

# The Valley of Unrest

by  
Douglass Sherley

## Introduction

In 1883, there appeared a strange book entitled *The Valley of Unrest*. *Literary News: A Monthly Journal of Current Literature* (Eds. [Frederick Leypoldt](#) & Augusta Leypoldt, Vol. 5, 1884) gave this notice of it: “Whether the strange facts detailed in this odd paper are authentic or not, they afford most fascinating reading for a good half hour. The writer claims to have been an old college mate of Edgar Allan Poe’s at the University of Virginia. The story he tells is as strange and weird as any of that lamented author’s prose compositions. It is well worth reading, not only for its freshness and pleasing style, but as a new leaf to the memory of the poet. Takes its name from Poe’s poem, “The Valley of Unrest,” which the writer believes owes its conception to the occurrences which he relates. The book is antique in its get-up. It is printed only on one side of quarto sheets of thick red paper, with most generous margins. The sheets are held together with blue silk cords.”

A more lukewarm reviewer made these comments on the book in the November 26, 1883 edition of the *New York Times*: “An interesting contribution to the already somewhat voluminous literature concerning the life of Edgar Allen [sic] Poe has just been published by Messrs. John P. Morton, Louisville. . . . The editor is Mr. Douglass Shirley [sic], who vouches for the authenticity of this posthumous manuscript now presented for the first time. . . . Whether or not the record of Poe’s life is taken as a genuine one, there is in the book much information about the old University of Virginia, the men who governed it, and the character of the institution itself which will be found interesting and of some value.”

According to Sam Moskowitz, in his introduction to the work, collected in *The Man Who Was Poe*, an 1884 New York edition of the volume was about 12 by 9 inches, printed and covered entirely in *orange* paper, holes punched through at the spine and bound with *brown* cord. As with the Louisville edition, the book presented itself in a quaint antiquity of style, *f* replacing *s* throughout and bearing with its title *The Valley of Unrest* the subtitles *A Book without a woman: Edgar Allan Poe: An Old Oddity Paper*.

There is dispute whether George Douglass Sherley was merely the editor of the work, as he claimed, or the author of it. The similarity of style between the introductions and the tale that follows suggested to Moskowitz that they are of the same provenance. On the other hand, George E. Woodberry, author of *Edgar Allan Poe* (1885), averred that Sherley had been a correspondent of Thomas Goode Tucker, a close friend of Poe at the University of Virginia, where Sherley also attended. And Sherley published excerpts from letters by Tucker in *Virginia University Magazine*. So it might be supposed that the account presented in *Valley* flows from Tucker and that, if not actually in his words, was taken down or revised by Sherley. Finally, Thomas Ollive Mabbott expressed skepticism of the account, from his belief that Poe's poem refers to a place in Scotland, which directly contradicts *Valley*.

There is added to these uncertainties, of course, the peculiar narrative itself and Sherley's strange hints in the book's first introduction of the author's tragic life and unnamed crime. But I can shed no more light on those mysteries than on the authorship. All are sealed together in the pages that follow.

As for Sherley, he lived from 1857-1917, was born in Louisville, Kentucky; was a student for a time at Centre College in Danville; later studied law at UVA; and afterward lived at 300 W. Chestnut St. in Louisville. He published a number of short books, including *Love Perpetuated*, *A Few Short Sketches*, and *The Inner Sisterhood*. He made a lecture tour 1893-4 with James Whitcomb Riley that started in Louisville and ended in New York City, where he appeared with Mark Twain. He died in Martinsville, Indiana and was buried in Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville.

I am indebted for these facts to Sam Moskowitz; *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* edited by John E. Kleber; the free archive of the *New York Times*; and Google Books (which had the relevant number of the *Literary News*). The below photographs of Sherley's grave are my own, taken on a visit to Cave Hill this past May. The motto reads:  
Whatever is, is best.

—John Wright  
August, 2008





GEORGE DOUGLASS SHERLEY  
BEST WHATEVER IS IS BEST 1917

\*\* The original text, with Sherley's two introductions, follows\*\*

# The Valley of Unrest

## Introduction—I

This book does not begin with an apology for its appearance. I, the editor, have none to offer. But it begins instead with what I am sure will be an unsatisfactory statement. I have neither the right nor the inclination to make public the knowledge which, by a mere accident, I chance to possess, concerning the author of the following pages.

This much I feel at liberty to state: He was well born, well reared, eccentric. He passed through life bearing the burden of some particular grievance of which the world did not know. His education was of his own curious making. His writings, a trifle weird, bear more plainly the marks of a peculiar originality than they do of erudition.

He was the only son, the hope and the pride of a proud man full of bitterness and world-hate. Between this father and child there was but little love, and absolutely no sympathy. A roving spirit early developed, and a fondness for studying human nature *direct*, rather than through the oftentimes more tedious medium of books, soon dissipated the hope and soon broke the pride of this over-ambitious and too exacting father. Young, erratic, with only the uncertain memory of a good mother, long dead, to keep him pure—without guile—he drifted beyond the line that sharply defines the difference between the right and the wrong.

Then there came a time when he was allowed to gratify the one passionate desire of his early youth—travel, travel, constant, worldwide travel. Those many years of restless wandering gained for him a unique and rich experience. Fortunate, indeed, were those who listened to his talk. He was a fanciful, magnetic man, full of strange conceits. He was a tragedy. His life was a rugged, tragic poem.

One act of his full-primed manhood—rare, brilliant—brought him the applause of an hour. Yet it was an act so rare, so brilliant, that it deserved better things. If I could mention his name, there are those now living who would recall to mind the matter and the man. Later on in life, embittered, scorned by those who by nature and by right ought to have been every thing to him, he committed an awful crime. Each detail thereof was coldly, calculatingly planned. And each detail was even more coldly, more calculatingly executed. But it was a crime with the criminal unknown. That guilty one, now dead, speaks to those who may listen from the printed pages of this book. But these pages tell the tale of other people's lives, and not of his own. They tell something of that strange man, Edgar Allan Poe, who was an intimate college friend. They tell something that

may chance to lend a fresh interest and a new charm to the always interesting and to the always charming study of—to quote from the following pages—That mysterious human fantasy.

*Autumn, 1883*  
The Editor.

#### Introduction—II

Whatever an idle fancy may chance to term this *Valley of Unrest*, it is woven, as may be seen, in and around about a poem, a mere fragment, seldom read, written by Edgar Allan Poe.

*The Valley of Unrest* is the name of the poem, and *The Valley of Unrest* is the name of the book.

It is a book without a woman. She does not find her subtle accustomed places in this valley of unrest. She seems to be absent in both the body and the spirit. It is an Eden without an Eve: but it is not a paradise without a serpent.

Harmony long ago fled the bounds of this strange unhappy valley, but she was not driven forth by woman.

Discord in greedy haste found a foothold in the dell, once a land of sweet and quiet rest. But discord was not brought thereto by woman's call or by woman's art.

Now, let the Valley of Unrest and the dwellers therein speak for themselves.

*Midsummer, 1883*  
Douglass Sherley.

## THE VALLEY OF UNREST

*By Edgar Allan Poe*

*Once* it smiled a silent dell  
Where the people did not dwell;  
They had gone unto the wars,  
Trusting to the mild-eyed stars,  
Nightly, from their azure towers,  
To keep watch above the flowers,  
In the midst of which all day  
The red sun-light lazily lay.  
*Now* each visitor shall confess  
The sad valley's restlessness.  
Nothing there is motionless—  
Nothing save the airs that brood  
Over the magic solitude.  
Ah, by no wind are stirred those trees  
That palpitate like the chill seas  
Around the misty Hebrides!  
Ah, by no wind those clouds are driven  
That rustle through the unquiet Heaven  
Uneasily, from morn till even,  
Over the violets there that lie  
In myriad types of the human eye—  
Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a nameless grave!  
They wave:—from out their fragrant tops  
Eternal dews come down in drops.  
They weep:—from off their delicate stems  
Perennial tears descend in gems.

There are moments in the lives of all men when the fragrance of some one flower, or the brief snatch of some favorite love-song, or the sound of some familiar voice, will instantly charm the mind with a strange and subtle witchery.

Mysterious moments, that bring back again the banished or forgotten things. Peculiar association of ideas that reproduce the once vivid pictures which have vanished from the canvas of life.

So it was to-night.

Here, in my den of old oddities, nothing pleased me. I put aside the yellow sheets of a German manuscript, a curious mass of erudition. It had failed to furnish solace to my lonely hour. I was possessed by a spirit of restlessness. I passed over to the square hole under the deep slant eaves that answers the purpose of a window. I thrust back the darkened unpainted shutter. It creaked dismally on its one rusty hinge. I looked out into the blackness of the night. A snow storm was raging. I could feel the soft white flakes falling against my withered face. And I thought of the snow storm of life that was beating in upon my full wintered years.

From below, far down the turn of the road, there came a sound of many voices, and the musical ring of jingling sleigh-bells, and then all was silent.

That was hours ago, early in the night. Yet the sound of those musical bells has somehow, by the charm of that strange subtle witchery, brought back from out of the past a mysterious human fantasy, which in those other and far-off years gave a coloring to my life that has not faded out, and never will.

A glance, a hand-clasp, and a word. Three potent factors that won my home-sick heart, on the afternoon of my first day at Virginia University. Edgar Allan Poe was the winner thereof. I had stood aloof, a lonely sixteen-year-old boy, on the outer edge of an unsympathetic crowd. His eye met mine. He came forward, offered me his hand, and said, "I like you. I want to know you." From that moment dated our friendship. From that day I was recognized as the most intimate friend of Poe while he remained at the University.

Now, in truth, he was indeed a mysterious human fantasy.

To-day, even after all these years of diligent investigation, there is so little actually known of the inner life of this strange man.

Several periods bear so heavy a mist of uncertainty and false report that we are forced to content ourselves with the barest outline.

Somewhere there is told a legend of a man, who did for sake of gold sell his shadow. But this, our human fantasy, must have parted with his substance, and passed through life only a shadow in dalliance with an immortal soul.

In that part fanciful, part biographical sketch of his own life, "William Wilson," thus does he speak of those years spent in the Manor-House School at Stoke Newington, England: "My earliest recollections of a school are connected with a large, rambling Elizabethan house in a misty looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient.

"In truth it was a dream-like and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. "At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies and thrill anew with indefinable delight at the deep hollow note of the church bell, breaking each hour with sudden and sullen roar upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay embedded and asleep."

Many a time, while we walked arm and arm beneath those now crumbling arcades at the Virginia University, Poe has talked by the hour of that old Manor-House School, long before he had even thought of formulating William Wilson. He would often thrill my boyish fancy with his world of romance and dreams without wakenings. The other day, a lengthening street of the English metropolis stretched itself over the leveled ruins of that ancient Manor House.

His life at the University has always been buried deep in a mass of obscurity. Much has been written about him, but little has been written and less is known about his University career.

With this one period of his life I am familiar, for he was then my only friend, and I knew him well.

Now in those days, a spirit of dissipation prevailed among the students of the University. While men like unto Gessner Harrison, Henry Tutwiler, and Phil. Cooke abstained from the midnight revel and strictly obeyed each obligation placed upon them by the faculty, we, a gay rollicking set, with Poe for our leader, were much given to a non-attendance at the daily lecture, and to a freedom from all regulations and restraints imposed by those high in authority. Yet somehow we managed to spend a large portion of our time in the University library; seated side by side, in one of those curious and now musty alcoves, we read the histories of Lingard and Hume.

Poe was passionately fond of French literature. Often have I made pause in my own reading and listened to his musically whispered translation from some old French play, until Wertenbaker, the ancient librarian appointed by Jefferson, and who died only a little while ago, would place a warning finger on his closed lips. Of late years I have often made search for those particular passages in the old French dramas; but I have not found them. And now this is my thought: he would more frequently weave the alleged

translation from his own imaginative brain than from the printed page; for he knew that my knowledge of French was limited, and that I would not be able to discover the charming fraud. The French drama is an old and pleasant story to me now. But it has never yielded the pleasure found in that library alcove, listening to those fraudulent translations, dreading the approach of Wertenbaker bidding us to be silent or leave the library.

We were familiar with the whole field of English poetry from Chaucer to Scott. There was not a passage of singular beauty in either that Poe could not instantly recall. And so it was with intermediate writers. He declared Shakespeare to be a magnificent whirlpool, into which he constantly desired to fling away the best that was in him. Once he said to me, "Shakespeare fascinates me with an evil fascination. He stirs up within me the demon-side of my nature. I have for him a passionate love-hate." Halcyon indeed were those days of my youth, when Poe was my friend, aye, the other half of my soul. Ah, there is a grim philosophy in the old saying, that we are never young but once!

Those weird tales and musical poems of the after years are but the crystallization of his thoughts and his fancies which so often found an echo in my heart, or that made echo up and down *The Valley of Unrest* that lies buried deep in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia.

My Lord Beachonfield's portraiture of his remarkable father, Isaac Disraeli, bears a strong likeness to young Poe, "indicating by the whole carriage of his life that he was of a different order from those among whom he lived; timid, susceptible, lost in revery, fond of solitude, or seeking no better company than a book, the years had stolen on till he had arrived at the mournful period of boyhood *when eccentricities excite attention and command no sympathy*."

Poe, unlike Isaac Disraeli, could at times completely yield himself to the gay companionship of reckless young fellows. But down in his heart he cared nothing for that wild dissipation that so often characterized his actions. It was but an effort, an unsuccessful effort, to make himself like unto others. Eccentricity is often a curse, and always a crime—a crime perpetrated against the ignorance of willfully common-place people; people who live according to rule; people who erect a standard, and who would have all live up, or rather down to it, and woe unto the man who departs therefrom.

Edgar Allan Poe, when first I knew him, was seventeen years of age, rather short of stature, thick and somewhat compactly set. He was strong of arm and swift of foot—for he was an expert in athletic and gymnastic arts. A more beautiful face on man or woman I have never seen. It was the beauty of the soul, always near the surface, always in a glow of strange, unearthly passion. His walk was rapid, and his movement quick and nervous. He had about him the air of a native-born Frenchman, and a mercurial disposition deliciously unstable. He was fond of cards. Seven-up and loo were his favorite games. He played like a mad-man. He drank like a mad-man. He did both under a sudden impulse. Something always seemed to drive him on. Unseen forces played havoc with his reason. He would

seize the glass that he actually loathed, yet always seemed to love, and without the least apparent pleasure swallow the contents, quickly draining the last drop. One glass, and his whole nervous nature ran riot within its highly tortured self. Then followed a flow of wild talk which enchained each fortunate listener with *a syren-like power*.

It is curious to follow the subsequent lives of those men who were his constant companions around the card-table, and who filled, from out of the same punch-bowl, their never-empty glasses with the same *peach and honey*.

*Peach and honey*, that drink once so popular, long years ago, with the Virginia and Carolina gentlemen of the old school.

There was Thomas S. Gholson, and of all the set there was not one more reckless. He was afterward a pious judge of some distinction and of great integrity. Upton Beale, who always held the winning card, became an Episcopal Minister. He was stationed for years, in fact until his death, at Norfolk, Virginia, and he was beloved by the people of his parish.

Philip Slaughter, Poe's most intimate *card-friend*, is still Kving. He, too, a minister of the gospel. I am told that he is an excellent God-fearing man. I wonder if he remembers those wayward days of his youth, when he and Poe were partners at cards, and held between them a common treasury.

I have lost sight of Nat. Dunn and Wm. A. Creighton. In all likelihood they have gone unto that other land.

Billie Burwell, a rare genius of that old set, has suffered many changes of fortune. He is neither judge nor minister; unlike the rest, he has never been able to finish sowing his wild oats. When last I heard of him he was living in New Orleans. He was still assiduously cultivating the refined society of kings and queens, and he was still a large dealer in diamonds and clubs. And there was yet another one, Thos. Goode Tucker, of North Carolina. He was a greathearted fellow. He was handsome, bold, and reckless. He was a warm friend and a bitter enemy, and he was passionately devoted to young Poe. This same Tucker was a great fox hunter. Poe and he were the constant terror of that Piedmont country. Whenever the farmers of Albemarle found their fences down, their fields of small grain trampled and all but ruined, they would roundly swear those infernal young rascals—Poe and Tucker—were the guilty ones, out on the chase again. And those farmers were right.

Tucker is now, like unto myself, an old man; yet he wrote me the other day, "Come with me for the sake of those old times, let us follow the hounds once more."

A strong, linked intimacy existed between Tucker and Poe. Tucker was not only intimate with the dissipated side of his nature, but with that other and better side known to only a few, principally women. It was a side which good and pure women were so sure to find out, appreciate, and defend, when others were so ready to blame. Whatever Poe may

have been in after years, he was, when I knew him at the University of Virginia, as honest a friend as the sometimes waywardness of his otherwise noble nature would allow. There was then not the least touch of insincerity, and never the slightest indication of that maliciously fickle disposition which in after times was so often brought up against him in life, and against his memory in death.

Marked peculiarities do not elicit sympathy from the common run of people—the great majority. They place the unhappy possessor in a most undesirable position. Misunderstandings constantly arise, and they can not often be explained, even if explanation be sought. Therefore it is not a matter of much surprise that Edgar Poe did not have many intimate friends. For he was indeed, even when I knew him—a mere boy—a man of strongly marked peculiarities. These peculiarities constantly led him into trouble. He made enemies out of those who should have been his friends. And of this he was more oftentimes unaware. For his enemies at the university were of that most dangerous, most contemptible *order—secret enemies—fellows ready* to give the stab from behind, and under cover of darkness. A band of envious cowards outskirt the ways of all such men as Poe. And always must eccentric greatness pay a penalty; nay, not one, but numberless ones to the clamoring, commonplace fool and the silent, envious knave.

Yet Poe was a power when he cared to try his strength. He was full of adaptability. He could play cards and drink *peach and honey* hour after hour, and day in and day out, with those who merely chanced to be thrown in his way. But a genuine friendship asks for something more and better than ordinary conviviality and a shuffling, each in turn, the same pack of cards. Other ties than those must be found to bring two souls together in a life-long attachment.

There was a curious magnetic sympathy existing not only between our hearts but even between our minds. In the silent watches of the night I have often closed the book before me, no matter how interesting, risen from my seat and, moving under the guidance of an irresistible impulse, gone out beneath the arcade, so full of strange shadows, and started toward the room near by, occupied by Poe, and have met him in his own doorway, coming to me, actuated by the *same irresistible impulse*. Not once, twice, or thrice, but again and again has this happened. And often in those silent watches of the night did he read to me the early productions *at his youth*. They were not published—not one of them—because unspared by his critical hand. His sensitive nature oftentimes made him a ruthless destroyer of much that was good. He could not brook the idle, laughing censure of his comrades. On several occasions I persuaded him to give his own small circle of intimate friends the rare privilege of listening to him read his own weird writings.

Those men—now all dead but Tucker and myself—who were so fortunate as to hear those impromptu readings could never forget them. In their old age their fireside stories were all the better for that memory. From out of the past, clear and strongly outlined, rise those readings. It is the memory of one especial night. The hour is late—after twelve. On West Range one midnight lamp is burning. It is the room of Edgar Allan Poe—No. 13. Our small circle is complete. By accident we have gathered there.

It is a rare meeting, unmarred by the presence of uncongenial souls. Each a kindred spirit, each in sympathy with the other. There is a short, impressive silence. Then, spell-bound, barely breathing, we listen to a story, weird and wonderfully strange, which Poe has just written—the ink not yet dry on the last page.

He reads with his whole soul thrown into every action and into each musical intonation of his well-toned voice. Now loud and rapid, like the mad rush of many waters; now low and slow, like the trickling of a stream in a hollow cavern. Then sinking into a whispered sentence of incantations and mad curses; then into a softly murmured, yet passionate vow of some ardent, hopeless lover, and—the story is told, the reading over. Ah, it was indeed a privilege to be there!

Once he wrote and read to us a long story full of quaint humor. Unlike the most of his stories, it was free from that usual somber coloring and those sad conclusions merged in a mist of impenetrable gloom that we so often find in his published writings. In a spirit of idle jest and not of adverse criticism, some one of our number spoke lightly of the story. This produced within him a fit of nervous anger, and he flung every sheet behind the blaze on his hearth. And thus was lost a story of excellent parts. "Gaffy," the name of his hero, furnished a name for the story. He was often thereafter good humoredly called "Gaffy" Poe, which was a name that he did not like.

Now, in those early days of the University of Virginia, a pernicious practice prevailed among the students at large. It was gambling at cards and for money. This vice was then prevalent among the best of Southern people. But Thomas Jefferson did not propose to tolerate its dangerous presence in his well-planned institution of learning. He found that it needed a speedy and effectual check. This, the year before his death, he promptly attempted to give; and while he may not have been entirely successful, yet, as one of the results of that effort, we were driven into The Valley of Unrest, which lies hidden in the wooded heart of the Ragged Mountains.

Mr. Jefferson, after much anxious deliberation with the University Board of Directors and others, decided upon a plan to eradicate the baleful habit of playing cards for sake of gold and silver coin. He consulted with the civil authorities. He found out the names of the most noted young gamblers, and he gave instructions that they should be indicted in due form and brought before the next grand jury. So, one bright morning in the early spring, the sheriff, with a goodly posse, suddenly appeared within the doorway of our lecture-room during the Latin hour. The staid old professor was calling the roll. That servant of the law stood in readiness to serve his writs on certain ones as the professor should mention the names of each guilty party. But gay young rascals are not to be so easily ensnared within the toils of the eager enemy. We needed no word of warning. The shadow across the doorway, and a gang of men behind, told its own story. With Edgar Allan Poe for our leader, we scattered in every direction—some through the window, and some through an opposite door.

Sheriff, posse, and professor were left in full possession of the lecture-room. Once on the outside, under the guidance of Poe—our master spirit in all times of danger—we mar-

shaded our scattered forces. Then, the hot pursuit. But those whom they wanted the most, the ringleaders—our own set—had made a successful escape, not to our rooms, for there we would not have been safe, but off to the wild Ragged Mountains, a jagged spur of the Blue Ridge, over an almost untrodden path.

But it was a hidden way well known to Poe, over which, always alone, he had often traveled. With ruling passion, strong even in hasty flight, some of the party had managed to arm themselves with a deck of cards and a goodly portion of *peach and honey*. This, in order that the hours of our self-imposed banishment might not hang heavy upon our idle hands.

Our place of concealment was The Valley of Unrest. It was a beautiful dell, high up in the mountains, almost inaccessible, and far away from the beaten path. It was the favorite haunt of Edgar Allan Poe. When almost overpowered by those strange spells of mental depression, approaching near unto the border-land of insanity, thither would he go, and alone. There for hours he would often linger, buried deep in the bitter-sweets of melancholy; and there, environed by low-sweeping pines, murmuring perpetual dirges, his active brain became strongly imbued with those wild, fanciful ideas which are so realistic even in their unreality; for, out of the dark-green, needle-pointed foliage of those low-sweeping pines there forever actually seemed to ooze a dreary somberness that permeated all the atmosphere with a gloom which hung like an uncanny mist over the beautiful dell.

It was a mysterious place. Something seemed to hush our voices and to muffle each footfall. If the spirit of adventure had not within each one of us been driven up to fever heat by the excitement of the moment, there could have been no human power able to detain us in that place of mystery. Surely it was this haunt of his youth that Poe did in after years so cunningly picture in exquisite verse, and fittingly termed *The Valley of Unrest*.

It must indeed be true that Poe was filled with the memory of that lonely dell, which lies so deeply buried in the great wooded heart of the Ragged Mountains, when he wrote that beautiful poem. And in that lonely dell, for the better part of three days and nights, we did conceal ourselves from the search of the sheriff and his posse in that long ago springtime.

Each day it was our custom to play cards and drink *peach and honey*. Each night we would light our torches, kindle a fire of pine fagots to dispel the chill night airs of early spring, then each in turn tell his story. After midnight we would go in single file and in silence down the mountain side. On the outskirts of the University we would find a little knot of anxious friends ready to supply us with provisions and *peach and honey*.

Before the coming of the dawn we would find ourselves back again within the shadows of that lonely dell, The Valley of Unrest.

Two lines that occur in the poem—

*"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a nameless grave"*

were uttered by Edgar Allan Poe while he told his story on the last night of our banishment in the Ragged Mountains; and it was the last story told on that night. Each time Poe's tale was the last; and while he talked we would forget to replenish the fire, forget every thing but the intricate plot which he might chance to unroll before us. When he finished we would, shivering, rise to our feet, and hastily depart from the spot and pass away from under its uncanny shadows, but not from the memory thereof. All of these years have not brought me a forgetfulness of those springtime nights and of that one last night.

On the afternoon of the third day the glad news came that we had been forgiven. Poe, our ringleader, was the only unhappy one of the party. He thought it so tame an ending for our flight, he was half unwilling to return again. That afternoon and night he was exceedingly gloomy and held aloof.

For the last time we lighted the torches and kindled the fire; for the last time we, each in turn, told our stories. Poe alone had not spoken. We had left him to himself. Thomas Goode Tucker had just finished a tale of a sweet and tender nature. The old story of two lovers—a grievous misunderstanding, a cruel separation, a happy reconciliation. It was a restful bit of human nature, a trifle commonplace, but so restfully, charmingly told as to gain a forgiveness for its evident touch of everyday life. During the little pause that follows the telling of any good story, Poe, still full of gloom, strode in from out of the shadows and stood in our midst with folded arms, and told *his* story.

To-night the recollection of those burning words, slow and distinctly uttered, rise before me in all of their original freshness and in all of their original horror. On the day after, I alone of that little party expressed a willingness to return some day to that spot in the Ragged Mountains where we had listened to that strange story, so wonderfully and strangely told.

His first words, delivered in a slow, monotonous tone, were those mysterious lines found in the poem—

*"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a nameless grave."*

He paused, then pointed to a little clump of early spring lilies. They were just coming into bloom. They were growing into beauty beneath the shadows of a large hemlock, on the inner edge of the firelight glow, plainly in the sight of all. Somehow, instantaneously, came the thought to each one of us, how like a grave-mound those clustered Mies had shaped themselves as they grew.

"No; you are wrong," he said, seeming to divine our very thought; the shape of yonder bed of fair lilies is but a foreshadowing of a grave yet to be there—a grave that shall be forever *nameless*. No one now lies beneath the purity of those blossoms. Their fragrance and their liveliness are not stolen from any human mold slowly decaying beneath the dark, rich soil. Out in the blackness of the night, beyond the flare of your torch and in the light of your fire, a company of ill-boding spirits have gathered. In their center three Demons of the Darkness. They are dancing. It is the Death-Dance. They stop. And now they are, each in turn, whispering to me. But you can neither hear nor see them. As they whisper to me I will repeat the words to you."

Bending forward in the attitude of an eager listener, and as if straining to catch the words of some one whispering, Poe slowly uttered the strange sentences of his wild story. The deception—if deception it was—was indeed most perfect. Each one of our number was ready to believe that Poe was actually hearing and repeating words spoken to him by some invisible person. The action was so wonderfully natural that it created the most absorbing effect. For a brief while I could scarcely believe my own identity. It was, in truth, some time before I could rid myself of the impression that Poe was in actual and direct communication with evil spirits. Tucker afterwards told me that several members of the party—otherwise sensible fellows—were never able entirely to rid themselves of this impression.

It is useless to even attempt a reproduction of that story. The bare outline—at best feeble—is all that I dare trust myself to give. Those three Demons are supposed to be the narrators using Poe as a mouthpiece. Consequently the story is divided into three parts.

## I

Two young men start out in life together. They have been unto one another more like brothers than like friends. Their hearts are drawn together by the tenderest ties that can bind two unselfish souls. Manhood finds them living a peaceful, harmonious life. Thus far without the shadows. But a curse yet unfulfilled hangs over them—some iniquity of the fathers that must be visited on the children of the third and fourth generation.

Discord, and then the horrors of civil war invade the peaceful land. The execution of the curse is near. There is a great issue at stake, and those young men differ about the merits of the cause. It is their first difference. They go on the battle-field and on opposite sides. In an evil hour, in the bitterness of a hand-to-hand conflict, they meet, each unknown to the other. Their weapons cross, a deadly thrust, and one lies dying. Then the cruel agony of a too-late recognition. While the dying man breathes away his

life, young, and so like a flower, on the bosom of his comrade, full of wretchedness, a voice:—"Your soul has expiated the curse of your race; peace abide with you." He is dead. But other voices, harsh and penetrating, ring out upon the ear of the grief-stricken survivor, Your curse has barely begun its baleful course; you are to go about the world a homeless, friendless wanderer; and when the end does come, you are to lie in a grave forever *nameless*."

## II

A storm. Night falls about, drawn on before its time. Out of the darkness of a distant valley a man full of years toils up the mountain side. But a human shadow. He trembles with fatigue and fright. The storm sweeps along the mountain. He seeks protection from its raging, unpent fury beneath the branches of a wide-spreading hemlock. It is where you are seated to-night. Years hence will mark his coming to this lonely dell in the heart of the Ragged Mountains. The shadows will steal away his power of action, and the shadows will close in and around about him, and from this spot he will not again depart.

## III

This human shadow, shut in by a troop of Demon-sent shadows, labors day by day at some mysterious task. Never man worked at so strange a labor. It is the slow making of a grave—and *his own*. Day after day the work goes on. Then there comes a pause. His labors are ended. And there, at the foot of a beautiful bed of lilies, an open grave. And now he sleeps in that grave, made by the painful toil of his weak and shriveled hands.

And Edgar Allan Poe, in conclusion, "The fitfulness of his life goes out into a perpetual darkness. *The Angel of Death* forever calms the trouble heart. And in those days when my three now powerful Demons shall have lost their high and most evil estate, and when other and better spirits shall have gathered here to hold high carnival in their stead, then the song of the midnight elfin shall be—

‘Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless grave*.’”

His story was ended. Those last words were said in a whisper. Then there was a long and painful silence. Not a word, not a movement, only the crackling sound of pine fagots almost burned out. We made effort to shake off the gloom settling down upon us. It was useless. Then we were startled to our feet by the sound of a retreating footfall. It came from the tangled mountain growth that enclosed our open space around the camp-fire.

Poe, with a wild expression on his face, lighted by the glare of the torch and fire, stood erect in our midst. With a mocking laugh that chilled every heart, he made this cry: —"Be still, my brave comrades; it is only the retreating footfall of my last Demon. He is gone! Come, scatter the dying embers. Bid farewell to our safe retreat. Now let us go, and in peace, down the mountain side, and again return to the University."

It is indeed a mystery how, on that night, we reached our deserted rooms; for it was the darkest night that I have ever known. And our souls too were filled with the darkness—a troop of grim terrors. Present in every mind the picture of that *nameless grave*. It was a picture with a ghoulis background of human Shadows and Death-Dancing Demons.

Now this which I have told is the bare outline—an incomplete synopsis—of that strange tale. It would take the touch of a master hand to render full justice to a story told by that master spirit, Edgar Allan Poe.

The days which followed thereafter almost drifted us into the belief that we had somewhere and somehow dreamed away the period of our hiding in the Ragged Mountains—a delicious slumber ruffled by the shadowy presence of a whispering phantom and a *nameless grave*—yet to be—far up in the wooded heart of that spur of the Blue Ridge.

The following December ended my term and my stay at the Virginia University. Poe left at the same time. Our lines of life stretched out in directions widely different, and they never crossed again. Our old friendship was never renewed. But our parting that December night was exceeding sad, full of tenderness and—pardon the weakness, for we were hardly more than boys—tears, hot, impulsive tears of deep regret. "I will never see you again," he said. His words were indeed prophetic. And perhaps it was better so, yet-But no; I will leave untold that which would only gratify an idle curiosity and open to public gaze an unsuspected heart-wound.

There is a sequel to that story of the *nameless grave*, as it was told to us by the boy Poe on that spring-time night in The Valley of Unrest.

About five years ago, after a long period of wandering in many strange and out-of-the-way places, I found myself in an old Italian town. There was a charm about the place. It was ancient, crude and interesting. To gratify an idle fancy—a mere whim—I had taken for the winter an old Ducal Palace, long ago given over to the chance tenant and—ruin. There came a holiday; then a night of the Carnival. I stood on the carved stone balcony of my own Ducal Palace and watched the motley throng passing down the crowded street. They pelted me where I stood, and laughed to see a face so full of sober thought in so gay a time.

Something—perhaps the odor of some flower, or, as it was to-night, the sound of some voice, rich, suggestive—something brought the desire to come back again to this, my native land. It had been for me the scene of much unhappiness, but a new generation of haste-lovers had risen, and I thought to go again to the home of my fathers. Vacant all the rest of that winter was my Ducal Palace. And the people said that I was driven out

by the ill-resting spirit of some Duke foully murdered in the long ago. So I left that uneasy shade in the full possession of that Ducal Palace, rich in tarnished gildings and faded colorings.

On my return, familiar places claimed my attention. Many of those whom I had known and loved were dead, and many changes marked the town of my birth. I turned from them all. I was disappointed. Only one place had not changed. Only one of those old places satisfied me. It was the University of Virginia. There everything seemed the same. True, a new set of Professors filled the chairs of those whom I had known, and men with unfamiliar faces frequented Rotunda, Porch, Arcade, and Lawn. Yet the place itself—its walls and its groves consecrated to knowledge—was just as I had left it.

One thought absorbed my attention. It was a foolish notion that would not down, and was yet ill-defined. Perhaps, by a mere accident, some one might have been buried in The Valley of Unrest and in a *nameless grave*. So it was, filled with this almost belief, that I determined to go and see for myself.

But to find that lonely dell far up in the wooded heart of the Ragged Mountains was not an easy task.

While a student I had often rambled over the University Range of Mountains. I had often gathered flowers and ferns from the scattered ruins of the old observatory. \* I had often stood on the summit of Lewis Mountain and looked down upon the Pantheon-modeled Dome of the old Rotunda. I had often watched the afternoon sunlight slowly creeping beneath the Arcades of Range and Lawn. And I had often looked down upon the town of Charlottesville, with glittering spire and gleaming roof, softened into a suggestion of something picturesque by distance and sunshine. But I had never but that once—those three days of hiding—explored the Ragged Mountains. From the time that I first saw them looking then as they always did, the embodiment of dense and somber loneliness, they had for me a charm. This charm was enhanced by our self-imposed banishment and the tale told by Edgar Allan Poe on that spring-time night beneath the shadows of those low-sweeping pines and in the glare of torch and camp-fire.

\* Now a new and beautiful Observatory stands on the old site.

That memory, after all of those years, had brought me again within the reach of The Valley of Unrest.

It was the spring-time. And it was early one bright morning when I started up the mountain-side to find again that beautiful dell. But in vain I wandered up and down the length and breadth of the Ragged Mountains. The old path was overgrown and forgotten. I was wearied with much and fruitless searching. I stretched out beneath a huge pine, on a bed of dry moss, and closed my eyes, but not in slumber. A bunch of new-blown lilies growing on a *nameless grave* was my one and troubled thought. It was about the hour of noon. Suddenly I grew conscious that some one was near, looking down into my face, studying its features. It was that peculiar and unmistakable feeling of

a *nearness* to a human being. Out of mere perverseness I remained still and as if asleep. My ear, on the alert for the slightest sound, caught the better part of these sentences: "Yes, yes, I am sure he is one of their number. True, he is greatly changed; but in spite of his long white hair and his heavily bearded face, I know him."

Breaking away from the capricious control of that perverse spirit, I arose and stood before a man as old, if not older than myself. He was a tall, angular, raw-boned mountaineer. His manner was calm, collected. His eye was bright and full of the fires of life, not yet burned out by the hoary encroachments of many years.

"Stranger," said he, in a voice somewhat low, and full of earnestness, "I have seen you before. But you have never seen me. You were about these parts now nigh on to fifty years ago. You were with a crowd of students from the University who came hither to bide from the county sheriff. Now come, stranger, and behold the fulfillment of a strange prediction that you and I and all the rest of us heard on the third and last night of your stay in the Ragged Mountains."

I had no answer. I was full of ill-concealed wonder. In silence I followed the man who had just spoken. We penetrated deep into the dense gloom of the forest. We neared an open spot. It was a lonely dell, and I was sure that once again, after all the years, I stood within the shadows of that Valley of Unrest.

Instantly came to mind those words placed in the mouth of Bedloe, in Edgar Allan Poe's "Tale of the Ragged Mountains": "The scenery which presented itself on all sides had about it an indescribable and to me a delicious aspect of dreary desolation. The solitude seemed absolutely virgin. I could not help believing that the green sods and the gray rocks upon which I trod had been trodden never before by the foot of human being."

"Do you remember," said the old man, "the tale that was told to us on that last spring-time night? See," and in the same tone, low and earnest, he repeated those familiar lines—

"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless grave*."

Slowly I turned, as he pointed, toward the center of the dell, and there my eyes fastened upon a green mound of earth, grave-shaped, without a stone, only a bunch of lilies at the head, just coming into bloom. In truth, I had found it, and there it was before me, the *nameless grave*.

There, seated beneath the same low-sweeping pines that had sheltered our party nearly fifty years before, and within sight of that grave-mound crowned with its early spring lilies, I listened to the plain and straightforward story of that ancient mountaineer, Gasper Conrad:

"Five miles from this place, just on the other side of the mountain-top, I was born. During the early years of my life I was a wood-cutter, full of ignorance and stupid happiness. Three times a week I hauled a load of wood into Char-lottesville. And that was all. It was my life. One morning about this time of the year I was chopping wood, just over yonder to the left of this spot. I heard a voice, loud, and then low. I rested on my ax and listened. In those days it was a rare thing to see or hear any body but our neighbors, rough, ignorant mountain people like myself. I came over this way and looked in through the wild undergrowth of the mountain. I saw a young man about eighteen or twenty years old walking rapidly up and down the open space. He walked in a hurried, jerky manner, repeating words clearly and distinctly, but words that I could not understand. I was rooted to the spot. My morning work was entirely forgotten. My heart while I listened seemed to beat with a new life and I seemed to hear a promise of better things. Suddenly he wheeled about and quickly disappeared. After that he often came, and always alone; frequently several times a week. I always managed to be near by. There was in the mere sound of his voice a new charm to me. It was a charm that I could not resist. One day, bold with desire to hear every word, I ventured too near. He saw me. My eagerness and my delight gained for me a ready forgiveness, and it gained for me something besides—his deep and generous interest. For to him I owe all of the little knowledge I now possess. From that time on, which was early in the spring, until late in the following December, he came almost dairy to this lonely valley up here in the mountains. Each time he would bring a bundle of books for me to read. Each time he would patiently explain away that which I did not understand and gladly remove every difficulty. This opened up to me a new life full of hitherto unknown riches. My chief delight was to listen while he read poetry and stories which he had just written, often the very night before. I never knew his name. Once I asked him. He said for his answer that he was a University student, and more than that it was neither well nor necessary for me to know. Each time he came alone, except when he brought your crowd of young fellows, to find a safe hiding place from the search of the county sheriff. That was about the time when I first knew him. I remember each detail of your stay in the mountain. Throughout the day you played your cards and drank your *peach and honey*. But with the coming of night you gathered around your bright fire, lit your torches, and, half laughing, half in earnest, told such queer things about Witches, Wizards, and Goblins. So passed away your time. It was on the last night that my friend told his story—and it was the last one told—of that *nameless grave*. Do you remember how you were startled to your feet, in the after-stillness, when the story was ended? Do you remember the sound of retreating footsteps on the outer edge of your company? They were mine. I had been concealed in the tangled undergrowth. I had heard the story. He alone, as he told his now prophetic tale, discovered me in my place of hiding. You know how well he used my hasty retreat to make you *feel*, even if you did not *believe*, that it was the departure of his last Demon. He came here for the last time on a raw December day. He bade me a tender, reluctant farewell. 'On the morrow,' he said, 'I leave forever this haunt of my youth. I will have no desire again to return. Solemnly, faithfully promise that you will not leave the mountains, and go down into that Valley of Human Wretchedness, that world about which you have read so much. Heaven knows it must be far better to read about it—aye, to even think and dream about it—than it is to know it, and alas! to *love it*, as I do.

Stay here always. Do what good you may among your neighbors. Forget all that which I have taught you. Be ignorant; be happy. But remember, dear Gasper, some day/ he said, pointing to what was then only a clump of new lilies in the early bloom, 'the clouds above will rapidly drift, unmoved by any wind,

"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless grave*."

"Ah, stranger, well may you look with wonder on that lily-crowned grave. Two people have known the manner of its making—my good wife and myself. But she is dead. I alone can give report of that grave-maker—the maker of his own grave, who lies at last in peace, I trust, beneath the evergreen sod of that *nameless grave*.

"In the autumn of 1835, near the close of the day, and in the midst of a frightful storm, there came about these parts a stranger. He was some fifty-five or six years of age. He sought shelter beneath my roof. He expressed to me while there the intention of building a small hut in which he intended to pass the winter. I liked the man. I liked his manner and his talk. So I tried to prevail upon him to live with us—share our poor quarters—because I knew they were far better than any he could provide for himself. He was kindly disposed toward me from the start. But he refused absolutely to have any thing to do with my neighbors. He would not accept from them a single offer of assistance, and would not even answer their questions. He was first regarded by the mountain people as a rough, surly fellow, and finally he was held in absolute dread—this partly on account of his manner toward them, and partly on account of his strange, uncouth appearance. He wore a great heavy beard, *mad* his long coarse, gray hair was always in a mass of ugly tangles. He was known by the somewhat appropriate name of Old Shaggy. The bare mention of his name was all-sufficient to quiet the noisy child or make the older and unruly ones creep off to their beds of straw in the low-swinging loft. Old women by the fireside told many a story of midnight murder and broad, open daylight crime. Old Shaggy was said to be, in each instance, the murderer or the criminal. If a child died suddenly, it was supposed that the curse of Old Shaggy rested on its little head. Even the death of our beasts of burden, our oxen and our few horses, was laid at the door of Old Shaggy. He was the terror of all this country side for twenty miles around. My continued intimacy with the man cost me the love and the good will of many of these honest people. They believed that he was an Evil Spirit in flesh, and blood, sent to torture the few inhabitants of the Ragged Mountains for some wrong-doing, the nature of which they did not know. When I passed among them they would draw aside, and, whispering, point after me: 'Gasper Conrad, poor fellow; Old Shaggy has sorely bewitched him, and his wife too. We 'uns will have nothin' mo' to do wid 'em.'

"They faithfully kept their word for many years, even after Old Shaggy had mysteriously disappeared from among them. To this day there is not one, even those of a new generation, no matter how brave, who will draw near this fatal place. For yonder, on the edge of this clearing, used to stand the little hut of Old Shaggy.

"He was a man of much information. He had rubbed up against the world and gotten from it much that was good and more that was bad. Yet it was all of the most intense interest, both the good and the bad. He had been everywhere, in every known part of the world. He once told me that he had been a steady traveler for about twenty years; that he did not remain long in any one place; and that now, weary of the life, he had returned here in order that he might die not far away from the place of his birth. For he said that he was born somewhere in Albemarle County, near the little town of Milton; that he was of a good family, always wayward, latterly profligate. His people thought him dead years before, killed in a drunken brawl; so they were told. He did not care for them to think otherwise, for he was indeed worse than dead to them.

"He parted from me one night with these words: 'And furthermore, dear Gasper, I know to the day, and even to the hour, the time appointed for my death. Years ago I determined that my grave should be in some unfrequented dell in the Ragged Mountains. For I love their lonely hollows and their wooded peaks. Hereabouts I have so often wandered in the days of my boyhood with dog and gun. Some day I will sleep in peace beneath its perpetual shadows, and in a grave that shall be forever *nameless*.'

"Those words filled my soul with terror. Back with a new force and a new meaning came the lines—

'Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless* grave.'

But I was silent. My emotion did not betray me. After that he more frequently spoke of himself and of his eventful life. Yet he never told me any thing of his actual history. That he was filled with a remorse of some kind for some crime or wrong-doing, I am sure. It seemed to be a remorse unsatisfied, relentless.

"A short while before his death he told me that he had been with Aaron Burr during his famous expedition, and that Burr was a brilliant man, fascinating, powerful, and that he had been the indirect cause of the one great evil in his miserable life. Somehow, stranger, I have always thought that evil was a foul but unintentional murder. I have gathered the idea more from the manner of Old Shaggy than from his guarded words.

"It was after dark, on the night of September 14, 1836. There was a loud knock at my door. Old Shaggy stood outside in the darkness; he refused to come in. 'No, no,' he said; 'there is not a moment to lose; every thing is ready; come, and come quickly!' I made a fresh torch, and followed after his rapid strides into the lonely valley. I felt that I was with a madman. I made no question. I was alone with Old Shaggy and with the Silence and the Shadows. By the light of the torch I discovered that he had torn down his hut, and cut the rough boards into short pieces, and placed them in a regular pile on the edge of an open grave. 'Made with my own hands,' he said. It was ten or

twelve feet deep, and there was in the broad bottom a rough-made coffin; an Hi-shaped lid near by on the outside. Without any emotion in either his manner or his voice, he turned to me and said: *It is about over now, this ugly dream called life. I am grateful to you for all your kindness. Do not let it fail me now, when I need it the most and for the last time.*' Speechless, powerless, I stood by his side. He turned away and flipped down into the grave. He deliberately placed himself in the coffin which he had made. He closed his eyes. He folded his strong arms across his great breast. One moment thus. Then he sprang up into a sitting posture, and in a loud voice, full of pitiful entreaty, exclaimed: 'Don't! don't! I am *Albert Pike Carr!*' He fell back into the coffin exhausted, as I thought, after this strange and unusual excitement. But it was the exhaustion that only death itself can bring.

"I made new torches and worked until the early dawn and afterward. The sunlight found the valley just as it used to be before the coming of Old Shaggy. For I had buried everything with him, even the rough boards of his hut. Nothing remained.

"But here in the center was the grave. And it was then, and even now is, as our friend predicted and as Old Shaggy wished it to *be—nameless.*

"Stranger, you have heard the story of that mount with its pretty lilies. I have told you all that I know about the man who lies beneath. I do not think his name was *Albert Pike Can*, That must have been the name of the man he murdered. And Old Shaggy died with the same words on his own lips that formed the death-cry of his victim—'Don't! don't! I am *Albert Pike Carr!*'"

The old man's story was ended. He was weary and out of breath. Yet he was full of nervous excitement. "Look!" and he seized my hand; "there is not a breath of wind, yet the trees are trembling as if in a storm, and the clouds overhead rush madly through the heavens.

"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless grave.*"

I left the old man standing by that lonely grave in that lonely dell. I reluctantly passed down the mountain-side. The evening wind, new risen, from out of those low-sweeping and mournful pines, made echo—laughing, mocking echo—"*nameless grave, nameless grave.*"

Thereafter, a short time, and while still at the University, a bundle of old family letters was placed at my disposal. They were written by a Virginia woman. She was the rarest wit of her day. I had known and liked her while a student. So each letter was to me full of interest; each page brought back a memory. Several sentences in a letter to her brother, a prominent Richmond lawyer, instantly attracted my attention. This was the excerpt:

"By the way, have you heard the latest news? I am told that one of the *Carrs*—Albert, I think; at all events the one inclined to be wild, and who is a lover of the venturesome—has run away from home, and in company with a *dissolute companion* gone to join that dreadful expedition of Col. Aaron Burr. The name of his comrade is unknown."

That was all—a mere dainty bit of a fair maiden's gossip. But it is enough to furnish the missing point in that story of the *nameless grave*. Now, given a number of facts, and a certain conclusion is inevitable. With the facts already brought forth, this is *my* theory—*my* conclusion:

Young Carr and his *dissolute companion* together go forth to join the expedition of the brilliant Burr. One of their number weakens in his devotion. Something must be done. Burr sends for this *dissolute companion*. "He will be on duty near the marsh to-night; do it quickly! do it well!" said Col. Burr. But the sides of a tent, like the walls of a house, have ears. Somebody crouching near, lost in the darkness.

"I am sick to-night; take my place on duty near the marsh; won't you, please?" said a soldier to young Carr. And "I will" was the brief and generous answer.

Later on, a man hurries across the corner of the marsh and goes far beyond the camp. He is a deserter, and he had made good his escape. Brave young Carr stands watchful duty in his place *near the marsh*. A footstep. "Who goes there?" cries out the valiant Carr. A sharp sword-thrust from behind. He turns, recognizes the man he loves, and conscious that it is the result of some cruel mistake, quickly exclaims: "Don't! don't! I am *Albert Pike Carr*."

But the recognition and words are too late. The moon had risen, but her tardy light was a mockery.

Years of remorse and constant wandering. The *dissolute companion* returns once again to his native place. By a curious coincidence he falls upon a dell, almost inaccessible, far up into the heart of the Ragged Mountains—The Valley of Unrest. He reaches the spot in the midst of a frightful storm, and he does not again leave the place. But with the skill and cunning of a madman he brings his life to a close by poison, or like means, on that 14th day of September, 1836—the deathday of Aaron Burr—another curious coincidence or strange fatality. Which?

It is not more than passing strange that a man run mad by the thought of a crime committed, double in its nature, should determine to end his life in some one particular spot and in some one particular way. Any clever madman might have brought about a death and a burial just as unique in its character. This signifies nothing. Yet it does seem strange indeed to find him in that one particular spot above all others—The Valley of Unrest. And stranger still, that he should have so strongly desired what is actually the case, and that which had been predicted by Edgar Allan Poe—a *nameless grave*. That he should chance to die on the same day, perhaps the very same hour, with Aaron Burr, who was the cause of his lifelong remorse—the cold-blooded instigator of his crime—is, in

truth, a remarkable element in this tangle of human destinies. Unnatural and most improbable sounds the entire story. If true, it is—of course by accident—the perfect fulfillment of a most peculiar prediction. If not true—only the garrulous mutterings of old age—then it is a curious, close-woven line of unaccountable things. But it is the plain and simple truth, this story as told by Gasper Conrad, the honest mountaineer.

Now this much I know to be a fact and beyond all doubt: There is in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia a certain lonely dell which does contain the grave of some man whose name is unknown. The mountaineers thereabout know by tradition the presence of that grave; consequently no power on earth can induce any one of them to enter that dell. And they know—also by tradition—the story of Old Shaggy, but not of his death and the strange manner thereof.

I also know it to be a fact, because told to me by Poe himself, that he constantly frequented that dell in the Ragged Mountains. I know that it was there that he guided us into a safe retreat from the pursuit of the county sheriff, and it was there I heard the story of the *nameless grave*, and it was there I heard him slowly, distinctly repeat those lines,

"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless grave*"—

not once only, but twice; at the opening and at the close of his mysterious prophetic tale. This—both the story and the lines—must have been heard by Gasper Conrad. How else could he have caught the oft-repeated refrain?

That Edgar Allan Poe must surely have meant this lonely dell when he wrote *The Valley of Unrest*, needs no proof. Read the Poem. It makes most excellent answer to any denial, no matter how idle or how earnest it may chance to be.

After reading those words in the old letter of that dead Beauty-Wit, I determined to go back into The Valley of Unrest, find Gasper Conrad, and question him more closely. Now, one Bishop keeps a little grocery and notion-store near the University Post-office, and there I had occasion to stop on my way out to the mountains and overheard this conversation, which made my intention useless: "So you say old Gasper Conrad is dead, do you?" I heard some one exclaim and then add, "When did he die?"

"Night 'fore last," answered a gruff, rough-looking fellow. He was evidently one of the Ragged Mountain people. There was a long, rusty piece of limp crape hanging on his left arm. It bore signs of frequent use.

A man idling near the door, leaning against an empty box, whittling a stick, said in a lazy, drawling tone, "Is that the same old fellow was all the time acting curious-like, and

talking about graves and lilies, or some land of flowers powing somewhere up there on the mountains?"

"The very same 'un," shortly answered the mountaineer, and then he strode out of the store and out of sight, with his heavy, stupid face turned toward his humble home.

"He was the old man's nevy, he was," said a melancholy bystander.

Dr. McKennie, who keeps the University Bookstore" established during my time by his excellent father, told me that he had for many years known and respected this rather remarkable mountaineer, Gasper Conrad. To use the words of the good Doctor: "He was honest, quiet, sensible; but to me a continual surprise. He had cultivated not only a taste, but an actual thirst for reading, and of a certain kind —always books of travel and adventure."

\* The University Bookstore is now in other hands. But Dr. West is still living. His address—University of Virginia, Albemarle Co., Va.

Filled with a desire to give a glimpse of Edgar Allan Poe, his inner life, while a student at the Virginia University, I have unreservedly written that which has gone before. I do not know into whose hands it may fall. I do not know if the great world will ever hear the burden of my song. Yet it was on my heart to write, and I have written. I have added something—if only a little something—to the much which has been said and written about this my Mysterious Human Fantasy. That much I have done, and something else. I have shown the curious juxtaposition of circumstances bringing about the complete fulfillment of a prediction made in a moment of midnight revel in the heart of the Ragged Mountains and by Edgar Allan Poe. It has about it at least the coloring, the strong coloring of a perfected prophecy.

Now the talk of the night is finished, and the night has gone. Again, far down the turn of the road I hear the musical ring of jingling sleigh-bells which hours ago rang up the memory of that Mysterious Human Fantasy, like unto the Witch of Endor bringing back a dead Samuel to a living and troubled Saul. Again, I hear the gladsome sound of merry voices—that same gay party which I heard so early in the night, returning now, at the break of another winter day, from the county dance.

They are gone.

Again, I lean out of the square hole under the deep, slanting eaves.

The cold gray lights creep into my den of Old Oddities.

They chill my heart.

The sun will shine to-day.

But will it bring brightness and warmth into my life?

Again, and from out of the cold, misty depths of the early dawn rises before me that  
Mysterious Human Fantasy.

It floats away with the dark humors of the night.

It teaches the first rising wind of this new-born day to whisper,

"Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a *nameless grave*."

END