

**Walter Pater**  
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THERE are some unworldly types of character which the world is able to estimate. It recognises certain moral types, or categories, and regards whatever falls within them as having a right to exist. The saint, the artist, even the speculative thinker, out of the world's order as they are, yet work, so far as they work at all, in and by means of the main current of the world's energy. Often it gives them late, or scanty, or mistaken acknowledgment; still it has room for them in its scheme of life, a place made ready for them in its affections. It is also patient of doctrinaires of every degree of littleness. As if dimly conscious of some great sickness and weariness of heart in itself, it turns readily to those who theorise about its unsoundness. To constitute one of these categories, or types, a breadth and generality of character is required. There is another type of character, which is not broad and general, rare, precious above all to the artist, a character which seems to have been the supreme moral charm in the Beatrice of the [248] *Commedia*. It does not take the eye by breadth of colour; rather it is that fine edge of light, where the elements of our moral nature refine themselves to the burning point. It crosses rather than follows the main current of the world's life. The world has no sense fine enough for those evanescent shades, which fill up the blanks between contrasted types of character—delicate provision in the organisation of the moral world for the transmission to every part of it of the life quickened at single points! For this nature there is no place ready in its affections. This colourless, unclassified purity of life it can neither use for its service, nor contemplate as an ideal. "Sibi unitus et simplicatus esse," that is the long struggle of the *Imitatio Christi*. The spirit which it forms is the very opposite of that which regards life as a game of skill, and values things and persons as marks or counters of something to be gained, or achieved, beyond them. It seeks to value everything at its eternal worth, not adding to it, or taking from it, the amount of influence it may have for or against its own special scheme of life. It is the spirit that sees external circumstances as they are, its own power and tendencies as they are, and realises the given conditions of its life, not disquieted by the desire for change, or the preference of one part in life rather than another, or passion, or opinion. The character we mean to indicate achieves this [249] perfect life by a happy gift of nature, without any struggle at all. Not the saint only, the artist also, and the speculative thinker, confused, jarred, disintegrated in the world, as sometimes they inevitably are, aspire for this simplicity to the last. The struggle of this aspiration with a lower practical aim in the mind of Savonarola has been subtly traced by the author of *Romola*. As language, expression, is the function of intellect, as art, the supreme expression, is the highest product of intellect, so this desire for simplicity is a kind of indirect self-assertion of the intellectual part of such natures. Simplicity in purpose and act is a kind of determinate expression in dexterous outline of one's personality. It is a kind of moral expressiveness; there is an intellectual triumph implied in it. Such a simplicity is characteristic of the repose of perfect intellectual culture. The artist and he who has treated life in the spirit of art desires only

to be shown to the world as he really is; as he comes nearer and nearer to perfection, the veil of an outer life not simply expressive of the inward becomes thinner and thinner. This intellectual throne is rarely won. Like the religious life, it is a paradox in the world, denying the first conditions of man's ordinary existence, cutting obliquely the spontaneous order of things. But the character we have before us is a kind of prophecy of this repose and simplicity, coming as it were in the order of grace, not of nature, by [250] some happy gift, or accident of birth or constitution, showing that it is indeed within the limits of man's destiny. Like all the higher forms of inward life this character is a subtle blending and interpenetration of intellectual, moral and spiritual elements. But it is as a phase of intellect, of culture, that it is most striking and forcible. It is a mind of taste lighted up by some spiritual ray within. What is meant by taste is an imperfect intellectual state; it is but a sterile kind of culture. It is the mental attitude, the intellectual manner of perfect culture, assumed by a happy instinct. Its beautiful way of handling everything that appeals to the senses and the intellect is really directed by the laws of the higher intellectual life, but while culture is able to trace those laws, mere taste is unaware of them. In the character before us, taste, without ceasing to be instructive, is far more than a mental attitude or manner. A magnificent intellectual force is latent within it. It is like the reminiscence of a forgotten culture that once adorned the mind; as if the mind of one philosophêsas pote met' erôtos, + fallen into a new cycle, were beginning its spiritual progress over again, but with a certain power of anticipating its stages. It has the freshness without the shallowness of taste, the range and seriousness of culture without its strain and over-consciousness. Such a habit may be described as wistfulness of mind, the feeling that there is "so much to [251] know," rather as a longing after what is unattainable, than as a hope to apprehend. Its ethical result is an intellectual guilelessness, or integrity, that instinctively prefers what is direct and clear, lest one's own confusion and intransparency should hinder the transmission from without of light that is not yet inward. He who is ever looking for the breaking of a light he knows not whence about him, notes with a strange heedfulness the faintest paleness in the sky. That truthfulness of temper, that receptivity, which professors often strive in vain to form, is engendered here less by wisdom than by innocence. Such a character is like a relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere. It has something of the clear ring, the eternal outline of the antique. Perhaps it is nearly always found with a corresponding outward semblance. The veil or mask of such a nature would be the very opposite of the "dim blackguardism" of Danton, the type Carlyle has made too popular for the true interest of art. It is just this sort of entire transparency of nature that lets through unconsciously all that is really lifegiving in the established order of things; it detects without difficulty all sorts of affinities between its own elements, and the nobler elements in that order. But then its wistfulness and a confidence in perfection it has makes it love the lords of change. What makes revolutionists is either self-pity, or indignation [252] for the sake of others, or a sympathetic perception of the dominant undercurrent of progress in things. The nature before us is revolutionist from the direct sense of personal worth,

that child, + that pride of life, which to the Greek was a heavenly grace. How can he value what comes of accident, or usage, or convention, whose individual life nature itself has isolated and perfected? Revolution is often impious. They who prosecute revolution have to violate again and again the instinct of reverence. That is inevitable, since after all progress is a kind of violence. But in this nature revolutionism is softened, harmonised, subdued as by distance. It is the revolutionism of one who has slept a hundred years. Most of us are neutralised by the play of circumstances. To most of us only one chance is given in the life of the spirit and the intellect, and circumstances prevent our dexterously seizing that one chance. The one happy spot in our nature has no room to burst into life. Our collective life, pressing equally on every part of every one of us, reduces nearly all of us to the level of a colourless uninteresting existence. Others are neutralised, not by suppression of gifts, but by just equipoise among them. In these no single gift, or virtue, or idea, has an unmusical predominance. The world easily confounds these two conditions. It sees in the character before us only indifferentism. Doubtless the chief vein of the life of humanity [253] could hardly pass through it. Not by it could the progress of the world be achieved. It is not the guise of Luther or Spinoza; rather it is that of Raphael, who in the midst of the Reformation and the Renaissance, himself lighted up by them, yielded himself to neither, but stood still to live upon himself, even in outward form a youth, almost an infant, yet surprising all the world. The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty; the statues of the gods had the least traces of sex. Here there is a moral sexlessness, a kind of impotence, an ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a divine beauty and significance of its own. Over and over again the world has been surprised by the heroism, the insight, the passion, of this clear crystal nature. Poetry and poetical history have dreamed of a crisis, where it must needs be that some human victim be sent down into the grave. These are they whom in its profound emotion humanity might choose to send. "What," says Carlyle, of Charlotte Corday, "What if she had emerged from her secluded stillness, suddenly like a star; cruel-lovely, with half-angelic, half-daemonic splendour; to gleam for a moment, and in a moment be extinguished; to be held in memory, so bright complete was she, through long centuries!"

Often the presence of this nature is felt like a sweet aroma in early manhood. Afterwards, as the adulterated atmosphere of the world assimilates [254] us to itself, the savour of it faints away. Perhaps there are flushes of it in all of us; recurring moments of it in every period of life. Certainly this is so with every man of genius. It is a thread of pure white light that one might disentwine from the tumultuary richness of Goethe's nature. It is a natural prophecy of what the next generation will appear, reserved, modified by the ideas of this. There is a violence, an impossibility about men who have ideas, which makes one suspect that they could never be the type of any widespread life. Society could not be conformed to their image but by an unlovely straining from its true order. Well, in this nature the idea appears softened, harmonised as by distance, with an engaging naturalness, without the noise of axe or hammer. People have often tried to find a type of life that might serve as a basement type. The philosopher, the saint, the artist, neither of them can be this type; the order of nature itself makes them

exceptional. It cannot be the pedant, or the conservative, or anything rash and irreverent. Also the type must be one discontented with society as it is. The nature here indicated alone is worthy to be this type. A majority of such would be the regeneration of the world.

+Transliteration: philosophêsas pote met' erôtos.

+Transliteration: chlidê.

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