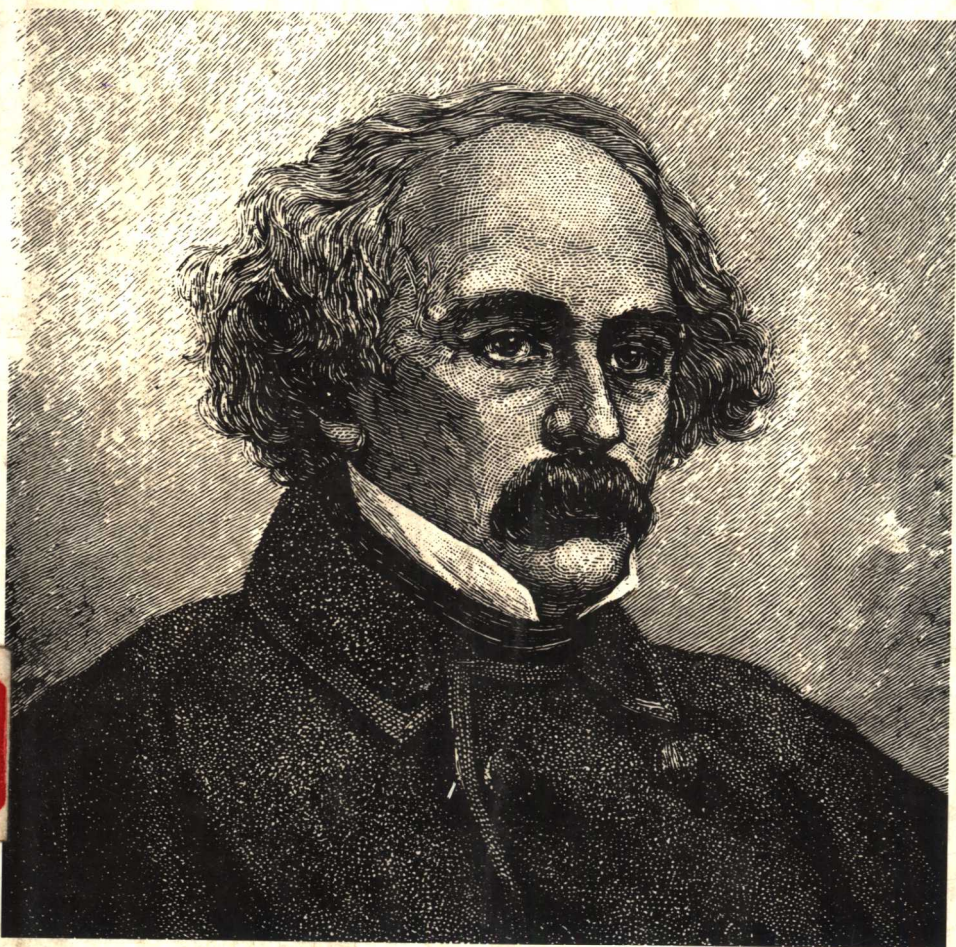


# NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

THE MAN, HIS TALES AND ROMANCES



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

*The Man,  
His Tales and Romances*

Edward Wagenknecht — *Editor*

*A Frederick Ungar Book*

CONTINUUM • NEW YORK

1989

The Continuum Publishing Company  
370 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

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Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Wagenknecht, Edward, 1900—

Nathaniel Hawthorne : the man, his tales, and romances / Edward Wagenknecht.

p. cm. — (Literature and life series)

"A Frederick Ungar book."

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8264-0409-X

1. Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 1804-1864. 2. Novelists, American—19th century—Biography. I. Title. II. Series.

PS1881.W32 1989

813'.3—dc19

[B]

88-18146

CIP

## Preface

*Nathaniel Hawthorne, Man and Writer* was published in 1961 as the first of the nine books about American writers that I wrote for the Oxford University Press. Like its successors, it was a straight psychograph or character portrait, the writings being drawn upon only to portray the man. This book is different. Chapter 1 is a biographical survey of Hawthorne's life experience, and chapter 5 ("The Man") is a very condensed summary of the findings reported in 1961. But the heart of the book is the critical study of Hawthorne's fiction contained in the three intervening chapters. Chapter 2, with its important appendix, is devoted to the tales, chapter 3 to the romances, and chapter 4 to the books Hawthorne attempted to produce during his last years but never succeeded in bringing to completion. Professor Edward H. Davidson, of the University of Illinois, is the supreme authority on this period, and I wish to thank him for his kindness in reading this chapter.

At this date, nobody can pretend to study Hawthorne in a vacuum. I am aware that this is attempted from time to time, but the results have not been generally enlightening. As in my other books in Frederick Ungar's Literature and Life series (*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*; *The Novels of Henry James*; and *The Tales of Henry James*), I have here chosen to view my subject in the light of modern criticism and research, though I have certainly not attempted any comprehensive survey or digest such as Lea Bertani Vozer Newman has offered in her *Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (G. K. Hall, 1977). Wherever they seemed called for, I have been frank to indicate either my agreement with or my dissent from other writers, but for the most part I have left such evaluation to my readers, using my notes not only to indicate my indebtedness but also to point the way to further elaboration of the ideas thrown out in my text, whether or not these are in harmony with my own approaches or interpretations.

Though I had assembled most of my own references independently before I encountered Lea Newman's study, I should not wish to allow either this or the fact that I am not always in entire agreement with this writer's views to obscure the fact that I heartily admire her work. From now on, any reader of Hawthorne's tales who does not avail himself of the generous help that has been provided here will merely be selling himself short.

Edward Wagenknecht

West Newton, Massachusetts  
October 1987

# Chronology

- 1804 July 4. Nathaniel Hawthorne born, Salem, Massachusetts.
- 1808 Father dies.
- 1813 Temporarily crippled by injury to foot and spends part of his boyhood near Raymond, Maine.
- 1825 Graduated, Bowdoin College.
- 1828 Publishes *Fanshawe* anonymously, at own expense.
- 1830 "The Hollow of the Three Hills" published in *Salem Gazette*; publication of other tales and sketches follows in various media.
- 1836 Edits *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*.
- 1837 Publishes *Peter Parley's Universal History* (with sister Elizabeth Hawthorne) and *Twice-Told Tales* (enlarged edition, 1842).
- 1839 Becomes engaged to Sophia Peabody.
- 1839-40 Employed in Boston Custom House.
- 1841 Lives at Brook Farm, West Roxbury, Massachusetts. Publishes *Grandfather's Chair*, stories from New England history for children, followed by *Famous Old People*, and *Liberty Tree*.
- 1842 July 9. Marries Sophia Peabody and goes to live with her at the Old Manse, Concord, Massachusetts (until 1845). Publishes *Biographical Stories for Children*.
- 1844 March 3. Una Hawthorne born at the Old Manse.

- 1845 Edits *Journal of an African Cruiser*, by Horatio Bridge.
- 1846–49 Employed in Salem Custom House.
- 1846 June 22. Julian Hawthorne born in Boston.
- 1846 Publishes *Mosses from an Old Manse* (revised 1854).
- 1849 Mother dies.
- 1850 Publishes *The Scarlet Letter*.
- 1850–51 Lives at Lenox, Massachusetts. Rose Hawthorne born, Lenox, May 20, 1851.
- 1851–52 Lives at West Newton, Massachusetts.
- 1851 Publishes *The House of the Seven Gables, The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales, True Stories from History and Biography*.
- 1852 May. Moves to The Wayside, Concord, Massachusetts.
- 1852 Publishes *The Blithedale Romance, A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys, The Life of Franklin Pierce*.
- 1853 Publishes *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys*.
- 1853–57 Serves as United States Consul, at Liverpool, England.
- 1857–60 Lives in Europe, largely Italy and England.
- 1860 Returns to The Wayside, June 28. Publishes *The Marble Faun*.
- 1863 Health breaks. Publishes *Our Old Home*.
- 1864 May 19. Dies at Plymouth, New Hampshire, May 23. Buried on Author's Ridge, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts.

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## The Life

Nathaniel Hathorne (later, by his own choice, Hawthorne), was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804, the second of the three children of Nathaniel Hathorne (1780–1808) by his wife, Elizabeth Clarke Manning (1780–1849). His elder sister Elizabeth had been born in 1802; the younger Mary Louisa, would follow in 1808.

The Hawthornes traced back to an English yeoman family who were supposed to have taken their name from Hawthorn Hill, overlooking Bray, Berkshire. The earliest direct ancestor of the writer who has been definitely identified is Thomas Hawthorne, of East Oakley in the hundred of Bray, who was born about the time of the discovery of America. During the lifetime of the first William (born about 1545), the preferred spelling came to be Hathorne. The first ancestor in the new world was the third William (1607–1681), who came over with his brother John between 1630 and 1633, settling first in Dorchester and later in Salem. Both he and his son John Hathorne (1641–1717) were involved in the persecution of Quakers and alleged witches.<sup>1</sup>

Hawthorne's father followed the sea and married the daughter of a neighboring blacksmith whose family had emigrated in 1689. He died, at twenty-eight, when his son was only four years old, on a voyage to Surinam (Dutch Guiana), interestingly enough the scene of one of the very earliest English romances, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688). Since his death left his widow practically destitute, she moved from the Union Street house owned by her husband's family to the Manning residence on nearby Herbert Street. Here Nathaniel grew up, in his "chamber under the eaves," in "Castle Dismal," an indulged, somewhat spoiled child, in a rather crowded, heavily feminine household.

When he was nine, an accident to his foot reduced him for over two years to a state of invalidism that probably contributed toward developing his taste for reading. This was nicely balanced by the fact that from about 1816 he was able to spend considerable time on land owned by the family in a heavily wooded area on Lake Sebago, near Raymond, Maine, where he savored all the delights of field and stream. Among his early schoolmasters and tutors was Noah Webster's archrival among American lexicographers, Joseph Emerson Worcester.

In 1821 his uncle Robert Manning, a man of substance and authority, sent him to Bowdoin, then a small, rural, freshwater college (founded 1803) near Brunswick, a lumbering village, some thirty miles from Portland, Maine. There were 114 students, among them Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Franklin Pierce. The faculty included some distinguished men, such as the scientist Parker Cleaveland and the philosopher Thomas Cogswell Upham. Tuition was only twenty-four dollars the year, but Hawthorne was often fined for breaches of discipline and sometimes for academic shortcomings, and Uncle Robert was not overprompt in paying his bills.

Hawthorne may have written some stories and sketches while still in college, from which he was graduated in 1825, and we hear of a collection called "Seven Tales of My Native Land," which he recalled from a prospective publisher who had angered him by keeping it too long. His sister Elizabeth thought she remembered tales about witches, pirates, and privateers, and his future sister-in-law, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, said that before publishing *Twice-Told Tales*, he destroyed more manuscript than he would publish afterwards; moreover, Hawthorne himself wrote much about authors burning their manuscripts. We hear also of "Provincial Tales" and "The Story-Teller," which latter made use of the author's travels in and about New England in the early 1830s. Arlin Turner rightly describes it as possessing "a tighter frame" than the other contemplated collections, "with the Story-Teller serving as both narrator and character." These all failed of publication in their original form, but some of their contents, which included a number of Hawthorne's finest short pieces, appeared individually in such magazines and annuals as *The Token*, *The New England Magazine*, and *The Democratic Review*, from which they found their final abiding place in

*Twice-Told Tales* (1837, 1842), *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), and *The Snow Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* (1851). Before any of these however, Hawthorne had published anonymously, at his own expense, in 1828, his first experimental romance, *Fanshawe: A Tale*, which he never acknowledged or reprinted.

In 1836 Hawthorne went to Boston to edit a few numbers of *The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* for Samuel G. Goodrich and the Bewick Company. He was responsible for selecting or improvising the contents, his stipend was often in arrears, and his engagement was terminated upon the company's bankruptcy. He remained on good terms with Goodrich however, and it was for him that with the aid of his sister Elizabeth, he turned out *Peter Parley's Universal History* (1837), a long popular compilation for young readers. In 1838 there was consideration of a plan that came to nothing of collaborating with Longfellow on a book for children, which was intended to "make a great hit, and entirely revolutionize the whole system of juvenile literature." In 1841 however, Elizabeth Peabody published for him a successful collection of tales from New England history called *Grandfather's Chair*, which was shortly followed by *Famous Old People* and *Liberty Tree*.

Meanwhile, however, in 1838, he had been involved in the most insane action of his life, when he virtually challenged his friend John O'Sullivan to a duel in behalf of Mary Crowninshield Silsbee (later Mrs. Jared Sparks), with whom Hawthorne seems to have fancied himself in love, and who either believed or pretended to believe that O'Sullivan had wronged her. Fortunately the latter kept his head, Hawthorne accepted his explanation graciously, and their friendship was not interrupted. Shortly thereafter, Jonathan Cilley, then a newly elected congressman, who had been at Bowdoin with Hawthorne, was killed in a duel by a colleague from Kentucky. It has been both asserted and denied that Cilley was encouraged to accept a challenge he might with "honor" have avoided by Hawthorne's example; if there is any truth in this, it must have laid another burden on the writer's sensitive conscience.

Perhaps Hawthorne might have missed Mary Silsbee more if he had not by this time have found himself falling in love with Sophia Peabody. The Peabodys and the Hawthornes had lived near each other in Salem since Nathaniel's childhood, but he never called at the

Peabody house as an adult until November 1837, when Sophia, who had gifts both as a writer and an artist but who was plagued with severe headaches, was in her chamber. At the earliest opportunity, her older sister Elizabeth, one of the pioneer Transcendentalists and a close associate of Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and William Ellery Channing, ran upstairs to urge her to come down and greet a visitor who was more handsome than Lord Byron. Sophia only laughed and said that if he had called once, he would call again. He did, and it was upon that occasion that the two first stood face to face. Their mutual attraction was instantaneous, but he looked at her so intently that he frightened her. The evening ended with Elizabeth's promise to call at the Hawthorne house, but Sophia declined the invitation on the ground that she never went out at night. "'I wish you would,' he said, in a low, urgent tone. But she smiled and shook her head, and he went away."

They soon progressed beyond this however, and it was not long before each understood how the other felt. It was Elizabeth who had established the adult connection between the two families through her discovery and praise of Hawthorne as a writer, and for some time observers seem to have been in doubt as to which sister Hawthorne was interested in. If Elizabeth was disappointed, nobody ever found it out, for she was one of the great saints and one of the great intellectuals, as well as one of the great eccentrics of early American culture, and she went through a somewhat-similar experience with Horace Mann before he made it clear that he meant to marry her sister Mary.<sup>2</sup>

Two other barriers remained between the lovers. One was Hawthorne's poverty, and the other was Sophia's health. The latter they agreed to leave to God. If it was His will that Sophia should marry Nathaniel, He would relieve her of her headaches. God graciously vouchsafed the sign. There is no record of their having asked Him for money, but in November 1838, the historian George Bancroft, now Collector of the Port of Boston, prompted by Elizabeth, offered Hawthorne a place in the Custom House, and in January 1839 he accepted it, though he wrote Longfellow that he was about as well qualified for the post as Sancho Panza had been for his governorship. He did his work well nevertheless, asserting himself without difficulty, and on at least one occasion spectacularly, over the rough

men with whom he had to deal. But he felt "hampered and degraded" by it, and in January 1841 he was happy to be relieved of his duties.

There followed another highly uncharacteristic action. From April to November 1841 this solitary, introspective man lived and invested and lost some of his hard-earned money in the Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education, a Transcendentalist kind of cooperative community that George Ripley and others were trying to establish in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, and which Elizabeth Peabody hailed in *The Dial* as offering "LEISURE TO LIVE IN ALL THE FACULTIES OF THE SOUL" and affording "A Glimpse of Christ's Idea of Society." The explanation was that, eager to be married, Nathaniel and Sophia hoped thus to solve their economic problem and secure a home of their own at the farm at an earlier date than they might expect to acquire it elsewhere. Again Hawthorne did a man's work and did it manfully, also becoming one of the officers of the institution, but neither he nor the enterprise itself thrived, and by November it was all beginning to look like a dream behind him: "the real Me was never an associate of the community." Labor might be "the germ of all good," as Elizabeth Peabody had proclaimed, but shoveling manure and feeding swine did not inspire literature, and even when it left leisure for it, it did not leave strength.

On July 9, 1842, Hawthorne and Sophia ventured upon matrimony nevertheless, the ceremony being performed by the Reverend James Freeman Clarke, at the West Street house in Boston where the Peabodys were now living. The groom was thirty-eight, his bride thirty-three. No member of the Hawthorne family attended. Elizabeth Hawthorne had written Sophia that she hoped their future intercourse would be agreeable, especially since they did not need to meet often if they did not "happen to suit each other."

From Samuel Ripley the newlyweds rented for a hundred dollars a year the Old Manse beside the battleground in Concord, a house that had been built by Emerson's grandfather in 1765 and where Emerson himself had once lived. Hawthorne never shared his wife's enthusiasm for either Emerson ("that everlasting rejecter of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what") or the Margaret Fuller whom Emerson regarded as a supremely great woman, and when Margaret suggested that her sister and the latter's husband Ellery Channing

might be received as boarders at the Old Manse, he firmly declined. He had no more intention of sharing Eden with another Adam and Eve than with the Serpent. Thoreau he liked better, for though he was as "ugly as sin," he was a "healthy and wholesome man," with "real poetry in him," and "a keen and delicate observer of nature."

Though the Hawthornes were blissfully happy in each other during their residence in the Old Manse, they had no income except what he could earn with his pen. He edited and improved the *Journal of an African Cruise* (1845) by his friend Horatio Bridge, and "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter" were among the "mosses" he produced while living there. On March 3, 1844, their first child, the lovely Una, was born there (Mrs. Hawthorne had had one previous miscarriage). By March of the following year they knew that the owner wished to reclaim the house, and they left Concord in October. This meant temporary lodgings in Salem and Boston, sometimes with in-laws and apart from each other. Their second child and only son Julian was born in Boston, on June 22, 1846.

Hawthorne's friends with political connections or influence now set to work to pull every string that could be pulled to get him back on the public payroll. For a time the Salem postmastership was the prize eyed, but what finally materialized in April 1846 was the surveyorship of the Salem Custom House.

This solved the financial problem, but it did not stay solved long. By June 1849 political machinations, involving prominently "that smooth, smiling, oily man of God," the Reverend Charles W. Upham, and other locally influential Whigs succeeded in depriving Hawthorne of his office. The result was a local sensation and a newspaper scandal which, as Hawthorne said, "caused the greatest uproar . . . since witch-time," and it flared up anew after the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, with its introductory sketch, "The Custom House." The familiar story that when Hawthorne told Sophia he had lost his place, she said, "Good, then you can write your book," is probably not literally true, though it well indicates the spirit of both parties. Nevertheless, Hawthorne longed for "some stated literary employment"; even an application for work at the Boston Athenaeum was considered.

After "your book," *The Scarlet Letter*, appeared on March 16, 1850, the worst of the Hawthornes' poverty was over, but meanwhile there was a period to go through when they were so pinched that they were even obliged to accept contributions from friends. Sophia used her artistic talents to decorate screens and lampshades for sale, and Hawthorne minded the children after spending a nine-hour day at his desk. He was now completely out of sympathy with Salem (his mother had died, tended by Sophia, in the summer of 1849): "I detest this town so much that I hate to go into the streets, or to have the people see me. Anywhere else, I shall at once be entirely another man."

"Anywhere else" turned out to be Lenox in the Berkshires. They rented a little old farmhouse there, "as red as the Scarlet Letter," in April 1850, but it was not available until the end of May, and this meant another period for Sophia and the children with her family in Boston and for Hawthorne in lodgings. The red house was in full view of what is now the Stockbridge Bowl and of much natural beauty, and Hawthorne's outdoor life there was much like what he had enjoyed at the Old Manse. There were literary neighbors too, of whom the most important was Herman Melville, Hawthorne's response to whose exuberant confidences were less eager than the younger man could have wished. Yet Sophia thought Melville's "Hawthorne and his Mosses" in *The Literary World* the first really adequate appreciation of her husband's genius that had appeared, and when *Moby-Dick* was published in 1851, Hawthorne was the dedicatee. He began work on *The House of the Seven Gables* soon after arriving in Lenox, and it was published on April 9, 1851. On May 20, his last child, Rose, was born, and in November the Hawthornes left Lenox for West Newton, Massachusetts, to spend the winter in a house on Chestnut Street, owned by Horace Mann and his wife, Sophia's sister Mary, who were leaving temporarily for Washington.

In West Newton, Hawthorne wrote his most realistic novel, *The Blithedale Romance*, making use of his memories of Brook Farm, ten years before; it was published on July 14, 1852. Meanwhile, in December 1851, he had learned that Bronson Alcott's "Hillside," in Concord, was for sale. In February 1852 he bought it and renamed

it "The Wayside," paying fifteen hundred dollars for the house, together with nine acres of land, later increased to thirteen. They moved in June, and this was the only house Hawthorne ever owned.<sup>3</sup>

All in all, 1852 was an eventful year in Hawthorne's life, both for good and for evil. After his friend Franklin Pierce was nominated on the forty-ninth ballot as Democratic candidate for the presidency, Hawthorne was enlisted to produce his campaign biography, which came out in early fall and led to his consular appointment and determined the pattern of the rest of his life. But in the summer, on her way to visit the Wayside, his sister Louisa was drowned in the *Henry Clay* steamboat accident, and he took it hard. Within four years inclusive (1851-53), he published seven books (*True Stories from History and Biography* had also appeared in 1851, and *A Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales* followed in 1852 and 1853). These were indeed his wonder years, marking the only period in which Hawthorne could have been called a truly prolific writer. After *Blithedale* he would not bring out another novel for eight years, and this would be the last to appear during his lifetime.

Having won the Election of 1852, Pierce honored his biographer and their long and devoted friendship by appointing him United States consul at Liverpool, which was considered the most lucrative post in the foreign service. As soon as the election was over, Hawthorne was much involved in advising Pierce about other appointments, an activity in which he displayed considerable sagacity. With members of the Peabody family occupying the Wayside during their absence, the Hawthornes sailed on the Cunard steamer *Niagara* on July 6, 1853, arriving at Liverpool after ten days at sea. On August 1, the new consul took up his duties.

As a public official, Hawthorne was drawn at once into many functions, even embracing speech making, which, until now, he had regarded as utterly outside the range of his capacities. There was also more social festivity than he had ever experienced before. Both American visitors and English celebrities sought out the distinguished author who was in government service, and the family explored historic sites and literary shrines in "our old home" whenever his consular duties granted him leisure. Hawthorne responded fervently to Gothic cathedrals, though not to the Anglican service. The family took a pew at a Unitarian church in Liverpool, whose pastor

was an American clergyman, William Henry Channing, but it was generally occupied by Sophia and the children.

Hawthorne was not born for government work, and it did not take him long to begin to be thoroughly sick of his job and to long for his hillside and "what I thought I should never long for—my pen!" Nevertheless it should be stated with emphasis that this dreamer made one of the most faithful, efficient, humane administrators on record. One communication to the secretary of state comprises 108 pages in his own handwriting, with numerous enclosures (one wonders if it was ever read). What he saw of English poverty and the causes that produced it appalled him, as all readers of *Our Old Home* will remember. He could not do anything about that, but, having learned that there was "nothing in this world so much like hell as the interior of an American ship," he did his best, though without avail, to effect reforms in the merchant service. When he tried to interest the great antislavery advocate Charles Sumner in this matter, Sumner did not even bother to answer his letter, which must have strengthened his conviction that reformers are blind as bats to everything except their own particular cause.

In assisting Americans in distress, even when he knew their troubles had been justly earned by their own folly or wickedness, he went far beyond not only the call of duty but even beyond what most persons would have considered reason, for he had always agreed with Hamlet that if men were used according to their deserts, few would escape whipping. When money was needed, and not provided for out of government funds, he supplied it from his own meager resources. Sometimes, as with the "Poor, Reverend Devil! Drunkard! Whoremaster Doctor of Divinity!" who had been in a brothel for a week, he had to become father confessor and disciplinarian to boot, and his adventures with the "Bedlamite" Delia Bacon, who wanted to open Shakespeare's grave in search of evidence that Bacon wrote his plays, and for the publication of whose book Hawthorne paid without accepting her heresy (or getting any thanks for his kindness), left him feeling that "this shall be the last of my benevolent follies, and I never will be kind to anybody again as long as I live."

What finally triggered his resignation however was that Mrs. Hawthorne could not stand the damp, cold English climate; indeed she and the girls spent one winter in Portugal, leaving Hawthorne