

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE



TALES, SKETCHES
AND OTHER PAPERS

EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION

Tales, Sketches And Other Papers

Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Nathaniel Hawthorne - A Biographical Primer

By Edward Everett Hale

American novelist: b. Salem, Mass., 4 July 1804; d. Plymouth, N. H., 19 May 1864. The founder of the family in America was William Hathorne (as the name was then spelled), a typical Puritan and a public man of importance. John, his son, was a judge, one of those presiding over the witchcraft trials. Of Joseph in the next generation little is said, but Daniel, next in decent, followed the sea and commanded a privateer in the Revolution, while his son Nathaniel, father of the romancer, was also a sea Captain. This pure New England descent gave a personal character to Hawthorne's presentations of New England life; when he writes of the strictness of the early Puritans, of the forests haunted by Indians, of the magnificence of the provincial days, of men high in the opinion of their towns-people, of the reaching out to far lands and exotic splendors, he is expressing the stored-up experience of his race. His father died when Nathaniel was but four and the little family lived

a secluded life with his mother. He was a handsome boy and quite devoted to reading, by an early accident which for a time prevented outdoor games. His first school was with Dr. Worcester, the lexicographer. In 1818 his mother moved to Raymond, Me., where her brother had bought land, and Hawthorne went to Bowdoin College. He entered college at the age of 17 in the same class with Longfellow. In the class above him was Franklin Pierce, afterward 12th President of the United States. On being graduated in 1825 Hawthorne determined upon literature as a profession, but his first efforts were without success. 'Fanshawe' was published anonymously in 1828, and shorter tales and sketches were without importance. Little need be said of these earlier years save to note that they were full of reading and observation. In 1836 he edited in Boston the *American Magazine for Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, but gained little from it save an introduction to 'The Token,' in which his tales first came to be known. Returning to Salem he lived a very secluded life, seeing almost no one (rather a family trait), and devoted to his thoughts and imaginations. He was a strong and powerful man, of excellent health and, though silent, cheerful, and a delightful companion when he chose. But intellectually he was of a separated and individual type, having his own extravagances and powers and submitting to no companionship in influence. In 1837 appeared 'Twice Told Tales' in book form: in a preface written afterward Hawthorne says that he was at this time "the obscurest man of letters in America." Gradually he began to be more widely received. In 1839 he became engaged to Miss Sophia Peabody, but was not married for some years. In 1838 he was appointed to a place in the Boston custom house, but found that he could not easily save time enough for literature and was not very sorry when the change of administration put him out of office. In 1841 was founded the socialistic community at Brook Farm: it seemed to

Hawthorne that here was a chance for a union of intellectual and physical work, whereby he might make a suitable home for his future wife. It failed to fulfil his expectations and Hawthorne withdrew from the experiment. In 1842 he was married and moved with his wife to the Old Manse at Concord just above the historic bridge. Here chiefly he wrote the 'Mosses of an Old Manse' (1846). In 1845 he published a second series of 'Twice Told Tales'; in this year also the family moved to Salem, where he had received the appointment of surveyor at the custom house. As before, official work was a hindrance to literature; not till 1849 when he lost his position could he work seriously. He used his new-found leisure in carrying out a theme that had been long in his mind and produced 'The Scarlet Letter' in 1850. This, the first of his longer novels, was received with enthusiasm and at once gave him a distinct place in literature. He now moved to Lenox, Mass., where he began on 'The House of Seven Gables,' which was published in 1851. He also wrote 'A Wonder-Book' here, which in its way has become as famous as his more important work. In December 1851 he moved to West Newton, and shortly to Concord again, this time to the Wayside. At Newton he wrote 'The Blithedale Romance.' Having settled himself at Concord in the summer of 1852, his first literary work was to write the life of his college friend, Franklin Pierce, just nominated for the Presidency. This done he turned to 'Tanglewood Tales,' a volume not unlike the 'Wonder-Book.' In 1853 he was named consul to Liverpool: at first he declined the position, but finally resolved to take this opportunity to see something of Europe. He spent four years in England, and then a year in Italy. As before, he could write nothing while an official, and resigned in 1857 to go to Rome, where he passed the winter, and to Florence, where he received suggestions and ideas which gave him stimulus for literary work. The summer of 1858 he passed at Redcar, in Yorkshire, where

he wrote 'The Marble Faun.' In June 1860 he sailed for America, where he returned to the Wayside. For a time he did little literary work; in 1863 he published 'Our Old Home,' a series of sketches of English life, and planned a new novel, 'The Dolliver Romance,' also called 'Pansie.' But though he suffered from no disease his vitality seemed relaxed; some unfortunate accidents had a depressing effect, and in the midst of a carriage trip into the White Mountains with his old friend, Franklin Pierce, he died suddenly at Plymouth, N. H., early in the morning, 19 May 1864.

The works of Hawthorne consist of novels, short stories, tales for children, sketches of life and travel and some miscellaneous pieces of a biographical or descriptive character. Besides these there were published after his death extracts from his notebooks. Of his novels 'The Scarlet Letter' is a story of old New England; it has a powerful moral idea at bottom, but it is equally strong in its presentation of life and character in the early days of Massachusetts. 'House of the Seven Gables' presents New England life of a later date; there is more of careful analysis and presentation of character and more description of life and manners, but less moral intensity. 'The Blithedale Romance' is less strong; Hawthorne seems hardly to grasp his subject. It makes the third in what may be called a series of romances presenting the molding currents of New England life: the first showing the factors of religion and sin, the second the forces of hereditary good and evil, and the third giving a picture of intellectual and emotional ferment in a society which had come from very different beginnings. 'Septimius Felton,' finished in the main but not published by Hawthorne, is a fantastic story dealing with the idea of immortality. It was put aside by Hawthorne when he began to write 'The Dolliver Romance,' of which he completed only the first chapters. 'Dr.

Grimshaw's Secret' (published in 1882) is also not entirely finished. These three books represent a purpose that Hawthorne never carried out. He had presented New England life, with which the life of himself and his ancestry was so indissolubly connected, in three characteristic phases. He had traced New England history to its source. He now looked back across the ocean to the England he had learned to know, and thought of a tale that should bridge the gulf between the Old World and the New. But the stories are all incomplete and should be read only by the student. The same thing may be said of 'Fanshawe,' which was published anonymously early in Hawthorne's life and later withdrawn from circulation. 'The Marble Faun' presents to us a conception of the Old World at its oldest point. It is Hawthorne's most elaborate work, and if every one were familiar with the scenes so discursively described, would probably be more generally considered his best. Like the other novels its motive is based on the problem of evil, but we have not precisely atonement nor retribution, as in his first two novels. The story is one of development, a transformation of the soul through the overcoming of evil. The four novels constitute the foundation of Hawthorne's literary fame and character, but the collections of short stories do much to develop and complete the structure. They are of various kinds, as follows: (1) Sketches of current life or of history, as 'Rills from the Town Pump,' 'The Village Uncle,' 'Main Street,' 'Old News.' These are chiefly descriptive and have little story; there are about 20 of them. (2) Stories of old New England, as 'The Gray Champion,' 'The Gentle Boy,' 'Tales of the Province House.' These stories are often illustrative of some idea and so might find place in the next set. (3) Stories based upon some idea, as 'Ethan Brand,' which presents the idea of the unpardonable sin; 'The Minister's Black Veil,' the idea of the separation of each soul from its fellows; 'Young Goodman Brown,' the power of doubt in

good and evil. These are the most characteristic of Hawthorne's short stories; there are about a dozen of them. (4) Somewhat different are the allegories, as 'The Great Stone Face,' 'Rappacini's Daughter,' 'The Great Carbuncle.' Here the figures are not examples or types, but symbols, although in no story is the allegory consistent. (5) There are also purely fantastic developments of some idea, as 'The New Adam and Eve,' 'The Christmas Banquet,' 'The Celestial Railroad.' These differ from the others in that there is an almost logical development of some fancy, as in case of the first the idea of a perfectly natural pair being suddenly introduced to all the conventionalities of our civilization. There are perhaps 20 of these fantasies. Hawthorne's stories from classical mythology, the 'Wonder-Book' and 'Tanglewood Tales,' belong to a special class of books, those in which men of genius have retold stories of the past in forms suited to the present. The stories themselves are set in a piece of narrative and description which gives the atmosphere of the time of the writer, and the old legends are turned from stately myths not merely to children's stories, but to romantic fancies. Mr. Pringle in 'Tanglewood Fireside' comments on the idea: "Eustace," he says to the young college student who had been telling the stories to the children, "pray let me advise you never more to meddle with a classical myth. Your imagination is altogether Gothic and will inevitably Gothicize everything that you touch. The effect is like bedaubing a marble statue with paint. This giant, now! How can you have ventured to thrust his huge disproportioned mass among the seemly outlines of Grecian fable?" "I described the giant as he appeared to me," replied the student, "And, sir, if you would only bring your mind into such a relation to these fables as is necessary in order to remodel them, you would see at once that an old Greek has no more exclusive right to them than a modern Yankee has. They are the common property of the world and of all time" ("Wonder-Book," p. 135).

'Grandfather's Chair' was also written primarily for children and gives narratives of New England history, joined together by a running comment and narrative from Grandfather, whose old chair had come to New England, not in the *Mayflower*, but with John Winthrop and the first settlers of Boston. 'Biographical Stories,' in a somewhat similar framework, tells of the lives of Franklin, Benjamin West and others. It should be noted of these books that Hawthorne's writings for children were always written with as much care and thought as his more serious work. 'Our Old Home' was the outcome of that less remembered side of Hawthorne's genius which was a master of the details of circumstance and surroundings. The notebooks give us this also, but the American notebook has also rather a peculiar interest in giving us many of Hawthorne's first ideas which were afterward worked out into stories and sketches.

One element in Hawthorne's intellectual make-up was his interest in the observation of life and his power of description of scenes, manners and character. This is to be seen especially, as has been said, in his notebooks and in 'Our Old Home,' and in slightly modified form in the sketches noted above. These studies make up a considerable part of 'Twice Told Tales' and 'Mosses from an Old Manse,' and represent a side of Hawthorne's genius not always borne in mind. Had this interest been predominant in him we might have had in Hawthorne as great a novelist of our everyday life as James or Howells. In the 'House of Seven Gables' the power comes into full play; 100 pages hardly complete the descriptions of the simple occupations of a single uneventful day. In Hawthorne, however, this interest in the life around him was mingled with a great interest in history, as we may see, not only in the stories of old New England noted above, but in the descriptive passages of 'The Scarlet Letter.' Still we have not, even here, the special quality for which we know

Hawthorne. Many great realists have written historical novels, for the same curiosity that absorbs one in the affairs of everyday may readily absorb one in the recreation of the past. In Hawthorne, however, was another element very different. His imagination often furnished him with conceptions having little connection with the actual circumstances of life. The fanciful developments of an idea noted above (5) have almost no relation to fact: they are "made up out of his own head." They are fantastic enough, but generally they are developments of some moral idea and a still more ideal development of such conceptions was not uncommon in Hawthorne. 'Rappacini's Daughter' is an allegory in which the idea is given a wholly imaginary setting, not resembling anything that Hawthorne had ever known from observation. These two elements sometimes appear in Hawthorne's work separate and distinct just as they did in his life: sometimes he secluded himself in his room, going out only after nightfall; sometimes he wandered through the country observing life and meeting with everybody. But neither of these elements alone produced anything great, probably because for anything great we need the whole man. The true Hawthorne was a combination of these two elements, with various others of personal character, and artistic ability that cannot be specified here. The most obvious combination between these two elements, so far as literature is concerned, between the fact of external life and the idea of inward imagination, is by a symbol. The symbolist sees in everyday facts a presentation of ideas. Hawthorne wrote a number of tales that are practically allegories: 'The Great Stone Face' uses facts with which Hawthorne was familiar, persons and scenes that he knew, for the presentation of a conception of the ideal. His novels, too, are full of symbolism. 'The Scarlet Letter' itself is a symbol and the rich clothing of Little Pearl, Alice's posies among the Seven Gables, the old musty house itself, are symbols, Zenobia's flower, Hilda's

doves. But this is not the highest synthesis of power, as Hawthorne sometimes felt himself, as when he said of 'The Great Stone Face,' that the moral was too plain and manifest for a work of art. However much we may delight in symbolism it must be admitted that a symbol that represents an idea only by a fanciful connection will not bear the seriousness of analysis of which a moral idea must be capable. A scarlet letter A has no real connection with adultery, which begins with A and is a scarlet sin only to such as know certain languages and certain metaphors. So Hawthorne aimed at a higher combination of the powers of which he was quite aware, and found it in figures and situations in which great ideas are implicit. In his finest work we have, not the circumstance before the conception or the conception before the circumstance, as in allegory. We have the idea in the fact, as it is in life, the two inseparable. Hester Prynne's life does not merely present to us the idea that the breaking of a social law makes one a stranger to society with its advantages and disadvantages. Hester is the result of her breaking that law. The story of Donatello is not merely a way of conveying the idea that the soul which conquers evil thereby grows strong in being and life. Donatello himself is such a soul growing and developing. We cannot get the idea without the fact, nor the fact without the idea. This is the especial power of Hawthorne, the power of presenting truth implicit in life. Add to this his profound preoccupation with the problem of evil in this world, with its appearance, its disappearance, its metamorphoses, and we have a due to Hawthorne's greatest works. In 'The Scarlet Letter,' 'The House of Seven Gables,' 'The Marble Faun,' 'Ethan Brand,' 'The Gray Champion,' the ideas cannot be separated from the personalities which express them. It is this which constitutes Hawthorne's lasting power in literature. His observation is interesting to those that care for the things that he describes, his fancy amuses, or charms or often

stimulates our ideas. His short stories are interesting to a student of literature because they did much to give a definite character to a literary form which has since become of great importance. His novels are exquisite specimens of what he himself called the romance, in which the figures and scenes are laid in a world a little more poetic than that which makes up our daily surrounding. But Hawthorne's really great power lay in his ability to depict life so that we are made keenly aware of the dominating influence of moral motive and moral law.

Tales and Sketches

Sketches From Memory

I. The Inland Port.

It was a bright forenoon, when I set foot on the beach at Burlington, and took leave of the two boatmen in whose little skiff I had voyaged since daylight from Peru. Not that we had come that morning from South America, but only from the New York shore of Lake Champlain. The highlands of the coast behind us stretched north and south, in a double range of bold, blue peaks, gazing over each other's shoulders at the Green Mountains of Vermont.

The latter are far the loftiest, and, from the opposite side of the lake, had displayed a more striking outline. We were now almost at their feet, and could see only a sandy beach sweeping beneath a woody bank, around the semicircular Bay of Burlington.

The painted lighthouse on a small green island, the wharves and warehouses, with sloops and schooners moored alongside, or at anchor, or spreading their canvas to the wind, and boats rowing from point to point, reminded me of some fishing-town on the sea-coast.

But I had no need of tasting the water to convince myself that Lake Champlain was not all arm of the sea; its quality was evident, both by its silvery surface, when unruffled, and a faint but unpleasant and sickly smell, forever steaming up in the sunshine. One breeze of the Atlantic with its briny fragrance would be worth more to these inland people than all the perfumes of Arabia. On closer inspection the vessels at the wharves looked hardly seaworthy,—there being a great lack of tar about the seams and rigging, and perhaps other deficiencies, quite as much to the purpose.

I observed not a single sailor in the port. There were men, indeed, in blue jackets and trousers, but not of the true nautical fashion, such as dangle before slopshops; others wore tight pantaloons and coats preponderously long-tailed,—cutting very queer figures at the masthead; and, in short, these fresh-water fellows had about the same analogy to the real "old salt" with his tarpaulin, pea-jacket, and sailor-cloth trousers, as a lake fish to a Newfoundland cod.

Nothing struck me more in Burlington, than the great number of Irish emigrants. They have filled the British Provinces to the brim, and still continue to ascend the St. Lawrence in infinite tribes overflowing by every outlet into the States. At Burlington, they swarm in huts and mean dwellings near the lake, lounge about the wharves, and elbow the native citizens entirely out of competition in their own line. Every species of mere bodily labor is the

prerogative of these Irish. Such is their multitude in comparison with any possible demand for their services, that it is difficult to conceive how a third part of them should earn even a daily glass of whiskey, which is doubtless their first necessary of life,—daily bread being only the second.

Some were angling in the lake, but had caught only a few perch, which little fishes, without a miracle, would be nothing among so many. A miracle there certainly must have been, and a daily one, for the subsistence of these wandering hordes. The men exhibit a lazy strength and careless merriment, as if they had fed well hitherto, and meant to feed better hereafter; the women strode about, uncovered in the open air, with far plumper waists and brawnier limbs as well as bolder faces, than our shy and slender females; and their progeny, which was innumerable, had the reddest and the roundest cheeks of any children in America.

While we stood at the wharf, the bell of a steamboat gave two preliminary peals, and she dashed away for Plattsburgh, leaving a trail of smoky breath behind, and breaking the glassy surface of the lake before her. Our next movement brought us into a handsome and busy square, the sides of which were filled up with white houses, brick stores, a church, a court-house, and a bank. Some of these edifices had roofs of tin, in the fashion of Montreal, and glittered in the sun with cheerful splendor, imparting a lively effect to the whole square. One brick building, designated in large letters as the custom-house, reminded us that this inland village is a port of entry, largely concerned in foreign trade and holding daily intercourse with the British empire. In this border country the Canadian bank-notes circulate as freely as our own, and British and American coin are jumbled into the same

pocket, the effigies of the King of England being made to kiss those of the Goddess of Liberty.

Perhaps there was an emblem in the involuntary contact. There was a pleasant mixture of people in the square of Burlington, such as cannot be seen elsewhere, at one view; merchants from Montreal, British officers from the frontier garrisons, French Canadians, wandering Irish, Scotchmen of a better class, gentlemen of the South on a pleasure tour, country squires on business; and a great throng of Green Mountain boys, with their horse-wagons and ox-teams, true Yankees in aspect, and looking more superlatively so, by contrast with such a variety of foreigners.

Ii. Rochester

The gray but transparent evening rather shaded than obscured the scene, leaving its stronger features visible, and even improved by the medium through which I beheld them. The volume of water is not very great, nor the roar deep enough to be termed grand, though such praise might have been appropriate before the good people of Rochester had abstracted a part of the unprofitable sublimity of the cascade. The Genesee has contributed so bountifully to their canals and mill-dams, that it approaches the precipice with diminished pomp, and rushes over it in foamy streams of various width, leaving a broad face of the rock insulated and unwashed, between the two main branches of the falling river. Still it was an impressive sight, to one who had not seen Niagara. I confess, however, that my chief interest arose from a legend, connected with these falls, which will become poetical in the lapse of years, and was already so to me as I pictured the catastrophe out of dusk and solitude. It was from a platform, raised over the naked island of the cliff, in the middle of the cataract that Sam Patch took his

last leap, and alighted in the other world. Strange as it may appear,—that any uncertainty should rest upon his fate which was consummated in the sight of thousands,—many will tell you that the illustrious Patch concealed himself in a cave under the falls, and has continued to enjoy posthumous renown, without foregoing the comforts of this present life. But the poor fellow prized the shout of the multitude too much not to have claimed it at the instant, had he survived. He will not be seen again, unless his ghost, in such a twilight as when I was there, should emerge from the foam, and vanish among the shadows that fall from cliff to cliff.

How stern a moral may be drawn from the story of poor Sam Patch! Why do we call him a madman or a fool, when he has left his memory around the falls of the Genesee, more permanently than if the letters of his name had been hewn into the forehead of the precipice?

Was the leaper of cataracts more mad or foolish than other men who throw away life, or misspend it in pursuit of empty fame, and seldom so triumphantly as he? That which he won is as invaluable as any except the unsought glory, spreading like the rich perfume of richer fruit from various and useful deeds.

Thus musing, wise in theory, but practically as great a fool as Sam, I lifted my eyes and beheld the spires, warehouses, and dwellings of Rochester, half a mile distant on both sides of the river, indistinctly cheerful, with the twinkling of many lights amid the fall of the evening.

The town had sprung up like a mushroom, but no presage of decay could be drawn from its hasty growth. Its edifices are of dusky brick, and of stone that will not be grayer in a hundred years than now; its churches are Gothic; it is

impossible to look at its worn pavements and conceive how lately the forest leaves have been swept away. The most ancient town in Massachusetts appears quite like an affair of yesterday, compared with Rochester. Its attributes of youth are the activity and eager life with which it is redundant. The whole street, sidewalks and centre, was crowded with pedestrians, horsemen, stage-coaches, gigs, light wagons, and heavy ox-teams, all hurrying, trotting, rattling, and rumbling, in a throng that passed continually, but never passed away. Here, a country wife was selecting a churn from several gayly painted ones on the sunny sidewalk; there, a farmer was bartering his produce; and, in two or three places, a crowd of people were showering bids on a vociferous auctioneer. I saw a great wagon and an ox-chain knocked off to a very pretty woman. Numerous were the lottery offices,—those true temples of Mammon,—where red and yellow bills offered splendid fortunes to the world at large, and banners of painted cloth gave notice that the "lottery draws next Wednesday." At the ringing of a bell, judges, jurymen, lawyers, and clients, elbowed each other to the court-house, to busy themselves with cases that would doubtless illustrate the state of society, had I the means of reporting them. The number of public houses benefited the flow of temporary population; some were farmer's taverns,—cheap, homely, and comfortable; others were magnificent hotels, with negro waiters, gentlemanly landlords in black broad-cloth, and foppish bar-keepers in Broadway coats, with chased gold watches in their waistcoat-pockets. I caught one of these fellows quizzing me through an eye-glass. The porters were lumbering up the steps with baggage from the packet boats, while waiters plied the brush on dusty travellers, who, meanwhile, glanced over the innumerable advertisements in the daily papers.

In short, everybody seemed to be there, and all had something to do, and were doing it with all their might, except a party of drunken recruits for the Western military posts, principally Irish and Scotch, though they wore Uncle Sam's gray jacket and trousers. I noticed one other idle man. He carried a rifle on his shoulder and a powder-horn across his breast, and appeared to stare about him with confused wonder, as if, while he was listening to the wind among the forest boughs, the hum and bustle of an instantaneous city had surrounded him.

A Night Scene

The steamboat in which I was passenger for Detroit had put into the mouth of a small river, where the greater part of the night would be spent in repairing some damages of the machinery.

As the evening was warm, though cloudy and very dark, I stood on deck, watching a scene that would not have attracted a second glance in the daytime, but became picturesque by the magic of strong light and deep shade.

Some wild Irishmen were replenishing our stock of wood, and had kindled a great fire on the bank to illuminate their labors. It was composed of large logs and dry brushwood, heaped together with careless profusion, blazing fiercely, spouting showers of sparks into the darkness, and gleaming wide over Lake Erie,—a beacon for perplexed voyagers leagues from land.

All around and above the furnace, there was total obscurity. No trees or other objects caught and reflected any portion of the brightness, which thus wasted itself in the immense void of night, as if it quivered from the expiring embers of

the world, after the final conflagration. But the Irishmen were continually emerging from the dense gloom, passing through the lurid glow, and vanishing into the gloom on the other side. Sometimes a whole figure would be made visible, by the shirtsleeves and light-colored dress; others were but half seen, like imperfect creatures; many flitted, shadow-like, along the skirts of darkness, tempting fancy to a vain pursuit; and often, a face alone was reddened by the fire, and stared strangely distinct, with no traces of a body. In short these wild Irish, distorted and exaggerated by the blaze, now lost in deep shadow, now bursting into sudden splendor, and now struggling between light and darkness, formed a picture which might have been transferred, almost unaltered, to a tale of the supernatural. As they all carried lanterns of wood, and often flung sticks upon the fire, the least imaginative spectator would at once compare them to devils condemned to keep alive the flames of their own torments.

Fragments From The Journal Of A Solitary Man

I.

My poor friend "Oberon"—[See the sketch or story entitled "The Devil in Manuscript," in "The Snow-Image, and other Twice-Told Tales."]—for let me be allowed to distinguish him by so quaint a name—sleeps with the silent ages. He died calmly. Though his disease was pulmonary, his life did not flicker out like a wasted lamp, sometimes shooting up into a strange temporary brightness; but the tide of being ebbed away, and the noon of his existence waned till, in the simple phraseology of Scripture, "he was not." The last words he said to me were, "Burn my papers,—all that you can find in yonder escritoire; for I fear there are some there which you may be betrayed into publishing. I have

published enough; as for the old disconnected journal in your possession—" But here my poor friend was checked in his utterance by that same hollow cough which would never let him alone. So he coughed himself tired, and sank to slumber. I watched from that midnight hour till high noon on the morrow for his waking. The chamber was dark; till, longing for light, I opened the window-shutter, and the broad day looked in on the marble features of the dead.

I religiously obeyed his instructions with regard to the papers in the *escritoire*, and burned them in a heap without looking into one, though sorely tempted. But the old journal I kept. Perhaps in strict conscience I ought also to have burned that; but casting my eye over some half-torn leaves the other day, I could not resist an impulse to give some fragments of it to the public. To do this satisfactorily, I am obliged to twist this thread, so as to string together into a semblance of order my Oberon's "random pearls."

If anybody that holds any commerce with his fellowmen can be called solitary, Oberon was a "solitary man." He lived in a small village at some distance from the metropolis, and never came up to the city except once in three months for the purpose of looking into a bookstore, and of spending two hours and a half with me. In that space of time I would tell him all that I could remember of interest which had occurred in the interim of his visits. He would join very heartily in the conversation; but as soon as the time of his usual tarrying had elapsed, he would take up his hat and depart. He was unequivocally the most original person I ever knew. His style of composition was very charming. No tales that have ever appeared in our popular journals have been so generally admired as his. But a sadness was on his spirit; and this, added to the shrinking sensitiveness of his nature, rendered him not misanthropic, but singularly averse to social intercourse. Of the disease, which was

slowly sapping the springs of his life, he first became fully conscious after one of those long abstractions in which he was wont to indulge. It is remarkable, however, that his first idea of this sort, instead of deepening his spirit with a more melancholy hue, restored him to a more natural state of mind.

He had evidently cherished a secret hope that some impulse would at length be given him, or that he would muster sufficient energy of will to return into the world, and act a wiser and happier part than his former one. But life never called the dreamer forth; it was Death that whispered him. It is to be regretted that this portion of his old journal contains so few passages relative to this interesting period; since the little which he has recorded, though melancholy enough, breathes the gentleness of a spirit newly restored to communion with its kind. If there be anything bitter in the following reflections, its source is in human sympathy, and its sole object is himself.

"It is hard to die without one's happiness; to none more so than myself, whose early resolution it had been to partake largely of the joys of life, but never to be burdened with its cares. Vain philosophy! The very hardships of the poorest laborer, whose whole existence seems one long toil, has something preferable to my best pleasures.

"Merely skimming the surface of life, I know nothing, by my own experience, of its deep and warm realities. I have achieved none of those objects which the instinct of mankind especially prompts them to pursue, and the accomplishment of which must therefore beget a native satisfaction. The truly wise, after all their speculations, will be led into the common path, and, in homage to the human nature that pervades them, will gather gold, and till the earth, and set out trees, and build a house. But I have

scorned such wisdom. I have rejected, also, the settled, sober, careful gladness of a man by his own fireside, with those around him whose welfare is committed to his trust and all their guidance to his fond authority. Without influence among serious affairs, my footsteps were not imprinted on the earth, but lost in air; and I shall leave no son to inherit my share of life, with a better sense of its privileges and duties, when his father should vanish like a bubble; so that few mortals, even the humblest and the weakest, have been such ineffectual shadows in the world, or die so utterly as I must. Even a young man's bliss has not been mine. With a thousand vagrant fantasies, I have never truly loved, and perhaps shall be doomed to loneliness throughout the eternal future, because, here on earth, my soul has never married itself to the soul of woman.

"Such are the repinings of one who feels, too late, that the sympathies of his nature have avenged themselves upon him. They have prostrated, with a joyless life and the prospect of a reluctant death, my selfish purpose to keep aloof from mortal disquietudes, and be a pleasant idler among care-stricken and laborious men. I have other regrets, too, savoring more of my old spirit. The time has been when I meant to visit every region of the earth, except the poles and Central Africa. I had a strange longing to see the Pyramids. To Persia and Arabia, and all the gorgeous East, I owed a pilgrimage for the sake of their magic tales. And England, the land of my ancestors! Once I had fancied that my sleep would not be quiet in the grave unless I should return, as it were, to my home of past ages, and see the very cities, and castles, and battle-fields of history, and stand within the holy gloom of its cathedrals, and kneel at the shrines of its immortal poets, there asserting myself their hereditary countryman. This feeling lay among the deepest in my heart. Yet, with this homesickness for the father-land, and all these plans of remote travel,—which I

yet believe that my peculiar instinct impelled me to form, and upbraided me for not accomplishing,—the utmost limit of my wanderings has been little more than six hundred miles from my native village. Thus, in whatever way I consider my life, or what must be termed such, I cannot feel as if I had lived at all.

"I am possessed, also, with the thought that I have never yet discovered the real secret of my powers; that there has been a mighty treasure within my reach, a mine of gold beneath my feet, worthless because I have never known how to seek for it; and for want of perhaps one fortunate idea, I am to die

'Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.'

"Once, amid the troubled and tumultuous enjoyment of my life, there was a dreamy thought that haunted me, the terrible necessity imposed on mortals to grow old, or die. I could not bear the idea of losing one youthful grace. True, I saw other men, who had once been young and now were old, enduring their age with equanimity, because each year reconciled them to its own added weight. But for myself, I felt that age would be not less miserable, creeping upon me slowly, than if it fell at once. I sometimes looked in the glass, and endeavored to fancy my cheeks yellow and interlaced with furrows, my forehead wrinkled deeply across, the top of my head bald and polished, my eyebrows and side-locks iron gray, and a grisly beard sprouting on my chin. Shuddering at the picture, I changed it for the dead face of a young mail, with dark locks clustering heavily round its pale beauty, which would decay, indeed, but not with years, nor in the sight of men. The latter visage shocked me least.

"Such a repugnance to the hard conditions of long life is common to all sensitive and thoughtful men, who minister to the luxury, the refinements, the gayety and lightsomeness, to anything, in short, but the real necessities of their fellow-creatures. He who has a part in the serious business of life, though it be only as a shoemaker, feels himself equally respectable in youth and in age, and therefore is content to live and look forward to wrinkles and decrepitude in their due season. It is far otherwise with the busy idlers of the world. I was particularly liable to this torment, being a meditative person in spite of my levity. The truth could not be concealed, nor the contemplation of it avoided. With deep inquietude I became aware that what was graceful now, and seemed appropriate enough to my age of flowers, would be ridiculous in middle life; and that the world, so indulgent to the fantastic youth, would scorn the bearded man, still telling love-tales, loftily ambitious of a maiden's tears, and squeezing out, as it were, with his brawny strength, the essence of roses. And in his old age the sweet lyrics of Anacreon made the girls laugh at his white hairs the more. With such sentiments, conscious that my part in the drama of life was fit only for a youthful performer, I nourished a regretful desire to be summoned early from the scene. I set a limit to myself, the age of twenty-five, few years indeed, but too many to be thrown away. Scarcely had I thus fixed the term of my mortal pilgrimage, than the thought grew into a presentiment that, when the space should be completed, the world would have one butterfly the less, by my far flight.

"O, how fond I was of life, even while allotting, as my proper destiny, an early death! I loved the world, its cities, its villages, its grassy roadsides, its wild forests, its quiet scenes, its gay, warm, enlivening bustle; in every aspect, I loved the world so long as I could behold it with young eyes

and dance through it with a young heart. The earth had been made so beautiful, that I longed for no brighter sphere, but only an ever-youthful eternity in this. I clung to earth as if my beginning and ending were to be there, unable to imagine any but an earthly happiness, and choosing such, with all its imperfections, rather than perfect bliss which might be alien from it. Alas! I had not yet known that weariness by which the soul proves itself ethereal."

Turning over the old journal, I open, by chance, upon a passage which affords a signal instance of the morbid fancies to which Oberon frequently yielded himself. Dreams like the following were probably engendered by the deep gloom sometimes thrown over his mind by his reflections on death.

"I dreamed that one bright forenoon I was walking through Broadway, and seeking to cheer myself with the warm and busy life of that far-famed promenade. Here a coach thundered over the pavement, and there an unwieldy omnibus, with spruce gigs rattling past, and horsemen prancing through all the bustle. On the sidewalk people were looking at the rich display of goods, the plate and jewelry, or the latest caricature in the bookseller's windows; while fair ladies and whiskered gentlemen tripped gayly along, nodding mutual recognitions, or shrinking from some rough countryman or sturdy laborer whose contact might have ruffled their finery. I found myself in this animated scene, with a dim and misty idea that it was not my proper place, or that I had ventured into the crowd with some singularity of dress or aspect which made me ridiculous. Walking in the sunshine, I was yet cold as death. By degrees, too, I perceived myself the object of universal attention, and, as it seemed, of horror and affright. Every face grew pale; the laugh was hushed, and

the voices died away in broken syllables; the people in the shops crowded to the doors with a ghastly stare, and the passengers on all sides fled as from an embodied pestilence. The horses reared and snorted. An old beggar-woman sat before St. Paul's Church, with her withered palm stretched out to all, but drew it back from me, and pointed to the graves and monuments in that populous churchyard. Three lovely girls whom I had formerly known, ran shrieking across the street. A personage in black, whom I was about to overtake, suddenly turned his head and showed the features of a long-lost friend. He gave me a look of horror and was gone.

"I passed not one step farther, but threw my eyes on a looking-glass which stood deep within the nearest shop. At first glimpse of my own figure I awoke, with a horrible sensation of self-terror and self-loathing. No wonder that the affrighted city fled! I had been promenading Broadway in my shroud!"

I should be doing injustice to my friend's memory, were I to publish other extracts even nearer to insanity than this, from the scarcely legible papers before me. I gather from them—for I do not remember that he ever related to me the circumstances—that he once made a journey, chiefly on foot, to Niagara. Some conduct of the friends among whom he resided in his native village was constructed by him into oppression. These were the friends to whose care he had been committed by his parents, who died when Oberon was about twelve years of age. Though he had always been treated by them with the most uniform kindness, and though a favorite among the people of the village rather on account of the sympathy which they felt in his situation than from any merit of his own, such was the waywardness of his temper, that on a slight provocation he ran away from the home that sheltered him, expressing openly his

determination to die sooner than return to the detested spot. A severe illness overtook him after he had been absent about four months. While ill, he felt how unsoothing were the kindest looks and tones of strangers. He rose from his sick-bed a better man, and determined upon a speedy self-atonement by returning to his native town. There he lived, solitary and sad, but forgiven and cherished by his friends, till the day he died. That part of the journal which contained a description of this journey is mostly destroyed. Here and there is a fragment. I cannot select, for the pages are very scanty; but I do not withhold the following fragments, because they indicate a better and more cheerful frame of mind than the foregoing.

"On reaching the ferry-house, a rude structure of boards at the foot of the cliff, I found several of those wretches devoid of poetry, and lost some of my own poetry by contact with them. The hut was crowded by a party of provincials, —a simple and merry set, who had spent the afternoon fishing near the Falls, and were bartering black and white bass and eels for the ferryman's whiskey. A greyhound and three spaniels, brutes of much more grace and decorous demeanor than their masters, sat at the door. A few yards off, yet wholly unnoticed by the dogs, was a beautiful fox, whose countenance betokened all the sagacity attributed to him in ancient fable. He had a comfortable bed of straw in an old barrel, whither he retreated, flourishing his bushy tail as I made a step towards him, but soon came forth and surveyed me with a keen and intelligent eye. The Canadians bartered their fish and drank their whiskey, and were loquacious on trifling subjects, and merry at simple jests, with as little regard to the scenery as they could have to the flattest part of the Grand Canal. Nor was I entitled to despise them; for I amused myself with all those foolish matters of fishermen, and dogs, and fox, just as if Sublimity and Beauty were not married at that place and moment; as

if their nuptial band were not the brightest of all rainbows on the opposite shore; as if the gray precipice were not frowning above my head and Niagara thundering around me.

"The grim ferryman, a black-whiskered giant, half drunk withal, now thrust the Canadians by main force out of his door, launched a boat, and bade me sit in the stern-sheets. Where we crossed the river was white with foam, yet did not offer much resistance to a straight passage, which brought us close to the outer edge of the American falls. The rainbow vanished as we neared its misty base, and when I leaped ashore, the sun had left all Niagara in shadow."

"A sound of merriment, sweet voices and girlish laughter, came dancing through the solemn roar of waters. In old times, when the French, and afterwards the English, held garrisons near Niagara, it used to be deemed a feat worthy of a soldier, a frontier man, or an Indian, to cross the rapids to Goat Island. As the country became less rude and warlike, a long space intervened, in which it was but half believed, by a faint and doubtful tradition, that mortal foot had never trod this wild spot of precipice and forest clinging between two cataracts. The island is no longer a tangled forest, but a grove of stately trees, with grassy intervals about their roots and woodland paths among their trunks.

"There was neither soldier nor Indian here now, but a vision of three lovely girls, running brief races through the broken sunshine of the grove, hiding behind the trees, and pelting each other with the cones of the pine. When their sport had brought them near me, it so happened that one of the party ran up and shook me by the band,—a greeting which I heartily returned, and would have done the same had it

been tenderer. I had known this wild little black-eyed lass in my youth and her childhood, before I had commenced my rambles.

"We met on terms of freedom and kindness, which elder ladies might have thought unsuitable with a gentleman of my description. When I alluded to the two fair strangers, she shouted after them by their Christian names, at which summons, with grave dignity, they drew near, and honored me with a distant courtesy. They were from the upper part of Vermont. Whether sisters, or cousins, or at all related to each other, I cannot tell; but they are planted in my memory like 'two twin roses on one stem,' with the fresh dew in both their bosoms; and when I would have pure and pleasant thoughts, I think of them. Neither of them could have seen seventeen years. They both were of a height, and that a moderate one. The rose-bloom of their cheeks could hardly be called bright in her who was the rosiest, nor faint, though a shade less deep, in her companion. Both had delicate eyebrows, not strongly defined, yet somewhat darker than their hair; both had small sweet mouths, maiden mouths, of not so warm and deep a tint as ruby, but only red as the reddest rose; each had those gems, the rarest, the most precious, a pair of clear, soft bright blue eyes. Their style of dress was similar; one had on a black silk gown, with a stomacher of velvet, and scalloped cuffs of the same from the wrist to the elbow; the other wore cuffs and stomacher of the like pattern and material, over a gown of crimson silk. The dress was rather heavy for their slight figures, but suited to September. They and the darker beauty all carried their straw bonnets in their hands."

I cannot better conclude these fragments than with poor Oberon's description of his return to his native village after his slow recovery from his illness. How beautifully does he express his penitential emotions! A beautiful moral may be