

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S HOUSE IN ROCK PARK

The following letter addressed to the Editor of the *Liverpool Mercury* is worthy of being placed on permanent record here, as a vindication of the action of the Sub-Committee of this Society which deals with the matter of Memorial Tablets :—

DEAR SIR,—In your recent review of Mr. Julian Hawthorne's new work, entitled "Hawthorne and his Circle," your reviewer cites the author's account of how he identified the house his father had occupied at Rock Ferry as a noticeable example of bad taste. As the matter is one of considerable local interest, may I hope that you will find space in an early issue for the account referred to and the appended correction thereof? Mr. Julian Hawthorne writes (p. 122) as follows :—

"As I have already made one confession in these pages not reflecting credit upon myself, I may as well make another now. Just thirty years after the events I am describing, somebody wrote to me from Rock Park, stating that the local inhabitants were desirous of putting up on the house which Hawthorne had occupied there, a marble or bronze slab recording the fact for the benefit of pilgrims. The Committee, however, did not know which of three or four houses was the right one, and the writer enclosed photographs of them all, and requested me to put a cross over our former habitation. Now, all the houses in Rock Park had been turned out of the same mould, and I knew no more than my interrogator which was which. But I

reflected that the Committee had been put to trouble and expense for photographs, postage stamps and what not, and that all that was really wanted was something to be sentimental over. So, rather than disappoint them, I resorted to a kind of *sortes virgilianæ*; I shut my eyes, turned round thrice, and made a mark at hazard on the line of photographs. The chances against my having hit it right were only four to one; the Committee were satisfied, the pilgrims have been made happy, and it is difficult to see where harm has been done. Nevertheless, the matter has weighed somewhat on my conscience ever since, and I am glad to have thus lightened myself of it."

From the inquiries I have made I can only conclude that Mr. Julian Hawthorne is labouring under an extraordinary delusion. There are no grounds for the regrets which have caused his peculiar confession, but, on the other hand, the confession must cause many regrets. No tablet has ever been placed on the house wherein Nathaniel Hawthorne and his family resided in Rock Park, Rock Ferry.

The facts are as follows:—In the year 1891 the vicar of Rock Ferry (the Rev. W. L. Paige-Cox) and the editor of *Wirral Notes and Queries* (the Rev. Francis Sanders) desired to identify the house in Rock Park where Nathaniel Hawthorne lived when he was the American Consul at Liverpool. In the course of the inquiries Mr. Paige-Cox wrote to the then American Consul, Mr. Thomas H. Sherman. Mr. Sherman wrote to Mr. Julian Hawthorne, and received a reply which was published and now lies before me. In the reply to Mr. Sherman, Mr. Julian Hawthorne expressed himself as "much gratified to hear of the proposed placing of a tablet on the house." He described the houses as he remembered them, quoted a

description from his mother's diary, and amongst other information, gave (correctly) the name of "our next-door neighbours on the left as you faced the house." There is no reference to photographs in the letter, as there would have been if any had been sent to be marked. Both Mr. Paige-Cox and Mr. Sanders have informed me that no photographs were taken, and consequently none were sent to Mr. Julian Hawthorne. Mr. Sanders published in the *Wirral Notes and Queries* for May 1892 (vol. i. pp. 34-6) an account of "Hawthorne's Home in Rock Park." The article is illustrated with a view of the house. The illustration was not taken from a photograph, but from a pen and ink drawing. At the end of the article Mr. Sanders appealed for subscriptions to defray the cost of a tablet. No subscriptions were received, no tablet was erected, and consequently there have been no pilgrims to be made happy. Mr. Julian Hawthorne asks if any harm has been done? Retrospectively, no. Prospectively, yes. If a tablet should ever be placed on the house, Mr. Julian Hawthorne's extraordinary confession will be repeatedly quoted to throw doubt on the identity of the house, and so ridicule those who may have placed a tablet thereon. To have prevented a tablet from being placed on the house is not a very serious matter, but it should not have been done in such a peculiar manner by the son of the man to whose memory the tablet would be intended as a mark of respect.

About the year 1896, the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire took up the work of erecting tablets on houses in this district with which distinguished people have been associated. My reason for troubling you now is to assure the public who have so kindly contributed to the cost of the tablets we have erected, that every care has

been taken to accurately identify the houses. No memory is trusted unless it confirms, or is confirmed by, authentic records. The advantage of this system is that it prevents the Committee from being fooled by any humorist—either American or English. The defect of the system is that it will not prevent any humorist from thinking that he has fooled the Committee. With apologies for troubling you at such length.

GEORGE T. SHAW,

*Hon. Sec. of the Memorial Tablets Sub-Committee of the
Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.*

ATHENÆUM, LIVERPOOL,
Nov. 14, 1903.