

Page - ① B.A. Part I (English Honours)  
Date: 10.06.21

John Keats (1795 - 1821)

Keats was not only the last but also the most perfect of the Romanticists. While Scott was merely telling stories and Wordsworth reforming poetry or upholding the moral law and Shelley advocating impossible reforms and Byron voicing his own egoism and the political discontent of the times Keats lived apart from man and from all political measures worshipping beauty like a devotee perfectly content to write what was in his own heart or to reflect some splendour of the natural world as he saw or dreamed it to be. He had moreover the novel idea that poetry exists for its own sake and suffers loss by being devoted to philosophy or politics or indeed to any cause however great or small. As he says in "Lamia":

Do not all charms fly

At the mere touch of  
cold philosophy?

There was an awful rain-  
bow once in heaven,  
we know her woof, her  
texture, she is given  
in the dull catalogue of  
common things.

Philosophy will clip an  
Angel's wings,  
conquer all mysteries  
by rule and line,  
empty the haunted air,  
and gnomed mine -  
Unweave a rainbow, as  
it ere while made  
The tender-person'd  
Lamia melt into a  
shade.

Partly because of this high  
ideal of poetry, partly be-  
cause he studied and uncon-  
sciously imitated the Greek  
classics and the best works  
of the Elizabethans, Keat's  
last little volume of poetry  
is unequalled by the work of  
any of his contemporaries.

Page - (03)

Date :- 10.06.21

When we remember that all his work was published in three short years from 1817 to 1820 and that he died when only twenty-five years old, we must judge him to be the most promising figure of the early nineteenth century and one of the most remarkable in the history of literature.

The end.

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