JULIAN HAWTHORNE

CONFESSIONS AND CRITICISMS

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CHAPTER I.

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A PRELIMINARY CONFESSION.

In 1869, when I was about twenty-three years old, I sent a couple of sonnets to the revived *Putnam's Magazine*. At that period I had no intention of becoming a professional writer: I was studying civil engineering at the Polytechnic School in Dresden, Saxony. Years before, I had received parental warnings—unnecessary, as I thought—against writing for a living. During the next two years, however, when I was acting as hydrographic engineer in the New York Dock Department, I amused myself by writing a short story, called "Love and Counter-Love," which was published in *Harper's Weekly*, and for which I was paid fifty dollars. "If fifty dollars can be so easily earned," I thought, "why not go on adding to my income in this way from time to time?" I was aided and abetted in the idea by the late Robert Carter, editor of *Appletons' Journal*; and the latter periodical and *Harper's Magazine* had the burden, and I the benefit, of the result. When, in 1872, I was abruptly relieved from my duties in the Dock Department, I had the alternative of either taking my family down to Central America to watch me dig a canal, or of attempting to live by my pen. I bought twelve reams of large letter-paper, and began my first work,

—"Bressant." I finished it in three weeks; but prudent counsellors advised me that it was too immoral to publish, except in French: so I recast it, as the phrase is, and, in its chastened state, sent it through the post to a Boston publisher. It was lost on the way, and has not yet been found. I was rather pleased than otherwise at this catastrophe; for I had in those days a strange delight in rewriting my productions: it was, perhaps, a more sensible practice than to print them. Accordingly, I rewrote and enlarged "Bressant" in Dresden (whither I returned with my family in 1872); but—immorality aside—I think the first version was the best of the three. On my way to Germany I passed through London, and there made the acquaintance of Henry S. King, the publisher, a charming but imprudent man, for he paid me one hundred pounds for the English copyright of my novel: and the moderate edition he printed is, I believe, still unexhausted. The book was received in a kindly manner by the press; but both in this country and in England some surprise and indignation were expressed that the son of his father should presume to be a novelist. This sentiment, whatever its bearing upon me, has undoubtedly been of service to my critics: it gives them something to write about. A disquisition upon the mantle of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and an analysis of the differences and similarities between him and his successor, generally fill so much of a notice as to enable the reviewer to dismiss the book itself very briefly. I often used to wish, when, years afterwards, I was myself a reviewer for the London *Spectator*, that I could light upon some son of his father who might similarly lighten my labors. Meanwhile, I was

agreeably astonished at what I chose to consider the success of "Bressant," and set to work to surpass it in another romance, called (for some reason I have forgotten) "Idolatry." This unknown book was actually rewritten, in whole or in part, no less than seven times. *Non sum qualis eram*. For seven or eight years past I have seldom rewritten one of the many pages which circumstances have compelled me to inflict upon the world. But the discipline of "Idolatry" probably taught me how to clothe an idea in words.

By the time "Idolatry" was published, the year 1874 had come, and I was living in London. From my note-books and recollections I compiled a series of papers on life in Dresden, under the general title of "Saxon Studies." Alexander Strahan, then editor of the *Contemporary Review*, printed them in that periodical as fast as I wrote them, and they were reproduced in certain eclectic magazines in this country,—until I asserted my American copyright. Their publication in book form was followed by the collapse of both the English and the American firm engaging in that enterprise. I draw no deductions from that fact: I simply state it. The circulation of the "Studies" was naturally small; but one copy fell into the hands of a Dresden critic, and the manner in which he wrote of it and its author repaid me for the labor of composition and satisfied me that I had not done amiss.

After "Saxon Studies" I began another novel, "Garth," instalments of which appeared from month to month in *Harper's Magazine*. When it had run for a year or more, with no signs of abatement, the publishers felt obliged to

intimate that unless I put an end to their misery they would. Accordingly, I promptly gave Garth his quietus. The truth is, I was tired of him myself. With all his qualities and virtues, he could not help being a prig. He found some friends, however, and still shows signs of vitality. I wrote no other novel for nearly two years, but contributed some sketches of English life to *Appletons' Journal*, and produced a couple of novelettes,—"Mrs. Gainsborough's Diamonds" and "Archibald Malmaison,"—which, by reason of their light draught, went rather farther than usual. Other short tales, which I hardly care to recall, belong to this period. I had already ceased to take pleasure in writing for its own sake,—partly, no doubt, because I was obliged to write for the sake of something else. Only those who have no reverence for literature should venture to meddle with the making of it,—unless, at all events, they can supply the demands of the butcher and baker from an independent source.

In 1879, "Sebastian Strome" was published as a serial in *All the Year Round*. Charley Dickens, the son of the great novelist, and editor of the magazine, used to say to me while the story was in progress, "Keep that red-haired girl up to the mark, and the story will do." I took a fancy to Mary Dene myself. But I uniformly prefer my heroines to my heroes; perhaps because I invent the former out of whole cloth, whereas the latter are often formed of shreds and patches of men I have met. And I never raised a character to the position of hero without recognizing in him, before I had done with him, an egregious ass. Differ as they may in other respects, they are all brethren in that; and yet I am by

no means disposed to take a Carlylese view of my actual fellow-creatures.

I did some hard work at this time: I remember once writing for twenty-six consecutive hours without pausing or rising from my chair; and when, lately, I re-read the story then produced, it seemed quite as good as the average of my work in that kind. I hasten to add that it has never been printed in this country: for that matter, not more than half my short tales have found an American publisher. "Archibald Malmaison" was offered seven years ago to all the leading publishers in New York and Boston, and was promptly refused by all. Since its recent appearance here, however, it has had a circulation larger perhaps than that of all my other stories combined. But that is one of the accidents that neither author nor publisher can foresee. It was the horror of "Archibald Malmaison," not any literary merit, that gave it vogue,—its horror, its strangeness, and its brevity.

On Guy Fawkes's day, 1880, I began "Fortune's Fool,"—or "Luck," as it was first called,—and wrote the first ten of the twelve numbers in three months. I used to sit down to my table at eight o'clock in the evening and write till sunrise. But the two remaining instalments were not written and published until 1883, and this delay and its circumstances spoiled the book. In the interval between beginning and finishing it another long novel—"Dust"—was written and published. I returned to America in 1882, after an absence in Europe far longer than I had anticipated or desired. I trust I may never leave my native land again for any other on this planet.

"Beatrix Randolph," "Noble Blood," and "Love—or a Name," are the novels which I have written since my return; and I also published a biography, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife." I cannot conscientiously say that I have found the literary profession—in and for itself—entirely agreeable. Almost everything that I have written has been written from necessity; and there is very little of it that I shall not be glad to see forgotten. The true rewards of literature, for men of limited calibre, are the incidental ones,—the valuable friendships and the charming associations which it brings about. For the sake of these I would willingly endure again many passages of a life that has not been all roses; not that I would appear to belittle my own work: it does not need it. But the present generation (in America at least) does not strike me as containing much literary genius. The number of undersized persons is large and active, and we hardly believe in the possibility of heroic stature. I cannot sufficiently admire the pains we are at to make our work—embodying the aims it does—immaculate in form. Form without idea is nothing, and we have no ideas. If one of us were to get an idea, it would create its own form, as easily as does a flower or a planet. I think we take ourselves too seriously: our posterity will not be nearly so grave over us. For my part, I do not write better than I do, because I have no ideas worth better clothes than they can pick up for themselves. "Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing with your best pains," is a saying which has injured our literature more than any other single thing. How many a lumber-closet since the world began has been filled by the results of this purblind and delusive theory! But this is not

autobiographical,—save that to have written it shows how little prudence my life has taught me.

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I remember wondering, in 1871, how anybody could write novels. I had produced two or three short stories; but to expand such a thing until it should cover two or three hundred pages seemed an enterprise far beyond my capacity. Since then, I have accomplished the feat only too often; but I doubt whether I have a much clearer idea than before of the way it is done; and I am certain of never having done it twice in the same way. The manner in which the plant arrives at maturity varies according to the circumstances in which the seed is planted and cultivated; and the cultivator, in this instance at least, is content to adapt his action to whatever conditions happen to exist.

While, therefore, it might be easy to formulate a cut-and-dried method of procedure, which should be calculated to produce the best results by the most efficient means, no such formula would truly represent the present writer's actual practice. If I ever attempted to map out my successive steps beforehand, I never adhered to the forecast or reached the anticipated goal. The characters develop unexpected traits, and these traits become the parents of incidents that had not been contemplated. The characters themselves, on the other hand, cannot be kept to any preconceived characteristics; they are, in their turn, modified by the exigencies of the plot.

In two or three cases I have tried to make portraits of real persons whom I have known; but these persons have always been more lifeless than the others, and most lifeless in

precisely those features that most nearly reproduced life. The best results in this direction are realized by those characters that come to their birth simultaneously with the general scheme of the proposed events; though I remember that one of the most lifelike of my personages (Madge, in the novel "Garth") was not even thought of until the story of which she is the heroine had been for some time under consideration.

Speaking generally, I should suppose that the best novels are apt to be those that have been longest in the novelist's mind before being committed to paper; and the best materials to use, in the way of character and scenery, are those that were studied not less than seven or eight years previous to their reproduction. Thereby is attained that quality in a story known as atmosphere or tone, perhaps the most valuable and telling quality of all. Occasionally, however, in the rare case of a story that suddenly seizes upon the writer's imagination and despotically "possesses" him, the atmosphere is created by the very strength of the "possession." In the former instance, the writer is thoroughly master of his subject; in the latter, the subject thoroughly masters him; and both amount essentially to the same thing, harmony between subject and writer.

With respect to style, there is little to be said. Without a good style, no writer can do much; but it is impossible really to create a good style. A writer's style was born at the same time and under the same conditions that he himself was. The only rule that can be given him is, to say what he has to say in the clearest and most direct way, using the most fitting and expressive words. But often, of course, this

advice is like that of the doctor who counsels his patient to free his mind from all care and worry, to live luxuriously on the fat of the land, and to make a voyage round the world in a private yacht. The patient has not the means of following the prescription. A writer may improve a native talent for style; but the talent itself he must either have by nature, or forever go without. And the style that rises to the height of genius is like the Phoenix; there is hardly ever more than one example of it in an age.

Upon the whole, I conceive that the best way of telling how a novel may be written will be to trace the steps by which some one novel of mine came into existence, and let the reader draw his own conclusions from the record. For this purpose I will select one of the longest of my productions, "Fortune's Fool."

It is so long that, rather than be compelled to read it over again, I would write another of equal length; though I hasten to add that neither contingency is in the least probable. In very few men is found the power of sustained conception necessary to the successful composition of so prolix a tale; and certainly I have never betrayed the ownership of such a qualification. The tale, nevertheless, is an irrevocable fact; and my present business it is to be its biographer.

When, in the winter of 1879, the opportunity came to write it, the central idea of it had been for over a year cooking in my mind. It was originally derived from a dream. I saw a man who, upon some occasion, caught a glimpse of a woman's face. This face was, in his memory, the ideal of beauty, purity, and goodness. Through many years and

vicissitudes he sought it; it was his religion, a human incarnation of divine qualities.

At certain momentous epochs of his career, he had glimpses of it again; and the effect was always to turn him away from the wrong path and into the right. At last, near the end of his life, he has, for the first time, an opportunity of speaking to this mortal angel and knowing her; and then he discovers that she is mortal indeed, and chargeable with the worst frailties of mortality. The moral was that any substitute for a purely spiritual religion is fatal, and, sooner or later, reveals its rottenness.

This seemed good enough for a beginning; but, when I woke up, I was not long in perceiving that it would require various modifications before being suitable for a novel; and the first modifications must be in the way of rendering the plot plausible. What sort of a man, for example, must the hero be to fall into and remain in such an error regarding the character of the heroine? He must, I concluded, be a person of great simplicity and honesty of character, with a strong tinge of ideality and imagination, and with little or no education.

These considerations indicated a person destitute of known parentage, and growing up more or less apart from civilization, but possessing by nature an artistic or poetic temperament. Fore-glimpses of the further development of the story led me to make him the child of a wealthy English nobleman, but born in a remote New England village. His artistic proclivities must be inherited from his father, who was, therefore, endowed with a talent for amateur sketching in oils; which talent, again, led him, during his minority, to

travel on the continent for purposes of artistic study. While in Paris, this man, Floyd Vivian, meets a young Frenchwoman, whom he secretly marries, and with whom he elopes to America. Then Vivian receives news of his father's death, compelling him to return to England; and he leaves his wife behind him.

A child (Jack, the hero of the story) is born during his absence, and the mother dies. Vivian, now Lord Castleman, finds reason to believe that his wife is dead, but knows nothing of the boy; and he marries again. The boy, therefore, is left to grow up in the Maine woods, ignorant of his parentage, but with one or two chances of finding it out hereafter. So far, so good.

But now it was necessary to invent a heroine for this hero. In order to make the construction compact, I made her Jack's cousin, the daughter, of Lord Vivian's younger brother, who came into being for that purpose. This brother (Murdock) was a black sheep; and his daughter, Madeleine, was adopted by Lord Vivian, because I now perceived that Lord Vivian's conscience was going to trouble him with regard to his dead wife and her possible child, and that he would make a pilgrimage to New England to settle his doubts, taking Madeleine with him; intending, if no child by the first marriage were forthcoming, to make Madeleine his heir; for he had no issue by his second marriage. This journey would enable Jack and Madeleine to meet as children. But it was necessary that they should have no suspicion of their cousinship. Consequently, Lord Vivian, who alone could acquaint them with this fact, must die in

the very act of learning it himself. And what should be the manner of his death?

At first, I thought he should be murdered by his younger brother; but I afterwards hit upon another plan, that seemed less hackneyed and provided more interesting issues. Murdock should arrive at the Maine village at the same time as Lord Vivian, and upon the same errand, to get hold of Lord Vivian's son, of whose existence he had heard, and whom he wished to get out of the way, in order that his own daughter, Madeleine, might inherit the property. Murdock should find Jack, and Jack, a mere boy, should kill him, though not, of course, intentionally, or even consciously (for which purpose the machinery of the Witch's Head was introduced).

With Murdock's death, the papers that he carried, proving Jack's parentage, should disappear, to be recovered long afterward, when they were needed. Lord Vivian should quietly expire at the same time, of heart disease (to which he was forthwith made subject), and Madeleine should be left temporarily to her own devices. Thus was brought about her meeting with Jack in the cave. It was their first meeting; and Jack must remember her face, so as to recognize her when they meet, years later, in England. But, as it was beyond belief that the girl's face should resemble the woman's enough to make such a recognition possible, I devised the miniature portrait of her mother, which Madeleine gave to Jack for a keepsake, and which was the image of what Madeleine herself should afterward become.

Something more was needed, however, to complete the situation; and to meet this exigency, I created M. Jacques

Malgré, the grandfather of Jack, who had followed his daughter to America, in the belief that she had been seduced by Vivian; who had brought up Jack, hating him for his father's sake, and loving him for his mother's sake; and who dwelt year after year in the Maine village, hoping some day to wreak his vengeance upon the seducer. But when M. Malgré and Vivian at last meet, this revenge is balked by the removal of its supposed motive; Vivian having actually married Malgré's daughter, and being prepared to make Jack heir of Castlemere. Moral: "'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord, 'I will repay.'"

The groundwork of the story was now sufficiently denned. Madeleine and Jack were born and accounted for. They had met and made friends with each other without either knowing who the other was; they were rival claimants for the same property, and would hereafter contend for it; still, without identifying each other as the little boy and girl that had met by chance in the cave so long ago. In the meanwhile, there might be personal meetings, in which they should recognize each other as persons though not by name; and should thus be cementing their friendship as man and woman, while, as Jack Vivian and Madeleine, they were at open war in the courts of law.

This arrangement would need careful handling to render it plausible; but it could be done. I am now of opinion, however, that I should have done well to have given up the whole fundamental idea of the story, as suggested by the dream. The dream had done its office when it had provided me with characters and materials for a more probable and less abstruse and difficult plot. All further dependence upon

it should then have been relinquished, and the story allowed to work out its own natural and unforced conclusion. But it is easy to be wise after the event; and the event, at this time, was still in the future.

As Madeleine was to be the opposite of the sinless, ideal woman that Jack was to imagine her to be, it was necessary to subject her to some evil influence; and this influence was embodied in the form of Bryan Sinclair, who, though an afterthought, came to be the most powerful figure in the story. But, before he would bring himself to bear upon her, she must have reached womanhood; and I also perceived that Jack must become a man before the action of the story, as between him and Madeleine, could continue. An interval of ten or fifteen years must therefore occur; and this was arranged by sending Jack into the western wilderness of California, and fixing the period as just preceding the date of the California gold fever of '49.

Jack and Bryan were to be rivals for Madeleine; but artistic considerations seemed to require that they should first meet and become friends much in the same way that Jack and Madeleine had done. So I sent Bryan to California, and made him the original discoverer of the precious metal there; brought him and Jack together; and finally sent them to England in each other's company. Jack, of course, as yet knows nothing of his origin, and appears in London society merely as a natural genius and a sculptor of wild animals.

By this time, I had begun to make Madeleine's acquaintance, and, in consequence, to doubt the possibility of her becoming wholly evil, even under the influence of Bryan Sinclair. There would be a constant struggle between

them; she would love him, but would not yield to him, though her life and happiness would be compromised by his means. He, on the other hand, would love her, and he would make some effort to be worthy of her; but his other crimes would weigh him down, until, at the moment when the battle cost her her life, he should be destroyed by the incarnation of his own wickedness, in the shape of Tom Berne.

This was not the issue that I had originally designed, and, whether better or worse than that, did not harmonize with what had gone before. The story lacked wholeness and continuous vitality. As a work of art, it was a failure. But I did not realize this fact until it was too late, and probably should not have known how to mend matters had it been otherwise. One of the dangers against which a writer has especially to guard is that of losing his sense of proportion in the conduct of a story. An episode that has little relative importance may be allowed undue weight, because it seems interesting intrinsically, or because he has expended special pains upon it. It is only long afterward, when he has become cool and impartial, if not indifferent or disgusted, that he can see clearly where the faults of construction lie.

I need not go further into the details of the story. Enough has been said to give a clew to what might remain to say. I began to write it in the winter of 1879-80, in London; and, in order to avoid noise and interruption, it was my custom to begin writing at eight in the evening, and continue at work until six or seven o'clock the next morning. In three months I had written as far as the 393d page, in the American edition. The remaining seventy pages were not completed,

in their published form, until about three years later, an extraordinary delay, which did not escape censure at the time, and into the causes of which I will not enter here.

The title of the story also underwent various vicissitudes. The one first chosen was "Happy Jack"; but that was objected to as suggesting, to an English ear at least, a species of cheap Jack or rambling peddler. The next title fixed upon was "Luck"; but before this could be copyrighted, somebody published a story called "Luck, and What Came of It," and thereby invalidated my briefer version. For several weeks, I was at a loss what to call it; but one evening, at a representation of "Romeo and Juliet," I heard the exclamation of *Romeo*, "Oh, I am fortune's fool!" and immediately appropriated it to my own needs. It suited the book well enough, in more ways than one.