

unfolded his inner self—a few family letters, perhaps, excepted—nowhere else, and the complaint of the critics will seem more unreasonable still. No one would have questioned the right of Dickens to leave an autobiography behind him; why should complaint be made when his *Life* is written from materials he himself designed for the purpose?

The volume before us comprises the period from the publication of "*David Copperfield*" to the sudden death of its author. The narrative is a pathetic, almost a melancholy one; but it is instructive also in the highest degree. It details the steps by which a man of genius who, by sheer force of intellect and breadth of heart and feeling, had gained the world's ear and occupied the foremost rank in the affection and respect of all classes of society, at last overtasked his powers and entered prematurely into his rest. Thus the life of Dickens is at once an incentive to hopeful energy and unfaltering perseverance, and a warning that nature has fixed limits to mental activity which not even the subtlest and most facile of minds may pass with impunity.

Still, notwithstanding the vein of sadness which runs through the concluding volume, it is not uniformly, or even often, depressing. The touching story of exhausted faculties and frame is constantly enlivened with flashes of humour and downright fun. The feeling of pain and the terrible unrest which at times possessed him were often resisted and overborne for a time by the native buoyancy and cheeriness of the novelist's nature. At such moments the pent-up flood of his humour broke forth in a stream of joy, bounding forward and eddying here and there in circlets of sportive fancy. In this busy activity, this unconquerable appreciation of the incongruous and bizarre, the reader often forgets the ever-impending catastrophe, so delicate is the study of light and shade through the course of his later life.

We cannot pretend to follow the biographer over the eighteen years covered by his concluding volume; it must suffice if a few of the salient points of the story are lightly touched upon within the limits of the brief space at our command. "*Bleak House*" followed "*David Copperfield*, to which it was, with all its merits, undoubtedly inferior. In this novel Dickens had the misfortune to wound unintentionally the feelings of a friend. In Lawrence Boythorn Dickens sketched his friend, Walter Savage Landor, but the likeness was not offensive. Unfortunately, in attempting to catch some of the mannerisms of Leigh Hunt, and invest the lively but unprincipled Harold Skimpole therewith, he was unwittingly led into trouble. It is probable that Hunt would never have noticed the points of resemblance had not some good-natured friend called his attention to it. Some alterations were made by Dickens, and the matter

was compromised—let us hope to the satisfaction of both parties. It was during the progress of "*Bleak House*" that the first symptoms of that restlessness appeared which soon became frequent and at last chronic with Dickens. For the moment the mischief seems to have been temporary, and may easily have been regarded as one of the humours of a mercurial temperament. Yet we find ominous hints of failing inventive power. He complains of his inability to "grind sparks out of his dull blade" for "*Bleak House*." In another letter he says, "What with '*Bleak House*' and '*Household Words*' and '*Child's History*' and Miss Coutts' Home, and the invitations to feasts and festivals, I really feel as if my head would split like a fired shell if I remained here." After a flying trip to the Continent, Dickens, for the first time, read two of his Christmas stories in public—the fatal inception of an exciting and lucrative life which finally ensnared and destroyed him. These first efforts were purely eleemosynary and, of course, there were no end of applications for his aid. Happily, for the moment wiser counsels prevailed. As we have hinted already, there are many pleasant glimpses of joyousness in this volume; one of these we may briefly refer to—the performances of "*Tom Thumb*" and "*Fortunio*," at Tavistock House, "when Thackeray rolled off his chair in a burst of laughter" at the unconscious drollery of the child-actors. "*Hard Times*," which Mr. Ruskin has highly praised, was the next work of Dickens. After a brief criticism of this work, with which we certainly concur, placing it in the second rank, notwithstanding some peculiar merits of its own, we have the record of Dickens' visits to the Continent. The keen power of observation, which never failed him, found fresh fields for its exercise in France, Switzerland and Italy; its results are given by the biographer in a fund of anecdote and quaint remark. "*Little Dorrit*" was the next serial written by Dickens. In writing it, he tried the plan of jotting down incidents and fancies as they occurred—another proof that the freshness of his imagination had been seriously impaired. Mr. Forster will not admit any real decay of imaginative power. "He had, however, lost the free and fertile method of the earlier time. He could no longer fill a wide-spread canvas with the same facility and certainty as of old; and he had frequently a quite unfounded apprehension of some possible break-down, at which the end might be at any moment beginning. There came accordingly, from time to time, intervals of unusual impatience and restlessness, strange to me, in connection with his home; his old pursuits were too often laid aside for other excitements and occupations, all of which expressed but the craving which still had possession of him to get by some means at some change