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*C. Millard Esq.
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Bungalow,

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PREFACE

FOR a long time considerable curiosity has been expressed about the manuscript of DE PROFUNDIS, which was known to be in my possession, the author having mentioned its existence to many other friends. The book requires little introduction, and scarcely any explanation. I have only to record that it was written by my friend during the last months of his imprisonment, that it was the only work he wrote while in prison, and the last work in prose he ever wrote. (The 'Ballad

She is half of the ...
Gaol Ballad ... in gaol ... to paper in ... of his release. (from ... to ...)

of Reading Gaol' was not planned or even composed until he had regained his liberty.)

In sending me instructions with regard to the publication of **DE PROFUNDIS**, Oscar Wilde wrote:—

'I don't defend my conduct. I explain it. Also there are in my letter certain passages which deal with my mental development in prison, and the inevitable evolution of my character and intellectual attitude towards life that has taken place; and I want you and others who still stand by me and have affection for me to know exactly in what mood and manner I hope to face the world. Of course, from one point of view, I know that on the day of my release

I shall be merely passing from one prison into another, and there are times when the whole world seems to me no larger than my cell, and as full of terror for me. Still I believe that at the beginning God made a world for each separate man, and in that world, which is within us, one should seek to live. At any rate you will read those parts of my letter with less pain than the others. Of course I need not remind you how fluid a thing thought is with me—with us all—and of what an evanescent substance are our emotions made. Still I do see a sort of possible goal towards which, through art, I may progress.

'Prison life makes one see people and things as they really are. That

is why it turns one to stone. It is the people outside who are deceived by the illusions of a life in constant motion. They revolve with life and contribute to its unreality. We who are immobile both see and know.

'Whether or not the letter does good to narrow natures and hectic brains, to me it has done good. I have "cleansed my bosom of much perilous stuff." I need not remind you that mere expression is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life. It is by utterance that we live. Of the many, many things for which I have to thank the Governor there is none for which I am more grateful than for his permission to write fully to you, and at as great a length as I

desire. For nearly two years I have had within a growing burden of bitterness, of much of which I have now got rid. On the other side of the prison wall there are some poor black soot-besmirched trees which are just breaking out into buds of an almost shrill green. I know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression.'

I venture to hope that DE PROFUNDIS, which renders so vividly, and so painfully, the effect of social *débâcle* and imprisonment on a highly intellectual and artificial nature, will give many readers a different impression of the witty and delightful writer.

ROBERT ROSS

CSM

P R E F A C E

The following transcript is an endeavour to reconstruct the whole of the letter, known as DE PROFUNDIS, written by Oscar Wilde whilst a prisoner in Reading Gaol. The transcript is made solely for private use and is copied from the only two sources available: ^① a typewritten copy in the collection of Stuart Mason (from a duplicate of which was set up Reynolds's edition of the "Suppressed Portion of 'De Profundis'" ~~which was~~ printed in New York for copyright purposes in 1913) and ^② the foolscap octavo edition of "De Profundis" (Methuen & Co., 1909) which contains a larger proportion of the whole than is to be found in the previous editions of 1905 and 1908.

to me?

There appears to be no copy extant of the published portion, the text of which Robert Ross severely edited, even altering the sequence of some passages towards the end. But notes are taken of these changes in Mason's typewritten copy where also, by accident or otherwise, are transcribed certain passages of the published part in their original version. Thus one can judge to some extent of the nature of the editing. We do not know, unfortunately, how much or how far Robert Ross altered, suppressed or changed the order of the text which he edited; but in the absence of the British Museum manuscript this is probably the nearest approach to a full display of the wonderful document.

in the Mason?

humain in its entirety.

The original manuscript, now in the British Museum, is written upon 20 sheets of blue foolscap paper (13 by 8 in.) forming 80 pages ruled with 33 blue lines. The specimen page reproduced in Stuart Mason's Bibliography shows 71 written lines to the page, of about 18 words to the line.

The present copy consists of $246\frac{1}{2}$ pages of 24 lines, averaging 9 words to the line or about 216 words to the page. This includes a certain over-lapping of the text both unpublished and published.

The unpublished portion, including those parts of the published version in their original form in the Mason typed copy, occupies about $150\frac{1}{2}$ pages of the whole: the published portion (excepting about two pages which are transcribed only from the Mason copy already alluded to) take up the remaining 96 pages. Thus it seems that about $\frac{2}{5}$ ths of the whole work has been published in Methuen's edition and the remaining $\frac{3}{5}$ ths in Reynolds's privately printed edition. The two pages referred to, of which only the original version is given here, show hardly any alteration from the published text: they are on pages 98-99 ("Prosperity, Pleasure and Success" down to "though not for pain"--about 12 lines) and on pages

195-197 (from "Do you ever feel any gratitude" down to "for the likes of us" --about 38½ lines.)

The text of both the edited and the original versions begins on pages 212-213 (about ²⁵12 lines of each) commencing at "We think we can have our emotions for nothing" down to "nothing is ever revealed." The original rendering follows/ on pages 213-214.

On page 240 about four lines referring to Bruges are repeated in original form on page 242.

Lastly, on pages 240-241 will be found the final paragraphs (beginning at "It is not for nothing" down to the end: "the meaning of sorrow and its beauty"), the original form of which will be found on pages 245-247.

Judging from these paragraphs, the changes are principally from the personal to the impersonal.

Notes in Mason's typed copy have made it possible to replace in their original sequence several passages transposed by Robert Ross in the printed text. These occur chiefly towards the end of the work. The first change appears on page 236 following ^{after} the manuscript version ~~and~~ ending with "far different emotions."

De Profundis, 1909, pp. 119-120: from "Of course to one so modern" down to "to find it somewhere."

Then follows (De Profundis, 1909, pp. 116-117):--"I have a strange longing" down to "live in their presence."

Then follows (De Profundis, 1909, pp. 120-121):--"All trials are trials for one's life" down to ~~the end,~~ "with bitter herbs make me whole."

Then (De Profundis, 1909, pp. 115-116):--"I am to be released" down to "for me years ago."

And lastly (De Profundis, 1909, pp. 117-119):--"It is not for nothing" down to "Sorrow and its beauty."

The rectification of these passages in the present copy ^{? is} are precious for the understanding of the whole.

In Mason's typed copy the following note is added to the passage relating to the costs in the Queensberry action (page 54):--

Note. £700 was the amount of Queensberry's costs in the unsuccessful action. The debts filed amounted to £6000. Q. was the petitioning creditor, making Wilde a bankrupt.

W. E. L.

Wimbledon, June 1920



2019-03-16

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THE MORNING VISIT, FROM THE LITHOGRAPH BY C. H. SHANNON.