



Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Little Trips Among the Eminent.

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[With acknowledgments to La-throp's biography, and to the critical essay, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," by Henry James.]

With the mention of Concord, Mass., there come before one not only visions of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Curtis, and Margaret Fuller, but also pre-eminently of another, a strange mystic character, whose books are as weird, as misty, as moonshine as was he himself, yet which depend for their peculiar charm upon that very weirdness, that exquisiteness of treatment which can be felt, rather than described, and which has given Hawthorne the distinction of being, in the realms of American fiction, "the most beautiful and most eminent representative of a literature." As Henry James remarks in his in many respects admirable criticism, "The importance of the literature may be questioned, but, at any rate, in the field of letters, Hawthorne is the most valuable example of the American genius."

Hawthorne was no philosopher, as was Emerson, and as was, to a certain extent, Thoreau; but he has based his claims to eternal recognition on other foundations. He was a master of expression. In the realms of pure imagination he has few peers. Accordingly, he has thrown upon the arena of literature a succession of mystically wonderful pictures of people and places which remind one, somehow, of ethereal moonlight, of the down of a thistle, of anything light and intangible and strangely beautiful, or strangely terrible. He did not seek to greatly influence mankind, except in so far as giving them artistic pleasure might affect them. He did not attempt to revolutionize anything or anyone. He was an artist, living for pure art's sake, but his medium and pigments were words.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, as might almost be surmised from the gloominess of some of his narratives, and the all-pervading sense of sin and moral responsibility which ever accompanies his pen, was of Puritan extraction. His earliest American ancestor, of the bone and marrow of this class, has afforded Hawthorne an interesting passage in the exquisite

introduction to *Scarlet Letter*: "I seem to have a stronger claim to a residence here," he says, in speaking of Salem, "on account of this grave, bearded, sable-cloaked progenitor, who came so early with his Bible and his sword, and trod the unworn street with such a stately port. . . . He had all the Puritan traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor, as witness the Quakers, who have remembered him in their histories, and relate an incident of his hard severity towards a woman of their sect, which will last longer, it will be feared, than any of his better deeds, though these were many."

To be definite, this ancestor—William Hathorne (as the name was then spelled)—is the same who figures in New England history, as does also his son, "Colonel John," as a magistrate of Salem, most vigorous in the persecution of witches and heretics. A reputed malediction, pronounced on the Colonel by one of his victims, probably suggested to his illustrious descendant the idea of the curse in "The House of the Seven Gables."

After the above-mentioned worthies, the elder of whom died in 1681, came a long line of obscure folk, principally seafaring, upon whom many misfortunes fell, attributed by the victims to the malediction hurled upon their progenitor. Then, upon July 4th, 1804, was born in the same little port whence his forbears had so often sailed into the rising sun, the future man of letters, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

According to his own account, never was spot less likely to foster the germs of poetry and idealism than that same little port of Salem. "Indeed," he says, "so far as the physical aspect is concerned, with its flat, unvaried surface covered chiefly with wooden houses, few or none of which pretend to architectural beauty; its irregularity, which is neither picturesque nor quaint, but only tame; its long and lazy street lounging wearisomely through the whole extent of the peninsula, with Gallows Hill and New Guinea at one end, and a view of the almshouse at the other—such being the features of my native town, it would be quite as reasonable to form a sentimental attachment to a disarranged chequer-board."

Probably, as a matter of fact, Salem was scarcely as barren of beauty or interest as it is pictured here. Hawthorne must have missed much that a genius with more enjoyment in life would have seen, for, although remarkably observant of detail, he was not one of those who feel "beauty everywhere" to the fullest extent. Had he been so, he could not have been content to shut himself up, as he did, during so many bright days and years of God's sunlight; yet, again, had he been so, he might have missed that dalliance with fancy, that sportiveness of the pure imagination which appears to have been so distinctively his, and upon which his peculiar fame chiefly rests.

He was ever a solitary boy—indeed, geniuses of the pen seem to have had a peculiar predilection for solitude—nor does his home seem to have been of the cheeriest. His father died when he was but a little child, and his mother and sisters appear to have been all but recluses.

In 1818, when he was fourteen years of age, the family removed to Lake Sebago, in Maine, a forest region of great beauty, where the lad came into closer touch with nature.

"I lived in Maine like a bird of the air," he says, "so perfect was the freedom I enjoyed." Then, in 1819, he was sent back to Salem to school. At seventeen he entered Bowdoin College, and interesting is his incidental account, in a letter written years afterwards to his friend, Horatio Bridge, of the days spent there: "If anybody is responsible at this day for my being an author, it is yourself. I know not whence your faith came; but, while we were lads together at a country college—gathering blueberries in study hours under those tall academic pines, or watching the great logs as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin, or shooting pigeons and gray squirrels in the woods, or bat-fowling in the summer twilight, or catching trout in that shadowy little stream, which, I suppose, is still wandering riverward through the forest—though you and I will never cast a line in it again—two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things the Faculty never heard of, or else it had been worse for us—still, it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny that he was to be a writer of fiction."

At college, it appears, Hawthorne was not all saint, as further appears from sundry letters written by the President to his mother, urging her influence in inducing her son to "observe more faithfully the laws of this institution."

Three years after his graduation, his first story, "Fanshawe," was published, but so disgusted was the young author that he destroyed, almost at once, practically the entire edition. He had determined, nevertheless, to devote his life to writing, and the method by which he had set himself to carry out the resolution, is one of the most remarkable on record.

For twelve years after leaving Bowdoin, he confined himself almost entirely to his room, roaming through the town or taking long walks along the beach only at night. Often he did not come down to his meals during a day, having them left at his door. During this time he read, wrote and studied, yet produced little to show for his pains. He does not, however, appear to have been especially unhappy, at least judging from his notebook entries, although he afterwards referred to his "accursed habits of solitude," and to his period of seclusion, "when everybody moved onward and left me behind." Little wonder that the tales written during such self-imprisonment should be weird, unreal, with a cold mistiness; and yet, even in the earliest of them, Hawthorne's charm, the Hawthornesque touch, is unmistakable.

His course at this time has been much questioned, and the clearest solution seems to be that he was shy, as few men have ever been shy, that he was proud, and yet poor—"poor with a poverty that one almost hates to look into," as a biographer has remarked. He was striving to win his way in the world, and seemed to shrink from facing it until he had obtained his foothold. And so he played with his fancies, now gloomy, now sweet, if scarcely gay, and wrote but a very few stories, after all, which he sent to the magazines, often receiving no pay for them whatever, although the majority of them were afterwards collected into "Twice Told Tales" and "Snow Image."

Long afterwards, writing of his ex-

perience in the little room, he said (in his Note Book): "If ever I should have a biographer, he ought to make great mention of this chamber in my memoirs, because so much of my lonely youth was wasted here, and here my mind and character were formed; and here I have been glad and hopeful, and here I have been despondent. And here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all—at least, till I were in my grave. And sometimes it seemed to me as if I were already in the grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed. But oftener I was happy, at least as happy as I then knew how to be. . . . By and by the world found me out in my lonely chamber, and called me forth—not, indeed, with a loud roar of acclamation, but rather with a still, small voice."

At last, two events happened to call him from his solitude. One day he was invited, with his sisters, to spend the evening at the home of the Misses Peabody, and almost ludicrously pathetic is the picture which is given of him as he entered the drawing-room, "a splendidly handsome youth, standing perfectly motionless, with the look of a sylvan creature on the point of fleeing away." A second invitation followed, which he also accepted, this time, "with no appearance whatever of timidity, but, instead, an almost fierce determination, making his face stern."—Event number one, whose ultimate issue was his marriage with the younger Miss Peabody, in 1842.

Event number two came with his appointment, by political influence, as weigher and gauger in Boston Custom House, at a salary of \$1,200 a year. He accepted the post joyfully, yet found his work no Elysian dream. In his Note Book, before the summer was out, he tells of "measuring coal all day on board of a black little British schooner. . . . But at last came the sunset, with delicate clouds, and a purple light upon the islands; and I blessed it because it was the signal of my release"; then, some weeks later: "I pray that I may find some way of escaping from this unblest Custom House, for it is a very grievous thralldom. I do detest all offices—all, at least, that are held on a political tenure, and I want nothing to do with politicians. . . . Their consciences are turned to India-rubber, or to some substance as black as that, and which will stretch as much."

(To be continued.)

A Word from Mr. Kelso.

Have you taken a child from one of the Children's Shelters into your home? If so, why have you done so? Has it been with the idea that you will get just as much as possible out of that child, and give just as little as possible? Or have you realized your responsibility and your opportunity for doing a little good and adding a little brightness to a world often too dreary? In short, have you been selfish, sordid and mean in the step that you have taken? Or, have you been benevolent, high-minded, human? Too often, it is to be feared, people look on these forlorn little ones as mere chattels, and forget to ask themselves the question, "If this child were mine, how would I wish him to be treated?"

Most commonly, perhaps, the lack