

skite," "bully," and "coward." Such an incident casts a strange light on the social refinement of the age, and is a melancholy example of the degradation of genius. Dickens' savage picture of the America of this period in "Martin Chuzzlewit"—boastful, insolent, and vulgar—may be caricature, but there is a germ of truth in it of which one has contemporary glimpses such as the foregoing. If the Bostonian school of Emerson, Thoreau, Whittier, and the enthusiasts of Brook farm did nothing else, at least they seem to have introduced a severer, saner tone into American letters, to have given literature an independent standing, and to have refused in spite of poverty to be contaminated by the influence of contemporary journalism.

Unfortunately, Poe stood aloof and alone—Pegasus in pound—beating his wings in a vain attempt to rise out of the mire, until his spirit was broken and his principles degraded. The last rally of his life was a strange one, in the year or two that succeeded his wife's death. In it he produced some of his most perfect poems—"Annabel Lee," and "For Annie"—some striking tales, and the extravagant, semi-scientific work, "Eureka," which he confidently believed was to confound Newton and re-establish the theory of the Universe on a new basis. On the other hand, his reason had never quite recovered its balance after his wife's death, and his passionate nature seemed to break be-

yond his control. He had always had a chivalrous admiration for women which once landed him in an undeserved scandal, and now he lost all restraint and surrendered himself to sentimentalism. He first pursued a literary widow, Mrs. Whitman, until against her judgment and really to save his reason, she consented to marry him. She had hardly done so when Poe broke out in one of his orgies of drug-drinking, and she immediately ended the affair. After this came a series of romantic attachments—friendships, according to Poe, but really a riot of sentiment and strong feeling which helped to exhaust his broken constitution. The end could not have been far off, but it came in a sudden and degrading form. He was found in the streets after a night of drink and exposure, and carried to a hospital, where he never regained consciousness and died among strangers.

Here ends the fitful fever-dream of his life and works. In all that Poe wrote there is a malarial taint, the delusive realism of fever, the lurid colouring, the half-belief, half-fear that it is true and the wish that it were not so. Other writers one associates with the moorland or the ocean, the breezy country or the cheerful haunts of men. But Poe has no place with healthy nature. In imagination one sees his lonely figure moving as in a nightmare, hag-ridden and melancholy, among the streets of cities, where the light flickers on blank walls, barred windows and endless pavements.

