

have devoted so much of his talent to describing trivial or unwholesome intrigues and posing as the hero of his own verses. The real tragedy of Byron's life is that he died just as he was beginning to find himself.

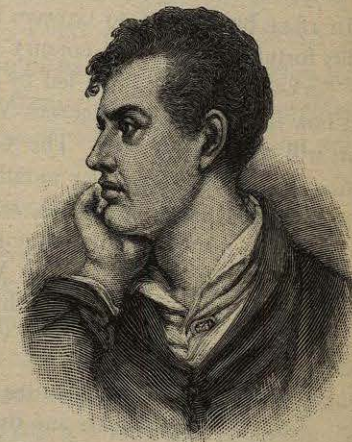
Life. Byron was born in London in 1788, the year preceding the French Revolution. We shall understand him better, and judge him more charitably, if we remember the tainted stock from which he sprang. His father was a dissipated spendthrift of unspeakable morals; his mother was a Scotch heiress, passionate and unbalanced. The father deserted his wife after squandering her fortune; and the boy was brought up by the mother who "alternately petted and abused" him. In his eleventh year the death of a granduncle left him heir to Newstead Abbey and to the baronial title of one of the oldest houses in England. He was singularly handsome; and a lameness resulting from a deformed foot lent a suggestion of pathos to his make-up. All this, with his social position, his pseudo-heroic poetry, and his dissipated life, — over which he contrived to throw a veil of romantic secrecy, — made him a magnet of attraction to many thoughtless young men and foolish women, who made the downhill path both easy and rapid to one whose inclinations led him in that direction. Naturally he was generous, and easily led by affection. He is, therefore, largely a victim of his own weakness and of unfortunate surroundings.

At school at Harrow, and in the university at Cambridge, Byron led an unbalanced life, and was more given to certain sports from which he was not debarred by lameness, than to books and study. His school life, like his infancy, is sadly marked by vanity, violence, and rebellion against every form of authority; yet it was not without its hours of nobility and generosity. Scott describes him as "a man of real goodness of heart, and the kindest and best feelings, miserably thrown away by his foolish contempt of public opinion." While at Cambridge, Byron published his first volume of poems, *Hours of Idleness*, in 1807. A severe criticism of the volume in the *Edinburgh Review* wounded Byron's vanity, and threw him into a violent passion, the result of which was the now famous satire called *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in which not only his enemies, but also Scott, Wordsworth, and nearly all the literary men of his day, were satirized in heroic couplets after the manner of Pope's *Dunciad*. It is only just to say that he afterwards made friends with

Scott and with others whom he had abused without provocation; and it is interesting to note, in view of his own romantic poetry, that he denounced all masters of romance and accepted the artificial standards of Pope and Dryden. His two favorite books were the Old Testament and a volume of Pope's poetry. Of the latter he says, "His is the greatest name in poetry . . . all the rest are barbarians."

In 1809 Byron, when only twenty-one years of age, started on a tour of Europe and the Orient. The poetic results of this trip were the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, with their famous descriptions of romantic scenery. The work made him instantly popular, and his fame overshadowed Scott's completely. As he says himself, "I awoke one morning to find myself famous," and presently he styles himself "the grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme." The worst element in Byron at this time was his insincerity, his continual posing as the hero of his poetry. His best works were translated, and his fame spread almost as rapidly on the Continent as in England. Even Goethe was deceived, and declared that a man so wonderful in character had never before appeared in literature, and would never appear again. Now that the tinsel has worn off, and we can judge the man and his work dispassionately, we see how easily even the critics of the age were governed by romantic impulses.

The adulation of Byron lasted only a few years in England. In 1815 he married Miss Milbanke, an English heiress, who abruptly left him a year later. With womanly reserve she kept silence; but the public was not slow to imagine plenty of reasons for the separation. This, together with the fact that men had begun to penetrate the veil of romantic secrecy with which Byron surrounded himself and found a rather brassy idol beneath, turned the tide of public opinion against him. He left England under a cloud of distrust and disappointment, in 1816, and never returned. Eight years were



GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON

spent abroad, largely in Italy, where he was associated with Shelley until the latter's tragic death in 1822. His house was ever the meeting place for Revolutionists and malcontents calling themselves patriots, whom he trusted too greatly, and with whom he shared his money most generously. Curiously enough, while he trusted men too easily, he had no faith in human society or government, and wrote in 1817: "I have simplified my politics to an utter detestation of all existing governments." During his exile he finished *Childe Harold*, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, his dramas *Cain* and *Manfred*, and numerous other works, in some of which, as in *Don Juan*, he delighted in revenging himself upon his countrymen by holding up to ridicule all that they held most sacred.

In 1824 Byron went to Greece, to give himself and a large part of his fortune to help that country in its struggle for liberty against the Turks. How far he was led by his desire for posing as a hero, and how far by a certain vigorous Viking spirit that was certainly in him, will never be known. The Greeks welcomed him and made him a leader, and for a few months he found himself in the midst of a wretched squabble of lies, selfishness, insincerity, cowardice, and intrigue, instead of the heroic struggle for liberty which he had anticipated. He died of fever, in Missolonghi, in 1824. One of his last poems, written there on his thirty-sixth birthday, a few months before he died, expresses his own view of his disappointing life:

My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone:
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.

Works of Byron. In reading Byron it is well to remember that he was a disappointed and embittered man, not only in his personal life, but also in his expectation of a general transformation of human society. As he pours out his own feelings, chiefly in his poetry, he is the most expressive writer of his age in voicing the discontent of a multitude of Europeans who were disappointed at the failure of the French Revolution to produce an entirely new form of government and society.

One who wishes to understand the whole scope of Byron's genius and poetry will do well to begin with his first work,

Hours of Idleness, written when he was a young man at the university. There is very little poetry in the volume, only a striking facility in rime, brightened by the devil-may-care spirit of the Cavalier poets; but as a revelation of the man himself it is remarkable. In a vain and sophomoric preface he declares that poetry is to him an idle experiment, and that this is his first and last attempt to amuse himself in that line. Curiously enough, as he starts for Greece on his last, fatal journey, he again ridicules literature, and says that the poet is a "mere babler." It is this despising of the art which alone makes him famous that occasions our deepest disappointment. Even in his magnificent passages, in a glowing description of nature or of a Hindoo woman's exquisite love, his work is frequently marred by a wretched pun, or by some cheap buffoonery, which ruins our first splendid impression of his poetry.

Byron's later volumes, *Manfred* and *Cain*, the one a curious, and perhaps unconscious, parody of *Faust*, the other of *Paradise Lost*, are his two best known dramatic works. Aside from the question of their poetic value, they are interesting as voicing Byron's excessive individualism and his rebellion against society. The best known and the most readable of Byron's works are *Mazeppa*, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold* (1812) are perhaps more frequently read than any other work of the same author, partly because of their melodious verse, partly because of their descriptions of places along the lines of European travel; but the last two cantos (1816-1818) written after his exile from England, have more sincerity, and are in every way better expressions of Byron's mature genius. Scattered through all his works one finds magnificent descriptions of natural scenery, and exquisite lyrics of love and despair; but they are mixed with such a deal of bombast and rhetoric, together with much that is unwholesome, that the beginner

will do well to confine himself to a small volume of well-chosen selections.¹

Byron is often compared with Scott, as having given to us Europe and the Orient, just as Scott gave us Scotland and its people; but while there is a certain resemblance in the swing and dash of the verses, the resemblance is all on the surface, and the underlying difference between the two poets is as great as that between Thackeray and Bulwer-Lytton. Scott knew his country well,—its hills and valleys which are interesting as the abode of living and lovable men and women. Byron pretended to know the secret, unwholesome side of Europe, which generally hides itself in the dark; but instead of giving us a variety of living men, he never gets away from his own unbalanced and egotistical self. All his characters, in *Cain*, *Manfred*, *The Corsair*, *The Giaour*, *Childe Harold*, *Don Juan*, are tiresome repetitions of himself,—a vain, disappointed, cynical man, who finds no good in life or love or anything. Naturally, with such a disposition, he is entirely incapable of portraying a true woman. To nature alone, especially in her magnificent moods, Byron remains faithful; and his portrayal of the night and the storm and the ocean in *Childe Harold* are unsurpassed in our language.

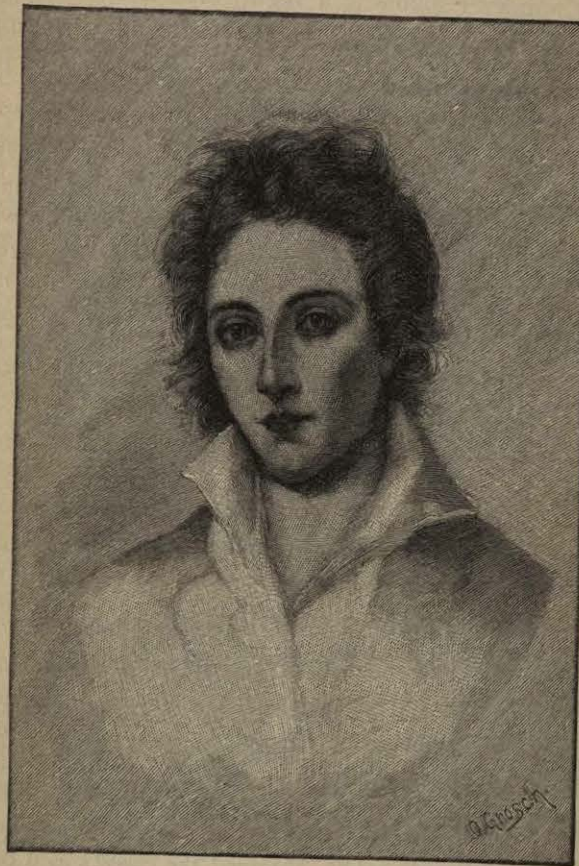
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792-1822)

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

In this fragment, from the "Ode to the West Wind," we have a suggestion of Shelley's own spirit, as reflected in all his poetry. The very spirit of nature, which appeals to us in the wind and the cloud, the sunset and the moonrise, seems

¹ See Selections for Reading, and Bibliography, at the end of this chapter.

to have possessed him, at times, and made him a chosen instrument of melody. At such times he is a true poet, and his work is unrivaled. At other times, unfortunately, Shelley joins with Byron in voicing a vain rebellion against society.



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

His poetry, like his life, divides itself into two distinct moods. In one he is the violent reformer, seeking to overthrow our present institutions and to hurry the millennium out of its slow walk into a gallop. Out of this mood come most of his longer poems, like *Queen Mab*, *Revolt of Islam*, *Hellas*, and *The*

Witch of Atlas, which are somewhat violent diatribes against government, priests, marriage, religion, even God as men supposed him to be. In a different mood, which finds expression in *Alastor*, *Adonais*, and his wonderful lyrics, Shelley is like a wanderer following a vague, beautiful vision, forever sad and forever unsatisfied. In the latter mood he appeals profoundly to all men who have known what it is to follow after an unattainable ideal.

Shelley's Life. There are three classes of men who see visions, and all three are represented in our literature. The first is the mere dreamer, like Blake, who stumbles through a world of reality without noticing it, and is happy in his visions. The second is the seer, the prophet, like Langland, or Wyclif, who sees a vision and quietly goes to work, in ways that men understand, to make the present world a little more like the ideal one which he sees in his vision. The third, who appears in many forms, — as visionary, enthusiast, radical, anarchist, revolutionary, call him what you will, — sees a vision and straightway begins to tear down all human institutions, which have been built up by the slow toil of centuries, simply because they seem to stand in the way of his dream. To the latter class belongs Shelley, a man perpetually at war with the present world, a martyr and exile, simply because of his inability to sympathize with men and society as they are, and because of his own mistaken judgment as to the value and purpose of a vision.

Shelley was born in Field Place, near Horsham, Sussex, in 1792. On both his father's and his mother's side he was descended from noble old families, famous in the political and literary history of England. From childhood he lived, like Blake, in a world of fancy, so real that certain imaginary dragons and headless creatures of the neighboring wood kept him and his sisters in a state of fearful expectancy. He learned rapidly, absorbed the classics as if by intuition, and, dissatisfied with ordinary processes of learning, seems to have sought, like Faustus, the acquaintance of spirits, as shown in his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

While yet a boy, I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.

Shelley's first public school, kept by a hard-headed Scotch master, with its floggings and its general brutality, seemed to him like a combination of hell and prison; and his active rebellion against existing institutions was well under way when, at twelve years of age, he entered the famous preparatory school at Eton. He was a delicate, nervous, marvelously sensitive boy, of great physical beauty; and, like Cowper, he suffered torments at the hands of his rough school-fellows. Unlike Cowper, he was positive, resentful, and brave to the point of rashness; soul and body rose up against tyranny; and he promptly organized a rebellion against the brutal fagging system. "Mad Shelley" the boys called him, and they chivied him like dogs around a little coon that fights and cries defiance to the end. One finds what he seeks in this world, and it is not strange that Shelley, after his Eton experiences, found causes for rebellion in all existing forms of human society, and that he left school "to war among mankind," as he says of himself in the *Revolt of Islam*. His university days are but a repetition of his earlier experiences. While a student at Oxford he read some scraps of Hume's philosophy, and immediately published a pamphlet called "The Necessity of Atheism." It was a crude, foolish piece of work, and Shelley distributed it by post to every one to whom it might give offense. Naturally this brought on a conflict with the authorities, but Shelley would not listen to reason or make any explanation, and was expelled from the university in 1811.

Shelley's marriage was even more unfortunate. While living in London, on a generous sister's pocket money, a certain young school-girl, Harriet Westbrook, was attracted by Shelley's crude revolutionary doctrines. She promptly left school, as her own personal part in the general rebellion, and refused to return or even to listen to her parents upon the subject. Having been taught by Shelley, she threw herself upon his protection; and this unbalanced couple were presently married, as they said, "in deference to anarch custom." The two infants had already proclaimed a rebellion against the institution of marriage, for which they proposed to substitute the doctrine of elective affinity. For two years they wandered about England, Ireland, and Wales, living on a small allowance from Shelley's father, who had disinherited his son because of his ill-considered marriage. The pair soon separated, and two years later Shelley, having formed a strong friendship with one Godwin, — a leader of young enthusiasts and a preacher of anarchy, — presently showed his belief in Godwin's

theories by eloping with his daughter Mary. It is a sad story, and the details were perhaps better forgotten. We should remember that in Shelley we are dealing with a tragic blend of high-mindedness and light-headedness. Byron wrote of him, "The most gentle, the most amiable, and the least worldly-minded person I ever met!"

Led partly by the general hostility against him, and partly by his own delicate health, Shelley went to Italy in 1818, and never returned to England. After wandering over Italy he finally settled in Pisa, beloved of so many English poets, — beautiful, sleepy Pisa, where one looks out of his window on the main street at the busiest hour of the day, and the only living thing in sight is a donkey, dozing lazily, with his head in the shade and his body in the sunshine. Here his best poetry was written, and here he found comfort in the friendship of Byron, Hunt, and Trelawney, who are forever associated with Shelley's Italian life. He still remained hostile to English social institutions; but life is a good teacher, and that Shelley dimly recognized the error of his rebellion is shown in the increasing sadness of his later poems:

O world, O life, O time!
On whose last steps I climb,
Trembling at that where I had stood before;
When will return the glory of your prime?
No more — oh, never more!

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
No more — oh, never more!

In 1822, when only thirty years of age, Shelley was drowned while sailing in a small boat off the Italian coast. His body was washed ashore several days later, and was cremated, near Viareggio, by his friends, Byron, Hunt, and Trelawney. His ashes might, with all reverence, have been given to the winds that he loved and that were a symbol of his restless spirit; instead, they found a resting place near the grave of Keats, in the English cemetery at Rome. One rarely visits the spot now without finding English and American visitors standing in silence before the significant inscription, *Cor Cordium*.

Works of Shelley. As a lyric poet, Shelley is one of the supreme geniuses of our literature; and the reader will do well to begin with the poems which show him at his very best. "The Cloud," "To a Skylark," "Ode to the West Wind," "To Night," — poems like these must surely set the reader to searching among Shelley's miscellaneous works, to find for himself the things "worthy to be remembered."

In reading Shelley's longer poems one must remember that there are in this poet two distinct men: one, the wanderer, seeking ideal beauty and forever unsatisfied; the other, the unbalanced reformer, seeking the overthrow of present institutions and the establishment of universal happiness. *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude* (1816) is by far the best expression of Shelley's greater mood. Here we see him wandering restlessly through the vast silences of nature, in search of a loved dream-maiden who shall satisfy his love of beauty. Here Shelley is the poet of the moonrise, and of the tender exquisite fancies that can never be expressed. The charm of the poem lies in its succession of dreamlike pictures; but it gives absolutely no impressions of reality. It was written when Shelley, after his long struggle, had begun to realize that the world was too strong for him. *Alastor* is therefore the poet's confession, not simply of failure, but of undying hope in some better thing that is to come.

Prometheus Unbound (1818–1820), a lyrical drama, is the best work of Shelley's revolutionary enthusiasm, and the most characteristic of all his poems. Shelley's philosophy (if one may dignify a hopeless dream by such a name) was a curious aftergrowth of the French Revolution, namely, that it is only the existing tyranny of State, Church, and society which keeps man from growth into perfect happiness. Naturally Shelley forgot, like many other enthusiasts, that Church and State and social laws were not imposed upon man from without, but were created by himself to minister to his necessities. In Shelley's poem the hero,

Prometheus, represents mankind itself, — a just and noble humanity, chained and tortured by Jove, who is here the personification of human institutions.¹ In due time Demogorgon (which is Shelley's name for Necessity) overthrows the tyrant Jove and releases Prometheus (Mankind), who is presently united to Asia, the spirit of love and goodness in nature, while the earth and the moon join in a wedding song, and everything gives promise that they shall live together happy ever afterwards.

Shelley here looks forward, not back, to the Golden Age, and is the prophet of science and evolution. If we compare his Titan with similar characters in *Faust* and *Cain*, we shall find this interesting difference, — that while Goethe's Titan is cultured and self-reliant, and Byron's stoic and hopeless, Shelley's hero is patient under torture, seeing help and hope beyond his suffering. And he marries Love that the earth may be peopled with superior beings who shall substitute brotherly love for the present laws and conventions of society. Such is his philosophy; but the beginner will read this poem, not chiefly for its thought, but for its youthful enthusiasm, for its marvelous imagery, and especially for its ethereal music. Perhaps we should add here that *Prometheus* is, and probably always will be, a poem for the chosen few who can appreciate its peculiar spiritlike beauty. In its purely pagan conception of the world, it suggests, by contrast, Milton's Christian philosophy in *Paradise Regained*.

Shelley's revolutionary works, *Queen Mab* (1813), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), *Hellas* (1821), and *The Witch of Atlas* (1820), are to be judged in much the same way as is *Prometheus Unbound*. They are largely invectives against religion, marriage, kingcraft, and priestcraft, most impractical when considered as schemes for reform, but abounding in

¹ Shelley undoubtedly took his idea from a lost drama of Æschylus, a sequel to *Prometheus Bound*, in which the great friend of mankind was unchained from a precipice, where he had been placed by the tyrant Zeus.

passages of exquisite beauty, for which alone they are worth reading. In the drama called *The Cenci* (1819), which is founded upon a morbid Italian story, Shelley for the first and only time descends to reality. The heroine, Beatrice, driven to desperation by the monstrous wickedness of her father, kills him and suffers the death penalty in consequence. She is the only one of Shelley's characters who seems to us entirely human.

Far different in character is *Epipsychidion* (1821), a rhapsody celebrating Platonic love, the most impalpable, and so one of the most characteristic, of all Shelley's works. It was inspired by a beautiful Italian girl, Emilia Viviani, who was put into a cloister against her will, and in whom Shelley imagined he found his long-sought ideal of womanhood. With this should be read *Adonais* (1821), the best known of all Shelley's longer poems. *Adonais* is a wonderful threnody, or a song of grief, over the death of the poet Keats. Even in his grief Shelley still preserves a sense of unreality, and calls in many shadowy allegorical figures, — Sad Spring, Weeping Hours, Glooms, Splendors, Destinies, — all uniting in bewailing the loss of a loved one. The whole poem is a succession of dream pictures, exquisitely beautiful, such as only Shelley could imagine; and it holds its place with Milton's *Lycidas* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* as one of the three greatest elegies in our language.

In his interpretation of nature Shelley suggests Wordsworth, both by resemblance and by contrast. To both poets all natural objects are symbols of truth; both regard nature as permeated by the great spiritual life which animates all things; but while Wordsworth finds a spirit of thought, and so of communion between nature and the soul of man, Shelley finds a spirit of love, which exists chiefly for its own delight; and so "The Cloud," "The Skylark," and "The West Wind," three of the most beautiful poems in our language, have no definite message for humanity. In his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" Shelley is

Shelley and
Wordsworth

most like Wordsworth; but in his "Sensitive Plant," with its fine symbolism and imagery, he is like nobody in the world but himself. Comparison is sometimes an excellent thing; and if we compare Shelley's exquisite "Lament," beginning "O world, O life, O time," with Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," we shall perhaps understand both poets better. Both poems recall many happy memories of youth; both express a very real mood of a moment; but while the beauty of one merely saddens and disheartens us, the beauty of the other inspires us with something of the poet's own faith and hopefulness. In a word, Wordsworth found and Shelley lost himself in nature.

JOHN KEATS (1795-1821)

Keats was not only the last but also the most perfect of the Romanticists. While Scott was merely telling stories, and Wordsworth reforming poetry or upholding the moral law, and Shelley advocating impossible reforms, and Byron voicing his own egoism and the political discontent of the times, Keats lived apart from men and from all political measures, worshiping beauty like a devotee, perfectly content to write what was in his own heart, or to reflect some splendor of the natural world as he saw or dreamed it to be. He had, moreover, the novel idea that poetry exists for its own sake, and suffers loss by being devoted to philosophy or politics or, indeed, to any cause, however great or small. As he says in "Lamia":

... 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.

Partly because of this high ideal of poetry, partly because he studied and unconsciously imitated the Greek classics and the best works of the Elizabethans, Keats's last little volume of poetry is unequaled by the work of any of his contemporaries. When we remember that all his work was published in three short years, from 1817 to 1820, and that he died when only twenty-five years old, we must judge him to be the most promising figure of the early nineteenth century, and one of the most remarkable in the history of literature.

Life. Keats's life of devotion to beauty and to poetry is all the more remarkable in view of his lowly origin. He was the son of a hostler and stable keeper, and was born in the stable of the Swan and Hoop Inn, London, in 1795. One has only to read the rough stable scenes from our first novelists, or even from Dickens, to understand how little there was in such an atmosphere to develop poetic gifts. Before Keats was fifteen years old both parents died, and he was placed with his brothers and sisters in charge of guardians. Their first act seems to have been to take Keats from school at Enfield, and to bind him as an apprentice to a surgeon at Edmonton. For five years he served his apprenticeship, and for two years more he was surgeon's helper in the hospitals; but though skillful enough to win approval, he disliked his work, and his thoughts were on other things. "The other day, during a lecture," he said to a friend, "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 fairyland." A copy of Spenser's *Faery Queen*, which had been given him by Charles Cowden Clark, was the prime cause of his abstraction. He abandoned his profession in 1817, and early in the same year published his first volume of *Poems*. It was modest enough in spirit, as was also his second volume, *Endymion* (1818); but that did not prevent brutal attacks upon the author and his work by the self-constituted critics of *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly*. It is often alleged that the poet's spirit and ambition were broken by these attacks;¹ but Keats was a man of strong character, and instead of quarreling with his reviewers, or being crushed by their criticism, he went quietly to work with the

¹ This idea is supported by Shelley's poem *Adonais*, and by Byron's parody against the reviewers, beginning, "Who killed John Keats? I, says the Quarterly."

idea of producing poetry that should live forever. As Matthew Arnold says, Keats "had flint and iron in him"; and in his next volume he accomplished his own purpose and silenced unfriendly criticism.

For the three years during which Keats wrote his poetry he lived chiefly in London and in Hampstead, but wandered at times over England and Scotland, living for brief spaces in the Isle of Wight, in Devonshire, and in the Lake district, seeking to recover his own health, and especially to restore that of his brother. His illness began with a severe cold, but soon developed into consumption; and added to this sorrow was another,—his love for Fannie Brawne, to whom he was engaged, but whom he could not marry on account of his poverty and growing illness. When we remember all this personal grief and the harsh criticism of literary men, the last small volume, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), is most significant, as showing not only Keats's wonderful poetic gifts, but also his beautiful and indomitable spirit. Shelley, struck by the beauty and promise of "Hyperion," sent a generous invitation to the author to come to Pisa and live with him; but Keats refused, having little sympathy with Shelley's revolt against society. The invitation had this effect, however, that it turned Keats's thoughts to Italy, whither he soon went in the effort to save his life. He settled in Rome with his friend Severn, the artist, but died soon after his arrival, in February, 1821. His grave, in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, is still an object of pilgrimage to thousands of tourists; for among all our poets there is hardly another whose heroic life and tragic death have so appealed to the hearts of poets and young enthusiasts.

The Work of Keats. "None but the master shall praise us; and none but the master shall blame" might well be written on the fly leaf of every volume of Keats's poetry; for never was there a poet more devoted to his ideal, entirely independent of success or failure. In strong contrast with his contemporary, Byron, who professed to despise the art that made him famous, Keats lived for poetry alone, and, as Lowell pointed out, a virtue went out of him into everything he wrote. In all his work we have the impression of this intense loyalty to his art; we have the impression also of a profound

dissatisfaction that the deed falls so far short of the splendid dream. Thus after reading Chapman's translation of Homer he writes:

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

In this striking sonnet we have a suggestion of Keats's high ideal, and of his sadness because of his own ignorance, when he published his first little volume of poems in 1817. He knew no Greek; yet Greek literature absorbed and fascinated him, as he saw its broken and imperfect reflection in an English translation. Like Shakespeare, who also was but poorly educated in the schools, he had a marvelous faculty of discerning the real spirit of the classics,—a faculty denied to many great scholars, and to most of the "classic" writers of the preceding century,—and so he set himself to the task of reflecting in modern English the spirit of the old Greeks.

The imperfect results of this attempt are seen in his next volume, *Endymion*, which is the story of a young shepherd beloved by a moon goddess. The poem begins with the striking lines:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever;
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us; and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing,

which well illustrate the spirit of Keats's later work, with its perfect finish and melody. It has many quotable lines and

passages, and its "Hymn to Pan" should be read in connection with Wordsworth's famous sonnet beginning, "The world is too much with us." The poem gives splendid promise, but as a whole it is rather chaotic, with too much ornament and too little design, like a modern house. That Keats felt this defect strongly is evident from his modest preface, wherein he speaks of *Endymion*, not as a deed accomplished, but only as an unsuccessful attempt to suggest the underlying beauty of Greek mythology.

Keats's third and last volume, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), is the one with which the reader should begin his acquaintance with this master of English verse. It has only two subjects, Greek mythology and mediæval romance. "Hyperion" is a magnificent fragment, suggesting the first arch of a cathedral that was never finished. Its theme is the overthrow of the Titans by the young sun-god Apollo. Realizing his own immaturity and lack of knowledge, Keats laid aside this work, and only the pleadings of his publisher induced him to print the fragment with his completed poems.

Throughout this last volume, and especially in "Hyperion," the influence of Milton is apparent, while Spenser is more frequently suggested in reading *Endymion*.

Of the longer poems in the volume, "Lamia" is the most suggestive. It is the story of a beautiful enchantress, who turns from a serpent into a glorious woman and fills every human sense with delight, until, as a result of the foolish philosophy of old Apollonius, she vanishes forever from her lover's sight. "The Eve of St. Agnes," the most perfect of Keats's mediæval poems, is not a story after the manner of the metrical romances, but rather a vivid painting of a romantic mood, such as comes to all men, at times, to glorify a workaday world. Like all the work of Keats and Shelley, it has an element of unreality; and when we read at the end,

And they are gone; aye, ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm,

it is as if we were waking from a dream, — which is the only possible ending to all of Keats's Greek and mediæval fancies. We are to remember, however, that no beautiful thing, though it be intangible as a dream, can enter a man's life and leave him quite the same afterwards. Keats's own word is here suggestive. "The imagination," he said, "may be likened to Adam's dream; he awoke and found it true."

It is by his short poems that Keats is known to the majority of present-day readers. Among these exquisite shorter poems we mention only the four odes, "On a Grecian Urn," "To a Nightingale," "To Autumn," and "To Psyche." These are like an invitation to a feast; one who reads them will hardly be satisfied until he knows more of such delightful poetry. Those who study only the "Ode to a Nightingale" may find four things, — a love of sensuous beauty, a touch of pessimism, a purely pagan conception of nature, and a strong individualism, — which are characteristic of this last of the romantic poets.

As Wordsworth's work is too often marred by the moralizer, and Byron's by the demagogue, and Shelley's by the reformer, so Keats's work suffers by the opposite extreme of aloofness from every human interest; so much so, that he is often accused of being indifferent to humanity. His work is also criticised as being too effeminate for ordinary readers. Three things should be remembered in this connection. First, that Keats sought to express beauty for its own sake; that beauty is as essential to normal humanity as is government or law; and that the higher man climbs in civilization the more imperative becomes his need of beauty as a reward for his labors. Second, that Keats's letters are as much an indication of the man as is his poetry; and in his letters, with their human sympathy, their eager interest in social problems, their humor, and their keen insight into life, there is no trace of effeminacy, but rather every indication of a strong and noble manhood. The third thing