

**SOME EDGAR ALLAN POE
LETTERS, PRINTED FOR PRIVATE
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OF W. K. BIXBY.**

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Some Edgar Allan Poe Letters, printed for private distribution only from originals in the collection of W. K. Bixby. by Edgar Allan Poe

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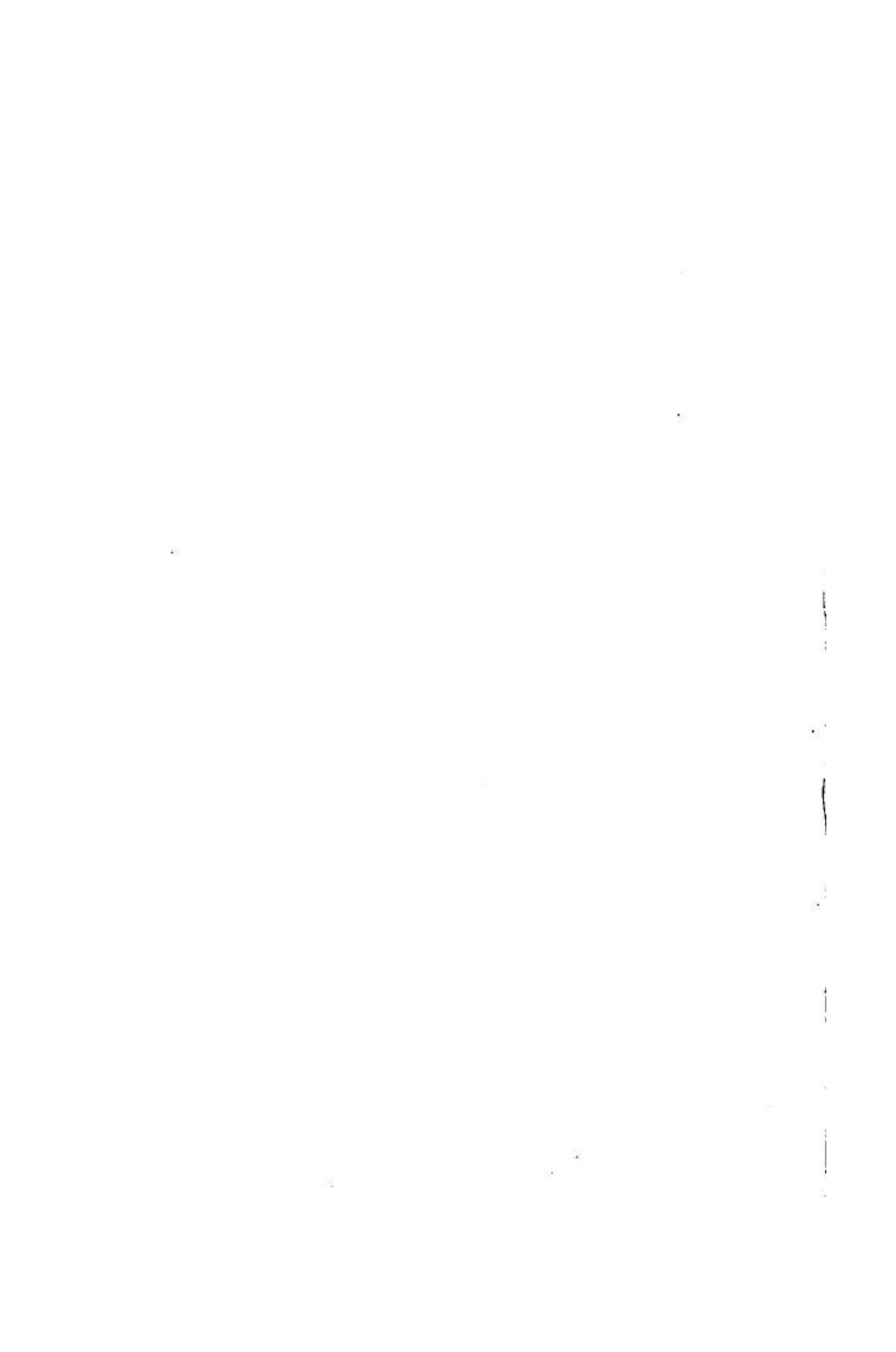
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**WILLIAM K. BIXBY
ST. LOUIS, MO.
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SOME EDGAR ALLAN POE LETTERS

On October 8, 1849, the day after Edgar Allan Poe's mysterious and tragic death at "The Church Home" in Baltimore, the Reverend Rufus W. Griswold, his literary executor, made a significant jotting in his diary:

"Wrote, hastily, two or three columns about Poe, for the Tribune."

The *hasty* judgment there expressed, and reaffirmed in Griswold's later Life of Poe, helped for many years to prejudice public opinion against the brilliant, erratic, and ill-fated genius. It was not allowed, however, to pass without protest and dissent; for as time went on, the world more and more realized the greatness of the man as a literary artist, and it became more and more impossible that he could have accomplished what he did in his short life, had he been a worthless and dissipated wretch such as he was depicted by Griswold. Letters, personal recollections,

the evidence of his own life-work, the sum-total of his achievements, gradually revised the old estimate and almost completely reversed it. The shadows were not indeed eliminated, for his own confessions agree with contemporary witnesses that he had serious faults and defects of temperament. Most human beings have failings of one kind or another and, as in Poe's case, they are frequently intensified by adverse circumstances and unfavorable environment.

The worst charges against Poe are those brought by Griswold; he gave it to be understood that he was an habitual drunkard; that he was unreliable; that he was filled with gnawing envy; that he was so arrogant that people who otherwise might have admired him were turned against him; that he was hot-tempered and recklessly irascible; that he lacked moral susceptibility; that he had "little of the true point of honor"; that even his ambition to succeed was in order "that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit," and not out of esteem or love of his species.

Poe occasionally drank too much; but he

struggled manfully with the temptation, recognizing that with his sensitive temperament a very little was sufficient to upset his self-control. For years at a stretch he drank nothing stronger than water; the enormous amount of his productivity is a sufficient refutation of Griswold's heartless charge. Pity rather than blame should be elicited by his occasional lapses. He was proud and suspicious, seeing affronts frequently where none was intended; but his friends recognized his loyalty, generosity, and desire to be fair. He was conscious of unusual abilities and naturally chafed against the fetters that held him down. He was ambitious, but his ambition was not wholly personal; he had the clear vision of a splendid future for American literature, and he burned with zeal to take part in the creation of it as well as in the defence of it; hence his jealous endeavors to exclude from the temple unworthy priests of the Musæ.

Poe was one of the few American book-reviewers, before his day or since, who had a well-founded canon of criticism, especially of poetry. Nothing could be more unfair than Griswold's assertion that "He was little better