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Period 5

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Scarlet Letter

Custom House Assignment

Section 1:

“Oftentimes they were asleep, but occasionally might be heard talking together, in voices between speech and a snore, and with that lack of energy that distinguishes the occupants of alms-houses, and all other human beings who depend for subsistence on charity, on monopolized labor, or any thing else but their own independent exertions.” This small section from the Custom House gives a brief description of the group of men that the narrator lives with. The descriptive language Hawthorne uses is very vivid and complex. All this section means is that the men were usually asleep or softly talking to one another.

Section 2:

“The sentiment is probably assignable to the deep and aged roots which my family has struck into the soil. It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement, which has since become a city…. In part, therefore, the attachment which I speak of is the mere sensuous sympathy of dust for dust.” This section of the Custom House the narrator is talking about his ancestors emigrating to Salem and how his sentiment towards Salem is there only since his family has been in Salam for generations.

Section 3:

“In the second story of the Custom–House there is a large room, in which the brick–work and naked rafters have never been covered with panelling and plaster. The edifice—originally projected on a scale adapted to the old commercial enterprise of the port, and with an idea of subsequent prosperity destined never to be realized—contains far more space than its occupants know what to do with. This airy hall, therefore, over the Collector’s apartments, remains unfinished to this day, and, in spite of the aged cobwebs that festoon its dusky beams, appears still to await the labor of the carpenter and mason. At one end of the room, in a recess, were a number of barrels piled one upon another, containing bundles of official documents. Large quantities of similar rubbish lay lumbering the floor.” The narrator in this section describes the second floor, describing it as a big, dusty room with rafters showing, cobwebs everywhere, barrels stacked with old documents, and debris on the ground.