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THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES

《七个尖角阁的房子》

北京师联教育科学研究所 编



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES.

IN September of the year during the February of which Hawthorne had completed "The Scarlet Letter," he began "The House of the Seven Gables." Meanwhile, he had removed from Salem to Lenox, in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, where he occupied with his family a small red wooden house, still standing at the date of this edition, near the Stockbridge Bowl.

"I sha'n't have the new story ready by November," he explained to his publisher, on the 1st of October, "for I am never good for anything in the literary way till after the first autumnal frost, which has somewhat such an effect on my imagination that it does on the foliage here about me-multiplying and brightening its hues." But by vigorous application he was able to complete the new work about the middle of the January following.

Since research has disclosed the manner in which the romance is interwoven with incidents from the history of the Hawthorne family,

"The House of the Seven Gables" has acquired an interest apart from that by which it first appealed to the public. John Hathorne (as the name was then spelled), the great-grandfather of Nathaniel Hawthorne, was a magistrate at Salem in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and officiated at the famous trials for witchcraft held there. It is of record that he used peculiar severity towards a certain woman who was among the accused; and the husband of this woman prophesied that God would take revenge upon his wife's persecutors. This circumstance doubtless furnished a hint for that piece of tradition in the book which represents a Pyncheon of a former generation as having persecuted one Maule, who declared that God would give his enemy "blood to drink."

It became a conviction with The Hawthorne family that a curse had been pronounced upon its members, which continued in force in the time of The romancer; a conviction perhaps derived from the recorded prophecy of The injured woman's husband, just mentioned; and, here again, we have a correspondence with Maule's malediction in The story.

Furthermore, there occurs in The "American Note-Books" (August 27, 1837), a reminiscence of The author's family, to the following effect.

Philip English, a character well-known in early Salem annals, was among those who suffered from John Hathorne's magisterial harshness, and he maintained in consequence a lasting feud with the old Puritan official. But at his death English left daughters, one of whom is said to have

married the son of Justice John Hathorne, whom English had declared he would never forgive. It is scarcely necessary to point out how clearly this foreshadows the final union of those hereditary foes, the Pyncheons and Maules, through the marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave. The romance, however, describes the Maules as possessing some of the traits known to have been characteristic of the Hawthornes: for example, "so long as any of the race were to be found, they had been marked out from other men--not strikingly, nor as with a sharp line, but with an effect that was felt rather than spoken of--by an hereditary characteristic of reserve." Thus, while the general suggestion of the Hawthorne line and its fortunes was followed in the romance, the Pyncheons taking the place of The author's family, certain distinguishing marks of the Hawthornes were assigned to the imaginary Maule posterity.

There are one or two other points which indicate Hawthorne's method of basing his compositions, the result in the main of pure invention, on the solid ground of particular facts. Allusion is made, in the first chapter of the "Seven Gables," to a grant of lands in Waldo County, Maine, owned by the Pyncheon family. In the "American Note-Books" there is an entry, dated August 12, 1837, which speaks of the Revolutionary general, Knox, and his land-grant in Waldo County, by virtue of which the

owner had hoped to establish an estate on the English plan, with a tenantry to make it profitable for him. An incident of much greater importance in the story is the supposed murder of one of the Pyncheons by his nephew, to whom we are introduced as Clifford Pyncheon. In all probability Hawthorne connected with this, in his mind, the murder of Mr. White, a wealthy gentleman of Salem, killed by a man whom his nephew had hired. This took place a few years after Hawthorne's graduation from college, and was one of the celebrated cases of the day, Daniel Webster taking part prominently in the trial. But it should be observed here that such resemblances as these between sundry elements in the work of Hawthorne's fancy and details of reality are only fragmentary, and are rearranged to suit the author's purposes.

In the same way he has made his description of Hepzibah Pyncheon's seven-gabled mansion conform so nearly to several old dwellings formerly or still extant in Salem, that strenuous efforts have been made to fix upon some one of them as the veritable edifice of the romance. A paragraph in The opening chapter has perhaps assisted this delusion that there must have been a single original House of the Seven Gables, framed by flesh-and-blood carpenters; for it runs thus:-

Familiar as it stands in the writer's recollection--for it has been an object of curiosity with him from boyhood, both as a specimen of the best and stateliest architecture of a long-past epoch, and as the scene of events more full of interest perhaps than those of a gray feudal castle--familiar as it stands, in its rusty old age, it is therefore only the more difficult to imagine the bright novelty with which it first caught the sunshine."

Hundreds of pilgrims annually visit a house in Salem, belonging to one branch of the Ingersoll family of that place, which is stoutly maintained to have been The model for Hawthorne's visionary dwelling. Others have supposed that the now vanished house of The identical Philip English, whose blood, as we have already noticed, became mingled with that of the Hawthornes, supplied the pattern; and still a third building, known as the Curwen mansion, has been declared the only genuine establishment. Notwithstanding persistent popular belief, The authenticity of all these must positively be denied; although it is possible that isolated reminiscences of all three may have blended with the ideal image in the mind of Hawthorne. He, it will be seen, remarks in the Preface, alluding to himself in the third person, that he trusts not to be condemned for "laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's private rights... and building a house

of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air."

More than this, he stated to persons still living that the house of the romance was not copied from any actual edifice, but was simply a general reproduction of a style of architecture belonging to colonial days, examples of which survived into the period of his youth, but have since been radically modified or destroyed. Here, as elsewhere, he exercised the liberty of a creative mind to heighten the probability of his pictures without confining himself to a literal description of something he had seen.

While Hawthorne remained at Lenox, and during the composition of this romance, various other literary personages settled or stayed for a time in the vicinity; among them, Herman Melville, whose intercourse Hawthorne greatly enjoyed, Henry James, Sr., Doctor Holmes, J. T. Headley, James Russell Lowell, Edwin P. Whipple, Frederika Bremer, and J. T. Fields; so that there was no lack of intellectual society in the midst of the beautiful and inspiring mountain scenery of the place. "In the afternoons, nowadays," he records, shortly before beginning the work, "this valley in which I dwell seems like a vast basin filled with golden Sunshine as with wine;" and, happy in the companionship of his wife and their three children, he led a simple, refined, idyllic life, despite the restrictions of a scanty and uncertain income.

A letter written by Mrs. Hawthorne, at this time, to a member of

her family, gives incidentally a glimpse of the scene, which may properly find a place here. She says: "I delight to think that you also can look forth, as I do now, upon a broad valley and a fine amphitheater of hills, and are about to watch the stately ceremony of the sunset from your piazza. But you have not this lovely lake, nor, I suppose, the delicate purple mist which folds these slumbering mountains in airy veils. Mr. Hawthorne has been lying down in the sun shine, slightly fleckered with the shadows of a tree, and Una and Julian have been making him look like the mighty Pan, by covering his chin and breast with long grass-blades, that looked like a verdant and venerable beard."

The pleasantness and peace of his surroundings and of his modest home, in Lenox, may be taken into account as harmonizing with the mellow serenity of the romance then produced. Of the work, when it appeared in the early spring of 1851, he wrote to Horatio Bridge these words, now published for the first time:-

"`The House of the Seven Gables' in my opinion, is better than `The Scarlet Letter:' but I should not wonder if I had refined upon the principal character a little too much for popular appreciation, nor if the romance of the book should be somewhat at odds with the humble and familiar scenery in which I invest it. But I feel that portions of it are as good as anything I can hope

to write, and the publisher speaks encouragingly of its success."

From England, especially, came many warm expressions of praise, --a fact which Mrs. Hawthorne, in a private letter, commented on as the fulfillment of a possibility which Hawthorne, writing in boyhood to his mother, had looked forward to. He had asked her if she would not like him to become an author and have his books read in England.

G. P. L.

PREFACE.

WHEN a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has

fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime even if he disregard this caution.

In the present work, the author has proposed to himself--but with what success, fortunately, it is not for him to judge--to keep undeviatingly within his immunities. The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. It is a legend prolonging itself, from an epoch now gray in the distance, down into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist, which the reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events for the sake of a picturesque effect. The narrative, it may be, is woven of so humble a texture as to require this advantage, and, at the same

time, to render it the more difficult of attainment.

Many writers lay very great stress upon some definite moral purpose, at which they profess to aim their works. Not to be deficient in this particular, the author has provided himself with a moral,--the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief; and he would feel it a singular gratification if this romance might effectually convince mankind--or, indeed, any one man--of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms. In good faith, however, he is not sufficiently imaginative to flatter himself with the slightest hope of this kind. When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod,--or, rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly, --thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude. A high truth, indeed,

fairly, finely, and skilfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work of fiction, may add an artistic glory, but is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first.

The reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative. If permitted by the historical connection,--which, though slight, was essential to his plan,--the author would very willingly have avoided anything of this nature.

Not to speak of other objections, it exposes the romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment. It has been no part of his object, however, to describe local manners, nor in any way to meddle with the characteristics of a community for whom he cherishes a proper respect and a natural regard. He trusts not to be considered as unpardonably offending by laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's private rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air. The personages of the tale--though they give themselves out to be of ancient stability and considerable prominence--are really of the author's own making, or at all events, of his own mixing; their virtues can

shed no lustre, nor their defects redound, in the remotest degree, to the discredit of the venerable town of which they profess to be inhabitants. He would be glad, therefore, if-especially in the quarter to which he alludes-the book may be read strictly as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex.

LENOX, January 27, 1851.

I. The Old Pyncheon Family

HALFWAY down a by-street of one of our New England towns stands a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely peaked gables, facing towards various points of the compass, and a huge, clustered chimney in the midst. The street is Pyncheon Street; the house is the old Pyncheon House; and an elm-tree, of wide circumference, rooted before the door, is familiar to every town-born child by the title of the Pyncheon Elm. On my occasional visits to the town aforesaid, I seldom failed to turn down Pyncheon Street, for the sake of passing through the shadow of these two antiquities, --the great elm-tree and the weather-beaten edifice.

The aspect of the venerable mansion has always affected me like a human countenance, bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive also, of the long lapse of mortal life, and accompanying vicissitudes that have passed within. Were these to be worthily recounted, they would form a narrative of no small interest and instruction, and possessing, moreover, a certain remarkable unity, which might almost seem the result of artistic arrangement. But the story would include a chain of events extending over the better part of two centuries, and, written out with reasonable amplitude, would fill a bigger folio volume, or a longer series of duodecimos, than could prudently be appropriated to the annals of all New England during a similar period. It consequently becomes imperative to make short work with most of the traditionary lore of which the old Pyncheon House, otherwise known as the House of the Seven Gables, has been the theme. With a brief sketch, therefore, of the circumstances amid which the foundation of the house was laid, and a rapid glimpse at its quaint exterior, as it grew black in the prevalent east wind,--pointing, too, here and there, at some spot of more verdant mossiness on its roof and walls,--we shall commence the real action of our tale at an epoch not very remote from the present day. Still, there will be a connection with the long

past--a reference to forgotten events and personages, and to manners, feelings, and opinions, almost or wholly obsolete --which, if adequately translated to the reader, would serve to illustrate how much of old material goes to make up the freshest novelty of human life. Hence, too, might be drawn a weighty lesson from the little-regarded truth, that the act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit in a far-distant time; that, 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.

The House of the Seven Gables, antique as it now looks, was not the first habitation erected by civilized man on precisely the same spot of ground. Pyncheon Street formerly bore the humbler appellation of Maule's Lane, from the name of the original occupant of the soil, before whose cottage-door it was a cow-path. A natural spring of soft and pleasant water--a rare treasure on the sea-girt peninsula where the Puritan settlement was made--had early induced Matthew Maule to build a hut, shaggy with thatch, at this point, although somewhat too remote from what was then the centre of the village. In the growth of the town, however, after some thirty or forty years, the site covered by this rude hovel had become exceedingly

desirable in the eyes of a prominent and powerful personage, who asserted plausible claims to the proprietorship of this and a large adjacent tract of land, on the strength of a grant from the legislature. Colonel Pyncheon, the claimant, as we gather from whatever traits of him are preserved, was characterized by an iron energy of purpose. Matthew Maule, on the other hand, though an obscure man, was stubborn in the defence of what he considered his right; and, for several years, he succeeded in protecting the acre or two of earth which, with his own toil, he had hewn out of the primeval forest, to be his garden ground and homestead. No written record of this dispute is known to be in existence. Our acquaintance with the whole subject is derived chiefly from tradition. It would be bold, therefore, and possibly unjust, to venture a decisive opinion as to its merits; although it appears to have been at least a matter of doubt, whether Colonel Pyncheon's claim were not unduly stretched, in order to make it cover the small metes and bounds of Matthew Maule. What greatly strengthens such a suspicion is the fact that this controversy between two ill-matched antagonists --at a period, moreover, laud it as we may, when personal influence had far more weight than now--remained for years undecided, and came to a close only with the death of the party occupying the disputed soil. The mode of his death, too, affects the mind differently, in our day,