

THE DEVIL WAS IN IT

BY JAMES SOUTHALL WILSON

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, with a frankness unusual to authors, acknowledged that as a youth he played the sedulous ape to many writers as a means of developing his own unique literary style. It now appears that Edgar Allan Poe, during his poverty-stricken years in Baltimore, from 1831, when he left West Point, to 1835, when he became an assistant on the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond, developed his prose in the same manner. But there was this great difference in Poe's procedure: his imitations, received ever since as original tales, were meant as deliberate burlesques and satires.

My first suspicion that this was Poe's early method and intention grew upon my mind more than ten years ago from a re-study of his "Silence." I could not bring myself to believe that, with his keen sense of the ludicrous, he could have been serious when he wrote into that melodious piece of prose the shrieking of the water-lilies on their stems, and used as a refrain "the rock rocked" and phrases such as "the thunder fell." When I recalled that he first called "Silence" a tale "in the manner of the psychological autobiographists" and used as his motto a phrase from one of his own early poems, "Ours is a world of words: quiet we call Silence—which is the merest word of all," I was sure that the piece was meant to poke fun at the Transcendentalists—the frog-pondians, as he nicknamed the Boston group. In mockery of their mysticism, he set out to show how

sonorous and beautiful words could be made to sound—signifying nothing. And incidentally, he borrowed somewhat from an early piece by Bulwer, "Monos and Daimonos," in producing his effect.

I was at first amazed at my own conclusion, for all the writers on Poe agreed that "Silence" was one of his most unblemished masterpieces. George Edward Woodberry considered it perfect. James A. Harrison called it "perhaps his most majestic piece of prose, worthy of Jean Paul Richter in its music and magnificence." C. Alphonso Smith said that "in dignity and elevation of thought, in faultlessness of keeping, in utter simplicity of style and structure" it placed Poe among the masters of English prose. And Hervey Allen said it was, "taken all in all as a pure work of art, his most majestic contribution to prose." Dared I assert that as a youngster in Baltimore he had written this piece as a burlesque?

Then I read again his own preface to the "Tales of the Folio Club," which Dr. James A. Harrison had first published in his complete edition of Poe's writings. Here it is made grotesquely clear that the tales which he meant to include in that collection were all either satires or burlesques. The manuscript consists of two leaves covered by a minute script in Poe's handwriting. The first two pages give the complete preface. The other two include a part of the tale "Silence," and are numbered 61 and 62, showing that there had been a mass of closely written manuscript between the

preface and this story. The motto under the title, "The Folio Club," is:

There is a Machiavelian plot
Though every hare olfact it not.—*Butler*.

The Folio Club is described as "a mere Junto of Dunderheadism", the members of which meet monthly at the house of one of them, "when each individual is expected to come prepared with a Short Prose Tale of his own composition." The author of the best tale becomes the president for the next meeting and the club is entertained at the expense of the man whose composition is voted the poorest. The relator of the preface represents himself as making an exposé of the club by publishing the tales read at the first meeting which he attended.

As Poe originally conceived his plan there were eleven members. The president was Mr. Snap, "formerly in the service of the *Down-East Review*." Mr. Convolvulus Gondola was "a young gentleman who had travelled a good deal." De Rerum Natura, Esq., "wore a singular pair of green spectacles." "There was a very little man in a black coat with very black eyes." Mr. Solomon Seadrift "had every appearance of a fish." Mr. Horribile Dictu, "with white eye-lashes, had graduated at Göttingen." Mr. Blackwood Blackwood "had written certain articles for foreign magazines." Mr. Rouge-et-Noir "admired Lady Morgan." There was also "a stout gentleman who admired Sir Walter Scott." Finally, Chronologos Chronology "admired Horace Smith and had a very big nose which had been in Asia Minor."

It is impossible to fix the date of the manuscript of the preface to "The Tales of the Folio Club." It is almost certainly as early as July, 1833, when Poe submitted several of the tales, in a script form similar to that of the pages that survive, in com-

petition for the prize of fifty dollars offered by the Baltimore *Saturday Visiter*. It is important to remember that at that time he was only twenty-four, and, though he had published poems in 1827, 1829, and 1831, was totally unknown to the public. Five of the tales had already appeared without his name in the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier*, but so unnoticed were they that this early publication remained for Dr. Killis Campbell to discover. The stories were published at intervals from January 14 to December 1, 1832, under the titles of "Metzengerstein," "The Duke de l'Omellette," "A Tale of Jerusalem," "A Decided Loss" ("Loss of Breath") and "The Bargain Lost" ("Bon-Bon"). It follows that Poe must have begun the series soon after he left West Point in 1831.

When later, in 1835, he became connected with the *Southern Literary Messenger* through the recommendation of J. P. Kennedy, the Baltimore novelist, he printed or reprinted most of these stories, but he continued his efforts to have them published as a book under the old title. He referred to this intention in an editorial note in the *Messenger*. He sent them to Cary & Lea and to the Harpers through the novelists Kennedy and Paulding, and letters survive showing that he offered them to two other publishers. The number of the stories increased to sixteen and then seventeen.

II

The surprising part of the matter is that Poe's burlesque intent has been so long overlooked. For this, as far as later readers are in consideration, he himself is partly responsible. No one would publish his "Tales of the Folio Club" with his burlesque trimmings, and when he printed them separately in magazines with mottoes or subtitles to indicate his drift, few

even of the craft caught his satirical aim. Of the phrases he used, "A Tale à la *Blackwood*" for "Lionizing" had been understood, but "in imitation of the German," attached to the title of "Metzengerstein," and "A Tale in the Manner of the Psychological Autobiographists," in the case of "Silence" missed fire.

Poe acted as Poe would act. He had written with his tongue in his cheek and now he published in a slightly revised form, shifting his tongue to the other cheek. He removed some of the specific references, such as those to "Vivian Grey" and Bulwer, and cut out the significant subtitles, and his American readers enjoyed them as sparkling (if pointless) *jeux d'esprit*. Staid scholars of later times have taken his boyish fun-making burlesques as mature efforts at independent humor. Dr. Fred Lewis Pattee was one of the first to guess that there must have been some sort of satirical intent behind them to give them piquancy in their day.

In the light of the origin and intent of the tales the comment of Poe's most scholarly biographer, George Edward Woodberry, becomes amusing. Speaking of the earlier group, he wrote, "In all of them, too, Poe is less original than in his other tales. 'King Pest' is very closely modeled on Vivian Grey's adventure . . . and 'Lionizing,' a sketch which was repeatedly and elaborately corrected in later years, . . . copies in style and conception 'Too Beautiful for Anything' in Bulwer's 'The Ambitious Student in Ill Health and Other Papers,' apparently a favorite book of Poe's." Poe had tried hard enough in his earlier versions to make his originality consist in not too obviously making sport of his originals; and his commentators make big eyes when they discover that a tale borrows from the story of which he meant it to be slyly recognized as a burlesque.

His meaning was not clear to most readers in his own day. Perhaps it would have been if the tales had ever been printed as a collection with the preface and the lost discussions by the members of the club, in which Poe had the opportunity to satirize the critics as well as the writers of tales. The complimentary comments on some of the tales which were reprinted in the back of the *Messenger* from the newspapers of the day show that they were read only as amusing and original magazine pieces. John P. Kennedy wrote to Poe on February 9, 1836: "Some of your bizarreries have been mistaken for satire—and admired too in that character. They deserved it, but you did not, for you did not intend them so." Poe had the habit of half agreeing with a correspondent's strictures: he could in courtesy temper his reply to the distinguished older author who had been his generous patron. He answered:

You are nearly, but not altogether right in relation to the satire of some of my tales. Most of them were *intended* for half-banter, half-satire—although I might not have fully acknowledged this to be their aim even to myself. "Lionizing" and "Loss of Breath" were satires properly speaking—at least so meant—the one of the rage for [social] lions, and the other of the extravagancies of *Blackwood*.

When J. K. Paulding, the New York novelist, submitted the tales to "Messrs. Harpers as to their republication" neither he nor the publishers wholly missed the aim of the author. It was not because they were satires but because they were not satires of the most familiar sort that the Harpers declined them: and Paulding agreeing with their cautious decision, excepted some of the stories from the objection. "His quiz on Willis, and the Burlesque of *Blackwood* were not only capital but, what is more, were understood by all," he wrote to Mr. White, the owner of the

Messenger in his letter reporting his failure to secure the Harpers as Poe's publishers. Harpers thought the stories had lost their novelty by appearing so recently in the *Messenger*—

but most especially they object that there is a degree of obscurity in their application, which will prevent ordinary readers from comprehending their drift, and consequently from enjoying the fine satire they convey. It requires a degree of familiarity with various kinds of knowledge which they do not possess to enable them to relish the joke; the dish is too refined for them to banquet on.

Paulding also made suggestions of his own, which included as a fit subject for satire "the ridiculous affectations and extravagancies of the fashionable English literature of the day," which was exactly what Poe's tales did satirize. He added the real explanation of why Poe's burlesques were not understood as burlesques:

For Satire to be relished, it is necessary that it should be leveled at something with which readers are familiar.

III

Here, then, was this young trickster, Edgar Allan Poe, in Baltimore from 1831 to 1835, learning how to write by imitating in burlesque the foibles of fashionable literature, from the epigrammatic cleverness of Bulwer and the extravagancies of the *Blackwood* article to what he considered the prose-poetic nonsense of the Transcendentalists or the frozen horrors of the German tale of terror.

Sometimes the tales are out and out burlesques of a whole novel. I am ashamed to confess that it took me nearly ten years to run down the original of "A Tale of Jerusalem," though I had conjectured from its subject that it was by Chronologos Chronology, who admired Horace Smith and

had a very big nose which had been in Asia Minor. "Zillah, a Tale of Jerusalem" by Horace Smith was a popular novel in 1829 and Poe not only burlesqued episodes in the story, such as the siege of the city, but lifted for ridicule whole sentences and phrases from its text, such as "true as the Pentateuch," and "bigger than the letter Jod." He filled his tale with *El Emanu!* *Booshoh-he!* and *El Elohim!* and closed it with words from Smith's book: "it is the unutterable flesh!" He burlesqued amusingly a three-volume novel in half a dozen pages.

"King Pest" was at first subtitled "A Tale Containing an Allegory, By ———", and the blank should be filled with Benjamin Disraeli's name. It is a specific and obvious burlesque of the incident of the palace of the wines in "Vivian Grey." There the moral is brought out that in liquor each man becomes a kind of beast according to his nature. Poe copies the devices, making them more repulsive and grotesque. The story was unquestionably told by the stout gentleman who admired Sir Walter Scott, and a point was given to the hint of imitation by the motto:

The gods do bear and well allow in kings
The things which they abhor in rascal routes.

The story opens in the most familiar Scott manner, with two men, at first unnamed, in an ale-house.

Some of the stories are half bantering satire and half burlesque. Others are aimed apparently, not at a particular author, but at a type of story or a fashion in tales. "Lionizing" was the "quiz on Willis," who had in the *Mirror* been depicting himself as surrounded by London celebrities, but it was also, as Woodberry saw, copied after "Too Beautiful for Anything," but—as he did not see—in burlesque. That sketch by Bulwer had appeared in New York early

in 1832 in "Conversation with an Ambitious Student in Ill Health: with Other Pieces," and the publisher, Harper, bragged that these pieces from the London *New Monthly Magazine* of 1830 and 1831 had "not in either country been given to the public in a collected form" before.

"Ms. Found In a Bottle" must have been told by Solomon Seadrift who looked like a fish—and told fishy stories of improbable sea-adventures. It may be aimed at the history of Sir Edward Seaward, a hoax in three volumes that Jane Porter edited for her brother. The Porter hoax was widely known and Poe himself mentions it in a letter with a casualness that takes its familiarity for granted.

It has been customary to take the first sixteen stories that he published as the sixteen that he declared in the *Messenger* to be the group composing the "Tales of the Folio Club." But it is really through internal evidence in the earliest form of the tales that surest identification can be found. Moreover, there are grounds for the elimination of some of the first sixteen published. "Hans Pfaall," so Poe wrote to the owner of the *Messenger*, had been written especially for the *Messenger*, and just after its first publication he wrote to Judge Tucker that "Morella" was his story most recently written. This time I take his word in both cases. For various good reasons neither of these stories is likely to have been among the Folio tales; nor obviously was "The Descent Into the Maelstrom" one, though a Mr. Latrobe in his old age specifically said it was one of those submitted for the *Visiter* prize in 1833.

On the other hand, there was obviously a story in burlesque of Lady Morgan—and only one of all Poe's writings is a burlesque of Lady Morgan. She knew a dazzling popularity in the days of Bulwer and Disraeli. She came under critical fire for

the French words she was introducing into her Irish stories. Mr. Rouge-et-Noir, "who admired Lady Morgan," evidently was the first teller of Poe's only effort at Irish humor, "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Arm In a Sling." As far as we know, the story was not published until the 1840 volume, for which the tales were not selected by Poe himself. Perhaps he did not print the story before because he did not like it, but in the making up of the volume it was included by the publishers for the sake of variety.

IV

Fourteen of the stories were definitely among the Folio Tales. These were "Ms. Found In a Bottle," "Lionizing," "Bon-Bon," "Loss of Breath," "Shadow," "Silence," "King Pest," "Metzengerstein," "Duc de L'Omelette," "Four Beasts in One," "A Tale of Jerusalem," "Mystification," "The Assignment" (in its early form called "The Visionary,") and "Berenice." The latter is the best constructed and most mature of the group and was probably told by the member "I," who is betraying his fellows of the club because they found his story too terrible.

There were various little betraying marks in some of the early editions of the stories that disappeared before they reached the form in which they are now usually reprinted. A thrust at Hewitt, the one-time editor of the Baltimore *Visiter*, disappears in later versions of "Loss of Breath." Hewitt received the verse prize of the *Visiter* when it was discovered that Poe's "Coliseum" was by the same author as "Ms. Found In a Bottle." Most of his poems were sickly with sentimentality and he wrote often of angels. In the early version of "Loss of Breath" the hero breaks "a bottle of Hewitt's 'Seraphic and highly-

scented double extract of Heaven, or oil of Archangels,' which, as an agreeable perfume, I here take the liberty of recommending." In the same tale, one version has a long satirical reference to the popular dramas of the American Indian which does not appear in another version. The second version in another place, however, had added to the absurdities that rush through the brain of the half-dead hero "falsities in the Pelham novels—beauties in 'Vivian Grey'—more than beauties in 'Vivian Grey'—profundity in 'Vivian Grey'—genius in 'Vivian Grey'—everything in 'Vivian Grey.'"

"Mystification" carries frequent reference to the "U. of G—n" which indicates that it was told by Mr. Horribile Dictu of the Teutonic eyelashes who had attended the University of Göttingen. Other stories of the group have no marks identifying them with a particular relator. I think when he first increased the tales from eleven to sixteen Poe had more than one tale read by some of the members of the club. "Shadow" and "Silence" should have been told by one person, and "Metzengerstein," though it borrows from Bulwer, should, as a German tale of terror, have been no one's but Horribile Dictu's. Too minute and detailed a discussion would be necessary to trace all the birthmarks of the tales that Poe in many cases removed from later versions.

There is a sixteenth tale to name. One of the sixteen tales sent to Cary & Lea was lost by them: but if, as is likely, Poe recovered or rewrote it, and if my allotment of the tales is entitled to the belief that I

put in it, there is left one member of the Folio Club without a story. The little black-eyed man in a black suit is, I suppose, the Devil. Poe would not have left him out and he would not have made him tell a tale like "Bon-Bon" in which he is the "goat." "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" is the only other one of Poe's stories, though published later, that has the characteristics of immaturity and likeness of spirit with the Folio Club group. In its earliest form "me" occurs throughout the tale where later "the Devil" or "him" is substituted; a significant alteration in the light of a study of the other early tales.

V

There is something ironic in finding Poe discovering his own technique by accident. He wrote many of these early stories in the first person because the stories that suggested the burlesque were written in the first person. Even his "tale of effect" and the horror story he first practiced in "half banter." This early group of stories cannot be intelligently read without a knowledge of how he first "intended" them. Chiefly, the story of the origin of the Folio Club Tales is significant as a factor in interpreting the origins of his later methods in the short story.

It was like Poe later to keep the secret of his earlier intention to himself. The tales were his most successful hoaxes. I think he would enjoy it, satirically smiling at his later critics. "Ours is a world of words," he wrote. "Quiet we call *Silence*—which is the merest word of all."

A HYMN FROM AN ABATTOIR

BY LLOYD LEWIS

MOST men who have written hymns have come, soon or late, to believe the Lord God Jehovah to be the real author of their compositions, and themselves to be little more than inspired stenographers. They have felt, no doubt sincerely, that this attitude was the ultimate in modesty, and it may be piously wondered if any of them ever recognized what conceit they proclaimed.

Philip Paul Bliss, however, was a truly humble man. Not only did he give the Almighty full credit for his amazing output of hymns; he also gave Him nearly all his royalties. The popularity which floated him on its tide from 1870 to 1876 never appeared to touch his vanity. It was a Higher Power, not he, who had written those gospel songs which practically every pious American Protestant seemed to be singing, and that Higher Power, he thought, should get back the proceeds in the form of contributions to evangelism.

So irresistible were Bliss's revival songs that scores of them continued as favorites as late as 1900, and some of them are employed even today by bucolic revivalists. What Sunday-school scholar of the elder generation has never sung "Hold the Fort," "Pull for the Shore," "What Shall the Harvest Be?," "Only An Armor-bearer," "Almost Persuaded," "Oh! That Will Be Heaven For Me," "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," "Jesus Loves Even Me," and the rest of the Bliss masterpieces?

Bliss's singing and exhorting were cele-

brated through the midlands and South in the middle '70's. His baritone voice was thrilling and his handsome face beamed with kindness behind his big black beard. What delight he took and gave when, at the end of a hymn, he told his hearers how divine inspiration had made him write it. Particularly was he sure of that inspiration in "Hold the Fort."

"Its use in churches all round the world," he would say, "is on account of its harmony with the word of God upon a truth intended to arouse Christians. Let us sing it—Number eleven!"

Then, with the organ swelling into that warlike melody, men, women and children would begin:

Ho! my comrades, see the signal
Waving in the sky;
Reinforcements now appearing;
Victory is nigh!

"Hold the fort, for I am coming,"
Jesus answers still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven:
"By Thy grace, we will."

See the mighty host advancing,
Satan leading on;
Mighty men around us falling,
Courage almost gone.

"Hold the fort," etc.

Had any of the singers stopped to inquire into the mundane genesis of the song, its words might have stuck in their throats, for the historical incident that inspired it was one of those upon which