

as great as among the feebler sort left within the walls. True, some of the leases still have many years to run. What of it? Shall it be supinely taken for granted that there is no honorable way out of these brutal and wicked compacts? There is no honorable way to remain under them. There are many just ways to be rid of them.

Let the terms of these leases themselves condemn their holders. There is no reasonable doubt that, in many States, the lessees will be found to have committed acts distinctly forfeiting their rights under these instruments. Moreover, with all their looseness, these leases carry conditions which, if construed as common humanity and the honor of the State demand, will make the leases intolerable to men whose profits are coined from the flesh and blood of human beings. It is safe to say there is not a lessee in the twelve convict-leasing States who,

were he but held to account for the excesses in his death-roll beyond those of prisons elsewhere in enlightened countries, would not throw up his unclean hands in a moment and surrender to decency, honesty, humanity, and the public welfare. But we waste words. No holder of these compacts need be driven to close quarters in order that, by new constraints, they may be made to become void. They are void already. For, by self-evidence, the very principles upon which they are founded are *contra bonos mores*; and though fifty legislatures had decreed it, not one such covenant can show cause why the seal of the commonwealth and the signatures of her officers should not be torn from it, and one of the most solemn of all public trusts returned to those official hands that, before God, the world, and the State, have no right to part with it.

George W. Cable.

KEATS.

On the slope of a "peak in Darien," in the shadow of the very ridge where stood the Spaniard,

" . . . when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise,"

my fellow-traveler captured a superb blue moth, of a species so rare and so difficult to secure that the natives sell one at the price of a day's labor. We took the beautiful creature with us on our transit, and delicately leashed it that night to the jealousies of our veranda on the plaza of the city of Panama. There, far within the old town, a mate was fluttering around it at sunrise,—to me a miracle, yet one predicted by my friend the naturalist. It is just as safe to predict that young poets will chance upon one another, among millions; "there's a special providence" in their conjunction and forgathering; instinct and circumstance join hands to bring this about. The name of Keats is set within a circlet of other names,—those of Clarke, Reynolds, Hunt, Charles Brown, the artists Haydon and Severn,—each of which is brighter for the fact that its owner gave something of his love and help to the poet whose name outshines them all. The name itself, at first derided as uncouth, has become a portion of the loveliness which once he made more lovely; it belongs to an ideal now so consecrate that all who watched with him, if but for an hour, have some part of our af-

fections. Among these, if last not least, Severn, who shut out his own fair prospects, relieved a comrade's agony and want, accompanied him along the edge of a river that each must cross alone, until, as sings the idyllist, the eddy seized him, and Daphnis went the way of the stream.

Cowden Clarke, Keats's earliest companion in letters, son of his head-master at the Enfield school, first put Spenser into his hands. At the vital moment, when the young poet had begun to plume his wings, Clarke also made him known to Leigh Hunt, of all men in England the one it behooved him to meet. Hunt, whose charming taste was almost genius, had become—and largely through his influence upon associates—the promoter of a renaissance; he went to the Italian treasure-house, where Chaucer and Shakspeare had been before him, and also, like them, disdained not our natural English tongue and the delight of English landscape—the greenest idyl upon earth. In many ways, since fortunate guidance will save even genius years of groping, he shortened the course by which Keats found the one thing needful, the key to his proper song. When the youth settled down for a real effort, he went off by himself, as we know, wrote "Endymion," and outdid his monitor in lush and swooning verse. But it was always Hunt who unerringly praised the finest, the most original phrases of one greater than himself, and took joy in assuring him of his birthright.

Shelley, too, Keats met at this time,—the peer who was to sing his dirge and pæan. Meanwhile, his own heroic instinct, the prescience of a muse “that with no middle flight intends to soar,” was shown by his recognition of the greatest masters as he found them,—Chaucer, Spenser, Chapman, Shakspeare, Milton,—and his serious study of few besides. One must have exemplars and preceptors; let these be of the best. Neophytes often are drawn to the imitators of imitators, the catch-penny favorites of the hour, and this to their own belittlement. The blind still lead the blind. Give an aspirant the range of English song, see the masters that attract him, and it is not hard to cast his horoscope.

Pity is akin to love, when not too self-conscious of good fortune and the wisdom that leads thereto. Keats died so young, and so piteously, that some writers, to whom his work has yielded profit and delight, naïvely regard him from the superior person's critical or moral point of view. Lowell, however, pays honor to the “strong sense” underlying his sensibility. When Mr. Lowell said that “the faults of Keats's poetry are obvious enough,” he plainly had in mind the faults of the youth's early work,—extravagances from which he freed himself by covering them in that sculptured monument, “Endymion,” with divine garlands and countless things of worth that beguile us once and again to revisit their tomb. Nor can we take him to task for careless rhymes thrown off in his correspondence. Of their kind, what juvenile letters are better, and who would not like to receive the letters of such a poet at play? Keats is the one metrical artist, in his finer productions, quite without fault, wearing by right, not courtesy, the epithet of Andrea del Sarto. Rich and various as are the masterpieces of the language, I make bold to name one of our shorter English lyrics that still seems to me, as it seemed to me ten years ago, the nearest to perfection, the one I would surrender last of all. What should this be save the “Ode to a Nightingale,” so faultless in its varied unity and in the cardinal qualities of language, melody, and tone? A strain that has a dying fall; music wedded to ethereal passion, to the yearning that floods all nature, while

“ . . . more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.”

Then what pictures, echoes, immortal imagery and phrase! Can a word or passage be changed without an injury, and by whom? The “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is a more objective poem, molded like the cold Pastoral

it celebrates, radiant with the antique light and joy. Could Beauty speak, even thus might she declare herself. We term Keats a Grecian, and assuredly the English lad created, in latest-born and loveliest semblance, the entire breed of “Olympus' faded hierarchy.” But what of “The Eve of St. Agnes”? Is it not the purest mediæval structure in our verse—a romance-poem more faultless, in the strict sense of the word, than larger models of earlier or later date? In proportion, color, exquisite detail, it is comparable to some Gothic hall or chapel of the best period; and just as surely “Isabella” is Florentine, and equally without flaw. These poems are none the less charged with high imaginings, Keats being one of the few whose imagination is not lessened by technical supremacy. The sonnet on Chapman's Homer was, in this respect, a foretaste of the large utterance to which he afterward attained. “Hyperion,” with its Titanic opening and Doric grandeur of tone inviolate from first to last, was a work which the author, with half his power still in reserve, left unfinished, in the loftiest spirit of self-criticism, avowing that it had too many Miltonic inversions. The word “faults” is, in truth, the last to use concerning Keats. His limitation was one of horizon, not of blemish within its bounds.

As regards verbal expression, a close test of original power, he certainly outranks any poet since Shakspeare. Others are poets and something more, or less,—reformers, men of the world, or, like Körner and Chénier, aglow for heroic action. Keats had but one ambition; he was all poet, and I think he would have remained so. However possible the grotesque changes contrived for Byron and Burns in Hawthorne's fantastic draft of “P's Correspondence,” the romancer felt that Keats would never become transformed, and pictured him as still true to the ideal. Shelley worshiped Goodness and Truth in the Beauty to which he vowed that he would dedicate his powers. Of Keats, one may say that his genius was Beauty's other self. In “Wuthering Heights,” Catharine Earnshaw avows: “I *am* Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.” And Keats *was* Beauty, with the affinity and passion of soul for soul.

It is hard to hold him to account for an early death from inherited phthisis, aggravated by bleeding at the hands of an old-time surgeon, or for the publication, after sixty years, of his turbid love-letters to Fanny Brawne,—letters in which, though probably the recipient flattered herself otherwise, there



THE LIFE-MASK OF JOHN KEATS.

is less of the real Keats than in the most trivial verse he ever wrote. If you would know an artist's true self, you must discover it through his art. It was deplorable that these poor letters should be brought to light; let us at least give them no more than their true proportion in our measure of the writer's strength and weakness. Mr. Arnold is warranted in contempt for those who enjoy the one letter that he quotes, and who profess to consider it a "beautiful and characteristic production." It reveals, as he asserts, "complete enervation," and I own that for the moment Keats appears to be "passion's slave." Nevertheless, why yield one jot or tittle to the implication that the old taunt of Blackwood's is sustained by this letter of a "surgeon's apprentice," — that anything "underbred and ignoble" can be postulated from even the entire series of these spasmodic epistles? A theory that such a youth as Keats was "ill brought up" cannot be thus deduced; the reverse, all things considered, seems to have been the case. Furthermore, it may be that the evolution of a poet advances quite as surely through experience of the average man's folly and emotion as through a class training in reticence, dignity, and self-restraint. In the first glow of ambition Keats inscribed "Endymion" to the memory of Chatterton, and gladly would have equaled that sleepless soul in fate, so were he equal to him in renown. Afterward, in his first experience of passion, he yielded to morbid sentiment, self-abandonment, the frenzy of a passing hour. It is not out of nature that genius, in these early crises, should be pitifully sensitive or take stage-strides. The training that would forestall this might, like Aylmer's process, too well remove a birth-mark. We can spare, now and then, a gray head on green shoulders, if thereby we gain a poet. Keats was a sturdy, gallant boy at school, — as a man, free from vices patrician or plebeian, and a gentleman in motive and bearing. No unusual precocity of *character* goes with the artistic temperament. It is observed of born musicians, who in childhood have mastered instrument and counterpoint, and of other phenomenal geniuses, that they are not old beyond their years, nor less simple and frolicsome than their playmates. But the heyday in the blood has always been as critical to poets as the "sinister conjunction" was to the youth of the Arabian tale. Shakspere, Milton, Burns, Shelley, Byron, were not specifically apostles of common sense in their love-affairs, but their own experience scarcely lowered the tone or weakened the vigor of their poetry. Keats's ideality was disturbed by the passion which

came upon him suddenly and late; he clung to its object with fiercer longing and anguish as he felt both her and life itself slipping away from his hold. Everything is extreme in the emotion of a poet. Mr. Arnold does justice to his probity and forbearance, to his trust in the canons of art and rigid self-measurement by an exacting standard; he surely must see, on reflection, that such a man's slavery to passion would be a short-lived episode. Before Keats could rise again to higher things, his doom confronted him. His spirit flew hither and thither, by many paths: across each, as in Tourguéneff's prose-poem, yawned the open grave, and behind him the witch Fate pressed ever more closely. He had prayed "for ten years" in which he might overwhelm himself in poesy. He was granted a scant five, and made transcendent use of them. Had he lived, who can doubt that he would have become mature in character as he was already in the practice of his art? It is to be noted, as regards form, that one of Shelley's most consummate productions was inspired by the works and death of Keats. I doubt not that Keats's sensuous and matchless verse would have taken on, in time, more of the elusive spirituality for which we go to Shelley. As it was, he and Wordsworth were the complements of each other with their respective gifts, and made the way clear for Tennyson and his successors. Impressed by the supreme art and fresh imagination of the author of "Hyperion," not a few are disposed to award him a place on the topmost dais where but two English poets await his coming, — if not entitled there to an equal seat, at least with the right to stand beside the thrones as lineal inheritor, the first-born prince of the blood. His poetry has been studied with delight in this western world for the last half-century. One page of it is worth the whole product of the "æsthetic" dilettants who most recently have undertaken to direct us, as if by privilege of discovery, to the fountain-head of modern song. But

"The One remains, the many change and pass."

This prophesying in the name of an acknowledged leader is old as the Christian era. And even the pagan Moschus, from whom, and from Bion, Shelley took the conception of his starry threnody, declares of a dead poet and certain live and unwelcome celebrants:

"Verily thou all silent wilt be covered in earth, while it has pleased the Nymphs that the frog shall always sing. Him, though, I would not envy, for he chants no beauteous strain."

Edmund C. Stedman.



THE GRAVES OF KEATS AND SEVERN,

[IN May, 1879, Joseph Severn, the artist, was still living in the city where fifty-eight years before he had closed the eyes of the dying Keats. He occupied rooms in the heart of Rome, in that building against the side of which is piled up the florid sculpture of the famous fountain of Trevi. It was here that we had the pleasure of meeting, more than once, the then aged friend of Keats, and of seeing some of the relics he still cherished of the poet. Among these was the original drawing made by Severn himself of Keats in his last illness (see *THE CENTURY* for June, 1883), also a plaster cast of the life-mask of Keats, which was believed by Severn to have been made by Haydon, the painter. The life-mask (an engraving of which is herewith given from a cast now in this country) is the most interesting, as it is the most real and accurate portrait of the poet in existence. It is, of course, much more agreeable than a death-mask would have been; for it not only escapes the haggardness of death, but there is even, so it seems to us, a suggestion of humorous patience in the expression of the mouth. The eyes being necessarily closed, it is the mouth that is especially to be observed in the mask; here will be found a sensitiveness, a sweetness, and a hint of eloquence that one would look for in any true portrait of Keats. In this mask one has the authentic form and shape—the very stamp of the poet's visage. It may be added that the mask bears a striking resemblance to one of Keats's relatives now living in America, and that it especially recalls the features of his niece, Mrs. Emma Keats Speed, of Louisville, Kentucky, who died in the month of September, 1883. At one of our visits, Mr. Severn maintained that Keats's eyes were hazel, and he insisted upon this recollection, though it was contrary to that of some others of Keats's friends. He spoke of the drawing of Keats now in the Kensington Museum, and said that he made it one day when Shelley was present, and "Shelley liked it very much." Mr. Severn, in referring to Washington Allston, said that he brought Keats's poetry to his attention, and to that of seven or eight of his friends, though Allston was the only one among them who appreciated it.

Since the date given above (May, 1879), Trelawney has been laid in the grave, beside that which contains the heart—"cor cordium"—of his friend Shelley, and Severn has been entombed in the neighboring inclosure by the side of Keats. Though apparently in good health at the time of our visits, and humorously boastful of the many years that his physician still promised him, Severn died within a few months—namely, August 3, 1879. There they all lie now, with others of their countrymen and countrywomen, beneath the shadow of the Aurelian wall of Rome, and of that pyramid of Caius Cestius which is to-day rather the monument of the two exiled English poets than of the ancient and well-nigh forgotten tribune for whose tomb it was built. It is pleasant to record (we believe for the first time) that among those who bore the expenses of the carved stone erected to the memory of Severn (and the other necessary costs of the entombment) were several of our American poets, from among whom two—Longfellow and Holland—have since followed into "the silent land." The engraving here presented of the companion graves of Keats and his friend is from a water-color drawing by one of the sons of Severn—namely, Mr. Walter Severn, of London.

As we go to press, an American edition of "The Letters and Poems of Keats" is about to appear, in three volumes (Dodd, Mead & Company, publishers), under the editorship of Mr. John Gilmer Speed, a grandson of George, the brother of the poet. Besides the poems, including a sonnet not before published, and besides the letters already published, are given the letters written by John to George Keats, in America, none of which, it seems, have been hitherto printed complete and unaltered, and many of which "now appear in print for the first time." Among the illustrations are reproductions in color of original paintings by Severn of the three brothers, John, George, and Tom. Mr. Speed's introductions and notes throw new light on the history of the entire family.—EDITOR CENTURY.]