

SOME NEW BOOKS.

Walter Pater. A book that has received much more attention than it has merited on this side of the Atlantic is 'The Life of Walter Pater' by THOMAS WRIGHT, two volumes (Putnam). Mr. Wright, who is known to a good many readers as the author of 'The Life of Edward Fitzgerald' and 'The Life of Sir Richard Burton,' tells us in a preface that the book before us would not have been written had not the meagre outline of Pater's life given by Mr. A. C. Benson been crowded with astonishing errors. We may find it a short road to a correct conception of one of the most brilliant and original writers of the Victorian era if we mention some of Mr. Benson's more striking errors of commission and omission. He asserts, for instance, that Pater 'did not arrive at his plentiful vocabulary, as some writers have done, by the production of large masses of writing that never see the light.' Benson adds that 'it is a curious fact that Pater evinced no precocious signs in boyhood and youth of a desire to write. Pater's family cannot remember that he ever showed any particular tendency to write.' That is to say Pater, the author, sprang into being like a phoenix. The truth is that both as a boy and as a young man he wrote enormously. He was, as Mr. Wright's pages prove, perhaps the most voluminous boy author that ever lived. Elsewhere Mr. Benson says that Pater wrote poetry from childhood except a few humorous verses. As a matter of fact he wrote thousands of lines of serious poetry, and although he burned most of them the author of these volumes has in his possession, he tells us, many hundreds of them. Mr. Benson also says that 'Pater wrote very few letters'; on the contrary, the subject of this biography wrote an enormous number of letters—some as many as 400 to a single friend—and many minor errors to lay stress upon two of particular importance. Mr. Benson avers that Pater's chief interest during his early life was philosophy. The fact is that his chief interest during all his youth and early manhood was English literature. Perhaps the most amazing of all Mr. Benson's mistakes is his assertion that Pater's metaphysical studies did not destroy his strong religious instincts. The book before us tells us that Pater was for many years entirely severed from religion. He had his period of active revolt, as had John Bunyan.

Previous writers about Pater have alleged that he was intimately acquainted with Swinburne and D. G. Rossetti. The present biographer has Mr. Watts-Dunton's authority for saying that Rossetti 'did not know Pater at all, save that he once saw him for five long minutes.' And Mr. Swinburne told Mr. Wright that he never met Pater to speak to him more than twice—once in London and once at Oxford, and that even then few words passed. As previous writers have assumed that Pater was a great authority on Greek art and the Renaissance, the conclusion that Mr. Wright has been forced to come to with regard to Pater's scholarship is likely to give most readers something of a shock. We shall return to this matter later, but observe here that Pater's knowledge, even of the subjects with which he was supposed to be most intimate, was by no means deep. He glowed with genuine love for delicate perfection, but he was too indolent to turn up his sleeves, as it were, and apply himself to the tremendous task of getting to the foundation of things. With him intuition seems to have been an adequate substitute for study. The present biographer, who has assumed that there is more Greek feeling in Pater than in Landor, who was a profound scholar as well as a great writer, more Greek feeling indeed in Pater than in any other English man of letters, with the exception of Keats, who knew nothing of Greek literature at first hand. If now one asks, 'What is the main interest of this book?' the biographer replies that it brings the reader into the closest possible relationship with one of the most distinguished writers of his day. The book is crowded from cover to cover with good things said by Pater and his friends. Pater's most intimate friend, Mr. G. R. McQueen, testifies that he was as amusing a companion as could be found.

The fact that Pater was of Dutch lineage should be borne constantly in mind by those who wish to understand his temperament and character. The Pater family from whom the subject of this biography was descended are first heard of in England about the year 1570, when a Dutch colony toward the close of the eighteenth century one Thompson Pater married a Miss Esther Grange and went out to New York, whence with three children, Elizabeth, Richard and William, he after a while found his way back to London, where he practised as a surgeon until his death in 1812. His elder son Richard followed his father's profession and settled in Stepney, and there on August 4, 1838, his only son, Walter, was born. The subject of this biography was born. The boy had a slightly malformed back and was of a curiously unprepossessing appearance. In 1853, when he was thirteen and a half years old, he was sent to the King's School, Canterbury, where Christopher Marlowe and many famous authors, Bishops and statesmen had been taught—the school, in fact, of Dr. Strong in 'David Copperfield.' The King's School at Canterbury, indeed, is the oldest public school in England, having been founded in the seventh century, when Kent was a separate kingdom and the arrival of Augustine's monks the latest sensation. That Pater was never a popular boy at King's School is not surprising, seeing that he avoided almost every one except two friends named Dombrain and McQueen, of whom he was so much thereafter. Nor did the head master, the Rev. George Wallace, really take to him, while Pater on his part, was never attracted to Mr. Wallace. If, however, Pater rather disliked the head master he always respected him for his wide learning and especially for his knowledge of history, literature and theology. He strove to imbue the boys with his own love for English literature and it is possibly due to him in some measure that Pater became one of the best public school authors that ever lived. In 1855 he succeeded in gaining an exhibition of £60 a year, tenable for three years, at Oxford. At the same time he received £30 as a gift from the school, and some friends made him a present in money. We next see him as Queen's College, Oxford, his friend McQueen, having gone to Balliol.

The Oxford of 1855, although its main features have been preserved, differed in numerous respects from the Oxford of today. Carfax Church is gone—or all but its tower; Brasenose College, after throwing down the row of old tenements that stood in its way, has presented itself with a new quadrangle, showing a handsome frontage to High street; Balliol has shot up a forest of gables and pinnacles. Broad street, the colleges of Keble and Magdalen, which have added to their original buildings many additional wings or stories or oriel; while Mansel Oxford, as its palatial pile in St. Aldgate's vicarage, has also broken out into architecture. The rest of the city is in general appearance much the same as it is now. Of individual undergraduates who were residents at the King's School in the middle of the century, A. C. Swinburne and John Addington Symonds of Balliol and John Richard Green of Jesus. Thirteen years had elapsed since Newman had gone over to Rome; Pusey, who was 66, had thirty more years to live; Keble was 58, had only eight years before him. The Broad Church leaders, Stanley and Jowett, were just 40. Matthew Arnold, who was 39, had been appointed professor of poetry in the preceding year, and the lecture, owing largely to his gift at the 'Phyllisites,' were attracting very little attention. As regards the dons, very many were of the old school—even the hard drinker not being extinct—but here and there might be found a Tractarian and here and there a Scientist. Such was the state of the university into which Pater, a raw youth of 19, had drifted. We may mention that after a year or two at Queen's Pater found his circle of friends narrow at the college, his room, 'formerly graceless and austere,' began to clothe themselves, though the decorative features were used with guarded moderation. It is noteworthy that with all Pater's reputation for aestheticism the equipment of every set of rooms occupied by him and of each of his houses, until the last few years of his life, was scanty and even bald. He was thrifty even to an amusing degree, as persons who have known Pater in his later years will testify.

It has been asserted by Mr. Gosse and by most of the writers who have followed him that Pater's severance from religion synchronized with his adoption of humanistic ideas—that is to say, shortly after his removal from Queen's College to Brasenose. The author of these volumes shows, however, that Pater began to be a doubter even before he left the King's School at Canterbury, and he lost all belief by the year 1859. He was influenced chiefly by Stanley, Kingsley and Maurice. For a time he called himself a Christian Socialist. Before long, however, he broke quite away from Christianity and pained his friend McQueen by indulging in 'Mephistophelean sneers' not only at 'trammelling creeds' but at religion in whatever form and in attacks upon the Bible, after the manner of Voltaire, although many of his remarks were evidently aimed simply with a view to giving his hearers a shock. McQueen reminded him of their peaceful, happy religious life at Canterbury; but Pater in reply said, 'At Canterbury I was a contemptible hypocrite.'

In March, 1860, the English religious world was cast into a ferment by the publication of 'Essays and Reviews,' written by seven Broad Churchmen, whom their opponents blithely called 'The Seven.' The chief of these was John Addington Little Benjamin, as the undergraduates called him—was at this time and had been since October, 1855, regius professor of Greek, which 'he taught the university for nothing'—that is to say, £40 a year; nor was it till 1865 that, 'after much bitterness,' his salary was raised to £500. Pater, who attended Jowett's lectures, was much drawn to the great man, and it is recorded that Jowett, pleased with some remarks that Pater once said to him, 'You have a mind that will attain eminence.' Referring to Jowett's great originality as a writer and a thinker Pater afterward said, 'He seemed to have taken the measure not merely of all opinions but of all possible ones and to have put the last refinements on literary expression.' And again, 'When he lectured on Plato it was a fascinating thing to see these qualities of his as if in the same given to the world at Oxford. His weakness in Latin and Greek, for example, was perfectly known not only among the dons of Brasenose and other colleges but also to his own pupils. The Rev. Anthony Bath wrote to the author of this biography: 'In my first term it was the business of Pater to take up his freshmen lectures in the 'Georgic'; and he was much at sea in them. On one occasion he insisted in translating *fragilis stragulae hordeis cubito* ('Georgic' l. 317) 'fills the barn with grain,' instead of 'binds the sheaves with the brittle straw.' He persisted in his translation and of course we gave way, but I suppose he saw that something was wrong, for after this we had to write out the correct one and our exercises were not returned to us.' It seems that at this time one of the duties of the tutors of Brasenose was to give divinity lectures to their pupils. Very often Pater shirked them, but his pupils, having discovered the dialling task and would gladly have had no class in divinity, took particular pains to be present and punctual. Finally he seized the bull by the horns and boldly discontinued the lectures. Another Brasenose man recalls that he attended Pater's lectures on Aristotle, and says that 'his manner in lecturing was to bend his head over the table at which he sat and to cover his eyes with his hands, not often looking up to ask a question.'

The essay on Winkelmann was followed by articles on Leonardo, Botticelli, Pico and Michael Angelo, and in 1873 Pater revised them thoroughly and republished them with some other studies in book form under the title 'The Renaissance.' Almost all of the writer's admirers concur with Mr. Wright in regarding 'The Renaissance' as Pater's masterpiece. 'Few more stimulating works have left the press, but no man could read it without being thrilled—raised almost himself—excited to more strenuous efforts. Very slowly had this rampired citizen risen, but its foundation is laid with sapphires and all its borders are pleasant stones. 'Marius' and everything else that he did pale before the barbaric beauty of this gorgeous structure.' Pater's teaching is briefly this: 'Imitate the men of the Renaissance and enjoy yourself.' Like them, you will find your delight in the 'attitude of the scholar,' in the 'enthusiastic acquisition of knowledge for its own sake.' We sorely need say that among the features of that great period was a revival of interest in the classics and in Greek sculpture. Homer, *Eclogues*, Ovid, Vergil, Horace, who so long had lain dank or dusty and forgotten in ancient libraries, were taken down, dried or cleaned and studied with enthusiasm. As the poet, such analogies that nobody else would have suspected. When, on the other hand, Pater lays himself out to decant on masterpieces of Greek plastic art in metal and marble the charm evaporates. He merely does what other men have done as well, if not better. Even to the essays on Greek sculpture, however, he does succeed in giving a certain warmth and sensuousness that are unobtainable in a conventional history, as on the Christian ideal. 'The essence of humanism,' says Pater, 'is the belief that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can be so wholly meaningless as they have spoken nor cradle beside which they have hushed their voices, nor dream which has once been entertained by actual human minds, nothing about which they have ever been passionate or expended time and zeal.' A latter day humanism had by this time become Pater's creed. 'Fain, Christian knight, satyr, martyr, Mary the Virgin and Venus—who appear to be not a virgin, Egepan and pantheist all huddled together amply in his tolerant brain; and his conversation comported with his writings.' In one breath he would utter sayings that befitted a Voltaire, and in the next express the hope that he would be buried in the robes of a Capuchin. Although, however, Pater's humanism is conspicuous enough in his 'Renaissance,' his present biographer holds that the qualities which have immortalized that book are wholly independent of the creed of the writer.

The opening essay in the book is an attempt to prove that there was a literary and artistic revival before the Renaissance period—a sort of false dawn; and he tells the stories of 'Amis and Amilre' and 'Aucassin and Nicolette,' both of which, Pater insists, reveal a yearning after freedom and duty and a revolt against the faith of the times. 'The gods who had been already beginning to peep from their hiding places, Venus, tired of her carves and bats, had already yoked her car with sparrows; Apollo, having snapped in twain his shepherd's crook, was furbishing up his rusty lyre; the aged Jupiter, who, clad in rabbit skins—a sort of polar Robinson Crusoe—had for 500 years pottered about the loobergs of Spitzbergen, was moving southward. In short, Olympus was once more beginning to go gay.'

Mr. Wright in the close of his first volume says that Pater approached the period when Pater began to write his work on the Renaissance, the kernel of which is the presentation of the theory that art should be pursued for its own sake. It is absurd of course to suppose that the phrase 'art for art's sake' was originated by Pater; years and years before his time artists and writers had formed themselves into two camps—the classic, who held that every work of art should have a moral, and the modern, who held that it should be pursued for its own sake. According to Théophile Gautier, one of its chief defenders, the formula 'signifies for the artist a method of working disengaged from all preoccupations save from that which in itself is beautiful. In the light of this doctrine, when rightly understood, all subjects are indifferent and acquire value only in proportion to the sentiment, style and power of ideal presentation brought to bear on them by the individual artist.' Among these Englishmen who assailed the theory was Swinburne and Pater, although his acquaintance with the poet was very slight, soon became a member of a brilliant circle of poets and artists—chiefly young men—for whom 'art for art's sake' was the watchword. A distinguished member of this circle, Mr. John Payne, speaking of the favorite contention of the classic school that an art work should be judged by its usefulness, or to use a more comprehensive word, its truth, says: 'Those who speak of truth in art as the end follow a delusive aim that can but result in the enfeebling of their own powers and landing them in the sandy deserts of didacticism.' He adds: 'They forget that beauty is necessarily truth; indeed it is, in the words of the divine pupil of Socrates, the splendor of truth—that is to say, something higher and more noble than truth itself. Truth, on the contrary, is not necessarily beautiful, and as the highest beauty cannot exist truth per se can never be his object.'

Pater is generally held to have been of a sluggish, cold nature, and his present biographer admits that there was a passivity, an unbroken calm about his latter days. In the early period of his adult life, however, when he wrote the essay on Winkelmann, he was 'when provoked by art and literature all fire, and it was certainly, to those who saw him at Oxford, the fire of the lava' and the 'feverish nursing of his own motive of his life' that attracted him so much in Winkelmann's character. Pater himself burned ardently to do notable work in the world and to win plaudits of the finest minds. He was struggling onward, upward, often disheartened, in the discouraging, depressing Oxford of the latter '50s and early '60s—in which to exhibit a spark of enthusiasm or a more than the usual stampery young man of letters and to attract glances of astonishment not unmingled with pity.

Mr. Wright does not hesitate to say that to Oxford Pater, considered as a man of genius, owed absolutely nothing. All his inspiration came from elsewhere. As a tutor Pater was scarcely a success, being, as we have previously said, a scholar in the sense given to the word at Oxford. His weakness in Latin and Greek, for example, was perfectly known not only among the dons of Brasenose and other colleges but also to his own pupils. The Rev. Anthony Bath wrote to the author of this biography: 'In my first term it was the business of Pater to take up his freshmen lectures in the 'Georgic'; and he was much at sea in them. On one occasion he insisted in translating *fragilis stragulae hordeis cubito* ('Georgic' l. 317) 'fills the barn with grain,' instead of 'binds the sheaves with the brittle straw.' He persisted in his translation and of course we gave way, but I suppose he saw that something was wrong, for after this we had to write out the correct one and our exercises were not returned to us.' It seems that at this time one of the duties of the tutors of Brasenose was to give divinity lectures to their pupils. Very often Pater shirked them, but his pupils, having discovered the dialling task and would gladly have had no class in divinity, took particular pains to be present and punctual. Finally he seized the bull by the horns and boldly discontinued the lectures. Another Brasenose man recalls that he attended Pater's lectures on Aristotle, and says that 'his manner in lecturing was to bend his head over the table at which he sat and to cover his eyes with his hands, not often looking up to ask a question.'

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labor—indeed, of overelaboration. Some of the sentences have to be reread carefully before the meaning can be grasped. Mr. Wright would say that 'it is indeed not as a builder of sentences, but as a selector and manipulator of words that Pater excels. The words and phrases are quietly and aesthetically beautiful and the language is marvelously fitted to the thought; but while the jewels are all of price the design of which they form a part is sometimes unhandsome and often bewildering.' The original of 'Marius the Epicurean,' was Richard C. Jackson, a young scholar whom in the spring of 1877 Pater met in Canon Liddon's rooms at Christ's Church. Mr. Jackson, born in 1851, is, we are told, of noble lineage, being descended from the ancient Earls of Norfolk. At the age of 12 he could recite the whole of the Book of Psalms and much of Dante's 'Inferno.' At the age of 26 Jackson was an authority on poetry, sculpture, painting and music. 'I am dumfounded,' he exclaimed, when Pater cited it with him. 'I will write a book about you.' He did. For months Pater could never separate himself from Jackson, and plied him with thousands of questions. One day Pater, after producing a number of little squares of white paper on which he had been making notes, said to Jackson: 'See, I told you I would write a book about you, and now I have sucked your veins dry I will begin. Some time, however, was to elapse before the plan was carried out. Pater had no leisure in 1882 in Cornwall, and on his return said to Jackson: 'I have made some progress with my 'Marius,' the setting of which is to be ancient Rome in the time of Marcus Aurelius. Similar studies—suggested by the changes of the soul—have occupied the minds of scholars in all ages; but mine will, I think, have a savor, a bouquet of its own.' It only remained for him to go to Rome to obtain local color. To Rome he went in 1883, and having surrendered himself to the influences of 'moldering plinths,' 'vague entablatures' and 'shattered colonnades,' he returned to England and proceeded hofort with his project.

Pater's book, 'Marius, the Epicurean,' was published in February, 1888. It is perfectly true that Pater had no leisure in 1882 in Cornwall, and on his return said to Jackson: 'I have made some progress with my 'Marius,' the setting of which is to be ancient Rome in the time of Marcus Aurelius. Similar studies—suggested by the changes of the soul—have occupied the minds of scholars in all ages; but mine will, I think, have a savor, a bouquet of its own.' It only remained for him to go to Rome to obtain local color. To Rome he went in 1883, and having surrendered himself to the influences of 'moldering plinths,' 'vague entablatures' and 'shattered colonnades,' he returned to England and proceeded hofort with his project.

It will be recalled by readers of the book that at Rome Marius is thrown into the company of the stoical and noble minded Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and finds gods whom no man can number. The old Olympians had formidable rivals in a host of new duties introduced from other lands. Eventually he becomes acquainted with a society of Christians whose sincerity and the beauty of whose religion make an indelible impression on him. He does not become a Christian, however, for though he dies in the midst of a persecution it is not for his religious principles, but in an attempt to save from death a Christian friend. Those who buried him, nevertheless, held his death, according to their generous view of the matter, to have been of the nature of a martyrdom, and he was buried with the honors of a martyr. 'I am sorry for his own life,' Mr. Jackson has observed that 'it is curious that the latter days of Pater's own life bore a remarkable resemblance to the latter days of Marius; for Pater could never truthfully be said to have become a Christian.' 'What,' inquired a friend of him, 'was your objection in writing 'Marius'?' 'To show,' replied Pater, 'the necessity of religion.' There are, of course, a society of Christians acquainted with the beauty of the finest perhaps being Marius's soliloquy as he crosses the Campagna and the account of the service in St. Caecilia's house and of the death of Marius. As the present biographer says, however, one is struck not so much by particular scenes as by the extraordinary care lavished upon the book as a whole—every sentence, perhaps every word of which had been carefully weighed. It has the finish of an exquisitely wrought alabaster vase.

Between March, 1885, and the spring of 1887 Pater was engaged upon a series of delicate sketches, subsequently issued in book form as 'Imaginary Portraits,' a title derived apparently from Landor's 'Imaginary Conversations.' Mr. Gosse and Mr. Arthur Symonds concur in the opinion that one of these imaginary portraits, 'Denys l'Auxerrois,' displays the peculiarities of Pater's style with more concentration than any other of his writings. 'Which the best of your books?' some one once inquired of Pater. 'Imaginary Portraits,' he answered.