

**NATHANIEL
HAWTHORNE:
AN ORATION**

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Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Oration by Joseph W. Symonds

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JOSEPH W. SYMONDS

**NATHANIEL
HAWTHORNE:
AN ORATION**

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.



AN ORATION

P *With the regards of*

CHARLES F. LIBBY,

3,

PORTLAND, ME.

BY

JOSEPH W. SYMONDS.



PORTLAND:
PUBLISHED BY THE ALUMNI.
1878.

4 January, 1892.

Friend [unclear]

[unclear]

—♦♦♦♦—

STEPHEN BERRY, PRINTER.

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ORATION.

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BRETHREN OF THE BOWDOIN ALUMNI, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

It is true, I apprehend, at least of those of us who after long absence revisit this seat of learning, that we come to remember the dead, not less than to rejoin the living. We renew with delight our intimacy with those who return, while across the intervening distances affection and memory go, to join hands with those who shall not return again. There are footsteps here which do not press the green of the fields; in many a favorite haunt, faces, long unseen, glimmer upon our thought in the splendor of noonday, or brighten out of the haunted darkness; while forms of men, unknown or forgotten of the world, glide silently among the loitering strangers who do not observe them, and walk arm in arm with us along "the gleam and shadow" of familiar paths. In the silence of these halls, or in the midst

of whatever tumult may fill them now, to us they are echoing still with sounds that fall more and more faintly in the distance;—with voices, perhaps, that long ago died away into the realms of memory. And when the joy is at its best, and the procession moves to the gladdest strain, our real selves, like shades, turn sadly aside from the gladsome march—as if to carry flowers to a grave.

Nor do our thoughts dwell only within the domain of personal recollection. The traditions of the college are our inheritance. The halo of early dreaming was over them all, when first we journeyed hither. They made part of the enchantment of college life. They greet us on every return. Imagination ranges farther than memory. Here is the goal, gleaming in every retrospect, where men, in the dew of their strength, have been accustomed to loiter, impatiently awaiting the signal for them to join the race;—men, too, whose influence lingers as a potent spell in this air, although their shadows had ceased to fall upon these breezy walks long before our feet had trod them. We do not see them all. They who have become immortal veil their faces when they walk among men. No vista, even of thought, here stretches back into the silent or legendary gloom of antiquity, but there *are* associations which illumine these scenes

with light from vanished faces, with the radiance of noble lives. These are the altars, blazing still with the consecrated flame, where for generations thought has been kindled, and character tempered to finer quality and moulded to statelier form. They shall not fall. The faith that reared them shall not fail. Silently, one by one it may be, the votaries come; but the golden chain of their succession shall not be broken off.

Yet, in the retrospect, we do not all look upon the same picture. In the foreground, and in clearer light, each sees the figures and events of his own time. No cloud obscures them;—while grouped around these, in more shadowy outline, but present in every picture that here passes before the imagination, stand the men whose genius and fame have become a part of our common inheritance.

And among these, somewhat aloof from the group, in the seclusion of a strange experience, with a shadow resting upon his face, that might be of a passing cloud, but does not pass, intent, absorbed, as if he had questioned guilt and sorrow for their darkest secret and was awaiting reply, or as if he were following to the utmost verge of thought the threads of sombre hue on which human life is woven in woof of changeful light and shade, however memory may

recall or fancy may paint him, will forever remain the noble presence of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

His life may be briefly sketched. You know it well. He was born in 1804. His inheritance from a line of ancestors who had lived in Salem nearly two centuries, taken all in all, was a sinister one, but it included, among its gifts of fortune, physical strength and a strong type of manly beauty. Mr. Fields, who was with him in England, heard it remarked in literary circles in London, that since Robert Burns no author had appeared there with so fine a face as Hawthorne's. When he lived in the little red farm-house in Lenox, his appearance suggested the idea of a "banished lord"; and Curtis, describing his personal presence, speaks of him as "a kind of poetic Webster." As a boy, he was full of health and spirit, fond of the open air, and mused and talked of vague adventures at sea. This love of the sea was an inherited passion, which never expired. In 1860, on his return from England, he said to a friend who was sea-sick: "I should like to sail on and on forever, and never touch the shore again."

He was not averse to books, and, at an early age, an accidental lameness, which held him a prisoner from his sports for several years, doubtless quickened his

taste for reading. The books within his reach were those to be found in New England homes seventy years ago, unless we except Rousseau and the Newgate Calendar, which he is said to have read before he was fourteen. Shakespeare, Milton, Johnson, Pope, Thomson and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* made part of his early reading, while over the *Pilgrim's Progress* he would muse by the hour without once speaking. The strength of this early impression, the profound influence of the story of Christian's pilgrimage upon his mind, is strikingly apparent in his works.

"The Celestial Railroad," one of the "Mosses," on which, in a dream, he takes passage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, in the pleasant company of one Mr. Smooth-it-away, is but a new chapter of Bunyan, with its moral for a later age. He lingers at Vanity Fair, and wakes from his dream when the wheels of the ferry, at the farther end of the route, dash over him the spray from the cold waters of the river of death.

But it is not in the form of his works that the boy's deep musing over the great allegory may be traced, so much as it is in the subjects to which it directed his attention and the tone with which it infused his thought. Sin, evil, outward-seeming