

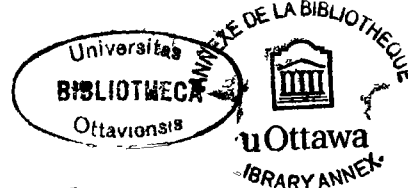
KEATS AND CHRISTIANITY

by Barbara Jean O'Connell

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

A key to criticism of Keats is his philosophy, albeit some deny its existence, not considering him a thinker. Arthur Symons is foremost among these critics in stating that he was not "troubled about his soul, the meaning of the universe, or any other metaphysical questions."¹ Other critics prefer to view him as a "natural animal" possessing the unique ability of verbalizing sense impressions. Hence we have H. W. Garrod presenting Keats as one "whose genius flourished in the fullness of sensuous experience." Yet he does not overlook Keats's metaphysical questionings, for he states that Keats did his best work when he shook himself entirely free from thought and followed his "natural inclinations."² Royal H. Snow shares Garrod's view relying upon the Odes to prove that Keats was primarily concerned with exalting the life of the senses. Hoxie Neale Fairchild completes the portrayal of Keats as the strictly sensuous poet stating that "nothing remains but the fact that the man was an artist who loved beautiful things for their sake."³

¹ Arthur Symons- Romanticism In English Poetry, 1909, p. 275.

² Thomas M. Raysor- The English Romantic Poets, 1950, p. 214.

³ Ibid., p. 214.

Other critics have seen Keats as a thinker. Matthew Arnold led the way in defining the passion for beauty as having an intellectual origin. Others followed, analyzing his poetry for its thought content. Mrs. F. M. Owens pointed out that "the philosophy of Keats was hidden under a luxuriant overgrowth of fancy"⁴ and was the first to show that "Endymion" lent itself to allegorical interpretation. Since then, many critics have paid tribute to Keats's intellectual powers by attempting to interpret this allegory.

Among the first to recognize a philosophical quest were two of his biographers, Sidney Colvin and Ernest de Selincourt. Other critics attempting to analyze this quest include Hugh I. A. Fausset who in Keats: A Study in Development sees a steady advance from early sensationalism to mature idealism in which the "opposing forces of life are seen in ideal reconciliation,"⁵ and Clarence D. Thorpe who in The Mind of John Keats states that Keats's development was a

definite progress towards solutions and a study of the process reveals a man of broad and deep sympathies who in greater maturity, without at all surrendering his affection for material beauty, became more

⁴ Frances Mary Owens- John Keats, 1880, p. 18.

⁵ Thomas H. Rayson- The English Romantic Poets, 1950, p. 217.

and more aware that great poetry...is never created by shallow and unfurnished minds doting merely on fanciful dreams and physical loveliness but can be produced only by an understanding intellect grown wise through knowledge and experience and disciplined by thought and hard work.⁶

Certain critics even maintain that the recognition of Keats as a philosopher is essential to the understanding of his genius. Three expound their theories in The Keats Memorial Volume. A. C. Bradley states that in dealing with Keats it is necessary to realize that he "was primarily concerned with specific problems in existence particularly those things which enforced upon his mind the sorrows of the world and the burden of the mystery."⁷ To Arthur Lynch Keats was "a philosopher first, a poet afterwards...and this strikes to the white of the truth in the understanding of his poetry."⁸ A. Clutton Brock believes that it was Keats's affinity for philosophy which prevented him from erring in writing poetry.

Various ventures have been made by critics to determine the nature of Keats's philosophy, frequently they have compared it to Neo-Platonism. Studies validating and invalidating this comparison prove enlightening. Claude Lee Finney

6 Ibid., p. 217.

7 Ibid., p. 213.

8 Ibid., p. 213.

in Keats's Philosophy of Beauty: An Interpretation of the Allegory of Endymion views it as another example of Spenserian Neo-Platonism. However, Newell F. Ford disagrees with this interpretation in The Meaning of Fellowship with Essences in Endymion. Attempts have also been made by critics to compare Keats's philosophy with that of the Art for Art's sake Group. The leaders of this movement were especially concerned with having Keats's name linked with theirs. Hence critics have found it necessary to test the strength of this link. Most have found it weak. Louise Rosenblatt, for instance, states that Keats reveals too much interest in the mystery and the comprehension of life and is too much concerned with "reflection and knowledge and truth,"⁹ to be labelled a true aesthete. F. R. Leavis shares this opinion for he states that Keats's "grasp of actualities"¹⁰ prevents his being classified solely as an aesthete.

But there have been few critics who have ventured a comparison between Keats's philosophy and Christianity. One can only suggest reasons for this lack in the large body of Keatsian criticism. Perhaps among literary critics Christianity is no longer considered the most profound

9 Ibid., p. 229.

10 Ibid., p. 230.

philosophy of Western culture. Or it may be that such a comparison would be too obvious; that those who are aware of the significance of Christianity would immediately recognize its presence or absence in a writer's work. However, this is not the case, for we have critics making rash and unsupported statements to the effect that "the absence of any kind of orientation to Christianity is remarkable in Keats."¹¹ A statement such as this demands a rebuttal. John Middleton Murry has provided it.

The difference emerges fairly clearly in a dual attitude towards the central Christian mystery. The Protestant type of mind lays more stress on the Atonement, the Catholic on the Incarnation; the Catholic mind is naturally sacramental, the Protestant naturally exegetic. At this point, if not before, the significance of this distinction for poetry is manifest. I should say that Keats's poetry is sacramental, and Milton's is not, Keats's poetry is charged with warmth and mystery like a pulse in the blood, while Milton's is not, Keats was not a professed Christian, while Milton was; yet Keats, I should say was much more a naturally Christian poet than was Milton.¹²

Although enlightening, this statement of Murry's does not provide a complete insight into Keats's Christianity. This thesis is then an attempt to explore it extensively.

¹¹ Graham Hough- The Romantic Poets, 1953, p. 173

¹² John Middleton Murry- Studies, 1930, p. 109

Paganism is the prime problem in dealing with Keats and Christianity. Many critics have labelled him a Pagan, making declarations such as the following:

Intellectually Keats was strongly in sympathy with Shelley and Byron. Indeed in Religious philosophy he was really more whole heartedly pagan than either. Byron for all his cynicism, never freed himself entirely from the spell of Christianity, and Shelley's transcendental fervour is far more obvious than his so-called atheism. But Keats had no religion save the religion of beauty, no God save Pan, the Earth was his great consoler, and so passionately did he love her, with a love far more concrete and personal than that of Wordsworth or Shelley that no other consideration impinges upon his work.¹³

Issue is taken with these critics in the first two chapters of this thesis. In the first chapter, one aspect of Keats's so-called Paganism is dealt with, that is, the role to which he assigned the senses in his life. Was he like the Epicureans cultivating them as an end in themselves? Or is it possible that, like the Modern Existentialists, he was basing his quest for truth on personal experience placing special emphasis on sense experience? Then, in the second chapter we pose the question of whether Keats saw beyond the purely natural to the supernatural. He seems to have recognized God in the total scheme of things, and yet, it was beauty which he exalted as the primary principle of existence. Does

¹³ Peter Westland- The Romantic Revival, 1950, p. 73

this exaltation indicate a pagan mentality, or is it compatible with the Christian view of reality?

The remaining chapters will be devoted to an examination of his view of man and his destiny to determine whether it contained any Christian elements. Chapter three consists of an examination of his thoughts on man's suffering. A question is raised immediately, that is, why did he not like his fellow poets propound theories for improving man's lot? This seems to indicate an acceptance of the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. Yet he did not accept this doctrine entirely and here we have his reasons for rejecting Christianity. Then in the fourth chapter we see whether Keats's rejection of the Church affected his morality. Some critics imply that it did. Yet others call him a hero. So the questions to be dealt with in this chapter include: If Keats did possess strong moral principles, from whence did he derive them and were they compatible with those preached by Christianity? Finally, in the fifth chapter, we tackle the problem of Keats's thoughts on the most crucial religious question, that is, the possibility of man's immortality. Most critics believe that he was skeptical. If he was, why did he bother to determine his own scheme of salvation? Even a more pressing issue dealt with in this chapter is, why and how this scheme differed from that preached by Christianity.

CHAPTER I

BEYOND THE SENSES

Paganism is a flexible term, denoting many things. In a strict sense it identifies non-Christians, notably those who hold no religious beliefs. It is also applied to those who erect pleasure as their standard of value. Although liberal, this is a valid interpretation of the term, for pleasure was considered the supreme good by the early pagan philosophers. Not believing in a personal god their lives were not controlled by any system of worship. Hence certain pagan philosophers, notably Aristippus, believed that personal pleasure, particularly that derived from the satisfaction of sensual desires, was the chief good in life.

In the latter sense Keats has been viewed as a pagan. Much of his writing, particularly his early poetry, reflects the pagan exaltation of pleasure.

Give me women, wine and snuff
Until I cry out "hold, enough!"
You may do so sans objection;
Till the day of resurrection;
For bless my beard they aye shall be
My beloved Trinity.¹

¹ Harold E. Briggs- The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of Keats, 1951, p. 26

In his letters too, he raised pleasure as the goal for his friends to pursue. To Reynolds he wrote, "But I conjure you to think of nothing but pleasure 'Gather the rose etc.' - Gorge the honey of life."² In a similar vein he wrote to Browne of the "pleasure which it is your duty to procure."³

A pagan tendency seems to be signified also in the extraordinary delight which he derived from the satisfaction of his senses. This proclivity is evident in his descriptions of taste sensations. "Talking of pleasure," he wrote to Dilke, "this moment I was writing with one hand and with the other holding to my mouth a Nectarine - good God how fine. It went down soft, slushy, cozy - all its delicious embonpoint melted down my throat like a beatified Strawberry."⁴ To his sister-in-law he wrote describing his "palate passions" including "the breast of Partridge, the back of hare, the backbone of grouse, the wing and side of a Pheasant and a Woodcock passim."⁵

² Maurice Buxton Forman- The Letters of John Keats, 1952, No. 87, p. 216.

³ Ibid., No. 154, p. 395.

⁴ Ibid., No. 153, p. 393.

⁵ Ibid., No. 123, p. 301.

Although Haydon's story of Keats putting cayenne pepper on his tongue to enjoy a draught of cold claret is considered apocryphal, it does not seem too far-fetched when compared with his description of the pleasure he derived from the drinking of this wine.

For really 'tis so fine - it fills the mouth
one's mouth with a gushing freshness - then
goes down cool and feverless- then you do
not feel it quarrelling with your liver -
no it is rather a Peace maker and lies as
quiet as it did in the grape- then it is
as fragrant as the Queen bee; and the
more ethereal Part of it mounts into the
brain, not assaulting the cerebral apart-
ments like a bully in a bad house looking
for his trul.....⁶

Then too, a pagan sensibility seems to be indicated in the sensuous imagery in his writing. In his letters, for instance, he calls the heart "the teat from which the mind or intelligence sucks identity."⁷ His most exceptional sensuous imagery is to be found in the second book of 'Endymion' where he describes the exotic blisses of Endymion's love using such phrases as "toying hands - smooth excesses - entwining soft embraces- milky sovereignties - and richly feast on the life of love."⁸

⁶ Ibid, No. 123, p. 301.

⁷ Ibid, No. 123, p. 355.

⁸ Harold E. Briggs, op. cit., p. 88.

It is not surprising then, that some critics refer to his "unchristian indulgence of sense"⁹ and regard him merely as a sensualist. To Newell F. Ford Keats was a "sybarite" who was "devoted to erotic sensuousness."¹⁰ Similarly R. H. Snow and Hoxie Neale Fairchild opine that Keats was mainly concerned with exalting a pleasurable way of life based on the satisfaction of the senses.

This view is quite misleading. Definitely he did not cultivate the senses at the expense of his other faculties. In his letters the pagan theme of "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" is not perceptible. Nor are there admissions of flagrant self-indulgence as are to be found in the letters of Byron who wrote at one point "I have been eating and drinking; which I always do when wretched; for then I grow fat and don't show it; and now I am in very good plight and spirits I can't leave off the custom, though I have no further occasion for it."¹¹ Although Keats did upon occasion overindulge, generally his habits were temperate as is evidenced by his writing to his sister-in-law "I never drink now above three

9 George Santayana- The Sense of Beauty, 1959, p. 36.

10 Thomas M. Raysor- The English Romantic Poets, 1950, p. 223.

11 Jacques Barzun- The Selected Letters of Lord Byron, 1953, p. 59

glasses of wine- and never any spirits and water."¹² Thus sensuousness did not degenerate into sensuality.

Discipline not self-indulgence was the ideal which motivated his life. His habits were even ascetic. To Haydon he wrote revealing his own willingness to deny himself personal pleasure "I know no one but you who can be fully aware of the turmoil and anxiety, the sacrifice of all that is called comfort, the readiness to measure time by what is accomplished, and to die in six hours could plans be brought to conclusions."¹³ Preferring solitude and study, Keats cultivated habits appropriate to a philosopher.

The soul is a world of itself, and has enough to do in its own home. Those whom I know already, and who as it were a part of myself, I could not do without but for the rest of mankind, they are as much to me a dream as Milton's Hierarchies. I think if I had a free and Healthy disposition and lasting organization of heart and lungs as strong as an ox so as to bear unhurt the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness, I could pass my life very nearly alone though it should last eighty years.¹⁴

In fact his love of solitude made him almost anti-social for he wrote his sister-in-law.

12 Maurice Buxton Forman, op. cit., No. 123, p. 300.

13 Ibid., No. 15, p. 30.

14 Ibid., No. 145, p. 374.

'Tis best to remain aloof from people
and like their good parts without being
eternally troubled with the dull processes
of their every day lives. When once a per-
son has smoked the vapidness of the routine
of Society he must have either self-inter-
est or life of some sort of distinction to
keep him in good humour with it. All I
can say is that standing at Charing Cross
and looking east, west, north and south I
can see nothing but dullness. I hope while
I am young to life retired in the country.¹⁵

Moreover he stated that he was prepared to accept the un-
desireable traits which he would develop in pursuing the
solitary life, stating to Taylor, "You will observe how
a solitary life engenders pride and egotism! True, I
know it does; but this pride and egotism will enable me
to write finer things so I will indulge it."¹⁶ He chose
the solitary life to meditate, or as he described it "to
perceive great things."¹⁷

Keats sacrificed his life for truth. He was a
thinker. Essentially his life was devoted to a philosophi-
cal quest for he sought the meaning of existence. At one
point in his life he considered giving himself entirely
to the study of philosophy and of preparing himself by

15 Ibid, No. 172, p. 453.

16 Ibid, No. 144, p. 372.

17 Ibid, No. 102, p. 271.

studying Greek and Italian and after this to "ask Hazlitt in about a year's time the best metaphysical path I can take."¹⁸

Although he never pursued this course, he did devote his life to intellectual pursuits. To him, the true joy of life lay in the acquisition of knowledge, as he shows in a letter to John Taylor "I know nothing, I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon's direction of 'Get Wisdom, get understanding' - I find Cavalier days are gone by. I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but a continual drinking of knowledge."¹⁹ His poetry too, was a "search after truth" as is evidenced by his comment to his brother and sister-in-law "It will be the best comment on my sonnet, it will show you that it was written with no agony but that of Ignorance with no thirst of anything but knowledge."²⁰ To Haydon he revealed his desire to develop his intellect consciously "Such things I ratify by looking upon myself and trying myself at lifting mental weights as it were. I am three

18 Ibid, No. 63, p. 136.

19 Ibid, No. 62, p. 133.

20 Ibid, No. 115, p. 317.

and twenty with little knowledge and middling intellect..²¹

Nor did he limit the scope of his quest.

Were I to study physic or rather Medicine again, I feel it would not make the least difference in my poetry; when the Mind is in its infancy a Bias is in reality a Bias but when we have acquired more strength a Bias becomes no Bias. Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole. I am so convinced of this that I am now glad at not having given away my medical books.²²

For to him "An extensive knowledge is needful to a thinking people- it takes away the heat and fever; and helps by widening speculation; to ease the burden of the mystery."²³

Above all Keats's interests must be considered intellectual. That which he held to be of prime value was mental activity. His concern with the strengthening powers of his intellect is indicated by his frequent remarks about its "ripeness" and from his comments such as "I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately I can't bear to be uninterested or unemployed."²⁴ To him it was only in the mind that a man truly lived,

21 Ibid, No. 115, p. 284.

22 Ibid, No. 64, p. 139.

23 Ibid, No. 64, p. 139.

24 Ibid, No. 41, p. 87.

It is a well known maxim of mine and of course must be well known that every point of thought is the centre of an intellectual world- the uppermost thoughts in a man's mind are the poles of his world he revolves upon them and everything is northward and southward through their means.²⁵

In a letter to Reynolds he described what he considered a pleasant life. "I had an idea that a man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner - let him on a certain day read a certain page of full Poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, a prophecy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale."²⁶ Moreover, he realized that it was necessary to develop his own intellect through perseverance for he wrote to his young sister, Fanny, "O there is nothing like fine weather, and health, and Books, and a fine country, and a contented mind and a diligent habit of reading and thinking."²⁷

Keats chose the thoughtful Wordsworth among the Romantics as one of his guides in his quest for truth. When Haydon wrote to him promising to show some of his poetry to Wordsworth, Keats's response indicates the

25 Ibid, No. 48, p. 101.

26 Ibid, No. 48, p. 101.

27 Ibid, No. 122, p. 294.

high esteem in which held the latter. "The idea of your sending it to Wordsworth puts me out of Breath- you know with what reverence I would send my well-wishes to him."²⁸ His admiration of Wordsworth reached a peak when the latter's 'Tintern Abbey' was published. Then he praised Wordsworth saying that he had explored unknown regions of thought.

this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open- but all dark - all leading to dark passages- We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a mist. We are in that state. We feel the "burden of the mystery." To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them.²⁹

Later he changed his opinion of Wordsworth. Some critics suggest that this was due to Wordsworth's disparaging Keats's poem 'Endymion.' However the criticism of Wordsworth in Keats's letters does not seem to be of this nature. Vengeance definitely does not appear to be the motive. Rather it seems that he dissociated himself from Wordsworth because the latter was becoming in his eyes a pedant. Hence he refused to pay homage to Wordsworth.

²⁸ Ibid, No. 6, p. 11.

²⁹ Ibid, No. 64, p. 142.

It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries- that Wordsworth etc. should have their due from us- But for the sake of a few fine lines of imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egotist. Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them until he makes himself a false coinage and deceives himself.³⁰

He referred to Wordsworth's pedantic manner in another letter to John Taylor "I am sorry that Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he visited in town by his egotism, vanity, and bigotry. Yet he is a great poet if not a philosopher."³¹

Rather it was Wordsworth's egotism which Keats disparaged. He criticized him, saying that he was one for whom conversation was "not a search after knowledge but an endeavour at effect."³² Moreover Keats felt that Wordsworth's egotism had marred his poetry for he wrote to Bailey, "There is in 'The Gipsies' no "Search after Truth."³³

Keats's preference for Shakespeare as his intellectual guide shows how far he was from being merely

30 Ibid, No. 50, p. 106.

31 Ibid, No. 50, p. 106.

32 Ibid, No. 115, p. 284.

33 Ibid, No. 26, p. 55.

addicted to the senses. Indeed he was quite fascinated by what he called Shakespeare's impersonality, so much that he stated Shakespeare's life had been an "Allegory" and that his works were the "comments on it."³⁴ However, Keats could not resist the temptation of trying to discover traits of Shakespeare's character in his works. At one point he suggested that Hamlet reflected Shakespeare's personality, saying "The middle age of Shakespeare was all clouded over, his days were not more happy than Hamlet who is perhaps more like Shakespeare himself in his common every day life than any other of his characters."³⁵ Apparently Keats was also concerned with whether or not Shakespeare was a Christian for he wrote to Reynolds,

I ought to have said a word on Shakespeare's Christianity- there are two passages which I have not looked over with you touching the thing; the one for; the other against, that of favour is in Measure for Measure, Act II, Sc. 2
Isab. Alas! Alas!
Why all the souls that were, were forfeit once
And he that might the best have took,
Found out the Remedy-
That against is in Twelfth Night, Act III Sc. 2
Maria For there is no Christian, that means
to be saved by believing rightly, can
ever believe such impossible grossness.³⁶

34 Ibid, No. 123, p. 304.

35 Ibid, No. 128, p. 346.

36 Ibid, No. 14, p. 24.

Keats even imagined that Shakespeare guided his writing, for he wrote to Reynolds,

I remember your saying that you had a notion of a good genius presiding over you. I have had the same thought, for things which I do half at random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen different features of Propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare this presidor?³⁷

Now although it was fashionable to pay honor to Shakespeare, Keats's affinity was not of this kind. Indeed he did enjoy a society in which Shakespeare was paid homage, for he wrote, "I am to be invited, Mrs. Hunt tells me to a party at Ollier's to keep Shakespeare's birthday. Shakespeare would stare to see me there."³⁸ However, Keats's admiration was not merely a fad, for he derived a tremendous personal enjoyment from the reading of Shakespeare's works. When he was visiting Shanklin, for instance, he wrote to his brothers, "I felt rather lonely this morning at breakfast, so I went and unbox'd a Shakespeare. Here's my comfort!"³⁹ The extent of pleasure which he derived from the reading of Shakespeare is revealed in his statement, "I have great reason to be content, for, thank God, I can read and

³⁷ Ibid, No. 15, p. 29.

³⁸ Ibid, No. 47, p. 100.

³⁹ Ibid, No. 12, p. 17.

perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths."⁴⁰ To him, Shakespeare was sufficient. "I am very near agreeing with Hazlitt that Shakespeare is enough for us."⁴¹

Shakespeare's ability to condense many truths into few words particularly appealed to him. In his opinion other writers were exhaustible but not Shakespeare "This however is true- Mrs. Tighe and Beattie once delighted me- now I see through them and can find nothing in them- or weakness- and yet how many they will delight! Perhaps a superior being may look upon Shakespeare in the same light- is it possible? No!"⁴² Hence the reading of Shakespeare always revealed to him new wonders, "Whenever you write, say a word or two on some passage in Shakespeare that may have come rather new to you; which must be continually happening notwithstanding that we read the same play forty times."⁴³ But it was the sonnets that Keats held in highest esteem. In them, he believed Shakespeare had said everything that was to be said, "I ne'er found so many beauties in the Sonnets.

⁴⁰ Ibid, No. 51, p. 107.

⁴¹ Ibid, No. 15, p. 31.

⁴² Ibid, No. 98, p. 258.

⁴³ Ibid, No. 13, p. 21.

They seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally-
He has left nothing to say about nothing or anything."⁴⁴

His preoccupation with intellect does not mean he gave it absolute authority in his quest for truth. Personal experience had to play its role, an entirely vital one. According to him, truth was the product of the "complex mind" and this he considered as one which "existed partly on sensation and partly on thought."⁴⁵

Most critics have been confused by Keats's stressing experience as a mode of arriving at truth. It is quite obvious though, in statements which he made in his letters dealing with this subject, that the theory he was attempting to clarify was that ideas were not to lead him to things, but the experience of things to lead him to ideas. This is evident in his statement that "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved on the pulses; we read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author."⁴⁶ This theory is evident again when he stated "nothing ever becomes real 'til your life has illustrated it."

⁴⁴ Ibid, No. 30, p. 64.

⁴⁵ Ibid, No. 31, p. 68.

⁴⁶ Ibid, No. 64, p. 141.

Moreover, Keats effected the theory in his own life, for he deliberately pursued experience. This is evidenced in a letter which he wrote to Bailey describing his reasons for making a four months tramping trip in the highlands, "I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more prejudice, use me to more hardships, identify finer scenes, load me with grander mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry than stopping among books even though I should read Homer."⁴⁷ Indeed he did not wish to be matured "by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness."⁴⁸

Keats's faith in experience as the mode of attaining truth was not exceptional, but one he shared in common with the major Romantic poets. Byron stated that judgments should be based on "experience, not books", saying, "There is nothing like inspection, and trusting to our own senses."⁴⁹ Shelley also refused to accept any truths which had not been attested to by his own experience. Actually Wordsworth was the outstanding exponent of this creed. In his 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads' he reiterated Aristotle's statement that the

⁴⁷ Ibid, No. 79, p. 192.

⁴⁸ Ibid, No. 90, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Jacques Barzun, op. cit. p. 22.

object of poetry was truth; but what Wordsworth stressed was that the poet had to feel this truth; he had to have a disposition to "be affected more than other men."

Even so, Keats was unusually vehement in his denunciations of theory as the sole means of attaining truth. He refused to accept any theory until he himself had experienced its truth for he wrote to his brother, "the more we know the more inadequacy we discover in the world to satisfy us- this is an old observation; but I have made up my Mind never to take anything for granted- but even to examine the truth of the commonest proverbs-"⁵⁰ He agreed with Shakespeare that the "web of life was of a mingled yarn"⁵¹ and to him, those who interpreted it literally were "very shallow people."⁵² His reason for refusing to accept the philosophy which was current in his day was also due to the fact that it did not coincide with his own experience.

Hence his attitude towards the intellect does seem peculiar. According to him, its function was to speculate but not to judge. He believed that the

50 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 98, p. 258.

51 Ibid., No. 25, p. 51.

52 Ibid., No. 123, p. 303.

intellect was to be used to expand ideas; to give them scope by probing the "depth of good and evil" and by looking to "the past and future."⁵³ Although he realized that certain ideas would appear irreconcilable, that they would be a source of perplexity, still he did not admit their resolution. "A Question," to him was not to be solved by reason but was to be looked upon "as the best beacon towards a little speculation."⁵⁴

Hence he was dubious of the powers of reason to attain final truth. He believed that reason could only provide a partial view of truth, for he wrote in a letter to Bailey, "I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning- and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections."⁵⁵ He refused to depend upon reason because of the difficulty involved in forming impartial opinions. Since he did not wish to be a man of one view, but a man of "great views" he wrote to Bailey, "I shall never be a reasoner, because I care not to be in

53 Ibid, No. 40, p. 83.

54 Ibid, No. 26, p. 57.

55 Ibid, No. 21, p. 67.

the right."⁵⁶ According to him the "only means of strengthening one's intellect was to "make up one's mind about nothing, to let it be a thoroughfare for all thoughts."⁵⁷

The truth which Keats sought then, was that of a vision. He realized that hollow formula would not inspire men, only truth embodied in a mystery. Thus he strove to acquire a virtue which he believed Shakespeare exemplified, that of "negative capability" and which he defined as "the ability of being in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without any irritable searching after fact and reason."⁵⁸

There is a similarity also between Keats's mode of attaining truth and that preached by the modern philosophers, the Existentialists. With his emphasis on experience as the mode of evolving truth, Keats could have been a precursor to this philosophy. Definitely there are echos of Kirkegaard's statement that "Life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced" in several of his statements concerning the mode that one should employ in the acquisition of knowledge, as for instance,

56 Ibid., No. 53, p. 111.

57 Ibid., No. 156, p. 425.

58 Ibid., No. 32, p. 71.

Probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer-being in itself a nothing-ethereal things may at least be thus divided under three heads. Things real- Things semi-real and no things. Things real such as existences of Sun, Moon, Stars and passages of Shakespeare. Things semi-real such as Love, Clouds, etc. when require a greeting of spirit to make them wholly experienced- and Nothings which are made great and dignified by an ardent pursuit.⁵⁹

It is perhaps an awareness of the Existentialist philosophy which causes modern critics to defend Keats's status as a philosopher. They do not disparage him for refusing to adhere to established truths, saying that he had no philosophy, rather, they define his method of attaining truth stating that it was based on experience. T. S. Eliot suggests that he "had no theories" and continues that "in the sense appropriate to the poet he had a philosophic mind."⁶⁰ Similarly, Newell F. Ford, in defining Keats's thinking, implies Existentialism, for he states that Keats "formulated no conclusions but did his thinking intuitively and passionately, rather than logically and sequentially."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., No. 53, p. 111.

⁶⁰ Sylvan Barnet- The Study of Literature, 1960, p. 249.

⁶¹ Newell F. Ford- The Pre-figurative Imagination of John Keats- 1951, p. 32.

Nor was Keats's Existentialist mode of attaining truth beyond the ken of Christianity. Some Christian philosophers such as Pascal have recommended experience as a means of attaining truth, saying that "Deux choses instruisent l'homme de toute sa nature: l'instinct et l'expérience."⁶² In fact, he has pointed out that the truths based upon experiences are usually more firmly rooted than those based on the theory of others.

On se persuade mieux, pour l'ordinaire,
par les raisons qu'on a soy mesme
trouvées que par celles qui sont
venues dans l'esprit des autres.⁶³

⁶² H. F. Stewart- Pascal's Pensees, 1950, p. 10.

⁶³ Ibid., No. 18, p. 10.

CHAPTER II

THE GOODNESS OF CREATION

22

So far it has been established that Keats was mainly concerned with the life of the mind, and that he used the senses as paths to the realm of abstraction. Now it is necessary to ascertain where Keats dwelt in this realm. Did he have the anti-religious vision, so common today, of the world as a meaningless chaos? If he did see order, did he regard it as a divine order? Certain statements seem to indicate that he did simply see confusion, as for instance, when he wrote that he was "quite perplexed, in a world of doubt and finding there is nothing stable in the world, uproars your only music."¹

An examination of Keats's general outlook, however, shows that he rarely looked upon the world with such eyes. His observations of the universe's order far outweigh those on disorder. He found the universe to be a meaningful creation not a meaningless mistake. Constantly he was fascinated by the purposeful designs which he discovered in nature. Even a wry comment to his brother on the weather reveals his awareness of the

¹ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 37, p. 79.

inner harmony of the universe's phenomenon "There is a continuous courtesy between the heavens and the earth - the heavens rain down their unwelcomeness and the earth sends it up again to be returned tomorrow."² In a more serious reflection on the animal world, Keats's perception of the meaningful designs in the universe is again apparent.

The noble animal Man, for his amusement smokes his pipe, the Hawk balances about the clouds; that is the only difference of their leisures. That is what makes the amusement of life to the speculative mind; I go among the fields, and catch a glimpse of the stoat or a field mouse, peeping out of withered grass; the creature hath a purpose and its eyes are bright with it; I go amongst the buildings of a city, and I see a man hurrying along- to what; The creature has a purpose and his eyes are bright with it. But then as Wordsworth says "We have all one human heart!"³

In fact, some critics note the profundity of Keats's vision. They find that the dominant idea in his poetry is the awareness of the unity of the universe. John Middleton Murry says that the key to Keats's poetic vision was a "perception of harmony,"⁴ in all things. Similarly Mrs. F. M. Owens states that "the idea which

2 Ibid., No. 63, p. 136.

3 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 123, p. 316.

4 Thomas M. Raysor- The Romantic Poets, 1950, p. 217.

underlies his poetry most deeply is that of the oneness of all true life."⁵

Even his glorification of the Ancient Greeks does not contradict this view. The tribute he paid to their gods, particularly Apollo, did not involve a question of personal belief, rather it reflected youthful aspirations. At times he wished to express his own hopes and found that Greek mythology had provided him with what he considered a worthy personage. Hence he addressed many of his early poems to Apollo simply to verbalize his ambitions, as is evidenced in his "Hymn To Apollo", which is an apology for his presuming to be a poet.

God of the Golden bow,
And of the golden lyre,
And of the golden hair,
And of the golden fire,
Charioteer
Of the patient year,

Where - where slept thine ire,
When like a blank idiot I put on thy wreath,⁶

But as Francis Thompson has pointed out Keats's glorification of Grecian times was not "pagan Paganism."⁷ In writing about this period what he exalted was not their

5 Mrs. F. M. Owens - John Keats, 1880, p. 25.

6 Harold E. Briggs - The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of Keats, 1951, p. 62.

7 Francis Thompson - Paganism Old and New, 1947, p. 39.

religious customs or lack of them but their delight in nature. He admired their mode of living which kept them in close contact with nature. This is obvious in Book I of 'Endymion.' Here he describes the natural beauty which he believed was given a prime place in the Grecian way of life.

the sun, the moon,
Trees old, and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in;⁸

Then he described his reason for choosing the story of Endymion as the subject of his poem and what he emphasized was the pleasant scenes which this story conjured up in his mind.

Therefore, 'tis with full happiness that I
Will trace the story of Endymion.
The very music of the name has gone
Into my being, and each pleasant scene
Is growing fresh before me as the green
Of our own vallies:⁹

Indeed Keats's attitude towards nature differed from that of the pagans, for, he did not see it as being haunted by evil spirits. Quite the contrary, he believed that it was animated by a singular benevolent spirit. According to him, it was only when man was "beset by dismal cares" that nature became a "hateful land."

⁸ Harold Briggs - op. cit., p. 65.

⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

Dungeoner of my friends, the wicked strand
 Where they are wrecked and lead a wreck'd life
 That monstrous region, whose full river pours
 Ever from the sordid urns unto the shores,
 Unknown of any weedy haired gods;
 Whose icy winds all zephyrless, holding scouting rods,
 Iced in the great forests, frosted, bleak as blood,
 Would fright a dryad; whose harsh herbage meads
 Make lean and land a starv'd ox while he frets
 There bad flowers have no scent, birds no sweet song
 And great un'erring nature at once seems wrong,¹⁰

But when man freed himself from his worries and allowed
 himself to be receptive to the powers of nature, he dis-
 covered a "world of blisses."

Linger awhile upon some bending planks
 That lean against the streamlet's rushy flanks
 And watch intently Nature's gentle doings;
 They will be found softer than ring dove's gentle cooings.¹¹

He was convinced that it was this benevolent spirit which
 brought joy to man. Hence, in his poetry, he extolled
 the simple country life where one could be free to ex-
 perience it,

To one who has long in city pent
 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
 And open face of heaven - to breathe a prayer
 Full into the face of the blue firmament.¹²

In his early poems, particularly, he voiced his prefer-
 ence for the simple country life, for, he believed that

10 Harold E. Briggs, op. cit., p. 279.

11 Ibid., p. 53.

12 Ibid., p. 26.

there this principle of benevolence would not be obscured by the constructions of man, such as city buildings.

O Solitude! If I must with thee dwell,
 Let it not be amongst the humbled heap
 Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,-
 Nature's observatory - whence the dell,
 Its flowery slopes, its rivers crystal swell
 May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep
 Mongst the boughs pavillion'd where the deer's
swift leap
 Startles the wild bee from the ox glove bell.¹³

If we may regard Keats's belief in order as well established, it is proper to consider the second question in the opening paragraph: Does such order have for him a divine source? The answer cannot be straight forward because of his sketchy references to God. There are but two passages in one poem in which he refers to a Creator. In the first, he states that it is impossible to enjoy nature without an awareness of the Maker.

No one who on the glorious sun has seen
 And all her glorious clouds and felt his bosom clean
 For his great Maker's presence; but must know
 What 'tis I mean.¹⁴

In the subsequent passage he struck a Christian note, stating that nature's beauty

gives a glory to the voice
 And from the heart upsprings, rejoice! rejoice!
 Sounds that will reach the framer of things
 And die away in ardent mutterings.¹⁵

13 Harold E. Briggs, op. cit., p. 13.

14 Harold E. Briggs, op. cit., p. 43.

15 Ibid., p. 43.

For the basic concept of this theory is that God is imprisoned in the universe.

Even so, Keats did not display a strong devotion to God in his poetry. Only twice did he refer directly to God; in the passage cited above, and in the following passage in which he paid homage to God's omniscience and expressed his hope for Divine justice.

God! She is like a milk white lamb that bleats
For man's protection. Surely the All-seeing
Who joys to see us with His gifts agreeing,
Will never give him pinions, who intreat
Such innocence to ruin.¹⁸

Yet Keats was not lacking in religious fervour, for, critics frequently comment on the religious tone which is immanent in his poetry. Mrs. F. M. Owens refers to his "religious consciousness" and states that it is most evident in his sonnets "And it is almost exclusively in the sonnets that we find direct allusion to that without which no poet is closely likened to his fellowmen - the emotion of religion."¹⁹ John Middleton Murry agrees with this opinion, stating that a spirit of religion emanates from all of Keats's poetry.

¹⁸ Harold E. Briggs, p. 26.

¹⁹ Mrs. F. M. Owens - op. cit., p. 178.

It was beauty which inspired this fervour. In his letters, his statements concerning his attitude towards beauty reflect the passion of a true religious devotion as for instance, "I have not the slightest feeling toward the public or to anything in existence but the eternal being the principle of beauty in all things."²⁰ It is quite evident that he considered it the supreme reality, for he stated, "Praise or blame has but a momentary effect upon the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own work."²¹ In fact, so exclusive was his devotion, that he had fears of becoming a recluse.

All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs - that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest spirits will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have - I do not think it will, I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful.²²

Some critics opine that the beauty to which Keats was dedicated was that of art, not nature. To verify their opinion they refer to one of Keats's best known poems 'Ode On A Grecian Urn', stating that here Keats exalted only the beauty of art. Exponents of this view including

²⁰ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 186, p. 468.

²¹ Ibid., No. 94, p. 239.

²² Ibid., No. 93, p. 227.

Colvin, Bridges, Garrod and Finney have agreed on two central points of interpretation; that Keats is praising the joy of art amid the pain of life; and that art is enjoyable because of its timelessness and achievement of permanence. An example of their interpretation would be Finney's statement "saddened by the mutability of natural beauty, he sought the consolation of the more permanent beauty of art."²³

With this interpretation, these critics are suggesting that Keats was a precursor to the "Aesthetes," that implicit in his poetry are the principles adopted by this latter nineteenth century movement. But would Keats have agreed with Oscar Wilde that only the "artist was the creator of beautiful things?" And would he have approved of Walter Pater's statement that beauty was a "quality which characterized the artist's mode of expression?" When Keats stated "A thing of beauty was a joy forever" was he including all created things or only those things created by man?

Since these critics chose the 'Ode On A Grecian Urn' as the basis of their interpretation, it will be re-examined to clear the confusion concerning Keats's dedication to beauty. First, the title. This poem is

²³ E. C. Pettet - On The Poetry of Keats, 1957, p. 375.

an Ode which implies praise- but is this praise dedicated to the Urn? No, the title includes the word "on", not "to." Moreover, in stating that Keats is exalting the beauty of the urn these critics are ignoring a fact central to any interpretation of this poem, that is, the urn as an art object never existed. Nor did Keats in this poem make any reference to its particular beauty; he did not mention its lines, composition, form, etc. It existed only in his imagination. However, the scenes which he described on it, did exist. They were recreations of scenes that he had observed on various art objects. The sources of these individual scenes have been traced by many critics and their findings have been summarized by E. C. Pettet.²⁴

The neo-Attic type of urn that Keats evidently had in mind consisted of one continuous scene not two or more as are found in the Ode. But though the Urn is imaginary, the pictures on it certainly owe something to works with which he was familiar, chiefly through illustration. For the scenes in the first three stanzas he probably derived some inspiration from the Borghese vase and the Bacchic piece of Poussin. While the scene in stanza IV is partly a compound of Claude's 'Sacrifice to Apollo' and of the Sosibas vase that he himself had drawn at one time. Besides these inspirations there may have been others like the Townley Vase.

Nor did Keats praise the execution of these scenes. So there is little evidence to support the opinion that

²⁴ E. C. Pettet - op. cit., p. 317.

Keats in this poem is exalting the beauty of this urn as an object of art.

Rather it was the beauty of nature which Keats was exalting in 'Ode On A Grecian Urn.' He used the urn as the subject, not the object in this poem. He described the various scenes of nature to show that they conveyed to him a truth about life itself- that beauty was inherent in existence. In the last stanza he was not lamenting the lack of beauty in existence, but pointing out that the urn could serve as a reminder to those grown old and lacking perception, that beauty was ever-present on earth.

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.²⁵

Some might view Keats's devotion to natural beauty merely as a part of a literary convention. It cannot be denied that Elizabethan literature, which had as one of its main themes the praise of nature's beauty, influenced Keats. According to Houghton, Keats's first biographer, it was Spenser among the Elizabethans who "was the great impulse of Keats's poetic life." In fact he points out that it was the reading of Spenser's 'Faerie Queene' which

25 Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 295.

inspired Keats's first poem beginning,

Now morning from her orient chamber came,
And her first footsteps touch'd the verdant hill;
Crowning the untainted rushes on its rills.²⁶

Obviously this is strict imitation of Spenser. Charles Cowden Clarke confirms this, for it was he who lent Keats the copy of Spenser, and, in recording the event he stated that, at this point in his literary development, Keats had simply tried to recreate the "external decorations" of Spenser's poetry. It would be absurd, however, to suppose that all of Keats's poems dedicated to nature's beauty were merely imitations of Spenser and other Elizabethan poets, for, in the larger part of Keats's poetry there is a lack of formality and objectivity which characterized Elizabethan literature.

A more probable source of Keats's devotion to nature's beauty was contemporary poets. Indeed the essence of the Romantic movement in poetry was a conscious devotion to nature's beauty. In the 'Preface' to the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth consecrated the poet's efforts to the praise of nature's beauty saying that the poet was one who considered "man and nature as essentially adapted to each other and the mind of man as the mirror of the finest and the most interesting properties of nature." Now Wordsworth was con-

²⁶ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 3.

vinced of nature's beauty, whereas, the praise of nature's beauty with Coleridge was definitely a convention for in his Ode originally addressed to Wordsworth he says that they will endow nature with beauty in their writing.

O lady! we receive but what we give,
 And in our lives alone does nature live;
 Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud
 And would we aught behold her higher worth
 Then that cold world inanimate allowed
 To the poor, loveless, ever-anxious crowd,
 Ah! from this soil itself must issue forth
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
 Enveloping the Earth -
 And from the bowl itself must be sent
 A sweet and potent voice, in its own mirth
 Of all the sweet sounds of life and element.²⁷

Keats's adoration seems to resemble the latter's attitude, for, in one of his early poems, 'Sleep and Poetry' he refers to this new school of poetry which promises to celebrate nature's beauty and states that he, too, intends to imitate this convention.

Open afresh your rounds of starry folds
 Ye ardent marigolds!
 Dry up moisture from your golden lids
 For great Apollo bids
 That in these days your praises should be sung
 On many harps, which he has lately strung;
 And when again your dewiness he kisses
 Tell him I have you in my world of blisses.²⁸

But the fact that here he addresses nature seems to indicate

²⁷ S. T. Coleridge- The Poetical and Dramatic Works of S. T. Coleridge, 1854, p. 31.

²⁸ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 53.

that like Wordsworth he, too, was convinced of nature's beauty.

Yet Keats's devotion to nature's beauty was stronger than that of Wordsworth's. As Mrs. F. M. Owens points out "Not even Wordsworth himself has entered more reverently and selflessly into the world of natural beauty than Keats, feeling its power and part in that great whole to which man also belongs."²⁹ His faith in nature's beauty to inspire man with joy seems never to have wavered. It was a perpetual source of wonder to him.

Many the wonders I this day have seen;
 The sun, when first he kist away the tears
 That filled the eyes of morn;-the laurelled peers
 Who from the feathery golden a learn-
 The ocean with its vastness, its blue freen.
 Its ships, its locks, its caves, its hopes, its fears
 Must think of what will be and what has been.³⁰

Whereas Wordsworth's contemplation of nature did not always lead to an exaltation of beauty but rather, often brought gloom and melancholy,

I heard a thousand blended notes
 While in a grove I sate reclined
 In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
 Bring sad thoughts to the mind.³¹

29 Mrs. F. M. Owens - op. cit., p. 172.

30 Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 28.

31 Lieder-Lovett-Root- op. cit., 1951, p. 628.

Nor did Keats share Shelley's vision of nature's beauty as a power unseen but felt in certain things and yet "dearer for its mystery."

Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
 With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
 Of human thoughts or form, where art thou gone?
 Why dost thou pass away, and leave our state,
 This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?³²

Rather Keats's vision of beauty was more immediate and universal. He recognized it in "things on earth and things above."³³ Never did he limit his perception of beauty to the nebulous as did Shelley who saw it only in clouds, wind, rain, hail, thunder, sunset, sunrise and moonlight. Keats felt with his senses the perfection of creation itself; discovering the harmony which existed between himself and the physical attributes of the external world, its colors, smells, textures and sounds all intoxicated him with their beauty. There was not a mood of the earth he did not love, not a season that did not inspire him. As he said himself "The setting sun will always set one to rights, or if a sparrow comes before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel."³⁴

³² Lieder-Lovett-Root- op. cit., p. 749.

³³ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 167.

³⁴ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 31, p. 68.

It must be concluded, then, that Keats's devotion to nature's beauty was not merely an imitation of literary conventions, but was based on a personal conviction. As was pointed out in Chapter I, Keats possessed a strong desire to determine the significance of things for himself and that his criterion in this endeavour was personal experience. That he had experienced nature on his own "pulses" and was convinced of its beauty is obvious in some of his comments in his letters. To Haydon he wrote saying that his poetry would be based on his observations of nature. "I have been looking on the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and its contents as materials to form greater things, that is, ethereal things."³⁵ Then, too, when he visited Shanklin, he wrote to his brothers telling them how his poetry had been inspired by his realization of nature's beauty.

How beautiful the season is now - 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 spring. Somehow a stubble field looks warm in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much that I composed upon it.³⁶

³⁵ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 15, p. 30.

³⁶ Ibid., No. 151, p. 384.

What follows is the 'Ode to Autumn.' There, Keats captured his own wonderment evoked by the discovery of the innate perfection of the common aspects of nature.

Moreover, this ability of Keats to discover beauty in the common aspects of nature is singled out for praise by critics who state that it constitutes his unique contribution to nature poetry, as for instance Robert Bridges.

He is forever drawing his imagery from common nature - which are for him the first time represented as beautiful and again in this we see his opposition to the eighteenth century writers who mainly contented themselves with conventional commonplaces. Whereas Keats discovers in the most usual objects either beauty or sources of delight and comfort,³⁷

Then the beauty to which dedicated himself was not merely an ideal or an idea. He did not consider it something which he had to conjure up in his mind. Rather he saw beauty, that is, he recognized its presence in all created things. When he stated "the mighty abstract Idea I have of beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute happiness," he did not mean that it was an idea which existed in his mind and which he applied to things, but rather that he saw beauty as the basic structure of all created things. As Charles Du Bos has pointed out he

³⁷ Robert Bridges- Collected Essays, Papers, etc., 1929, p. 104.

saw beauty as an object.

En d'autres termes la Beauté est objective avant d'être subjective et, a vrai dire, le degré de subjectivité qui intervient dans la réponse de l'âme, le degré, de chaleur, de profondeur, l'intimité de sa réponse sont en fonction de l'immuable objectivité de l'appel qui lui a été adressé. "Une chose belle" -une chose, ah! comme Keats a su choisir le mot juste et s'il l'a choisi, c'est qu'il n'oublie jamais que la Beauté est d'abord et avant tout objective. Oui, la Beauté est une chose.³⁸

Hence his was a rare vision of the universe, for, many see beautiful things, but few see all things as beautiful.'

Here, again the similarity of his poetic vision with that of the Christian poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins is evident.

Yet some would deny that Keats possessed a Christian vision, as for instance, Charles Du Bos who has pointed out that Keats did not mention the source of beauty.

Mais qu' y a-t-il, ou n' y-a-il pas, decaché derrière ces essences elles-mêmes? Y a-t-il, ou n' y-a-t-il pas, une Essence, pris cette fois au singuliere d'ou toutes les essences incarnées dans les "choses belles" émanerait? Y a-t-il, ou n'y a-t-il pas une Beauté essentielle, celle mentionnée pas Keats.³⁹

True, he did not make explicit the relationship between the beauty of nature and of God, but even some of the great Christian mystics had to be reminded that beauty was of

³⁸ Charles Du Bos- op. cit., p. 13.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

God's essence. It was not until St. John of the Cross asked a Beas nun in what her prayers consisted and she told him, "In considering the beauty of God and in rejoicing that He has such beauty" that the Saint went into ecstasies and was moved to write five stanzas on the Divine beauty beginning, "Beloved, let us sing. And in thy beauty see ourselves portrayed."⁴⁰ Moreover, the fact that Keats praised the Creator for nature's beauty indicates that he was approaching the fullness of this insight.

⁴⁰ Image Books- Ascent of Mt. Carmel, p. XI

CHAPTER III

ORIGINAL SIN

42

Now we come to Keats's vision of man, the creature for whom the good and beautiful universe was made. Dwelling on his view of nature many critics ignore the other metaphysical questions with which he concerned himself. This should not be, for, considering his youth, the scope of his speculations was quite remarkable. Noting this, one critic, George Elliott, has ventured to suggest that it was his preoccupation with profound philosophical questions which caused his death.¹ Although this seems preposterous, it is true that early in his career Keats realized that it was necessary for him to put aside the pleasurable and concern himself with more serious problems such as man's role in the universe. Even in his poetry his decision to do this, is evident.

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts;²

What is obvious here is that Keats's view of man was colored by a profound awareness of misery. Never

1 Thomas Raysor- The Romantic Poets, 1950, p. 220.

2 Harold E. Briggs- The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of Keats, 1951, p. 45.

did he ignore the "pain of existence."³ He considered it his duty to determine the significance of man's suffering saying, "this leads me to suppose that there are no men thoroughly wicked enough so as to never be self-spiritualized into a sublime misery-but alas! 'tis but for an hour, he is the only man who has kept watch on Man's mortality who has philanthropy enough to overcome the indolent enjoyment of intellect who is brave enough to volunteer for uncomfortable hours."⁴ Moreover, he was willing to accept the anxiety which such speculations would bring him "Health and Spirits only belong to those selfish man- the man who thinks much of his fellow man can never be in spirits."⁵

It is not surprising that in evaluating his vision of man, some critics imply that his awareness of misery was Christian, although none have stated definitely that it infers an acceptance of the doctrine of Original Sin. Most simply label it as "naturalism" or "realism" and compare it with Shakespeare's view of humanity. Trilling, for instance, in describing Keats's view of man defines the Christian view but does not pay homage to it as much, rather he praises

³ Maurice Buxton Forman- The Letters of John Keats, 1952, p. 146.

⁴ Ibid., No. 26, p. 55.

⁵ Ibid., No. 26, p. 56.

Keats for his "proud, bitter and joyful acceptance of tragic life which we associate pre-eminently with Shakespeare."⁶ Similarly, Paul de Reul in comparing the truth of Keats's vision with that of Shakespeare's, implies the Christian attitude "In reading of Keats we become more alive and stronger, he accelerates in us the vital rhythm. Like Shakespeare he is always in contact with nature and with life."⁷ But implications are not enough!

It must be stated that underlying Keats's vision of man is the doctrine of Original Sin which makes explicit that corruption is inherent in existence. Take, as an instance, his attitude towards Godwin's philosophy of perfectability, which propounded that man could free himself from all troubles and suffering. This, he stated was impossible because his own experiences had convinced him that imperfection was inherent in existence, saying that he did not "believe in this sort of perfectability- the nature of the world would not allow it- the inhabitants of the world will correspond to itself."⁸ Hence, unlike the other Romantic poets, he did not have any illusions concerning his ability

⁶ Lionel Trilling- The Selected Letters of John Keats, p. 3.

⁷ Thomas Raysor- op. cit., p. 222.

⁸ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 94, p. 233.

to contrive a world better than that which already existed. True, he did rail with his contemporaries at the hideous conditions of his society as is evidenced by his vehement criticism of the government in a letter to his brother.

There is nothing manly or sterling of a truth in any part of government. There are many men in the country, I have no doubt, who would like to be beheaded in Tower-hill merely because of the sake of eclat; there are many men who like Hunt from a principle of taste would like to see things go on better. There are many like Sir Phillip Burdett, who like to sit at the head of political dinners; but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their country. The motives of our worst men are interest, and of our best vanity; we have no Milton, or Algernon Sidney.⁹

Nevertheless, he did not propose any Utopian society to cure these social ills. Unlike Southey and Colerige who, in their youth, proposed a "Pantisocratic" society, Keats never believed that any human plan would undo the imperfection inherent in the human condition.

Nor is it absurd to suppose that this attitude of Keats paralleled Christian doctrine, for, having received a Christian education he was familiar with this doctrine. In helping his young sister to prepare for confirmation he showed his knowledge of the details of this doctrine.

The prophecy to our first parents is this—
Genesis 3 Chapter 3, verse (15) "and I will
put enmity between these and the woman and

⁹ Ibid., No. 119, p. 289.

between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruize thy head and thou shalt bruize his heel - Christ the son of David by dying on the Cross triumphed over death and the grave from which he saved mankind; and in that way did he bruize the serpent's head.¹⁰

He did not forget these details, for later in his career, he conjured up the image of Eve leaving paradise to illustrate the depth of unhappiness which man could experience.

Yet, he seems to have either deliberately ignored, or to have been unaware of the full implications of this doctrine. The theory which he evolved concerning the intellect contradicts the effects of Original Sin upon man's nature: that is, according to Christianity the functioning of the intellect is impeded by the unleashed lower appetites, particularly those of the senses as a result of Adam's sin. But Keats in his theory did not adhere to this teaching for he implied that the intellect was perfect, in fact, that it was divinely oriented, stating that there was "intelligences or sparks of the Divinity in millions."¹¹ Moreover he believed that they tended unhindered towards the true and the good saying "They know, they see, and they are pure, in short, they are God."¹²

10 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 119, p. 289.

11 Ibid., No. 123, p. 334.

12 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 123, p. 334.

Carrying his theory to its logical conclusion in 'Eudymion' he strayed even further from this doctrine. Here he defined his concept of happiness and it seems to coincide with Christian teaching.

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine
A fellowship with essences till we shine
Full alchemiz'd and free of space.¹³

But the pity is that in the subsequent passage he erred in stating that the intellect could bring man complete happiness on earth which, according to him, consisted of a union of minds in love or friendship.

But there are
Richer entanglements, enthrallments, far
More self destroying, leading by degrees
To the chief intensity, the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship.¹⁴

With this theory then, he was ignoring the Christian teaching that man's complete fulfillment was realized in a union not with humanity on earth but with the Divinity in heaven.

However, he soon saw that he could not effect his theory of happiness in his own life. His comments in his correspondence on the subject of happiness show he discovered it to be of rare occurrence. Hence he did not depend upon it stating in a letter to Bailey that his own unhappiness

¹³ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

had caused him to adopt a stoical attitude.

You perhaps at one time thought there was such a thing as Worldly happiness to be arrived at, at a certain period of time marked out - you of necessity from your disposition have thus been led away. I scarcely remember counting upon happiness. I look not for it if it be not in the present hour - nothing startles me beyond the present moment.¹⁵

In fact, his lack of happiness led him to contradict his theory of happiness entirely, for he dismissed the concept of happiness as being merely a youthful ideal.

...young men for sometime have as an ideal that such a thing as happiness is to be had and therefore are extremely impatient under unpleasant restraining - in time however of such stuff is the world about them they know better and instead of striving from uneasiness greet it as an habitual sensation - a pannier which is to weigh upon them throughout life.¹⁶

Nor did he discover that love or friendship brought him lasting happiness for he complained to Fanny Brawne that he had never experienced complete happiness, that he had "never known any unalloy'd happiness for many days together."¹⁷

So in practise, if not in theory, he did come to accept the lack of worldly happiness, hence approaching the Christian view of man's life, even if the reasoning he used

¹⁵ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 31, p. 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., No. 62, p. 133.

¹⁷ Ibid., No. 134, p. 352.

to arrive at this conclusion was not solid, for he believed that if a person experienced complete happiness in life, then death would of necessity hold all the troubles that life should have contained.

The most interesting question that can come before us is, how far by the persevering endeavours of a seldom appearing Socrates mankind can be made happy - I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme but what must it end in? Death - and who could in such a case bear with death - the whole troubles of the world which are now frittered away in a series of years, would then be accumulated for the last days of a being.¹⁸

Even this faulty reasoning does underline Keats's belief in an intrinsic imperfectability of humanity which is the basis of the doctrine of Original Sin.

There was another effect of Original Sin upon man's nature which he seems to have ignored. His exaltation of the imagination seems to be a deliberate flaunting of Christian doctrine which states that this human faculty was to be controlled, not let run wild, since Adam's sin had unleashed its power permitting it to interfere with the more important faculties of the intellect and the will. Pascal, in *Pensees*, defined the Christian attitude toward the imagination.

C'est cette partie dominante dans l'homme, cette maistresse d'erreur et de faussete et d'autant plus fourbe qu'elle ne l'est pas toujours; car elle seroit regle infaillible de verite, si elle l'estoit infaillible de mensonge. Mais,

¹⁸ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 123, p. 334.

estant le plus souvent fausse, elle ne donne aucune
marque de sa qualite, marquant du mesme caractere le
vray et le faux.¹⁹

He also made it quite clear that the imagination is particularly harmful in that it distorts the perception of reality in that is "grossit les petits objets jusqu'a en remplir nostre ame par une estimation fantastique; et, pas une insolence temeraire, elle amoindrit les grandes jusqu'a sa mesure...."²⁰ Whereas Keats encouraged the cultivation of the imagination. In 'Fancy' for instance one could hardly agree with Trilling's estimate that Keats strongly "adhered to the principle of reality,"²¹ for here he advocates the use of the imagination to escape from reality.

Then let winged Fancy wander
Through the thought still spread beyond her;
Open wide the mind's cage door
She'll dart forth and cloudward soar.²²

As E. C. Pettet points out, he is in favour of fantasy; that man should use his imagination to create a beautiful world in which to dwell. This is obvious in the following passage:

19 Pantheon- Pascal's Pensees, 1950, p. 38.

20 Pantheon- op. cit., p. 48.

21 Lionel Trilling - op. cit., p. 24.

22 Harold E. Briggs- p. 250.

She will bring in spite of frost,
 Beauty that the earth hast lost;
 She will bring thee, all together,
 All delights of summer weather;
 All the buds and bells of May
 From dewy sward or thorny spray;
 All the heap'd Autumn's wealth;
 With a still mysterious stealth;
 She will mix these pleasures up
 Like three fit wines in a cup,
 And thou shalt quaff it;²³

Not only in his poetry, but in his correspondence as well he exalted the imagination above that of the intellect. It seems almost as if he is saying that he preferred to live in a world of images rather than of ideas for in a statement which he made in a letter to Shelley this appears to be the implication "My imagination is a monastery and I am its monk- you may explain my metaphor to yourself."²⁴ Although he refused to adhere to the truth revealed by the intellect, he had no doubts concerning the veracity of the imagination as is evidenced by statements such as, "the imagination may be compared to Adam's dream he awoke and found it truth."²⁵

To a certain extent, his exaltation of the imagination was justified, for, it was appropriate to his vocation of a poet. It must be borne in mind that beauty to him was the supreme reality and that he valued the imagination pri-

²³ Ibid., p. 251.

²⁴ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 227, p. 508.

²⁵ Ibid., No. 31, p. 67.

marily because he considered it that human faculty which not only perceived but recreated images of beauty evidenced in his statement that "what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth whether it existed before or not, for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love, they are all in their sublime creative of essential beauty."²⁶

Although many of his statements concerning the imagination contradicted Christian teaching, there are those in which he was not advocating fantasy but rather was affirming the essential creative powers of man, as for instance, his remark that he placed his trust in "the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination."²⁷ Moreover this extolling of the creative powers of imagination was proper to his era, for he, like the other Romantic poets, realized that the poet had to deliberately exercise this faculty in order to create great works representative of the thoughts and feeling of his age. Indeed, in one of his early poems, he echoed the sentiment of his fellow poets in criticizing the lack of imagination in his age.

Is there so small a range
In the present state of manhood that the high
Imagination cannot freely fly

26 Ibid., No. 31, p. 67.

27 Ibid., No. 31, p. 67.

As she was wont of old?²⁸

Modern Christian authorities might well approve of Keats's attitude towards the imagination. They would agree with him that the poet had to use and cultivate his imagination in order to grasp, retain and combine images of reality and to use it to recreate these images in their work. Most would point out that it is essential for the poet to do this because his value lies in his ability to provide an integrated insight into reality and that this depends upon the imagination. Although F. J. Sheed does not refer to the poet's imagination in his text, Theology And Sanity, he does state that the poet's gifts should be recognized and appreciated for they can help Christians to fulfill their prime duty which is to know God through an exploration of reality. In defining these "gifts", however, it is evident that it is the imagination to which he is referring.

What the Christian knows as a truth the poet responds to as a living fact he sees things so, that is one half of his gift. By the other half of his gift he can communicate his experience, so that we can see them so too.²⁹

²⁸ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 46.

²⁹ F. J. Sheed- Theology And Sanity, 1953, p. 317.

Whereas the Protestant Christian authorities of Keats's day probably would have censured his exaltation of the imagination, for Calvinism, the sect of Christianity which flourished in his milieu did not preach that man's prime duty was to explore reality but rather to atone for sin. That it did take a dim view of poetry and the poet is evident in Keats's questioning its right to condemn what was natural to man.

O for a recourse somewhat more human, independent of the great Consolation of Religion and undepraved sensations- of the beautiful- the poetical in all things - O for a remedy against such wrongs within the pale of the world! Should not these things be pure enjoyment, should they stand the chance of being contaminated by being called the antagonists of Bishops?³⁰

Then, if Keats's view of man seems extraordinarily optimistic, it should be weighed as a reaction against the excessive pessimism of Calvinism. What this Church stressed was the doctrine of Original Sin; man was sinful, he had to atone not only for his own sins, but for the innate guilt which he had inherited as a result of the sin committed by his first parents, Adam and Eve. Nor was it possible for him to ever pay back God for his sinfulness. Thus, even an admirer of this sect, J. A. Froude, after examining its teachings admitted that it turned existence into a nightmare."³¹ It is also well known that Shelley and Byron

³⁰ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 26, p. 59.

³¹ Charles G. Heberman- The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908, Vol. III, p. 222.

having received Calvinistic upbringings also rejected the Church. J. Middleton Murry has pointed out that "most sensitive individuals"³² of this period rejected Calvinism.

In this context then, Keats's attitude towards the Church does not seem so heretical. We understand now why he called the teachings of the Church, "vulgar superstitions" and too why he mocked it stating that it spread gloom.

The Church bells toll a melancholy round,
Calling the people to some other prayers
Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares.³³

Nor does his anti-clericalism appear so radical, of which Gittings has written "every anti-clerical remark made in his company drew from him a mark of approval."³⁴ Indeed he believed that the clergy reflected the inhumaneness of the doctrines they preached. This antipathy flourished when his friend Bailey's ordination was delayed, for, on this occasion he wrote bitterly "it must be shocking to find in a sacred profession such barefaced oppression and impertinence - The stations of the world and Grandeurs have taken it into their heads that they cannot commit themselves to-

³² John Middleton Murry- Studies, 1930, p. 129.

³³ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 41.

³⁴ Robert Gittings- The Living Year, 1954, p. 196.

wards an inferior in rank."³⁵ He again denounced the inhumaneness of the clergy two years later stating that parsons were characterized by duplicity.

A Parson is a Lamb in a drawing room and a lion in a Vestry. The notions of society will not permit a Parson to give way to his temper in any shape - so he festers in himself - his features get a peculiar diabolical self sufficient iron stupid expression, he is continually acting. His mind is against every man and every man's mind is against him. He is an hypocrite to the believer and a coward to the unbeliever.³⁶

His final written word of the subject of the clergy was that he hoped that in future years they would sink into oblivion. "Parsons will always keep up their character but as it is said there are some animals the ancients knew which we do not. Let us hope our posterity will miss the black badger with the tri-cornered hat."³⁷

Keats not only rejected Calvinism's morbid concept of man, but also of God. According to Calvin's teaching, God was the sole agent. In this he was reiterating Luther's doctrine of Pre-destination. But Calvin carried this doctrine to the ultimate in pessimism by denying man's free

³⁵ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 28, p. 59.

³⁶ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 23, p. 300.

³⁷ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 23, p. 300.

will entirely; emphasizing that God caused all and that man could cause nothing. Unlike Shelley, Keats did not become an atheist dismissing God as a cruel and vindictive being. On the contrary, he paid homage to God's omniscience in his poetry; as was pointed out in the previous chapter, and to God's beneficence and omnipotence in his correspondence; as is evidenced in the frequent requests he made, for God's blessing on his close friends and members of his family, and for God's assistance in his own endeavours, "I hope God will give me strength to rejoice."³⁸ Moreover, his correspondence bears evidence of his belief that God was responsible for the blessings he received, "Thank God, I am born in England with our own great men before my eyes."³⁹

Not only, then, was his concept of God closer to the traditional teaching of Christianity, but also his concept of man. His awareness of the misery and the possibilities of greatness that lay within man's nature, are the elements which Pascal defines as being those which distinguish Christianity.

Il faudroit que le vraye religion enseignast la

³⁸ Ibid., No. 102, p. 271.

³⁹ Ibid., No. 191, p. 472.

grandeur, la misère, portast à l'estime et,⁴⁰
 au mepris de soy, à l'amour et à la hayne.

It was an awareness of "un instinct que nous ne pouvons re-
 primes, qui nous eleve,"⁴¹ which caused Keats to reject the
 Calvinistic sect of Christianity. So, we have critics, in
 evaluating Keats's concept of man, saying that his aware-
 ness of the dual aspect of man's nature made him unique
 not only among the Romantic poets but also those who suc-
 ceeded him.

He stands as the last image of health at
 the very moment when the sickness of Europe
 began to be apparent, he with his intense
 naturalism that took so positive an account
 of the mystery of man's nature reckoning as
 boldly with pain as with pleasure.⁴²

Regrettable though, is the fact that his attitude
 towards Christ's Crucifixion was tainted by Calvinist teach-
 ing. The ferocious opposition which he displayed can be
 attributed to the Calvinist emphasis of the doctrine of
 Pre-destination. This sect ignored the traditional Christian
 interpretation of the sacrifice as being motivated by the
 Divine Love of Christ for God and for Man, instead they
 chose to teach that God had demanded this sacrifice from

⁴⁰ Pantheon- op. cit., p. 193.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴² Lionel Trilling- op. cit., p. 40.

his Divine Son as being the only fit retribution for man's sin. Consequently Keats did not recognize the splendour of this sacrifice. To him it was an extremely ugly act and he could not understand why Christians were inspired by it. This is evident in the reference which he made to it in a letter to Leigh Hunt.

And now I am upon a horrid subject - what a horrid one you were upon last Sunday and well you handled it. The last Examiner was a Battering Ram against Christianity - Blasphemy - Tertullian - Erasmus - Sir Phillip Sidney - and then the dreadful Petzelians and their expiation by blood and do Christians shudder at the same thing in the newspapers which they attribute to their God in its most aggravating forms.⁴³

A statement such as this explains why some of his contemporaries considered his attitude towards Christianity "very dark." Perhaps had he lived he would have come to recognize the splendour of Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross which delivered man from the corruption of sin in order to reconcile them to God through his Divine Person. Even so, he did admire those who recognized and believed in it, for, he asked Fanny Brawne to swear her fidelity "by the blood of the Christ you believe in."⁴⁴

⁴³ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 14, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 221, p. 497.

CHAPTER IV

MORALITY

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It seems that Keats's rejection of the Church affected his morality. Initially, critics of the latter part of the nineteenth century, noted for their rigid moral code, condemned him for moral weakness; Thomas Carlyle led the attack accusing him of being a "weak-eyed maudlin sensibility" capable only of a "vague random tunefulness of nature."¹ Then, the Neo-Humanist Movement in the twentieth century produced critics with acute moral sensibilities, such as Irving Babbitt and P. E. More who again derogated Keats for a lack of moral fibre.

Particularly useful to determine his morality, as well as many other questions, is Keats's collected correspondence. There his soul is revealed; for never did he, like Byron in his letters, adopt a pose. "Intimate" is the best word which has been used to describe them: whether he wrote to a member of his family, one of his many friends, or a business acquaintance, he always managed to communicate a little of himself. Hence we have critics such as Lionel Trilling, stating that "because of the let-

¹ Thomas M. Raysor- The English Romantic Poets, 1950, p. 222.

ters it is impossible to think of Keats only as a poet- inevitably we think of him as something more than a poet, we think of him as a man."²

Of those critics who have studied his letters and biography, few have found evidence of moral weakness. Sidney Colvin, for instance, remarks upon the strength of his character, saying that it was one of "noble integrity" and defining his outstanding traits as "generosity, modesty, humour, and self-knowledge, such a spirit of conduct and degree of self-control as would have done justice to one infinitely better trained and less hardly tried."³ In fact, some critics call him a hero, as for instance, Lionel Trilling who says that Keats was one who was inspired "with the desire to live life in the heroic mold."⁴ Allen Tate agrees, stating that Keats was "among the few heroes of English Literature."⁵

The question, however, is whether his morality was specifically Christian. We may, for the sake of concision,

² Lionel Trilling- The Selected Letters of John Keats, 1956, p. 1.

³ Sidney Colvin- John Keats: His Life and Poetry, 1913, p. 80.

⁴ Lionel Trilling- The Selected Letters of John Keats, 1956, p. 16.

⁵ Thomas M. Raysor- op. cit., p. 232.

dwell on two virtues: fortitude, which is the essential virtue of the Old Testament, and charity, the essential virtue of the New Testament. God required the Jews to keep His law, which implied fortitude. Through the Prophets, they were exhorted to strengthen their wills by accepting suffering, notably in the Book of Sirach (2,4-5) "Accept whatever befalls you, in crushing misfortunes be patient, for in fire, gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation."⁶ In the New Testament, the Gentiles and Jews alike, were told that the supreme virtue was charity, as for example, St. Peter (I Ep. 4, 8) "But above all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves; for charity covers a multitude of sins."⁷

Fortitude Keats had aplenty and it is in keeping with that preached by Judaism and Christianity. Even though some believe that he merely "inherited" this virtue, such as Lionel Trilling, who calls it a "tempermental endowment,"⁸ it is evident that Keats realized the value of this virtue and deliberately developed it. He knew, for

⁶ Holy Bible, New Catholic Edition, 1957, Old Testament, p. 775.

⁷ Ibid., New Testament, p. 308.

⁸ Lionel Trilling- op. cit., p. 17.

instance, that he had to accept suffering of all types in order to strengthen his will, "However I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of man- they make our prime objects as well as a Passion."⁹ In all suffering he saw that there was some good if one learned to cope with it. However, every ill has its share of good- this very Bane would at any time enable me to look with an obstinate eye on the Devil himself."¹⁰ Even personal insults such as envy and detraction he considered "stimulants to further exertion." Those who did not realize the value of suffering he disparaged, for, in discussing an argument between Haydon and Reynolds, he laid the blame on Reynolds saying that he had no "powers of sufferance."¹¹

The virtue which he called "disinterestedness" implied Christian charity; given he used the term to describe the ability to sacrifice one's self in the interests of one's fellows. He first recognized this virtue in his friend, Bailey, who was a theological student and it was then that he admitted that he too, wished to acquire this virtue. He was still trying to perfect it when Haslam's

9 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 15, p. 28.

10 Ibid., op. cit., No. 15, p. 30.

11 Ibid., No. 37, p. 80.

father died, for then he reprimanded himself for his inability to forget himself and sympathize with his fellow man.

Very few men have ever been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others. In the greater part of the Benefactors of Humanity some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness—some melodramatic scenery has fascinated them— From the manner in which I feel Haslam's misfortune I perceived how far I am from any humble standard of disinterestedness.¹²

Although he never used the term, charity, to describe the virtue he cultivated, he did recognize it as being associated with Christianity, for, in naming those persons whom he considered as prime examples of "disinterestedness" he included Christ, saying, "I have no doubt that thousands of people have had hearts completely disinterested. I can remember but two, Socrates and Jesus."¹³ Moreover, he realized that he too, was acquiring this virtue for he wrote "I shall ever feel grateful for having made known to me so real a fellow as Bailey. He delights me in the selfish and disinterested part of my disposition."¹⁴

His relationship with his family particularly was marked by charity— a most Christian manifestation of this

12 Ibid., No. 123, p. 314.

13 Ibid., No. 123, p. 315.

14 Ibid., No. 37, p. 79.

virtue. Even at an early age his willingness to sacrifice himself for another showed itself, for, Haydon relates, that as a boy he armed himself with a sword and brandished it on guard at the door of his mother's room, refusing to let anyone visit her because she was ill. Toward his brothers he also showed a deep instinct for saving and protecting, particularly his youngest brother, Tom, offering at one point to fight an usher who had boxed his ears. Then, too, when Tom was taken ill, it was John who provided for his care and who personally cared for him during his last days. He helped his other brother, George, to prepare for his trip to America, and after he left, took great pains to indite long and interesting letters to keep both him and his wife in good spirits. He displayed a similar willingness toward his younger sister, Fanny, for he not only made long trips to visit her, but often took the trouble to write letters which would amuse her.

With his friends Keats not only practiced, but preached charity. Kindness and generosity was of his nature. It manifested itself particularly in the concern which he showed towards his friends' problems. Even though he possessed little in the way of material goods, he was more than willing to share what he had with those less fortunate than himself; and if he was not able to help them himself he pleaded with his more affluent friends to help

them, as was evidenced in his treatment of Haydon. With his spiritual means he gave unstintingly as is evidenced by the solicitude which he showed to all his friends in his letters. He even concerned himself with their physical well-being. Note, for instance, his comment to Bailey, "But do not sacrifice your health to books, do take it kindly and not so voraciously. I am certain if you are your physician, your stomach will resume its proper strength, and then what great benefits will follow."¹⁵ Always he urged his friends to be worthy human beings, to be their greatest selves, exhorting them particularly to be kind saying "Men should bear with one another. There lives not the man who may not be cut up- aye hashed to pieces on his weakest side."¹⁶

Practising fortitude and charity, he naturally radiated other moral virtues which we may mention. In his vocation as a poet, for instance, the virtue which he exemplified was prudence. This, too, he developed consciously.

Hunt I hear is going on very badly - I mean in money matters. I shall not be surprised to hear the worst- Haydon too, in consequence of his eyes is out of his pockets. I live as pru-

15 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 25, p. 53.

16 Ibid., No. 40, p. 83.

dently as possible, for me to do.¹⁷

Not only did he show prudence in his willingness to sacrifice himself for poetry, but also in his willingness to work at it. Poetry to him was not merely a past-time, it was a definite task, an occupation, as is evident in his comment,

"There is no greater sin after the seven deadly than to flatter one's self into an idea of being a great poet."¹⁸

Diligence then, was the word he used to describe his approach to poetry, "but then I ought to be diligent and at least keep myself within reach of materials of diligence."¹⁹

His charity also enabled him to practise humility. As a poet he was aware of his own superior powers of perception and creation, but at the same time he realized that in society he had to restrain himself and not make a display of them. Occasionally, he confided to members of his family the strain which this imposed upon him.

I suffer greatly by going into parties where from the rules of society and a natural pride I am obliged to smother my spirit and live like an idiot because I feel that my impulses given way to would too much amaze them - I live under an everlasting restraint - never relieved except when I am com-

17 Ibid., No. 123, p. 296.

18 Ibid., No. 15, p. 30.

19 Ibid., No. 172, p. 448.

posing - So I will write away.²⁰

Even though he was irritated at times because he had to humble himself in society, he knew that there was consolation awaiting him in his poetry.

Think of my Pleasure in solitude, in comparison with my commerce with the world - there I am a child - there they do not know me, not even my most intimate acquaintance - I dive into their feelings as though I were refraining from irritating a little child - Some think me middling others silly, others was foolish - every one thinks he sees my weak side against my will, when in truth, it is with my will - I am content to be thought all these things because I have so great a resource. This is one reason why they like me so; because they all show to great advantage in a room, and eclipse from a certain tact one who is reckoned a good poet.²¹

Yet Keats was prone to pride. There can be no doubt that he aspired to be a poet because he believed that it would bring him personal glory. In a letter to Hunt it is obvious that his strongest ambition was to attain personal fame.

I have asked myself so often why I should be a poet more than other man, - seeing how great a thing it is - how great things are to be gained by it - What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame - that at last the Idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with my-

20 Ibid., No. 98, p. 259.

21 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 94, p. 240.

self to drop into a Phaston.²²

Even in his poetry he frankly admitted that he sought acclaim for himself, referring to his "ambitious head"²³ and admitting that he ever felt "athirst for glory."²⁴ Such desire, however, is innate in all men. Pascal points out that in itself it is not to be despised for it "est la plus grande marque de son excellence," since it implies that "il estime si grande la raison de l'homme, que, quelque avantage qu'il ait sur la terre, s'il n'est placé avantageusement aussy dans la raison de l'homme."²⁵ But at the same time he emphasizes the fact that if a man allows his desire for glory to dominate his ambitions it can become "la plus grande bassesse."²⁶

Although Keats's career was motivated by pride, he did not allow it to dominate his ambition. Gradually he shed his desire for fame and concentrated on mastering the art of poetry. At one point he admitted that the opinion

22 Ibid., No. 14, p. 25.

23 Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 58.

24 Ibid., p. 60.

25 Pantheon- Pascal's Pensees, p. 86.

26 Ibid., p. 86.

of the public held no interest whatsoever for him. "I have not the slightest feeling for the public or for anything in existence- but the eternal being, the Principle of beauty in all things and the memory of great men."²⁷ Nor was he concerned with his fellow poets' opinion of him, "You see Bailey how independent my writing has become - Hunt's discussion was of no avail - I refused to visit Shelley that I might have own unfettered scope."²⁸

Had his pride been for himself and not for his poetry Keats certainly would have been crushed by the harsh criticism which he received in the 'Quarterly's review of 'Endymion.' However, he ignored the personal insults and concerned himself with rectifying the defects which he admitted were in his poetry.

J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the slipshod Endymion. That it is so is no fault of mine. No! - though it may sound paradoxical. It is as good as I had power to make it - by myself. Had I been nervous about its being perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over its every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble - I will write independently. I have written independently without judgment. I may write independently and with judgment hereafter.²⁹

27 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 60, p. 129.

28 Ibid., No. 25, p. 52.

29 Ibid., No. 91, p. 22.

To a degree, this pride was necessary, for it gave him confidence in his writing of poetry. True, he did experience doubt and depression as do most writers, however, he never yielded to it. In fact, he devised a special method for coping with depression which he described in a letter to his brother, George.

Whenever I find myself growing vapourish, I rouse myself, wash, and put on a clean shirt, brush my hair and clothes, tie my shoe strings neatly, and in fact adonize as if I were going out - then all clean and comfortable I sit down to write. This I find the greatest relief.³⁰

There was, nevertheless, in Keats's character a natural pride, one based not on his powers as a poet- but rather on his honesty as a man. This was particularly evident in his dealings in money matters. He took pride in the fact that his own sense of justice inspired others with confidence in him and was not ashamed to mention it in making a request for a loan." I am sure you are confident in my responsibility and the sense of squareness that is always in me."³¹ Another time his sense of justice prompted him to post a Bill for a loan which he was making and in offering to do so he gave his reason as "a relief to myself from a too lax sensation of life- which ought to be respon-

³⁰ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 156, p. 399.

³¹ Ibid., No. 70, p. 152.

sible- which requires chains for its own sake."³²

It is not surprising then, that Keats's strong moral character drew recognition and respect from a host of friends. The painters, writers, barristers, solicitors, and theological students who comprised the "Keats Circle," not only believed in his powers as a poet, but also admired his goodness as a man. Indeed, the devotion which he inspired in his friends was extraordinary- William Haslam, a school-fellow said of him, "If I know what it is to love, I truly love John Keats."³³ Another of his friends, John Reynolds, left a lasting tribute of his devotion by having his tombstone inscribed "The friend of John Keats."³⁴ His fellow poets, Byron and Shelley showed a similar loyalty in that both rushed to his defense when he was attacked in the 'Quarterly' and Shelley also left a lasting tribute of his devotion with his famous elegy "Adonais."

Moreover, Keats's morality appears more Christian than some of his fellow poets, most notably Byron. Although G. Wilson Knight has analyzed Byron's character for evidence of Christian virtues, making statements that he "was more

32 Ibid., No. 144, p. 371.

33 Lionel Trilling- op. cit., p. 46.

34 Ibid., p. 49.

kindly, probably a more innately Christian man than Dante or Milton,"³⁵ there is evidence in Byron's letters which definitely point to the fact that at times Byron could be a most cruel and hard-hearted man. This could not be said of Keats. Then, too, Byron stated quite frankly that he preferred the principles of some philosophers to Christian morality "In morality, I prefer Confucius to the Ten Commandments and Socrates to St. Paul."³⁶ Whereas Keats was willing to admit that the virtues which he admired and imitated had their parallels in Christianity.

³⁵ G. Wilson Knight- Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, 1953, p. 29.

³⁶ Jacques Barzun- The Selected Letters of Lord Byron, p. 20.

CHAPTER V

IMMORTALITY

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Keats's thoughts on the most crucial of religious questions must be analyzed. For the Christian, immortality means that the soul enjoys everlasting happiness with God in heaven. This belief stems from others, the most important of which is a belief in God; then, in a belief in the soul as the spiritual essence of man; and a belief that happiness is the ultimate fate of man. A belief in immortality is crucial to the Christian because, as Pascal has pointed out, it determines his conduct.

L'immortalité de l'âme est une chose qui nous importe si forte, qui nous touche si profondément, qu'il faut avoir perdu tout sentiment pour être dans l'indifférence de savoir ce qui en est. Toutes nos actions et nos pensées doivent prendre des routes si différentes, selon qu'il y aura des biens éternels à espérer ou non, qu'il est impossible de faire une démarche avec sens et jugement, qu'en la réglant pas la vue de ce point, qui doit être notre dernier objet.¹

Although no complete analysis has been made of Keats's attitude towards immortality, some critics have commented on it. Most have agreed that he did not hold this belief, but they are not in accord as to the cause

¹ Pantheon- Pascal's Pensees, 1950, p. 102.

of this. Mrs. F. M. Owens is of the opinion that Keats's early death prevented him from formulating his conclusions concerning religious questions.

From all this we may fairly draw the inference that his nature, though essentially a spiritual one had not crystallized for itself or had transmitted to it any distinct form of religious belief; that he was reticent on the subject, and that, had he lived to be older, his genius would have grasped expressed whatever truth it might have grasped.²

But this statement is misleading, for it leaves the impression that Keats never bothered to consider the question of immortality; or that he deliberately put it aside deciding that he should deal with it when he was more mature;- neither of which is true. Nor does Sidney Colvin come any closer to the truth with his comment, that as in all religious matters, Keats wavered in his attitude towards immortality.

In religion Keats had neither been a believer nor a scoffer, respecting Christianity and by turns clinging to and drifting from the doctrine of immortality.³

It is true that his rejection of the Church affected his attitude towards all religious beliefs. In fact, he referred to his religious scepticism in a letter to his friend, Bailey.

² Mrs. F. M. Owens- John Keats, 1880, p. 89.

³ Sidney Colvin- John Keats: His Life and Poetry, 1913, p. 275.

You know my ideas about religion. I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is proveable, I wish I could enter into all your feelings on the subject merely for one short ten minutes and give you a page or two to your liking. I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think poetry itself merely a Jack-O-Lantern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance - ⁴

But scepticism should not be confused with cynicism. It must be remembered that he was pursuing his own quest for truth and that one of the prime problems which he wished to solve was the ultimate fate of man. Like Goethe's Young Werther he was constantly asking himself "What is the heart, what is the destiny of man?" In fact, so frequently did he speculate upon this matter that he felt obliged to justify himself in a letter to his brother.

Give me this credit, do you not think I strive to know myself. Give me this credit and you will not think on my own account I repeat the lines of Milton.

How charming is divine philosophy
Not harsh'd and crabbed as dull fools suppose
But musical as Apollo's lute.⁵

It was his questioning of the fate of the poet's soul in his poetry which led him to speculate on the possibility of immortality. In his poem, 'Bard of Passion And Of Mirth', for instance, he questioned the possibility of the poet's

⁴ Maurice Buxton Forman- Letters of John Keats, No. 58, p. 110.

⁵ Ibid., No. 123, p. 316.

soul enjoying a double immortality.

Bards of Passion and of Mirth
 Ye have left your souls on earth!
 Have ye souls in heaven too,⁶
 Double lived in regions new.

This question he answered in other poems stating that after death the poet's souls fled

into the realms above
 Regions of peace and everlasting love.⁷

Moreover, in 'Epistle to My Brother George' he expressed the hope that his own soul would share in this immortality.

What though I leave this dull and earthly mould
 Yet shall my soul lofty converse hold
 With after times.⁸

Then too, his conviction that man was destined for ultimate happiness strengthened his belief in immortality. Never did his awareness of misery cause him to lose hope in eternal happiness, as it did for Byron, who revealed his cynical attitude towards immortality in his letters.

I will have nothing to do with your immortality;
 we are miserable enough in this life, without
 the absurdity of speculating on another one, if
 men are to live why die at all? If they are going
 to die, why disturb the sweet and sound sleep

⁶ Harold E. Briggs- The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Keats, p. 252.

⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

⁸ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 30.

that knows no waking.⁹

On the contrary, Keats's own misery strengthened his conviction that he would experience happiness in an after life, for, shortly before his death, when his physical suffering was intensified by his anguish at being parted from Fanny, he wrote expressing his belief in an after life.

I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing before me, some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last visit at Wentworth Place ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be. We cannot be made for this sort of suffering.¹⁰

This belief in immortality was crucial for Keats insofar as it determined his attitude towards death. Believing that happiness awaited him in an after life he anticipated death. Whereas Byron, dwelling on the misery of life, hoped that death signified total extinction.

I look to death as a relief from pain, without a wish for an after life, but a confidence that the God who punishes in this existence has left the last asylum for the weary.¹¹

The contrast between their respective attitudes is strikingly borne out in one of Keats's early poems in which he re-

⁹ Jacques Barzun- The Selected Letters of Lord Byron, 1951, p. 36.

¹⁰ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 239, p. 522.

¹¹ Jacques Barzun- op. cit., p. 36.

futed Byron's concept of death as total extinction, saying that death for him signified an awakening to bliss.

Can death be asleep, when life is but a dream
and scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain to die.

How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
His rugged path, nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake.¹²

Only once did Keats express dread of death. This occurred when he realized that he was approaching death himself and that he would be separated from his beloved Fanny, so, in anguish he wrote to her.

I wish for death every day and night to deliver
me from these pains and then I wish death away,
for death would destroy these pains which are
better than nothing, land and sea, weakness and
decline are great separators, but death is the
great divorcer.

Even this, though, was tempered by a previous declaration of his hope that they would be reunited in an after life.

I long to believe in immortality, I shall
never bid you an entire farewell, if I am
destined to be happy with you here- how short
is the longest life. I wish to believe in
immortality, I wish to live with you forever.¹⁴

12 Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 15.

13 Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 239, p. 522.

14 Ibid., No. 223, p. 501.

It comes as no surprise then, that some critics unaware of his belief in immortality, are baffled by his treatment of death in his poetry. Frequently, critics, such as Colvin, single out some poems as being peculiar in that they contain "another strange reference to joyful death."¹⁵ Actually though they are not so strange considering that when he wrote "Why Did I Laugh Tonight" for instance, his own misery, both mental and physical, had intensified to such an extent, that his hope for eternal happiness took possession of him, and all he could desire was that death would release him into this immortal state where he would realize how paltry temporal blisses were in comparison.

O Darkness, Darkness ever must I moan,
 To question Heaven and Heart in vain,
 Why Did I laugh? I know this being's lease
 My fancy to it utmost blisses spread;
 Yet could I on this very midnight's cease,
 And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;
 Verse, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed,
 But death intenser, Death is life's high need.¹⁶

So extreme was his suffering that even moments of bliss caused him to anticipate the greater bliss of immortality.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful death
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme
 To take into the air my sweet breath;

¹⁵ Sidney Colvin- op. cit., p. 302.

¹⁶ Harold E. Briggs- op. cit., p. 252.

Now more than ever seem'st rich to die.¹⁷

He did admit, however, that although he was convinced of immortality, he was unsure of its exact nature. This is evident in the passage he wrote shortly after his brother Tom's death, concerning their belief in immortality.

The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature; but his last moments were not so painful, and his very last was without pain. I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death- Yet the commonest observations of the commonest people on death are as true as their proverbs. I have scarce a doubt of immortality of some nature or other, neither had Tom.¹⁸

Yet he was convinced that happiness was of the essence of immortality, for, he stated that one of his favourite speculations was that "we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated."¹⁹ Moreover, he realized that part of this happiness consisted of a communion of spirit.

That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality- there will be no space and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligences of each other.²⁰

17 Ibid., p. 290.

18 Maurice Buxton Forman- No. 98, p. 245.

19 Ibid., No. 31, p. 67.

20 Ibid., No. 98, p. 246.

However, he never referred to the Christian explanation of this happiness as consisting of a communion with the Divine Spirit of God. This is most peculiar since, as was pointed out previously, he not only accepted the existence of God, but also paid Him homage.

It is probable though, that he ignored this aspect of immortality because of the Calvinist interpretation of the doctrine, for, what they stressed was that God alone decided man's fate; that neither man's prayers or his actions played any role in God's ultimate decisions. In rejecting this doctrine, Keats did not turn against God,- he merely ridiculed those who preached this doctrine.

The common cognomen of the world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears' from which we are redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven. What a little circumscribed notion.²¹

Yet, in working out his own scheme of salvation he did not exclude God entirely, rather he stated that it was He, who designed each individual's "eternal bliss." But what he stressed in his scheme was that one had to possess a "sense of identity" to attain eternal bliss. This was attained, according to him, by developing the natural powers of the soul.

²¹ Maurice Buxton Forman- op. cit., No. 123, p. 334

These three materials are the intelligence, the human Heart, as distinguished from intelligence or Mind- and the world of elemental space suited for the proper action of Mind or Heart on each other for the purpose of forming the soul or intelligence destined to possess the sense of identity.²²

Hence, each man determined his own fate by allowing circumstances to mould his faculties of intellect and heart to form a soul.

Men are formed by circumstances- What are circumstances but touchstones of his heart- what are touchstones? but provings of his heart, what are provings of his heart, but alterers of his nature? and what is his altered nature but his soul.²³

His scheme of salvation coincided with the traditional teachings of Christianity also in that it stressed that man was responsible for his own fate. Although this has been refuted by Protestant sects of Christianity, traditional sects of Christianity maintain that man determines his own fate by exercising his "free will." F. J. Sheed, a modern exponent of such a creed, emphasizes this, stating that God himself has shown man that he is free to determine his own fate.

In any event, the fact of our freedom is certain; God has said it. He has told us of the alternatives of right and wrong, urged us to do right, warned us against doing wrong, promised

22 Ibid., No. 123, p. 335.

23 Ibid., No. 123, p. 336.

reward for the one, threatened punishment for the other; told us in a hundred ways that we are responsible for our choices. He who made us makes it clear that he made us free to choose.²⁴

Unfortunately though, Keats's scheme of salvation was incomplete in the light of the traditional teachings of Christianity, for he failed to consider the role of grace in the attainment of salvation. According to traditional Christianity, the development of the natural powers of the soul is not sufficient for salvation; the soul must be supernaturalized through grace. F. J. Sheed has also clarified this.

The supernatural life is not a development of the natural powers; it is something over and above, something that our nature could never grow to, something that it can only receive is a direct gift from God.²⁵

He states that this supernaturalization of the soul is necessary because the soul could not exist in heaven without it.

When we come to die we are judged by the answer to one question- whether we have supernatural life in our soul. If we have, then to heaven we shall surely go, for the supernatural life is the power to love the life of heaven. If we have not, then we cannot possibly go to Heaven, for we could not live there when we get there. Grasp clearly that the supernatural life, which we also call sanctifying grace, is not simply a pass-

- 24 F. J. Sheed- Theology and Sanity, 1946, p. 145.

25 Ibid., p. 151.

port to heaven, it is the power to live in Heaven.²⁶

In comparison with other Romantic writers, however, Keats's attitude toward immortality was more Christian. Evolving his scheme of salvation he maintained the belief that God created a soul for each individual's existence, whereas, Wordsworth, generally considered the most Christian of the Romantics, tended toward the interpretation of some Eastern religions with regard to this belief, for, in 'Intimations In Immortality' he speculated upon the possibility of the soul having more than one existence. Nor did Keats share Shelley's indifference concerning the ultimate fate of the soul - probably this was due to his awareness of his own approaching death. Even though he was overly optimistic concerning this fate; believing that all souls enjoyed happiness, at least he would not indulge in Byron's pessimism who found the doctrine of immortality the least acceptable part of Christianity.

26 Ibid., p. 151.

What appears as anti-Christian in Keats was actually anti-Calvinism. When he mocked the Church in his writings, he was reacting to the pessimism of this sect, which preached sorrow and spread gloom with its doctrines of Atonement and Pre-destination. His vehement denunciation of Christ's Crucifixion can also be attributed to this sect, which dwelt on the morbid aspects of Christ's sufferings and erroneously stated that they had been demanded by God. However, his anti-Calvinism did not divorce him entirely from Christianity. His was not the total rejection of Byron, for he retained a belief in the basic doctrines of Christianity.

Some will be surprised to learn that he held a firm belief in God. Never did he permit Calvinism's excessive emphasis of God's omnipotence to distort his vision as did Shelley who dismissed God as a tyrant. Rather Keats preferred to view the Supreme Being as beneficent and this vision was enhanced by his observations of the goodness of God's creation, the universe.

To a certain extent, he also held the doctrine of Original Sin, for, he believed that suffering was inherent in humanity. So firm was his belief that, unlike some of his fellow poets, he refused to adhere to the philosophy of perfectability which propounded the theory that man

could rid himself of suffering. At times though he was excessively optimistic concerning the possibility of man enjoying temporal happiness, but this was a reaction to the Calvinist doctrine of Atonement which exaggerated man's responsibility for suffering.

Nor did he allow the pessimism of Calvinism to destroy his belief in immortality. He evolved his own belief in immortality the nature of which was quite similar to that preached by the traditional sects of Christianity. However, he did reject the Calvinist doctrine of Pre-destination and in working out his own scheme of salvation he ignored God's role.

Even though he rejected the Crucifixion, he did not reject Christ. In fact his own morality was based upon a virtue which he believed Christ personified, This he called "disinterestedness" and was, in reality, charity, for it implied the ability of sacrificing one's self for the benefit of one's fellow man.

Hence Keats's poetry should not be considered the work of a pagan poet. Although this thesis has not included a thorough analysis of the Christian elements in his poetry, certain beliefs are evident, as for instance, his belief in God and the immortality of the soul. Moreover, most of his poetry reflects a Christian spirit in that it is devoted to the praise of the goodness and beauty of God's creation.

Since Keats has been labelled a pagan, it seems absurd to look for Christian elements in his philosophy. However, it is this label which is inept, as a study of his life reveals that he was not a pagan sensualist interested only in pleasure, rather that he was a thinker devoted to a philosophical quest, similar to that of the Existentialists. An examination of this quest also confutes this label, for, it shows that he did not view the universe as a meaningless chaos, but that he discovered and praised a divine order in it.

Nor does the fact that he rejected the Church prove him a pagan. Despite his severe criticism of two doctrines peculiar to Calvinism, he did hold the basic beliefs of Christianity. He accepted the doctrine of Original Sin, insofar as he believed that suffering was inherent in human existence. Though Calvinism warped his view of the Crucifixion, it did not influence his attitude towards Christ, for, he imitated a virtue which he believed that Christ personified. Moreover, he adhered to the crucial doctrine of Christianity, that of immortality, although his rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of pre-destination caused him to ignore the full significance of God's role in his scheme of salvation.

His philosophy, then, did contain more elements of Christianity than some of the other Romantic poets. Hence his poetry should not be considered the work of a pagan poet.

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