

Edgar Allan Poe—A Critique.

(Continued from page two.)

it is no surprise that Baltimore made Poe the sensation of the day, and invited him to balls and dinners—and, too, it should be no matter of surprise that Poe turned a deaf ear to all the city's cry. He was working now fourteen or fifteen hours a day—this was better than the crowd to him. And for seventeen years he lives such a life—not always as happy though as these days.

On September 22, 1834, Poe married his young love, the beautiful and sweet Virginia Clemm, who was at the age of fourteen—just budding into lovely womanhood.

Soon after this marriage, The Southern Literary Messenger, a new literary venture just launched at Richmond, called Poe to be associate editor. He eagerly accepted this call, and we find the poet and his mother-in-law and wife moving from their native scenes to the childhood haunts of Edgar. But here were his greater troubles to begin. He did uncommon work, both as critic and playwright. "Yet he felt with all the morbid sensitiveness of one spoiled by luxury and arrogance in youth, the difference between the present every day work—life and that independence which if again at his command would enable him to work as his genius prompted—which would enable him to indulge his finer sense and finish at ease the work best suited to his powers." This lack of freedom—this yoke of necessity bore heavily upon him. From this time he was subject to moods of brooding and despair, of crying out upon fate, that were his pest and ultimate destruction.

Poe filled his pest faithfully and turned out copy with tremendous rapidity. But finally the inevitable came. Poe was hard to deal with, for few understood the man. He and the chief editor quarrelled, and Poe withdrew of his own accord, and was not dismissed, as is often said.

New York was the next stage in the poet's nomadic life. Here he worked, as in Richmond, living a burdened life. The common-place work was allotted as his task, and justly chafing under this rule we find him severing relations again.

Philadelphia was the next stop. He came here in 1838 and remained for six years. Then again he emigrates to New York.

"In 1845 'The Raven' began its immortal plaint, its eternal song of nevermore." The floods of praise swept over the world, but they came not near the genius who penned the words, for he was kneeling by his dying child-wife. On January 30, 1847, her last smile was given to her prince and poet, and he was left to live on loneliness and heavenly love.

After this Poe took to drinking. To drown trouble in wine and to write—this was his only aim. Time after time he visited Baltimore and on one of these vis-

its he wrote the fine poem, "The Bells."

And finally it was in Baltimore where the peculiar worshipper of beauty—where the unique and sensitive feminine spirit—where genius, played its last role. "At the moment when the poet, rallying from the desolation caused by the death of his wife, found new hope and purpose, and was on his way to marry a woman who possibly might save him, the tragedy of his life began again. Its final scene was as swift, irreparable, black with terror, as that of any drama ever written. His death was gloom. After October 7, 1849, men saw him no more; but the shadow of a veiled old woman, mourning for him, hovered here and there. After many years a lauded tomb was placed above his ashes, and there remain to American literature the relics, so unequal in value, of the most isolated and exceptional of all its poets and pioneers." (American Poets, 237.)

And now just a word to Poe's literary work—the estimate and the place which has been given him—and we have done.

There is the same controversy concerning his literary standing as there is concerning his life and character. In the editorials of the Independent for January 21, 1909, we find this statement, among others: "We admire his craftsmanship twice displayed, but on the evidence of two poems of a hundred lines each we decline to lift him to the summit of our Parnassus." This would place genius upon a basis of quantity and not quality. Mr. Hamilton Wright Mabie, in the Outlook for April 24, 1909, says: "The simple fact is that Poe wrote a small group of poems as lovely and as far beyond the reach of analysis as a flower; and the very perfection of these pieces teases the critics who come to them with the usual academic apparatus or with the standards of definitely ethical or intellectual art. He has waited long for clear and adequate appreciation; for the rank at home which has been given him abroad. He can afford to wait; for while his work lacks greatness in range, passion, reality, it shows the individuality of conception and distinction of workmanship which lie within reach of the true poets only. Then is Poe's claim to rank among the poets disputed because it rests on songs so few and of a quality so elusive? When was poetry measured by magnitude or valued by bulk? How little there is of Keats, and how securely his kinship with the greater English poets rests on that group of odes and sonnets! How often Emerson came with serene and smiling face to the temple; how rarely he brought the gods the gift of immortal song." A. C. H.

DR. J. H. BROOKS

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