

Up to this time, Keats gave no evidence of the future Poet whose brilliant career was so soon to be cut short by death's ruthless hand. But when we consider the susceptibility which appears in his poems to all forms of beauty, the spontaneous flow and the luxuriant variegation of language and metaphor, which they exhibit, it would seem he only needed a small impulse to make him a poet. This was given by his celebrated friend in lending him a volume of the *Fairie Queen*. Stranger than the lyre of Orpheus, the poetry of Spenser transformed the young surgeon into a great poet. Chapman's Homer strangely captivated him, and he would pour over it all night long sometimes shouting aloud in exultation. His profession was anything but congenial to him, which after mastering, he left. A garland from Appollo had more charms for him than all the well earned honors sparingly given by Æsculapins. In 1818, Keats published his first poem of any length, the *Eudymion*. There have probably been few poems in the whole range of literature upon which critical malignity has lavished more unfeeling abuse than upon that of the sensitive but aspiring friend of Leigh Hunt and Cowden Clarke. It survived its critics, however, and is now recognized, in spite of its faults, as one of the beautiful poems in English literature. The motives that swayed the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* in their indiscriminate abuse of the *Endymion* is due to motives, other than those that arose from the defects they perceived in the young poet's work. Keats humble origin, profession, and his connection with Leigh Hunt, Haydon, Hazlitt, and others, to whom the above Tory journals were in opposition, clearly points to the aristocratic spite and the dishonest partisanship of Gifford and Terry. Yet Wm. Gifford forgot the time when he was a cobbler, and Terry, when he was an actor. "Ye cannot soar where he is sitting now."

We cannot now enter into the question as to the effect of these criticisms on the health of the poet. Byron by a jeer, of such as he alone was capable, Shelley by a noble and touching elegy on the death of his friend, started what Rossetti calls "one of the romances of literature," that these attacks hastened his death. With a mind so aspiring, an imagination so acute, and especially

with a temperament so sensitive, these bitter criticisms probably affected him more than his noble biographer (Richard Moncton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton) and his English Editor, W. M. Rossetti, are willing to admit, and more than Keats himself was aware of. Yet on this point, the latter's testimony is clear and unmistakable; "I have not the slightest feeling of humility towards the public, or to anything in existence, but the Eternal Being, the principle of beauty, and the memory of great men. I never wrote one single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison, beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could inflict. I think I shall be among the English poets after my death."

The old English Reviews were not the only monopolists of the attempt in this case deservedly unsuccessful to break the poets on the wheel of violent literary criticism. Christopher North would clip the wings of the aspiring sons of the Muses when they came within his reach; yet the otherwise genial Professor was sometimes as prodigal of praise as of censure. Sitting on the throne, his enduring talents have erected, Macaulay would summon the young poets before his tribunal to receive their sentence; yet Macaulay himself profoundly bowed to Calliope's latest son.

And there is an American poet, short-lived like Keats, yet otherwise how different! whose character at once pleases and puzzles, attracts and repels us, and who seemed strangely to delight in flaying alive the minor poets who aspire to a position which he himself was jealous and successful in holding. We already have anticipated the name. He was Poe—Edgar Allen Poe.

Something soon occurred which told Keats that what he had to do must be done quickly. In 1828 his younger brother, whom he dearly loved, expired; and the affectionate and constant attendance of the poet hastened his rapidly approaching end. And it is strange that, with the echo of the footsteps of the inevitable Conqueror meeting him as the Monster approached him from the dark corridors of the unknown, and the odors that seem to step in replace the senses of the voyager, drifting toward the shore of the mysterious other World, enveloping him, he could compose those beautiful poems that were written during the last two years of his life.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)