



Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife.¹

IN giving us this record of two beautiful lives Mr. Julian Hawthorne has done a fitting filial task. There is much to be commended in his work. He shows in his first pages that he grasps the very soul and secret of the potency of his father's writing. He puts before us the man who worked at the mystery of evil with an unrelenting mind and pen, and made human charity deeper in the hearts of those who read him rightly. He felt and showed that "in reality, the beauty, the pathos, and the power of the spectacle of humanity lies in the fact that it is a spectacle of a mortal struggle between two eternal forces." The influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne's books is not always salutary. There are certain moods and conditions of the human spirit that make it impossible to see any light upon the dark pages that he wrote. There is not much sunshine in his work, and the dim daylight that he had is unwholesome for weak souls. But it was daylight so far as it went. There is nothing artificial about Hawthorne, and above all nothing morbid. It is not at all the right word to use about him. A quotation from a letter written by Hawthorne's warm friend, Mr. Henry Bright, to the editor of these volumes, will help much to correct an erroneous idea in regard to what has often been called the morbidness of Hawthorne's character:—

"I need hardly say with what a feeling of affection I always regarded your father. He was almost the *best* man I ever knew, —and quite the most interesting. Nothing annoys me more than the word 'morbid' as applied to him. He was the *least* morbid of men, with a singularly sweet temper and a very far-reaching charity; he was reserved and (in a sense) a *proud* man, who did not care to be worried or bored by people he was not fond of. But he was, I am sure, a singularly happy man, — happy in all his do-

mestic relations, happy in his own wonderful imaginative faculty, and in the fame which he had achieved."

Again: "Justice has never yet been done to your mother. Of course, she was overshadowed by him, — but she was a singularly accomplished woman, with a great gift of expression, and a most sympathetic nature; she was, too, an artist of no mean quality. Her 'Notes in England and Italy' contain much that is valuable, and much that is beautifully written."

A singular and tender interest attaches to the few letters the son has given of those written by Nathaniel Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody during their courtship. He was thirty-eight and she thirty-two when they were married, and their biographer says: "No cloud or change ever passed over their affection, even for a moment; but every succeeding year found their union more exquisitely complete." The story of their love and marriage is very beautiful, and it was to their mutual devotion that Hawthorne always attributed the awakening of the power to conceive and write the volumes which followed. The history of Hawthorne's dismissal from his service in the custom-house at Salem, and of the consequent writing of the "Scarlet Letter" is familiar. The "Blithedale Romance" followed soon after, and later, near the close of his long foreign residence, the "Marble Faun." During his six years' consulate at Liverpool he wrote nothing except his inimitable "Note-Book." His muse was true to her servant, and gave him inspiration only when he looked faithfully to have it.

To his mother's life, her devotion to his sisters and himself, to her symmetrical womanly character and the beauty of her maternity, the son has made a beautiful tribute in these companion volumes. Their title shows that he, knowing and loving the author of "The Scarlet Letter" better than any other man possibly can, felt also the full measure of what Nathaniel Hawthorne owed to his wife.

¹Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife. A Biography by Julian Hawthorne. In two volumes. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co.