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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. **14**

quite naturally into a new kind of play. Sheridan was the best model at hand to learn from, and there were qualities of stage speech and action in which he could surpass him. Then might not Alfred de Musset show him some of the secrets of fine comedy? He had, to start with, a wit that was typically Irish in its promptness and spontaneity. His only rival in talk was Whistler, whose wit was unpleasantly bitter. The word sprang from Wilde's lips, some unsought nonsense, a flying paradox; Whistler's was a sharper shaft, but it flew less readily. And now this inventiveness of speech found itself at home in the creation of a form of play which, in 'Lady Windermere's Fan,' begins by being seriously and tragically comic, and ends in 'The Importance of Being Earnest,' which is a sort of sublime farce, meaningless and delightful.

'Lady Windermere's Fan' has been imitated since by popular playwrights, and Wilde was justified in saying:—

"I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterisation."

One begins by admiring its wit; one ends by being convinced by its drama. What other dramatist of our age has concealed such ingenuity of plot under such ready wit; has presented life jesting so gaily on the edge of a precipice, over which no one quite falls? A temperament is expressed in an epigram, and the speech comes naturally in its place. In 'A Woman of No Importance' the epigrams almost obliterate the action until the end of the third act, almost every sentence being a separate piece of wit. Many of the epigrams are celebrated, almost classic ('The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden. It ends with Revelations.' 'The English country gentleman galloping after a fox—the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable'), yet the click, click of them is after a time almost tedious. Even the stupid people never say stupid things.

'A Woman of No Importance' is scarcely so good, dramatically, as 'Lady Windermere's Fan,' and 'An Ideal Husband' is not so good as either, while 'The Importance of Being Earnest' is by far the most perfect of the four. It is, however, really the least witty, and too serious in its parade of the circumstances, which are as winding and difficult as a maze. All are experimental, all have some ingenious difference, though the actual stage tricks do not vary much in method. There is always a fan, or a glove, or a letter, or a handbag by which somebody is incriminated or identified. Dramatically 'Lady Windermere's fan' is more significant and more natural than Ibsen's "vine-leaves in the hair," which is a bad symbol; and as for the hand-bag in 'The Importance of Being Earnest,' it is an unparalleled invention of its kind. That perfect play is nothing but delicious nonsense. "Delightful work may be produced under burlesque and farcical con-

ditions," Wilde had written, a few years before he wrote the play, and he added: "And in work of this kind the artist in England is allowed very great freedom." It is a great freedom that he takes in making a work of art in the act of merely amusing us. The matter has been questioned, quite unnecessarily. A great wit who can condense that volatile essence into a permanent sawtooth, perfume, or tonic, has his place among artists. Wilde had many failures; they have been taken for masterpieces; but if, as it has been said by the just, generous, and scrupulous editor of his works, "in his last years he was the severest critic of his own achievements," it is not unlikely that he would have been content to survive, in men's memories and in his own printed pages, as the most brilliant and entertaining wit of his time.

NEW NOVELS.

The Great Anulet. By Maud Diver. (Blackwood & Sons.)

Mrs. DIVER excels in representing the better side of Anglo-Indian life, political and domestic, and bringing vividly before us its strenuousness, self-sacrifice, and loyalty. A husband and wife, parted on their wedding day by a misunderstanding of the kind habitual in fiction, are the principal characters, and the story, which errs perhaps on the side of length, is woven round the gradual process of their reconciliation. But such wider issues as frontier warfare, Himalayan exploration, and cholera camps play a large part in the action, and are handled with sympathy and power. The author's men and women are clearly drawn, and nearly always impress us as real people; and her style shows refinement and distinction.

Crossings. By Mary and Jane Findlater. (Smith, Elder & Co.)

THIS novel must be commended to all readers who regard delicate and finished characterization as the essential element of a good story. The scene is laid in a Scottish village, and the nationality of the actors is unmistakable; but there is no infusion of broad dialect. We are introduced to a lady of magnetic vitality, who entertains a passion for a man hopelessly divided from her, while at the same time she is the object of the generous ardour of a boy which is as futile as her own. The situation has its tragic elements, but she has too sound a nature to be permanently embittered. Her relations to her family are the more generous for the tempestuous inner life which none of them suspects. Besides the rather too perfect hero, there is a stiff old admiral who is very human under his buckram.

Dean's Hall. By Maude Goldring. (John Murray.)

To judge from her title-page, Miss Goldring makes her first appearance in this Yorkshire story of a Quaker gentleman's choice between love of property, sanctified

by regard for his father, and love of woman as represented by a farmer's daughter. The author's point of view is non-sectarian, and the most likeable characters in her story are two who cause trouble in the Quaker pen and one who does not belong to it. A local celebrity called the Wise Woman of Littondale has been rather boldly appropriated by Miss Goldring, who, by Letty Thwaites's kindness to the Wise Woman's daughter, shows that her heroine was not afraid of slander. The usual signs of a novice's work are absent; but though power is shown in the rupture between the hero and his sister, and humour is to be found in the thought as well as the dialect of the story, the whole is deficient in movement.

The Red Neighbour. By W. J. Eccott. (Blackwood & Sons.)

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY French history has been studied to good purpose for the plot of this fascinating romance. The conversations are bright and natural; and the action, which involves some impressive scenes of unfamiliar type, is uniformly brisk. The *dénouement* occurs soon after the death of Turenne. Several scenes are laid in Paris, but none at Court; and most of the characters make journeys more or less exciting to Alsace, or even beyond the Rhine. The character of the title, a woman of the people who has become rich as a dealer in cosmetics and great ladies' confidences, is a remarkable creation. Her successful prosecution of a long-cherished scheme of revenge is a main factor in the complicated, but clearly delineated theme. The alternations of humour, stirring episodes, and delicate sentiment are skilfully managed.

The Little God's Drum. By Ralph Straus. (Chatto & Windus.)

MATRIMONIAL alliances, either contemplated or achieved, by the members of a literary and aesthetic coterie with headquarters in Curzon Street form the staple of this exquisite comedy, in which the most amusing figure—an elderly bachelor addicted to matchmaking—tries to pair off the ladies of his acquaintance with his eligible male friends. In humorous contrast with the conventional lovers depicted in fiction, some of the characters are too impulsive in the bestowal or loan of their affections, while others redress the balance by being too tepid and deliberate. The heroine is a poor orphan who lives in the East End, and her experiences supply most of the lighter element which serves as foil to the lighter episodes.

The House on the Borderland. By William H. Hodgson. (Chapman & Hall.)

Mr. HODGSON has a genuine power for evoking horrible images; otherwise he could never have been inspired, by the sight of the Irish "gentleman who pays the rent," to imagine the existence of "swine-creatures" of loathsome aspect and occult ability, who besiege the house

prose, and where Sicilian shepherds and pun spiders shepherd and pun spiders and return, and everywhere like some of the sound of a faint murmur. Verses are spoken by carefully directed marionettes; songs, dialogues, and dramas are presented, with changing scenery and bewildering lights. At times the show-man comes before the curtain, and cutting a caper, argues, expostulates, and calls the attention of the audience to the perfection of the mechanical by which his effects are produced, and his own skill in the handling of the wires. Scene follows scene, without rest or interval, until suddenly the lights go out, and the play is over. Such an artificial world Wilde created, and it is only now beginning to settle down into any sort of known order. In Germany he is the writer of 'Salome,'

has cried: "Kill him!" under her eyes. The stage direction instructs us:—
He dies—Simone rises and looks at Bianca. She comes towards him as one dazed with wonder and with outstretched arms.
Bianca.
Why did you not tell me you were so strong?
Simone.
Did you not tell me you were beautiful?
Then the curtain falls, and we are fed with a fruitless epigram. Now turn to that scene which ends the third act of 'Lady Windermere's Fan,' The appearance of Mrs. Erlynne from Door R. is a great climax, because it is psychologically right and theatrically right. Her words, which seem to say nothing, are tragic, because they are the expression of a concealed heroism. The curtain falls on a suspense which leaves us breathless. 'The Duchess of Padua' is meant to be an imitation of Webster or Marston, a macabre tragedy of blood. It is meant to be passionate and heroic, and splendid

of a poetical Nature-study written in Miltonic blank verse, and appearing in the age of Pope, has so surprised the critics that they have hailed him, on the one hand, as primarily a philosophic poet; on the other, as a forerunner of the romantic revival, precisely as André Chénier, who translated some lines of Thomson, has been regarded in France. But Thomson, like Chénier, was essentially *de son siècle*. Mr. Macaulay does good service in pointing out that Thomson was "in a certain sense the complement of Pope, applying to country scenes something of the same power of true observation and vivid portraiture, which Pope used upon the town." Thomson is not primarily a philosophic poet; he uses the relations of man with Nature only for ornament and digression, just as Pope introduces the supernatural machinery of the Sylyph to embroider his description of town life in 'The Rape of the Lock.'

Perhaps the most valuable effect of Mr. Macaulay's sketch of the literary conditions of the time is to bring into clear relief the fact that Thomson, though an original poet, did not create the taste by which he was appreciated: "The very artificiality of London literary society had been preparing the way for some such assertion as his of the claims of the country." Mr. Macaulay, in tracing the literary pedigree of the poet, shows that there had been a singular outburst of Nature poetry in blank verse among Edinburgh students of his time, and that Thomson was not so much an independent founder of a school of poetry as the most eminent member of a group of contemporary poets, including Ritcaltoun, Lady Winchelsea, Mallet, Armstrong, and Dyer, all working in the same pursuit of Nature. Upon these points, as upon other crucial questions of style and tendency, we find Mr. Macaulay a singularly wise and temperate guide. The evidence of handwriting, by which he finally identified Thomson's collaborator in the Hagley revision of 'The Seasons' as Lyttelton—not Pope, as had been fondly held by some—was set forth in *The Athenæum* (Oct. 1, 1904). We do not understand, by the way, the plan of the indexer of this volume, who has registered "Industry, triumphs of;" but has naught to say of "Indolence."

The Works of Oscar Wilde. 11 vols. (Methuen & Co.)

OSCAR WILDE was a prodigious enter-tainer, and now that his complete works are brought together—eleven volumes of them, with another or two to come, in white and pale gold covers, fine paper, print, and margins, each volume separate, so that they can be arranged in what order you like—they have the aspect of a kind of 'Thousand and One Nights,' so vari-coloured are they. The whole pageant is decorative, and passes swiftly; blood streams harmlessly across stages where a sphinx sits, with and without a secret, repeating clanging verse and mysterious

by regard for his father, and love of woman as represented by a farmer's daughter. The author's point of view is non-sectarian, and the most likeable characters in her story are two who cause trouble in the Quaker pen and one who does not belong to it. A local celebrity called the Wise Woman of Littondale has been rather boldly appropriated by Miss Goldring, who, by Letty Thwaites's kindness to the Wise Woman's daughter, shows that her heroine was not afraid of slander. The usual signs of a novice's work are absent; but though power is shown in the rupture between the hero and his sister, and humour is to be found in the thought as well as the dialect of the story, the whole is deficient in movement.

MUMÆNETHA EHT

THE ATHENÆUM

prose, and where Sicilian shepherds and young girls on English lawns pass and return, and everywhere paradox-puppets turn somersaults like agile acrobats to the sound of a faint music which sometimes rises to a wild clamour. Verse and prose are spoken by carefully directed marionettes; songs, dialogues, and dramas are presented, with changing scenery and bewildering lights. At times the show-man comes before the curtain, and, cutting a caper, argues, expostulates, and calls the attention of the audience to the perfection of the mechanism by which his effects are produced, and his own skill in the handling of the wires. Scene follows scene, without rest or interval, until suddenly the lights go out, and the play is over.

Such an artificial world Wilde created, and it is only now beginning to settle down into any sort of known order. In Germany he is the writer of 'Salome,' in France a poet and critic, in England the writer of 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol,' or perhaps of 'De Profundis.' Nowhere is there any agreement as to the question of relative merit; in fact, nowhere is there any due acknowledgment of what that merit really is. There is, indeed, so much variety in Wilde's work, he has made so many experiments in so many directions, that it is only now, with this almost complete edition before us, that we can trace the curious movement, forward and backward, of a mind never fully certain of its direction. It was a long time before Wilde discovered that he was above all a wit, and that it was through the medium of the comic stage that he could best express his essential talent. His desire was to write tragedies, above all romantic tragedies in verse. His failure in the attempt was hopeless, because he had got hold of the wrong material and the wrong manner.

The earliest thing that he wrote was a play in prose, now printed for the first time, called 'Vera; or, the Nihilists,' written for the most part in excited language of this kind: "Peace! ye gorged adders, peace!" The plot is melodramatic, and the whole action altogether futile; it is amusing to read now and discover the first ineffectual attempts to be witty. Prince Paul says to the Marquis de Poitraro: "Ah! Marquis, I trust Madame la Marquise is well." The Marquis answers: "You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more of her." Whereat the Prince, bowing, replies: "Perhaps I see more in her, Marquis." Soon after 'Vera' comes 'The Duchess of Padua.' This and the fragment of 'The Florentine Tragedy' are also published for the first time, and we see in them an attempt to write romantic drama. The end of 'The Florentine Tragedy' is done on almost the same method as the end of the third act of 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' It is meant to be a great climax, and it is hardly only a bad epigram. The merchant husband, Simone, who is hated by his wife Bianca, kills her lover (to whom she

has cried: "Kill him!") under her eyes. The stage direction instructs us:—

He dies—Simone rises and looks at Bianca. She comes towards him as one dazed with wonder and with outstretched arms.

Bianca.

Did you not tell me you were so strong?

Why?

Did you not tell me you were so strong?

Why?

Then the curtain falls, and we are fed with a fruitless epigram. Now turn to that scene which ends the third act of 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' The appearance of Mrs. Erylne from Door R. is a great climax, because it is psychologically right and theatrically right. Her words, which seem to say nothing, are tragic, because they are the expression of a concealed heroism. The curtain falls on a suspense which leaves us breathless.

'The Duchess of Padua' is meant to be an imitation of Webster or Marston, a macabre tragedy of blood. It is meant to be passionate and heroic, and splendid in verisification. The passion is mere ice; the speech, hackneyed, far-fetched, and cheap-bought, is offered at second hand. The murderous Duchess would go beyond Lady Macbeth, and wash, not only her hands, but also her soul. "Can I not wash my hands? Ay, but my soul?" she exclaims. Her moods and her lover's toss to and fro from one to the other a dozen times in less than twenty minutes in a corridor at the top of a staircase where the murder has just been committed. The time is past when lovers can say to one another:—

Duchess. And Passion sets a seal upon the lips.
Griffin. Oh, with mine own life let me break that seal!

Still less can we listen to one of the same lovers, at their first meeting, when he elaborates on the spur of the moment this series of figures of speech:—

Nay, sweet, lift up your head,
Let me unlock those little scarlet doors
That shut in music, let me dive for coral
In your red lips, and I'll bear back a prize
Richer than all the gold the Griffin guards
In rude Armenia.

"These are but words, words, words," as the Duchess comments on another occasion. Even the frenzied speech in which the two lovers squabble with one another on the edge of death has no natural heat, no appropriate anguish.

Wilde's last attempt at romantic drama is, if not successful, filled with a strange fascination, not easy to define. 'Salome,' which in Germany is regarded as great work, is difficult for us to dissociate from Beardsley's illustrations, in which what is icily perverse in the dialogue (it cannot be designated drama) becomes in the ironical designs pictorial, a series of poses. On the stage these poses are less decorative than on the page, though they have an effect of their own, not fine, but languid and horrible and frozen. To Wilde passion was a thing to talk about with elaborate and coloured words. Salome is a doll, as many have imagined her, soulless, set in motion by some pitiless destiny, personified momentarily by her mother; Herod is a nodding mandarin in a Chinese grotesque. So 'The Sphinx' offers no subtlety, no

quite natural, a few years before he wrote the play, and he added "and every where paradox-puppets turn somersaults like agile acrobats to the sound of a faint music which sometimes rises to a wild clamour. Verse and prose are spoken by carefully directed marionettes; songs, dialogues, and dramas are presented, with changing scenery and bewildering lights. At times the show-man comes before the curtain, and, cutting a caper, argues, expostulates, and calls the attention of the audience to the perfection of the mechanism by which his effects are produced, and his own skill in the handling of the wires. Scene follows scene, without rest or interval, until suddenly the lights go out, and the play is over.

both from prudence and patriotism, to obey the call of their friend. Thus the President was forced back upon so-called Clerical Conservatives, "partisans des Régimes monarchiques d'espèces variées... ennemis invétérés et connus de la République." It was the association with the idea of monarchy that destroyed the Clerical Conservative party of the time. M. de Martens discusses the first rise of the idea of separation of Church and State, and also the resurrection of "le mouvement social," both of which he rightly declares to have happened while he was in office.

Sport and Life on the Pacific Slope, by Horace Annosley Vachell (Eveleigh Nash), is not a new book, for it is advertised as "Completely revised, with new chapters added"; yet in the edition of 1908 there is no reference whatever to the original one of 1900. Beyond this, and the curious mistake for an Englishman to make of a reference to "Hardy Bros. of Amick-on-Tweed" (p. 318), we have no fault to find, though some sensitive readers in this country, not to mention those who dwell in the Wild West, may resent the author's candid criticism. Yet it is clear that he has profound admiration for that country, "the land of to-morrow," and its inhabitants, whilst his eyes are open to the defects of his own people as fully as to those of the West he says:—

"Our pretty Californienne dines in the middle of the day and sups at six. The same girl, in England, would be painfully ill at ease in the presence of a stranger. Moreover, you would note regretfully that the English girl's skirt was ill hung, that her hair was somewhat towheaded, that her shoes were vilely cut. The Californienne, on the contrary, challenges criticism out of a pair of sparkling eyes. 'Take a square look at me,' she seems to say; 'it will brace you up.' Should you accept this invitation in sober earnest, defiance 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 men-servants, French cooks and dresses, *décolleté* 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 animosity 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

series of portraits of the famous humorist. Here are again two portraits: the treatise on 'Christian Science,' a striking example of the author's keen and outspoken public criticism, which we noticed at length some while since; and a volume of stories and trifles which do not lack inimitable touches, though they include a type of humour more popular in the United States than in this country.

AMONG new editions of interest is Mr. Arthur Symonds's revision of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Constable), a body of delicate criticism on writers who largely through Mr. Symonds have become known to English readers. The appearance of such a book in a second edition is matter for congratulation, for criticism which deals with ideas rather than facts or anecdotes is not popular in this country.

Lois, by Emily Hickey (R. & T. Washbourne), is a tale for young people written from the standpoint of the modern Roman Catholic, which (as here presented) does not appear to differ greatly from that of the High Church Anglican. It is a well-written story, dealing in a sympathetic spirit with the adventures, literary and otherwise, of two devoted girl-friends, who are both conscientious Agnostics. One of them, under the influence of "advanced" opinions, trifles for a moment with free love, but redeems herself by an heroic death; the other ultimately finds peace as a "tertiary" of St. Dominic. The tone of the book is controversial, but in no way intolerant.

NOTES FROM PARIS.

IN his peaceful retreat at Versailles Pierre de Nolhac is continuing his studies on the eighteenth century. He has given up Petrarck in order to study the figure of Madame Vigée-Lebrun. In reading the memoirs she wrote when she was eighty-two 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.

Not having been able himself to relate the life of Madame du Barry, he refers his friends to the book Claude St. André is going to devote to her. It may meet with as great a success in London as in Paris, as it is owing to the kindness of your amateurs and ours that the author has been able to reproduce unknown miniatures by Lawrence, Hall and Cosway, and little-known busts by Lemoyne, Houdou, and Caffari. These will be a revelation for lovers of the eighteenth century; and some chapters on the part the Countess played during the Revolution will come out at the end of this month with a preface by Pierre de Nolhac, from which I quote the following passage:—

"Ce n'est point l'image vague de la courtesane traditionnelle, mais bien un vrai caractère de femme, qui nous est présenté dans le livre solide et brillant de M. Claude St. André. Pour la première fois on voit vivre Mme. du Barry; on évoque un être réel, très particulier et d'une séduction incontestable. L'auteur a fondé par le seul effort d'une lucide conscience d'historien des traits qui semblaient contradictoires. Bien n'est dissimulé des origines de la maîtresse royale et des coupables intrigues qui l'élevèrent si haut. Rien n'est caché de sa facilité à paraître une morale commune à bien des femmes de son temps; mais de même son rôle est expliqué sans prévention hostile, en parfaite connaissance de l'époque et des milieux. Les amis comme les adversaires, dont plusieurs, jusqu'ici inconnus, ont minutieusement été interrogés; et si l'on peut soupçonner par endroits le jeune écrivain de quelque faiblesse pour son héroïne, c'est qu'il possède ce don de sympathie sans lequel on ne pénètre guère l'intimité des âmes, don précieux pour celui qui se penche, afin de les entendre, sur les figures du passé."

It is this same gift of sympathy which distinguishes the work of Pierre de Nolhac. C. G.

DR. JOHNSON: LETTER AND SEAL.

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 referring the conjectures of Baudelot, pretends that it represents Hercules in the service of Omphale queen of Lydia.... Laclau 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

quite naturally into a new kind of play. Sheridan was the best model at hand to learn from, and there were qualities of stage speech and action in which he could surpass him. Then might not Alfred de Musset show him some of the secrets of fine comedy? He had, to start with, a wit that was typically Irish in its promptness and spontaneity. His only rival in talk was Whistler, whose wit was unpleasantly bitter. The word sprang from Wilde's lips, some unsought nonsense, a flying paradox; Whistler's was a sharper shaft, but it flew less readily. And now this inventiveness of speech found itself at home in the creation of a form of play which, in 'Lady Windermere's Fan,' begins by being seriously and tragically comic, and ends in 'The Importance of being Earnest,' which is a sort of sublime farce, meaningless and delightful.

'Lady Windermere's Fan' has been imitated since by popular playwrights, and Wilde was justified in saying:—

"I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterisation."

One begins by admiring its wit; one ends by being convinced by its drama. What other dramatist of our age has concealed such ingenuity of plot under such ready wit; has presented life jesting so gaily on the edge of a precipice, over which no one quite falls? A temperament is expressed in an epigram, and the speech comes naturally in its place. In 'A Woman of No Importance' the epigrams almost obliterate the action until the end of the third act, almost every sentence being a separate piece of wit. Many of the epigrams are celebrated, almost classic ("The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden. It ends with Revelations." "The English country gentleman galloping after a fox—the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable"), yet the click, click of them is after a time almost tedious. Even the stupid people never say stupid things.

'A Woman of No Importance' is scarcely so good, dramatically, as 'Lady Windermere's Fan,' and 'An Ideal Husband' is not so good as either, while 'The Importance of being Earnest' is by far the most perfect of the four. It is, however, really the least witty, and too serious in its parade of the circumstances, which are as winding and difficult as a maze. All are experimental, all have some ingenious difference, though the actual stage tricks do not vary much in method. There is always a fan, or a glove, or a letter, or a handbag by which somebody is incriminated or identified. Dramatically Lady Windermere's fan is more significant and more natural than Ibsen's "vine-leaves in the hair," which is a bad symbol; and as for the hand-bag in 'The Importance of being Earnest,' it is an unparalleled invention of its kind. That perfect play is nothing but delirious nonsense. "Delightful work may be produced under burlesque and farcical con-

ditions," Wilde had written, a few years before he wrote the play, and he added: "And in work of this kind the artist in England is allowed very great freedom." It is a great freedom that he takes in making a work of art in the act of merely amusing us. The matter has been questioned, quite unnecessarily. A great wit who can condense that volatile essence into a permanent savour, perfume, or tonic, has his place among artists. Wilde had many failures; they have been taken for masterpieces; but if, as it has been said by the just, generous, and scrupulous editor of his works, "in his last years he was the severest critic of his own achievements," it is not unlikely that he would have been content to survive, in men's memories and in his own printed pages, as the most brilliant and entertaining wit of his time.

NEW NOVELS.

The Great Amulet. By Maud Diver. (Blackwood & Sons.)

Mrs. DIVER excels in representing the better side of Anglo-Indian life, political and domestic, and bringing vividly before us its strenuousness, self-sacrifice, and loyalty. A husband and wife, parted on their wedding day by a misunderstanding of the kind habitual in fiction, are the principal characters, and the story, which errs perhaps on the side of length, is woven round the gradual process of their reconciliation. But such wider issues as frontier warfare, Himalayan exploration, and cholera camps play a large part in the action, and are handled with sympathy and power. The author's men and women are clearly drawn, and nearly always impress us as real people; and her style shows refinement and distinction.

Crossriggs. By Mary and Jane Findlater. (Smith, Elder & Co.)

THIS novel must be commended to all readers who regard delicate and finished characterization as the essential element of a good story. The scene is laid in a Scottish village, and the nationality of the actors is unmistakable; but there is no infusion of broad dialect. We are introduced to a lady of magnetic vitality, who entertains a passion for a man hopelessly divided from her, while at the same time she is the object of the generous ardour of a boy which is as futile as her own. The situation has its tragic elements, but she has too sound a nature to be permanently embittered. Her relations to her family are the more generous for the tempestuous inner life which none of them suspects. Besides the rather too perfect hero, there is a stiff old admiral who is very human under his buckram.

Dean's Hall. By Maude Goldring. (John Murray.)

To judge from her title-page, Miss Goldring makes her first appearance in this Yorkshire story of a Quaker gentleman's choice between love of property, sanctified

by regard for his father, and love of woman as represented by a farmer's daughter. The author's point of view is non-sectarian, and the most likeable characters in her story are two who cause trouble in the Quaker pen and one who does not belong to it. A local celebrity called the Wise Woman of Littondale has been rather boldly appropriated by Miss Goldring, who, by Letty Thwaites's kindness to the Wise Woman's daughter, shows that her heroine was not afraid of slander. The usual signs of a novice's work are absent; but though power is shown in the rupture between the hero and his sister, and humour is to be found in the thought as well as the dialect of the story, the whole is deficient in movement.

The Red Neighbour. By W. J. Eccott. (Blackwood & Sons.)

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY French history has been studied to good purpose for the plot of this fascinating romance. The conversations are bright and natural; and the action, which involves some impressive scenes of unfamiliar type, is uniformly brisk. The *dénouement* occurs soon after the death of Turenne. Several scenes are laid in Paris, but none at Court; and most of the characters make journeys more or less exciting to Alsace, or even beyond the Rhine. The character of the title, a woman of the people who has become rich as a dealer in cosmetics and great ladies' confidences, is a remarkable creation. Her successful prosecution of a long-cherished scheme of revenge is a main factor in the complicated, but clearly delineated theme. The alternations of humour, stirring episodes, and delicate sentiment are skilfully managed.

The Little God's Drum. By Ralph Straus. (Chatto & Windus.)

MATRIMONIAL alliances, either contemplated or achieved, by the members of a literary and æsthetic coterie with headquarters in Curzon Street form the staple of this exquisite comedy, in which the most amusing figure—an elderly bachelor addicted to matchmaking—tries to pair off the ladies of his acquaintance with his eligible male friends. In humorous contrast with the conventional lovers depicted in fiction, some of the characters are too impulsive in the bestowal or loan of their affections, while others redress the balance by being too tepid and deliberate. The heroine is a poor orphan who lives in the East End, and her experiences supply most of the serious element which serves as foil to the lighter episodes.

The House on the Borderland. By William H. Hodgson. (Chapman & Hall.)

MR. HODGSON has a genuine power for evoking horrible images; otherwise he could never have been inspired, by the sight of the Irish "gentleman who pays the rent," to imagine the existence of "swine-creatures" of loathsome aspect and occult ability, who besiege the house

of a poetical Nature-study written in Miltonic blank verse, and appearing in the age of Pope, has so surprised the critics that they have hailed him, on the one hand, as primarily a philosophic poet; on the other, as a forerunner of the romantic revival, precisely as André Chénier, who translated some lines of Thomson, has been regarded in France. But Thomson, like Chénier, was essentially *de son siècle*. Mr. Macaulay does good service in pointing out that Thomson was "in a certain sense the complement of Pope, applying to country scenes something of the same power of true observation and vivid portraiture, which Pope used upon the town." Thomson is not primarily a philosophic poet; he uses the relations of man with Nature only for ornament and digression, just as Pope introduces the supernatural machinery of the Sylph to embroider his description of town life in 'The Rape of the Lock.'

Perhaps the most valuable effect of Mr. Macaulay's sketch of the literary conditions of the time is to bring into clear relief the fact that Thomson, though an original poet, did not create the taste by which he was appreciated: "The very artificiality of London literary society had been preparing the way for some such assertion as his of the claims of the country." Mr. Macaulay, in tracing the literary pedigree of the poet, shows that there had been a singular outburst of Nature poetry in blank verse among Edinburgh students of his time, and that Thomson was not so much an independent founder of a school of poetry as the most eminent member of a group of contemporary poets, including Riccaltoun, Lady Winchelsea, Mallet, Armstrong, and Dyer, all working in the same pursuit of Nature. Upon these points, as upon other crucial questions of style and tendency, we find Mr. Macaulay a singularly wise and temperate guide. The evidence of handwriting, by which he finally identified Thomson's collaborator in the Hagley revision of 'The Seasons' as Lyttelton—not Pope, as had been fondly held by some—was set forth in *The Athenæum* (Oct. 1, 1904). We do not understand, by the way, the plan of the indexer of this volume, who has registered "Industry, triumphs of," but has naught to say of "Indolence."

The Works of Oscar Wilde. 11 vols. (Methuen & Co.)

OSCAR WILDE was a prodigious entertainer, and now that his complete works are brought together—eleven volumes of them, with another or two to come, in white and pale gold covers, fine paper, print, and margins, each volume separate, so that they can be arranged in what order you like—they have the aspect of a kind of 'Thousand and One Nights,' so varicoloured are they. The whole pageant is decorative, and passes swiftly; blood streams harmlessly across stages where a sphinx sits, with and without a secret, repeating clanging verse and mysterious

prose, and where Sicilian shepherds and young girls on English lawns pass and return, and everywhere paradox-puppets turn somersaults like agile acrobats to the sound of a faint music which sometimes rises to a wild clamour. Verse and prose are spoken by carefully directed marionettes; songs, dialogues, and dramas are presented, with changing scenery and bewildering lights. At times the showman comes before the curtain, and, cutting a caper, argues, expostulates, and calls the attention of the audience to the perfection of the mechanism by which his effects are produced, and his own skill in the handling of the wires. Scene follows scene, without rest or interval, until suddenly the lights go out, and the play is over.

Such an artificial world Wilde created, and it is only now beginning to settle down into any sort of known order. In Germany he is the writer of 'Salome,' in France a poet and critic, in England the writer of 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol,' or perhaps of 'De Profundis.' Nowhere is there any agreement as to the question of relative merit; in fact, nowhere is there any due acknowledgment of what that merit really is. There is, indeed, so much variety in Wilde's work, he has made so many experiments in so many directions, that it is only now, with this almost complete edition before us, that we can trace the curious movement, forward and backward, of a mind never fully certain of its direction. It was a long time before Wilde discovered that he was above all a wit, and that it was through the medium of the comic stage that he could best express his essential talent. His desire was to write tragedies, above all romantic tragedies in verse. His failure in the attempt was hopeless, because he had got hold of the wrong material and the wrong manner.

The earliest thing that he wrote was a play in prose, now printed for the first time, called 'Vera; or, the Nihilists,' written for the most part in excited language of this kind: "Peace! ye gorged adders, peace!" The plot is melodramatic, and the whole action altogether futile; it is amusing to read now and discover the first ineffectual attempts to be witty. Prince Paul says to the Marquis de Poivraro: "Ah! Marquis. I trust Madame la Marquise is well." The Marquis answers: "You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more of her." Whereat the Prince, bowing, replies: "Perhaps I see more in her, Marquis." Soon after 'Vera' comes 'The Duchess of Padua.' This and the fragment of 'The Florentine Tragedy' are also published for the first time, and we see in them an attempt to write romantic drama. The end of 'The Florentine Tragedy' is done on almost the same method as the end of the third act of 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' It is meant to be a great climax, and it is really only a bad epigram. The merchant-husband, Simone, who is hated by his wife Bianca, kills her lover (to whom she

has cried: "Kill him!") under her eyes. The stage direction instructs us:—

He dies—Simone rises and looks at Bianca. She comes towards him as one dazed with wonder and with outstretched arms.

Bianca. Why Did you not tell me you were so strong?
Simone. Why Did you not tell me you were beautiful?

Then the curtain falls, and we are fed with a fruitless epigram. Now turn to that scene which ends the third act of 'Lady Windermere's Fan.' The appearance of Mrs. Erlynne from Door R. is a great climax, because it is psychologically right and theatrically right. Her words, which seem to say nothing, are tragic, because they are the expression of a concealed heroism. The curtain falls on a suspense which leaves us breathless.

'The Duchess of Padua' is meant to be an imitation of Webster or Marston, a macabre tragedy of blood. It is meant to be passionate and heroic, and splendid in versification. The passion is mere ice; the speech, hackneyed, far-fetched, and cheap-bought, is offered at second hand. The murderous Duchess would go beyond Lady Macbeth, and wash, not only her hands, but also her soul. "Can I not wash my hands? Ay, but my soul?" she exclaims. Her moods and her lover's toss to and fro from one to the other a dozen times in less than twenty minutes in a corridor at the top of a staircase where the murder has just been committed. The time is past when lovers can say to one another:—

Duchess. And Passion sets a seal upon the lips.
Guido. Oh, with mine own, life let me break that seal!

Still less can we listen to one of the same lovers, at their first meeting, when he elaborates on the spur of the moment this series of figures of speech:—

Nay, sweet, lift up your head,
Let me unlock those little scarlet doors
That shut in music, let me dive for coral
In your red lips, and I'll bear back a prize
Richer than all the gold the Griffin guards
In rude Armenia.

"These are but words, words, words," as the Duchess comments on another occasion. Even the frenzied speech in which the two lovers squabble with one another on the edge of death has no natural heat, no appropriate anguish.

Wilde's last attempt at romantic drama is, if not successful, filled with a strange fascination, not easy to define. 'Salome,' which in Germany is regarded as great work, is difficult for us to dissociate from Beardsley's illustrations, in which what is icily perverse in the dialogue (it cannot be designated drama) becomes in the ironical designs pictorial, a series of poses. On the stage these poses are less decorative than on the page, though they have an effect of their own, not fine, but languid and horrible and frozen. To Wilde passion was a thing to talk about with elaborate and coloured words. Salome is a doll, as many have imagined her, soulless, set in motion by some pitiless destiny, personified momentarily by her mother; Herod is a nodding mandarin in a Chinese grotesque. So 'The Sphinx' offers no subtlety, no

ment would have been even stronger. It seems probable that this poem was constructed by another master from two previous poems, or strings of poems, and its composition shows great art, in spite of occasional inconsistencies.

But we must not plunge into the Homeric question any deeper. One thing is manifest. The old traditional view, maintained by Gladstone, that a single man of genius composed both poems in their integrity, cannot hold its own with modern scholars, and his speculations are now but a sort of prehistoric stratum in the vast controversy. Turning to particular utterances in this book, we cordially agree with what the author says about the dominance of the Greek writers, in every department of knowledge, as classics, down to the Renaissance. In giving the instance of medicine he even understates his case; for long after the Renaissance, and dating from the middle of the seventeenth century, we have learned medical works based wholly upon Hippocrates as an infallible authority, and this in contrast to the theories and practice which were then in vogue. Thoughtful men felt that, far from progress having been made, the world had retrogressed since the golden days of the classical authors. How early the Greeks began to write books is another question on which we wish for some more definite teaching from Mr. Murray. He speaks of the first books as being written with difficulty, probably on prepared skins—no doubt Herodotus's "Ionic hides." But is it not more probable that there were no books earlier than the trade with Egypt, and that papyrus was the material, even in the eighth century B.C. imported for the purpose from Naucratis, or the earlier Egyptian marts, and used in Greece? Nor is it likely that this material was particularly expensive.

The use of analogy in this book, which we have questioned in the case of the Pentateuch, is nevertheless its most attractive feature. The citation of the growth of the legend of Alexander, as we have it in pseudo-Callisthenes, is apt and interesting. But we should have called the original author rather a Greek-speaking Egyptian than an Egyptian Greek, as Mr. Murray does; and he surely does not appreciate the old habit of inventing for a conqueror a legend of his birth which made him out not a stranger, but a prince of the land he conquered.

To the following statements we cannot subscribe: "The 'Iliad' has been deliberately elaborated on a plan which puts it out of use for the purposes of ordinary recitation"; and "it would occupy 20 to 24 hours of steady declamation." We think, on the contrary, that the 15,000 lines of the 'Iliad' could be recited in a few hours—it would be easy to make the experiment—and also that it is eminently suited for partial recitations. The *aristeia*, for example, of the various heroes are separate chapters in themselves.

On the early invasions of Greece, and the gradual settlement of new and rude

wanderers in the homes of early culture. Mr. Murray is most interesting. But even though the fort at Athens was of old called the *polis*, we do not feel that the nucleus of the Greek cities was usually the stronghold which the Hellenic invaders had first occupied, as invaders, for safety. Thus the Temenion, on the shore of Argos, which had been the original fort of the Doric invader, was still pointed out in historic times, but it never became the capital of Argolis.

We have found conjecture of this ingenious quality in many pages of the book. We cannot but admire it, but we are constantly disposed to question the arguments brought forward. Nor is this at all the fault of the author's style, which is on the whole exceedingly attractive, though we cannot but ask why he uses "barbarity" for *barbarism*. The two words seem to us distinct, the first implying moral censure, the latter social backwardness. Mr. Murray does not favour the latter word, or discards it as unnecessary. But we must not trifle with so serious an author.

James Thomson. By G. C. Macaulay. "English Men of Letters," New Series. (Macmillan & Co.)

THE popularity of the poetry of James Thomson has in the last fifty years undergone some eclipse. As the poet of Nature, his light has been dimmed by the greater suns, Wordsworth and Tennyson. But he was a true poet, with the true poet's illuminating vision of common things, the power of observation and the memory of the artist. Also his admirable treatment of blank verse, and the Spenserian stanza—curiously in contrast with his failures in the uncongenial couplet and his faults of diction—will preserve him always from contempt, though we may think the praise some critics bestow on his mastery of metre and rhythm excessive. At his best he could write half-lines and phrases that can be mistaken for the work of his masters, Milton and Shakspeare, and passages that, without possessing the varied tones and swelling music of the "mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies," yet have a pleasing rhetorical swing and cadence of their own. "Thomson," Gray observes, "has an ear sometimes." But he was something more than a genuine poet in mind and temperament. He was also a philosopher, with wisdom and humour enough, as Mr. Macaulay's sane and sober retelling of the story of his life reminds us, both to preach and to practise the virtues implied in "an elegant sufficiency, content, retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books":—

I care not, Fortune, what you me deny;
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face.

The tradition of his laziness, fostered by the record of his habits of late rising, eating the sunny side of the peaches in his garden with his hands in his pockets, and cutting his books with the snuffers, coupled with his own humorous description

of himself as "a bard more fat than bard beseems," and the choice of subject in 'The Castle of Indolence,' has resulted in his being sometimes exalted into a monster of sluggish corpulence, a prodigy of obese inertia. The fact that he was a very active walker, a very late worker, as well as the quality, quantity, and careful workmanship and revision of his poems, demonstrates the exaggeration which underlies that view. A poet, and an assiduous worker in the profession of poetry, Thomson more than most men practised the precept of *Candide*, "Il faut cultiver notre jardin." He did not, indeed, always confine himself to the cultivation of his own plot in the domain of literature. He wrote plays, for which his friends and compatriots secured a certain success. Scotchmen might, in the words of a squib of the times, with tuneful hands and merry feet attest them to be true-born wit. But in his dramas, as Johnson (whose criticism of a poet with whom he was not in sympathy is brilliant and just) rightly observed, "his diffusive and descriptive style produced declamation rather than dialogue." As for his unreadable poem on Liberty, Englishmen can scarcely regret the patriotic and political feeling which inspired it, when they remember that the same feeling gave them 'Rule, Britannia!'

Thomson's true calling, however, was, in his own excellent phrase, the portrait-painting of Nature. It is the observation of 'The Seasons' as well as the exquisite workmanship of 'The Castle of Indolence' which gives him his place in the history of English poetry. Is it possible that Voltaire was thinking of Thomson, the enthusiastic gardener, the devotee of poetry, the contented philosopher, when he penned the phrase which sums up the ironic lessons of 'Candide'? Voltaire had met the English poet both in England and in Paris; he admired 'The Seasons,' and, indeed, his quotation of the lines

In what far-distant region of the sky,
Hush'd in deep silence, sleep ye when 'tis calm?

in answer to Boswell's question as to the mode of existence of ideas which had passed out of our consciousness, but were afterwards to be recollected, implies an intimate knowledge of that poem. Moreover, only a year after the publication of 'Candide,' 'Socrate' was produced, founded, as Voltaire stated, upon a drama in prose by the late Mr. Thomson, so that the latter may well have been in Voltaire's mind.

Now that James Thomson has at last been awarded a place among "English Men of Letters," the poet has found in Mr. Macaulay a sober, sympathetic, and scholarly biographer, and a critic who does not allow his reasoned judgments to be impaired by any passion for brilliant paradox. Though nobody would claim for Thomson a place in the highest rank of poets, both his choice and treatment of subject, and his subsequent influence upon English and French literature, render a careful analysis of his exact position of importance. The phenomenon

belonging to the emperor of Russia,.....concludes [from a story related by Plutarch, 'Quæes. Græc.,' 58] that it is not Hercules at the court of Omphale, but Hercules conqueror of the Meropes, who is represented on this gem."—From Sir F. Douce's autograph note on first fly-leaf of the Bodleian copy of Baudelot's 'Histoire de Ptolémée Auletes, Dissertation sur une Pierre Gravée Antique du Cabinet de Madame.' Bodleian Library, Douce B.B. 502.

But how did an impression of this engraved gem, or rather, of a copy of it, get on to Dr. Johnson's letter? I can find no mention of the seal in Boswell, nor in the sale catalogue of Dr. Johnson's goods. If he possessed such a thing, it seems most unlikely that there would be no allusion to it. Who, then, of his friends lent it to him to fasten this letter? Is any one of his time, or just before, or soon after, known to have had a copy of this celebrated and much-discussed engraved amethyst? Were copies of the design allowed to be taken, and sold? Or was this one a royal gift to some especially favoured person, who lent it to Dr. Johnson? Underneath is given an illustration of the impression of the seal on the letter.

The letter itself is dated 1755. I call attention to this date and those given above, as plausible conjectures may arise, as they have in my mind, which the dates annihilate. There were intervening vicissitudes, but as—to judge from the dates—they do not seem to affect the issue, it would only complicate matters to insert an account of them.



The letter is addressed "To the Rev^d Mr Congreve, at Leacroft near Lichfield," and runs as follows:—

DEAR SIR There is a kind of restoration to youth in the revival of old friendships. Your letter revived many Ideas which time had not indeed obliterated but had thrown back from recollection, and hidden under later occurrences.

The occasion of your letter is very honourable to you, and is therefore in a particular manner pleasing to me. You will not expect that after so many years I should be able to give much positive evidence about the little debt that you mention. I can only say that I know not that it was ever discharged, and promise that if you pay it to my mother, I will return it, if it shall appear by any future proof to have been paid twice.

I fully persuade myself that I shall pass some of the winter months with my mother, I would have come sooner but could not break my Shackles. It will be an additional pleasure to meet you.

Where is your Brother Charles? I once received a letter from him, but I think without direction how to answer it. It is wrong in those who have been early acquainted to suffer time and place to destroy that friendship, which is not easily supplied by any subsequent acquisitions.

I am, Sir,

Your affectionate humble Servant

Oct. 16, 1755.

SAM: JOHNSON.

J. SCHOMBERG.

WATERMARKS.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA has conferred upon M. C. M. Briquet the distinction of Docteur ès Lettres, honoris causa, in recognition of the eminent service rendered to history, archaeology, and ethnology by the publication of his dictionary of watermarks.*

This great work, which has occupied twenty-five years of preparation, and has unhappily cost its author the use of his eyesight, constitutes an astonishing mine of information. As a book of reference it will supersede all the works of preceding authorities. Not only does M. Briquet reproduce facsimiles of between 16,000 and 17,000 ancient watermarks, but to every design he has added an elucidatory note. His introductory pages also contain much valuable information on the history of paper-making and paper-mills.

The motives which impelled makers for many centuries, and in common throughout Europe, to employ religious emblems as their trade-marks, have as yet not been satisfactorily explained. In his 'Principia Typographica' S. L. Sotheby conjectured that watermarks were dictated by the nature of the books in which they are found. He points out that in the Bible printed by Eggesteyn the mark of a crown is used in the paper on which the Book of Kings was struck off, the bull's-head mark having been used in every other part of the work. Again, in the first edition of 'Berlingheri Geographia' the marks of the paper on which the text is printed differ materially from those in that used for the charts. The watermarks in the charts have an allusion to navigation and discovery, "thus leading us," says Sotheby, "to conclude that the paper was made expressly for the occasion." "I venture to assert," he continues, "that until after or probably the close of the fifteenth century there are no marks in paper which may be said to apply individually to the maker of the paper."

The investigations of M. Briquet do not endorse these curious conclusions, although Sotheby was undoubtedly correct in his belief that ancient papermarks carried meanings other than their obvious trade purpose. M. Briquet briefly discusses, but does not attempt to solve, "les nombreux problèmes que soulevent la signification et l'emploi des filigranes." His great work will gain in appreciation as the value of watermarks becomes gradually more realized. Even during the past few weeks their significance has been strikingly evidenced by Mr. W. W. Greg in *The Library*.

HAROLD BAYLEY.

'FOOTSTEPS OF SCOTT.'

IF Mr. Crockett is satisfied that the picture of a severed head at Abbotsford resembles the authentic portraits of Queen Mary Stuart about 1584-7, and if he thinks that the picture is in the style of the late sixteenth century, I am obliged to differ from him. By 1587 Mary, as a contemporary witness remarks, and as authentic portraits of *circa* 1584 prove, was fat and flat-faced; we also know that her hair was grey. The head at Abbotsford does not at all resemble the contemporary portraits and descriptions; and I should look at it several times before I thought of the sixteenth century as the date of its making. The inscription is neither here nor there,

* 'Les Filigranes: Histoire des Marques du Papier des leur Apparition vers 1282 jusqu'er 1600,' 4 vols., London, Quaritch.

unless one can examine it at leisure; inscriptions are too frequently "faked." Mr. Crockett says "it is known that leave was granted for such a picture." Can Mr. Crockett oblige me with information as to the whereabouts of the original document in which permission for painting the severed head is granted? I cannot remember having seen it cited by any writer on the biography or iconography of Mary Stuart, and an exact reference would be a valuable addition to knowledge. THE REVIEWER.

OSCAR WILDE'S LETTERS ON PRISON REFORM.

Oxford.

IN your long and interesting review of 'The Works of Oscar Wilde' you state that the "two terrible, unforgettable letters" on the cruelties of prison life were "no doubt useless," and I am sure that you will be the first to rejoice to know that, so far from their being "useless," there is scarcely a single reform suggested in them by Wilde that has not been carried out more or less as he proposed.

It is related on undeniable authority that the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the question of Prison Reform in the years 1897 and 1898 spent three days considering the suggestions made in Wilde's letters, with what good results may very briefly be stated as follows:—At the end of the first month's imprisonment a prisoner is allowed to write a letter or to receive a visit, and to read a book, instead of waiting three months as formerly; the sanitary arrangements have been improved; the food weighed out each day is somewhat less scanty and more varied; the plank bed is insisted on for the first fourteen days only, instead of a month; and though little children are still committed to most of the horrors of prison life, much has been done of late years in the way of extending the Borstal system. CHRISTOPHER MILLARD.

LIST OF NEW BOOKS.

ENGLISH.

- Theology.*
Barton (G. A.), A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes, 8/6. In the International Critical Commentary.
Creed of Buddha, by the Author of 'The Creed of Christ,' 5/ net.
Duff (A.), Hints on Old Testament Theology, 2/6 net. These essays were written with the idea of explaining the newer results of Old Testament study for teachers.
Godrycz (J.), Doctrine of Modernism and its Refutation, 75 cents net.
Harris (J. R.), Aaron's Breastplate, and other Addresses, 2/6 net. In Books of the Inner Life.
McNeile (Rev. A. H.), Book of Exodus, 10/6. With Introduction and notes. In Westminster Commentaries.
Nash (H. S.), The Atoning Life, 5/ net.
Newman (Cardinal), Church of the Fathers, 2/ net. Reprinted from Historical Sketches, Vol. II. In Longman's Pocket Library.
Pan-Anglican Papers: Church Work amongst the Aborigines in Christendom; Methods of carrying on Missionary Work, III., 2d. each.
Pusey (Rev. E. B.), Prayers, Penitence, Holy Communion, 2/6 net. Holy Communion; Penitence, 1/ net each. Gathered from Pusey's writings by E. H. and F. H.
Sarolea (C.), Cardinal Newman and his Influence on Religious Life and Thought, 3/. In the World's Epoch-Makers.
Sidey (Rev. W. W.), The First Christian Fellowship, 2/ net. A study of the life of Jesus and His twelve Disciples.
Walker (W. L.), Teaching of Christ in its Present Appeal, 2/6 net. New Edition.

Law.

- Harris' Law of Tender, 21/ net.
Rahman (M. Abdur), Institutes of Mussalman Law, 24/ net.
Select Essays in Anglo-American Legal History, Vol. I., 12/ net. Compiled and Edited by a Committee of the Association of American Law Schools.
Topham (A. F.), Real Property, 12/6
Trevelyan (E. J.), Hindu Family Law, 25/ net.

Fine Art and Archeology.

- Allen (G. H.), Curtis (C. D.), Egbert (J. C.), and Van Buren (A. W.), Supplementary Papers of the American School of Classical Studies in Rome, Vol. II. One of the Archaeological Institute of America Publications.

both from prudence and patriotism, to obey the call of their friend. Thus the President was forced back upon so-called Clerical Conservatives, "partisans des Régimes monarchiques d'espèces variées... ennemis invétérés et connus de la République." It was the association with the idea of monarchy that destroyed the Clerical Conservative party of the time. M. de Marcère discusses the first rise of the idea of separation of Church and State, and also the resurrection of "le mouvement social," both of which he rightly declares to have happened while he was in office.

Sport and Life on the Pacific Slope, by Horace Annesley Vachell (Eveleigh Nash), is not a new book, for it is advertised as "Completely revised, with new chapters added"; yet in the edition of 1908 there is no reference whatever to the original one of 1900. Beyond this, and the curious mistake for an Englishman to make of a reference to "Hardy Bros., of Alnick-on-Tweed" (p. 318), we have no fault to find, though some sensitive readers in this country, not to mention those who dwell in the Wild West, may resent the author's candid criticism. Yet it is clear that he has profound admiration for that country, "the land of to-morrow," and its inhabitants, whilst his eyes are open to the defects of his own people as fully as to those of the land of his adoption. Of the women of the West he says:—

"Our pretty Californienne dines in the middle of the day and sups at six. The same girl, in England, would be painfully ill at ease in the presence of a stranger. Moreover, you would note regretfully that the English girl's skirt was ill hung, that her hair was somewhat tumbled, that her shoes were vilely cut. The Californienne, on the contrary, challenges criticism out of a pair of sparkling eyes. 'Take a square look at me,' she seems to say; 'it will brace you up.' Should you accept this invitation in sober earnest, defiance 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 men-servants, French cooks and dresses, *décadent* 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

series of portraits of the famous humorist. Here are again two portraits; the treatise on 'Christian Science,' a striking example of the author's keen and outspoken public criticism, which we noticed at length some while since; and a volume of stories and trifles which do not lack inimitable touches, though they include a type of humour more popular in the United States than in this country.

AMONG new editions of interest is Mr. Arthur Symons's revision of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Constable), a body of delicate criticism on writers who largely through Mr. Symons have become known to English readers. The appearance of such a book in a second edition is matter for congratulation, for criticism which deals with ideas rather than facts or anecdotes is not popular in this country.

Lois, by Emily Hickey (R. & T. Washbourne), is a tale for young people written from the standpoint of the modern Roman Catholic, which (as here presented) does not appear to differ greatly from that of the High Church Anglican. It is a well-written story, dealing in a sympathetic spirit with the adventures, literary and otherwise, of two devoted girl-friends, who are both conscientious Agnostics. One of them, under the influence of "advanced" opinions, trifles for a moment with free love, but redeems herself by an heroic death; the other ultimately finds peace as a "tertiary" of St. Dominic. The tone of the book is controversial, but in no way intolerant.

NOTES FROM PARIS.

IN his peaceful retreat at Versailles Pierre de Nolhac is continuing his studies on the eighteenth century. He has given up Petrarch in order to study the figure 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.

Not having been able himself to relate the life of Madame du Barry, he refers his friends to the book Claude St. André is going to devote to her. It may meet with as great a success in London as in Paris, as it is owing to the kindness of your amateurs and ours that the author has been able to reproduce unknown miniatures by Lawrence, Hall and Cosway, and little-known busts by Lemoyne, Houdon, and Caffieri. These will be a revelation for lovers of the eighteenth century; and some chapters on the part the Countess played during the Revolution will be of historical interest. This work will come out at the end of this month with a preface by Pierre de Nolhac, from which I quote the following passage:—

"Ce n'est point l'image vague de la courtoisie traditionnelle, mais bien un vrai caractère de femme, qui nous est présenté dans le livre solide et brillant de M. Claude St. André. Pour la première fois on voit vivre Mme. du Barry; on évoque un être réel, très particulier et d'une séduction incontestable. L'auteur a fondu par le seul effort d'une lucide conscience d'historien des traits qui semblaient contradictoires. Rien n'est dissimulé des origines de la maîtresse royale et des coupables intrigues qui l'élevèrent si haut. Rien n'est caché de sa facilité à pratiquer une morale commune à bien des femmes de son temps; mais de même son rôle est expliqué sans prévention hostile, en parfaite connaissance de l'époque et des milieux. Les amis comme les adversaires, dont plusieurs, jusqu'ici inconnus, ont minutieusement été interrogés; et si l'on peut soupçonner par endroits le jeune écrivain de quelque faiblesse pour son héroïne, c'est qu'il possède ce don de sympathie sans lequel on ne pénètre guère l'intimité des âmes, don précieux pour celui qui se penche, afin de les entendre, sur les figures du passé."

It is this same gift of sympathy which distinguishes the work of Pierre de Nolhac.
C. G.

DR. JOHNSON: LETTER AND SEAL.

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.....Lachau and Leblond, rejecting the explanation of Winckelman, have classed this head among the unknown ones. M. Koehler, keeper of the engraved stones.

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 in the day, and for the remainder to compose the long day, and so for twenty-three hours one is breathing the foulest possible air.

With regard to the punishment of insomnia, it only exists in Chinese and in English prisons. In China it is inflicted by placing the prisoner in a small bamboo cage; in England by means of the plank bed. The object of the plank bed is to produce insomnia. There is no other object in it, and it invariably succeeds. And even when one is subsequently allowed a hard mattress, as happens in the course of imprisonment, one still suffers from insomnia. For sleep, like all wholesome things, is a habit. Every prisoner who has been on a plank bed suffers from insomnia. It is a revolting and ignorant punishment.

With regard to the needs of the mind, I beg that you will allow me to say something.

The present prison system seems almost to have for its aim the wrecking and the destruction of the mental faculties. The production of insanity is, if not its object, certainly its result. That is a well ascertained fact. Its causes are obvious. Deprived of books, of all human intercourse, isolated from every humane and humanising influence, condemned to eternal silence, robbed of all intercourse with the external world, treated like an unintelligent animal, brutalised below the level of any of the brute-creation, the wretched man who is confined in an English prison can hardly escape becoming insane. I do not wish to dwell on these horrors; still less to excite any momentary sentimental interest in these matters. So I will merely, with your permission, point out what should be done.

Every prisoner should have an adequate supply of good books. At present, during the first three months of imprisonment, one is allowed no books at all, except a Bible, prayer-book and hymn-book. After that, one is allowed one book a week. That is not merely inadequate, but the books that compose an ordinary prison library are perfectly useless. They consist chiefly of third-rate badly-written religious books, so-called, written apparently for children, and utterly unsuitable for children or for anyone else. Prisoners should be encouraged to read, and should have whatever books they want, and the books should be well-chosen. At present the selection of books is made by the prison-chaplain.

Under the present system a prisoner is only allowed to see his friends four times a year, for twenty minutes each time. This is quite wrong. A prisoner should be allowed to see his friends once a month, and for a reasonable time. The mode at present in vogue of exhibiting a prisoner to his friends should be altered. Under the present system, the prisoner is either locked up in a large iron cage, or in a large wooden box, with a small aperture, covered with wire netting, through which he is allowed to peer. His friends are placed in a similar cage, some three or four feet distant, and two warders stand between, to listen to, and, if they wish, stop or interrupt the conversation such as it may be. I propose that a prisoner should be allowed to see his relatives or friends in a room. The present regulations are inexpressively revolting and harassing. A visit from our relatives or friends is to every prisoner an intensification of humiliation and mental distress. Many prisoners, rather than support such an ordeal, refuse to see their friends at all. And I cannot say I am surprised. When one sees one's solicitor, one sees him in a room with a glass door, on the other side of which stands the warder. When a man sees his wife and children, or his parents, or his friends, he should be allowed the same privilege. To be exhibited, like an ape in a cage, to people who are fond of one, and of whom one is fond, is a needless and horrible degradation.

Every prisoner should be allowed to write and receive a letter at least once a month. At present one is allowed to write only four times a year.

No mattress for 14 days
instead of 28 days.

1898
Books

- 1st month: Books of Instruction in addition to religious books.
- 2nd month 1 library book a week
- 3rd " " 2 library books a week.

1898

First visit after 56 days:
then after every 28 days.

First letter after 56 days:
then every 28 days — in lieu of visit.

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This is quite inadequate. One of the tragedies of prison life is that it turns a man's heart to stone. The feelings of natural affection, like all other feelings, require to be fed. They die easily of inanition. A brief letter, four times a year, is not enough to keep alive the gentler and more humane affections by which ultimately the nature is kept sensitive to any fine or beautiful influences that may heal a wrecked and ruined life.

The habit of mutilating and expurgating prisoners' letters should be stopped. At present, if a prisoner in a letter makes any complaint of the prison system, that portion of his letter is cut out with a pair of scissors. If, upon the other hand, he makes any complaint when he speaks to his friends through the bars of the cage, or the aperture of the wooden box, he is brutalised by the warders, and reported for punishment every week till his next visit comes round, by which time he is expected to have learned, not wisdom, but cunning, and one always learns that. It is one of the few things that one does learn in prison. Fortunately, the other things are, in some instances, of higher import.

If I may trespass on your space for a little longer, may I say this? You suggested in your leading article that no prison chaplain should be allowed to have any care or employment outside the prison itself. But this is a matter of no moment. The prison chaplains are entirely useless. They are, as a class, well-meaning, but foolish, indeed silly men. They are of no help to any prisoner. Once every six weeks or so a key turns in the lock of one's cell door, and the chaplain enters. One stands, of course, at attention. He asks one whether one has been reading the Bible. One answers "Yes" or "No," as the case may be. He then quotes a few texts, and goes out and locks the door. Sometimes he leaves a tract.

The officials who should not be allowed to hold any employment outside the prison, or to have any private practice, are the prison doctors. At present the prison doctors have usually, if not always, a large private practice, and hold appointments in other institutions. The consequence is that the health of the prisoners is entirely neglected, and the sanitary condition of the prison entirely overlooked. As a class I regard, and have always from my earliest youth regarded, doctors as by far the most humane profession in the community. But I must make an exception for prison doctors. They are as far as I came across them, and from what I saw of them in hospital and elsewhere, brutal in manner, coarse in temperament, and utterly indifferent to the health of the prisoners or their comfort. If prison doctors were prohibited from private practice they would be compelled to take some interest in the health and sanitary condition of the people under their charge. I have tried to indicate in my letter a few of the reforms necessary to our English prison system. They are simple, practical, and humane. They are, of course, only a beginning. But it is time that a beginning should be made, and it can only be started by a strong pressure of public opinion formularised in your powerful paper, and fostered by it.

But to make even these reforms effectual, much has to be done. And the first, and perhaps the most difficult task is to humanise the governors of prisons, to civilise the warders, and to Christianise the chaplains.—Yours, &c.

THE AUTHOR OF THE "BALLAD
OF READING GAOL."

March 23.

This is quite inadequate. One of the tragedies of prison life is that it turns a man's heart to stone. The feelings of natural affection, like all other feelings, require to be fed. They die easily of inanition. A brief letter, four times a year, is not enough to keep alive the gentler and more humane affections by which ultimately the nature is kept sensitive to any fine or beautiful influences that may heal a wrecked and ruined life.

The habit of mutilating and expurgating prisoners' letters should be stopped. At present, if a prisoner in a letter makes any complaint of the prison system, that portion of his letter is cut out with a pair of scissors. If, upon the other hand, he makes any complaint when he speaks to his friends through the bars of the cage, or the aperture of the wooden box, he is brutalised by the warders, and reported for punishment every week till his next visit comes round, by which time he is expected to have learned, not wisdom, but cunning, and one always learns that. It is one of the few things that one does learn in prison. Fortunately, the other things are, in some instances, of higher import.

If I may trespass on your space for a little longer, may I say this? You suggested in your leading article that no prison chaplain should be allowed to have any care or employment outside the prison itself. But this is a matter of no moment. The prison chaplains are entirely useless. They are, as a class, well-meaning, but foolish, indeed silly men. They are of no help to any prisoner. Once every six weeks or so a key turns in the lock of one's cell door, and the chaplain enters. One stands, of course, at attention. He asks one whether one has been reading the Bible. One answers "Yes" or "No," as the case may be. He then quotes a few texts, and goes out and locks the door. Sometimes he leaves a tract.

The officials who should not be allowed to hold any employment outside the prison, or to have any private practice, are the prison doctors. At present the prison doctors have usually, if not always, a large private practice, and hold appointments in other institutions. The consequence is that the health of the prisoners is entirely neglected, and the sanitary condition of the prison entirely overlooked. As a class I regard, and have always from my earliest youth regarded, doctors as by far the most humane profession in the community. But I must make an exception for prison doctors. They are as far as I came across them, and from what I saw of them in hospital and elsewhere, brutal in manner, coarse in temperament, and utterly indifferent to the health of the prisoners or their comfort. If prison doctors were prohibited from private practice they would be compelled to take some interest in the health and sanitary condition of the people under their charge. I have tried to indicate in my letter a few of the reforms necessary to our English prison system. They are simple, practical, and humane. They are, of course, only a beginning. But it is time that a beginning should be made, and it can only be started by a strong pressure of public opinion formularised in your powerful paper, and fostered by it.

But to make even these reforms effectual, much has to be done. And the first, and perhaps the most difficult task is to humanise the governors of prisons, to civilise the warders, and to Christianise the chaplains.—Yours, &c..

THE AUTHOR OF THE "BALLAD
OF READING GAOLE"

March 23.

Daily Chronicle
March 28, 1898

OUR PRISON SYSTEM.

THE TORTURERS.

[Suggested by a letter to the "Chronicle" from the author of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol."]

The key is turned; before my eyes
The garnished torture-chamber lies;
A burnished place, without a stain,
With speckless galleries of pain;
The moody torturers behind,
Th' experienced wreckers of the mind.
O then their hellish task began,
To madden me their fellow man;
To take a human creature fair,
Then loose an idiot to the air.
'Twas God who said "Let there be light!"
But they restore the dreadful night;
The instruments of chaos, they
Roll back the gloom upon His day.

The merest darkness did they find
To wrap my solitary mind;
So deep, that I no more believed,
Nor hoped; but fearfully conceived
That I God's creature had been hurled,
Out of his scheme, to a blank world,
Where no thing grew, nor was there
sound,

Only a blackness without bound;
Even Christ in such a gulph was blind,
And groped for me, but could not find.
Yet saw I on the ebon night
Roses that dripped with raindrops bright,
I saw the green Atlantic swell
With slow bright dance within my cell.

Roses and ocean disappeared,
And then the darkness worse I feared.
At last one called me as from dawn,
And I on him was swift to fawn,
And by such terror was unmanned,
I could have kissed that cruel hand.
Eternal hunger did they use
My reason slowly to confuse;
And to the grave they kept me nigh,
Yet would not let me wholly die:
Ever half-in, half-out of death,
I drew a calculated breath;
My eyes from slumber did they keep,
Eyes that had earned eternal sleep.
Such humbleness as none should feel
I felt; and to a man would kneel;
Before him like a brute would lie,
And lift to him a shifting eye.
My wife to view her husband came;
I was inured to every shame:
Caged like an ape, my antics played,
Until she fled from me afraid.
No more can I recall, until,
When on me they had worked their will,
I slowly climbed the winding stair,
And drifted helpless through the air.

STEPHEN PHILLIPS.

Get, see it well the in it's power
To man appointed course
And when thou see God in him
O, go long, make man,
In his manner well he outcast man,
And others very mourn

I know not what thou can do right
Or what thou can do wrong,
All the we know who do in good
Is that the well is strong,
The road is like a son,
A son when you are long.

But then I know that every man
That man have made for man,
Since first man took his brother's life,
And he said unto begin,
But when the west and ^{said} ~~knows~~ the clouds
With a most evil ban

With front & grin and feet & ears
As long the prison said:
We keep the old thing in the way
With soul and body man,
And said man can know with it.
And said man heart from ~~heart~~ hand

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[Suggested by a
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To man appointed course
And alien tears will bill for him
O'go long. woken arm,
In his mourners will be outcast men,
And outcasts always mourn

I know not whether laws be right
Or whether laws be wrong,
All that we know who be in gaol
Is that the wall is strong,
The each day is like a year,
A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every law
That men have made for man,
Since first man took his brother's life,
And the sad word began,
But share the chest and ^{said} boards the chaff
Like a most evil game

With front of iron and feet of lead
We trap the person good,
We trap the slippery asphalt ring
With soul and body mowed,
And each man has cross with hate,
And each man's heart cross ~~broken~~ hard

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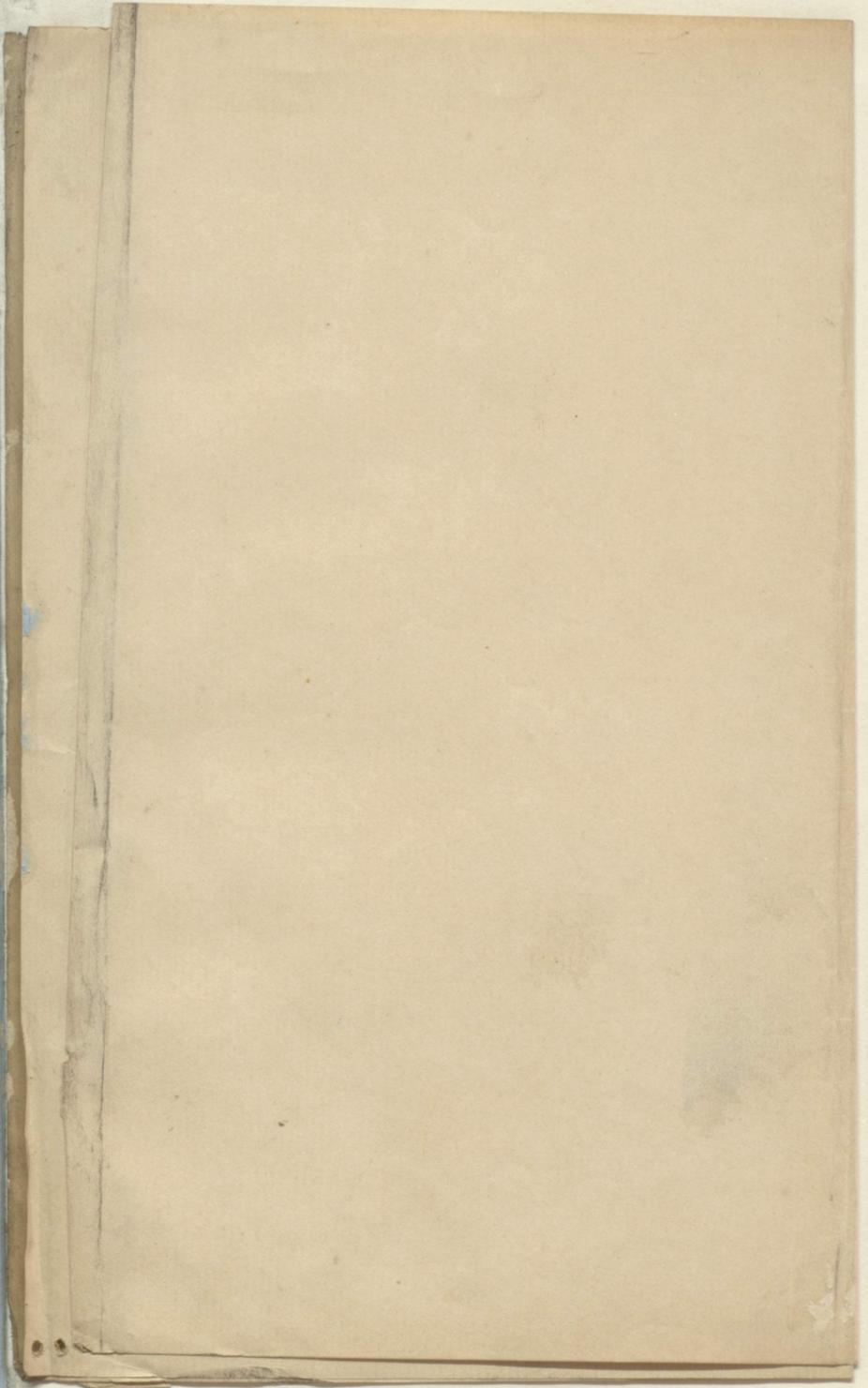
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STEPHEN PHILLIPS.

318
Chap.
Hand Made and paper



OSCAR WILDE'S LETTERS
ON PRISON REFORM

To the Editor of THE ATHENAEUM.

Sir,

In your long and interesting review of the Works of Oscar Wilde there is much that I, in common with other admirers of Wilde, think unkind and even unfair, but there is perhaps only one expression that I can say you are absolutely unjustified in using. You state that the "two terrible, unforgettable letters" on the cruelties of prison life were "no doubt useless", and I am sure that you will be the first to rejoice to know that so far from their being "useless" there is scarcely a single reform suggested in them by Wilde that has not been carried out more or less as he proposed.

It is related on undeniable authority that the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the question of Prison Reform in the years 1897 and 1898 spent three days considering the suggestions made in Wilde's letters, with what good results may very briefly be stated as follows:— At the end of the first month's imprisonment a prisoner is allowed to write a letter or to receive a visit, and to read a book, instead of waiting three months as formerly; the sanitary arrangements have been improved; the food weighed out each day is somewhat less scanty and more varied; the cruel torture of the plank bed is insisted on for the first fourteen days only instead of a month; and though little children are still ~~sent~~ committed to most of the horrors of prison life, much has been done of late years in the

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in the way of extending the Borstal system.

A very great deal still remains to be done to make an English prison a little less like a Siberia or a Devil's Island, but, for the improvements that have taken place since Wilde himself suffered, no small credit must be given to those "two terrible, unforgettable" but, I am glad to say, far from "useless letters, written to a daily paper".

Your Obedient Servant

Oxford, May 19.

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Ifley, near Oxford.

Aug. 31, 1905

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I shall be happy to make fair remuneration for anything you can let me have.

I am yours faithfully

C.S. Millard

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For Mr. Sherard describing Wilde's life in prison. I had intended writing it for an American edition of his book which Turner was not provided with. Probably he would be willing to allow you the use of the material thus supplied. I shall be writing to him shortly and will mention the subject.

In regard to specimens of his hand writing, I have nothing that I would care to see published. People - especially English people - would blame me and condemn me for more severely for breaking the rules of the prison than they would him for breaking the laws of Society. Wilde says in "De Profundis" that the Prisoners' element in life is not the faultless as understood at - No, it is the picture he understood and understood. The English people cannot understand a man who deliberately steps over the traces, but must they in harness if one wishes to keep

The following is my correct
address: —

T. Oppert
Statt

St. George's Workhouse

Falkenberg Road

London, S.W.

3081, 11. 21A

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Iffley, near Oxford.

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The following is my correct
address.

T. Martin

Staff

St. George's Workhouse

Fulham Road

London, S.W.

Ilford, near Oxford.

AUG. 21, 1902

in favour. That is why the Individual is so seldom in favour,
In England it is the men who make the laws who are the most
honoured & Ireland it is the men who break them.

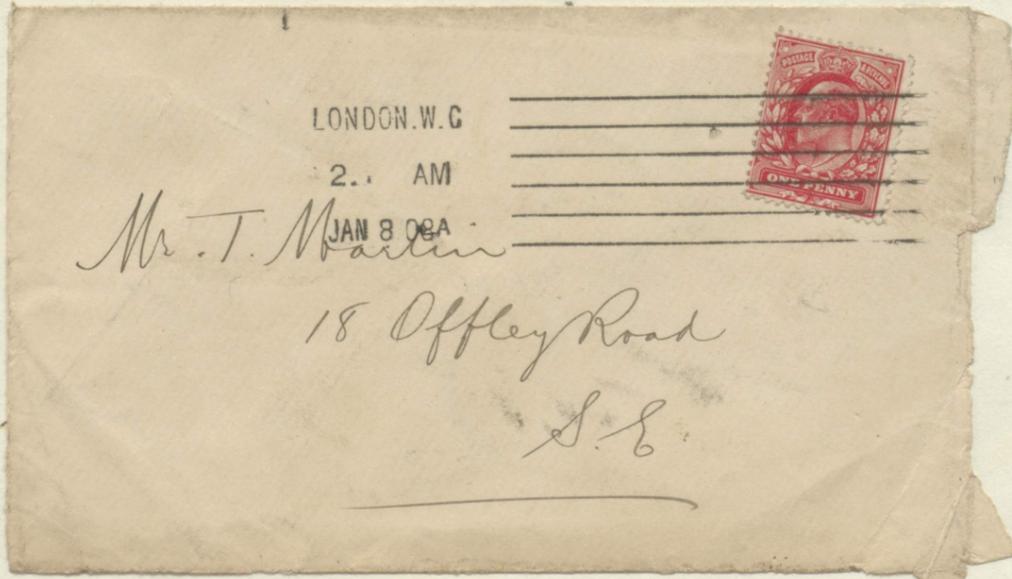
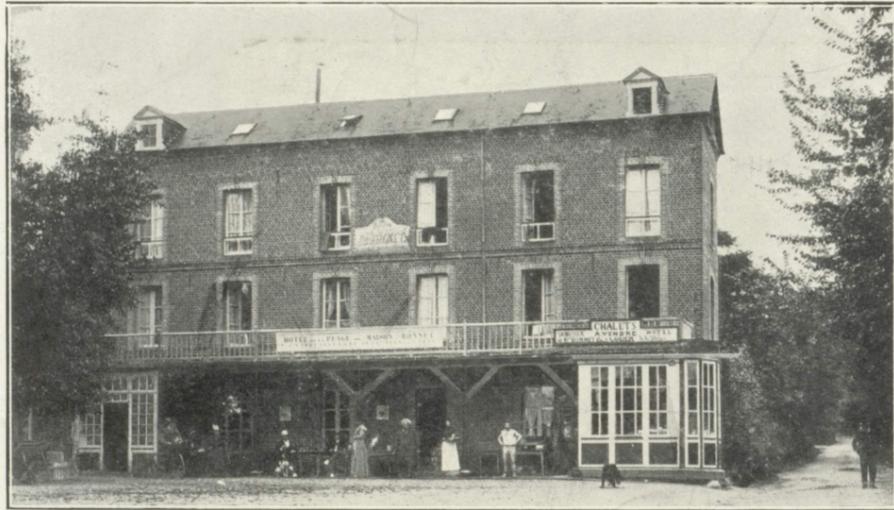
If you were to write and ask Mr Ross he might let you have
a letter of Oscar's, for myself I do not see how I can oblige
you without incurring the censure of the respectable public?
for having held communication with an ex-prisoner.

Yours Sincerely

T. Martin

P. S.

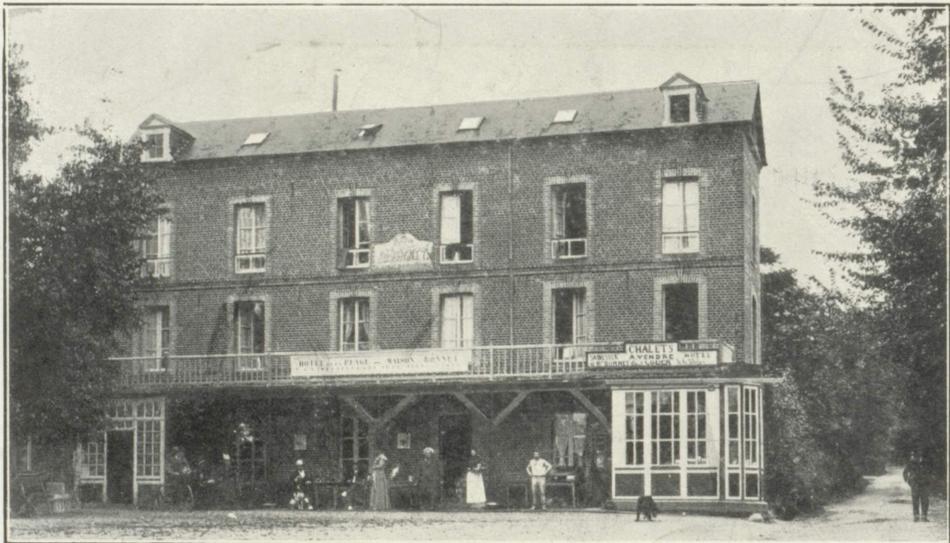
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envelope of his but that is
little good.



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Mr. T. Martin

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18 Offley Road

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