John Keats : a critical essay / by Robert Bridges.

Contributors

Bridges, Robert, 1844-1930.
Gee, Samuel (Samuel Jones), 1839-1911
Royal College of Physicians of London

Publication/Creation

London : Publisher not identified, 1895.

Persistent URL

https://wellcomecollection.org/works/djg4tbyf

Provider

Royal College of Physicians

License and attribution

Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
https://wellcomecollection.org

Samuel Lyell.

April 27. 1895.

JOHN KEATS

Two Hundred and Fifty Copies printed

No. 216

Walker & Boutall Ph. Sc.

JOHN KEATS

A CRITICAL ESSAY

BY

ROBERT BRIDGES

PRIVATELY PRINTED

MDCCCXCV

JOHN KEATS

INTRODUCTION

I.

IF one English poet might be recalled to-day from the dead to continue the work which he left unfinished on earth, it is probable that the crown of his country's desire would be set on the head of John Keats; and this general feeling is based on a judgment of his work which we may unhesitatingly accept, namely, that the best of it is of the highest excellence, but the mass of it disappointing.

Nor is there any likelihood of this verdict being overset, although some may always unreservedly admire him on account of his excellences,—and this because his fault is often the excess of a good and rare quality,—and others again as unreservedly depreciate him on account of that very want of restraint, which in his early work, besides its other immaturities, is often of such a nature as to be offensive to

good taste, and very provocative of impatient condemnation.

Among Keats' poems, too, a quantity of indifferent and bad verse is now printed, not only from a reverence for his first volume, which he never revised, and which is very properly reprinted as he issued it, but also from a feeling which editors have had, that since anything might be of value, everything was ; so that any scrap of his which could be recovered has gone into the collections. Concerning which poor stuff we may be consoled to know that Keats himself would have had no care ; for, not to speak of what was plainly never intended for poetry at all, he seems to have regarded at least his earlier work as a mere product of himself and the circumstances, now good now bad, its quality depending on influences beyond his control and often adverse, under which he always did his best. On one point only was he sensitive, and that was his belief that he sometimes did well, and would do better. The failures he left as they were, having too much pride to be ashamed of them, and too strong a conviction of an ever-flowing, and, as he felt, an increasing and bettering inspiration to think it worth while to spend fresh time in revising what a younger moment had cast off.

The purpose of this essay is to examine Keats'

more important poems by the highest standard of excellence as works of art, in such a manner as may be both useful and interesting; to investigate their construction, and by naming the faults to distinguish their beauties, and set them in an approximate order of merit; also, by exhibiting his method, to vindicate both the form and meaning of some poems from the assumption of even his reasonable admirers that they have neither one nor other. Within the limits of an introductory chapter this cannot be done, even imperfectly, without the omission of much which the reader may look for in an account of Keats' poetry, but such omissions can be easily supplied: a knowledge, too, of the circumstances of Keats' life will be assumed,* and some acquaintance with his letters to his friends; and since these make of themselves a most charming book,† and one that can never be superseded as a commentary on his work in its personal aspect, this view of the subject will here be disregarded except when required to aid the criticism or interpretation of a poem.

* Mr. Sidney Colvin's *Life of Keats*, in the *English Men of Letters* series, supplies all these desiderata most satisfactorily.

† And a beautiful book if some of the letters were omitted. *Letters of John Keats to his Family and Friends* Edited by Sidney Colvin. Macmillan & Co., 1891.

I shall take the poems in what seems the most convenient order for my purpose, and shall not trouble the reader with any other artificial connection, reserving general remarks till the end. The worser pieces I shall not notice at all.

II. ENDYMION.

Endymion is Keats' longest poem. It is the story of how Cynthia, the moon-goddess, who is also herself the moon, fell in love with the mortal Endymion. "A great trial of invention," wrote Keats, for he had "to fill 4000 lines with one bare circumstance." When he composed the poem, he was in a state of mental excitement varied by fits of depression; he grew tired of it, had a poor opinion of it, and in his preface described it as a feverish attempt.

To one who expects to be carried on by the interest of a story, this poem is more tedious and unreadable than can be imagined; and parts of it merit at least some of the condemnation which fell on the whole. Keats thought to "surprise by a fine excess;" his excess rather confuses and blurs, and it is a severe task to keep the attention fixed. A want of definition

in the actual narration,—so that important matters do not stand out,—a sameness in the variety, and the reiteration of languid epithets, are the chief cause of this ; and in the second book, where Endymion is wandering in strange places, the uncertainty as to where he is, in the absence of explanatory statement as to what is intended, reduces the reader to despair. And yet it is nothing less than a marvel how even these faults can have obscured so completely the poetic excellences from a more general recognition.* I shall give a short analysis of the outward events of the poem, such as the reader may find useful both as a guide and for reference or index, and will add some explanation of the allegory. But first with respect to the allegory I would say this, that the minor characters and incidents are so numerous and so yielding to various interpretation, that for the sake of brevity and simplicity I must confine myself to the main points, without which there is no sense in the whole ; and since, even with these, the mere putting their explanation into definite statement cannot be done without throwing the whole temporarily out of focus, I am the more content to neglect those lesser matters, in which the poet should be regarded

* As an example of what is meant, see the poverty of the selections from *Endymion* in Ward's *English Poets.*

as having, in his own words, "let himself go from some fine starting-point towards his own originality;" nor would I wish to represent the poem other than he meant it, "a little region in which lovers of poetry may wander" at their will.

ANALYSIS OF ENDYMION.

BOOK I.—ON THE EARTH.

1. *Author's prologue, 1-62.
2. Festival of Pan on Latmos, 63-406.
   [Endymion enters, 168; *Ode to Pan, 232-306.]
3. Peona takes E. to her bower, 407-515.
   [Address to Sleep, 453-463.]
   E. tells of his vision of an unknown goddess among the poppies—he dreamt he was asleep, 516-710.
   Peona rallies him on his love, 710-768.
   E. replies with his *argument on the meaning of Love, 769-857, and gives an account of a second, 893, and third, 963, meeting with the same vision, to end of book.

BOOK II.—WANDERINGS UNDER THE EARTH.

1. *Prologue on supremacy of love above heroism, &c., 1-43.
2. E., while enjoying the pleasures of nature, reads a message on a butterfly's wings, 43-63.

The butterfly leads him to a nymph, who foretells his wanderings and ultimate success, 64–130.

E. meditates on the disappointment of desire, and prays to Cynthia as his especial goddess, but not recognised as his visitant; and receives answer bidding him descend into the silent mysteries of earth, 131–214.

He obeys, –218.

Description of an underworld of gems, 219–280.

E. feels horror of solitude, and wishes to return to the earth. He comes to a temple of Diana, his goddess, and prays Diana to deliver him from the underworld, 281–332.

Flowers spring out of the marble, 333–350.

He goes on to soft music, 351–363.

Is tortured by the music, 364–375.

Comes to a lightsome wood of myrtles, 376–386.

3. Description of Adonis, 387–427.

The waking of Adonis, 428–533.

Venus encourages E., and enjoins secrecy, 534–587.

4. E. follows a diamond balustrade through waterworks to a gloom where he sees Cybele, 588–649.

Balustrade breaks off, and he goes on an eagle to a jasmine bower, where he soliloquises, 649–706.

Cynthia comes unknown to him in bower, 707–827,

And leaves him asleep, 853.

[*The poet speaks of the mystery of his legend, 827–853.]

5. E. wakes to melancholy thought, and strays to a grotto where he sees Alpheus and Arethusa—he prays for them, 854–1017.
   He goes altogether under the sea, –1023.

Book III.—Under the Sea.

1. *Prologue on regalities and supremacy of the Moon, 1–71.
2. A moonbeam reaches E. under sea, 72–102, and shines on him till morning, 102–119.
   [Description of sea-floor, 119–141.]
   [*Address to the Moon, 142–187.]
3. He meets with Glaucus and Scylla, 187–1027.
   Neptune's hall, 866–887.
   Venus cheers E., 887–923.
   Neptune's feast, 924–937.
   Hymn to Neptune, 943–990.
   Nereids carry off E., 1005–1018.
   E. hears a heavenly voice promising to take him up, 1019–1027.
4. E. finds himself back on the earth, 1028–1032.

Book IV.—In the Air.

1. Prologue to English Muse, 1–29.
2. E. finds a beautiful Indian maid bewailing her loneliness. He falls in love with her, 30–330,
   [*Her song, 146–290.]
   And accompanies her in the air on flying horses, 330.
   *Vision of Sleep journeying, 367–397.

E. and Indian sleep on the sleeping horses, 398.
Cynthia appears to E. as the moon, 430.
The Indian disappears, –512.
*Cave of quietude described, 512–562.
Diana's feast and hymn to D., 563–611.

3. In midst of hymn E. is borne to Latmos again, and finds there and addresses the Indian lady, 611–797.
   [The poet speaks, 770–780.]
4. Peona reappears, and by the identification of the Moon, Cynthia, and the Indian lady as one, the tale concludes, –1003.

In so far as the poem has an inner meaning, Endymion must be identified with the poet as Man. The Moon represents "Poetry" or the Ideality of desired objects, *The principle of Beauty in all things:* it is the supersensuous quality which makes all desired objects ideal; and Cynthia, as moon-goddess, crowns and personifies this, representing the ideal beauty or love of woman: and in so far as she is also actually the Moon as well as the Indian lady,—who clearly represents real or sensuous passion,—it follows that the love of woman is in its essence the same with all love of beauty; and this proposition and its converse will explain much that is otherwise strange and difficult.

Allegory of Endymion.

Man in Keats' poem begins with a desire for excellence, renown, and fame, and connects the

Moon with his passion, iii. 142 *seq.*, that is, he sees beauty or "poetry" or ideality in his desire. This Ideality, assuming the form of the goddess, that is, of woman, *which it is*,* makes him renounce ambition and pursue poetic love. Next he has to humanise the ideality of his passion; and this comes about by his contact with the mystery of life, and by sympathy with dead lovers' tragedies; and this sympathy leaves him a prey to real sensuous passion. In this he falls, as he thinks, from his faith; and his sensuous passion, coming into sudden contact with his old ideals, vanishes at one moment quite away, and leaves him a prey to utter despair, iv. 507 *seq.*; and he is at discord with himself, until he unexpectedly discovers that his real and ideal loves are one and the same.

General meaning.

The circumstance that ideal beauty, if it is the Moon, is represented as falling in love with man, merely implies selection or election, and narrows down the application of the allegory to those men who feel supernatural visitations (*End.* i. 795), such as are the *Visionaries* of the *Revision of Hyperion*. Also, to follow Keats' meaning, it must not be lost sight of that when

* The absolute identification must be intended in iv. 430, &c.

Endymion is visited by Cynthia, he never recognises her to be the Moon,* although her advent was heralded by "the loveliest moon," &c., i. 591. The identity is not revealed to him till Book IV. 430, &c.; and so, when he finds himself loving both Cynthia and the Indian lady at the same time, he remembers his first love, the Moon, as distinct from them, and says that he has a *triple* soul. There is no doubt about this, and it seems to me one of the two keys to the allegory. That it has escaped the attention of diligent readers is a proof that it is not insisted on with sufficient clearness in the poem, and it is a good example of the lack of definition in the presentation of Keats' main designs.

Keats was not making an allegory, but using a legend, and he never, so far as I know, stated that he intended his poem for an allegory (unless this is implied in ii. 838-9), so that it may naturally shock the reader to find the Moon identified with such an abstraction as *the principle of beauty in all things*. But as a matter of fact, the symbolism may be arrived at in the simplest way: the poet was very sensible to the mysterious effects

Symbolism of the moon.

* See i. 606, 894, 943–959; ii. 128, esp. 168–195, and 302–332, 576, esp. 686 *seq.*, and 739, 753; iii. 175, &c., 913–914.

of moonlight,* and felt the poetry of nature more deeply under that influence; and, that mood being given, one step further only is necessary, which is that other ecstatic and poetic moods should be likened to it, and the conditioning cause of the first, which is known, be taken for a symbol of the other unknown causes, or of that which is common to all. This is, I think, the other chief key to the sense, and it makes the difficult passage in *End.* iii. 142–187 (and see especially lines 163–169) intelligible and plain; and the poem becomes, with these explanations, readable as a whole, suggestive of meaning, and full of shadowy outlines of mysterious truth.

Scheme of the poem.

The general scheme of the poem is broad and simple. The four books (see the Analysis) correspond with the four elements—I. Earth; II. Fire—for it is more probable that this element has been somewhat

* And see Wordsworth's two *Odes to the Moon*:—

"O still beloved! for thine, meek Power, are charms
That fascinate the very babe in arms."

And better Guy de Maupassant:—

"Pourquoi ces frissons de cœur, cette émotion de l'âme? . . . A qui étaient destinés ce spectacle sublime, cette abondance de poésie jetée du ciel sur la terre? . . . Dieu peut-être a fait ces nuits-là pour voiler d'idéal les amours des hommes."

lost sight of in its necessary modifications than that it was not intended in its proper home beneath the earth's crust; III. Under sea = Water; IV. Air; and these typify respectively—I. Natural beauty; II. The mysteries of earth; III. The secrets of death; IV. Spiritual freedom and satisfaction. The first idea needs little comment: the last three books are concerned with states of mind which, on his own confession, lay beyond the poet's experience; and here he must be regarded as a searcher for truth rather than as full prophet. What the mysteries of earth are will appear in the explanation of *Sleep and Poetry*. Their region "beneath in the earth" is moonless, *i.e.*, unlovely, and oppresses Endymion with the horror of solitude; but even here he finds a cold shrine to Diana and immortal bowers of beauty; and at last the mysteries flush into love, and he holds unexpected communion with Cynthia herself. After this "the blank amazements amaze no more," and he meets with Alpheus and Arethusa. The reason for the choice of this legend is very clear; they are two lovers, who, like Endymion himself, have left the earth, and are pursuing their passion underground, whence they are destined, as he too is, to arrive again at the upper air through the sea. So in the third book the story of Glaucus and Scylla has a similar fit-

ness. Glaucus is a mortal, who, of his own curiosity and instinctive desire, has plunged straight into the "secrets of Death" from the world of natural beauty, where he was living on the brink of them. Scylla may have done the same; but the general meaning of this third book I am not at all able to interpret. The region is one where the moonbeams can reach, and the phenomena of earth's day and night are dimly seen. The secrets of Death are in some way connected with magic, of which there are two kinds—the first, the earthly magic or witchcraft of Circe, who is "arbitrary queen of sense," and can gratify the sense but not resolve the secrets of Death, whose evil power she seems rather to aid; and the second, a serious magic, which Glaucus has to learn before he can win redemption from Circe's curse. The meaning of the secrets of Death is probably the same as the imagination in *Rev. of Hyperion* (q.v.), but whether Glaucus is a visionary who lives entirely in the past (see *End.* iii. 327–337, 122, &c.), or whether Death has a more realistic meaning, or whether, as is not impossible, the two ideas are combined, I cannot guess. It seems intended that the sorrow of the secrets of Death can only be surmounted and their magic resolved by a soul who has been in perfect communion with ideal

beauty, and has traced her presence through the whole of creation.

The episode of Glaucus and Scylla, bk. iii. from line 188 onwards, may be omitted at first reading, and it must always, though most consecutive in narration, please the least, even though a key should be found for it. Of the four books, of almost equal length, the fourth reads by far the shortest. As for the beauties of the poem, they are innumerable, and the reader will find them for himself, if he will be patient with the defects that so curiously hide them. Of these I would say no more here, if they did not very many of them depend on a lamentable deficiency in Keats' art, which, while it affects much of his work, is brought into unusual prominence by the subject of *Endymion;* and that is his very superficial and unworthy treatment of his ideal female characters. It may be partly accounted for thus: Keats' art is primarily objective and pictorial, and whatever other qualities it has are as it were added on to things as perceived; and this requires a satisfactory pictorial basis, which, in the case of ideal woman, did not exist in Keats' time. Neither the Greek nor the Renaissance ideals were understood, and the thin convention of classicism, which we may see in the works of West and Canova, was played out;

Idea of woman.

so that the rising artists, and Keats with them, finding "nothing to be intense upon," turned to nature, and produced from English models the domestic-belle type, which ruled throughout the second quarter of the century, degrading our poets as well as painters. It was *banal*, and the more ideal and abstract it sought to be, the more empty it became; so that it was the portrait-painters only, like Lawrence, who, having to do with individual expression of subjective qualities, escaped from the meanness, and represented women whom we can still admire. Now Keats was clearly in a predicament from which neither circumstances nor disposition provided him an escape. The social condition of his parents probably excluded him from contact with the best types, and he seems to have had some idiosyncrasy. He deplores in one of his letters that he was not at ease in women's society; and when he attributes this to their not answering to his preconception of them, it looks as if he were seeking his ideal among them. Certainly what appears to be the delineation of his conception often offends taste without raising the imagination, and it reveals a plainly impossible foundation for dignified passion, in the representation of which Keats failed, as we shall see later. I conclude that he supposed that common expressions became

spiritualised by being applied to an idea. Whatever praise is given to Keats' work must always be with this reservation ; and he generally does his best where there is no opportunity for this kind of fault. There are exceptions, and these are, as one would expect, among the more personally inspired poems ; for such sonnets as *Time's Sea*, *I cry your Mercy*, *Bright Star*, though perhaps not quite untainted by this weakness if interpreted by the rest of his work, are yet, if considered alone, above reproach.

This ideal carries much better his other more homely type of woman, represented to him by his sister-in-law, who was no doubt the model of Peona, a lady who has no aspirations after the moon, a simple nature which he grew to value even more, of which in the revised *Hyperion* he says—

> " They seek no wonder but the human face,
> No music but a happy-noted voice."

And it must be remembered that his behaviour towards his own younger sister was a pattern of brotherliness and natural affection, full of sympathy, chivalry, devotion, and commonsense.

III. THE SHORT "ENDYMION" AND "SLEEP AND POETRY."

"I stood tiptoe."

The first poem in Keats' first volume, "I stood tiptoe upon a little hill," must be considered in relation to *Endymion*, for "Endymion" was its original title, and it may be regarded as a prelude to the longer poem. It was written in December 1816, and was more worked at * than one might suppose from what Keats tells us of his habits at that time. The argument of the poem, though much disguised by its objective manner, is carefully elaborated. It begins with a description of Nature as seen in a walk in the then suburbs of London—already romantically remote from us—and from this passes insensibly to other descriptions of Nature, with incidental reference to the new school of poetry, which promises to celebrate Nature (51, &c.). Then (l. 94 *seq.*), in an unfortunate passage, maiden beauty intrudes, and then (113) the moon

> "Coming into the blue with all her light."

And this moon is the same symbol as in the long poem—

---

* Letters iv.

"O Maker of sweet poets! dear delight
Of this fair world . . .
Lover of loneliness and wandering,
Of upcast eye."

And then (125) follows a poetic statement of the inspiration of poetry by Nature, which is unique in its bold and fanciful identification of versification with natural forms, *e.g.* l. 127—

"In the calm grandeur of a sober line
We see the waving of the mountain pine," &c.

He then suggests that this ecstasy in Nature may have given origin not only to the music of verse, but to the poetic ideas of such myths as Psyche, Syrinx, and Narcissus, and lastly (181) of Endymion, asserting his preference for that tale, and his wish to write it; and the poem ends (210–242) with a passage of human sympathy, as the direct effect of the marriage of Endymion and Cynthia.

This will give some notion of Keats' poetic method, but I will take one other poem to illustrate it, the last in the first volume, called *Sleep and Poetry;* and it is conveniently grouped here, because, like the one just noticed, it is in the same metre as *Endymion*, and both are good examples of Keats' early style.* Sleep and Poetry.

* Concerning the versification of *Endymion* there is no reason to repeat objections which were evident from the first to their Serene Cæcities the *Edinburgh* and *Black-*

They often fall into the feeble manner which he caught from Leigh Hunt,* and they never rise to Keats' full height, but here and there, especially in single lines, they do touch on it, and, quite apart from their inner meaning, have a beauty worthy of their author, and are very pleasant reading.

Sleep and Poetry is crowded with meaning. The short analysis of it is thus. Sleep, which figures the unawakened state of mind,† is for its gentle soothing and inspiring qualities (1–18, and *cf. End.* i. 453 *seq.*) subordinated to Poetry, which reveals more (19–34). Poetry, which represents the mind awakened to mystery, inspires with ambition and confidence (–40).

Keats then states his own devotion to Poetry (47–55), and prays to her for inspiration to penetrate the mysteries of Nature and human life (–84). He doubts whether fate will grant him length of life, and figures images of life which bring him back to a picture of the state of mind described in the opening lines of the poem (85–95).

wood, but some remarks will be found under *Lamia*, and on p. 77, *seq.*

* I have not read Hunt's poems, but this assertion of critics is unmistakably confirmed in Keats' Letters.

† As pointed out by Mrs. F. M. Owen in "Keats, a Study," Kegan Paul, 1880—an important book in the history of the criticism of Keats' genius.

Then in an important passage (101–162), to which I will recur, he states the spheres of emotion through which this poetic love of Nature will carry him. Then (162–235) follow the well-known invective against the Augustan school, and his prophecy of the coming revival; and at 235 a definition of the true object of poetry, to comfort mankind; implying sympathy with human misery. The rest of the poem, 270 to end, is his peroration to his first publication, an apology for presumption, a determination to write, a tribute to the sympathetic support of his friends, a description of his refuge in Leigh Hunt's study, and he ends his book saying of his verses—

> "Howsoever they be done,
> I leave them as a father does his son."

This argument seems consecutive enough, but the passage 101–162 requires explanation. The meaning of it is exactly the same with that of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. In that poem Wordsworth distinguishes three states of mind following by development one on another; 1st. boyhood—mere animal pleasure; 2nd. simple unreflective ecstasy in Nature; 3rd. reflective pleasure in nature, *i.e.* pleasure accompanied by or inwoven with that sense of mystery which it is the object of his poem to exhibit. Now

Compared with Wordsworth.

Keats, in a letter to Reynolds, May 1818,* refers to these lines on *Tintern Abbey*, and sets out his own ideas in the following language :—

"I compare human life to a large Mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it ; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness, and Oppression—whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the balance of good and evil —we are in a mist—*we* are now in that state—We feel the 'burden of the Mystery.'

"To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey,' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages."

I do not think that any one who knows

* Letters lii.

Keats' letters would suppose that he was merely borrowing from Wordsworth, but there is no objection to supposing that he may have learnt some of his obstinate questionings from that master, though he thought them out for himself. The sense in the two poems is, however, identical, and it will repay us to examine the extreme difference between Keats' objective treatment and Wordsworth's philosophising. For instance, here is Wordsworth's description of what Keats calls the infant or thoughtless chamber—

> " The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
> And their glad animal movements."

Keats speaks directly of this first state in the opening lines, and incidentally, though not without full contrastive purpose, he describes it last among his images of human life, where " knowledge is sorrow, sorrow is wisdom, and wisdom is folly." These images are of life considered first as a mere atomic movement in a general flux, then as a dream on the brink of destruction, then as a budding hope, then as an intellectual distraction, then as an ecstatic glimpse of beauty, and lastly as an instinctive pleasure ; and this corresponds exactly with what Wordsworth describes above. But how does Keats put it ?—

" A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air ;
A laughing school-boy, without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm."

Of the Second Chamber Wordsworth's lines may serve the general purpose of this essay, as giving an excellent plain description of Keats' mental condition when he wrote most of his earlier poetry—

" The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied," &c. (Cp. *End.* iii. 142, &c.)

And when they both describe the Third Chamber here are the parallel passages : Wordsworth has—

" And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

And Keats has—

" Lo, I see afar,
O'er-sailing the blue cragginess, a car

And steeds with streamy manes—the charioteer
Looks out upon the winds with furious fear:
And now the numerous tramplings quiver lightly
Along a huge cloud's ridge; and now with sprightly
Wheel downward come they into fresher skies.

. . . . . .

And now I see them on a green-hill's side
In breezy rest among the nodding stalks.
The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear
Shapes of delight, of mystery. . . .
. . . . . Most awfully intent
The driver of those steeds is forward bent
And seems to listen."

It is impossible to read Wordsworth's statement without seeing his meaning. Keats' poetry is as obscure as the "dark passages" themselves; but it must be acknowledged that it is a definitely aimed attempt to express a definitely conceived thought in poetical terms. If the imagery fails to define the poet's thought, it must be remembered that definition is hardly to be reached in this field; and if there does lie behind Keats' poetry a meaning which it is impossible to make absolutely distinct in his objective manner, then it is not strange that his poetry should attract many who have to confess that they do not entirely understand it.

There must be thousands and thousands of

persons alive at this moment in England, who, if they could only give poetic expression to those mysterious feelings with which they are moved in the presence of natural beauty, would be one and all of them greater poets than have ever yet been; but this objective presentation of ecstatic moods is only given in rare touches, and seems to be the reward of consummate art. The old simile, which in the *Iliad* is seldom more than an ornament used to enliven the description in an almost barbaric taste, may be used for a device to secure something of this evasive wonder. The poet having put his reader into the fit mood, then thrusts a natural picture before him, which is seen by him from the human or mysterious point of view; for instance, in *Hyperion*, the exquisite passage—

Poetry of Nature.

Similes.

> "Like a 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,"

is not so much a heightening of the picture of those old monstrous gods, lying out "at random, carelessly diffused,"—which is its excuse and opportunity,—so much as it is a glorifying of the mystery of Stonehenge and the forlorn moor, the poetry of which is seized at once by

the reader, whose mood has been created for him by the story.

Nothing can exceed the force of such a reserved method as this. The intention is artistically concealed by the very means which are taken to prepare the effect, and the picture bursts unexpectedly on the reader with all the force of a landscape seen suddenly upon reaching the brow of a hill. But it is of course much more difficult to picture ideas than moods. The purely objective picturing of an idea in poetry is very like a musical presentation; and as instrumental music can give a mood, but cannot be trusted to suggest the simplest idea without the interpretation of words or action either accompanying or preparing it, so the poetic picture requires a statement of its intention; and even then it seems as vague in itself as music, because it would equally well picture some other intentions. Keats gives a statement of the intention of his charioteer in 123–125 and 157, and also by a few words in the picture; yet it must be confessed that he is not quite successful; and if it may be said that in Wordsworth the statement is overdone, and that what poetry there is, is swamped in a self-conscious disquisition, Keats reads like an Apocalypse.

IV. HYPERION.

Keats was twenty-two years old when he finished *Endymion* in November 1817. It represents his youthful effort towards a reconstruction of English poetry on Elizabethan lines, in sympathy with the romantic and natural schools of his time, and in reaction against the poetry of the last century. A year passed before he began *Hyperion*, his other long poem, and in that time he fell under the influence of Milton, recognising in *Paradise Lost* the model of that workmanship, the neglect of which had spoiled his first attempt. *Hyperion* was to be an epic in Milton's manner, narrating the overthrow of the old elemental Greek gods by the new Olympian hierarchy. The difficulty that the events are supramundane is met by reliance on ancient sculpture for the types of the gods, with some hints from Milton's Pandemonium, and by placing the scene on earth, where his romantic love of Nature could have full play. Hyperion has a palace in the sky, which is luxuriantly described, and he is pictured as resting awhile on the clouds, where he is addressed by Cœlus from space; but he is quickly brought down to earth, where also the other gods are wandering.

Hyperion.

The opening promises well; we are conscious at once of a new musical blank verse, a music both sweet and strong, alive with imagination and tenderness. There and throughout the poem are passages in which Keats, without losing his own individuality, is as good as Milton, where Milton is as good as Virgil;* and such passages rank with the best things that Keats ever did; but in other places he seems a little overshadowed by Milton, while definite passages of the *Paradise Lost* are recalled, and in some places the imitation seems frigid. Milton's grammar and prosody are apparently aimed at, but they are not strictly kept, nor is the poem maintained at the Miltonic elevation. Here and there, too, a fanciful or weak expression betrays the author of *Endymion*. When, in April 1819, Keats had written little more than the first two books, he broke it off; and though it was not finally discarded till five months afterwards, he never continued it. In his letters he attributes his dissatisfaction to the style; but one cannot read to the end without a conviction that the real hindrance lay deeper; for although we may say that this torso of Keats' is the only poem since Milton which has seriously challenged the epic place, it is to the style mainly that this is due; the subject lacks the solid basis

* And see again p. 95.

of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest: like *Endymion*, it is all imagination; or, if we should accept Keats' personifications as sufficiently real for his purpose, even then the poem fails in conduct. The first two books describe the conditions of the older gods, and are impassioned with defeat, dismay, and collapse; the third introduces the new hierarchy, and we expect to find them radiant, confident, and irresistible; but there is no change in the colour of the poem; of the two deities introduced, Apollo is weeping and raving, and Mnemosyne, who has deserted the old dynasty for her hope in the new, "wails morn and eventide." It is plain that the story was strangling itself.

This failure is really the same in kind as the fault of *Endymion:* there is little but imagination, and a one-sidedness or incompleteness of that; a languor which, though it has now generally left the language, lingers in the main design. That Keats was conscious, too, that some of his earlier weaknesses were still visible will appear when we come to consider the *Revision of Hyperion;* but his own criticism of the poem was that it was Miltonic and artificial, and he confesses in a letter of September 1819* to a revulsion of taste. *Paradise*

* Letters cxvi.

Lost, which not a month before had been "every day a greater wonder" to him, is now "a corruption of our language, accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations. I have but lately (he writes) stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me." These last words mean a great deal, and remind one of Milton's ambitious avoidance of Shakespeare in his own later work. But Keats' condemnation of grammatical inversion seems a going back from the great advance in style which he had made, and it is worth while to inquire what he meant. It might seem at first that he attributed to inversions the appearance of Miltonism in his poem, and that he could not afford to be imitative. But he had not abused inversion in *Hyperion*, nor is it absent from his revision, nor wholly from his other poems; and the truth is that it is of the essence of good style. In ordinary speech the words follow a common order prescribed by use, and if that does not suit the sense, correction is made by vocal intonation: but the first thing that a writer must do is to get his words in the order of his ideas, as he wishes them to enter the reader's mind; and when such an arrangement happens not to be the order of common speech, it may be called

Grammatical inversion.

a grammatical inversion. To take the simplest case, the position of the adjective with regard to its substantive : in French it generally follows the substantive, and this is in most cases its proper place,* and for this reason alone descriptions of scenery are generally more pictorial in French prose than in English, the necessarily frequent predicates being in their natural position : in English the common use sets the epithet before the object, and when this is a malposition of ideas, a poet must invert either his grammar or his ideas ; and what is true of adjectives is true also of every word in the sentence. The best simple writers have the art of making the common grammatical forms obey their ideas, and Keats has usually a right order of ideas in a simple grammatical form, and a preference for this style over more elaborate constructions is no doubt what he intended to advocate, and this is well enough : but it must be remembered that he often gets good effect from the proper use of inversion, which is present where least suspected ; and also that he does not refuse to invert the gram-

* Diderot asserts the contrary ; but he seems to me to have confused himself with a metaphysical argument. His disquisition on this subject raises the general questions with his usual perspicacity. *Lettre sur les Sourds et Muets.*

matical order for the sake of rhyme or metre, which, though it may occasionally be a beauty, is generally a license or abuse, a resource of bad writers, and almost as much to be condemned as those needless or false inversions which are sometimes used in the mechanical avoidance of the appearance of prose.

Revision of Hyperion.

If now, for the convenience of pursuing our subject, we consider the *Revision of Hyperion*, we must remember that we are passing over Keats' most important work,—for it was between his beginning the *Hyperion* in September 1818 to September 1819, when he discarded it, that is, when he was under the Miltonic influence, that almost all his best work was done,—and we shall now be dealing with what was really a transitional period, though its development was arrested, as under the torture of passion, disappointment, and mortal disease his bright hopes of poetic attainment faded from him, and his voice was silenced for ever.

He had been disappointed, too, in a resolution which he had made to support himself and those whom his generosity invited to look to his talents for assistance, by doing some hack-work independent of his poetry; and he had returned dispirited to Hampstead (October 1819), the home of his unfortunate passion, and

there, hiding from his friends his restlessness and gloom, had betaken himself again to composition. By some paradoxical devilry, moreover, he devoted the best hours of the day to supplying the market with a comic poem in the Byronic vein, *The Cap and Bells*, and worked in the evenings only, when fatigued and distracted, at the *Revision of Hyperion*, which might be in itself enough to account for any inferiority in the execution. This fragment is very interesting; first, it shows a new departure in style; secondly, a deliberate resumption of his old allegorising vein, which we found in *Endymion* and the early poems; thirdly, the most mature attempt that he ever made to express some of his own convictions concerning human life. It is in this third aspect that the chief interest lies, and it is strange that its matter should not have prevented the *Revision* from passing for a first draught, with such critics as might overlook the evidence of the form. The style, being evidently less mastered than in the longer poem, might at first sight deceive; but it should not have deceived, for, in spite of the inefficient execution, it is in some respects an advance; it aims at a greater severity and has a more thoughtful power than any of Keats' other work. But the evidence of the alterations of the passages common to the two

Style.

versions is glaring. For instance, an old trick of Keats' is the abuse of invocation, as almost any page of *Endymion* will show: now in the *Revision of Hyperion* there is not a single vocative O admitted; and if we examine a passage which contained them in the original, and which is kept in the *Revision*, we shall see how their exclusion accounts for the alterations: for example, *Hyp.* i. 50.— Invocation.

> "Would come in these like accents; O how frail
> To that large utterance of the early gods!
> Saturn, look up! though wherefore, poor old king?
> I have no comfort for thee, no not one:
> I cannot say 'O wherefore sleepest thou?'
> For heaven is parted from thee, and the earth
> Knows thee not, thus afflicted, for a god."

The O's being proscribed, the first line is altered in *Revision*, 328, to

> "Would come in this like accenting: how frail!"

and the fifth line to

> "Wherefore thus sleepest thou?"

And this new *thus* drives out the original *thus* from line 7, which now becomes *so afflicted.* He then sees the two *wherefores* and alters the third line to *and for what, poor lost king;* the change of *lost* for *old* being made to avoid the hackneyed *poor old.*

(Dante.)

And besides this conscious correction of old faults, it is now for the first time that the influence of Dante appears, and that not merely in the gravity of the vision in this poem, which is unlike any other of his embodiments, and in the sort of connection conceived between his vision of doom and his own experience and poetic meaning, all which he might have come at through a translation, but in echoes of the Italian balance in passages where the sense is like Dante's, as in this—

> "High prophetess, said I, purge off,
> Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film."

And also where there is only the indefinable and individual touch to point to, as in —

> "When in mid-day the sickening east-wind
> Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
> Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,"

where the last line shows that Keats has now added to his style a mastery of Dante's especial grace: and such passages as this, or again when he calls written words

> "The shadows of melodious utterance,"

which is also Dantesque in thought, should, I think, have forbidden the later critics, who knew from external evidence when the *Revision* was

written, from judging that the new style came from decay of poetic power. In these quotations there is certainly no falling off in the magic of his pen, while faults so foreign to him as the wrongness, lowness, and awkwardness in the diction of these lines—

> "Therefore, that happiness be somewhat *shared*,
> Such *things* as thou *art* are admitted oft
> Into *like gardens thou didst pass* erewhile,"

show want of mastery in his new, not failure in his old manner, and are like fatigue.

To conclude this question of style, it may be added, that though the effect of an imitation of Milton is fairly got rid of from the *Revision*, and whole passages are excluded because they were too Miltonic, yet inversions and classicisms are used, and in the line—

> "Saturn, sleep on ; O thoughtless, why did I,"

a Latinism is actually introduced to supplant a mannerism of his own ; for *O thoughtless* is changed to *me thoughtless*.

To pass now to the meaning of the poem, we will begin with what is certain, and so lead up to the more doubtful matters. First, it is certain that the poem was intended as an allegory ; it is named *A Vision*, but of Knowledge now, not of Love, and it

Allegory.

begins in a figurative garden, as the *Divina Commedia* in a wood, and there is a supernatural guide, who is to explain things unseen by what is seen. It is also clear that the first version of *Hyperion* was to be used to supply the vision, and from this it follows that the old *Hyperion* had also an inner meaning, for it is impossible that Keats would have forced into an allegory a poem which he had conceived and written without such intention. But the original poem being unfinished, this did not clearly appear; there are, however, indications of it, and one passage, the speech of Oceanus in Bk. ii., fairly supplies the argument, which is that there is a self-destructive progress in Nature towards good, and that beauty, and not force, is the law of this flux or change. It seems also probable that Keats intended to make Hyperion and Mnemosyne instruct Apollo, and thus to show Light and Song passing into union and perfection out of elemental chaos and crudeness. However this may be, Oceanus bids Saturn take comfort in his dethronement, "for," he says,

Of Hyperion.

> "To bear all naked truths,
> And to envisage circumstance, all calm
> That is the top of sovereignty."

And it is further clear in the *Revision* that this

top of sovereignty is the reward of the poet for conduct in certain circumstances of real life, and that the whole of the introduction (lines 19–266) is an objective picture of those circumstances. Here the allegory is complete, and it is here that it should be intelligible. Of Revision.

And this will serve to guide us at once to separate the *Revision* into two parts, the first down to line 266, which is the new allegory, and the second from line 267 onward, which is an adaptation of the original poem. This latter part we may neglect ; it is only a maiming of his earlier fine work; but the first part is original, and though it opens badly, and has some poor places, it is from line 19 onwards, generally worthy to be reckoned with Keats' best work.

Although one cannot be wrong in assuming that this allegory is a description of Keats' own life, and of his latest convictions, and one would think that his letters and poems should supply the key with some certainty, yet I would not take on myself the responsibility of venturing very far, and would leave what I say as suggestion only.

As I read it, the visionaries are those who neglect conduct for the pursuit of any ideal. The garden and feast represent the beauties of

Nature, and the drink is poetry, which is made from the fruits of the feast. The intoxication which followed the draught represents that complete and excited absorption by poetry which Keats describes himself as suffering when he was writing *Endymion*, and the swoon would be that state of selfish isolation into which he fell in his Miltonic period. His awaking in the temple is his recovery from this to a sympathy with the miseries of the world; and the temple itself is the temple of Knowledge, which it is death for a visionary to enter if he have not that sympathy. The steps to the altar are the struggle of such a mind to reach truth: and truth itself is revealed by knowledge. The leaves burning on the altar are years of the poet's life, or his youthful faculties.

Whether or no any or all of these points are rightly interpreted, it is sure that the general meaning is, that though Keats conceived of the true poet as a prophet and seer, yet he now valued the life of action and conduct above that of meditation and poetry, and condemns as selfish the merely artistic life which he had been leading; and he is now preaching that actual contact and sympathy with human misery and sorrow are the only school for real insight, which is the reward of true human conduct, and not to be arrived at by any other path. In this

way only can the poet hope to create anything of value and become himself immortal.

Moneta, the new name for Mnemosyne, must be connected with *moneo*, and Memory is the same as Knowledge, and she can *admonish* or teach a knowledge of "the mysteries of earth." And this knowledge is what is required to make a poet of a visionary. She is thus foster-mother of Apollo as well as mother of the Muses. She has a harp; and when Apollo says, "For me dark, dark, and painful vile *oblivion* seals my eyes," this oblivion must be ignorance regarded as the opposite of that knowledge which is memory. Compare *Hyperion*, iii., where Apollo "becomes immortal" by reading in Mnemosyne's eyes, just as the poet is to do in the *Revision*. Thus the temple must be the temple of Knowledge = Memory;* and it is fit that Mnemosyne, the Memory of all things, should be primeval, and sister to the oldest god.

The conception of her temple, all that is spared from the thunder of the war, is extremely fine in its allegorical manner, with its doors barred to the sunrise, and the western past closed by a mighty mythical image of a dead god, and an altar, beside which the goddess of the memory of all change stands veiled in the

* *Cf.* Letter xxxvii., "Memory should not be called Knowledge." February 1818.

smoke of the sacrifice of the poet's life. The marble palace in *End.* ii. 256–270, corresponds somewhat closely with this temple, though the meaning is now changed, and it should be compared; but in taking this allegory to interpret Keats' mind, it must be remembered first, that all the different states through which he may represent himself as having passed, were only consecutive in the sense that he may have been at one time more dominated by one view of things, at another time by another; and though in the changing strength of his convictions there may have been a real growth, yet the different feelings were most of them known to him almost from the first, as his letters show: and secondly, that what he condemned as his selfish period was the period in which he most benefited mankind; and he saw at the time the truth of the paradox, and was tortured by the "solitariness," which proved his sympathy to be alive; and that very torture may have been his misery at the foot of the altar-stairs, on which, when he once stepped, they filled his freezing body with natural heat. There is a great nobility in all this, and considering what vile treatment he had met with, it is very beautiful that there is not only no word of resentment, but no place for complaint: he takes all the blame on his own unworthiness. But it is also very sad:

how changed now is his faith in the meaning of natural beauty to men: his old ideal mistress, Cynthia, the "lover of the upcast eye," is likened with the eyes of the goddess of memory, of which he says—

> " They saw me not,
> But in blank splendour beam'd, like the mild moon,
> Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
> What eyes are upward cast."

V. THE TALES.

There are three finished tales or short narrative poems by Keats, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Lamia*. They are all famous for their beauty, and the first two, which are in stanza, may be said to have become almost popular. *Isabella* has, in fact, caused the story of the pot of basil to be widely known in England, as much perhaps from the pictures of artists who took their subject from Keats as from the poem itself. The story is unpleasant, and is the worst executed of the three; but the poet has overcome the gruesomeness with skill—he parenthetically interrupts his narration to confess the difficulty,—yet he seldom stays for many lines together above his weaker vein: the appear-

Isabella.

ance of Lorenzo's ghost to Isabella, from stanza xxxi. onwards, being the best sustained passage. The poem has many examples of Keats' originality of imagination and felicity of phrase, but is tainted throughout by a characteristic ægritude of passion, which makes the best occasion to speak of the curiously close similarity which exists between him and the school of painting which had Rossetti for its head. The lovers who "could not in the self-same mansion dwell without *some malady*," the "sick longing" of Isabella, the "passion both meek and wild," the "little sweet among much bitterness," and the consciousness of something too horrible to speak of behind the scene; with all the passionate faintness of the personages of the romance, in whom, as in a faded tapestry, the brilliance of the dresses has outlasted the flesh-colour, have a likeness to the creations of this school so remarkable, that Keats may be safely credited with a chief share of the parentage. *Isabella* was written in February-April 1818, when *Endymion* was in the press.

The Eve of St. Agnes.

The Eve of St. Agnes, written in January 1819, and revised in September, that is, in the *Hyperion* period, is much more powerful. It is well done throughout, and except for some expressions, criticism could only quarrel with the machinery of the story.

This opens with four stanzas about an "ancient bedesman," who has personally nothing whatever to do with the tale; he provides contrast to the revelry, which he introduces by hearing it, and he also makes opportunity for describing his haunt in the chapel of the heroine's castle: but the chapel is never used again. The feast, too, which Porphyro sets out in Madeline's chamber is robbed of its motive and serves no purpose but to enrich the description. Both these strands should have been woven in; but they are selected in sympathy with the story, and make some of the most successful colouring. *The Eve of St. Agnes* is not only a passionate tale, but it is very rich in the kind of beauty characteristic of Keats, and contains high poetry both of diction and feeling:* the majority of readers would not wish it different from what it is.

Lamia, which was written between July and September 1819, that is, in the interval between the discontinuing and the rejection of *Hyperion*, is in rhymed couplets. These differ from those of *Endymion* in showing an approach to Dryden's versification,† and in

Lamia.

* See again p. 90.

† So the critics say; and Charles Brown told Lord Houghton that Keats purposely studied Dryden's verse: I have not myself any intimate acquaintance with it.

so far a return from the extreme reaction against Pope with which Keats began. There will always be difference of opinion as to what the excellence of this metre is, but the source of the uncertainty in which Keats found himself is easy to explain. The metre in Chaucer's hands came to be perfectly successful, and chiefly because it was light ; and the lightness was due to the presence in his language of terminal vowels and inflexions which have since become mute or entirely disappeared. For instance, Chaucer wrote—

"As thick as motës in the sonnë beam."

Milton's ten syllables are

"As the gay motes that people the sunbeams."

All the buoyancy is gone ; and this exemplifies the change which necessarily came over the rhymed heroic verse. It became heavier and less adapted for narration, and at last was cast mechanically in polished couplets, which passed in a dull generation for a triumph of classic grace, and were prescribed by the Universities as the only form in which they would recognise English poetry. Later poets have used different devices for lightening the metre, so as to make it again do Chaucer's work, but the general result is that their lightly constructed verse is slovenly. *Endymion* was very

successful in the quality of lightness, but it met with no favour, and the lightness was gained at the cost of other qualities which Keats could now regard without prejudice. In *Endymion* the couplet and line units are reduced to a minimum of value, and with these the rhyme value sinks, so that the unrhymed lines in the poem are scarcely noticed: on the other hand, the verses are frequently tagged by evidently foisted rhymes. But in reading the first dozen lines of *Lamia*, the problem seems solved; all is both light and sure, and there are neither tags nor self-conscious couplets: nothing could be better, and a great deal of the poem is as good as this. The device of separating the couplets by a pause in the sense after the first rhyme is retained from *Endymion*, and rhyme-triplets and twelve-syllable lines are introduced. But the poem is not all equally well written, the whole passage, i. 300–350, where the subject does not suit him, is plainly below the mark, and here the tags reappear, and they are much more self-evident and offensive in this kind of verse than in *Endymion*, where they were an avowed means of construction, and where their frequency became familiar and had the advantage of giving great force to any unbroken couplets that were introduced. As for the triplets and twelve-syllable lines, these are no doubt used

sometimes with skill, but among regular 'heroics' they are a device of the most transparent artificiality, and by their carefully irregular intrusion they openly expose the monotony which they would awkwardly obviate. From which it would seem that they would find a better home in the less regular verse.

(Eve of St. Mark.)

The problem how to match Chaucer's narrative in modern English is much more nearly solved in the unfinished Tale, *The Eve of St. Mark*, written in eight-syllable couplets with the same sort of latitude which Coleridge advocated in *Christabel*. This metre carries the description of the cathedral town on a showery Sunday evening in spring with an easy geniality combining beauty and homeliness, and suits just as well the indoors picture, which is a light combination of mystery and real life; and his mastery of all this, quite as much as his playful and charming imitation of the dainties and delicacies of middle English, assure one that Keats had Chaucer in his mind when he wrote it, and might have succeeded perfectly in this manner.

As for the poetry of *Lamia*,* it does not all go on as well as it begins, and sometimes fails too in its most highly-wrought passages. The description of the serpent is overdone to vague-

* For a criticism of the passion, see p. 88.

ness, and her transformation has the same fault. Words like *rosy* and *phosphor* assert themselves; others are dressed at the call of the rhyme; while very common expressions occasionally produce a bathos, i. 201, 330, 335; ii. 12, 15, 89, 128. Yet Keats was trying to correct his old faults; for instance, in revising he appears to have written *silently* in ii. 134 for *silverly*; and *Lamia* is constructively the most perfect of his three narratives. I remark that "the taller grasses and full flowering weed" of i. 44 do not agree with the daffodils of line 184: and I consider it a blot that Lycius should die at the end; because he is killed by Apollonius, who, if he could not rescue him, should have let him alone. Philosophy or Reason is made unamiable: but I am afraid that Keats may have intended this; and he makes Apollonius laugh, which is almost diabolic. The general meaning is, no doubt, the antagonism of reason and pleasure, or of science and imagination (ii. 229 *seq.*), or both; and that reason should take delight in destroying pleasure is only one of the ugly doctrines that lurk beneath the text if it be read as a parable. But it is very uncertain how much Keats intended. He may have had in his mind the selfishness of the artist absorbed in his ideals, and his catastrophe in the justifiable indifference

of the world to the creations of mere art. On August 23, 1819, he wrote thus: "A solitary life engenders pride and egotism, but this pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than anything else could,—so I will indulge it." And in less than a month he had wholly banished from himself as unworthy this strong conviction of his duty.

VI. THE ODES.

Had Keats left us only his Odes, his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is, for they have stood apart in literature, at least the six most famous of them; and these were all written in his best period, when he was under the Miltonic influence—that is, between the early spring of 1819, while he was still engaged on *Hyperion*, and the autumn, when he discarded it. These are the six: 1. *Psyche;* 2. *Melancholy;* 3. *Nightingale;* 4. *Greek Urn;* 5. *Indolence;* 6. *Autumn.*

To these should be added 7. the fragment of the *May Ode*, May 1st, 1818, and 8. the *Ode to Pan*, from *Endymion*, bk. i., and 9. the *Bacchic Ode to Sorrow* in *Endymion*, bk. iv. But the two hymns to *Neptune* and *Diana* in *Endymion* are only worth enumeration, and the two early

odes to *Apollo* and the *Ode to a Lock of Milton's Hair* are, as are the two later *Odes to Fanny*, chiefly or entirely of personal interest.

Of the seven odes first enumerated, the first place must be given for its perfection to that last composed—that is, the *Ode to Autumn*. This is always reckoned among the faultless masterpieces of English poetry; and unless it be objected as a slight blemish that the words "Think not of them" in the 2nd line of the 3rd stanza are somewhat awkwardly addressed to a personification of Autumn, I do not know that any sort of fault can be found in it. But though this is the best as a whole, it is yet left far behind by the splendour of the *Nightingale*, in which the mood is more intense, and the poetry vies in richness and variety with its subject.

The song of the nightingale is, to the hearer, full of assertion, promise, and cheerful expectancy, and of pleading and tender passionate overflowing in long drawn-out notes, interspersed with plenty of playfulness and conscious exhibitions of musical skill. Whatever pain or sorrow may be expressed by it, it is idealised —that is, it is not the sorrow of a sufferer, but the perfect expression of sorrow by an artist, who must have felt, but is not feeling; and the ecstasy of the nightingale is stronger than its

sorrow, although different hearers may be differently affected according to their mood. Keats in a sad mood seized on the happy interpretation and promise of it, and gives it in this line—

"Singest of *summer* in full-throated ease."

But the intense feeling in his description of human sorrow (stanza 3) is weakened by the direct platitude that the bird has never known it; and in the penultimate stanza the thought is fanciful or superficial,—man being as immortal as the bird in every sense but that of sameness, which is assumed and does not satisfy. The introduction, too, of the last stanza is artificial, while his choosing *elf* to rhyme to *self** turns out disastrously; and he loses hold of his main idea in the words "plaintive anthem," which, in expressing the dying away of the sound, changes its character. No praise, however, could be too high for those last six lines; and if grammar and sense are a little obscure in the first ten, I could not name any English poem of the same length which contains so much beauty as this ode.

* The elf belongs to W. Brown of Tavistock, whom I suspect to have been the remote cause of the hitch in the first stanza—

"Philomel, I do not envy thy sweet carolling."

Brit. Past., i. 3, 164.

Next to this I should rank *Melancholy*. The perception in this ode is profound, and no doubt experienced. The paradox that melancholy is most deeply felt by the organisation most capable of joy is clinched at the end by the observation of the reaction which satiety provokes in such temperaments, so that it is also in the moment of extremest joy that it suddenly fades—

> " Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips :
> Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine."

In spite of the great beauty of this ode, especially of the last stanza, it does not hit so hard as one would expect. I do not know whether this is due to a false note* towards the end of the second stanza, or to a disagreement between the second and third stanzas. In the second stanza the melancholy is, as Lord Houghton said, a "luxurious tenderness," while in the third it is strong, painful, and incurable.

The line—

> " That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,"

means all the flowers only that are sacred to sorrow. See *End.* iv. 170.

* For its explanation, see p. 88.

Next in order might come *Pysche*, for the sake of the last section (l. 50 to end), though this is open to the objection that the imagery is worked up to outface the idea—which is characteristic of Keats' manner. Yet the extreme beauty quenches every dissatisfaction. The beginning of this ode is not so good, and the middle part is mid-way in excellence.

Next, and disputing place with the last, comes the *Grecian Urn*. The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful; but its amplification in the poem is unprogressive, monotonous, and scattered, the attention being called to fresh details without result (see espec. ll. 21–24, anticipated in 15, 16), which gives an effect of poverty in spite of the beauty. The last stanza enters stumbling on a pun, but its concluding lines are very fine, and make a sort of recovery with their forcible directness.

The last of the six, *Indolence*, is the objective picturing of a transient mood, and may be the description of an actual half-waking vision. If the details, such as the appearing of the figures four times, have no definite meaning, and I cannot fix any, they are too arbitrary. Parts of stanzas 2 and 3 and all the 5th are of the best work; but the whole ode scarcely earns its title;

and its main interest, that is its fervour and feeling, betrays the poet into an undignified utterance in line 4 of the last verse.

The fragment of the *May Ode* is immortal on account of the famous passage of inimitable beauty descriptive of the Greek poets—

"Leaving great verse unto a little clan," &c.

With these seven the two chief odes in *Endymion* are worthy to rank. The ode to Pan in Book I. is good enough in design. Pan is first invoked as ruler in dark and moist woods; secondly, as the god to whom all natural products are sacred, with contrast of sunny places; thirdly, as king of fauns and satyrs; fourthly, for six lines as farm-god. But this last idea has been anticipated by interpolation in the previous section. Then the last part of the ode connects Pan with the secrets and power of Nature. The expression *But no more*, however interpreted, is unfortunate at the end of the ode. The diction throughout is rich and the imagery chosen well for the work that it has to do in the various aspects of the god's energy, the different objects being seized and shown in happy phrases full of knowledge and feeling; and though it might perhaps have been better if the second section had immediately preceded the last, rather than that the mysteries should

follow close on the farm, there is no great fault to find. But yet the ode does not at first reading make an impression corresponding to these merits, nor has it won, like the others, a high reputation ; and this may be due partly to the vagueness of the personification, caused by the variety of attributes and objects, and partly to the versification, which, though generally easy and fluent, pauses, especially in the second division, too frequently in the mid-line, in the manner of tagging, and produces there something of the effect of a catalogue, very foreign to the repose and finish which we look for in a set ode.

Lastly, as to the *Ode to Sorrow* in the 4th book of *Endymion*, I regard this as one of the greatest of Keats' achievements, and agree with all that Mr. Sidney Colvin has said in its praise in his Life of Keats. It unfortunately halts in the opening, and the 1st and 4th stanzas especially are unequal to the rest, as is again the 3rd from the end, "Young stranger," which for its matter would with more propriety have been cast into the previous section ; and these impoverish the effect, and contain expressions which might put some readers off. If they would begin at the 5th stanza and omit the 3rd from the end, they would find little that is not admirable. And, as it stands, the ode

is, I think, the better for these omissions. The pictorial description of the Bacchic procession is unmatched for life, wide motion, and romantic dreamy Orientalism, while the concluding stanzas, returning to the first movement, are as lovely as any Elizabethan lyric, and in the same manner. The bold contrast and passion of the ode, in spite of its weaker opening and the few expressions which remind one that it is an early work, give it a unique place among the richest creations of the English Muse.

VII. SONNETS.

There are nearly sixty sonnets in the latest editions of Keats' poems, but the most of them are sonnets only in external form. The metrical laws and liberties of sonnet-writing have been much inflicted on readers, and sonnets are usually classified by their differences in these minor particulars. But a more useful classification would be by their contents and form of thought. The typical sonnet is a reflective poem on love, or at least in some mood of love or desire, or absorbing passion or emotion; and such a definition includes almost everything which cannot be readily referred to some

quite different species of poetry, as a few considerations may illustrate.

The Greek epigram, for instance, was originally, as the name implies, an inscription: its business was to record some event or mark some place, and its excellence to raise an emotion in the reader's mind. Its qualities, terseness with pathos, soon established a form which poets used for other purposes, until in the hands of city wits the name wholly changed its signification, and often now the record is a piece of scandal, and the emotion such as may be expressed by a well-bred jeer; a sad fall from Simonides. The sonnet form has been as loosely and variously used as the epigram, and the many varieties of the two have more than one point of contact; but it is plain that an epigram proper cannot become a sonnet by mere expansion to fourteen lines;—this happens to exceed epigrammatic length, but is possible in dedications and temple inscriptions,—and such a hybrid may at least be separated off as an epigrammatic sonnet.

Again, Horace elaborated a form of ode which it is easier to recognise than in few words describe; and a number of Milton's sonnets may be referred to this ode form. If we compare, for example, his *Cyriack, whose grandsire*, with *Martiis cœlebs* or *Æli vetusto*, there can be no

doubt that Milton was here deliberately using the sonnet form to do the work of Horace's tight stanzas; and not the whole of Shakespeare's or Petrarch's sonnets set alongside will show enough kinship with these sonnets of Milton to draw them away from their affinity with Horace. Such sonnets, too, as his addresses to Vane, Fairfax, and Cromwell are properly odes, and should be called odes, or at least odic sonnets.

Again, there is a class of poetry called "occasional verse," and such a poem as may be written on any trivial event or fancy cannot become a sonnet because it goes begging for a dress, and, conscious not only of nakedness but of leanness, steals a well-cut garment for disguise.

These examples may suffice, if it be noted first, that nothing forbids a true sonnet from having an epigrammatic, or odic, or occasional motive—and this last is very common; and secondly, that all these forms and others are found mixed in the sonnet with its true subject-matter in all proportions.

Now not so many as half of Keats' sonnets can by any stretch of interpretation be called sonnets proper, if we consider their substance rather than their verse form. The greater number of them are occasional, reflective, or

odic addresses or dedications, or poems on places and books. And these hybrids come thickest among the earlier poems, while the true sonnets predominate towards the end. Again, almost all the early sonnets are Italian in rhyme system, and all the later are Shakespearian ; and if we pick out from them the twelve best poems, these will all be found to be true sonnets and eight of them on the Shakespearian model. Twelve is all that very high praise can be given to, and that number already encroaches on the second best ; and if a next twelve be chosen, this would be made up almost equally of true sonnets and hybrids. From which it seems that these hybrid poems of Keats', though most of them contain lines which make us glad to possess and preserve them, are among his immature performances ; and also that as he improved in composition he relinquished his foreign subject-matter, and the Italian rhyme system, and did his best work in the English manner.

There are ten very fine sonnets ; they are—

"Much have I travelled."
"When I have fears."
"Come hither all sweet maidens."
"Four seasons."
"Bright star."

"O soft embalmer."
"I cry your mercy."
"As Hermes once."
"The day is gone."
"Time's sea."

And with these some might class for its easy and pleasant mastery—

"To one who hath been long in city pent."

And the sonnet "Why did I laugh to-night?" has been selected and admired by some critics: it seems to me to be turgid and capricious, and hence unsuccessful. But all the first ten are extremely fine—the first eight being nearly faultless—and must stand among the best in the language. And if we pass from them to the next in merit, there is a great fall. Such a list would contain *Spenser a jealous honourer; Many the wonders; Nymph of the downward smile; How many bards; Small busy flames; Keen fitful gusts; My spirit is too weak; Glory and loveliness*, and *The town the churchyard;* and there is not one of these which does not plainly fail, and that sometimes badly, in some part, though all have their points of excellence.*

* Matthew Arnold selected eight sonnets; five are among the eight which I have set first: the other three are—*After dark vapours; Great spirits now; The poetry of the earth.*

Not to speak of the magnificence of the ten best sonnets (the 8th line of the first is below the mark; the final couplet of No. 2 is weak; and the 4th line of No. 9 requires much allowance, see p. 21), Keats' sonnets are generally distinguished by a total absence of the self-consciousness which is the common bane of sonnets, and has got them a bad name among honest folk; so that many lovers of poetry put Keats' sonnets next to Shakespeare's. They are free from effort and puzzle-headedness and pedantry, and when they do fall, they do not fall stiffly but negligently, and most of them are pleasant poems and grateful to the reader.

VIII. EPISTLES.

There are four *Epistles* written in ten-syllable couplets :—

1. To Geo. Felton Mathew (Nov. 1815).
2. To my brother George (Aug. 1816).
3. To Ch. Cowden Clarke (Sept. 1816).
4. To Reynolds (March 1818).

And with them may be grouped the two poems criticised on p. 22, that is the short *Endymion* and *Sleep and Poetry*.

Though there are good things in these *Epistles*, their execution is in every respect

very poor, and they are in so far more like letters written in rhyme than poems in the form of letters, and they may all be taken with the apology which Keats sent with the fourth, to "excuse the unconnected subject and careless verse." The Epistle to Cowden Clarke is altogether far the worst, and though it has a rational argument, it is not worth defending from any condemnation for want of artistic form ; but it is in my opinion wrong to include the other early epistles and poems in this judgment. In my previous analysis of two of these, I have pointed out their really solid construction, and the 1st, 2nd, and 4th of the *Epistles* are, I should say, quite as well built. Their "argument" is perfectly clear, and if the form of it escapes the reader's attention, that is due to the lightness of the imaginative touch and flight, which is a welcome escape from the conscious pedantries of form, and, so long as the sense is clear, a great merit. Indeed, if the expression of these *Epistles* were at all worthy of their framework, they would be models of what such epistles should be. Nos. 1 and 2 must be passed over here. No. 4 is of great interest. Its argument (though Keats himself calls the poem unconnected) is a very beautiful artistic movement of thought, just short of caprice, returning at the end with great force to

the apparent first motive, which is suddenly revealed as being much weightier than at first allowed to appear. The heads are these:— Automatic capricious imaginations of all kinds, 1–12, very common; they may be beautiful, as a picture by Titian, described, –25; or like Claude's Enchanted Castle, described, –66. The wish that all our imaginings could take such colouring, &c., question why they cannot, –85. The poet shows himself haunted by a horrid mood,* –end.

The passage l. 67 onwards is of importance with respect to Keats' method—

> "O that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,
> Would all their colours from the sunset take:
> From something of *material sublime*," &c.

If this be compared with the passage which is contrasted with Wordsworth on p. 29 there will be a mutual illustration of sense.

Keats also here, in a confession of failure, analyses his inability to express his ideas—

> "Imagination brought
> Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,
> Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
> Cannot refer to any standard law
> Of either earth or heaven."

---

* And see again p. 91.

Also in this poem he plainly states that he does not consider his mind matured, nor able to teach, and that he is a prey to the moods of pessimism, but that he will not give way to them. He longs rather for the time when he shall arrive at "the love of good and ill," and speaks of it as his "award."

IX. LYRICAL POEMS.

Seven-syllable couplets.

If we include among the lyrical poems those written in seven-syllable couplets, we find three popular pieces, *Souls of Poets*, *Bards of Passion*, and *Ever let the fancy roam*. In a letter to his brother, January 1819, Keats writes: "These are specimens of a sort of rondeau which I think I shall become partial to, because you have one idea amplified with greater ease and more delight and freedom than in the sonnet." The theme is stated in the first four lines, and then, after an amplification without progress, these are used again in the last division to make a close by return, like a rondo in music; and the form seems good, simple, and attractive. These three poems have all of them the popular qualities of fluency and grace, and the statement of the subject is provocative of interest; yet,

though the first sustains itself in a fine vein for six lines, there is little other merit either of thought or diction in the first two. Mr. M. Arnold chose these and excluded the *Fancy* from his selection, but there can be no doubt that this last is by far the best of the three. It is maintained throughout at a fair level, and the simple descriptions of nature, recalling *L'Allegro*, are often very beautiful; and in the last division there is a sensuous passage done in the fine Miltonic manner, where the eight-syllable line is introduced with great effect, descriptively of Jove's languor.

Of the five other poems in this measure there is none worthy of praise as a whole.

Lyrics in stanzas.

There are left now only the lyrical poems in stanza, and easily first, holding a unique place in literature, stands *La belle dame sans merci.* This occurs in a long journalistic letter from Keats to his brother in America, and is dated "Wednesday evening," that is, April 28, 1819. It seems as if he had composed it on that day, and written it down hastily from memory, so that he had to correct several mistakes afterwards; and, from the remarks appended to it, it looks as if he was at the time unaware of its great merit. It was not inserted in the *Lamia* volume, but first appeared through Leigh Hunt in the

Indicator for May 10, 1820, and this version differs from that in Keats' letter in one or two points; and these may be corrections by Keats, but the original first line will certainly preserve the first version, which exists in Keats' own handwriting, as the favourite and accepted one. "*Wretched wight*," the correction, is cold and poor, and fatal to the tragic motive of the poem, and out of keeping with its heroic detail, whereas the original "*knight-at-arms*" gives the keynote of romance and of aloofness from real life, and the suggestion of armour is of the greatest value to the general colouring. It would be impertinence to praise this poem, which charms alike old and young: and it stands above the reach of criticism. For other reasons it is better not to criticise, "*In a drear-nighted December*," which, after a very long interval indeed, must be placed next. This poem is a great favourite, and perhaps deservedly so, both for its beauty and originality, but the latter quality proves expensive. And after this poem there is another gap, for if we mention the next best lyrics, we come to such poems as *Meg Merrilies*, and *Where be you going, you Devon maid?* which, as Lord Houghton printed it, omitting the second stanza, is successful; and *I had a dove*, which could only have been written by a poet; and *Walking in Scotland*,

of which the obscurity and strangeness of the sentiment described make it noteworthy. Mrs. Owen quotes the Faery song *Shed no tear!* as worthy of Keats, but we wonder how it was that there are not more better lyrics. Keats, one would have thought, would have excelled in them, and we can only suppose that we have his odes instead.

Success in lyrical verse requires a delicately strict subjection of imagination to one purpose, and this was not a part of Keats' poetic instinct; and though when he came to learn it, he wrote as it would seem almost unconsciously one of the best lyrics in the world; yet it is not improbable that he would still have regarded lyrics as a tract where he might cast off restraint. The fact remains that, with the exception of *La belle dame*, he never brought all his genius to "spend its fury in a song."

X. "OTHO" AND "STEPHEN."

Otho the Great is contemporary with *Lamia:* it was written July–September 1819, and should therefore be among Keats' best work; but it is not, so that its failure must be specially accounted for: and it may, I think, be entirely laid to inexperience, and to the ugly

Otho.

and ill-shapen Elizabethan models to which Keats apparently looked in good faith for guidance; and among which, with their stagey fury, unnecessary confusions, rude manners, and occasional magnificences, his play might pass undistinguished. Unfortunately too this play turns on a question of maiden virtue, which he could not handle, and which he did not even choose for himself, for the plot was furnished him by a friend, who gave him the scenes across the table to versify or dramatise one by one—a most deadening situation. It is badly contrived: the antecedent conditions are very elaborate, and yet are never plainly stated; they have to be discovered from isolated, ill-managed and confused hints in the dialogue; so that the attention of an auditor, if it was not entirely put off by this riddle, would only be kept alive by a wish to come to a judgment of his guesses. The riddle, moreover, has no satisfactory solution. Then the scenes themselves are rather lacking in distinct dramatic point, independently of the uncertainty of the motive. But if these faults are not wholly due to Keats, he must yet have the blame of the lack of moral import, and of the imperfect delineation of the characters, whose manners are not good, and who seem to take a conscious interest in the plot. The style has the faults of cold magnifi-

cence, occasional flatness and common expressions, with careless grammar, and the use of childish tricks for impromptu effect. In spite of all this, there is a succinctness and force about the whole, which forbid one to conclude that Keats would not have succeeded in drama: and though it is commonly said that he lacked the essential moral grasp, his letters seem to me to refute this, and his determination would have been sufficient assurance of success. In fact, the fragment of *Stephen*, which he began on his own lines after finishing *Otho*, already shows an advance. This is written in a style midway between Marlowe and Shakespeare, and recalls the opening of the third part of *Henry VI.* The imitated magnificence is somewhat restless, but the narrative and purpose of the characters stand out fairly well amid the stir and freedom which was evidently the poet's aim.

Stephen.

It would be easy to quote from *Otho* some fine passages, and many fine lines and expressions, but they seem to be buried in a rubbish-heap from which one gladly turns back to the green tangle of *Endymion.*

XI. DICTION AND RHYTHM.

Vocabulary.

Keats' vocabulary, to judge by the impression that one gets from reading his poems, is rich, and his use of quite a large number of words that are not commonly found must be reckoned among the factors of his style. Mr. W. Arnold* has made a special examination of these, and his remarks imply an objection to adjectives with the suffix *y*, like *bloomy and bowery;* but when these are formed from substantives they are regular enough. Adjectives thus formed from other adjectives—take *paly*, which should mean ful[l] of pales or palings,—are not on the same footing : to any one accustomed to Chaucer's verse they would sound more like old than new words, and they would be useful in versification, but they are also like baby-talk, and generally indefensible ; it does not appear, however, that Keats laid himself open to any reproach in this particular. *Paly* had been used by other writers ; and even with these words the test is their success, not their regularity. I never heard of any one objecting to Shakespeare's

"I can call spirits from the *vasty* deep."

---

* Essay published with his edition of Keats' poems.

Indeed, what is in question is very much the same with the words as with the spirits, whether they will come when you do call for them.

Among Keats' inventions *spangly* does not look promising ; but the passage in *Isabella*—

> "As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,
> Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,
> We put our eyes into a pillowy cleft,
> And see the *spangly* gloom froth up and boil,"

amply justifies the word, for which no other could be substituted : and it has been received into the language. So again the "*pipy* hemlock" in the Ode to Pan is admirable : on the other hand, "*boundly reverence*" defies interpretation : but the general result of Mr. Arnold's examination is that most of the strange words in Keats were taken from earlier writers. Readers of the poems cannot miss noting these : they are less likely to observe the exact nature of the class of epithets which most frequently recur ; the chief group might, I think, be called languid, such as *quiet*, *sweet*, *fair*, *white*, *green*, *old*, *young*, *little*, and other such words as *tender*, *gentle*, *easy*, *fresh*, *pleasant*, most of these suggestive of comfort. Then the *melting*, *fainting*, *swimming*, *swooning*, and *panting* words are over-

frequent. Words like *wild*, *dark*, *deep*, *strange*, *lone*, *mysterious*, &c., have a great deal to do, but they are not worked so hard as by Shelley. Keats has also a pretty steady recurrence of certain objects; he is as fond of *moss* and *eagles* as Shelley was, and *echoes*, *bees*, *marble*, *silver*, *dew*, *nests* and *weeds*,—and the list might be extended,—are too conspicuous. A great deal of the general insipidity and tedium of *Endymion* may be analysed down to this. The over-frequent use which he makes of *tiptoe*—taken from Shakespeare—is very characteristic of his manner. But he outgrew all this, and if in his early poems he uses these words too frequently, yet he has also used them as well as they can be used. Some faults of his pronunciation, which have been called Cockneyisms, cannot be passed so easily. Thus *perhaps*, used as a monosyllable, is abominable: but this occurs only in the early poems. And he renounces in *Lamia* his pronunciation of *toward*, which he had hitherto used as a disyllable accented on the last, and comes round to the contracted pronunciation. This word, and words like *fire* and *lyre*, which he makes disyllables, often weaken his lines; for in disyllabic metres which admit elisions and trisyllabic feet, they will not readily, at least to my ear, sustain a whole foot

Pronunciation.

of two syllables. Verse which allows such a line as this—

"Ah desperate mortal! I even dared to press" (*End.* i. 661),

halts at the following—

"And then, towards me, like a very maid" (i. 634).
"Dearest Endymion, my entire love" (iii. 1022).
"The lyre of his soul Æolian tuned" (ii. 866).

But Keats also amended this later, though too late to destroy the effect of his example, and used these syllables* in *Hyperion* as Milton would have done—

"Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side" (iii. 63).

Of the same kind is the exaggerated value which he gives to the semivowel *l*, in the following lines for example—

"The dazz-l-ing sunrise; two sisters sweet,
Turn'd syllab-l-ing thus: Ah, Lycius bright."

He also, like Shelley, makes a trisyllable of *evening*.

There is another peculiarity common to

---

* Lyre is an unfortunate word to extend unduly. I have seen the following verse as motto for a song-book—

"The lyres' voice is lovely everywhere."

Keats and Shelley, which should be noticed because it introduces an instability into Keats' rhythms. It is found in earlier writers, for instance, in this line from Shakespeare—

" Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer,"

where the accent of the last foot is not inverted, but the compound *torch-bearer*, which we pronounce with a stress both on the first and second syllables, carries no stress at all on the second, but perhaps a slight compensating stress or delay on the last. There are a great many words made in this way of a monosyllable and a disyllable, in which we now observe both the colliding accents ; and if these words occur in disyllabic rhythms of alternate stress, with their first syllable in the regular stressed place, then the next foot will to our ears, trained as they have been by Milton, have its stress inverted. I think that this is not always intended by Keats : here are examples—

" A shów-monstèr about the streets of Prague."
" That cámp-mushroòm, dishonour of our house."
" Of béan-blossòms in heaven freshly shed."
" Or they might watch the qúoit-pitchèrs, intent."
" Of lóve-spanglès jùst off yon cape of trees."
" The poor folk of the séa-countrỳ I blest."
" Then came a conquering eárth-thundèr and rumbled."
" All deáth-shadòws, and glooms that overcast."
" Make not your rosary of yéw-berriès."

And the pronunciation in the following lines is probably caused by the same dislike of colliding accents in a compounded trisyllable—

" Look'd up; a cónflicting of shame and ruth."
" And strives in vain to únsettle and wield."

And thus no doubt—

" In a dreár-nightèd December."

We now read this line and most of the others with our changed accent, and we rather like the irregularity thus introduced into the verse. There is, in fact, one line of Shelley which is particularly admired for a very beautiful rhythm, which he probably did not intend—

" And wild-roses and ivy serpentine,"

where Shelley, I should suppose, stressed *wild-roses* like *primroses:* in the same poem is

" There grew pied windflowers and violets."

And he has

" Swéet-basìl and mignonétte."

Bride-maidèns, *quick-silvèr*, *bird-footèd*, *train-bearèr*, &c., and in the *Recollection* are *pine-forèst*, and *wóodpeckèr*, where the beautiful versification has, at least to my ear, a charm added to it by the extra license which our pronunciation introduces.

Whether these poets took this accent from the Elizabethans, or whether it really had lingered on, I do not know; in later poets it seems only an affectation; but it is a real source of uncertainty in Keats' verse, because he not only used the other pronunciation also, but he admitted the rhythmical inversions which that would introduce into the verses where it was apparently not intended.

Rhythm.

And for this reason it would not do to decide this question merely on the assumption that Keats could not have intended the inversion of stress. He begins one sonnet with the line—

"How many bards gild the lapses of time,"

where the inversion of the third and fourth stresses is very musical and suitable to the exclamatory form of the sentence. Again, in *End.* i.—

"Young companies nimbly began dancing."

The inversion of the third and fifth stresses admirably pictures the dancers stepping on the scene: and such rhythms as

"Visions of all places; a bowery nook,"

show what a broad view he took of rhythm, and how melodiously his verse carries variety.

And he was fond of inversion even of the fifth foot, *e.g.*—

"Guarding his forehead with her round elbow."
"Was in his plaited brow; yet his eyelids."
"Like vestal primroses, but dark velvet."
"Golden, or rainbow-sided, or purplish," &c.

And if these might be regarded as merely a grace snatched from the remembered cadences of old romance, yet he also uses this inversion deliberately with its full proper force of strangeness of suggestion in the following line—

"What it might mean. Perhaps, thought I, Morpheus,"

and for the irony of impossibility in

"Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art,"

and in the following, where the strong enclitic accent has almost the effect of terror (see p. 47)—

"Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not."

In one place at least in *Endymion* an inverted fifth foot is made to rhyme to a line with an extra-metrical syllable at the end of it: an uncomfortable effect common in Wyatt and writers of the time of Henry VIII. And in another place a rhythmical effect is sought by using Chaucer's license of omitting the first

syllable of the line; for there is evidence that Keats intended this (Lett. xxxix.)—

> " And the dull twanging bow-string, and the raft
> Branch down sweeping from a tall ash top."

As there is not space in this essay to treat this subject thoroughly, I have chosen these few points as being of special interest. I may conclude by saying generally that Keats' rhythm, in spite of its variety, is easy and melodious rather than sonorous or powerful.

XII. GENERAL.

Imaginative phrases.

In these detached criticisms many of the main qualities of Keats' poetry have been incidentally brought out; there is one, as yet unmentioned, which claims the first place in a general description, and that is the very seal of his poetic birthright, the highest gift of all in poetry, that which sets poetry above the other arts; I mean the power of concentrating all the far-reaching resources of language on one point, so that a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the æsthetic imagination at the moment when it is most expectant and exacting, and at the same time astonishes the intellect with a new

aspect of truth. This is only found in the greatest poets, and is rare in them; and it is no doubt for the possession of this power that Keats has been often likened to Shakespeare, and very justly, for Shakespeare is of all poets the greatest master of it; the difference between them here is that Keats' intellect does not supply the second factor in the proportion or degree that Shakespeare does; indeed, it is chiefly when he is dealing with material and sensuous subjects that his poems afford illustrations; but these are, as far as they go, not only like Shakespeare, but often as good as Shakespeare when he happens to be confining himself to the same limited field. Examples from Shakespeare are such well-known sayings as these—

"My way of life
Is faln into the sear, the yellow leaf."—*Macbeth.*

"Lay not that flattering unction to your soul."—*Hamlet.*

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."—*Tempest.*

Examples from Keats are—

"The journey homeward to habitual self."

"Solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven."

"My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams."

In most of Keats' phrases of this sort there is a quality which makes them unlike Shakespeare; and if we should put into one group all those which are absolutely satisfactory, and then make a second group of those which are not so simply convincing, we should find in these last that the un-Shakespearian quality was more declared, and came out as something fanciful, or rather too vaguely or venturesomely suggestive; the whole phrase displaying its poetry rather than its meaning, and being in consequence less apt and masterly. This second group would contain many of the most admired lines of Keats, and these are very characteristic of him. Such are—

> "Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks,"

and—

> "How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood."

The *Revision of Hyperion* shows that Keats himself was dissatisfied with his *senators;* and one can see the reason without condemning the passage or approving its omission. Finally, there would be left a third group of such-like phrases which plainly miss the mark.

Closely allied to these imaginative phrases, and perhaps more characteristic of Keats and

peculiar to him, are the short vivid pictures which may be called his masterpieces of word-painting, in which with a few words he contrives completely to finish a picture which is often of vast size. Good examples of this are the sestet of the *Leander* sonnet; the last four lines of the *Chapman's Homer;* the passage beginning *Golden his hair* in *Hyperion* ii. 371; and, to quote one from *Endymion*—

> "The woes of Troy, towers smothering o'er their blaze,
> Stiff-holden shields, far-piercing spears, keen blades,
> Struggling, and blood, and shrieks."

For its wealth in such rare strokes of descriptive imagination Keats' poetry must always take the very first rank; and it is his imaginative quality of phrase which sets him more than any other poet of his time in creative antagonism to the eighteenth-century writers; for it was not only foreign to their style, but incomprehensible and repugnant to their pseudo-classic taste, which preferred a "reasonable propriety of thought," such as Hume found to be lacking in Shakespeare, to the shadowy powers of imagination, however godlike.

Relation to Nature.

The limitation of Keats' faculty in this excellence—which, if it may be ascribed wholly to his youth, amply justifies the sentiment of the opening lines of

this essay—leads us on naturally to another of his chief characteristics, and that is his close relationship with common Nature: he is for ever drawing his imagery from common things, which are for the first time represented as beautiful: and again in this we see his opposition to the eighteenth-century writers, who mainly contented themselves with conventional commonplaces for their natural imagery; whereas Keats discovers in the most usual objects either beauty or sources of delight or comfort, or sometimes even of imaginative horror, which are all new; and here his originality seems inexhaustible, and his wide poetic sympathies the strongest. Nor does he confine himself to matters of which he could have had much experience; he makes Nature the object of his imaginative faculty—Nature apart from man, or related to man as an enchantress to a dreamer. This is, I suppose, what he means when, comparing himself with Byron, he says, "There is this great difference between us: he describes what he sees,—I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task: now see the immense difference."* Here he shows a vast wealth which makes his poems a mine of pleasure. *Endymion* is crowded to excess with

* Letters, cxvi. p. 301.

a variety of these images, and as they came up in his mind in an endless stream to illustrate his ideas, the ideas sometimes fare rather badly ; for though they were no doubt generally held firm in his own mind, they are yet drowned by the images of their objective presentation ; until these themselves at last lose even their own virtue, and fatigue the reader, who feels like a sightseer in a gallery overcrowded with pictures, which by degrees he ceases to regard with attention.

Passion.

And in this devotion to natural beauty lies, I believe, one true reason of Keats' failure in the delineation of human passion. The only passion delineated by Keats is the imaginative love of Nature, and human love is regarded by him as a part of this, and his lover is happy merely because admitted into communion with new forms of natural beauty. This, which appeared in theory in the explanation of the allegory of *Endymion* (p. 13), is practically exposed in the 2nd stanza of the *Ode to Melancholy*, where, among the objects on which a sensitive mind is recommended to indulge its melancholy fit, the anger of his mistress is enumerated with roses, peonies, and rainbows, as a beautiful phenomenon, plainly without respect to its cause, meaning, or effect. And so in *Lamia*—

" He took delight
Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new,"

and

" Fine was the mitigated fury."

How different is the parallel passage of Shakespeare, which at once occurs to one—

" O, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful
In the contempt and anger of his lip !"

This is not artistic admiration, but a lover's entire devotion.

In the criticism of *Endymion* we found a want of taste in Keats' idea of woman; we have now to add a charge of lack of true insight into human passion. If this was wholly due to the absence of awakening experience, it is at least unfortunate that in *Lamia*, in which from its date we might have expected something mature, he should have chosen so low a type. Though perhaps suggested by the original of his story, it was not necessary to it; and even if he preferred to have his snake-woman bad, there was every reason why Lycius' passion should have been of a higher type. How unworthy it is is shown in the description of their meeting and in the following sentiment—

" But too short was their bliss
To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss."

This love is an association for mutual pleasure, the end of which is satiety and revulsion, and it is, I repeat, at least unfortunate that Keats, after he had known love, should, in his first attempt to delineate it, have been satisfied with so vulgar a type. The ideal passion in *Isabella* is insipid, and even in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the passion, as expressed in stanzas xxxv.–xxxix., is at best of a conventional type, and has to have a good deal read into it by the light of the story.

But Keats' doctrine of beauty, which might be defended if it was spiritualised, which it never is by him, may often be reconciled with true feeling by the allowance which is due to his objective method; concerning this, as illustrations have been given (see pp. 18–19), I shall say no more here except to repeat that Keats' imagery probably always followed, if it did not always clearly picture, some train of ideas; and when he says in the Ode *To Fanny*

> "My muse had wings,
> And ever ready was to take her course
> Whither I bent her force,
> *Unintellectual*, yet divine to me;—
> Divine, I say! What sea-bird o'er the sea
> Is a philosopher the while he goes
> Winging along where the great water throes?"

these words should not be taken as a disavowal of meaning in "those abstractions which were

his only life," but as an apology for immaturity, and they must be interpreted in the light of his high idea of philosophy. Keats was conscious, like Virgil, of a double inclination. He said of himself, April 1818:* "I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy. Were I calculated for the former, I should be glad; but as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter." This would be a strange variant of

Intellectual element.

"Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ,"

if we need suppose it to be anything more than an utterance of that contrarious mood so common to introspection: it is nevertheless evidence that Keats was unlikely to have depreciated the intellectual element of his art: but the intellectual element is always in league with emotion, and would have been, I imagine, considered by him as worthless in poetry without such mixture. In the *Epistle to Reynolds*, analysed on p. 68, even the unpleasantness of the consideration of what we call the struggle for existence would, simply presented, have been flat and commonplace; but he shows it as a "horrid mood," by which he is haunted,

* Letters, I.

and uses great skill and a wealth of contrasted beauty in introducing it under this enhanced aspect, "wreathing a flowery band spite of the unhealthy ways made for his searching;" and in calling his Muse unintellectual, he was no doubt uttering his reiterated impatience for more knowledge, the expression of which recurs so often in his poems and letters, that it is needless to quote any one, and which rises to a sort of consummation in the *Revision of Hyperion*, where it seems as if he had imagined himself to have at length attained to an insight of the mystery.

Earnestness.

There is less opposition, it seems to me, between Keats' true instinct for ideal philosophy and his luxurious poetry (which seems rather its young expression), than between these on the one hand and his practical human qualities, as revealed by his letters, on the other. The bond of all was an unbroken and unflagging earnestness, which is so utterly unconscious and unobservant of itself as to be almost unmatched. It is always present in his poetry both for good and ill, in the spontaneous and felt quality of his epithets, and the absence of any barrier even, it would sometimes seem, of consideration or judgment between his mind and his pen. Whether this earnestness is the account of his

failure in his purely comic freaks I do not know, but it may certainly account for his want of humour, for which, in spite of some traces in his letters, it does not appear to have left any room. The best of the letters are serious and full of good matter, a few are quite foolish, and a great number are written in a high-spirited jocular vein, which seems to be carelessly assumed for the double purpose of amusing his correspondent and relaxing his own mind. The chief charm in all of them is their unalloyed sincerity: there is nothing between the pen and the mind, not always even an effort or desire to write what should be worth reading: it is enough that it is he that writes, and his brother or friend that will read.

Lack of humour.

In spite of this earnestness and philosophy, it is certainly true that Keats' mind was of a luxurious habit; and it must have been partly due to this temperament that he showed so little severity towards himself in the castigation of his poems, though that was, as I said before, chiefly caused by the prolific activity of his imagination, which was always providing him with fresh material to work on. In this respect he is above all poets an example of what is meant by inspiration: the mood which all artists require, covet, and

Luxurious habit.

Inspiration.

find most rare was the common mood with him; and I should say that being amply supplied with this, what as an artist he most lacked was self-restraint and self-castigation, —which was indeed foreign to his luxurious temperament, unselfish and devoted to his art as he was,—the presence of which was most needful to watch, choose, and reject the images which crowded on him as he thought or wrote.

Milton.

And it is thus that Keats' best period was when he fell under the influence and example of Milton. He was a great deal influenced by other poets, and had an unequalled power of reproducing not only the style of any writer whom he imitated, but the mental attitude which informed the style,* so that one is tempted to venture a bull of him, and say that if he had not been so original, he would have been only a plagiarist. But it was not until he came to rival Milton's epic that his originality seemed to be in danger; and no one would think of judging *Hyperion* by its likeness to *Paradise Lost*. If the two poems should be generally compared, though it is plain that Keats does not reach the sustained

* This is not true of his earliest work. But see for example the sonnet *Time's Sea*, which might have been written by Shakespeare.

sonority and force of Milton (nor has he even shown as much skill in characterising his divinities, whose elemental personalities would seem to have offered him a more interesting and poetically rich opportunity than the biblical devils did to Milton), yet in one respect he is in my opinion superior to Milton, and that is for a warmth in his poetry of inestimable worth. To give an example, where he describes Asia, he has

> "More thought than woe was in her dusky face,
> For she was prophesying of her glory."

Here there is a sympathetic touch in *dusky* which Milton would not have stopped to give, and it has the effect—at least it has to me—of warming the fine intellectual picture of Oriental slavery and metaphysics with an emotion that brings one at once into contact and sympathy with it.

So fragmentary and incomplete a treatise may break off abruptly. I began it with a due sense, as I thought, of responsibility, and with full admiration for the poet: I find both increased at the end. I owe much to the kindness of friends, who have read my papers and offered suggestions; especially I may name

Mrs. Margaret L. Woods, and my old friend Canon Dixon, whose remarks were of great service to me ; but most of all I have to thank Mr. Ellis Wooldridge, without the promise of whose collaboration I should not have ventured on my task. In the qualitative analysis there is as much of his work as of my own, and I could not put my name to it without this acknowledgment.

Of the books which I have read, or in any way used, I have mentioned all in the notes except Lord Houghton's short memoir, and Mr. Coventry Patmore's Essay, and Mr. Buxton Forman's large edition, which last, on account of its careful text and numbered lines, I have trusted for all my references.

If my criticism should seem sometimes harsh, that is, I believe, due to its being given in plain terms, a manner which I prefer, because by obliging the writer to say definitely what he means, it makes his mistakes easy to point out, and in this way the true business of criticism may be advanced ; nor do I know that, in work of this sort, criticism has any better function than to discriminate between the faults and merits of the best art : for it commonly happens, when any great artist comes to be generally admired, that his faults, being graced by his excellences, are confounded with them in the

popular judgment, and being easy of imitation, are the points of his work which are most liable to be copied. Keats has had some such imitators, and would, I imagine, have been glad to be justified from them. And if I have read him rightly, he would be pleased, could he see it, at the universal recognition of his genius, and the utter rout of its traducers; but much more moved, stirred he would be to the depth of his great nature to know that he was understood, and that for the nobility of his character his name was loved and esteemed.

R. B.

YATTENDON, 1894.

P.S.—The statement in the text that Keats began *Hyperion* in November 1818, and worked at it as late as April 1819, finally discarding it in September 1819, is, I think, probable; but I do not wish it to be taken for more than an opinion. It seems possible that the poem may have been begun as long as two months earlier, and as much of it as there is may, in that case, have been done by January. This does not affect the sequence of his work; but a careless interpretation of his reference to *Hyperion* in the letter to Bailey of August 1819 would entirely mislead. I have not attempted to settle doubtful details of chronology, and do not wish to appear to have done so. This question of the exact date of *Hyperion* would take many pages by itself to exhibit and weigh the evidence.