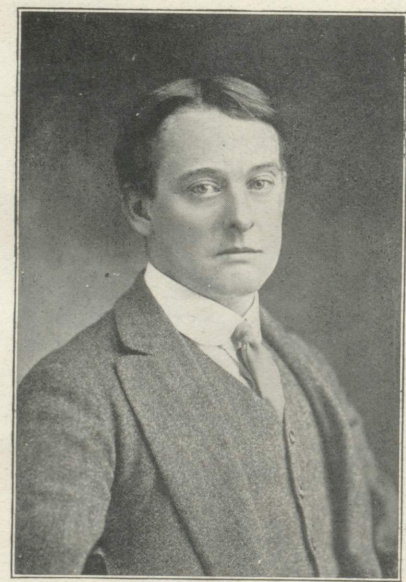
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2019 Worcester's University Library

Advertisement for 'AMUSEMENTS' listing various theatrical performances and their schedules. Includes titles like 'THE MAD OF THE MOUNTAINS', 'D. RICHARD IN THE LANTERN', and 'M. VANCE MOSCOVITCH IN THE'. Shows times and prices for different seating areas.

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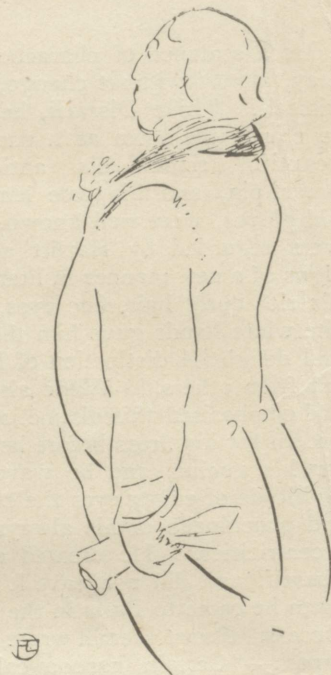
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Photograph by Lillie Charles.

Oscar Wilde in Paris

By Arthur Ransome

As the years pass by there seems to be an increasing interest in everything connected with the brilliant but ill-starred career of Oscar Wilde. In the following article, Mr. Arthur Ransome recounts the details of Wilde's life in France, the country that he loved so well and with whose people he found so deep an affinity. After the poet was released from prison, he went to the little seaside place called Berneval, some eight miles from Dieppe, and there, with Ernest Dowson, and occasionally other visitors, he spent a number of quiet and happy days. He is remembered in Berneval by residents to this day as a kindly, generous man, who was fond of bathing in the sea and of taking lonely walks along the beach. As Berneval is so little known to the British public, I have thought it advisable to illustrate this article with photographs of some of its most characteristic scenes which will ever be associated with the name of one of the greatest British geniuses.



Oscar Wilde.
From a pen drawing by
Toulouse-Lautree.
From the "Hyperion Almanack"

THIS is in no sense an article on Wilde's work, nor is it an estimate or character of the man. The utmost it attempts is to show how intimately Paris was connected with his life, to put into English some anecdotes still told by the Frenchmen who remember him, and, incidentally, to set right an error of fact about the writing of *Salomé*, an error into which a statement true in itself has led even the most competent of his English biographers.

Oscar Wilde's relations with Paris divide into three periods, before, during, and after his term of imprisonment. He had travelled in France as a boy, grew up with an excellent knowledge of French, wrote *The Sphinx* in Paris in 1874, and in May ten years later took his bride to Paris for their honeymoon. He almost became a French man of letters, and, when the Censor refused to license Madame Sarah Bernhardt's performance of *Salomé*, already in rehearsal at the Palace Theatre, he threatened to change his nationality. He was always at home in Paris, and he died there. On the

background of that city, rather than of London, the drama of his life stands out, cleared of side issues, far enough away to be seen by us, with its lighthearted, exuberant beginning, its moment of glory, when he could say with Traherne:—

"I was as high and great
As Kings are in their seat:
All other Things were mine,"

its catastrophe, which he turned into a momentary renaissance, its defeat and sombre end.

The Man who carried a Sunflower.

Long before his more general success, Wilde had projected on the screen of notoriety that is observed by the public a flamboyant caricature of himself. He did this partly for his own amusement, partly as a means of expression, partly also as a passport to celebrity. His essay on Wainwright, that startles again and again those who know the story of its author as well as of his subject (the essay called "Pen, Pencil, and Poison"), con-

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Berneval le Grand.
The quaint Normandy village some two miles from Berneval sur Mer where Wilde stayed after his release from prison.

the Ecole Romane; none the less, he continued, by courtesy, his insistence. 'Du Plessys, let us hear your latest verses,' commanded the master. Leaping up, Du Plessys trumpeted in vibrant tones, 'The Tomb of Jean Moréas.' Oscar Wilde, choked, conquered, routed, he who had silence about him in the salons of London, asked for his hat and coat, and fled into the night. It was certainly the first time that all the incense round a dinner table had not been reserved for himself."

There is a feeling of amused hostility in that story, read by itself, which is not present in the man who tells it. Stuart Merrill, it is well to remember, not only loved Wilde well enough to laugh at him, but was also the moving spirit in the petition for Wilde's release that was projected in Paris a few years later.

Wilde and his Fairy-tales.

At this time Wilde preferred telling stories to talking. They were fairy tales,

like that of "The Fisherman and his Soul," or parables, like that of "Narcissus." In 1894 a few of these parables were printed in *The Fortnightly Review*, and all those that André Gide mentions in his little book were so published. I suspect that when Gide heard them they had already been written, and that, wonderfully as he improvised in English, Wilde did not choose to risk the hesitations of new compositions in French. Stuart Merrill, the American-French poet, who tells the anecdote of the dinner with Moréas' disciples, remembers the sonorous, unhurried movement of these tales, and the powerful music of the narrator's voice. André Gide, whose account of them is the best published, is a little too reticent. I have heard that Wilde's narrative was the main thread of a melody whose accompaniment was made by Gide, then very young and very impressionable, sobbing distractedly into his plate. That is all to the credit of Monsieur Gide, and it is a pity he has not chosen to remember it himself, as it

tains a sentence of characterisation that may, almost without change, be fitted to himself. "Like Disraeli, he determined to startle the town as a dandy, and his beautiful rings, his antique cameo breast-pin, and his pale lemon-coloured kid gloves, were well known, and indeed were regarded by Hazlitt as being the signs of a new manner in literature, while his rich curly hair, fine eyes, and exquisite white hands gave him the dangerous and delightful distinction of being different from others." Wilde also possessed and emphasised this distinction. He was known for his dress before he was known for his genius, and he waved before a multitude of empty eyes the cap and bells and punchinello of his always decorative eccentricities. He created a legend of himself, and did not leave it behind him when he came to Paris in the years of his success. Stuart Merrill wrote in a French paper:—"Certain hansom-cabmen even say that they have seen him about the hour of cats and poets, walking with an enormous lily in his hand." He was able to add: "Oscar Wilde rejects, as if regretfully, their testimony, in replying that legend is often truer than the truth." In 1883, before this time, when he came to Paris after his lecturing tour in America, he carried a jewelled walking stick, in imitation of the stick that pleased Balzac by setting the whole town talking of its owner and itself. And, in 1891, when André Gide met him, "some compared him to an Asiatic Bacchus, others to a Roman Emperor, others to Apollo himself." Wilde was "the man who walked the streets with a sunflower in his hand," and everybody wanted to see him, if only to look for the sunflower. He was also "the man who smoked cigarettes with gold tips," a luxury of Oriental magnificence in London at that time, and still more remarkable in Paris in those days before the *bureaux de tabac* had begun to sell Muratti's little tin boxes beside the paper packets of the State.

He became known as a talker. André Gide writes of a dinner: "Nous étions quatre, mais Wilde fut le seul qui parla." His talk was the subject of argument. He was accustomed to fit it to his widely-varying audiences, and, sometimes, he

miscalculated. There are still legends in Paris that make him a large over-confident man, whose conversation was very disappointing. Some accuse him of lack of taste in his anxiety to startle and amuse. But mistakes were rare with him, and the main tradition is of an entertainer, the charm of whose talk was only equalled by that of his personality.

An Uncomfortable Dinner.

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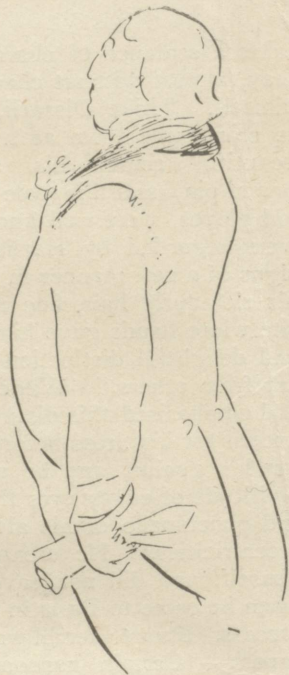
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Oscar Wilde in Paris

By Arthur Ransome

As the years pass by there seems to be an increasing interest in everything connected with the brilliant but ill-starred career of Oscar Wilde. In the following article, Mr. Arthur Ransome recounts the details of Wilde's life in France, the country that he loved so well and with whose people he found so deep an affinity. After the poet was released from prison, he went to the little seaside place called Berneval, some eight miles from Dieppe, and there, with Ernest Dowson, and occasionally other visitors, he spent a number of quiet and happy days. He is remembered in Berneval by residents to this day as a kindly, generous man, who was fond of bathing in the sea and of taking lonely walks along the beach. As Berneval is so little known to the British public, I have thought it advisable to illustrate this article with photographs of some of its most characteristic scenes which will ever be associated with the name of one of the greatest British geniuses.



Oscar Wilde.
From a pen drawing by
Toulouse-Lautree.
From the "Hyperion Almanack"

THIS is in no sense an article on Wilde's work, nor is it an estimate or character of the man. The utmost it attempts is to show how intimately Paris was connected with his life, to put into English some anecdotes still told by the Frenchmen who remember him, and, incidentally, to set right an error of fact about the writing of *Salomé*, an error into which a statement true in itself has led even the most competent of his English biographers.

Oscar Wilde's relations with Paris divide into three periods, before, during, and after his term of imprisonment. He had travelled in France as a boy, grew up with an excellent knowledge of French, wrote *The Sphinx* in Paris in 1874, and in May ten years later took his bride to Paris for their honeymoon. He almost became a French man of letters, and, when the Censor refused to license Madame Sarah Bernhardt's performance of *Salomé*, already in rehearsal at the Palace Theatre, he threatened to change his nationality. He was always at home in Paris, and he died there. On the

background of that city, rather than of London, the drama of his life stands out, cleared of side issues, far enough away to be seen by us, with its lighthearted, exuberant beginning, its moment of glory, when he could say with Traherne:—

"I was as high and great
As Kings are in their seat:
All other Things were mine,"

its catastrophe, which he turned into a momentary renaissance, its defeat and sombre end.

The Man who carried a Sunflower.

Long before his more general success, Wilde had projected on the screen of notoriety that is observed by the public a flamboyant caricature of himself. He did this partly for his own amusement, partly as a means of expression, partly also as a passport to celebrity. His essay on Wainwright, that startles again and again those who know the story of its author as well as of his subject (the essay called "Pen, Pencil, and Poison"), con-

tains a sentence of characterisation that may, almost without change, be fitted to himself. "Like Disraeli, he determined to startle the town as a dandy, and his beautiful rings, his antique cameo breast-pin, and his pale lemon-coloured kid gloves, were well known, and indeed were regarded by Hazlitt as being the signs of a new manner in literature, while his rich curly hair, fine eyes, and exquisite white hands gave him the dangerous and delightful distinction of being different from others." Wilde also possessed and emphasised this distinction. He was known for his dress before he was known for his genius, and he waved before a multitude of empty eyes the cap and bells and punchinello of his always decorative eccentricities. He created a legend of himself, and did not leave it behind him when he came to Paris in the years of his success. Stuart Merrill wrote in a French paper:—"Certain hansom-cabmen even say that they have seen him about the hour of cats and poets, walking with an enormous lily in his hand." He was able to add: "Oscar Wilde rejects, as if regretfully, their testimony, in replying that legend is often truer than the truth." In 1883, before this time, when he came to Paris after his lecturing tour in America, he carried a jewelled walking stick, in imitation of the stick that pleased Balzac by setting the whole town talking of its owner and itself. And, in 1891, when André Gide met him, "some compared him to an Asiatic Bacchus, others to a Roman Emperor, others to Apollo himself." Wilde was "the man who walked the streets with a sunflower in his hand," and everybody wanted to see him, if only to look for the sunflower. He was also "the man who smoked cigarettes with gold tips," a luxury of Oriental magnificence in London at that time, and still more remarkable in Paris in those days before the *bureaux de tabac* had begun to sell Muratti's little tin boxes beside the paper packets of the State.

He became known as a talker. André Gide writes of a dinner: "Nous étions quatre, mais Wilde fut le seul qui parla." His talk was the subject of argument. He was accustomed to fit it to his widely-varying audiences, and, sometimes, he

miscalculated. There are still legends in Paris that make him a large over-confident man, whose conversation was very disappointing. Some accuse him of lack of taste in his anxiety to startle and amuse. But mistakes were rare with him, and the main tradition is of an entertainer, the charm of whose talk was only equalled by that of his personality.

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Berneval le Grand.

The quaint Normandy village some two miles from Berneval sur Mer where Wilde stayed after his release from prison.

the Ecole Romane; none the less, he continued, by courtesy, his insistence. 'Du Plessys, let us hear your latest verses,' commanded the master. Leaping up, Du Plessys trumpeted in vibrant tones, 'The Tomb of Jean Moréas.' Oscar Wilde, choked, conquered, routed, he who had silence about him in the *salons* of London, asked for his hat and coat, and fled into the night. It was certainly the first time that all the incense round a dinner table had not been reserved for himself."

There is a feeling of amused hostility in that story, read by itself, which is not present in the man who tells it. Stuart Merrill, it is well to remember, not only loved Wilde well enough to laugh at him, but was also the moving spirit in the petition for Wilde's release that was projected in Paris a few years later.

Wilde and his Fairy-tales.

At 12019-03-18 Wilde pre Jissen Women's University Library Gide, and it is a story he has stories to talking. They were fairy tales,

like that of "The Fisherman and his Soul," or parables, like that of "Narcissus." In 1894 a few of these parables were printed in *The Fortnightly Review*, and all those that André Gide mentions in his little book were so published. I suspect that when Gide heard them they had already been written, and that, wonderfully as he improvised in English, Wilde did not choose to risk the hesitations of new compositions in French. Stuart Merrill, the American-French poet, who tells the anecdote of the dinner with Moréas' disciples, remembers the sonorous, unhurried movement of these tales, and the powerful music of the narrator's voice. André Gide, whose account of them is the best published, is a little too reticent. I have heard that Wilde's narrative was the main thread of a melody whose accompaniment was made by Gide, then very young and very impressionable, sobbing distractedly into his plate. That is all to the credit of Gide, and it is a pity he has not chosen to remember it himself, as it



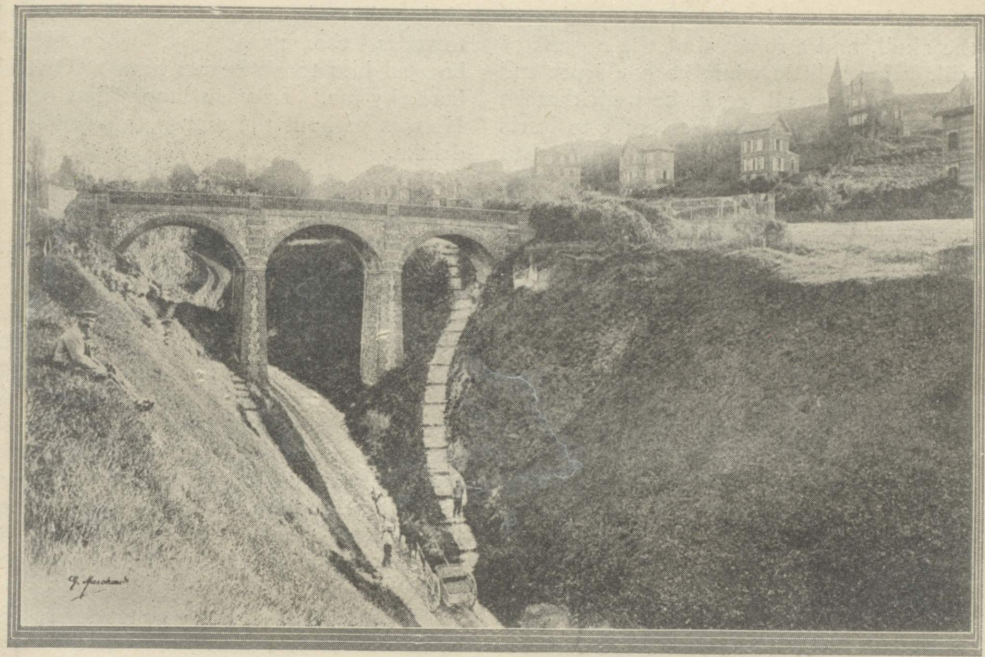
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Berneval-sur-Mer.
The tiny gorge leading down to the beach where Oscar Wilde spent many happy hours.

please let Lugne-Poë know that I am sensible of the honour he has done me. He is a poet himself." In that time, when English journalists only stopped abusing him to close their lips over his name, when English mothers forbade all mention of the man or the writer, when admiration of his books was become a secret thing, like a half-ashamed religion, if there is any truth in the saying that we are where we are loved, then Oscar Wilde may indeed be said to have been in Paris.

A Fatal Tracheotomy.

As soon as Wilde left prison, he crossed the Channel to Dieppe, and settled in an inn at the little village of Berneval, where he lived as Sebastian Melmoth. André Gide saw him there, and has preserved a most valuable conversation, in which Wilde stated, as directly as in *De Profundis*, his conception of what he had to do with his life. "Prison has completely changed me," he said. "I counted on it for that. . . . One must never take up the same exist-

ence. . . . My life is like a work of art; an artist never begins the same thing over again . . . unless he has failed in it." And again, "The public is so terrible that it never knows a man except by the last thing he has done. If I returned to Paris now, they would only see in me the condemned. I do not want to reappear before I have written a play. Until then I must be left in peace."

At Berneval he took a little chalet, and wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. But he could not write his play in spite of the two subjects he had invented in prison. He was loved by everyone. The curé offered him a stall in the choir, and he felt adopted by the place. He found that the customs-officers were bored, and lent them the novels of Dumas père. On the day of the Queen's Jubilee in 1897, he gave a feast to forty children from the school with their master. But these pleasures were like the hallucinatory interests that a man takes in insignificant things when recovering from an operation.

The operation had been serious and



The Hotel de la Plage, Berneval, near Dieppe, where Oscar Wilde stayed. Here he was joined by the poet, Ernest Dowson. Inset is a striking and characteristic portrait of the great dramatist and wit at the height of his fame. The crosses mark the rooms occupied by Wilde.

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"(1) In the name of humanity, because public and private witness shows that M. Oscar Wilde is seriously ill;

"(2) In the name of art, because his possible death would deprive letters of works whose value is sufficiently guaranteed by the literary past of the author."

The appeal to sign this manifesto brought curious answers. Sardou, the writer of successful vaudevilles, replied, "C'est une boue trop immonde, pour que je m'en mêle, de quelque façon que soit." Alphonse Daudet wished to know in what company he was asked to protest. Zola suggested that it was an attempt at advertisement to which he did not wish to lend his name. The younger men, among whom were many since become famous and then not without renown, were proud to sign.

Guilt at First Incredible.

Those who had known him in Paris could not believe that Wilde was guilty

of the offence for which he was condemned. They remembered the man who had told them fairy stories round the dinner table, the man whose courtesy was characteristic even among a courteous people, the man whose kindness many had experienced, the man who could not suffer without disgust the ordinary licentious anecdotes of the smoking room. The trial with its result seemed a fantastic nightmare. When the indiscretions of his friends convinced them of the truth, they replied immediately with other truths, that Wilde was mad, that there are few men without a private madness of their own, and that there are no laws for men of genius. Henri de Regnier, the poet and novelist, who has just been elected a member of the French Academy, defended him eloquently and in vain. Merrill and Deschamps were indefatigable without success. The Théâtre de l'Œuvre put *Salomé* upon the stage, Lugne-Poë playing the part of Herod, and Wilde wrote from prison: "It is something that at a time of disgrace and shame I should still be regarded as an artist: I wish I could feel more pleasure, but I seem dead to all emotions except those of anguish or despair. However,

successful: a tracheotomy, an opening of the skull, and a removal of the organs of will. For a little while he could pretend to himself that all would be well, that he could write a play and then come to Paris and "be again the King of Life." But his will was gone. He could only talk of his projects, and he came to Paris with his play unwritten.

"I am so Lonely."

Various friends tried desperately to give him confidence. Stuart Merrill gave a dinner in his honour, but some of the guests did not appear, and Wilde was made, perhaps, more miserable by their absence than if the dinner had not taken place. It is hard for a King to become a knight, and Wilde's power of leadership was gone. With him it was always the throne or nothing, and when some who had known him closed their doors on him, he would call on no one for fear of a similar rebuff. Gide and a friend passed him sitting before a *café*. He ordered drinks for them, and Gide was

sitting down in front of him with his back towards the passers-by, when Wilde begged him to sit beside him. "Oh! sit here, by me. I am so lonely just now." He was without the money to pay for the drinks.

"Afin de Finir ma Semaine."

In spite of his poverty, for though he had an allowance, he was frequently penniless (Merrill has a pathetic note from him asking for a very little sum "afin de finir ma semaine"), he refused in any way to profit by his condemnation. Fernand Xau offered him a weekly article to write. His messenger imprudently said, "After the noise of your condemnation you are sure of a great success." Wilde straightened himself, and replied, "Thank you. My successes before the condemnation are sufficient for me."

He went to Italy, to Switzerland, and to the South of France, returning always to Paris. During the Paris exhibition he used to spend two or three evenings a week in the exhibition grounds. Paul



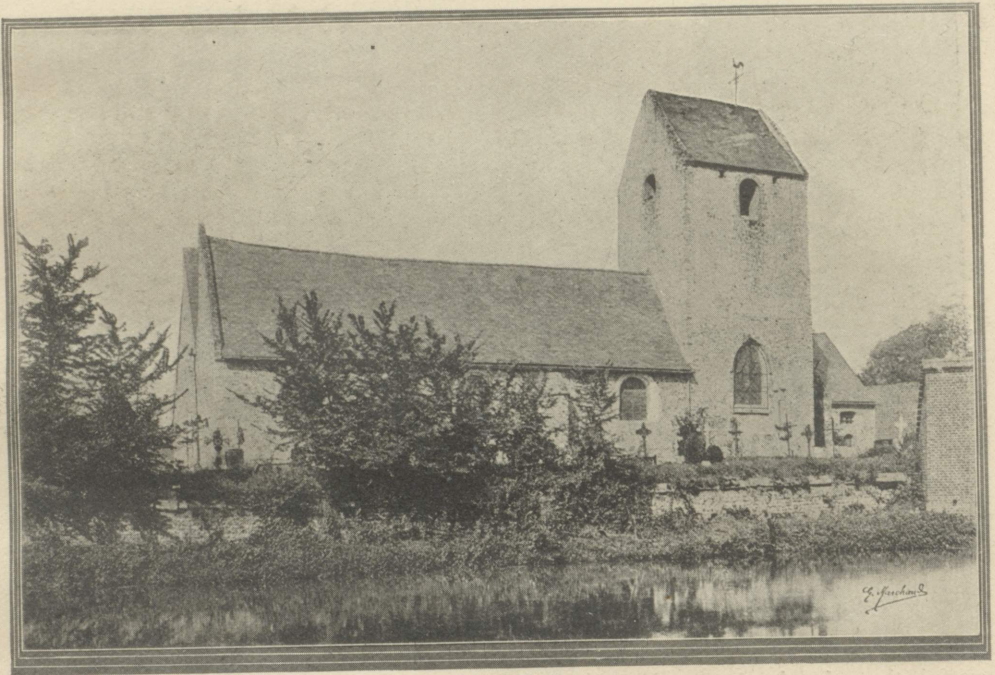
Berneval-sur-Mer.
The beach, cliffs, and casino.

OSCAR WILDE'S FRIENDS.

LORD A. DOUGLAS'S STORY.

Though Oscar Wilde has been dead for 13 years, the notoriety of his name is kept alive by an apparently endless succession of quarrels among his friends and his friends' friends. Ultimately it will be possible to strip Wilde's writings of the adventitious interest of social celebrity and of scandal, and to estimate their intrinsic value. Before this estimate is likely to be made by the present generation some measure of agreement will be necessary on the facts of Wilde's career; and although Lord Alfred Douglas's *OSCAR WILDE AND MYSELF* (Long, 10s. 6d. net.) is not the kind of soft answer which will turn away the wrath of his various opponents, it will help people to form their estimate of the facts of the intimacy and confirm their probable impression of Oscar Wilde's character and talents.

Lord Alfred Douglas has a pungent or even feline literary touch, but his general statement of the relations between Oscar Wilde and himself is straightforward and credible. He has frankly outgrown any excessive admiration for Wilde either as a writer or a man. The process of disillusionment was completed by the discovery of Wilde's attacks in the unpublished portions of "De Profundis." The writer denies that he knew the extent and character of Wilde's viciousness until after legal proceedings had been begun, and makes some true and incisive observations on Wilde's craving for notoriety, which falsified his talent and substituted imitativeness and shallow epigram for what might have been independent genius. But the time has not yet come for a final appreciation, nor is Lord Alfred Douglas the critic to undertake it. He is fairly entitled to tell his story of the relationship, though it would have been all the better for being told more shortly and with less acrimonious reference to a number of people of very small real importance.



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getful that the Anglo-Saxons share at least one characteristic with the Orient in their resemblance to the Medes and Persians, drew up a petition on Wilde's behalf:—

“(1) In the name of humanity, because public and private witness shows that M. Oscar Wilde is seriously ill;

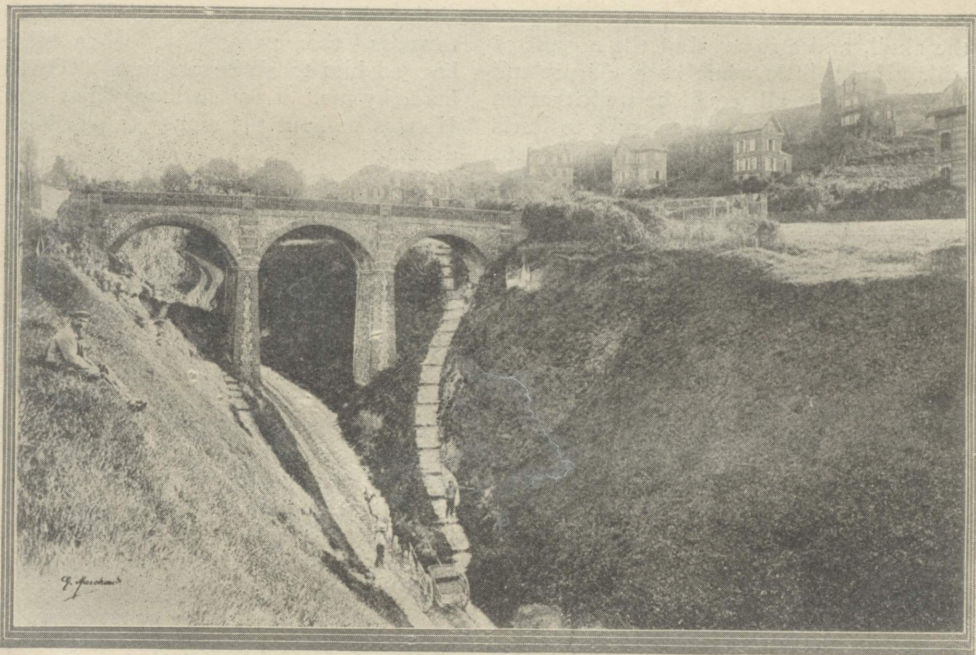
“(2) In the name of art, because his possible death would deprive letters of works whose value is sufficiently guaranteed by the literary past of the author.”

The appeal to sign this manifesto brought curious answers. Sardou, the writer of successful vaudevilles, replied, “C'est une boue trop immonde, pour que je m'en mêle, de quelque façon que soit.” Alphonse Daudet wished to know in what company he was asked to protest. Zola suggested that it was an attempt at advertisement to which he did not wish to lend his name. The younger men, among whom were many since become famous and then not without renown, were proud to sign.

Guilt at First Incredible.

Those who had known him in Paris could not believe that Wilde was guilty

of the offence for which he was condemned. They remembered the man who had told them fairy stories round the dinner table, the man whose courtesy was characteristic even among a courteous people, the man whose kindness many had experienced, the man who could not suffer without disgust the ordinary licentious anecdotes of the smoking room. The trial with its result seemed a fantastic nightmare. When the indiscretions of his friends convinced them of the truth, they replied immediately with other truths, that Wilde was mad, that there are few men without a private madness of their own, and that there are no laws for men of genius. Henri de Regnier, the poet and novelist, who has just been elected a member of the French Academy, defended him eloquently and in vain. Merrill and Deschamps were indefatigable without success. The Théâtre de l'Œuvre put *Salomé* upon the stage, Lugne-Poë playing the part of Herod, and Wilde wrote from prison: “It is something that at a time of disgrace and shame I should still be regarded as an artist: I wish I could feel more pleasure, but I seem dead to all emotions except those of anguish or despair. However,



Berneval-sur-Mer.

The tiny gorge leading down to the beach where Oscar Wilde spent many happy hours.

please let Lugne-Poë know that I am sensible of the honour he has done me. He is a poet himself." In that time, when English journalists only stopped abusing him to close their lips over his name, when English mothers forbade all mention of the man or the writer, when admiration of his books was become a secret thing, like a half-ashamed religion, if there is any truth in the saying that we are where we are loved, then Oscar Wilde may indeed be said to have been in Paris.

A Fatal Tracheotomy.

As soon as Wilde left prison, he crossed the Channel to Dieppe, and settled in an inn at the little village of Berneval, where he lived as Sebastian Melmoth. André Gide saw him there, and has preserved a most valuable conversation, in which Wilde stated, as directly as in *De Profundis*, his conception of what he had to do with his life. "Prison has completely changed me," he said. "I counted on it for that. . . . One must not . . . up the . . .

ence. . . . My life is like a work of art; an artist never begins the same thing over again . . . unless he has failed in it." And again, "The public is so terrible that it never knows a man except by the last thing he has done. If I returned to Paris now, they would only see in me the condemned. I do not want to reappear before I have written a play. Until then I must be left in peace."

At Berneval he took a little chalet, and wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. But he could not write his play in spite of the two subjects he had invented in prison. He was loved by everyone. The curé offered him a stall in the choir, and he felt adopted by the place. He found that the customs-officers were bored, and lent them the novels of Dumas père. On the day of the Queen's Jubilee in 1897, he gave a feast to forty children from the school with their master. But these pleasures were like the hallucinatory interests that a man takes in insignificant things when recovering from an operation.

2019-03-18 Jissen Women's University Library 120 The operation had been serious and