

**THE GREAT STONE FACE:  
AND OTHER TALES OF  
THE WHITE MOUNTAINS**

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The Great Stone Face: And Other Tales of the White Mountains by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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**NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

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AND OTHER TALES OF  
THE WHITE MOUNTAINS**



**The Riverside Literature Series**

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**THE GREAT STONE FACE  
AND OTHER TALES OF THE  
WHITE HILLS**

**BY**

**NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**



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*Prof. Howard M. Jones*

## INTRODUCTION.

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THE first three numbers in this collection are tales of the White Hills in New Hampshire. The passages from *Sketches from Memory* show that Hawthorne had visited the mountains in one of his occasional rambles from home, but there are no entries in his *Note Books* which give accounts of such a visit. There is, however, among these notes the following interesting paragraph, written in 1840 and clearly foreshadowing *The Great Stone Face*:

“The semblance of a human face to be formed on the side of a mountain, or in the fracture of a small stone, by a *lusus naturæ* [freak of nature]. The face is an object of curiosity for years or centuries, and by and by a boy is born whose features gradually assume the aspect of that portrait. At some critical juncture the resemblance is found to be perfect. A prophecy may be connected.”

It is not impossible that this conceit occurred to Hawthorne before he had himself seen the Old Man of the Mountain, or the Profile, in the Franconia Notch which is generally associated in the minds of readers with *The Great Stone Face*.

In *The Ambitious Guest* he has made use of the incident still told to travellers through the Notch, of the destruction of the Willey family in August, 1826. The house occupied by the family was on the slope of a mountain, and after a long drought there was a ter-

rible tempest which not only raised the river to a great height but loosened the surface of the mountain so that a great land slide took place. The house was in the track of the slide, and the family rushed out of doors. Had they remained within they would have been safe, for a boulder above the house parted the avalanche so that it was diverted into two paths and swept past the house on either side. Mr. and Mrs. Willey, their five children, and two hired men were crushed under the weight of earth, rocks, and trees.

In the *Sketches from Memory* Hawthorne gives an intimation of the tale which he might write and did afterward write of *The Great Carbuncle*. The paper is interesting as showing what were the actual experiences out of which he formed his imaginative stories. In other parts of the same general collection of reminiscences he gives an account of his travel on the Erie Canal in a canal-boat, of Burlington, Vermont, and of Rochester, New York. The sketch of *My Visit to Niagara* is taken from the twelfth volume of Hawthorne's collected works, and gives a picture of the place as it was about 1830.

*Old Ticonderoga* gives a capital opportunity for the student to trace from Hawthorne's hints the several historical events which suggested the pictures to his mind.

*The Sister Years*, as the reader will discover, was originally published as a Carrier's Address in connection with the *Salem Gazette*, New Year's Day, 1839. It was quite common at one time to issue little souvenirs of this sort, but more often in poetry than in prose. They were used by those who made a business of carrying the local paper to subscribers before the custom of newsboys and news-stands sprang up.



## THE GREAT STONE FACE.

ONE afternoon, when the sun was going down, a mother and her little boy sat at the door of their cottage, talking about the Great Stone Face. They had but to lift their eyes, and there it was plainly to be seen, though miles away, with the sunshine brightening all its features.

And what was the Great Stone Face?

Embosomed amongst a family of lofty mountains, there was a valley so spacious that it contained many thousand inhabitants. Some of these good people dwelt in log-huts, with the black forest all around them, on the steep and difficult hill-sides. Others had their homes in comfortable farm-houses, and cultivated the rich soil on the gentle slopes or level surfaces of the valley. Others, again, were congregated into populous villages, where some wild, highland rivulet, tumbling down from its birthplace in the upper mountain region, had been caught and tamed by human cunning, and compelled to turn the machinery of cotton-factories. The inhabitants of this valley, in short, were numerous, and of many modes of life. But all of them, grown people and children, had a kind of familiarity with the Great Stone Face, although some possessed the gift of distinguishing this grand natural phenomenon more perfectly than many of their neighbors.

The Great Stone Face, then, was a work of Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness, formed on the

perpendicular side of a mountain by some immense rocks, which had been thrown together in such a position as, when viewed at a proper distance, precisely to resemble the features of the human countenance. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, a hundred feet in height; the nose, with its long bridge; and the vast lips, which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage, and could discern only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the farther he withdrew from them, the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear; until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive.

It was a happy lot for children to grow up to manhood or womanhood with the Great Stone Face before their eyes, for all the features were noble, and the expression was at once grand and sweet, as if it were the glow of a vast, warm heart, that embraced all mankind in its affections, and had room for more. It was an education only to look at it. According to the belief of many people, the valley owed much of its fertility to this benign aspect that was continually beaming over it, illuminating the clouds, and infusing its tenderness into the sunshine.

As we began with saying, a mother and her little boy sat at their cottage-door, gazing at the Great Stone

Face, and talking about it. The child's name was Ernest.

"Mother," said he, while the Titanic visage smiled on him, "I wish that it could speak, for it looks so very kindly that its voice must needs be pleasant. If I were to see a man with such a face, I should love him dearly."

"If an old prophecy should come to pass," answered his mother, "we may see a man, some time or other, with exactly such a face as that."

"What prophecy do you mean, dear mother?" eagerly inquired Ernest. "Pray tell me all about it!"

So his mother told him a story that her own mother had told to her, when she herself was younger than little Ernest; a story, not of things that were past, but of what was yet to come; a story, nevertheless, so very old, that even the Indians, who formerly inhabited this valley, had heard it from their forefathers, to whom, as they affirmed, it had been murmured by the mountain streams, and whispered by the wind among the tree-tops. The purport was, that, at some future day, a child should be born hereabouts, who was destined to become the greatest and noblest personage of his time, and whose countenance, in manhood, should bear an exact resemblance to the Great Stone Face. Not a few old-fashioned people, and young ones likewise, in the ardor of their hopes, still cherished an enduring faith in this old prophecy. But others, who had seen more of the world, had watched and waited till they were weary, and had beheld no man with such a face, nor any man that proved to be much greater or nobler than his neighbors, concluded it to be nothing but an idle tale. At all events, the great man of the prophecy had not yet appeared.