The Romanticism of John Keats

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THE ROMANTICISM OF JOHN KEATS

BY

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THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

MARGARET ESTHER BALLEW

ENTITLED

The Romanticism of John Keats

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION.

The poetical activities of John Keats extend over a period of only a few years duration, from the time when he first wrote his Imitation of Spenser, to his last despairing cry, - "Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art!" - on his way to Italy and his grave. And yet, during so brief an interval, he has secured his name from ever being "writ in water" and has added gems of immense value to the accumulated store of English poetry. In every History of the Romantic Movement in England, mention is always made of John Keats, but so far no detailed account of his relation to the movement has ever been entered into. There is abundant material in his poems and in his letters for such an account and it is the purpose of this thesis to give as much of that material and the conclusions to be drawn therefrom, as is possible in so brief a space.

In considering the Romanticism of Keats, the material has naturally fallen under two main divisions. First, Romanticism, as shown in the sources from which Keats drew his inspiration for poetry, as in the foreign influences and the English poets in whom he took the keenest delight. Second, the Romantic traits or tendencies which are evident in his letters and in his poetry.

In this thesis, no attempt has been made to trace the influence of his poetry upon later writers, although it would be an interesting field for investigation. Moreover the treatment of the two chapters taken up is by no means exhaustive, but merely
sets forth a few interesting facts which heretofore have received little or no attention.
CHAPTER ONE.

The meagre schooling which John Keats received was under the direction of the Rev. John Clarke at Enfield. In his earlier years, he displayed no particular signs of any intellectual bent but was rather of a highly pugnacious spirit, leading in all active exercises and giving promise of becoming great in some military capacity rather than in literature. From his fourteenth year, however, all the energy of his nature turned to study. He became suddenly and completely absorbed in reading, and was continually at work before school in the morning and during play-hours in the afternoon. He won easily all the literary prizes of the school. He exhausted the school library along the lines of History, Travel, and Fiction, and was borrowing books from the son of his schoolmaster when his mother's death suddenly put an end to his school days. His father had died several years previous to this and in 1810, when he was just fifteen years of age, he was withdrawn from school and apprenticed for a period of five years to a surgeon at Edmonton. However, his newly awakened passion for literature could not be suppressed, and his early eagerness for knowledge remained with him throughout his life.¹

At Enfield, no doubt, Keats acquired a sufficient knowledge of French to enable him to read the language without difficulty.

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¹ Apr. 4, 1818, Keats writes to John Taylor:— "... I mean to follow Soloman's directions. 'Get learning - get understanding.' I find earlier days are gone by - I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge." - P. 298. Cambridge Edition, 1899.
However, the literature of that people seems to have little interested him. In 1817, he makes the following interesting comment upon the French language:— "While I was speaking about France, it occurred to me to speak a few words on their language— it is perhaps the poorest one ever spoken since the jabbering in the tower of Babel and when you come to know that the real use and greatness of a tongue is to be referred to its literature—you will be astonished to find how very inferior it is to our native speech— I wish the Italian would supersede French in every school throughout the country, for that is full of real poetry and romance of a kind more fitted for the pleasure of ladies than perhaps our own. It seems to me that the only end to be gained in acquiring French is the immense accomplishment of speaking it— it is none at all, a most lamentable mistake indeed."¹ In the following year, he writes that he is reading Voltaire and Gibbon,² but the influence of these men is too obscure to be traced. His opinion of Rousseau can be determined from a portion of a letter to Fanny Brawne in 1820:— "I have been turning over two volumes of letters written between Rousseau and two ladies in the perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment in which the ladies and gentlemen of those days were so clever, and which is still prevalent among ladies of this country who live in a state of reasoning romance. . . . . What would Rousseau have said at seeing our little correspondence! What would his ladies have said! I don't care much——

¹ To Fanny Keats, September 10, 1817. P. 265 Cambridge Ed., 1899.
² Feb. 21, 1818. P. 289 Cambridge Ed.
I would sooner have Shakespeare's opinion about the matter. The common gossiping of washerwomen must be less disgusting than the continual and eternal fence and attack of Rousseau and these sublime petticoats. . . . . . Thank God that I am born in England with our own great Men before my eyes.\(^1\) One French writer, however, Keats sincerely admired. The poet Rousseau, the sixteenth century champion of Romanticism, with his classical and mediaeval peculiarities, drew his attention and in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, he acknowledges that the works of this French writer have great beauties,\(^2\) and in the same letter encloses a free translation of one of his sonnets which is now included in every complete set of his works.

In a brief review of the Romantic Movement in English Literature in the Critic for Ja., 1900, Mr. Lewis Gates says that Keats is perhaps the least easily brought under the Romantic formula, yet indubitably belongs there despite the common talk about his Hellenism. However, those elements in the Greek which appealed to him, contrasted with those which the eighteenth century classicists made fundamental, seem rather to place him in direct opposition to the ideas of the Augustan age. This Augustan ideal was in reality more French than Greek, and the small amount of true Hellenism was, to a very considerable extent, on the side of polish and form. On the other hand, the Greek ideal of Beauty, lost upon the prosaic Augustan, intoxicated his sensitive and aesthetic temperament to such a degree that it becomes at times almost pain-

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\(^1\) Feb. 24, 1820. P. 429, Cam. Ed.

\(^2\) Sept. 22, 1818. P. 328, Cam. Ed.
ful. Greek mythology, with its vast field for the play of the imagination and fancy, especially was a realm where Keats delighted to wander in spiritual communion with the beautiful gods and goddesses. The ideas of religion, as set forth by some of the greatest Grecian philosophers, attracted him and were the basis for his own religious beliefs. Surely these three main sources of interest in Greek cannot be considered as belonging to the conventional, common sense, conforming Augustan ideal.

Keat's knowledge of Greek was undoubtedly almost wholly second-hand, but his intuitive response to its spirit made his knowledge more truly Grecian than that of the translators and compilers to whom he went as his sources of information. In April, 1818, Keats writes to Reynolds:— "I shall learn Greek and very likely Italian. . . . I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare and I have lately upon Milton."¹ However, in September, 1819, after saying that he is engaged in the study of Italian, he writes:— "I do not think of returning upon Greek. I would not go even so far if I were not persuaded of the power the knowledge of any language gives one."² From this, it is evident that he could only have been engaged in the study of the language for a year and a half as the greatest possible time, and that much of the latter part of even this period was given over to the study of Italian. Moreover this was during his most productive years of literary activity and likewise he says that the study of lan-

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¹ Apr. 27, 1818. P. 299, Cam. Ed.
² Sept. 22, 1819. P. 404, Cam. Ed.
guages is "a nice way to fill up intervals",¹ so that it is extremely improbable that he realized much of his dream of "feasting upon old Homer" in the original. According to Charles Cowden Clarke, whose earlier relations with Keats at Enfield were continued even more intimately in London, the store from whence he acquired his perfect intimacy with Greek mythology was Tooke's Pantheon, Lempriere's Classical Dictionary and Spence's Polymetis.² The Classical Dictionary, he seemed almost to learn by heart.

Keats wrote eleven poems, including his two longest productions, directly upon Grecian subjects, seven of which - Hymn to Apollo, Ode to Apollo, Endymion, Fragment of an Ode to Maia, Ode to Psyche, Lamia, and Hyperion - are stories from their mythology; two are poems to Homer and the remaining two areː On Seeing the Elgin Marbles and his famous Ode on a Grecian Urn. With the exception of Lamia, Lemprierè's Classical Dictionary seems to have been the chief source from which he secured the foundation for his poems on mythological subjects. From such limited and uninteresting details, he drew his material and breathed into it a truly Grecian spirit from his own imagination. Hyperion, he designed as a long epic of equal length with Endymion, which should treat of the dethronement of Hyperion by Apollo, and, incidentally, the overthrow of the minor gods, and of the war of the Giants for Saturn's reestablishment; but for some reason he gave up the project before he had completed the second book. There is little doubt but that Lamia is based upon a reference found in

¹ Sept. 22, 1819. P. 404, Cam. Ed.
Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. In September, 1819, Keats writes that he has been reading this book and expresses the keenest admiration for it. Lamia was commenced the June or July previous to this, but, in all probability, his reading would date back to that time.

Keat's eagerness for knowledge led him into another field of study - Italian, of which mention has already been made. The following comment which he makes upon Italian art is interesting and significant:— "I looked over a book of prints taken from the fresco of the church at Milan, the name of which I forgot. In it were comprised specimens of the first and second age in Art in Italy. I do not think I ever had a greater treat out of Shakespeare, full of romance and the most tender feeling: magnificence of drapery beyond everything I ever saw, not excepting Raphael's -

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1 To George and Georgiana Keats, Sept. 18, 1819. P. 397, Cam. Ed.

2 The passage from the Anatomy of Melancholy is as follows: "Menippus Lyceius a young man twenty-five years of age, that going between Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman, which taking him by the hand carried him home to her house in the suburb of Corinth, and told him she was a Phoenician by birth, and if he would tarry with her, he would hear her sing and play, and drink such wine as never any drank, and no man should molest him; but she being fair and lovely would live and die with him that was fair and lovely to behold. The young man, a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her awhile to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding amongst other guests, came Apollonius, who, by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia, and that all her furniture was like Tantalus's gold described by Homer, no substance, but mere illusions. When she saw herself decried, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved, and thereupon, the plate, house, and all that was in it vanished in an instant: many thousands took notice of this fact, for it was done in the midst of Greece." P.494. Ed. 1847.
but grotesque to a curious pitch; yet still making up a fine whole, even finer to me than more accomplished works, as there was left so much room for imagination."¹ Bocaccio, Ariosto and Dante especially appealed to him. Their mediaeval richness of coloring attracted him. He had sufficient knowledge of the language to read with pleasure in the original. In 1819 he writes:— "In the course of a few months I shall be as good an Italian scholar as I am a French one. I am reading Ariosto at present, not managing more than six or eight stanzas at a time. . . . . Also the reading of Dante is well worth the while."² Regarding the circumstances surrounding the composition of the poem, A Dream, After Reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca he writes:— "The fifth canto of Dante pleases me more and more—it is that one in which he meets with Paolo and Francesca. I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind and in the midst of them I dreamt of being in that region of Hell. The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life. I floated about the whirling atmosphere, as it is described, with a beautiful figure, to whose lips mine were pressed as it seemed for an age—and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm—even flowery tree-tops sprung up, and we rested on them, sometimes with the lightness of a cloud, till the wind blew us away again. I tried a sonnet upon it—there are fourteen lines, but nothing of what I felt—0 that I could dream it every night."³

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Isabella, or the Pot of Basil, is a poem founded on one of the stories taken from the Decameron of Boccaccio. This adaptation was intended to form part of a collection of tales from the great Italian novelist, versified by Keats and his friend Reynolds. It is the general belief that Isabella was the only one of these tales that Keats completed. However, Henry Noble McCracken, in an article in the Modern Philology for October, 1907, attempts to prove that the story of the Eve of St. Agnes is an adaptation of an episode in the Filocolo of Boccaccio. The parallel as he draws it is interesting and striking, but not conclusive. The ancient bedesman, the feast which Porphyryro prepares and the elopement at the close, three of the most striking features of the poem, are

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1 Mr. McCracken gives the following comparison of summaries of the two stories to show what part is common to both:— "A maiden longing for her lover, and sighing in the midst of others' joy on a feast day, is prepared for the coming of her lover by being told of dreams in which her lover appears in her bed-chamber while she is asleep in bed. She pays no heed to the music and festivities of friends but sighs continually. The lover gets into her castle with danger to himself, unobserved by all save an old woman, friendly to the lovers. The lover at once demands the whereabouts of his lady. A plan is arranged between the two, that the lover shall be hidden in the room of the maiden, while she comes in, undresses and goes to bed. The lover must not harm the girl. The girl comes into her room, undresses and gets into bed, the lover looking on from his place of concealment. The room is lighted by a strange light, so that the lover may see the beauties of his love. The girl, wakeful at first, finally sleeps from fatigue. The lover comes from his place of hiding, views his love asleep, and, sinking beside her on the bed, in words of love bids her awake. This she does not do. Under stronger measures the maiden wakes, at the very moment when she is dreaming about her lover. She mistakes her lover for the lover of her dream, and addresses him in sad words, begging him not to leave her. The lover finally succeeds in waking her and the lovers spend the night together. The love is made an honest thing by the vows and ring in one case, by the terms 'my bride' in the other."
not found in the Filocolo story. If these are original, there is nothing in the incidents noted below that would call for a greater creative imagination than Keats possessed, with the St. Agnes' Eve superstition as a foundation upon which to base his imagination. In speaking in one of his letters of the two poems he says: - "I have written two tales, one from Boccaccio, called the Pot of Basil, and another called St. Agnes' Eve, on a popular superstition,"¹ which would lead us to a similar conclusion. Likewise, in another letter, when he says that he is "revising St. Agnes' Eve and studying Italian,"² it is Ariosto whom he is reading and not Boccaccio.³

In the realm of English Literature, the four men whom Keats loved best and after whom he modeled his poetry to a very large extent, are the four that had little influence on the classicists but were even considered crude and inelegant, namely, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare.

The chivalric atmosphere of Chaucer, the quaint melody of his verse, his intimacy with nature and his deep sympathy with men and women are ever sources of unfailing delight to Keats. After reading the Floure and the Lefe in 1817, he gives a fitting expression of his opinion concerning it in the sonnet which he wrote at the close. "If my memory does not betray me," says Charles Cowden Clarke, "this charming out-door fancy-scene was

¹ To Mr. Bailey, 1819. Houghton Ed. P. 214.
² To John Taylor, Sept. 5, 1819. P. 319, Cam. Ed.
³ I have been unable to obtain an English translation or even an Italian copy of Filocolo so that it is impossible to determine the resemblance between the stories first-hand.
Keats' first introduction to Chaucer. Certain I am that Troilus and Cresseide was an after acquaintance and clearly do I remember his approbation of the favorite passages that I had marked."¹ In his later years, Chaucer's sympathy with humanity especially appeals to him. "I am more at home," he writes in 1819, "amongst men and women, I would rather read Chaucer than Ariosto."² Nowhere in Keats' poetry do we find the use of the stanza-form³ of which Chaucer was so fond, but in Endymion and in other poems he does use the heroic couplet, not in the fixed and purely metrical sense of Pope but in the free and flowing style of its earlier form in the hands of the master. From the beginning of his acquaintance until the close, always the nature descriptions, as in Spenser, bring a note of response from the kindred spirit of Keats. Chaucer speaks of the daisies, 'white and red';⁴ Keats of the daisy vermeil "rimm'd and white".⁵ There is a simplicity and naturalness about these descriptions that left its impress upon the writings of the young poet.

More than any other one writer, was Spenser the poetical god of Keats. At the age of fifteen, he was first introduced to him through Charles Cowden Clarke, who read to him the Epithalamium in the afternoon and gave him the Fairie Queen to take home with him the same evening. Mr. Clarke himself writes of the incident:—

¹ Atlantic. 7:92-3.
² To John Taylor, Nov. 17, 1819. P. 415, Cam. Ed.
³ ababcc.
⁴ Prologue Legend of Good Women, Lls. 39-41.
⁵ Endy. L. 50.
"That night he took away with him the first volume of the Fairie Queen, and went through it as I told his biographer, Monckton Milnes, "as a young horse would through a spring meadow, ramping!" Like a true poet too, - a poet "born, not manufactured", - a poet in grain - he especially singled out the epithets, for that felicity and power in which Spenser is so eminent. He hoisted himself up and looked burly and dominant as he said - "What an image that is - Sea-shouldering whales!" The fairy-land into which he was ushered through the doorway which Spenser opened enchanted him. He seemed to live in a world apart and from this book more than any other he received the inspiration to try his skill in the poetic art. In his imitation of Spenser, his earliest poem, in Specimen of an Induction to a Poem, in Calidore and others, there is a noticeable tinge of the Spenserian spirit. The stanza-form of Spenser attracted him and he tried it, with the greatest success in his Eve of St. Agnes, the mediaeval atmosphere of which poem seeming especially to make such a stanza fitting and appropriate. From him, Keats learned the effectiveness of detailed nature description. Numerous instances of this similar love for the specific instead of the general in nature may easily be noted, but the following is sufficient. In Spenser there are the lines:-

". . . . . the Violet pallid blew,
The little Dazie that at evening closes,
The virgin Lillie, and the Primrose trew,

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With store of vermeil Roses.\textsuperscript{1}

Compare these with the following from Keats:-

"The daisy and the marigold;
White-plumed lilies, and the first
Hedge-grown primrose that hath burst;
Shaded hyacinth, alway
Sapphire queen of the mid-May."\textsuperscript{2}

Even more minute influences of Spenser may be noted. The shepherd hero of Endymion seems to give one a faint echo of the love-sick youth in the Shepherd's Calendar. There is a chivalric and reverential treatment of women in the poems of Keats that takes its coloring to some extent from the writings of his master. In the Fairie Queen are the lines:-

"And by her in a line a milk white lamb she laid
So pure and innocent, as same lamb
She was in life."\textsuperscript{3}

Keats, in his poem Woman! When I Behold Thee Flippant, Vain, expresses a similar idea:-

"God! she is like a milk white lamb that bleats
For man's protection."

In the Epithalamium is the passage:\textsuperscript{4}

"So well it her beseems that ye would weene
Some angell she had been."

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\textsuperscript{1} Fairie Queen. Bk. I, Canto 1 - IV - V.
\textsuperscript{2} Fancy. Lls. 48-52.
\textsuperscript{3} Bk. I, Canto 1 - IV - V.
\textsuperscript{4} Lls. 152-3.
"She seem'd a splendid angel."
is Keats' description of Madeline.
Likewise again in the Epithalamium are the lines:—
"Her long loose yellow locks lyke golden wyre,
Sprinkled with perle."
which in all probability either consciously or unconsciously influenced Keats in the line in the Eve of St. Agnes:—
"Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees."
Altho not a close parallel, yet in the line:—
"Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eye,"² there seems to be the same note, more tersely expressed, as in "An Hymn to Honour and Beauty":—³
"For that same goodly hew of white and red,
With which the cheeks are sprinkled shal decay,
And those sweete rosy leaves so fairely spred
Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away
To that they were, even to corrupted clay."

It was early in Keats poetical career that he writes:— "I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare and as I have lately upon Milton,"⁴ and the notes⁵ which he has written to Paradise Lost testify to his keen appreciation of the great epic. Later, however, the restraint and studied art seemed to irritate him. He gave up Hyperion because there were too many "Miltonic

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¹ Lls. 154-5.
² Ode to a Nightingale. L. 29. ³ Lls. 96-99.
⁴ To Reynolds, April 27, 1818. P. 299, Cam. Ed.
⁵ Forman Ed. III, 19-30.
inversions in it". ¹ In 1819 he writes:— "I prefer the native music of it (Chatterton's English) to Milton's, cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written, but is the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another verse alone." Nevertheless, Keats learned much in dignity and poetic expression from Milton, as is seen in Hyperion and the more rugged of his sonnets. His blank verse is smooth and dignified although it does not possess the majestic swing of Milton. The debate of the fallen Titans in Book II, as has been often pointed out, seems to have been modeled on the debate of the fallen angels. The passage:—

"O ye whose charge
It is to hover round our pleasant hills!
Whose congregated majesty so fills
My boundly reverence." ³

has much of the strength of the great poet. Keats, at times, follows his use of the double negative as in: "They cut away no formless monster's head," in Isabella. ⁴

A number of times the meter of Milton's minor poems is used and in one poem, A Fragment, it is quite evident that Keats had in mind the combination of the spirit of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, with the spirit of L'Allegro dominant. The Passage begins:—

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¹ To Reynolds, Sept. 22, 1819. P. 408, Cam. Ed.
² Sept. 22. P. 404, Cam. Ed.
³ Sleep and Poetry. Lls. 206-209.
⁴ L - 1 2.
"Welcome joy, and welcome sorrow,
Lethe's weed and Herme's feather.
Come today, and come tomorrow,
I do love you both together." etc.\(^1\)

William Shakespeare is the one writer who follows closely upon Spenser in the affections of Keats and who eventually gains first place in the poets esteem. The human passions as portrayed by Shakespeare, appealed to the poet more and more as he reached manhood. There are numerous passages in Keats' letters which show his deep love for and keen appreciation of the works of the great poet and dramatist. In 1817, he writes: "I never quite despair and I read Shakespeare – indeed I shall I think never read any other Book much."\(^2\) And again while staying in Southhampton: "I felt rather lonely this morning at Breakfast so I went and unboxed a Shakespeare – 'There's my Comfort!'\(^3\)" I have great reason to be content for thank God I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths",\(^4\) he says at still another time. In a very significant passage he sums up his estimate of the power of the man: "The genius of Shakespeare was an innate universality: wherefore he laid the achievements of human intellect prostrate beneath his indolent and kingly gaze; he could do easily men's utmost - his plan of tasks to come was not of this world. If what --o--

\(^1\) Mr. Forman compares the first line of the Ode on Solitude, - 'To one who has been long in the city pent,' to the line in P. L. IX-445 - "As one who long in populous city pent."

\(^2\) To Haydon, May 11, P. 260, Cam. Ed.

\(^3\) April 15, 1817. P. 256, Cam. Ed.

\(^4\) Feb. 27, 1818. P. 289, Cam. Ed.
he proposed to do hereafter would not in the idea, answer the aims, how tremendous must have been his conception of ultimates.¹ Keats expresses a keen delight in the beauties of the sonnets. "They seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally"² and it is undoubtedly from Shakespeare and from Milton that he receives his interest in the sonnet form. Moreover his own thought was intensified and his power of expression strengthened with the study of Shakespeare as the following passage would indicate:-

"O that the earth were empty, as when Cain
Had no perplexity to hide his head!
Or that the sword of some brave enemy
Had put a sudden stop to my hot breath,
And hurl'd me down the illimitable gulf
Of times past, unremembered."³

A closer resemblance still may be noted by comparing certain passages of the two writers. In the poem on Fancy, the line:-

"... ... ... ... ... ... hark
'Tis the early April lark,"⁴ immediately calls to mind Shakespeare's line:-

"Hark! Hark! the lark."

In the Ode to a Nightingale is the following:-

"White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;

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¹ Forman Ed. III - 14.
² Nov. 22, 1817. P. 276, Cam. Ed.
³ Otho the Great. Lls. 1-5, Act III, Sc. 1.
⁴ L. 44.
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine."

Of the four flowers mentioned in these four lines, three are identical with those in the following three from Shakespeare:

"Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine."

In Endymion, Book II, l. 7, the line:— "One kiss brings honey-dew from buried days," recalls the line in Julius Caesar Act II, Sc. I, l. 230:— "Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber."

Although the time has not permitted a careful study of their influence, yet this chapter can hardly be closed without at least mentioning the pleasure which Keats took in the perusal of the works of Thomas Chatterton and James Thomson, writers undisputably of the Romantic school.

Keats' admiration for Chatterton was early and constant. To him he dedicates Endymion and bewails his early fate in an Ode in which he speaks of him as one in whose eye "Genius mildly flashed and high debate" and whose"voice, majestic and elate, melted in dying numbers." No doubt the tragic gloom surrounding the life of this child of sorrow interested Keats not a little in his favor and yet he had a genuine admiration for his poetry. He dedicates Endymion"with every feeling of pride and regret and with a bowed mind to the memory of the most English of poets except Shakespeare, Thomas Chatterton." In 1819, he writes:

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1 Lls. 46-49. 2 Ts. Chatterton. Lls. 4, 5, and 6.
3 P. 46, Cam. Ed.
"The purest English, I think, - or what ought to be the purest - is Chatterton's. The language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's Gallicisms and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's, cut by feet."¹

In 1819, Keats writes: - "This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless - I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's Castle of Indolence - my passions are all asleep, from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me, to a delightful sensation, about three degrees on this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lilies, I should call it languor, but as I am I must call it laziness."² This touch of indolence in his nature was especially susceptible to the atmosphere of such a poem as Thomson's. In his own Ode on Indolence there is a distinct echo of that "don't care" spirit of the longer allegorical poem. The expression: -

"And flowery beds that slumbrous influence kést
From poppies breathed."³

seems especially to have appealed to Keats, for numerous instances of a similar use of the poppy occurs, such as:- "Sleep, quiet with poppy coronet;"⁴ "Drowsed with the fume of poppies;"⁵

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¹ Sept. 22, 1819. P. 404, Cam. Ed.
² To Geo. Keats, March 19, 1819. P. 362, Cam. Ed.
³ Canto I, III, llis. 21-22.
⁴ Sleep and Poetry. L. 348.
⁵ Autumn, II, L. 6.
"Weather of poppy buds,"¹ "Ere thy poppy throws

Around my bed its dewy charities,"² and

"Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd."³

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¹ Sleep and Poetry, L. 14.
² To Sleep. Lls. 7 and 8.
³ Eve of St. Agnes. XXVII, L. 3.
CHAPTER TWO.

Without attempting a concise definition of the term Romanticism, it is the intention, in this chapter, merely to point out the traits which Keats possessed, which are conceded fittingly to be classed under the main head of Romanticism.

First of all, Keats is the poet who exalts the imagination. "A smile was on his countenance; he seemed to common lookers on, like one who dream'd of idleness in groves Elysian,"¹ are lines which characterize him as well as the shepherd hero Endymion. It is impossible to conceive of one with such a nature, as a skillful apprentice to a surgeon, and Keats himself frankly admits his unfitness for such an occupation when he tells Charles Cowden Clarke that "the other day, during the lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray; and I was off with them to Oberon and fairy-land."² Mr. Colvin, likewise, tells the story told by Brown, - that when once opening a man's artery, Keats did it with the utmost nicety, but reflecting on what passed through his mind at the time, his dexterity seemed a miracle, and he never took up the lancet again.³

Keats writes concerning himself and Lord Byron:- "he describes what he sees, I describe what I imagine."⁴ He sees, and sees

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¹ Endymion, Bk. I. Lls. 175-177.
² Atlantic, 1861. VII, 90.
³ Life of John Keats, p.16.
⁴ To George and Georgiana Keats, Sept. 18, 1819. P. 399. Cam. Ed.
clearly, visions visible to himself alone. Endymion is made up of one imaginary scene after the other, and, after the first shock of surprise at such a bewildering maze of images, it is evident that each scene is there entire, clear and distinct, and while this early exuberance of imagery is toned down somewhat in his later productions, yet the same imaginary element is still dominant.

"Spenser himself," says Leigh Hunt, "was not remoter, in my eyes, from all the commonplaces of life than my new friend. Our whole talk was made up of idealisms. In the street we were in the thick of the old woods."\(^1\) Regarding the truth of the things he imagined, Keats writes:— "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not."\(^2\) In this plea for the Imagination as the basis for poetry, he is in direct opposition to the ideals of the Augustan age and resolutely defends his position in the following passage from Sleep and Poetry.

"Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood that the high
Imagination cannot freely fly
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?
From the clear space of ether, to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning

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\(^1\) Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, II, 43-44.
\(^2\) To Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817. P. 274, Cam. Ed.
Of Jove's large eyebrow, to the tender greening
Of April meadows? here her altar shone,
E'en in this isle; and who could paragon
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
Of harmony, to where it aye will poise
Its mighty self of convoluting sound,
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,
Eternally around a dizzy void?
Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloy'd
With honours; nor had any other care
Than to sing out and soothe their wavy hair.

Could all this be forgotten? Yes, a schism
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism
Made great Apollo blush for this his land
Men were thought wise who could not understand
His glories; with a puling infant's force
They sway'd about upon a rocking-horse
And thought it Pegasus."

With Imagination as the instrument, Keats, likewise, believes
that the chief aim of poetry is the creation of beauty, or in
other words, poetry for poetry's sake alone. There is not the
slightest trace of didacticism in any of his poems, and here again

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Lls. 163-167.
The following from the Epistle to George Felton Matthew
shows well Keats' imaginative powers:-
"That I am oft in doubt whether at all
I shall again see Phoebus in the morning
Or flush'd Aurora in the roseate dawning!"
he refuses allegiance to the ideals of the Augustan age. "We hate poetry," he writes in 1818, "that has a palpable design upon us and if we do not agree seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul."\(^1\) And again: "The Genius of poetry must work out its own salvation. It cannot be matured by law and precept but by sensation and watchfulness in itself."\(^2\) The poetic impulse is a passion with Keats, so intense at times as to be scarcely endured unless relieved by composition. In 1817, he writes:- "I find I cannot exist without Poetry, without eternal Poetry - half the day will not do - the whole of it. .... I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan. I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late - the Sonnet overleaf did me good. I slept the better last night for it."\(^3\) No English poet ever had a higher and more exalted conception of what poetry should be than Keats. The summit seems at times far beyond his reach but so intense is his desire to gain

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Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream:
Or a rapt seraph in a moonlight beam;
Or again witness what with thee I've seen,
The dew by fairy feet swept from the green,
After a night of some quaint jubilee
Which every elf and fay had come to see:
When bright processions took their airy march
Beneath the curv'd moon's triumphal arch."

\(^1\) To Reynolds, Feb. 3, 1818. P. 285, Cam. Ed.
\(^2\) To James Hessey, Oct. 9, 1818. P. 329, Cam. Ed.
\(^3\) To Reynolds, Apr. 18, 1817. P. 258, Cam. Ed.
it that it seems to him there can be no fiercer hell than the failure in this great object. It is the fondest hope of his life to see his name with those of the greatest of the English poets. His own keen instinct for self-criticism would not permit him to harbor delusive hopes and he knew well that Endymion would not measure up to the ideals and standards and that the good he would get from his summer's employment would be the fruit of experience which he might gather in his next poem. However, he was scarcely prepared for the fierce attack which its publication provoked, but, as one whose ideal is even higher than that of his critics, he did not despair, and, merely shrinking a little more from the eye of the public, he gave himself up even more completely to developing what he felt to be his great talent. Keats never shows a desire for popularity. "I never wrote one single line of Poetry with the least shadow of public thought"¹ he writes in 1818, and in the same letter he says:— "I have not the slightest feel of humility toward the public - or to anything in existence, but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of Great Men. When I am writing for myself, for the mere sake of the moment's enjoyment, perhaps nature has its course with me - but a Preface is written to the Public; a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility." "I feel assured," he says at still another time, "I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labor should be burnt every Morning,

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¹ Apr. 9, 1818. P. 296, Cam. Ed.
and no eye ever shine upon them."  

There is in Keats much of the purely sensuous. "Oh for a life of Sensation rather than of thoughts," is a much quoted sentence of his and sets forth admirably this trait of his character. At one time, he is writing to a friend with one hand and holding in the other a nectarine. "Good God how fine. It went down soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy - all its delicious embonpoint melted down my throat like a large beatified Strawberry." "I should like now to promenade round your Gardens," he writes to his sister Fanny, - "apple tasting - pear tasting - plum-judging - apricot-nibbling - peach scrumching - nectarine-sucking and Melon-carving. I also have a great feeling for antiquated cherries full of sugar cracks - and a white currant tree kept for company. I admire lolling on a lawn by a water lilled pond to eat white currants

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1 Oct. 27, 1818. P. 336, Cam. Ed.  
In a letter to John Taylor, February 27, 1818, Keats lays down the following interesting axioms for poetry:- First, "I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; It should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance. Second, Its touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of Imagery should, like the sun, come natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what poetry should be, than to write it - and this leads me to Another axiom - That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all."-

2 To Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817. P. 274, Cam. Ed.

3 To Charles Dilke, Sept. 22, 1819. P. 410, Cam. Ed.
and see gold-fish."\(^1\)

Keats' feeling for pleasure is largely Epicurean. He enjoys to its utmost the pleasure of the hour\(^2\) with no thought of what is to follow.

"So when I am in a voluptuous vein,
I pillow my head on the sweets of the rose,
And list to the tale of the wreath and the chain,
Till its echoes depart, then I sink to repose."\(^3\)

Even before the inroads of disease had weakened the more manly fibre, the letters to Fanny Brawne are full of the most sensuous feeling. "Ask yourself, my love, whether you are not very cruel to have entramelled me so," he writes, "so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it - make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me - write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been.

. . . . . I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days - three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain."\(^4\)

The master passion of Keats, however, the one which controlled and subdued all others is not, as Mr. Arnold so admirably expresses it, "a passion of the sensuous or sentimental man, is not a passion of the sentimental poet. It is an intellectual and spiritual

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\(^1\) Aug. 28, 1819. P. 391-2, Cam. Ed.

\(^2\) To Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817. P. 274, Cam. Ed.

\(^3\) On Receiving a Curious Shell and a Copy of Verses.

\(^4\) July 3, 1819. P. 380, Cam. Ed.
passion."¹ He is the "Esthete", holding as his motto:

"Tis the eternal Law

That first in Beauty should be first in Might,"² and discerning clearly the relation between Truth and Beauty. "I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty,"³ he writes. With him, as he felt it must be with all great poets, the sense of Beauty "overcomes every other consideration or rather obliterates all consideration."⁴ He speaks of his "yearning passion" for the beautiful⁵ and certainly the mission of his poetry is to impart to others something of his own love of beauty.

"... Yes in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits,"⁶

is the actual experience of Keats.

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever;
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness,"

is a fitting introduction to the poem Endymion, which is a network of flowers and bowers, dazzling with its intricate maze of beauty. In this, he has permitted his ardor to surfeit the pages,

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¹ Essays in Criticism, Second Series. P. 115.
² Hyperion. Bk.II, 11s. 228-229.
³ To Geo. and Georgiana Keats, Dec. 31, 1816. P. 345, Cam.
⁵ To Geo. and Georgiana Keats, Oct. 25, 1818. P. 335, Cam.
but in his Eve of St. Agnes,¹ his more mature work, there is a
wealth of beautiful imagination which at no time causes a feeling
of satiety. In 1820, when Keats felt that his struggle against
disease was hopeless, he writes:— "I have lov'd the principle of
beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made my-
self remembered."² He has made himself remembered, even in words
and phrases which he has so richly weighted down with beautiful
suggestions, such as the following:— "the honied middle of the
night;"³ "the music yearning like a God in pain;"⁴ "the maiden's
chamber, silken, hush'd and chaste;"⁵ "And still she slept an
azure lidded sleep;"⁶ "and catch soft floatings from a faint
heart hymning;"⁷ and,

"... ... ... ... her heart was voluble

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¹ Leigh Hunt in his book, Imagination and Fancy, has the
following admirable characterization of this poem:-
"There is nothing of the conventional craft of arti-
ficial writers; no heaping up of words or smiles for
their own sakes or the rhyme's sake; no gaudy common
places; no borrowed airs of earnestness; no tricks
of inversion; no substitution of reading or of ingen-
ious thoughts for feeling or spontaneity; no irrele-
vancy or unfitness of any sort. All flows out of sin-
cerity and passion. The writer is as much in love
with the heroine as his hero is; his description of
the painted window, however gorgeous, has not an untrue
or superfluous word; and the only speck of fault in
the whole poem arises from an excess of emotion." —
P. 287.

² To Fanny Brawne, Feb. 19, 1820. P. 428, Cam. Ed.

³ Eve of St. Agnes, VI, L. 4.

⁴ Ibid., VII, L. 2.

⁵ Ibid., XXI, L. 7.

⁶ Ibid., XXX, L. 1.

⁷ Sleep and Poetry, L. 34.
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell."

Keats' idealistic worship of beauty naturally influenced the viewpoint from which he looked upon woman-kind. Beauty, again, in appearance and action is his criterion. "I am certain," he writes in 1818, "I have not a right feeling toward women - at this moment I am striving to be just to them, but I cannot - Is it because they fall so far beneath my boyish imagination? When I was a schoolboy I thought a fair woman a pure goddess: my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not. I have no right to expect more than their reality. I thought them ethereal, above men - I find them perhaps equal - great by comparison is very small." And again in a similar vein: - "These things combined with the opinion I have of the generality of women - who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar-Plum than my time, form a barrier against Matrimony which I rejoice in." This is not because Keats' regard for women is low or contemptible, but rather the result of an opposite cause. He does not attribute to them ethereal qualities as does Shelley, and yet his ideal is of one fitted to occupy the throne of a goddess, and when measured by this, the generality of women disappointed and disgusted him. An affectation of fashion and polite-

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1 Eve of St. Agnes, XXIII.
2 To Benjamin Bailey, July 18, 1818. P. 318, Cam. Ed.
3 To George and Georgiana Keats, October 25, 1818. P. 335, Cam. Ed.
ness he feels to be prevalent among them and he looks upon it with scorn. A woman without beauty jars the aesthetic sensibility of Keats. At one time he writes: "I never intend to spend any time with Ladies unless they are handsome - you lose time to no purpose." "Let my eyes be fed", he says, "or I'll never go out to dinner anywhere." A beautiful woman kept him awake at night as might a tune of Mozart's, and he tells Fanny Brawne that without her beauty, it would have been impossible for him to have loved her. "Henry is wife bound"; he writes in 1820, "there is no getting him out. I am sorry he has not a prettier wife: indeed 'tis a shame; she is not half a wife. I think I could find some of her relations in Buffon, or Capt. Cook's voyages or the hieroglyphics in Moor's Almanack." Regarding his little niece, he writes to his sister-in-law: "She is sure to be a fine woman. Let her only have delicate nails both on hands and feet and both as small as a May-fly's, who will live you his life on a 3 square

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1 Jan. 15, 1820, he writes to his sister-in-law: "If the American ladies are worse than the English, they must be very bad. You say you would like your Emily brought up here. You had better bring her up yourself. You know a good number of English ladies: what incomium could you give of half a dozen of them? The greater part seem to me downright American. I have known more than one Mrs. Audobon. Her affectation of fashion and politeness cannot transcend ours. Look at our Cheapside tradesman's sons and daughters - only fit to be taken off by a plague."

2 To Geo. and Georgiana K., Oct. 29, 1818. P. 164-5, Houghton Ed.

3 Ibid.

4 To Geo. Keats, Oct. 29, 1818. P. 164-5, Houghton Ed.

5 July 8, 1819. P. 382, Cam. Ed.

6 To Georgiana Keats, Jan. 28, 1820. P. 422, Cam. Ed.
inch of oak-leaf: and nails she must have, quite different from
the market-women here, who plough into butter and make a quarter
pound taste of it."\textsuperscript{1} Keats voices his ideal of womanhood in the
following:

"Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair;
Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast,
Are things on which the dazzled senses \textit{rest}
Till the fond, fixed eyes, forget they stare.
From such fine pictures, heavens! I cannot dare
To turn my admiration, though unpossess'd
They be of what is worthy, - and virtues rare.
Yet these I leave as thoughtless as a lark;
These lures I straight forget, - e'en ere I dine,
Or thrice my palate moisten: but when I mark
Such charms with mild intelligences shine,
My ear is open like a greedy shark,
To catch the tunings of a voice divine."\textsuperscript{2}

The wife of his brother George, a lady of a very attractive
personality, seems to have approached more nearly than any other
to this ideal conception of womanhood. "I have a tenderness for
you," he writes, "and an admiration which I feel to be as great
and more chaste than I can have for any woman in the world. You
will mention Fanny (his sister) - her character is not formed,
hers identity does not press upon me as yours does. I hope from
the bottom of my heart that I may one day feel as much for her as

\textsuperscript{1} To Georgiana Keats, Sept. 18, 1819. P. 396, Cam. Ed.
\textsuperscript{2} Woman! When I Behold thee Flippant, Vain.
I do for you."¹ In September, 1819, Keats writes:— "Nothing strikes me so forcibly with a sense of the ridiculous as love. A man in love I do think cuts the sorriest figure in the world: queer when I know a poor fool to be really in pain about it, I could burst out laughing in his face. His pathetic visage becomes irresistible,"² yet it is only a short time until he yields completely to the fascination of Fanny Brawne and is inspired with such a passion as only one of his deeply intense nature could be inspired with, and which ate into the very life of his being with almost as deadly effect as the disease which showed to him the utter hopelessness of his passion. His letters to her are full of the most intense feeling,³ but, with a reticence in harmony with his sensitive nature, he never mentions his love for her to any save to Charles Armitage Brown, nor, likewise, is it seen in his poetry, the best of which was composed or partly composed after he had come under her influence.

There is, in Keats, much of the desire to escape from the "here and the now, to the not here and the not now". He feels that a man should have the fine-point of his soul taken off to live in this world and at one time he says:— "I hate the world: it batters too much the wings of my self-will and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it."⁴

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¹ To George and Georgiana Keats, October 13 or 14, 1818. P. 329, Cam. Ed.
² To George Keats, Sept. 17, 1819. P. 394, Cam. Ed.
⁴ To Fanny Brawne, July 27, 1819. P. 385, Cam. Ed.
"O that I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever and the fret,"^1

lines in which he gives utterance to this vague longing, as he
does likewise, in the following:—

"O, for an age so sheltered from annoy,
That I may never know how change the moons,
Or hear the voice of busy commonsense."^2

There is much of this impatience for material things in Keats.
Business affairs irritate him. In regard to money matters, he
writes in 1819:— "I have all my life thought little of these
matters - they seem not to belong to me. It may be a proud sen-
tence; but by heaven I am as entirely above all matters of interest
as the sun is above the earth."^3

He shows his lack of business
instinct in his transactions with Haydon, when he accepts a bond
merely for the satisfaction of his friend, but will hear no mention
of interest. In regard to borrowing money, in the same letter he
writes:— "I shall have a little trouble in procuring the Money
and a great ordeal to go through - no trouble indeed to any one
or ordeal either - I mean I shall have to go to town some thrice
and stand in the Bank an hour or two - to me worse than anything
in Dante - I should have less chance with the people around me

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^1 To a Nightingale, Lls. 19-23.
^2 Ode on Indolence.
^3 To Fanny Brawne, Aug. 17, 1819. P. 389, Cam. Ed.
than Orpheus had with the Stones.\textsuperscript{1}

In Keats' earlier years, he seems to have been much in Society and enjoyed it, but as his passion for poetry develops, he retires more and more within himself. "I have written this," he writes in 1818, "that you might see I have my share of the highest pleasures and that though I may choose to pass my days alone I shall be no Solitary. . . . . Think of my pleasure in Solitude in comparison of my commerce with the world - there I am a child - there they do not know me, not even my most intimate acquaintance - I give into their feelings as though I were refraining from irritating a little child. . . . . everyone thinks he sees my weak side against my will when in truth it is with my will - I am content to be thought all this because I have in my own breast so great a resource."\textsuperscript{2} He wishes for solitude that he may give himself entirely to the working out of his dream to become a great writer. "How a solitary life engenders pride and egocentricism. True - I know it does: but this pride and egocentricism will enable me to write finer things than any one else could - so I will indulge it,"\textsuperscript{3} and again in a similar vein: - "You would not find me at all unhappy in it (solitude), as all my thoughts and feelings which are of the selfish nature, every day continue to make me more iron - I am convinced more and more that fine writing is next to fine doing the top thing in the world. . . . . The more I know what my diligence may in time effect the more does my heart dis-
tend with Pride and Obstinacy - I feel it in my power to refuse the poisonous suffrage of a public."¹ No doubt the stinging criticism which his first volume of poems provoked, had something to do with his attitude toward Society and yet to one of the intense nature of Keats, the vapidness of such a life would sooner or later have become apparent. In 1820, he writes to his sister-in-law in America:— "I dare say you would be able to suck out more amusement than I am able to do. To me it is all as dull here as Louisville could be. I am tired of the theatres. Almost all of the parties I may chance to fall into I know by heart. I know all the different styles of talk in different places, - what subjects will be started, how it will proceed like an acted play, from the first to the last act. If I go to Hunt's I run my head into many tunes heard before, old puns, and old music: to Haydon's worn out discourses of poetry and painting. The Miss ———— I am afraid to speak to, for fear of some sickly reiteration of phrase or sentiment. When they were at the dance the other night I tried manfully to sit near and talk to them, but to no purpose; and if I had it would have been to no purpose still. My question or observation must have been an old one, and the rejoinder very antique indeed. At Dilke's I fall foul of politics. 'Tis best to remain aloof from people and like their good parts without being eternally troubled with the dull process of their every-day lives. . . . . I hope while I am young to live retired in the country. When I grow in years and have a right to be idle, --o--

¹ To Reynolds, Aug. 25, 1819. P. 390, Cam. Ed.
I shall enjoy cities more.\(^1\) His was the idea of luxurious solitude. "I adore fine weather," he writes, "Give me books, fruit, French wine and fine weather and a little music out of doors and I can pass a summer very quietly without caring much about Fat Louis, fat Regent or the duke of Wellington."\(^2\) This is further seen in his Sonnet to Solitude. He does not wish to be alone among buildings but in -

"boughs pavilioned, where the deer’s swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell."\(^3\)

A little while before he died, Keats said that he felt the "daisies growing over him"\(^4\) and this love for nature in its free and natural aspect was a passion with him throughout his life. In his last illness, he writes: - "I think of green fields: I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy - their shapes and colors are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy. I have seen foreign flowers in hothouses, of the most beautiful nature, but I do not care a straw for them. The simple flowers of our Spring are what I want to see again,"\(^5\) and again he writes of one of those spring flowers: - "I hope you have good store of double violets - I think they are the Princesses of flowers and in a shower

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\(^1\) To Georgiana Keats, Jan. 15, 1820. P. 421, Cam. Ed.
\(^2\) To Fanny Keats, Aug. 28, 1819. P. 391, Cam. Ed.
\(^3\) Ode to Solitude.
\(^4\) Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, II, P. 47.
\(^5\) To James Rice, Feb. 16, 1820, P. 426, Cam. Ed.
of rain almost as fine as barley sugar drops are to a school-boy's tongue."¹ The fine weather and bursting life of the Spring acted almost as an intoxicant upon the spirit of Keats. "I know not what I should do without a sunshiny morning now and then - it clears up one's spirits,"² he writes, and again: - "The thrushes are singing now as if they would speak to the winds because their big brother Jack, the Spring, was not far off."³ Nor did the more sober beauties of the autumn season fail to receive their share of appreciation. "How beautiful the season is now," he writes in September, 1819, "How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather - Dian skies - I never liked stubble-fields so much as now - Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow, a stubble field looks warm - in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it,"⁴ and then follows his poem to Autumn which is one of the most sympathetic apprecia-
tions of this season in all literature. In Endymion, there are numerous passages showing the pleasure he felt in the moon. I quote merely the following: -

"What is there in thee, Moon? that thou shouldst move
My heart so potently? When yet a child
I oft have dried my tears when thou hast smiled,
Thou seemest my sister: hand in hand we went

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¹ To Fanny Keats, Apr. 13, 1819. P. 374, Cam. Ed.
² To George Keats, Dec. 30, 1818. P. 344, Cam. Ed.
⁴ To Reynolds, Sept. 22, P. 402, Cam. Ed.
From eve to morn across the firmament.\(^1\)

Keats has a genuine fondness for lakes and mountains. In 1818, he writes:-'...the near Hills were not very lofty but many of them steep, beautifully wooded - the distant mountains in the Hebrides very grand, the Saltwater Lakes coming up between Crags and Islands full tide and scarcely ruffled - sometimes appearing as one large Lake, sometimes as three distinct ones in different directions.'\(^2\) There are numerous passages in which he mentions his love for the sea. "I have found the ocean's music," he writes to Jane Reynolds, "varying (tho self-same) more than the passion of Timotheus, an enjoyment not to be put into words,"\(^3\) and again in the same letter:- "... in what mood and with what accompaniment do you like the sea best? ... But don't you think there is something extremely fine after sunset, when there are a few white clouds about and a few stars blinking - when the waters are ebbing, and the horizon a mystery?"\(^4\)

"O ye! who have your eyeballs vex'd and tir'd, Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea; O ye! whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude, Or fed too much with cloying melody, - Sit ye near some old cavern's mouth, and brood Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quired;"\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Endymion, Pk. III, Lls. 142-45.

\(^2\) To Thomas Keats, July 20, 1818. P. 317, Cam. Ed.

\(^3\) To Jane Reynolds, Sept. 14, 1817. P. 268, Cam. Ed.

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) On the Sea.
is further evidence of this same love. Indeed, Keats' poems are full of phrases showing his love for nature in her various aspects. I mention only a few of these:— "palmy fern and rushes fenny;"¹ "rain-scented eglantine;"² "the white boughs wreath'd and curl'd;"³ "the leafiness of dales;"⁴ "hedge-grown primrose;"⁵ "The clouds were pure and white as flocks new shorn, And fresh from the clear brook; sweetly they slept On the fields of heaven;"⁶ "Their scanty-leaved and finely tapering stems, Had not yet lost their starry diadems Caught from the early sobbing of the morn."⁷ and "All close they met again, before the dusk Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil."⁸ There is, in Keats, much of the Romantic moodiness and melancholy. In 1817, he speaks of his horrid "Morbidity of Temperament"⁹; and he realizes that this will be one of his greatest enemies in life. In the same year he writes again:— "Instead of

¹ Endymion, Bk. I, L. 80.
² Ibid., L. 100.
³ I Stood Tiptoe Upon a Little Hill, L. 140.
⁴ Sleep and Poetry, L. 7.
⁵ Fancy, L. 50.
⁶ I Stood Tiptoe Upon a Little Hill, Lls. 7-10.
⁷ Ibid., Lls. 4-6.
⁹ To Haydon, May 10, P. 261, Cam. Ed.
Poetry, I have a swimming in my head and feel the effects of a mental debauch, lowness of spirits, anxiety to go on without the power to do so which does not at all tend to my ultimate progression.¹ This is before a series of unfortunate circumstances had surrounded the life of Keats. In the spring of 1818, he published Endymion which was so harshly criticised by the Blackwood's and the Quarterly magazine, the conservative reviews of the day. A little later, his brother George, with his wife, went to seek a more favorable fortune in America and Keats himself took a walking tour through Scotland, the fatigue and exposure of which brought on his fatal disease. In December of the same year, his brother Tom died of consumption and while he was still mourning his loss, the consuming passion for Fanny Brawne fastened its grip upon him. It is in the light of such facts that one realizes to how great an extent Keats has succeeded in placing his poetry apart from himself, for, save for a more subdued spirit, there is little evidence of the suffering he was enduring. It is likewise a proof of how completely he could forget himself when the poetic passion seized him. In his letters, however, the influence is plainly manifest. In 1818 he writes:— "However I am now so depressed that I have not an idea to put to paper - my hand feels like lead — and yet it is an unpleasant numbness, it does not take away the pain of existence."² At another time, he says that he is never alone without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death.³

¹ To Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, May 16, P. 262, Cam. Ed.
² To Benjamin Bailey, May 22, 1818. P. 303, Cam. Ed.
³ Ibid., June 10, 1818. P. 305, Cam. Ed.
Keats felt keenly how quickly and completely the course of his heretofore happy life had been changed. "Circumstances," he writes, "are like clouds continually gathering and bursting. While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events - while we are laughing it sprouts, it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck." It was in the year 1819 that he composed his Ode to a Nightingale, the whole atmosphere of which is that of delicate and exquisite melancholy, and in the same year he closes an Ode to Melancholy with the following:

"She dwells with Beauty - Beauty that must die:
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips;
Aye, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung."

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1 To George and Georgiana Keats, March 19, 1819. P. 362, Cam. Ed.
2 July 15, 1819, he writes to Fanny Brawne: - "You must have found out by this time I am a little given to bode ill like a raven: it is my misfortune and not my fault: it has proceeded from the general tenor of the circumstances of my life, and rendered every event suspicious."
Keats' ideas of religion were as yet vague and unformed when he died. There is much of a youthful rationalistic spirit in him and he seems casting about for some satisfactory conception of God. In one of his letters, after speaking of his admiration of Jesus as a man, he says:— "It is to be lamented that the history of Jesus was written and revised by Men interested in the pious frauds of Religion. Yet through all this I see his splendor. Even here, though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of, I am, however, young, writing at random, straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness, without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion." It is in "straining at these particles of light" that he toys with the Platonistic idea that the soul has forever existed and passes into an eternity beyond. In a letter to his brother, in 1819, he writes the following:— "The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is a vale of tears, from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven—What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you please 'The Vale of Soul Making.' Then you will find out the use of the world. . . . . I say 'Soul-Making'—Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence. There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. Intelligences are atoms of perception—they know and they see and they are pure,

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1 To George and Georgiana Keats, March 19, 1819. P. 363, Cam. Ed.
in short they are God - how then are Souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them - so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one; individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this? . . . . .

As various as the Lives of Men are - so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence. This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not offend our reason and humanity - I am convinced that many difficulties which Christians labour under would vanish before it - there is one which even now strikes me - the salvation of children. In them the spark or intelligence returns to God without any identity - it having had no time to learn of and be altered by the heart or seat of the human passions."¹ However, when Keats was wasting away with disease in Italy, this intellectual conception of religion seems not to have satisfied him. In his own words, Severn gives us the closing scene of his life. "... he said that he was sure why I held up so patiently was owing to my Christian faith, and that he was disgusted with himself for ever appearing before me in such a savage guise; that he now felt convinced how much every human being required the support of religion, that he might die decently. "Here am I," said he, "with desperation in death that would disgrace the commonest fellow. Now, my dear Severn, I am sure, if you could get some of the works of Jeremy Taylor to read to me, I might become really a Christian and leave the world in

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¹ To George and Georgiana Keats, Apr. 21 or 22, 1819. P. 369-70, Cam. Ed.
peace." I read some passages to him, and I could tell by the grasp of his dear hand that his mind was reviving. He was a great lover of Jeremy Taylor, and it did not seem to require much effort in him to embrace the Holy Spirit in those comforting works. Thus he gained strength of mind from day to day just in proportion as his poor body grew weaker and weaker. At last I had the consolation of finding him calm, trusting, and more prepared for his end than I was. . . . . . In all he then uttered he breathed a simple Christian spirit; indeed, I always think that he died a Christian, that "Mercy" was trembling on his dying lips and that his tortured soul was received by those Blessed Hands which could alone welcome it."  

The name of Keats is seldom connected with politics, and yet, the wise comments in his letters on this subject bring out more clearly the manly side of his nature and his keen intelligence. His insight into the problems of his country is clear and penetrating. Liberty is the keynote. "The more I know of men, the more I know how to value entire liberality in them," he writes, and in one of the few passages in his poetry which contain reference to contemporary subjects, patriotism is the theme:—

"In the long vista of the years to roll,
Let me not see our country's honour fade:
0 let me see our land retain her soul,
Her pride, her freedom; and not freedom's shade.

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1 Atlantic, II - 403.
2 To George and Georgiana Keats, Jan. 15, 1820. P. 420, Cam. Ed.
Let me not see the patriot's high bequest,
Great Liberty! how great in plain attire!
With the base purple of a court oppress'd,
Bowing her head and ready to expire."

In 1818, Keats writes to his brother George:— "Notwithstanding the part which the Liberals take in the cause of Napoleon, I cannot but think he has done more harm to the life of Liberty than any one else could have done: not that the divine right Gentlemen have done or intend to do any good — no they have taken a Lesson of him, and will do all the further harm he would have done without any of the good." Keats had an ideal conception of what a government should be, and he felt that in the gradual development of the years, the freedom of the individual would take place.

"All civilized countries," he writes in 1819, "become gradually more enlightened, and there should be a continual change for the better. Look at this country at present, and remember it when it was even thought impious to doubt the justice of a trial by combat. From that time there has been a gradual change. Three great changes have been in progress: first for the better, next for the worse, and a third for the better once more. The first was the gradual annihilation of the tyranny of the nobles, when kings found it their interest to conciliate the common people, elevate them and be just to them. . . . . . The change for the

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1 To Hope.

2 To George and Georgiana Keats, Oct. 14 or 15, 1818. P. 332, Cam. Ed.
worse in Europe was again this: the obligation of kings to the multitude began to be forgotten. . . . . The example of England and the liberal writers of France and England, sowed the seed of opposition to this tyranny, and it was swelling in the ground until it burst in the French Revolution. This had an unlucky termination. It put a stop to the rapid progress of free sentiments in England, and gave our Court hopes of turning back to the despotism of the eighteenth century. They have made a handle of this event in every way to undermine our freedom. They spread a horrid superstition against all innovation and improvement. . . . . You will see that I mean that the French Revolution put a temporary stop to this third change - the change for the better - Now it is in progress again, and I think it is an effectual one. This is no contest between Whig and Tory, but between right and wrong, ¹ and Keats expresses a sincere desire to put a "mite of help to the Liberal side of the question" before he dies. ²

Keats is aristocratic in intellectual tastes and culture but democratic in human sympathies. He brings his Liberal views in politics down to a practical basis in relation to his fellow men. His whole life to the very last act was one routine of unselfishness and consideration for the feelings of others. ³ There are numerous passages in his letters where he speaks of his desire to be of some service to the world. "I will speak of my views", he

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¹ To George and Georgiana Keats, Sept. 18, 1819. P. 398, Cam. Ed.
² To Charles Dilke, Sept. 22, 1819. P. 410, Cam. Ed.
³ C. C. Clarke, 7:100.
writes, "and of the life I purpose to myself. I am ambitious of doing the world some good. If I should be spared, that may be the work of maturer years." At another time:— "I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world—Some do it with their Society—some with their wit . . . . . and in a thousand ways, all dutiful to the command of great Nature—there is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study and thought—I will pursue it." He tells Reynolds that he "would jump down Aetna" for any great public good and writes to Shelley that the pursuit of beauty is only justified when accompanied by devotion to human service. Keats admires human nature but he does not like men. "I should like to compose things honorable to Men," he writes, —"but not fingerable over by Men." And at another time:— "Upon the whole I dislike mankind. Whatever people on the other side of the question may advance, they cannot deny that they are always surprised at hearing a good action and never a bad one." But, in regard to human nature, he says:— "We have all one human heart! There is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify; so that among these human creatures, there is continually some birth of new heroism; the pity is that we must wonder at it, as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish. I have no doubt but that thousands of people, never heard of, have

1 To Richard Woodhouse, Oct. 27, 1818. P. 337, Cam. Ed.
2 To John Taylor, Apr. 24, 1818. P. 298, Cam. Ed.
3 To Reynolds, Apr. 9, 1818. P. 297, Cam. Ed.
4 To Benjamin Haydon, Dec. 22, 1818. P. 349, Cam. Ed.
5 To Georgiana Keats, Jan. 15, 1820. P. 420, Cam. Ed.
had hearts completely disinterested.” In another passage, he shows insight into human nature when he says that there is not a man who may “not be lashed upon his weaker side. The best men have but a portion of good, a kind of spiritual yeast by which a man is propelled to strive and buffet with circumstances.”

This desire to be of service to the world did not lead Keats into the midst of men, but rather to a closer communion with nature, where he might receive inspiration to write the finest poetry it was possible for him to write, and in so doing, accomplish his part of the uplifting of mankind.

Though not a prominent trait, there is, in Keats, a genuine interest in the Middle Ages. "Manners and customs long since passed, whether among the Babylonians or the Bactrians are as real, or even more real than those among which I now live," he writes in 1818. There is an amusing allegorical passage in his letter to Messrs. Taylor and Hessey based on his having received a "dun" as he calls it:— "... . I shall immediately proceed to destroy some of the minor heads of that hydra the dun; to conquer which the knight need have no Sword Shield Cuirass, Cuisse Her-badgeon Spear Casque Greaves Palmrons spurs Chevron or any other scaly commodity, but he need only take the Bank-note of Faith and Cash of Salvation, and set out against the monster, invoking the aid of no Archimago or Urganda, but finger me the paper, light

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1 To George and Georgiana Keats, March 19, 1819. P. 363, Cam. Ed.

2 To Benjamin Bailey, Jan. 23, 1818. P. 283, Cam. Ed.

3 To George and Georgiana Keats, Dec. 31, 1818. P. 345, Cam. Ed.
as the Sibyl's leaves in Virgil, whereat the fiend skulks off with his tail between his legs. Touch him with this enchanted paper, and he whips you his head away as fast as a snail's horn - but then the horrid propensity he has to put it up again has discouraged many very valiant Knights. . . . . I think I could make a nice little allegorical poem, called 'The Dun', where we would have the Castle of Carelessness, the drawbridge of Credit, Sir Novelty Fashion's expedition against the City of Tailors, etc., etc.¹ In speaking of learning foreign languages, he mentions the "fund of curious literature of the Middle Ages"² to be gained from a knowledge of Latin.

"Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry;
For large white plumes are dancing in mine eye"³ is the beginning of a story which he never tells, but he does tell of armor-clad knights, "sweet-lipped ladies"⁴ and "light-footed damsels"⁵ He mentions his love for antiquities⁶ and, in several places, expresses his fondness for a Cathedral⁷ at Winchester built over fourteen hundred years ago, and for other ancient build-

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¹ To Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, May 16, 1817. P. 262, Cam. Ed.
² To George and Georgiana Keats, Sept. 22, 1817. P. 404, Cam. Ed.
³ Specimen of an Induction to a Poem.
⁴ Calidore. L. 135.
⁵ Specimen of an Induction to a Poem. L. 41.
⁷ To Fanny Brawne, Aug. 9, 1819. P. 387, Cam. Ed.
ings in that city. He speaks of "Gothic arches"¹ and of St. Cross as a very interesting old place because of its "Gothic tower."² "What do you say," he writes again, "to a black-letter Chaucer, printed in 1596? Aye, I have got one! I shall have it bound in Gothique - a nice sombre binding. It will go a little way to un-modernize."³ There is, in him, also, a mediaeval feeling for color, as the description of the tracery window in the Eve of St. Agnes gives manifest proof. "He told me," says Charles Cowden Clarke, "that when he first came upon the view of Loch Lomond, the sun was setting, the lake was in shade, and of a deep blue, and at the further end was a slash across it of deep orange."⁴

"Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst."⁵ is only one of the numerous instances of this, to be found in his poetry. There is, likewise, a touch of the strange and terrible as:-

"The long carpets rose along the gusty floor;"⁶

"And through it moan'd a ghostly undersong,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among;"⁷

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¹ Specimen of an Induction to a Poem. L. 33.
² To George and Georgiana Keats, Sept. 21, 1819. P. 403, Cam. Ed.
³ To Reynolds, May 3, 1818. P. 300, Cam. Ed.
⁵ Eve of St. Agnes. XXV, Lls. 4-5.
⁶ Ibid., XL, L. 9.
⁷ Isabella, XXXVI, Lls. 7-8.
"... then they would sigh,
And think of yellow leaves, of owlet's cry,
Of logs piled solemnly —¹
and:
"... then skeletons of man,
Of beast, behemoth, and leviathan,
And elephant, and eagle, and huge jaw
Of nameless monster. A cold leaden awe
These secrets struck into him."²

¹ Endymion, Bk. I, Lls. 181-183.
² Ibid., Bk. III, Lls. 133-137.
CONCLUSION.

Briefly summing up the material of the two preceding chapters, we have the following as proof of Keats' Romanticism: The only French writer whom he greatly admires is the Romantic Ronsard:
His interest in Greek is that of a true classicist as opposed to the classicist of the Augustan age: He takes the keenest delight in the mediaeval Italian writers, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Dante: Among the English poets, he passes for inspiration back of the eighteenth century to Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare: He exalts the imagination and the theory of poetry for poetry's sake alone: In him there is much of the purely sensuous on the one hand, and on the other, there is his "intellectual and spiritual" yearning for the Beautiful as his master passion: He has a deep and reverential regard for womanhood: He longs to escape from this matter-of-fact world to he knows not where: He has a dislike for the constraints of Society and turns to a life of Solitude: Nature, not improved by the hand of art, but in her free and simple aspect, appeals to him: A Romantic moodiness or Melancholy is easily traceable in his life: He is a non-conformist in religion and a Liberal in politics: He admires human nature and his life purpose is to be of service to the world; and lastly, he has a genuine interest in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Keats' life is clean morally: There is nothing of the violent, reactionary spirit of Byron and Shelley and there is developing a sturdy spirit of independence and a desire to make his own fortune in the world when the fatal disease which took his mother and
brother claimed him also. Conjectures as to what the final outcome would have been if Keats had continued to live, are useless, and yet his life was so full of promise, and the few poems he left, so perfect, that it is impossible to long banish such thoughts. If these three conservative qualities had had time to fuse with the Romantic phases of his nature, enriching and subduing, it is impossible almost to conceive what the result might have been, but true it is that during even the few years that he devoted to poetical activities, he gave sufficient evidence of his genius as to gain the name for himself of the most poetical of English poets.

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