



### POE AND RACHEL.

WILL the world never let Edgar Poe rest? I see it stated in one of the papers that it has been discovered, by examining his dust, that the brain is ossified, and rattles in the skull! "To what base uses may we come at last!"

To apply the caliper of moral measurement to this child of genius seems labor lost. There must have been in him a chameleon-like temperament, by which he assimilated to those with whom he associated, and thus each analyzer of Poe gives us a glimpse of his own idiosyncrasies rather than a revelation of this unique, wonderful creation.

I prefer to regard these persons of rare, exceptional genius as demonized—in a high, not malignant sense. When Luther stood before the august Diet convened at Worms, his memorable saying, "Here stand I, I can not be otherwise," was a conscious illustration of this. He, Luther, courageous, penetrating, discerning, could be only Luther, just as the cells of his brain and the leadings of conscience had brought him down from the ages. A strong will may achieve much; but the bias of nature can not wholly be controvened.

I like the Bible method of biography, that gives us the facts of a life and leaves the moral status to be adjusted by the reader. There we have Sarah forcing Hagar and Ishmael out into the wilderness; Rebecca inciting her son Jacob to deceive her husband and wrong her less-favored child; Rachel and Lear, with their domestic quarrels; and all down the history of the favored people, heinous crimes committed, scarcely without reprehension; the design being to give us the experience of individual life, good and bad, praiseworthy or blame-

worthy, with surprising candor, as if facts were the only important things in delineating a life. But a careful observer will detect an enlarging silver thread of approval for the truly excellent pervading all the pages of Jewish history; as in the wise courtesy of Abigail, and the steadfastness of the mother of the Maccabees. I think we must learn to accept genius as it is, and not pester it with too critical an eye, leaving the "stern daughter of the voice of God," Duty, to look after her wise children and approve them in her own time and way. Our judgments of genius, in any sense, seem an impertinence. Who are we, that we dare condemn?—we, who have not the spear of Ithuriel, to test the right of a being to be just what he is, and nothing else; to be what he is, and powerless to be otherwise—part and parcel of a lurid phantasmagoria, over which steal weird shadows, half human, half devilish—half divine, it may be.

We may hold the breath, feeling as if some hidden arcana were about to open before us—the breaking of the last magic seal once held by old King Solomon, by which the demons of Eblis are about to break from their bondage; but it is becoming in us to look on, and hold our peace.

In 1855, New York was alive with excitement over one of these wondrous demonized creations. The windows in Broadway were full of a tall, statuesque figure, about whom the classic robe fell in long, heavy folds, and upon whose arm glittered the form of a serpent. I was never tired of studying this Sphinx; the small, compact, beautiful head, that somehow made mine ache; the strange eyes under the contracted brow; the brow contracted by no ordinary emotion, but from a terrible intensity. It

seemed as if a fiery band encircled the head in the shape of the coral fillets in which she delighted.

My first sight of Rachel was in company with Mr. J. C. Derby, the favorite book-publisher at that time, and noted for his Abrahamic beard, which a Turk might envy, together with Mrs. Terhune (Marian Harland) and Caroline Cheeseboro—both writers of some eminence—and the latter a woman of unquestioned genius, as is testified in her work, "Victoria, or the World Overcome." Miss Cheeseboro was a small, weird-looking woman, taciturn, and gentle. I think neither she nor her companion were at all drawn to me; but in this world people meet and part, and see each other as "through a glass darkly."

The curtain rose, and Rachel was there: tall, lithe, panther-like. A movement, not a walk—an undulating stir, and she was before us. How she came there seemed a mystery. A lofty, magnificent statue, draped, motionless, and causing the heart to stay its beat; and the vast multitude could no more have applauded the instant of her appearing than if an unearthly spirit had suddenly become visible to the eye; but the applause that followed was something to be remembered.

Her voice was indescribable—a marvelous voice, deep, clear, distinct. No other French ever spoken was so like a Cathedral hymn; it assumed a majesty, a dignity like a Miltonic rhythm. The tragic tones of her voice were a soul-harrowing wail; her low sob went through and through the heart as the sobs of a suffering child affect us. Her infantile tears—real tears—were echoed by a flood from our own eyes. The abandon of her passion so expanded her whole aspect, that she was the veritable reality of the tragic muse.

In one point of view Rachel affected me as no other human being ever did. In others there is incompleteness, impediment, obstruction, as if the designs of nature had not been well carried out—as if she had started, perhaps, with some splendid intention, but her work had been marred or hindered. The opportunities had not been favorable; Destiny had interposed with

an iron grasp, and the great work sank to oblivion, and the result was a failure in some way; giving us characters too good for much, too bad for safety; and they are lost among plodding schoolmen, or behind prison bars.

Not so with Rachel. All that had been designed in her—morally, mentally, physically, whatever may be said of the nature of the design—was complete in her. Her most careless glance, movement, tone, sigh, or tear, were each and all perfect in kind. You would not change it; you would not criticise it, but yield to it as to some over-mastering fascination. She had not been hindered nor obstructed—nothing had been in the way of her full development to the full pattern laid out in the projection of nature. She seemed to have taken herself up, as it were, and, without let or hindrance, become just what the intimations suggested. It was said of her that she never knew what trouble was. Not that she did not have occasion for discontent and suffering such as all persons of sensibility feel; but she would not accept it. She was not gay; neither was she sad or sentimental. She was an artiste, without the tenderness allied to art. She was a feminine King David, without the conscience that rendered the remorse of the sweet psalmist of Israel sublime.

There is something in the Jewish nationality favorable to this entire individual development—fostered, it may be, by their vagrant, isolated experience as a nation. The physique of Rachel was purest porcelain—the finest of clay; every line of every nerve and limb perfected to the nicest adjustment; not a particle of superfluous bone, not a shred of needless muscle. She belonged exclusively to the serpentine, fascinating class—to the Cleopatras and serpents of old Nile. She had a marvelous attraction, but evolved no sympathy. One might be cruel to her, and feel no remorse.

ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

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WOMAN AS A SMELLER AND TASTER.—  
The marked superiority of women over men is, in few respects, more remarkable than in