

## Literature.

[The prompt mention in our list of "Books of the Week" will be considered by us an equivalent to their publishers for all volumes received. The interests of our readers will guide us in the selection of works for further notice.]

### DR. GRIMSHAW'S SECRET.\*

If a man's own disposition of his literary productions are to be respected after he is dead, Hawthorne has certainly received hard measure from his friends. He particularly desired that no biography of him should be written, and there are already four, with two more in prospect. He wrote to Mr. Fields: "Whatever would do me credit, you may be pretty sure I should be ready enough to bring forward. Anything else it is our mutual interest to conceal."

The pen had hardly dropped from his hand at the end of the first chapter of "The Dolliver Romance" before the printing of the unfinished "Septimius Felton" began, and now we have Mr. Lathrop's publication of the fragments of "The Ancestral Footstep," in *The Atlantic*, a second series of notes in *The Century*, and, more than all, the elaborate and not altogether unquestioned publication of *Doctor Grimshawe's Secret* has propounded to the critics another first-class literary puzzle.

In the perplexities of the case as it now stands and in the general question whether it was wise to bring out these publications we have no interest, nor can we see that they have either contributed anything important to English literature or to the position of Mr. Hawthorne in it. It would certainly be most unfair to the distinguished author to accept these confused, baffling, and baffled sketches as indications of his ordinary method of work.

The five series of more or less finished fragments which have been brought out since Mr. Hawthorne's death (including that published in *The Century*) have enough in common to show that his mind was dealing with the elements of a powerful romance; but they indicate, as well, that he was caught on the horns of a dilemma, and was unable to decide to which of two fascinating motives to commit himself—unless, indeed, as there is reason to think he had made his choice in "The Dolliver Romance" and gone as far as one chapter in carrying it out. Mr. Julian Hawthorne wishes us to believe that *Dr. Grimshawe's Secret* marks the solution of the dilemma. But the indications are strong that all previous to "The Dolliver Romance" were preliminary attempts, more or less inadequate and successively abandoned.

The leading idea of this romance was to be the search for the secret of earthly immortality, as it was also in "Septimius Felton," where it is associated with another idea, that, of a mysterious "bloody footstep," which we know was long in the author's mind, took strong hold on his imagination, and, it is easy to believe, threw him into the perplexity of a double motive.

The three other series have no hint of the leading motive of the first two, but develop the idea of the "bloody footstep," though in a way which connects them so closely with "Septimius Felton" as to give them the appearance of preliminary studies for it and, possibly, also, for the "Dolliver." Dr. Grimshawe is another presentment of Portsoaken in "Septimius," Hannah is the near relative of Aunt Keziah, in the same tale, and the horror of Orontes and the spiders is spun into the web of both.

The real story of the "bloody footstep" makes it a kind of Protestant miracle, told of George Marsh, one of the Marion martyrs who, on his way from Smithells Hall to the stake, stamped his foot on the ground, praying that, if the religion for which he was to die were true, the mark might remain. Hawthorne has two versions of this legend; but in both it is changed into a tale of family crime and retribution. Smithells is said to be fairly recognizable in the description given of Braithwaite Hall in *Dr. Grimshawe*.

The history of Mr. Julian Hawthorne's manuscript is not as clear as could be desired, though we see no reason to doubt that it is substantially a genuine Hawthorne

\* DR. GRIMSHAW'S SECRET. A Romance, by NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE. Edited, with Preface and Notes, by JULIAN HAWTHORNE. 12mo, pp. xiii, 368. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co.

manuscript; that is, with the changes in fitting it for the press, confessed or implied in the editor's preface, which may be more or less according to the editor's view of the limits of propriety in the matter. It is a pity that he has not gone more into details at several points. In view of the doubts raised in advance and those that were sure to follow, he should have given his readers the means of identifying the original manuscript. It has also been asserted that the manuscript was only lately discovered and the editor's preface certainly implies as much in the assertion that it was carried to London some eight years ago, stored there, and "not again seen by me until last Summer, when I unpacked it in this city"—that is, in New York. Yet Mr. Keningale Cook wrote to the *London Athenæum* that he saw a transcript of more or less of it four years ago.

It may be unjust to hold the editor responsible for the announcement made in this country, last Summer; but we were led to expect a love-thread as the essential feature of the story; but, to our surprise, there is really nothing of the sort in it. What does this mean? Has any one blundered, or must this stand as another unexplained but singularly significant perplexity to be ranked with the editor's account of his father's method of work, which has been met with flat contradiction?

Mr. Julian Hawthorne's habits in the use of language are, however, very clearly indicated by the book itself, which, he tells us in the preface, though not complete "as a work of art" (what is a story but a work of art?), "as a story is complete as it stands." Yet he confesses a large number of changes required to bring the parts together, leaves us to surmise that there were many more; and, after all, what do we find? A first, or American part, full of characteristic Hawthorne power. The Doctor's house and the Doctor himself, the creepy sensation given by his spiders, the crusty Hannah, and the two children are in his best style. There is a strange school-master, Colcord, brought into view, and then spirited off into the clouds, evidently to reappear somewhere. There is an Englishman, Hammond, who digs up a silver key, but leaves it lying, unfound, on the ground, to be discovered by a child, who is hinted at as the child of destiny and invested with a strange interest peculiar to Hawthorne.

Plainly, there is beginning enough, but when we leap on to the middle it is beyond the possibilities to make anything out or to say what it all means. Mr. Julian Hawthorne believes that he knows, and we may give him the credit of an honest opinion to that effect. Certainly it looks, also, as if, from this point on, he had done his best to work up into presentable shape the fragments he found on his hands and make them creditable to his father. All this defect and incoherency is an unanswerable reply to the suspicions raised against the manuscript and warrant its genuineness. But it makes a doubtful impression of the editor's judgment and prepares us to believe that he may be as far astray as to the amount of influence he has had on the present form of the story as he certainly is as to its completeness. End it has none. The middle is confused, inconsequent, and often little better than nonsense.

As a chapter in the literary biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, these publications, though not without interest, are not worth the candle. They contain little that is new and nothing to compensate for the rude exhibition of the author. Things are often both necessary and fit to be done which are not fit to be seen. It was honorable to Hawthorne to produce what he did as he did; but it is yet more honorable to him that he did not wish to be seen in the dust of the labor and be judged by windfalls from his fruitful genius, which, until they had ripened on his bough and been touched with his genius, were not at all of his kind.