

THE SCARLET LETTER

The novel, (*The Scarlet Letter*) written by Nathaniel Hawthorn, brought out the rigid adherence of Scripture which many Puritans of the seventeenth century had fallen into. It was a society that, one could say, dwelt on the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. One can understand why Hawthorn would point an accusing finger at people who, it would seem, were more interested in the appearance of morality than morality itself. A society which had become quite rigid. A society who from all external appearances, had lost its compassion for the lowly and struggling Christians. Christians for whatever reason had unfortunately fallen into sin. This is something we must always be on guard against.

The purpose of this little pamphlet is to get the reader to stop and think, and not just let the emotions run away without sincere thought, which a book such as ***THE SCARLET LETTER*** can most certainly do. It is easy for a book that tries to jar the conscience, to cause its readers to despise one extreme, then, without realizing it, go to the opposite extreme.

It is important for us to realize that most all extremes eventually cause problems, anguish and heartaches. Most often those who are going to extremes do not realize that it is happening. In most cases, they feel that they are merely being courageous by standing firm in what they believe to be a truth. I once read that a heresy is often nothing more than a truth that has been exaggerated. The new media is often guilty of this; they tell us the news, then focus our attention on what they want us to believe concerning the news they have just reported. Yes, our liberal media today is extremely effective in its ability to make us love something evil and hate something good. It is all done by getting us to focus our attention on the small amount of **good** in the evil. For example, they will tell you of the rights of women. Now isn't this **good**? However, the wonderful right they are talking about is the right to kill an innocent human life. They will tell you of the right one has to marry, and isn't this **good** — should not everyone have the right to marry whomever they choose? The problem here is they are promoting the right for homosexuals to marry. So now, the very nature of marriage has to be redefined. As you can see, they have taken the sacrament of holy matrimony and turned it into something completely opposed to the nature of marriage. What is condemned by God, is being presented as a right. What is abnormal is presented as normal. Again, a heresy is an exaggeration of a truth.

In the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorn intentionally or unintentionally, had in a sense, created an emotional acceptance of sin. Just as news reports present the news to get you thinking the way they want you to think on a subject, Hawthorn moves the reader to see the gross injustice of the Christian people, which in all honesty did exist. In fact the injustice is so outrageous and grievous (for us today especially) that the reader is almost compelled to side with the woman who has committed adultery. I am not suggesting that Hawthorn intends to promote the acceptance of sin, I am just bringing out the fact that, given the way he developed

the story, the Christian people of that town were portrayed to look badly and the adulterer looked good compared to them.

The reader might be asking: are you trying to suggest that society should adapt the practice of labeling a person with a scarlet letter *A* on the bosom of one caught in adultery, like they did in Hawthorn's novel? The answer is an absolute *NO*. That would be completely ridiculous. We would not be able to supply the number of scarlet *A*'s required to do so. It would be far more practical and I may add, far less expensive, to have the moral people put on the letter *P* — signifying purity or pure. Not very many *P*'s would be needed if we did this.

The Lesser of Two Evils

I would like the reader to closely examine the situation in Hawthorn's novel. For instance, how many people in that community were burdened with that humiliating letter? To my recollection, there was only one—ONLY ONE in the whole town. WHY? Could it be possible that the rejection by the whole community is a tremendous deterrent to sinful behavior? Could it be possible, that a two-faced and self-righteous community, with all its faults and prejudices, could actually produce only one adulterer? While we today, with all our compassion, kindness, and nonjudgmental philosophy, have produced a swarm of adulterers and, to make matters worse, they are non-repentant adulterers. If we are to take the novel at face value, should we not look into the complete situation? What Hawthorn wanted to accomplish, I truly believe he did. Injustice should always be exposed. However is it not ironic that in this instance, an injustice has actually created a far more stable society.

Let's Compare

Let's compare the moral standards of your community with that of the one portrayed in Hawthorn's novel.

Hawthorn had one poor woman who was unmercifully treated for her act of adultery. He had a community that was truly uncharitable toward a fellow Christian who had fallen into sin. He had a child who also was scorned. This was pretty much the scenario of his novel.

The community, with all its self rightness, was trying to live up to some standard of Christian ethics. The woman caught in adultery repented, and accepted the suffering she underwent for her sin. She became a wonderful Christian person who dedicated her life to the poor. Her daughter Pearl grew up, married, and lived a successful life. Is this not pretty much what Hawthorn put forth in his novel?

Now let's take your community. Would you say there is only one adulterer in it? I know of one woman who had seven children for seven different men. Both she and the seven children were on welfare. These children will grow up and if our statistics are correct, will also be on welfare along with their illegitimate children, and on and on it goes. This chain of adultery and fornication, if not broken, will continue the cycle of sin and government dependency.

I pose this question to you: In your community, are there not many women and children suffering far more than Pearl and her mother Hester? You decide. We need also to consider the millions upon millions of dollars spent on welfare and other social services. In addition

we have the high crime rate, all of these are often a direct result of single parent families. The high divorce rate (as high as 70 and 80 percent in some areas) can be credited in large part to adultery by one or both of the spouses.

Take a little time to think; in your community, is there not a gradual acceptance of adultery, fornication, homosexuality and now even homosexual marriage? Notice that I didn't say gay marriages. The reason is that most homosexuals are anything but gay. Check the data on homosexuals; see the many problems their life style attracts. A decline in the belief of God is at the core of all our problems, or at least a decline in the belief of right and wrong. A belief that excludes any punishment for sins committed by violating the laws of God.

Conclusion

If Nathaniel Hawthorne were to live in our day, how would he write of the modern Christian community? Would he not hold today's Christians in even greater scorn than he did those in seventeenth century Boston? Would he not mock the contradiction between what today's Christian believes and their actions and life style? At least in his novel the people's actions were consistent with what they claimed to believe, rigid though these actions may appear to us. Is it not possible that Hawthorne would have preferred those bygone days, where families were far more intact and united, thereby creating a much more wholesome environment for both the children and community?

Yes, when one compares our present time with the one in the novel, could we not rightly embrace the shortcomings of that imperfect town of which Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote those many years ago?