

JOHN PRENTISS POE.

On the morning of October 14th, 1909, there passed quietly from among us a pre-eminently distinguished man, who by his extraordinary forensic, ethical, educational and governmental labors through half a century, has left to the people of Maryland an immortal heritage, and reared to himself a living temple, impregnable alike to the crumbling of age and the ruin of time—John Prentiss Poe, jurist, educator, author, orator, and loyal leader of his chosen political party.

Hardly a parallel is found in the history of Maryland where the death of one of its sons evoked such spontaneous, overwhelming and genuine sorrow as was expressed by Bench, Bar, Press and People at the unexpected demise of Mr. Poe.

His rare intellectual powers; his energetic labors in legal fields; his indefatigable industry as an instructor; his fertility as a writer; his persuasive eloquence as an orator; and his gentle, winning, courteous and magnetic personality, which would have placed him in eminent rank in any profession or pursuit, unquestionably won for him the amply deserved respect, admiration, love and confidence of the people of Maryland.

Heredity alone would have entitled him to the enviable and unrivalled position which he attained, for in his veins coursed the blood of ancestors in whom was exemplified the harmonious blending of genius, heroism, culture, refinement and religion. His father (Judge Neilson Poe) was a lawyer of distinct ability and an experienced writer and journalist, while his mother (Josephine Emily Clemm) was a rare type of that purity, delicacy and tenderness of character which never fails to impress its beauty and goodness upon all who come within the orbit of its shining light.

Mr. Poe was born in Baltimore on August 22nd, 1836, and early sent to Boursaud's French and English Academy, from which he went to St. Mary's Seminary, where a certificate, dated June 15, 1850 (found among his papers), shows that even at the early age of fourteen years he had acquired a marked proficiency in Latin.

He matriculated at Princeton, graduating in 1854 (not quite eighteen years of age), and on June 15th, 1904, was honored by that University with the Degree of LL. D. He was an active Alumnus in all its movements.

He was admitted to the bar in 1857. His first case is reported in 11th Md. and his last in 111th Md.

He was Professor of Law of the University of Maryland from 1870 and Dean of the Faculty from 1884 until the time of his death. School Commissioner from 1871 to 1886. City Counsellor from 1882 to 1884. President of the City Tax Commission 1885. State Senator from 1890 to 1892, introducing and working for the establishment of the first Australian Ballot Law. Attorney General of the State from 1891 to 1895. Delegate at Large to the Democratic National Convention of 1904, taking a leading part in formulating its Platform. Codifier of the Public General Laws of Maryland of 1888, and again of 1904; also of City Code. Author of four editions of "Poe on Pleading and Practice." Counsel and Adviser of the Democratic State Central Committee. President of the Maryland State Bar Association, 1903 and 1904, and Author of numerous literary productions, essays and addresses, all attesting his great learning, profound research and lofty eloquence.

His wife, who was Anne Johnson Hough, and three daughters and six sons survive him; these latter were educated and graduated at Princeton.

As a *lawyer*, Mr. Poe has been ranked by both Bench and Bar as one of the most illustrious and successful Maryland has ever produced and as a potent advocate in the forum without a peer.

At the very beginning of his career he displayed that energy and love of industry which characterized his whole life. While earning a salary as a bank clerk he studied law and was admitted to the bar, winning when he was but twenty-one years of age, his first case, of considerable magnitude and importance in the Court of Appeals. This victory was the forerunner of a chain of triumphs found chronicled through one hundred volumes of the Maryland Reports.

Mr. Poe was fittingly endowed for forensic debate. His industry was unflagging and capacity for work prodigious. Labor seemed the very essence and object of his life. His learning was solid.

An indefatigable reader, the rich repository of his accumulated knowledge was unexampled. His satire was poignant, but totally free from malice or bitterness, and his wit keen as a briar. His memory, up to the last hour of his life, even for the minutest incidents of time and place, was little short of marvelous. His complete acquaintance with all the famous law cases of his native State and country, as well as the most important litigation in the English Courts, together with a thorough knowledge and study of English literature, for which he had a conspicuous predilection, gave him a vigorous grasp of detail from which his alert and vigilant mind could always select a ready and befitting reference. His method was orderly, his classification and development systematic, and his intellect clear and incisive. Of the technicalities and intricacies of the law he had fast hold, and for unravelling a complex question he showed peculiar aptitude. No legal problem ever appeared too obscure for his solution, and in the analysis of a case he was complete master. He was forcible, lucid and cogent and his style, even when clothing matter of the driest nature, graceful, persuasive and effective in felicitous expression.

His unswerving interest and devotion to his client's cause were proverbial, but he never deviated from his lofty and noble ideals of the exalted requirements of his profession. Yet in handling his client prior to trial, he was at times remorseless and inflexible in eliciting the truth and facts of the case. He would literally try the case against his client.

On one occasion while under such rigorous cross-question, his client arose and vehemently bringing a hand down upon the office desk indignantly protested, "Mr. Poe, we go no further until I know whether you are for me or against me."

He was, as has many times been said of him, a most formidable opponent. Yet in time of triumph no man