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Complete Works
OF
OSCAR WILDE

EDITED BY
ROBERT ROSS

DUCHESS OF PADUA
DE PROFUNDIS

AUTHORIZED EDITION

THE WYMAN-FOGG COMPANY
BOSTON :: MASSACHUSETTS

DE PROFUNDIS



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BY G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

NOTE

The Duchess of Padua was written in 1882, and finished in March 1883. It was produced in New York on November 14, 1891, at Hammerstein's Opera House. Twenty prompt copies were printed for private circulation and use in the theatre. One of only two copies known to exist contains the author's corrections, and on it the present edition is based. Certain passages were found to have been bracketed, or deleted in pencil. Whether these passages were omitted for stage presentation, or were intended to be omitted by the author altogether, there is no evidence to show. They have, however, been retained in the present edition, and are indicated by brackets. The original manuscript was stolen, with other unpublished works, from the author's house in April 1895. The play has been translated by Dr. Max Meyerfeld (Egon, Fleischel and Co., Berlin, 1904). An unauthorised English *prose* translation from the German has been printed in Paris, London, or America, and is offered for sale by unscrupulous publishers and unscrupulous booksellers along with other spurious works ascribed to Oscar Wilde. The dramatic rights for America belong to the representatives of Miss Gale and the late Laurence Barrett. The dramatic rights for England, the Colonies, and the Continent are vested in the author's literary executor, and administrator of his estate,
Robert Ross.

TO
A. S.

MADAM.

A few months before his death Mr. Oscar Wilde expressed to me a regret that he had never dedicated any of his works to one from whom he had received such infinite kindness and to whom he was under obligations no flattering dedication could repay. With not very great sincerity, because I knew he was a dying man, I suggested he might still write a play or book which you would accept. He answered with truth, 'There is nothing but *The Duchess of Padua* and it is unworthy of her and unworthy of me.' With all his egoism and self-complacency you will know, perhaps as well as I do, that he never regarded his works as an adequate expression of his extraordinary genius and his magnificent intellectual endowment; many people hardly believe that in his last years he was the severest critic of his own achievements. In the pages of *De Profundis* there are many references to yourself, and I think I am carrying out my dear friend's wishes in asking your acceptance of a play which was the prelude to a singularly brilliant and, if the last five years are omitted, a very happy life.

ROBERT ROSS

Xmas 1906.

NOTE ON THE LENGTH OF THIS PLAY

THE Play of *The Duchess of Padua* is about 2600 lines long, divided into the following proportions nearly :—

Act I.	.	.	.	.	443 lines.
Act II.	.	.	.	.	642 lines.
Act III.	.	.	.	.	510 lines.
Act IV.	.	.	.	.	564 lines.
Act V.	.	.	.	.	443 lines.

I estimate the acting time of the play at two hours and twenty-five minutes, in the following proportions nearly :—

Act I.	.	.	.	.	25 minutes.
Act II.	.	.	.	.	36 minutes.
Act III.	.	.	.	.	29 minutes.
Act IV.	.	.	.	.	31 minutes.
Act V.	.	.	.	.	25 minutes.

O. W.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIMONE GESSO, Duke of Padua

BEATRICE, his Wife

ANDREAS POLLAJUOLO, Cardinal of Padua

MAFFIO PETRUCCI,

JEPPO VITELLOZZO,

TADDEO BARDI,

} Gentlemen of the Duke's
Household

GUIDO FERRANTI, a Young Man

ASCANIO CRISTOFANO, his Friend

COUNT MORANZONE, an Old Man

BERNARDO CAVALCANTI, Lord Justice of Padua

HUGO, the Headsman

LUCY, a Tire woman

Servants, Citizens, Soldiers, Monks, Falconers with their
hawks and dogs, etc.

PLACE: *Padua*

TIME: *The latter half of Sixteenth Century*

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. *The Market Place of Padua (25 minutes).*

ACT II. *Room in the Duke's Palace (36 minutes).*

ACT III. *Corridor in the Duke's Palace (29 minutes).*

ACT IV. *The Hall of Justice (31 minutes).*

ACT V. *The Dungeon (25 minutes).*

Style of Architecture : Italian, Gothic, and Romanesque.

ACT I

SCENE

The Market Place of Padua at noon ; in the background is the great Cathedral of Padua ; the architecture is Romanesque, and wrought in black and white marbles ; a flight of marble steps leads up to the Cathedral door ; at the foot of the steps are two large stone lions ; the houses on each side of the stage have coloured awnings from their windows, and are flanked by stone arcades ; on the right of the stage is the public fountain, with a triton in green bronze blowing from a conch ; around the fountain is a stone seat ; the bell of the Cathedral is ringing, and the citizens, men, women and children, are passing into the Cathedral.

(Enter GUIDO FERRANTI and ASCANIO ORISTOFANO.)

ASCANIO

Now by my life, Guido, I will go no farther ; for if I walk another step I will have no life left to swear by ; this wild-goose errand of yours !

(Sits down on the steps of the fountain.)

CROCE : (*Citizen bows.*) I thank you, sir.

ASCANIO

Well?

GUIDO

Ay! it is here.

ASCANIO

I would it were somewhere else, for I see no wine-shop.

GUIDO

(*Taking a letter from his pocket and reading it.*) 'The hour noon; the city, Padua; the place, the market; and the day, Saint Philip's Day.'

ASCANIO

And what of the man, how shall we know him?

GUIDO (*reading still*)

'I will wear a violet cloak with a silver

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

falcon broidered on the shoulder.' A brave ACT I.
attire, Ascanio.

ASCANIO

I'd sooner have my leathern jerkin. And you think he will tell you of your father?

GUIDO

Why, yes! It is a month ago now, you remember; I was in the vineyard, just at the corner nearest the road, where the goats used to get in, a man rode up and asked me was my name Guido, and gave me this letter, signed 'Your Father's Friend,' bidding me be here to-day if I would know the secret of my birth, and telling me how to recognise the writer! I had always thought old Pedro was my uncle, but he told me that he was not, but that I had been left a child in his charge by some one he had never since seen.

ASCANIO

And you don't know who your father is?

GUIDO

No.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. ASCANIO

No recollection of him even ?

GUIDO

None, Ascanio, none.

ASCANIO (*laughing*)

Then he could never have boxed your ears so often as my father did mine.

GUIDO (*smiling*)

I am sure you never deserved it.

ASCANIO

Never; and that made it worse. I hadn't the consciousness of guilt to buoy me up. What hour did you say he fixed ?

GUIDO

Noon. (*Clock in the Cathedral strikes.*)

ASCANIO

It is that now, and your man has not come. I don't believe in him, Guido. I think it is some wench who has set her eye at you; and, as I have followed you from Perugia to Padua, I swear you shall follow me to the nearest

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

tavern. (*Rises.*) By the great gods of eating, ACT I.
Guido, I am as hungry as a widow is for a husband, as tired as a young maid is of good advice, and as dry as a monk's sermon. Come, Guido, you stand there looking at nothing, like the fool who tried to look into his own mind; your man will not come.

GUIDO

Well, I suppose you are right. Ah! (*Just as he is leaving the stage with ASCANIO, enter LORD MORANZONE in a violet cloak, with a silver falcon brodered on the shoulder; he passes across to the Cathedral, and just as he is going in GUIDO runs up and touches him.*)

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, thou hast come in time.

GUIDO

What! Does my father live?

MORANZONE

Ay! lives in you.
Thou art the same in mould and lineament,
Carriage and form, and outward semblances;
I trust thou art in noble mind the same.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

That I am some great Lord of Italy,
And we will have long days of joy together.
Within the hour, dear Ascanio.

ACT I

(*Exit ASCANIO.*)

Now tell me of my father? (*Sits down on a
stone seat.*) Stood he tall?

I warrant he looked tall upon his horse.

His hair was black? or perhaps a reddish
gold,

Like a red fire of gold? Was his voice low?
The very bravest men have voices some-
times

Full of low music; or a clarion was it
That brake with terror all his enemies?

Did he ride singly? or with many squires
And valiant gentlemen to serve his state?

For oftentimes methinks I feel my veins
Beat with the blood of kings. Was he a
king?

MORANZONE

Ay, of all men he was the kingliest.

GUIDO (*proudly*)

Then when you saw my noble father last
He was set high above the heads of men?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I MORANZONE

Ay, he was high above the heads of men,
*(Walks over to GUIDO and puts his hand upon
his shoulder.)*

On a red scaffold, with a butcher's block
Set for his neck.

GUIDO *(leaping up)*

What dreadful man art thou,
That like a raven, or the midnight owl,
Com'st with this awful message from the
grave?

MORANZONE

I am known here as the Count Moranzone,
Lord of a barren castle on a rock,
With a few acres of unkindly land
And six not thrifty servants. But I was one
Of Parma's noblest princes ; more that that,
I was your father's friend.

GUIDO *(clasping his hand)*

Tell me of him.

MORANZONE

You are the son of that great Duke Lorenzo,
[Whose banner waved on many a well-fought
field.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Against the Saracen, and heretic Turk,]

ACT I

He was the Prince of Parma, and the Duke
Of all the fair domains of Lombardy
Down to the gates of Florence; nay, Florence
even
Was wont to pay him tribute——

GUIDO

Come to his death.

MORANZONE

You will hear that soon enough. Being at
war——

O noble lion of war, that would not suffer
Injustice done in Italy!—he led
The very flower of chivalry against
That foul adulterous Lord of Rimini,
Giovanni Malatesta—whom God curse!
And was by him in treacherous ambush
taken,

[And was by him in common fetters bound]
And like a villain, or a low-born knave,
Was by him on the public scaffold murdered.

GUIDO (*clutching his dagger*)

Doth Malatesta live?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I MORANZONE

No, he is dead.

GUIDO

Did you say dead? O too swift runner,
Death,
Couldst thou not wait for me a little space,
And I had done thy bidding!

MORANZONE (*clutching his wrist*)

Thou canst do it!
The man who sold thy father is alive.

GUIDO

Sold! was my father sold?

MORANZONE

Ay! trafficked for,
Like a vile chattel, for a price betrayed,
Bartered and bargained for in privy market
By one whom he had held his perfect friend,
One he had trusted, one he had well loved,
One whom by ties of kindness he had bound—
[Oh! to sow seeds of kindness in this world
Is but to reap ingratitude!]

GUIDO

And he lives
Who sold my father.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT I.

I will bring you to him.

GUIDO

So, Judas, thou art living! well, I will make
This world thy field of blood, so buy it
straightway,
For thou must hang there.

MORANZONE

Judas said you, boy?
Yes, Judas in his treachery, but still
He was more wise than Judas was, and held
Those thirty silver pieces not enough.

GUIDO

What got he for my father's blood?

MORANZONE

What got he?
Why cities, fiefs, and principalities,
Vineyards, and lands.

GUIDO

Of which he shall but keep
Six feet of ground to rot in. Where is he,
This damned villain, this foul devil? where?
Show me the man, and come he cased in steel,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. In complete panoply and pride of war,
Ay, guarded by a thousand men-at-arms,
Yet I shall reach him through their spears,
and feel
The last black drop of blood from his black
heart
Crawl down my blade. Show me the man, I
say,
And I will kill him.

MORANZONE (*coldly*)

Fool, what revenge is there?
Death is the common heritage of all,
And death comes best when it comes suddenly.

(*Goes up close to GUIDO.*)

Thy father was betrayed, there is your cue;
For you shall sell the seller in his turn.
I will make you of his household, you will sit
At the same board with him, eat of his
bread——

GUIDO

O bitter bread!

MORANZONE

Your palate is too nice,
Revenge will make it sweet. Thou shalt o'
nights

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Pledge him in wine, drink from his cup, and be **ACT I**
His intimate, so he will fawn on thee,
Love thee, and trust thee in all secret
things.

If he bids thee be merry thou must laugh,
And if it be his humour to be sad
Thou shalt don sables. Then when the time
is ripe—— (GUIDO *clutches his sword.*)
Nay, nay, I trust thee not; your hot young
blood,
Undisciplined nature, and too violent rage
Will never tarry for this great revenge,
But wreck itself on passion.

GUIDO

Thou knowest me not.
Tell me the man, and I in everything
Will do thy bidding.

MORANZONE

Well, when the time is ripe,
The victim trusting and the occasion sure,
I will by sudden secret messenger
Send thee a sign.

GUIDO

How shall I kill him, tell me ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

That night thou shalt creep into his private
chamber ;

[That night remember.]

GUIDO

[I shall not forget.]

MORANZONE

[I do not know if guilty people sleep,]

But if he sleeps see that you wake him first,
And hold your hand upon his throat, ay! that
way,

Then having told him of what blood you are,
Sprung from what father, and for what
revenge,

Bid him to pray for mercy ; when he prays,
Bid him to set a price upon his life,
And when he strips himself of all his gold
Tell him thou needest not gold, and hast not
mercy,

And do thy business straight away. Swear
to me

You will not kill him till I bid you do it,
Or else I go to mine own house, and leave
You ignorant, and your father unavenged.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT I.

Now by my father's sword——

MORANZONE

The common hangman
Brake that in sunder in the public square.

GUIDO

'Then by my father's grave——

MORANZONE

What grave? what grave?
Your noble father lieth in no grave,
I saw his dust strewn on the air, his ashes
Whirled through the windy streets like com-
mon straws
To plague a beggar's eyesight, and his head,
That gentle head, set on the prison spike,
[Girt with the mockery of a paper crown]
For the vile rabble in their insolence
To shoot their tongues at.

GUIDO

Was it so indeed?
Then by my father's spotless memory,
And by the shameful manner of his death,
And by the base betrayal by his friend,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. For these at least remain, by these I swear
I will not lay my hand upon his life
Until you bid me, then—God help his soul,
For he shall die as never dog died yet.
And now, the sign, what is it ?

MORANZONE

This dagger, boy ;

It was your father's.

GUIDO

O, let me look at it !

I do remember now my reputed uncle,
That good old husbandman I left at home,
Told me a cloak wrapped round me when a babe
Bare too much yellow leopards wrought in gold ;
I like them best in steel, as they are here,
They suit my purpose better. Tell me, sir,
Have you no message from my father to me ?

MORANZONE

Poor boy, you never saw that noble father,
For when by his false friend he had been sold,
Alone of all his gentlemen I escaped
To bear the news to Parma to the Duchess.

GUIDO

[Speak to me of my mother.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT I.

When your mother,
[Than whom no saint in heaven was more pure,]
Heard my black news, she fell into a swoon,
And, being with untimely travail seized—
[Indeed, she was but seven months a bride—]
Bare thee into the world before thy time,
And then her soul went heavenward, to wait
Thy father, at the gates of Paradise.

GUIDO

A mother dead, a father sold and bartered !
I seem to stand on some beleaguered wall,
And messenger comes after messenger
With a new tale of terror ; give me breath,
Mine ears are tired.

MORANZONE

When thy mother died,
Fearing our enemies, I gave it out
Thou wert dead also, and then privily
Conveyed thee to an ancient servitor,
Who by Perugia lived ; the rest thou knowest.

GUIDO

Saw you my father afterwards ?

■

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

Ay! once;

In mean attire, like a vineyard dresser,
I stole to Rimini.

GUIDO (*taking his hand*)

O generous heart!

MORANZONE

One can buy everything in Rimini,
And so I bought the gaolers! when your father
Heard that a man child had been born to him,
His noble face lit up beneath his helm
Like a great fire seen far out at sea,
And taking my two hands, he bade me, Guido,
To rear you worthy of him, so I have reared you
To revenge his death upon the friend who
sold him.

GUIDO

Thou hast done well; I for my father thank you.
And now his name?

MORANZONE

How you remind me of him,
You have each gesture that your father had.

GUIDO

The traitor's name?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT I.

Thou wilt hear that anon ;
The Duke and other nobles at the Court
Are coming hither.

GUIDO

What of that ? his name ?

MORANZONE

Do they not seem a valiant company
Of honourable, honest gentlemen ?

GUIDO

His name, milord ?

*(Enter the DUKE OF PADUA with COUNT
BARDI, MAFFIO, PETRUCCI, and other
gentlemen of his Court.)*

MARANZONE *(quickly)*

The man to whom I kneel
Is he who sold your father ! mark me well.

GUIDO *(clutches his dagger)*

The Duke !

MARANZONE

Leave off that fingering of thy knife.
Hast thou so soon forgotten ?

(Kneels to the DUKE.)
My noble Lord.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. DUKE

Welcome, Count Moranzone; 'tis some time
Since we have seen you here in Padua.
We hunted near your castle yesterday—
Call you it castle? that bleak house of yours
Wherein you sit a-mumbling o'er your beads,
Telling your vices like a good old man.
[I trust I'll never be a good old man.
God would grow weary if I told my sins.]
(Catches sight of GUIDO and starts back.)
Who is that?

MARANZONE

My sister's son, your Grace,
Who being now of age to carry arms,
Would for a season tarry at your Court.

DUKE *(still looking at GUIDO)*

What is his name?

MARANZONE

Guido Ferranti, sir.

DUKE

His city?

MORANZONE

He is Mantuan by birth.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE (*advancing towards GUIDO*)

ACT I

You have the eyes of one I used to know,
But he died childless [So, sir, you would serve
me ;

Well, we lack soldiers ;] are you honest, boy ?
Then be not spendthrift of your honesty,
But keep it to yourself ; in Padua
Men think that honesty is ostentatious, so
It is not of the fashion. Look at these lords
[Smelling of civet and the pomander box. . . .]

COUNT BARDI (*aside*)

Here is some bitter arrow for us, sure.

DUKE

Why, every man among them has his price,
Although, to do them justice, some of them
Are quite expensive.

COUNT BARDI (*aside*)

There it comes indeed.

DUKE

So be not honest ; eccentricity
Is not a thing should ever be encouraged,
Although, in this dull stupid age of ours,
The most eccentric thing a man can do

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. Is to have brains, then the mob mocks at him ;
And for the mob, despise it as I do,
I hold its bubble praise and windy favours
In such account, that popularity
Is the one insult I have never suffered.

MAFFIO (*aside*)

He has enough of hate, if he needs that.

DUKE

Have prudence ; in your dealings with the
world
Be not too hasty ; act on the second thought,
First impulses are generally good.

GUIDO (*aside*)

Surely a toad sits on his lips, and spills its
venom there.

DUKE

See thou hast enemies,
Else will the world think very little of thee,
It is its test of power ; yet see you show
A smiling mask of friendship to all men,
Until you have them safely in your grip,
Then you can crush them.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO (*aside*)

ACT I.

O wise philosopher!
That for thyself dost dig so deep a grave.

MORANZONE (*to him*)

Dost thou mark his words?

GUIDO

O, be thou sure I do.

DUKE

And be not over-scrupulous; clean hands
With nothing in them make a sorry show.
If you would have the lion's share of life
You must wear the fox's skin; Oh, it will fit
you;

It is a coat which fitteth every man,
[The fat, the lean, the tall man, and the short,
Whoever makes that coat, boy, is a tailor
That never lacks a customer.]

GUIDO

Your Grace,

I shall remember.

DUKE

That is well, boy, well.
I would not have about me shallow fools,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. Who with mean scruples weigh the gold of
life,
And faltering, paltering, end by failure;
failure,
The only crime which I have not committed:
I would have *men* about me. As for con-
science,
Conscience is but the name which cowardice
Fleeing from battle scrawls upon its shield.
You understand me, boy ?

GUIDO

I do, your Grace,
And will in all things carry out the creed
Which you have taught me.

MAFFIO

I never heard your Grace
So much in the vein for preaching ; let the
Cardinal
Look to his laurels, sir.

DUKE

The Cardinal !
Men follow my creed, and they gabble his.
I do not think much of the Cardinal ;
Although he is a holy churchman, and

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I quite admit his dulness. Well, sir, from ACT I
now

We count you of our household.

*(He holds out his hand for GUIDO to kiss.
GUIDO starts back in horror, but at a
gesture from COUNT MORANZONE, kneels
and kisses it.)*

We will see

That you are furnished with such equipage
As doth befit your honour and our state.

GUIDO

I thank your Grace most heartily.

DUKE

Tell me again

What is your name?

GUIDO

Guido Ferranti, sir.

DUKE

And you are Mantuan? Look to your wives,
my lords,
When such a gallant comes to Padua.
Thou dost well to laugh, Count Bardi; I have
noted

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. How merry is that husband by whose hearth
Sits an uncomely wife.

MAFFIO

May it please your Grace,
The wives of Padua are above suspicion.

DUKE

What, are they so ill-favoured ! Let us go,
This Cardinal detains our pious Duchess ;
His sermon and his beard want cutting both :
Will you come with us, sir, and hear a text
From holy Jerome ?

MORANZONE (*bowing*)

My liege, there are some matters——

DUKE (*interrupting*)

Thou need'st make no excuse for missing mass.
Come, gentlemen.

(*Exit with his suite into Cathedral.*)

GUIDO (*after a pause*)

So the Duke sold my father;
I kissed his hand.

MORANZONE

Thou shalt do that many times.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

Must it be so?

ACT I

MORANZONE

Ay! thou hast sworn an oath.

GUIDO

That oath shall make me marble.

MORANZONE

Farewell, boy,
Thou wilt not see me till the time is ripe.

GUIDO

I pray thou comest quickly.

MORANZONE

I will come
When it is time; be ready.

GUIDO

Fear me not.

MORANZONE

Here is your friend; see that you banish him
Both from your heart and Padua.

GUIDO

From Padua,
Not from my heart.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

Nay, from thy heart as well,
I will not leave thee till I see thee do it.

GUIDO

Can I have no friend ?

MORANZONE

Revenge shall be thy friend,
Thou need'st no other.

GUIDO

Well, then be it so.
(*Enter* ASCANIO CRISTOFANO.)

ASCANIO

Come, Guido, I have been beforehand with you in everything, for I have drunk a flagon of wine, eaten a pasty, and kissed the maid who served it. Why, you look as melancholy as a schoolboy who cannot buy apples, or a politician who cannot sell his vote. What news, Guido, what news ?

GUIDO

Why, that we two must part, Ascanio.

ASCANIO

That would be news indeed, but it is not true.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT I

Too true it is, you must get hence, Ascanio,
And never look upon my face again.

ASCANIO

No, no; indeed you do not know me, Guido;
'Tis true I am a common yeoman's son,
Nor versed in fashions of much courtesy;
But, if you are nobly born, cannot I be
Your serving man? I will tend you with
 more love
Than any hired servant.

GUIDO (*clasping his hand*)

Ascanio!

(*Sees MORANZONE looking at him and drops
ASCANIO'S hand.*)

It cannot be.

ASCANIO

What, is it so with you?
I thought the friendship of the antique world
Was not yet dead, but that the Roman type
Might even in this poor and common age
Find counterparts of love; then by this love
Which beats between us like a summer sea,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. Whatever lot has fallen to your hand
May I not share it ?

GUIDO

Share it ?

ASCANIO

Ay!

GUIDO

No, no.

ASCANIO

Have you then come to some inheritance
Of lordly castle, or of stored-up gold ?

GUIDO (*bitterly*)

Ay! I have come to my inheritance.
O bloody legacy! and O murderous dole!
Which, like the thrifty miser, must I hoard,
And to my own self keep; and so, I pray you,
Let us part here.

ASCANIO

What, shall we never more
Sit hand in hand, as we were wont to sit,
Over some book of ancient chivalry
Stealing a truant holiday from school,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Follow the huntsmen through the autumn ACT I
woods,
And watch the falcons burst their tasselled
jesses,
When the hare breaks from covert.

GUIDO

Never more.

ASCANIO

Must I go hence without a word of love ?

GUIDO

You must go hence, and may love go with
you.

ASCANIO

You are unknightly, and ungenerous.

GUIDO

Unknightly and ungenerous if you will.
Why should we waste more words about the
matter !
Let us part now.

ASCANIO

Have you no message, Guido ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. GUIDO

None ; my whole past was but a schoolboy's
dream,
To-day my life begins. Farewell.

ASCANIO

Farewell (*exit slowly*).

GUIDO

Now are you satisfied ? Have you not seen
My dearest friend, and my most loved com-
panion,
Thrust from me like a common kitchen knave !
Oh, that I did it ! Are you not satisfied ?

MORANZONE

Ay ! I am satisfied. Now I go hence,
[Back to my lonely castle on the hill]
Do not forget the sign, your father's dagger,
And do the business when I send it to you.

GUIDO

Be sure I shall. (*Exit LORD MORANZONE.*)

GUIDO

O thou eternal heaven !
If there is aught of nature in my soul,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Of gentle pity, or fond kindness,
Wither it up, blast it, bring it to nothing,
Or if thou wilt not, then will I myself
Cut pity with a sharp knife from my heart
And strangle mercy in her sleep at night
Lest she speak to me. Vengeance there I
 have it.

ACT I.

Be thou my comrade and my bedfellow,
Sit by my side, ride to the chase with me,
When I am weary sing me pretty songs,
When I am light o' heart, make jest with
 me,

And when I dream, whisper into my ear
The dreadful secret of a father's murder—
Did I say murder? (*Draws his dagger.*)

 Listen, thou terrible God!

Thou God that punishest all broken oaths,
And bid some angel write this oath in fire,
That from this hour, till my dear father's
 murder

In blood I have revenged, I do forswear
The noble ties of honourable friendship,
The noble joys of dear companionship,
Affection's bonds, and loyal gratitude,
Ay, more, from this same hour I do for-
 swear

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. All love of women, and the barren thing
Which men call beauty——

(The organ peals in the Cathedral, and under a canopy of cloth of silver tissue, borne by four pages in scarlet, the DUCHESS OF PADUA comes down the steps; as she passes across their eyes meet for a moment, and as she leaves the stage she looks back at GUIDO, and the dagger falls from his hand.)

Oh! who is that?

▲ CITIZEN

The Duchess of Padua!

END OF ACT I.

Missing Page

Missing Page

ACT II

SCENE

A state room in the Ducal Palace, hung with tapestries representing the Masque of Venus ; a large door in the centre opens into a corridor of red marble, through which one can see a view of Padua ; a large canopy is set (R.C.) with three thrones, one a little lower than the others ; the ceiling is made of long gilded beams ; furniture of the period, chairs covered with gilt leather, and buffets set with gold and silver plate, and chests painted with mythological scenes. A number of the courtiers are out on the corridor looking from it down into the street below ; from the street comes the roar of a mob and cries of 'Death to the Duke' : after a little interval enter the Duke very calmly, he is leaning on the arm of Guido Ferranti ; with him enters also the Lord Cardinal ; the mob still shouting.

DUKE

No, my Lord Cardinal, I weary of her !
Why, she is worse than ugly, she is good.

MAFFIO (*excitedly*)

Your Grace, there are two thousand people
there
Who every moment grow more clamorous.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUKE

Tut, man, they waste their strength upon
their lungs!

People who shout so loud, my lords, do no-
thing,

The only men I fear are silent men.

(A yell from the people.)

You see, Lord Cardinal, how my people love
me,

[This is their serenade, I like it better
Than the soft murmurs of the amorous
lute;

Is it not sweet to listen to? *(Another yell.)*
I fear

They have become a little out of tune,

So I must tell my men to fire on them.

I cannot bear bad music!] Go, Petrucci,

And tell the captain of the guard below

To clear the square. Do you not hear me,
sir?

Do what I bid you.

(Exit PETRUCCI.)

CARDINAL

I beseech your Grace

To listen to their grievances.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE (*sitting on his throne*)

ACT II

Ay! the peaches
Are not so big this year as they were last.
I crave your pardon, my lord Cardinal,
I thought you spake of peaches.

(*A cheer from the people.*)

What is that?

GUIDO (*rushes to the window*)

The Duchess has gone forth into the square,
And stands between the people and the guard,
And will not let them shoot.

DUKE

The devil take her!

GUIDO (*still at the window*)

And followed by a dozen of the citizens
Has come into the Palace.

DUKE (*starting up*)

By Saint James,
Our Duchess waxes bold!

BARDI

Here comes the Duchess.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUKE

Shut that door there ; this morning air is cold.

(They close the door on the corridor.)

(Enter the DUCHESS followed by a crowd of meanly dressed Citizens.)

DUCHESS *(flinging herself upon her knees)*

I do beseech your Grace to give us audience.

DUKE

[Am I a tailor, Madame, that you come
With such a ragged retinue before us ?]

DUCHESS

[I think that their rags speak their grievances
With better eloquence than I can speak.]

DUKE

What are these grievances ?

DUCHESS

Alas, my Lord,
Such common things as neither you nor I,
Nor any of these noble gentlemen,
Have ever need at all to think about ;
They say the bread, the very bread they eat,
Is made of sorry chaff

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

FIRST CITIZEN

ACT II.

Ay! so it is,
Nothing but chaff.

DUKE

And very good food too,
I give it to my horses.

DUCHESS (*restraining herself*)

They say the water,
Set in the public cisterns for their use,
[Has, through the breaking of the aqueduct,]
To stagnant pools and muddy puddles turned.

DUKE

They should drink wine; water is quite un-
wholesome.

SECOND CITIZEN

Alack, your Grace, the taxes which the
customs
Take at the city gate are grown so high
We cannot buy wine.

DUKE

Then you should bless the taxes
Which make you temperate.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

Think, while we sit
In gorgeous pomp and state [and nothing lack
Of all that wealth and luxury can give
And many servants have to wait upon us
And tend our meanest need], gaunt poverty
Creeps through their sunless lanes, and with
sharp knives
Cuts the warm throats of children stealthily
And no word said.

THIRD CITIZEN

Ay! marry, that is true,
My little son died yesternight from hunger,
He was but six years old; I am so poor,
I cannot bury him.

DUKE

If you are poor,
Are you not blessed in that? Why, poverty
Is one of the Christian virtues,
(*Turns to the CARDINAL.*)
Is it not?
I know, Lord Cardinal, you have great
revenues,
Rich abbey-lands, and tithes, and large estates
For preaching voluntary poverty.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

Nay but, my lord the Duke, be generous ;
While we sit here within a noble house
[With shaded porticoes against the sun,
And walls and roofs to keep the winter
out,]

There are many citizens of Padua
Who in vile tenements live so full of holes,
That the chill rain, the snow, and the rude
blast,

Are tenants also with them ; others sleep
Under the arches of the public bridges
All through the autumn nights, till the wet
mist
Stiffens their limbs, and fevers come, and
so——

DUKE

And so they go to Abraham's bosom, Madam.
They should thank me for sending them to
Heaven,
If they are wretched here.

(To the CARDINAL.)

Is it not said
Somewhere in Holy Writ, that every man
Should be contented with that state of life

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. God calls him to? Why should I change
their state,
Or meddle with an all-wise providence,
Which has apportioned that some men should
starve
And others surfeit? I did not make the
world.

FIRST CITIZEN

He hath a hard heart.

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, be silent, neighbour;
I think the Cardinal will speak for us.

CARDINAL

True, it is Christian to bear misery,
[For out of misery God bringeth good,]
Yet it is Christian also to be kind,
[To feed the hungry, and to heal the sick,]
And there seem many evils in this town,
Which in your wisdom might your Grace
reform.

FIRST CITIZEN

What is that word reform? What does it
mean?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT II.

Marry, it means leaving things as they are ; I
like it not.

DUKE

Reform, Lord Cardinal, did *you* say reform ?
There is a man in Germany called Luther,
Who would reform the Holy Catholic Church.
Have you not made him heretic, and uttered
Anathema, maranatha, against him ?

CARDINAL (*rising from his seat*)

He would have led the sheep out of the fold,
We do but ask of you to feed the sheep.

DUKE

When I have shorn their fleeces I may feed
them.

As for these rebels——

(DUCHESS *entreats him.*)

FIRST CITIZEN

That is a kind word,
He means to give us something.

SECOND CITIZEN

Is that so ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUKE

These ragged knaves who come before us
here,
With mouths chock-full of treason.

THIRD CITIZEN

Good my Lord,
Fill up our mouths with bread; we'll hold
our tongues.

DUKE

Ye shall hold your tongues, whether you
starve or not.

My lords, this age is so familiar grown,
That the low peasant hardly doffs his hat,
Unless you beat him; and the raw mechanic
Elbows the noble in the public streets,
[As for this rabble here, I am their scourge,
And sent by God to lash them for their sins.]

DUCHESS

[Hast thou the right? art thou so free from
sin?]

DUKE

[When sin is lashed by virtue it is nothing,
But when sin lashes sin then is God glad.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

[Oh, are you not afraid?]

DUKE

[What have I to fear?

Being man's enemy am I not God's friend?

(To the Citizens.)

Well, my good loyal citizens of Padua,]

Still as our gentle Duchess has so prayed us,

And to refuse so beautiful a beggar

Were to lack both courtesy and love,

Touching your grievances, I promise this——

FIRST CITIZEN

Marry, he will lighten the taxes!

SECOND CITIZEN

Or a dole of bread, think you, for each man?

DUKE

That, on next Sunday, the Lord Cardinal

Shall, after Holy Mass, preach you a sermon

Upon the Beauty of Obedience.

(Citizens murmur.)

FIRST CITIZEN

I' faith, that will not fill our stomachs!

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. SECOND CITIZEN

A sermon is but a sorry sauce, when
You have nothing to eat with it,

DUCHESS

Poor people,
You see I have no power with the Duke,
But if you go into the court without,
My almoner shall from my private purse,
[Which is not ever too well stuffed with
gold,]
Divide a hundred ducats 'mongst you all.

ALMONER

[Your grace has but a hundred ducats left.]

DUCHESS

[Give what I have.]

FIRST CITIZEN

God save the Duchess, say I.

SECOND CITIZEN

God save her.

DUCHESS

And every Monday morn shall bread be set
For those who lack it.

(Citizens applaud and go out.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

FIRST CITIZEN (*going out*)

ACT I.

Why, God save the Duchess again!

DUKE (*calling him back*)

Come hither, fellow! what is your name?

FIRST CITIZEN

Dominick, sir.

DUKE

A good name! Why were you called
Dominick?

FIRST CITIZEN (*scratching his head*)

Marry, because I was born on Saint George's
day.

DUKE

A good reason! here is a ducat for you!
Will you not cry for me God save the
Duke?

FIRST CITIZEN (*feebly*)

God save the Duke.

DUKE

Nay! louder, fellow, louder.

D

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. FIRST CITIZEN (*a little louder*)

God save the Duke!

DUKE

More lustily, fellow, put more heart in
it!

Here is another ducat for you.

FIRST CITIZEN (*enthusiastically*)

God save the Duke!

DUKE (*mockingly*)

Why, gentlemen, this simple fellow's love
Touches me much. (*To the Citizen, harshly.*)

Go! (*Exit Citizen, bowing.*)

This is the way, my lords,

You can buy popularity nowadays.

Oh, we are nothing if not democratic!

(*To the DUCHESS.*)

[So] Well, Madam,

You spread rebellion 'midst our citizens,

[And by your doles and daily charities,

Have made the common people love you.

Well,

I will not have you loved.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS (*looking at* GUIDO)

ACT II.

[Indeed, my lord,

I am not.]

DUKE

[And I will not have you give
Bread to the poor merely because they are
hungry.]

DUCHESS

My Lord, the poor have rights you cannot
touch,
The right to pity, and the right to mercy.

DUKE

So, so, you argue with me? This is she,
The gentle Duchess for whose hand I yielded
Three of the fairest towns in Italy,
Pisa, and Genoa, and Orvieto.

DUCHESS

Promised, my Lord, not yielded: in that
matter
Brake you your word as ever.

DUKE

You wrong us, Madam,
There were state reasons.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

What state reasons are there
For breaking holy promises to a state ?

DUKE

[There are wild boars at Pisa in a forest
Close to the city : when I promised Pisa
Unto your noble and most trusting father,
I had forgotten there was hunting there.]

DUCHESS

[Those who forget what honour is, forget
All things, my lord.]

DUKE

[At Genoa they say,
Indeed I doubt them not, that the red mullet
Runs larger in the harbour of that town
Than anywhere in Italy.

(Turning to one of the Court.)

You, my lord,
Whose gluttonous appetite is your only god,
Could satisfy our Duchess on that point.

DUCHESS

[And Orvieto ?]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE (*yawning*)

ACT II.

I cannot now recall
Why I did not surrender Orvieto
According to the word of my contract.
Maybe it was because I did not choose.

(*Goes over to the DUCHESS.*)

Why look you, Madam, you are here alone ;
['Tis many a dusty league to your grey
France,

And even there your father barely keeps
A hundred ragged squires for his Court.]
What hope have you, I say ? Which of these
lords

And noble gentlemen of Padua
Stands by thy side.

DUCHESS

There is not one
(*GUIDO starts, but restrains himself.*)

DUKE

Nor shall be.
While I am Duke in Padua : listen, Madam,
[I am grown weary of your airs and graces,]
Being mine own, you shall do as I will,
And if it be my will you keep the house,
Why then, this palace shall your prison be ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. And if it be my will you walk abroad,
Why, you shall take the air from morn to
night.

DUCHESS

Sir, by what right——?

DUKE

Madam, my second Duchess
Asked the same question once: her monu-
ment

Lies in the chapel of Bartholomew,
Wrought in red marble; very beautiful.
Guido, your arm. Come, gentlemen, let us go
And spur our falcons for the mid-day chase.
Bethink you, Madam, you are here alone.

*(Exit the DUKE leaning on GUIDO, with his
Court.)*

DUCHESS *(looking after them)*

[Is it not strange that one who seems so fair
Should thus affect the Duke, hang on each
word

Which falls like poison from those cruel lips,
And never leave his side, as though he loved
him?

Well, well, it makes no matter unto me.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I am alone, and out of reach of love.]

ACT II.

The Duke said rightly that I was alone ;

Deserted, and dishonoured, and defamed,

Stood ever woman so alone indeed ?

Men when they woo us call us pretty
children,

Tell us we have not wit to make our lives,

And so they mar them for us. Did I say
woo ?

We are their chattels, and their common
slaves,

Less dear than the poor hound that licks their
hand,

Less fondled than the hawk upon their
wrist.

Woo, did I say ? bought rather, sold and
bartered,

Our very bodies being merchandise.

I know it is the general lot of women,

Each miserably mated to some man

Wrecks her own life upon his selfishness :

That it is general makes it not less bitter.

I think I never heard a woman laugh,

Laugh for pure merriment, except one
woman,

That was at night time, in the public streets.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Poor soul, she walked with painted lips, and
wore

The mask of pleasure : I would not laugh like
her ;

No, death were better.

*(Enter GUIDO behind unobserved ; the DUCHESS
flings herself down before a picture of the
Madonna.)*

O Mary mother, with your sweet pale face
Bending between the little angel heads
That hover round you, have you no help for
me ?

Mother of God, have you no help for
me ?

GUIDO

I can endure no longer.

This is my love, and I will speak to her.

Lady, am I a stranger to your prayers ?

DUCHESS *(rising)*

None but the wretched need my prayers, my
lord.

GUIDO

Then must I need them, lady.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

How is that ?

Does not the Duke show thee sufficient
honour,

[Or dost thou lack advancement at the Court ?

Ah, sir, that lies not in my power to give you,
Being my own self held of no account.]

GUIDO

Your Grace, I lack no favours from the Duke,
Whom my soul loathes as I loathe wickedness,
But come to proffer on my bended knees,
My loyal service to thee unto death.

DUCHESS

Alas ! I am so fallen in estate
I can but give thee a poor meed of thanks.

GUIDO (*seizing her hand*)

Hast thou no love to give me ?

(*The DUCHESS starts, and GUIDO falls at her
feet.*)

O dear saint,
If I have been too daring, pardon me !
Thy beauty sets my boyish blood aflame,
And, when my reverent lips touch thy white
hand,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Each little nerve with such wild passion thrills
That there is nothing which I would not do
To gain thy love. *(Leaps up.)*

Bid me reach forth and pluck
Perilous honour from the lion's jaws,
And I will wrestle with the Nemean beast
On the bare desert! Fling to the cave of War
A gaud, a ribbon, a dead flower, something
That once has touched thee, and I'll bring it
back

Though all the hosts of Christendom were
there,

Inviolatè again! ay, more than this,
Set me to scale the pallid white-faced cliffs
Of mighty England, and from that arrogant
shield

Will I raze out the lilies of your France
Which England, that sea-lion of the sea,
Hath taken from her!

O dear Beatrice,
Drive me not from thy presence! without
thee

The heavy minutes crawl with feet of lead,
But, while I look upon thy loveliness,
The hours fly like winged Mercuries
And leave existence golden.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

I did not think
I would be ever loved : do you indeed
Love me so much as now you say you do ?

GUIDO

Ask of the sea-bird if it loves the sea,
Ask of the roses if they love the rain,
Ask of the little lark, that will not sing
Till day break, if it loves to see the day :—
And yet, these are but empty images,
Mere shadows of my love, which is a fire
So great that all the waters of the main
Can not avail to quench it. Will you not
speak ?

DUCHESS

I hardly know what I should say to you.

GUIDO

Will you not say you love me ?

DUCHESS

Is that my lesson ?
Must I say all at once ? 'Twere a good lesson
If I did love you, sir ; but, if I do not,
What shall I say then ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. GUIDO

If you do not love me,
Say, none the less, you do, for on your tongue
Falsehood for very shame would turn to truth.

DUCHESS

What if I do not speak at all? They say
Lovers are happiest when they are in doubt.

GUIDO

Nay, doubt would kill me, and if I must die,
Why, let me die for joy and not for doubt.
Oh tell me may I stay, or must I go?

DUCHESS

I would not have you either stay or go;
For if you stay you steal my love from me,
And if you go you take my love away.
Guido, though all the morning stars could
sing
They could not tell the measure of my love.
I love you, Guido.

GUIDO (*stretching out his hands*)

Oh, do not cease at all;
I thought the nightingale sang but at night;
Or if thou needst must cease, then let my lips

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Touch the sweet lips that can such music ACT II.
make.

DUCHESS

To touch my lips is not to touch my heart.

GUIDO

Do you close that against me ?

DUCHESS

Alas ! my lord,
I have it not : the first day that I saw you
I let you take my heart away from me ;
Unwilling thief, that without meaning it
Didst break into my fenced treasury
And filch my jewel from it ! O strange theft,
Which made you richer though you knew it
not,
And left me poorer, and yet glad of it !

GUIDO (*clasping her in his arms*)

O love, love, love ! 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.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

You are my lord,
And what I have is yours, and what I have
not
Your fancy lends me, like a prodigal
Spending its wealth on what is nothing worth.
(Kisses him.)

GUIDO

Methinks I am bold to look upon you thus :
The gentle violet hides beneath its leaf
And is afraid to look at the great sun
For fear of too much splendour, but my eyes,
O daring eyes ! are grown so venturous
That like fixed stars they stand, gazing at you,
And surfeit sense with beauty.

DUCHESS

Dear love, I would
You could look upon me ever, for your eyes
Are polished mirrors, and when I peer
Into those mirrors I can see myself,
And so I know my image lives in you.

GUIDO *(taking her in his arms)*

Stand still, thou hurrying orb in the high
heavens,
And make this hour immortal ! *(A pause.)*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

Sit down here,

A little lower than me : yes, just so, sweet,
That I may run my fingers through your
hair,

And see your face turn upwards like a flower
To meet my kiss.

Have you not sometimes noted,
When we unlock some long-disused room
With heavy dust and soiling mildew filled,
Where never foot of man has come for years,
And from the windows take the rusty bar,
And fling the broken shutters to the air,
And let the bright sun in, how the good
sun

Turns every grimy particle of dust
Into a little thing of dancing gold ?
Guido, my heart is that long-empty room,
But you have let love in, and with its gold
Gilded all life. Do you not think that love
Fills up the sum of life ?

GUIDO

Ay ! without love

Life is no better than the unhewn stone
Which in the quarry lies, before the sculptor

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Has set the God within it. Without love
Life is as silent as the common reeds
That through the marshes or by rivers grow,
And have no music in them.

DUCHESS

Yet out of these
The singer, who is Love, will make a pipe
And from them he draws music; so I think
Love will bring music out of any life.
Is that not true?

GUIDO

Sweet, women make it true.
There are men who paint pictures, and carve
statues,
Paul of Verona and the dyer's son,
Or their great rival, who, by the sea at Venice,
Has set God's little maid upon the stair,
White as her own white lily, and as tall,
Or Raphael, whose Madonnas are divine
Because they are mothers merely; yet I think
Women are the best artists of the world,
For they can take the common lives of men
Soiled with the money-getting of our age,
And with love make them beautiful.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

Ah, dear,
I wish that you and I were very poor ;
The poor, who love each other, are so rich.

GUIDO

Tell me again you love me, Beatrice.

DUCHESS (*fingering his collar*)

How well this collar lies about your throat.

(LORD MORANZONE *looks through the door
from the corridor outside.*)

GUIDO

Nay, tell me that you love me.

DUCHESS

I remember,
That when I was a child in my dear France,
Being at Court at Fontainebleau, the King
Wore such a collar.

GUIDO

Will you not say you love me ?

DUCHESS (*smiling*)

He was a very royal man, King Francis,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Yet he was not royal as you are.

Why need I tell you, Guido, that I love
you?

*(Takes his head in her hands and turns his
face up to her.)*

Do you not know that I am yours for ever,
Body and soul.

*(Kisses him, and then suddenly catches sight of
MORANZONE and leaps up.)*

Oh, what is that? *(MORANZONE disappears.)*

GUIDO

What, love?

DUCHESS

Methought I saw a face with eyes of flame
Look at us through the doorway.

GUIDO

Nay, 'twas nothing :
The passing shadow of the man on guard.

*(The DUCHESS still stands looking at the
window.)*

'Twas nothing, sweet.

DUCHESS

Ay! what can harm us now,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who are in Love's hand? I do not think I'd
care

Though the vile world should with its lackey
Slander

Trample and tread upon my life; why should I?
They say the common field-flowers of the
field

Have sweeter scent when they are trodden
on

Than when they bloom alone, and that some
herbs

Which have no perfume, on being bruised die
With all Arabia round them; so it is

With the young lives this dull world seeks to
crush,

It does but bring the sweetness out of them,
And makes them lovelier often. And besides,
While we have love we have the best of life:
Is it not so?

GUIDO

Dear, shall we play or sing?

I think that I could sing now.

DUCHESS

Do not speak,

For there are times when all existences

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Seem narrowed to one single ecstasy,
And Passion sets a seal upon the lips.

GUIDO

Oh, with mine own lips let me break that seal!
You love me, Beatrice ?

DUCHESS

Ay ! is it not strange
I should so love mine enemy ?

GUIDO

Who is he ?

DUCHESS

Why, you : that with your shaft didst pierce
my heart !

Poor heart, that lived its little lonely life
Until it met your arrow.

GUIDO

Ah, dear love,
I am so wounded by that bolt myself
That with untended wounds I lie a-dying,
Unless you cure me, dear Physician.

DUCHESS

I would not have you cured ; for I am sick
With the same malady.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT II.

Oh how I love you !
See, I must steal the cuckoo's voice, and tell
The one tale over.

DUCHESS

Tell no other tale !
For, if that is the little cuckoo's song,
The nightingale is hoarse, and the loud lark
Has lost its music.

GUIDO

Kiss me, Beatrice !

(She takes his face in her hands and bends down and kisses him ; a loud knocking then comes at the door, and GUIDO leaps up ; enter a Servant.)

SERVANT

A package for you, sir.

GUIDO *(carelessly)*

Ah ! give it to me.

(Servant hands package wrapped in vermilion silk, and exit ; as GUIDO is about to open it the DUCHESS comes up behind, and in sport takes it from him.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS (*laughing*)

Now I will wager it is from some girl
Who would have you wear her favour ; I am
so jealous

I will not give up the least part in you,
But like a miser keep you to myself,
And spoil you perhaps in keeping.

GUIDO

It is nothing.

DUCHESS

Nay, it is from some girl.

GUIDO

You know 'tis not.

DUCHESS (*turns her back and opens it*)

Now, traitor, tell me what does this sign
mean,
A dagger with two leopards wrought in steel?

GUIDO (*taking it from her*)

O God !

DUCHESS

I'll from the window look, and try
If I can't see the porter's livery

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who left it at the gate! I will not rest ACT II.
Till I have learned your secret.

(Runs laughing into the corridor.)

GUIDO

Oh, horrible!

Had I so soon forgot my father's death,
Did I so soon let love into my heart,
And must I banish love, and let in murder
That beats and clamours at the outer gate?
Ay, that I must! Have I not sworn an
oath?

Yet not to-night; nay, it must be to-night.
Farewell then all the joy and light of life,
All dear recorded memories, farewell,
Farewell all love! Could I with bloody hands
Fondle and paddle with her innocent hands?
Could I with lips fresh from this butchery
Play with her lips? Could I with murderous
eyes

Look in those violet eyes, whose purity
Would strike mine blind, and make each eye-
ball reel

In night perpetual? No, murder has set
A barrier between us far too high
For us to kiss across it.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

Guido!

GUIDO

Beatrice,

You must forget that name, and banish me
Out of your life for ever.

DUCHESS (*going towards him*)

O dear love!

GUIDO (*stepping back*)

There lies a barrier between us two
We dare not pass.

DUCHESS

I dare do anything

So that you are beside me.

GUIDO

Ah! There it is.

I cannot be beside you, cannot breathe
The air you breathe; I cannot any more
Stand face to face with beauty, which un-
nerves

My shaking heart, and makes my desperate
hand

Fail of its purpose. Let me go hence, I pray;
Forget you ever looked upon me.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

What!

With your hot kisses fresh upon my lips
Forget the vows of love you made to me?

GUIDO

I take them back!

DUCHESS

Alas, you cannot, Guido,
For they are part of nature now; the air
Is tremulous with their music, and outside
The little birds sing sweeter for those vows.

GUIDO

There lies a barrier between us now,
Which then I knew not, or I had forgot.

DUCHESS

There is no barrier, Guido; why, I will go
In poor attire, and will follow you
Over the world.

GUIDO (*wildly*)

The world's not wide enough
To hold us two! Farewell, farewell for ever.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS (*calm, and controlling her passion*)

Why did you come into my life at all, then,
Or in the desolate garden of my heart
Sow that white flower of love—— ?

GUIDO

O Beatrice!

DUCHESS

Which now you would dig up, uproot, tear
out,
Though each small fibre doth so hold my
heart
That if you break one, my heart breaks
with it ?
Why did you come into my life? Why
open
The secret wells of love I had sealed up ?
Why did you open them—— ?

GUIDO

O God!

DUCHESS (*clenching her hand*)

And let

The floodgates of my passion swell and burst
Till, like the wave when rivers overflow
That sweeps the forest and the farm away,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Love in the splendid avalanche of its might ACT II.
Swept my life with it? Must I drop by
drop

Gather these waters back and seal them up?
Alas! Each drop will be a tear, and so
Will with its saltness make life very bitter.

GUIDO

I pray you speak no more, for I must go
Forth from your life and love, and make a way
On which you cannot follow.

DUCHESS

I have heard
That sailors dying of thirst upon a raft,
Poor castaways upon a lonely sea,
Dream of green fields and pleasant water-
courses,
And then wake up with red thirst in their
throats,
And die more miserably because sleep
Has cheated them: so they die cursing sleep
For having sent them dreams: I will not
curse you
Though I am cast away upon the sea
Which men call Desolation.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. GUIDO

O God, God!

DUCHESS

But you will stay : listen, I love you, Guido.

(She waits a little.)

Is echo dead, that when I say I love you

There is no answer ?

GUIDO

Everything is dead,

Save one thing only, which shall die to-night !

DUCHESS

[Then I must train my lips to say farewell,

And yet I think they will not learn that
lesson,

For when I shape them for such utterance

They do but say I love you : must I chide
them ?

And if so, can my lips chide one another ?

Alas, they both are guilty, and refuse

To say the word.]

GUIDO

[Then I must say it for them,

Farewell, we two can never meet again.]

(Rushes towards her.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

If you are going, touch me not, but go.

(*Exit* GUIDO.)

[Never again, did he say never again?

Well, well, I know my business! I will
change

The torch of love into a funeral torch,

And with the flowers of love will strew my
bier,

And from love's songs will make a dirge,
and so

Die, as the swan dies, singing.

O misery,

If thou wert so enamoured of my life,

Why couldst thou not some other form have
borne?

The mask of pain, and not the mask of love,

The raven's voice, and not the nightingale's,

The blind mole's eyes, and not those agate
eyes

Which, like the summer heavens, were so blue

That one could fancy one saw God in them,

So, misery, I had known thee.]

Barrier! Barrier!

Why did he say there was a barrier?

There is no barrier between us two.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. He lied to me, and shall I for that reason
Loathe what I love, and what I worshipped,
hate?

I think we women do not love like that.
For if I cut his image from my heart,
My heart would, like a bleeding pilgrim,
follow

That image through the world, and call it
back

With little cries of love.

*(Enter DUKE equipped for the chase, with
falcons and hounds.)*

DUKE

Madam, you keep us waiting ;
You keep my dogs waiting.

DUCHESS

I will not ride to-day.

DUKE

How now, what's this ?

DUCHESS

My Lord, I cannot go.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE

ACT II.

What, pale face, do you dare to stand against
me?

Why, I could set you on a sorry jade
And lead you through the town, till the low
rabble

You feed toss up their hats and mock at you.

DUCHESS

Have you no word of kindness ever for me?

DUKE

[Kind words are lime to snare our enemies !]
I hold you in the hollow of my hand
And have no need on you to waste kind
words.

DUCHESS

Well, I will go.

DUKE (*slapping his boot with his whip*)

No, I have changed my mind,
You will stay here, and like a faithful wife
Watch from the window for our coming back.
Were it not dreadful if some accident
By chance should happen to your loving Lord?
Come, gentlemen, my hounds begin to chafe,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. And I chafe too, having a patient wife.
Where is young Guido ?

MAFFIO

My liege, I have not seen him
For a full hour past.

DUKE

It matters not,
I dare say I shall see him soon enough.
Well, Madam, you will sit at home and spin.
I do protest, sirs, the domestic virtues
Are often very beautiful in others.

(Exit DUKE with his Court.)

DUCHESS

The stars have fought against me, that is all,
And thus to-night when my Lord lieth asleep,
Will I fall upon my dagger, and so cease.
My heart is such a stone nothing can reach it
Except the dagger's edge : let it go there,
To find what name it carries : ay ! to-night
Death will divorce the Duke ; and yet to-
night

He may die also, he is very old.
Why should he not die ? Yesterday his hand
Shook with a palsy : men have died from palsy,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And why not he? Are there not fevers also, ACT II.
Agues and chills, and other maladies

Most incident to old age?

No, no, he will not die, he is too sinful;

Honest men die before their proper time.

Good men will die: men by whose side the
Duke

In all the sick pollution of his life

Seems like a leper: women and children
die,

But the Duke will not die, he is too sinful.

Oh, can it be

There is some immortality in sin,

Which virtue has not? And does the wicked
man

Draw life from what to other men were
death,

Like poisonous plants that on corruption
live?

No, no, I think God would not suffer that:

Yet the Duke will not die: he is too sinful.

But I will die alone, and on this night

Grim Death shall be my bridegroom, and the
tomb

My secret house of pleasure: well, what of
that?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. The world's a graveyard, and we each, like
coffins,

Within us bear a skeleton.

*(Enter LORD MORANZONE all in black; he
passes across the back of the stage looking
anxiously about.)*

MORANZONE

Where is Guido?

I cannot find him anywhere.

DUCHESS *(catches sight of him)*

O God!

'Twas thou who took my love away from me.

MORANZONE *(with a look of joy)*

What, has he left you?

DUCHESS

Nay, you know he has.

Oh, give him back to me, give him back, I say,
Or I will tear your body limb from limb,

And to the common gibbet nail your head

Until the carrion crows have stripped it bare.

Better you had crossed a hungry lioness

Before you came between me and my love.

(With more pathos.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Nay, give him back, you know not how I ACT II
love him,

Here by this chair he knelt a half hour since,
'Twas there he stood, and there he looked at
me,

This is the hand he kissed [these are the lips
His lips made havoc of], and these the ears
Into whose open portals he did pour
A tale of love so musical that all
The birds stopped singing! Oh give him back
to me.

MORANZONE

He does not love you, Madam.

DUCHESS

May the plague
Wither the tongue that says so! Give him
back.

MORANZONE

Madam, I tell you you will never see him,
Neither to-night, nor any other night.

DUCHESS

What is your name?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. MORANZONE

My name? Revenge!
(*Exit.*)

DUCHESS

Revenge!

I think I never harmed a little child.
What should Revenge do coming to my door?
It matters not, for Death is there already,
Waiting with his dim torch to light my
way.

'Tis true men hate thee, Death, and yet I
think

Thou wilt be kinder to me than my lover,
And so dispatch the messengers at once,
Hurry the lazy steeds of lingering day,
And let the night, thy sister, come instead,
And drape the world in mourning; let the owl,
Who is thy minister, scream from his tower
And wake the toad with hooting, and the
bat,

That is the slave of dim Persephone,
Wheel through the sombre air on wandering
wing!

Tear up the shrieking mandrakes from the
earth

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And bid them make us music, and tell the **ACT II.**
mole

To dig deep down thy cold and narrow bed,
For I shall lie within thine arms to-night.

END OF ACT II.

Missing Page

Missing Page

ACT III

SCENE

A large corridor in the Ducal Palace : a window (L.C.) looks out on a view of Padua by moonlight : a staircase (R.C.) leads up to a door with a portière of crimson velvet, with the Duke's arms embroidered in gold on it : on the lowest step of the staircase a figure draped in black is sitting : the hall is lit by an iron cresset filled with burning tow : thunder and lightning outside : the time is night.

(Enter GUIDO through the window.)

GUIDO

The wind is rising : how my ladder shook !
I thought that every gust would break the
 cords! *(Looks out at the city.)*
Christ ! What a night :
Great thunder in the heavens, and wild light-
 nings
Striking from pinnacle to pinnacle
Across the city, till the dim houses seem

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. To shudder and to shake as each new glare
Dashes adown the street.

(Passes across the stage to foot of staircase.)

Ah! who art thou
That sittest on the stair, like unto Death
Waiting a guilty soul? *(A pause.)*

Canst thou not speak?
Or has this storm laid palsy on your tongue,
And chilled your utterance? [Get from my
path,
For I have certain business in yon chamber,
Which I must do alone.]

(The figure rises and takes off his mask.)

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti,
Thy murdered father laughs for joy to-night.

GUIDO *(confusedly)*

What, art thou here?

MORANZONE

Ay, waiting for your coming

GUIDO *(looking away from him)*

I did not think to see you, but am glad,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

That thou mayest know the [very] thing I ACT III.
mean to do.

MORANZONE

First, I would have you know my well-laid
plans ;

Listen : I have set horses at the gate
Which leads to Parma : when thou hast done
thy business

We will ride hence, and by to-morrow night

[If our good horses fail not by the way ?

Parma will see us coming ; I have advised

Many old friends of your great father there,

Who have prepared the citizens for revolt.

With money, and with golden promises,

The which we need not keep, I have bought
over

Many that stand by this usurping Duke.

As for the soldiers, they, the Duke being
dead,

Will fling allegiance to the winds, so thou

Shalt sit again within thy father's palace,

As Parma's rightful lord.]

GUIDO

It cannot be.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. MORANZONE

Nay, but it shall.

GUIDO

Listen, Lord Moranzone,
I am resolved not to kill this man.

MORANZONE

Surely my ears are traitors, speak again :
It cannot be but age has dulled my powers,
I am an old man now : what did you say ?
You said that with that dagger in your belt
You would avenge your father's bloody
murder ;
Did you not say that ?

GUIDO

No, my lord, I said
I was resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE

You said not that ; it is my senses mock me ;
Or else this midnight air o'ercharged with
storm
Alters your message in the giving it.

GUIDO

Nay, you heard rightly ; I'll not kill this man.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT III

What of thine oath, thou traitor, what of thine
oath ?

GUIDO

I am resolved not to keep that oath.

MORANZONE

What of thy murdered father ?

GUIDO

Dost thou think
My father would be glad to see me coming,
This old man's blood still hot upon mine
hands ?

MORANZONE

Ay ! he would laugh for joy.

GUIDO

I do not think so,
There is better knowledge in the other
world ;
Vengeance is God's, let God himself revenge.

MORANZONE

Thou art God's minister of vengeance.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. GUIDO

No!
God hath no minister but his own hand.
I will not kill this man.

MORANZONE

Why are you here,
If not to kill him, then ?

GUIDO

Lord Moranzone,
I purpose to ascend to the Duke's chamber,
And as he lies asleep lay on his breast
The dagger and this writing ; when he awakes
Then he will know who held him in his power
And slew him not : this is the noblest vengeance
Which I can take.

MORANZONE

You will not slay him ?

GUIDO

No.

MORANZONE

Ignoble son of a noble father,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who sufferest this man who sold that father ACT III.
To live an hour.

GUIDO

 'Twas thou that hindered me ;
I would have killed him in the open square,
The day I saw him first.

MORANZONE

 It was not yet time ;
Now it is time, and, like some green-faced girl,
Thou pratest of forgiveness.

GUIDO

 No ! revenge :
The right revenge my father's son should take.

MORANZONE

[O wretched father, thus again betrayed,
And by thine own son too!] : You are a coward,
Take out the knife, get to the Duke's chamber,
And bring me back his heart upon the blade.
When he is dead, then you can talk to me
Of noble vengeance.

GUIDO

 Upon thine honour,
And by the love thou bearest my father's name,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Dost thou think my father, that great gentleman,
That generous soldier, that most chivalrous lord,
Would have crept at night-time, like a common thief,
And stabbed an old man sleeping in his bed,
However he had wronged him : tell me that.

MORANZONE (*after some hesitation*)

You have sworn an oath, see that you keep that oath.
Boy, do you think I do not know your secret,
Your traffic with the Duchess ?

GUIDO

Silence, liar !

The very moon in heaven is not more chaste,
Nor the white stars so pure.

MORANZONE

And yet, you love her ;
Weak fool, to let love in upon your life,
Save as a plaything.

GUIDO

You do well to talk :
Within your veins, old man, the pulse of youth

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Throbs with no ardour. Your eyes full of ACT III.
rheum

Have against Beauty closed their filmy doors,
And your clogged ears, losing their natural
sense,

Have shut you from the music of the world.
You talk of love! You know not what it is.

MORANZONE

[Oh, in my time, boy, have I walked i' the
moon,

Swore I would live on kisses and on blisses,
Swore I would die for love, and did not die,
Wrote love bad verses; ay, and sung them
badly,

Like all true lovers: Oh, I have done the
tricks!

I know the partings and the chamberings;
We are all animals at best, and love
Is merely passion with a holy name.]

GUIDO

Now then I know you have not loved at
all.

Love is the sacrament of life; it sets
Virtue where virtue was not; cleanses men

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Of all the vile pollutions of this world ;
It is the fire which purges gold from dross,
It is the fan which winnows wheat from chaff,
It is the spring which in some wintry soil
Makes innocence to blossom like a rose.
The days are over when God walked with
men,

But Love, which is His image, holds His place.
When a man loves a woman, then he knows
God's secret, and the secret of the world.
There is no house so lowly or so mean,
Which, if their hearts be pure who live in it,
Love will not enter ; but if bloody murder
Knock at the Palace gate and is let in,
Love like a wounded thing creeps out and
dies.

This is the punishment God sets on sin.
The wicked cannot love.

(A groan comes from the DUKE's chamber.)

Ah ! What is that ?

Do you not hear ? 'Twas nothing.

So I think

That it is woman's mission by their love
To save the souls of men : and loving her,
My Lady, my white Beatrice, I begin
To see a nobler and a holier vengeance

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. That she has shut her heart against me now :
No, I will never see her.

MORANZONE

What will you do ?

GUIDO

After that I have laid the dagger there,
Get hence to-night from Padua.

MORANZONE

And then ?

GUIDO

I will take service with the Doge at Venice,
And bid him pack me straightway to the
wars,

[In Holy Land against the Infidel ;]

And there I will, being now sick of life,
Throw that poor life against some desperate
spear.

(A groan from the DUKE'S chamber again.)

Did you not hear a voice ?

MORANZONE

I always hear,
From the dim confines of some sepulchre,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

A voice that cries for vengeance: We waste **ACT III.**
time,

It will be morning soon; are you resolved
You will not kill the Duke?

GUIDO

I am resolved.

MORANZONE

[Guido Ferranti, in that chamber yonder
There lies the man who sold your father's life,
And gave him to the hangman's murderous
hands.

There does he sleep: you have your father's
dagger;
Will you not kill him?]

GUIDO

[No, I will not kill him.]

MORANZONE

O wretched father, lying unavenged.

GUIDO

More wretched were thy son a murderer.

MORANZONE

Why, what is life?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. GUIDO

I do not know, my lord,
I did not give it, and I dare not take it.

MORANZONE

I do not thank God often ; but I think
I thank him now that I have got no son !
And you, what bastard blood flows in your
veins
That when you have your enemy in your
grasp
You let him go ! I would that I had left you
With the dull hinds that reared you.

GUIDO

Better perhaps
That you had done so ! May be better still
I'd not been born to this distressful world.

MORANZONE

Farewell !

GUIDO

Farewell ! Some day, Lord Moranzone,
You will understand my vengeance.

MORANZONE

Never, boy.
(Gets out of window and exit by rope ladder.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT III

Father, I think thou knowest my resolve,
And with this nobler vengeance are content.
Father, I think in letting this man live
That I am doing what you would have done.
Father, I know not if a human voice
Can pierce the iron gateway of the dead,
Or if the dead are set in ignorance
Of what we do, or do not, for their sakes.
And yet I feel a presence in the air,
There is a shadow standing at my side,
And ghostly kisses seem to touch my lips,
And leave them holier. *(Kneels down.)*

O father, if 'tis thou,
Canst thou not burst through the decrees of
death,
And if corporeal semblance show thyself,
That I may touch thy hand!

No, there is nothing. *(Rises.)*
'Tis the night that cheats us with its phantoms,
And, like a puppet-master, makes us think
That things are real which are not. It grows
late.

Now must I to my business.

*(Pulls out a letter from his doublet and
reads it.)*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III.

When he wakes,
And sees this letter, and the dagger with it,
Will he not have some loathing for his life,
Repent, perchance, and lead a better life,
Or will he mock because a young man spared
His natural enemy? I do not care.
Father, it is your bidding that I do,
Your bidding, and the bidding of my love
Which teaches me to know you as you are.

(Ascends staircase stealthily, and just as he reaches out his hand to draw back the curtain the DUCHESS appears all in white. GUIDO starts back.)

DUCHESS

Guido! what do you here so late?

GUIDO

O white and spotless angel of my life,
Sure thou hast come from Heaven with a
message
That mercy is more noble than revenge?

DUCHESS

[Ay! I do pray for mercy earnestly.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT III.

[O father, now I know I do your bidding,
For hand in hand with Mercy, like a God,
Has Love come forth to meet me on the way.]

DUCHESS

[I felt you would come back to me again,
Although you left me very cruelly :
Why did you leave me? Nay, that matters
not,
For I can hold you now, and feel your heart
Beat against mine with little throbs of love :
Our hearts are two caged birds, trying to kiss
Across their cages' bars : but the time goes,
It will be morning in an hour or so ;
Let us get horses : I must post to Venice,
They will not think of looking for me there.]

[GUIDO]

Love, I will follow you across the world.

DUCHESS

[But are you sure you love me ?]

GUIDO

[Is the lark
Sure that it loves the dawn that bids it sing ?]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. DUCHESS

[Could nothing ever change you?]

GUIDO

[Nothing ever :

The shipman's needle is not set more sure
Than I am to the lodestone of your love.]

DUCHESS

There is no barrier between us now.

GUIDO

None, love, nor shall be.

DUCHESS

I have seen to that.

GUIDO

Tarry here for me.

DUCHESS

No, you are not going?

You will not leave me as you did before?

GUIDO

I will return within a moment's space,
But first I must repair to the Duke's chamber,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And leave this letter and this dagger there, ACT III.
That when he wakes——

DUCHESS

When who wakes?

GUIDO

Why, the Duke.

DUCHESS

He will not wake again.

GUIDO

What, is he dead?

DUCHESS

Ay! he is dead.

GUIDO

O God! how wonderful
Are all thy secret ways! Who would have
said
That on this very night, when I had yielded
Into thy hands the vengeance that is Thine,
Thou with thy finger should have touched
the man,
And bade him come before thy judgment
seat.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. DUCHESS

I have just killed him.

GUIDO (*in horror*)

Oh!

DUCHESS

He was asleep ;

Come closer, love, and I will tell you all.

[Kiss me upon the mouth, and I will tell you.

You will not kiss me now?—well, you will
kiss me

When I have told you how I killed the Duke.
After you left me with such bitter words,
Feeling my life went lame without your
love.]

I had resolved to kill myself to-night.

About an hour ago I waked from sleep,

And took my dagger from beneath my
pillow,

Where I had hidden it to serve my need,

And drew it from the sheath, and felt the
edge,

And thought of you, and how I loved you,
Guido,

And turned to fall upon it, when I marked

The old man sleeping, full of years and sin ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Do you remember saying that women's love
Turns men to angels? well, the love of man
Turns women into martyrs; for its sake
We do or suffer anything.]

GUIDO

[O God!]

DUCHESS

[Will you not speak?]

GUIDO

[I cannot speak at all.]

DUCHESS

[This is the knife with which I killed the
Duke.

I did not think he would have bled so
much,

But I can wash my hands in water after;

Can I not wash my hands? Ay, but my
soul?]

Let us not talk of this! Let us go hence:

Is not the barrier broken down between us?

What would you more? Come, it is almost
morning. (*Puts her hand on GUIDO'S.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO (*breaking from her*)

ACT III

O damned saint! O angel fresh from Hell!
What bloody devil tempted thee to this!
That thou hast killed thy husband, that is
nothing—

Hell was already gaping for his soul—
But thou hast murdered Love, and in its place
Hast set a horrible and bloodstained thing,
Whose very breath breeds pestilence and
plague,
And strangles Love.

DUCHESS (*in amazed wonder*)

I did it all for you.

I would not have you do it, had you willed
it,

For I would keep you without blot or stain,
A thing unblemished, unassailed, untarnished.
Men do not know what women do for love.
Have I not wrecked my soul for your dear
sake,

Here and hereafter?

[Oh be kind to me,

I did it all for you.]

GUIDO

No, do not touch me,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Between us lies a thin red stream of blood,
I dare not look across it: when you stabbed
him
You stabbed Love with a sharp knife to the
heart.
We cannot meet again.

DUCHESS (*wringing her hands*)

For you! For you!
I did it all for you: have you forgotten?
You said there was a barrier between us;
That barrier lies now i' the upper chamber
Upset, overthrown, beaten, and battered
down,
And will not part us ever.

GUIDO

No, you mistook:
Sin was the barrier, you have raised it up;
Crime was the barrier, you have set it there.
The barrier was murder, and your hand
Has builded it so high it shuts out heaven,
It shuts out God.

DUCHESS

I did it all for you;
You dare not leave me now: nay, Guido,
listen.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Get horses ready, we will fly to-night. ACT III.

The past is a bad dream, we will forget it :
Before us lies the future : will we not have
Sweet days of love beneath our vines and
laugh?—

No, no, we will not laugh, but, when we
weep,

Well, we will weep together ; I will serve you
[Like a poor housewife, like a common
slave ;]

I will be very meek and very gentle :
You do not know me.

GUIDO

Nay, I know you now ;
Get hence, I say, out of my sight.

DUCHESS (*pacing up and down*)

O God,
How I have loved this man !

GUIDO

You never loved me.
Had it been so, Love would have [stopped]
your hand,

[Nor suffered you to stain his holy shrine,
Where none can enter but the innocent.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. DUCHESS

These are but words, words, words.

GUIDO

Get hence, I pray :
How could we sit together at Love's table ?
You have poured poison in the sacred wine,
And Murder dips his fingers in the sop.
[Rather than this I had died a thousand
deaths.]

DUCHESS

[I having done it, die a thousand deaths.]

GUIDO

[It is not death but life that you should fear.]

DUCHESS (*throws herself on her knees*)

Then slay me now! I have spilt blood
to-night,
You shall spill more, so we go hand in
hand
To heaven or to hell. Draw your sword,
Guido,
[And traffic quickly for my life with Death,
Who is grown greedy of such merchandize.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Quick, let your soul go chambering in my heart,
ACT III.

It will but find its master's image there.
Nay, if you will not slay me with your sword,
Bid me to fall upon this reeking knife,
And I will do it.

GUIDO (*wresting knife from her*)

Give it to me, I say.

O God, your very hands are wet with blood!
This place is Hell, I cannot tarry here.

DUCHESS

[Will you not raise me up before you go,
Or must I like a beggar keep my knees.]

GUIDO

I pray you let me see your face no more.

DUCHESS

Better for me I had not seen your face.
[O think it was for you I killed this man.]

(GUIDO *recoils: she seizes his hands as she
kneels.*)

Nay, Guido, listen for a while:
Until you came to Padua I lived

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Wretched indeed, but with no murderous
thought,

Very submissive to a cruel Lord,
Very obedient to unjust commands,
As pure I think as any gentle girl
Who now would turn in horror from my
hands—

You came : ah ! Guido, the first kindly words
I ever heard since I had come from France
Were from your lips : well, well, that is no
matter.

You came, and in the passion of your eyes
I read love's meaning, everything you said
Touched my dumb soul to music, [and you
seemed

Fair as that young Saint Michael on the wall
In Santa Croce, where we go and pray.
I wonder will I ever pray again ?

Well, you were fair, and in your boyish face
The morning seemed to lighten,] so I loved
you.

And yet I did not tell you of my love.
'Twas you who sought me out, knelt at my feet
As I kneel now at yours, and with sweet vows,
(Kneels.)

Whose music seems to linger in my ears,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Swore that you loved me, and I trusted you. ACT III

I think there are many women in the world
[Who had they been unto this vile Duke
mated,

Chained to his side, as the poor galley slave
Is to a leper chained,—ay ! many women]
Who would have tempted you to kill the man.
I did not.

Yet I know that had I done so,
I had not been thus humbled in the dust,
(Stands up.)

But you had loved me very faithfully.
(After a pause approaches him timidly.)

I do not think you understand me, Guido :
It was for your sake that I wrought this deed
Whose horror now chills my young blood to
ice,

For your sake only.
(Stretching out her arm.)

Will you not speak to me ?
Love me a little : in my girlish life
I have been starved for love, and kindness
Has passed me by.

GUIDO

I dare not look at you :

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. You come to me with too pronounced a
favour,
Get to your tirewomen.

DUCHESS

Ay, there it is !
There speaks the man ! yet had you come to
me
With any heavy sin upon your soul,
Some murder done for hire, not for love,
Why, I had sat and watched at your bedside
All through the night-time, lest Remorse
might come
And pour his poisons in your ear, and so
Keep you from sleeping ! Sure it is the guilty,
Who, being very wretched, need love most.

GUIDO

There is no love where there is any guilt.

DUCHESS

No love where there is any guilt ! O God,
How differently do we love from men !
There is many a woman here in Padua,
Some workman's wife, or ruder artisan's,
Whose husband spends the wages of the week
In a coarse revel, or a tavern brawl,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And reeling home late on the Saturday night, **ACT III.**
Finds his wife sitting by a fireless hearth,
Trying to hush the child who cries for hunger,
And then sets to and beats his wife because
The child is hungry, and the fire black.
Yet the wife loves him! and will rise next day
With some red bruise across a careworn face,
And sweep the house, and do the common
service,

And try and smile, and only be too glad
If he does not beat her a second time
Before her child!—that is how women love.

(A pause: GUIDO says nothing.)

[Do you say nothing? Oh be kind to me
While yet I know the summer of my days.]
I think you will not drive me from your side.
Where have I got to go if you reject me?—
You for whose sake this hand has murdered
life,
You for whose sake my soul has wrecked
itself
Beyond all hope of pardon.

GUIDO

Get thee gone:
The dead man is a ghost, and our love too,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

He will not answer ; if you mock him now, ACT III.
He will not laugh ; and if you stab him now
He will not bleed.

I would that I could wake him !
O God, put back the sun a little space,
And from the roll of time blot out to-night,
And bid it not have been ! put back the sun,
And make me what I was an hour ago !
No, no, time will not stop for anything,
Nor the sun stay its courses, though Repent-
ance
Calling it back grow hoarse ; but you, my love,
Have you no word of pity even for me ?
O Guido, Guido, will you not kiss me once ?
Drive me not to some desperate resolve :
Women grow mad when they are treated
thus :
Will you not kiss me once ?

GUIDO (*holding up knife*)

[I will not kiss you
Until the blood grows dry upon this knife,
And not even then.]

DUCHESS

[Dear Christ ! how little pity
We women get in this untimely world ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Men lure us to some dreadful precipice,
And, when we fall, they leave us.]

GUIDO (*wildly*)

Back to your dead!

DUCHESS (*going up the stairs*)

Why, then I will be gone! and may you
find

More mercy than you showed to me to-night!

GUIDO

Let me find mercy when I go at night
And do foul murder.

DUCHESS (*coming down a few steps*)

Murder did you say?

Murder is hungry, and still cries for more,
And Death, his brother, is not satisfied,
But walks the house, and will not go away,
Unless he has a comrade! Tarry, Death,
For I will give thee a most faithful lackey
To travel with thee! Murder, call no more,
For thou shalt eat thy fill.

There is a storm
Will break upon this house before the morn-
ing,
So horrible, that the white moon already

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Turns grey and sick with terror, the low wind ACT III.
Goes moaning round the house, and the high
stars

Run madly through the vaulted firmament,
As though the night wept tears of liquid
fire

For what the day shall look upon. O weep,
Thou lamentable heaven! Weep thy fill!
Though sorrow like a cataract drench the
fields,

And make the earth one bitter lake of tears,
It would not be enough. (*A peal of thunder.*)

Do you not hear,
[There is artillery in the Heaven to-night.]
Vengeance is wakened up, and has unloosed
His dogs upon the world, and in this matter
Which lies between us two, let him who
draws

The thunder on his head beware the ruin
Which the forked flame brings after.

(*A flash of lightning followed by a peal of
thunder.*)

GUIDO

Away! away!

(*Exit the DUCHESS, who as she lifts the crimson*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. *curtain looks back for a moment at GUIDO, but he makes no sign. More thunder.)*

Now is life fallen in ashes at my feet
And noble love self-slain ; and in its place
Crept murder with its silent bloody feet.
And she who wrought it—Oh ! and yet she
loved me,
And for my sake did do this dreadful thing.
I have been cruel to her : Beatrice !
Beatrice, I say, come back.

(Begins to ascend staircase, when the noise of Soldiers is heard.)

Ah ! what is that ?

Torches ablaze, and noise of hurrying feet.
Pray God they have not seized her.

(Noise grows louder.)

Beatrice !

There is yet time to escape. Come down,
come out !

(The voice of the DUCHESS outside.)

This way went he, the man who slew my
lord.

(Down the staircase come hurrying a confused body of Soldiers ; GUIDO is not seen at first, till the DUCHESS surrounded by Servants carrying torches appears at the

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

top of the staircase, and points to GUIDO, ACT III. who is seized at once, one of the Soldiers dragging the knife from his hand and showing it to the Captain of the Guard in sight of the audience. Tableau.)

END OF ACT III.

Missing Page

Missing Page

ACT IV

SCENE

The Court of Justice: the walls are hung with stamped grey velvet: above the hangings the wall is red, and gilt symbolical figures bear up the roof, which is made of red beams with grey soffits and moulding: a canopy of white satin flowered with gold is set for the Duchess: below it a long bench with red cloth for the Judges: below that a table for the clerks of the Court. Two soldiers stand on each side of the canopy, and two soldiers guard the door; the citizens have some of them collected in the Court, others are coming in greeting one another; two tipstaves in violet keep order with long white wands.

FIRST CITIZEN

Good morrow, neighbour Anthony.

SECOND CITIZEN

Good morrow, neighbour Dominick.

FIRST CITIZEN

This is a strange day for Padua, is it not?
—the Duke being dead.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. SECOND CITIZEN

I tell you, neighbour Dominick, I have not known such a day since the last Duke died : [and if you believe me not, I am no true man.]

FIRST CITIZEN

They will try him first, and sentence him afterwards, will they not, neighbour Anthony ?

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, for he might 'scape his punishment then ; but they will condemn him first so that he gets his deserts, and give him trial afterwards so that no injustice is done.

FIRST CITIZEN

Well, well, it will go hard with him I doubt not.

SECOND CITIZEN

Surely it is a grievous thing to shed a Duke's blood.

THIRD CITIZEN

They say a Duke has blue blood.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT IV.

I think our Duke's blood was black like his soul.

FIRST CITIZEN

Have a watch, neighbour Anthony, the officer is looking at thee.

SECOND CITIZEN

I care not if he does but look at me; he cannot whip me with the lashes of his eye.

THIRD CITIZEN

What think you of this young man who stuck the knife into the Duke?

SECOND CITIZEN

Why, that he is a well-behaved, and a well-meaning, and a well-favoured lad, and yet wicked in that he killed the Duke.

THIRD CITIZEN

'Twas the first time he did it: may be the law will not be hard on him, as he did not do it before.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. SECOND CITIZEN

True.

TIPSTAFF

Silence, knave.

SECOND CITIZEN

Am I thy looking-glass, Master Tipstaff, that thou callest me knave?

FIRST CITIZEN

Here be one of the household coming. Well, Dame Lucy, thou art of the Court, how does thy poor mistress the Duchess, with her sweet face?

MISTRESS LUCY

O well-a-day! O miserable day! O day! O misery! why it is just nineteen years last June, at Michaelmas, since I was married to my husband, and it is August now, and here is the Duke murdered; there is a coincidence for you!

SECOND CITIZEN

Why, if it is a coincidence, they may not

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

kill the young man : there is no law against ACT IV.
coincidences.

FIRST CITIZEN

But how does the Duchess ?

MISTRESS LUCY

Well, well, I knew some harm would happen to the house : six weeks ago the cakes were all burned on one side, and last Saint Martin even as ever was, there flew into the candle a big moth that had wings, and a'most scared me.

FIRST CITIZEN

But come to the Duchess, good gossip : what of her ?

MISTRESS LUCY

Marry, it is time you should ask after her, poor lady ; she is distraught almost. Why, she has not slept, but paced the chamber all night long. I prayed her to have a posset, or some aqua-vitæ, and to get to bed and sleep a little for her health's sake, but she answered me she was afraid she might dream. That was a strange answer, was it not ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. SECOND CITIZEN

These great folk have not much sense, so Providence makes it up to them in fine clothes.

MISTRESS LUCY

Well, well, God keep murder from us, I say, as long as we are alive.

(Enter LORD MORANZONE hurriedly.)

MORANZONE

Is the Duke dead ?

SECOND CITIZEN

He has a knife in his heart, which they say is not healthy for any man.

MORANZONE

Who is accused of having killed him ?

SECOND CITIZEN

Why, the prisoner, sir.

MORANZONE

But who is the prisoner ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT IV.

Why, he that is accused of the Duke's murder.

MORANZONE

I mean, what is his name?

SECOND CITIZEN

Faith, the same which his godfathers gave him : what else should it be ?

TIPSTAFF

Guido Ferranti is his name, my lord.

MORANZONE

I almost knew thine answer ere you gave it.

(Aside.)

Yet it is strange he should have killed the Duke,

Seeing he left me in such different mood.

It is most likely when he saw the man,

This devil who had sold his father's life,

That passion from their seat within his heart

Thrust all his boyish theories of love,

And in their place set vengeance; yet I
marvel

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. That he escaped not.

(Turning again to the crowd.)

How was he taken, tell me

THIRD CITIZEN

Marry, sir, he was taken by the heels.

MORANZONE

But who seized him ?

THIRD CITIZEN

Why, those that did lay hold^d of him.

MORANZONE

How was the alarm given ?

THIRD CITIZEN

That I cannot tell you, sir.

MISTRESS LUCY

It was the Duchess herself who pointed him out.

MORANZONE *(aside)*

The Duchess ! There is something strange in this.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MISTRESS LUCY

ACT IV.

Ay! And the dagger was in his hand—the Duchess's own dagger.

MORANZONE

What did you say?

MISTRESS LUCY

Why, marry, that it was with the Duchess's dagger that the Duke was killed.

MORANZONE (*aside*)

There is some mystery about this: I cannot understand it.

SECOND CITIZEN

They be very long a-coming.

FIRST CITIZEN

I warrant they will come soon enough for the prisoner.

TIPSTAFF

Silence in the Court!

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. FIRST CITIZEN

Thou dost break silence in bidding us keep it, Master Tipstaff.

(Enter the LORD JUSTICE and the other Judges.)

SECOND CITIZEN

Who is he in scarlet? Is he the headsman?

THIRD CITIZEN

Nay, he is the Lord Justice.

(Enter GUIDO guarded.)

SECOND CITIZEN

There be the prisoner surely.

THIRD CITIZEN

He looks honest.

FIRST CITIZEN

That be his villany: knaves nowadays do look so honest that honest folk are forced to look like knaves so as to be different.

(Enter the Headsman, who takes his stand behind GUIDO.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT IV.

Yon be the headsman then ! O Lord ! Is the axe sharp, think you ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Ay ! sharper than thy wits are ; but the edge is not towards him, mark you.

SECOND CITIZEN (*scratching his neck*)

I' faith, I like it not so near.

FIRST CITIZEN

Tut, thou need'st not be afraid ; they never cut the heads off common folk : they do but hang us. (*Trumpets outside.*)

THIRD CITIZEN

What are the trumpets for ? Is the trial over ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Nay, 'tis for the Duchess.

(*Enter the DUCHESS in black velvet ; her train of flowered black velvet is carried by two pages in violet ; with her is the CARDINAL in scarlet, and the gentlemen of the Court*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV.

in black ; she takes her seat on the throne above the Judges, who rise and take their caps off as she enters ; the CARDINAL sits next to her a little lower ; the Courtiers group themselves about the throne.)

SECOND CITIZEN

O poor lady, how pale she is ! Will she sit there ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Ay ! she is in the Duke's place now.

SECOND CITIZEN

That is a good thing for Padua ; the Duchess is a very kind and merciful Duchess ; why, she cured my child of the ague once.

THIRD CITIZEN

Ay, and has given us bread : do not forget the bread.

▲ SOLDIER

Stand back, good people.

SECOND CITIZEN

If we be good, why should we stand back ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

TIPSTAFF

ACT IV.

Silence in the Court!

LORD JUSTICE

May it please your Grace,
Is it your pleasure we proceed to trial
Of the Duke's murder? (DUCHESS *bows.*)

Set the prisoner forth.

What is thy name?

GUIDO.

It matters not, my lord.

LORD JUSTICE

Guido Ferranti is thy name in Padua.

GUIDO.

A man may die as well under that name as
any other.

LORD JUSTICE

Thou art not ignorant
What dreadful charge men lay against thee
here,
Namely, the treacherous murder of thy Lord,
Simone Gesso, Duke of Padua;
What dost thou say in answer?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. GUIDO

I say nothing.

LORD JUSTICE

[Dost thou admit this accusation, then ?]

GUIDO

[I admit naught, and yet I naught deny.
I pray thee, my Lord Justice, be as brief
As the Court's custom and the laws allow.
I will not speak.]

LORD JUSTICE

[Why, then, it cannot be
That of this murder thou art innocent,
But rather that thy stony obstinate heart
Hath shut its doors against the voice of
justice.
Think not thy silence will avail thee aught,
'Twill rather aggravate thy desperate guilt,
Of which indeed we are most well assured ;
Again I bid thee speak.]

GUIDO

[I will say nothing.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

LORD JUSTICE

ACT IV.

[Then naught remains for me but to pronounce
Upon thy head the sentence of swift Death.]

GUIDO

[I pray thee give thy message speedily,
Thou couldst not bring me anything more
dear.]

LORD JUSTICE (*rising*)

Guido Ferranti——

MORANZONE (*stepping from the crowd*)

Tarry, my Lord Justice.

LORD JUSTICE

Who art thou that bid'st justice tarry, sir?

MORANZONE

So be it justice it can go its way ;
But if it be not justice——

LORD JUSTICE

Who is this ?

COUNT BARDI

A very noble gentleman, and well known
To the late Duke.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. LORD JUSTICE

Sir, thou art come in time
To see the murder of the Duke avenged.
There stands the man who did this heinous
thing.

MORANZONE

Has merely blind suspicion fixed on him,
Or have ye any proof he did the deed ?

LORD JUSTICE

[Thrice has the Court entreated him to speak,
But surely guilt weighs heavy on the tongue,
For he says nothing in defence, nor tries
To purge himself of this most dread account,
Which innocence would surely do.]

MORANZONE

My lord,
I ask again what proof have ye ?

LORD JUSTICE (*holding up the dagger*)

This dagger,
Which from his blood-stained hands, itself all
blood,
Last night the soldiers seized : what further
proof
Need we indeed ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT IV.

(takes the dagger and approaches the DUCHESS)

Saw I not such a dagger
Hang from your Grace's girdle yesterday?

(The DUCHESS shudders and makes no answer.)

Ah! my Lord Justice, may I speak a moment
With this young man, who in such peril
stands?

LORD JUSTICE

Ay, willingly, my lord, and may you turn him
To make a full avowal of his guilt.

(LORD MORANZONE goes over to GUIDO, who stands R. and clutches him by the hand.)

MORANZONE *(in a low voice)*

[She did it! Nay, I saw it in her eyes.
Boy, dost thou think I'll let thy father's son
Be by this woman butchered to his death?
Her husband sold your father, and the wife
Would sell the son in turn.]

GUIDO

[Lord Moranzone,
I alone did this thing: be satisfied,
My father is avenged.]

K

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. MORANZONE

[Enough, enough,
I know you did not kill him ; had it been you,
Your father's dagger, not this woman's toy,
Had done the business : see how she glares
at us !
By Heaven, I will tear off that marble mask,
And tax her with this murder before all.]

GUIDO

[You shall not do it.]

MORANZONE

[Nay, be sure I shall.]

GUIDO

[My lord, you must not dare to speak.]

MORANZONE

[Why not ?
If she is innocent she can prove it so ;
If guilty, let her die.]

GUIDO

[What shall I do ?]

MORANZONE

[Or thou or I shall tell the truth in court.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT IV.

[The truth is that I did it.]

MORANZONE

[Sayest thou so ?

Well, I will see what the good Duchess says.]

GUIDO

[No, no, I'll tell the tale.]

MORANZONE

[That is well, Guido.

Her sins be on her head and not on thine.

Did she not give you to the guard ?]

GUIDO

[She did.]

MORANZONE

[Then upon her revenge thy father's death :
She was the wife of Judas.]

GUIDO

[Ay, she was.]

MORANZONE

[I think you need no prompting now to do it,
Though you were weak and like a boy last
night.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. GUIDO

[Weak like a boy, was I indeed last night?
Be sure I will not be like that to-day.]

LORD JUSTICE

Doth he confess ?

GUIDO

My lord, I do confess
That foul unnatural murder has been done.

FIRST CITIZEN

Why, look at that : he has a pitiful heart,
and does not like murder ; they will let him
go for that.

LORD JUSTICE

Say you no more ?

GUIDO

My lord, I say this also,
That to spill human blood is deadly sin.

SECOND CITIZEN

Marry, he should tell that to the headsman :
'tis a good sentiment.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT IV.

Lastly, my lord, I do entreat the Court
To give me leave to utter openly
The dreadful secret of this mystery,
And to point out the very guilty one
Who with this dagger last night slew the
Duke.

LORD JUSTICE

Thou hast leave to speak.

DUCHESS (*rising*)

I say he shall not speak :
What need have we of further evidence ?
Was he not taken in the house at night
In Guilt's own bloody livery.

LORD JUSTICE (*showing her the statute*)

Your Grace

Can read the law.

DUCHESS (*waiving book aside*)

Bethink you, my Lord Justice,
Is it not very like that such a one
May, in the presence of the people here,
Utter some slanderous word against my Lord,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. Against the city, or the city's honour,
Perchance against myself.

LORD JUSTICE

My liege, the law.

DUCHESS

He shall not speak, but, with gags in his
mouth,
Shall climb the ladder to the bloody block.

LORD JUSTICE

The law, my liege.

DUCHESS

We are not bound by law,
But with it we bind others.

MORANZONE

My Lord Justice,
Thou wilt not suffer this injustice here.

LORD JUSTICE

The Court needs not thy voice, Lord Moran-
zone.

Madam, it were a precedent most evil
To wrest the law from its appointed course,
For, though the cause be just, yet anarchy

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Might on this licence touch these golden scales ACT IV.
And unjust causes unjust victories gain.

COUNT BARDI

I do not think your Grace can stay the law.

DUCHESS

Ay, it is well to preach and prate of law:
Methinks, my haughty lords of Padua,
If ye are hurt in pocket or estate,
So much as makes your monstrous revenues
Less by the value of one ferry toll,
Ye do not wait the tedious law's delay
With such sweet patience as ye counsel
me.

COUNT BARDI

Madam, I think you wrong our nobles here.

DUCHESS

I think I wrong them not. Which of ye all
Finding a thief within his house at night,
With some poor chattel thrust into his
rags,
Will stop and parley with him? do ye not
Give him unto the officer and his hook

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. To be dragged gaolwards straightway ?

And so now,
Had ye been men, finding this fellow here,
With my Lord's life still hot upon his
hands,
Ye would have haled him out into the court,
And struck his head off with an axe.

GUIDO

O God !

DUCHESS

Speak, my Lord Justice.

LORD JUSTICE

Your Grace, it cannot be :
The laws of Padua are most certain here :
And by those laws the common murderer
even
May with his own lips plead, and make
defence.

DUCHESS

[Tarry a little with thy righteousness.]
This is no common murderer, Lord Justice,
But a great outlaw, and a most vile traitor,
Taken in open arms against the state.
For he who slays the man who rules a state

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Slays the state also, widows every wife, ACT IV.
And makes each child an orphan, and no less
Is to be held a public enemy,
Than if he came with mighty ordonnance,
And all the spears of Venice at his back,
To beat and batter at our city gates—
Nay, is more dangerous to our common-
wealth

[Than gleaming spears and thundering ordonnance,]

For walls and gates, bastions and forts, and
things

Whose common elements are wood and stone
May be raised up, but who can raise again
The ruined body of my murdered lord,
And bid it live and laugh ?

MAFFIO

Now by Saint Paul

I do not think that they will let him speak.

JEPPO VITELLOZZO

There is much in this, listen.

DUCHESS

Wherefore now,

Throw ashes on the head of Padua,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. With sable banners hang each silent street,
Let every man be clad in solemn black,
But ere we turn to these sad rites of mourning
Let us bethink us of the desperate hand
Which wrought and brought this ruin on our
state,
And straightway pack him to that narrow
house,
Where no voice is, but with a little dust
Death fills right up the lying mouths of men.

GUIDO

Unhand me, knaves! I tell thee, my Lord
Justice,
Thou mightst as well bid the untrammelled
ocean,
The winter whirlwind, or the Alpine storm,
Nor roar their will, as bid me hold my peace!
Ay! though ye put your knives into my
throat,
Each grim and gaping wound shall find a
tongue,
And cry against you.

LORD JUSTICE

Sir, this violence
Avails you nothing; for save the tribunal

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Give thee a lawful right to open speech, ACT IV.
Naught that thou sayest can be credited.

*(The DUCHESS smiles and GUIDO falls back
with a gesture of despair.)*

Madam, myself, and these wise Justices,
Will with your Grace's sanction now retire
Into another chamber, to decide
Upon this difficult matter of the law,
And search the statutes and the precedents.

DUCHESS

Go, my Lord Justice, search the statutes
well,
Nor let this brawling traitor have his way.

MORANZONE

Go, my Lord Justice, search thy conscience
well,
Nor let a man be sent to death unheard.
(Exit the LORD JUSTICE and the Judges.)

DUCHESS

Silence, thou evil genius of my life!
Thou com'st between us two a second time;
This time, my lord, I think the turn is mine.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. GUIDO

I shall not die till I have uttered voice.

DUCHESS

Thou shalt die silent, and thy secret with
thee.

GUIDO

Art thou that Beatrice, Duchess of Padua?

DUCHESS

I am what thou hast made me; look at me
well,
I am thy handiwork.

MAFFIO

See, is she not
Like that white tigress which we saw at
Venice,
Sent by some Indian soldan to the Doge.

JEPPPO

Hush! she may hear thy chatter.

HEADSMAN

My young fellow,
I do not know why thou shouldst care to
speak,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Seeing my axe is close upon thy neck, ACT IV.
And words of thine will never blunt its edge.
But if thou art so bent upon it, why
Thou mightest plead unto the Churchman
 yonder:
The common people call him kindly here,
Indeed I know he has a kindly soul.

GUIDO

This man, whose trade is death, hath cour-
 tesies
More than the others.

HEADSMAN

 Why, God love you, sir,
I'll do you your last service on this earth.

GUIDO

My good Lord Cardinal, in a Christian land,
With Lord Christ's face of mercy looking
 down
From the high seat of Judgment, shall a
 man
Die unabsolved, unshrived? And if not so
May I not tell this dreadful tale of sin,
If any sin there be upon my soul.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. DUCHESS

Thou dost but waste thy time.

CARDINAL

Alack, my son,
I have no power with the secular arm.
My task begins when justice has been done,
To urge the wavering sinner to repent
And to confess to Holy Church's ear
The dreadful secrets of a sinful mind.

DUCHESS

Thou mayest speak to the confessional
Until thy lips grow weary of their tale,
But here thou shalt not speak.

GUIDO

My reverend father,
You bring me but cold comfort.

CARDINAL

Nay, my son,
For the great power of our mother Church,
Ends not with this poor bubble of a world,
Of which we are but dust, as Jerome saith,
For if the sinner doth repentant die,
Our prayers and holy masses much avail
To bring the guilty soul from purgatory.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT IV.

And when in purgatory thou seest my Lord
With that red star of blood upon his heart,
Tell him I sent thee hither.

GUIDO

O dear God!

MORANZONE

This is the woman, is it, whom you loved?

CARDINAL

Your Grace is very cruel to this man.

DUCHESS

No more than he was cruel to her Grace.

CARDINAL

[Ay! he did slay your husband.

DUCHESS

Ay! he did.]

CARDINAL

Yet mercy is the sovereign right of princes.

DUCHESS

I got no mercy, and I give it not.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. He hath changed my heart into a heart of
stone,

He hath sown rank nettles in a goodly field,
He hath poisoned the wells of pity in my
breast,

He hath withered up all kindness at the root;
My life is as some famine-murdered land,
Whence all good things have perished utterly :
I am what he hath made me.

[*The DUCHESS weeps.*]

JEPPO

Is it not strange
That she should so have loved the wicked
Duke ?

MAFFIO

It is most strange when women love their
lords,
And when they love them not it is most
strange.

JEPPO

What a philosopher thou art, Petrucci !

MAFFIO

Ay ! I can bear the ills of other men,
Which is philosophy.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT IV.

They tarry long,
These greybeards and their council ; bid them
come ;

Bid them come quickly, else I think my heart
Will beat itself to bursting : not indeed,
That I here care to live ; God knows my life
Is not so full of joy, yet, for all that,
I would not die companionless, or go
Lonely to Hell.

Look, my Lord Cardinal,
Canst thou not see across my forehead here,
In scarlet letters writ, the word Revenge ?
Fetch me some water, I will wash it off :
'Twas branded there last night, but in the
daytime

I need not wear it, need I, my Lord Cardinal ?
Oh how it sears and burns into my brain :
Give me a knife ; not that one, but another,
And I will cut it out.

CARDINAL

It is most natural
To be incensed against the murderous hand
That treacherously stabbed your sleeping
lord.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV DUCHESS

I would, old Cardinal, I could burn that hand;
But it will burn hereafter.

CARDINAL

Nay, the Church
Ordains us to forgive our enemies.

DUCHESS

Forgiveness? what is that? I never got it.
They come at last: well, my Lord Justice,
well. (*Enter the Lord Justice.*)

LORD JUSTICE

Most gracious Lady, and our sovereign Liege,
We have long pondered on the point at issue,
And much considered of your Grace's wisdom,
And never wisdom spake from fairer lips—

DUCHESS

Proceed, sir, without compliment.

LORD JUSTICE

We find,
As your own Grace did rightly signify,
That any citizen, who by force or craft
Conspires against the person of the Liege,
Is *ipso facto* outlaw, void of rights

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Such as pertain to other citizens,
Is traitor, and a public enemy,
Who may by any casual sword be slain
Without the slayer's danger, nay if brought
Into the presence of the tribunal,
Must with dumb lips and silence reverent
Listen unto his well-deserved doom,
Nor has the privilege of open speech.

ACT IV.

DUCHESS

I thank thee, my Lord Justice, heartily ;
I like your law : and now I pray dispatch
This public outlaw to his righteous doom ;
[For I am weary, and the headsman weary,]
What is there more ?

LORD JUSTICE

Ay, there is more, your Grace.
This man being alien born, not Paduan,
Nor by allegiance bound unto the Duke,
Save such as common nature doth lay down,
Hath, though accused of treasons manifold,
Whose slightest penalty is certain death,
Yet still the right of public utterance
Before the people and the open court,
Nay, shall be much entreated by the Court,
To make some formal pleading for his life,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. Lest his own city, righteously incensed,
Should with an unjust trial tax our state,
And wars spring up against the common-
wealth :

So merciful are the laws of Padua
Unto the stranger living in her gates.

DUCHESS

Being of my Lord's household, is he stranger
here ?

LORD JUSTICE

Ay, until seven years of service spent
He cannot be a Paduan citizen.

GUIDO

I thank thee, my Lord Justice, heartily ;
I like your law.

SECOND CITIZEN

I like no law at all :
Were there no law there 'd be no law-breakers,
So all men would be virtuous.

FIRST CITIZEN

So they would ;
'Tis a wise saying that, and brings you far.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

TIPSTAFF

ACT IV.

Ay! to the gallows, knave.

DUCHESS

Is this the law?

LORD JUSTICE

It is the law most certainly, my liege.

DUCHESS

Show me the book: 'tis written in blood-red.

JEPPPO

Look at the Duchess.

DUCHESS

Thou accursed law,
I would that I could tear thee from the state
As easy as I tear thee from this book.

(Tears out the page.)

Come here, Count Bardi: are you honourable?
Get a horse ready for me at my house,
For I must ride to Venice instantly.

BARDI

To Venice, Madam?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. DUCHESS

Not a word of this,
Go, go at once. (*Exit* COUNT BARDI.)

A moment, my Lord Justice.
If, as thou sayest it, this is the law—
Nay, nay, I doubt not that thou sayest right,
Though right be wrong in such a case as this—
May I not by the virtue of mine office
Adjourn this court until another day ?

LORD JUSTICE

Madam, you cannot stay a trial for blood.

DUCHESS

I will not tarry then to hear this man
Rail with rude tongue against our sacred per-
son.

[I have some business also in my house
Which I must do :] Come, gentlemer

LORD JUSTICE

My liege,
You cannot leave this court until the prisoner
Be purged or guilty of this dread offence.

DUCHESS

Cannot, Lord Justice ? By what right do you
166

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Set barriers in my path where I should go? ACT IV
Am I not Duchess here in Padua,
And the state's regent?

LORD JUSTICE

For that reason, Madam,
Being the fountain-head of life and death
Whence, like a mighty river, justice flows,
Without thy presence justice is dried up
And fails of purpose: thou must tarry here.

DUCHESS

What, wilt thou keep me here against my
will?

LORD JUSTICE

We pray thy will be not against the law.

DUCHESS

What if I force my way out of the court?

LORD JUSTICE

Thou canst not force the Court to give thee
way.

DUCHESS

I will not tarry. (*Rises from her seat.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. LORD JUSTICE

Is the usher here?

Let him stand forth. (*Usher comes forward.*)

Thou knowest thy business, sir.

(*The Usher closes the doors of the court, which are L., and when the DUCHESS and her retinue approach, kneels down.*)

USHER

In all humility I beseech your Grace

Turn not my duty to discourtesy,

Nor make my unwelcome office an offence.

[The self-same laws which make your Grace
the Regent

Bid me watch here: my Liege, to break those
laws

Is but to break thine office and not mine.]

DUCHESS

Is there no gentleman amongst you all

To prick this prating fellow from our way.

MAFFIO (*drawing his sword*)

Ay! that will I.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

LORD JUSTICE

ACT IV.

Count Maffio, have a care,
And you, sir. (To JEPPPO.)

The first man who draws his sword
Upon the meanest officer of this Court,
Dies before nightfall.

DUCHESS

Sirs, put up your swords :
It is most meet that I should hear this man.
(Goes back to throne.)

MORANZONE

Now hast thou got thy enemy in thy hand.

LORD JUSTICE *(taking the time-glass up)*

Guido Ferranti, while the crumbling sand
Falls through this time-glass, thou hast leave
to speak.
This and no more.

GUIDO

It is enough, my lord.

LORD JUSTICE

Thou standest on the extreme verge of death ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. See that thou speakest nothing but the truth,
Naught else will serve thee.

GUIDO

If I speak it not,
Then give my body to the headsman there.

LORD JUSTICE (*turns the time-glass*)

Let there be silence while the prisoner speaks.

TIPSTAFF

Silence in the Court there.

GUIDO

My Lords Justices.
And reverent judges of this worthy court,
I hardly know where to begin my tale,
So strangely dreadful is this history.
First, let me tell you of what birth I am.
I am the son of that good Duke Lorenzo
Who was with damned treachery done to
death
By a most wicked villain, lately Duke
Of this good town of Padua.

LORD JUSTICE

Have a care,
It will avail thee nought to mock this prince
Who now lies in his coffin.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MAFFIO

ACT IV.

By Saint James,
This is the Duke of Parma's rightful heir.

JEPPPO

I always thought him noble.

GUIDO

I confess
That with the purport of a just revenge,
A most just vengeance on a man of blood,
I entered the Duke's household, served his
will,
Sat at his board, drank of his wine, and was
His intimate : so much I will confess,
And this too, that I waited till he grew
To give the fondest secrets of his life
Into my keeping, till he fawned on me,
And trusted me in every private matter
Even as my noble father trusted him ;
That for this thing I waited.

(To the Headsman.)

Thou man of blood !

Turn not thine axe on me before the time :
Who knows if it be time for me to die ?
Is there no other neck in court but mine ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. LORD JUSTICE

The sand within the time-glass flows apace.
Come quickly to the murder of the Duke.

GUIDO

I will be brief: Last night at twelve o' the
clock,

By a strong rope I scaled the palace wall,
With purport to revenge my father's murder—
Ay! with that purport I confess, my lord.
This much I will acknowledge, and this also,
That as with stealthy feet I climbed the stair
Which led unto the chamber of the Duke,
And reached my hand out for the scarlet cloth
Which shook and shivered in the gusty door,
Lo! the white moon that sailed in the great
heaven

Flooded with silver light the darkened room,
Night lit her candles for me, and I saw
The man I hated, cursing in his sleep,
And thinking of a most dear father murdered,
Sold to the scaffold, bartered to the block,
I smote the treacherous villain to the heart
With this same dagger, which by chance I
found

Within the chamber.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS (*rising from her seat*)

ACT IV.

Oh!

GUIDO (*hurriedly*)

I killed the Duke.

Now, my Lord Justice, if I may crave a boon,
Suffer me not to see another sun
Light up the misery of this loathsome world.

LORD JUSTICE

Thy boon is granted, thou shalt die to-night.
Lead him away : Come, Madam.

(GUIDO *is led off; as he goes the DUCHESS stretches out her arms and rushes down the stage.*)

DUCHESS

Guido! Guido!
(*Faints.*)

Tableau

END OF ACT IV.

Missing Page

Missing Page

ACT V

SCENE

A dungeon in the public prison of Padua ; Guido lies asleep on a pallet (L.C.) ; a table with a goblet on it is set (L.C.) ; five soldiers are drinking and playing dice in the corner on a stone table ; one of them has a lantern hung to his halbert ; a torch is set in the wall over Guido's head. Two grated windows behind, one on each side of the door which is (C.), look out into a passage ; the stage is rather dark.

FIRST SOLDIER (*throws dice*)

Sixes again ! good Pietro.

SECOND SOLDIER

I' faith, lieutenant, I will play with thee no more. I will lose everything.

THIRD SOLDIER

Except thy wits ; thou art safe there !

SECOND SOLDIER

Ay, ay, he cannot take them from me.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. THIRD SOLDIER

No; for thou hast no wits to give him.

THE SOLDIERS (*loudly*)

Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER

Silence! You will wake the prisoner; he is asleep.

SECOND SOLDIER

What matter? He will get sleep enough when he is buried. I warrant he'd be glad if we could wake him when he's in the grave.

THIRD SOLDIER

Nay! for when he wakes there it will be judgment day.

SECOND SOLDIER

Ay, and he has done a grievous thing; for, look you, to murder one of us who are but flesh and blood is a sin, and to kill a Duke goes being near against the law.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, well, he was a wicked Duke.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND SOLDIER

ACT V

And so he should not have touched him ; if one meddles with wicked people, one is like to be tainted with their wickedness.

THIRD SOLDIER

Ay, that is true. How old is the prisoner ?

SECOND SOLDIER

Old enough to do wrong, and not old enough to be wise.

FIRST SOLDIER

Why, then, he might be any age.

SECOND SOLDIER

They say the Duchess wanted to pardon him.

FIRST SOLDIER

Is that so ?

SECOND SOLDIER

Ay, and did much entreat the Lord Justice, but he would not.

FIRST SOLDIER

I had thought, Pietro, that the Duches was omnipotent.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. SECOND SOLDIER

True, she is well-favoured; I know none so comely.

THE SOLDIERS

Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER

I meant I had thought our Duchess could do anything.

SECOND SOLDIER

Nay, for he is now given over to the Justices, and they will see that justice be done; they and stout Hugh the headsman; but when his head is off, why then the Duchess can pardon him if she like; there is no law against that.

FIRST SOLDIER

[I do not think that stout Hugh, as you call him, will do the business for him after all. This Guido is of gentle birth, and so by the law can drink poison first, if it so be his pleasure.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

THIRD SOLDIER

ACT V.

[Faith, to drink poison is a poor pleasure.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[What kind of poison is it?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[Why, of the kind that kills.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[What sort of a thing is poison?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[It is a drink, like water, only not so healthy: if you would taste it there is some in the cup there.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[By Saint James, if it be not healthy, I will have none of it!]

THIRD SOLDIER

[And if he does not drink it?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[Why, then, they will kill him.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. THIRD SOLDIER

[And if he does drink it?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[Why, then, he will die.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[He has a grave choice to make. I trust he will choose wisely.]

(Knocking comes at the door.)

FIRST SOLDIER

See who that is.

(Third Soldier goes over and looks through the wicket.)

THIRD SOLDIER

It is a woman, sir.

FIRST SOLDIER

Is she pretty ?

THIRD SOLDIER

I can't tell. She is masked, lieutenant.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

FIRST SOLDIER

ACT V

It is only very ugly or very beautiful women who ever hide their faces. Let her in.

(Soldier opens the door, and the DUCHESS masked and cloaked enters.)

DUCHESS *(to Third Soldier)*

Are you the officer on guard?

FIRST SOLDIER *(coming forward)*

I am, madam.

DUCHESS

I must see the prisoner alone.

FIRST SOLDIER

I am afraid that is impossible. *(The DUCHESS hands him a ring, he looks at and returns it to her with a bow and makes a sign to the Soldiers.)*

Stand without there. *(Exeunt the Soldiers.)*

DUCHESS

Officer, your men are somewhat rough.

FIRST SOLDIER

They mean no harm.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. DUCHESS

I will be going back in a few minutes. As I pass through the corridor do not let them try and lift my mask.

FIRST SOLDIER

You need not be afraid, madam.

DUCHESS

I have a particular reason for wishing my face not to be seen.

FIRST SOLDIER

Madam, with this ring you can go in and out as you please; it is the Duchess's own ring.

DUCHESS

Leave us. (*The Soldier turns to go out.*)
A moment, sir. For what hour is . . .

FIRST SOLDIER

At twelve o'clock, madam, we have orders to lead him out; but I dare say he won't wait for us; he's more like to take a drink out of that poison yonder. Men are afraid of the headsman.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT V.

Is that poison ?

FIRST SOLDIER

Ay, madam, and very sure poison too.

DUCHESS

You may go, sir.

FIRST SOLDIER

By Saint James, a pretty hand ! I wonder who she is. Some woman who loved him, perhaps. *(Exit.)*

DUCHESS *(taking her mask off)*

At last !

He can escape now in this cloak and vizard,
We are of a height almost : they will not
know him ;

As for myself what matter ?

So that he does not curse me as he goes,

I care but little : I wonder will he curse me,

He has the right. It is eleven now,

They will not come till twelve. [What will
they say

When they find the bird has flown ?]

(Goes over to the table.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V.

So this is poison.

Is it not strange that in this liquor here
There lies the key to all philosophies?

(Takes the cup up.)

It smells of poppies. I remember well
That, when I was a child in Sicily,
I took the scarlet poppies from the corn,
And made a little wreath, and my grave uncle,
Don John of Naples, laughed: I did not know
That they had power to stay the springs of
life,

To make the pulse cease beating, and to chill
The blood in its own vessels, till men come
And with a hook hale the poor body out,
And throw it in a ditch: the body, ay,—
What of the soul? that goes to heaven or
hell.

Where will mine go?

*(Takes the torch from the wall, and goes over
to the bed.)*

How peacefully here he sleeps,
Like a young schoolboy tired out with play:
I would that I could sleep so peacefully,
But I have dreams. *(Bending over him.)*

Poor boy: what if I kissed him?
No, no, my lips would burn him like a fire.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

He has had enough of Love. Still that white neck ACT V.

Will 'scape the headsman : I have seen to that :
He will get hence from Padua to-night,
And that is well. You are very wise, Lord
Justices,

And yet you are not half so wise as I am,
And that is well.

O God ! how I have loved you,
And what a bloody flower did Love bear !

(Comes back to the table.)

What if I drank these juices, and so ceased ?
Were it not better than to wait till Death
Come to my bed with all his serving men,
Remorse, disease, old age, and misery ?
I wonder does one suffer much : I think
That I am very young to die like this,
But so it must be. Why, why should I
die ?

He will escape to-night, and so his blood
Will not be on my head. No, I must die ;
I have been guilty, therefore I must die
He loves me not, and therefore I must die :
I would die happier if he would kiss me,
But he will not do that. I did not know
him,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. I thought he meant to sell me to the Judge;
That is not strange; we women never know
Our lovers till they leave us.

(Bell begins to toll.)

Thou vile bell,
That like a bloodhound from thy brazen
throat

Call'st for this man's life, cease! thou shalt not
get it.

He stirs—I must be quick: *(Takes up cup.)*

O Love, Love, Love,

I did not think that I would pledge thee thus!

*(Drinks poison, and sets the cup down on the
table behind her: the noise wakens GUIDO,
who starts up, and does not see what she
has done. There is silence for a minute,
each looking at the other.)*

I do not come to ask your pardon now,
Seeing I know I stand beyond all pardon,
A very guilty, very wicked woman;
Enough of that: I have already, sir,
Confessed my sin to the Lords Justices;
They would not listen to me: and some said
I did invent a tale to save your life,
You having trafficked with me; others said
That women played with pity as with men;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Others that grief for my slain Lord and ACT V.
husband

Had robbed me of my wits : they would not
hear me,

And, when I swear it on the holy book,
They bade the doctor cure me. They are ten,
Ten against one, and they possess your life.

They call me Duchess here in Padua.

I do not know, sir ; if I be the Duchess,
I wrote your pardon, and they would not take
it ;

They call it treason, say I taught them that ;
Maybe I did. Within an hour, Guido,
They will be here, and drag you from the cell,
And bind your hands behind your back, and
bid you

Kneel at the block : I am before them there ;
Here is the signet ring of Padua,
'Twill bring you safely through the men on
guard,

There is my cloak and vizard ; they have
orders

Not to be curious : when you pass the gate
Turn to the left, and at the second bridge
You will find horses waiting : by to-morrow
You will be at Venice, safe. *(A pause.)*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V

Do you not speak?

Will you not even curse me ere you go?—

You have the right.

(*A pause.*)

You do not understand

There lies between you and the headsman's
axe

Hardly so much sand in the hour-glass

As a child's palm could carry: here is the ring.

I have washed my hand: there is no blood
upon it:

You need not fear. Will you not take the
ring?

GUIDO (*takes ring and kisses it*)

Ay! gladly, Madam.

DUCHESS

And leave Padua.

GUIDO

Leave Padua.

DUCHESS

But it must be to-night.

GUIDO

To-night it shall be.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT V.

Oh, thank God for that!

GUIDO

So I can live; life never seemed so sweet
As at this moment.

DUCHESS

Do not tarry, Guido,
There is my cloak: the horse is at the bridge,
The second bridge below the ferry house:
Why do you tarry? Can your ears not hear
This dreadful bell, whose every ringing stroke
Robs one brief minute from your boyish life.
Go quickly.

GUIDO

Ay! he will come soon enough.

DUCHESS

Who?

GUIDO (*calmly*)

Why, the headsman.

DUCHESS

No, no.

GUIDO

Only he

Can bring me out of Padua.

191

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. DUCHESS

You dare not !

You dare not burden my o'erburdened soul
With two dead men ! I think one is enough.
For when I stand before God, face to face,
I would not have you, with a scarlet thread
Around your white throat, coming up behind
To say I did it : [Why, the very devils
Who howl away in hell would pity me ;
You will not be more cruel than the devils
Who are shut out from God.]

GUIDO

Madam, I wait.

DUCHESS

No, no, you cannot : you do not understand,
[I have less power in Padua to-night
Than any common woman ; they will kill you.]
I saw the scaffold as I crossed the square,
[Already the low rabble throng about it
With fearful jests, and horrid merriment,
As though it were a morris-dancer's platform,
And not Death's sable throne.] O Guido,
Guido,
You must escape !

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT V.

[Ay, by the hand of death,
Not by your hand.]

DUCHESS

[Oh, you are merciless,
Merciless now as ever : No, no, Guido,
You must go hence.]

GUIDO

Madam, I tarry here.

DUCHESS

Guido, you shall not : it would be a thing
So terrible that the amazed stars
Would fall from heaven, and the palsied moon
Be in her sphere eclipsed, and the great sun
Refuse to shine upon the unjust earth
Which saw thee die.

GUIDO

Be sure I shall not stir.

DUCHESS (*wringing her hands*)

[You do not know : once that the judges come
I have no power to keep you from the axe ;
You cannot wait : have I not sinned enough ?]
Is one sin not enough, but must it breed
A second sin more horrible again

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. Than was the one that bare it? O God, God,
Seal up sin's teeming womb, and make it
barren,
I will not have more blood upon my hand
Than I have now.

GUIDO (*seizing her hand*)

What! am I fallen so low
That I may not have leave to die for you?

DUCHESS (*tearing her hand away*)

Die for me?—no, my life is a vile thing,
Thrown to the miry highways of this world;
You shall not die for me, you shall not, Guido,
I am a guilty woman.

GUIDO

Guilty?—let those
Who know what a thing temptation is,
Let those who have not walked as we have
done,
In the red fire of passion, those whose lives
Are dull and colourless, in a word let those,
If any such there be, who have not loved,
Cast stones against you. As for me.

DUCHESS

Alas!

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO (*falling at her feet*)

ACT V

You are my lady, and you are my love!
O hair of gold, O crimson lips, O face
Made for the luring and the love of man!
Incarnate image of pure loveliness!
Worshipping thee I do forget the past,
Worshipping thee my soul comes close to
thine,
Worshipping thee I seem to be a god,
And though they give my body to the block,
Yet is my love eternal!

(DUCHESS *puts her hands over her face*:
GUIDO *draws them down.*)

Sweet, lift up
The trailing curtains that overhang thine
eyes
That I may look into those eyes, and tell you
I love you, never more than now when Death
Thrusts his cold lips between us: Beatrice,
I love you: have you no word left to say?
Oh, I can bear the executioner,
But not this silence: will you not say you
love me?
Speak but that word and Death shall lose his
sting,
But speak it not, and fifty thousand deaths

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. Are, in comparison, mercy. Oh you are cruel,
And do not love me.

DUCHESS

Alas! I have no right.
For I have stained the innocent hands of love
With spilt-out blood: there is blood on the
ground,
I set it there.

GUIDO

Sweet, it was not yourself,
It was some devil tempted you.

DUCHESS (*rising suddenly*)

No, no,
We are each our own devil, and we make
This world our hell.

GUIDO

Then let high Paradise
Fall into Tartarus! for I shall make
This world my heaven for a little space.
[I love you, Beatrice.]

DUCHESS

[I am not worthy,
Being a thing of sin.]

GUIDO

No, my Lord Christ,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

The sin was mine, if any sin there was. ACT V.

'Twas I who nurtured murder in my heart,
Sweetened my meats, seasoned my wine with
it,

And in my fancy slew the accursed Duke
A hundred times a day. Why, had this man
Died half so often as I wished him to,
Death had been stalking ever through the
house,
And murder had not slept.

But you, fond heart,
Whose little eyes grew tender over a whipt
hound,

You whom the little children laughed to
see

Because you brought the sunlight where you
passed,

You the white angel of God's purity,
This which men call your sin, what was it?

DUCHESS

Ay!

What was it? There are times it seems a
dream,

An evil dream sent by an evil god,
And then I see the dead face in the coffin

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. And know it is no dream, but that my hand
Is red with blood, and that my desperate soul
Striving to find some haven for its love
From the wild tempest of this raging world,
Has wrecked its bark upon the rocks of sin.
What was it, said you?—murder merely?

Nothing

But murder, horrible murder.

GUIDO

Nay, nay, nay,

'Twas but the passion-flower of your love
That in one moment leapt to terrible life,
And in one moment bare this gory fruit,
Which I had plucked in thought a thousand
times.

My soul was murderous, but my hand refused;
Your hand wrought murder, but your soul
was pure.

And so I love you, Beatrice, and let him
Who has no mercy for your stricken head,
Lack mercy up in heaven! Kiss me, sweet.

(Tries to kiss her.)

DUCHESS

No, no, your lips are pure, and mine are
soiled,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. DUCHESS

No, no, 'tis not too late: you must get hence;

The horse is by the bridge, there is still time.

Away, away, you must not tarry here!

(Noise of Soldiers in the passage.)

A VOICE OUTSIDE

Room for the Lord Justice of Padua!

(The LORD JUSTICE is seen through the grated window passing down the corridor preceded by men bearing torches.)

DUCHESS

It is too late.

A VOICE OUTSIDE

Room for the headsman.

DUCHESS *(sinks down)*

Oh!

(The Headsman with his axe on his shoulder is seen passing the corridor, followed by Monks bearing candles.)

GUIDO

[Farewell, dear love, for I must drink this poison.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I do not fear the headsman, but I would die ACT V.
Not on the lonely scaffold.]

DUCHESS

[Oh !]

GUIDO

[But here,
Here in thine arms, kissing thy mouth:
farewell !

(Goes to the table and takes the goblet up.)

What, art thou empty ?

(Throws it to the ground.)

O thou churlish gaoler,
Even of poisons niggard !]

DUCHESS (*faintly*)

Blame him not.

GUIDO

O God ! you have not drunk it, Beatrice ?
Tell me you have not ?

DUCHESS

Were I to deny it,
There is a fire eating at my heart
Which would find utterance.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V GUIDO

O treacherous love,
Why have you not left a drop for me ?

DUCHESS

No, no, it held but death enough for one.

GUIDO

Is there no poison still upon your lips,
That I may draw it from them ?

DUCHESS

Why should you die ?
You have not spilt blood, and so need not die :
I have spilt blood, and therefore I must die.
Was it not said blood should be spilt for
blood ?
Who said that ? I forget.

GUIDO

Tarry for me,
Our souls will go together.

DUCHESS

Nay, you must live.
There are many other women in the world

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who will love you, and not murder for your sake. ACT V.

GUIDO

I love you only.

DUCHESS

You need not die for that.

GUIDO

Ah, if we die together, love, why then
Can we not lie together in one grave.

DUCHESS

A grave is but a narrow wedding-bed.

GUIDO

It is enough for us.

DUCHESS

And they will strew it
With a stark winding-sheet, and bitter herbs ;
I think there are no roses in the grave,
Or if there are, they all are withered now
Since my Lord went there.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. GUIDO

Ah! dear Beatrice,
Your lips are roses that death cannot wither.

DUCHESS

Nay, if we lie together, will not my lips
Fall into dust, and your enamoured eyes
Shrivel to sightless sockets, and the worms,
Which are our groomsmen, eat away your
heart?

GUIDO

I do not care: Death has no power on love,
And so by Love's immortal sovereignty
I will die with you.

DUCHESS

But the grave is black,
And the pit black, so I must go before
To light the candles for your coming hither.
No, no, I will not die, I will not die.
Love, you are strong, and young, and very
brave,
Stand between me and the angel of death,
And wrestle with him for me.

*(Thrusts GUIDO in front of her with his back
to the audience.)*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I will kiss you, ACT V.

When you have thrown him. Oh, have you
no cordial,

To stay the workings of this poison in me?
Are there no rivers left in Italy
That you will not fetch me one cup of water
To quench this fire?

GUIDO

O God!

DUCHESS

You did not tell me
There was a drought in Italy, and no water,
Nothing but fire.

GUIDO

O Love!

DUCHESS

Send for a leech,
Not him who stanch'd my husband, but
another,
We have no time: send for a leech, I say:
There is an antidote against each poison,
And he will sell it if we give him money.
Tell him that I will give him Padua,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. For one short hour of life: I will not die.
Oh, I am sick to death: no, do not touch me;
This poison gnaws my heart: I did not know
It was such pain to die: I thought that life
Had taken all the agonies to itself;
It seems it is not so.

GUIDO

O damnéd stars,
Quench your vile cresset-lights in tears, and
bid
The moon, your mistress, shine no more to-
night.

DUCHESS

Guido, why are we here? I think this room
Is poorly furnished for a marriage chamber.
Let us get hence at once. Where are the
horses?

We should be on our way to Venice now.
How cold the night is! We must ride faster.
[That is our wedding-bell, is it not, Guido?]

(The Monks begin to chant outside.)

Music! It should be merrier; but grief
Is of the fashion now—I know not why.
You must not weep: do we not love each
other?—

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

That is enough. Death, what do you here? ACT V.

You were not bidden to this table, sir ;
Away, we have no need of you : I tell you
It was in wine I pledged you, not in poison.
They lied who told you that I drank your
poison.

It was spilt upon the ground, like my Lord's
blood ;

You came too late.

GUIDO

Sweet, there is nothing there :
These things are only unreal shadows.

DUCHESS

Death,

Why do you tarry, get to the upper chamber ;
The cold meats of my husband's funeral feast
Are set for you ; this is a wedding feast.
You are out of place, sir ; and, besides, 'tis
summer.

We do not need these heavy fires now,
You scorch us. [Guido, bid that grave-digger
Stop digging in the earth that empty grave.
I will not lie there.] Oh, I am burned up,
[Burned up and blasted by these fires within
me.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. Can you do nothing? Water, give me water,
Or else more poison. No: I feel no pain—
Is it not curious I should feel no pain?—
And Death has gone away, I am glad of
that.

I thought he meant to part us. Tell me, Guido,
Are you not sorry that you ever saw me?

GUIDO

I swear I would not have lived otherwise.
Why, in this dull and common world of ours
Men have died looking for such moments as
this
And have not found them.

DUCHESS

Then you are not sorry?
How strange that seems.

GUIDO

What, Beatrice, have I not
Stood face to face with beauty; that is enough
For one man's life. Why, love, I could be
merry;
I have been often sadder at a feast,
But who were sad at such a feast as this

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

When Love and Death are both our cup- ACT V.
bearers;
We love and die together.

DUCHESS

Oh, I have been
Guilty beyond all women, and indeed
Beyond all women punished. Do you think—
No, that could not be—Oh, do you think that
love
Can wipe the bloody stain from off my hands,
Pour balm into my wounds, heal up my hurts,
And wash my scarlet sins as white as snow?—
For I have sinned.

GUIDO

They do not sin at all
Who sin for love.

DUCHESS

No, I have sinned, and yet
Perchance my sin will be forgiven me.
I have loved much.

*(They kiss each other now for the first time
in this Act, when suddenly the DUCHESS
leaps up in the dreadful spasm of death,
tears in agony at her dress, and finally,*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V.

with face twisted and distorted with pain, falls back dead in a chair. GUIDO seizing her dagger from her belt, kills himself; and, as he falls across her knees, clutches at the cloak which is on the back of the chair, and throws it entirely over her. There is a little pause. Then down the passage comes the tramp of Soldiers; the door is opened, and the LORD JUSTICE, the Headsman, and the Guard enter and see this figure shrouded in black, and GUIDO lying dead across her. The LORD JUSTICE rushes forward and drags the cloak off the DUCHESS, whose face is now the marble image of peace, the sign of God's forgiveness.)

Tableau

CURTAIN

DE PROFUNDIS

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A PREFATORY DEDICATION TO DR. MAX MEYERFELD, BY THE EDITOR	vii
FOUR LETTERS WRITTEN FROM READ- ING PRISON	1
<i>DE PROFUNDIS</i> , WITH ADDITIONAL MATTER	29
TWO LETTERS TO THE <i>DAILY</i> <i>CHRONICLE</i> ON PRISON LIFE . .	167

A PREFATORY DEDICATION

MY DEAR DR. MEYERFELD,—It is a great pleasure to dedicate this new edition of De Profundis to yourself. But for you I do not think the book would have ever been published. When first you asked me about the manuscript which you heard Wilde wrote in prison, I explained to you vaguely that some day I hoped to issue portions of it, in accordance with the writer's wishes; though I thought it would be premature to do so at that moment. You begged however that Germany (which already held Wilde's plays in the highest esteem) should

PREFATORY

have the opportunity of seeing a new work by one of her favourite authors. I rather reluctantly consented to your proposal; and promised, at a leisured opportunity, to extract such portions of the work as might be considered of general public interest. I fear that I postponed what was to me a rather painful task; it was only your visits and more importunate correspondence (of which I frankly began to hate the sight) that brought about the fulfilment of your object. There was no idea of issuing the work in England; but after despatching to you a copy for translation in Die Neue Rundschau, it occurred to me that a simultaneous publication of the original might gratify Wilde's English friends and admirers who had expressed curiosity on the subject. The decision was not reached without some misgiving, for reasons which need only be

DEDICATION

touched upon here. Wilde's name unfortunately did not bring very agreeable memories to English ears: his literary position, hardly recognised even in the zenith of his successful dramatic career, had come to be ignored by Mr. Ruskin's countrymen, unable to separate the man and the artist; how rightly or wrongly it is not for me to say. In Germany and France, where tolerance and literary enthusiasm are more widely distributed, Wilde's works were judged independently of the author's career. Salomé, prohibited by the English censor in the author's lifetime, had become part of the repertoire of the European stage, long before that finest of all his dramas inspired the great opera of Dr. Strauss; whilst the others, performed occasionally in the English provinces without his name, were still banned in the London

PREFATORY

theatres. His great intellectual endowments were either denied or forgotten. Wilde (who in De Profundis exaggerates his lost contemporary position in England and shows no idea of his future European reputation) gauges fairly accurately the nadir he had reached when he says that his name was become a synonym for folly.

In sending copy to Messrs. Methuen (to whom alone I submitted it) I anticipated refusal, as though the work were my own. A very distinguished man of letters who acted as their reader advised, however, its acceptance, and urged, in view of the uncertainty of its reception, the excision of certain passages, to which I readily assented. Since there has been a demand to see these passages, already issued in German, they are here replaced along with others of

DEDICATION

minor importance. I have added besides some of those letters written to me from Reading, which though they were brought out by you in Germany, I did not, at first, contemplate publishing in this country. They illustrate Wilde's varying moods in prison. Owing to a foolish error in transcription, I sent you these letters with wrong dates—dates of other unpublished letters. The error is here rectified. By the courtesy of the editor and the proprietors of the Daily Chronicle I have included the two remarkable contributions to their paper on the subject of prison life: these and The Ballad of Reading Gaol being all that Wilde wrote after his release other than private correspondence. The generous reception accorded to De Profundis has justified the preparation of a new and fuller edition. The most sanguine hopes have been realised;

PREFATORY

English critics have shown themselves ready to estimate the writer, whether favourably or unfavourably, without emphasising their natural prejudice against his later career, even in reference to this book where the two things occasion synchronous comment. The work has met of course with some severe criticisms, chiefly from 'narrow natures and hectic-brains.'

But in justice to the author and myself there are two points which I ought to make clear: the title De Profundis, against which some have cavilled, is, as you will remember from our correspondence, my own; for this I do not make any apology. Then, certain people (among others a well-known French writer) have paid me the compliment of suggesting that the text was an entire forgery by myself or a cento of Wilde's letters to myself. Were I capable either of

DEDICATION

the requisite art, or the requisite fraud, I should have made a name in literature ere now. I need only say here that De Profundis is a manuscript of eighty close-written pages on twenty folio sheets; that it is cast in the form of a letter to a friend not myself; that it was written at intervals during the last six months of the author's imprisonment on blue stamped prison foolscap paper. Reference to it and directions in regard to it occur in the letters addressed to myself and printed in this volume. Wilde handed me the document on the day of his release; he was not allowed to send it to me from prison. With the exception of Major Nelson, then Governor of Reading Gaol, myself, and a confidential typewriter, no one has read the whole of it. Contrary to a general impression, it contains nothing scandalous. There is no definite scheme or

PREFATORY

plan in the work; as he proceeded the writer's intention obviously and constantly changed; it is desultory; a large portion of it is taken up with business and private matters of no interest whatever. The manuscript has, however, been seen and authenticated by yourself, by Mr. Methuen, and Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, when editor of The Daily Mirror, where a leaf of it was facsimiled.

Editorial egoism has led me to make this introduction longer than was intended, but I must answer one question: both you and other friends have asked why I do not write any life of Wilde. I can give you two reasons: I am not capable of doing so; and Mr. Robert Sherard has ably supplied the deficiency. Mr. Sherard's book contains all the important facts of his career; the errors are of minor importance, except

DEDICATION

in regard to certain gallant exaggerations about myself. His view of Wilde, however, is not MY view, especially in reference to the author's unhappiness after his release. That Wilde suffered at times from extreme poverty and intensely from social ostracism I know very well; but his temperament was essentially a happy one, and I think his good spirits and enjoyment of life far outweighed any bitter recollections or realisation of an equivocal and tragic position. No doubt he felt the latter keenly, but he concealed his feeling as a general rule, and his manifestations of it only lasted a very few days. He was, however, a man with many facets to his character; and he left in regard to that character, and to his attainments, both before and after his downfall, curiously different impressions on professing judges

PREFATORY DEDICATION

of their fellowmen. To give the whole man would require the art of Boswell, Purcell or Robert Browning. My friend Mr. Sherard will only, I think, claim the biographical genius of Dr. Johnson; and I, scarcely the talent of Theophrastus.— Believe me, dear Dr. Meyerfeld, yours very truly,

ROBERT ROSS

REFORM CLUB

August 31st, 1907

LETTERS FROM READING PRISON

LETTER I

10th March 1896.

MY DEAR ROBBIE,—I want you to have a letter written at once to Mr. — the solicitor, stating that as my wife has promised to settle a third on me, in the case of her predeceasing me, I do not wish any opposition to be made to her purchasing my life interest. I feel that I have brought such unhappiness on her, and such ruin on my children, that I have no right to go against her wishes in anything. She was gentle and good to me

LETTERS FROM

here, when she came to see me. I have full trust in her. Please have this done at once, and thank my friends for their kindness. I feel I am acting rightly leaving this to my wife.

Please write to Stuart Merrill in Paris, or Robert Sherard, to say how gratified I was at the performance of my play, and have my thanks conveyed to Lugne-Poë:¹ it is something that at a time of disgrace and shame I should be still regarded as an artist: I wish I could feel more pleasure, but I seem dead to all emotions except those of anguish and despair. However, please let Lugne-Poë know that I am sensible of the honour he has done me. He is a poet himself. I fear you will find it difficult to read this, but as I am not

¹ The first impersonator of Herod and first producer of *Salomé* in Paris, 1896.

READING PRISON

allowed writing materials I seem to have forgotten how to write—you must excuse me. Thank More for exerting himself for books; unluckily I suffer from headaches when I read my Greek and Roman poets—so they have not been of much use—but his kindness was great in getting the set. Ask him to express my gratitude to the lady who lives at Wimbledon. Write to me please in answer to this, and tell me about literature, what new books, etc.—also Jones's play and Forbes-Robertson's management:—about any new tendency in the stage of Paris or London. Also try and see what Lemaître, Bauër, and Sarcey said of *Salomé*, and give me a little *résumé*; please write to Henri Bauër, and say I am touched at his writing nicely; Robert Sherard knows him. It was sweet of you to come and see me.

LETTERS FROM

You must come again next time. Here I have the horror of death with the still greater horror of living, and in silence and misery. . . .

.¹

I always remember you with deep affection.

I wish Ernest would get from Oakley Street my portmanteau, fur coat, clothes, and the books of my own writing which I gave my dear mother—ask . . . in whose name the burial ground of my mother was taken.

Always your friend,

OSCAR WILDE

¹ The hiatus here is due to the scissors of Major Isacson, then Governor of Reading Gaol. He was succeeded by Major Nelson.

READING PRISON

LETTER II

H.M. PRISON, READING,

after September 1896 [N.D.].

. . . To these purely business matters, perhaps More Adey will kindly reply. His letter dealing purely with business, I shall be allowed to receive. It will not, I mean, interfere with your literary letter, with regard to which the Governor has just now read me your kind message.

For myself, my dear Robbie, I have little to say that can please you. The refusal to commute my sentence has been like a blow from a leaden sword. I am dazed with a dull sense of pain. I had fed on hope, and now anguish, grown hungry, feeds her fill on me as though she had been starved of her proper appe-

LETTERS FROM

tite. There are, however, kinder elements in this evil prison air than before: sympathies have been shown to me, and I no longer feel entirely isolated from humane influences, which was before a source of terror and trouble to me. And I read Dante, and make excerpts and notes for the pleasure of using a pen and ink. And it seems as if I were better in many ways, and I am going to take up the study of German. Indeed, prison seems to be the proper place for such a study. There is a thorn, however—as bitter as that of St. Paul, though different—that I must pluck out of my flesh in this letter. It is caused by a message you wrote on a piece of paper for me to see. I feel that if I kept it secret it might grow in my mind (as poisonous things grow in the dark) and take its place with other terrible thoughts

READING PRISON

that gnaw me. . . . Thought, to those that sit alone and silent and in bonds, being no 'winged living thing,' as Plato feigned it, but a thing dead, breeding what is horrible like a slime that shows monsters to the moon.

I mean, of course, what you said about the sympathies of others being estranged from me, or in danger of being so, by the deep bitterness of my feelings: and I believe that my letter was lent and shown to others. . . . Now, I don't like my letters shown about as curiosities: it is most distasteful to me. I write to you freely as to one of the dearest friends I have, or have ever had: and, with a few exceptions, the sympathy of others touches me, as far as its loss goes, very little. No man of my position can fall into the mire of life without getting a great deal of pity from his

LETTERS FROM

inferiors ; and I know that when plays last too long, spectators tire. My tragedy has lasted far too long ; its climax is over ; its end is mean ; and I am quite conscious of the fact that when the end does come I shall return an unwelcome visitant to a world that does not want me ; a *revenant*, as the French say, and one whose face is grey with long imprisonment and crooked with pain. Horrible as are the dead when they rise from their tombs, the living who come out from tombs are more horrible still. Of all this I am only too conscious. When one has been for eighteen terrible months in a prison cell, one sees things and people as they really are. The sight turns one to stone. Do not think that I would blame any one for my vices. My friends had as little to do with them as I had with theirs. Nature

READING PRISON

was in this matter a stepmother to all of us. I blame them for not appreciating the man they ruined. As long as my table was red with wine and roses, what did they care? My genius, my life as an artist, my work, and the quiet I needed for it, were nothing to them. I admit I lost my head. I was bewildered, incapable of judgment. I made the one fatal step. And now I sit here on a bench in a prison cell. In all tragedies there is a grotesque element. You know the grotesque element in mine. Do not think I do not blame myself. I curse myself night and day for my folly in allowing something to dominate my life. If there was an echo in these walls, it would cry 'Fool' for ever. I am utterly ashamed of my friendships. . . . For by their friendships men can be judged.

LETTERS FROM

It is a test of every man. And I feel poignant abasement of shame for my friendships . . . of which you may read a full account in my trial.

It is to me a daily source of mental humiliation. Of some of them I never think. They trouble me not. It is of no importance. . . . Indeed my entire tragedy seems to be grotesque and nothing else. For as a result of my having suffered myself to be thrust into a trap . . . in the lowest mire of Malebolge, I sit between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade. In certain places no one, except those actually insane, is allowed to laugh: and indeed, even in their case, it is against the regulations for conduct: otherwise I think I would laugh at that. . . . For the rest, do not let any one suppose that I am crediting others with

READING PRISON

unworthy motives. They really had no motives in life at all. Motives are intellectual things. They had passions merely, and such passions are false gods that will have victims at all costs and in the present case have had one wreathed with bay. Now I have plucked the thorn out — that little scrawled line of yours rankled terribly. I now think merely of your getting quite well again, and writing at last the wonderful story of . . . Pray remember me with my thanks to your dear mother, and also to Aleck. The ‘Gilded Sphinx’¹ is, I suppose, wonderful as ever. And send from me all that in my thoughts and feelings is good, and whatever of re-

¹ The ‘Gilded Sphinx’ is a nickname given to the clever author of *The Twelfth Hour*. She became acquainted with Wilde through her amusing parodies of his work in *Punch*. She received him hospitably at her house in 1895 when he was released on bail between his trials.

LETTERS FROM

membrance and reverence she will accept, to the lady of Wimbledon, whose soul is a sanctuary for those who are wounded and a house of refuge for those in pain. Do not show this letter to others—nor discuss what I have written in your answer. Tell me about that world of shadows I loved so much. And about the life and the soul tell me also. I am curious of the things that stung me; and in my pain there is pity.

Yours,

OSCAR

LETTER III

April 1st, 1897.

MY DEAR ROBBIE,—I send you a MS. separate from this, which I hope will arrive safely. As soon as you have read it, I

READING PRISON

want you to have it carefully copied for me. There are many causes why I wish this to be done. One will suffice. I want you to be my literary executor in case of my death, and to have complete control of my plays, books, and papers. As soon as I find I have a legal right to make a will, I will do so. My wife does not understand my art, nor could be expected to have any interest in it, and Cyril is only a child. So I turn naturally to you, as indeed I do for everything, and would like you to have all my works. The deficit that their sale will produce may be lodged to the credit of Cyril and Vivian. Well, if you are my literary executor, you must be in possession of the only document that gives any explanation of my extraordinary behaviour. . . . When you have read the letter, you will see the psychological ex-

LETTERS FROM

planation of a course of conduct that from the outside seems a combination of absolute idiocy with vulgar bravado. Some day the truth will have to be known—not necessarily in my lifetime . . . but I am not prepared to sit in the grotesque pillory they put me into, for all time; for the simple reason that I inherited from my father and mother a name of high distinction in literature and art, and I cannot for eternity allow that name to be degraded. 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

READING PRISON

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 we 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. It is not unlikely that you may help me.

As regards the mode of copying: of

LETTERS FROM

course it is too long for any amanuensis to attempt: and your own handwriting, dear Robbie, in your last letter seems specially designed to remind me that the task is not to be yours. I think that the only thing to do is to be thoroughly modern and to have it typewritten. Of course the MS. should not pass out of your control, but could you not get Mrs. Marshall to send down one of her typewriting girls—women are the most reliable as they have no memory for the important—to Hornton Street or Phillimore Gardens, to do it under your supervision? I assure you that the typewriting machine, when played with expression, is not more annoying than the piano when played by a sister or near relation. Indeed many among those most devoted to domesticity prefer it. I wish the copy to be done not on

READING PRISON

tissue paper but on good paper such as is used for plays, and a wide rubricated margin should be left for corrections. . . . If the copy is done at Hornton Street the lady typewriter might be fed through a lattice in the door, like the Cardinals when they elect a Pope; till she comes out on the balcony and can say to the world: 'Habet Mundus Epistolam'; for indeed it is an Encyclical letter, and as the Bulls of the Holy Father are named from their opening words, it may be spoken of as the '*Epistola: in Carcere et Vinculis.*' . . . In point of fact, Robbie, 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

LETTERS FROM

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'; to borrow a phrase from the poet whom you and I once thought of rescuing from the Philistines. 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 and at as great a length as I desire. For nearly two years I 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 that are just breaking out into buds of an almost shrill green. I

READING PRISON

know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression.

Ever yours,

OSCAR

LETTER IV

April 6th, 1897.

. . . Consider now, my dear Robbie, my proposal. I think my wife, who in money matters is most honourable and high-minded, will refund the £— paid for my share. I have no doubt she will. But I think it should be offered from me and that I should not accept anything in the way of income from her; I can accept what is given in love and affection to me, but I could not accept what is doled out grudgingly or with conditions. I would sooner let my wife be quite free. She

LETTERS FROM

may marry again. In any case I think that if free she would allow me to see my children from time to time. That is what I want. But I must set her free first, and had better do it as a gentleman by bowing my head and accepting everything. You must consider the whole question, as it is to you and your ill-advised action it is due: and let me know what you and others think. Of course you acted for the best. But you were wrong in your view. I may say candidly that I am getting gradually to a state of mind when I think that everything that happens is for the best. This may be philosophy or a broken heart, or religion, or the dull apathy of despair. But, whatever its origin, the feeling is strong with me. To tie my wife to me against her will would be wrong. She has

READING PRISON

a full right to her freedom. And not to be supported by her would be a pleasure to me. It is an ignominious position to be a pensioner on her. Talk over this with More Adey. Get him to show you the letter I have written to him. Ask your brother Aleck to give me his advice. He has excellent wisdom on things.

Now to other points.

I have never had the chance of thanking you for the books. They were most welcome. Not being allowed the magazines was a blow, but Meredith's novel charmed me. What a sane artist in temper! He is quite right in his assertion of sanity as the essential in romance. Still up to the present only the abnormal has found expression in life and literature. Rossetti's letters are dreadful; obviously forgeries by his brother. I was interested, however, to

LETTERS FROM

see how my grand-uncle's *Melmoth* and my mother's *Sidonia* have been two of the books that fascinated his youth. As regards the conspiracy against him in later years, I believe it really existed, and that the funds for it came out of Hake's¹ Bank. The conduct of a thrush in Cheyne Walk seems to be most suspicious, though William Rossetti says: 'I could discern nothing in the thrush's song at all out of the common.' Stevenson's letters are most disappointing also—I see that romantic surroundings are the worst surroundings possible for a romantic writer. In Gower Street Stevenson could have written a new *Trois Mousquetaires*. In Samoa he wrote letters to the *Times* about Germans. I see also the traces of a terrible strain to lead

¹ Egmont Hake, author of *Free Trade in Capital* and advocate of a new scheme of banking which amused Wilde very much.

READING PRISON

a natural life. To chop wood with any advantage to oneself or profit to others, one should not be able to describe the process. In point of fact the natural life is the unconscious life. Stevenson merely extended the sphere of the artificial by taking to digging. The whole dreary book has given me a lesson. If I spend my future life reading Baudelaire in a café I shall be leading a more natural life than if I take to hedger's work or plant cacao in mud-swamps. *En Route* is most over-rated. It is sheer journalism. It never makes one hear a note of the music it describes. The subject is delightful, but the style is of course worthless, slipshod, flaccid. It is worse French than Ohnet's. Ohnet tries to be commonplace and succeeds. Huysmans tries not to be, and is. Hardy's novel is pleasant, and the

LETTERS FROM

style perfect ; and Harold Frederic's very interesting in matter. Later on, there being hardly any novels in the prison library for the poor imprisoned fellows I live with, I think of presenting the Library with about a dozen good novels : Stevenson's (none here but the *Black Arrow*), some of Thackeray's (none here), Jane Austen (none here), and some good Dumas-*père*-like books, by Stanley Weyman, for instance, and any modern young man. You mentioned Henley had a protégé?¹ Also the Anthony Hope man. After Easter you might make out a list of about fourteen and apply to let me have them. They would please the few who do not care about De Goncourt's journal.² Don't

¹ This is Mr. H. G. Wells.

² De Goncourt's journal, of which a new volume had been published, contained references to Wilde. It was one of the books sent to him in prison.

READING PRISON

forget I would pay myself for them. I have a horror myself of going out into a world without a single book of my own. I wonder would there be any of my friends, such as C—— L——, Reggie Turner, G—— B——, Max, and the like, who would give me a few books? You know the sort of books I want: Flaubert, Stevenson, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck, Dumas *père*, Keats, Marlowe, Chatterton, Coleridge, Anatole France, Gautier, Dante and all Dante literature: Goethe and Goethe literature, and so on. I should feel it a great compliment to have books waiting for me—and perhaps there may be some friends who would like to be kind to me. One is really very grateful, though I fear I often seem not to be. But then remember I have had incessant worries besides prison-life.

LETTERS FROM

In answer to this you can send me a long letter all about plays and books. Your handwriting, in your last, was so dreadful that it looked as if you were writing a three volume novel on the terrible spread of communistic ideas among the rich, or in some other way wasting a youth that always has been, and always will remain, quite full of promise. If I wrong you in ascribing it to such a cause, you must make allowances for the morbidity produced by long imprisonment. But do write clearly. Otherwise it looks as if you had something to conceal.

There is much that is horrid, I suppose, in this letter. But I had to blame you to yourself, not to others. Read my letter to More. Harris comes to see me on Saturday, I hope. Remember me to Arthur Clifton and his wife, who, I find,

READING PRISON

is so like Rossetti's wife—the same lovely hair—but of course a sweeter nature, though Miss Siddal is fascinating and her poem A1.

Yours ever,

OSCAR

DE PROFUNDIS

• • • • •

MY place would be between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade. I daresay it is best so. I have no desire to complain. One of the many lessons that one learns in prison is, that things are what they are and will be what they will be. Nor have I any doubt that the leper of mediævalism and the author of *Justine* will prove better company than *Sandford and Merton*. . . .

All this took place in the early part of November of the year before last. A great river of life flows between me and a date so distant. Hardly, if at all, can you see across so wide a waste. But to me it

DE PROFUNDIS

seems to have occurred, I will not say yesterday, but to-day. Suffering is one very long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons. We can only record its moods, and chronicle their return. With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one centre of pain. The paralysing immobility of a life every circumstance of which is regulated after an unchangeable pattern, so that we eat and drink and lie down and pray, or kneel at least for prayer, according to the inflexible laws of an iron formula: this immobile quality, that makes each dreadful day in the very minutest detail like its brother, seems to communicate itself to those external forces, the very essence of whose existence is ceaseless change. Of seed-time or harvest, of the reapers bending over the corn, or the

DE PROFUNDIS

grape gatherers threading through the vines, of the grass in the orchard made white with broken blossoms or strewn with fallen fruit: of these we know nothing, and can know nothing.

For us there is only one season, the season of sorrow. The very sun and moon seem taken from us. Outside, the day may be blue and gold, but the light that creeps down through the thickly-muffled glass of the small iron-barred window beneath which one sits is grey and niggard. It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always twilight in one's heart. And in the sphere of thought, no less than in the sphere of time, motion is no more. The thing that you personally have long ago forgotten, or can easily forget, is happening to me now, and will happen to me again to-morrow. Remember this, and

DE PROFUNDIS

you will be able to understand a little of why I am writing, and in this manner writing. . . .

A week later, I am transferred here. Three more months go over and my mother dies. No one knew how deeply I loved and honoured her. Her death was terrible to me; but I, once a lord of language, have no words in which to express my anguish and my shame. Never even in the most perfect days of my development as an artist could I have found words fit to bear so august a burden; or to move with sufficient stateliness of music through the purple pageant of my incommunicable woe. She and my father had bequeathed me a name they had made noble and honoured, not merely in literature, art, archæology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in

DE PROFUNDIS

its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally. I had made it a low byword among low people. I had dragged it through the very mire. I had given it to brutes that they might make it brutal, and to fools that they might turn it into a synonym for folly. What I suffered then, and still suffer, is not for pen to write or paper to record. My wife, always kind and gentle to me, rather than that I should hear the news from indifferent lips, travelled, ill as she was, all the way from Genoa to England to break to me herself the tidings of so irreparable, so irredeemable, a loss. Messages of sympathy reached me from all who had still affection for me. Even people who had not known me personally, hearing that a new sorrow had broken into my life, wrote to ask that some ex-

DE PROFUNDIS

pression of their condolence should be conveyed to me. . . .

Three months go over. The calendar of my daily conduct and labour that hangs on the outside of my cell door, with my name and sentence written upon it, tells me that it is May. . . .

Prosperity, pleasure and success, may be rough of grain and common in fibre, but sorrow is the most sensitive of all created things. There is nothing that stirs in the whole world of thought to which sorrow does not vibrate in terrible and exquisite pulsation. The thin beaten-out leaf of tremulous gold that chronicles the direction of forces the eye cannot see is in comparison coarse. It is a wound that bleeds when any hand but that of love touches it, and even then must bleed again, though not in pain.

DE PROFUNDIS

Where there is sorrow there is holy ground. Some day people will realise what that means. They will know nothing of life till they do. — and natures like his can realise it. When I was brought down from my prison to the Court of Bankruptcy, between two policemen, — waited in the long dreary corridor that, before the whole crowd, whom an action so sweet and simple hushed into silence, he might gravely raise his hat to me, as, handcuffed and with bowed head, I passed him by. Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. It was in this spirit, and with this mode of love, that the saints knelt down to wash the feet of the poor, or stooped to kiss the leper on the cheek. I have never said one single word to him about what he did. I do not know to the present moment whether he is aware

DE PROFUNDIS

that I was even conscious of his action. It is not a thing for which one can render formal thanks in formal words. I store it in the treasure-house of my heart. I keep it there as a secret debt that I am glad to think I can never possibly repay. It is embalmed and kept sweet by the myrrh and cassia of many tears. When wisdom has been profitless to me, philosophy barren, and the proverbs and phrases of those who have sought to give me consolation as dust and ashes in my mouth, the memory of that little, lovely, silent act of love has unsealed for me all the wells of pity: made the desert blossom like a rose, and brought me out of the bitterness of lonely exile into harmony with the wounded, broken, and great heart of the world. When people are able to understand, not merely how beautiful ——'s action was, but why it

DE PROFUNDIS

meant so much to me, and always will mean so much, then, perhaps, they will realise how and in what spirit they should approach me. . . .

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The first volume of Poems that in the very springtide of his manhood a young man sends forth to the world should be like a blossom or flower of spring, like the white thorn in the meadow at Magdalen or the cowslips in the Cumnor fields. It should not be burdened by the weight of a terrible and revolting tragedy; a terrible revolting scandal. If I had allowed my name to serve as herald to such a book, it would have been a grave artistic error; it would have brought a wrong atmosphere round the whole work and in modern art atmosphere counts for so much. Modern life is complex and relative; those are its

DE PROFUNDIS

two distinguishing notes; to render the first we require atmosphere with its subtlety of *nuances*, of suggestion, of strange perspectives; as for the second we require background. That is why sculpture has ceased to be a representative art and why music is a representative art and why literature is, and has been and always will remain the supreme representative art. . . .

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Every twelve weeks R—— writes to me a little budget of literary news. Nothing can be more charming than his letters, in their wit, their clever concentrated criticism, their light touch: they are real letters, they are like a person talking to one; they have the quality of a French *causerie intime*: and in his delicate mode of deference to me, appealing at one time to my judgment, at another to my sense of humour,

DE PROFUNDIS

at another to my instinct for beauty or to my culture, and reminding me in a hundred subtle ways that once I was to many arbiter of style in art; the supreme arbiter to some; he shows how he has the tact of love as well as the tact of literature. His letters have been the messengers between me and that beautiful unreal world of art where once I was King, and would have remained King indeed, had I not let myself be lured into the imperfect world of coarse uncompleted passion, of appetite without distinction, desire without limit, and formless greed. Yet when all is said surely — might have been able to understand or conceive, at any rate that on the ordinary grounds of mere psychological curiosity it would have been more interesting to me to hear from — than to learn that Alfred Austin was trying to

DE PROFUNDIS

bring out a volume of poems; that George Street was writing dramatic criticism for the *Daily Chronicle*; or that by one who cannot speak a panegyric without stammering, Mrs. Meynell had been pronounced to be the new Sibyl of style. . . .

.

Other miserable men when they are thrown into prison, if they are robbed of the beauty of the world are at least safe in some measure from the world's most deadly slings, most awful arrows. They can hide in the darkness of their cells and of their very disgrace make a mode of sanctuary. The world having had its will goes its way, and they are left to suffer undisturbed. With me it has been different. Sorrow after sorrow has come beating at the prison doors in search of me; they have opened the gates wide and let them in. Hardly if

DE PROFUNDIS

at all have my friends been suffered to see me. But my enemies have had full access to me always; twice in my public appearances in the Bankruptcy Court; twice again in my public transferences from one prison to another have I been shown under conditions of unspeakable humiliation to the gaze and mockery of men. The messenger of Death has brought me his tidings and gone his way; and in entire solitude and isolated from all that could give me comfort or suggest relief I have had to bear the intolerable burden of misery and remorse, which the memory of my mother placed upon me and places on me still. Hardly has that wound been dulled, not healed, by time, when violent and bitter and harsh letters come to me from solicitors. I am at once taunted and threatened with poverty. That I can bear.

DE PROFUNDIS

I can school myself to worse than that; but my two children are taken from me by legal procedure. That is, and always will remain to me a source of infinite distress, of infinite pain, of grief without end or limit. That the law should decide and take upon itself to decide that I am one unfit to be with my own children is something quite horrible to me. The disgrace of prison is as nothing compared with it. I envy the other men who tread the yard along with me. I am sure that their children wait for them, look for their coming, will be sweet to them.

The poor are wiser, more charitable, more kind, more sensitive than we are. In their eyes prison is a tragedy in a man's life, a misfortune, a casualty, something that calls for sympathy in others. They speak of one who is in prison as of one who is

DE PROFUNDIS

'in trouble' simply. It is the phrase they always use, and the expression has the perfect wisdom of love in it. With people of our own rank it is different. With us, prison makes a man a pariah. I, and such as I am, have hardly any right to air and sun. Our presence taints the pleasures of others. We are unwelcome when we reappear. To revisit the glimpses of the moon is not for us. Our very children are taken away. Those lovely links with humanity are broken. We are doomed to be solitary, while our sons still live. We are denied the one thing that might heal us and keep us, that might bring balm to the bruised heart, and peace to the soul in pain. . . .

I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand. I

DE PROFUNDIS

am quite ready to say so. I am trying to say so, though they may not think it at the present moment. This pitiless indictment I bring without pity against myself. Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still.

I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. I had realised this for myself at the very dawn of my manhood, and had forced my age to realise it afterwards. Few men hold such a position in their own lifetime, and have it so acknowledged. It is usually discerned, if discerned at all, by the historian, or the critic, long after both the man and his age have passed away. With me it was different. I felt it myself, and made others feel it. Byron was a symbolic figure, but his relations

DE PROFUNDIS

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.

The gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring;—I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art:—I altered the minds of men and the colours of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder. 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. Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched, I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty:

DE PROFUNDIS

to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me. I summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram. Along with these things I had things that were different. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a *flâneur*, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went

DE PROFUNDIS

to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the house-tops. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility.

I have lain in prison for nearly two years. Out of my nature has come wild

DE PROFUNDIS

despair; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at; terrible and impotent rage; bitterness and scorn; anguish that wept aloud; misery that could find no voice; sorrow that was dumb. I have passed through every possible mood of suffering. Better than Wordsworth himself I know what Wordsworth meant when he said—

‘Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark,
And has the nature of infinity.’

But while there were times when I rejoiced in the idea that my sufferings were to be endless, I could not bear them to be without meaning. Now I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole world is meaningless, and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like a treasure in a field, is Humility.

DE PROFUNDIS

It is the last thing left in me, and the best: the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived, the starting-point for a fresh development. It has come to me right out of myself, so I know that it has come at the proper time. It could not have come before, nor later. Had any one told me of it, I would have rejected it. Had it been brought to me, I would have refused it. As I found it, I want to keep it. I must do so. It is the one thing that has in it the elements of life, of a new life, a *Vita Nuova* for me. Of all things it is the strangest; one cannot give it away and another may not give it to one. One cannot acquire it except by surrendering everything that one has. It is only when one has lost all things, that one knows that one possesses it.

Now I have realised that it is in me,

DE PROFUNDIS

I see quite clearly what I ought to do; in fact, must do. And when I use such a phrase as that, I need not say that I am not alluding to any external sanction or command. I admit none. I am far more of an individualist than I ever was. Nothing seems to me of the smallest value except what one gets out of oneself. My nature is seeking a fresh mode of self-realisation. That is all I am concerned with. And the first thing that I have got to do is to free myself from any possible bitterness of feeling against the world.

I am completely penniless, and absolutely homeless. Yet there are worse things in the world than that. I am quite candid when I say that rather than go out from this prison with bitterness in my heart against the world, I would gladly and

DE PROFUNDIS

readily beg my bread from door to door. If I got nothing from the house of the rich I would get something at the house of the poor. Those who have much are often greedy; those who have little always share. I would not a bit mind sleeping in the cool grass in summer, and when winter came on sheltering myself by the warm close-thatched rick, or under the penthouse of a great barn, provided I had love in my heart. The external things of life seem to me now of no importance at all. You can see to what intensity of individualism I have arrived—or am arriving rather, for the journey is long, and ‘where I walk there are thorns.’

Of course I know that to ask alms on the highway is not to be my lot, and that if ever I lie in the cool grass at night-time it will be to write sonnets to

DE PROFUNDIS

the moon. When I go out of prison, R—— will be waiting for me on the other side of the big iron-studded gate, and he is the symbol, not merely of his own affection, but of the affection of many others besides. I believe I am to have enough to live on for about eighteen months at any rate, so that if I may not write beautiful books, I may at least read beautiful books; and what joy can be greater? After that, I hope to be able to recreate my creative faculty.

But were things different: had I not a friend left in the world; were there not a single house open to me in pity; had I to accept the wallet and ragged cloak of sheer penury: as long as I am free from all resentment, hardness, and scorn, I would be able to face the life with much more calm and confidence

DE PROFUNDIS

than I would were my body in purple and fine linen, and the soul within me sick with hate.

And I really shall have no difficulty. When you really want love you will find it waiting for you.

I need not say that my task does not end there. It would be comparatively easy if it did. There is much more before me. I have hills far steeper to climb, valleys much darker to pass through. And I have to get it all out of myself. Neither religion, morality, nor reason can help me at all.

Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws. But while I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does, I see that there is something wrong in what

DE PROFUNDIS

one becomes. It is well to have learned that.

Religion does not help me. The faith that others give to what is unseen, I give to what one can touch, and look at. My gods dwell in temples made with hands; and within the circle of actual experience is my creed made perfect and complete: too complete, it may be, for like many or all of those who have placed their heaven in this earth, I have found in it not merely the beauty of heaven, but the horror of hell also. When I think about religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who *cannot* believe: the Confraternity of the Fatherless¹ one might

¹ In the early editions the word read *Faithless*. Wilde's writing, usually so clear, was sometimes cramped in the MSS. of *De Profundis*. I read it, however, *Faithless* until some one pointed out to me that from the context it must be *Fatherless*; an expert on handwriting has decided in favour of the new reading.

DE PROFUNDIS

call it, where on an altar, on which no taper burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblest bread and a chalice empty of wine. Every thing to be true must become a religion. And agnosticism should have its ritual no less than faith. It has sown its martyrs, it should reap its saints, and praise God daily for having hidden Himself from man. But whether it be faith or agnosticism, it must be nothing external to me. Its symbols must be of my own creating. Only that is spiritual which makes its own form. If I may not find its secret within myself, I shall never find it: if I have not got it already, it will never come to me.

Reason does not help me. It tells me that the laws under which I am convicted are wrong and unjust laws, and

DE PROFUNDIS

the system under which I have suffered a wrong and unjust system. But, somehow, I have got to make both of these things just and right to me. And exactly as in Art one is only concerned with what a particular thing is at a particular moment to oneself, so it is also in the ethical evolution of one's character. I have got to make everything that has happened to me good for me. The plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes shredded into oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins and finishes, the harsh orders that routine seems to necessitate, the dreadful dress that makes sorrow grotesque to look at, the silence, the solitude, the shame—each and all of these things I have to transform into a spiritual experience.

DE PROFUNDIS

There is not a single degradation of the body which I must not try and make into a spiritualising of the soul.

I want to get to the point when I shall be able to say quite simply, and without affectation, that the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison. I will not say that prison is the best thing that could have happened to me; for that phrase would savour of too great bitterness towards myself. I would sooner say, or hear it said of me, that I was so typical a child of my age, that in my perversity, and for that perversity's sake, I turned the good things of my life to evil, and the evil things of my life to good.

What is said, however, by myself or by others, matters little. The important

DE PROFUNDIS

thing, the thing that lies before me, the thing that I have to do, if the brief remainder of my days is not to be maimed, marred, and incomplete, is to absorb into my nature all that has been done to me, to make it part of me, to accept it without complaint, fear, or reluctance. The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right.

When first I was put into prison some people advised me to try and forget who I was. It was ruinous advice. It is only by realising what I am that I have found comfort of any kind. Now I am advised by others to try on my release to forget that I have ever been in a prison at all. I know that would be equally fatal. It would mean that I would always be haunted by an intolerable sense of disgrace, and that those

DE PROFUNDIS

things that are meant for me as much as for anybody else — the beauty of the sun and moon, the pageant of the seasons, the music of daybreak and the silence of great nights, the rain falling through the leaves, or the dew creeping over the grass and making it silver— would all be tainted for me, and lose their healing power and their power of communicating joy. To regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul.

For just as the body absorbs things of all kinds, things common and unclean no less than those that the priest or a vision has cleansed, and converts them into swiftness or strength, into the play of beautiful muscles and the moulding of fair flesh, into

DE PROFUNDIS

the curves and colours of the hair, the lips, the eye; so the soul in its turn has its nutritive functions also, and can transform into noble moods of thought and passions of high import what in itself is base, cruel, and degrading; nay, more, may find in these its most august modes of assertion, and can often reveal itself most perfectly through what was intended to desecrate or destroy.

The fact of my having been the common prisoner of a common gaol I must frankly accept, and, curious as it may seem, one of the things I shall have to teach myself is not to be ashamed of it. I must accept it as a punishment, and if one is ashamed of having been punished, one might just as well never have been punished at all. Of course there are many things of which I was convicted that I had not done, but

DE PROFUNDIS

then there are many things of which I was convicted that I had done, and a still greater number of things in my life for which I was never indicted at all. And as the gods are strange, and punish us for what is good and humane in us as much as for what is evil and perverse, I must accept the fact that one is punished for the good as well as for the evil that one does. I have no doubt that it is quite right one should be. It helps one, or should help one, to realise both, and not to be too conceited about either. And if I then am not ashamed of my punishment, as I hope not to be, I shall be able to think, and walk, and live with freedom.

Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things,

DE PROFUNDIS

creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society that it should force them to do so. Society takes upon itself the right to inflict appalling punishment on the individual, but it also has the supreme vice of shallowness, and fails to realise what it has done. When the man's punishment is over, it leaves him to himself; that is to say, it abandons him at the very moment when its highest duty towards him begins. It is really ashamed of its own actions, and shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irredeemable wrong. I can claim on my side that if I realise what I have suffered, society should realise what it has inflicted on me; and that there

DE PROFUNDIS

should be no bitterness or hate on either side.

Of course I know that from one point of view things will be made different for me than for others; must indeed, by the very nature of the case, be made so. - The poor thieves and outcasts who are imprisoned here with me are in many respects more fortunate than I am. The little way in grey city or green field that saw their sin is small; to find those who know nothing of what they have done they need go no further than a bird might fly between the twilight at dawn and dawn itself: but for me the world is shrivelled to a hand-breadth, and everywhere I turn my name is written on the rocks in lead. For I have come, not from obscurity into the momentary notoriety of crime, but from a sort of eternity of fame to a sort of eternity of

DE PROFUNDIS

infamy, and sometimes seem to myself to have shown, if indeed it required showing, that between the famous and the infamous there is but one step, if as much as one.

Still, in the very fact that people will recognise me wherever I go, and know all about my life, as far as its follies go, I can discern something good for me. It will force on me the necessity of again asserting myself as an artist, and as soon as I possibly can. If I can produce only one beautiful work of art I shall be able to rob malice of its venom, and cowardice of its sneer, and to pluck out the tongue of scorn by the roots.

And if life be, as it surely is, a problem to me, I am no less a problem to life. People must adopt some attitude towards me, and so pass judgment both on themselves and me. I need not say I am not

DE PROFUNDIS

talking of particular individuals. The only people I would care to be with now are artists and people who have suffered : those who know what beauty is, and those who know what sorrow is : nobody else interests me. Nor am I making any demands on life. In all that I have said I am simply concerned with my own mental attitude towards life as a whole ; and I feel that not to be ashamed of having been punished is one of the first points I must attain to, for the sake of my own perfection, and because I am so imperfect.

Then I must learn how to be happy. Once I knew it, or thought I knew it, by instinct. It was always springtime once in my heart. My temperament was akin to joy. I filled my life to the very brim with pleasure, as one might fill a cup to the very brim with wine. Now I am

DE PROFUNDIS

approaching life from a completely new standpoint, and even to conceive happiness is often extremely difficult for me. I remember during my first term at Oxford reading in Pater's *Renaissance*—that book which has had such strange influence over my life—how Dante places low in the Inferno those who wilfully live in sadness; and going to the college library and turning to the passage in the *Divine Comedy* where beneath the dreary marsh lie those who were 'sullen in the sweet air,' saying for ever and ever through their sighs—

'Tristi fummo

Nell' aere dolce, che dal sol s'allegra.'

I knew the Church condemned *accidia*, but the whole idea seemed to me quite fantastic, just the sort of sin, I fancied, a priest who knew nothing about real life would invent. Nor could I understand

DE PROFUNDIS

how Dante, who says that 'sorrow remarries us to God,' could have been so harsh to those who were enamoured of melancholy, if any such there really were. I had no idea that some day this would become to me one of the greatest temptations of my life.

While I was in Wandsworth prison I longed to die. It was my one desire. When after two months in the infirmary I was transferred here, and found myself growing gradually better in physical health, I was filled with rage. I determined to commit suicide on the very day on which I left prison. After a time that evil mood passed away, and I made up my mind to live, but to wear gloom as a king wears purple: never to smile again: to turn whatever house I entered into a house of mourning: to make my friends walk slowly

DE PROFUNDIS

in sadness with me: to teach them that melancholy is the true secret of life: to maim them with an alien sorrow: to mar them with my own pain. Now I feel quite differently. I see it would be both ungrateful and unkind of me to pull so long a face that when my friends came to see me they would have to make their faces still longer in order to show their sympathy; or, if I desired to entertain them, to invite them to sit down silently to bitter herbs and funeral baked meats. I must learn how to be cheerful and happy.

The last two occasions on which I was allowed to see my friends here, I tried to be as cheerful as possible, and to show my cheerfulness, in order to make them some slight return for their trouble in coming all the way from town to see me. It is

DE PROFUNDIS

only a slight return, I know, but it is the one, I feel certain, that pleases them most. I saw R—— for an hour on Saturday week, and I tried to give the fullest possible expression of the delight I really felt at our meeting. .And that, in the views and ideas I am here shaping for myself, I am quite right is shown to me by the fact that now for the first time since my imprisonment I have a real desire for life.

There is before me so much to do that I would regard it as a terrible tragedy if I died before I was allowed to complete at any rate a little of it. I see new developments in art and life, each one of which is a fresh mode of perfection. I long to live so that I can explore what is no less than a new world to me. Do you want to know what this new world is? I think you can guess what it is. It is

DE PROFUNDIS

the world in which I have been living. Sorrow, then, and all that it teaches one, is my new world.

I used to live entirely for pleasure. I shunned suffering and sorrow of every kind. I hated both. I resolved to ignore them as far as possible: to treat them, that is to say, as modes of imperfection. They were not part of my scheme of life. They had no place in my philosophy. My mother, who knew life as a whole, used often to quote to me Goethe's lines—written by Carlyle in a book he had given her years ago, and translated by him, I fancy, also :—

‘ Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the midnight hours
Weeping and waiting for the morrow,—
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.’

They were the lines which that noble

DE PROFUNDIS

Queen of Prussia, whom Napoleon treated with such coarse brutality, used to quote in her humiliation and exile; they were the lines my mother often quoted in the troubles of her later life. I absolutely declined to accept or admit the enormous truth hidden in them. I could not understand it. I remember quite well how I used to tell her that I did not want to eat my bread in sorrow, or to pass any night weeping and watching for a more bitter dawn.

I had no idea that it was one of the special things that the Fates had in store for me: that for a whole year of my life, indeed, I was to do little else. But so has my portion been meted out to me; and during the last few months I have, after terrible difficulties and struggles, been able to comprehend some of the lessons hidden

DE PROFUNDIS

in the heart of pain. Clergymen and people who use phrases without wisdom sometimes talk of suffering as a mystery. It is really a revelation. One discerns things one never discerned before. One approaches the whole of history from a different standpoint. What one had felt dimly, through instinct, about art, is intellectually and emotionally realised with perfect clearness of vision and absolute intensity of apprehension.

I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art. What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward: in which form reveals. Of such modes of existence there are not a few: youth and

DE PROFUNDIS

the arts preoccupied with youth may serve as a model for us at one moment: at another we may like to think that, in its subtlety and sensitiveness of impression, its suggestion of a spirit dwelling in external things and making its raiment of earth and air, of mist and city alike, and in its morbid sympathy of its moods, and tones, and colours, modern landscape art is realising for us pictorially what was realised in such plastic perfection by the Greeks. Music, in which all subject is absorbed in expression and cannot be separated from it, is a complex example, and a flower or a child a simple example, of what I mean; but sorrow is the ultimate type both in life and art.

Behind joy and laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind sorrow there is always sorrow.

DE PROFUNDIS

Pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask. Truth in art is not any correspondence between the essential idea and the accidental existence; it is not the resemblance of shape to shadow, or of the form mirrored in the crystal to the form itself; it is no echo coming from a hollow hill, any more than it is a silver well of water in the valley that shows the moon to the moon and Narcissus to Narcissus. • Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit. • For this reason there is no truth comparable to sorrow. There are times when sorrow seems to me to be the only truth. Other things may be illusions of the eye or the appetite, made to blind the one and cloy the other, but out of sorrow have the worlds been

DE PROFUNDIS

built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain.

More than this, there is about sorrow an intense, an extraordinary reality. I have said of myself that I was one who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. There is not a single wretched man in this wretched place along with me who does not stand in symbolic relation to the very secret of life. For the secret of life is suffering. It is what is hidden behind everything. When we begin to live, what is sweet is so sweet to us, and what is bitter so bitter, that we inevitably direct all our desires towards pleasures, and seek not merely for a 'month or twain to feed on honeycomb,' but for all our years to taste no other food, ignorant all the while that we may really be starving the soul.

DE PROFUNDIS

I remember talking once on this subject to one of the most beautiful personalities I have ever known :¹ a woman, whose sympathy and noble kindness to me, both before and since the tragedy of my imprisonment, have been beyond power and description ; one who has really assisted me, though she does not know it, to bear the burden of my troubles more than any one else in the whole world has, and all through the mere fact of her existence, through her being what she is—partly an ideal and partly an influence : a suggestion of what one might become as well as a real help towards becoming it ; a soul that renders the common air sweet, and makes what is spiritual seem as simple and natural as sunlight or the sea : one for

¹ This is the lady at Wimbledon to whom reference is made in Letter 11., and to whom the editor has dedicated the *Duchess of Padua*.

DE PROFUNDIS

whom beauty and sorrow walk hand in hand, and have the same message. On the occasion of which I am thinking I recall distinctly how I said to her that there was enough suffering in one narrow London lane to show that God did not love man, and that wherever there was any sorrow, though but that of a child in some little garden weeping over a fault that it had or had not committed, the whole face of creation was completely marred. I was entirely wrong. She told me so, but I could not believe her. I was not in the sphere in which such belief was to be attained to. Now it seems to me that love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world. I cannot conceive of any other explanation. I am convinced that there is no other, and

DE PROFUNDIS

that if the world has indeed, as I have said, been built of sorrow, it has been built by the hands of love, because in no other way could the soul of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full stature of its perfection. Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul.

When I say that I am convinced of these things I speak with too much pride. Far off, like a perfect pearl, one can see the city of God. It is so wonderful that it seems as if a child could reach it in a summer's day. And so a child could. But with me and such as me it is different. One can realise a thing in a single moment, but one loses it in the long hours that follow with leaden feet. It is so difficult to keep 'heights that the soul is competent to gain.' We think in eternity, but we move slowly through time; and

DE PROFUNDIS

how slowly time goes with us who lie in prison I need not tell again, nor of the weariness and despair that creep back into one's cell, and into the cell of one's heart, with such strange insistence that one has, as it were, to garnish and sweep one's house for their coming, as for an unwelcome guest, or a bitter master, or a slave whose slave it is one's chance or choice to be.

And, though at present my friends may find it a hard thing to believe, it is true none the less, that for them living in freedom and idleness and comfort it is more easy to learn the lessons of humility than it is for me, who begin the day by going down on my knees and washing the floor of my cell. For prison life with its endless privations and restrictions makes one rebellious. The most terrible thing about it is not that it breaks one's heart—

DE PROFUNDIS

hearts are made to be broken—but that it turns one's heart to stone. One sometimes feels that it is only with a front of brass and a lip of scorn that one can get through the day at all. And he who is in a state of rebellion cannot receive grace, to use the phrase of which the Church is so fond—so rightly fond, I dare say—for in life as in art the mood of rebellion closes up the channels of the soul, and shuts out the airs of heaven. Yet I must learn these lessons here, if I am to learn them anywhere, and must be filled with joy if my feet are on the right road and my face set towards 'the gate which is called beautiful,' though I may fall many times in the mire and often in the mist go astray.

This New Life, as through my love of Dante I like sometimes to call it, is of course no new life at all, but simply the

DE PROFUNDIS

continuance, by means of development and evolution, of my former life. I remember when I was at Oxford saying to one of my friends as we were strolling round Magdalen's narrow bird-haunted walks one morning in the year before I took my degree, that I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world, and that I was going out into the world with that passion in my soul. And so, indeed, I went out, and so I lived. My only mistake was that I confined myself so exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sun-lit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom. Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even, the broken words that come from lips in pain, remorse that makes one walk on thorns, conscience that condemns, self-abasement

DE PROFUNDIS

that punishes, the misery that puts ashes on its head, the anguish that chooses sackcloth for its raiment and into its own drink puts gall:—all these were things of which I was afraid. And as I had determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to taste each of them in turn, to feed on them, to have for a season, indeed, no other food at all.

I don't regret for a single moment having lived for pleasure. I did it to the full, as one should do everything that one does. There was no pleasure I did not experience. I threw the pearl of my soul into a cup of wine. I went down the primrose path to the sound of flutes. I lived on honeycomb. But to have continued the same life would have been wrong because it would have been limiting. I had to pass on. The other half of

DE PROFUNDIS

the garden had its secrets for me also. Of course all this is foreshadowed and pre-figured in my books. Some of it is in *The Happy Prince*, some of it in *The Young King*, notably in the passage where the bishop says to the kneeling boy, 'Is not He who made misery wiser than thou art?' a phrase which when I wrote it seemed to me little more than a phrase; a great deal of it is hidden away in the note of doom that like a purple thread runs through the texture of *Dorian Gray*; in *The Critic as Artist* it is set forth in many colours; in *The Soul of Man* it is written down, and in letters too easy to read; it is one of the refrains whose recurring *motifs* make *Salomé* so like a piece of music and bind it together as a ballad; in the prose poem of the man who from the bronze of the image of the 'Pleasure

DE PROFUNDIS

that liveth for a moment' has to make the image of the 'Sorrow that abideth for ever' it is incarnate. It could not have been otherwise. At every single moment of one's life one is what one is going to be no less than what one has been. Art is a symbol, because man is a symbol.

It is, if I can fully attain to it, the ultimate realisation of the artistic life. For the artistic life is simply self-development. Humility in the artist is his frank acceptance of all experiences, just as love in the artist is simply the sense of beauty that reveals to the world its body and its soul. In *Marius the Epicurean* Pater seeks to reconcile the artistic life with the life of religion, in the deep, sweet, and austere sense of the word. But Marius is little more than a spectator: an ideal spectator indeed, and one to whom it is

DE PROFUNDIS

given 'to contemplate the spectacle of life with appropriate emotions,' which Wordsworth defines as the poet's true aim; yet a spectator merely, and perhaps a little too much occupied with the comeliness of the benches of the sanctuary to notice that it is the sanctuary of sorrow that he is gazing at.

I see a far more intimate and immediate connection between the true life of Christ and the true life of the artist; and I take a keen pleasure in the reflection that long before sorrow had made my days her own and bound me to her wheel I had written in *The Soul of Man* that he who would lead a Christ-like life must be entirely and absolutely himself, and had taken as my types not merely the shepherd on the hillside and the prisoner in his cell, but also the painter to whom the world is a pageant

DE PROFUNDIS

and the poet for whom the world is a song. I remember saying once to André Gide, as we sat together in some Paris *café*, that while metaphysics had but little real interest for me, and morality absolutely none, there was nothing that either Plato or Christ had said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of Art and there find its complete fulfilment.

Nor is it merely that we can discern in Christ that close union of personality with perfection which forms the real distinction between the classical and romantic movement in life, but the very basis of his nature was the same as that of the nature of the artist—an intense and flamelike imagination. He realised in the entire sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation. He under-

DE PROFUNDIS

stood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich. Some one wrote to me in trouble, 'When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting.' How remote was the writer from what Matthew Arnold calls 'the Secret of Jesus.' Either would have taught him that whatever happens to another happens to oneself, and if you want an inscription to read at dawn and at night-time, and for pleasure or for pain, write up on the walls of your house in letters for the sun to gild and the moon to silver, 'Whatever happens to oneself happens to another.'

Christ's place indeed is with the poets. His whole conception of Humanity sprang right out of the imagination and can only be realised by it. What God was to the

DE PROFUNDIS

pantheist, man was to him. He was the first to conceive the divided races as a unity. Before his time there had been gods and men, and, feeling through the mysticism of sympathy that in himself each had been made incarnate, he calls himself the Son of the one or the Son of the other, according to his mood. More than any one else in history he wakes in us that temper of wonder to which romance always appeals. There is still something to me almost incredible in the idea of a young Galilean peasant imagining that he could bear on his own shoulders the burden of the entire world : all that had already been done and suffered, and all that was yet to be done and suffered : the sins of Nero, of Cæsar Borgia, of Alexander VI., and of him who was Emperor of Rome and Priest of the Sun : the sufferings of those

DE PROFUNDIS

whose names are legion and whose dwelling is among the tombs: oppressed nationalities, factory children, thieves, people in prison, outcasts, those who are dumb under oppression and whose silence is heard only of God; and not merely imagining this but actually achieving it, so that at the present moment all who come in contact with his personality, even though they may neither bow to his altar nor kneel before his priest, in some way find that the ugliness of their sin is taken away and the beauty of their sorrow revealed to them.

I had said of Christ that he ranks with the poets. That is true. Shelley and Sophocles are of his company. But his entire life also is the most wonderful of poems. For 'pity and terror' there is nothing in the entire cycle of Greek tragedy to touch it. The absolute purity

DE PROFUNDIS

of the protagonist raises the entire scheme to a height of romantic art from which the sufferings of Thebes and Pelops' line are by their very horror excluded, and shows how wrong Aristotle was when he said in his treatise on the drama that it would be impossible to bear the spectacle of one blameless in pain. Nor in Æschylus nor Dante, those stern masters of tenderness, in Shakespeare, the most purely human of all the great artists, in the whole of Celtic myth and legend, where the loveliness of the world is shown through a mist of tears, and the life of a man is no more than the life of a flower, is there anything that, for sheer simplicity of pathos wedded and made one with sublimity of tragic effect, can be said to equal or even approach the last act of Christ's passion. The little supper with his companions,

DE PROFUNDIS

one of whom has already sold him for a price; the anguish in the quiet moon-lit garden; the false friend coming close to him so as to betray him with a kiss; the friend who still believed in him, and on whom as on a rock he had hoped to build a house of refuge for Man, denying him as the bird cried to the dawn; his own utter loneliness, his submission, his acceptance of everything; and along with it all such scenes as the high priest of orthodoxy rending his raiment in wrath, and the magistrate of civil justice calling for water in the vain hope of cleansing himself of that stain of innocent blood that makes him the scarlet figure of history; the coronation ceremony of sorrow, one of the most wonderful things in the whole of recorded time; the crucifixion of the Innocent One before the eyes of his mother

DE PROFUNDIS

and of the disciple whom he loved; the soldiers gambling and throwing dice for his clothes; the terrible death by which he gave the world its most eternal symbol; and his final burial in the tomb of the rich man, his body swathed in Egyptian linen with costly spices and perfumes as though he had been a king's son. When one contemplates all this from the point of view of art alone one cannot but be grateful that the supreme office of the Church should be the playing of the tragedy without the shedding of blood: the mystical presentation, by means of dialogue and costume and gesture even, of the Passion of her Lord; and it is always a source of pleasure and awe to me to remember that the ultimate survival of the Greek chorus, lost elsewhere to art, is to be found in the servitor answering the priest at Mass.

DE PROFUNDIS

Yet the whole life of Christ—so entirely may sorrow and beauty be made one in their meaning and manifestation—is really an idyll, though it ends with the veil of the temple being rent, and the darkness coming over the face of the earth, and the stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre. One always thinks of him as a young bridegroom with his companions, as indeed he somewhere describes himself; as a shepherd straying through a valley with his sheep in search of green meadow or cool stream; as a singer trying to build out of the music the walls of the City of God; or as a lover for whose love the whole world was too small. His miracles seem to me to be as exquisite as the coming of spring, and quite as natural. I see no difficulty at all in believing that such was the charm of his personality that

DE PROFUNDIS

his mere presence could bring peace to souls in anguish, and that those who touched his garments or his hands forgot their pain; or that as he passed by on the highway of life people who had seen nothing of life's mystery saw it clearly, and others who had been deaf to every voice but that of pleasure heard for the first time the voice of love and found it as 'musical as Apollo's lute'; or that evil passions fled at his approach, and men whose dull unimaginative lives had been but a mode of death rose as it were from the grave when he called them; or that when he taught on the hillside the multitude forgot their hunger and thirst and the cares of this world, and that to his friends who listened to him as he sat at meat the coarse food seemed delicate, and the water had the taste of good wine, and

DE PROFUNDIS

the whole house became full of the odour and sweetness of nard.

Renan in his *Vie de Jésus*—that gracious fifth gospel, the gospel according to St. Thomas, one might call it—says somewhere that Christ's great achievement was that he made himself as much loved after his death as he had been during his lifetime. And certainly, if his place is among the poets, he is the leader of all the lovers. He saw that love was the first secret of the world for which the wise men had been looking, and that it was only through love that one could approach either the heart of the leper or the feet of God.

And above all, Christ is the most supreme of individualists. Humility, like the artistic acceptance of all experiences, is merely a mode of manifestation. It is man's soul that Christ is always looking

DE PROFUNDIS

for. He calls it 'God's Kingdom,' and finds it in every one. He compares it to little things, to a tiny seed, to a handful of leaven, to a pearl. That is because one realises one's soul only by getting rid of all alien passions, all acquired culture, and all external possessions, be they good or evil.

I bore up against everything with some stubbornness of will and much rebellion of nature, till I had absolutely nothing left in the world but one thing. I had lost my name, my position, my happiness, my freedom, my wealth. I was a prisoner and a pauper. But I still had my children left. Suddenly they were taken away from me by the law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, 'The body of a child

DE PROFUNDIS

is as the body of the Lord: I am not worthy of either.' That moment seemed to save me. I saw then that the only thing for me was to accept everything. Since then—curious as it will no doubt sound—I have been happier. It was of course my soul in its ultimate essence that I had reached. In many ways I had been its enemy, but I found it waiting for me as a friend. When one comes in contact with the soul it makes one simple as a child, as Christ said one should be.

· It is tragic how few people ever 'possess their souls' before they die. 'Nothing is more rare in any man,' says Emerson, 'than an act of his own.' It is quite true. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are some one else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation. Christ was not merely the

DE PROFUNDIS

supreme individualist, but he was the first individualist in history. People have tried to make him out an ordinary philanthropist, or ranked him as an altruist with the unscientific and sentimental. But he was really neither one nor the other. Pity he has, of course, for the poor, for those who are shut up in prisons, for the lowly, for the wretched; but he has far more pity for the rich, for the hard hedonists, for those who waste their freedom in becoming slaves to things, for those who wear soft raiment and live in king's houses. Riches and pleasure seemed to him to be really greater tragedies than poverty or sorrow. And as for altruism, who knew better than he that it is vocation not volition that determines us, and that one cannot gather grapes of thorns or figs from thistles?

To live for others as a definite self-

DE PROFUNDIS

conscious aim was not his creed. It was not the basis of his creed. When he says, 'Forgive your enemies,' it is not for the sake of the enemy, but for one's own sake that he says so, and because love is more beautiful than hate. In his own entreaty to the young man, 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor,' it is not of the state of the poor that he is thinking, but of the soul of the young man, the soul that wealth was marring. In his view of life he is one with the artist who knows that by the inevitable law of self-perfection, the poet must sing, and the sculptor think in bronze, and the painter make the world a mirror for his moods, as surely and as certainly as the hawthorn must blossom in spring, and the corn turn to gold at harvest-time, and the moon in her ordered wanderings change from shield to sickle, and from sickle to shield.

DE PROFUNDIS

But while Christ did not say to men, 'Live for others,' he pointed out that there was no difference at all between the lives of others and one's own life. By this means he gave to man an extended, a Titan personality. Since his coming the history of each separate individual is, or can be made, the history of the world. Of course, culture has intensified the personality of man. Art has made us myriad-minded. Those who have the artistic temperament go into exile with Dante and learn how salt is the bread of others, and how steep their stairs; they catch for a moment the serenity and calm of Goethe, and yet know but too well that Baudelaire cried to God—

*'O Seigneur, donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon corps et mon cœur sans dégoût.'*

Out of Shakespeare's sonnets they draw,

DE PROFUNDIS

to their own hurt it may be, the secret of his love and make it their own; they look with new eyes on modern life, because they have listened to one of Chopin's nocturnes, or handled Greek things, or read the story of the passion of some dead man for some dead woman whose hair was like threads of fine gold, and whose mouth was as a pomegranate. But the sympathy of the artistic temperament is necessarily with what has found expression. In words or in colours, in music or in marble, behind the painted masks of an *Æschylean* play, or through some Sicilian shepherds' pierced and jointed reeds, the man and his message must have been revealed.

To the artist, expression is the only mode under which he can conceive life at all. To him what is dumb is dead. But

DE PROFUNDIS

to Christ it was not so. With a width and wonder of imagination that fills one almost with awe, he took the entire world of the inarticulate, the voiceless world of pain, as his kingdom, and made of himself its external mouthpiece. Those of whom I have spoken, who are dumb under oppression and 'whose silence is heard only of God,' he chose as his brothers. He sought to become eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, and a cry in the lips of those whose tongues had been tied. His desire was to be to the myriads who had found no utterance a very trumpet through which they might call to heaven. And feeling, with the artistic nature of one to whom suffering and sorrow were modes through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful, that an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image,

DE PROFUNDIS

he made of himself the image of the Man of Sorrows, and as such has fascinated and dominated art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing.

For the Greek gods, in spite of the white and red of their fair fleet limbs, were not really what they appeared to be. The curved brow of Apollo was like the sun's disc over a hill at dawn, and his feet were as the wings of the morning, but he himself had been cruel to Marsyas and had made Niobe childless. In the steel shields of Athena's eyes there had been no pity for Arachne; the pomp and peacocks of Hera were all that was really noble about her; and the Father of the Gods himself had been too fond of the daughters of men. The two most deeply suggestive figures of Greek mythology were, for religion, Demeter, an earth goddess, not one of

DE PROFUNDIS

the Olympians, and for art, Dionysos, the son of a mortal woman to whom the moment of his birth had proved also the moment of her death.

But Life itself from its lowliest and most humble sphere produced one far more marvellous than the mother of Proserpina or the son of Semele. Out of the Carpenter's shop at Nazareth had come a personality infinitely greater than any made by myth and legend, and one, strangely enough, destined to reveal to the world the mystical meaning of wine and the real beauties of the lilies of the field as none, either on Cithaeron or at Enna, had ever done.

The song of Isaiah, 'He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him,' had seemed to

DE PROFUNDIS

him to prefigure himself, and in him the prophecy was fulfilled. We must not be afraid of such a phrase. Every single work of art is the fulfilment of a prophecy: for every work of art is the conversion of an idea into an image. Every single human being should be the fulfilment of a prophecy: for every human being should be the realisation of some ideal, either in the mind of God or in the mind of man. Christ found the type and fixed it, and the dream of a Virgilian poet, either at Jerusalem or at Babylon, became in the long progress of the centuries incarnate in him for whom the world was 'waiting.' 'His visage was marred more than any man's, and his form was more than the sons of men,' are among the signs noted by Isaiah as distinguishing the new ideal, and as soon as art understood what was meant it opened like a flower

DE PROFUNDIS

at the presence of one in whom truth in art was set forth as it had never been before. For is not truth in art, as I have said, 'that in which the outward is expressive of the inward; in which the soul is made flesh and the body instinct with spirit in which form reveals.'

To me one of the things in history the most to be regretted is that the Christ's own renaissance which has produced the Cathedral at Chartres, the Arthurian cycle of legends, the life of St. Francis of Assisi, the art of Giotto, and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, was not allowed to develop on its own lines, but was interrupted and spoiled by the dreary classical Renaissance that gave us Petrarch, and Raphael's frescoes, and Palladian architecture, and formal French tragedy, and St. Paul's Cathedral, and Pope's poetry, and everything that is

DE PROFUNDIS

made from without and by dead rules, and does not spring from within through some spirit informing it. But wherever there is a romantic movement in art there somehow, and under some form, is Christ, or the soul of Christ. He is in *Romeo and Juliet*, in the *Winter's Tale*, in Provençal poetry, in the *Ancient Mariner*, in *La Belle Dame sans merci*, and in Chatterton's *Ballad of Charity*.

We owe to him the most diverse things and people. Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, the note of pity in Russian novels, Verlaine and Verlaine's poems, the stained glass and tapestries and the quattro-cento work of Burne-Jones and Morris, belong to him no less than the tower of Giotto, Lancelot and Guinevere, Tannhäuser, the troubled romantic marbles of Michael Angelo. pointed

DE PROFUNDIS

architecture, and the love of children and flowers — for both of which, indeed, in classical art there was but little place, hardly enough for them to grow or play in, but which, from the twelfth century down to our own day, have been continually making their appearances in art, under various modes and at various times, coming fitfully and wilfully, as children, as flowers, are apt to do: spring always seeming to one as if the flowers had been in hiding, and only came out into the sun because they were afraid that grown up people would grow tired of looking for them and give up the search; and the life of a child being no more than an April day on which there is both rain and sun for the narcissus.

It is the imaginative quality of Christ's own nature that makes him this palpitating centre of romance. The strange

DE PROFUNDIS

figures of poetic drama and ballad are made by the imagination of others, but out of his own imagination entirely did Jesus of Nazareth create himself. The cry of Isaiah had really no more to do with his coming than the song of the nightingale has to do with the rising of the moon—no more, though perhaps no less. He was the denial as well as the affirmation of prophecy. For every expectation that he fulfilled there was another that he destroyed. ‘In all beauty,’ says Bacon, ‘there is some strangeness of proportion,’ and of those who are born of the spirit—of those, that is to say, who like himself are dynamic forces—Christ says that they are like the wind that ‘bloweth where it listeth, and no man can tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth.’ That is why he is so

DE PROFUNDIS

fascinating to artists. He has all the colour elements of life: mystery, strangeness, pathos, suggestion, ecstasy, love. He appeals to the temper of wonder, and creates that mood in which alone he can be understood.

And to me it is a joy to remember that if he is 'of imagination all compact,' the world itself is of the same substance. I said in *Dorian Gray* that the great sins of the world take place in the brain: but it is in the brain that everything takes place. We know now that we do not see with the eyes or hear with the ears. They are really channels for the transmission, adequate or inadequate, of sense impressions. It is in the brain that the poppy is red, that the apple is odorous, that the skylark sings.

Of late I have been studying with

DE PROFUNDIS

diligence the four prose poems about Christ. At Christmas I managed to get hold of a Greek Testament, and every morning, after I had cleaned my cell and polished my tins, I read a little of the Gospels, a dozen verses taken by chance anywhere. It is a delightful way of opening the day. Every one, even in a turbulent, ill-disciplined life, should do the same. Endless repetition, in and out of season, has spoiled for us the freshness, the naïveté, the simple romantic charm of the Gospels. We hear them read far too often and far too badly, and all repetition is anti-spiritual. When one returns to the Greek, it is like going into a garden of lilies out of some narrow and dark house.

And to me, the pleasure is doubled by the reflection that it is extremely

DE PROFUNDIS

probable that we have the actual terms, the *ipsissima verba*, used by Christ. It was always supposed that Christ talked in Aramaic. Even Renan thought so. But now we know that the Galilean peasants, like the Irish peasants of our own day, were bilingual, and that Greek was the ordinary language of intercourse all over Palestine, as indeed all over the Eastern world. I never liked the idea that we knew of Christ's own words only through a translation of a translation. It is a delight to me to think that as far as his conversation was concerned, Charmides might have listened to him, and Socrates reasoned with him, and Plato understood him: that he really said *ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός*, that when he thought of the lilies of the field and how they neither toil nor spin, his abso-

DE PROFUNDIS

lute expression was *καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνει· οὐ κοπιᾷ οὐδὲ νήθει,* and that his last word when he cried out 'my life has been completed, has reached its fulfilment, has been perfected,' was exactly as St. John tells us it was: *τετελεσται*—no more.

While in reading the Gospels—particularly that of St. John himself, or whatever early Gnostic took his name and mantle—I see the continual assertion of the imagination as the basis of all spiritual and material life, I see also that to Christ imagination was simply a form of love, and that to him love was lord in the fullest meaning of the phrase. Some six weeks ago I was allowed by the doctor to have white bread to eat instead of the coarse black or brown bread of ordinary prison fare. It is a great deli-

DE PROFUNDIS

cacy. It will sound strange that dry bread could possibly be a delicacy to any one. To me it is so much so that at the close of each meal I carefully eat whatever crumbs may be left on my tin plate, or have fallen on the rough towel that one uses as a cloth so as not to soil one's table; and I do so not from hunger—I get now quite sufficient food—but simply in order that nothing should be wasted of what is given to me. So one should look on love.

Christ, like all fascinating personalities, had the power of not merely saying beautiful things himself, but of making other people say beautiful things to him; and I love the story St. Mark tells us about the Greek woman, who, when as a trial of her faith he said to her that he could not give her the bread of the

DE PROFUNDIS

children of Israel, answered him that the little dogs—(κυνάρια, 'little dogs' it should be rendered)—who are under the table eat of the crumbs that the children let fall. Most people live for love and admiration. But it is by love and admiration that we should live. If any love is shown us we should recognise that we are quite unworthy of it. Nobody is worthy to be loved. The fact that God loves man shows us that in the divine order of ideal things it is written that eternal love is to be given to what is eternally unworthy. Or if that phrase seems to be a bitter one to bear, let us say that every one is worthy of love, except him who thinks that he is. Love is a sacrament that should be taken kneeling, and *Domine, non sum dignus* should be on the lips and in the hearts of those who receive it.

DE PROFUNDIS

If ever I write again, in the sense of producing artistic work, there are just two subjects on which and through which I desire to express myself: one is 'Christ as the precursor of the romantic movement in life': the other is 'The artistic life considered in its relation to conduct.' The first is, of course, intensely fascinating, for I see in Christ not merely the essentials of the supreme romantic type, but all the accidents, the wilfulnesses even, of the romantic temperament also. He was the first person who ever said to people that they should live 'flower-like lives.' He fixed the phrase. He took children as the type of what people should try to become. He held them up as examples to their elders, which I myself have always thought the chief use of children, if what is perfect should have

DE PROFUNDIS

a use. Dante describes the soul of a man as coming from the hand of God 'weeping and laughing like a little child,' and Christ also saw that the soul of each one should be *a guisa di fanciulla che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia*. He felt that life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped into any form was death. He saw that people should not be too serious over material, common interests: that to be unpractical was to be a great thing: that one should not bother too much over affairs. The birds didn't, why should man? He is charming when he says, 'Take no thought for the morrow; is not the soul more than meat? is not the body more than raiment?' A Greek might have used the latter phrase. It is full of Greek feeling. But only Christ

DE PROFUNDIS

could have said both, and so summed up life perfectly for us.

His morality is all sympathy, just what morality should be. If the only thing that he ever said had been, 'Her sins are forgiven her because she loved much,' it would have been worth while dying to have said it. His justice is all poetical justice, exactly what justice should be. The beggar goes to heaven because he has been unhappy. I cannot conceive a better reason for his being sent there. The people who work for an hour in the vineyard in the cool of the evening receive just as much reward as those who have toiled there all day long in the hot sun. Why shouldn't they? Probably no one deserved anything. Or perhaps they were a different kind of people. Christ had no patience with the dull lifeless

DE PROFUNDIS

mechanical systems that treat people as if they were things, and so treat everybody alike: for him there were no laws: there were exceptions merely, as if anybody, or anything, for that matter, was like aught else in the world!

That which is the very keynote of romantic art was to him the proper basis of natural life. He saw no other basis. And when they brought him one taken in the very act of sin and showed him her sentence written in the law, and asked him what was to be done, he wrote with his finger on the ground as though he did not hear them, and finally, when they pressed him again, looked up and said, 'Let him of you who has never sinned be the first to throw the stone at her.' It was worth while living to have said that.

DE PROFUNDIS

Like all poetical natures he loved ignorant people. He knew that in the soul of one who is ignorant there is always room for a great idea. But he could not stand stupid people, especially those who are made stupid by education: people who are full of opinions not one of which they even understand, a peculiarly modern type, summed up by Christ when he describes it as the type of one who has the key of knowledge, cannot use it himself, and does not allow other people to use it, though it may be made to open the gate of God's Kingdom. His chief war was against the Philistines. That is the war every child of light has to wage. Philistinism was the note of the age and community in which he lived. In their heavy inaccessibility to ideas, their dull respect-

DE PROFUNDIS

bility, their tedious orthodoxy, their worship of vulgar success, their entire preoccupation with the gross materialistic side of life, and their ridiculous estimate of themselves and their importance, the Jews of Jerusalem in Christ's day were the exact counterpart of the British Philistine of our own. Christ mocked at the 'whited sepulchre' of respectability, and fixed that phrase for ever. He treated worldly success as a thing absolutely to be despised. He saw nothing in it at all. He looked on wealth as an encumbrance to a man. He would not hear of life being sacrificed to any system of thought or morals. He pointed out that forms and ceremonies were made for man, not man for forms and ceremonies. He took sabbatarianism as a type of the things that should be set at nought. The cold

DE PROFUNDIS

philanthropies, the ostentatious public charities, the tedious formalisms so dear to the middle-class mind, he exposed with utter and relentless scorn. To us, what is termed orthodoxy is merely a facile unintelligent acquiescence; but to them, and in their hands, it was a terrible and paralysing tyranny. Christ swept it aside. He showed that the spirit alone was of value. He took a keen pleasure in pointing out to them that though they were always reading the law and the prophets, they had not really the smallest idea of what either of them meant. In opposition to their tithing of each separate day into the fixed routine of prescribed duties, as they tithe mint and rue, he preached the enormous importance of living completely for the moment.

DE PROFUNDIS

Those whom he saved from their sins are saved simply for beautiful moments in their lives. Mary Magdalen, when she sees Christ, breaks the rich vase of alabaster that one of her seven lovers had given her, and spills the odorous spices over his tired dusty feet, and for that one moment's sake sits for ever with Ruth and Beatrice in the tresses of the snow-white rose of Paradise. All that Christ says to us by the way of a little warning is that every moment should be beautiful, that the soul should always be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, always waiting for the voice of the lover, Philistinism being simply that side of man's nature that is not illumined by the imagination. He sees all the lovely influences of life as modes of light: the imagination itself is the

DE PROFUNDIS

world of light. The world is made by it, and yet the world cannot understand it: that is because the imagination is simply a manifestation of love, and it is love and the capacity for it that distinguishes one human being from another.

But it is when he deals with a sinner that Christ is most romantic, in the sense of most real. The world had always loved the saint as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of God. Christ, through some divine instinct in him, seems to have always loved the sinner as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of man. His primary desire was not to reform people, any more than his primary desire was to relieve suffering. To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not his aim. He would have thought little

DE PROFUNDIS

of the Prisoners' Aid Society and other modern movements of the kind. The conversion of a publican into a Pharisee would not have seemed to him a great achievement. But in a manner not yet understood of the world he regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful holy things and modes of perfection.

It seems a very dangerous idea. It is—all great ideas are dangerous. That it was Christ's creed admits of no doubt. That it is the true creed I don't doubt myself.

Of course the sinner must repent. But why? Simply because otherwise he would be unable to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of initiation. More than that: it is the means by which one

DE PROFUNDIS

alters one's past. The Greeks thought that impossible. They often say in their Gnostic aphorisms, 'Even the Gods cannot alter the past.' Christ showed that the commonest sinner could do it, that it was the one thing he could do. Christ, had he been asked, would have said—I feel quite certain about it—that the moment the prodigal son fell on his knees and wept, he made his having wasted his substance with harlots, his swine - herding and hungering for the husks they ate, beautiful and holy moments in his life. It is difficult for most people to grasp the idea. I dare say one has to go to prison to understand it. If so, it may be worth while going to prison.

There is something so unique about Christ. Of course just as there are

DE PROFUNDIS

false dawns before the dawn itself, and winter days so full of sudden sunlight that they will cheat the wise crocus into squandering its gold before its time, and make some foolish bird call to its mate to build on barren boughs, so there were Christians before Christ. For that we should be grateful. The unfortunate thing is that there have been none since. I make one exception, St. Francis of Assisi. But then God had given him at his birth the soul of a poet, as he himself when quite young had in mystical marriage taken poverty as his bride: and with the soul of a poet and the body of a beggar he found the way to perfection not difficult. He understood Christ, and so he became like him. We do not require the Liber Conformitatum to teach us that the life of St. Francis was the true *Imitatio*

DE PROFUNDIS

Christi, a poem compared to which the book of that name is merely prose.

Indeed, that is the charm about Christ, when all is said: he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once at least in his life each man walks with Christ to Emmaus.

As regards the other subject, the Relation of the Artistic Life to Conduct, it will no doubt seem strange to you that I should select it. People point to Reading Gaol and say, 'That is where the artistic life leads a man.' Well, it might lead to worse places. The more mechanical people to whom life is a shrewd speculation depending on a careful calculation of ways and means, always know where they are

DE PROFUNDIS

going, and go there. They start with the ideal desire of being the parish beadle, and in whatever sphere they are placed they succeed in being the parish beadle and no more. A man whose desire is to be something separate from himself, to be a member of Parliament, or a successful grocer, or a prominent solicitor, or a judge, or something equally tedious, invariably succeeds in being what he wants to be. That is his punishment. Those who want a mask have to wear it.

But with the dynamic forces of life, and those in whom those dynamic forces become incarnate, it is different. People whose desire is solely for self-realisation never know where they are going. They can't know. In one sense of the word it is of course necessary, as the Greek oracle said, to know oneself: that is the

DE PROFUNDIS

first achievement of knowledge. But to recognise that the soul of a man is unknowable, is the ultimate achievement of wisdom. The final mystery is oneself. When one has weighed the sun in the balance, and measured the steps of the moon, and mapped out the seven heavens star by star, there still remains oneself. Who can calculate the orbit of his own soul? When the son went out to look for his father's asses, he did not know that a man of God was waiting for him with the very chrism of coronation, and that his own soul was already the soul of a king.

I hope to live long enough and to produce work of such a character that I shall be able at the end of my days to say, 'Yes! this is just where the artistic life leads a man!' Two of the most perfect lives I have come across in my own ex-

DE PROFUNDIS

perience are the lives of Verlaine and of Prince Kropotkin: both of them men who have passed years in prison: the first, the one Christian poet since Dante; the other, a man with a soul of that beautiful white Christ which seems coming out of Russia. And for the last seven or eight months, in spite of a succession of great troubles reaching me from the outside world almost without intermission, I have been placed in direct contact with a new spirit working in this prison through man and things, that has helped me beyond any possibility of expression in words: so that while for the first year of my imprisonment I did nothing else, and can remember doing nothing else, but wring my hands in impotent despair, and say, 'What an ending, what an appalling ending!' now I try to say to myself, and sometimes when I am

DE PROFUNDIS

not torturing myself do really and sincerely say, 'What a beginning, what a wonderful beginning!' It may really be so. It may become so. If it does I shall owe much to this new personality that has altered every man's life in this place.

You may realise it when I say that had I been released last May, as I tried to be, I would have left this place loathing it and every official in it with a bitterness of hatred that would have poisoned my life. I have had a year longer of imprisonment, but humanity has been in the prison along with us all, and now when I go out I shall always remember great kindnesses that I have received here from almost everybody, and on the day of my release I shall give many thanks to many people, and ask to be remembered by them in turn.

The prison style is absolutely and en-

DE PROFUNDIS

tirely wrong. I would give anything to be able to alter it when I go out. I intend to try. But there is nothing in the world so wrong but that the spirit of humanity, which is the spirit of love, the spirit of the Christ who is not in churches, may make it, if not right, at least possible to be borne without too much bitterness of heart.

I know also that much is waiting for me outside that is very delightful, from what St. Francis of Assisi calls 'my brother the wind, and my sister the rain,' lovely things both of them, down to the shop-windows and sunsets of great cities. If I made a list of all that still remains to me, I don't know where I should stop: for, indeed, God made the world just as much for me as for any one else. Perhaps I may go out with something that I had not got

DE PROFUNDIS

before. I need not tell you that to me reformations in morals are as meaningless and vulgar as Reformations in theology. But while to propose to be a better man is a piece of unscientific cant, to have become a deeper man is the privilege of those who have suffered. And such I think I have become.

If after I am free a friend of mine gave a feast, and did not invite me to it, I should not mind a bit. I can be perfectly happy by myself. With freedom, flowers, books, and the moon, who could not be perfectly happy? Besides, feasts are not for me any more. I have given too many to care about them. That side of life is over for me, very fortunately, I dare say. But if after I am free a friend of mine had a sorrow and refused to allow me to share it, I should feel it most bitterly. If he

DE PROFUNDIS

shut the doors of the house of mourning against me, I would come back again and again and beg to be admitted, so that I might share in what I was entitled to share in. If he thought me unworthy, unfit to weep with him, I should feel it as the most poignant humiliation, as the most terrible mode in which disgrace could be inflicted on me. But that could not be. I have a right to share in sorrow, and he who can look at the loveliness of the world and share its sorrow, and realise something of the wonder of both, is in immediate contact with divine things, and has got as near to God's secret as any one can get.

Perhaps there may come into my art also, no less than into my life, a still deeper note, one of greater unity of passion, and directness of impulse. Not width but intensity is the true aim of modern art.

DE PROFUNDIS

We are no longer in art concerned with the type. It is with the exception that we have to do. I cannot put my sufferings into any form they took, I need hardly say. Art only begins where Imitation ends, but something must come into my work, of fuller memory of words perhaps, of richer cadences, of more curious effects, of simpler architectural order, of some æsthetic quality at any rate.

When Marsyas was 'torn from the scabbard of his limbs'—*della vagina della membra sue*, to use one of Dante's most terrible Tacitean phrases—he had no more song, the Greek said. Apollo had been victor. The lyre had vanquished the reed. But perhaps the Greeks were mistaken. I hear in much modern Art the cry of Marsyas. It is bitter in Baudelaire, sweet and plaintive in Lamartine, mystic in

DE PROFUNDIS

Verlaine. It is in the deferred resolutions of Chopin's music. It is in the discontent that haunts Burne-Jones's women. Even Matthew Arnold, whose song of Callicles tells of 'the triumph of the sweet persuasive lyre,' and the 'famous final victory,' in such a clear note of lyrical beauty, has not a little of it; in the troubled undertone of doubt and distress that haunts his verses, neither Goethe nor Wordsworth could help him; though he followed each in turn, and when he seeks to mourn for *Thyrsis* or to sing of the *Scholar Gipsy*, it is the reed that he has to take for the rendering of his strain. But whether or not the Phrygian Faun was silent, I cannot be. Expression is as necessary to me as leaf and blossoms are to the black branches of the trees that show themselves above the prison walls and are so restless in the wind. Between

DE PROFUNDIS

my art and the world there is now a wide gulf, but between art and myself there is none. I hope at least that there is none.

To each of us different fates are meted out. My lot has been one of public infamy, of long imprisonment, of misery, of ruin, of disgrace, but I am not worthy of it—not yet, at any rate. I remember that I used to say that I thought I could bear a real tragedy if it came to me with purple pall and a mask of noble sorrow, but that the dreadful thing about modernity was that it put tragedy into the raiment of comedy, so that the great realities seemed commonplace or grotesque or lacking in style. It is quite true about modernity. It has probably always been true about actual life. It is said that all martyrdoms seemed mean to the looker on. The nineteenth century is no exception to the rule.

DE PROFUNDIS

Everything about my tragedy has been hideous, mean, repellent, lacking in style; our very dress makes us grotesque. We are the zanies of sorrow. We are clowns whose hearts are broken. We are specially designed to appeal to the sense of humour. On November 13th, 1895, I was brought down here from London. From two o'clock till half-past two on that day I had to stand on the centre platform of Clapham Junction in convict dress, and handcuffed, for the world to look at. I had been taken out of the hospital ward without a moment's notice being given to me. Of all possible objects I was the most grotesque. When people saw me they laughed. Each train as it came up swelled the audience. Nothing could exceed their amusement. That was, of course, before they knew who I was. As soon as they

DE PROFUNDIS

had been informed they laughed still more. For half an hour I stood there in the grey November rain surrounded by a jeering mob.

For a year after that was done to me I wept every day at the same hour and for the same space of time. That is not such a tragic thing as possibly it sounds to you. To those who are in prison tears are a part of every day's experience. A day in prison on which one does not weep is a day on which one's heart is hard, not a day on which one's heart is happy.

Well, now I am really beginning to feel more regret for the people who laughed than for myself. Of course when they saw me I was not on my pedestal, I was in the pillory. But it is a very unimaginative nature that only cares for people on

DE PROFUNDIS

their pedestals. A pedestal may be a very unreal thing. A pillory is a terrific reality. They should have known also how to interpret sorrow better. I have said that behind sorrow there is always sorrow. It were wiser still to say that behind sorrow there is always a soul. And to mock at a soul in pain is a dreadful thing. In the strangely simple economy of the world people only get what they give, and to those who have not enough imagination to penetrate the mere outward of things, and feel pity, what pity can be given save that of scorn ?

I write this account of the mode of my being transferred here simply that it should be realised how hard it has been for me to get anything out of my punishment but bitterness and despair. I have, however, to do it, and now and then I

DE PROFUNDIS

have moments of submission and acceptance. All the spring may be hidden in the single bud, and the low ground nest of the lark may hold the joy that is to herald the feet of many rose-red dawns. So perhaps whatever beauty of life still remains to me is contained in some moment of surrender, abasement, and humiliation. I can, at any rate, merely proceed on the lines of my own development, and, accepting all that has happened to me, make myself worthy of it.

People used to say of me that I was too individualistic. I must be far more of an individualist than ever I was. I must get far more out of myself than ever I got, and ask for less of the world than ever I asked. Indeed, my ruin came not from too great individualism of life, but from too little. The one disgraceful,

DE PROFUNDIS

unpardonable, and to all time contemptible action of my life was to allow myself to appeal to society for help and protection. To have made such an appeal would have been from the individualist point of view bad enough, but what excuse can there ever be put forward for having made it? Of course once I had put into motion the forces of society, society turned on me and said, 'Have you been living all this time in defiance of my laws, and do you now appeal to those laws for protection? You shall have those laws exercised to the full. You shall abide by what you have appealed to.' The result is I am in gaol. Certainly no man ever fell so ignobly, and by such ignoble instruments, as I did. I say in *Dorian Gray* somewhere that 'A man cannot be too careful in the

DE PROFUNDIS

choice of his enemies.' I little thought that it was by a pariah I was to be made a pariah myself.

The Philistine element in life is not the failure to understand art. Charming people, such as fishermen, shepherds, ploughboys, peasants and the like, know nothing about art, and are the very salt of the earth. He is the Philistine who upholds and aids the heavy, cumbrous, blind, mechanical forces of society, and who does not recognise dynamic force when he meets it either in a man or a movement.

People thought it dreadful of me to have entertained at dinner the evil things of life, and to have found pleasure in their company. But then, from the point of view through which I, as an artist in life, approach them they were delight-

DE PROFUNDIS

fully suggestive and stimulating. It was like feasting with panthers; the danger was half the excitement. I used to feel as a snake-charmer must feel when he lures the cobra to stir from the painted cloth or reed basket that holds it and makes it spread its hood at his bidding and sway to and fro in the air as a plant sways restfully in a stream. They were to me the brightest of gilded snakes, their poison was part of their perfection. I did not know that when they were to strike at me it was to be at another's piping and at another's pay. I don't feel at all ashamed at having known them, they were intensely interesting; what I do feel ashamed of is the horrible Philistine atmosphere into which I was brought. My business as an artist was with Ariel, I set myself to wrestle with Caliban.

DE PROFUNDIS

Instead of making beautiful coloured musical things such as *Salomé* and *The Florentine Tragedy* and *La Sainte Courtisane*, I forced myself to send long lawyer's letters and was constrained to appeal to the very things against which I had always protested. Clibborn and Atkins were wonderful in their infamous war against life. To entertain them was an astounding adventure; Dumas *père*, Cellini, Goya, Edgar Allan Poe, or Baudelaire would have done just the same. What is loathsome to me is the memory of interminable visits paid by me to the solicitor H—, when in the ghastly glare of a bleak room I would sit with a serious face telling serious lies to a bald man till I really groaned and yawned with ennui. There is where I found myself, right in the centre of Philistia, away from every-

DE PROFUNDIS

thing that was beautiful or brilliant or wonderful or daring. I had come forward as the champion of respectability in conduct, of puritanism in life, and of morality in art. *Voilà où mènent les mauvais chemins . . .* but I can think with gratitude of those who by kindness without stint, devotion without limit, cheerfulness and joy in giving have lightened my black burden for me, have visited me again and again, have written to me beautiful and sympathetic letters, have managed my affairs for me, arranged my future life, and stood by me in the teeth of obloquy, taunt and open sneer, or insult even. I owe everything to them. The very books in my cell are paid for by — out of his pocket-money; from the same source are to come clothes for me when I am released. I am not ashamed of taking

DE PROFUNDIS

a thing that is given in love and affection; I am proud of it. Yes, I think of my friends, such as More Adey, R——, Robert Sherard, Frank Harris, Arthur Clifton, and what they have been to me, in giving me help, affection, and sympathy. I think of every single person who has been kind to me in my prison life down to the warder who gives me a ‘Good-morning’ and a ‘Good-night’ (not one of his prescribed duties) down to the common policemen who, in their homely, rough way strove to comfort me on my journeys to and fro from the Bankruptcy Court under conditions of terrible mental distress—down to the poor thief who recognising me as we tramped round the yard at Wandsworth, whispered to me in the hoarse prison voice men get from long and compulsory silence: ‘I am sorry

DE PROFUNDIS

for you ; it is harder for the likes of you than it is for the likes of us.'

A great friend of mine—a friend of ten years' standing—came to see me some time ago, and told me that he did not believe a single word of what was said against me, and wished me to know that he considered me quite innocent, and the victim of a hideous plot. I burst into tears at what he said, and told him that while there was much amongst the definite charges that was quite untrue and transferred to me by revolting malice, still that my life had been full of perverse pleasures, and that unless he accepted that as a fact about me and realised it to the full I could not possibly be friends with him any more, or ever be in his company. It was a terrible shock to him, but we are friends, and I have not got his friend-

DE PROFUNDIS

ship on false pretences. I have said to you to speak the truth is a painful thing. To be forced to tell lies is much worse.

I remember that as I was sitting in the Dock on the occasion of my last trial listening to Lockwood's appalling denunciation of me—like a thing out of Tacitus, like a passage in Dante, like one of Savonarola's indictments of the Popes of Rome—and being sickened with horror at what I heard, suddenly it occurred to me, *How splendid it would be, if I was saying all this about myself.* I saw then at once that what is said of a man is nothing. The point is, who says it. A man's very highest moment is, I have no doubt at all, when he kneels in the dust, and beats his breast, and tells all the sins of his life.

Emotional forces, as I say somewhere

DE PROFUNDIS

in *Intentions*, are as limited in extent and duration as the forces of physical energy. The little cup that is made to hold so much can hold so much and no more, though all the purple vats of Burgundy be filled with wine to the brim, and the treaders stand knee-deep in the gathered grapes of the stony vineyards of Spain. There is no error more common than that of thinking that those who are the causes or occasions of great tragedies share in the feelings suitable to the tragic mood: no error more fatal than expecting it of them. The martyr in his 'shirt of flame' may be looking on the face of God, but to him who is piling the faggots or loosening the logs for the blast the whole scene is no more than the slaying of an ox is to the butcher, or the felling of a tree to the charcoal burner in the forest, or the fall

DE PROFUNDIS

of a flower to one who is mowing down the grass with a scythe. Great passions are for the great of soul, and great events can be seen only by those who are on a level with them. We think we can have our emotions for nothing. We cannot. Even the finest and the most self-sacrificing emotions have to be paid for. Strangely enough, that is what makes them fine. The intellectual and emotional life of ordinary people is a very contemptible affair. Just as they borrow their ideas from a sort of circulating library of thought—the *Zeitgeist* of an age that has no soul and send them back soiled at the end of each week—so they always try to get their emotions on credit, or refuse to pay the bill when it comes in. We must pass out of that conception of life ; as soon as we have to pay for an emotion we shall know its

DE PROFUNDIS

quality and be the better for such knowledge. Remember that the sentimentalist is always a cynic at heart. Indeed sentimentality is merely the Bank-holiday of cynicism. And delightful as cynicism is from its intellectual side, now that it has left the tub for the club, it never can be more than the perfect philosophy for a man who has no soul. It has its social value; and to an artist all modes of expression are interesting, but in itself it is a poor affair, for to the true cynic nothing is ever revealed.

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I know of nothing in all drama more incomparable from the point of view of art, nothing more suggestive in its subtlety of observation, than Shakespeare's drawing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They are Hamlet's college friends. They

DE PROFUNDIS

have been his companions. They bring with them memories of pleasant days together. At the moment when they come across him in the play he is staggering under the weight of a burden intolerable to one of his temperament. The dead have come armed out of the grave to impose on him a mission at once too great and too mean for him. He is a dreamer, and he is called upon to act. He has the nature of the poet, and he is asked to grapple with the common complexity of cause and effect, with life in its practical realisation, of which he knows nothing, not with life in its ideal essence, of which he knows so much. He has no conception of what to do, and his folly is to feign folly. Brutus used madness as a cloak to conceal the sword of his purpose, the dagger of his will, but the Hamlet mad-

DE PROFUNDIS

ness is a mere mask for the hiding of weakness. In the making of fancies and jests he sees a chance of delay. He keeps playing with action as an artist plays with a theory. He makes himself the spy of his proper actions, and listening to his own words knows them to be but 'words, words, words.' Instead of trying to be the hero of his own history, he seeks to be the spectator of his own tragedy. He disbelieves in everything, including himself, and yet his doubt helps him not, as it comes not from scepticism but from a divided will.

Of all this Guildenstern and Rosencrantz realise nothing. They bow and smirk and smile, and what the one says the other echoes with sickliest intonation. When, at last, by means of the play within the play, and the puppets in their dalliance,

DE PROFUNDIS

Hamlet 'catches the conscience' of the King, and drives the wretched man in terror from his throne, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz see no more in his conduct than a rather painful breach of Court etiquette. That is as far as they can attain to in 'the contemplation of the spectacle of life with appropriate emotions.' They are close to his very secret and know nothing of it. Nor would there be any use in telling them. They are the little cups that can hold so much and no more. Towards the close it is suggested that, caught in a cunning spring set for another, they have met, or may meet, with a violent and sudden death. But a tragic ending of this kind, though touched by Hamlet's humour with something of the surprise and justice of comedy, is really not for such as they. They never die. Horatio,

DE PROFUNDIS

who in order to 'report Hamlet and his cause aright to the unsatisfied,'

' Absents him from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draws his breath in pain,'

dies, though not before an audience, and leaves no brother. But Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are as immortal as Angelo and Tartuffe, and should rank with them. They are what modern life has contributed to the antique ideal of friendship. He who writes a new *De Amicitia* must find a niche for them, and praise them in Tusculan prose. They are types fixed for all time. To censure them would show 'a lack of appreciation.' They are merely out of their sphere: that is all. In sublimity of soul there is no contagion. High thoughts and high emotions are by their very existence isolated.

DE PROFUNDIS

I am to be released, if all goes well with me, towards the end of May, and hope to go at once to some little seaside village abroad with R—— and M——.

The sea, as Euripides says in one of his plays about Iphigeneia, washes away the stains and wounds of the world.

I hope to be at least a month with my friends, and to gain peace and balance, and a less troubled heart, and a sweeter mood; and then if I feel able I shall arrange through R—— to go to some quiet foreign town like Bruges, whose grey houses and green canals and cool still ways had a charm for me years ago. I have a strange longing for the great simple primeval things, such as the sea, to me no less of a mother than the Earth. It seems to me that we all look at Nature too much, and live with her too little. I

DE PROFUNDIS

discern great sanity in the Greek attitude. They never chattered about sunsets, or discussed whether the shadows on the grass were really mauve or not. But they saw that the sea was for the swimmer, and the sand for the feet of the runner. They loved the trees for the shadow that they cast, and the forest for its silence at noon. The vineyard-dresser wreathed his hair with ivy that he might keep off the rays of the sun as he stooped over the young shoots, and for the artist and the athlete, the two types that Greece gave us, they plaited with garlands the leaves of the bitter laurel and of the wild parsley, which else had been of no service to men.

We call ours a utilitarian age, and we do not know the uses of any single thing. We have forgotten that water can cleanse, and fire purify, and that the Earth is

DE PROFUNDIS

mother to us all. As a consequence our art is of the moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and deals directly with things. I feel sure that in elemental forces there is purification, and I want to go back to them and live in their presence.

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It is not for nothing or to no purpose that in my lifelong cult of literature I have made myself

‘ Miser of sound and syllable, no less
Than Midas of his coinage.’

I must not be afraid of the past ; if people tell me that it is irrevocable I shall not believe them ; the past, the present, and the future are one moment in the sight of God, in whose sight we should try to live. Time and space, succession and extension, are merely accidental conditions

DE PROFUNDIS

of thought ; the imagination can transcend them and move in a free sphere of ideal existences. Things also are in their essence of what we choose to make them ; a thing *is* according to the mode in which we look at it. 'Where others,' says Blake, 'see but the dawn coming over the hill, I see the sons of God shouting for joy.' What seemed to the world and to myself my future I lost when I allowed myself to be taunted into taking action against Queensberry ; I daresay I lost it really long before that. What lies before me is my past. I have got to make myself look on that with different eyes, to make God look on it with different eyes. This I cannot do by ignoring it, or slighting it, or praising it, or denying it ; it is only to be done by accepting it as an inevitable part of the evolution of my life and character : by

DE PROFUNDIS

bowing my head to everything I have suffered. How far I am away from the true temper of soul, this letter in its changing uncertain moods, its scorn and bitterness, its aspirations and its failure to realise those aspirations, shows quite clearly; but do not forget in what a terrible school I am sitting at my task, and incomplete, imperfect as I am, my friends have still much to gain. They came to me to learn the pleasure of life and the pleasure of art. Perhaps I am chosen to teach them something more wonderful, the meaning of sorrow and its beauty.

Of course to one so modern as I am, 'enfant de mon siècle,' merely to look at the world will be always lovely. I tremble with pleasure when I think that on the very day of my leaving prison both the laburnum and the lilac will be blooming

DE PROFUNDIS

in the gardens, and that I shall see the wind stir into restless beauty the swaying gold of the one, and make the other toss the pale purple of its plumes so that all the air shall be Arabia for me. Linnæus fell on his knees and wept for joy when he saw for the first time the long heath of some English upland made yellow with the tawny aromatic blossoms of the common furze; and I know that for me, to whom flowers are part of desire, there are tears waiting in the petals of some rose. It has always been so with me from my boyhood. There is not a single colour hidden away in the chalice of a flower, or the curve of a shell, to which, by some subtle sympathy with the very soul of things, my nature does not answer. Like Gautier, I have always been one of those 'pour qui le monde visible existe.'

DE PROFUNDIS

Still, I am conscious now that behind all this beauty, satisfying though it may be, there is some spirit hidden of which the painted forms and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this spirit that I desire to become in harmony. I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. The Mystical in Art, the Mystical in Life, the Mystical in Nature—this is what I am looking for. It is absolutely necessary for me to find it somewhere.

All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death; and three times have I been tried. The first time I left the box to be arrested, the second time to be led back to the house of detention, the third time to pass into a prison for two years. Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place

DE PROFUNDIS

for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt: she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.

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TWO LETTERS TO THE *DAILY
CHRONICLE* ON PRISON LIFE

I. THE CASE OF WARDER MARTIN: SOME
CRUELITIES OF PRISON LIFE¹

THE EDITOR OF THE 'DAILY CHRONICLE.'

SIR, — I learn with great regret, through the columns of your paper, that the warder Martin, of Reading Prison, has been dismissed by the Prison Commissioners for having given some sweet biscuits to a little hungry child. I saw the three children myself on the Monday preceding my release. They

¹ May 28, 1897.

THE CASE OF

had just been convicted, and were standing in a row in the central hall in their prison dress, carrying their sheets under their arms previous to their being sent to the cells allotted to them. I happened to be passing along one of the galleries on my way to the reception room, where I was to have an interview with a friend. They were quite small children, the youngest—the one to whom the warder gave the biscuits—being a tiny little chap, for whom they had evidently been unable to find clothes small enough to fit. I had, of course, seen many children in prison during the two years during which I was myself confined. Wandsworth Prison especially contained always a large number of children. But the little child I saw on the afternoon of Monday the 17th, at Reading, was

WARDER MARTIN

tinier than any one of them. I need not say how utterly distressed I was to see these children at Reading, for I knew the treatment in store for them. The cruelty that is practised by day and night on children in English prisons is incredible, except to those that have witnessed it and are aware of the brutality of the system.

People nowadays do not understand what cruelty is. They regard it as a sort of terrible mediæval passion, and connect it with the race of men like Eccelin da Romano, and others, to whom the deliberate infliction of pain gave a real madness of pleasure. But men of the stamp of Eccelin are merely abnormal types of perverted individualism. Ordinary cruelty is simply stupidity. It is the entire want of imagination. It is the

THE CASE OF

result in our days of stereotyped systems, of hard-and-fast rules, and of stupidity. Wherever there is centralisation there is stupidity. What is inhuman in modern life is officialism. Authority is as destructive to those who exercise it as it is to those on whom it is exercised. It is the Prison Board, and the system that it carries out, that is the primary source of the cruelty that is exercised on a child in prison. The people who uphold the system have excellent intentions. Those who carry it out are humane in intention also. Responsibility is shifted on to the disciplinary regulations. It is supposed that because a thing is the rule it is right.

The present treatment of children is terrible, primarily from people not understanding the peculiar psychology of a child's nature. A child can understand

WARDER MARTIN

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

The child consequently, being taken away from its parents by people whom it has never seen, and of whom it knows

THE CASE OF

nothing, and finding itself in a lonely and unfamiliar cell, waited on by strange faces, and ordered about and punished by the representatives of a system that it cannot understand, becomes an immediate prey to the first and most prominent emotion produced by modern prison life—the emotion of terror. The terror of a child in prison is quite limitless. I remember once in Reading, as I was going out to exercise, seeing in the dimly lit cell right opposite my own a small boy. Two warders—not unkindly men—were talking to him, with some sternness apparently, or perhaps giving him some useful advice about his conduct. One was in the cell with him, the other was standing outside. The child's face was like a white wedge of sheer terror. There was in his eyes the terror of a hunted animal. The next

WARDER MARTIN

morning I heard him at breakfast-time crying, and calling to be let out. His cry was for his parents. From time to time I could hear the deep voice of the warder on duty telling him to keep quiet. Yet he was not even convicted of whatever little offence he had been charged with. He was simply on remand. That I knew by his wearing his own clothes, which seemed neat enough. He was, however, wearing prison socks and shoes. This showed that he was a very poor boy, whose own shoes, if he had any, were in a bad state. Justices and magistrates, an entirely ignorant class as a rule, often remand children for a week, and then perhaps remit whatever sentence they are entitled to pass. They call this 'not sending a child to prison.' It is, of course, a stupid view on their part. To a little

THE CASE OF

child, whether he is in prison on remand or after conviction is not a subtlety of social position he can comprehend. To him the horrible thing is to be there at all. In the eyes of humanity it should be a horrible thing for him to be there at all.

This terror that seizes and dominates the child, as it seizes the grown man also, is of course intensified beyond power of expression by the solitary cellular system of our prisons. Every child is confined to its cell for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four. This is the appalling thing. To shut up a child in a dimly lit cell, for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four, is an example of the cruelty of stupidity. If an individual, parent or guardian, did this to a child, he would be severely punished. The Society for the

WARDER MARTIN

Prevention of Cruelty to Children would take the matter up at once. There would be on all hands the utmost detestation of whomsoever had been guilty of such cruelty. A heavy sentence would, undoubtedly, follow conviction. But our own actual society does worse itself, and to the child to be so treated by a strange abstract force, of whose claims it has no cognisance, is much worse than it would be to receive the same treatment from its father or mother, or some one it knew. The inhuman treatment of a child is always inhuman, by whomsoever it is inflicted. But inhuman treatment by society is to the child the more terrible because there is no appeal. A parent or guardian can be moved, and let out a child from the dark lonely room in which it is confined. But a warder cannot. Most

THE CASE OF

warders are very fond of children. But the system prohibits them from rendering the child any assistance. Should they do so, as Warder Martin did, they are dismissed.

The second thing from which a child suffers in prison is hunger. The food that is given to it consists of a piece of usually badly-baked prison bread and a tin of water for breakfast at half-past seven. At twelve o'clock it gets dinner, composed of a tin of coarse Indian meal stirabout; and at half-past five it gets a piece of dry bread and a tin of water for its supper. This diet in the case of a strong grown man is always productive of illness of some kind, chiefly, of course, diarrhoea, with its attendant weakness. In fact, in a big prison astringent medicines are served out regularly by the

WARDER MARTIN

warders as a matter of course. In the case of a child, the child is, as a rule, incapable of eating the food at all. Any one who knows anything about children knows how easily a child's digestion is upset by a fit of crying, or trouble and mental distress of any kind. A child who has been crying all day long, and perhaps half the night, in a lonely dimly lit cell, and is preyed upon by terror, simply cannot eat food of this coarse, horrible kind. In the case of the little child to whom Warder Martin gave the biscuits, the child was crying with hunger on Tuesday morning, and utterly unable to eat the bread and water served to it for its breakfast. Martin went out after the breakfasts had been served, and bought the few sweet biscuits for the child rather than see it starving. It was a beautiful

THE CASE OF

action on his part, and was so recognised by the child, who, utterly unconscious of the regulation of the Prison Board, told one of the senior warders how kind this junior warder had been to him. The result was, of course, a report and a dismissal.

I know Martin extremely well, and I was under his charge for the last seven weeks of my imprisonment. On his appointment at Reading he had charge of Gallery C, in which I was confined, so I saw him constantly. I was struck by the singular kindness and humanity of the way in which he spoke to me and to the other prisoners. Kind words are much in prison, and a pleasant 'Good-morning' or 'Good-evening' will make one as happy as one can be in a prison. He was always gentle and considerate. I happen to know another

WARDER MARTIN

case in which he showed great kindness to one of the prisoners, and I have no hesitation in mentioning it. One of the most horrible things in prison is the badness of the sanitary arrangements. No prisoner is allowed under any circumstances to leave his cell after half-past five P.M. If, consequently, he is suffering from diarrhoea, he has to use his cell as a latrine, and pass the night in a most fetid and unwholesome atmosphere. Some days before my release Martin was going the rounds at half-past seven with one of the senior warders for the purpose of collecting the oakum and tools of the prisoners. A man just convicted, and suffering from violent diarrhoea in consequence of the food, as is always the case, asked the senior warder to allow him to empty the slops in his cell on account of the horrible odour of the cell

THE CASE OF

and the possibility of illness again in the night. The senior warder refused absolutely ; it was against the rules. The man had to pass the night in this dreadful condition. Martin, however, rather than see this wretched man in such a loathsome predicament, said he would empty the man's slops himself, and did so. A warder emptying a prisoner's slops is, of course, against the rules, but Martin did this act of kindness to the man out of the simple humanity of his nature, and the man was naturally most grateful.

As regards the children, a great deal has been talked and written lately about the contaminating influence of prison on young children. What is said is quite true. A child is utterly contaminated by prison life. But the contaminating influence is not that of the prisoners. It is that of the

WARDER MARTIN

whole prison system—of the governor, the chaplain, the warders, the lonely cell, the isolation, the revolting food, the rules of the Prison Commissioners, the mode of discipline, as it is termed, of the life. Every care is taken to isolate a child from the sight even of all prisoners over sixteen years of age. Children sit behind a curtain in chapel, and are sent to take exercise in small sunless yards—sometimes a stone-yard, sometimes a yard at the back of the mills—rather than that they should see the elder prisoners at exercise. But the only really humanising influence in prison is the influence of the prisoners. Their cheerfulness under terrible circumstances, their sympathy for each other, their humility, their gentleness, their pleasant smiles of greeting when they meet each other, their complete acquiescence in their punish-

THE CASE OF

ments, are all quite wonderful, and I myself learned many sound lessons from them. I am not proposing that the children should not sit behind a curtain in chapel, or that they should take exercise in a corner of the common yard. I am merely pointing out that the bad influence on children is not, and could never be, that of the prisoners, but is, and will always remain, that of the prison system itself. There is not a single man in Reading Gaol that would not gladly have done the three children's punishment for them. When I saw them last it was on the Tuesday following their conviction. I was taking exercise at half-past eleven with about twelve other men, as the three children passed near us, in charge of a warder, from the damp, dreary stone-yard in which they had been at their exercise.

WARDER MARTIN

I saw the greatest pity and sympathy in the eyes of my companions as they looked at them. Prisoners are, as a class, extremely kind and sympathetic to each other. Suffering and the community of suffering makes people kind, and day after day as I tramped the yard I used to feel with pleasure and comfort what Carlyle calls somewhere 'the silent rhythmic charm of human companionship.' In this, as in all other things, philanthropists and people of that kind are astray. It is not the prisoners who need reformation. It is the prisons.

Of course no child under fourteen years of age should be sent to prison at all. It is an absurdity, and, like many absurdities, of absolutely tragic results. If, however, they are to be sent to prison, during the daytime they should be in a workshop or

THE CASE OF

schoolroom with a warder. At night they should sleep in a dormitory, with a night-warder to look after them. They should be allowed exercise for at least three hours a day. The dark, badly ventilated, ill-smelling prison cells are dreadful for a child, dreadful indeed for any one. One is always breathing bad air in prison. The food given to children should consist of tea and bread-and-butter and soup. Prison soup is very good and wholesome. A resolution of the House of Commons could settle the treatment of children in half an hour. I hope you will use your influence to have this done. The way that children are treated at present is really an outrage on humanity and common sense. It comes from stupidity.

Let me draw attention now to another terrible thing that goes on in English

WARDER MARTIN

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

About three months ago I noticed amongst the prisoners who took exercise with me a young man who seemed to me to be silly or half-witted. Every prison, of course, has its half-witted clients, who return again and again, and may be said to live in the prison. But this young man struck me as being more than usually half-witted on account of his silly grin and idiotic laughter to himself, and the peculiar restlessness of his eternally twitching hands. He was noticed by all the other

THE CASE OF

prisoners on account of the strangeness of his conduct. From time to time he did not appear at exercise, which showed me that he was being punished by confinement to his cell. Finally, I discovered that he was under observation, and being watched night and day by warders. When he did appear at exercise he always seemed hysterical, and used to walk round crying or laughing. At chapel he had to sit right under the observation of two warders, who carefully watched him all the time. Sometimes he would bury his head in his hands, an offence against the chapel regulations, and his head would be immediately struck up by a warder so that he should keep his eyes fixed permanently in the direction of the Communion-table. Sometimes he would cry—not making any disturbance—but with tears streaming down

WARDER MARTIN

his face and an hysterical throbbing in the throat. Sometimes he would grin idiot-like to himself and make faces. He was on more than one occasion sent out of chapel to his cell, and of course he was continually punished. As the bench on which I used to sit in chapel was directly behind the bench at the end of which this unfortunate man was placed I had full opportunity of observing him. I also saw him, of course, at exercise continually, and I saw that he was becoming insane, and was being treated as if he was shamming.

On Saturday week last I was in my cell at about one o'clock occupied in cleaning and polishing the tins I had been using for dinner. Suddenly I was startled by the prison silence being broken by the most horrible and revolting shrieks, or rather howls, for at first I thought some animal

THE CASE OF

like a bull or a cow was being unskilfully slaughtered outside the prison walls. I soon realised, however, that the howls proceeded from the basement of the prison, and I knew that some wretched man was being flogged. I need not say how hideous and terrible it was for me, and I began to wonder who it was who was being punished in this revolting manner. Suddenly it dawned upon me that they might be flogging this unfortunate lunatic. My feelings on the subject need not be chronicled; they have nothing to do with the question.

The next day, Sunday 16th, I saw the poor fellow at exercise, his weak, ugly, wretched face bloated by tears and hysteria almost beyond recognition. He walked in the centre ring along with the old men, the beggars, and the lame people, so that I was able to observe him the whole time.

WARDER MARTIN

It was my last Sunday in prison, a perfectly lovely day, the finest day we had had the whole year, and there, in the beautiful sunlight, walked this poor creature—made once in the image of God—grinning like an ape, and making with his hands the most fantastic gestures, as though he was playing in the air on some invisible stringed instrument, or arranging and dealing counters in some curious game. All the while these hysterical tears, without which none of us ever saw him, were making soiled runnels on his white swollen face. The hideous and deliberate grace of his gestures made him like an antic. He was a living grotesque. The other prisoners all watched him, and not one of them smiled. Everybody knew what had happened to him, and that he was being driven insane — was insane

THE CASE OF

already. After half an hour he was ordered in by the warder, and I suppose punished. At least he was not at exercise on Monday, though I think I caught sight of him at the corner of the stone-yard, walking in charge of a warder.

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

This man is undoubtedly becoming insane. Prison doctors have no knowledge of mental disease of any kind. They are as a class ignorant men. The pathology of

WARDER MARTIN

the mind is unknown to them. When a man grows insane, they treat him as shamming. They have him punished again and again. Naturally the man becomes worse. When ordinary punishments are exhausted, the doctor reports the case to the justices. The result is flogging. Of course the flogging is not done with a cat-of-nine-tails. It is what is called birching. The instrument is a rod; but the result on the wretched half-witted man may be imagined.

His number is, or was, A. 2.11. I also managed to find out his name. It is Prince. Something should be done at once for him. He is a soldier, and his sentence is one of court - martial. The term is six months. Three have yet to run.

May I ask you to use your influence to

THE CASE OF

have this case examined into, and to see that the lunatic prisoner is properly treated?

No report by the Medical Commissioners is of any avail. It is not to be trusted. The medical inspectors do not seem to understand the difference between idiocy and lunacy — between the entire absence of a function or organ and the diseases of a function or organ. This man A. 2.11 will, I have no doubt, be able to tell his name, the nature of his offence, the day of the month, the date of the beginning and expiration of his sentence, and answer any ordinary simple question; but that his mind is diseased admits of no doubt. At present it is a horrible duel between himself and the doctor. The doctor is fighting for a theory. The man is fighting for his life. I am anxious that the man should win. But let the

WARDER MARTIN

whole case be examined into by experts who understand brain - disease, and by people of humane feelings who have still some common sense and some pity. There is no reason that the sentimentalist should be asked to interfere. He always does harm.

The case is a special instance of the cruelty inseparable from a stupid system, for the present Governor of Reading is a man of gentle and humane character, greatly liked and respected by all the prisoners. He was appointed in July last, and though he cannot alter the rules of the prison system he has altered the spirit in which they used to be carried out under his predecessor. He is very popular with the prisoners and with the warders. Indeed he has quite altered the whole tone of the prison life. Upon the other hand,

WARDER MARTIN

the system is, of course, beyond his reach as far as altering its rules is concerned. I have no doubt that he sees daily much of what he knows to be unjust, stupid, and cruel. But his hands are tied. Of course I have no knowledge of his real views of the case of A. 2.11, nor, indeed, of his views on our present system. I merely judge him by the complete change he brought about in Reading Prison. Under his predecessor the system was carried out with the greatest harshness and stupidity.—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

OSCAR WILDE.

May 27.

PRISON REFORM

PRISON REFORM ¹

THE EDITOR OF THE 'DAILY CHRONICLE'

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

From a leading article that appeared in your columns about a week ago, I learn that the chief reform proposed is an

¹ March 24, 1898.

PRISON REFORM

increase in the number of inspectors and official visitors, that are to have access to our English prisons.

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

PRISON REFORM

prisoner who has been allowed the smallest privilege dreads the arrival of the inspectors. And on the day of any prison inspection the prison officials are more than usually brutal to the prisoners. Their object is, of course, to show the splendid discipline they maintain.

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

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

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

The food supplied to prisoners is entirely inadequate. Most of it is revolting in character. All of it is insufficient. Every

PRISON REFORM

prisoner suffers day and night from hunger. A certain amount of food is carefully weighed out ounce by ounce for each prisoner. It is just enough to sustain, not life exactly, but existence. But one is always racked by the pain and sickness of hunger.

The result of the food—which in most cases consists of weak gruel, suet, and water—is disease in the form of incessant diarrhoea. 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

PRISON REFORM

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

PRISON REFORM

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 diarrhoea 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

PRISON REFORM

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 diarrhoea 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

PRISON REFORM

of fresh air. One is only allowed out of one's cell for one hour out of the twenty-four that compose the long day, and so for twenty-three hours one is breathing the foulest possible air.

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.

PRISON REFORM

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

PRISON REFORM

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 any one 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

PRISON REFORM

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 inexpressibly re-

PRISON REFORM

volting 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. This is

PRISON REFORM

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,

PRISON REFORM

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 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

PRISON REFORM

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

PRISON REFORM

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.

PRISON REFORM

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, etc.,

THE AUTHOR OF THE 'BALLAD
OF READING GAOL'

March 23.

