

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

[Born, 1811. Died, 1849.]

THE family of Mr POE is one of the oldest and most respectable in Baltimore. DAVID POE, his paternal grandfather, was a quartermaster-general in the Maryland line during the Revolution, and the intimate friend of LAFAYETTE, who, during his last visit to the United States, called personally upon the general's widow, and tendered her his acknowledgments for the services rendered to him by her husband. His great-grandfather, JOHN POE, married, in England, JANE, a daughter of Admiral JAMES MCBRIDE, noted in British naval history, and claiming kindred with some of the most illustrious English families. His father and mother died within a few weeks of each other, of consumption, leaving him an orphan, at two years of age. Mr. JOHN ALLAN, a wealthy gentleman of Richmond, Virginia, took a fancy to him, and persuaded General POE, his grandfather, to suffer him to adopt him. He was brought up in Mr. ALLAN'S family; and as that gentleman had no other children, he was regarded as his son and heir. In 1816 he accompanied Mr. and Mrs. ALLAN to Great Britain, visited every portion of it, and afterward passed four or five years in a school kept at Stoke Newington, near London, by the Reverend Doctor BRANSBY. He returned to America in 1822, and in 1825 went to the Jefferson University, at Charlottesville, in Virginia, where he led a very dissipated life, the manners of the college being at that time extremely dissolute. He took the first honours, however, and went home greatly in debt. Mr. ALLAN refused to pay some of his debts of *honour*, and he hastily quitted the country on a Quixotic expedition to join the Greeks, then struggling for liberty. He did not reach his original destination, however, but made his way to St. Petersburg, in Russia, where he became involved in difficulties, from which he was extricated by the late Mr. HENRY MIDDLETON, the American minister at that capital. He returned home in 1829, and immediately afterward entered the military academy at West Point. In about eighteen months from that time, Mr. ALLAN, who had lost his first wife while Mr. POE was in Russia, married again. He was sixty-five years of age, and the lady was young: POE quarrelled with her, and the veteran husband, taking the part of his wife, addressed him an angry letter, which was answered in the same spirit. He died soon after, leaving an infant son the heir to his property, and bequeathed POE nothing.

The army, in the opinion of the young cadet, was not a place for a poor man; so he left West Point abruptly, and determined to maintain himself by authorship. He had printed, while in the military academy, a small volume of poems,

most of which were written in early youth. They illustrated the character of his abilities, and justified his anticipations of success. For a considerable time, however, his writings attracted but little attention. At length, in 1831, the proprietor of a weekly literary gazette in Baltimore offered two premiums, one for the best story in prose, and the other for the best poem. In due time our author sent in two articles, both of which were successful with the examining committee, and popular upon their appearance before the public. The late Mr. THOMAS W. WHITE had then recently established "The Southern Literary Messenger," at Richmond, and upon the warm recommendation of Mr. JOHN P. KENNEDY, who was a member of the committee that has been referred to, Mr. POE was engaged by him to be its editor. He continued in this situation about a year and a half, in which he wrote many brilliant articles, and raised the "Messenger" to the first rank of literary periodicals.

He next removed to Philadelphia, to assist Mr. W. E. BURTON in the editorship of the "Gentleman's Magazine," a miscellany that in 1840 was merged in "Graham's Magazine," of which Mr. POE became one of the principal writers, particularly in criticism, in which his papers attracted much attention, by their careful and skilful analysis, and generally caustic severity. At this period, however, he appears to have been more ambitious of securing distinction in romantic fiction, and a collection of his compositions in this department, published in 1841, under the title of "Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque," established his reputation for ingenuity, imagination, and extraordinary power in tragical narration.

Near the end of 1844 Mr. POE removed to New York, where he conducted for several months a literary miscellany called "The Broadway Journal." In 1845 he published a volume of "Tales," and a collection of his "Poems;" in 1846 wrote a series of literary and personal sketches entitled "The Literati of New York City," which commanded much attention; in 1848 gave to the public, first as a lecture, and afterwards in print, "Eureka, a Prose Poem;" and in the summer of 1849 delivered several lectures, in Richmond and other cities, and on the seventh of October, while on his way to New York, died, suddenly, at Baltimore.

After his death a collection of his works, in three volumes, was published in New York, edited by me, in fulfilment of wishes he had expressed on the subject. It embraced nearly all his writings, except "Arthur Gordon Pym," a nautical romance, originally printed in the "Southern Literary Messenger," and a few pieces of humorous prose, in which he was less successful than in other kinds of

literature. In a memoir which is contained in these volumes I have endeavored to present, with as much kindly reserve in regard to his life as was consistent with justice, a view of his extraordinary intellectual and moral character. Unquestionably he was a man of genius, and those who are familiar with his melancholy history will not doubt that his genius was in a singular degree wasted or misapplied.

In poetry, as in prose, he was most successful in the metaphysical treatment of the passions. His

poems are constructed with wonderful ingenuity and finished with consummate art. They illustrate a morbid sensitiveness of feeling, a shadowy and gloomy imagination, and a taste almost faultless in the apprehension of that sort of beauty most agreeable to his temper. His rank as a poet is with the first class of his times. "The Raven," "Ulalume," "The Bells," and several of his other pieces, will be remembered as among the finest monuments of the capacities of the English language.