

## MANIFESTATIONS OF MANIC-DEPRESSIVE INSANITY IN LITERARY GENIUS.

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The question of the relation of genius to insanity is one of absorbing interest, and has been discussed by writers of all ages. The ancients were unable to differentiate between the revelations of the wise and the divinations of the insane. They believed that both classes of individuals were inspired, the genius by a benign divinity, and the insane by an evil spirit. The Greeks had but one word "mania" to designate enthusiasm, inspiration and delirium. The writings of those who have made a study of the relation of genius to insanity would indicate that they are closely allied. Plato<sup>1</sup> said, "Delirium is not an evil, but a great benefaction when it emanates from divinity." Aristotle said,<sup>2</sup> "There is no great mind without a mixture of insanity." He also stated that under the influence of congestion of the brain there were persons who became great poets, prophets and sibyls. Democritus<sup>3</sup> made insanity an essential condition of poetry. Pascal wrote, "L'extrême esprit est voisin de l'extrême folie." Shakespeare affirmed that the lunatic, the lover and the poet were of imagination all compact. Dryden wrote,

"Great wits to madness sure are near allied,  
And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

Wordsworth,<sup>4</sup> in speaking of poets, said, "We other poets in our youth commence with buoyancy, but it results finally in despair and insanity." James Sully,<sup>5</sup> after a careful study of the subject, concluded that there was undoubtedly a relation between high

<sup>1</sup> Phaedo.

<sup>2</sup> Problemata, Sec. XXX.

<sup>3</sup> Horace, Ars Poet., 296-297.

<sup>4</sup> Resolution and Independence.

<sup>5</sup> Genius and Insanity, Popular Science Monthly, Aug., 1885.

intellectual ability and mental derangement. Nisbit<sup>6</sup> came to the conclusion that genius and insanity are but phases of a morbid susceptibility of, or want of balance in, the cerebro-spinal system. Lauvrière<sup>7</sup> says, "There is scarcely, in effect, a human faculty of which the excessive development cannot very nearly touch indifferently either genius or insanity, without its being possible to trace between the two extremes the least line of demarcation." Von Kraft-Ebing wrote, "The fluctuating lines between sanity and insanity can oscillate between the two extremes of genius and mental disease."

Grasset<sup>8</sup> affirms that "between calm, cold reason and a transport of passion, between originality and eccentricity, between nervousness and agitation, between a person that is slightly touched and one who is demented, there are all degrees of transition, and it is impossible to say where insanity begins. A sharp line would be arbitrary and false."

Not only have we the testimony of those who have made a study of the subject, but we also have the writings of geniuses who at one time or another have shown manifestations of insanity. Diderot,<sup>9</sup> who died insane, said, "O, how near are genius and madness! Men imprison them and chain them, or raise statues to them." Lamartine wrote, "The genius carries in him the principles of destruction, of death, of insanity, as the fruit carries the worm." Voltaire<sup>10</sup> said, "The heavens in forming us mixed in our life reason and insanity." Dean Swift<sup>11</sup> affirmed that genius was dependent upon madness." Lord Beaconsfield said,<sup>12</sup> "I have sometimes half believed, although the suspicion is mortifying, that there is only a step between the state of those who deeply indulge in imaginative meditation, and insanity. I was not always sure of my identity, or even existence, for I have found it necessary to shout aloud to be sure that I lived."<sup>13</sup> Tolstoy said that philosophical skepticism had led him to a condition bordering on insanity, and

<sup>6</sup> The Genius of Insanity.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar A. Poe, Lauvrière.

<sup>8</sup> Semi-Insane and Semi-Responsible, Grasset.

<sup>9</sup> Diderot, Dictionnaire Encyclopédique.

<sup>10</sup> Dissertation on Man.

<sup>11</sup> Tale of a Tub, Swift.

<sup>12</sup> Contarini Fleming.

adds, "I imagined there existed nothing outside of me, either living or dead, and that objects were not objects, but vain appearances. This state reached such a point that sometimes I turned suddenly around and looked behind me, in the hope of seeing something that was not."

In observing the insane, the symptoms which stand out most prominently are peculiarities of action, hallucinations and delusions, defects of reasoning and judgment. Just where the line can be drawn between the physiological and the pathological manifestations of these characteristics is a question. The psychology of the normal glides imperceptibly into the psychopathology of the insane, and genius appears to flourish on the borderland between the two. False perceptions are widespread, and to the excited imagination may occur at any time. There are cases on record where large numbers, under the stress of religious or patriotic excitement, have seen signs in the heavens and heard voices from the sky. The soldiers of Constantine saw a cross in the sky bearing the inscription, "In hoc signo vinces." When these false perceptions are not registered as such, and when they persist, we have the hallucinations of insanity. Here again we see the difficulty in dividing the normal from the abnormal, the sane from the insane. Lauvrière says,<sup>11</sup> "Does it not too often happen that the vision of the artist degenerates to the hallucinatory obsession, if not to ocular perversion, the inspiration of the poet to delirious wanderings, philosophic contemplation to ecstatic vision, the obstinate logic of the scientist to arguing monomania, the imperious energy of the man of action to criminal impulsion? And in how many celebrated cases, to the great consternation of humanity, this transition is tragically accomplished."

Difficult as it is to draw the line between false perceptions and hallucinations, it is equally difficult to differentiate between false beliefs and delusions. According to Prof. Ribot the difference between the genius and the insane is the fact that the former has critical sense. While he possesses the ardent and vivid imagination of the insane, he exercises the critical sense concurrently with the creative idea. The insane, without this inhibition, wanders on into the realm of the impossible and the ridiculous. This rule, however, does not hold in the case of the literary genius. The genius

<sup>11</sup> Edgar A. Poe, Lauvrière.

of poetry and fiction involves the special exercise of the imagination, unhampered by retrospective experiences or sane and logical anticipation, and leaps to conclusions not discerned by reason. When the imagination extends beyond the bounds of possibility, and pictures the unseen with a vividness and clearness seen in the works of the poet and novelist, the borderland of insanity is being approached, if not passed.

Having read the testimony of those who have made a study of the relation of genius to insanity, as well as of those who have combined the two, let us consider briefly the manifestations of insanity as seen in the genius. The collection of facts on this subject is not easy. The term "insanity" has so long been associated in the lay mind with all that is grotesque, repulsive and disgraceful, that where it has existed in the genius or his family the biographers have usually carefully concealed the fact. Lombroso, in his "Man of Genius," however, presents an overwhelming mass of facts to prove that men of genius descended from families rich in degenerates and insane, that many of them bore the physical stigmata of degeneration, were precocious, vain, egotistical, characterless, immoral, sexual perverts, alcoholics, drug habitués, and many of them actually insane.

There is abundant evidence to prove that many noted geniuses suffered from hallucinations and delusions. Socrates received messages from his familiar spirit or demon. Mahomet and Swedenborg saw visions and received messages from heaven. Brutus saw an apparition which said, "I am thy evil genius, thou shalt meet me at Philippi." Descartes, after a long retirement, was followed by an invisible person who urged him to pursue his investigations after truth. Martin Luther, while laboring under extreme religious excitement, saw the devil and threw an inkstand at his head. Savonarola, one day while talking to a nun, saw the heavens opened, and saw a vision of the calamities of the church and heard a voice telling him to proclaim them to the people. When Columbus was cast upon the shores of Jamaica, he heard a voice reproaching him for his discouragement and lack of faith in God. Bunyan, on Elston Green, heard a voice which "made him pause, and bade him sin no more." Hobbs confessed that he could not go in the dark without thinking he saw visions of the dead." Samuel John-

<sup>14</sup> Life, W. Irving.

son heard his mother's voice calling him when she was many miles distant." Oliver Cromwell saw an apparition which appeared to him in the night and told him he would be the greatest man in England. Byron was haunted by a specter. Shelley had hallucinations of sight, but whether these were due to laudanum it is impossible to say, Anna Lee, the founder of the Shakers, saw Christ and received messages from Him. When Flaubert described the poisoning of Madam Bovary, he tasted the arsenic on his tongue, and showed symptoms of arsenical poisoning, even to the point of emesis. James Thomson, in his "City of Dreadful Night," described his hallucinatory experiences. Dickens was one day discovered in tears. On being asked the cause of his grief, he replied, "Little Nell is dead."

While the theory that genius is allied to insanity has found many advocates, it has on the other hand many opponents. There is a strong sentimental reason for objecting to the association of that which is most noble and sublime in the mind of man with that state which is considered the saddest, most pathetic, and even disgraceful. Joly<sup>15</sup> states that "It is not necessary to refute the theory of genius and insanity, for strength is not weakness, health is not disease; and for the rest, the cases quoted in favor of these hypotheses are only particular cases."

Moreau de Tours<sup>16</sup> classifies genius as a neurosis, and sums up his conclusions by saying that genius is the highest expression, the *ne plus ultra*, of intellectual activity, which is due to the overexcitation of the nervous system, and in this sense is neurotic. Schilling,<sup>17</sup> Hagen<sup>18</sup> and Jurgen-Meyer<sup>19</sup> have argued along the same lines. Lombroso<sup>20</sup> classes as paranoiacs all the great religious and political reformers of the world, Christ, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Savonarola, Cola di Rienzi, Lazaretti and others, and as epileptics Mahomet, St. Paul, Cæsar, Napoleon, Flaubert, Charles V, Paganini, Mozart, Schiller and numerous other famous characters.

<sup>15</sup> Life, Lord Macaulay.

<sup>16</sup> Psychologie du Genie, 1883.

<sup>17</sup> Psychologie Morbide, 1859.

<sup>18</sup> Psychiatrische Briefe, 1863.

<sup>19</sup> Verwandtschaft des Genies mit dem Irrsinn, Berlin, 1877.

<sup>20</sup> Genie und Talent, 1879.

<sup>21</sup> The Man of Genius, Lombroso.

Grasset<sup>22</sup> is inclined to be more kindly disposed toward the genius, and classes him as semi-insane. He says, "The insane man is never anything but diseased, harmful, or at least useless to society. The semi-insane man is often eminently useful, sometimes even superman."

In attempting to study the subject at close range, that is, in regard to individual cases, we find that the literary genius offers the best opportunity for study. The letters, poems and other productions of the authors themselves show the nature of their symptoms. In fact, in many instances the literary productions were clearly defined symptoms of insanity. While many writers have admitted that geniuses have very frequently shown signs of degeneracy, they have refused to believe that there was any connection between the two, that is, they believe that the insanity is simply an incident in the life of the genius. On the other hand, the study of the life and works of literary genius would indicate that the literature was incidental to the psychosis, and simply formed an outlet for the abnormal feelings and passions of the writer, and accessory circumstances in many cases determined whether a mind, in its excited state, produced lasting results of a high order or wasted its energy in fruitless activity. Lombroso says, "The examination of the productions of the insane writers supplies us with a new source of analysis and criticism for the study of genius in literature. They show us that literary madness is not only a curious psychiatric singularity, but a special form of insanity which hides impulses more dangerous because not easily perceived." He states that poetry is the chief production of the insane writers, and theology and prophecy predominate in the writings of the mattoids. Of the forty-five insane writers referred to by Philmonests fifteen devoted themselves to poetry, twelve to theology, five to prophecy, three to autobiography, three to mathematics, two to psychiatry and two to politics. Moreau de Tours<sup>23</sup> wrote, "The state of inspiration, be it poetic, be it prophetic, is precisely that what offers the closest analogy to real insanity. Here genius and insanity are nearly synonymous, because of approaching and confounding each other. Taken out of itself, the mind seems in the presence of intellectual

<sup>22</sup> Semi-Insane and Semi-Responsible.

<sup>23</sup> *Psychologie Morbide*, 1859.

phenomena in which reason has no part. The substratum of genius is a semi-morbid state of the brain, a veritable erethism." Byron said, "Poetry is the expression of passion under excitement, and grows in vigor and effectiveness as the excitement increases."

A study of the life and works of literary geniuses would indicate that the psychosis most common among this class of individuals is manic-depressive insanity. In patients suffering from this form of mental trouble we are usually able to elicit a family history of some form of degeneracy. We see in the patient emotional instability—excitements with exaltation, exaggerated ego, expansiveness, hyperactivity, verbosity, graphomania with a tendency to make a play upon words, rhyming, punning, etc., fleeting delusions and occasionally hallucinations, alternating with periods of emotional depression, retardation, inhibition of thought and activity, delusions of self-unworthiness and often persecution. In addition we see moral weakness, aboulias, abnormal sensibilities, peculiarities of dress and action.

In a study of a few of the English and American authors of note we find practically the same manifestations. Byron's maternal grandmother suffered from melancholia, and took her own life. Another relative took poison. His mother was eccentric. His father, who was known as "mad Jack Byron," committed suicide. Charles Lamb's father and sister were insane; his mother suffered from paralysis. Dorothy Wordsworth, the sister of the poet, died insane, his daughter Catherine suffered from epilepsy, and another daughter is said to have been insane at times. De Quincey's father died of tuberculosis, his sister of hydrocephalus, and a son of "some obscure brain trouble." The father of Thomas Chatterton was a chronic alcoholic. Pope's mother suffered from senile dementia. Johnson, in writing of Pope, says, "He inherited headaches from his mother, and a crooked figure from his father." He was so small of stature that his seat at the table had to be raised to bring him on a level with the others. Dean Swift's uncle died insane. Samuel Johnson's father is described by Murphy as being "afflicted with a degree of melancholy little short of madness—violent passions, wrong-headed, positive." James Thomson's father suffered from paralysis, his mother from melancholia. Gray's father was a worthless scoundrel. Cowper inherited insanity from both sides of his ancestry. Shelley's grandfather suffered

from melancholia, and his father had tendencies in the same direction. Hartley Coleridge, the eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, bore the hereditary burden of a father addicted to opium, and at times insane. He was an eight-months baby, and was of abnormally small stature, his height being less than five feet. Southey had a maternal uncle who is described as an "idiot." His mother suffered from paralysis in infancy. Sir Walter Scott had a maternal uncle who was insane; his father suffered from organic dementia, his mother from aphasia and post-apoplectic dementia; one daughter died of "brain fever," another of tuberculosis. Edgar Allan Poe had alcoholic parents, an insane uncle, an imbecile sister and an alcoholic brother. Samuel Clemens' (Mark Twain's) daughter suffered from epilepsy.

Undoubtedly the sphere in which literary geniuses have shown the most pathological manifestations is that of the emotions. In their productions we see evidences of all degrees of elation, from mild hypomania to maniacal frenzy, and all grades of depression from slight melancholia to the blackest despair which ends in suicide. Mobius<sup>24</sup> has shown that the writings of Goethe are analogous to the productions of a manic-depressive. Hahn,<sup>25</sup> in an article on the psychopathology of Goethe comes to a similar conclusion. Goethe himself confessed, "My character passes from extreme joy to extreme melancholy." He also stated that a certain amount of cerebral irritation was necessary to the composition of a poem. Alfieri said that during the progress of his literary work his brain was in a condition of abnormal excitement, and he adds, "This excitement has all the characteristics of a mild mania." He also suffered from depressions so profound that at one time he tried to tear the bandages from his wrist, after being bled by a surgeon, in order that he might bleed to death.

Lombroso mentions writers who have claimed to have known patients who, in their normal condition, displayed no evidences of genius or talent, but who, under the influence of an attack of maniacal excitement, became great poets, linguists, musicians, artists and mathematicians. While this is not the experience of the ordinary psychiatrist, there is not one who has not seen patients who

<sup>24</sup> Ueber das Pathologische bei Goethe, Mobius, 1898.

<sup>25</sup> Chronique Medicale, 1904, pp, 321-358.



were bright, witty and interesting talkers and keen observers while in a hypomanic state, but who on their return to normal, were dull, uninteresting and unobserving. The brain, quickened by its abnormal state of excitement, seizes upon facts that in the normal condition are overlooked, the creative power is stimulated, the imagination unhampered. The overexcitation of the nervous system which in the ordinary case of manic-depressive insanity manifests itself by fruitless activities and profitless graphomania, in the genius, who is of a higher order of intelligence, finds an outlet in poetry and fiction.

After a prolonged period of excitement and overwork, nature finally calls into play its inevitable law of compensation, and takes revenge for this reckless expenditure of force by a period, equally prolonged, of mutism, retardation and inhibition of thought and action. We see an individual change in a day from a state of mania or hypomania to one of deepest depression. This is exactly what we find in the works of the literary genius. It has been said, "Melancholy is the crown of thorns of genius." Lucretius, a writer of Latin verse, suffered from periodic attacks of depression, in one of which he died by his own hand. Rousseau had alternating periods of mania and melancholia, and during the latter entertained the most distressing delusions of persecutions. Madame Dudevant (George Sand), at the age of seventeen, suffered from a depression during which she attempted suicide. Describing this attack she says, "The temptation was so sudden and bizarre that I considered it a species of insanity." Schiller passed through a period of melancholy which caused him to be suspected of insanity. Lessman, the humorist who wrote the "Journal of Melancholia," hanged himself during an attack of depression. Tasso, in a letter to Urbino, exclaimed, "Francesco, O, Francesco! With my infirm limbs I have an infirm soul. So great is my grief that I am considered by others and myself as mad." Newton suffered from depressions so severe that his friends considered him insane at times. Samuel Johnson,\* who compiled the first English dictionary, described his own condition as follows: "My indolence has sunk into a deeper sluggishness. A kind of strange oblivion has overspread me so that I know not what has become of the

\* Life, Lord Macaulay.

last year. My memory grows confused, and I know not how the days pass over me." His new edition of Shakespeare appeared after a delay of nine years, due to these recurrent depressions. Thomas Chatterton<sup>17</sup> was afflicted with fits of depression during which he would remain speechless for days. He committed suicide at the age of seventeen, leaving behind a large collection of poems and articles. At the time of his death he was a contributor to almost every magazine published in London. Hartley Coleridge described his depressions in several of his poems. He compared these attacks to black clouds which overspread his horizon and obscured his mental faculties. James Thomson<sup>18</sup> is said to have suffered from "insomnia, congenital melancholia and fits of intemperance." In his Requiem, which he wrote some time prior to his death, he refers to his life as one of pain, woe, grief and fear. Henry Clarence Kendall, the Australian poet, was at one time confined in a hospital for the insane. In some of his poems he refers to it as "the shadow of 1872." John Stuart Mill was insane for several months at the age of twenty. This was a depression of the most profound type. Maltbie D. Babcock, the New York preacher and poet, had an attack of "nervous prostration," and was a patient in a sanitarium for four weeks. He finally took his life while suffering from an attack of Mediterranean fever. Adam Lindsay Gordon, an Australian poet, shot himself during a depression which occurred at the time he had reached the height of his popularity. Mrs. J. S. McCullough (Myrtle Reed), committed suicide by taking poison.

The moral weakness and lack of will-power of literary geniuses has often been remarked upon. Among noted authors we find that Shelley, Madame de Staël, De Quincey, Coleridge and Francis Thomson used opium. James Mangan, the Irish poet, used alcohol and opium. He died at the age of forty-six from the effects of debauchery. Hartley Coleridge died from the effects of prolonged alcoholic indulgence. Ernest Dowson, the English poet, became insane from the constant use of alcohol and haschish. Henry Clarence Kendall indulged in prolonged alcoholic debauches. James Thomson was a drunkard and a drug habitué. Byron, Burns and Poe were addicted to the excessive use of alcohol.

<sup>17</sup> Life, Chas. Edward Russell.

<sup>18</sup> Saturday Review, Feb. 16, 1895.

Numerous attempts have been made to account for these weaknesses. R. R. Madden<sup>29</sup> has attempted to show that the peculiarities of genius are due to dyspepsia, Dr. George M. Gould<sup>30</sup> that they are the result of eye strain. James Sully<sup>31</sup> ascribes them to the delicate nervous organization of the genius which makes him more susceptible to external stimuli. He believes that the fact that the most strenuous efforts of genius are often met with indifference or ridicule induces a pathological state of mind. He admits that his study of genius has familiarized him with striking illustrations of moral weakness. Baudelair, who himself was insane at times, ascribed it to heredity. He says, "Are there, then, sacred souls devoted to the altar, condemned to march to death and glory across their own ruin? Exists then a diabolical providence which prepares their unhappiness from the cradle? The reply is not doubtful. Science gives it; it is heredity. It is heredity that in literary history, as well as elsewhere, pronounces true damnation, which imprints in the sinuous folds of certain foreheads, too narrow or too high, that strange mysterious tattooing."

To the psychiatrist the explanation of the moral weakness and lack of will-power in the genius is patent. It is simply a symptom of the psychosis from which he suffers. In the case of so many noted writers who were dysomaniacs or narcomaniacs, their psychosis was attributed by their biographers to their habits, instead of recognizing the fact that their evil habits were simply a manifestation of their abnormal mental state. In the case of many authors the over-indulgence in alcohol and drugs was simply an effort to escape from the brooding horror of mental depression, which overwhelmed them from time to time, inhibiting their thought processes, clogging their imagination, and paralyzing their activities. In the hand to hand struggle with poverty, in which most of these men were engaged, this was a serious matter, and they were driven to unwise and often desperate means of overcoming this depression. De Quincey stated that during his nervous excitement opium steadied and concentrated his thoughts, and during his depression it stimulated him to action. He once wrote,

<sup>29</sup> The Infirmities of Genius, Madden.

<sup>30</sup> Biographical Clinics, Gould, 1903-1909.

<sup>31</sup> Genius and Insanity, Sully, Popular Science Monthly, Aug., 1885.

"Without opium I can't get on with my work, which the publishers are urging me to complete. The work *must* be done, the opium can't be left off."<sup>22</sup> Poe said, "I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life, reputation and reason, but in a desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories of wrongs, injustice and implied dishonor, and from a sense of intolerable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom."<sup>23</sup> Robert Burns made similar statements.

In addition to the emotional instability and moral weakness of noted writers, we find in the works of many of them distinct evidences of hallucinations and delusions. These, although variously designated as inspirations, visions and revelations, cannot be clearly differentiated from the fallacious sense perceptions and delusions of the insane. Several authors have, in their writings, given detailed accounts of their mental processes while insane. A full description of the insanity of Rousseau is contained in his works, "Confessions," "Dialogues" and "Reveries." Hoffman describes his psychoses in "Kreisler," and Musset gives his experiences while insane in "Confessions."

While manic-depressive insanity appears to have been the predominating psychosis among English and American writers, we find evidences of other abnormal mental conditions existing among them. Charles Darwin, according to Hahn,<sup>24</sup> was a neurasthenic. Samuel Johnson was an incurable hypochondriac. He would set his heart on touching every post in the street, and if by any chance he missed a post he would go back a hundred yards to cure the omission.<sup>25</sup> Whittier, says Lombroso, was a neurasthenic. Huxley was a hypochondriac. He complained all his life of dyspepsia, "obstruction of the liver, heart trouble," etc. He took large doses of quinine and strychnine, notwithstanding physicians could find no evidence of organic disease. While he supposed himself to be suffering from grave cardiac disease, he could climb two thousand feet without difficulty. Voltaire labored under the delusion that

<sup>22</sup> De Quincey and his Friends, Hogg.

<sup>23</sup> Memoir, Ingram.

<sup>24</sup> The Neurasthenia of Charles Darwin, *Chronique Medicale*, 1901.

<sup>25</sup> Life, Lord Macaulay.

he was suffering from some insidious disease while he was in perfect health."<sup>8</sup> Southey became demented at the age of sixty-six. Sir Walter Scott had an attack of acute anterior poliomyelitis in infancy, which left him lame for life. He suffered from senile dementia prior to his death. Thomas Carlyle was a neurasthenic. He complained constantly in his letters of "dyspepsia, nervousness, hypochondria," and was always anxious for sympathy and commiseration. At twenty-seven he could sleep only with his fingers in his ears. He consulted physician after physician, who, after the manner of their time, dosed him with large quantities of drugs. He described his condition at the age of thirty-one as "sick with sleeplessness, nervous, bilious, splenetic," and adds, "It is strange how one gets habituated to sickness. None can say how bilious I am or am like to be." Again he writes, "I shall never be other than ill, wearied, sick-hearted, bilious, heartless and forlorn—sick, sleepless, driven half-mad. I am sure to be sick everywhere." Despite Carlyle's lifelong habit of complaining, self-commiseration and drug-taking, he lived to the advanced age of eighty-five, and the physicians who attended him during the last years of his life could find no evidences of organic disease. Froude states, "In spite of his imagined ill-health he was impervious to cold and his health was essentially robust." Lord Byron's lack of natural affection, exaggerated ego, absence of moral sense, of which he was extremely proud, emotional instability, together with physical stigmata of degeneration, would stamp him as a psychopath and a degenerate. He was at one time interviewed by a physician and a lawyer with a view to determining his sanity. The autopsy findings in his case would indicate that his death, which occurred at the age of thirty-seven, was due to meminoencephalitis, which was probably specific in origin. The cases of manic-depressive insanity among noted writers are very numerous.

*Thomas De Quincey*<sup>9</sup> probably offers one of the most striking pictures. De Quincey's efforts to support a wife and large family by his literary productions were foiled and frustrated by the sudden appearances of the most intense mental depressions, accompanied by feelings of hopeless inadequacy, retardation and inhibition.

<sup>8</sup> Man of Genius, Lombroso.

<sup>9</sup> De Quincey and his Friends, James Hogg, 1895, Thomas De Quincey, H. A. Page.

De Quincey's mental peculiarities were manifested early in life. Gen. W. C. B. Eatwell, M. D., in his medical review of the life of De Quincey, indicates that he suffered from some nervous trouble during his second and third year. He also states that at the age of six De Quincey suffered from "cataleptic epilepsy." While standing by the casket of his deceased sister he had a vision, in which hallucinations of sight and hearing were present. Immediately following this he passed into a depression, during which he showed a tendency to seclude himself from his family. De Quincey, speaking of this period later, says, "Under the influence of rapacious grief that grasped at what it could not obtain, the faculty of shaping images in the distance out of slight elements, and grouping them after the yearnings of the heart, grew upon me with morbid excess."

At twelve he is supposed to have suffered from an injury to the head, which was followed by mental symptoms. Spencer, however, states that he believed the injury was purely imaginary, and gave his opinion that De Quincey's trouble arose from irritation in his too active and susceptible brain. Like others of his class, De Quincey was precocious.

At sixteen he suffered from a pathological depression. In a letter to his mother he describes himself as being weary, torpid and languid, and expresses a wish to die. At seventeen he probably suffered from a mild excitement. He ran away from boarding school, and for months wandered aimlessly among the solitary hills of Wales, with no object in view except to alleviate his restlessness. About this time, also, he suffered from a nervous affection. He says, "A hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into slumber, which has since returned upon me at different periods of my life—a sort of twitching, which compelled me to throw out my feet violently for the sake of relieving it. This sensation coming on as soon as I commenced to sleep, and the effort to relieve it constantly awaking me, at length I slept from exhaustion, and through increasing weakness I was constantly falling asleep and constantly waking."

Following his wanderings in Wales he went to London, where he was again overtaken by a depression. He spent his days sitting idly in the parks, and his nights sleeping on the floor of a hovel with a bundle of papers under his head and covered by an old rug. Once he fainted in the street from exhaustion and hunger. He entered Oxford at the age of eighteen. Shortly after his admission to that institution he again became depressed. Page says, "His exceptional life in London, and the sufferings he had undergone, induced some morbid disinclination to associate with others, and he was in no little danger of subsiding into a helpless, brooding apathy."

About this time he began to take opium for neuralgia, and the drug appears to have had a magical effect upon his disordered mind. Here," he exclaims, "is a panacea for all human woes. Here is the secret of happiness about which philosophers have disputed, at once discovered." From that time until his death he was an occasional devotee of the drug.

Although De Quincey remained at Oxford five years, he never received a degree. At the first part of the final examination, which was written, he

acquitted himself with such credit that one examiner, writing to another member of the faculty, said, "You have sent us the cleverest man I ever met. If his *viva voce* examination to-morrow corresponds with what he has done to-day, he will carry everything before him." That night De Quincey disappeared from Oxford never to return. The stress and strain of the approaching oral examination probably precipitated a depression.

At twenty-seven he suffered from what he describes as an "attack of nervous horror which lasted five months, and which went off in a night as unaccountably as it had come on, in a second of time." At twenty-eight he had a depression lasting three months, following the death of little Kate Wordsworth. He said he abandoned himself to a frenzy of grief, and often spent the night on her grave. The child appeared to him daily during this time. This attack also ended suddenly.

The depressions and excitements from which De Quincey suffered seriously interfered with any continuous effort of any sort. Although he had spent his entire time in writing and studying, at the age of thirty he had not published a single line. His literary productions, written on scraps of paper, were circulated far and wide, but he invariably stated that they were not ready for the press. Later, when he became a regular contributor to various publications, the publishers were driven to distraction by his tendency to begin what he was unable to finish. Mr. Hogg, with whom he was associated in his literary work, wrote, "I soon found it was of no use to show impatience, that the cause of his delays were for the most part beyond his control." His conduct of his financial affairs is described by Page as "bordering on absolute imbecility, and only by means of a small annuity derived from legacies was his family saved from abject poverty."

De Quincey had good insight into his condition, and his letters give clear descriptions of typical manic-depressive depressions. He writes, "I suffer from a most afflicting derangement of the nervous system, which at times makes it difficult for me to write at all." "A nervous malady of a very peculiar character which has attacked me intermittently for the last eleven years." "My power to make sustained effort dropped in a way I could not control, insomuch that with parts to be cancelled, and with whole days of torpor and pure defect of power to produce anything at all, very often it turned out that all my labors were barely sufficient (sometimes not sufficient) to meet the current expenses of my residence in London." "O, my God! what miseries I have been born to endure, what tortures am I yet to suffer!" "Sleep and waking became alike in the prevailing sense of sunless gloom, and boundless abysses, out of which there seemed no hope of rising, while space and time alike became boundless, infinite. At length I grew afraid to sleep, and I shrunk from it as from savage torture. Often I fought with my own drowsiness, and kept it aloof by sitting up the whole night and the following day. I sometimes seemed to have lived seventy or a hundred years in one night. In the earlier stage of my malady the splendor of my dreams was chiefly architectural, and I beheld such pomp

of cities and palaces as were never yet beheld by the waking eye unless in the clouds. But now came a tremendous change. Hitherto the human face mixed often in my dreams, but not despotically, nor with any special power of tormenting. Now the tyranny of the human face began to unfold itself. The sea seemed to be paved with innumerable faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing, surged up by thousands, by myriads, by generations." "No purpose could be answered by my vainly trying to make intelligible for my daughters what I cannot make for myself—the indescribable horror that night and day broods over my nervous system."

Describing his feelings of inadequacy, retardation and inhibition, he wrote, "There it is that I recognize the mind affected by my morbid condition—infinite incoherence, ropes of sand, gloomy incapacity of vital pervasion by some one plastic principle, that is the hideous incubus upon my mind always." His "Confessions of an Opium Eater" were written during a period of hypomania, hastily and without correction or revision. It happened that at the time he undertook to revise the work he was seized by a depression. Writing to his publisher he says, "A nervous malady which has attacked me intermittently for the last eleven years came on May 1st, almost concurrently with the commencement of this revision, and so obstinately has the malady pursued its noiseless, and what I may call its subterranean siege, that, although dedicating myself to this solitary labor, I have yet spent, within a few days, six calendar months upon the recast of one volume."

In each case De Quincey appears to have recovered from his depressions suddenly. Describing his recoveries he says, "I recovered in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, such a rectification of the compass as I had not known for years." On another occasion, "Instantaneously, as if by magic, the cloud of profoundest melancholy which rested on my brain drew off, and once again I was happy, and my brain performed its functions as healthily as ever."

Of the excitements of De Quincey we have little account. Dr. Eatwell says there were times when his entire nervous system was in a state of exaltation. De Quincey at times complained that the electrical rapidity and rush of his thoughts was such that only one word out of fifty could be retained and written down. Page describes his flight of ideas very aptly, "His talk is like a stream which runs with rapid change from rocks to roses. It slips from politics to puns. It glides from Mahomet to Moses, beginning with the laws which keep the planets in their radiant courses, and ending with some precept deep for dressing eels or shoeing horses." His restlessness was so great at times that he could only control it by vigorous exercise. It is recorded that in ninety days he walked one thousand miles.

In addition to the symptoms of manic-depressive insanity already enumerated, De Quincey showed evidences of peculiarities of dress, and a tendency to collect useless articles. Hogg states that he often came into the parlor with shoes but no stockings, or stockings but no shoes. His appearance was at times so disreputable that on one occasion when he called on a minister who was out at the time he called the housekeeper refused him admittance



to the house, but allowed him to sit on the porch and write a note to the minister. One can imagine the mortification of the latter when he returned and found a note signed by De Quincey.

The newspapers and periodicals which reached him from all parts of the world he preserved with religious care. Even his MSS. which had appeared in print he preserved. Hogg states, "He clung to his gatherings with a childlike pertinacity. Nay, he was wont to drag such heaps from place to place with him, whereby arose some of the oddest accidents on record." On one occasion when in Glasgow he filled two tea chests with papers. These he left in the care of a bookseller to be sent for later. He omitted to note the name and address of the shop, and was never able to find the place. His daughters laughed at their own imprudence in putting a bath tub in his room. This he immediately used as a receptacle for literary matter. His large library was so scattered, and so hopelessly mixed with the debris which surrounded him, that it was practically worthless. He wasted his time and energy searching for articles which he had mislaid, and he stated that some of his most effective articles were entirely lost.

Biographers have been unanimous in the opinion that De Quincey's abnormal mental condition was due entirely to his excessive use of opium. On the contrary, the addiction to opium was the effect rather than the cause of his psychosis, inasmuch as the latter preceded the former many years. In a letter to a friend, after a graphic description of a depression, De Quincey says, "You will naturally ask if there is any key to the original cause. Sincerely I do not believe there is. One inevitable suggestion at first arose to everybody consulted, namely, that it might be some horrid recoil from the long habit of using opium to excess. But this seems improbable for more reasons than one: 1st, because previously to any considerable use of opium, namely in 1812, I suffered from an unaccountable attack of nervous horror which lasted for five months, and went off in one night." During his depressions he was able to perform his duties only by the aid of laudanum, a bottle of which sat constantly on his desk. He described its effects as follows, "It purifies the moral affection, elevates the imagination, and gives a larger scope to it, a power to recreate experiences and phantasies of infancy already becoming dim. Opium introduces into the faculties the most exquisite order, regulation and harmony." How much De Quincey's psychosis was colored by opium it is impossible to say, but it was probably responsible to some extent for the hallucinations and delusions so graphically described in his "Confessions of an Opium Eater."

*Jonathan Swift*.—The psychosis of Swift, known as "the mad parson," has been the subject of much controversy. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Dr. Beddoes<sup>28</sup> described it as "homogeneous and progressive," and assigned as its cause specific disease. Sir Walter Scott<sup>29</sup> indignantly denied this assertion, and took occasion to reprimand Dr.

<sup>28</sup> Hygeia Essay IX., Beddoes.

<sup>29</sup> Life, Scott.

Beddoes severely for casting reflections upon the character of the Dean. He brought forward no facts to refute the assertion, however, and threw no further light on the subject. In 1846 Sir Wm. Wilde<sup>40</sup> reinvestigated the case. He claimed to have discovered from a plaster cast, taken from the face of Swift after death, that the Dean suffered from a stroke of paralysis. He claimed that there was no proof that Swift had ever been insane, and stated that his peculiarities in later life were due to the ordinary decay of nature. The condition of complete dementia into which Swift sank before his death he attributed to paralysis of the muscles of speech, and the loss of memory to a subarachnoid effusion. Dr. Bucknell<sup>41</sup> next attempted to solve the problem, and ascribed the almost lifelong malady of Swift to "labyrinthian vertigo," or Menier's disease, on which was engrafted dementia with hemiplegia and aphasia, the result of disease of the brain; "probably the third frontal convolution."

The study of the writings, life history and autopsy report of Dean Swift would point to a diagnosis of manic-depressive insanity, on which was engrafted arterio-sclerotic dementia. His psychosis seems to have made its appearance at the age of twenty-three, when he was attacked by dizziness, ringing in the ears and extreme depression. These depressions appeared periodically throughout the remainder of his life, and gradually became more frequent and of longer duration. Collins<sup>42</sup> described his condition at twenty-five as follows: "The more indulgence he received, the more exacting and querulous he became; the brighter appeared the prospect without, the blacker grew the gloom within. No kindness availed to either soothe or cheer him. The first symptoms, or what he believed to be the first symptoms of that mysterious malady which pursued him through life, and which, after making existence a misery to him, was to bring him under circumstances of unspeakable degradation to the tomb, had already revealed themselves."

For many years his depressions were so mild as to call for little notice by his biographers, but they refer to them from time to time. His writings would indicate that a state of hypomania existed a greater portion of the time. The literature which he produced at these times is described as the most diabolical ever produced by the human mind. His satires, his unsparing criticism and sarcasm, made him known and feared throughout England. He respected neither age, sex nor rank. Taine<sup>43</sup> says, "If ever a soul was satiated with the joy of tearing, outraging and destroying, it was his. He dragged poetry not only through the mud but into filth. He rolled in it like a raging madman, and enthroned himself in it, and bespattered all passers-by."

Many of his writings could only be the productions of an insane mind. For instance, in a pamphlet entitled "A modest proposal for preventing the

<sup>40</sup> Dublin Quarterly Journal of Medical Science.

<sup>41</sup> Brain, Jan., 1882.

<sup>42</sup> Life, Churton Collins.

<sup>43</sup> English Literature, Vol. II.

children of the poor of Ireland from being a burden to their parents," he suggests that these children be fattened, sold to the wealthy, killed, their bodies used for food, and their skins for gloves and shoes. He dilates in the most horrible manner on the age at which they would be most palatable, the best manner of cooking, and the relative weights and values at different ages. Sir Walter Scott, "in speaking of Swift's writings, says, "A large portion of his works exhibited in an intense activity all the worst attributes of human nature, revenge, spite, malignity, uncleanness."

A depression of unusual severity occurred at the age of forty-seven. The combined effect of his political downfall, death of friends, ill health and unpopularity was probably responsible for this. Collins says, speaking of this period, "The fierce and gloomy passions which prosperous activity had for a long while composed, again awoke and he became a prey to that constitutional melancholy which had been his bane since childhood."

Between the ages of sixty-one and seventy-one alternating periods of excitement and depression followed each other in rapid succession. Collins says, "When he was not under the spell of dull, dumb misery, he was on the rack of furious passion." These ten years were, in a literary way, the most prolific of his life. A great number of his productions were not worth publishing, but some of his best poems were composed during this period. His writings show the workings of a mind perpetually oscillating between unutterable despair and demoniacal rage. In both states he relieved his mind by constant writing.

At the age of seventy-three his memory is recorded as failing. As arterio-sclerotic changes advanced, his irritability and ferocity increased, he became violent and had to be secluded in a room, where he is reported as pacing the floor night and day like a caged animal. The final picture is one of complete dementia, with hemiplegia and aphasia. The autopsy showed cerebral shrinkage and arterio-sclerosis.

*John Keats.*<sup>42</sup>—In the brief and tragic career of the poet Keats the evidences of pathological depressions and excitements can be gathered from a large number of letters written to his numerous friends and carefully preserved by them. That he suffered from these depressions as a boy is attested by his brother, George Keats, who, in writing of the poet, says, "From the time we were boys at school until we separated, I in a great measure relieved him by constant sympathy, explanation and inexhaustible spirits and good humor from many a bitter fit of hypochondriasm. He avoided teasing anyone with his miseries but Tom and myself."

Like others of his class, Keats was a precocious boy. He was an omnivorous reader, and according to Charles Cowden Clark he won all the literary prizes in the schools he attended. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty he studied medicine and surgery, but to one of his dreamy, imaginative disposition the practical art of medicine did not appeal. He said

"Life, Scott.

"Keats' Complete Poetical Works and Letters, edited by Horace E. Scudder, 1899.

to a friend, "The other day during a lecture there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray, and I was off with them to fairyland." At twenty he abandoned the practice of medicine, and from that time until his death he devoted himself to literature.

Keats is described by Scudder as being a prey to "moods of depression." The only poem written by him which gives any hint of his abnormal state of mind was composed at the age of twenty-four, before he was stricken with the "white plague," which was the cause of his untimely end. This poem is entitled "Why did I laugh to-night?" and shows the most intense depression, bordering on despair.

The letters of Keats give abundant evidence of depression, retardation, inhibition of thought and action, into which he had good insight. At the age of twenty-three he wrote to Benjamin Bailey, "I have this morning such a lethargy that I cannot write. The reason for my delay is oftentimes from this feeling. I wait for a proper temper. Now you ask for an immediate answer. I am so depressed that I have not an idea to put on paper; my hand feels like lead, and yet it is an unpleasant numbness. It does not take away the pain of existence. I don't know what to write." Three days later he made another attempt, and says "You see how I have delayed, and even now I have a confused idea of what I should be about. My intellect must be in a degenerate state—it must be, for when I should be writing about God knows what, I am troubling you with moods of my own mind, or rather body, for mind there is none. I am in a temper that if I were under water I would scarcely kick to come up to the top. In vain have I waited until Monday to have an interest in that or anything else. I feel no spur at my brother's going to America, and am almost stony-hearted about his wedding." When twenty-four years of age, he wrote to his sister, Fanny Keats, "I have thought of writing to you often, and I am sorry to confess that my neglect of it has been but a small instance of my idleness of late, which has been growing upon me so that it will require a great shake to get rid of it. I have written nothing, and almost read nothing." Writing to Lehigh Hunt he said, "I went to the Isle of Wight and thought so much about poetry, and so long together, that I could not get to sleep at night, and moreover, I know not how it was I could not get wholesome food. By this means in a week or so I became not over-capable in my upper stories. Another thing, I was too much in solitude, and consequently was obliged to be in continual burning of thought as an only recourse." Writing to Mr. Hayden he says, "You tell me never to despair! I wish it was as easy for me to observe the saying. Truth is, I have a horrid morbidity of temperament, which has shown itself at intervals. It is, I have no doubt, the greatest enemy and stumbling-block I have to fear." Writing to his publishers, explaining his delay in finishing some work, he says, "I hope now to be able to resume my work. I have endeavored to do so once or twice, but to no purpose. Instead of poetry I have a swimming in my head, and feel all the effects of a mental debauch, lowness of spirits, anxiety to go on without the power to do so, which does not at all tend to my ultimate progression. This evening I go

to Canterbury, having got tired of Margate. I was not right in my head when I came."

There is little evidence to show that Keats suffered from abnormal excitements, although it is hinted at in various letters, one of which states, "I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately. I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time have been addicted to passiveness." Writing to George Keats he says, "I shall send you more than letters, I mean a tale, which I must begin on account of the activity of my mind, of its inability to remain at rest. If I am not in action in mind or body I am in pain, and for that I suffer greatly by going into parties where, from the rules of society, and a natural pride, I am obliged to smother my spirit and look like an idiot; for I feel my impulses, given away to, would too much amaze them. I live under an everlasting restraint, never relieved except when I am composing, so I will write away."

Like so many other men of genius Keats was harassed by poverty. His sensitive nature was continually being wounded by harsh and adverse criticisms of his works, his mind was distracted by an unfortunate love affair, and finally tuberculosis, which he contracted from his brother, terminated his career at the age of twenty-six. At his own request the following words were engraved upon his tombstone:

"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

*Charles and Mary Lamb.*<sup>46</sup>—Charles Lamb, who was of abnormally small stature, and stammered, bore the hereditary burden of an insane father, a sister who was afflicted with manic-depressive insanity and a mother who suffered from paralysis. It is interesting to note that Charles Lamb appears to have suffered only from depressions, while Mary had recurrent attacks of mania of the most violent type. At the age of thirty-one during one of these attacks, she murdered her mother and seriously wounded her father and her aunt. She had suffered from attacks prior to this one, but not of such a violent type. Following this she was placed in an asylum, and from that time until her death she had to be confined in an institution from time to time. In writing of his sister, Charles Lamb stated, "I consider her perpetually on the brink of madness, but when she is not violent her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of the world." Again and again he took her from the asylum, and as often returned her when her irritability and change of manner indicated that an attack of mania was approaching. Cornwall says, "It was very afflicting to encounter the young brother and his sister walking together (weeping together) on this painful errand, Mary herself, although sad, very conscious of the necessity for temporary separation from her only friend. They used to carry a straight-jacket with them." In the intervals between her attacks, Hazlett described her as the most rational and wisest woman whom he had ever known.

<sup>46</sup> Memoir, by Barry Cornwall, 1866.

Although Charles Lamb suffered from periods of depression all his life, only once was it considered necessary to restrain him in an asylum. Cornwall says, "Lamb's very curious and peculiar humor showed itself early. It was perhaps born of the solitude in which his childhood passed away, perhaps cherished by the seeds of madness that were in him, that were in his sister, that were in the ancestry from which he sprung." When he was twenty-one years of age his mother was killed in the tragic manner above described. While the coroner was holding an inquest over her body, Lamb was forced to sit and play cards with his insane father. After placing his sister in an asylum he passed into a depression which necessitated his treatment in the same institution with his sister. During this depression he burned all the poetry he had composed, all the extracts he had made and what he called "the journal of my foolish passion which I had long kept." In a letter to Coleridge he said "During my madness my mind ran on you almost as much as on another person, who was the most immediate cause of my frenzy." His "foolish passion" referred to is supposed to have been a love affair which terminated unhappily. This, in connection with his mother's death and sister's insanity, was a contributing, if not the causal, factor in his mental breakdown. During the remainder of his life his depressions never became so severe as to render it necessary for him to receive institutional care. Cornwall states that "his energy or mental power was indeed subject to fluctuations, no excessive merriment, but much depression." Lamb himself confessed, "My waking life has much of confusion, the trouble and obscure perplexity of an ill dream. In the daytime I stumble upon dead mountains." Stevenson<sup>47</sup> says, "His diluted insanity cast an enduring shadow over his life."

It is interesting to note that in the literary productions of the brother and sister Charles Lamb contributed largely to the pathos and Mary to the humor of their works. In their translations Charles translated the tragedy and Mary the comedy.

*Samuel Taylor Coleridge.*—In a recent article entitled "The psychopathy of Coleridge,"<sup>48</sup> Dr. DuPouy has shown that Coleridge, in addition to being an abnormal character, suffered from manic-depressive insanity, and his statements are confirmed by the writings and biographies of the poet.

Coleridge describes himself as a child, "Before I was eight years old I was a 'character'; sensibility, imagination, vanity, sloth, and a feeling of deep and bitter contempt for all who traversed the orbit of my understanding were even then prominent and manifest." "It is thus," he says, "that I became a dreamer and that I acquired a disposition opposed to all physical activity. I was capricious and passionate without measure,

<sup>47</sup> *Genius and Mental Disease*, Wm. G. Stevenson, *Popular Science Monthly*, Mar., 1877.

<sup>48</sup> *Journal de Psychologie Normal et Pathologique*, Mai-Juin, 1910.

I knew nothing of play and was indolent. I was despised and detested by all the boys."

When five or six years of age, having quarrelled with his brother, he stole away from home and spent a cold, rainy October night in the fields. Three times in later life he disappeared mysteriously under some morbid impulse. When eighteen years of age, while walking the streets of London, he fancied himself Leander swimming the Hellespont, and thrust out his arms while buffeting the waves. In doing so he caught the coat-tails of a gentleman who took him for a pickpocket.<sup>48</sup>

There is abundant evidence to show that Coleridge suffered from pathological depressions before he acquired the opium habit. At the age of twenty he wrote to Mrs. Evans, "You covet to be near my heart. Believe me that you and my sister have the very first row in the front box of my heart's theatre, and, God knows, you are not crowded. There, my dear spectators, you shall see what you shall see—farce, comedy, tragedy, my laughter, my cheerfulness, my melancholy."<sup>49</sup> Writing to Southey at the age of twenty-two he says, "I sit down to write to you, not that I have anything particular to say, but it is a relief, and forms a very respectable part in my theory of escapes from the folly of melancholy. I appear to myself like a sick physician, feeling the pang acutely, yet deriving a wonted pleasure from examining its progress and developing its cause."<sup>50</sup>

As time elapsed, his depressions became more and more severe. When he was twenty-four the failure of the "Watchman," in which he was interested, threw him into a depression so acute that he attempted self-destruction. It was at this time that he first had recourse to opium to alleviate his mental distress, sleeplessness and physical pain. This pain is described as neuralgic in character, but was, in all probability, that vague sense of pain so often complained of by patients during the depressed stage of manic-depressive insanity. Southey, writing of these pains, said, "Coleridge is now in bed with lumbago. Never was a poor fellow tormented with such pantomime complaints. His disorders are perpetually shifting, and he is never a week together without some one or other." Coleridge, in writing to a clergyman about this time, says, "I have been suspended on the border of insanity, and during the last fortnight I have been obliged to take opium every night."

At the age of twenty-eight an attack of still greater severity occurred. This was insidious in onset and slowly progressive. He was then engaged in the translation of Wallenstein's works, but all literary efforts had to be abandoned. He was struck by an intellectual sterility and utter hopelessness which made all work impossible. He described his state of mind as being one of drowsy, unimpassioned grief, which could find no outlet in word, sigh or tear.

His rheumatic pains, which seem to have recurred with the onset of each depression, again appeared, and once more he resorted to laudanum.

<sup>48</sup> Life, Hall Caine.

<sup>50</sup> Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ernest Hartley Coleridge.

DuPouy says, "He was invaded by that which M. Aynard calls *neurasthenia*, and which we prefer to name *melancholic depression*." Coleridge complained that each one of these crises deprived him temporarily of the gift which nature made him at birth, namely, his creative imagination.

The next attack of which we have any record occurred at the age of thirty-one. Writing to a friend Coleridge says, "My spirits are dreadful, owing entirely to the horror of the nights—I truly dread to sleep. It is no shadow with me, but a substantial misery foot thick that makes me sit by my bedside of a morning and cry. I have abandoned all opiates except ether be one." (Then follows a poem giving further details of his lamentable condition.) "I do not know how I came to scribble down these verses to you; my heart was aching and my head all confused, but they are, doggerel as they may be, a true picture of my nights. What to do I am at a loss, for it is hard to be withered, having the faculties and attainments which I have. O, dear, dear Southey, my head is sadly confused." When thirty-four years of age he claimed to have had a stroke of paralysis in his right arm and hand, but as biographers make no mention of this, it was probably the result of his disordered sensations and imagination.

In connection with the emotional depression evidenced in these attacks to which Coleridge was subject, we see evidences of the typical retardation, feeling of inadequacy, hesitancy and helpless indecision of the manic-depressive. Writing to his brother at the age of twenty he says, "There is a vice of such powerful venom that a drop of it will poison the overflowing goblet of a thousand virtues. This vice constitution seems to have implanted in me, and habit has made it almost omnipotent. It is *Indolence*. Anxieties that stimulate others infuse an additional narcotic into my mind. Like some poor laborer whose night's sleep has but imperfectly refreshed his weary frame, I have sat in a drowsy indifference, and, doing nothing, have thought what a deal I had to do." At times his inhibition and retardation were so great that he was unable to open and read the letters he received from his wife. At thirty-eight he came to the following conclusion, "My case is a species of madness only that it is a derangement, an utter impotence of the volition, and not of the intellectual faculties. This is, perhaps, in part a constitutional idiosyncrasy." For a year he lived abroad and communicated with no one in England, not even his wife and family. On his return Wordsworth described his condition,

"Ah! piteous sight it was to see the man  
When he came back to us a withered flower,  
Or like a sinful creature pale and wan  
Down would he sit, and without strength or power  
Look at the common grass from hour to hour."

These attacks of depression alternated with periods of hypomania, and during these excitements, modified by opium, he composed poems of unquestionable literary value. *Kubla Khan* is a genuine "pipe dream," and was composed during a profound sleep induced by opium. After writing forty-five lines of it he was interrupted by a visitor, and he never



could recall the remainder of the poem. His excitement became so great at times that he is said to have run around in his home in a nude condition, in a frenzied state. While in a state of hypomania he was an interesting and incessant talker. Southey said, "He talked forever, and you wished to have him talk forever." Lang<sup>21</sup> says, "He always gave more promises than he could fulfil, but who could fulfil the promises of Coleridge." Sir Humphry Davy says, "His eloquence is diminished in—nothing, perhaps even become more seductive. His will is probably more disproportionate, but never with his faculties. Brilliant images float on his spirit, agitated by all the bruises and modified by all the rainbows. Within an hour he speaks of beginning three works, and recited the poem *Christabel*, unfinished, as I have already heard it."

Coleridge was egotistical, fault-finding, and restless at all times. He found it almost impossible to remain friends with anyone, even members of his own family. As a consequence of his fluctuations of mental activity we see all sorts of irregularities. Tasks commenced were never completed. *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*, as well as seventy-five per cent of his other poems, were never finished. He was once offered thirty guineas for a poem he had improvised, but despite his dire need of money he was never able to get it on paper. Gigantic projects were formed but never executed. Harassed by poverty he tried one occupation after another by which to earn a living, but was equally unsuccessful in each. Speaking of his irregularities of conduct DuPouy says, "That conscious and anguished mental anarchy seems to us to have been related more to the psychosis that had pursued his entire existence than to the opium, of which the arrival is secondary to the appearance of the first periodic attacks and their mental fluctuations. We do not intend in the meantime to deny the fatal rôle that it played in the physical and mental health of Coleridge, as much by its own medium as by the exacerbation of the psychic troubles—manic-depressive."

*William Cowper.*—In the case of the poet Cowper, to establish a diagnosis of manic-depressive insanity is not difficult. The early age at which his psychosis made its appearance is unusual. Wright<sup>22</sup> states that at the age of eleven he was "struck with a lowness of spirits uncommon at his age. At the same time he was troubled with the hallucination that he was consumptive and consequently fated to an early death." He further adds that Cowper's affliction was inherited melancholia. The first attack which was recognized by his friends as being insanity occurred at the age of twenty-two. This attack is disregarded by many of his biographers, but Wright states that the depression was more marked than any that had gone before, and was of sufficient severity to cause a suspension of Cowper's studies. It lasted for twelve months, disappeared suddenly, and was followed by a period of hypomania which took a religious aspect. "My heart," says Cowper, "became light and joyful in a moment, I could have wept with transport had I been alone." It is stated that he laughed until his sides ached, at anything or nothing.

<sup>21</sup> Life, Andrew Lang.

<sup>22</sup> Life, Thomas Wright, 1892.

The first attack of violent mania occurred at the age of thirty-two. Proving the falsity of the various theories of the cause of his insanity, namely, licentiousness, religion, etc., Goldwin Smith<sup>28</sup> says, "The truth is, his malady was simply hypochondria, having its source in a delicacy of constitution and weakness of digestion, combined with the influence of melancholy surroundings." The circumstances surrounding his mental breakdown are as follows: The office of Clerk of the Journals in the House of Lords was vacant. Cowper received the nomination. An examination before the Peers, however, had to be undergone. Under the strain of the pending examination Cowper developed delusions of persecution, and fancied there was a force at work against him. He could not take up a newspaper without reading in it a fancied libel of himself. He imagined certain members of the House of Lords were leagued against him. After hopelessly poring over the journals for some months he became mentally deranged and attempted suicide. He afterwards gave a detailed account of the feelings which led him to attempt this rash act. In his earlier days he had read a treatise in favor of suicide. These arguments kept recurring to his mind and he could not rid himself of them. Finally he bought a bottle of laudanum with the intention of swallowing it. With the typical instability of purpose seen in the manic-depressive he changed his mind and decided to abandon suicide and place himself in a monastery. Before he could pack his trunk he again changed his mind and decided to drown himself. He called a coach and ordered the coachman to drive to the tower wharf, intending to throw himself in the river. The low tide and the presence of a porter on the dock caused him to again change his mind. During the trip home he attempted five times to take the laudanum which he still carried in his pocket. He stated that his hand became paralyzed and he could not raise the poison to his lips. The night before the day appointed for the examination he lay with the point of a knife pressed against his breast, but lacked the courage to drive it into his heart. Towards morning he resolved to hang himself, and this attempt would have been successful but for an accident. He suspended himself from the door casing, and had become unconscious when the garter by which he was suspended broke. The noise of his fall brought the laundress, who supposed him to be in a fit. When the day of the examination arrived Cowper was so completely deranged that all hope of securing the position for him was abandoned. After his attempted suicide he was seized with a religious horror of his act, and for months he entertained the delusion that his soul was lost, and that he had committed the unpardonable sin. During this period he composed a set of English Sapphics which unfortunately were preserved. Goldwin Smith describes them as "a ghastly play of poetic faculty in a mind utterly deprived of reason, and amidst the horrors of onrushing madness. Diabolical they might be called, rather than religious." During this attack, Cowper suffered from auditory and tactile hallucinations. He gave a detailed account of his psychosis in "The Memoir." He was finally placed in a

<sup>28</sup> Essay on Wm. Cowper, Goldwin Smith, 1880.

private sanitarium, where he recovered suddenly, after a few months. Cowper ascribed his recovery to the religious light which broke suddenly upon him.

He immediately passed into a state of hypomania, which he attributed to his change of religious attitude. Wright says, "In place of unspeakable wretchedness came transcendent happiness. To rejoice day and night was all his employment. He was even too happy to sleep much, thinking it was lost time that was spent in slumber. Dr. Cotton was alarmed lest the sudden transition from despair to joy should terminate in fatal frenzy." This state of mind lasted for three months.

He appears to have remained in his normal mental condition for several years following this excitement, and in the interval composed the Olney Hymns. As another depression gradually overcame him, his poetry became tinged with the shadow of his approaching malady. The last poem written during this period of lucidity was the well-known hymn "God moves in a mysterious way." This was written after the onset of a depression, and after another attempt at suicide. Again the delusion that his soul was lost dominated his mind, and this delusion was reinforced by hallucinations of the most distressing kind. He says, "I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding to an almost childlike imbecility. I did not indeed lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer, but a question was necessary or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was encompassed by a misapprehension of things and persons. I believed everybody hated me. I was convinced that my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp." He was once more placed in a sanitarium, where he again attempted suicide. This he did in obedience to what he supposed to be a divine command to offer himself a living sacrifice to God. This depression lasted six months.

The fourth attack occurred at the age of fifty-two. This was a mild depression of short duration, followed by a period of hypomania during which he composed "John Gilpin."

The fifth attack occurred when the poet was fifty-six years of age. This was more severe than the previous one, and he again attempted self-destruction by hanging. The accidental entering of the room by a friend was all that saved his life. In this case his recovery occurred suddenly after six months.

The sixth recurrence of mental disorder took place at the age of sixty-two, after prolonged and strenuous labor connected with the translation of Homer. His former delusions again made their appearance. For six days he sat motionless and silent, refusing food almost entirely. Then followed a period of agitation and apprehension graphically described by Lady Hasketh in a letter to a friend. "He does nothing but walk backward and forward. He does not sit down for more than a half hour all day except at meal time. He has come to expect daily and hourly that he will be carried away, and he kept in his room from breakfast until four o'clock Sunday because he was afraid someone would take possession of

his bed." Auditory hallucinations were so distressing that his friends arranged a speaking tube in his room through which they sent comforting messages, but all to no purpose.

In the life of Cowper we see another example of distressing poverty, the result of incompetency, spasmodic industry and lack of fixity of purpose. From the consequences of these deficiencies he was saved, to a large extent, by his willingness to accept assistance from anyone who might offer it. He had many friends, and on the bounty of one of them, a Mrs. Unwin, he existed for thirty years. During his lifetime he tried many occupations. He studied law for several years, was artist, carpenter, farmer and teacher in turn. Many of his poems he left uncompleted. "The Mediterranean" was commenced but never finished. Of "The Four Ages" he wrote but a fragment.

Although only six distinct attacks of insanity have been described in detail, all biographers agree that Cowper was subject to mild depressions and elations all his life. During the last three years of his life senile and arterio-sclerotic changes were probably added to his original psychosis, and he is said to have had only "occasional gleams of reason, and faint revivals of literary faculty." During one of these his last and most pathetic poem, "The Castaway," was composed. The brightness of his mental faculties, which had so often been temporarily obscured by attacks of manic-depressive insanity, was at last extinguished in a cloud of the darkest despair.

*John Ruskin*, whose father and mother were first cousins, suffered from periodic attacks of insanity. In this case we see recurrent attacks of mania, but no depressions. These attacks seem to have made their appearance when the author was about twenty, but were at first mild in character. It was not until he was about forty years of age that his friends realized that he was actually insane, and it was not until he was fifty-eight that his excitements became so severe that he was unable to conduct his lecture course at Oxford. During his early life his mania took the form of social and religious reform. He engaged in constant controversies on all sorts of subjects, and was bitter in his denunciations of all classes and sorts of persons. Mr. Cook says, "He was like the living conscience of the modern world." Despite his most frantic efforts to reform the world his work appeared to have little effect. He once confessed "it is not my work that drives me mad, but the sense that nothing comes of it." His conduct was far from exemplifying the reforms he insisted upon for others, and this may have had something to do with the ineffectiveness of his labors as a reformer. Describing himself, he says, "Vacillating, foolish, miserably failing in all my conduct in life, and blown about hopelessly by storms of passion, I, a man clothed in soft raiment, I, a reed shaken by the wind, have yet this message to all men again entrusted to me." In spite of his admitted weaknesses, he clung to the delusion that he was a specially appointed reformer of the world. Harrison says,<sup>4</sup> "He was at all times a megalomaniac."

<sup>4</sup> Life, Frederick Harrison.

As he advanced in years his attacks of mania became more pronounced. Harrison says, in speaking of these, "a cruel record—a state of hopeless confusion of letters, drawings and works." Ruskin himself describes them as follows:<sup>88</sup> "My illnesses, so called, are only brought on by vexation and worry, and leave me after a few weeks of wandering thoughts the same as I was before. I can't fix my mind on a sum in addition. It goes off between seven and nine into a speculation on the seven deadly sins or the nine muses."

During the last twenty years of his life his attacks are described by his biographers as "attacks of brain fever." Collingwood, his private secretary and biographer, describes his condition at sixty-five, "The attacks of mental disease which at the time of his recall to Oxford seemed to have been safely distanced, began again, at more frequent intervals. Crash after crash of tempest fell upon him, clearing away for a while, until they left him beaten down and helpless at last. During his declining years his mind was often clouded."

It is remarkable that with the many recurrences of attacks of mania, Ruskin did not become demented. It is stated by his biographers that for one year prior to his death, which occurred at the age of eighty, his mind was perfectly clear. Harrison says, "His attacks of brain fever had passed over him, like passing storms, leaving a clear sky."

*Robert Burns.*<sup>89</sup>—The tragic life of the "ill-starred genius of Scotland" has been portrayed again and again by biographers, and while they have dilated upon his brilliant genius, his vivid imagination, his sly humor, his irresistible pathos, they have one and all tried to excuse or explain the reckless folly and excesses which blasted his career and finally caused his untimely end. His comparative failure has been ascribed by some to poverty, others to circumstances, lack of opportunity, evil companions, lack of will-power, etc. There is to my mind a deeper reason than these, namely, the fact that the Scottish poet was born with a manic-depressive temperament which constituted a mild degree of insanity. From early boyhood Burns suffered from pathological depressions. These were described by his brother, Gilbert Burns, as occurring when the poet was thirteen or fourteen years of age. "I doubt not but the hard labor and sorrow of this period of his life was, in a great measure, the cause of the deep depressions of spirit with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards." At this time he was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull headache, which at a future period of his life was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed in the night time.

During his depressions he showed the feelings of inadequacy, retardation and ideas of self-accusation seen in the manic-depressive, and these are brought out clearly in many of his letters and poems. That these depressions were not caused by the reaction from alcoholic excesses is shown by

<sup>88</sup> Life, M. H. Spielman.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Burns, A. Cunningham.

an extract from a letter written to his father at the age of twenty-three, before the poet had begun to indulge in alcohol to excess. "The finishing evil which brought up the rear of the infernal file was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such an extent that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their *mittimus* 'Depart from me, ye cursed.'" A short time later he wrote, "The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind that I dare neither review past events, nor look forward to the future. I am quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains and uneasiness and disquietudes of this weary life. For I assure you I am heartily tired of it, and I do not very much deceive myself I could contentedly and gladly resign it."

For months at a time Burns was unable to produce anything in a literary way, or even take an interest in the common affairs of life. His feeling of inadequacy and apprehension are pathetically described in his own words, "I saw myself alone, unfit for the struggle of life, shrinking at every rising cloud in the chance-directed atmosphere of fortune, while all defenceless I looked around for a cover. When all my school-fellows were striking off with eager hope, earnest, intent on some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I was standing idly in the market-place, or only left the chase of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt fancy from whim to whim."

The following extracts from letters show the state of Burns' mind from time to time. When his fame as a poet had become established we find him writing from Edinburgh, "These have been six horrid weeks. Anguish and low spirits have made me unfit to read, write or think. I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer does a commission, for I would not take in any poor, ignorant wretch by selling out." Writing to Cunningham he says, "Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tossed on the sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? For these two months I have not been able to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were *ab origine* blasted with a deep, incurable taint of hypochondria which poisons my existence." To another friend he wrote, "My body, too, was attacked by the most dreadful distemper—a hypochondria or confirmed melancholy. In this wretched state, the recollections of which make me shudder, I hung my harp on the willow trees, except in some lucid intervals." To Mrs. Dunlop he wrote, "Will you take this effusion, miserable effusion of low spirits, just as they flow from the bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me, but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages."

While the larger number of Burns' poems were written in a cheerful strain, his depressions apparently not being conducive to the production of poetry, we find scattered here and there lines which indicate abnormal depression. The following, written to a mouse whose nest he had destroyed in plowing, shows an apprehensiveness abnormal in one so young,

"Still, thou art blest compared wi' me.  
The present only toucheth thee,  
But Oh! I backward cast my e'e  
On prospects drear!  
And forward tho' I canna see,  
I guess and fear."

His "Ode to Despondency" is of the same order. In this he complains that life is an intolerable burden, expresses apprehension of impending calamity, from which he sees no hope of escape except by death. Cunningham says, speaking of the character of Burns, "The gaiety of many of Burns' writings and the lively and even cheerful coloring with which he portrayed his own character may lead some persons to suppose that the melancholy which hung over him toward the end of his days was not an original part of his constitution." It is not to be doubted, indeed, that this melancholy acquired a darker hue in the progress of his life, but independent of his own and his brother's testimony, evidence is to be found among his papers that he was subject very early to these depressions of mind, which in him arose to an uncommon degree.

Alternating with these depressions were periods of reckless gaiety which suggest hypomania. During these attacks he criticized the church, the state and persons in authority in the most scathing and extravagant manner. The indecorum of his speeches and poems caused him to be accused of heresy in the church and disloyalty to his king and country. The latter accusation came near costing him his position as exciseman. He is described as the standing marvel of the town in which he lived. His toasts, his jokes, his epigrams and his songs were the daily food of conversation and scandal. Describing his own feelings Burns says, "In the hour of social mirth my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the ban of the executioner." The wonderful variety of the trend of humor and thought in the poems of Burns, which were all a part and parcel of his own history, can only be explained by his alternating depressions and excitements. That he should have composed "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "The Holy Fair" within a few days of each other seems incredible, and can only be explained in this way. James Gray says, "Over the social bowl his wit flashed for hours together, penetrating whatever it struck like the fire from heaven. It was playful or caustic by turns, following an allusion through all its wanderings, astounding by its rapidity or amusing by its wild originality, and grotesque yet natural combinations, but never, within my observation, disgusting by its grossness."

To alleviate his depressions Burns resorted to the excessive use of alcohol, which invariably brings a train of evils in its wake. He died at the age of thirty-seven from the effects of prolonged dissipation. The epitaph which he composed about ten years before his death is strangely appropriate, and conveys with pathetic force the insight of the author, who found himself unable to cope with the mysterious force which carried him downward.

*Francis Parkman.*—The diagnosis of the mental affection of the noted historian and novelist is not so easy as in the case of the poets. Parkman's biographers, being his personal friends, carefully concealed or ignored the symptoms of mental disorder which at times existed, and one writer deplores the fact that Parkman himself disclosed so many facts in regard to the same. All the information that can be gathered in regard to the psychosis of the author is gleaned from his autobiography and letters. Being a reticent, uncomplaining New Englander, his works show nothing of his abnormal mental state, but occasional glimpses may be caught in regard to it in reading his letters. In a communication to Mr. Brimmer<sup>87</sup> he says, "Causes antedating my birth gave me constitutional liabilities to which I largely ascribed the mischief that ensued. As a child I was sensitive and restless, rarely ill but never robust." He also made the statement that his childhood was neither healthful nor buoyant.

As a student at Harvard he was so silent and reserved that his classmates ironically nicknamed him "*lucus a non lucendo*." While in his junior year, at the age of twenty he was forced, on account of ill health, to abandon his studies and go abroad. Whether this illness was of body or mind appears to be a mystery. In a letter written to his mother he stated that he had resolved to go to Paris to see Dr. Louis, the head of his profession, to see if he could do anything for him.

At the age of twenty-three, while at Harvard, we have the first definite account of an attack of mental disorder, which was, in all probability, manic-depressive insanity. In a letter to Mr. Brimmer, speaking of this period he says, "I had been conscious for some time of an overstimulated condition of the brain. While constantly reminding myself that the task before me was a long one, and that haste was folly, and that the slow way was the surer and better one, I felt myself spurred forward irresistibly. It was like a rider whose horse has got the bit between his teeth, who, while seeing his danger cannot stop. As the mischief gave no outward sign, nobody was aware of it but myself." Weakness of vision, which he claimed was one of the symptoms of this disorder, caused him to abandon all literary work. He then went West, where a life of privation and hardship caused what he described as a "wasting and dangerous disorder." He says, "After going back to civilization the malady gradually subsided, after setting in action a train of other disorders which continued its work. In a year or more I was brought to a state of nervous prostration which debarred all mental effort."<sup>88</sup> "The difficulties were threefold, an extreme weakness of sight, disabling him from even writing his name except with eyes closed, a condition of the brain prohibiting fixed attention except at occasional brief intervals, and an exhaustion and total derangement of the nervous system, producing of necessity a mood of mind most unfavorable to effort." He was at this time twenty-five years of age. This attack passed, and the author was enabled to finish his

<sup>87</sup> Life, Henry Dwight Sedgwick.

<sup>88</sup> Autobiography.



"Conspiracy of Pontiac." His mental condition appears to have remained normal until the age of twenty-eight, when a tubercular knee kept him a prisoner for two years. Parkman describes this attack in some detail. "The effects of the confinement were as curious as unenviable. All the irritability of the system centered in the head. The most definite of the effects produced was one clearly resembling the tension of an iron band around the head, and contracting with an extreme force with the attempt to concentrate the thoughts, listen to reading, or at times to engage in conversation. This was, however, endurable in comparison with other forms of attack, which cannot be intelligibly described for want of analogous sensations by which to convey the requisite impressions. The brain was stimulated to restless activity, impelling through it a headlong current of thought which, however, must be arrested, and the irritated organ held in quiescence, on a penalty to avoid which no degree of exertion was too costly. The whirl, the confusion and strange, undefined torture attending this condition are only to be conceived by one who has felt them. Possibly they may have analogies in the savage punishment once in use in some of our prisons, where drops of water were made to fall from a height on the shaved head of the offender, soon producing an effect which soon brought to reason the most contumacious. Sleep, of course, was banished during the periods of attack, and in its place was demanded, for the exclusion of thought, an effort more severe than the writer has ever put forth in any other cause. In a few hours, however, a condition of exhaustion would ensue, and both patient and disease being spent, the latter fell into a dull, lethargic state." Years afterwards, in a letter to Mr. Brimmer, Parkman described this attack as follows: "I was attacked with an effusion of water on the knee, which subsided in two or three months, then returned and kept me prisoner for two years, and deprived me of the necessary exercise for several years more. The consequence was that the devil which had been partially exorcised returned triumphant. The evil now centered in the head, producing cerebral symptoms of such a nature that in 1853 the physician who attended me at the time, after cautious circumlocution, said in a low voice that his duty required him to warn me that death would probably follow within six months, and stood amazed at the smile of incredulity with which the announcement was received. I had known my enemy longer than he, and learned that its mission was not death but torment. Five years later another physician, an eminent physiologist of Paris, tried during a whole winter to discover the particular manifestations of insanity which he was convinced must attend the symptoms he had observed. 'What conclusion have you reached?' I asked. 'That I never saw a saner man in my life.' 'But,' said I, 'what is the chance that this brain of mine will ever get into working order again?' He shook his head and replied, 'It is not impossible.' With that I was forced to content myself. Between 1852 and 1860 this cerebral rebellion passes through great and seemingly

\*Life, Charles Haight Farnham.

capricious fluctuations. It had its ebbs and floods. Slight, and sometimes imperceptible, causes would produce an access which sometimes lasted with little respite for months. When it was in its milder moods, I used the opportunity to collect material and prepare ground for future work, should work ever become practicable. When it was worst the condition was not enviable. I could neither listen to reading nor engage in conversation even of the lightest. Sleep was difficult, and often banished entirely for one or two nights, during which the brain was apt to be in a state of abnormal activity, which had to be repressed at any cost, since thought produced the intensest torture. The effort required to keep the irritated organ quiet was so fatiguing that I occasionally rose and spent hours in the open air. I found distraction and relief in watching policemen and the tramps on the malls of Boston Common, at the risk of passing for a tramp myself. Toward the end of the night the cerebral excitation would seem to tire itself out, and gave place to a condition of weight and oppression much easier to bear."

For half a century Parkman appears to have suffered from periodic attacks of mental disturbance which were precipitated by ill health, trouble and misfortune. The attack described above, which occurred at the age of thirty-four, was caused by the death of his wife and son within a few months. During this attack he consulted the famous Brown-Sequard. The French physicians were at variance as to the diagnosis and treatment of his mental disorder. Farnham states, "The wisest did nothing, one recommended tonics, another milk diet, another galvanism, another hydrotherapy, one scarred him behind the neck with nitric acid, another drew red hot irons along his spine." Another author states that his general troubles were believed by the doctors to come from an "abnormal state of paralysis of certain arteries of the brain." There is to my mind little doubt that the symptoms so graphically described by Parkman himself, the flight of ideas, incapacity for consecutive and prolonged thought, restlessness, sleeplessness and vague somatic sensations, the early age of onset, and the absence of dementia, prove that these attacks, which are referred to by biographers as a "mysterious nervous disorder," were nothing more or less than the hypomania, if not the mania, of manic-depressive insanity.

*Edgar Allan Poe.*—Around few characters has public opinion waged such bitter and uncompromising warfare as around the character of the poet Poe. The literature on the subject of his life and writings, though voluminous, is far from satisfactory. Some of his biographers have described him as proud, vain, egotistical, immoral, lacking in self-control. Others have pictured him as humble, kind, affectionate, reserved, a man of almost superhuman virtues. Unfortunately few of his letters have been preserved, and this most fruitful source of knowledge of his real character is almost entirely wanting. We have, therefore, to draw our conclusions from his stories, poems and biographies.

The theory that Poe was insane was first advanced in 1875, when F. G. Fairfield, in an article in *Harper's Bazaar*, endeavored to prove, on the

theory of Dr. Leblois, that the peculiarities of Poe were due to dormant epilepsy which manifested itself in periodic outbursts of insanity. In 1897, Arvède Barine<sup>80</sup> in three articles endeavored to show that Poe was essentially a dipsomaniac, and that all his other irregularities grew out of this unfortunate weakness. In 1904 Lauvrière published an extensive study of the Psychopathy of Poe, in which he endeavors to prove that the poet suffered from circular insanity, on a basis of psychopathic degeneracy.

Certain it is, Poe labored under a heavy hereditary burden, born of alcoholic and tubercular parents, with a sister an imbecile, a brother an alcoholic and mentally unbalanced, and an uncle insane, he early displayed evidences of abnormal mentality. Precocity, exaggerated ego, insane ideas of grandeur and importance rendered him not amenable to discipline and training. When poverty and adversity overtook him, and he was thrown upon his own resources, his mental weakness made its appearance. Unable to cope with the difficulties of life, he was plunged into the depths of depression and despair, which he attempted to alleviate by recourse to intoxicants, which added a weird coloring to his already diseased imagination. From the cradle to the grave he oscillated between extreme phases of ecstasy and melancholy. Lauvrière<sup>81</sup> says, "It can scarcely be doubted that towards the end of his sad career, from the time of his second sojourn in New York, and above all from the death of his dear Virginia, the poor degenerate was scarcely more than a kind of insane person, partially reasoning, in whom circular insanity, in double form, left more and more its grip of dipsomaniac impulsions on his attacks of melancholic depression, and of mystic erotomanic fury on his attacks of manic exaltation."

The various histories of the life of Poe, although conflicting in many respects, all agree that he was subject to pathological depressions, which during the latter part of his life were complicated by alcohol and drugs. When the poet was sixteen, he fell violently in love with a woman of thirty-one. Her death threw him into an acute depression, and for hours at a time he would lie stretched upon her grave, regardless of wind and rain.<sup>82</sup> Thomas Bolling,<sup>83</sup> in his reminiscences of Poe, states, "He wore a melancholy smile always, and even his smile (for I do not remember ever to have seen him laugh), seemed forced. R. W. Griswold, writing in the New York Tribune at the time of Poe's death, said of him, "His conversation was at times almost superhuman in its eloquence. His imagery was from worlds which no mortal can see, but with the vision of genius. He was at all times a dreamer, dwelling in ideal realms in heaven or hell, peopled with creatures of his own brain. He walked the streets in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayer. With his glances introverted and a heart

<sup>80</sup> *Revue des Deux Mondes*, July-Sept., 1897.

<sup>81</sup> Edgar A. Poe, Lauvrière, 1904.

<sup>82</sup> The Case of Edgar A. Poe, Robert A. Stewart.

<sup>83</sup> *Memoir*, John R. Graham.

gnawed by anguish, and with a face shrouded in gloom, he would brave the wildest storms all night, with drenched garments; and with arms beating the winds and rain, would speak as if to spirits." N. P. Willis describes him as having "two antagonistic spirits imprisoned in one body, equally powerful and having complete mastery, by turns, of one man, that is to say, inhabited by both a devil and an angel." C. Mercer Adams says, "In his happier and saner moods he is a delightful and entertaining writer. The two-fold nature of Poe has been variously presented by his biographers."

The poems of Poe, especially those written during the latter part of his life, were largely pictures of his own feelings and passions. One of the last poems written by him, entitled "Alone," would indicate that he realized his mental peculiarities, but was powerless to overcome them. In the few letters of Poe which have been preserved, we have a very good description of attacks of manic-depressive insanity. One of these, written at the age of twenty-four, before he had become a prey to the drink habit, states, "Excuse me, my dear sir, if in this letter you find much incoherency. I am suffering under a depression of spirits such as I have never felt before. I have struggled in vain against this melancholy. My heart is open before you, if it be worth reading, read it. I am wretched and know not why. O pity me, for I feel that my words are incoherent, but I will recover myself. You will not fail to see that I am suffering under a depression of spirits which will ruin me if it be long continued."\*

Writing to Lowell he says, "I am extremely inactive and prodigiously industrious by fits. There are periods when every sort of mental exercise is torture to me, and when nothing pleases me except to commune in the solitude of mountains and woods, those altars of Byron. I am thus lost in dreams and in vagabond wanderings for entire months, and awaken finally a prey to a sort of mania for writing. Then I scratch the whole day, and read all night while the malady lasts." In a letter to a friend he says, "I become insane with long intervals of horrible insanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drink—God knows how often or how much. As a matter of course my enemies referred the insanity to the drink rather than the drink to the insanity." There are two years of Poe's life, after he was expelled from West Point, of which biographers can give no account. It is probable that they were occupied in these insane wanderings that he describes.

The various biographers of Poe have drawn a pathetic picture of a man totally unfit to fight the battle of life, struggling to make a living for himself and a tubercular wife, suffering from prolonged periods of depression during which he could produce nothing in a literary way, and again from excitements during which he wrote with facility, but displayed the critical and dictatorial attitude of the manic-depressive, coupled with exaggerated ego and expansiveness. During these periods he alienated the affections of his contemporaries by his scathing criticisms, and

\* Memoir, Ingram.

insulting comments on their works. Instead of devoting his time to the production of poems and stories, it is stated by Ingram that he frittered away his genius writing biting and sarcastic reviews.

His industry was necessarily spasmodic, and consequently he wrote nothing that called for prolonged and sustained effort, or for deep and continued thought and concentration. His fame rests on a few short poems. His pathological reaction to alcohol, in which he indulged freely during the latter years of his life, complicated his psychosis to some extent, and it is impossible to say how much it is responsible for the hallucinations and delusions with which his works abound. Willis<sup>4</sup> says, "With a single glass of wine his whole nature was reversed. The demon became uppermost, and although none of the usual signs of intoxication were visible, his will was palpably insane. Possessing his reasoning faculties in excited activity, with his wonted look and memory, he easily seemed personating only another phase of his mental character and was accused, accordingly, of insulting arrogance and bad-heartedness. In this reversed character it was never our chance to see him. We knew it from hearsay, and we mention it in connection with this sad infirmity of physical constitution which puts it upon very nearly the ground of temporary and almost irresponsible insanity."

Out of a strange mixture of insane hallucinations, delusions, excitements and depressions, alcoholism and morphinism, Poe's literary genius formed a wonderfully weird and grotesque literature, in which all these characteristics appeared and were strangely commingled. A hallucinatory experience is probably described in "The Raven," where the poet sees and talks with the bird, and the air grows dense with a perfume from an unseen source. His stories are weird, unnatural and grotesque. They depict the obsessions, impulses, delusions of persecution, illusions and hallucinations of an insane mind with horrible vividness. Prince Prospero sees the bloody mask of the Red Death arise in his closely guarded palace. The Seven Drinkers of Ptolemais see the phantom of death. The Man of the Crowd cannot shake off the tyranny of his crimes and his remorse. The Black Cat follows its victim until it drives from his mind everything that is good, leaving only the darkest and most evil thoughts and a hatred of all mankind. Many of Poe's characters were insane. Bernice was an epileptic, Madeline had periods of cataleptic stupor. Stewart, in describing his works, says, "His genius worked in the wild tissues of delirium, and gossamer fabric of dreams. An indescribably weird phantasmagoric dreamscape, peopled by spectral women, wraiths and demons, he fills with haunting music caught from the sighing of the blast mid mouldering ruins, shrieks of despair in the dark, the roar of the destroying tempest, the gurgling of buried streamlets, the sigh of the lone fir trees, the wail of lost souls, the host of birds of ill omen, the triumphant clamor of the whirlwind, the regurgitation of the devouring and engulfing deep, the laughter of derisive demons, all these compelling sounds of nature, all those

<sup>4</sup>Death of Edgar A. Poe, Willis.

figments of fancy that awaken the soul to awful premonitions of impending and unavoidable woe."

In concluding his thesis of the subject of Poe, Lauvrière says, "Poor lunatic! who in spite of all his pretensions to wisdom did not understand that to be too much an angel one is a beast. Your fall, will it serve as an example? Will the spark of genius immortal in your books compensate you for your faults and your misfortunes? Culpable or not, genius or not, victim of life, we pity you none the less."

Considering the abnormal mentality of writers whose histories have hitherto been briefly recounted, we are led to ask why they devoted their lives to literature. The literary genius, as we have seen him here, is apparently an individual utterly unable to adapt himself to ordinary surroundings. With an emotional instability which raises him to the pinnacle of exaltation one day, and plunges him into the depth of despair the next, his industry must necessarily be spasmodic. The common ills of life, poverty, sickness and death, which the normal man rises above, overwhelm him and throw him into a depression so profound that no stimulus is sufficient to arouse him to action. We see him placed in a world where success is gained only by constant and unceasing effort. In the grind for his daily bread, and in the stress and rush of business, the genius is rudely pushed aside by those of coarser grain and "earthlier make." His pride is humbled, his sensibilities wounded, his ambition crushed. He finds himself unable to cope with the situation. In the world in which he is placed nothing is ideal—the beautiful is ever marred by the unsightly, the roses are protected by thorns, pleasures are mixed with pain. In compensation he creates for himself a world of his own, in which his imagination eliminates the unsightly, the disagreeable and the evil; or on the other hand he pictures it in magnified form. In his literature he finds an outlet for all his abnormal feelings and passions. Here he pours forth, under various guises, his rapturous joys and his woeful depressions, his loves and his hates, his hopes and his fears, his dreams of bliss and his dread of impending calamity. The manifestations of his abnormal mental condition, which are denied him in actual life, find an outlet in poetry and fiction, under the guise of literary and poetical inspiration.