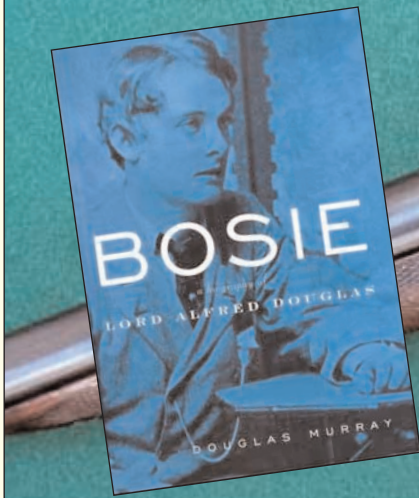


# Bosie's Gun.

By  
John Campbell

Part II.



## Lord Alfred Puts Shooting Aside As Oscar Wilde Rises, Then Falls In British Society.

On balance, the internet is one of the greatest boons to ever befall mankind. In my view, it ranks right alongside Johann Gutenberg's printing press and Marconi's radio. Mostly because each of them resulted in explosions of information.

In fact, never before in history has so much information been so instantly accessible and retrievable as with the internet. As a result, I was able to discover a great deal about the previous owner of my Westley Richards 20 Ga. double in a matter of minutes... not months.

All I did was enter "Lord Douglas" into a Google search box and hit "go." Seconds later, I was presented with scores of options. It was like opening the lid to a buccaneer's treasure box. I clicked my heart out

for hours, becoming ever more fascinated with the story that was unfolding before me on the screen.

Incredible people soon became the key players: Oscar Wilde, The Marquess of Queensberry, George Bernard Shaw and Winston Churchill.

What's more, the story had everything: Literature, drama, intrigue, passion, international scandal, tragedy, crime & punishment, redemption... and sport. Shooting sport. And the Westley Richards in my gunroom undoubtedly played a role in it. At least the shooting part.

From a purely biographical perspective, I first discovered that I was really dealing with someone known as Lord Alfred Douglas. He was born October 22, 1870 at



**Bosie as he entered the renowned Oxford.**

Ham Hill House in Worcestershire, and died on March 20, 1945, shortly before the end of WW II in Europe. He was the third son of John Sholto Douglas, the ninth Marquess of Queensberry... whose name will forever be affixed to the famous Marquess of Queensberry Rules of boxing. The Marquess was also a noted sportsman and shooter.

His son, the young Lord Alfred, was often known by his nickname "Bosie." This stemmed from "Boysie," a common West Country nickname, and one his mother used to call him. The appellation simply meant "little boy." But the term soon transformed itself into "Bosie," which stuck for a lifetime. Lord Alfred was educated at Winchester College as well as Magdalen College,

Oxford. In later life he would author many books as well as a great deal of highly regarded poetry. In fact, George Bernard Shaw compared Bosie's work to Shelley, Frank Harris (perhaps too exuberantly) compared him to Shakespeare, and three of Bosie's works were included in the famous Oxford Book of English Verse.

But it was at Oxford's Magdalen College in 1891, when Bosie encountered the most propitious person in his life: the dashing and brilliant Irish writer, Oscar Wilde.

The time was early summer of 1891 and opening night of Wilde's highly acclaimed play "Lady Windermere's Fan." When they were introduced, Wilde was instantly captivated by Bosie's wit and intelligence. But the connection went dangerously beyond this, and soon developed into a situation that would ultimately destroy both men.

At the time, Wilde was married to the beautiful Constance Lloyd and had two sons. But an indiscreet Canadian houseguest had awakened Wilde's latent homosexual nature a few years earlier. This personal predilection was impossible for Wilde to contain, and he soon engaged in a rather public liaison with Bosie. This included the services of "rent



**Beaded fences on Bosie's 20 are a feature of higher level Westley Richards guns.**

boys” as well as other forms of indulgences that were not easily countenanced in Victorian England.

Bosie’s father, the Marquess of Queensberry, inevitably caught wind of the affair and became incensed that his son was cavorting around London with England’s most famous playwright. So, in 1895, and just a few days after the opening of Wilde’s play, “The Importance Of Being Earnest,” the Marquess stormed into Wilde’s London club, The Abermarle. He did not find Wilde in attendance there, so he left his card. And on the card, the Marquess angrily wrote [To] “Mr. Wilde posing as a Somdomite” [sic]. This insult did not sit well with Wilde, even if it was misspelled. And Bosie (who hated his father at the time), urged Wilde to sue the Marquess for libel (a social offense that would have a recurring role in Bosie’s life).

At this point, George Bernard Shaw, author Frank Harris (also a celebrated field shot), Bosie, and Oscar Wilde met for luncheon at London’s Café Royal. There, Shaw and Harris tried to dissuade Wilde from pursuing his action against the Marquess of Queensberry. Sadly, they failed. Especially since Bosie himself was determined that his father should pay.

In later years, Bosie and Shaw would carry on a lengthy correspondence. But the two never met again personally. Still, it was an odd friendship. Shaw was an atheist, socialist, vegetarian, and highly opinionated. Douglas was religious, litigious, cantankerous, and lonely. In fact, playwright Anthony Wynn has recently transformed the correspondence between Shaw and Bosie into a play, “Bernard and Bosie: A Most Unlikely Friendship.”

In the end, Wilde did sue for libel, but

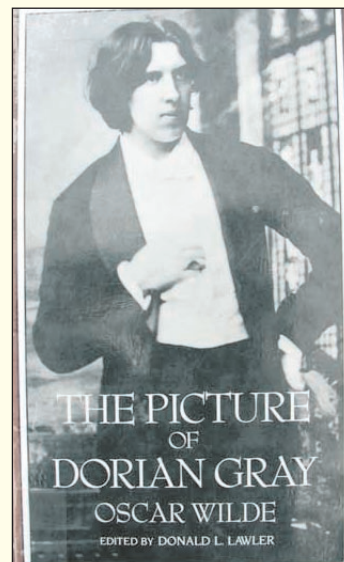
it was not a wise decision.

Apart from today’s permissive society, homosexuality was patently illegal in England at the time. This worked against Wilde’s claim of libel... as did the rent boys whom the Marquess’ attorney called as witnesses.

Wilde lost his case and, to add insult to injury, was subsequently arrested by the Crown for homosexual conduct. Against this he had little defense, since his previous “show trial” for libel had fairly well established the fact of his gay lifestyle.

Wilde was, of course, convicted and sentenced to two years of hard labor in Reading Gaol prison. Dickensian conditions there brought about a series of illnesses that effectively brought Wilde to death’s door. Things did not go well for Wilde outside the walls either. While his days in confinement ground on, Wilde’s wife, Constance, and their two sons fled England in disgrace. And Bosie himself went into self-imposed exile. Tortured by his conscience, Wilde then did something that would cap his ruin in later years. While still in prison, he wrote a deeply personal letter to Bosie which he titled *De Profundis* (from the depths). It laid the blame for Wilde’s downfall at Bosie’s feet, and detailed why they could never be together again.

Upon Wilde’s release in 1897, he



**Oscar Wilde’s fame began with Dorian Gray. Library of Congress photo.**

immediately left for France and joint exile with his wife, Constance. Collaterally, he made a very stupid move. This was to instruct his literary agent to copy *De Profundis* and deliver the original to Bosie.



**Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas.**

According to Bosie, such a letter was never delivered to him. Instead, it would vanish for more than a decade, then resurface and ultimately be delivered to the public at large.

Depleted from his incarceration and financially derelict, Wilde died in France in 1900. It was Bosie who paid the funeral expenses. Wilde was interred at *Le Pere Lachaise* near Paris... also the resting place of Frederic Chopin, Honore de Balzac and (much later) Jim Morrison.

For more than a decade after this, the ghost of Wilde haunted Bosie. Even marriage and a son could not exorcise Wilde from Bosie's world. In 1912, a new book was published on the life of Oscar Wilde. And it contained some very juicy passages that Bosie instantly considered libelous. Boise sued. And, as part of the proceedings, the original and unedited version of Wilde's *De Profundis* was uncovered in (of all places) the British Museum and read into the record. The Fleet Street Boys latched onto this blockbuster immediately, published the document, and ruined both Bosie and Wilde all



**Wilde's gravesite at *Le Pere Lachaise*.**

himself from Wilde. During this time, Bosie's wife, Olive, left Bosie and took their son with her. They later reconciled, but never lived together again.

In 1924, after Bosie repeatedly accused Winston Churchill, First Lord of The Admiralty, of conspiracy in the death of Lord Kitchener and wartime profiteering, Churchill finally retaliated by bringing his own prosecution for criminal libel against Lord Alfred. Bosie lost this case and was sentenced to six months in Wormwood Scrubs prison. This experience changed Bosie. He now had first-hand knowledge of prison conditions and could identify with the suffering Wilde endured during his incarceration. Following his release, Bosie's writings showed a renewed respect for Wilde, and he regarded his old friend with fondness and affection, rather than bitterness.

It is also heartening to know that the rift between Lord Alfred and Winston Churchill was eventually closed in good will. During WW II, Bosie stood firmly with the Old Bulldog and considered Hitler a "rav-

over again. For another decade, Bosie lived with a fierce loathing of Oscar Wilde and of everything Wilde stood.

Bosie even converted to Roman Catholicism and pursued more than a dozen court actions in attempt to clear his name and separate him-

ing” lunatic. Bosie even wrote a popular pamphlet, *Ireland And the War Against Hitler*, which called for the seizure of Ireland’s southern ports to protect shipping. This, due to little-publicized accounts that Ireland’s officially professed neutrality was tainted with some German sympathies.

Eventually, Lord Alfred’s nephew, Francis, the new Marquess of Queensberry, convinced Bosie to write a poem in support of Churchill. He did, and Queensberry sent a copy to the legendary British Prime Minister.

Churchill liked the sonnet, and penned a response to Queensberry, asking that it be passed along to Lord Alfred:

“Thank you very much for the sonnet you sent me which I shall keep and value. Tell him [Douglas] from me that “Time Ends All things.”” To both men’s credit, it was a noble resolution to their previous antipathy. Bosie’s sonnet to Churchill appeared in the July 4, 1941, edition of the *Daily Mail*:

Not that of old I loved you over-much,  
Or followed your quick changes with  
great glee,

While through rough paths of harsh  
hostility

You fought your way, using a sword  
and crutch

To serve occasion. Yours it was to  
clutch

And lose again, Lacking the charity  
Which looks behind the mask, I did  
not see

The immanent shadow of the ‘Winston  
touch.’

Axe for embedded evil’s cancerous  
roots.

When all the world was one vast funer-  
al pyre,



**Winston Churchill was the object of Lord Alfred’s accusations in 1924. In 1941, the two had reconciled as a result of the war.**

Like genie smoke you rose, a giant  
form  
Clothed with Addisonian attributes  
Of God-directed angel. Like your sire  
You rode the whirlwind and out-  
stormed the storm.

But misfortune did not completely  
abandon Bosie’s life. His only son,  
Raymond, would be diagnosed as schizo-  
phrenic, institutionalized, and remain so until  
his death in 1964.

His father, Lord Alfred “Bosie”  
Douglas, died on March 29, 1945. •

**Part III in the next DGClassics.**