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Vol. 14

SOME CRUELTIES

OF PRISON LIFE

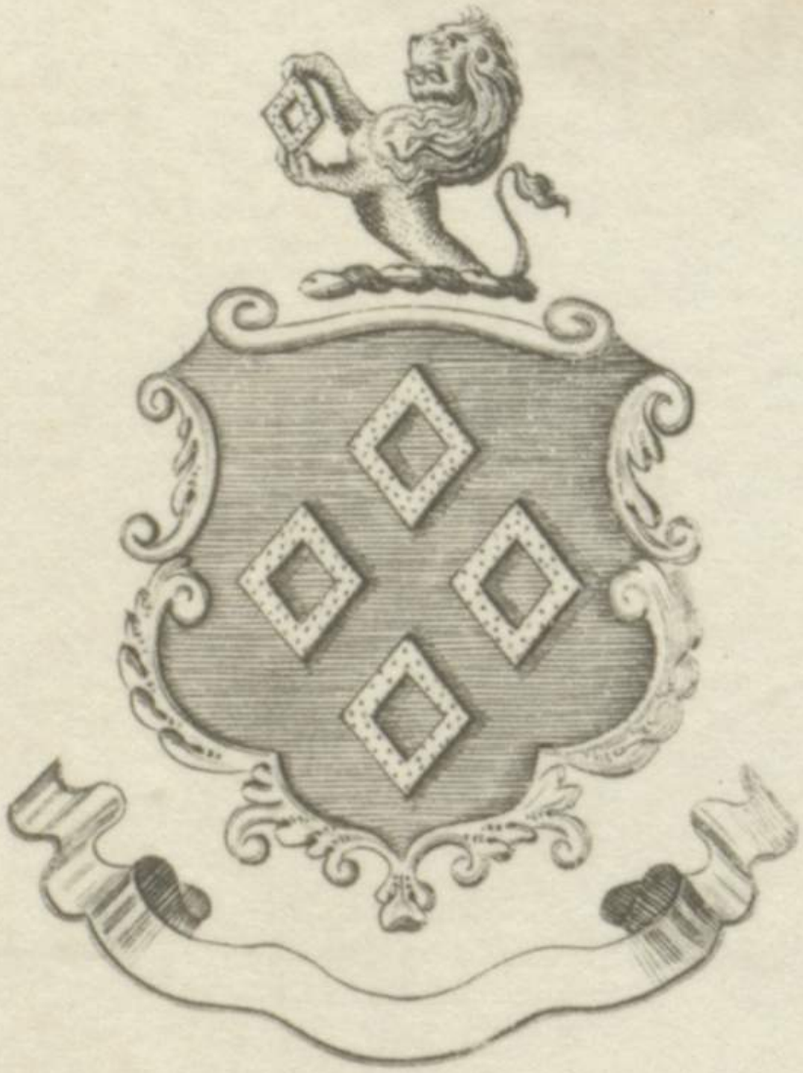
BY OSCAR WILDE

1897-8

ワイルド資料 十四

The Mason Library 第十四集

Christopher Sclater Millard.



Christopher Sclater Millard.

The Daily Chronicle.

TELEGRAMS,
"MUNIARC, LONDON."
TELEPHONES,
NATIONAL: 2440 HOLBORN.
POST OFFICE: 6914 CENTRAL.

WHITEFRIARS STREET,
LONDON, E.C.

Feb 24 1913

Stuart Mason Esq.,
6 Molyneux House, W.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 19th instant, Mr. A.E. Fletcher was editor of the "Daily Chronicle" in 1890 when Oscar Wilde wrote the letter on "Dorian Gray"; Mr. Whelan Boyle died the year previously. Mr. H.W. Massingham was editor in 1897-1898 when Wilde's two letters on prison reform were published.

Mr. Edward Lloyd bought the "Clerkenwell News" in 1876 when the paper ceased to be sold as the "Clerkenwell News" and was thereafter known as the "Daily Chronicle". The Proprietors of the "Daily Chronicle" still retain the copyright in the title "Clerkenwell News".

Yours truly,

The Editor

THE SUPPRESSED PORTION
OF
"DE PROFUNDIS"

By OSCAR WILDE

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME PUBLISHED
BY HIS LITERARY EXECUTOR
ROBERT ROSS

PAUL R. REYNOLDS
NEW YORK
1913.

To face p. 456

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LONDON: PRIVATELY PRINTED
MDCCCXCV.

To face p. 404

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SIR,—I understand that the Home Secretary's Prison Reform Bill is to be read this week for the first or second time, and as your journal has been the one paper in England that has taken a real and vital interest in this important question, I hope that you will allow me, as one who has had long personal experience of life in an English gaol, to point out what reforms in our present stupid and barbarous system are urgently necessary.

The complaint of the warder Martin, which we printed a few days ago, and which the Home Secretary denied in the usual official form, has produced a startling essay on prison life which is addressed to us to-day by Mr. Oscar Wilde. It is a poignant and a thrilling indictment of a system which has not a friend among intelligent men. These accounts, of which the world can have little confirmation, but which are confirmed by all we have published concerning the prison system, can hardly fail to recall the public mind to the effort which we ourselves made to throw light on the dark places, and to the proposals for reform, inadequate as they are, of Mr. Herbert Gladstone's Committee. Sir Matthew White Ridley has a Bill on hand of which we shall have something to say presently.

But meanwhile, we desire to direct attention especially to two aspects of this tragedy that goes on its dull round in the midst of all our cities: the prison lunatic or semi-lunatic, and the prison child. It is a nightmare to think of little children in such a hell; and we look to the Home Secretary to provide at once some less fiendish method of amending or punishing the urchins who are condemned generally for offences not their own. As for the horrid tale of prison lunacy, our readers know what we have said of that long since. The lovers of official darkness may go on denying it, and for that purpose they may, as they do, keep idiots like that one of whom Mr. Oscar Wilde draws a ghastly picture in daily companionship with other prisoners. But this also is an infamy, and they will, we hope, take the opportunity which was denied their predecessors of thoroughly initiating the work of humanising our prisons. Up to the present nothing has been done, and the system is worse than it ever was, for the simple reason that reformers have been cruelly and unscrupulously victimised, and that some most dangerous appointments have been made. We shall open up this subject again at some future time, and we shall then have a very black story to tell.

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To face p.390

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People nowadays do not understand what cruelty is. They regard it as a sort of terrible mediæval passion, and connect it with the race of men like Eccelin da Romano, and others, to whom the deliberate infliction of pain gave a real madness of pleasure. But men of the stamp of Eccelin are merely abnormal types of perverted individualism. Ordinary cruelty is simply stupidity. It is the entire want of imagination. It is the result in our days of stereotyped systems, of hard-and-fast rules, and of stupidity. Wherever there is centralisation there is stupidity. What is inhuman in modern life is officialism. Authority is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised. It is the Prison Board, and the system that it carries out, that is the primary source of the cruelty that is exercised on a child in prison. The people who uphold the system have excellent intentions. Those ho carry it out are humane in intention also. Responsibility is shifted on to the disciplinary regulations. It is supposed that because a thing is the rule it is right.

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The present treatment of children is terrible, primarily from people not understanding the peculiar psychology of a child's nature. A child can understand a punishment inflicted by an individual, such as a parent or guardian, and bear it with a certain amount of acquiescence. What it cannot understand is a punishment inflicted by society. It cannot realise what society is. With grown people it is, of course, the reverse. Those of us who are either in prison or have been sent there, can understand, and do understand, what that collective force called society means, and whatever we may think of its methods or claims, we can force ourselves to accept it. Punishment inflicted on us by an individual, on the other hand, is a thing that no grown person endures or is expected to endure.

The child consequently, being taken away from its parents by people whom it has never seen, and of whom it knows nothing, and finding itself in a lonely and unfamiliar cell, waited on by strange faces, and ordered about and punished by the representatives of a system that it cannot understand, becomes an immediate prey to the first and most prominent emotion produced by modern prison life—the emotion of terror. The terror of a child in prison is quite limitless. I remember once in Reading, as I was going out to exercise, seeing in the dimly-lit cell right opposite my own a small boy. Two warders—not unkndly men—were talking to him, with some sternness apparently, or perhaps giving him some useful advice about his conduct. One was in the cell with him, the other was standing outside. The child's face was like a white wedge of sheer terror. There was in his eyes the terror of a hunted animal. The next morning I heard him at breakfast time crying, and calling to be let out. His cry was for his parents. From time to time I could hear the deep voice of the warder on duty telling him to keep quiet. Yet he was not even convicted of whatever little offence he had been charged with. He was simply on remand. That I knew by his wearing his own clothes, which seemed neat enough. He was, however, wearing prison socks and shoes. This showed that he was a very poor boy, whose own shoes, if he had any, were in a bad state. Justices and magistrates, an entirely ignorant class as a rule, often remand children for a week, and then perhaps remit whatever sentence they are entitled to pass. They call this "not sending a child to prison." It is, of course, a stupid view on their part. To a little child, whether he is in prison on remand or after conviction is not a subtlety of social position he can comprehend. To him the horrible thing is to be there at all. In the eyes of humanity it should be a horrible thing for him to be there at all.

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This terror that seizes and dominates the child, as it seizes the grown man also, is of course intensified beyond power of expression by the solitary cellular system of our prisons. Every child is confined to its cell for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four. This is the appalling thing. To shut up a child in a dimly-lit cell, for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four, is an example of the cruelty of stupidity. If an individual, parent or guardian, did this to a child, he would be severely punished. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children would take the matter up at once. There would be on all hands the utmost detestation of whomsoever had been guilty of such cruelty. A heavy sentence would, undoubtedly, follow conviction. But our own actual society does worse itself, and to the child to be so treated by a strange abstract force, of whose claims it has no cognisance, is much worse than it would be to receive the same treatment from its father or mother, or someone it knew. The inhuman treatment of a child is always inhuman, by whomsoever it is inflicted. But inhuman treatment by Society is to the child the more terrible because there is no appeal. A parent or guardian can be moved, and let out a child from the dark lonely room in which it is confined. But a warder cannot. Most warders are very fond of children. But the system prohibits them from rendering the child any assistance. Should they do so, as Warder Martin did, they are dismissed.

The second thing from which a child suffers in prison is hunger. The food that is given to it consists of a piece of usually badly-baked prison bread and a tin of water for breakfast at half-past seven. At twelve o'clock it gets dinner, composed of a tin of coarse Indian meal stirabout, and at half-past five it gets a piece of dry bread and a tin of water for its supper. This diet in the case of a strong grown man is always productive of illness of some kind, chiefly of course diarrhœa, with its attendant weakness. In fact in a big prison astringent medicines are served out regularly by the warders as a matter of course. In the case of a child, the child is, as a rule, incapable of eating the food at all. Anyone who knows anything about children knows how easily a child's digestion is upset by a fit of crying, or trouble and mental distress of any kind. A child who has been crying all day long, and perhaps half the night, in a lonely dimly-lit cell, and is preyed upon by terror, simply cannot eat food of this coarse, horrible kind. In the case of the little child to whom Warder Martin gave the biscuits, the child was crying with hunger on Tuesday morning, and utterly unable to eat the bread and water served to it for its breakfast. Martin went out after the breakfasts had been served and

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I know Martin extremely well, and I was under his charge for the last seven weeks of my imprisonment. On his appointment at Reading he had charge of Gallery C, in which I was confined, so I saw him constantly. I was struck by the singular kindness and humanity of the way in which he spoke to me and to the other prisoners. Kind words are much in prison, and a pleasant "Good morning" or "Good evening" will make one as happy as one can be in a prison. He was always gentle and considerate. I happen to know another case in which he showed great kindness to one of the prisoners, and I have no hesitation in mentioning it. One of the most horrible things in prison is the badness of the sanitary arrangements. No prisoner is allowed under any circumstances to leave his cell after half-past five p.m. If, consequently, he is suffering from diarrhœa, he has to use his cell as a latrine, and pass the night in a most fetid and unwholesome atmosphere. Some days before my release Martin was going the rounds at half-past seven with one of the senior warders for the purpose of collecting the oakum and tools of the prisoners. A man just convicted, and suffering from violent diarrhœa in consequence of the food, as is always the case, asked the senior warder to allow him to empty the slops in his cell on account of the horrible odour of the cell and the possibility of illness again in the night. The senior warder refused absolutely; it was against the rules. The man had to pass the night in this dreadful condition. Martin, however, rather than see this wretched man in such a loathsome predicament, said he would empty the man's slops himself, and did so. A warder emptying a prisoner's slops is, of course, against the rules, but Martin did this act of kindness to the man out of the simple humanity of his nature, and the man was naturally most grateful.

As regards the children, a great deal has been talked and written lately about the contaminating influence of prison on young children. What is said is quite true. A child is utterly contaminated by prison life. But the contaminating influence is not that of the prisoners. It is that of the whole prison system—of the governor, the chaplain, the warders, the lonely cell, the isolation, the revolting food, the rules of the Prison Commissioners, the mode of discipline as it is termed, of the life. Every care is taken to isolate a child from the sight even of all prisoners over

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sixteen years of age. Children sit behind a curtain in chapel, and are sent to take exercise in small sunless yards—sometimes a stone-yard, sometimes a yard at the back of the mills—rather than that they should see the elder prisoners at exercise. But the only really humanising influence in prison is the influence of the prisoners. Their cheerfulness under terrible circumstances, their sympathy for each other, their humility, their gentleness, their pleasant smiles of greeting when they meet each other, their complete acquiescence in their punishments, are all quite wonderful, and I myself learnt many sound lessons from them. I am not proposing that the children should not sit behind a curtain in chapel, or that they should take exercise in a corner of the common yard. I am merely pointing out that the bad influence on children is not, and could never be, that of the prisoners, but is, and will always remain, that of the prison system itself. There is not a single man in Reading Gaol that would not gladly have done the three children's punishment ment for them. When I saw them last it was on the Tuesday following their conviction. I was taking exercise at half-past eleven with about twelve other men, as the three children passed near us, in charge of a warder, from the damp, dreary stone-yard in which they had been at their exercise. I saw the greatest pity and sympathy in the eyes of my companions as they looked at them. Prisoners are, as a class, extremely kind and sympathetic to each other. Suffering and the community of suffering makes people kind, and day after day as I tramped the yard I used to feel with pleasure and comfort what Carlyle calls somewhere "the silent rhythmic charm of human companionship." In this, as in all other things, philanthropists and people of that kind are astray. It is not the prisoners who need reformation. It is the prisons.

Of course no child under fourteen years of age should be sent to prison at all. It is an absurdity, and, like many absurdities, of absolutely tragic results. If, however, they are to be sent to prison, during the daytime they should be in a workshop or schoolroom with a warder. At night they should sleep in a dormitory, with a night-warder to look after them. They should be allowed exercise for at least three hours a day. The dark, badly-ventilated, ill-smelling prisons cells are dreadful for a child, dreadful indeed for anyone. One is always breathing bad air in prison. The food given to children should consist of tea and bread-and-butter and soup. Prison soup is very good and wholesome. A resolution of the House of Commons could settle the treatment of children in half an hour. I hope you will use your influence to have this done. The way that children are treated at present is really an outrage on humanity and common-sense. It comes from stupidity.

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Let me draw attention now to another terrible thing that goes on in English prisons, indeed in prisons all over the world where the the system of silence and cellular confinement is practised. I refer to the large number of men who become insane or weak-minded in prison. In convict prisons this is, of course, quite common; but in ordinary gaols also, such as that I was confined in, it is to be found.

About three months ago I noticed amongst the prisoners who took exercise with me a young man who seemed to me to be silly or half-witted. Every prison, of course, has its half-witted clients, who return again and again, and may be said to live in the prison. But this young man struck me as being more than usually half-witted on account of his silly grin and idiotic laughter to himself, and the peculiar restlessness of his eternally twitching hands. He was noticed by all the other prisoners on account of the strangeness of his conduct. From time to time he did not appear at exercise, which showed me that he was being punished by confinement to his cell. Finally, I discovered that he was under observation, and being watched night and day by warders. When he did appear at exercise he always seemed hysterical, and used to walk round crying or laughing. At chapel he had to sit right under the observation of two warders, who carefully watched him all the time. Sometimes he would bury his head in his hands, an offence against the chapel regulations, and his head would be immediately struck up by a warder so that he should keep his eyes fixed permanently in the direction of the Communion-table. Sometimes he would cry—not making any disturbance—but with tears streaming down his face and a hysterical throbbing in the throat. Sometimes he would grin idiot-like to himself and make faces. He was on more than one occasion sent out of chapel to his cell, and of course he was continually punished. As the bench on which I used to sit in chapel was directly behind the bench at the end of which this unfortunate man was placed I had full opportunity of observing him. I also saw him, of course, at exercise continually, and I saw that he was becoming insane, and was being treated as if he was shamming.

On Saturday week last I was in my cell at about one o'clock occupied in cleaning and polishing the tins I had been using for dinner. Suddenly I was startled by the prison silence being broken by the most horrible and revolting shrieks, or rather howls, for at first I thought some animal like a bull or a cow was being unskilfully slaughtered outside the prison walls. I soon realised, however, that the howls proceeded from the basement of the prison, and I knew that some wretched man was being flogged. I need not say how hideous and terrible it was for me, and I began to wonder who it was who was

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being punished in this revolting manner. Suddenly it dawned upon me that they might be flogging this unfortunate lunatic. My feelings on the subject need not be chronicled; they have nothing to do with the question.

The next day, Sunday 16th, I saw the poor fellow at exercise, his weak, ugly, wretched face bloated by tears and hysteria almost beyond recognition. He walked in the centre ring along with the old men, the beggars, and the lame people, so that I was able to observe him the whole time. It was my last Sunday in prison, a perfectly lovely day, the finest day we had had the whole year, and there, in the beautiful sunlight, walked this poor creature—made once in the image of God—grinning like an ape, and making with his hands the most fantastic gestures, as though he was playing in the air on some invisible stringed instrument, or arranging and dealing counters in some curious game. All the while these hysterical tears, without which none of us ever saw him, were making soiled runnels on his white swollen face. The hideous and deliberate grace of his gestures made him like an antic. He was a living grotesque. The other prisoners all watched him, and not one of them smiled. Everybody knew what had happened to him, and that he was being driven insane—was insane already. After half an hour he was ordered in by the warder, and, I suppose, punished. At least he was not at exercise on Monday, though I think I caught sight of him at the corner of the stoneyard, walking in charge of a warder.

On the Tuesday—my last day in prison—I saw him at exercise. He was worse than before, and again was sent in. Since then I know nothing of him, but I found out from one of the prisoners who walked with me at exercise that he had had twenty-four lashes in the cookhouse on Saturday afternoon, by order of the visiting justices on the report of the doctor. The howls that had horrified us all were his.

This man is undoubtedly becoming insane. Prison doctors have no knowledge of mental disease of any kind. They are as a class ignorant men. The pathology of the mind is unknown to them. When a man grows insane, they treat him as shamming. They have him punished again and again. Naturally the man becomes worse. When ordinary punishments are exhausted, the doctor reports the case to the justices. The result is flogging. Of course the flogging is not done with a cat-of-nine-tails. It is what is called birching. The instrument is a rod; but the result on the wretched half-witted man may be imagined.

His number is, or was, A. 2. 11. I also managed to find out his name. It is Prince. Something should be done at once for him. He is a soldier, and his sentence is one of court-martial. The term is six months. Three have yet to run.

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May I ask you to use your influence to have this case examined into, and to see that the lunatic prisoner is properly treated?

No report by the Medical Commissioners is of any avail. It is not to be trusted. The medical inspectors do not seem to understand the difference between idiocy and lunacy—between the entire absence of a function or organ and the diseases of a function or organ. This man A. 2. 11. will, I have no doubt, be able to tell his name, the nature of his offence, the day of the month, the date of the beginning and expiration of his sentence, and answer any ordinary simple question; but that his mind is diseased admits of no doubt. At present it is a horrible duel between himself and the doctor. The doctor is fighting for a theory. The man is fighting for his life. I am anxious that the man should win. But let the whole case be examined into by experts who understand brain-disease, and by people of humane feelings who have still some common-sense and some pity. There is no reason that the sentimentalist should be asked to interefere. He always does harm.

The case is a special instance of the cruelty inseparable from a stupid system, for the present Governor of Reading is a man of gentle and humane character, greatly liked and respected by all the prisoners. He was appointed in July last, and though he cannot alter the rules of the prison system he has altered the spirit in which they used to be carried out under his predecessor. He is very popular with the prisoners and with the warders. Indeed he has quite altered the whole tone of the prison-life. Upon the other hand, the system is of course beyond his reach as far as altering its rules is concerned. I have no doubt that he sees daily much of what he knows to be unjust, stupid, and cruel. But his hands are tied. Of course I have no knowledge of his real views of the case of A. 2.11, nor, indeed, of his views on our present system. I merely judge him by the complete change he brought about in Reading Prison. Under his predecessor the system was carried out with the greatest harshness and stupidity.—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

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May 27. OSCAR WILDE.

3/9, Lamont Road,
Chelsea. S. W.

Dear Sir,

You might send proofs of articles to the above address when ready.

I wrote also ~~[illegible]~~ wishing to know whether Mr. Jacobs would care for a MS. (about 75 pp. or twenty thousand words) entitled "The London Workhouse" or "The Workhouse From within"? If so, I think I could produce a very interesting book on that subject. If he fancies the idea I'll call and [illegible]

MAY 28, 1897.

THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY CHRONICLE.

SIR,—I most emphatically protest against the misleading answers which were given by the Home Secretary to Mr. Davitt last night anent my dismissal from the Prison Service.

In the first place he asserted that Mr. Davitt had "received a very incorrect account of the circumstances." The account which the hon. Member received was a facsimile of what appeared in *The Daily Chronicle*, and that account I defy either the Home Secretary or the Prison Commissioners to refute. Secondly, with reference to the unsatisfactory explanation which I give. I fail to see how I could have made any more satisfactory one unless by telling a deliberate falsehood. (Probably that is what he meant.) I admitted the offence, expressed my regrets, so what more could I do?

If the Commissioners could find no other way of justifying their action, it certainly would have been much better not to have justified it at all, as the inferences made use of by the Home Secretary leads one to believe that I had purposely misrepresented the case or suppressed some material fact, which I deny.
—Yours, &c., T. MARTIN.

103, Queen's-road, Reading.

"Cant [illegible]"

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T. Macaulay

MARCH 24, 1898.

DON'T READ THIS

IF YOU WANT TO BE HAPPY TO-DAY.

THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY CHRONICLE.

SIR,—I understand that the Home Secretary's Prison Reform Bill is to be read this week for the first or second time, and as your journal has been the one paper in England that has taken a real and vital interest in this important question, I hope that you will allow me, as one who has had long personal experience of life in an English gaol, to point out what reforms in our present stupid and barbarous system are urgently necessary.

From a leading article that appeared in your columns about a week ago, I learn that the chief reform proposed is an increase in the number of inspectors and official visitors, that are to have access to our English prisons.

Such a reform as this is entirely useless. The reason is extremely simple. The inspectors and justices of the peace that visit prisons come there for the purpose of seeing that the prison regulations are duly carried out. They come for no other purpose, nor have they any power, even if they had the desire, to alter a single clause in the regulations. And what is cruel and ignorant is this very code of regulations. No prisoner has ever had the smallest relief, or attention, or care from any of the official visitors. The visitors arrive not to help the prisoners, but to see that the rules are carried out. Their object in coming is to ensure the enforcement of a foolish and inhuman code. And, as they must have some occupation, they take very good care to do it. A prisoner who has been allowed the smallest privilege dreads the arrival of the inspectors. And on the day of any prison inspection the prison officials are more than usually brutal to the prisoners. Their object is, of course, to show the splendid discipline they maintain.

The necessary reforms are very simple. They concern the needs of the body and the needs of the mind of each unfortunate prisoner.

With regard to the first, there are three permanent punishments authorised by law in English prisons:—

1. Hunger.
2. Insomnia.
3. Disease.

The food supplied to prisoners is entirely inadequate. Most of it is revolting in character. All of it is insufficient. Every prisoner suffers day and night from hunger. A certain amount of food is carefully weighed out ounce by ounce for each prisoner. It is just enough to sustain, not life exactly, but existence. But one is always racked by the pain and sickness of hunger.

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The result of the food—which in most cases consists of weak gruel, badly-baked bread, suet, and water—is disease in the form of incessant diarrhœa. This malady, which ultimately with most prisoners becomes a permanent disease, is a recognised institution in every prison. At Wandsworth Prison, for instance—where I was confined for two months, till I had to be carried into hospital, where I remained for another two months—the warders go round twice or three times a day with astringent medicines, which they serve out to the prisoners as a matter of course. After about a week of such treatment it is unnecessary to say that the medicine produces no effect at all. The wretched prisoner is then left a prey to the most weakening, depressing, and humiliating malady that can be conceived; and if, as often happens, he fails, from physical weakness, to complete his required revolutions at the crank or the mill he is reported for idleness, and punished with the greatest severity and brutality. Nor is this all.

Nothing can be worse than the sanitary arrangements of English prisons. In old days each cell was provided with a form of latrine. These latrines have now been suppressed. They exist no longer. A small tin vessel is supplied to each prisoner instead. Three times a day a prisoner is allowed to empty his slops. But he is not allowed to have access to the prison lavatories, except during the one hour when he is at exercise. And after five o'clock in the evening he is not allowed to leave his cell under any pretence, or for any reason. A man suffering from diarrhœa is consequently placed in a position so loathsome that it is unnecessary to dwell on it, that it would be unseemly to dwell on it. The misery and tortures that prisoners go through in consequence of the revolting sanitary arrangements are quite indescribable. And the foul air of the prison cells, increased by a system of ventilation that is utterly ineffective, is so sickening and unwholesome that it is no uncommon thing for warders, when they come in the morning out of the fresh air and open and inspect each cell, to be violently sick. I have seen this myself on more than three occasions, and several of the warders have mentioned it to me as one of the disgusting things that their office entails on them.

The food supplied to prisoners should be adequate and wholesome. It should not be of such a character as to produce the incessant diarrhœa that, at first a malady, becomes a permanent disease.

The sanitary arrangements in English prisons should be entirely altered. Every prisoner should be allowed to have access to the lavatories when necessary, and to empty his slops when necessary. The present system of ventilation in each cell is utterly useless. The air comes through choked-up gratings, and through a small ventilator in the tiny barred window, which is far too small, and too badly constructed, to admit any adequate amount of fresh air. One is only allowed out of one's cell for one hour out of the twenty-four that compose the long day, and so for twenty-three hours one is breathing the foulest possible air.

accept this invitation in sober earnest, demure will curve her lips into a smile. The odds are she will put you to the blush with the sharp question: 'Anything wrong?'.....She is *unconsciously* the most selfish creature of her sex. To find her mate, you must go to England and take the gilded youth who fondly believes that the world owes him a living."

The back seat taken by the breadwinner, and the shrine on which his women-folk are exalted, are duly noted, as is the fact that, apart from politics and business, "the young American man follows wherever his sister, or some other man's sister, may lead."

Chapters are devoted to 'Ranch Life,' 'Business Life,' 'Anglo-Franco Californians' (an exclusive set who try to maintain the standard of European life: "English menservants, French cooks and dresses, *decadent* pictures, five o'clock tea, eight o'clock dinner," &c.), and hired servants, of whom the author has had varied experience and has much to tell.

The chapters on shooting and fishing are full of interest to sportsmen, and should be useful to those who contemplate a visit. They may perhaps be none the worse for Mr. Vachell's warning that there exists in the West a rooted antipathy to everything British. Perhaps this feeling of dislike may be softened and got rid of by the increased facilities for travel which bring Californians yearly in greater numbers to this country, in which, so far as we know, the enmity is not reciprocated. The volume is well turned out, easy to handle, and entertaining to read.

After an interval two additions, Vols. XXIV. and XXV., have been made to the excellent and luxurious "Author's Edition" of the *Works of Mark Twain* (Chatto & Windus), which has given us some things not generally known in England, and an excellent of Madame Vigée-Lebrun. In reading the memoirs she wrote when she was eighty-two the Keeper of Trianon has detected many errors, and very excusable they are, if we think how old the lady-painter was when she recalled the days of her youth. The perusal of the unpublished letters, rediscovered at the Bibliothèque Nationale, proves how variable in style the memoirs are, and discloses the unacknowledged, but certain collaboration of some writer among Aimé Martin's circle—perhaps Aimé Martin himself. Therefore it was a good idea to pick and choose among documents the chief value of which lies in the picturesqueness of Madame Vigée-Lebrun's impressions, and her own original vision of people and things. Pierre de Nolhac means to allow room for the twelve years she spent out of France, and the portraits, of international interest, of the women she came across in Rome, Naples, Petersburg, and London.

The woman-painter of Marie Antoinette's Court could describe with her pen the womanly figures of the time, just as she immortalized them with her brush. With deep sympathy and insight Pierre de Nolhac has studied her life and work and her circle, and his book, which will come out before the end of the year, will match the works of art already published in the Goupil edition—books about Fragonard, Nattier, and Boucher. Next year M. de Nolhac hopes to issue a popular edition of that series, after the publication of his important work on the history of Versailles, to which he has devoted several years.

In spite of these engrossing occupations, the author of 'Marie Antoinette' manages to find time to watch over the making of some books in which he takes an interest.

DR. JOHNSON

Oxford.

The hitherto unpublished letter of Dr. Johnson which is printed below is undoubtedly genuine. The original is the property of Lieut.-Col. Congreve, V.C., D.S.O., who is a direct lineal descendant of Dr. Johnson's correspondent, and who has very kindly allowed me to transcribe it for publication. It is written on the square-shaped letter paper of the period, the last page having been left blank, and then folded over to form a covering and receive the address. The letter is sealed with red wax, and the impression, although much cracked, shows quite clearly the design of the seal, which is most interesting and extraordinary. I hope the publication of it in *The Athenæum* will lead to an explanation, and perhaps the discovery of the seal. Dr. Arthur J. Evans, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, who has special knowledge of engraved gems, has identified this impression as from a celebrated gem which belonged to Gaston, Duke of Orleans, was bequeathed by him to Louis XIV. in 1660, passed by purchase in 1787 to the Empress Catherine of Russia, and is now in The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. It represents a male head veiled and laureated. The gem was the subject of much controversy among the antiquaries of the eighteenth century. Baudelot [de Dairval] published in 1698 a book attempting to prove that it represented the head of Ptolemy Auletes, King of Egypt:—

"Winckelman after refuting the conjectures of Baudelot, pretends that it represents Hercules in the service of Omphale queen of Lydia.....Lochan and Leblond, rejecting the explanation of Winckelman, have classed this head among the unknown ones. M. Koehler, keeper of the engraved stones

heat of an Egyptian desert, no thrill in anything but the words and cadences; the poem, like 'Salome,' is a sort of celebration of dark rites.

Wilde was not in the highest sense a poet, though his verse has occasionally a technical singularity, as in 'The Sphinx,' which can delude the mind through the ears to listen, when the lines are read out, to a flow of loud and bright words which are as meaningless as the monotonous Eastern music of drum and gong is to the Western ear. One or two lyrics and 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' come near to being poetry, but there is nothing else, in the blank-verse plays or the idylls, and elegies, and sonnets of the volume of 1881, which is anything but imitation of some good poet, but dangerous model.

Where Wilde comes nearest to poetry is in the prose stories (now contained in one volume) of 'A House of Pomegranates' and 'The Happy Prince.' Wilde's sense of beauty was uncertain, his technique came and went; yet, in these stories for children, what was artificial in him, and vulgar, and foolish (as in the earlier sensational and burlesque experiments) took on lovely new draperies, which suggested at times the beating of a real heart under them. Every narrative is an allegory, and is filled with delicate suggestions; its scene is a dream-world, made for the pleasure of children; it is something between a fairy-tale and an 'Imaginary Portrait.' The style has quieted; the teller of the tale is hardly discernible. Here are parables, decked out for young minds—moral tales, one might call them; somehow as real in their imaginary world as the impossible credible people in the modern comedies. The same ingenuity is seen at play, here for children, there for too acutely grown-up people. Each has its own atmosphere, form, and locality.

But when we turn from this almost faultless book to the 'Poems in Prose' of a later date, we find an attempt to be Biblical and remotely imaginative, and a specious symbolism creeps in, no longer sincere or significant. It is a shallow pool, trying to look as if it had some deep meaning.

Here we may begin to consider what Wilde really understood by beauty, a word which recurs persistently throughout his work. In an enumeration of his gifts ("the gods have given me almost everything"), he had said with confidence: "Whatever I touched I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty." His expression of what he conceived by beauty is developed from many models, and has no new ideas in it; one can trace it, almost verbally, to Pater, Flaubert, Gautier, Baudelaire, and other writers from whom he drew sustenance. Throughout a large part of his work he is seen deliberately imitating the effects that these and other writers have achieved before him. All through the 'Intentions' there is a far-off echo of Pater; in 'Salome' melodrama is mixed with recollections of 'Pelléas et Mélisande' and of 'La Tentation de Saint Antoine.' 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' owes much, we think, to the work of Huysmans. Of the writers named, all but the last had their own sense of beauty, their own imaginative world where they were at home, and could speak its language naturally. Wilde's style is constantly changing, as made things do when one alters them, and it is only at intervals that it ceases to be artificial, imitative, or pretentious. The attempt to write constantly in a beautiful way leads to a vast amount of grandiloquence, which is never convincing because it is evidently not sincere. In a sense, every writer is sincere, for he has only himself to work with. But Wilde was artificial; he looked on art as "the supreme reality," and life as "a mere mode of fiction." Hence the attempt to combine words and epithets in a striking and unusual way, the frequent incapacity to distinguish between pure gold and alloy, the preference, indeed, of tinsel to plain cloth; the uncertainty, in short, as to what was real and what was false beauty. That sense, never instinctive, goes off gradually in the course of his career, ending in the conscious sonority of such passages in 'De Profundis' as this: "or to move with sufficient stateliness of music through the purple pageant of my incommunicable woe." Here words have ceased to become capable of expressing what may have been a sincere feeling.

From the first, one of Wilde's limitations had been his egoism, his self-absorption, his self-admiration. This is one of the qualities which have marred the delightful genius of the Irish nation, and it can be traced in the three other Irishmen who may be said to have formed, with Wilde, a group apart in the literature of our time. It is not needful to name them: one is a dramatist, one a novelist, one a poet. All have remarkable qualities, each a completely different individuality, and the desire of each is, as Wilde admits, to "make people wonder." In each there is something not human, which is either the cause or the outcome of an ambition too continually conscious of itself. The great man is indifferent to his greatness; it is an accident if he is so much as conscious of it.

There is a passage in 'De Profundis' in which Wilde brags of his greatness with incredible *naïveté*. It is now well known. It begins: "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age"; and it continues: "Byron was a symbolic figure, but his relations were to the passion of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, of larger scope." Now Wilde, with his critical sense, must have been aware that the words *noble*, *permanent*, and *vital* were precisely the negatives of whatever reasonable praise could be given to him. The only moment of nobility which can be found in the whole of his work is in those two terrible, unforgettable, no doubt useless letters, written to a daily paper on the atrocities committed legally in English prisons; and they were wrung from him through the personal suffering which had forced upon him a consciousness of the evil that was being done to others more helpless than himself. Those letters should have put all England in revolt against its permitted ignorance of cruelty, and it is well that they should have been reprinted at the end of 'De Profundis.' Beyond this one outburst, where shall we find in Wilde's work anything noble, permanent, or vital? Byron, with all his defects, had these qualities in the highest degree. He too was an egoist, but his egoism was justified, and he took his greatness lightly. He did not, like Wilde, pose admiringly before the reflection of himself in a flattering mirror.

Wilde was a maker of idols, of painted idols, Salome and the Sphinx. He bowed down before the pagan gods who were never actual to him. He did often good service for what seemed to him, and often was, the cause of art against the Philistines. But his manner of attacking them was not always adequate, and many of the stones in his sling rebounded upon him from the forehead of Goliath.

To alter the minds of men is to possess a vast magnetic and irrefutable mind filled by a conviction which may seem irrational, as the forces of nature seem to our ignorance. Wilde was never concerned with fundamental ideas, except perhaps in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism,' which contains his best and sanest and most valuable thinking, yet is almost as entertaining as 'Intentions.'

> "Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue....In a word, it comes [the use of the word "unhealthy"] from that monstrous and ignorant thing that is called Public Opinion, which, bad and well-meaning as it is when it tries to control action, is infamous and of evil meaning when it tries to control thought or Art....One who is an Emperor and King may stoop down to pick up a brush for a painter, but when the democracy stoops down it is merely to throw mud.... It is impossible for the artist to live with the People. All despots bribe. The people bribe and brutalise."

All that has been laughed at; but it is indeed a fine and severe form of wit, in which the truths are hardly so much as paradoxes.

'Intentions' is the most amusing book of criticism in English. It has nothing to say that has not been proved or disproved already, but never was such boyish disrespect for ideas, such gaiety of paradox. Its flaw is that it tries to be Paterish and pagan and Renaissance and Greek, and to be clothed in Tyrian robes, and to tread "with tired feet the purple white-starred fields of asphodel." But it is possible to forget the serious, exasperating pages in a lazy delight in so much pleasant wit. "Utterance," the Irishman's need of talk and invariable talent for it: that is there, scattering itself casually like fireworks, but on its way to become a steady illumination.

Wilde's last and greatest discovery was when, about the year 1891, the idea came to him that the abounding wit, which he had kept till then chiefly for the entertainment of his friends, could be turned