

Page - (01) B.A. Part I (English Honours)
Date: 28.01.22

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

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- erewhile 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 contem-

Page (03)

Date : 28.01.22

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.

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