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THE LITERATI:

SOME HONEST OPINIONS ABOUT

AUTORIAL MERITS AND DEMERITS,

WITH

Occasional Words of Personality.

op 15188

TOGETHER WITH

MARGINALIA, SUGGESTIONS, AND ESSAYS.

BY EDGAR A. POE.

If I have in any point receded from what is commonly received, it hath been for the purpose of proceeding *melius* and not *in aliud*.—LORD BACON.

Truth, peradventure, by force, may for a time be trodden down, but never, by any means, whatsoeuer, can it be trodden out.—LORD COKE.

WITH A SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR,

BY RUFUS WILMOT GRISWOLD.

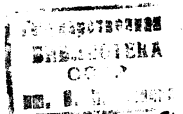
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MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

HITHERTO I have not written or published a syllable upon the subject of Mr. Poe's life, character, or genius, since I was informed, some ten days after his death, of my appointment to be his literary executor. I did not suppose I was delated from the expression of any feelings or opinions in the case by the acceptance of this office, the duties of which I regarded as simply the collection of his works, and their publication, for the benefit of the rightful inheritors of his property, in a firm and manner that would probably have been most agreeable to his own wishes. I would gladly have declined a trust imposing so much labor, for I had been compelled by ill health to solicit the indulgence of my publishers, who had many thousand dollars invested in an unfinished work under my direction; but when I was told by several of Mr. Poe's most intimate friends—among others by the family of S. D. Lewis, Esq., to whom in his last years he was under greater obligations than to any or to all others—that he had long been in the habit of expressing a desire that in the event of his death I should be his editor, I yielded to the apparent necessity, and proceeded immediately with the preparation of the two volumes which have heretofore been published. But I had, at the request of the Editor of "The Tribune," written hastily a few paragraphs about Mr. Poe, which appeared in that paper with the telegraphic communication of his death; and two or three of these paragraphs having been quoted by Mr. N. P. Willis, in his Notice of Mr. Poe, were as a part of that Notice unavoidably reprinted in the volume of the deceased author's Tales. And my unconsidered and imperfect, but, as every one who knew its subject readily perceived, very kind article, was now vehemently attacked. A writer under the signature of "GEORGE R. GRAHAM," in a sophomorical and trashy but widely circulated Letter, denounced it as "the fancy sketch of a jaundiced vision," "an immortal infamy," and its composition a "breach of trust." And to excuse his five months' silence, and to induce a belief that he did not know that what I had written was already published before I could have been advised that I was to be Mr. Poe's executor, (a condition upon which all the possible force of his Letter depends,) this silly and ambitious person, while represented as entertaining a friendship really passionate in its tenderness for the poor author, (of whom in four years of his extreme poverty he had not purchased for his magazine a single line,) is made to say that in half a year he had not seen so noticeable an article,—though within a week after Mr. Poe's death it appeared in "The Tribune," in "The Home Journal," in three of the daily papers of his own city, and in "The Saturday Evening Post," of which he was or had been himself one of the chief proprietors and editors! And Mr. JOHN NEAL, too, who had never had even the slightest personal acquaintance with Poe in his life, rushes from a sleep which the public had trusted was eternal, to declare that my characterization of Poe (which he is pleased to describe as "poetry, exalted poetry, poetry of astonishing and original strength") is false and malicious, and that I am a "calumniator," a "Rhodanmanthus," etc. Both these writers—JOHN NEAL following the author of the Letter signed "GEORGE R. GRAHAM"—not only assume what I have shown to be false, (that the remarks on Poe's character were written by me as his executor,) but that there was a long, intense, and implacable enmity betwixt Poe and myself, which disqualified me for the office of his biographer. This scarcely needs an answer after the poet's dying request that I should be his editor; but the manner in which it has been urged, will, I trust, be a sufficient excuse for the following demonstration of its absurdity.

My acquaintance with Mr. Poe commenced in the spring of 1841. He called at my hotel, and not finding me at home, left two letters of introduction. The next morning I visited him, and we had a long conversation about literature and literary men, pertinent to the subject of a book, "The Poets and Poetry of America," which I was then preparing for the press. The following letter was sent to me a few days afterwards:

PHILADELPHIA, March 29.

R. W. Griswold, Esq.: My Dear Sir:—On the other leaf I send such poems as I think my best, from which you can select any which please your fancy. I should be proud to see one or two of them in your book. The one called "The Haunted Palace" is that of which I spoke in reference to Professor Longfellow's plagiarism. I first published the "H. P." in Brooks's "Museum," a monthly journal at Baltimore, now dead. Afterwards, I embodied it in a tale called "The House of Usher," in Burton's magazine. Here it was, I suppose, that Professor Longfellow saw it; for, about six weeks afterwards, there appeared in the "Southern Literary Messenger" a poem by him called "The Belleguared City," which may now be found in his volume. The identity in title is striking; for by "The Haunted Palace" I mean to imply a mind haunted by phantoms—a disordered brain—and by the "Belleguared City" Prof. L. means just the same. But the whole tournure of the poem is based upon mine, as you will see at once. Its allegorical conduct, the style of its versification and expression—all are mine. As I understood you to say that you meant to preface each set of poems by some biographical notice, I have ventured to send you the above memoranda—the particulars of which (in a case where an author is so little known as myself) might not be easily obtained elsewhere. "The Coliseum" was the prize poem alluded to.

With high respect and esteem, I am your obedient servant, EDGAR A. POE.

The next is without date:

My Dear Sir:—I made use of your name with Carey & Hart, for a copy of your book, and am writing a review of it, which I shall send to Lowell for "The Pioneer." I like it decidedly. It is of immense importance, as a guide to what we have done; but you have permitted your good nature to influence you to a degree: I would have omitted at least a dozen whom you have quoted, and I can think of five or six that should have been in. But with all its faults—you see I am perfectly frank with you—it is a better book than any other man in the United States could have made of the materials. This I will say.

With high respect, I am your obedient servant, EDGAR A. POE.

The next refers to some pecuniary matters:

PHILADELPHIA, June 11, 1843.

Dear Griswold:—Can you not send me \$5? I am sick, and Virginia is almost gone. Come and see me. Peterson says you suspect me of a curious anonymous letter. I did not write it, but bring it along with you when you make the visit you promised to Mrs. Clemm. I will try to fix that matter soon. Could you do anything with my note?

Yours truly, E. A. P.

We had no further correspondence for more than a year. In this period he delivered a lecture upon "The Poets and Poetry of America," in which my book under that title was, I believe, very sharply reviewed. In