

Pater (Walter) - "Marius the Epicurean"

Post by "Cassius" of May 13, 2019 at 10:06 AM

Here are the last two chapters of the book. Aside from the focus on Aurelius and the lack of reference to Epicurus, there's something repellent to me that seems to ooze out of every sentence from every section that I glance at. I'd like to find out I am wrong but I see little if anything Epicurean in these concluding thoughts:

"For the weariness came back tenfold; and he had finally to abstain from thoughts like these, as from what caused physical pain. And then, as before in the wretched, sleepless nights of those forced marches, he would try to fix his mind, as it were impassively, and like a child thinking over the toys it loves, one after another, that it [223] may fall asleep thus, and forget all about them the sooner, on all the persons he had loved in life—on his love for them, dead or living, grateful for his love or not, rather than on theirs for him—letting their images pass away again, or rest with him, as they would. In the bare sense of having loved he seemed to find, even amid this foundering of the ship, that on which his soul might "assuredly rest and depend." One after another, he suffered those faces and voices to come and go, as in some mechanical exercise, as he might have repeated all the verses he knew by heart, or like the telling of beads one by one, with many a sleepy nod between-whiles.

For there remained also, for the old earthy creature still within him, that great blessedness of physical slumber. To sleep, to lose one's self in sleep—that, as he had always recognised, was a good thing. And it was after a space of deep sleep that he awoke amid the murmuring voices of the people who had kept and tended him so carefully through his sickness, now kneeling around his bed: and what he heard confirmed, in the then perfect clearness of his soul, the inevitable suggestion of his own bodily feelings. He had often dreamt he was condemned to die, that the hour, with wild thoughts of escape, was arrived; and waking, with the sun all around him, in complete liberty of life, had been full of gratitude for his place there, alive still, in the [224] land of the living. He read surely, now, in the manner, the doings, of these people, some of whom were passing out through the doorway, where the heavy sunlight in very deed lay, that his last morning was come, and turned to think once more of the beloved. Often had he fancied of old that not to die on a dark or rainy day might itself have a little alleviating grace or favour about it. The people around his bed were praying fervently—Abi! Abi! Anima Christiana!+ In the moments of his extreme helplessness their mystic bread had been placed, had descended like a snow-flake from the sky, between his lips. Gentle fingers had applied to hands and feet, to all those old passage-ways of the senses, through which the world had come and gone for him, now so dim and obstructed, a medicinal oil. It was the same people who, in the gray, austere evening of that day, took up his remains, and buried them secretly, with their

accustomed prayers; but with joy also, holding his death, according to their generous view in this matter, to have been of the nature of martyrdom; and martyrdom, as the church had always said, a kind of sacrament with plenary grace."

1881-1884.