

## OUR BIOGRAPHICAL BUREAU.

"Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And departing, leave behind us  
Foot-prints on the sands of time."

## The Death of Poe.

"... "An unhappy master, whom unmerciful disaster,  
Followed fast and followed faster, till his song one burden  
bore,  
Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of never—nevermore!"

IN the western extremity of Newgate street, and directly opposite Old Bailey, frowns darkly skyward the venerable edifice of Newgate prison. Its aged walls, begrimed by the smoke of the great metropolis, could tell sad tales of misery and sin, had they but human tongues. To what scenes have they not been witness? What sounds of woe have they not heard? Innocent men have languished there, from whose vision that last solace of all men, bright Hope, has faded. Life-long prisoners have there sobbed themselves to sleep in their hopeless captivity. Condemned criminals have counted within those gloomy walls the few quickly flying hours, that still intervened between life, with all its throbbing activity, and a shameful death.

Sad, however, as are the records of this dismal place, a great thinker of our time, Thomas Carlyle, has likened to them the biographies of authors.

"Nothing," says he, in his preface to a work on Schiller, "but the Newgate Calendar is sadder than the history of authors."

While the fate of Burns, and many another ill-starred genius, prominently attest the truth of this statement, preeminently does that of Edgar Allan Poe, whose life was a tragedy, from the rising of the curtain on an orphaned outcast to its falling on that pitiable *denouement* in the gutters of Baltimore.

It is of this culminating catastrophe to a most unhappy life, of which I propose now to speak, feeling that to it are especially applicable the lines of the "cunning Wizard of the North:"

"By many a death-bed I have been,  
And many a sinner's parting seen,  
But never aught like this."

On the 6th of October, 1849, the unfortunate poet left Richmond for the North, for the purpose of bringing his foster-mother to his approaching wedding with Mrs. Shelton. Brighter days seemed in store for him. The marriage with Mrs. Shelton was likely to prove a most desirable union; while his abstinence from the fatal cup, for some years past, was an earnest of future sobriety.

"But who can control his fate?"

At Baltimore he unfortunately met with some so-called friends, who, in accordance with the unfortunate drinking custom of our country, invited him to take a social glass. Ah! if he could have seen the lurking demon in that glass, which "at the last bit him like a serpent and stung him like an adder," he would have dashed it into a thousand fragments at his feet, rather than have tasted a drop thereof. But, in accordance perhaps with that "destiny, which shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may," Poe drank, with the invariable result to his excessively sensitive organization of total stupefaction. At Havre de Grace the car conductor found him lying unconscious on his seat. Recognizing the eminent poet, and knowing that he had relatives in Baltimore, the humane man sent him back on a passing train.

From the time when he arrived in Baltimore to the following morning, when he was found lying in the street insensible, the greatest uncertainty exists as to his movements. It was the eve of an exciting municipal election; and, according to some, he was found wandering deranged through the streets by a crowd of political ruffians, who inhumanely took him and locked him up in the party headquarters, for use on the following day. At its dawn, these despicable wretches, who would verily seem to be.

"Neither man nor woman,  
Neither beast nor human,  
But ghoul,"

drugged him with opiates and dragged him from poll to poll, forcing him to vote the ballot which they thrust into his hand. Then, having accomplished their inhuman purposes, they left him in the gutter to die.

According to others, and both accounts seem to be well attested, after leaving the cars he wandered through the streets. As evening approached, an unkind fate drove him into the lower quarters of Baltimore, where he was forced into a vile den, by a crowd of L'assomoir rowdies—drugged, robbed, and stripped of his apparel—and then, clad in some filthy rags, thrust forth into the streets, along which he helplessly staggered, until finally he stumbled over some obstacle that lay in his path and fell insensible to the pavement.

Whichever of these accounts may be true, and we may readily believe both, for there is nothing incongruous between them, certain it is that no tongue can tell the sufferings and cruel agonies which the hapless poet suffered. It was the effects of these, as well as the exposure to the cutting October air, and the drugs and opiates that were administered to him, that killed Edgar Allan Poe, and robbed us of one of the brightest geniuses that ever illumined the world of letters.

When, therefore, his biographical enemies—far worse than even the despicable L'assomoir ruffians who murdered him—assert that he died of intoxication, they assert, knowingly, an outrageous falsehood! Nothing is more contrary to the facts. Were we to need any other proof than that adduced from the attending circumstances, the positive statements of his physicians, Dr. Moran and Professor Monkur, who both affirm that he died of ill-usage and exposure, should be conclusive to every reasonable mind.

From the early dawn of that cutting October day, to ten o'clock a. m., Poe lay in the streets insensible. Hundreds must have passed him, and never raised a hand to help the unfortunate man. Truly this was a modern rendering of the beautiful parable of the Master, and shows that human nature is much the same, in the broad light of the nineteenth century, as it was nine hundred years ago, when that other man "went down from Jerusalem to Jerico, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." Verily, on that keen October morning, of the year 1849, there were many modern priests and Levites who "passed by on the other side;" but, thank God, and to the credit of our human nature, there was likewise a good Samaritan, an unknown gentleman, who, recognizing the eminent poet, secured a hack and drove him to the Washington Hospital.

Here he was carefully cared for. In about an hour he regained his consciousness, and feebly asked:

"Where am I?"

Dr. Moran sat down beside him, stroked the dark, raven curls from his forehead, and asked him how he felt?

"Miserable!" was the sad reply.

Then a little later, he continued:

"You are very kind, doctor; where am I?"

"You are in the care of friends."

To this Poe replied, sadly and bitterly:

"My best friend would be the man who would blow my brains out."

Dr. Moran told him to be quite and not to excite himself.

"Oh! wretch that I am!" cried he, in despair. "Oh, God! the terrible strait I am in! Is there no ransom for the deathless spirit?"

With the belief it would soothe him, Dr. Moran asked him if he would have a glass of wine?

"He opened wide his large eyes," says the doctor, in his official memoranda, "and fixed them so steadily upon me, and with such anguish in them, that I looked from him to the wall beyond the bed. Then he said:

"Sir, if its potency would transport me to the Elysian bowers of the undiscovered spirit-world, I would not taste it! Of its horrors, who can tell?"

Then a little later, he continued, in heart-rending tones:

"Doctor, am I ill. Is there no hope?"