

# UNKNOWN WIVES OF WELL-KNOWN MEN

## \* XXII—THE WIFE OF OSCAR WILDE

BY ARTHUR HOWARD PICKERING



HE first meeting of Oscar Wilde with the beautiful Miss Lloyd, who afterward became his wife, had in it something of the dramatic. One afternoon while out calling with his mother, Lady Wilde, he was presented to a lovely young

girl with whom he talked for some time and in whom he became very much interested, so much so that when leaving the house he turned to his mother and said:

"By the by, mamma, I think of marrying that girl."

Lady Wilde laughed, for she was accustomed to her son's eccentricities and sudden fancies.



MRS. WILDE

This fancy, however, was buried deeper than any that had gone before. Oscar Wilde went to America; he lectured, posed, talked and wrote until his name was as familiar in the chief cities of the United States as in England. He returned home, he settled down to steady literary work, and—much to the amazement of Lady Wilde, as well as of his friends—he married "that girl."

Constance Lloyd was the daughter of Horatio Lloyd, Queen's Counsel, an English gentleman who had gained a great reputation as a lawyer for a very erudite opinion on certain railway bonds which were ever afterward known as "Lloyd's bonds." Constance was a beautiful girl, with masses of thick wavy chestnut hair, large blue eyes, beautifully penciled eyebrows, a broad forehead and a figure full of grace. In their early married days, when Mr. Wilde was still practicing his gospel of the beautiful, and was himself the head and front of the æsthetic movement in England, his young wife was a willing and loving disciple, and wore the æsthetic gowns and artistic colors approved of and designed by her husband. Walter Pater has written nobly on the subject of beauty; but Mr. and Mrs. Wilde were willing in their own persons to preach their sermon.

The first appearance of Mrs. Wilde in society was a marked success; her youth, her beauty, her freedom from affectation, her lovely æsthetic gowns, were the talk of the town. Few persons knew how bashful this lovely young girl really was, what an effort she had to make before she entered a drawing-room. Mrs. Wilde often says now that her first season, after her marriage, was torture to her; the constant meeting of new people, the knowledge that she must do her best to make a pleasing impression, hung like a pall over her whenever she left her pretty home. In her own house, on her reception days, it was even worse; and yet she always appeared perfect mistress of herself and of the occasion, and the very bashfulness from which she suffered lent a new and, as it were, a far-off charm to this pretty woman. In her own person she furnished an excuse and at the same

time a text for her husband's essays on beauty. No one, who saw her in those early days, in her clinging draperies of dull gray or blue, or in her graceful white Grecian gowns, can ever forget the beautiful pictures she presented.

Ultra-æstheticism in dress having gone out of fashion, and having accomplished its work, Mrs. Wilde to-day is only æsthetic enough to tinge the fashions of the season with her own personality. Her gowns are perfect examples of good taste in fold, harmony and color. She is still so æsthetic as to care for the beautiful; but she bends the fashions of the day to her own sweet will instead of clinging to the mediæval forms re-introduced, some years ago, by her husband. Indeed, in no manner is Mrs. Wilde conspicuous to-day, excepting for her beauty and good taste, any more than is her husband, who has returned to the somewhat conventional costume of the latter portion of the nineteenth century, and only occasionally helps to make a new color or a flower "the rage."

To see Mrs. Wilde at her best, one should visit her at her pretty house in Tite Street, Chelsea. On one side of the hall is Mr. Wilde's "den," where books, periodicals, manuscripts and flowers are to be found on all sides. The dining-room is at the back, and is a study in ivory white; walls, ceiling, furniture and china all harmonize. Above stairs is the drawing-room, with its many beautiful panels of stamped Japanese leather, its few perfect specimens of bric-à-brac, its low, comfortable lounges, its graceful chairs, its pretty tea table with its delicate porcelain and old silver, its artistic etchings, and its full-length portrait of Oscar Wilde in an old-fashioned costume. Here on Wednesday afternoons during the season, Mrs. Wilde can be found, with her two pretty boys clinging to her gown, dispensing "tea" to her guests and receiving them with gracious hospitality, while her husband assists with his ever-ready fund of witty talk.

There are two children, both boys, Cyril and Vivian. Oscar Wilde laughingly says that he has put them at a disadvantage with this modern age by giving them such romantic names; the names of Cyril and Vivian do seem out of place in the money-making, materialistic world of London; but yet it is hardly to be expected that the Wilde boys will ever become business men. With such a father and such a sweet, poetic and lovely mother, it almost goes without saying that the boys must develop into artists of some sort or other. They are attractive boys, with great masses of thick, wavy brown hair, thoughtful blue eyes, and the sturdy strength and rounded limbs of young Greeks.

Although Mrs. Wilde has always taken such a lively interest in her husband's pursuits, and has cared for all that is truly beautiful, she has by no means neglected the more homely duties of domestic life. She overlooks her household in almost an American fashion, and herself cares for the pleasures and necessities of her children.

Americans, especially those who have become famous in literature or art, are always sure of a hearty welcome from the Wildes. Mrs. Wilde has never yet crossed the Atlantic, but hopes to do so some day. Her boy Cyril is an adventurous spirit whose ambition is to be a sailor and to sail to America, where he has promised to visit all his dear American friends and have some "tea and cake" with them. Edgar Fawcett, Edgar Saltus, Clyde Fitch and Jonathan Sturges are all friends of Mrs. Wilde, and are sure to find their way to her pretty home whenever they pass through



MRS. WILDE AND HER BOY, CYRIL

\* In this series of pen-portraits of "Unknown Wives of Well-Known Men," commenced in the January, 1891, JOURNAL, the following, each accompanied with portrait, have been printed:

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London. Any American who wishes to see London society and does not meet and visit Mrs. Wilde has lost one of the most delightful opportunities offered by that great metropolis, for her home proves that it is not alone unlimited wealth and gorgeous entertainments that attract interesting men and women. There is perhaps no house in London where more brilliant and delightful people congregate during the season, and where the talk is sure to be so effervescent, as in the little salon presided over by Mrs. Oscar Wilde. Poets, artists, sculptors, members of Parliament, scientific men, actors and actresses, ladies of high title, men of lofty position, and the gilded youth of the day, gather together around Mrs. Wilde's tea-table, attracted quite as much by the charm of the hostess as by the inimitable wit of her husband.