

OUTCAST motif

Hester Prynne, therefore, did not flee. On the outskirts of town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, 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, while its comparative remoteness put it out of the sphere of that social activity which already marked the habits of the emigrants. It stood on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-covered hills toward the west. A clump of scrubby trees, such as alone grew on the peninsula, did not so much conceal the cottage from view, as seem to denote that there was some object which would fain have been, or at least ought to be, concealed. In this little, lonesome dwelling, with some slender means that she possessed, and by the license of the magistrates, who still kept an inquisitorial watch over her, Hester established herself, with her infant child. A mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot. Children, too young to comprehend wherefore this woman should be shut out from the sphere of human charities, would creep nigh enough to behold 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, discerning 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, incurred even no risk of want.

“The children of the Puritans looked up from their play... ‘Behold, verily, there is the woman of the scarlet letter, and, of a truth moreover, there is the likeness of the scarlet letter running along by her side! Come, therefore, and let us fling mud at them!’” (103).

“ ‘But wilt thou promise,’ asked Pearl, ‘to take my hand, and Mother’s hand, tomorrow noontide?’

‘Not then, Pearl,’ said the minister” (149).

“...or insanity, as we should term it—led her to do what few of the townspeople would have ventured on; to begin a conversation with the wearer of the scarlet letter in public...[Mistress H] had the renown of being a principle actor in all the works of necromancy...the crowd gave way before her, and seemed to fear the touch of her garment” (225).