

## Foreword

The very atmosphere of Salem in Hawthorne's time was such as to awaken the imagination—namely, such a one as found roots in the past, in ghostly legends, and in strange stories told by an earlier generation. In the older part of town, houses which had weathered in time since the days of the witch hunts two hundred years before were still to be found along cobbled streets. Old sailors gathered at the inns to exchange a yarn or two, and they paid little attention to the young man in a far corner, who sat not only listening but taking notes.

Locked closets wherein skeletons had been found were rumored to exist in old houses. Walls with bricked-up doors still quivered to heavy knocking. Families lay under curses which had existed for generations. Houses poisoned those who had folly enough to live in them. Old maids, the last of once-exalted families, lived in near-total darkness. Children supposedly sired by demons lived on far past the normal span of a lifetime.

Salem indeed was a town in which Puritanism lingered on. One could almost see, still waiting, the stocks and the hanging tree.

Out of Salem, Hawthorne ventured on trips which

added to his store of notes. He tramped the countryside with those considered in his day to be vagabonds, picking up traits of character and tales along the way. Sometimes he could be found at a cattle fair, listening to the chaffering of farmers and drovers, or might be seen looking on at the commencement ceremony at some country college.

Though he was never long away from Salem, his travels took him from Maine or the Berkshires to Martha's Vineyard and along the Erie Canal. Few writers before him had revealed such a gift for finding the proper subject for his skill or such conscientious pursuit of his ends.

Hawthorne's somber view of life made him aware that he was ever threatened by depression, but he possessed another side to his nature to which he clung desperately. His was a mind which conceived such dark portraits as Wakefield, Ethan Brand, and their like, but which could also produce enchanted tales for children telling of golden heroes and mighty deeds.

Hawthorne's very appearance hinted at his unusual view of life. He had a massive head, black and brilliant eyes, and he walked with the rolling gait of a sailor, impressing others when he wished with a truculent voice and attitude. Sometimes he would stare at his reflection in a mirror, half expecting to see another face. His thoughts often leaned to the uncanny, and he saw the world in terms of allegory, taking satisfaction in throwing a ghostly glimmer over the scenes he portrayed.

He prowled through museums looking at old portraits and reading histories of New England and the annals of Salem. The grounds of the witchcraft trials and Gallows Hill were often visited on his rambles.

As he worked with his stories of another day, Hawthorne began to want changes in customs and in modes of worship, and he searched for a better system. Still his

stories continued to hint of the darker world he wished to leave behind him. He once argued that all towns should be purified by fire every fifty years. Notwithstanding, passivity was the principal component of his character, though curiosity ran a close second.

Thus it is that we have these stories of another time, when people lived by different and sterner codes, when men and women invited Fate and then lived by the results of that choice, no matter how hard or sterile their lot might be.

—Andre Norton