

Himself and Others

Wilde, asked what was his real ambition in life, replied:

God knows! I won't be a dried-up Oxford don, anyhow. I'll be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other I'll be famous, and if not famous I'll be notorious. Or perhaps ... I'll rest and do nothing These things are on the knees of the gods. What will be, will be.



It is sad. One half of the world does not believe in God, and the other half does not believe in me.



When I had to fill in a census paper I gave my age as nineteen, my profession as genius, my infirmity as talent.



When he heard a passer-by say: 'There goes that bloody fool Oscar Wilde', he remarked to his companion:

It's extraordinary how soon one gets known in London.



Wilde himself did not 'walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in his mediaeval hand', as Gilbert suggested in Patience. Said Wilde long afterwards:

Anyone could have done that. The great and difficult thing was what I achieved – to make the whole world believe that I had done it.



Going into a florist's shop in Jermyn Street, he asked for several bunches of flowers to be removed from the window. 'With pleasure, sir. How many would you like to have?' asked the assistant.

Oh, I don't want any, thank you. I only asked to have them removed from the window because I thought that they looked tired.



When people agree with me I always feel that I must be wrong.



I consider ugliness a kind of malady, and illness and suffering always inspire me with revulsion. A man with the toothache ought, I know, to have my sympathy, for it is a terrible pain, yet he fills me with nothing but aversion.



I never put off till tomorrow what I can possibly do – the day after.



Sir Bernard Partridge often told of a dinner party in Tite Street with Oscar and his wife. A chicken was brought in and Oscar took up the carvers and tried to cut a wing but laid them down again wearily, saying:

Constance, why do you give me these ... pedestrians ... to eat?



To know everything about oneself one must know all about others.



Wilde dined expensively in Paris, sometimes at the Cafe de Paris. He excused the luxury by saying:

It's a duty we owe to the dignity of letters.



He once wrote to Sherard: I am hard at work being idle.



Asked by Arthur Balfour what his religion was, he replied:

Well, you know, I don't think I have any. I am an Irish Protestant.



To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.



It became evident that lectures would not keep the taxgatherer from the door, and one day he was accosted on his Tite Street doorstep. 'I have called about the taxes,' said a little man. Demanded Wilde haughtily:

Taxes! Why should I pay taxes?

'But, sir, you are the householder here, are you not? You live here, you sleep here,' came the reply.

Ah, yes; but then, you see, I sleep so badly.



I am the only person in the world I should like to know thoroughly, but I don't see any chance of it just at present.



I shall never make a new friend in my life, though perhaps a few after I die.



After bringing a friend back to his Merrion Square house he said:

I want to introduce you to my mother. We have founded a Society for the Suppression of Virtue.



I was influenced by my mother. Every man is when he is young.

A Woman of No Importance



Swinburne is so eloquent that whatever he touches becomes unreal.



Mr Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty.