Nathaniel Hawthorne
Dictionary of American Biography. 1936.

Born: July 04, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts, United States
Died: May 19, 1864 in Plymouth, New Hampshire, United States
Nationality: American
Occupation: Writer

Full Text:

Hawthorne, Nathaniel (July 4, 1804 - May 18 or 19, 1864), novelist, was born in Salem, Mass., the son of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Elizabeth Clarke Manning, his wife. The earliest Hawthorne (or Hathorne, as the name was spelled until the novelist changed it) in America was Maj. William Hathorne [*q.v.*], who came to Massachusetts in 1630 and settled first at Dorchester and then at Salem. His son, John Hathorne, served as judge in the Salem witchcraft trials; the curse pronounced upon him by one of his victims was remembered by his descendants and was blamed for any evil fortune which befell the house. The third Hathorne of the line was a farmer; the fourth, the "bold Hathorne" of the Revolutionary sea ballad; the fifth, likewise a ship captain, who died four years after the birth of his son, the future novelist. Elizabeth Clarke Manning was descended from ancestors who settled in Salem in 1679. The younger Nathaniel was the first Hawthorne to choose a sedentary calling, a choice which he made the more easily because the will to action had by this time faded out of the stock, to be succeeded by a mild pride of blood and a quiet loyalty to the concerns of the mind.

The death of his father in 1808 plunged his mother into a perpetual widowhood, which she observed by keeping her own room so far as possible and never taking her meals at the common table of the household. Naturally the son grew up in what he later called the "cursed habits" of solitude. These seem not, however, to have made themselves felt during his pre-adolescent years, even during the years between nine and twelve when a slight lameness shut him off from sports and turned him to a course of reading in books as romantic as *The Faerie Queene* and as realistic as *The Newgate Calendar* and made him by fourteen acquainted with Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Clarendon, Froissart, Rousseau, and novels and romances of all sorts. At fourteen, however, about the age when, if the father had lived, the boy would presumably have gone to sea and have begun to study the world, he went instead to Raymond, Me., where his maternal uncles owned a tract of land on Sebago Lake in the midst of the wilderness. There the youth had his imagination touched by the forest, which was for him a school in which the principal instruction was in contented loneliness. It is true that after a year in Maine he went back to his studies in or near Salem, and that from 1821 to 1825 he was at Bowdoin College, where he gambled a little, drank rather more, and skylarked a good deal in a robust, athletic, innocent way, but after taking his degree he felt no impulse to enter a profession or to venture abroad into the expanding America of his age, and so settled down in Salem to a dozen years devoted to making himself a man of letters. After some early exercises in deliberate gloom he arrived at a levelness of temper which marked both his life and his work. In the end he did not regret his long retreat. "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 with the freshness of my heart" (*Passages from the American Note-Books,* p. 219). In spite of what may be suspected from this argument, Hawthorne was neither particularly priggish nor excessively shy. He was only trusting to his imagination. "I used to think I could imagine all passions, all feelings, and states of heart and mind" (*Ibid.*). Indeed, until he reached his maturity at about thirty-three, Hawthorne's imagination does seem to have been competent to sustain and interest him.

At the same time, he did not confine his imagination to an exclusive diet of itself. At least once a year, ordinarily in the summer, he was likely to shake off his solitude, leave Salem and his mother's house behind, and strike out on a kind of wary vagabondage through other districts of New England. His *American Note-Books* show him to have used his eyes and ears on his travels, as do several of his

tales and sketches. The White Mountains furnished the scene for "The Ambitious Guest," "The Great Carbuncle," and "The Great Stone Face"; some crossroads north of Boston, for "The Seven Vagabonds"; Martha's Vineyard, for "Chippings with a Chisel"; the Shaker community at Canterbury, N. H., which he visited in 1831, for "The Canterbury Pilgrims" and, with changes, "The Shaker Bridal"; Greylock in the Berkshires, for "Ethan Brand." If the "Sketches from Memory," "Old Ticonderoga," and "My Visit to Niagara" are as autobiographical as they look, Hawthorne visited Lake Champlain, followed the Erie Canal between Utica and Syracuse, stopped at Rochester, saw Niagara Falls, and may even have gone as far as to Detroit. Everywhere he was attentive to the manners and customs that he found. Merely as historian he has genuine value. In especial he had a decided taste for low life, for tollgatherers, pedlars, cattledrovers, hawkers of amusement, stageagents, tavernhaunters. He must himself have experienced the longing of the narrator in "The Seven Vagabonds" to join a crew of chance-met nomads and live by telling stories to random audiences along the road.

Such longings, however sincere for this or that brief moment, did not move Hawthorne to become the picaresque romancer which New England has never had. In a community of scholars, he read more than he tramped, ruffling the history of his native section in search of color and variety. "The knowledge communicated by the historian and biographer," he wrote in one of the earliest pieces of prose known to be his, "is analogous to that which we acquire of a country by the map--minute, perhaps, and accurate, . . . but cold and naked" (*Tales, Sketches, and Other Papers,* 1883 edition, p. 227). He aimed to enliven and warm the record by reconstructing typical "moments of drama, little episodes of controversy, clashes between the parties and ideas which divided the old New England." In "The Gentle Boy," the first of his stories to attract attention, he went back to the Quaker persecutions; in "Young Goodman Brown," to the witchcraft mania; in "The Gray Champion," to the last days of Governor Andros; in "The Maypole of Merry Mount" and "Endicott and the Red Cross," to the early days of the settlement; in the "Legends of the Province House," to the Revolution. In these, and in others of slighter value, Hawthorne tended always to look for the conflict rather of ideas than of parties. "The future complexion of New England," he wrote concerning the struggle between the Puritans and the jolly rioters of Merry Mount, "was involved in this important quarrel. Should the grizzly saints establish their jurisdiction over the gay sinners, then would their spirits darken all the clime and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm forever. But should the banner of Merry Mount be fortunate, sunshine would break upon the hills, and flowers would beautify the forest, and late posterity do homage to the Maypole." Himself a descendant of the Puritans, Hawthorne nevertheless sympathized, lightly ironical as his language might now and then be, with the other side, with the humane and expansive rebels against the order of austerity and orthodoxy.

That this was less a historical than a moral position on his part is indicated by the theme which occupied him most in the short stories. He was solitary by habit, but he deeply feared the solitude which comes from egotism, the proud, hard isolation which shuts the essential egotist away from society. In "Wakefield," telling the story of a man who had left his family to live twenty years in secret in the next street, Hawthorne closely studied the motives which might have accounted for such an experiment of selfishness and vanity. "The Minister's Black Veil" represented what might follow if even a virtuous egotist should hide his face in fact as others do in effect. "Rappaccini's Daughter" took up the ancient legend of a girl so long fed on poisons that no poison could hurt her, and found behind it the tragedy of an involuntary egotist so far removed from nature as to have become herself a poison. "Ethan Brand" revived a later legendary idea, that of the unpardonable sin, and showed a Calvinist who believed he had committed it, and who grew, as he brooded, into a conviction that he was a sinner without equal, and finally reached a state of pride, of egotistic desperation, which as Hawthorne saw it was less pardonable than any other sin the man might have committed. Solitude, these early stories sought to illustrate, leads to egotism; egotism leads to pride; and pride, by different roads, leads always away from nature. "The Birthmark" showed a husband so crazed by a lust for perfection that he employed dark sciences to remove a birthmark from the cheek of his otherwise flawless wife and thereby caused her death. "The Christmas Banquet" showed the punishment of pride to be an incurable inner sense of coldness and emptiness, "a feeling," the victim says, "as if what should be my heart were a thing of vapor--a haunting perception of unreality. . . . All things, all persons . . . have

been like shadows flickering on the wall." There can be no question that Hawthorne was, as it is traditional to say, concerned from the first with sin, but neither can there be any question that he was concerned with the sin least likely to be involved with meanness and brutality, the sin which of all the deadly sins is perhaps closest to a virtue.

Aside from the stories which he wrote there are virtually no events to mark the progress of his life from 1825 to 1837. Early in that period, though the exact date is not known, he tried to find a publisher for a book which he meant to call "Seven Tales of My Native Land." Exasperated by his failure with established publishers, and by the delays of the Salem printer who said he would take the chance, the author destroyed the manuscript. In 1828 he issued, at his own expense and anonymously, the undistinguished *Fanshawe,* of which the scene was more or less Bowdoin and the hero more or less Hawthorne. The novel, though it got him no readers, got him a publisher, the energetic Samuel Griswold Goodrich [*q.v.*] of Boston, who was just then founding an annual, the *Token.* During the fourteen years of its persistence the *Token,* with the *New England Magazine,* to the editors of which Goodrich introduced him, was to be Hawthorne's chief outlet. Not till 1832, however, did anything from the lonely venturer at Salem rise much above the elegant melancholy which characterized this and similar annuals, and even "The Gentle Boy," in that year, did not rise too far above it. This tale was quickly followed, however, by enough short masterpieces to justify the publication in 1837 of the first series of *Twice-Told Tales,* with which, though the book was calmly received, the dozen years of solitary experiment came to an end, as did also the earlier plans for a book to be called "Provincial Tales" and another to be called "The Story-Teller." For another dozen years or so, which saw a second series of *Twice-Told Tales* (1842), *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), and *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* (1851), Hawthorne continued to write short stories, but he had an increasing reputation, and he lived approximately in the visible world.

During 1836 he had already acted as editor for seven months of the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge,* published by Goodrich in Boston, where Hawthorne not only edited but also wrote or compiled the whole of every issue. After this he compiled *Peter Parley's Universal History* (1837), a piece of hackwork which is said to have sold over a million copies before it went out of print. As Oliver Goldsmith had done before him, Hawthorne put his smooth, clear prose into routine service for young readers, whom later he served by writing *Grandfather's Chair* (1841), *Famous Old People* (1841), *Liberty Tree* (1841), *Biographical Stories for Children* (1842), and, finally, the books in which his serviceable pen became silver, *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1852) and *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys* (1853), two of the lasting triumphs of their mode. All these undertakings were, of course, for the sake of money, the want of which did as much as anything else to break up Hawthorne's career of solitude. With the help of his friend Franklin Pierce [*q.v.*], the emerging recluse tried in 1837 for the post of historian to an expedition to the Antarctic then being planned, and, failing that, became weigher and gager in the Boston Custom House from 1839 to 1841. Having resigned his place, which he knew he would probably lose when the Whigs came again into office, he went to live at West Roxbury, with the Transcendental enthusiasts who had founded Brook Farm. Hawthorne invested his savings in the little Utopia, but he was otherwise not an enthusiast, and he left after an intermittent year of residence had proved to him that the association did not suit his temper or solve his problem.

Neither the Custom House nor Brook Farm had enabled him to enter the world enough to get his living from it and yet to keep his imagination free in the security thus obtained. In both he had been disappointed by the realities to which he had looked forward with the hope that they might give the needed stir and substance to his life. Temporarily abandoning any such hope, he was married July 9, 1842, to Sophia Amelia Peabody of Salem, his love for whom during the past four years had steadily increased his dissatisfaction with solitude. "Indeed," he had written to her, "we are but shadows; we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream,--till the heart be touched. That touch creates us,--then we begin to be,--thereby we are beings of reality and inheritors of eternity" (*Passages from the American Note-Books,* p. 219). In the Old Manse at Concord, where Hawthorne made his home for the next three years, he discovered in love,

of which he seems to have had no previous experience, a reality which he had not discovered in "encounters with the multitude." Profoundly happy with his wife, he was not, for sometime, too much disturbed by his serious lack of money or by his unproductiveness as a writer. Nor was he distracted by the presence near him of the most distinguished group of men who have ever come together in a single American village. He was merely bored by Bronson Alcott, and was chiefly tolerant towards Ellery Channing. He listened to Emerson with interest but without the customary reverence and without catching the infection of abstract thought. Only with Thoreau did Hawthorne arrive at anything like intimacy, and that was based upon the habits of silence which they had in about an equal degree, and upon a taste for things, as distinguished from opinions, in which Thoreau had gone further than Hawthorne but in which Hawthorne was eager to follow him. Though the effects of so much happiness were not immediately visible, these three years were in the long run the most fruitful, or at least the most stabilizing, of all that Hawthorne ever lived through.

The Concord idyll, however, was broken up by the pressure of necessity. Hawthorne removed his wife and child to Salem in 1845, tried to become postmaster, and instead was appointed surveyor of the port. Before taking up the duties of his office he brought together what he believed was to be his final collection of short stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), and wrote for it an introductory paper exquisitely describing the circumstances of his pastoral interlude. By comparison his next three years, about which he was later to write in his introduction to *The Scarlet Letter,* were an interlude of comedy. The custom house at Salem depressed and troubled him as much as that at Boston had done, but he now stood on surer ground and could smile at what would once have made him fret. Nevertheless, he resented his dismissal when the Democrats went out of power in 1849, and he thereafter held a grudge against his native town. He had written little during the period, though to it belong "The Great Stone Face" and "Ethan Brand," and had finally lost interest in short stories, but when, once more forced into private life, he resumed his proper occupation, he found, or at least showed, how much he had stored up during his two interludes. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), which brought his art to its somewhat tardy peak, poured from him in a serene flood.

The novels marked no decided break with the tales. In style, tone, tempo, themes, Hawthorne proceeded much as he had always done. Only his dimensions were different. *The Scarlet Letter,* for which a hint had already appeared in "Endicott and the Red Cross," is really a succession of moments of drama from the lives of the principal characters, almost without the links of narrative which ordinarily distinguish a novel from a play. What binds the parts together is the continuity of the mood, the large firmness of the central idea. Both mood and idea lift the story to a region more spacious than seventeenth-century Salem might have been expected to furnish. This novel again portrays a clash between elements opposed in old New England, but, at the same time, the universal clash between egotism and nature. Dimmesdale is destroyed by the egotism which leads him to keep the secret of his offense, even though another must bear the whole punishment. Chillingworth is destroyed by the egotism which leads him to assume the divine responsibility of vengeance. Hester, whose nature no less than her fate makes it impossible for her to be a stealthy egotist, is the only one of the three who survives the tragedy and grows with her experience. If *The Scarlet Letter* was an extended study of such egotism as Hawthorne had dealt with in many of his tales, *The House of the Seven Gables* was an extended description of such houses and households as he had dealt with in many of his sketches. This house was described from an actual house in Salem, and this household was in some respects like the household of Hawthorne's own youth--withdrawn, solitary, declining, haunted by an ancestral curse. Into the story he distilled all the representative qualities, all the typical memories of decadent New England, without, however, bringing in that New England complacency which made a virtue out of decay and refused to admit the existence of any evil in adversity. The Pyncheons inevitably dwindle to ashes, and the life of their proud line has to be carried on, collaterally, by nature, by the infusion of less genteel blood. With *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne said farewell to the Salem in which he had grown up. In *The Blithedale Romance* he turned to the contemporary world. His setting was more or less what he remembered from Brook Farm, which he used in order "to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play

their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives." This was as near as he cared to come to "certainly the most romantic episode of his own life--essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact," as Hawthorne characterized Brook Farm in his preface. By a kind of softness in the tone, by a kind of charming formalism in the characterization and dialogue, he dimmed the lights and suffused the colors of his drama. Yet he no less firmly indicated his guiding thesis, which was that philanthropy, of the sort displayed by Hollingsworth, is at bottom only another egotism and may bring the philanthropist into tragic conflict with nature.

The Scarlet Letter was written and published, with great success, while Hawthorne was still living in Salem, after he had lost his place in the custom house. The second novel he wrote at Lenox in the Berkshires, to which he had gone with his family in 1850 and where he lived in a farm house during a cold winter and two agreeable summers. Though again in retirement, he saw a good many friends, and in particular made the acquaintance of Herman Melville [*q.v.*], who was then writing *Moby Dick* at Pittsfield. How relatively contented Hawthorne was in his solitude, how steady in his skepticism, is made clear by the contrast between him and this bitter, violent man of genius. In 1851 the household was again moved, to West Newton, where the third novel was completed the next spring. The novels brought Hawthorne money as well as an increase of reputation. He bought a house in Concord and returned to the scene of his greatest happiness. Once more, however, there were interruptions, even less congenial to the novelist than those which, at Lenox, had seen him taking advantage of his new fame by collecting *The Snow Image and Other Twice-Told Tales* and writing *A Wonder-Book.* Pierce, nominated for president by the Democrats, asked his old friend to prepare a campaign biography. Hawthorne was totally uninterested in politics, but he had hitherto benefited by political appointments, and he had a strong sense of obligation to the man who had most aided him. He consequently wrote, with great labor, *The Life of Franklin Pierce* (1852), and, after some hesitation on his part, was rewarded by another appointment, this time that of United States consul at Liverpool. In 1853, at the age of nearly fifty, Hawthorne for the first time left the New World for the Old, where he was to remain for seven years.

The seven years came too late to work any important changes in either his art or his thought. In his native province he had inclined toward the universal; in a larger universe he inclined toward the provincial. During the whole of his stay in England, from 1853 to 1858, he made friends with no men or women of first-rate quality, very few of whom he even saw. Instead he faithfully, if now and then complainingly, discharged his consular duties, visited historical scenes in the spirit of the conscious tourist, and waited two years before he went for the first time to London. London, however, delighted him. In Italy, where Hawthorne lived during 1858 and the first months of 1859, he felt most at home among the American and British residents and travelers. Though he believed he was not homesick, he felt overpowered by Europe, by the rush of countless new impressions. With the eagerness of a very young American he tasted the pleasures of antiquity in the expected places. With the patience of a man long withheld from the masterpieces of architecture, music, painting, sculpture, he gorged cathedrals and galleries. Often he was bored. At the end of his journey he could still seriously condemn the representation of the nude in works of art. But his provincialism, because it remained honest, did not become disagreeable. What small men may learn earlier Hawthorne was learning late, and he gave himself to the task with a temper which was observant, sensitive, and resolute. When, after another year in England, he came back to Concord in 1860, he remained a provincial, but he also regretted the world he had left behind.

Hawthorne's stay abroad had not stimulated his pen. After *Tanglewood Tales,* written before he left Concord, he did not publish another book before *The Marble Faun* (1860), begun in Italy and completed in England. It, with *Our Old Home* (1863), a beautiful, shrewd, slyly satirical commentary upon England, summed up what he had acquired in Europe. He was enough a son of New England to feel an obligation to describe Rome in his romance with something of the thoroughness of a guidebook, though of a guidebook remarkably suave and melodious. He was also enough of a son of his province to show, in his central idea, that he had been frightened by paganism and driven back to Calvinism. Miriam and Donatello are both creatures of nature, of a sort to which Hawthorne had given

his sympathy in the earlier tales and novels; but these two, surprised into the crime of murder, see it as a sin even more than as a crime, and are driven by conscience along a path which a Puritan might have traveled. Their sense of sin is their teacher, and from it they receive their moral education. Indeed, Donatello, who is pure nature, becomes truly human only after sin has touched him. The conclusion seems a long way from the position which Hawthorne had taken in his drama of Merry Mount.

The four years after his return saw, except for *Our Old Home,* nothing further by him. He was constantly tempted by another theme for a romance, or rather, by two: the idea of an elixir of life and that of the return to England of an American heir to some hereditary estate. Yet though Hawthorne experimented with them in four fragments, *The Ancestral Footstep, Septimius Felton, Dr. Grimshaw's Secret,* and *The Dolliver Romance,* all published posthumously, he could not fuse or complete them. The Civil War fatally interrupted his reflections. Moreover, his imagination was dissolving, his vitality was breaking up, along with the New England era of which he had been, among its poets and romancers, the consummate flower. He could not survive his age. He could not even endure the tumult of its passing. In 1862 he visited Washington, called upon Lincoln with a delegation from Massachusetts, and wrote a magazine article called "Chiefly About War Matters" which vexed many readers of the *Atlantic* (July 1862) who could not understand the novelist's unconcern with the specific issues of the conflict. The death of Thoreau in 1862 weighed upon Hawthorne, as did the illness of his daughter Una. He wrote *Our Old Home* with difficulty and could not bring himself to undertake a serial for the *Atlantic.* In May 1864 he set out from Concord somewhat as he had been accustomed to do in his years at Salem, except that now, too feeble to go alone, he was accompanied by his friend Pierce, and went by carriage. In Plymouth, N. H., Hawthorne died quietly in his sleep. He was mourned as a classic figure and has ever since been so regarded.

FURTHER READINGS:

[Hawthorne himself furnishes a good deal of valuable biographical material in the *Passages from the Am. Notebooks* (1868), *Passages from the English Notebooks* (1870), and *Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks* (1871), edited from his journal by his wife. The published notebooks do not always represent the original manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library with complete fidelity. His wife in *Notes in England and Italy* (1869), his son Julian Hawthorne in *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife* (1884) and in *Hawthorne and His Circle* (1903), his daughter Rose Hawthorne Lathrop in *Memories of Hawthorne* (1897), and his son-in-law George Parsons Lathrop in *A Study of Hawthorne* (1876) all have the special authority which comes from their relationship. In addition there have been numerous biographical and critical studies by other writers, among whom may be mentioned: Newton Arvin, *Hawthorne* (1929); Horatio Bridge, *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1893), Moncure Daniel Conway, *Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1890), L. Dhaleine, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre* (1905), Herbert Gorman, *Hawthorne: a Study in Solitude* (1927), Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879), Lloyd Morris, *The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne* (1927), F. P. Stearns, *The Life and Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1906), Caroline Ticknor, *Hawthorne and His Publisher* (1913), George Edward Woodberry, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1902). There is a careful bibliography of the writings by and about Hawthorne in *The Cambridge Hist. of Am. Lit.,* II (1918), 415-24.]

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"Nathaniel Hawthorne." *Dictionary of American Biography*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936. *Biography In Context*, https://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/BT2310011646/BIC?u=lom_metronetmnfc&sid=BIC&xid=0fdde0e2. Accessed 4 Dec. 2018.

Gale Document Number: GALE|BT2310011646

The House of the Seven Gables Reader's Guide

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Category: Fiction Classics | Historical Fiction | Suspense & Thriller

READERS GUIDE

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Hawthorne considered this novel to be a romance, which in literary terms refers to a narrative, allegorical treatment of heroic, fantastic, or supernatural events. Do you think this term accurately describes the book? Why or why not?

2. What do you make of the relationship between interior consciousness and external appearance in the novel? How does this conflict, as experienced by each of the central characters, inform the novel? And how does the house serve as a metaphor for this struggle?

3. Discuss the theme of class and social structure in the novel. What do you think Hawthorne intends in his depiction of Hepzibah's and Clifford's slow decline, and the curse on the Pyncheons' house? Are these related in any way? What about the role of the Maules?

4. Is the house a kingdom or a prison? Neither, or both? What is the curse that afflicts the Pyncheons? Discuss.

5. Discuss the role played by Holgrave in the novel. How does his nomadic, rootless existence stand in contrast to the Pyncheons? How does his marriage to Phoebe complicate this?

6. Discuss the scene in which Clifford attempts to join the procession. How does this illuminate the fundamental struggle of the Pyncheon family?

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES
FURTHER STUDY

by: Nathaniel Hawthorne

Study Questions

1 Who would you say is the principal protagonist of *The House of the Seven Gables*? Who is the principal antagonist?

The House of the Seven Gables does not have one obvious protagonist like Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* or Hamlet in *Hamlet.* Instead, many of the novel's characters grow and change throughout the novel, all contributing to the plot development. Holgrave fits this description, though his change is somewhat peripheral, almost an afterthought Hawthorne rushes through in the final chapters. Phoebe blossoms into womanhood, becoming wiser as she grows older, but when she arrives at the Pyncheon homestead, she is so removed from the events of the house that the story really cannot be

called hers. Hepzibah and Clifford, on the other hand, are rooted in the house's tradition of misery, and the story focuses extensively on their transition from living in fear and constraint to more sustained happiness and freedom. They are the best examples of protagonists that we meet in *The House of the Seven Gables.*

The antagonists—the characters or forces who oppose the protagonist and create conflict—are less obvious. Although the menacing Judge Pyncheon provides the clearest conflict and is the most likely antagonist, he is in some ways no more responsible for the troubles of Clifford and Hepzibah than any Pyncheon ancestor. He is certainly the novel's most tangible villain, but his close ties to the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon make him seem more of a figurehead for past evils than an independent operator. Because the Judge's actions move the novel and drive it forward, we could even consider him the novel's main protagonist. In naming him the protagonist, we should keep in mind that he stands for 200 years of tainted -Pyncheon history.

2

In the Preface, Hawthorne claims his book is a romance rather than a novel. Romances need not deal with "everyday, ordinary things" and usually incorporate fantastic elements. Do you think that *The House of the Seven Gables* is more of a romance or a novel? Should it be classified as another genre altogether?

The House of the Seven Gables is, in fact, a skillful blending of both narrative approaches. The book contains some fantastic elements, but most of these never stray far from reality. Two scenes—the two Maule ghosts restraining the spirit of Colonel Pyncheon and the ghosts parading in front of the dead Judge—

are too fantastical to have actually occurred, but one is presented as a vision of Alice Pyncheon's and the other as speculation on the narrator's part. The hypnotic powers of the young Matthew Maule and Holgrave are certainly eerie and mystical, but hypnosis does exist, and therefore these scenes are not entirely fantastical. While *The House of the Seven Gables* does not belong to the horror genre, it does incorporate many elements of horror, sharing with the horror genre the realization that the greatest shock value can be created by making things too horrible to be true but not so awful that they can't be believed. By straddling the line between the romance and the novel, and by refusing to commit entirely to any genre, Hawthorne makes his work shocking but also thought-provoking. He creates a work of fiction that entertains and teaches with a fantastical plot that is also rich with literary and historical themes.

3 Discuss the role of "fate" in the novel. How much of the Pyncheons' bad luck is caused by fate, and how much results from their own actions and choices?

At the beginning of *The House of the Seven Gables,* fate is believed to direct the fortunes of Hepzibah and Clifford. The novel indulges this belief with its graphic descriptions of a curse that has worked itself into the very walls of the house. As the story progresses, however, we begin to wonder if other elements are not also at work. Holgrave's revolutionary doctrine of tearing down the houses of the dead implies that Clifford and Hepzibah become complicit in their persecution by being passive. They accept the cruelty they are handed with a meekness that borders on irresponsibility. The rest of the Pyncheons also appear to be partly responsible for their own bad luck: Maule's curse seems to affect only those who are driven by excessive ambition and greed, while the

The House of the Seven Gables | Discussion Questions 1 - 10

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What purpose does Chapter 1 serve in *The House of the Seven Gables*?

Chapter 1, which details the incident between Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew Maule, is crucial to the story. The flashback sets the stage for the rest of the text. The story focuses primarily on the Puncheons. Colonel Pyncheon's behaviors and traits are periodically seen in his descendants, but they, like Colonel Pyncheon, have questionable morals and ultimately suffer. Colonel Pyncheon's actions impact all the descendants in his family, particularly those who live in the House of the Seven Gables. As for the Maules, they are pitiable. However, they are far from pathetic, as they share their ancestor's determination and refusal to go down easily.

Matthew Maule Colonel Pyncheon Retribution Portrait House

In what ways are the narrator and Holgrave similar in *The House of the Seven Gables*?

When Hepzibah Pyncheon opens the shop, she is full of trepidation and shame. She feels dejected knowing she has fallen to such a level where she has to earn her own money, and believes this is not suitable for a lady. Holgrave, on the other hand, profusely praises Hepzibah's actions. He tells her, "You will ... have the sense of healthy and natural effort for a purpose." Holgrave adds that letting go of the past will be freeing, as Hepzibah will not be tied to old notions (including what it means to be a lady). The narrator similarly has no patience for labels and for the aristocracy. In Chapter 1, the narrator claims "influential classes ... are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob." Both Holgrave and the narrator look down upon the upper classes. They are not special and distinct and do not deserve to be envied.

Hepzibah Pyncheon Holgrave Classism

How is Colonel Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables* influenced by Nathaniel Hawthorne's background?

Colonel Pyncheon took advantage of the Salem Witch Trials. As noted in the text, members of the upper class were part of the frenzy and "applaud[ed] the work of blood." The narrator goes on to describe the era and what occurred as "the frenzy of that hideous epoch." Colonel Pyncheon had Matthew Maule killed in order to take his land. Nathaniel Hawthorne had a relative who served as a judge at the Salem Witch Trials. The author felt a sense of shame knowing his name was associated with the trials, as he felt the trials were a sham. Just as Hawthorne's ancestor participated in the Salem Witch Trials and brought shame to the Hawthorne family, so, too, does Colonel Pyncheon bring shame to the Pyncheon family.

Matthew Maule Colonel Pyncheon Retribution Guilt Portrait

How does Matthew Maule's well foreshadow the Pyncheon family's fate in *The House of the Seven Gables*?

Matthew Maule was originally drawn to and settled on the land because of its natural spring of water. The spring became known as Maule's well and retained the name after Colonel Pyncheon took the land for himself. However, when the workmen began construction on the House of the Seven Gables, "the spring of water ... lost the deliciousness of its pristine quality." Neighbors saw this as an "ominous fact," but Colonel Pyncheon ignored the sign. The ominous fate of the well is similar to the fate of the Pyncheon family once they take up residence in the House of the Seven Gables. The family suffers a series of misfortunes, and the guilt lingers even after Colonel Pyncheon is long gone. However, the family remains on the property and its members continue to think highly of themselves.

Matthew Maule Colonel Pyncheon Guilt Well House

What elements of *The House of the Seven Gables* make it a Gothic novel as well as a romance, as it is termed in the Preface?

The House of the Seven Gables can be considered a Gothic novel as well as a romance, particularly because Gothic fiction often incorporates romantic elements such as strong emotion, individuality, and nature. In fact, the Gothic genre is also known as Gothic Romance. Gothic works also tend to be dark and gloomy, and the plots frequently feature fear, horror, the supernatural, and death. The dismal and decaying House of the Seven Gables, like a person breathing his last breath, certainly contributes the requisite elements of gloom. Matthew Maule's curse adds a supernatural element to the story. With the deaths of Colonel Pyncheon, Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, it is as if the curse has succeeded. Matthew Maule (the younger) and Holgrave have the ability to hypnotize people. When Matthew Maule (the younger) uses this skill, the drama and emotion reach new heights as Alice Pyncheon is led to her death. All of these plot points mark Nathaniel Hawthorne's work as Gothic fiction.

Matthew Maule Colonel Pyncheon Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon Matthew Maule (the younger) Holgrave Alice Pyncheon Retribution House

How does Hepzibah Pyncheon represent the decay of the Pyncheon family in *The House of the Seven Gables*?

Hepzibah Pyncheon is trapped by the house and is described as "the Old Maid [who] was alone in the old house." Her audible sighs and creaky joints—similar to the creaky, rusty joints of the house—paint her as an aged, broken, and unhappy person. Each of her days seemed the same as the one before. There is neither joy nor excitement in her life. She wanders around the old house before retrieving the old miniature figurine. The portrait also represents time gone by. Hepzibah longs for the past when she led a more fulfilling life. Like the Pyncheon family, Hepzibah is down on her luck and clings to the past. Her physical decay, just like the decay of the house, is symbolic of the family's decay. However, there is a hint of something more. Her scowl is not by choice, and she possessed a heart that "never frowned." There is a goodness inside Hepzibah that wants to express itself.

Hepzibah Pyncheon House

How is Hepzibah Pyncheon characterized based on her conversation with Holgrave and her reaction to the workmen in Chapter 3 of *The House of the Seven Gables*?

Hepzibah Pyncheon has retained the pride the Pyncheons have felt since the days of their ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon. Hepzibah takes an aristocratic view of the world and considers herself a lady; as such, she considers many tasks—and people—beneath her. Her classism makes her ashamed to open up the store, and tells Holgrave if Matthew Maule could see her in the shop, "he would call it the fulfillment of his worst wishes." Her shame is heightened when the two workmen begin talking about her. Hepzibah feels "overwhelming shame that strange and unloving eyes should have the privilege of gazing" on her shop window. Hepzibah is a proud woman. She does not want pity nor does she want people to see her at what she considers a low point. She retains the pride of the family, though she believes she is suffering due to its history. Holgrave urges her to set aside her classism, to step out of her "circle of gentility," and join "the united struggle of mankind."

Hepzibah Pyncheon Holgrave Two workmen Retribution Classism

How is Uncle Venner's first appearance in the novel, in Chapter 4, similar to his other appearances in *The House of the Seven Gables*?

Uncle Venner is a positive, cheerful, and pleasant individual in every scene in which he appears; he is unfailingly generous and unselfish. In his initial appearance, he tries to cheer up Hepzibah Pyncheon over her new venture. He repeatedly compliments Phoebe Pyncheon and calls her angelic. Hepzibah leans on him and asks his opinion, and Clifford Pyncheon enjoys speaking with him so much so, he wishes Uncle Venner will join them when they leave the House of the Seven Gables. When the Pyncheon cousins and Holgrave gather in the back of the house on Sundays, Uncle Venner is a welcome addition. This is undoubtedly due to his positive aura. Venner is described as "the vagrant artist [...] the wood-sawyer, the messenger of everybody's petty errands, the patched philosopher." In sharp contrast to Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, he never seeks to profit from or take advantage of others, and his character conveys Nathaniel Hawthorne's belief that status and material things do not bring happiness.

Uncle Venner Phoebe Pyncheon Holgrave Clifford Pyncheon Hepzibah Pyncheon

How do the various descriptions of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon in Chapters 1, 4, and 5 add mystery to *The House of the Seven Gables*?

In Chapter 1, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon is greatly praised. He is referred to as an "honor to his race," a gentleman, a Christian, and a good citizen. His many personal qualities are in addition to his professional qualities. In Chapter 4, Hepzibah Pyncheon refuses to accept Judge Pyncheon's help and does not want to speak to him. In Chapter 5, Hepzibah tells Phoebe Pyncheon, "He will hardly cross the threshold while I live! No, no!" The reader is left with questions. Who is the real Judge Pyncheon? How can he be praised so highly yet draw such ire from Hepzibah? Why is Judge Pyncheon not around to help her if he is such a gentleman? As the novel proceeds, it becomes clear that while Pyncheon may seem an "honor to his race" to those who know him little, his good deeds are all for show; he is motivated only by his desire for status, praise, and material comforts. Despite his wealth, he is insatiably greedy for more; as Hepzibah knows all too well, he cares nothing for the damage he will do Clifford Pyncheon by hounding him for part of the inheritance from Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon.

Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon Hepzibah Pyncheon Classism

How does Phoebe Pyncheon's first appearance foreshadow her time in Chapter 5 of *The House of the Seven Gables*?

Phoebe—whose name is from the Greek *phoibos*, meaning "bright, pure"— is a breath of fresh air and a ray of light in the old house. Upon awakening in the house for the first time, she is compared to the morning's light, "the new guest there,—with a bloom on her cheeks like the morning's own." Phoebe awakens to a place that is unfamiliar. What is unfamiliar to Phoebe is not so much the physical location but the figurative darkness hovering over the house. Phoebe does a number of minor things to the room to brighten it up. Her presence and her actions—while not dramatic—have the same impact on everyone she meets and on the house itself. Phoebe Pyncheon makes everything better.

Phoebe Pyncheon

* * * * *

After many days there was more than one account of what had been witnessed on the scaffold. Most of the spectators testified to having seen, on the breast of the unhappy minister, a scarlet letter imprinted in the flesh. Others denied that there was any mark whatever on his breast, more than on a new-born infant's. According to these highly respectable witnesses the minister's confession implied no part of the guilt of Hester Prynne, but was to teach us that we were all sinners alike. Old Roger Chillingworth died and bequeathed his property to little Pearl.

For years the mother and child lived in England, and then Pearl married, and Hester returned alone to the little cottage by the forest.

* * * * *

The House of the Seven Gables

"The House of the Seven Gables," published in 1851, was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne directly after "The Scarlet Letter," and though not equal to that remarkable book, was full worthy of its author's reputation, and brought no disappointment to those who looked for great things from his pen. It seemed to James Russell Lowell "the highest art" to typify, "in the revived likeness of Judge Pyncheon to his ancestor the colonel, that intimate relationship between the present and the past in the way of ancestry and descent, which historians so carefully overlook." Here, as in "The Scarlet Letter," Hawthorne is unsparing in his analysis of the meaning of early American Puritanism--its intolerance and its strength.

I.--The Old Pyncheon Family

Half-way down a by-street of one of our New England towns stands a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely-peaked gables, and a huge clustered chimney in the midst. The street is Pyncheon Street; the house is the old Pyncheon House; and an elm tree before the door is known as the Pyncheon elm.

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. In the growth of the town, however, after some thirty or forty years, the site covered by the rude hovel of Matthew Maule (originally remote from the centre of the earlier village) had become exceedingly desirable in the eyes of a prominent personage, who asserted claims to the land on the strength of a grant from the Legislature. Colonel Pyncheon, the claimant, was a man of iron energy of purpose. Matthew Maule, though an obscure man, was stubborn in the defense of what he considered his right. The dispute remained for years undecided, and came to a close only with the death of old Matthew Maule, who was executed for the crime of witchcraft.

It was remembered afterwards how loudly Colonel Pyncheon had joined in the general cry to purge the land from witchcraft, and had sought zealously the condemnation of Matthew Maule. At the moment of execution--with the halter about his neck, and while Colonel Pyncheon sat on horseback grimly gazing at the scene--Maule had addressed him from the scaffold, and uttered a prophecy. "God," said the dying man,

pointing his finger at the countenance of his enemy, "God will give him blood to drink!"

When it was understood that Colonel Pyncheon intended to erect a spacious family mansion on the spot first covered by the log-built hut of Matthew Maule the village gossips shook their heads, and hinted that he was about to build his house over an unquiet grave.

But the Puritan soldier and magistrate was not a man to be turned aside from his scheme by dread of the reputed wizzard's ghost. He dug his cellar, and laid deep the foundations of his mansion; and the head-carpenter of the House of the Seven Gables was no other than Thomas Maule, the son of the dead man from whom the right to the soil had been wrested.

On the day the house was finished Colonel Pyncheon bade all the town to be his guests, and Maude's Lane--or Pyncheon Street, as it was now called--was thronged at the appointed hour as with a congregation on its way to church.

But the founder of the stately mansion did not stand in his own hall to welcome the eminent persons who presented themselves in honour of the solemn festival, and the principal domestic had to explain that his master still remained in his study, which he had entered an hour before.

The lieutenant-governor took the matter into his hands, and knocked boldly at the door of the colonel's private apartment, and, getting no answer, he tried the door, which yielded to his hand, and was flung wide open by a sudden gust of wind.

The company thronged to the now open door, pressing the lieutenant-governor into the room before them.

A large map and a portrait of Colonel Pyncheon were conspicuous on the walls, and beneath the portrait sat the colonel himself in an elbow chair, with a pen in his hand.

A little boy, the colonel's grandchild, now made his way among the guests, and ran towards the seated figure; then, pausing halfway, he began to shriek with terror. The company drew nearer, and perceived that there was blood on the colonel's cuff and on his beard, and an unnatural distortion in his fixed stare. It was too late to render assistance. The iron-hearted Puritan, the relentless persecutor, the grasping and strong-willed man, was dead! Dead in his new house!

Colonel Pyncheon's sudden and mysterious end made a vast deal of noise in its day. There were many rumours, and a great dispute of doctors over the dead body. But the coroner's jury sat upon the corpse, and, like sensible men, returned an unassailable verdict of "Sudden Death."

The son and heir came into immediate enjoyment of a considerable estate, but a claim to a large tract of country in Waldo County, Maine, which the colonel, had he lived, would undoubtedly have made good, was lost by his decease. Some connecting link had slipped out of the evidence, and could not be found. Still, from generation to generation, the Pyncheons cherished an absurd delusion of family importance on the strength of this impalpable claim; and from father to son they clung with tenacity to the ancestral house for the better part of two centuries.

The most noted event in the Pyncheon annals in the last fifty years had been the violent death of the chief member of the family--an old and wealthy bachelor. One of his nephews, Clifford, was found guilty of the murder, and was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. This had happened thirty years ago, and there were now rumours that the long-buried criminal was about to be released. Another nephew had become the heir, and was now a judge in an inferior court. The only members of the family known to be extant, besides the judge and the thirty years' prisoner,

were a sister of the latter, wretchedly poor, who lived in the House of the Seven Gables by the will of the old bachelor, and the judge's single surviving son, now travelling in Europe. The last and youngest Pyncheon was a little country girl of seventeen, whose father--another of the judge's cousins--was dead, and whose mother had taken another husband.

II.--The House without Sunshine

Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon was reduced to the business of setting up a pretty shop, and that in the Pyncheon house where she had spent all her days. After sixty years of idleness and seclusion, she must earn her bread or starve, and to keep shop was the only resource open to her.

The first customer to cross the threshold was a young man to whom old Hepzibah let certain remote rooms in the House of the Seven Gables. He explained that he had looked in to offer his best wishes, and to see if he could give any assistance.

Poor Hepzibah, when she heard the kindly tone of his voice, began to sob.

"Ah, Mr. Holgrave," she cried, "I never can go through with it! Never, never, never! I wish I were dead in the old family tomb with all my forefathers--yes, and with my brother, who had far better find me there than here! I am too old, too feeble, and too hopeless! If old Maule's ghost, or a descendant of his, could see me behind the counter to-day, he would call it the fulfilment of his worst wishes. But I thank you for your kindness, Mr. Holgrave, and will do my utmost to be a good shopkeeper."

On Holgrave asking for half a dozen biscuits, Hepzibah put them into his hand, but rejected the compensation.

"Let me be a lady a moment longer," she said, with a manner of antique stateliness. "A Pyncheon must not--at all events, under her forefathers' roof--receive money for a morsel of bread from her only friend."

As the day went on the poor lady blundered hopelessly with her customers, and committed the most unheard-of errors, so that the whole proceeds of her painful traffic amounted, at the close, to half a dozen coppers.

That night the little country cousin, Phoebe Pyncheon, arrived at the gloomy old house. Hepzibah knew that circumstances made it desirable for the girl to establish herself in another home, but she was reluctant to bid her stay.

"Phoebe," she said, on the following morning, "this house of mine is but a melancholy place for a young person to be in. It lets in the wind and rain, and the snow, too, in the winter time; but it never lets in the sunshine! And as for myself, you see what I am--a dismal and lonesome old woman, whose temper is none of the best, and whose spirits are as bad as can be. I cannot make your life pleasant, Cousin Phoebe; neither can I so much as give you bread to eat."

"You will find me a cheerful little body," answered Phoebe, smiling, "and I mean to earn my bread. You know I have not been brought up a Pyncheon. A girl learns many things in a New England village."

"Ah, Phoebe," said Hepzibah, sighing, "it is a wretched thought that you should fling away your young days in a place like this. And, after all, it is not even for me to say who shall be a guest or inhabitant of the old Pyncheon house. Its master is coming."

"Do you mean Judge Pyncheon?" asked Phoebe, in surprise.

"Judge Pyncheon!" answered her cousin angrily. "He will hardly cross the threshold while I live. You shall see the face of him I speak of."

She went in quest of a miniature, and returned and placed it in Phoebe's hand.

"How do you like the face?" asked Hepzibah.

"It is handsome; it is very beautiful!" said Phoebe admiringly. "It is as sweet a face as a man's can be or ought to be. Who is it, Cousin Hepzibah?"

"Did you never hear of Clifford Pyncheon?"

"Never. I thought there were no Pyncheons left, except yourself and our Cousin Jaffrey, the judge. And yet I seem to have heard the name of Clifford Pyncheon. Yes, from my father, or my mother. But hasn't he been dead a long while?"

"Well, well, child, perhaps he has," said Hepzibah, with a sad, hollow laugh; "but in old houses like this, you know, dead people are very apt to come back again. And, Cousin Phoebe, if your courage does not fail you, we will not part soon. You are welcome to such a home as I can offer you."

III.--Miss Hepzibah's Guests

The day after Phoebe's arrival there was a constant tremor in Hepzibah's frame. With all her affection for a young cousin there was a recurring irritability.

"Bear with me, my dear child!" she cried; "bear with me, for I love you, Phoebe; and truly my heart is full to the brim! By-and-by I shall be kind, and only kind."

"What has happened?" asked Phoebe. "What is it that moves you so?"

"Hush! He is coming!" whispered Hepzibah. "Let him see you first, Phoebe; for you are young and rosy, and cannot help letting a smile break out. He always liked bright faces. And mine is old now, and the tears are hardly dry on it. Draw the curtain a little, but let there be a good deal of sunshine, too. He has had but little sunshine in his life, poor Clifford; and, oh, what a black shadow! Poor--poor Clifford!"

There was a step in the passage-way, above stairs. It seemed to Phoebe the same that she had heard in the night, as in a dream. Very slowly the steps came downstairs, and paused for a long time at the door.

Hepzibah, unable to endure the suspense, rushed forward, threw open the door, and led in the stranger by the hand. At the first glance Phoebe saw an elderly man, in an old-fashioned dressing gown, with grey hair, almost white, of an unusual length. The expression of his countenance seemed to waver, glimmer, and nearly to die away, and feebly to recover itself again.

"Dear Clifford," said Hepzibah, "this is our Cousin Phoebe, Arthur's only child, you know. She has come from the country to stay with us a while, for our old house has grown to be very lonely now."

"Phoebe? Arthur's child?" repeated the guest. "Ah, I forget! No matter. She is very welcome." He seated himself in the place assigned him, and looked strangely around. His eyes met Hepzibah's, and he seemed bewildered and disgusted. "Is this you, Hepzibah?" he murmured sadly. "How changed! how changed!"

"There is nothing but love here, Clifford," Hepzibah said softly--"nothing but love. You are at home."

The guest responded to her tone by a smile, which but half lit up his face. It was followed by a coarser expression, and he ate his food with fierce voracity and asked for "more--more!"

That day Phoebe attended to the shop, and the second person to enter it was a gentleman of portly figure and high respectability.

"I was not aware that Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon had commenced business under such favourable auspices," he said, in a deep voice, "You are her assistant, I suppose?"

"I certainly am," answered Phoebe. "I am a cousin of Miss Hepzibah, on a visit to her."

"Her cousin, and from the country?" said the gentleman, bowing and smiling. "In that case we must be better acquainted, for you are my own little kinswoman likewise. Let me see, you must be Phoebe, the only child of my dear Cousin Arthur. I am your kinsman, my dear. Surely you must have heard of Judge Pyncheon?"

Phoebe curtsied, and the judge bent forward to bestow a kiss on his young relative. But Phoebe drew back; there was something repulsive to her in the judge's demonstration, and on raising her eyes she was startled by the change in Judge Pyncheon's face. It had become cold, hard, and immitigable.

"Dear me! What is to be done now?" thought the country girl to herself. "He looks as if there were nothing softer in him than a rock, nor milder than the east wind."

Then all at once it struck Phoebe that this very Judge Pyncheon was the original of a miniature which Mr. Holgrave--who took portraits, and whose acquaintance she had made within a few hours of her arrival--had shown her yesterday. There was the same hard, stern, relentless look on the face. In reality, the miniature was copied from an old portrait of Colonel Pyncheon which hung within the house. Was it that the expression had been transmitted down as a precious heirloom, from that Puritan ancestor, in whose picture both the expression, and, to a singular degree, the features, of the modern judge were shown as by a kind of prophecy?

But as it happened, scarcely had Phoebe's eyes rested again on the judge's countenance than all its ugly sternness vanished, and she found herself almost overpowered by the warm benevolence of his look. But the fantasy would not quit her that the original Puritan, of whom she had heard so many sombre traditions, had now stepped into the shop.

"You seem to be a little nervous this morning," said the judge. "Has anything happened to disturb you--anything remarkable in Cousin Hepzibah's family--an arrival, eh? I thought so! To be an inmate with such a guest may well startle an innocent young girl!"

"You quite puzzle me, sir!" replied Phoebe. "There is no frightful guest in the house, but only a poor, gentle, child-like man, whom I believe to be Cousin Hepzibah's brother. I am afraid that he is not quite in his sound senses; but so mild he seems to be that a mother might trust her baby with him. He startle me? Oh, no, indeed!"

"I rejoice to hear so favourable and so ingenious an account of my Cousin Clifford," said the benevolent judge. "It is possible that you have never heard of Clifford Pyncheon, and know nothing of his history. But is Clifford in the parlour? I will just step in and see him. There is no need to announce me. I know the house, and know my Cousin

Hepzibah, and her brother Clifford likewise. Ah, there is Hepzibah herself!"

Such was the case. The vibrations of the judge's voice had reached the old gentlewoman in the parlour, where Clifford sat slumbering in his chair.

"He cannot see you," said Hepzibah, with quivering voice. "He cannot see visitors."

"A visitor--do you call me so?" cried the judge. "Then let me be Clifford's host, and your own likewise. Come at once to my house. I have often invited you before. Come, and we will labour together to make Clifford happy."

"Clifford has a home here," she answered.

"Woman," broke out the judge, "what is the meaning of all this? Have you other resources? Take care, Hepzibah, take care! Clifford is on the brink of as black a ruin as ever befel him yet!"

From within the parlour sounded a tremulous, wailing voice, indicating helpless alarm.

"Hepzibah!" cried the voice. "Entreat him not to come in. Go down on your knees to him. Oh, let him have mercy on me! Mercy!"

The judge withdrew, and Hepzibah, deathly white, staggered towards Phoebe.

"That man has been the horror of my life," she murmured. "Shall I never have courage enough to tell him what he is?"

IV.--The Spell is Broken

The shop thrived under Phoebe's management, and the acquaintance with Mr. Holgrave ripened into friendship.

Then, after some weeks, Phoebe went away on a temporary visit to her mother, and the old house, which had been brightened by her presence, was once more dark and gloomy.

It was during this absence of Phoebe's that Judge Pyncheon once more called and demanded to see Clifford.

"You cannot see him," answered Hepzibah. "Clifford has kept his bed since yesterday."

"What! Clifford ill!" said the judge, starting. "Then I must, and will see him!"

The judge explained the reason for his urgency. He believed that Clifford could give the clue to the dead uncle's wealth, of which not more than a half had been mentioned in his will. If Clifford refused to reveal where the missing documents were placed, the judge declared he would have him confined in a public asylum as a lunatic, for there were many witnesses of Clifford's simple childlike ways.

"You are stronger than I," said Hepzibah, "and you have no pity in your strength. Clifford is not now insane; but the interview which you insist upon may go far to make him so. Nevertheless, I will call Clifford!"

Hepzibah went in search of her brother, and Judge Pyncheon flung himself down in an old chair in the parlour. He took his watch from his pocket and held it in his hand. But Clifford was not in his room, nor could

Hepzibah find him. She returned to the parlour, calling out to the judge as she came, to rise and help find Clifford.

But the judge never moved, and Clifford appeared at the door, pointing his finger at the judge, and laughing with strange excitement.

"Hepzibah," he said, "we can dance now! We can sing, laugh, play, do what we will! The weight is gone, Hepzibah--gone off this weary old world, and we may be as lighthearted as little Phoebe herself! What an absurd figure the old fellow cuts now, just when he fancied he had me completely under his thumb!"

Then the brother and sister departed hastily from the house, and left Judge Pyncheon sitting in the old house of his forefathers.

Phoebe and Holgrave were in the house together when the brother and sister returned, and Holgrave had told her of the judge's sudden death. Then, in that hour so full of doubt and awe, the one miracle was wrought, without which every human existence is a blank, and the bliss which makes all things true, beautiful, and holy shone around this youth and maiden. They were conscious of nothing sad or old.

Presently the voices of Clifford and Hepzibah were heard at the door, and when they entered Clifford appeared the stronger of the two.

"It is our own little Phoebe! Ah! And Holgrave with her!" he exclaimed. "I thought of you both as we came down the street. And so the flower of Eden has bloomed even in this old, darksome house to-day."

A week after the judge's death news came of the death of his son, and so Hepzibah became rich, and so did Clifford, and so did Phoebe, and, through her, Holgrave.

It was far too late for the formal vindication of Clifford's character to be worth the trouble and anguish involved. For the truth was that the uncle had died by a sudden stroke, and the judge, knowing this, had let suspicion and condemnation fall on Clifford, only because he had himself been busy among the dead man's papers, destroying a later will made out in Clifford's favour, and because it was found the papers had been disturbed, to avert suspicion from the real offender he had let the blame fall on his cousin.

Clifford was content with the love of his sister and Phoebe and Holgrave. The good opinion of society was not worth publicly reclaiming.

It was Holgrave who discovered the missing document the judge had set his heart on obtaining.

"And now, my dearest Phoebe," said Holgrave, "how will it please you to assume the name of Maule? In this long drama of wrong and retribution I represent the old wizzard, and am probably as much of a wizzard as ever my ancestor was."

Then, with Hepzibah and Clifford, Phoebe and Holgrave left the old house for ever.

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ROBERT HICHENS

The Garden of Allah