

THE SCARLET LETTER.

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

BEGUN TUESDAY, AUGUST 30.

Back numbers may be had at the EVENING JOURNAL Counting Room.

SYNOPSIS.

Chapters I and II—Hester Prynne, with her arms and upon her bosom wearing a scarlet A as the brand of adultery, stands upon a scaffold in the market place at Boston. Her pastor, Arthur Dimmesdale, exhorts her to name the father of her child. She will not and is led to prison. III—A stranger in the settlement enters the prison as physician. He is Roger Chillingworth, a wanderer who Hester had married years before in England. He agrees to keep her identity secret. IV and V—Hester leaves the prison and lives in retirement with her child. VI—The authorities propose to take the child from its mother. Roger Dimmesdale prevents it. VII—Roger Chillingworth becomes physician to Dimmesdale, who is an invalid, and goes to live in a room adjoining the minister's. So on the story proceeds through 19 chapters, each one absorbing in interest to the end.

The unfortunate physician, while uttering these words, lifted his hands with a look of horror, as if he had beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognize, usurping the place of his own image in a glass. It was one of those moments—which sometimes occur only at the interval of years—when a man's moral aspect is faithfully revealed to his mind's eye. Not improbably, he had never before viewed himself as he did now.

"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; and as he proceeded his manner lost its fiercer characteristics and subsided into gloom. "Dost thou remember me, Hester, as I was nine years ago? Even then I was in the autumn of my days, and was it the early autumn. But all my life had been made up of earnest, studious, thoughtful, quiet years, bestowed faithfully for the increase of mine own knowledge, and faithfully, too, though this latter object was but casual to the other—faithfully for the advancement of human welfare. No life had been more peaceful and innocent than mine; few lives so rich with benefits conferred. Dost thou remember me? Was I not, though you might deem me cold, nevertheless 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 art 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 myself!"

"I have left thee to the scarlet letter," replied Roger Chillingworth. "If that have not avenged me I can do no more!" He laid his finger on it with a smile.

"It has avenged thee!" answered Hester Prynne. "I judged no less," said the physician. "And now, what wouldst thou will me touching this man?"

"I must reveal the secret," answered Hester firmly. "He must discern thee in thy true character. What may be the result, I know not. But this long debt of confidence, due from me to him, whose name and ruin I have been, shall at length be paid. So far as concerns the overthrow or preservation of his fair fame and his earthly state, and perchance his life, he is in thy hands. Nor do I—whom the scarlet letter has disciplined to truth, though it be the truth of red hot iron entering into the soul—nor do I perceive such advantage in his living any longer a life of ghastly emptiness that I shall stoop to implore thy mercy. Do with him as thou wilt! There is no good for him—no good for me—no good for thee! There is no good for little Pearl! There is no path to guide us out of this dismal maze!"

"Woman, I could well nigh pity thee!" said Roger Chillingworth, unable to restrain a thrill of admiration, too, for there was a quality almost majestic in the despair which she expressed. "Thou hadst great elements. Peradventure, hadst thou 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. I said, but now, that there could be no good ever for him or thee, who are here wandering together in this gloomy maze of evil and suffering at every step over the guilt wherewith we have strewn our path. It is not so! There might be good for thee, and not alone, since thou hast been deeply wronged, and hast it at thy will to pardon. Wilt thou give up that only privilege? Wilt thou reject that priceless benefit?"

"Peace, Hester, peace!" replied the old man, with gloomy sternness. "It is not granted me to pardon. I have no such power as thou tellest me of. My old faith, long forgotten, comes back to me and explains all that we do and all we suffer. By thy first step away thou didst plant the germ of evil, but since that moment it has all been a dark necessity. Ye that have wronged me are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiendlike, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands. 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 betook himself again to his employment of gathering herbs. "Be it sin or no," said Hester Prynne bitterly, as she still gazed after him, "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 nuptial 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 not otherwise than happy, but now, as viewed through the dismal medium of her subsequent life, they classed themselves among her ugliest remembrances. She marvelled how such scenes could have been. She marvelled how she could ever have been wrought upon to marry him. She deemed it her crime most to be repented of that she had ever endured and reciprocated the lukewarm grasp of his hand, and had suffered the smile of her lips and eyes to mingle and melt into his own. And it seemed a fouler offense committed by Roger Chillingworth than any which had since been done him that, in the time when her heart knew no better, he had persuaded her to fancy herself happy by his side.

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

Let man tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win along with it the utmost passion of her heart! Else it may be their miserable fortune, as it was Roger Chillingworth's, when some night's touch that their own may have awakened all her sensibilities, to be reproached even for the calm content, the marble image of happiness, which they will have imposed upon her as the warm reality. But Hester ought long ago to have done with this injustice. What did it lock upon? Had seven long years under the tortures of the scarlet letter inflicted so much of misery and wrought out so much of repentance?

The emotions of that brief space, while she stood gazing after the crooked figure of old Roger Chillingworth, threw a dark light on Hester's state of mind, revealing much that she might not otherwise have acknowledged to herself. He being gone, she summoned back her child.

CHAPTER XII.

PASTOR AND PARISHIONER.

Hester Prynne remained constant in her resolve to make known to Mr. Dimmesdale, at whatever risk of present pain or ulterior consequences, the true character of the man who had crept into his intimacy. For several days, however, she vainly sought an opportunity of addressing him in some of the meditative walks which she knew him to be in the habit of taking along the shores of the peninsula or on the wooded hills of the neighboring country. There would have been no scandal, indeed, nor peril to the holy whiteness of the clergyman's good fame had she visited him in his own study; where many a penitent, ere now, had confessed sins of perhaps as deep a dye as the one betokened by the scarlet letter. But, partly that she dreaded the secret or undisguised interference of old Roger Chillingworth, and partly that her conscious heart imputed suspicion where none could have been felt, and partly that both the minister and she would need the whole wide world to breathe in while they talked together—for all these reasons Hester never thought of meeting him in any narrower privacy than beneath the open sky.

At last, while attending in a sick chamber, whether the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale had been summoned to make a prayer, she learned that he had gone the day before to visit the Apostle Eliot among his Indian converts. He would probably return by a certain hour in the afternoon of the morrow. Betimes, therefore, the next day Hester took little Pearl, who was necessarily the companion of all her mother's excursions, however inconvenient her presence, and set forth.

The road, after the two wayfarers had crossed from the peninsula to the mainland, was no other than a footpath. 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, and disclosed such imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that Hester's mind it imagel not amiss 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, however, by a breeze, so that a gleam of flicking sunshine might now and then be seen at its solitary play along the path. This fitting cheerfulness was always at the farther extremity of some long vista through the forest. The sportive sunbeams—feebly sportive at best in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene—withdraw itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier because they had hoped to find them bright.

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

"Nor ever will, my child, I hope," said Hester. "And why not, mother?" asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race. "Will not it come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?" "Run away, child," answered her mother, "and catch the sunshine! It will soon be gone."

ward the trunk that led through the forest, but still remained under the deep shadow of the trees. She beheld the minister advancing along the path on either side and leaning on a staff which he had cut by the wayside. He looked haggard and feeble and betrayed a nervous dependency in his air which had never so remarkably characterized him in his walks about the settlement, nor in any other situation where he deemed himself liable to notice. Here it was woefully visible, in this intense seclusion of the forest, which of itself would have been a heavy trial to the spirits. There was a listlessness in his gait, as if he saw no reason for taking one step farther, nor felt any desire to do so, but would have been glad, could he be glad of anything, to fling himself down at the root of the nearest tree and lie there passive for evermore. The leaves might bestrew him and the soil gradually accumulate and form a little hillock over his frame, no matter whether there were life in it or no. Death was too definite an object to be wished for or avoided.

To Hester's eye the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale exhibited no symptom of positive and vigorous suffering except that, as little Pearl had remarked, he kept his hand over his heart.

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

"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, like a man taken by surprise in a mood to which he was reluctant to have witnesses. Throwing his eyes anxiously in the direction of the voice, he indistinctly beheld a form under the trees clad in garments so somber and so little relieved from the gray twilight into which the clouded sky and the heavy foliage had darkened the noontide, that he knew not whether it were a woman or a shadow. It may be that his pathway through life was haunted thus by a specter that had stolen out from among his thoughts.

He made a step nigher and discovered the scarlet letter.

"Hester! 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 past! And thou, Arthur Dimmesdale, dost thou yet live?"

It was no wonder that they thus questioned one another's actual and bodily existence and even doubted of their own. So strangely did they meet in the dim world that it was like the first encounter in the world beyond the grave of two spirits who had been intimately connected in their former life, but now stood coldly shuddering in mutual dread, not yet familiar with their state, nor wanted to the companionship of a disembodied being. Each a ghost and awestricken at the other's ghost! They were awestricken likewise at themselves because the crisis flung back to them their consciousness and revealed to each heart its history and experience, as life never does except at such breathless epochs. The soul beheld its features in the mirror of the passing moment. It was with fear and tremulously, and as it were, by a slow and reluctant necessity, that Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne. The grasp, cold as it was, took away what was dearest in the interview. They now felt themselves at least inhabitants of the same sphere.

Without a word more spoken—neither he nor she assuming the guidance, but with an unexpressed consent—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 before been sitting. When they found voice to speak it was at first only to utter remarks and inquiries such as any two acquaintances might have made about the gloomy sky, the threatening storm and next the health of each. Thus they went onward, not boldly, but step by step into the themes that were brooding deepest in their hearts. So long estranged by fate and circumstances, they needed something slight and casual to run before and throw open the doors of intercourse, so that their real thoughts might be led across the threshold.

After awhile 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?" she asked.

"None—nothing but despair!" he answered. "What else could I look for, being what I am, and leading such a life as mine? Were I an atheist—a man devoid of conscience—a wretch with coarse and brutal instincts—I might have found peace long ere now. Nay, I never should have lost it! But as matters stand with my soul, whatever of good capacity there originally was in me, all of God's gifts that were the choicest have become the ministers of spiritual torment. Hester, I am most miserable!"

"The people reverence thee," said Hester. "And surely thou workest good among them! Doth 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. It must needs be a delusion. What can a ruined soul like mine effect toward the redemption of other souls—or a polluted soul toward their purification? And as for the people's reverence, would that it were turned to scorn and hatred! Canst thou deem it, Hester, a consolation that I must stand up in my pulpit and meet so many eyes turned upward to my face, as if the light of heaven were beaming from it—must see my flock hungry for the truth and listening for my words as if a tongue of Pentecost were speaking!—and then look inward and discern the black reality of what they behold? I have laughed, in bitterness and agony of heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am! And what laughs at it?" "You wronged yourself in this," said Hester gently. "You have deeply and surely repented. Your sin is left behind you in the days long past. Your present life is not less holy, in very truth, than it seems in people's eyes. In there no reality in the penitence thus sealed

and witnessed by good works? And wherefore 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 art you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom. Mine burns in secret. Thou little knowest 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. Had I one friend—or were it my worst enemy—to whom, when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby. Even thus much of truth would save me. But now it is all falsehood—all emptiness—all death!"

Hester Prynne looked into his face, but hesitated to speak. Yet, uttering his long restrained emotions so vehemently as he did, his words here offered her the very point of circumstances in which to interpose what she came to say. 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 hast in me the partner of it!" Again she hesitated, but brought out the words, with an effort. "Thou hast long had such an enemy, and dwellest with him under the same roof!"

"Hah! 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, or, indeed, for a single moment, at the mercy of one whose purposes could not be other than malevolent. The very contiguity of his enemy, beneath whatever mask the latter might conceal himself, was enough to disturb the magnetic sphere of a being so sensitive as Arthur Dimmesdale. There had been a period when Hester was less alive to this consideration; or perhaps in the misanthropy of her own trouble she left the minister to bear what she might picture to herself as a more tolerable doom. But of late, since the night of his vigil, all her sympathies toward him had been both softened and invigorated. She now read his heart more accurately. She doubted not the continual presence of Roger Chillingworth—the secret poison of his malignity infecting all the air about him—and his authorized interference as a physician with the minister's physical and spiritual infirmities—that these had opportunities had been turned to a cruel purpose. By means of them the sufferer's conscience had been kept in an irritated state, the tendency of which was not to cure by wholesome pain, but to alienate and corrupt his spiritual being. Its result on earth could hardly fail to be insanity, and hereafter that eternal alienation from the good and true, of which madness is perhaps the earthly type.

Such was the ruin to which she had brought the man once—nay, why should we not speak it—still so passionately loved! Hester felt that the sacrifice of the clergyman's good name, and death itself, as she had already told Roger Chillingworth, 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 lain down on the forest leaves and died there at Arthur Dimmesdale's feet.

"O Arthur," cried she, "forgive me! In all things else I have striven to be true! Truth was the one virtue which I might have held fast, and did hold fast through all extremity, save when thy good, thy life, thy fame, were put in question! Then I consented to a deception. But a lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side! Dost thou not see what I would say? That old man, the physician—the whom they call Roger Chillingworth—he was my husband!"

The minister looked at her for an instant with all the violence of passion which—intempered in more shapes than one, with his higher, purer, softer qualities—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. For the brief space that it lasted it was a dark transfiguration. But his character had been so much enfeebled by suffering that even its lower energies were incapable of more than a temporary struggle. 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 that the first sight of him, and as often as I have seen him since? Why did I not understand? O Hester Prynne, thou little, little knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame!—the infidelity!—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 had it 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. "Wilt thou not frown? Wilt thou forgive?" "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 no 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 fallen tree. Life had never brought them a gloomier hour. It was the point whether their pathway had so long been tending and darkening ever as it stole along, and yet it inclosed a charm that made them linger upon it and claim another and another and after all another moment. The forest was obscure around them and creaked with a blast that was passing through it. Their thoughts were tossing heavily above their heads, while one solemn old tree groaned dolefully to another, as if telling the sad story of the pair that sat beneath or constrained to forebode evil to come.

[Continued Tomorrow.]

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

She stopped the horse car, and upon reaching the crowded platform attempted to get off the wrong side. "The other side, ma'am," said the conductor. "I want to get off on this side," she insisted. "You can't do it, ma'am," was the reply. "Conductor!" she cried. "I want to get off on this side of the car." Whereupon the police official in a loud voice remarked: "Ma'am, please stand aside and let the lady climb the gate."

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"He—" I have something to say to you, but there are so many people in the room I am afraid I won't have a chance. She—Wait a moment! I will ask one of the young ladies to say on the piano. Harper's Lisztar.

I feel it my duty to say a few words in regard to Kie's Cream Hair, and I do so cheerily without solicitation. I have used it more or less half a year and have found it to be most admirable. I have suffered from dandruff of the worst kind ever since I was a little boy and I never hoped for cure, but Cream Hair seems to do even the trick. Many of my acquaintances have used it with excellent results. Oscar Osterm, 45 Warren avenue, Chicago, Ill.

"He—" Won't you let me have a kiss, now that I am going to bed? She—If you can give any good reason why I should, I might think about it—possibly. He—If I should like to establish a precedent. Life.

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Wood—"I met a lunatic man this morning who had just had a round with a Cape Cod farmer." Van Peil—"Did he say anything?" Wood—"Yes, he hit me on the ear when I saw him." New York Herald.

Barnett's fine shoes at 422 Madison street.

First Student—"How did you get on in your examination?" Second Student—"Badly! And to add insult to injury, one of the professors was having hearing, so that I had to repeat in a very loud tone everything I did not know." Fliegende Blätter.

Autumn in the Mountains. The important announcement is made that Deer Park will remain open until October 31st, affording an opportunity to spend September, the most delightful month in the Adirondacks. The luxurious trains of the Adirondack are then in its autumnal glory, wild flowers abound, and game and fish are plentiful. All year-round limited Express trains of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad between the park and West stop at both resorts. Pullman parlor or sleeping cars on all trains.

"Al, my valet tells me I'm going to a wedding tomorrow. Miss Van Peil is to be married to some fellow, you know, but I can't think of his confounded name." "Why, old man, you're to marry her yourself." "My Jove, I am. What a memory you've got." Chicago News Record.

Advice to Housekeepers. The place to buy your prime oysters wholesale or retail is at Coze's Oyster Bay, southeast corner Third and Van Buren streets. All oysters are shipped direct from the oyster beds, and are opened by experienced hands, and all orders filled and delivered promptly by special delivery wagons. Basting, broiling and hotels supplied at special rates. Do not forget the telephone No. 738.

Henry—"I meant to call on you last evening, Mary, but really, I—fact is I don't know what to offer as an excuse." Mary—"Oh, don't feel amused, Henry. Any excuse you care to offer will be amply sufficient." Boston Transcript.

W. C. D. E. E. Spring clothing cleaned and repaired. Skilled workmen. No. 91 Market street.

Count Peter von Strubel (just arrived in England in time for her Grace's concert). "Ach, Tottchen! How is it sat in England your ladies are so beautiful and your gentlemen so healthy? Her Grace—"Tonight early all the ladies are English, Count, and the gentlemen are mostly foreign, as it happens." Punch.

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