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THE SCARLET LETTER by Nathaniel Hawthorne

EDITOR'S NOTE

Nathaniel Hawthorne was already a man of forty-six, and a tale writer of some twenty-four years' standing, when "The Scarlet Letter" appeared. He was born at Salem, Mass., on July 4th, 1804, son of a sea-captain. He led there a shy and rather sombre life; of few artistic encouragements, yet not wholly uncongenial, his moody, intensely meditative temperament being considered. Its colours and shadows are marvelously reflected in his "Twice-Told Tales" and other short stories, the product of his first literary period. Even his college days at Bowdoin did not quite break through his acquired and inherited reserve; but beneath it all, his faculty of divining men and women was exercised with almost uncanny prescience and subtlety. "The Scarlet Letter," which explains as much of this unique imaginative art, as is to be gathered from reading his highest single achievement, yet needs to be ranged with his other writings, early and late, to have its last effect. In the year that saw it published, he began "The House of the Seven Gables," a later romance or prose-tragedy of the Puritan-American community as he had himself known it--defrauded of art and the joy of life, "starving for symbols" as Emerson has it. Nathaniel Hawthorne died at Plymouth, New Hampshire, on May 18th, 1864.

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I. THE PRISON DOOR

A throng of bearded men, inter-mixed with women, was assembled in front of a wooden door which was heavy oak, studded with iron spikes.

The founders of a new colony have recognised it necessary to allot a cemetery, and a prison. It may be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house almost as soon as they marked out the first burial-ground. Some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age. The rust on the iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the New World. Between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, overgrown. But on one side of the door, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the criminal as he came forth to his doom.

II. THE MARKET-PLACE

The grass-plot before the jail, in Prison Lane, was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston, all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron-clamped oaken door. The grim rigidity of these good people would have suggested some awful business. It could have been the anticipated execution of some culprit. But, no inference could be drawn.

It might be that a sluggish bond-servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post. It might be that a religionist was to be scourged out of town, or an Indian, whom the white man's firewater had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven into the shadow of the forest. It might be, that a witch, like Mistress Hibbins, was to die upon the gallows. In either case, there was the same solemnity of the spectators, as befitted a people among whom religion and law were identical. A transgressor might look for no sympathy from such bystanders at the scaffold.

On the summer morning when our story begins, the women in the crowd appeared to take a peculiar interest in whatever penal infliction might be expected.

The bright morning sun, therefore, shone on broad shoulders and round and ruddy cheeks and had hardly yet grown paler or thinner in New England. There was a boldness of speech among these matrons that would startle us today, in respect to its purport or its volume of tone.

"Goodwives," said a dame of fifty, "I'll tell ye a piece of my mind. It would be great for the public if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of this Hester Prynne. What think ye, gossips? If the hussy stood up for judgment before us five, would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? I think not."

"People say," said another, "that the Reverend Master Dimmesdale, her godly pastor, takes it to heart that such a scandal should have come upon his congregation."

"The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch--that is true," added a third woman. "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead. Madame Hester would have winced at that. But she--the naughty baggage--little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown! Why, she may cover it with a brooch, or other adornment, and so walk the streets as brave as ever!"

"Ah, but," interposed, more softly, a young wife, holding a child by the hand, "let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart."

"Why do we talk of brands, whether on her gown or the flesh of her forehead?" cried another female. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die; is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the

Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed a man in the crowd, "is there no virtue in woman, except from a wholesome fear of the gallows? That is the hardest word yet! Hush now, for the lock is turning in the door, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself."

At the door of the jail there appeared, like a black shadow emerging into sunshine, the grim presence of the town-beadle, with a sword by his side, and his staff of office in his hand. This person represented the whole severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final application to the offender. Stretching forth the official staff in his left hand, he laid his right upon the shoulder of a young woman, whom he drew forward, until, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air as if by her own free will. She carried in her arms a child, a baby of three months old, who turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day; because it had lived only with the grey twilight of the prison.

When the young woman--the mother of this child--stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; so that she might conceal a certain token, which was fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging

that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much gorgeous luxuriance, that it was of a splendour greatly beyond what was allowed by the regulations of the colony.

The young woman was tall and very elegant. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam; and a face which, besides being beautiful, had deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too, and had a certain state and dignity. And never had Hester Prynne appeared more ladylike, than as she walked from the prison. Those who had before known her, and had expected her to be dimmed by a disastrous cloud, were astonished to see how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and shame in which she was enveloped. Her clothes, which she had made for the occasion in prison, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit. The point which drew all eyes was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.

"She hath good skill at her needle, that's certain," remarked one of the females; "but did ever a woman, before this brazen hussy, have such

a way of showing it? Why, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they meant for a punishment?"

"It were well," muttered one of the old dames, "if we stripped Madame Hester's rich gown off her dainty shoulders; and as for the red letter which she hath stitched so curiously, I'll bestow a rag of mine to make a fitter one!"

"Oh, peace, neighbours--peace!" whispered their youngest companion; "do not let her hear you! There is not a stitch in that embroidered letter that she has not felt in her heart."

The grim beadle now made a gesture with his staff. "Make way, good people in the King's name!" cried he. "Open a passage; and I promise ye, Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her apparel from this time till an hour past noon. A blessing on the colony of Boston, where sinfulness is dragged out into the sunshine! Come, Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!"

A lane was opened through the crowd of spectators. Preceded by the beadle, and attended by a bunch of stern-looking men and unkind-looking women, Hester Prynne set forth towards the place appointed for her punishment. A crowd of eager and curious schoolboys, understanding little of the matter, except that it gave them a half-holiday, ran before her, turning their heads continually to stare into her face and at the baby in her arms, and at the shameful letter on her breast. It was no great distance from the

prison door to the market-place. Measured by the prisoner's experience, however, it might be seen as a journey of some length; for haughty as she was, she might have undergone an agony from every footstep of those that came to see her, as if her heart had been flung into the street for them all to trample upon. It is human nature though, to not let the sufferer know how painful the punishment is during the punishment, but in the pang of shame that comes every time one remembers it. With almost a serene manner, therefore, Hester passed through this portion of her ordeal, and came to the scaffold, at the western extremity of the market-place. It stood nearly beneath the eaves the church, and appeared to be a fixture there.

In fact, this scaffold constituted a punishment, which now is not used, but was held, in the old time, to be effective in the promotion of good citizenship. It was the platform of the pillory, and above it rose the framework to confine the human head in its tight grasp, and hold it up to the public gaze. The very ideal of public shame was embodied in this piece of wood and iron. The culprit could not hide his face for shame; it was the essence of this punishment to do.

In Hester Prynne's instance, her sentence was that she should stand a certain time upon the platform, but without undergoing that grip about the neck and confinement of the head. Knowing well her part, she ascended a flight of wooden steps, and was thus displayed to the multitude, at about the height of a man's shoulders above the street. Here

was the taint of deepest sin, that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant that she had borne.

The scene was not without a mixture of awe. The witnesses of Hester Prynne's disgrace had not yet passed beyond their simplicity. They were stern enough to look upon her death, if that had been the sentence, without a murmur at its severity. The solemn presence of the governor, and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town, all of whom sat or stood in a balcony of the meeting-house, looking down upon the platform, kept the scene from turning to ridicule. Accordingly, the crowd was sombre and grave. The unhappy culprit sustained herself as best a woman might, under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her, and concentrated at her bosom. It was almost intolerable, but she had fortified herself to encounter the stings and venomous stabs of public.

Yet there were intervals when the whole scene, in which she was the most conspicuous object, where her memory was active, and kept bringing up other scenes than this street of a little town: other faces than were from beneath the brims of those steeple-crowned hats. Reminiscences, passages of infancy and school-days, sports, childish quarrels, and the little domestic traits of her maiden years, came swarming back upon her; one picture as vivid as another; as if all alike a play. Be that as it might, the scaffold of the pillory revealed to Hester Prynne the entire

track along which she had been treading since her happy infancy. Standing there, she saw again her native village, in Old England, and her home: a decayed house of grey stone, with a poverty-stricken aspect, but retaining a shield of arms over the door. She saw her father's face, with its white beard; her mother's, too, with the look of anxious love which it always wore in her remembrance. She saw her own face, glowing with girlish beauty, and illuminating the mirror in which she had gazed. There she saw another man, very old, pale, thin, and scholar-like, with eyes dim and bleared by the lamp-light that had served them to pore over many books. Yet those same eyes had a strange, penetrating power, when it was their purpose to read the human soul. This figure, as Hester Prynne recalled, was slightly deformed, with the left shoulder a trifle higher than the right. Next rose before her in memory, the narrow streets, the tall, grey houses, the huge cathedrals of Amsterdam; where new life had awaited her with the misshapen scholar. Lastly, came back the market-place of the Puritan settlement, with all the townspeople assembled, and looking at Hester Prynne who stood on the scaffold of the pillory, an infant on her arm, and the letter A, in scarlet, fantastically embroidered with gold thread, upon her bosom.

Could it be true? She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real. Yes these were her realities--all else had vanished!

III. THE RECOGNITION

Hester Prynne, the wearer of the scarlet letter was at length relieved, by noticing, on the outskirts of the crowd, a figure. An Indian was standing there; but the red men were not infrequent visitors of the English settlements. By the Indian's side, and evidently sustaining a companionship with him, stood a white man, wearing a strange combination of Puritan and Indian costume.

He was not tall. There was a remarkable intelligence in his face. Although he was clothed strangely, it was evident to Hester Prynne that one of this man's shoulders rose higher than the other. Again, at the first instant of seeing this man, and the slight deformity of his figure, she pressed her infant to her bosom and the poor babe uttered another cry of pain. But the mother did not seem to hear it.

At his arrival in the market-place, and some time before she saw him, the stranger had bent his eyes on Hester Prynne. It was carelessly at first. Very soon, however, his look became keen and penetrative. Horror twisted itself across his features. His face darkened with some powerful emotion, which he controlled by an effort of his will. When he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger and laid it on his lips. Then touching the shoulder of a townsman who stood near to him, said: "Good Sir, who is this woman?—and why is she here set up to

public shame?"

"You must be a stranger in this region, friend," answered the townsman, looking curiously at the questioner and his savage companion, "else you would surely have heard of Hester Prynne and her evil doings. She hath raised a great scandal in godly Master Dimmesdale's church."

"I am a stranger, and have been a wanderer, against my will. I have met with mishaps by sea and land, and have been long held in bonds among the Indians; and am now brought to be ransomed out of my captivity. Please tell me of Hester Prynne's--have I her name right?--of this woman's offences, and what has brought her to yonder scaffold?"

"It must gladden your heart, after your troubles and sojourn in the wilderness," said the townsman, "to find yourself at length in a land where sin is punished in the sight of rulers and people, as here in our godly New England. Yonder woman, Sir, was the wife of a certain scholarly man, English by birth, but who had long ago dwelt in Amsterdam, whence he was minded to cross over the sea. He sent his wife before him, remaining himself to look after some necessary affairs. In some two years, the woman has been a dweller here in Boston, and no tidings have come of this gentleman, Master Prynne; and his young wife, look you, being left to her own misguidance--"

"Ah!--aha!--I conceive you," said the stranger with a bitter smile. "So learned a man as you speak of should have learned this too in his books.

And who, Sir, may be the father of yonder babe--it is some three or four months old, I should judge--which Mistress Prynne is holding in her arms?"

"That matter remaineth a riddle," answered the townsman. "Madame Hester absolutely refuseth to speak, and the magistrates have laid their heads together in vain. The guilty one stands looking on at this sad spectacle, unknown by us, and forgetting that God sees him."

"That learned man should come himself to look into the mystery."

"It behoves him well if he be still in life," responded the townsman. "Our Massachusetts magistracy, thinking that this woman is youthful and fair, and doubtless was strongly tempted to her fall, and most likely, her husband may be at the bottom of the sea, they have not been bold to put in force the extremity of our law against her, of death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart they have doomed her to stand three hours on the platform of the pillory, and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom."

"A wise sentence," remarked the stranger. "She will be a living sermon against sin, until the letter be engraved upon her tombstone. It irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her sin should not at least, stand on the scaffold by her side. But he will be known!"

He bowed courteously to the townsman, and whispering a few words to his Indian attendant, they both made their way through the crowd. While this passed, Hester Prynne had been standing on her pedestal, still

with a fixed gaze towards the stranger. Talking to him would have been more terrible than even to have him see her as she now was, with the hot mid-day sun burning down upon her face, and lighting up its shame; with the scarlet token of infamy on her breast; with the sin-born infant in her arms; with a whole people staring at her. Dreadful as it was, she realized it was better to stand with so many between him and her, than to greet him face to face--alone. She worried about the dreaded moment when her punishment would be over. Involved in these thoughts, she scarcely heard a voice behind her until it had repeated her name in a loud and solemn tone.

"Listen to me, Hester Prynne!" said the voice.

It has already been noticed that directly over the platform on which Hester Prynne stood was a kind of balcony, appended to the meeting-house. It was the place where proclamations were to be made. Here, to witness the scene sat Governor Bellingham himself with four sergeants around his chair. He wore a dark feather in his hat, a border of embroidery on his cloak, and a black velvet tunic beneath—a gentleman advanced in years, with a hard experience written in his wrinkles. He was not ill-fitted to be the head and representative of a community. The other eminent men with him were good men, just and sage. But, out of the whole human family, these were men who should be less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil. Hester Prynne now turned her face. She seemed conscious that

whatever sympathy she might expect lay in the larger and warmer heart of the crowd; for, as she lifted her eyes towards the balcony, the unhappy woman grew pale, and trembled. The voice which had called her attention was that of the reverend John Wilson, the eldest clergyman of Boston, a man of kind and genial spirit. "Hester Prynne," said the clergyman, "I have striven with my young brother here, under whose preaching of the Word you have been privileged to sit"--here Mr. Wilson laid his hand on the shoulder of a pale young man beside him--"I have sought this godly youth, that he should deal with you before these wise rulers, and in hearing of all the people, as touching the vileness and blackness of your sin. Knowing your natural temper better than I, he could the better judge what arguments to use, such as might prevail over your hardness and obstinacy, so that you should no longer hide the name of him who tempted you to this fall. But he opposes to me that it were wronging the very nature of woman to force her to lay open her heart's secrets in such broad daylight, and in presence of so great a multitude. Truly, as I sought to convince him, the shame lay in the commission of the sin, and not in the showing of it forth. What say you to it, once again, brother Dimmesdale? Must it be thou, or I, that shall deal with this poor sinner's soul?"

There was a murmur among the dignified occupants of the balcony; and Governor Bellingham, speaking in an authoritative voice, "Good Master Dimmesdale," said he, "the responsibility of this woman's

soul lies with you. Convince her to repentance and confession, as a proof."

The directness of this appeal drew the eyes of the whole crowd upon the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale--young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest land. His eloquence and religious fervour had already given the highest eminence in his profession. He was a person of very striking aspect, with large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which was nervous. There was an air about this young minister--an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look--as of a being quite astray, and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own. So far as his duties would permit, he trod in the shadowy by-paths, and thus kept himself simple and childlike, coming forth with a freshness and dewy purity of thought, which, as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel.

Such was the young man whom the Reverend Mr. Wilson and the Governor had introduced so openly to the public notice, bidding him speak, in the hearing of all men, to that mystery of a woman's soul, so sacred even in its pollution. The nature of his position drove the blood from his cheek.

"Speak to the woman, my brother," said Mr. Wilson. "It is of moment to her soul. Tell her to confess the truth!" The Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale bent his head, in silent prayer, and then came forward. "Hester Prynne," said he, leaning over the balcony and looking down steadfastly

into her eyes, "thou hears what this good man says. If thou feels it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will be made more effective to her salvation, speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so than to hide a guilty heart through life. What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him to add hypocrisy to sin?"

The young pastor's voice was sweet, rich, deep, and broken. Hearing it caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and brought the listeners into sympathy. Even the poor baby at Hester's bosom was affected by the same influence, for it directed its vacant gaze towards Mr. Dimmesdale, and held up its little arms with a murmur. So powerful seemed the minister's appeal that the people believed that Hester Prynne would speak out the guilty name, or else that the guilty one himself would be drawn forth and compelled to ascend the scaffold.

Hester shook her head.

"Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven's mercy!" cried Reverend Wilson, more harshly than before. "Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast."

"Never," replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. "It is too deeply

branded. Ye cannot take it off. I might endure his agony as well as mine!"

"Speak, woman!" said another voice, sternly, proceeding from the crowd, "Speak; and give your child a father!"

"I will not speak!" answered Hester, turning pale, but responding to this voice, which she surely recognised. "My child must seek a heavenly father; she shall never know an earthly one!"

"She will not speak!" said Mr. Dimmesdale, leaning over the balcony. "Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!"

The elder clergyman, who had carefully prepared himself for the occasion, then talked to the multitude about sin, in all its branches, but with continual reference to the shameful letter. So forcibly did he dwell upon this symbol, for the hour or more during which he spoke, that it assumed new terrors in their imagination, and seemed to derive its scarlet hue from the flames of Hell itself. Hester Prynne, meanwhile, kept her place upon the pedestal of shame, with glazed eyes, and an air of weary indifference.

In this state, the voice of the preacher thundered upon her ears. The infant pierced the air with its screams; she strove to hush it. With the same hard demeanour, she was led back to prison, and vanished from the public gaze within its iron-clamped portal. It was whispered by those who peered after her that the scarlet letter threw a lurid gleam along the dark passage-way of the interior.

IV. THE INTERVIEW

After her return to the prison, Hester Prynne was in a state of nervous excitement, that demanded constant watchfulness, lest she should do violence on herself, or do some half-frenzied mischief to the poor babe. As night approached, Master Brackett, the jailer, thought fit to call a physician. There was need of professional assistance, not merely for Hester herself, but more urgently for the child—who seemed to have drunk in all the turmoil, the anguish and despair, which pervaded the mother's system. It now writhed in pain.

Closely following the jailer, appeared that individual, whose presence in the crowd had been of such deep interest to Hester. He was lodged in the prison, not as suspected of any crime, but as the most convenient place for him to stay until the magistrates could confer with the Indians respecting his ransom. His name was announced as Roger Chillingworth. The jailer, after ushering him into the room, remained a moment, marvelling at the quiet that followed his entrance; for Hester Prynne had immediately become as still as death, although the child continued to moan.

"Leave me alone with my patient," said the practitioner. "Trust me, you shall briefly have peace in your house."

The stranger's first care was given to the child, whose cries made it necessary to postpone all other business to the task of soothing her. He

examined the infant carefully, and then proceeded to unclasp a leathern case. It appeared to contain medical preparations, one of which he mingled with a cup of water.

"My old studies in alchemy," said he, "and my sojourn have made a better physician of me than many that claim the medical degree. Here, woman! The child is yours--she is not mine--neither will she recognise my voice as a father's. Administer this, with thy hand."

Hester repelled the offered medicine, at the same time gazing with apprehension into his face. "Wouldst thou avenge thyself on the innocent babe?" whispered she.

"Foolish woman!" responded the physician, half coldly, half soothingly. "What should ail me to harm this misbegotten babe? The medicine is good, and were it my child, I could do no better for it."

As she still hesitated, he took the infant in his arms, and himself administered the draught. The moans of the little patient subsided; and in a few moments, as is the custom of young children after relief from pain, it sank into a profound slumber. The physician next bestowed his attention on the mother. With calm and intent scrutiny, he felt her pulse, looked into her eyes--a gaze that made her heart shrink and shudder, because so familiar, and yet so strange and cold--and, finally, satisfied with his investigation, proceeded to mingle another draught.

"I have learned many new secrets in the wilderness, and here is one

of them--a recipe that an Indian taught me. Drink it! It may be less soothing than a sinless conscience. That I cannot give thee. But it will calm the swell and heaving of thy passion."

He presented the cup to Hester, who received it with an earnest look into his face; not precisely a look of fear, yet full of doubt as to what his purposes might be. She looked also at her slumbering child.

"I have thought of death," said she--"have wished for it--would even have prayed for it, were it fit that such as I should pray for anything. Yet, if death be in this cup, I bid thee think again. See! it is at my lips."

"Drink, then," replied he, still with the same cold composure. "Dost thou know me so little, Hester Prynne? Even if I imagine revenge, what could I do better than to let thee live so that this burning shame may still blaze upon thy bosom?" As he spoke, he laid his long fore-finger on the scarlet letter, which forthwith seemed to scorch into Hester's breast, as if it had been red hot. He noticed her involuntary gesture, and smiled. "Live, therefore, and bear about thy doom with thee, in the eyes of men and women--in the eyes of him whom thou did call thy husband--in the eyes of your child! And, that thou may live, take off this draught."

Without further delay, Hester Prynne drained the cup, and seated herself on the bed, where the child was sleeping; while he drew the only chair, and took his seat beside her. She could not but tremble at this; for she felt that he was the man whom she had most deeply injured.

"Hester," said he, "I ask not why or how you have fallen into the pit. The reason is not far to seek. It was my foolishness, and your weakness. I--a man of thought--a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the dream of knowledge--what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own? Misshapen from my birth, how could I think that intellectual gifts might cover a physical deformity in a young girl's fantasy? Men call me wise. I might have foreseen this. I might have known that, as I came out of the forest, and entered this settlement of Christian men, the very first object to meet my eyes would be Hester, standing up, a statue of shame, before the people. From the moment when we came down the church-steps together, a married pair, I might have seen the fire of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path!"

"You know," said Hester--for, depressed as she was, she could not endure this last quiet stab at the token of her shame--"you know that I was honest with thee. I felt no love, nor pretended any."

"True," replied he. "It was my folly! But, up to that era of my life, I had lived in vain. The world had been so cheerless! My heart was large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one! It seemed not so wild a dream--old as I was, and sombre as I was, and misshapen as I was--that the simple bliss might yet be mine. And so, Hester, I drew thee into my heart!"

"I have greatly wronged thee," murmured Hester.

"We have wronged each other," answered he. "Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed you into a false and unnatural relation with my decay. Therefore, as a man who has not thought in vain, I seek no vengeance. Between thee and me, the scale hangs balanced. But, Hester, the man lives who has wronged us both! Who is he?"

"Ask me not!" replied Hester. "That thou shalt never know!"

"Never?" rejoined he, with a smile of dark and self-relying intelligence. "Never know him! Believe me, Hester, there are few things hidden from the man who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery. Thou may cover up thy secret from the prying multitude. Thou may conceal it, too, from the ministers and magistrates, even as thou did this day. But, as for me, I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books. There is a sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly. Sooner or later, he must be mine."

The eyes of the wrinkled scholar glowed so intensely upon her, that Hester clasped her hand over her heart, dreading lest he should read the secret there at once.

"Thou wilt not reveal his name? Not the less he is mine," resumed he, with a look of confidence. "He wears no scarlet letter on his garment, as you do, but I shall read it on his heart. Yet fear not for him! I shall not interfere with Heaven's own method of retribution, or turn him in to human

law. I shall not try to kill him; no, ruin his reputation, if he be a man of fair repute. Let him live! Let him hide himself in outward honour, if he may! Not the less he shall be mine!"

"Thy acts are like mercy," said Hester, bewildered and appalled; "but thy words interpret thee as a terror!"

"Thou hast kept the secret of thy paramour. Keep, likewise, mine! There are none in this land that know me. Breathe not to any human soul that thou didst ever call me husband! Here I shall pitch my tent. No matter whether of love or hate: no matter whether of right or wrong! Hester Prynne, thou belong to me. My home is where thou art. Betray me not!"

"Why dost thou desire it?" inquired Hester, shrinking from this secret bond. "Why not announce thyself openly, and cast me off at once?"

"It may be," he replied, "because I do not want to be the husband of a faithless woman. It may be for other reasons. Enough, it is my purpose to live and die unknown. Let, therefore, thy husband be to the world as one already dead, and of whom no tidings shall ever come. Recognise me not, by word, by sign, by look! Breathe not the secret, above all, to the man. Shouldst thou fail me in this, beware! His fame, his position, his life will be in my hands. Beware!"

"I will keep thy secret, as I have his," said Hester. "Swear it!" rejoined he. And she took the oath.

"And now, Mistress Prynne," said Roger Chillingworth, as he was

hereafter to be named, "I leave thee alone with thy infant and the scarlet letter! How is it, Hester? Must thou wear the token in thy sleep? Art thou afraid of nightmares and hideous dreams?"

"Why dost thou smile at me?" inquired Hester, troubled at the expression of his eyes. "Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about us? Hast thou enticed me into a bond that will ruin my soul?"

"Not thy soul," he answered, with a smile. "No, not thine!"

V. HESTER AT HER NEEDLE

Hester Prynne's term of confinement was now at an end. Her prison-door was thrown open, and she came forth into the sunshine, which seemed, to her sick and morbid heart, as if meant for no other purpose than to reveal the scarlet letter on her breast. Perhaps there was a more real torture in her first unattended footsteps from the prison than even in the procession and spectacle that have been described, where she was pointed at. The very law that condemned her had held her up through the terrible ordeal. But now, with this walk from her prison door, began the daily custom; and she must either carry it forward, or sink beneath it. She could no longer borrow from the future to help her through the present grief. Tomorrow would bring its own trial with it; so would the next day, and so would the next: each its own trial. The accumulating days and added years would pile up their misery upon the heap of shame. Throughout them all, she would become the general symbol at which the preacher might point as the images of woman's frailty and sinful passion. Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast—at her, the child of honourable parents—at her, who had once been innocent—as the figure, the body, the reality of sin. And over her grave, the infamy that she must carry there would be her only monument.

It may seem marvelous that, with the world before her—kept by no restrictive clause within the limits of the Puritan settlement—free to return

to her birth-place, or to any other European land, and there hide her character and identity under a new exterior, it may seem marvelous that this woman should still call that place her home, where, she must be shamed. But there is a feeling that compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghost-like, the spot where some great and marked event has happened. Her sin, her shame were the roots which she had struck into the soil. It was as if a new birth had converted the forest-land into Hester Prynne's life-long home. All other scenes of earth—even that village of rural England--were foreign to her, in comparison.

The chain that bound her here was of iron links, and could never be broken. It might be, too, that another feeling kept her within the scene and pathway that had been so fatal. There dwelt one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union that, unrecognized on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment, and make that their marriage-altar. What, finally, she reasoned upon as her motive for continuing a resident of New England--was half a truth, and half a self-delusion. Here, she said to herself had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment; and so, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost: more saint-like, because the result of martyrdom.

Hester Prynne, therefore, did not flee. On the outskirts of the town, there was a small thatched cottage. It had been built by an earlier

settler, and abandoned, because the soil about it was too sterile for cultivation; its remoteness put it out of social activity. It stood on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-covered hills, towards the west. A clump of scrubby trees did not conceal the cottage from view. In this little lonesome dwelling, with some slender means that she possessed, and by the licence of the magistrates, who still kept watch over her, Hester established herself, with her infant child. A mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot. Children would creep near and watch her plying her needle at the cottage-window, or standing in the doorway, or laboring in her little garden, or coming forth along the pathway that led townward, and, seeing the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off with a strange contagious fear.

Lonely as was Hester's situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, did not want. She possessed an art that supplied food for her thriving infant and herself. It was the art of needle-work. She wore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her skill. Here, in the dark simplicity of the Puritans' modes of dress, there might be a call for the finer productions of her handiwork.

Public ceremonies were marked by a well-conducted ceremonial, and a somber magnificence. Gorgeously embroidered gloves were deemed necessary to the men assuming the reins of power, and were readily allowed to individuals dignified by rank or wealth, even while laws forbade these

and extravagances to the lower classes. For funerals, too—whether for the apparel of the dead body, or the sorrow of the survivors—there was a frequent demand for such labour as Hester Prynne could supply. Baby-linen—for babies then wore robes of state—afforded still another possibility.

By degrees, not very slowly, her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion. Her needle-work was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfs, and the minister on his band; it decked the baby's little cap; it was shut up in the coffins of the dead. But it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in to embroider the white veil which was to cover the pure blushes of a bride. The exception indicated the relentless vigour with which society frowned upon her sin.

Hester sought not to acquire anything beyond a subsistence for herself, and a simple abundance for her child. Her own dress was of the coarsest materials and the darkest hue, with only that one ornament—the scarlet letter—which it was her doom to wear. The child's attire, on the other hand, was distinguished by a fanciful ingenuity, which served to heighten the airy charm that early began to develop itself in the little girl. Except for that small expenditure in the decoration of her infant, Hester bestowed all her extra money in charity, on wretches less miserable than herself, and who insulted the hand that fed them. Much of the time, she made coarse garments for the poor. It is probable that there was an idea of

penance in this mode of occupation, and that she offered up a real sacrifice of enjoyment in devoting so many hours to such rude handiwork. Women derive a pleasure from the delicate toil of the needle. To Hester Prynne it might have been a mode of expressing, and therefore soothing, the passion of her life. In this manner, Hester Prynne came to have a part to perform in the world. But every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished. The poor often reviled the hand that was stretched forth. Women of elevated rank, likewise, were accustomed to distil drops of bitterness into her heart. Hester had schooled herself long and well; and she never responded to these attacks.

Continually, and in a thousand other ways, did she feel the anguish that had been so cunningly contrived for her by the ever-active sentence of the Puritans. Clergymen paused in the streets, to speak to the crowd, with around the poor, sinful woman. If she entered a church, trusting to share the Sabbath smile of the Universal Father, it was often her mishap to find herself the subject. She grew to have a dread of children; for they had from their parents a vague idea of something horrible in this dreary woman with never any companion but one only child. Therefore, first allowing her to pass, they pursued her at a distance with shrill cries. Another torture was felt in the gaze of a new eye. When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter they branded it afresh in Hester's soul; so that, oftentimes, she could

scarcely refrain, yet always did, from covering the symbol with her hand. But then, again, an accustomed eye had likewise its own anguish to inflict. Its cool stare of familiarity was intolerable. From first to last, in short, Hester Prynne had always this dreadful agony in feeling a human eye upon the token; the spot never grew callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with daily torture.

But sometimes, she felt an eye--a human eye--upon the brand, that seemed to give a momentary relief, as if half of her agony were shared. The next instant, back it all rushed again, with still a deeper throb of pain; for, in that brief interval, she had sinned anew. (Had Hester sinned alone?)

Walking to and fro, she felt that the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense. She believed that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts. If truth were to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne's. Hester Prynne yet struggled to believe that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself.

The vulgar townspeople had a story about the scarlet letter. They said that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth, but was red-hot with infernal fire, and could be seen glowing whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night-time. It seared Hester's bosom so deeply, that perhaps there was more truth in the rumor than we may be inclined to admit.

VI. PEARL

We have as yet hardly spoken of the infant; that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung a lovely and immortal flower, out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion. How strange it seemed to the sad woman, as she watched the growth, and the beauty that became every day more brilliant, and the intelligence that threw its quivering sunshine over the tiny features of this child! Her Pearl--for so had Hester called her; named "Pearl," as being of great price--purchased with all she had--her mother's only treasure! How strange, indeed! Man had marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter. God had given her a lovely child to connect her parent forever, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven! Yet these thoughts affected Hester Prynne less with hope than apprehension. She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no faith, therefore, that its result would be good. Day after day she looked fearfully into the child's face, ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity that should correspond with her guiltiness. Certainly there was no physical defect. The child had a native grace. Little Pearl was not clad in rustic weeds. Her mother, had bought the richest material, and allowed her imagination in the decoration of the dresses which the child wore before the public eye. So magnificent was the small figure, and such was the splendor of Pearl's own proper beauty. However, there was a trait of passion which she never lost.

Her nature appeared to possess depth, too, as well as variety. The

child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence, a great law had been broken; and the result was a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder.

The discipline of the family in those days was of a far more rigid kind than now. The frown, the harsh rebuke, the frequent application of the rod, were used for the growth of all virtues. Hester, nevertheless, mindful, of her own errors and misfortunes, sought to impose a tender but strict control over the infant. But the task was beyond her skill. After testing both smiles and frowns, and proving that neither possessed any influence, Hester was ultimately compelled to stand aside and permit the child to be swayed by her own impulses. Physical restraint was effectual, of course, while it lasted.

Pearl seemed rather an airy sprite, which, after playing for a little while upon the cottage floor, would flit away with a mocking smile.

Heart-smitten at this bewildering and baffling child, Hester sometimes burst into passionate tears. Then, perhaps, Pearl would frown, and clench her little fist, and harden her small features into a stern look of discontent. Then she would laugh. Or she would be convulsed with rage of grief and sob out her love for her mother in broken words. Hester's only real comfort was when the child lay asleep. Then she was sure of her, and tasted hours of quiet, sad, delicious happiness; until little Pearl awoke!

How soon did Pearl arrive at an age that was capable of social

speech! And then what happiness would it have been could Hester Prynne have heard her clear, bird-like voice mingling with the uproar of other childish voices. But this could never be. Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants. Nothing was more remarkable than how the child comprehended her loneliness. Never since her release from prison had Hester gone out in public without her. In all her walks about the town, Pearl, too, was there: first as the babe in arms, and afterwards as the little girl, small companion of her mother. She saw the children of the settlement on the grassy margin of the street, or in their yards; playing at going to church, or at beating Quakers; or taking scalps in a fight with the Indians, or scaring one another with witchcraft. Pearl saw, and gazed intently, but never sought to make acquaintance. If the children gathered about her, as they sometimes did, Pearl would grow positively terrible in her puny wrath, snatching up stones to fling at them.

The truth was, that the little Puritans, had got a vague idea of something unearthly in the mother and child, and therefore scorned them in their hearts, and reviled them with their tongues. Pearl felt the sentiment, and returned it with the bitterest hatred. Mother and daughter stood together in the same circle of seclusion from human society.

At home, within and around her mother's cottage, the unlikeliest materials--a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower--were the puppets of Pearl's

play, and, without undergoing any outward change, became whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world. The pine-trees, aged, black, and solemn, were the Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted most unmercifully. She never created a friend, but seemed always to have armed enemies, against whom she rushed to battle. It was sad to observe, in one so young, this recognition of an adverse world.

The very first thing which she had noticed in her life, was—what?—not the mother's smile. But that first object was the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom! One day, as her mother stooped over the cradle, the infant's eyes had been caught by the glimmering of the gold embroidery of the letter; she grasped at it, smiling. Then, gasping for breath, Hester clutched the fatal token, endeavoring to tear it away. From that time, except when the child was asleep, Hester had never felt a moment's safety.

In the afternoon of a certain summer's day, after Pearl grew big enough to run about, she amused herself with gathering handfuls of wild flowers, and flinging them at her mother's bosom; dancing like a little elf. Hester sat, pale as death, looking sadly into little Pearl's wild eyes.

"Child, what art thou?" cried the mother.

"Oh, I am your little Pearl!" answered the child.

"Art thou my child, in very truth?" asked Hester.

"Yes; I am little Pearl!" repeated the child.

"Thou art not my child! Thou art no Pearl of mine!" said the mother half playfully. "Tell me, then, what thou art, and who sent thee?"

"Tell me, mother!" said the child, seriously, coming up to Hester, and pressing herself close to her. "Do thou tell me!"

"Thy Heavenly Father sent thee!" answered Hester Prynne. But she said it with a hesitation that did not escape the acuteness of the child. She put up her small forefinger and touched the scarlet letter.

"He did not send me!" cried she. "I have no Heavenly Father!"

"Hush, Pearl, hush! Thou must not talk so!" answered the mother, suppressing a groan. "He sent us all into the world. If not, thou strange and elfish child, whence didst thou come?"

"Tell me! Tell me!" repeated Pearl, no longer seriously, but laughing and capering about the floor. "It is thou that must tell me!"

But Hester could not resolve the query, being herself in doubt. She remembered the talk of the townspeople, who had given out that poor little Pearl was a demon offspring: such as had occasionally been seen on earth, through their mother's sin, and to promote some foul and wicked purpose.

VII. THE GOVERNOR'S HALL

Hester Prynne went one day to the mansion of Governor Bellingham, with a pair of gloves which she had fringed and embroidered to his order, and which were to be worn on some great occasion of state.

Another and far more important reason than the delivery of a pair of embroidered gloves, impelled Hester, at this time, to seek an interview with a personage of so much power. It had reached her ears that some of the leading inhabitants wanted to deprive her of her child. On the supposition that Pearl was of demon origin, these good people argued that a Christian interest in the mother's soul required them to remove such a stumbling-block from her path. If the child, on the other hand, were really capable of moral and religious growth, then, surely, it should be transferred to wiser and better guardianship than Hester Prynne's. Among those who promoted this, was Governor Bellingham.

Full of concern, therefore, Hester Prynne set forth from her cottage. Little Pearl, of course, was her companion. She was now of an age to run lightly along by her mother's side, and, constantly in motion from morn till sunset. We have spoken of Pearl's rich and luxuriant beauty--a bright complexion, eyes possessing intensity, and hair already of a deep, glossy brown, and which in after years, would be nearly black. There was fire in her and throughout her. Her mother had arrayed her in a crimson velvet tunic, embroidered in fantasies and flourishes of gold thread. So

much red coloring made her the very brightest little jet of flame.

This garb reminded the beholder of the token which Hester Prynne was doomed to wear upon her bosom. It was the scarlet letter endowed with life! Pearl was the one as well as the other. As the two wayfarers came within the town, the children looked up from their play and spoke gravely one to another.

"Behold, there is the woman of the scarlet letter: moreover, there is the likeness of the scarlet letter running along by her side! Come, and let us fling mud at them!"

But Pearl, who was a dauntless child, after frowning and stamping her foot, suddenly made a rush at her enemies, and put them all to flight. She resembled an infant pestilence--the scarlet fever--whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation. She screamed and shouted, too, with a terrific volume of sound, which caused the hearts of the fugitives to quake within them. The victory accomplished, Pearl returned quietly to her mother, and looked up, smiling, into her face. Without further adventure, they reached the dwelling of Governor Bellingham. This was a large wooden house, moss-grown, crumbling to decay, and melancholy at heart. However, there was the freshness of the passing year on its exterior, and the cheerfulness, gleaming forth from the sunny windows. It had, indeed, a very cheery aspect, the walls being overspread with a kind of stucco, in which fragments of broken glass were intermixed; so that, when the

sunshine fell over the front of the edifice, it glittered and sparkled as if diamonds had been flung against it by the handful. It was further decorated with strange figures and diagrams drawn in the stucco, when newly laid on, now grown hard and durable, for the admiration of after times.

Pearl, looking at this bright wonder of a house began to dance, and demanded that the whole breadth of sunshine should be stripped off its front, and given her to play with.

"No, my little Pearl!" said her mother; "thou must gather thine own sunshine. I have none to give thee!"

They approached the door, which was arched, and flanked on each side by a narrow tower, in which were lattice-windows with wooden shutters. Lifting the iron hammer, Hester Prynne gave a summons, which was answered by one of the bond servants--a free-born Englishman, but now a seven years' slave. During that term he was to be the property of his master, as much a commodity as an ox or a joint-stool. The serf wore the customary garb of serving-men at that period in the old halls of England.

"Is the worshipful Governor Bellingham in?" inquired Hester.

"Yea," replied the bond-servant, staring with wide-open eyes at the scarlet letter, which he had never before seen. "Yea, his honorable worship is within. But he hath a godly minister or two with him, and likewise a leech. Ye may not see his worship now."

"Nevertheless, I will enter," answered Hester Prynne; and the

bond-servant offered no opposition.

So the mother and little Pearl were admitted into the hall of entrance. Here, then, was a wide and reasonably lofty hall, extending through the whole depth of the house. At one extremity, this spacious room was lighted by the windows of the two towers.

At about the centre of the oaken panels that lined the hall was suspended a suit of mail. It had been manufactured by a skilful armorer in London. There was a steel head-piece, a cuirass, a gorget and greaves, with a pair of gauntlets and a sword hanging beneath; all, and especially the helmet and breastplate, so highly burnished as to glow with white radiance, and scatter an illumination everywhere about upon the floor. This bright suit of armor had been worn by the Governor on many a solemn training field, and had glittered at the head of a regiment in the Pequod war. For, though a lawyer, this new country had transformed Governor Bellingham into a soldier, as well as a statesman and ruler.

Little Pearl, who was as greatly pleased with the gleaming armor as she had been with the glittering front of the house, spent some time looking into the polished mirror of the breastplate.

"Mother," cried she, "I see you here. Look! Look!"

Hester looked by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar effect of this convex mirror, the scarlet letter was in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most

prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed hidden behind it.

"Come along, Pearl," said she, drawing her away, "Come and look into this fair garden. It may be we shall see flowers there; more beautiful ones than we find in the woods."

Pearl ran to the bow-window and looked along the vista of a garden walk. Cabbages grew in plain sight; and a pumpkin-vine. There were a few rose-bushes, however, and a number of apple-trees. Pearl, seeing the rose-bushes, began to cry for a red rose, and would not be pacified.

"Hush, child--hush!" said her mother, earnestly. "Do not cry, dear Pearl! I hear voices in the garden. The Governor is coming, and gentlemen along with him."

In fact, a number of persons were seen approaching the house. Pearl gave a scream, and then became silent, because she was excited by the appearance of those new personages.

VIII. THE ELF-CHILD AND THE MINISTER

Governor Bellingham walked foremost, and appeared to be showing off his estate. The venerable pastor, John Wilson, was seen over Governor Bellingham's shoulders.

Behind the Governor and Mr. Wilson came two other guests--one, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, whom the reader may remember as having taken a brief and reluctant part in the scene of Hester Prynne's disgrace; and, in close companionship with him, Roger Chillingworth, a person of great skill in physic, who for two or three years past had been settled in the town. It was understood that this man was the physician as well as friend of the young minister, whose health had severely suffered by his self-sacrifice to the labors and duties of his position in the church.

The Governor ascended one or two steps, and, throwing open the hall window, found himself close to little Pearl. The shadow of the curtain fell on Hester, and partially concealed her.

"What have we here?" said Governor Bellingham, looking with surprise at the scarlet little figure before him.

"Ay, indeed!" cried Mr. Wilson. "What little bird of scarlet plumage may this be? Young one, who art thou, and what has ailed thy mother to bedizen thee in this strange fashion? Art thou a Christian child? Dost know thy catechism? Or art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry, in

merry old England?"

"I am mother's child, and my name is Pearl!"

"Pearl!--Ruby, rather--or Coral!--or Red Rose, at the very least!" responded the old minister, putting forth his hand in a vain attempt to pat little Pearl on the cheek. "But where is this mother of thine? Ah! I see," he added; and, turning to Governor Bellingham, whispered, "This is the selfsame child of whom we have held speech together; and behold here the unhappy woman, Hester Prynne, her mother!"

Governor Bellingham stepped through the window into the hall, followed by his three guests.

"Hester Prynne," said he, "there hath been much question concerning thee. The point hath been discussed, whether we, the authority, do well by trusting an immortal soul in yonder child, to the guidance of one who hath stumbled and fallen amid the pitfalls of this world. She should be taken out of thy charge, and clad soberly, and disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth. What canst thou do for the child in this kind?"

"I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this!" answered Hester Prynne, laying her finger on the red token.

"Woman, it is thy badge of shame!" replied the stern magistrate. "It is because of the stain which that letter indicates that we would transfer thy child to other hands."

"Nevertheless," said the mother, calmly, "this badge hath taught me--it daily teaches me--it is teaching me at this moment--lessons where my child may be wiser and better, even though they can profit nothing to me."

"We will judge warily," said Bellingham, "Good Master Wilson, examine this Pearl and see whether she hath had such Christian teaching as befits a child of her age."

The old minister seated himself in a chair and made an effort to draw Pearl betwixt his knees. But the child, unaccustomed to the touch of any but her mother, escaped, and stood on the upper step.

"Pearl," said he, with great solemnity, "thou must take heed to instruction, that so, thou may wear in thy bosom the pearl of great price. Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?"

Now Pearl knew well enough who made her, for Hester Prynne, the daughter of a pious home, had begun to teach her those truths. But that perversity, which all children have, took possession of her, and closed her lips. After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson's question, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door.

This fantasy was probably suggested by the Governor's red roses, as Pearl stood outside of the window, together with her recollection of the prison rose-bush, which she had just passed.

Old Roger Chillingworth, with a smile on his face, whispered something in the young clergyman's ear. Hester Prynne looked at the man of skill, and even then, with her fate hanging in the balance, was startled to perceive what a change had come over his features--how much uglier they were, how his dark complexion seemed to have grown duskier, and his figure more misshapen--since the days when she had familiarly known him. She met his eyes for an instant, but was immediately constrained to give all her attention to the scene now going forward.

"This is awful!" cried the Governor, slowly recovering from the astonishment into which Pearl's response had thrown him. "Here is a child of three years old, and she cannot tell who made her! Without question, she is equally in the dark as to her soul, its present depravity, and future destiny! Methinks, gentlemen, we need inquire no further."

Hester caught hold of Pearl, and drew her into her arms, confronting the old Puritan magistrate. Alone in the world, cast off by it, and with this sole treasure to keep her heart alive, she was ready to defend to the death.

"God gave me the child!" cried she. "She is my happiness—she is my torture! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me, too! She is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with the power of retribution for my sin! Ye shall not take her! I will die first!"

"My poor woman," said the not unkind old minister, "the child

shall be well cared for--far better than thou canst do for it."

"God gave her into my keeping!" repeated Hester Prynne, raising her voice almost to a shriek. "I will not give her up!" And here by a sudden impulse, she turned to the young clergyman, Mr. Dimmesdale, at whom, up to this moment, she had seemed hardly to look at. "Speak thou for me!" cried she. "Thou was my pastor, and had charge of my soul, and know me better than these men can. Speak for me! Thou know--for thou hast sympathies which these men lack--thou know what is in my heart, and what are a mother's rights, and how much the stronger they are when that mother has but her child and the scarlet letter! I will not lose the child!"

At this wild and singular appeal, which indicated that Hester Prynne's situation had provoked her to little less than madness, the young Minister came forward, pale, and holding his hand over his heart, as was his custom whenever his peculiarly nervous temperament was thrown into agitation. He looked now more careworn and emaciated than as we described him at the scene of Hester's public shame; and his large dark eyes had a world of pain in their troubled and melancholy depth.

"There is truth in what she says," began the minister, "truth in what Hester says, and in the feeling which inspires her! God gave her the child, and gave her, too, an instinctive knowledge of its nature and requirements which no other mortal being can possess. And, is there not a quality of sacredness in the relation between this mother and this child?"

"Ay--how is that?" interrupted the Governor.

"It must be even so," resumed the minister. "This child of its father's guilt and its mother's shame has come from the hand of God, to work in many ways upon her heart. It was meant for a blessing—for the one blessing of her life! It was meant for a retribution, too; a torture to be felt at many an unthought-of moment; a pang, a sting, an ever-recurring agony, in the midst of a troubled joy! Hath she not expressed this thought in the garb of the poor child, so forcibly reminding us of that red symbol which sears her bosom? She recognizes the solemn miracle which God hath wrought in the existence of that child. This child is to keep her soul alive, and to preserve her from blacker depths of sin into which Satan might else have sought to plunge her! Therefore it is good for this poor, sinful woman, that she hath an infant confided to her care to remind her, at every moment, of her fall. For Hester Prynne's sake, then, and no less for the poor child's sake, let us leave them as Providence hath seen fit to place them!"

"You speak, my friend, with a strange earnestness," said Roger.

"And there is a weighty import in what my young brother hath spoken," added the Rev. Mr. Wilson. "What say you, worshipful Master Bellingham? Hath he not pleaded well for the poor woman?"

"Indeed hath he," answered the magistrate; 'we will even leave the matter as it now stands; so long, at least, as there shall be no further scandal in the woman. The child must be started in the catechism, at thy hands or

Master Dimmesdale's. Moreover, at a proper season, the men must take heed that she go both to school and meeting."

The young minister, on ceasing to speak had withdrawn a few steps from the group, and stood with his face partially concealed in the heavy folds of the window-curtain; while the shadow of his figure, which the sunlight cast upon the floor, was tremulous with the vehemence of his appeal. Pearl stole softly towards him, and taking his hand in the grasp of both her own, laid her cheek against it; a caress so tender, that her mother asked herself--"Is that my Pearl?" Yet she knew that there was love in the child's heart, although it mostly revealed itself in passion. The minister looked round, laid his hand on the child's head, hesitated, and then kissed her brow. Little Pearl laughed, and went capering down the hall.

"The little baggage hath witchcraft in her, I profess," said Reverend Wilson to Mr. Dimmesdale. "She needs no old woman's broomstick to fly!"

"A strange child!" remarked old Roger Chillingworth. "It is easy to see the mother's part in her. Should we research, analyze that child's nature, and give a shrewd guess at the father?"

"Nay; it would be sinful to follow that clue," said Mr. Wilson. "Better to fast and pray upon it; and still better to leave the mystery as we find it, unless Providence reveal it of its own accord. Every good Christian man should show a father's kindness towards the poor, deserted babe."

The affair being so satisfactorily concluded, Hester Prynne, with Pearl, departed from the house. As they descended the steps, the lattice of a chamber-window was thrown open, and forth into the sunny day was thrust the face of Mistress Hibbins, Governor Bellingham's bitter-tempered sister, and the same who, a few years later, was executed as a witch.

"Hist, hist!" said she. "Wilt thou go with us to-night? There will be a merry company in the forest; and I well-nigh promised the Black Man that comely Hester Prynne should make one."

"Make my excuse to him, so please you!" answered Hester, with a triumphant smile. "I must tarry at home, and keep watch over my little Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book too, and that with mine own blood!"

"We shall have thee there!" said the witch-lady, frowning.

But here was already an illustration of the young minister's argument against sundering the relation of a fallen mother to the offspring of her frailty. Even thus early had the child saved her from Satan's snare.

IX. THE LEECH

Under the appellation of Roger Chillingworth, the reader will remember, was hidden another name, which its former wearer had resolved should never more be spoken. In the crowd that witnessed Hester Prynne's ignominious exposure, stood a man, elderly, travel-worn, who, just emerging from the perilous wilderness, beheld the woman, in whom he hoped to find embodied the warmth and cheerfulness of home, set up as a type of sin before the people.

He resolved not to be pilloried beside her on her pedestal of shame. Unknown to all but Hester Prynne, and possessing the lock and key of her silence, he chose to withdraw his name from mankind, and to vanish out of life as completely as if he indeed lay at the bottom of the ocean.

He took up his residence in the Puritan town as Roger Chillingworth. As his studies had made him extensively acquainted with the medical science of the day, it was as a physician that he presented himself and was cordially received. Skilful men, of the medical profession, were of rare occurrence in the colony. Roger Chillingworth was a brilliant acquisition. In his Indian captivity, he had gained much knowledge of the properties of native herbs and roots.

This learned stranger, early after his arrival, had chosen for his spiritual pastor the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. The young scholar was considered by his admirers as an apostle. About this period, however, the

health of Mr. Dimmesdale had begun to fail. The paleness of the young minister's cheek was thought to be because of his too earnest devotion to study, his fulfilment of duty, and more than all, to the fasts and vigils of which he made a frequent practice. His form grew emaciated; he was known to put his hand over his heart with first a flush and then a paleness, indicative of pain.

Such was the young clergyman's condition when Roger Chillingworth made his advent to the town. His first entry on the scene had an aspect of mystery. He was now known to be a man of skill; he gathered herbs and the blossoms of wild-flowers, and dug up roots and plucked off twigs from the forest-trees. Why, with such rank in the learned world, had he come hither? What, could he be seeking in the wilderness? In answer to this, a rumor spread that Heaven had brought an absolute miracle, by transporting this eminent Doctor bodily through the air and setting him down at the door of Mr. Dimmesdale's!

This idea was enforced by the strong interest which the Physician had in the young clergyman; he attached himself to him as a parishioner, and sought to win a friendly regard and confidence. He expressed great alarm at his pastor's health, but was anxious to attempt the cure. The elders, the deacons, the motherly dames, and the young and fair maidens of Mr. Dimmesdale's flock, wanted him to make trial of the physician's skill. Mr. Dimmesdale gently repelled their entreaties. "I need

no medicine," said he.

But how could the young minister say so, when, every Sabbath, his cheek was paler and thinner--when it had now become a habit to press his hand over his heart? Was he weary of his labors? Did he wish to die? He finally promised to confer with the physician.

"I wish it were God's will," said the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, when he requested old Roger Chillingworth's professional advice, "I could be content that my labors, and my sorrows, and my sins, and my pains, should shortly end with me, and what is earthly of them be buried in my grave, and the spiritual go with me to my eternal state, rather than that you should put your skill to the proof in my behalf."

"Ah," replied Roger Chillingworth, with quietness, "Saintly men, who walk with God on earth, would love to be away, to walk with him on the golden pavements of the New Jerusalem."

"Nay," rejoined the young minister, putting his hand to his heart, with a flush of pain, "if I were worthier to walk there, I could be better content to toil here."

In this manner, the mysterious old Roger Chillingworth became the medical adviser of the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. As not only the disease interested the physician, but he was strongly moved to look into the character and qualities of the patient, these two men, so different in age, came gradually to spend much time together. For the sake of the minister's

health, and to enable the leech to gather plants with healing balm in them, they took long walks on the sea-shore, or in the forest.

Thus Roger Chillingworth scrutinized his patient carefully, both as he saw him in his ordinary life and as he appeared when in other moral scenery. He deemed it essential to know the man, before attempting to do him good. So Roger Chillingworth--the man of skill, the kind and friendly physician--strove to go deep into his patient's bosom, delving among his principles, prying into his recollections, and probing everything with a cautious touch, like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern. A man burdened with a secret should especially avoid the intimacy of his physician.

Time went on; a kind of intimacy grew up between these two minds; they discussed every topic of ethics and religion; they talked of matters that seemed personal to themselves; and yet no secret, such as the physician fancied must exist there, ever stole out of the minister's consciousness into his companion's ear. The latter had his suspicions, indeed, that even the nature of Mr. Dimmesdale's bodily disease had never fairly been revealed to him. It was strange!

After a time, at a hint from Roger Chillingworth, the friends of Mr. Dimmesdale suggested that the two be lodged in the same house; so that every ebb and flow of the minister's life-tide might pass under the eye of his anxious and attached physician. There was much joy throughout the town when this was attained. It was held to be the best possible measure for the

young clergyman's welfare; unless he had selected one of the many blooming damsels to become his devoted wife. He rejected all suggestions of the kind.

The new abode of the two friends was with a pious widow, of good social rank. It had the graveyard on one side. Mr. Dimmesdale had the front apartment, with a sunny exposure, and heavy window-curtains.

Here the pale clergyman piled up his library. On the other side of the house, old Roger Chillingworth arranged his study and laboratory: provided with a distilling apparatus and the means of compounding drugs and chemicals. These two learned persons sat themselves down, each in his own domain, yet familiarly passing from one apartment to the other.

And so the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale's best friends imagined that the hand of God had done all this for the purpose of restoring the young minister to health. But, it must now be said, another portion of the community had begun to take its own view of the relation betwixt Mr. Dimmesdale and the mysterious old physician. There was an aged handicraftsman who had been a citizen of London; he testified to having seen the physician, under some other name, in company with Dr. Forman, the famous conjurer. Individuals hinted that the man of skill, during his Indian captivity, had enlarged his medical attainments by joining in the incantations of the savage priests, often performing seemingly miraculous cures by their skill in the black art. A large number affirmed that Roger

Chillingworth's aspect had undergone a remarkable change while he had dwelt in town. At first, his expression had been calm, meditative, scholar-like. Now there was something ugly and evil in his face, which they had not previously noticed, and which grew still the more obvious to sight the oftener they looked upon him. According to the vulgar idea, the fire in his laboratory had been brought from the lower regions.

To sum up, it grew to be a widely diffused opinion that the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale was haunted either by Satan himself or Satan's emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth.

X. THE LEECH AND HIS PATIENT

Old Roger Chillingworth, throughout life, had been calm in temperament, kindly, ever a pure and upright man. He had begun an investigation, desirous only of truth, of wrongs inflicted on himself. But, as he proceeded, a terrible fascination seized the old man within its grip, and never set him free again. He now dug into the poor clergyman's heart, like a miner searching for gold. Sometimes a light glimmered out of the physician's eyes, burning blue and ominous, like the reflection of a furnace.

Yet Mr. Dimmesdale would perhaps have seen this individual's character more perfectly, if a certain morbidness had not made him suspicious of all mankind. Trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize his enemy when he actually appeared. He therefore kept up a friendship with him, daily seeing the old physician in his study, or visiting the laboratory and watching the processes by which weeds were converted into drugs of potency.

One day, leaning his forehead on his hand, and his elbow on the sill of the open window that looked towards the grave-yard, he talked with Chillingworth, while the old man was examining a bundle of plants.

"Where," asked he, "kind doctor, did you gather those, with such a dark, flabby leaf?"

"In the graveyard here at hand," answered the physician continuing his employment. "They are new to me. I found them growing

on a grave, which had no tombstone, no other memorial of the dead man, except these ugly weeds. They grew out of his heart, and may be some hideous secret that was buried with him, which would have been better to confess during his lifetime."

"Maybe," said Mr. Dimmesdale, "he desired it, but could not."

"And why not?" rejoined the physician. "Since all the powers of nature call for the confession of sin, these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make plain, an outspoken crime?"

"That, is but a fantasy of yours," replied the minister. "There can be no power to disclose the secrets buried in the human heart. The heart, guilty of such secrets, must hold them until the day when all hidden things shall be revealed. The hearts holding such miserable secrets will yield them up, at that last day, not with reluctance, but with a joy unutterable."

"Then why not reveal it here?" asked Roger Chillingworth, glancing quietly aside at the minister.

"They mostly do," said the clergyman. "Many, many a poor soul hath given its confidence to me, not only on the death-bed, but while strong in life, and fair in reputation. And after such an outpouring, oh, what a relief have I witnessed in those sinful brethren!"

"Yet some men bury their secrets," observed the physician.

"True; there are such men," answered Mr. Dimmesdale. "It may be that they are kept silent by their nature. They shrink from displaying

themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, then, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service."

"These men deceive themselves," said Roger Chillingworth. "They fear to take up the shame that rightfully belongs to them"

"It may be so," said the young clergyman, indifferently.--"But, now, my well-skilled physician, have I profited by your kindly care of this weak frame of mine?"

Before Chillingworth could answer, they heard the clear, wild laughter of a young child's voice from the adjacent burial-ground. Looking from the open window, the minister saw Hester Prynne and little Pearl passing along the footpath. Pearl looked as beautiful as the day. She skipped irreverently from one grave to another; until coming to the broad, flat tombstone, she began to dance upon it. In reply to her mother's command to behave more decorously, little Pearl paused to gather the prickly burrs from a tall tree which grew beside the tomb. Taking a handful of these, she arranged them along the lines of the scarlet letter that decorated her mother, to which the burrs adhered. Hester did not pluck them off.

Roger Chillingworth had by this time approached the window and smiled grimly down. "There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human opinions in that child's composition," remarked he. "I saw her, the other day, bespatter the Governor himself with water at the

cattle-trough in Spring Lane. What, in heaven's name, is she? Is the imp altogether evil? Hath she affections? "

"None, save the freedom of a broken law," answered Mr. Dimmesdale, in a quiet way, "Whether capable of good, I know not."

The child, looking up to the window with a bright, but naughty smile, threw one of the burrs at the Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale. The clergyman shrank from the light missile. Detecting his emotion, Pearl clapped her little hands in the most extravagant ecstasy. Hester Prynne, likewise, had involuntarily looked up, and all these four persons, old and young, regarded one another in silence, till the child laughed aloud, and shouted--"Come away, mother! Come away, or yonder old black man will catch you! He hath got hold of the minister already. Come away, or he will catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!"

So she drew her mother away, skipping and dancing among the hillocks of the dead people.

"There goes a woman," resumed Roger Chillingworth, "who hath none of that mystery of hidden sinfulness which you deem so grievous to be borne. Is Hester Prynne the less miserable, think you, for that scarlet letter on her breast?"

"I do believe it," answered the clergyman. "Nevertheless, I cannot answer for her. There was a look of pain in her face which I would gladly have been spared the sight of. But still, it must be better for the sufferer to

be free to show his pain than to cover it up in his heart."

"You inquired of me, a little time ago," said Chillingworth, "my judgment as touching your health."

"I did," answered the clergyman, "and would gladly learn it. Speak frankly, be it for life or death."

"The disorder is a strange one," said the physician. "Looking daily at you, I should deem you a man sore sick. But I know not what to say, the disease is what I seem to know, yet know it not."

"You speak in riddles, sir," said the minister, glancing aside.

"Then, to speak more plainly," continued the physician, "Let me ask as one having charge of your life and physical well-being, have all the operations of this disorder been laid open to me? A bodily disease may be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part."

"Then I need ask no further," said the clergyman, rising from his chair. "You deal not, I take it, in medicine for the soul!"

"Thus, a sickness," continued Roger Chillingworth, going on, but standing up and confronting the emaciated and white-cheeked minister, with his low, misshapen figure,—"a sickness, a sore place, in your spirit has manifested itself in your bodily frame. Should your physician heal the bodily evil? How may this be unless you first lay open to him the trouble in your soul?"

"No, not to an earthly physician!" cried Mr. Dimmesdale,

passionately. "If it be the soul's disease, then I commit myself to the one Physician of the soul! He can cure, or He can kill. Let Him do with me as, in His justice and wisdom, He shall see good!"

With a frantic gesture he rushed out of the room.

"It is as well to have made this step," said Roger Chillingworth.

"There is nothing lost. We shall be friends again anon. But see, now, how passion takes hold upon this man, and hurries him out of himself! As with one passion so with another."

It proved not difficult to re-establish the intimacy of the two companions, on the same footing and in the same degree as before. The young clergyman, after a few hours of privacy, was sensible that the disorder of his nerves had hurried him into an outbreak of temper. With remorseful feelings, he lost no time in making apologies, and asked his friend still to continue his care. Roger Chillingworth readily assented, and went on with his medical supervision of the minister; doing his best for him, but always leaving the patient's apartment with a mysterious and puzzled smile upon his lips. This expression was invisible in Mr. Dimmesdale's presence, but grew strongly evident as the physician crossed the threshold.

"A rare case," he muttered. "I must look deeper into it. A strange sympathy betwixt soul and body! I must search this matter to the bottom."

It came to pass that the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale fell into a deep, deep slumber, sitting in his chair. The profound depth of the

minister's repose was remarkable. His spirit had now so withdrawn into itself that he stirred not in his chair when old Roger Chillingworth came into the room. The physician advanced directly in front of his patient, laid his hand upon his bosom, and thrust aside the vestment, that had always covered it even from the professional eye.

Then, Mr. Dimmesdale shuddered, and slightly stirred.

After a brief pause, the physician turned away. But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! He threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom.

XI. THE INTERIOR OF A HEART

After the incident last described, the intellect of Roger Chillingworth had now a plain path before it. Calm, gentle, passionless, as he appeared, there was yet a quiet depth of malice, in this unfortunate man, which led him to imagine a more intimate revenge than any mortal had ever wreaked upon an enemy. To make himself the one trusted friend, to whom should be confided all the fear, the remorse, the agony, the ineffectual repentance! All that guilty sorrow, hidden from the world, whose great heart would have pitied and forgiven, to be revealed to him, the Pitiless--to him, the Unforgiving!

A revelation had been granted to him. The very inmost soul of the reverend was brought out before his eyes, so that he could see and comprehend its every movement. He became a chief actor in the poor minister's interior world. He could play upon him as he chose. The victim was forever on the rack.

All this was accomplished with a subtlety so perfect, that the Minister never suspected him. True, he looked doubtfully, fearfully at the deformed figure of the old physician. His gestures, his grizzled beard, his acts, his garments, were odious in the clergyman's sight. But as a matter of principle, he continued his habits of social familiarity with the old man.

While thus suffering under bodily disease, and gnawed and tortured by some black trouble of the soul, and given over to the

machinations of his deadliest enemy, the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale had achieved a brilliant popularity in his sacred office. He won it by his sorrows. His fame already overshadowed the soberer reputations of his fellow-clergymen, eminent as several of them were.

His secret burden kept him down on a level with the lowest. But this very burden gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind; so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain. The people deemed the young clergyman a miracle of holiness. In their eyes, the very ground on which he trod was sanctified. And all this time, when poor Mr. Dimmesdale was thinking of his grave, he questioned with himself whether the grass would ever grow on it, because an accursed thing must there be buried!

It is inconceivable, the agony with which this public veneration tortured him. He longed to speak out from his own pulpit at the full height of his voice, and tell the people what he was. "I, who ascend the sacred desk--I, who have laid the hand of baptism upon your children--I, who have breathed the parting prayer over your dying friends--I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!"

More than once, Mr. Dimmesdale had gone into the pulpit, with a purpose to have spoken words like the above. More than once he had cleared his throat, and drawn in the long breath, through which would come the black secret of his soul. More than once--more than a hundred times--

he had actually spoken! Spoken! But how? He had told his hearers that he was altogether vile, the worst of sinners, an abomination! Would they not start up in their seats, and tear him down out of the pulpit which he defiled?

Not so, indeed! They heard it all, and did but reverence him the more. They little guessed what lurked in those self-condemning words. "The godly youth!" said they among themselves. "The saint on earth! Alas! if he discern such sinfulness in his own white soul, what horrid spectacle would he behold in mine!" The minister well knew--subtle, but remorseful hypocrite that he was!--the light in which his vague confession would be viewed. Therefore, above all things, he loathed his miserable self!

In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes, he had plied it on his own shoulders, laughing bitterly at himself the while. It was his custom, too, to fast rigorously, and until his knees trembled beneath him, as an act of penance. He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness, sometimes with a glimmering lamp, and sometimes, viewing his own face in a looking-glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. But he could not purify himself.

One night the minister started from his chair. A new thought had struck him. There might be a moment's peace in it. Dressing himself with as much care as if it had been for public worship, he stole softly down the staircase, undid the door, and left.

XII. THE MINISTER'S VIGIL

Walking in the shadow of a dream, Mr. Dimmesdale reached the spot where Hester Prynne had lived through her first hours of public ignominy. The same platform or scaffold, black and weather-stained with the storm or sunshine of seven long years, remained standing beneath the balcony of the meeting-house. The minister went up the steps.

It was an obscure night in early May. Clouds muffled the whole sky from zenith to horizon. The town was all asleep. There was no peril of discovery. The minister might stand there until morning without other risk than that the chill night air would creep into his frame, and stiffen his joints with rheumatism. No eye could see him. Why, then, had he come? Was it but the mockery of penitence? He had been driven by the impulse of that remorse which dogged him everywhere, and Cowardice which drew him back, just when the other impulse had hurried him to a disclosure. Poor, miserable man!

While standing on the scaffold, Mr. Dimmesdale was overcome with a great horror of mind, as if the universe were gazing at a scarlet token on his naked breast, right over his heart. On that spot, in very truth, there was the gnawing and poisonous tooth of bodily pain. Without any effort of his will, or power to restrain himself, he shrieked aloud.

"It is done!" muttered the minister, covering his face with his hands. "The whole town will awake and find me here!"

But it was not so. The shriek had perhaps sounded with a far greater power, to his own startled ears, than it actually possessed. The town did not awake. The clergyman, therefore, uncovered his eyes and looked about him. At a window of the Governor's house appeared old Mistress Hibbins, the Governor's sister, with a lamp, which revealed the expression of her sour and discontented face. She looked anxiously upward. Beyond a doubt, this venerable witch-lady had heard Mr. Dimmesdale's outcry, and interpreted it as the clamor of the fiends and night-hags, with whom she was known to make excursions in the forest. The old lady quickly extinguished her lamp, and vanished.

The minister grew comparatively calm. His eyes, however, were soon greeted by a glimmering light, which was approaching up the street. He beheld the Reverend Mr. Wilson, who had been praying at the bedside of some dying man. The good old minister came freshly from the death-chamber of Governor Winthrop, who had passed from earth to heaven within that very hour. Father Wilson was moving homeward, aiding his footsteps with a lighted lantern. Mr. Dimmesdale smiled and then wondered if he was going mad. As the Reverend Wilson passed beside the scaffold, closely muffling his cloak about him, the minister could hardly restrain himself from speaking—"A good evening to you, Father Wilson. Come up hither, and pass a pleasant hour with me!"

Good Heavens! Had Mr. Dimmesdale actually spoken? For one

instant he believed that he had. But they were uttered only within his imagination. The venerable Father Wilson continued to step slowly onward, looking carefully at the muddy pathway before his feet, and never once turning his head towards the guilty platform.

Shortly afterwards, Dimmesdale felt his limbs growing stiff with the chilliness of the night. Morning would break and find him there. The neighbourhood would begin to rouse itself. All the townspeople would come stumbling over their thresholds, and turning up their horror-stricken visages around the scaffold. Whom would they discern there, with the red eastern light upon his brow? Whom, but the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, half-frozen to death, overwhelmed with shame, and standing where Hester Prynne had stood!

Carried away by the grotesque horror of this picture, the minister burst into a great peal of laughter. It was immediately responded to by a light, airy, childish laugh, in which he recognised the tones of little Pearl.

"Pearl! Little Pearl!" cried he; then, suppressing his voice—
"Hester! Hester Prynne! Are you there?"

"Yes; it is Hester Prynne!" she replied, in a tone of surprise; and the minister heard her footsteps approaching from the side-walk. "It is I, and my little Pearl."

"Whence come you, Hester? What sent you hither?"

"I have been watching at a death-bed," answered Hester Prynne,

"at Governor Winthrop's death-bed, and have taken his measure for a robe, and am now going homeward to my dwelling."

"Come up hither, Hester, thou and little Pearl," said the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. "Ye have both been here before, but I was not with you. Come up hither once again, and we will stand all three together."

She silently ascended the steps, and stood on the platform, holding Pearl by the hand. The minister felt for the child's other hand, and took it. The moment that he did so, there came a tumultuous rush of new life, hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain.

"Minister!" whispered little Pearl.

"What wouldst thou say, child?" asked Mr. Dimmesdale.

"Wilt thou stand here with mother and me, to-morrow noontide?"

"Nay; not so, my little Pearl," answered the minister; for, with the new energy of the moment, all the dread of public exposure, that had so long been the anguish of his life, had returned upon him; and he was already trembling--"not so, my child. I shall, indeed, stand with thy mother and thee one other day, but not to-morrow."

Pearl laughed, and attempted to pull away her hand. But the minister held it fast. "A moment longer, my child!" said he.

"But wilt thou promise," asked Pearl, "to take my hand, and

mother's hand, to-morrow noontide?"

"Not then, Pearl," said the minister; "but another time."

"And what other time?" persisted the child.

"At the great judgment day," whispered the minister. "Then, and there, before the judgment-seat, thy mother, and thou, and I must stand together. But the daylight of this world shall not see our meeting!"

Pearl laughed again. But before Mr. Dimmesdale had done speaking, a light gleamed far and wide over all the muffled sky. So powerful was its radiance, that it thoroughly illuminated the dense medium of cloud betwixt the sky and earth. The night sky brightened. There stood the minister, with his hand over his heart; and Hester Prynne, with the embroidered letter on her bosom; and little Pearl, herself a symbol, and the connecting link between those two.

There was witchcraft in little Pearl's eyes; and her face wore that naughty smile which made its expression so elvish. She withdrew her hand from Mr. Dimmesdale's, and pointed across the street. But he clasped both his hands over his breast, and cast his eyes towards the zenith.

Nothing was more common, in those days, than to interpret all meteoric appearances as a revelation from a supernatural source. Thus, a blazing spear, a sword of flame, a bow, or a sheaf of arrows seen in the midnight sky, prefigured Indian warfare. Pestilence was known to have been foreboded by a shower of crimson light.

Looking upward to the zenith, the minister beheld there the appearance of an immense letter--the letter A--marked out in lines of dull red light. It was burning duskily through a veil of cloud.

As Mr. Dimmesdale gazed upward to the zenith, he was, nevertheless, perfectly aware that little Pearl was pointing her finger towards Roger Chillingworth, who stood at no great distance from the scaffold. The minister appeared to see him. The physician was not careful then, to hide the malevolence with which he looked upon his victim. Roger Chillingworth looked like the arch-fiend, standing there with a smile and scowl, to claim his own. So vivid was the expression, so intense the minister's perception of it, that it seemed still to remain painted on the darkness after the meteor had vanished.

"Who is that man, Hester?" gasped Dimmesdale, overcome with terror. "I shiver at him! Dost thou know the man? I hate him, Hester!" She remembered her oath, and was silent. "Who is he? Canst thou do nothing for me? I have a nameless horror of the man!"

"Minister," said little Pearl, "I can tell thee who he is!"

"Quickly, then, child!" said the minister, bending his ear close to her lips. "Quickly, and as low as thou canst whisper."

Pearl mumbled something into his ear that sounded, indeed, like human language, but was only such gibberish. The elvish child then laughed aloud.

"Dost thou mock me now?" said the minister.

"Thou wast not bold!--thou wast not true!" answered the child.

"Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand, and mother's hand, noon-tide!"

"Worthy sir," answered the physician, who had now advanced to the foot of the platform--"pious Master Dimmesdale! Can this be you? We men of study, whose heads are in our books, have need to be looked after! We dream in our waking moments, and walk in our sleep. Come, good sir, and my dear friend, let me lead you home!"

"How knewest that I was here?" asked the minister, fearfully.

"I knew nothing of the matter. I had spent the better part of the night at the bedside of Governor Winthrop, doing what my poor skill might to give him ease. He, going home to a better world, I was on my way homeward, when this light shone out. Come with me, Reverend, else you will be poorly able to do Sabbath duty tomorrow. You should study less and take a little pastime, or these night whimsies will grow upon you."

"I will go home with you," said Mr. Dimmesdale.

He yielded himself to the physician, and was led away.

The next day, however, being the Sabbath, he preached a discourse which was held to be the richest and most powerful that had ever proceeded from his lips. Souls, more souls than one, were brought to the truth by the efficacy of that sermon, and vowed within themselves to cherish a holy gratitude towards Mr. Dimmesdale throughout the long hereafter. But as he

came down the pulpit steps, the grey-bearded sexton met him, holding up a black glove, which the minister recognised as his own.

"It was found," said the Sexton, "this morning on the scaffold where evil-doers are set up to public shame. Satan dropped it there, I take it, intending a scurrilous jest against your reverence. But he was blind and foolish, as he ever and always is. A pure hand needs no glove to cover it!"

"Thank you, my good friend," said the minister, gravely, but startled at heart; for so confused was his remembrance, that he had almost brought himself to look at the events of the past night as a dream.

"Yes, it seems to be my glove, indeed!"

"And, since Satan saw fit to steal it, your reverence must handle him without gloves henceforward," remarked the old sexton, grimly smiling. "But did your reverence hear of the portent that was seen last night? a great red letter in the sky--the letter A, which we interpret as Angel. For, our good Governor Winthrop was made an angel this past night!"

"No," answered the minister; "I had not heard of it."

XIII. ANOTHER VIEW OF HESTER

Hester Prynne was shocked at the condition to which she found the Reverend Dimmesdale reduced. His nerve seemed absolutely destroyed. A terrible machinery was operating on Mr. Dimmesdale's well-being. Knowing what this poor fallen man had once been, her whole soul was moved. Hester saw that there lay a responsibility in reference to the clergyman, which she owned to no other. Here was the iron link of mutual crime, which neither he nor she could break.

Years had come and gone. Pearl was now seven years old. Her mother, with the scarlet letter on her breast, had long been a familiar object to the townspeople. A general regard had grown up in reference to Hester Prynne. The blameless purity of her life during all these years was reckoned largely in her favor.

Hester was always ready to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty, even though the bitter-hearted pauper threw back a gibe to the food brought regularly to his door, or the garments wrought for him by the fingers that could have embroidered a monarch's robe. None were so self-devoted as Hester when pestilence stalked through the town. In all seasons, the outcast of society at once found her place. She came, not as a guest, into the household that was darkened by trouble. There glimmered the embroidered letter, with comfort in its unearthly ray. Elsewhere the token of sin, it was the taper of the sick chamber. The letter was the symbol

of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Abel, so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength.

It was only the darkened house that could contain her. When sunshine came again, she was not there. Her shadow had faded across the threshold. Meeting them in the street, she never raised her head to receive their greeting. If they were resolute to accost her, she laid her finger on the scarlet letter, and passed on. This produced a softening influence on the public mind.

The rulers of the community were longer in acknowledging the influence of Hester's good qualities than the people. Day by day, nevertheless, their sour and rigid wrinkles were relaxing into an expression of almost benevolence. Individuals in private life, meanwhile, had quite forgiven Hester Prynne for her frailty; they had begun to look upon the scarlet letter as the token, not of that one sin for which she had borne so long and dreary a penance, but of her many good deeds since. "Do you see that woman with the embroidered badge?" they would say to strangers. "It is our Hester--the town's own Hester—who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted!" The scarlet letter enabled her to walk securely amid all peril. Had she fallen among thieves, it would have kept her safe.

The effect of the symbol on the mind of Hester Prynne herself was

powerful and peculiar. All the light of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline. Even the attractiveness of her person had undergone a similar change. Her rich and luxuriant hair had either been cut off, or was so completely hidden by a cap, that not a shining lock of it ever once gushed into the sunshine. There seemed to be no longer anything in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon. Such is frequently the fate of the feminine character and person, when the woman has encountered, and lived through, an experience of peculiar severity. If she be all tenderness, she will die. If she survive, the tenderness will either be crushed out of her, or crushed so deeply into her heart that it can never show itself more.

Much of the marble coldness of Hester's impression was to be attributed to the circumstance that her life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling to thought. Standing alone in the world, the world's law was no law for her mind.

Her interview with Mr. Dimmesdale, on the night of his vigil, had given her a new theme of reflection. She had witnessed the intense misery beneath which the minister struggled. She saw that he stood on the verge of lunacy, if he had not already stepped across it. A deadlier venom had been infused into it by the hand that proffered relief. A secret enemy had been continually by his side, under the semblance of a friend and helper. Strengthened by years of hard and solemn trial, she felt herself no longer

inadequate to cope with Roger Chillingworth.

Hester Prynne resolved to meet her former husband, and do what might be in her power for the rescue of the victim on whom he had so evidently set his grip. One afternoon, walking with Pearl in a retired part of the peninsula, she beheld the old physician with a basket on one arm and a staff in the other hand, stooping along the ground in quest of roots and herbs to concoct his medicine.

XIV. HESTER AND THE PHYSICIAN

Hester bade little Pearl run down to the margin of the water and play with the shells and tangled sea-weed.

Meanwhile her mother had accosted the physician. "I would speak a word with you," said she--"a word that concerns us much."

"Aha! and is it Mistress Hester that has a word for old Roger Chillingworth?" answered he. "With all my heart! Why, mistress, I hear good tidings of you on all hands! It was debated whether the scarlet letter might be taken off your bosom. I made my entreaty to the worshipful magistrate that it might be done."

"It lies not in the pleasure of the magistrates to take off the badge," replied Hester. "Were I worthy, it would fall away of its own nature, or be transformed into something that should speak a different purport."

"Nay, then, wear it, if it suit you better," rejoined he, "A woman must follow her own fancy touching the adornment of her person."

All this while Hester had been looking steadily at the old man, and was shocked to discern what a change had occurred within the past seven years. It was not so much that he had grown older; but the former aspect of an intellectual and studious man, calm and quiet, had altogether vanished, and been succeeded by an eager, searching, almost fierce, yet carefully guarded look. There came a glare of red light out of his eyes, as if the old man's soul were on fire and kept on smoldering duskily within.

In a word, Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man's faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only undertake a devil's job. This unhappy person had effected such a transformation by devoting himself for seven years to the constant analysis of a heart full of torture, adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he gloated over.

Here was another ruin, the responsibility of which came home to her.

"It is of yonder miserable man that I would speak."

"And what of him?" cried Chillingworth, eagerly. "Not to hide the truth, Mistress Hester, my thoughts happen just now to be busy with the gentleman. So speak freely and I will make answer."

"When we last spoke together," said Hester, "now seven years ago, you extorted a promise of secrecy between yourself and me. As the life and good fame of yonder man were in your hands, there seemed no choice to me but to be silent in accordance with your behest. Since that day no man is so near to him as you. You tread behind his every footstep. You are beside him, sleeping and waking. You search his thoughts. You burrow and rankle in his heart! Your clutch is on his life, and you cause him to die daily a living death, and still he knows you not. In permitting this I have acted a false part by the only man to whom the power was left me to be true!"

"What choice had you?" asked Roger Chillingworth. "My finger, pointed at this man, would have hurled him from his pulpit into a dungeon, thence, to the gallows!"

"It had been better so!" said Hester Prynne.

"What evil have I done the man?" asked Roger Chillingworth again. "I tell thee, Hester Prynne, the richest fee that ever physician earned from monarch could not have bought such care as I have wasted on this miserable priest! But for my aid his life would have burned away in torments within the first two years after his crime and thine. For, Hester, his spirit lacked the strength that could have borne up, as you have, beneath a burden like thy scarlet letter. Oh, I could reveal a goodly secret! But enough. That he now breathes and creeps on earth is owing all to me!"

"Better he had died at once!" said Hester Prynne.

"Yea, woman, thou sayest truly!" cried old Roger Chillingworth, letting the lurid fire of his heart blaze out before her eyes. "Better had he died at once! Never did mortal suffer what this man has suffered. And all, all, in the sight of his worst enemy!"

"Hast thou not tortured him enough?" said Hester, noticing the old man's look. "Has he not paid thee all?"

"No, no! He has but increased the debt!" answered the physician. "Dost thou remember me, Hester, as I was nine years ago? Even then I was in the autumn of my days. But all my life had been made up of studious, thoughtful, quiet years, for the increase of knowledge, and for the advancement of human welfare. No life had been more peaceful and innocent than mine. Dost thou remember me? Was I not, though you might

deem me cold, a man thoughtful for others, craving little for himself--kind, true, just and of constant, if not warm affections? Was I not all this?"

"All this, and more," said Hester.

"And what am I now?" demanded he, looking into her face, and permitting the whole evil within him to be written on his features. "I have already told thee what I am--a fiend! Who made me so?"

"It was myself," cried Hester, shuddering. "It was I, not he. Why hast thou not avenged thyself on me?"

"I have left thee to the scarlet letter," replied Roger Chillingworth. "If that has not avenged me, I can do no more!"

"It has avenged thee," answered Hester.

"I judged no less," said the physician. "And now what wouldst thou with me touching this man?"

"I must reveal the secret," answered Hester, firmly. "He must see you in your true character. What may be the result I know not. There is no good for him, no good for me, no good for you.

"Woman, I could pity thee," said Chillingworth. "You had great elements. Had you met earlier with a better love than mine, this evil had not been. I pity thee, for the good that has been wasted in thy nature."

"And I thee," answered Hester Prynne, "for the hatred that has transformed a wise and just man to a fiend! Wilt thou yet purge it out of thee, and be once more human? If not for his sake, then doubly for thine

own! Forgive, and leave his further retribution to the Power that claims it!

"Peace, Hester--peace!" replied the old man, with gloomy sternness--"it is not granted me to pardon. I have no such power. By thy first step awry, thou did plant the germ of evil. It is our fate. Let the black flower blossom as it may! Now, go thy ways, and deal as thou wilt with yonder man." He waved his hand, and began gathering herbs.

XV. HESTER AND PEARL

So Roger Chillingworth took leave of Hester Prynne. He gathered here and there a herb, or grubbed up a root and put it into the basket on his arm. Hester gazed after him a little while, looking to see whether the tender grass of early spring would not be blighted beneath him.

"Be it sin or no," said Hester Prynne, bitterly, "I hate the man!"

She upbraided herself for the sentiment, but could not overcome or lessen it. Attempting to do so, she thought of those long-past days in a distant land, when he used to emerge at eventide from the seclusion of his study and sit down in the firelight of their home, and in the light of her smile. He needed to bask himself in that smile, he said, in order that the chill of so many lonely hours among his books might be taken off the scholar's heart. Such scenes had once appeared happy, but now, they classed themselves among her ugliest remembrances.

"Yes, I hate him!" repeated Hester more bitterly than before. "He betrayed me! He has done me worse wrong than I did him!"

He being gone, she summoned back her child.

"Pearl! Where are you?"

Pearl had been at no loss for amusement while her mother talked with the old gatherer of herbs. She gathered seaweed and made herself a scarf and a head-dress, and assumed the aspect of a little mermaid. As the last touch to her mermaid's garb, Pearl took some eel-grass and imitated on

her own bosom the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother's. A letter—the letter A—but freshly green instead of scarlet. The child bent her chin upon her breast, and contemplated this device with strange interest.

"I wonder if mother will ask me what it means?" thought Pearl.

Just then she heard her mother's voice, and, flitting along, appeared before Hester laughing, and pointing her finger to the token on her bosom.

"My little Pearl," said Hester, after a moment's silence, "the green letter, and on thy childish bosom, has no purport. But dost thou know, my child, what this letter means which thy mother is doomed to wear?"

"Yes, mother," said the child. "It is the great letter A. Thou hast taught me in the horn-book."

Hester looked steadily into her little face; but she could not satisfy herself whether Pearl really attached any meaning to the symbol. She felt a morbid desire to ascertain the point.

"Dost thou know, child, why thy mother wears this letter?"

"Truly do I!" said Pearl, looking brightly into her mother's face.

"It is for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart!"

"And what reason is that?" asked Hester, half smiling at the absurd incongruity of the child's observation; but on second thought turning pale.

"What has the letter to do with any heart save mine?"

"Nay, mother, I have told all I know," said Pearl. "Ask yonder old

man whom thou hast been talking with--it may be he can tell. Mother dear, what does this scarlet letter mean?--and why dost thou wear it on thy bosom?--and why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?"

She took her mother's hand in both her own, and gazed into her eyes earnestly.

"What does the letter mean, mother? and why dost thou wear it? and why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?"

"What shall I say?" thought Hester to herself. "No! if this be the price of the child's sympathy, I cannot pay it."

Then she spoke aloud--"Silly Pearl," said she, "what questions are these? There are many things in this world that a child must not ask about. What know I of the minister's heart? And as for the scarlet letter, I wear it for the sake of its gold thread."

In all the seven bygone years, Hester Prynne had never before been false to the symbol on her bosom.

But the child did not see fit to let the matter drop. Two or three times at supper-time, and while Hester was putting her to bed, Pearl looked up, with mischief gleaming in her black eyes.

"Mother," said she, "what does the scarlet letter mean?"

And the next morning, the first indication the child gave of being awake was by popping up her head, and making that other enquiry, "Mother!--Mother!--Why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?"

"Hold thy tongue, naughty child!" answered her mother. "Do not tease me; else I shall put thee into the dark closet!"

XVI. A FOREST WALK

Hester Prynne remained constant in her resolve to make known to Mr. Dimmesdale the true character of the man who had crept into his intimacy. For several days, however, she vainly sought an opportunity of finding him on a walk which she knew he often took. There would have been no scandal if she had she visited him in his own study, where many a penitent had confessed sins. But, partly that she dreaded the secret or interference of Roger Chillingworth, and partly that both the minister and she would need the whole wide world to breathe in, while they talked together--for these reasons Hester never thought of meeting him anywhere other than beneath the open sky.

At last, while attending a sick chamber, she learnt that he had gone, the day before, to visit the Apostle Eliot, among his Indian converts. He would probably return tomorrow afternoon. Therefore, the next day, Hester took Pearl and set forth.

The road was no other than a foot-path. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest. This hemmed it in so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, that, to Hester's mind, it was the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering. The day was chill and somber. Overhead was a gray expanse of cloud, slightly stirred by a breeze; so that a gleam of flickering sunshine might now and then be seen at its solitary play along the path.

"Mother," said Pearl, "the sunshine does not love you. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom. See! There it is, playing a good way off. Stand here, and let me run and catch it. I am a child. It will not flee from me--I wear nothing on my bosom yet!"

"Nor ever will, my child, I hope," said Hester.

"And why not, mother?" asked Pearl. "Will not it come on its own when I am grown?"

"Run away, child and catch the sunshine. It will soon be gone."

Pearl set forth at a great pace, and as Hester smiled to perceive, did actually catch the sunshine, and stood laughing in it, all brightened by its splendor. The light lingered about the lonely child, as if glad of such a playmate, until her mother had drawn almost nigh enough to step into the magic circle too.

"It will go now," said Pearl, shaking her head.

"See!" answered Hester, smiling; "now I can stretch out my hand and grasp some of it."

As she attempted to do so, the sunshine vanished; or, to judge from the bright expression that was dancing on Pearl's features, the child had absorbed it, and would give it forth, with a gleam about her in the shade.

"Come, my child!" said Hester, "we will sit down a little way within the wood, and rest ourselves."

"I am not weary, mother," replied the little girl. "But you may sit

down, if you will tell me a story meanwhile."

"A story, child!" said Hester. "And about what?"

"Oh, a story about the Black Man," answered Pearl. "How he haunts this forest, and carries a book with him a big, heavy book, with iron clasps; and how this ugly Black Man offers his book and an iron pen to everybody that meets him here among the trees; and they are to write their names with their own blood; and then he sets his mark on their bosoms. Didst thou ever meet the Black Man, mother?"

"And who told you this story, Pearl," asked her mother.

"It was the old dame in the chimney corner, at the house where you watched last night," said the child. "But she fancied me asleep while she was talking of it. She said that a thousand people had met him here, and had written in his book, and have his mark on them. And that ugly tempered lady, old Mistress Hibbins, was one. And, mother, the old dame said that this scarlet letter was the Black Man's mark on thee, and that it glows like a red flame when thou meets him at midnight, here in the dark wood. Is it true, mother? And do thou go to meet him in the nighttime?"

"Didst thou ever awake and find thy mother gone?" asked Hester.

"Not that I remember," said the child. "But, mother, tell me! Is there a Black Man? And didst thou ever meet him? And is this his mark?"

"Will you let me be at peace, if I tell you?" asked her mother.

"Yes, if thou tell me all," answered Pearl.

"Once in my life I met the Black Man!" said her mother. "This scarlet letter is his mark!"

Thus conversing, they entered sufficiently deep into the wood to secure themselves from the observation of any casual passenger along the forest track. Here they sat down on a heap of moss; with a brook flowing through the midst.

"What does this sad little brook say, mother?" inquired she.

"If thou had a sorrow of thine own, the brook might tell thee of it," answered her mother, "even as it is telling me of mine. But now, Pearl, I hear a footstep along the path. Go play, and leave me to speak with him that comes yonder."

"Is it the Black Man?" asked Pearl.

"Wilt thou go and play?" repeated her mother, "But do not stray far into the wood. And take heed to come at my first call."

"Yes, mother," answered Pearl, "But if it be the Black Man, wilt thou not let me stay a moment, and look at him, with his book under his arm?"

"Go, silly child!" said her mother impatiently. "It is no Black Man! Thou canst see him now. It is the minister!"

"And so it is!" said the child. "And, mother, he has his hand over his heart! Is it because, when the minister wrote his name in the book, the Black Man set his mark in that place? But why does he not wear it outside his bosom, as thou do, mother?"

"Go now, child," cried Hester Prynne. "But do not stray far. Keep where you can hear the babble of the brook."

The child went singing away, following up the current of the brook. She set herself to gathering violets and some scarlet columbines.

When her elf-child had departed, Hester Prynne made a step or two towards the track that led through the forest, but still remained under the deep shadow of the trees. She beheld the minister advancing along the path alone, and leaning on a staff which he had cut by the wayside. He looked haggard and feeble. There was a listlessness in his gait, as if he saw no reason for taking one step further, but would have been glad to fling himself down at the root of the nearest tree, and lie there passive for evermore. To Hester's eye, the Reverend exhibited no symptom of suffering, except that, as Pearl had remarked, he kept his hand over his heart.

XVII. THE PASTOR AND HIS PARISHIONER

Slowly as the minister walked, he had almost gone by before Hester Prynne could gather voice enough to attract his observation.

"Arthur Dimmesdale!" she said, faintly at first, then louder, but hoarsely--"Arthur Dimmesdale!"

"Who speaks?" answered the minister. Gathering himself quickly up, he stood more erect. He made a step nearer, and discovered the scarlet letter. "Hester Prynne!", said he; "is it thou? Art thou in life?"

"Even so." she answered. "In such life as has been mine these seven years! And thou, Arthur Dimmesdale, dost thou live?"

Without a word more spoken they glided back into the shadow of the woods whence Hester had emerged, and sat down on the heap of moss where she and Pearl had been sitting.

After a while, the minister fixed his eyes on Hester Prynne's.

"Hester," said he, "hast thou found peace?"

She smiled drearily, looking down upon her bosom. "Hast thou?"

"None--nothing but despair!" he answered. "What else could I look for, being what I am, and leading such a life as mine? Hester, I am most miserable!"

"The people revere thee," said Hester. "And surely thou work good among them! Does this bring thee no comfort?"

"More misery, Hester!--Only the more misery!" answered the

clergyman with a bitter smile. "As concerns the good which I may appear to do, I have no faith in it. What can a ruined soul like mine effect towards the redemption of other souls? As for the people's reverence, I wish it were turned to scorn and hatred! I have laughed, in bitterness and agony of heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am! Satan laughs at it!"

"You wrong yourself in this," said Hester gently. "You have deeply and sorely repented. Your sin is left behind you in the days long past. Your present life is not less holy than it seems in people's eyes. Is there no reality in the penitence thus sealed and witnessed by good works? And why should it not bring you peace?"

"No, Hester--no!" replied the clergyman. "There is no substance in it! It is cold and dead, and can do nothing for me! Of penance, I have had enough! Of penitence, there has been none! Else, I should long ago have thrown off these garments of mock holiness, and have shown myself to mankind as they will see me at the judgment-seat. Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knows what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am! It is all falsehood!--all emptiness!--all death!"

Hester Prynne looked into his face, but hesitated to speak. She conquered her fears and spoke: "Such a friend as thou hast even now wished for," said she, "with whom to weep over thy sin, thou has in me, the partner

of it!" Again she hesitated, but brought out the words with an effort. "Thou has long had such an enemy, and dwells with him, under the same roof!"

The minister started to his feet, gasping for breath, and clutching at his heart, as if he would have torn it out of his bosom.

"What sayest thou?" cried he. "An enemy! And under mine own roof! What mean you?"

Hester Prynne was now fully sensible of the deep injury for which she was responsible to this unhappy man, in permitting him to lie for so many years. All her sympathies towards him had been both softened and invigorated. She doubted not that the continual presence of Roger Chillingworth and his interference, as a physician, caused the minister's physical and spiritual infirmities.

Such was the ruin to which she had brought the man still so passionately loved! Hester felt that the sacrifice of the clergyman's good name, and death itself, would have been infinitely preferable to the alternative which she had taken upon herself to choose. And now, rather than have had this grievous wrong to confess, she would gladly have laid down on the forest leaves, and died there, at Arthur Dimmesdale's feet.

"Oh, Arthur!" cried she, "forgive me! In all things else, I have striven to be true! Then I consented to a deception. But a lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side! That old man!--the physician!--he whom they call Roger Chillingworth!--he was my husband!"

The minister looked at her for an instant, with all that violence of passion, which was, in fact, the portion of him which the devil claimed, and through which he sought to win the rest. Never was there a blacker or a fiercer frown than Hester now encountered. He sank down on the ground, and buried his face in his hands.

"I might have known it," murmured he--"I did know it! Was not the secret told me, in the natural recoil of my heart at the first sight of him, and as often as I have seen him since? Why did I not understand? Oh, Hester Prynne, thou little knows all the horror of this thing! And the shame!--the indelicacy!--the horrible ugliness of this exposure of a sick and guilty heart to the very eye that would gloat over it! Woman, woman, thou art accountable for this!--I cannot forgive thee!"

"Thou shalt forgive me!" cried Hester, flinging herself on the fallen leaves beside him. "Let God punish! Thou shalt forgive!"

With sudden and desperate tenderness she threw her arms around him, and pressed his head against her bosom, little caring though his cheek rested on the scarlet letter. He would have released himself, but strove in vain to do so. Hester would not set him free, lest he should look her sternly in the face. All the world had frowned on her--for seven long years it had frowned upon this lonely woman--and still she bore it all, nor ever once turned away her firm, sad eyes. Heaven, likewise, had frowned upon her, and she had not died. But the frown of this pale, weak, sinful, and sorrow-

stricken man was what Hester could not bear, and live!

"Wilt thou yet forgive me?" she repeated, over and over again.

"I do forgive you, Hester," replied the minister at length, with a deep utterance, out of an abyss of sadness, but no anger. "I freely forgive you now. May God forgive us both. We are not, Hester, the worst sinners in the world. There is one worse than even the polluted priest! That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. Thou and I, Hester, never did so!"

"Never, never!" whispered she. "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other. Hast thou forgotten it?"

"Hush, Hester!" said Arthur Dimmesdale, rising from the ground. "No; I have not forgotten!"

They sat down again, side by side, and hand clasped in hand on the mossy trunk of the tree. The boughs were tossing above their heads; while one solemn old tree groaned dolefully to another, as if telling the sad story of the pair that sat beneath.

And yet they lingered. How dreary looked the forest-track that led backward to the settlement, where Hester Prynne must take up again the burden of her ignominy and the minister the hollow mockery of his good name! So they lingered an instant longer. No golden light had ever been so precious as the gloom of this dark forest. Here seen only by his eyes, the scarlet letter need not burn into the bosom of the fallen woman! Here seen

only by her eyes, Arthur Dimmesdale, false to God and man, might be, for one moment true! He started at a thought that suddenly occurred to him.

"Hester!" cried he, "here is a new horror! Roger Chillingworth knows your purpose to reveal his true character. Will he continue, then, to keep our secret? What will now be the course of his revenge?"

"There is a strange secrecy in his nature," replied Hester, thoughtfully; "and it has grown upon him by the hidden practices of his revenge. I deem it not likely that he will betray the secret. He will doubtless seek other means of satiating his dark passion."

"And I!--how am I to live longer, breathing the same air with this deadly enemy?" exclaimed Dimmesdale, pressing his hand nervously against his heart--a gesture that had grown involuntary with him. "Think for me! Thou art strong. Resolve for me!"

"Thou must dwell no longer with this man," said Hester, slowly and firmly. "Thy heart must be no longer under his evil eye!"

"It were far worse than death!" replied the minister. "But how to avoid it? What choice remains to me? Shall I lie down again on these withered leaves, where I cast myself when thou didst tell me what he was? Must I sink down there, and die at once?"

"Alas! what a ruin has befallen thee!" said Hester, with the tears in her eyes. "Wilt thou die for very weakness? There is no other cause!"

"The judgment of God is on me," answered the conscience-stricken

priest. "It is too mighty for me to struggle with!"

"Heaven would show mercy," rejoined Hester, "had thou but the strength to take advantage of it."

"Be strong for me!" answered he. "Advise me what to do."

"Is the world, then, so narrow?" exclaimed Hester Prynne, fixing her deep eyes on the minister's. "Does the universe lie within the compass of the town? Where leads the forest-track? Deeper it goes, and deeper into the wilderness. There thou art free! So brief a journey would bring thee from a world where thou hast been most wretched, to one where thou may still be happy! Is there not shade enough in all this forest to hide thy heart from the gaze of Chillingworth?"

"Yes, Hester; but only under the fallen leaves!" replied the minister, with a sad smile.

"Then there is the broad pathway of the sea!" continued Hester. "It brought thee hither. If thou choose, it will bear thee back again. In our native land, whether in some remote rural village, or in vast London--or, surely, in Germany, in France, in Italy--thou would be beyond his power and knowledge! And what has thou to do with all these iron men, and their opinions? They have kept thy better part in bondage too long already!"

"It cannot be!" answered the minister, listening as if he were called upon to realize a dream. "I am powerless to go. Wretched and sinful as I am, I have had no other thought than to drag on my earthly existence where

Providence has placed me. Lost as my own soul is, I would still do what I may for other human souls! I dare not quit my post, even if my sure reward is death and dishonor, when my dreary watch shall come to an end!"

"Thou art crushed under this seven years' weight of misery," replied Hester. "But thou shalt leave it all behind thee! It shall not cumber thy steps, neither shall thou board the ship with it, if thou prefer to cross the sea. Leave this wreck and ruin here where it hath happened. Begin all anew! There is happiness to be enjoyed! There is good to be done! Exchange this false life for a true one. Preach! Write! Do anything, except lie down and die! Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale, and make another, and a high one, that you can wear without fear or shame. Why should you tarry so much as one other day in the torments that have so gnawed into your life? Up, and away!"

"Oh, Hester!" cried Arthur Dimmesdale, "thou tells of running a race to a man whose knees are tottering beneath him! I must die here! There is not the strength or courage left me to venture into the wide, strange, difficult world alone!"

It was the last expression of the despondency of a broken spirit. He lacked energy to grasp the better fortune that seemed within his reach.

He repeated the word--"Alone, Hester!"

"Thou shall not go alone!" answered she. Then, all was spoken!

XVIII. A FLOOD OF SUNSHINE

Arthur Dimmesdale gazed into Hester's face with a look in which hope and joy shone out, but with fear between them, and a kind of horror at her boldness, who had spoken what he hinted at, but dared not speak.

But Hester Prynne had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness, as vast and shadowy as the untamed forest. Her intellect and heart had their home in desert places. The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers--stern and wild ones--and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.

The minister, on the other hand, had never gone through an experience beyond the scope of generally received laws; although, in a single instance, he had so fearfully transgressed one of the most sacred of them. But this had been a sin of passion, not of principle.

As regarded Hester Prynne, the whole seven years of outlaw and ignominy had been little other than a preparation for this very hour. But Arthur Dimmesdale! Were such a man once more to fall, what plea could be urged in extenuation of his crime?

The struggle, if there were one, need not be described. Let it suffice that the clergyman resolved to flee, and not alone.

"If in all these past seven years," thought he, "I could recall one

instant of peace or hope, I would endure, for the sake of Heaven's mercy. But now--since I am doomed--why should I not snatch the solace allowed to the condemned culprit before his execution? Neither can I any longer live without her companionship; so powerful is she--so tender to soothe! O Thou to whom I dare not lift mine eyes, will Thou yet pardon me?"

"Thou wilt go!" said Hester calmly, as he met her glance.

The decision once made, a glow of strange enjoyment threw its flickering brightness over the trouble of his breast. It was the exhilarating effect--upon a prisoner just escaped from the dungeon of his own heart--of breathing the wild, free atmosphere. His spirit rose.

"Do I feel joy again?" cried he, wondering at himself. "I thought the germ of it was dead in me! Oh, Hester, thou art my better angel! I seem to have flung myself--sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened--down upon these leaves, and to have risen up all anew, and with new powers to glorify Him that hath been merciful! This is already the better life! Why did we not find it sooner?"

"Let us not look back," answered Hester Prynne. "The past is gone! Wherefore should we linger upon it now? See! With this symbol I undo it all, and make it as if it had never been!"

So speaking, she undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, and, taking it from her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves. The mystic token alighted on the hither verge of the stream. With a

hand's-breadth further flight, it would have fallen into the water. But there lay the embroidered letter, glittering like a lost jewel.

The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight until she felt the freedom! By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair, and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale. The gloom of the earth and sky vanished with their sorrow. All at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf. Such was the sympathy of Nature with the bliss of these two spirits! Love must always create a sunshine, filling the heart so full of radiance, that it overflows upon the world.

Hester looked at him with a thrill of another joy.

"Thou must know Pearl!" said she. "Our Pearl! Thou hast seen her, but thou will see her now with new eyes. She is a strange child! You will love her dearly, as I do, and will advise me how to deal with her!"

"Dost thou think the child will be glad to know me?" asked the minister, somewhat uneasily. "I have long shrunk from children, because they often show a distrust--a backwardness to be familiar with me. I have even been afraid of little Pearl!"

"Ah, that was sad!" answered the mother. "But she will love thee dearly, and thou her. She is not far off. I will call her. Pearl!"

"I see the child," observed the minister. "Yonder she is, standing in a streak of sunshine, a good way off, on the other side of the brook. So thou think the child will love me?"

Hester smiled, and called to Pearl, who was visible at some distance. She heard her mother's voice, and came slowly through the forest.

Pearl had been gathering violets, anemones, columbines, and some twigs of the freshest green, which the old trees held down before her eyes. With these she decorated her hair and her young waist, and became a nymph child. In such guise had Pearl adorned herself, when she heard her mother's voice, and came slowly back—for she saw the clergyman!

XIX. THE CHILD AT THE BROOKSIDE

"Thou wilt love her dearly," repeated Hester Prynne, as she and the minister sat watching Pearl. "Do thou not think her beautiful? And see with what natural skill she has made those simple flowers adorn her! She is a splendid child!"

"Do thou know, Hester," said Arthur Dimmesdale, with an unquiet smile, "that this dear child, tripping about always at thy side, hath caused me many an alarm? I thought--oh, Hester!--that my own features were partly repeated in her face, and so strikingly that the world might see them! But she is mostly thine!"

"No, no! Not mostly!" answered the mother. "A little longer, and thou need not to be afraid to trace whose child she is. But how strangely beautiful she looks with those wild flowers in her hair! It is as if one of the fairies, whom we left in dear old England, had decked her out to meet us."

It was with a feeling which neither of them had ever before experienced, that they sat and watched Pearl's slow advance. In her was visible the tie that united them. She had been offered to the world, these seven past years; and in her was revealed the secret they so darkly sought to hide--all written in this symbol--all plainly manifest! Pearl was the oneness of their being.

"Let her see nothing strange--no passion or eagerness--in thy way of accosting her," whispered Hester. "Our Pearl is a fitful and fantastic little

elf sometimes. Especially she is generally intolerant of emotion, when she does not fully comprehend why. But the child hath strong affections! She loves me, and will love thee!"

"Thou cannot think," said the minister, glancing aside at Hester Prynne, "how my heart dreads this interview, and yearns for it! But, in truth, as I already told thee, children are not readily won to be familiar with me. They will not climb my knee, nor prattle in my ear, nor answer to my smile, but stand apart, and eye me strangely. Even little babes, when I take them in my arms, weep bitterly. Yet Pearl, twice in her little lifetime, hath been kind to me! The first time--thou know it well! The last was when thou led her with thee to the house of yonder stern old Governor."

"And thou didst plead so bravely in her behalf and mine!" answered the mother. "I remember it; and so shall Pearl. Fear nothing. She may be strange and shy at first, but will soon learn to love thee!"

By this time Pearl had reached the margin of the brook, and stood on the further side, gazing silently at Hester and the clergyman, who still sat together on the mossy tree-trunk waiting to receive her.

"Pray hasten her, for this delay has already imparted a tremor to my nerves," said the minister.

"Come, dearest child!" said Hester, stretching out both her arms. "How slow thou art! Here is a friend of mine, who must be thy friend also. Thou wilt have twice as much love henceforward as thy mother alone could

give thee! Leap across the brook and come to us!"

Pearl, without responding in any manner to these honey-sweet expressions, remained on the other side of the brook. Now she fixed her bright wild eyes on her mother, now on the minister, and now included them both in the same glance. For some unaccountable reason, as Arthur Dimmesdale felt the child's eyes upon himself, his hand--with that gesture so habitual as to have become involuntary--stole over his heart. At length, Pearl stretched out her hand, with the small forefinger extended, and pointing evidently towards her mother's breast.

"Strange child! why dost thou not come to me?" exclaimed Hester.

Pearl still pointed with her forefinger, and a frown gathered on her brow. As her mother still kept beckoning to her, the child stamped her foot with a yet more imperious look and gesture.

"Hasten, Pearl, or I shall be angry with thee!" cried Hester. "Leap across the brook, naughty child, and run hither! Else I must come to thee!"

But Pearl, not a whit startled at her mother's threats, now suddenly burst into a fit of passion, throwing her small figure into the most extravagant contortions. She accompanied this wild outbreak with piercing shrieks, which the woods reverberated on all sides.

"I see what ails the child," whispered Hester to the clergyman, "Pearl misses something that she has always seen me wear!"

"I pray you," answered the minister, "if thou hast any means of

pacifying the child, do it forthwith!" said he, attempting to smile, "Pacify her if thou loves me!"

Hester turned again towards Pearl with a crimson blush upon her cheek, a conscious glance aside at the clergyman, and then a heavy sigh.

"Pearl," said she sadly, "look down at thy feet! There!--before thee!--on the hither side of the brook!"

The child turned her eyes to the point indicated, and there lay the scarlet letter so close upon the margin of the stream that the gold embroidery was reflected in it. "Bring it hither!" said Hester.

"Come thou and take it up!" answered Pearl.

"Was ever such a child!" observed Hester aside to the minister. "Oh, I have much to tell thee about her! But, in very truth, she is right as regards this hateful token. I must bear its torture yet a little longer--only a few days longer--until we shall have left this region. The forest cannot hide it! The mid-ocean shall take it from my hand, and swallow it up forever!"

With these words she advanced to the brook, took up the scarlet letter, and fastened it again to her bosom. As Hester had spoken of drowning it in the sea, there was a sense of inevitable doom upon her as she received back this deadly symbol from the hand of fate. She had flung it into infinite space! She had drawn an hour's free breath! Here again was the scarlet misery glittering on the old spot!

When the dreary change was wrought, she extended her hand to

Pearl. "Do thou know thy mother now, child?" asked she, reproachfully, but with a subdued tone. "Wilt thou come across the brook, and own thy mother, now that she has her shame upon her--now that she is sad?"

"Now I will!" answered the child, bounding across the brook, and clasping Hester in her arms "Now thou art my mother! and I am thy Pearl!"

In a mood of tenderness that was not usual with her, she drew down her mother's head, and kissed her brow and both her cheek. But then Pearl put up her mouth and kissed the scarlet letter, too.

"That was not kind!" said Hester. "When thou hast shown me a little love, thou mocks me!"

"Why doth the minister sit yonder?" asked Pearl.

"He waits to welcome thee," replied her mother. "He loves thee, my little Pearl, and loves thy mother, too. Wilt thou not love him? Come, he longs to greet thee!"

"Doth he love us?" said Pearl, looking up with acute intelligence into her mother's face. "Will he go back with us, hand in hand, we three together, into the town?"

"Not now, my child," answered Hester. "But in days to come he will walk hand in hand with us. We will have a home and fireside of our own; and thou shalt sit upon his knee; and he will teach thee many things, and love thee dearly. Thou wilt love him--wilt thou not?"

"And will he always keep his hand over his heart?"

"Foolish child, what a question is that!" exclaimed her mother.

"Come, and ask his blessing!"

But Pearl would show no favor to the clergyman. It was only by an exertion of force that her mother brought her up to him. The minister—painfully embarrassed, but hoping that a kiss might prove a talisman to admit him into the child's regard--bent forward, and impressed one on her brow. Hereupon, Pearl broke away from her mother, and, running to the brook, stooped over it, and bathed her forehead, until the unwelcome kiss was quite washed off. She then remained apart, silently watching Hester and the clergyman; while they talked together and made arrangements for their new lives together.

XX. THE MINISTER IN A MAZE

As the minister departed, he threw a backward glance. There was Hester, still standing beside the tree-trunk. And there was Pearl, too, lightly dancing from the brook to her mother's side. So the minister had not fallen asleep and dreamed!

He recalled the plans which Hester and himself had sketched for their departure. It had been determined between them that the Old World, with its crowds and cities, offered them a more eligible shelter and concealment than the wilds of New England or America. It so happened that a ship lay in the harbor; this vessel had recently arrived from the Spanish Main, and within three days' time would sail for Bristol. Hester—whose vocation, as a Sister of Charity, had brought her acquainted with the captain and crew--could take upon herself to secure the passage of two individuals and a child with all the needed secrecy.

The minister inquired of Hester the precise time at which the vessel might be expected to depart. It would probably be on the fourth day from the present.

"This is most fortunate!" he then said to himself. On the third day from the present, he was to preach the Election Sermon; a great method of terminating his professional career. "At least, they shall say of me," thought this exemplary man, "that I leave no public duty unperformed or ill-performed!"

The excitement of Mr. Dimmesdale's feelings as he returned from his interview with Hester, lent him unaccustomed physical energy, and hurried him townward at a rapid pace. The pathway among the woods seemed wilder and less trodden by the foot of man, than he remembered it on his outward journey. He recalled how feebly, and with what frequent pauses for breath he had toiled over the same ground, only two days before.

At this moment Mr. Dimmesdale met old Mistress Hibbins, the reputed witch-lady. She came to a full stop, looked shrewdly into his face, smiled craftily, and began a conversation.

"So, Reverend sir, you have made a visit into the forest," observed the witch-lady. "The next time I pray you to allow me only a fair warning, and I shall be proud to bear you company. My good word will go far towards gaining any strange gentleman a fair reception."

"I profess, madam," answered the clergyman, "on my conscience and character, that I am utterly bewildered as to the purport of your words! I went not into the forest to seek a potentate. My object was to greet that pious friend of mine, the Apostle Eliot, and rejoice with him over the many precious souls he hath won from heathendom!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the old witch-lady. "Well, well! we must talk in the daytime! You carry it off like an old hand! But at midnight, and in the forest, we shall have other talk together!"

She passed on with her aged stateliness, but often turning back and

smiling at him, like one willing to recognize a secret intimacy of connexion.

"Have I then sold myself," thought the minister, "to the fiend whom, if men say true, this yellow-starched and velveteed old hag has chosen for her prince and master?"

The wretched minister! He had made a bargain very like it! Tempted by a dream of happiness, he had yielded himself with deliberate choice, as he had never done before, to what he knew was deadly sin.

He had by this time reached his dwelling on the edge of the burial ground, and, hastening up the stairs, took refuge in his study. The minister was glad to have reached this shelter. Here he had studied and written; here gone through fast and vigil, and come forth half alive; here striven to pray; here borne a hundred thousand agonies! There was the Bible, in its rich old Hebrew, with Moses and the Prophets speaking to him, and God's voice through all. There on the table, with the pen beside it, was an unfinished sermon.

A knock came at the door of the study, and the minister said, "Come in!"--not wholly devoid of an idea that he might behold an evil spirit. And so he did! It was old Roger Chillingworth that entered. The minister stood white and speechless, with one hand on the Hebrew Scriptures, and the other spread upon his breast.

"Welcome home, reverend sir," said the physician "And how found you the Apostle Eliot? But, dear sir, you look pale, as if the travel through

the wilderness had been too sore for you. Will not my aid be requisite to put you in heart and strength to preach your Election Sermon?"

"Nay, I think not so," rejoined the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. "My journey, and the sight of the holy Apostle yonder, and the free air which I have breathed have done me good. I think to need no more of your drugs, my kind physician, good though they be, and administered by a friendly hand."

All this time Roger Chillingworth was looking at the minister with the grave and intent regard of a physician towards his patient. But, in spite of this outward show, the Reverend was almost convinced of the old man's knowledge of his talk in the woods with Hester Prynne. The physician knew then that he was no longer his trusted friend, but his bitterest enemy. Yet did the physician, in his dark way, creep near the secret.

"Were it not better," said he, "that you use my poor skill tonight? Dear sir, we must take pains to make you strong and vigorous for this occasion of the Election discourse. The people look for great things from you, another year may come and find their pastor gone."

"Yes, to another world," replied the minister with pious resignation. "Heaven grant it be a better one; for, I hardly think to tarry with my flock through another year! But touching your medicine, kind sir, in my present frame of body I need it not."

"I joy to hear it," answered the physician. "It may be that my

remedies, so long in vain, begin now to take due effect. Happy man were I, could I achieve this cure!"

"I thank you from my heart, most watchful friend," said the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale with a solemn smile. "I thank you, and can only repay your good deeds with my prayers."

"A good man's prayers are golden recompense!" rejoined Chillingworth. "They are the current gold coin of the New Jerusalem, with the King's own mark on them!"

Left alone, the minister summoned a servant of the house, and requested food, which, being set before him, he ate with ravenous appetite. Then flinging the already written pages of the Election Sermon into the fire, he began another, which he wrote with such an impulsive flow of thought and emotion; he only wondered how Heaven could transmit its grand and solemn music through so foul an organ pipe as he.

Thus the night fled away; morning came, and at last sunrise threw a golden beam into the study, and laid it right across the minister's bedazzled eyes. There he was, with the pen still in his fingers, and a vast, written speech with him!

XXI. THE NEW ENGLAND HOLIDAY

In the morning of the day on which the new Governor was to receive his office, Hester Prynne and Pearl came into the market-place. It was already thronged with the inhabitants of the town.

On this public holiday, as on all other occasions for seven years past, Hester was clad in a garment of coarse gray cloth. Pearl was decked out with airy gaiety. Her dress seemed an outward manifestation of her character.

"What is this, mother?" cried she. "Why have all the people left their work to-day? Is it a play-day for the whole world? See, there is the blacksmith! He has washed his sooty face, and put on his Sabbath-day clothes, and looks as if he would gladly be merry! And there is Master Brackett, the old jailer, nodding and smiling at me. Why does he do so?"

"He remembers thee a little babe, " answered Hester.

"He should not nod and smile at me--the black, ugly-eyed old man!" said Pearl. "He may nod at thee; for thou art clad in gray, and wear the scarlet letter. But see, mother, how many faces of strange people, and Indians among them, and sailors! What have they all come to do, here?"

"They wait to see the procession pass," said Hester. "For the Governor and the magistrates are to go by, and the ministers, and all the great people, with the music and the soldiers marching before them."

"And will the minister be there?" asked Pearl. "And will he hold

both his hands to me, as when thou ledst me to him from the brook-side?"

"He will be there, child," answered her mother, "but he will not greet thee to-day, nor must thou greet him."

"What a strange, sad man is he!" said the child, as if speaking partly to herself. "In the dark nighttime he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine, as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder! And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kisses my forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But, here, in the sunny day, and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we know him! A strange, sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart!"

"Be quiet, Pearl--thou understand not these things," said her mother. "Think not now of the minister, but look about thee, and see how cheery is everybody's face today. To-day, a new man is beginning to rule over them; and so they make merry and rejoice."

The picture of human life in the market-place, though its general tint was the sad gray, brown, or black, was yet enlivened by some diversity of hue. A party of Indians arrived in their savage finery of curiously embroidered deerskin robes, wampum-belts, and feathers, and armed with the bow and arrow and stone-headed spear. Also mariners--a part of the crew of the vessel from the Spanish Main--had come ashore to see the humors of Election Day. They were rough-looking desperadoes, with sun-

blackened faces, and an immensity of beard; their wide short trousers were confined about the waist by belts, often clasped with a rough plate of gold, and sustaining always a long knife, and in some instances, a sword.

Thus the Puritan elders in their black cloaks, starched bands, and steeple-crowned hats, smiled at the clamor and rude deportment of these jolly seafaring men; and it excited neither surprise nor aversion when so reputable a citizen as old Roger Chillingworth, the physician, was seen to enter the market-place in close and familiar talk with the commander of the questionable vessel.

The latter was by far the most showy and gallant figure, so far as apparel went, to be seen among the multitude. He wore a profusion of ribbons on his garment, and gold lace on his hat, which was also encircled by a gold chain, and surmounted with a feather. There was a sword at his side and a sword-cut on his forehead, which, by the arrangement of his hair, he seemed anxious rather to display than hide.

After parting from the physician, the commander of the Bristol ship strolled idly through the market-place; until happening to approach the spot where Hester Prynne was standing, he appeared to recognize her, and did not hesitate to address her. As was usually the case wherever Hester stood, a small vacant area—a magic circle--had formed itself about her, into which none ventured or felt disposed to intrude. Now, if never before, it was a good thing by enabling Hester and the seaman to speak together

without risk of being overheard.

"So, mistress," said the mariner, "I must bid the steward make ready one more berth than you bargained for! No fear of scurvy or ship fever this voyage. What with the ship's surgeon and this other doctor, our only danger will be from drug or pill; as there is a lot of apothecary's stuff aboard, which I traded for with a Spanish vessel."

"What mean you?" inquired Hester, startled more than she permitted to appear. "Have you another passenger?"

"Why, know you not," cried the shipmaster, "that this physician here--Chillingworth he calls himself--is minded to try my cabin-fare with you? Ay, ay, you must have known it; for he tells me he is of your party, and a close friend to the gentleman you spoke of--he that is in peril from these sour old Puritan rulers."

"They know each other well," replied Hester, with a mien of calmness, though in consternation. "They have long dwelt together."

Nothing further passed between the mariner and Hester Prynne. But at that instant she beheld old Roger Chillingworth himself, standing in the remotest corner of the market-place and smiling on her; a smile which conveyed secret and fearful meaning.

XXII. THE PROCESSION

Before Hester Prynne could call together her thoughts, and consider what was to be done in this new and startling aspect of affairs, the sound of music was heard approaching. It denoted the advance of the procession on its way towards the meeting-house where Mr. Dimmesdale was to deliver an Election Sermon.

Soon the head of the procession showed itself, with a slow and stately march, making its way across the market-place. First came the music. Pearl at first clapped her hands, but then she gazed silently. She noticed the shimmer of the sunshine on the weapons and bright armor of the military company, which followed after the music. Next in order to the magistrates came the young and distinguished Reverend Dimmesdale.

Never, since Mr. Dimmesdale first set his foot on the New England shore, had he exhibited such energy as was seen in the procession. There was no feebleness of step; his frame was not bent, nor did his hand rest ominously upon his heart. Yet, his strength seemed not of the body. It might be spiritual and imparted to him by the angels.

Hester Prynne, gazing steadfastly at the clergyman, felt a dreary influence come over her. One glance of recognition she thought must pass between them. She thought of the dim forest, with its dell of solitude, and love, and anguish, and the tree-trunk, where, sitting hand-in-hand, they had mingled their sad and passionate talk with the melancholy murmur of the

brook. How deeply had they known each other then! And was this the man? She hardly knew him now! He, moving proudly past, so unattainable in his worldly position, through which she now saw him! Her spirit sank with the idea that all must have been a delusion. Hester could scarcely forgive him for being able to completely withdraw himself from their mutual world—while she stood alone.

Pearl either saw and responded to her mother's feelings, or herself felt the remoteness and intangibility that had fallen around the minister. While the procession passed, the child was uneasy, fluttering up and down. When the whole had gone by, she looked up into Hester's face—"Mother," said she, "was that the same minister that kissed me by the brook?"

"Hold thy peace, dear little Pearl!" whispered her mother. "We must not always talk in the marketplace of what happens to us in the forest."

"I could not be sure that it was he--so strange he looked," continued the child. "Else I would have run to him, and bid him kiss me now, before all the people, as he did yonder among the dark trees. What would the minister have said, mother? Would he have clapped his hand over his heart, and scowled on me, and bid me be gone?"

"What should he say, Pearl," answered Hester, "save that it was no time to kiss, and that kisses are not to be given in the market-place? Well for thee, foolish child, that thou didst not speak to him!"

Mistress Hibbins, who, arrayed in great magnificence, with a triple

ruff, a gown of rich velvet, and a gold-headed cane, had come forth to see the procession. As this ancient lady had the renown of being a principal actor in all the works of necromancy that were continually going forward, the crowd gave way before her, and seemed to fear the touch of her garment, as if it carried the plague among its gorgeous folds.

"Now, what mortal imagination could conceive it?" whispered the old lady confidentially to Hester. "Yonder divine man! That saint on earth, as the people uphold him to be, and as he really looks! Who, now, that saw him pass in the procession, would think how he appeared while taking an airing in the forest! Aha! We know what that means, Hester Prynne! But truly, I find it hard to believe him the same man. Many a church member saw I, walking behind the music, that has danced in the same measure with me, when Somebody was fiddler. But this minister! Could thou surely tell, whether he was the same man on the forest path?"

"Madam, I know not of what you speak," answered Hester Prynne, feeling Mistress Hibbins to be of infirm mind; yet strangely startled and awe-stricken by the confidence with which she affirmed a personal connexion between so many persons and the Evil one. "It is not for me to talk lightly of a learned and pious minister of the Word, like the Reverend."

"Fie, woman--fie!" cried the old lady, shaking her finger at Hester. "Dost thou think I have been to the forest so many times, and have yet no skill to judge who else has been there? I know thee, Hester, for I behold the

token. We may all see it in the sunshine! and it glows like a red flame in the dark. Thou wear it openly, so there need be no question about that. But this minister! When the Black Man sees one of his own servants, signed and sealed, so shy of owning to the bond as is the Reverend, he hath a way of ordering matters so that the mark shall be disclosed, in open daylight, to the eyes of all the world! What is that the minister seeks to hide, with his hand always over his heart?"

"Hast thou seen it, Mistress Hibbins?" eagerly asked little Pearl.

"No matter, darling!" responded Mistress Hibbins. "Thou thyself wilt see it, one time or another. They say, child, thou art of the lineage of the Prince of Air! Wilt thou ride with me some fine night to see thy father? Then thou shalt know wherefore the minister keeps his hand over his heart!" Laughing so shrilly that all the market-place could hear her, the weird old gentlewoman took her departure.

By this time the preliminary prayer had been offered in the meeting-house, and the Reverend's voice was heard commencing his discourse. Hester took up her position close beside the scaffold of the pillory. It was in sufficient proximity to bring the whole sermon to her ears.

Muffled as the sound was, Hester Prynne listened with such intensesness, and sympathized so intimately, that the sermon had a meaning for her, entirely apart from its words. She could detect the cry of pain in his words. During all this time, Hester stood, statue-like, at the foot of the

scaffold. If the minister's voice had not kept her there, there would have been a certain magnetism in that spot, where had started the first hour of her life of ignominy.

Little Pearl, meanwhile, had quitted her mother's side, and was playing at her own will about the market-place. The Puritans looked on. She ran and looked the wild Indian in the face, and he saw a nature wilder than his own. Thence, she flew into the midst of a group of mariners, the swarthy-cheeked wild men of the ocean, and they gazed wonderingly and admiringly at Pearl.

One of these seafaring men, the shipmaster, who had spoken to Hester Prynne, was so smitten with Pearl, that he attempted to lay hands upon her, with purpose to snatch a kiss. Finding it as impossible to touch her as to catch a hummingbird in the air, he took from his hat the gold chain that was twisted about it, and threw it to the child. Pearl immediately twined it around her neck and waist.

"Thy mother is yonder woman with the scarlet letter," said the seaman, "Wilt thou carry her a message from me?"

"If the message pleases me, I will," answered Pearl.

"Then tell her," rejoined he, "that I spoke again with the hump shouldered old doctor, and he engages to bring his friend, the gentleman, aboard with him. So let thy mother take no thought, save for herself and thee. Wilt thou tell her this, thou witch-baby?"

"Mistress Hibbins says my father is the Prince of the Air!" cried Pearl, with a naughty smile. "If thou call me that ill-name, I shall tell him of thee, and he will chase thy ship with a tempest!"

Pursuing a zigzag course across the marketplace, the child returned to her mother, and communicated what the mariner had said. Hester's strong, calm steadfastly-enduring spirit almost sank, on beholding this dark and grim countenance of an inevitable doom, which at the moment when a passage seemed to open for the minister and herself out of their misery.

With her mind harassed by the shipmaster's intelligence, she was also subjected to another trial. There were many people present from the country round about, who had often heard of the scarlet letter, but who had never beheld it with their own eyes. These, after exhausting other amusements, now thronged about Hester Prynne with rude intrusiveness. The gang of sailors, observing the spectators, and learning the purport of the scarlet letter, came and thrust their sunburnt and desperado-looking faces into the ring. Even the Indians were affected by a sort of cold shadow of the white man's curiosity and, gliding through the crowd, fastened their snake-like black eyes on Hester's bosom. Lastly, the inhabitants of the town lounged to the same quarter, and tormented Hester, perhaps more than all the rest, with their well-acquainted gaze at her shame.

At the final hour, when she was so soon to fling aside the burning letter, it had strangely become the centre of more remark and excitement,

and was made to sear her breast more painfully, than at any time since the first day she put it on.

While Hester stood in that magic circle of ignominy, the admirable preacher was looking down from the sacred pulpit upon an audience whose very inmost spirits had yielded to his control. The sainted minister in the church! The woman of the scarlet letter in the marketplace! What imagination would have been irreverent enough to surmise that the same scorching stigma was on them both!

XXIII. THE REVELATION OF THE SCARLET LETTER

The eloquent voice, on which the souls of the listening audience had been borne aloft as on the swelling waves of the sea, at length came to a pause. There was a momentary silence. Then ensued a murmur and half-hushed tumult. In a moment more the crowd began to gush from the doors.

In the open air their rapture broke into speech. The street and the market-place absolutely babbled, from side to side, with applauses of the minister.

Never had man spoken in so wise, so high, and so holy a spirit, as he. He made a special reference to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness. And, as he drew towards the close, a spirit of prophecy had come upon him, and he saw a new and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord. Yes; their minister whom they so loved—and who so loved them all--had the foreboding of untimely death upon him, and would soon leave them in their tears.

Thus, there had come to the Reverend a life more brilliant and full of triumph than any previous one, or than any which could hereafter be. He stood, at this moment, on the very proudest eminence of superiority, The minister bowed his head forward on the cushions of the pulpit at the close of his Election Sermon. Meanwhile Hester was standing beside the scaffold of the pillory, with the scarlet letter still burning on her breast!

Now was heard again the clamor of the music, and the measured

tramp of the military escort issuing from the church door. The procession was to be marshalled to the town hall, where a solemn banquet would complete the ceremonies of the day.

As the ranks of military men and civil fathers moved onward, all eyes were turned towards the minister. The shout died into a murmur, as one portion of the crowd after another obtained a glimpse of him. How feeble and pale he looked, amid all his triumph! The glow, which they had just before beheld burning on his cheek, was extinguished. It seemed hardly the face of a man alive, with such a death-like hue: it was hardly a man with life in him, that tottered on his path so nervously, tottered, and did not fall!

One of his clerical brethren--it was the venerable John Wilson--stepped forward hastily to offer his support. The minister repelled the old man's arm. He still walked onward. And now, he had come opposite the well-remembered and weather-darkened scaffold, where, Hester Prynne had encountered the world's ignominious stare. There stood Hester, holding Pearl by the hand! And there was the scarlet letter on her breast! The minister here made a pause.

Bellingham, for the last few moments, had kept an anxious eye upon him. He now left his place in the procession, and advanced to give assistance thinking that Mr. Dimmesdale's might fall. But Dimmesdale's expression warned back the magistrate. The crowd, meanwhile, looked on

with awe. This earthly faintness was only another phase of the minister's celestial strength; it would not have seemed a miracle too high for one so holy, if he had ascended before their eyes, and faded at last into the light of heaven!

He turned towards the scaffold, and stretched forth his arms.

"Hester," said he, "come hither! Come, my little Pearl!"

The child flew to him, and clasped her arms about his knees.

Hester likewise drew near, but paused before she reached him. At this instant Roger Chillingworth thrust himself through the crowd to snatch back his victim from what he sought to do! Be that as it may, the old man rushed forward, and caught the minister by the arm. "Madman, hold! what is your purpose?" whispered he. "Wave back that woman! Cast off this child! All shall be well! Do not blacken your fame, and perish in dishonour! I can yet save you! Would you bring infamy on your sacred profession?"

"Ha, tempter! Thou art too late!" answered the minister, encountering his eye, fearfully, but firmly. "Thy power is not what it was! With God's help, I shall escape thee now!"

"Hester Prynne," cried he, with a piercing earnestness, "in the name of Him, who gives me grace to do what I withheld myself from doing seven years ago, come hither now, and twine thy strength about me! This wretched and wronged old man is opposing it with all his might!--and the fiend's! Come, Hester--come! Support me up yonder scaffold."

The crowd was in a tumult. The men of rank and dignity were so taken by surprise that they remained silent and inactive spectators of the judgment which Providence seemed about to work. They beheld the minister, leaning on Hester's shoulder, and supported by her arm around him, approach the scaffold, and ascend its steps; while still the little hand of the sin-born child was clasped in his. Roger Chillingworth followed, as one intimately connected with the drama of guilt and sorrow in which they had all been actors, and well entitled, therefore to be present at its closing scene.

"Had thou sought the whole earth over," said he looking darkly at the clergyman, "there was no one place so secret--no high place nor lowly place, where thou could have escaped me--save on this very scaffold!"

"Thanks be to Him who hath led me hither!" answered the minister.

Yet he trembled, and turned to Hester, with an expression of doubt and anxiety in his eyes. "Is not this better," murmured he, "than what we dreamed of in the forest?"

"I know not!" she hurriedly replied. "Better? Yea; so we may both die, and Pearl die with us!"

"For thee and Pearl, be it as God shall order," said the minister; "and God is merciful! Let me now do the will which He hath made plain before my sight. For, Hester, I am a dying man. So let me make haste to take my shame upon me!"

Partly supported by Hester, and holding one hand of Pearl's, the

Reverend turned to the dignified and venerable rulers; to the holy ministers; to the people. The sun shone down upon the clergyman, and gave a distinctness to his figure, as he stood out from all the earth, to put in his plea of guilty at the bar of Eternal Justice.

"People of New England!" cried he, with a voice that rose over them, high, solemn, and majestic, "ye, that have loved me!--ye, that have deemed me holy! —behold me here, the one sinner of the world! At last--at last!--I stand upon the spot where I should have stood, here, with this woman, whose arm sustains me at this dreadful moment, from groveling down upon my face! Lo, the scarlet letter which Hester wears! Ye have all shuddered at it! Wherever her walk hath been--wherever, so miserably burdened--it hath cast a lurid gleam of awe and horrible repugnance round about her. But there stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered!"

It seemed, at this point, as if the minister must leave the remainder of his secret undisclosed. But he fought back the bodily weakness--and, still more, the faintness of heart—that was striving for the mastery with him. He threw off all assistance, and stepped passionately forward a pace before the woman and the children.

"It was on him!" he continued. "God's eye beheld it! The angels were forever pointing at it! (The Devil knew it well, and fretted it continually with the touch of his burning finger!) But he hid it cunningly

from men, and walked among you! Now, at the death-hour, he stands up before you! He bids you look again at Hester's scarlet letter! He tells you, that it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast! Stand anywhere that question God's judgment on a sinner! Behold! Behold, a dreadful witness of it!"

With a convulsive motion, he tore away the ministerial band from before his breast. It was revealed! For an instant, the gaze of the horror-stricken multitude was concentrated on the ghastly miracle; while the minister stood, with a flush of triumph in his face. Then, down he sank upon the scaffold. Hester partly raised him, and supported his head against her bosom. Old Roger Chillingworth knelt down beside him, with a blank, dull countenance, out of which the life seemed to have departed.

"Thou hast escaped me!" he repeated.

"May God forgive thee!" said the minister. "Thou hast deeply sinned!" He withdrew his dying eyes from the old man, and fixed them on the woman and the child.

"My little Pearl," said he, feebly, with a sweet and gentle smile over his face; "dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not, in the forest! But now thou wilt?"

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. As her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards

her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was fulfilled.

"Hester," said the clergyman, "farewell!"

"Shall we not meet again?" whispered she, bending her face down close to his. "Shall we not spend our immortal life together? Surely, we have ransomed one another, with all this woe! Thou look far into eternity, with those bright dying eyes! Then tell me what thou see!"

"Hush, Hester--hush!" said he. "The law we broke!--the sin here awfully revealed!--let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! It may be, that, when we forgot our God--when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul--it was vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, by giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending that dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me here, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies not been, I had been lost forever! Praise be His name! His will be done! Farewell!" That final word came forth with the minister's expiring breath. The multitude, silent, broke out in a strange voice of awe and wonder.

XXIV. CONCLUSION

Most of the spectators testified to having seen, on the breast of the minister, a SCARLET LETTER--the very semblance of that worn by Hester Prynne--imprinted in the flesh. As regarded its origin there were various explanations. Some affirmed that the Reverend, on the very day when Hester first wore her ignominious badge, had begun a course of penance by inflicting a hideous torture on himself. Others contended that the stigma had not been produced until a long time after, when old Roger Chillingworth had caused it to appear, through magic and poisonous drugs. Others whispered their belief, that the symbol was the effect of remorse, gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly, and at last manifesting Heaven's dreadful judgment by the visible presence of the letter.

Certain persons, who were spectators of the whole scene, and professed never once to have removed their eyes from the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, denied that there was any mark on his breast. Neither had his dying words acknowledged, nor even remotely implied, a connexion on his part, with the guilt for which Hester Prynne had so long worn the scarlet letter. After exhausting life in his efforts for mankind's spiritual good, he had made the manner of his death a parable, in order to impress on his admirers the mighty and mournful lesson, that, we are sinners all alike. This version of Mr. Dimmesdale's story is one in which a man's friends will uphold his character, when proofs, clear as the sunshine on the scarlet letter,

establish him a false and sin-stained creature of the dust.

The authority which we have chiefly followed--a manuscript of old date, drawn up from the verbal testimony of individuals, some of whom had known Hester Prynne, while others had heard the tale from contemporary witnesses fully confirms the view taken in the foregoing pages. Among many morals which press upon us from the poor minister's miserable experience, we put only this into a sentence:--"Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!"

Nothing was more remarkable than the change which took place, almost immediately after Mr. Dimmesdale's death, in the appearance and demeanor of the old man known as Roger Chillingworth. All his strength and energy seemed at once to desert him; he positively withered up, shriveled away and almost vanished from mortal sight. This unhappy man had made his life the pursuit of revenge; and when, by its complete triumph that evil principle was left with no further material to support it--when, in short, there was no more Devil's work on earth for him to do. But, to all these shadowy beings as well as Roger Chillingworth we would be merciful.

Leaving this discussion apart, we have a matter of business to communicate to the reader. At old Roger Chillingworth's decease, (which took place within the year), and by his will, he bequeathed a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England to little Pearl.

So Pearl became the richest heiress of her day in the New World. In no long time after the physician's death, the wearer of the scarlet letter disappeared, and Pearl along with her. For many years no tidings of them were received. The story of the scarlet letter grew into a legend. Its spell, however, was still potent, and kept the scaffold awful where the poor minister had died, and likewise the cottage by the sea-shore where Hester Prynne had dwelt. One afternoon some children were at play, when they saw a tall woman in a gray robe approach the cottage-door. In all those years it had never once been opened. On the threshold she paused. But her hesitation was only for an instant, though long enough to display a scarlet letter on her breast.

And Hester Prynne had returned. But where was Pearl? None knew whether the elf-child had gone to a maiden grave; or whether her wild nature had been softened and made capable of a woman's happiness. But through the remainder of Hester's life there were indications that she was the object of love and interest with one of another land. Letters came. In the cottage there were articles of comfort and luxury such as Hester never cared to use, but which only wealth could have purchased and affection have imagined for her. There were little ornaments, beautiful tokens of a continual remembrance, that must have been wrought by delicate fingers at the impulse of a fond heart. And once Hester was seen embroidering a baby-garment. The gossips of that day believed that Pearl was not only

alive, but married, happy, and mindful of her mother; and that she would most joyfully have entertained that sad and lonely mother at her fireside.

But there was a life for Hester here. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was to be her penitence. She had returned and resumed the symbol of our dark tale. Never after did it quit her bosom. But, in the years Hester's life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe and reverence. People brought all their sorrows and sought her counsel. Women came to Hester's cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester comforted them as best she might. She assured them of her firm belief that, at some brighter period, a new truth would bring the whole relation between man and woman onto a surer ground of mutual happiness.

After many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one. It was near that grave, with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tomb-stone served for both. On this simple slab of slate there appeared an engraving—
"ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES"