

The Scarlet Letter

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Nathaniel Hawthorne



Ooligan Press 2013

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Nathaniel Hawthorne
Introduction © 2012

ISBN 13:

Ooligan Press
Portland State University
PO Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207
www.ooliganpress.pdx.edu
ooligan@ooliganpress.pdx.edu
(503) 725-9748

Printed in the United States
Cover and book design by Tia Weyrauch

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The Custom-House

Introductory to "The Scarlet Letter"

It is a little remarkable, that—though disinclined to talk over-much of myself and my affairs at the fireside, and to my personal friends—an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me, in addressing the public. The first time was three or four years since, when I favoured the reader—inexcusably, and for no earthly reason that either the indulgent reader or the intrusive author could imagine—with a description of my way of life in the deep quietude of an Old Manse. And now—because, beyond my deserts, I was happy enough to find a listener or two on the former occasion—I again seize the public by the button, and talk of my three years' experience in a Custom-House. The example of the famous "P. P., Clerk of this Parish," was never more faithfully followed. The truth seems to be, however, that when he casts his leaves forth upon the wind, the author addresses, not the many who will fling aside his volume, or never take it up, but the few who will understand him better than most of his schoolmates or lifemates. Some authors, indeed, do far more than this, and indulge themselves in such confidential depths of revelation as could fittingly be addressed only and exclusively to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy; as if the printed book, thrown at large on the wide world, were certain to find out the divided segment of the writer's own nature, and complete his circle of existence by bringing him into communion with it. It is scarcely
