

**A WONDER-BOOK  
FOR GIRLS  
AND BOYS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649102839

A wonder-book for girls and boys by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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**NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

**A WONDER-BOOK  
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AND BOYS**





PERSEUS SHOWING THE GORGON'S HEAD

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The Riverside Literature Series

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A WONDER-BOOK

FOR GIRLS AND BOYS

BY

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

WITH A MYTHOLOGICAL INDEX



BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
The Riverside Press Cambridge

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\* Mrs M. S. Berg. Oct. 21/19.

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

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### THE WONDER-BOOK.

EVEN from the data to be obtained by a perusal of his works, the general reader will be likely to infer that Hawthorne took a vital interest in child-life; and in his published Note-Books are found many brief memoranda which indicate his disposition to write for children. After he married and had begun to rear a family of his own, this interest of his in the earliest developments of mind and character became, naturally, much more active. He was accustomed to observe his children very closely. There are private manuscripts still extant, which present exact records of what his young son and elder daughter said or did, from hour to hour; the father seating himself in their play-room and patiently noting all that passed.

To this habit of watchful and sympathetic scrutiny we may attribute in part the remarkable felicity, the fortunate ease of adaptation to the immature understanding, and the skilful appeal to fresh imaginations, which characterize his stories for the young. Natural tact and insight prompted, faithful study from the real assisted, these productions.

While still living at Lenox, and soon after publishing "The House of the Seven Gables," he sketched as follows, in a letter to Mr. James T. Fields, May 23,

1851, his plan for the work which this note accompanies :—

“ I mean to write, within six weeks or two months next ensuing, a book of stories made up of classical myths. The subjects are : The Story of Midas, with his Golden Touch, Pandora’s Box, The Adventure of Hercules in quest of the Golden Apples, Bellerophon and the Chimera, Baucis and Philemon, Perseus and Medusa ; these, I think, will be enough to make up a volume. As a framework, I shall have a young college-student telling these stories to his cousins and brothers and sisters, during his vacations, sometimes at the fireside, sometimes in the woods and dells. Unless I greatly mistake, these old fictions will work up admirably for the purpose ; and I shall aim at substituting a tone in some degree Gothic or romantic, or any such tone as may best please myself, instead of the classic coldness which is as repellant as the touch of marble.”

With such precision as to time did he carry out this scheme, that on the 15th of July he wrote the Preface to the completed volume. It was unusual, however, for him to work with such rapidity, or indeed to write at all in the summer season ; and this exertion, coming so soon after his work upon the romance, may have had something to do with increasing a languor which he had already begun to feel, and inducing him to remove from Lenox in the autumn. While he remained in Berkshire he had more or less literary companionship, which is alluded to in the Note-Books and also in the closing chapter of the “ Wonder-Book,” where he likewise refers thus to himself :—

“ ‘ Have we not an author for our next neighbor ? ’ asked Primrose. ‘ That silent man, who lives in the

old red house near Tanglewood Avenue, and whom we sometimes meet, with two children at his side, in the woods or at the lake. I think I have heard of his having written a poem, or a romance, or an arithmetic, or a school-history, or something of that kind.' "

The manuscript of the "Wonder-Book" is the only one of Hawthorne's completed books which, in its original form, is owned by any member of his family. The book was written on thin blue paper of rather large size, and on both sides of the pages. Scarcely a correction or an erasure occurs, from the beginning to the end; and wherever an alteration was made, the after-thought was evidently so swift that the author did not stop to blot, for the word first written is merely smeared into illegibility and another substituted for it. It appears to be certain that, although Hawthorne meditated long over what he intended to do and came rather slowly to the point of publication, yet when the actual task of writing was begun it proceeded rapidly and with very little correction; and in most cases probably very little re-drafting was done. His private correspondence exhibits the same easy flow of composition, in sentences of notable finish; offering a marked contrast, for example, to the habit of the historian Motley, who even in his letters expunged words on every page.

The "Wonder-Book" proved to be a financial as well as literary success, and was presently translated and published in Germany.

G. P. L.