

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

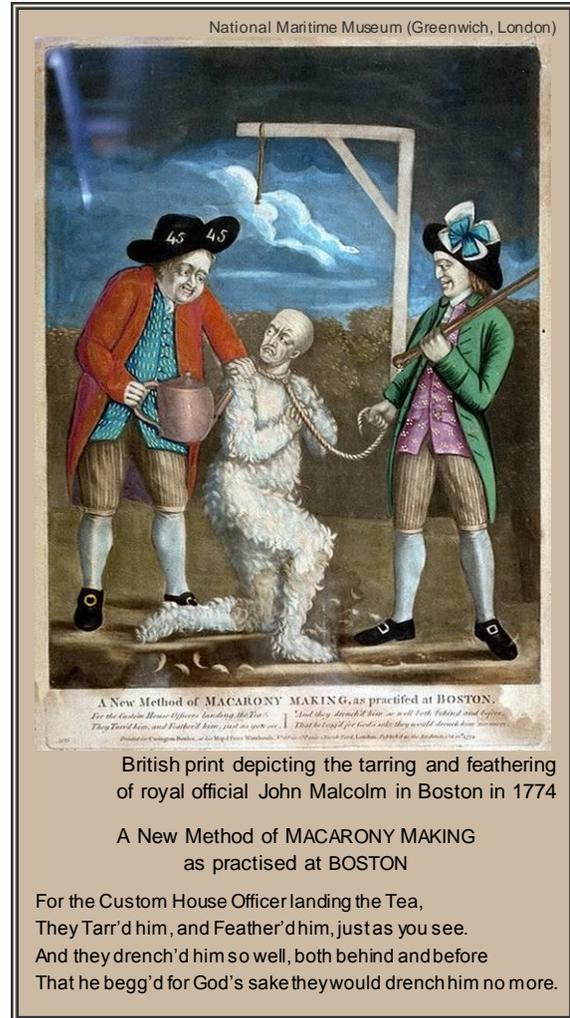
My Kinsman, Major Molineux

__SHORT STORY, 1830__

Set in pre-revolutionary Boston of 1730, Hawthorne's story depicts mob vengeance inflicted on an aristocratic American-born British official as witnessed by the official's eighteen-year-old nephew, a country boy setting out to create his adult life (perhaps representing the fledgling nation-to-be). For almost sixty years after the Massachusetts Bay colony was founded in 1630, its citizens had enjoyed considerable autonomy—until their charter was revoked by King James II in 1684. Although James was soon deposed in the 1689 Glorious Revolution and many rights were restored in a new charter, the citizens never regained the right to elect their own governors. In addition, Britain in 1730 enacted new taxes to replenish its treasury. From then on, there was constant discord between the colonists and the royal governors, escalating to revolutionary furor in the 1760s and 1770s.

In this story the official, Major Molineux, is tarred and feathered, an act of humiliation and retribution long employed in colonial America by vigilante groups upon unpopular persons, especially Loyalists during the revolutionary period. The mob would strip the victim to the waist, pour hot tar over his/her body, and roll the person in feathers that would adhere to the tar. Usually the person was paraded about the area on a cart before being released, perhaps, or threatened with further violence. Occasionally the victims would die. In an 1840 story, "The Hutchinson Mob," Hawthorne described the mob attack on the house of Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Hutchinson in Boston during the Stamp Act controversy of 1765 (see sidebar, p. 10).

AFTER the kings of Great Britain had assumed the right of appointing the colonial governors,¹ the measures of the latter seldom met with the ready and general approbation, which had been paid to those of their predecessors under the original charters. The people looked with most jealous scrutiny to the exercise of power, which did not emanate from themselves, and they usually rewarded the rulers with slender gratitude for the compliances by which, in softening their instructions from beyond the sea, they had incurred the reprehension of those who gave them. The annals of Massachusetts Bay will inform us, that of six governors, in the space of about forty years from the surrender of the old charter under James II, two were imprisoned by a popular insurrection; a third, as Hutchinson² inclines to believe, was driven from the province by the whizzing of a musket ball; a fourth, in the opinion of the same historian, was hastened to his grave by continual bickerings with the House of Representatives; and the remaining two, as well as their successors till the Revolution, were favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway. The inferior members of the court party, in times of high political excitement, led scarcely a more desirable life. These remarks may serve as a preface to the following adventures, which chanced upon a summer night not far from a hundred years ago.³ The reader, in order to avoid a long and dry detail of colonial affairs, is requested to



British print depicting the tarring and feathering of royal official John Malcolm in Boston in 1774

A New Method of MACARONY MAKING
as practised at BOSTON

For the Custom House Officer landing the Tea,
They Tarr'd him, and Feather'd him, just as you see.
And they drench'd him so well, both behind and before
That he begg'd for God's sake they would drench him no more.

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¹ 1684, in Massachusetts; see headnote.

² Thomas Hutchinson: lieutenant-governor and later governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony, and author of *The History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay: From the Charter of King William and Queen Mary, in 1691, until the Year 1750, 1767*. Literary scholar Peter Shaw notes: "During the Stamp Act protests in 1765 Hutchinson's house was destroyed by a mob similar to the one described by Hawthorne. The parallel with Hutchinson links the 1730s, when the story takes place, to the Revolutionary period that it is meant to evoke." [Peter Shaw, "Their Kinsman, Thomas Hutchinson; Hawthorne, the Boston Patriots, and His Majesty's Royal Governor," *Early American Literature*, 11:2 (Fall 1976), p. 183]

³ 1730, one hundred years before Hawthorne's writing the story in 1830, and one hundred years after the founding of Massachusetts Bay in 1630.

dispense with an account of the train of circumstances that had caused much temporary inflammation of the popular mind.⁴

It was near nine o'clock of a moonlight evening when a boat crossed the ferry with a single passenger who had obtained his conveyance, at that unusual hour, by the promise of an extra fare.⁵ While he stood on the landing-place, searching in either pocket for the means of fulfilling his agreement, the ferryman lifted a lantern, by the aid of which, and the newly risen moon, he took a very accurate survey of the stranger's figure. He was a youth of barely eighteen years, evidently country-bred, and now, as it should seem, upon his first visit to town. He was clad in a coarse grey coat, well worn, but in excellent repair; his under garments were durably constructed of leather, and sat tight to a pair of serviceable and well-shaped limbs; his stockings of blue yarn, were the incontrovertible handiwork of a mother or a sister; and on his head was a three-cornered hat, which in its better days had perhaps sheltered the graver brow of the lad's father. Under his left arm was a heavy cudgel, formed of an oak sapling and retaining a part of the hardened root; and his equipment was completed by a wallet, not so abundantly stocked as to incommode the vigorous shoulders on which it hung. Brown, curly hair, well-shaped features, and bright, cheerful eyes, were nature's gifts, and worth all that art could have done for his adornment.

The youth, one of whose names was Robin, finally drew from his pocket the half of a little province-bill of five shillings, which, in the depreciation of that sort of currency, did but satisfy the ferryman's demand, with the surplus of a sexangular piece of parchment valued at three pence. He then walked forward into the town, with as light a step as if his day's journey had not already exceeded thirty miles, and with as eager an eye as if he were entering London city, instead of the little metropolis of a New England colony. Before Robin had proceeded far, however, it occurred to him that he knew not whither to direct his steps; so he paused and looked up and down the narrow street, scrutinizing the small and mean wooden buildings that were scattered on either side.

"This low hovel cannot be my kinsman's dwelling," thought he, "nor yonder old house, where the moonlight enters at the broken casement; and truly I see none hereabouts that might be worthy of him. It would have been wise to inquire my way of the ferryman, and doubtless he would have gone with me and earned a shilling from the Major for his pains. But the next man I meet will do as well."

He resumed his walk and was glad to perceive that the street now became wider and the houses more respectable in their appearance. He soon discerned a figure moving on moderately in advance and



⁴ Discord in Massachusetts Bay in 1730s.

⁵ Ferryman on the Charlestown and Winimiset ferries were allowed to take passengers after sunset if they charged double. [Robert C. Grayson, "The New England Sources of 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *American Literature*, 54:4 (December 1982), p. 548]

hastened his steps to overtake it. As Robin drew nigh, he saw that the passenger was a man in years, with a full periwig of grey hair, a wide-skirted coat of dark cloth, and silk stockings rolled about his knees.⁶ He carried a long and polished cane, which he struck down perpendicularly before him at every step; and at regular intervals he uttered two successive hems of a peculiarly solemn and sepulchral intonation. Having made these observations, Robin laid hold of the skirt of the old man's coat, just when the light from the open door and windows of a barber's shop fell upon both their figures.

"Good evening to you, honored Sir," said he, making a low bow, and still retaining his hold of the skirt. "I pray you tell me whereabouts is the dwelling of my kinsman, Major Molineux?"⁷

The youth's question was uttered very loudly, and one of the barbers, whose razor was descending on a well-soaped chin, and another who was dressing a Ramillies wig,⁸ left their occupations and came to the door. The citizen, in the meantime, turned a long favored countenance upon Robin and answered him in a tone of excessive anger and annoyance. His two sepulchral hems, however, broke into the very center of his rebuke with most singular effect, like a thought of the cold grave obtruding among wrathful passions.

"Let go my garment, fellow! I tell you, I know not the man you speak of. What! I have authority, I have—hem, hem—authority; and if this be the respect you show for your betters, your feet shall be brought acquainted with the stocks by daylight, tomorrow morning!"

Robin released the old man's skirt and hastened away, pursued by an ill-mannered roar of laughter from the barber's shop. He was at first considerably surprised by the result of his question, but, being a shrewd youth, soon thought himself able to account for the mystery.

"This is some country representative," was his conclusion, "who has never seen the inside of my kinsman's door, and lacks the breeding to answer a stranger civilly. The man is old, or verily—I might be tempted to turn back and smite him on the nose. Ah, Robin, Robin! even the barber's boys laugh at you, for choosing such a guide! You will be wiser in time, friend Robin."

He now became entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets which crossed each other and meandered at no great distance from the water-side. The smell of tar was obvious to his nostrils, the masts of vessels pierced the moonlight above the tops of the buildings, and the numerous signs, which Robin paused to read, informed him that he was near the center of business. But the streets were empty, the shops were closed, and lights were visible only in the second stories of a few dwelling-houses. At length, on the corner of a narrow lane through which he was passing, he beheld the broad countenance of a British hero swinging before the door of an inn, whence proceeded the voices of many guests. The casement of one of the lower windows was thrown back, and a very thin curtain permitted Robin to distinguish a party at supper round a well-furnished table. The fragrance of the good cheer steamed forth into the outer air, and the youth could not fail to recollect that the last remnant of his travelling stock of provision had yielded to his morning appetite, and that noon had found, and left him, dinnerless.

"Oh, that a parchment three-penny might give me a right to sit down at yonder table," said Robin, with a sigh. "But the Major will make me welcome to the best of his victuals, so I will even step boldly in and inquire my way to his dwelling."

He entered the tavern and was guided by the murmur of voices and the fumes of tobacco to the public room. It was a long and low apartment with oaken walls grown dark in the continual smoke, and a floor which was thickly sanded but of no immaculate purity. A number of persons, the larger part of whom appeared to be mariners, or in some way connected with the sea, occupied the wooden benches or leather-bottomed chairs, conversing on various matters and occasionally lending their attention to some topic of general interest. Three or four little groups were draining as many bowls of punch, which the West India trade had long since made a familiar drink in the colony. Others, who had the aspect of men who lived by regular and laborious handicraft, preferred the insulated bliss of an unshared potation, and became more

⁶ Official enforcing the town's 9pm curfew. [Grayson, p. 549]

⁷ Perhaps alluding (in a role reversal) to William Molineux, a radical Whig (Patriot) leader who urged an attack on Hutchinson's mansion in 1770. [Peter Shaw, "Fathers, Sons, and the Ambiguities of Revolution in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *The New England Quarterly*, 49:4 (Dec. 1976), pp. 559-576, citing RoyHarvey Pearce, "Hawthorne and the Sense of the Past, or, The Immortality of Major Molineux." in Pearce, *Historicism Once More: Problems and Occasions for the American Scholar* (Princeton University Press, 1969)]

⁸ Powdered wig with a long pigtail tied at the top and bottom with black velvet bows.

taciturn under its influence. Nearly all, in short, evinced a predilection for the Good Creature⁹ in some of its various shapes, for this is a vice to which, as the Fast-day sermons of a hundred years ago will testify,¹⁰ we have a long hereditary claim. The only guests to whom Robin's sympathies inclined him were two or three sheepish countrymen, who were using the inn somewhat after the fashion of a Turkish Caravansary.¹¹ They had gotten themselves into the darkest corner of the room and, heedless of the Nicotian atmosphere,¹² were supping on the bread of their own ovens and the bacon cured in their own chimney-smoke. But though Robin felt a sort of brotherhood with these strangers, his eyes were attracted from them to a person who stood near the door, holding whispered conversation with a group of ill-dressed associates. His features were separately striking almost to grotesqueness, and the whole face left a deep impression on the memory. The forehead bulged out into a double prominence with a vale between; the nose came boldly forth in an irregular curve, and its bridge was of more than a finger's breadth; the eyebrows were deep and shaggy, and the eyes glowed beneath them like fire in a cave.

While Robin deliberated of whom to inquire respecting his kinsman's dwelling, he was accosted by the innkeeper, a little man in a stained white apron, who had come to pay his professional welcome to the stranger. Being in the second generation from a French Protestant, he seemed to have inherited the courtesy of his parent nation, but no variety of circumstance was ever known to change his voice from the one shrill note in which he now addressed Robin.

"From the country, I presume, Sir?" said he, with a profound bow. "Beg to congratulate you on your arrival and trust you intend a long stay with us. Fine town here, Sir, beautiful buildings, and much that may interest a stranger. May I hope for the honor of your commands in respect to supper?"

"The man sees a family likeness! the rogue has guessed that I am related to the Major!" thought Robin, who had hitherto experienced little superfluous civility.

All eyes were now turned on the country lad, standing at the door in his worn three-cornered hat, grey coat, leather breeches, and blue yarn stockings, leaning on an oaken cudgel and bearing a wallet on his back.

Robin replied to the courteous innkeeper with such an assumption of consequence as befitted the Major's relative.

"My honest friend," he said, "I shall make it a point to patronize your house on some occasion, when—" here he could not help lowering his voice—"I may have more than a parchment three-pence in my pocket. My present business," continued he, speaking with lofty confidence, "is merely to inquire the way to the dwelling of my kinsman, Major Molineux."

There was a sudden and general movement in the room, which Robin interpreted as expressing the eagerness of each individual to become his guide. But the innkeeper turned his eyes to a written paper on the wall, which he read, or seemed to read, with occasional recurrences to the young man's figure.

"What have we here?" said he, breaking his speech into little dry fragments. "Left the house of the subscriber, bounden servant, Hezekiah Mudge—had on, when he went away, grey coat, leather breeches, master's third best hat. One pound currency reward to whosoever shall lodge him in any



⁹ Alcohol.

¹⁰ Clergymen often intoned against public vices in the occasional fast-day and thanksgiving sermons of colonial America.

¹¹ Roadside inns along the trade routes of Asia, North Africa, and southeast Europe.

¹² Filled with tobacco smoke (from nicotiana: nicotine).

¹³ Early American Imprints, Series I, American Antiquarian Society with Readex/NewsBank, Doc. #11484; reproduced by permission.

jail in the province.' Better trudge,¹⁴ boy, better trudge!"

Robin had begun to draw his hand towards the lighter end of the oak cudgel, but a strange hostility in every countenance induced him to relinquish his purpose of breaking the courteous innkeeper's head. As he turned to leave the room, he encountered a sneering glance from the bold-featured personage whom he had before noticed, and no sooner was he beyond the door than he heard a general laugh, in which the innkeeper's voice might be distinguished like the dropping of small stones into a kettle.

"Now, is it not strange," thought Robin, with his usual shrewdness, "is it not strange that the confession of an empty pocket should outweigh the name of my kinsman, Major Molineux? Oh, if I had one of those grinning rascals in the woods, where I and my oak sapling grew up together, I would teach him that my arm is heavy though my purse be light!"

On turning the corner of the narrow lane, Robin found himself in a spacious street with an unbroken line of lofty houses on each side and a steepled building¹⁵ at the upper end, whence the ringing of a bell announced the hour of nine. The light of the moon and the lamps from numerous shop windows discovered people promenading on the pavement, and amongst them Robin hoped to recognize his hitherto inscrutable relative. The result of his former inquiries made him unwilling to hazard another, in a scene of such publicity, and he determined to walk slowly and silently up the street, thrusting his face close to that of every elderly gentleman in search of the Major's lineaments.

In his progress, Robin encountered many gay and gallant figures. Embroidered garments, of showy colors, enormous periwigs, gold-laced hats, and silver hilted swords, glided past him and dazzled his optics. Travelled youths, imitators of the European fine gentlemen of the period, trod jauntily along, half-dancing to the fashionable tunes which they hummed, and making poor Robin ashamed of his quiet and natural gait. At length, after many pauses to examine the gorgeous display of goods in the shop windows, and after suffering some rebukes for the impertinence of his scrutiny into people's faces, the Major's kinsman found himself near the steepled building, still unsuccessful in his search. As yet, however, he had seen only one side of the thronged street, so Robin crossed and continued the same sort of inquisition down the opposite pavement with stronger hopes than the philosopher seeking an honest man, but with no better fortune. He had arrived about midway towards the lower end from which his course began when he overheard the approach of some one, who struck down a cane on the flag-stones at every step, uttering, at regular intervals, two sepulchral hems.

"Mercy on us!" quoth Robin, recognizing the sound.

Turning a corner, which chanced to be close at his right hand, he hastened to pursue his researches in some other part of the town. His patience was now wearing low, and he seemed to feel more fatigue from his rambles since he crossed the ferry than from his journey of several days on the other side. Hunger also pleaded loudly within him, and Robin began to balance the propriety of demanding, violently and with lifted cudgel, the necessary guidance from the first solitary passenger whom he should meet. While a



¹⁴ Trudge: walk firmly though wearily. The tavern keeper is insinuating that Robin may be the escaped indentured servant, for which the runaway ad is posted on the wall.

¹⁵ Old State House. in which the colonial assembly met. [Grayson, p. 554] See detail from *The Bloody Massacre* above.

resolution to this effect was gaining strength, he entered a street of mean appearance on either side of which a row of ill-built houses was straggling towards the harbor. The moonlight fell upon no passenger along the whole extent, but in the third domicile which Robin passed, there was a half-opened door, and his keen glance detected a woman's garment within.

"My luck may be better here," said he to himself.

Accordingly, he approached the door, and beheld it shut closer as he did so; yet an open space remained, sufficing for the fair occupant to observe the stranger without a corresponding display on her part. All that Robin could discern was a strip of scarlet petticoat and the occasional sparkle of an eye, as if the moonbeams were trembling on some bright thing.

"Pretty mistress,"—for I may call her so with a good conscience, thought the shrewd youth, since I know nothing to the contrary—"my sweet pretty mistress, will you be kind enough to tell me whereabouts I must seek the dwelling of my kinsman, Major Molineux?"

Robin's voice was plaintive and winning, and the female, seeing nothing to be shunned in the handsome country youth, thrust open the door and came forth into the moonlight. She was a dainty little figure with a white neck, round arms, and a slender waist at the extremity of which her scarlet petticoat jutted out over a hoop, as if she were standing in a balloon. Moreover, her face was oval and pretty, her hair dark beneath the little cap, and her bright eyes possessed a sly freedom which triumphed over those of Robin.

"Major Molineux dwells here," said this fair woman.

Now her voice was the sweetest Robin had heard that night, the airy counterpart of a stream of melted silver; yet he could not help doubting whether that sweet voice spoke Gospel truth. He looked up and down the mean street, and then surveyed the house before which they stood. It was a small, dark edifice of two stories, the second of which projected over the lower floor, and the front apartment had the aspect of a shop for petty commodities.

"Now truly I am in luck," replied Robin, cunningly, "and so indeed is my kinsman, the Major, in having so pretty a housekeeper. But I prithee trouble him to step to the door. I will deliver him a message from his friends in the country and then go back to my lodgings at the inn."

"Nay, the Major has been a-bed this hour or more," said the lady of the scarlet petticoat, "and it would be to little purpose to disturb him to-night, seeing his evening draught¹⁶ was of the strongest. But he is a kind-hearted man, and it would be as much as my life's worth to let a kinsman of his turn away from the door. You are the good old gentleman's very picture, and I could swear that was his rainy-weather hat. Also he has garments very much resembling those leather— But come in, I pray, for I bid you hearty welcome in his name."

So saying, the fair and hospitable dame took our hero by the hand, and though the touch was light and the force was gentleness, and though Robin read in her eyes what he did not hear in her words, yet the slender waisted woman in the scarlet petticoat proved stronger than the athletic country youth. She had drawn his half-willing footsteps nearly to the threshold, when the opening of a door in the neighborhood startled the Major's housekeeper and, leaving the Major's kinsman, she vanished speedily into her own domicile. A heavy yawn preceded the appearance of a man who, like the Moonshine of Pyramus and Thisbe,¹⁷ carried a lantern, needlessly aiding his sister luminary in the heavens. As he walked sleepily up the street, he turned his broad, dull face on Robin and displayed a long staff, spiked at the end.

"Home, vagabond, home!" said the watchman, in accents that seemed to fall asleep as soon as they were uttered. "Home, or we'll set you in the stocks by peep of day!"

"This is the second hint of the kind," thought Robin. "I wish they would end my difficulties by setting me there tonight."

Nevertheless, the youth felt an instinctive antipathy towards the guardian of midnight order, which at first prevented him from asking his usual question. But just when the man was about to vanish behind the corner, Robin resolved not to lose the opportunity and shouted lustily after him—

¹⁶ Draft, beer.

¹⁷ In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the character Robin Starveling plays the lantern-carrying Moonshine in the play-within-a-play based on the tragedy, from Roman mythology, of the doomed young lovers Pyramus and Thisbe who meet at night by moonlight.

“I say, friend! will you guide me to the house of my kinsman, Major Molineux?”

The watchman made no reply, but turned the corner and was gone; yet Robin seemed to hear the sound of drowsy laughter stealing along the solitary street. At that moment, also, a pleasant titter saluted him from the open window above his head. He looked up and caught the sparkle of a saucy eye; a round arm beckoned to him and next he heard light footsteps descending the staircase within. But Robin, being of the household of a New England clergyman, was a good youth as well as a shrewd one; so he resisted temptation and fled away.

He now roamed desperately and at random through the town, almost ready to believe that a spell was on him, like that by which a wizard of his country had once kept three pursuers wandering a whole winter night within twenty paces of the cottage which they sought. The streets lay before him, strange and desolate, and the lights were extinguished in almost every house. Twice, however, little parties of men, among whom Robin distinguished individuals in outlandish attire, came hurrying along, but though on both occasions they paused to address him, such intercourse did not at all enlighten his perplexity. They did but utter a few words in some language of which Robin knew nothing, and perceiving his inability to answer, bestowed a curse upon him in plain English and hastened away. Finally, the lad determined to knock at the door of every mansion that might appear worthy to be occupied by his kinsman, trusting that perseverance would overcome the fatality which had hitherto thwarted him. Firm in this resolve, he was passing beneath the walls of a church which formed the corner of two streets when, as he turned into the shade of its steeple, he encountered a bulky stranger, muffled in a cloak. The man was proceeding with the speed of earnest business, but Robin planted himself full before him, holding the oak cudgel with both hands across his body as a bar to further passage.

“Halt, honest man, and answer me a question,” said he, very resolutely. “Tell me, this instant, whereabouts is the dwelling of my kinsman, Major Molineux?”

“Keep your tongue between your teeth, fool, and let me pass!” said a deep, gruff voice, which Robin partly remembered. “Let me pass, I say, or I’ll strike you to the earth!”

“No, no, neighbor!” cried Robin, flourishing his cudgel, and then thrusting its larger end close to the man’s muffled face. “No, no, I’m not the fool you take me for, nor do you pass till I have an answer to my question. Whereabouts is the dwelling of my kinsman, Major Molineux?”

The stranger, instead of attempting to force his passage, stepped back into the moonlight, unmuffled his own face and stared full into that of Robin.

“Watch here an hour, and Major Molineux will pass by,” said he.

Robin gazed with dismay and astonishment on the unprecedented physiognomy of the speaker. The forehead with its double prominence, the broad-hooked nose, the shaggy eyebrows, and fiery eyes, were those which he had noticed at the inn, but the man’s complexion had undergone a singular, or, more properly, a two-fold change. One side of the face blazed of an intense red, while the other was black as midnight, the division line being in the broad bridge of the nose; and a mouth, which seemed to extend from ear to ear, was black or red, in contrast to the color of the cheek. The effect was as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage. The stranger grinned in Robin’s face, muffled his parti-colored features, and was out of sight in a moment.

“Strange things we travellers see!” ejaculated Robin.

He seated himself, however, upon the steps of the church-door, resolving to wait the appointed time for his kinsman’s appearance. A few moments were consumed in philosophical speculations upon the species of the *genus homo* who had just left him; but having settled this point shrewdly, rationally, and satisfactorily, he was compelled to look elsewhere for his amusement. And first he threw his eyes along the street. It was of more respectable appearance than most of those into which he had wandered, and the moon, “creating, like the imaginative power, a beautiful strangeness in familiar objects,” gave something of romance to a scene that might not have possessed it in the light of day. The irregular and often quaint architecture of the houses, some of whose roofs were broken into numerous little peaks, while others ascended, steep and narrow, into a single point, and others again were square; the pure milk-white of some of their complexions, the aged darkness of others, and the thousand sparklings, reflected from bright substances in the plastered walls of many; these matters engaged Robin’s attention for a while, and then

began to grow wearisome. Next he endeavored to define the forms of distant objects, starting away with almost ghostly indistinctness, just as his eye appeared to grasp them; and finally he took a minute survey of an edifice which stood on the opposite side of the street, directly in front of the church-door where he was stationed. It was a large square mansion, distinguished from its neighbors by a balcony, which rested on tall pillars, and by an elaborate Gothic window, communicating therewith.

“Perhaps this is the very house I have been seeking,” thought Robin.

Then he strove to speed away the time, by listening to a murmur which swept continually along the street, yet was scarcely audible except to an unaccustomed ear like his. It was a low, dull, dreamy sound, compounded of many noises, each of which was at too great a distance to be separately heard. Robin marvelled at this snore of a sleeping town, and marvelled more, whenever its continuity was broken by now and then a distant shout, apparently loud where it originated. But altogether it was a sleep-inspiring sound, and to shake off its drowsy influence, Robin arose and climbed a window-frame that he might view the interior of the church. There the moonbeams came trembling in and fell down upon the deserted pews and extended along the quiet aisles. A fainter, yet more awful radiance, was hovering around the pulpit, and one solitary ray had dared to rest upon the opened page of the great Bible. Had Nature, in that deep hour, become a worshipper in the house, which man had builded? Or was that heavenly light the visible sanctity of the place, visible because no earthly and impure feet were within the walls? The scene made Robin’s heart shiver with a sensation of loneliness, stronger than he had ever felt in the remotest depths of his native woods, so he turned away and sat down again before the door. There were graves around the church, and now an uneasy thought obtruded into Robin’s breast. What if the object of his search, which had been so often and so strangely thwarted, were all the time mouldering in his shroud?¹⁸ What if his kinsman should glide through yonder gate, and nod and smile to him in dimly passing by?

“Oh, that any breathing thing were here with me!” said Robin.

Recalling his thoughts from this uncomfortable track, he sent them over forest, hill, and stream, and attempted to imagine how that evening of ambiguity and weariness had been spent by his father’s household. He pictured them assembled at the door, beneath the tree, the great old tree, which had been spared for its huge twisted trunk and venerable shade when a thousand leafy brethren fell. There, at the going down of the summer sun, it was his father’s custom to perform domestic worship, that the neighbors might come and join with him like brothers of the family, and that the wayfaring man might pause to drink at that fountain and keep his heart pure by freshening the memory of home. Robin distinguished the seat of every individual of the little audience. He saw the good man in the midst, holding the Scriptures in the golden light that shone from the western clouds. He beheld him close the book and all rise up to pray. He heard the old thanksgivings for daily mercies, the old supplications for their continuance, to which he had so often listened in weariness, but which were now among his dear remembrances. He perceived the slight inequality of his father’s voice when he came to speak of the Absent One. He noted how his mother turned her face to the broad and knotted trunk; how his elder brother scorned because the beard was rough upon his upper lip, to permit his features to be moved; how his younger sister drew down a low hanging branch before her eyes; and how the little one of all, whose sports had hitherto broken the decorum of the scene, understood the prayer for her playmate and burst into clamorous grief. Then he saw them go in at the door; and when Robin would have entered also, the latch tinkled into its place, and he was excluded from his home.

“Am I here, or there?” cried Robin, starting; for all at once, when his thoughts had become visible and audible in a dream, the long, wide, solitary street shone out before him.

He aroused himself and endeavored to fix his attention steadily upon the large edifice which he had surveyed before. But still his mind kept vibrating between fancy and reality. By turns, the pillars of the balcony lengthened into the tall, bare stems of pines, dwindled down to human figures, settled again into their true shape and size, and then commenced a new succession of changes. For a single moment, when he deemed himself awake, he could have sworn that a visage, one which he seemed to remember, yet could not absolutely name as his kinsman’s, was looking towards him from the Gothic window. A deeper

¹⁸ I.e., what if Major Molineux were dead.

sleep wrestled with and nearly overcame him, but fled at the sound of footsteps along the opposite pavement. Robin rubbed his eyes, discerned a man passing at the foot of the balcony, and addressed him in a loud, peevish, and lamentable cry.

“Halloo, friend! must I wait here all night for my kinsman, Major Molineux?”

The sleeping echoes awoke, and answered the voice; and the passenger, barely able to discern a figure sitting in the oblique shade of the steeple, traversed the street to obtain a nearer view. He was himself a gentleman in his prime, of open, intelligent, cheerful, and altogether prepossessing countenance. Perceiving a country youth, apparently homeless and without friends, he accosted him in a tone of real kindness, which had become strange to Robin’s ears.

“Well, my good lad, why are you sitting here?” inquired he. “Can I be of service to you in any way?”

“I am afraid not, Sir,” replied Robin, despondingly; “yet I shall take it kindly, if you’ll answer me a single question. I’ve been searching half the night for one Major Molineux; now, Sir, is there really such a person in these parts, or am I dreaming?”

“Major Molineux! The name is not altogether strange to me,” said the gentleman, smiling. “Have you any objection to telling me the nature of your business with him?”

Then Robin briefly related that his father was a clergyman, settled on a small salary at a long distance back in the country, and that he and Major Molineux were brothers’ children. The Major, having inherited riches and acquired civil and military rank, had visited his cousin in great pomp a year or two before; had manifested much interest in Robin and an elder brother, and, being childless himself, had thrown out hints respecting the future establishment of one of them in life. The elder brother was destined to succeed to the farm which his father cultivated in the interval of sacred duties. It was therefore determined that Robin should profit by his kinsman’s generous intentions, especially as he seemed to be rather the favorite and was thought to possess other necessary endowments.

“For I have the name of being a shrewd youth,” observed Robin, in this part of his story.

“I doubt not you deserve it,” replied his new friend, good naturedly, “but pray proceed.”

“Well, Sir, being nearly eighteen years old, and well-grown, as you see,” continued Robin, raising himself to his full height, “I thought it high time to begin the world. So my mother and sister put me in handsome trim, and my father gave me half the remnant of his last year’s salary, and five days ago I started for this place to pay the Major a visit. But, would you believe it, Sir? I crossed the ferry a little after dusk and have yet found nobody that would show me the way to his dwelling. Only an hour or two since, I was told to wait here and Major Molineux would pass by.”

“Can you describe the man who told you this?” inquired the gentleman.

“Oh, he was a very ill-favored fellow, Sir,” replied Robin, “with two great bumps on his forehead, a hook nose, fiery eyes, and, what struck me as the strangest, his face was of two different colors. Do you happen to know such a man, Sir?”

“Not intimately,” answered the stranger, “but I chanced to meet him a little time previous to your stopping me. I believe you may trust his word, and that the Major will very shortly pass through this street. In the mean time, as I have a singular curiosity to witness your meeting, I will sit down here upon the steps and bear you company.”

He seated himself accordingly, and soon engaged his companion in animated discourse. It was but of brief continuance, however, for a noise of shouting, which had long been remotely audible, drew so much nearer, that Robin inquired its cause.

“What may be the meaning of this uproar?” asked he. “Truly, if your town be always as noisy, I shall find little sleep, while I am an inhabitant.”

“Why, indeed, friend Robin, there do appear to be three or four riotous fellows abroad [outside; out and about] to-night,” replied the gentleman. “You must not expect all the stillness of your native woods, here in our streets. But the watch will shortly be at the heels of these lads, and—”

“Aye, and set them in the stocks by peep of day,” interrupted Robin, recollecting his own encounter with the drowsy lantern-bearer. “But, dear Sir, if I may trust my ears, an army of watchmen would never make head against such a multitude of rioters. There were at least a thousand voices went to make up that one shout.”

“May not one man have several voices, Robin, as well as two complexions?” said his friend.

“Perhaps a man may, but Heaven forbid that a woman should!” responded the shrewd youth, thinking of the seductive tones of the Major’s housekeeper.

The sounds of a trumpet in some neighboring street now became so evident and continual that Robin’s curiosity was strongly excited. In addition to the shouts, he heard frequent bursts from many instruments of discord, and a wild and confused laughter filled up the intervals. Robin rose from the steps, and looked wistfully towards a point whither several people seemed to be hastening.

“Surely some prodigious merrymaking is going on,” exclaimed he. “I have laughed very little since I left home, Sir, and should be sorry to lose an opportunity. Shall we just step round the corner by that darkish house, and take our share of the fun?”

“Sit down again, sit down, good Robin,” replied the gentleman, laying his hand on the skirt of the grey coat. “You forget that we must wait here for your kinsman, and there is reason to believe that he will pass by in the course of a very few moments.”

The near approach of the uproar had now disturbed the neighborhood. Windows flew open on all sides, and many heads, in the attire of the pillow and confused by sleep suddenly broken, were protruded to the gaze of whoever had leisure to observe them. Eager voices hailed each other from house to house, all demanding the explanation, which not a soul could give. Half-dressed men hurried towards the unknown commotion, stumbling as they went over the stone steps that thrust themselves into the narrow foot-walk. The shouts, the laughter, and the tuneless bray, the antipodes of music, came onward with increasing din, till scattered individuals and then denser bodies began to appear round a corner at the distance of a hundred yards.

“Will you recognize your kinsman, Robin, if he passes in this crowd?” inquired the gentleman.

“Indeed, I can’t warrant it, Sir; but I’ll take my stand here and keep a bright look out,” answered Robin, descending to the outer edge of the pavement.

A mighty stream of people now emptied into the street and came rolling slowly towards the church. A single horseman wheeled the corner in the midst of them, and close behind him came a band of fearful wind-instruments, sending forth a fresher discord

In *The Whole History of Grandfather’s Chair* (short stories, 1840), Hawthorne describes the mob attack on the house of Lieut. Gov. Thomas Hutchinson in Boston during the Stamp Act controversy of 1765.

“The Hutchinson Mob”

(Pt. III, Story 3)

“Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson . . . had formerly been much respected and beloved by the people, and had often proved himself a friend to their interests. But the time was come when he could not be a friend to the people without ceasing to be a friend to the king. It was pretty generally understood that Hutchinson would act according to the king’s wishes, right or wrong, like most of the other gentlemen who held offices under the crown.” . . .

In order to show what a fierce and dangerous spirit was now aroused among the inhabitants, Grandfather related a passage from history which we shall call The Hutchinson Mob.

On the evening of the 26th of August, 1765, a bonfire was kindled in King Street. It flamed high upward, and threw a ruddy light over the front of the Town House, on which was displayed a carved representation of the royal arms. The gilded vane of the cupola glittered in the blaze. The kindling of this bonfire was the well-known signal for the populace of Boston to assemble in the street.

Before the tar-barrels, of which the bonfire was made, were half burned out, a great crowd had come together. They were chiefly laborers and seafaring men, together with many young apprentices, and all those idle people about town who are ready for any kind of mischief. Doubtless some school-boys were among them.

While these rough figures stood round the blazing bonfire, you might hear them speaking bitter words against the high officers of the province. Governor Bernard, Hutchinson, Oliver, Storey, Hallowell, and other men whom King George delighted to honor, were reviled as traitors to the country. Now and then, perhaps, an officer of the crown passed along the street, wearing the gold-laced hat, white wig, and embroidered waistcoat which were the fashion of the day. But when the people beheld him they set up a wild and angry howl; and their faces had an evil aspect, which was made more terrible by the flickering blaze of the bonfire.

“I should like to throw the traitor right into that blaze!” perhaps one fierce rioter would say. . . .

“Grandfather,” said Laurence, indignantly, “if the people acted in this manner, they were not worthy of even so much liberty as the King of England was willing to allow them.”

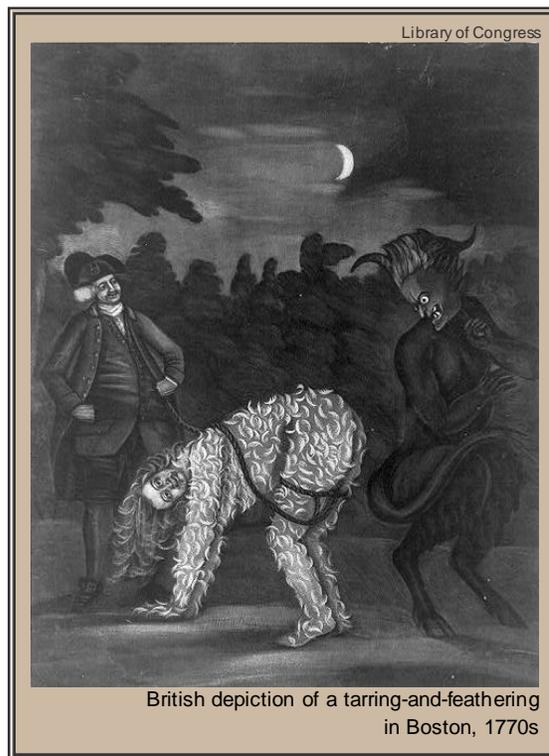
“It was a most unjustifiable act, like many other popular movements at that time,” replied Grandfather. “But we must not decide against the justice of the people’s cause merely because an excited mob was guilty of outrageous violence. Besides, all these things were done in the first fury of resentment. Afterwards the people grew more calm, and were more influenced by the counsel of those wise and good men who conducted them safely and gloriously through the Revolution.”

now that no intervening buildings kept it from the ear. Then a redder light disturbed the moonbeams, and a dense multitude of torches shone along the street, concealing by their glare whatever object they illuminated. The single horseman, clad in a military dress and bearing a drawn sword, rode onward as the leader, and, by his fierce and variegated countenance, appeared like war personified: the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them. In his train were wild figures in the Indian dress, and many fantastic shapes without a model, giving the whole march a visionary air as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain and were sweeping visibly through the midnight streets. A mass of people, inactive, except as applauding spectators, hemmed the procession in, and several women ran along the side-walks piercing the confusion of heavier sounds with their shrill voices of mirth or terror.

“The double-faced fellow has his eye upon me,” muttered Robin, with an indefinite but uncomfortable idea that he was himself to bear a part in the pageantry.

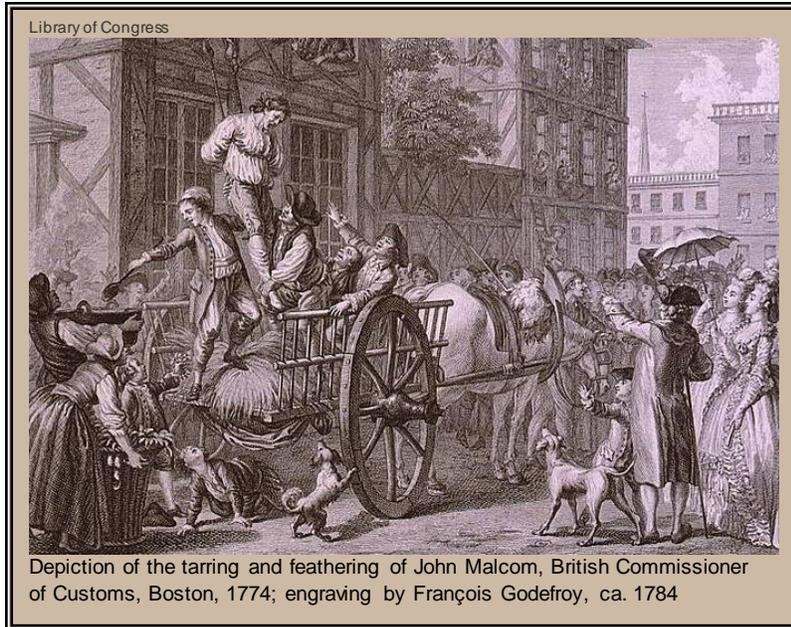
The leader turned himself in the saddle and fixed his glance full upon the country youth as the steed went slowly by. When Robin had freed his eyes from those fiery ones, the musicians were passing before him, and the torches were close at hand; but the unsteady brightness of the latter formed a veil which he could not penetrate. The rattling of wheels over the stones sometimes found its way to his ear, and confused traces of a human form appeared at intervals and then melted into the vivid light. A moment more and the leader thundered a command to halt. The trumpets vomited a horrid breath and held their peace. The shouts and laughter of the people died away, and there remained only a universal hum, nearly allied to silence. Right before Robin’s eyes was an uncovered cart. There the torches blazed the brightest, there the moon shone out like day, and there, in tar-and-feathery¹⁹ dignity, sat his kinsman Major Molineux!

He was an elderly man of large and majestic person and strong, square features, betokening a steady soul; but steady as it was, his enemies had found means to shake it. His face was pale as death, and far more ghastly. The broad forehead was contracted in his agony so that his eyebrows formed one grizzled line. His eyes were red and wild, and the foam hung white upon his quivering lip. His whole frame was agitated by a quick and continual tremor, which his pride strove to quell, even in those circumstances of overwhelming humiliation. But perhaps the bitterest pang of all was when his eyes met those of Robin, for he evidently knew him on the instant as the youth stood witnessing the foul disgrace of a head that had grown grey in honor. They stared at each other in silence, and Robin’s knees shook and his hair bristled with a mixture of pity and terror. Soon, however, a bewildering excitement began to seize upon his mind. The preceding adventures of the night, the unexpected appearance of the crowd, the torches, the confused din, and the hush that followed, the spectre of his kinsman reviled by that great multitude, all this, and more than all, a perception of tremendous ridicule in the whole scene, affected him with a sort of mental inebriety. At that moment a voice of sluggish merriment saluted Robin’s ears. He turned instinctively, and just behind the corner of the church stood the lantern-bearer, rubbing his eyes and drowsily enjoying the lad’s amazement. Then



British depiction of a tarring-and-feathering in Boston, 1770s

¹⁹ In colonial America, “tarring and feathering” was an act of humiliation and retribution committed by vigilante groups upon unpopular persons, especially officials of the British administration and, during the revolutionary period, Loyalists. The mob would strip the victim to the waist, pour hot tar over his/her body, and roll the person in feathers that would adhere to the tar. Usually the person was paraded about the area on a cart before being released, perhaps, or threatened with further violence. Occasionally the victims would die.



he heard a peal of laughter like the ringing of silvery bells. A woman twitched his arm, a saucy eye met his, and he saw the lady of the scarlet petticoat. A sharp, dry cachinnation²⁰ appealed to his memory, and, standing on tiptoe in the crowd, with his white apron over his head, he beheld the courteous little innkeeper. And lastly, there sailed over the heads of the multitude a great, broad laugh, broken in the midst by two sepulchral hems; thus—

“Haw, haw, haw—hem, hem—haw, haw, haw, haw!”

The sound proceeded from the balcony of the opposite edifice, and thither Robin turned his eyes. In

front of the Gothic window stood the old citizen, wrapped in a wide gown, his grey periwig exchanged for a nightcap which was thrust back from his forehead, and his silk stockings hanging down about his legs. He supported himself on his polished cane in a fit of convulsive merriment, which manifested itself on his solemn old features like a funny inscription on a tomb-stone. Then Robin seemed to hear the voices of the barbers, of the guests of the inn, and of all who had made sport of him that night. The contagion was spreading among the multitude when, all at once, it seized upon Robin, and he sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street. Every man shook his sides, every man emptied his lungs, but Robin’s shout was the loudest there. The cloud-spirits peeped from their silvery islands as the congregated mirth went roaring up the sky! The Man in the Moon heard the far bellow: “Oho,” quoth he, “the old Earth is frolicsome tonight!”

When there was a momentary calm in that tempestuous sea of sound, the leader gave the sign, the procession resumed its march. On they went, like fiends that throng in mockery round some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony. On they went, in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man’s heart. On swept the tumult, and left a silent street behind.

* * * * *

“Well, Robin, are you dreaming?” inquired the gentleman, laying his hand on the youth’s shoulder.

Robin started, and withdrew his arm from the stone post to which he had instinctively clung while the living stream rolled by him. His cheek was somewhat pale, and his eye not quite so lively as in the earlier part of the evening.

“Will you be kind enough to show me the way to the ferry?” said he, after a moment’s pause.

“You have then adopted a new subject of inquiry?” observed his companion, with a smile.

“Why, yes, Sir,” replied Robin, rather dryly. “Thanks to you, and to my other friends, I have at last met my kinsman, and he will scarce desire to see my face again. I begin to grow weary of a town life, Sir. Will you show me the way to the ferry?”

“No, my good friend Robin, not to-night, at least,” said the gentleman. “Some few days hence, if you continue to wish it, I will speed you on your journey. Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux.”

²⁰ Loud raucous laughter.