To [sum](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl09.html" \l "g18) up the matter, it grew to be a widely [diffused](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#diffused) opinion, that the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, like many other personages of especial sanctity, in all ages of the Christian world, was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan's [emissary,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#emissary) in the [guise](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#guise) of old Roger Chillingworth. This [diabolical](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#diabolical) agent had the Divine permission, for a season, to burrow into the clergyman's intimacy, and plot against his soul. No sensible man, it was confessed, could doubt on which side the victory would turn. The people looked, with an unshaken hope, to see the minister come forth out of the conflict, [transfigured](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#transfiguration) with the glory which he would unquestionably win. Meanwhile, nevertheless, it was sad to think of the [perchance](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#perchance) [mortal](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213180653/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#mortal) agony through which he must struggle towards his triumph.

Hester [looked,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213183830/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl07.html" \l "g20) by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar effect of this convex mirror, [the scarlet letter](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213183830/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl07-n.html#letter) was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it. Pearl pointed upward, also, at a similar picture in the head-piece; smiling at her mother, with the elfish intelligence that was so familiar an expression on her small [physiognomy.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213183830/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#physiognomy) That look of naughty merriment was likewise reflected in the mirror, with so much breadth and intensity of effect, that it made Hester Prynne feel as if it could not be the image of her own child, but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl's shape.

"And [wherefore?"](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g10) [rejoined](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#rejoined) the physician. "Wherefore not; since all the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make [manifest](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#manifest) an outspoken crime?"

"That, [good](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g11) Sir, is but a fantasy of yours," replied the minister. "There can be, if I [forbode](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html" \l "foreboded" \o "forbode" \t "Words) [aright,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#aright) no power, short of the Divine mercy, to disclose, whether by uttered words, or by [type or emblem,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#type) the secrets that may be buried with a human heart. The heart, making itself guilty of such secrets, must [perforce](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#perforce) hold them, until [the day when all hidden things shall be revealed.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10-n.html#day) Nor have I so read or interpreted [Holy Writ,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10-n.html#HolyWrit) as to understand that the [disclosure](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#disclosure) of human thoughts and deeds, then to be made, is intended as a part of the [retribution.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#retribution) That, surely, were a shallow view of it. No; these revelations, unless I greatly err, are meant merely to promote the intellectual satisfaction of all intelligent beings, who will stand waiting, on that day, to see the dark problem of this life made plain. A knowledge of men's hearts will be [needful](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#needful) to the completest solution of that problem. And I conceive, moreover, that the hearts holding such miserable secrets as you speak of will yield them up, at that last day, not with reluctance, but with a joy unutterable."

"Then [why](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g12) not reveal them here?" asked Roger Chillingworth, glancing quietly aside at the minister. "Why should not the guilty ones sooner [avail](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#avail) themselves of this unutterable [solace?"](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#solace)

"They [mostly](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g13) do," said the clergyman, [griping](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#gripe) hard at his breast, as if [afflicted](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#afflicted) with an [importunate](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#importunately) throb of pain. "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 ever, after such an outpouring, O, what a relief have I witnessed in those sinful brethren! even as in one who at last draws free air, after long [stifling](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#stifling) with his own [polluted](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#polluted) breath. How can it be otherwise? Why should a wretched man, guilty, we will say, of murder, prefer to keep the dead corpse buried in his own heart, rather than fling it forth at once, and let the universe take care of it!"

"Yet [some](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g14) men bury their secrets thus," observed the calm physician.

"True; [there](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g15) are such men," answered Mr. Dimmesdale. "But, not to suggest more obvious reasons, it may be that they are kept silent by the very [constitution](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#constitution) of their nature. Or,--can we not suppose it?--guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God's glory and man's welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; [no evil of the past be redeemed by better service.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10-n.html#evil) So, to their own unutterable torment, they go about among their fellow-creatures, looking pure as new-fallen snow; while their hearts are all speckled and spotted with iniquity of which they cannot rid themselves."

"These [men](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g16) deceive themselves," said Roger Chillingworth, with somewhat more emphasis than usual, and making a slight gesture with his forefinger. "They fear to take up the shame that rightfully belongs to them. Their love for man, their zeal for God's service,--these holy impulses may or may not coexist in their hearts with the evil inmates to which their guilt has unbarred the door, and which [must needs](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#mustneeds) [propagate](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#propagate) a hellish breed within them. But, if they seek to glorify God, let them not lift heavenward their unclean hands! If they would serve their fellow-men, let them do it by making [manifest](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#manifest) the power and reality of conscience, in [constraining](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#constrained) them to [penitential](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#penitence) [self-abasement!](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#abased) Wouldst thou have me to believe, O wise and [pious](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#pious) friend, that a false show can be better--can be more for God's glory, or man's welfare--than God's own truth? Trust me, such men deceive themselves!"

"It [may](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g17) be so," said the young clergyman indifferently, as [waiving](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#waiving) a discussion that he considered irrelevant or [unseasonable.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html" \l "unseasonable" \o "unseasonable" \t "Words)He had a ready [faculty,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#faculty) indeed, of escaping from any topic that [agitated](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#agitate) his too sensitive and nervous temperament.--"But, now, I would ask of my well-skilled physician, whether, in good [sooth,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#sooth) he [deems](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#deem) me to have profited by his kindly care of this weak frame of mine?"

Before [Roger](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html#g18) Chillingworth could answer, they heard the clear, wild laughter of a young child's voice, proceeding from the adjacent burial-ground. Looking instinctively from the open window,--for it was summer-time,--the minister beheld Hester Prynne and little Pearl passing along the footpath that traversed the [inclosure.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html" \l "inclosure" \o "inclosure" \t "Words) Pearl looked as beautiful as the day, but was in one of those moods of perverse merriment which, whenever they occurred, seemed to remove her entirely out of the sphere of sympathy or human contact. She now skipped [irreverently](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#reverential) from one grave to another; until, coming to the broad, flat, [armorial](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html" \l "armorial" \o "armorial" \t "Words)tombstone of a departed worthy,--perhaps of Isaac Johnson himself,--she began to dance upon it. In reply to her mother's command and [entreaty](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html" \l "entreat" \o "entreaty" \t "Words) that she would behave more [decorously,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#decorous) little Pearl paused to gather the prickly [burrs](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#burrs) from a tall[burdock,](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#burdock) which grew beside the tomb. Taking a handful of these, she arranged them along the lines of the scarlet letter that decorated the maternal bosom, to which the burrs, as their nature was, [tenaciously](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#tenacity) adhered. Hester did not pluck them off.

Roger [Chillingworth](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g19) had by this time approached the window, and smiled grimly down.

"There [is](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html#g20) no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human [ordinances](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#ordinances) or opinions, right or wrong, mixed up with that child's composition," remarked he, as much to himself as to his companion. "I saw her, the other day, [bespatter](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#bespatter) the Governor himself with water, at the cattle-trough in [Spring Lane.](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10-n.html#SpringLane) What, in Heaven's name, is she? Is the imp altogether evil? Hath she affections? Hath she any discoverable principle of being?"

"None,--save [the](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g21) freedom of a broken law," answered Mr. Dimmesdale, in a quiet way, as if he had been discussing the point within himself. "Whether capable of good, I know not."

The [child](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl10.html" \l "g22) probably overheard their voices; for, looking up to the window, with a bright, but naughty smile of mirth and intelligence, she threw one of the prickly burrs at the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. The sensitive clergyman shrank, with nervous dread, from the light missile. Detecting his emotion, Pearl clapped her little hands in the most [extravagant](http://web.archive.org/web/20050213181057/http:/www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhg.html#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, mother, or he will catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!"