

A BOOK AND ITS WRITER.

POE'S TALES OF THE GROTESQUE AND ARABESQUE.

By EDWARD KEMPE.



IN a handful of weird tales, a few pages of passionate verse, and the tradition of a singularly unhappy life, the name of Edgar Allan Poe has survived within a few years of the centenary of his birth.

"The evil that men do lives after them" in the world's memory. Every one who has read the "Raven and the Bells," the "Pit and the Pendulum," and the "Murders in the Rue Morgue," will have heard this much of their author—that he lived an intemperate and unhappy life and died of drink. What a biography for a man of genius, the popular epitome of a record of passionate effort in pursuit of the ideal, of the extremes of brilliant success and tragic failure, of such hopes and such disappointments as average men are incapable of realising. It is the human instinct to reduce everything to an epigram, and it is impossible to deny a certain rough justice to the world's summing up. Yet, any one who studies the life of Poe will be moved to pity at the hostility which dogged him through his life, and survived to blacken his memory.

To turn to the Tales which are the subject of this article. They are a collection of magazine stories, frankly sensational, written to take the popular taste, not remarkable for humour, pathos, characterisa-

tion, or the more human side of creative art. The tortures of the inquisition, the horrors of premature burial (which might be called Poe's ruling dread), of the grave, the charnel house and the sheeted ghost, murder in its ugliest forms, and the material terrors of the guilty conscience, the ocean regarded as the storehouse of supernatural secrets and weird happenings—this is the material of Poe's tales, together with a few grotesque farcies tinged with a humour of a rather ugly cast.

Here is sensation enough for the most hardened reader, but the curious critic asks, where are the qualities that have preserved the Tales against the lapse of time?

For though nothing is more popular than sensationalism, there is no form of literature less likely to endure. A shudder is a passing emotion. The generation which rejoiced in Monk Lewis or Mrs. Radcliffe have long laid them by, as a traveller skims the pages of a railway novel and leaves it behind him at his journey's end. Yet Poe's tales not only captivated his magazine readers but have survived the lapse of nearly three generations, and still possess the power of thrilling in new editions.

Of course, a tale may be sensational and something more. Hamlet and Lear, it has been pointed out, are as full of sensations as any police novel, but behind all the