

and I am sure that he does not write so entertainingly.

The Art of Being Ruled. By Wyndham Lewis. Harper and Brothers.

MORE POE BIOGRAPHY

By Lorine Pruette

THE final publication of the Valentine letters, together with increasing study of the Ellis-Allan correspondence in the Library of Congress, has permitted the clearing up of a great many mysterious parts of Poe's career. The biography by Hervey Allen comes nearer than any other to covering fully the details of the poet's life. Through its two volumes we advance step by step, leisurely, intimately, from the moment that a small orphan boy is taken home by Frances Allan to the final and still unexplained death scene in Baltimore. The impressive documentation bears witness to the author's scholarship and patient research; the care with which he distinguishes between authenticated details and the imaginative reconstruction, whether by himself or by others, of uncertain points, is evidence of his sincerity.

The author sets out to give Poe a background, temporal, physical, and cultural; he succeeds in making Poe a reasonable figure. Here is no mysterious creature, actuated by dim, fantastic desires beyond the understanding of ordinary men; rather here is a youth, sensitive and gifted, exposed to a series of unusual misfortunes, some growing directly out of his own nature, many due entirely to the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed. The disgraceful and heart breaking conditions of authorship a century ago are made quite clear; in the light of Mr. Allen's exposition it seems amazing that America

should have developed a literature of any sort.

John Allan, too, becomes a comprehensible figure; his little vanities, his financial worries, his pride in his final position, his niggardliness, even his tortured sensuality, take on the aspects and characteristics of a genuine person. His comparative indifference to the welfare of his own illegitimate children makes his neglect of young Edgar all the more understandable. Indeed, although the biographer does not directly suggest this, it is more than possible that John Allan's conscience reproached him for taking more of a fatherly interest in this child of actors than in his own offspring; and that this pricking of his conscience, together with his undoubted concern for Edgar, occasioned some of his bitterest outbursts. The author makes the point that John Allan and Edgar Poe had entered into a veritable father-son relationship, and that this explains the unflinching capacity of each to hurt the other.

The America of the first half of the nineteenth century is recreated in many important phases in the effort to present Poe as a part of his time and place. This conception is contrary to the dogma of the early biographers who sought to put Poe out of time, out of space. The author emphatically declares that "Poe often found his material in the life and the place about him, and worked only in a secondary and indirect way from literary sources." The influence of Poe's stay in the Carolinas is revealed very strikingly by an analysis of some of his stories.

For half of his short life Edgar Poe was more or less a sick man. Congenital heart trouble, a highly "nervous" temperament, privation and starvation, contrived to put him in a state where even the briefest nepenthe from alcohol or drugs was a valued release. We no

longer care whether Poe drank much or little. It is probable that he was much more temperate than most of our esteemed forefathers, but it is certain that his drinking was more than usually disastrous. Similarly the flock of cooing and idiotic women who swarmed about him, whatever his condition, was also disastrous. A full understanding of the bitter years of economic failure and growing delusions of greatness may yet reveal the saintly devotion of poor Aunt Maria Clemm as more harmful than all the severities of John Allan. Toward the end Poe unquestionably required the ministrations of some devoted woman, but there is a strong probability that earlier in life a more robust atmosphere would have been helpful. Mrs. Clemm's manoeuvres to bring about the absurd marriage with Virginia, in spite of the protests of the entire family, constitute one striking evidence of her unfortunate influence. However important the sickly Virginia may finally have become as a protection to her husband, the choice of a thirteen year old girl as a mate was surely not calculated to increase Poe's chance of a satisfactory adjustment to life. As a boy Edgar had shown himself capable of both calf love and passion. Something happened to change him into a man whose sensuality was definitely perverse and abnormal. Psychoanalysis is now revealing case after case of the most appalling nature developing out of the repressions and maladjustments due to marriage with a cold or inadequate mate. Virginia may easily have been part cause as well as symbol of Poe's condition, and the thwarted sexuality of John Allan and his foster son show some interesting parallels as well as important differences.

New light is now being shed on the relation between Edgar Poe and his brother, William Henry Leonard Poe.

It is clear, from the little book called "Poe's Brother", that the two boys enjoyed a mutual exchange of adventures and dreams, and some of Poe's gorgeous lies about foreign experiences may well have been based on adventures borrowed from Henry. The few poems surviving from the older brother show that Edgar's gift had at least a considerable hereditary background.

Israfil: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe. By Hervey Allen. George H. Doran Company.

Poe's Brother. By Hervey Allen and Thomas Ollive Mabbott. George H. Doran Company.

A HISTORY OF SEX

By Edith d'Alby

"WERE I to tell as much of the truth as I know about sex, society would frown at me, the postal authorities would forbid its printed circulation, some self-constituted censor would hail me before a tribunal, and were I dependent upon patients for a livelihood, want would soon stare me in the face."

This sentence appears upon the first page of Dr. Collins's latest book, in which he "looks at love and life" squarely and sanely. How much he does tell of the truth he knows is difficult to say, but he tells more than any author, not writing for a specialized public, has dared tell, and does it with the power, sincerity, and lucidity which have gained him reputation in letters. Those who have read his previous books know that this statement needs no superlatives.

Dr. Collins is not particularly interested in us when all is right with our world; his mission is neither to chant of love as the blissful gift of God, nor to echo Dr. Pangloss's philosophy of life