

HORATIO BRIDGE



PERSONAL  
RECOLLECTIONS OF  
NATHANIEL  
HAWTHORNE

# **Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne**

**Horatio Bridge**

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*What then? shall we sit idly down and say  
The night hath come, it is no longer day?  
The night hath not yet come; we are not quite  
Cut off from labor by the failing light  
Something remains for us to do or dare  
Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear  
"Morituri Salutamus"*

## **Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne**

### **Preface**

THREE papers of "Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne," recently published in *Harper's Magazine*, were favorably received, and have brought many letters, from strangers as well as from friends, urging me to publish still more upon the same subject. I may therefore hope that a somewhat more extended account--in book-form--of Hawthorne will also be well received.

Accordingly, while taking the papers just mentioned as the basis of a volume, I have added some new material--including several letters from Hawthorne and General Pierce--now first published.

For many years I have resisted the persuasions of friends and publishers to write something of Hawthorne's life and character; to which end many recollections and not a little material, still in my possession, might, perchance, be profitably applied. But, conscious of having neither the literary ability nor the critical skill essential to a biographical sketch of the great romance-writer or to an analysis of his writings, I shall refrain from attempting either, and here limit my narrative chiefly to matters connected with his college days, and to some incidents in his later career which, I think, have not yet been fully recounted by others.

The rules of chronology will not be strictly adhered to in the following pages, whatever may be the effect on the story. My main object is to give some facts--new and old--with little regard to structure or embellishment.

A somewhat busy life on my part and frequent separations, by sea and land, often broke the continuity of our personal association, but never that of our friendship. As an offset to those separations, however, I probably received more letters from Hawthorne, of a purely friendly character, than did any other man.

The earlier of those letters were all destroyed at his request. Some of the others --the publishing of which I trust no friend of his would disapprove--are herein given.

H. B.

"The Moorings," Athens, PA., 1892.

## Chapter I.

THE boyhood of Nathaniel Hawthorne has been chronicled by his son Julian, in the biography of "Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife"; by his son-in-law Lathrop, in the "Study of Hawthorne"; and recently, in an article in the Wide-Awake, by his relative Elizabeth Manning.

I shall therefore refer to that period only because Hawthorne's isolation and environment in boyhood seem to me to have had an important influence upon his character and conduct, even after he had come to manhood. He is described by his eldest sister (see "Biography," Vol. I., p. 99) as a "beautiful and bright boy; indulged not only by his mother, but by all his uncles and aunt."

Perhaps he might have been spoiled by this indulgence, had not an accident brought on a tedious lameness which--though temporarily disabling--doubtless proved a "blessing in disguise" by keeping him aloof from the active sports of boyhood, and compelling him to seek occupation and pleasure mainly in books.

This enforced physical inaction, together with the seclusion of his mother's house and his long absences from Salem, combined to make him almost a stranger in his native town until he had left college; and these conditions must necessarily have had great influence in forming his peculiar character and shaping his later course.

With these preliminary remarks I turn to the subject of his college life, the delineation of which was the original and principal motive for the present writing.

A boy on going to college seventy years ago went under conditions so different from those of to-day that, to appreciate the situation, one must revert to the old stage-coach as, in the early morning, it passed from house to house, the driver blowing his horn to summon the passengers, and the family coming out to give their farewells and such cautions as would overwhelm with mortification a young fellow of the present day. In such a case, if a pretty sister made one of the family group, it would add materially to the interest felt in the new-comer. There may be as much susceptibility in the collegian of the present time, but we had a rather more naïve way of showing it.

The stage-coach gave better opportunities for travellers to become acquainted with each other than are afforded by the modern railway-car. Some old men will recollect the mail-stage formerly plying between Boston and Brunswick (Maine), drawn by four strong, spirited horses, and bowling along at the average speed of ten miles an hour. The exhilarating pace, the smooth roads, and the juxtaposition of the insiders tended, in a high degree, to the promotion of enjoyment and good-fellowship, which might ripen into lasting friendship.

Among the passengers in one of these coaches in the summer of 1821 were Franklin Pierce, Jonathan Cilley, Alfred Mason, and Nathaniel Hawthorne--the last-named from Salem, the others from New Hampshire. Pierce had already spent his freshman year at Bowdoin College, which institution his companions were on their way to enter.

This chance association was the beginning of a life-long friendship between Pierce, Cilley, and Hawthorne; and it led to Mason and Hawthorne becoming chums. There was no great congeniality between the two room-mates, owing

partly to their joining rival societies, but more to the dissimilarity in their tastes and habits. Both, however, were well-bred and amiable, and they lived together harmoniously for two years.

A slight acquaintance with Mason led me to call at their rooms, and there I first met Hawthorne. He interested me greatly at once, and a friendship then began which, for the forty-three years of his subsequent life, was never for a moment chilled by indifference nor clouded by doubt. Though our paths in life, like our characters, were widely different, our friendship never wavered till the sad end came.

###

Hawthorne was a slender lad, having a massive head, with dark, brilliant, and most expressive eyes, heavy eyebrows, and a profusion of dark hair. For his appearance at that time the inquirer must rely wholly upon the testimony of friends; for, I think, no portrait of him as a lad is extant. On one occasion, in our senior year, the class wished to have their profiles cut in silhouette by a wandering artist of the scissors, and interchanged by all the thirty-eight. Hawthorne disapproved the proposed plan, and steadily refused to go into the Class Golgotha, as he styled the dismal collection. I joined him in this freak, and so our places were left vacant. I now regret the whim, since even a moderately correct outline of his features as a youth would, at this day, be interesting.

Hawthorne's figure was somewhat singular, owing to his carrying his head a little on one side; but his walk was square and firm, and his manner self-respecting and reserved. A fashionable boy of the present day might have seen something to amuse him in the new student's

appearance; but had he indicated this he would have rued it, for Hawthorne's clear appreciation of the social proprieties and his great physical courage would have made it as unsafe to treat him with discourtesy then as at any later time.

Though quiet and most amiable, he had great pluck and determination. I remember that in one of our convivial meetings we had the laugh upon him for some cause, an occurrence so rare that the bantering was carried too far. After bearing it awhile, Hawthorne singled out the one among us who had the reputation of being the best pugilist, and in a few words quietly told him that he would not permit the rallying to go farther. His bearing was so resolute, and there was so much of danger in his eye, that no one afterwards alluded to the offensive subject in his presence. This characteristic was notably displayed several years later, when a lady incited him to quarrel with one of his best friends on account of a groundless pique of hers. He went to Washington for the purpose of challenging the gentleman, and it was only after ample explanations had been made, showing that his friend had behaved with entire honor, that Pierce and Cilley, who were his advisers, could persuade him to be satisfied without a fight. The lady had appealed to him to redress her fancied wrongs, and he was too chivalrous to decline the service.

Hawthorne, with rare strength of character, had yet a gentleness and an unselfishness which endeared him greatly to his friends. He was a gentleman in the best sense of the word, and he was always manly, cool, self-poised, and brave. He was neither morose nor sentimental; and, though taciturn, was invariably cheerful with his chosen friends; and there was much more of fun and frolic in his disposition than his published writings indicate.



## Chapter II.

HAWTHORNE dedicated but two of his books to friends-- "Our Old Home" to ex-President Pierce, in 1863; and "The Snow Image" to myself, in 1850.

In the preface to the last he gives some pleasant glimpses of his college life, which present a better picture of his lighter occupations than can be found elsewhere; and it may be interesting to the admirers of his writings to have some of the statements in the following extract from that preface amplified and explained by one who was familiar with the scenes and incidents to which he refers.

In that dedication he says:

"Be all that as it may, there can be no question of the propriety of my inscribing this volume of earlier and later stories to you, and pausing here a few moments to speak of them as friend speaks to friend; still being cautious, however, that the public and the critics shall overhear nothing which we care about concealing. On you, if on no other person, I am entitled to rely to sustain the position of my dedicatee. If anybody is responsible for my being at this day an author, it is yourself. I know not whence your faith came, but while we were lads together at a country college, gathering blueberries in study hours under those tall, academic pines, or watching the great logs as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin, or shooting pigeons or gray squirrels in the woods, or bat-fowling in the summer twilight, or catching trout in that shadowy little stream which, I suppose, is still wandering riverward through the forest, though you and I will never cast a line in it again; two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things that the Faculty

never heard of, or else it would have been the worse for us--still, it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny that he was to be a writer of fiction. And a fiction-monger he became in due season. But was there ever such a weary delay in obtaining the slightest recognition from the public as in my case? I sat down by the Wayside of life, like a man under enchantment, and a shrubbery sprang up around me, and the bushes grew to be saplings, and the saplings became trees, until no exit appeared possible through the entangling depths of my obscurity. And there, perhaps, I should be sitting at this moment, with the moss on the imprisoning tree-trunks, and the yellow leaves of more than a score of autumns piled above me, if it had not been for you. For it was through your interposition--and that, moreover, unknown to himself--that your early friend was brought before the public somewhat more prominently than theretofore in the first volume of 'Twice-Told Tales.' Not a publisher in America, I presume, would have thought well enough of my forgotten or never-noticed stories to risk the expense of print and paper; nor do I say this with any purpose of casting odium on the respectable fraternity of booksellers for their blindness to my wonderful merit. To confess the truth, I doubted of the public recognition quite as much as they could do. So much the more generous was your confidence; and knowing, as I do, that it was founded on old friendship rather than cold criticism, I value it only the more for that.

"So now, when I turn back upon my path, lighted by a transitory gleam of public favor, to pick up a few articles which were left out of my former collections, I take pleasure in making them the memorial of our very long and unbroken connection."

###

Formerly the college grounds and the land adjoining included a great area of pine forest, with blueberry bushes and other shrubs for its undergrowth, and with foot-paths running deviously for miles under the shady trees, where, in their season, squirrels and wild pigeons might be found in sufficient numbers to afford good sport. The woodland gave a charmingly secluded retreat, and imparted a classic aspect to the otherwise tame scenery of the Brunswick Plains. Unhappily, in later years a public road was made between the campus and the quiet old graveyard, and a street was opened on another side, so that the grove has been sadly circumscribed. I am sorry to add that many of those "tall academic pines" have been cut down, leaving only their stumps to tell of their former existence and their destruction. The beauty of these woods made such an impression upon Longfellow's poetical mind that--fifty years later--in addressing the few remaining members of our class, he thus apostrophized the woods he so well remembered:

"Ye groves of pine,  
That once were mine, but are no longer mine."

###

In our day one could wander for miles through this forest without meeting a person (except a stray student or two) or hearing a sound other than the occasional chatter of a squirrel, the song of a bird, or the sighing of the wind through the branches overhead.

By crossing the road leading to Bath, a town nine miles away, one came into another division of the pine woods, where the sandy soil was not so level, and through which ran the "shadowy little stream" that, after traversing the main street of the village and skirting the small elevation

near Professor Cleveland's house, made its way to the river, a mile or so below the falls of the Androscoggin.

In this brook we often fished for the small trout that were to be found there; but the main charm of those outings was in the indolent loitering along the low banks of the little stream, listening to its murmur or to the whispering of the overhanging pines.

There was one favorite spot in a little ravine, where a copious spring of clear cold water gushed out from the sandy bank and joined the larger stream. This was the Paradise Spring, which deserves much more than its present celebrity for the absolute purity of its waters. Of late years the brook has been better known as a favorite haunt of the great romance writer, and it is now often called the Hawthorne Brook.

###

Another locality, above the bridge, afforded an occasional stroll through the fields and by the river. There, in spring, we used to linger for hours to watch the giant pine-logs (for there were giants in those days) from the far-off forests, floating by hundreds in the stream until they came to the falls; then, balancing for a moment on the brink, they plunged into the foamy pool below. Those who have seen such huge tree-trunks, each possessing a certain individuality, approach in groups or singly, and disappear, will understand why it was so fascinating to "watch the great logs as they tumbled along the current."

###

The Androscoggin River, one of the largest in New England, bounds the village on the north, while on the opposite side,

and two or three miles distant, lies Maquoit Bay (an inlet of the beautiful Casco Bay), which afforded a genuine marine view, vulgarized though it was by the dilapidated wharf and the two or three melancholy sloops that plied between this point and Portland, laden with lumber and firewood. A trip in one of these coasters is said to have inspired a high officer of the college with the beneficent idea of writing a book of "Songs for Sailors." Though the little volume fell still-born from the press, a few copies escaped, and gave occasion for great fun to the irreverent youngsters, who parodied it without mercy. I can only rescue for a brief hour from oblivion the initial stanza of the first poem in the book, and here offer it as a "specimen brick":

"All you who would be seamen  
Must bear a valiant heart,  
And when you come upon the sea  
You must not think to start;  
Nor once to be faint-hearted  
In hail, rain, wind, or snow;  
Nor to think for to shrink  
When the stormy winds do blow."

In process of time it was my fortune to "come upon the sea," and I experienced the full force of "hail, rain, wind, or snow" on several occasions--notably in the Portsmouth, beating round Cape Horn in a wild, wintry gale; and again in the Saratoga, in a blinding storm of snow and sleet, embayed off the coast of New Hampshire, and only saved from total shipwreck by cutting away the masts and anchoring on a rocky lee-shore. I take shame upon myself for not recalling, then and there, those appropriate and inspiring lines.

To this little bay within a bay we occasionally resorted, but the tiresome walk over the sandy road deprived the

excursions of half their pleasure.

The bay and the rapid river gave to the flat region adjacent to the college its only picturesque features. Of these Longfellow wrote:

"Thou river, widening through the meadows green  
To the vast sea, so near and yet unseen!"

###

Another of our favorite strolls was in a sparsely settled street by the riverside. There, after tea, Hawthorne and I often walked, silent or conversing, according to the humor of the hour. These rambles sometimes ended at the unpainted cottage of an old fortune-teller who, from the tea-leaves in a cracked cup or from a soiled pack of cards, evoked our respective destinies. She always gave us brilliant futures, in which the most attractive of the promised gifts were abundance of gold and great wealth of wives. Lovely beings these wives of destiny were sure to be, some of whom the old crone prophesied would be "dark-complected" and others "light-complected," but all surpassingly beautiful. These blessings, and more, she predicted for so small a silver coin that, though we were her best patrons, our modest stock of pocket-money was not inconveniently diminished by her fees.

We were fully repaid for the outlay by the fun of the hour; but, to the discredit of the prophetess, it must be said that the gold never came to us, but to each a very happy marriage without the dangerous procession of blondes and brunettes. And it was an added tie between us that each had the highest appreciation of the many excellent qualities of his friend's wife.

A few years since I revisited the spot where the sibyl once had lived; but, alas! only to find that her house was gone, and that a railway-track had usurped its former site.

###

In our long evening walks, especially when discussing the probable future of each, Hawthorne was less reserved than at other times. On such occasions I always foretold his success if he should choose literature as a profession. He listened without assenting, but, as he told me long afterwards, he was cheered and strengthened in his subsequent career by my enthusiastic faith in his literary powers.

The professors and students all acknowledged his superiority in Latin and English composition, yet to me he insisted that he could never bring himself into accord with the general reading public, nor make himself sufficiently understood by it to gain anything more than a beggarly support as an author. It was this distrust of being rightfully appreciated that, for so many years, prevented him from taking that rank among the foremost writers of America which scholars and critics now concede to him.

### **Chapter III.**

THE class of 1825 became distinguished in the annals of Bowdoin for those of its graduates of that year who ultimately attained high rank in literature, theology, and politics.

Though the general reader may care little for any notice of the different individuals of this class, Bowdoin men will probably be interested in some account of its more noticeable members.