

EIR American History

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S 200TH BIRTHDAY

What His Doctor Revealed About Poe's Assassination

by Anton Chaitkin

On his 200th birthday, we celebrate the genius of Edgar Allan Poe, uplifter of the common man to reason and self-government. He was the Republic's warrior, a leader of American patriots' intelligence wars against the British Empire.

In his stories, poems, essays, and criticism, Poe championed the "soaring" Plato and Kepler against the "creeping, crawling" Aristotle and Newton. He waged a blazing literary combat against the trans-Atlantic imperialists who ruled and strangled American literature through British magazines and a clique in the New York newspapers. The empire feared Poe's popularity, which could lead inspired humanity to storm the heavens.

Stung by his criticism, cabals in New York and Boston called him a drunkard, a drug addict, a sexual pervert, and a plagiarist.

Rufus Griswold was an editor and a serial character assassin who had attacked Poe, and been nailed by Poe as a liar. Griswold hoodwinked Poe's bereaved family into turning Poe's papers over to him for an "official" edition of Poe's works. Griswold then wrote a Poe biography, shamelessly vilifying Poe, saying he had died of drunkenness or a drug overdose. He promoted the *menticial* lie that the power of Poe's creative imagination came from insanity and narcotics, and not self-guided intuitive reason.

Though it was soon discredited by all authorities on Poe's life and work, this filth by Griswold circulated globally, and provided an excuse for the British and their underlings to perpetuate their Poe Myth.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Jan. 19, 1809,

twenty-four days before Abraham Lincoln. To honor Poe's 200th birthday, *EIR* presents here excerpts from the 1885 book written by the physician, Dr. John J. Moran, Jr., who attended the dying Poe after he was brought to a Baltimore hospital, in 1849.

From *A Defense of Edgar Allan Poe. Life, Character and Dying Declarations of the Poet. An Official Account of his Death, by his Attending Physician, John J. Moran, M.D.* William F. Boogher, Publisher. 1331 F Street, Washington D.C., 1885. (Subheads have been added.)

Dr. Moran's Report

The Slanders

Thirty-five years have elapsed since the death of Edgar Allan Poe. . . [How] he died, up to the present day, remains a matter of doubt except so far as have been gathered from a few brief voluntary publications made by his physician. [Many] false charges . . . have been made and published, and distorted accounts that have been received as truth. . .

. . . Mr. George R. Graham [Poe's employer as an editor/writer in the early 1840s, when Poe wrote "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," featuring the Poe-like detective, Auguste C. Dupin] . . . in 1850, . . . wrote and published the most forcible defense that has yet been made . . . [which] so uncovered the falsity of [Rufus] Griswold's account of Poe's life that few if any are now left to give it a place in their thoughts or memory. . .

The Doctor and His Hospital

The hospital in which the poet died has been questioned as to its standing and character. My professional experience has been assailed, my veracity and even my own identity have been disputed....

The hospital in which Poe died was second to none in Baltimore as to size, comforts and location.... The Washington College University Hospital, in which hundreds of students daily traversed its wards, receiving instruction at the bedside of patients from able professors of the faculty.... I ... conducted and controlled this institution for six years as resident physician, living with my family on the premises. I had the entire charge and responsibility of house and patients, including United States sailors, a portion of the hospital being set apart for [them] who were sent there by order of the Government....

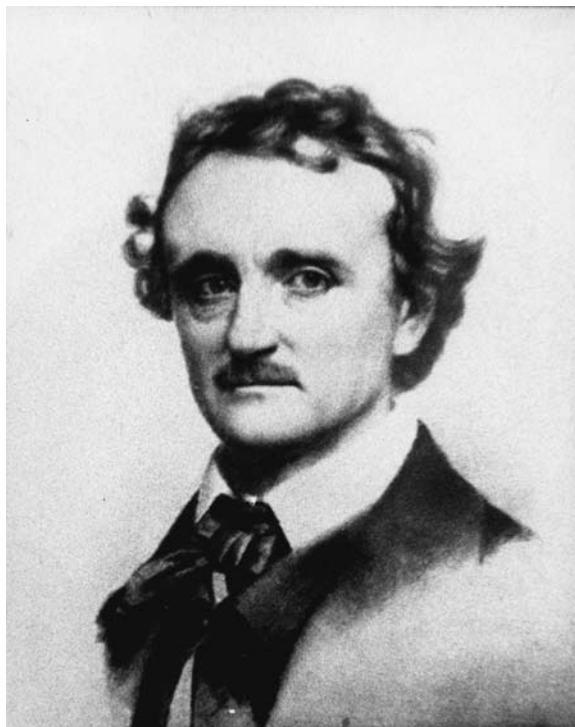
Poe's Family and General Lafayette

Mr. David Poe, the grandfather of Edgar Allan Poe, ... engaged in mercantile business. During the Revolution [he] became a deputy quartermaster of the Maryland line ... and had often been called Major and sometimes General Poe. [It] was at [his Baltimore mercantile] office that he received General Lafayette, Count Rochambeau, Count DeGrasse and other French officers....

In ... *Niles' Register*, October 23, 1824, is recorded a visit of ... General Lafayette, to Baltimore [43 years after the battle of Yorktown]....

After an introduction of the surviving officers and soldiers of the Revolution who resided in and near Baltimore to the General, he observed to one of the gentlemen present, "I have not yet seen, among these gentlemen, my friendly and patriotic *commissary*." The General was informed that Mr. David Poe was then dead, but his widow was still living. He expressed an

anxious wish to see her. Said the General: "Mr. David Poe, who resided in Baltimore when I was here, had, out of his own very limited means, supplied me with five hundred dollars to aid in clothing my troops, and his wife, with her own hands, cut out 500 pairs of pantaloons, and superintended the making of them for the use of my men."



Edgar Allan Poe, in his poems and other writings, championed the "soaring" Plato and Kepler against the "creeping, crawling" Aristotle and Newton, and waged a literary war against the British cultural imperialists. He was murdered by his enemies.

Mr. David Poe, Jr., son of Gen. David Poe, of revolutionary memory, was the father of Edgar Allan Poe, who was born in Boston on January 19, 1809....

In the year 1833, [the young Poe was] a competitor for two prizes offered by the proprietor of the *Saturday Visitor* ... in Baltimore.... The committee [praised] "the singular force and beauty of [Poe's entries] [and] awarded the premium to a tale entitled the "MS. Found in a Bottle."...

Mr. John P. Kennedy, chairman of the committee, became the firm friend of Poe and continued so to be until his death, and when informed of the decease he declared it impossible to credit any of Griswold's stories of the poet's life.

... I here aver that there is no evidence and never has been, that Poe ever was seen drunk, or that he ever got drunk from the year 1845 to 1849, embracing a period of four years. Later he confesses to the effect of stimulants at long intervals, but of these four years preceding his death, we have the clearest testimony that he was a temperate man.

Mr. George Graham says: "For three or four years I knew Poe intimately, and for eighteen months I saw him almost daily; ... writing or conversing at the same desk; knowing all his hopes ... he was always the same polished gentleman, the quiet, unobtrusive, thoughtful scholar, the devoted husband; frugal in his personal expenses, punctual and unwearied in his industry, and the soul of honor."

The Assassination

Poe ... was in my care and under my charge for sixteen hours... He told me ... where he had been, from whence he came, and for which place he started when he left Richmond, when he arrived in Baltimore ... and the name of the hotel where he registered...

Poe left Richmond on October 4, 1849, ... by boat... Mrs. Shelton, his affianced, [said] that the poet parted from her at her residence at 4 P.M. October 4th, to take the steamer "Columbus" for Baltimore, intending to visit Philadelphia and York, to close up some business he had with certain publishers and return to Richmond in a few days. She states that ... he ... said to her: "I have a singular feeling, amounting to a presentiment, that this will be our last meeting until we meet to part no more," and then walked slowly and sadly away...

The boat arrived in Baltimore about 4 o'clock on the morning of October 5th...

He left for Philadelphia about noon and went as far as the Susquehanna River, across which the passengers had to be transferred by boat, there being no bridge at that time. The river being very rough, owing to a storm then blowing, Poe refused to venture across. He remained on the cars and returned to Baltimore.

Arriving there at about 8 o'clock P.M., a porter carried his trunk to the hotel he had left in the morning. Alighting from the cars he turned down Pratt street, on the south side, and walked toward the dock where his boat was. He was followed by two suspicious characters, as the testimony of the conductor will show, and when he reached the southwest corner of Pratt and Light streets, he was seized, by the two roughs, dragged into one of the many sinks of iniquity or gambling hells which lined the wharf. He was drugged, robbed, stripped of every vestige of the clothing he had on when he left Richmond and the cars a little while before, and re-clothed with a stained, faded, old bombazine coat, pantaloons of a similar character, a pair of worn-out shoes run down at the heels, and an old straw hat.

Later in this cold October night he was driven or thrown out of the den in a semi-conscious state, and feeling his way in the darkness, he stumbled upon a skid or long wide board lying across some barrels on the west side of the wharf, about thirty yards from the den... [They had left] him half dead. He stretched himself upon the plank and lay there until after daybreak on the morning of the 6th. A gentleman, passing by, noticed the man, and on seeing his face recognized the

poet. He called a hack, and [sent Poe] to the hospital, arriving there about 9 o'clock.

... My witnesses are Judge [Neilson] Poe, of Baltimore, a second cousin of the poet; and the conductor of the train, Capt. George W. Rollins, well-known in Baltimore. The ... conductor a few days after the poet's death [met me] on the street [and] said, "I saw in the papers the death of the gentleman I had on my train the other day." I asked, "Do you know who he was?" He said he did not at that time, but he had learned since that it was Edgar Poe. He remarked that he was the finest specimen in appearance of a gentleman that he had lately seen. "I was attracted to him from his appearance." [I asked,] "how was he dressed?"

He replied, "In black clothes; his coat was buttoned up close to his throat. There were two men well dressed that came aboard of the train from the other side of the river, having come from Philadelphia or New York. They took a seat back of Poe. From their appearance I knew they were sharks or men to be feared, and when I got out of the train at Baltimore, I saw them following Poe down towards the dock."

... Mrs. Shelton, who yet lives, [said about the] clothing he had on when he left her in Richmond on the 4th of October, ... he was dressed ... "in a full suit of black cloth."

... [At the hospital,] I did not then know but he might have been drinking, and so to determine the matter, I said, "Mr. Poe, you are extremely weak, ... I will give you a glass of toddy." He opened wide his eyes, and fixed them so steadily upon me, and with such anguish in them that I had to look from him to the wall beyond the bed. He then said, "Sir, if I thought its potency would transport me to the Elysian bowers of the undiscovered spirit world, I would not take it."

"I will then administer an opiate, to give you sleep and rest," I said. Then he rejoined, "Twin sister, spectre to the doomed and crazed mortals of earth and perdition."

... Here was a patient supposed to have been drunk, very drunk, and yet refuses to take liquor. The ordinary response is, "Yes, Doctor, give me a little to strengthen my nerves." I found there was no tremor of his person, no unsteadiness of his nerves, no fidgeting with his hands, and not the slightest odor of liquor upon his breath or person...

He ... said that he [had] had ... "a vague and horrible dread that I would be killed, that I would be thrown in the dock..."