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CHURCH

THE WORKS
OF
EDGAR ALLAN POE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND A MEMOIR

BY

RICHARD HENRY STODDARD

VOL. V



POE'S COTTAGE AT FORDHAM

NEW YORK
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
EUREKA	I
THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION	157
MARGINALIA	175
A CHAPTER ON AUTOGRAPHS	351
THE LITERATI	431
GEORGE BUSH	436
GEORGE H. COLTON	438
N. P. WILLIS	440
WILLIAM M. GILLESPIE	450
CHARLES F. BRIGGS	451
WILLIAM KIRKLAND	454
JOHN W. FRANCIS	456
ANNA CORA MOWATT	458
GEORGE B. CHEEVER	464
CHARLES ANTHON	466
RALPH HOYT	469
GULIAN C. VERPLANCK	471
FREEMAN HUNT	472
PIERO MARONCELLI	476
LAUGHTON OSBORN	477
FITZ-GREENE HALLECK	483
ANN S. STEPHENS	491
EVART A. DUYCKINCK	492
MARY GOVE	496
JAMES ALDRICH	496

	PAGE
HENRY CARY	499
CHRISTOPHER PEASE CRANCH	501
SARAH MARGARET FULLER	506
JAMES LAWSON	517
CAROLINE M. KIRKLAND	518
PROSPER M. WETMORE	523
EMMA C. EMBURY	524
EPES SARGENT	526
FRANCES SARGENT OSGOOD	528
LYDIA M. CHILD	547
THOMAS DUNN BROWN	549
ELIZABETH BOGART	554
CATHERINE M. SEDGWICK	554
LEWIS GAYLORD CLARK	561
ANNE C. LYNCH	564
CHARLES FENNO HOFFMAN	566
MARY E. HEWITT	571



EUREKA :

AN ESSAY ON THE MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE.

[To the few who love me and whom I love—to those who feel rather than to those who think—to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities—I offer this book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth ; constituting it true. To these I present the composition as an Art Product alone :—let us say as a Romance ; or, if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem.

What I here propound is true :—therefore it cannot die ; or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will “ rise again to the Life Everlasting.”

Nevertheless it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead.]

IT is with humility really unassumed—it is with a sentiment even of awe—that I pen the opening sentence of this work : for of all conceivable subjects I approach the reader with the most solemn—the most comprehensive—the most difficult—the most august.

What terms shall I find sufficiently simple in their sublimity—sufficiently sublime in their simplicity—for the mere enunciation of my theme?

I design to speak of the *Physical, Metaphysical, and*

Mathematical—of the Material and Spiritual Universe—of its Essence, its Origin, its Creation, its Present Condition, and its Destiny. I shall be so rash, moreover, as to challenge the conclusions, and thus, in effect, to question the sagacity, of many of the greatest and most justly revered of men.

In the beginning, let me as distinctly as possible announce—not the theorem which I hope to demonstrate—for, whatever the mathematicians may assert, there is, in this world at least, *no such thing* as demonstration—but the ruling idea which, throughout this volume, I shall be continually endeavoring to suggest.

My general proposition, then, is this:—*In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation.*

In illustration of this idea, I propose to take such a survey of the Universe that the mind may be able really to receive and to perceive an individual impression.

He who from the top of *Ætna* casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the *extent* and *diversity* of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its *oneness*. But as, on the summit of *Ætna*, *no* man has thought of whirling on his heel, so no man has ever taken into his brain the full uniqueness of the prospect; and so, again, whatever considerations lie involved in this uniqueness, have as yet no practical existence for mankind.

I do not know a treatise in which a survey of the *Uni-*

verse—using the word in its most comprehensive and only legitimate acceptance—is taken at all:—and it may be as well here to mention that by the term “Universe,” wherever employed without qualification in this essay, I mean to designate *the utmost conceivable expanse of space, with all things, spiritual and material, that can be imagined to exist within the compass of that expanse.* In speaking of what is *ordinarily* implied by the expression, “Universe,” I shall take a phrase of limitation—“the Universe of stars.” Why this distinction is considered necessary will be seen in the sequel.

But even of treatises on the really limited, although always assumed as the *unlimited*, Universe of *stars*, I know none in which a survey, even of this limited Universe, is so taken as to warrant deductions from its *individuality*. The nearest approach to such a work is made in the “Cosmos” of Alexander Von Humboldt. He presents the subject, however, *not* in its individuality but in its generality. His theme, in its last result, is the law of *each* portion of the merely physical Universe, as this law is related to the laws of *every other* portion of this merely physical Universe. His design is simply syncretical. In a word, he discusses the universality of material relation, and discloses to the eye of Philosophy whatever inferences have hitherto lain hidden *behind* this universality. But however admirable be the succinctness with which he has treated each particular point of his topic, the mere multiplicity of these points occasions, necessarily, an amount of detail, and

thus an involution of idea, which preclude all *individuality* of impression.

It seems to me that, in aiming at this latter effect, and, through it, at the consequences—the conclusions—the suggestions—the speculations—or, if nothing better offer itself, the mere guesses which may result from it—we require something like a mental gyration on the heel. We need so rapid a revolution of all things about the central point of sight that, while the minutiae vanish altogether, even the more conspicuous objects become blended into one. Among the vanishing minutiae, in a survey of this kind, would be all exclusively terrestrial matters. The Earth would be considered in its planetary relations alone. A man, in this view, becomes mankind; mankind a member of the cosmical family of Intelligences. [

And now, before proceeding to our subject proper, let me beg the reader's attention to an extract or two from a somewhat remarkable letter, which appears to have been found corked in a bottle and floating on the *Mare Tenebrarum*—an ocean well described by the Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hephestion, but little frequented in modern days unless by the Transcendentalists and some other divers for crotchets. The date of this letter, I confess, surprises me even more particularly than its contents; for it seems to have been written in the year *two thousand eight hundred and forty-eight*. As for the passages I am about to transcribe, they, I fancy, will speak for themselves.

“Do you know, my dear friend,” says the writer, addressing, no doubt, a contemporary—“Do you know that it is scarcely more than eight or nine hundred years ago since the metaphysicians first consented to relieve the people of the singular fancy that there exist *but two practicable roads to Truth?* Believe it if you can. It appears, however, that long, long ago, in the night of Time, there lived a Turkish philosopher called Aries and surnamed Tottle.” [Here, possibly, the letter-writer means Aristotle; the best names are wretchedly corrupted in two or three thousand years.] “The fame of this great man depended mainly upon his demonstration that sneezing is a natural provision, by means of which over-profound thinkers are enabled to expel superfluous ideas through the nose; but he obtained a scarcely less valuable celebrity as the founder, or at all events as the principal propagator, of what was termed the *deductive* or *a priori* philosophy. He started with what he maintained to be axioms, or self-evident truths; and the now well-understood fact that *no* truths are *self*-evident, really does not make in the slightest degree against his speculations:—it was sufficient for his purpose that the truths in question were evident at all. From axioms he proceeded, logically, to results. His most illustrious disciples were one Tuclid, a geometrician,” [meaning Euclid,] “and one Kant, a Dutchman, the originator of that species of Transcendentalism which, with the change merely of a C for a K, now bears his peculiar name.

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