

The Free Lance.

experiences of his own life or the lives of those with whom his own was blended.

Even Shakespeare, consummate master that he was of all the secrets of literary art, hesitated not to avail himself of the most touching memories, and enriched his song with scenes from his boyhood.

But look abroad as we may we can find no author whose writings are so truly his own' counterpart as those of Edgar Allen Poe. Had we no record of his life, his poems would in a great measure supply the deficiency, since they are autobiographical in a stricter sense than is poetry of even a more strongly subjective character. Amid all weirdness and glamour of his style there glides the shrouded figure of himself. It requires no straining of the eye to recognize this mysterious presence. He is there in form as real as though everything he wrote were but expressions of sensations born of his own wretched life.

A vague unrest, the result no doubt of constant disappointments, is reflected from all of his poems. No biographer could hope to more than faintly shadow the weird picture Poe gives us of himself in that wonderful poem "The Raven," which occupies, we think, the most prominent position among the creations of American imaginative literature. With the genius of despair he paints his terrible infirmity in the most awful colors. Though he does not declare it he forces upon us the conviction that he is that bird's—

"Unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster,
Till his songs one burden bore,
Till the dirges of his hope that
Melancholy burden bore
Of never, nevermore."

This poem is a life history in itself, a dirge of vanished dreams and blighted hopes, ushering us into his presence when desolate and unhappy, and finally dismissing us with the utter hopelessness that "His soul shall never be lifted from its destroying shadow."