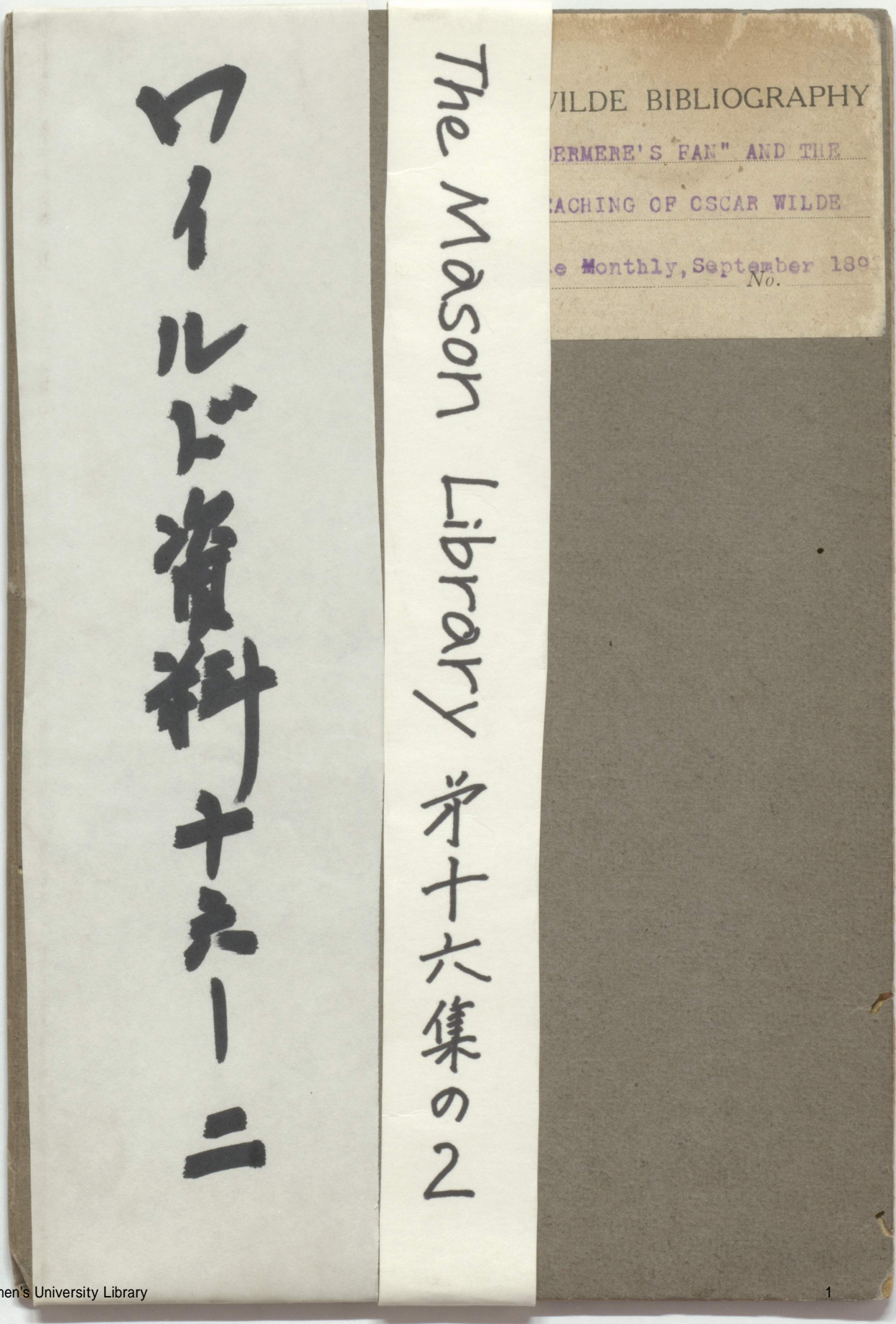




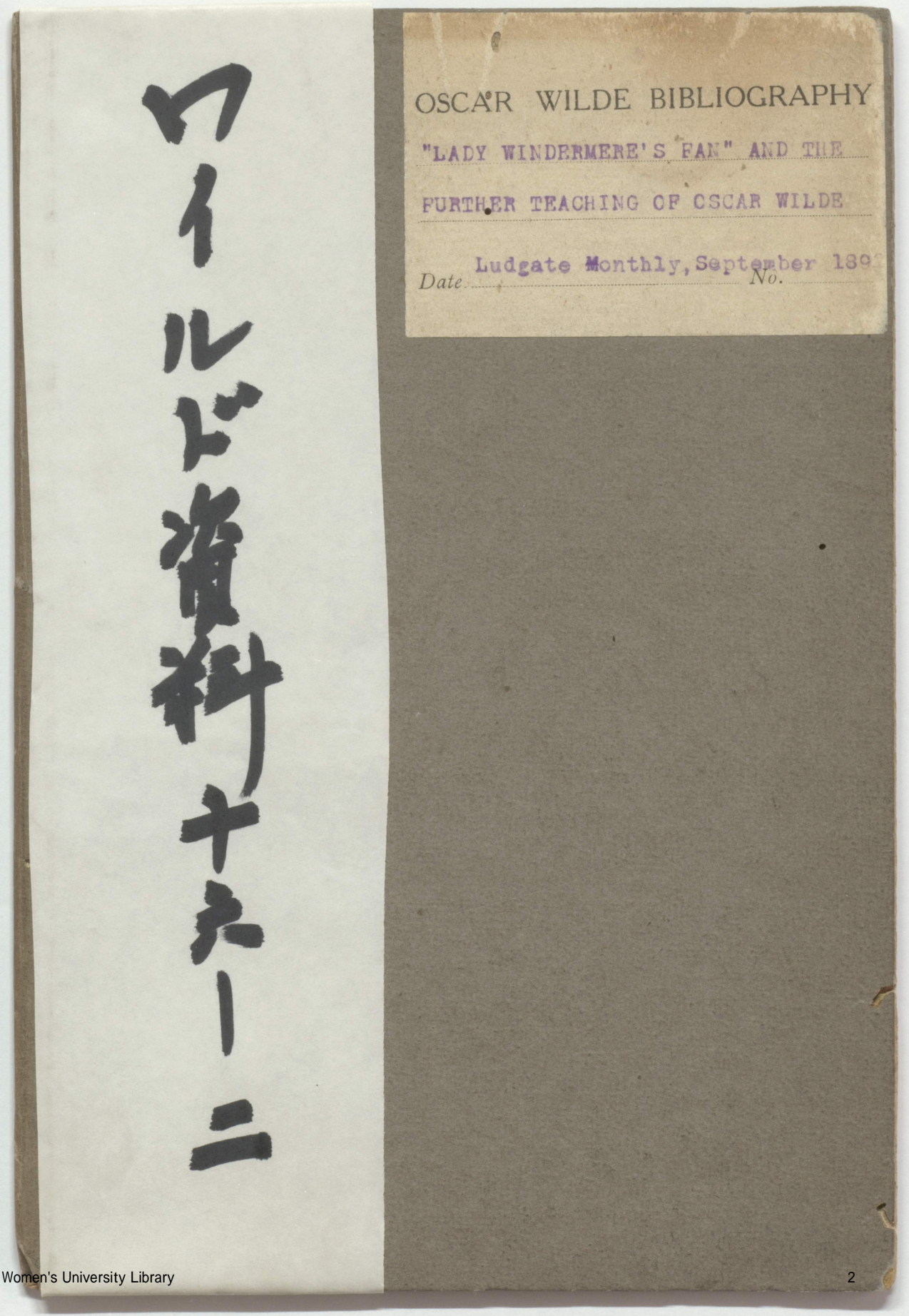
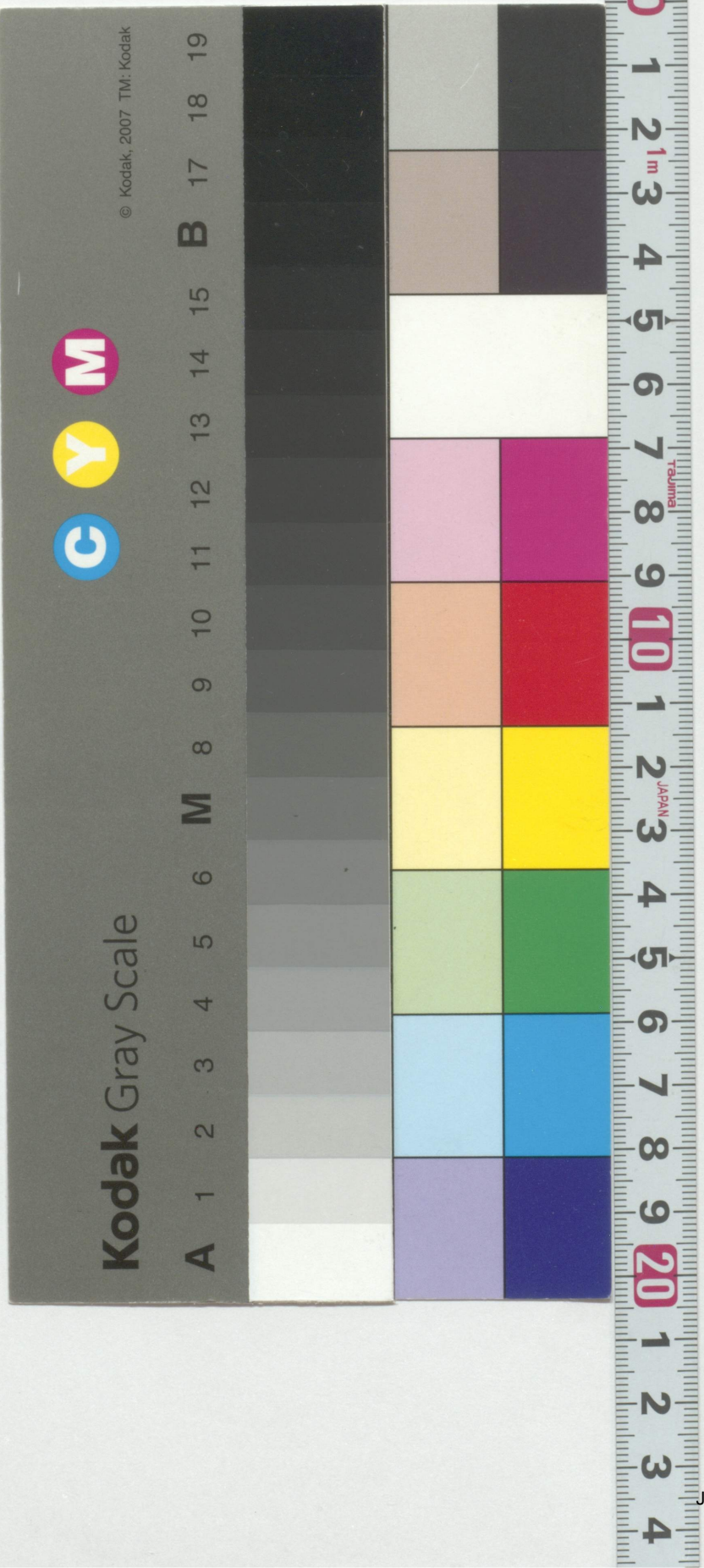
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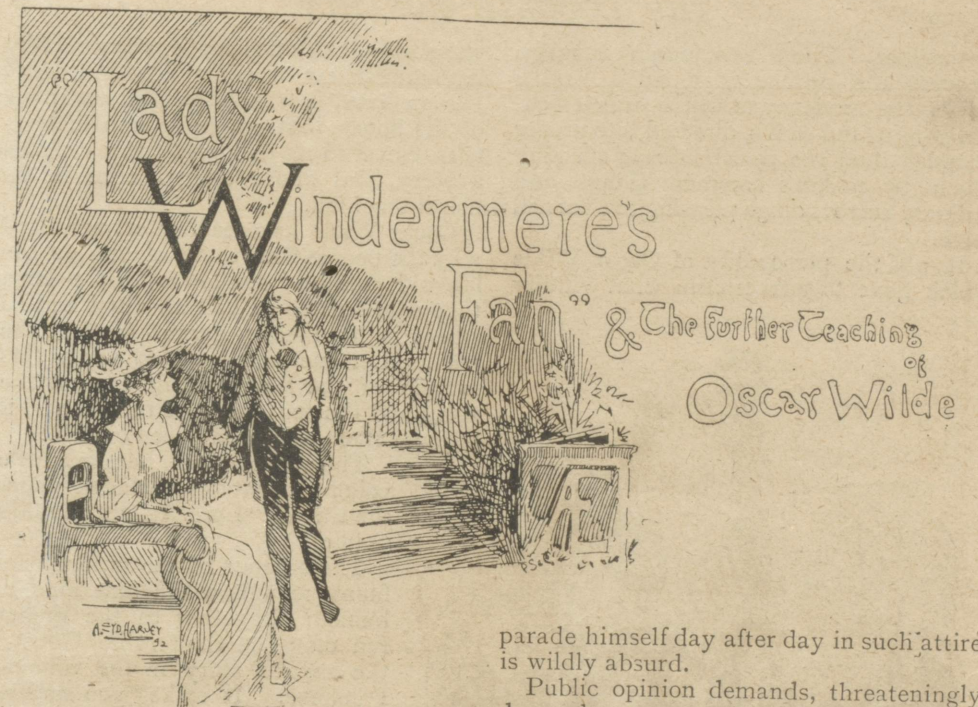
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MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER AND MISS WINIFRED EMERY AS LORD AND LADY WINDERMERE.



AESTHETICISM, as we once knew it, is a thing of the past. Not that it is altogether extinct, but its more pronounced eccentricities have been abandoned. The limp figure, the unsteady carriage, and the dreamy gaze have disappeared. The silken hose and knee breeches, the shapeless gowns, and all the mysterious apparel which distinguished the aesthete, have been laid by for the season of Theatricals and Tableaux Vivants, and the disciples of higher culture no longer consider it necessary to advertise their creed in any very violent outward and visible form. It is well so, for as presented to us it was essentially too un-English to last. One of our most pronounced national characteristics is conventionality, and if a man is not conventional in his habits and appearance he must be prepared for comment or ridicule, according to the extent of his transgression. What then, indeed, must a man expect who presents himself to the vulgar gaze arrayed in a costume of ruby plush, the proportions of his calves displayed in silken texture of the same unpretending hue, and wearing a collar such as that in which the heart of the charcoal minstrel is popularly supposed to delight? To imagine that he will be allowed to calmly

parade himself day after day in such attire is wildly absurd.

Public opinion demands, threateningly demands, some recognition, and public opinion and æstheticism are elements which it would be about as difficult to harmonise as fire and water. I so well remember the only occasion upon which I was so fortunate as to discover, in one of our most public thoroughfares, a genuine specimen of an æsthete of the sterner sex. Not that he looked very stern, poor creature; he rather seemed to be humbly invoking the paving stones to open and swallow him up, or may be vowing, once being delivered from the stare of the multitude, never again to fly in the face of a critical public. He wore a pensive and melancholy smile, and clutched in his nervous hands, which he held on a level with his breast, a sunflower blossom. His costume, which I have endeavoured to portray in a sketch, was of thin silk. It was black, and consequently not so obtrusive as those of his more gay and festive brethren; but it was sufficiently unconventional to attract a considerable following of rude boys, and, not unnaturally, curious individuals, who evidently regarded the affair as some kind of advertisement, and expected every moment a shower of handbills setting forth the unequalled merits of a patent medicine or a complexion soap.

But it must not be supposed that there was in æstheticism nothing but these

absurdities. There was, unquestionably, beneath the surface of it all a motive power the tendency of which was essentially right, and which, directed into proper channels, had the possibilities of effecting much by making common things and ordinary surroundings pleasing to a refined taste.

It was the personality of Oscar Wilde which gave to æstheticism what vitality

was somewhat exclusive, he is now rapidly becoming better known. "The Picture of Dorian Gray," perhaps the most attractive of his books, is strong in its imaginativeness, clever in its dialogue, fascinating as a story, and above all, powerful in its moral teaching.

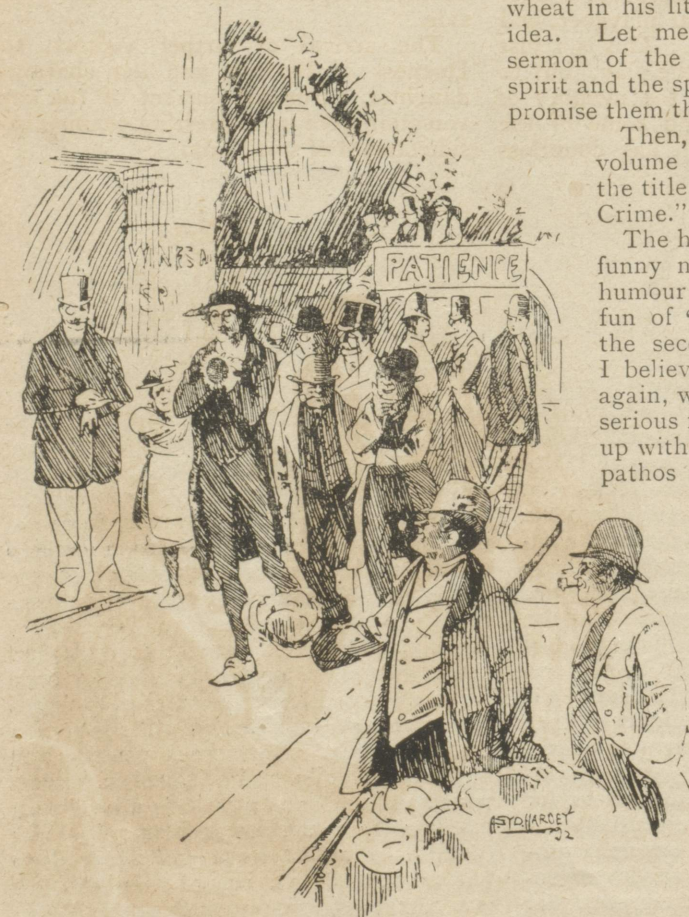
Oscar Wilde as a teacher of morality! why the people who think of him as the languid youth of sunflowers and poetry, they who fancied he had all chaff and no wheat in his literary garner, scoff at the idea. Let me commend to them this sermon of the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; I'll promise them they won't sleep over it.

Then, in contrast, here is a little volume of stories included under the title of "Lord Arthur Saville's Crime."

The humour of the professional funny man is a different kind of humour altogether to the quaint fun of "The Canterville Ghost," the second story in the volume, I believe. It makes you scream again, when you imagined it was serious for a moment, and finishes up with the sweetest little touch of pathos imaginable. These stories are all pleasing, all tinged deeply with the originality of Oscar.

Oscar Wilde makes originality a fine art, carries it to an extreme, and is apparently often prompted in what he does purely and simply by the fact that no one else acts in the same way. I really believe, too, that sometimes he acts as he does just to give his critics a chance, and it is so amusing to see how immediately they rise to the smallest bait and give themselves

away. He wrote a good play—like all good plays, not altogether without defects. When, however, the critic nibbled the end of his pen and ransacked his fertile brain for something bitter to give to the boy who was waiting for copy, it was not upon these defects that he seized as a rod of chastisement, so much as the fact that at the close of the performance the author had dared to



HE WORE A PENSIVE AND MELANCHOLY SMILE

it had, and when he wisely modified some of his eccentricities his disciples very quickly followed suit. It was soon after he left Oxford, where at Magdalen he had won the Newdigate Prize, that the outside world first became conscious of the fact that, although influenced to some extent by the teaching of Mr. Whistler, Oscar Wilde was a most original thinker and writer; and, although at first his audience

appear before the footlights to address his audience with the fragrant fumes still rising from a cigarette which he held between his fingers. His critics have literally yelled with rage over this incident. Oscar has languidly smiled, and the admiring public has murmured, "What a charming man!"

In writing of "Lady Windermere's Fan" I feel a considerable amount of consolation in the fact that I am not writing as a critic: the opinions I offer are those of an occasional playgoer, and my purpose is not to say, "This is a just estimate of the worth of the play," but to endeavour to revive in the memory of the reader, the story and some of the incidents of a play which has doubtless pleased us both.

"Lady Windermere's Fan" might be described as an every-day story, beautifully told. Oscar Wilde had at his disposal all the playwright's property of unusual incident—bank failures, detectives, murders, forgeries—but he has avoided them all, and the result is that, not being distracted with all these nightmare concoctions of the dramatist, we find ourselves better able to appreciate the clever dialogue and the rare wit with which the play abounds. The rise of the curtain discovers a reception-room in the residence of Lord Windermere. The scene is pleasing in the extreme.

Lady Windermere is discovered arranging roses, and as she daintily groups them a visitor is announced, and Lord Darlington enters the room.

Lord Darlington is the villain of the play—that is to say, a villain by contrast, and, for want of anybody worse, acts in that capacity.

Obviously with some intent, he now turns the conversation to the light in which the world regards, to the light in which Lady Windermere herself regards, those indications of frailty in

humanity which society politely overlooks in man, but for the mere suspicion of which a woman, even with the laxity of our nineteenth century notions, is branded and ignored. Lady Windermere's early training has been in the hands of relatives of Puritanical views, and the principles which she has imbibed have been Puritanical; she admits of no compromise: sin should have its own reward of banishment; sinners, regardless of sex, should be moral lepers, passed by on the other side.

The arrival of further visitors, the Duchess of Berwick and her charming daughter, turns the current of the conversation from its interesting channel to a side stream of small talk.



THE AUTHOR APPEARED WITH A CIGARETTE.

Lord Darlington having left and the tractable maiden having been sent out on the balcony to look at the sunset, the Duchess broaches the subject which has evidently been the purpose of her call. It is almost amusing—just a little sad at times, perhaps—to listen to this woman of the world advance good motive in breathing scandal; to watch her undermine the faith of a devoted wife in a good husband, proffering sympathy, yet gloating over the misery, and endeavouring in the end to gloss over the enormity of the imputed transgression by advancing the fact of the commonness of the fault.

It is a Mrs. Erlynne, a woman of unknown antecedents and doubtful connections, with whom the name of Lord Windermere is discreditably associated; suggestions are thrown out of luxurious living at Lord Windermere's expense; time devoted to her company; and the Duchess at last leaves her victim with an agony of doubt battling with the simple faith in her husband's steadfastness, which hitherto has never known a shade. At

first she endeavours to throw the suspicion from her as a thing unworthy, but doubt is tenacious, and at times the more unreasonable it is the more difficult it is to remove.

The bank-book will dispose of the question, and feverishly she turns over page by page, murmuring, in her excitement, the names amongst which she fails to find the one she seeks.

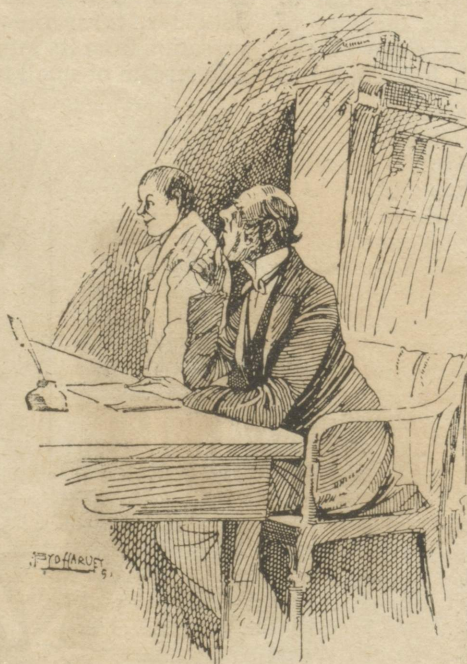
With an exclamation and a sigh of relief she closes the book; but as she returns it to its place in her husband's desk she finds another, marked "private" and bound with a locked clasp. Here is food for doubt, indeed, and all the ugly fears she thought disposed of spring once more

into being. The fastening is torn away, and there page after page bears silent witness to what she has no reason to believe is other than a guilty record. It is in this stupor of despair that Lord Windermere finds her; the blanched face, the torn book lying at her feet, tell their own story, and as is natural to a man who has been filched of a secret, innocent or guilty, his first thought and his first words are those of annoyance. No man under the circumstances could possibly look innocent unless prepared

with an explanation, and this Lord Windermere does not choose to make. In the face of this a protestation of innocence and an appeal for confidence appear unreasonable, and further appeals that Mrs. Erlynne might be invited to the ball which Lady Windermere is giving that very evening, only serve to excite her anger so far that she threatens her husband that if Mrs. Erlynne comes at his invitation she shall publicly insult her. Lord Windermere pleads earnestly the cause of this woman who, by some unfortunate circumstance, has forfeited

a high position in society. She is anxious, having paid the penalty of exclusion for so long a time, to gain once more the position which she has lost; she is prepared for sacrifice, but to be ignored is intolerable; Lady Windermere, of all women, is in a position to stretch out a hand, if not of welcome, then of assistance; surely she will do this for a woman who has repented? No, Lady Windermere is adamant, she believes that Mrs. Erlynne has wronged her, and, backed by her Puritanical principles of no compromise, she is fixed in her purpose and adheres to her threat.

Lord Windermere pleads, but pleads in vain, and finding all appeal useless, in



THE CRITIC NIBBLED THE END OF HIS PEN.

spite of protest and threat, himself writes the invitation and sends it by a servant. It is a serious domestic rupture and all overtures of peace are rejected. His concern for Mrs. Erlynne is unaccountable, and when he places her interests in preference to his wife's entreaties, and invites her to an entertainment given in honour of his wife's birthday, and in defiance of her entreaties, we cannot understand it until we learn that Mrs. Erlynne is really the mother of Lady Windermere, and that the desire to spare his wife the reflection which the publicity of the fact would bring has been his motive for what he has done, and his desire to spare her feelings the reason for his silence. Then we begin to feel an interest in Lord Windermere, recognise his devotion and appreciate it.

The evening arrives and we are introduced to the reception-room, adjacent to the ball-room. What a mysterious influence, by the bye, there is in melody. I must pause to say this because

I have so often endeavoured to analyse the mystery and have had to laugh at myself for the folly. The spell with which music holds us raises the art almost to divinity. The harmony that crept up upon the still air from the old church in the valley as we watched the sunset from the hillside, the tender love-song in the soft light, the stray notes that came to us as we sat where the moonlight shadows were deepest, memories that may kindle the cynic's smile maybe, but memories with which some of us would be very loth to part.

Lady Windermere's reception is a gay scene; in addition to the host and hostess,

the Duchess of Berwick is there, her daughter and a young man who has made money in Australia and who is encouraged by the Duchess to aspire to the distinction of a son-in-law. Lord Darlington is there, hanging upon the smiles of his hostess. Cecil Graham, a cynical youth of whom we hear more later; Lord Augustus Lorton, a dissolute brother of the Duchess, who has been married three times and divorced twice, or divorced once and married twice, he tells Cecil, who makes the enquiry, that he does not remember

which. Of Lord Lorton, a most amusing character, known amongst his associates as "Tubby," we also hear more later. Much consternation is caused by the announcement of Mrs. Erlynne's arrival. She advances to her hostess, who, instead of striking her with her fan, as she had threatened, turns her back upon her. Nothing daunted, Mrs. Erlynne seeks refuge in the greeting of Lord Windermere, who does his best to place her at ease in an

assembly where she is evidently avoided, or regarded with suspicion. She has the appearance of the woman that she is: a woman who has, as the cynical Cecil remarks, half-a-dozen pasts, which all fit; a woman who looks, the same youth remarks, like an edition de luxe of a very bad French novel. Lord Lorton, as might be imagined, is one of her devoted admirers, a perfect slave, and submits to be led about in the most docile manner.

As the evening advances Lady Windermere loses none of her resentment, it seems to deepen, and when Lord Darlington takes an opportunity of making



WHERE THE MOONLIGHT SHADOWS WERE DEEPEST.

love to her she does not repulse him as she did. He becomes bolder and flinging away reserve pleads his love, urges her husband's faithlessness and implores her to fly with him from a life which must ever be little less than degradation. She is not firm in her refusal, but she refuses and adheres to it, although her lover pleads with all the devotion of a man whose happiness depends upon what he prays for, and when he leaves her she leaves her with despair. With a sudden impulse she writes a note of farewell to her husband and is gone. She has scarcely left the house when Mrs. Erlynne enters the room, discovers the letter addressed to Lord Windermere, and, recognising the handwriting, with womanly wit she grasps the situation: opens the letter and confirms her supposition.

The letter is a knife-stab to her; she calls to mind the night, years ago, upon which she wrote just such an one herself, and as she thinks of all the misery, all the wretchedness it has brought upon her, a mother's love, a weakness she almost laughs at herself for possessing, prompts her to endeavour to avert a like fate for her child. She determines to set off against all her empty life one devoted deed, and flinging her cloak around her, and crushing the letter into her pocket, she starts. We next find her in the room of Lord Darlington, pleading with Lady Windermere to abandon her purpose and return to her husband.

The scene is touching in the extreme; all that is womanly in this blind victim of fashion comes to the surface. At first Lady Windermere treats her with contempt, spurns her from her, but as she realises how thoroughly in earnest the woman is, as she listens to the appeal to return for the sake of her little child, she softens, yields to Mrs. Erlynne wrapping her cloak around her, and is about to accompany her from the room when voices are heard without, and, heedless of the place of refuge, the women are forced to retire for concealment. Mrs. Erlynne urges Lady Windermere between the heavy curtains on to the balcony, and retires herself to a room which opens from the one which they have just occupied.

The men now enter, laughing and smoking, and regretting the fact that the clubs should be closed at the ridiculously early hour of two o'clock. Lord Winder-

mere is amongst them, Lord Augustus Lorton, otherwise "Tubby," Cecil Graham and Lord Darlington.

They distribute themselves about Lord Darlington's den, and make themselves comfortable. For this occasion Oscar Wilde has reserved much of the wit and amusing dialogue of the play. I should much like to have a copy to read over again, and quote here some of the smart things which he has put into the mouths of these early-morning revellers. Tubby you could never put into words, unfortunately; Tubby, with his "deah boy!" is absolutely unique. You cannot help liking Tubby in spite of his wickedness. But Cecil Graham's cynicism I should like to remember, although I hate a cynic. Cynicism is the one fault I find in Oscar Wilde, the one fault which I endeavour to gloss over to myself, the one fault which I endeavour to forget.

Just as Lord Windermere has put on his overcoat and expressed his intention of leaving, Cecil Graham astonishes the company by laughingly accusing Darlington, who has been rather posing as a woman-hater, of having a fair creature concealed in his rooms; producing from behind his back as witness to the charge a fan, which he has discovered lying upon the settee by the fire.

It is the property of Lady Windermere, the fan which her husband had that morning given her for a birthday gift. Windermere recognises it, and, blanching to the lips, turns to Darlington and demands an explanation. Darlington is as completely taken aback as Windermere himself, and imagines for a moment that Lady Windermere has relented and come to him, and yet doubts the possibility. The scene is the situation of the play, and is completed when Mrs. Erlynne appears from the inner room, and explains that she must have brought it away in mistake. Mrs. Erlynne's appearance holds them spellbound, and Lady Windermere selects this moment to escape.

Darlington cannot understand Mrs. Erlynne's presence and dare not enquire the reason, but smiles in cynical admiration at her ready wit, and Mrs. Erlynne ignores the painful silence and makes no explanation.

Mrs. Erlynne, calling at the Windermere's on the morrow with the intelligence that she is going abroad, finds the condition of affairs is now reversed.



MRS. ERLYNNE CLAIMS THE FAN.

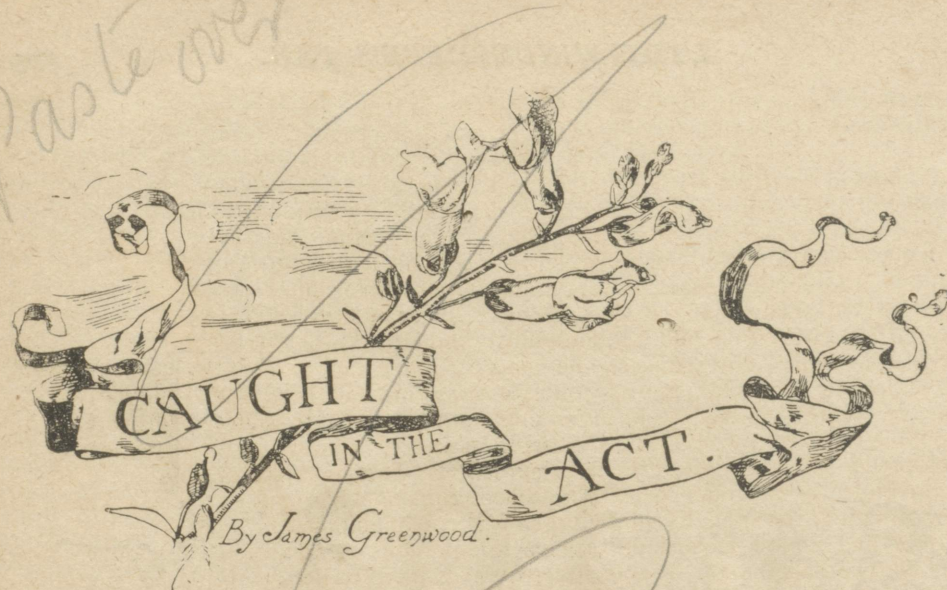
Lady Windermere welcomes her with open arms, Lord Windermere with cold disdain. When her husband is from the room Lady Windermere expresses her intention of confessing everything; but Mrs. Erlynne demands to be allowed to decide in the matter and will hear of nothing further being said, and compels, with much persuasion, Lady Windermere to consent to secrecy.

The sacrifice is complete and it brings its own reward—a very doubtful one, truly, but a reward, nevertheless. It is

in the person of "Tubby," who, although much aggrieved, accepts an explanation from Mrs. Erlynne, and is led, a willing victim, to the altar, and then to the Continent.

As a parting gift Mrs. Erlynne begs the fan, and the two women who have so strangely met are strangely parted, the one with a debt of gratitude which disarmed all doubt, the other bearing in her heart the sweetest treasure humanity can carry—the happiness which is the reward of a worthy deed. A. SYDNEY HARVEY.

Paste over



BUT nine days a husband, a more unhappy-looking young man was not to be seen that sunny morning along the whole sea-front of Brighton.

Why? Was it because, like a newly-born kitten, he had opened his eyes on that ninth day, and for the first time, to discover that the new world into which he had launched was anything but the paradise he had anticipated? No, it was not that; a more charming or delightful little woman than she whom Mr. Billington had married it would be difficult to imagine, and he loved her now far more than at any time during their courtship. Was it because he harboured a secret he should have disclosed before the marriage, a secret on which their mutual happiness depended, and which must now be revealed? Again, no. His precious Emily knew exactly how he was situated, and his previous life was to her as an open book.

She was aware, even, of what it was that was so sorely troubling him,

but did not take it to heart a half or a quarter so much as he did: "If the worst comes, where will be the tremendous hardship?" argued the hopeful little lady. "It was, of course, very wicked of

us to get married without papa's consent, when we very well knew that he intended me for someone else, and when it comes to his knowledge he will be awfully angry; and serve you right, too, you bad boy. I don't pity you one bit. You know what a hot-tempered man he is, and how he raves on small provocation, so goodness knows what he will do when he is called on to face this enormous one. Very well, suppose he swears by all that's good that he will never forgive me, and that as for you, you shall never again cross the threshold of his business premises? Suppose anything so dreadful even as that happens? we shan't have to go about begging (not but that there would be some fun in that: you can play on the flute a little, and I can sing. Ha, ha! what a comical picture it would make), you can



MR. RUFF, THE JUNIOR PARTNER.

