

NEWMAN AND PATER

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN stood alone among the leaders of the Oxford Movement; he possessed that elevation of mind which helps men to acquire those rare attributes of spiritual cultivation making for the fulfilment of life in Divine terms. Spiritual cultivation demands many qualities, and among the more prominent may be discerned courage, strength of will, sensitiveness, courtesy, kindness, refinement and enlightened reticence. The last the rarest of all and the crown of the edifice. It is no rhetorical exaggeration to urge that all of these reposed in the character of Newman.

Newman was logical in matters of Religion; he combined the qualities of the scholar and the saint; he was an intellect and a master of the spiritual life. A gentleman deeply read in English literature and with whom I have had the privilege of written discussion on the character of Newman, noted in one of my papers that he regarded it as singular that Newman, more than the other outstanding figures of the Oxford Movement, should have possessed the logical faculty in a degree unusual among men of definitely artistic temperament, as his perfect literary style shews him to have been. My literary acquaintance went on to say that although the criticism and comparisons Froude makes in Volume IV, "Short-Studies," have encountered much hostile criticism he still thought that Newman was shewn in his proper magnitude as against Keble's wistful sentiment and Pusey's hesitation. Newman's mastery of spiritual values shewed that he was well versed in the management of conduct.

To assert that we live in an age of economic and political disturbance is a journalistic commonplace. Men of ability have sought to contribute to our knowledge of the social structure of society; ancient institutions have been criticised, changed out of all recognition and in some cases destroyed: invariably the approach has been material in concept. The world in which we live is consciously or unwittingly displaying a lamentable lack of understanding in regard to the

spiritual, life has become incomplete and one-sided. The younger generation need an example within their own environment. They must have before their eyes a life which is capable of becoming their ideal. This is the basis of development, the foundation of the fine art of living. It is unfortunate that in the world to-day they perceive at a first glance so many men respected for successful lives built up on material foundations. The problem remains that of translating spiritual values into social forms: the spiritual basis of life must be seen in the social structure.

Such is the position now, such was to some extent the position in the 19th Century at the advent of the Oxford Movement, but for the fact that the economic structure of society in this country had then no real experience of depressions. Liberal thought was dominant, freedom of action was the impetus to material wealth, freedom of thought was the means of ultimate knowledge, the intellect of man was capable of reaching to un contemplated heights if allowed to develop unfettered. Then, as now, men were known to style themselves Liberal Catholics. The Oxford Movement indicated the danger. Newman visualised the intellect of man as becoming rampant, something wild and evil in direction. The intellect of man must be restrained, the force of materialism arrested, the balance restored. Such was Newman's Critique of Liberal thought and practice.

For the future it is clear that spiritual leadership will need to be allied to a sound knowledge of the economic and sociological structure of society. It is unfortunate that Newman did not work in this field for he was one who could have shewn its real relation to the world of the spirit.

Dr. Barry writes of Newman in the Anglican Church; he tells of his "still figure, and clear, low penetrating voice, and the mental hush that fell upon his audience while he meditated alone with the Alone, in words of awful austerity. His discourses were poems, but transcripts too from the soul, reasonings in a heavenly dialectic"

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With the development of the French doctrine of Art for Art's sake English Literature was influenced by a period of

Æstheticism. This period was marked by the masterly writings of Walter Pater; in our own day it has suffered something of a reverse by the death of George Moore. Pater was a stylist, his work resembles elegant marble, chiselled to perfection with delicate care. Beauty to him demanded a cloistered, secluded appreciation, and it was thus he dealt with the Renaissance—*Studies in Art and Poetry*. He wrote of Michelangelo—"He loved the very quarries of Carrara, those strange grey peaks which even at mid-day convey into any scene from which they are visible something of the solemnity and stillness of evening, sometimes wandering among them month after month, till at last their pale ashen colours seem to have passed into his painting; and on the crown of the head of the David there still remains a morsel of uncut stone, as if by one touch to maintain its connection with the place from which it was hewn"—(*The poetry of Michelangelo*'). On the fly leaf of Pater's Preface to "The Renaissance" is to be found this significant quotation "yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove."

My same literary acquaintance has aptly pointed out that, moreover, Pater had a system, concealed though it was by the artistry of writing. It was that Beauty is at the heart of life; it is to be sought in contemplated seclusion, and in its culmination, is in the mind. Perhaps it might be called another aspect of that reaction against the acquisitive haste of this modern age.

The mind of Pater conceived beauty not in the abstract but in the concrete, he said so in so many words, yet his writings had about them a sensitive impression of abstraction. The suggestion that Michelangelo's genius was in harmony with itself was true of Pater as of his subject in that essay. Things of beauty as dealt with by Pater, seemed more ethereal than real. The concrete never mastered his style; he achieved a perfect balance in utterance through his contemplative process. The quality of his life precluded him from becoming sensual, as George Moore sometimes was, and thus his setting in English Literature was definite. He seldom dealt with the beauty of the trivial. He was the master in the period of Æstheticism.

Walter Pater was born in 1839 and died in 1894. He lived in the environment of a University; he was a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford. His life was essentially one of scholarly retirement, his doctrines were academic. It has been said of Pater that he had a strange and secretive mind. In his writings he shewed that he had great interest in those moments in history when men's minds seemed to be actuated by a dynamic urge forward—The Renaissance, the beginnings of Christianity, and it would not be out of place to dwell upon this latter example with the following quotation:

“The æsthetic charm of the Catholic Church, her evocative power over all that is eloquent and expressive in the better mind of man, her outward comeliness, her dignifying convictions about human nature: all this, as abundantly realised centuries later by Dante and Giotto, by the great medieval church-builders, by the great ritualists like Saint Gregory, and the masters of sacred music in the middle age—we may see already, in dim anticipation, in those charmed moments towards the end of the second century.” (*Marius the Epicurean*—Chapter XXII “The Minor Peace of the Church.”) In his novel, *Marius the Epicurean*, we see something of Pater's philosophy; he “seems to spiritualise the search for pleasure as far as sacrifice pure and simple.” (Legouis and Cazamian's *History of English Literature*).

Modern criticism of Pater as a writer asserts that he failed to be among the great ones in English Literature for the reason that his sensitive refinement, developed as it was to a high degree, undermined his power to create. Creative strength seems to demand at intervals a certain brusqueness in the style of a writer, it requires him to take hold of reality. Pater could not descend to this mode of expression, and in this he was justified. He was interested in the technique of writing as witness his charming Essay on Style.

Pater, like George Moore after him, will surely be remembered as a stylist. His accurate and polished writing is a sheer delight to those who take pleasure in the 19th century. To some of us it is comforting that the workmanship of the stylist still persists.

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