



TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT

Discuss the following in groups of four. Each group can deal with one topic and present the views of your group to the whole class.

Q1. The reader's sympathy is with the peddler right from the beginning of the story. Why is this so? Is the sympathy justified?

Ans: The peddler wins our sympathy for his way of life and how the world treats him. It is an admitted fact that the underdog always runs away with sympathy, so does the peddler with the rattraps. He begs the material like wire for his rattraps. His business not being specially profitable, he resorts to begging and petty thievery to keep body and soul together.

His life is sad and monotonous. He plods along the road lost in his own meditation. The world has never been very kind to him and he feels happy in calling it a rattrap. Whenever, he asks shelter for the night, he meets sour faces. He is an unwelcome, unwanted and undesirable figure. The blacksmiths at forge glance at him only casually and indifferently. The master blacksmith nods a haughty consent without honouring him with a single word.

The old and lonely crofter finds him an enjoyable company. The ironmaster mistakes him for an old regimental comrade. Only Edla Willmansson behaves with him in a kind, friendly manner. Her nice treatment arouses the tramp's goodness. He redeems himself by returning the stolen money and wins our admiration. Thus, we see that the sympathy is not only well earned but well justified too.

Q2. The story also focuses on human loneliness and the need to bond with others.

Ans: There are at least three characters in the story who suffer from loneliness and express the need to bond with others. They represent three strata of the human society as well. The peddler with the rattraps, the old crofter and the ironmaster all suffer from loneliness. The peddler is called a tramp, a vagabond and stranger at various points of the story. He moves wearily from one place to the other. He is lost in his own thoughts. He seeks shelter for night and people look at him with sour faces. Even the blacksmiths look haughtily at him and nod consent. The old crofter suffers from loneliness as he has neither wife nor child with him. Hence, he feels happy when he gets the peddler to talk to in his loneliness.

The ironmaster is also lonely in his manor house. His wife Elizabeth has died and his sons are abroad. There is no one at home except his oldest daughter and himself. His requests to Captain von Stehle to accompany him show his need for human bonding. He admits frankly that they didn't have any company for Christmas. The stranger turns down the request not because he is against bonding with others but because he fears being caught with stolen money.

Q3. Have you known/heard of an episode where a good deed or an act of kindness has changed a person's view of the world?

Ans: Yes, I know how the kindness of a Bishop transformed a hard-hearted beastly convict into a man again with faith in God and human values. The story is presented in the form of a famous play 'The Bishop's Candlesticks'. The Bishop provides food and shelter at midnight to a runaway convict who threatens him with a knife. Long years of imprisonment and harsh treatment in the prisonship has transformed the man into beast and he is devoid of all human

feelings now. The convict runs away with the Bishop's silver candlesticks, but is caught by the police.

In order to save the convict from further punishment and torture, the Bishop tells the police officer that the fellow is his friend and he had himself given him the candlesticks. This kind act of the Bishop melts the hard heart of the convict. He sobs and weeps. He promises to be a man again.

Q4. The story is both entertaining and philosophical. Discuss.

Ans: The story entertains us by providing glimpses into human nature and how people react to various situations. The actions of the peddler after stealing thirty kronor are quite amusing. The reactions of the blacksmiths to the tramp's request for shelter show how casual and indifferent human beings can be.

The U-turn in the ironmaster's attitude towards the stranger reveals how selfish and ignorant human beings can be. Mistaking the vagabond for his old regimental comrade, whom he thinks he has run across unexpectedly, he asks the stranger to accompany him home and spend Christmas with them. When the stranger refuses to go with him, the ironmaster sends his daughter. With her better persuasive power she makes him follow her.

The ironmaster is annoyed on seeing the stranger in broad daylight. But instead of realising his own mistake, he puts the blame on the man. He talks of handing him over to the sheriff. The metaphor of the world being a rattrap saves the situation for the tramp, but the ironmaster wants to turn him out. His daughter's comments are quite entertaining and philosophical. She wants the tramp to enjoy a day of peace. Secondly, she does not want to chase away a person whom they had invited home and had promised Christmas cheer.

WORKING WITH WORDS

Q1. The man selling rattraps is referred to by many terms such as "peddler, stranger" etc. Pick out all such references to him. What does each of these labels indicate of the context or the attitude of the people around him.

Ans: Initially, the man who went around selling small rattraps of wire is called a 'Vagabond' for he plodded along the road, left to his own meditations. He is referred to as "stranger" by the narrator while describing his meeting with the old crofter. When he leaves the next day he is described as "the man with rattraps." When he returns half an hour later to steal money he is called 'the rattrap peddler.' For the blacksmiths at the forge he is an intruder. The narrator now refers to him as a 'tramp'. For the rich ironmaster he is a "ragamuffin". Since he had never seen the ironmaster or known his name, the man with rattraps is called a 'stranger'. He is described as 'stranger' while he stretches himself out on the floor when the ironmaster leaves. The label sticks to him during his stay at the manor house as a guest. These descriptions also suggest the degree of social difference between the persons and the peddler of rattraps and their attitude towards him.

Q2. You came across the words, plod, trudge, stagger in the story. These words indicate movement accompanied by weariness. Find five other such words with a similar meaning.

Ans: Five other words with a similar meaning are: clomp, lumber, lurch, reel, stumble.

***** END *****