

Revision Notes

Chapter – 8

Silk Road

The author chronicles the challenges and hardships he faced in the Silk Road regions as they are now. The reader finds it refreshing to traverse such vast tracts of physical geography, expanses of the natural world that remain largely untamed.

As a trade route, the Silk Road has been less a single highway and more a network of overland routes linking Europe with Asia, making trade possible between those with a passion for silk, horses and exotic fauna and flora. Just about every transaction imaginable has occurred along its many trails over the centuries.

Middleton's particular passion consists of exposing himself to nature's vicissitudes like facing oxygen starvation in Tibet as he climbs towards the "navel of the universe," and other hardships during the journey.

The author is an adventurer, but at heart more a meticulous academic than a daredevil. Researching the different forms of altitude sickness, he is alarmed to discover it can lead to swelling of the brain or to the lungs slowly filling with fluid.

Having no religious inclinations himself, he begins to speculate on Tibetan Buddhism as a prerequisite for survival at such an altitude, yet makes the classic Western error of putting bodily discipline before mental striving.

This account of the Silk Road, with its contrasts and exotic detail, certainly describes the challenges and hardships Middleton faced. However, if he had sacrificed some of the sense of his own heroism, and introduced instead more of a sense of wonder or of the absurd, the book would have proved a more entertaining read.

Father to Son

The poem 'Father to Son' discusses the universal problem of generation gap. The elderly people fail to understand the needs of their children. Their hardened attitude creates disaffection in the minds of the budding youth. The youngsters become disobedient and obstinate. Neither of them bows down to come to terms. It gives birth to family conflicts.

The poem is quite autobiographical in tone. In reality it talks of an exclusive personal experience of the poet for his son. Both have lost understanding between them. The poet is trying to remove this gap as well as feeling trouble for his carelessness. He wants to have a cordial relationship with his son.

The father complains that he does not understand his own child. Though they have lived together for so many years now i.e. since the time of his son's birth, the father knows nothing of him. The father tries to build up a relationship with his son from the early years, in a manner when his son began to recognize people around, to crawl and to walk in a desperate attempt.

The father wonders whether he has destroyed the seed of his off-spring or sown it where the land belongs to his heir and none is his. Both father and son continue to speak like strangers now and there seem no signs of understanding in the air between the two. In traditional belief, the son is created and born to the liking and designs of his father, yet in this case, the father cannot share what his son loves.

Most of the time silence surrounds them. The father's greatest wish is for his son to be 'The Prodigal' son who will very soon return to his father's house; the home which he always knew. This is definitely the better alternative rather than to see his son move out into the world blindly on his own, by himself and fall into trouble. The father is ready to forgive him at any cost as long as he is able to reshape him up from the long bounded sorrow to a new love. Both father and son all over the world must learn to live on the same globe and on the same land.

The father finally admits that there are times that he cannot understand himself or why his anger grows from grief? He had some aspirations and expectations from his son. However, their relationship has become bitter now. Their tastes too have become diagonally opposite. The breach has become so wide that they cannot come closer. However they have learnt to put out each other's empty hand and with each other's heart that is longing for something to forgive.

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