



CHAPTER TWO

The Market Place



n a summer morning about two centuries ago, the grass plot in front of the jail in Prison Lane was occupied by a large number of Bostonians. Their eyes were fixed on the old oak door. Their faces were grim ¹ and rigid.

Every time there was such a group of people in front of the jail, there was usually a whipping of a disobedient child, a lazy bond-servant, ² a Quaker ³ or a turbulent Indian. It could also have been the hanging of a witch.

The spectators looked very solemn and severe, as was typical

1. grim : hard, serious.

2. bond-servant : slave.

3. Quaker : see Religion in America page 53.

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of people who believed that religion and law were almost identical.

There was practically no sympathy from the crowd for the condemned individual. What we would consider a small offence today, was then punished very harshly—even with death itself.

The women in the crowd were particularly interested in what was about to happen. They were wives and maidens ¹ of English birth. Their features ² were hard, their expressions bitter.

“Goodwives,” ³ said a severe-looking woman of fifty, “we should be the ones to judge the evil doings of this Hester Prynne, since we are women of mature age and church members of good repute. ⁴ What do you all think? If the hussy ⁵ were judged by us five, would she receive the same sentence as the magistrates have decided on? I think not!”

“People say,” said another woman, “that the Reverend Master Dimmesdale, her pastor, is very upset that such a scandal has fallen upon his congregation.”

“The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but they are too generous—that is the truth,” added a third older woman.

“At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron ⁶ on Hester Prynne’s forehead. Madame Hester would have winced ⁷ at that, I am sure! But, little will she care what they put

1. **maidens** : unmarried women.
2. **features** : eyes, nose, mouth and other parts of the face.
3. **Goodwives** : Puritan expression for a married woman.
4. **repute** : reputation.
5. **hussy** : badly-behaved girl or woman.
6. **hot iron** : a metal bar which has been heated in the fire.
7. **wincing** : moved away suddenly because of pain.

on her dress! She could cover it with a brooch, and then walk the streets as proud as ever!"

"But even if she covers the mark, the pain will always be in her heart," said a soft-spoken young wife, holding a child by hand.

"Goodness!" exclaimed a man in the crowd, "Is there no virtue in a woman, except for what comes from the fear of punishment? Quiet now! The lock of the prison door is turning, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself!"



The door of the jail was thrown open, and there appeared the grim, threatening figure of the town-beadle. ¹ He was like a black shadow emerging into the sunshine. He had a sword by his side and carried a staff of office. ² His aspect represented the extreme severity of the Puritan code of law.

He stretched out the official staff in his left hand, and laid his right hand on the young woman's shoulder, pulling her forward. Once they had reached the prison door, she pushed his hand away from her shoulder. This action marked her natural dignity and force of character. She stepped out into the open

1. town-beadle : officer of the town.

2. staff of office : thick stick used as a mark of office.

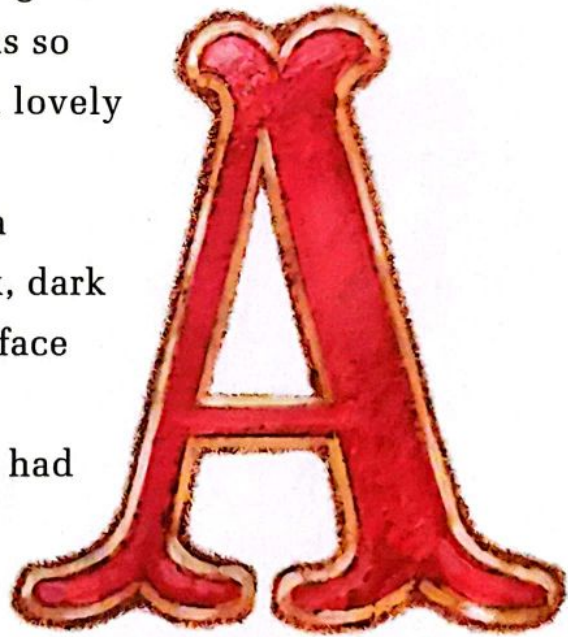
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air, of her own free will. In her arms, she carried an infant of about three months.

When the young woman—the mother of the child—stood before the crowd, her first impulse was to hold the infant close to her chest, as if to hide something that was fastened to her dress.

After a moment, however, she realized that she was using her child, the living sign of her shame,¹ to hide another sign of shame. Therefore, she put the child on her arm and, with a burning blush² and an arrogant smile, she looked straight at her townspeople. On the breast of her dress, in fine red cloth, surrounded with elaborate designs in gold thread, appeared the letter “A”. It was so artistically done, that it looked like a lovely decoration on her dress.

The young woman was tall, with a perfectly elegant body. She had thick, dark hair that reflected the sunshine. Her face was beautifully regular and her complexion³ was rich in colour. She had a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was lady-like, too. She had a certain gentle dignity about her. She radiated a painful, but beautiful light.



The point which drew all eyes was the SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered, which illuminated her. It had the

1. **shame** : painful feeling of guilt.
2. **blush** : when you blush, your face becomes red because you are embarrassed.
3. **complexion** : natural colour and appearance of the skin.

The Scarlet Letter

effect of a spell, ¹ taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.

"She is very skilled with her needle," remarked one of the female spectators, "but only a brazen ² hussy could show her skill in this manner! This is her way of laughing at the magistrates, and making the punishment something to be proud of!"

"Oh, peace neighbours, peace!" whispered their youngest companion. "Don't let her hear you!"

"Make way, make way!" cried the beadle. "Open a passage, and I promise you that every man, woman and child will be able to look at Mistress Prynne and her apparel, ³ from now until one o'clock. A blessing on the Colony of Massachusetts, where injustice and wickedness are dragged out into the sunshine! Come along, Madame Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the marketplace!"

Hester Prynne walked towards the place of her punishment. A crowd of curious schoolboys ran in front of her, turning their heads to look at her face and at the humiliating letter on her breast. It was as though her heart had been thrown out into the street for the spectators to walk on.

However, no one could see her inner agony, and she walked serenely to the scaffold. ⁴ The scaffold was the platform of the pillory, ⁵ that horrid instrument of discipline that confines the

1. **spell** : condition caused by magic power, enchantment.

2. **brazen** : shameless, immodest.

3. **apparel** [əpærəl] : clothing.

4. **scaffold** :



5. **pillory** :



human head in its tight grip, and exposes it to the world.

Hester Prynne was not condemned to the pillory. She was condemned to stand on the scaffold, for everyone to look at. It was intolerable! The Governor, several counsellors, a judge, a general and the ministers of the town were all at the balcony of the meetinghouse, looking down on the platform.

As she stood on the scaffold, vivid memories of her childhood flashed through her mind. She remembered her schooldays and her years as a young girl. These memories made her forget, for a few instants, the brutal reality of the present. She remembered her native village in England and her paternal home—a decayed¹ house of grey stone with a poverty-stricken aspect. She saw her father's face, and her mother's too. She saw her own face, alive with the happiness and beauty of youth.

Then she remembered another face, the face of a man troubled by his years—the pale, thin face of a scholar, with dull eyes that had toiled² over many books. Yet, those tired eyes had a strange, penetrating power to read the human soul. Hester also remembered his slight deformity: his left shoulder was a bit higher than the right.

Suddenly, Hester's mind returned to the present, to the marketplace of the Puritan settlement, with all the townspeople looking at her, at her infant and at the scarlet letter. This was her new reality.

1. **decayed** : fallen to a lower or worse state, deteriorated.

2. **toiled** : worked very, very hard, without tiring.

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One of the main streets of Boston, 1685, with platform, or scaffold, visible in the background.

- 1 a. Why were the townspeople gathered in front of the jail?
- b. Why were the goodwives complaining? What other punishment did one goodwife suggest?
- c. What was Hester's punishment?
- d. Describe the memories that flashed through Hester's mind, as she stood on the scaffold.

- 2 Find the words in the cell window that best describe the following characters. You can use some words more than once.

elegant body bitter young regular face dark hair black eyes	marked brow threatening burning blush hard features
colourful grim complexion black shadow solemn severe	black shadow tall rigid natural dignity arrogant smile

Hester	Women in the crowd	Spectators	Town-Beadle

Word puzzle

3 Write the word that fits the description.

- a. badly behaved girl or woman S
- b. painful feeling of guilt H
- c. prison I
- d. many people C
- e. judge G
- f. small child F
- g. speak very softly H
- h. people who watch S T
- i. menacing H
- j. compassion M

4 Look at these two types of “if” clauses from Chapter 2:

- A. But even **if** she covers the mark, the pain **will** always be in her heart.
- B. If the hussy **were** judged by us five, **would** she receive the same sentence as the magistrates have decided on?

A. **This is the first conditional and it is used to talk about a possible future action or situation. Generally, we use the Present Simple after “if”, and the future “will” after the main clause.**

B. **This is the second conditional and it is used to talk about an action or situation which is *improbable, hypothetical or imaginary*. Generally we use the Past Simple after “if”, and “would” in the main clause.**

Match the two parts of the sentences to make first and second conditionals.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> If we need you urgently, | a. if you understand Italian. |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> If the wind continues to blow, | b. I would finish the book. |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> You will enjoy the opera, | c. you'd feel better. |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> If I had another week, | d. if he saw her now. |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> He would hardly recognize her, | e. if they plan to travel. |
| 6. <input type="checkbox"/> They will need a passport, | f. we'll call you. |
| 7. <input type="checkbox"/> If you got more sleep, | g. she will shut the window. |

Themes for thought, discussion and writing

- 5** How does public punishment differ from private punishment? Which is more effective in your opinion?
- 6** Hawthorne describes the spectators as "people who believed that religion and law were almost identical." Are there countries today where religion and law are practically the same thing? Do you think church and state should be separate? Why or why not?
- 7** The human mind often protects itself from harsh, terrible events by momentarily "switching" to the past or the future, in order to block out the painful present. How did Hester's mind do this? Has this experience ever happened to you?

by *my Samuel Sennall of Boston*
and for my own proper acco^t and
in and upon the good *called the*

THE PURITANS - THE ORIGINS

Puritanism was a Protestant religious reform movement. It developed within the Church of England during the late 16th century. The Puritan movement found its origins in the writings and thinking of early religious reformers such as Thomas Cranmer, and was heavily influenced by the Protestant theologian, John Calvin whose real name was Jean Chauvin. His religious movement within Puritanism was called Calvinism. In Scotland the Calvinists became known as Presbyterians. In France they were called Huguenots.

The Puritans wanted to purify¹ the church of any remaining Roman Catholic influence. They rejected the authority of the Roman Catholic Pope and relied on the Bible as a source of religious truth. They believed in predestination: a person was either predestined by God for eternal salvation or to eternal damnation.

Their religious beliefs influenced every aspect of their daily life: social, political and economic. They observed austere morality, dress and behaviour. They cultivated family piety, thrift,² honesty, business enterprise, education and science.

In England they were often persecuted and they strongly desired to go to the New World where they could finally practise their religion freely, and create a settlement completely governed by Puritan ideas and laws.

In 1629 a group of Puritans and merchants convinced King Charles I of England to grant their newly formed Massachusetts Bay Company an area north of the Plymouth Colony for settlement. Initially, the company was considered a business venture, but the Puritan leader, John Winthrop, decided to use the colony as a refuge for persecuted Puritans.

In March 1630, Governor John Winthrop led 700 Puritans to the New World. He was on board the vessel *Arbella* followed by six other ships. The Puritans arrived in Massachusetts Bay and landed in what is now Salem. Shortly after,

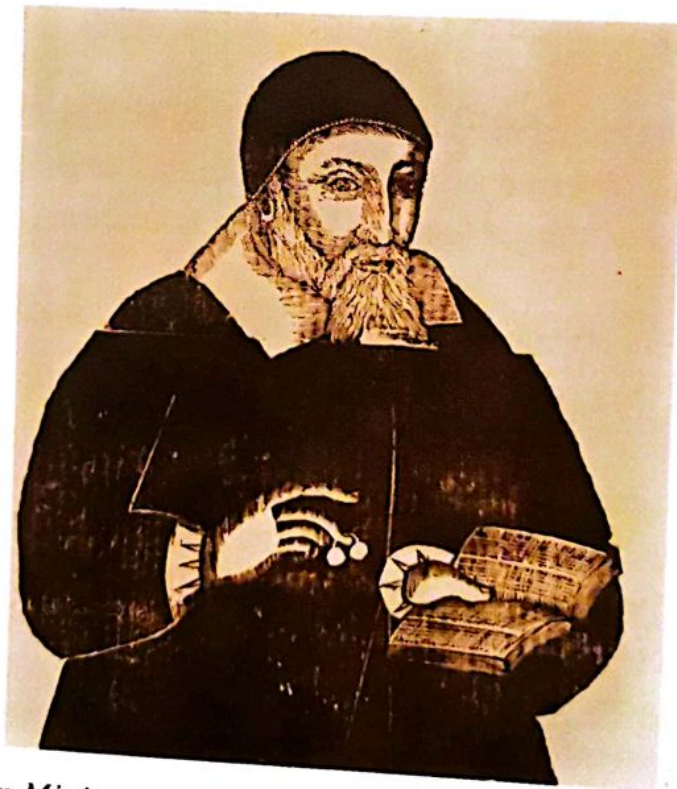
1. **purify** : the word Puritan comes from this word.
2. **thrift** : not to spend money foolishly, to save one's money and use it wisely.

by my Samuel Snoll of Bo
and for my own proper acco^{nt}
in and upon the good & ch called the

Governor Winthrop founded Boston, which became a prosperous seaport and the capital city.

After the persecution suffered in England, they were now able to practise their stern¹ religion freely and they began to persecute their own dissenters! Those who were not good members of the church were persecuted, punished and banished. If a person was accused of being a witch or a heretic, he or she was burned at the stake or hanged. Blasphemy was punished very severely: the guilty person's ears were cut off!

Success in the work world was seen as a sign of God's favour, and one's predestination to salvation. In fact, shortly after their arrival, the Puritans established a flourishing fish, fur and lumber² trade with many countries.



*Puritan Minister, Reverend Richard Mather (1596-1669).
He was the first of a generation of Mather ministers.*

1. **stern** : serious, strict.
2. **lumber** : timber, wood.

in and upon the good *eth* called the *Puritan*

Devotion to hard work and business enterprise is at the basis of the Puritan philosophy. Accumulation of wealth is not considered sinful, as long as it doesn't lead to an idle, dissolute life.

The work ethic, which is at the root of modern American society, derives from the Calvinists (Puritans). It has strongly influenced Americans from the time of the colonies to the present, even those who are not Calvinists. The work ethic has become a sort of all-encompassing American national credo.¹

1 Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Puritanism developed within the Roman Catholic Church, during the late 15th century. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. John Calvin, the Protestant reformer, influenced the Puritan movement. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Their religious beliefs never influenced their economic and political life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. They wanted to go to the New World to practise their religion freely. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. The Massachusetts Bay Company was formed by King Charles I. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. In March 1630, Governor Winthrop led 700 Puritans to the New World, on board the <i>Arbella</i> . | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. The Puritans landed in Boston and then founded Salem. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

1. **credo** : statement of beliefs and principles.

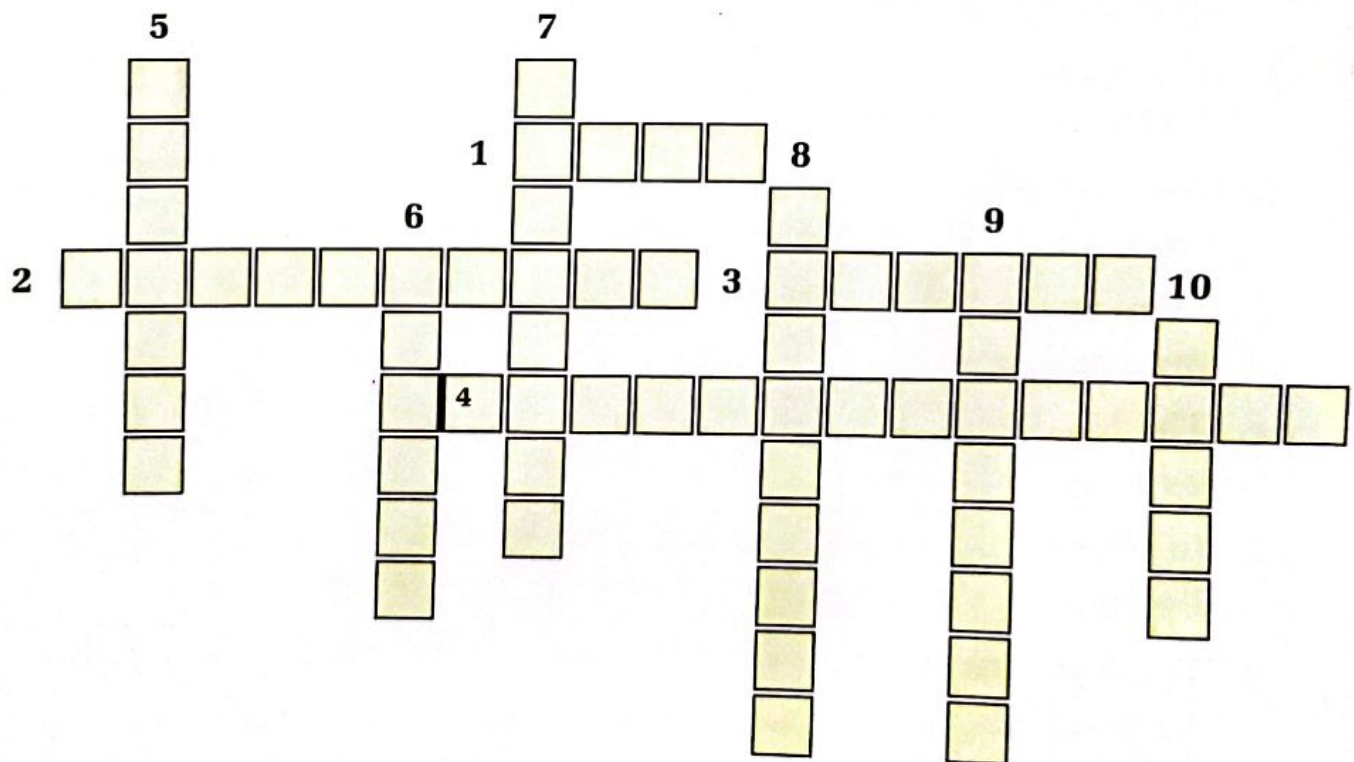
2 How much do you know about the Puritans? Complete the crossword puzzle, and find out!

ACROSS

1. Inactive, indolent
2. the Puritans were often in England
3. timber, wood
4. what the Puritans believed in

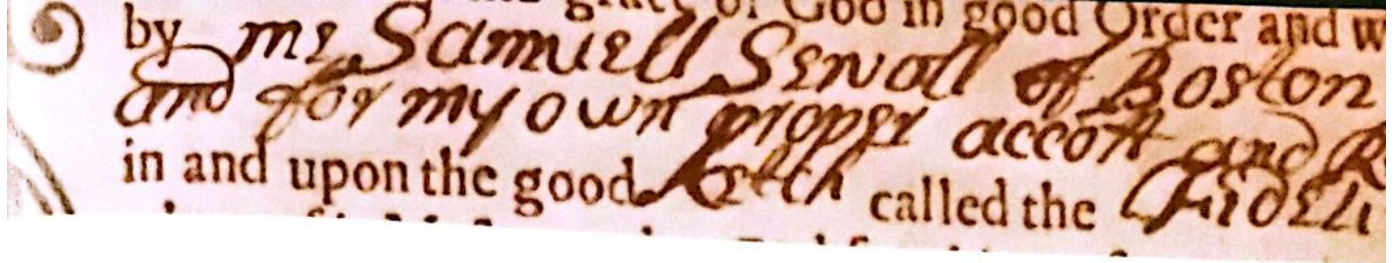
DOWN

5. the name of the ship which took Winthrop to the new world
6. French Protestant theologian
7. founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630
8. bad language about God
9. bad members of the church were often
10. religious or dutiful behaviour



3 Explain in your own words these Calvinist concepts:

- a. predestination
- b. the work ethic



- 4 In the United States, the Calvinist concept of the work ethic has grown and developed very strongly in all sectors of society. It is believed that with hard work, thrift and honesty, anyone can achieve success.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this way of thinking? Fill in the table below.

Advantages	Disadvantages

- 5 Compare tables with your classmates and discuss them.
- 6 Do you agree with the Calvinist work ethic? Why or why not?
- 7 How important is success in the work world to you?
- ☐ extremely important ☐ quite important
- ☐ very important ☐ not important
- 8 Arrange the following in order of their importance to you with 1 as most important and 3 least important.
- ☐ family ☐ free time ☐ work