

The Olio.

THE RAVEN.

BY EDGAR A. POE, ESQ.

[The following lines from a correspondent—besides the deep quaint strain of the sentiment, and the curious introduction of some ludicrous touches amidst the serious and impressive, as was doubtless intended by the author—appear to us one of the most felicitous specimens of unique rhyming which has for some time met our eye. The resources of English rhythm for varieties of melody, measure, and sound, producing corresponding diversities of effect, have been thoroughly studied, much more perceived by very few poets in the language.—While the classic tongues, especially the Greek, possess by power of accent, several advantages for versification over our own, chiefly through greater boundance of spondaic feet, we have other and very great advantages of sound by the modern sage of rhyme. Alliteration is nearly the only effect of that kind which the ancients had in common with us. It will be seen that much of the melody of “The Raven” arises from alliteration, and the studious use of similar sounds in unusual places. In regard to its measure, it may be noted that if all the verses were like the second, they might properly be placed merely in short lines, producing a not uncommon form; but the presence in all the others of one line—mostly the second in the verse—which flows continuously, with only an aspirate pause in the middle, like that before the short line in the Sapphic Adonic, while the fifth has at the middle pause no similarity of sound with any part beside, gives the versification an entirely different effect. We could wish the capacities of our noble language, in prosody, were better understood.—[Ed. Am. Review.]

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

“’Tis some visiter,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—

Only this, and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,

And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had tried to borrow

From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken and uncertain rustling of each purple curtain

Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;

So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating

“’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—

Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—

This it is, and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,

“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;

But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,

And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,

That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I opened wide the

door;—

Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering,

fearing,

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream

before;

But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,

And the only word there spoken was the whispered word,

“Lenore!”

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word,

“Lenore!”

Merely this, and nothing more.

Then into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,

Soon I heard again a tapping somewhat louder than before.

“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;

Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—

Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—

’Tis the wind, and nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,

In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore;

Not the least obeisance made he; nor an instant stopped or

stayed he;

But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber

door—

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—

Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,

By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,

“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art

sure no craven,

Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the Nightly

shore—

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian

shore!”

Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,

Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;

For we cannot help agreeing that no sublunary being

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,

With such a name as “Nevermore.”

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only

That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.

Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—

Till I scarcely more than muttered, “other friends have flown

before—

On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown

before.”

Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

Wondering at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken.

“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store,

Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster

Followed fast and followed faster—so, when Hope he would

adjure,

Stern Despair returned, instead of the sweet Hope he dared

adjure—

That sad answer, “Nevermore!”

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,

Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust,

and door;

Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking

Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—

What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird

of yore

Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

Thus I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing

To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;

This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining

On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o’er,

But whose velvet violet lining with the lamplight gloating o’er,

She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen

censor

Swung by angels whose faint foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.

“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels

he hath sent thee

Respite—respite and Nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!

Let me quaff this kind Nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”

Quoth the raven “Nevermore.”

“Prophet,” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or

devil!—

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here

ashore,

Desolate, yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—

On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—

Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!”

Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet,” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!

By that Heaven which bends above us—by that God we both

adore—

Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if, within the distant Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”

Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked,

upstarting—

“Get the back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian

shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath

spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off

my door!”

Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon that is dreaming,

And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on

the floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the

floor

Shall be lifted—nevermore!