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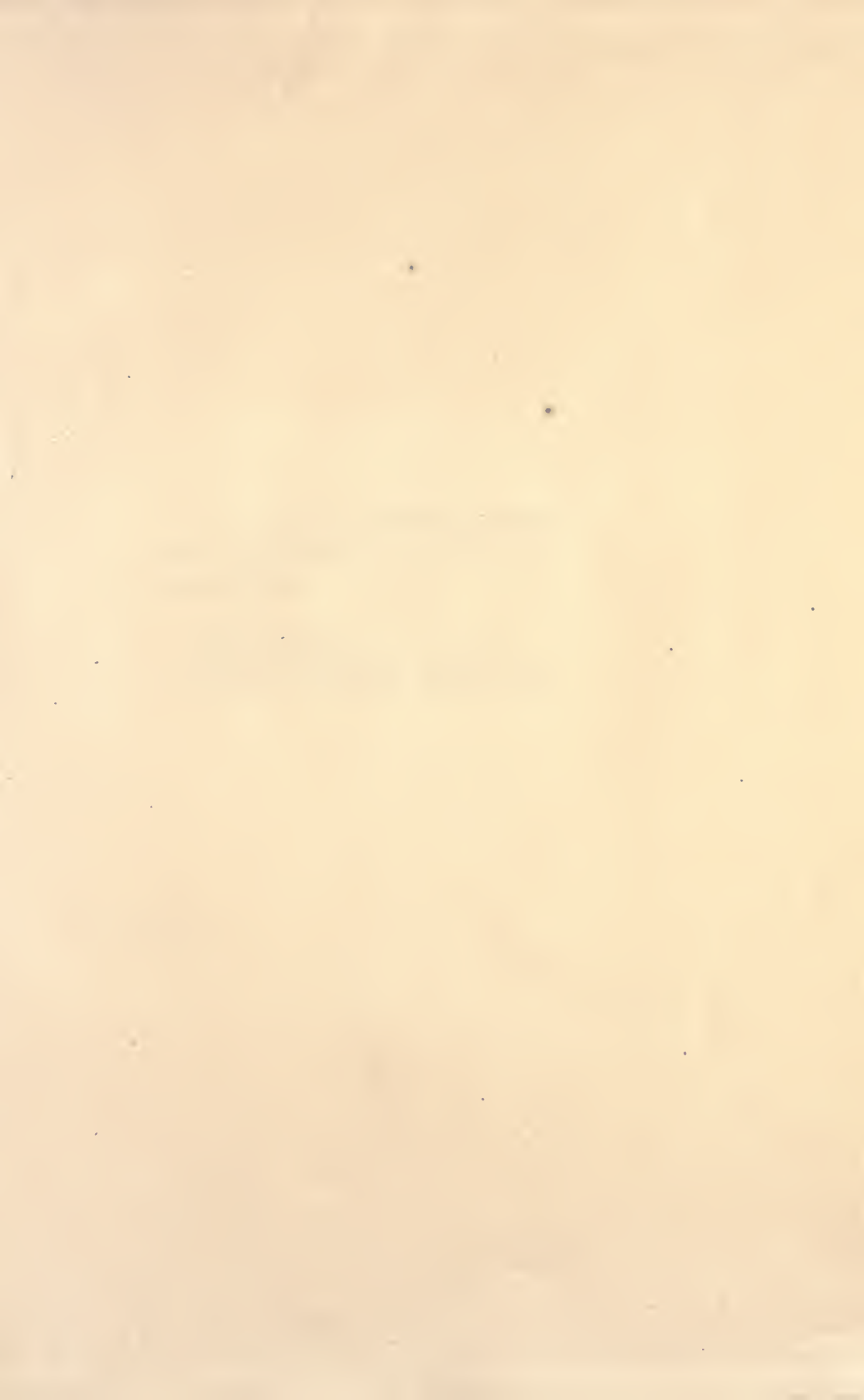


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The Last Letters
of
Edgar Allan Poe
to
Sarah Helen Whitman



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G. P. Putnam's Sons





The Last Letters of
Edgar Allan Poe

To
Sarah Helen Whitman



Edited by
James A. Harrison

*In Commemoration of
The Hundredth Anniversary of Poe's Birth
January 19, 1909*

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The University of Virginia

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BY
JAMES A. HARRISON
AND
CHARLOTTE F. DAILEY

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

PS
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1909

Dedicated
To the Three Ladies
Whose Generous Loan
of
Pictures and Valuable Poe MSS.
Has rendered this work possible:
Miss Charlotte F. Dailey
Mrs. Henry R. Chace
and
Miss Amelia F. Poe

731226



PREFACE

IT is the custom in foreign countries when the jubilee of any distinguished writer, poet or inventor occurs, to celebrate the event by a *Festschrift* or Literary Memorial of some kind containing unpublished data, original research or memorabilia of a notable kind bearing on the life, the career or the works of the author or inventor concerned.

It seemed appropriate that the Alma Mater of Edgar Allan Poe should carry out this graceful custom in honor of his Hundredth Birthday, January 19, 1909, and to do this the editor of the Virginia Edition of Poe's Complete Works has undertaken to print for the first time in their entirety, from the original MSS., the celebrated correspondence between the poet and Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman, whose Anniversary is also January 19th. These glowing letters rival the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" or the letters of Abelard and Héloïse in interest and eloquence.

Poe matriculated at the University of Virginia on the 14th of February, 1826, and his Alma Mater might

almost be said to send him this belated *Valentine* in honor of that signal event.

The editor's warmest acknowledgments are due to Miss Charlotte F. Dailey and Mrs. Henry R. Chace, of Providence, Rhode Island—Mrs. Whitman's heirs—for permission to print these letters; and to Mrs. R. L. Traylor, of Richmond, Va., for the use of the miniature of Poe. This rare likeness belonged to the late Robert Lee Traylor and is painted in oil on an ivory disk. It represents the poet at twenty-six years of age and is the earliest known portrait of him.

Acknowledgment is also due to the Century Company for permission to reprint the banns of matrimony and the marriage contract between Mrs. Whitman and Poe, and also for permission to reproduce the portraits of Poe and Mrs. Whitman.

J. A. H.

University of Virginia,
January, 1909.





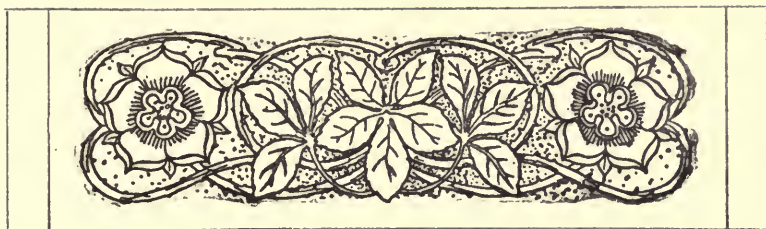
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The Last Letters of Edgar Allan Poe to
Sarah Helen Whitman



The Last Letters of Edgar Allan Poe to Sarah Helen Whitman

INTRODUCTION

IN publishing the following correspondence between Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe exactly as it occurs in the original MSS., without change or alteration of any kind, the editor feels that he is not dealing with a hackneyed subject, but one which, in its present form, is almost entirely new. For the first time this celebrated courtship, involving one of the loveliest women and the most talked of poet of their day, is revealed in full, with all the authenticity possible to accurately copied MSS., and the most scrupulous care taken in abstaining from "editing," adding, or condensing in any shape or form.

The result is honorable alike to both sides. The false delicacy of a generation ago submitted (without

Introduction

knowing it) to curtailed and unfaithful copies of a correspondence all—or none—of which should have been published. Garbled extracts got into biographies of Poe; single letters were divided up into several, undated or unsigned; long passages were omitted or placed where they are not found in the original, and an incoherent mass of unintelligible rhetoric, as different as possible from the lucid and direct Poe, was brought together where the originals, in Poe's exquisite hand-writing, show perfect order and clearness.

Mrs. Whitman's friends, wearying of this injustice to a man who honored the Rhode Island poetess so highly, have consented to the full publication of her correspondence with Poe.¹ At least half the letters of Poe here given are new, and the other half have been restored to their complete integrity.

Poe's contract of marriage with Mrs. Whitman is here given for the first time in book form. Mrs. Whitman's most intimate living friends do not believe that she ever intended to marry Poe; but this the marriage contract and the lady's intense sincerity of soul, her never-ceasing love for the poet, and her expression in one of the unpublished letters of her "unutterable affection for him," contradict this belief. Her eloquent defense of Poe against his critics proclaims in every line her admiring affection and the beautiful poems

¹ See paper on Poe and Mrs. Whitman in the *Century Magazine* for January, 1909.

addressed to him by her confirm the statement. She was singularly like him in the ethereal flow of a poetic gift as spontaneous, as delicate, as a moonbeam, and her insistence that her maiden name—Power—was only another form of Poe was not merely fanciful.¹

The letters as now given present a mass of “human documents” not easily equalled in the annals of literary men and women.

¹ “The Family of Poe or Poë,” by Sir E. T. Bewley, 1906.





POE TO SARAH HELEN WHITMAN

FIRST LETTER

FORDHAM, Sunday night, *Oct. 1*, 1848.

I HAVE pressed your letter again and again to my lips, sweetest Helen—bathing it in tears of joy, or of a “divine despair.” But I—who so lately, in your own presence, vaunted the “power of words”—of what avail are mere words to me now? Could I believe in the efficiency of prayers to the God of Heaven, I would kneel—humbly kneel—at this the most earnest epoch of my life—kneel in entreaty for words—but for words that should disclose to you—that might enable me to lay bare to you my whole heart. All thoughts—all passions seem now merged in that one consuming desire—the mere wish to make you comprehend—to make you see that for which there is no human voice—the unutterable fervor of my love for you—for so well do I know your poet-nature, oh Helen, Helen! that I feel sure if you could but look down now into the depths of my soul with your pure spiritual eyes you could not refuse to speak to

me that, alas! you still resolutely leave unspoken—you would *love* me if only for the greatness of my love. Is it not something in this cold, dreary world, *to be loved?*—Oh, if I could but burn into your spirit the deep the true meaning which I attach to those three syllables underlined!—but, alas! the effort is all in vain and “I live and die unheard.”

When I spoke to you of what I felt, saying that I loved now for the *first* time, I did not hope you would believe or even understand me: nor can I hope to convince you now—but if, throughout some long, dark summer night, I could but have held you close, close to my heart and whispered to you the strange secrets of its passionate history, then indeed you would have seen that I have been far from attempting to deceive you in this respect. I could have shown you that it was not, and could never have been, in the power of any other than yourself to have moved me as I am now moved—to oppress me with this ineffable emotion—to surround and bathe me in this electric light, illumining and enkindling my whole nature—filling my soul with glory, with wonder, and with awe. During our walk in the cemetery I said to you, while the bitter, bitter—tears sprang into my eyes—“Helen I love now—now—for the first time and only time.” I said this, I repeat, in no hope, that you could—believe me, but because I could not help feeling how unequal



were the heart-riches we might offer each to each:—
I, for the first time, giving my all, at once, and forever, even while the words of your poem were yet ringing in my ears:—

Oh then, beloved, I think on thee
And on that life so strangely fair,
Ere yet one cloud of Memory
Had gathered in Hope's golden air.

I think on thee and thy lone grave
On the green hillside far away—
I see the wilding flowers that wave
Around thee as the night winds sway;

And still, though only clouds remain
On Life's horizon, cold and drear,
The dream of Youth returns again
With the sweet promise of the year.

Ah Helen, these lines are indeed beautiful, beautiful—but their very beauty was cruelty to me. Why—why did you show them to me? There seemed, too, so very especial a purpose in what you did.

I have already told you that some few casual words spoken of you—[three words marked over and illegible]—by Miss Lynch, were the first in which I had heard your name mentioned. She described you, in some measure, personally. She alluded to what she called your “eccentricities” and hinted at your sorrows. Her description of the former strangely arrested—her allusion to the latter en-

chained and riveted, my attention. She had referred to thoughts, sentiments, traits, moods¹ which I knew to be my own, but which, until that moment, I had believed to be my own solely—unshared by any human being. A profound sympathy took immediate possession of my soul. I cannot better explain to you what I felt than by saying that your unknown heart seemed to pass into my bosom—there to dwell forever—while mine, I thought, was translated into your own. From that hour I loved you. Yes, I *now* feel it was then—on that evening of sweet dreams—that the very first dawn of human love burst upon the icy night of my spirit. Since that period I have never seen or heard your name without a shiver, half of delight, half of anxiety. The impression, left, however, upon my mind by Miss Lynch (whether through my own fault or her design I knew not) was that you were a wife *now* and a most happy one,—and it is only within the last few months that I have been undeceived in this respect. For this reason I shunned your presence and even the city in which you lived—You may remember that once, when I passed through Providence with Mrs. Osgood,² I positively refused to accompany her to your house, and even provoked her into a quarrel by the obstinacy and seeming

¹ Just as Poe corrected it.

² "1845" in Mrs. Whitman's own numbers.

unreasonableness of my refusal. I *dared* neither go nor say why I could not. I *dared* not speak of you—much less see you. For years your name never passed my lips, while my soul drank in, with a delirious thirst, all that was uttered in my presence respecting you. The merest whisper that concerned you awoke in me a shuddering sixth sense, vaguely compounded of fear, ecstatic happiness, and a wild, inexplicable sentiment that resembled nothing so nearly as the consciousness of guilt. —Judge, then, with what wondering, unbelieving joy I received, in your well-known MS., the Valentine¹ which first gave me to see that you knew me to exist. The idea of what men call Fate lost then for the first time, in my eyes, its character of futility. I felt that nothing hereafter was to be doubted, and lost myself, for many weeks, in one continuous, delicious dream, where all was a vivid yet indistinct bliss,—Immediately after reading the Valentine, I wished to contrive some mode of acknowledging—without wounding you by seeming directly to acknowledge—my sense—oh, my keen—my profound—my exulting—my ecstatic sense of the honor you had conferred on me. To accomplish, as I wished it, precisely what I wished, seemed impossible, however; and I was on the point of abandoning the idea, when my eyes fell upon a volume of my own poems; and then the lines I had

¹ "Feb. 1848" in Mrs. Whitman's own numbers.

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

written, in my passionate boyhood¹ to the first, purely ideal love of my soul—to the Helen Stannard of whom I told you—flashed upon my recollection. I turned to them. They expressed all—*all* that I would have said to you—so fully—so accurately—and so conclusively, that a thrill of intense superstition ran at once throughout my frame. Read the verses and then take into consideration the peculiar need I had, at the moment, for just so seemingly unattainable a mode of communicating with you as they afforded. Think of the absolute appositeness with which they fulfilled that need—expressing not only all that I would have said of your person, but all that of which I most wished to assure you, in the lines commencing “On desperate seas long wont to roam.” Think, too, of the rare agreement of name—Helen and not the far more usual Ellen think of all those coincidences, and you will no longer wonder that, to one accustomed as I am to the Calculus of Probabilities, they wore an air of positive miracle. There was but one difficulty—I did not wish to copy the lines in my own MS. nor did I wish you to trace them to my volume of poems, I hoped to leave at least something of doubt on your mind as to how, why, and especially whence they came. And now, when, on accidentally turning the leaf, I found even this difficulty obviated, by the poem happening to

¹ Mrs. Whitman drew a line in the margin against this passage.

be the last in the book, thus having no letter-press on its reverse—I yielded at once to an overwhelming sense of Fatality. From that hour I have never been able to shake from my soul the belief that my Destiny, for good or for evil, either here or hereafter, is in some measure interwoven with your own.¹—Of course, I did not expect on your part any acknowledgement of the printed lines “To Helen,” and yet, without confessing it even to myself, I experienced an undefinable sorrow in your silence. At length, when I thought you had time fully to forget me (if indeed you had ever really remembered) I sent you the anonymous lines in MS. I wrote them, first, through a pining, burning desire to communicate with you in *some* way—even if you remained in ignorance of your correspondent. The mere thought that *your* dear fingers would press—*your* sweet eyes dwell upon characters which I had penned—characters which had welled out upon the paper from the depths of so devout a love—filled my soul with a rapture which seemed *then* all sufficient for my human nature. It *then* appeared to me that merely this one thought involved so much of bliss that here on earth I could have no right ever to repine—no room for discontent.— If ever, *then*, I dared to picture for myself a richer happiness, it was always connected with your image in Heaven.

¹ Mrs. W. drew a line in the margin against this passage.

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

But there was yet another idea which impelled me to send you those lines:—I said to myself—The sentiment—the holy passion which glows within my spirit *for her*, is of Heaven, heavenly, and has no taint of the earth. Thus there *must* lie, in the recesses of her own pure bosom, at least the germ of a reciprocal love; and if this be indeed so, she will need no earthly clew—she will instinctively feel who is her correspondent. —In this case, then, I may hope for some faint token, at least, giving me to understand that the source of the poem is known and its sentiments comprehended even if disapproved. Oh God—how long—*how long* I waited *in vain*—hoping against Hope—until at length I became possessed with a spirit far sterner—far more reckless than Despair.—I explained to you—but without detailing the vital influence they wrought upon my fortune—though singular additional yet seemingly trivial fatalities by which you *happened* to address your lines to Fordham in place of New York—by which my aunt *happened* to get notice of their being in the West Farms Post-Office—and by which it *Happened* that, of all my set of the “Home Journal,” I failed in receiving only that individual number which contained your published verses; but I have not yet told you that your MS. lines¹ reached me in Richmond on the very day in which I was about to depart on a

¹ The last six lines or stanzas.

tour and an enterprize which would have changed my very nature—fearfully altered my very soul—steeped me in a stern, cold, and debasing, although brilliant gigantic ambition—and borne me “far, far away” and forever from *you*, sweet, sweet Helen, and from this divine dream of your Love.

And now, in the most simple words at my command, let me paint to you the impression made upon me by your personal presence.— As you entered the room, pale, timid, hesitating, and evidently oppressed at heart; as your eyes rested appealingly, for one brief moment, upon mine, I felt, for the first time in my life, and tremblingly acknowledged, the existence of spiritual influences altogether out of the reach of reason. I saw that you were Helen—*my* Helen—the Helen of a thousand dreams—she whose visionary lips had so often lingered upon my own in the divine trance of passion—she whom the great Giver of all Good preordained to be mine—mine only—if not now, alas! then at least hereafter and *forever* in the Heavens.— You spoke falteringly and seemed scarcely conscious of what you said. I heard no words—only the soft voice, more familiar to me than my own, and more melodious than the songs of the angels. Your hand rested within mine, and my whole soul shook with a tremulous ecstasy. And then but for very shame—but for the fear of grieving or oppressing you—I would have fallen at your feet in as pure—

in as real a worship as was ever offered to Idol or to God. And when, afterwards, on those two successive evenings of all—Heavenly delights, you passed to and fro about the room—now sitting by my side, now far away, now standing with your hand resting on the back of my chair, while the preternatural thrill of your touch vibrated even through the senseless wood into my heart—while you moved thus restlessly about the room—as if a deep Sorrow or a more profound Joy haunted your bosom—my brain reeled beneath the intoxicating spell of your presence [and it was with no human senses that I either saw or heard you. It was my soul only that distinguished you there].¹ I grew faint with the luxury of your voice and blind with the voluptuous lustre of your eyes.

Let me quote to you a passage from your letter:—
“You will, perhaps, attempt to convince me that my person is agreeable to you—that my countenance interests you;—but in this respect I am so variable that I should inevitably disappoint you if you hoped to find in me tomorrow the same aspect which one knew today. And again, although my reverence for your intellect and my admiration of your genius make me feel like a child in your presence, you are not perhaps aware that I am many years older than yourself. I fear you do not know it, and that if you

¹ Brackets introduced by Mrs. Whitman.

had known it you would not have felt for me as you do.”— To all this what shall I—what can I say—except that the heavenly candor with which you speak oppresses my heart with so rich a burden of love that my eyes overflow with sweet tears. You are mistaken, Helen, very far mistaken about this matter of age. I am older than you; and if illness and sorrow have made you seem older than you are—is not all this the best of reasons for my loving you the more? Cannot my patient cares—my watchful, earnest attention—cannot the magic which lies in such devotion as I feel for you, win back for you much—oh, very much of the freshness of your youth? But grant that what you urge were even true. Do you not feel in that inmost heart of hearts that the “soul-love” of which the world speaks so often and so idly is, in this instance at least, but the veriest, the most absolute, of realities? Do you not—I ask of your reason, darling, not less than of your heart—do you not perceive that it is my diviner nature—my spiritual being—which burns and pants to commingle with your own? Has the soul age, Helen? Can immortality regard Time? Can that which began never and shall never end, consider a few wretched years of its incarnate life? Ah, I could weep—I could almost be angry with you for the unwarranted wrong you offer to the purity—to the sacred reality of my affection.—And how am I to

answer what you say of your personal appearance? Have I not seen you, Helen? Have I not heard the more than melody of your voice? Has not my heart ceased to throb beneath the magic of your smile? Have I not held your hand in mine and looked steadily into your soul through the crystal Heaven of your eyes? Have I done all these things?—or do I dream?—or am I mad? Were you *indeed* all that your fancy, enfeebled and perverted by illness, tempts you to suppose that you are, still, life of my life! I could but love you—but worship you the more:—it would be so glorious a happiness to prove to you what I feel! But as it is, what can I—what am I to say? who ever spoke of you without emotion—without praise? who ever saw you and did not love? But now a deadly terror oppresses me; for I clearly see that these objections—so groundless—so futile when urged to one whose nature must be so well known to you as mine is—can scarcely be meant earnestly; and I tremble lest they but serve to mask others, more real, and which you hesitate—perhaps in pity—to confide to me. Alas! I too distinctly perceive, also, that in no instance you have ever permitted yourself to say that you *love me*. You are aware, sweet Helen, that on my part there are insuperable reasons forbidding me to urge upon you my love. Were I not poor—had not my late errors and reckless excesses justly lowered me in the esteem of the good—

were I wealthy, or could I offer you worldly honors—ah then—then—how proud would I be to persevere—to sue—to plead—to pray—to beseech you for your love—in the deepest humility—at your feet—at your feet, Helen, and with floods of passionate tears.

And now let me copy here one other passage from your letter—“I find that I cannot now tell you all that I promised. I can only say to you!

[Here follow four lines of her letter obliterated and two lines of his letter obliterated.—C. F. D.]

may God forever shield *you* from the agony which these your words occasion *me*! You will never, *never* know—you can *never* picture to yourself the hopeless, rayless despair with which I now trace these words. Alas Helen! my soul!—what is it that I have been saying to you!?!—to what madness have I been urging you?—I who am *nothing* to you—*you* who have a dear mother and sister to be blessed by your life and love. But ah, darling! if I seem selfish, yet believe that I truly, *truly* love you, and that it is the most spiritual of love that I speak, even if I speak it from the depths of the most passionate of hearts. Think—oh, think for me, Helen, and for

[The remainder of this page is cut off, and begins again upon the back.—C. F. D.]

comfort you—soothe you—tranquilize you. My love—my faith—should instil into your bosom a preternatural calm. You would rest from care—from all

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

worldly agitation. You would get better and finally well. And if *not*, Helen,—if not—if you died—then at least I would clasp your dear hand in death, and willingly—oh, *joyfully*,—*joyfully*—*joyfully*—go down with you into the night of the Grave.

Write soon—soon—oh, *soon*—but not *much*. Be not weary or agitate yourself for *my* sake. Say to me those coveted words which would turn Earth into Hea—

[*The rest of the page is missing.—C. F. D.*]





POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

SECOND LETTER

Oct. 18, 1848.

IN pressing my last letter between your dear hands, there passed into your spirit a sense of the *Love* that glowed within those pages:—you say this, and I feel that indeed it *must* have been so:—but, in receiving the paper upon which your eyes now rest, did no shadow steal over you from the *Sorrow* within me?— Oh, God! how I now curse the impotence of the pen—the inexorable distance between us! I am pining to speak to *you*—Helen—to you in person—to be near you while I speak—gently to press your hand in mine—to look into your soul through your eyes and thus to *be sure* that my voice passes into your heart. Only thus could I hope to make you understand what I feel; and even thus I *should* not hope to make you do so; for it is only Love which can comprehend Love—and alas! you do not love me.—Bear with me! have patience with me!—for indeed my heart is broken; and let me struggle as

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

I will, I cannot write to you the calm, cold language of a world which I loathe—of a world in which I have no interest—of a world which is not mine. I repeat to you that my heart is broken—that I have no farther object in life—that I have absolutely no wish but *to die*. These are hackneyed phrases; but they will not now impress you as such—for you must and do know the passionate agony with which I write them. “You do not love me”—in this brief sentence lies all I can conceive of despair. I have no resource—no hope;—Pride itself fails me now. You do not love me; or you could not have imposed upon me the torture of eight days silence—of eight days terrible suspense. You do not love me—or, responding to my prayers, you would have said to me—“Edgar, I do.” Ah, Helen, the emotion which now consumes me teaches me too well the nature of the impulses of Love! Of what avail to me, in my deadly grief, are your enthusiastic words of mere admiration? Alas!—alas!—I have been loved, and a relentless Memory contrasts what you say with the unheeded, unvalued words of others. But ah—again, and most especially—you do not love me, or you would have felt too thorough a sympathy with the sensitiveness of my nature, to have so wounded me as you have done with this terrible passage of your letter:—“How often I have heard men and even women say of you—‘He has great intellectual

Second Letter

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power, but no principle—no moral sense.’” Is it possible that such expressions as these could have been repeated to me—to me—by one whom I loved—ah, whom I love—by one at whose feet I knelt—I still kneel—in deeper worship than ever man offered to God?—And you proceed to ask me why such opinions exist. You will feel remorse for the question, Helen, when I say to you that, until the moment when those horrible words first met my eye, I would not have believed it *possible* that any such opinions could have existed at all:—but that they do exist breaks my heart in separating us forever. I love you too truly ever to have offered you my hand—ever to have sought your love—had I *known* my name to be so stained as your expressions imply.—Oh God! what shall I say to you Helen, dear Helen!—let me call you now by that sweet name, if I may never so call you again.—It is altogether in vain that I tax my Memory or my Conscience. There is no oath which seems to me so sacred as that sworn by the all-divine love I bear you.—By this love, then and by the God who reigns in Heaven, I swear to you that my soul is incapable of dishonor—that, with the exception of occasional follies and excesses which I bitterly lament, but to which I have been driven by intolerable sorrow, and which are hourly committed by others without attracting any notice whatever—I can call to mind no act of my life which

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

would bring a blush to my cheek—or to yours. If I have erred at all, in this regard, it has been on the side of what the world would call a Quixotic sense of the honorable—of the chivalrous. The indulgence of this sense has been the true voluptuousness of my life. It was for this species of luxury that, in early youth, I deliberately threw away from me a large fortune, rather than endure a trivial wrong. It was for this that at a later period, I did violence to my own heart, and married, for another's happiness, where I knew that no possibility of my own existed.—Ah, how profound is my love for you, since it forces me into these egotisms for which you will inevitably despise me! Nevertheless, I must now speak to you the truth or nothing. It was in mere indulgence, then, of the sense to which I refer, that, at one dark epoch of my late life, for the sake of one who, deceiving and betraying, still loved me much, I sacrificed what seemed in the eyes of men my honor, rather than abandon what was honor in hers and in my own.—But, alas! for nearly three years I have been ill, poor, living out of the world; and thus, as I now painfully see, have afforded opportunity to my enemies—and especially to one, the most malignant and pertinacious of all friends.—

[The next line is entirely obliterated, and then continues—C. F. D.]:

to slander me, in private society, without my know-

ledge, and thus with impunity. Although much, however, may (and I now see must) have been said to my discredit, during my retirement, those few who, knowing me well, have been steadfastly my friends, permitted nothing to reach my ears—unless in one instance, where the malignity of the accuser hurried her beyond her usual caution, and thus the accusation was of such a character that I could appeal to a court of justice for redress. The tools employed in this instance were Mr. Hiram Fuller, Mr. T. D. English. I replied to the charge fully, in a public newspaper—afterwards suing the “Mirror” (in which the scandal appeared) obtaining a verdict and obtaining such an amount as, for the time, completely to break up that journal.—And you ask me, *why* men so misjudge me—why I have enemies. If your knowledge of my character and of my career does not afford you an answer to the query, at least it does not become me to suggest the answer. Let it suffice that I have had the audacity to remain poor that I might preserve my independence—that, nevertheless, in letters, to a certain extent and in certain regards, I have been “successful”—that I have been a critic—an unscrupulously honest and in many cases a bitter one—that I have been uniformly attacked—where I attacked at all—those who stood highest in power and influence—and that, whether in literature or in society, I have seldom refrained from expressing, either directly or indirectly,

the pure contempt with which the pretensions of ignorance, arrogance, or hostility inspire me.—And you who know all this—you ask me *why* I have enemies. Ah, Helen, I have a hundred friends for every individual enemy—but has it never occurred to you that you do not live among my friends? Miss Lynch, Miss Fuller, Miss Blackwell, Mrs. Ellet—neither these nor any within their influence, are my friends. Had you read my criticisms generally, you would see, too, how and why it is that the Channings—the Emerson and Hudson coterie—the Longfellow clique, one and all—the cabal of the “N. American Review”—you would see why all these, whom *you* know best, know me least and are my enemies. Do you not remember with how deep a sigh I said to you in Providence—“My heart is heavy, Helen, for I see that your friends are not my own.” But the cruel sentence in your letter would not—could not so deeply have wounded me, had my soul first been so strengthened by those assurances of your love, which I so wildly—so vainly—and, I now feel, so presumptuously entreated. That our souls are one, every line which you have ever written asserts—but our hearts do not beat in unison. Tell me, darling! to your heart has any angel ever whispered that the very noblest lines in all human poetry are these—hackneyed though they be!

“I know not—I ask not if guilt’s in thy heart:—
I but know that *I love thee* whatever thou art.”

When I first read your letter I could do nothing but shed tears, while I repeated, again and again, those glorious, those all-comprehensive verses, till I could scarcely hear my own voice for the passionate throbbings of my heart.

Forgive me, best and only beloved Helen, if there be bitterness in my tone. Towards *you* there is no room in my soul for any other sentiment than devotion—it is Fate only which I accuse:—it is my own unhappy nature which wins me as the true *love* of no woman whom by any possibility I could love.

I heard something, a day or two ago, which, had your last letter never reached me, might not irreparably have disturbed the relations between us, but which, as it is, withers forever all the dear hopes upspringing in my bosom. A few words will explain to you what I mean. Not long after the receipt of your Valentine I learned, for the first time, that you were free—unmarried. I will not pretend to express to you what is absolutely inexpressible—that wild—long-enduring thrill of joy which pervaded my whole being on hearing that it was not *impossible* I might one day call you by the sacred title, wife:—but there was one alloy to this happiness:—I *dreaded* to find you in worldly circumstances superior to my own. Let me speak freely to you *now*, Helen, for perhaps I may never thus be permitted to speak to you again—Let me speak openly—fearlessly—trusting to the

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

generosity of your own spirit for a true interpretation of my own. I repeat, then, that I *dreaded* to find you in worldly circumstances superior to mine. So great was my *fear* that you were rich, or at least possessed some property which might cause you to seem rich in the eyes of one so poor as I had always permitted myself to be—that, on the day I refer to, I had not the courage to ask my informant any questions concerning you.—I feel that you will have difficulty in comprehending me; but the horror with which, during my sojourn in the world, I have seen affection made a subject of barter, had, long since,—long before my marriage—inspired me with the resolution that, under no circumstances, would I marry where “interest,” as the world terms it, could be suspected as, on my part, the object of the marriage. As far as this point concerned yourself, however, I was relieved, the next day, by an assurance that you were wholly dependent upon your mother. May I—dare I add—can you believe me when I say that this assurance was doubly grateful to me by the additional one that you were in ill health and had suffered more from domestic trouble than falls usually to the lot of woman?—and even if your faith in my nature is not too greatly tasked by such an assertion, can you forbear thinking me unkind, selfish, or ungenerous? You cannot:—but oh! the sweet dreams which absorbed me at once!—dear dreams of a de-

votional care for you that end only with life—of a tender, cherishing, patient solicitude which should bring you back, at length, to health and to happiness—a care—a solicitude—which should find its glorious reward in winning me, after long years, that which I could *feel* to be *your love!*—without well understanding *why*. I had been led to fancy you ambitious:—perhaps the fancy arose from your lines:

Not a bird that roams the forest
Shall our lofty eyrie share!—

but my very soul glowed with ambition for *your* sake, although I have always contemned it for my own. It was then only—then when I thought of you—that I dwelt exultingly upon what I felt that I could accomplish in Letters and in Literary Influence—in the widest and noblest field of human ambition.

“I will erect,” I said, “a prouder throne than any on which mere monarch ever sat; and on this throne she—*she* shall be my queen.” When I saw you, however,—when I touched your gentle hand—when I heard your soft voice, and perceived how greatly I had misconceived your womanly nature—these triumphant visions melted sweetly away in the sunshine of a love ineffable; and I suffered my imagination to stray with you, and with the few who love us both, to the banks of some quiet river, in some lovely valley of our land. Here, not too

far secluded from the world, we exercised the taste controlled by no conventionalities, but the sworn slave of a Natural Art, in the building for ourselves a cottage which no human being could ever pass without an ejaculation of wonder at its strange, weird, and incomprehensible, yet most simple beauty. Oh, the sweet and gorgeous, but not often rare flowers in which we half buried it!—the grandeur of the little-distant magnolias and tulip-trees which stood guarding it—the luxurious velvet of its lawn—the lustre of the rivulet that ran by the very door—the tasteful yet quiet comfort of the interior—the music—the books—the unostentatious pictures—and, above all, the love—the *love* that threw an unfading *glory* over the whole!—Ah, Helen! my heart is, indeed, breaking and I must now put an end to these divine dreams. Alas! all is now a dream; for I have lately heard that of you which (taken in connexion with your letter and with that of which your letter does not assure me) puts it forever out of my power to ask you—again to ask you—to become my wife. That *many* persons in your presence, have declared me wanting in honor, appeals irresistibly to an instinct of my nature—an instinct which *I feel* to be honor, let the dishonorable say what they may, and forbids me, under such circumstances, to insult you with my love:—but that you are quite independent in your worldly position (as I have just heard)—

in a word *that you are comparatively rich while I am poor*, opens between us a *gulf*—a gulf, alas! which the Sorrow and the slander of the World has rendered forever impassable—by me.

I have not yet been able to procure all the criticisms, etc. of which you spoke, but will forward them, by express, in a day or two. Meantime I enclose the lines by Miss Fuller; and "The Domain of Arnheim" which happens to be at hand, and which, moreover, expresses *much of my soul*.—It was about the 10th. of Sep.,¹ I think, that your sweet MS. verses reached me in Richmond. I lectured in Lowell on the 10th. of July. Your first letter was received by me at Fordham on the evening of Saturday Sep. 30. I was in Providence, or its neighborhood, during the Monday you mention. In the morning I revisited the cemetery—at 6 P.M. I left the city in the Stonington train for N. Y. I cannot explain to you—since I cannot myself comprehend—the feeling which urged me not to see you again before going—not to bid you a second time *farewell*. I had a sad foreboding at heart. In the seclusion of the cemetery you sat by my side—on the very spot where my arm first tremblingly encircled your waist.

EDGAR.

¹ Mrs. Whitman makes this note: "It was earlier."—C. F. D.



POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

THIRD LETTER

[Written on the day on which Mr. Poe returned from Lowell. I sent him word I would meet him in half an hour at the Atheneum.—S. H. W.]

Explanatory of the note which follows.]

Dearest Helen—

I have no engagement, but am *very* ill—so much so that I must go home, if possible—but if you say “stay,” I will try and do so. *If you cannot see me—* write me *one word* to say that you do love me and that, *under all circumstances*, you will be mine. Remember that these coveted words you have never yet spoken—and, nevertheless, I have not reproached you. It was not in my power to be here on Saturday as I proposed, or I would undoubtedly have kept my promise. If you can see me, even for a few moments do so—but if not write—or send some message which will comfort me.

Tuesday Nov 7.

Edgar Poe to S. H. W. Nov 7. 48
76 Benefit St—Providence R. I.

Third Letter

31

[Address on a brown envelope

Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman
Providence
R. I.]

[Sent to me on the evening of Nov. 8th 1848

By E A P————]

The letter bears the above endorsement—C. F. D.





POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

FOURTH LETTER

Nov. 14th, 1848.

My dearest Helen

So kind, so true, so generous (—so unmoved by all that would have moved one who had been less an angel—beloved of my heart, of my imagination, of my intellect, life of my life, soul of my soul)—dear dearest Helen, how shall I ever thank you as I ought—I am calm and tranquil and but for a strange shadow of coming evil which haunts me I should be happy. That I am not supremely happy, even when I feel your dear love at my heart terrifies me. What can this mean? Perhaps, however, it is only the necessary reaction after such terrible excitements.

It is five o'clock and the boat is just being made fast to the wharf. I shall start in the train that leaves New York at 7 for Fordham. I write this to show you that I have not *dared* to break my promise to you. And now, dearest Helen, be true to me.

Fourth Letter

33

[The original letter contained in a P. S. a grateful acknowledgment of Mr. Wm. J. Pabodie's kindness to him during his recent illness in Providence. Mr. Pabodie *borrowed* the letter after Mrs. Whitman had made a transcript of the enclosed portion of it and afterwards told her he had either lost or mislaid it. —C. F. D.]





POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

FIFTH LETTER

Wednesday Morning—*the 22d. Nov.*¹

MY dearest Helen—Last Monday I received your note, dated Friday, and promising that on Tuesday I should get a long letter from you. It has not yet reached me, but I presume will be at the P. O. when I send this in.—In the meantime I write these few words to thank you, from the depths of my heart, for the dear expressions of your note—expressions of tenderness so wholly undeserved by me—and to assure you of my safety and health. The terrible excitement under which I suffered, has subsided, and I am as calm as I well could be, remembering what is past. *Still* the Shadow of Evil *haunts* me, and although tranquil, I am unhappy. I dread the Future—and you alone can reassure me. I have so much to say to you, but must wait until I hear from

¹ Inserted by Mrs. W.—C. F. D.

Fifth Letter

35

you. My mother was delighted with your wish to be remembered and begs me to express the pleasure it gave her.

Forever your own

EDGAR.

Remember me to Mr. Pabodie.





POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

SIXTH LETTER

Friday *the 24th.*

IN a little more than a fortnight, dearest Helen I shall, once again, clasp you to my heart:—until then I forbear to agitate you by speaking of my wishes—of my hopes, and especially of my fears. You say that all depends on my own firmness. If this be so, all is safe—for the terrible agony which I have so lately endured—an agony known only to my God and to myself—seems to have passed my soul through fire and purified it from all that is weak. Henceforward I am strong:—this those who love me shall see—as well as those who have so relentlessly endeavored to ruin me. It needed only some such trial as I have just undergone, to make me what I was born to be, by making me conscious of my own strength.—But all does not depend, dear Helen, upon my firmness—all depends upon the sincerity of your love.

You allude to your having been "tortured by reports which have all since been explained to your entire satisfaction." On this point my mind is fully made up. I will rest neither by night nor by day until I bring those who have slandered me into the light of day—until I expose them, *and their motives* to the public eye. I *have* the means and I will ruthlessly employ them. On one point let me caution you, *dear* Helen. No sooner will Mrs. E. hear of my proposals to yourself, than she will set in operation every conceivable chicanery to frustrate me:—and, if you are not prepared for her arts, she will *infallibly* succeed—for her whole study, throughout life, has been the gratification of her malignity by such means as any other human being would die rather than adopt. You will be sure to receive anonymous letters so skillfully contrived as to deceive the most sagacious. You will be called on, possibly, by persons whom you never heard of, but whom she has instigated to call and villify me—without even *their* being aware of the influence she has exercised. I do not know *any* one with a more *acute* intellect about such matters as Mrs. Osgood—yet even she was for a long time completely blinded by the arts of this fiend and simply because her generous heart could not conceive how any woman could stoop to machinations at which the most degraded of the fiends would shudder. I will give you here but one instance of

her baseness and I feel that it will suffice. When, in the heat of passion—stung to madness by her inconceivable perfidy and by the grossness of the injury which her jealousy prompted her to inflict upon all of us—upon both families—I permitted myself to say what I should not have said—I had no sooner uttered the words, than I felt their dishonor. I felt, too, that, although she must be damnably conscious of her own baseness, she would still have a right to reproach me for having betrayed, under any circumstances, her confidence. Full of these thoughts, and terrified almost to death lest I should again, in a moment of madness, be similarly tempted, I went immediately to my secretary—(when these two ladies¹ went away)—made a package of her letters, addressed them to her, and with my own hands left them at her door. Now, Helen, you cannot be prepared for the diabolical malignity which followed. Instead of feeling that I had done all I could to repair an unpremeditated wrong—instead of feeling that almost any other person would have retained the letters to make good (if occasion required) the assertion that I possessed them—instead of this, she urged her brothers and brother-in-law *to demand of me the letters*. The position in which she thus placed me you may imagine. Is it any wonder that I was driven mad by the intolerable sense of

¹ "Miss L. and Margaret F." writes Mrs. W. on the margin.—C. F. D.

wrong?—If you value your happiness, Helen, beware of this woman. She did not cease her persecutions here. My poor Virginia who was continually tortured (although never deceived) by her anonymous letters, on her death-bed declared that Mrs. E. had been her murderer. Have I not a right to hate this fiend and to caution you against her? You will now comprehend what I mean in saying that the only thing for which I found it impossible to forgive Mrs. O. was her reception of Mrs. E.

Be careful of your health, dearest Helen, and perhaps all will yet go well. Forgive me that I let these wrongs prey upon me—I did not so bitterly feel them until they threatened to deprive me of you. I confess, too, that the insults of your mother and sister still rankle at my heart,—but for your dear sake I will endeavor to be calm.

Your lines “To Arcturus” are truly beautiful I would retain the Vergilian words—omitting the translation. The first note leave out:—61 Cygni has been proved nearer than Arcturus and Alpha Lyrae is presumably so.—Bessel, also, has shown 6 other stars to be nearer than the brighter one of this hemisphere—There is an obvious tautology in “pale candescent.” To be *candescent* is to become *white* with *heat*. Why not read—“To blend with thine its incandescent fire?” Forgive me *sweet* Helen, for these *very* stupid and captious criticisms. Take

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

vengeance on my next poem.—When “Ulalume” appears, cut it out and enclose it:—newspapers seldom reach me.—In last Saturday’s “Home Journal” is a letter from M. C. (who is it?) I enclose a passage which seems to refer to my lines:

—the very roses’ odors
[Died in the arms of the adoring airs.]

The accusation will enable you to see how groundless such accusations may be, even when seemingly best founded. Mrs. H.’s book was published 3 months ago. You had my poem about the first of June—was it not?

Forever your own, Edgar.

Remember me to Mr. Pabodie—Mrs. Burgess and Mrs. Newcomb.

Fordham

November 24th. 1848

From Edgar Poe
to Sarah Helen Whitman.

[Stationery square, like former letters with cartouch enclosing B & S.—C. F. D.]





POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

SEVENTH LETTER

Sunday evening 26.

I WROTE you yesterday, sweet Helen, but, through my fear of being too late for the mail omitted some things I wish to say. I fear, too, that my letter must have seemed cold—perhaps even harsh or selfish—for I spoke nearly altogether of my own griefs. Pardon me, *my* Helen, if not for the love I bear you, at least for the sorrows I have endured—more, I believe, than have often fallen to the lot of man. How much have they been aggravated by my own consciousness that, in too many instances, they have arisen from my own culpable weakness or childish folly!—my sole hope now, is in you, Helen. As you are true, to me or fail me, so do I live or die.

I forgot to reenclose your poem and do so now. Why have you omitted the two forcible lines—

While in its depths withdrawn, far, far away,
I see the dawn of a diviner day?

—is that dawn no longer perceptible?

Who wrote the verses signed "Mary," I am unable to say.

Can you solve me the riddle of the poem enclosed? It is from last Saturday's "Home Journal." Somebody sent it to me in MS.

Was I right, dearest Helen, in my first impression of you?—you know I have implicit faith in first impressions. Was I right in the idea I had adopted before seeing you—in the idea that you are ambitious? If so, and *if you will have faith in me*, I can and will satisfy your wildest desires. It would be a glorious triumph, Helen, for *us*—for *you and me*. I dare not trust my schemes to a letter—nor, indeed, have I room even to hint at them here. When I see you I will explain all—as far, at least, as I dare explain all my hopes even to you.

Would it *not* be "glorious," *darling*, to establish, in America, the sole unquestionable aristocracy—that of intellect—to secure its supremacy—to lead and to control it? All this I can do, Helen, and will—if you bid me—and aid me.

I received yesterday a letter from Mr. Dunnell. He says that they have "lost" their lecturer for the 6th. prox. and offers me that night instead of the 13th. I have written him, however, that I cannot be in Providence before the 13th.

My kindest regards to Mr. Pabodie.

Devotedly —————

Seventh Letter

43

[Mrs. Whitman adds this:

Signature and postscript cut out and given to James T. Fields, 1865.]

“P. S.—” Preserve the printed lines. I send the MS.—Perhaps you may recognize it. As one of the signs of the times I notice that Griswold has lately copied my Raven in his Hartford Weekly Gazette—I enclose his editorial comments so that you have quite a budget of enclosures.”

[*The letter now continues:*]

P. S.—I open this letter, *dearest love*, to ask you to mail me, *as soon as possible*, three articles of mine which you will find among the *critical papers* I gave you—viz.: “The Philosophy of Composition”—Tale Writing—Nathl. Hawthorne—and a review of Longfellow’s poems. I wish to refer to them in writing my Lecture and can find no other copies. Do not fail to send them *dear—dear Helen*, as soon as you get this. Enclose them *in a letter*—so that I may be sure to get them in season.

Mrs. B’s. “Ida Grey” is in “Graham” for August—45.





POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

EIGHTH LETTER

*Dec. 17, 1848.*¹
Saturday, 2 P.M.

My own dearest Helen—Your letters—to my mother and myself—have just been received, and I hasten to reply, in season for this afternoon's mail. I cannot be in Providence until Wednesday morning; and, as I must try and get some sleep after I arrive, it is more than probable that I shall not see you until about 2 P.M. Keep up heart—*for all will go well.* My mother sends her dearest love and says she will return good for evil and treat you much better than your mother has treated me.

Remember me to Mr. P. and believe me

Ever your own

EDGAR.

¹ This date as given above was added by Mrs. Whitman.—C. F. D.



POE TO MRS. WHITMAN

NINTH AND LAST LETTER

[Fragments of a letter received from Edgar Poe in the beginning of January, 1849. A letter to which I never replied. Mrs. Whitman's own note.—C. F. D.]

HEAVEN knows that I would shrink from wounding or grieving you. I blame no one but your mother. Mr. Pabodie will tell you all. May Heaven shield you from all ill.

[No signature]





REQUEST FOR BANNS OF MARRIAGE

[A copy of the request for the Banns of Marriage between Edgar A. Poe and Sarah Helen Whitman: found among Mrs. Whitman's papers.]

WILL Dr. Crocker have the kindness to publish the banns of matrimony between Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman and myself, on Sunday and on Monday. When we have decided on the day of marriage we will inform you, and will thank you to perform the ceremony.¹

Respy. yr. Ob. St.

EDGAR A. POE.

¹ Dr. Wm. F. Channing had the original of this.—C. F. D.





CONTRACT CONCERNING MARRIAGE BETWEEN POE AND MRS. WHITMAN

PROVIDENCE, *December 15, 1848.*

TO Charles F. Tillinghast Administrator with the Will annexed of the estate of Ruth Marsh late of Providence deceased.

You are hereby required in conformity to the provisions of the Will of the above named Ruth Marsh to pay to me the Subscriber the whole of the Estate of the said Ruth Marsh now in your possession or Control—the said Estate consisting of Bank Stock and Notes as follows namely

Fifteen Shares of the Merchants Bank.

Ten do. of the Globe Bank.

Five do. of the Manufactures Bank.

Fourteen do. of the Blackstone Canal Bank.

Sixteen do. of the Arcade Bank.

Six do. of the Exchange Bank.

William H Cook's Note for One thousand Dollars.

Tallman and Bucklin's Note for Two thousand Dollars.

Poe to Mrs. Whitman

Benjamin Allen: Notes for Eight Hundred and Eighteen Dollars.

Weston A Fisher's Note for Fifteen Hundred Dollars.

All of which Notes are secured by the Mortgage of Real Estate.

Signed this fifteenth day
of December 1848 in presence of

Henry Martin
William J. Pabodie

ANNA POWER
EDGAR A. POE

PROVIDENCE, *December 15, 1848.*

We Sarah Helen Whitman and Susan Anna Power legatees named in the will of the within named Ruth Marsh and to whom such part of the principal or interest of the Estate of the said Ruth Marsh as shall remained undisposed of at the decease of our mother the within named Anna Power is given hereby unite in the preceding request of Anna Power that the whole of the Estate of the said Ruth Marsh now in his possession be transferred to her our said Mother for her own use. And in consideration of such conveyance to be made by him we hereby release him the said Charles F. Tillinghast from all claims and demands which we have or may have on account of the said Estate of the said Ruth Marsh.

In witness whereof we have hereto set our Hands and Seals this fifteenth day of December 1848.

In presence of
Henry Martin

Sarah H. Whitman [Seal]
Susan Anna Power [Seal]

Marriage Contract

49

Whereas a Marriage is intended between the above named Sarah H. Whitman and the Subscriber Edgar A. Poe,—I hereby approve of and assent to the transfer of the property in the manner proposed in the papers of which the preceding are copies.

Providence December 22 1848

In presence of

William J. Pabodie

EDGAR A. POE





POE TO MRS. CLEMM

My own dear Mother—We shall be married on Monday, and will be at Fordham on Tuesday, in the first train.





250

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