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NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM
OF JOHN KEATS.

by
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.....

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NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM OF KEATS.

Foreword.

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II. Casual acquaintances.

III. Periodical reviewers.

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Introduction.

Gossip is irresistibly fascinating. Few of us may openly avow our fondness for it - the connotations of the word deter us. We prefer adroitly to disguise the dubious reality under the more euphemistic "study of human nature". Still the fact remains that we cheerfully accept the rôle of listener on only one occasion - only when someone whom we know is being discussed, whether favourably or unfavourably does not matter. Put on the defensive, we justify ourselves by the plea that our experience is being greatly enlarged: first, by seeing the object of discussion in a new light, second, by seeing what he has power to evoke from his critics. Gossip, then, is not only fascinating, it is also instructive.

Turning to the matter in hand, it is in something of the spirit of enlightened gossip that I approach the study of John Keats. It is not of the details of his life and the technical merits and demerits of his work that I wish to hear. I am eager to learn of something apart from these - to learn what people thought of Keats and what impression he, in turn, made upon his critics. I shall take from those to whom I listen only what appears to be a sincere expression of personal opinion and shall pass over mere transmitted and unassimilated detail. Then, when I have listened long enough I shall compare what I have heard with what Keats thought of himself. Stating my aim a little more formally, I shall

endeavour to trace the main currents in the criticism expressed by those who in the nineteenth century came in contact with Keats, either by personal encounter or in his works alone.

My sources are not exhaustive. I do not intend them to be so. To satisfy my own curiosity I have made a fairly careful study of Keats's critics in the nineteenth century. Important figures may be missing and unimportant ones may be present. But, for my purpose, that is of little consequence. For my own part, true to my rôle of unobtrusive listener, I shall contribute little to the chorus of talk around me. I shall listen, compare, enjoy--nothing more.

Chapter 1.

Relatives and Intimate Friends

Our search for the real Keats begins with the question: "What did his relative think of him?" A prophet may be without honour in his own country and even at his own hearth. This does not seem to have been so with John Keats. His mother, by his brother George's account, appears to have been¹ "extremely fond of him and humoured him in every whim, of which he had not a few." Beyond leading us to suspect in John Keats a hint of the "enfant gâté" this remark cannot influence our estimate of the man. Moreover, on the strength of later references, partaking of a similar rather petulant nature, we may discount somewhat George's statement. We may even see in his attitude a faint reflection of that of the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Leaving the scanty account of what Mrs. Keats thought of her eldest son we find, in still another letter of George Keats's, the following:² "I loved him from boyhood even when he wronged me, for the goodness of his heart and the nobleness of his spirit, before we left school we quarrelled often and fought fiercely, and I can safely say and my school-fellows will bear witness that John's temper was the cause of all, still we were more attached than Brothers ever are -

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell - Vol. 1, p. 13.

2. *Ibid.* Vol. 1, p. 23.

After we left school we never passed an opposing word." Here again we are influenced to sympathize with John, rather than with his younger brother. We may even feel sorry for him in his endurance of such a prig - especially if we call to mind George's conduct in the affair of the two hundred pounds of which the poet stood in such dire need towards the close of his life. But fairness compels us to admit that ¹ others of John Keats's schoolfellows have left us independent accounts of his juvenile pugnaciousness. The sincere interest which George took in his brother's literary career further dissuades us from over-discounting his criticisms on grounds of envy or priggishness. That both George and Tom Keats must have felt a deep affection for their gifted brother is shown by the eagerness with which they copied out and preserved John's poems. Moreover, evidence of a later date, after Tom's death, convinces us that Keats, on his part, must have recognized and appreciated his brother George's sincere interest in his literary work. Had it not been so, Keats, always too proud and considerate to weary a correspondent, would hardly have incorporated into his trans-Atlantic letters to George and Georgina, so many transcripts of verses and so many references to his literary progress and aspirations. Finally, we have conclusive proof that, to his brothers at least, Keats was no petted, misunderstood weakling. The brother who outlived

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 1, p. 22.

his untimely death vigorously assailed the current misconception of the poet as a shrinking, timid soul, mortally wounded by mere words. In a letter quoted by Matthew Arnold George Keats wrote: "John was the very soul of manliness and courage, and as much like the Holy Ghost as Johnny Keats." Here is a contradiction (from one who should have known-if anyone did!)^{of} -/the "snuffed-out-by-an-article" school of Keats critics.

So much for Keats's family. Next we pause to listen to the opinions of his intimate friends. It is a commonplace that people are judged by the company they keep. Before, then, asking point-blank, what Keats's friends did and said to show what they thought of him let us note the varied occupations and conditions of the six friends of the poet whom we shall single out to tell us of him. The group comprises a fairly typical girl of eighteen, two artists, a lawyer, a retired brush-salesman, and a radical poet-critic-essayist. Without comment we may readily draw our own conclusions as to the nature of a man who could inspire and keep the friendship of such diverse individuals.

From Fanny Brawne, the poet's fiancée, we hear, strangely enough, very little about Keats. In an undated letter, reproduced by Amy Lowell, Miss Brawne referred to him as "one who I have heard called the best judge of poetry living."

1. Essays In Criticism; Second Series by Matthew Arnold p. 105.
2. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 134.

Too much weight should not be given to the fact that Fanny Brawne did not give the opinion her endorsement - perhaps she modestly considered herself unqualified to judge, or, more probably, simply accepted it as true. She, at any rate, was perfectly willing to defer to Keats's judgment of poetry, for, in the same letter she said: ¹ "as my dear Keats did not admire Lord Byron's poetry as many people do it soon lost its value with me." In view of Byron's immense popularity at that time this shows that Keats's opinions must have indeed carried great weight with her. Her third utterance, years later, shows that although she had treasured Keats's letters for sentimental reasons she was not ignorant of their importance. ² She counselled her children to preserve the letters as "they would some day be considered of value." Taken all in all, her opinion of Keats, as a poet at least, seems rather feeble when compared with the enthusiasm of less intimate friends, for example, Richard Woodhouse of whom we shall hear in the following chapter. Still we must remember that Keats did not try to impress Fanny Brawne in the role of poet. Moreover, he seems to have been quite satisfied with her interest in and sympathy for his literary work - witness their exchange of books and the numerous literary allusions in their letters.

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 135.

2. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 136.

From a man who was privileged to see as much of Keats as was the former brush salesman Charles Brown we might expect to hear a great deal about Keats. But in spite of their living and tramping in Scotland together, Brown has left us very little information of value. From the solid, practical egoist we look in vain for the passionate devotion of Woodhouse. Not only was Brown incapable of Woodhouse's self-forgetfulness but he also failed signally to appreciate the seriousness of Keats's illness when others, who had less opportunity to do so, fully realized its gravity. All that Brown saw was the inconvenience of altering his usual plans for the summer disposal of his house. Quite unperturbed he allowed Keats, seriously ill though he was, to seek lodgings elsewhere. That there was, however, something in Brown upon which Keats relied, and which he needed is shown by the poet's pathetic final letters, divulging, to this same Brown, his long-concealed love for Fanny Brawne. Moreover, Brown did care enough about his friend to write a life of him as early as 1829. That the publishers refused it does not lessen Brown's sincerity in his labours. We may believe that his was a disinterested endeavour to keep alive his friend's memory and not merely a bid for literary repute on his own account for later, in 1841, he generously placed his manuscript at the disposal of Monckton Milnes, Keats's first biographer.

Our next witness, Benjamin Robert Haydon, has been described by Sir Sidney Colvin as

¹ "that writer whose vividness of statement is seldom found, when we have opportunity to test it, to co-exist with strict accuracy." This same Haydon Amy Lowell described as ² "a perfect reporter and a poor interpreter." In spite of a justifiable caution inspired by the two above remarks we need not consider as wasted the time we shall spend in interviewing Haydon. Outspoken - as well as pig-headed - to the last degree Haydon never scrupled to express his honest opinion of Keats. That his opinion was subject to remarkable fluctuations is not so much to the point as that what he said was sincerely meant at the time of utterance.

Haydon did experience genuine affection for the man Keats. Without any false reticence he wrote to him: ³ "My dear Keats, I feel greatly delighted by your high opinion, allow me to add a fourth, to be proud of - John Keats's genius! This I speak from my heart. You and Bewick are the only men I ever liked with all my heart.....there can never be as long as we live any ground of dispute between us. My friendship for you is beyond its teens, and beginning to ripen to its maturity. I always saw through your nature at once, and you shall always find me a devoted and affectionate brother."

1. The John Keats Memorial Volume. p. 67

2. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 1, p. 251.

3. The John Keats Memorial Volume. p. 191-2.

By his affection Haydon was impelled, as were many others of Keats's friends, to action. In his Journal, in March, 1817, he made this entry: ¹ "I only know that, if I sell my picture, Keats shall never want till another is done, that he may have leisure for his effusions; in short, he shall never want all his life while I live." Haydon failed miserably to make good his resolve when the opportunity came, but we should not on that account deny his sincerity.

The frankness with which Haydon and Keats expressed their good opinions of one another might lead the uncharitable to discount their opinions as so much mutual admiration. But, all things considered, this would be unfair. He honestly enjoyed a disinterested intellectual companionship with Keats. He wrote: ² "I have enjoyed Shakespeare with John Keats more than with any other human creature." He was fully aware, too, of Keats's independent claims to greatness. ³ "John Keats," he wrote, "was the only man I ever met who seemed and looked conscious of a high calling, except Wordsworth."

It is only natural that a man of such warm impulses should have countenanced the killed-by-an-article fallacy. In a letter written to Miss Mitford shortly after the poet's death Haydon stated: ⁴ "Keats was a victim of personal abuse and want of nerve to bear it....Fiery, impetuous, ungovernable

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 1, p. 194.

2. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 258.

3. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 251.

4. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 520.

and undecided, he expected the world to bow at once to his talents as his friends had done, and he had not patience to bear the natural irritation of envy at the undoubted proof he gave of strength."

In the painter Joseph Severn we find a figure strikingly different from that of Keats's other artist friend, Benjamin Haydon of whom we have just taken our leave. Inevitably it is cited as the crowning proof of Severn's devotion to Keats that he crossed the seas with the dying poet to Italy. While Severn's tender care of Keats deserves unbounded commendation it must not be forgotten that he had just won a travelling scholarship for the pursuance of his studies at Rome. Although in his later years Severn became something of a confirmed raconteur of Keats' reminiscences, we have no evidence that he ever felt any overwhelming attachment for the poet or that he ever fully understood, - or was, indeed, ever granted the opportunity to understand - the real Keats.

Only two instances of what, in discussing other friends of Keats, we have called intellectual sympathy may be recorded of Severn. First, the artist in Severn was delighted by Keats's keen observation of out-of-doors nature. Second, after his first reading of "Isabella" he wrote to Haslam (July 1820):¹ "Are you aware another volume of Poems was published last week - in which is "Lovely Isabel - poor simple Isabel"? I have been delighted with this volume and think it

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 466.

will even please the million."

Severn admitted that he had never heard Keats utter a word to indicate that the cruel criticism of the periodicals had been responsible for his fatal illness. Later, when the Fanny Brawne correspondence was published, he declared that for the first time he understood what Keats must have suffered, and felt convinced that had it not been for his ¹ "death-stricken marriage project" he might have lived many years. Still, in spite of Keats's acknowledged silence on the subject, and in the face of his own admitted ignorance of the real cause of Keats's sufferings until years later, Severn was, nevertheless, with Brown, responsible for the petulant phraseology of Keats's epitaph: ² "This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who on his death bed, in the bitterness of his heart, at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraven on his tombstone 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'."

The voice of our next witness, calls us back from Keats's last days to the earlier and happier years of his short life. John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats's poet-lawyer friend, was one of the several friends of the poet who, as we shall see in a later chapter, did not hesitate to make a public stand against the detractors of his friend. His opinion of the hostile critics is expressed vigorously in a friendly letter of en-

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 535.

2. Ibid. p. 524.

couragement in which he urged Keats to publish his "Pot of Basil" ¹ "It's completeness", he insisted "will be a full answer to all the ignorant malevolence of cold lying Scotchmen and stupid Englishmen. The overweening struggle to oppress you only shows the world that so much of Endeavour cannot be directed to Nothing." "Men do not set their muscles, and strain their sinews to break a straw." That the motive power behind this defense was supplied by genuine affection is shown by a heartfelt - if flowery - posthumous tribute to Keats as "the sincerest friend, the most lovable associate, the deepest listener to the griefs and disappointments of all around him 'that ever lived in the tide of times'." Coupled with Reynold's affection, was the knowledge, perhaps limited in its scope, but none the less real, that his friend was a man of genius, Waxing lyrical Reynolds sang;

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"He, who is gone, was one of the very kindest friends I possessed, and yet he was not kinder perhaps to me, than to others. His intense mind and powerful feeling would, I truly believe, have done the world some service, had his life been spared - but he was of too sensitive a nature - and thus he was destroyed."

The last, and, in the eyes of posterity, probably the most trustworthy of Keats's critic-friends is the poet-essayist Leigh Hunt. Himself capable of winning and keeping the affection of a host of friends, Hunt graciously welcomed the young Keats into his circle. Even when Keats saw fit to withdraw from the Hunt coterie and rather neglected his old friends Hunt continued to regard him in a kindly light. Years later he said of him, very simply, - ² "It was a pleasure to his friends to have him in their houses." Two things inspire us with confidence in Hunt's criticism. First, from the very beginning, his praise was tempered with blame. Second, the fundamental points of his earlier estimate were repeated practically unaltered years later, when to have recognized and encouraged the early genius of Keats was something of which to be proud. The criticism below appeared in the "Examiner" of July 6, 1817: ³ "We do not, of course, mean to say, that Mr. Keats has as much talent as he will have ten years hence, or

1. *Ibid.* p. 521.

2. John Keats Memorial Volume. p. 177.

3. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 1, p. 481-2.

that there are no imitations in his book, or that he does not make mistakes common to inexperience; - the reverse is inevitable at his time of life. In proportion to our ideas, or impressions of the images of things, may be our acquaintance with the things themselves. But our author has all the sensitiveness of temperament requisite to receive these impressions; and wherever he has turned hitherto, he has evidently felt them deeply. The very faults indeed of Mr. Keats arise from a passion for beauties, and a young impatience to vindicate them; and as we have mentioned these, we shall refer to them at once." The following, very similar to the preceding, was written by Leigh Hunt and was given to the public in his "Essay on Imagination and Fancy", first published in 1844:¹ "Keats was born a poet of the most poetical kind. All his feelings came to him through a poetical medium, or were speedily coloured by it. His fame may now forgive the critics who disliked his politics and did not understand his poetry...and there can be no doubt that he has taken a permanent station among the British Poets, of a very high if not thoroughly mature description."

In the foregoing pages we have seen Keats as he appeared to those who knew and loved him best. We have heard his brother George and six of his most intimate friends join in paying homage to the kindness, loyalty, and independence of the man as well as to the undoubted genius of the poet. On only one matter have we noted a division of opinion - upon

1. "Essays" (Oxford University Press) by Leigh Hunt. p. 478.

the killed-by-an-article theory. With all that we have heard firmly fixed in our minds we now prepare to pass from the inner sanctum of Keats's life to the outer vestibule. There we shall find awaiting us a varied assemblage of men and women whom we may designate as the poet's casual acquaintances.

Chapter 11.Casual Acquaintances

First in order of time among Keats's casual acquaintances come those who met him during his career as a medical student. Of the brilliant Sir Astley Cooper who lectured him on anatomy and physiology it is recorded that ¹ "He took an interest in young Keats, and recommended him to the special care of his own dresser and namesake, George Cooper." The fact that a man of such recognized brilliance should have singled out one of his students for personal interest speaks well for the qualities and capacities of the student in question. Certainly we may interpret this as an indication of a favourable opinion of Keats held by Sir Astley Cooper.

From a fellow classmate, Henry Stephens, we have, however, a more definite expression of opinion. Stephens, by the way, ² was the man to whom Amy Lowell referred as the hospital friend who cared enough about Keats to copy the whole of his "Poems" 1817, into a blank book. Stephen's account of Keats comes to us at third hand by way of Sir Sidney Colvin. After mentioning Keats's almost religious awe for great poets and his consciousness of his own powers, he went on to explain: ³ "It may readily be imagined that this feeling was accompanied

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 30.

2. John Keats by Amy Lowell. p. 187.

3. John Keats by Amy Lowell. p. 31.

by a good deal of pride and conceit, and that amongst mere medical students he would walk as one of the Gods might be supposed to do when mingling with mortals. This pride exposed him, as may be readily imagined, to occasional ridicule, and some mortification."

Our third witness, Walter Cooper Dendy, is much less trustworthy. Only recently his veracity has been assailed in the correspondence columns of the "London Times Literary Supplement".¹ Dendy, unlike Stephens, seems to have given Keats no credit for poetic genius, although he does appear to have thought that he might have amounted to something had he persevered in his medical studies. His opinion of what he terms² "the romantic poet of Endymion" was that he "for the phantom of his waking dreams gave up the study of that science which might have nursed and fortified a mind so soon chilled to death by the icy finger of criticism." He proceeded to reproduce a fragment of poetry which, he stated, was "scribbled in our presence while the precepts of Sir Astley Cooper fell unheeded on his ear." Dendy's opinions are not particularly harsh nor are they intentionally malicious. Indeed, they are useful in showing us the reaction to Keats of one of a more practical turn of mind. Still, after reading them, we are glad to remember three things. The first is that Dendy had finished his own medical course some time before

1. "London Times: Literary Supplement" May 24, 1934.

2. Ibid.

Keats began his. This being so he must have had only a slight opportunity - as a junior demonstrator, it has been conjectured - of making the acquaintance of Keats. The second point is that the poem reproduced by Dendy cannot be definitely ascribed to Keats. The third is that Keats's Medical Notebook ¹ proves that - scribbled poetry notwithstanding - the poet listened to his lectures to some purpose.

Having heard the reminiscences of Sir Astley Cooper, of Henry Stephens, and of Walter Dendy, we are now ready to listen to the opinions of Keats's casual acquaintances of later years.

The popularity of Keats is proved by the number of acquaintances, apart from intimate friends, who were pleased to lay claim to his time and conversation. Because of the slow growth of his fame we may take it for granted that their interest was inspired by something in the man himself rather than by any desire for reflected glory. The expressions of opinion most valuable for our present survey are those culled from the writings, or inferred from the actions, of Benjamin Bailey, Mrs. Charles Dilke, Junior, and Richard Woodhouse.

Benjamin Bailey, Keats's divinity student acquaintance, showed the stuff of which his esteem was made when he ventured ² to write for the "Oxford Herald" a very favourable review of "Endymion".

1. Published by the Oxford University Press. 1934.

2. In May, 1818.

Mrs. Charles Dilke, Junior, the wife of one of Keats's neighbors at Wentworth Place, forgot herself so far - for it was the nineteenth century - to exclaim in a letter to her father-in-law: ¹ "If the public cry him up as a great poet, I will henceforth be their humble servant; if not, the devil take the public." Her enthusiasm was not based on blind feminine admiration for the genius poet, for on an earlier occasion she had written: ² "You will find him a very odd young man, but good-tempered, and good-hearted, and very clever indeed."

From Mrs. Dilke we turn to Richard Woodhouse, the most interesting of all Keats's casual acquaintances. The attitude of Woodhouse to Keats rather mystifies us. It is more than strange that a man with such genuine regard, appreciation, and undoubted affection for Keats should have remained a mere acquaintance. How with such feelings for Keats he could have been content to remain more or less aloof and how Keats, knowing his feelings could have allowed him to do so is something of a puzzle.

Woodhouse's warm personal devotion to Keats is more of a tribute than his commendation of his genius - glowing though that commendation be. In September 1819 he concluded a letter ³ to the publisher Taylor with these words: "I make no apology

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 445.

2. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 152.

3. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 320.

for stuffing my letter with these Keatsiana. I am sure nothing else I could say would have half the interest. And I deem myself in luck to have such a subject to write about." Keats seems to have been always present in his thoughts. When budgetting for a projected vacation in 1819 he asked himself:¹ "Would it not be better to 'miser it' till next Summer so as to afford to take J.K. with me?" More than that, his affection was tinged by sympathetic understanding for, in Keats, he discerned no trace of the unbecoming pride with which Dendy had charged him. To the contrary, he wrote in generous approval:² "I wonder how he came to stumble upon that deep truth that 'people are debtors to him for his verses and not he to them for admiration.' Methinks such a conviction on any one's mind is enough to make half a Milton of him."

Woodhouse, too, like a surprising number of Keats's friends and acquaintances did not stop at mere words. He would have been willing and honoured to help him financially had the opportunity arisen. Writing to Taylor on August 31, 1819,³ he said: "You are well acquainted with my good wishes towards Keats, as well as with their complete disinterestedness. Whatever people regret they could not do for Shakespeare or Chatterton, because he did not live in their time, that I would

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 305.

2. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 301.

3. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 302.

embody into a Rational principle, and (with due regard to certain expediences) do for Keats. But--" and we may be sure the recollection caused him real pain - "one's means are not unlimited."

Woodhouse outdid Keats's own brothers in his meticulous care of every scrap of the poet's writing that came into his possession. Writing to Taylor in August 1819 he was able to say of "Isabella":¹ "Recollect that this is the fourth time I have written it over, recollect also that I could say it by heart with about five promptings: and if, as really was the case, I went through it with more pleasure than ever, one of two conclusions is inevitable: either that it is a noble poem, or that my judgment is not worth the tythe of a fig. And I am quite content to be set down for a dolt in the opinion of that man who should deny the first of the above alternatives. May those to whom you show the poem derive as much gratification from it as I did."

From the very first Woodhouse was motivated in his care of Keats's works by a desire that posterity should see his idol to the best advantage. In his manuscript book of copies² of Keats's poems he wrote; in November 1818: "There is a great degree of reality about all that Keats writes: and there must be allusions to particular circumstances, in his poems:

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 293.
2. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 61-2.

which would add to their beauty and interest, if properly understood.- To arrest some few of these circumstances, and bring them to view in connection with the poetic notice of them, is one of the objects of this collection - and of the observations - as it is of the notes in the interleaved copies of his published works."

In spite of the bulk of the preceding eulogies it will be well to quote, in conclusion, still another rather lengthy expression of opinion. For, it proves that Woodhouse was by no means blind to the flaws in his idol, but, on the contrary, had them clearly before his eyes when giving his deliberate and reasoned estimate of the man. In a letter to his cousin, Miss Frogley, probably written in 1819, he said: ¹ "Such a genius, I verily believe, has not appeared since Shakespeare and Milton.....But in our common conversation upon his merits, we should always bear in mind that his fame may be more hurt by indiscriminate praise than by wholesale censure. I would at once admit that he has great faults - enough indeed to sink another writer. But they are more than counter-balanced by his beauties: and this is the proper mode of appreciating an original genius....I express my opinion, that Keats, during his life (if it please God to spare him to the usual age of man, and the critics not to drive him from the free air of the Poetic heaven before his Wings are fully

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 186-7

fledged) will rank on a level with the best of the last or of the present generation: and after his death will take his place at their head.....But, while I think thus, I would make persons respect my judgment by the discrimination of my praise, and by the freedom of my censure where his writings are open to it."

From the Pylades-like Woodhouse we proceed, naturally enough, to his friend and regular correspondent, John Taylor, of the publishing firm Taylor and Hessey. Publishers are often too eager to conciliate the critics to take up the cudgels against them on behalf of their clients. But, of Taylor who published Keats's 1818 and 1820 volumes we learn that he made an impassioned plea to Gifford of the "Quarterly" for fair play towards "Endymion". The nature of his interview with Mr. Blackwood of "Blackwood's Magazine" - also in defense of Keats - is revealed by his curt comment: ¹ "I am perfectly sure he will never call on me again." Nor was Taylor diffident about expressing his confidence in the ability of the young and comparatively obscure poet. Berating the "Quarterly Review" he said, in a letter written in 1820 to the poet John ² Clare: "Damn them (I say) who could act in so cruel a way to a young man of undoubted Genius." In a letter, mailed to a relative on the eve of the appearance of the "Poems" of 1820

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 451.

2. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 449.

he wrote: ¹ "If it does not sell well, I think nothing will ever sell well again. I am sure of this, that for Poetic Genius there is not his equal living, and I would compare him against anyone with either Milton or Shakespeare for Beauties." Taylor's was no purely intellectual worship of genius for to still another correspondent he had written; ² "If you knew him, you would also feel that odd personal interest in all that concerns him."

Finally - and actions, especially from a shrewd man of business, speak louder than words - we may note the many kind advances of money made to Keats by Taylor and Hessey even when his prospects of recovery and future work were almost hopeless. That Keats, on his part, was sensible of the good esteem in which Taylor and Hessey held him is shown by the frank and friendly tone of most of his letters to them. Keats was far from being as unworldly and obtuse about money matters as the typical poet is supposed to be. But even had he been so we may be confident that he would have fared none the worse in his dealings with the firm of Taylor and Hessey.

The relations between Keats and the Ollier brothers who published his first volume were not so satisfactory as those with Taylor and Hessey to whom we have just been listening.

1. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 427.

2. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 187.

The attitude of Charles and James Ollier may be divined from two very contradictory pieces of evidence - the first a complimentary sonnet, written on March 2, 1817, by Charles Ollier; the second, a letter to George Keats, signed C. & J. Ollier, and dated April 29, 1817, disclaiming further responsibility for the sale of the "Poems".

Concerning the complimentary sonnet, the peculiar thing is that it was written to a poet by a publisher. The reversal of this order, poet to publisher, is not altogether without precedent. But, of the Ollier sonnet, Amy Lowell quite rightly exclaimed: "For a publisher to break into poetic eulogy of a client is so very strange an occurrence that this fact alone must have given Keats every assurance of a good reception for his book."

The second piece of evidence, the disclaiming letter, did, it is true, deny further responsibility for the sale of the poet's works. But, when we learn of the meddling, officious letter from George Keats to which it was an answer we cannot blame the Olliers too severely for their sudden change of front. Moreover, although the losers by their recent publishing venture, and although denied credit for their efforts on their client's behalf, the brothers made it plain that in their opinion the poems were worthy of a better reception from

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 1, p. 270.

2. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 312

3. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 270

the public.

With the Ollier Brothers we conclude Chapter 11 of our survey. In this chapter we have heard of the interest of Sir Astley Cooper in his young and obscure student. We have heard of Henry Stephens's delight in the poems of his fellow-classmate whom he, nevertheless, accused of ridiculous conceit. We have heard, too, the evidence of Walter Cooper Dendy who saw in the poet only an infatuated youth who foolishly abandoned a worth-while calling. Then, leaving behind us Keats's student days, we have listened to Benjamin Bailey defending his friend in the "Oxford Herald", and to Mrs. Charles Dilke, Junior's, abuse of a public which seemed likely to neglect her young neighbour. We have been detained - perhaps over-long by the generous affection and impartial critical discernment of Richard Woodhouse. Then, in conclusion, we have glanced at the relations between Keats and his publishers, the Ollier Brothers, and Messrs. Taylor and Hessey.

We have still to hear many opinions concerning John Keats. But few of the voices to which we shall listen in subsequent chapters will have the cordial ring inspired by the kindly understanding and forbearance of personal friends and acquaintances. They will be the voices of strangers - hostile strangers, self-seeking strangers, or friendly strangers - but for all that, of strangers. The first of these stranger critics

to whom we shall listen will be the periodical reviewers of the nineteenth century.

Chapter lll.Periodical Reviewers

In chapters one and two reference has been made on more than one occasion to the views held by one or another of our witnesses in the killed-by-an-article controversy. It is a commonplace of Keats criticism that the mere mention of contemporary reviewers in connection with the name of the poet instantly conjures up the idea of savage and politically inspired hostility.

Only this year, however, the voices of two men whose research qualified them to speak authoritatively have been raised against any such sweeping condemnation of the reviewers. George L. Marsh and Newman J. White, who in 1934 contributed to "Modern Philology" an index to all contemporary periodical notices on John Keats, surprise us with the following significant statement: "If bulk and numbers alone are to be considered the critics of Keats were preponderantly friendly and encouraging rather than inimical." The "London Times" Reviewer who criticised the work of Marsh and White summarized their findings thus: "The influence of the periodicals who were friendly towards Keats's work was greater altogether than that of his redoubtable adversaries 'The Quarterly', 'Blackwood's' and the 'British Critic'.

In sum they (i.e. Marsh and White) suggest to the biographers of Keats, that the tradition emphasizing his injuries at the hands of the unjust should now be abandoned."

With this authoritative pronouncement in mind we shall now commence our study of the criticism accorded to John Keats by the periodical reviewers of the nineteenth century.

Keats's first volume of poems was published early in 1817. Months after its publication the "Eclectic Review" owned and edited by Josiah Condor, the dissenting hymn-writer, accorded it a somewhat lengthy review. Although willing to bestow some little praise upon the poems Condor insistently deplored ¹ "that a young man of vivid imagination and fine talents should have been flattered into the resolution to publish verses of which a few years hence he will be glad to escape from the remembrance." Later, when in July 1820 "Lamia" was published the same pious Condor pretended to see ² in the unauthorized advertisement to the poem a sign of repentance on the part of the author. In his criticism he advanced a doubt as to whether the author were a Christian.

As we may expect when we hear the name of the reviewer, Benjamin Haydon, the ³ "Champion's" criticism (March 9, 1817) of Keats's first volume of poems, was extremely favourable.

1. John Keats, by Amy Lowell, Vol. 1, p. 274

2. *Ibid.* Vol. 2, p. 452.

3. "Studies in Keats" by Middleton Murry, p. 98-105.

Still, although very favourable indeed, the review did not lay itself open to the charge of partiality. Some defects which are signalled out for reprimand are: the poet's extreme youth, the frequent carelessness of his versification which "at times passes to an absolute faultiness of measure", and his over-fondness for compound epithets. The reviewer noted with pleasure the antagonism of the young Keats to French critical doctrines and made the -- in 1817 very daring, almost impudent in fact -- prophecy that he would surpass Byron. He detected in his songs the voice of one who is "singing from the pure inspiration of nature" rather than in an attempt to imitate some earlier author. Even at this early date, the thought of Shakespeare came easily to the mind of one judging Keats for we read "he is fated to look on natural objects with the mind as Shakespeare and Chaucer did and not merely with the eye as nearly all modern poets do". The reviewer prophesied that the new poet was destined to "lay his name in the lap of immortality."

George Felton Mathew, another of Keats's personal friends,
¹ was responsible for the review which appeared two months later (May 1817) in the "European Magazine". Mathews characterized Haydon's cavalier pronouncement concerning Keats and Byron as injudicious. Although he, too, soundly berated what he termed Keats's "slovenly independence" of versification, he joined

1. Studies in Keats - by Middleton Murry, p. 106-112.

with Haydon in condoning his faults as being natural to his tender years. Very sternly he rebuked certain ideas which he declared "savour too much of the foppery and affectation of Leigh Hunt." In connection with this last Middleton Murry recalls to our minds the fact that Mathew, as an early friend of Keats, later somewhat neglected for Leigh Hunt, might not here have spoken quite impersonally and judicially. The "Ode on first looking into Chapmans Homer" Mathew dismissed as a "fair specimen" although "absurd in its application". He closed by holding out to Keats the hope of immortality if - and this in a nasal strain reminiscent of Condor - he would only remember "religion and love of virtue are not inconsistent with the character of a poet".

¹
The review of Keats's first book which appeared October, 1817, in "Constables' Edinburgh Magazine" can hardly be described as unfavorable. Several good qualities of the poem were noted and Keats was lauded for his "glorious Virgilian conception" in "I stood Tip Toe On A Little Hill". Nevertheless, pious admonitions similar to those of Condor were very much to the fore. Keats was adjured to "cast off the uncleanness of this school" - Leigh Hunt is of course meant - if ever he hoped to "make his way to the truest strain of poetry in which, taking him by himself it appears he might succeed." The "Edinburgh Magazine", however, lacked the enduring evangelical fervour of the "Eclectic Review" which,

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 1, P. 274.

even in 1820, when "Lamia" appeared, could perplex itself over the state of Keats's Christianity. When, after the appearance of the Z articles in "Blackwood's", Bailey submitted a defense of his friend to the "Edinburgh Magazine" it was returned to him without a word of explanation. Keats was very evidently already regarded as beyond the pale. The Edinburgh potentates had none of Condor's doubts about the state of Keats's soul. They knew.

And now we turn to hear what "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine" thought of John Keats. Much has been written in explanation of the motives that prompted the savage malevolence of "Blackwood's" attack upon Keats. And much abuse has - deservedly on the whole - been heaped upon that journal witness Landor's "The Blackguard Journal" (an epithet heartily endorsed by Swinburne), and Sir Robert Bridge's reference of later date¹ to "their serene Caecities the 'Edinburgh Review' and 'Blackwood's'." For our purposes the findings of all research on the subject may be put down very briefly - party politics and the desire of a newly-established journal to make itself read by any expedient. It will be well too, before examining what "Blackwood's" thought, and did not scruple to say, of John Keats - to remember the following note, from the pen of Sir Sidney Colvin:² "More amazing even than the

1. Collected Essays and Papers (by Robert Bridges) Vol.4, P.31.

2. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 300.

virulence of 'Blackwood's' was its waywardness and inconsistency....the only contemporary whose treatment by the 'Blackwood' trio-Blackwood, Lockhart, and Wilson-is truly consistent was Leigh Hunt and of him it was consistently blackguardly." Of this inconsistency as far as Keats is concerned we shall have ample proof as we turn over the pages of "Blackwood's" magazine from October 1817 to June 1882.

In the October 1817 issue of "Blackwood's" Magazine appeared article number one "On the Cockney School of Poetry" signed with the initial Z which most scholars have decided rather ineffectually masked the identity of "Blackwood's" dual editors John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart. The article opened by holding up to ridicule a poem from the pen of Cornelius Webbe, one of the followers of Hunt. In the lines from Webbe reprinted in "Blackwood's" there occurred in large capitals the name of Leigh Hunt coupled with that of Keats. Keats was referred to as "the Muses' Son of Promise" and the writer of the poem proposed to dwell on "the feats he yet may do". Then Z commenced his tirade of abuse against Leigh Hunt, principally, it appears, on the ground that he was "no gentleman". But of John Keats nothing more.

In article number two, December 1817, Z proposed to answer the charges brought against him by Hunt in his "Examiner" "and now and then to relieve my main attack upon you by a diversion against some of your young and less important auxiliaries, the Keats's, the Shelleys and the Webbe's."

An open letter from Z to Leigh Hunt, published in the May 1817 issue of "Blackwood's", reference was made to the "ivy crown shed nodding over both eyes as it was fixed by the delicate hand of young Mr. Keats" and also to "that magnificent chamber of yours at Lisson Grove where amiable but infatuated Bardling Mr. John Keats slept on the night he composed the famous Cockney poem".

Keats came in for considerable more mention in article number four of the series, published August 1818. Before quoting from this fourth article, however, it will be interesting to pause for a moment over a personal letter written in January of the same year by Lockhart to a friend who had met Keats and been favorably impressed by him. Lockhart replied ¹ "What you say of Keats is pleasing and if you like to write a little review of him in admonition to leave his ways etc., and in praise of his natural genius, I shall be greatly obliged to you." But now back to article number four of the Cockney School Series--"to witness the disease of any human understanding, however feeble, is distressing, but the spectacle of an able mind reduced to a state of insanity is, of course, ten times more afflicting. It is with such sorrow as this that we have contemplated the case of Mr. John Keats". The writer then proceeded to make mention of his "natural talents of an excellent, perhaps superior order which if devoted to the purposes of any useful profession must have

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 306.

rendered him a respectable, if not eminent, citizen". The reviewer stated how, at first he had hoped that Keats would see the error of his ways but added that in this hope he had been disappointed. "The "idiocy" of the poems was bad enough" he said, "but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm settled imperturbably drivelling idiocy of 'Endymion'." then came the pious hope that "even now he may not be utterly incurable" "Fine, firm treatment and rational restraint" might yet affect his cure". "Reading this criticism may show him he is sick and put him in the way to be cured". The reviewer deplored the fact that the "Examiner's" favourable reception of Keats had "confirmed the wavering apprentice in his desire to quit the gallipots and also excited a fatal admiration for the most worthless and affected of all the versifiers of our time". Then followed ridicule of several of the poems of "good Johnny Keats" and sharp rebukes for his presumption in venturing to criticise the Classicists - and, culminating all - a devastating and utterly ignorant tirade against "Endymion". The article closed maliciously: "We venture to make one small prophecy that his bookseller will not a second time venture £50 upon anything he can write. It is better and wiser to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet, so back to the shop Mr. John, back to plasters and pills and young Sangrado - be a little more sparing of your extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry."

In Articles number five April 1819) and number six (October 1819) and in "Shufflebotham's Dream" (Oct. 1820) occurred passing references to Keats who was set off as "A young Aesculapius who follows Hunt in all his movements. "The affair of the ivy crowning seemed especially to rankle in the mind of Z and was mentioned several times.

In spite of numerous indications that ^{the} Z articles were far from being passively accepted "Blackwood's" persisted in their hostility. They were undeterred when their London agents objected strenuously to the articles, or even when Murray of the "Quarterly Review" withdrew the money he had invested in the Blackwood venture. Blackwood, as might be expected, refused to publish a defence of Keats submitted to his journal by Keats's friend Bailey.

When the "Lamia volume was brought out in July 1820 "Blackwood's" acknowledged it only by what Amy Lowell describes as: ¹ "a quasi-apology, quasi-snarl interpolated in a review of Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' printed in the number for September." And in the same issue, in a doggerel against the Cockney school, Keats was once more referred to under the guise of the "Cockney apothecary." In "Blackwood's", September 1820, was printed "An Extract from A Wastrel's Diary" in which it was lamented that Keats "is evidently possessed of talents that under better direction might have done very considerable things."

1. John Keats - by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 451.

Death was no impediment to the abuse of "Blackwood's", for literary animosities die even harder than do consumptive poets. Keats died in February 1821, but in December 1821 Macginn - this time - was ready with further ammunition for the task of reviewing Shelley's "Adonais". Most unfeelingly the reviewer recounted Keats's brief literary career, the neglect of his books and the death by consumption of "the poor sedentary man with an unhealthy aspect and a mind harrassed by the first troubles of verse making". Then Macginn attacked the charge that Keats had been done to death by the adverse criticism of the "Quarterly Review". Shelley was attacked as everything possible - including an atheist, a madman and a dunce.

In "Rhapsodies of a Punch Bowl" number one, March 1822, occurred this passage "Poor Keats, - I cannot pass his name without saying that I really think he had some genius about him. I do think he had something that might have ripened into fruit had he not made such a mumbling work of the buds... something that might have been wine had he not kept pouring it before the grounds had time to be settled and the spice to be concentrated or the flavour to be formed."

In September 1822, appeared another very heartless article in the form of "Letter number one, of Mr. Mullion," addressed to Barry Cornwall, who had evidently been expostulating with Blackwood's for their attitude towards Keats. Shelley, dead only a few months, was ridiculed for his "awkward posture" in

death "grasping a volume of Keats's poetry with one hand in his bosom" and was remonstrated with for his folly in ever setting sail with such "fatal ballast" as John Keats's poems, equal inweight to "seventeen tons of pigiron". Once again, too, the whole killed-by-an-article controversy was fought out.

In March 1823, "Letters from Italy", Keats was begrudged his tombstone. The correspondent stated: "I was glad to see that a coppice was about to be erected over the grave of poor Keats, yet Fielding lies at Lisbon without a slab or token of his name and the chiefs of our army have been there and also Mr. Canning".

The next mention of Keats in the pages of Blackwood's occurred in August 1823. On that date the reviewer answered the allegation of the "Edinburgh Review" that Keats had been attacked merely because of his political principles. He ridiculed the notion that "Johnny Keats" was slaughtered by the "Quarterly" or any other review. He defended as harmless "Blackwood's" frequent gibes at Keats on the score of his profession. His indignation burst out in: "But let us hear no more of Johnny Keats. It really is too disgusting to have him and his poems recalled in this manner after all the world thought they had got rid of the concern. I would just ask any candid man this question "What did Keats write?" Would not the answer be - 'I never heard the name - oh yes, I do remember something - Keats - was it Keats you said?--are you

sure you did not mean Cottle'?"

The preface of 1826 to Volume Nineteen of "Blackwood's" contained a great deal of self-congratulation for having rid England of the dread menace of Cockneyism. It contained also some attempts to palliate the journalistic treatment allotted to John Keats by insisting that it was only the Cockney in him they had attacked. Byron was made something of a scapegoat when references were dragged in to his "cutting sarcasm on poor Keats" and his "outrageous merriment on this very deed of murder."

Two years later (March 1828) the publication of Leigh Hunt's "Lord Byron And Some Of His Contemporaries" gave "Blackwood's" review still another opportunity to justify the magazine's treatment of Keats. "Mr. Keats", it was stated "died in the ordinary course of nature. Nothing was ever said in this Magazine about him that need to have given him a fatal sickness, and, had he lived he would have profited by our advice and been grateful for it although perhaps conveyed to him in a pill too bitter.His genius we saw and praised but it was deplorably sunk in the mire of Cockneyism".

In "Noctes Ambrosianae XL" of December 1828 Wilson, as Christopher North, refused to allow his "brother" - the "Edinburgh Review" --- credit for his tardy praise of "Endymion" and berated him instead for his silence on the "Lamia" volume in which - he now insisted: - "Keats genius is seen to the

best advantage."

In "Blackwood's" of April 1830, one of a number of complimentary four-line poetical portraits was dedicated to John Keats and no objection or comment was made by the editors.

An essay of July 1840 "On Personification" poured contempt upon Keats's "Endymion", in which one of the loveliest classical fables is defaced by an absurd incoherence of detail and overlaid by an extravagant profusion of embellishment."

In October 1852 reference was made to "that fragment 'Hyperion', which suddenly elevated Keats in the judgment of many who had been little disposed to admire his poetry". For its failure to extol this gem on its appearance "Blackwood's" ridiculed the "Quarterly Review",---quite forgetful of its own conduct.

It is impossible at this point to resist carrying our survey a little farther than is really necessary--if only for the sake of being able to regale ourselves with a few further instances of the inconsistencies of "Blackwood's". In March 1854, in an article of scorn for Matthew Arnold "any man of cultivated taste" was urged to read "Hyperion"--"a splendid poem" - and then - if he could - to stomach "Sohrab and Rustum". Also, the "Church of Brou" was dismissed as very dull indeed when set off against the gorgeous masterpiece of the "Eve of St. Agnes".

In an article in September 1875, entitled "Elegies", "Adonais" was given high praise but it was still insisted that "Shelley's wrath against Keats's critics is unreasonable."

Even as late as 1882 "Blackwood's" felt that it should not give the impression of being too remorseful for its treatment of Keats. It prefaced an equivocal review of "St. Agnes Eve" with the grudging words: "It is perhaps a respectable instinct which inclines us to accept as good all the work of him who has come to be recognized as a great writer. So far as reparation for neglect (...no mention of abuse here!!!--) can be made to the departed it has been made to Keats although the fine passages he wrote bear small proportion to the pages which are never quoted and hardly ever read and though his chief poems are but fragments, in his case promise received the reward which is generally reserved for achievements." Then followed an ungracious acknowledgement of the beauties, and a childish tearing at the inconsistencies, of the same "Eve of St. Agnes" which, not so many months earlier, had been cited as infinitely better than Matthew Arnold's poem.

But our desire - admittedly a little malicious - to see how "Blackwood's" continued to conduct itself in the matter of Keats - has led us too far afield. It has been interesting to see how the magazine persisted - except for minor lapses - in its policy of abuse. But we must remember that Lockhart severed his connection with Blackwoods in 1825 and Wilson, not many years later. It is to these two men that we now return

to see if any doubts as to the right conduct of their treatment of Keats ever entered their minds. Lockhart, years later, excused himself on the grounds of his youth, and hid under cover of the general policy of Blackwoods. He took the opportunity of once more shifting the real guilt to the "Quarterly Review" which he accused of vindictiveness far greater than that of his own magazine. From Wilson we have only the even less significant utterance, already quoted from the "Noctes Ambrosianae" of 1828.

We now leave "Blackwood's Magazine" to consider the criticism of the "Quarterly Review". However much "Blackwood's" may have felt justified in its gibes at the "Quarterly" for its failure to notice the "Lamia" volume it could not charge it with neglect of "Endymion". "Endymion" was published in April 1818 and in the same month it was reviewed by John Wilson Croker of the "Quarterly Review". Whether neglect would have been preferable to such notice we shall soon see. Croker commenced by bluntly stating that he had read only "Book one" and that of that he could make nothing. He suspected that Keats might be a *nom de plume* "for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody". Some praise was given however. It was willingly conceded that the new poet "does have powers of language and rays of fancy and glimmers of genius" but these, the reviewer added, were all annulled by Keats's allegiance to the Cockney persuasion. Croker affected to temper his criticism in view

of what he considered the extenuating nature of Keats's preface and said that he had "observed in him a certain degree of talent which deserves to be put in the right way or which at least ought to be warned out of the wrong." The versification and content of "Endymion" were both assailed: "there is hardly a complete couplet enclosing a complete idea in the whole book." Like Haydon, Croker censured Keats for his overuse of compound epithets. In conclusion he wrote: "But enough of Mr. Leigh Hunt and his simple neophyte. If any-one should be bold enough to purchase this poetic Romance and so much more patient than ourselves as to get beyond the first book and so much more fortunate as to find a meaning we entreat him to make us acquainted with his success. We shall then return to the task which we now abandon and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers."

In March 1828 the "Quarterly" published its review of Hunt's "Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries." The reviewer ridiculed what he took to be Hunt's belief that next to himself "Mr. Keats will be considered by posterity as the greatest poet of these times." He insinuated in his review the remark that "by now our readers have probably forgotten all about 'Endymion: A Poem', and the other works of this young man, the all but universal roar of laughter with which they were received some ten or twelve years ago and the ridiculous story (which Mr. Hunt denies) of the author's death being caused by the reviewers."

In his 1832 review of Tennyson's second volume of poems the "Quarterly" critic referred mockingly to the "lamented Keats" and to "the vast popularity which 'Endymion' has notoriously attained."

Even twenty years after Keats's death the feud was not forgotten. In the March 1840 issue, in an article entitled, "Journalism in France", occurred this passage: "The same sort of twaddle was levelled against the conductors of this Review when they had the misfortune to criticise a sickly poet who died soon afterwards, apparently for the express purpose of dishonouring us....how can we anticipate such contingencies?...must we like the director of an insurance office refer our intended victim to a medical board of examination?...but what right has any man to aspire to walk in glory with Byron, Milton, etc., if he is too delicate to endure the rough questioning of his contemporaries, if he cannot even support the heat of the furnace by which the truth and purity of his own nature is to be tried?"

In October 1861,ⁱⁿ an article on "English Poetry" occurs the significant reference to Keats's poems as "The too scanty and imperfect work of one who, if from the promise we may infer the fulfilment, would have ranked, had life been permitted to him, as the greatest poet of England."

In a review of "Swinburne, Rossetti and Morris" in "The Quarterly Review" for January 1877 we read: "Of the many remarkable poetical appearances in the early part of the present

century there was none more remarkable in its character than the poetry of Keats." "Keats," the reviewers stated "was the first purely literary English poet who had appeared since Spenser." Once again the killed-by-an-article question was brought up, but this time with no hint of vindictiveness: "Though his own death is said to have been hastened by the hostility of his critics his immediate successors have not only monopolised the field of poetry but have silenced opposition and, as a last triumph, of ascendancy, have turned criticism itself into their tool."

April 1882 saw the publication of a very temperate and judicial article "English Poets and Oxford Critics" in which Matthew Arnold's recently issued criticism of Keats was discussed. The reviewer paid full tribute to Keats as a depicter of sensuous beauty but did not follow Arnold in his discovery in Keats of a higher passion "of an intellectual and spiritual kind."

In April 1888 appeared in the same journal a review of two newly published lives of Keats - the one by Sidney Colvin the other by William Michael Rossetti. The "Quarterly" saw in this event no occasion for repentance or retraction - witness the following: "The April 1818 criticism of "Endymion" in this magazine has proved the nucleus of a widely accepted literary myth....but it may be said at the outset that there is little or nothing of the adverse criticism contained in that famous review which we desire to withdraw even after the

lapse of seventy years." The writer said of "Endymion", "whoever now"--and we may imagine the emphasis he placed upon the "now"--"whoever now studies 'Endymion' reads it with the knowledge that the author has written poetry which places him in the first rank of English poets." And, since, even in 1888 it seemed necessary to quell the resurgent killed-by-an-article accusation he continued with: "The most conclusive evidence is found in the fact that all his best work was written subsequently to the publication of 'Endymion'." Then, point by point, the five charges levelled against "Endymion" seventy years earlier were reiterated and justified.

In an article "The Poetry of Tennyson" published in the January 1893 issue of the "Quarterly" the names of Keats and Tennyson were once again coupled in the pages of the "Quarterly", but this time in a spirit far other than that which inspired the mocking criticism of 1832.

In January 1897 the name of Keats was linked with that of Sterne as one of the "Fathers of Literary Impressionism in England". "In John Keats", said the contributor, "we come to the greatest impressionist we have ever had or it seems to us are ever likely to have."

But, once more, we find ourselves too far afield, for 1897 is a far call from the contemporary periodical criticism with which this chapter purports to deal. Before passing on to an examination of still other contemporary journals we shall pause for a moment to listen to only a few of the demurs which

greeted the criticism which we have just heard.

The severity of the "Quarterly's" attack on the new poet called forth in the "Morning Chronicle" two letters on his behalf - both signed only with initials - one J.S. (October 3, 1818), the other R.B. (October 8). The anonymous J.S. deplored the unfairness of the attack on Keats and cited as proof of his own complete disinterestedness the fact that he had not read "Endymion" - in which he later found real beauties - until prompted thereto by the "Quarterly's" tirade. Keats's friend Reynolds was successful in inducing "The Alfred, West of England Journal and General Advertiser" to publish, on October 6, 1818, an article he had written in praise of Keats and against the "Quarterly." Leigh Hunt's "Examiner" reprinted Reynold's article a few days later with the addition of a few introductory remarks by Leigh Hunt himself.

Returning to our main theme, we have yet to hear the criticism proffered by the Whig Journal "The Edinburgh Review" of which Constable was the proprietor and Francis Jeffrey the editor. It is not a little strange that one of the most temperate - although certainly very dilatory contemporary criticisms of Keats should have come from the man of whom it was said "that he regarded authors as criminals who appeared before him with ropes already around their necks".

1

Jeffrey's criticism of Keats's poems appeared in August, 1820, a month after the "Lamia" volume, but over two years after

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 480.

"Endymion" had made its appearance. Endymion and the later poems were made the subject of a dispassionate study. Their beauties were extolled, though, at the same time the reviewer pointed out that these works "have the faults of youth - extravagance, irregularity, rash attempts at originality, ".....not to complete the list of faults.."which manifestly require all the indulgence that can be claimed for a first attempt." Very gratifying was the editor's account of the first impression the works of Keats had made upon him - even though we can hardly admire his tardiness in expressing it. He said "I saw these just recently and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display". He went on to speak of a "second spring" in English poetry brought about by a return to the older poets and especially to the older dramatists and, of this second spring, he said, "few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness or richer in promise than this which is now before us."

Four minor critical publications are yet to be heard from. Of the most important of these lesser organs - "The British Critic", Amy Lowell has this to say ¹ "it was merely the terrier yapping beside the big dogs." "The British Critic" like Condor and the "Eclectic Review" regretted the "morality of the principal poems" but rather atoned for their disparagement by pronouncing the author, in their opinion, ² "a person of no

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 88.

2. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 452.

ordinary genius."

Equally noncommittal was the notice of the "Lamia" volume in the "Monthly Review", which had ignored entirely the appearance of "Endymion". Keats's chief virtue was conceded to be his originality and his chief defect was said to be over-originality. The critic made the profession that ¹ "the author's writings present us with so many fine and striking ideas that we shall always read his poems with much pleasure.

The "Indicator", Leigh Hunt's journal was, as would be expected, favorable to the "Lamia" volume and greeted it with two reviews with only a week between them. ² "Mr. Keats", wrote the "Indicator" Reviewer, "undoubtedly takes his seat with the oldest and best of our living poets."

We conclude this section of our study with the very magnanimous treatment given to the "Lamia" volume by "Colburn's New Monthly" of which the then very popular poet Campbell was the editor. ³ Campbell declared "These poems are very superior to anything which the author has previously commended to the press." In closing he wondered at "the gigantic stride which Keats had taken" and expressed "the good hope that if he proceeds in the high and pure style which he has now chosen he will attain an exalted and lasting station among English poets."

1. Ibid. p. 447

2. John Keats by Amy Lowell. Vol. 2, p. 447

3. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 452.

Chapter IV.Creative Literary Artists

From the periodical reviewers to whom we have listened in the preceding chapter, we now pass to the opinions of the Creative Literary Artists concerning John Keats. A survey of this nature soon leads one to the conclusion that creative artists are far less self-centred and far more generous in their praise of others of their fraternity than they have generally been given credit for. The difficulty is not to find writers who paid tribute to Keats. It is rather to select from the many who offer themselves those whose opinions will be most valuable to us.

In arranging the various opinions finally selected for inclusion I have hesitated for some time between two methods of arrangement - the first according to the date of the utterance of the criticism, the second according to the literary craftsmanship of the speaker. Since it is much more likely that all men of a given decade will have certain thoughts in common than that all novelists, say, will have a similar cast of mind, I finally decided to separate the speakers into two main categories, prose-writers and poets, and to observe, within these two broad divisions, a chronological order.

The three prose-writers whom I have singled out from among Keats's contemporaries to express their opinions concerning him are Jane Porter, the novelist, and the essayists,

Hazlitt and Lamb. The first, Miss Porter, expressed to Keats's friend Woodhouse, her desire to meet Keats, but the poet, when told of this, rather ungallantly decided to ¹ "leave the matter to chance" and so the desired meeting never came about. Miss Porter testified that she took a ² "very rare delight in reading 'Endymion'", in which she described "the first fruits of Genius". She expressed the wish that the "ill-natured review will not have damped such Parnassian fire."

But if Jane Porter admired the poet and never saw the man, Hazlitt, it is to be feared, admired and respected the man but never clearly saw the poet. Three year's after Keats's death, however, he paid him the tribute of inclusion in his "Select English Poets" and prefaced his poems with the following ³ eulogy: "He gave the greatest promise of genius of any poet of his day." In "Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy" ⁴ published in 1824, Hazlitt attacked "the living mummy of William Gifford" for his politically-inspired persecution of Keats. The motive of Hazlitt's defence of Keats - appearing in this same year in the "Edinburgh Review" in Hazlitt's article on Shelley's posthumous poems - is generally considered to be personal spite against "Blackwood's" rather than any desire to champion Keats.

1. John Keats by Amy Lowell, p. 122.

2. John Keats by Amy Lowell, p. 122

3. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 201

4. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 108

Charles Lamb had some personal acquaintance with Keats but has left us no personal reminiscences of him. His review of Keats's "Lamia" volume (1821) although conservative was favorable and contained the significant pronouncement that among modern poets Keats ranked second only to Woodsworth. It is disappointing to note that this tribute from Elia was published anonymously.

Skipping a decade or two and listening to the voices of De Quincey and Carlyle we almost imagine ourselves back in the presence of the "Blackwood's" trio. "Endymion", according to De Quincy, is the "incomprehensible reveries of an oyster.... a piece of gossamery affectation." Keats, himself, is a renegade of the deepest dye, for, "upon this Mother tongue, upon this English language has Keats trampled with the hoofs of a buffalo." Still, for all that, "Hyperion", is, to De Quincy, "sublime and imperishable."

But listen to Carlyle! He had not exhausted his vituperation in the "dead dog" passage to be echoed back from France later in this study in the section "Keats Abroad". He insisted as well that to him the poetry of Keats is "weak-eyed maudlin sensibility and a certain vague random tunefulness."

1. Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 446.

2. Library of Literary Criticism, Vol. IV, p. 670.

3. The Bookman Illustrated History of Literature by T. Seccombe and W. Robertson. p. 441.

4. Essay on Burns, by Thomas Carlyle.

In welcome relief is the generous tribute of John Ruskin-¹ rendered the more sincere by its very petulance: "I dare not read him, so discontented he makes me with my own work." Ruskin, we note with interest, did not class Keats with Shakespeare. He regarded Shakespeare's genius as of the creative order whereas that of Keats was of the reflective or perceptive type.

Leaving a gap of several more decades we turn to hear Lafcadio Hearne's opinion of Keats. Our interest is doubly keen: first, because Hearne has written several very readable essays on Keats's attitude towards Nature, second, because, as we shall see in a later chapter, he seems to have helped a great deal towards making Keats appreciated in Japan. It is, then, with puzzled surprise that we read the terse comment of his biographer, Dr. Gould,² "He confessed his detestation of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, preferring Dobson, Watson and Lang." Hearne, may, of course have made the remark quoted above merely for the sake of effect or else he may have been rather hypocritical in the opinions he expressed to his Japanese students. For, he has also left us two other pronouncements of a very different character. First,³ "Keats is really worth many months of study" and second,⁴ "The mistakes of the great poets like Keats have more literary value than the

1. The Book of Poetry, Edwin Markham, p. 1630.

2. Concerning Lafcadio Hearne, by George Gould, p. 94

3. Interpretations of Literature, by Lafcadio Hearne, p. 199.

4. Ibid. p. 200.

corrections of his critics."

We pass over in silence another quarter-century and hear the voice of George Bernard Shaw speaking to us from the pages of the "Keats Memorial Volume". Shaw, always to be relied upon to say something unexpected, gives us in his short essay a surprising mixture of conventional and unconventional Keats criticism. He begins with the disarming, if abrupt statement, a little reminiscent of the criticism of Leigh Hunt, that ¹"It is very difficult to say anything about Keats except that he was a poet." Nor does his second remark impress us as particularly novel: "He was the most literary of all the major poets." But, if, by this time, we are perhaps just a little off our guard we are called back to ourselves with startling suddenness by the unexpectedness of the following pronouncement: "Keats achieved the very curious feat of writing one poem of which it might be said that if Karl Marx can be imagined as writing a poem instead of a treatise on Capital he would have written 'Isabella'". Then Shaw, giving us no opportunity to recover from the unexpected shock, closes with a parallel between Keats and Shakespeare, quite different from any of those to which we have listened thus far: "and so Keats is among the prophets with Shakespeare and had he lived would no doubt have come down from 'Hyperion' and 'Endymion' to tin-tacks as a very full-blooded modern revolutionist."

1. Keats Memorial Volume. pp. 173-176.

Because space is limited, and since there is no definite point made in their tributes of appreciation, beyond the paramount point that they enjoy the poetry of Keats, I shall conclude this section of my survey with the following list of names of still further writers of creative prose who, strictly speaking, lie beyond the scope of this study. They are: Henry Van Dyke, Katherine Tynan, Marie Corelli, Sir Hall Caine, and John Drinkwater. Sir Hall Caine, strangely enough, resurrects once more the contention that Keats was killed by an article. John Drinkwater sees in the tragic yet undaunted life struggle of John Keats a saving lesson for the modern world.

If I confessed myself bewildered by the host of prose-writers anxious to express themselves about John Keats, what am I to say when confronted by the company of the poets? Here indeed the too frequently quoted phrase, "the poets' poet" vindicates its supreme appropriateness as the inevitable epithet for John Keats as well as for his master Spenser. From the number who press forward I have selected only the sixteen who have the most significant opinions to offer concerning Keats. The speakers are listed in chronological order.

Lord Byron's very evident dislike of Keats is generally attributed to the latter's slighting references in "Sleep and Poetry" to Byron's mentors Boileau and Pope.

Byron's opinion of the "Lamia" volume of 1821 is set down in the following extract from a letter to his bookseller Murray,

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dated October 12, 1820: "Pray send me no more poetry but what is rare and decidedly good." - (no concession here that de gustibus non disputandum est!) - "there is such a trash of Keats and the like upon my tables that I am ashamed to look at them.....no more Keats I entreat.....flay him alive! If some of you don't I must skin him myself, there is no bearing the drivelling idiotism of the Manikin."

Byron's reaction to Jeffrey's kindly criticism of Keats in the "Edinburgh Review" is described by Sir Sidney Colvin as being ² "so foul-mouthed and outrageous that his latest and far from squeamish editors have had to mask its grossness under a cloud of asterisks." Only Keats's death averted the publication of Byron's already prepared attack upon him - hinted at in the words quoted above: "I'll skin him myself."

In a letter to Disraeli (March 15, 1820) Byron looked down from his own lofty heights of fame and experience upon Keats as ³ "a young person learning to write poetry and beginning by teaching the art...a tadpole of the Lakes...a young disciple of the six or seven new schools." As proof of his Lordship's later change of heart Byron's editors refer to a manuscript note appended to the above vituperation (after Keats's death) which states that: "My indignation at Mr. Keats's depreciation of Pope has hardly permitted me to do justice to his own genius..

1. Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, edited by Thomas Moore, p. 458.
2. John Keats by Sidney Colvin, p. 480
3. A History of English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century, (by Henry Beers, p. 116.

He is a loss to our literature and the more so as he himself before his death is said to have been persuaded that he had not taken the right line and was reforming his style upon the more classical models of the language."

¹
Byron's most generous praise of Keats - like the equivocal re-consideration above, not uttered until after Keats's death, is his reference to "Hyperion" as "The authentic large utterance of the early gods."

Both the good and the bad points of Byron's attitude to Keats are very clearly to be seen in the two quotations with which we take our leave of him to pass on to Shelley. The first passage is from Byron's letter to Murray, dated April 26, 1821.² Byron writes: "Is it true, what Shelley writes me, that poor John Keats died at Rome of the 'Quarterly Review'? I am very sorry for, it though I think he took the wrong line as a poet, and was spoilt by Cockneyfying, and suburbing, and versifying Tooke's 'Pantheon' and Lempriere's 'Dictionary'. I know by experience, that a savage review is hemlock to a sucking author; and the one on me (which produced the 'English Bards' etc.) knocked me down - but I got up again. Instead of bursting a blood-vessel, I drank three bottles of claret, and began an answer, finding that there was nothing in the article for which I could lawfully knock Jeffrey on the head

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin, p. 431

2. Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, edited by Thomas Moore, p. 502.

in an honourable way. However, I would not be the person who wrote the homicidal article for all the honour and glory in the world, though I by no means approve of that school of scribbling which it treats upon."

The second quotation is Stanza LX, Canto XI of "Don Juan", published several years after Keats's death:

"John Keats, who was killed off by one critique,
Just as he really promised something great,
If not intelligible, without Greek
Contrived to talk about the Gods of late,
Much as they might have been supposed to speak,
Poor fellow! His was an untoward fate;
'Tis strange the mind, that fiery particle,
Should let itself be snuff'd out by an article."

Shelley's opinion of Keats must be considered in the light of the essential difference between the two authors. This difference has been aptly set off by Clutton Brock, as follows: ¹ "For Keats the aesthetic life was an escape. For Shelley it was a prophecy or model of the world as he hoped to make it." We have already seen how "Blackwood's" had assailed Keats because of his political affiliations, if not principles. If we are to believe the critic just cited Shelley's admiration of Keats may be put down largely to a nascent radicalism which he discerned in him and considered

1. Keats Memorial Volume, p. 62

worthy of encouragement, rather than to any wider intellectual sympathy with the man himself. To this we may add the fact of Keats's untimely death which, in itself, was capable of winning the sympathy of the warm-hearted Shelley. Still, however, sincere Shelley's grief may have been we see in his magnificent elegy "Adonais" as little of the true Keats as we do of the real Daphnis in Virgil's Fifth Eclogue.

Few critics fail to endorse, in part at least, Shelley's view of "Endymion", set forth as follows: ¹ "I think if he had printed about fifty pages of fragments from it I should have come to admire Keats as a poet more than I ought of which there is now no danger." Yet, at a later date, Shelley, who usually said what he thought, wrote to the author of "Endymion" and stated: ² "I have lately read over your 'Endymion' and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though" he adds in well-meant warning "treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This people in general will not endure and", he adds, "rather tactlessy to be sure, "that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things so but you will. I "-and is this last proffered as a help along the road to greatness?-" I always tell Ollier to send you copies of my books."

It is to Shelley's credit that he did not, as less discerning critics are prone to do, confuse the dual issues of

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin, p. 239

2. John Keats, by Amy Lowell, Vol. 2, p. 441

true greatness and of popularity. He wrote: "In spite of his transcendent genius Keats never was nor ever will be a popular poet."

In conclusion Shelley cannot, be denied either keen penetration or unselfish generosity - witness the following frank avowal concerning his proffered hospitality to Keats.

¹ "I am aware indeed in part that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me and this is an additional motive and will be an added pleasure."

From Barry Cornwall (Bryan Proctor), we have two tributes to Keats, one to the man and one to his work. Proctor's interest in Keats as a man was motivated by his interest in his work. When Hunt, at his request, had introduced him to Keats, he recorded the meeting thus: ² "I never encountered a more manly and simple young man." His opinion of Keats's poetry is one which we have already heard expressed and which we shall hear repeated many more times in this survey: ³ "Keats as a writer was more intensely and exclusively poetical than any other."

1. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin, p. 484

2. John Keats, by Amy Lowell, Vol. 2, p. 400

3. The Bookman Illustrated History of English Literature,
by ~~Thomas~~ T. Seccombe and W. Robertson, p. 439.

From the voluminous and long-lived poet Southey we have no praise - and no blame - for Keats. The fact of being ignored by one who was in a sense one of the literary leaders of his age may be interpreted in one of two ways. Either Southey regarded Keats unfavorably or else was quite indifferent to poetry of the type produced by the younger poet.

For William Wordsworth to pay any attention at all to young John Keats was no doubt, in the mind of the older poet something of a condescension. For the great man, besides being the acknowledged literary leader of his age, was also many years the Keats's senior. Moreover, we know that, by all accounts, Wordsworth considered himself and his own works with an engrossing seriousness that tended to the exclusion of all less important literary men and literary productions. As Keats himself noted in a letter written June 26, 1813 in the course of a walking tour which took him past Wordsworth's home:
¹"But Lord Wordsworth instead of being in retirement has himself and his house full in the thick of fashionable visitors quite convenient to be pointed at all summer long." Nevertheless, Wordsworth entertained Keats kindly when he called upon him and on several different occasions extended him an invitation to dinner. Of Wordsworth's remark - ²"a pretty piece of paganism! - elicited by Keats's "Hymn to Pan" - much has been said, but the consensus of opinion is that the remark was meant to be slighting and belittling. More than that, into
 1. The Letters of John Keats, edited by M. B. Eorman, Vol. 1, p.
 2. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 104. footnote 5.

it is read the inevitable antagonism of the old school for a prophet of the new.

Is this inference justified, however, where such a different meaning could be taken from the words merely by assuming that they had been uttered in a kindly tone of voice or to the accompaniment of certain conciliating gestures?

From Wordsworth we pass to a number of minor poets, most of them belonging to a period somewhat later than that of Keats. The fact that minor poets were moved to imitate Keats shows that he was not altogether without literary influence even so early as in the first decade after his death. Moreover, when that influence is shown in such close imitation as that of Thomas Hood, (1790-1846) the proof is indeed conclusive. Hood's "Ode to Autumn" is--even in phraseology--very reminiscent of Keats's "Ode to Melancholy". Of this sincerest form of flattery another instance occurs in Hood's "The Water Lady" which is suggestive of Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". Hood's "Verse to the Moon" brings to our minds certain passages in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale". The degree of resemblance may be ascertained from the following phrases from Hood's Moon poem: "Clustered by all thy family of stars.." and "casting their dappled shadows at my feet." Hood has left us, as well, an unfinished poetical romance entitled "Lamia". A direct tribute to Keats is found in the "Lines Written in Keats's "Endymion" wherein Keats himself is mourned under the guise of Endymion.

In spite of his restraint and, at times, frigidity, Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864) too, was a firm admirer of Keats's poetry. Moreover, he expressed his love from the very beginning - in the days before Keats was elevated to something of a cult by the adoration of the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren.

Hastening on to the Pre-Raphaelites we find that Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), himself a painter as well as a poet was attracted to Keats chiefly by the beauty of his pictorial passages. So near to perfection did he consider the work of Keats that he is said to have attempted to dissuade the young William Morris from poetry on the grounds that after Keats there was nothing more to be done.

Although the French critic Louis Cazamian sees in William Morris (1854-1896) a disciple of Spenser rather than of Keats we have from the pen of Morris the eulogistic reference:

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"Keats - for whom I have such a boundless admiration and whom I venture to call one of my masters". To Morris, along with Mrs. Owen,^{is} generally conceded the credit for discovering in Keats the "humanitarian idealist". Moreover Morris, perhaps earlier than Shaw, saw in Keats's "Isabella" the issue between capitalism and labour. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" was in Morris's opinion, the germ from which all the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had sprung.

As early as 1857, the date of the publication of "Aurora Leigh," we have from Elizabeth Barrett Browning a criticism of

1. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin, p. 539

Keats which has been repeated in part or whole by many later critics, and dissented from vigorously by some - notably Sir Sidney Colvin. She apostrophized Keats as:

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"The man who never stepped

In gradual progress like another man,
But turning grandly on his central self
Ensphered himself in twenty perfect years
And died not young - (the life of a long life
Distilled to a mere drop, falling like a tear
Upon the world's cold cheek to make it burn
For ever, by that strong accepted soul
I count it strange and hard to understand
That nearly all young poets should write old."

Concluding our interview with minor poets we return to creative artists of recognizedly outstanding genius. We hear from the mouth of Robert Browning, one of those testimonies which are often more significant than expressed praise. Browning tells how that, when as a fourteen year old boy he was presented with the poems of Keats and Shelley, he became "in-²spired with a fervent and wholly new conception of the scope and power of poetry." In his work occur numerous references to the name of Keats. Browning, we may note in passing, ranked Keats not with Shakespeare, but rather with Milton.

Edward Fitzgerald - the translator of Rubaiyat - shared to the full the admiration of his friend Tennyson for Keats.

1. Aurora Leigh, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1004-1014.
2. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin, p. 526.

Shelley he counted as ¹ "not worth Keats's little finger." The letters as well as the poems elicited from him very high praise.

Tennyson's interest in Keats may be traced back to his under-graduate days at Cambridge and his association with the Hallam group whose interest in Keats prompted them to the reprinting of *Adonais*. We have already seen how, in the jeering 1832 Review of Tennyson's second volume, his name was contemptuously linked with that of "the lamented Mr. Keats" - evidently to make clear to the public that here again had arisen another presumptuous youngster. Later, when Tennyson's artistry was acknowledged and Keats's genius fully recognized, scholars once more linked the two names, but this time in praise. Keats's has been generally conceded to be the greatest single literary influence upon Tennyson. For all that Tennyson himself declared that Keats although ² "a great master" had not been his model". However this may be, Tennyson paid Keats a generous tribute of praise. ³ "Keats" he said, "with his high spiritual vision would have been, if he had lived, the greatest of us. There is something magic and of the innermost soul of poetry in almost everything which he wrote."

1. Ibid. p. 541

2. New Essays Towards A Critical Method - John Robertson, p. 257 - footnote.

3. A Keats Concordance, by ⁷⁷ ~~Day~~ Baldwin (and others) p. V.

And again - ¹ "Keats would have become one of the greatest of all poets had he lived. At the time of his death there was apparently no sign of exhaustion or having written himself out; his keen poetical instinct was in full process of development at the time. Each new effort was a steady advance on that which had gone before."

Swinburne, in the opinion of Sir Sidney Colvin, has done little to advance Keats's fame because of the ² "torrent of hyperbolical adjectives of praise and blame which he has poured upon him." This is hardly just, for both praise and blame are usually applicable to one and the same person. Still, if Sir Sidney here accuses Swinburne of inconsistency in his praise and blame of Keats, that is quite another matter. As we listen to the opinions expressed by Swinburne we shall be especially on the watch for any such inconsistency. When we have turned the last page of Swinburne's "Miscellanies" we have no doubt about one thing - that as far as Swinburne was concerned Keats must be considered as unspeakably inferior to both Shelley and Coleridge. Note the passionate fervor of the following: ³ "At the sound of the 'Ode to the West Wind' the stars of Wordsworth's heaven grow fainter in our eyes and the nightingale of Keats's garden falls silent in our ears."

1. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin, p. 542
2. Idem. p. 542.
3. Miscellanies by Swinburne, p. 155.

The poet who wrote that and the poet who wrote 'Christabel', but these alone of their generation are indeed to be counted among the very chiefest glories of English poetry and it is surely no inadequate reward for the noble labour of a long and strenuous life to stand where Wordsworth stands - but a little lower than these." And even if conceded to be, as Swinburne seems to concede him, Wordsworth's peer- Keats at his worst is inferred to be as bad as Wordsworth at his worst- a terrible indictment indeed! Swinburne wrote: ¹ "Not that we do not prefer the nebulosity of Shelley at his cloudiest to the raggedness of Wordsworth at his raggedest or the sickliness of Keats at his sickliest".

Swinburne agreed heartily with Arnold and Monckton Milnes in denying the killed-by-an-article theory. He also, anticipated Marsh and White (quoted on page one of Chapter three of this survey), in showing that, on the whole, the contemporary periodical criticism of Keats was far from unfavourable. Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Swinburne marvelled at the rapid development of Keats's poetic powers. ² "Never", he exclaimed, "was any one of them but Shelley so little of a marvelous boy and so suddenly revealed as a marvellous man." Swinburne condones the "Quarterly" and "Blackwood's", reviewers and Shelley in their inability to read "Endymion" in its entirety. He deplored in conclusion, the tendency of those

1. Miscellanies by Swinburne, p. 103.

2. Ibid. p. 210

critics of Keats who ¹ "fix their mind's eye on the more salient and distinctive notes of his genius" to the obscuring of his more subtle beauties.

Coventry Patmore dissented violently from the current tendency to link the names of Keats and Shakespeare ² "Is it not the truth" he inquired "that among real poets Keats was the most un-Shakespearean poet that ever lived?" Shakespeare, he went to say, is the father of them in whom "intellect predominates" - the "masculine poets". Keats on the other hand leads the poets of "beauty and sweetness" - the "feminine (not effeminate)" poets. Patmore diverged, too, from Keats's philosophy of life and opposed his theory that a consciousness of the identity of Truth and Beauty is sufficient for man. His own view is: "But it is a fact of primary significance both in morals and in art (a fact which is sadly lost sight of just now) that the highest beauty and joy are not attainable when they occupy the first place as motives but only when they are more or less accidents of the exercise of the many virtues of the vision of truth". In spite of all this, Patmore professed to a deep love for the poetry of Keats and acclaimed "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" ³ as "probably the finest Lyric in the English language."

1. Ibid. p. 215

2. Principle in got, Religio Poetal and other Essays, by Coventry Patmore. p. 61.

3. Library of Literary Criticism. Vol. IV. p. 680.

In Keats Matthew Arnold saw a "fluidity of diction"¹ akin to that of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Arnold acknowledged Keats's greatness as a writer of sensuous poetry but added:² "the question with some people will be whether he is anything else." That he himself was not to be classed with the "some people" referred to is shown by a later passage where he made it plain that³ "the yearning passion for the Beautiful which was with Keats as he himself truly says the master passion is not a passion of the sensuous or sentimental man, is not a passion of the sensuous or sentimental poet. It is (connected and made one) as Keats declared that in his case it was 'with the ambition of the intellect'".

With the side of Keats revealed in Haydon's life and in the Fanny Brawne correspondence Matthew Arnold had no sympathy. Something of the snobbishness of "Blackwood's" critic is discernible in his abuse of the letters as⁴ "the love letters of a surgeon's apprentice." Matthew Arnold did however, identify himself with those⁵ "who believe Keats to have been, by his promise at any rate, if not by his performance, one of

1. Essays in Criticism; Second Series. by Matthew Arnold, p.29

2. Ibid. P. 100

3. Ibid. p. 115

4. Ibid. p. 103

5. Ibid. p. 104.

the very greatest of English poets." That Arnold was no sharer in the killed-by-an-article heresy which has persisted with surprising vigour even to the present day is shown by his incredulous dismissal of ¹ "the fantastic Johnny Keats invented for common opinion by Lord Byron and the reviewers". He designated as highly praiseworthy the perspicuity and disinterestedness of Keats's self-criticism. He extols, too, the poet's lack of deference towards the contemporary public. Once more occurs a reference to the folly of the killed-by-an-article theory. ² "Keats" insisted Arnold "had flint and iron in him". Keats's achievement is very definitely set off as ranking ³ "in one of the two great modes by which poetry interprets, in the faculty of naturalistic interpretation in what we call "natural magic" with that of Shakespeare." Of Keats' aspiration to be ⁴ "among the English poets after my Death" Arnold stated simply "he is with Shakespeare". Arnold went on to hint that in the second of the "great modes" of poetry that of (moral interpretation) he fails to take his place beside Shakespeare only by reason of his immaturity not because of any revealed incapacity for such a feat. Judging Keats by his body of poetry as a whole Arnold felt constrained to rate him below Wordsworth, Milton and Shakespeare.

1. Ibid. p. 106.

2. Essays in Criticism; Second Series, by Matthew Arnold, p.112

3. Ibid. p. 119

4. Ibid. p. 119

Although by no means too partial a critic, Sir Robert Bridges (the last of the poet-critics to whom we shall listen) is confident that Keats held great promise for the future.

¹ "If", he speculated, "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 is disappointing. Nor is there any likelihood of this verdict being overset."

Bridges set before himself as an aim in his criticism "to vindicate both the form and meaning of some poems from the assumption of even his reasonable admirers that they have neither the one nor the other." He admitted with sorrow Keats's inability to portray female character but excuses him on the ground of a fundamental objectivity of outlook. He praised Keats for his supreme capacity for ² "concentrating all the far-reaching resources of language on one point so that a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the aesthetic imagination when it is most expectant and exacting and at the same time astonishes the intellect with a new aspect of truth", of the remarkable frequency with which Keats has been enthroned with Shakespeare, the late poet laureate had

1. Collected Essays and Papers, by Robert Bridges. Vol. 4, p. XIII

2. Ibid. Vol. IV, P. XCI.

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this to say: "and very justly, for Shakespeare is of all ,
poets, the greatest master of it" and by "it" he referred to
the happy faculty he has just discussed. On the intellectual
side, however, Bridges claimed that the parallel between
Keats and Shakespeare could not be maintained. Finally,
unlike Arnold, he was unable to discern in the passion of
Keats any deep spirituality. Reminiscent of Patmore, rather
than of Arnold, is his reference to ² "Keats's doctrine of
Beauty which might be defended if it was spiritualized, which
it never is by him."

1. Collected Essays and Papers by Robert Bridges. Vol IV.
p. XCI.

2. Ibid. XCVII.

Chapter V.Scholars of Literature.

In this chapter I propose to examine the opinions of those whose most important contributions to literature have been critical rather than creative. The classification "scholars of literature" is, an arbitrary one and, needless to say the terms "scholars of literature" and "creative artists" are not to be taken as being mutually exclusive. Although this survey deals only with nineteenth century criticism I have not hesitated to include in it the opinions of several older critics of note who have continued to write into the present century.

For more than half a century after his death Keats was almost entirely neglected by scholars of literature. Then, in 1884 he was suddenly recalled or - more properly - introduced - to the literary public by the appearance of two biographies. The one was by William Michael Rossetti, the other by Sidney Colvin.

In the opinion of Sir Sidney Colvin, William Rossetti's criticism of Keats is "icily unjust." In listening to Rossetti we shall not forget Colvin's stricture as it will lead us to a better understanding of the latter's own critical attitude when the time comes to examine it.

William Michael Rossetti discerned in Keats's early work absolutely no hint of precocity and no indication of future

1. John Keats. by Sidney Colvin. p. 541.

greatness. He laid the blame for the killed-by-an-article theory upon Shelley whom he felt spoke from sentiment rather than with authority.

Rossetti rather condescendingly inferred that his criticism of Keats should be tempered by the following consideration:
¹ "Since Keats died at twenty-five we are compelled to judge of an apprentice in the severe school of life as if he had gone through the full course." He was very dubious as to whether Keats took any interest in ² "matters of intellectual or general concern other than poetic ones." How he could have read the Keats letters - first published in 1848 by Monckton Milnes - and still have thought this is very peculiar.

Keats's chief weakness was set off by Rossetti as follows:
³ "To the last Keats seems to have been wanting in those faculties of selection and of discipline which we sum up by a rough and ready process in the word 'taste'."

The following passage forms a significant resume of the various adverse criticisms scattered throughout Rossetti's book:
⁴ "In large measure it is unassailably true that sensuousness is the paramount bias of Keats's poetic genius. He was a man of perception rather than of contemplation or speculation..

1. Life of Keats, by William Rossetti. p. 129

2. Ibid. p. 130

3. Ibid. p. 200

4. Ibid. p. 207

Perceptible things must be objects of sense. His chief fame must be due to the fact that he is a master of imagination in verbal form."

Of Keats's ultimate rank among the poets Rossetti had only this to say: ¹ "I cannot agree with those who place Keats with or even above Shelley. The latter is superior and even superior beyond any reasonable terms of comparison."

With Rossetti's faint praise still ringing in our ears we turn to listen to the more kindly voice of Sir Sidney Colvin. We shall allow him to speak to us through the pages of his comprehensive "John Keats" of 1917 rather than through those of his small publication of 1884.

Of the difficulties inherent in the task of the Keats critic Colvin has this to say: ² "One great snare in judging Keats is his variability in mood and opinion,--the very excellence of what was best in both his poetry and himself is a second snare,--a third is the frankly avowed intensity of the sensuous element in his nature."

Although not dwelling over-much on Keats as a poet of revolt, Sir Sidney Colvin does emphasize the spirit of freedom discernible in his work. He says: ³ "The element in which his poetry moves is liberty, the consciousness of release from those conventions and restraints, not inherent in its true nature,

1. Life of Keats, by William Rossetti. p. 208

2. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin, p. 542.

3. Ibid. p. 85

by which the art had for the last hundred years been hampered."

Colvin, like many of his fellow critics sees in Keats the pure poet. He cannot, however, see his way clear to express an opinion as to whether or not Keats might have become a great dramatic poet had he lived. Interesting, in this connection is Colvin's remark that:¹ "Parts of his letters recall more clearly than any other English writer the prose passages of 'Hamlet' and 'Much Ado About Nothing'".

In view of the frequent insistence by Keats critics upon the preponderantly literary sources of their poet's inspiration the following quotation from Sir Sidney Colvin comes as a partial explanation. He write:² "An intensely intuitive genius for nature like his hardly needs the stimulus of nature's beauties for long or at their highest power, but on a minimum of experience can summon up and multiply for itself spirit sunsets and glories of mountain richer and more varied than the mere receptive lover of scenery can witness and register in memory during a lifetime of travel and pursuit."

In conclusion, Keats's claim to a philosophy of life is not disregarded by Sir Sidney Colvin. It is, however, made quite clear that by philosophy Keats meant³ "not metaphysics but knowledge and the fruits of reading generally."

From Sir Sidney Colvin we pass to Andrew Lang whose opin-

1. Letters of John Keats, edited by Sidney Colvin. p. XVI.

2. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin. p. 275

3. Ibid. p. 266.

ion of Keats (expressed in 1889) is refreshing in its spontaneous and unstudied candour. He gave it as his honest opinion that perhaps, had he lived in 1820, he too might have - on the basis of the poets then published works - misjudged Keats as thoroughly as did Blackwood's Magazine. Lang had no patience with the theory that Keats was killed by an article nor did he take too seriously those critics who professed to see in Keats a second Shakespeare. A propos of this second point he rather humorously professed to find still another parallel between Keats and Shakespeare in the fact that they have both been ¹ "gushed about" a great deal. For Sir Sidney Colvin's life of Keats (1884) Lang had the heartiest of praise. His only criticism - that it was too short - was later nullified by the appearance in 1917 of Colvin's monumental biography "John Keats."

The criticism of our next witness, John Robertson, is in several ways reminiscent of that of William Michael Rossetti. Like Rossetti Robertson appears to believe that Keats has been tremendously over-rated. Speaking of the Buxton Forman edition of Keats's poems Robertson ventures the doubt: ² "It is not the popularity of a poet which produces new editions but new editions which maintain a poet's popularity." Elsewhere he ³ infers that were it not for the "peculiar sympathy which

1. Letters or Literature, by Andrew Lang. p. 54.

2. New Essays Towards a Critical Method, by John Robertson.

p. 237.

3. Ibid. p. 252.

we give to Keats 'Hyperion' would be as little known to-day as is 'The Pleasures of Hope!' He goes on to attribute Keats's high rank among poets to two things, first, ¹ "the scarcity of perfect work", and second "the inability of most readers and of the most prominent critics to discriminate clearly between good work and bad." Unlike Rossetti Robertson does give Keats credit for precocity of genius but depreciates his praise by insisting that ² "phthisis goes with both erotic and intellectual precocity and that precocity is in itself a disease." Nevertheless he feels confident that time would have made of John Keats a great poet, and admits that ³ "to have failed as he did at his years was to show greatness. To succeed to the extent that he did was hardly better proof." Finally, Robertson joins with Colvin and Lang in complaining of the difficulty which beset the path of the critics of Keats. He says: ⁴ "The body of criticism on Keats is about as difficult to assay conclusively as the poet's performance."

That Frederic Harrison (writing in 1889) did not rank Keats with Shakespeare is obvious at the very outset. He maintained: ⁵ "Neither Lamb nor Keats can claim a place in the very foremost rank of our writers and poets. It would be untrue or unreal to pretend that they do." Harrison discrim-

1. New Essays Towards A Critical Method, by John Robertson.
p. 244.

2. Ibid. p. 240.

3. Ibid. p. 253.

4. Ibid. p. 338.

(Frederic Harrison, p. 190.

5. Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and other Literary Estimates, by

inated against Keats because of the single and unmixed nature of his genius which has in its appeal nothing of the universal. This fact, to him, carried with it the conviction that ¹ "We could no more compare Keats with Shakespeare than we could compare Mont Blanc with one of its own snowy pinnacles." Speaking broadly, however, it seemed to be with Harrison a case of "I loved not Keats so well loved I not Shakespeare more." For, although excluding him from ² "the inmost circle of the blessed poets whose thrones are grouped about Shakespeare" he willingly praised his ³ "unrivalled gift of sensuous lyric" and dwelt upon the fact that his was a precocity unexcelled in the whole history of English literature. His opinion of Keats's ultimate rank is that he is entitled to a place among the poets ⁴ "somewhere below Milton and Shakespeare."

In the criticism of Henry Beers, the author of "A History of Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century" (1901) we find little that is strikingly original. The contribution of Beers may be summarized briefly as follows: First, Keats was pre-eminently a poet. Beyond poetry he had no other interests. Second, Keats's inspiration came from books rather than from life. Third, by virtue of his "natural magic" - Matthew Arnold's phrase - he ranks with Shakespeare.

1. Tennyson, Ruskin Mill and Other Literary Estimates by Frederic Harrison. p. 191.
2. Ibid. p. 190.
3. Ibid. p. 190.
4. Ibid. p. 195.

John Churton Collins, writing in 1905, states confidently¹ that "the eulogies of Matthew Arnold are now commonplaces, which express nothing further than literal and measured truth." Collins dwells longest on Keats's claim to pre-eminence as a poet of Beauty. This seems to impel him to the rather ambiguous conclusion that² "Keats has done more than any of the divine brotherhood to which he undoubtedly belonged to vindicate in the judgment at least of inferior disciples and critics the disastrous separation of aesthetics from ethics and metaphysics."

Passing from Churton Collins to Stopford Brooke, we hear once more opinions which impress us as being more original than some to which we have already listened. Brooke agrees with his fellow critics that Keats was a "pure poet" who remained aloof from all extra-political concerns. But he does not let the matter rest there. He goes on to explain the reasons which motivated this often-mentioned detachment of the poet.³ "Keats" he tells us, "unconsciously felt as Byron and Shelley did not that the ideas on which the world had lived since 1789 were in that form exhausted. No high spiritual or political emotion of any kind came to him out of the heart of the people for there was no such emotion in England."

A second point into which Brooke sees more clearly than the average critic is the matter of Keats's attitude to nature. Altering the usual emphasis, in discussing the poet's devotion

1. Studies in Poetry and Criticism by John Collins. p. 283.

2. Ibid. p. 285.

3. Studies in Poetry by Stopford Brooke. p. 205.

to nature, he gives more credit to the Romanticist tendencies of the nineteenth century and less to Keats himself: ¹ "To love Nature for her own sake," he points out, "had now become one of the impulses, one of the special qualities of English song." This is a well-taken point and one often overlooked by those who are preoccupied to the exclusion of all else with the emotional equipment of the poet.

Finally, Brooke does not share in the orthodox view (advanced by Matthew Arnold and vigorously championed by Amy Lowell) of Keats's infallibility as a self-critic. In his ² opinion "it was only at the close that he reproached himself for trying to do what he was unable by nature to do."

Our next witness shall be Arthur Symons. His views are culled from his "The Romantic Movement in English Poetry", published in 1903. Keats was to Symons a decadent (albeit more than a decadent) who called to mind in many ways the mannerisms and casts of thought peculiar to Mallarme and Baudelaire. Worse still, he was a decadent of the Neo-Latin persuasion which took its roots in the morbid eroticism of Catullus and Propertius. That Keats was a decadent of this Neo-Latin type rather than of the "belated Elizabethan" school ³ is proved in Symon's mind, by the fact that "he was more in-

1. Studies in Poetry, by Stopford Brooke. p. 224.

2. Ibid. p. 251.

3. The Library of Literary Criticism. Vol. IV. p. 680.

toxicated with earth than was the sixteenth century."

Some of the reasons which led Symons to this conclusion may be inferred from statements made in several places throughout his book. Among them are the following. First, Keats¹ "had the courage of the intellect and the cowardice of the nerves." Second, Keats's idea of Beauty is sharply distinguished from that of Shelley as being often² "the fatal desire of the moth for the candle flame rather than 'the desire of the moth for the star'." Third, Keats was a practitioner of the art for art's sake theory and as such his poetic identity, nay more, even his personality, was swallowed up and lost sight of in the artist. A fourth point which apparently influenced Symons was his conviction that Keats could lay no claim to intellectuality and that, accordingly, although to other poets one must^{come} / with some mental alertness,³ "to read Keats you have only to surrender your senses to their natural happiness." Even Keats's method of workmanship, in Symons's opinions, linked him to the decadents, for the fifth point which we note in his criticism is that superb artist of detail though Keats was conceded to be he lacked anything that approached to an architectonic faculty. As a final summation comes the following praise, still however harking back⁴ to the pervading theme of decadence: "He was one of our great-

1. The Romantic Movement in English Poetry, by Arthur Symons, p. 298.

2. Ibid. p. 303.

3. Ibid. p. 134.

4. Ibid. p. 181.

est, one of our most passionate poets."

From the opinions of our next witness Edward Dowden we shall select for consideration only one statement - significant because it presents still another point of view regarding Keat's detachment from the extra-poetical activities of his age. Dowden does not agree with Beers and Colvin in their contention that Keats was a poet pure and simple, nor does he follow Brooks in demonstrating that there were no extra-poetical activities worthy of his attention. His attitude is that¹

"Even Keats belongs to the movement connected with Rousseau and the Revolution by his passion for some absolute perfection - and with him it was the absolute of beauty and also the immitigable hunger for human love....Now this craving for something which shall satisfy the soul, something absolute, perfect, infinite, is closely akin to the emotional side of the transcendental movement. The new Gospel of faith and love of the century possesses something in common with the new scepticism and despair 'la maladie du siecle'."

We now pass on to a consideration of the criticisms advanced by Professor J. W. Mackail, Professor Mackail not² only states with assurance that Keats "stands in the first rank of English poets" but also goes on to add that the fact of his high rank is "universally recognized."

1. Studies in Literature by Edward Dowden. p. 59.

2. Lectures on Poetry by J. W. Mackail. p. 281.

This admission does not, however, convince him that the last word has been written in the story of Keats criticism for he affirms his belief that ¹"at no time can the last word be said on any great poet." As a sincere personal tribute comes Mackail's admission that he reads Keats's poems every year ²"with greater love and admiration". Mackail's closing tribute is reminiscent of the praise of Leigh Hunt, quoted earlier in this study: Keats seems to go in some respects straighter than almost any other English poet to the heart of poetry."

Professor A.C. Bradley, to whom we shall listen next, will not detain us long but in the short time in which he speaks he will be able to give us his opinion upon six different points which we have already heard dissenting opinions. That Professor Bradley does not entirely discountenance the killed-by-an-article theory is shown by the reservation implied in his pronouncement upon the adverse reviews: ³"So long as health remained to him they did him nothing but good." Bradley joins with Dowden in his insistence that it is unfair to see in Keats a figure removed from the extra-poetical activities of his age. He says: ⁴"It is a mistake to suppose that he had not political interests. But he cared nothing for the mere quarrels of Whig and Tory." In Bradley's opinion Keats's

1. Lectures on Poetry by D.W. Mackail, p. 283.

2. Ibid. p. 283

3. Oxford Lectures on Poetry. by A.C. Bradley. p. 225.

4. Ibid. p. 217.

remarks upon the true poet's lack of identity are far more applicable to Shakespeare than to Keats himself, and by the same token, more applicable to Keats than to Milton, Wordsworth and Shelley. In connection with the often-discussed comparison between Keats and Shakespeare, Professor Bradley, distinguished Shakespearean critic though he be, does not hesitate to endorse Matthew Arnold's verdict that Keats "is of Shakespeare's tribe." As far as Bradley's appraisal of Keats's claims to a philosophy of life coincides closely with that of Sir Sidney Colvin. His words are: ¹ "any philosophy to be found in his writing was evidently such reflection on human nature and life and the world as any thoughtful man may practise; his reflection - intent no doubt but neither technical nor systematic." Bradley's final verdict upon Keats is: ² "It would be more than hazardous I think to say that he was the most highly endowed of all our poets in the nineteenth century but he might well have written its greatest long poems."

On the subject of Keats's relation to the extra-political issues of his age Sir Edmund Gosse dissents vigorously from Professor Bradley to whom we have just been listening. Gosse stresses the fact that ³ "Keats is either a poet or absolutely

1. Keats Memorial Volume. p. 46

2. Oxford Lectures on Poetry, by A. C. Bradley. p. 238.

3. "Critical Kit Kits" by Edmund Gosse. p. 23.

nothing." In Gosses's book "Critical Kit Kats", Keats's lack of originality is dwelt upon in considerable detail and no hope is held forth that greater maturity would have supplied the deficiency. Nevertheless Sir Edmund Gosse declares that to him Keats is ¹ "One of the very greatest poets that the modern world has ever seen." And, making his statement still more sweeping, concludes his critique with, "I sometimes fancy that we lost in the author of the five great odes the most masterful capacity for poetic expression which the world has ever seen."

The last of the "scholars of literature" to whom we shall listen in this chapter is Professor George Saintsbury, late Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh University and for many years dean of English critics. Saintsbury was by no means sanguine in his prophecy of what longer life might have meant to Keats. The poet was, in his opinion, much less likely to have surpassed the works he had already produced than was Shelley. In dwelling upon Keats's importance in the history of English Literature, however, Saintsbury was by no means diffident. All the main points of his criticism of Keats, considered from this point of view, are aptly epitomized in the following extract from his "A History of Nineteenth Century Literature". "Keats", he wrote, ² "as no one of his contemporaries did, felt, expressed, and

1. Critical Kit Kats by Edmund Gosse. p. 24.

(bury. p. 88.

2. A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, by Geo. Saintsbury.

handed on, the exact change wrought in English poetry by the great Romantic movement. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott and even Southey to some extent were the authors of this but, being the authors, they were necessarily not the results of it. Byron was fundamentally out of sympathy with it.. Shelley an angel and an effectual angel, of poetry was hardly a man/^{and}still less an Englishman. But Keats felt it all, expressed what of it he had time and strength to express and left the rest to his successors, helped, guided, furthered by his own example. Keats, in short, is the father, directly or at short stages of descent of every English poet born within the nineteenth century who has not been a mere 'sport' or exception. He begat Tennyson and Tennyson begat all the rest."

In concluding this section of our survey we shall pause for a moment to summarize the opinions expressed by the fourteen "scholars of literature" to whom we have listened.

Three of those critics have dwelt upon the special difficulties attendant upon the path of the critics of Keats. A fourth, Professor J.W. Mackail, has explained somewhat their sense of difficulty by pointing out the futility of seeking definitiveness in the criticism of any great poet.

Eight of our witnesses have emphasized the importance of Keats as a poet pure and simple. They have, nevertheless, differed among themselves as to the degree of interest bestowed by the poet upon extra-poetical affairs.

Five of them have coupled the names of Keats and Shakespeare - each one in a manner peculiarly his own.

Other topics, too, have been discussed by one or more of the "scholars of literature". Among the subsidiary points brought to our attention in the course of this chapter have been: Keats's faults - his deficiency in taste, originality and the faculty for self criticism; Keats as a decadent; Keats's precocity; and Keats's philosophy of life. None of these subjects, however, have been discussed with the degree of thoroughness bestowed upon the topics indicated in the preceding four paragraphs.

Finally, diverse though the utterances of our various speakers have been, there is one point upon which all are agree. A semblance - more than a semblance, the very reality - of harmony has been given to their utterances by one thing - by the unanimity of their ultimate verdict upon John Keats. All have assigned to him a very high place in the annals of literature. Some, it is true have ranked him higher than others have done. But, whether they have ranked him with Shakespeare or a little below Shelley none have, for a single moment, denied that he has abundantly fulfilled, and will continue to fulfil, his modest boast, "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death."

Chapter VI.A Broader View

Thus far we have been concerned with what various individuals - relatives, friends, acquaintances, periodical critics, prose-writers, poets, and scholars of literature - thought of John Keats. We are now ready to take a broader view of the poet. This Chapter of my survey will be devoted to a consideration of Keats and the writers of histories of literature, Keats and the general public, and Keats and the foreigner. In it I have consciously disregarded my general principle of excluding all "modern" criticism and have carried my survey down to the present day. My purpose in so doing is to indicate briefly what has been thought about Keats since the close of his own century. For, unless some mention, at least, is made of what the twentieth century thinks of John Keats it will be impossible to place a true evaluation upon what the nineteenth century thought.

It is especially appropriate that we should commence our search after the "Broader View" of Keats by listening to the voices of writers of histories of literature. Literary histories have a peculiar value in surveys of this kind - a value that is in inverse ratio to their uselessness for full and detailed study. The very limitation of their space ensures the inclusion of what, in the minds of the compilers, are the salient points about the author or period under discussion. In the following paragraphs I shall examine what the compilers of

fourteen histories of literature felt was the most important thing to be said about John Keats. I shall arrange their opinions in chronological order.

In a volume bearing the ambitious title "Handbook of Universal Literature" (Circa. 1855) Anne Botta makes a criticism of Keats which, whether we agree with it or not, is different from any we have as yet cited. She says: "In native felicity¹ of poetic adornment these two (Keats and Shelley) were the first minds of their time but the inadequacy of their performance to their poetic faculties show how needful to the production of effective poetry is a substratum of solid thought, of practical sense and of manly and extensive sympathy."

Louise Imogen Guiney, in "Warner's Library of the World's Best Literature" (1902) makes it her prime point that Keats² "has had from the first a most fecundating influence on other minds."

A.B. de Mille in his history of literature ("Nineteenth Century Series" - 1903) joins with many others in deploring Keats's untimely death. He does not, however, emphasize unduly the tragedy of his dying unacclaimed. His argument is: "The work he was able to do gave almost unbounded promise for the future. No poet at the age at which Keats died had done such great work." De Mille's second contention is that Keats,

1. Handbook of Universal Literature, by Anne Botta, p. 500

2.

3. Nineteenth Century Series (Vol. XIX) by A.B. de Mille. p.82

by virtue of his influence on Tennyson, may well be called the¹
 "father of most of the modern poets."

The "Garnett-Gosse Illustrated History of English Literature" hails Keats as² "the master spirit in the evolution of Victorian poetry." It touches also upon his debt to Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Ariosto. This history emphasizes Keats's early and unacclaimed death. It singles out "Adonais" for commendation as his first "posthumous triumph."

The authors of the "Bookman Illustrated History of English Literature" (1906) delve deeply into Keats's aesthetic philosophy. Their conclusion is that of all poets Keats³ "carried the idea that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' farthest, held it most consciously, and acted upon it most whole-heartedly." For this reason, they decide, Keats cannot be assigned to any poetic school save⁴ "the one which he himself founded and at the head of which he stands." After considering Keats's aesthetic philosophy the joint authors turn to his philosophy of life. This, it is interesting to note, they find to be profoundly pessimistic. They hold forth the hope, however, that had he lived longer he might have outgrown his pessimism and would, with increasing maturity, have⁵ "struck a balance between les joies et les douleurs dans la vie."

1. Ibid. p. 83.

2. Illustrated History of English Literature, by R. Garnett, and E. Gosse. p. 140

3. "The Bookman Illustrated History of English Literature" by L. Seccombe and W. Robertson. P. 439.

4. Ibid. p. 440.

5. Ibid. p. 445.

The "Dictionary of National Biography" (1908) is more retrospective in its criticism. It dwells at considerable length upon Keats's relationship to the Elizabethans and the later imitators of Spenser.

Turning to the "Cambridge History of English Literature" (1915) we select as significant two statements - both at variance with opinions expressed in several other histories of literature. The first is that Spenser was not the chief Elizabethan influence on Keats. The second is that ¹ "with the publication of his last volume in July 1821 some perception of his real stature at last dawned in the high places of criticism."

The points considered most important by the editors of "Chambers' History of Literature" (1922) are : ² Keats's "felicity of phrase", his "saturating language with colour", his choice of subjects from Greek mythology, his describing nature "imaginatively but without much of Wordsworthian spirituality", and his influence on the Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters.

In speaking of Keats's early death Professors Neilson and Thorndike, in their "History of English Literature" (1927) do not share De Mille's optimism as to the promise Keats held for the future. Still, they do not deny that there is a possibility that he might have left even greater works behind him had he lived longer. Their rather contradictory conclusion is that

1. Cambridge History of English Literature. Vol. XII. p. 92.
2. Chambers Cyclopedia of English Literature. pp. 99-107.

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 "though in the picturing of natural beauty it is hard to see how he could have surpassed what he has left us, his intellectual powers were only beginning to expand." These writers, like many others, pay tribute to Keats's consummate skill in permeating his poetry with sensuous beauty.

One of the criticisms advanced by Bernard Groom in his "A Literary History of England" (1929) is strikingly reminiscent of a statement made by Leigh Hunt. Groom says: "It is doubtful whether any other man has ever lived whose nature was more entirely and essentially poetical." Unlike Sir Sidney Colvin, Groom is confident that had Keats lived longer he might well have fulfilled his cherished ambition of becoming a great dramatist. He bases his opinion upon a study of the dramatic elements in "Lamia" and "Isabella."

The writer of an unsigned article contributed to the "Encyclopedia Britannica" (1929) discusses in great detail the influence of Leigh Hunt upon Keats. He demonstrates that in view of this influence and its consequent pernicious effects upon the poet's style those contemporary critics who assailed him as a Cockney poet were not entirely without justification.

George F. Reynolds, in his "History of English Literature" (1929) dwells in the usual topics of Keats's unpoetical environment, the tragedy of his lack of contemporary appreciation

1. History of English Literature by W. Neilson and A. Thorndike. P. 290.
2. A Literary History of England by Bernard Groom. p. 283.

and his skill as a poet of nature. In addition he makes the too-often neglected point that ¹ "as a thinker about poetry as well as a master in its creation "Keats cannot now be overlooked."

Laurie Magnus in his "History of European Literature" (1934) becomes eloquent over Keats's recovery for English literature of the pagan attitude towards life. In his Epilogue he expatiates at length upon ² "the more than accidental likeness" between Petrarch and Keats. The history of European literature is, he contends, epitomized in the work of those two great writers.

The very brief notice in "Everyman's Dictionary of English Literature" (---) stresses as noteworthy two things - first, the failure of Keats's contemporaries to appreciate him; second, his intense love of beauty and his ability to translate that beauty into exquisite poetry.

Any attempt to summarize the opinions of the fourteen literary historians to whom we have just listened would be pedantic and superfluous. The very brevity of their criticisms makes further condensation unnecessary. The inclusion of their opinions in this survey is justified if it has done two things: first, if it has demonstrated the most frequently recurring points in Keats's criticism; second, if it has proved that Keats' criticism underwent no sudden change at the turn of

1. History of English Literature by G.F. Reynolds. p. 315.
2. History of European Literature, by Laurie Magnus. p. 293.

the century but continued to follow much the same lines as it had hitherto taken.

Dismissing the writers of histories of literature and their contributions to our "Broader View" of Keats, we are now ready to approach the second topic to be dealt with in this chapter - "Keats and the General Public."

Probably no better single treatment has been accorded to the topic "Keats and the General Public" than that given to it by Sir Sidney Colvin in Chapter XVII, entitled "Epilogue", of his life of Keats. In the following pages I propose to set down in chronological order only a few of the many available facts which illustrate the varying attitude of the public towards the work of John Keats from the date of the publication of his first volume to the present time. Needless to say, my treatment of the subject will be general rather than detailed and will owe a great deal to Sidney Colvin's admirable survey already mentioned.

Our first news of the public's reaction to the new poet, John Keats, is indeed a dismal one. Cowden Clark, referring to the reception of the poet's first volume of poems in 1817, tells us: "Alas, that book might have emerged in Timbuctoo with far stronger chance of fame and appreciation. The whole community as if by compact seemed determined to know nothing about it." It is highly probable that Clark exaggerated somewhat the apathy of the reading public. Still, we need not

1. John Keats by Sidney Colvin. p. 131.

allow for too wide a margin of exaggeration when we remember that the original copies of Keats's three volumes were able to meet the demands of the book-sellers without a further issue until 1840.

Nevertheless, in spite of the utter indifference berated by Clarke, and amply proved by the scanty demand for the poet's works, Keats was not without his public following. In December, 1818, he was both gratified and annoyed to receive a twenty-five pound note and a congratulatory sonnet from an unknown admirer. In the sonnet the unknown writer expressed his indignation over the adverse criticisms of the reviews, held out to Keats the hope of future glory, and gave him the comforting assurance that:

"there breathe now who dote upon thy fame
Whom thy wild numbers wrap beyond their being,
Who love the freedom of thy Lays - their Aim
Above the scope of a dull tribe unseeing."

... Still another instance of a letter from an unknown, though this time not anonymous, admirer is a communication, received in 1820, from a total stranger, a teller in an East Lothian Bank. The writer, John Aitken, who later became editor of "Constable's Miscellany", praised the poet's work and begged him to pay him a long visit. The invitation was disregarded.

Eight years later, in 1828, the "Athenaeum," significant as the index of Cambridge opinion, published an article claiming that ¹ "Keats, whose memory they (the 'Blackwood's' group) persevered only a few months back in spitting upon was, as

1. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin. p. 526.

every one knows who has read him, among the most delightful English poets of our day."

In the following year a group of Cambridge students, under the leadership of Arthur Hallam, gave evidence of their sincere interest in Keats by bringing out a reprint of "his first post-humous tribute - 'Adonais'."

From Joseph Severn we hear that in 1832 ¹ "young Mr. Gladstone, fresh from Oxford" sought out the painter while in Rome to hear about John Keats from him.

At last, in 1840, there was published the first separate edition of Keats's collected poems. Even this tardy reprint owed its impetus to a source outside of England. For, the volume was reproduced from one published in Paris in 1829 for readers on the Continent. Sad to say, this 1840 edition proved to be no more of a best-seller than its predecessor of the poet's lifetime had been. The bulk of the copies were sold as "remainders" and bound up into a single volume with still another lot of illustrious "remainders" - copies of Browning's "Bells and Pomegranates".

Slowly, however, the tide of popular favour was turning. Colvin, in his account of public feeling in the late forties and early fifties of the last century tells us that the three Pre-Raphaelite leaders Holman Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti vied to outdo each other in their veneration of Keats.

1. Ibid. p. 526.

Nevertheless victory was not yet assured. In 1848 appeared Lord Houghton's "Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats". Of the contemporary reception of this first biography of the poet Sir Edmund Gosse records: ¹ "It was widely looked upon as a rash and fantastic act to concentrate so much attention upon so imperfect a career."

Still, in spite of the continued disheartening apathy of the public we learn from the pages of the "Keats Memorial Volume" that during this same period the heaven was slowly at work, even in the high places. Oscar Browning, Fellow of King's College Cambridge, records that in 1851 one of the masters at Eton assigned the speech of Clymene from Keats's "Hyperion" to his classes as an exercise in Latin verse. That this was done in a spirit of appreciation of Keats and not in the desire to save really good poetry from being mangled by schoolboys is shown by the fact that the same master offered a prize to any boy who could recite "Hyperion" from memory.

A hasty excursion into the realm of fiction (1854) reveals to us the attitude towards Keats of Colonel Newcome - undoubtedly a more trustworthy observer than many of his flesh-and-blood contemporaries. Thackeray records that the Colonel heard with bewilderment from Clive and his friends that ² "young Keats was a genius to be estimated in future days with Raphael-- Mr. Keats and this young Mr. Tennyson of

1. Literary Kit Kats - by Edmund Gosse. pp.24-25

2. Quoted from the "Newcomes" by Thackeray, by Sidney Colvin, in his John Keats. p. 538.

Cambridge the chief of modern poetic literature."

Leaving Colonel Newcome to his puzzlement we pass on from him and the younger generation whose changing standards so disturbed him and find ourselves on the threshold of the twentieth century. There is no doubt that in the intervening years the heaven still continued to do its silent work, but for all that it was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that there appeared any significant indication that Keats was at last about to come into his own.

Then, on July 16, 1894, the first memorial to Keats on English soil was unveiled in the Hampstead Parish Church. The fact that the funds which made possible this monument were raised in the United States shows that on the other side of the Atlantic as well Keats was not, by this time, without an appreciative audience.

Next, after another uneventful quarter century, there appeared, in 1917 the two most important of all memorials to the poet's memory. Merely to name them is sufficient for their value and significance is obvious. The first was Sir Sidney Colvin's definitive biography of John Keats. The second was the "Keats Concordance" prepared by six professors of Cornell University, and published by the Carnegie Institute of Washington.

Two years later - 1919 - saw determined and successful efforts directed by the "Morning Post" and seconded by Englishmen of all classes to preserve as a national memorial Keats's

House at Hampstead.

In conclusion it is interesting to note, that even the modern novelist has found material for his books in the life of John Keats - witness, among several others, Raymond Knister's "My Star Predominant", 1934, which retells the life story of the poet with a close adherence to actual fact.

In the preceding paragraphs we have studied the critical opinions expressed in England by writers of histories of literature and by the general public from 1817 down to the present day. Before concluding our study with a view of what Keats thought of himself we shall glance briefly at representative critical opinions from countries other than England. This digression also, for reasons already stated, will be carried beyond our normal limit, the turn of the century. The benefits of this excursion will be twofold. First, we shall see whether Keats was essentially English in his appeal or whether he actually did partake of that universality which has led many of his ardent admirers to link his name with that of Shakespeare. Second, we shall see whether foreign critics of Keats have something original to say about him or whether they are content to echo the critical opinions of his once abusive and now admiring countrymen.

Before interviewing witnesses from the different foreign countries I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the "Keats Memorial Volume" (1921). In that invaluable work are assembled

contributions from thirty non-English speaking countries. These tributes to Keats are given in both the native language and in English translation. I have, it is true, found material elsewhere as well, but my debt to the "Keats Memorial Volume" is outstanding.

...Consideration of critical opinions from the United States will not detain us long, - not because American criticism is unimportant in mass or quality (far other is the case), but because in the preceding chapter of this study American and English scholars have often been considered side by side. To students of English literature America cannot, as yet, at any rate, be regarded as a foreign country.

Keats cannot have been at all widely appreciated in the United States in 1884, judging from the contents of an anthology, "A Thousand and One Gems of English and American Poetry" published in New York in that year. Although the volume contains three hundred and thirty-eight pages of what the editors term recognized gems of poetry not one single line from the pen of John Keats is included. The outlook is considerably more promising nine years later. For the editors of "Quotations" published in Pennsylvania in 1893, allotted to Keats about seven entries.

We have already noted that it was American money which financed the Monument unveiled at Hampstead on July 16, 1894. It was at the presentation of this monument that Sir Edmund Gosse made the following statement-a statement so sweeping in

its scope that, although uttered by an Englishman it will almost serve for the American answer to the question: "What is your opinion of John Keats?" Sir Edmund Gosse's words were: ¹ "All the recent poets of America are of Keats's kith and kin. Not one but has felt his influence....today's ceremony is really the pilgrimage of long-exiled children to what was once the home of their father."

The last voices from the United States which we shall listen are those of the poets James Russell Lowell and Edwin Markham. That the veteran American poet Edwin Markham entertained a very high opinion of Keats is clear to all readers of his Anthology "The Book of Poetry". James Russell Lowell, for his part, has left us a sonnet "To The Spirit of John Keats" as well as explicit references to Keats in his "Table for Critics". Even more clearly than certain English critics ² Lowell saw in Keats the figure of a rebel. He wrote: "Keats was the first resolute and wilful heretic, the true founder of the modern school which admits no Cis-Alpine authority save Milton."

Leaving America we journey to the Hague, Holland, where we hear Edward B. Koster paying tribute to Keats's masterly artistry and his passionate love of the beautiful.

1. Critical Kit Kats by Edmund Gosse. p. 28.

2. History of Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century, by Henry Beers

Even more valuable for our purposes is Koster's simple statement:

¹ "I owe to John Keats some of the happiest hours of my life."

Germany contributes to our study two voices - very different in tone, but each representing a distinct school of German scholarship. Herr Johannes Hoops of Heidelberg contributes to the "Memorial Volume" a laborious attempt to prove that the opening lines of "Endymion" were inspired by a passage in Bacon's "Essay on Gardens". Herr Scherer, on the other hand, suggests to us the true German Romanticist, when he implies a decided preference for ² "Keats's heady philtres" as opposed to "Wordsworth's deeper but in a way rather grovelling understanding of nature."

Turning to the three Scandinavian countries we encounter first Nils Møller of Norway, chanting a sonnet in honour of John Keats ³ "cherished and dear."

In his Swedish translation "Ode Til en Grekisk Urna" Dr. Anders Osterling succeeds in reproducing to a remarkable degree the spirit and at times even the cadences of the English original. Of the Swedish attitude to Keats Dr. ⁴ Osterling writes: "Keats can scarcely be said to belong to those English poets who have many readers in Sweden, but he will always be admired by the faithful few."

1. Keats Memorial Volume. pp. 233-4.

2. Library of Literary Criticism. Vol. IV. p. 679.

3. Keats Memorial Volume. p. 241.

4. Ibid. p. 243.

Dr. Osterling relates that the first reference he recalls to Keats in Swedish literature occurred in Per Hallstrom's "Thanatos". In this book the teller of the story described how he used to enjoy reading Keats's poetry. Dr. Osterling concludes with a parallel between Keats and the Swedish poet Stagnelius.

From Denmark we hear the scholarly voice of George Brandes - author of "Naturalism in England" (1905). In Keats, Brandes sees an outstanding example of the poet devoted to art for art's sake. At the same time he feels that had Keats lived longer he might have been attracted to some of the political or social issues of his day. The Danish scholar's most detailed study of Keats occurs in a chapter which he entitles "All-Embracing Sensuousness". In the poet's works he sees ¹ "the most fragrant flower of English naturalism". Still, a few pages later, he can make the statement that ² "Wordsworth's poetry of nature leads us into the open air; following Keats we enter a hot-house." By virtue of his purely artistic detachment Keats - in Brandes's opinion - forms ³ "the connecting link between the conservative and the progressive poets."

Once more we hear the name of Keats coupled with that of

1. Naturalism in England by George Brandes. p. 137.

2. Ibid. 142.

3. Ibid. p. 145

Shakespeare, this time by Bogdan Popovitch of Serbia. Popovitch is impelled to thus associate the two poets by reason of Keats's lifelike depiction of external nature. He tells us that ¹"the company of those in Serbia who love Keats is little but not little enthusiastic." In concluding, he does what many other foreign critics are prone to do - selects a poet of his own nation who died young (in this case Boitch) and likens him to Keats.

Dr. Stephanovitch, also of Serbia, records with pride that many years earlier he had attempted to render into his native language "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". He pays glowing personal tribute to Keats as ²"his very darling among English poets." With no evident fear of contradiction he states that Keats has given all the first vital impulses from which modern poetry is derived.. He concludes with a phrase reminiscent of the criticism of Leigh Hunt: "He remains as the greatest intuitive and therefore, the most truly poetical of poets."

Rafael Altamira of Madrid admits that very few of his countrymen have read Keats in the original English and that, because of the scarcity of translations, even in anthology collections, few Spaniards have been able to read him in their native tongue. Altamira earnestly desires a Spanish translation of Keats's poems and feels that such a translation

1. Keats Memorial Volume. pp. 250-2

2. Ibid. p. 247.

would be of great value to Spanish literature and culture. Concluding his article he quotes the prominent Spanish critic Palage who praises Keats for his love of Nature, his skill as a painter of picture, and his successful reproduction of the calm dignity of the Grecian spirit.

In this roll-call of the nations we now turn towards Italy- with peculiar interest for it was there that Keats spent the last days of his life and it is there that he lies buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome.

In April 1910, the King of Italy himself acted as chairman and sanctioned with his presence the opening of the Keats House in Rome. Keats house itself was made possible by American and English money although Marie Corelli, herself half Italian topped the English subscription list with a very generous donation. That the Italians continue to show some interest at least in Keats is evidenced by the fact that many of the lectures given in Rome by the Keats-Shelley Society are delivered in the Italian language.

Italian readers have been much more fortunate than Spanish ones in having access to translations of Keats's poems. "Endymion" was first translated into Italian in the 1830's by Pareto. In 1906 appeared Taddeo Wiel's anthology of translations from English poets. In 1923 a verse translation of "Hyperion" was included by Mario Praz in his "Atene e Roma". Praz, himself a well-known student of English literature, traces in his "Romantic Agony" (1933) the influence of Keats upon the French

Symbolists by way of the English Pre-Raphaelites. In 1924 Fascino issued his translation of the works of Keats. The following year appeared Mario Praz's most scholarly volume "Poeti Inglesi Dell Ottocento". In this work are a number of translations from Keats, accompanied by bibliographical and biographical announcements and notes. In the year 1929 was published R. Piccili's Italian translation of "Hyperion", the "Odes" and the "Sonnets".

It is something of a paradox that certainly the bulkiest, and perhaps the most discerning, body of foreign criticism of Keats should come from France, a country for whose literature, language, and even manners, the poet had no sympathy.

Turning first to the great Taine (1863) we find only a passing reference to John Keats. Keats is not even considered as an individual literary figure. His name is coupled with that of Shelley to prove Taine's contention that although these two¹ "thanks to the nervous delicacy of their sickly or overflowing imagination" partially succeeded in recapturing the Greek spirit this is a task in which no Englishman need ever hope for even moderate success.

2

Joseph Texte writing in 1898 sees in Keats² "le grand poete du neo-hellenisme en Angleterre", although to a European, and especially to a Frenchman Byron makes a strong appeal Texte finds quite compatible with his admiration for Keats the realization that no Englishman could be less capable of com-

1. History of English Literature by Hippolyte Taine. p. 130

2. Etudes de Litterature Europeenne by Joseph Texte. p. 1898.

posing "Childe Harold" than John Keats. Justifiably nettled by Keats's scorn of things French Texte humorously inclines for a moment towards applying to Keats the epithet "bourgeois" as the Gallic equivalent of Matthew Arnold's "Philistine." Elsewhere we have heard Laurie Magnus acclaim Keats as the restorer to English literature of the pagan spirit. Now we hear Texte expressing ^{the} same view and showing simultaneously just what it entails. Because of this same restoration of Paganism, says Texte, ¹ "tous les purs Chrétiens à commencer par Carlyle qui le traitait de 'dead-dog' ont senti en Keats un ennemi et leur instinct ne s'est pas trompé."

Professor Louis Cazamian, the last French critic to whom we shall listen, thus accounts for the contemporary English neglect of, and even antagonism towards, John Keats. He says; ² "In pushing the virtual qualities of their epoch to a degree of realization that was too complete they (Keats and Shelley) had overstepped the limits." Cazamian is still another critic who couples the names of Shakespeare and Keats. ³ "How closely," he exclaims "the cult of Shakespeare was interwoven with the tenor of his thoughts can be seen from his private letters."

Cazamian can not see Keats as the whole-hearted pagan that Texte imagined him to be. He sees him tinged a most un-pagan

1. Etude de Litterature Européenne by Joseph Texte, pp. 141-2

2. History of English Literature by Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian. p. 1076.

3. Ibid. p. 1092.

mysticism as well. More than this, he even detects in his work traces of "diffuse puritanism." Cazamian carefully traces Keats's influence not only to the Pre-Raphaelites but also to the English Aesthetes. He is firm in his conviction that at the time of his unfortunate death Keats ¹ "gave promise of becoming the greatest poet of his generation and one who better than any other would have untied the free inspiration of Romanticism with the formal principles of the schools of the past."

From Frances's tiny neighbour, Belgium, we hear the voices of two witnesses. Maurice Maeterlinck expresses his admiration for Keats with the most vigorous enthusiasm. ² "Keats", he rapturously proclaims, "is one of those miraculous poets who are born charged from head to foot with divine melody and who appear but once in the course of a century." Then, true to the European method, he proceeds to draw a number of parallels between John Keats and the French poet Andre Chenier.

Keats himself would probably have appreciated the tribute paid him by our next witness, Emile Cammaerts, also of Belgium. Cammaerts, in his verse contribution to the "Keats Memorial Volume" wrote: ³ "Mais aucun n'a compris la lune comme toi."

1. Ibid. p. 1096.

2. Keats Memorial Volume. p. 239.

3. Ibid. pp. 225-6.

Taking leave of Belgium and with it of Europe - we now journey towards the countries of Asia. Eastern cultures and conventions are so different from our own and - to Occidental eyes - often so strange that it is with a thrill of surprise that we encounter even in Oriental writings references to an English poet.

It would be gratifying to know how much of the interest of Japanese scholars in John Keats is due to the sojourn among them of Lafcadio Hearne. Especially since, as we have seen in a preceding chapter, Hearne himself confessed to what almost amounted to a violent distaste for the poetry of Keats.

Our spokesman for Japan shall be Dr. Saito whose thesis "Keats and Japan" was accepted for the doctorate by the University of Tokio in 1924. Dr. Saito freely admits that Byron seems to be the most popular English poet in Japan ¹ and but adds that "both Shelley and Keats are there in increasing brightness." ² In Matthew Arnold Dr. Saito sees "one of the ablest and most sympathetic exponents of Keats." He dissents from those English critics who saw in Keats the concrete embodiment of the art-for-art's sake theory. Saito wrote:
³ "Keats says nothing in favor of the art for art's sake doctrine nor is he to be labelled as a precursor of that school. Keats's

1. Keats and Japan, by Dr. Saito. p. 12.

2. Ibid. p. 41

3. Ibid. p. 43.

humanitarian conception of beauty and poetry is at variance with the aesthetic hedonists' notion. Keats's view is art for life's sake." In Keats's objectivity Saito sees a very important reason why he should not be included in the company of those of his contemporaries, whom we term Romanticists.

Elsewhere Dr. Saito writes: ¹ "Though his poetry is in a sense the culminating point of English Romanticism he was not content with the Romantic view of life." Even from Japan comes the parallel between Keats and Shakespeare: ² "Of all the poets in the United Kingdom", says Saito, "Keats is most akin to Shakespeare in his flexible and receptive selflessness". With Bernard Groom our Japanese witness sees in Keats the promise of a great dramatist. Interpreting Keats's philosophy of life Dr. Saito discerns the ³ "endeavor to be a humanitarian idealist." He discusses in detail the often argued phrase, "O for a life of sensation rather than thought." His studied conclusion is that ⁴ "the greatness of Keats does not lie so much in his sensuous poetry as in his Neo-Idealistic poetry and view of life." In conclusion Dr. Saito dissents - as did John Drinkwater - from Sir Sidney Colvin's suggestion that it may

1. Ibid. p. 137

2. Ibid. p. 50.

3. Keats and Japan, by Dr. Saito. p. 64.

4. Ibid. p. 143.

be that the poetry of Keats is neither real nor vigorous enough to appeal to our post-war world.

Next, leaving the Far East for the Near East we hear from Arabis the voice of Sayyid Muhammad Ali Nami proclaiming:

¹
"Keats is one of the greatest English poets.....no one rivals him in the race nor even ventures to pierce the dust of his horse."

²
In Persia we pause over a chronogram for the year 1821, composed by Mahdi Husain Nasiri who laments that another Keats has not yet arisen.

Nor are the scholars of India prevented by the barriers of an alien tongue from a true insight into the poetry of Keats. This is proved by the fact that one of the contributors to the "Keats Memorial Volume" is able to refer to Keats as
³
"Greek in temper though not in art." Keats's untimely death seems to have made a deep impression upon the kindly men of India for no less than three references are made in the "Memorial Volume" contributions to the poet's death at the hands of the reviewers. We hear:

⁴
"Base calumny assailed his tender heart,
And in his bosom left its poisoned dart."

1. Keats Memorial Volume. p. 267
2. Ibid. p. 265.
3. Keats Memorial Volume. p. 256.
4. Ibid. p. 276.

and:

¹
"Jealously green with felon stroke,
Thy youthful vigour fatally broke".

and yet again:

²
"But the dart struck the innocent heart, which soon
succumbed, leaving behind a garden decked with sweet-smelling
flowers." For our final tribute from the land of Ganges none
could be better than this one which Keats himself would surely
have appreciated: ³ "Enough he had of true poetic fire
A score of humbler poets to inspire.
His songs of Nature are a priceless store,
For never poet lived loved Nature more."

1. Ibid. p. 256.

2. Ibid. p. 261.

3. Ibid. p. 276.

Chapter VII.Keats's Self-Criticism.

In the preceding chapters we have seen what others at home and abroad thought of John Keats. We are now ready to attempt to discover what Keats thought of himself. Nor shall we be disappointed in our quest for there are few major figures in English literature to whom one may turn in greater confidence of finding a full and honest expression of self-criticism. The necessity of keeping his distant and dearly loved brother and sister-in-law, and his nearer but hardly more accessible sister Fanny, posted on all his activities and thoughts laid upon John Keats the necessity of being his own Boswell. How well he succeeded in this his published correspondence bears witness. Add to the journal letters to George and Georgina in America and the letters to Fanny at Walthamstow the many other letters and notes to friends and acquaintances and you have the self-revealing mass of correspondence collected and edited in two substantial volumes by Maurice Buxton Forman in 1930. The value of this voluminous correspondence is enhanced by the fact that no one has ever so much as hinted that Keats conducted his correspondence with a view to its ultimate publication. His pride alone would have ensured against that. In his letters we have no conscious posturing before a mirror but rather the frank and manly self-expression and self-revelation of a still very young man to his best friends. But let Keats speak for

himself.

Having seen so much of Keats the man, from so many different angles, we are by this time probably anxious above all else to see how he responded to his critics. Did he act as we should expect the man of whom we have heard so much, from such a host of witnesses, to act? This, then, shall be the first point of self-criticism upon which we shall listen to the words of the poet himself.

Naturally, a man of Keats's passionate temperament, would react violently to personal abuse, as distinguished from legitimate criticism. That Keats did so is shown in his ¹comment in a letter to Bailey dated November 1817, upon the personal attack made upon Leigh Hunt in Article Number one of the Cockney School series. The slighting references to himself he passed over with "I don't mind the thing much", but he goes on to add, "if he should go to such lengths with me as he has done with Hunt, I must infallibly call him to an account if he be a human being, and appears in Squares and Theatres, where we might possibly meet - I don't relish his abuse." Although Keats was never subjected to abuse of such a scurrilous personal nature we have every reason to believe that he would have made good his boast in just such a manner as that hinted above.

1. Unless specifically stated in footnotes, all letters quoted from are found in "The Letters of John Keats" (2 Vols.) edited by Maurice Buxton Forman.

The abuse which later was directed towards him, although it certainly overstepped the bounds of good taste, was never so insufferable as that of which Hunt was a victim. That Keats took in good part the references to his "gallipots" is shown by his own use of the term in a letter to his sister Fanny, July 8, 1819. His words were: "I have enough knowledge of my gallipots to ensure me an employment and maintenance."

Still another proof that the adverse criticisms did not rankle deeply in Keats's mind is shown by the words in which he couched his refusal to publish "The Pot of Basil". The stand he took in the matter showed that although he did not actually believe the poem an unworthy one he was not blind to its faults and certainly did not wish to subject himself to ridicule which he felt would be in part justifiable. "I will give you," he wrote to Woodhouse in September 21, 1818, "a few reasons why I shall persist in not publishing 'The Pot of Basil'. It is too smokeable. I can get it smoak'd at the Carpenters' shaving chimney which more cheaply. There is too much inexperience of life and simplicity of knowledge in it - which might do very well after one's death - but not while one is alive. They are very few would look to the reality. I intend to use more finesse with the Public. It is possible to write fine things which cannot be laughed at in any way. 'Isabella' is what I should call were I a reviewer "A weak-side Poem" with an amusing sover-sadness about it. Not that I do not think Reynolds and you are quite right about it. It is enough for me.

But this will not do to be public. If I may so say, in my dramatic capacity I enter fully into the feeling: but in *Propria Persona* I should be apt to quiz it myself."

A third light-hearted reference to the reviewers occurs in a letter to his friend Bailey, in June 1818, "With respect to domestic Literature - the Edinburgh Magazine in another blow up against Hunt calls me the amiable Mister Keats and I have more than a Laurel from the Quarterly Reviewers for they have smothered me in 'Foliage'."

Keats could even in the harsh criticism of the "Quarterly" something in the nature of gratuitous advertisement, for he wrote, in October 1818, to George and Georgina in America: "Even as a matter of present interest the attempt to crush me in the 'Quarterly' has only brought me more into notice and it is a common expression among bookmen 'I wonder that the "Quarterly" should cut its own throat.'" It does me not the least harm in Society to make me appear little and ridiculous. I know when a man is superior to me and give him all due respect - he will be the last to laugh at me and as for the rest I feel that I make an impression upon them which insures me personal respect while I am in sight whatever they may say when my back is turned."

Very significant too is the following extract from a letter written to his brother George in September 17, 1819. The passage to which we shall listen shows that Keats was much more likely to be hurt by being ignored completely than by even

very harsh criticism. Speaking of the silence of the "Edinburgh Review" he complained: "The Edinburgh Review are afraid to touch upon my poem. They do not know what to make of it - they do not like to condemn it and they will not praise it for fear - they are as shy as I would be of wearing a Quaker's hat. The fact is that they have no real taste - they dare not compromise their judgments on so puzzling a question. If, on my next publication, they should praise me and so lug in 'Endymion' I will address them in a manner they will not at all relish. The cowardliness of the 'Edinburgh' is worse than the abuse of the 'Quarterly'."

At times, however, Keats's light-heartedness and self-forsook him somewhat. Rather at variance with what we have just been listening to is an undated remark which, according to Sir Sidney Colvin, was made by Keats, from his sick bed, to Reynolds:¹ "If I die you must ruin Lockhart". Was this a joking belittlement of the seriousness of his own illness or was it actually a proof of the brooding upon adverse criticism which, in Colvin's opinion, accompanied the final stages of his disease? Another remark indicative of a similar gloomy state of mind occurs in a letter to George Keats in America, September 17, 1819. Keats refers to "the mire of a bad reputation which is continually rising against him", and observes that "my name with the literary fasionables is vulgar - I am a weaver boy to them."

1. John Keats, by Sidney Colvin. p. 521.

Of the reviewers themselves - quite apart from any references which they had made to him and his friends - Keats spoke with a bitterness which he would have scorned to use in his own defence. "I have no doubt of success" he wrote to his brother George, February 14, 1819, "in a course of years if I persevere - but it must be patience - for the Reviews have enervated and made indolent men's minds - few think for themselves. These Reviews are getting more and more powerful, and especially the 'Quarterly' - they are like a superstition which the more it prostrates the Crowd and the longer it continues the more powerful it becomes just in proportion to their increasing weaknesses. I was in hopes that when people saw, as they must do now, all the trickery and iniquity of these Plagues they would soon scout them but they are like the spectators at the Westminster cock-it - they like the battles and do not care who wins or who loses."

All such moods of pessimism or of resentment were, however, ephemeral. Even while they lasted Keats realized that they were superficial and would soon pass away. To Haydon, in January 1819, he wrote: "I have been writing a little now and then lately; but nothing to speak of - being discontented and as it were moulting. Yet I do not think I shall ever come to the rope or the pistol, for after a day or two's melancholy, although I smoke more and more for my own insufficiency - I see by little and little more of what is to be done and it is to be done, should I ever be able to do it."

Always after such moods of pessimism or fatigue Keats returned to the task in hand with resolution and industry undiminished. Writing to Haydon on October 3, 1819, he confidently affirmed: "I have no reason to complain because I am certain that anything really fine will in these days be felt. I have no doubt that if I had written 'Othello' I should have been cheered by as good a mob as (Henry) Hunt.... I shall go on in patience in the confidence that if I ever do anything worth remembering the Reviewers will no more be able to stumble-block me than the Royal Academy could you."

We have just heard how Keats responded to his critics the contemporary reviewers. We shall now attempt to learn his reaction towards the contemporary public.

In a letter, written to Miss Jeffrey of Teignmouth, June 9, 1819, without any trace of maudlin self-pity, Keats made the observation: "One of the great reasons that the English have produced the finest writers in the world, is that the English world has ill-treated them during their lives and fosters them after their death." To his publisher, John Taylor, Keats on August 24, 1819, described the Public as "A Drummer Boy who holds out his hand familiarly to a field marshall." Then, fearing lest this, and other similar utterances might have laid him open to the charge of false pride he hastened to give his definition of true pride - "I will give you a definition of the proud man. He is a man who has neither vanity nor wisdom. One filled with hatreds cannot

be vain, neither can he be wise." Discussing with his friend Reynolds (April 9, 1818), the matter of Prefaces, Keats once again expressed his view of the Public as "a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility. If I write a Preface in a supple or subdued style, it will not be in character with me as a public speaker. I would be subdued before my friends and thank them for subduing me - but among Multitudes of Men - I have no feel of stooping, I hate the idea of humility to them. I never wrote one single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought."

Keats refers pointedly to a certain section of the despised public in a letter to Charles Brown, August 1820. After speaking of the slow sale of his books he said: "One of the causes I understand from different quarters, of the unpopularity of this new book and the others also, is the offence the ladies take at me. On thinking that over I am certain that I have said nothing in/^a spirit to displease any woman I would care to please; but still there is a tendency to class women in my books with roses and sweetmeats - they never see themselves dominant."

There is no need for us to think that Keats's dislike of the public was assumed merely to compensate himself for his inability to gain public recognition. His ideas of his own capabilities as a popular writer are well set forth in this extract from a letter from which we have already quoted - the

letter to John Taylor, August 24, 1810. He wrote: "I feel every confidence that if I choose I may be a popular writer; that I never will be; but for all that I will get a livelihood. I equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman - they are both a cloying treacle to the wings of independence. I shall ever consider them (People) as debtors to me for verses, not myself to them for admiration - which I can do without."

Finally, in a letter to Haydon, December 23, 1818, Keats congratulates himself upon possessing - at the time of writing - a small but independent income. "For", said he, "I never expect to get anything by my books; and moreover I wish to avoid publishing. I admire human nature but I do not like Men. I should like to compose things honourable to man but not fingerable over by men. So I am anxious to exist without troubling the printer's devil or drawing upon Men's or Women's admiration, in which great solitude I hope God will give me strength to rejoice."

The third question to which we shall seek an answer in this chapter is: "What was Keats's own opinion of himself as a poet?" There is no doubt that Keats was either unconscious of his genius or unwilling to let others know of its existence. Still he seldom was so flamboyantly outspoken as when he retorted to Mr. Abbey, his sister's guardian, who annoyed him a great deal, - ¹ "I know that I possess abilities greater than most men and therefore I am determined to gain my living by

exercising them." Later, in a letter to George and Georgina in America, June 27, 1818, he jocularly referred to himself as "one whom you understand intends to be immortal in the best points and let all his sins and peccadillos die away." For the most part, however, Keats, though not inclined to keep his light under a bushel, cared little for the praise of others. Writing to his publisher Hessey, on October 19, 1818 he said: "My own criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what 'Blackwood's' or the 'Quarterly' could possibly inflict; and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary perception of what is fine. This (hostile criticism) is a mere matter of the moment, and I think I shall be among the English poets after my death."

Closely connected with Keats's opinion of himself as a poet is his opinion of himself in connection with Shakespeare. This subject has been exhaustively dealt with by the book "Keats and Shakespeare" by Middleton Murray. For our purposes here one significant quotation - from a letter to Haydon, May, 1817 - will be sufficient. Keats wrote: "I remember your saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought, for things which I do half at random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare this presider?"

Although, as we have just seen, conscious of his own genius, Keats was even more conscious of the greatness of the task which lay before him. He realized that Poetry was a high calling for which his best not too good - for which, in fact, it was not even adequate. He knew too, that in his self-appointed calling constant improvement was necessary. For his progress in his ascent he was willing to give himself credit where it was due him but was even more willing to acknowledge his mistakes and to learn from them. The two volumes of his letters contain reference after reference to his conception of the high calling of poetry. To Reynolds on August 25, 1819, he wrote: "I am convinced more and more day by day that fine writing is, next to fine doing the top of the world.....The more I know what my diligence may in time probably effect the more does my heart distend with obstinacy..... I think if I had a free and healthy and lasting organization of heart and lungs as strong as an ox's so as to be able to bear unhurt the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness I could pass my life very nearly alone though it should last eighty years. But I feel my body too weak to support me to the height, and am obliged continually to check myself and strive to be nothing.....it is the only state for the best sort of Poetry - that is all I care for, all I live for."

Sometimes the greatness of his calling seemed almost to overwhelm him. To Leigh Hunt, May 1817, he exclaimed; "I have asked myself so often why I should be a Poet more than

other men - seeing how great a thing it is - seeing how great things are to be gained by it - What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame - that at last the idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton - yet 'tis a disgrace to fail even in a huge attempt and at this moment I drive the thought from me." His doubts, however, although sincere, never daunted Keats for long. A few months later, in October 1818, he wrote to his brother George, in a much more confident vein. "The only thing", he declared, "that can ever affect me personally for more than one short passing day is any doubt about my powers for poetry. I seldom have any and I look with hope to the nighing time when I shall have none."

As a thing entirely apart from any momentary distrust of his own powers there came to Keats far deeper doubts - doubts of the ultimate worth of any mundane pursuit. To Bailey he wrote on March 13, 1818: "I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack-a-lantern to amuse whoever happens to be struck with its brilliance...so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer - being in itself a nothing." Of these doubts Keats has left us no recorded solution - even as Shakespeare has left us none.

In conclusion we shall wander a little farther afield than the confines of our chosen topic, "Keats Criticism" to glance very briefly at Keats's philosophy of life, or his co-called

aesthetic philosophy. That he did have some deep guiding principle in all his work is obvious to any reader of either the correspondence or the poems. In a letter to Miss Jeffrey, (June 9, 1818) he expressed the hope that "I am a little more of a philosopher than I was, consequently a little less of a versifying pet lamb." A more explicit statement of his theory occurs in a letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated October 7, 1818: "I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared that may be the work of maturer year - in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conception I have of Poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs - that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will. I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself: but from some character in whose soul I now live." Finally, to Haydon, on March 8, 1819, he expressed the resolve "never to write for the sake of writing or making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge or experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me; otherwise I will be dumb."

"-Otherwise I will be dumb -" in these words Keats very simply, and quite unconsciously reveals how little he could ever have been perturbed by the hostility or elated by the praises of any critic. His dignity as a man made it imperative that he should be prepared to defend himself against personal abuse. His self-reliant nature made it inevitable that he should disdain the public. His very humanity made it natural that at times he should have fallen into pessimism over the unfair treatment he received as well as over his greater worries of health and means of livelihood. But, the significant point is this, - that he never remained long in any of these states, impetuous readiness for self-defence, scorn of the public, or self-pity. Always he returned to his true balance - to his trust that "anything really fine will in these days be felt", to his happiness in his own "solitary perception of what is fine", to his conviction that "fine writing is, next to fine doing, the top of the world". Then, re-assured and fortified he would press on in the pursuit which even for him "might take its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer - being itself a nothing."

Epilogue

In the preceding pages I have endeavoured to set forth a picture of John Keats the man and poet as others saw him and as he saw himself. Starting in the intimacy of his home circle, following him in his career as a medical student and interviewing his friends and acquaintances we have heard much of the living human man himself - more probably than of the poet. From the contemporary reviewers and from contemporary writers of prose and poetry we have learned what the literary world of his day thought of him. From studies by eminent scholars of literature and by consultation with writers of poetry and creative prose of the two succeeding generations we have heard the final verdict accorded him by his mother century, the nineteenth. Trespassing a little beyond the bounds of our survey, we have seen in "A Broader View" what other lands and a later age thought of him. Finally, turning to the pages of his published correspondence we have heard what Keats thought of himself. Of the vicissitudes of Keats's contemporary and posthumous fame much has been said and much will yet be said. It must all, however, be in substance homogeneous with the portion which we have examined here. Lord Dunsany, in his short verses "To Keats", sets forth very simply the whole history of the criticism of Keats and at the same time throws over it something of the glamour of young poesy:

1

On a magical morning, with twinkling feet
And a song at his lips that was strange and sweet,
Somebody new came down the street,
To the world's derision and laughter.

Now he is dumb with no more to say,
Now he is dead and taken away,
Silent and still, and leading the way,
And the world comes tumbling after.

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