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POE & HIS POETRY

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Edgar Allan Poe

POE AND HIS POETRY

BY

LEWIS CHASE Ph.D.

Author of "The English Heroic Play" &c.



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GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

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This is to some extent recognized by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connexion for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connexion with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

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addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

NOTE

MUCH material of the first importance, indeed indispensable even for a brief life of Poe, is private property, and necessarily the biographer's first step is to obtain the owners' consent to use it. This consent has in all cases been granted to me with a willingness and courtesy for which I am as grateful as for the deed itself. To Mr. Ingram, who is the largest single proprietor, I am deeply indebted for the use of a number of facts which he was the first to make known, and more specifically for Poe's letter on his irregularities, and for Mrs. Shew's account of the composition of "The Bells." To Professor Woodberry my thanks are due for permission to make unrestricted use of his material, of which I have availed myself somewhat shamelessly, more especially in the remarks on the nature of the poet's genius ; also for the Stedman-Woodberry text of the Poems. Mr. Whitty has kindly allowed me to reprint "Gratitude," a poem hitherto unpublished in England, I believe, and another one of his discoveries, the definitive version of "Lenore," together with several facts contained in the "Memoir," and in contributions to the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Despatch. I am also under obligation to the late Professor Harrison's Life and Letters, to Mr. Ransome's Critical Study, and to the Editor of the Sewanee (Tennessee) Review for Professor Campbell's excerpts from the Ellis-Allan papers which are now in the Library of Congress.

L. C.

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POE AND HIS POETRY

THE most famous American writer has been more than any of his contemporary compatriots a subject of controversy. That small portion of his work which is not prose, although it offers difficulties of its own, has escaped the whirlpool which seethes round the outward aspects of his career. As reflecting this the poems are of slight service, but as revelations of their maker's inner life they are invaluable. Here there is no contentious seed ; they are but variations of the one theme which riveted his mind, and echoed his moods of meditation. The thought, the mood, the expression are so typical that some, like M. Gourmont, aver that in his poetry Poe is revealed completely.

II

EDGAR Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, January 19, 1809. On the paternal side he was descended from John Poe, of Dring, Co. Cavan, who emigrated from Ireland to Pennsylvania, dying about 1756. His son David, a wheelwright and Assistant Quartermaster-General in Baltimore, Maryland, during the Revolution, was so well and honourably known, if not distinguished, that over his grave the

Marquis de Lafayette remarked, " Ici repose un cœur noble." The General, as he was called, had a son David, intended for the Bar, who incurred parental displeasure by going on the stage and marrying an actress, Elizabeth Arnold, the widow of an actor named Hopkins. Her mother, of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, made her first appearance in the United States in 1796, and married a piano-player, one Tubbs, who for a season with his wife and step-daughter set up a theatre in Portland, Maine, where Elizabeth was praised by the Press. All that is known of mother and daughter alike is contained in brief newspaper mention of their performances from Maine to Virginia. Shortly after the death of Hopkins she married in 1805 David Poe, a member of the same company, and had three children, William Henry, Edgar, and Rosalie. Doubtless a clue to the tradition that David deserted his wife, supported by Henry's assertion that he did not know what had become of his father, is to be found in a letter from John Allan to this eldest son regarding his sister and mother—" At least she is half your sister, and God forbid, dear Henry, that we should visit upon the living the errors and frailties of the dead." This must have been the family disgrace to which the second son was wont to allude mysteriously. Mrs. Poe died in needy circumstances in Richmond, Virginia, in 1811. Henry was cared for by Baltimore friends, Rosalie by the MacKenzie family of Richmond, and Edgar by their intimate acquaintances, the

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Allans. He was not legally adopted, but was baptized Edgar Allan Poe.

At the age of six he could read, draw, and dance ; his precocity in other ways was remarkable ; and in boyhood, as in manhood, he radiated, in certain moods, winsomeness, gentleness, and grace. His standing on the dining-table, declaiming and toasting the guests in wine and water, is the most memorable picture of his infancy.

In 1815 Allan's affairs calling him to England, he took his wife, her sister, and his ward, and resided successively in two houses in Southampton Row on sites now occupied by the Bedford and West Central hotels. Edgar attended the Manor House school at Stoke Newington, where the impression of John Bransby, the master, was that his parents (he then went under the name of Allan) spoilt him by allowing him too much pocket-money. He characterized the boy as intelligent, wayward, and wilful ; and his disinclination in after years to discuss the young Virginian may be attributed to resentment at Poe's having made uncomplimentary use of his name in "William Wilson," the early pages of which, although deviating from fact, are commonly supposed to be autobiographic in spirit of the Stoke Newington days.

" Twice during Sunday . . . we were paraded in the same formal manner to the morning and evening service in the one church of the village. Of this church the principal of our school was pastor. With how deep a spirit of wonder and

perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as with step solemn and slow he ascended the pulpit ! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast—could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy ? O gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution ! ”

In reminiscence Poe described the English years as sad, lonely, and unhappy : but they could not have been unprofitable. He seems to have entered the school “ backward with his studies,” if the awful indictment can apply to a child of six or seven, and, on leaving, was able to speak French, to construe easy Latin, and was far better acquainted with literature and history than many of his seniors. Among his other acquisitions is to be counted that first-hand contact with the old-world setting which proved so fruitful to his imagination. Upon the Allans’ return to Virginia in 1820 Edgar was sent to school there to Joseph Clarke, from Trinity College, Dublin, and to his successor, William Burke. He continued the studies begun at Stoke Newington, standing well in his classes ; if he did not lead at all times, it was due to carelessness rather than inability. The effects of English residence show nowhere more strongly than in his attitude towards sport and cultivation of the out-of-door life. In the manly art

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of self-defence he appears to have been more skilful than Keats before him ; he certainly could have out-Byroned Byron in the water. At the age of fifteen he swam from Ludlam's wharf on the James River to Warwick Bar, six miles, against a strong tide, in a hot June sun, and afterwards walked back to Richmond with little apparent fatigue. From the same year dates his first military experience as what would now be termed a boy scout. He was appointed lieutenant of the Richmond Junior Volunteers, otherwise known as the Junior Morgan Riflemen, which acted as a bodyguard to General Lafayette upon his memorable visit to the town.

Either Edgar's brilliancy as a pupil or his skill in sports would have assured him an enviable position in the school, but the two together were not enough to make him generally popular. The other boys used to ask one another to their houses for dinner or to spend the night ; but Poe, it was remarked, never invited his school-mates to go home with him after hours. He was thought to be " self-willed, capricious, inclined to be imperious, and though of generous impulses, not steadily kind or even amiable."

In spite of a devoted if small circle of young admirers of both sexes he appears, while still in his early teens, to have begun to live a visionary, self-absorbed life, which is reflected in " A Dream within a Dream."

A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM

Take this kiss upon the brow !
 And, in parting from you now,
 Thus much let me avow :
 You are not wrong who deem
 That my days have been a dream ;
 Yet if hope has flown away
 In a night, or in a day,
 In a vision, or in none,
 Is it therefore the less gone ?
 All that we see or seem
 Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
 Of a surf-tormented shore,
 And I hold within my hand
 Grains of the golden sand—
 How few ! yet how they creep
 Through my fingers to the deep,
 While I weep—while I weep !
 O God ! can I not grasp
 Them with a tighter clasp ?
 O God ! can I not save
 One from the pitiless wave ?
 Is *all* that we see or seem
 But a dream within a dream ?

✓ Apart from boy and girl friendships of the same period is to be distinguished Edgar's infatuation for a lady much older than himself, which owing to her death was of exceedingly brief duration. The romantic memory of the day when Mrs. Stanard, the mother of a younger

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school-fellow, spoke to him tenderly, and kindled the "one idolatrous and purely *ideal* love" of his boyhood was never effaced.

There is a "legend" that the youthful lover wept over her grave nightly—a fancy which would only make the boy father to the man, since Poe in the flesh as in spirit was as if spell-drawn to such haunts, and it is known that he mourned his wife in precisely the manner in which he is reported to have lamented Mrs. Stanard, whose image, according to Mrs. Whitman, suggested the lines :

TO HELEN

3 - Helen, thy beauty is to me a
3 - Like those Nicæan barks of yore, b
~ That gently, o'er a perfumed sea, g
4 The weary, wayworn wanderer bore h
3 To his own native shore. h

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

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

III

IN 1823 Allan, who had heretofore been in but variable circumstances, inherited a large fortune, and for the following three years, for the first and only time, Edgar was surrounded by wealth and luxury which clearly had their effect upon the trend of his imagination. But the household had its moments of inharmony between master and mistress, and as the foster-son's sympathies were with the latter, of whom he always spoke affectionately, his presence at home from Allan's point of view was dispensable. Consequently, after a few months' preparation under private tutors, he was despatched to the University of Virginia, where he matriculated February 14, 1836, in ancient and modern languages, and where he remained until the Christmas vacation.

Here as elsewhere Poe easily demonstrated his scholarly capabilities. The professor complimented him on his rendering into English verse a selection from Tasso, and he "excelled" in Latin and French. As at school, he joined in sports, and also took long, unaccompanied walks in the Ragged Mountains. Among his other diversions were debating (of which the accounts are meagre) and writing what may have been the first drafts of later work, and which he read to his circle. But the most vivid memoirs of his university pastimes refer to his manner of drinking, and to the extent of his losses at cards.

He drank in gulps in order to get the effect

with as little of the taste as possible—a habit he kept up through life and which, though by no means uncommon among a large class of drinkers, seems to have differentiated him from his companions, who remarked upon it as peculiar. Some of them also looked askance at his recklessness at cards, particularly when losing heavily. By the end of the year these losses amounted to more than £400. Allan, who had by this time outgrown his inclination to spoil his charge with too much pocket-money, declined not only to pay these debts of honour but even to provide sufficiently for legitimate expenses. At least that was the compromised debtor's opinion, who resented the smallness of his allowance, and whom Allan removed from Charlottesville to his own counting-house. Thus his university residence terminated sadly, but without intervention of the authorities, since neither his drinking nor his gambling was exceptional or flagrant enough to meet with official censure. Proverbially, good fortune in love should have followed such ill luck at cards, but Poe's grievances culminated in receiving no answer to letters addressed to Sarah Elmira Royster, a young girl of Richmond to whom he had become secretly engaged. It transpired that her father intercepted them on account of the youth of the lovers, and she, equally piqued at the supposed neglect, in due time married another. Poe's unrest is explained by the discovery of the way in which he had been duped in this budding romance, as well as by

the uncongeniality of counting-house routine and the friction of an inharmonious home—the latter greatly emphasized by his late behaviour. He disappeared from Richmond. Whether or not he ran away, it seems that he left there in a sailing vessel, adopting the alias of Henri Le Rennet, but where he voyaged has not yet been satisfactorily settled. One story is that the vessel went to Ireland and back: another, that he made his way to London and Paris, where he sought employment in vain. The allegation of extensive European travel may reasonably be dismissed on account of the brevity of his absence; and if the period from March to May 1827 was spent beyond his native shore, the experience gained, except in seamanship, must have been virtually negligible. The nautical knowledge displayed in his prose may be noted, but he had both earlier and later opportunities of obtaining it. Wherever he was, he must have been preparing the manuscript of his first book, "Tamerlane and Other Poems, By A Bostonian," because this appeared in the summer of 1827.

In maturity, Poe represented and championed the South and West as opposed to New England, and it is one of fate's little ironies not only that his birthplace should be where it was, but also, considering the ridicule he liked to direct towards the "Hub," that at eighteen he should indelibly stamp himself a Bostonian. As a characterization no single word could be more mislead-

ing, since he was actually antipathetic to what Boston—that is, New England—stood for in his day, and in clear-cut contrast to its group of writers, individually and collectively. Unlike any of them, he was born of obscure parentage and under an evil star. He early began to speak of himself as a “lost soul,” and his short life-journey was through devious ways of misfortune and sorrow. They, without exception, had other means of support than authorship, but he was the first professional American of letters who was devoted exclusively to his pen, and lived, or rather starved, by it.

The spiritual contrast between him and the New Englanders is no less definite. They were primarily concerned with religious and ethical questions, waxing zealous over social, economic and political issues for their own sakes.¹ Indifferent to these matters, the “Bostonian” disapproved of Lowell’s anti-slavery utterances as fanatical, ridiculed Emerson and transcendentalism, and abhorred the didactic note in Longfellow. His interest in writing was purely literary, and literature to him was an æsthetic and intellectual thing.

The term group, or school, is applied advisedly to the New Englanders because they shared in and gave expression to a communal spirit. But Poe was never one of a community : he never experienced intellectual companionship : he never came under an inspiring leader, such as

¹ Cf. Mr. Hudson’s “Lowell and his Poetry,” in this Series, pp. 11-15.

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Lowell found in Emerson. He was, in short, a solitary figure. Out of touch with the main intellectual centre of the land, absorbed in questions caviare to the general and apathetic to others, he was, in a certain sense, distinctly un-American. That section of the country in which he lived was not dominated by English tradition to such an extent as was Boston, and as he resented the subserviency of America to the mother-country he may be said to be distinctly un-English—again in contrast to the New Englanders, who, as a group, were both American and English at the same time.

Poe began his career as a poet before he was fifteen. By 1823 he was the acknowledged bard of the school, composing an ode on the retirement of the master, who also recalled having seen a manuscript volume of verses by his brilliant pupil, which may have contained the germ of "Tamerlane."

"The greater part of the Poems which comprise this little volume were written in the year 1821-22, when the author had not completed his fourteenth year. They were, of course, not intended for publication; why they are now published concerns no one but himself. Of the smaller pieces very little need be said: they perhaps savour too much of egotism; but they were written by one too young to have any knowledge of the world except from his own breast. In 'Tamerlane' he has exposed the folly of even risking the best feelings of the

heart at the shrine of ambition. He is conscious that in this there are many faults (besides that of the general character of the poem), which, he flatters himself, he could with little trouble have corrected, but, unlike many of his predecessors, has been too fond of his early productions to amend them in his *old age*. He will not say that he is indifferent as to the success of these Poems—it might stimulate him to other attempts—but he can safely assert that failure will not at all influence him in a resolution already adopted. This is challenging criticism—let it be so. *Nos hæc novimus esse nihil.*”

This Preface to “Tamerlane” is of more general interest, however, than as merely fixing doubtful dates, being, indeed, prophetic on sundry points. The italicized allusion to old age suggests hoaxing, that inclination to mystify the public which became one of the author’s habits; and it sounds the note of pride, of defiantly challenging criticism, which also became habitual to him. The misleading insinuation, in particular, that these verses had not undergone revision for publication in his nineteenth year, but were strictly illustrative of the state of his genius at a much earlier period, introduces a trait which at times leaves on the reader’s mind the uncertain suspicion of the poet’s self-deception—of his wonted and almost wanton untrustworthiness as autobiographer. One who attempts a biographical interpretation of the poems in detail must face this charac-

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teristic of the principal source of his material, and unless unmindful of "the benefit of the doubt," must further confess a weakness for overstepping now and again the boundary of authenticated fact into the realm of what may or may not be true.

If the school volume be not "Tamerlane," it is yet probable that its maker subsequently used whatsoever in it he considered of value, and that its loss is not to be greatly regretted, except as another of already numerous instances of how he worked and re-worked his model.

Since Poe's development was mainly technical the chronological order of the poems may, except by the special student, be safely disregarded. From beginning to end there was little expansion of subject-matter, little broadening of human interest, and the composition usually had little tangible relation to his active life.

For the special student the case is different. Poe desired to be known by the ultimate form of his poems, and he seems to have begun to discredit earlier renderings soon after their appearance. Although he relied upon initial inspiration as instinctively as other singers, the time and attention he devoted to revision, his method of subjecting each word to unrelenting scrutiny, and of publishing the revised version as often as he got a chance in newspapers, magazines, and in new editions, renders the whole of his work a veritable encyclopædia, or rather a unique laboratory of poetic craft. As

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has been well said, "There is no such example in literature of poetic elaboration as is contained in the successive issues of Poe's poems." He is the type *par excellence* of the pertinacious quest for technical perfection.

TAMERLANE

Kind solace in a dying hour !
Such, father, is not (now) my theme ;
I will not madly deem that power
Of Earth may shrive me of the sin
Unearthly pride hath revell'd in ;
I have no time to dote or dream.
You call it hope—that fire of fire !
It is but agony of desire ;
If I *can* hope—Oh, God ! I can—
Its fount is holier, more divine ;
I would not call thee fool, old man,
But such is not a gift of thine.

Know thou the secret of a spirit
Bowed from its wild pride into shame.
O yearning heart, I did inherit
Thy withering portion with the fame,
The searing glory which hath shone
Amid the jewels of my throne—
Halo of Hell—and with a pain
Not Hell shall make me fear again,
O craving heart, for the lost flowers
And sunshine of my summer hours !
The undying voice of that dead time,
With its interminable chime,
Rings, in the spirit of a spell,
Upon thy emptiness—a knell.

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I have not always been as now :
The fevered diadem on my brow
I claimed and won usurpingly.
Hath not the same fierce heirdom given
Rome to the Cæsar, this to me ?—
The heritage of a kingly mind,
And a proud spirit which hath striven
Triumphantly with human kind.

On mountain soil I first drew life :
The mists of the Taglay have shed
Nightly their dew upon my head ;
And, I believe, the wingèd strife
And tumult of the headlong air
Have nestled in my very hair.

So late from Heaven—that dew—it fell
('Mid dreams of an unholy night)
Upon me with the touch of Hell,
While the red flashing of the light
From clouds that hung, like banners, o'er,
Appeared to my half-closing eye
The pageantry of monarchy,
And the deep trumpet-thunder's roar
Came hurriedly upon me, telling
Of human battle, where my voice,
My own voice, silly child ! was swelling
(O ! how my spirit would rejoice,
And leap within me at the cry)
The battle-cry of Victory !

The rain came down upon my head
Unsheltered, and the heavy wind
Rendered me mad and deaf and blind :

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It was but man, I thought, who shed
Laurels upon me : and the rush,
 The torrent of the chilly air,
Gurgled within my ear the crush
 Of empires—with the captive's prayer,
The hum of suitors, and the tone
Of flattery 'round a sovereign's throne.

My passions, from that hapless hour,
 Usurped a tyranny which men
Have deemed, since I have reached to power,
 My innate nature—be it so :
 But, father, there lived one who, then,
Then, in my boyhood, when their fire
 Burned with a still intenser glow
(For passion must, with youth, expire)
E'en *then* who knew this iron heart
 In woman's weakness had a part.

I have no words—alas !—to tell
The loveliness of loving well.
Nor would I now attempt to trace
The more than beauty of a face
Whose lineaments, upon my mind,
Are—shadows on the unstable wind :
Thus I remember having dwelt
 Some page of early lore upon,
With loitering eye, till I have felt
The letters, with their meaning, melt
 To fantasies with none.

Oh, she was worthy of all love !
 Love, as in infancy, was mine :
'Twas such as angel minds above
 Might envy ; her young heart the shrine

On which my every hope and thought
 Were incense, then a goodly gift,
 For they were childish and upright,
 Pure as her young example taught :
 Why did I leave it, and, adrift,
 Trust to the fire within, for light ?

We grew in age and love together,
 Roaming the forest and the wild :
 My breast her shield in wintry weather ;
 And when the friendly sunshine smiled,
 And she would mark the opening skies,
 I saw no Heaven but in her eyes.
 Young Love's first lesson is the heart :
 For 'mid that sunshine and those smiles
 When, from our little cares apart,
 And laughing at her girlish wiles,
 I'd throw me on her throbbing breast
 And pour my spirit out in tears,
 There was no need to speak the rest,
 No need to quiet any fears
 Of her—who asked no reason why
 But turned on me her quiet eye.

Yet more than worthy of the love
 My spirit struggled with, and strove
 When on the mountain peak alone
 Ambition lent it a new tone,—
 I had no being but in thee :
 The world, and all it did contain
 In the earth, the air, the sea,—
 Its joy, its little lot of pain
 That was new pleasure, the ideal
 Dim vanities of dreams by night,

And dimmer nothings which were real
 (Shadows, and a more shadowy light),
 Parted upon their misty wings,
 And so confusedly became
 Thine image, and a name, a name,—
 Two separate yet most intimate things.

I was ambitious—have you known
 The passion, father? You have not.
 A cottager, I marked a throne
 Of half the world as all my own,
 And murmured at such lowly lot;
 But, just like any other dream,
 Upon the vapour of the dew
 My own had past, did not the beam
 Of beauty which did while it through
 The minute, the hour, the day, oppress
 My mind with double loveliness.

We walked together on the crown
 Of a high mountain which looked down,
 Afar from its proud natural towers
 Of rock and forest, on the hills—
 The dwindled hills! begirt with bowers
 And shouting with a thousand rills.

I spoke to her of power and pride,
 But mystically, in such guise
 That she might deem it nought beside
 The moment's converse; in her eyes
 I read, perhaps too carelessly,
 A mingled feeling with my own;
 The flush on her bright cheek to me
 Seemed to become a queenly throne
 Too well that I should let it be
 Light in the wilderness alone.

I wrapped myself in grandeur then,
 And donned a visionary crown ;
 Yet it was not that Fantasy
 Had thrown her mantle over me ;
 But that, among the rabble—men,
 Lion ambition is chained down
 And crouches to a keeper's hand :
 Not so in deserts where the grand,
 The wild, the terrible, conspire
 With their own breath to fan his fire.

Look 'round thee now on Samarcand !
 Is she not queen of Earth ? her pride
 Above all cities ? in her hand
 Their destinies ? in all beside
 Of glory which the world hath known,
 Stands she not nobly and alone ?
 Falling, her veriest stepping-stone
 Shall form the pedestal of a throne !
 And who her sovereign ? Timour—he
 Whom the astonished people saw
 Striding o'er empires haughtily
 A diademed outlaw !

O, human love, thou spirit given,
 On earth, of all we hope in Heaven !
 Which fall'st into the soul like rain
 Upon the Siroc-withered plain,
 And, failing in thy power to bless,
 But leav'st the heart a wilderness !
 Idea ! which bindest life around
 With music of so strange a sound
 And beauty of so wild a birth—
 Farewell ! for I have won the Earth.

When Hope, the eagle that towered, could see
 No cliff beyond him in the sky,
 His pinions were bent droopingly,
 And homeward turned his softened eye.
 'Twas sunset : when the sun will part,
 There comes a sullenness of heart
 To him who still would look upon
 The glory of the summer sun.
 That soul will hate the evening mist
 So often lovely, and will list
 To the sound of the coming darkness (known
 To those whose spirits hearken) as one
 Who, in a dream of night, *would fly*,
 But *cannot*, from a danger nigh.

What though the moon—the white moon
 Shed all the splendour of her noon ?
 Her smile is chilly, and her beam,
 In that time of dreariness, will seem
 (So like you gather in your breath)
 A portrait taken after death.
 And boyhood is a summer sun
 Whose waning is the dreariest one ;
 For all we live to know is known,
 And all we seek to keep hath flown.
 Let life, then, as the day-flower, fall
 With the noonday beauty—which is all !

I reached my home, my home no more,
 For all had flown who made it so.
 I passed from out its mossy door,
 And, though my tread was soft and low,
 A voice came from the threshold stone
 Of one whom I had earlier known :

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

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A voice came from the threshold stone
Of one whom I had earlier known :

O, I defy thee, Hell, to show,
 On beds of fire that burn below,
 An humbler heart—a deeper woe.

Father, I firmly do believe—

I know, for Death who comes for me
 From regions of the blest afar
 Where there is nothing to deceive,
 Hath left his iron gate ajar,
 And rays of truth you cannot see
 Are flashing through Eternity—
 I do believe that Eblis hath
 A snare in every human path ;
 Else how, when in the holy grove
 I wandered of the idol, Love,
 Who daily scents his snowy wings
 With incense of burnt offerings
 From the most unpolluted things,
 Whose pleasant bowers are yet so riven
 Above with trellised rays from Heaven
 No mote may shun, no tiniest fly,
 The lightning of his eagle eye,—
 How was it that Ambition crept,
 Unseen, amid the revels there,
 Till growing bold, he laughed and leapt
 In the tangles of Love's very hair ?

A few weeks previous to the advent of "Tamerlane" (on May 26, 1827), following his instincts as already shown by his youthful volunteering, and influenced no doubt by the memory of his grandfather's honourable record, Poe enlisted at Boston, under the name of Edgar A. Perry, as a private soldier in the army of the United States. He was at once assigned

POE & HIS POETRY

to Battery A of the First Artillery, then serving in the harbour at Fort Independence. On October 31 the battery was ordered to Fort Moultrie, Charlestown, South Carolina, and one year later was again transferred to Fortress Monroe, Virginia. It appears from the records that "Perry" discharged his duties as company clerk, artificer, and assistant in the commissariat department so as to win the good-will of his superiors, and was in all respects a sober, faithful and efficient soldier. On January 1, 1829, he was appointed sergeant-major, a promotion which was granted solely for merit.

In due course his superiors became aware of his identity, and being recognized as more intelligent and better educated than his comrades, he was advised to ask Allan to provide a substitute for him, and to obtain a cadetship at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Honourably dismissed from the army on April 15, 1829, he passed a year and a quarter, mostly in Baltimore, before he entered upon his new duties. Although adopting a military career, it is plain that he did not intend to abandon literature. He was engaged during the interval in composing "Al Aaraaf" or other verse and sending it round to editors and literary men for advice and comment. The volume appeared in 1829, still slender like the first, but in more becoming and self-respecting garb. The title-page ran, "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems. By Edgar A. Poe. Baltimore. Heath and Dunning, 1829."

“Al Aaraaf” is generally regarded as incomprehensible, and its incoherent story need not be retold here. In treatment it is as much Moore’s as “Tamerlane” is Byron’s, and its originality consists only in the symbolization of the pervasive music of nature in Ligeia.¹ Nevertheless it shows a gain of both mental and literary power; it displays a lively fancy, a flowing metre, and some fine lines that place it above “Tamerlane” as a product of crude genius. Certain individual characteristics, in particular, such as the attempt to seize the impalpable, to fix the evanescent, to perceive the supersensual, are already strongly marked. “Romance” and “Science” may be cited as well as “Ligeia.” Col. Higginson, after hearing the author deliver “Al Aaraaf,” wrote that the poem “produced no very distinct impression on the audience until Poe began to read the maiden’s song in the second part. Already his tones had been softening to a finer melody than at first, and when he came to the verses ‘Ligeia! Ligeia! My beautiful one!’ his voice seemed attenuated to the faintest golden thread; the audience seemed hushed and, as it were, breathless; there seemed no life in all the hall but his, and every syllable was accentuated with such delicacy, and sustained with such sweetness, as I never heard equalled by other lips. When the lyric ended . . . I felt that we had been under the spell of some wizard.”

Poe ratified the statement that “in a poem called ‘Ligeia’ he intended to personify the music of nature.”

SONG FROM "AL AARAAF"

'Neath blue-bell or streamer,
 Or tufted wild spray
 That keeps from the dreamer
 The moonbeam away,
 Bright beings ! that ponder,
 With half closing eyes,
 On the stars which your wonder
 Hath drawn from the skies,
 Till they glance through the shade, and
 Come down to your brow
 Like—eyes of the maiden
 Who calls on you now,—
 Arise from your dreaming
 In violet bowers
 To duty beseeming
 These star-litten hours !
 And shake from your tresses
 Encumbered with dew
 The breath of those kisses
 That cumber them too—
 Oh, how, without you, Love !
 Could angels be blest ?—
 Those kisses of true love
 That lulled ye to rest !
 Up ! shake from your wing
 Each hindering thing !
 The dew of the night,
 It would weigh down your flight ;
 And true love caresses,
 Oh, leave them apart.
 They are light on the tresses,
 But lead on the heart.

Ligeia ! Ligeia !
 My beautiful one !
 Whose harshest idea
 Will to melody run,
 Oh, 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 ?

Ligeia ! wherever
 Thy image may be,
 No magic shall sever
 Thy music from thee.
 Thou hast bound many eyes
 In a dreamy sleep,
 But the strains still arise
 Which thy vigilance keep :
 The sound of the rain,
 Which leaps down to the flower
 And dances again
 In the rhythm of the shower,
 The murmur that springs
 From the growing of grass,
 Are the music of things,
 But are modelled, alas !
 Away, then, my dearest,
 Oh, hie thee away
 To springs that lie clearest
 Beneath the moon-ray,—
 To lone lake that smiles,
 In its dream of deep rest,

At the many star-isles
 That enjewel its breast !
 Where wild flowers, creeping,
 Have mingled their shade,
 On its margin is sleeping
 Full many a maid ;
 Some have left the cool glade, and
 Have slept with the bee ;
 Arouse them, my maiden,
 On moorland and lea !
 Go ! breathe on their slumber,
 All softly in ear,
 The musical number
 They slumbered to hear :
 For what can awaken
 An angel so soon,
 Whose sleep hath been taken
 Beneath the cold moon,
 As the spell which no slumber
 Of witchery may test,—
 The rhythmical number
 Which lulled him to rest ?

ROMANCE

Romance, who loves to nod and sing
 With drowsy head and folded wing
 Among the green leaves as they shake
 Far down within some shadowy lake,
 To me a painted paroquet
 Hath been—a most familiar bird—
 Taught me my alphabet to say,
 To lisp my very earliest word
 While in the wild-wood I did lie,
 A child—with a most knowing eye.

Of late, eternal condor years
 So shake the very heaven on high
 With tumult as they thunder by,
 I have no time for idle cares
 Through gazing on the unquiet sky ;
 And when an hour with calmer wings
 Its down upon my spirit flings,
 That little time with lyre and rhyme
 To while away—forbidden things—
 My heart would feel to be a crime
 Unless it trembled with the strings.

SONNET—TO SCIENCE

Science ! true daughter of Old Time thou art,
 Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
 Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
 Vulture, whose wings are dull realities ?
 How should he love thee ? or how deem thee wise,
 Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
 To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
 Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing ?
 Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car,
 And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
 To seek a shelter in some happier star ?
 Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
 The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
 The summer dream beneath the tamarind-tree ?

Legally, Poe was too old to fulfil one of the West Point entrance conditions, and accordingly had the hand of time turned back two years. He had resorted to the same trick in the army, and later was to have the audacity to communicate with the editor of a biographical dictionary

calling attention to an incorrect birth date and supplying another, also incorrect, with blissful disregard of the fact that he himself had furnished the original misinformation. Poe's mature countenance even at this time gave rise to a jest to the effect that he had procured a cadet's appointment for his son, and the boy having died, the father had taken his place. This fact that he was so much older than he was supposed to be, together with his previous instruction, must account for his high standing in French and mathematics, which is so frequently remarked.

The curious feature of his residence was his neglect of, and contempt for, military duties. He not only successfully evaded the regulation against smuggling liquor to chambers, probably with the attendant consequence of drinking to excess more frequently than heretofore, but upon Allan's declining to procure for him an honourable discharge, he took matters into his own hands, and had little difficulty in repeatedly breaking enough rules to force expulsion. He was court-martialled, found guilty, and sentenced to be "dismissed," March 6, 1831.

The reason for the poet-cadet's determination to quit the service is undoubtedly to be sought in his growing desire to follow a literary rather than military career. His sojourn there was too short to permit general appreciation of his better qualities, while the respect which his talent commanded was impaired by fear of his biting wit. Throughout life, according to

Professor Harrison, his uncurbable tongue was the root of all his misfortunes. The students enjoyed his lampoons at a master's expense, but they could hardly be expected to listen to diatribes on Tom Campbell's plagiarism. It was, indeed, the seriousness of Poe's literary opinions and aspirations which most differentiated him, one might add, alienated him, from his fellows.

West Point might have forgotten him, but that while there he had collected subscriptions for the publication of a volume of poems which arrived a few weeks after his departure. The subscribers expected jests and parodies on the masters. Their indignation can be imagined when the book turned out to be mean and tawdry in appearance, and without reference to the Academy, except in dedication; as far removed from it in fact, or from anything light or topical, as the author's previous volumes. It was called "Poems by Edgar A. Poe. Second Edition.

Published by Elam Bliss. 1831," with the explanation: "Believing only a portion of my former volume to be worthy a second edition—that small portion I thought it as well to include in the present book as to republish by itself. I have therefore herein combined 'Al Aaraaf' and 'Tamerlane' with other poems hitherto unprinted."

In this volume Poe's great gift first became manifest, both in the character of his poetic motives and in the fascination of some perfect lines. In such poems as "The Sleeper," and, more particularly, those developed from slight

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Oriental suggestions, such as the two landscape effects of "The City in the Sea" and "The Valley of Unrest," the strangeness, the remoteness and mystical power of his imagination are so given as to be henceforth identified with his name. It is no far cry to "The Conqueror Worm" and "Dreamland," which may be appropriately added here although of much later publication ("Graham's Magazine," September 1843 and June 1844 respectively). In contrast to these, and exceptional in tone among the poems, is "Israfel," of the 1831 volume, "the first pure song of the poet, the notes most clear and liquid and soaring of all he ever sang."

THE SLEEPER

At midnight, in the month of June,
I stand beneath the mystic moon.
An opiate vapour, dewy, dim,
Exhales from out her golden rim,
And, softly dripping, drop by drop,
Upon the quiet mountain-top,
Steals drowsily and musically
Into the universal valley.
The rosemary nods upon the grave ;
The lily lolls upon the wave ;
Wrapping the fog about its breast,
The ruin moulders into rest ;
Looking like Lethe, see ! the lake
A conscious slumber seems to take,
And would not, for the world, awake.
All beauty sleeps !—and lo ! where lies
Irene, with her destinies !

O lady bright ! can it be right,
 This window open to the night ?
 The wanton airs, from the tree-top,
 Laughingly through the lattice drop ;
 The bodiless airs, a wizard rout,
 Flit through thy chamber in and out,
 And wave the curtain canopy
 So fitfully, so fearfully,
 Above the closed and fringed lid
 'Neath which thy slumb'ring soul lies hid,
 That, o'er the floor and down the wall,
 Like ghosts the shadows rise and fall.
 O lady dear, hast thou no fear ?
 Why and what art thou dreaming here ?
 Sure thou art come o'er far-off seas,
 A wonder to these garden trees !
 Strange is thy pallor : strange thy dress :
 Strange, above all, thy length of tress,
 And this all solemn silentness !

The lady sleeps. Oh, may her sleep,
 Which is enduring, so be deep !
 Heaven have her in its sacred keep !
 This chamber changed for one more holy,
 This bed for one more melancholy,
 I pray to God that she may lie
 Forever with unopened eye,
 While the pale sheeted ghosts go by.

My love, she sleeps. Oh, may her sleep,
 As it is lasting, so be deep !
 Soft may the worms about her creep !
 Far in the forest, dim and old,
 For her may some tall vault unfold :
 Some vault that oft hath flung its black

And wingèd panels fluttering back,
 Triumphant, o'er the crested palls
 Of her grand family funerals :
 Some sepulchre, remote, alone,
 Against whose portal she hath thrown,
 In childhood, many an idle stone :
 Some tomb from out whose sounding door
 She ne'er shall force an echo more,
 Thrilling to think, poor child of sin,
 It was the dead who groaned within !

THE CITY IN THE SEA

Lo ! Death has reared himself a throne
 In a strange city lying alone
 Far down within the dim West,
 Where the good and the bad and the worst
 and the best
 Have gone to their eternal rest.
 There shrines and palaces and towers
 (Time-eaten towers that tremble not)
 Resemble nothing that is ours.
 Around, by lifting winds forgot,
 Resignedly beneath the sky
 The melancholy waters lie.

No rays from the holy heaven come down
 On the long night-time of that town ;
 But light from out the lurid sea
 Streams up the turrets silently,
 Gleams up the pinnacles far and free :
 Up domes, up spires, up kingly halls
 Up fanes, up Babylon-like walls,
 Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers
 Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers

Up many and many a marvellous shrine
 Whose wreathèd friezes intertwine
 The viol, the violet, and the vine.

Resignedly beneath the sky
 The melancholy waters lie.
 So blend the turrets and shadows there
 That all seem pendulous in air,
 While from a proud tower in the town
 Death looks gigantically down.

There open fanes and gaping graves
 Yawn level with the luminous waves ;
 But not the riches there that lie
 In each idol's diamond eye,—
 Not the gaily-jewelled dead,
 Tempt the waters from their bed ;
 For no ripples curl, alas,
 Along that wilderness of glass ;
 No swellings tell that winds may be
 Upon some far-off happier sea ;
 No heavings hint that winds have been
 On seas less hideously serene !

But lo, a stir is in the air !
 The wave—there is a movement there !
 As if the towers had thrust aside,
 In slightly sinking, the dull tide ;
 As if their tops had feebly given
 A void within the filmy Heaven !
 The waves have now a redder glow,
 The hours are breathing faint and low ;
 And when, amid no earthly moans,
 Down, down that town shall settle hence,
 Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,
 Shall do it reverence.

THE VALLEY OF UNREST

Once it smiled a silent dell
Where the people did not dwell ;
They had gone unto the wars,
Trusting to the mild-eyed stars,
Nightly, from their azure towers,
To keep watch above the flowers,
In the midst of which all day
The red sunlight lazily lay.
Now each visitor shall confess
The sad valley's restlessness.
Nothing there is motionless,
Nothing save the airs that brood
Over the magic solitude.
Ah, by no wind are stirred those trees
That palpitate like the chill seas
Around the misty Hebrides !
Ah, by no wind those clouds are driven
That rustle through the unquiet Heaven
Uneasily, from morn till even,
Over the violets there that lie
In myriad types of the human eye,
Over the lilies there that wave
And weep above a nameless grave !
They wave :—from out their fragrant tops
Eternal dews come down in drops.
They weep :—from off their delicate stems
Perennial tears descend in gems.

1843

THE CONQUEROR WORM

Lo ! 'tis a gala night
 Within the lonesome latter years.
 An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
 In veils, and drowned in tears,
 Sit in a theatre to see
 A play of hopes and fears,
 While the orchestra breathes fitfully
 The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
 Mutter and mumble low,
 And hither and thither fly ;
 Mere puppets they, who come and go
 At bidding of vast formless things
 That shift the scenery to and fro,
 Flapping from out their condor wings
 Invisible Woe.

That motley drama—oh, be sure
 It shall not be forgot !
 With its Phantom chased for evermore
 By a crowd that seize it not,
 Through a circle that ever returneth in
 To the self-same spot ;
 And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
 And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see amid the mimic rout
 A crawling shape intrude :
 A blood-red thing that writhes from out
 The scenic solitude !

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

It writhes—it writhes !—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all !
And over each quivering form
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, “ Man,”
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

1844

DREAMLAND

By a route obscure and lonely,
Haunted by ill angels only,
Where an Eidolon, named Night,
On a black throne reigns upright,
I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule :
From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,
Out of Space—out of Time.

Bottomless vales and boundless floods,
And chasms and caves and Titan woods,
With forms that no man can discover
For the tears that drip all over ;
Mountains toppling evermore
Into seas without a shore ;
Seas that restlessly aspire,
Surging, unto skies of fire ;
Lakes that endlessly outspread
Their lone waters, lone and dead,—

Their still waters, still and chilly
 With the snows of the lolling lily.

By the lakes that thus outspread
 Their lone waters, lone and dead,—
 Their sad waters, sad and chilly
 With the snows of the lolling lily ;
 By the mountains—near the river
 Murmuring lowly, murmuring ever ;
 By the grey woods, by the swamp
 Where the toad and the newt encamp ;
 By the dismal tarns and pools
 Where dwell the Ghouls ;
 By each spot the most unholy,
 In each nook most melancholy,—
 There the traveller meets aghast
 Sheeted Memories of the Past :
 Shrouded forms that start and sigh
 As they pass the wanderer by,
 White-robed forms of friends long given,
 In agony, to the Earth—and Heaven.

For the heart whose woes are legion
 'Tis a peaceful, soothing region ;
 For the spirit that walks in shadow
 'Tis—oh, 'tis an Eldorado !
 But the traveller, travelling through it,
 May not—dare not openly view it ;
 Never its mysteries are exposed
 To the weak human eye unclosed ;
 So wills its King, who hath forbid
 The uplifting of the fringed lid ;
 And thus the sad Soul that here passes
 Beholds it but through darkened glasses.

By a route obscure and lonely,
 Haunted by ill angels only,
 Where an Eidolon, named Night,
 On a black throne reigns upright,
 I have wandered home but newly
 From this ultimate dim Thule.

ISRAFEL

And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures.

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
 Whose heart-strings are a lute ;
 None sing so wildly well
 As the angel Israfel,
 And the giddy stars (so legends tell),
 Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
 Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above
 In her highest noon,
 The enamoured moon
 Blushes with love,
 While, to listen, the red levin
 (With the rapid Pleiads, even,
 Which were seven)
 Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir
 And the other listening things)
 That Israfeli's fire
 Is owing to that lyre
 By which he sits and sings,
 The trembling living wire
 Of those unusual strings.

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

But the skies that angel trod,
Where deep thoughts are a duty,
Where Love's a grown-up God,
Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in a star.

Therefore thou art not wrong,
Israfeli, who despisest
An unimpassioned song ;
To thee the laurels belong,
Best bard, because the wisest :
Merrily live, and long !

The ecstasies above
With thy burning measures suit :
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
With the fervour of thy lute :
Well may the stars be mute !

Yes, Heaven is thine ; but this
Is a world of sweets and sour ;
Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky.

IV

P O E'S next place of residence after West Point was Baltimore, where he boarded part of the time with his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, and her young daughter Virginia. He tried to make a start in the world, to earn his own living as best he could, but in vain. Nothing came of his application for a clerkship in the city, or for a mastership at a suburban school, just as a few years later he failed to secure a much-desired Government berth in the Customs department. Perforce, for one reason or another, all avenues of livelihood were barred to him except Grub Street and what it might lead to. He never liked the thought of writing for a living : " I would be glad to get almost any appointment . . . so that I have something independent of letters for a subsistence. To coin one's brain into silver, at the nod of a master, is to my thinking the hardest task in the world." Distaste for writing as a means of livelihood did not affect his absorbing love for literature. From this period he must be thought of as devoted to it exclusively, with no other professional interest. The last year of his life he wrote : " Right glad am I to find you once more in a true position—' in the field of letters.' Depend upon it, after all, Thomas, literature is the most noble of professions. In fact it is about the only one fit for a man. For my part, there is no seducing me from the path. I shall be a *littérateur* at least all my life ; nor would I

abandon the hopes which still lead me on for all the gold in California.”

The story of Poe's life, from these early attempts in Baltimore to the end of his days, is the story of his failure to get on in the world by means of his pen. Its tragedy does not hinge, as is widely supposed, on the rupture with his guardian ; much less, as hints thrown out by himself would imply, on the crossing of his path by real or imaginary enemies determined on his downfall ; but on the simple fact that there was such a small demand for what he had to sell. His friend, George R. Graham, summed up the situation :

“ The very natural question, ‘ Why did he not . . . thrive ? ’ is easily answered. It will not be *asked* by the many who know the precarious tenure by which literary men hold a mere living in this country. The avenues through which they can profitably reach the country are few. . . . The unfortunate tendency to cheapen every literary work to the lowest point of beggarly flimsiness in price and profit prevents even the well-disposed from extending anything like adequate support to even a part of the great throng. . . . The character of Poe's mind was of such an order as not to be very widely in demand. The class of educated mind which he could readily and profitably address was small—the channels through which he could do so at all were few—and publishers all, or nearly all, contented with such pens as were already engaged, hesitated to incur the expense

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of his to an extent which would sufficiently remunerate him. . . . Let the moralist who stands upon 'tufted carpet,' and surveys his smoking board, the fruits of his individual toil or mercantile adventure, pause before he lets the anathema trembling upon his lip fall upon a man like Poe, who, wandering from publisher to publisher with his fine print-like manuscript, scrupulously clean and neatly rolled, finds no market for his brain—with despair at heart, misery ahead for himself and his loved one, and gaunt famine dogging at his heels, thus sinks by the wayside, before the demon that watches his steps, and whispers oblivion.'

It is doubtful if Poe would have prospered more in England, since, even with distinguished sponsors, his persistent efforts for publication here seem to have met with all but complete failure. After his death he became one of the most popular authors of the century, his followers and imitators amassing large fortunes. But he starved, not more for want of acceptance than because the rate of payment was so mean and uncertain. The analogy is with the obscure inventor at least a generation in advance of his time, toiling for the enrichment of others. The product of the two years following West Point may almost be termed an invention, the opening up of an aspect with which we are not here concerned, but one just as original as his poetry and of enormous influence—the discovery of his genius for the short story.

When in the summer of 1838 the "Baltimore

Saturday Visitor " offered two prizes, one of a hundred, and one of fifty dollars, respectively, for the best tale and poem, the extent to which Poe embraced the opportunity, sending in six stories, shows how he had been spending his time. " A MS. found in a Bottle " took the larger prize. It was rumoured that " The Coliseum " (some lines of which, incidentally, were incorporated in " Politian, a dramatic fragment ") would have won the other, had the committee not deemed it inadvisable to award both to the same competitor.

THE COLISEUM

Type of the antique Rome ! Rich reliquary
 Of lofty contemplation left to Time
 By buried centuries of pomp and power !
 At length—at length—after so many days
 Of weary pilgrimage and burning thirst
 (Thirst for the springs of lore that in thee lie),
 I kneel, an altered and an humble man,
 Amid thy shadows, and so drink within
 My very soul thy grandeur, gloom, and glory.

Vastness, and Age, and Memories of Eld !
 Silence, and Desolation, and dim Night !
 I feel ye now, I feel ye in your strength,
 O spells more sure than e'er Judæan king
 Taught in the gardens of Gethsemane !
 O charms more potent than the rapt Chaldee
 Ever drew down from out the quiet stars !

Here, where a hero fell, a column falls ;
 Here, where the mimic eagle glared in gold,
 A midnight vigil holds the swarthy bat ;

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Here, where the dames of Rome their gilded hair
Waved to the wind, now wave the reed and thistle ;
Here, where on golden throne the monarch lolled,
Glides, spectre-like, unto his marble home,
Lit by the wan light of the hornèd moon,
The swift and silent lizard of the stones.

But stay ! these walls, these ivy-clad arcades,
These mouldering plinths, these sad and blackened
shafts,
These vague entablatures, this crumbling frieze,
These shattered cornices, this wreck, this ruin,
These stones—alas ! these grey stones—are they all,
All of the famed and the colossal left
By the corrosive Hours to Fate and me ?

“ Not all ”—the Echoes answer me—“ not all !
Prophetic sounds and loud arise forever
From us, and from all Ruin, unto the wise,
As melody from Memnon to the Sun.
We rule the hearts of mightiest men—we rule
With a despotic sway all giant minds.
We are not impotent, we pallid stones :
Not all our power is gone, not all our fame,
Not all the magic of our high renown,
Not all the wonder that encircles us,
Not all the mysteries that in us lie,
Not all the memories that hang upon
And cling around about us as a garment,
Clothing us in a robe of more than glory.”

The prose prize was the first step in Poe's fame. He emerged from almost complete obscurity to a rank among the few who constituted the literary set of the town, and it

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cemented, if it did not commence, his acquaintance with John P. Kennedy, one of the three judges of the competition. To him the young aspirant not only owed encouragement and advancement, but in his own words, "Mr. Kennedy has been at all times a true friend to me—he was the first true friend I ever had—I am indebted to him for life itself." Kennedy wrote in his diary, referring to 1833 or 1834 : "I gave him clothing, free access to my table, and the use of a horse for exercise whenever he chose ; in fact, brought him up from the very verge of despair." How fully Kennedy's assistance was needed, however, even he may not have realized before March 1835, when his invitation to dine received what has become perhaps the most frequently referred to of Poe's letters, one of the half-dozen images by which the story of his life is stamped on the popular imagination. "Your kind invitation to dinner to-day has wounded me to the quick. I cannot come—and for reasons of the most humiliating nature in my personal appearance. You may conceive my deep mortification in making this disclosure to you—but it was necessary. If you will be my friend so far as to loan me twenty dollars, I will call on you to-morrow—otherwise it will be impossible, and I must submit to my fate." It was this disclosure that aroused Kennedy's closer attention, and he became the immediate director of Poe's professional fortunes, communicating with this and that publisher on behalf of his protégé.

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Allan died March 27, 1834. A few months later Poe wrote to Kennedy : " Since the day you first saw me my situation in life has altered materially. At that time I looked forward to the inheritance of a large fortune, and in the meantime was in receipt of an annuity sufficient for my support. This was allowed me by a gentleman of Virginia (Mr. Jno. Allan), who adopted me at the age of two years, both my parents being dead, and who until recently always treated me with the affection of a father. But a second marriage on his part, and I dare say many follies on my own, at length ended in a quarrel between us. He is now dead, and has left me nothing."

This letter, illustrative of Poe's untrustworthiness in autobiography, calls for a word on the relation between Allan and his charge. In the first place Allan took the orphan in reluctantly, and only to gratify his wife. Had she lived, matters would assuredly have taken a different course between her husband and his ward. The Baltimore relatives soon got the impression that the Allans intended to adopt the infant legally, and probably Allan's indifference gave place to satisfaction when William Ewing, Edgar's first schoolmaster, remarked his charm, and the child's great beauty and vivacity became the subject of general comment. Allan was especially pleased with the lad during the English years, writing home repeatedly that he is a " fine boy," mentioning his " good reputation," his ability and willingness " to receive

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instruction," and with increasing warmth—"he is a very fine boy and a good scholar."

But by the time Edgar was fifteen, Allan's attitude towards him had changed. Writing in November 1824, he says: "For me he does nothing, and seems quite miserable, sulky, and ill-tempered to all the family. How we have acted to produce this is beyond my conception: why I have put up so long with his conduct is little less wonderful. The boy possesses not a spark of affection for us, not a particle of gratitude for all my care and kindness towards him. I have given [him] a much superior education than ever I received myself. . . . I fear his associates have led him to adopt a line of thinking and acting very contrary to what he possessed when in England. . . . Had I done my duty as faithfully to my God as I have to Edgar, then had Death come when he will he would have no terrors for me."

It is open to doubt if Allan felt equally conscience-free ten years later, although it does not seem that Poe left much undone to keep him in that frame of mind. Allan quite disliked his foster-son, from his sixteenth year, if not before, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Poe, unless self-deceived, must have become aware thus early of the change of attitude and how it affected his own prospects; for every known act of the elder man defines more clearly his position. As Mr. Whitty says, Allan, "anxious to have Poe out of the way," sent him to the university. Later, to gratify his

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wife, he procured the young soldier's discharge from the army, thinking by the West Point appointment that he had made sure of not being bothered again—a not unreasonable assumption, since during these years there must have passed months at a time when all communication between the two seemed to both to be definitely closed.

The impression that Allan tried again and again to get rid of Poe and was deterred by Mrs. Allan, in whose death early in 1829 Poe lost his strongest hold upon her husband's consideration, is strengthened by the impersonal tone of a letter in May of the same year from the foster-father to the Secretary of War : “. . . Frankly, Sir, do I declare that he is no relation to me whatever ; that I have many in whom I have taken an interest to promote theirs ; with no other feeling than that every man is my care if he be in distress. For myself I ask nothing, but I do request your kindness to this youth in the promotion of his future prospects. And it will afford me great pleasure to reciprocate any kindness you can show him.”

Not only is there no mention of the author of this letter having brought up its subject from infancy, but it classes him merely as one of the objects of his common charity ; and it was written previous to the second marriage, which took place a year from the following October, while Poe was at West Point. The second Mrs. Allan was thirty years of age, and of her three children the first, a son, was born in 1831, and

hence was three years old when Poe wrote that he himself looked forward to the inheritance of a large fortune.

During his fatal illness Allan declined to see his foster-son, although he sent him remittances, small, and perhaps irregularly, up to the end. He regarded him as ungrateful, reckless and untrustworthy. The second Mrs. Allan considered him thoroughly bad. On the other hand, the first wife and her sister, Miss Valentine, as well as the MacKenzies, took a much kindlier view. These two conflicting traditions still flourish side by side in Virginia. Judgment may well be suspended, however, until Poe's letters to the Allans, together with other private papers, have been made public.

V

IN 1835 Kennedy called the attention of T. W. White, editor of the "Southern Literary Messenger," to Poe, who, after a few months as regular contributor, was offered a position on the office staff, necessitating change of residence from Baltimore to Richmond. From the first he was prolific, and as editor in all but name was pre-eminently successful. The rise in the "Messenger's" circulation from five hundred to twenty-five hundred copies was directly due to his connexion with it, especially to his critical essays, which, together with the poetry and the tales, point the range of his genius. Of the three they

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had the largest share in his professional or worldly success. By his poetry alone he would have lived until near the close of his life in obscurity; the tales, notwithstanding their early laurels, made no appeal to the general reader. It was through book reviewing that he first won wide recognition, and he gained respect as the first of his compatriots to consider literature independently of advertising. Coleridge was his model in criticism, as Byron and Moore had been in his early verse. But just as in the poems and the tales he worked out his own salvation, arriving at uniqueness, he so developed and expounded certain criteria as to entitle him to the credit of pioneering in this field. His critical limitations, such as depreciation of the classics, are too obvious to require comment.

Yet, since the man is behind every page, we may pause for a moment over this aspect of his work as indicative of his mental and moral character. Herein may be found a variety of petty vices to which literary genius is liable, such as unwarranted assumption of learning, many forms and degrees of pride, provincial antipathies, prejudices, spleen—which pass before the eyes as in a morality. Because of the note of denunciation in some memorable passages the erroneous notion is current that the writer was a master of abuse and of abuse only. It would, on the contrary, be slightly nearer the truth to say that he erred too frequently in over-praise. In fact, so conspicuous are Poe's common vices that they somewhat

hide his rare complementary virtues. For a self-styled victim of whim, he was surprisingly painstaking and thorough, and his patience was extraordinary. His reviews disclose unfailing curiosity, inexhaustible resourcefulness, intellectual honesty, and an unfaltering pursuit of beauty ; while, in spite of some wild mistakes, he exhibited one of the cardinal qualities of a great reviewer—quickness and certainty in the recognition of unknown genius. Finally, as critic, he is quite the most edifying commentator imaginable on himself as artist, there being perhaps no better example in English letters of analytic and creative power, of theory and practice, marching hand in hand.

This explains the nature of his criticism. It was the latest of his gifts to assume form, and may be conjectured to have arisen unconsciously from his need to justify his verse and tales to himself. At least it gradually developed into the application in minute detail of principles of composition which he practised. In other words, it was fundamentally technical, and as such, taken in conjunction with his tales and poems, strongly indicates his foreign predilections. For Poe was not only non-Anglo-Saxon, but it has been ably maintained that even in genius, as indubitably in his interests, he was akin to the French. The argument is partly grounded upon his intense absorption in the processes of the arts of poetry and prose.

Poe had not been long in Richmond before his letters call attention to a new experience in

his life—ill-health. As a boy he had been rugged ; he was still strong when at the university, in the army, and at West Point. But from his twenty-sixth year, again and again, although at irregular and infrequent intervals, he became subject to attacks of nervous exhaustion, leading to complete collapse, always accompanied by melancholia, and sometimes by delirium, when he fancied himself pursued by enemies.

How he came by this weakness, what stuff 'twas made of, we are yet to learn. Heredity must have been partly responsible, since the mother, and probably the father, died young, as well as the dissipated brother, while the sister to the end of a long life remained in a state of arrested mental development. Granting that Poe himself, as collegian and cadet, may not, as compared with many of his associates, have been intemperate, it is nevertheless possible that between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two he drank enough to impair permanently his sensitive constitution. Then he went to Baltimore, where he is said to have nearly died of starvation, after which, without regard to succeeding years of poverty, his early health must have been past recall.

The part that drink and drugs played in his undoing, to what extent they were the cause, the effect of, or the refuge from fits of depression, is difficult to determine ; but there was some intimate connexion between intoxicants and delirium. It is also difficult to determine how

alcohol and opium influenced his work. Limiting ourselves to the poems, I do not believe that they were different in kind from what they would have been had he not resorted to stimulants. Morbidity was inherent in his constitution; in his own words, his was a "funereal mind." The sameness of theme from first to last was natural to him, and in most instances it must have generated itself without artificial agency, and if one or two exceptions might be cited, they would only go to prove that his genius could not be deflected from its normal orbit. Be the original inspiration what it may, each poem was subjected to so much revision that, as it stands, it is a product of calm perseverance and sobriety. Poe in daily routine was of simple, childlike habits and tastes, living for months at a time with apparent contentment upon frugal fare. He was never an habitual drunkard, but rather a regular abstainer with irregular lapses, not always to excess, but always in danger of excess. He was, moreover, fatally prone to indulge in these lapses inopportunistly, under circumstances tending to do him much harm, such as once during a visit to Washington, as a candidate for a Government position. That piquant irony which is so noticeable in Poe's life is not lacking in connexion with this trait in that theoretically he was a Prohibitionist, and actually a member of the "Sons of Temperance."

As a direct result of ill-health, low spirits, and consequent behaviour, Poe's first editorial

venture was brief. He left his employer, who wrote to a friend that the young man's habits were not good, and that he was so melancholic that he—White—would not be surprised to hear of his suicide. Eventually a petition to be reinstated was granted, but not without a word of advice: If again "you should be an assistant in my office, it must be especially understood by us that all engagements on my part would be dissolved the moment you get drunk. No man is safe that drinks before breakfast. No man can do so and attend to business properly." In the short interval, however, Poe was evidently in a desperate mood, but instead of committing suicide, the very day after White suggested the possibility, his assistant did something almost as rash—he took out licence papers to marry, and with his fiancée, Virginia Eliza Clemm, and her mother, returned from Baltimore to Richmond, where the following May the wedding took place. It is not definitely known whether or not this was preceded by a private marriage. The union was a family affair, his wife being his cousin, and his mother-in-law his aunt. The bride was a beautiful but sickly girl not yet fourteen, mated with a groom twice her age. The marriage was strenuously opposed by near relatives, but it appears to have turned out better than might have been expected, at least for the man. One can but believe that it was Mrs. Clemm who brought it to pass, for she was the prop of the family, with the most practical common sense of the three, and when need

arose, warded off their impecunious fate as best she could by sewing and taking in boarders. Virginia idolized her husband, and submitted complacently, seemingly now and then with approval, to that series of romantic friendships in which he indulged.

He always preferred the society of women to that of his own sex, taking advantage of his fascination over them, not as a Don Juan, but as a philanderer. Since objects of his affection were numerous and transitory, over-much importance is not to be attached to the names of the worthy ladies to whom he addressed verses, for, except in those rare cases where the context or other evidence points to but a single source, the poet's love-poems are composite and impersonal. The first draft may have been called forth by his feeling for some one of his inamoratas, which served its purpose in arousing the mood of composition. He frequently adapted succeeding revisions to the exigencies of gallantry, altering a phrase here and there, and of course changing the inscription.

A case in point is the interchange of slight but tender effusions in prose and verse which passed between Poe and Mrs. Frances Sargent Osgood, who had resided in London where she had published a volume of poems. Poe praised her work in lectures and in reviews, and in 1845 addressed to her the following verse, which was originally written in his wife's album. Among the textual changes involved

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was a suppression of the "Eliza" of Virginia's name.

TO F——s S. O——d

Thou wouldst be loved ?—then let thy heart
From its present pathway part not :
Being everything which now thou art,
Be nothing which thou art not.
So with the world thy gentle ways,
Thy grace, thy more than beauty,
Shall be an endless theme of praise,
And love—a simple duty ;

It will be seen from the following selections how futile in general would be the effort to trace to a concrete source verses addressed to real or imaginary ladies.

TO ——

The bowers whereat, in dreams, I see
The wantonest singing birds,
Are lips—and all thy melody
Of lip-begotten words.

Thine eyes, in Heaven of heart enshrined,
Then desolately fall,
O God ! on my funereal mind
Like starlight on a pall ;

Thy heart—*thy* heart !—I wake and sigh,
And sleep to dream till day
Of the truth that gold can never buy,
Of the bawbles that it may.

TO ——

I heed not that my earthly lot
 Hath little of Earth in it,
 That years of love have been forgot
 In the hatred of a minute :
 I mourn not that the desolate
 Are happier, sweet, than I,
 But that you sorrow for my fate
 Who am a passer-by.

TO F——

Beloved ! amid the earnest woes
 That crowd around my earthly path
 (Drear path, alas ! where grows
 Not even one lonely rose),
 My soul at least a solace hath
 In dreams of thee, and therein knows
 An Eden of bland repose.

And thus thy memory is to me
 Like some enchanted far-off isle
 In some tumultuous sea,—
 Some ocean throbbing far and free
 With storms, but where meanwhile
 Serenest skies continually
 Just o'er that one bright island smile.

TO ONE IN PARADISE

Thou wast all that to me, love,
 For which my soul did pine :
 A green isle in the sea, love,
 A fountain and a shrine
 All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,
 And all the flowers were mine.

Ah, dream too bright to last !

Ah, starry Hope, that didst arise
But to be overcast !

A voice from out the Future cries,
“ On ! on ! ”—but o’er the Past
(Dim gulf !) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast.

For, alas ! alas ! with me
The light of Life is o’er !
No more—no more—no more—
(Such language holds the solemn sea
To the sands upon the shore)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar.

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams.

EULALIE—A SONG

I dwelt alone
In a world of moan,
And my soul was a stagnant tide,
Till the fair and gentle Eulalie became my blushing
bride,
Till the yellow-haired young Eulalie became my
smiling bride.

Ah, less—less bright
The stars of the night

Than the eyes of the radiant girl !

And never a flake

That the vapour can make

With the moon-tints of purple and pearl

Can vie with the modest Eulalie's most unregarded
curl,

Can compare with the bright-eyed Eulalie's most
humble and careless curl.

Now doubt—now pain

Come never again,

For her soul gives me sigh for sigh ;

And all day long

Shines, bright and strong,

Astarte within the sky,

While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her matron
eye,

While ever to her young Eulalie upturns her violet
eye.

If it is impossible to probe to the personal genesis of these and other verses, they nevertheless form the basis of the poet's own interpretation of his emotions. He is almost exclusively a love poet in the sense that nearly always the song is sung to a woman. But varied as must have been his actual experience, he selected sorrow as the only phase for artistic embodiment. He pursued it with astonishingly undeviating precision, proclaiming in the Introduction to his third volume the obvious key to the majority of his poems which are merely the imaginative amplification of the sentiment :

I could not love except where Death
 Was mingling his with Beauty's breath,—
 Or Hymen, Time and Destiny
 Were stalking between her and me.

Mrs. Whitman thought that his wife was the only woman Poe truly loved, to whom, she was sure, "Annabel Lee," the simplest and sweetest of his ballads, was addressed.

ANNABEL LEE

It was many and many a year ago,
 In a kingdom by the sea,
 That a maiden there lived whom you may know
 By the name of Annabel Lee ;
 And this maiden she lived with no other thought
 Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
 In this 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 wingèd 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.

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The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me ;
Yes ! that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee. ✓

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we,
Of many far wiser than we ;
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee :

For the moon never beams, without bringing me
dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee ;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee ;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

It should not be thought, however, that Poe's fascination extended only over those to whom he made love. Although it is true that a succession of broken friendships with literary women resulted in his cursing the class, yet women generally, of diverse temperaments, of all ages, and of all degrees of acquaintance, became, and usually remained, his devoted admirers. Some very sympathetic reminiscences are in the diaries of young girls, who

saw him two or three times only, and then at friends' houses or in public. From the other extreme of intimacy stands Mrs. Clemm, who loved and served him best of all, and from whom, rather than from her daughter, came such intellectual companionship as his home afforded. Her devotion has thus been commemorated by Willis : " Winter after winter, the most touching sight to us, in this whole city, has been that tireless minister to genius, thinly and insufficiently clad, going from office to office with a poem, or an article on some literary subject, to sell—sometimes simply pleading in a broken voice that he was ill, and begging for him—mentioning nothing but that ' he was ill,' whatever might be the reason for his writing nothing ; and never, amid all her tears and recitals of distress, suffering one syllable to escape her lips that could convey a doubt of him, or a complaint, or a lessening of pride in his genius and good intentions. Her daughter died a year and a half since, but she did not desert him. She continued his ministering angel—living with him, caring for him, guarding him against exposure, and when he was carried away by temptation, amid grief and the loneliness of feelings unreplied to, and awoke from his self-abandonment prostrated in destitution and suffering, begging for him still." ✓

This loyalty, which was so perfectly reciprocated by her son-in-law, is voiced in his most touching sonnet :

TO MY MOTHER

Because I feel that, in the Heavens above,
 The angels, whispering to one another,
 Can find among their burning terms of love
 None so devotional as that of "Mother,"
 Therefore by that dear name I long have called you—
 You who are more than mother unto me,
 And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you
 In setting my Virginia's spirit free.
 My mother, my own mother, who died early,
 Was but the mother of myself ; but you
 Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
 And thus are dearer than the mother I knew
 By that infinity with which my wife
 Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.

In 1837 Poe resigned his position. He had rendered the "Messenger" brilliant and long-standing service, in view of which his employer would undoubtedly have tolerated even longer the rather demoralizing periods of his assistant's ill-health. The sub-editor, on his part, may have felt that he was insufficiently remunerated. The "Hymn" and "To Zante," in addition to "To F.," "To F—— O——," and "To One in Paradise," were first published during his connexion with this magazine.

HYMN

At morn—at noon—at twilight dim,
 Maria ! thou hast heard my hymn.
 In joy and woe, in good and ill,
 Mother of God, be with me still !

When the hours flew brightly by,
 And not a cloud obscured the sky,
 My soul, lest it should truant be,
 Thy grace did guide to thine and thee.
 Now, when storms of fate o'ercast
 Darkly my Present and my Past,
 Let my Future radiant shine
 With sweet hopes of thee and thine !

SONNET TO ZANTE

Fair isle, that from the fairest of all flowers
 Thy gentlest of all gentle names dost take,
 How many memories of what radiant hours
 At sight of thee and thine at once awake !
 How many scenes of what departed bliss,
 How many thoughts of what entombèd hopes,
 How many visions of a maiden that is
 No more—no more upon thy verdant slopes !
No more ! alas, that magical sad sound
 Transforming all ! Thy charms shall please
 no more,
 Thy memory no more. Accursèd ground !
 Henceforth I hold thy flower-enamelled shore,
 O hyacinthine isle ! O purple Zante !
 “ Isola d'oro ! Fior di Levante ! ”

Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were the three literary centres of the country. The first not appealing to the Southerner, he entered the Manhattan town presumably with the expectation of permanent employment on the “New York Review,” but his connexion with it was slight owing to a financial panic which affected the periodical. After a few obscure weeks there

he journeyed to Philadelphia, and it is probable that in the ensuing years as an unattached writer he had more leisure to think and brood than at any later time. In April 1839 appeared "The Haunted Palace." It is a part of the "Fall of the House of Usher," and, as Lowell said, "loses greatly by being taken out of its rich and appropriate setting. . . . Was ever the wreck and desolation of a noble mind so musically sung ?"

THE HAUNTED PALACE

In the greenest of our valleys
 By good angels tenanted,
 Once a fair and stately palace—
 Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion,
 It stood there ;
 Never seraph spread a pinion
 Over fabric half so fair.

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
 On its roof did float and flow
 (This—all this—was in the olden
 Time long ago),
 And every gentle air that dallied,
 In that sweet day,
 Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
 A wingèd odour went away.

Wanderers in that happy valley
 Through two luminous windows saw
 Spirits moving musically,
 To a lute's well-tunèd law,

Round about a throne where, sitting,
 Porphyro gene,
 In state his glory well befitting,
 The ruler of the realm was seen.

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

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
 Assailed the monarch's high estate ;
 (Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
 Shall dawn upon him desolate !)
 And round about his home the glory
 That blushed and bloomed,
 Is but a dim-remembered story
 Of the old time entombed.

And travellers now within that valley
 Through the red-litten windows see
 Vast forms that move fantastically
 To a discordant melody ;
 While, like a ghastly rapid river,
 Through the pale door
 A hideous throng rush out forever,
 And laugh—but smile no more.

In July the poet became associate editor of the periodical whose variable title was then "Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine and American

Monthly Review." The April 1840 issue contained "Silence."

SILENCE ¹

There are some qualities, some incorporate things,
 That have a double life, which thus is made
 A type of that twin entity which springs
 From matter and light, evinced in solid and shade.
 There is a twofold Silence—sea and shore,
 Body and soul. One dwells in lonely places,
 Newly with grass o'ergrown ; some solemn graces,
 Some human memories and tearful lore,
 Render him terrorless : his name's " No More."
 He is the corporate Silence : dread him not :
 No power hath he of evil in himself ;
 But should some urgent fate (untimely lot !)
 Bring thee to meet his shadow (nameless elf,
 That haunteth the lone regions where hath trod
 No foot of man), commend thyself to God !

The return to the editorial desk after two years as a free lance was not accidental ; it denotes the constancy of Poe's professional ideal as opposed to his somewhat errant pursuit of it. To be the proprietor and editor of a magazine became, in his own words, the grand passion of his life from which he never swerved for a moment. He repeatedly issued a prospectus of the review he wished to establish, altering it only in such minor details as the proposed name from the " Penn " to the " Stylus." Life-long the phantom hovered

¹ Cf. Mr. Whitty's edition of the Poems, pp. 223-4, for Poe's use of Hood's sonnet, " Silence,"

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over his spirit, making him restless and discontented with whatsoever positions he occupied, which he regarded merely as means to an end.

The main causes of the falling out between Burton and his subordinate after they had worked together for a year show the latter's discontent, and afford an instructive illustration of the truth that it takes two to make a quarrel. Burton was one of the leading comedians of the day, but needing funds to attain his ambition to become a theatrical manager, advertised the magazine for sale without confiding his intention to his subordinate, who, with reciprocal reticence, tried to launch his own monthly. He looked upon Burton as a blackguard and villain, but the latter felt more kindly towards Poe, remarking to Graham, who bought the magazine, "I want you to take care of my young editor." This new connexion was also of a year's duration. The proprietor was well aware of the young editor's ambition and held out hopes of satisfying it. But to Poe's chagrin, his presence on "Graham's Magazine" resulted in making it surprisingly successful. It had opened in January 1841 with a circulation of eight thousand, which by July had risen to seventeen, by December to twenty-five, until in March 1842 it reached forty thousand. Poe had, however, no proprietary interest, and under the circumstances there was no reason why Graham should back him in a separate venture. The resignation was effected without breaking the amicable

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relation with the owner, who became his chief masculine eulogist.

VI

EARLY in life Poe formed the habit of entering into correspondence with men of letters, and it seems curious since his notes were numerous and covered a wide territory that they should in no case have struck such a spark of intellectual companionship as arose, for instance, between Emerson and Carlyle. Of correspondents now known to fame his friendship with Lowell proved the most fruitful, although it did not endure. He had a couple of long conversations with Dickens when the novelist was in Philadelphia, and there was some interchange of letters, which, however, came to nought. He is remembered in connexion with Dickens principally through an example of that analytical power which is the distinguishing mark of his tales of ratiocination. From meagre details he is alleged to have foretold the plot of "Barnaby Rudge"—a feat which is said to have so surprised its author that he asked if Poe were the devil. It is needless to say that he had a penchant for ciphers, cryptograms, and puzzles of all sorts.

In these Philadelphia years Poe waged that attack upon a fellow-poet which later in New York developed into the "Longfellow war." He imagined himself to be injured, declaring, "By 'The Haunted Palace' I mean a disordered brain, and Professor Longfellow means

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the same thing by 'The Beleaguered City' . . . the whole tournure of the poem is based upon mine, as you will see at once. The allegorical conduct, the style of its versification and expression—all are mine." Again, he instanced Tennyson's "The Death of the Old Year" as a source of "The Midnight Mass for the Dying Year." This he stigmatized as of "the most barbarous class of literary robbery; that class in which, while the words of the wronged author are avoided, his most intangible and therefore his least defensible and least reclaimable property is purloined." As these citations show, their writer was a monomaniac on the subject of plagiarism, not only imagining it where it did not exist, but being inclined to attribute slight accidental similarity between two poems to conscious imitation. There is no reason to suspect his sincerity. In the main, where it did not affect his monomania, Poe's appreciation of the attacked poet was both just and cordial, and the whole affair may be dismissed in Longfellow's gracious words: "The harshness of his criticisms I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature chafed by some indefinable sense of wrong."

The Rev. Rufus W. Griswold, who is also known to students of American literature by his historically invaluable compilations of its early verse and prose, was the most promising editor to assure a favourable publication to Poe's works, which the poet asked him to undertake,

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disregarding the fact that he once ridiculed Griswold in a public lecture, and that each held but a poor private opinion of the other. Literary executorship is usually a labour either of love or of pecuniary remuneration. In this case, being neither, it was fulfilled in a spirit which was, to say the least, not friendly—a defect which, it is alleged, assures the author of the first “Memoir” an “immortality of infamy,” branding him as Poe’s “evil angel.”

This is not the place to remark the unfortunate element thus introduced by Griswold in the poet’s posthumous reputation. There is no escaping, however, from the disasters of his life. Perhaps the greatest of these—the domestic tragedy—began in 1841. In answer to the question as to whether he could hint the “terrible evil” which was the cause of his irregularities, he wrote :

“Yes, I can do more than hint. This ‘evil’ was the greatest which can befall a man. Six years ago a wife whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood-vessel in singing. Her life was despaired of. I took leave of her for ever, and underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially, and I again hoped. I went through precisely the same scene. . . . Then again—again—and even once again, at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death—and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity. But I am constitutionally sensitive—nervous in a

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very unusual degree. I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank—God only 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.”¹

In spite of this cloud over the family which gathered in Philadelphia, one hears of Virginia at harp or piano entertaining their friends, and there were some months there when they were apparently more comfortable than they ever were again. Yet, on the whole, the poet had not prospered in the Quaker City, and in 1844 he removed to New York to seek his fortune anew. In that town or one of its suburbs, with the exception of a few journeys of short duration, he passed the remaining five years of his life, but with no more worldly success than elsewhere.

A few months intervened before he secured a situation as “mechanical paragrapher” on the “Evening Mirror,” the editor of which was N. P. Willis. The “paragrapher” was virtually a sub-editor. The pay was small, the labour perfunctory, and the spirit of the poet himself, compelled to subdue his uneven temper to the bland geniality of his superior in such ways as in toning down the severity of book reviews, chafed him. It has justly been called a striking instance of Pegasus in harness. When Poe left he said that “Willis was too Willissy” for him.

¹ Copyright by J. H. Ingram.

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But though their relationship was never close, the latter's championship of Poe's virtues during his life and after was constant and influential.

In 1845, after serving for a while as co-editor, Poe became the editor and proprietor of a magazine—the "Broadway Journal"—thus nominally reaching the height of his worldly ambition. The attainment was merely nominal, for a few issues only, and terminated in bankruptcy. He appealed in vain for sufficient funds to start it aright and to keep it afloat. One of the creditors was Horace Greeley, who recalled with grim humour an incident in this connexion. "Among my literary treasures," he wrote to "a gushing youth" who asked him if he had, and to spare, a Poe autograph, "there happens to be exactly one autograph of our country's late lamented poet, Edgar A. Poe. It is his note of hand for fifty dollars, with my endorsement across the back. It cost me exactly fifty dollars and seventy-five cents (including protest), and you may have it for half that amount."

Failure, however, had no power unto the end to dull Poe's vision of a magazine of his own. He once made to Lowell the idealistic suggestion that all the leading authors in the land should contribute to and own a single periodical. He had his pet hobby in mind when he wrote to Mrs. Whitman about their forming together an aristocracy of intellect. In one of the last phases of his last courtship, Mrs. Shelton complained that he desired her not for herself alone but for her money to carry on the "Stylus." And just

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before he died he contemplated removing to St. Louis, having opened up negotiations with a Middle Westerner in regard to the same old project.

VII

LIKE Byron, Poe awoke one morning to find himself famous. The success of "The Raven," published in the "Evening Mirror," January 29, 1845, from advance sheets of the February issue of the "American Whig Review," was so unprecedented, spreading rapidly from its instantaneous local reception to London drawing-rooms and to Paris salons, that it has been alleged that "no brief poem ever established itself so immediately, so widely, and so imperishably in men's minds." The poet said that the bird was originally an owl, and that for more than ten years there lay in his desk the unfinished poem, on which he worked intermittently. The true germ of the present form, however, is contained in "Graham's," for February 1842, where, in a review of "Barnaby Rudge," Poe suggested that the raven therein might have performed the same part in regard to the idiot that he evolved between his own raven and the lover.¹ Fledgeling or full grown, the fowl seems to have been flying

¹ "However much of 'The Raven,'" writes Professor Page, "may have been suggested by Poe's predecessor, it suggested even more to his followers. The most important instance [in English] is perhaps to be found . . . in 'The Blessed Damozel.'" Mr. Caine quotes Rossetti as saying: "I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth and I determined to reverse the condition, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven."

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if not croaking, from office to office at least a year before it found a perch.

An acquaintance of the poet recalls that he saw "The Raven" long before it was published: "I was in Graham's office when the poem was offered to him. Poe said that his wife and Mrs. Clemm were starving, and that he was in very pressing need of the money. I carried him fifteen dollars contributed by Mr. Graham, Mr. Godey, Mr. McMichael, and others, who condemned the poem but gave the money as a charity."

THE RAVEN

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak
and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten
lore,—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came
a tapping,

As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber
door.

"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my
chamber door :

Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak
December,

And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost
upon the floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow ;—vainly I had sought
to borrow

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From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the
lost Lenore,
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels
name Lenore :

Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple
curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt
before ;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood
repeating
“ ’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door,
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door :

This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger ; hesitating then no
longer,
“ Sir,” said I, “ or Madam, truly your forgiveness I
implore ;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came
rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my
chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you ”—here I opened
wide the door :—

Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there
wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to
dream before ;

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But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave
no token,

And the only word there spoken was the whispered
word, " Lenore ? "

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the
word, " Lenore " :

Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me
burning,

Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than
before.

" Surely," said I, " surely that is something at my
window lattice ;

Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery
explore ;

Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery
explore :

'Tis the wind and nothing more."

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt
and flutter,

In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of
yore.

Not the least obeisance made he ; not a minute stopped
or stayed he ;

But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my
chamber door,

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber
door :

Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into
smiling

By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it
wore,—

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“ Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said,
“ art sure no craven,

Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the
Nightly shore :

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s
Plutonian shore ! ”

Quoth the Raven, “ Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse
so plainly,

Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy
bore ;

For we cannot help agreeing that no living human
being

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his
chamber door,

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his
chamber door,

With such name as “ Nevermore.”

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke
only

That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did
outpour.

Nothing further then he uttered, not a feather then he
fluttered,

Till I scarcely more than muttered,—“ Other friends
have flown before ;

On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have
flown before.”

Then the bird said, “ Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
“ Doubtless,” said I, “ what it utters is its only stock
and store,

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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—nevermore.' "

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and
bust and door ;

Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to
linking

Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of
yore,

What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous
bird of yore

Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable ex-
pressing

To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my
bosom's core ;

This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease
reclining

On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light
gloated o'er,

But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light
gloating o'er

She shall press, ah, nevermore !

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from
an unseen censer

Swung by seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the
tufted floor.

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“ Wretch,” I cried, “ thy God hath lent thee—by these
angels he hath sent thee

Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of
Lenore !

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost
Lenore ! ”

Quoth the Raven, “ Nevermore.”

“ Prophet ! ” said I, “ thing of evil ! prophet still, if
bird or devil !

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee
here ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land en-
chanted—

On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I
implore :

Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead ?—tell me—tell me,
I implore ! ”

Quoth the Raven, “ Nevermore.”

“ Prophet ! ” said I, “ thing of evil—prophet still, if
bird or devil !

By that Heaven that bends above us, by that God we
both adore,

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant
Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name
Lenore :

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name
Lenore ! ”

Quoth the Raven, “ Nevermore.”

“ Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend ! ”
I shrieked, upstarting :

“ Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s
Plutonian shore !

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Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul
hath spoken !

Leave my loneliness unbroken ! quit the bust above
my door !

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form
from off my door ! ”

Quoth the Raven, “ Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is
sitting

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber
door ;

And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is
dreaming,

And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his
shadow on the floor :

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on
the floor

Shall be lifted—nevermore !

On the last day of the year 1845 appeared
“The Raven and Other Poems, by Edgar A.
Poe. Wiley and Putnam, New York.” It was
dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, whom
the author ranked as second only to Tennyson,
and from whom he received a letter, saying :
“Your ‘Raven’ has produced a sensation, a
‘fit horror’ here in England. Some of my
friends are taken by the fear of it and some by
the music. I hear of persons haunted by the
‘Nevermore,’ and one acquaintance of mine
who has the misfortune of possessing a ‘bust of
Pallas’ never can bear to look at it in the
twilight. I think you will like to hear that our

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great poet, Mr. Browning . . . was much struck by the rhythm of that poem.”

In the preface the poet speaks in dispraise of the contribution, saying that he thinks nothing in it of much value to the public or very creditable to himself : “ Events not to be controlled have prevented me from making, at any time, any serious effort in what, under happier circumstances, would have been the field of my choice. With me poetry has not been a purpose, but a passion ; and the passions should be held in reverence ; they must not—they cannot at will be excited, with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations of mankind.”

The volume contains the poetic labours of the author up to the close of the year, and although a few were to be added before his death, they illustrate fully his powers. It is probable also that even had he lived longer the grounds for his poetic reputation would have remained the same, as several months later he expressed the conviction that whereas he might yet surpass his own prose, he had written his best poems.

VIII

ONE effect of the poet's newly won popularity was to make him, in so far as his poverty and precarious health would allow, the lion of a New York season. Usually alone, but sometimes accompanied by his invalid wife, he attended the receptions of literary men

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and women. In a large company he was liable to feel the absence of perfect sympathy with which he was regarded, due partly to his reputation for being dissipated, partly to his own open criticisms of acquaintances, which in some instances roused their victims to active enmity. In such gatherings he was a noticeable figure. The broad retreating brow, large piercing eyes, and sensitive lips, together with the pallor of illness and privation, imparted an air of much distinction. The voice and manner, too, with double charm of actor ancestry and Southern boyhood, added particular impressiveness to his recitations of "The Raven."

The common element in the poems as a whole is so dominant that it seems well, following closely Professor Woodberry, to focus attention on it rather than to dissipate comment on individual specimens. "The Philosophy of Composition," whether or not based on fact in its analysis of "The Raven," is just as characteristic of Poe as the poem itself, and it is only one of many reminders that a consideration of his practice should begin with a brief summary of his theory. He believed, then, that of the pleasures that spring from Truth, or from Passion, or from Beauty, the last is the most pure, keen, and absorbing. In the moods aroused through the sentiment of beauty man is most clearly conscious of his eternal nature, and in the lifting up of his spirit under such influences penetrates to the divine. This power is possessed by all beauty in nature, but the

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suggestions of something fairer, beyond and above nature, which arise in its presence, stimulate man to attempt to reach this unknown loveliness, by recombining the elements he perceives, and thus, in imagination, to fashion by art, under the guidance of his own instinct, an ideal beauty which shall be a new and purer source of spiritual emotion. Creation of beauty is the end of all the fine arts, but in music and poetry it is most directly accomplished. It would, however, be an error to suppose that Poe, in thus adopting the doctrines of Coleridge and rejecting passion and truth and morality as poetic themes, meant to sever poetry from these others by distinct boundaries. On the contrary, he expressly states that "the incitements of Passion, the precepts of Duty, and even the lessons of Truth," may be advantageously introduced into a poem, if they are only subordinated and blended in by the skill of the artist who understands how to use them for the heightening of the effect of mere beauty. To beauty itself, furthermore, Poe assigns both a moral value, as lending attraction to virtue, and an intellectual value, as leading out to the mystical province of that truth which, withdrawn from the probing of the reason, is fathomed by the imagination alone. Poe was, in truth, devoted to a "mystical æstheticism," so strong was his religious conception of Beauty as foreshadowing the divine.

Among the minor articles of his creed it may be noted that a poem should aim at a single

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artistic effect, but not to the exclusion of a secondary suggested meaning ; and should be touched if possible by a certain quaintness, grotesqueness or peculiarity of rhythm or metre, to give it individuality. The single, though minor, tenet with which his name as critic is most popularly associated is that a long poem is a contradiction in terms.

But just as his theory of art has been attacked from his day to our own, so a discussion of his poetry becomes, perhaps, chiefly an answer to the persistent objections against it.

The first of these refers to its unreality. The scene that is like nothing in the world is illumined with a light that never was on sea or land. There is no nature element here as the phrase is applied in other poetry. The poet never regarded nature as anything but the crucible of his own fancies. To qualify his conceptions as unreal is merely to gather into a colourless word those dim tracts—out of space, out of time—where his spirit wandered. A second charge, of artificiality, although applicable only to the later work, strikes at the heart of a question on which he took a decided stand. His zeal for technical perfection means that no poet was ever less spontaneous in excellence than he. Since the last draft, preceded by innumerable alterations, was always an improvement on the first, the result is held to have given him an over-weening faith in the power of technique, *per se*, and to confine his distinction to being a consummate literary artist. The comment,

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broadly, contains much truth; but it has suffered from a too limited interpretation, almost as if it were the synonym for pseudo-lyrical clap-trap, an implication of superficiality foreign to Poe's art, which represented a training in the mechanism of his craft so thorough and so intelligent, impelled by an instinct so sure, that his two most famous and seemingly immortal poems may be designated as the least spontaneous and the most artificial. His resourcefulness in artifice is commonly so contrasted with the paucity of his creative faculty that there is danger of overlooking the fact—since an enduring work of art must begin with inspiration which cannot at will be excited—that Poe must have experienced generative moments during which he was an inspired poet.

In consideration of our latter-day confusion in the functions of the different arts which Poe's example undeniably precipitated, the most suggestive indictment against these verses is that they overstep the boundary between music and poetry. The well-founded charge refers only secondarily to the music of the verse, as the expression is commonly intended. In this sense Poe was, paradoxically, unmusical; for, in spite of the fact that his verse appeals peculiarly to musicians, by whom it has been extravagantly praised, readers sensitive to verbal melody have always insisted that his ear, at first noticeably defective, remained fallible to the end, even admitting many perfect passages to the contrary, and others remarkable for rhythmic

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movement. But the point of this special criticism is that in these verses sonorousness counts independently of its relation to the meaning of the words, at times seeming to become simply a volume of sound with an exclusively emotional appeal. The management of the refrain, the recurrence to the same vowels and to the same syllables, the variations of the one idea, as in "The Raven," or the repetitions of the same images as in "Ulalume," are some of the ways in which the poet appropriated the methods and effects of musical composition for his poetic purposes. He worked consciously and consistently to this end, and thus made his home in the borderland between music and poetry, recognizing in its mysterious vagueness his own element.

Fewness in number (for Poe did not write a dozen poems of the first rank, being known to the world at large only through "The Raven," coupled now and then with "The Bells," and more rarely with "Ulalume"), vagueness, lack of ideas, insubstantiality, sometimes obvious artifice, resemblance to musical composition—in brief, the stock censures applied to his work, he would have construed as praise in disguise, denying for the most part their relevancy to poetry in general, and to his in particular. He would assuredly have referred to his theory that the aim of the poet should be to bring about in others the state felt in himself, which in his case was one of brooding reverie. If in his prose tales he reiterated that he meant not to

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tell a story but to produce an effect; much more is it to be recognized that in poetry he aimed not to convey an idea but to produce an impression. The diversity of criticism upon his verse is largely due to the assumption that it can be measured intelligibly by any other than his own standard.

There is, however, a still more formidable charge than all the rest combined. It is morbidity. Poe's genius was developed in strength by brooding over a fixed idea as do the insane. Except in "Israfel," the theme of his imagination is ruin; the larger number of the few best poems illustrate the special phase of ruin which he declared the most poetic of all—the death of a beautiful woman; and when some other mode of expression was imperative, it was found only in such objective work as the marvellous allegories, "The Conqueror Worm" and "The Haunted Palace." In the poems generally the poetic uses of melancholy are so exalted that if one does not feel their spell at least at moments, "there are some regions of mortality unknown to him"; but if, like their maker, who forever stands relieved against an impenetrable background of shadow, one remains permanently fascinated, it is to forget Poe's own gospel of the ends of art, and not to perceive the meaning of the irony that, in M. Lauvriere's phrase, made the worshipper of beauty the poet of the outcast soul. It will thus be seen that, succeeding in all else, Poe's poems fail to fulfil the supreme condition of his own

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test. Instead of foreshadowing the divine, they foreshadow the infernal.

Second only in favour to "The Raven" is that "wonderful onomatopoeic experiment," "The Bells." A passage in Chateaubriand's "Genie du Christianisme," a book of which Poe made much and early use, has been suggested as the first seed of the poem. Frequent allusions to the mystical sound of bells throughout his work renders probable the assumption that, like so many of his pieces, it was long brooded over before it took on satisfactory form.¹ Mr. Ingram has related the immediate circumstances of the composition: "Poe wrote the first draft of 'The Bells' at Mrs. Shew's residence. 'One day he came in,' she records, 'and said, 'Marie Louise, I have to write a poem; I have no feeling, no sentiment, no inspiration.'" His hostess persuaded him to have some tea. It was served in the conservatory, the windows of which were open, and admitted the sound of neighbouring church bells. Mrs. Shew said, playfully, 'Here is paper'; but the poet, declining it, declared, 'I so dislike the sound of bells to-night, I cannot write. I have no subject—I am exhausted.' The lady then took up the pen and, pretending to mimic his style, wrote, 'The Bells, by E. A. Poe'; and then in pure sportiveness, 'The bells, the little silver bells,' Poe finishing off the stanza. She then suggested for the next verse, 'The heavy iron bells'; and

¹ Poe told a friend that his final inspiration for this poem was Dickens's "Chimes."

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this also Poe expanded into a stanza. He next copied out the complete poem, and headed it, 'By Mrs. M. L. Shew,' remarking that it was her poem, as she had suggested and composed so much of it." ¹

THE BELLS

I

Hear the sledges with the bells,
Silver bells!

What a world of merriment their melody foretells!

How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,

In the icy air of night!

While the stars, that oversprinkle

All the heavens, seem to twinkle

With a crystalline delight;

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells

From the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells—

From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells,

Golden bells!

What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!

Through the balmy air of night

How they ring out their delight!

From the molten-golden notes,

And all in tune,

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P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
 On the moon !
Oh, from out the sounding cells,
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells !
 How it swells !
 How it dwells
 On the Future ! how it tells
 Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
 Of the bells, bells, bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells !

III

Hear the loud alarum bells,
 Brazen bells !
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells !
 In the startled ear of night
 How they scream out their affright !
 Too much horrified to speak,
 They can only shriek, shriek,
 Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
 Leaping higher, higher, higher,
 With a desperate desire,
 And a resolute endeavour,
 Now—now to sit or never,
By the side of the pale-faced moon.
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells !
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of Despair !

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

How they clang, and clash, and roar !
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air !
Yet the ear it fully knows,
By the twanging
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows ;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,—
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells,
Of the bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
In the clamour and the clangour of the bells !

IV

Hear the tolling of the bells,
Iron bells !
What a world of solemn thought their monody
compels !
In the silence of the night
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone !
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats
Is a groan.
And the people—ah, the people,
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who tolling, tolling, tolling
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone—

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

They are neither man nor woman,
They are neither brute nor human,

They are Ghouls :

And their king it is who tolls ;

And he rolls, rolls, rolls,

Rolls

A pæan from the bells ;

And his merry bosom swells

With the pæan of the bells,

And he dances, and he yells :

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the pæan of the bells,

Of the bells :

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the throbbing of the bells

Of the bells, bells, bells—

To the sobbing of the bells ;

Keeping time, time, time,

As he knells, knells, knells,

In a happy Runic rhyme,

To the rolling of the bells,

Of the bells, bells, bells :

To the tolling of the bells,

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells—

To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

Fame, which was now his, did not in the least mitigate the pathos of the domestic scene. He was always in debt. When he was regularly employed, had he and his wife both been well, perhaps there would have been enough money to keep them from want. But there were many

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

months when Poe had no regular employment worthy the name. The result was need, the like of which is unparalleled in the annals of illustrious Americans. The direct cause of Virginia's death was starvation—insufficient clothes, insufficient food. The poverty of the household got into the papers, resulting in a small public contribution, in the humiliation of the recipient, and in his vain disclaimer. The family had removed in the spring of 1846 to a small cottage at Fordham, then fourteen miles from New York. In the autumn Mrs. Gove-Nichols visited them, and recalls the scene: Everything “was so neat, so purely clean, so scant and poverty-stricken, that I saw the poor sufferer with such a heartache as the poor feel for the poor. There was no clothing on the bed, which was only straw, but a snow-white counterpane and sheets. The weather was cold, and the sick lady had the dreadful chills that accompany the hectic fever of consumption. She lay on the straw bed, wrapped in her husband's great-coat, with a large tortoise-shell cat in her bosom. The wonderful cat seemed conscious of her great usefulness. The coat and the cat were the sufferer's only means of warmth, except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet.” Virginia died January 30, 1847. Poe was very ill and his life almost despaired of. Mrs. Clemm was assisted in ministering to him by Mrs. Shew, who had some medical training. She decided that Poe “in his best health, had lesion of one side of the brain. . . . As he could

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not bear stimulants or tonics without producing [temporary] insanity, I did not feel much hope that he could be raised up from brain fever brought on from extreme suffering of mind and body,—actual want and hunger and cold having been borne by this heroic husband in order to supply food and medicine . . . to his dying wife, until exhaustion and lifelessness were so near at every reaction of the fever, that even sedatives had to be administered with extreme caution.”

“Many times,” wrote his friend Charles Burr, “after the death of his beloved wife, was he found at the dead hour of a winter night, sitting beside her tomb almost frozen in the snow, where he had wandered from his bed, weeping and wailing.” “Ulalume,” published December 1847, like “The Raven,” anonymously, is therefore allegorized autobiography. That, to most readers, it is unintelligible, mere melodious nonsense, suggestive of humour rather than pathos, only shows how far the poet was now removed, through one or another influence, from normal humanity. Yet from a consideration of its imperfections as well as of its essence, it has been called “the most spontaneous, the most unmistakably genuine utterance of Poe, the most clearly self-portraying work of his hand.” Regarded, then, as affording the extremest form of his essential genius, isolated in the main from other distracting features, but representative of the crux of the Poesque, it is appropriate to try to indicate its nature by

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re-stating the self-set goal of the poet as solely to transmit or to produce a mood. For this purpose he resorted, strictly speaking, to incantation, handling the refrain like a wand, to evoke a spirit, and thus to cast a spell. Repetition to the point of droning monotony follows as a matter of intention; through it alone is success possible. The formula itself gives the impression of being perfectly clear to the poet and of being remote to the reader. In "Ulalume" the thought moves so slowly, with such slight advances from its initial stage, with such indistinguishable deepening of tone, that it only just keeps wearily in action. The whole question is—Does the spell work? Or are not the majority of readers as unmoved as an infidel by ritual? But upon some surely, in moments of susceptibility, the effect is magical. It dulls the mind's eye, and while apparently lulling the senses, provokes a mysterious emotional excitement, under which the spell is cast and the spirit evoked, enveloped in physical exhaustion and mental gloom.

ULALUME

The skies they were ashen and sober ;
The leaves they were crisped and sere,
The leaves they were withering and sere ;
It was night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year ;
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir ;
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

Here once, through an alley Titanic
Of cypress, I roamed with my soul—
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll,
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
In the ultimate climes of the pole,
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober,
But our thoughts they were palsied and sere,
Our memories were treacherous and sere,
For we knew not the month was October,
And we marked not the night of the year,
(Ah, night of all nights in the year !)
We noted not the dim lake of Auber
(Though once we had journeyed down here),
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

And now, as the night was senescent
And star-dials pointed to morn,
As the star-dials hinted of morn,
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn,
Astarte's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.

And I said—" She is warmer than Dian :
She rolls through an ether of sighs,
She revels in a region of sighs :

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

She has seen that the tears are not dry on
These cheeks, where the worm never dies,
And has come past the stars of the Lion
To point us the path of the skies,
To the Lethean peace of the skies ;
Come up, in despite of the Lion,
To shine on us with her bright eyes :
Come up through the lair of the Lion,
With love in her luminous eyes."

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
Said—" Sadly this star I mistrust,
Her pallor I strangely mistrust :
Oh, hasten !—oh, let us not linger !
Oh, fly !—let us fly !—for we must."
In terror she spoke, letting sink her
Wings until they trailed in the dust ;
In agony sobbed, letting sink her
Plumes till they trailed in the dust,
Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

I replied—" This is nothing but dreaming :
Let us on by this tremulous light !
Let us bathe in this crystalline light !
Its sibyllic splendour is beaming
With hope and in beauty to-night :
See, it flickers up the sky through the night !
Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,
And be sure it will lead us aright :
We safely may trust to a gleaming
That cannot but guide us aright,
Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night."

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
And tempted her out of her gloom,
And conquered her scruples and gloom ;

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

And we passed to the end of the vista,
 But were stopped by the door of a tomb,
 By the door of a legended tomb ;
 And I said—" What is written, sweet sister,
 On the door of this legended tomb ? "
 She replied—" Ulalume—Ulalume—
 'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume ! "

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
 As the leaves that were crispèd and sere,
 As the leaves that were withering and sere,
 And I cried—" It was surely October
 On this very night of last year
 That I journeyed—I journeyed down here,
 That I brought a dread burden down here :
 On this night of all nights in the year,
 Ah, what demon has tempted me here ?
 Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber,
 This misty mid region of Weir :
 Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber,
 This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

Said *we*, then—the two, then—" Ah, can it
 Have been that the woodlandish ghouls—
 The pitiful, the merciful ghouls—
 To bar up our way and to ban it
 From the secret that lies in these wolds—
 From the thing that lies hidden in these wolds—
 Have drawn up the spectre of a planet
 From the limbo of lunary souls,
 This sinfully scintillant planet
 From the Hell of the planetary souls ? "

Poe wrote to a lady, September, 1849 : " I fear you will find the verses scarcely more intelligible to-day than last night in my recitation. I would endeavour to explain to you what I really meant—or what I fancied I meant, if it were not that I remembered Dr. Johnson's bitter and rather just remark about the folly of explaining what, if worth explanation, would explain itself."

POE & HIS POETRY

The melancholy period of the last illness and death of Virginia was relieved by a successful libel suit and £45 damages, recovered from Thomas Dunn English, now remembered as the author of "Ben Bolt"; by echoes of Poe's budding reputation in Europe, and by the solicitude of friends. One of these advised re-marriage, with the warning that the poet could be saved from sudden death only by a prudent, calm life with a woman who had sufficient strength and affection to manage his affairs. Whether or not directly influenced by the hint, the two remaining years present the pathetic spectacle of the widower living much as before, alternating between dejection and hopefulness, tolerable health and intolerable relapses, but attributing, with increasing grimness, all his misfortunes to poverty, concluding the escape to be matrimony, and acting accordingly.

Three women in especial are associated with his widowerhood, for one of whom, at least, although married, he had a spontaneous and disinterested affection. She was Mrs. Richmond—"Annie"—"the only being in the whole world whom I have loved at the same time with truth and with purity." He vividly pictured her and her home in the tale, "Landor's Cottage," and inscribed to her the poem "For Annie," which he himself considered "much the best" he ever wrote. The last two lines of the first stanza were suggested by Longfellow as an inscription for the monument erected over Poe's grave.

FOR ANNIE

Thank Heaven ! the crisis,
 The danger, is past,
 And the lingering illness
 Is over at last,
 And the fever called " Living " ✓
 Is conquered at last. ✓

Sadly I know
 I am shorn of my strength,
 And no muscle I move
 As I lie at full length :
 But no matter !—I feel
 I am better at length.

And I rest so composedly
 Now, in my bed,
 That any beholder
 Might fancy me dead,
 Might start at beholding me,
 Thinking me dead.

The moaning and groaning,
 The sighing and sobbing,
 Are quieted now,
 With that horrible throbbing
 At heart :—ah, that horrible,
 Horrible throbbing !

The sickness, the nausea,
 The pitiless pain,
 Have ceased, with the fever
 That maddened my brain,
 With the fever called " Living " ✓
 That burned in my brain.

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

And oh ! of all tortures,
 That torture the worst
 Has abated—the terrible
 Torture of thirst
 For the naphthaline river
 Of Passion accurst :
 I have drank of a water
 That quenches all thirst :

Of a water that flows,
 With a lullaby sound,
 From a spring but a very few
 Feet under ground,
 From a cavern not very far
 Down under ground.

And ah ! let it never
 Be foolishly said
 That my room it is gloomy,
 And narrow my bed ;
 For man never slept
 In a different bed :
 And, *to sleep*, you must slumber
 In just such a bed.

My tantalized spirit
 Here blandly reposes,
 Forgetting, or never
 Regretting, its roses :
 Its old agitations
 Of myrtles and roses ;

For now, while so quietly
 Lying, it fancies
 A holier odour
 About it, of pansies :

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

A rosemary odour,
Commingled with pansies,
With rue and the beautiful
Puritan pansies.

And so it lies happily,
Bathing in many
A dream of the truth
And the beauty of Annie,
Drowned in a bath
Of the tresses of Annie.

She tenderly kissed me,
She fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
To sleep on her breast,
Deeply to sleep
From the heaven of her breast.

When the light was extinguished,
She covered me warm,
And she prayed to the angels
To keep me from harm,
To the queen of the angels
To shield me from harm.

And I lie so composedly
Now, in my bed
(Knowing her love)
That you fancy me dead ;
And I rest so contentedly
Now, in my bed,
(With her love at my breast)
That you fancy me dead,
That you shudder to look at me
Thinking me dead.

But my heart it is brighter
 Than all of the many
 Stars in the sky,
 For it sparkles with Annie :
 It glows with the light
 Of the love of my Annie,
 With the thought of the light
 Of the eyes of my Annie.

His last fiancée (who believed herself engaged to him at the time of his death, and donned mourning when the news reached her), was none other than his early love, Sarah Royster, now Mrs. Shelton, who is said to have married another under the erroneous impression that Poe had forgotten her—a marriage which may be the subject of this “ Song.”

SONG

I saw thee on thy bridal day,
 When a burning blush came o’er thee,
 Though happiness around thee lay,
 The world all love before thee ;

And in thine eye a kindling light
 (Whatever it might be)
 Was all on Earth my aching sight
 Of loveliness could see.

That blush, perhaps, was maiden shame :
 As such it well may pass,
 Though its glow hath raised a fiercer flame
 In the breast of him, alas !

POE & HIS POETRY

Who saw thee on that bridal day,
When that deep blush *would* come o'er thee,
Though happiness around thee lay,
The world all love before thee.

Indeed it is highly probable that much of his early verse was distinctly affected by his wooing and its issue.

Miss Royster, so Poe said, was "his ideal and the original of Lenore." The reference being to the following elegy, identity of inspiration with the lady of "The Raven" is, of course, not to be sought. For no other reason, apparently, than the accident of its use in his most famous poem, the name Lenore has quite absorbed to itself the other fanciful appellations of his verse—Annabel, Helen, Ligeia, Alessandra, Eulalie, Ulalume. In one and all, however, the character is the same—the pure abstraction of the eternal feminine as Poe conceived it in the single aspect of love departed.

LENORE¹

Ah, broken is the golden bowl!—the spirit flown forever!
Let the bell toll!—a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river;
And, Guy De Vere, hast *thou* no tear?—weep now or never more!
See, on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love,
Lenore!

¹ Copyright, 1911, by J. H. Whitty.

P O E, & H I S P O E T R Y

Come, let the burial rite be read—the funeral song be sung!—

An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young—

A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so young.

“ Wretches ! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride ;

And, when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her—that she died :—

How *shall* the ritual then be read—the requiem how be sung

By you—by yours, the evil eye—by yours the slanderous tongue

That did to death the innocence that died, and died so young ? ”

Peccavimus : yet rave not thus ! and let a Sabbath song

Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel no wrong !

The sweet Lenore hath gone before, with Hope that flew beside,

Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have been thy bride—

For her, the fair and debonaire, that now so lowly lies, The life upon her yellow hair, but not within her eyes—

The life still there upon her hair, the death upon her eyes.

“ Avaunt !—avaunt ! to friends from fiends, the indignant ghost is riven—

From Hell unto a high estate within the utmost Heaven—

P O E & H I S P O E M R Y

From moan and groan to a golden throne beside the
King of Heaven :—

Let *no* bell toll, then, lest her soul, amid its hallowed
mirth,

Should catch the note as it doth float up from the
damnèd Earth !

And I—to-night my heart is light : no dirge will I
upraise,

But waft the angel on her flight with a pæan of old
days ! ”¹

A more romantic courtship, and doubtless the most romantic episode of a life full of experience, was with Mrs. Whitman—“Helen, my Helen, the Helen of a thousand dreams”—the beginning chronicled in the following lines, and the end of which was her beautiful loyalty to the poet’s memory.

TO HELEN

I saw thee once—once only—years ago :

I must not say how many—but not many.

It was a July midnight ; and from out

A full-orbed moon, that, like thine own soul soaring

Sought a precipitate pathway up through heaven,

There fell a silvery-silken veil of light,

With quietude and sultriness and slumber,

Upon the upturned faces of a thousand

Roses that grew in an enchanted garden,

Where no wind dared to stir, unless on tiptoe :

¹ In a December 1844 review of a certain poet, Poe wrote : “ Her tone is not so much the tone of passion, as of a gentle and melancholy regret, interwoven with a pleasant sense of the natural loneliness surrounding the lost in the tomb, and the memory of her beauty while alive—Elegiac poems should either assume this character or dwell purely on the beauty (moral or physical) of the departed. I have endeavoured to carry out this idea in some verses which I have called ‘ Lenore.’ ”

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

Fell on the upturned faces of these roses
 That gave out, in return for the love-light,
 Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death :
 Fell on the upturned faces of these roses
 That smiled and died in this parterre, enchanted
 By thee, and by the poetry of thy presence.

Clad all in white, upon a violet bank
 I saw thee half reclining ; while the moon
 Fell on the upturned faces of the roses,
 And on thine own, upturned—alas, in sorrow !

Was it not Fate, that, on this July midnight—
 Was it not Fate (whose name is also Sorrow)
 That bade me pause before that garden-gate
 To breathe the incense of those slumbering roses ?
 No footstep stirred : the hated world all slept,
 Save only thee and me—O Heaven ! O God !
 How my heart beats in coupling those two words !—
 Save only thee and me. I paused, I looked,
 And in an instant all things disappeared.
 (Ah, bear in mind this garden was enchanted !)
 The pearly lustre of the moon went out :
 The mossy banks and the meandering paths,
 The happy flowers and the repining trees,
 Were seen no more : the very roses' odours
 Died in the arms of the adoring airs.
 All, all expired save thee—save less than thou :
 Save only the divine light in thine eyes,
 Save but the soul in thine uplifted eyes :
 I saw but them—they were the world to me :
 I saw but them, saw only them for hours,
 Saw only them until the moon went down.
 What wild heart-histories seemed to lie enwritten
 Upon those crystalline, celestial spheres ;

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

How dark a woe, yet how sublime a hope ;
How silently serene a sea of pride ;
How daring an ambition ; yet how deep,
How fathomless a capacity for love !

But now, at length, dear Dian sank from sight,
Into a western couch of thunder-cloud ;
And thou, a ghost, amid the entombing trees
Didst glide away. Only thine eyes remained :
They would not go—they never yet have gone ;
Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,
They have not left me (as my hopes have) since ;
They follow me—they lead me through the years ;
They are my ministers—yet I their slave ;
Their office is to illumine and enkindle—
My duty, to be saved by their bright light,
And purified in their electric fire,
And sanctified in their elysian fire ;
They fill my soul with beauty (which is hope),
And are, far up in heaven, the stars I kneel to
In the sad, silent watches of my night ;
While even in the meridian glare of day
I see them still—two sweetly scintillant
Venuses, unextinguished by the sun.

“ Gratitude ” also is supposed to have been addressed to Mrs. Whitman.

GRATITUDE

TO——

As turns the eye to bless the hand that led its infant
years,
As list'ning still for that sweet voice which every tone
endears,

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

So I to thee, through mental power, would each remembrance trace,
And bless the hand that led me on to fonts of lasting grace.

As sailor on the billowy deep hath seen some light afar,
And shunned the rock that lies between his pathway and the star,
So hast thou been o'er stormy wave to me, 'mid sorrow's night,
A beacon true whose glory spreads afar its rays of light.

As flow sweet sounds of melody from strings drawn out by skill,
As roll its wavelets o'er the soul and all its chambers fill,
So came the words of holy truth endued with wisdom's zeal,
So fell their impress on my heart and stamped it with their seal.

As runs the rivulet its course and swifter as it flows,
Still murmuring of the hidden depths where first its waters rose,
So evermore as life glides on expanding far and wide,
Will turn the heart to where at first was ope'd its holiest tide.

As pours the captive bird its song to him who sets it free,
So flows my breath in song of praise in gratitude to thee.

As o'er the earth the sun reflects its rays of living light,
So thou by thy pure rays of thought art power to mental sight.¹

¹ Copyright by J. H. Whitty.

P O E & H I S P O E T R Y

“Eldorado,” by common tradition, closes selections from Poe, perhaps because of the unverified legend that it was his last composition in verse.

ELDORADO

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old,
This knight so bold,
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow :
“Shadow,” said he,
“Where can it be,
This land of Eldorado ?”

“Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,”
The shade replied,
“If you seek for Eldorado !”

IX

I N the concluding lustrum of his life the poet took to the lecture platform, reading from his prose or verse, or both, and meeting with uneven applause. Once in New York the attendance was so small that there was no lecture, and money was refunded. Unable to compose a poem especially for his appearance in Boston, he passed off a juvenile effusion in its stead, and made matters worse by explaining it as a joke—that the “Frogpond” deserved no better. On the other hand, in Providence he attracted a larger audience than other lecturers in the same course, among whom were Daniel Webster, Rufus Choate and Theodore Parker. The climax of his success seems to have been reached in Richmond, one of the social centres of the United States, where, a couple of months before his death, he was welcomed home as a distinguished son, and where, like his mother, years before, he made his last public appearance.

In contrast to brightening prospects and apparent welfare, Poe had repeatedly confessed of late that he was haunted by a “strange shadow of coming evil,” a prophesy to be fulfilled with horrible literalness, the shadow to assume the blackest form of unredeemed woe. Although sober when leaving Richmond, intending to return to New York, he got no farther than Baltimore, where he was seen semi-intoxicated. What else happened during the five days after arrival is conjectural; nor is the silence of

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witnesses or companions of his last aberration to be wondered at considering the tragic issue. There is a widely credited rumour that he was captured by an election gang, drugged, made to vote at several places, and utterly unconscious and exhausted left to his fate. On the sixth day he was found and taken to the Baltimore City Marine Hospital, from which, in due course, the Resident Physician wrote to Mrs. Clemm the account of her nephew's four days there: "When brought to the hospital he was unconscious of his condition—who brought him, or with whom he had been associating. . . . To this state succeeded . . . a busy but not active or violent delirium. . . . I was summoned to his bedside as soon as consciousness supervened, and questioned him. . . . But his answers were incoherent and unsatisfactory. . . . Wishing to rally and sustain his now fast sinking hopes, I told him I hoped that in a few days he would be able to enjoy the society of his friends here, and I would be most happy to contribute in every way possible to his ease and comfort. At this he broke out with much energy, and said the best thing his best friend could do would be to blow out his brains with a pistol. . . . Shortly after giving expression to these words Mr. Poe seemed to doze. . . . When I returned I found him in a violent delirium, resisting the efforts of two nurses to keep him in bed. . . . Enfeebled from exertion, he became quiet and seemed to rest for a short time; then gently moving his head, he said, 'Lord help my poor soul,' and

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expired." He died on October 7, 1840, and was buried in Baltimore.

Lowell said that Poe lacked character. The comprehensiveness of the indictment may be attributed to the then current disregard of all other standards than the commercial, the ethical, and the didactic, and by directing this triple test to three particular traits of the poet he was judged and condemned. The first charge is the unpardonable offence against commercial honour—he did not pay his debts; the second is intemperance, which, particularly when detected in company with other frailties, was locally regarded even in his day as positive moral delinquency; and the third is contained in Emerson's characterization, that Poe was a "jingle man"—a taunt not directly thrust at the music of his verse, but indirectly at its want of didactic substance. While it would be futile to deny these charges, yet their comprehensiveness as completely disposing of their unhappy subject may well be denied. It was this inherent assumption of finality at the time they were made that now seems inadequate and short-sighted.

There was, to be sure, another side to the contemporary picture. Poe always had well-wishers and admirers, without whose succour his career would have been briefer than it was. In the family circle he was the embodiment of gentleness, unselfishness and devotion: his editorial associates, generally speaking, liked and respected him: in drawing-rooms he was

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lionized. Whatsoever the tenor of contemporary documents, however, they do not help much towards the estimate to which posterity inclines, since they considered the man and his achievement apart; whereas, to us, the two are inseparable. He is not of those of whom it may be said that they are greater than their work. His work, rather, redeems his life, of which it is the core. The contemporary interpretation of the poet's character or lack of it will eventually be superseded, not for want of evidence, but because the pettiness with which at close range his worth was encased will scale off from age to age, disclosing and illuminating the labour done.

It is not therefore in the home, much less in the office or in society, but in the garret, as it were, alone, at work, that the figure of Poe stands out with greatest distinctness, pathos and honour. In an environment which offered not a single ray of intellectual sympathy or incentive in what was to him as the bread of life, handicapped by perverseness, melancholia and poverty, and by training which in spite of school and college was, for his own line of development, so chaotic and superficial that he stands conspicuously forth as self-educated, self-made, Poe pursued for twenty years with amazing steadfastness an æsthetic and intellectual ideal. He never attained it, as a matter of course. But in verse and prose he recorded the search, patiently, diligently; and the record of his inquisitive, sleepless mind has proved both an

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inspiration and a text for fellow-seekers of the same ideal. He founded a school of literary art which rapidly broke the confines of race and tongue, penetrated to every nook and corner of Europe, and everywhere met with response. He is, in Mr. Gosse's phrase, "The Piper of Hamelin to all later English poets. . . . There is hardly one whose verse music does not show traces of Poe's influence." It is said that in many a little German, Austrian, or Italian bookshop he is the sole representative of the literature of his country. In France he is regarded as spiritually native. The narrowness of his genius is beyond question: its very quality has been severely attacked and is repellent to many minds; but only superlatives aptly describe its stimulating power and also his historical position. He was the first American critic, and his possession in such large measure of the analytic faculty is held by some to be the secret of his ever-increasing reputation. He was the inventor, for his race, of the short story as a *genre*. Again, "The Raven" is the most popular poem of its length in the language, and no other short poem has been the subject of so much commentary. Taken for all in all, no nineteenth-century man of letters using English as his medium has influenced so extensively the technique of succeeding writers.

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