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*The Works of
Edgar Allan Poe*

in

One Volume

*Poems, Tales, Essays, Criticisms
with New Notes*

Special Biographical Introduction

by

Hervey Allen

Author of

"Israfel," the Life of Poe

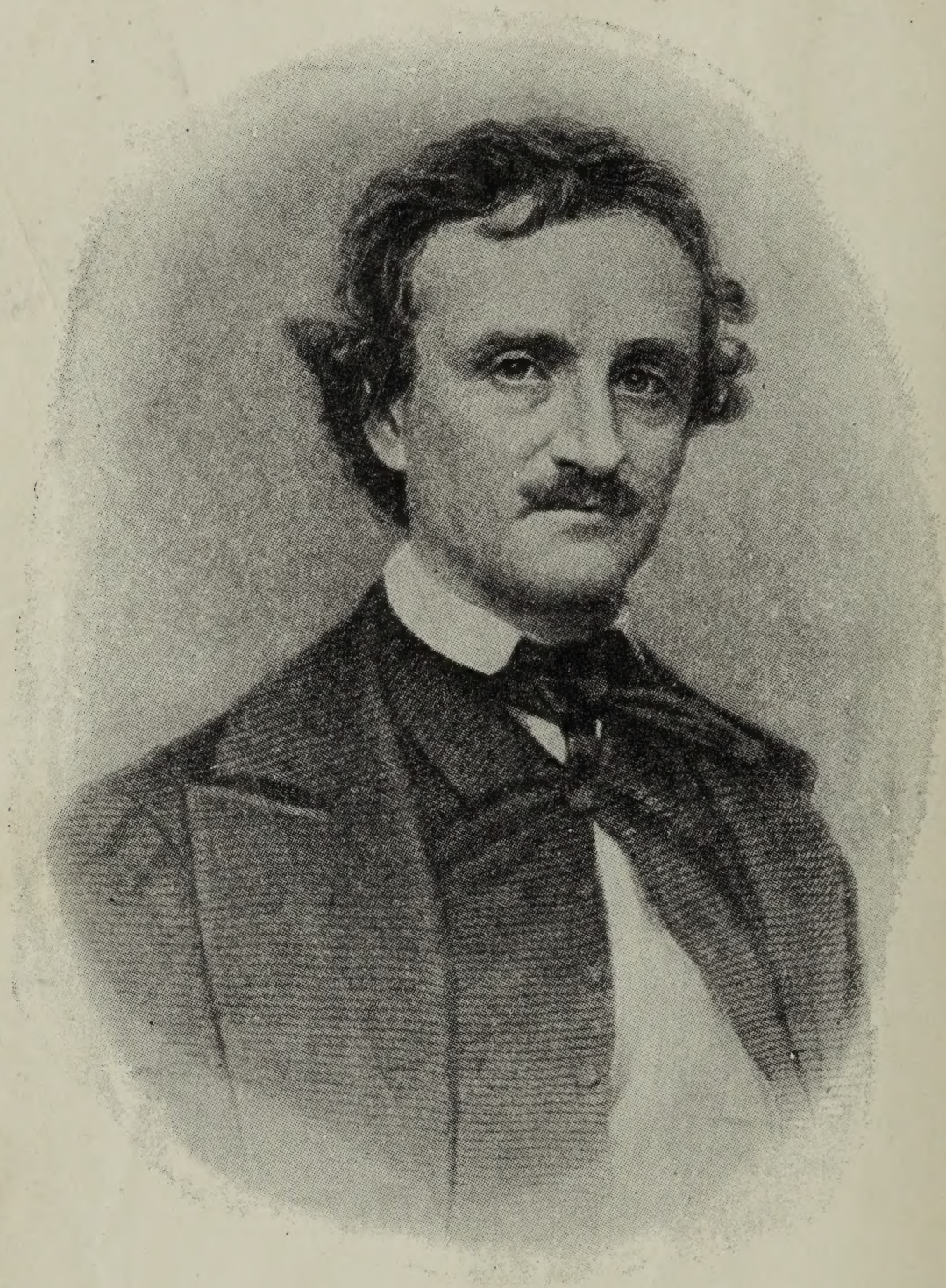


P. F. COLLIER & SON CORPORATION
NEW YORK

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F. R. COLLIER & SON CORPORATION
NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE FERRIS PRINTING COMPANY



Edgar A. Poe

Introduction

UP UNTIL within recent years the biography of Poe has been one of the most obscure and controversial in the field of American letters. The careful labors of various scholars, and the bringing to light of new evidence from time to time, due to research and fortunate accidents during the elapse of years, has now made it possible to reconstruct with a more less final degree of accuracy the main events in the life of one of the few figures in American literature who has attained a niche in the hall of international fame. As far as the events and the calendar facts of the poet's life are concerned, there is no excuse any longer to speak of the "Poe mystery." The enigma, if any, which continues to cling to the name of Edgar Allan Poe is to be found in the character of the man rather than in the facts of his mortal journey.

To the reader of these and the following pages who may become interested in the fascinating, and withal strange character of Poe himself, the satisfaction of curiosity must be found to a large degree elsewhere, in the historical, literary, critical, and psychological commentaries which have gradually gathered about the poet's name. But the main interest in any writer whose works remain alive, must of necessity be most legitimately centered in what he wrote. Biographical and bibliographical, even psychological comment is necessarily secondary.

The most essential thing then is to have available a conveniently arranged,

accurately edited, and complete text of his work, with an introduction containing the pertinent and definitely ascertained facts about the life of the author in the light of the most recent research available. If to these facts a few critical remarks, not open to reasonable objection be added, in order to aid the generally intelligent reader to a more immediate and yet primary approach, and if the whole work be permanently bound in a single pleasant volume, the publisher may be considered to have rendered a valuable and a practical service.

Such is the ideal of the present edition of the Works of Edgar Allan Poe. In the case of Poe, indeed, such a service is peculiarly necessary and timely. There are available many excellent and well edited editions of *various collections* of his work both in prose and poetry, but a reasonably complete edition of his work in all fields bound in one volume has been up until the present time entirely unavailable to the public. To remedy this somewhat scandalous state of affairs, one that has recently been justly complained of by an eminent English critic, is the *raison d'être* of this book. Considerable expense, research, and justifiable enthusiasm has gone into its preparation. The introduction will, as outlined above, confine itself almost exclusively to biographical facts. To these we can now proceed:

Edgar Allan Poe was born at 33 Hollis Street, Boston, Mass., on January 19, 1809, the son of poverty stricken

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actors, David, and Elizabeth (born Arnold) Poe. His parents were then filling an engagement in a Boston theatre, and the appearances of both, together with their sojourns in various places during their wandering careers, are to be plainly traced in the play bills of the time.

Paternal Ancestry

The father of the poet was one David Poe of Baltimore, Maryland, who had left the study of the law in that city to take up a stage career contrary to the desire of his family. The Poes had settled in America some two or three generations prior to the birth of Edgar. Their line is distinctly traced back to Dring in the Parish of Kildallen, County Cavan, Ireland, and thence into the Parish of Fenwick in Ayrshire, Scotland. Hence they derived from Scotch-Irish stock, with what trace of the Celtic is doubtful. The first Poes came to America about 1739. The immediate paternal ancestors of the poet landed at Newcastle, Delaware, in 1748 or a little earlier. These were John Poe and his wife Jane McBride Poe who went to settle in eastern Pennsylvania. This couple had ten children in their family, among them one David who was the grandfather of the poet. David Poe married Elizabeth Cairnes, also of Scotch-Irish ancestry, then living in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, whence, sometime prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution they moved to Baltimore, Maryland.

David Poe and his wife, Elizabeth Cairnes Poe, took the patriot side in the Revolution. David was active in driving the Tories out of Baltimore and

was appointed "Assistant Deputy Quartermaster," which meant that he was a local purchasing agent of military supplies for the Revolutionary Army. He is said to have been of considerable aid to Lafayette during the Virginia and Southern campaigns, and for this patriotic activity he received the courtesy title of "General." His wife Elizabeth took an active part in making clothes for the Continental Army. David and Elizabeth Poe (Sr.) had seven children David, the eldest son, becoming the father of the poet. Two sisters of David, Eliza Poe (afterward Mrs. Henry Herring) and Maria Poe (later Mrs. William Clemm) enter into the story of the poet's life, the latter particularly, as she became his mother-in-law in addition to being his aunt. With her he lived from 1835 to 1849.

Young David Poe was destined for the law, but as previously mentioned, he finally left his native city to go on the stage. His first professional appearance took place at Charleston, S. C., in December, 1803. A dramatic notice of this performance in a local paper describes David Poe as being extremely diffident while—

" . . . His voice seems to be clear, melodious and variable; what its compass may be can only be shown when he acts unrestrained by timidity. His enunciation seemed to be very distinct and articulate; and his face and person are much in his favor. His size is of that pitch well fitted for general action if his talents should be suited to sock and buskin. . . ." This is perhaps the only direct evidence extant of the physical appearance of the poet's father. No pictures of him are known to exist. His histrionic powers were at best very

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limited. He continued to play in minor parts in various Southern cities and in January, 1806, married Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins, a young childless widow, also an actress, whose husband had died but a few months before. Elizabeth Arnold Poe became the mother of Edgar Allan Poe.

Maternal Ancestry

The young widow whom David Poe married in 1806 had been born in England in the spring of 1787. She was the daughter of Henry Arnold, and Elizabeth Arnold (born Smith) both actors at the Covent Garden Theatre Royal, London. Henry Arnold died apparently about 1793. His widow continued to support herself and her child by acting and singing, and in 1796, taking her young daughter with her, she came to America and landed in Boston. Mrs. Arnold continued her professional career in America at first with considerable minor success. Either immediately before, or just after arriving in the United States, however, she married a second time, one Charles Tubbs, an Englishman of minor parts and character. The couple continued to act, sing, and dance in various cities throughout the eastern seaboard and the young Miss Arnold was soon noticed on the play bills appearing in childish roles as a member of the various troupes to which her family belonged. Mr. and Mrs. Tubbs disappeared from view about 1798 but the career of Elizabeth Arnold, Poe's mother, can be traced accurately by various show bills and notices in the newspapers of the different cities in which she played until her death in 1811. It was during her

wanderings as an actress that she married C. D. Hopkins, himself an actor, in August, 1802. There were no children by this union. Hopkins died three years later, and in 1806, as previously noted, his widow was married to David Poe.

The couple continued to play together but with very minor success. They had three children. William Henry Leonard born in Boston in 1807, Edgar born in Boston in 1809, and Rosalie at Norfolk, Va., probably in December, 1810. Due to their poverty, which was always extreme, the first child, Henry, had been left in the care of his grandparents in Baltimore shortly after his birth. Edgar was born while his parents were filling an engagement at the Boston Theatre. In the summer of 1809 the Poes went to New York where David Poe either died or deserted his wife, probably the former. Mrs. Poe was left with the infant Edgar and some time afterward gave birth to a daughter. A suspicion was afterwards thrown on the paternity of this last child and on the reputation of Mrs. Poe, which played an unfortunate part in the lives of her children. It is safe to say that it was unjust.

From 1810 on, Mrs. Poe continued, although in failing health, to appear in various roles in Norfolk, Va., Charleston, S. C., and Richmond. In the winter of 1811 she was overtaken by a fatal illness and died on December 8th in circumstances of great misery and poverty at the house of a Scotch milliner in Richmond. She was buried in the churchyard of St. John's Episcopal Church in that city two days later, but not without some pious opposition.

Mrs. Poe was survived by three orphaned children. Two of these, Edgar

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and Rosalie, were with her at the time of her death and were cared for by charitable persons. Edgar, then about two years old, was taken into the home of John Allan, a Scotch merchant in fairly prosperous circumstances, while the infant Rosalie was given shelter by a Mr. and Mrs. William Mackenzie. The Allans and Mackenzies were close friends and neighbors. The children remained in these households, and the circumstances of their fostering were, as time went on, equivalent to adoption.

Frances Keeling Valentine Allan, the wife of the Scotch merchant who had given shelter to the "infant orphan Edgar Poe," was a childless woman who had been married for some years. The child Edgar appears to have been a bright and attractive little boy, and despite some reluctance on the part of Mr. Allan, he was soon ensconced as a permanent member of the household. Although there is some evidence of an attempt on the part of paternal relatives in Baltimore to assert their interest in the child, the young boy remained as the foster-son of John Allan in Richmond, where he was early put to a school kept by a Scotch dame and apparently later to one William Irwin, a local schoolmaster. There is every evidence that his early years of childhood were spent in happy and comfortable surroundings. Mrs. Allan and her maiden sister, Nancy Valentine, who resided in the same household, were peculiarly fond of their "pet." He seems, indeed, to have been somewhat overdressed and spoiled as a very little boy, a propensity on the part of the women which the foster-father tried to offset by occasional but probably well-timed severity.

In 1815 the family sailed for England on the Ship "Lotnair," taking Edgar with them. After a brief stay in London they visited Scotch relatives, the Galts, Allans, and Fowlds, at Kilmarnock, Irvine, and other places about Ayrshire. A journey was made to Glasgow and then back to London in the late fall of 1815 when Edgar was sent back to Scotland at Irvine. There for a short time he attended the Grammar School. By 1816, however, he was back in London where his foster-father was endeavoring to build up a branch of his Richmond firm, Ellis and Allan, by trading in tobacco and general merchandise. The family resided at Southampton Row, Russell Square, while the young Edgar was sent to a boarding school kept by the Misses Dubourgs at 146 Sloane Street, Chelsea. He remained there until the summer of 1817. In the fall of that year he was entered at the Manor House School of the Rev. Mr. John Bransby at Stoke Newington, then a suburb of London. At this place he remained until some time in the spring of 1820 when he was withdrawn to return to America. The young Poe's memories of his five years' stay in Scotland and England were exceedingly vivid and continued to furnish him recollections for the remainder of his life. He seems to have been a precocious and somewhat lordly young gentleman. A curious and vivid reminiscence of these early school days in England remains in his story of "William Wilson." It is significant of his relations with his foster-parents that the bills for his English schooling are rendered for Master Allan. There can be little doubt that at this time Mr. Allan regarded him as a son. Other evidence is not lacking.

exemplified, among English writers, in Addison, Irving, and Hawthorne. The "ease" which is so often spoken of as its distinguishing feature, it has been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone, as a point of really difficult attainment. This idea however, must be received with some reservation. The natural style is difficult only to those who should never intermeddle with it—to the unnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct, that the *tone* in composition, should be that which, at any given point or upon any given topic, would be the tone of the great mass of humanity. The author who, after the manner of the *North Americans*, is merely at *all* times *quiet*, is of course, upon *most* occasions, merely silly or stupid, and has no more right to be thought "easy" or "natural" than has a cockney exquisite, or the sleeping beauty in the wax-works.

The "peculiarity," or sameness, or monotone of Hawthorne, would, in its mere character of "peculiarity," and without reference to what *is* the peculiarity, suffice to deprive him of all chance of popular appreciation. But at his failure to be appreciated, we can, *of course*, no longer wonder, when we find him monotonous at decidedly the worst of all possible points—at that point which, having the least concern with Nature, is the farthest removed from the popular intellect, from the popular sentiment, and from the popular taste. I allude to the strain of allegory which completely overwhelms the greater number of his subjects, and which in some measure interferes with the direct conduct of absolutely all.

In defence of allegory (however, or for whatever object employed), there

is scarcely one respectable word to be said. Its best appeals are made to the fancy—that is to say, to our sense of adaptation, not of matters proper, but of matters improper for the purpose, of the real with the unreal; having never more of intelligible connection than has something with nothing, never half so much of effective affinity as has the substance for the shadow. The deepest emotion aroused within us by the happiest allegory, *as* allegory, is a very, very imperfectly satisfied sense of the writer's ingenuity in overcoming a difficulty we should have preferred his not having attempted to overcome. The fallacy of the idea that allegory, in any of its moods, can be made to enforce a truth—that metaphor, for example, may illustrate as well as embellish an argument—could be promptly demonstrated; the converse of the supposed fact might be shown, indeed, with very little trouble—but these are topics foreign to my present purpose. One thing is clear, that if allegory ever establishes a fact, it is by dint of overturning a fiction. Where the suggested meaning runs through the obvious one in a *very* profound undercurrent, so as never to interfere with the upper one without our own volition, so as never to show itself unless *called* to the surface, there only, for the proper uses of fictitious narrative, is it available at all. Under the best circumstances, it must always interfere with that unity of effect which, to the artist, is worth all the allegory in the world. Its vital injury, however, is rendered to the most vitally important point in fiction—that of earnestness or verisimilitude. That "The Pilgrim's Progress" is a ludicrously over-rated book, owing its seeming popularity to one or two of those accidents in

critical literature which by the critical are sufficiently well understood, is a matter upon which no two thinking people disagree; but the pleasure derivable from it, in any sense, will be found in the direct ratio of the reader's capacity to smother its true purpose, in the direct ratio of his ability to keep the allegory out of sight, or of his *inability* to comprehend it. Of allegory properly handled, judiciously subdued, seen only as a shadow or by suggestive glimpses, and making its nearest approach to truth in a not obtrusive and therefore not unpleasant *appositeness*, the "Undine" of De La Motte Fouque is the best, and undoubtedly a very remarkable specimen.

The obvious causes, however, which have prevented Mr. Hawthorne's *popularity*, do not suffice to condemn him in the eyes of the few who belong properly to books, and to whom books, perhaps, do not quite so properly belong. These few estimate an author, not as do the public, altogether by what he does, but in great measure—indeed, even in the greatest measure—by what he evinces a capability of doing. In this view, Hawthorne stands among literary people in America much in the same light as did Coleridge in England. The few also, through a certain warping of the taste, which long pondering upon books as books merely never fails to induce, are not in condition to view the errors of a scholar as errors altogether. At any time these gentlemen are prone to think the public not right rather than an educated author wrong. But the simple truth is, that the writer who aims at impressing the people, is *always* wrong when he fails in forcing

that people to receive the impression. How far Mr. Hawthorne has addressed the people at all, is of course not a question for me to decide. His books afford strong internal evidence of having been written to himself and his particular friends alone.

There has long existed in literature a fatal and unfounded prejudice, which it will be the office of this age to overthrow—the idea that the mere bulk of a work must enter largely into our estimate of its merit. I do not suppose even the weakest of the Quarterly reviewers weak enough to maintain that in a book's size or mass, abstractly considered, there is anything which especially calls for our admiration. A mountain, simply through the sensation of physical magnitude which it conveys, does indeed affect us with a sense of the sublime, but we cannot admit any such influence in the contemplation even of "The Columbiad." The Quarterlies themselves will not admit it. And yet, what else are we to understand by their continual prating about "sustained effort?" Granted that this sustained effort has accomplished an epic—let us then admire the effort (if this be a thing admirable), but certainly not the epic on the effort's account. Common sense, in the time to come, may possibly insist upon measuring a work of art rather by the object it fulfils, by the impression it makes, than by the time it took to fulfil the object, or by the extent of "sustained effort" which became necessary to produce the impression. The fact is, that perseverance is one thing and genius quite another; nor can all the transcendentalists in Heathendom confound them.

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