

GEORGE KEATS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DIAL.

Dear Sir,—When last at your house I mentioned to you that I had in my possession a copy of some interesting remarks upon Milton, hitherto unpublished, by John Keats the poet. According to your wish I have copied them for your periodical. But I wish, with your permission, to say here how they came into my possession; and in doing this I shall have an opportunity of giving the imperfect tribute of a few words of remembrance to a noble-minded man and a dear friend, now no more an inhabitant of this earth.

Several years ago I went to Louisville, Ky., to take charge of the Unitarian church in that city. I was told that among those who attended the church was a brother of the poet Keats, an English gentleman, who had resided for many years in Louisville as a merchant. His appearance, and the shape of his head arrested attention. The heavy bar of observation over his eyes indicated the strong perceptive faculties of a business man, while the striking height of the head, in the region assigned by phrenology to veneration, was a sign of nobility of sentiment, and the full development behind marked firmness and practical energy. All these traits were equally prominent in his character. He was one of the most intellectual men I ever knew. I never saw him when his mind was inactive. I never knew him to acquiesce in the thought of another. It was a necessity of his nature to have his own thought on every subject; and when he assented to your opinion, it was not acquiescence but agreement. Joined with this energy of intellect was a profound intellectual modesty. He perceived his deficiency in the higher reflective faculties, especially that of a philosophical method. But his keen insight enabled him fully to appreciate what he did not himself possess. Though the tendency of his intellect was wholly critical, it was without dogmatism and full of reverence for the creative faculties. He was thoroughly versed in English literature, especially that of the Elizabethan period a taste for which he had probably imbibed from his brother and his friends Leigh Hunt and others. This taste

he preserved for years in a region, where scarcely another could be found who had so much as heard the names of his favorite authors. The society of such a man was invaluable, if only as intellectual stimulus. It was strange to find, on the banks of the Ohio, one who had successfully devoted himself to active pursuits, and who yet retained so fine a sensibility for the rarest and most evanescent beauties of ancient song.

The intellectual man was that which you first saw in George Keats. It needed a longer acquaintance before you could perceive, beneath the veil of a high-bred English reserve, that profound sentiment of manly honor, that reverence for all Truth, Loftiness, and Purity, that ineffaceable desire for inward spiritual sympathy, which are the birth-right of all in whose veins flows the blood of a true poet. George Keats was the most manly and self-possessed of men — yet full of inward aspiration and conscious of spiritual needs. There was no hardness in his strong heart, no dogmatism in his energetic intellect, no pride in his self-reliance. Thus he was essentially a religious man. He shrunk from pietism, but revered piety.

The incidents of his life bore the mark of his character. His mind, stronger than circumstances, gave them its own stamp, instead of receiving theirs. George Keats, with his two younger brothers, Thomas and John, were left orphans at an early age. They were placed by their guardian at a private boarding school, where the impetuosity of the young poet frequently brought him into difficulties, where he needed the brotherly aid of George. John was very apt to get into a fight with boys much bigger than himself, and George, who seldom fought on his own account, very often got into a battle to protect his brother. These early adventures helped to bind their hearts in a very close and lasting affection.

After leaving school, George was taken into his guardian's counting room, where he stayed a little while, but left it, because he did not choose to submit to the domineering behavior of the younger partner. Yet he preferred to bear the accusation of being unreasonable, rather than to explain the cause, which might have made difficulty. He lived at home, keeping house with his two brothers, and doing nothing for some time, waiting till he should be of age, and should receive his small inheritance. Many said

he was an idle fellow, who would never come to any good; but he felt within himself a conviction that he could make his way successfully through the world. His guardian, a wise old London merchant, shared his opinion, and always predicted that George would turn out well.

His first act on coming of age did not seem, to the worldly wise, to favor this view. He married a young lady, the daughter of a British Colonel, but without fortune, and came with her to America. They did not, however, act without reflection. George had only four or five thousand dollars, and knew that if he remained in London, he could not be married for years. Nor would he be able to support his wife in any of the Atlantic cities, in the society to which they had been accustomed. But by going at once to the West, they might live, without much society, to be sure, but yet with comfort, and the prospect of improving their condition. Therefore see this boy and girl, he twenty-one and she sixteen, leaving home and friends, and going to be happy in each other's love, in the wild regions beyond the Alleghanies. Happy is he whose first great step in life is the result not of outward influences, but of his own well considered purpose. Such a step seems to make him free for the rest of his days.

Journeys were not made in those days as they are now. Mr. Keats bought a carriage and horses in Philadelphia, with which he travelled to Pittsburgh, and then they descended the Ohio in a keel-boat, sending their horses on by land to Cincinnati. This voyage of six hundred miles down the river was full of romance to these young people. No steam-boat then disturbed, with its hoarse pantings, the sleep of those beautiful shores. Day after day, they floated tranquilly on, as through a succession of fairy lakes, sometimes in the shadow of the lofty and wooded bluff, sometimes by the side of wide-spread meadows, or beneath the graceful overhanging branches of the cotton-wood and sycamore. Sometimes, while the boat floated lazily along, the young people would go ashore and walk through the woods across a point, around which the river made a bend. All uncertain as their prospects were, they could easily, amid the luxuriance of nature, abandon themselves to the enjoyment of the hour.

Mr. Keats made a visit of some months to Henderson,

Ky., where he resided in the same house with Mr. Audubon, the naturalist. He was still undetermined what to do. One day, he was trying to chop a log, and Audubon, who had watched him for some time, at last said, — "I am sure you will do well in this country, Keats. A man who will persist, as you have been doing, in chopping that log, though it has taken you an hour to do what I could do in ten minutes, will certainly get along here." Mr Keats said that he accepted the omen, and felt encouraged by it.

After investing the greatest part of his money in a boat, and losing the whole of it, he took charge of a flour mill, and worked night and day with such untiring energy, that he soon found himself making progress. After a while he left this business and engaged in the lumber trade, by which in the course of some years he accumulated a handsome fortune. In the course of this business he was obliged to make visits to the lumberers, which often led him into wild scenes and adventures. Once, when he was taking a journey on horseback, to visit some friends on the British Prairie, he approached the Wabash in the afternoon at a time when the river had overflowed its banks. Following the horse path, for there was no carriage road, he came to a succession of little lakes, which he was obliged to ford. But when he reached the other side it was impossible to find the path again, and equally difficult to regain it by recrossing. The path here went through a cane-brake, and the cane grew so close together that the track could only be distinguished when you were actually upon it. What was to be done? There was no human being for miles around, and no one might pass that way for weeks. To stop or to go on seemed equally dangerous. But at last Mr. Keats discovered the following expedient, the only one perhaps, that could have saved him. The direction of the path he had been travelling was east and west. He turned and rode toward the south, until he was sure that he was to the South of the track. He then returned slowly to the North, carefully examining the ground as he passed along, until at last he found himself crossing the path, which he took, and reached the river in safety.

George Keats not only loved his brother John, but revered his genius, and enjoyed his poetry, believing him to belong to the front rank of English bards. Modern

criticism seems disposed to concur with this judgment. A genuine and discriminating appreciation of his brother's poetry always gave him great pleasure. He preserved and highly prized John's letters, and unpublished verses, the copy of Spenser filled with his works, which he had read when a boy, and which had been to him a very valuable source of poetic inspiration, and a Milton in which were preserved in a like manner John's marks and comments. From a fly-leaf of this book, I was permitted to copy the passages I now send. I know not whether you will agree with me in their being among the most striking criticisms we possess upon his great author. That the love of the brothers was mutual, appears from the following lines from one of John's poems, inscribed "To my brother George."

"As to my sonnets, though none else should heed them,
I feel delighted, still, that you should read them.
Of late too, I have had much calm enjoyment,
Stretched on the grass at my best loved employment,
Of scribbling lines to you —"

Less than two years ago, in the prime of life and the midst of usefulness, George Keats passed into the spiritual world. The city of Louisville lost in him one of its most public-spirited and conscientious citizens. The Unitarian Society of that place lost one, who, though he had been confirmed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, was too honest not to leave the popular and fashionable church for an unpopular faith, which was more of a home to his mind. For myself, I have ever felt that it was quite worth my while to go and live in Louisville, if I had gained thereby nothing but the knowledge and friendship of such a man. I did not see him in his last days. I was already living in a distant region. But when he died, I felt that I had indeed lost a friend. We cannot hope to find many such in this world. We are fortunate if we find any. Yet I could not but believe that he had gone to find his brother again among

"The spirits and intelligences fair,
And angels waiting on the Almighty's chair."

The love for his brother, which continued through his life to be among the deepest affections of his soul, was a pledge of their reunion again in the spirit-land.

Perhaps I have spoken too much of one who was necessarily a stranger to most of your readers. But I could not bear that he should pass away and nothing be said to tell the world how much went with him. And the *Dial*, which he always read, and in whose aims he felt a deep interest, though not always approving its methods, seems not an improper place, nor this a wholly unsuitable occasion, for thus much to be said concerning **GEORGE KEATS**.

With much regard yours,

J. F. C.

Boston, March 13, 1843.
