

DE PROFUNDIS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649551750

De Profundis by Oscar Wilde

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OSCAR WILDE

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BY

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AUTHORIZED EDITION

**JOHN W. LUCE & CO.
BOSTON**

23493.33(1)

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A PREFATORY DEDICATION

MY DEAR DR. MEYERFELD,—It is a great pleasure to dedicate this new edition of De Profundis to yourself. But for you I do not think the book would have ever been published. When first you asked me about the manuscript which you heard Wilde wrote in prison, I explained to you vaguely that some day I hoped to issue portions of it, in accordance with the writer's wishes; though I thought it would be premature to do so at that moment. You begged however that Germany (which already held Wilde's plays in the highest esteem) should

PREFATORY

have the opportunity of seeing a new work by one of her favourite authors. I rather reluctantly consented to your proposal; and promised, at a leisured opportunity, to extract such portions of the work as might be considered of general public interest. I fear that I postponed what was to me a rather painful task; it was only your visits and more importunate correspondence (of which I frankly began to hate the sight) that brought about the fulfilment of your object. There was no idea of issuing the work in England; but after despatching to you a copy for translation in Die Neue Rundschau, it occurred to me that a simultaneous publication of the original might gratify Wilde's English friends and admirers who had expressed curiosity on the subject. The decision was not reached without some misgiving, for reasons which need only be

DEDICATION

touched upon here. Wilde's name unfortunately did not bring very agreeable memories to English ears: his literary position, hardly recognised even in the zenith of his successful dramatic career, had come to be ignored by Mr. Ruskin's countrymen, unable to separate the man and the artist; how rightly or wrongly it is not for me to say. In Germany and France, where tolerance and literary enthusiasm are more widely distributed, Wilde's works were judged independently of the author's career. Salomé, prohibited by the English censor in the author's lifetime, had become part of the repertoire of the European stage, long before that finest of all his dramas inspired the great opera of Dr. Strauss; whilst the others, performed occasionally in the English provinces without his name, were still banned in the London