SUSAN ARCHER WEISS

THE HOME LIFE OF POE

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Содержание

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TO THE READER

In considering this book, will the reader especially note that it is not a "Life" or a "Biography" of Poe, of which too many already exist and to which nothing can be added after the exhaustive works of Woodbury and Prof. Harrison. I have not treated Poe in his character of poet or author, but confined myself to his private home-life, domestic and social, as I have heard it described by Poe's most intimate friends who knew him from infancy—some of them my own relatives—and from my own brief knowledge of him in the last three months of his life. The book may therefore be considered as a *supplement* to the more complete "Lives and Biographies," showing Poe in a character as yet wholly unknown to the public, but which should be known in order to enable us to form a correct judgment of his character. I have corrected various misstatements of writers which, repeated by one from another, have come to be received as truth.

> I have made no attempt at producing an artistic work, but have treated the subject as it demands, in a plain and practical manner with regard to facts apart from idealism of any kind.
> *The Author.*

CHAPTER I
FIRST GLIMPSE OF EDGAR POE

It may be regarded as a somewhat curious coincidence that the first glimpse afforded us of Edgar Poe is on the authority of my own mother.

This is the story, as she told it to me:

"In the summer of 1811 there was a fine company of players in Norfolk, and we children were as a special treat taken to see them. I remember the names of Mr. Placide, Mr. Green, Mr. Young and Mr. Poe, with their wives. I can recall Mrs. Young as a large, fair woman with golden hair; but my most distinct recollection is of Mrs. Poe. She was rather small, with a round, rosy, laughing face, short dark curls and beautiful large blue eyes. Her manner was gay and saucy, and the audience was continually applauding her. She appeared to me a young girl, but was past thirty, and had been twice married.

"At this time," continued my mother, "we were living on Main street, and my uncle, Dr. Robert Butt, of the House of Burgesses, lived close by, on Burmuda street. The large, bright garret-room of his house was used by our little cousins as a play-room, and was separated from that of the adjoining house by only a wooden partition. One day, when we were playing here, we heard voices on the other side of the partition, and, peeping through a small knothole, saw two pretty children, with whom we soon made acquaintance. Mr. and Mrs. Poe had taken lodgings in this garret with a little boy and girl and an old Welsh nurse. Sometimes this woman would say to us, 'Hush, hush, dumplings, don't make a noise,' and we knew that some one was sick in that room. Most of the time she had the children out of doors, and in the evenings we would play with them on the sidewalk. The boy was a merry, romping little fellow, but hard to manage. One day, when he would persist in playing in the middle of the street, a runaway horse came dashing around a corner, and I remember how the nurse rushed toward him, screaming: 'Ho! Hedgar! Hedgar!' snatching him away at the risk of her own life.

"This nurse was a very nice old woman, plump, rosy and good-natured. She wore a huge white cap with flaring frills, and pronounced her words in a way that amused us. She was devoted to the children, who were spoiled and wilful. The little girl was running all about, and the boy appeared about three years old."

Of this old lady it may be here said that she was really the mother of Mrs. Poe, whom she called "Betty." As an actress of the name of Arnold, she had played in various companies in both this country and Europe, taking parts in which comic songs were sung. Her pretty daughter, Elizabeth, she had brought up to her own profession, and had married her early to an actor named Hopkins, who died in October, 1805. Two months after his death his widow married David Poe, who was at that time a member of their company; and mean while her mother, Mrs. Arnold, had bestowed her own hand upon a musician of the romantic name of Tubbs, who soon left her a widow. Thenceforth she devoted herself to her daughter's family, remaining with the company and occasionally appearing in some unimportant part.

When in the summer of that year of 1811 Mr. Placide's company left Norfolk to open a season in Richmond, Mr. David Poe was too ill with consumption to accompany them, and his family remained in Norfolk. He must undoubtedly have died there; for from that time in all the affairs of his family his name is not once mentioned, nor is the remotest allusion made to him. He was probably buried by the city in one of the obscure suburban cemeteries. By his death the widow was left penniless, and Mr. Placide, to whose company she still belonged, and who was anxious to have her services in his Richmond campaign, sent one of his employees to bring the family to Richmond at his own expense. A room and board had been engaged for them "at the house of a milliner named Fipps on Main street," in the low-lying district between Fifteenth and Seventeenth streets, still known as

"*Bird-in-hand*." This room was not by any means the wretched apartment which it has been described by some of Poe's biographers. It was not a "cellar," not even a basement room, but one back of the shop, the family residing above, and must have been comfortably furnished, for this neighborhood was at this time the shopping district of the ladies of Richmond, and Mrs. Fipps was probably a fashionable shopkeeper. Damp Mrs. Poe's room must have been, since this locality was the lowest point in the city, where, when the river overflowed its banks, as was frequently the case, the water would rise to the back doors of the Main street buildings and at times flood the ground floors. In this room Mrs. Poe contracted the malarial fever then known as "ague-and-fever," which proved fatal to her.

Owing to her illness Mrs. Poe, though her appearance was constantly advertised, did not appear on the stage more than a half dozen times, if as often. Mr. Placide wrote to her husband's relatives in Baltimore in behalf of herself and children, but received no satisfactory answer, and the company kindly gave her a benefit performance. Also, one of the Richmond papers, the "*Enquirer*," of November 25th, made an appeal "to the kind-hearted of the city" in behalf of the sick actress and her little children. This brought to their aid among others Mr. John Allan and his friend, Mr. Mackenzie.

Both these gentlemen were engaged in the tobacco business, and being of Scotch nationality, the feeling of clanship led them to take a special interest in this family, whom they discovered to be of good Scotch stock. Everything possible was done for their comfort, and Mrs. Allan herself came to minister to the sick woman. On her first visit she found Mrs. Tubbs feeding the children with bread soaked in sweetened gin and water, which she called "gin-tea," and explained that it was her custom, in order to "make them strong and healthy." This was little Edgar's initiation into the habit which became the bane and ruin of his life.

It soon became evident that Mrs. Poe was very near her end. Pneumonia set in; and on the 8th of December, 1811, she died.

The question now was, what was to be done with the children? After a consultation among all parties, it was agreed that Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Allan should take charge of them at their own homes until they should be claimed by their Baltimore relatives.

It was a sad scene when the little ones were lifted up to look their last upon the face of their dead mother, and then to be separated forever from the grandmother who had so loved and cared for them. In parting she gave to each a memento of their mother; to the boy a small water-color portrait of the latter, inscribed, "For my dear little son, Edgar, from his mother," and to the girl a jewel case, the contents of which had long since been disposed of. It was all that she had had to leave them, and with this slender inheritance in their hands the little waifs were taken away to the homes of strangers.

On the day following a small funeral procession wended its way up the steep ascent of Church Hill to the graveyard of St. John's church,[1] crowning its summit. At that day it was no easy matter to get one whose profession had been that of an actor buried in consecrated ground; yet Mr. Mackenzie succeeded in effecting this. The grave was in a then obscure part of the cemetery, "close against the eastern wall," and here, after the brief service, the mother of Edgar Poe was laid to rest.

Mrs. Tubbs remained with Mr. Placide's company, and doubtless returned with them to England and to her own family.

Six weeks after the death of Mrs. Poe occurred that awful tragedy and holocaust of the burning of the Richmond theatre, which shrouded the whole country in gloom. On that night a large and fashionable audience attended the performance of "*The Bleeding Nun*," eighty of whom perished in the flames. Mrs. Allen had expressed a wish to attend, with her sister and little Edgar, but her husband objected and instead took them on a Christmas visit to the country; so they escaped the tragedy, as did also the members of Placide's company.

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[1] In this historical church it was that Patrick Henry thrilled the hearts of his hearers with the memorable words, "Give me liberty or give me death!" and sent them forever "ringing down the grooves of time."

CHAPTER II
POE'S FIRST HOME

Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie, on taking charge of the Poe children, entered into a correspondence with their grandfather, Mr. David Poe, of Baltimore, in regard to them. He was by no means anxious to claim them. He represented that he and his wife were old and poor, and that already having the eldest child, William Henry, upon his hands, he could not afford to burden himself with the others. Finally he proposed that the children should be placed in an orphan asylum, where they would be properly cared for, on hearing of which Mrs. Mackenzie declared that she would never turn the baby, Rosalie, out of her home, but would bring her up with her own children; while Mrs. Allan, who was childless and had become much attached to Edgar, proposed to her husband to adopt him.

Mr. Allan demurred. His chief objection was that the boy was the child of actors, and that to have him brought up as his son would not be advisable for him or creditable to themselves. It required some special pleading on the part of the lady, and she so far prevailed as that her husband consented to keep and care for the boy as for a son, but refused to be bound by any terms of legal responsibility as either guardian or adoptive parent, preferring to remain free to act in the future as he might think proper. Mr. Mackenzie pursued the same course with regard to Rosalie, though each bestowed on his protege his own family name in baptism.

There has been much useless discussion among Poe's biographers in regard to the ages of the children at this time. Woodbury "*calculates*," according to certain data obtained from a Boston newspaper regarding the appearance of Mrs. Poe on the stage. "At this time," he says, speaking of her prolonged absence in 1807, "William Henry *may have* been born;" and accordingly fixes Edgar's birth as having occurred two years later, in 1809.

Wishing to satisfy myself on this point, I some time since decided to go to the fountain-head for information, and wrote to Mrs. Byrd, a daughter of Mrs. Mackenzie, who had been brought up with Rosalie Poe. Her answer I have carefully preserved and here give *verbatim*:

"Dear S–.—You ask the ages of Rose and Edgar. He was born in 1808, Rose in 1810. A remark of his (in answer to an invitation to her wedding) was that if I had put off my marriage one week it would have been on his birthday. I was married on the 5th of October.... Their mother died on the 8th Dec., 1811; and on the 9th the children were taken to Mr. Allan's and our house.... Their mother was boarding at Mrs. Fipps', a milliner on Main street. She was Scotch and of good family; and my father and Mr. Allan had her put away decently at the old Church on the Hill.... Mr. Poe died first."

This account of the children's ages is entitled to more weight than those of his biographers, based upon mere calculation and "*probabilities*." When the children were baptized as Edgar Allan and Rosalie Mackenzie, their ages were also recorded, though whether in church or family records is not known; and it is not likely that Mrs. Byrd, who was brought up with Rosalie Poe, could be mistaken on this point.

Were Woodbury correct in assuming that William Henry, the eldest child, "*may have been born*" in October, 1807, and Edgar, January 19, 1809, it would follow that the latter, when taken charge of by the Allans in December, 1811, was less than two years old; an impossibility, considering that his sister was then over one year old and running about playing with other children. As to Mr. Poe's claim to October 12 as his birthday, it is not likely that, howsoever often he may have given a false date to others, he would have ventured upon it to the daughter of Mrs. Mackenzie, the latter of whom would have detected the error.

It must be accepted as a final conclusion that, as Mrs. Byrd states, Edgar was born in 1808 and Rosalie in 1810.[2] Her positive assertion is proof sufficient against all mere calculation and conjecture; and in this book I shall hold to these dates as authentic.

[2] The official date of Rosalie Poe's death, on June 14, 1874, represents her as 64 years of age. This would make her a year and a half old when adopted by the Mackenzies, in December, 1811.

CHAPTER III
THE ALLAN HOME

Mr. Allan was at this time thirty-one years of age—a plain, practical business man, or, as some one has described him, "an honest, hard-headed Scotchman, kindly, but stubborn and irascible." His wife, some years younger than himself, was a beautiful woman, warm-hearted, impulsive and fond of company and amusement. Both were charitable, and though not at this time in what is called "society," were in comfortable circumstances and fond of entertaining their friends.

There was yet another member of the family, Miss Ann Valentine, an elder sister of Mrs. Allan; a lady of a lovely disposition and almost as fond of Edgar as was his so-called "mother." She was always his "Aunt Nancy."

The Allans were at this time living in the business part of the town, occupying one of a row of dingy three-story brick houses still standing on Fourteenth street, between Main and Franklin. Mr. Allan had his store on the ground floor, the family apartments being above. This was at that time and until long afterward a usual mode of living with some of the down-town merchants; though a few had already built handsome residences on Shocko Hill.

Little Edgar, bright, gay and beautiful, soon became the pet and pride of the household. Even Mr. Allan grew fond of him, and his wife delighted in taking him about and showing him off among her acquaintances. In his baggy little trousers of yellow Nankin or silk pongee, with his dark ringlets flowing over an immense "tucker," red silk stockings and peaked purple velvet cap, with its heavy gold tassel falling gracefully on one shoulder, he was the admiration of all beholders. His disposition was affectionate and his temper sweet, though having been hitherto allowed to have his own way, he was self-willed and sometimes difficult to manage. To correct his faults and as a counter balance to his wife's undue indulgence, Mr. Allan conscientiously set about training the boy according to his own ideas of what was best. When Edgar was "good" he was petted and indulged, but an act of disobedience or wrong-doing was punished, as some said, with undue severity. To shield him from this was the aim of the family, even of the servants; and the boy soon learned to resort to various little tricks and artifices on his own account. An amusing instance of this was told by Mrs. Allan herself. Edgar one day would persist in running out in the rain, when Mr. Allan peremptorily called him in, with the threat of a whipping. He presently entered and, meekly walking up to his guardian, looked him in the face with his large, solemn gray eyes and held out a bunch of switches. "What are these for?" inquired the latter. "To whip me with," answered the little diplomat; and Mr. Allan had to turn aside to hide a smile, for the "switches" had been selected with a purpose, being only the long, tough leaf-stems of the alanthus tree.

Another anecdote I recall illustrative of the strict discipline to which Edgar was subject.

My uncle, Mr. Edward Valentine, who was a cousin of Mrs. Allan, and often a visitor at her house, was very fond of Edgar; and liking fun almost as much as did the child, taught him many amusing little tricks. One of these was to snatch away a chair from some big boy about to seat himself; but Edgar, too young to discriminate, on one occasion made a portly and dignified old lady the subject of this performance. Mr. Allan, who in his anger was always impulsive, immediately led away the culprit, and his wife took the earliest opportunity of going to console her pet. As the child was little over three years old, it may be doubted whether the punishment administered was the wisest course, but it was Mr. Allan's way, who apparently believed in the moral suasion of the rod.

Edgar had no dogs and no pony, and did not ride out with a groom to attend him, "like a little prince," as a biographer has represented. At this time the Allans' circumstances were not such as to

admit of such luxuries. As to his appearance in this style at the famous White Sulphur Springs, that is equally mythical.[3]

There was, however, at least one summer when Edgar was six years of age in which the Allans were at one of the lesser Virginia springs, and in returning paid a visit to Mr. Valentine's family, near Staunton. This gentleman often took Edgar out with him, either driving or seated behind him on horseback; and on receiving his paper from the country post-office would make the boy read the news to the mountain rustics, who regarded him as a prodigy of learning. Thus far he had been taught by an old Scotch dame who kept an "infant-school," and who then and for years afterward called him "her ain wee laddie," and to whom as long as she lived he was accustomed to carry offerings of choice smoking tobacco. He also learned from her to speak in the broad Scottish dialect, which greatly amused and pleased Mr. Allan. The boy was at even this age remarkably quick in learning anything.

Mr. Valentine also delighted in getting up wrestling matches between Edgar and the little pickaninnies with whom he played, rewarding the victor with gifts of money. But there was one thing which no money or other reward could induce the boy to undertake, and this was to go near the country churchyard after sunset, even in company with these same little darkies. Once, in riding home late, Edgar being seated behind Mr. Valentine, they passed a deserted log-cabin, near which were several graves, when the boy's nervous terror became so great that he attempted to get in front of his companion, who took him on the saddle before him. "They would run after us and pull me off," he said, betraying at even this early age the weird imagination of his maturer years.

This incident led to his being questioned, when it was discovered that he had been accustomed to go with his colored "mammy" to the servants' rooms in the evenings, and there listen to the horrible stories of ghosts and graveyard apparitions such as this ignorant and superstitious race delight in. It is not improbable that the gruesome sketch of the "*Tempest*" family, one of his earliest published, whose ghosts are represented as seated in coffins around a table in an undertaker's shop, and thence flying back to their near-by graves, was not inspired by some such story heard in Mr. Allan's kitchen.

Undoubtedly, these ghostly narratives, heard at this early and impressionable age, served in part to produce those weird and ghoulish imaginings which characterize some of Poe's writings, and to create that tinge of superstition which was well known to his friends. He always avoided cemeteries, hated the sight of coffins and skeletons, and would never walk alone at night even on the street; believing that evil spirits haunted the darkness and walked beside the lonely wayfarer, watching to do him a mischief. Death he loathed and feared, and a corpse he would not look upon. And yet, as bound by a weird fascination, he wrote continually of death.

Edgar Poe, like every other Southern child, had his negro "mammy" to attend to him until he went to England, to whom and the other servants he was as much attached as they to him. Indeed, a marked trait of his character was his liking for negroes, the effect of early association, and to the end of his life he delighted in talking with them and in their quaint and kindly humor and odd modes of thought and expression.

Edgar had been about three years with the Allans when he was again deprived of a home and sent among strangers. Mr. Allan went on a business trip to England and Scotland, accompanied by his wife, Miss Valentine and Edgar; the latter of whom was put to school in London, where he must have felt his loneliness and isolation. Still, he came to the Allans in holiday times, and was with them in Scotland for some months previous to their return to Virginia. Little is known of them during this absence of five years.

[3] Lest my mention of these little anecdotes and certain other matters should lead the reader to conclude that I am quoting from Gill, I would refer them to Appendix No. 1 of this volume.

CHAPTER IV
POE'S BOYHOOD

The Allans returned to Richmond in June, 1820, Edgar being then twelve years old. Having no house ready for their reception they were invited by Mr. Ellis, Mr. Allan's business partner, to his home on Franklin, then as now the fashionable street of the city.

Mr. Allan at once put Edgar to Professor Clarke's classical school, where he was in intimate association with boys of the best city families.

At the end of this year the Allans removed to a plain cottage-like dwelling at the corner of Clay and Fifth streets, in a quiet and out-of-the-way neighborhood. It consisted of but five rooms on the ground floor and a half story above; and here for some years they resided.

Of Poe as a schoolboy various accounts have been given by former schoolmates, with most of whom he was very popular, while others represent him as reserved and not generally liked. All, however, agree that he was a remarkably bright pupil, with, in the higher classes, but one rival, and that he was high-spirited and the leader in all sorts of fun and frolic.

Mrs. Mackenzie's eldest son, John, or "Jack," two years older than Edgar, though not mentioned by any of Poe's biographers, was the most intimate and trusted of all his lifelong friends. The two were playmates in childhood, and schoolmates and companions up to the time of Poe's departure for the University. Poe always called Mrs. Mackenzie "Ma," and was almost as much at home in her house as was his sister.

I remember Mr. John Mackenzie as a portly, jolly, middle-aged gentleman with a florid face and a hearty laugh. This is what he said of Poe after the latter's death:

"I never saw in him as boy or man a sign of morbidness or melancholy; unless," he added, "it was when Mrs. Stanard died, when he appeared for some time grieving and depressed. At all other times he was bright and full of fun and high spirits. He delighted in playing practical jokes, masquerading, and making raids on orchards and turnip-patches. Oh, yes; every schoolboy liked a sweet, tender, juicy turnip; and many a time after the apple crop had been gathered in, we might have been seen, a half dozen of us, seated on a rail-fence like so many crows, munching turnips. We didn't object to a raw sweet potato at times—anything that had the relish of being stolen. On Saturdays we had fish-fries by the river, or tramped into the woods for wild grapes and chinquepins. It was not always that Mr. Allan would allow Edgar to go on these excursions, and more than once he would steal off and join us, though knowing that he would be punished for it."

"Mr. Allan was a good man in his way," added Mr. Mackenzie, "but Edgar was not fond of him. He was sharp and exacting, and with his long, hooked nose and small keen eyes looking from under his shaggy eyebrows, always reminded me of a hawk. I know that often, when angry with Edgar, he would threaten to turn him adrift, and that he never allowed him to lose sight of his dependence on his charity."

Edgar, he said, was allowed a liberal weekly supply of pocket money, but being of a generous disposition and giving treats of taffy and hot gingerbread to his schoolmates at recess, besides being generally extravagant, this supply was always exhausted before the week was out, when he would borrow, and so be kept constantly in debt. He was, however, very prompt in paying off his debts.

Mr. Robert Sully, nephew of the distinguished artist, Thomas Sully, and himself an artist, was through life one of Poe's firmest friends. A boy of delicate physique and a disposition so sensitive and irritable that few could keep on good terms with him, he was always in difficulties. "I was a dull boy at school," he said to me; "and Edgar, when he knew that I had an unusually hard lesson, would help me out with it. He would never allow the big boys to teaze me, and was kind to me in every way. I used to admire and in a way envy him, he was so bright, clever and handsome.

"He lived not far from me, just around the corner; and one Saturday he came running up to our house, calling out, "Come along, Rob! We are going to the Hermitage woods for chinquepins, and you must come too. Uncle Billy is going for a load of pine-needles, and we can ride in his wagon." Now, that showed his consideration; he knowing that I could not walk the long distances that most boys could, and therefore seldom went on one of their excursions."

In one of Poe's biographies is an absurd story to the effect that Mr. Clarke, his first teacher, once on detecting him robbing a neighbor's turnip-patch, tied one of the vegetables about his neck as a token of disgrace, which the boy purposely wore home, when Mr. Allan, in a fury at this insult to his adopted son, called on the teacher and threatened him with personal chastisement. It is scarcely necessary at this day to deny the truth of that story; but the following is what Mr. Clarke himself says about it in an interview with a reporter in Baltimore some years after Poe's death, he being at that time nearly eighty years old.[4]

"Edgar had a very sweet disposition. He was always cheerful, brimful of mirth and a very great favorite with his schoolmates. I never had occasion to speak a harsh word to him, much less to make him do penance. He had a great ambition to excel."

He spoke with pride of Edgar as a student, especially in the classics. He and Nat Howard on one vacation each wrote him a complimentary letter in Latin, both equally excellent in point of scholarship; but Edgar's was in verse, which Nat could not write.

"Whenever Poe came to Baltimore he would not forget to come and see me, and I would offer him wine. It was the custom, you know. When he became editor of Graham's Magazine and could afford it, he sent wine to me, gratis.... I think that as boy and man Edgar loved me dearly. I am sure I loved him.... Yes; he was a dear, open-hearted, cheerful and good boy; and as a man he was a loving and affectionate friend to me. I went to his funeral."

The old Professor said that Poe's sister, Rosalie, he had seen when her brother was a pupil of his. "She was at that time about ten years old, was pretty and a very sweet child."

Poe, after leaving Professor Clarke's, entered Dr. Burke's classical school in 1832, where he remained until he went to the University. Here one of his classmates was Dr. Creed Thomas, a noted Richmond physician, who died so late as in 1890. In his reminiscences of Poe, published in a Richmond paper not long before his own death, he says:

"Poe was one of our brightest pupils. He read and scanned the Latin poets with ease when scarcely thirteen years of age. He was an apt student and always recited well, with a great ambition to excel in everything.

"Despite his retiring disposition he was never lacking in courage. There was not a pluckier boy in school. He never provoked a quarrel, but would always stand up for his rights.... It was a noticeable fact that he never asked any of his schoolmates to go home with him after school. The boys would frequently on Fridays take dinner or spend the night with each other at their homes, but Poe was never known to enter in this social intercourse. After he left the school ground we saw no more of him until next day."

Dr. Thomas spoke of Poe's fondness for the stage. He and several other of the brightest boys held amateur theatricals in an old building rented for the purpose. Poe was one of the best actors; but Mr. Allan, upon learning of it, forbade his having anything to do with these theatricals, a great grievance to the boy.

"A singular fact," proceeds Dr. Thomas, "is that Poe never got a whipping while at Burke's. I remember that the boys used to come in for a flogging quite frequently—I got my share. Poe was quiet and dignified during school hours, attending strictly to his studies; and we all used to wonder at his escaping the rod so successfully."

[4] This account, clipped from a Baltimore paper, was given by Professor Clarke's son to a Richmond reporter in 1894.

He adds that Poe was not popular with most of his schoolmates; that his manners were retiring and distant. Doubtless there were boys with whom he did not care to associate, feeling the lack of a congeniality between himself and them. Then there were the prim and priggish class who looked with virtuous disapproval on the robber of apple orchards and turnip-patches, and who in after years never had a good word to say of Poe, whether as boy or man.

It will be observed from Dr. Davis' account that the "quiet and dignified" manner which distinguished Poe in manhood was natural to him even as a boy.

As regards his never inviting his schoolmates to accompany him home to dinner or to spend the night, this would not have been agreeable to Edgar, who would have preferred having his time to himself for reading or writing his verses, a volume of which he now began to make up. But he was by no means deprived of company at home. The Allans, as has been said, were fond of entertaining their friends, and at their "sociables" and "tea parties" Edgar was generally required to be present, with one or two young friends to keep him company, and often he was treated to a "party" of his own —boys and girls—where a rigid etiquette was required, though dancing and charades were indulged in. This was Mrs. Allan's idea of affording him enjoyment and cultivating in him elegant and graceful manners; but to him it was most distasteful. Throughout his life he detested social companies. Mrs. Mackenzie, in speaking of the social restraint under which the Allans at this time sought to keep Edgar, said that it was very distasteful to the boy, who liked to choose his companions, and who now, at the age of fifteen, began to be dissatisfied and to think that he was subject to undue restraint at home. She often heard him express the wish that he had been adopted by Mr. Mackenzie instead of by Mr. Allan; and she would talk to him in her motherly way, endeavoring to impress him with a sense of what he owed to the latter. His disposition, she said, was very sweet and affectionate, and he was grateful for any kindness, and always happy to be at her house as much as he was allowed to be from home. Her son John could never be persuaded to visit Edgar at his home, so strict was the etiquette observed at table and in general behavior. She believed that Mr. Allan, in taking charge of Edgar, had been influenced more by a desire to please his wife than any real interest in the child, though he had conscientiously endeavored to do his duty by him. She had once heard him say that Edgar did not know the meaning of the word *gratitude*; to which she replied that it could not be expected of children, who were not able to understand their obligations; and that she did not at present look for gratitude from Rose, but for affection and obedience. Mrs. Allan was devoted to Edgar and he was very fond of her. It was she, Mrs. Mackenzie thought, rather than her husband, who so extravagantly supplied him with money, seeming to take a pride in his having more than his schoolmates. She was a good and amiable woman, fond of pleasure generally, and less domestic in her tastes than either her husband or sister.

Mr. John Mackenzie, in speaking of Edgar, bore witness to his high spirit and pluckiness in occasional schoolboy encounters, and also to his timidity in regard to being alone at night and his belief in and fear of the supernatural. He had heard Poe say, when grown, that the most horrible thing he could imagine as a boy was to feel an ice-cold hand laid upon his face in a pitch-dark room when alone at night; or to awaken in semi-darkness and see an evil face gazing close into his own; and that these fancies had so haunted him that he would often keep his head under the bed-covering until nearly suffocated.

The restrictions sought to be placed upon Poe's associations and amusements served only to render him more democratic. He, with two or three of his young friends of congenial tastes, were fond of stealing off for a bath in the river near *Rocketts* or below *the Falls*, in company with the hardy, adventurous boys of those localities, who were known as "river rats." It was from them that he learned to swim, to row and, when the river was low, to wade across its rocky bed to the willowy islands and set fish-traps. When in Richmond in after years, he told how he had met with some of these former companions, and how much he had enjoyed talking with them about "old times" on the river.

As regards religious influences and teachings in the Allan home, it does not appear that Edgar was especially subject to these. Mr. and Mrs. Allan were members of St. John's Episcopal church and punctilious in all church observances, and they required of Edgar a strict attendance at Sunday school and his presence in the family pew during divine service. But in those days it was not thought necessary for professed Christians to deny themselves social pleasures. On Sundays luxurious dinners were provided, to which friends were invited from church, and rides and drives were indulged in. Edgar was sent to dancing school, and Mrs. Allan had her dancing entertainments and her husband his card parties, which were attended by some of the most prominent professional men of the city; amusements which, as is well known, exposed Episcopalians to the charge of worldliness by other denominations. At all these entertainments wine flowed freely.

I have an impression, too vague to be asserted as fact, that Edgar Poe was confirmed at the same time with his sister and Mary Mackenzie, at St. John's church, and by the clergyman who had baptized them. To any inquiry as to his religious denomination, he always answered, "I am an Episcopalian." But it was often remarked upon by their friends in Richmond that neither he nor Rosalie had ever been known to manifest a sign of religious feeling or of interest in religious things. It was noticeable in both that, phrenologically considered, the organ of *veneration* was so undeveloped as to give a depressed or flat appearance to the top of the head when seen in profile. And it was known to Poe's intimate friends that, while he believed in a Supreme Power, he had no faith in the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. Hence he was as a bark at sea with a guiding star in view but no rudder to direct its course. His eager seeking for truth was ever but a groping in darkness, with now and then a faint, far-away ray of the light of Truth flashing upon his sight—as we see in *Eureka*.

Yet Poe was careful to offer no disrespect to religion, and he was a frequent attendant at church and a great lover of church music.

Great injustice has been done the Allans by Poe's biographers in representing them as responsible for his early dissipation. By all the story has been repeated of how the child of three or four years was accustomed to be given a glass of wine at dinner parties and required to drink the health of the company.

It was no unusual thing for little children to be taught this trick for the amusement of company, as from my own recollections I can myself aver. But the liquor given them was simply a little sweetened wine and water. As Edgar grew older he was, like other boys in his position—as the Mackenzies—allowed his glass of wine at table; but no word was ever heard of his being fond of wine until his return from the University.

I have heard a Richmond gentleman who was Poe's chum at the University speak of the latter's peculiar manner of drinking. He was no *connoisseur*, they said, in either wine or other liquors, and seemed to care little for their mere taste or flavor. "You never saw him critically discussing his wine or smacking his lips over its excellence; but he would generally swallow his glass at a draught, as though it had been water—especially when he was in any way worried." In this way he would soon become intoxicated, while his companions remained sober. "He had the weakest head of any one that I ever knew," said this gentleman, who attributed his dissipation while at the University, not to a natural inclination, but to a weakness of will which allowed himself to be easily influenced by his companions.

Hitherto we have seen in Poe, the schoolboy, only what was amiable and lovable; but now, in his sixteenth year, he began to show that beneath this were springs of bitterness which, when disturbed, could arouse him to a passion and a power hitherto unsuspected.

I never heard of but one authentic instance of his being subject to slight or "snubbing" while a boy on account of his parentage or his dependent position in Mr. Allan's family, although several writers have taken it for granted that such was the case. What effect such treatment would have had upon him is evinced in the instance in question, in which a young man, a sprig of an aristocratic family, chose to object to association with the son of actors, and not only made a point of ignoring

him on all occasions, but made offensive allusions to him as a "charity boy." This last being reported to Edgar, aroused in him a resentment which found expression in a rhyming lampoon upon "*Don Pompiosa*," so brimfull of wit, sarcasm and keenest ridicule that it was circulated throughout the city for some time, though none knew who was the author. The young man in question could not make his appearance upon the street without being pointed out and laughed at, with audible allusions to "*Don Pompiosa*," and was, it was said, at length actually driven from the town, leaving Poe triumphant. This was the forerunner of those keen literary onslaughts which in after years made Poe as a critic the terror of his enemies.

CHAPTER V
SCHOOLBOY LOVE AFFAIRS

That Poe was, both as boy and man, unusually susceptible to the influence of feminine charms has been the testimony of all who best knew him. "I never knew the time," said Mr. Mackenzie, "that Edgar was not in love with some one."

Nor was it unusual for me, when a girl, to meet with some comely matron who would laughingly admit that she had been "one of Edgar Poe's sweethearts." Neither did he confine his boyish gallantries to girls of his own age, but admired grown-up belles and young married ladies as well; though this was probably in a great measure owing to the playful petting with which they treated the handsome and chivalrous boy-lover.

But this was a trait which did not meet with the approval of Miss Jane Mackenzie, sister of the gentleman who adopted Rosalie Poe. This lady, noted for her elegant manners and accomplishments, kept a fashionable "Young Ladies' Boarding-School," patronized by the best families of the State; and many a brilliant belle and admired Virginia matron boasted of having received her education at "Miss Jane's." As I remember her, she was tall and stately, prim and precise, and was attired generally in black silk and elaborate cap and frizette, a very *Lady-Prioress* sort of a person. She had the reputation of being exceedingly "strict" in regard to the manners and conduct of her pupils, and was a contrast to the rest of her family, all of whom were remarkably genial.

When Edgar was about fifteen or sixteen he began to make trouble for Miss Jane. Repeatedly she would detect him in secret correspondence with some one of her fair pupils, supplemented on his part by offerings of candy and "original poetry," his sister Rosalie being the medium of communication. The verses were sometimes compared by the fair recipients and found to be alike, with the exception of slight changes appropriate to each; a practice which he kept up in after years. He possessed some skill in drawing, and it was his habit to make pencil-sketches of his girl friends, with locks of their hair attached to the cards.

Poe himself has told of his boyish devotion to Mrs. Stanard, which made so deep an impression upon the mind and heart of the embryo poet. The story is well known of how he once accompanied little Robert Stanard home from school (to see his pet pigeons and rabbits), and how his heart was won by the gentle and gracious reception given him by the boy's lovely mother, and the tenderness of tone and manner with which she talked to him; she knowing his pathetic history. In his heart a chord of feeling was stirred which had never before been touched; and thenceforth he regarded her with a passionate and reverential devotion such as we may imagine the religious devotee to feel for the Madonna. He calls this "the first pure and ideal love of his soul," and possibly it may in time have been increased by the knowledge of the doom which hung above and overtook her at the last —the partial shrouding of the bright intellect, the effect of a hereditary taint. Indeed, it is probable that on this account Poe saw very little if anything of Mrs. Stanard in the two succeeding years, in which time she led a secluded life with her family, dying in April, 1824, at the age of thirty-one. But the impression had been made, and remained with him during his lifetime, forming the one solitary *Ideal* which pervaded nearly all his poems—the death of the young, lovely and beloved. This experience was probably the beginning of those occasional dreamy and melancholy moods about this time noticed by some of his companions. The living friend of his boyhood's dream became the "lost Lenore" of his maturer years.

But though Poe deeply felt the loss of this beloved friend, the story is not to be accepted that he was accustomed to go at night to the cemetery where she was buried "and there, prostrate on her grave, weep away the long hours of cold and darkness." No one who knew Poe in his boyhood, with his horror of cemeteries, of darkness, and of being alone at night, would believe this story, first told

by Poe himself to Mrs. Whitman, and by her poetic fancy further embellished. Besides this is the practical refutation afforded by the high brick wall and locked gates of the cemetery, with the strict discipline of the Allan home, which would have made such midnight excursions impossible.

Another account connected with Mrs. Stanard, and repeated by Poe's biographers until it has become an article of faith with the public, is that the exquisite lines "To Helen" were inspired by and addressed to that lady. If written at ten years of age, as Poe asserts, it will be remembered that he was at this time at school in London, and it was not until two years after his return, and when he was thirteen years of age, that he ever saw Mrs. Stanard. He might have altered the lines to suit her—his "Psyche," with the pale and "classic face"—and I recall that the "folded scroll" of the first version was afterward changed to "the agate lamp within thy hand," as more appropriate to Psyche. Poe never made an alteration in his poems that was not an improvement.

Those who knew Mrs. Stanard describe her as slender and graceful, with regular delicate features, a complexion of marble pallor and dark, pensive eyes. A portrait of her which was in possession of her son, Judge Robert Stanard, represented her as a young girl wearing—perhaps in respect to her Scottish descent—a *snood* in her dark, curling hair.

CHAPTER VI
ROSALIE POE

Of Edgar Poe's sister, Rosalie, it may be said that all accounts represent her as having been, up to the age of ten years, a pretty child, with blue eyes and rosy cheeks, and of a sweet disposition. Though evincing nothing of Edgar's talent and quickness at learning, she was yet a rather better pupil than the average; and it had been Miss Mackenzie's intention to give her every advantage of education afforded by her own school, so as to fit her for becoming a teacher.

But when Rosalie Poe was in her eleventh or twelfth year, a strange change came over her, for which her friends could never account. Without having ever been ill, a sudden blight seemed to fall upon her, as frost upon a flower, and she drooped, as it were, mentally and physically. She lost all energy and ambition, and thenceforth made little or no progress in her studies, growing up into a languid and uninteresting girlhood. Still, she was amiable, generous and devoted to her friends, who were generally chosen for their personal beauty, and for this reason my sister was a great favorite with her. To Mrs. Mackenzie she was always dutiful and affectionate, but her great pride and affection centered in her brother. She felt painfully, and would often allude to, the difference between them. Once she said to me, "Of course, I can't expect Edgar to love me as I do him, he is so far above me."

A peculiarity of Miss Poe is worth mentioning, because it is one shared by her brother, and must have been hereditary. She could not taste wine without its having an immediate effect upon her. She would, after venturing to take a glass of wine at dinner, sleep for hours, and awaken either with a headache or in an irritable and despondent mood. As is well known, the same effect was produced upon Edgar by a moderate indulgence in drink, such as would not affect another man; and this hereditary weakness should go far in accounting for and excusing those excesses of which all the world is unfortunately aware.

Of the elder brother of Edgar, William Henry, I have heard scarcely any mention until after Poe's death, and few seemed to know that there was such a person. It seems, however, that in the summer, when Edgar was preparing for the University, this brother came to Richmond on a visit to himself and Rose. Edgar took him around to introduce to his young lady acquaintances, by one of whom he has been described as handsome, gentlemanly and agreeable. He died a year or two afterward, leaving some poems which show him to have been possessed of unusual poetic talent. Had he lived, he might have rivaled his brother as a poet.

CHAPTER VII
THE UNREST OF YOUTH

In the summer of 1825, Mr. Allan, having come into possession of a large fortune left him by an uncle, purchased and removed to the handsome brick residence at the corner of Main and Fifth streets, built by Mr. Gallego, a wealthy Spanish gentleman, and which became known as the Allan House.

To own such a residence had long been the desire of Mrs. Allan, and upon taking possession of the house she furnished it handsomely and commenced entertaining in a style which rendered them conspicuous in Richmond society. It was even said that they lived extravagantly; and Edgar, with abundance of pocket-money, became the envy of his companions.

But he was not happy. The impatience of restraint of which the Mackenzies spoke, and the dissatisfaction of which was to him, despite its luxuries, an uncongenial home, rendered him discontented. The heart of the boy of fifteen began to pulse with the restlessness of the bird when it feels the first nervous twitchings of its wings, and his great desire now was to get away from home and enjoy greater freedom. He would often, when particularly dissatisfied, speak to the Mackenzies of going to sea or enlisting in the army. At present, however, he contented himself with requesting Mr. Allan to send him to the University.

Mr. Allan did not see the use of a higher education for one whom he destined for a commercial business, but finally yielded; and Edgar left Mr. Burke's school and, under a private tutorage, commenced fitting himself for the University. This period, from June to February 14, 1825, was the only time, with the exception of two brief intervals, that he resided in the Allan House.

On another point, however, he did not so easily have his way. He was very anxious that his youthful poems should be published in book form, and importuned Mr. Allan to that effect, but this was a thing with which the latter had no sympathy. He did consent to go with the boy to hear what Mr. Clarke's judgment of the verses would be; but finally concluded that Edgar was too young to publish a book; and so the latter's eager and ambitious hopes were for the time frustrated.

Still, this must have been a pleasant summer for him, in the enjoyment of his new home, with its fine lawn and garden, in place of the cramped cottage on Clay street, and especially in the knowledge that he was breaking away from his schoolboy days and assuming something of the independence of youth. It was at this time that he made the famous swim of seven miles on James river, from Warwick Park to Richmond, which has been so much commented upon—showing with what fine athletic powers he was gifted.

It was on the 14th of February, 1825, that Poe entered the University; inscribing on the matriculation book the date of his birth as January 19, 1809, making him sixteen years of age, when he was really seventeen (born in 1808). This date, it will be observed, agrees with no other that he has given.

Of his course at the University his biographers have informed us, on the authority of professors and students, some of whom credit him with almost every vice of dissipation, while others defend him from such imputation. But when he returned home, at the end of the first year, with a brilliant scholastic record, it became known that Mr. Allan had been called upon to pay his gambling and other debts, amounting on the whole to over two thousand dollars. Mr. Allan went on to Charlottesville to investigate the matter, and scrupulously paid all that he considered honest debts, refusing to notice the gambling debts.

Poe, having paid little attention to his personal affairs, was almost as much surprised as was Mr. Allan at the amount of his indebtedness. He appeared truly penitent, and frankly so expressed

himself to Mr. Allan, offering to repay the latter by his services in his counting-house. It was agreed that after the Christmas holidays he should take his place in the office as clerk.

This was the beginning of the declension of Poe's social and personal reputation. By his elders he was severely condemned, while the good little boys who had formerly looked doubtfully upon the robber of orchards and turnip-patches now passed him by with sidelong glances and pursed-up lips. And yet, good cause though Mr. Allan had to be angry—as he was—we have the following account of Edgar's reception at home when he returned from the University for the Christmas holidays, a reception for which he was doubtless indebted to his devoted foster-mother:

A former schoolmate of his, Charles Bolling, writes to the editor of a Richmond paper that Mr. Allan, when on a visit to the country, having given him a cordial invitation to call on him when in Richmond, he, one evening, near Christmas, went to his house, where he was kindly received. After sitting awhile, he perceived certain signs as of preparation for the entertainment of company, and at once rose to leave, but his host insisted upon his remaining, saying that Edgar had just come home from the University, and some of his young friends had been invited to meet him. Bolling replied that he was not in a suitable dress for company, when Mr. Allan said: "Go up to Edgar's room. He will supply you with one of his own suits." He found Edgar lying on a lounge reading, who welcomed him cordially, and, throwing open his wardrobe doors, placed the contents at his disposal.

This was a room which, on their removal to their new home, Mrs. Allan had chosen for Edgar's occupation, furnishing it handsomely, with his books and pictures arranged in bookcases and on the wall. He took great pleasure in this apartment, and had always passed much of his time there.

When the two youths had attired themselves to their satisfaction, they repaired to the drawing-room, where Poe did his duty in welcoming his guests. But after awhile he took Bolling aside and proposed that they should go down the street and have a spree of their own. To this the latter very properly objected, saying: "Oh, no; that would never do." But being urged, finally consented; and they stole away from the company together.

This was an assertion of independence which one year previous he would not have ventured upon. But he was now no longer a schoolboy, but a University student and, as he claimed, nearly eighteen years of age. This past year had wrought a great change in him; and he was already in his heart prepared to break away from the restraint and authority which he had found so irksome and assert his independence.

In due time Poe was installed in Mr. Allan's counting-house as clerk, but had occupied that position but a short time when it became intolerable to him. He begged Mr. Allan to give him some other employment, saying that he would rather earn his living in any other way. Mr. Allan, still angry about the University debts, told him that he was his own master, and could choose what employment he pleased, but that henceforth he was not to look to him for assistance. After an angry scene between the two, Poe packed his traveling bag and, leaving the Allan house, did not return to it for the space of two years.

It will be observed that this was no runaway act on Poe's part, as asserted by biographers. He took an affectionate leave of Mrs. Allan and Miss Valentine—who supplied him with money—and neither of whom believed but that he would be back in a few weeks.

He went to take leave of the Mackenzies, who, all but his friend "Jack," advised him to return and submit himself to Mr. Allan; but this he would not, could not, do. He claimed that Mr. Allan had spoken insultingly to him, and declared that he would no longer be dependent on him. And so he went forth, as he said, to seek his fortune.

He made his way to Boston, where the first use to which he put his money was in publishing a cheap edition of his poems. They were not of a kind to attract attention, and he never realized a dollar from them. Ambitious to have them known, he sent a number to his friends in Richmond and other places South, and the rest turned over to his publisher, an obscure young man of the name of Thomas, in part payment of the expense of publishing.

Then followed a season of wandering in search of employment until, his money all gone, he had no resource but to enlist in the army, which he did on May 2, 1827, being then, as he claimed, eighteen (really nineteen) years of age, but representing himself as twenty-two.

CHAPTER VIII
IN BARRACKS

In the year 1829, my uncle, Dr. Archer, then Post Surgeon at Fortress Monroe, was one day called to the hospital to attend a private soldier known as Edgar A. Perry. Finding him a young man of superior manners and education, his interest was aroused, and his patient, won by his sympathy, finally confessed that his real name was Edgar A. Poe, and that he was the adopted son of Mr. John Allan, of Richmond; and also expressed an earnest desire to leave the army, in which he had now been for two years, the term of enlistment being five years.

Dr. Archer informed the commanding officer of these revelations, and as Perry, *alias* Poe, had proven himself in all respects a model soldier, interest in his case was at once aroused. It was suggested that, with his education and the social position which he had enjoyed, a cadetship at West Point would be more suited to him than the place of a private at Fortress Monroe. Poe, in his anxiety to be rid of the army, was willing enough to accept this proposal, and by the advice of his new friends wrote to Mr. Allan, informing him of his wishes and asking his assistance.

For some time he received no answer; but at length there came a letter which must have caused his heart a pang of real sorrow. It was from Mr. Allan, informing him of the death of his wife, and directing him to apply for a furlough and come on at once to Richmond, where he arrived two days after her burial.

Woodbury is mistaken in saying that in all this time Mr. Allan had not known of Edgar's whereabouts. According to Miss Valentine, Poe never at any time ceased entirely to correspond with Mrs. Allan, who never, to her dying day, lost her interest in the boy whom she had loved as a son, and neither ceased her endeavors to reconcile himself and her husband, urging Edgar to return and Mr. Allan to receive him. In anticipation of such result, she kept his room as he had left it, ready for his occupation at any time that it might suit his wayward fancy to return.

Mr. Allan talked to Poe seriously, and, finding that his great desire was to get a discharge from the army, promised to assist him; but only upon condition of his entering West Point, by which there would be secured to him an honorable and independent position for life, and Allan himself be relieved from all responsibility concerning him. But that he had not entirely forgiven Edgar was evident from a letter to the latter's commanding officer, wherein he exposes, unnecessarily, perhaps, the youth's gambling habits at the University, declaring that "he is no relation of mine whatever, and no more to me than many others who, being in need, I have regarded as being my care." Poe must have felt this latter as a humiliation; and it was certainly not calculated to increase his regard for the writer.

Poe's career at West Point is well known. At first all went well. One of his Virginia comrades, Col. Allan Magruder, describes him as of a simple and kindly nature, but, by reason of his distance and reserve, not popular with the cadets, and that he at length confined his association exclusively to Virginians. But the old discontent and impatience of restraint returned upon him, and after some months he wrote to Mr. Allan that he wished to leave West Point—a step to which the latter positively refused his assistance.

Finding nobody inclined to help him, he resolved to force his discharge. He purposely neglected his studies and military duties, deliberately violated the rules, engaged—it was said by some—in all sorts of disgraceful pranks; and finally was tried by court-martial and, on March 7, 1831, dismissed from the institute.

It has been naturally inferred that Poe's object in this voluntary self-sacrifice was simply to free himself from the irksomeness of military duties which, on trial, he found so opposed to his taste and inclination. But perhaps the real motive was one which has never yet been suspected.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.