

ENGLISH SEMESTER 2 NOTES

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On Saying Please

Introduction:

Alfred George Gardiner was a British journalist and author. His essay written under the pen-name called Alpha of the Plough. In this essay Gardiner points out that good manners is essential in all human beings but not following of it is not punishable under law. He also concentrates on the sterling character of particular bus conductor in the essay 'On Saying Please'.

A fired Lift-man:

A young lift-man in a city office who threw a passenger out off was fired (dismissed) as a fine for the offence he committed. The person who entered the lift said 'Top', but the lift-man demanded 'Top, Please'. Since the passenger refused the lift-man threw him out from the lift. Discourtesy (Rude Behavior) is not a legal offence. If a thief breaks into one's house and he/she knocks the thief down the law will free him. If we have the freedom to box people's ears (punch) because we did not like their behavior, or the tone of voice, our fist would never be idle and the gutters will run with blood all day.

Law's on Manners:

There is no law against bad manners. At the same time violence will not be allowed. Gardiner says that the action against the life-man was justified. Law protects one from violence. There is no law to force anyone to say 'Please' or 'Thank you'. It does not force any one to adjust the voice to the feelings of others. It does not also say that one should wax moustache or dye one's hair. No rewards through law for the wound of a person's feeling.

The lift-man brooding over the insult by the hour would visit his wife in the evening is the only way to restore the equilibrium by showing his anger to his wife. The lift-man perhaps felt insulted and it is an insult for his self respect. He loses his mental balance. Thus his bad temper affects many persons. Bad manners poison the even flow of life and there is not court that regulates the social behavior of a person. Even the Ten Commandments do not provide for protection.

Customs sacred than law:

Social customs made us civil and courteous in society. 'Please' and 'Thank you' are the first essential needs of society which keep the machine of life oiled and running sweetly. There is no question of superior or inferior in such a case. There is no question of getting the service done through order.

Polite Conductor:

Once the author jumped on to a bus and found that he had no money in his pocket and told the fact to the conductor. The conductor works in Underground Railway Company, which also runs the buses. The conductor readily gave him the

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ticket and told him that he could pay the money when he had the chance to meet him. Luckily, the author found a shilling (coin) in the corner of one of his pocket and squared him (paid the amount).

Few days later, the author's most sensitive toe was trampled on rather heavily as he sat reading on the top of a bus. He looked up with some anger and more agony and saw the most cheerful conductor. He at once said 'Sorry, sir'; I know these are heavy boots. Hope I didn't hurt you. After this incident the author began to admire him whenever he boarded his bus. He noticed that if it was raining he would run up the stairs to give someone the tip that there was a room inside. With old people he was as considerate as a son, and with children as kind as a father. If a blind person on board he takes extra care to drop him the other side of the road.

Quoting Keats:

What struck the author was the ease with which he got through his work. If bad manners are infectious, so also are good manners. 'NOTHING CLEARS UP MY SPIRITS LIKE A FINE DAY' said Keats. In lightening their spirits he lightened his own task. His liveliness and fun was not a wasteful luxury, but a sound investment.

Conclusion:

He adds up the comment on the lift-man by narrating a story of Chesterfield. In his time the London streets were without pavements of today, and a man who took the wall had the driest footing. 'I never give the wall to a scoundrel' said a man who met Chesterfield one day in the street. 'I always do' said Chesterfield, stepping with a bow into the road. The author hopes that the lift-man will agree this revenge was much sweeter than to assault or harm someone.

Headache

Introduction:

R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) is one of the most famous and distinguished Indian writer in English. He had a fine insight into various aspects on the lives of the poor and the middle class people, particularly in South India. He makes the dull and common place events more interesting and this essay is one such essay. In a writing career that spanned over sixty years, Narayan received many awards and honours. His writings are full of humour. In this essay he explains the advantages of headache.

A blessing for Mankind:

R.K. Narayan explains how headache conferred on mankind as a blessing by a benign providence and also talks about the usefulness of headache to avoid difficult situations. He later narrates an incident in his school life about the letter writing exercise, where his teacher used headache as a cause in the specimen letter. He always wondered what made his teacher to select for headache as a cause even in a specimen letter. Later he talks about the drill class during his school days and how students usually mentioned 'headache' as an excuse for avoiding the drill class after the school hours. One day the instructor asked all the students suffering from headache to hold their arms. For many students it raised large hope. The instructor also added that he was going to give them some special exercise to cure their splitting headache. Not even a boy raised his arms. Thus the instructor put an end to that problem.

Touch of Importance:

Headache gives the sufferer a touch of importance because it can be mentioned in any social gathering and is well taken. No other pain can be so openly mentioned with freedom from punishment. Other aches sound crude and bad which cannot be mentioned in public and thus headache helps us to avoid many embarrassing situation.

What is indisposition?

Indisposition is a superior expression; it can be used only by eminent people. R. K. Narayan was really concerned about finding the real meaning of the word indisposition since it is very vague and confusing. He feels that he was not able to understand the meaning of the word indisposition except that it sounds very well in press notes or health bulletins or in messages from eminent men to gatherings to which they have been invited. It cannot be written directly and it will sound better in the third person. A gentleman is an eminent one, has a secretary or a deputy who can speak for him. For example a gentleman regrets his inability to attend the meeting today owing to indisposition (sickness or unwillingness). People will understand and accept the statement and will not question the concerned person.

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R.K. Narayan wants to know the perfect meaning of indisposition. Is the concerned person down with flu or malaria or cold or rheumatism (pain in joints and muscles)? He feels that the word indisposition could be used only at a particular level, not by all and if a school boy says "As I am indisposed, I want to be let off", he will have his ears twisted for his intelligence beyond his age.

Headache as an excuse:

If we openly say that we want to avoid the situation or an important meeting, people will get angry. No one has really got courage to tell that he/she is not willing to attend a meeting or a social gathering. The world is not yet ripe for such outspokenness and frankness. So we safely use headache as an excuse.

At home, headache is used as an excuse to avoid many uncomfortable situations. The mother-in-law, who is angry with the daughter-in-law, uses it to avoid food. The son, who does not want to take his wife out, gives headache as an excuse. The boy, who has skipped his homework, claims headache in order to avoid his tutor and to send him back away. The cultured existence is not to interfere too deeply, but to accept the face value as expressed by the speaker.

Conclusion:

Headache has become a confirmed habit. Lots of medicines have been produced to cure headache, which people always carry with them and feels uneasy without them. Opticians give glasses to cure and relieve headache. All these things prove that mankind easily begins to believe in myths.

How to be a Doctor

Introduction:

Leacock published what many consider is literary masterpiece. He wrote two excellent biographies: 'Mark Twain' published in 1932, and 'Charles Dickens, His Life and Work' in 1933. In this lesson, he discusses the advancement of the medical profession. Yet, there are many ways by which he criticizes at the doctors and their noble profession. The large exposure to the medical treatment is what is attractive to the general public which is ridiculed by the author.

Advancement of Science:

The progress (growth) of science is a wonderful thing. Though he appreciates the practical benefits of science like electricity, airplane and the vacuum cleaner, he has some reservations about the progress of medicine. A hundred year ago there were no bacilli (bacteria), no ptomaine poisoning (food poisoning), no diphtheria (throat infection) and no appendicitis. Rabies was little known. Many diseases like psoriasis (skin disease) and parotitis (swell in salivary gland) and trypanosomiasis (sleeping disease), have been discovered and have become household names.

Growth in the treatments:

A hundred years ago fever could be cured by the letting of blood; even seventy years ago fever could be cured by administration of sedative drugs; thirty years ago fever could be healed by the means of low diet and application of ice and now they are absolutely of no use now. For example, Rheumatism (painful disorder of joints) in the ancient times being cured by carrying round potatoes in the pockets of the patients as means of cure. Now they can carry absolutely anything they like. Or, take the treatment of epilepsy (fits), the first thing we should do to a patient is to unfasten the collar buttons and let them breath, Now a days, many doctors consider to button up collar and the patient choke as a mean of cure.

Modern and Ancient Doctors:

In the olden days a man was turned out thoroughly equipped as a doctor after putting in two winter sessions at college and spending his summers in running logs for a sawmill. Some of the students even turned sooner as doctors. Nowadays it takes anywhere from 5-8 years to become a doctor.

Varied Diet charts given by a modern Doctor:

If the patient enters the consulting room and says he have a bad pain, the doctor would ask the patient to stand up and gives a heavy blow under the heart and stomach and says there is a slight anesthesia of tympanum (loss of feeling in the ear drum).

The author criticizes the modern day doctors saying that, if the patient suffers from headache the doctor will examine the stomach. If the patient asks about the

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diet, the answer will be given in two different ways and it depends on how the doctor is feeling about his appetite, if he is hungry, he will ask the patient to eat plenty. If he had a great lunch, the doctor will advise the patient not to eat much, which will certainly affect your health. If the patient enquires about drinking, the doctor will respond in two ways, either to drink more or avoid drinking. To create confidence in the minds and hearts of the patients, the doctors prescribe some laboratory tests.

Conclusion:

Thus the author remarks that, though everyone is aware of this, entire people still continue to run to the doctors in case of any slight physical problems.

The Lady or the Tiger

Introduction:

F.R. Stockton was an American humorist and writer. He first attracted notice by his stories for children; soon he gained popularity through the story called 'The Lady or the Tiger'. Though it cannot be considered a model short story, it is interesting in its own way. The story revolves around a semi-barbaric king who tries to reform and refine his subjects through a special kind of punishment. The King's peculiar way of meting out justice is narrated humorously.

Semi-barbaric king:

The king was a semi-barbaric ruler and a man of great fancy. He implemented his ideas using his authority. He would think over an issue and once he was convinced, he would follow his ideas. He had a barbaric method (cruel method) of administering justice which looked very fair. The fate of the accused person would be decided in King's arena. The accused person had the choice of opening one of two similar looking doors and could be killed by a tiger or could marry a beautiful woman. The King thought that the cruel practice will refine his subjects and culture the minds of the people who live in the kingdom. The practice is impartial and incorruptible at any chance.

Door with the Tiger:

The accused subjects were asked to step inside the amphitheatre and directly opposite to them were two doors. The subject would walk directly to the doors and open one of them. He could open either door he pleased. If he opens the open, there came out a hungry tiger, the fiercest and cruelest immediately sprang upon him and tore him to pieces as punishment. The audience in the public arena would walk slowly toward homeward mourning greatly for the dead souls.

Door with the Lady:

If the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady. The most suitable to his years and to this lady the accused subject was immediately married as a reward of his innocence. Once the lady comes out, another door opens beneath the king, and a priest followed by a band of choirs and the wedding was promptly cheered. This was the King's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. The accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty and if innocent he was rewarded on the spot whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgment.

King's Daughter and Her Love:

The king had a daughter and she was the apple of his eyes and was loved by him above all humanity. Among the subjects a man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station loved the king's daughter. The love affair moved on happily for

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many months, until one day king happened to discover it. The youth was immediately cast into prison and a day was appointed for his trial (punishment) in the public arena.

The tiger cages searched for the most savage and horrible beast and the hunt for the suitable lady for the marriage were on. The appointed day arrived. The signal was given. The youth advanced into the arena. His eyes were fixed upon the princess (King's daughter). When her lover turned and looked at her, she looked pale and white. She knew behind which door crouches the tiger and behind which door stood the lady. Quick glances were shared and the answer reached the young maiden who loved the King's daughter. She had a difficult decision to make, whether to save the young man from death or to allow him to another woman. She raised her hand and made a slight, quick movement towards the right. Without slightest hesitation he went to the door on the right and opened it. Now the point of the story is this: DID THE TIGER CAME OUT OF THE DOOR OF DID THE LADY?

Conclusion:

The writer leaves it to the imagination of the readers as to what came out of the opened door the lady of the tiger. For, how could we be sure that the princess would let the young man live and marry the lady when she loved him so much herself? Again however jealous she is, would the princess lead young man to a wrong choice and be eaten by the tiger? The readers should settle if for them.

Mother Teresa

- John Frazer

Introduction

John Frazer is an English architect, and influential teacher and writer on architect. In this essay Frazer talks about a great women Mother Teresa who devoted her life to do to service for the poor people, who has been described as 'the lady of the slums, the champion of the poor, the apostle (messenger) of the unwanted, the angel of mercy, the gently mother'.

Birth of Mother Teresa

She was born in Yugoslavia of Albanian parents (26 August 1910 – 5 September 1997), and she received training as a nun (sister in church) in Dublin, Ireland and came to Kolkata in 1929 as a teacher. She collected orphan children and taught them hygiene (Cleanliness). In 1946, she decided to devote her life to the service of poor and those who suffered from diseases. She started missionaries of charity.

Lady of the slums

Mother Teresa came to Kolkata slums and she walked into the dirty slums wearing a white sari. She had only five rupees with and yet she felt she could help the sick and the poor. She knocked on the dirty house doors where the children were ragged (who wears torn clothes), and barefooted (no slippers). She gave education to them under trees. She is a best know woman in India. Though poor, Mother Teresa in like Himalaya in wealth. Her asset (property) includes 7500 children in 60 schools 9, 60,000 patients in 214 dispensaries (clinics) 47, 00 leprosy people in 54 clinics 1,600 orphaned or abandoned children in 20 homes and 3, 400 dying people in 23 homes. This is her real asset.

About her

She established the Catholic order (organization) in 1950. The Jawaharlal Nehru Award was given to her service to humanity without distinction of caste, creed (religious belief) and nationality. She is nearly 150 cm tall. She is calm and straight forward, who is always capable of good laughter with visitors. She is hard to deal with when it comes to helping the needy. She has a good listening capacity but there was some objection to the Pope inviting her to open slums in Rome. She only travels by third class ticket and do menial service too. She is very humorous (Funny), integrity (good), and fortitude (bold in taking pain).

She is Simple

Mother Teresa's help to the poor is a sign of simplicity. She will not worry about

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others those who discourage her. She helps others and gives room to the poor's and diseased people though there is no place for her in her room.

Her first big venture (risk) was a home for the very poor sick and dying people. She started it when she saw an old woman being bitten by rats dying in the streets. She went and complained to the Municipal authorities to provide place for the poor. Later she was offered a vacant pilgrim hostel by side of Hindu temple, and the place named Nirmal Hriday. The sick and the dying are treated in Nirmal Hriday.

Peace Prize

The missionaries of charity run ten schools in Kolkata with strength of around 2500 students. Milk and bread are provided to the children. This First International Pope John XXIII Peace Prize went to Mother Teresa in January 1971. She used the prize money of Rs. one lakh to start a leper colony in West Bengal. This was followed by the Templeton Foundation Prize for progress in Religion.

Conclusion

The prize money of Rs. 6,46 lakhs was presented to Mother Teresa by Prince Philip. Many branches of Missionaries of Charity were established in different parts of world. At the age of 87 she passed away on 5 September 1997. She is known as the angel of mercy and gentle mother.

The night at the scorpion

Stanza 1

In stanza 1, the poet says that he remembers well that night when her mother was stung by a scorpion. The poet is of the views that the heavy rain which lasted for 10 hours made the scorpion crawl beneath a sack of rice. The last phrase shows the poet's sympathy towards the scorpion.

Stanza 2

In stanza 2, the poet says that after biting his mother with its diabolic (monstrous tail), the scorpion went back to rain outside again. The poet here shows sympathy as well as anger towards the scorpion. He is angry when he talks about its biting and sympathetic when he talks about its going to rain again.

Stanza 3

Hearing about the incident, the villagers rush to the poet's home. However, he is not happy with them and calls them swarms of flies who buzz the name of God a hundred times to paralyse the Evil One.

Stanza 4

The poet then explains how the villagers searched for the scorpion. According to him, the villagers began searching for the scorpion and their shadows themselves seemed to be like a giant scorpion on the mud-baked walls.

The villagers begin searching for the scorpion because they believe that the poison spreads across the body with the movement of scorpion so if the latter is stopped and paralysed, the poison effect can also be controlled.

This is a superstition and Nissim knows that well. This is why he hates the coming of villagers to his home. The stanza also depicts the Indianess that prevails in a number of other poems as well.

Stanza 5

Having failed in finding the scorpion, they begin giving their own interpretation to the biting of the scorpion. Some of them said that his mother's sins which she committed in her previous birth (as believed in Hinduism) have been forgiven.

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The others assumed that she is going to die and said that the pain that she is suffering from will decrease the troubles in her next birth. Some other put forward that her good deeds will be balanced against her bad deeds because of the bite of the scorpion.

Stanza 6

Some others said that the poison will purify and refresh her flesh of desire and her spirit of ambition. All of them seemed to be in peace because of their thoughts.

Stanza 7

More and more people come with candles & lanterns. His mother is however crying and rolling on the mat with severe pain but nobody cares for her except for his father who is a sceptic, rationalist. He leaves no stone unturned to cure her.

He uses powder, mixture, herb and hybrid to help her recover from the pain. He even poured a little paraffin upon the bitten toe and then fires it up. The poet watches the flames of fire burning on the skin of his mother.

He also watches the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation. The phrase again refers to superstitious people of his village who believe in irrational measures to cure a person. His mother ultimately recovers from the poison after 24 hours.

Stanza 8

The last line is quite emotional and heart touching. It reflects the motherhood of a lady. The poet says that after recovering from the poison, his mother's words were Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children.

Even in such condition, his mother remains more concerned about the safety and health of her children.

The Mending wall

-Robert Frost

About the poet:

Robert Frost was born on 26th March 1874, in San Francisco. After the death of his father from tuberculosis when Frost was eleven years old, he moved with his mother and sister to Lawrence, Massachusetts. He became interested in reading and writing poetry during his high school years there, and eventually enrolled at Dartmouth College and later at Harvard University in Boston, though he never earned a formal college degree.

Frost's poetry is principally associated with the life and landscape of New England and he was a poet of traditional verse forms and metrics. However, he is anything but merely a regional poet. He is essentially a modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken, in the psychological complexity of his portraits, and in the degree to which his work is infused with layers of ambiguity and irony.

Frost died in Boston on 29th January 1963.

About Mending Wall:

"Mending Wall" by Robert Frost is the opening poem of his second collection of poetry entitled *North of Boston*, which was published in 1914.

Like most of the poems in the above-mentioned collection, "Mending Wall" narrates a story that is based in rural New England. This is a story of the fence that is rebuilt every spring between the lands of two New England farmers.

The Setting of Mending Wall:

This poem is set at the site of the stone wall between the farms of two hardworking men of New England, one of whom is the poet himself. There is speculation on how the said wall has come to be broken. There is the talk of rebuilding the wall as well.

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Summary of Mending Wall:

The poem consists of 46 lines in total. These lines are not divided into stanzas. Here they are divided into meaningful segments in order to make the poem easier to follow and understand. This poem is written in the first person, hence we can safely assume that the speaker of the poem is the poet himself.

Lines 1 – 4:

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.*

In these lines, the poet speculates that there must be something in the vicinity that breaks down the wall again and again. Perhaps the water beneath the ground is frozen and the resulting ice expands to cause cracks in the wall and to make the boulders at its top fall down. The crack then grows until it is so wide that two people can pass through it side by side and walk in the same direction.

Lines 5 – 11:

*The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.*

In these lines, the poet rejects the idea that the wall could have been broken by hunters. He himself has made repairs after hunters have rearranged the stones to allow rabbits to come out of their holes for their dogs to catch. However, the gaps that have now appeared on the wall have been made by something that is unseen and unheard.

Lines 12 – 15:

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;

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*And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.*

In these lines, the poet says that the wall is between two lands separated by a hill. The farmer who lives on the other side of the hill is informed about the hole. A day is fixed on which they both meet and walk along the wall, each on his side surveying the damage.

Lines 16 – 19:

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'

In these lines, the poet says that he and his neighbor each take it upon themselves to restore the boulders that have fallen on his side of the hill. However, this is a difficult task since the stones are not always of the same size or shape. Some are oblong and some are round, and only magic can hold them in their places.

Lines 20 – 24:

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

In these lines, the poet says that his hands, as well as his neighbour's hands, become calloused as a result of picking up the heavy boulders. It feels like they are playing some sort of game where there is only one opponent on each team. It seems like play rather than work because the wall is wholly unnecessary since the two farmers grow a different kind of plants. The poet grows apples and his neighbor grows pine

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trees.

Lines 25 – 29:

My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:

In these lines, the poet says that he has tried to tell his neighbor that his apple trees will never encroach upon his pines, but that the neighbor remains unconvinced. His logic in putting up the wall is that all good neighbors are separated by strong fences. However, in the springtime, the poet feels mischievous and tries to convince his neighbor to agree with him in another way.

Lines 30 – 35:

'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.'

In these lines, the poet asks his neighbor why good fences make good neighbors. Fences often sprout some greenery on them and they attract cows. But there are no cows where the wall between their farms has broken down. In fact, the poet would like to know what he is keeping out and what he is protecting by building the wall, and also who might not take kindly to the idea of the wall being put up.

Lines 36 – 41:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

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That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.

In these lines, the poet again speculates that the wall could have been pulled down by elves. But he doesn't want to tell his serious neighbor that, hoping instead that the neighbor would come to the same conclusion by himself. As the neighbor works on rebuilding the wall, the poet feels that he resembles an uncouth and uncivilized inhabitant of the stone age, whose weapons are those very rocks which make up the wall.

Lines 42 – 46:

He moves in darkness as it seems to me –
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

In these lines, the poet suggests that his neighbor has some kind of kinship with darkness, but not just the darkness that is caused by the shade of trees in the forest. The neighbor cannot disagree with his father in saying that good fences account for peace among neighbors.

The village school master

-Oliver Goldsmith

The poem is an excerpt from a longer poem by Goldsmith called "The Deserted Village" and conveys the speaker's sentiments about a teacher. The word "village" in the title clearly suggests that the poem is set in a rural area, probably where the speaker lived and was taught by the subject of the poem. In the first two lines, the speaker mentions exactly where the school was located. The fence beside which the school building was situated is described as "straggling," which means that it was dilapidated and probably leaning over. The road leading towards and past the school was lined with flowers, which were "unprofitably gay." The phrase suggests that the flowers that were blooming beautifully were not being admired or appreciated.

In the following couplet the speaker refers to the school building itself, a "noisy mansion" bustling with the activity of teaching and learning. The village teacher, equipped to manage a class, taught his lessons there. The term "master" denotes the respect he enjoyed. The speaker goes on to describe the teacher's character and style of teaching. Each description is rounded off in a rhyming couplet.

The teacher was very strict and had a stern look about him. The speaker states that he "knew him well," which means that he had an in-depth understanding of his teacher and could probably read into his expressions and gestures. This familiarity could also have been the result of the many personal and individual encounters he had had with his educator. The word "truant" implies that the speaker may have been one of those who deliberately missed classes and who had been confronted by the teacher about his misdemeanors.

Further aspects about the teacher's personality indicate that he had an expressive face and that his pupils could easily read his mood as a result. They would, for example, know that a certain ominous look spelled trouble coming, especially for those who had been disobedient. They would be trembling in anticipation and fear of what was to come. It is clear that the teacher also had a good sense of humor, for "many a joke had he." The students would feign pleasure at his funny stories and laugh at them, probably to avoid being reprimanded.

Word would quickly spread around the classroom about impending trouble whenever the teacher scowled. The speaker provides a contrast to the teacher's strict demeanor not only by stating that he was humorous at times but also by mentioning that he was kind. The speaker states that if one should take it to the extreme, it could be said that the teacher's greatest flaw was that he loved learning too much.

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...or if severe in aught,

The love he bore to learning was in fault.

The schoolmaster was not only much admired and respected by his students but was evidently also looked up to by the village residents. Everyone seemed to have praise for his great knowledge. It was a known fact in the village that he could write, do mathematics, and predict weather patterns and tides. It was also assumed that he was an accurate surveyor who could determine borders easily. It is apparent that he could also debate intelligently and be involved in discussions with the village parson, a person who was greatly respected by his parishioners. The teacher seemed to be a fierce opponent in such discourse, for he would continue arguing a point even after he had already lost the dispute. The master would use difficult words and emotive language to sound convincing and impress the poorly educated village folk.

People in this rural community were in awe that the teacher could know so much. They could not understand how his small head could contain so much knowledge. The poem ends, however, on a sad and poignant note. The final couplet tells us that all the teacher's achievements have become a thing of the past. The place where he had enjoyed so much success has ceased to exist and has been forgotten.

The eulogistic nature of the poem conveys the speaker's respect and admiration for his erstwhile educator. The poem also reflects the changes that occurred in rural communities when land was divided and property was abandoned or claimed by private landowners. Many inhabitants then emigrated to find a home elsewhere.

QUICK SUMMARY

The poem first describes an abandoned schoolhouse that was once noisy and led by a stern schoolmaster who took education and teaching seriously. Throughout the poem, the narrator describes how the children perceived him; although he was stern, they laughed at his jokes and recognized his kindness, and they admired all his knowledge and talent. Now, the narrator remarks that all of it is in the past and the schoolmaster is not here anymore.