



The Threefold Destiny

Hawthorne, Nathaniel

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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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I have sometimes produced a singular and not unpleasing effect, so far as my own mind was concerned, by imagining a train of incidents in which the spirit and mechanism of the faëry legend should be combined with the characters and manners of familiar life. In the little tale which follows a subdued tinge of the wild and wonderful is thrown over a sketch of New England personages and scenery, yet, it is hoped, without entirely obliterating the sober hues of nature. Rather than a story of events claiming to be real, it may be considered as an allegory such as the writers of the last century would have expressed in the shape of an Eastern tale, but to which I have endeavored to give a more lifelike warmth than could be infused into those fanciful productions.

In the twilight of a summer eve a tall dark figure over which long and remote travel had thrown an outlandish aspect was entering a village not in "faëry londe," but within our own familiar boundaries. The staff on which this traveller leaned had been his companion from the spot where it grew in the jungles of Hindostan; the hat that overshadowed his sombre brow, had shielded him from the suns of Spain; but his cheek had been blackened by the red-hot wind of an Arabian desert and had felt the frozen breath of an Arctic region. Long sojourning amid wild and dangerous men, he still wore beneath his vest the ataghan which he had once struck into the throat of a Turkish robber. In every foreign clime he had lost something of his New England characteristics, and perhaps from every people he had unconsciously borrowed a new peculiarity; so that when the world-wanderer again trod the street of his native village it is no wonder that he passed unrecognized, though exciting the gaze and curiosity of all. Yet, as his arm casually touched that of a young woman who was wending her way to an evening lecture, she started and almost uttered a cry.

"Ralph Cranfield!" was the name that she half articulated.

"Can that be my old playmate Faith Egerton?" thought the traveller, looking round at her figure, but without pausing.

Ralph Cranfield from his youth upward had felt himself marked out for a high destiny. He had imbibed the idea—we say not whether it were revealed to him by witchcraft or in a dream of prophecy, or that his brooding fancy had palmed its own dictates upon him as the oracles of a sybil, but he had imbibed the idea, and held it firmest among his articles of faith—that three marvellous events of his life were to be confirmed to him by three signs.

The first of these three fatalities, and perhaps the one on which his youthful imagination had dwelt most fondly, was the discovery of the

maid who alone of all the maids on earth could make him happy by her love. He was to roam around the world till he should meet a beautiful woman wearing on her bosom a jewel in the shape of a heart—whether of pearl or ruby or emerald or carbuncle or a changeful opal, or perhaps a priceless diamond, Ralph Cranfield little cared, so long as it were a heart of one peculiar shape. On encountering this lovely stranger he was bound to address her thus: "Maiden, I have brought you a heavy heart. May I rest its weight on you?" And if she were his fated bride—if their kindred souls were destined to form a union here below which all eternity should only bind more closely—she would reply, with her finger on the heart-shaped jewel, "This token which I have worn so long is the assurance that you may."

And, secondly, Ralph Cranfield had a firm belief that there was a mighty treasure hidden somewhere in the earth of which the burial-place would be revealed to none but him. When his feet should press upon the mysterious spot, there would be a hand before him pointing downward—whether carved of marble or hewn in gigantic dimensions on the side of a rocky precipice, or perchance a hand of flame in empty air, he could not tell, but at least he would discern a hand, the forefinger pointing downward, and beneath it the Latin word "*Effode*"—"Dig!" And, digging thereabouts, the gold in coin or ingots, the precious stones, or of whatever else the treasure might consist, would be certain to reward his toil.

The third and last of the miraculous events in the life of this high-destined man was to be the attainment of extensive influence and sway over his fellow-creatures. Whether he were to be a king and founder of a hereditary throne, or the victorious leader of a people contending for their freedom, or the apostle of a purified and regenerated faith, was left for futurity to show. As messengers of the sign by which Ralph Cranfield might recognize the summons, three venerable men were to claim audience of him. The chief among them—a dignified and majestic person arrayed, it may be supposed, in the flowing garments of an ancient sage—would be the bearer of a wand or prophet's rod. With this wand or rod or staff the venerable sage would trace a certain figure in the air, and then proceed to make known his Heaven-instructed message, which, if obeyed, must lead to glorious results.

With this proud fate before him, in the flush of his imaginative youth Ralph Cranfield had set forth to seek the maid, the treasure, and the venerable sage with his gift of extended empire. And had he found them? Alas! it was not with the aspect of a triumphant man who had achieved a

nobler destiny than all his fellows, but rather with the gloom of one struggling against peculiar and continual adversity, that he now passed homeward to his mother's cottage. He had come back, but only for a time, to lay aside the pilgrim's staff, trusting that his weary manhood would regain somewhat of the elasticity of youth in the spot where his threefold fate had been foreshown him. There had been few changes in the village, for it was not one of those thriving places where a year's prosperity makes more than the havoc of a century's decay, but, like a gray hair in a young man's head, an antiquated little town full of old maids and aged elms and moss-grown dwellings. Few seemed to be the changes here. The drooping elms, indeed, had a more majestic spread, the weather-blackened houses were adorned with a denser thatch of verdant moss, and doubtless there were a few more gravestones in the burial-ground inscribed with names that had once been familiar in the village street; yet, summing up all the mischief that ten years had wrought, it seemed scarcely more than if Ralph Cranfield had gone forth that very morning and dreamed a day-dream till the twilight, and then turned back again. But his heart grew cold because the village did not remember him as he remembered the village.

"Here is the change," sighed he, striking his hand upon his breast. "Who is this man of thought and care, weary with world-wandering and heavy with disappointed hopes? The youth returns not who went forth so joyously."

And now Ralph Cranfield was at his mother's gate, in front of the small house where the old lady, with slender but sufficient means, had kept herself comfortable during her son's long absence. Admitting himself within the enclosure, he leaned against a great old tree, trifling with his own impatience as people often do in those intervals when years are summed into a moment. He took a minute survey of the dwelling—its windows brightened with the sky-gleam, its doorway with the half of a millstone for a step, and the faintly-traced path waving thence to the gate. He made friends again with his childhood's friend—the old tree against which he leaned—and, glancing his eye down its trunk, beheld something that excited a melancholy smile. It was a half-obliterated inscription—the Latin word "*Effode*"—which he remembered to have carved in the bark of the tree with a whole day's toil when he had first begun to muse about his exalted destiny. It might be accounted a rather singular coincidence that the bark just above the inscription had put forth an excrescence shaped not unlike a hand, with the forefinger

pointing obliquely at the word of fate. Such, at least, was its appearance in the dusky light.

"Now, a credulous man," said Ralph Cranfield, carelessly, to himself, "might suppose that the treasure which I have sought round the world lies buried, after all, at the very door of my mother's dwelling. That would be a jest indeed."

More he thought not about the matter, for now the door was opened and an elderly woman appeared on the threshold, peering into the dusk to discover who it might be that had intruded on her premises and was standing in the shadow of her tree. It was Ralph Cranfield's mother. Pass we over their greeting, and leave the one to her joy and the other to his rest—if quiet rest he found.

But when morning broke, he arose with a troubled brow, for his sleep and his wakefulness had alike been full of dreams. All the fervor was re-kindled with which he had burned of yore to unravel the threefold mystery of his fate. The crowd of his early visions seemed to have awaited him beneath his mother's roof and thronged riotously around to welcome his return. In the well-remembered chamber, on the pillow where his infancy had slumbered, he had passed a wilder night than ever in an Arab tent or when he had reposed his head in the ghastly shades of a haunted forest. A shadowy maid had stolen to his bedside and laid her finger on the scintillating heart; a hand of flame had glowed amid the darkness, pointing downward to a mystery within the earth; a hoary sage had waved his prophetic wand and beckoned the dreamer onward to a chair of state. The same phantoms, though fainter in the daylight, still flitted about, the cottage and mingled among the crowd of familiar faces that were drawn thither by the news of Ralph Cranfield's return to bid him welcome for his mother's sake. There they found him, a tall, dark, stately man of foreign aspect, courteous in demeanor and mild of speech, yet with an abstracted eye which seemed often to snatch a glance at the invisible.

Meantime, the widow Cranfield went bustling about the house full of joy that she again had somebody to love and be careful of, and for whom she might vex and tease herself with the petty troubles of daily life. It was nearly noon when she looked forth from the door and descried three personages of note coming along the street through the hot sunshine and the masses of elm-tree shade. At length they reached her gate and undid the latch.

"See, Ralph!" exclaimed she, with maternal pride; "here is Squire Hawkwood and the two other selectmen coming on purpose to see you."

Now, do tell them a good long story about what you have seen in foreign parts."

The foremost of the three visitors, Squire Hawkwood, was a very pompous but excellent old gentleman, the head and prime-mover in all the affairs of the village, and universally acknowledged to be one of the sagest men on earth. He wore, according to a fashion even then becoming antiquated, a three-cornered hat, and carried a silver-headed cane the use of which seemed to be rather for flourishing in the air than for assisting the progress of his legs. His two companions were elderly and respectable yeomen who, retaining an ante-Revolutionary reverence for rank and hereditary wealth, kept a little in the squire's rear.

As they approached along the pathway Ralph Cranfield sat in an oaken elbow-chair half unconsciously gazing at the three visitors and enveloping their homely figures in the misty romance that pervaded his mental world. "Here," thought he, smiling at the conceit—"here come three elderly personages, and the first of the three is a venerable sage with a staff. What if this embassy should bring me the message of my fate?"

While Squire Hawkwood and his colleagues entered, Ralph rose from his seat and advanced a few steps to receive them, and his stately figure and dark countenance as he bent courteously toward his guests had a natural dignity contrasting well with the bustling importance of the squire. The old gentleman, according to invariable custom, gave an elaborate preliminary flourish with his cane in the air, then removed his three-cornered hat in order to wipe his brow, and finally proceeded to make known his errand.

"My colleagues and myself," began the squire, "are burdened with momentous duties, being jointly selectmen of this village. Our minds for the space of three days past have been laboriously bent on the selection of a suitable person to fill a most important office and take upon himself a charge and rule which, wisely considered, may be ranked no lower than those of kings and potentates. And whereas you, our native townsman, are of good natural intellect and well cultivated by foreign travel, and that certain vagaries and fantasies of your youth are doubtless long ago corrected,—taking all these matters, I say, into due consideration, we are of opinion that Providence hath sent you hither at this juncture for our very purpose."

During this harangue Cranfield gazed fixedly at the speaker, as if he beheld something mysterious and unearthly in his pompous little figure, and as if the squire had worn the flowing robes of an ancient sage

instead of a square-skirted coat, flapped waistcoat, velvet breeches and silk stockings. Nor was his wonder without sufficient cause, for the flourish of the squire's staff, marvellous to relate, had described precisely the signal in the air which was to ratify the message of the prophetic sage whom Cranfield had sought around the world.

"And what," inquired Ralph Cranfield, with a tremor in his voice—"what may this office be which is to equal me with kings and potentates?"

"No less than instructor of our village school," answered Squire Hawkwood, "the office being now vacant by the death of the venerable Master Whitaker after a fifty years' incumbency."

"I will consider of your proposal," replied Ralph Cranfield, hurriedly, "and will make known my decision within three days."

After a few more words the village dignitary and his companions took their leave. But to Cranfield's fancy their images were still present, and became more and more invested with the dim awfulness of figures which had first appeared to him in a dream, and afterward had shown themselves in his waking moments, assuming homely aspects among familiar things. His mind dwelt upon the features of the squire till they grew confused with those of the visionary sage and one appeared but the shadow of the other. The same visage, he now thought, had looked forth upon him from the Pyramid of Cheops; the same form had beckoned to him among the colonnades of the Alhambra; the same figure had mistily revealed itself through the ascending steam of the Great Geyser. At every effort of his memory he recognized some trait of the dreamy messenger of destiny in this pompous, bustling, self-important, little-great man of the village. Amid such musings Ralph Cranfield sat all day in the cottage, scarcely hearing and vaguely answering his mother's thousand questions about his travels and adventures. At sunset he roused himself to take a stroll, and, passing the aged elm tree, his eye was again caught by the semblance of a hand pointing downward at the half-obliterated inscription.

As Cranfield walked down the street of the village the level sunbeams threw his shadow far before him, and he fancied that, as his shadow walked among distant objects, so had there been a presentiment stalking in advance of him throughout his life. And when he drew near each object over which his tall shadow had preceded him, still it proved to be one of the familiar recollections of his infancy and youth. Every crook in the pathway was remembered. Even the more transitory characteristics of the scene were the same as in by-gone days. A company of cows were

grazing on the grassy roadside, and refreshed him with their fragrant breath. "It is sweeter," thought he, "than the perfume which was wafted to our ship from the Spice Islands." The round little figure of a child rolled from a doorway and lay laughing almost beneath Cranfield's feet. The dark and stately man stooped down, and, lifting the infant, restored him to his mother's arms. "The children," said he to himself, and sighed and smiled—"the children are to be my charge." And while a flow of natural feeling gushed like a well-spring in his heart he came to a dwelling which he could nowise forbear to enter. A sweet voice which seemed to come from a deep and tender soul was warbling a plaintive little air within. He bent his head and passed through the lowly door. As his foot sounded upon the threshold a young woman advanced from the dusky interior of the house, at first hastily, and then with a more uncertain step, till they met face to face. There was a singular contrast in their two figures—he dark and picturesque, one who had battled with the world, whom all suns had shone upon and whom all winds had blown on a varied course; she neat, comely and quiet—quiet even in her agitation—as if all her emotions had been subdued to the peaceful tenor of her life. Yet their faces, all unlike as they were, had an expression that seemed not so alien—a glow of kindred feeling flashing upward anew from half-extinguished embers.

"You are welcome home," said Faith Egerton.

But Cranfield did not immediately answer, for his eye had, been caught by an ornament in the shape of a heart which Faith wore as a brooch upon her bosom. The material was the ordinary white quartz, and he recollected having himself shaped it out of one of those Indian arrowheads which are so often found in the ancient haunts of the red men. It was precisely on the pattern of that worn by the visionary maid. When Cranfield departed on his shadowy search, he had bestowed this brooch, in a gold setting, as a parting gift to Faith Egerton.

"So, Faith, you have kept the heart?" said he, at length.

"Yes," said she, blushing deeply; then, more gayly, "And what else have you brought me from beyond the sea?"

"Faith," replied Ralph Cranfield, uttering the fated words by an uncontrollable impulse, "I have brought you nothing but a heavy heart. May I rest its weight on you?"

"This token which I have worn so long," said Faith, laying her tremulous finger on the heart, "is the assurance that you may."

"Faith, Faith!" cried Cranfield, clasping her in his arms; "you have interpreted my wild and weary dream!"

Yes, the wild dreamer was awake at last. To find the mysterious treasure he was to till the earth around his mother's dwelling and reap its products; instead of warlike command or regal or religious sway, he was to rule over the village children; and now the visionary maid had faded from his fancy, and in her place he saw the playmate of his childhood.

Would all who cherish such wild wishes but look around them, they would oftenest find their sphere of duty, of prosperity and happiness, within those precincts and in that station where Providence itself has cast their lot. Happy they who read the riddle without a weary world-search or a lifetime spent in vain!

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