

THE COMPLETE TALES
AND POEMS
OF
EDGAR ALLAN POE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
HERVEY ALLEN

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INTRODUCTION

BY HERVEY ALLEN

WHEN Edgar Allan Poe died under miserable and tragic circumstances in Baltimore in 1849, the disorder of the latter years of his life was amply reflected in the astonishing disarray and scatterment of his writings. By nature a precise, delicate and pedantic writer, one of the ablest editors of his time, the "unmerciful disaster which followed fast and followed faster," that species of "hard luck" which is the subtle result of a nervous ineptitude to cope with practical affairs, continued to dog both the memory of his personality and the editing of his works.

The aftermath of Poe's death was a long and intricate story full of the sound and fury of a controversy about the nature of the man's personality, his loves and misfortunes, and for years it was a tale told by idiots, male and female, in which incredible oceans of slushy sentimentality, bathos and wishy-washy hysteria broke in waves of froth over the submerged rocks of fact.

It would be useless, even ludicrous, to rehearse that story here even in outline, for it is the character of Poe's writings rather than the man himself with which this volume should interest us. Suffice it to say, at the time of his death his reputation suffered one of the major misfortunes which can overtake the fame of any author. The results of the labor of a lifetime, two decades of continuous and persistent writing both in verse and prose, lay scattered in the pages of obscure, provincial, female and piffling—not to say downright eccentric—magazines, newspapers, weeklies, journals, remaindered and suppressed books, and prospectuses—the very names of which are frequently productive of ribaldry or conducive to nausea. Only the cast-iron constitutions of professional scholars can solemnly digest their contents with the bowels of compassion. But that was not all. That was only a major misfortune.

To make tragedy complete, Poe *had* gathered his writings together, story and verse; he had revised and re-edited them, adding many improvements and correcting minor errors—and then he had left them in the care of his most bitter and relentless enemy—and died. Scarcely was Poe's body cold before Rufus W. Griswold, his literary executor, was out in the New York newspapers with what, under the guise of an

obituary, amounted to a major defamation of the poet's character, to a subtle sneering at and depreciation of his work.

Rufus W. Griswold was the ablest American anthologist of his time. He had a keen nose for talent but a jaundiced eye for genius, since jealousy was a large item in his personality. Poe had from time to time offended him and also given evidence of genius. Griswold's revenge was to attack Poe posthumously. He delayed the publication of the material that had been left in his hands, and when he did publish it, he published only part of it, and disregarded many of Poe's corrections and emendations. All this occurred in the early fifties of the last century.

Thus from the very beginning there was great difficulty in gathering and editing the work of Poe. Griswold had some, by no means all, of Poe's work which was published under his auspices. There were a number of Poe's books, poetry and verse, some of which, especially the earlier ones, were always difficult, often all but impossible to obtain. And there was, as mentioned above, the body of the man's work in various versions scattered through newspapers, magazines and obscure publications, published in widely diverse and unexpected places—published whenever and wherever Poe had been able to get something into print.

Nothing is more indicative of the true genius of this writer than that his fame survived and continued to increase, despite the enormous difficulty of collecting his work, and, when once something was retrieved, of deciding what was to be the final and "official" text. For Poe put his writing, particularly his verse, through endless revisions, improving it and re-publishing it constantly. It is only in our own day that the research of scholars and the work of textual critics have come to rest in a more or less final agreement as to what is to be the standard version of Poe texts. Thanks to this agreement, this present collection is possible.

There is small space here to go into particulars about Poe's publications. A hasty and entirely general glance at the course of Poe's fame, with a brief mention of the various kinds of writings he left behind him, is all that can be attempted, or need be expected in a non-critical preface.

The survival of any writer's work is due much more to chance than most critics care to admit. That Poe survived at all was largely due to continued newspaper re-publication of "The Raven" and "The Bells." From the instant of its appearance "The Raven" became the most widely known of all American poems, and it has so remained to the present day. His short story, "The Gold Bug," was also extremely

popular and frequently repeated in print. Poe says in a letter to a friend that he wrote the bird to run with the bug and that the bird beat the bug all hollow. The "Murders in the Rue Morgue" also continued to be read and re-read, and the "Fall of the House of Usher." But in spite of all this his fame might well have lapsed. The Civil War and all that went with it fell like a wet blanket of oblivion on most of his contemporaries.

But Poe was taken up abroad, especially in France, where his personality, poetry and prose, as well as his literary theories fascinated the great poet Baudelaire, who did him the inestimable service of translating him supremely well. In some cases the translations are thought even to have **surpassed the originals.**

From then on Poe became a fructifying influence in French literature. No writer in English has so greatly affected modern French literature as Poe. Then, in a curious roundabout way, his theories and technique came back to us in America, reflected directly from France or filtered through the medium of English letters also much influenced from France.

Briefly, Poe vastly influenced all modern poetry by the way he used imagery to evoke and suggest rather than to picture and photograph with words what he had to say—his method is subjective rather than objective—and the modern short story, particularly the tale of ratiocination, the detective story for instance, is largely his invention. It is not too crude a way of putting it to add that the whole innumerable present generation of detective fiction is descended from the "Murders in the Rue Morgue" by way of Sherlock Holmes. In verse Poe's influence is too subtle and too ramified to trace here. Most modernists are unconsciously vastly indebted to him. "To Helen," for instance, is a thoroughly modern poem. The imagery is evocative; its "logic" is subliminal. His theories as to the proper construction and use of material for the short story have become the stock in trade of thousands of successful trade-writers as well as the convenient machinery of some "great ones."

Poe's fame at home was also kept alive by a long controversy about the nature of his personality, carried on at first for personal and egoistic reasons by those who had met him when he was alive, and afterwards by innumerable psychologizers and theoretic biographers, who, more interested in their own theories than in Poe, continued at least to bring tomes to his cenotaph where no complete silence has ever been observed. The man's bibliography became a scandal. "To be greatly interested in Poe," said one great writer, "is the mark of a second-rate mind."

Meanwhile, and it was a long meanwhile, it began to occur to a few editors and scholars that it might be profitable, and withal praiseworthy, to introduce into this scene of literary chaos and belittling controversy, some modicum of orderly thinking and textual decency; at least the world ought to have a chance of judging Poe by his own work instead of by what was written *about* him and his writings by other people. Editions of Poe of various kinds began to appear. To list them all or even part of them would be futile and occupy columns of small print. For the most part one editor was content to batten upon another. Not many years ago the great English critic, George Saintsbury, complained of this bitterly. However, genuine scholars and men of letters and of good will and conscience eventually took a hand in the task. *The Complete Works of Poe* appeared in various editions, all incomplete, at various times. Also, for the most part, these editions were extremely expensive, frequently grotesquely illustrated, and occupied whole shelves. In several cases the proof-readers of some editions seemed to have been engaged in sabotage, or on strike. In any case, the public suffered, and so did Poe.

Finally Professor Killis Campbell appeared on the scene and in his *Poe Canon* made firm land rise out of the mist. In these long labors in the textual field the names of Professors Kent and Mabbott are bright and honorable. Students of Poe will always be in their debt. Nevertheless, there is not yet available a variorum edition with literally all of Poe's writings retrieved. That will still take time and scholarly and financial effort to achieve, but the goal is in sight.

But it is possible now to bring out an edition of Poe's *Complete Works*, in the sense that all of the important and nearly all of the minor, even trivial, utterances of Poe's pen can be placed before the reader with a textual accuracy and finality that bear the impress and benefit of much scholarly labor; that for any but the specialist or pedant is satisfactory.

That is, we now have a reasonably accurate compendium of Poe's work in verse, short story, criticism, reviews and miscellaneous comment available for the general reader for enjoyment or for the scholar worthy of his attention and library.

This edition of the *Complete Works* is in that category. It does not pretend to be final. It does claim to make his work readily available in an attractive format, to have been carefully prepared, intelligently arranged and reasonably priced. In short, it proposes to put into the hands of the general public the entire range of the work of one of the greatest of American writers in a most convenient and readable volume that will be at once popular and reliable.

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TALES

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THE UNPARALLELED ADVENTURE OF ONE HANS PFAALL

With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear *and a horse of air*,
To the wilderness I wander.

—Tom O'Bedlam's Song

BY LATE accounts from Rotterdam, that city seems to be in a high state of philosophical excitement. Indeed, phenomena have there occurred of a nature so completely unexpected—so entirely novel—so utterly at variance with preconceived opinions—as to leave no doubt on my mind that long ere this all Europe is in an uproar, all physics in a ferment, all reason and astronomy together by the ears.

It appears that on the —— day of ——, (I am not positive about the date,) a vast crowd of people, for purposes not specifically mentioned, were assembled in the great square of the Exchange in the well-conditioned city of Rotterdam. The day was warm—unusually so for the season—there was hardly a breath of air stirring; and the multitude were in no bad humor at being now and then besprinkled with friendly showers of momentary duration, that fell from large white masses of cloud profusely distributed about the blue vault of the firmament. Nevertheless, about noon, a slight but remarkable agitation became apparent in the assembly: the clattering of ten thousand tongues succeeded; and, in an instant afterward, ten thousand faces were upturned toward the heavens, ten thousand pipes descended simultaneously from the corners of ten thousand mouths, and a shout, which could be compared to nothing but the roaring of Niagara, resounded long, loudly, and furiously, through all the city and through all the environs of Rotterdam.

The origin of this hubbub soon became sufficiently evident. From behind the huge bulk of one of those sharply defined masses of cloud already mentioned, was seen slowly to emerge into an open area of blue space, a queer, heterogeneous, but apparently solid substance, so oddly shaped, so whimsically put together, as not to be in any manner comprehended, and never to be sufficiently admired, by the host of sturdy burghers who stood open-mouthed below. What could it be? In the name of all the devils in Rotterdam, what could it possibly portend? No one knew; no one could imagine; no one—not even the burgomaster Mynheer Superbus Von Un-

derduk—had the slightest clew by which to unravel the mystery; so, as nothing more reasonable could be done, every one to a man replaced his pipe carefully in the corner of his mouth, and maintaining an eye steadily upon the phenomenon, puffed, paused, waddled about, and grunted significantly—then waddled back, grunted, paused, and finally—puffed again.

In the meantime, however, lower and still lower toward the goodly city, came the object of so much curiosity, and the cause of so much smoke. In a very few minutes it arrived near enough to be accurately discerned. It appeared to be—yes! it *was* undoubtedly a species of balloon; but surely no *such* balloon had ever been seen in Rotterdam before. For who, let me ask, ever heard of a balloon manufactured entirely of dirty newspapers? No man in Holland certainly; yet here, under the very noses of the people, or rather at some distance *above* their noses was the identical thing in question, and composed, I have it on the very best authority, of the precise material which no one had ever before known to be used for a similar purpose. It was an egregious insult to the good sense of the burghers of Rotterdam. As to the shape of the phenomenon, it was even still more reprehensible. Being little or nothing better than a huge fool's-cap turned *upside down*. And this similitude was regarded as by no means lessened when, upon nearer inspection, the crowd saw a large tassel depending from its apex, and, around the upper rim or base of the cone, a circle of little instruments, resembling sheep-bells, which kept up a continual tinkling to the tune of Betty Martin. But still worse.—Suspended by blue ribbons to the end of this fantastic machine, there hung, by way of car, an enormous drab beaver hat, with a brim superlatively broad, and a hemispherical crown with a black band and a silver buckle. It is, however, somewhat remarkable that many citizens of Rotterdam swore to having seen the same hat repeatedly before; and indeed the whole assembly seemed to regard it with eyes of familiarity; while the vrow Grettel Pfaall, upon sight of it, uttered an exclamation of joyful surprise, and declared it to be the identical hat of her good man himself. Now this was a circumstance the more to be observed, as Pfaall, with three companions, had actually disappeared from Rotterdam about five years before, in a very sudden and unaccountable manner, and up to the date of this narrative all attempts at obtaining intelligence concerning them had failed. To be sure, some bones which were thought to be human, mixed up with a quantity of odd-looking rubbish, had been lately discovered in a retired situation to the east of the city; and some people went so far as to imagine that in this spot a foul murder had been committed, and that the sufferers were in all probability Hans Pfaall and his associates. But to return.

The balloon (for such no doubt it was) had now descended to within a hundred feet of the earth, allowing the crowd below a sufficiently distinct

view of the person of its occupant. This was in truth a very singular some body. He could not have been more than two feet in height; but this altitude, little as it was, would have been sufficient to destroy his *equilibrium*, and tilt him over the edge of his tiny car, but for the intervention of a circular rim reaching as high as the breast, and rigged on to the cords of the balloon. The body of the little man was more than proportionally broad, giving to his entire figure a rotundity highly absurd. His feet, of course, could not be seen at all. His hands were enormously large. His hair was gray, and collected into a *queue* behind. His nose was prodigiously long, crooked, and inflammatory; his eyes full, brilliant, and acute; his chin and cheeks, although wrinkled with age, were broad, puffy, and double; but of ears of any kind there was not a semblance to be discovered upon any portion of his head. This odd little gentleman was dressed in a loose surtout of sky-blue satin, with tight breeches to match, fastened with silver buckles at the knees. His vest was of some bright yellow material; a white taffety cap was set jauntily on one side of his head; and, to complete his equipment, a blood-red silk handkerchief enveloped his throat, and fell down, in a dainty manner, upon his bosom, in a fantastic bow-knot of super-eminent dimensions.

Having descended, as I said before, to about one hundred feet from the surface of the earth, the little old gentleman was suddenly seized with a fit of trepidation, and appeared disinclined to make any nearer approach to *terra firma*. Throwing out, therefore, a quantity of sand from a canvas bag, which he lifted with great difficulty, he became stationary in an instant. He then proceeded, in a hurried and agitated manner, to extract from a side-pocket in his surtout a large morocco pocket-book. This he poised suspiciously in his hand, then eyed it with an air of extreme surprise, and was evidently astonished at its weight. He at length opened it, and drawing therefrom a huge letter sealed with red sealing-wax and tied carefully with red tape, let it fall precisely at the feet of the burgomaster, Superbus Von Underduk. His Excellency stooped to take it up. But the *aëronaut*, still greatly discomposed, and having apparently no further business to detain him in Rotterdam, began at this moment to make busy preparations for departure; and it being necessary to discharge a portion of ballast to enable him to reascend, the half dozen bags which he threw out, one after another, without taking the trouble to empty their contents, tumbled, every one of them, most unfortunately upon the back of the burgomaster, and rolled him over and over no less than half a dozen times, in the face of every individual in Rotterdam. It is not to be supposed, however, that the great Underduk suffered this impertinence on the part of the little old man to pass off with impunity. It is said, on the contrary, that during each of his half dozen circumvolutions he emitted no less than half a dozen distinct and furious whiffs from his pipe, to which he held fast

the whole time with all his might, and to which he intends holding fast (God willing) until the day of his decease.

In the meantime the balloon arose like a lark, and, soaring far away above the city, at length drifted quietly behind a cloud similar to that from which it had so oddly emerged, and was thus lost forever to the wondering eyes of the good citizens of Rotterdam. All attention was now directed to the letter, the descent of which, and the consequences attending thereupon, had proved so fatally subversive of both person and personal dignity to his Excellency, Von Underduk. That functionary, however, had not failed, during his circumgyratory movements, to bestow a thought upon the important object of securing the epistle, which was seen, upon inspection, to have fallen into the most proper hands, being actually addressed to himself and Professor Rubadub, in their official capacities of President and Vice-President of the Rotterdam College of Astronomy. It was accordingly opened by those dignitaries upon the spot, and found to contain the following extraordinary, and indeed very serious, communication:—

“To their Excellencies Von Underduk and Rubadub, President and Vice-President of the States’ College of Astronomers, in the city of Rotterdam.

“Your Excellencies may perhaps be able to remember an humble artisan, by name Hans Pfaall, and by occupation a mender of bellows, who, with three others, disappeared from Rotterdam, about five years ago, in a manner which must have been considered unaccountable. If, however, it so please your Excellencies, I, the writer of this communication, am the identical Hans Pfaall himself. It is well known to most of my fellow-citizens, that for the period of forty years I continued to occupy the little square brick building, at the head of the alley called Sauerkraut, in which I resided at the time of my disappearance. My ancestors have also resided therein time out of mind—they, as well as myself, steadily following the respectable and indeed lucrative profession of mending of bellows: for, to speak the truth, until of late years, that the heads of all the people have been set agog with politics, no better business than my own could an honest citizen of Rotterdam either desire or deserve. Credit was good, employment was never wanting, and there was no lack of either money or good-will. But, as I was saying, we soon began to feel the effects of liberty and long speeches, and radicalism, and all that sort of thing. People who were formerly the best customers in the world, had now not a moment of time to think of us at all. They had as much as they could do to read about the revolutions, and keep up with the march of intellect and the spirit of the age. If a fire wanted fanning, it could readily be fanned with a newspaper; and as the government grew weaker, I have no doubt that leather

and iron acquired durability in proportion—for, in a very short time, there was not a pair of bellows in all Rotterdam that ever stood in need of a stitch or required the assistance of a hammer. This was a state of things not to be endured. I soon grew as poor as a rat, and, having a wife and children to provide for, my burdens at length became intolerable, and I spent hour after hour in reflecting upon the most convenient method of putting an end to my life. Duns, in the meantime, left me little leisure for contemplation. My house was literally besieged from morning till night. There were three fellows in particular who worried me beyond endurance, keeping watch continually about my door, and threatening me with the law. Upon these three I vowed the bitterest revenge, if ever I should be so happy as to get them within my clutches; and I believe nothing in the world but the pleasure of this anticipation prevented me from putting my plan of suicide into immediate execution, by blowing my brains out with a blunderbuss. I thought it best, however, to dissemble my wrath, and to treat them with promises and fair words, until, by some good turn of fate, an opportunity of vengeance should be afforded me.

“One day, having given them the slip, and feeling more than usually dejected, I continued for a long time to wander about the most obscure streets without object, until at length I chanced to stumble against the corner of a bookseller’s stall. Seeing a chair close at hand, for the use of customers, I threw myself doggedly into it, and, hardly knowing why, opened the pages of the first volume which came within my reach. It proved to be a small pamphlet treatise on Speculative Astronomy, written either by Professor Encke of Berlin or by a Frenchman of somewhat similar name. I had some little tincture of information on matters of this nature, and soon became more and more absorbed in the contents of the book—reading it actually through twice before I awoke to a recollection of what was passing around me. By this time it began to grow dark, and I directed my steps toward home. But the treatise (in conjunction with a discovery in pneumatics, lately communicated to me as an important secret, by a cousin from Nantz) had made an indelible impression on my mind, and, as I sauntered along the dusky streets, I revolved carefully over in my memory the wild and sometimes unintelligible reasonings of the writer. There are some particular passages which affected my imagination in an extraordinary manner. The longer I meditated upon these, the more intense grew the interest which had been excited within me. The limited nature of my education in general, and more especially my ignorance on subjects connected with natural philosophy, so far from rendering me diffident of my own ability to comprehend what I had read, or inducing me to mistrust the many vague notions which had arisen in consequence, merely served as a farther stimulus to imagination; and I was vain enough, or perhaps reasonable enough, to doubt whether those crude ideas which