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Nathaniel Hawthorne: An oration delivered before the alumni of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, July 10, 1878

Joseph White Symonds

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NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

BOWDOIN COLLEGE,

1878.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.



AN ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ALUMNI OF BOWDOIN COLLEGE,

BRUNSWICK, MAINE, JULY 10, 1878,

BY

JOSEPH W. SYMONDS.



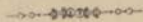
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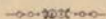
1878.



STEPHEN BERRY, PRINTER.



ORATION.



BRETHREN OF THE BOWDOIN ALUMNI, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

It is true, I apprehend, at least of those of us who after long absence revisit this seat of learning, that we come to remember the dead, not less than to rejoin the living. We renew with delight our intimacy with those who return, while across the intervening distances affection and memory go, to join hands with those who shall not return again. There are footsteps here which do not press the green of the fields; in many a favorite haunt, faces, long unseen, glimmer upon our thought in the splendor of noonday, or brighten out of the haunted darkness; while forms of men, unknown or forgotten of the world, glide silently among the loitering strangers who do not observe them, and walk arm in arm with us along "the gleam and shadow" of familiar paths. In the silence of these halls, or in the midst

of whatever tumult may fill them now, to us they are echoing still with sounds that fall more and more faintly in the distance;—with voices, perhaps, that long ago died away into the realms of memory. And when the joy is at its best, and the procession moves to the gladdest strain, our real selves, like shades, turn sadly aside from the gladsome march—as if to carry flowers to a grave.

Nor do our thoughts dwell only within the domain of personal recollection. The traditions of the college are our inheritance. The halo of early dreaming was over them all, when first we journeyed hither. They made part of the enchantment of college life. They greet us on every return. Imagination ranges farther than memory. Here is the goal, gleaming in every retrospect, where men, in the dew of their strength, have been accustomed to loiter, impatiently awaiting the signal for them to join the race;—men, too, whose influence lingers as a potent spell in this air, although their shadows had ceased to fall upon these breezy walks long before our feet had trod them. We do not see them all. They who have become immortal veil their faces when they walk among men. No vista, even of thought, here stretches back into the silent or legendary gloom of antiquity, but there *are* associations which illumine these scenes

with light from vanished faces, with the radiance of noble lives. These are the altars, blazing still with the consecrated flame, where for generations thought has been kindled, and character tempered to finer quality and moulded to statelier form. They shall not fall. The faith that reared them shall not fail. Silently, one by one it may be, the votaries come; but the golden chain of their succession shall not be broken off.

Yet, in the retrospect, we do not all look upon the same picture. In the foreground, and in clearer light, each sees the figures and events of his own time. No cloud obscures them;—while grouped around these, in more shadowy outline, but present in every picture that here passes before the imagination, stand the men whose genius and fame have become a part of our common inheritance.

And among these, somewhat aloof from the group, in the seclusion of a strange experience, with a shadow resting upon his face, that might be of a passing cloud, but does not pass, intent, absorbed, as if he had questioned guilt and sorrow for their darkest secret and was awaiting reply, or as if he were following to the utmost verge of thought the threads of sombre hue on which human life is woven in woof of changeful light and shade, however memory may

recall or fancy may paint him, will forever remain the noble presence of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

His life may be briefly sketched. You know it well. He was born in 1804. His inheritance from a line of ancestors who had lived in Salem nearly two centuries, taken all in all, was a sinister one, but it included, among its gifts of fortune, physical strength and a strong type of manly beauty. Mr. Fields, who was with him in England, heard it remarked in literary circles in London, that since Robert Burns no author had appeared there with so fine a face as Hawthorne's. When he lived in the little red farm-house in Lenox, his appearance suggested the idea of a "banished lord"; and Curtis, describing his personal presence, speaks of him as "a kind of poetic Webster." As a boy, he was full of health and spirit, fond of the open air, and mused and talked of vague adventures at sea. This love of the sea was an inherited passion, which never expired. In 1860, on his return from England, he said to a friend who was sea-sick: "I should like to sail on and on forever, and never touch the shore again."

He was not averse to books, and, at an early age, an accidental lameness, which held him a prisoner from his sports for several years, doubtless quickened his

taste for reading. The books within his reach were those to be found in New England homes seventy years ago, unless we except Rousseau and the Newgate Calendar, which he is said to have read before he was fourteen. Shakespeare, Milton, Johnson, Pope, Thomson and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* made part of his early reading, while over the *Pilgrim's Progress* he would muse by the hour without once speaking. The strength of this early impression, the profound influence of the story of Christian's pilgrimage upon his mind, is strikingly apparent in his works.

"The Celestial Railroad," one of the "Mosses," on which, in a dream, he takes passage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, in the pleasant company of one Mr. Smooth-it-away, is but a new chapter of Bunyan, with its moral for a later age. He lingers at Vanity Fair, and wakes from his dream when the wheels of the ferry, at the farther end of the route, dash over him the spray from the cold waters of the river of death.

But it is not in the form of his works that the boy's deep musing over the great allegory may be traced, so much as it is in the subjects to which it directed his attention and the tone with which it infused his thought. Sin, evil, outward-seeming

good with a nucleus of guilt at its heart, sorrow, calamity, death, the dark enigmas of life, a dusky throng, floated into view.

He was early familiar with the Bible, and, in later life, often justified the use of a particular word by repeating a passage from it. There were thrown in his way, too, in those days, I imagine, more austere books, from the pages of which religion casts gloom, rather than light, on human life.

But while he had all the healthfulness, and, in a certain sense, the happiness of childhood, there was early developed a love of solitude which abstracted him even from the society of his fellows at school. Long rambles, alone, were his favorite school-boy pastime. His father, a sea captain, died abroad of fever in 1808. Hawthorne's earliest thought of him must have been of one who had sailed away never to return. It was an event that bore upon its gloomy wings not only the darkness of mystery, but the burden of perpetual loss. He died young, without fortune. Day by day, year by year, the boy grew into a consciousness of the hopes that had perished on the distant shore. The tendrils of thought, aspiring to the light, found only a dark and mysterious phase of life to cling to. It shows either a native tendency, or the effect of this early experience, that,

in his reading, a gloomy but picturesque phrase always arrested his attention and remained in his memory. One of his favorite quotations was the line from Richard III:—

“Stand back, my lord, and let the coffin pass.”

Fancy was already flitting in dark places. Among the mental visitors were already they who veiled their beauty in sombre guise.

Hawthorne remembered his mother while she was yet young and beautiful, but he may never have seen her face when there was not a sadness even in her smile. She lived in the seclusion of mourning, never forgetting the moment when, in place of the joyous hopes with which she had freighted her husband's ship, there were left only a sense of dependence and the heart-break of widowhood. Sensitive, refined, of strong susceptibility to emotion, of devout faith, cherishing only her children and her husband's memory, it is not strange, if it is true, that to her, in the midst of this experience, even religion spoke with new solemnity in its voice, was not free from gloom, and, in minute regard for days and forms and fasts, seemed to walk the darker ways of superstition. How profoundly Hawthorne was affected by his mother's grief, and the depth of his sympathy for her, may be seen in many passages of his writings;

perhaps most strikingly in the exquisite pathos of the Twice-Told Tale, "The Wives of the Dead." Mary, whose husband is reported drowned at sea, is described asleep, with a look of motionless contentment upon her face, "as if her heart, like a deep lake, had grown calm because its dead had sunk down so far within."

At the age of fourteen, Hawthorne came to reside with his mother in the house which her brothers had built for her on their new lands in Maine—a large house, the walls of which are still standing, near the shores of Sebago Lake, in Raymond. He lived there several years, at different times, including some of the vacations of his college course. They were days of delight. With gun or fishing-rod in hand, he wandered at will through the unbroken forest, skirted the shores of the lake in his boat, watching the lights and shadows on near and distant mountains, or, in winter, when the moonlight was on the ice, skated alone till midnight, building fires to chase the black shadows of the forest from the shores.

"Ah," he exclaimed, during the last year of his life, "how well I recall the summer days when, with my gun, I roamed at will through the woods of Maine. I lived like a bird of the air, so perfect was the freedom I enjoyed."

He has referred to this as the happiest period of his life. He grew tall and strong, and had the vigor and freshness of youth and the open air. There was stimulus to the imagination, too, in the life he led and in its surroundings of natural objects. The mountains, "blue with loftiness and distance," were on every hand. A vein of the supernatural ran through the legends of the primitive people. There were more real terrors in the woods, and more of the lore of witchcraft and superstition lingered in them, then than now. Fables of ghosts and haunted houses, and enchanted trees, and familiar spirits, were more common and less devoid of meaning. From a pulpit-rock in the neighborhood, the devil was said to have preached, and, at the stamping of his foot, the entire congregation sank in the swamp at its base.

Slight influences these; but slight influences may affect the drift of a boy's thought. The interior impulse remaining the same, its course may be almost unconsciously changed. We know that, in mature life, Hawthorne found a fascination for himself, and for his readers as well, in the unreal realm.

There is still another feature of his life at Raymond. It was very solitary. "It was there," he exclaims, in a moment of unreserve, "it was there I first got my cursed habits of solitude." The grand

hermitage of nature was around him, and he sought out its most secret haunts of beauty and unbroken silence, while in his heart and at his home there was the loneliness of sorrow. This experience strengthened a tendency that had already too strong a root in his own nature. It had in it an element of harm to himself, whatever may be the wealth it has added to our literature. He needed the sunshine and ripple of life more than the gloom of the pine woods, or the sound of the voices that whisper mournfully in mountain glens.

In the preface to "The Snow Image," addressed to his friend Horatio Bridge, Hawthorne has given a pleasant picture of his life at Bowdoin. "I know not," he says, "whence your faith came; but, while we were lads together at college, gathering blueberries, in study hours, under those tall academic pines, or watching the great logs as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin, or shooting pigeons and gray squirrels in the woods, or bat-fowling in the summer twilight, or catching trouts in that shadowy little stream which, I suppose, is still wardering riverward through the forest, though you and I will never cast a line in it again,—two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things that the faculty never

heard of, or else it had been the worse for us,—still it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny, that he was to be a writer of fiction."

I have found but few details of his career at Bowdoin. He was a member of the Athenæan Society, and, in December, 1823, read a Latin theme before it, which is still preserved. He was a private soldier in a college military company, of which Franklin Pierce was an officer. He was fined fifty cents for playing cards for money, and President Allen wrote to his mother that her advice might be beneficial to him.

In Hawthorne's letter to his mother, he draws the distinction that he did not play for money, but for a quart of wine; and he adds, "If I had told the President that, he would probably have fined me for having a blow." (The term "blow," as Mr. Lathrop, in his "Study of Hawthorne," suggests, being probably an abbreviated form of expression for what, to a later generation, was known as a "blow-out.") "There was no untruth in the case," Hawthorne adds, in his letter to his mother, "as the wine cost fifty cents," that being the amount of money for which he was charged with playing.

An old term bill shows that he was also fined twenty cents for neglect of theme.

Notwithstanding the idleness to which he refers in the letter to Bridge, he graduated well in the famous class of 1825. His rank entitled him to a part at Commencement, except that his persistent neglect of declamation, and his own tastes, prevented his making his appearance in public.

In "Fanshawe," an anonymous romance published three years after he left college (which he endeavored to suppress, but which now appears among his collected works), the scene is laid at Harley College, the President and two students are among the characters, and it is not difficult to trace, in its incidents and descriptions, many things that might have been suggested by his residence here.

There are but few other allusions to his college life in his works or published letters. I will not dwell upon it. There are those among you who remember him here. And I have the honor to speak to-day in the presence of a venerable man,* from whose lips, by precept and by example, Hawthorne learned more than half a century ago, the charmed secret of grace and elegance of diction, and from whom the world has been glad to learn that, in Hawthorne's college themes, and in his renderings

* Professor Packard.

from the ancient classics, there was even then the promise of that matchless simplicity and brilliancy of style in which his later works are written ; a style so pure that it seems a new element, in which the airiest creatures of the imagination may play at will, in all the lightness of motion, in the wavy grace of flowing and vanishing outlines.

For twelve years after graduation, Hawthorne led a life of absolute seclusion. Writing to Longfellow in 1837, alluding to their last meeting at Bowdoin, he says: "Ever since that time I have secluded myself from society ; and yet I never meant any such thing, nor dreamed what sort of life I was going to lead. I have made a captive of myself, and put me into a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out, and if the door were open I should be almost afraid to come out."

"There is no fate in this world," he continues, "so horrible as to have no share in either its joys or sorrows. For the last ten years I have not lived, but only dreamed of living. It may be true that there have been some unsubstantial pleasures in the shade, which I might have missed in the sunshine, but you cannot conceive how utterly devoid of satisfaction all my retrospects are. I have laid up no treasures of pleasant remembrances against old age ;

but there is some comfort in thinking that future years can hardly fail to be more varied and, therefore, more tolerable than the past."

Late in life he speaks of "the heavy seclusion in which I shut myself up for twelve years after leaving college, when everybody moved onward and left me behind."

And again: "I am disposed to thank God for the gloom and chill of my early life, in the hope that my share of adversity came then, when I bore it alone."

In 1840, at his old room in Salem, he writes: "And now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolts and bars; for if I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude.

* * * But living in solitude till the fullness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth and the freshness of my heart."

He was a recluse even from his mother and sisters. He frequently failed to join the family circle even at table. He walked the streets of the city at night—was rarely seen upon them by day. Of the room in which, during those years, he used to sit alone,

musings, reading, studying, the wings of fancy busy in far and strange flight, he wrote afterwards, "This claims to be called a haunted chamber, for thousands upon thousands of visions have appeared to me in it; and some few of them have become visible to the world. If ever I should have a biographer, he ought to make great mention of this chamber in my memoirs, because so much of my lonely youth was wasted here; and here my mind and character were formed; and here I have been glad and hopeful, and here I have been despondent. And here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all, at least, till I were in my grave. And sometimes it seemed as if I were already in the grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed. But oftener I was happy—at least, as happy as I then knew how to be, or was aware of the possibility of being. By and by the world found me out in my lonely chamber and called me forth—not, indeed, with a loud roar of acclamation, but rather with a still, small voice—and forth I went, but found nothing in the world that I thought preferable to my old solitude till now."

Long, solitary walks at night, in the city or for

miles along the shore, divided his time with the teeming solitude of his chamber.

“After a time,” he says in the “Night Sketches,” “the visions vanish and will not appear again at my bidding. Then, it being night-fall, a gloomy sense of unreality depresses my spirits, and impels me to venture out before the clock shall strike bed-time, to satisfy myself that the world is not entirely made up of such shadowy materials as have busied me throughout the day. A dreamer may dwell so long among fantasies, that the things without him will seem as unreal as those within.”

Thus he sought relief, I imagine, from too intense a vitality of thought or from the gloom and chill which come when the imagination is dim and vacant after too bright a glow; and so, during this dark and troublous period, he kept his mind healthful and clear. His “four precepts: to break customs; to shake off spirits ill-disposed; to meditate on youth; to do nothing against one’s genius,” indicate the same mental vigor.

But it is curious to reflect, by what a strange throng, of his own creation, he must have been accompanied on his lonely walks. Perhaps an old Puritan divine, with the governor and the selectmen of Boston, in plain, patriarchal garb, discoursed with

him about the doings of Satan in the town of Salem ; or the two lovers, with their dark companion, may have passed him, in their vain pursuit for a spot of earth free from wrong and sorrow, whereon to build their Temple of Happiness. The seven vagabonds, the revelers at Merry Mount, the motley adventurers who sought the blazing gem among the mountains, may have shrunk back as they saw the minister with the black veil in their midst, or heard the sound of the wedding knell. These, and throngs of stranger fancies, attended him on his way.

The intensity of his solitude, during this period, can only be felt by reading his own record of his inner life, and the stories in which strange phases of it appear.

“ I was like a man talking to himself in a dark room,” he says.

“ To think, as the sun goes down, what events have happened in the course of the day,—events of ordinary occurrence ; as, the clocks have struck, the dead have been buried ; ”

“ A recluse like myself, or a prisoner, to measure time by the progress of sunshine through his chamber ; ”

“ The journal of a human heart for a single day in

ordinary circumstances. The lights and shadows that flit across it; its internal vicissitudes;"

What depths of silence and self-communing lurk in these passages from his note books!

"To make one's own reflection in a mirror the subject of a story," was a suggestion of this early period; and "Monsieur du Miroir" subsequently appeared as one of the "Mosses."

The only outlet for a mind overcharged was in writing; to choose among the fancies that pressed tumultuously upon his thought, bid some to stay and drive back the throng.

"You cannot conceive," exclaims Oberon, in the Twice-Told Tale, "The Devil in Manuscript," "what an effect the composition of these tales has had on me. I have become ambitious of a bubble and careless of solid reputation. I am surrounding myself with shadows which bewilder me by aping the realities of life. They have drawn me aside from the beaten path of the world, and led me into a strange sort of solitude,—a solitude in the midst of men,—where nobody wishes for what I do, nor thinks nor feels as I do. The tales have done all this."

"This scene," he continues, "came into my fancy as I walked along a hilly road, on a starlight October evening; in the pure and bracing air, I became all

soul, and felt as if I could climb the sky and run a race along the Milky Way. Here is another tale, in which I wrapt myself during a dark and dreary night-ride in the month of March, till the rattling of the wheels and the voices of my companions seemed like faint sounds of a dream, and my visions a bright reality. That scribbled page describes shadows which I summoned to my bedside at midnight; they would not depart when I bade them; the gray dawn came and found me wide awake and feverish, the victim of my own enchantments."

I would not make the mistake of identifying Hawthorne with the characters he has drawn, nor of supposing that his essays are merely transcripts of his own experience. But I believe he can be known better by a study of his works than by any biography, and that certain phases of his own experience, during the time to which I now refer, appear in some of the Twice-Told Tales, such as "The Haunted Mind," "Night Sketches," and "Foot-prints on the Seashore."

Imagine what these twelve years must have been to a young man who was conscious that friends from whom he had received aid were eager for his success, and who cherished—veil it as he might—a lofty ambition. What he says of one of the charac-

ters in Fanshawe was true of himself: "If his inmost heart could have been laid open, there would have been discovered that dream of undying fame, which, dream as it is, is more powerful than a thousand realities."

Fanshawe, published in 1828, was a failure. He next wrote "Seven Tales of my Native Land," which, after a weary search for a publisher, he cast into the flames.

"What is more potent than fire?" exclaims Oberon in his gloomiest tone, in the Twice-Told Tale to which I have already referred. "Even thought, invisible and incorporeal as it is, cannot escape it. In this little time, it has annihilated the creations of long nights and days, which I could no more reproduce in their first glow and freshness, than cause ashes and whitened bones to rise up and live. * * The deed has been my fate."

The Twice-Told Tales, as the author himself says, "were published in magazines and annuals, extending over a period of ten or twelve years, and comprising the whole of the writer's young manhood, without making (so far as he has ever been aware) the slightest impression on the public." "He was, for a good many years, the obscurest man of letters in America." There was no sign of recognition.

“I sat down by the way-side of life,” he wrote, in 1851, alluding to this early period, “like a man under enchantment, and a shrubbery sprang up around me, and the bushes grew to be saplings, and the saplings became trees, until no exit appeared possible through the entangling depths of my obscurity.”

The thought of having lost his true place in the world, of having been carried apart from the main current of life, and finding it impossible to get back again, appears again and again in various forms. It vexed his solitude. It was the inevitable result of that absolute failure of response, of sympathy, of assurance from any outward source, that, in the stillness and twilight of revery, he was not pursuing a vagary or a shadow.

The publication of the *Twice-Told Tales*, in collected form, in 1837, while it gave Hawthorne no wide-spread reputation, won for him in literary circles recognition as a man of genius, and made, therefore, a new epoch in his life. Men of kindred tastes and pursuits began to invade the solitude of the dreaming recluse, and the dull eyes of the public to open to the new beauty of thought and fancy with which the pictures from his pen were invested.

His subsequent career is too recent, and has been

too open to the view of all, for me to detain you in tracing it here. The two years in the Boston Custom House, under Bancroft, the historian, then collector of the port; the year at Brook Farm; the four years of delightful residence, after his marriage, at the Old Manse, in Concord, during which the "Mosses" were written; the four succeeding years as surveyor of the port of Salem, the period which produced the "Scarlet Letter"; the three years of rapid production from 1850 to 1853, passed at Lenox, and at the Wayside, in Concord, during which he wrote "The House of the Seven Gables," "The Blithedale Romance," "The Wonder Book," "Tanglewood Tales," "The Snow Image," and the "Life of Franklin Pierce"; the seven years of residence and travel abroad, towards the close of which appeared "The Marble Faun," on which alone a lofty fame might securely rest; his return to America in the summer of 1860; the publication of "Our Old Home"; the writing and abandoning of "Septimius Felton," a "Romance of Immortality," and the subsequent attempt to treat the same subject in a new way in "The Dolliver Romance," which it caused him so poignant a pain to find that he was never to finish; his depression of spirit in view of the civil war; the despair of failing health and of loss of power to put into

literary form any one of the subjects on which his mind had long been engaged; his sudden death in 1864, the harvest of life still unreaped, the ripe wealth of autumn, all about him, ungathered into sheaves;—these are events which have too often claimed your attention and been the source of enthusiasm, of inspiration, of joy, of sadness or of pain to you all, for me to dwell upon them in your presence to-day.

One of the striking characteristics of Hawthorne, which we may emphasize to-day, is the fact that in all respects, in his history, his personality and his works, he is distinctively of New England type. With but the most trifling exceptions, until he went to England as consul, in 1853, his feet had trod only New England soil. The town in which he was born had been the scene of the darkest and most intense manifestations of early Puritan life, while, in its modern stillness and isolation, as in a placid lake, there was a clear reflection of that austere and picturesque period. There was a dark shading in the picture, but Hawthorne's mind was fascinated by it, and the charm was perhaps all the stronger for the elements of strangeness, terror and gloom that were mixed in the spell. He studied it till the figures of that time walked through his thought as

clearly as if he were to meet them in the historic places with which their presence was associated. In the "Twice-Told Tales," he traces, in an imaginative mood, the history of Main street, Salem, from the time when it was but a "track of leaf-strewn forest-land," trodden by the Indian queen and priest or magician, the wolves prowling near. The first settler comes, the upheaved axe glitters in the sunshine, the log cabin appears, neighbors arrive, and the track goes from clearing to clearing; Endicott, the first governor, the stern Puritan, is seen with "his bearded face, under the shadow of the broad-brimmed, steeple-crowned Puritan hat * * * * in a doublet and hose of sad-colored cloth"; the meeting-house appears, and other houses with frames hewn and fitted in England, of English oak; men of history and legend walk along the street; the Quakers come and are led to the pillory or to prison, or scourged through the street by warrant from Major Hawthorne; the prisoners condemned as witches pass on from the jail to the place of execution, on Gallows Hill; and wise Cotton Mather sits on his horse and tells the multitude that "all has been religiously and justly done, and Satan's power shall this day receive its death-blow in New England."

"These scenes," he says, "you think are all too

sombre. So, indeed, they are; but the blame must rest on the sombre spirit of our forefathers, who wove their web of life with hardly a single thread of rose-color or gold, and not on me, who have a tropic love of sunshine, and would gladly gild all the world with it, if I knew where to find so much."

In another place he has spoken of this terrible delusion as one "which should teach us, among its other morals, that the influential classes, and those who take upon themselves to be leaders of the people, are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob. Clergymen, judges, statesmen,—the wisest, calmest, holiest persons of their day,—stood in the inner circle round about the gallows, loudest to applaud the work of blood, latest to confess themselves miserably deceived."

Another Twice-Told Tale, in which, more than a hundred years before the Revolution, Endicott, at the head of the Salem train-band, with his sword cuts the red cross, the symbol of Popery, from the British banner, declaring that "neither Pope nor tyrant hath part" in the ensign of New England, is a historic scene, with a wondrous setting of minute and suggestive details.

The Tory magnificence of dress, and courtly manners and style of life, under the royal governors, is

another feature of Colonial life which appears in elaborate description in many of his stories.

I know not where will be found more minute reproduction of the details of a past epoch, than in Hawthorne's treatment of early New England life. It was done, not in love, nor in hate, but in a stern regard for truth, which was part of his own inheritance from Puritan ancestry. His own ancestors, as you know, had been prominent men of the Colony, and among the foremost in the persecution of the witches and Quakers; and there was the tradition, in the Hawthorne family, of an hereditary curse pronounced by one of the condemned upon the stern judge and his descendants,—a tradition by which some explained the fallen fortunes of the family. What dark fruitage was borne, as this tradition developed in Hawthorne's thought!

Yet, however conscious he might be of the excesses of Puritan zeal, it was the Puritan blood in his veins that rendered the personages of those times so near and real to him. That subtle analysis of spiritual moods which made him at home in the darkest recesses of the human heart, long reflection upon motives and moods and processes in minds conscious of crime, sure intuition of the laws that govern them, a profound and perhaps melancholy thoughtfulness

upon the problems of religion, of good and evil, guilt and sorrow, life and death, these are but new growths in later times of those dark-veined leaves that grew of old upon the Puritan stalk. Every phase of early New England life, every type of early New England character, are familiar to him. The sea, the sky, the air, the storms, the winds, the seasons, the blazing hearth, the deep snows, the dark forest over which superstition had thrown its terrors, Thanksgiving day, the Election Sermon, Thursday Lecture, the solemn Sunday,—all the memories of New England crowd his pages. Early New England history and literature was a store-house of materials for him, as the Homeric poems for the Greek dramatists. On no other soil could such a man have been born; in no other air could he have flourished: There is no want of admiration for the heroism and saintliness of the men who first trod our soil. But, from some tendency of his own mind, or from an oppressive sense of the part his family had played in the delusion of witchcraft, the frowning virtues of that time seem to cast black shadows on the landscape.

“Look back,” says he, “through all the social customs of New England, in the first century of her existence, read all her traits of character, and tell

me if you find one occasion, other than a funeral feast, where jollity was sanctioned by universal practice."

"It must have been a dismal abode for the man of pleasure," he adds, "when the only boon companion was death."

But how often, out of the gloom, he bursts into words of passionate love for New England! From the first Twice-Told Tale, "The Gray Champion," in which the figure of an ancient man, perhaps a regicide, "the type of New England's hereditary spirit, whose shadowy march on the eve of danger must ever be the pledge that New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry," in the streets of Boston, confronts with words of menace and doom the tyranny of James II, in the person of the royal governor; and then vanishes to appear again, perhaps, on Lexington Green;—from this first Twice-Told Tale, through a series of pictures to which the last touch of beauty is given by the most delicate hand; until in Rome, in a moment of weariness and disenchantment, he fancies one of his characters longing for a New England village, "with its great old elm trees, and the neat, comfortable houses scattered along the wide, grassy margin of its street, and the white meeting-house, and the stream of gold brown water, * * * that native homeliness,

those familiar sights, * * * those days that never brought any strange event; that life of sober week-days, and a solemn Sabbath at the close;" although "the clouds along the horizon will be the only gallery of art;"—from first to last, his history, his character, his thought and feeling, bear a deep tinge of New England color. The fair flower of his genius shot up, wild, from dark and rugged soil, and seemed to love the shade. It was no exotic. It may not, perhaps, be quite true to say that, with strong personal and distinctive traits, he was the Puritan of the seventeenth, flourishing in the air of the nineteenth century, but, at least, his character was the old material, refined and cast in new mould. It was the complex result of Puritan descent, exceptional family history, strange personal experience, the discipline of various reading and study, a most sensitive spiritual organization, with a sort of mental affinity for what is true as its guide in the study of the laws underlying the phenomena of human experience and conduct.

Well may we be proud of this New England flower, of strange and peculiar beauty! It grows not elsewhere. On New England hills it will not grow again. But it is ours, and imperishable.

Against Hawthorne, the charge of being morbid,

or misanthropic, however eminent the authority in its support, I believe cannot justly be preferred. In a few of his stories, perhaps, it seems as if a strange horror seized him, or an ugly phantom stole out of his solitude; and the gloom is not relieved. But it is of very few that this can be said. He seems to me rather to have been a man of strong and healthful mind, whose thought turns, in large degree, upon what is mournful or mysterious in human life, and who does not hesitate to peer into the gloom, farther than others can see, whatever its depths may hold, while at the same time retaining all his own native healthfulness and clearness of sight. Whether the surface of the story be sparkling or sad, a deep moral lies below. The range and force of moral law are again and again his theme. When once the germ of evil is sown, all else is a dark necessity. It is "sure to blossom darkly soon, and bear black fruit betimes." "An evil deed invests itself with the character of doom."

"The act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit in a far distant time; together with the seed of the merely temporary crop, which mortals term expediency, they inevitably sow the acorns of a more enduring growth, which may darkly overshadow their

posterity." This is the weighty truth that pervades the story of "The House of the Seven Gables."

He has created characters that have their share, or more, of human infirmity; but, however secret their sin, retribution does not fail to overtake the malefactors; and the fact that the consciousness of guilt, or the cherishing of an evil purpose, carries with it its own penalty is illustrated with marvelous power. There is no morbid sentiment, no false moral.

The great mystery of the existence of evil is one which this far-seeing man seems to strain his vision to probe. It is studied in the beautiful fable of the modern Faun, transformed by crime and remorse. The question recurs again and again, in various forms, "Is sin, then,—which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the universe—is it, like sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier Paradise than his?" But each time the question is dismissed, as containing deep and perilous matter on which it is not safe for men to set their feet.

We must muse long over this book before we begin

to see its depth of meaning. If Miriam was guiltless until her eyes bade Donatello cast Father Antonio from the Rock, then her fate illustrates the terrible bondage into which the guilt of others may cast an innocent person. "Free as she seemed to be—beggar as he looked—the nameless vagrant was dragging the beautiful Miriam through the streets of Rome, fettered and shackled more cruelly than any captive queen of yore, following in an Emperor's triumph." This very bondage becomes intolerable, and hurries the innocent into crime. It is these remote relations, the far-stretching results of an evil deed, that Hawthorne sketches so vividly. That the crime of one should involve the misery of many is one of the darkest riddles in human experience. Hawthorne not only paints the effect of crime upon the actors themselves, and those who share in the guilt, but enforces the truth that even the secret knowledge of another's crime is a thing hardly to be borne by a mind of unsullied innocence.

There is undoubtedly contained in "The Marble Faun," Hawthorne's deep pondering over the story of Beatrice Cenci, and the name of Miriam will forever remain the symbol of as brilliant beauty, as strange sorrow, as maddening experience, as mute isolation and remoteness from help, as dark a mystery

and doom as terrible, not upon the scaffold, but in the horror of her own heart.

There is good in all lives. None are free from sin. We must, therefore, accept our brotherhood with the guiltiest. These are the more obvious truths upon which he falls back, when the perilous theory that sin is but a stage of discipline is rejected. But he never theorizes. He neither advocates nor accepts a theory. He opens great avenues of thought, along which he saunters, inviting us to follow if we will.

His impressions of Rome are singularly vivid and intense, as they glow upon the pages of "The Marble Faun." Roman antiquity, like a pageant, passes in review before him, as he walks and lingers amid the ruins of the imperial city. The mighty shade of the empire haunts its birth-place and its grave. The bells ring out "a peal of triumph, because Rome is still imperial." Beneath the Arch of Titus, there pass before his mind the Roman armies in their outward march to fight battles, a world's width away; or a Roman triumph, with royal captives and inestimable spoil, streams and flaunts in hundred-fold succession through the yet stalwart archway. Cicero's foot may have stepped upon the half-worn pavement below, or Horace strolled near by, "making his foot-

steps chime with the measure of the ode that was ringing in his mind."

Then a dreary sense of the discomfort and desolation of modern Rome oppresses him. These wrecks about him are all that survived when barbarism, like a flood, rolled in upon the glory of classical antiquity. All Rome has been swallowed up in the gulf into which Curtius precipitated himself in the vain hope of saving her. "The palace of the Cæsars has gone down thither, with a hollow, rumbling sound of its fragments! All the temples have tumbled into it; and thousands of statues have been thrown after! All the armies and the triumphs have marched into the great chasm, with their martial music playing, as they stepped over the brink. All the heroes, the statesmen and the poets! All piled on poor Curtius, who thought to have saved them all."

Hawthorne, with all his pensiveness and gravity, is said to have been of cheerful mood,—a fine, strong organization,—usually reserved and silent, but if he talked there was the play of glancing wit and humor in his conversation, as in his books.

"I should fancy," wrote Hillard to him at one time, "from your books, that you were burdened with some secret sorrow, that you had some blue chamber in your soul, into which you hardly dared

to enter yourself; but when I see you, you give me the impression of a man as healthy as Adam in Paradise."

After an evening at Emerson's, during which Hawthorne was silent, Emerson said of him, "Hawthorne rides well his horse of the night."

It would seem that he sometimes wrote more sombrely than he intended. Of "The Scarlet Letter" he said, "I found it impossible to relieve the shadows of the story with so much light as I would gladly have thrown in."

In a letter from England, to his publisher, he says, "When I get home, I will try to write a more genial book; but the Devil himself always seems to get into my inkstand, and I can only exorcise him by pensful at a time."

In a later letter, he says, "I wish God had given me the faculty of writing a sunshiny book."

We sometimes long for more social warmth and sweet contentment, than we find in his pages. Joy too often comes in excess and only for the moment, disappearing with the excitement, quickly as the ethereal quality of the wine of Monte Beni. Some sinister omen, or symbol of death, appears in the midst of mirth and riot; "the strange sigh and sadness which always come when we are merriest."

We wish he were more lavish in the use of his unlimited resources of humor; and the brilliancy of his wit sometimes makes more real, as by a vivid flash, the dimness of the twilight into which he has lured us. But if we read his books with the same clear sight with which he wrote them, if we are not happier, we shall at least be wiser men. To read his historical sketches is like wandering through old portrait galleries, or walking streets that have long disappeared, with quaint old houses about us, and figures in the antique garb of a past generation. His essays contain a vein of the richest humor, are full of the most minute and lively description, the purest thought and emotion. His feeling is always the finest and most delicate; his fancy, unflinching and bright; while in psychological insight he is unrivalled among the men of our time. His pages are never sullied. The aroma of high character and fine culture abides in all that he has done. He was a man of genius, whose life moved to ideal aims, in solitude or among men. His life is among the noblest examples of truth, to himself and the world; his works, the most peculiar and original, and perhaps the richest legacy, American literature has received. What Hawthorne wrote when Cooper died may be repeated of himself:

“It may not be too much to hope, that in the eyes of the public at large, American literature may henceforth acquire a weight and value which have not heretofore been conceded to it; time and death have begun to hallow it.”

Brethren of the Alumni, I am aware that I have given an imperfect account of the ideal charm that enwreathes the memory of this famous and brilliant man, like vine-leaves and darkly clustering grapes on storied walls. Nor is it possible for me to do justice to my theme. To portray the genius of Hawthorne requires a subtler fancy, a more delicate touch than mine. It is one of the penalties of a life that moves in paths remote from the realm of letters that, at least where nicety is required, the channels between thought and expression, of which Shelley speaks, remain more or less obstructed. Words do not grasp the thought. There are excellencies in Hawthorne that I can perceive but cannot define, a deeper meaning, a truer beauty, which elude me when I endeavor to throw the heavy links of my sentences around them.

Nor would I have attempted it except on an occasion like this. But surely it is fitting for the Alumni of Bowdoin to draw near to the grave of Nathaniel Hawthorne, among those most sad for his too early

death, among those rejoicing most of all for the excellence of his genius, and for his lofty and enduring renown ; and that one of our number, however imperfectly he may succeed, should endeavor to express our proud and grateful remembrance of him.

It is in this spirit that I have spoken to you to-day, and you, listening in this spirit, will not deem it presumptuous in me to have taken upon my lips an immortal name.