

Chapter 21

My Watch

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Understanding the Text

1. What was the importance of the watch to the author?

Answer

The watch was important to the author as it showed him the correct time thus keeping him punctual. He had it working properly for 18 months until he let it run down. He had staunch faith on its judgement and its prediction. It worked perfectly until then without gaining or losing any part of it.

2. What were the attempts made by the author to get his watch repaired?

Answer

After a possession of 18 months, the author let his watch run down. Devastated, the author went to all possible watch makers starting from the chief jeweller, the very next day. The head of the establishment pushed the regulator of the watch a little too much, which did no good, rather worsened its condition. Then the author went to another watch maker who kept it for a week and slowed it down, however, too much. Then he went to another one who kept it for three days; and then couple of more. Even after having spent thousands dollars, none of the watch makers could fix the watch. Hopeless, the author gave it a last shot and went to a watch maker who turned out to be an erstwhile, not a good, steam-boat engineer. It was now that the author realised that "a good horse was a good horse until it had run away once, and that a good watch was a good watch until the repairers got a chance at it."

3. Why did the author finally give up on his watch?

Answer

The author got the watch repaired seven times. By the end, he realised

that the watch, with its original cost being two hundred dollars, had cost him two to three thousand on repairs itself. And the watch was still malfunctioning. It was when he reached the seventh watch maker and acknowledged the mechanic to be an old acquaintance, a steam-boat engineer of other days and not a good engineer. He gave his verdict like all other watch makers, the author was not gullible and this time he perceived what his uncle William used to say that a good horse was a good horse until it had run away once, and that a good watch was a good watch until the repairers got a chance at it. So, he finally gave up the repairing and decided to let the watch be.

4. What was Uncle Williams' comment on the 'tinkerers' of the world?

Answer

Uncle William is not a character in the story; however, the author gives a glimpse of him. When the author gave the watch for mending the last time, he reckoned that it was costing him more than the original cost. All the attempts so far have been futile and the verdict of the last watch maker made him remember what uncle William used to say that a good horse was a good horse until it had run away once, and that a good watch was a good watch until the repairers got a chance at it. The author perceived what his uncle had known with all his knowledge and experience. All the unsuccessful tinkers in the world are not specialists. They are the 'Jacks' of all trades and masters of none. Uncle William used to wonder what became of all those gunsmiths, shoe-makers, engineers and blacksmiths who never could be successful in their work sphere. It is important to acquire specialisation at least in one particular field, else one is left being a tinker, an apprentice, and not a specialist.

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5. Explain these lines

- (a) 'I seemed to detect in myself a sort of sneaking fellow-feeling for the mummy in the museum, and a desire to swap news with him.
- (b) Within a week it sickened to a raging fever and its pulse went up to a hundred and fifty in the shade.
- (c) She makes too much steam—you want to hang the monkey wrench on the safety valve!

Answer

(a) After being oiled and cleaned and 'regulated' for the second time, the watch came home to the author after a week. However, the watch was slowed down to such a degree that the author missed all his appointments, his dinner. He felt like he was drifted in the past somewhere. Gradually the watch slowed even more, he felt like he was living in the previous week. The author felt like he missed all that was happening in the world. He was solitary and lingered in the past all because of his watch. The author here compares his situation to that of a mummy, who belongs to bygone ages. He felt it ideal to find a fellowship with the mummy in some museum he probably had been to or an imaginary one. He felt travelling in the past just like the mummy due to the slow time projected by his watch.

(b) When the author let his watch run down after eighteen months, he took it to chief jeweller's to set it by the exact time. The head of the establishment however, despite being stopped by the author, pushed the regulator. This gave the watch, probably, a kick and the watch shot ahead of its time. It gained faster and faster, day by day. Post two months, it appeared to be having some sort of a fever with an extremely high pulse rate. It moved 13 days ahead of the actual date and when the year touched October, the author commented, the watch was enjoying the snow fall of November already. This erratic behaviour annoyed the author a lot and so he decided to get it doctored once again.

(c) The seventh time the author took the watch to a watch maker, he reckoned the apprentice to be an old acquaintance, a steam-boat engineer of other days and not a good engineer. Like all watch makers, he diagnosed and gave his verdict. The author observed keenly and judged him at his very verdict when he said, "She makes too much steam—you want to hang the monkey wrench on the safety valve! The author immediately remembered what his uncle William used to say and perceived that a tinker is a tinker after all, this being an unsuccessful engineer and wondered like his uncle what became of all the unsuccessful tinkers.

Apperciation

1. How is humour employed to comment on the pains that the author took to get his watch set right.

Answer

It is funny how the author and his dear watch had to go through all the pain that was delivered by seven watch makers. In the end, it was all futile and no good was done to the watch. The seven episodes with the watch makers are humorous as while all the watch makers tried their hand on the watch, toying it all up and operating and exploring and disassembling and then assembling every inch of it, it all gave sheer pain to the author to whom the watch was so dear. Every time with all the hope and strength he took it to a new watch maker; however, not a single of all the tinkers could put it all back to place to make it function all properly. How strange it is that none of the seven watch makers could mend the watch while they all experimented and did all sorts of research and development on it.

2. 'The author's treatment of the subject matter makes the readers identify themselves with the experience.' Comment on the statement.

Answer

Samuel L. Clemens, Mark Twain, had less than ten years of schooling. He worked as a printer's apprentice, a steamboat pilot, a prospector and a journalist. All this gave him varied experiences and a wide knowledge of humanity. In all his works, he brings in elements from his own experiences and his own life creating a replica of his own self. All his stories have a combination of realistic and make believe world. What he presents are the situations that any ordinary human might face in her/his daily life; thus, making them all appear very realistic and hence the readers easily connect to the story and identify themselves with the experiences. For instance, in the story, the author faced a problem that is so ordinary. Any of us might have a watch that malfunctions and has a simple error. However, the problem rather than being mended, aggravates every time we take it to be doctored. This is a typical example of how an ordinary human faces problems with not just gadgets; it might be a medical condition or as simple as an argument with a known face.

3. Identify some of the improbable images the author has used to effect greater humour.

Answer

There are instances when the author goes on exaggerating the actual

situation to add humour to the story. For example, when the watch is repaired for the second time, it slowed down. The description is a hyperbole of the actual happening. No matter how slow a watch is, it will show the time according to 12 hours, it cannot literally travel in the past. However, the way the author describes its watch enjoying snowfall before the season arrives is humorous. Also, the citation of the mummy is funny, plus it describes the mental state of the poor author.