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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 men 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

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At the mere touch of cold philosophy?

There was an awful rainbow 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- erewhile made
The tender-person'd
Lamia melt into a
shade.

Partly because of this high ideal of poetry, partly because he studied and unconsciously imitated the Greek classics and the best works of the Elizabethans, Keat's least little volume of poetry is unequalled by the work of any of his contem-

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pooraries. 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.

Munni Bhushan Sinha
Deptt. of English
S.S. College, Jehanabad