

Esther Gould's Book Corner

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A RARE STUDY OF A GENIUS "JOHN KEATS" By Amy Lowell Houghton Mifflin Co.

One cannot help wondering if Keats is grateful, yet chuckling, over Miss Amy Lowell's scholarly two volumes in his defense. Keats the unwarlike battleground over which for the hundred odd years since his death the battle has raged so fiercely. Shouldn't it be amusing to have one's life turned up so neatly as, for example, in this passage: "The Five Courts was the great place for rackets, the precursor of our modern tennis but Keats did not, apparently, play, although we know that on one occasion he met Hazlitt going there for a game and went along with him part of the way." Scotland Yard never worked any better even for Sherlock Holmes, than this!

Yet, seriously, in Miss Lowell Keats has an able champion. If you would walk with him from day to day, know how he felt and talked and wrote, understand that inner necessity which makes any life what it is, read this book. There have been criticisms in plenty heaped on the head of the young poet who seemed to manage some of his affairs so poorly, but Miss Lowell in each case gives us the key to an understanding which goes behind criticism. And our harshest criticism crumbles into a sigh of "Poor Keats!"

But there is not even very much of "Poor Keats"-ing here. As Miss Lowell shrewdly says, everyone since Keats has looked at his life with the full consciousness of his tragic end. He himself did not have that consciousness except in a few rare moments, when as any unbalanced nature might, he felt a sort of Doom brooding over him.

No, much of Keat's life was happy. His boyhood at school and the rare vacations when he was at home were happy normal times. The death of his mother when he was 15 threw a shadow over his happiness, but this only served to drive him to what was always one of his greatest and most dependable joys—that of reading.

Even the years when Keats was apprenticed to a surgeon, while they were tearing his desire in two were not unhappy years. He made friends easily and deeply, a rare combination, and took unusual pleasure in their possession. He was genial, lovable, stimulating, faithful in the extreme, in fact a rare friend himself. And all this led to happiness.

Then above all joys was the extreme joy of poetry. After explaining the really marked scientific bent of the poet's mind, Miss Lowell says, "In dealing with Keats one must always remember that, with him, it was never other things less but poetry more." What a remarkable person he was! Not to let the overmastering love for and genius for poetry make him less a man.

Unfortunately, though, it did make him less a lover. The sad working out of the tragedy with Fanny Brawne, Miss Lowell treats, too, with patience and understanding. In fact to her, one of the chief triumphs of her book

was the bringing of Miss Brawne into a more favorable light. From hitherto unused sources she has brought to light facts which really do change the persona of the drama not a little. And Miss Brawne becomes a good deal less of a villain and more of a heroine. Of this we may be glad. There are always two points of view and surely critics have too often been blind to her's. Besides there is so much bitterness in the story at the end—so many people including "the world" in general aching to put on the villain's garb and rant and tear, that we should be glad to have one less applicant for the part.

For the serious student of Keats, Miss Lowell's book will be a fund of information, some of it entirely new, and much that has been brought together and compared for the first time. Miss Lowell presents many theories, then is never lacking with one of her own. An incalculable amount of thought as well as unsparing work went to the writing of this book.

For the student or lover of poetry Miss Lowell is a particularly congenial interpreter. No one could know better than she the struggle of the "modern" in art, and Keats was a 100 years ahead of his time.

For those who delight in Keats as a character there are numberless passages to be remembered. Such joyous human foolish things as we seldom think of Keats' saying, "O weep for Adonais he is dead" has been too long our thought of him. Brown, his companion on a walking trip writes in a letter home, after describing his own costume: "Don't laugh at me, although Mr. Keats calls me the Red Cross Knight and declares my own shadow is ready to split its sides as it follows me."

Sometimes the humor is mixed with an unexplainable pathos. As in this

letter to his sister—he was 21 at the time, he describes a perfect room which would satisfy him, and adds "I should like the window to open onto the Lake of Geneva—and there I'd sit and read all day like the picture of somebody reading." In a life which was certainly hectic though it was not entirely unhappy, it is no wonder that he longed even for the repose of "the picture of somebody reading."

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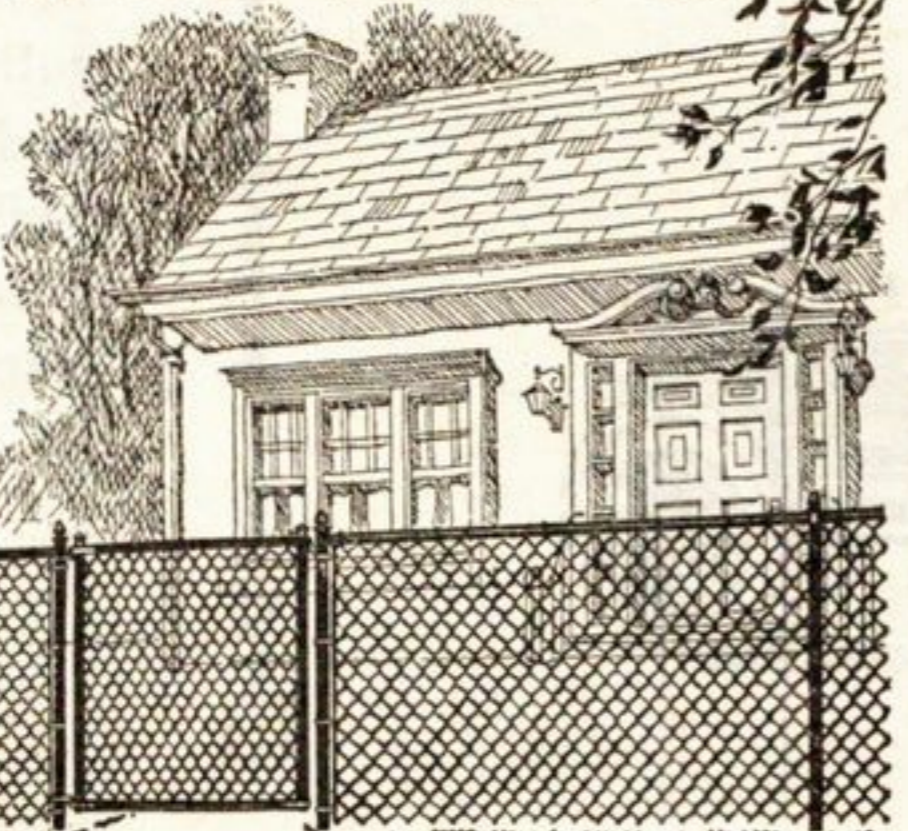
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Federation

"TO form a more perfect union" was the animating thought of the statesmen who met to draft America's constitution. Their problem was to weld the sections they represented into a political entity that would function most efficiently and enduringly in the service of the people.

A similar problem was presented nearly a century later to the organizers of America's telephone service. Licenses under the first patents were being granted to isolated companies that were forming to introduce local

service. "A more perfect union" of these companies seemed, from the beginning of the telephone's adoption by the people, to be essential, and so the structure of the Bell System was planned.

This organization exists today substantially as it was then conceived,—a group of companies, each preserving its individuality and applying local knowledge to local needs, but all federated into a single cohesive union in order that nation-wide, universal service may be provided.



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