

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

SEPTIMIUS FELTON, OR,
THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

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Introductory Note

Septimius Felton

The existence of this story, posthumously published, was not known to any one but Hawthorne himself, until some time after his death, when the manuscript was found among his papers. The preparation and copying of his Note-Books for the press occupied the most of Mrs. Hawthorne's available time during the interval from 1864 to 1870; but in the latter year, having decided to publish the unfinished romance, she began the task of putting together its loose sheets and deciphering the handwriting, which, towards the close of Hawthorne's life, had grown somewhat obscure and uncertain. Her death occurred while she was thus engaged, and the transcription was completed by her daughters. The book was then issued simultaneously in America and England, in 1871.

Although "Septimius Felton" appeared so much later than

"The Marble Faun," it was conceived and, in another form, begun before the Italian romance had presented itself to the author's mind. The legend of a bloody foot leaving its imprint where it passed, which figures so prominently in the following fiction, was brought to Hawthorne's notice on a visit to Smithell's Hall, Lancashire, England.¹ Only five days after hearing of it, he made a note in his journal, referring to "my Romance," which had to do with a plot involving the affairs of a family established both in England and New England; and it seems likely that he had already begun to associate the bloody footstep with this project. What is extraordinary, and must be regarded as an unaccountable coincidence—one of the strange premonitions of genius—is that in 1850, before he had ever been to England and before he knew of the existence of Smithell's Hall, he had jotted down in his Note-Book, written in America, this suggestion: "The print in blood of a naked foot to be traced through the street of a town." The idea of treating in fiction the attempt to renew youth or to attain an earthly immortality had engaged his fancy quite early in his career, as we discover from "Doctor Heidegger's Experiment," in the "Twice-Told Tales." In 1840, also, we find in the journal: "If a man were sure of living forever, he would not care about his offspring." The "Mosses from an Old Manse" supply another link in this train of reflection; for "The Virtuoso's Collection" includes some of the elixir vitae "in an antique sepulchral urn." The narrator there represents himself as refusing to quaff it.

¹ See *English Note-Books*, April 7, and August 25, 1855.

"No; I desire not an earthly immortality,' said I. 'Were man to live longer on earth, the spiritual would die out of him.... There is a celestial something within us that requires, after a certain time, the atmosphere of heaven to preserve it from ruin.'" On the other hand, just before hearing, for the first time, the legend of Smithell's Hall, he wrote in his English journal:—

"God himself cannot compensate us for being born for any period short of eternity. All the misery endured here constitutes a claim for another life, and still more *all the happiness*; because all true happiness involves something more than the earth owns, and needs something more than a mortal capacity for the enjoyment of it." It is sufficiently clear that he had meditated on the main theme of "Septimius Felton," at intervals, for many years.

When, in August, 1855, Hawthorne went by invitation to Smithell's Hall, the lady of the manor, on his taking leave, asked him "to write a ghost-story for her house;" and he observes in his notes, "the legend is a good one." Three years afterwards, in 1858, on the eve of departure for France and Italy, he began to sketch the outline of a romance laid in England, and having for its hero an American who goes thither to assert his inherited rights in an old manor-house possessing the peculiarity of a supposed bloody foot-print on the threshold-stone. This sketch, which appears in the present edition as "The Ancestral Footstep," was in journal form, the story continuing from day to day, with the dates attached. There remains also the manuscript without elate, recently edited under the title "Dr. Grimshawe's Secret,"

which bears a resemblance to some particulars in "Septimius Felton."

Nothing further seems to have been done in this direction by the author until he had been to Italy, had written "The Marble Faun," and again returned to The Wayside, his home at Concord. It was then, in 1861, that he took up once more the "Romance of Immortality," as the sub-title of the English edition calls it. "I have not found it possible," he wrote to Mr. Bridge, who remained his confidant, "to occupy my mind with its usual trash and nonsense during these anxious times; but as the autumn advances, I myself sitting down at my desk and blotting successive sheets of paper as of yore." Concerning this place, The Wayside, he had said in a letter to George William Curtis, in 1852: "I know nothing of the history of the house, except Thoreau's telling me that it was inhabited a generation or two ago by a man who believed he should never die." It was this legendary personage whom he now proceeded to revive and embody as Septimius; and the scene of the story was placed at The Wayside itself and the neighboring house, belonging to Mr. Bronson Alcott, both of which stand at the base of a low ridge running beside the Lexington road, in the village of Concord. Rose Garfield is mentioned as living "in a small house, the site of which is still indicated by the cavity of a cellar, in which I this very summer planted some sunflowers." The cellar-site remains at this day distinctly visible near the boundary of the land formerly owned by Hawthorne.

Attention may here perhaps appropriately be called to the fact that some of the ancestors of President Garfield settled at Weston, not many miles from Concord, and that the name is still borne by dwellers in the vicinity. One of the last letters written by the President was an acceptance of an invitation to visit Concord, and it was his intention to journey thither by carriage, incognito, from Boston, passing through the scenes where those ancestors had lived, and entering the village by the old Lexington road, on which *The Wayside* faces. It is an interesting coincidence that Hawthorne should have chosen for his first heroine's name, either intentionally or through unconscious association, this one which belonged to the region.

The house upon which the story was thus centred, and where it was written, had been a farm-house, bought and for a time occupied by Hawthorne previous to his departure for Europe. On coming back to it, he made some additions to the old wooden structure, and caused to be built a low tower, which rose above the irregular roofs of the older and newer portions, thus supplying him with a study lifted out of reach of noise or interruption, and in a slight degree recalling the tower in which he had taken so much pleasure at the *Villa Montauto*. The study was extremely simple in its appointments, being finished chiefly in stained wood, with a vaulted plaster ceiling, and containing, besides a few pictures and some plain furniture, a writing-table, and a shelf at which Hawthorne sometimes wrote standing. A story has gone abroad and is widely believed, that, on mounting the

steep stairs leading to this study, he passed through a trap-door and afterwards placed upon it the chair in which he sat, so that intrusion or interruption became physically impossible. It is wholly unfounded. There never was any trap-door, and no precaution of the kind described was ever taken. Immediately behind the house the hill rises in artificial terraces, which, during the romancer's residence, were grassy and planted with fruit-trees. He afterwards had evergreens set out there, and directed the planting of other trees, which still attest his preference for thick verdure. The twelve acres running back over the hill were closely covered with light woods, and across the road lay a level tract of eight acres more, which included a garden and orchard. From his study Hawthorne could overlook a good part of his modest domain; the view embraced a stretch of road lined with trees, wide meadows, and the hills across the shallow valley. The branches of trees rose on all sides as if to embower the house, and birds and bees flew about his casement, through which came the fresh perfumes of the woods, in summer.

In this spot "Septimius Felton" was written; but the manuscript, thrown aside, was mentioned in the Dedicatory Preface to "Our Old Home" as an "abortive project." As will be found explained in the Introductory Notes to "The Dolliver Romance" and "The Ancestral Footstep," that phase of the same general design which was developed in the "Dolliver" was intended to take the place of this unfinished sketch, since resuscitated.

G.P.L.

Preface

The following story is the last written by my father. It is printed as it was found among his manuscripts. I believe it is a striking specimen of the peculiarities and charm of his style, and that it will have an added interest for brother artists, and for those who care to study the method of his composition, from the mere fact of its not having received his final revision. In any case, I feel sure that the retention of the passages within brackets (*e. g.* p. 253), which show how my father intended to amplify some of the descriptions and develop more fully one or two of the character studies, will not be regretted by appreciative readers. My earnest thanks are due to Mr. Robert Browning for his kind assistance and advice in interpreting the manuscript, otherwise so difficult to me.

Una Hawthorne.

Septimius Felton; Or, The Elixir of Life

It was a day in early spring; and as that sweet, genial time of year and atmosphere calls out tender greenness from the ground,—beautiful flowers, or leaves that look beautiful because so long unseen under the snow and decay,—so the pleasant air and warmth had called out three young people, who sat on a sunny hill-side enjoying the warm day and one another. For they were all friends: two of them young men, and playmates from boyhood; the third, a girl, who, two or three years younger than themselves, had been the object of their boy-love, their little rustic, childish gallantries, their budding affections; until, growing all towards manhood and womanhood, they had ceased to talk about such matters, perhaps thinking about them the more.

These three young people were neighbors' children, dwelling in houses that stood by the side of the great Lexington road, along a ridgy hill that rose abruptly behind them, its brow covered with a wood, and which stretched, with one or two breaks and interruptions, into the heart of the village of Concord, the county town. It was in the side of this hill that, according to tradition, the first settlers of the village had burrowed in caverns which they had dug out for their shelter, like swallows and woodchucks.

As its slope was towards the south, and its ridge and crowning woods defended them from the northern blasts and snow-drifts, it was an admirable situation for the fierce New England winter; and the temperature was milder, by several degrees, along this hill-side than on the unprotected plains, or by the river, or in any other part of Concord. So that here, during the hundred years that had elapsed since the first settlement of the place, dwellings had successively risen close to the hill's foot, and the meadow that lay on the other side of the road—a fertile tract—had been cultivated; and these three young people were the children's children's children of persons of respectability who had dwelt there,—Rose Garfield, in a small house, the site of which is still indicated by the cavity of a cellar, in which I this very past summer planted some sunflowers to thrust their great disks out from the hollow and allure the bee and the humming-bird; Robert Hagburn, in a house of somewhat more pretension, a hundred yards or so nearer to the village, standing back from the road in the broader space which the retreating hill, cloven by a gap in that place, afforded; where some elms intervened between it and the road, offering a site which some person of a natural taste for the gently picturesque had seized upon. Those same elms, or their successors, still flung a noble shade over the same old house, which the magic hand of Alcott has improved by the touch that throws grace, amiableness, and natural beauty over scenes that have little pretension in themselves.

Now, the other young man, Septimius Felton, dwelt in a

small wooden house, then, I suppose, of some score of years' standing,—a two-story house, gabled before, but with only two rooms on a floor, crowded upon by the hill behind,—a house of thick walls, as if the projector had that sturdy feeling of permanence in life which incites people to make strong their earthly habitations, as if deluding themselves with the idea that they could still inhabit them; in short, an ordinary dwelling of a well-to-do New England farmer, such as his race had been for two or three generations past, although there were traditions of ancestors who had led lives of thought and study, and possessed all the erudition that the universities of England could bestow. Whether any natural turn for study had descended to Septimius from these worthies, or how his tendencies came to be different from those of his family,—who, within the memory of the neighborhood, had been content to sow and reap the rich field in front of their homestead,—so it was, that Septimius had early manifested a taste for study. By the kind aid of the good minister of the town he had been fitted for college; had passed through Cambridge by means of what little money his father had left him and by his own exertions in school-keeping; and was now a recently decorated baccalaureate, with, as was understood, a purpose to devote himself to the ministry, under the auspices of that reverend and good friend whose support and instruction had already stood him in such stead.

Now here were these young people, on that beautiful spring morning, sitting on the hill-side, a pleasant spectacle of fresh

life,—pleasant, as if they had sprouted like green things under the influence of the warm sun. The girl was very pretty, a little freckled, a little tanned, but with a face that glimmered and gleamed with quick and cheerful expressions; a slender form, not very large, with a quick grace in its movements; sunny hair that had a tendency to curl, which she probably favored at such moments as her household occupation left her; a sociable and pleasant child, as both of the young men evidently thought. Robert Hagburn, one might suppose, would have been the most to her taste; a ruddy, burly young fellow, handsome, and free of manner, six feet high, famous through the neighborhood for strength and athletic skill, the early promise of what was to be a man fit for all offices of active rural life, and to be, in mature age, the selectman, the deacon, the representative, the colonel. As for Septimius, let him alone a moment or two, and then they would see him, with his head bent down, brooding, brooding, his eyes fixed on some chip, some stone, some common plant, any commonest thing, as if it were the clew and index to some mystery; and when, by chance startled out of these meditations, he lifted his eyes, there would be a kind of perplexity, a dissatisfied, foiled look in them, as if of his speculations he found no end. Such was now the case, while Robert and the girl were running on with a gay talk about a serious subject, so that, gay as it was, it was interspersed with little thrills of fear on the girl's part, of excitement on Robert's. Their talk was of public trouble.

"My grandfather says," said Rose Garfield, "that we shall

never be able to stand against old England, because the men are a weaker race than he remembers in his day,—weaker than his father, who came from England,—and the women slighter still; so that we are dwindling away, grandfather thinks; only a little sprightlier, he says sometimes, looking at me."

"Lighter, to be sure," said Robert Hagburn; "there is the lightness of the Englishwomen compressed into little space. I have seen them and know. And as to the men, Rose, if they have lost one spark of courage and strength that their English forefathers brought from the old land,—lost any one good quality without having made it up by as good or better,—then, for my part, I don't want the breed to exist any longer. And this war, that they say is coming on, will be a good opportunity to test the matter. Septimius! Don't you think so?"

"Think what?" asked Septimius, gravely, lifting up his head.

"Think! why, that your countrymen are worthy to live," said Robert Hagburn, impatiently. "For there is a question on that point."

"It is hardly worth answering or considering," said Septimius, looking at him thoughtfully. "We live so little while, that (always setting aside the effect on a future existence) it is little matter whether we live or no."

"Little matter!" said Rose, at first bewildered, then laughing,—"little matter! when it is such a comfort to live, so pleasant, so sweet!"

"Yes, and so many things to do," said Robert; "to make fields

yield produce; to be busy among men, and happy among the women-folk; to play, work, fight, and be active in many ways."

"Yes; but so soon stilled, before your activity has come to any definite end," responded Septimius, gloomily. "I doubt, if it had been left to my choice, whether I should have taken existence on such terms; so much trouble of preparation to live, and then no life at all; a ponderous beginning, and nothing more."

"Do you find fault with Providence, Septimius?" asked Rose, a feeling of solemnity coming over her cheerful and buoyant nature. Then she burst out a-laughing. "How grave he looks, Robert; as if he had lived two or three lives already, and knew all about the value of it. But I think it was worth while to be born, if only for the sake of one such pleasant spring morning as this; and God gives us many and better things when these are past."

"We hope so," said Septimius, who was again looking on the ground. "But who knows?"

"I thought you knew," said Robert Hagburn. "You have been to college, and have learned, no doubt, a great many things. You are a student of theology, too, and have looked into these matters. Who should know, if not you?"

"Rose and you have just as good means of ascertaining these points as I," said Septimius; "all the certainty that can be had lies on the surface, as it should, and equally accessible to every man or woman. If we try to grope deeper, we labor for naught, and get less wise while we try to be more so. If life were long enough to enable us thoroughly to sift these matters, then, indeed!—but

it is so short!"

"Always this same complaint," said Robert. "Septimius, how long do you wish to live?"

"Forever!" said Septimius. "It is none too long for all I wish to know."

"Forever?" exclaimed Rose, shivering doubtfully. "Ah, there would come many, many thoughts, and after a while we should want a little rest."

"Forever?" said Robert Hagburn. "And what would the people do who wish to fill our places? You are unfair, Septimius. Live and let live! Turn about! Give me my seventy years, and let me go,—my seventy years of what this life has,—toil, enjoyment, suffering, struggle, fight, rest,—only let me have my share of what's going, and I shall be content."

"Content with leaving everything at odd ends; content with being nothing, as you were before!"

"No, Septimius, content with heaven at last," said Rose, who had come out of her laughing mood into a sweet seriousness. "Oh dear! think what a worn and ugly thing one of these fresh little blades of grass would seem if it were not to fade and wither in its time, after being green in its time."

"Well, well, my pretty Rose," said Septimius apart, "an immortal weed is not very lovely to think of, that is true; but I should be content with one thing, and that is yourself, if you were immortal, just as you are at seventeen, so fresh, so dewy, so red-lipped, so golden-haired, so gay, so frolicsome, so gentle."

"But I am to grow old, and to be brown and wrinkled, gray-haired and ugly," said Rose, rather sadly, as she thus enumerated the items of her decay, "and then you would think me all lost and gone. But still there might be youth underneath, for one that really loved me to see. Ah, Septimius Felton! such love as would see with ever-new eyes is the true love." And she ran away and left him suddenly, and Robert Hagburn departing at the same time, this little knot of three was dissolved, and Septimius went along the wayside wall, thoughtfully, as was his wont, to his own dwelling. He had stopped for some moments on the threshold, vaguely enjoying, it is probable, the light and warmth of the new spring day and the sweet air, which was somewhat unwonted to the young man, because he was accustomed to spend much of his day in thought and study within doors, and, indeed, like most studious young men, was overfond of the fireside, and of making life as artificial as he could, by fireside heat and lamplight, in order to suit it to the artificial, intellectual, and moral atmosphere which he derived from books, instead of living healthfully in the open air, and among his fellow-beings. Still he felt the pleasure of being warmed through by this natural heat, and, though blinking a little from its superfluity, could not but confess an enjoyment and cheerfulness in this flood of morning light that came aslant the hill-side. While he thus stood, he felt a friendly hand laid upon his shoulder, and, looking up, there was the minister of the village, the old friend of Septimius, to whose advice and aid it was owing that Septimius had followed his instincts by going to

college, instead of spending a thwarted and dissatisfied life in the field that fronted the house. He was a man of middle age, or little beyond, of a sagacious, kindly aspect; the experience, the lifelong, intimate acquaintance with many concerns of his people being more apparent in him than the scholarship for which he had been early distinguished. A tanned man, like one who labored in his own grounds occasionally; a man of homely, plain address, which, when occasion called for it, he could readily exchange for the polished manner of one who had seen a more refined world than this about him.

"Well, Septimius," said the minister, kindly, "have you yet come to any conclusion about the subject of which we have been talking?"

"Only so far, sir," replied Septimius, "that I find myself every day less inclined to take up the profession which I have had in view so many years. I do not think myself fit for the sacred desk."

"Surely not; no one is," replied the clergyman; "but if I may trust my own judgment, you have at least many of the intellectual qualifications that should adapt you to it. There is something of the Puritan character in you, Septimius, derived from holy men among your ancestors; as, for instance, a deep, brooding turn, such as befits that heavy brow; a disposition to meditate on things hidden; a turn for meditative inquiry,—all these things, with grace to boot, mark you as the germ of a man who might do God service. Your reputation as a scholar stands high at college. You have not a turn for worldly business."

"Ah, but, sir," said Septimius, casting down his heavy brows, "I lack something within."

"Faith, perhaps," replied the minister; "at least, you think so."

"Cannot I know it?" asked Septimius.

"Scarcely, just now," said his friend. "Study for the ministry, bind your thoughts to it; pray; ask a belief, and you will soon find you have it. Doubts may occasionally press in; and it is so with every clergyman. But your prevailing mood will be faith."

"It has seemed to me," observed Septimius, "that it is not the prevailing mood, the most common one, that is to be trusted. This is habit, formality, the shallow covering which we close over what is real, and seldom suffer to be blown aside. But it is the snake-like doubt that thrusts out its head, which gives us a glimpse of reality. Surely such moments are a hundred times as real as the dull, quiet moments of faith or what you call such."

"I am sorry for you," said the minister; "yet to a youth of your frame of character, of your ability I will say, and your requisition for something profound in the grounds of your belief, it is not unusual to meet this trouble. Men like you have to fight for their faith. They fight in the first place to win it, and ever afterwards to hold it. The Devil tilts with them daily and often seems to win."

"Yes; but," replied Septimius, "he takes deadly weapons now. If he meet me with the cold pure steel of a spiritual argument, I might win or lose, and still not feel that all was lost; but he takes, as it were, a great clod of earth, massive rocks and mud, soil and dirt, and flings it at me overwhelmingly; so that I am

buried under it."

"How is that?" said the minister. "Tell me more plainly."

"May it not be possible," asked Septimius, "to have too profound a sense of the marvellous contrivance and adaptation of this material world to require or believe in anything spiritual? How wonderful it is to see it all alive on this spring day, all growing, budding! Do we exhaust it in our little life? Not so; not in a hundred or a thousand lives. The whole race of man, living from the beginning of time, have not, in all their number and multiplicity and in all their duration, come in the least to know the world they live in! And how is this rich world thrown away upon us, because we live in it such a moment! What mortal work has ever been done since the world began! Because we have no time. No lesson is taught. We are snatched away from our study before we have learned the alphabet. As the world now exists, I confess it to you frankly, my dear pastor and instructor, it seems to me all a failure, because we do not live long enough."

"But the lesson is carried on in another state of being!"

"Not the lesson that we begin here," said Septimius. "We might as well train a child in a primeval forest, to teach him how to live in a European court. No, the fall of man, which Scripture tells us of, seems to me to have its operation in this grievous shortening of earthly existence, so that our life here at all is grown ridiculous."

"Well, Septimius," replied the minister, sadly, yet not as one shocked by what he had never heard before, "I must leave you to

struggle through this form of unbelief as best you may, knowing that it is by your own efforts that you must come to the other side of this slough. We will talk further another time. You are getting worn out, my young friend, with much study and anxiety. It were well for you to live more, for the present, in this earthly life that you prize so highly. Cannot you interest yourself in the state of this country, in this coming strife, the voice of which now sounds so hoarsely and so near us? Come out of your thoughts and breathe another air."

"I will try," said Septimius.

"Do," said the minister, extending his hand to him, "and in a little time you will find the change."

He shook the young man's hand kindly, and took his leave, while Septimius entered his house, and turning to the right sat down in his study, where, before the fireplace, stood the table with books and papers. On the shelves around the low-studded walls were more books, few in number but of an erudite appearance, many of them having descended to him from learned ancestors, and having been brought to light by himself after long lying in dusty closets; works of good and learned divines, whose wisdom he had happened, by help of the Devil, to turn to mischief, reading them by the light of hell-fire. For, indeed, Septimius had but given the clergyman the merest partial glimpse of his state of mind. He was not a new beginner in doubt; but, on the contrary, it seemed to him as if he had never been other than a doubter and questioner, even in his boyhood;

believing nothing, although a thin veil of reverence had kept him from questioning some things. And now the new, strange thought of the sufficiency of the world for man, if man were only sufficient for that, kept recurring to him; and with it came a certain sense, which he had been conscious of before, that he, at least, might never die. The feeling was not peculiar to Septimius. It is an instinct, the meaning of which is mistaken. We have strongly within us the sense of an undying principle, and we transfer that true sense to this life and to the body, instead of interpreting it justly as the promise of spiritual immortality.

So Septimius looked up out of his thoughts, and said proudly: "Why should I die? I cannot die, if worthy to live. What if I should say this moment that I will not die, not till ages hence, not till the world is exhausted? Let other men die, if they choose, or yield; let him that is strong enough live!"

After this flush of heroic mood, however, the glow subsided, and poor Septimius spent the rest of the day, as was his wont, poring over his books, in which all the meanings seemed dead and mouldy, and like pressed leaves (some of which dropped out of the books as he opened them), brown, brittle, sapless; so even the thoughts, which when the writers had gathered them seemed to them so brightly colored and full of life. Then he began to see that there must have been some principle of life left out of the book, so that these gathered thoughts lacked something that had given them their only value. Then he suspected that the way truly to live and answer the purposes of life was not to gather

up thoughts into books, where they grew so dry, but to live and still be going about, full of green wisdom, ripening ever, not in maxims cut and dry, but a wisdom ready for daily occasions, like a living fountain; and that to be this, it was necessary to exist long on earth, drink in all its lessons, and not to die on the attainment of some smattering of truth; but to live all the more for that; and apply it to mankind and increase it thereby.

Everything drifted towards the strong, strange eddy into which his mind had been drawn: all his thoughts set hitherward.

So he sat brooding in his study until the shrill-voiced old woman—an aunt, who was his housekeeper and domestic ruler—called him to dinner,—a frugal dinner,—and chided him for seeming inattentive to a dish of early dandelions which she had gathered for him; but yet tempered her severity with respect for the future clerical rank of her nephew, and for his already being a bachelor of arts. The old woman's voice spoke outside of Septimius, rambling away, and he paying little heed, till at last dinner was over, and Septimius drew back his chair, about to leave the table.

"Nephew Septimius," said the old woman, "you began this meal to-day without asking a blessing, you get up from it without giving thanks, and you soon to be a minister of the Word."

"God bless the meat," replied Septimius (by way of blessing), "and make it strengthen us for the life he means us to bear. Thank God for our food," he added (by way of grace), "and may it become a portion in us of an immortal body."

"That sounds good, Septimius," said the old lady. "Ah! you'll be a mighty man in the pulpit, and worthy to keep up the name of your great-grandfather, who, they say, made the leaves wither on a tree with the fierceness of his blast against a sin. Some say, to be sure, it was an early frost that helped him."

"I never heard that before, Aunt Keziah," said Septimius.

"I warrant you no," replied his aunt. "A man dies, and his greatness perishes as if it had never been, and people remember nothing of him only when they see his gravestone over his old dry bones, and say he was a good man in his day."

"What truth there is in Aunt Keziah's words!" exclaimed Septimius. "And how I hate the thought and anticipation of that contemptuous appreciation of a man after his death! Every living man triumphs over every dead one, as he lies, poor and helpless, under the mould, a pinch of dust, a heap of bones, an evil odor! I hate the thought! It shall not be so!"

It was strange how every little incident thus brought him back to that one subject which was taking so strong hold of his mind; every avenue led thitherward; and he took it for an indication that nature had intended, by innumerable ways, to point out to us the great truth that death was an alien misfortune, a prodigy, a monstrosity, into which man had only fallen by defect; and that even now, if a man had a reasonable portion of his original strength in him, he might live forever and spurn death.

Our story is an internal one, dealing as little as possible with outward events, and taking hold of these only where it

cannot be helped, in order by means of them to delineate the history of a mind bewildered in certain errors. We would not willingly, if we could, give a lively and picturesque surrounding to this delineation, but it is necessary that we should advert to the circumstances of the time in which this inward history was passing. We will say, therefore, that that night there was a cry of alarm passing all through the succession of country towns and rural communities that lay around Boston, and dying away towards the coast and the wilder forest borders. Horsemen galloped past the line of farm-houses shouting alarm! alarm! There were stories of marching troops coming like dreams through the midnight. Around the little rude meeting-houses there was here and there the beat of a drum, and the assemblage of farmers with their weapons. So all that night there was marching, there was mustering, there was trouble; and, on the road from Boston, a steady march of soldiers' feet onward, onward into the land whose last warlike disturbance had been when the red Indians trod it.

Septimius heard it, and knew, like the rest, that it was the sound of coming war. "Fools that men are!" said he, as he rose from bed and looked out at the misty stars; "they do not live long enough to know the value and purport of life, else they would combine together to live long, instead of throwing away the lives of thousands as they do. And what matters a little tyranny in so short a life? What matters a form of government for such ephemeral creatures?"

As morning brightened, these sounds, this clamor,—or something that was in the air and caused the clamor,—grew so loud that Septimius seemed to feel it even in his solitude. It was in the atmosphere,—storm, wild excitement, a coming deed. Men hurried along the usually lonely road in groups, with weapons in their hands,—the old fowling-piece of seven-foot barrel, with which the Puritans had shot ducks on the river and Walden Pond; the heavy harquebus, which perhaps had levelled one of King Philip's Indians; the old King gun, that blazed away at the French of Louisburg or Quebec,—hunter, husbandman, all were hurrying each other. It was a good time, everybody felt, to be alive, a nearer kindred, a closer sympathy between man and man; a sense of the goodness of the world, of the sacredness of country, of the excellence of life; and yet its slight account compared with any truth, any principle; the weighing of the material and ethereal, and the finding the former not worth considering, when, nevertheless, it had so much to do with the settlement of the crisis. The ennobling of brute force; the feeling that it had its godlike side; the drawing of heroic breath amid the scenes of ordinary life, so that it seemed as if they had all been transfigured since yesterday. Oh, high, heroic, tremulous juncture, when man felt himself almost an angel; on the verge of doing deeds that outwardly look so fiendish! Oh, strange rapture of the coming battle! We know something of that time now; we that have seen the muster of the village soldiery on the meeting-house green, and at railway stations; and heard the drum and fife, and seen the

farewells; seen the familiar faces that we hardly knew, now that we felt them to be heroes; breathed higher breath for their sakes; felt our eyes moistened; thanked them in our souls for teaching us that nature is yet capable of heroic moments; felt how a great impulse lifts up a people, and every cold, passionless, indifferent spectator,—lifts him up into religion, and makes him join in what becomes an act of devotion, a prayer, when perhaps he but half approves.

Septimius could not study on a morning like this. He tried to say to himself that he had nothing to do with this excitement; that his studious life kept him away from it; that his intended profession was that of peace; but say what he might to himself, there was a tremor, a bubbling impulse, a tingling in his ears,—the page that he opened glimmered and dazzled before him.

"Septimius! Septimius!" cried Aunt Keziah, looking into the room, "in Heaven's name, are you going to sit here to-day, and the redcoats coming to burn the house over our heads? Must I sweep you out with the broomstick? For shame, boy! for shame!"

"Are they coming, then, Aunt Keziah?" asked her nephew. "Well, I am not a fighting-man."

"Certain they are. They have sacked Lexington, and slain the people, and burnt the meeting-house. That concerns even the parsons; and you reckon yourself among them. Go out, go out, I say, and learn the news!"

Whether moved by these exhortations, or by his own stifled curiosity, Septimius did at length issue from his door, though

with that reluctance which hampers and impedes men whose current of thought and interest runs apart from that of the world in general; but forth he came, feeling strangely, and yet with a strong impulse to fling himself headlong into the emotion of the moment. It was a beautiful morning, spring-like and summer-like at once. If there had been nothing else to do or think of, such a morning was enough for life only to breathe its air and be conscious of its inspiring influence.

Septimius turned along the road towards the village, meaning to mingle with the crowd on the green, and there learn all he could of the rumors that vaguely filled the air, and doubtless were shaping themselves into various forms of fiction.

As he passed the small dwelling of Rose Garfield, she stood on the doorstep, and bounded forth a little way to meet him, looking frightened, excited, and yet half pleased, but strangely pretty; prettier than ever before, owing to some hasty adornment or other, that she would never have succeeded so well in giving to herself if she had had more time to do it in.

"Septimius—Mr. Felton," cried she, asking information of him who, of all men in the neighborhood, knew nothing of the intelligence afloat; but it showed a certain importance that Septimius had with her. "Do you really think the redcoats are coming? Ah, what shall we do? What shall we do? But you are not going to the village, too, and leave us all alone?"

"I know not whether they are coming or no, Rose," said Septimius, stopping to admire the young girl's fresh beauty,

which made a double stroke upon him by her excitement, and, moreover, made her twice as free with him as ever she had been before; for there is nothing truer than that any breaking up of the ordinary state of things is apt to shake women out of their proprieties, break down barriers, and bring them into perilous proximity with the world. "Are you alone here? Had you not better take shelter in the village?"

"And leave my poor, bedridden grandmother!" cried Rose, angrily. "You know I can't, Septimius. But I suppose I am in no danger. Go to the village, if you like."

"Where is Robert Hagburn?" asked Septimius.

"Gone to the village this hour past, with his grandfather's old firelock on his shoulder," said Rose; "he was running bullets before daylight."

"Rose, I will stay with you," said Septimius.

"Oh gracious, here they come, I'm sure!" cried Rose. "Look yonder at the dust. Mercy! a man at a gallop!"

In fact, along the road, a considerable stretch of which was visible, they heard the clatter of hoofs and saw a little cloud of dust approaching at the rate of a gallop, and disclosing, as it drew near, a hatless countryman in his shirt-sleeves, who, bending over his horse's neck, applied a cart-whip lustily to the animal's flanks, so as to incite him to most unwonted speed. At the same time, glaring upon Rose and Septimius, he lifted up his voice and shouted in a strange, high tone, that communicated the tremor and excitement of the shouter to each auditor: "Alarum! alarum!"

alarum! The redcoats! The redcoats! To arms! alarum!"

And trailing this sound far wavering behind him like a pennon, the eager horseman dashed onward to the village.

"Oh dear, what shall we do?" cried Rose, her eyes full of tears, yet dancing with excitement. "They are coming! they are coming! I hear the drum and fife."

"I really believe they are," said Septimius, his cheek flushing and growing pale, not with fear, but the inevitable tremor, half painful, half pleasurable, of the moment. "Hark! there was the shrill note of a fife. Yes, they are coming!"

He tried to persuade Rose to hide herself in the house; but that young person would not be persuaded to do so, clinging to Septimius in a way that flattered while it perplexed him. Besides, with all the girl's fright, she had still a good deal of courage, and much curiosity too, to see what these redcoats were of whom she heard such terrible stories.

"Well, well, Rose," said Septimius; "I doubt not we may stay here without danger,—you, a woman, and I, whose profession is to be that of peace and good-will to all men. They cannot, whatever is said of them, be on an errand of massacre. We will stand here quietly; and, seeing that we do not fear them, they will understand that we mean them no harm."

They stood, accordingly, a little in front of the door by the well-curb, and soon they saw a heavy cloud of dust, from amidst which shone bayonets; and anon, a military band, which had hitherto been silent, struck up, with drum and fife, to which

the tramp of a thousand feet fell in regular order; then came the column, moving massively, and the redcoats who seemed somewhat wearied by a long night-march, dusty, with bedraggled gaiters, covered with sweat which had rundown from their powdered locks. Nevertheless, these ruddy, lusty Englishmen marched stoutly, as men that needed only a half-hour's rest, a good breakfast, and a pot of beer apiece, to make them ready to face the world. Nor did their faces look anywise rancorous; but at most, only heavy, cloddish, good-natured, and humane.

"O heavens, Mr. Felton!" whispered Rose, "why should we shoot these men, or they us? they look kind, if homely. Each of them has a mother and sisters, I suppose, just like our men."

"It is the strangest thing in the world that we can think of killing them," said Septimius. "Human life is so precious."

Just as they were passing the cottage, a halt was called by the commanding officer, in order that some little rest might get the troops into a better condition and give them breath before entering the village, where it was important to make as imposing a show as possible. During this brief stop, some of the soldiers approached the well-curb, near which Rose and Septimius were standing, and let down the bucket to satisfy their thirst. A young officer, a petulant boy, extremely handsome, and of gay and buoyant deportment, also came up.

"Get me a cup, pretty one," said he, patting Rose's cheek with great freedom, though it was somewhat and indefinitely short of rudeness; "a mug, or something to drink out of, and you shall

have a kiss for your pains."

"Stand off, sir!" said Septimius, fiercely; "it is a coward's part to insult a woman."

"I intend no insult in this," replied the handsome young officer, suddenly snatching a kiss from Rose, before she could draw back. "And if you think it so, my good friend, you had better take your weapon and get as much satisfaction as you can, shooting at me from behind a hedge."

Before Septimius could reply or act,—and, in truth, the easy presumption of the young Englishman made it difficult for him, an inexperienced recluse as he was, to know what to do or say,—the drum beat a little tap, recalling the soldiers to their rank and to order. The young officer hastened back, with a laughing glance at Rose, and a light, contemptuous look of defiance at Septimius, the drums rattling out in full beat, and the troops marched on.

"What impertinence!" said Rose, whose indignant color made her look pretty enough almost to excuse the offence.

It is not easy to see how Septimius could have shielded her from the insult; and yet he felt inconceivably outraged and humiliated at the thought that this offence had occurred while Rose was under his protection, and he responsible for her. Besides, somehow or other, he was angry with her for having undergone the wrong, though certainly most unreasonably; for the whole thing was quicker done than said.

"You had better go into the house now, Rose," said he, "and see to your bedridden grandmother."

"And what will you do, Septimius?" asked she.

"Perhaps I will house myself, also," he replied. "Perhaps take yonder proud redcoat's counsel, and shoot him behind a hedge."

"But not kill him outright; I suppose he has a mother and a sweetheart, the handsome young officer," murmured Rose pityingly to herself.

Septimius went into his house, and sat in his study for some hours, in that unpleasant state of feeling which a man of brooding thought is apt to experience when the world around him is in a state of intense action, which he finds it impossible to sympathize with. There seemed to be a stream rushing past him, by which, even if he plunged into the midst of it, he could not be wet. He felt himself strangely ajar with the human race, and would have given much either to be in full accord with it, or to be separated from it forever.

"I am dissevered from it. It is my doom to be only a spectator of life; to look on as one apart from it. Is it not well, therefore, that, sharing none of its pleasures and happiness, I should be free of its fatalities its brevity? How cold I am now, while this whirlpool of public feeling is eddying around me! It is as if I had not been born of woman!"

Thus it was that, drawing wild inferences from phenomena of the mind and heart common to people who, by some morbid action within themselves, are set ajar with the world, Septimius continued still to come round to that strange idea of undyingness which had recently taken possession of him. And

yet he was wrong in thinking himself cold, and that he felt no sympathy in the fever of patriotism that was throbbing through his countrymen. He was restless as a flame; he could not fix his thoughts upon his book; he could not sit in his chair, but kept pacing to and fro, while through the open window came noises to which his imagination gave diverse interpretation. Now it was a distant drum; now shouts; by and by there came the rattle of musketry, that seemed to proceed from some point more distant than the village; a regular roll, then a ragged volley, then scattering shots. Unable any longer to preserve this unnatural indifference, Septimius snatched his gun, and, rushing out of the house, climbed the abrupt hill-side behind, whence he could see a long way towards the village, till a slight bend hid the uneven road. It was quite vacant, not a passenger upon it. But there seemed to be confusion in that direction; an unseen and inscrutable trouble, blowing thence towards him, intimated by vague sounds,—by no sounds. Listening eagerly, however, he at last fancied a mustering sound of the drum; then it seemed as if it were coming towards him; while in advance rode another horseman, the same kind of headlong messenger, in appearance, who had passed the house with his ghastly cry of alarm; then appeared scattered countrymen, with guns in their hands, straggling across fields. Then he caught sight of the regular array of British soldiers, filling the road with their front, and marching along as firmly as ever, though at a quick pace, while he fancied that the officers looked watchfully around. As he looked, a shot

rang sharp from the hill-side towards the village; the smoke curled up, and Septimius saw a man stagger and fall in the midst of the troops. Septimius shuddered; it was so like murder that he really could not tell the difference; his knees trembled beneath him; his breath grew short, not with terror, but with some new sensation of awe.

Another shot or two came almost simultaneously from the wooded height, but without any effect that Septimius could perceive. Almost at the same moment a company of the British soldiers wheeled from the main body, and, dashing out of the road, climbed the hill, and disappeared into the wood and shrubbery that veiled it. There were a few straggling shots, by whom fired, or with what effect, was invisible, and meanwhile the main body of the enemy proceeded along the road. They had now advanced so nigh that Septimius was strangely assailed by the idea that he might, with the gun in his hand, fire right into the midst of them, and select any man of that now hostile band to be a victim. How strange, how strange it is, this deep, wild passion that nature has implanted in us to be the death of our fellow-creatures, and which coexists at the same time with horror! Septimius levelled his weapon, and drew it up again; he marked a mounted officer, who seemed to be in chief command, whom he knew that he could kill. But no! he had really no such purpose. Only it was such a temptation. And in a moment the horse would leap, the officer would fall and lie there in the dust of the road, bleeding, gasping, breathing in spasms, breathing no

more.

While the young man, in these unusual circumstances, stood watching the marching of the troops, he heard the noise of rustling boughs, and the voices of men, and soon understood that the party, which he had seen separate itself from the main body and ascend the hill, was now marching along on the hill-top, the long ridge which, with a gap or two, extended as much as a mile from the village. One of these gaps occurred a little way from where Septimius stood. They were acting as flank guard, to prevent the up-roused people from coming so close to the main body as to fire upon it. He looked and saw that the detachment of British was plunging down one side of this gap, with intent to ascend the other, so that they would pass directly over the spot where he stood; a slight removal to one side, among the small bushes, would conceal him. He stepped aside accordingly, and from his concealment, not without drawing quicker breaths, beheld the party draw near. They were more intent upon the space between them and the main body than upon the dense thicket of birch-trees, pitch-pines, sumach, and dwarf oaks, which, scarcely yet beginning to bud into leaf, lay on the other side, and in which Septimius lurked.

[Describe how their faces affected him, passing so near; how strange they seemed.]

They had all passed, except an officer who brought up the rear, and who had perhaps been attracted by some slight motion that Septimius made,—some rustle in the thicket; for he stopped, fixed

his eyes piercingly towards the spot where he stood, and levelled a light fusil which he carried. "Stand out, or I shoot," said he.

Not to avoid the shot, but because his manhood felt a call upon it not to skulk in obscurity from an open enemy, Septimius at once stood forth, and confronted the same handsome young officer with whom those fierce words had passed on account of his rudeness to Rose Garfield. Septimius's fierce Indian blood stirred in him, and gave a murderous excitement.

"Ah, it is you!" said the young officer, with a haughty smile. "You meant, then, to take up with my hint of shooting at me from behind a hedge? This is better. Come, we have in the first place the great quarrel between me a king's soldier, and you a rebel; next our private affair, on account of yonder pretty girl. Come, let us take a shot on either score!"

The young officer was so handsome, so beautiful, in budding youth; there was such a free, gay petulance in his manner; there seemed so little of real evil in him; he put himself on equal ground with the rustic Septimius so generously, that the latter, often so morbid and sullen, never felt a greater kindness for fellow-man than at this moment for this youth.

"I have no enmity towards you," said he; "go in peace."

"No enmity!" replied the officer. "Then why were you here with your gun amongst the shrubbery? But I have a mind to do my first deed of arms on you; so give up your weapon, and come with me as prisoner."

"A prisoner!" cried Septimius, that Indian fierceness that was

in him arousing itself, and thrusting up its malign head like a snake. "Never! If you would have me, you must take my dead body."

"Ah well, you have pluck in you, I see, only it needs a considerable stirring. Come, this is a good quarrel of ours. Let us fight it out. Stand where you are, and I will give the word of command. Now; ready, aim, fire!"

As the young officer spoke the three last words, in rapid succession, he and his antagonist brought their firelocks to the shoulder, aimed and fired. Septimius felt, as it were, the sting of a gadfly passing across his temple, as the Englishman's bullet grazed it; but, to his surprise and horror (for the whole thing scarcely seemed real to him), he saw the officer give a great start, drop his fusil, and stagger against a tree, with his hand to his breast. He endeavored to support himself erect, but, failing in the effort, beckoned to Septimius.

"Come, my good friend," said he, with that playful, petulant smile flitting over his face again. "It is my first and last fight. Let me down as softly as you can on mother earth, the mother of both you and me; so we are brothers; and this may be a brotherly act, though it does not look so, nor feel so. Ah! that was a twinge indeed!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Septimius. "I had no thought of this, no malice towards you in the least!"

"Nor I towards you," said the young man. "It was boy's play, and the end of it is that I die a boy, instead of living forever, as

perhaps I otherwise might."

"Living forever!" repeated Septimius, his attention arrested, even at that breathless moment, by words that rang so strangely on what had been his brooding thought.

"Yes; but I have lost my chance," said the young officer. Then, as Septimius helped him to lie against the little hillock of a decayed and buried stump, "Thank you; thank you. If you could only call back one of my comrades to hear my dying words. But I forgot. You have killed me, and they would take your life."

In truth, Septimius was so moved and so astonished, that he probably would have called back the young man's comrades, had it been possible; but, marching at the swift rate of men in peril, they had already gone far onward, in their passage through the shrubbery that had ceased to rustle behind them.

"Yes; I must die here!" said the young man, with a forlorn expression, as of a school-boy far away from home, "and nobody to see me now but you, who have killed me. Could you fetch me a drop of water? I have a great thirst."

Septimius, in a dream of horror and pity, rushed down the hill-side; the house was empty, for Aunt Keziah had gone for shelter and sympathy to some of the neighbors. He filled a jug with cold water, and hurried back to the hill-top, finding the young officer looking paler and more deathlike within those few moments.

"I thank you, my enemy that was, my friend that is," murmured he, faintly smiling. "Methinks, next to the father and mother that gave us birth, the next most intimate relation must be

with the man that slays us, who introduces us to the mysterious world to which this is but the portal. You and I are singularly connected, doubt it not, in the scenes of the unknown world."

"Oh, believe me," cried Septimius, "I grieve for you like a brother!"

"I see it, my dear friend," said the young officer; "and though my blood is on your hands, I forgive you freely, if there is anything to forgive. But I am dying, and have a few words to say, which you must hear. You have slain me in fair fight, and my spoils, according to the rules and customs of warfare, belong to the victor. Hang up my sword and fusil over your chimney-place, and tell your children, twenty years hence, how they were won. My purse, keep it or give it to the poor. There is something, here next my heart, which I would fain have sent to the address which I will give you."

Septimius, obeying his directions, took from his breast a miniature that hung round it; but, on examination, it proved that the bullet had passed directly through it, shattering the ivory, so that the woman's face it represented was quite destroyed.

"Ah! that is a pity," said the young man; and yet Septimius thought that there was something light and contemptuous mingled with the pathos in his tones. "Well, but send it; cause it to be transmitted, according to the address."

He gave Septimius, and made him take down on a tablet which he had about him, the name of a hall in one of the midland counties of England.

"Ah, that old place," said he, "with its oaks, and its lawn, and its park, and its Elizabethan gables! I little thought I should die here, so far away, in this barren Yankee land. Where will you bury me?"

As Septimius hesitated to answer, the young man continued. "I would like to have lain in the little old church at Whitnash, which comes up before me now, with its low, gray tower, and the old yew-tree in front, hollow with age, and the village clustering about it, with its thatched houses. I would be loath to lie in one of your Yankee graveyards, for I have a distaste for them,—though I love you, my slayer. Bury me here, on this very spot. A soldier lies best where he falls."

"Here, in secret?" exclaimed Septimius.

"Yes; there is no consecration in your Puritan burial-grounds," said the dying youth, some of that queer narrowness of English Churchism coming into his mind. "So bury me here, in my soldier's dress. Ah! and my watch! I have done with time, and you, perhaps, have a long lease of it; so take it, not as spoil, but as my parting gift. And that reminds me of one other thing. Open that pocket-book which you have in your hand."

Septimius did so, and by the officer's direction took from one of its compartments a folded paper, closely written in a crabbed hand; it was considerably worn in the outer folds, but not within. There was also a small silver key in the pocket-book.

"I leave it with you," said the officer; "it was given me by an uncle, a learned man of science, who intended me great good by

what he there wrote. Reap the profit, if you can. Sooth to say, I never read beyond the first lines of the paper."

Septimius was surprised, or deeply impressed, to see that through this paper, as well as through the miniature, had gone his fatal bullet,—straight through the midst; and some of the young man's blood, saturating his dress, had wet the paper all over. He hardly thought himself likely to derive any good from what it had cost a human life, taken (however uncriminally) by his own hands, to obtain.

"Is there anything more that I can do for you?" asked he, with genuine sympathy and sorrow, as he knelt by his fallen foe's side.

"Nothing, nothing, I believe," said he. "There was one thing I might have confessed; if there were a holy man here, I might have confessed, and asked his prayers; for though I have lived few years, it has been long enough to do a great wrong! But I will try to pray in my secret soul. Turn my face towards the trunk of the tree, for I have taken my last look at the world. There, let me be now."

Septimius did as the young man requested, and then stood leaning against one of the neighboring pines, watching his victim with a tender concern that made him feel as if the convulsive throes that passed through his frame were felt equally in his own. There was a murmuring from the youth's lips which seemed to Septimius swift, soft, and melancholy, like the voice of a child when it has some naughtiness to confess to its mother at bedtime; contrite, pleading, yet trusting. So it continued for a few minutes;

then there was a sudden start and struggle, as if he were striving to rise; his eyes met those of Septimius with a wild, troubled gaze, but as the latter caught him in his arms, he was dead. Septimius laid the body softly down on the leaf-strewn earth, and tried, as he had heard was the custom with the dead, to compose the features distorted by the dying agony. He then flung himself on the ground at a little distance, and gave himself up to the reflections suggested by the strange occurrences of the last hour.

He had taken a human life; and, however the circumstances might excuse him,—might make the thing even something praiseworthy, and that would be called patriotic,—still, it was not at once that a fresh country youth could see anything but horror in the blood with which his hand was stained. It seemed so dreadful to have reduced this gay, animated, beautiful being to a lump of dead flesh for the flies to settle upon, and which in a few hours would begin to decay; which must be put forthwith into the earth, lest it should be a horror to men's eyes; that delicious beauty for woman to love; that strength and courage to make him famous among men,—all come to nothing; all probabilities of life in one so gifted; the renown, the position, the pleasures, the profits, the keen ecstatic joy,—this never could be made up,—all ended quite; for the dark doubt descended upon Septimius, that, because of the very fitness that was in this youth to enjoy this world, so much the less chance was thereof his being fit for any other world. What could it do for him there,—this beautiful grace and elegance of feature,—where there was no form, nothing tangible

nor visible? what good that readiness and aptness for associating with all created things, doing his part, acting, enjoying, when, under the changed conditions of another state of being, all this adaptedness would fail? Had he been gifted with permanence on earth, there could not have been a more admirable creature than this young man; but as his fate had turned out, he was a mere grub, an illusion, something that nature had held out in mockery, and then withdrawn. A weed might grow from his dust now; that little spot on the barren hill-top, where he had desired to be buried, would be greener for some years to come, and that was all the difference. Septimius could not get beyond the earthiness; his feeling was as if, by an act of violence, he had forever cut off a happy human existence. And such was his own love of life and clinging to it, peculiar to dark, sombre natures, and which lighter and gayer ones can never know, that he shuddered at his deed, and at himself, and could with difficulty bear to be alone with the corpse of his victim,—trembled at the thought of turning his face towards him.

Yet he did so, because he could not endure the imagination that the dead youth was turning his eyes towards him as he lay; so he came and stood beside him, looking down into his white, upturned face. But it was wonderful! What a change had come over it since, only a few moments ago, he looked at that death-contorted countenance! Now there was a high and sweet expression upon it, of great joy and surprise, and yet a quietude diffused throughout, as if the peace being so very great

was what had surprised him. The expression was like a light gleaming and glowing within him. Septimius had often, at a certain space of time after sunset, looking westward, seen a living radiance in the sky,—the last light of the dead day that seemed just the counterpart of this death-light in the young man's face. It was as if the youth were just at the gate of heaven, which, swinging softly open, let the inconceivable glory of the blessed city shine upon his face, and kindle it up with gentle, undisturbing astonishment and purest joy. It was an expression contrived by God's providence to comfort; to overcome all the dark auguries that the physical ugliness of death inevitably creates, and to prove by the divine glory on the face, that the ugliness is a delusion. It was as if the dead man himself showed his face out of the sky, with heaven's blessing on it, and bade the afflicted be of good cheer, and believe in immortality.

Septimius remembered the young man's injunctions to bury him there, on the hill, without uncovering the body; and though it seemed a sin and shame to cover up that beautiful body with earth of the grave, and give it to the worm, yet he resolved to obey.

Be it confessed that, beautiful as the dead form looked, and guiltless as Septimius must be held in causing his death, still he felt as if he should be eased when it was under the ground. He hastened down to the house, and brought up a shovel and a pickaxe, and began his unwonted task of grave-digging, delving earnestly a deep pit, sometimes pausing in his toil, while the

sweat-drops poured from him, to look at the beautiful clay that was to occupy it. Sometimes he paused, too, to listen to the shots that pealed in the far distance, towards the east, whither the battle had long since rolled out of reach and almost out of hearing. It seemed to have gathered about itself the whole life of the land, attending it along its bloody course in a struggling throng of shouting, shooting men, so still and solitary was everything left behind it. It seemed the very midland solitude of the world where Septimius was delving at the grave. He and his dead were alone together, and he was going to put the body under the sod, and be quite alone.

The grave was now deep, and Septimius was stooping down into its depths among dirt and pebbles, levelling off the bottom, which he considered to be profound enough to hide the young man's mystery forever, when a voice spoke above him; a solemn, quiet voice, which he knew well.

"Septimius! what are you doing here?"

He looked up and saw the minister.

"I have slain a man in fair fight," answered he, "and am about to bury him as he requested. I am glad you are come. You, reverend sir, can fitly say a prayer at his obsequies. I am glad for my own sake; for it is very lonely and terrible to be here."

He climbed out of the grave, and, in reply to the minister's inquiries, communicated to him the events of the morning, and the youth's strange wish to be buried here, without having his remains subjected to the hands of those who would prepare it for

the grave. The minister hesitated.

"At an ordinary time," said he, "such a singular request would of course have to be refused. Your own safety, the good and wise rules that make it necessary that all things relating to death and burial should be done publicly and in order, would forbid it."

"Yes," replied Septimius; "but, it may be, scores of men will fall to-day, and be flung into hasty graves without funeral rites; without its ever being known, perhaps, what mother has lost her son. I cannot but think that I ought to perform the dying request of the youth whom I have slain. He trusted in me not to uncover his body myself, nor to betray it to the hands of others."

"A singular request," said the good minister, gazing with deep interest at the beautiful dead face, and graceful, slender, manly figure. "What could have been its motive? But no matter. I think, Septimius, that you are bound to obey his request; indeed, having promised him, nothing short of an impossibility should prevent your keeping your faith. Let us lose no time, then."

With few but deeply solemn rites the young stranger was laid by the minister and the youth who slew him in his grave. A prayer was made, and then Septimius, gathering some branches and twigs, spread them over the face that was turned upward from the bottom of the pit, into which the sun gleamed downward, throwing its rays so as almost to touch it. The twigs partially hid it, but still its white shone through. Then the minister threw a handful of earth upon it, and, accustomed as he was to burials, tears fell from his eyes along with the mould.

"It is sad," said he, "this poor young man, coming from opulence, no doubt, a dear English home, to die here for no end, one of the first-fruits of a bloody war,—so much privately sacrificed. But let him rest, Septimius. I am sorry that he fell by your hand, though it involves no shadow of a crime. But death is a thing too serious not to melt into the nature of a man like you."

"It does not weigh upon my conscience, I think," said Septimius; "though I cannot but feel sorrow, and wish my hand were as clean as yesterday. It is, indeed, a dreadful thing to take human life."

"It is a most serious thing," replied the minister; "but perhaps we are apt to over-estimate the importance of death at any particular moment. If the question were whether to die or to live forever, then, indeed, scarcely anything should justify the putting a fellow-creature to death. But since it only shortens his earthly life, and brings a little forward a change which, since God permits it, is, we may conclude, as fit to take place then as at any other time, it alters the case. I often think that there are many things that occur to us in our daily life, many unknown crises, that are more important to us than this mysterious circumstance of death, which we deem the most important of all. All we understand of it is, that it takes the dead person away from our knowledge of him, which, while we live with him, is so very scanty."

"You estimate at nothing, it seems, his earthly life, which might have been so happy."

"At next to nothing," said the minister; "since, as I have

observed, it must, at any rate, have closed so soon."

Septimius thought of what the young man, in his last moments, had said of his prospect or opportunity of living a life of interminable length, and which prospect he had bequeathed to himself. But of this he did not speak to the minister, being, indeed, ashamed to have it supposed that he would put any serious weight on such a bequest, although it might be that the dark enterprise of his nature had secretly seized upon this idea, and, though yet sane enough to be influenced by a fear of ridicule, was busy incorporating it with his thoughts.

So Septimius smoothed down the young stranger's earthy bed, and returned to his home, where he hung up the sword over the mantel-piece in his study, and hung the gold watch, too, on a nail,—the first time he had ever had possession of such a thing. Nor did he now feel altogether at ease in his mind about keeping it,—the time-measurer of one whose mortal life he had cut off. A splendid watch it was, round as a turnip. There seems to be a natural right in one who has slain a man to step into his vacant place in all respects; and from the beginning of man's dealings with man this right has been practically recognized, whether among warriors or robbers, as paramount to every other. Yet Septimius could not feel easy in availing himself of this right. He therefore resolved to keep the watch, and even the sword and fusil,—which were less questionable spoils of war,—only till he should be able to restore them to some representative of the young officer. The contents of the purse, in accordance with

the request of the dying youth, he would expend in relieving the necessities of those whom the war (now broken out, and of which no one could see the limit) might put in need of it. The miniature, with its broken and shattered face, that had so vainly interposed itself between its wearer and death, had been sent to its address.

But as to the mysterious document, the written paper, that he had laid aside without unfolding it, but with a care that betokened more interest in it than in either gold or weapon, or even in the golden representative of that earthly time on which he set so high a value. There was something tremulous in his touch of it; it seemed as if he were afraid of it by the mode in which he hid it away, and secured himself from it, as it were.

This done, the air of the room, the low-ceilinged eastern room where he studied and thought, became too close for him, and he hastened out; for he was full of the unshaped sense of all that had befallen, and the perception of the great public event of a broken-out war was intermixed with that of what he had done personally in the great struggle that was beginning. He longed, too, to know what was the news of the battle that had gone rolling onward along the hitherto peaceful country road, converting everywhere (this demon of war, we mean), with one blast of its red sulphurous breath, the peaceful husbandman to a soldier thirsting for blood. He turned his steps, therefore, towards the village, thinking it probable that news must have arrived either of defeat or victory, from messengers or fliers, to cheer or sadden the old men, the women, and the children, who alone

perhaps remained there.

But Septimius did not get to the village. As he passed along by the cottage that has been already described, Rose Garfield was standing at the door, peering anxiously forth to know what was the issue of the conflict,—as it has been woman's fate to do from the beginning of the world, and is so still. Seeing Septimius, she forgot the restraint that she had hitherto kept herself under, and, flying at him like a bird, she cried out, "Septimius, dear Septimius, where have you been? What news do you bring? You look as if you had seen some strange and dreadful thing."

"Ah, is it so? Does my face tell such stories?" exclaimed the young man. "I did not mean it should. Yes, Rose, I have seen and done such things as change a man in a moment."

"Then you have been in this terrible fight," said Rose.

"Yes, Rose, I have had my part in it," answered Septimius.

He was on the point of relieving his overburdened mind by telling her what had happened no farther off than on the hill above them; but, seeing her excitement, and recollecting her own momentary interview with the young officer, and the forced intimacy and link that had been established between them by the kiss, he feared to agitate her further by telling her that that gay and beautiful young man had since been slain, and deposited in a bloody grave by his hands. And yet the recollection of that kiss caused a thrill of vengeful joy at the thought that the perpetrator had since expiated his offence with his life, and that it was himself that did it, so deeply was Septimius's Indian nature

of revenge and blood incorporated with that of more peaceful forefathers, although Septimius had grace enough to chide down that bloody spirit, feeling that it made him, not a patriot, but a murderer.

"Ah," said Rose, shuddering, "it is awful when we must kill one another! And who knows where it will end?"

"With me it will end here, Rose," said Septimius. "It may be lawful for any man, even if he have devoted himself to God, or however peaceful his pursuits, to fight to the death when the enemy's step is on the soil of his home; but only for that perilous juncture, which passed, he should return to his own way of peace. I have done a terrible thing for once, dear Rose, one that might well trace a dark line through all my future life; but henceforth I cannot think it my duty to pursue any further a work for which my studies and my nature unfit me."

"Oh no! Oh no!" said Rose; "never! and you a minister, or soon to be one. There must be some peacemakers left in the world, or everything will turn to blood and confusion; for even women grow dreadfully fierce in these times. My old grandmother laments her bedriddenness, because, she says, she cannot go to cheer on the people against the enemy. But she remembers the old times of the Indian wars, when the women were as much in danger of death as the men, and so were almost as fierce as they, and killed men sometimes with their own hands. But women, nowadays, ought to be gentler; let the men be fierce, if they must, except you, and such as you, Septimius."

"Ah, dear Rose," said Septimius, "I have not the kind and sweet impulses that you speak of. I need something to soften and warm my cold, hard life; something to make me feel how dreadful this time of warfare is. I need you, dear Rose, who are all kindness of heart and mercy."

And here Septimius, hurried away by I know not what excitement of the time,—the disturbed state of the country, his own ebullition of passion, the deed he had done, the desire to press one human being close to his life, because he had shed the blood of another, his half-formed purposes, his shapeless impulses; in short, being affected by the whole stir of his nature,—spoke to Rose of love, and with an energy that, indeed, there was no resisting when once it broke bounds. And Rose, whose maiden thoughts, to say the truth, had long dwelt upon this young man,—admiring him for a certain dark beauty, knowing him familiarly from childhood, and yet having the sense, that is so bewitching, of remoteness, intermixed with intimacy, because he was so unlike herself; having a woman's respect for scholarship, her imagination the more impressed by all in him that she could not comprehend,—Rose yielded to his impetuous suit, and gave him the troth that he requested. And yet it was with a sort of reluctance and drawing back; her whole nature, her secretest heart, her deepest womanhood, perhaps, did not consent. There was something in Septimius, in his wild, mixed nature, the monstrousness that had grown out of his hybrid race, the black infusions, too, which melancholic men had left there,

the devilishness that had been symbolized in the popular regard about his family, that made her shiver, even while she came the closer to him for that very dread. And when he gave her the kiss of betrothment her lips grew white. If it had not been in the day of turmoil, if he had asked her in any quiet time, when Rose's heart was in its natural mood, it may well be that, with tears and pity for him, and half-pity for herself, Rose would have told Septimius that she did not think she could love him well enough to be his wife.

And how was it with Septimius? Well; there was a singular correspondence in his feelings to those of Rose Garfield. At first, carried away by a passion that seized him all unawares, and seemed to develop itself all in a moment, he felt, and so spoke to Rose, so pleaded his suit, as if his whole earthly happiness depended on her consent to be his bride. It seemed to him that her love would be the sunshine in the gloomy dungeon of his life. But when her bashful, downcast, tremulous consent was given, then immediately came a strange misgiving into his mind. He felt as if he had taken to himself something good and beautiful doubtless in itself, but which might be the exchange for one more suited to him, that he must now give up. The intellect, which was the prominent point in Septimius, stirred and heaved, crying out vaguely that its own claims, perhaps, were ignored in this contract. Septimius had perhaps no right to love at all; if he did, it should have been a woman of another make, who could be his intellectual companion and helper. And then, perchance,—

perchance,—there was destined for him some high, lonely path, in which, to make any progress, to come to any end, he must walk unburdened by the affections. Such thoughts as these depressed and chilled (as many men have found them, or similar ones, to do) the moment of success that should have been the most exulting in the world. And so, in the kiss which these two lovers had exchanged there was, after all, something that repelled; and when they parted they wondered at their strange states of mind, but would not acknowledge that they had done a thing that ought not to have been done. Nothing is surer, however, than that, if we suffer ourselves to be drawn into too close proximity with people, if we over-estimate the degree of our proper tendency towards them, or theirs towards us, a reaction is sure to follow.

Septimius quitted Rose, and resumed his walk towards the village. But now it was near sunset, and there began to be straggling passengers along the road, some of whom came slowly, as if they had received hurts; all seemed wearied. Among them one form appeared which Rose soon found that she recognized. It was Robert Hagburn, with a shattered firelock in his hand, broken at the butt, and his left arm bound with a fragment of his shirt, and suspended in a handkerchief; and he walked weariedly, but brightened up at sight of Rose, as if ashamed to let her see how exhausted and dispirited he was. Perhaps he expected a smile, at least a more earnest reception than he met; for Rose, with the restraint of what had recently passed drawing her back, merely went gravely a few steps to meet

him, and said, "Robert, how tired and pale you look! Are you hurt?"

"It is of no consequence," replied Robert Hagburn; "a scratch on my left arm from an officer's sword, with whose head my gunstock made instant acquaintance. It is no matter, Rose; you do not care for it, nor do I either."

"How can you say so, Robert?" she replied. But without more greeting he passed her, and went into his own house, where, flinging himself into a chair, he remained in that despondency that men generally feel after a fight, even if a successful one.

Septimius, the next day, lost no time in writing a letter to the direction given him by the young officer, conveying a brief account of the latter's death and burial, and a signification that he held in readiness to give up certain articles of property, at any future time, to his representatives, mentioning also the amount of money contained in the purse, and his intention, in compliance with the verbal will of the deceased, to expend it in alleviating the wants of prisoners. Having so done, he went up on the hill to look at the grave, and satisfy himself that the scene there had not been a dream; a point which he was inclined to question, in spite of the tangible evidence of the sword and watch, which still hung over the mantel-piece. There was the little mound, however, looking so incontrovertibly a grave, that it seemed to him as if all the world must see it, and wonder at the fact of its being there, and spend their wits in conjecturing who slept within; and, indeed, it seemed to give the affair a questionable

character, this secret burial, and he wondered and wondered why the young man had been so earnest about it. Well; there was the grave; and, moreover, on the leafy earth, where the dying youth had lain, there were traces of blood, which no rain had yet washed away. Septimius wondered at the easiness with which he acquiesced in this deed; in fact, he felt in a slight degree the effects of that taste of blood, which makes the slaying of men, like any other abuse, sometimes become a passion. Perhaps it was his Indian trait stirring in him again; at any rate, it is not delightful to observe how readily man becomes a blood-shedding animal.

Looking down from the hill-top, he saw the little dwelling of Rose Garfield, and caught a glimpse of the girl herself, passing the windows or the door, about her household duties, and listened to hear the singing which usually broke out of her. But Rose, for some reason or other, did not warble as usual this morning. She trod about silently, and somehow or other she was translated out of the ideality in which Septimius usually enveloped her, and looked little more than a New England girl, very pretty indeed, but not enough so perhaps to engross a man's life and higher purposes into her own narrow circle; so, at least, Septimius thought. Looking a little farther,—down into the green recess where stood Robert Hagburn's house,—he saw that young man, looking very pale, with his arm in a sling sitting listlessly on a half-chopped log of wood which was not likely soon to be severed by Robert's axe. Like other lovers, Septimius had not

failed to be aware that Robert Hagburn was sensible to Rose Garfield's attractions; and now, as he looked down on them both from his elevated position, he wondered if it would not have been better for Rose's happiness if her thoughts and virgin fancies had settled on that frank, cheerful, able, wholesome young man, instead of on himself, who met her on so few points; and, in relation to whom, there was perhaps a plant that had its root in the grave, that would entwine itself around his whole life, overshadowing it with dark, rich foliage and fruit that he alone could feast upon.

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