

Guilt will destroy us.

“Hush, Hester, hush!” said he, with tremulous solemnity. “The law we broke!- the sin here so awfully revealed!- let those 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 thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting pure reunion. God knows; He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this dearth of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be His name! His will be done! Farewell!

That final word came forth with the minister’s expiring breath. The multitude, silent till then, broke out in a strange, deep voice of awe and wonder, which could not as yet find utterance, save in this murmur that rolled so heavily after the departed spirit (174).