

Edgar Allan Poe's Complete Poetical Works

By

Edgar Allan Poe

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MEMOIR OF EDGAR ALLAN POE.

During the last few years every incident in the life of Edgar Poe has been subjected to microscopic investigation. The result has not been altogether satisfactory. On the one hand, envy and prejudice have magnified every blemish of his character into crime, whilst on the other, blind admiration would depict him as far "too good for human nature's daily food." Let us endeavor to judge him impartially, granting that he was as a mortal subject to the ordinary weaknesses of mortality, but that he was tempted sorely, treated badly, and suffered deeply.

The poet's ancestry and parentage are chiefly interesting as explaining some of the complexities of his character. His father, David Poe, was of Anglo-Irish extraction. Educated for the Bar, he elected to abandon it for the stage. In one of his tours through the chief towns of the United States he met and married a young actress, Elizabeth Arnold, member of an English family distinguished for its musical talents. As an actress, Elizabeth Poe acquired some reputation, but became even better known for her domestic virtues. In those days the United States afforded little scope for dramatic energy, so it is not surprising to find that when her husband died, after a few years of married life, the young widow had a vain struggle to maintain herself and three little ones, William Henry, Edgar, and Rosalie. Before her premature death, in December, 1811, the poet's mother had been reduced to the dire necessity of living on the charity of her neighbors.

Edgar, the second child of David and Elizabeth Poe, was born at Boston, in the United States, on the 19th of January, 1809. Upon his mother's death at Richmond, Virginia, Edgar was adopted by a wealthy Scotch merchant, John Allan. Mr. Allan, who had married an American lady and settled in Virginia, was childless. He therefore took naturally to the brilliant and beautiful little boy, treated him as his son, and made him take his own surname. Edgar Allan, as he was now styled, after some elementary tuition in Richmond, was taken to England by his adopted parents, and, in 1816, placed at the Manor House School, Stoke-Newington.

Under the Rev. Dr. Bransby, the future poet spent a lustrum of his life neither unprofitably nor, apparently, ungenially. Dr. Bransby, who is himself so quaintly portrayed in Poe's tale of 'William Wilson', described "Edgar Allan," by which name only he knew the lad, as "a quick and clever boy," who "would have been a very good boy had he not been spoiled by his parents," meaning, of course, the Allans. They "allowed him an extravagant amount of pocket-money, which enabled him to get into all manner of mischief. Still I liked the boy," added the tutor, "but, poor fellow, his parents spoiled him."

Poe has described some aspects of his school days in his oft cited story of 'William Wilson'. Probably there is the usual amount of poetic exaggeration in these reminiscences, but they are almost the only record we have of that portion of his career and, therefore, apart from their

literary merits, are on that account deeply interesting. The description of the sleepy old London suburb, as it was in those days, is remarkably accurate, but the revisions which the story of 'William Wilson' went through before it reached its present perfect state caused many of the author's details to deviate widely from their original correctness. His schoolhouse in the earliest draft was truthfully described as an "old, irregular, and cottage-built" dwelling, and so it remained until its destruction a few years ago.

The 'soi-disant' William Wilson, referring to those bygone happy days spent in the English academy, says,

"The teeming brain of childhood requires no external world of incident to occupy or amuse it. The morning's awakening, the nightly summons to bed; the connings, the recitations, the periodical half-holidays and perambulations, the playground, with its broils, its pastimes, its intrigues--these, by a mental sorcery long forgotten, were made to involve a wilderness of sensation, a world of rich incident, a universe of varied emotion, of excitement the most passionate and spirit-stirring, 'Oh, le bon temps, que ce siècle de fer!'"

From this world of boyish imagination Poe was called to his adopted parents' home in the United States. He returned to America in 1821, and was speedily placed in an academy in Richmond, Virginia, in which city the Allans continued to reside. Already well grounded in the elementary processes of education, not without reputation on account of his

European residence, handsome, proud, and regarded as the heir of a wealthy man, Poe must have been looked up to with no little respect by his fellow pupils. He speedily made himself a prominent position in the school, not only by his classical attainments, but by his athletic feats--accomplishments calculated to render him a leader among lads.

"In the simple school athletics of those days, when a gymnasium had not been heard of, he was 'facile princeps',"

is the reminiscence of his fellow pupil, Colonel T. L. Preston. Poe he remembers as

"a swift runner, a wonderful leaper, and, what was more rare, a boxer, with some slight training.... He would allow the strongest boy in the school to strike him with full force in the chest. He taught me the secret, and I imitated him, after my measure. It was to inflate the lungs to the uttermost, and at the moment of receiving the blow to exhale the air. It looked surprising, and was, indeed, a little rough; but with a good breast-bone, and some resolution, it was not difficult to stand it. For swimming he was noted, being in many of his athletic proclivities surprisingly like Byron in his youth."

In one of his feats Poe only came off second best.

"A challenge to a foot race," says Colonel Preston, "had been passed between the two classical schools of the city; we selected Poe as our

champion. The race came off one bright May morning at sunrise, in the Capitol Square. Historical truth compels me to add that on this occasion our school was beaten, and we had to pay up our small bets. Poe ran well, but his competitor was a long-legged, Indian-looking fellow, who would have outstripped Atalanta without the help of the golden apples."

"In our Latin exercises in school," continues the colonel, "Poe was among the first--not first without dispute. We had competitors who fairly disputed the palm, especially one, Nat Howard, afterwards known as one of the ripest scholars in Virginia, and distinguished also as a profound lawyer. If Howard was less brilliant than Poe, he was far more studious; for even then the germs of waywardness were developing in the nascent poet, and even then no inconsiderable portion of his time was given to versifying. But if I put Howard as a Latinist on a level with Poe, I do him full justice."

"Poe," says the colonel, "was very fond of the Odes of Horace, and repeated them so often in my hearing that I learned by sound the words of many before I understood their meaning. In the lilting rhythm of the Sapphics and Iambics, his ear, as yet untutored in more complicated harmonies, took special delight. Two odes, in particular, have been humming in my ear all my life since, set to the tune of his recitation:

'Jam satis terris nivis atque dirce

Grandinis misit Pater, et rubente,'

And

'Non ebur neque aureum

Mea renidet in dono lacu ar,' etc.

"I remember that Poe was also a very fine French scholar. Yet, with all his superiorities, he was not the master spirit nor even the favorite of the school. I assign, from my recollection, this place to Howard. Poe, as I recall my impressions now, was self-willed, capricious, inclined to be imperious, and, though of generous impulses, not steadily kind, nor even amiable; and so what he would exact was refused to him. I add another thing which had its influence, I am sure. At the time of which I speak, Richmond was one of the most aristocratic cities on this side of the Atlantic.... A school is, of its nature, democratic; but still boys will unconsciously bear about the odor of their fathers' notions, good or bad. Of Edgar Poe," who had then resumed his parental cognomen, "it was known that his parents had been players, and that he was dependent upon the bounty that is bestowed upon an adopted son. All this had the effect of making the boys decline his leadership; and, on looking back on it since, I fancy it gave him a fierceness he would otherwise not have had."

This last paragraph of Colonel Preston's recollections cast a suggestive light upon the causes which rendered unhappy the lad's early life and

tended to blight his prospective hopes. Although mixing with members of the best families of the province, and naturally endowed with hereditary and native pride,--fostered by the indulgence of wealth and the consciousness of intellectual superiority,--Edgar Poe was made to feel that his parentage was obscure, and that he himself was dependent upon the charity and caprice of an alien by blood. For many lads these things would have had but little meaning, but to one of Poe's proud temperament it must have been a source of constant torment, and all allusions to it gall and wormwood. And Mr. Allan was not the man to wean Poe from such festering fancies: as a rule he was proud of the handsome and talented boy, and indulged him in all that wealth could purchase, but at other times he treated him with contumely, and made him feel the bitterness of his position.

Still Poe did maintain his leading position among the scholars at that Virginian academy, and several still living have favored us with reminiscences of him. His feats in swimming to which Colonel Preston has alluded, are quite a feature of his youthful career. Colonel Mayo records one daring performance in natation which is thoroughly characteristic of the lad. One day in mid-winter, when standing on the banks of the James River, Poe dared his comrade into jumping in, in order to swim to a certain point with him. After floundering about in the nearly frozen stream for some time, they reached the piles upon which Mayo's Bridge was then supported, and there attempted to rest and try to gain the shore by climbing up the log abutment to the bridge. Upon reaching the bridge, however, they were dismayed to find that its

plank flooring overlapped the abutment by several feet, and that it was impossible to ascend it. Nothing remained for them but to let go their slippery hold and swim back to the shore. Poe reached the bank in an exhausted and benumbed condition, whilst Mayo was rescued by a boat just as he was succumbing. On getting ashore Poe was seized with a violent attack of vomiting, and both lads were ill for several weeks.

Alluding to another quite famous swimming feat of his own, the poet remarked, "Any 'swimmer in the falls' in my days would have swum the Hellespont, and thought nothing of the matter. I swam from Ludlam's Wharf to Warwick (six miles), in a hot June sun, against one of the strongest tides ever known in the river. It would have been a feat comparatively easy to swim twenty miles in still water. I would not think much," Poe added in a strain of exaggeration not unusual with him, "of attempting to swim the British Channel from Dover to Calais."

Colonel Mayo, who had tried to accompany him in this performance, had to stop on the way, and says that Poe, when he reached the goal, emerged from the water with neck, face, and back blistered. The facts of this feat, which was undertaken for a wager, having been questioned, Poe, ever intolerant of contradiction, obtained and published the affidavits of several gentlemen who had witnessed it. They also certified that Poe did not seem at all fatigued, and that he walked back to Richmond immediately after the performance.

The poet is generally remembered at this part of his career to have been slight in figure and person, but to have been well made, active, sinewy,

and graceful. Despite the fact that he was thus noted among his schoolfellows and indulged at home, he does not appear to have been in sympathy with his surroundings. Already dowered with the "hate of hate, the scorn of scorn," he appears to have made foes both among those who envied him and those whom, in the pride of intellectuality, he treated with pugnacious contempt. Beneath the haughty exterior, however, was a warm and passionate heart, which only needed circumstance to call forth an almost fanatical intensity of affection. A well-authenticated instance of this is thus related by Mrs. Whitman:

"While at the academy in Richmond, he one day accompanied a schoolmate to his home, where he saw, for the first time, Mrs. Helen Stannard, the mother of his young friend. This lady, on entering the room, took his hands and spoke some gentle and gracious words of welcome, which so penetrated the sensitive heart of the orphan boy as to deprive him of the power of speech, and for a time almost of consciousness itself. He returned home in a dream, with but one thought, one hope in life --to hear again the sweet and gracious words that had made the desolate world so beautiful to him, and filled his lonely heart with the oppression of a new joy. This lady afterwards became the confidant of all his boyish sorrows, and hers was the one redeeming influence that saved and guided him in the earlier days of his turbulent and passionate youth."

When Edgar was unhappy at home, which, says his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, "was very often the case, he went to Mrs. Stannard for sympathy, for

consolation, and for advice." Unfortunately, the sad fortune which so frequently thwarted his hopes ended this friendship. The lady was overwhelmed by a terrible calamity, and at the period when her guiding voice was most requisite, she fell a prey to mental alienation. She died, and was entombed in a neighboring cemetery, but her poor boyish admirer could not endure to think of her lying lonely and forsaken in her vaulted home, so he would leave the house at night and visit her tomb. When the nights were drear, "when the autumnal rains fell, and the winds wailed mournfully over the graves, he lingered longest, and came away most regretfully."

The memory of this lady, of this "one idolatrous and purely ideal love" of his boyhood, was cherished to the last. The name of Helen frequently recurs in his youthful verses, "The Pæan," now first included in his poetical works, refers to her; and to her he inscribed the classic and exquisitely beautiful stanzas beginning "Helen, thy beauty is to me."

Another important item to be noted in this epoch of his life is that he was already a poet. Among his schoolfellows he appears to have acquired some little reputation as a writer of satirical verses; but of his poetry, of that which, as he declared, had been with him "not a purpose, but a passion," he probably preserved the secret, especially as we know that at his adoptive home poesy was a forbidden thing. As early as 1821 he appears to have essayed various pieces, and some of these were ultimately included in his first volume. With Poe poetry was a personal matter--a channel through which the turbulent passions of his heart

found an outlet. With feelings such as were his, it came to pass, as a matter of course, that the youthful poet fell in love. His first affair of the heart is, doubtless, reminiscently portrayed in what he says of his boyish ideal, Byron. This passion, he remarks, "if passion it can properly be called, was of the most thoroughly romantic, shadowy, and imaginative character. It was born of the hour, and of the youthful necessity to love. It had no peculiar regard to the person, or to the character, or to the reciprocating affection... Any maiden, not immediately and positively repulsive," he deems would have suited the occasion of frequent and unrestricted intercourse with such an imaginative and poetic youth. "The result," he deems, "was not merely natural, or merely probable; it was as inevitable as destiny itself."

Between the lines may be read the history of his own love. "The Egeria of his dreams--the Venus Aphrodite that sprang in full and supernal loveliness from the bright foam upon the storm-tormented ocean of his thoughts," was a little girl, Elmira Royster, who lived with her father in a house opposite to the Allans in Richmond. The young people met again and again, and the lady, who has only recently passed away, recalled Edgar as "a beautiful boy," passionately fond of music, enthusiastic and impulsive, but with prejudices already strongly developed. A certain amount of love-making took place between the young people, and Poe, with his usual passionate energy, ere he left home for the University had persuaded his fair inamorata to engage herself to him. Poe left home for the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, in the beginning of 1825. He wrote frequently to Miss Royster, but her

father did not approve of the affair, and, so the story runs, intercepted the correspondence, until it ceased. At seventeen, Elmira became the bride of a Mr. Shelton, and it was not until some time afterwards that Poe discovered how it was his passionate appeals had failed to elicit any response from the object of his youthful affection.

Poe's short university career was in many respects a repetition of his course at the Richmond Academy. He became noted at Charlottesville both for his athletic feats and his scholastic successes. He entered as a student on February 1, 1826, and remained till the close of the second session in December of that year.

"He entered the schools of ancient and modern languages, attending the lectures on Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian. I was a member of the last three classes," says Mr. William Wertenbaker, the recently deceased librarian, "and can testify that he was tolerably regular in his attendance, and a successful student, having obtained distinction at the final examination in Latin and French, and this was at that time the highest honor a student could obtain. The present regulations in regard to degrees had not then been adopted. Under existing regulations, he would have graduated in the two languages above-named, and have been entitled to diplomas."

These statements of Poe's classmate are confirmed by Dr. Harrison, chairman of the Faculty, who remarks that the poet was a great favorite with his fellow-students, and was noted for the remarkable rapidity with

which he prepared his recitations and for their accuracy, his translations from the modern languages being especially noteworthy.

Several of Poe's classmates at Charlottesville have testified to his "noble qualities" and other good endowments, but they remember that his "disposition was rather retiring, and that he had few intimate associates." Mr. Thomas Boiling, one of his fellow-students who has favored us with reminiscences of him, says:

"I was 'acquainted', with him, but that is about all. My impression was, and is, that no one could say that he 'knew' him. He wore a melancholy face always, and even his smile--for I do not ever remember to have seen him laugh--seemed to be forced. When he engaged sometimes with others in athletic exercises, in which, so far as high or long jumping, I believe he excelled all the rest, Poe, with the same ever sad face, appeared to participate in what was amusement to the others more as a task than sport."

Poe had no little talent for drawing, and Mr. John Willis states that the walls of his college rooms were covered with his crayon sketches, whilst Mr. Boiling mentions, in connection with the poet's artistic facility, some interesting incidents. The two young men had purchased copies of a handsomely-illustrated edition of Byron's poems, and upon visiting Poe a few days after this purchase, Mr. Bolling found him engaged in copying one of the engravings with crayon upon his dormitory ceiling. He continued to amuse himself in this way from time to time

until he had filled all the space in his room with life-size figures which, it is remembered by those who saw them, were highly ornamental and well executed.

As Mr. Bolling talked with his associate, Poe would continue to scribble away with his pencil, as if writing, and when his visitor jestingly remonstrated with him on his want of politeness, he replied that he had been all attention, and proved that he had by suitable comment, assigning as a reason for his apparent want of courtesy that he was trying 'to divide his mind,' to carry on a conversation and write sensibly upon a totally different subject at the same time.

Mr. Wertenbaker, in his interesting reminiscences of the poet, says:

"As librarian I had frequent official intercourse with Poe, but it was at or near the close of the session before I met him in the social circle. After spending an evening together at a private house he invited me, on our return, into his room. It was a cold night in December, and his fire having gone pretty nearly out, by the aid of some tallow candles, and the fragments of a small table which he broke up for the purpose, he soon rekindled it, and by its comfortable blaze I spent a very pleasant hour with him. On this occasion he spoke with regret of the large amount of money he had wasted, and of the debts he had contracted during the session. If my memory be not at fault, he estimated his indebtedness at \$2,000 and, though they were gaming

debts, he was earnest and emphatic in the declaration that he was bound by honor to pay them at the earliest opportunity."

This appears to have been Poe's last night at the university. He left it never to return, yet, short as was his sojourn there, he left behind him such honorable memories that his 'alma mater' is now only too proud to enrol his name among her most respected sons. Poe's adopted father, however, did not regard his 'protégé's' collegiate career with equal pleasure: whatever view he may have entertained of the lad's scholastic successes, he resolutely refused to discharge the gambling debts which, like too many of his classmates, he had incurred. A violent altercation took place between Mr. Allan and the youth, and Poe hastily quitted the shelter of home to try and make his way in the world alone.

Taking with him such poems as he had ready, Poe made his way to Boston, and there looked up some of his mother's old theatrical friends. Whether he thought of adopting the stage as a profession, or whether he thought of getting their assistance towards helping him to put a drama of his own upon the stage,--that dream of all young authors,--is now unknown. He appears to have wandered about for some time, and by some means or the other succeeded in getting a little volume of poems printed "for private circulation only." This was towards the end of 1827, when he was nearing nineteen. Doubtless Poe expected to dispose of his volume by subscription among his friends, but copies did not go off, and ultimately the book was suppressed, and the remainder of the edition, for "reasons of a private nature," destroyed.

What happened to the young poet, and how he contrived to exist for the next year or so, is a mystery still unsolved. It has always been believed that he found his way to Europe and met with some curious adventures there, and Poe himself certainly alleged that such was the case. Numbers of mythical stories have been invented to account for this chasm in the poet's life, and most of them self-evidently fabulous. In a recent biography of Poe an attempt had been made to prove that he enlisted in the army under an assumed name, and served for about eighteen months in the artillery in a highly creditable manner, receiving an honorable discharge at the instance of Mr. Allan. This account is plausible, but will need further explanation of its many discrepancies of dates, and verification of the different documents cited in proof of it, before the public can receive it as fact. So many fables have been published about Poe, and even many fictitious documents quoted, that it behoves the unprejudiced to be wary in accepting any new statements concerning him that are not thoroughly authenticated.

On the 28th February, 1829, Mrs. Allan died, and with her death the final thread that had bound Poe to her husband was broken. The adopted son arrived too late to take a last farewell of her whose influence had given the Allan residence its only claim upon the poet's heart. A kind of truce was patched up over the grave of the deceased lady, but, for the future, Poe found that home was home no longer.

Again the young man turned to poetry, not only as a solace but as a

means of earning a livelihood. Again he printed a little volume of poems, which included his longest piece, "Al Aaraaf," and several others now deemed classic. The book was a great advance upon his previous collection, but failed to obtain any amount of public praise or personal profit for its author.

Feeling the difficulty of living by literature at the same time that he saw he might have to rely largely upon his own exertions for a livelihood, Poe expressed a wish to enter the army. After no little difficulty a cadetship was obtained for him at the West Point Military Academy, a military school in many respects equal to the best in Europe for the education of officers for the army. At the time Poe entered the Academy it possessed anything but an attractive character, the discipline having been of the most severe character, and the accommodation in many respects unsuitable for growing lads.

The poet appears to have entered upon this new course of life with his usual enthusiasm, and for a time to have borne the rigid rules of the place with unusual steadiness. He entered the institution on the 1st July, 1830, and by the following March had been expelled for determined disobedience. Whatever view may be taken of Poe's conduct upon this occasion, it must be seen that the expulsion from West Point was of his own seeking. Highly-colored pictures have been drawn of his eccentric behavior at the Academy, but the fact remains that he wilfully, or at any rate purposely, flung away his cadetship. It is surmised with plausibility that the second marriage of Mr. Allan, and his expressed

intention of withdrawing his help and of not endowing or bequeathing this adopted son any of his property, was the mainspring of Poe's action. Believing it impossible to continue without aid in a profession so expensive as was a military life, he determined to relinquish it and return to his long cherished attempt to become an author.

Expelled from the institution that afforded board and shelter, and discarded by his former protector, the unfortunate and penniless young man yet a third time attempted to get a start in the world of letters by means of a volume of poetry. If it be true, as alleged, that several of his brother cadets aided his efforts by subscribing for his little work, there is some possibility that a few dollars rewarded this latest venture. Whatever may have resulted from the alleged aid, it is certain that in a short time after leaving the Military Academy Poe was reduced to sad straits. He disappeared for nearly two years from public notice, and how he lived during that period has never been satisfactorily explained. In 1833 he returns to history in the character of a winner of a hundred-dollar award offered by a newspaper for the best story.

The prize was unanimously adjudged to Poe by the adjudicators, and Mr. Kennedy, an author of some little repute, having become interested by the young man's evident genius, generously assisted him towards obtaining a livelihood by literary labor. Through his new friend's introduction to the proprietor of the 'Southern Literary Messenger', a moribund magazine published at irregular intervals, Poe became first a paid contributor, and eventually the editor of the publication, which

ultimately he rendered one of the most respected and profitable periodicals of the day. This success was entirely due to the brilliancy and power of Poe's own contributions to the magazine.

In March, 1834, Mr. Allan died, and if our poet had maintained any hopes of further assistance from him, all doubt was settled by the will, by which the whole property of the deceased was left to his second wife and her three sons. Poe was not named.

On the 6th May, 1836, Poe, who now had nothing but his pen to trust to, married his cousin, Virginia Clemm, a child of only fourteen, and with her mother as housekeeper, started a home of his own. In the meantime his various writings in the 'Messenger' began to attract attention and to extend his reputation into literary circles, but beyond his editorial salary of about \$520 brought him no pecuniary reward.

In January, 1837, for reasons never thoroughly explained, Poe severed his connection with the 'Messenger', and moved with all his household goods from Richmond to New York. Southern friends state that Poe was desirous of either being admitted into partnership with his employer, or of being allowed a larger share of the profits which his own labors procured. In New York his earnings seem to have been small and irregular, his most important work having been a republication from the 'Messenger' in book form of his Defoe-like romance entitled 'Arthur Gordon Pym'. The truthful air of "The Narrative," as well as its other merits, excited public curiosity both in England and America; but Poe's

remuneration does not appear to have been proportionate to its success, nor did he receive anything from the numerous European editions the work rapidly passed through.

In 1838 Poe was induced by a literary friend to break up his New York home and remove with his wife and aunt (her mother) to Philadelphia. The Quaker city was at that time quite a hotbed for magazine projects, and among the many new periodicals Poe was enabled to earn some kind of a living. To Burton's 'Gentleman's Magazine' for 1837 he had contributed a few articles, but in 1840 he arranged with its proprietor to take up the editorship. Poe had long sought to start a magazine of his own, and it was probably with a view to such an eventuality that one of his conditions for accepting the editorship of the 'Gentleman's Magazine' was that his name should appear upon the title-page.

Poe worked hard at the 'Gentleman's' for some time, contributing to its columns much of his best work; ultimately, however, he came to loggerheads with its proprietor, Burton, who disposed of the magazine to a Mr. Graham, a rival publisher. At this period Poe collected into two volumes, and got them published as 'Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesques', twenty-five of his stories, but he never received any remuneration, save a few copies of the volumes, for the work. For some time the poet strove most earnestly to start a magazine of his own, but all his efforts failed owing to his want of capital.

The purchaser of Burton's magazine, having amalgamated it with another,

issued the two under the title of 'Graham's Magazine'. Poe became a contributor to the new venture, and in November of the year 1840 consented to assume the post of editor.

Under Poe's management, assisted by the liberality of Mr. Graham, 'Graham's Magazine' became a grand success. To its pages Poe contributed some of his finest and most popular tales, and attracted to the publication the pens of many of the best contemporary authors. The public was not slow in showing its appreciation of 'pabulum' put before it, and, so its directors averred, in less than two years the circulation rose from five to fifty-two thousand copies.

A great deal of this success was due to Poe's weird and wonderful stories; still more, perhaps, to his trenchant critiques and his startling theories anent cryptology. As regards the tales now issued in 'Graham's', attention may especially be drawn to the world-famed "Murders in the Rue Morgue," the first of a series--"une espèce de trilogie," as Baudelaire styles them--illustrative of an analytic phase of Poe's peculiar mind. This 'trilogie' of tales, of which the later two were "The Purloined Letter" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget," was avowedly written to prove the capability of solving the puzzling riddles of life by identifying another person's mind by our own. By trying to follow the processes by which a person would reason out a certain thing, Poe propounded the theory that another person might ultimately arrive, as it were, at that person's conclusions, indeed, penetrate the innermost arcanum of his brain and read his most secret thoughts. Whilst

the public was still pondering over the startling proposition, and enjoying perusal of its apparent proofs, Poe still further increased his popularity and drew attention to his works by putting forward the attractive but less dangerous theorem that "human ingenuity could not construct a cipher which human ingenuity could not solve."

This cryptographic assertion was made in connection with what the public deemed a challenge, and Poe was inundated with ciphers more or less abstruse, demanding solution. In the correspondence which ensued in 'Graham's Magazine' and other publications, Poe was universally acknowledged to have proved his case, so far as his own personal ability to unriddle such mysteries was concerned. Although he had never offered to undertake such a task, he triumphantly solved every cryptogram sent to him, with one exception, and that exception he proved conclusively was only an imposture, for which no solution was possible.

The outcome of this exhaustive and unprofitable labor was the fascinating story of "The Gold Bug," a story in which the discovery of hidden treasure is brought about by the unriddling of an intricate cipher.

The year 1841 may be deemed the brightest of Poe's checkered career. On every side acknowledged to be a new and brilliant literary light, chief editor of a powerful magazine, admired, feared, and envied, with a reputation already spreading rapidly in Europe as well as in his native continent, the poet might well have hoped for prosperity and happiness.

But dark cankers were gnawing his heart. His pecuniary position was still embarrassing. His writings, which were the result of slow and careful labor, were poorly paid, and his remuneration as joint editor of 'Graham's' was small. He was not permitted to have undivided control, and but a slight share of the profits of the magazine he had rendered world-famous, whilst a fearful domestic calamity wrecked all his hopes, and caused him to resort to that refuge of the broken-hearted--to that drink which finally destroyed his prospects and his life.

Edgar Poe's own account of this terrible malady and its cause was made towards the end of his career. Its truth has never been disproved, and in its most important points it has been thoroughly substantiated. To a correspondent he writes in January 1848:

"You say, 'Can you hint to me what was "that terrible evil" which caused the "irregularities" so profoundly lamented?' 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 forever, and underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially, and I again hoped. At the end of a year, the vessel broke again. 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 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. I had, indeed, nearly abandoned all hope of a permanent cure, when I found one in the death of my wife. This I can and do endure as becomes a man. It was the horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could not longer have endured, without total loss of reason."

The poet at this period was residing in a small but elegant little home, superintended by his ever-faithful guardian, his wife's mother--his own aunt, Mrs. Clemm, the lady whom he so gratefully addressed in after years in the well-known sonnet, as "more than mother unto me." But a change came o'er the spirit of his dream! His severance from 'Graham's', owing to we know not what causes, took place, and his fragile schemes of happiness faded as fast as the sunset. His means melted away, and he became unfitted by mental trouble and ill-health to earn more. The terrible straits to which he and his unfortunate beloved ones were reduced may be comprehended after perusal of these words from Mr. A. B. Harris's reminiscences.

Referring to the poet's residence in Spring Gardens, Philadelphia, this writer says:

"It was during their stay there that Mrs. Poe, while singing one evening, ruptured a blood-vessel, and after that she suffered a

hundred deaths. She could not bear the slightest exposure, and needed the utmost care; and all those conveniences as to apartment and surroundings which are so important in the case of an invalid were almost matters of life and death to her. And yet the room where she lay for weeks, hardly able to breathe, except as she was fanned, was a little narrow place, with the ceiling so low over the narrow bed that her head almost touched it. But no one dared to speak, Mr. Poe was so sensitive and irritable; 'quick as steel and flint,' said one who knew him in those days. And he would not allow a word about the danger of her dying: the mention of it drove him wild."

Is it to be wondered at, should it not indeed be forgiven him, if, impelled by the anxieties and privations at home, the unfortunate poet, driven to the brink of madness, plunged still deeper into the Slough of Despond? Unable to provide for the pressing necessities of his beloved wife, the distracted man

"would steal out of the house at night, and go off and wander about the street for hours, proud, heartsick, despairing, not knowing which way to turn, or what to do, while Mrs. Clemm would endure the anxiety at home as long as she could, and then start off in search of him."

During his calmer moments Poe exerted all his efforts to proceed with his literary labors. He continued to contribute to 'Graham's Magazine,' the proprietor of which periodical remained his friend to the end of his life, and also to some other leading publications of Philadelphia and

New York. A suggestion having been made to him by N. P. Willis, of the latter city, he determined to once more wander back to it, as he found it impossible to live upon his literary earnings where he was.

Accordingly, about the middle of 1845, Poe removed to New York, and shortly afterwards was engaged by Willis and his partner Morris as sub-editor on the 'Evening Mirror'. He was, says Willis,

"employed by us for several months as critic and subeditor.... He resided with his wife and mother at Fordham, a few miles out of town, but was at his desk in the office from nine in the morning till the evening paper went to press. With the highest admiration for his genius, and a willingness to let it atone for more than ordinary irregularity, we were led by common report to expect a very capricious attention to his duties, and occasionally a scene of violence and difficulty. Time went on, however, and he was invariably punctual and industrious. With his pale, beautiful, and intellectual face, as a reminder of what genius was in him, it was impossible, of course, not to treat him always with deferential courtsey.... With a prospect of taking the lead in another periodical, he at last voluntarily gave up his employment with us."

A few weeks before Poe relinquished his laborious and ill-paid work on the 'Evening Mirror', his marvellous poem of "The Raven" was published. The effect was magical. Never before, nor, indeed, ever since, has a single short poem produced such a great and immediate enthusiasm. It did

more to render its author famous than all his other writings put together. It made him the literary lion of the season; called into existence innumerable parodies; was translated into various languages, and, indeed, created quite a literature of its own. Poe was naturally delighted with the success his poem had attained, and from time to time read it in his musical manner in public halls or at literary receptions. Nevertheless he affected to regard it as a work of art only, and wrote his essay entitled the "Philosophy of Composition," to prove that it was merely a mechanical production made in accordance with certain set rules.

Although our poet's reputation was now well established, he found it still a difficult matter to live by his pen. Even when in good health, he wrote slowly and with fastidious care, and when his work was done had great difficulty in getting publishers to accept it. Since his death it has been proved that many months often elapsed before he could get either his most admired poems or tales published.

Poe left the 'Evening Mirror' in order to take part in the 'Broadway Journal', wherein he re-issued from time to time nearly the whole of his prose and poetry. Ultimately he acquired possession of this periodical, but, having no funds to carry it on, after a few months of heartbreaking labor he had to relinquish it. Exhausted in body and mind, the unfortunate man now retreated with his dying wife and her mother to a quaint little cottage at Fordham, outside New York. Here after a time the unfortunate household was reduced to the utmost need, not even

having wherewith to purchase the necessities of life. At this dire moment, some friendly hand, much to the indignation and dismay of Poe himself, made an appeal to the public on behalf of the hapless family.

The appeal had the desired effect. Old friends and new came to the rescue, and, thanks to them, and especially to Mrs. Shew, the "Marie Louise" of Poe's later poems, his wife's dying moments were soothed, and the poet's own immediate wants provided for. In January, 1846, Virginia Poe died; and for some time after her death the poet remained in an apathetic stupor, and, indeed, it may be truly said that never again did his mental faculties appear to regain their former power.

For another year or so Poe lived quietly at Fordham, guarded by the watchful care of Mrs. Clemm,--writing little, but thinking out his philosophical prose poem of "Eureka," which he deemed the crowning work of his life. His life was as abstemious and regular as his means were small. Gradually, however, as intercourse with fellow literati re-aroused his dormant energies, he began to meditate a fresh start in the world. His old and never thoroughly abandoned project of starting a magazine of his own, for the enunciation of his own views on literature, now absorbed all his thoughts. In order to get the necessary funds for establishing his publication on a solid footing, he determined to give a series of lectures in various parts of the States.

His re-entry into public life only involved him in a series of misfortunes. At one time he was engaged to be married to Mrs. Whitman, a

widow lady of considerable intellectual and literary attainments; but, after several incidents of a highly romantic character, the match was broken off. In 1849 Poe revisited the South, and, amid the scenes and friends of his early life, passed some not altogether unpleasing time. At Richmond, Virginia, he again met his first love, Elmira, now a wealthy widow, and, after a short renewed acquaintance, was once more engaged to marry her. But misfortune continued to dog his steps.

A publishing affair recalled him to New York. He left Richmond by boat for Baltimore, at which city he arrived on the 3d October, and handed his trunk to a porter to carry to the train for Philadelphia. What now happened has never been clearly explained. Previous to starting on his journey, Poe had complained of indisposition,--of chilliness and of exhaustion,--and it is not improbable that an increase or continuance of these symptoms had tempted him to drink, or to resort to some of those narcotics he is known to have indulged in towards the close of his life. Whatever the cause of his delay, the consequences were fatal. Whilst in a state of temporary mania or insensibility, he fell into the hands of a band of ruffians, who were scouring the streets in search of accomplices or victims. What followed is given on undoubted authority.

His captors carried the unfortunate poet into an electioneering den, where they drugged him with whisky. It was election day for a member of Congress, and Poe with other victims, was dragged from polling station to station, and forced to vote the ticket placed in his hand. Incredible as it may appear, the superintending officials of those days registered

the proffered vote, quite regardless of the condition of the person personifying a voter. The election over, the dying poet was left in the streets to perish, but, being found ere life was extinct, he was carried to the Washington University Hospital, where he expired on the 7th of October, 1849, in the forty-first year of his age.

Edgar Poe was buried in the family grave of his grandfather, General Poe, in the presence of a few friends and relatives. On the 17th November, 1875, his remains were removed from their first resting-place and, in the presence of a large number of people, were placed under a marble monument subscribed for by some of his many admirers. His wife's body has recently been placed by his side.

The story of that "fitful fever" which constituted the life of Edgar Poe leaves upon the reader's mind the conviction that he was, indeed, truly typified by that:

"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.'"

JOHN H. INGRAM.

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