

A
WONDER BOOK

For Girls and Boys

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE



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Introduction

A Wonder Book has been called a "summery" book, a happy book, and it deserves these appellations. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote it with the utmost enjoyment, and his own children, who are said to have known it by heart before it was published, read it with the utmost enjoyment, as generations of children have read it since. For a long time, Hawthorne, who in many of his stories translated legends of the past into allegory, had believed that the ancient myths, for all their classicism and indestructibility, were ideal stories for rewriting into current language, imbuing with current morality, and telling to young people. When he began actually writing *A Wonder Book*, he wrote confidently, rapidly, and with scarcely any need for revising. The immediate and lasting success of the book is testimony to his judgment as well as to his art. Equally successful was *Tanglewood Tales*, a sequel to *Wonder Book*.

In *A Wonder Book*, Hawthorne takes a number of classical myths which have won the interest of readers for centuries and imaginatively presents them, connecting them by amusing incidents which take place outside of the actual telling of the legends themselves. The myths, which include: "The Gorgon's Head," "The Golden Touch," "The Paradise of Children," "The Three Golden Apples," "The Miraculous Pitcher," and "The Chimæra," are told by a student, Eustace Bright, to his young cousins and sisters and brothers during his college vacations.

The children to whom Eustace tells the tales are probably

patterned after Hawthorne's own children, whom for hours at a time Hawthorne would watch and listen to at play. Here, however, they bear the enchanting names of Primrose, Periwinkle, Sweet Fern, Dandelion, Blue Eye, Clover, Huckleberry, Plantain, and Buttercup. Through their comments on the myths, each one manages to establish his own individual personality and perception.

The setting in which Eustace Bright tells his stories is Lenox, Massachusetts, locale of Hawthorne's summer home. Authentic, too, are Bald Summit, Tanglewood, and Shadow Brook, all parts of this Berkshire landscape, which, in the between-story incidents, is described in each season, whether it be fall when "the trees have been touched by King Midas" or winter, when the hills are clothed with white, and Eustace must tell his tales by the Tanglewood fireside. Additionally realistic is the mention of some of the writers of the day: Melville (who also lived in Lenox), Holmes, James, Longfellow, and "that writer fellow who lived nearby" and who, of course, is Hawthorne himself.

Although the myths are not altered at all basically, they are written in a Gothic and romantic, rather than a classical, tone. And unmistakably they are written for children. "My stars, it was perfectly terrible," Eustace interjects at one time, and, at another, "No, you will never guess it, not if you were to try ten thousand times!" The humor, too, is light and natural. In "The Golden Touch," the storyteller says, "The egg, indeed, might have been mistaken for one of those which the famous goose in the story book was in the habit of laying, but King Midas was the only one who had anything to do with the matter."

There is a lovely intimacy in the stories. "Perseus could not bear to tell his mother what he had undertaken to do," says Eustace Bright. When he tells his young listeners "The Paradise of Children," he explains, "What was most wonderful of all, the children never quarrelled among themselves, neither had they any crying fits; nor since first time began had a single one of these little mortals ever gone into a corner and sulked." And later, in the same story, "Do you think that you should be less curious than Pandora? If you were left alone with a box, might you feel a little tempted to lift the lid? But you would not do it. Oh, fie! No, no!"

Simple as it is, the language of *A Wonder Book* is filled with passages of beauty and imagination and poetic symbolism. The most modern of children will appreciate Hawthorne's description of the sky, in which Pegasus, the flying horse, made his home.

The bravest sights were the meteors, that gleamed suddenly out, as if a bonfire had been kindled on the sky and made the moonshine pale for so much as a hundred miles around them.

Any child who has played beside the ocean will relish Hawthorne's picture of the Old Man of the Sea.

. . . a stick of timber that has been tossed about by the waves and has got all overgrown with barnacles, and, at last, drifting ashore, seems to have been thrown up from the deepest bottom of the sea.

Because he believed that all literature should be imbued with morality, and because he understood a child's capacity for absorbing the deep in both theme and feeling if these things are presented simply and unartificially, Hawthorne never fails to emphasize the *meaning* of the story. In "The Golden Touch," he says, "The commonest things, such as lie within everybody's grasp, are more valuable than the riches which so many mortals sigh and struggle after . . . And now at last, when it was too late, he felt how infinitely a warm and tender heart that loved him exceeded in value all the wealth that could be piled betwixt the earth and sky." In "The Miraculous Pitcher," too, he explains, "When men do not feel toward the humblest stranger as if he were a brother, they are unworthy to exist on earth, which was created as the abode of a great human brotherhood." Hawthorne's thought in "The Chimæra" is expressed more subtly, but Primrose, who is thirteen and oldest of the children, reacts to it with an understanding glimmer of tears in her eyes.

And Bellerophon put his faith in the child, who had seen the image of Pegasus in the water, and in the maiden who had heard him neigh so melodiously, rather than in the middle-aged clown, who believed only in cart-horses, or in the old man, who had forgotten the beautiful things of his youth.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, July 4, 1804. He was four years old when his father, a shipmaster, died, and his mother shut herself in her room, seldom speaking to Nathaniel or his sisters, whose childhoods were lonely and solitary. For a time, Hawthorne was afflicted with lameness,

which increased his feeling of loneliness. All these circumstances, however, made him a constant reader and an excellent student. At Bowdoin College, where he first began to think of writing as a career, he was a classmate of Longfellow and of Franklin Pierce, who later became President of the United States. Even after his graduation from Bowdoin, Hawthorne resumed his solitary life, with his only recreation reading and writing.

In 1836, however, he began to come out of his solitude when he became a magazine editor, and in 1837 several of his stories were published in *Twice-Told Tales*. He was weigher and gauger at the Boston Custom House for a year and attended the famous Brook Farm in 1841-1842. In 1842, he married Sophia Peabody of Salem and moved with her to the Old Manse in Concord. His happy marriage and family life helped Hawthorne establish a normal relationship with society; in his second collection of tales, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, he speaks feelingly of his marriage. He moved to Salem, where he worked in the Custom House until 1849, when he began to write his famous novels: *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and *The Blithedale Romance*, all of which had their setting in New England. From 1853 to 1857, he was American consul at Liverpool. In 1860, because his health was failing, he went to Italy, where he wrote his last completed novel, and his only one with an Italian background, *The Marble Faun*. He returned to America, where he died May 16, 1864.

Considered one of America's greatest writers, Hawthorne was often stern and darkly moralistic in his writing for adults. When he wrote for children, however, as in *A Wonder Book*, warmth and joy pervade his pages and extend to his young readers. As the children in *A Wonder Book* say, "His stories are good to hear at night because then we can dream about them asleep, and good in the morning too because then we can dream about them awake."

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Preface

THE author has long been of opinion that many of the classical myths were capable of being rendered into very capital reading for children. In the little volume here offered to the public, he has worked up half a dozen of them, with this end in view. A great freedom of treatment was necessary to his plan; but it will be observed by every one who attempts to render these legends malleable in his intellectual furnace, that they are marvellously independent of all temporary modes and circumstances. They remain essentially the same, after changes that would affect the identity of almost anything else.

He does not, therefore, plead guilty to a sacrilege in having sometimes shaped anew, as his fancy dictated, the forms that have been hallowed by an antiquity of two or three thousand years. No epoch of time can claim a copyright in these immortal fables. They seem never to have been made; and certainly, so long as man exists, they can never perish; but, by their indestructibility itself, they are legitimate subjects for every age to clothe with its own garniture of manners and sentiment, and to imbue with its own morality. In the present version they may have lost much of their classical aspect (or, at all events, the author has not been careful to preserve it), and have, perhaps, assumed a Gothic or romantic guise.

In performing this pleasant task,—for it has been really a task fit for hot weather, and one of the most agreeable, of a literary kind, which he ever undertook,—the author has not always thought it necessary to write downward, in order to meet the comprehension of children. He has generally suffered the theme to soar, whenever such was its tendency, and when he himself was buoyant enough to follow without an effort. Children possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling, so long as it is simple, likewise. It is only the artificial and the complex that bewilder them.

LENOX, July 15, 1851.



THE GORGON'S HEAD

Tanglewood Porch

INTRODUCTORY TO "THE GORGON'S HEAD"

Beneath the porch of the country-seat called Tanglewood, one fine autumnal morning, was assembled a merry party of little folks, with a tall youth in the midst of them. They had planned a nutting expedition, and were impatiently waiting for the mists to roll up the hill-slopes, and for the sun to pour the warmth of the Indian summer over the fields and pastures, and into the nooks of the many-colored woods. There was a prospect of as fine a day as ever gladdened the aspect of this beautiful and comfortable world. As yet, however, the morning mist filled up the whole length and breadth of the valley, above which, on a gently sloping eminence, the mansion stood.

This body of white vapor extended to within less than a hundred yards of the house. It completely hid everything beyond that distance, except a few ruddy or yellow tree-tops, which here and there emerged, and were glorified by the early sunshine, as was likewise the broad surface of the mist. Four or five miles off to the southward rose the summit of Monument Mountain, and seemed to be floating on a cloud. Some fifteen miles farther away, in the same direction, appeared the loftier Dome of Taconic, looking blue and indistinct, and hardly so substantial as the vapory sea that almost rolled over it. The nearer hills, which bordered the valley, were half submerged, and were specked with little cloudwreaths all the way to their tops. On the whole, there was so much cloud, and so little solid earth, that it had the effect of a vision.

The children above-mentioned, being as full of life as they could hold, kept overflowing from the porch of Tanglewood, and scampering along the gravel-walk, or rushing

across the dewy herbage of the lawn. I can hardly tell how many of these small people there were; not less than nine or ten, however, nor more than a dozen, of all sorts, sizes, and ages, whether girls or boys. They were brothers, sisters, and cousins, together with a few of their young acquaintances, who had been invited by Mr. and Mrs. Pringle to spend some of this delightful weather with their own children, at Tanglewood. I am afraid to tell you their names, or even to give them any names which other children have ever been called by; because, to my certain knowledge, authors sometimes get themselves into great trouble by accidentally giving the names of real persons to the characters in their books. For this reason, I mean to call them Primrose, Periwinkle, Sweet Fern, Dandelion, Blue Eye, Clover, Huckleberry, Cowslip, Squash-blossom, Milkweed, Plantain, and Buttercup; although, to be sure, such titles might better suit a group of fairies than a company of earthly children.

It is not to be supposed that these little folks were to be permitted by their careful fathers and mothers, uncles, aunts, or grandparents, to stray abroad into the woods and fields, without the guardianship of some particularly grave and elderly person. O no, indeed! In the first sentence of my book, you will recollect that I spoke of a tall youth, standing in the midst of the children. His name—(and I shall let you know his real name, because he considers it a great honor to have told the stories that are here to be printed)—his name was Eustace Bright. He was a student at Williams College, and had reached, I think, at this period, the venerable age of eighteen years; so that he felt quite like a grandfather towards Periwinkle, Dandelion, Huckleberry, Squash-blossom, Milkweed, and the rest, who were only half or a third as venerable as he. A trouble in his eyesight (such as many students think it necessary to have, nowadays, in order to prove their diligence at their books) had kept him from college a week or two after the beginning of the term. But, for my part, I have seldom met with a pair of eyes that looked as if they could see farther or better than those of Eustace Bright.

This learned student was slender, and rather pale, as all Yankee students are; but yet of a healthy aspect, and as

light and active as if he had wings to his shoes. By the by, being much addicted to wading through streamlets and across meadows, he had put on cowhide boots for the expedition. He wore a linen blouse, a cloth cap, and a pair of green spectacles, which he had assumed, probably, less for the preservation of his eyes, than for the dignity that they imparted to his countenance. In either case, however, he might as well have let them alone; for Huckleberry, a mischievous little elf, crept behind Eustace as he sat on the steps of the porch, snatched the spectacles from his nose, and clapped them on her own; and as the student forgot to take them back, they fell off into the grass, and lay there till the next spring.

Now, Eustace Bright, you must know, had won great fame among the children, as a narrator of wonderful stories; and though he sometimes pretended to be annoyed, when they teased him for more, and more, and always for more, yet I really doubt whether he liked anything quite so well as to tell them. You might have seen his eyes twinkle, therefore, when Clover, Sweet Fern, Cowslip, Buttercup, and most of their playmates, besought him to relate one of his stories, while they were waiting for the mist to clear up.

"Yes, Cousin Eustace," said Primrose, who was a bright girl of twelve, with laughing eyes, and a nose that turned up a little, "the morning is certainly the best time for the stories with which you so often tire out our patience. We shall be in less danger of hurting your feelings, by falling asleep at the most interesting points,—as little Cowslip and I did last night!"

"Naughty Primrose," cried Cowslip, a child of six years old; "I did not fall asleep, and I only shut my eyes, so as to see a picture of what Cousin Eustace was telling about. His stories are good to hear at night, because we can dream about them asleep; and good in the morning, too, because then we can dream about them awake. So I hope he will tell us one this very minute."

"Thank you, my little Cowslip," said Eustace; "certainly you shall have the best story I can think of, if it were only for defending me so well from that naughty Primrose. But,

children, I have already told you so many fairy tales, that I doubt whether there is a single one which you have not heard at least twice over. I am afraid you will fall asleep in reality, if I repeat any of them again."

"No, no, no!" cried Blue Eye, Periwinkle, Plantain, and half a dozen others. "We like a story all the better for having heard it two or three times before."

And it is a truth, as regards children, that a story seems often to deepen its mark in their interest, not merely by two or three, but by numberless repetitions. But Eustace Bright, in the exuberance of his resources, scorned to avail himself of an advantage which an older story-teller would have been glad to grasp at.

"It would be a great pity," said he, "if a man of my learning (to say nothing of original fancy) could not find a new story every day, year in and year out, for children such as you. I will tell you one of the nursery tales that were made for the amusement of our great old grandmother, the Earth, when she was a child in frock and pinafore. There are a hundred such; and it is a wonder to me that they have not long ago been put into picture-books for little girls and boys. But, instead of that, old gray-bearded grandsires pore over them, in musty volumes of Greek, and puzzle themselves with trying to find out when, and how, and for what they were made."

"Well, well, well, well, Cousin Eustace!" cried all the children at once; "talk no more about your stories, but begin."

"Sit down, then, every soul of you," said Eustace Bright, "and be all as still as so many mice. At the slightest interruption, whether from great, naughty Primrose, little Dandelion, or any other, I shall bite the story short off between my teeth, and swallow the untold part. But, in the first place, do any of you know what a Gorgon is?"

"I do," said Primrose.

"Then hold your tongue!" rejoined Eustace, who had rather she would have known nothing about the matter. "Hold all your tongues, and I shall tell you a sweet pretty story of a Gorgon's head."

And so he did, as you may begin to read on the next

page. Working up his sophomorical erudition with a good deal of tact, and incurring great obligations to Professor Anthon, he, nevertheless, disregarded all classical authorities, whenever the vagrant audacity of his imagination impelled him to do so.

The Gorgon's Head

Perseus was the son of Danaë, who was the daughter of a king. And when Perseus was a very little boy, some wicked people put his mother and himself into a chest, and set them afloat upon the sea. The wind blew freshly, and drove the chest away from the shore, and the uneasy billows tossed it up and down; while Danaë clasped her child closely to her bosom, and dreaded that some big wave would dash its foamy crest over them both. The chest sailed on, however, and neither sank nor was upset; until, when night was coming, it floated so near an island that it got entangled in a fisherman's nets, and was drawn out high and dry upon the sand. The island was called Seriphus, and it was reigned over by King Polydectes, who happened to be the fisherman's brother.

This fisherman, I am glad to tell you, was an exceedingly humane and upright man. He showed great kindness to Danaë and her little boy; and continued to befriend them, until Perseus had grown to be a handsome youth, very strong and active, and skilful in the use of arms. Long before this time, King Polydectes had seen the two strangers,—the mother and her child—who had come to his dominions in a floating chest. As he was not good and kind, like his brother the fisherman, but extremely wicked, he resolved to send Perseus on a dangerous enterprise, in which he would probably be killed, and then to do some great mischief to Danaë herself. So this bad-hearted king spent a long while in considering what was the most dangerous thing that a young man could possibly undertake to perform. At last, having hit upon an enterprise that promised to turn out as fatally as he desired, he sent for the youthful Perseus.

The young man came to the palace, and found the king sitting upon his throne.