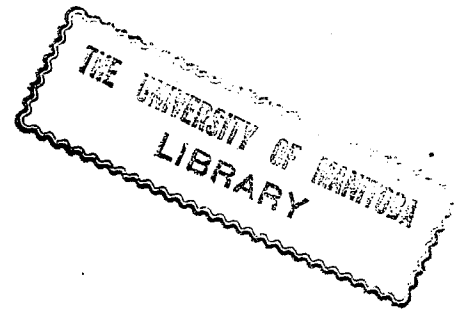


JOHN KEATS
and
HIS RELATION TO SHELLEY
AND OTHER ROMANTIC POETS

by



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Introduction

It is only during recent years that the best critics and scholars have paid closer and warmer homage to Keats. Not only among those of our own English tongue has he come to be appreciated, but his fame has spread to the continent, especially to France, where his works have been studied with intelligence and care.

In view of this new wave of appreciation let us hope that Keats is really coming to his own. Perhaps, he will never fill quite the same place in the minds and hearts of people which Alfred Tennyson holds. The very subjects that he treats are not those which are destined to catch the attention of the ordinary reader. They are in the main too abstract, they treat of ideals and seem to have little reference to present day affairs.

Shelley wrote concerning Keats - "In spite of his transcendent genius Keats never was, nor ever will be, a popular poet and the total neglect and obscurity in which the astonishing remnants of his mind still be, was hardly to be dissipated by a writer who, however he may differ from Keats in more important qualities, at least, resembles him in that accidental one, want of popularity".¹

1. Quoted by W. M. Rossetti, in Memoir of Shelley, page 152.

Keats will, however, continue to be read and enjoyed by an ever increasing number. His position and place among the great poets is assured and he will charm all lovers of true poetry with the fine rhythm and music of his verse.

SKETCH OF LIFE OF KEATS

Early Life:

On either the 29th or 31st of October, 1795, the poet, Keats, was born. It is hard to imagine circumstances or parentage more inappropriate to the birth and upbringing of a poet than were those of John Keats, for his father was the manager of the livery stable of the poet's grandfather, Mr. John Jennings. Careful examination into the history of the families of his parents reveals no great scholar or genius and we can "draw no argument as to the influence of heredity or environment on the birth or growth of genius".¹

His father is reported as a man of remarkably fine common sense and native respectability, and his mother as a clever, lively, and passionately fond of amusement. If these be correct estimates of the character of his parents, they may help to explain the deep duality of his nature, the over-sensitive and passionate side inherited, probably, from his mother and his manly good sense and clear vision and judgement from his father.

We learn very little concerning his relatives from either Keats or his brothers. The great ambition

1. "John Keats", by Sidney Colvin, page 2.

of the three seems to have been to try and raise the family, to leave the past behind them and make a brilliant career in the future. These ambitions were fostered by their father, who, though unable to afford the expense of sending his sons to Harrow, sent them to a school kept by a Mr. John Clarke at Enfield. It was while attending this school that John Keats met Charles Cowden Clarke, who afterwards was to become so great a friend and adviser of Keats, and to whom we are indebted for so much of our information concerning his early character. It is from him that we learn that "he was a favourite with all. Not the less beloved was he for having a highly pugnacious spirit, which, when roused, was one of the most picturesque exhibitions off the stage, I ever saw. It was all, however, a wisp-of-straw conflagration".¹ Until the last year of his school life Keats showed no particular signs of an intellectual bent. However, during the last few terms "he showed an indefatigable energy. He was at work before the first school hour began, and that was at seven o'clock; almost all the intervening times of recreation were so devoted".² (Cowden Clarke)

In February 1810, Keats's mother died, and the next term, on the advice of his guardian, he was withdrawn from school and bound apprentice to a Mr. Hammond, a surgeon and apothecary at Edmonton. Of these apprentice days Keats has left us no

1. "John Keats" by Sidney Colvin, page 13.

2. "John Keats" by Sidney Colvin, page 13.

reference; but we learn from his friends that he had no real love for his work, and that only the fact that Edmonton was some two miles from Enfield, where Cowden Clarke still lived, made life at all endurable. It became his custom to walk to Enfield once or twice a week, there to discuss with his friend the authors whom he had learned to love. It was at this time that Clarke introduced him to Spenser, that poet who was to exert such a great power over the young man.

Secretly, Keats was ambitious to become a great writer, but not until 1815 did he venture to show his sonnet entitled "Written on the day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left Prison" to his friend.

In 1815, Keats left the service of Mr. Hammond and went to live in London as a student at Guy's Hospital. Though he remained there long enough to obtain his license to practice from the court of Apothecaries, his growing distaste for the profession led him to abandon it in 1817, very much against the advice of his guardian. It was about this time that Cowden Clarke introduced Keats to Leigh Hunt, and the foundation of that memorable friendship, which was to have so great an influence on Keats' life was laid.

Friends: Hunt, Haydon, Shelley.

Leigh Hunt was a man some eleven years Keats' senior and with his brother, John, edited a newspaper known as "The Examiner". This paper was one of those which helped

to fight the losing battle of Liberalism. For some years they managed to continue to print their articles without incurring the wrath of the authorities, but at last, late in 1812, after denouncing the Prince Regent "as a violator of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps, a man who had just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity", ¹ the Hunt brothers were summoned and condemned to two years' imprisonment and a fine of £500 each. On his release from prison Keats wrote the sonnet, his first effort, which he showed to Cowden Clarke. He felt himself very much honoured when Clarke offered to introduce him to Hunt whom he had admired for so long.

Leigh Hunt was not a great writer. Charles Lamb says of him, "Matchless as a fireside companion, it was his misfortune to carry too much of a fire side or parlour tone and sometimes, it must be owned, a very second rate parlour tone into literature". He had, however, the power of appreciating the works of others and of judging where their faults lay. It was this trait which made him such a power and influence in the life of John Keats.

With his very nervous, sensitive temperament, his tendency to fits of despondency, Keats was very much dependent upon his friends for their help and encouragement, and in Hunt he found a man well fitted to aid him. The friendship which quickly ripened was, however, not without its disadvantages, for Hunt was now always under the eye of the government and Keats, as

1. "John Keats" by Sidney Colvin, page 42.

his friend and associate, shared largely the blame and criticism which was heaped upon him.

It was at the home of Hunt that Keats met the artist, Haydon. These two found much in common, for Keats had a fine natural sense for the excellencies of painting and sculpture. He was also ready to shower praises on Haydon, which pleased that artist's insatiable vanity. A little later he wrote of Keats: "He is a man after my own heart. He sympathises with me and comprehends me. We saw through each other and I hope are friends forever".¹

Another acquaintance which Keats made at the home of the Hunts was that of Shelley, a young poet some three years Keats's senior. Keats was not very much attracted by this young man, and in order to understand this it is necessary to know something of the life and character of Shelley.

Shelley, from a very young child, had lived in a world of his own peopled with beings from his imagination. This experience is common among children, but there is a striking difference between the ordinary imaginative child and Shelley. The former is content with realistic make-believe, but Shelley wanted to do things he had never done before and to realize the sensations these new experiments created.

At the age of about twelve Shelley went to Eton, where he was known as "Mad Shelley" or the Atheist, the latter title given him not so much because he did not believe in

1. Quoted by Sidney Colvin in "John Keats", page 67.

God as because he was a rebel, always striking against old existing customs and rules. From Eton, Shelley went to Oxford in 1810, where he met Hogg to whom we are indebted for a detailed account of his life and character. Though Hogg's writings are often tiresome, they give us many details which are invaluable in forming an estimate of Shelley's character.

The period spent at Oxford was a very happy one for him. At that institution he was free to follow his own course as much as he pleased, for it was the same then as in the days of Gibbon; a student could learn if he wished to do so but there were none to force him against his will. The greater part of Shelley's time was spent in the study of chemistry and philosophy. He was continually seeking for ideal existence and the supreme test was joy, as it would, no doubt, be in heaven.

On his return to Oxford after the Christmas holidays Shelley, thinking to strike a blow in aid of liberty, wrote his famous pamphlet on the "Necessity of Atheism". He believed not so much in the fact that there was no God as that the present form of Christianity, with all its imperfections, was unfit to bring about a betterment of this world. He had the pamphlet printed anonymously, and scattered the copies through the college. It soon came to the notice of the Dons who laid the blame on Shelley, his rather radical ideas having attracted their notice. When

questioned concerning the authorship of the paper he refused to give an answer. This was taken as an acknowledgement and he was promptly expelled. When his friend, Hogg, tried to intercede on his behalf the college authorities believed that he was implicated in the affair and passed the sentence of expulsion on him also.

The two friends left the college and went straight up to London where they found lodging so much to Shelley's liking that he exclaimed "We must stay here, stay forever".¹ While in London Shelley made the acquaintance of Harriet Westbrook and her sister, Eliza. From the very first Eliza seems to have decided that Shelley and her sister must marry. She soon learned that the poet would do anything for anyone he thought to be oppressed. She pictured Harriet as a prey to the whims of an arrogant and overbearing father who was making her life unhappy. In order to relieve these conditions, Shelley proposed to marry Harriet, and thus free her from parental tyranny. This he did in 1811.

All these years Shelley had been writing pamphlets and poems in which he had set forth his ideas. But it was not till 1813 that he published "Queen Mab", the first of his works "which shows any promise of his future greatness".² In this poem he sets forth the ideas which dominated his whole life - "his fierce impatience of our

1. "Shelley, the Man and the Poet", by A.Clutton Brock, page 32.

2. "Shelley, the Man and the Poet", by A.Clutton Brock, page 74

present imperfections and a vast desire and hope for a perfection to be".¹ He thought of life as a constant struggle of the good that is in men with the evil that is outside them. The subject of the poem "Queen Mab" is the same as that of his great poem "Prometheus Unbound" - the past and present misery and their future regeneration.

In 1814 occurred that incident which has caused so much controversy, namely, Shelley's estrangement from Harriet and his flight with Mary Godwin. As to the real grounds of the estrangement we can only conjecture. Peacock, a friend and biographer of Shelley, says, "I have often thought that if the sister had not lived with them the link of their married life would not have been so readily broken".² Hogg tells us that Harriet lost her intellectual interests and became very fond of dress.³ Whatever foundation there may be for these statements, we do know that Shelley provided for Harriet and her children and continued to write to her after he left with Mary.

Matters continued in this way until in 1816, shortly after the return of the Shelleys from the continent, news came saying that Harriet had committed suicide by drowning herself. Public opinion now became so strongly opposed to Shelley that early in 1818 he and his wife, Mary, left

1. Ibid, page 75

2. Quoted by A. Clutton Brock in Shelley, the Man and the Poet page 83.

3. "Shelley, the Man and the Poet", by A. Clutton Brock.

England, never to return. They travelled through Switzerland and Italy, finally settling on the Bay of Spezzia. It was while attempting to cross this bay in a great storm that Shelley was drowned, 1822, at the early age of thirty.

Such is a brief outline of the man whom Keats met at the home of Leigh Hunt. Although the two poets had no strong dislike for each other they never became the firm friends that Shelley and Byron, or that Keats and Severn were. Added to the differences in ideas and character were two prejudices of Keats which he was never able to wholly overcome. The first of these was the idea that Shelley, who was of good birth, despised his humble origin. The second was the fact that so many of the friends of Shelley were seeking financial aid from him and Keats' independent spirit revolted at the idea of being classed as one of the band of parasites surrounding Shelley. Even though Keats "must have known that he could learn much from the elder poet's trained scholarship and fine literary sense, he refused his cordial invitation to stay with him at Great Marlowe, in order that he might have his own unfettered scope".¹

Travels and Works

In August 1817, Keats went to visit Bailey at Oxford. Here under the sympathetic influence and the congenial

1. "John Keats", by Sidney Colvin, page 73.

friendship he wrote a great deal of his first long poem, "Endymion," which he finally finished in 1818. The quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the place was well suited for study and many of the most beautiful passages of the poem were written while there.

During June, July and August 1818, Keats went with Brown on a walking tour through the Lake District of England and through Scotland.

This was the first time that the young poet had come in contact with such beauties of nature and some of his impressions are carefully preserved for us by his companion, Brown.

When they came in view of Lake Windermere, one fine, mild day, Brown says of Keats "that his bright eyes darted on a mountain peak beneath, which was gently floating on a silver cloud, thence to a very small island adorned with the foliage of trees that lay beneath us, and surrounded by water of a glorious hue, when he exclaimed, - 'How can I believe in that? - Surely it cannot be', catching the further extremity of the lake he thought it more and more wonderfully beautiful".¹ He has embodied his impressions of the scene from the top of Mount Skiddaw in the lines from "Hyperion" -

"-dismal cirque
Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor",
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve
In dull November and their chancel vault
The heaven itself is blinded throughout night"¹

There was, however, growing in his mind the thought

1. Quoted by Sidney Colvin in "John Keats", page 273.

2. Quoted by Sidney Colvin in "John Keats", page 276.

that his fellow creatures are of more interest than natural scenes. This tendency is noticed even while on the walking tour. He writes of a visit to an inn at Ambleside which interested him very greatly.

"We were greatly amused by a country dancing school held at the Lun; it was indeed 'no new cotillon fresh from France'. No, they kickit and jumpit with mettle extraordinary and whiskit and friskit and toed it and go'd it and twirl'd it and whirl'd and stamped it and sweated it, tattooing the floor like mad. -- I never felt so near the glory of Patriotism, the glory of making by any means a country happier. This is what I like better than scenery".¹

Death

The Scotch tour proved too hard for Keats's constitution and by the time they reached Inverness he had contracted such a sore throat that the doctors forebade him to continue his journey. He returned to England where he found his brother, Tom, to be very ill. It was while nursing this brother that Keats worked on his poem "Hyperion". The work, however, did not progress very rapidly as the nursing and anxiety drew very heavily from his slender store of health and strength. In 1818 Tom died, and Keats became an inmate of the house of his friend, Brown.

1. Quoted by Sidney Colvin in "John Keats" (1917), page 278.

It was at this period that the famous reviews so bitterly criticized his small volume of work. His friends were very indignant at the injustice of these reviews, for they saw that it was his friendship with Hunt that had, in a large measure, drawn the unjust criticisms upon him. Some of them even went so far as to say that the reviews had a great deal to do with undermining Keats's health and causing his early death. This, however, is not the case, for under it all Keats was perfectly calm and really tried to benefit by the criticisms, none of which were so severe and just as his own. To quote his own words regarding the article in Blackwoods:

"Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic in his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwood or the Quarterly could possibly inflict, - and also when I feel I am right no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine. J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the slipshod Endymion. That it is so is no fault of mine. Not though it may sound a little paradoxical, it as good as I had power to make it by myself. - I will write independently - I have written independently without judgement. I may

write independently, and with judgement hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man".¹

This year was one in which some of the best of his writings were done. The five odes, Ode to Psyche, On Indolence, On a Grecian Urn, To a Nightingale and To Melancholy, besides Le Bell Dame sans Merci, The Eve of St. Agnes and Lamia were written. From this list it is very clear that the Scotch reviews did not discourage Keats and cause him to abandon poetry for some other profession, for which he might be better fitted.

During all this time his health had been becoming steadily worse, until in August 1820, it was decided that he must not attempt to stand the rigours of a northern winter but must spend the time in the south. Finding that Brown was away in Scotland on a second walking tour, Severn offered to accompany the poet to Italy. After a long and tedious voyage they settled in Rome, so that they might be near the eminent physician, Dr. Clarke.

For some weeks after his arrival Keats seemed to rally, and his friends were filled with great hopes for his ultimate recovery. The improvement was, however, only temporary, and in February 1821, attended by his faithful friend, Severn, he died. Before his death he chose as his epitaph -

1. Quoted in "Alabama Student", by William Osler, page 45.

"16"

'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'.

So firmly did he believe that none of his works would live and be read by men in the future.

THE AGE OF KEATS
ITS CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS

To fully estimate the character of the writings of Keats, we must glance briefly at the age in which he lived. The new literary school, which reached its culmination in 1798, in the publication of the "Lyrical Ballads" of Wordsworth and Coleridge, was known as the Romantic School.

Very many writers have tried to formulate a definition for this new movement, which showed itself in almost every country. H. A. Beers quotes some critics as saying that it was wholly subjective.¹ The writers poured forth their own feelings and were governed in a great measure by their emotions, and, wrote to please themselves without reference to the tastes of their readers. If this be true the works of Scott must be excluded. The novels and poems of this great writer are almost wholly objective, and yet it would be impossible to include them, filled with the spirit of romance as they were, with the writings of the previous age. Another writer, according to Mr. Beers, has said that Romanticism is a revival of the past. This is only in a measure true, for can we say that all the works of Shelley are inspired by the past? The most satisfactory method of defining the movement is by comparing it with the previous

1. "English Romanticism, xviii Century", by H. A. Beers.

age and pointing out wherein lie the chief differences.

The eighteenth century laid down many hard and fast rules, and any writer who refused to conform to these was debarred from entering the ranks of the so-called great. In the first place, they said that every individual should conform to a type, and that poetry must be confined to common experience and within the understanding of this average man. The Romanticists abandoned this rule. They laid stress on individualism, and the free self expression of that individual. We group the Romantic writers together because they lived during the same period and were subject to the same influence, not because there is a great similarity in their works, in fact the writings of many of them have very little in common.

The second rule laid down by the writers of the eighteenth century is that enthusiasm and imagination must be subservient to reason and common sense. The writers of the succeeding age, in their eagerness to show their disapproval of this rule, seem to have abandoned common sense and reason entirely.

A third rule of the Classicists was that all poetry should be cast in one form, the heroic couplet. A glance through the works of Keats will be enough to show how completely this rule was overthrown by the later school. The writers were experimenters in the matter of form and

style. The Romanticists further rebelled against the clear, hard and crystalline poetry by seeking the best in humanity, and not seeking that best among the society of the day, but out at the very edge of civilization where man lived and developed unhampered by the conventional. By this search for the good, the ideal, a sense of wonder at the mysteries of life was awakened. H. A. Beer quotes Dr. Hedge as saying: "the essence of Romance is mystery. The woody dell, the leafy glen, the forest path which leads one knows not whither are romantic, the public highway is not".¹

They call upon imagination, external nature, and the past to help them to solve the mysteries of life. Professor Herford says: "Primarily, it was an extraordinary development of the imaginative sensibility. At countless points the universe of sense and thought acquired a new potency of response and appeal to man, a new capacity of ministering to and mingling with his richest and intensest life".²

Thus the three leading features of the age were aspiration after perfection and the ideal, the sense of mystery, and the appealing to the emotions by the method of suggestion. These were in direct opposition to the ideas of the previous writers. For them nothing was left to the imagination, they conceived that they had settled all questions of the mysteries of life and death. In a word, the Age of Classicism might be described as an age of completeness; while Romanticism is an age of

1. "A History of English Romanticism in 18th century", by H. A. Beers, pages 11 and 12.

2. "The Age of Wordsworth", by Prof. C.H. HERFORD, page 14.

incompleteness, the whole invaded by the modern spirit of mysticism.

One of the chief sources of the new Romantic thought was the revolutionary naturalism of Rousseau. This French writer taught the revealing power of love, the right of the individual to have liberty of thought and action, and the power of natural scenery to respond to the needs of man. The later writers took up the latter theme and developed it until both man and nature were reconciled as elements in a single ideal. When the French people rose and threw off the yoke of oppression, under which they had been labouring for so long, it was merely an expression of the ideal of individual liberty preached by Rousseau.

During the first stages of that great struggle for liberty the chief writers and thinkers of England eagerly welcomed the movement as the dawn of a new day, and threw all the weight of their influence on the side of the down-trodden people. Later, however, many of them became disgusted at the excesses and the despotic acts which were committed in the name of freedom. But notwithstanding the fact that a reaction seemed to spread over the countries of Europe and with the rule of Napoleon, liberty and freedom were apparently crushed and the good started by the Revolution stamped out, still the spirit of freedom remained the same, the spirit that made "Romanticism stand for liberty, progress, originality and the spirit of the future;

as opposed to Classicism which stood for conservation,
authority, imitation, the spirit of the past". ¹

1. "A History of English Romanticism in 18th Century"
by H. A. Beers, page 11.

KEATS'S RELATION TO ROMANTICISM

AND ROMANTIC WRITERS

There is very little in the writings of Keats to indicate that he was keenly interested in the political changes of his day. We know that he was a liberal, but this seems to have been more from chance of circumstances than a real and careful study of the situation. His friends were liberals; he was thrown among liberals and, for these reason, he espoused the liberal cause.

Two passages, however, occur in his poetical writings which show that the natural bent of his mind was opposed to oppression and tyranny. In his sonnet written on the day Leigh Hunt was liberated, he speaks of the Regent as the "minion of grandeur" and his ministers as a "wicked crew". The second passage is found in his first long poem, "Endymion". Here he burst forth in indignation against crowned heads, oppressors of poor humanity -

"There are who lord it o'er their fellow men
With most prevailing tinsel, who unpen
Their baaing vanities, to browse away
The comfortable green and juicy hay
From human pastures; or, O torturing fact!
Who through an idiot blink, will see unpack'd
Fire branded foxes to sear up and singe
Our sanctuary splendour, not a sight
Able to face an owl's, they still are dight
By the blear-eyed nations in empurpled vests

" And crowns and turbans. With unladen breasts,
Save of blown self applause, the proudly mount,
To their spirits perch, their being's high account,
Their tiptop nothings, their dull skies, their thrones
Amid the fierce intoxicating tones
Of trumpets, shoutings and belaboured drums
And sudden cannon." ¹

Again, in one of his letters we find the following words which show that he was really alive to the great changes that were going on around him: "Notwithstanding the part which the liberals take in the cause of Napoleon, I cannot but think he has done more harm to the Life of Liberty than anyone else could have done, not that the divine right gentlemen have done or intend to do any good. No, they have taken a lesson of him and will do all the further harm he would have done without any of the good. The worst thing he has done is that he has taught them how to organize monstrous armies". ² The opening words of this passage recall Shelley's thoughts and opinions of the French Revolution as expressed in "Prometheus Unbound" -

"Names are these, Nature's sacred watchwords, they
Were borne aloft in bright, emblazonry;
The nations thronged around and cried aloud
As with one voice, Truth, liberty and love!
Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven
Among them; there was strife, deceit and fear.
Tyrants rushed in and did divide the spoil" ³

Some have criticized Keats as being unsympathetic

1. "Endymion", by John Keats, Bk III, lines 1-18
2. Quoted in "Oxford Lectures in Poetry", by A.C. Bradley, page 217.
3. "Prometheus Unbound", by Shelley, Act. 1, lines 648-654.

and indifferent to the cares of his fellow men. This is not the case, for, he was intensely interested in the actions of men; he was not, however, an ardent reformer, as was Shelley whose passion for liberty often carried him beyond the bounds of the practical. Shelley was a true child of the Revolution and very greatly influenced in his writings by the Frenchmen, Condorcet, Rousseau and Volney. His first long poem, "Queen Mab", is a tirade against the oppression of kings and priests. He wished to break away from the past which seemed to him to be wholly bad - the Golden Age lay in the future.

There is another point at which Keats is at variance with many of the Romantic writers, and that is his curious silence on the subject of religious belief. Shelley vehemently denounced the accepted forms of religion, because in them he thought he saw a form of tyranny and oppression. Towards the end of his life he became more tolerant, and Browning wrote of him, in his "Essay on Shelley", that had he lived he believed that "Shelley would have become a Christian". Keats, however, ignored the church because he did not find it interesting. The Beauty of life seemed to have satisfied his imagination, though we find his mind permeated with the essence of religion.

"Sounds which will reach the Framers of all things
And die away in ardent mutterings.
No one who once the glorious sun has seen
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean
For his great Maker's presence, but must know
What 't is I mean and feel his being glow;
Therefore, no insult will I give his spirit,
By telling what he sees from native merit".¹

Through all his life he held to the belief in immortality. In his letters we find his references to the subject. Writing to his brother, George, he says - "I have a firm belief in immortality and so had Tom. The going on of the world makes me dizzy. Sometimes I imagine an immense separation and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality. There will be no space and consequently, the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other - when they will completely understand each other in different degrees. The higher the degree of good, so higher is our love and friendship".²

In a letter written to Bailey in 1818, he makes further reference to the subject - "You know my ideas about religion. I do not think myself more in the right than other people and that nothing in this world is proveable. I wish I could enter into all your

1. "Sleep of Beauty", by John Keats, lines 39-44.

2. Quoted in "A Study of John Keats", by F.M.Owen, page 181

feelings on the subject, merely for one short ten minutes and give you a page or two to your liking".¹

One of the phases of Romanticism already noticed is the great revival of interest in external nature. Very early in life, Wordsworth, that great leader of the English Romantic poets, became imbued with the idea, which he later developed in his writings, that nature could "chasten and subdue",² as well as exalt. When quite a boy, so the poet tells us, he was out snaring birds. He had been unsuccessful and rather than go home empty-handed he took a bird from a companion's trap. As he went, he felt that all nature was crying out against his act, proclaiming him as a thief. Nature, however, is able to afford him the greatest joy, he finds delight "in silvery smoke wreaths", in "bright fields of water, in sun and moon; a delight so vivid that it filled the landscape with 'gleams like the flashing of a shield'".³ As Wordsworth grew to manhood, he began to take a keener interest in the world of affairs. When he came to understand the French Revolution, he threw himself on the side of the oppressed people; nature seemed to lose some of its interest and power over him, the sufferings of oppressed humanity occupied his whole attention.

1. Quoted in "A Study of John Keats", by F.M.Owen, page 181

2. "Age of Wordsworth" by Prof. C. H. Herford, page 147.

3. "Age of Wordsworth", by Prof. C. H. Herford, page 148.

Later, when he saw the excesses and tyrannical acts committed, he returned to his beloved Lake District and to his love of nature.

Now, neither Keats nor Shelley, though revelling in the beauties of natural scenery, found in nature relief for the cares of humanity. Keats sought for ideal beauty . This he did not find in nature; he was too conscious of the strife and deformities in the natural world. He could not explain these imperfections which he saw, and turned to seek his ideal elsewhere. Some aspects of nature attracted him more than others. He was ravished by the sumptuous splendor of colour. The simple commonplace did not inspire him; he could not feel the beatings of the great heart of nature as did Wordsworth. Nature to him was not a great spirit. F. M. Owen says of him, " he draws no lessons from nature, he points no morals, he simply leads us with a magical expression into the close sympathy which he has himself with nature and makes it live for us as it does for him. He is penetrated by it in some measure as the Greeks were and gives us its essence in his own nature. We seem to be with him on the

"Swelling downs where sweet air stirs
Blue harebells lightly and where prickly furze
Buds lavish gold".¹

1. "A Study of John Keats", by F.M.Owen, page 21.

Like Shelley, Keats was a myth-maker. He made nature live to his own fancy, and many of his descriptions are drawn more from his imagination than from actual observation. This may be explained by the fact that the greater part of his life was passed, not among natural scenes but in cities. Still he has the power to describe nature in such a way that the scene lives before our eyes.

We see and feel the wideness of the sea, in -

"The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablutions round earth's human shores". 1

or the sonnet, "On the Sea" -

"It keeps eternal whisperings around
Desolate shores and with its mighty swell,
Gluts twice ten thousand caverns, till the spell
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound
Often 't is in such gentle temper found
That scarcely will the very smallest shell
Be mov'd for days from whence it sometime fell,
When last the winds of heaven were unbound
Oh, ye, who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd
Feast them upon the wideness of the sea,
Oh, ye, whose ears are dimm'd with uproar rude,
Or fed too much with cloying melody, -
Sit ye near some old caverns mouth and brood
Until ye start, as if the sea nymphs quirk'd". 2

Unlike Wordsworth, Shelley was not inspired by the common, ordinary scenes of nature, though loved to be alone in some quiet nook, there to write and dream. In his poetry, he is at his best in descrip-

1. Sonnet, "Bright Star", by John Keats, lines 5 & 6
2. Sonnet, "On the Sea", by John Keats

tions of her grandeur and majesty. He revels in the rugged scenery of the Alps and Caucasus mountains. In his longer poems he is fond of taking his hero long journeys through wild mountains, away from the haunts of man, so that he may indulge his fancy in description of these parts.

"Nature's most secret steps
He, like her shadow, has pursued where'er
The red volcano overcanopies
Its fields of snow and pinnacles of ice
With burning smoke, or where bitumen lakes
On black bare pointed islets ever beat
With sluggish surge, or where the secret caves
Rugged and dark, winding among the springs
Of fire and poison".¹

In his treatment of Nature, Shelley is thus closely related to Keats. He sought but failed to find his ideal in her. On every hand he saw strife and oppression, the higher plants and animals living on the lower. He failed to find peace and comfort such as Wordsworth found.

Keats was a great experimenter in verse forms. He studied Spenser and was profoundly influenced by that great writer's style. His work abounds in compound epithets, "azure-lidded sleep," of the maiden in St. Agnes' Eve and describing the snake in Lamia as "cirque-couchant". Few writers have surpassed him in his power of word painting. Of the line

1. "Alastor", by Shelley, lines 81-89.

"Mid hushed cool-rooted flowers fragrant-eyed"
(Ode to Psyche)

Sidney Colvin says - "What other poet has compressed into a single line so much of the essential virtue of flowers, of their power to minister to the spirit of man through all his senses at once." ¹

Concerning the invocation in the fourth stanza in the same ode,

"O brightest! though too late for antique vows
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest-boughs
Holy the air, the water and the fire;
Yet even in these days so far retir'd
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see and sing by my own eyes inspired"

Colvin writes - "It expresses with the fullest reach of Keats's felicity, in style and a singular freshness and fire of music in the verse, both his sense of the meaning of the Greek nature religion and his delight in imagining the beauty of its shrines and ritual". ²

Another characteristic of Keats's poetry is its exquisite harmony. There is an almost irresistible desire to read the poems aloud. One example of this exquisite melody may be quoted -

"Shed no tear! Oh, shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Weep no more! Oh, weep no more!
Young buds sleep in the roots white core.
Dry your eyes! Oh, dry your eyes!
For I was taught in Paradise
To ease my breast of melodies". ³

3. Quoted by F.H. Owen, in "Study of Keats", page 413.
1. "John Keats", by Sidney Colvin, page 412.
2. "John Keats", by Sidney Colvin, page 413.

Not only was Keats influenced by Spenser, but he read and studied Chaucer. We see direct traces of his influence in the "Eve of St. Mark" where he tries to reproduce Chaucer's actual style and vocabulary,

"Als writith he of swevenis,
 Men han beforne they wake in bliss
 Whanne that her friendes thinke him bound
 In crimped shroude farre undergrounde
 And now a litling child mote be
 A saint er t'its nativitie".¹
 "Eve of St. Mark", lines 99-114.

STUDY OF SPECIAL WORKS OF KEATS

In the preceding chapter the general relation of Keats to his age has been noticed. In order, however, to realize his individual genius some of his greater poems must be studied. His first great poem was written in 1817. Herefor the first time we see the influence of the moon in the poet's life. For the populace she was the cold heavenly body which controlled the tides and, at certain stages, was said to have a very detrimental influence over people suffering from brain disease. But for Keats she was something very different. "For him it was", to quote Sidney Colvin, "her transmuting and glorifying power that counted, not her pallor, but her splendor, the magic alchemy exercised by her light upon the things of earth, the heightened mystery, poetry and withal, unity of aspect which she sheds upon them".¹ Keats was very fond of the classical myths and though he knew nothing of Greek he seemed to have the power to enter into the Greek spirit and interpret it more truly than could any of his contemporaries.

The poem "Endymion" presents the beloved old story he had learned from the allegorical court

1. "John Keats", by Sidney Colvin, page 166.

comedy, "Endimion" of John Lyly. He was also indebted, however, to Fletcher, Michael and Drayton. From Drayton's "Man in the Moone" he conceived the idea of introducing the feast with Pan and also the invention of the magic robe of Glaucus. Another thought for which he was indebted to Drayton was the sending of his hero on journeys beside, or in pursuit of, his goddess through manifold regions of earth and air.

The theme of the poem is the pursuit of the poetic soul for essential Beauty. The soul can never attain this perfect Beauty in selfishness or in isolation, it is only through contact with others that it can be purified. The purpose of the scene with the old man, Glaucus, is to bring out this thought. The hero is turned aside from his own quest and selfish aims to minister to the wants of others. His sympathies are thus broadened, he takes interest in the lives and actions of those around him. After he is able to pursue his quest and successfully gain his reward.

The poem is divided into four books.- The action of Book 1 takes place on earth. It relates the trouble of the hero who, finally, falls into a trance and is carried off by his ^sister to a little island.

Here he is persuaded to tell his sorrow. He has seen a vision of the moon goddess and feels that not until he finds her will he have perfect happiness.

In Book II there is a renewed declamation on the power and glory of love. He is taken to the temple of Diana. The gloomy splendors of the place oppress him and he longs to be carried back to earth. He is then led to an embowered chamber where Adonis lies asleep.

Book III begins with the denunciation of kings and conquerors, which has already been noted as one of the few places where Keats expresses his opinions of the existing forms of government. Later, the hero is introduced to Glaucus whom he is to deliver from the bondage of old age. Later, he goes with Glaucus to where the latter's lover is lying dead. Through the power of Endymion she is restored to life and joy. Endymion is now allowed to continue his journey in pursuit of his own goddess.

In Book IV, the hero learns that all secondary and transient loves are visitations of his celestial love in disguise. He meets the Indian maid who, later, reveals herself as his goddess, Cynthia. Thus the two are finally joined.

Such is a very brief outline of the poem planned and worked out by the young poet. Through the whole work we can feel the influence of the Elizabethans. There is wonderful freedom in his verse and sound and sense flow together. This last leads to a grave fault, viz., that the sense is sometimes sacrificed to the rhyme, the words are inexact and inappropriate; he turns verbs into nouns, as a complain, a shine, a pierce, and nouns into verbs, as passion, fragment up.

A second fault in the poem is the over profuseness of description. The thread of the narrative is often obscured and the unity seems to be lost. These faults are due, however, to immaturity and the poet himself was only too conscious of them. In his preface he says - "What manner I mean will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished. The two first books and indeed the two last, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press, nor should they if I thought a year's castigation would do them any good - it will not; the foundations are too sandy".¹

1. "Endymion", by John Keats, Preface.

His first masterpiece was "Hyperion". In this poem he had conquered the faults of his earlier work, "Endymion". He had been studying Dryden, and, as a result of his reading, "Hyperion" is a more classical work. There are no digressions or reflections and its great ideas are expressed in simple forceful language. Here Keats expresses his belief in progress and his love of humanity. The following passage found in an early version indicates that he was really alive to the sufferings of mankind.

"High Prophetess," said I, "purge off
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film."
"None can usurp this height", returned that shade,
But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and wilt not let them rest".
"Are there not thousands, in the world", said I
Who love their fellows even to the death,
Who feel the giant agony of the world,
And move, like slaves to poor humanity,
Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
Other men here but I am here alone".¹

The influence of Milton is felt all through the poem. Some critics have predicted that had Keats finished "Hyperion" he would have created an epic that would have surpassed his master, Milton. Keats, however, says himself of "Hyperion" - "I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me, Miltonic verse cannot be written but is the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to

1. Quoted by F.M.Owen, in "Study of John Keats", page 107

another verse alone." ¹ Later he writes, "I have given up Hyperion - there were too many Miltonic inversions in it - Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or rather artist's, humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations". ¹

Shelley admired this fragment and placed it as the highest achievement of Keats. He wrote to Leigh Hunt concerning it - "The fragment called 'Hyperion' promises for Keats that he is destined to be one of the first poets of his age". ²

The subject treated in this poem is the overthrowal of Saturn and his followers by his own offspring. The justification of this act is the thought that the conquerors are better fitted to rule the world and bring peace and happiness to mankind than were their predecessors. There is the suggestion that they, in their turn, may be compelled to give place to some abler and more advanced rulers. So Keats brings out his idea of progress until we arrive at the Golden Age to come.

In another class of his poems we see his sympathy and understanding of Greek life and teaching. This power of entering into the spirit of Greek Life and expressing the same in purely English style was one of the great accomplishments of his art. In some of his verse-tales this trait is plainly seen. Lamia, for instance, relating the story originally told by Philostratus, has the directness of narrative and the richness of style of the Romantic

1. "A Study of John Keats", by F.M.Owen, page 107.

2. "Poetical works of Keats", edited by Andrew Lang, intro. p.17

writers with the pagan spirit of Ancient Greece. By his delicate treatment of his subject the poet has made us sympathize with the heroine in her overthrow. As in all his verse-tales the interest is not so much in the narrative as in the pictures which he builds round the thread of the story. Hancock says of the poem "that the real poetic value lies almost wholly in the pictorial art which visualizes the delights of lovers in Greece".¹

In contrast to "Lamia" is the "Eve of St. Agnes", which contains no Greek elements, where even the setting and scene are laid in the Middle Ages. He tried to combine sensations in order to make them stand out clearly before the reader. He sets off the drunken revellry by the breathless stillness in Madeline's bedroom. To bring about this effect, the poet has very carefully planned his style, every word has a special value, an exact meaning and must also arouse the exact emotion through its associations. He cast the whole in the Spenserian stanza. In the first part of the poem it is evident that the poet is working in a borrowed form, one with which he is not quite familiar. By the time the second half is reached the difficulty is overcome and scarcely a defect in form can be discerned. Lafcadio Hearn in his lecture on Keats says that this poem "The Eve of St. Agnes" is the daintiest of the longer poems; it has none of the harshness and gloom as in Coleridge's "Christabel".²

1. "John Keats", by A. E. Hancock, page 132.

2. "Interpretations in Literature", by Lafcadio Hearn, p.177.

Let us turn to still another class of Keats's poems, the Odes. Here he revived an old form and brought it to a stage bordering on perfection. One of his most perfect is the "Ode to Psyche". He says himself concerning this ode, in a letter to his brother, George - "The following poem, the last I have written, is the first and only one with which I have taken even moderate pains. I have, for the most part, dashed off my lines in a hurry; this one I have done leisurely. I think it reads the more richly for it and it will, I hope, encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit".¹

"To Autumn" has been considered by critics to be the most faultless of all his work. It does not open up such great avenues of thought as do some of the other poems, but it is more objective. Nature and the season seem to be speaking to us and through the whole is revealed a fine subtlety of observation of nature.

In criticizing the five odes, W.M. Payne says - "The odes indeed constitute one of the supreme achievements of English poetry. Their finished and flawless beauty is unequalled elsewhere in Keats and is hardly surpassed anywhere in our literature".²

He further records Mr. Forman as saying "they have the tremulous thickness of utterance arising from intense emotion".²

1. "Study of John Keats," by F.M. Owen, page 164.

2. "The Greater English Poets" of the 19th Century,"

by W. M. Payne, pages 30 and 31.

RELATION OF KEATS AND SHELLEY

Though at first there seems to be very little in common between the methods and the content of thought of the two poets, Keats and Shelley, a careful study shows that they are closely related. In spite of the fact that Keats refused Shelley's invitation to visit him at Marlowe because he wished to follow his "own scope unfettered", he was really greatly influenced by Shelley. All through his life, Keats sought the principle of beauty in all things and towards the end of his life he was consoled with the thought that he had loved and faithfully sought after this principle. Compare with this the following lines from Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" -

"Spirit of Beauty, that does consecrate
With thine own hues all thou does shine upon" 1

The subject matter in the two poems of "Endymion" and "Alastor" is the same. In each the poet tells the story of a young poet seeking for his ideal, the embodiment of which, in human form, he has seen in a dream. From this dream he has learned the rapture of union with his ideal and realizes to the full that complete satisfaction can never come save in such an union. The greater part of each poem is taken up with the journeys of the poet in pursuit of this ideal. The

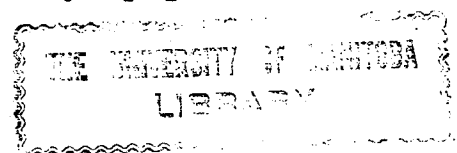
1. "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", by Shelley, Stanza 11

essential difference between the two poems is that Keats is not troubled with the contrast between the ideal and the real which so haunted Shelley.

A second pair of poems by these contemporary writers, which show the close connection between their ideas are Shelley's "To a Skylark" and Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale". The same thought forms the subject of both these poems, that "our human life is all unrest and sorrow, an oscillation between longing and satiety, a looking before and after. We are aware of a perfection that we cannot attain and that leaves us dissatisfied by everything attainable, and we die and do not understand death. But the bird is beyond this division and dissonance, it attains the ideal".¹ This idea, that perfect happiness belongs only to youth is a common one with Keats. We find it expressed in the "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and also in the "Eve of St. Agnes". He seemed to feel that as the mind grew and developed and attained the power to think, then the individual came to realize the sorrow of the world; all its marring deformities and the burden of the mystery of life and death. With it all, however, he realized the impossibility of restraining or curbing its natural development.

Even in the master-pieces of the two writers we find one idea worked out. In "Hyperion" the progress and development of humanity are shown. The older race of Gods

1. "Oxford Lectures", by A. C. Bradley, page 228.



led by Saturn have been overthrown. Apollo and his followers, more progressive, have conquered and reign supreme. There is a hint that another race, still more advanced and better able to rule, will arise and, in turn, vanquish Apollo. In his lyrical drama "Prometheus Unbound", Shelley has worked out the same idea. Jupiter is overthrown and Prometheus, the fire-bringer, is liberated. Shelley believed that with the downfall of tyranny all the wrongs of humanity would be at once righted. The last act of his drama is a song of triumph over the liberation of humanity and the righting of all ills. To quote from one of the lyrics, a song of the spirits shows the thought in his mind, that the instant tyranny is overcome, all the wrongs are righted and the Golden Age of perfection is heralded -

"We come from the mind
Of human kind
Which was late so dusk and obscene and blind
Now 'tis an ocean
Of clear emotion
A heaven of serene and mighty motion". 1

or the same thought is expressed in -

"Our spoil is won,
Our task is done,
We are free to dive, or soar, or run;
Beyond and around
Or within the bound
Which clips the world with darkness round.

"We'll pass the eyes
Of the starry skies
Into the hoar deep to colonize;
Death, chaos and night
From the sound of our flight
Shall flee, like mist from a tempest's might". 2

Both poets were influenced by Wordsworth's Excursion".

1. "Prometheus Unbound", by Shelley, lines 93-98
2. "Prometheus Unbound", by Shelley, lines 135-146.

The poem was written under the influence of Godwin when Wordsworth was passing through one of the trying experiences of his life. His faith in humanity had been shattered and he had not yet found the consolation in nature which he was later to feel and enjoy. In the "Excursion" he tried to demonstrate the absolute and moral sufficiency of the individual, at the same time showing the danger of inactive and unsympathetic solitude. Both Keats and Shelley treated of the latter part of this theme. The former expresses his tendency to dream and the necessity to get beyond himself and feel the sorrows of others -

"None can usurp this height", returned the shade
 But those to whom the miseries of the world
 Are miseries and will not let them rest
All else who find a haven in the world,
 When they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
 If by a chance into this fane, they come,
 Rot in the pavement where thou rotted'st half!
 "Are there not thousands in the world", said I
 Encouraged by the sooth voice of the Shade
"Who love their fellows even to the death
Who feel the giant agony of the world
 And more like slaves to poor humanity
 Labour for mortal good".¹

In the Preface to "Alastor", or the "Spirit of Solitude", Shelley says -

"All else selfish, blind and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world. Those who love not their fellow-beings live

1. Quoted by A.C. Bradley in "Oxford Lectures on Poetry", page 241.

unfruitful lives and prepare for their old age a miserable grave.

The good die first
And those whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket".¹

The chief differences between these two poets lie in the fact that Shelley was opposed to the idea that beauty is manifest in suffering and conflict. For him, before there is perfect beauty there must be perfect freedom, which brings in its turn, perfect happiness and beauty. Keats on the other hand believed that true beauty comes through suffering and conflict.

A second point of difference is manifested in their writings, viz., that Keats's idealism is much more concrete than that of Shelley. The Titans in "Hyperion" must fall because they are less beautiful and for him the Ideal lay in perfect beauty. He was always seeking and pining for his ideal. Shelley emphasized love as a phase of the ideal. He sought the principle of perfect love and was attracted to any object that seemed to him to manifest this perfect love. This thought caused many of his actions, which have been so bitterly criticized.

In comparing the works of these two poets it has been said that Keats was not a deep thinker, that he was indifferent to the truth. This is far from true, for though he did not aspire to be a great philosophical

1. "Alastor", by Shelley, Preface.

poet, as did Shelley, he studied and thought deeply. He even criticizes Wordsworth for this lack of depth of thought, saying "If Wordsworth had thought a little deeper at that moment he would not have written it", and a little later, "it is a kind of sketchy intellectual landscape, not a search after truth".¹

A. C. Bradley says of him that there is "a Shakespearian strain in him shown in his interest for everything or heard of, to be curious about a thing, accept it, identify himself with it without asking whether it is better or worse than another or how far it is from the ideal principle. It is this impulse which speaks in the words - 'If a sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel'".²

1. Quoted by A. C. Bradley in "Oxford Lectures on Poetry", page 334.

2. Quoted by A. C. Bradley in "Oxford Lectures on Poetry" page 237.

SHELLEY'S OPINIONS CONCERNING KEATS'S WORK

It has been noted earlier in this essay that Keats and Shelley were never very close friends. In spite of this fact, however, Shelley's keen mind was quick to discern the power of Keats's genius and he has left us some very fair criticisms of his fellow poet.

In a letter to Mr. Ollier, Shelley said, "I have read your Altham and Keats's poem and Lamb's work. For the second in this list much praise is due to me for having read it. The author's intention appearing to be that no person should possibly get to the end of it. Yet it is full of some of the highest and finest gleams of poetry, indeed everything seems to be viewed which is described in it. I think if he had printed about fifty pages of fragments from it I should have been led to admire Keats as a poet more than I ought, of which there is now no danger".¹

Later in July 1820, he said of "Endymion", after reading it a second time.- "I have lately read your "Endymion" again and even with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This, people in general will not endure; and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel

1. "Shelley Memorials", edited by Lady Shelley, page 119.

persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will".¹

During the earlier stages of their acquaintance Shelley tried to warn Keats against publishing his works too early. He advised him to wait until his style and thought became more mature. He had tried publishing his own youthful works and saw the mistake that he had made. He realized the sensitive nature of Keats and saw how detrimental adverse criticisms and neglect of the public would be to him. Keats rather resented this advice. He could never understand Shelley and always feared that he might be patronizing him. Nothing was farther from his mind than this, for though he could be a very harsh and, sometimes, unjust critic when the time seemed to warrant, it was his last wish to inflict unnecessary pain on a fellow man. Byron says of him - "He is to my knowledge the least selfish and mildest of men - a man who has made more sacrifices of his fortunes and feelings for others than any I ever heard of".²

The work of Keats that ranked the highest, according to Shelley's judgement, was "Hyperion". In 1820 he wrote concerning the new volume which contained the fragment, "Hyperion" - "Keats's new volume has arrived to us and the fragment called "Hyperion" promises for him that he is destined to become one of the first

1. "Memoir of Shelley", by W.M. Rossetti, page 107.
2. "Memoir of Shelley", by W.M. Rossetti, page 61.

writers of the Age. His other things are imperfect enough and what is worse written in that bad sort of style which is becoming fashionable among those who fancy they are imitating Leigh Hunt and Wordsworth. Where is Keats now? I am anxiously expecting him in Italy when I shall take care to bestow every possible attention on him. I consider his a most valuable life and I am deeply interested in his safety. I intend to be the physician both of his body and soul, and to keep the one warm and to teach the other Greek and Spanish. I am aware, indeed, in part, that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me and this is an additional motive and will be an added pleasure".¹

The last half of this quotation shows the genuine regard in which he held Keats and his eager desire to try and alleviate the young poet's suffering. Writing later in 1820 he says, "Among the modern things which have reached me is a volume of the poems by Keats; in other respects insignificant enough but containing the fragment of a poem called "Hyperion". It is certainly an astonishing piece of writing and gives me a conception of Keats which, I confess, I had not before".²

Again in a letter to Peacock in 1821, he writes, "Among your anathemas of the modern attempts in poetry, do you include Keats's 'Hyperion'? I think it is very fine. His other poems are worth little, but if 'Hyperion' be not grand poetry none has ever been pro-

1. "Memoirs of Shelley", by W.M. Rossetti, page 138.
 2. "Memoirs of Shelley", by W.M. Rossetti, page 108.

duced by our contemporaries".¹

Like many others of his friends Shelley could never rid himself of the belief that the harsh criticisms published by "Blackwood's" and the "Quarterly Review" were in a very great measure responsible for the death of Keats. He realized that the poet's sensitive, nervous temperament and believed that the harsh unjust words would have a very detrimental effect on the mind and health of his friend. In 1820 he wrote, "Poor Keats was thrown in a dreadful state of mind by this review, which, I am persuaded, was not written with any intention of producing the effect to which it has, at least, greatly contributed of embittering his existence and inducing a disease from which there are now faint hopes of his recovery. The first effects are described to me to have resembled insanity and it was by assiduous watching that he was restrained from effecting purposes of suicide. The agony of his suffering at length produced the rupture of a blood vessel in the lungs and the usual process of consumption appears to have begun".²

What Shelley failed to recognize were the manly qualities and sound common sense of the man which caused him to profit rather than otherwise by these criticisms. No one more fully realized than did Keats himself the imperfections and signs of immaturity in his work. He

1. "Memoirs of Shelley," by W.M. Rossetti, page 108.

2. "Quoted by Sidney Colvin in "John Keats", page 516.

forever deplored the fact, and his great grief when he came to die, was that he had left nothing worth while, nothing that would live and be known by future generations of men. He felt that he had the power to become a great poet but that the time was not given him to develop this power.

ADONAIS

Upon hearing of the death of Keats, Shelley wrote his beautiful elegy, "Adonais", in memory of the dead poet. It is known from a letter he wrote to Ollier on the 8th of June 1821 that he had then the poem almost ready for publication - "You may announce for publication a poem entitled 'Adonais'. It is a lament on the death of poor Keats, with some interposed stabs on the assassins of his peace and of his fame, and will be preceded by a criticism on 'Hyperion', asserting the clue claims which that fragment gives him to the rank which I have assigned him. My poem is finished and consists of about forty Spenser stanzas. If you have interest enough in the subject I could wish that you inquire of some of the friends and relations of Keats respecting the circumstances of his death and could transmit me any information you may be able to collect and, especially, as to the degree in which, as I am assured, the brutal attack in the "Quarterly Review" excited the disease by which he perished".¹

On June 16, 1821, he wrote to John Gisborne, "As it is I have finished my Elegy and this day sent it to the press at Pisa. You shall have a copy the moment it is completed. I think it will please you. I have dipped my pen in consuming fire for his destroyers; otherwise,

1. "Adonais", edited by Thomas J. Wise, introduction, page 8.

the style is clear and solemn".¹ This passage taken in connection with a previous letter of the 5th of June in which he mentions the fact that he has started the elegy has led the critics to believe that he was some two weeks occupied in writing it. Whether he was unable to collect sufficient material for his notes on "Hyperion" or whether the work has been lost is not known but there is no such volume of his work extant.

Shelley seems to have taken great pains in the composition and correction of the proofs of the elegy. So nearly perfect is the work that some critics have been led to class it as his masterpiece. He himself thought well of it and was very anxious to hear how the English would accept it, and confesses that he will be surprised to hear of its failure to interest the public. He writes regarding the style, - "'Adonais', in spite of its mysticism, is the least imperfect of my compositions and as the image of my regret and honour for poor Keats, I wish it to be so".²

Written towards the end of his life when he had become more tolerant of religion, it gives the world a better opportunity to estimate more accurately the extent of his religious beliefs than do some of his earlier works, where he indulged in destructive criticism of the existing forms of worship. Throughout the poem he seems

1. "Ibid", page 16

2. "Adonais", edited by Thomas J. Wise, introduction, page 16.

to express belief in a Deity. The following lines taken on their own merit would certainly indicate a belief in God.

"Through wood and stream and field and hill and
ocean
A quickening life from the Earth's heart has
burst
As it has ever done, with change and motion
From the great morning of the world when first
God dawned in chaos." ¹

As to his belief in the immortality of the soul, Rossetti states - "That Shelley regarded the aspirations of man after individual immortality as some presumption in favour of that and he himself had the aspirations in a marked degree, but at the same time he considered it a mere presumption - unproved, incapable of proof and exceedingly uncertain. He found it difficult to perceive that he is immortal". ² However, it seems hardly likely that if Shelley did not believe in immortality he would refer to Keats so often as having an individual soul which is still living or in the future state.

He speaks of him -

"he is not dead, he doth not sleep
He hath awakened from the dream of life" ¹

or again

"He lives, he works - 'tis Death is dead, not he,
Mourn not for Adonais". ²

Picturing the arrival of the spirit of Adonais to the life hereafter he names those who will be there to meet and welcome him. The first to arise is Chatterton, the Boy

1. "Adonais", by Shelley, stanza XLX
2. "Memoirs of Shelley", by W.M. Rossetti
1. "Memoirs of Shelley", by W.M. Rossetti
2. "Adonais", Shelley, XXXIX and XLI

Poet, whose work he had admired so much. Sydney is the next to come forward and then he breaks into these words -

"And many more whose names on Earth are dark
But whose transmitted effluence cannot die
So long as fire outlives the parent spark,
Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.
'Thou art become as one of us,' they cry,
'It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
'Swung blind in unascended majesty,
'Silent, alone amid a Heaven of song,
'Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our
throng'" 1

The charm of the whole poem has caused the critics to place it with Milton's "Lycidas" and the "In Memoriam" of Tennyson as one of the three great elegies in the English language.

Roger Ingpen writes of it in his introduction to the works of Shelley, "it is unquestionably one of the greatest and most beautiful elegies in the English language". 2

1. "Adonais", by Shelley, stanza XLVI
2. "Works of Shelley", edited by Roger Ingpen, introduction,
page 31.

CONCLUSION

When Keats died in 1891, he had no idea of the great influence he was to exert, and the high esteem in which his writings were to be held. He felt that he had within him the power to become a great poet, but he feared that time had not been given him to develop this power. To judge from the attitude of his contemporaries, it would seem that Keats was justified in his opinion. Very few people, save his own intimate friends, knew anything of his writings. The criticisms published in the reviews had brought him before the notice of a few, but his works were not read and studied by the general public.

It was not until about eight years after the publication of "Adonais" that some enthusiasts from Cambridge, including Hallam, Monckton Milnes, and Sutherland began to make a study of the poetry of Shelley. Through their comments on "Adonais" they drew attention to Keats; scholars began to study his work and his fame spread among a certain class. Alfred Tennyson, closely connected with this group of men, was influenced by Keats's work "which did most to colour his style in poetry and make him strive to 'load every rift of a subject with ore'".¹

Another writer who paid high tribute to Keats was Rossetti. During the course of his life, this man was influenced, first by Shelley, then by Keats, then by

1. "John Keats", by Sidney Colvin, 1917, page 539.

Browning, but Keats always continued to keep the highest place in his affections. So highly did he estimate the works of Keats that, it is reported, he urged William Morris to become a painter as John Keats had done all there was to be done in poetry.

One of the latest notes of appreciation was written to Sir Sidney Colvin by Matthew Arnold, some few years after the publication of the latter's essay on Keats, reprinted in 1892, in "Essays on Criticism". In this note Arnold writes - "If Keats had left nothing but 'Endymion' it would have alone shown his remarkable power and have been worth preserving on that account; but when he has left plenty which shows it much better. I cannot but wish 'Endymion' away from his volume".¹

In the light of these later criticisms let us interrupt the well known verse of Shelley,

"Here lieth one whose name was writ in water,
But, ere the breath that could erase it blew,
Death, in remorse for that fell slaughter,
Death, the immortalizing winter, flew
Athwart the stream, - and time's printless
 torrent grew
A scroll of crystal, blazoning the name
Of Adonais".²

1. Quoted by Sidney Colvin in "John Keats" (1917), page 543

2. Quoted by William Osler in "Alabama Student", page 54.

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