

* English. *

THE INFLUENCE OF BEAUTY.

BY KEATS.



JOHN KEATS.

I.—SUGGESTIONS.

In teaching poetry there are three essentials :

1. To bring out the bare meaning. This is easy in narrative poetry ; it is more difficult in didactic poetry ; and it is most difficult in poetry of impression. To explain individual difficulties alone will not suffice. The meaning of the poem, as a whole, must be clearly brought out ; otherwise, the teaching will fail.

2. To show the true connection between the story or intended lesson or motive of the poem and its poetical dress : for example, the great pleasure felt in reading a story written in very beautiful language ; the musical sound of the words, and their appropriateness to the ideas they are intended to convey ; and the musical arrangement of the words. The teacher can do this by reading the poem so as to bring out the rhythm, and musical quality of the words and phrases, and then by making the pupils read it over many times with this object in view.

3. To inspire a real love of poetry. Try to make the pupils feel that poetry is for our enjoyment, and try to teach the poem so that they will enjoy it. Aim at arousing the imagination ; the object of teaching poetry is to educate that faculty. Try to bring out clearly what it is that is really fine about the poem.

Keats is the poet of delight, and this extract fitly expresses his aim as a poet, and the central thought in all his writings. To feel delight in life and in nature, and to give expression to it, and thus to bring delight to others—these were his aims. In one of his beautiful odes he says :

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

and in this poem, he begins with the famous line,

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

The best way to begin the teaching of the lesson is to take the first line and unfold its full meaning before allowing another line to be read. The thought centres in the word *joy*. The poet would teach us to take a life-long delight in beautiful things. When this idea has been fully grasped, we are prepared to understand how he develops his thought, and forces its truth upon us, and at last, how to take a real delight in the poetry itself.

The teacher will find it advantageous in preparing the lesson to write out, personally, a paraphrase of the extract, in order to become perfectly familiar with the peculiar force of each phrase, for the purpose of exposition. In teaching the lesson the meaning of words and phrases should be first explained, and

then the teacher should paraphrase the passage orally. The pupils should then be required to make their own paraphrases, using the utmost care to obtain neat and accurate expression.

II.—EXPLANATORY NOTES.

The lines of the lesson are the opening lines of Keats' longest poem, *Endymion* (*en-dim-ion*).

Nothingness.—Non-existence. Even if it should perish in fact, it would still continue to exist in memory.

Wreathing a flowery band.—The poet teaches us that, by obtaining possession of beautiful sounds and sights and thoughts, we can form a chain which will hold us fast in love to the world we live in.

Spite of.—Notwithstanding. See line 11.

Inhuman.—Not human, *i.e.*, in the highest sense. The scarcity of noble natures is contrary to God's intention, *viz.*, that all human natures should be noble.

The unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways.—The different employments of life, all of which bring temptations to evil. Unhealthy, because the life of the soul is injured by evil ; o'er-darkened, because evil brings sorrow.

Made for our searching.—Appointed to test us.

Pall.—A black cloth used in some countries to throw over a coffin. Here compared to the sorrows which overhang and darken the mind.

Sprouting a shady boon.—Throwing out a leafy covering for the sheep, to shade them from the sun.

Boon.—Literally means something asked for ; hence a benefit ; here the blessing of shade, which the sheep seek, from the heat of the sun.

Daffodils.—A common English plant growing in woods and meadows. It has bright yellow, bell-shaped flowers. Often mentioned by poets from love of the flower and its musical name.

A cooling covert.—Note the poet's fancy in imagining the trickling water winding in and out, under shrubs and stones and overhanging banks, seeking, as it were, to keep the hot sun from stealing away its coolness.

Brake.—A kind of fern. Here a place in the woods overgrown with brakes, or brushwood and shrubs.

Musk-rose.—A kind of rose, so called from its fragrance.

Blossoms.—Blossoms.

Dooms.—An uncommon use of the word. It generally means judgment, or fate, or evil fortune, and has no plural form. Here it means the happy fates of the world's heroes, who, though dead, live forever in our memories.

An endless fountain.—The poet here changes the likeness of the "shapes of beauty," from the "flowery band" to "an endless fountain." Endless, unusual in this connection, means never-failing ; and the poet's idea is that these "things of beauty" he has mentioned together with others which he leaves to the imagination, form a never-failing source of supply for those things which we can take possession of, in order to bring happiness to our lives.

Immortal drink.—The best meaning is : drink suited to immortal natures. This is in keeping with the poet's high ideal of mankind ; and the evident classical allusion to the nectar or drink of the gods may be disregarded.

Essences.—An essence is that which constitutes the particular nature or reality of a thing. The poet uses the word to enforce his belief that these "things of beauty" are as real as anything in life, even though they dwell in the imagination alone, and are not prosaic facts. They are not feelings which pass away like a sweet taste in the mouth. They are real ; they are part of life. To have the faculty of knowing and enjoying beautiful things makes life good and happy ; not to have that faculty is our greatest loss.

So does the moon.—Note the grammatical irregularity. The two subjects are quite distinct.

The passion poetry.—The passion for writing poetry, and the passion for enjoying poetry. The passion is two-sided.

Glories infinite.—The moon and poetry. The poet gives them as the highest examples of the things of beauty which are a joy forever ; the one, concrete, representing the beautiful in fact ; the other, the abstract, representing the beautiful in thought.

Haunt us.—Are so constantly with us.

They always us.—They become part of our lives, so that life seems to us worth nothing without them.

III.—QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES.

1. Expand the line, "a thing of beauty is a joy forever," so as to bring out fully what the poet means.

2. What is meant by "it will never pass into nothingness" ?

3. What does the poet say that the capacity for enjoying beautiful things will bring to us ?

4. Name in your own words the different things which the poet mentions as objects of beauty that we should learn to appreciate.

5. Separate the real objects of beauty mentioned by the poet from those which exist only in the mind.

6. To what two things does he compare these objects ?

7. Explain fully : "essences," "grandeur of the dooms," "immortal drink," "glories infinite," "whether there be shine, or gloom o'er-cast," "sprouting a shady boon," "some shape of beauty moves away the pall," "spite of despondence," "inhuman dearth of noble natures," "the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways made for our searching."

8. Write out the full meaning of the passage in as few words as possible.

9. Write an extended paraphrase of the passage.

10. Mention as many objects as you can, not given in the poem, which you think likely to give lasting enjoyment, keeping the real objects distinct from those which exist in thought alone.

IV.—BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE—JOHN KEATS

(1795-1820.)

The poet Keats was born in London, October 29, 1795. He was of humble origin, his father, Thomas Keats, being the head assistant of a Mr. Jennings, who kept large livery stables in Moorfields ; his mother was Mr. Jennings' daughter. Little is known of the poet's boyhood, save his ungovernable temper. He was sent away to a school at Enfield when he was eight or nine. His father died in 1804, and, six years later, his mother died of consumption. Keats then left school, and, with a fortune of \$8,000, he began life as a medical student. He studied in a desultory fashion for five or six years, but finally gave up surgery for literature. In 1818 the "Endymion" was published, and raised a storm of opposition from the critics, whose animosity was directed against Keats partly on account of his intimacy with Leigh Hunt. The unfavorable reception of his poems greatly embittered his life, and discouraged him from accomplishing as much as he might otherwise have done. He spent most of the next year in walking through the most picturesque parts of England and Scotland. But, towards the close of the year, the terrible consumption, which was so soon to end fatally, seized upon him ; and almost immediately destroyed the energy and happiness of life, by reducing him to despair. In the middle of the next year, his physician advised him to try the climate of Italy as a last resource. He set out in the company of the artist Severn, who gave up his opportunities of study in Rome, to care for the wants of his dying friend. Keats died in Rome, February 27, 1821. He was buried in the beautiful Protestant cemetery there, with the motto of his own choosing upon the tombstone, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." Thus was extinguished, foredoomed by inherited disease, at the early age of twenty-five, one of the brightest lives in the history of our literature. His writings gave promise, sadly unfulfilled, of the richest treasures of poetry. His principal works are "Hyperion," a fragment of a very fine ballad ; "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" ; "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil" ; "The Eve of St. Agnes" ; "Lamia" ; a number of delightful sonnets, and five beautiful odes : "To Psyche ; To Autumn" ; "On Melancholy" ; "To a Nightingale" ; and "On a Grecian Urn." "Endymion," though Keats' longest poem, is not equal to his maturer work. J.O.M.

LITTLE by little the morning breaks,
Little by little the world awakes.
Little by little the sunbeams shine,
Little by little—line in line.
Little by little mounts the sun,
Little by little, to sultry noon.
Little by little the shadows grow,
Little by little they lengthen slow.
Little by little the sun goes down,
Little by little the twilights come.
Little by little the night creeps on,
Little by little—Life's day is done.

—F. Albert Wilson.