

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

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A Florentine Tragedy by Oscar Wilde & Sturge Moore

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OSCAR WILDE & STURGE MOORE

**A FLORENTINE
TRAGEDY**

A FLORENTINE
TRAGEDY

By
OSCAR WILDE

OPENING SCENE
BY STURGE MOORE

1908
JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY
BOSTON AND LONDON

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WHEN Oscar Wilde was arrested at an Hotel in Sloane Street in April, 1895, he asked me to go to his house, 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, in order to secure his unpublished MSS. These consisted chiefly of "The Duchess of Padua," the enlarged version of "Mr. W. H." and "A Florentine Tragedy." On reaching the house I found that the door of his library had been locked. He subsequently wrote from Holloway Prison and again asked if I had found any of the MSS. Accompanied by another of his friends I obtained access to the room, but was unable to find the missing works. A remarkable feature of the case was that all the published MSS. were lying

about in various fragmentary states, and it was perfectly obvious that someone familiar with the author's writing had been there before us. A few days later an execution was put into the house on a judgment obtained by a creditor, and this was followed by one of the most disgraceful auctions that ever occurred in London. Not many personal friends were present, as all the money they could afford was being devoted to his defence. Private letters and MSS. were dispersed, though I believe the sale of such things under the circumstances was illegal; and private collectors who were anxious to buy any of the pictures, works of art, or literary relics (of which Wilde possessed a certain number) were hustled by the dealers. An eye-witness informs me that he saw a great many small objects being pocketed by the crowd. For many years afterwards the second-hand shops were full of objects from the sale.

Whether any of the three MSS. escaped my notice, and were included in the sale, of course I cannot say. "The Duchess of Padua" I possessed in a transcript, so the loss of the MS. was of no special consequence. I have been told, however, that all three MSS. are now in America, but I have never been able to hear anything definite or satisfactory on the subject. A few years afterwards I was looking over the papers and letters which I had succeeded in rescuing from Tite Street, and came across loose sheets of MS. and typewriting which I had imagined at the time were fragments of "The Duchess of Padua." On putting them together in a coherent form I immediately recognized that they belonged to the lost "Florentine Tragedy," or such portions of it as Wilde ever wrote. I assumed that the opening scene, though once extant, had disappeared. One day, however, I heard from Mr. Willard, the well

known actor, that he possessed a type-written fragment of a play which Wilde had submitted to him, and this he kindly forwarded for my inspection. It agreed in every particular with what I had taken so much trouble to put together. This suggests, conclusively I imagine, that Wilde had never written the opening scene, as Mr. Willard's version began where mine did. It was characteristic of the author to have finished what he never began.

When the Literary Theatre Society produced "Salome" in 1906 they asked me for some other short drama by Wilde to present at the same time, as "Salome" does not take very long to play. I offered them the fragment of "A Florentine Tragedy." By a fortunate coincidence, Mr. Thomas Sturge Moore, the poet and dramatist, happened to be on the committee of this Society, and to him was entrusted by my consent the task of

writing an opening scene to make the play complete. It is not for me to criticise either his work or Wilde's, but I think I am justified in saying that Wilde himself would have envied, with an artist's envy, such lines as:

We will sup with the moon,
Like Persian princes that in Babylon
Sup in the hanging gardens of the King.

In a stylistic sense Mr. Sturge Moore has accomplished a feat in reconstruction, whatever opinions may be held of "A Florentine Tragedy" by Wilde's admirers or detractors. The achievement is particularly remarkable because Mr. Sturge Moore has nothing in common with Wilde other than what is shared by all real poets and dramatists. He is a landed proprietor on Parnassus, not a trespasser. In England we are more familiar with the poachers. Time and Death are of course necessary before