IT is pleasant when, looking at medieval sculpture, we are reminded of that of Greece; pleasant likewise, conversely, in the study of Greek work to be put on thoughts of the Middle Age. To the refined intelligence, it would seem, there is something attractive in complex expression as such. The Marbles of Aegina, then, may remind us of the Middle Age where it passes into the early Renaissance, of its most tenderly finished warrior-tombs at Westminster or in Florence. A less mature phase of medieval art is recalled to our fancy by a primitive Greek work in the Museum of Athens, Hermes, bearing a ram, a little one, upon his shoulders. He bears it thus, had borne it round the walls of Tanagra, as its citizens told, by way of purifying that place from the plague, and brings to mind, of course, later images of the "Good Shepherd." It is not the subject of the work, however, but its style, that sets us down in thought before some gothic cathedral front. Suppose the Hermes Kriophorus lifted into one of those empty niches, and the archaeologist will inform you rightly, as at Auxerre or Wells, of Italian influence, perhaps of Italian workmen, and along with them indirect old Greek influence coming northwards; while the connoisseur assures us that all good art, at its respective stages of development, is in essential qualities everywhere alike. It is observed, as a note of imperfect skill, that in that carved block of stone the animal is insufficiently detached from the shoulders of its bearer. Again, how precisely gothic is the effect! Its very limitation as sculpture emphasises the function of the thing as an architectural ornament. And the student of the Middle Age, if it came within his range, would be right in so esteeming it. Hieratic, stiff and formal, if you will, there is a knowledge of the human body in it nevertheless, of the body, and of the purely animal soul therein, full of the promise of what is coming in that chapter of Greek art which may properly be entitled, "The Age of Athletic Prizemen."

That rude image, a work perhaps of Calamis of shadowy fame, belongs to a phase of art still in grave-clothes or swaddling-bands, still strictly subordinate to religious or other purposes not immediately its own. It had scarcely to wait for the next generation to be superseded, and we need not wonder that but little of it remains. But that it was a widely active phase of art, with all the vigour of local varieties, is attested by another famous archaic monument, too full of a kind of sacred poetry to be passed by. The reader does not need to be reminded that the Greeks, vivid as was their consciousness of this life, cared much always for the graves of the dead; that to be cared for, to be honoured, in one's grave, to have tymbos amphipolos,(1) a frequented tomb, as Pindar says, was a considerable motive with them, even among the young. In the study of its funeral monuments we might indeed follow closely enough the general development of art in Greece from beginning to end. The carved slab of the ancient shepherd of Orchomenus, with his dog and rustic staff, the stele of the ancient man-at-arms signed "Aristocles," rich originally with colour and gold and fittings of bronze, are among the few still visible pictures, or portraits, it may be, of the earliest Greek life. Compare them, compare their expression, for a moment, with the deeply incised tombstones of the Brethren of St. Francis and their clients, which still roughen the pavement of Santa Croce at Florence, and recall the varnished polychrome decoration of those Greek monuments in connexion with the worn-out blazonry of the funeral brasses of England and Flanders. The Shepherd, the Hoplite, begin a series continuous to the era of full Attic mastery in its gentlest mood, with a large and varied store of memorials of the dead, which, not so strangely as it may seem at first sight, are like selected pages from daily domestic life. See, for instance, at the British Museum, Trypho,—"the son of Eutychus," one of the
very pleasantest human likenesses there, though it came from a cemetery—a son it was hard to leave in it at nineteen or twenty. With all the suppleness, the delicate muscularity, of the flower of his youth, his handsome face sweetened by a kind and simple heart, in motion, surely, he steps forth from some shadowy chamber, strigil in hand, as of old, and with his coarse towel or cloak of monumental drapery over one shoulder. But whither precisely, you may ask, and as what, is he moving there in the doorway? Well! in effect, certainly, it is the memory of the dead lad, emerging thus from his tomb,—the still active soul, or permanent thought, of him, as he most liked to be.

(Footnote 1: 
Transliteration: tymbos amphipolos. Translation: "a much frequented tomb.")

The Harpy Tomb, so called from its mysterious winged creatures with human faces, carrying the little shrouded souls of the dead, is a work many generations earlier than that graceful monument of Trypho. It was from an ancient cemetery at Xanthus in Lycia that it came to the British Museum. The Lycians were not a Greek people; but, as happened even with "barbarians" dwelling on the coast of Asia Minor, they became lovers of the Hellenic culture, and Xanthus, their capital, as may be judged from the beauty of its ruins, managed to have a considerable portion in Greek art, though infusing it with a certain Asiatic colour. The frugally designed frieze of the Harpy Tomb, in the lowest possible relief, might fairly be placed between the monuments of Assyria and those primitive Greek works among which it now actually stands. The stiffly ranged figures in any other than strictly archaic work would seem affected. But what an undercurrent of refined sentiment, presumably not Asiatic, not "barbaric," lifting those who felt thus about death so early into the main stream of Greek humanity, and to a level of visible refinement in execution duly expressive of it!

In that old burial-place of Xanthus, then, a now nameless family, or a single bereaved member of it, represented there as a diminutive figure crouching on the earth in sorrow, erected this monument, so full of family sentiment, and of so much value as illustrating what is for us a somewhat empty period in the history of Greek art, strictly so called. Like the less conspicuously adorned tombs around it, like the tombs in Homer, it had the form of a tower—a square tower about twenty-four feet high, hollowed at the top into a small chamber, for the reception, through a little doorway, of the urned ashes of the dead. Four sculptured slabs were placed at this level on the four sides of the tower in the manner of a frieze. I said that the winged creatures with human faces carry the little souls of the dead. The interpretation of these mystic imageries is, in truth, debated. But in face of them, and remembering how the sculptors and glass-painters of the Middle Age constantly represented the souls of the dead as tiny bodies, one can hardly doubt as to the meaning of these particular details which, repeated on every side, seem to give the key-note of the whole composition.*(2) Those infernal, or celestial, birds, indeed, are not true to what is understood to be the harpy form. Call them sirens, rather. People, and not only old people, as you know, appear sometimes to have been quite charmed away by what dismays most of us. The tiny shrouded figures which the sirens carry are carried very tenderly, and seem to yearn in their turn towards those kindly nurses as they pass on their way to a new world. Their small stature, as I said, does not prove them infants, but only new-born into that other life, and contrasts their helplessness with the powers, the great presences, now around them. A cow, far enough from Myron's famous illusive animal, suckles her calf. She is one of almost any number of artistic symbols of new-birth, of the renewal of life, drawn from a world which is, after all, so full of it. On one side sits enthroned, as some have thought, the Goddess of Death; on the opposite side the Goddess of Life, with her flowers and fruit. Towards her three young maidens are advancing--were they still alive thus, graceful, virginal, with their long, plaited hair, and long, delicately-folded tunics, looking forward to carry on their race into the future? Presented severally, on the other sides of the dark hollow within, three male persons—a young man, an old man, and a boy—seem to be bringing home, somewhat wearyly, to their "long home," the young man, his armour, the boy, and the old man, like old Socrates, the mortuary cock, as they approach some shadowy, ancient deity of the tomb, or it may be the throned impersonation of their "fathers of old." The marble surface was coloured, at least in part, with fixtures of metal here and there. The designer, whoever he may have been, was possessed certainly of some tranquilising second thoughts concerning death, which may well have had their value for mourners; and he has expressed those thoughts, if lisplying, yet with no faults of commission, with a befitting grace, and, in truth, at some points, with something already of a really Hellenic definition and vigour. He really speaks to us in his work, through his
symbolic and imitative figures,—speaks to our intelligence persuasively. The surviving thought of the lad Trypho, returning from his tomb to the living, was of athletic character; how he was and looked when in the flower of his strength. And it is not of the dead but of the living, who look and are as he, that the artistic genius of this period is full. It is a period, truly, not of battles, such as those commemorated in the Marbles of Aegina, but of more peaceful contests--at Olympia, at the Isthmus, at Delphi--the glories of which Pindar sang in language suggestive of a sort of metallic beauty, firmly cut and embossed, like crowns of wild olive, of parsley and bay, in crisp gold. First, however, it had been necessary that Greece should win its liberty, political standing-ground, and a really social air to breathe in, with development of the youthful limbs. Of this process Athens was the chief scene; and the earliest notable presentment of humanity by Athenian art was in celebration of those who had vindicated liberty with their lives--two youths again, in a real incident, which had, however, the quality of a poetic invention, turning, as it did, on that ideal or romantic friendship which was characteristic of the Greeks.

(Footnote 2: In some fine reliefs of the thirteenth century, Jesus himself draws near to the deathbed of his Mother. The soul has already quitted her body, and is seated, a tiny crowned figure, on his left arm (as she had carried Him) to be taken to heaven. In the beautiful early fourteenth century monument of Aymer de Valence at Westminster, the soul of the deceased, "a small figure wrapped in a mantle," is supported by two angels at the head of the tomb. Among many similar instances may be mentioned the soul of the beggar, Lazarus, on a carved capital at Vezelay; and the same subject in a coloured window at Bourges. The clean, white little creature seems glad to escape from the body, tattooed all over with its sores in a regular pattern.)

With something, perhaps, of hieratic convention, yet presented as they really were, as friends and admirers loved to think of them, Harmodius and Aristogeiton stood, then, soon after their heroic death, side by side in bronze, the work of Antenor, in a way not to be forgotten, when, thirty years afterwards, a foreign tyrant, Xerxes, carried them away to Persia. Kritios and Nesistes were, therefore, employed for a reproduction of them, which would naturally be somewhat more advanced in style. In its turn this also disappeared. The more curious student, however, would still fancy he saw the trace of it--of that copy, or of the original, afterwards restored to Athens--here or there, on vase or coin. But in fact the very images of the heroic youths were become but ghosts, haunting the story of Greek art, till they found or seemed to find a body once more when, not many years since, an acute observer detected, as he thought, in a remarkable pair of statues in the Museum of Naples, if freed from incorrect restorations and rightly set together, a veritable descendant from the original work of Antenor. With all their truth to physical form and movement, with a conscious mastery of delineation, they were, nevertheless, in certain details, in the hair, for instance, archaic, or rather archaistic--designedly archaic, as from the hand of a workman, for whom, in this subject, archaism, the very touch of the ancient master, had a sentimental or even a religious value. And unmistakably they were young assassins, moving, with more than fraternal unity, the younger in advance of and covering the elder, according to the account given by Herodotus, straight to their purpose;--against two wicked brothers, as you remember, two good friends, on behalf of the dishonoured sister of one of them.

Archaeologists have loved to adjust them tentatively, with various hypotheses as to the precise manner in which they thus went together. Meantime they have figured plausibly as representative of Attic sculpture at the end of its first period, still immature indeed, but with a just claim to take breath, so to speak, having now accomplished some stades of the journey. Those young heroes of Athenian democracy, then, indicate already what place Athens and Attica will occupy in the supreme age of art soon to come; indicate also the subject from which that age will draw the main stream of its inspiration--living youth, "iconic" in its exact portraiture, or "heroic" as idealised in various degrees under the influence of great thoughts about it--youth in its self-denying contention towards great effects; great intrinsically, as at Marathon, or when Harmodius and Aristogeiton fell, or magnified by the force and splendour of Greek imagination with the stimulus of the national games. For the most part, indeed, it is not with youth taxed spasmodically, like that of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, and the "necessity" that was upon it, that the Athenian mind and heart are now busied; but with youth in its voluntary labours, its habitual and measured discipline, labour for its own sake, or in wholly friendly contest for prizes which in reality borrow all their value from the quality of the receiver.
We are with Pindar, you see, in this athletic age of Greek sculpture. It is the period no longer of battle against a foreign foe, recalling the Homeric ideal, nor against the tyrant at home, fixing a dubious ideal for the future, but of peaceful combat as a fine art--pulvis Olympicus. Anticipating the arts, poetry, a generation before Myron and Polycleitus, had drawn already from the youthful combatants in the great national games the motives of those Odes, the bracing words of which, as I said, are like work in fine bronze, or, as Pindar himself suggests, in ivory and gold. Sung in the victor's supper-room, or at the door of his abode, or with the lyre and the pipe as they took him home in procession through the streets, or commemorated the happy day, or in a temple where he laid up his crown, Pindar's songs bear witness to the pride of family or township in the physical perfection of son or citizen, and his consequent success in the long or the short foot-race, or the foot-race in armour, or the pentathlon, or any part of it. "Now on one, now on another," as the poet tells, "doth the grace that quickeneth (quickeneth, literally, on the race-course) look favourably." Ariston hydor (3) he declares indeed, and the actual prize, as we know, was in itself of little or no worth--a cloak, in the Athenian games, but at the greater games a mere handful of parsley, a few sprigs of pine or wild olive. The prize has, so to say, only an intellectual or moral value. Yet actually Pindar's own verse is all of gold and wine and flowers, is itself avowedly a flower, or "liquid nectar," or "the sweet fruit of his soul to men that are winners in the games." "As when from a wealthy hand one lifting a cup, made glad within with the dew of the vine, maketh gift thereof to a youth";--the keynote of Pindar's verse is there! This brilliant living youth of his day, of the actual time, for whom, as he says, he "awakes the clear-toned gale of song"--epeon hoimon ligyn (4)--that song mingles sometimes with the splendours of a recorded ancient lineage, or with the legendary greatness of a remoter past, its gods and heroes, patrons or ancestors, it might be, of the famous young man of the hour, or with the glory and solemnity of the immortals themselves taking a share in mortal contests. On such pretext he will tell a new story, or bring to its last perfection by his manner of telling it, his pregnancy and studied beauty of expression, an old one. The tale of Castor and Polydeukes, the appropriate patrons of virginal yet virile youth, starred and mounted, he tells in all its human interest.


(Footnote 4: Transliteration: epeon hoimon ligyn. Translation: "the clear strain of words (i.e. song)." Pindar, Odes, Book O, poem 9, line 47. See page 279 note for reference.)

"Ample is the glory stored up for Olympian winners." And what Pindar's contemporaries asked of him for the due appreciation, the consciousness, of it, by way of song, that the next generation sought, by way of sculptural memorial in marble, and above all, as it seems, in bronze. The keen demand for athletic statuary, the honour attached to the artist employed to make his statue at Olympia, or at home, bear witness again to the pride with which a Greek town, the pathos, it might be, with which a family, looked back to the victory of one of its members. In the courts of Olympia a whole population in marble and bronze gathered quickly,--a world of portraits, out of which, as the purged and perfected essence, the ideal soul, of them, emerged the Diadumenus, for instance, the Discobolus, the so-called Jason of the Louvre. Olympia was in truth, as Pindar says again, a mother of gold-crowned contests, the mother of a large offspring. All over Greece the enthusiasm for gymnastic, for the life of the gymnasia, prevailed. It was a gymnastic which, under the happy conditions of that time, was already surely what Plato pleads for, already one half music, mousike,(5) a matter, partly, of character and of the soul, of the fair proportion between soul and body, of the soul with itself. Who can doubt it who sees and considers the still irresistible grace, the contagious pleasantness, of the Discobolus, the Diadumenus, and a few other precious survivals from the athletic age which immediately preceded the manhood of Pheidias, between the Persian and the Peloponnesian wars?
Now, this predominance of youth, of the youthful form, in art, of bodily gymnastic promoting natural advantages to the utmost, of the physical perfection developed thereby, is a sign that essential mastery has been achieved by the artist—the power, that is to say, of a full and free realisation. For such youth, in its very essence, is a matter properly within the limits of the visible, the empirical, world; and in the presentment of it there will be no place for symbolic hint, none of that reliance on the helpful imagination of the spectator, the legitimate scope of which is a large one, when art is dealing with religious objects, with what in the fulness of its own nature is not really expressible at all. In any passable representation of the Greek discobolus, as in any passable representation of an English cricketer, there can be no successful evasion of the natural difficulties of the thing to be done—the difficulties of competing with nature itself, or its maker, in that marvellous combination of motion and rest, of inward mechanism with the so smoothly finished surface and outline—finished ad unguem—which enfold it.

Of the gradual development of such mastery of natural detail, a veritable counterfeit of nature, the veritable rhythmus of the runner, for example—twinkling heel and ivory shoulder—we have hints and traces in the historians of art. One had attained the very turn and texture of the crisp locks, another the very feel of the tense nerve and full-flushed vein, while with another you saw the bosom of Ladas expand, the lips part, as if for a last breath ere he reached the goal. It was like a child finding little by little the use of its limbs, the testimony of its senses, at a definite moment. With all its poetic impulse, it is an age clearly of faithful observation, of what we call realism, alike in its iconic and heroic work; alike in portraiture, that is to say, and in the presentment of divine or abstract types. Its workmen are close students now of the living form as such; aim with success at an ever larger and more various expression of its details; or replace a conventional statement of them by a real and lively one. That it was thus is attested indirectly by the fact that they busied themselves, seemingly by way of a tour de force, and with no essential interest in such subject, alien as it was from the pride of health which is characteristic of the gymnastic life, with the expression of physical pain, in Philoctetes, for instance. The adroit, the swift, the strong, in full and free exercise of their gifts, to the delight of others and of themselves, though their sculptural record has for the most part perished, are specified in ancient literary notices as the sculptor's favourite subjects, repeated, remodelled, over and over again, for the adornment of the actual scene of athletic success, or the market-place at home of the distant Northern or Sicilian town whence the prizeman had come.--A countless series of popular illustrations to Pindar's Odes! And if art was still to minister to the religious sense, it could only be by clothing celestial spirits also as nearly as possible in the bodily semblance of the various athletic combatants, whose patrons respectively they were supposed to be.

The age to which we are come in the story of Greek art presents to us indeed only a chapter of scattered fragments, of names that are little more, with but surmise of their original significance, and mere reasonings as to the sort of art that may have occupied what are really empty spaces. Two names, however, connect themselves gloriously with certain extant works of art; copies, it is true, at various removes, yet copies of what is still found delightful through them, and by copyists who for the most part were themselves masters. Through the variations of the copyist, the restorer, the mere imitator, these works are reducible to two famous original types—the Discobolus or quoit-player, of Myron, the beau ideal (we may use that term for once justly) of athletic motion; and the Diadumenus of Polycleitus, as, binding the fillet or crown of victory upon his head, he presents the beau ideal of athletic repose, and almost begins to think.

Myron was a native of Eleutherae, and a pupil of Ageladas of Argos. There is nothing more to tell by way of positive detail of this so famous artist, save that the main scene of his activity was Athens, now become the centre of the artistic as of all other modes of life in Greece. Multiplicasse veritatem videtur, says Pliny. He was in fact an earnest realist or naturalist, and rose to central perfection in the portraiture, the idealised portraiture, of athletic youth, from a mastery first of all in the delineation of inferior objects, of little lifeless or living things. Think, however, for a moment, how winning such objects are still, as presented on Greek coins;--the ear of corn, for instance, on those of Metapontum; the microscopic cockle-shell, the dolphins, on the coins of Syracuse. Myron, then, passes from pleasant truth of that kind to the delineation of the worthier sorts of animal life,--the ox, the dog--to nothing short of illusion in the treatment of
them, as ancient connoisseurs would have you understand. It is said that there are thirty-six extant epigrams on his brazen cow. That animal has her gentle place in Greek art, from the Siren tomb, suckling her young there, as the type of eternal rejuvenescence, onwards to the procession of the Elgin frieze, where, still breathing deliciously of the distant pastures, she is led to the altar. We feel sorry for her, as we look, so lifelike is the carved marble. The sculptor who worked there, whoever he may have been, had profited doubtless by the study of Myron's famous work. For what purpose he made it, does not appear;--as an architectural ornament; or a votive offering; perhaps only because he liked making it. In hyperbolic epigram, at any rate, the animal breathes, explaining sufficiently the point of Pliny's phrase regarding Myron--Corporum curiosus. And when he came to his main business with the quoit-player, the wrestler, the runner, he did not for a moment forget that they too were animals, young animals, delighting in natural motion, in free course through the yielding air, over uninterrupted space, according to Aristotle's definition of pleasure: "the unhindered exercise of one's natural force." Corporum tenus curiosus;--he was a "curious workman" as far as the living body is concerned. Pliny goes on to qualify that phrase by saying that he did not express the sensations of the mind--animi sensus. But just there, in fact, precisely in such limitation, we find what authenticates Myron's peculiar value in the evolution of Greek art. It is of the essence of the athletic prizeman, involved in the very ideal of the quoit-player, the cricketer, not to give expression to mind, in any antagonism to, or invasion of, the body; to mind as anything more than a function of the body, whose healthful balance of functions it may so easily perturb;--to disavow that insidious enemy of the fairness of the bodily soul as such.

Yet if the art of Myron was but little occupied with the reasonable soul (animus), with those mental situations the expression of which, though it may have a pathos and a beauty of its own, is for the most part adverse to the proper expression of youth, to the beauty of youth, by causing it to be no longer youthful, he was certainly a master of the animal or physical soul there (anima); how it is, how it displays itself, as illustrated, for instance, in the Discobolus. Of voluntary animal motion the very soul is undoubtedly there. We have but translations into marble of the original in bronze. In that, it was as if a blast of cool wind had congealed the metal, or the living youth, fixed him imperishably in that moment of rest which lies between two opposed motions, the backward swing of the right arm, the movement forwards on which the left foot is in the very act of starting. The matter of the thing, the stately bronze or marble, thus rests indeed; but the artistic form of it, in truth, scarcely more, even to the eye, than the rolling ball or disk, may be said to rest, at every moment of its course,--just metaphysically, you know.

This mystery of combined motion and rest, of rest in motion, had involved, of course, on the part of the sculptor who had mastered its secret, long and intricate consideration. Archaic as it is, primitive still in some respects, full of the primitive youth it celebrates, it is, in fact, a learned work, and suggested to a great analyst of literary style, singular as it may seem, the "elaborate" or "contorted" manner in literature of the later Latin writers, which, however, he finds "laudable" for its purpose. Yet with all its learned involution, thus so oddly characterised by Quintilian, so entirely is this quality subordinated to the proper purpose of the Discobolus as a work of art, a thing to be looked at rather than to think about, that it makes one exclaim still, with the poet of athletes,--"The natural is ever best!"--to de phya hapan kratiston. (6) Perhaps that triumphant, unimpeachable naturalness is after all the reason why, on seeing it for the first time, it suggests no new view of the beauty of human form, or point of view for the regarding of it; is acceptable rather as embodying (say, in one perfect flower) all one has ever fancied or seen, in old Greece or on Thames' side, of the unspoiled body of youth, thus delighting itself and others, at that perfect, because unconscious, point of good-fortune, as it moves or rests just there for a moment, between the animal and spiritual worlds. "Grant them," you pray in Pindar's own words, grant them with feet so light to pass through life!

(Footnote 6: Transliteration: to de phya hapan kratiston. Pater's translation: "The natural is ever best!" Pindar, Odes, Book O., poem 9, line 100. See See page 279 note for reference.)

The face of the young man, as you see him in the British Museum for instance, with fittingly inexpressive expression, (look into, look at the curves of, the blossom-like cavity of the opened mouth) is beautiful, but not altogether virile. The eyes, the facial lines which they gather into one, seem ready to follow the coming motion of the discus as those of an
onlooker might be; but that head does not really belong to the discobolus. To be assured of this you have but to compare with that version in the British Museum the most authentic of all derivations from the original, preserved till lately at the Palazzo Massimi in Rome. Here, the vigorous head also, with the face, smooth enough, but spare, and tightly drawn over muscle and bone, is sympathetic with, yields itself to, the concentration, in the most literal sense, of all beside;--is itself, in very truth, the steady centre of the discus, which begins to spin; as the source of will, the source of the motion with which the discus is already on the wing,--that, and the entire form. The Discobolus of the Massimi Palace presents, moreover, in the hair, for instance, those survivals of primitive manner which would mark legitimately Myron's actual pre-Pheidian standpoint; as they are congruous also with a certain archaic, a more than merely athletic, spareness of form generally--delightful touches of unreality in this realist of a great time, and of a sort of conventionalism that has an attraction in itself.

Was it a portrait? That one can so much as ask the question is a proof how far the master, in spite of his lingering archaism, is come already from the antique marbles of Aegina. Was it the portrait of one much-admired youth, or rather the type, the rectified essence, of many such, at the most pregnant, the essential, moment, of the exercise of their natural powers, of what they really were? Have we here, in short, the sculptor Myron's reasoned memory of many a quoit-player, of a long flight of quoit-players; as, were he here, he might have given us the cricketer, the passing generation of cricketers, sub specie eternitatis, under the eternal form of art?

Was it in that case a commemorative or votive statue, such as Pausanias found scattered throughout Greece? Was it, again, designed to be part only of some larger decorative scheme, as some have supposed of the Venus of Melos, or a work of genre as we say, a thing intended merely to interest, to gratify the taste, with no further purpose? In either case it may have represented some legendary quoit-player--Perseus at play with Acrisius fatally, as one has suggested; or Apollo with Hyacinthus, as Ovid describes him in a work of poetic genre.

And if the Discobolus is, after all, a work of genre--a work merely imitative of the detail of actual life--for the adornment of a room in a private house, it would be only one of many such produced in Myron's day. It would be, in fact, one of the pristae directly attributed to him by Pliny, little congruous as they may seem with the grandiose motions of his more characteristic work. The pristae, the sawyers,--a celebrated creation of the kind,--is supposed to have given its name to the whole class of like things. No age, indeed, since the rudiments of art were mastered, can have been without such reproductions of the pedestrian incidents of every day, for the mere pleasant exercise at once of the curiosity of the spectator and the imitative instinct of the producer. The Terra-Cotta Rooms of the Louvre and the British Museum are a proof of it. One such work indeed there is, delightful in itself, technically exquisite, most interesting by its history, which properly finds its place beside the larger, the full-grown, physical perfection of the Discobolus, one of whose alert younger brethren he may be,--the Spinario namely, the boy drawing a thorn from his foot, preserved in the so rare, veritable antique bronze at Rome, in the Museum of the Capitol, and well known in a host of ancient and modern reproductions.

There, or elsewhere in Rome, tolerated in the general destruction of ancient sculpture--like the "Wolf of the Capitol," allowed by way of heraldic sign, as in modern Siena, or like the equestrian figure of Marcus Aurelius doing duty as Charlemagne,--like those, but like very few other works of the kind, the Spinario remained, well-known and in honour, throughout the Middle Age. Stories like that of Ladas the famous runner, who died as he reached the goal in a glorious foot-race of boys, the subject of a famous work by Myron himself, (the "last breath," as you saw, was on the boy's lips) were told of the half-grown bronze lad at the Capitol. Of necessity, but fatally, he must pause for a few moments in his course; or the course is at length over, or the breathless journey with some all-important tidings; and now, not till now, he thinks of resting to draw from the sole of his foot the cruel thorn, driven into it as he ran. In any case, there he still sits for a moment, for ever, amid the smiling admiration of centuries, in the agility, in the perfect naivete also as thus occupied, of his sixteenth year, to which the somewhat lengthy or attenuated structure of the limbs is conformable. And then, in this attenuation, in the almost Egyptian proportions, in the shallowness of the chest and shoulders especially, in the Phoenician or old Greek sharpness and length of profile, and the long, conventional, wire-drawn hair of the boy, arching formally over the forehead and round the neck, there is something of archaism, of that archaism which survives, truly, in Myron's own work, blending with the grace and power of well-nigh the maturity of Greek art. The blending of interests, of artistic alliances, is certainly delightful.
Polycleitus, the other famous name of this period, and with a fame justified by work we may still study, at least in its immediate derivatives, had also tried his hand with success in such subjects. In the Astragalizontes, for instance, well known to antiquity in countless reproductions, he had treated an incident of the every-day life of every age, which Plato sketches by the way.

Myron, by patience of genius, had mastered the secret of the expression of movement, had plucked out the very heart of its mystery. Polycleitus, on the other hand, is above all the master of rest, of the expression of rest after toil, in the victorious and crowned athlete, Diadumenus. In many slightly varying forms, marble versions of the original in bronze of Delos, the Diadumenus, indifferently, mechanically, is binding round his head a ribbon or fillet. In the Vaison copy at the British Museum it was of silver. That simple fillet is, in fact, a diadem, a crown, and he assumes it as a victor; but, as I said, mechanically, and, prize in hand, might be asking himself whether after all it had been worth while. For the active beauty of the Agonistes of which Myron’s art is full, we have here, then, the passive beauty of the victor. But the later incident, the realisation of rest, is actually in affinity with a certain earliness, so to call it, in the temper and work of Polycleitus. He is already something of a reactionary; or pauses, rather, to enjoy, to convey enjoyably to others, the full savour of a particular moment in the development of his craft, the moment of the perfecting of restful form, before the mere consciousness of technical mastery in delineation urges forward the art of sculpture to a bewildering infinitude of motion. In opposition to the ease, the freedom, of others, his aim is, by a voluntary restraint in the exercise of such technical mastery, to achieve nothing less than the impeccable, within certain narrow limits. He still hesitates, is self-exacting, seems even to have checked a growing readiness of hand in the artists about him. He was renowned as a graver, found much to do with the chisel, introducing many a fine after-thought, when the rough-casting of his work was over. He studied human form under such conditions as would bring out its natural features, its static laws, in their entirety, their harmony; and in an academic work, so to speak, no longer to be clearly identified in what may be derivations from it, he claimed to have fixed the canon, the common measure, of perfect man. Yet with Polycleitus certainly the measure of man was not yet "the measure of an angel," but still only that of mortal youth; of youth, however, in that scrupulous and uncontaminate purity of form which recommended itself even to the Greeks as befitting messengers from the gods, if such messengers should come.

And yet a large part of Myron's contemporary fame depended on his religious work--on his statue of Here, for instance, in ivory and gold--that too, doubtless, expressive, as appropriately to its subject as to himself, of a passive beauty. We see it still, perhaps, in the coins of Argos. And has not the crowned victor, too, in that mechanic action, in his demure attitude, something which reminds us of the religious significance of the Greek athletic service? It was a sort of worship, you know--that department of public life; such worship as Greece, still in its superficial youth, found itself best capable of. At least those solemn contests began and ended with prayer and sacrifice. Their most honoured prizes were a kind of religiously symbolical objects. The athletic life certainly breathes of abstinence, of rule and the keeping under of one's self. And here in the Diadumenus we have one of its priests, a priest of the religion whose central motive was what has been called "the worship of the body,"--its modest priest.

The so-called Jason at the Louvre, the, Apoxyomenus, and a certain number of others you will meet with from time to time--whatever be the age and derivation of the actual marble which reproduced for Rome, for Africa, or Gaul, types that can have had their first origin in one only time and place--belong, at least aesthetically, to this group, together with the Adorante of Berlin, Winckelmann's antique favourite, who with uplifted face and hands seems to be indeed in prayer, looks immaculate enough to be interceding for others. As to the Jason of the Louvre, one asks at first sight of him, as he stoops to make fast the sandal on his foot, whether the young man can be already so marked a personage. Is he already the approved hero, bent on some great act of his famous epopee; or mere youth only, again, arraying itself mechanically, but alert in eye and soul, prompt to be roused to any great action whatever? The vaguely opened lips certainly suggest the latter view; if indeed the body and the head (in a different sort of marble) really belong to one another. Ah! the more closely you consider the fragments of antiquity, those stray letters of the old Greek aesthetic alphabet, the less positive will your conclusions become, because less conclusive the data regarding artistic origin and purpose. Set here also, however, to the end that in a congruous atmosphere, in a real perspective, they may assume their full moral and aesthetic expression, whatever of like spirit you may come upon in Greek or any other work, remembering that in England also, in Oxford, we have still, for any master of such art that may be given us, subjects
truly "made to his hand."

As with these, so with their prototypes at Olympia, or at the Isthmus, above all perhaps in the Diadumenus of Polycleitus, a certain melancholy (a pagan melancholy, it may be rightly called, even when we detect it in our English youth) is blent with the final impression we retain of them. They are at play indeed, in the sun; but a little cloud passes over it now and then; and just because of them, because they are there, the whole aspect of the place is chilled suddenly, beyond what one could have thought possible, into what seems, nevertheless, to be the proper and permanent light of day. For though they pass on from age to age the type of what is pleasantest to look on, which, as type, is indeed eternal, it is, of course, but for an hour that it rests with any one of them individually. Assuredly they have no maladies of soul any more than of the body--Animi sensus non expressit. But if they are not yet thinking, there is the capacity of thought, of painful thought, in them, as they seem to be aware wistfully. In the Diadumenus of Polycleitus this expression allies itself to the long-drawn facial type of his preference, to be found also in another very different subject, the ideal of which he fixed in Greek sculpture--the would-be virile Amazon, in exquisite pain, alike of body and soul--the "Wounded Amazon." We may be reminded that in the first mention of athletic contests in Greek literature--in the twenty-third book of the Iliad--they form part of the funeral rites of the hero Patroclus. It is thus, though but in the faintest degree, even with the veritable prince of that world of antique bronze and marble, the Discobolus at Rest of the Vatican, which might well be set where Winckelmann set the Adorante, representing as it probably does, the original of Alcamenes, in whom, a generation after Pheidias, an earlier and more earnest spirit still survived. Although the crisply trimmed head may seem a little too small to our, perhaps not quite rightful, eyes, we might accept him for that canon, or measure, of the perfect human form, which Polycleitus had proposed. He is neither the victor at rest, as with Polycleitus, nor the combatant already in motion, as with Myron; but, as if stepping backward from Myron's precise point of interest, and with the heavy discus still in the left hand, he is preparing for his venture, taking stand carefully on the right foot. Eye and mind concentrate, loyally, entirely, upon the business in hand. The very finger is reckoning while he watches, intent upon the cast of another, as the metal glides to the goal. Take him, to lead you forth quite out of the narrow limits of the Greek world. You have pure humanity there, with a glowing, yet restrained joy and delight in itself, but without vanity; and it is pure. There is nothing certainly supersensual in that fair, round head, any more than in the long, agile limbs; but also no impediment, natural or acquired. To have achieved just that, was the Greek's truest claim for furtherance in the main line of human development. He had been faithful, we cannot help saying, as we pass from that youthful company, in what comparatively is perhaps little--in the culture, the administration, of the visible world; and he merited, so we might go on to say--he merited Revelation, something which should solace his heart in the inevitable fading of that. We are reminded of those strange prophetic words of the Wisdom, the Logos, by whom God made the world, in one of the sapiential, half-Platonic books of the Hebrew Scriptures:--"I was by him, as one brought up with him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth. My delights were with the sons of men."+

(Footnote 7: *Proverbs* 8.30-31.)

(The end)

Walter Horatio Pater's essay: Age Of Athletic Prizemen: A Chapter In Greek Art

By Walter Pater