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978-1-108-06542-9 - Correspondence and Table-Talk: With a Memoir by his Son:

Volume 2

Benjamin Robert Haydon Edited by Frederick Wordsworth Haydon

Excerpt

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## B. R. HAYDON.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

*LETTERS TO AND FROM KEATS.**From KEATS.*

MY DEAR SIR,

20th November, 1816.

Last evening wrought me up, and I cannot forbear sending you the following.

Yours imperfectly,

JOHN KEATS.

“Great spirits now on earth are sojourning,  
 He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,  
 Who on Helvellyn’s summit wide awake  
 Catches his freshness from archangel’s wing ;  
 He of the rose, the violet, the spring,  
 The social smile, the chain for freedom’s sake :  
 And lo ! whose steadfastness would never take  
 A meaner sound than Raphael’s whispering ;  
 And other spirits are there standing apart  
 Upon the forehead of the age to come :  
 These, these will give the world another heart  
 And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum  
 Of mighty workings ?  
 Listen awhile, ye nations, and be dumb.”

*From KEATS.*

MY DEAR SIR,

Thursday afternoon, 20th November, 1816.

Your letter has filled me with a proud pleasure, and shall be kept by me as a stimulus to exertion. I begin to fix my eye upon one horizon. My feelings entirely fall in with

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yours in regard to the ellipsis, and I glory in it. The idea of your sending it to Wordsworth put me out of breath. You know with what reverence I would send my well-wishes to him.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN KEATS.

*To KEATS.*

MY DEAR KEATS,

March, 1817.

Many thanks, my dear fellow, for your two noble sonnets. I know not a finer image than the comparison of a poet unable to express his high feelings to a sick eagle looking at the sky, where he must have remembered his former towerings amid the blaze of dazzling sunbeams, in the pure expanse of glittering clouds; now and then passing angels, on heavenly errands, lying at the will of the wind with moveless wings, or pitching downward with a fiery rush, eager and intent on objects of their seeking. . . .

I feel deeply the high and enthusiastic praise with which you have spoken of me in the first sonnet. Be assured you shall never repent it. The time shall come, if God spare my life, when you will remember it with delight.

God bless you!

B. R. HAYDON.

*To KEATS.*

MY DEAR KEATS,

11th May, 1817.

I have been intending to write to you every hour this week, but have been so interrupted that the postman rang his bell every night in vain, and with a sound that made my heart quake. I think you did quite right to leave the Isle of Wight if you felt no relief; and being quite alone, after study you can now devote your eight hours a-day with just as much seclusion as ever. Do not give way to any forebodings. They are nothing more than the over-eager anxieties of a great spirit stretched beyond its strength, and then relapsing for a time to languid inefficiency. Every man of great views is, at times, thus tormented, but begin again where you left off without hesitation or fear. *Trust in God* with all your might, my dear Keats. This dependence, with your own energy, will give you strength, and hope, and comfort.

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I am always in trouble, and wants, and distresses; here *I found a refuge*. From my soul I declare to you I never applied for help, or for consolation, or for strength, but I found it. I always rose up from my knees with a refreshed fury, an iron-clenched firmness, a crystal piety of feeling that sent me streaming on with a repulsive power against the troubles of life.

Never despair while there is this path open to you. By habitual exercise you will have habitual intercourse and constant companionship; and at every want turn to the Great Star of your hopes with a delightful confidence that will never be disappointed.

I love you like my own brother. Beware, for God's sake, of the delusions and sophistications that are ripping up the talents and morality of our friend! He will go out of the world the victim of his own weakness and the dupe of his own self-delusions, with the contempt of his enemies and the sorrow of his friends, and the cause he undertook to support injured by his own neglect of character.\*

I wish you would come up to town for a day or two that I may put your head in my picture. I have rubbed in Wordsworth's, and advanced the whole. God bless you, my dear Keats! do not despair; collect incident, study character, read Shakespeare, and trust in Providence, and you *will* do, you must.

Ever affectionately yours,

B. R. HAYDON.

To KEATS.

MY DEAR KEATS,

17th September, 1817.

I am delighted to hear that you are getting on with your poem. Success to it and to you, with all my heart and soul. Will you oblige me by going to Magdalen College and inquiring of the porter there about a young man who, when I was lately at Oxford, was copying the altar-piece at Magdalen by Morales. I am anxious to know about that young man—the copy promised something. Will you, if you can, see the young man, and ascertain what his wishes in Art are? if he has ambition and seems to possess power? all of which you can soon discover. In these cases should any friend be disposed to assist him up to London and to support him for a year, I will

\* This is in reference to Leigh Hunt.—Ed.

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train him in the Art with no further remuneration than the pleasure of seeing him advance. I will put him in the right way, and do all I can to advance him. Do oblige me by exerting yourself in this case for me. Perhaps Mr. Bailey may also feel interest. Remember me to him.

Yours sincerely,  
B. R. HAYDON.

*From KEATS.*

MY DEAR HAYDON,

Oxford, 28th September.

I read your letter to the young man, whose name is Cripps. He seemed more than ever anxious to avail himself of your offer. He does not possess the philosopher's stone, nor Fortunatus' purse, nor Gyges' ring; but at Bailey's suggestion, who, I assure you, is a very capital fellow, we have strummed up a kind of contrivance whereby he will be enabled to do himself the benefits you will lay in his path. I have a great idea that he will be a tolerably neat brush. It is, perhaps, the finest thing that will befall him this many a year, for he is just of an age to get grounded in bad habits from which you will pluck him. He brought a copy of Mary Queen of Scots. It appears to me that he has copied the bad style of the painting, as well as coloured the eye-balls yellow, like the original. He has also the fault that you pointed out to me in Hazlitt on the constringing and diffusion of substance. However, I really believe that he will take fire at the sight of your picture and set about things. If he can get ready in time to return to town with me, which will be in a few days, I will bring him to you.

You will be glad to hear that within these last three weeks I have written a thousand lines, which are the third book of my poem. My ideas with respect to it are, I assure you, very low; and I would write the subject thoroughly again but I am tired of it, and think the time would be better spent in writing a new romance which I have in my eye for next summer. Rome was not built in a day; and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of experience, which I hope to gather in my next poem.

Bailey's kindest wishes and my vow of being,

Yours eternally,  
JOHN KEATS.

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*From KEATS.*

MY DEAR HAYDON,

Wentworth Place, Hampstead, 1818.

My throat has not suffered me yet to expose myself to the night air. However, I have been to town in the day-time; have had several interviews with my guardian; have written him rather a plain-spoken letter, which has had its effect, and he now seems inclined to put no stumbling-block in my way.

The difficulty is whether I can inherit what belonged to poor Tom before my sister is of age—a period of six years. Should it not be so, I must incontinently take to corduroy trousers. But I am nearly confident it is all a Bam! I shall see you soon; but do let me have a line to-day or to-morrow concerning your health and spirits.

Ever your sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

*To KEATS.*

MY DEAR KEATS,

10th March, 1818.

I have been long, long convinced of the paltry subterfuge of conversation to weaken the effect of unwelcome truth, and have left company where truth is never found; of this be assured, effect and effect only, self-consequence and dictatorial constraint, are what those love who shine in conversation at the expense of truth, principle, and everything else which interferes with their appetite for dominion. I am most happy you approve of my last Sunday's defence, and I hope you will like the next equally well. . . . I shall come and see you as soon as this contest is clear of my hands. I cannot before, every moment is so precious. Take care of your throat, and

Believe me, my dear fellow,

Truly and affectionately your friend,

B. R. HAYDON.

P.S.—At any rate, finish your present great intention of a poem. It is as fair a subject as can be. Once more, adieu!

B. R. H.

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*To KEATS.*

MY DEAR KEATS,

. . . . I feared your ardour might lead you to disregard the accumulated wisdom of ages in moral points, but the feelings put forth lately have delighted my soul: always consider principle of more value than genius, and you are safe, because on the score of genius you can never be vehement enough. I have read your 'Sleep' and 'Poetry.' It is a flash of lightning that will rouse men from their occupations, and keep them trembling for the crash of thunder that will follow.

God bless you! let our hearts be buried on each other.

B. R. HAYDON.

*To KEATS.*

MY DEAR KEATS,

March, 1818.

I shall go certainly mad! In a field at Stratford-upon-Avon, in a field that belonged to Shakespeare, they have found a gold ring and seal, with the initials W. S., and a true lover's knot between. If this is not Shakespeare, who is it?—A true lover's knot! I saw an impression to-day, and am to have one as soon as possible: as sure as that you breathe, and that he was the first of beings, the seal belonged to him.

O Lord!

B. R. HAYDON.

*From KEATS.*

MY DEAR HAYDON,

Teignmouth, Saturday morning.

In sooth I hope you are not too sanguine about that seal; in sooth I hope it is not Brummagem; in double sooth I hope it is his, and in triple sooth I hope I shall have an impression. Such a piece of intelligence came doubly welcome to me while in your own county, and in your own hand, not but what I have blown up the said county for its watery qualifications. The six first days I was here it did nothing but rain; and at that time having to write to a friend, I gave Devonshire a good blowing up; it has been fine for almost three days, and I was coming round a bit, but to-day it rains again. With me the county is on its good behaviour. I have enjoyed the most

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delightful walks these three fine days, beautiful enough to  
make me content.

1.

“Here all the summer could I stay,  
For there’s Bishop’s Teign,  
And King’s Teign,  
And Coomb at the clear Teign’s head,  
Where close by the stream  
You may have your cream  
All spread upon barley bread.

2.

“There’s Arch Brook,  
And there’s Larch Brook,  
Both turning many a mill;  
And cooling the drouth  
Of the salmon’s mouth,  
And fattening his silver gill.

3.

“There’s the wild wood,  
A mild hood  
To the sheep on the lea o’ the down,  
Where the golden furze,  
With its green thin spurs,  
Doth catch at the maiden’s gown.

4.

“There’s Newton Marsh,  
With its spear-grass harsh,  
A pleasant summer level,  
Where the maidens sweet  
Of the Market Street  
Do meet in the dark to revel.

5.

“There’s Barton rich,  
With dyke and ditch,  
And hedge for the thrush to live in;  
And the hollow tree  
For the buzzing bee,  
And a bank for the wasp to hive in.

6.

“And O and O,  
The daisies blow,  
And the primroses are wakened,  
And the violets white  
Sit in silver light,  
And the green buds are long in the spike end.

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“Then who would go  
 Into dark Soho,  
 And chatter with dark-hair'd critics,  
 When he can stay  
 For the new-mown hay,  
 And startle the dappled crickets?”

There's a bit of doggerel; perhaps you would like a bit of  
 botheral.

1.

“Where be you going, you Devon maid,  
 And what have ye there in the basket?  
 Ye tight little fairy just fresh from the dairy,  
 Will ye give me some cream if I ask it?”

2.

“I love your meads, and I love your dales,  
 And I love your junkets mainly,  
 But behind the door I love kissing more,  
 O look not so divinely.

3.

“I love your hills, and I love your dales,  
 And I love your flocks a-bleating,  
 But oh, on the heather, to lie together,  
 With both our hearts a-beating.

4.

“I'll put your basket all safe in a nook,  
 Your shawl I'll hang on the willow,  
 And we will sigh in the daisy's eye,  
 And kiss on a grass-green pillow.”

I know not if this rhyming-fit has done anything; it will be  
 safe with you, if worthy to put among my Lyrics.

How does the work go on? I should like to bring out *my*  
 ‘Dentatus’ at the time your epic makes its appearance.

I expect to have my mind clear for something new. Tom  
 has been much worse, but is now getting better: his remem-  
 brances to you. I think of seeing the Dart and Plymouth; but  
 I don't know; it has yet been a mystery to me how and where  
 Wordsworth went. I can't help thinking he has returned to  
 his shell, with his beautiful wife and his enchanting sister. It  
 is a great pity that people by associating themselves with the  
 finest things spoil them. Hunt has damned Hampstead with  
 masks and sonnets and Italian tales; Wordsworth has damned



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the Lakes; Milman has damned the old dramatists; West has damned wholesale; Peacock has damned satire; Hazlitt has damned the bigoted and the blue-stockinged—how durst the man? He is your only good damner; and if ever I am damned, I should like him to damn me. It will not be long ere I see you, but I thought you would like a line out of Devon.

Remember me to all we know.

Yours affectionately,

JOHN KEATS.

*To KEATS.*

MY DEAR KEATS,

London, 25th March, 1818.

I take it as a great friendly kindness to remember me in this way. Your versicles are beautiful. Surely you will not leave Devonshire without going to Plymouth, the country around which is most exquisite. I will give you letters, and promise you a kind and welcome reception. Do go, my dear Keats; and if you consent, let me know, as I will write to my friends immediately. Go round by the Totness road, which is very fine, and come home by Ashburton and then by Bridgewater, where I have a sister, who will be most happy to see you.

I am getting on well, and have got my 'Christ' better than I have ever had it yet, and in a good state to complete it. I feel very happy to hear your poem is advancing towards publication. God grant it the most complete success, and may its reputation equal your genius.

Devonshire has somehow or other caught the character of being "rainy;" but I must own to you that I do not think it more so than any other county. Pray remember the time of year. It has rained in town almost incessantly ever since you went away. The fact is, you dog, you carried the rain with you as Ulysses did the winds, and then, opening your rain bags, you look round with a knowing wink and say, "Confound this Devonshire, how it rains!" Stay till summer, and then look into its deep blue summer sky, fresh grass, and tawny banks, and silver bubbling streams; nor must you leave Devonshire without seeing some of its wild scenery, rocky, mossy, craggy, with roaring rivers, and as clear as crystal. It will do your mind good.

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Shakespeare, in speaking of some one who is gradually dying, makes another say, "How is he?—Still ill?" "*Nature and sickness debate it at their leisure.*" Is not this exquisite? When I die I'll have my Shakespeare placed on my heart, with Homer in my right hand and Ariosto in my other, Dante under my head, Tasso at my feet, and Corneille under my —, for I hate Corneille, a heartless, tirade maker. I leave my other side, that is my right one, for you, if you realise all of which your genius is capable, as I am sure you will.

Write to me if you go to Devonshire. I have heard nothing from Wordsworth ever since he went, which I take to be unkind. Hazlitt is going to lecture at the "Crown and Anchor." I am sorry for it, though he will get money. It is letting his talent down a little. What affectation in Hunt's title, "Foliage!"

Yours ever, dear Keats,

B. R. HAYDON.

*From KEATS.*

MY DEAR HAYDON,

Teignmouth, 10th April, 1818.

I am glad you are pleased with my nonsense, and if it so happen that the humour takes me, when I have set down to prose to you I will not gainsay it. I should be (God forgive me) ready to swear, because I cannot make use of your assistance in going through Devon if I was not in my own mind determined to visit it thoroughly at some more favourable time of the year. But now Tom, who is getting greatly better, is anxious to be in town, therefore I put off my threading the country. I purpose within a month to put my knapsack at my back, and make a pedestrian tour through the North of England and part of Scotland, to make a sort of prologue to the life I intend to pursue, that is to write, and to study, and to see all Europe at the lowest expense. I will clamber through the clouds and exist; I will get such an accumulation of stupendous recollections that as I walk through the suburbs of London I may not see them. I will stand upon Mont Blanc, and remember this coming summer, when I intend to straddle Ben Lomond. With my soul, galligaskins are out of the question. I am nearer myself to hear your 'Christ' is being tinted into immortality. Believe me,