



**A Rill from the Town Pump**  
Hawthorne, Nathaniel

**Published:** 1837

**Categorie(s):** Fiction, Short Stories

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## **About Hawthorne:**

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, where his birthplace is now a museum. William Hathorne, who emigrated from England in 1630, was the first of Hawthorne's ancestors to arrive in the colonies. After arriving, William persecuted Quakers. William's son John Hathorne was one of the judges who oversaw the Salem Witch Trials. (One theory is that having learned about this, the author added the "w" to his surname in his early twenties, shortly after graduating from college.) Hawthorne's father, Nathaniel Hathorne, Sr., was a sea captain who died in 1808 of yellow fever, when Hawthorne was only four years old, in Raymond, Maine. Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College at the expense of an uncle from 1821 to 1824, befriendng classmates Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future president Franklin Pierce. While there he joined the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. Until the publication of his *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837, Hawthorne wrote in the comparative obscurity of what he called his "owl's nest" in the family home. As he looked back on this period of his life, he wrote: "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living." And yet it was this period of brooding and writing that had formed, as Malcolm Cowley was to describe it, "the central fact in Hawthorne's career," his "term of apprenticeship" that would eventually result in the "richly meditated fiction." Hawthorne was hired in 1839 as a weigher and gauger at the Boston Custom House. He had become engaged in the previous year to the illustrator and transcendentalist Sophia Peabody. Seeking a possible home for himself and Sophia, he joined the transcendentalist utopian community at Brook Farm in 1841; later that year, however, he left when he became dissatisfied with farming and the experiment. (His Brook Farm adventure would prove an inspiration for his novel *The Blithedale Romance*.) He married Sophia in 1842; they moved to The Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts, where they lived for three years. There he wrote most of the tales collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Hawthorne and his wife then moved to Salem and later to the Berkshires, returning in 1852 to Concord and a new home The Wayside, previously owned by the Alcotts. Their neighbors in Concord included Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Like Hawthorne, Sophia was a reclusive person. She was bedridden with headaches until her sister introduced her to Hawthorne, after which her headaches seem to have abated. The Hawthornes enjoyed a long marriage, often taking walks in the park. Sophia greatly admired her husband's work. In one of her journals, she writes: "I am always so dazzled and bewildered with

the richness, the depth, the... jewels of beauty in his productions that I am always looking forward to a second reading where I can ponder and muse and fully take in the miraculous wealth of thoughts." In 1846, Hawthorne was appointed surveyor (determining the quantity and value of imported goods) at the Salem Custom House. Like his earlier appointment to the custom house in Boston, this employment was vulnerable to the politics of the spoils system. A Democrat, Hawthorne lost this job due to the change of administration in Washington after the presidential election of 1848. Hawthorne's career as a novelist was boosted by *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, in which the preface refers to his three-year tenure in the Custom House at Salem. *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) followed in quick succession. In 1852, he wrote the campaign biography of his old friend Franklin Pierce. With Pierce's election as president, Hawthorne was rewarded in 1853 with the position of United States consul in Liverpool. In 1857, his appointment ended and the Hawthorne family toured France and Italy. They returned to *The Wayside* in 1860, and that year saw the publication of *The Marble Faun*. Failing health (which biographer Edward Miller speculates was stomach cancer) prevented him from completing several more romances. Hawthorne died in his sleep on May 19, 1864, in Plymouth, New Hampshire while on a tour of the White Mountains with Pierce. He was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts. Wife Sophia and daughter Una were originally buried in England. However, in June 2006, they were re-interred in plots adjacent to Nathaniel. Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne had three children: Una, Julian, and Rose. Una was a victim of mental illness and died young. Julian moved out west, served a jail term for embezzlement and wrote a book about his father. Rose married George Parsons Lathrop and they became Roman Catholics. After George's death, Rose became a Dominican nun. She founded the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne to care for victims of incurable cancer. Source: Wikipedia

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Noon by the north clock! Noon by the east! High noon, too, by these hot sunbeams, which full, scarcely aslope, upon my head and almost make the water bubble and smoke in the trough under my nose. Truly, we public characters have a tough time of it! And among all the town-officers chosen at March meeting, where is he that sustains for a single year the burden of such manifold duties as are imposed in perpetuity upon the town-pump? The title of "town-treasurer" is rightfully mine, as guardian of the best treasure that the town has. The overseers of the poor ought to make me their chairman, since I provide bountifully for the pauper without expense to him that pays taxes. I am at the head of the fire department and one of the physicians to the board of health. As a keeper of the peace all water-drinkers will confess me equal to the constable. I perform some of the duties of the town-clerk by promulgating public notices when they are posted on my front. To speak within bounds, I am the chief person of the municipality, and exhibit, moreover, an admirable pattern to my brother-officers by the cool, steady, upright, downright and impartial discharge of my business and the constancy with which I stand to my post. Summer or winter, nobody seeks me in vain, for all day long I am seen at the busiest corner, just above the market, stretching out my arms to rich and poor alike, and at night I hold a lantern over my head both to show where I am and keep people out of the gutters. At this sultry noontide I am cupbearer to the parched populace, for whose benefit an iron goblet is chained to my waist. Like a dramseller on the mall at muster-day, I cry aloud to all and sundry in my plainest accents and at the very tiptop of my voice.

Here it is, gentlemen! Here is the good liquor! Walk up, walk up, gentlemen! Walk up, walk up! Here is the superior stuff! Here is the unadulterated ale of Father Adam—better than Cognac, Hollands, Jamaica, strong beer or wine of any price; here it is by the hogshead or the single glass, and not a cent to pay! Walk up, gentlemen, walk up, and help yourselves!

It were a pity if all this outcry should draw no customers. Here they come.—A hot day, gentlemen! Quaff and away again, so as to keep yourselves in a nice cool sweat.—You, my friend, will need another cupful to wash the dust out of your throat, if it be as thick there as it is on your cowhide shoes. I see that you have trudged half a score of miles to-day, and like a wise man have passed by the taverns and stopped at the running brooks and well-curbs. Otherwise, betwixt heat without and fire within, you would have been burnt to a cinder or melted down to nothing at all, in the fashion of a jelly-fish. Drink and make room for that

other fellow, who seeks my aid to quench the fiery fever of last night's potations, which he drained from no cup of mine.—Welcome, most rubicund sir! You and I have been great strangers hitherto; nor, to confess the truth, will my nose be anxious for a closer intimacy till the fumes of your breath be a little less potent. Mercy on you, man! the water absolutely hisses down your red-hot gullet and is converted quite to steam in the miniature Tophet which you mistake for a stomach. Fill again, and tell me, on the word of an honest toper, did you ever, in cellar, tavern, or any kind of a dram-shop, spend the price of your children's food for a swig half so delicious? Now, for the first time these ten years, you know the flavor of cold water. Good-bye; and whenever you are thirsty, remember that I keep a constant supply at the old stand.—Who next?—Oh, my little friend, you are let loose from school and come hither to scrub your blooming face and drown the memory of certain taps of the ferule, and other schoolboy troubles, in a draught from the town-pump? Take it, pure as the current of your young life. Take it, and may your heart and tongue never be scorched with a fiercer thirst than now! There, my dear child! put down the cup and yield your place to this elderly gentleman who treads so tenderly over the paving-stones that I suspect he is afraid of breaking them. What! he limps by without so much as thanking me, as if my hospitable offers were meant only for people who have no wine-cellars.—Well, well, sir, no harm done, I hope? Go draw the cork, tip the decanter; but when your great toe shall set you a-roaring, it will be no affair of mine. If gentlemen love the pleasant titillation of the gout, it is all one to the town-pump. This thirsty dog with his red tongue lolling out does not scorn my hospitality, but stands on his hind legs and laps eagerly out of the trough. See how lightly he capers away again!—Jowler, did your worship ever have the gout?

Are you all satisfied? Then wipe your mouths, my good friends, and while my spout has a moment's leisure I will delight the town with a few historical reminiscences. In far antiquity, beneath a darksome shadow of venerable boughs, a spring bubbled out of the leaf-strewn earth in the very spot where you now behold me on the sunny pavement. The water was as bright and clear and deemed as precious as liquid diamonds. The Indian sagamores drank of it from time immemorial till the fatal deluge of the firewater burst upon the red men and swept their whole race away from the cold fountains. Endicott and his followers came next, and often knelt down to drink, dipping their long beards in the spring. The richest goblet then was of birch-bark. Governor Winthrop, after a journey afoot from Boston, drank here out of the hollow of his hand. The elder

Higginson here wet his palm and laid it on the brow of the first town-born child. For many years it was the watering-place, and, as it were, the washbowl, of the vicinity, whither all decent folks resorted to purify their visages and gaze at them afterward—at least, the pretty maidens did—in the mirror which it made. On Sabbath-days, whenever a babe was to be baptized, the sexton filled his basin here and placed it on the communion-table of the humble meeting-house, which partly covered the site of yonder stately brick one. Thus one generation after another was consecrated to Heaven by its waters, and cast their waxing and waning shadows into its glassy bosom, and vanished from the earth, as if mortal life were but a flitting image in a fountain. Finally the fountain vanished also. Cellars were dug on all sides and cart-loads of gravel flung upon its source, whence oozed a turbid stream, forming a mud-puddle at the corner of two streets. In the hot months, when its refreshment was most needed, the dust flew in clouds over the forgotten birth-place of the waters, now their grave. But in the course of time a town-pump was sunk into the source of the ancient spring; and when the first decayed, another took its place, and then another, and still another, till here stand I, gentlemen and ladies, to serve you with my iron goblet. Drink and be refreshed. The water is as pure and cold as that which slaked the thirst of the red sagamore beneath the aged boughs, though now the gem of the wilderness is treasured under these hot stones, where no shadow falls but from the brick buildings. And be it the moral of my story that, as this wasted and long-lost fountain is now known and prized again, so shall the virtues of cold water—too little valued since your fathers' days—be recognized by all.

Your pardon, good people! I must interrupt my stream of eloquence and spout forth a stream of water to replenish the trough for this teamster and his two yoke of oxen, who have come from Topsfield, or somewhere along that way. No part of my business is pleasanter than the watering of cattle. Look! how rapidly they lower the water-mark on the sides of the trough, till their capacious stomachs are moistened with a gallon or two apiece and they can afford time to breathe it in with sighs of calm enjoyment. Now they roll their quiet eyes around the brim of their monstrous drinking-vessel. An ox is your true toper.

But I perceive, my dear auditors, that you are impatient for the remainder of my discourse. Impute it, I beseech you, to no defect of modesty if I insist a little longer on so fruitful a topic as my own multifarious merits. It is altogether for your good. The better you think of me, the better men and women you will find yourselves. I shall say nothing of my

all-important aid on washing-days, though on that account alone I might call myself the household god of a hundred families. Far be it from me, also, to hint, my respectable friends, at the show of dirty faces which you would present without my pains to keep you clean. Nor will I remind you how often, when the midnight bells make you tremble for your combustible town, you have fled to the town-pump and found me always at my post firm amid the confusion and ready to drain my vital current in your behalf. Neither is it worth while to lay much stress on my claims to a medical diploma as the physician whose simple rule of practice is preferable to all the nauseous lore which has found men sick, or left them so, since the days of Hippocrates. Let us take a broader view of my beneficial influence on mankind.

No; these are trifles, compared with the merits which wise men concede to me—if not in my single self, yet as the representative of a class—of being the grand reformer of the age. From my spout, and such spouts as mine, must flow the stream that shall cleanse our earth of the vast portion of its crime and anguish which has gushed from the fiery fountains of the still. In this mighty enterprise the cow shall be my great confederate. Milk and water—the TOWN-PUMP and the Cow! Such is the glorious copartnership that shall tear down the distilleries and brew-houses, uproot the vineyards, shatter the cider-presses, ruin the tea and coffee trade, and finally monopolize the whole business of quenching thirst. Blessed consummation! Then Poverty shall pass away from the land, finding no hovel so wretched where her squalid form may shelter herself. Then Disease, for lack of other victims, shall gnaw its own heart and die. Then Sin, if she do not die, shall lose half her strength. Until now the frenzy of hereditary fever has raged in the human blood, transmitted from sire to son and rekindled in every generation by fresh draughts of liquid flame. When that inward fire shall be extinguished, the heat of passion cannot but grow cool, and war—the drunkenness of nations—perhaps will cease. At least, there will be no war of households. The husband and wife, drinking deep of peaceful joy—a calm bliss of temperate affections—shall pass hand in hand through life and lie down not reluctantly at its protracted close. To them the past will be no turmoil of mad dreams, nor the future an eternity of such moments as follow the delirium of the drunkard. Their dead faces shall express what their spirits were and are to be by a lingering smile of memory and hope.

Ahem! Dry work, this speechifying, especially to an unpractised orator. I never conceived till now what toil the temperance lecturers undergo for my sake; hereafter they shall have the business to



themselves.—Do, some kind Christian, pump a stroke or two, just to wet my whistle.—Thank you, sir!—My dear hearers, when the world shall have been regenerated by my instrumentality, you will collect your useless vats and liquor-casks into one great pile and make a bonfire in honor of the town-pump. And when I shall have decayed like my predecessors, then, if you revere my memory, let a marble fountain richly sculptured take my place upon this spot. Such monuments should be erected everywhere and inscribed with the names of the distinguished champions of my cause. Now, listen, for something very important is to come next.

There are two or three honest friends of mine—and true friends I know they are—who nevertheless by their fiery pugnacity in my behalf do put me in fearful hazard of a broken nose, or even a total overthrow upon the pavement and the loss of the treasure which I guard.—I pray you, gentlemen, let this fault be amended. Is it decent, think you, to get tipsy with zeal for temperance and take up the honorable cause of the town-pump in the style of a toper fighting for his brandy-bottle? Or can the excellent qualities of cold water be no otherwise exemplified than by plunging slapdash into hot water and woefully scalding yourselves and other people? Trust me, they may. In the moral warfare which you are to wage—and, indeed, in the whole conduct of your lives—you cannot choose a better example than myself, who have never permitted the dust and sultry atmosphere, the turbulence and manifold disquietudes, of the world around me to reach that deep, calm well of purity which may be called my soul. And whenever I pour out that soul, it is to cool earth's fever or cleanse its stains.

One o'clock! Nay, then, if the dinner-bell begins to speak, I may as well hold my peace. Here comes a pretty young girl of my acquaintance with a large stone pitcher for me to fill. May she draw a husband while drawing her water, as Rachel did of old!—Hold out your vessel, my dear! There it is, full to the brim; so now run home, peeping at your sweet image in the pitcher as you go, and forget not in a glass of my own liquor to drink "SUCCESS TO THE TOWN-PUMP."

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