

# Memories of Trinity Days\*

Horace Wilkins

‘Wilde was a queer, awkward lad’ – a lad ‘who hardly ever made a step he didn’t knock something over. He was big, ungainly and clumsy to such a degree that it made him a laughing stock. But those who made fun of Wilde did not know him. He was a big-hearted, liberal fellow, who never did a mean, underhanded thing, and his last shilling was at anybody’s disposal.’

Wilkins remembered Oscar as a backward boy, ‘ever moping and dreaming,’ and as he talked, Wilkins made a sweeping statement:

‘One day a thing happened which seemed, as it were, to change the current of Wilde’s life. He wrote a poem which he read at one of the class symposiums. It struck me as a beautiful thing, but when he had finished reading, the bully of the class laughed sneeringly. I never saw a man’s face light up with such savagery of hate as Wilde’s. He strode across the room and, standing in front of the man, asked him by what right he sneered at his poetry. The man laughed again and Wilde slapped him across the face.

‘The class interfered, but inside of an hour the crowd was out behind the college arranging for a fight.

‘Wilde, in a towering rage, was ready to fight with howitzers if necessary, but the bully wanted to fight with nature’s weapons. No one supposed that Wilde had a ghost of a show, but when he led out with his right it was like a pile-driver. He followed the surprised bully up with half a dozen crushers and that ended it.

‘Talk about that man being a “pallid young man”; when I see these allusions in the newspapers I always think of his fighting qualities. I think he would make an ox shake his head and blink.

‘Well, after that, Wilde’s stock was high at Trinity. It seemed to put new ambition into him and the next term found him at the head of all his classes. He seemed to be able to master everything he tackled.’

\* Lloyd Lewis, and Henry Justin Smith, *Oscar Wilde Discovers America* [1882] (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936) pp. 8–9. Editor’s title.

## NOTE

Memories of Trinity days came to Horace Wilkins, a Britisher in Salt Lake City, Utah, when, in 1882, he read of Wilde’s prominence during his American lecture tour.