

## Moral Dilemma in *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg*

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An evil soul producing holy witness  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goody apple rotten at the heart  
Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

■ William Shakespeare  
*The Merchant of Venice*

It is an admitted and acknowledged fact that Adam and Eve, the first man and woman on this planet, lived in perfect happiness. Satan tempted them to eat the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a result, they were expelled from the paradise as punishment. That idea is well reflected in John Milton's *Paradise lost*. Milton takes one step ahead in saying that a "fugitive and cloistered virtue was not worth celebrating in *Areopagitica*". Mark Twain endorses the same belief in *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg*. The story is a retelling of *The Paradise lost*. In similar vein, Nathaniel Hawthorne, on the one hand, talks about the same idea in "The Young Goodman Brown." It is an allegorical story of good and evil. He makes use of Puritan myth to convey "the power of blackness" in everyone. He wants to convey the idea that nobody is perfect. Everyone is a sinner. Man, by nature, is prone to commit mistakes primarily because of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve. Edgar Allan Poe evinces a genuine interest in talking about the classics of revenge in "The Cask of Amontillado". He describes the element of revenge. Mark Twain comes down heavily on the double standards of the citizens of Hadleyburg who pretended to be a righteous people. He debunks narrow values. He also feels that man too has a darker side. Mark Twain penetrates the allegorical aspects of The Garden of Eden theory.

The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg is closely akin to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Young Good Man Brown. The story sets in New England of Salem where the puritans tried to create a religious society with strict moral values. It also tells how witch trials take place and makes the young man loses his innocent belief in religious faith. Young Goodman Brown is a story of good and evil. Hawthorne wants to convey the idea that nobody is perfect in this world.

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Man is unable to resist the temptation of committing sin. Everyone is succumbed to the temptation of committing some sin in their life. John Milton's *Areopagitica* conveys the same message in a different manner. Milton begins his argument by speaking in favor of Parliament's History of defending history. He eventually claims that man is tempted to commit mistakes in terrestrial life. Mark Twain develops the same idea in his short story "The man that corrupted Hadleyburg". It is an interesting short story that conveys the values of life. Mark Twain asseverates that human beings cannot easily avoid temptation.

The story begins with positive image of Hadleyburg. Hadleyburg is a fictional town where people manage to maintain their cloistered virtue. Mark Twain presents Hadleyburg as an ideal society in which people deliberately avoided the imputation of sin and guilt with a view to leading a monastic life. The town meticulously protects every citizen against all temptation from infancy to death. People feel so proud of their spotless reputation of their village simply because of its sequestered and cloistered virtue. With its impeccable image, it wins the attention of the neighboring villagers. They feel jealous towards Hadleyburg.

"It was many years ago. Hadleyburg was the most honest and upright town in all the region round about. It had kept that reputation unsmirched during three generations, and was prouder of it than of any other of its possessions. It was so proud of it, and so anxious to insure its perpetuation, that it began to teach the principles of honest dealing to its babies in the cradle, and made the like teachings the staple of their culture thenceforward through all the years devoted to their education."

.... [1-5]

The image has reached on the precipice of fall. The fall comes in the form of mysterious stranger who happen to pass through the community. He is infuriated by upstanding members of the community. The inhabitants of the town cause him excruciating misery. The image of the town insinuated that the inhabitants of town are driven by their overweening pride. He holds an opinion that Community is not tainted with crime. His intention is to make them culpable. To quench his thirst for revenge, he meticulously devises a plan to purportedly corrupt the town for his own personal advancement. To materialize his vision, he makes it a point to send a letter to each of the nineteen families providing them with a piece of advice. He leaves a sack of gold at the home of Mary and Edward Richard along with a letter. The letter states that it was just a happenstance that he happens to be a gambler and reduced to the level of pauper in the street of Hadleyburg. He finds that a country townsman gave him twenty dollars. On a parting note, he offered him a piece of advice.

Imbued by his noble gesture, he drastically changed his outlook on life and became rich man by dint of hard work. He used that incident as a launching pad to show his gratitude for his kind act. With these words, he gives her a sack and leaves. The town goes into frenzy when it understands that the fortune will be publicly given to the correct person within thirty days. Soon after this, a sack of gold becomes a sore point in the mind of the people. It is interesting to note that a host of notable personalities in the village, in an evil hour, have succumbed to the temptation. Everyone adopts different methods to win gold. The town has lost its values. It obviously shows that people are not tired of homogenized views. During the town hall meeting, Burger reads the claims. He is shell shocked to find the boorish attitude of the people. He is not happy the way in which people behave to claim the sack. He opens the sack in the presence of people. He understands that the stranger, in manner of speaking, fabricated a tale in order to quench his thirst for revenge. He succeeds in his attempt to laugh at their crackpot ideas. He had a bitter experience while traveling through Hadleyburg. He says that it was not good enough to avoid the imputation of guilt. Burgers also discovers that the sack contains not gold but gilded lead pieces.

Love of gold is the first bait that exposes the hypocrisy of the Hadleyburg. Just as Satan tempted the Eve, he tempted the people to hold the bag. The image of the town is thus exploited by a sack of gold. It has made great inroads into their honesty. The sack of gold is the first temptation to infiltrate the Hadleyburg community. At the end, Mark Twain illustrates the cathartic effect of humor. The people of Hadleyburg laugh down their corruptible principal citizens of that change their motto from the concept of “Lead us not into temptations to “Lead us into temptations”. The story makes it clear that Mark Twain, far from being a cynic, is very much a man of the world. He calls upon people not to abjure the company of men but to live in the very midst of it, struggle with evil, and thereby fortifying their virtue. Mark Twain wants to convey the idea that temptation is endemic to the human condition. He also nailed human greed beautifully in the dynamics of his writings.

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