

desires. The other is less flexible, but its results are of more permanent value.

Granted the historic doubt, let us state the question: was Edgar Allan Poe a drunkard?

If the prophet Nehemiah wrote the Pentateuch, if Bacon created the plays known as Shakspeare's, if Alexander Pope's apprentices translated Homer (who was probably a myth himself), and if Alexandre Dumas' young men wrote the great French romancer's novels—why should not Edgar Allan Poe turn out to have been a total abstainer?

As the public may be aware, the New York Shakspeare Society has recently been occupied in a successful attempt to preserve the Poe cottage in Fordham from destruction. As the matter is at rest (the bill to lay out Poe Park and move the cottage thereon having become a law May 22, 1896), it is unnecessary to call further attention to the matter here; but in his work in connection with it, and in the voluminous

correspondence it involved, the writer could not well avoid learning much about Poe. As Poe was and always is an interesting subject, much of what he learned may be of general interest.

From those who claimed to have been Poe's neighbors at Fordham, or who said that their parents had been, there came curiously contradictory statements as to the poet's character and habits. I heard it asserted that he was a shiftless, careless, unhappy man, with a kind word for nobody—a drunkard who was pointed out to strangers as he reeled home at night. On the other hand, people who knew him personally, or whose fathers and mothers have so testified to them, have assured me that Poe never drank liquor, simply because his stomach was so delicate that a single glass of wine was poison to him,

and that he could not, even by a physical effort, swallow, much less retain, a drop of ardent spirits.

I have been assured, by this latter group of witnesses, that Edgar Poe was a sweet and lovable gentleman, with a smile and a courteous word or gesture for every one who met him; that he dressed with scrupulous care, and that, however threadbare his garments, he was always precise and dainty, even dapper, in his neatness and in his gait; that, far from pointing him out with scorn and reproach, his neighbors loved to see him, spoke highly of him, sympathized with his misfortunes, and, had they dared, would have openly offered him the assistance which they did, as often as possible, clandestinely render him. Within half an hour I have been told that those who helped him never heard from him again, or received only contumely in return; and, on equally good authority, that in requiting favors he was punctilious almost to excess.

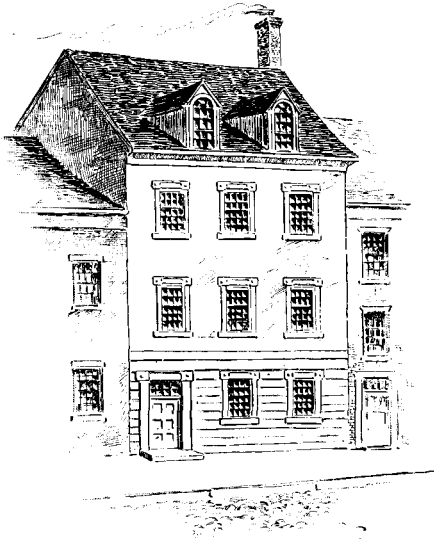


ELIZABETH POE, MOTHER OF EDGAR ALLAN POE.

Even in the critical estimates of his writings, the same antipodes of assertion are to be found. On the one hand, we read that he carried his habitual insincerity and dishonesty into his work—that he treated literature as if he knew the whole trick of it, as if he could write a "Paradise Lost" if he cared to; that if he had any literary creed, it was that any rigmarole, if it was sonorous or catchy, or had a march or refrain to tickle the ear, would earn him the price of a dinner. On the other hand, we are informed that "Poe failed to make a living at literature, not because he was an irregular profligate, but because he did ten times as much work as he was paid to do." If he received the meanest and most trivial book to review, this witness tells us, he would spend hours of labor in going to

original sources of consultation, and would add taste and conjecture, and balance authorities as to its subject matter—a form of profligacy, to be sure, but not a profligacy which makes a man a byword and a reproach to his fellow men.

In view of these contradictions, an experiment which the writer tried may be worth recounting. I took two of Poe's letters, cut from them their dates, ad-



130 GREENWICH STREET (1844).

Here "*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*" was written.

dresses, and signatures, and submitted them to an expert in handwriting, who examined them at his leisure, in my presence. To provide for a perfectly disinterested judgment, I had cut into the letters themselves, mutilating the contexts. When I desired the expert's opinion as to whether they were written by one and the same person, he stated at once that they were. There could be no manner of doubt that they were. I then asked what sort of a person had written them. He answered:

"I should say an extremely methodical young person, with firm nerves, and not liable to excitements."

"Certainly not to alcoholic excitements?"

"Certainly not," he answered; and from this proposition he could not be shaken.

A year ago the public interest was aroused by a trial, held in a New York criminal court, to determine whether a young girl, who shot her betrayer to death, was a murderess or an epileptic, mentally and legally incapable of committing a crime. To decide this very abstruse question, not only alienists and pathologists, but phrenologists and professors of the science of heredity were summoned among the expert witnesses; and charts, sketches, weights, and measurements, not only of the prisoner's head, but of those of her father, mother, brothers, sisters, ancestors, and collaterals of ancestors, as far back as procurable, were paraded before the intelligent jury. I suppose if we only had before us the weights and measurements of the skull and brain of Edgar Allan Poe, we might perhaps be able to throw light upon the apparent mystery of his mental condition. Unfortunately, we possess no such statistics.

It may be stated, however, after an inspection of all the authentic portraits, including the last daguerreotype made for his fiancée, which she kindly placed in the writer's hands, I should be inclined to infer that above a horizontal line drawn from the lower edge of the orbital cavity to the middle of the ear cavity, the bumps were abnormally developed, while below it they were unusually, if not abnormally, minimized. Phrenologists, no doubt, would be able to tell us exactly what this would render probable; whether, for example, it would produce "sweet bells, jangled, out of tune and harsh," or something directly to the contrary. The ordinary observer sees no trace of the inebriate in any of Poe's portraits—one of which, one that is probably new to most readers, is reproduced at the head of this article.

Edgar Allan Poe's grandfather was a soldier, Commissary General David Poe, of the Maryland line, in the Revolutionary army. Though not figuring in history, this officer seems to have been a man of dignity and of soldierly qualities. At least, long after the peace, when the Marquis de Lafayette revisited the United States, he visited General Poe's grave, and knelt and kissed the turf, saying: "*Ici repose un cœur noble!*"—an effusion which he

does not appear to have duplicated over the ashes of any other of his departed comrades in that struggle.

General Poe's son, Edgar Allan's father, was a student reading for the bar in



VIRGINIA, WIFE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE.

Baltimore when he fell in love with, and married, Elizabeth Arnold, an English actress who appears to have stood high in her profession. From his grandfather and father came Edgar Allan's sense of honor and pride—as to which latter quality, for once, all his biographers and neighbors are agreed. From his mother, he seems to have inherited a very delicate physique. This, probably, was partly the result of his parents' poverty. The life of an actor at that date in the United States was a migratory one, and the young couple went together everywhere, enduring not a few hardships. As in the case of Heine—whom Poe resembled in many ways—the frail body seems to have been accompanied by an extreme sensitiveness, a tendency to melancholy, and a natural bent toward satire and bitterness. This temperament was intensified by the well known incidents of his early career, and especially by the loss of his expectations as heir to his wealthy adopted father.

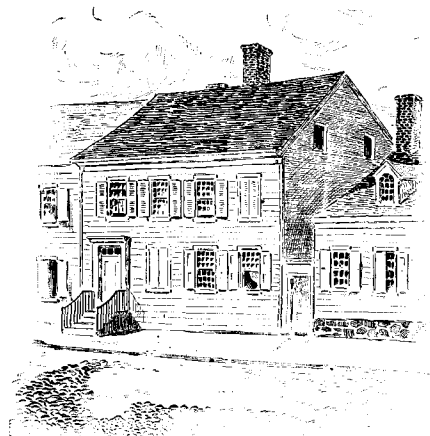
As for young Poe's discharge from West Point, where he was entered as a cadet of the United States army, I am unable to discover any record to his discredit, except that he could not master the prescribed course of mathematics, of course the *sine qua non* of military instruction. Yet in such stories as "The Gold Bug" and "The Purloined Letter,"

the young man showed that he had absorbed the principles, if not the technique, of mathematical science.

Even in his short career at the United States Military Academy, young Poe gave an impression of eccentricity, and of a nature incomprehensible to his instructors or his sturdy fellow cadets. A classmate of his, writing many years afterward, said: "I believe now that he was marked for an early death, if only from an incompatibility of soul and body. These had not the usual relations to each other, and were on such distant terms of acquaintance as to make a separation seem inevitable."

Imagine such a personality thrown entirely upon his own resources; and add the extra burden which such a friendless and poverty stricken lad is almost sure to assume—namely, marriage with a delicate girl, as poor as himself, and still more helpless; and you can calculate Poe's chances for success in the world.

The only real home, with control of his own front door, which Edgar Allan Poe ever had, was in the tiny cottage now standing on that ancient thoroughfare, the Kingsbridge Road, Fordham, in what is now the Borough of the Bronx, City



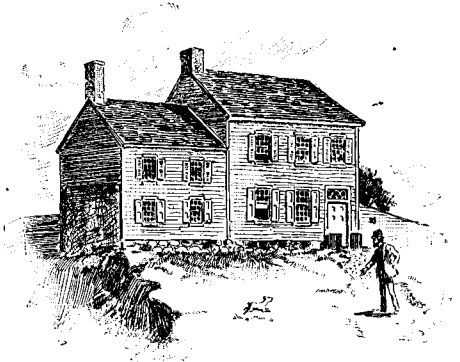
113½ CARMINE STREET (NO LONGER STANDING).

Here Poe resided in 1837.

of New York. The cottage had been built about ten years (there are several others almost identical in size and interior arrangements still standing) when Poe rented it, and brought his wife and

her mother thither. He was able to furnish it comfortably, and even with some small elegance, from a circumstance now to be related.

In the course of his many and precarious employments, Poe had drifted into the penny-a-liner trade, as it then was in the United States, of book reviewing. To review a book, it was only expected



HOUSE NEAR BOULEVARD AND EIGHTY FOURTH STREET (REMOVED IN 1893).

Here "The Raven" was written.

that the hack should give the name of the author and publisher correctly, and say something about its contents. But it can be imagined that poor Poe may have reflected that these authors and publishers were comfortable persons with plenty to eat and drink, while he was starving; and may have felt that his only way to equalize the discrepancy was to damn their books when he had the chance. At any rate, he gave his Heine-like satire full rein on most of them; and this easily led to a project which he soon put into existence—to write down all American men of the pen. He did this with so much bitterness and abuse, or what the victims considered abuse, that some of them retaliated. Among others Thomas Dunn English took up the cudgel in his own defense, and wrote a stinging screed upon Edgar Allan Poe. For the publication of this, Poe began a suit for libel against its publisher, and his lawyer recovered a few hundred dollars. It was with this money, probably the largest sum he ever possessed at any one time, that he furnished the famous "Poe cottage" at Fordham, which the State of New York has just passed a law

to preserve as a perpetual shrine to his memory and his genius.

When nature decrees the mental and physical makeup of a human being, it seems as if fortune resolves to send to that human being only such circumstances and casualties as will accentuate that makeup. So, at least, it was in the case of Edgar Allan Poe. If ever there came a momentary ray to brighten his life, it was only to ban it more cruelly in the end. All the publishers with whom he made contracts—though his services eclipsed and surpassed a hundred fold, in value and brilliancy, any other services they could obtain—seem either to have failed outright, or to have been obliged to make heroic retrenchments. And their first and common step in the plan of retrenchment was—to discharge Poe!

As he stated it himself, some

unmerciful disaster

Followed fast, and followed faster,

everything he undertook. There seemed actually no place on God's green earth where he could remain. It was always "Move on! Move on!"

After one of these *débouts*, Poe issued a prospectus for a magazine of his own. The result was that he obtained a few advance subscriptions, not nearly enough to make a beginning with, but just enough to tantalize. Wandering about, hungry and sleepless, with these in his pocket, they went for bread. This, of course, is proof enough that the man was a rascal and a swindler; and those whom he had stung by his satire did not by any means allow their opinion of his conduct to fail of publicity.

One day, in cold and bitterness, a letter reached him. Whether from curiosity's sake, or from some sort of appreciation, it asked him to visit Boston and deliver a lecture. At this date, while the public appetite for literature was scarcely enough, as it was in the England of Ben Jonson's day, "to pay for a sea coal fire," and while there were few who would subscribe for a magazine or buy a book, almost anybody (in the vicinity of Boston, at least) would pay a couple of shillings to hear a "lecture" about almost anything. It must have been a hard job for poor Poe to scrape enough cash together to journey from New York to Boston; but he got

there. Perhaps his entire mental and physical forces had been exhausted in raising the fare, and he had none in reserve to prepare a lecture worthy of delivery upon a Boston rostrum, before a

the fact that to this day, fifty two years later, Boston has not forgiven Poe or his memory. To this day, the sternest and most uncompromising critics of the dead poet come from Boston.

New-York: Aug. 9. 45

Dear Sir, It is nearly a month since I received a note from you, requesting an interview — but, by some inadvertence, I placed it (your note) among my pile of "answered letters". This will account to you for my seeming discourtesy in not sooner giving you an answer.

I have now to say that I shall be happy to see you at any time, at my residence 195 East Broadway. You will generally find me at home in the morning before 10.
Very Resp^{ly}.

Yr. ac. S^r

Edgar A. Poe

Mr Thomas W. Field.

FACSIMILE OF A LETTER WRITTEN BY POE.

Boston audience—which then, as now, was nothing if not insistent on the worth of its money. At any rate, poor Poe stood there unprepared and speechless. He made some sort of performance, however; read his poem of "Al Aaraaf," and retired in a storm of hisses and cat calls. The incident is mentioned in order to note

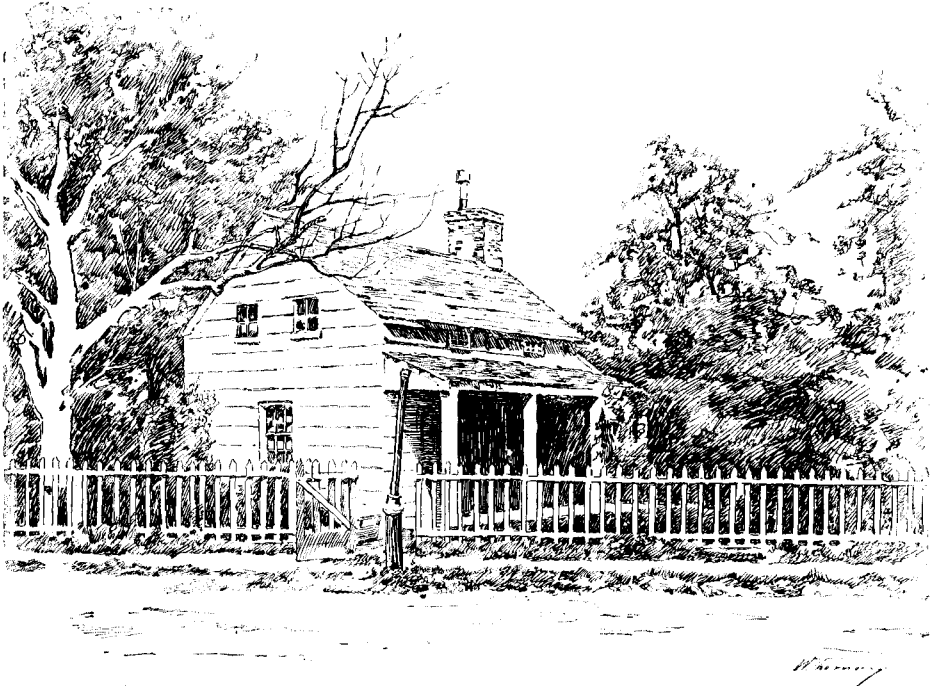
The case of Edgar Allan Poe is probably the only case where the question of the personal habits of a great creator of literature has persisted beyond the man's grave. We do not discuss the personal morals of Dickens, of Georges Sand, of Lawrence Sterne, of Dean Swift, of Molière, or of Shakspeare. And yet, though

half a century has been completed since Poe's death, the men who prepare costly editions of his immortal works still write nasty introductions and prefaces concerning Poe's irretrievable badness! This may be a compliment, but it seems like a ghoulisn one.

Mr. Woodbury's "Life of Poe" is a unique example in literature of a biog-

their conversation, the poet's companion used the word "metaphysics." Poe replied: "Bother mathematics, let's have another beer." The argument of my informant was that Poe was so intoxicated that he did not know the difference between metaphysics and mathematics.

Old Dominie Ward says that Shakspeare died of a fever contracted by over



THE POE COTTAGE AT FORDHAM.

Drawn by William Thomson.

rapher selecting his subject with the apparent purpose of doing his best to damn that subject for all time. I doubt if real biography can be written in this way; or whether the world would not prefer to let enthusiasm, rather than the meaner instincts of malice and hate, search for the truth.

Of the scores of incidents in Poe's life at Fordham that reach us from his old neighbors, all those related with purpose to show him an inebriate have invariably been extremely trivial and contemptible. Here is a fair sample of them. An old gentleman told me that one day he happened to be sitting in a tavern at Fordham (still standing near the Harlem Railway station) when Poe and a friend came in. The friend ordered beer. In the course of

indulgence when on a "lark" with Ben Jonson. But modern discovery, in view of the lack of drainage in Stratford-on-Avon in 1616, thinks that the immortal dramatist died of malaria. Similarly, I suppose that the admirers of Richard III are convinced that the young princes in the Tower died of diphtheria. But nobody has thought of either malaria, diphtheria, or that worst malady of all—an empty stomach—in the case of Edgar Allan Poe!

As to Poe's personality, our late movement to save the Fordham cottage naturally brought us much in the way of new and therefore unprinted matter. "Mr. Poe had the most engaging manners of any gentleman I ever met," wrote the lady who sent the daguerreotype. "He was always a very civil man," said an employee of a

carriage factory (still standing, though it has been rebuilt, on the spot it occupied in Poe's day, about ten rods from the Fordham cottage). "He went by the shop every morning, for he used to go to the city a good deal." The Harlem Railroad had just been opened as far as White Plains. "Knowing that he was a bright fellow," this informant added, "we came to think, from the taste and neatness with which he was dressed, that he must be making quite a bit of money in a very few hours."

At that time Archbishop Hughes had recently established St. John's College at Fordham, its present fine buildings being then supplied by temporary quarters. A priest who remembers Poe perfectly says: "Mr. Poe came here often, very often. He seemed to like to be with us and about the college. Agreeably and gradually, he became a privileged person among us. He was never other than a true gentleman. His grave, tender face, his simple and unconscious graciousness, his quick and never failing sympathy, his honest yet gentle earnestness, made him the most lovable of men." Yet, on page 67 of *The Atlantic Monthly* for January, 1897, it is asserted that the small park which is to be laid out in Fordham, and to which the cottage is to be moved, is to be called "Poet's Park," which suggests "that the poet's own name was avoided because it was not respectable"! As a matter of fact, the name adopted is not "Poet's Park," but "Poe Park." A neighboring street already bears the name of Poe Avenue.

Besides the famous cottage, of which a sketch appears on page 528, Poe lived at different times in several other places in New York. To the house on Carmine Street, shown on page 525, but no longer standing, he first brought his young wife when the couple took up their domicile in the metropolis. Here lived with them William Gowans, the eccentric book miser of Nassau Street, who bought so many volumes, and sold so few, that both cellar and attic of his place of business were found, at his death, packed with forgotten purchases. Mr. Gowans was full of admiration for the gentle wife, and of praise for the poet; but that he ever spoke of Edgar Allan Poe as an inebriate

is unrecorded. The guests who used to attend the salons of the Duyckink brothers, while telling of the beautiful pale face, the large, sad eyes, and the gentle but courtly bearing of Edgar Allan Poe, also forgot to speak of him as a dipsomaniac. Perhaps, after all, it is a tribute to his genius that the few animosities he did awaken were jealousies so professionally capital that after half a century they still deny, to him alone of mortals, the benefit of the principle *de mortuis*.

I cannot see anything irretrievably disgraceful in Poe's enlistment as a private in the army, or in his accepting the efforts of friends to procure his discharge, in their desire to save to American literature its most brilliant genius. Samuel Taylor Coleridge did exactly the same thing, without hypothecating his fame. It has been stated that Poe deserted. That such a charge should be made, a charge so untrue and so easily disprovable, is nothing but a characteristic sample of the malice of his detractors. A deserter, by military law, would have been imprisoned, or, in war time, shot; and Poe received neither punishment.

We know now that the charge that Poe resold his manuscripts is a lie, circumstantially nailed by the publisher, still fortunately living, from whose reminiscences the allegation originated. This publisher did, it seems, pay Poe three times for three versions of "The Bells," himself insisting on so doing, because the poems were substantially distinct pieces. The statement that Poe stole the theme, meter, rhythm, and technique of "The Raven" from a certain lunatic in a certain madhouse has also fallen to the ground, it having been ascertained that there never was either such a lunatic or such a madhouse.

The truth is, perhaps, that Poe's greatest crime was his poverty—often abject, and always extreme. A starving man with not enough money to buy a meal, but with enough to pay for a glass of whisky, might be like the philosopher who said that he could resist anything but temptation. And while a glass of whisky might have no visible effect upon a full stomach, upon an empty stomach it might have a very considerable one.

So far I have not attempted an answer

to my own question ; but here are facts that bear directly upon it. In 1875, when a monument to Poe was erected in Baltimore, certain records were examined and certain affidavits were taken. There was the record on the books of the Washington University Hospital, where Poe died : "Cause of death—exhaustion caused by exposure." There was the statement of the resident physician, Dr. John J. Moran, that there was no odor of liquor perceptible upon the patient when brought in. There was the statement of the conductor of the train which brought Poe for the last time to Baltimore, that his passenger was not under the influence of liquor. There was Dr. Moran's additional statement that, on his proposing to administer spirits to his patient, the latter refused them, obliging the physician to administer an opiate instead, against his own better judgment. Lastly, there were the statements of callers who, when it was discovered who the distinguished patient was, came to his bedside ; and these were unanimously to the effect that the dying man was not suffering from delirium tremens, but was rational and aware of his rapidly approaching end.

As any rehearsal of familiar matter has been avoided in this paper, the statement of the lady whom Poe was about to marry, that he left her in Richmond, to proceed to New York to settle certain business affairs prior to his marriage, need not be more than alluded to. But Dr. Moran states that he learned from Poe's own dying lips this story : that he had passed rapidly through Baltimore, having arrived

from Richmond by boat—there was no railroad—and in Baltimore had taken a train for Philadelphia ; but that the river Susquehanna (then crossed by a ferry) was so turbulent owing to the frightful storm then raging, that he had returned in the cars to Baltimore.

Here his story stopped. The narrative is taken up by the evidence of the conductor of the train, who noticed two suspicious looking men, closely watching Mr. Poe—so closely, in fact, as to arouse his surmise that mischief was designed. He had intended warning his passenger, but his duties had prevented when the train reached Baltimore at midnight.

What followed will probably never be known ; but at break of day the poet was found dying and insensible upon a sidewalk near the railway station, and was carried to the hospital. That the suspicious characters had drugged their victim, in order to rob him, is more than likely, in the opinion of Dr. Moran. The story that Poe was made drunk in order to use him as a "repeater" at a local election, is entirely disposed of by the fact that there was no election, local or otherwise, on that day. There was an election in Baltimore that year (1849) on the 3d of October, but Poe was then in Richmond, from which city he started for Baltimore on the steamer Columbus at 4 P. M. on October 4.

Poor Poe ! If he was human, was he therein different from the rest of humanity ? Even those who will not admit it might join us in saying, over his ashes : "May he rest in peace !"

SONGS OF THE SOUTH.

MORNING.

THE darkness flees ; softly from off the distant Blue Ridge rises high the mist.

The Sun King, triumphant, comes to meet his bride, the fair young day. Hark ! Hark !

The sound of rippling water greets the ear ; the newly risen lark

Pours forth its glad song, lingering to caress the jasmine, dew drop kissed.

EVENING.

The gray shadows lengthen ; far off across the fields a nightingale calls to its mate.

The roses sleep, their perfume on the scented air borne high and wide

To me, still waiting at our tryst. In the magnolia's shade I hide

And yearn for you, sweetheart. Ah, love, dear love, why tarry you so late ?

Maud Howard Peterson.

IN THE BALKANS.

BY HARRY J. HASKELL.

A tragedy and its sequel—A realistic story of the Christian peasantry ruled by the Sultan, based on the author's experience of life in the realm of the Turk.

1876.

BY day, the blue foothills that bounded the long, level plain to the south were dim with smoke; by night, the clouds above them were red with a dull glare.

"We are too far away up here in the Balkans," the peasants said to one another. "The Bashibazouks will never find us here!"

But they knew that they talked to keep their spirits up, and that they did not really believe what they said. The shepherds brought in their flocks early at night, and the farmers took care to leave their work in time to reach the village before sunset. In the evenings, they gathered in the wine shops about the market place, where they drank *rakiah*, sipped their coffee, and talked in an undertone about the latest word from the south.

Occasionally a refugee stopped at the mountain village—some man scarcely able to crawl, with haggard face and sunken, staring eyes. On such occasions the villagers gathered around as the stranger told his story of horror and desolation, and when they had heard it they crossed themselves and stole away silently to their homes. On the next saint's day the church would be packed, and the priest's chant, "*Gospodee pomeloi nee*"—"Lord have mercy upon us"—would be echoed by every soul in the building.

But young Vatralski was an exception to the rest. He believed that they were making fools of themselves to be so frightened, and told them so. Then the wise ones shook their heads, and said to each other,

"Ivan Vatralski has been married only a year. He will know better when he is older. Now he thinks only of the wife

and the baby and the sheep. He will be wiser some day."

Vatralski's wife had great faith in her husband, and tried her best, though often unsuccessfully, to hide her fears.

"Listen, Ivan," she said one evening, while her husband was mending the wooden fountain in the yard, "Baba Stoyanka says evil is at hand."

"So?" he returned, without looking up. "How does Baba Stoyanka know?"

"Thou rememberest the good sister who died here three years ago? The Baba says her spirit came last night to give the village warning."

"Ah, Vasilka, that could not be," the man said, stopping his work. "The good nun is in Paradise. Only evil spirits stay on earth after death."

His wife came closer and spoke in a whisper. "It is true. But the priest had the body dug up. It looks just as when it was buried—except that the face is frowning. And thou knowest, Ivan, that the spirit stays on earth till it is released by the body's decay. It must have been the sister's ghost that the Baba saw. Oh, I am afraid!" And she laid her head on her husband's broad shoulder.

"Don't fear, little one," he said. "These are old wives' tales. Am I not strong to protect thee? Dost thou not remember the bear I killed when it attacked my flock? And we have three wolves' skins—"

"So, so," she interrupted, still sobbing a little, "but the Bashibazouks—I fear them so! Thou knowest what the man who escaped from Eski Zaghra told us—how the Turks boiled his father in oil; how his brother they roasted on a spit; how his wife—O holy Mother of God, have mercy!" She clung closer to her husband.