HAWTHORNE AND PURITANISM

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HAWTHORNE'S literary reputation is inextricably linked with Puritanism and the Puritans. The critics have made much of his Puritan subject matter and his sympathetic treatment of Puritan themes. Some have come close to identifying Hawthorne with Puritanism, as though he were a spiritual contemporary of Cotton Mather born out of his time.

W. C. Brownell, for instance, saw in Hawthorne a genuine son of the Puritans and called *The Scarlet Letter* "the Puritan *Faust.*" In a rather sweeping generalization he asserted that Hawthorne's writings were almost invariably successful when they dealt with Puritan themes, almost always a failure when they did not. He attributed the didactic tone of Hawthorne's fiction to his preoccupation with Puritanism, and in many other ways related Hawthorne's literary accomplishments with Puritan subjects and influences.[1] Herbert Schneider similarly sees Hawthorne as reviving the best in Puritanism, "the empirical truth behind the Calvinistic symbols. He recovered what Puritanism professed but seldom practiced—the spirit of piety, humility, and tragedy in the face of the inscrutable ways of God."[2]

Other critics have found Hawthorne's chief literary motivation in criticism of Puritanism rather than emulation. Parrington saw him as criticizing the Puritans from a sceptical point of view,[3] while Stuart Pratt Sherman called him "a subtle critic and satirist of Puritanism from the Transcendental point of view."[4] T. S. Eliot writes, "The work of Hawthorne is truly a criticism . . . of the Puritan morality, of

[1] *American Prose Masters* (New York, 1909), 123, 115, 76-78.

[2] *The Puritan Mind* (New York, 1930), 262-263.

[3] *The Romantic Revolution in America* (New York, 1927), 442-450.

[4] *Americans* (New York, 1922), 137. We may wonder how, in view of Hawthorne's bitter attack upon Transcendentalism in "The Celestial Railroad," Sherman could apply the term Transcendental to its author. That story seems to call for a reversal of Sherman's formula; it is clearly critical and satirical of Transcendentalism from an almost entirely orthodox Puritan point of view.

the Transcendental morality, and of the world which Hawthorne knew."[5]

Still others take a middle ground, noting both the Puritan influences on Hawthorne and his reaction against Puritanism. Frank P. Stearns wrote that Hawthorne "pursued a middle course. He separated himself from the Puritans without joining their opponents."[6] And Barrett Wendell, while admitting that Hawthorne "could never shake off the temperamental earnestness of the Puritan" and that he is "most characteristic when . . . he expresses that constant, haunting sense of ancestral sin" which he inherits from his Puritan forefathers, nevertheless pointed out that for Hawthorne Puritanism was no longer a way of life but rather a subject for literary art.[7]

In view of this critical agreement, on the one hand, as to the importance of Puritanism as a factor in Hawthorne's writings, and disagreement, on the other, as to Hawthorne's attitude toward the Puritans, it may be of interest to examine more closely the evidence of Hawthorne's writings themselves for his treatment of Puritanism and its influence upon his thought.

I.

As early as 1830 Hawthorne had published two historical sketches of Puritans in the Salem *Gazette,* "Sir William Phips" and "Mrs. Hutchinson." The first of these is uncritical, little more than a retelling of Cotton Mather's life of the Governor, but the second is interesting as showing where Hawthorne's sympathies lay in the Antinomian crisis—entirely with the orthodox. Mrs. Hutchinson's "strange and dangerous opinions," he says, threatened the very existence of the colony. In the present case "religious freedom was wholly inconsistent with public safety." Winthrop is pictured as "a man by whom the innocent and guilty might alike desire to be judged"; Endecott is gently criticized as one who "would

[5] Cited by F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), 193.
[6] *The Life and Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Philadelphia, 1906), 106.
[7] *Literary History of America* (New York, 1900), 433.

stand with his drawn sword at the gate of heaven, and resist to the death all pilgrims thither, except they travelled his own path." This is mild treatment for Endecott. Those supporting Mrs. Hutchinson fare rather worse. John Cotton, who had supported her for a time, "began to have that light in regard to his errors, which will sometimes break in upon the wisest and most pious men when their opinions are unhappily discordant with those of the powers that be." Vane is dismissed as "the youthful governor preferred by a hasty judgment of the people over all the wise and hoary heads that had preceded him to New England."

How can we explain this surprising partisanship of Hawthorne's? Was he simply following the account of some orthodox Puritan? Did he dislike Anne Hutchinson, seeing in her mystical doctrines a kinship with the Transcendentalism he could not stomach? This sketch is unique among Hawthorne's writings for its unqualified bias in favor of the Puritans.

Another incident of Puritan history, the Quaker persecutions, receives more restrained treatment. "The Gentle Boy" finds both Puritans and Quakers at fault. The Quakers are pictured as fanatical, seeking persecution, but full of "a holy courage, unknown to the Puritans themselves, who had shunned the cross, by providing for the peaceful exercise of their religion in a distant wilderness." The speech of one of the Quakers is called "a flood of malignity which she mistook for inspiration." But the authorities are not blameless either. Along with the Quaker extravagances, the Puritan persecution "which was at once their cause and consequence" increased until it resulted in the death of two Quakers in 1659. "An indelible stain of blood is upon the hands of all who consented to this act." Elsewhere Hawthorne speaks of "innocent blood" polluting "the hands that were so often raised in prayer."

Yet the purpose of this story is not to weigh the evidence for or against the Puritans but to show the evil effects of a monomania, even of a religious cast; and though the Quakers

are on the whole sympathetically treated, a degree of this fanaticism is attributed to all of them.

The notorious witchcraft trials are of course mentioned in various places in Hawthorne's writings. In "Alice Doane's Appeal," an early sketch, the witchcraft mania is said to have "disgraced an age." But the most interesting passage in this story is its picture of Cotton Mather:

> In the rear of the procession rode a figure on horseback, so darkly conspicuous, so sternly triumphant, that my hearers mistook him for the visible presence of the fiend himself; but it was only his good friend, Cotton Mather, proud of his well-won dignity, as the representative of all the hateful features of his time; the one bloodthirsty man, in whom were concentrated those vices of spirit and errors of opinion that sufficed to madden the whole surrounding multitude.

In the light of the studies of Kittredge and others, we do not judge Mather so harshly today for his part in the delusion. More just, perhaps, is Hawthorne's treatment of him in *Grandfather's Chair,* where he is spoken of as "chief agent of the mischief, but we will not suppose that he acted otherwise than conscientiously." In the same work, Mather is praised for his sponsorship of small-pox inoculation—"The best and wisest thing he ever did."

Holgrave's story in *The House of the Seven Gables,* telling of Matthew Maule, reports:

> This old reprobate was one of the sufferers when Cotton Mather, and his brother ministers, and the learned judges, and other wise men, and Sir William Phipps, the sagacious governor, made such laudable efforts to weaken the great enemy of souls, by sending a multitude of his adherents up the rocky pathway of Gallows Hill. Since those days, no doubt, it has grown to be suspected that, in consequence of an unfortunate overdoing of a work praiseworthy in itself, the proceedings against the witches had proved far less acceptable to the Beneficent Father than to that very Arch Enemy whom they were intended to distress and utterly overwhelm.

The irony of the religious incentive seems to have struck Hawthorne particularly, as did the ease with which the wisest were deluded.

One other historic incident of Puritan times is treated at some length by Hawthorne—the Merry Mount episode. It is dealt with in almost epic style in "The Maypole of Merry Mount." "Jollity and gloom were contending for an empire," Hawthorne wrote, setting the theme of his tale. The maypole revels of Morton and his followers are described at some length. Everything is gaiety and fun. But:

> Unfortunately, there were men in the new world of a sterner faith than those Maypole worshippers. Not far from Merry Mount was a settlement of Puritans, most dismal wretches, who said their prayers before daylight, and then wrought in the forest or the cornfield till evening made it prayer time again. Their weapons were always at hand to shoot down the straggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians. Their festivals were fast days, and their chief pastime the singing of psalms. Woe to the youth or maiden who did but dream of a dance! The selectman nodded to the constable; and there sat the light-heeled reprobate in the stocks; or if he danced, it was round the whipping-post, which might be termed the Puritan Maypole.

Ultimately, of course, the Puritans were successful in their contention with the revelers at Merry Mount, and the forces of gloom prevailed.

This gloom of the Puritans is one of Hawthorne's chief *motifs*. Endecott is pictured in "The Maypole" as "the Puritan of the Puritans," so stern of aspect "that the whole man, visage, frame, and soul, seemed wrought of iron." Elsewhere a Puritan throng gathers in the meeting house, "mostly with such sombre visages that the sunshine becomes little better than a shadow when it falls upon them." The "grim prints of Puritan ministers" Hawthorne found in his study at the Manse looked "like men who had wrestled so continually and so sternly with

the devil that somewhat of his sooty fierceness had been imparted to their own visages." Gloom was a prevailing characteristic of the age, Hawthorne wrote in "Dr. Bullivant," and "its long shadow, falling over all the intervening years, is visible, though not too distinctly, upon ourselves." We have yet to learn the "forgotten art of gaiety," Hawthorne remarked in *The Scarlet Letter,* laying most of the blame for American sombreness upon the second generation in New England, who "wore the blackest shade of Puritanism."

But there was much of this Puritan gloom in Hawthorne himself, as Melville observed. It pervades his stories and romances and even has a part in his own philosophy of life. In "The Maypole," after the Puritans have routed the revelers, the young couple stand "in the first hour of wedlock, while the idle pleasures, of which their companions were the emblems, had given place to the sternest cares of life, personified by the dark Puritans. But never had their youthful beauty seemed so pure and high as when its glow was chastened by adversity." Hawthorne seems to believe that gaiety and cheerfulness belong only to youth, and that maturity means sadness and sobriety. Speaking of the same young couple, he wrote:

> No sooner had their hearts glowed with real passion than they were sensible of something vague and unsubstantial in their former pleasures. . . . From the moment that they truly loved, they had subjected themselves to earth's doom of care and sorrow, and troubled joy, and had no more a home at Merry Mount.

It is well that this is so, Hawthorne thinks, for the sadness represents growth. As Holgrave says to Phoebe, in *The House of the Seven Gables,* "This bemoaning of one's self . . . over the first, careless, shallow gayety of youth departed, and this profound happiness at youth regained,—so much deeper and richer than that we lost,—are essential to the soul's development."[8] It is possible to see in this view of life the germ of Hawthorne's belief in the humanizing effects of sin in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun.*

[8] *Complete Works* (Boston, 1883), III, 256-257.

The Puritan sternness is also seen in what Hawthorne calls in *The Scarlet Letter* "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law." He pictured the Puritans waiting with "grim rigidity" outside the jail for Hester to appear. The slightest offense, he wrote, met with the same "solemnity of demeanor" as the most awful, "as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical."

After picturing the various wrong-doers and their punishments in "Endicott and the Red Cross," Hawthorne concluded sympathetically, "It was the policy of our ancestors to search out even the most secret sins, and expose them to shame, without fear or favor, in the broadest light of the noonday sun." There is irony in the description of these culprits, and this irony becomes marked when Endecott is speaking about liberty of conscience. Indeed, the sad and quiet smile which crosses Roger Williams' mild countenance during this speech and its interruptions is Hawthorne's own. Yet in spite of their mistakes in administering justice, the Puritans were right, Hawthorne thought, in their diligence against what they considered evil.

It is interesting to recall, in this connection, a passage in *The Blithedale Romance* which throws some light on Hawthorne's own conception of justice. Speaking of his observations of Zenobia and Hollingsworth and their sin, he declared:

> True, I might have condemned them. Had I been judge as well as witness, my sentence might have been stern as that of destiny itself. But, still, no trait of original nobility of character, no struggle against temptation,—no iron necessity of will, on the one hand, nor extenuating circumstance to be derived from passion and despair, on the other,—no remorse that might coexist with error, even if powerless to prevent it,—no proud repentance that should claim retribution as a meed,—would go unappreciated. True, again, I might have given my full assent to the punishment which was sure to follow. But it would be given mournfully, and with undiminished love.[9]

[9] *Complete Works*, v, 503.

The stern justice of the Puritans Hawthorne does not condemn, but he would add sympathy and tenderness to justice.

Hawthorne presented the Puritans as inhospitable to the arts. This is shown in the oft-quoted passage from *The Scarlet Letter* where Hawthorne imagines his ancestors frowning upon him as a mere story-teller, and in "The Prophetic Pictures," where the artist's lifelike creations are deemed by some "an offense against the Mosaic law, and even a presumptuous mockery of the Creator," and by others black magic or witchcraft. And in *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne observed that "the Puritanism, which, however diversified with later patchwork, still gives its tint to New England character" seems to threaten occasionally, even in Hawthorne's own day, to outlaw the stage and the legitimate drama.

The one aspect of the Puritans which drew most praise from Hawthorne is their love of liberty and their willingness to fight for it. Endecott's cutting the Red Cross from the flag was "a very strong expression of Puritan character" and "one of the boldest exploits which our history records." Hawthorne would ever honor the name of Endecott for the deed. "We look back through the mist of ages, and recognize in the rending of the Red Cross from New England's banner the first omen of that deliverance which our fathers consummated after the bones of the stern Puritan had lain more than a century in the dust." For Hawthorne this is a foretaste of the Revolution. The colonies, by gradually taking political power into their own hands, had won liberties and privileges which Old England had never enjoyed. These were threatened by Laud, but the forefathers perceived the danger and "were resolved that their infant country should not fall without a struggle, even beneath the giant strength of the King's right arm." For Hawthorne the real glory of the Puritans was that they laid the foundations of American liberty.

What is the sum of all this? Did Hawthorne like the Puritans, as has been suggested, better than the people of his own day? No simple answer will do. He saw their faults, but he saw

them in relation to their own times. Perhaps it was the times that were bad. "They were the best men and women of their day," he wrote of the early Puritans, but that is not the whole story. "Happy are we, if for nothing else, yet because we did not live in those days," he wrote in "Main Street," and he added:

In truth, when the first novelty and stir of spirit had subsided,—when the new settlement, between the forest border and the sea, had actually become a little town,—its daily life must have trudged onward with hardly anything to diversify and enliven it, while also its rigidity could not fail to cause miserable distortions of the moral nature. Such a life was sinister to the intellect and sinister to the heart; especially when one generation had bequeathed its religious gloom and the counterfeit of its religious ardor, to the next; for these characteristics, as was inevitable, assumed the form both of hypocrisy and exaggeration, by being inherited from the example and precept of other human beings, and not from an original and spiritual source.

Hawthorne, like most close observers of Puritanism, had far less respect for the second generation of Puritans than for the first.

The sons and grandchildren of the first settlers were a race of lower and narrower souls than their progenitors had been. The latter were stern, severe, intolerant, but not superstitious, not even fanatical; and endowed, if any men of that age were, with a far-seeing worldly sagacity. But it was impossible for the succeeding race to grow up, in heaven's freedom, beneath the discipline which their gloomy energy of character had established; nor, it may be, have we even yet thrown off all the unfavorable influences which, among many good ones, were bequeathed to us by our Puritan forefathers.

This is a fair summary of the Puritan era, and it may stand, perhaps, as Hawthorne's most careful estimate of that age. "Let us thank God," he continued, "for having given us such ancestors; and let each successive generation thank Him, not

less fervently, for being one step further from them in the march of ages."

II.

Hawthorne's own religion was personal, non-institutional. He never set down his creed in ordered fashion. Yet we have Julian Hawthorne's word for it that his faith was deep and reverent. He did not attend church, though he confesses in "Sunday at Home" that his "inner man goes constantly to church." He did not care to read "books of religion," since they "so seldom really touch upon their ostensible subject. . . . So long as an unlettered soul can attain to saving grace, there would seem to be no deadly error in holding theological libraries to be accumulations of, for the most part, stupendous impertinence."

Yet he had preferences in religion and theology. In the same passage from "The Old Manse" where he disparaged all religious books, he stated his preference for "the elder books," which seemed to him to have possessed earnestness and warmth when they were written, while the "frigidity of the modern productions . . . was characteristic and inherent." He seems to agree with Emerson that Unitarianism, as compared with Calvinism, was a "pale, shallow religion."[10]

This same preference is even more apparent in "The Celestial Railroad," where the modern approach to salvation is devastatingly contrasted with the old Puritan approach of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*[11] and is shown to be lazy, super-

[10] *Emerson's Journals* (Boston, 1909-1914), IX, 408.

[11] Hawthorne thought highly of the two great Puritan writers, Bunyan and Milton. Bunyan, especially, seems to have been one of his favorites. "The Celestial Railroad" shows a thorough familiarity with *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The fanaticism of Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance* exemplifies for Hawthorne "the most awful truth in Bunyan's book of such,—from the very gate of heaven there is a by-way to the pit!" Elsewhere Bunyan is characterized as "moulded of homeliest clay, but instinct with celestial fire." In the same passage from *Mosses from an Old Manse* Hawthorne speaks of "the severe divinity of Milton," and in "Earth's Holocaust" he says, "Milton's work, in particular, sent up a powerful blaze, gradually reddening into a coal, which promised to endure longer than almost any other material of the pile."

ficial, and actually misleading. The "tracts, sermons, and essays of modern clergymen," together with "volumes of French philosophy and German rationalism," "extracts from Plato, Confucius, and various Hindoo sages," and "a few ingenious commentaries on the Scriptures" have been "converted into a mass like granite" which yet forms a rather unstable foundation for the bridge across the Slough of Despond. Other modern improvements in theology are shown as equally unsatisfactory. The loose interpretation of Scripture is satirized, as is the vagueness of Transcendentalism.

Hawthorne's preference for the primitive Christianity of the Puritans is an emotional one, closely akin to his feeling about the ritual of the Episcopal Church as expressed in his *English Notebooks:*

> The spirit of my Puritan ancestors was mighty within me, and I did not wonder at their being out of patience with all this mummery, which seemed to me worse than papistry because it was a corruption of it. At last a canon gave out the text, and preached a sermon about twenty minutes long,—the coldest, driest, most superficial rubbish; for this gorgeous setting of the magnificent cathedral [Chester], the elaborate music, and the rich ceremonies seem inevitably to take the life out of the sermon, which, to be anything, must be all. The Puritans showed their strength of mind and heart by preferring a sermon an hour and a half long, into which the preacher put his whole soul, and lopping away all these externals, into which religious life had first leafed and flowered, and then petrified.[12]

He was horrified when the reformers in "Earth's Holocaust" threw the Bible into the flames. But he was reassured when he observed that the pages of the Holy Scriptures, "instead of being blackened into tinder, only assumed a more dazzling whiteness as the finger marks of human imperfection were purified away. Certain marginal notes and commentaries, it is true, yielded to the intensity of the fiery test, but without detriment to the smallest syllable that had flamed from the pen

[12] *Complete Works,* VIII, 403-404.

of inspiration." Hawthorne's sympathies were with the Puritans in their desire to reëstablish a primitive Christianity based squarely on the Bible and stripped of ritual and institutionalism.

Yet the Puritan system became an iron cage once the zeal of the primitive faith went out of it.

> Their house of worship, like their ceremonial, was naked, simple, and severe. But the zeal of a recovered faith burned like a lamp within their hearts, enriching everything around them with its radiance; making of these new walls and this narrow compass its own cathedral; and being, in itself, that spiritual mystery and experience, of which sacred architecture, pictured windows, and the organ's grand solemnity are remote and imperfect symbols. All was well so long as their lamps were freshly kindled at the heavenly flame. After a while, however, whether in their time or their children's, these lamps began to burn more dimly, or with a less genuine lustre; and then it might be seen how hard, cold, and confined was their system,—how like an iron cage was that which they called Liberty.[13]

It is this faith, not any system of theology or religious creed, that meant religion for Hawthorne. The cry of Young Goodman Brown, "My Faith is gone!" is the cry of one who has lost all religion and is henceforth given over to scepticism and misery. Hard as the Puritans were, prone as they were to paint the sword more prominently than the Bible, as in the portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon, they had this faith which seemed lacking in the churchmen of Hawthorne's own day.

Hawthorne was a true son of the Puritans in his fear of Catholicism. In *The Marble Faun* Kenyon wishes to say to Hilda, after her confession, "Hilda, have you flung your angelic purity into that mass of unspeakable corruption, the Roman Church?" Hilda, after almost crossing herself with holy water, "felt as if her mother's spirit, somewhere within the dome, were looking down upon her child, the daughter of Puritan forefathers, and weeping to behold her ensnared by

[13] *Complete Works*, III, 449.

these gaudy superstitions."[14] Hawthorne can see the efficacy of certain tendencies of the Catholic faith. He pictures a Catholic youth standing before a shrine, "writhing, wringing his hands, contorting his whole frame in an agony of remorseful recollection," but finally kneeling down to weep and pray. "If this youth had been a Protestant," Hawthorne observes, "he would have kept all that torture pent up in his heart, and let it burn there till it seared him into indifference."[15] Yet there is something delusive in the ease with which Catholics may rid themselves of the effects of sin. Hilda, in spite of her "inheritance of New England Puritanism," could scarcely escape the lure of the easy solace of Catholicism. But in reality Catholicism cannot "satisfy the soul's cravings." It supplies forms, and beauty, it offers remedies for the weaknesses of human nature; but it does not meet the real needs of the soul.[16] Religion is not a matter of externals, of confessions and absolutions, but of the individual heart and the individual soul.

The heart and the soul! Here is one of the major keys to Hawthorne's philosophy of life, as well as his purely religious thought. "The kingdom of God is within you," but also the kingdom of the Devil, evil as well as good. Not in the mind, not in the intellect, nor in the fruits of the intellect, for the mind deals largely with externals, but deep in the heart lie all of good and evil, all that was of real importance for Hawthorne. Hence the fatality of Ethan Brand, who is too much mind, not enough heart. Hence, too, Hawthorne's suspicion of science, in Rappaccini and Aylmer, and hence his distrust of reformers and all who put their trust in externals.

Hollingsworth, in *The Blithedale Romance,* is ridden by an idea, a purely intellectual motivation comparable to the monomania of Ethan Brand. He violates human affections and human souls; he is "thrown completely off his moral balance, and quite bewildered as to his personal relations, by

[14] *Complete Works,* VI, 400.
[15] *Complete Works,* VI, 395.
[16] *Complete Works,* VI, 392.

his great excrescence of a philanthropic scheme." He acts upon pure theory, failing to go beneath it to the bedrock of human hearts and souls.

Other reformers fared no better in Hawthorne's hands. With great glee he imagined a modern reformer about to make converts to his fanatical beliefs, when he is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of a keeper from the madhouse from which he has escaped.[17] And the reformers in "Earth's Holocaust," though there is a worthy motive behind much of their destruction, have done their work in vain, for the source of evil is in the human heart, as is also the source of good.

> The heart, the heart,—there was the little yet boundless sphere wherein existed the original wrong of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types. Purify that inward sphere, and the many shapes of evil that haunt the outward, and which now seem almost our only realities, will turn to shadowy phantoms and vanish of their own accord; but if we go no deeper than the intellect, and strive, with merely that feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong, our whole accomplishment will be a dream.

Here is the importance of heart over intellect stated succinctly. The "world" is not capable of improvement by the mind of man. Thinking of his own disappointment with the Brook Farm experiment, Hawthorne wrote in *Blithedale,* "I rejoice that I could once think better of the world's improvability than it deserved. It is a mistake into which men seldom fall twice in a lifetime." Man's intellect is not to be trusted to make the world better. That will come, if at all, in God's due time, and man's meddling may well make matters worse.[18]

This fundamental error is seen also in the "scientists" whom Hawthorne put into his writings. True, they are not genuine scientists, from the modern point of view, with their elixirs

[17] *Complete Works,* IX, 20-21.

[18] *Complete Works,* XII, 417. "There is no instance, in all history, of the human will and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adopted to that end."

of life and so forth, but they represented science for Hawthorne. They are constantly trying to improve on nature, and they as constantly fail. Rappaccini and Aylmer meet with "the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom"; Beatrice is "the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature." The same considerations led Hawthorne to condemn the practices of mesmerism and spiritualism as violations of the sanctity of the individual soul.[19]

Where does all this leave Hawthorne in relation to the Puritans? There is still the great problem of sin to be considered, but it is well to pause for a moment to take our bearings. The Puritans, it would seem, placed too much trust in the intellect and too little in the heart. Yet they allowed the mind free play only within the limits of revelation as set forth in the Bible; it was not to be trusted to build upon itself and fashion its own castles in the air. Even Jonathan Edwards's flights of the intellect are tied to sound Calvinistic doctrine. It is in Hawthorne's emphasis upon the heart that he deviated most markedly from the Puritan path, as did Edwards. There is a hint of the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light in both men, or trust in the affections for the perception of truth, but Hawthorne scarcely went so far as Edwards in this. By "heart" in the quoted passage from "Earth's Holocaust" he meant something not much different from "soul," and here he was on firm Calvinistic ground again. It is the individual soul which was precious for both Hawthorne and the Puritans. Even society was unimportant except as a collection of individual souls. And the reform and salvation of these souls was alone worth the effort or indeed within the reach of the moralist.

It is with just this problem—the reform and salvation of the individual soul—that Hawthorne so greatly concerned himself. The salvation, to be sure, is not a strictly Puritanical one. He thought of immortality as a universal hope, not limited to the elect;[20] and instead of a Heaven and Hell he foresaw that at

[19] *Complete Works,* III, 253; V, 545.
[20] *Complete Works,* VII, 331-332.

the last day "man's only inexorable judge will be himself, and the punishment of his sins will be the perception of them."[21] But sin was none the less a reality and an absolute in Hawthorne's thought. It stands at the very core of his thinking. It is the main theme of two of his novels, and it has a large part in a third. It colors many of the tales and sketches. Hawthorne was the anatomist of sin as Burton was of melancholy. And this concern with sin is one of Hawthorne's closest links with the Puritans.

What is sin? Hawthorne answered this question after a fashion in the sketch, "Fancy's Show Box." He defined guilt as a "stain upon the soul," and raised the question whether even the thought of sin, without its being carried out, will not "draw down the full weight of a condemning sentence, in the supreme court of eternity." His conclusion is that the mere thought of seduction, or murder, or legal chicanery is a positive sin. "Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest, since, though his hands may be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity." It must be remembered that it is Conscience who shows Mr. Smith the pictures of his guilt, and it is within that man is judged and punished. Yet the universality of sin is established by this sketch.

"There is evil in every human heart," Hawthorne wrote, "which may remain latent, perhaps, through the whole of life; but circumstances may rouse it to activity."[22] In "The Procession of Life" there is no one to answer the call for those free from sin. One must conclude that Hawthorne, like his Puritan ancestors, believed in the universal, if not the total depravity of man. Even his Hilda, we must suppose, or his Priscilla or his Phoebe has sin latent within. If Hawthorne were a Freudian,[23]

[21] *Complete Works,* x, 205.

[22] *Complete Works,* IX, 43.

[23] Regis Michaud, *The American Novel Today* (Boston, 1928), following D. H. Lawrence, thinks Hawthorne was a kind of Freudian, releasing, through his discussions of sexual sin, his own repressions. Though this is a tempting explanation of Hawthorne's obsession with the subject of sin, there is apparently no concrete evidence to support such a theory.

this would be a most modern doctrine, but it would be the negation of sin. Hawthorne did not deny sin; he raised it to a position of supreme importance in life.

Hawthorne did not set down for us a hierarchy of sins. He emphasized the brotherhood of sinners and made few distinctions among sins. He was not even greatly concerned with the sin itself, but rather with its effect upon the sinner. Yet in *The Scarlet Letter* there is gradation of a sort. Of the three main characters,—Hester, Chillingworth, Dimmesdale—Hester is the least guilty. Her adultery, made public and punished openly, is serious enough, but Dimmesdale's sin is worse because secret. He knows this and says as much when he publicly urges Hester to reveal the father of Pearl:

"Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so, than to hide a guilty heart through life. What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him—yea, compel him, as it were—to add hypocrisy to sin?"

Dimmesdale is guilty of another sin in making public confession without revealing the true nature of his guilt. He deceives his audience, but he does not deceive himself, and in striving "to put a cheat upon himself by making the avowal of a guilty conscience . . . he gained only one other sin." Yet Dimmesdale is not the worst. Chillingworth's revenge has been blacker than the sins of the two lovers, for he has "violated in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart."[24] The cold-blooded sin of Chillingworth is worse than the sin committed in passion, even than the cowardly sin of hypocrisy.

Thus one of the worst sins is pride, especially the pride of the intellect. This is the unpardonable sin of Ethan Brand, the "sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God." Rappaccini's sin is pride of intellect also, as is Aylmer's. The pride of

[24] *Complete Works*, v, 89, 176, 234.

Eleanore Rochcliffe is different, but equally disastrous. "The curse of Heaven hath stricken me, because I would not call man my brother, nor woman sister. I wrapped myself in PRIDE as in a MANTLE, and scorned the sympathies of nature." Akin to this is Roderick's selfishness in "Egotism."

The greatest deterrent of human pride, Hawthorne believed, is the brotherhood of mankind in sin. "It is a terrible thought, that an individual wrong-doing melts into the great mass of human crime, and makes us . . . guilty of the whole."[25] Thus Miriam and Donatello were not isolated in their sin, but belonged to "an innumerable confraternity of guilty ones, all shuddering at each other." Young Goodman Brown, too, "felt a loathful brotherhood" for the sinners in the forest "by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart." The sinner also acquires a keen insight into the guilt of others. Dimmesdale is touched by this brotherhood of sin.

> It kept him down, on a level with the lowest; him, the man of ethereal attributes, whose voice the angels might else have listened to and answered! But this very burden it was that gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain into itself, and sent its own throb of pain through a thousand hearts, in gushes of sad, persuasive eloquence.

This brotherhod of sin, though in a sense democratic, as a negator of pride, is not to be thought of as a pleasant thing. Hawthorne wrote of "the ever-increasing loathsomeness of a union that consists in guilt."[26]

Sin destroys everything it touches. It is the "stern and sad truth . . . that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state, repaired."[27] The "infectious poison" of Dimmesdale's sin "had stupefied all blessed impulses, and awakened into vivid life the whole brotherhood of bad ones. Scorn, bitterness, unprovoked ma-

[25] *Complete Works*, VI, 208.
[26] *Complete Works*, VI, 207.
[27] *Complete Works*, V, 241.

lignity, gratuitous desire of ill, ridicule of whatever was good and holy, all awoke, to tempt, even while they frightened him."[28] Sin leads to loss of faith in Hester and in Young Goodman Brown. It taints Hester's beauty so that the world is only the darker for it. Sin may even be responsible for physical disease, Hawthorne believed. In the *American Notebooks* he had thought of bodily disease as a symbol for moral or spiritual disease, but he seems later to have arrived at a cause and effect relationship. Chillingworth, the physician, thinks a bodily disease "may . . . be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part." In "The New Adam and Eve" leprosy is thought of as but the outward mark of sin. In curing the inner disease, the outer would also be cured. "The Hollow of the Three Hills" shows the terrible effects of sin, not only on the sinner but on all about her. The wages of sin is death for the sinner, but misery, madness, and death for parents, husband, and child as well.

The sins of one generation descend to the next; "the wrongdoing of one generation lives into successive ones, and . . . becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief"; "the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases which lead to crime are handed down from one generation to another."[29] This is Hawthorne's "moral" in *The House of the Seven Gables.* And Pearl of *The Scarlet Letter* exemplifies the same principle. "In giving her existence, a great law had been broken; and the result was a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder."[30]

Even that old Puritan, Thomas Hooker, could scarcely ring the changes on the subject of sin with more relentlessness. These views of sin may not be theologically correct in all particulars, from the Puritan point of view, but they have the true spirit. If Hawthorne had stopped there we could have said,

[28] *Complete Works,* v, 265.
[29] *Complete Works,* III, 14, 147.
[30] *Complete Works,* v, 115.

"Here is a Puritan!" But he went on to bolder speculations, speculations which even frightened him a little. He discovered an educative effect in sin.

This aspect of Hawthorne's thought has been noticed often, usually with the observation that it is latent in *The Scarlet Letter* and fully developed in *The Marble Faun*. Yet there is a suggestion of this view in "The Maypole of Merry Mount," where sadness is accepted as the badge of maturity, and it is apparent in "A Virtuoso's Collection," where the author wrote, "I can spare none of my recollections, not even those of error and sorrow. They are all alike the food of my spirit." We have seen, in *The Scarlet Letter,* how Dimmesdale acquired through sin a new sympathy and understanding. Hester hoped that "the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost; more saint-like, because the result of martyrdom." Hawthorne called this hope "half a truth and half a self-delusion." Again he wrote of Hester, "The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free . . . . Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers . . . and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss."[31]

It is in *The Marble Faun* that the idea of education by sin is fully developed. The idea is suggested by Kenyon to Donatello in speaking of Miriam, "And here, Donatello, is one whom Providence marks out as intimately connected with your destiny. The mysterious process, by which our earthly life instructs us for another state of being, was begun for you by her." The last part of the book is in the nature of a series of debates on good and evil, with the educative effect of sin as a central question. Kenyon, talking with Hilda, pleads in defense of Miriam that there is a mixture of good in things evil. But Hilda cannot understand "how two mortal foes, as Right and Wrong surely are, can work together in the same deed." If such a mixture did exist, the good would be turned to poison,

[31] *Complete Works,* v, 104, 239-240.

not the evil to wholesomeness.[32] This sounds like Hawthorne debating with himself, Hilda representing the absolute Calvinistic view of sin he has always held, while Kenyon voices a new liberality and relativism. Later it is Miriam and Kenyon who discuss the problem. Miriam suggests that their sin has been a means of educating Donatello, the faun-like creature, to manhood and maturity. "Was it a means of education, bringing a simple and imperfect nature to a point of feeling and intelligence which it could have reached under no other discipline?" She suggests further that the fall of man through Adam's sin was "the destined means by which, over a long pathway of toil and sorrow, we are to attain a higher, brighter, and profounder happiness, than our lost birthright gave," and asks, "Will not this idea account for the permitted existence of sin, as no other theory can?"[33] But when Kenyon repeats Miriam's suggestion to Hilda she is horrified. "Do you not perceive," she upbraids him, "what a mockery your creed makes, not only of all religious sentiments, but of moral law? and how it annuls and obliterates whatever precepts of Heaven are written deepest within us?" Kenyon is duly contrite, "I never did believe it! But the mind wanders wild and wide."[34]

Thus Hawthorne hesitated to accept the logic of the story he has created. Or he had deliberately raised the question of relativism in religion and morals so as to reassert his belief in the concrete and absolute nature of sin. It is Hilda, the strict Calvinist, who triumphs in the end. And we are turned back even from this narrow pathway of escape from the Puritan doom.

When we come to another tenet of Calvinism—predestination—Hawthorne is not so clearly in agreement with the Puritans. A passage which seems close to acceptance of the doctrine is in "Wakefield," where Hawthorne observed "how an influence beyond our control lays its strong hand on every deed

[32] *Complete Works*, VI, 436-438.
[33] *Complete Works*, VI, 491-492.
[34] *Complete Works*, VI, 519-520.

which we do, and weaves its consequences into an iron tissue of necessity." But this passage must be read in the light of another passage in the same tale. "Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever." In this sense "necessity" may mean merely the inevitable consequences of our own acts. It is this interpretation which the story itself seems to illustrate. And a passage from "The Haunted Mind" supports the same view. One of the unpleasant visitors at the bedside of the unhappy person pictured there is "Fatality, an emblem of the evil influence that rules your fortune; a demon to whom you subjected yourself by some error at the outset of life." The same idea is expressed by Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*. "By thy first step awry thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has all been a dark necessity."[35] Thus Hawthorne's "necessity" becomes little more than cause and effect. But there is another passage, in *The Marble Faun,* which does state the doctrine of predestination in clear terms. "As these busts in the block of marble," thought Miriam, "so does our individual fate exist in the limestone of time. We fancy that we carve it out; but its ultimate shape is prior to all our actions."[36] There is, of course, the question whether Miriam's thoughts are Hawthorne's, as there is the same question in connection with Chillingworth's statement.

In commenting on Michelangelo's painting of the Three Fates, Hawthorne noted particularly "the terrible, stern, passionless severity, neither loving nor hating us, that characterizes these ugly old women."

> If they were angry, or had the least spite against human kind, it would render them the more tolerable. They are a great work, containing and representing the very idea that makes a belief in

[35] *Complete Works,* V, 210.
[36] *Complete Works,* VI, 141.

fate such a cold torture to the human soul. God give me the sure belief in his Providence![37]

Hawthorne obviously preferred God's Providence to Fate, but which he believed in is not entirely clear. Again, in a letter to Miss Peabody, he wrote,

I only know that I have done no good—none whatever. Vengeance and beneficence are things that God claims for Himself. His instruments have no consciousness of His purpose; if they imagine they have, it is a pretty sure token that they are *not* his instruments. The good of others, like our own happiness, is not attained by direct effort, but incidentally.[38]

Even this passage is not conclusive. Hawthorne is speaking of reform, and his belief in the futility of direct methods for bettering the world has been noted already. There is perhaps a somewhat dismal sort of free will implied in his further conviction that individual efforts for reform usually succeed in hindering the projects they seek to advance.

"David Swan," that curious little tale of the young man who sleeps beside the road while the Girl of his Dreams, whose father is a rich merchant, and two thieves, prepared to kill him if he stirs, pass through the orbit of his life without his knowledge, concludes with this significant passage: "Does it not argue a superintending Providence that, while viewless and unexpected events thrust themselves continually athwart our path, there should still be regularity enough in mortal life to render foresight even partially available?" Here Hawthorne seems to be arguing for a fatherly sort of Providence who guides man's footsteps from day to day. The question arises whether Hawthorne believed in the intervention of Providence to soften the awful and just punishments for sin. There is a suggestion of such intervention in Dimmesdale's saying, just before his death:

[37] Quoted by Austin Warren, *Hawthorne* (New York, 1934), xxxiii. Warren is convinced that Hawthorne accepted predestination. His argument may be found on pages xxxi-xxxiv.

[38] Warren, *Hawthorne,* xxxiv.

God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever![39]

He and Hester have broken the law, and according to Hawthorne's strict Calvinistic justice deserve eternal punishment, but there is at least a chance of God's mercy, and the very tortures of the soul which he has undergone may have been given him by God for his atonement.

It seems evident that Hawthorne had some sort of belief in Providence, and that he toyed with the idea of necessity, though he does not come out clearly for predestination. In this aspect of his thought he did not, apparently, follow the Puritans entirely.

We may say, in summary, that Hawthorne was the most sympathetic to the Puritans of the major writers of his day. Whereas Whittier and Holmes saw the cause and cure of evil in social institutions, Hawthorne doubted the efficacy of most social reform and turned inward to the heart and soul. Whereas Emerson flirted with a belief in natural goodness, Hawthorne doggedly retained his belief in universal depravity. But, more than this, he turned again and again to the Puritans for story material and dealt sympathetically with them in nearly every case. He admired their stern virtues, though he was not blind to their faults. He liked them for establishing the American traditions of political liberty and democracy. He thought he would even have liked their three-hour sermons! He liked their tough-mindedness, and, in his writings at least, he was almost as tough-minded himself.

Yet he was not one of them. In spite of his views of sin, his was a laxer dogma and a more tender mind. Their burning zeal for holiness and salvation was not his. In spite of his didacticism and his allegories, reminiscent of the Mathers' Remark-

[39] *Complete Works*, X, 21.

able Providences, their high seriousness is diluted in him with gentle irony. He is urbane where they are bigoted and rude but sure of themselves. He is polished, unobtrusive, not always quite sincere, where they were fired with pious zeal. His Hildas and Priscillas would have fared poorly in those rude days. His Kenyons and Coverdales would have been received with little more ceremony. He was probably right in thinking his Puritan ancestors would have looked askance at him.

Certainly Hawthorne did not swallow Puritanism whole. Even his belief in universal depravity was colored by an un-Puritan sympathy for the sinner. Even his preoccupation with sin as an absolute entity was softened by his feeling of the brotherhood of sinners and the humanizing effects of sins of passion, and he went beyond the Puritans in his detestation of sins of the intellect above sins of the flesh. He did not accept completely the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, nor did he emphasize the supreme sovereignty of God which was the driving force of Calvinism. His is an emotional philosophy, based on sympathies and antipathies of the heart, not the mind, and along with theology he discarded the whole Puritan exegesis as too coldly intellectual. A thorough-going sceptic he was not. A Transcendentalist he certainly was not. He escapes being labeled because he was an artist more than a philosopher, more even than a moralist or an analyst—a symbolist of moods and inner struggles, a poet of human hearts and souls.