

American Romantic(Ism) Notions In Mark Twain's The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg

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Abstract: *Mark twain is one of the well reputed authors, who laid path to the American literary tradition with his masterpiece huckleberry Finn. Most of his works are humorous and satiric over "the so called American society". His works, in a funny way, deal with the problems that faced by the simple people in the society. Twain never discusses any issues with the serious tone but, in place of dealing the issues seriously, he takes humour as his weapon to ridicule the issues and their shortcomings. He is well respected as a realist but his short story "The man that corrupted the Hadleyburg has a few American romantic features like hypocrisy in the so called "civilized" society. One of the salient features of American Romanticism is that civilisation is corrupt and a breeding ground for hypocrisy and, behaves inhumanly. Twain takes the people of Hadleyburg as an example to justify the concept that the urbanised luxuries in a civilised world push the common people out of their righteousness. This short story has four chapters and discusses Hadleyburgians' greed over wealth and their pride over their "incorruptible" town.*

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The present work deals with Hadleyburg, a small town filled with a set of people who proclaim their town incorruptible as it is the town of highly moral people. The neighbouring townsfolks are jealous of the fame that Hadleyburg has and respect it as a righteous place to live in. This short story works on the hypocrisy that lies in the town and shows a civilised society can never be a perfect place for morality as it is filled with luxury and needs. As Gandhi said, nature has everything for man's need but not to his greed. Here in this town, the folks are so much of genteel British and behave so modest. This town unknowingly harmed a stranger who felt offended by the treatment of the townsfolks towards him. The stranger has not revealed in the entire story about the offence that he received but with the bits and bins of information, the narrator picturizes him that the stranger wants to show the world that the Hadleyburgians are the hypocrites and greedy to avenge them for his insult.

The stranger intends to test their so-called integrity and righteousness. He pleases to evince the civilised society's true nature when it comes to desire and greed. The stranger in this story wants to teach a lesson to the entire town that they are not different from others after all, they never got a chance to

test their honesty. The stranger leaves handing over a bag full of gold coins to Mary Richards along with a note that says that the sack contains gold as a token of his respect to a man who helped him get through his hardship by lending him some money with which the stranger could earn much more wealth in gambling but he couldn't recognise the one who gave him a helping hand but, he remembers the remark that he pronounced while rendering the help to him. That remark still rings over the stranger's head and he is very much sure that the gentleman would remember that remark. If that man's remark matches with the note that is kept inside the sack, that would make him the rightful one to receive that reward. The stranger in his note, requests Edward Richards to appoint the Rev. Mr. Burgess to identify his benefactor.

On reading this note, Mary is frightened and feels offended to have the money that is earned out of gambling. She thinks that such wealth is a sin. She closes the door for the fear of burglars and wants to protect the money until her husband gets back home. Mary sits down gently quivering with excitement,

"What a strange thing it is! . . . And what a fortune for that kind man who set his bread afloat upon the waters! . . . If

it had only been my husband that did it! --for we are so poor, so old and poor! . . ." Then, with a sigh--"But it was not my Edward; no, it was not he that gave stranger twenty dollars. It is a pity too; I see it now. . ."Then, with a shudder--"But it is GAMBLERS' money! the wages of sin; we couldn't take it; we couldn't touch it. I don't like to be near it; it seems a defilement." She moved to a farther chair. . ."I wish Edward would come, and take it to the bank; a burglar might come at any moment; it is dreadful to be here all alone with it." (12).

Edward reaches home at eleven, he tells his wife, "[I]t is dreadful to be poor, and have to make these dismal journeys at my time of life." When His wife tells him about the sack, and he reads the note that was attached to it once again. Mr. Edward Richards is flummoxed at the stranger's surprise visit and garnered by the wealth that was in store in the sack. in spite of being poor, Edward Richards wishes to spread the news to the world to know the stranger's wish, at the same time, the honesty of the town would be spoken high of.

Edward rushes to the office of the local newspaper The Missionary Herald to mail the news to all over America. The Newspaper Editor Archibald Cox takes the news and hurries the mailing work in order to spread the news to other parts of the country. Edward reaches home and contemplates with his wife over the rightful owner of the wealth. He hypothetically gives a remark that Mr. Barclay Goodson might be the "man" because he was so kind and helpful but, Mr. Barclay Goodson hated the town saying that the people were narrow minded and stingy. Edward knows that Goodson dead long ago and would not come for asking the money. Mary agrees with him and encourages him to devise a plan to swindle the sack. When Edward becomes convinced that Mr. Barclay Goodson was that "man", he rushes to the newspaper office to stop the mailing with an intention to swindle the sack of gold. Meanwhile, Archibald Cox gets the same intention after his wife's suggestion to keep the secret between them and Richards. Edward and Archibald Cox reach the office at the same time in a great hurry to stop the mail. They make a pact after confirming that none of the townsfolks is aware of the sack so they can share the riches between them and erase it from their memory to lead a better life with their amassed wealth, but the mail boy, to their dismay, informs that the mail has been already sent to spread the news all over America. The disappointed ones return their homes with a long face for losing such a fortune.

Twain just throws light on hypocrisy that lies in the "standard" society because integrity of any man can be respected in hard times in which he is pushed to defend his principle against all the odds that fortify his giving up his integrity. Without being a part of a situation that could scamper one's lively condition, one cannot claim to be loyal. Everyone in the civilised society, lives a life based on the opinions of others over their affairs. One lives in an unshakeable hypocrite condition knowingly that one cannot have that much integrity in toto as a civilised one. Twain points out that the civilised society cannot have a perfect morale as it is filled with temptation and greed. One's self boasting of being incorrupt in a civilised society, is ridiculous because such a society respects one's wealth and makes everyone lead a dual life. Edward and Cox, respected as the prominent ones in the town, want to acquire that wealth

thinking Barclay Goodson, thought -to -be -the rightful owner, may not come from his grave to claim his reward. They are sure about the other folks in the town that none of them would dare to come forward claiming the wealth as they are aware that they are not the rightful owner. Even if any Tom, Dick and Harry comes forward claiming the sack with the wrong remark, he would be outcast from the town forever for being corrupt so none would put themselves in that strife. Moreover, the town would banish such dishonest souls so as to maintain their "incorruptible" town as incorruptible. So, it becomes obvious to them to swindle the money without anyone's intercede. In fact, both of them are inwardly corrupt because of their greed over wealth. It is clear that their being incorrupt is merely an outward expression for the fear of being exposed. Edward, while discussing with his wife, pities for the life and plans to exploit the situation to benefit himself the way Cox wishes to.

Barclay Goodson when he was alive, used to criticise the town being narrow minded, foolish and stingy. What made Edward Richards and Cox think that Barclay Goodson would be the one who would have helped, is that his dislike towards his town and its folks; his unshakeable belief that the town was filled with selfish people. It is clear that the town full of greedy and stingy people cannot remain incorruptible. Twain holds this point very strenuously in the following chapters.

The news of the "sack" is spread throughout America so as to brag about their town's incorruptible fame and their being singled out for their noble gesture to identify the rightful claimant of such a wealth. Not only the townsfolks are eager to know the rightful owner of the reward but the entire America. Moreover, they have a great feeling that their "incorruptible town" would be a great example for the people of America to be honest like them.

It is decided that in the first option, If a man comes announcing the words similar to the remark that the stranger kept inside the sack, Edward Richards will then open the sack and check the words in the sealed envelope in the sack and handover the gold to him; the second option. In thirty days, on a Friday, if anyone who claims to have spoken the remark, should report to the town hall at 8 p.m, he must give the local minister, the Rev. Burgess who would compare the one with the remark in the sealed envelope and reward the righteous. The news spreads like forest fire in and around of Hadleyburg. People are totally surprised by every day's event followed by the arrival of the "sack of gold". The sack is now at the bank run by Mr. Pinkerton, a wealthy man of the town. The news brought a media attention towards the town more than ever. The reporters are flooded the town; they made the town overnight a popular one more than ever with interviews and pictures of the folks and places of the town.

After three weeks, on a Saturday evening, Edward Richards receives a letter form an unknown Howard L. Stephenson, who, on his arrival from Mexica, came to know about the fuss in Hadleyburg. On the very night that the stranger was on the street begging money in Hadleyburg, Stephenson says, he was nearby and overheard the remark in question. It was Goodson who made it, he says. Stephenson further details that he was a friend of Barclay Goodson while he was leaving the town by train; Barclay Goodson used to admire Edward Richards for his service; if he were rich he

would have left a great fortune to Edward Richards when he died. Stephenson says that it makes Edward Richards the legitimate heir to the sack of gold, and so he reveals the remark to him. The remark is that godson heard was *you are far from being a bad man: go, and reform.* Mary rejoices over it and requests her husband to tell her about the service that he did to Barclay Goodson. As such Edward Richards could not recollect any service that he did to Barclay Goodson, would make him his legitimate heir. So, he hushes to his wife saying that he promised to Barclay Goodson that he would never disclose it to anyone. He ponders over what kind of service that he conferred on Barclay Goodson made him a legitimate heir and, to think high of him. As far as Edward knows he was the one who found out that the woman whom Barclay Goodson courted was of a negro blood, on hearing this, Barclay Goodson stopped his marriage with that woman. Recalling this, Edward Richards could convince himself that it might be the service that Barclay Goodson felt grateful to him.

On the same evening, eighteen prominent Hadleyburg residents receive a letter from Howard Stephenson. The content of the letter resembles to that of Edward Richards. In each case, the recipient thinks over his good deed for Goodson and succeeds in recalling one. These prominent citizens, like Edward Richards, believe they have been singled out for the sack of gold. Meanwhile, the recipients and their wives make big plans for the money. They start buying things on credits, reshaping their houses, reforming their farms and so on.

One fine day, all the claimants are requested to submit their notes to Burgess in the townhall. The town hall is filled with a lot of people from all over the country. Extra chairs are put to accommodate the prominent ones of the town and the others found sitting on the floor. All are eager to know the one who is going to be rich and respected for his humility. Burgess reads out louder the remark from Mr. Billson and then he recites louder the note that the stranger left in the sack, both remarks are similar. The crowd rejoices over Mr. Billson riches but to their surprise, Wilson comes up with the protest stating that he had the same remark submitted. The confused gathering insists on unpacking the sack to see the actual remark. Burgess opens the sack and finds two notes one says

Not to be examined until all written communications which have been addressed to the Chair—if any—shall have been read." The other says, "I do not require that the first half of the remark . . . shall be quoted with exactness, for it was not striking, and could be forgotten; but its closing fifteen words are quite striking, and I think easily rememberable; unless THESE shall be accurately reproduced, let the applicant be regarded as an impostor."Burgess reads the first part of the remark: "YOU ARE FAR FROM BEING A BAD MAN. He then reads the rest of the remark: "GO, AND REFORM—OR, MARK MY WORDS—SOME DAY, FOR YOUR SINS YOU WILL DIE AND GO TO HELL OR HADLEYBURG—TRY AND MAKE IT THE FORMER. (34)

Burgess starts reading all the notes given by Robert J. Titmarsh, Eliphilet Weeks, Oscar B. Wilder, Archibald Cox and others. All are similar. It brings a great laughter in the gathering and people make fun of the entire scene. The townhall is thundered by the laughs and the mock songs ridiculing the "prominent ones" and "Hadleyburg the incorruptible". Edward is greatly relieved as his note was not

read. Burgess silences the crowd and reads the second note that is left in the sack.it utters

...There wasn't any pauper stranger, nor any twenty-dollar contribution, nor any accompanying benediction and compliment—these are all inventions... he suffered an offense that made him want to strike out at the vanity of the residents, "the place where feeble and foolish people are most vulnerable."...and soon realized that the reputation of the townspeople rested on keeping themselves and their young ones away from temptation....."Why, you simple creatures, the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire," he says. ... "If I have succeeded, open the sack and summon the Committee on Propagation and Preservation of the Hadleyburg Reputation."... (41)

The sack was filled with coins made of leads but the crowd still rejoices over Richards being the one who did not claim for the gold giving the remark. They honour Richards as the righteous one and deserves something. Richards feel guilty of their action. The stranger is also there in the crowd watching the entire scene. He thinks that Richards to be honoured for not being tempted by the gold. There is an auction to bid the leads and the stranger invoked them upon. He devises the plan to cheat one of those eighteen prominent people to buy that sack for a good money for their temptation over stealing it. He announces in the crowd that he is going to stamp on the coins the names of the people who put the note for the gold. Pinkerton vehemently opposes it but others give a nod of acceptance. Harkness makes a secret deal with the stranger that he would buy all the coins for 40000\$. The stranger as he planned sells those lead ones to Harkness. As a token of his respect, he leaves a cheque worth \$ 38500 signed by Harkness, to Mary as a reward. Richards get suspicious of it and feels scared of the consequences that cheque may create. A note along with a cheque, says

...I am a disappointed man. Your honesty is beyond the reach of temptation. I had a different idea about it, but I wronged you in that, and I beg pardon, and do it sincerely. I honour you—and that is sincere too. This town is not worthy to kiss the hem of your garment. Dear sir, I made a square bet with myself that there were nineteen debauchable men in your self-righteous community. I have lost. Take the whole pot, you are entitled to it.... (49)

With this note, they feel sorrier than ever. Edward invents that Mr. Burgess might take revenge against him by disclosing the remark for not saving him from the disgrace that he endured in the past.

A few days later, the old couple receive a note now it is from burgess. It says,

You saved me, in a difficult time. I saved you last night. It was at cost of a lie, but I made the sacrifice freely, and out of a grateful heart. None in this village knows so well as I know how brave and good and noble you are. At bottom you cannot respect me, knowing as you do of that matter of which I am accused, and by the general voice condemned; but I beg that you will at least believe that I am a grateful man; it will help me to bear my burden. [Signed] 'BURGESS.'" (50)

After reading this, Edward sighs,

"Saved, once more. And on such terms!" He put the note in the lire. "I—I wish I were dead, Mary, I wish I were out of it all!"...."Oh, these are bitter, bitter days, Edward. The stabs,

through their very generosity, are so deep--and they come so fast!" (50)

Three days before the election, each of two thousand voters receives a prized memento "the coin", the renowned bogus double-eagles stamped on it. Around one of the eagles, the written words are...THE REMARK I MADE TO THE POOR STRANGER WAS... (50) ... Around the other face was stamped these...GO, AND REFORM. [SIGNED] PINKERTON... (50). Thus, makes Pinkerton lose his winning in election to Harkness.

The Richards feel guiltier of their sin to acquire the gold. Edward's health starts deteriorate due to guilt grip. He becomes delirious over the time. Their health condition saddens the people of Hadleyburg as they are the pride of Hadleyburg. The couples burn the cheque out of fear that it might be the trick that the stranger wants to play with them and make them look ridiculous in front of the people. The nurses who take care of them, are confused with their strange gabbling. After a few days, more news come about the health of the old ones. They are becoming weaker and more delirious. In the latest hour, Edward's mind is cleared and he sends for burgess. Burgess thinks Edwards wishes to say something in privacy so he requests everyone to leave the room but Edward wants everyone stay as a witness for the confessions. He confesses:

...I want you all to hear my confession, so that I may die a man, and not a dog. I was clean-- artificially--like the rest; and like the rest I fell when temptation came. I signed a lie, and claimed the miserable sack. Mr. Burgess remembered that I had done him a service, and in gratitude (and ignorance) he suppressed my claim and saved me. You know the thing that was charged against Burgess years ago. My testimony, and mine alone, could have cleared him, and I was a coward and left him to suffer disgrace... (53)

Burgess feels irritated by the Old man's words and leaves the place saying that the dying Old man blabbers and protests impassionedly. But it falls to the deaf man's ears. He denies saving him from not reading Edward's note, perhaps he has lost it. Edward's uttered his last words...he did a natural and justifiable thing; he repented of the saving kindness which he had done me, and he EXPOSED me--as I deserved--. Out of my heart I forgive him... (53). With this, Edward has once again wronged the innocent burgess for what he did not do.

In the final, as the stranger wished, all the nineteen have fallen prey to the fiendish sack. finally, the town legislator proposes for a new name for the town and promises to bring back its former glory. The story ends with the quote...it is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again. (54)

This story has one more interesting character Jack Holliday, a good-natured loafer. He mocks at everything in the town as he knows it well that the town is filled with hypocrisy and foolishness. Twain introduces him as... Jack Halliday, who was the loafing, good-natured, no-account, irreverent fisherman, hunter, boys' friend, stray-dogs' friend, typical "Sam Lawson" of the town... (21). Jack was ridiculed by the townsfolks for being uncivilised. He is very much aware of the fact that his town is not what it claims to be. When the auction was announced, the Saddler announces;

...Mr. Chairman, we've got ONE clean man left, anyway, out of the late aristocracy; and he needs money, and deserves it. I move that you appoint Jack Halliday to get up there and auction off that sack of gilt twenty-dollar pieces, and give the result to the right man--the man whom Hadleyburg delights to honour--Edward Richards."(43)

Jack represents the attitude of Twain in this story.

Twain has used some certain romantic notions like civilisation itself is corrupt and hypocrite. The people live in the town thinks that they are incorruptible but they have temptation for wealth and luxury. In the beginning, the Richards consider the wealth to be handed over to the rightful claimant but, when they think about the life that they can lead with that money and the fame that they may get, they wish to keep the money for them. In one case, it can be considered that the old couples are poor to be tempted easily but the prominent people of the town themselves are tempted by that wealth because a civilised society looks at how a man lives. The entire people of the town are corrupted because of their accusing Pinkerton as the culprit but he is not so in this case. They elect Harkness as the legislator but he is the one who made a secret deal with the stranger to use those coins as a drum card to defeat Pinkerton. As Harkness planned, Pinkerton is defeated in the election so the town has chosen the corrupt man. The town can never be an incorruptible one again. The more one becomes civilised the more one loses his human values. Civilisation never respects individuals or grants freedom to them. Richards' greed over the sack of gold has ruined his peace. His simple life in spite of being terrible poor, has given him peace of mind. When the temptation haunts him, he ends up prey to his desires. The prominent people of the town have lost their respect and become the reason for their town's failure as an incorruptible town.

Perhaps, the town was already corrupt and the stranger was the one who exposed it? It remains a question. But, a few incidents reveal that the town was already corrupt. For instance, the town had a racial difference that was the reason Goodson could not marry the one he loved. Slavery is one of the major defects in a civilised society. Second one is that Mary was afraid of letting the door open for the fear of burglars.so the town was not a safe one. The third one is Edwards did not speak truth to save Mr. Burgess but, betrayed him to save himself from being outcast by the people of the town. The Richards' utmost selfishness has caused a good man like Mr. Burges suffer in disgrace forever. The fourth one is that even though the Richards knew in the townhall that they were also submitted the note but they kept quiet when it was unannounced, besides, they blushed to the expression "their invulnerable probity" in spite of being culprits.it shows how hypocrite the people were. It can be said that Twain thought that civilisation has nothing in store for a good man in fact it outcasts such people.

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