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Keats, John

John Keats unpublished poem to his sister Fanny, April, 1818.

Boston, 1909.

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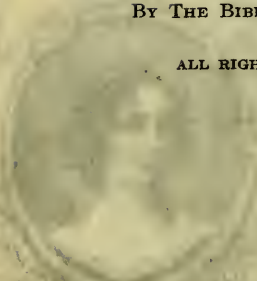
John Keats  
Unpublished Poem  
To His Sister Fanny  
April, 1818



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Boston ——— 1909

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## Introductory Remarks



In spite of the announcements by publishers of "exhaustive" and "definitive" editions of the works of dead authors there is scarcely a single list which may really be called complete. After the field of production has been supposedly thoroughly gleaned there always remains something which has been overlooked or forgotten which is eagerly snatched up and utilized by a later comer. Sometimes the existence of this flotsam and jetsam is known, but is for the time out of reach; but often it turns up accidentally and is regarded by the finder as treasure-trove. There is doubtless much of the kind lying hidden in dusty nooks and out-of-the-way places, patiently awaiting discovery and disinterment at the hands of the curious delver in the literary wreckage of the past.

The present poem, addressed by the poet Keats to his sister Fanny, can hardly be reckoned among the literary "finds" of the time, because it never

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was lost. Written nearly a hundred years ago, it long remained in the Keats family, with other fragmentary matter; then passing into the possession of Keats' biographer, Richard Monckton Milnes, who testifies in the margin to its genuineness. Although the date affixed to the MS. is 1818, internal evidence would tend to show that it might have been written a few years earlier. Fanny Keats was born in 1803, when her brother was eight years old. Her father died while she was an infant, and her mother soon followed. The boys were sent away to school, while Fanny was placed with a guardian, a Mr. Abbey. The brother and sister were tenderly attached, and the lad was fond of addressing long rhymed letters to his sister, of which the one before us is doubtless an example. It is not, truth to say, especially rich in literary quality, though there are fine lines here and there with the true Keatsian touch. But what is more important than the poem itself is the fact that it brings us, through association, face to face with certain phases of the poet's career and character that have been charily dealt with by his biographers, as if to know the truth would destroy the charm of his work or detract from its literary influence.

There is no recent English poet who has been so persistently misunderstood and misrepresented as Keats. We have been taught by his lesser biographers—and they are legion—to regard him as an anæmic and effeminate young person of extraordinary sensitiveness, whose life and work were cut short by the severe criticism of his verse by a leading magazine. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

As a boy Keats was physically strong and healthy. His overflowing vitality took an aggressive form, and he was known from his childhood as an habitual fighter. He fought his mates at school, he fought the town boys, he fought his teacher, and even his own brothers; and so furious sometimes became his attacks that they seemed to verge upon madness. These fits, however, soon passed and no lasting grudge was ever held.

When he was eighteen he fell in with a rollicking set of young fellows, all of literary ambitions and aspirations. The days of deep drinking had not passed, and it was no disgrace to be seen under the influence of a bottle of wine or a stiff glass of punch. This kind of life and companionship had a peculiar fascination for Keats, and he gave himself up to it without limit. There

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is little doubt that his manner of life for the next three or four years had much to do with bringing on the trouble which shortened his career. Owing to his irregular habits the doors of his sister's guardian were shut against him and although they corresponded they saw little of each other afterwards.

In the winter of 1820, Heats took a severe chill and in a fit of coughing burst a bloodvessel. He died at Rome a year later. Four or five years later Fanny married a Spanish gentleman by whom she had four children. She died at Madrid in 1887.

The original MS. of this poem, which is herein reproduced in facsimile, was recently purchased by our Society from Mr. E. D. Brooks for eleven hundred dollars. It has been presented to Mr. William K. Birby with the compliments of The Bibliophile Society.

Charles E. Hurd



## To Fanny

As young and pretty as the bud  
Of the strawberry in the wood ;  
As restless as the lawn that 's there  
Playing like a thing of air,  
Chasing the wind, if there be any;—  
Like these art thou, my little Fanny.

I look on thee, and in thy face,  
The life is there of childish grace,—  
I see the silent thought that breaks  
Into young smiles as Fancy wakes ;  
And newly wing'd Intelligence,  
Trying its little flights from thence :  
I see a strife 'twixt Health and Beauty,—  
Which shall the best achieve its duty.  
A gentle strife for both contend,  
But both, like bees, their labours blend.  
Thy cheek by health is rounded well,  
By its hand invisible ;  
But sweet and rosy hues there are,  
And you may trace young Beauty there.  
Health made thy gentle lips to be  
Happy in their own company ;

rit.]

All lavish of the cherry's dyes,  
And like its leaf, when Autumn flies;—  
But Beauty claims thy young blue eyes.  
And oh thy little light soft hair,  
Parted upon thy forehead fair,  
Doth seem to take its own Delight  
In leaning smooth and looking bright.  
Thy figure small, and tiny feet  
Dotting the carpet round us, greet  
Our hearts with joy, and feed the sense  
Of love for utter innocence.

These beauties, Fanny, are to thee  
As pet, unknown Society;  
And so, they 're a befitting dress  
For thy mental prettiness,—  
For thy simple thoughts, that seem  
Fragments of a Summer dream,—  
For thy merry lips' first sayings,—  
And thy fancy's fairy strappings:—  
Thou art wiser far than many  
That in pearls are richer, Fanny!

Doth not Wisdom dwell with thee  
In thy white simplicity—  
In thy young imaginings  
Which float about on unstain'd wings,—

In busy prattlings kindly meant,  
And in thy beautiful content.

Thine is the bloom of life — and we  
Are Jarrers in Society;  
Opposers of each other's good,  
And spoilers of all neighbourh'd:  
Prone to pain and serious folly,  
And framers of self-melancholy.  
Thou dost wander light and free  
In thine own heart's company,  
Making mirth wherever chance  
May lead thee in thy mazy dance,  
Like the linnet wild, that weaves  
Its liberty among the leaves.

Little copier of the lives  
Of thy playmate relatives, —  
Mocker of the elder ones; —  
How thy wayward fancy runs  
By light from thine own laughing eyes  
Its circle of sweet mimicries.  
Oft in thy little face I find  
The fitting shadows of the mind  
Pass and repass, as thou dost tease  
Thy mind with infant sophistries.  
And then, when no conclusion 's near,  
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Thou, like a true philosopher,  
Dost seek the joyous heart again  
And leav'st at rest the little brain.

Faretheewell—I 've found in thee  
Blithe and sweet Society;  
Merriment in drooping pain,  
Pictures, given back again,  
Of the pranks of childishness  
Ere I tasted of distress;  
Faretheewell—may youth be slow  
To pass from thee who wear'st it so;  
For years are but the wings of care  
To one so innocent and fair.

[May the calm light that 's round thee now  
Never be darken'd from thy brow;]  
Around thee joy, within thee truth,  
Thou 'rt worthy of perpetual youth;  
Worthy of that delight which lies  
Under thy blue and pleasant eyes;  
Worthy thy mother's fond caressing.  
I owe thee, Fanny, many a blessing  
For hours of kindness and glee,  
For words of childish charity,  
For pleasures generous, light, and many,  
And therefore do I bless thee, Fanny.

Ap'l, 1818.

As young & pretty as the bud,  
Of the strawberry in the wood;  
As restless as the fawn that's there  
Playing like a thing of air,  
Chasing the Wind, if there be any,  
Like these, art thou, my little Fanny.

I look on thee, and in thy face,  
~~The life & grace in childish grace.~~  
I see the silent thought that breaks  
Into young smiles as Fanny wakes;  
And newly wing'd Intelligence,  
Trying its little flight from hence  
To find the way to Health & Beauty,  
Which shall the best achieve its duty,  
A gentle strife for both contend,  
And both like bees their labours blend.  
The cheek by Health is rounder well,  
By the hand invisible,  
And sweet to see, here they are  
And you may trace your Beauty there.  
Health made thy gentle lips to be  
Happy in their own company.

all lavish of the cherry's dyes,  
And like its leaf, when Antenna flies, - }  
But Beauty claims thy young blue eyes, - }  
And oh thy little light soft hair  
Parted upon thy forehead fair,  
Doth seem to take its own delight  
In ~~being~~ <sup>leaning</sup> smooth & looking bright,  
Thy figure small, & tiny feet  
Dotted the carpet round us, greet  
Our hearts with joy, to feed the sense  
Of love for utter innocence.

These beauties, Fanny, are to thee  
As yet, unknown Society, -

And so, they're a befitting drop  
For thy mental prettiness,  
For thy simple thoughts, that seem  
Fragments of a summer dream,  
For thy merry lips' first sayings,  
And thy Fancy's fancy sayings:  
Thou art wiser far than many,  
That ~~are~~ in years are richer, Fanny!

Doth not Wisdom dwell with thee  
In thy white simplicity -  
In thy young imaginings  
which float about on unstead'd wings,  
In busy prattling kindly meant,  
And in thy beautiful content

There is the bloom of life - and we  
 Are farrest in society  
 X Prone to pain, & serious folly  
 And frames of self melancholy.  
 Then thy little day enjoyest, enjoying  
 With thou dost wander light & free  
 In ~~little~~ thine own heart's for company  
 Making smitt' whic'er chance  
 May lead thee in thy mazy damed  
 Like the linnet wild, that weaves  
 Its liberty among the leaves.

+ Opposer of such other good  
 And spoilers of all neighbors

Little Copier of the lives  
 Of thy playmate relatives,  
 Mocker of the Ulder Ones; -  
 How thy wayward Fancy runs  
 By the light from <sup>thine own</sup> laughing Eyes  
 In circle of sweet mimeries  
 Oft in thy little face I find  
 The flitting shadows of the mind  
 Pass & repass, as thou dost tease  
 Thy mind with infant sophistries  
 And there, when no conclusion's near,  
 Thou like a ~~great~~ true philosopher  
~~Thou takest~~ ~~thy~~ ~~own~~ ~~heart~~ ~~again~~  
~~and~~ ~~leavest~~ ~~thine~~ ~~little~~ ~~brain~~.

Faretheivell - I've found in thee  
 A little & sweet society

Movement in <sup>drooping</sup> ~~lamenting~~ pain

and

~~misery~~

Pictures, given back again  
Of the pranks of childhood  
Here I tasted of distress

Then ~~not~~ worthy ~~to be~~  
Bred ~~with~~ the world's care

Parthenon - May youth be slow

To pass from thee who wear it to

For years are but the wings of care

To one so innocent & fair

May the calm light that's round thee

Never be darkened from thy brow

Around thee joy ~~with~~ <sup>thy</sup> truth;

~~Worth~~ ~~of~~ ~~perpetual~~ ~~youth~~;

~~Which~~ ~~purges~~ ~~with~~ ~~the~~ ~~blow~~ ~~of~~ ~~truth~~

Worthy of that delight which lies

Within thy blue & pleasant eyes

Worthy thy Mother's fond caressing

And I ~~do~~ <sup>thank</sup> thee many a blessing

For hours of kindness & glee

For words of childish cheer

For pleasures generous, light & true

And therefore do I bless thee many

Apr. 1818

J. Keble writing to his mother

















