



Edgar Allan Poe.
(1809 - 1849.)

Little Trips Among the Eminent.

Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe—one hesitates, almost, to tell again the story that must be told of him, so intimate a heart-history is it, so pitiful a record of privation, and suffering, and error, and weakness—such, perhaps, as has been scarcely equalled in the annals of literary men. And yet the story is no new one. The mistakes and disappointments that hounded poor Poe almost from his cradle to his grave, have by no means been hidden under a bushel, no more than have his glittering triumphs. Of no man, perhaps, have more scathing denunciations and more overdrawn laudations been written. Poe, who himself as a critic, urged on by mercenary editors, who saw in his keen and caustic observations a "paying feature" of their journals, unmercifully lashed a host of literary small fry whose pretensions he could ill brook, could not hope to escape the venom that such criticisms often breed.

On the other hand, a host of admirers have also been ready with terms that could not be too extravagant in praise of Poe and his work. They have lauded his genius, as they well might, for, as a writer of American fiction, he stands second only to Hawthorne, while a few of his poems have won the enthusiastic praise of two continents; they have covered up or ignored his weaknesses, and faults in plenty Poe assuredly had; they have raved over his "idyllic marriage," while, as a matter of fact, that marriage, in the opinion of those in the best position to know, was one of the mistakes of his much-mistaking life. Yet too much praise is, perhaps, much better than unmerited censure, and, as the praise and the blame are becoming adjusted, and time goes on, Poe's place among the great writers of the world is becoming more clearly defined.

A year ago, the centenary of his birth was celebrated, with much rejoicing, in America, in England, in France, and many banquets were

held. Oh, the irony of it—"banquets," at which sumptuous fare abounded, at which "The Raven" and "The Bells" were read and laudatory speeches sounded in the honor of the writer of them—the writer of them, who had so often been hungry and threadbare, without a friendly roof to cover his head! But such are sometimes the ironies of life.

Poe was the son of a travelling actor and his actress wife, and was born—as it happened—in Boston, probably in January, 1809. While yet little more than an infant, his father died of consumption, and shortly afterwards his mother became ill of malarial fever. With her two children and her mother, one Mrs. Tubbs, she was now living in Richmond, Va., and so desperate was the straits to which the family was reduced that a notice asking for aid was put in the papers. Among others who responded were a Mr. Mackenzie and a Mr. John Allan, and the story is told that when Mrs. Allan called on the sick woman she found Mrs. Tubbs feeding the little ones with bread soaked in sweetened gin and water, little Edgar's initiation into a practice that afterwards worked him so much ruin. On Mrs. Poe's death, however, little Rosalie was adopted by the Mackenzies, and Edgar by the Allans, and so more immediate disaster was averted.

Mr. Allan was a tobacco merchant in comfortable circumstances. At a somewhat later date he fell heir to a large fortune, and proceeded to live up to it, hence little Edgar grew up with all the tastes of a child of wealth. It does not appear, however, that the home was in all respects the best for him. While Mrs. Allan petted and spoiled him, Mr. Allan was often unduly strict, and on no occasion let the proud youth forget that he was dependent upon his charity. The lad's earlier years, however, in spite of this constant rasping, appears to have had their share of happiness. He was bright, lovable, and very handsome, made marked progress at school, and was loved by both classmates and teachers. "Yes," said one of the latter, on Poe's death, "he was a dear, open-hearted, cheerful and good boy, and as a man he was a loving and affectionate friend to me."

It nowhere appears from the most authentic records that Poe was at any time the weird, melancholy, ghoulish sort of lad that some careless biographers have represented him to be. Many are the pranks told of him, and the athletic feats, particularly his famous seven-mile swim on the James River. It is noted, however, that he always had a morbid fear of graveyards and a horror of death, deepened on the passing away of a Mrs. Stanard, who had been kind to him, and whom he worshipped as a child and in memory. All his life he held these superstitions. He loathed death, yet, with a strange fascination, wrote continually of it.

After spending five years in England, where Edgar went to school at Stoke-Newington, the Allans returned to Richmond, and here Edgar attended the University, making a brilliant record as a student, but falling too readily into the gambling and drinking habits of his wealthy and extravagant classmates. Mr. Allan was, in fact, called upon to pay gambling and other debts to the amount of \$2,000, and a scene

ensued. Penitent, the lad offered to work off the amount in his foster-father's counting-house, and so began the short business career which he loathed, and for which he was not fitted. He asked that a small volume of his poems might be published, but was refused. Then he requested that he might try some other life-work, and another scene ensued, the result of which was that the lad left home and started life on his own account.

He went first to Boston, and spent nearly all of his few dollars in publishing a slender volume of poems, from which he never realized a dollar. He next went into the army. On the death of Mrs. Allan, he returned, the breach was temporarily patched up, and he was sent to West Point Academy. Here, it appears, he was subjected to so many snubs on account of his parentage that the place became intolerable to him. He asked to be allowed to leave, but was refused, and deliberately so neglected his military duties that he was expelled.

On returning to Richmond, he found that Mr. Allan was married again, but never dreaming that his position in his home was altered, he went confidently in and handed his travelling bag to a servant with a smile, requesting that it be taken to his room. He was informed then that his beautifully-furnished room had been taken for a guest-chamber, and that his personal effects had been put in a little room in the servants' quarter, and, on venturing to remonstrate with the new Mrs. Allan, he was peremptorily ordered to leave.

Without another word, he turned away, and in another moment found himself without the gate, homeless, penniless, friendless, without the faintest idea of how he should earn his living.

There now opened before Poe the beginning of a new existence, so wearily full of drudgery and disappointments that it was well he did not see its weary lengths before him. Somehow he found his way to Baltimore, but with neither trade, profession nor recommendations he was unable to find employment steadily. Upon one occasion an old university classmate saw him as one of a line of laborers carrying bricks to the bricklayers, but Poe made no movement of recognition. And so for some time he drifted about, doing the day's work for the day's need, hovering from one miserable boarding-house to another, often ill, and often, it may be feared, drowning his soul-weariness in drink.

At last he was found, ill and alone, by his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, and again a new chapter began. Mrs. Clemm was a dressmaker, in poor circumstances, but she took the youth to her home and nursed him back to life again. Before three years had passed, she had become so fond of him that she formed a plan for keeping him ever with her, and so brought about his marriage with her daughter, a child of but thirteen years of age, although represented as more in negotiating the marriage.

In the meantime, Poe had won a \$100 prize for a story, "The Gold Bug," had obtained employment in the office of The Evening Visitor, and had determined to devote his life to literature.

At the time of his marriage he

was twenty-seven years of age, educated, a man of opinions, and fast becoming conscious of his literary powers. His wife was but a comparatively illiterate child, and a veritable child she continued to remain throughout her short life. She was very fond of her handsome husband, in a childlike way. To him she was but a pet and plaything, and it is significant that in all his affairs, and for criticisms of his work, it was Mrs. Clemm that he consulted, not Virginia. It is significant, also, that he continued to form friendships with other women more capable of understanding and appreciating his work than was his child-wife; and it is significant that the period immediately succeeding his marriage was one of marked dissipation. It is only fair to state, however, that Poe really drank much less than many a man upon whom such libations would have no effect. One who knew him has remarked that he had "the weakest head" of anyone he ever knew. A single glass of wine was enough to set him "the worse"; and, in a time when wine was served at every table, and almost every man drank more or less, it may be imagined that poor Poe, with his weak will, often fell.

Before passing from this point of his career, it may be said that it is believed that he was engaged to a Miss Elizabeth White at the time of his marriage to Virginia Clemm; also, that two marriages with the latter were brought about under Mrs. Clemm's skillful manoeuvring, the first in secret, another in public at something less than a year later.

There now succeeded a time of bitter poverty and much change. Poe found himself obliged to pay the board of Mrs. Clemm, as well as of himself and his wife, out of his small salary, and the margin left was appallingly small. He flitted from paper to paper, always, as under editor, finding himself cramped and thwarted by men whom he recognized as less capable than himself. He formed continual plans for starting a magazine of his own, "The Stylus," in which he might raise American periodical literature to the heights which he dreamed for it, but found himself ever and anon repressed by want of funds. From Richmond he drifted to New York, and from thence to Philadelphia, at times falling into such straitened circumstances that Mrs. Clemm came to the rescue by keeping boarders or working at dressmaking.

In Philadelphia, where he had a position for some time on the staff of the Graham Magazine—whose circulation, by the way, was increased, because of his brilliant stories, from 5,000 to 55,000, within a couple of years—a brief period of comparative ease came to the restless family. Poe appears to have steadily resisted the temptation to drink. A little cottage with a rose-vine over the porch was secured in a suburb, and, of its three ground-floor rooms, one was rented to a lodger. There was enough to eat and wear, and neighbors have told of seeing the young wife and her mother sewing on "the stoop," apparently quite happy. "Poe always appeared like a gentleman," said one of these neighbors, years afterwards, "though thin and sickly-looking. His wife was pretty, but not noticeably so. She was too fleshy." And the description goes on to note her very black, smooth hair, full lips, and

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