

Keats After a Hundred Years

ON February the twenty-third, 1821, there was little to give Joseph Severn any confidence that Time would ever reverse the sentence which his friend the Young English Poet, newly dead, had desired in the bitterness of his heart should be inscribed above his grave. Yet Severn lived to see the name of John Keats "numbered among the Immortal Poets of England" and before his own death he loyally, though ill-advisedly, suggested that the anonymous "unseemly stone" be replaced by one bearing the poet's name. This project, broached to C. W. Dilke and Monckton Milnes, was fortunately not carried out and the original stone remains to this day in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, the goal of many pilgrim feet.

The reversal of the judgment pronounced by The Quarterly Review and in even more scurrilous fashion by Blackwood's was not the work of a moment. Unwittingly, by giving currency to the rumor that "the malicious power of his enemies"—the Reviewers—had crushed out his friend's young life, Severn aided in establishing the tradition of the sentimental and mawkish "Cockney Poet" which for long stood in the way of a just estimate of the genius of Keats. The charge against Lockhart was taken up with flaming indignation, in which the natural compassion of a fellow-sufferer found voice, in the tremendous thirty-seventh stanza of *Adonais*; and presently Byron followed Shelley in the repetition of this accusation, a certain not altogether customary sympathy hiding behind the apparent flippancy of the oft-quoted passage in *Don Juan*.

The spectre of the weak and whining poet, thus raised, was not soon laid; and that the righteous work was finally accomplished was due chiefly to the talent and discrimination of Keats's first biographer, Lord Houghton; to the dispassionate analysis of the two sides of the poet's character made by Matthew Arnold; and to Swinburne's scornful repudiation of the notion that the soul of such a man could let itself be "snuffed out" by the professional ribaldry of "unwashed malignants." Even so, the publication of the *Letters to Fanny Brawne* might have evoked again the piteous ghost; but by that time (1889) the fact of the essential manliness of John Keats had been proved beyond contradiction and the more lamentable of the letters were regarded quite properly as of interest to the pathologist rather than to the critic of high and serious poetry.

But this unhappy tradition was but one contributory hindrance to the growth of the poet's fame. His name, so far as it was known at all, was linked with the names of Leigh Hunt and of John Hamilton Reynolds, worthy men one of whom was endowed with genius of a sort, yet men whose writings afforded some sort of justification for the lampoons of William Maginn and others such as he. The associations suggested by the epithet "Cockney School" had to be broken down before Keats's authentic genius could become apparent. Moreover he died just as Byron, rising above a temporary decline in popularity, entered upon his last phase, the phase that culminated in the heroic death that moved all Europe. During the remaining eighteenth-twenties the thronging *Lives* and *Tributes* and *Estimates* consecrated to the "Noble Poet"; the gossip circulating about the destruction of his *Memoirs*; the controversy over the proposed monument at Westminster; the growing interest in the forthcoming official *Life* by Thomas Moore; and at length the resultant dispute with Lady Byron over certain statements in Moore's book—these and other incidents of

the first years of Byron's posthumous renown centred attention still upon him and kept memories of Keats and Shelley within a narrow circle of friends and followers.

And yet there were signs of a change in taste that revolted from the silly extremes of "Byronism" perpetrated by Byron's imitators. And there was a hesitating undirected quest of a more exquisite and subtle art than Byron had been capable of. By the middle eighteen-thirties people were believing that the feet of this gigantic idol of the regency were made of clay; Carlyle, Macaulay, Sir Henry Taylor, Landor, the brothers Hare, and other critics and guides, each in his own way and working within his own circle of influence, had helped to undermine Byron's reputation.

At the middle of the century Landor demands that "Byron piping-hot" be left in the rear:

Along the coast prevail malignant heats,
Halt on high ground behind the shade of Keats.

The way had been made clear for "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown."

Shelley's fame spread more rapidly than did that of his fellow-poet. His gentle birth, his notorious life, his tragic death, his relative disassociation with the "Cockney School," and the piety of such friends as Peacock and Hogg nourished his reputation. Soon we find young poets like Beddoes echoing his lyric cadences, and a little later Browning does homage to the "Sun-treader." In *The Athenaeum* for March 25, 1829, one can find some forgotten lines on The Protestant Burial Ground at Rome in which the writer, after paying tribute to the "young bard, whose lay was of Endymion," turns to one "mightier far, spirit of light and love, Shelley." It is significant, however, that when in the course of a *Memoir* of Shelley published in the same journal in 1830 an attack is launched against "the sickly affectation" of the "perverse and limited school" of Keats, an editorial foot-note of reproof is subjoined. Two years later *The Athenaeum* published an "elegy on the Death of John Keats" by B. W. Procter ("Barry Cornwall").

A curious example of the way the special prestige of Shelley grew side by side with the direct influence that was to dominate the poetry of Victorian times is found in the youthful Bayard Taylor's *Ode to Shelley*. The American's praise of the author of *To a Skylark* finds expression in stanzas modelled closely after the *Ode to a Nightingale*.

There were of course those, mainly of the older generation, who refused to recognize the rising of these new stars. Sir Sidney Colvin is incorrect in assigning to so late a date as 1844 Richard Jeffrey's quaintly perverse and almost lyrical farewell to the romantic poets, in which he numbers "the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley" along with "the splendid strains of Moore" and "the blazing star of Byron" among the half-forgotten things of yesterday. That curious and oft cited passage belongs to 1829. But another and greater critic, Thomas De Quincey, though afterwards he brought himself to make a belated recantation, was guilty so late as 1845 of a denunciation of Keats for "trampling upon this mother tongue, this English language, as with the hoofs of a Buffalo." This is indeed a strange accusation.

About the same time, the rival claims of various contestants for the task having been adjusted, consultations were

in progress which in 1848 resulted in Monckton Milnes's two-volume biography of the poet. The time was ripe for this undertaking. In the case of Keats's verse there had been no such private inhibition as that imposed by Sir Timothy Shelley against the republication of his son's writings: and yet the three little volumes of 1817, 1818, and 1820 served to supply such demand as existed for twenty years.

It was not till 1840 that a collected edition of his poems appeared in England. An American edition had preceded the English one by six years. It is well to remember this when England prides herself upon her early appreciation of Walt Whitman. But by 1847 the young poets and painters who were soon to be banded together as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were reading their Keats. In that year Holman Hunt sent to the Royal Academy a picture which has been inspired by Keats's *The Eve of Saint Agnes*.

A little later Rossetti was urging Morris to become a painter on the ground that Keats had exhausted the possibilities of poetry. The seed cast by Monckton Milnes, himself one of the Cambridge admirers of Keats and Shelley in the eighteen-thirties, fell on ground prepared to receive it. It was about this time, also, that Tennyson was emerging from his long struggle for recognition and was assuming his place as the foremost living poet. The evidences of his discipleship to Keats could not be ignored, and it may be said that 1850, the year of Wordsworth's death and of Tennyson's accession to the laureateship, marks also the permanent establishment of Keats's fame.

With the later ever-broadening developments of that renown—a progress whose milestones are the editions of the *Poetical Works* by W. M. Rossetti, by Forman, by Colvin, by Ellis, by De Selincourt, and by Lampson; the several partial or complete collections of his letters; the various and varying estimates by Arnold and Swinburne and W. M. Rossetti and Herford and more other critics than can be set down; the foundation of the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association with its sacred trust of the house in which the poet died; and the monumental *Life* by Sir Sidney Colvin—with these and other evidences of that splendid prestige it is not necessary to deal here.

Nor need one rehearse once more the multitudinous proofs of Keats's predominant influence upon Victorian verse, an influence without serious rival despite the independence of Browning (who, however, praised Keats in memorable fashion) and despite the Shelley-worship of Swinburne (who, however, turned to Keats for guidance in the most appealing of all his poems, the *Vision of Spring* in *Winter*.)

Signs of that influence are on every hand: in the poetry of Marston and Payne and De Tabley and Wilde and Phillips and Thompson and Watson, not to mention earlier and more obvious names. On the continent his fame has never approached that of Byron; in England and America it gives him the right to be revered not only by virtue of his own achievement but because he is the Master and Exemplar of the Victorians.

To attempt a new "appreciation" of that achievement and another analysis of the qualities of his genius, after those problems have exercised so many better wits than mine, would be presumptuous. Nous devrions pourtant lui porter quelques fleurs. This centennial tribute has, therefore, taken the form of a sketch of the unfolding of his renown.

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The New Unionism

The New Unionism, by J. M. Budish and George Soule.
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THE New Unionism is not, as its title might suggest, a controversial essay on trade union theory. It is not a propagandistic tract. It is a competent and scholarly objective analysis of the structure of self-government evolved by the workers in one of the greatest of our American industries. It is more than that. The authors go behind the structure to the racial and temperamental characteristics of a people to whom self-government is a vital necessity. They reveal the new unionism as the evolutionary product of a highly intelligent and liberty-loving people rising against the pressure of a gigantic economic and industrial machine.

Just as trade and commerce transformed the institutions of feudalism into the constitutions of self-governing political commonwealths, so machine industry is transforming the structure of government today. Just as the typical American spirit a hundred years ago sought freedom through the democratic control of trade and commerce by the enfranchised citizen of the commonwealth, so that same spirit is seeking a larger measure of freedom today by extending the scope of democratic control to industry through the workshop. The present volume is essentially a study of the traditional American spirit operating upon and through the workers in the needle trades.

This interpretation of the growth of the needle trades unions, whose membership is predominantly both foreign-born and Jewish, will strike superficial observers,—especially those who have been influenced by the current anti-union, open shop "American plan" propaganda,—as novel, possibly fantastic. But it is not the interpretation of the authors of the New Unionism alone. One of the most powerful of these unions, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, has been hailed before the Supreme Court of New York County by enemies who demand its dissolution on the ground that it is radical, subversive, un-American. Among its defenders are such men as Professor Henry R. Seager of Columbia University and Mr. Allen T. Burns, Director of the Study of Methods of Americanization of the Carnegie Corporation. In his sworn affidavit, Professor Seager says that "considering the valuable service which the Amalgamated Clothing Workers has already rendered toward a better organization of the American clothing industry . . . I should regard the dissolution of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers as a public misfortune." And Mr. Burns, who is preeminently qualified to recognize the American spirit when he sees it, declares his conviction that "In insisting on the continuation of democratic government in industry the Amalgamated Clothing Workers are supporting a practical school in citizenship, are reinforcing the foundations of the American republic."

If such authoritative opinions run counter to the prevailing attitude of many Americans toward the trade unions, and the Jewish unions in particular, it is probably because the literature on the subject is exceedingly sparse and almost exclusively limited to government documents. In spite of its steadily increasing strength and the unique service it has rendered, the trade union movement had not yet become thoroughly acclimated in America. The reaction of the average American layman to the very term is one of bristling hostility. It is the normal reaction of most men to whatever is strange, different, misunderstood. Read-