

A word must be said on the philosophic side of Poe's genius, which forms so strange a contrast to his florid imagination. As a thinker Poe is ingenious and versatile, if not profound. He was fond of speculation on such picturesque problems as the consciousness after death, the possibilities of mesmerism, the transmigration of souls, some of which form the text of his tales and prose poems. But perhaps the most curious side of Poe's scientific faculty is that which finds expression in the famous trilogy of detective tales, and extraordinary feats of cypher reading. Not only was Poe the inventor of the "detective formula," not only does its great modern exponent, Conan Doyle, admit that he has "covered its limits so completely that I fail to see how his followers can find any fresh ground which they can call their own. On this narrow path the writer must walk, and he sees the footmarks of Poe always in front of him." Not only this, but Poe himself proved that as an arm-chair detective he was the equal of Sherlock Holmes and his own Dupin. Whether his faculty was due to an extraordinary acuteness of analysis, or as he himself suggests, to a union of the qualities of poet and mathematician, enabling him to follow the process of reasoning in another man's mind by putting himself in his place, it is hard to say. At any rate there is no reason to doubt that in the second of his three famous tales, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Poe simply re-arranged under assumed names the details of an untraced murder, which was agitating New York at the time, and that the imaginary conclusion to his tale which he evolved from the clues provided by the newspapers, was long afterwards proved by the confession of the murderer to be absolutely correct.

"And over all there hung a cloak of fear." Strong as was his love of

the beautiful, as strong almost as that of his contemporary, Keats, keen as was his analytical faculty, they are overshadowed always by that obsession, or waking nightmare, in which his imagination, if not his mind, always seems to move. He might be called the chronicler of death. Not the "beautiful death" of the strong soul of Whitman, but that king of terrors, which haunted the superstitious minds of the Dark Ages, in the shape of the grisly skeleton of the dance of death. That a mind of Poe's rank should have submitted to this hateful tyranny is pitiable. It doubtless grew on him with the weakness for drugs, and to a healthy mind poisons much of his written remains.

Edgar Poe began his career a high-spirited, handsome, active boy, inheriting the hot blood of an old Southern family, which was dying out in poverty and misfortune. His father and mother, wandering actors, died in his infancy, and he was adopted by Mr Allan, a wealthy friend of his family. Thus Poe was unfortunate from the outset. Discipline was the prime need of his character, and he seems to have been alternately treated with lavish indulgence and unjust severity, the worst possible handling for a boy of high spirit and little self-control. He was educated rather irregularly at schools in England and Virginia, and at the age of seventeen went to the University of Virginia, where he seems to have taken his life into his own hands and began sowing his wild oats. Within a year he had left the University under a cloud of debt, quarrelled with his adoptive father, and published his first volume of poems. From this time his stormy independence begins. He went to Europe and disappeared for two years, then returned in the guise of the prodigal, and submitted to academic discipline once more at the famous West Point Military Col-