

Thought in the Poetry of Keats

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THOUGHT IN KEATS' POETRY.

Keats was primarily the poet of beauty; of beauty in all forms, in art, in nature, in ancient legend, in human emotion. This beauty he saw through the medium of a sensitive, though powerful imagination and pictured forth in verse of the most delicate and melodious excellence. His perception was vivid and passionate and he felt with keen appreciation a world of poetic delight about him. The nature and temperament of the man are strongly reflected in his work. Beauty for its own sake is the ruling principle of Keats' art. Consequently, his poetry is for the most part aesthetic and emotional rather than ethical or didactic. A sensuous delight in beauty, a free indulgence in poetic imagery and fancy, a rich melody of verse are, then, the qualities most characteristic of Keats' poetry.

These qualities are so prominent that they sometimes outface the deeper meaning, which the poems often contain. It is generally believed that Keats shows in his work little of real thought or mental power. On the other hand, a few of his admirers have tried to weigh his poetry down with more philosophy and allegorical meaning than it really deserves, or can gracefully bear. Neither of these positions is wholly correct. While it is true that Keats was not given to metaphysical speculation or to subtle intellectual investigations, yet, a close study of his poetry will reveal more depth of thought than is usually attributed to the poet.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine especially those poems of Keats, which show some real thought or meaning, something beyond the mere charm of the verse and the interest of the narrative. This method of treatment will necessarily exclude from consideration some of Keats' important and most beautiful poems, as well as much that is poor. It will also pass over those characteristics of Keats' poetry for which he is best known and for which he is most loved. The thought discovered here will simply be defined, not discussed as to its originality. A chronological order will be followed in the treatment of the poems.

Keats' first volume of poetry contains two important works, which are of interest to us as showing the early bent of the poet's mind. These two are the poem beginning: "I Stood Tip-Toe upon a Little Hill", and the one entitled "Sleep and Poetry".

The first shows the poet's early attitude toward nature. To him nature makes a direct appeal. He loves her for her own sake and enjoys her apart from any relation to man. Keats' perception of nature here is that of the child-

"when fancy clear takes in all beauty with an easy span".

Sonnett
p 382
Gladstone
Ed.

There is no place for serious thought in this passionate and intense enjoyment of natural beauty; for a flood of images crowd upon the vision and immediately-

"The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings."

I Stood
Tip-toe
line 133

Nature is not a prophet to forthtell the truths of the universe and to reveal to the understanding of man the great heart of the infinite pulsating through all her visible forms. No metaphysical theories of life and immortality, no ideal systems of social order, no secrets of human destiny are seen in the mysterious workings of nature.

"The hurrying freshnesses aye preach
A natural sermon o'er their pebbly beds,"

I Stood
Tip-toe
ll. 70-71

but this sermon suggests no moral or spiritual teaching. Instead of calling to his mind the sufferings and responsibilities of life, nature invites man to delight in her beauties. The trees, the grass, the flowers, "the blue cragginess" of the sky speak but a simple message of joy.

It was this sensuous delight that man has ever felt in

nature, which first gave rise to poetic creation. The imagination was born

"On the smooth wind to realms of wonderment"

I Stood
Tip-toe
l.142.

where the whisper of the breeze told a tale of fancy and myth.

The legends of Psyche, Narcissus and Endymion were first suggested to the mind of some bard under the magic spell of

nature. Moreover the very music ^{of the verse} had its origin in the rhythm and melody found in all created things, and

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

127-128

This early objective treatment of nature is wholly sensuous, and shows no mental coloring; but it deserves notice here as a contrast to the slight element of thought associated with nature in the poem next to be considered.

Sleep and Poetry.

Sleep and Poetry is full of meaning. Sleep represents the early state of the mind before awakened to a full realization of the truth and destiny of life. In this state the mind perceives the beauties of the external world with a keen and passionate delight; but all pleasure is merely sensuous. Then poetry, or the poetic influence over the mind opens up new realms of vision. The imagination begins to work, and passes beyond the visible forms of beauty, into a world of delightful ideality. But this new world of poetic fancy is still apart from man. The mind in turn leaves this second state for a higher one, where human responsibilities and interests are concerned. Of this change the poet says:

Sleep and
oetry, ll.
122-124

"And can I ever bid these joys farewell ?
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts,"

ll 136-150 — Nature now lives anew in sympathetic response to the emotions of the human heart. Moreover it is not reason or intellectual discernment here that penetrates the secrets of the universe and searches out truth, but,

265-266

"th' imagination
Into most lovely labyrinths will be gone"

and there find out the mysteries of nature and of human life,
for

3-165

"Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood that the high
Imagination cannot fly?

167-170

----- Has she not shown us all
From the clear space of ether, to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding?"

Of himself the poet say:

11.284-292

"What though I am not wealthy in the dower
 Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know
 The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
 Hither and thither all the changing thoughts
 Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts
 Out the dark mysteries of human souls
 To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
 A vast idea before me, and I glean
 Therefrom my liberty."

Keats also sets forth in this poem his theory of poetry, its true aim and function. He expresses his enthusiastic love for his art in the words

11.96-97

"O for ten years that I may overwhelm
 myself in poesy."

His famous line describing poesy:

"Tis might half slumb'ring on his own right arm"
 is a fine example of poetry, but an exceedingly vague definition. Keats believed that poetry should first of all bring pleasure and comfort to man. Therefore

11.267-
268

"They shall be accounted poet kings

Who simply say the most heart-easing things."

Again he speaks of

245-247

"the great end
 Of poesy, that it should be a friend
 To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man".

There is then in Sleep and poetry a decided advantage^{ce} in point of thought over the poem first considered. More is to be seen in nature than mere objective beauty. poetry, instead of being but the expression in song or legend of the ecstatic delight caused by nature, is a diviner art, which has been touched and hallowed by the spirit of human sympathy.

But by far the most important addition of thought found in the poem is the principle that it is the office of the imagination and not that of the reason to find out truth, to "pluck out the heart of the mystery" in nature and in human life.

Endymion.

Endymion is an exceedingly interesting poem as a study. It not only claims our attention for its bearing upon Keats' personal history, but also for its relation to the development of his genius. It will be considered here only in reference to the real thought material that it contains. Before discussing the poem it will be well to review the narrative.

Endymion, the shepherd prince of Latmus is in love with Cynthia, whom he has seen in a vision, though he does not know yet that she is the moon-goddess. Directed by a message that he reads on the wings of a butterfly, he descends into the mysteries of the lower world. Here he wanders for some time, seeing rare and wonderful sights and meeting with many unusual adventures. He encounters Adonis, Venus, Cybell, and other mythical personages. Cynthia visits him in a beautiful bower, and leaves him asleep. Endymion then meets Alpheus and Arethusa, two lovers who are suffering a passion like his own, and he prays for them. He unexpectedly finds himself under the sea. Here he meets Glancus and Scylla, restores to life the dead lovers who have been drowned at sea. He returns to earth and immediately falls in love with a beautiful Indian maiden, whom he finds bewailing her sorrow and loneliness. Together they are born through the upper air on flying horses. Cynthia appears to Endymion and he at once forgets the Indian maiden, who vanishes. In the midst of a hymn to Diana, Eddyion is born to earth again. Here he finds the Indian maiden, and a second time transfers his affections from the goddess to her. He finally decides to forget all love

and to live the life of a religious recluse. But now the goddess herself appears, and he learns that the moon, Cythia and the Indian are the same and Endymion vanishes with the goddess to enjoy immortal bliss.

The poem, if read for the story itself, is disappointing. There are too many long episodes and digressions. The thread of the narrative is often lost in a confusion of fanciful and bewildering images. Even the frequent occurrence of passages of almost unsurpassed poetic beauty does not save the poem at times from being tedious.

specially
 Abbott Bridges
 and Mrs. F. M.
 Owen.

Some of Keats' admirers have read into this poem an elaborate and involved allegory, which weighs down with meaning every detail of the story. Some of the principal points of interpretation are these: Cynthia stands for abstract beauty, or poetic ideality. Endymion is man, or the human soul. His wanderings in search of his love are but the longings and the struggles of the human soul after ideal beauty. Since this longing takes the form of love and since the Indian woman, (human love) and Cynthia (divine love), prove to be at last the same, then all love, human as well as divine is the same, namely, ideal beauty. It is while communing with external nature that Endymion reads on the wings of a butterfly the message summoning him to an unknown world of mystery. Thus does nature ever admit her communicants into the realms of her mysteries and there reveals to them her secrets. In the dark and solitary underworld Endymion finds a shrine to Diana. Also a moonbeam reaches him in the cold ocean depths. So does beauty, ideal beauty, permeate all things and ever shines

upon him who earnestly seeks ideality. When Endymion forgets his own sorrows to sympathize with the woes of Alpheus and Arethusa and when he offers aid to Glaucus and the dead lovers, then his prospects begin to look up. Success becomes assured and he is hastened on his way toward the attainment of his love. It is, then, sympathy with the cares and sorrows of others which helps to alleviate one's own woes, and finally brings satisfaction and happiness. Here is voiced the common ethical and religious ideal of social service.

Some critics go more into detail than this in interpreting the allegory; others not so much. The outline I have given touches upon the chief and more reasonable allegorical applications. To read deeper than this is certainly "hobbling pegasus with logs of prose", and even some of these interpretations, I think, are wholly fanciful. True, the incidents and details of the story seem to have a certain fitness for the meanings attached to them, but that is not saying that the poet selected them with the deliberate intention that they should set forth such meanings, for it is possible, by a little ingenuity, to read into almost any poem some spiritual or political meaning.

In the first place, I have not been able to find any statement or implication made by Keats himself or by any of his intimate contemporaries that this poem was intended for an allegory. On the other hand, Keats did say of it in a letter to Mr. Bailey, "It will be a test of my pow^e_r of imagination and chiefly of my invention- which, is, a rare thing indeed- by which I must make 4,000 lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with poetry."

This does not sound as if every little detail has a particular meaning, or any necessary place in the development of a long and complicated allegory.

Moreover in the poem "I stood Tip-toe up^on a Little Hill" the legend of Endymion is spoken of as having its origin in the mind of some poet under the ecstatic spell of the beauties of nature. It is only a beautiful myth, only the sweet story of the loves of Diana and Endymion. The origin and only meaning of the tale is told as follows:

"He was a poet, sure a lover too,
 Who stood on Latmus' top, what time there blew
 Soft breezes from the myrtle vale below;
 And brought in faintness solemn, sweet, and slow
 A hymn from Dian's temple; while upswelling,
 The incense went to her own starry dwelling.
 But though her face was clear as infant's eyes,
 Though she stood smiling o'er the sacrifice,
 The Poet wept at her so piteous fate,
 Wept that such beauty should be desolate:
 So in fine wrath some golden sounds he won,
 And gave meek Cynthia her Endymion.

11.193-204

This passage is of special interest, for, it must be remembered, ~~that~~ it was written not long before Endymion and it is believed by many that the whole poem from which these lines are taken was first written for a prologue to the longer Endymion. Now if Keats had intended to make the story of Endymion in each detail the exposition of a carefully planned system of thought, there would surely be some mention of his design in this early introduction or prologue to the later poem. But the tale is spoken of here as merely the fancy of some poet and lover, and to Keats, it seems, the story was attractive for its own simple theme and not for the subtle meanings that

some have tried to make it bear.

The lack of external evidence cannot argue against an allegorical teaching in some of Keats' later works where the meaning is well defined or expressly pointed out. For instance in such poems as Hyperion and Lamia the lesson is not left to the inference of the reader but is clearly drawn by the poet himself. In Endymion, however, there is no evidence within the poem itself, not even a hint, that the story has a hidden meaning. In one place ^{in the Proem} the poet says of it

"t'is a ditty
Not of these days, but long ago 'twas told
By a cavern wind unto a forest old;
And then the forest told it in a dream
To a sleeping lake, whose cool and level gleam
A poet caught as he was journeying
To Phoebus' shrine; and in it he did fling
His weary limbs, bathing an hour's space,
And after, straight in that inspired place
He sang the story up into the air
Giving it universal freedom."

Mr. Bridges suggests that the last two lines may imply that Keats wished the legend to be interpreted allegorically, but I can see nothing in this whole passage that indicates a deeper significance in the legend than that suggested in the lines quoted from the prologue.

It is barely possible, however, that Keats may have wished the legend to illustrate some meaning in a very general way even though he had no intention of making the poem in all its parts a consistent allegory. We know very well that allegorizing was a poetical manner with Keats, but this habit was never carried to the absurdly analytical extent that some would have it carried to in Endymion.

The main theme may be in its broader outline metaphorical, that is it may stand for the longing of the human soul after beauty. Also the introduction of the Indian woman- so unnecessary to the development of the story, may have some special significance. The Indian woman, I think, stands for beauty, just as Cynthia does. Her identity with Cynthia shows that beauty is beauty- always one and the same in essence under whatever form it may appear. It is only our human ignorance that discriminates between what we suppose to be different kinds of beauty, confusing the form with the reality back of the form. It must be remembered that the two women are one in reality, never in form or appearance. This interpretation may seem fanciful but it is clearly born out, I think, in Hyperion. The fact that the same thought is expressed with much force and clearness in this later poem is the best evidence I have for believing that the incident here may have been intended to reflect the meaning I have attributed to it.

The thought then in Endymion may be this. There is in the human soul an innate longing for the attainment of ideal beauty. This beauty, which permeates the whole universe, is always one in substance, though it may appear under many different forms. It is not safe, I think, to go further, and even these interpretations are but possible. They may be wholly misplaced. But if they should be rejected altogether Keats' poetry would not suffer any serious loss in thought. The first I deem of no remarkable importance, for the thought is a truism, and the second, as I said, is plainly brought out in Hyperion.

It might seem, perhaps, that too much space here is devoted to Endymion when the poem is of so little importance as regards mere thought. But Endymion, more than any other of the poems of Keats has been overburdened with far-fetched and too-ingenious interpretations which certainly give the poem much more subtlety of thought than it deserves.

Endymion is Keats' first strong plea for the beautiful and begins with the immortal line

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

Lamia.

Lamia is one of the most vivid as well as the most finished of Keats' narrative poems. The story is taken from Burton's Anatomy of Meloncholy, where it is quoted from the "Life of Apollonius" a work by Philostratus. Lamia a serpent-woman gains complete mastery over Lycius, a young student of philosophy. She builds for him a magnificent palace where they dwell together and celebrate their marriage feast. To this feast Apollonius, the old philosopher and teacher of Lycius, comes as an unbidden guest. He publicly denounces Lamia and reveals her true character. Under his fierce and steady gaze, the enchantress, with a scream, vanishes. The poem ends with the death of Lycius.

Rossetti's
Life of Keats
p.108

The teaching of the poem is obvious. The antagonism of Lamia and Apollonius is the antagonism of pleasure and philosophy, or of the imagination and reason. Of this meaning I think there can be no doubt for the poet draws the lesson himself in the well known lines:

"Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade."

The poet's sympathy is plainly with the serpent-woman and his resentment at the interference of Apollonius with Lamia's happiness is boldly asserted. He makes philosophy cold and uninviting. Apollonius laughs as he enters the palace as if philosophy took delight in the wanton destruction of pleasure.

Lamia, though, stands for more than mere physical enjoyment. She is sense perception. She is imagination. This must be the explanation of Keats' sympathy with her. But even then the stand the poet takes would be more consistent if he had made the opponent of philosophy good as well as beautiful. We can hardly bring ourselves- even with Keats- to champion a heroine who dwells in

Lamia II
1.31

"That purple lined palace of sweet sin"

nor can we blame philosophy for destroying a happiness that of itself would have ended in misery

Lamia II
11.9-10

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

But here, as in Endymion, Keats surely did not intend to make the allegory or inner meaning apply at every point.

Keats attitude toward reason or pure intellect is frequently expressed in his other works. In one place he says:

Epistle to
Reynolds
74-75-76

"Oh, never will the prize,
High reason, and the love of good and ill
Be my award!"

and again he speaks of his poetical inspiration:

Lines to
Fanny
11. 11-17

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

The poet's need of knowledge is set forth in the song of the thrush

What the
Thrush Said
11.9-12

"O fret not after knowledge- I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth,
O fret not after knowledge- I have none,
And yet the evening listens."

The same idea ^{we} is found in Sleep and poetry where Keats says

that for him

Sleep and
Poetry
ll.288-89

"no great minist'ring reason sorts
Out the dark mysteries of human souls
to clear conceiving."

The poem, then, in a general way seems to stand for the antagonism of imagination and reason or science, and asserts the superiority of imagination as a controlling principle in human thought.

Hyperion.

Hyperion is a fragment. The poem deals with the overthrow of the old Titan race of divinities by the young Olympian gods. The influence of Milton is seen in Hyperion both in the general plan of the piece and in the style and diction. The theme itself may have been suggested by a passage in Paradise Lost.

Book I.
ll.510-514

"Titan, Heaven's first-born,
With his enormous brood, and birthright seized
By younger Saturn: he from mightier Jove,
His own and Rhea's son, like measure found;
So Jove usurping reigned."

The one motif of the poem is set forth in the speech of Oceanus to the assembled host of fallen gods. Oceanus reasons that the young Apollo and his followers must in turn gain supremacy just as the Titan gods surpassed in power and beauty the older Chaos and Darkness.

Hyperion
II. 222-18

"So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old Darkness: nor are we
Thereby more conquer'd than by us the rule
Of shapeless chaos."

These gods of the new hierarchy

Hyperion II
ll.226-231

"do tower
Above us in their beauty, and must reign
In right thereby; for 'tis the external law
That first in beauty should be first in might:
Yea, by that law, another race may drive
Our conquerors to mourn as we do now."

Beauty is immortal and always the same, its visible manifestations only changing from time to time as new forms, more capable of reflecting the real nature of beauty, appear to supercede the old ones. But these visible forms are never beauty itself, only,

Hyperion I
316-318

"symbols divine,
Manifestations of that beauteous life,
Diffus'd unseen throughout eternal space".

This idea is not fully worked out because the poem is unfinished, but the truth that the poet intended to make the warfare of the Grecian gods illustrate is plainly set forth, I think, in the passage quoted. This principle we saw in Endymion where the Indian woman and Cynthia are both made to stand for the same beauty- their apparent difference in beauty being only a difference in degree. Cynthia is a form more capable of reflecting the real nature of beauty, and therefore the Indian woman vanishes when Cynthia appears, just as the old hierarchy of gods gives place to the new. Thus, power and supremacy will ever pass from one form or agency to another until absolute beauty is revealed to man in its reality. This law working in nature and in man makes beauty the dynamic force in all change and progress.

Hyperion, A Vision.

Hyperion, A Vision, is but a recast of the earlier Hyperion. The story is represented as being revealed to the poet by Moneta, the only survivor of the fallen race of gods. There is an introduction of 226 lines which is important as expressing some of the author's own opinions concerning human life and the character and mission of the poet. This introduction is perhaps the most personal of Keats' verses.

The poet finds himself in a beautiful garden where a sumptuous feast is spread. He partakes of this feast and drinks freely of a "cool vessel of transparent juice". This drink causes him to sink into a deep swoon. When his senses return the garden and feast have vanished and he is in an old half-ruined sanctuary. A veiled priestess is ministering at an altar before an unknown image. The poet makes his way to the steps of the altar where the priestess addresses him.

11.107-
108

"If thou canst not ascend
These steps, die on the marble where thou art"

and further-

11.114-117

"The sands of thy short life are spent this hour,
And no hand in the universe can turn
Thy hour-glass, if these gummed leaves be burnt
Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps

with difficulty the poet ascends the marble steps. Then follows a very significant passage.

147-155

None can usurp this height returned that shade
But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.
All else who find a haven in the world,
where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
If by a chance into this fame they come,
Rot on the pavement where thou rottedst half'.
'Are these not thousands in the world', said I,

11. 155-181

Who love their fellows even to the death,
 Who feel the giant agony of the world,
 And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
 Labor for mortal good? I sure should see
 Other men here, But I am here alone,'
 'Those whom thou spakest of are no visionaries'
 Rejoined that voice; 'they are no dreamers weak;
 They seek no wonder but the human face,
 No music but a happy-noted voice:
 They come not here, they have no thought to come;
 And thou art here, for thou art less than they.
 What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
 To the great world? Thou are a dreaming thing,
 A fever of thyself: think of the earth;
 What bliss, even in hope, is there for thee?
 What haven? every creature has its home,
 Every sole man has days of joy and pain,
 Whether his labours be sublime or low-
 The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct:
 Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
 Bearing more woes than all his sins deserve.
 Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
 Such things as thou are are admitted oft
 Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
 And suffered in these temples: for that cause
 Thou standest safe beneath this statue's knees.'"

The poet then learns that he is in the temple of the fallen Titan gods and that the image before him is that of Saturn. The priestess pictures to him in a vision

198-200

"a war foughten long since by giant hierarchy
 against rebellion." At this point begins the story

of the first Hyperion.

This introduction is certainly allegorical and is in a way descriptive of Keats' own life. The garden, the feast, and the deep sleep stand for the early period of his poetic growth when sense perception alone ruled his poetic nature. But he is awakened from this sleep to a realization of human responsibility. The priestess, or knowledge, points out to the visionary the importance and necessity of knowing practical things. Knowledge instructs the dreamer that he must

share in the cares and activities of the world in order to save himself and to perform fully the poet's mission to mankind. The further different details of the opening lines yield readily to various and fitting interpretations; but I hesitate here to give them any definite meanings for there is always danger of pressing an allegory too far. It is very likely though that Keats intended to express more in this introduction than the one general meaning that I have indicated.

The desire for a higher sense of the practical is frequently expressed by Keats. We saw in *Sleep and Poetry* that, very early in life, he felt the importance of the poet's sympathizing with the common sorrows and experiences of men. The conviction, then, however, did not impress him with such force as it does here. This longing for a deeper knowledge of human nature and a wider vision of actual events never materially affected Keats' work. It might have done so had he lived longer. But I think it is doubtful whether this mental awakening would have ever developed into anything more than it did- a mere desire on his part to interpret poetically "the agonies, the strife of human hearts".

The Odes.

The Odes are Keats' finest work, and with the beautiful **Eve of St. Agnes**, are the poems best known and most characteristic of his genius. Beautiful as they are, however, they present no new or powerful thought. There is in them reflection and sentiment, some moralizing, and much meditation, but there is no deep or subtle meaning half hidden amidst the splendid imagery.

The Ode to Autumn reveals no idea of nature different from that already expressed by Keats in his earlier poems. The Odes on a Grecian Urn, To Psyche, To Maia show Keats' appreciation and love for the beauty in ancient art and legend. This too, though never so well, he has expressed before. The Odes To a Nightingale and To Melancholy reflect the changing mental states and emotions of the poet. These changing moods are, in themselves, as interesting as their expression is beautiful, but need not be considered here as they show no great depth of thought.

In the Ode on a Grecian Urn, the transitoriness of human life is set over against the permanency of plastic art. The poet ends with the famous axiom:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

A thing, to be beautiful, must be complete in all its parts, must possess symmetry and proportion. In one instance Keats uses the word "completeness" where he clearly means beauty. "By all the soft completeness of thy face", he says.

So also truth cannot be truth and lack anything, that is, be short of full completeness. Herein is to be found the analogy, or rather, the identity of truth and beauty. The poem itself, however, does not develop this thought as a logical conclusion of what has gone before. The inference, in its relation to the rest of the poem, is wholly arbitrary. The thought seems to have dashed through the poet's mind while allowing his imagination free play in contemplating the beauties of the urn. This is perhaps an illustration of the working of Keats' theory that it is the imagination and not reason that shall find out truth.

The principle of the identity of truth and beauty is commonly admitted to be Keats' chief contribution of thought to English poetry. But the thought itself is not his after all, for the idea is as old as plato. Only the epigrammatic statement of the principle, with the illustration and application of it in his art really belongs to Keats. But so perfectly has Keats illustrated this principle in his poetry that he shall ever stand as one of the highest apostles and prophets of the beautiful, even if he was not the first to discover the final nature and essence of absolute beauty.

How Keats would have applied this law of the absolute-ness of beauty to the solution of the great social and spiritual problems of human existence, he has not told us, beyond the exposition of the general law that beauty is the moving force in the progress of the world, the impetus in man and

nature, which continually works toward ultimate good. We saw this law at work in Endymion where the shepherd prince is led on by the desire to attain ideal beauty. The same thought is also expressed in Hyperion where beauty is made the cause of the passing of glory and power from a lower to a higher hierarchy of gods. Perhaps the method by which beauty works through all being as a dominant power was not defined in the poet's own mind beyond this general law.

Shorter and Minor Poems.

I have found in the shorter and minor poems of Keats no thought of importance different from that expressed in the poems here reviewed. Little is said of religion or immortality. Christianity finds no voice in Keats' poetry, but a beautiful passage in Endymion sets forth a religious ideal that is certainly noble in its conception.

"Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemiz'd, and free of space, Behold
The clear religion of Heaven!"

777-781

It has been maintained by some that Keats did not believe in the immortality of the soul. Others deny this statement. But reasons for either opinion must be found in his letters and in his personal history, not in his poetry. The sonnet beginning

"As from the darkening gloom a silver dove
Upsoars, and darts into the eastern light
On pinions that naught moves but pure delight
So fled thy soul into the realms above
Regions of peace and everlasting love,"

suggests the writer's belief that the soul lives after death. But the nature and whole conception of the poem makes it unsafe to say whether this is the statement of a settled belief or merely a poetical fancy.

Conclusion.

The substance then, of the thought presented in the poetry of Keats is briefly this. Beauty is present in all things, as a moving and working force. This beauty is identical with final truth, and is always the same in reality, though it may appear under many different forms. Moreover, it is prophetic imagination, not pure reason, that finds out and recognizes this truth, or absolute beauty. The end and aim of poetry is to visualize imagination- to picture forth this ideal beauty and thereby "soothe the cares and lift the thoughts of man". The idea of the sympathetic relation between man and external nature found only an awakening in Keats' mind, never a full development. It therefore did not materially affect his work, though it cannot be wholly disregarded in considering the thought in his poetry.

Other lines of thought are suggested, but not clearly defined, or consistently worked out. With Keats the exposition of any intellectual theory or mental principle is always secondary to the appeal he endeavors to make to the emotions. Therefore the apparent confusion of ideas in much of his work may be due to the poet's indifference to the logical presentation and development of a definite line of thought. It was hard for Keats to hold to his central or general theme. His attention flew off after every new image that floated before him. He trusts himself entirely to his imagination, believing that

"He ne'er is crowned
With immortality, who fears to follow
Where airy voices lead."

Endy. II
ll. 211-13

Keats had a mind rich in poetic imagery and these images often crowd his canvass in such jostling confusion that they completely overshadow the ideas which they are intended to illustrate. The poet dwells with such fondness upon minor and subordinate situa-

believing that these are the chief if not the only features of his work. It is but conjecture, of course, to say that Keats, had he lived, would have brought his imagination under discipline and would have made it serve instead of overpower his thought. It is at least reasonable to suppose that such would have been the case.

Whether Keats' growing interest in the world and in humanity would have greatly improved his poetry or not it is impossible to say. It is probable, however, that his luxuriant temperament could never have been fully reconciled to ideas and principles of a purely ethical or social significance. Furthermore, Keats was the maker of a distinct and individual kind of poetry, and any forced introduction of an ethical or didactic element into it would have changed its

See Intro. whole nature. Keats was not, like Shelley, born with "a passion for reforming the world" and any acquired taste might have marred the richness of his natural genius and diminished the fire of his divine inspiration. We are certainly glad that the exquisite beauty of the rare masterpieces he has left us is not sullied by any conscious infusion of didactic coloring.

To all lovers of the beautiful Keats' poetry has given a rich and lasting pleasure; and even though it fails to appeal with any degree of force to the intellect or to the moral consciousness, as such, yet it ever lifts the soul to a contemplation of all that is fair and lovely. By an instinct growing out of his divine origin man naturally loves best the good and the beautiful. It is only a distorted taste-

to Pro-
metheus
Unbound
Gladstone
Ed.

the result of blindness to real beauty- that makes him choose what is unfair. The strongest force, then, against evil is the presence of the good and the mightiest weapon against ugliness in any form is a revelation of the beautiful.

Thus Keats' poetry works an indirect ethical influence which much philosophizing often fails to do, and Keats himself becomes a moral and spiritual teacher- a prophet to point men's souls to eternal truth which is forever identical with absolute beauty.

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