

THE BLITHEDALE
ROMANCE



HAWTHORNE

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THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE.

BY

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE,

Author of "The Scarlet Letter," "The House of the Seven Gables," "Mosses From an Old Manse," Etc.

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NEW YORK:
THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,



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PREFACE.

IN the "BLITHEDALE" of this volume many readers will, probably, suspect a faint and not very faithful shadowing of BROOK FARM, in Roxbury, which (now a little more than ten years ago) was occupied and cultivated by a company of socialists. The author does not wish to deny that he had this community in his mind, and that (having had the good fortune, for a time, to be personally connected with it) he has occasionally availed himself of his actual reminiscences, in the hope of giving a more life-like tint to the fancy-sketch in the following pages. He begs it to be understood, however, that he has considered the institution itself as not less fairly the subject of fictitious handling than the imaginary personages whom he has introduced there. His whole treatment of the affair is altogether incidental to the main purpose of the romance; nor does he put forward the slightest pretensions to illustrate a theory, or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to socialism.

In short, his present concern with the socialist community is merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives. In the old countries, with which fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This

atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible. With the idea of partially obviating this difficulty (the sense of which has always pressed very heavily upon him), the author has ventured to make free with his old and affectionately remembered home at BROOK FARM, as being certainly the most romantic episode of his own life,—essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact,—and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality. Furthermore, the scene was in good keeping with the personages whom he desired to introduce.

These characters, he feels it right to say, are entirely fictitious. It would, indeed (considering how few amiable qualities he distributes among his imaginary progeny), be a most grievous wrong to his former excellent associates, were the author to allow it to be supposed that he has been sketching any of their likenesses. Had he attempted it, they would at least have recognized the touches of a friendly pencil. But he has done nothing of the kind. The self-concentrated Philanthropist; the high-spirited Woman, bruising herself against the narrow limitations of her sex; the weakly Maiden, whose tremulous nerves endow her with sibylline attributes; the Minor Poet, beginning life with strenuous aspirations, which die out with his youthful fervor;—all these might have been looked for at BROOK FARM, but, by some accident, never made their appearance there.

The author cannot close his reference to this subject, without expressing a most earnest wish that some one of the many cultivated and philosophic minds, which took an interest in that enterprise, might now give the world its history. Ripley, with whom rests the honorable paternity of the institution, Dana, Dwight, Channing, Burton, Parker, for instance,—with others, whom he dares not name, because they veil themselves from the public eye,—among these is the ability to convey both the outward narrative and the inner truth and spirit of the whole affair, together with the lessons which those years of thought and toil must have elaborated, for the behoof of future experimentalists. Even the brilliant Howadji might find as rich a theme in

his youthful reminiscences of BROOK FARM, and a more novel one,—close at hand as it lies,—than those which he has since made so distant a pilgrimage to seek, in Syria and along the current of the Nile.

CONCORD (Mass.), MAY, 1852.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. OLD MOODIE	9
II. BLITHEDALE	12
III. A KNOT OF DREAMERS	16
IV. THE SUPPER-TABLE	23
V. UNTIL BED-TIME	30
VI. COVERDALE'S SICK-CHAMBER	35
VII. THE CONVALESCENT	44
VIII. A MODERN ARCADIA	51
IX. HOLLINGSWORTH, ZENOBIA, PRISCILLA	60
X. A VISITOR FROM TOWN	70
XI. THE WOOD-PATH	76
XII. COVERDALE'S HERMITAGE	83
XIII. ZENOBIA'S LEGEND	89
XIV. ELIOT'S PULPIT	98
XV. A CRISIS	107
XVI. LEAVE-TAKINGS	114
XVII. THE HOTEL	121
XVIII. THE BOARDING-HOUSE	127
XIX. ZENOBIA'S DRAWING-ROOM	182
XX. THEY VANISH	189
XXI. AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE	143

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII. FAUNTLEROY	149
XXIII. A VILLAGE-HALL	158
XXIV. THE MASQUERADERS	166
XXV. THE THREE TOGETHER	173
XXVI. ZENOBIA AND COVERDALE	180
XXVII. MIDNIGHT	186
XXVIII. BLITHEDALE PASTURE	193
XXIX. MILES COVERDALE'S CONFESSION	198

THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

OLD MOGDIE.

THE evening before my departure for Blithedale, I was returning to my bachelor apartments, after attending the wonderful exhibition of the Veiled Lady, when an elderly man, of rather shabby appearance, met me in an obscure part of the street.

"Mr. Coverdale," said he, softly, "can I speak with you a moment?"

As I have casually alluded to the Veiled Lady, it may not be amiss to mention, for the benefit of such of my readers as are unacquainted with her now forgotten celebrity, that she was a phenomenon in the mesmeric line; one of the earliest that had indicated the birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug. Since those times, her sisterhood have grown too numerous to attract much individual notice; nor, in fact, has any one of them ever come before the public under such skilfully contrived circumstances of stage-effect as those which at once mystified and illuminated the remarkable performances of the lady in question. Now-a-days, in the management of his "subject," "clairvoyant," or "medium," the exhibitor affects the simplicity and openness of scientific experiment; and even if he profess to tread a step or two across the boundaries of the spiritual world, yet carries with him the laws of our actual life, and extends them over his preternatural conquests. Twelve or fifteen years ago, on the contrary, all the arts of mysterious arrangement, of picturesque disposition, and artistically contrasted light and shade, were made available, in order to set the apparent miracle in the strongest attitude of opposition to ordinary facts. In the case of the