

English Literature in the Lower Grades.

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A RILL FROM THE TOWN PUMP.

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A Rill from the Town Pump, as it is given in the reader, contains about half of the town pump's speech, as Hawthorne gives it in *Twice-Told Tales*. It is there headed as follows:

(Scene—The corner of two principal streets. The Town Pump talking through its nose.)

The two principal streets are Essex and Washington streets, Salem, the home of the town pump. Hawthorne was born in Salem, and has delighted in celebrating his native town in his writings. Some extracts from his "*Grandfather's Chair*," a series of stories on children from American history, will throw light on references and allusions in the lesson:

Meantime, those of the Puritans who remained in England continued to suffer grievous persecutions on account of their religious opinions. They began to look round them for some spot where they might worship God, not as the king and bishops thought fit, but according to the dictates of their own consciences. When their brethren had gone from Holland to America, they bethought themselves that they likewise might find refuge from oppression there. Several gentlemen among them purchased a tract of country on the coast of Massachusetts Bay, and obtained a charter from King Charles, which authorized them to make laws for the settlers. In the year 1628 they sent over a few people with John Endicott at their head, to commence a plantation at Salem. . . . Many other Puritans prepared to follow Endicott. . . . In 1630 a fleet of ten or twelve vessels left England; for a multitude of people, who were discontented with the king's government, were flocking over to the new world. Among the passengers was John Winthrop, who had sold the estate of his forefathers, and was going to prepare a new home for his wife and children in the wilderness. He had the king's charter in his keeping, and was appointed the first governor of Massachusetts. Imagine him a person of grave and benevolent aspect, dressed in a black velvet suit, with a broad ruff round his neck, and a peaked beard upon his chin. There was likewise a minister of the gospel whom the English bishops had forbidden to preach, but who knew that he should have liberty both to preach and pray in the forests of America. He wore a black cloak, called a Geneva cloak, and had a black velvet cap, fitting close to his head. . . . At that period there were but six or eight dwellings in the town (Salem); and these were miserable hovels, with roofs of straw and wooden chimneys. The passengers in the fleet either built huts with bark and branches of trees, or erected tents of cloth till they could provide themselves with better shelter. John Endicott was the chief person in the plantation, and had the only comfortable house which the newcomers had beheld since they left England.

The minister of the gospel who came out in 1630

was Francis Higginson, called "The Elder Higginson," because his son, also a minister, was a prominent man in Massachusetts.

The extract falls into three main divisions. First, the town pump enlarges upon his office; secondly, he describes his various customers; and, lastly, he pours forth historical reminiscences. In the original he talks on, insisting on his "own multifarious merits," until the clock strikes one, when he says, "Nay, then, if the dinner-bell begins to speak, I may as well hold my peace."

The unity of the whole tale is not to be seen in this fragment, but the beautiful accuracy in the choice of words, and the delicate humour, both characteristic of Hawthorne's style, will repay careful study.

What feelings are expressed by the exclamations in the first paragraph? Why is the last sentence in the form of a question? Turn it into a statement. Note the following account of "The March Meeting."

In a New England township, once each year, usually in March, a town-meeting is held, at which all the grown men of the township are expected to be present and to vote. At the town-meeting . . . town officers are elected for the year.—*John Fiske*.

What titles does the town pump claim, and on what grounds? Study carefully the adjectives "cool, steady, upright, downright, impartial," until you see how exactly they apply to the pump, used literally. Then apply them in their figurative use to the discharge of public business. Note the short and simple words of the paragraph beginning, "Summer or winter nobody seeks me in vain." Collect some other sentences made up of such words and compare them with others containing longer and more sonorous ones. Can you discover on what principle the author is working in using these different kinds of words? Is it only for the sake of variety, or does the wording suit the thought? Consider what opportunities the town pump has for seeing the people of the town. Describe, rather fully, in your own words, the different persons who come to drink.

How does the pump know the history of the town? Study the description of the spring. Compare with it the following picture from Kingslev's *Water-Babes* of a "real North country limestone fountain:

Out of a low cave of rock, at the foot of a limestone crag, the great fountain rose, welling and bubbling and gurgling, so clear that you could not tell where the water ended and the air began.