

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."

Genius and Short Lives.



LIST of the men and women of genius who have died at or about the early age of 37, and secured for themselves an undisputed place in the ranks of the immortals, would occupy not the least brilliant portion of the record of the illustrious dead. It is astonishing how many men, whose names are a household possession in every civilized country, have done all their best work after 37, and who would never have been heard of, or at best would have shone only as the smaller lights of literature, if they had been carried off at the age at which Byron, Shelly, Burns, and Raphael closed their careers. And when we come to look at what Milton did after 37, what Goethe and a thousand others did after the same age, and how little they had done before it, we cannot estimate how much richer the world might have been had those bright intellects which were cut off in their earliest prime been permitted to give thirty or forty years of additional work to the world. It is certain that thirty or forty more years would have cooled the blood of Byron and carried him out of what we all know, and what literary history has stigmatized, as Byronism; but it is impossible to forecast what would have been the result as to predict from Werther the development that ended in "Faust." Who can foresee what Shelly would have done, in the full ripeness of his splendid power, during another quarter of a century, and if he had died, say, at the age of Shakespeare? Burns, too, we know, dreamed of great works, and when he died there were literary movements in the air which might have turned his labors and his life into a new channel. And was Raphael's genius exhausted when the grave closed over him at 37? No more than Michael Angelo's would have been, and some of the sublimest work of the great Tuscan was done in the late evening of his life.

A consideration of this kind should entirely modify our comparative estimate and criticism of distinguished men. Nothing is commoner, for example, among Germans, and among cultivated Englishmen as well, than to ascribe to Goethe a genius far transcending Schiller's. The comparison is made between the whole body of Goethe's literary work, extending over upward of eighty years of exceptional healthy activity, and the product of poor Schiller's mutilated existence, stretching to scarcely more than one-half that term, with a large portion of it belonging to the period of childhood and youth. But, had Goethe died at the same age as Schiller, he would have had a poorer result to show than Schiller has. He would have had a great deal less than Byron in pure poetical work, incomparably less also than Shelly, and, in respect of genuine poetry expressing the simple feelings of the heart and an apprehension of the beauty of nature, he would have stood an immeasurable distance behind even the unlettered Burns. There is no doubt that Schiller, when he died, at 46, had reached a loftier height of dramatic art than Goethe had at the same age—we might say than Goethe had reached at 84. Schiller had left behind him a long roll of immortal dramas, some of them lit up with the radiance of a fine poetry, and many of which will keep the stage as long as the stage exists; but at the same age Goethe had only produced one or two dramas of any pretension. As for Byron, there is nothing that Goethe did up to 36—Byron's age at his death—that will bear comparison with the marvelous philosophical insight of "Manfred," nothing to equal the astonishing satirical power of the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" (and Goethe frequently did try his hand at satire); nor anything that deserves even to be named in the same breath as "Don Juan."

Miss Austen and Charlotte Bronte were rather more than 37 when they died, but they died at an age at which George Eliot had not written a single novel. One or two translations, an essay or two in the Westminster Review, and the "Secures of Clerical Life" were all that came from the hand of the subsequent author of "Adam Bede" and "Daniel Deronda." Carlyle moralizes on what might have been the

consequences to English history if a stray bullet had struck down Oliver Cromwell. Perhaps they would not have been so great as he imagined, and might have proved to be nothing more than an earlier Restoration. But given a fatal chill or a fever at 37, and the long series of works with which George Eliot has enriched English literature would have had no existence; in other words, there would have been no George Eliot. Miss Austen's observant eye had not grown dim, nor her facile pen been robbed of its cunning, when her life terminated; and the world knows not how many more photographs of simple English character and manners it has thus lost. We might instance Keats also, and Kirk White and Chatterton, but one died in his boyhood, and the others before they were much more than boys, and a broken column is the fittest and most suggestive memorial over their graves. The mysterious "might-have-been," in the cases of Keats and Chatterton, if they had lived till a ripe manhood, would have given to English literature many a noble poem it does not now possess. For it has seldom happened that a poet or a novelist has exhausted himself in a single work. Philip James Bailey did so in "Festus," and Alexander Smith and Sidney Dobell may be said to have thoroughly drained their intellects in one or two efforts. No length of life would have enabled any of them to add greatly to their fame, though they might have lived on, fanning the embers of their early reputation. Spontaneity, energy, native force were wanting in them more almost than any English poet above mediocrity. So, likewise, Pollok, attempting to follow in the footsteps of Milton, had probably attained the highest pinnacle of his possibilities in "The Course of Time," when his shattered constitution gave way and he sank to his early grave.—*Standard.*

An Old Story of Dickens Retold.

Reminiscence of old Major Throckmorton, who for years kept the Galt House in Louisville, are always in order. It was the Major, who said that the turkey was a very inconvenient bird—too large for one and not large enough for two.

When Charles Dickens visited this country in 1846, he meant to stay a day or two in Louisville, and of course, put up at the Galt House. He had been settled in his room on the second story only an hour or two when the Major, a bosom friend of Henry Clay, and on terms of more or less intimacy with every notable man in the South, sent in his name to the novelist, and followed in, a moment after in person. "Mr Dickens," he began, extending his hand, "we are glad to welcome you. We know you and admire you, and will reckon it a privilege to be allowed to extend to you the hospitalities of the metropolis of Kentucky. As your especial host, I beg that you will command me for any service in my power to render." Mr. Dickens received this with a frigid stare. "When I need you, landlord," he said, pointing to the door, "I will ring." The Major was, for an instant paralyzed. Then he rushed at his patron, caught him by one leg and shoulder, and had him half way out of the window before another visitor in the room could interfere and save the Englishman's life. Mr. Dickens left town the same day and the only mention that he made in his "American Notes" was to refer to a casual pig that he saw rooting in the street as he was on his way to take the river steamer.—*Hotel Mail*

[Written for the Family Circle.]

A Lament.

All that I fain would sing or say,
Some abler tongue has sung or said;
And nothing worthy will remain
To speak of me when I am dead.

The thoughts that gladly I'd express,
I meet with in some poet's line;
I feel their grace and nobleness,
But can I claim, that they are *Mine*.

And things I find, too, I have felt,
Vaguely and in a far-off way;
And sadly tender strains that melt
Like wreaths of mist, unreal, away.

O could I find a realm unknown
That ne'er had owned a sovereign sway;
I'd claim and make it all my own
By right of first discovery.

—Mrs. Cross.