

Keats's Realms of Gold

Joseph Warren Beach

PMLA, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Mar., 1934), 246-257.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%28193403%2949%3A1%3C246%3AKROG%3E2.0.CO%3B2-F>

PMLA is currently published by Modern Language Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/mla.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



XIII

KEATS'S REALMS OF GOLD

MORE than one critic has recalled the passage in Robertson's *History of America* which probably inspired the final simile of Keats's most famous sonnet.¹ It was in September, 1513. Balboa and his men had been struggling for twenty days across the sixty miles of forest and mountain that made the isthmus of Darien, having been obliged to battle with the natives as well as with torrents, swamps, and precipices. Many of the men were sick and ready to give up.

At length the Indians assured them, that from the top of the next mountain they should discover the ocean which was the object of their wishes. When, with infinite toil, they had climbed up the greater part of that steep ascent, Balboa commanded his men to halt, and advanced alone to the summit, that he might be the first who should enjoy a spectacle which he had so long desired. As soon as he beheld the South Sea, stretching in endless prospect before him, he fell on his knees, and, lifting up his hands to heaven, returned thanks to God, who had conducted him to a discovery so beneficial to his country, and so honourable to himself. His followers, observing his transports of joy, rushed forward to join him in his wonder, exultation, and gratitude. They held on their course to the shore with great alacrity, when Balboa, advancing up to the middle in the waves, with his buckler and sword, took possession of that ocean in the name of the king his master, and vowed to defend it, with these arms, against all his enemies.

So wrote the Rev. William Robertson,² during the early years of the American Revolution. We know from Cowden Clarke^{2a} that his book was in the school library at Enfield, and that Keats before his sixteenth year "must have exhausted the school library, which consisted principally of abridgements of all the voyages and travels of note," etc. Thus before his interest in poetry had been greatly aroused, before he had discovered Spenser, he had known the joys of voyage and exploration, and when he once really got a glimpse of Homer, half a dozen years later, he had already in the storehouse of his imagination the picture of the Spanish conquistador having his first glimpse of the Southern Sea.

It seems natural enough for Keats to compare his own discovery of Homer with the Spaniard's discovery of the Pacific Ocean. But the processes of the poetic imagination are generally more complicated than

¹ H. Buxton Forman, *The Complete Works of John Keats* (1900), I, 46; E. de Selincourt, *The Poems of John Keats*, fifth edition (1926), p. 398. Also Sir Sidney Colvin and Amy Lowell in their lives of Keats.

² *History of America*, I, 203-204.—All references are to the Dublin, 1777, edition.

^{2a} Colvin's *John Keats*, p. 14.

that. And Miss Lowell has indicated another link in the chain of association. Keats's sonnet was composed during an early walk before breakfast, after an all-night reading session with his friend Cowden Clarke. Clarke had been introducing him to some of the "famourest" passages in Chapman's Homer, both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. One scene which particularly impressed Keats and drew from him "one of his delighted stares" was that describing the shipwreck of Ulysses on the shores of Phaeacia. Thus the sea-voyage of Ulysses is there, as a part of the greatness of Homer, to call up more readily the thought of the Pacific.

This is of course one of the most striking and effective images in all our poetry. But it is not an isolated bit of decoration, and to appreciate it rightly we must not neglect the rest of the poem, as so many critics have done. The lines of the octave are among the finest that Keats had written up to that time. But what is more important, they are *all of a piece* with the sestet. They are a perfect preparation for it.³ Their metaphors are taken from the same quarry as the similes of the sestet, and indeed, if my surmise is right, they have their original source in the same boyhood reading of Keats. When this is once clear, I believe we shall have gone a long way toward solving the vexed problem of why Keats should have written Cortes for Balboa.

The general meaning of the poem is clear to every one. Keats had become a passionate reader of poetry. Certain passages in Shakespeare read aloud would move him to tears. The reading of Chapman was accompanied with shouts of delight. It is obvious that the "Realms of Gold" and the "Western islands" are general figures for great things in the world of poetry, and that "one wide expanse" is a special figure for the work of Homer. All these figures are so fine that we say, somewhat naïvely, that they are inevitable. Since Keats made this poem they are inevitable. But before he had made it, they had yet to be found. And it is worth our while to visit with Keats the places where he may have found them. The task is a simple one. We have only to read the first eight books of Robertson's history, following in the tracks of the school-boy (not yet the poet) Keats.

"Much have I travell'd," writes Keats. As a boy of fifteen, in the pages of Robertson, he had in all likelihood accompanied the early Portuguese explorers on their bold excursions down the coast of Africa. They believed, like every one else, that the temperate zone of the South was separated from that in which they lived by an impenetrable barrier of

³ This point has recently been made by Middleton Murry in a subtle essay. But he has not taken into account the dominant influence of Robertson except in the concluding simile. Mr. Murry's essay appears in the *Hibbert Journal*, xxvii, 93-110, and in the (American) *Bookman*, LXVIII, 391-401.

fiery heat, in which no mortal could survive. But with repeated trial they grew bold. They pushed their discoveries beyond Cape Non (a promontory which, "as its name imports, was hitherto considered as a boundary which could not be passed"), beyond Cape Bojador, beyond Cape de Verd. Finally, on November 20, 1497, Vasco da Gama, after a four months' struggle against contrary winds, rounded the Cape of Good Hope. He followed up the East coast of Africa to the Mahometan city of Melinda, and thence to the coast of Malabar. Meantime, in Robertson, Keats had accompanied Columbus on his voyage to the West Indies, where he established the colony of Hispaniola on the island of Hayti, and later, on that in which he discovered the mainland of America, near the mouth of the Orinoco river.

"Round many Western islands have I been." Keats had read in Robertson how the ventures of the Portuguese were encouraged by their discovery of various groups of islands off the west coast of Africa. There were first the Canary or Fortunate Islands and the Madeiras. And then there were the Cape de Verd islands and the Azores, "the former of these above three hundred miles from the African coast, and the latter nine hundred miles from any continent." But much more important were the western islands discovered by Columbus—San Salvador and others of the Bahamas, Cuba, Hayti, Jamaica, and St. Juan de Puerto Rico. Keats says nothing about stopping on his western islands. He went *round* them. He was on a search for what lay beyond. And so with these Spaniards. They stopped long enough to establish colonies on some of the islands or to ascertain with certainty that they were islands. But what they were looking for was a passage beyond these West Indies to the true and opulent Indies of the East. And so it was that they came to the mainland of America—Columbus to the coast of Guiana, Juan Diaz de Solis to Yucatan, Alonso de Ojeda to Darien, Juan Ponce de Leon to Florida, Francisco Hernandez Cordova to Yucatan and Campeachy, and Juan de Grijalva to New Spain (Mexico). And so it was that Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the isthmus of Darien and came to the Southern Ocean, and Francisco Pizarro sailed from Panama to the coast of Peru.

"Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold." The new realms discovered by the poets are held by them as vassals to the god of poetry. Keats had read in Robertson's history how John de Bethencourt, a Norman baron, obtained a grant of the Canaries from Henry III of Castile, made a conquest of these islands, "and the possession of the Canaries remained for some time in his family, as a fief held of the crown of Castile." He had also read how Prince Henry of Portugal, the enthusiastic discoverer, had silenced the murmurs of timid and jealous persons opposed to the further

prosecution of his explorations. He applied to the Pope. Thus:⁴

He besought the holy father, to whom, as the vicar of Christ, all the kingdoms of the earth were subject, to confer on the crown of Portugal a right to all the countries possessed by infidels, which should be discovered by the industry of its subjects, and subdued by the force of its arms. He entreated him to enjoin all Christian powers, under the highest penalties, not to molest Portugal while engaged in this laudable enterprise, and to prohibit them from settling in any of the countries which the Portuguese should discover. He promised that in all their expeditions it should be the chief object of his countrymen to spread the knowledge of the Christian religion, to establish the authority of the holy see, and to increase the flock of the universal pastor. As it was by improving with dexterity every favorable conjuncture for acquiring new powers, that the court of Rome had gradually extended its usurpations, Eugene IV, the pontiff to whom this application was made, eagerly seized the opportunity which now presented itself. He instantly perceived that, by complying with Prince Henry's request, he might exercise a prerogative no less flattering in its own nature, than likely to prove beneficial in its consequences. A bull was accordingly issued, in which, after applauding in the strongest terms the past efforts of the Portuguese, and exhorting them to proceed in that laudable career on which they had entered, he granted them an exclusive right to all the countries which they should discover, from Cape Non to the continent of India.

Armed with such authority the Portuguese explorers, whenever they landed in a new country, took possession of it "for the crown of Portugal." If it was inhabited, they did their best to make the rulers vassals to the king. Thus in Guinea, King John "established a commercial intercourse with the more powerful kingdoms; he endeavoured to render such as were feeble or divided tributary to the crown of Portugal. Some of the petty princes voluntarily acknowledged themselves his vassals: others were compelled to do so by force of arms."

In the same way, the Spanish explorers always took possession of new countries in the name of their king, confirmed by Pope Alexander VI in the possession of all territories occupied by them beyond a line drawn from pole to pole a hundred leagues westward of the Azores. Robertson sets forth the main articles of the treaty of the Spanish king and queen with Columbus. "Ferdinand and Isabella, as sovereigns of the ocean, constituted Columbus their high admiral in all seas, islands, and continents, which should be discovered by his industry," etc. He also relates⁵ how Columbus took possession of San Salvador.

He landed in a rich dress, and with a naked sword in his hand. His men followed, and kneeling down, they all kissed the ground which they had so long desired to see. They next erected a crucifix, and, prostrating themselves before it, returned thanks to God for conducting their voyage to such an happy issue. They

⁴ Robertson, I, 48-49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 91-92.

then took solemn possession of the country for the crown of Castile and Leon, with all the formalities which the Portuguese were accustomed to observe in acts of this kind, in their new discoveries.

And eventually the great emperor Montezuma, having been taken captive by Cortes, was constrained to declare that he held Mexico "in fealty to" the King of Spain. It is thus that Robertson relates the affair.⁶

He urged Montezuma to acknowledge himself a vassal of the King of Castile, to hold his crown of him as superior, and to subject his dominions to the payment of an annual tribute. With this requisition, the last and most humbling that can be made to one possessed of sovereign authority, Montezuma was so obsequious as to comply. He called together the chief men of his empire, and, in a solemn harangue, reminding them of the traditions and prophecies which led them to expect the arrival of a people sprung from the same stock with themselves, in order to take possession of the supreme power, he declared his belief that the Spaniards were this promised race; that, therefore, he recognized the right of their monarch to govern the Mexican empire; that he would lay his crown at his feet, and obey him as a tributary. While uttering these words, Montezuma discovered how deeply he was affected in making such a sacrifice. Tears and groans frequently interrupted his discourse. Overawed and broken as his spirit was, it still retained such a sense of dignity, as to feel that pang which pierces the heart of princes when constrained to resign independent power. The first mention of such a resolution struck the assembly dumb with astonishment. This was followed by a sudden murmur of sorrow, mingled with indignation, which indicated some violent irruption of rage to be near at hand. This Cortez foresaw, and seasonably interposed to prevent it, by declaring that his master had no intention to deprive Montezuma of the royal dignity, or to make any innovation upon the constitution and laws of the Mexican empire. This assurance added to their dread of the Spanish power, and to the authority of their monarch's example, extorted a reluctant consent from the assembly. The act of submission and homage was executed with all the formalities which the Spaniards were pleased to prescribe.

Here was a passage affecting enough in every way to impress upon the boy Keats the significance of holding land in fealty to some great sovereign power.

"And many goodly states and kingdoms seen." Such were, in Guinea, the kingdoms made vassals of King John of Portugal. Such was the kingdom of Malabar discovered by Vasco da Gama. And such again were the empires of Montezuma and of the Incas of Peru.

II

Now we come to the ocean discovered by Balboa. "Oft of one wide expanse had I been told." The wide expanse "which deep-brow'd Homer

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 66-67.

ruled as his Demesne" was the far-spreading ocean of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. And he was moved to call it a wide expanse because the images of travel and discovery suggested the great Southern ocean to which all the voyages of the Portuguese and Spaniards led them as their goal. If it seems curious to assign to Homer as his demesne a realm of water rather than of fruitful land, we have only to remember that whoever controlled the water controlled the land, and that accordingly Ferdinand and Isabella entitled themselves "sovereigns of the ocean." In particular the Pacific ocean, when it was at length discovered, proved to be the gateway to India, as well as to the undreamed of empires of Brazil and Peru. Balboa's discovery made Spain master of greater wealth than any Atlantic commanded.

Keats had often been told of Homer as something finer and beyond anything he knew in poetry, just as Balboa and his companions were told by a young cazique of Darien of another ocean six days' journey to the south where was situated a kingdom vastly wealthier than any they had visited. "Yet did I never breathe its pure serene. . . ." So Keats improves upon his colorless first draft, "Yet never could I judge what Men could mean." There has been some speculation as to why Keats should have used the phrase, "its pure serene." Mr. Paget Toynbee has gone somewhat far afield to explain the use by Keats of a phrase which does not appear in any of the older English poets. He suggests that it is an echo from Cary's translation of Dante's *Paradiso*. The passage in Italian is as follows:

Lume non é, se non vien dal Sereno
Che non si turba mai.

Cary's translation introduces the adjective "pure" along with the adjective used as noun, "serene."

Light is none
Save that which cometh from the pure serene
Of ne'er disturbed ether.

Mr. Toynbee tells us:⁷

"Cary's "Dante" had been published in January, 1814, in the diminutive edition of three volumes, a copy of which Keats carried in a corner of his knapsack on his tour in the north in the summer of 1818. If my surmise is correct Keats's acquaintance with Cary's "Dante" must have begun at a somewhat earlier date than is usually assumed."

More recently Professor Douglas Bush⁸ has pointed out that the phrase

⁷ Quoted by Amy Lowell in her *John Keats* (two volumes in one, Houghton Mifflin, 1929), I, 180.

⁸ "Some Notes on Keats," *Philological Quarterly*, VIII, 313-315.

in question occurs in Coleridge's "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni."

Thou too, hoar Mount! with thy sky-pointing peaks,
Oft from whose feet the avalanche, unheard,
Shoots downward, glittering through the *pure serene*,
Into the depth of clouds, that veil thy breast . . .

Of course it is not necessary to assume the influence of either Cary or Coleridge. The coinage of such a phrase is quite within Keats's powers; the use of the adjective as noun is altogether in his manner. In any case Keats is not, I think, using the word *serene* quite in either Dante's sense or Coleridge's. Dante is speaking of God as the source of spiritual light, and the nearest translation of his *Sereno* is "clearness." The figure which Keats so appropriately applies to Homer is derived from the thought of the Pacific ocean.

He had presumably read in his Robertson of Magellan's naming of the Pacific in 1520. Magellan had sailed down the whole eastern coast of South America seeking for the elusive passage to the Southern Sea. He had suffered terribly from the rigor of the climate. He had lost one of his squadron; had put down an insurrection on three of his ships; he had sailed twenty days through the dangerous winding straits to which he gave his name, where one of his ships deserted him. Then at last:⁹

The great southern ocean opened to his view. . . . But he was still at a greater distance than he imagined from the object of his wishes. He sailed during three months and twenty days, in an uniform direction towards the northwest, without discovering land. In this voyage, the longest that had ever been made in the unbounded ocean, he suffered incredible distress. . . . One circumstance alone afforded them some consolation; they enjoyed an uninterrupted course of fair weather, with such favourable winds, that Magellan bestowed on that ocean the name of Pacific, which it still retains.

There is, I believe the clue to Keats's use of the word *serene*. He means it in its commonest dictionary sense: "marked by peaceful repose; unruffled; placid"—in short, pacific. He is thinking of the mild, peaceful air of the southern ocean.

At this point I shall cite another passage from Robertson, and suggest, in a tentative way, that it may have some connection with the famous simile that opens the sestet:

Then felt I like some watcher of the Skies
When a new Planet swims into his ken.

The obvious interpretation of these lines is that the "watcher of the Skies" is quite simply an astronomer, and the swimming into his ken

⁹ Robertson, II, 130.

describes the discovery of a new planet. This is made the more probable from the fact that, in 1811, Master John Keats had received as a prize in school a copy of John Bonnycastle's *Introduction to Astronomy*. Mr. Ifor Evans¹⁰ has recently shown how likely it is that Keats had had his imagination stimulated by this volume, provided as it was with many quotations from the poets, and in particular by the final Discourse entitled *Of the New Planets and Other Discoveries*, in which a striking account is given of Herschel's discovery of Uramus in 1781.

The simile of the watcher of the Skies is thus the one image in the whole poem which is not obviously derived from voyages of discovery on the seas. But here again it is possible that more than one range of association has been drawn upon by the poet's imagination. Professor Lowes has a good deal to say, in *The Road to Xanadu*, of impressions and images equipped, in Coleridge's phrase, with "hooks and eyes of memory," and has shown how, over and over again in Coleridge, to a given image, by the natural process of association, some other image attached itself in the poet's subconscious mind, and the two came to the surface later in an imaginative phrase which is a perfect synthesis of things at first quite separate.

Now, in the course of his reading in Robertson, Keats would come upon the following sentence, so well calculated to strike the imagination of a poet:¹¹

A powerful fleet was fitted out, which, after discovering the kingdoms of Benin and Congo, advanced about fifteen hundred miles beyond the line, and the Portuguese, for the first time, beheld a new heaven, and observed the stars of another hemisphere.

Here is a situation closely akin to that of Balboa or that of Magellan taking his first view of the Pacific ocean. It is, we might say, a note of the same harmony. The very rhythm of the sentence is such as to appeal to a poet. And the rhythm and thought together would have been sufficient, one might suppose, to draw from Keats "one of his delighted stares." It might even conceivably have suggested to him, on first reading, the thought of an astronomer discovering a new planet. That is another note of the same harmony. So that the two images—that of the Portuguese sailors, for the first time, observing the stars of another hemisphere; and that of the watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken—might have become inseparably hooked together in his imagination. And then, six or seven years later, he is writing a sonnet, during an early morning walk, in which he tries to adumbrate his

¹⁰ "Keats's Approach to the Chapman Sonnet," *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, XVI, 26-52.

¹¹ Robertson, I, 52.

feelings when he first "heard Chapman speak out loud and bold." All his images relate to what he remembers of his reading in Robertson's *History*. Among these lurks obscurely the thought of Portuguese mariners when, for the first time they "beheld a new heaven, and observed the stars of another hemisphere." But this thought has become inseparably linked in his mind with that of the astronomer and the new planet. And it is that closely related thought—its imaginative equivalent—which finds expression in his sonnet. It is apparently alien to the texture of the poem, otherwise so consistent and homogeneous. But was it possibly, for Keats, as much of a piece with the rest as the western islands and the realms of gold?

III

And that brings us back to the first line, to the most significant phrase of the whole octave, "the Realms of Gold." The critics have generally had nothing to say of this phrase, either taking for granted its beautiful precision, or mutely agreeing with Leigh Hunt's view that there was "a little vagueness in calling the regions of poetry 'the realms of gold'." Sir Sidney Colvin certainly does nothing to clear up the vagueness by his suggestion:¹²

The "realms of gold" lines in the Chapman sonnet, recording Keats's range of reading in our older poetry, had been in a measure anticipated in this other, written six months earlier:

How many bards gild the lapses of time!

There may indeed be some imaginative connection between gilding and gold. But to appreciate the precise connotations of the realms of gold, and its exact consistency with the rest of the Chapman sonnet, we must take the phrase literally.

The realms of gold, which stand figuratively for the regions of poetry, are simply countries in which the precious metal was found by the Portuguese and Spanish explorers. There is no theme more constantly recurring in Robertson's chronicle than that of the search for gold. It was, one might say, the motivating force of the whole series of voyages. The region south of the river of Senegal was prized by the Portuguese because "it produced ivory, rich gums, gold, and other valuable commodities." This was the Gold Coast or Guinea, from which the English coin took its name.

But the most frequent reference to gold is in connection with the travels and conquests of the Spaniards—Columbus, Balboa, Cortes, and Pizarro. One of the chief preoccupations of Columbus was the search for gold. When he landed on San Salvador:—¹³

¹² *John Keats* (1925), p. 88.

¹³ Robertson, I, 94.

Having observed that most of the people whom he had seen wore small plates of gold, by way of ornament, in their nostrils, he eagerly inquired where they got that precious metal. They pointed towards the south, and made him comprehend by signs, that gold abounded in countries situated in that quarter. Thither he immediately determined to direct his course, in full confidence of finding there those opulent regions which had been the object of his voyage, and would be a recompense for all his toils and dangers.

Thus the quest for gold took him to Cuba, where, however:—¹⁴

He did not find gold in such quantity as was sufficient to satisfy either the avarice of his followers, or the expectations of the court to which he was to return. The people of the country, as much astonished at his eagerness in quest of gold as the Europeans were at their ignorance and simplicity, pointed towards the east, where an island which they called Hayti was situated, in which that metal was more abundant than among them.

Following this lead, Columbus visited Hayti and set up a colony. More gold was found there, and the natives were unmercifully looted and taxed in order that he might produce enough to “justify what he had reported with respect to the richness of the country” and “encourage Ferdinand and Isabella to persevere in prosecuting his plans.” But never could they find enough gold on the islands, and so, in their search for India and more gold, they came to the mainland. And here their greed for gold was the occasion for their discovering the Pacific. When Balboa was governor of the colony at Santa Maria in Darien, he was eager to perform “some signal service that would secure him the preference to every competitor.”

Full of this idea, he made frequent inroads into the country, subdued several of the caziques, and collected a considerable quantity of gold, which abounded more in that part of the continent than in the islands. In one of those excursions, the Spaniards contended with such eagerness about the division of some gold, that they were at the point of proceeding to acts of violence against one another. A young cazique who was present, astonished at the high value which they set upon a thing of which he did not discern the use, tumbled the gold out of the balance with indignation; and, turning to the Spaniards, ‘Why do you quarrel (says he) about such a trifle? If you are so passionately fond of gold, as to abandon your own country, and to disturb the tranquillity of distant nations for its sake, I will conduct you to a region where the metal which seems to be the chief object of your admiration and desire is so common that the meanest utensils are formed of it.’ Transported with what they heard, Balboa and his companions inquired eagerly where this happy country lay, and how they might arrive at it. He informed him that, at the distance of six suns, that is of six days’ journey, towards the south, they should discover another ocean, near to which

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 96.

this wealthy kingdom was situated; but if they intended to attack that powerful state, they must assemble forces far superior in number and strength to those with which they now appeared.¹⁵

The happy country thus described was Peru. Balboa never got there himself, having been made the victim of a conspiracy on the part of his rivals for power. But the realm of the Incas was duly discovered and exploited by Francisco Pizarro, who had accompanied Balboa in the great march across the isthmus. Meantime Hernan Cortes, who, as Robertson points out, had been prevented by illness from being one of the colony in Darien, proceeded westward up the coast of Mexico, established a settlement at Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, subjugated Montezuma, and made the empire of Mexico subject to the crown of Spain. These two countries were the veritable realms of gold. After the people had been looted, the mines of gold and silver were systematically worked. Altogether, Robertson reckons, between 1492 and 1777, "Spain has drawn from the New World a supply of wealth amounting, at least, to two thousand millions of pounds sterling."¹⁶

The great rounder of western islands was Christopher Columbus. The great conquerors of realms of gold were Cortes and Pizarro, to each of whom Robertson devotes, as he does to Columbus, an entire book of his history. Especially picturesque was the Mexican career of stout Cortes—his burning of the ships in order that there might be no turning back, his exemplary cruelty, treachery, faith, diplomacy, and courage. The crossing of Darien was the one notable feat of Balboa. But he was a relatively obscure figure, disposed of by Robertson in a dozen pages. It was natural enough for the boy Keats to have lost sight of him amid the more dazzling figures. Leigh Hunt would appear to have shared Keats's confusion of him with Cortes. If then Titian's portrait of Cortes, with his eagle eyes, came to reinforce Keats's impression, as implied by Hunt, the process was complete. Cortes had become for him the type of all conquistadors, absorbing into himself, like Percival or Lancelot, the feats and glamor of a dozen minor heroes.

IV

We have seen with what solid blocks of history Keats built up the airy fabric of his fancy. It is true that for him the true realms of gold were in the spiritual and imaginative world, impalpable, immaterial. But the images with which he bodied forth his dream were not immaterial. His western islands were no mythical Atlantis, but actual concretions of earth, washed by a real ocean, geographical barriers to be got round in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 200.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 389.

the quest for gold. Very likely, in Keats's imagination, the islands of the conquistadors took a glamor from ancient fables of *Hesperidum Insulae* or Islands of the Blessed in the western stream of Ocean. Nearly every phrase in the sonnet has its classical overtones of poetic suggestion. The realms of gold may thus bear some vague suggestion of the golden age of Saturn. But the thread of all his imagery is historical and realistic. In substance his image refers to no visionary Eldorado, but to actual "states and kingdoms," political powers to be subjugated and reduced to vassalage. Their conquest was as rude an affair of blood and sweat and tears, and even death, as Keats's conquest of his realm of poetry.

JOSEPH WARREN BEACH

University of Minnesota