In the High Court of Justice

Kings Bench Division

Douglas

v.

Ransome and others

Unpublished Portion of "De Profundis."

Dr H A McCardie

[illegible] your father - [illegible] you
[illegible] by Bacaustony
[illegible] to go to prison thro' your friendship
[illegible] sole author of the tragedy

7. unintellectual nature of friendships

8 — 12 extravagance causing financial ruin

12 — 14 ethical degradation — domination of your will over mine.

14 — 17 goaded me into my absurd action

18 — 28 attempts to break off the friendship

28 — 37 unkindness & ingratitude during illness at Brighton Oct 1894

37 - 38 - fruit attempt to break death of Reg's ld est brother

(41 - Reference to sonnet letter)

PLEASE RETURN TO

40 folly - In all our relations I perceive Doom impending Friendship with you was my ruin

ROBERT ROSS Esqre.
Reform Club,
Pall Mall.

p 3. The gutter & the thing that love in it had begun to fascinate you

p 19. the mere (the one to fine on which you talk centred)

24. Serious trouble at Oxford of a particular character

75 - further reference to trouble at Oxford

p 42 - I had to take another's faults on my shoulders

43. The Chameleon

44-45. You forced me into bringing the charge against Queensberry & promised your family wd pay costs

Your illusions 47 motive of your devotion the flesh pots of Egypt

48 - your extravagance combined & I paid

48-49. illusion in attacking your own father

49-50 - the sinister figure in my tragedy was yourself

51. In you State stronger than love

53 & 53 State of your father - State blinded you

53 & 58. Persecution by Queensberry

59 } I've had to go to prison thro' your friendship
60 } - you the sole author of the tragedy

you vaulted over an excuse being put in as a "score" off your father.

63-64 - made bankrupt by your father

65 - The sins of another were put on to me

66. You were my enemy - Such an enemy as no man ever had. (You had my life & threw it away)

(about here the keynote is - I have shown you what hate is - do you realise what love is? I would not hate you.)

69. You wanted to publish my letters in the Mercure de France

69-70 - your family ought, after your promise, to have had my costs -

72. You wanted to publish article in the Mercure de France

p76
1st years of De Profundis

De Profundis pp 21-23 → 77 - fatality of friendships

80. dedication of yr poems to me.

84-85 - reproaches for working & the mother & not to him, & for not working at all

85-86 You laughed at predictions of ruin.

91. your silence made prison worse but I must forgive you

94-95 - abusive letters - & then turning up as if nothing happened

100 - your mother contributed by putting me in a false position

104 - the lawyer's letters were your suggestion

106 - you must be a little ashamed

109-10 - I had to pay for everything for you

119. beg bankruptcy

Dear Bosie

[redacted]

...erness and of bitter things that

H. Q. Prison
Reading

After long and fruitless waiting I have determined to write to you myself, as much for your sake as for mine, as I would not like to think that I had passed through two long years of imprisonment without ever having received a ~~simple~~ single line from you, or any news or message even, except such as gave me pain.

Our ill-fated and most lamentable friendship has ended in ruin and public infamy for me, yet the memory of our ancient affection is often with me, and the thought that loathing, bitterness and contempt should for ever take that place in my heart once held by love is very sad to me: and you yourself will, I think, feel in your heart that to write to me as I lie in the loneliness of prison-life is better than to publish my letters without my permission or to dedicate poems to me unasked, though the world will know nothing of whatever words of grief or passion, of remorse or indifference you may choose to send as your answer or your appeal.

See post for explanation

I have no doubt that in this letter which I have to write of your life and of mine, of the past and of the future,

of sweet things changed to bitterness and of bitter things that may be turned into joy, there will be much that will wound your vanity to the quick. If it prove so, read the letter over and over again till it kills your vanity. If you find in it something of which you feel that you are unjustly accused remember that one should be thankful that there is any fault of which one can be unjustly accused. If there be in it one single passage that brings tears to your eyes weep as we weep in prison where the day no less than the night is set apart for tears. It is the only thing that can save you. If you go complaining to your mother, as you did with reference to the scorn of you I displayed in my letter to Robbie, so that she may flatter and soothe you back into self-complacency or conceit, you will be completely lost. If you find one false excuse for yourself you will soon find a hundred, and be just what you were before. Do you still say, as you said to Robbie in your answer, that "I attribute unworthy motives" to you? Ah! you had no motives in life. You had appetites merely. A motive is an intellectual aim. That you were "very young" when our friendship began? Your defeat was not that you knew so little about life, but that you knew so much. The morning dawn of boyhood with its delicate

bloom, its clear pure light, its joy of innocence and expectation you had left far behind. With very swift and running feet you had passed from romance to Realism. The gutter and the things that live in it had begun to fascinate you. That was the origin of the trouble in which you sought my aid, and I, unwisely according to the wisdom of the world, out of pity and kindness gave it toy you. You must read this letter right through, though each word may become to you as the fire or knife of the surgeon that makes the delicate flesh burn or bleed. Remember that the fool to the eyes of the gods and the fool to the eyes of man are very different. One who is entirely ignorant of the modes of Art in its revolution or the moods of thought in its progress, of the pomp of the Latin line or the richer music of the vowelled Greek, of Tuscan Sculpture or Elizabethan song may yet be full of the very sweetest wisdom. The real fool, such as the Gods mock or mar, is he who does not know himself. I was such a one too long. You have been such a one too long. Be so no more. Do not be afraid. The supreme vice is shallowness. Everything that is realised is right. Remember also that whatever is misery to you to read, is still greater misery to me to set down. To you the Unseen Powers have been very good. They have permitted you

to see the strange and tragic shapes of life as one seen shadows in a crystal. The head of Medusa that turns living men to stone, you have been allowed to look at in a mirror merely. You yourself have walked free among the flowers. From me the beautiful world of colour and motion has been taken away.

I will begin by telling you that I blame myself terribly As I sit in this dark cell in convict clothes, a disgraced and ruined man, I blame myself. In the perturbed and fitful nights of anguish, in the long monotonous days of pain, it is myself I blame. I blame myself for allowing an unintellectual friendship, and a friendship whose primary aim was not the creation and contemplation of beautiful things, to entirely dominate my life. From the very first there was too wide a gap between us. You had been idle at your school, worse than idle at your university. You did not realise that an artist, and especially such an artist as I am, one, that is to say, the quality of whose work depends on the intensification of personality, requires intellectual atmosphere, quiet, peace, and solitude. You admired my work when it was finished: you enjoyed the brilliant successes of my first nights, and the brilliant banquest that followed them:

you were proud and quite naturally so, of being the intimate friend of an artist so distinguished: but you could not understand the conditions requisite for the production of artistic work. I am not speaking in phrases of rhetorical exaggeration but in terms of absolute truth to actual fact when I remind you that during the whole time we were together I never wrote one single line. Whether at Torquay, Goring, London, Florence, or elsewhere, my life, as long as you were by my side, was entirely sterile and uncreative. And with but few intervals you were, I regret to say, by my side always.

I remember, for instance, in September '93, to select merely one instance out of many, taking a set of chambers, purely in order to work undisturbed, as I had broken my contract with John Hare for whom I had promised to write a play and who was pressing me on the subject. During the first week you kept away. We had, not unnaturally indeed, differed on the question of the artistic value of your translation of "Salome". So you contented yourself with sending me foolish letters on the subject. In the first week I wrote and completed in every detail, as it was ultimately performed, the first act of an "An Ideal Husband" the second week you returned and my work practically had to be given up. I arrived at St James' Place every morning at 11.30

in order to have the opportunity of thinking and writing without the interruption inseparable from my own household, quiet and p peaceful as that household was. But the attempt was vain. At 12 o'clock you drove up and stayed smoking cigarettes and chattering till 1 ½.30, when I had to take you out to luncheon at the Cafe Royal or the Berkeley. Luncheon with its liquers lasted usually till 3.30. For an hour you retired to White's At tea-time you appeared again and stayed till it was time to dress for dinner. You dined with me either at the Savoy or at Tite Street. We did not separate as a rule till after midnight as Supper at Willis's had to wind up the entrancing day. That was my life for those three months, every single day, except during the four days when you went abroad. I then, of course, had to go over to Calais to fetch you back. For one of my nature and temperament it was a position at once grotesque and tragic.

You surely must realise that now? You must see now that your incapacity of being alone: your nature so exigent in its persistent claim on the attention and time of others: your lack of any power of sustained intellectual concentration: the unfortunate accident - for I like to think it was no more - that you had not yet been able to acquire the "Oxford temper" in intellectual matters, never, I mean, been one who could play

gracefully with ideas but had arrived at violence of opinion merely:— that all these things, combined with the fact that your desires and interests were in Life not in Art, were as destructive to your own progress in culture as they were to my work as an artist? When I compare my friendship with you to my friendship with still younger men as John Gray and Pierre Louÿs I feel ashamed. My real life, my higher life was with them and such as they.

Of the appalling results of my friendship with you I don't speak at present. I am thinking merely of its quality while it lasted. It was intellectually degrading to me. You had the rudiments of an artistic temperament in its germ. But I met you either too late or too soon, I don't know which. When you were away I was all right. The moment, in the early December of the year to which I have been alluding, I had succeeded in inducing your mother to send you out of England, I collected again the torn and ravelled web of my imagination, got my life back into my own hands, and not merely finished the three remaining acts of the "Ideal Husband" but conceived and had almost completed two other plays of a completely different type, the "Florentine Tragedy" and "La Sainte Courtisane" when suddenly

unbidden, unwelcome, and under circumstances fatal to my happiness you returned. The two works left then imperfect I was unable to take up again. The mood that created them I could never recover. You now, having yourself published a volume of Verse, will be able to recognise the truth of everything I have said here. Whether you can or not, it remains as a hideous truth in the very heart of our friendship. While you were with me you were the absolute ruin of my Art, and in allowing you to stand persistently between Art and myself I give to myself shame and blame in the fullest degree. You couldn't know, you couldn't understand, you couldn't appreciate. I had no right to expect it of you at all. Your interests were merely in your meals and moods. Your desires were simply for amusements, for ordinary or less ordinary pleasures. They were what your temperament needed, or thought it needed for the moment. I should have forbidden you my house and chambers except when I specially invited you. I blame myself without reserve for my weakness. It was merely weakness. One half hour with Art was always more to me than a cycle with you. Nothing really at any period of my life was ever of the smallest importance to me compared with Art. But in the case of an artist, weakness is

nothing less than a crime, when it is a weakness that paralyses the imagination.

I blame myself for having allowed you to bring me to utter and discreditable financial ruin. I remember one morning in the early October of '92 sitting in the yellowing woods at Bracknell with your mother. At that time I knew very little of your real nature. I had stayed from a Saturday to Monday with you at Oxford. You had stayed with me at Cromer for ten days and played golf. The conversation turned on you, and your mother began to speak to me ~~of~~ about your character. She told me of your two chief faults, your vanity, and your being as she termed it "all wrong about money". I have a distinct recollection of how I laughed. I had no idea that the first would bring me to prison and the second to bankruptcy. I thought vanity a sort of graceful flower for a young man to wear, as for extravagance - for I thought she meant no more than extravagance - the virtues of prudence and thrift were not in my own nature or my own race. But before our friendship was one month older I began to see what your mother really meant. Your insistence on a life of reckless profusion: your incessant demands for money: your claim that all your pleasures

should be paid for by me whether I was with you or not: brought me after some time into serious monetary [~~troubles~~] difficulties, & what made the extravagances to me at any rate so monotonously uninteresting, as your persistent grasp on my life grew stronger and stronger, was that the money was really spent on little more than the pleasures of eating, drinking and the like. Now and then it is a joy to have one's table red with wine and roses, but you outstripped all taste and temperance. You demanded without grace and received without thanks. You grew to think that you had a sort of right to live at my expense and in a profuse luxury to which you had never been accustomed, and which for that reason made your appetites all the more keen, and at the end if you lost money gambling in some Algiers Casino you simply telegraphed next morning to me in London to lodge the amount of your losses to your account at your bank, and gave the matter no further thought of any kind.

When I tell you that between the autumn of 1892 and the date of my imprisonment I spent with you and on you more than £5000 in actual money, irrespective of the bills I incurred, you will have some idea of the sort of life on which you insisted. Do you think I exaggerate? My ordinary expenses with you for an

ordinary day in London - for luncheon, dinner, supper, amusements, hansoms and the rest of it - ranged from £12 to £20, and the weeks expenses were naturally in proportion and ranged from £80 to £130. For our three months at Goring my expenses (rent of course included) were £1340. Step by step with the Bankruptcy Receiver I had to go over every item of my life. It was horrible. "Plain living and high thinking" was, of course, an ideal you could not at that time have appreciated, but such an extravagance was a disgrace to both of us. One of the most delightful dinners I remember ever having had is one Robbie and I had together in a little Soho café, which cost about as many shillings as my dinners to you used to cost pounds. Out of my dinner with Robbie came the first and best of all my dialogues. Idea, title, treatment, mole, everything was struck out at a 3 franc 50 c. table-d'hote. Out of the reckless dinners with you nothing remains but the memory that too much was eaten and too much was drunk. And my yielding to your demands was bad for you. You know that now. It made you grasping often: at times not a little unscrupulous: ungracious always. There was on far too many occasions too little joy or privilege in being yo your host. You forgot - I will not say the formal courtesy of thanks, for formal courtesies will strain a close friendship -

but simply the grace of sweet companionship, the charm of pleasant conversation, that as the Greeks called it, and all those gentle humanities that made life lovely, and are an accomplishment to life as music might be, keeping things in tune and filling with melody the harsh or silent places. And though it may seem strange to you that one in the terrible position in which I am situated should find a difference between one disgrace and another, still I frankly admit that the folly of throwing away all this money on you, and letting you squander my fortune to your own hurt as well as to mine, gives to me and in my eyes a note of common profligacy to my Bankruptcy that makes me doubly ashamed of it. I was made for other things.

But most of all I blame myself for the entire ethical degradation I allowed you to bring on me. The basis of character is will power, and my will power became absolutely subject to yours. It sounds a grotesque thing to say, but it is none the less true. Those incessant scenes that seemed to be almost physically necessary to you, and in which your mind and body grew distorted and you became a thing as terrible to look at as to listen to: that dreadful mania you inherit from your father, the mania for writing revolting and loathsome letters: your

your entire lack of any control over your emotions as displayed in your long resentful moods of sullen silence, no less than in the sudden fits of almost epileptic rage: all these things in reference to which one of my letters to you, left by you lying about at the Savoy or some other Hotel and so produced in Court by your father's counsel, contained an entreaty not devoid of pathos, had you at that time been able to recognise pathos either in its elements or its expression : — these, I say, were the origin and causes of my fatal yielding to you in your daily increasing demands. You wore one out. It was the triumph of the smaller over the bigger nature. It was the case of that tyranny ~~of~~ of the weak over the strong which somewhere in one of my plays I describe as being "the only tyranny that lasts."

And it was inevitable. In every relation of life with others one has to find some moyen de vivre. In your case, one had either to give up to you or to give you up. There was no other alternative. Through deep if misplaced affection for you: through great pity for your defects of temper and temperament: through my own proverbial good nature and Celtic laziness: through an artistic aversion to coarse scenes and ugly words: through that incapacity to bear resentment of any kind which at that time characterised me: through my dislike of seeing life made bitter

and uncomely by what to me, with my eyes really fixed on other things, seemed to be mere trifles too petty for more than a moments thought or interest: -- through these reasons, simple as they may sound, I gave up to you always. As a natural result, your claims, your efforts at domination, your exactions grew more and more unreasonable. Your meanest motive, your lowest appetite, your most common passion, became to you laws by which the lives of others were to be guided always, and to which, if necessary, they were to be without scruple sacrificed. Knowing that by making a scene you could always have your way, it was but natural that you should proceed, almost unconsciously I have no doubt, to every excess of vulgar violence. At the end you iid not know to what gaol (goal) you were hurrying, or with what aim in view. Having made you out of my genius, my will power and my fortune, you required, in the blindness of an inexhaustible greed, my entire existence. You took it. At the one supremely and tragically critical moment of all my life, just before my lamentable step of beginning my absurd action, on the one side there was your father attacking me with hideous cards left at my club, on the other side there was you attacking me with no less loathsome letters. The letter I

received from you on the morning of the day I let you take me down to the Police Station to apply for the ridiculous warrant for your father's arrest was one of the worst you ever wrote, and for the most shameful reason. Between you both I had lost my head. My judgment forsook me. Terror took its place. I saw no possible escape, I may say frankly, from either of you. Blindly I staggered as an ox into the shambles. I had made a gigantic psychological error. I had always thought that my giving up to you in smallthings meant nothing: that when a great moment arrived I could re-assert my will power in its natural superiority. It was not so. At the great moment my will power completely failed me. In life there is really no great or small thing. All things are of equal value and of equal size. My habit - due to indifference chiefly at first - of giving up to you in everything had become insensibly a real part of my nature. Without my knowing it, it had stereotyped my temperament to one permenent and fatal mood. That is why, in the subtle epilogue to the first edition of his essays, Pater says that "Failure is to form habits". When he said it the dull Oxford people thought the phrase a mere wilful inversion of the somewhat wearisome text of Aristotelian

Ethics, but there is a wonderful, a terrible truth hidden in it. I had allowed you to sap my strength of character, and to me the formation of a habit had proved to be not failure merely but Ruin. Ethically you had been even still more destructive to me than you had been artistically.

The warrant once granted, your will of course directed everything. At a time when I should have been in London taking wise council and calmly considering the hideous trap in which I had allowed myself to be caught - the booby trap as your father calls it to ~~this~~ the present day - you insisted on my taking you to Monte carlo, of all revolting places on God's earth, that all day and all night as well, you might gamble as long as the Casino remained open. As for me - baccarat having no charms for me - I was left alone outside to myself. You refused to discuss even for five minutes the position to which you and your father had brought me. My business was merely to pay your hotel expenses and your losses. The slightest allusion to the ordeal awaiting me was regarded as a bore. A new brand of champagne that was recommended to us had more interest for you.... On our return to London those of my friends who really desired my welfare implored me to retire abroad, and not to face an impossible trial. You imputed mean

motives to them for giving such aivice ani cowardice to me for listening to it. You forced me to stay to brazen it out, if possible, in the box by absurd and silliness lies At the end of course, I was arrested and your father became the hero of the hour: more indeed than the hero of the hour merely: your family now ranks strangely enough, with the Immortals: for with the grotesqueness of effect that is as it were a Gothic element in history, and makes Clio the least serious of all the Muses, your father will always live among the kind pure minded parents of Sunday school literature, your place is with the infant Samuel and in the lowest mire of Malebolge I sit between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade.

Of course, I should have got rid of you. I should have shaken you out of my life as a man shakes from his raiment a thing that has stung him. In the most wonderful of all his plays Aeschylus tells us of the great lord who brings up in his house the lion cub, the and loves it because it comes bright eyed to his call and fawns on him for its food:

and the thing grows up and shows the nature of its race,

and destroys the lord and his house and all that he possesses. I feel that I was such

a one as he. But my fault was, not that I did not part from you, but that I parted from you far too often. As far as I can make out I ended my friendship with you every three months regularly. And each time that I did so you managed by means of entreaties, telegrams, letters, the interposition of your friends, the interposition of mine, and the like to induce me to allow you back. When at the end of March '93 you left my house at Torquay I had determined never to speak to you again, or to allow you under any circumstances to be with me, so revolting had been the scene you made the night before your departure. You wrote and telegraphed from Bristol to beg me to forgive you and meet you. Your tutor, who had stayed behind, told me that at times you were quite irresponsible for what you said and did, and that most if not all of the men at Magdalen were of the same opinion. I consented to meet you and of course I forgave you. On the way up to town you begged me to take you to the Savoy. That was indeed a visit fatal to me. Three months later in June, we are at Goring. Some of your Oxford friends come to stay from a Saturday to Monday. The morning of the day they went away you made a scene so dreadful, so distressing that I told you that we must part. I remember quite well as we stood on the level croquet

ground with the pretty lawn all round us, pointing out to you that we were spoiling each others lives, that you were absolutely ruining mine and that I evidently was not making you happy, and that an irrevocable parting, and complete separation was the one wise philosophic thing to do. You went sullenly after luncheon leaving one of your most offensive letters behind with the butler to be handed to me after your departure. Before three days had elapsed you were telegraphing from London to beg to be forgiven & and allowed to return. I had taken the place to please you. I had engaged your own servants at your request. I was always terribly sorry for the hideous temper to which you were really a prey. I was fond of you. So I let you come back and forgave you. Three months later still, in September, new scenes occurred, the occasion of them being my pointing out the school boy faults of your attempted translation of "Salome". You must by this time be a fair enough French scholar to know that the translation was as unworthy of you, as an ordinary Oxonian, as it was of the work it sought to renier. You did not of course, know it then, and in one of the violent letters you wrote to me on the point, you said that you were under "no intellectual obligation of any kind" to me. I remember that when I read that statement

I felt that it was really the one true thing you had written to me in the whole course of our friendship. I saw that a less cultivated nature would really have suited you much better. I am not saying this in bitterness at all, but simply as a fact of companionship. Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation, and conversation must have a common basis, and between two people of widely different culture the only common basis possible is the lowest level. The trivial in thought and action is charming. I had made it the keystone of a very very brilliant philosophy expressed in plays and paradoxes. But the froth and folly of our life grew often very wearisome to me: it was only in the mire that we met: and fascinating, terribly fascinating though the one topic round which you talk invariably centred was, still at the end it became quite monotonous to me: I was often bored to death by it, and accepted it as I accepted your passion for music halls, or your mania for absurd extravagances in eating and drinking, or any other of your to me less attractive characteristics, as a thing that it is to say, that one simply ha had to put up with, a part of the high price one had to pay for knowing you. When after leaving Goring I went to Dinard for a

fortnight you were extremely angry with me for not taking you with me, so, before my departure there, made some very unpleasant scenes on the subject at the Albemarle Hotel, and sent me some ~~very~~ equally unpleasant telegrams to a country house I was staying for a few days. I told you, I remember, that I thought it was your duty to be with your own people for a little, as you had passed the whole season away from them. But in reality, to be perfectly frank with you I could not under any circumstances have let you be with me. We had been together for nearly twelve weeks. I required rest and freedom from the terrible strain of your companionship. It was necessary for me to be a little by myself. It was intellectually necessary. And so I confess I saw in your letter from which I have quoted, a very good opportunity for ending the fatal friendship that had sprung up between us, and ending it without bitterness, as I had indeed tried to do on that bright June morning at Goring three months before. It was however represented to me, - I am bound to say candidly by one of my own friends to whom you had gone in your difficulty - that you would be much hurt, perhaps almost humiliated at having your work sent back to you like a schoolboy's exercise that I was expecting far too much intellectually from you; and

no matter what you wrote or did, you were absolutely and entirely devoted to me. I did not want to be the first to check or discourage you in your beginnings in literature: I knew quite well that no translation unless one done by a poet could render the ~~of~~ colour and cadence of my work in any adequate measure: devotion seemed to me, seems to me still, a wonderful thing, not to be lightly thrown away: so I took the translation and you back. Exactly three months later, after a series of scenes culminating in one more than usually revolting, when you came one Monday evening to my rooms accompanied by two of your friends, I found myself actually flying abroad next morning to escape from you, giving my family some absurd reason for my sudden departure, and leaving a false address with my servant for fear you might follow me by the next train. And I remember that afternoon, as I was in the railway carriage whirling up to Paris, thinking in what an impossible, terrible, utterly wrong state my life had got into when I, a man of world wide reputation, was actually forced to run away from England in order to try and get rid of a friendship that was entirely destructive of everything fine in me either from the intellectual or ethical point of view: the person from whom I was flying, being no terrible creature sprung from sewer or mire into modern life with whom I had entangled my days, but you yourself

a young man of my own social rank and position, who had been at my own college at Oxford and was an incessant guest at my house. The usual telegrams of entreaty and remorse followed: I disregarded them. Finally you threatened that unless I consented to meet you, you would under no circumstances consent to proceed to Egypt. I had myself, with your knowledge and concurrence begged your mother to send you to Egypt away from England, as you were wrecking your life in London. I knew that if you did not go it would be a terrible disappointment to her and for her sake I did meet you and under the influence of great emotion, which even you cannot have forgotten, I forgave the past; though I said nothing at all about the future. On my return to London next day I remember sitting in my room and sadly and seriously trying to make up my mind whether or not you were what you seemed to me to be, so full of terrible defects, so utterly ruinous both to yourself and others, so fatal a one to know even or to be with. For a whole week I thought about it, and wondered if after all, I was not unjust and mistaken in my estimate of you. At the end of the week a letter from your mother is handed in. It expressed to the full every feeling I myself had about you. In it she spoke of your blind exaggerated vanity which made you despise your home, and treat your elder brother - that candidissima anima"- "as a Philistine".: of

your temper which made her afraid to speak to you about your life, the life she felt, she knew you were leading: about your conduct in money matters, so distressing to her in more ways than one: of the degeneration and change that had taken place in you. She saw, of course, that heredity had burdened you with a terrible legacy, and frankly admitted it, admitted it with terror: he is "the one of my children who has inherited the fatal Douglas temperament," she wrote of you. At the end she stated that she felt bound to declare that your friendship with me, in her opinion, had so intensified your vanity that it had become the source of all your faults, and earnestly begged me not to meet you abroad. I wrote to her at once, in reply, and told her that i agreed entirely with every word she had said. I added much more. I went as far as I could possibly go. I told her that "the origin of our friendship was you in your undergraduate days at Oxford coming to beg me to help you in very serious trouble of a very particular character. I told her that your life had been continually in the same manner troubled. The reason of your going to Belgium you had

placed to the fault of your companion in that journey, and your mother had reproached me with having introduced you to him. I replaced the fault on the right shoulders, on yours. I assured her at the end that I had not the smallest intention of meeting you abroad and begged her to try to keep you there either as an "honorary "attache" if that were possible, or to learn modern languages if it were not, or for any reason she chose, at least during two or three years and for your sake as well as for mine. In the meantime your are writing to me by every post from Egypt. I took not the smallest notice of any of your communications. I read them and tore them up. I had quite settled to have no more to do with you. My mind was made up and I gladly devoted myself to the Art whose progress I had allowed you to interrupt. At the end of three months, your mother with that unfortunate weakness of will that characterises her, and that in the tragedy of my life has been an element no less fatal than your Father's violence, actually writes to me herself - I had no doubt of course that your instigation-tells me that you are extremely anxious to hear from me and, in order that I should have no excuse for not communicating with you, sends me your address in Athens, which of course, I knew perfectly well. I confess I was absolutely astounded at her letter. I could not understand

how, after what she had written to me in December, and what I in answer had written to her, she could in any way try to repair or to renew my unfortunate friendship with you. I acknowledged her letter, of course, and again urged her to try and get you connected with some Embassy abroad, so as to prevent your returning to England, but I did not write to you, or take any more notice of your telegrams than I did before your mother had written to me. Finally you actually telegraphed to my wife begging her to use her influence with me to get me to write to you. Our friendship had always been a source of distress to her: not merely because she had never liked you personally, but because she saw how your continual companionship altered me, and not for the better: still, just as she had always been most gracious and hospitable to you, so she could not bear the idea of my being in any way unkind - for so it seemed to her - to any of my friends. She thought, knew indeed, that it was a thing alien to my character. At her request I did communicate with you. I remember the wording of my telegram quite well. I said that time healed every wound but that for many months to come I would neither write to you nor see you. You started without delay for Paris, sending me passionate telegrams on the road to beg me to see you once, at anyrate. I declined. You

arrived in Paris late on a Saturday night, and found a brief letter from me waiting for you at your hotel stating that I would not see you. Next morning I receive in Tite Street a telegram of some ten or eleven pages in length from you. You stated in it that no matter what you had done to me you could not believe that I would absolutely decline to see you: you reminded me that for the sake of seeing me even for one hour you had travelled six days and nights across Europe without stopping once on the way: you made what I must admit was a most pathetic appeal and ended with what seemed to me a threat of suicide and one not thinly veiled. You had yourself often told me how many of your race there had been who had stained their hands in their own blood; your uncle certainly, your grandfather possibly; many other in the mad bad line from which you come. Pity, my old affection for you, regard for your mother to whom your death under such dreadful circumstances would have been a blow almost too great for her to bear, the horror of the idea that so young a life, and one that amidst all its ugly faults had still promise of beauty in it should come to so revolting an end, mere humanity itself - all these, if excuses be necessary, must serve as my excuse for consenting to accord you one last interview. When I arrived in

Paris, your tears breaking out again and again all through the evening, and falling over your cheeks like rain as we sat, at dinner first at Voisins, at supper at Paillards afterwards: the unfeigned joy you evinced at seeing me, holding my hand whenever you could as though you were a gentle and penitent child: your contrition, so simple and sincere, at the moment: made me consent to renew our friendship. Two days after we had returned to London, your father saw you having luncheon with me at the Cafe Royal, joined my table, drank of my wine, and that afternoon through a letter addressed to you, began his first attack on me. ..... It may be strange, but I had once again, I will not say the chance, but the duty of separating from you forced on me. I need hardly remind you that I refer to your conduct to me at Brighton from October 10th to 13th, 1894. Three years ago is a long time for you to go back. But we who live in prison, and in whose lives there is no event but sorrow, have to measure time by throbs of time, and the record of bitter moment We have nothing else to think of. Suffering - curious as it may sound to you - is the means by which we exist, because it is the only means by which we become conscious of existing; and the remembrance of suffering in the past is necessary to us as the warrant, the evidence of our continued identity. Between myself

and the memory of joy lies a gulf no less deep than that between myself and joy in its actuality. Had our life together been as the world fancied it to be, one simply of pleasure, profligacies, and laughter, I would not be able to recall a single passage in it. It is because it was full of moments and days tragic, bitter, sinister in their warnings, dull or dreadful in their monotonous scenes and unseemly violences, that I can see or hear each separate incident in its detail, can indeed see or hear little else. So much in this place do men live by pain that my friendship with you in the way through which I am forced to remember it, appears to me always as a prelude consonant with those varying modes of anguish which each day I have to realise; nay more, to necessitate them even; as though my life, whatever it had seemed to myself and to others, had all the while been a real synphony of Sorrow, passing through its rhythmically linked movements to its certain resolution, with that inevitableness that in Art characterises the treatment of every great theme ..... I spoke of your conduct to me on three successive days three years ago, did I not? I was trying to finish my last play at Worthing by myself. The two visits you had paid to me had ended. You suddenly appeared a third time bringing with you a

companion whom you actually proposed should stay in my house. I, (you must admit now quite properly) absolutely declined. I entertained you, of course, I had no option in the matter: but elsewhere: and not in my own home. The next day, and Monday, your companion returned to duties of his profession, and you stayed with me. Bored with Worthing, and still more I have no doubt with my fruitless efforts to concentrate my attention on my play, the only thing that really interested me at the moment, you insist on being taken to the Grand Hotel at Brighton. The night we arrive you fall ill with that dreadful low fever that is foolishly called the influenza, your second if not third attack. I need not remind you how I waited on you, and tended you, not merely with every luxury of fruit, flowers, presents, books and the like that money can procure but with that affection, tenderness and love that, whatever you may think, is not to be procured for money. Except for an hours walk in the morning, an hours drive in the afternoon I never left the hotel. I got special grapes from London for you, as you did not care for those the Hotel supplied, invented things to please you, remained either with you or in the room next to yours, sat with you every evening to quiet or amuse you. After four or five days you recover, &

Feb 10-13
1894

I take lodgings in order to try and finish my play. You, of course, accompany me. The morning after the day on which we were installed I feel extremely ill. You have to go to London on business, but promise to return in the afternoon. In London you meet a friend, and do not come to Brighton till late on the next day by which time I am in a terrible fever, and the Doctor finds I have caught the influenza from you. Nothing could have been more uncomfortable for anyone ill than the lodgings turn out to be. My sitting room is on the first floor, my bedroom on the third. There is no manservant to wait on one, not even any one to send out on a message, or to get what the doctor orders. But you are there. I feel no alarm. The next two days you leave me entirely alone without care, without attendance, without anything. It was not a question of grapes, flowers and charming gifts: it was a question of mere necessities: I could not even get the milk the Doctor had ordered for me: lemonade was pronounce an impossibility: and when I begged you to procure a book at the booksellers, or if they had not got whatever I had fixed on, to choose something else, you never even take the trouble to go there. And when I was left all day without anything to read in consequence, you calmly tell me that you bought me the book and

Feb 10-13th 1894

that they promised to send it down a statement which I found out by chance afterwards to have been entirely untrue from beginning to end. All the while you are of course, living at my expense, driving about, dining at the Grand Hotel, and indeed only appearing in my room for money. On the Saturday night, you having completely left me unattended and alone since the morning, I asked you to come back after dinner, and sit with me for a little. With inimitable voice and ungracious manner you promise to do so. I wait till 11. o'clock and you never appear. I then left a note for you in your room just reminding you of the promise you had made me, and how you had kept it. At three in the morning, unable to sleep, and tortured with thirst, I made my way in the dark and cold, down to the sitting room in the hopes of finding some water there I found you. You fell on me with every hideous word an intemperate mood, an undisciplined and untutored nature could suggest. By the terrible alchemy of egotism you converted your remorse into rage. You accused me of selfishness in expecting you to be with me when I was ill; of standing between you and your amusements; of trying to deprive you of your pleasures. You told me, and I know it was quite true, that you had come back at midnight simply in order to change your dress-clothes,

Oct 10-13 1894

and go out again to where you hoped new pleasures were waiting for you, but that by leaving for you a letter in which I had remi reminded you that you had neglected me the whole day and the whole evening I had really robbed you of your desire for more enjoyments, and diminished your actual capacity for fresh delights. I went back upstairs in disgust, and remained sleepless till dawn, nor till long after dawn was I able to get anything to quench the thirst of the fever that was on me. At eleven o'clock you came into my room. In the previous scene I could not help observing that by my letter I had, at any rate, checked you in a night of more than usual excess. In the morning you were quite yourself. I waited naturally to hear what excuses you had to make, and in what way you were going to ask for the forgiveness that you knew in your heart was invariably waiting for you, no matter what you did; your absolute trust that I would always forgive you being the thing in you that I always really liked the best, perhaps the best thing in you to like. So far from doing that, you began to repeat the same scene with renewed emphasis and more violent assertion: I told you at length to leave the room: you pretended to do so, but when I lifted up my head from the pillow in which I had buried it, you were still there, and with brutality of laughter and

hysteria of rage you moved suddenly towards me. A sense of ~~honor~~ (horror) came over me, for what exact reason I could not make out: but I got out of my bed at once, and bare footed and just as I was, made my way down the two flights of stairs to the sitting room, which I did not leave till the owner of the lodgings - whom I had rung for - had assured me that you had left my bedroom, and promised to remain within call in case of necessity. After an interval of an hour, during which time the doctor had come and found me, of course, in a state of absolute nervous prostration, as well as in a worse condition of fever than I had been at the outset, you returned silently for money: took what you could find on the dressing table, and mantlepiece and left the house with your luggage. Need I tell you what I thought of you during the two lonely wretched days of illness that followed? Is it necessary for me to state, that I saw clearly that it would be a dishonour to myself to continue even an acquaintance with such a one as you had showed yourself to be? That I recognised that the ultimate moment had come and recognised it as being really a great relief? And that I knew that for the future my Art and Life would be freer and better and more beautiful in every possible way? Ill as I was, I felt at ease. The fact that the separation was irrevocable gave me

Oct 1894

peace. By tuesday the fever had left me, and for the first time dined downstairs. Wednesday was my birthday. Amongst the telegrams and communications on my table was a letter in your handwriting. I opened it with a sense of sadness over me. I knew that the time had gone by when a pretty phrase, an expression of affection, a word of sorrow would make me take you back. But I was entirely deceived. I had underrated you. The letter you sent to me on my birthday was an elaborate re-repetition of the two scenes set cunningly and carefully down in black and white! You mocked me with common jests. Your one satisfaction in the whole affair was, you said, that you retired to the Grand Hotel, and entered your luncheon to my account before you left for town. You congratulated me on my prudence in leaving my sick bed on my sudden flight downstairs. "It was an ugly moment for you", you said, "uglier than you imagine". Ah! I felt it but too well. What it had really meant I did not know: whether you had with you the pistol you had bought to try and frighten your father with, and that thinking it to be unloaded, you had once fired off in a public restaurant in my company: whether your hand was moving towards a common dinner knife that by chance was lying on the table between us: whether

forgetting in your rage your low stature and inferior strength you had thought of some special personal insult, or attack even, as I lay ill there: I could not tell. I do not know to the present moment. All I know is that a feeling of utter horror had come over me, and that I had felt that unless I left the room at once, and got away, you would have done, or tried to do something that would have been, even to you, a source of lifelong shame. Only once before in my life had I experienced such a feeling of horror at any human being. It was when in my library at Tite Street, waving his small hands in the air in epileptic fury, your father, with his bully, or his friend, between us, had stood uttering every foul word his fool mind could think of, and screaming the loathsome threats he afterwards with such cunning carried out. In the latter case, he, of course, was the one who had to leave the room first. I drove him out. In your case I went. It was not the first time I had been obliged to save you from yourself.....You concluded your letter by saying, "When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting. The next time you are ill I will go away at once". Ah! what coarseness of fibre does that reveal. What an entire lack of imagination! How callous, how common

had the temperament by that time become!..."When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting. The next time you are ill I will go away at once". How often have those words come back to me in the wretched solitary cell of the various pris ons I have been sent to. I have said them to myself over and over again, and seen in them, I hope unjustly, some of the secret of your strange silence. For you to write this to me, when the very illness and fever from which I was suffering, I had caught from tending you, was of course revolting in its coarseness and crudity; but for any human being in the whole world to write thus to another would be a sin for which there is no pardon, were there any sin for which there is none.....

I confess that when I had finished your letter I felt almost polluted, as if by associating with one of such a nature I had soiled and shamed my life irretrievably. I had, it is true, done so, but I was not to learn how fully, till just six months later on in life. I settled with myself to go back to London on the Friday, and see Sir George Lewis personally and request him to write to your father to state that I had determined never under any circumstances to allow you to enter my house, to sit at my board, to talk to me, walk with me, or anywhere and at any time to be my companion at all. This done

I would have written to you just to inform you of the course of action I had adopted, the reasons you would inevitably have realised yourself. I had everything arranged on Thursday night, when on Friday morning, as I was sitting at breakfast before starting I happened to open the newspaper and saw in it a telegram stating that your elder brother, the real head of the family, the heir to the title, the pillar of the house, had been found dead in a ditch with his gun lying discharged beside him. The horror of the circumstances of the tragedy, now known to have been an accident, but then stained with a darker suggestion the pathos of the sudden death of one so loved by all who knew him and almost on the eve, as it were, of his marriage; my idea of what your own sorrow would be, or should be; my consciousness of the misery awaiting your mother at the loss of the one to whom she clung for comfort and joy in life, and who, as she told me once herself, had from the very day of his birth never caused her to shed a single tear; my conciousness of your own isolation, both your other brothers being out of Europe and you consequently the only one to whom your mother and sister could look not merely for companionship in their sorrow but also for those dreary responsibilities of dreadful detail that Death al-

ways brings with it; the mere sense of the "lacrimae rerum" of the tears of which the world is made, and of the sadness of all human things; .....out of the confluence of these thoughts and emotions crowding into my brain came infinite pity for you and your family. My own griefs and bitterness against you I forgot. What you had been to me in my sickness, I could not be to you in your bereavement. I telegraphed at once to you my deepest sympathy, and in the letter that followed invited you to come to my house as soon as you were able. I felt that to abandon you at that particular moment, and formally through a solicitor, would have been too terrible for you.....On your return to town from the actual scene of the tragedy to which you had been summoned, you came at once to me very sweetly & very simply, in your suit of woe, and with your eyes dim with tears. You sought consolation and help, as a child might seek it. I opened to you my house, my home, my heart. I made your sorrow mine also, that you might have help in bearing it. Never, even by one word, did I allude to your conduct towards me, to the revolting scenes, and the revolting letter. Your grief, which was real seemed to me to bring you nearer to me than you had ever been. The flowers you took

from me to put on your brothers grave were to be a symbol not merely of the beauty of his life, but of the beauty that in all lives lies dormant and may be brought to light.....
The Gods are strange, It is not our vices only they make instruments to scourge us. They bring us to ruin through what in us is good, gentle, humane, loving, But for my pity and affection for you and yours, I would not now be weeping in this terrible place.

Of course, I discern in all our relations, not Destiny merely, but Doom: Doom that walks always swiftly, because she goes to the shedding of blood. Through your father you come, of a race, marriage with whom is horrible, friendship is fatal, and that lays violent hands either on its own life, or on the lives of others. In every little circumstance in which the ways of our lives met; in every point of great, or seemingly trivial import in which you came to me for pleasure or for help; in the small chances, the slight accidnts that look in their relation to life, to be no more than the dust that dances in a beam, or the leaf that flutters from a tree, Ruin followed like the echo of a bitter ~~idy~~ cry, or the shadow that hunts with the beast of prey. Our friendship really begins with your begging

me in a most pathetic and charming letter to assist you in a position appalling to anyone, doubly so to a young man at Oxford: I do so, and ultimately through your using my name as your friend with Sir George Lewis, I begin to lose his esteem and friendship, a friendship of fifteen years standing. When I was deprived of his advice and help and regard I was deprived of the one great safeguard of my life. You send me a very nice poem of the undergraduate school of verse for my approval: I reply by a letter of fantastic literary conceits: I compare you to Hylas, or Hyacinth, Jonquil or Narcisse or some one whom the great God of Poetry favoured, and honoured with his love. The letter is like a passage [~~out of one~~] from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, transposed to a minor key. It can only be understood by those who have read the Symposium of Plato, or ~~[illegible]~~ caught the spirit of a certain grave mood made beautiful for us in in Greek marbles. It was, and let me say frankly – the sort of letter I would in a happy if wilful moment, have written to any graceful young man of either University who had sent me a poem of his own making, certain that he would have sufficient wit, or culture, to interpret rightly its fantastic phrases. Look at the history of that letter! It passes from you into

see book of the trials p27

the hands of a loathsome companion: from him to a gang of blackmailers: copies of it are sent about London to my friends, and to the manager of the Theatre where my work is being performed: every construction but the right one is put on it: society is thrilled with the absurd rumours that I have had to pay a high sum of money for having written an infamous letter to you: this forms the basis of your father's worst attack: I produce the original letter myself in Court to show what it really is: it is denounced by your father's counsel as a revolting and insidious attempt to corrupt innocence: ultimately it forms part of a criminal charge: the Crown takes it up: the Judge sums up on it with little learning and much morality: I go to prison for it at last. That is the result of writing you a charming letter. While I am staying with you at Salisbury you are terribly alarmed at a threatening communication from a former companion of yours: you beg me to see the writer and help: I do so: the result is ruin to me. I am forced to take everything you have done on my own shoulders and answer for it. When, having failed to take your degree, you have to go down from Oxford, you telegraph to me in London to beg me to come to you: I do so

June 1893

at once: you ask me to take you to Goring, as you did not like under the circumstances, to go home: at Goring you see a house that charms you: I take it for you: the result from every point of view is Ruin to me. One day you come to me and ask me as a personal favour to you, to write something for an Oxford undergraduate magazine, about to be started by some friend of yours whom I had never heard of in all my life, and knew nothing at all about. To please you - what did I not do always to please you? - I send him a page of paradoxes destined originally for the Saturday Review. A few months later I find myself standing in the dock of the old Bailey on account of the character of t the magazine. It forms part of the Crown Charge against me. I am called upon to defend your friend's prose and your own verse. The former I cannot palliate; the latter, I, loyal to the bitter extreme, to your youthful literature as to your youthful life, do very strongly defend, and will not hear of your being a writer of indecencies. But I go to prison, all the same, for your friends undergraduate magazine and the "Love that dares not tell its name". At Christmas I give you a "very pretty present" as you described it in your letter of thanks on which I knew you had set your heart worth some £40 or £50 at

The Chameleon published Dec '94

Pls sonnet in the Chameleon see Trials book p 271

most. When the crash of my life comes, and I am ruined, the bailiff who ~~ceases~~ seizes my library, and has it sold, does so to pay for the "very pretty present". It was for that, the execution was put into my house. At the ultimate and terrible moment when I am taunted, and spurned on by your taunts, to take an action against your father and have him arrested, the last straw to which I clutch in my wretched efforts to escape is the terrible expense. I tell the Solicitor in your presence that I have no funds, that I cannot possibly affordthe appalling cost, that I have no money at my disposal. What I said was, as you know, perfectly true. On that fatal Friday instead of being in Humphrey's office weakly consenting to my own ruin, I would have been free and happy in France, away from you and your father, unconscious of his loathsome card, and indifferent to your letters, if I had been able to leave the Avondale Hotel. But the Hotel people absolutely refused to allow me to go. You had been staying with me for ten days: indeed you had ultimately and to my great, and you will admit, rightful indignation, brought a comapnion of yours to stay with me also: my bill for the ten days was nearly £140. The proprietor said he could not allow my luggage to be removed from the Hotel till I had paid the account in full. That is what kept me in London. Had it not

been for the Hotel bill I would have gone to Paris on Thursday morning....When I told the Solicitor I had no money to face the gigantic expense, you interposed at once. You said that your own family would be only too delighted to pay all the necessary costs: that your father had been an incubus to them all: that they had often discussed the possibility of getting him put into a lunatic asylum so as to keep him out of the way: that he was a daily source of annoyance and distress to your mother and to everyone else: that if I would only come forward to have him shut up I would be regarded by the family as their champion and their benefactor: and that your mother's rich relations themselves would look on it as a real delight to be allowed to pay all costs and expenses that might be incurred in any such effort. The Solicitor closed at once, and I was hurried to the Police Court. I had no excuse left for not going. I was forced into it. Of course, your family don't pay the costs and, when I am made bankrupt, it is by your father and for the costs - the meagre balance of them - some £700. At the present moment my wife, estranged from me over the important question of whether I should have £3 or £3/10/- a week to live on, is preparing a divorce suit, for which, of course, entirely new evidence and an

Note £700 was the amount of Queensberry's costs in the unsuccessful action the debts filed amounted to £6000. 2. was the petition creditor making Wilde a bankrupt

entirely new trial, to be followed perhaps by more serious proceedings, will be necessary. I, naturally, know nothing of the details. I merely know the name of the witness on whose evidence my wife's solicitors rely. It is your own Oxford servant, whom at your special request I took into my service for our summer at Goring....But, indeed, I need not go on further into more instances of the strange doom you seem to have brought on me in all things big and little. It makes me feel sometimes as if you yourself had been merely a puppet worked by some secret and unseen hand to bring terrible events to a terrible issue. But puppets themselves have passions. They will bring a new plot into what they are presenting, and twist the ordered issue of vicissitude to suit some whim or appetite of their own. To be entirely free, and at the same time entirely dominated by law, is the eternal paradox of human life that we realise at every moment: and this, I often think, is the only explanation possible of your nature, if indeed for the profound and terrible mystery of a human soul there is any explanation at all, except one that makes the mystery all the more marvellous still.

Of course, you had your illusions, lived in them indeed, and through the shifting mists and coloured veils saw all things changed. You thought, I remember quite well, that your devoting yourself to me, to the entire exclusion of your family and family life, was a proof of your wonderful appreciation of me and your great affection. No doubt to you it seemed so. But recollect with me was luxury, high living, unlimited pleasure money without stint. Your family life bored you. The "cold cheap wine of Salisbury" to use a phrase of your own making, was distasteful to you. On my side and along with my intellectual attractions, were the flesh pots of Egypt. When you could not find me to be with, the companions whom you chose as substitutes were not flattering.....You thought again that in sending a lawyers letter to your father to say that, rather than sever your eternal friendship with me, you will give up the allowance of £250 a year (with which I believe deductions for your Oxford debts, he was then making you, you were realising the very chivalry of friendship, touching the noblest note of self denial. But your surrender of your little allowance did not mean that you were ready to give up even one of your most superfluous luxuries, or most unnecessary extravagances. On the

contrary. Your appetite for luxurious living was never so keen. My expenses for eight days in Paris for myself, you and your Italian servant were nearly £150: Paillard alone absorbing £85. At the rate at which you wished to live, your entire income for a whole year, if you had taken your meals alone, and been ~~ever~~ especially economical in your selection of the cheaper form of pleasures, would hardly have lasted you for three weeks. The fact that in what was merely pretence of bravado you had surrendered your allowance, such as it was, gave you at last a plausible reason for your claim to live at my expense: or what you thought a plausible reason: and on many occasions you seriously availed yourself of it, and gave the very fullest expression to it: and the continued drain, principally of course, on me, but also to a certain extent, I know, on your mother, was never so distressing, because in my case, at any rate, never so completely unaccompanied by the smallest word of thanks, or sense of limit....You thought again that in attacking your own father with dreadful letters, abusive telegrams, and insulting postcards you were really fighting your mother's battles, coming forward as her champion, and avenging the no doubt terrible wrongs and sufferings of her married life. It was

quite an illusion on your part; one of your worst indeed. The way for you to have avenged your mother's wrongs on your father, if you considered it part of a sons duty to do so, was by being a better son to your mother than you had been: by not making her afraid to speak to you on serious things: by not signing bills the payment of which devolved on her: by being gentler to her, and not bringing sorrow into her days. Your brother Francis made great amends to her for what she had suffered, by his sweetness and goodness to her through the brief years of his flower like life. You should have taken him as your model. You were wrong then in fancying that it would have been an absolute delight and joy to your mother if you had managed through me to get your father put into prison. I feel sure you were wrong. And if you want to know what a woman really feels when her husband and the father of her children, is in prison dress, in a prison cell, write to my wife and ask her. She will tell you..... I also had my illusions. I thought life was going to be a brilliant comedy, and that you were to be one of many graceful figures in it. I found it to be a revolting and repellent tragedy, and that the sinister occasion of the

great catastrophe, sinister in its[~~conception~~] concentration of aim and intensity of narrowed will power, was yourself, stripped of the mask of joy and pleasure by which you, no less than I, had been deceived and led astray.

You can now understand - can you not? a little of what I am suffering. Some paper, the Pall Mall Gazette, I think, describing the dress rehearsal of one of my plays, spoke of you as following me about like my shadow: the memory of our friend ship is the shadow that walks with me here: that seems never to leave me: that wakes me up at night to tell me the same story over and over till its wearisome iteration makes all sleep abandom me till dawn: at dawn it begins again: it follows me into the prison yard and makes me talk to myself as I tramp round: each detail that accompanied each dreadful moment I am forced to recall: there is nothing that happened in those ill-starred years that I cannot recreate in that chamber of the brain which is set apart for grief or for despair: every strained note of your voice, every twitch and gesture of your nervous hands, every bitter word, every poisionous phrase comes back to me: I remember the street or river down which we passed: the wall

or woodland that surrounded us, at what figure on the dial stood the hands of the clock, which way went the wings of the wind, the shape and colour of the moon.

There is, I know, one answer to all that I have said to you, and that is that you loved me: that all through those two and a half years during which the fates were weaving into one scarlet pattern the threads of our divided lives you really loved me. Yes: I know you did. No matter what your conduct to me was, I always felt that at heart you really did love me. Though I saw quite clearly that my position in the world of Art, the interest that my personality had always excited, my money, the luxury in which I lived, the thousand and one things that went to make up a life so charmingly so wonderfully improbable as mine was, were, each and all of them, elements that fascinated you and made you cling to me: yet besides al this there was something more, some strange attraction for you: you loved me far better than you loved anybody else. But you, like myself, have had a terrible tragedy in your life, though one of an entirely opposite character to mine. Do you want to learn what it was? It was this. In you Hate was always stronger than Love. Your hatred of your father was of such stature that

it entirely outstripped, o'erthrew, and overshadowed your love of me. There was no struggle between them at all, or but little; of such dimensions was your hatred and of such monstrous growth. You did not realise that there was no room for both passions in the same soul. They cannot live together in that fair carven house. Love is fed by the imagination, by which we become wiser than we know, better than we feel, nobler than we are: by which we can see life as a whole; by which and by which alone, we can understand others in their real as in their ideal relations. Only what is fine, and finely conceived, can feed Love. But anything will feed hate. There was not a glass of champagne that you drank, not a rich dish you ate of in all those years, that did not feed your hate and make it fat. So to gratify it, you gambled with my life, as you gambled with my money, carelessly, recklessly, indifferently to the consequence. If you lost, the loss would not yours, you fancied, be yours. If you won, you knew, would be the exultation and the advantages of victory.

Hate blinds people. You were not aware of that. Love can read the writing on the remotest star, but Hate so blinded you that you could see no further than the narrow,

walled in, and already lust withered garden of your common desires. Your terrible lack of imagination, the one really fatal defect of your character, was entirely the result of the Hate that lived in you. Subtly, silently, and in secret, Hate gnawed at your nature, as the lichen bites at the root of some sallow plant, till you grew to see nothing but the most meagre interests and the most petty aims. That faculty in you which Love would have fostered, Hate poisoned and paralysed. When your father first began to attack me it was as your private friend, and in a private letter to you. As soon as I had read the letter with its obscene threats and coarse violences I saw at once that there was a terrible danger looming on the horizon of my troubled days: I told you I would not be the catspaw between you both in your ancient hatred of each other: That I in London was naturally much bigger game for him than a Secretary for Foreign Affairs at Homburg: that it would be unfair to me to place me even for a moment in such a position: as that I had something better to do with my life than to have scenes with a man drunken, declasse, and half witted as he was. You could not be made to see this. Hate blinded you. You wished that the quarrel had really nothing to do with me: that

you would not allow your father to dictate to you in your private friendships: that it would be most unfair of me to interefere. You had already, before you saw me on the subject, sent your father a foolish and vulgar telegram as your answer. That of course, committed you to a foolish and vulgar coarse of action to follow. The fatal errors of life are not due to mans being unreasonable. An unreasonable moment may be one's finest moment. They are due to man's being logical. There is a wide difference. That telegram conditioned the whole of your subsequent relations with your father, and consequently the whole of my life. And the grotesque thing about it is that it was a telegram of which the commonest street boy would have been ashamed. From pert telegrams to priggish lawyers letters~~to your father was~~ was a natural progress, and the result of your lawyers letters to your father was, of course, to urge him on still further. You left him no option. but to go on. You forced it on him as a point of honour, or of dishonour rather, that your appeal should have the more effect. So the next time he attacks me no longer in a private letter, and as your private friend, but in public and as a public man. I have to expel him from my house. He goes from Restaurant to

Restaurant looking for me, in order to insult me before the whole world, and in such a manner that if I retaliated I would be ruined, and if I did not retaliate I would be ruined also. Then surely was the time when you should have come forward, and and said that you would not expose me to such hideous attacks, such infamous persecution, on your account, but would, readily and at once, resign any claim you had to my friendship? You feel that now, I suppose. But it never ever occurred to you then. Hate blinded you. All you could think of (besides of course, writing to him insulting letters and telegrams) was to buy a ridiculous pistol that goes off in the Berkeley, under circumstances that create a worse scandal than ever came to your ears. Indeed the idea of your being the object of a terrible quarrel between your father and a man of my position seemed to delight you. It, I suppose, very naturally pleased your vanity, and flattered your self importance. That your father might have had your body, which did not interest me, and left me your soul which did not interest him, would have been to you a distressing[~~situation~~] solution of the question. You scented the chance of a public scandal and flew to it. The prospect of a battle in which you would be safe delighted you. I never remember you in higher spirits than you were for

the rest of that season. Your only disappointment seemed to be that nothing actually happened, and that no further meeting or fracas had taken place between us. You consoled yourself by sending him telegrams of such a character that at last the wretched man wrote to you and said that he had given orders to his servants that no telegrams were to be brought to him under any pretence whatsoever. That did not daunt you. You saw the immense opportunities afforded by the open post card, and availed yourself of them to the full. You hounded him on in the chase still more. I do not suppose he would ever really have given it up. Family instincts were really strong in him. His hatred of you was just as persistent as your hatred of him, and I was the stalking horse for both of you, and a mode of attack as well as a mode of shelter. His very passion for notoriety was not merely individual, but racial. Still, if his interest had flagged for a moment your letters and post-cards would soon have quickened it to its ancient flame. They did so. And he naturally further still. Having assailed me as a private gentleman and in private, as a public man and in public, he ultimately determines to make his final and great

attack on me as an artist, and in the place where my art is being represented. He secures by fraud a seat for the first night of one of my plays, and contrives a plot to interrupt the performance, to make a foul speech about me to the audience, to insult my actors, to throw offensive or indecent missiles at me when I am called before the curtain at the close, utterly in in some hideous way to ruin me through my work. By the merest chance, in the brief and accidental sincerity of a more than usually intoxicated mood, he boasts of his intention before others. Information is given to the police, and he is kept out of the Theatre. You had your chance then. Then was your opportunity. Dont you realise now that you should have seen it, and come forward and said that you would not have my art, at any rate, ruined for your sake? You knew what my art was to me, the great primal note by which I had revealed, first myself to myself, and then myself to the world; the real passion of my life; the love to which all other loves were as marsh water to red wine, or the glow worm of the marsh to the magic mirror of the moon. Don't you understand now that your lack of imagination was the one really fatal defect of your

character? What you had to do was quite simple, and quite clear before you, but hate had blinded you, and you could see nothing. I could not apologise to your father for his having insulted me and persecuted me in the most loathsome manner for nearly nine months. I could not get rid of you out of my life. I had tried it again and again. I had gone so far as actually leaving England and going abroad in the hope of escaping from you. It had all been of no use. You were the only person who could have done anything.

The key of the situation rested entirely with yourself. It was the one great opportunity you had of making some slight return to me for all the love and affection and kindness and generosity and care I had shown you. Had you appreciated me even at a tenth of my value as an artist you would have done so. But hate blinded you. The faculty "by which, and by which alone we can understand others in their real, as in their ideal relations" was dead in you. You thought simply of how to get your father into prison. To see him "in the dock" as you used to say: that was your one idea. The phrase became one of many scies of your daily conversation. One heard it at every meal. Well, you had your desire gratified. Hate granted your every single thing you wished for. It was an indulgent master to you.

It is so, indeed, to all who serve it. For two days you sat on a high seat with the Sheriffs, and feasted your eyes with the spectacle of your father standing in the dock of the Central Criminal Court. And on the third day I took his place. What had occurred? In your hideaous game of hate together, you had both thrown dice for my soul and you happened to have lost. That was all.

You see that I have to write your life to you and you have to realise it. We have known each other now for more than four years. Half of the time we have been together: the other half I have had to spend in prison as the result of our friendship. Where you will receive this letter, if indeed it ever reaches you, I don't know. Rome, Naples, Paris, Venice, some beautiful city on sea or river, I have no doubt, holds you. You are surrounded, if not with all the useless luxury you had with me, at any rate with everything that is pleasurable to eye, ear, and taste. Life is quite lovely to you. And yet, if you are wise, and wish to find life much lovelier still, and in a different manner, you will let the reading of this terrible letter - for such I know it is - prove to you as important a crisis and turning point of your life as the writing of it is to me. Your

pale face used to flush easily with wine or pleasure. If, as you read what is here written, it from time to time becomes scorched, as though by a furnace-blast, with shame it will be all the better for you. The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right. I have now got as far as the house of detention, have I not? After a night passed in the Police Cells, I am sent there in the van. You were most attentive and kind. Almost every afternoon, if not actually every afternoon till you go abroad youtook the trouble to drive up to Holloway to see me. You also wrote very sweet and nice letters. But that it was not your father but you who had put me into prison, that from beginning to end you were the responsible person, that it was through you, for you, and by you that I was there, never for one instant dawned upon you. Even the spectacle of me behind the bars of a wooden cage could not quicken that dead imaginative nature. You had the sympathy and the sentimentality of the spectator of a rather pathetic play. That you were the true author of the hideous tragedy did not occur to you. I saw that you realised nothing of what you had done. I did not desire to be the one to tell you what your own heart should have told you, what it indeed would have told you

if you had not let hate harden it and make it insensate. Everything must come to one out of one's own nature. There is no use in telling a person a thing that they don't feel and can't understand. If I write to you now as I do it is because your own silence and conduct during my long imprisonment have made it necessary. Besides as things had turned out the blow had fallen upon me alone. That was a sense of pleasure to me. I was content for many reasons to suffer, though there was always to my eyes, as I watched you, something not a little contemptible in your complete and wilful blindness. I remember your producing with absolute pride a letter you had published in one of the halfpenny newspapers about me. It was a very prudent, temperate, indeed commonplace production. You appealed to the "English sense of fair play", or something very dreary of that kind, on behalf of "a man who was down". It was the sort of letter you might have written had a painful charge been brought against some respectable person with whom personally you had been quite unacquainted. But you thought it a wonderful letter. You looked on it as a proof of almost quixotic chivalry. I am aware that you wrote other letters to other newspapers that they did not publish. But then they were simply to say that you hated your father. Nobody cared if

you did or not. Hate, you had yet to learn, is, intellectually considered, the eternal negation. Considered from the point of view of the emotions it is a form of atrophy, and kills everything but itself. To write to the papers to say that one hates someone else is as if one were to write to the papers to say that one had some secret and shameful malady: the fact that the man you hated was your own father, and that the feeling was thoroughly reciprocated, did not make your Hate noble or fine in any way. If it showed anything it was simply that it was an hereditary disease.....I remember again, when an execution was put into my house, and my books and furniture were seized and advertised to be sold, and Bankruptcy was impending, I naturally wrote to tell you about it. I did not mention that it was to pay for some gifts of mine to you that the bailiffs had entered the house where you had so often dined. I thought, rightly or wrongly, that such news might pain you a little. I merely told you the bare facts. I thought it proper that you should know them. You wrote back from Boulogne in a strain of almost lyrical exultation. You said that you knew that your father was "hard up for money" and had been obliged to raise £1500 for the expenses of the trial and that my going bankrupt was really a "splendid score" off him. as he would not then be able to get any of his costs out of me!

Do you realise now what hate blinding a person is? Do you recognise that now when I described it as an atrophy destructive of everything but itself, I was scientifically describing a real psychological fact? That all my charming things were to be sold: my Burne-Jones drawings: my Whistler drawings: my Montecelli: my Simeon Solomons: my china: my library with its collection of presentation volumes from almost every poet of my time, from Hugo to Whitman, from Swinburne to Mallerne, from Monis to Verlaine: with its beautifully bound editions of my father's and mother's works, its wonderful array of college and school prizes: its editions de luxe, and the like: was absolutely nothing to you. You said it was a great bore: that was all. What that you really saw in it was the possibility that your father might ultimately lose a few hundred pounds, and that paltry consideration filled you with ecstatic joy. As for the costs of the trial, you may be interested to know that your father openly said in the Orleans Club that if it had cost him £20,000 he would have considered the money thoroughly well spent, he had extracted such enjoyment, and delight, and triumph out of it all. The fact that he was able not merely to put me into prison for two years but to take me out for an afternoon and make me a

public bankrupt was an extra refinement of pleasure that he had not expected. It was the crowning point of my humiliation and of his complete and perfect victory. Had your father had no claim for his costs on me, you, I know perfectly well, would as far as words go, at any rate have been most sympathetic about the entire loss of my library, a loss irreparable to a man of letters the one of all my material ~~losses~~ losses the most distressing to me. You might even, remembering the sums of money I had lavishly spent on you and how you had lived on me for years, have taken the trouble to buy in some of my books for me. The best all went for less than £150: about as much as I would spend on you in an ordinary week. But the mean small pleasure of thinking that your father was going to be a few pence out of pocket made you forget all about trying to make me a little return, so slight, so easy, so inexpensive, so obvious, and so enormously welcome to me, had you brought it about. Am I right in saying that Hate blinds people? Do you see it now? If you don't, try to see it.

How clearly I saw it then, as now, I need not tell you. But I said to myself "At all costs I must keep love in my heart. If I go into prison without love what will become of my soul?"

The letters I wrote to you at that time from Holloway were my efforts to keep Love as the dominant note of my own nature. I could if I had chosen have torn you to pieces with bitter reproaches. I could have sent you with maledictions. I could have held up a mirror to you, and shown you such an image of yourself that you would not have recognised it as your own till you found it mimicking back your gestures of horror, and then you would have known whose shape it was, and hated it and yourself for ever. More than that indeed. The sins of another were being placed to my account. Had I so chosen, I could on either trial have saved myself at his expense, not from shame indeed but from imprisonment. Had I cared to show that the Crown witmesses - the three most important - had been carefully coached by your father and his solicitors, not in reticences merely, but in assertions, in the absolute transference deliberate, plotted, and rehearsed, of the actions and doings of someone else on to me, I could have had each one of them dismissed from the box by the Judge, more summarily than even wretched perjured Atkins was. I could have walked out of Court with my tongue in my cheek, and my hands in my pockets, a free man. The strongest pressure was put upon me to do so, I was earnestly advised, begged, entreated to do so by people

whose sole interest was my welfare, and the welfare of my house. But I refused. I did not choose to do so. I have never regretted my decision for a single moment, even in the most bitter periods of my imprisonment. Such a course of action would have been beneath me. Sins of the flesh are nothing. They are maladies for physicians to cure, if they should be cured Sins of the soul alone are shameful. To have secured my acquitt alby such means would have been a life long torture to me. But do you really think that you were worthy of the love I was showing you then, or that for a single moment I thought you were? Do you really think that at any period in our friendship you were worthy of the love I showed you, or that for a single moment I thought you were? I knew you were not. But love does not traffic in a marketplace, nor use a hucksters scales. Its joy like the joy of the intellect, is to feel itself alive. The aim of love is to love: no more, and no less. You were my enemy: such an enemy as no man ever had. I had given you my life, and to gratify the lowest and most contemptible of all human passions, Hatred and Vanity and Greed. You had thrown it away. In less than three years you had

entirely ruined me from every point of view. For my own sake there was nothing for me to do but to love you. I knew that if I allowed myself to hate you, that in the dry desert of existence over which I had to travel, and am travelling still, every rock would lose its shadow, every palm tree be withered, every well of water prove pisoned at its source. Are you beginning now to understand a little? Is your imagination awakening from the long legarthy in which it has lain? You know already what Hate is. Is it beginning to dawn on you what love is? and what is the nature of love? It is not too late for you to learn, though to teach it to you, I may have had to go to a convicts cell?

After my terrible sentence, when the prision dress was on me, and the prison house closes, I sat amidst the ruins of my wonderful life, crushed by anguish, bewildered with terror, dazed through pain. But I would not hate you. Every day I said to myself, "I must keep Love in my heart today, else how shall I live through the day?" I reminded myself that you meant no evil, to me at any rate: I set myself to think that you had but drawn a bow at venture, and that the arrow had pierced a King between the joints of his harness. To have weighed you

against the smallest of my sorrows, the meanest of my losses, would have been, I felt, unfair. I determined I would regard you as one suffering too. I forced myself to believe that at last the scales had fallen from your long blinded eyes. I used to fancy and with pain what your horror must have been when you contemplated your terrible handiwork. There were times, even in those dark days, the darkest of all my life, when I actually longed to console you. So sure was I that at last you had realised what you had done.

It did not occur to me then that you could have the supreme vice, shallowness. Indeed it was a real grief to me when I had to let you know that. I was obliged to reserve for family business my first opportunity of receiving a letter: but my brother in law had written to me to say that if I would only write once to my wife she would, for my own sake and for our childrens sake, take no action for divorce. I felt my duty was to do so setting aside other reasons. I could not bear the idea of being separated from Cyril, that beautiful loving, loveable child of mine, my friend of all friends, my companion beyond all comapnions, one single hair of whose little golden head should have been dearer and more valuable to me than, I will not

say you from top to toe, but the entire chrsolite of the whole world: was so indeed to me always, though I failed to understand to till toolate.....two weeks after your application, I get news of you. Robert Sherard, that bravest and most chivalrous of all brilliant beings, comes to see me, and amongst other things tells me that in that ridiculous "Mercure de France" with its absurd affectation of being the true centre of literary corruption, you are about to publish an article on me with specimens of my letters. He asks me if it really was by my wish. I was greatly taken back, and much annoyed, and gave orders that the thing was to be stopped at once. You had left my letters lying about for blackmailing companions to steal, for hotel servants to pilfer, for housemaids to sell. That was simply your careless want of appreciation of what I had written to you. But that you should seriously propose to publish selections from the balance was almost incredible to me. And which of my letters were they? I could get no information. That was my first news of you. It displeased me.

The second piece of news followed shortly afterwards. Your fathers solicitors had appeared in the prison, and served me personally with a bankruptcy notice, for a paltry £700, the

amount of their taxed costs. I was adjudged a public insolvent and ordered to be produced in Court. I felt most strongly, and feel still, and will revert to the subject again, that these costs should have been paid by your family. You had taken personally on yourself the responsibility of stating that your family would do so. It was that which had made the solicitor take up the case in the way he did. You were absolutely responsible. Even irrespective of your engagement on your family's behalf you should have felt that as you had brought the whole ruin on me, the least that could have been done was to spare the additional ignominy of bankruptcy for an absolutely contemptible sum of money, less than half of what I spent on you in three brief summer months at Goring. Of that, however, no more here. I did, through my solicitor's clerk, I fully admit, receive a message from you on the subject, or at any rate in connection with the occasion. The day he came to receive my depositions and statements, he lent across the table - the prison warder being present - and having consulted a piece of paper which he pulled from his pocket, said to me in a low voice, "Prince Fleur de lys wishes to be remembered to you". I stared at him. He repeated the message again. I did not know

what he meant. "The gentleman is abroad at present at present" he added mysteriously. It all flashed across me, and I remember that for the first(time) and last time in my entire prison life, I laughed. In that laugh was all the scorn of all the world. Prince Fleur de Lys! I saw - and subsequent events showed me that I rightly saw - that nothing that had happened had made you realise a single thing. You were in your own eyes still the graceful prince of a trivial comedy, not the sombre figure of a tragic show. All that had occurred was as but a feather for the cap that gilds a narrow head, a flower to pink the doublet that hides the heart that hate, and hate alone, can warm, that love and love alone, finds cold. Prince Fleur de lys! You were, no doubt quite right to communicate with me under an assumed name. I myself, at that time, had no name at all. In the great prison where I was then incarcerated, I was merely the figure and letter of a little cell ina long gallery one of a thousand lifeless numbers, as of a thousand lifeless lives. But surely there were many real names in real history which would have suited you much better, and by which I would have had no difficulty at all in recognising you at once? I did not look for you behind the spangles of a tinsel vizard only suitable

for an amusing masquerade. Ah!, had your soul been, as for its own perfection even it should have been, wounded with sorrow, bowed with remorse, and humble with grief, such was not the disguise it would have chosen beneath whose shadow to seek entrance to the House of Pain! The great things of life are what they seem to be, and for that reason, strange as it may sound to you, are often difficult to interpret. But the little things of life are symbols. We receive our bitter lessons most easily through them. Your seemingly casual choice of a feigned name was, and will remain symbolic. It reveals you.

Six weeks later a third piece of news arrives. I am called out of the hospital ward, where I was lying wretchedly ill, to receive a special message from you through the Governor of the Prison. He reads me out a letter you had addressed to him in which you stated that you proposed to publish an article "on the case of Mr Oscar Wilde" in the Mercure de France, ("a magazine" you added for some extraordinary reason "corresponding to the English Fortnightly Review") and were anxious anxious to obtain my permission to publish extracts and selections from .....what letters? The letters I had written to you from Holloway Prison; the letters that should have been

to you things sacred and secret beyond anything in the whole world! these actually were the letters you proposed to publish for the jaded décadent to wonder at, for the greedy feuilletoniste to chronicle for the little lions of the Quartier Latin to gape and mouth at: Had there been nothing in your own heart to cry out against so vulgar a sacrilege you might at least have remembered the sonnet he wrote who saw with such sorrow and scorn the letters of John Keats sold by public auction in London and have understood at last the real meaning of my lines

".....I think they love not Art
Who break the crystal of a poets' heart
That small and sickly eyes may glare or gloat."

For what was your article to show? That I had been too fond of you? The Paris gamin was quite aware of the fact. They all read the newspapers, and most of them write for them.....
That I was a man of genius? The French understood that, and the peculiar quality of my genius, much better than you did, or could have expected to do.....That along with genius goes often a curious perversity of passion and desire? Admirable: but the subject belongs to Lombroso rather than you. Besides the pathological phenomenon in question is also found amongst those

who have not genius.....That in your war of hate with your father I was at once shield and weapon to each of you? May more, that in that hideous hunt for my life, that took place when the war was over he never could have reached me had not your nets been already about my feet? Quite true: but I am told that Henri Bauer had already done it extremely well. Besides, to corroborate his view, had such been your intention, you did not require to publish my letters: at any rate those written from Holloway prison.

Will you say, in answer to my questions, that in one of my Holloway letters I had myself asked you to try as far as you were able, to set me a little right with some small portion of the world? Certainly, I did so. Remember, how and why I am here, at this very moment. Do you think I am here on account of my relations with the witnesses of my trial? My relations real or supposed with people of that kind were matters of no interest to either the Government or Society. They knew nothing of them, and cared less. I am here for having tried to put your father into prison. My attempt failed of course, My own counsel threw up their briefs. Your father completely turned the tables on me, and had me in prison, has me there still. That is why there is

contempt felt for me. That is why people despise me. That is why I have to serve out every day, every hour, every minute of my dreadful imprisonment. That is why my petitions have been refused..... You were the only person who, and without in any way exposing yourself to scorn or danger or blame, could have given another colour to the whole affair: have put the matter in a different light: have shown to a certain degree how things really stood. I would not of course, have expected, nor indeed wished you to have stated how and for what purpose you had sought my assistance in your trouble at Oxford: or how, and for what purpose, if you had a purpose at all, you had practically never left my side for nearly three years. My incessant attempts to break off a friendship that was so ruinous to me as an artist, as a man of position, as a member of society even, need not have been chronicled with the accuracy with which they have been set down here. Nor would I have desired you to have described with such almost monotonous recurrence: the scenes you used to make, nor to have reprinted your wonderful series of telegrams to me with their strange mixture of romance and finance: nor to have quoted from letters the more revolting or heartless passages as I have been forced to do. Still, I thought it would have been good, as well for you as for me, if

you had made some protest against your father's version of our friendship, one no less grotesque than venomous, and as absurd in its inference to you as it was in its reference dishonouring to me. That version has now actually passed into serious history: it is quoted, believed, and chronicles: the preacher has taken it for his text, and the moralist for his barren theme: and I who appealed to all the ages have had to accept my verdict from one who is an ape and a buffoon. I have said, and with some bitterness I admit, in this letter that such was the irony of things that your father would live to be the hero of a sunday school tract: that you would rank with the infant Samuel:

[Beginning of "De Profundis" Edition 12/6.
But my place would be .....

1 para only)

..... Sandford & Merton

But at the time I wrote to you I felt that for both our sakes it would be a good thing, a proper thing, a right thing, not to accept that account your father had put forward through his counsel for the edification of a Philistine world and that is why I asked you to think out and write something that would be nearer the truth. It would at least have been better for you than scribbling to the French papers about the domestic life of your parents. What did the French care whether or not your parents had led a happy domestic life? One cannot conceive a subject more entirely uninteresting to them. What did interest them was how an artist of my distinction, one who by the school and movement of which he wasthe incarnation had exercised a marked influence on the direction of French thought could, having led such a life, have brought such an action. Had you proposed for your article to publish the letters, endless I fear in number, in which I had spoken to you of the ruin you were bringing on my life, of the madness of moods of rage that you were allowing to master you to your own hurt as well as to mine, and of my desire, nay my determination to end a friendship so fatal to me in every way, I could have understood it, though I would not have allowed such letters to be published: when your

father's counsel desiring to catch me in a contradiction suddenly produced in court a letter of mine, written to you in March '93, in which I stated that, rather than endure a repetition of the hideous scenes you seemed to take such a terrible pleasure in making, I would readily consent to be "blackmailed" by every renter in London", it was a very real grief to me that that side of my friendship with you should inadvertently be revealed to the common gaze: but that you should have been so slow to see, so lacking in all sensitiveness, and so dull in apprehension of what is rare delicate and beautiful, as to propose yourself to publish the letters in which, and through which, I was trying to keep alive the very spirit and soul of love, that it might dwell in my body through the long years of that bodies' humiliation, - this was, and stillis to me a source of the very deepest pain, the most poignant disappointment. Why you did so, I fear I know but too well. If hate blinded your eyes, vanity sewed your eyelids together with threads of iron. The faculty by which, and by which alone, one can understand others in their real as in their ideal relations" your narrow egotism had blunted, and long disuse had made of no avail. The imagination was as much in prison as I was. Vanity

had barred up the windows, and the name of the warder was hate.

all this took Place . . . . . .

De Profundis
pp 21 to 23

. . . . . in this manner writing

My friends come to see me again. I enquire, as I always do, after you. I am told that you are in your villa at Naples, and are bringing out a volume of poems. At the close of the interview it is mentioned casually that you are dedicating them to me. The tidings seemed to give me a sort of nausea of life. I said nothing, but silently went back to my cell with contempt and scorn in my heart. How could you dream of dedicating a volume of poems to me without first asking my permission? Dream, do I say? How could you dare to do such a thing? Will you give as your answer that in the days of my greatness and fame I had consented to receive the dedication of your early work? Certainly I did so; just as I would have accepted the homage of any other young man beginning the difficult and beautiful art of literature. All homage is delightful to an artist, and doubly sweet when youth brings it. Laurel and bay leaf wither when aged hands pluck them. Only youth has a right to crown an artist. That is the real privilege of being young, if youth only knew it. But the days of abasement and infamy are different from those of greatness and of fame. You had yet to learn that Prosperity, Pleasure and Success may be rough of grain and common in fibre

Dr Profundis p 25.

but that sorrow is the most sensitive of all created things. There is nothing that stirs in the whole world of thought or motion to which sorrow does not vibrate in terrible if exquisite pulsation. The thin beaten out leaf of tremulous gold that chronicles the direction of forces that 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 for pain. You could write to the Governor of Wandsworth Prison to ask my permission to publish my letters in the "Mercure de France", corresponding to our English Fortnightly Review". Why not have written to the Governor of the Prison at Reading to ask my permission to dedicate your poems to me, whatever fantastic description you may have chosen to give of them? Was it because in the one case the Magazine in question had been prohibited by me from publishing letters the legal copyright of which, as you are of course, perfectly well aware, was and is vested entirely in me, and in the other you thought that you could enjoy the wilfulness of your own way without my knowing anything about it till it was too late to interfere? The mere fact that I was a man disgraced, ruined, and in prison should have made you, if you desired to write my name on the fore page

of your work, beg it of me as a favour, an honour, a privilege. that is the way in what one should approach those who are in distress and sit in shame.

A volume of poems page 27 (5/- Ed)

The first volume of poems

De Profundis pp 27-28 ... art

I have spoken to you at length on this point in order that you should grasp its full bearings, and understand why I wrote at once to Robbie is terms of such scorn and contempt of you, and absolutely prohibited the dedication, and desired that the words I had written of you should be copied out carefully and sent to you. I felt that at last the time had come when you should be made to see, to recognise, to realise a little what you had done. Blindness may be carried so far that it becomes grotesque, and unimaginative nature, if something be not done to rouse it, will become petrified into absolute insensibility, so that while the body may eat, and drink, and have its pleasures, the soul, whose house it is, may, like the soul of Branca d'Oria in Dante, be dead absolutely. My letter seems to have arrived not a moment too soon. It fell on you, as far as I can judge, like a thunderbolt. You described yourself, in your answer to Robbie, as being "deprived of all power of thought and expression". Indeed, apparently you can think of nothing better than to write to your mother to complain. Of course, she, with the blindness to your real good that has been her ill-starred fortune and yours, gives you every comfort she can

think of, and lulls you back, I suppose, into your former unhappy, unworthy condition; while as far as I am concerned, she lets my friends know that she is "very much annoyed" at the severity of my remarks about you. Indeed it is not merely to my friends that she conveys her sentiments of annoyance, but also to those - a very much larger number, I need hardly remind you - who are not my friends: and I am informed now, and through channels very kindly disposed to you and yours, that in consequence of this a great deal of the sympathy that, by reason of my distinguished genius and terrible sufferings, had been gradually but surely growing up for me, has been entirely taken away. People say, "Ah! he first tried to get the kind father put into prison and failed: now he turns round and blames the innocent son for his failure. How right we were to despise him. How worthy of contempt he is!" It seems to me that when my name is mentioned in your mother's presence, if she has no word of sorrow or regret for her share - no slight one - in the ruin of my house, it would be more seemly if she remained silent. And as for you - don't you think now that, instead of writing to her to complain, it would have been better for you, in every way, to have written to me directly, and to have had the courage

to say to me whatever you had or fancied you had to say. It is nearly a year ago now since I wrote that letter. You cannot have remained during that entire time "deprived of all power of thought and expression". Why did you not write to me? You saw by my letter how deeply wounded, how outraged I was by your whole conduct. More than that: you saw your entire friendship with me set before you, at last in its true light, and by a mode not to be mistaken. Often in old days I had told you that you were ruining my life. You had always laughed. When Edwin Levy at the very beginning of our friendship, seeing your manner of putting me forward to bear the brunt, and annoyance and expense even of that unfortunate Oxford mishap of yours, if we must so term it, in reference to which his advice and help had been sought, warned me for the space of a whole hour against knowing you, you laughed, as at Bracknell I described to you my long and impressive interview with him. When I told you how even that unfortunate young man who ultimately stood beside me in the dock had warned me more than once that you would prove far more fatal in bringing me to utter destruction than any even of the common lads whom I was foolish enough to know, you laughed though not with such sense of amusement. When my more prudent or less well disposed friends either

warned me, or left me, on account of my friendship with you, you laughed with scorn. You laughed immoderately when, on the occasion of your father writing his first abusive letter to you about me, I told you that I knew I would be the mere catspaw of your dreadful quarrel and come to some evil between you. But every single thing that happened as I had said it would happen, as far as the result goes. You had no excuse for not seeing how all things had come to pass. Why did you not write to me? Was it cowardice? Was it callousness? What was it? The fact that I was outraged with you and had expressed my sense of the outrage was all the more reason for writing. If you thought my letter just, you should have written. If you thought it in the smallest point unjust, you should have written. I waited for a letter. I felt sure that at last you would see that, if old affection, much protested love, the thousand acts of ill requited kindness I had showered on you, the thousand unpaid debts of gratitude you owed me: - that if all these were nothing to you, mere duty itself, most barren of all bonds between man and man, should have made you write. You cannot say that you seriously thought I was obliged to receive none but business communications from members of my family. You knew

perfectly well that every twelve weeks.....

Dr Prof. 28-29 .... Lloyd of Shyte

....Ah! had you been in prison - I will not say through any fault of mine, for that would be a thought too terrible for me to bear - but through fault of your own, error of your own, faith in some unworthy friend, slip in sensual mire, trust misapplied, or love ill bestowed, or none, or all of these, - do you think that I would have allowed you to eat your heart away in darkness and solitude without trying in some way, however slight, to help you to bear the bitter burden of your disgrace? Do you think that I would not have let you know that if you suffered, I was suffering too; that if you wept there were tears in my eyes also; and that if you lay in the house of bondage and were despised of men, I out of my very griefs had built a house in which to dwell until your coming, a treasury in which all that man had denied to you would be laid up for your healing, one hundredfold in increase? If bitter necessity, or prudence, to me more bitter still, had prevented my being near you, and robbed me of the joy of your presence, though seen through prison bars and in a shape of shame, I would have written you in season and out of season in the hope that some mere phrase, some single word, some broken echo even of Love might reach you. If you had refused

to receive my letters, I would have written none the less, so that you should have known that at any rate there were always letters waiting for you. Many have done so to me. Every three months people write to me, or propose to write to me. Their letters and communications are kept. They will be handed to me when I go out of prison. I know they are there. I know the names of the people who have written them. I know that they are full of sympathy, and affection, and kindness. That is sufficient for me. I need to know no more. Your silence has been horrible. Nor has it been a silence of weeks and months merely, but of years; of years even as they have to count them who, like yourself, live swiftly in happiness and can hardly catch the gilt feet of the days as they dance by, and are out of breath in the chase after pleasure. It is a silence without excuse; a silence without palliation. I know you had feet of clay ~~that made the gold of the image precious~~ Who knew it better? When I wrote among my ~~epigrams~~ aphorisms, that it was simply the feet of clay that made the gold of the image precious, it was of you I was thinking. But it is no gold image with clay feet that you had made of yourself. Out of the very dust of the common highway that the

hooves of the horned things pash into mire you have moulded your perfect semblance for me to look at, so that, whatever my secret desire might have been it would be impossible for me now to have for you any feeling other than that of contempt and scorn either. And, setting aside all other reasons, your indifference, your worldly wisdom, your callousness, your prudence, whatever you may choose to call it, has been made doubly bitter to me by the peculiar circumstances that either accompanied or followed my fall.

Other miserable men

. . .

peace to the soul in Pain

De Prof
29-32

.....And to all this has been added the hard small fact that by your actions and by your silence, by what you have done and by what you have left undone, you have made every day of my long imprisonment still more difficult for me to live through. The very bread and water of prison fare you have by your conduct changed. You have rendered the one bitter and the other brackish to me. The sorrow you should have shared you have doubled, the pain you should have sought to lighten you have quickened to anguish. I have no doubt that you did not mean to do so. I know that you did not mean to do so. It was simply that "one really fatal defect in your character, your entire lack of imagination."

And the end of it all is that I have got to forgive you. I must do so. I don't write this letter to put bitterness into your heart, but to pluck it out of mine. For my own sake I must forgive you. One cannot always keep an adder in one's breast to feed on one, nor rise up every night to sow thorns in the garden of one's soul. It will not be difficult at all for me to do so, if you help me a little. Whatever you did to me inthe old days I always readily forgave. It did you no good then. Only one whose life is without stain

of any kind can forgive sins ~~[illegible]~~. But now when I sit in humiliation and disgrace it is different. My forgiveness should mean a great deal to you now. Some day you will realise it. Whether you do so early or later soon or not at all, my way is clear before me. I cannot allow you to go through life bearing in your heart the burden ofhaving ruined a man like me. The thought might make you callously indifferent, or morbidly sad. I must take the burden from you and put it on my own shoulders.

I must say to myself — P43 P146 12/6 D

De Prof 32

P. 146

P107

....What is loathsome to me is the memory of interminable visits paid by me to the solicitor Humphreys in your company, when in the ghastly glare of a bleak room you and I would sit, with serious faces telling serious lies to a bald man, till I really groaned and yawned with ennui. There is where I found myself after two years friendship with you, right in the centre of Philistia, away from everything that was beautiful, or brilliant, or wonderful, or daring. At the end, I had to come forward on your behalf, as the champion of Respectability in conduct of Pantanism in life, and of Morality in Art. Voila ou menent les mauvais chimins.

And the curious thing is to me that you should have tried to imitate your father in his chief characteristics. I cannot understand why he was to you an exemplar, where he should have been a warning, except that whenever there is hatred between two people there is bond or brotherhood of some kind. I suppose that, by some strange law of antipathy of similars, you loathed each other, not because in so many points you were so different but because in some you were so like. In June 1893 when you left Oxford, without a degree and with debts, petty in themselves, but considerable to a man of your fathers income,

your father wrote you a very vulgar, violent and abusive letter. The letter you sent him in reply was in every way worse, and of course far less excusable, and consequently you were extremely proud of it. I remember quite well your saying to me with your most conceited air, that you could beat your father "at his own trade" Quite true. But what a trade! What a competition! You used to laugh and sneer at your father for retiring from your cousins house where he was living in order to write filthy letters to him from a neighbouring hotel. You used to do just the same to me. You constantly lunched with me at some public restaurant, sulked or made a scene during luncheon, and then retire to White's Club and wrote me a letter of the very foulest character. The only difference between you and your father was that after you had despatched your letter to me by special messenger, you would arrive yourself at my rooms some hours later not to apologise, but to know if I had ordered dinner at the Savoy and if not, why not. Sometimes you would actually arrive before the offensive letter had been read. I remember on one occasion you had asked me to invite to luncheon at the Cafe Royal two of your frienis, one of whom I had never seen in my life, I did so, and at your special request ordered beforehand

a specially luxurious lucheon to be prepared. The chef, I remember, was sent for, and particular instructions given about the wines. Instead of coming to luncheon you sent me at the Cafe an abusive letter timed so as to reach me after we had been waiting half an hour for you. I read the first line, and saw what it was, and putting the letter in my pocket explained to your friends that you were suddenly taken ill, and that the rest of the letter referred to your symptoms. In point of fact I did not read the letter till I was dressing for dinner, at Tite Street that evening. As I was in the middle of its mire, wondering with infinite sadness how you could write letters that were really like the froth and foam on the lips of an epileptic, my servant came in to tell me that you were in the hall and very anxious to see me for five minutes. I at once sent down and asked you to come up. You arrived, looking I admit very frightened and pale, to beg my advice and assistance, as you had been told that a man from Lumley the solicitor had been enquiring for you at Cadogan place, and you were afraid that your Oxford trouble or some new danger was threatening you. I consoled you, and told you, what proved to be the case, that it was merely a tradesmans bill merely, and let you stay to dinner andpass your

evening with me. You never mentioned a single word about your hideous letter, nor did I. I treated it simply as an unhappy sympton of an unhappy temperament. The subject was never alluded to. To write to me a loathsome letter at 2.30 and fly to me for help and sympathy at 7.15 the same afternoon, was a perfectly ordinary occurrence in your life. You went quite beyond your father in such habits, as you did in others. When his revolting letters to you were read in open court he naturally felt ashamed and pretended to weep. Had your letters to him been read by his own Counsel still more horror and repugnance would have been felt by everyone. Nor was it merely in style that you beat him "at his own trade", but in the mode of attack you distanced him completely. You availed yourself of the public telegram, and the open postcard. I think you might have left such modes of annoyance to people like Alfred Wood whose sole source of income it is. Don't you? What was a profession to him and his class was a pleasure to you, and a very evil one. Norhave you ever given up your horrible habit of writing offensive letters, after all that has happened to me through them and for them. You still regard it as one of your accomplishments, and you exercise it on my friends, or those

who have been kind to me in prison like Robert Sherard and others. That is disgraceful of you. When Robert Sherard heard from me that I did not wish you to publish any article on me in the "Mercure de France", with or without letters, you should have been grateful to him for having ascertained my wishes on the point, and for having saved you from, without intending it, inflicting more pain on me than you had already done. You must remember that a patronising and Philistine letter about "fair play" for a "man who is down" is all right for an English newspaper. It carries on the old traditions of English journalism in regard to their attitude towards artists. But in France such a tone would have exposed me to ridicule and you to contempt. I could not have allowed any article till I had known its aim, temper, mode of approach and the like. In art, good intentions are not of the smallest value. All bad art is the result of good intentions.

Nor is Robert Sherard the only one of my friends to whom you have addressed acrimonious and bitter letters because they sought that my wishes and my feelings should be consulted in matters concerning myself, the publication of articles on me,

the dedication of your verses, the surrender of my letters and presents, and such like, you have annoyed ~~it~~ or sought to annoy others also.

Does it ever occur to you what an awful position I would have been in if for the last two years, during my appalling sentence, I had been dependent on you as a friend? Do you ever think of that? Do you ever fell any gratitude to those who by kindness without stint, devotion without limit, cheerfulness and joy in giving, have lightened my black burden for me, have arranged my future life for me, have visited me again and again, have written to me beautiful and sympathetic letters, have managed my affairs for me, have stood by me in the teeth of obloquy, taunt, open sneer or insult even? I thank God every day that he gave me friends other than you. I owe everything to them. The very books in my cell are paid for by Robbie 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 a thing that is given by love and affection. I am proud of it. But do you ever think of what my friends such as More Adey, Robbie, Robert Sherard, Frank Harris, and Arthur Clifton have been to me in giving me comfort, help, affection, sympathy,

and the like? I suppose that has never dawned on you. And yet - if you had any imagination in you - you would know that there is not a single person who has been kind to me in prison life down to the warder who may give me a good morning or a good-night that is not one of his prescribed duties - down to the common policeman 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 hoarse prisonevoice men get from long and compulsory silence:"I am sorry for you: it is harder for the likes of you than it is for the likes of us": - not one of them all, I say, the very mire from whose shoes you should not be proud and kneel down and clean.

Have you imagination enough to see what a fearful tragedy it was for me to have come across your family? What a tragedy it would have been for anyone at all, who had a great position, and great name, anything of importance to lose. There is hardly one of the eldiers of your family - with the exception of Percy, who is really a good fellow - who did not in someway contribute to my ruin.....

I have spoken of your mother to you with some bitter-

ness, and I strongly advise you to let her see this letter, for your own sake chiefly. If it is painful for her to read such an indictment against one of her sons, let her remember that my mother, who intellectually ranks with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and historically with Madame Roland, died brokenhearted because the son of whose genius and art she had been so proud, and whom she had regarded always as a worthy continuer of a distinguished name, had been condemned to the treadmill for two years. You will ask me in what way your mother contributed to my destruction I willtell you. Just as you strove to shift on to me all your immoral responsibilities ~~////~~ so your mother strove to shift on to me all her moral responsiblities with regard to you. Instead of speaking directly to you about your life, as a mother should, she always wrote privately to me with earnest, frightened entreaties not to let you know that she was writing to me. You see the position in which I was placed between you and your mother. It was one as false, as absurd, and as tragic as the one in which I was placed between you and your father. In August ~~////~~ 1892 and on the 8th of November of the same year I had two long interviews with your Mother about you. On both occasions I asked her why she did not speak directly to you herself.

On both occasions she gave me the same answer: "I am afraid to: he gets so angry when he is spoken to". The first time, I knew you so slightly that I did not understand what she meant. The second time I knew you so well that I understood perfectly. (During the interval you had had an attack of jaundice and been ordered by the doctor to go fo a week to Bournemouth, and had induced me to accompany you as you hated being alone). But the first duty of a mother is not to be afraid of speaking seriously to her son. Had your mother spoke seriously to you about the trouble she saw you were in in July 1892 and made you confide in her it would have been much better and much happier ultimately for both of you. All the underhand and secret communications with me were wrong. What was the use of your mother sending me endless notes, marked "Private" on the envelope, begging me not to ask you so often to dinner, and not to give you any money, each note ending with an earnest postscript "On no account let Alfred know that I have written to you". What good could come of such a correspondence? Did you ever wait to be asked to dinner? Never. You took all your meals as a matter of course with me. If I

remonstrated you always had one observation: "If I don't dine with you, where am I to dine? You don't suppose I am going to dine at home" It was unanswerable. And if I absolutely refused to let you dine with me, you always threatened that you would do something foolish, and always did it. What possible result could there be from letters such as your mother used to send me, except that which did occur, a foolish and fatal shifting of the moral responsibility on to my shoulders? Of the various details in which your mother;s weakness and lack of courage proved so ruinous to herself, to you, and to me, I don't want to speak any more, but surely, when she heard of your father coming down to my house to make a loathsome scene and create a public scandal, she might then have seen that a serious crisis was impending, and taken some steps to try and avoid it? But all she could think of doing was to send down plausible George Wyndham with his pliant tongue to propose to me....what? That I should"gradually "drop you". As if it had been possible for me to gradually drop you! I had tried to end our friendship in every possible way, going so far as actually to leave England and give a false address abroad in the hopes of breaking at one blow a bond that had become irksome, hateful, and ruinous

Do you think that I could have gradually dropped you? Do you think that would have satisfied your father? You know it would not. What your father wanted, indeed, was not the cessation of our friendship, but a public scandal. That is what he was striving for. His name had not been in the papers for years. He saw the opportunity of appearing before the ~~Bristol~~ British public in an entirely new character, that of the affectionate father. His sense of humour was roused. Had I severed my friendship with you it would have been a terrible disappointment to him and the small notoriety of a second divorce suit, however revolting its details and origin, would have proved but little consolation to him. For what he was aiming at was popularity and to pose as a champion of purity, as it is termed is, in the present condition of the ~~Bristol~~ British public, the surest mode of becoming for the nonce a heroic figure. Of this public I have said in one of my plays that if it is Caliban for one half of the year, it is Tartuffe for the other, and your father, in whom both characters may be said to have become incarnate, was in this way marked out as the proper ~~[illegible]~~ representative of Puritanism in its aggressive and most characteristic form. No gradual dropping of you would have been of any avail, even

had it been practicable. Don't you feel now that the only thing for your mother to have done was to have asked me to come to see her, and had you and your brother present, and said definitely that the friendship must absolutely cease? She would have found in me her warmest seconder, and with Drunlanrig and myself in the room she need not have been afraid of speaking to you. She did not do so. She was afraid of her responsibilities, and tried to shift them on to me. One letter she certainly did write to me. It was a brief one, to ask me not to send the lawyers letter to your father warning him to desist. She was quite right. It was ridiculous my consulting lawyers and seeking their protestion. But she nullified any effect her letter might have produced by her usual postscript: "On no account let Alfred know that I have written to you". You were entranced at the idea of my sending lawyers letters to your father, as well as yourself. It was your suggestion. I could not tell you that your mother was strongly against the idea, for she had bound me with the most solemn promises never to tell you about her letters to me, and I foolishly kept my promise to her.

Don't you see that it was wrong of her not to speak directly to you? That all the backstairs interviews with me, and the area gate correspondence were wrong? Nobody can shift their responsibility on anyone else. They always return ultimately to the proper owner. Your one idea of life, your one philosophy, if you are to be credited with a philosophy, was that whatever you did was to be paid for by someone else: I don't mean merely in the financial sense - that was simply the practical application of your philosophy to everyday life - but in the broadest fullest sense of transferred responsibility. You made that your creed. It was very successful as far as it went. You forced me into taking action because you knew that your father would not attack your life or yourself in any way and that I would defend both to the utmost, and take on my own shoulders whatever would be thrust on me. You were quite right. Your father and I, each from different motives of course, did exactly as you counted on our doing. But somehow, in spite of everything, you have not really escaped. The "infant Samuel theory" as for brevity's sake one may term it, is all very well as far as the general world knows. It may be a good ideal scorned in London, and a little sneered at in Oxford, but that is merely because there are a few people who know you in each place,

and because in each place you left traces of your passage. Outside of a small set in those two cities, the world looks on you as the good young man who was very nearly tempted into wrongdoing by the wicked and immoral artist, but was rescued just in time by his kind and loving father. It sounds all right. But yet, you know you have not escaped. I am not referring to a silly question asked by a silly juryman, which was of course, treated with contempt by the Crown and the Judge. No one cared about that. I am referring perhaps principally to yourself. In your own eyes, and some day you will have to think of your conduct, youare not, cannot be quite satisfied at the way in which things have turned out. Secretly you must think of yourself with a good deal of shame. A brazen face is a capital thing to show the world, but now and then when you are alone, and have no audience, you have, I suppose, to take the mask off for mere breathing purposes. Else, indeed, you would be stifled.....And in the same manner your mother must at times regret that she tried to shift her grave responsibilities on someone else, who already had enough of a burden to carry. She occupied the position of both parents to you. Did she really fulfil the duties of either? If I bore with your bad temper

and your rudeness and your scenes, she might have borne with them too. When last I saw my wife - fourteen months ago now - I told her that she would have to be to Cyril a father as well as a mother. I told her everything about your mothers mode of dealing with you in every detail as I have set it down in this letter, only, of course, far more fully. I told her the reasons of the endless notes with "Private" on the envelope that used to come to Tite Street from your mother, so constantly that my wife used to laugh and say that we must be collaborating in a society novel or something of that kind. I implored her not to be to Cyril what your mother was to you. I told her that she should bring him up so that if he shed innocent blood he would come and tell her, that she might clense his hands for him first, and then teach him how by penance or expiation to clense his soul afterwards. I told her that if she was frightened of facing the responsibility of the life of another, though her own child, she should get a guardian to help her. That she has, I am glad to say, done. She has chosen Adrian Hope a man of high birth and culture and fine character her own cousin, whom you met once at Tite Street, and with him Cyril and Vivian have a good chance of a beautiful future. Your

mother, if she was afraid of talking seriously to you, should have chosen someone among her own relatives to whom you might have listened. But she should not have been afraid. She should have had it out with you and faced it. At any rate, look at the result. Is she satisfied and pleased?

I know she puts the blame on me. I hear of it, not from people who know you, but from people who do not know you, and do not desire to know you. I hear of it often. She talks of the influence of an elder over a younger man, for instance. It is one of her favourite attitudes towards the question, as it is always a successful appeal to popular prejudice and ignorance. I need not ask you what influence I had over you. You know I had none. It was one of your frequent boasts that I had none, and the only one indeed, that was well founded. What was there, as a mere matter of fact, in you that I could influence. Your brain? It was undeveloped. Your imagination? It was dead. Your heart? It was not yet born. Of all the people who have ever crossed my life, you were the one, and the only one, I was unable in any way to influence in any direction. When I lay ill and helpless in a fever caught from tending you I had not sufficient influence over you to induce you to get me

even a cup of milk to drink, or to see that I had the ordinary necessities of a sick room, or to take the trouble to drive a couple of hundred yards to a bookseller to get me a book at my own expense. When I was actually engaged in writing, and penning comedies that were to beat Congreve for brilliancy, and Dumas fils for philosophy, and I suppose everybody else for every other quality, I had not sufficient influence with you to get you to leave me undisturbed as an artist should be left. Wherever my writing room was, it was to you an ordinary lounge, a place to smoke and drink hock and seltzer in, and chatter about absurdities. The "influence of an elder over a younger man" is an excellent theory till it comes to my ears. Then it becomes grotesque. When it comes to your ears, I suppose you smile - to yourself you are certainly entitled to do so. I hear also much of what she says about money. She states, and with perfect justice, that she was ceaseless in her entreaties to me not to supply you with money. I admit it. Her letters were endless, and the postscript "Pray do not left Alfred know that I have written to you" appears in them all. But it was no pleasure to me to have to pay every single thing for you from your morning shave to your midnight hansom. It was a horrible bore.

I used to complain to you again and again about it. I used to tell you - you remember, don't you - how I loathed your regarding me as a "useful" person, how no artist wishes to be regarded or so treated; artists, like art itself, being of their very essence quite useless. You used to get very angry when I said it to you. Thetruth always made you angry. Truth, indeed, is a thing that is most painful to listen to and most painful to utter. But it did not make you alter your views or your mode of life. Every day I had to pay for every simple thing you did all day long. Only a person of absurd good nature, or of indescribable folly would have done so. I unfortunately was a complete combination of both. When I used to suggest that your mother should supply you with the money you wanted, you always had a very pretty and graceful answer. You said that the income allowed her by your father - some £1500 a year I believe - was quite inadequate to the wants of a lady of her position, and that you could not go to her for more money than you were getting already. You were quite right about her income being one absolutely unsuitable to a lady of her position and tastes, but you should not have made that an excuse for living in luxury on me: it should on the contrary been a suggestion

to you for economy in your own life. The fact is that you were, and are I suppose still, a typical sentimentalist. For a sentimentalist is simply one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it. To propose to spare your mother's pocket was beautiful. To do so at my expense was ugly. You think that one can have one's emotions for nothing. One cannot. Even the finest and 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, and refuse to pay the bill when it comes in. You should pass out of that conception of life. As soon as you have to pay for an emotion you will know its quality, and be the better for such knowledge. And remember that the sentimentalist is always a cynic at heart. Indeed sentimentality is merely the bank holiday of cynicism. [~~Indeed sentimentality~~] 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. I think that if you look back now to your attitude towards your mother's income, and your attitude towards mine, you will not feel proud of yourself, and perhaps you may someday, if you don't show your mother this letter, explain to her that your living on me was a matter in which my wishes were not consulted for a moment. In was simply a peculiar, and to me personally most distressing form that your devotion to me took. To make yourself dependent on me for the smallest as well as for the largest sums, lent you in your own eyes all the charm of childhood, andin the insisting on my paying for everone of your pleasures you thought that you had found the secret of eternal youth. I confess that it pains me when I hear of your mother's remarks about me, and I am sure that on reflection you will agree with me that if she has no word of regret or sorrow for the ruin your race has brought on mine, it would be better if she remained silent. Of course, there is no reason she should see any portion of this letter that refers to any mental development I have been going through, or to any point of departure I hope to attain to. It

would not be interesting to her. But the parts concerned purely with your life I should show her if I were you.

If I were you, in fact, I would not care about being loved on false pretences. There is no reason why a man should show his life to the world. The world does not understand things. But with people whose affection one desires to have it is different.

.....So with you. You would be much happier if you let your mother know a little at any rate of your life from yourself. I told her a good deal about it in December 1893, but of course I was forced into reticences and generalities. It did not seem to give her any more courage in her relations with you. On the contrary she avoided looking at the truth more persistently than ever. If you told her yourself it would be different. My words may perhaps be often too bitter to you, but the facts you cannot deny. Things were as I have said they were, and if you have read this letter as carefully as you should have done you have met yourself face to face.

I have now written, and at great length, to you in order that should realise what you were to me before my imprisonment, during those three fatal years of friendship: what you have been to me during my imprisonment, already within two moons of its completion almost: and what I hope to be to myself and to others when my imprisonment is over. I cannot reconstruct my letter or rewrite it. You must take it as it stands, blotted in many places with tears, in some with the signs of passion or pain, and make it out as best you can, blots, corrections, and all. As for the corrections and errata, I have made them in order

that my words should be an absolute expression of my thoughts, and err neither through surpusage nor through being inadequate. Language requires to be tuned, like a violin: and just as too many or too few vibrations in the voice of the singer or the trembling of the string will make the note false, so too much or too little in words will spoil the message. As it stands, at any rate, my letter has its definite meaning behind every phrase. There is in it nothing of rhetoric. Whenever there is erasion or substitution, however slight, however elaborate, it is because I am seeking to render my real impression, to find for my mood its exact equivalent. Whatever is first in feeling is last in form.

I will admit that it is a severe letter. I have not spared you. Indeed you may say that, after admitting that to weigh you against the smallest of my sorrows, the meanest of my losses would be really unfair to you, I have actually done so, and made scruple by scruple the most careful assay of your nature. That is true. But you must remember that you put yourself in the scales.

You must remember that, if when matched with one mere moment of my imprisonment the balance in which you lie kicks

the beam, Vanity made you choose the balance, and Vanity made you cling to it. There was the one great psychological error of our friendship, its entire want of proportion. You forced your way into a life too large for you, and whose orbit transcended your power of vision no less than your power of cyclic motion, one whose thoughts, passions and actions were of intense import, of wide interest, and fraught, too heavily indeed, with wonderful or awful consequences. Your little life of little whims and moods was admirable in its own little sphere. It was admirable at Oxford, where the worst that could happen to you was a reprimand from the Dean or a lecture from the President, and wherethe highest excitement was Magdalen becoming head of the river, and the lighting of a bonfire in the quad as a celebration of the august event. It should have continued in its own sphere after you left Oxford. In yourself, you were all right. You were a very complete specimen of a very modern type. It was simply in reference to me that you were wrong. Your reckless extravagance was not a crime. Youth is always extravagant. It was your forcing me to pay for your extravagances that was disgraceful. Your desire to have a friend with whom you could pass your time

from morning to night was charming. It was almost idyllic. But the friend you fastened on should not have been a man of letters an artist, one to whom your continual presence was as utterly as destructive of all beautiful work as it was actually paralysing to the creative faculty. There was no harm in your seriously considering that the most perfect way of passing an evening was to have a champagne dinner at the Savoy, a box at a Music hall to follow, and a charming supper at Willis's as a bonne-bouche for the end. Heaps of delightful young men in London are of the same opinion. It is not even an eccentricity. It is a qualification of becoming a member ~~for~~ of White's But you had no right to require of me that I should become the purveyor of such pleasures for you. It showed your lack of any real appreciation of my genius. Your quarrel with your father again, whatever on may think about its character, should obviously remained a question entirely between the two of you. It should have been carried on in a backyard. Such quarrels I believe, usually are. Your mistake was in insisting on its being played as a tragic comedy on a high stage in History, with the whole world as an audience, and myself for the prize for the victor in the contemptible contest. Thefact that your father

loathed you, and that you loathed your father, was not a matter of any interest to the English public. Such feelings are very common in English domestic life, and should be confined to the placethey characterise: the home. Away from the home circle they are quite out of place. To translate them is an offence. Family life is not to be treated as a red flag to be flaunted in the streets, or a horn to be blown hoarsely on the housetop. You took domesticity out of its proper sphere, just as you took yourself out of your proper sphere. And those who quit their proper sphere change their surroundings merely, not their natures. They do not acquire the thoughts or passions appropriate to the sphere they enter. It is not intheir power to do so...

153 - 157

? p 112

.....What Ophelia ////// herself could not understand was not to be realised by "Guilderstern and gentle Rosencrantz" by "Rosencrantz and gentle Guilderstern". Of course, I do not propose to compare you. There is a wide difference between you. What with them was chance, with you was choice. Deliberately and by me uninvited you thrust yourself into my sphere, usurped there a place for which you had neither right nor qualifications and having by curious persistence and by the rendering of your very presence a part of each separate day, succeeded, in absorbing my entire life and could do no better with that life than break it in pieces. Strange as it may seem to you it was but natural that you should do so. If one gives to a child a toy too wonderful for its little mind, or too beautiful for its but half awakened eyes, it breaks the toy if it is wilful, if it is listless it lets it fall and goes its way to its own companions. So it was with you. Having got hold of my life, you did not know what to do with it. You couldn't have known. It was too wonderful a thing to be in your grasp. You should have let it slip from your hands and gone back to your own companions at their play. But unfortunately you were wilful, and so you broke it. That when everything is said, is perhaps the ultimate

secret of all that has happened. For secrets are always smaller than their manifestations. By the displacement of an atom a world may be shaken. And that I may not spare myself any more than you I will add this: that dangerous to me as my meeting with you was, it was rendered fatal to me by the particular moment in which we met. For you were at that time of life when all that one does is no more than the sowing of the seed, and I was at that time of life when all that one does is no less than the reaping of the harvest.

There are some few things more about which I must write to you. The first is about my Bankruptcy. I heard some days ago, with great disappointment I admit, that it is too late now for your family to pay your father off, that it would be illegal, and that I must remain in my present painful position for some considerable time to come. It is bitter to me because I am assured on legal authority that I cannot even publish a book without the permission of the Receiver to whom all the accounts must be submitted. I cannot enter into a contract with the manager of a theatre, or produce a play without the receipts to your father and my few other creditors. I think that even you will admit now that the scheme of "scoring off" your father

by allowing him to make me a bankrupt has not really been the brilliant all round success you imagined you imagined it was going to turn out. It has not been so to me at any rate, and my feelings of pain and humiliation at my pauperism should have been consulted rather than your own sense of humour however caustic, or unexpected. In point of actual fact in permitting my bankruptcy, as in urging me on to the original trial you really were playing right into your fathers hands, and doing just what he wanted. Alone, and unassisted, he would from the veryoutset have been powerless. In you - though you did not mean to hold such a horrible office - he has always found his chief ally. I know More Adey told you in his letter that last summer you really did express on more than one occasion your desire to repay me "a little of what I spent" on you. As my life, my name, my place in history, and if your family had all the marvellous things in the world at their command, or what the world holds as marvellous, genius, beauty, wealth, high position and the like, and laid them all at my feet, it would not repay me for one tithe of the smallest things that have been taken from me, or one tear of the least tears that I

have shed. However, of course, everything one does has to be paid for. Even to the Bankrupt it is so. You seem to be under the impression that Bankruptcy is a convenient means by which a man can avoid paying his debts, a "score off his creditors" in fact. It is quite the other way. It is the means by which a man's creditors "score off" him, if we are to continue your favorite phrase, and by which the law by the confiscation of all his property forces him to pay everyone of his debts, and if he fails to do so leaves him as penniless as the commonest mendicant who stands in an archway or creeps down a road, holding out his hand for the alms for which, in England, at any rate, he is afraid to ask. The law has taken from me not merely all that I have, my books, furniture, pictures, my copyright in my published works, my copyright in my plays, everything in fact from "The Happy Prince" and "Lady Windermere's Fan" down to the stair carpets and door scraper of my house, but also all that I am ever going to have. My interest in my marriage settlement, for instance, was sold. Fortunately I was able to buy it in through my friends. Otherwise, in case my wife died, my two children during my life time would be as penniless as myself. My interest in our Irish Estate, entailed

on me by my father, will I suppose have to go next. I feel very bitterly about it being sold, but I must submit. Your fathers seven hundred pence, - or pounds is it? - stand in the way, and must be refunded. Even when I am stripped of all I have, and am ever to have, and am granted a discharge as a hopeless Insolvent, I have still got to pay my debts. The Savoy dinners - the clear turtle soup. The luscious ortolans wrapped in thin crinkled Sicilian vineleaves, the heavy amber coloured, indeed almost amber - scented champagne - Dagonet, 1880, I think, was your favorite wine? - all have still to be paid for. The suppers at Willis's, the special cuvées of Perrier-Jouet reserved always for us, the wonderful pâtés procured directly from Strasburg, the marvellous fin champagne served always at the bottom of great bell shaped glasses that its bouquet might be the better savoured by the true epicures of what was really exquisite in life - these cannot be left unpaid, as bad debts of a dishonest client. Even the dainty sleeve links - four heart shaped moonstones of silver mist girdled by alternate ruby and diamond for their setting - that I designed and had made at Henry Lewis's as a special little present to you, to celebrate the success of my second comedy - these even - though I believe you

sold them for a song a few months afterwards - have to be paid for. I cannot leave the jeweller out of pocket for the presents I gave you, no matter what you did with them. So, even if I get my discharge, you see I still have my debts to pay. And what is true of a bankrupt is true of everyone else in life. For every single thing that is done someone has to pay. Even you yourself - with all your desire for absolute freedom from all duties, your insistence on having everything supplied to you by others, your attempts to reject any claim on your affection, or regard, or gratitude - even you will have someday to reflect seriously on what you have done, and try, however unavailingly, to make some attempt at atonement. The fact that you will not be able really to do so will be part of your punishment. You can't wash your hands of all responsibility, and propose with a shrug or a smile, to pass on to a new friend and a freshly spread feast. You can't treat all that you have brought upon me as a sentimental reminiscence to be served up occasionally with the cigarettes and liqueurs, a picturesque background to a modern life of pleasure like an old tapestry hung in a common inn. It may for the moment have the charm of a new sauce or a fresh vintage, but the scraps of a banquet grow stale, and the

dregs of a bottle are bitter. Either today, or tomorrow, or someday you have got to realise it. Otherwise you may die without having done so, and then what a mean, starved, unimaginative life you would have had. In my letter to More I have suggested one point of view from which you have better approach the subject as soon as possible. He will tell you what it is. To understand it you will have to cultivate your imagination. Remember that imagination is the quality that enables one to see things and people in their real as in their ideal relations. If you cannot realise it by yourself, talk to others on the subject. I have had to look at my past face to face. Look at your past face to face. Sit down quietly and consider it. The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right. Talk to your brother about it. Indeed, the proper person to talk to is Percy. Let him read this letter, and know all the circumstances of our friendship. When things are clearly put before him, no judgment is better. Had we told him the truth what a lot would have been saved to me of suffering and disgrace! You remember that I proposed to do so, the night you arrived in London from Algiers. You absolutly refused. So when he came inafter dinner we had to play the comedy of your father

being an insane man subject to absurd and unaccountable delusions. It was a capital comedy while it lasted, none the less so because Percy took it all quite seriously. Unfortunately it ended in a very revolting manner. The subject on what I write now is one of its results, and if it be a trouble to you, pray do not forget, that it is the deepest of my humiliations, and one I must go through. I have no option. You have none, either.

The second thing about which I have to speak to you is with regard to the conditions, circumstances, and place of our meeting when my term of imprisonment is over. From extracts from your letter to Robbie written in the early summer of last year I understand that you have sealed up in two packages my letters and my presents to you, - such at least as remain of either - and are anxious to hand them personally to me. It is of course, necessary that they should be given up. You did not understand why I wrote beautiful letters to you, any more than you understood why I gave you beautiful presents. You failed to see that the former were not meant to be published any more than the latter were meant to be pawned. Besides they belong to a side of life that is long over, to a friendship that

somehow you were unable to appreciate at its proper value. You must look back with wonder now to the days when you had my entire life in your hands. I too look back to them with wonder, and with other, with far different emotions.

I am to be released

p 115

De Prof
126

.....,...At the end of a month when the June roses are in all their wanton opulence, I will if I feel able arrange through Robbie to meet you in some quiet foreign town like Bruges, whose grey houses and green canals and cool still ways had a charm for me years ago. For the moment you will have to change your name. The little title of which you were so vain, - and indeed it made your name sound like the name of a flower !- you will have to surrender, if you wish to see me; just as my name once so musical in the mouth of fame will have to be abandoned by me in turn. How narrow and mean, and inadequate to its burdens is this century of ours: it can give to succes its palace of porphyry, but for sorrow and shame it does not keep even a wattled house in which they may dwell: all it can do for me is to bid me alter my name into some other name, where even mediaevalism would have given me the cowl of a monk or the face cloth of theleper behind which I might be at peace.....I hope that our meeting will be what a meeting between you and me should be, aftereverything that has occurred. In old days there was always a wide chasm between us, the chasm of achieved Art and acquired culture: there is a still wider chasm between us now

the chasm of Sorrow: but to humility there is nothing that is impossible, and to love all things are easy.

As regards your letter to me in answer to this, it may be as long or as short as you choose. Address the envelope to "The Governor", H.M.Prison, Reading". Inside, in another, and an open envelope, place your own letter to me: if your paper is very thin do not write on both sides, as it makes it hard for others to read. I have written to you with perfect freedom. You can write to me with the same. What I must know from you is why you have never made any attempt to write to me, since the August of the year before last, more especially after, in the May of last year, eleven months ago now, you knew and admitted to others that you knew how you made me suffer, and how I realised it. I waited month after month to hear from you. Even if I had not been waiting but had shut the doors against you you should have remembered that no one can possibly shut the doors against Love for ever. The unjust judge in the Gospels rises up at length to give a just decision because justice comes daily knocking at his door; and at night time the friend, in whose heart there is no real friendship yields at length to his friend "because of his importunity". There is no prison in

any world into which Love cannot force and entrance. If you did not understand that, you did not understand anything about Love at all. Then, let me know all about your article on me for the "Mercure de France". I know something of it. You had better quote from it. It is set up in type. Also, let me know the exact terms of your dedication of your poems. If it is in prose, quote the prose: if in verse, quote the verse. I have no doubt that there will be beauty in it. Write to me with full frankness, about yourself: about your life: your friends: your occupations: your books. Tell me about your volume and its reception. Whatever you have to say for yourself, say it without fear. Don't write what you don't mean: that is all. If anything in your letter is false or counterfeit I shall detect it by the ring at once. It is not for nothing, or to no purpose that in my life long cult of literature, I have made myself,

"Miser of sound and syllable, no less
Than Midas of his coinage."

Remember also that I have yet to know you. Perhaps we have yet to know each other. For myself, I have but this last thing to say. Do not be afraid of the past. If people tell you that it is irrevocable, do not believe them. The past

the present and the future are but 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 of thought. The imagination can transcend them, and more in a free sphere of ideal existences. Things, also, are in their essence what we choose to make them. A thing is, according tothe mode in which one looks 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 irretrievably when I let myself be taunted into taking the action against your father: had, I dare say, 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 the world look on it 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 fully accepting it as an inevitable part of the evolution of my life and character: by bowing my head to everything that 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 you quite clearly. But do not forget in what a terrible school I am sitting at my task. And incomplete, imperfect, as I am, yet from me you may have still much to gain. You came to me to learn the Pleasure of Life and the Pleasure of Art. Perhaps I am chosen to teach you something much more wonderful:— the meaning of Sorrow and its beauty.

Your affectionate friend,

Oscar Wilde