

To Find Joy

Pat McTarsney

I read the poem, but I did more; I drifted into the forest and heard the rhythmic footfalls of the man who walked before me. I, too, heard the enchanter's song; and drunk with the beauty of the sound, I felt regret that I could not escape with him from the miseries of man. I closed the book; but instead of laying it aside to continue my work, I listened intently to catch the fading notes of the bird's song. It faded out as my thoughts turned to other things. Is man's life an inescapable snare, or might joy surpass sorrows? Then as the song again passed through my mind, I thought of the magnitude of nature, of the beauty of the forest, of the magnificence of the nightingale's song, and I was certain that no man's sorrow was so great that he could not find joy in the nightingale's world. What would it be like to live in that world?

"That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease."

Song, trees, shadows—numberless shadows. Again I was transported into solitude and the forest, and all thoughts of grief and pain were banished by the heavy balm of nature. Surrounded by the fragrant silence, I had found peace.

"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;—"

Nature had removed my sorrow, but I had not found joy. I had found only restful contentment, the line which few men go beyond; but somewhere in this shadowy world Keats found supreme joy; and in some way I too must find it.

Then as I groped for that evasive joy, the song of the nightingale filled the dark evening; and I recalled these lines.

"Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Posey—"

Surely, this nightingale world must have been Keats' poetry, his inspiration, his world, and his joy. As the liquid song beauty of the nightingale's world was real, and perhaps the flowed from the bird, my own joy began to mount like bubbles on a summer's day, and then I knew. For Keats the poetic nightingale's world was his life—our world his dream.