Sophia, who read it sitting together on the sills by the Salen to Salm's, wrote to her father that she and Elizabeth had "passed the time" on the train reading "The Sister Years," finding it "full of wisdom" and "illuminated with wit."

The address, presented as a seasonal allegory, features the New Year as a young woman enmeshed in misty fog and rain, arriving in Salem on the first morning train of January, 1839. Wearing a dress "rather too airy" for winter, and carrying a basket of roses, she has come to replace her "disconsolate" older sister, the Old Year, who waits for her on the steps of City Hall, burdened with an enormous folio volume, "her Book of Choriclises." Spilling from her arms are remnants of the difficult months of 1838: "several bundles of love letters, eloquently breathing an eternity of burning passion, which grew cold and perished, almost before the ink was dry," as well as "an assortment of many thousand broken promises and a large parcel of disappointed hopes."

The New Year listens uncomprehendingly to the Old Year's litany of woe, saying that she "threw my storehouse open to you with almost complete abandon, not contemplating your independent use of its contents," but "you look at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision."

By the time of the Civil War, Hawthorne and his family moved to Concord. As the town of Concord. There he was affiliated with a mysterious almoner that made it difficult for him to write. He died in 1864, at the age of fifty-nine, leaving behind several unpublished manuscripts.

Elizabeth lived to be ninety and became an advocate of progressive ideas, promoting abolition, woman suffrage, and Indian rights; establishing the first American kindergarten; and attending temperance meetings in Boston that featured Biddy, as a gathering place for transcendentalists, and a year later she became the publisher of "The Dial," the movement's main organ. She took over her own newspaper, she published Hawthorne's first stories for children, three volumes of historical tales beginning with "Her Grandfather's Chair," in 1840. But when the series didn't sell he was quarreled with her, and, in 1841, in a rare ex-pression of bitterness, Elizabeth confided to Theodore Parker, a new friend, that, as he put it in a commiserating letter, she had been "cruelly wounded." It's not clear whether she named Hawthorne as her collaborator.

Biographers often cite Sophia as the inspiration for several of Hawthorne's characters. Yet his relationship with Elizabeth may have been equally significant. All of his novels feature powerful women, and more often two. Both "The Birthright," "The Marble Faun," "The House of Seven Gables," and "The Blithedale Romance" are about "harmful" and manipulative—women who view themselves as sisters and vie for the affection of the novel's hero. The defiantly sensual Sibs- ter Pynne, Hawthorne's most memori-able heroine, combines the attractions of both Elizabeth and Sophia.

In 1853, Sophia and Nathaniel moved to England, where Hawthorne assumed the position of United States consul in Liverpool, a government sinecure provided by Presi dent Franklin Pierce, another Bowdoin alumnus. Four years later, Elizabeth sent Sophia an anti-slavery essay she had written. Hawthorne intercepted it and returned it to her without showing Sophia, chiding her for "boring" her sister with propaganda. "No doubt it seems the treach of truths to you," he wrote, "but you look at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision."

"The Civil War, Hawthorne and his family moved to Concord. As the town of Concord. There he was affiliated with a mysterious almoner that made it difficult for him to write. He died in 1864, at the age of fifty-nine, leaving behind several unpublished manuscripts."

The emphasis of "I must hasten to tell you that it is all a mistake. It is true that for the first three years after Hawthorne became known to you and I you and I were truly and earnestly friends, and Sophia was considered so much of an invalid as to be marriable by any of us, including Atwood and Hawthorne."

Except to a few close friends, Eliza- beth never spoke of how Hawthorne had treated Sophia. She was not only not even to Sophia, to whom she revealed devoted. Mary Church, realizing the signif-icance of Elizabeth's expressions, had debated whether to include it in her biography: "Only after careful consideration did I decide to give it as an incident of her life that tends to clear the atmosphere & put in right relation much that has seemed inexplicable and indeed must so remain until the whole truth was made known— Naturally it could never be doing the lives of any who bore a part."

Eliza-thelizabeth's relatives evidently consid- ered the biography too inflammatory to publish. Benjamin T. Pickman, Jr., Eliza- beth's nephew, had lent his letters and journals to Church, but after he read her manuscript she refused to cooperate fur-ther with her, having seen the possibility of almost complete abandonment, not con- templating your independent use of its contents, "he wrote to her in no uncertain terms. (Mann have destroyed many to him with no evil inclination in them."

Eliza-thetothethen to whom he had told you yesterday that last Sunday, Sophia wrote. "But I know he did not wish to say any partic- ular thing, and so I will not try to make sense. I do not believe any one you determined to help him better than you except myself," she wrote. "He knew you appreciated you— as he constantly did— as well as I am her best friend, he always said."