

# Papers and Originals

## Keats—the Man, Medicine and Poetry\*

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The conception of this lecture is a gracious gesture, for no poet was ever so involved with medicine as John Keats. I would pay a tribute to the kindly interest which, even before the institution of this lecture, the medical profession has shown in Keats. When his apprenticeship was over he came to study in the joint medical school of the United Hospitals, as Guy's and the adjoining and older foundation of St. Thomas's were then called. Guy's has always remembered him, and the earliest medical study of Keats, entitled *Keats as Doctor and Patient*, was published in 1937 by Sir William Hale-White, a distinguished consulting physician of Guy's. There have been many books on Keats; indeed, I have written one myself—it was published in 1934. It has one thing in common with Sir William Hale-White's distinguished study, for while both were based on the most reliable information then available most of what they record of Keats's life is now proved to be inaccurate. This has been due to the outstanding work of four scholars, three of them American, Professors C. L. Finney, W. J. Bate, and Aileen Ward. To these must be added the work of an Englishman, and the greatest Keats scholar of our generation, Robert Gittings, whose definitive life appeared in 1968 and tells us all that we are ever likely to know of the poet unless there is some very unexpected find. If I am able to adjust the record it is solely owing to my dependence on these four scholars, and particularly on Robert Gittings.

One must always remember the brevity of Keats's life and how medicine absorbed his youth and so much of his adult years. He died on Friday, 23 February 1821, four months after his 25th birthday, and the last year of his life had been one of a posthumous existence in mental and physical anguish. How short was that life can be seen by recalling that both Keats and Thomas Carlyle were born in 1795. Carlyle, who, like his wife, was always complaining of ill-health, lived on to 1881—60 years longer than Keats, who was infected by tubercle bacilli while nursing his brother Tom in 1818, just 64 years before Koch discovered the cause of the infection.

Further, Carlyle was able to spend the whole of his long life in the pursuit of literature, in reading and writing. Keats—and this is based on the new and revised information—was apprenticed to Hammond the apothecary in October 1810. A number of biographers have assumed, as I did in 1934, that all this happened in 1811, and that Keats was at school until he was 16. But it is clear now that the Society of Apothecaries, following the Act of 1815, would not admit anyone to hospital study and so to their examination unless he had been an apprentice for a full five years. The notion that somehow the period could have been shortened in Keats's case has gained wide currency. Sir William Hale-White writes: "for some unknown reason his apprenticeship was shortened to four years." We know now that this is erroneous. Keats left school at the age of 14 and 8 months. He did not fully give up medicine until he was over 21—that is, in 1816. Only four years remained to be devoted solely to poetry, and, as we have seen, ill-health crept in malignantly on the end of that brief period.

### Entry into Medicine

There has often been a suggestion that Keats was forced into medicine. It is a groundless surmise. I will not explore in detail the financial history of the Keats family. Mr. Robert Gittings has after years of research made it as clear as it will ever be. Some facts are indisputable. John Keats and his brothers derived their main income from a trust which had been arranged on their behalf by the generosity of their grandmother, Mrs. Jennings. This was administered after their mother's death by Mr. Abbey, a tea-merchant, and another trustee who seems to have been wholly inactive. It has long been part of the Keats legend to present Mr. Abbey as Keats's evil genius, as the unimaginative man of commerce who forced the poet into the profession of medicine, which he did not wish to pursue. All this is untrue, but there is one lesson that I think many of us can learn from Mr. Abbey, and that is do not go to a good city dinner and then afterwards indulge in reminiscences and confidences. At least, if you do, make sure that no one is taking it down. Yet this was exactly the error into which Mr. Abbey fell. Years after Keats's death he dined at the Girdlers' Company and afterwards had a long talk with Keats's friend and publisher, Mr. Taylor. He talked freely and inaccurately, and unfortunately almost everything he said was recorded and reproduced in the early lives of Keats.

As a trustee, in my view his conduct was unexceptionable, at least so far as John Keats and his brothers were concerned. When later he came to settle the affairs of their sister, Fanny, he is more open to criticism. He could not know that Keats as a boy of 15 would be a poet, for the very good reason that Keats did not know himself. Indeed, at this period Keats was not conspicuously interested in literature or even in reading. I share the view that Keats wanted to be a doctor, because he had nursed his mother in her last illness and had seen her die. He wanted to be a doctor for the best of all reasons, that he had a genuine desire to heal the sick. To the trustees, given the funds they had available, it was a reasonable proposal. Further, the means to put the plan into action were conveniently at hand. Thomas Hammond, a Guy's man, was the family physician, and attended Keats's mother. He was prepared to take an apprentice, and to him Keats went. There is much evidence that at this time Keats was high-spirited, even aggressive. He was certainly not "bookish," and everything about him was far removed from the sentimentality which was later to be found in his earliest poetry. It may have been some excess of animal spirits that led him temporarily at least to quarrel with Hammond. But there was mutual respect, and Keats probably entered Guy's better equipped than most students of his time.

Another illusion is that Keats was turned away from medicine by physical repugnance at hospital conditions at the beginning of the century: the blood, the smells, and the cries of agonized patients under the surgeon's knife. Sir William Hale-White quotes a graphic account of the contemporary operating-theatres and then adds, "What must have been the sensations of a patient coming into a crammed theatre like this; what must have been the feelings of a dresser like Keats, with

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his nature, when attending such a loathsome cruel exhibition?" There is no evidence to support this view. It is writing into Keats's youth the sentimental view of his temperament that Shelley and others, innocently, presented after his death:

A pale flower by some sad maiden cherished.

This was not the young Keats who, if his height had permitted, might have become a soldier. There was a toughness in the young man himself as there was in the times. Southwark had still almost an Elizabethan quality with its bear-baiting performances, and Keats showed to his friend Cowden Clarke how much he enjoyed these entertainments. He knew what to expect at Guy's before he went there, and he accepted it as part of human life, as a way of alleviating suffering. There is further evidence that contradicts this view once popularly held. All that was necessary for Keats to do to qualify for appearance before the Court of Examiners of the Society of Apothecaries was a successful period of six months' hospital study after the completion of his five years as an apprentice. Keats registered at Guy's not for six months but for a full year. This meant that he was aiming at Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons as well as becoming a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries. On 1 October 1815 he paid a preliminary fee of £1 2s. 0d. and on the next day paid a further fee of £25 4s. 0d. to register as a surgical pupil for 12 months. All this confirms how earnest was his intention, and he must have convinced Mr. Abbey that these extra fees were worth while and the further period of study which the law did not exact when he began his apprenticeship.

### Surgery at Guy's

I have tried to keep to the facts, and now I enter on the area of surmise and speculation. My own belief is that if circumstances had been a little different Keats might have remained in medicine and poetry could have been extinguished or at least have played a subordinate role. Surgery when Keats entered Guy's was a matter not only of knowledge but of great physical dexterity and rapidity of skilful action. Without anaesthetics, with the patient drowsed with laudanum and strapped down, the physician had to perform the remedial act in a period of seconds. Now there was one surgeon at Guy's who, given the state of surgical knowledge at the time, performed all this with renowned excellence. He was Astley Cooper, and a notebook survives in which Keats summarized 12 of his lectures. Either through his own merits or from some personal introduction Keats appears to have caught Astley Cooper's attention. It was Astley Cooper who put him under the care of his own dresser, and Keats must have admired the professional dexterity of this exceptionally able surgeon. But Keats was not to continue under Astley Cooper's influence.

Keats became dresser to William Lucas, the son of a most competent surgeon to whom Hammond himself had been a dresser in the days of his training. Unfortunately, it was only his father's name that Lucas Junior inherited, and in those days in medicine, as in many other professions, your father's name was an adequate guarantee to appointment to responsible office. As Robert Gittings writes: "Dogged by ill-health, including premature deafness, 'Billy' Lucas had never been fit enough to study anatomy in the unhealthy dissecting-rooms of his day; but the influence of a successful father proved stronger than this handicap, and in 1799 he succeeded to the parental position as surgeon in the hospital. Here he began a career of butchery which even his generous colleague, Astley Cooper, was to recall with horror: 'he was neat-handed' (Astley Cooper recalled) 'but rash in the extreme, cutting amongst the important parts as though they were only skin, and making us all shudder from the apprehensions of his opening arteries or committing some other error.'" Robert Gittings adds: "He put students off surgery, not as has been suggested because he was dull, but

because he was dangerous; the person most to appreciate the danger was his own dresser, left to clear up the mess he had made." And his dresser was John Keats.

It was at this time, and in my view owing to the horror of watching Lucas operate, that led Keats away from medicine, though, as I shall suggest later, the attraction of poetry was there already, in an enticing and most agreeable manner. But despite the horrors of the dressers' room, the constant bleeding of patients, the horror of seeing the absence of surgical skill that approached manslaughter, he persisted with medicine. If anything shows the character of the man it is resolve to see this through and to qualify for the final test. His trustees had been making available payments from his share of the legacy, which meant that he had called heavily on his capital. So he came on 25 July 1816 to sit his examination in the Apothecaries Hall in Blackfriars in translation of the *Pharmacopoeia* and physicians' prescriptions, the theory and practice of medicine, pharmaceutical chemistry, and materia medica. The examination was not in any way nominal, as some early accounts suggest. Astley Cooper himself commented on the improvement in medical education which had followed the Apothecaries Act, and the "certain course of education," which it prescribed "indispensable for medical students."

Keats passed, and passed although his mind was already awakened to literature. Yet he did not immediately abandon his intention to be a surgeon. He was bound by his trustee, Abbey, until he was 21 and his own mind was confused. Charles Brown, his strange but intimate friend, was to confirm the view that it was not poetry that drove Keats out of medicine but rather the fear that he might perform like Lucas and commit some fatal accident. "He has assured me the muse had no influence over him in his determination, he being compelled, by conscientious motives alone, to quit the profession, upon discovering that he was unfit to perform a surgical operation." "My last operation," he quotes Keats as saying, "was the opening of a temporal artery." Brown confused what Keats actually did with what he was afraid of doing, what indeed he had seen Lucas do. Keats was in fact opening a vein, and he commented to Brown: "I did it with the utmost nicety; but reflecting on what passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle and I never took up the lancet again."

### Devotion to Poetry

In the late autumn of 1816 Keats had his final interview with Abbey, and it is not difficult to realize the shock Keats's trustee must have had to hear that he intended to abandon his profession. It was a very lonely moment for a young man with no parents or older friend to guide him. The interview must have been a heated one, and Keats was led to speak with a self-sustaining confidence: "My mind is made up . . . I know that I possess abilities greater than most men, and therefore I am determined to gain my living by exercising them." From that day onwards he devoted himself to poetry. But he never spoke a hostile word about medicine and his medical studies and he kept his medical books. Yet as he left the old environs in Southwark he seemed to feel a breath of fresh air:

To one who has been long in city pent,  
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair  
And open face of heaven, —to breathe a prayer  
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.  
Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,  
Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair  
Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair  
And gentle tale of love and languishment?  
Returning home at evening, with an ear  
Catching the notes of Philomel, —an eye  
Watching the sailing cloudlets bright career,  
He mourns that day so soon has glided by:  
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear  
That falls through the clear earth silently.



How was it that the boy who had left school before he was 15, and had been diligent in his medical studies and the gruesome tasks that fell to a dresser at Guy's, had also become a poet? At first he was not a very good poet, but still a poet, and by the autumn of 1816 one who was prepared to risk all on success as a poet.

It is certainly the happiest part of the turbulent story of Keats's life, an episode of unalloyed pleasure. It has some profound moral for those who conduct education today, though I would prefer not to try to define exactly what it is. Certainly it demonstrates that in education personal relationships are the most important factors. Visual aids, computerized methods, nothing can equal the direct human contact between the teacher and the taught. As a boy his home life could have offered him no security. When he was 8 his father fell from his horse and died. Two months after the funeral his mother remarried. Of his devotion to her there is no question, and his nursing of her in her final illness was, unless I am mistaken, a traumatic experience in his life. But during this whole period he must have been lonely and shaken.

### Charles Cowden Clarke

It was at this time that he found the friendship of Charles Cowden Clarke, the son of the head master of his school. Fortunately for Keats it was a small school with a humane and forward outlook and above all a well-stocked library. John Clarke, the head master, was a man of liberal views, an anti-flogger, and his son Charles Cowden was a youth of a gentle and affectionate disposition, older than Keats, first a pupil in the school and later a teacher. While Keats was a medical apprentice to Hammond he would employ his free afternoons to walk over to Enfield and spend the time reading and later writing verses with Charles Cowden Clarke. The head master's table was always open to him for dinner, and it would often be late at night before he would set out on the walk back to Edmonton. Those afternoons and evenings with Charles Cowden Clarke were the most tranquil period of his whole life: they were certainly the period of his most real education.

At first there was little or no idea of writing poetry: that was to come in the spring of 1814. But reading became a genuine passion, and it is not surprising that with Cowden Clarke's guidance it was to a romantic poem such as Spenser's *Faerie Queene* that he became attached. Cowden Clarke in a famous passage describes how Keats "ramped through [the poem] . . . like a young horse turned into a Spring meadow." During the years with Hammond, Keats read with Cowden Clarke whenever an opportunity occurred, but it was during the early months at Guy's that he began, and not without agitation, to feel himself as a writer.

There is no greater excitement for a young poet than to meet some writer who is known and who has had his works published and whose reputation is already made. This was a service that Cowden Clarke performed for Keats by introducing him to Leigh Hunt. Of Leigh Hunt's generosity to Keats there can be no question. Embarrassed though he was by financial and other difficulties, he opened his home to the young poet and published his verses. He discovered in Keats "exuberant specimens of genuine though young poetry." The publication by Leigh Hunt of his sonnet in his radical paper the *Examiner* on 5 May 1816 must have filled Keats with a sense of wonder. It may have been the beginning of the road from medicine to poetry. "The murky buildings" in the early lines certainly seem to suggest the area of Guy's and St. Thomas's as Keats knew them.

O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell  
Let it not be among the jumbled 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 boughs pavilion'd where the deer's swift leap  
Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.  
But though I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee  
Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,  
Whose words are images of thought refin'd,  
Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be  
Almost the highest bliss of human kind  
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

Is there not here the beginning of his own discovery of himself, the record of his friendship with Cowden Clarke, "the sweet converse of an innocent mind," and an awareness of a world so far from the crowds in the outpatient department with festering wounds to be dressed, with teeth to be extracted, and with the endless and allegedly curative bleeding?

### Influence of Leigh Hunt

It could be argued that Leigh Hunt, despite all his generosity, was the worst influence to which Keats could be exposed. If one wanted to be superficially clever and yet profoundly unjust one could describe him as the Dr. Lucas—the Dr. Lucas junior—of poetry. For Leigh Hunt, who was a courageous radical and prepared to suffer imprisonment, and as a critic was alert enough to discover the genius of both Keats and Shelley, could himself write at times the most excruciatingly sentimental verses. Immediately before Keats met him he had undergone a two-year period of imprisonment in Surrey gaol for a most deliberate and bludgeoning libel on the Prince Regent. He had converted his prison room into a fantastic bower with designs of roses beneath a cerulean blue, and the wits of the town, even Byron, then at the height of his London elegance, came to pay him court. Even in prison he developed his reputation as a poet, and his poetry was very different from his libel. He extracted the moving and beautiful story of Paolo and Francesca from Dante's *Inferno* and somehow contrived to reduce the loveliest of all romantic legends, where the finer shades of pathos and sentiment meet, into a theme of common flirtation culminating in the incredibly egregious couplet:

The two divinest things this world has got,  
A lovely woman in a rural spot.

This was the very tendency which endangered Keats's own early poetry, yet it would be unjust to make Leigh Hunt solely responsible. For Keats had an artful dalliance in his verses before Leigh Hunt's influence had appeared. Genius is a strange and wayward element, never developing steadily and rationally. It suddenly jumps forward, excels itself, and abandons its origins. Great and original genius may begin with incredible badness. So it is with Keats; when one reads some of the earliest verse it is impossible to believe how profoundly and how soon the depth of his genius is to be changed. In the early poetry, and as I have suggested even before Leigh Hunt, he had a coy habit of making an inventory of the desirable qualities in women, as if he were a horse-dealer parading a thoroughbred—"soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy breast."

### Changed Quality

One can name the very day when Keats broke through that early sentimental verse. In the autumn of 1816 Mr. Alsager, a financial correspondent of *The Times*, lent Charles Cowden Clarke a beautiful copy of the folio edition of Chapman's translation of Homer, and Clarke at once summoned Keats to share the delight of exploring the volume. Previously they had been familiar only with Pope's version. Keats was at the time lodging with his brothers in Dean Street, Borough, "housekeeper and solitary" as Cowden Clarke himself says.

And on an October evening Keats walked over to Clerkenwell, where Cowden Clarke was staying. On through the night they read, plunging here and there to pick out the famous passages. Then Keats walked home. Cowden Clark did not rise early the next morning, but when he came down he found on the breakfast-table an envelope in Keats's handwriting. Its sole contents was a sonnet of which the later, published version reads:

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

Leigh Hunt realized the changed quality, and whatever one may think of his poetry here is the evidence of his quality, may one say his creative quality, as a critic. He wrote: "That noble sonnet which terminates with so energetic a calmness and which completely announced the new poet taking possession." Keats in those dawn hours had broken into new territory. When he left Cowden Clarke his mind was full of one thought alone, the new deep vision of Homer which Chapman revealed. But this led him back into thronged memories beyond the handsome Chapman folio—there was the fifth book of the *Odyssey*—the shipwreck of Ulysses—the memory of Bonnycastle's *Astronomy*—a school prize—Bonnycastle's interest in the poets—his extract from Pope's Homer—Bonnycastle and the new planets—Herschel's planet—the old red-brick school-house at Enfield—the West India merchant who built it—the school library—Robertson's *America*—where he confused Balboa's first sight of the Pacific with Cortez's first view of Mexico City, and so to Apollo, patron of poets, and to Homer again. Out of this welter of enthusiasm and recollection, like a water-lily out of mud, arose this moment of creative power, and so the far-reaching resources of stored suggestion concentrated into a single imaginative experience, the sonnet was produced and Keats knew himself to have taken command, knew himself to be a poet.

From that night with Cowden Clarke he had only three years to devote to poetry. By October 1819 it was at an end. In February 1820 he had the haemorrhage telling him that he had the disease which he knew would be fatal. A year later he was dead. It can be affirmed without any hesitation that those three years show the most miraculous advance made by any poet in our literature, the greatest achievement given his age, and the brevity of the period, and one must add so much that was adverse and disturbing in his experience.

### Sequence of Odes

Nothing is more illustrative of Keats's creative development than his sequence of odes. In one shape or another odes have been written in English since Elizabethan times, mainly by writers who had admired the form in Greek or in Latin in Pindar or in Horace. Among others Ben Jonson had written odes, and Cowley, and Gray—all classical scholars. Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare that he had "little Latin and less Greek." Of Keats it might be said that he had no Greek, and the little Latin he had came mainly from concocting prescriptions rather than from reading poets. Yet somehow he developed an original and most imaginative classical element in his poetry by reading Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*,

Tooke's *Pantheon*, a school-book anthology of mythological stories, by looking at pictures and vases, and by reading many classical works in translation. The order of the odes is uncertain, yet probably the *Ode to Psyche* was the first. Keats wrote it out in April 1819 in a journal letter to his brother George and to George's wife. He seems conscious in transcribing the poem that his genius has broken through and taken possession of new territory, just as earlier he realized that in the Chapman sonnet he had discovered something unknown to him before. He writes: "The following poem—the last I have written—is the first and the only one with which I have taken even moderate pains. I have for the most part dash'd off my lines in a hurry. This I have done leisurely—I think it reads the more richly for it, and will I hope encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit."

He had come upon the story of Cupid and Psyche probably in a sixteenth-century translation of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, or *Golden Ass*. In that volume it stands out, as Walter Pater was later to write, as "a true gem amid its mockeries, its coarse though genuine humanity, its burlesque horrors." The ode form as Keats employs it is a genuine invention, for it permits him to dispense with narrative and concentrate on a single instant. He imagines that he sees the two lovers together and he recognizes them. Cupid, "the winged boy," can claim no particular attention, for he is already a god and adequately attended to by the Muses. But Psyche—surely Psyche should be a goddess? She appeared a little too late in history for the Greeks to make her a goddess. Yet Keats will do this—in his mind she shall be a goddess and so, suddenly, in his last and commanding stanza he builds up a thickly wreathed complication of images for the mental apotheosis of Psyche.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane  
In some untrodden region of my mind,  
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:  
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees  
Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;  
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,  
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;  
And in the midst of this wide quietness  
A rosy sanctuary will I dress  
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,  
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name.  
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:  
And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
That shadowy thought can win,  
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
To let the warm Love in!

He is saying that though Psyche cannot be worshipped in physical form she shall be worshipped in the mind, in the memory of all things that are beautiful. There follows from *Psyche* the whole sequence of the *Odes*, *To a Nightingale*, *On Melancholy*, *On Indolence*, and the best known the *Grecian Urn*, and other poems influenced by the main sequence. A stanza in the *Ode on Melancholy* summarizes the thought behind all the odes:

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

The odes are the most finished, the most original and solid of his achievements, and from them he passed on to the unfinished *Hyperion*.



### A Fatal Journey

I have constantly in my mind that I have not said enough of Keats as a poet, and yet other thoughts will come crowding in. Part of the tragedy of Keats's life was ill-health, but the other part was money. Until Mr. Gittings conducted his meticulous researches we did not know fully the truth about this. It was always thought that Keats and his brothers were solely dependent on his grandmother's trust which Mr. Abbey administered; indeed, this is what Keats thought himself. But buried in Chancery there was a second trust of securities which had belonged to his grandfather. If those resources could have been at his disposal most of the worries of the last period of his life would have disappeared, perhaps, even, he would not have undertaken the last and fatal Italian journey. Then I have always been absorbed by the way that medicine and health or ill-health entered so much in Keats's life apart from his own training as a doctor. There was his nursing of his mother, and of brother Tom, and his own fateful illness. The physician can only carry out the regimens prescribed in his own day, and kindness is not enough; knowledge is so much superior. Keats in Rome could not have had more kindness than in James Clarke, who was sufficiently advanced in his reading to possess copies of *Endymion* and the poems of 1820. It is true later that as Court physician he diagnosed Lady Flora Hastings as pregnant when she was suffering from an abdominal tumour, which proved fatal. Sir William Hale-White suggests that it was not Clarke's fault and that he covered up for others. Certainly the Queen, like Louis XIV, was faithful to her medical adviser. James Clarke was physician to the Queen and the Prince Consort, and was made a baronet and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was even a member of the Senate of the University of London.

The amount of kindness he extended to Keats and Severn, his companion, is truly remarkable. He probably knew more of "Tubercular Phthisis" when he was writing for the *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine* than when he attended Keats. One wonders whether it was treating Keats that made him realize that a journey such as Keats had made to Rome was of no practical use. In his article he wrote that "it is natural for the relations of such a patient to cling to that which seems to offer a ray of hope. But did they know the discomforts, the fatigue, the exposure and irritations necessarily attendant on a long journey in the advanced period of consumption they would shrink from such a measure." Clarke followed the practice of his day in believing that tuberculosis was not contagious. He believed in the "efficacy of bleeding from a vein when the patient coughs up blood and also under other circumstances."<sup>1</sup> He was in advance of his time about diet and fresh air, but he did not know the answer and he must not be blamed. Until he came to perform the post-mortem examination he did not think that the lungs had been much affected.

### His Philosophy of Beauty

So Keats dies and the mind is thrown back to contemplate the tragic waste in human life, how rare genius is, how when it does occur it consumes itself or is consumed by the adverse and seemingly meaningless circumstances of life. Is it an idle speculation to think what Keats might have contributed if he had lived as long as did Carlyle, lived into the later decades of the century when the industrial revolution, when mechanization and bureaucracy, were laying their despoiling hands on the country. He had a philosophy of beauty which no artist in our own age, no writer or pictorial artist, has had the faith and courage to maintain. On 22 November 1817 he wrote to his friend Benjamin Bailey, that remarkable passage: "I am

certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love, they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty." It may be thought that this could lead him away to a world of fantasy that neglected the real world, the sort of artificial beauty that Tennyson later featured in the *Idylls of the King*. Yet his poetry was maturing so rapidly that speculation is dangerous. Thus across one of the most romantic of his stories, *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*, there flashes, like a streak of angry lightning, an abuse of vested interests, so violent in its intensity that it might have come from a Marxian pamphleteer. Indeed, George Bernard Shaw, writing in the century of Keats's death, was to imply that they were the only mature verses in his poetry. Keats is describing the two brothers of Isabella:

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,  
Enrich'd from ancestral merchandize,  
And for them many a weary hand did swelt  
In torch'd mines and noisy factories,  
And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt  
In blood from stinging whip; —with hollow eyes  
Many all day in dazzling river stood,  
To take the rich-ored drifting of the flood.  
For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,  
And went all naked to the hungry shark;  
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death  
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark  
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe  
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:  
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,  
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.  
Why were they proud? Because their marble founts  
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?—  
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts  
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?—  
Why were they proud? Because red-lin'd accounts  
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?—  
Why were they proud? Again we ask aloud,  
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?

This is, however, a sudden, almost an irrelevant intrusion. When he came to *Hyperion*, to his unfinished poem and his most mature, he returns to his preoccupation with what the life of the poet should be, what indeed is beauty, and what relation it can have to the general life of a suffering humanity.

The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it.

He sees that the poet must break away from an isolated contemplation of his own personality to identify himself with the world:

Thou art a dreaming thing,  
A fever of thyself; think of the earth.

Out of that identity with the world the poet must develop a universal sympathy, and employ his art into relation with it:

None can usurp this height, returned that shade,  
But those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest.  
All else who find a haven in the world,  
Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days.

His mind was reaching out to a long poem, epical in range, and philosophical in intention. Such a poem might have had a profound influence on the literature and the mind of the Victorian age. But what might have happened is only speculation, indeed idle speculation. The artist cannot follow the dictates of his intellect unless they are in harmony with his creative intuitions. All one can affirm is that before his early death he had led a critic as grudging as Matthew Arnold to say, "He is! He is; with Shakespeare!"

<sup>1</sup> Sir William Hale-White, *Keats as Doctor and Patient*, 1937.