

# The Causeur\*

Sir Max Beerbohm

I have always retained great admiration for Oscar Wilde's essays and his fancy stories and his plays. And I deem myself very fortunate in having often heard his surpassingly brilliant conversation.

I suppose there are now few survivors among the people who had the delight of hearing Oscar Wilde talk. Of these I am one.

I have had the privilege of listening also to many other masters of table-talk – Meredith and Swinburne, Edmund Gosse and Henry James, Augustine Birrell and Arthur Balfour, Gilbert Chesterton and Desmond MacCarthy and Hilaire Belloc – all of them splendid in their own way. But assuredly Oscar in *his* own way was the greatest of them all – the most spontaneous and yet the most polished, the most soothing and yet the most surprising.

That his talk was mostly a monologue was not his own fault. His manners were very good; he was careful to give his guests or his fellow-guests many a conversational opening; but seldom did anyone respond with more than a very few words. Nobody was willing to interrupt the music of so magnificent a virtuoso. To have heard him consoles me for not having heard Dr. Johnson or Edmund Burke, Lord Brougham or Sydney Smith.

\* *Adam International Review*, xxii, nos 241–3 (1954) viii–ix.

## NOTE

In 1954, the centenary of Wilde's birth was commemorated and a plaque was affixed to his Chelsea house, 16 Tite Street. See 'Plaque for Oscar Wilde's House', *The Times* (London), (30 July 1953) p. 10; Irene Pengilly, 'Chelsea Week', *The Times* (London), (24 May 1954) p. 5; 'Centenary of the Birth of Oscar Wilde', *The Times* (London), (12 Aug 1954) p. 8; 'Commemoration of Oscar Wilde: Chelsea Ceremony', *The Times* (London), (18 October 1954) p. 8; 'Wilde Centenary', *Plays and Players* (London), II, no. 2 (Nov 1954) 21; 'Special Exhibitions at British Museum', *The Times* (London), (12 Oct 1954) p. 10; Compton Mackenzie, 'Sidelight', *The Spectator* (London), cxciii (29 Oct 1954) 523; 'Sir Max Beerbohm Tribute to Wilde', *The Times* (London), (15 Oct 1954) p. 5; and 'Tributes from France and Belgium', *Adam International Review*, xxii, nos 241–3 (1954) viii–ix. For a note on Sir Max Beerbohm see p. 272.