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OSCAR WILDE

Born 1854, Dublin, Ireland

Died 1900, Paris, France

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Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

OSCAR WILDE

*Only Dull People Are
Brilliant at Breakfast*

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To know nothing about their great men is one of the necessary elements of English education.

We spend our days, each one of us, in looking for the secret of life. Well, the secret of life is in art.

The supreme object of life is to live. Few people live. It is true life only to realize one's own perfection, to make one's every dream a reality.

To me the life of the businessman who eats his breakfast early in the morning, catches a train for the city, stays there in the dingy, dusty atmosphere of the commercial world, and goes back to his house in the evening, and after supper to sleep, is worse than the life of the galley slave – his chains are golden instead of iron.

Bad art is a great deal worse than no art at all.

... nothing is worth doing except what the world says is impossible.

To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist – the problem is entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one’s vinegar.

Life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

There is always more brass than brains in an aristocracy.

Good kings are the only dangerous enemies that modern democracy has.

I have always been of the opinion that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative . . .

... the British cook is a foolish woman, who should be turned, for her iniquities, into a pillar of that salt which she never knows how to use.

Of Shakespeare it may be said he was the first to see the dramatic value of doublets, and that a climax may depend on a crinoline.

... the stage is not merely the meeting-place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life.

The true dramatist . . . shows us life under the conditions of art, not art in the form of life.

... our ordinary English novelists . . . fail . . . in concentration of style. Their characters are far too eloquent and talk themselves to tatters. What we want is a little more reality and a little less rhetoric . . . we wish that they would talk less and think more.

They lead us through a barren desert of verbiage to a mirage that they call life: we wander aimlessly through a very wilderness of words in search of one touch of nature. However, one should not be too severe on English novels; they are the only relaxation of the intellectually unemployed.

A poet can survive everything but a misprint.

... a poet without hysterics is rare.

There is no such thing as a stupid American. Many Americans are horrid, vulgar, intrusive and impertinent, just as many English people are also; but stupidity is not one of the national vices. Indeed, in America there is no opening for a fool. They expect brains even from a boot-black, and get them.

As for marriage, it is one of their most popular institutions. The American man marries early, and the American woman marries often; and they get on extremely well together.

America has never quite forgiven Europe for having been discovered somewhat earlier in history than itself.

... it would be a very good thing if people were taught how to speak. Language is the noblest instrument we have, either for the revealing or the concealing of thought; talk itself is a sort of

spiritualized action; and conversation is one of the loveliest of the arts.

The only form of fiction in which real characters do not seem out of place is history.

Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion; and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband; indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages; but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ago ceased to talk scandal about her.

Unless one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating.

Nobody, even in the provinces, should ever be allowed to ask an intelligent question about pure

mathematics across a dinner table. A question of this kind is quite as bad as inquiring suddenly about the state of a man's soul . . .

But what is the good of friendship if one cannot say exactly what one means? Anybody can say charming things and try to please and to flatter, but a true friend always says unpleasant things, and does not mind giving pain. Indeed, if he is a really true friend he prefers it, for he knows that then he is doing good.

The only thing that sustains one through life is the consciousness of the immense inferiority of everybody else, and this is a feeling that I have always cultivated.

I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying.

I have always been of opinion that hard work is simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatever to do.

All that is known by that term [*fin de siècle*] I particularly admire and love. It is the fine flower of our civilization: the only thing that keeps the world from the commonplace, the coarse, the barbarous.

Flaubert did not write French prose, but the prose of a great artist who happened to be French.

I was thinking in bed this morning that the great superiority of France over England is that in France every bourgeois wants to be an artist, whereas in England every artist wants to be a bourgeois.

Prayer must never be answered: if it is, it ceases to be prayer and becomes correspondence.

I have made an important discovery . . . that alcohol, taken in sufficient quantities, produces all the effects of intoxication.

Missionaries, my dear! Don't you realize that missionaries are the divinely provided food for destitute and underfed cannibals? Whenever they are on the