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THE LIFE OF
WALTER PATER



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This Work is
Dedicated,
by kind permission,
to the
Rev. Arthur J. Galpin, M.A.,
Head Master of
Walter Pater's School,
The King's School, Canterbury.

Mr. Benson's principal errors of commission and omission are as follows:—

(1) He makes the astounding statement (p. 210) 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," and on page 209 he says, "It is a curious fact that Pater showed 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. As a matter of fact, both as a boy and as a young man he wrote enormously. He was, as these pages will show, perhaps the most voluminous boy-author who ever lived.

(2) Mr. Benson says (p. 209) Pater "never wrote poetry in childhood except a few humorous verses." On the contrary he wrote thousands of lines of serious poetry. I have in my own possession many hundreds of them, and I have been promised more.

(3) He states that Roman Catholicism in the Pater family was of late date. On the contrary the Paters are a very old Catholic family.

(4) He does not once mention Harbledown where Pater lived all the time he attended the King's School at Canterbury.

(5) He says (p. 3) that Pater was popular at school. On the contrary, as these pages will show, no boy could possibly have been more unpopular there.

(6) He says that Pater was apt to be reticent about his own interior feelings. On the contrary, when with very intimate friends like McQueen and Richard C. Jackson, he wore his heart on his sleeve. He told them everything. Had it not been so this book would have been sadly lacking in details.

(7) Mr. Benson does not once mention five of Pater's most intimate friends, Dombrain, McQueen, Richard C. Jackson, Richard Robinson, and M. B. Moorhouse;

and this is the more remarkable because the first three were almost daily in his company for four, five, and seventeen years respectively, and shared all his confidences. No friendships, as these pages will show, could possibly have been more intimate or more interesting. To omit Mr. Jackson is to tell the story of David and leave out Jonathan.

(8) Mr. Benson tells nothing about the great central event of Pater's life—his connection with the St. Austin's "Monkery," which is something like giving an account of Wellington and leaving out the Peninsular War and Waterloo.

(9) He says (p. 11), that Pater's chief interest in his early life was philosophy. It was not so. His chief interest during all his youth and early manhood was English Literature.

(10) He says (p. 13)—and perhaps this is the most amazing error of all—that Pater's metaphysical studies did not destroy his strong religious instinct. On the contrary, as Mr. Gosse (*Critical Kit-Kats*, p. 250) says, and as our own pages prove, Pater was for many years quite severed from religion. He had his period of active revolt, as had John Bunyan and John Newton.

(11) He gives scarcely any anecdotes about Pater, and records only two or three uninteresting conversations.

(12) He says (p. 185) that Pater "wrote very few letters"—a legend to be found in most accounts of Pater, who, on the contrary, wrote an enormous number of letters—as many as four hundred, indeed, to one friend—and most of them long letters.

I am also sorry to notice that Mr. Benson tries to justify Pater at the expense of Jowett. But, at the period to which we refer, Pater was hopelessly in the wrong, and the attitude that Jowett assumed and the action that he took were such as all men acquainted with the whole story must unhesitatingly approve (see

are dealt with in the first seventeen chapters of this book absolutely nothing has previously been recorded beyond what might be put in half-a-dozen lines. "I am very glad," said Mr. Edmund Gosse to me, "that you intend giving so full an account of Pater's early life (1839 to 1859), for of that hardly anything is known."

On Pater's ancestry and the connection of the family with Weston Underwood and Olney I have been able to throw much new light, my information being derived from the Catholic registers at Olney, which were kindly examined for me by the Rev. F. Carton de Wiart, and from several members of the Pater family, including Mr. John E. Pater of Olney. For the extracts from the Thornton Registers I have to thank Dr. Bradbrook of Bletchley.

Of Pater's childhood at Enfield and Tonbridge a full account is given, my informants and helpers being Mr. John James Pater, Mr. Edgar Aloysius Pater, Mrs. Goodwin (Mira Pater), Mrs. Comber (Eleanor Pater), and Mr. John Fagg.

My pages will be found particularly rich in reminiscences of Walter Pater's "saintly boyhood" at Canterbury, and I have to thank for much kind assistance in connection with this period the Right Rev. Bishop Mitchinson, formerly Head-Master of the King's School; the Rev. A. J. Galpin, the present Head-Master, to whom this book is, by permission, dedicated; the Rev. J. B. Kearney, who figures conspicuously in these pages; and the following old King's School boys—Mr. George Spain,⁽¹⁾ the Rev. Dr. Chafy, the Rev. Henry Biron, Sir George Collard, and Mr. J. R. McQueen.

My pen quite fails me in my endeavours to express my gratitude to Mr. McQueen for his countless favours. But for him this book would have had a huge and unseemly gap. Indeed in the whole course of my

(1) It is also interesting to note that Mr. Spain's sister married one of the sons of Mr. Anby Beatson, the Second Master of the King's School.

literary career I have never met with a more courteous and generous helper. He has taken the trouble to write scores of letters, and he has patiently answered to the best of his ability hundreds of questions, by word of mouth as well as by letter, for I have several times had the pleasure of being his guest at Chailey. I have also been much helped by the manuscript notes made by Mr. McQueen in a copy of Mr. Benson's book and in a copy of the work on Pater written by Mr. Ferris Greenslet. The latter book, although it contains a few apposite observations, is a most lamentable performance. As an example, and a fair example of Mr. Greenslet's style, I may give one little remark of his on Pater's study "Diaphanéité." He says, "The whole composition moves with unwonted resiliency and speed"—which is absurd enough when one remembers that "resiliency" is the quality of leaping back. "I observed the 'resiliency'," comments Mr. McQueen, "but I am never surprised at anything I read in these little memoirs about Pater. The authors seem to think fine writing makes up for ignorance of facts."⁽¹⁾

It had not previously been known that Pater wrote anything before 1863, but I am able, as I have already intimated, to prove that he was one of the most prolific of schoolboy writers, and that in his undergraduate days he was equally industrious with his pen. Of the poems written by him at this period, a number, some of them long poems and signed, have been placed in my hands, but I have not printed them in this book, for, although (owing to their wealth of biographical detail) they have been of enormous service to me in the writing of it, they are by no means masterpieces. They are pretty, that is all; and such being the case, and taking into consideration the reception of the *Essays from the Guardian*, when issued in book-form, I have judged that lovers of Pater would resent their appearance at the present moment. I have,

(1) Letter to me, 10th April, 1905.

was thrown. In short my ambition is that the critics and the public should say of this book—"It tells the truth, though only just as much as the public has a right to know, and tells it in the most delicate manner conceivable." In spite of occasional appearances to the contrary, the careful student of Pater's life will observe, as did Lady Dilke, a gradual ennobling of Pater's character until at last he is seen to have regained the faith and the scrupulous rectitude of his boyhood. Indeed, the reader may, if so disposed, and in accordance with a suggestion already made, regard him as an æsthetic—a High Church—John Bunyan or John Newton—men who in their latter days looked back with distress on an unsatisfactory past; dwellers in Mesech who eventually worked their way into a more satisfying country.

As previous writers have assumed that Pater was a great authority on Greek Art and the Renaissance period, the conclusion I have been forced to come to in respect to Pater's scholarship will necessarily give most readers something of a shock. I refer to my remarks at the end of Chapters 28 and 39, in which I have pointed out (and my knowledge has been derived not only from the study of Pater's works but also from the admissions of some of his nearest friends) 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 work of getting to the foundation of things. The truth is that for his own peculiar art he did not require a prodigious amount of knowledge. He is the grasshopper of English literature. "Thou sippest a little dew," we may say to him, and

"Straight thou makest the woods and hills
Echo all with thy dulcet trills." (1)

(1) "The Grasshopper," by Remy Belleau. Translated by Mr. John Payne in Section II. ("The Renaissance,") of his *Flowers of France*.

And, after all, intuition is everything. There is more Greek feeling in Pater even than in Landor, who was a profound scholar as well as a great writer; there is more Greek feeling in Pater, indeed, than in any other English litterateur, with the exception of Keats.

In writing this book I have endeavoured to bear in mind that the first duty of a biographer is to try to avoid hurting the feelings of any living person. With this in view I have gone through my manuscript again and again, and have struck out everything that seemed likely to give offence. Thus I have thought it well to omit all Pater's jibes at religion. As regards the Jowett incident, I have given Pater's antagonist his precise due. Because I am writing the Life of Pater that is no reason why I should blacken the memory of every man who could not see eye to eye with him. However, with my treatment of this incident, and of some others which are also delicate in the extreme, I feel sure the most captious will find no fault. Pater's home life—his life with his sisters—I have considered absolutely sacred, and there will be found in these pages nothing whatever about it—that is to say, nothing subsequent to his childhood; and, indeed, it is a subject that could not in the least interest the general public. There is an old saw which runs, "Try to please and you will please." If the opposite holds good, namely, "Try not to displease and you will not displease," I shall account myself happy.

It may be asked "What is the main interest of this book?" The reader who looks for desperate adventures will be grievously disappointed. Pater slew neither lion nor centaur nor ferocious sow. No, the charm of this book—if charm it have—will be that it brings the reader into the closest possible relationship with one of the most distinguished writers of his day. Certainly it is crowded from cover to cover with good things said by Pater and his friends, and I wish the reader to feel that, with its wealth of anecdote and

I have only, in conclusion, to give myself the pleasure of expressing my warmest thanks to all persons who have kindly assisted me in what has proved a most difficult undertaking—and especially to the following :

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 Birchall, Rev. Oswald, Blackhill, Camphill, Malvern.
 Biron, Rev. Henry, Lympe Vicarage, Hythe.
 Bradbrook, Dr., Bletchley.
 Browne, Rev. Charles H., St. Andrew's, Eastbourne.
 Browning, Mr. Oscar, Cambridge.
 Bussell, Rev. Dr., Brasenose College.
 Bywater, Professor J., Oxford.
 Campbell, Professor Lewis.
 Chafy, Rev. Dr., Rous Lench Court, Evesham.
 Channing, Mr. Francis Allston, M.P., 40, Eaton Place, S.W.
 Collard, Sir George, Canterbury.
 Comber, Mrs. (Eleanor Pater), Hughendon, Exmouth.
 Fagg, Mr. John, Quarry Bank, Tonbridge.
 Friend, Mr. G. H.
 Galton, Rev. Arthur, Corbar Tower, Buxton.
 Goodwin, Mrs. (Mira Pater), Arnold House, Lowestoft.
 Hornby, Rev. Dr., Provost of Eton.
 Irvine, Rev. J. W., Littlemore Vicarage, Oxford.
 Jackson, Mr. Richard C.
 Kearney, Rev. J. B., Cambridge.
 Kearney, Miss, 146, Hills Road, Cambridge.
 McQueen, Mr. John Rainier, of Braxfield, Brookhouse, Chailey, Sussex.
 Magrath, Rev. Dr., Provost of Queen's College, Oxford.
 Marshall, Rev. J. M., Croft Rectory, Darlington.
 Matthews, Rev. W. Stabb, Briercliffe Vicarage, Burnley.
 Mitchinson, The Right Rev. Bishop, Master of Pembroke College.
 Monck, Rev. G. G., Closworth Rectory, Sherborne, Dorset.
 Moore, Rev. Canon Edward, Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford.
 Moorhouse, Rev. M. B., Audley Park Gardens, Bath.
 Moneypenny, Rev. P. A., Hadlow.
 Nunn, Rev. J. E., Shefford, Lambourne.
 Pater, Mr. Edgar Aloysius.
 Pater, Mr. John E., Olney:
 Pater, Mr. John James, 109, Clarendon Road, Southsea.
 Pater, Miss E. M., Olney.
 Payne, Mr. John.
 Raper, Mr. R. W., Trinity College, Oxford.
 Reichel, Rev. Oswald, A la Ronde, Lymptstone, Devon.
 Robertson, Mr. Magnus Rainier, Chailey, Sussex.
 Sayce, Rev. Professor, Queen's College, Oxford.
 Sampson, Mr. C. H., Brasenose College, Oxford.
 Shand, Rev. Canon, Clayton Rectory, Hassocks, Sussex.
 Spain, Mr. George, 10, Victoria Square, Newcastle-on-Tyne.
 Swinburne, Mr. A. C., The Pines, Putney.

Terrell, Mr. Gilbert A'Becket, Great Fish Hall, Hadlow.
 Walker, Mr. Frank, Brasenose College.
 Ward, Mr. H. Snowden, Golden Green, Hadlow.
 Watson, Mr. R. Talbot.
 Watts-Dunton, Mr. Theodore, The Pines, Putney.
 Williams, Rev. W. S. G., Great Rollright Rectory, Chipping Norton.

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 laid under contribution.

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THOMAS WRIGHT.

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