

of his life at this period. His correspondence reveals, too, so far as it can, the man as he was, his aspirations, thoughts, and hopes.

II.

The spirit of *negative capability* dominated these years—the capability, as he expresses it, “of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact and reason.” The native hue of any resolution which he may have entertained—and we shall learn that he had such—was soon sicklied o’er, and he lapsed into idleness so far as any remunerative work was concerned. A practical woman like Mrs. Abey, the wife of the trustee of his mother’s estate, condoned his conduct with the words “the Keatses were ever indolent, that they would ever be so, and that it was born in them.” In a letter to his brother he uses the right word. Here is his confession: “This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless—I long after a stanza or two of Thomson’s ‘Castle of Indolence’—my passions are all asleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation about three degrees this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lilies, I should call it languor; but as I am* I must call it laziness. . . . This is the only happiness and is a rare instance of the advantage of the body overpowering the mind.”

The gospel of “living” as against that of “doing,” which Milton preached in the celebrated sonnet on his blindness, found in Keats a warm advocate. “Let us not, therefore,” he says, “go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there for a knowledge of what is not to be arrived at, but let us open our leaves like a flower, and be passive and receptive, budding patiently under the eye of Apollo, and taking truths from every noble insect that favors

* Especially as I have a black-eye.