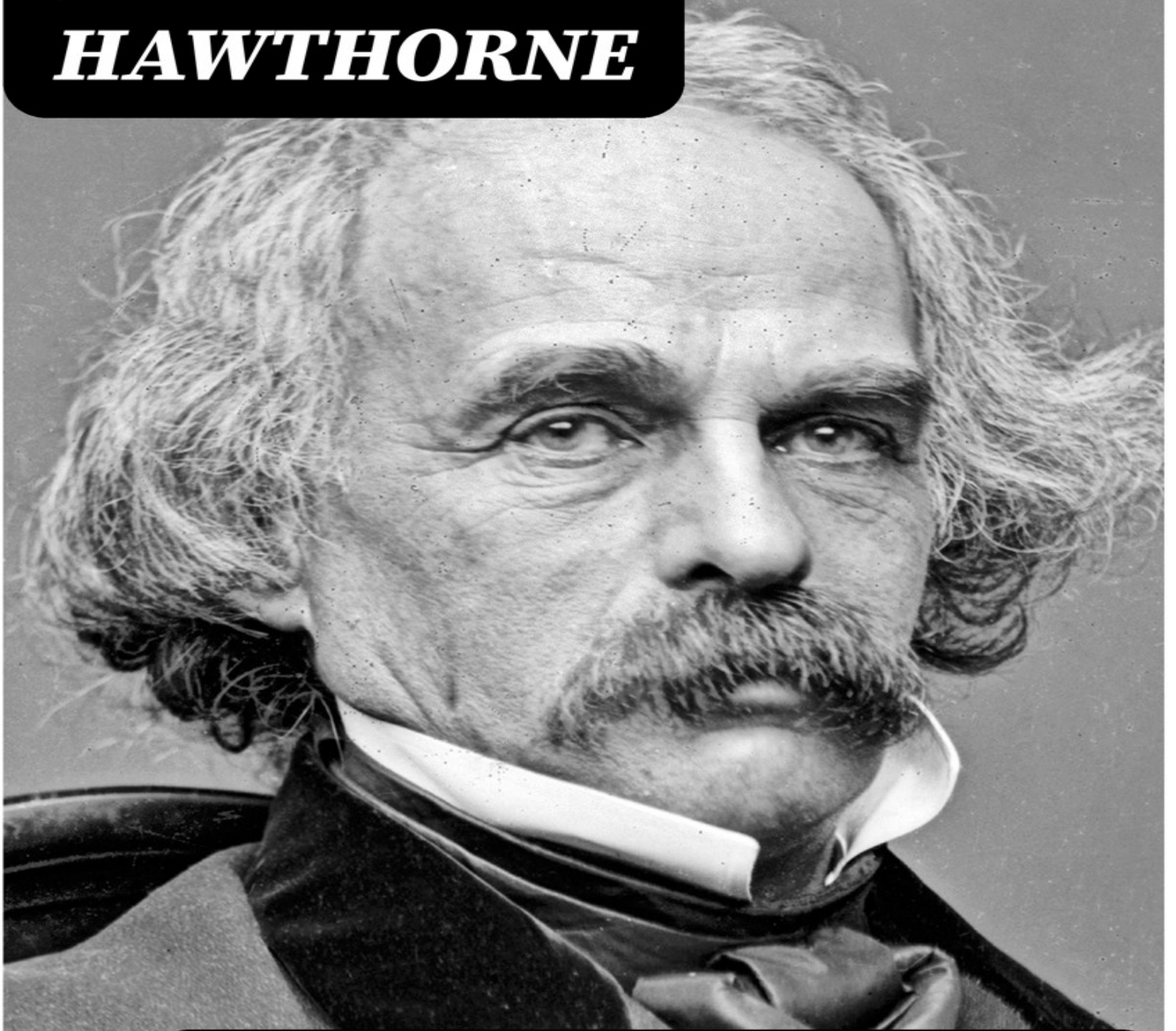


***JULIAN  
HAWTHORNE***



***HAWTHORNE  
AND HIS  
CIRCLE***

**Julian Hawthorne**

# **Hawthorne and His Circle**

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# INTRODUCTION

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Inheritance of friendships—Gracious giants—My own good fortune—My father the central figure—What did his gift to me cost him?—A revelation in Colorado—Privileges make difficulties—Lights and shadows of memory—An informal narrative—Contrast between my father's life and mine.

The best use we can make of good fortune is to share it with our fellows. Those to whom good things come by way of inheritance, however, are often among the latest to comprehend their own advantage; they suppose it to be the common condition. And no doubt I had nearly arrived at man's estate before it occurred to me that the lines of few fishers of men were cast in places so pleasant as mine. I was the son of a man of high desert, who had such friends as he deserved; and these companions and admirers of his gave to me in the beginning of my days a kindly welcome and encouragement generated from their affection and reverence for him. Without doing a stroke of work for it, I found myself early in the enjoyment of a principality of good will and fellowship—a species of freemasonry, I might call it, though the secret was patent enough—for the rights in which, unaided, I might have contended my lifetime long in vain. Men and women whose names are consecrated apart in the dearest thoughts of thousands were familiars and playmates of my childhood; they supported my youth and bade my manhood godspeed. But to me, for a long while, the favor of these gracious giants of mind and character seemed agreeable indeed, but nothing out of the ordinary; my tacit presumption was that other children as well as I

could if they would walk hand in hand with Emerson along the village street, seek in the meadows for arrow-heads with Thoreau, watch Powers thump the brown clay of the "Greek Slave," or listen to the voice of Charlotte Cushman, which could sway assembled thousands, modulate itself to tell stories to the urchin who leaned, rapt, against her knees. Were human felicity so omnipresent as a happy child imagines it, what a world would this be!

In time, my misapprehension was corrected, rather, I think, through the application to it of cold logic than by any rude awakening. I learned of my riches not by losing them—the giants did not withdraw their graciousness—but by comparing the lot of others with my own. And yet, to tell the truth—perhaps I might better leave it untold; only in these chapters, especially, I will not begin with reserves—to say truth, then, my world, during my father's lifetime, and afterwards for I will not say how long, was divided into two natural parts, my father being one of them, and everybody else the other. Hence I was led to regard the parties of the latter part, rich or poor, giants or pygmies, as being, after all, of much the same stature and value. The brightness (in the boy's estimation) of the paternal figure rendered distinctions between other brightnesses unimportant. The upshot was, in short, that I inclined to the opinion that while compassion was unquestionably due to other children for not having a father like mine, yet in other respects my condition was not egregiously superior to theirs. They might not know the Brownings or the Julia Ward Howes; but then, very likely, the Smiths and the Joneses, whom they did know, were nearly as good.

After fifty years, of course, such prepossessions yield to experience. My father was the best friend I ever had, and he will always stand in my estimation distinct from all other friends and persons; but I can now recognize that in addition to the immeasurable debt I owe him for being to me what he was in his own person, he bestowed upon me a privilege also immeasurable in the hospitality of these shining ones who were his intimates. Did the gift cost him nothing? Nothing, in one sense. But, again, what does it cost a man to walk upright and cleanly during the years of his pilgrimage: to deal justly with all, and charitably: diligently to cultivate and develop every natural endowment: always to seek truth, tell it, and vindicate it: to discharge to the utmost of his ability every duty that was intrusted to him: to rest content, in the line of his calling, with no work inferior to his best: to say no word and do no act which, were they known, might weaken the struggle against temptation of any fellow-creature? These qualities were the price at which Hawthorne bought his friends; and in receiving those friends from him, his children could not but feel that the bequest represented his unfaltering grasp upon whatever is pure, lofty, and generous in human life.

Yes, whatever it may cost a man of genius to be all his life a good man, and to use and develop his genius to the noblest ends only, that my father's friends cost him, and in that amount am I his debtor; and the longer I myself live, and the more I see of other men, the higher and rarer do I esteem the obligation. Moreover, in speaking of his friends, I was thinking of those who personally knew him; but the world is full to-day of friends of his who never saw him, to

whom his name is my best and surest introduction. Once, only three years since, in the remote heart of the Colorado mountains, I chanced to enter the hut of an aged miner; he sat in a corner of the little family room; on the wall near his head was fixed a small bookshelf, filled with a dozen dog-eared volumes. The man had for years been paralyzed; he could do little more than to raise to that book-shelf his trembling hand, and take from it one or other of the volumes. When this helpless veteran learned my name, he uttered a strange cry, and his face worked with eager emotion; the wife of his broad-shouldered son brought me to him in his corner; his old eyes glowed as they perused me. I could not gather the meaning of his broken, trembling speech; the young woman interpreted for me. Was I related to the great Hawthorne? "Yes; I am his son." "His son!" Seldom have I met a gaze harder to sustain than that which the paralytic bent upon me. Would I might have worn, for the time being, the countenance of an archangel, so to fill out the lineaments, drawn during so many lonely years by his imagination and his reverence, of his ideal writer! "The son of Hawthorne!" He said no more, save by the strengthless pressure of his hands upon my own; the woman told me how all the books on the little shelf were my father's books, and for fifteen years the old man had read no others. Helpless tears of joy, of gratitude, of wonder ran down the furrows of his cheeks into his white beard. And how could I at whom he so gazed help being moved: on that desolate, unknown mountain-side, far from the world, the name which I had inherited was loved and honored! One does not get one's privileges for nothing. My father gave me power to

make my way, and cast sunshine on the path; but he made the path arduous, too!

Be that as it may, I now ask who will to look in my mirror, and see reflected there some of the figures and the scenes that have made my life worth living. As I peer into the dark abysm of things gone by, many places that seemed at first indistinct, grow clearer; but many more must remain impenetrable. Upon the whole, however, I am surprised to find how much is still discernible. Nearly a score of years ago I published, in the shape of a formal biography of Hawthorne and his wife, the consecutive facts of their lives, and numerous passages from their journals and correspondence. My aim is different now; I wish to indite an informal narrative from my own point of view, as child, youth, and man. There will be gaps in it—involuntary ones; and others occasioned by the obligation to retain those pictures only that seem likely to arouse a catholic interest. Yet there will be a certain intimacy in the story; and some matters which history would omit as trivial will be here adduced, for the sake of such color and character as they may contain. I shall not stalk on stilts, or mouth phrases, but converse comfortably and trustfully as between friends. If a writing of this kind be not flexible, unpretending, discursive, it has no right to be at all. Art is not in question, save the minor art that lives from line to line. Gossip about men, women, and things—it can amount to little more than that.

In the earlier chapters the *dramatis personae* and the incidents must naturally group themselves about the figure of my father; for it was thus that I saw them. To his boy he was the fountain of love, honor, and energy; and to the boy



he seemed the animating or organizing principle of other persons and events. With his death, in my eighteenth year, the world appeared disordered for a season; then, gradually, I learned to do my own orientation. I was destined to an experience superficially much more active and varied than his had been; and it was a world superficially very different from his in which I moved and dealt. There must follow a corresponding modification in the character of the narrative; yet that, after all is superficial, too. For the memory of my father has always been with me, and has doubtless influenced me more than I am myself aware. And certainly but for him this book would never have been attempted.

## I

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Value of dates—My aunt Lizzie's efforts—My father's decapitation—My mother's strong-box—The spirit of The Scarlet Letter—The strain of imaginative composition—My grandmother Hawthorne's death—Infantile indifference to calamity—The children's plays and books—The house on Mall

Street—Scarlet fever—The study on the third floor—The haunted mahogany writing-desk—The secret drawers—The upright Egyptian—Mr. Pickwick—My father in 1850—The flowered writing-gown, and the ink butterfly—Driving the quill pen—The occupants of the second floor—Aunt Louisa and Aunt Ebe—The dowager Mrs. Hawthorne—I kick my aunt

Lizzie—The kittens and the great mystery—The greatest book of the age.

My maternal aunt, Miss Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, was a very learned woman, and a great student of history, and teacher of it; and by the aid of huge, colored charts, done by my uncle Nat Peabody and hung on the walls of our sitting-room, she labored during some years to teach me all the leading dates of human history—the charts being designed according to a novel and ingenious plan to fix those facts in childish memory. But as a pupil I was always most inapt and grievous, in dates and in matters mathematical especially; so that I gave her inexhaustible patience many a sad hour. To this day I cannot tell in what year was fought the battle of Marathon, or when John signed Magna Charta; though the battle itself, and the scene of the barons with menacing brows gathered about John, stood clearly pictured in my imagination. Dates were arbitrary, and to my memory nothing arbitrary would stick. Nevertheless, when I am myself constructing a narrative, whether it be true or fictitious, I am wedded to dates, and cannot be divorced from them. It must be set down precisely when the events took place, in what years the dramatis personae were born, and how old they were when each juncture of their fortunes came to pass. I can no more dispense with dates than I can talk without consonants; they carry form, order, and credibility. Or they are like the skeleton which gives recognizable shape to men and animals. Nothing mortal can get on without them..

Whether this addiction be in the nature of a reaction from my childish perversity, giving my erudite and beloved aunt

Lizzie (as I called her) her revenge so long after our lessons are over; or how else to explain it, I know not; but it leads me to affirm here that the nadir of my father's material fortunes was reached about the year 1849. At that time his age was five-and-forty, and I was three.

The causes of this financial depression were several. One morning he awoke to find himself deprived, by political chicanery, of the income of a custom-house surveyorship which for some while past had served to support his small family. Now, some men could have gone on writing stories in the intervals between surveying customs, and have thus placed an anchor to windward against the time when the political storm should set in; but Nathaniel Hawthorne was devoid of that useful ability. Nor had he been able to spend less than he earned; so, suddenly, there he was on his beam-ends. Leisure to write, certainly, was now abundant enough; but he never was a rapid composer, and even had he been so, the market for the kind of things he wrote was, in the middle of the past century, in New England, neither large nor eager. The emoluments were meagre to match; twenty dollars for four pages of the Democratic Review was about the figure; and to produce a short tale or sketch of that length would take him a month at least. How were a husband and wife and their two children to live for a month on the mere expectation of twenty dollars from the Democratic Review—which was, into the bargain, terribly slow pay? Such was the problem which confronted the dark-haired and grave-visaged gentleman as he closed his desk in the Salem custom-house for the last time, and put on his hat to walk home.

Thanks, however, to some divine foresight on my mother's part, aided by a wonderful talent for practical economy, she had secretly contrived to save, out of her weekly stipends, small sums which in the aggregate bulked large enough to make an important difference in the situation. So when her husband disclosed his bad news, she opened her private drawer and disclosed her banknotes, with such a smile in her eyes as I can easily picture to myself. Stimulated by the miracle, he remembered that the inchoate elements of a story, in which was to figure prominently a letter A, cut out of red cloth, or embroidered in scarlet thread, and affixed to a woman's bosom, had been for months past rumbling round in his mind; now was the time of times to shape it forth. Yonder upon the table by the window stood the old mahogany writing-desk so long unused; here were his flowered dressing-gown and slippers down-at-heel. He ought to be able to finish the story before the miraculous savings gave out; and then all he would have to do would be to write others. And, after all, to be rid of the surveyorship was a relief.

But matters were not to be run off quite so easily as this. The Scarlet Letter, upon coming to close quarters with it, turned out to be not a story of such moderate caliber as Hawthorne had hitherto been used to write, but an affair likely to extend over two or three hundred pages, which, instead of a month or so, might not be completed in a year; yet it was too late to substitute something more manageable for it—in the first place, because nothing else happened to be at his disposal, and secondly, because The Scarlet Letter took such intimate hold upon the vitals of his

heart and mind that he was by no means able to free himself from it until all had been fulfilled. Only men of creative genius know in what glorious and harrowing thralldom their creations hold them. Having once been fairly begun, *The Scarlet Letter* must inevitably finish itself for good or ill, come what might to the writer of it.

[IMAGE: BIRTHPLACE OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE AT SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS]

This is a story of people and events, not a study in literary criticism; but the writing of *The Scarlet Letter* was an event of no trifling importance in the story of its author's life. To read the book is an experience which its readers cannot forget; what its writing must have been to a man organized as my father was is hardly to be conveyed in words. Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth—he must live through each one of them, feel their passion, remorse, hatred, terror, love; and he must enter into the soul of the mysterious nature of Pearl. Such things cannot with impunity be done by any one; the mere physical strain, all conditions being favorable, would be almost past bearing. But my father, though uniformly his bodily health was all his life sound, was never what I would call a robust man; he was exquisitely balanced. At the time he began his book he was jaded from years of office drudgery, and he was in some anxiety as to the issue of his predicament. The house in which he dwelt, small and ill-placed in a narrow side-street, with no possibility of shutting out the noise of traffic and of domestic alarms, could not but make the work tell more heavily upon him. But in addition to this there were fortuitous occasions of emotional stress, all of which I shall

not mention; but among them were the distasteful turmoil aroused by his political mishap; and, far more poignant, the critical illness of his mother. Circumstances led to her being housed under his roof; there she lingered long at death's door, and there at last she died. He profoundly loved her; but deep-rooted, too, in both of them was that strange, New England shyness, masking in visible ice the underlying emotion. Not since his boyhood had their mutual affection found free, natural expression; and now, in this final hour, that bondage of habit caused the words of tenderness to stumble on their lips. The awful majesty of approaching death, prompting them to "catch up the whole of love and utter it" ere it be too late, wrought this involuntary self-repression into silent agony.

She died; his own health was shaken to its foundations; his children fell ill, his wife underwent acute suffering; and through all this, and more, *The Scarlet Letter* must be written. No wonder that, when he came to read the story in manuscript to his wife, his voice faltered and broke; and she slipped to her knees and hid her face on her arms in the chair. "I had been suffering," he commented, long afterwards, "from a great diversity and severity of emotion." Great works of art—things with the veritable spirit of enduring life in them—are destined to be born in sore travail and pain. Those who give them birth yield up their own life to them.

It was at this period—say, about 1850—that my own personal recollections, in a shadowy and incoherent way, begin. The shadows are exclusively of time's making; they were not of the heart. All through the trials of my parents I

retained a jocund equanimity (save for some trifling childish ailments) and esteemed this world a friendly and agreeable place. The *Scarlet Letter* dashed my spirits not a whit; I knew not of its existence, by personal evidence, till full a dozen years later; and even the death of my grandmother left me light of heart, for the passing of the spirit from the body can but awaken the transient curiosity of a child of four. For the rest, my physical environment, in itself amusing and interesting enough to me, had its chief importance from the material it afforded on which to construct the imaginary scenes and characters of my play. My sister Una and myself were forever enacting something or somebody not ourselves: childish egoism oddly decking itself in the non-ego. We believed in fairies, in magic, in angels, in transformations; Hans Christian Andersen, Grimm, *The Black Aunt* (oh, delectable, lost volume) were our sober history-books, and *Robinson Crusoe* was our autobiography. But I did occasionally take note of concrete appearances, too; and some of them I remember.

The house—the third which we had inhabited since my father became surveyor—was on Mall Street, and was three stories in height, with a yard behind and at one end; this yard, which was of importance to my sister and myself, had access to the street by a swinging gate. There were three or four trees in it, and space for play. The house was but one room deep, and lying as it did about north and south, the rooms were open to both the morning and the afternoon sunshine. They opened one into the other in a series; and when my father was safe up-stairs in his study, my mother would open all the doors of the suite on the lower floor, and

allow the children to career triumphantly to and fro. No noise that we could make ever troubled her nerves, unless it was the noise of conflict; the shriek of joy, however shrill, passed by her harmless; but the lowest mutter of wrath or discontent distressed her; for of such are the mothers of the kingdom of heaven! And so zealous was our regard for her just and gentle law that I really think we gave way as little as most children to the latter.

Of course, whenever the weather permitted, we were out in the yard, or even promenaded for short distances up and down the street. And once—"How are you?" inquired a friend of the family, as he drove by in his wagon. "Oh, we've got the scarlet fever!" we proudly replied, stepping out gallantly along the sidewalk. For we were treated by a homoeopathic doctor of the old school, who was a high-dilutionist, and mortal ills could never get a firm grip on us. In winter we rejoiced in the snow; and my father's story of the Snow Image got most of its local color from our gambols in this fascinating substance, which he could observe from the window of his study.

The study was on the third floor of the house, secluded from the turmoil of earth, so far as anything could be in a city street. No one was supposed to intrude upon him there; but such suppositions are ineffectual against children. From time to time the adamantine gates fell ajar, and in we slipped. It seemed a heavenly place, tenanted by a being possessed of every attribute that our imaginations could ascribe to an angel. The room and its tenant glimmer before me as I write, luminous with the sunshine of more than fifty years ago. Both were equipped for business rather than for



beauty; furniture and garments were simple in those Salem days. A homely old paper covered the walls, a brownish old carpet the floor. There was an old rocking-chair, its black paint much worn and defaced; another chair was drawn up to the table, which stood to the left of the eastern window; and on the table was a mahogany desk, concerning which I must enter into some particulars. It was then, and for years afterwards, an object of my most earnest scrutiny. Such desks are not made nowadays.

When closed, it was an oblong mahogany box, two feet long by half that width, and perhaps nine inches high. It had brass corners, and a brass plate on the top, inscribed with the name, "N. Hawthorne." At one end was a drawer, with a brass handle playing on a hinge and fitting into a groove or socket when down; there was a corresponding handle at the other end, but that was for symmetry only; the one drawer went clear through the desk. I often mused over the ethics of this deception.

Being opened, the desk presented a sloping surface two feet square, covered with black velvet, which had been cut here and there and pasted down again, and was stiffened with many ink-spatterings. This writing surface consisted of two lids, hinged at their junction in the centre; lifting them, you discovered two receptacles to hold writing-paper and other desk furniture. They were of about equal capacity; for although the upper half of the desk was the more capacious, you must not forget that two inches of it, at the bottom, was taken up by the long drawer already mentioned.

But there was, also, a more interesting curtailment of this interior space. Along the very top of the desk, as it lay open,

was a narrow channel, perhaps a couple of inches wide and deep, divided into three sections; two square ones, at the opposite ends, held the ink-bottle and the sand-bottle; the long central one was for quill pens. These, in the aggregate, appeared to the superficial eye to account for all that remained of the cubic contents of the structure; but the supreme mystery and charm of the affair was that they did not!

No; there was an esoteric secret still in reserve; and for years it remained a secret to me. The bottle-sockets and pen-tray did not reach down to the level of the long drawer by nearly an inch. Measurement would prove that; but you would have said that the interval must be solid wood; for nothing but a smooth panel met the eye when you pulled aside the sheets of writing-paper in their receptacle to investigate. But the lesson of this world, and of the desk as a part of it, is that appearances are not to be trusted. The guile of those old desk-makers passes belief.

I will expose it. In the pen-tray lay a sort of brass nail, as long as your little finger, and blunt at the end. Now take the sand-bottle from its hole. In one corner of the bottom thereof you will see a minute aperture, just big enough to admit the seemingly useless brass nail. Stick it in and press hard. With an abrupt noise that makes you jump, if you are four or five years old, that smooth, unsuspected strip of panel starts violently forward (propelled by a released spring) and reveals—what? Nothing less than the fronts of two minute drawers. They fit in underneath the pen-tray, and might remain undiscovered for a hundred years unless you had the superhuman wit to divine the purpose of the

brass nail. The drawers contain diamonds, probably, or some closely folded document making you the heir to a vast estate. As a matter of fact, I don't know what they contained; the surprise of the drawers themselves was enough for me. I need not add that I did not guess the riddle myself; but nothing that I can call to mind impressed me more than when, one day, my father solved it for me with his little brass wand. At intervals, afterwards, I was allowed to work the miracle myself, always with the same thrill of mysterious delight. The desk was human to me; it was alive.

There were little square covers for the ink and sand-bottles; and on the under sides of these were painted a pair of faces; very ruddy in the cheeks they were, with staring eyes and smiling mouths; and one of them wore a pair of black side-whiskers. They were done by my father, with oil—colors filched from my mother's paint-box. They seemed to me portraits of the people who lived in the desk; evidently they enjoyed their existence hugely. And when I considered that the desk was also somehow instrumental in the production of stories—such as the Snow Image—of a delectable and magical character, the importance to my mind of the whole contrivance may be conceived. When I grew beyond child's estate, I learned that it had also assisted at the composition of *The Scarlet Letter*. If ever there were a haunted writing-desk, this should have been it; but the ghosts have long since carried it away, whither I know not.

On the table were two ornaments; one, the finely moulded figure of an Egyptian in bronze, the wide Egyptian head-dress falling on the shoulders, the arms lying rigidly at

the sides, with fists clinched. Generations of handling had made it almost black, but the amiable expression of the little countenance—the figure was about seven inches tall—greatly endeared it to me. Its feet were pressed close together on a small round stand; but one day somebody set it down on a hot stove, where it remained without flinching till the feet were melted off. After some years my mother had an ebony stump affixed to it, preserving the proportions of the figure and setting it once more erect. He was of greater endurance and of finer physical if not of moral development than the Tin Soldier of Hans Christian Andersen. The other ornament, less than half the Egyptian's size, and also made of bronze, was a warrior in mediaeval armor, whose head lifted off, showing a sharp-pointed rod the sheath of which was the body. Its use was to pick the wicks of the oil-lamps of that epoch, and its name was Mr. Pickwick. When afterwards I became acquainted with the world's Mr. Pickwick, I supposed his creator had adopted the name from our bronze warrior; but the world's Pickwick was made of stuff more enduring than bronze; he remains, but our little warrior has vanished.

I come now to the human occupant of this chamber of marvels. I see a tall, strong man, whose wide-domed head was covered with wavy black hair, bushing out at the sides. It thinned somewhat over the lofty crown and brow; the forehead was hollowed at the temple and rounded out above, after the Moorish style of architecture. Under heavy, dark eyebrows were eyes deep-set and full of light, marvellous in range of expression, with black eyelashes. All seemed well with me when I met their look. The straight,

rather salient nose had a perceptible cleft at the tip, which, I was told, was a sign of good lineage; muddy-mettled rascals lacked it; so that I was much distressed by the smooth, plebeian bluntness, at that time, of my own little snub. The mouth, then unshaded by a mustache, had a slight upward turn at the corners, indicative of vitality and good-humor; the chin rounded out sharply convex from the lip. The round, strong column of the neck well supported the head; my mother compared it with that of the Apollo Belvedere, a bust of which stood in the corner of our sitting-room. The head was deep—a great distance between the base of the ear and the wing of the nostril—and was well filled out behind. Above the blue of the shaven beard the complexion showed clear white and red, announcing a strong heart and good digestion. My father shaved himself daily; I was not permitted to see the operation, but I knew he lathered, and wondered why. He was naturally athletic; broad-shouldered and deep in the chest, lean about the loins, weighing never over one hundred and eighty pounds; his height was five feet ten and three-quarter inches; his legs and feet were slender and graceful, his gait long and springy, and he could stand and leap as high as his shoulder. In the house he wore slippers, which seemed always old and down-at-heel.

In the house, also, he wore a writing-gown, made for him some years before by my mother; it reached nearly to his heels, and had been a gorgeous affair, though now much defaced. The groundwork was purple, covered all over with conventional palm-leaf in old-gold color; the lining was red. This lining, under the left-hand skirt of the gown, was blackened with ink over a space as large as your hand; for

the author was in the habit of wiping his pen thereon; but my mother finally parried this attack by sewing in the centre of the place a penwiper in the shape of a butterfly.

While story-writing, the door of the study was locked against all the world; but after noon he became approachable, except during The Scarlet Letter period, when he wrote till evening. He did not mind my seeing him write letters; he would sit with his right shoulder and head inclined towards the desk; the quill squeaked softly over the smooth paper, with frequent quick dips into the ink-bottle; a few words would be written swiftly; then a pause, with suspended pen, while the next sentence was forming in the writer's mind. When he miswrote, instead of crossing out the word, he would smear it out with his finger, and rewrite over the smear; so that his page had a mottled appearance. The writing was accompanied by intermittent nods of the head, as one would say, "Sic cogito!" So far as he is concerned, the shadows close in on me here.

But I have said that the house was of three stories, and I have accounted for two of them only. The second was occupied by my grandmother Hawthorne and her two daughters, Aunt Louisa and Aunt Ebe (the latter appellation being an infantile version of her name invented by my father, who was her junior, and used by us to distinguish between her and that other Elizabeth who was Aunt Lizzie Peabody). Of my grandmother Hawthorne I have no personal recollection at all; she was a Manning, a beautiful old lady, whom her son resembled. She had been a recluse from society for forty years; it was held to be good form, in that age and place, to observe such Hindoo rites after the

death of a husband; hers had died in his thirty-fourth year in Surinam. But she had also insensibly fallen into the habit of isolating herself in some degree from her own family; they were all of them addicted to solitude of the body, though kindly enough disposed in the abstract. When we went to live in the Mall Street house, the old lady and her daughters uprooted themselves from their home of many years in Herbert Street and dwelt with us; and that quaint crystallization of their habits was in a measure broken up. But the dowager Mrs. Hawthorne, it soon appeared, had come there to die; she was more than seventy years old. My aunt Louisa I seem dimly to recall as a tall, fragile, pale, amiable figure, not very effective. My aunt Ebe I afterwards came to know well, and shall defer mention of her. So I was encompassed by kindly petticoats, and was very happy, but might have been better for a stout playmate of my own sex. I had a hobby-horse, which I rode constantly to fairy-land in quest of treasure to bestow upon my friends. I swung with Una on the gate, and looked out upon the wonder of the passing world. The tragedy of my grandmother's death, which, as I have said, interrupted the birth of *The Scarlet Letter*, passed me by unknowing, or rather without leaving a trace upon my memory. On the other hand, I can reconstitute vividly two absurd incidents, destitute of historical value. After my grandmother Hawthorne's death I fell ill; but the night before the disease declared itself, I was standing in a chair at the nursery window, looking out at the street-lamp on the corner, and my aunt Lizzie Peabody, who had just come on from Boston, was standing behind me, lest I should fall off. Now, I was normally the most sweet-

tempered little urchin imaginable; yet suddenly, without the faintest warning or provocation, I turned round and dealt my loving aunt a fierce kick in the stomach. It deprived her of breath for a space; but her saintly nature is illustrated by the fact that the very first use she made of her recovered faculties was to gasp out, "Sophie, the child must be ill!" Fortunately for my reputation, the illness was not long in arriving. The other episode must have happened at about the same period, and is likewise concerned with Aunt Lizzie. We had a cat, and the cat had had kittens a day or two before. Aunt Lizzie came into the nursery, where Una and I were building houses of blocks, and sat down in the big easy-chair. The cat was in the room, and she immediately came up to my aunt and began to mew and to pluck at her dress with her claws. Such attentions were rare on pussy's part, and my aunt noticed them with pleasure, and caressed the animal, which still continued to devote its entire attention to her. But there was something odd in the sound of her mewling and in the intent regard of her yellow eyes. "Can anything be the matter with pussy?" speculated my aunt. At that moment my father entered the room, and my aunt rose to greet him. Then the massacre was revealed, for she had been sitting upon the kittens. Their poor mother pounced upon them with a yowl, but it was too late. My dear aunt was rather a heavy woman, and she had been sitting there fifteen minutes. We all stood appalled in the presence of the great mystery.

One day a big man, with a brown beard and shining brown eyes, who bubbled over with enthusiasm and fun, made his appearance and talked volubly about something,



and went away again, and my father and mother smiled at each other. The Scarlet Letter had been written, and James T. Fields had read it, and declared it the greatest book of the age. So that was the last of Salem.



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Horatio Bridge, my father's college friend, was a purser in the navy and lived in Augusta, Maine, his official residence being at Portsmouth. He had kept in closer touch with the romancer than any of his other friends had since their graduating days, and he had been from the first a believer in his coming literary renown. So, when *The Scarlet Letter* shone eminent in the firmament of book-land, it was his triumphant "I-told-you-so" that was among the earliest to be heard. And when my father cast about for a more congenial place than Salem to live in, it was to Bridge that he applied for suggestions. He stipulated that the place should be somewhere along the New England sea-coast.

Had this wish of his been fulfilled it might have made great differences. Hawthorne had always dwelt within sight and sound of the Atlantic, on which his forefathers had sailed so often between the Indies and Salem port, and Atlantic breezes were necessary to his complete well-being. At this juncture physical health had for the first time become an object to him; he was run down by a year of suffering and hard work, and needed nature's kindest offices. A suitable house of his own by the sea-side would probably have brought him up to his best physical condition to begin with, and kept him so; and it would so have endeared itself to him that when, two or three years later, Pierce had offered him a foreign appointment he might have been moved to decline it, and have gone on writing American romances to the end—to the advantage of American letters. Concord had its own attractions; but it never held him as the sea would have done, nor nourished his health, nor stimulated his genius. A house of his own

beside the Atlantic might well have added twenty years to his life.

But it was not upon the knees of the gods.

Bridge's zealous efforts failed to find a place available, and after an uneasy interval, during which his friend wandered uncomfortably about Boston and the neighborhood (incidentally noting down some side-scenes afterwards to be incorporated in *The Blithedale Romance*), a cottage in the Berkshire Hills was spoken of, and upon examination seemed practicable. Lenox, at that time, was as little known as Mount Desert; it was not until long afterwards that fashion found them out and made them uninhabitable to any but fashionable folks. Moreover, my father had seen something of Lenox a dozen years before.

A dozen years before he was not yet betrothed to Sophia Peabody; he already loved her and she him; but her health seemed an insuperable barrier between them. This and certain other matters were weighing heavily upon his soul, and his future seemed dark and uncertain. He thought of taking a voyage round the world; he thought of getting into politics; he even thought—as young men full of life sometimes will—of death. What he finally did, with native good sense, was to make a two-months' trip in the mountainous region to the westward, to change the scene and his state of mind, and to get what artists call a fresh eye. He chose North Adams as his headquarters, and forayed thence in various directions over a radius of twenty miles. He was then beginning to revolve one of the two great romance themes that preoccupied his whole after-life, neither of which was he destined to write. This was the idea

of the Unpardonable Sin; the other was the conception of the Deathless Man. The only essay we have towards the embodiment of the first vision is the short fragment published in Mosses from an Old Manse, called "Ethan Brand." The other was attempted in various forms, of which Septimius, Dr. Grimshawe's Secret, and The Dolliver Romance, all posthumously published, are the most important.

But Stockbridge, Pittsfield, and Lenox had been included among his haunts during the break-away above mentioned, and he remembered that the scenery was beautiful, the situation remote, and the air noble. Next to the sea it seemed an ideal place to recuperate and write in. Thither, at all events, he resolved to go, and early in the summer of 1850 we arrived at the little red house above the shores of Stockbridge Bowl, with bag and baggage. Little though the house was, the bag and baggage were none too much to find easy accommodation in it.

A fair-sized city drawing-room of these sumptuous contemporary days could stow away in a corner the entire structure which then became our habitation, and retain space enough outside it for the exploitation of social functions. Nevertheless, by the simple expedient of making the interior divisions small enough, this liliputian edifice managed to contain eight rooms on its two floors (including the kitchen). One of the rooms was, in fact, the entrance-hall; you stepped into it across the threshold of the outer door, and the staircase ascended from it. It was used as an extension of the drawing-room, which opened out of it. The drawing-room adjoined the dining-room, with windows

facing the west, with a view of the mountains across the lake, and the dining-room communicated with the kitchen. One of the western-looking up-stairs rooms served as my father's study; my sister Una had her chamber, I mine (which was employed as the guest-chamber upon occasion), and our parents the other. What more could be asked? for when Rose was born, her crib stood beside her mother's bedstead.

When we were not asleep—that is, during twelve hours out of the twenty-four—Una's existence and mine were passed mainly in the outer sitting-room and in the dining-room. There was plenty to entertain us. I had my rocking-horse, which I bestrode with perfect fearlessness; my porcelain lion, which still survives unscathed after the cataclysms of half a century; my toy sloop, made for me by Uncle Nat; and a jack-knife, all but the edge and point, which had been removed out of deference to my youth. Una had a doll, a miniature mahogany centre-table and bureau, and other things in which I felt no interest. In common, we possessed the box of wooden bricks, and the big portfolio containing tracings by my mother, exquisitely done, of Flaxman's "Outlines of the Iliad and Odyssey" and other classic subjects. We knew by heart the story of all these mythological personages, and they formed a large part of our life. They also served the important use of suggesting to my father his Wonder-Book and Tanglewood Tales stories, and, together with the figures of Gothic fairy-lore, they were the only playmates, with the exception of our father and mother, that we had or desired.

But our father and mother were, of course, the main thing, after all. She was with us all day long; he, from the time he stopped writing, early in the afternoon, till our bedtime. They answered all our questions about things animate and inanimate, physical and metaphysical; and that must have taken time, for our curiosity was magnificent; and "The Old Boy," my father records, "asked me today what were sensible questions—I suppose with a view to asking me some." They superintended our projections of creation on the black-board—a great, old-fashioned black-board, the like of which I have not since beheld; they read to us and told us stories. Many of these stories were of incidents of their own child-life; and there was also the narrative of our mother's voyage to Cuba and back, and residence there when she was about eighteen or twenty—a fascinating chronicle. Meal-times were delectable festivals, not only because the bread-and-milk, the boiled rice and tapioca pudding, and eggs and fruit tasted so good, but by reason of the broad outlook out of window over the field, the wood, the lake, and the mountains; supper-time, with the declining sun pouring light into the little room and making the landscape glorious, was especially exhilarating. Ambrosial was the bread baked by Mrs. Peters, the taciturn and serious religious person of color who attended to our cooking; the prize morsels were the ends, golden brown in hue, crunching so crisply between our teeth. I used to wonder how a being with hands so dark as those of Mrs. Peters managed to turn out dough so immaculate. She would plunge them right into the ivory-hued substance, yet it became only whiter than before. But the life of life was, of course, out-doors. There was a barn