

THE WORKS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

IN FIVE VOLUMES

The Raven Edition

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EDGAR ALLAN POE

AN APPRECIATION

Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of “never—never more!”

THIS stanza from “The Raven” was recommended by James Russell Lowell as an inscription upon the Baltimore monument which marks the resting place of Edgar Allan Poe, the most interesting and original figure in American letters. And, to signify that peculiar musical quality of Poe’s genius which inthralls every reader, Mr. Lowell suggested this additional verse, from the “Haunted Palace”:

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,
And sparkling ever more,
A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.

Born in poverty at Boston, January 19, 1809, dying under painful circumstances at Baltimore, October 7, 1849, his whole literary career of scarcely fifteen years a pitiful struggle for mere subsistence, his memory malignantly misrepresented by his earliest biographer, Griswold, how completely has truth at last routed falsehood and how magnificently has Poe come into his own. For “The Raven,” first published in 1845, and, within a few months, read, recited and parodied wherever the English language was spoken, the half-starved poet received \$10! Less than a year later his brother poet, N. P. Willis, issued this touching appeal to the admirers of genius on behalf of the neglected author, his dying wife and her devoted mother, then living under very straitened circumstances in a little cottage at Fordham, N. Y.:

“Here is one of the finest scholars, one of the most original men of genius, and one of the most industrious of the literary profession of our country, whose temporary suspension of labor, from bodily illness, drops him immediately to a level with the common objects of public charity. There is no intermediate stopping-place, no respectful shelter, where, with the delicacy due to genius and culture, he might secure aid, till, with returning health, he would resume his labors, and his unmortified sense of independence.”

And this was the tribute paid by the American public to the master who had given to it such tales of conjuring charm, of witchery and mystery as “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “Ligeia”; such fascinating hoaxes as “The Unparalleled Adventure of Hans Pfaall,” “MSS. Found in a Bottle,” “A Descent Into a Maelstrom” and “The Balloon-Hoax”; such tales of conscience as “William Wilson,” “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-tale Heart,” wherein the retributions of remorse are portrayed with an awful fidelity; such

tales of natural beauty as “The Island of the Fay” and “The Domain of Arnheim”; such marvellous studies in ratiocination as the “Gold-bug,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Purloined Letter” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” the latter, a recital of fact, demonstrating the author’s wonderful capability of correctly analyzing the mysteries of the human mind; such tales of illusion and banter as “The Premature Burial” and “The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether”; such bits of extravaganza as “The Devil in the Belfry” and “The Angel of the Odd”; such tales of adventure as “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym”; such papers of keen criticism and review as won for Poe the enthusiastic admiration of Charles Dickens, although they made him many enemies among the over-puffed minor American writers so mercilessly exposed by him; such poems of beauty and melody as “The Bells,” “The Haunted Palace,” “Tamerlane,” “The City in the Sea” and “The Raven.” What delight for the jaded senses of the reader is this enchanted domain of wonder-pieces! What an atmosphere of beauty, music, color! What resources of imagination, construction, analysis and absolute art! One might almost sympathize with Sarah Helen Whitman, who, confessing to a half faith in the old superstition of the significance of anagrams, found, in the transposed letters of Edgar Poe’s name, the words “a God-peer.” His mind, she says, was indeed a “Haunted Palace,” echoing to the footfalls of angels and demons.

“No man,” Poe himself wrote, “has recorded, no man has dared to record, the wonders of his inner life.”

In these twentieth century days—of lavish recognition—artistic, popular and material—of genius, what rewards might not a Poe claim!

Edgar’s father, a son of General David Poe, the American revolutionary patriot and friend of Lafayette, had married Mrs. Hopkins, an English actress, and, the match meeting with parental disapproval, had himself taken to the stage as a profession. Notwithstanding Mrs. Poe’s beauty and talent the young couple had a sorry struggle for existence. When Edgar, at the age of two years, was orphaned, the family was in the utmost destitution. Apparently the future poet was to be cast upon the world homeless and friendless. But fate decreed that a few glimmers of sunshine were to illumine his life, for the little fellow was adopted by John Allan, a wealthy merchant of Richmond, Va. A brother and sister, the remaining children, were cared for by others.

In his new home Edgar found all the luxury and advantages money could provide. He was petted, spoiled and shown off to strangers. In Mrs. Allan he found all the affection a childless wife could bestow. Mr. Allan took much pride in the captivating, precocious lad. At the age of five the boy recited, with fine effect, passages of English poetry to the visitors at the Allan house.

From his eighth to his thirteenth year he attended the Manor House school, at Stoke-Newington, a suburb of London. It was the Rev. Dr. Bransby, head of the school, whom Poe so quaintly portrayed in “William Wilson.” Returning to Richmond in 1820 Edgar was sent to the school of Professor Joseph H. Clarke. He proved an apt pupil. Years afterward Professor Clarke thus wrote:

“While the other boys wrote mere mechanical verses, Poe wrote genuine poetry; the boy was a born poet. As a scholar he was ambitious to excel. He was remarkable for

self-respect, without haughtiness. He had a sensitive and tender heart and would do anything for a friend. His nature was entirely free from selfishness."

At the age of seventeen Poe entered the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. He left that institution after one session. Official records prove that he was not expelled. On the contrary, he gained a creditable record as a student, although it is admitted that he contracted debts and had "an ungovernable passion for card-playing." These debts may have led to his quarrel with Mr. Allan which eventually compelled him to make his own way in the world.

Early in 1827 Poe made his first literary venture. He induced Calvin Thomas, a poor and youthful printer, to publish a small volume of his verses under the title "Tamerlane and Other Poems." In 1829 we find Poe in Baltimore with another manuscript volume of verses, which was soon published. Its title was "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Other Poems." Neither of these ventures seems to have attracted much attention.

Soon after Mrs. Allan's death, which occurred in 1829, Poe, through the aid of Mr. Allan, secured admission to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Any glamour which may have attached to cadet life in Poe's eyes was speedily lost, for discipline at West Point was never so severe nor were the accommodations ever so poor. Poe's bent was more and more toward literature. Life at the academy daily became increasingly distasteful. Soon he began to purposely neglect his studies and to disregard his duties, his aim being to secure his dismissal from the United States service. In this he succeeded. On March 7, 1831, Poe found himself free. Mr. Allan's second marriage had thrown the lad on his own resources. His literary career was to begin.

Poe's first genuine victory was won in 1833, when he was the successful competitor for a prize of \$100 offered by a Baltimore periodical for the best prose story. "A MSS. Found in a Bottle" was the winning tale. Poe had submitted six stories in a volume. "Our only difficulty," says Mr. Latrobe, one of the judges, "was in selecting from the rich contents of the volume."

During the fifteen years of his literary life Poe was connected with various newspapers and magazines in Richmond, Philadelphia and New York. He was faithful, punctual, industrious, thorough. N. P. Willis, who for some time employed Poe as critic and sub-editor on the "Evening Mirror," wrote thus:

"With the highest admiration for Poe's genius, and a willingness to let it alone for more than ordinary irregularity, we were led by common report to expect a very capricious attention to his duties, and occasionally a scene of violence and difficulty. Time went on, however, and he was invariably punctual and industrious. We saw but one presentiment of the man—a quiet, patient, industrious and most gentlemanly person.

"We heard, from one who knew him well (what should be stated in all mention of his lamentable irregularities), that with a single glass of wine his whole nature was reversed, the demon became uppermost, and, though none of the usual signs of intoxication were visible, his will was palpably insane. In this reversed character, we repeat, it was never our chance to meet him."

On September 22, 1835, Poe married his cousin, Virginia Clemm, in Baltimore. She had barely turned thirteen years, Poe himself was but twenty-six. He then was a resident of Richmond and a regular contributor to the "Southern Literary Messenger." It was not until a year later that the bride and her widowed mother followed him thither.

Poe's devotion to his child-wife was one of the most beautiful features of his life. Many of his famous poetic productions were inspired by her beauty and charm. Consumption had marked her for its victim, and the constant efforts of husband and mother were to secure for her all the comfort and happiness their slender means permitted. Virginia died January 30, 1847, when but twenty-five years of age. A friend of the family pictures the death-bed scene—mother and husband trying to impart warmth to her by chafing her hands and her feet, while her pet cat was suffered to nestle upon her bosom for the sake of added warmth.

These verses from "Annabel Lee," written by Poe in 1849, the last year of his life, tell of his sorrow at the loss of his child-wife:

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In a kingdom by the sea;

But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee;

With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.
And this was the reason that, long ago;
In this kingdom by the sea.
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;

So that her high-born kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea,

Poe was connected at various times and in various capacities with the "Southern Literary Messenger" in Richmond, Va.; "Graham's Magazine" and the "Gentleman's Magazine" in Philadelphia; the "Evening Mirror," the "Broadway Journal," and "Godey's Lady's Book" in New York. Everywhere Poe's life was one of unremitting toil. No tales and poems were ever produced at a greater cost of brain and spirit.

Poe's initial salary with the "Southern Literary Messenger," to which he contributed the first drafts of a number of his best-known tales, was \$10 a week! Two years later his salary was but \$600 a year. Even in 1844, when his literary reputation was established securely, he wrote to a friend expressing his pleasure because a magazine to which he was to contribute had agreed to pay him \$20 monthly for two pages of criticism.

Those were discouraging times in American literature, but Poe never lost faith. He was finally to triumph wherever pre-eminent talents win admirers. His genius has had no better description than in this stanza from William Winter's poem, read at the dedication exercises of the Actors' Monument to Poe, May 4, 1885, in New York:

He was the voice of beauty and of woe,
Passion and mystery and the dread unknown;
Pure as the mountains of perpetual snow,
Cold as the icy winds that round them moan,
Dark as the caves wherein earth's thunders groan,
Wild as the tempests of the upper sky,
Sweet as the faint, far-off celestial tone of angel
whispers, fluttering from on high,
And tender as love's tear when youth and beauty die.

In the two and a half score years that have elapsed since Poe's death he has come fully into his own. For a while Griswold's malignant misrepresentations colored the public estimate of Poe as man and as writer. But, thanks to J. H. Ingram, W. F. Gill, Eugene Didier, Sarah Helen Whitman and others these scandals have been dispelled and Poe is seen as he actually was-not as a man without failings, it is true, but as the finest and most original genius in American letters. As the years go on his fame increases. His works have been translated into many foreign languages. His is a household name in France and England-in fact, the latter nation has often uttered the reproach that Poe's own country has been slow to appreciate him. But that reproach, if it ever was warranted, certainly is untrue.

W. H. R.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

By James Russell Lowell

THE situation of American literature is anomalous. It has no centre, or, if it have, it is like that of the sphere of Hermes. It is divided into many systems, each revolving round its several suns, and often presenting to the rest only the faint glimmer of a milk-and-water way. Our capital city, unlike London or Paris, is not a great central heart from which life and vigor radiate to the extremities, but resembles more an isolated umbilicus stuck down as near as may be to the centre of the land, and seeming rather to tell a legend of former usefulness than to serve any present need. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, each has its literature almost more distinct than those of the different dialects of Germany; and the Young Queen of the West has also one of her own, of which some articulate rumor barely has reached us dwellers by the Atlantic.

Perhaps there is no task more difficult than the just criticism of contemporary literature. It is even more grateful to give praise where it is needed than where it is deserved, and friendship so often seduces the iron stylus of justice into a vague flourish, that she writes what seems rather like an epitaph than a criticism. Yet if praise be given as an alms, we could not drop so poisonous a one into any man's hat. The critic's ink may suffer equally from too large an infusion of nutgalls or of sugar. But it is easier to be generous than to be just, and we might readily put faith in that fabulous direction to the hiding place of truth, did we judge from the amount of water which we usually find mixed with it.

Remarkable experiences are usually confined to the inner life of imaginative men, but Mr. Poe's biography displays a vicissitude and peculiarity of interest such as is rarely met with. The offspring of a romantic marriage, and left an orphan at an early age, he was adopted by Mr. Allan, a wealthy Virginian, whose barren marriage-bed seemed the warranty of a large estate to the young poet.

Having received a classical education in England, he returned home and entered the University of Virginia, where, after an extravagant course, followed by reformation at the last extremity, he was graduated with the highest honors of his class. Then came a boyish attempt to join the fortunes of the insurgent Greeks, which ended at St. Petersburg, where he got into difficulties through want of a passport, from which he was rescued by the American consul and sent home. He now entered the military academy at West Point, from which he obtained a dismissal on hearing of the birth of a son to his adopted father, by a second marriage, an event which cut off his expectations as an heir. The death of Mr. Allan, in whose will his name was not mentioned, soon after relieved him of all doubt in this regard, and he committed himself at once to authorship for a support. Previously to this, however, he had published (in 1827) a small volume of poems, which soon ran through three editions, and excited high expectations of its author's future distinction in the minds of many competent judges.

That no certain augury can be drawn from a poet's earliest lispings there are instances enough to prove. Shakespeare's first poems, though brimful of vigor and youth and picturesqueness, give but a very faint promise of the directness, condensation and overflowing moral of his maturer works. Perhaps, however, Shakespeare is hardly a case in point, his "Venus and Adonis" having been published, we believe, in his twenty-sixth year. Milton's Latin verses show tenderness, a fine eye for nature, and a delicate appreciation of classic models, but give no hint of the author of a new style in poetry. Pope's youthful pieces have all the sing-song, wholly unrelieved by the glittering malignity and eloquent irreligion of his later productions. Collins' callow namby-pamby died and gave no sign of the vigorous and original genius which he afterward displayed. We have never thought that the world lost more in the "marvellous boy," Chatterton, than a very ingenious imitator of obscure and antiquated dulness. Where he becomes original (as it is called), the interest of ingenuity ceases and he becomes stupid. Kirke White's promises were indorsed by the respectable name of Mr. Southey, but surely with no authority from Apollo. They have the merit of a traditional piety, which to our mind, if uttered at all, had been less objectionable in the retired closet of a diary, and in the sober raiment of prose. They do not clutch hold of the memory with the drowning pertinacity of Watts; neither have they the interest of his occasional simple, lucky beauty. Burns having fortunately been rescued by his humble station from the contaminating society of the "Best models," wrote well and naturally from the first. Had he been unfortunate enough to have had an educated taste, we should have had a series of poems from which, as from his letters, we could sift here and there a kernel from the mass of chaff. Coleridge's youthful efforts give no promise whatever of that poetical genius which produced at once the wildest, tenderest, most original and most purely imaginative poems of modern times. Byron's "Hours of Idleness" would never find a reader except from an intrepid and indefatigable curiosity. In Wordsworth's first preludings there is but a dim foreboding of the creator of an era. From Southey's early poems, a safer augury might have been drawn. They show the patient investigator, the close student of history, and the unwearied explorer of the beauties of predecessors, but they give no assurances of a man who should add aught to stock of household words, or to the rarer and more sacred delights of the fireside or the arbor. The earliest specimens of Shelley's poetic mind already, also, give tokens of that ethereal sublimation in which the spirit seems to soar above the regions of words, but leaves its body, the verse, to be entombed, without hope of resurrection, in a mass of them. Cowley is generally instanced as a wonder of precocity. But his early insipidities show only a capacity for rhyming and for the metrical arrangement of certain conventional combinations of words, a capacity wholly dependent on a delicate physical organization, and an unhappy memory. An early poem is only remarkable when it displays an effort of *reason*, and the rudest verses in which we can trace some conception of the ends of poetry, are worth all the miracles of smooth juvenile versification. A school-boy, one would say, might acquire the regular see-saw of Pope merely by an association with the motion of the play-ground tilt.

Mr. Poe's early productions show that he could see through the verse to the spirit beneath, and that he already had a feeling that all the life and grace of the one must depend on and be modulated by the will of the other. We call them the most remarkable boyish poems that we have ever read. We know of none that can compare with them for

maturity of purpose, and a nice understanding of the effects of language and metre. Such pieces are only valuable when they display what we can only express by the contradictory phrase of *innate experience*. We copy one of the shorter poems, written when the author was only fourteen. There is a little dimness in the filling up, but the grace and symmetry of the outline are such as few poets ever attain. There is a smack of ambrosia about it.

TO HELEN

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand!
The agate lamp within thy hand,
Ah! Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!

It is the tendency of the young poet that impresses us. Here is no "withering scorn," no heart "blighted" ere it has safely got into its teens, none of the drawing-room sansculottism which Byron had brought into vogue. All is limpid and serene, with a pleasant dash of the Greek Helicon in it. The melody of the whole, too, is remarkable. It is not of that kind which can be demonstrated arithmetically upon the tips of the fingers. It is of that finer sort which the inner ear alone *can* estimate. It seems simple, like a Greek column, because of its perfection. In a poem named "Ligeia," under which title he intended to personify the music of nature, our boy-poet gives us the following exquisite picture:

Ligeia! Ligeia!
My beautiful one,
Whose harshest idea
Will to melody run,
Say, is it thy will,
On the breezes to toss,
Or, capriciously still,
Like the lone albatross,
Incumbent on night,
As she on the air,
To keep watch with delight
On the harmony there?

John Neal, himself a man of genius, and whose lyre has been too long capriciously silent, appreciated the high merit of these and similar passages, and drew a proud horoscope for their author.

Mr. Poe had that indescribable something which men have agreed to call *genius*. No man could ever tell us precisely what it is, and yet there is none who is not inevitably aware of its presence and its power. Let talent writhe and contort itself as it may, it has no such magnetism. Larger of bone and sinew it may be, but the wings are wanting. Talent sticks fast to earth, and its most perfect works have still one foot of clay. Genius claims kindred with the very workings of Nature herself, so that a sunset shall seem like a quotation from Dante, and if Shakespeare be read in the very presence of the sea itself, his verses shall but seem nobler for the sublime criticism of ocean. Talent may make friends for itself, but only genius can give to its creations the divine power of winning love and veneration. Enthusiasm cannot cling to what itself is unenthusiastic, nor will he ever have disciples who has not himself impulsive zeal enough to be a disciple. Great wits are allied to madness only inasmuch as they are possessed and carried away by their demon, while talent keeps him, as Paracelsus did, securely prisoned in the pommel of his sword. To the eye of genius, the veil of the spiritual world is ever rent asunder that it may perceive the ministers of good and evil who throng continually around it. No man of mere talent ever flung his inkstand at the devil.

When we say that Mr. Poe had genius, we do not mean to say that he has produced evidence of the highest. But to say that he possesses it at all is to say that he needs only zeal, industry, and a reverence for the trust reposed in him, to achieve the proudest triumphs and the greenest laurels. If we may believe the Longinuses and Aristotles of our newspapers, we have quite too many geniuses of the loftiest order to render a place among them at all desirable, whether for its hardness of attainment or its seclusion. The highest peak of our Parnassus is, according to these gentlemen, by far the most thickly settled portion of the country, a circumstance which must make it an uncomfortable residence for individuals of a poetical temperament, if love of solitude be, as immemorial tradition asserts, a necessary part of their idiosyncrasy.

Mr. Poe has two of the prime qualities of genius, a faculty of vigorous yet minute analysis, and a wonderful fecundity of imagination. The first of these faculties is as needful to the artist in words, as a knowledge of anatomy is to the artist in colors or in stone. This enables him to conceive truly, to maintain a proper relation of parts, and to draw a correct outline, while the second groups, fills up and colors. Both of these Mr. Poe has displayed with singular distinctness in his prose works, the last predominating in his earlier tales, and the first in his later ones. In judging of the merit of an author, and assigning him his niche among our household gods, we have a right to regard him from our own point of view, and to measure him by our own standard. But, in estimating the amount of power displayed in his works, we must be governed by his own design, and placing them by the side of his own ideal, find how much is wanting. We differ from Mr. Poe in his opinions of the objects of art. He esteems that object to be the creation of Beauty, and perhaps it is only in the definition of that word that we disagree with him. But in what we shall say of his writings, we shall take his own standard as our guide. The temple of the god of song is equally accessible from every side, and there is room enough in it for all who bring offerings, or seek in oracle.

In his tales, Mr. Poe has chosen to exhibit his power chiefly in that dim region which stretches from the very utmost limits of the probable into the weird confines of superstition and unreality. He combines in a very remarkable manner two faculties

which are seldom found united; a power of influencing the mind of the reader by the impalpable shadows of mystery, and a minuteness of detail which does not leave a pin or a button unnoticed. Both are, in truth, the natural results of the predominating quality of his mind, to which we have before alluded, analysis. It is this which distinguishes the artist. His mind at once reaches forward to the effect to be produced. Having resolved to bring about certain emotions in the reader, he makes all subordinate parts tend strictly to the common centre. Even his mystery is mathematical to his own mind. To him X is a known quantity all along. In any picture that he paints he understands the chemical properties of all his colors. However vague some of his figures may seem, however formless the shadows, to him the outline is as clear and distinct as that of a geometrical diagram. For this reason Mr. Poe has no sympathy with Mysticism. The Mystic dwells in the mystery, is enveloped with it; it colors all his thoughts; it affects his optic nerve especially, and the commonest things get a rainbow edging from it. Mr. Poe, on the other hand, is a spectator *ab extra*. He analyzes, he dissects, he watches

“with an eye serene,
The very pulse of the machine,”

for such it practically is to him, with wheels and cogs and piston-rods, all working to produce a certain end.

This analyzing tendency of his mind balances the poetical, and by giving him the patience to be minute, enables him to throw a wonderful reality into his most unreal fancies. A monomania he paints with great power. He loves to dissect one of these cancers of the mind, and to trace all the subtle ramifications of its roots. In raising images of horror, also, he has strange success, conveying to us sometimes by a dusky hint some terrible *doubt* which is the secret of all horror. He leaves to imagination the task of finishing the picture, a task to which only she is competent.

“For much imaginary work was there;
Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,
That for Achilles’ image stood his spear
Grasped in an armed hand; himself behind
Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind.”

Besides the merit of conception, Mr. Poe’s writings have also that of form.

His style is highly finished, graceful and truly classical. It would be hard to find a living author who had displayed such varied powers. As an example of his style we would refer to one of his tales, “The House of Usher,” in the first volume of his “Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque.” It has a singular charm for us, and we think that no one could read it without being strongly moved by its serene and sombre beauty. Had its author written nothing else, it would alone have been enough to stamp him as a man of genius, and the master of a classic style. In this tale occurs, perhaps, the most beautiful of his poems.

The great masters of imagination have seldom resorted to the vague and the unreal as sources of effect. They have not used dread and horror alone, but only in combination with other qualities, as means of subjugating the fancies of their readers. The loftiest

muse has ever a household and fireside charm about her. Mr. Poe's secret lies mainly in the skill with which he has employed the strange fascination of mystery and terror. In this his success is so great and striking as to deserve the name of art, not artifice. We cannot call his materials the noblest or purest, but we must concede to him the highest merit of construction.

As a critic, Mr. Poe was aesthetically deficient. Unerring in his analysis of dictions, metres and plots, he seemed wanting in the faculty of perceiving the profounder ethics of art. His criticisms are, however, distinguished for scientific precision and coherence of logic. They have the exactness, and at the same time, the coldness of mathematical demonstrations. Yet they stand in strikingly refreshing contrast with the vague generalisms and sharp personalities of the day. If deficient in warmth, they are also without the heat of partisanship. They are especially valuable as illustrating the great truth, too generally overlooked, that analytic power is a subordinate quality of the critic.

On the whole, it may be considered certain that Mr. Poe has attained an individual eminence in our literature which he will keep. He has given proof of power and originality. He has done that which could only be done once with success or safety, and the imitation or repetition of which would produce weariness.

DEATH OF EDGAR A. POE

By N. P. Willis

THE ancient fable of two antagonistic spirits imprisoned in one body, equally powerful and having the complete mastery by turns-of one man, that is to say, inhabited by both a devil and an angel seems to have been realized, if all we hear is true, in the character of the extraordinary man whose name we have written above. Our own impression of the nature of Edgar A. Poe, differs in some important degree, however, from that which has been generally conveyed in the notices of his death. Let us, before telling what we personally know of him, copy a graphic and highly finished portraiture, from the pen of Dr. Rufus W. Griswold, which appeared in a recent number of the "Tribune":

"Edgar Allen Poe is dead. He died in Baltimore on Sunday, October 7th. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was known, personally or by reputation, in all this country; he had readers in England and in several of the states of Continental Europe; but he had few or no friends; and the regrets for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art has lost one of its most brilliant but erratic stars.

"His conversation was at times almost supramortal in its eloquence. His voice was modulated with astonishing skill, and his large and variably expressive eyes looked repose or shot fiery tumult into theirs who listened, while his own face glowed, or was changeless in pallor, as his imagination quickened his blood or drew it back frozen to his heart. His imagery was from the worlds which no mortals can see but with the vision of genius. Suddenly starting from a proposition, exactly and sharply defined, in terms of utmost simplicity and clearness, he rejected the forms of customary logic, and by a crystalline process of accretion, built up his ocular demonstrations in forms of gloomiest and ghastliest grandeur, or in those of the most airy and delicious beauty, so minutely and distinctly, yet so rapidly, that the attention which was yielded to him was chained till it stood among his wonderful creations, till he himself dissolved the spell, and brought his hearers back to common and base existence, by vulgar fancies or exhibitions of the ignoblest passion.

"He was at all times a dreamer dwelling in ideal realms in heaven or hell peopled with the creatures and the accidents of his brain. He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayer (never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was already damned, but) for their happiness who at the moment were objects of his idolatry; or with his glances introverted to a heart gnawed with anguish, and with a face shrouded in gloom, he would brave the wildest storms, and all night, with drenched garments and arms beating the winds and rains, would speak as if the spirits that at such times only could be evoked by him from the Aidenn, close by whose portals his disturbed soul sought to forget the ills to which his constitution subjected him—close by the Aidenn where were those he loved—the Aidenn which he might never see, but in fitful glimpses, as its gates

opened to receive the less fiery and more happy natures whose destiny to sin did not involve the doom of death.

“He seemed, except when some fitful pursuit subjugated his will and engrossed his faculties, always to bear the memory of some controlling sorrow. The remarkable poem of ‘The Raven’ was probably much more nearly than has been supposed, even by those who were very intimate with him, a reflection and an echo of his own history. *He* was that bird’s

“Unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of ‘Never-never more.’

“Every genuine author in a greater or less degree leaves in his works, whatever their design, traces of his personal character: elements of his immortal being, in which the individual survives the person. While we read the pages of the ‘Fall of the House of Usher,’ or of ‘Mesmeric Revelations,’ we see in the solemn and stately gloom which invests one, and in the subtle metaphysical analysis of both, indications of the idiosyncrasies of what was most remarkable and peculiar in the author’s intellectual nature. But we see here only the better phases of his nature, only the symbols of his juster action, for his harsh experience had deprived him of all faith in man or woman. He had made up his mind upon the numberless complexities of the social world, and the whole system with him was an imposture. This conviction gave a direction to his shrewd and naturally unamiable character. Still, though he regarded society as composed altogether of villains, the sharpness of his intellect was not of that kind which enabled him to cope with villany, while it continually caused him by overshots to fail of the success of honesty. He was in many respects like Francis Vivian in Bulwer’s novel of ‘The Caxtons.’ Passion, in him, comprehended—many of the worst emotions which militate against human happiness. You could not contradict him, but you raised quick choler; you could not speak of wealth, but his cheek paled with gnawing envy. The astonishing natural advantages of this poor boy—his beauty, his readiness, the daring spirit that breathed around him like a fiery atmosphere—had raised his constitutional self-confidence into an arrogance that turned his very claims to admiration into prejudices against him. Irascible, envious—bad enough, but not the worst, for these salient angles were all varnished over with a cold, repellent cynicism, his passions vented themselves in sneers. There seemed to him no moral susceptibility; and, what was more remarkable in a proud nature, little or nothing of the true point of honor. He had, to a morbid excess, that, desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition, but no wish for the esteem or the love of his species; only the hard wish to succeed—not shine, not serve—succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit.

“We have suggested the influence of his aims and vicissitudes upon his literature. It was more conspicuous in his later than in his earlier writings. Nearly all that he wrote in the last two or three years—including much of his best poetry—was in some sense biographical; in draperies of his imagination, those who had taken the trouble to trace his steps, could perceive, but slightly concealed, the figure of himself.”

Apropos of the disparaging portion of the above well-written sketch, let us truthfully say:

Some four or five years since, when editing a daily paper in this city, Mr. Poe was employed by us, for several months, as critic and sub-editor. This was our first personal acquaintance with him. He resided with his wife and mother at Fordham, a few miles out of town, but was at his desk in the office, from nine in the morning till the evening paper went to press. With the highest admiration for his genius, and a willingness to let it atone for more than ordinary irregularity, we were led by common report to expect a very capricious attention to his duties, and occasionally a scene of violence and difficulty. Time went on, however, and he was invariably punctual and industrious. With his pale, beautiful, and intellectual face, as a reminder of what genius was in him, it was impossible, of course, not to treat him always with deferential courtesy, and, to our occasional request that he would not probe too deep in a criticism, or that he would erase a passage colored too highly with his resentments against society and mankind, he readily and courteously assented—far more yielding than most men, we thought, on points so excusably sensitive. With a prospect of taking the lead in another periodical, he, at last, voluntarily gave up his employment with us, and, through all this considerable period, we had seen but one presentment of the man—a quiet, patient, industrious, and most gentlemanly person, commanding the utmost respect and good feeling by his unvarying deportment and ability.

Residing as he did in the country, we never met Mr. Poe in hours of leisure; but he frequently called on us afterward at our place of business, and we met him often in the street—invariably the same sad mannered, winning and refined gentleman, such as we had always known him. It was by rumor only, up to the day of his death, that we knew of any other development of manner or character. We heard, from one who knew him well (what should be stated in all mention of his lamentable irregularities), that, with a single glass of wine, his whole nature was reversed, the demon became uppermost, and, though none of the usual signs of intoxication were visible, his will was palpably insane. Possessing his reasoning faculties in excited activity, at such times, and seeking his acquaintances with his wonted look and memory, he easily seemed personating only another phase of his natural character, and was accused, accordingly, of insulting arrogance and bad-heartedness. In this reversed character, we repeat, it was never our chance to see him. We know 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 a temporary and almost irresponsible insanity.

The arrogance, vanity, and depravity of heart, of which Mr. Poe was generally accused, seem to us referable altogether to this reversed phase of his character. Under that degree of intoxication which only acted upon him by demonizing his sense of truth and right, he doubtless said and did much that was wholly irreconcilable with his better nature; but, when himself, and as we knew him only, his modesty and unaffected humility, as to his own deservings, were a constant charm to his character. His letters, of which the constant application for autographs has taken from us, we are sorry to confess, the greater portion, exhibited this quality very strongly. In one of the carelessly written notes of which we chance still to retain possession, for instance, he speaks of “The Raven”—that extraordinary poem which electrified the world of imaginative readers, and has become the type of a school of poetry of its own—and, in evident

earnest, attributes its success to the few words of commendation with which we had prefaced it in this paper.—It will throw light on his sane character to give a literal copy of the note:

“FORDHAM, April 20, 1849

“My DEAR WILLIS—The poem which I inclose, and which I am so vain as to hope you will like, in some respects, has been just published in a paper for which sheer necessity compels me to write, now and then. It pays well as times go—but unquestionably it ought to pay ten prices; for whatever I send it I feel I am consigning to the tomb of the Capulets. The verses accompanying this, may I beg you to take out of the tomb, and bring them to light in the ‘Home journal?’ If you can oblige me so far as to copy them, I do not think it will be necessary to say ‘From the ——, that would be too bad; and, perhaps, ‘From a late —— paper,’ would do.

“I have not forgotten how a ‘good word in season’ from you made ‘The Raven,’ and made ‘Ulalume’ (which by-the-way, people have done me the honor of attributing to you), therefore, I would ask you (if I dared) to say something of these lines if they please you.

“Truly yours ever,

“EDGAR A. POE.”

In double proof of his earnest disposition to do the best for himself, and of the trustful and grateful nature which has been denied him, we give another of the only three of his notes which we chance to retain:

“FORDHAM, January 22, 1848.

“My DEAR MR. WILLIS—I am about to make an effort at re-establishing myself in the literary world, and *feel* that I may depend upon your aid.

“My general aim is to start a Magazine, to be called ‘The Stylus,’ but it would be useless to me, even when established, if not entirely out of the control of a publisher. I mean, therefore, to get up a journal which shall be *my own* at all points. With this end in view, I must get a list of at least five hundred subscribers to begin with; nearly two hundred I have already. I propose, however, to go South and West, among my personal and literary friends—old college and West Point acquaintances—and see what I can do. In order to get the means of taking the first step, I propose to lecture at the Society Library, on Thursday, the 3d of February, and, that there may be no cause of *squabbling*, my subject shall *not be literary* at all. I have chosen a broad text: ‘The Universe.’

“Having thus given you *the facts* of the case, I leave all the rest to the suggestions of your own tact and generosity. Gratefully, *most gratefully*,

“Your friend always,

“EDGAR A. POE.”

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