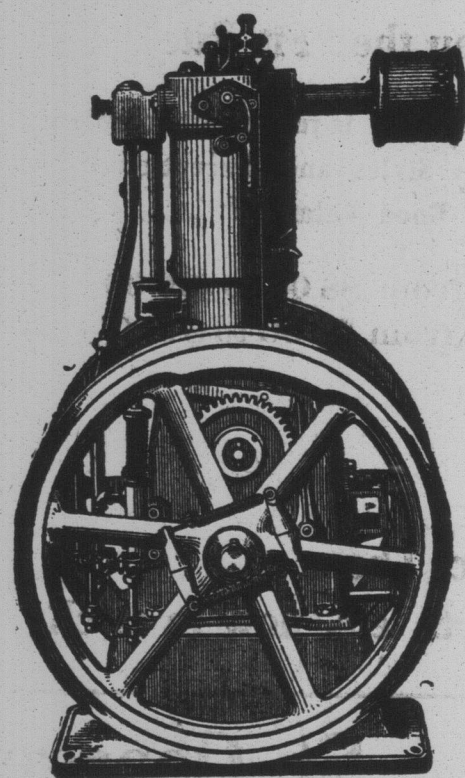


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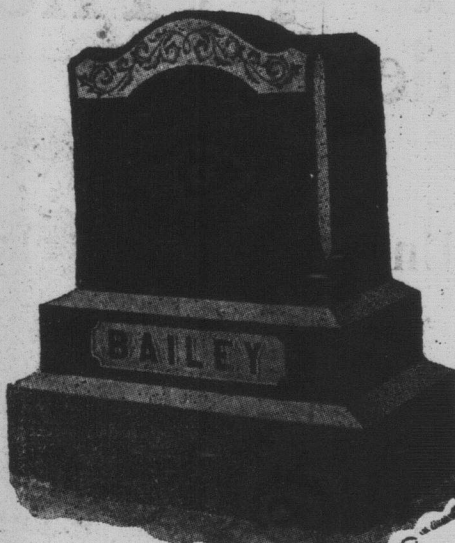
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Drugs Used by Famous Authors

Erratic indeed are the ways of genius—ways which have often resulted in pitiful endings, particularly in the case of men whose works are to be found amongst the world's standard literature. Take the case of Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, the centenary of whose birth was recently celebrated. Poe was the son of a man of whose habits seem to have descended from father to son. Before he reached the age of thirty the intemperance of the famous poet, critic, and romancer had cost him several lucrative appointments; and to his fondness for brandy—for that was the intoxicant for which he had the greatest weakness—he added a passion for opium.

In fairness to Poe's memory, however, it should be added that he was intemperate only at intervals. He strove hard to break himself of the drink and drug habit, but periods of sobriety were interspersed with fits of reckless indulgence and months of poverty.

Ten Wine-glasses of Laudanum

Poe reminds one very much of Thomas DeQuincey, whose devotion to opium contributed in no small degree to his notorious eccentricity and dreaminess. He had acquired the habit first in 1804, when he resorted to laudanum to cure an attack of neuralgia, and to such an extent did it grow upon him that he was known to take at times as much as 12,000 drops, or about ten wine-glasses, a day. He was constantly struggling to reduce his appalling quantity, and managed after a while to keep himself within moderate bounds, with occasional opium debauches.

Amongst DeQuincey's eccentricities, by the way, it might be mentioned that he was haunted by an idea that he was being pursued by his various and no doubt much-tired landladies. Another man whose works are to be found amongst the classics, and who contracted the habit of eating opium, was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet and philosopher, who tired so many avocations before he discovered his forte. In his early youth he apprenticed himself to a cobbler; then he tried to become a surgeon; and about eighteen years before his death, even after his writings had secured for him world-wide fame, he actually conceived the idea of becoming a Unitarian minister. Afterwards he worked as a journalist for the Morning Post, and ultimately returned to his old love, poetry and philosophy.

The "Kendal Black Drop."

It was when Coleridge was about thirty that he came under the influence of what was henceforward to be the curse of his life. His health had never been robust; rheumatism and neuralgia had tortured him; and, by becoming his own doctor, he had recourse to the anodyne of opium. Little by little the habit grew, and the "Kendal black drop" at length enslaved him. It injured his constitution and dulled his imagination; it enfeebled his will and went far to destroy his sense of truth and honor. Few things are so pathetic as his own lament over the deterioration of his nature, in his "Dejection, an Ode." Thomas Shadwell, a dramatic writer of some note in the seventeenth century, died through an overdose of laudanum, while Walter Savage Landor was said to be addicted to the use of opium. Lord Byron's entire poetic career led him at times to seek relief for shattered nerves in doses of morphia, and Sheridan indulged in the same habit.

Killed by Coffee Drinking

Richard Savage, who claimed to be the illegitimate child of Lord Rivers and Countess Maclefeld, ruined himself by dissipation, after producing works which have placed him amongst minor English poets, while Dryden's eccentricity took the form of having himself flogged at frequent intervals and eating raw meat. The latter, he said, strengthened his imagination.

Both Dumas and Balzac showed no inclination to gass the wine bottle. On the other hand, Voltaire drank huge quantities of coffee when engaged in writing. As a matter of fact, over-indulgence in that beverage during a protracted literary effort was the real cause of his death. Schiller also drank coffee "to thaw the frost out of his veins," but he fancied imbibing the infusion while seated with his feet in hot water. This, he believed, stimulated his imagination in sluggish moods, and he refreshed it during work by copious draughts from a flask of Rhenish wine.

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