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978-1-108-05946-6 - Tales of Mystery, Imagination, & Humour And Poems
Edgar Allan Poe
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Tales of Mystery, Imagination, & Humour

According to even his most forgiving biographers, Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49) was a difficult man. Arrested whilst touring Europe, and expelled from the United States Military Academy at West Point, he tended to lose both work and friends through drunkenness. Best known for his goriest stories, Poe is often presented to the modern reader as a writer of horror. However, this collection, published in 1852, offers a broader selection of his work. It includes one of his first pieces of detective fiction, ‘The Gold-Beetle’, resulting from his preoccupation with cryptography; ‘A Descent into the Maelström’, an early example of science fiction; the mesmeric verse of ‘The Raven’; and some of his lesser-known love poetry. A pioneer of modern genre fiction, Poe remains important and influential in the American literary canon. This lavishly illustrated collection represents an excellent introduction to his work.

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Tales of Mystery,
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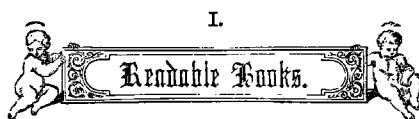
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TALES OF MYSTERY,
IMAGINATION, & HUMOUR;
AND POEMS.

By EDGAR ALLAN POE.

ILLUSTRATED WITH TWENTY-SIX ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD.



The Gold Beetle, page 22.

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Memoir of the Author.



HE subjoined memoir of the author of the following remarkable Tales and Poems, has been derived from the particulars of his life, by the Rev. Rufus Grims-wold, prefixed to a recent edition of his works.

EDGAR ALLAN POE was born at Baltimore, in the United States, in January 1811. His father, David Poe, was descended of a good family. While a law student at Baltimore, he became enamoured of an English actress named Elizabeth Arnold, whose prettiness and vivacity, rather than her genius for the stage, had made her a great favourite. An elopement was the result, which was followed by a marriage; when the young lawyer gave up the dryer studies he had been engaged in to follow his wife's profession, and they continued to act in company at various theatres in the principal cities of the Union till their deaths, which occurred, in the course of some few years, within a short period of each other. They left behind them three young children in a state of utter destitution.

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Edgar, the eldest, who was then about six years old, was a child of remarkable beauty and precocious wit. A Mr. John Allan, a merchant of large fortune and liberal disposition, who had been intimate with his parents, having no children of his own, adopted him; and it was generally understood among his acquaintances that he intended to make him the heir of his estate.

In 1816, he accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Allan to Great Britain, when he visited the most interesting portions of the country, and afterwards passed four or five years in a school kept at Stoke Newington, near London, by the Rev. Dr. Bransby.

At the end of this period, he returned to the United States, and entered the university at Charlottesville, where he led a very dissipated life. The manners which then prevailed there were extremely dissolute, and he was known as the wildest and most reckless student of his class; but his unusual opportunities, and the remarkable ease with which he mastered the most difficult studies, kept him all the while in the first rank for scholarship, and he would have graduated with the highest honours, had not his gambling, intemperance, and other vices, induced his expulsion from the university.

At this period, he was noted for feats of hardihood, strength, and activity; and on one occasion, in a hot day of June, he swam from Richmond to Warwick, seven miles and a half, against a tide running probably from two to three miles an hour. He was expert at fence, had some skill in drawing, and was a ready and eloquent conversationalist and declaimer.

His allowance of money while at Charlottesville had been liberal, but he quitted the place very much in debt; and when Mr. Allan refused to accept some of the drafts with which he had paid his losses in gaming, he wrote to him an abusive letter, quitted his house, and soon after left the country with the Quixotic intention of joining the Greeks, then in the midst of their struggle with the Turks. He never reached his destination, and we know but little of his adventures in Europe for nearly a year. By the end of this time, he had made his way to St. Petersburg; and, shortly after, the American minister in that capital was summoned one morning to save him from penalties incurred in a drunken debauch. Through the ambassador's intercession, he was set at liberty and enabled to return to the United States.

His meeting with Mr. Allan was not very cordial, but that gentleman declared himself willing to serve him in any way that should seem judicious; and when Poe expressed some anxiety to enter the Military Academy, he induced several eminent persons to sign an application which secured his appointment to a scholarship in that institution.

For a few weeks, the cadet applied himself with much assiduity

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to his studies, and he became at once a favourite with his mess and with the officers and professors of the academy; but his habits of dissipation were renewed; he neglected his duties and disobeyed orders; and, in ten months from his matriculation, he was cashiered.

He again went to Richmond, and was again received into the family of Mr. Allan, who was disposed still to be his friend, and, in the event of his good behaviour, to treat him as a son; but it soon became necessary that he should close his doors against him for ever. According to Poe's own statement, he ridiculed the second marriage of his patron with a Miss Paterson, a lady some years his junior, with whom he stated he had a quarrel; but a different story, scarcely suitable for repetition here, which, if true, throws a dark shade upon the quarrel and a very ugly light upon Poe's character, was told by the friends of the other party. Whatever the circumstances, they parted in anger, and Mr. Allan, from that time, declined to see or in any way to assist him. Mr. Allan died in the spring of 1834, in the fifty-fourth year of his age, leaving three children to share his property, of which not a single dollar was bequeathed to Poe.

Soon after he left the Military Academy at West Point, Poe had printed at Baltimore a small volume of verses, and the favourable manner in which it was commonly referred to confirmed his belief that he might succeed in the profession of literature, to which he forthwith devoted himself. His contributions to the journals, however, attracted little attention, and his hopes of gaining a living in this way being disappointed, he enlisted in the army as a private soldier. He was recognised by officers who had known him at the Military Academy, and efforts were made, privately, but with prospects of success, to obtain for him a commission, when it was discovered by his friends that he had deserted.

He next makes his appearance as a competitor for two prizes offered by the proprietor of the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*, for the best tale and poem suited to his magazine, and it seems that when the committee met to make their award, one of them, taking up a little book remarkably beautiful and distinct in caligraphy, was tempted to read several pages; and, becoming interested, summoned the attention of the company to the half-dozen compositions it contained. It was eventually unanimously decided that the prizes should be paid to "the first of geniuses who had written legibly." Not another MS. was unfolded. Immediately the "confidential envelope" was opened, and the successful competitor was found to bear the scarcely known name of Poe. The committee, indeed, awarded to him the premiums for both the tale and the poem, but subsequently altered their decision, so as to exclude him from the second premium, in consideration of his having obtained the higher one. The prize

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tale was the *MS. found in a Bottle*. This award was published on the 12th of October, 1833. The next day, the publisher called to see Mr. Kennedy, one of the committee and a well-known literary character, and gave him an account of the author, which excited his curiosity and sympathy, and caused him to request that he should be brought to his office. Accordingly, he was introduced; the prize-money had not yet been paid, and he was in the costume in which he had answered the advertisement of his good fortune. Thin, and pale even to ghastliness, his whole appearance indicated sickness and the utmost destitution. A well-worn frock-coat concealed the absence of a shirt, and imperfect boots disclosed the want of hose. But the eyes of the young man were luminous with intelligence and feeling, and his voice and conversation and manners all won upon the lawyer's regard. Poe told his history, and his ambition, and it was determined that he should not want means for a suitable appearance in society, nor opportunity for a just display of his abilities in literature. Mr. Kennedy accompanied him to a clothing store, and purchased for him a respectable suit, with changes of linen, and sent him to a bath, from which he returned with the suddenly-regained style of a gentleman.

His new friends were very kind to him, and availed themselves of every opportunity to serve him. Through their efforts, he obtained the editorship of a magazine published at Richmond, Virginia, to which he contributed numerous articles; but, after the lapse of a few months, his old habits of dissipation began to show themselves, and for a week he was in a condition of brutish drunkenness, which resulted in his dismissal. When he became sober, however, he had no resource but in reconciliation; and he wrote letters and induced acquaintances to call upon his employer, Mr. White, with professions of repentance and promises of reformation. With considerate and judicious kindness, that gentleman answered him:—

“My dear Edgar,—I cannot address you in such language as this occasion and my feelings demand: I must be content to speak to you in my plain way. That you are sincere in all your promises, I firmly believe; but, when you once again tread these streets, I have my fears that your resolutions will fail, and that you will again drink till your senses are lost. If you rely on your strength, you are gone. Unless you look to your Maker for help, you will not be safe. How much I regretted parting from you, is known to Him only and myself. I had become attached to you; I am still; and I would willingly say return, did not a knowledge of your past life make me dread a speedy renewal of our separation. If you would make yourself contented with quarters in my house, or with any other private family, where liquor is not used, I should think there was some hope for you; but, if you go to a tavern, or

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to any place where it is used at table, you are not safe. You have fine talents, Edgar, and you ought to have them respected, as well as yourself. Learn to respect yourself, and you will soon find that you are respected. Separate yourself from the bottle, and from bottle companions, for ever. Tell me if you can and will do so. If you again become an assistant in my office, it must be understood that all engagements on my part cease the moment you get drunk. I am your true friend,

T. W. W."

A new contract was arranged, but Poe's irregularities frequently interrupted the kindness, and finally exhausted the patience, of his generous though methodical employer; and in January, 1837, he took his leave of the readers of the magazine.

While in Richmond, with an income of but a hundred pounds a-year, he had married his cousin, Virginia, Clemm, a very amiable and lovely girl, who was as poor as himself, and little fitted, except by her gentle temper, to be the wife of such a person. He went from Richmond to Baltimore, and, after a short time, to Philadelphia, and then to New York; and, towards the end of the year 1838, he settled in Philadelphia. He had no very definite purposes, but trusted for support to the chances of success as a magazinist and newspaper correspondent. Mr. Burton, a comedian, had recently established a magazine, in Philadelphia, and to this Poe first became a contributor and afterwards chief editor.

An awakened ambition, and the healthful influence of a conviction that his works were appreciated and that his fame was increasing, led him, for a while, to cheerful views of life and to regular habits of conduct. He wrote to one friend, that he had quite overcome "the seductive and dangerous besetment" by which he had so often been prostrated, and to another that, incredible as it might seem, he had become a "model of temperance," and of "other virtues," which it had sometimes been difficult for him to practise. Before the close of the summer, however, he relapsed into his former courses, and for weeks was regardless of everything but a morbid and insatiable appetite for the means of intoxication.

He was with Mr. Burton until June, 1840—more than a year. Mr. Burton appreciated his abilities, and would gladly have continued the connexion, but Poe was so unsteady of purpose and so unreliable, that the actor was never sure when he left the city that his business would be cared for. On one occasion, returning after the regular day of publication, he found the number unfinished and Poe incapable of duty. He prepared the necessary copy himself, published the magazine, and was proceeding with arrangements for another month, when he received a letter from his assistant, of which the tone may be inferred from this answer:—

"I am sorry you have thought it necessary to send me such a

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letter. Your troubles have given a morbid tone to your feelings which it is your duty to discourage. I myself have been as severely handled by the world as you could possibly have been, but my sufferings have not tinged my mind with melancholy, nor jaundiced my views of society. You must rouse your energies, and if care assail you, conquer it. I will gladly overlook the past. I hope you will as easily fulfil your pledges for the future. We shall agree very well, though I cannot permit the magazine to be made a vehicle for that sort of severity which you think is so 'successful with the mob.' I am truly much less anxious about making a monthly "sensation" than I am upon the point of fairness. You must, my dear sir, get rid of your avowed ill-feelings toward your brother authors. You see I speak plainly: I cannot do otherwise upon such a subject. You say the people love havoc. I think they love justice. I think you yourself would not have written the article on Dawes in a more healthy state of mind. I am not trammelled by any vulgar consideration of expediency; I would rather lose money than, by such undue severity, wound the feelings of a kind-hearted and honourable man; and I am satisfied that Dawes has something of the true fire in him. I regretted your word-catching spirit. But I wander from my design. I accept your proposition to recommence your interrupted avocations upon the *Maga*. Let us meet as if we had not exchanged letters. Use more exercise, write when feelings prompt, and be assured of my friendship. You will soon regain a healthy activity of mind, and laugh at your past vagaries."

This letter was kind and judicious. It gives us a glimpse of Poe's theory of criticism, and displays the temper and principles of the literary comedian in an honourable light. Two or three months afterwards, Burton went out of town to fulfil a professional engagement, leaving material and directions for completing the next number of the magazine in four days. He was absent nearly a fortnight, and, on returning, he found that his printers in the meanwhile had not received a line of copy; but that Poe had prepared the prospectus of a new monthly, and obtained transcripts of his subscription and account books, to be used in a scheme for supplanting him. He encountered his associate late in the evening at one of his accustomed haunts, and said: "Mr. Poe, I am astonished: give me my manuscripts, so that I can attend to the duties you have so shamefully neglected, and when you are sober we will settle." Poe interrupted him with—"Who are you that presume to address me in this manner? Burton, I am—the editor—of the *Penn Magazine*—and you are—hiccup—a fool." Of course, this ended his relations with the magazine.

A few months afterwards, however, he was installed as editor of *Graham's Magazine*, and his connexion with this periodical which

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lasted about a year and a half, was one of the most active and brilliant periods of his literary life. He wrote in it several of his finest tales and most trenchant criticisms, and challenged attention by his papers entitled *Autography*, and those on cryptology and cyphers. In the first, adopting a suggestion of Lavater, he attempted the illustration of character from hand-writing; and, in the second, he assumed that human ingenuity could construct no secret writing which human ingenuity could not resolve—a not very dangerous proposition, since it implied no capacity in himself to discover every riddle of this kind that should be invented. He, however, succeeded with several difficult cryptographs that were sent to him, and the direction of his mind to the subject led to the composition of some of the tales of ratiocination which so largely increased his reputation. The infirmities which induced his separation from Mr. White and from Mr. Burton at length compelled Mr. Graham to seek for another editor; but Poe still remained in Philadelphia, engaged from time to time in various literary occupations, and in the vain effort to establish a journal of his own to be called *The Stylus*. Although it requires considerable capital to carry on a monthly of the description he proposed, I think it would not have been difficult, with his well-earned fame as a magazinist, for him to have found a competent and suitable publisher, but for the unfortunate notoriety of his habits, and the failure in succession of three persons who had admired him for his genius and pitied him for his misfortunes, by every means that tact or friendship could suggest, to induce the consistency and steadiness of application indispensable to success in such pursuits.

During his residence at Philadelphia, his manner, except during his fits of intoxication, was very quiet and gentlemanly; he was usually dressed with simplicity and elegance; and there was a singular neatness and air of refinement in his home. It was in a small house, in one of the pleasant and silent neighbourhoods far from the centre of the town, and though slightly and cheaply furnished, everything in it was so tasteful and so fitly disposed that it seemed altogether suitable for a man of genius. For this, and for most of the comforts he enjoyed in his brightest as in his darkest years, he was chiefly indebted to his mother-in-law, who loved him with more than maternal devotion and constancy.

In the autumn of 1844, Poe removed to New York, and forthwith entered upon a new sort of life. Heretofore, from the commencement of his literary career, he had resided in provincial towns. Now he was in a metropolis, and with a reputation which might have served as a passport to any society he could desire. For the first time, he was received into circles capable of both the appreciation and the production of literature. He added to his fame, soon after he came to the city, by the publication of that re-

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markable composition, *The Raven*, of which Mr. Willis has observed that, in his opinion, "it is the most effective single example of fugitive poetry ever published in America, and is unsurpassed in English poetry for subtle conception, masterly ingenuity of versification, and consistent sustaining of imaginative power." His reputation as a magazinist rose rapidly, and he contributed numerous tales and critical articles to several of the chief periodicals. While on the high road to fame, however, he became engaged in various disputes, which of themselves, and the manner in which he sought to excuse his errors, reflect but little credit on his moral character. To give an example, he borrowed fifty dollars from a distinguished literary woman of South Carolina, promising to return it in a few days, and when he failed to do so, and was asked for a written acknowledgment of the debt that might be exhibited to the husband of the friend who had thus served him, he denied all knowledge of it, and threatened to exhibit a correspondence which he said would make the woman infamous, if she said any more on the subject. Of course, there had never been any such correspondence; but, when Poe heard that a brother of the slandered party was in quest of him for the purpose of taking the satisfaction supposed to be due in such cases, he sent for a friend and induced him to carry to the gentleman his retraction and apology, with a statement, which seemed true enough at the moment, that Poe was "out of his mind." It is an ungracious duty for a biographer to have to describe such conduct on the part of a person of Poe's unquestionable genius and enlarged capacity; but those who are familiar with the career of this extraordinary creature, can unfortunately recall but too many similar anecdotes.

As the autumn of 1846 wore on, Poe's habits of frequent intoxication and his inattention to the means of support reduced him to much more than common destitution. He was now living at Fordham, several miles from New York, so that his necessities were not generally known even among his acquaintances; but when the dangerous illness of his wife was added to his misfortunes, and his dissipation and accumulated causes of anxiety had prostrated all his own energies, the subject was introduced into the journals. The result was a variety of pecuniary contributions, sufficient to relieve him from all temporary embarrassments; but his wife did not live to share this better fortune, for the illness above mentioned terminated in her death. A circumstance narrated by Mr. N. P. Willis refers to the period of Poe's life:—

"Our first knowledge of Mr. Poe's removal to this city was by a call which we received from a lady who introduced herself to us as the mother of his wife. She was in search of employment for him, and she excused her errand by mentioning that he was ill, that her daughter was a confirmed invalid, and that their circum-

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stances were such as compelled her taking it upon herself. The countenance of this lady, made beautiful and saintly with an evidently complete giving up of her life to privation and sorrowful tenderness, her gentle and mournful voice urging its plea, her long-forgotten but habitually and unconsciously-refined manners, and her appealing and yet appreciative mention of the claims and abilities of her son, disclosed at once the presence of one of those angels upon earth that women in adversity can be. It was a hard fate that she was watching over. Mr. Poe wrote with fastidious difficulty, and in a style too much above the popular level to be well paid. He was always in pecuniary difficulty, and, with his sick wife, frequently in want of the merest necessaries of life. Winter after winter, for years, 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 or 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 unrequited, and awoke from his self-abandonment prostrated in destitution and suffering, *begging* for him still. If woman’s devotion, born with a first love and fed with human passion, hallow its object, as it is allowed to do, what does not a devotion like this—pure, disinterested, and holy as the watch of an invisible spirit—say for him who inspired it?”

For nearly a year, Mr. Poe was not often before the public, but he was as industrious, perhaps, as he had been at any time; and, early in 1848, advertisement was made of his intention to deliver several lectures, with a view to obtain an amount of money sufficient to establish a long-contemplated monthly magazine. His first lecture—and only one at this period—was given at the Society Library in New York, and was upon the Cosmogony of the Universe; it was attended by an eminently-intellectual auditory, and the reading of it occupied about two hours and a half; it was afterwards published under the title of *Eureka, a Prose Poem*.

To the composition of this work he brought his subtlest and highest capacities, in their most perfect development. Denying that the arcana of the universe can be explored by induction, but informing his imagination with the various results of science, he

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entered with unhesitating boldness, though with no guide but the divinest instinct, into the sea of speculation, and there built up of according laws and their phenomena, as under the influence of a scientific inspiration, his theory of Nature.

Poe was thoroughly persuaded that he had discovered the great secret; that the propositions of *Eureka* were true; and he was wont to talk of the subject with a sublime and electrical enthusiasm which they cannot have forgotten who were familiar with him at the period of its publication.

In his preface he wrote:—"To the few who love me and whom I love; to those who feel, rather than to those who think; to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities—I offer this book of truths; not in the character of truth-teller, but for the beauty that abounds in its truth, constituting it true. To these I present the composition as an art-product alone—let us say as a romance; or, if it be not urging too lofty a claim, as a poem. What I here propound is true; therefore it cannot die; or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will rise again to the life everlasting."

From this time, Poe did not write much; he had quarrelled with the conductors of the chief magazines for which he had previously written, and they no longer sought his assistance. It was at this period that his name was associated with that of one of the most brilliant women of New England, and it was publicly announced that they were to be married. He had first seen her on his way from Boston, when he visited that city to deliver a poem before the Lyceum there. Restless, near the midnight, he wandered from his hotel near where she lived, until he saw her walking in a garden. He related the incident afterwards in one of his poems, worthy of himself, of her, and of the most exalted passion:—

"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 upturn'd faces of a thousand
Roses that grew in an enchanted garden,
Wher no wind dared to stir, un ess on tiptoe—
Tell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
That gave out, in return for the love-light,
Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death—
Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
That smiled and died in this pasterre, enchanted
By thee, and by the poetry of thy presence.
"Clad all in white, upon a violet ban
I saw thee halt reclining; while the moon
Fell on the upturn'd faces of the roses,
And on thine own, upturn'd—alas, in sorrow!

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MEMOIR.

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" 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. (Oh, Heaven!—oh, God!
 How my heart beats in couplings 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 adorning 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!
 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!"

They were not married, and the breaking of the engagement affords a striking illustration of his character. He said to an acquaintance in New York, who congratulated with him upon the prospect of his union with a person of so much genius and so many virtues—"It is a mistake: I am not going to be married." "Why, Mr. Poe, I understand that the banns have been published." "I cannot help what you have heard, my dear madam; but, mark me, I shall not marry her." He left town the same evening, and, the next day, was reeling through the streets of the

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city which was the lady's home, and in the evening—that should have been the evening before the bridal—in his drunkenness he committed at her house such outrages as made necessary a summons of the police. Here was no insanity leading to indulgence: he went from New York with a determination thus to induce an ending of the engagement, and he succeeded.

Sometime in August, 1849, Mr. Poe left New York for Virginia. In Philadelphia, he encountered persons who had been his associates in dissipations while he lived there; and for several days he abandoned himself entirely to the control of his worst appetites. When his money was all spent, and the disorder of his dress evinced the extremity of his recent intoxication, he asked, in charity, means for the prosecution of his journey to Richmond. There, after a few days, he joined a temperance society, and his conduct showed the earnestness of his determination to reform his life. He delivered, in some of the principal towns of Virginia, two lectures, which were well attended; and, renewing his acquaintance with a lady whom he had known in his youth, he was engaged to marry her, and wrote to his friends that he should pass the remainder of his days among the scenes endeared by all his pleasantest recollections of youth.

On Thursday, the 4th of October, he set out for New York, to fulfil a literary engagement and to prepare for his marriage. Arriving in Baltimore, he gave his trunk to a porter, with directions to convey it to the cars which were to leave in an hour or two for Philadelphia, and went into a tavern to obtain some refreshment. Here he met acquaintances, who invited him to drink; all his resolutions and duties were soon forgotten; in a few hours he was in such a state as is commonly induced only by long-continued intoxication; after a night of insanity and exposure, he was carried to a hospital; and there, on the evening of Sunday, the seventh of October, 1849, he died, at the age of thirty-eight years.

It is a melancholy history. No American author of as much genius had ever as much unhappiness; but Poe's unhappiness was, in an unusual degree, the result of infirmities of nature, or of voluntary faults in conduct. A writer, who evidently knew him well, and who came forward as his defender, is "compelled to admit that the blemishes in his life were effects of character rather than of circumstances." How this character might have been modified by a judicious education of all his faculties, is left for the decision of others; but it will be evident to those who read this biography, that the unchecked freedom of his earlier years was as unwise as its results were unfortunate.

The influence of Mr. Poe's aims and vicissitudes upon his writings was more conspicuous in his later than in his earlier

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works. Nearly all that he wrote in the last two or three years—including much of his best poetry—was, in some sense, biographical. In draperies of his imagination, those who take the trouble to trace his steps will perceive, but slightly concealed, the figure of himself; and the lineaments here disclosed are not different from those displayed in this biography, which is but a filling up of the picture he has himself sketched.

In person, he was below the middle height, slenderly but compactly formed; and, in his better moments, he had, in an eminent degree, that air of gentlemanliness which men of a lower order seldom succeed in acquiring.

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

He was at all times a dreamer—dwelling in ideal realms—in heaven or hell—peopled with the creatures and the accidents of his brain. He walked the streets in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayer (never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was already damned, but) for their happiness who, at the moment, were objects of his idolatry; or, with his glances introverted to a heart gnawed with anguish, and with a face shrouded in gloom, he would brave the wildest storms; and all night, with drenched garments and arms beating the winds and rains, would speak as if to spirits that at such times only could be evoked by him from the Aidenn, close by whose portals his disturbed soul sought to forget the ills to which his constitution subjected him—close by the Aidenn where were those he loved—the Aidenn which he might never see, but in fitful glimpses, as its gates opened to receive the less fiery and more happy natures whose destiny to sin did not involve the doom of death.

He seemed, except when some fitful pursuit subjugated his will

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MEMOIR.

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

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

His harsh experience had deprived him of all faith, in man or woman. He had made up his mind upon the numberless complexities of the social world, and the whole system, with him, was an imposture. This conviction gave a direction to his shrewd and naturally unamiable character. Still, though he regarded society as composed altogether of villains, the sharpness of his intellect was not of that kind which enabled him to cope with villainy, while it continually caused him, by overshots, to fail of the success of honesty. He was, in many respects, like Francis Vivian, in Bulwer's novel of *The Caxtons*. Passion, in him, comprehended many of the worst emotions which militate against human happiness. You could not contradict him, but you raised quick choler; you could not speak of wealth, but his cheek paled with gnawing envy. The astonishing natural advantages of this poor boy—his beauty, his readiness, the daring spirit that breathed around him like a fiery atmosphere—had raised his constitutional self-confidence into an arrogance that turned his very claims to admiration into prejudices against him. Irascible, envious—bad enough, but not the worst, for these salient angles were all varnished over with a cold repellant cynicism, his passions vented themselves in sneers. There seemed to him no moral susceptibility; and, what was more remarkable in a proud nature, little or nothing of the true point of honour. He had, to a morbid excess, that desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition, but no wish for the esteem of the love of his species; only the hard wish to succeed—not shine, not serve—succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit.