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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall

- learn the most popular form of literature
- discuss the plot, characters, setting and themes of the story

5.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Somerset Maugham was a great novelist playwright and short story writer. He was born on January 25, 1874 in Paris, France. His father was a lawyer handling the legal affairs of the British Embassy in Paris. He lost his mother at the age of eight. His father died of cancer two years later. He was sent back to England to be cared by his uncle. He boarded at King's school, Centerburg where he was teased for his short stature, stammering and shy introvert nature. At the age of 16, he went to Germany where he studied literature, philosophy and German language at Heidelberg University. Then he studied in London and qualified as a surgeon, at St. Thomas Hospital. In his novel *Of Human Bondage* he has recounted his unhappy childhood and experiences as a medical student.

During the World wars I and II, Maugham served in the British Intelligence service. In 1914, he was the member of Red Cross Unit in France. Later, he acted as a secret agent in Geneva. Maugham's travels filled his interest in the orient and South Sea Islands. His novel *The Moon and the Six Pence* (1919) is based on the life of the famous painter Paul Gauguin. His novel *The Painted*

Veil was originally set in Hongkong which he later changed into fictional Tching-Yen.

As a short story writer Maugham was influenced by Anton Chekhov, the famous Russian short-story writer who conveyed an over-whelming sense of the mystery of life in his stories. However, unlike he knows he was focused on story-telling in a dramatic manner. He believed that dramatization intensifies the lives of characters in the stories. Thus, Maugham stands as a great modern exponent of the art of the literary narrated stories. This characteristic method is to tell the story himself in the first person using spoken style and verbal clichés to unfold a scene or character. In Maugham's stories the narrating 'I' is objective.

Maugham's major collections of short stories include *Orientation*, *The Casuarina Tree*. First Person singular *cosmopolitans*, *The Mixture as Before*, *The creatures of circumstances* etc. Maugham was a versatile writer who wrote 20 novels 16 collections of short stories, 25 plays and 189 articles.

Somerset Maugham achieved commercial success with high sales of his books, successful productions of plays and film adaptations of his novels. Despite his success on a writer, he could not attract much respect from the critics and his peers. He lacked *Lyrical quality* and the use of metaphor in his works. Anthony Burgess and George Orwell were influenced by Maugham's writing style. Maugham died on 16, December 1965 at the age of 91.

Maugham's stories are marked by irony, satire and wit. His style was simple and economical. His novel *The Razor's Edge* is considered his magnum opus. In 1938, Maugham had met the great spiritual holy man Sri Raman Maharshi in his ashram. His novel *The Razor's Edge* is the story of an American Spiritual seeker who meets the Guru Shri Ganesha and undergoes ecstatic mystical experience. The novel portrays Maugham's personal spiritual experience in the presence of Sri Raman Maharshi through the American protagonist of the novel Larry Darrell who was traumatized by his experiences of World War I and sets off in search of some transcendent meaning of life. The novel shows Maugham's spiritual inclination and belief that true happiness lies within and not outside in the material world.

5.2 ABOUT THE STORY

The Verger is a story with an unexpected twist at the end. The protagonist Albert Edward Foreman was a Verger at St Peter's Church, Neville

Square. He had been the verger there for sixteen years never thinking or imagining that he might lose his job because of his ignorance of reading and writing. He was an illiterate man who could not read or write but as a verger, he worked quite successfully never entertaining any complaint about his work and behavior. However, everything in the World is not what it looks like. A new Vicar is appointed at St.Peters who comes to know that Foreman could not read or write. He called Foreman and made an unpleasant announcement that he should either learn to read or write soon or resign from his job.

The new Vicar believed that illiteracy can be dangerous at a church like St.Peters. The new vicar was a red-faced energetic man in his early forties who always fussed over everything in the church with his finger in every pie. The new Vicar admitted that Foreman had managed his work quite well de-

spite his lack of literacy but now it was necessary for him to learn to read and write as it was a matter of prudence as well as of principle.

Foreman politely replied that it was too late for him to learn to read and write. He said

“I’m too old a dog to learn new tricks”. Foreman lost his job and walking along the street, he had an intense desire to smoke to relieve his depressive mood. He could not find any tobacco shops in the street. An idea came to his mind to open a tobacco shop in the street. Soon he opened his first shop and within a few years, he had a number of shops and lot of money. He became a successful business man as a tobacconist.

Maugham introduces irony at the end of the story. The irony makes the story reach its climax. Foreman had already become a successful businessman with more than 10 tobacco shops of his ownership. He went to the bank for his regular depositing of earned money. The bank manager told him that he had already deposited around thirty thousand pounds with the bank. The bank manager advised him to invest his money to earn a better rate of interest. Foreman said that he did not want to invest in stocks and shares but he had a full trust in the banker. He added that he would leave it all in his hands. The manager told him that Foreman required to sign some papers for transfer.

Foreman told the manager that he did not know how to read and write. The manager was utterly surprised thinking it was the most extraordinary thing he had ever heard. He started at Foreman as if he were a prehistoric monster. He asked: “Good God, man, what would you be now if you had been able to?” Foreman replied, “I’d be verger of St. Peter’s, Melville Square.

The reply hardly contains ten words but all of them are sharp and thought-provoking. Had Foreman been, literate, he would have been nothing but the verger at St. Peter’s all his life. It is generally taken for granted that literacy brings success but in case of Foreman, had he accepted the new vicar’s order to read and write, he would still have been a verger, success and literacy have no connection at all. Educated persons turn out to be officers, clerks, teachers, or employees in general. Uneducated even illiterate persons turn out to be successful businessmen, industrialists and powerful politicians. In fact, it is the uneducated people who rule the entire society. It is an irony that knowledge is always enslaved to power and wealth.

Somerset Maugham never tried to teach moral lessons in his stories. On the contrary, he always turned the moral lessons upside down in ironical endings of his stories.

5.3 TEXT OF THE STORY

There had been a christening that afternoon at St. Peter’s, Neville

Square, and Albert Edward Foreman still wore his verger’s gown. He kept his new one, its folds as full and stiff though it were made not of alpaca but of perennial bronze, for funerals and weddings (St. Peter’s, Neville Square, was a church much favoured by the fashionable for these ceremonies) and now he wore only his second-best. He wore it with complacency for it was the dignified symbol of his office, and without it (when he took it off to go home) he had the disconcerting sensation of being somewhat insufficiently clad. He took pains with it; he pressed it and ironed it himself. During the sixteen years he had been verger of this church he had had a succession of such gowns, but he had never been able to throw them away when they were

worn out and the complete series, neatly wrapped up in brown paper, lay in the bottom drawers of the wardrobe in his bedroom.

The vergger busied himself quietly, replacing the painted wooden cover on the marble font, taking away a chair that had been brought for an infirm old lady, and waited for the vicar to have finished in the vestry so that he could tidy up in there and go home. Presently he saw him walk across the chancel, genuflect in front of the high altar and come down the aisle; but he still wore his cassock.

“What’s he ‘anging about for?” the vergger said to himself “Don’t ‘e know I want my tea?”

The vicar had been but recently appointed, a red-faced energetic man in the early forties, and Albert Edward still regretted his redecessor, a clergyman of the old school who preached leisurely sermons in a silvery voice and dined out a great deal with his more aristocratic parishioners. He liked things in church to be just so, but he never fussed; he was not like this new man who wanted to have his finger in every pie. But Albert Edward was tolerant. St. Peter’s was in a very good neighbourhood and the parishioners were a very nice class of people. The new vicar had come from the East End and he couldn’t be expected to fall in all at once with the discreet ways of his fashionable congregation.

“All this ‘ustle,” said Albert Edward. “But give ‘im time, he’ll learn.”

When the vicar had walked down the aisle so far that he could address the vergger without raising his voice more than was becoming in a place of worship he stopped.

“Foreman, will you come into the vestry for a minute. I have something to say to you.”

“Very good, sir.”

The vicar waited for him to come up and they walked up the church together.

“A very nice christening, I thought sir. Funny ‘ow the baby stopped cryin’ the moment you took him.”

“I’ve noticed they very often do,” said the vicar, with a little smile.

“After all I’ve had a good deal of practice with them.”

It was a source of subdued pride to him that he could nearly always quiet a whimpering infant by the manner in which he held it and he was not unconscious of the amused admiration with which mothers and nurses watched him settle the baby in the crook of his surpliced arm. The vergger knew that it pleased him to be complimented on his talent.

The vicar preceded Albert Edward into the vestry. Albert Edward was a trifle surprised to find the two churchwardens there. He had not seen them come in. They gave him pleasant nods.

“Good afternoon, my lord. Good afternoon, sir,” he said to one after the other.

They were elderly men, both of them and they had been churchwardens almost as long as Albert Edward had been vergger. They were sitting now at a handsome refectory table that the old vicar had brought many years before from Italy and the vicar sat down in the vacant chair between them. Albert

Edward faced them, the table between him and them and wondered with slight uneasiness what was the matter. He remembered still the occasion on which the organist had got in trouble and the bother they had all had to hush things up. In a church like St. Peter's, Neville Square, they couldn't afford scandal. On the vicar's red face was a look of resolute benignity but the others bore an expression that was slightly troubled.

"He's been naggin' them he 'as," said the vergger to himself. "He's jockeyed them into doin' something, but they don't like it. That's what it is, you mark my words."

But his thoughts did not appear on Albert Edward's clean cut and distinguished features. He stood in a respectful but not obsequious attitude. He had been in service before he was appointed to his ecclesiastical office, but only in very good houses, and his deportment was irreproachable. Starting as a page-boy in the household of a merchant-prince he had risen by due degrees from the position of fourth to first footman, for a year he had been single-handed butler to a widowed peeress and, till the vacancy occurred at St. Peter's, butler with two men under him in the house of a retired ambassador. He was tall, spare, grave and dignified. He looked, if not like a duke, at least like an actor of the old school who specialised in dukes' parts. He had tact, firmness and self-assurance. His character was unimpeachable.

The vicar began briskly. "Foreman, we've got something rather unpleasant to say to you. You've been here a great many years and I think his lordship and the general agree with me that you've fulfilled the duties of your office to the satisfaction of everybody concerned."

The two churchwardens nodded.

"But a most extraordinary circumstance came to my knowledge the other day and I felt it my duty to impart it to the churchwardens. I discovered to my astonishment that you could neither read nor write."

The vergger's face betrayed no sign of embarrassment.

"The last vicar knew that, sir," he replied. "He said it didn't make no difference. He always said there was a great deal too much education in the world for 'is taste."

"It's the most amazing thing I ever heard," cried the general. "Do you mean to say that you've been vergger of this church for sixteen years and never learned to read or write?"

"I went into service when I was twelve sir. The cook in the first place tried to teach me once, but I didn't seem to 'ave the knack for it, and then what with one thing and another I never seemed to 'ave the time. I've never really found the want of it. I think a lot of these young fellows waste a rare lot of time readin' when they might be doin' something useful."

"But don't you want to know the news?" said the other churchwarden.

"Don't you ever want to write a letter?"

"No, me lord, I seem to manage very well without. And of late years now they've all these pictures in the papers I get to know what's goin' on pretty well. Me wife's quite a scholar and if I want to write a letter she writes it for me. It's not as if I was a bettin' man."

The two churchwardens gave the vicar a troubled glance and then looked

down at the table.

“Well, Foreman, I’ve talked the matter over with these gentlemen and they quite agree with me that the situation is impossible. At a church like St. Peter’s Neville Square, we cannot have a verger who can neither read nor write.”

Albert Edward’s thin, sallow face reddened and he moved uneasily on his feet, but he made no reply.

“Understand me, Foreman, I have no complaint to make against you. You do your work quite satisfactorily; I have the highest opinion both of your character and of your capacity; but we haven’t the right to take the risk of some accident that might happen owing to your lamentable ignorance. It’s a matter of prudence as well as of principle.”

“But couldn’t you learn, Foreman?” asked the general.

“No, sir, I’m afraid I couldn’t, not now. You see, I’m not as young as I was and if I couldn’t seem able to get the letters in me ‘ead when I was a nipper I don’t think there’s much chance of it now.”

“We don’t want to be harsh with you, Foreman,” said the vicar. “But the churchwardens and I have quite made up our minds. We’ll give you three months and if at the end of that time you cannot read and write I’m afraid you’ll have to go.”

Albert Edward had never liked the new vicar. He’d said from the beginning that they’d made a mistake when they gave him St. Peter’s. He wasn’t the type of man they wanted with a classy congregation like that. And now he straightened himself a little. He knew his value and he wasn’t going to allow himself to be put upon.

“I’m very sorry sir, I’m afraid it’s no good. I’m too old a dog to learn new tricks. I’ve lived a good many years without knowin’ ‘ow to read and write, and without wishin’ to praise myself, self-praise is no recommendation, I don’t mind sayin’ I’ve done my duty in that state of life in which it ‘as pleased a merciful providence to place me, and if I could learn now I don’t know as I’d want to.”

“In that case, Foreman, I’m afraid you must go.”

“Yes sir, I quite understand. I shall be ‘appy to ‘and in my resignation as soon as you’ve found somebody to take my place.”

But when Albert Edward with his usual politeness had closed the church door behind the vicar and the two churchwardens he could not sustain the air of unruffled dignity with which he had borne the blow inflicted upon him and his lips quivered. He walked slowly back to the vestry and hung up on its proper peg his verger’s gown. He sighed as he thought of all the grand funerals and smart weddings it had seen. He tidied everything up, put on his coat, and hat in hand walked down the aisle. He locked the church door behind him. He strolled across the square, but deep in his sad thoughts he did not take the street that led him home, where a nice strong cup of tea awaited; he took the wrong turning. He walked slowly along. His heart was heavy. He did not know what he should do with himself. He did not fancy the notion of going back to domestic service; after being his own master for so many years, for the vicar and churchwardens could say what they liked, it was he that had run St. Peter’s, Neville Square, he could scarcely demean himself by accept-

ing a situation. He had saved a tidy sum, but not enough to live on without doing something, and life seemed to cost more every year. He had never thought to be troubled with such questions.

The vergers of St. Peter's, like the popes Rome, were there for life. He had often thought of the pleasant reference the vicar would make in his sermon at evensong the first Sunday after his death to the long and faithful service, and the exemplary character of their late verger, Albert Edward Foreman. He sighed deeply. Albert Edward was a non-smoker and a total abstainer, but with a certain latitude; that is to say he liked a glass of beer with his dinner and when he was tired he enjoyed a cigarette. It occurred to him now that one would comfort him and since he did not carry them he looked about him for a shop where he could buy a packet of Gold Flakes. He did not at once see one and walked on a little. It was a long street with all sorts of shops in it, but there was not a single one where you could buy cigarettes.

"That's strange," said Albert Edward. To make sure he walked right up the street again. No, there was no doubt about it. He stopped and looked reflectively up and down.

"I can't be the only man as walks along this street and wants a fag," he said. "I shouldn't wonder but what a fellow might do very well with a little shop here. Tobacco and sweets, you know."

He gave a sudden start.

"That's an idea," he said. "Strange 'ow things come to you when you least expect it."

He turned, walked home, and had his tea.

"You're very silent this afternoon, Albert," his wife remarked.

"I'm thinkin'," he said.

He considered the matter from every point of view and next day he went along the street and by good luck found a little shop to let that looked as though it would exactly suit him. Twenty-four hours later he had taken it and when a month after that he left St. Peter's, Neville Square, for ever, Albert Edward Foreman set up in business as a tobacconist and newsagent. His wife said it was a dreadful come-down after being verger of St. Peter's, but he answered that you had to move with the times, the church wasn't what it was, and 'enceforward he was going to render unto Caesar what was Caesar's.

Albert Edward did very well. He did so well that in a year or so it struck him that he might take a second shop and put a manager in. He looked for another long street that hadn't got a tobacconist in it and when he found it and a shop to let, took it and stocked it. This was a success too. Then it occurred to him that if he could run two he could run half a dozen, so he began walking about London, and whenever he found a long street that had no tobacconist and a shop to let he took it. In the course of ten years he had acquired no less than ten shops and he was making money hand over fist. He went round to all of them himself every Monday, collected the week's takings and took them to the bank.

One morning when he was there paying in a bundle of notes and a heavy bag of silver the cashier told him that the manager would like to see him. He was shown into an office and the manager shook hands with him.

“Mr. Foreman, I wanted to have a talk to you about the money you’ve got on deposit with us. D’you know exactly how much it is?”

“Not within a pound or two, sir; but I’ve got a pretty rough idea.”

“Apart from what you paid in this morning it’s a little over thirty thousand pounds. That’s a very large sum to have on deposit and I should havethought you’d do better to invest it.”

“I wouldn’t want to take no risk, sir. I know it’s safe in the bank.”

“You needn’t have the least anxiety. We’ll make you out a list of absolutely gilt-edged securities. They’ll bring you in a better rate of interest than we can possibly afford to give you.”

A troubled look settled on Mr. Foreman’s distinguished face. “I’ve never ‘ad anything to do with stocks and shares and I’d ‘ave to leave it all in your ‘ands,” he said.

The manager smiled. “We’ll do everything. All you’ll have to do next time you come in is just to sign the transfers.”

“I could do that all right, said Albert uncertainly. “But ‘ow should I know what I was signin’?”

“I suppose you can read,” said the manager a trifle sharply.

Mr. Foreman gave him a disarming smile.

“Well, sir, that’s just it. I can’t. I know it sounds funny-like but there it is, I can’t read or write, only me name, an’ I only learnt to do that when I went into business.”

The manager was so surprised that he jumped up from his chair.

“That’s the most extraordinary thing I ever heard.”

“You see it’s like this, sir, I never ‘ad the opportunity until it was too late and then some’ow I wouldn’t. I got obstinate-like.”

The manager stared at him as though he were a prehistoric monster.

“And do you mean to say that you’ve built up this important business and amassed a fortune of thirty thousand pounds without being able to read or write? Good God, an, what would you be now if you had been able to?”

“I can tell you that sir,” said Mr. Foreman, a little smile on his still aristocratic features. “I’d be verger of St. Peter’s, Neville Square.”

- W. Somerset Maugham

5.4 KEY WORDS

Verger	: an official in a church who acts as an attendant
Alpaca	: a long haired domesticated animal valued for wool
Perennial	: Everlasting, ceaseless
Complacence	: Self-satisfaction, contentment
Disconcerting	: Disturbing, perturbing
Clad	: Clothed, dressed
Wrapped	: Covered, overjoyed, delighted
Succession	: Sequence, series, progression
Infirm	: Frail, weak, debilitated

Vestry	: A room attached to a church used as an office
Genuflect	: To bend, to lower one's body for worship
Aisle	: Passage between rows of seats in a church, theatre train or aircraft
Cassock	: Full length gown worn by Christian clergy
Energetic	: Full of Vigour, Energy
Predecessor	: Former, previous holder post, precursor
Aristocratic	: High-born, well-bred, elite
Parishioner	: An inhabitant of a particular church parish
Fuss	: A display of unnecessary excitement, activity or interest
Finger in every Pie	: Interference in all matters.
Tolerant	: Open minded, unprejudiced, broad-minded
Congregation	: A group of people assembled for religions work-shop
Whimper	: Cry, moan, groan, wail
Amuse	: Entertain, gladden, make laugh
Crook	: A bend in something, curve/wicked person
Surplice	: A loose linen vestment worn over a cassock by the clergy
Hush up	: Silenced, quieted, gagged
Scandal	: Unethical behavior, outrageous, wrongdoing
Resolute	: Determined, purposeful, firm
Be dignity	: Kindness or tolerance toward others.
Slightly	: a little, moderately to a small degree
Jockeyed	: Struggle by every available means to achieve something
Obsequious	: Servile, submissive
Ecclesiastical	: Related to church or clergy
Deportment	: Posture, gait, way of standing
Inapproachable	: not accessible, difficult to approach
Page-boy	: a page in a hotel or attending a bride at wedding
Footman	: A servant whose duty is to admit visitor and wait at a table
Butler	: Chief servant of house
Peeress	: a woman holding the rank of a peer
Unimpeachable	: Not able to be doubted/unquestionable
Embarrassment	: a feeling of self-consciousness or shame/uneasiness
Knack	: talent , skill, ability, capability, aptness
Glance	: a brief, hurried look, take a quick look
Lamentable	: deplorable, unfortunate, regrettable

Ignorance	: Lack of knowledge, unfamiliarity with
Prudence	: Wisdom, understanding
Principle	: proposition, concept, idea, system of belief
Brash	: Unpleasantly rough or jarring to the senses
Providence	: Fate, destiny, nemesis, God's will
tidy up	: An act of tidying something
Stroll	: Wander, roam, amble, saunter
Notion	: Idea, belief, concept, thought
Abstainer	: One who keeps away from one who refrains from doing something
Reflectively	: Thoughtfully in pondering state
Tobacconist	: tobacco-seller
Dreadful	: Terrible, frightful, horrible
Come-down	: loss of status, mortification, demotion
Anxiety	: Feeling of worry, apprehension, unease
Gilt-edged	: Reliable stocks for investment
Distinguished	: Famed, renowned, dignified
Disarming	: Famed, renowned, dignified
Trifle	: unimportant thing/trivial matter, inessential
Obstinate	: Stubborn, headstrong, unyielding
Prehistoric	: Primitive, primeval, ante-diluvia
Monster	: Large, ugly, frightening imaginary creature
Amass	: accumulate, collect, stockpile

5.5 SUMMARY OF THE STORY

Albert Edward Foreman was a Verger at St. Peter's church, Neville Square. He started his career as a foot-man rising to the position of the verger. He was an honest, sincere and hard-working man. He loved his work and took pride in his position. People of the parish respected him for his sincerity and positive attitude. He was self-confident but with humility. However, a new vicar who was appointed at the church told him that he should learn to read and write as it was necessary for every churchman to be literate. Foreman said that it was too late for him to learn to read and write. The Vicar told him that in that case, he would lose his job. Foreman lost his job and while walking home from church, he had a desire to smoke. He could not find a single tobacconist shop. He found a vacant shop on rent. He started his new career as a tobacconist and newsagent. The shop ran quite well and he took another shop in a lane where there was no tobacco shop. Then he walked down the streets of London and started tobacco shops wherever he noticed that there was no tobacco shop. In ten years, he became the owner of ten tobacco shops earning huge income.

One day, he went to the bank to deposit money. The bank manager suggested to him to invest some of his money in stocks and shares for higher rate of returns. Foreman said that he knew nothing about share market and he wanted his money to be safe. The bank manager was a trust worthy man who assured

Foreman that he would manage his investment in such a way that he would get higher rate of returns without any risk. Foreman agreed and the manager requested him to sign some papers. Foreman replied that he was illiterate and did not know how to read and write.

The bank manager was shocked and surprised because he had never seen a person who had earned so much money despite total lack of literacy. He asked Foreman what he would here become if he had been a literate man. Foreman replied that he would have been the verges of St.Peter's church.

5.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) was a well-known novelist, playwright and short story writer. His works are characterized by clear unadorned style, cosmopolitan settings and a shrewd understanding of human nature. He travelled extensively and during the World War I he worked as a secret agent. His reputation rests, mainly on his novels *of Human Bondage* (1915), *The Moon and the Sixpence* (1919), *Cakes and Ale* (1930) and *The Razor's Edge* (1944). *The Razor's Edge* is considered his magnum opus. It is a novel about a young American war Veteran who goes to India in search of a satisfying way of life. He met a great spiritual saint Shri Ganesha from whom he achieved peace and inner harmony. He was profoundly impressed by his silence, tranquility, renunciation and resignation.

Somerset Maugham's short-stories often have twisted ending in an ironical manner Maugham often presented funny sides of life which is full of contradictions. Generally we believe that honest people prosper and the wicked suffer but in his famous story *Ant and the Grasshopper*, he depicts Tom who led prodigal life become a rich man at the end of the story as he marries a wealthy widow who dies and leaves all her property and luxurious mansions in inheritance to her husband. Tom lived like a grasshopper enjoying life extravagantly. His elder brother George lived an honest and hard-working life like an industrious ant. He retires from his work and lives a mediocre life. Maugham takes a different turn from the famous fable of Aesop that bad deeds might not always be punished and good deeds many often go unrewarded.

The Verger is a story of Albert Edward Foreman who had been the Verger at St.Peter's Church, Neville square for 16 years. One day, a new Vicar was appointed there who fired Foreman for being illiterate. He told him to learn to read and write but Foreman refused to do so saying that he was too old to learn new tricks. Finally he left his job and while walking back home, he had an intense desire to smoke a cigarette. There were no tobacco shops in the streets. An idea came to his mind that he should open a tobacco shop in the street. Soon he opened a tobacco shop which ran very well. In a few years, he opened other shops and learned a lot of money. Within ten years he had as many as ten shops in London. He deposited his accumulated income in a bank which rose to thirty thousand pounds or more.

Foreman became a successful business man. Once he visited the bank and the bank manager suggested that he should invest his money into shares and stocks to get higher returns. Foreman wanted to take no risk but the bank manager told him that he would manage his investment prudentially incurring no risk. Foreman trusted the bank manager and told him to undertake

necessary procedure. The bank manager said that he would have to sign some papers. The climax in the story comes when foreman said that he was quite illiterate and he could neither read nor write. The bank manager was shocked and surprised. He told Foreman that he had become a wealthy businessman despite his being illiterate. He asked him what he would have been if he had been a literate man. Foreman replied that he would have been nothing but a verger at St. Peter's church had he been a literate person. Foreman's reply can be taken as denouement in the story.

The author wants to suggest that illiteracy is not equal to ignorance. It is a sarcastic remark which carries a proven truth that formal education literacy has nothing to do with practical success in the world. There is a story that the topper in the class became a teacher and his classmate who was a back bencher became the minister of education. We find many such examples in the world around us.

The story is about church wardens and therefore we find many words related to church such as vicar, vestry, cassock, surplice, congregation, parishioners, ecclesiastical etc.

The story has been told from the third person singular, the omniscient narrator. The tone of the narrator is detached and impassive. The over-all mood of the story is peaceful without any tension or conflict. Even when foreman is dismissed from the job, he remains calm and composed and soon finds out what he should do to maintain his family. As the verger, he had done his job honestly and sincerely never entertaining any complaint from the parishioners. He loved his job and his positive attitude made him quite popular. He was fired from his job but soon he became a successful businessman on account of his practical, calm and placid temperament. He was quite egoless, gentle and agreeable. These qualities place him on a higher pedestal than the vicar and other church people. The story even poses a question whether so-called religious people possess spiritual virtues like love, compassion equanimity and sobriety.

The author has used the simple past and past perfect tenses in his narration. There are themes like appearance, opportunity, dedication, independence and humility. The author highlights the strength of human spirit that can triumph over obstacles through courage, determination and dedication.

Somerset Maugham wrote more than hundred stories and burnt about fourteen as Winston Churchill warned that they violated the official secrets Act. Maugham's writing career extended over 65 years and he insisted that a writer should be judged by his best work. He placed himself in the first of the second-raters.

In Maugham's essay on the short story he says that the essence of short story is story telling. Maugham preferred to tell stories that were sparked by incidents he had witnessed or heard about. Many of his stories are like dramatized maxims. He had skeptical world view that turns popular beliefs upside down. He was fascinated by men and women who were destroyed by code of honor, an appetite or a passion. He liked characters who were gay amusing and unscrupulous.

The narrator in Maugham's short stories is uninvolved and impersonal. He often presents cynical or pessimistic world view quite dispassionately.

Maugham believed religion was an illusion to help humanbeing endure the accident of existence. Maugham was a great traveler who sojourned in the most parts of the world. His extensive travel gave him wider experiences of human nature. He wrote ordinarily like a speaker in prose. He had gone the renders authentic pleasure in words, settings and depiction of his characters. His dialogues are realistic and befitting the characters and situations. Twisted ending makes his stories entertaining and pleasurable. Even if all things perish, there will remain story tellers who will entertain the listeners near the fireplace at home or campfire in the forest. Maugham firmly held that true beauty of short stories lies in story telling that entertains and shocks the readers with a surprising, ironical twist.

5.7 THE TONE OF THE STORY

Somerset Maugham was a great story teller. Good story telling requires dispassionate and impersonal tone. In his stories there is always a predominant tone of irony and objective treatment of characters and incidents. In his theory and practice of the short story, Maugham shifts the whole emphasis of craftsmanship away from the point of ‘single effect’ to the other basic question of who is the narrator. The typical Maugham situation is built around a sense of disillusion which comes from “Seeing through” the veil of outward appearances. The underlying theme of most of his stories is that the reality is usually different from outward appearances.

The over-all mood of the story is free of conflict or tension. Foreman loses the job of the Verger but he is not utterly depressive. He remains calm and composed and solved the problem of the loss of job by starting a tobacco shop. Even after earning a lot of money, he shuns arrogance, vanity and ambitiousness. Maugham was a rational man who looked at things unemotionally and intellectually. Though he was interested in spirituality, his attitude always remained analytic and dispassionate. This is a true of his treatment of themes, character and incidents.

5.8 THEMES OF THE STORY

In *The Verger* there are themes of appearance opportunity, dedication, independence and humility. Foreman is a dedicated verger who is quite conscious about appearance. For example, he prefers to keep his new verger’s gown for occasions like wedding and funerals. The new vicar too thinks that appearance is important. He believes that literacy is important for church officials and other church people. He thinks that the ability to read and write for the church people reflects the reputation and prestige of St.Peter church. Foreman who is unable to read and write had to lose his job as the Verger, despite his honesty, sincerity and hard work. For the Vicar, literacy is important because it adds to the appearance of cultured and sophisticated behaviors.

Another important theme in *The Verger* is opportunity. Foreman loses his job but he remains calm and composed turning the loss of job into an opportunity for new enterprise. He sets up, tobacco a successful businessman owning ten tobacco shops in London. He seized the opportunity turning defeat into victory. He was a dedicated verger who earned the love and respect of the parishioners. His deep sense of sincerity and dedication makes his successful as a businessman also. Maugham seems to suggest that mere literally

is not an asset. It is dedication and steadfastness that earn success and reputation.

After losing his job, Foreman decided to set up an independent business. He became his own boss with no servility to anyone. He decided to be and wearable to nobody but himself. When the new Vicar told him to learn to read and write, he politely refused to do so. He said that he was too old a dog to learn new tricks. The new Vicar told him that if he failed to learn to read and write, he would have to lose his job. Foreman abandoned his job without blaming the new Vicar. However he shows his independent, free-willed nature.

Despite his independence and freewill, Foreman is never arrogant and vain. Humility is one of his greatest virtues. Though he amasses a lot of wealth, his healthiness and success never go to his head. When the bank manager asks him to sign papers, he says that he did not know how to read and write. The bank manager was utterly shocked and surprised. He asked Foreman what he would have been if he had been a literate man. Foreman humbly replied that he would be the Verger at St. Peter's Church if he had been able to read and write. He does not ridicule literacy but shows his humility about his past life and the present worldly success. He displays his ingenuity and flexibility in his life.

5.9 STYLE AND DICTION OF THE STORY

The style of Somerset Maugham in his stories is simple, lucid and ironic. He usually wrote in the prose without figurative language. His style lacked poetic beauty but its dominating trait was effective story-telling. He avoided romantic and emotional narration. He relied more on rational attitude towards life and the world. He said about himself that. "I have never pretended to be anything but a story teller". Most of his stories are narrated in third person singular in an impersonal and dispassionate manner.

5.10 THE TITLE OF THE STORY

The title of the story is *The Verger* the church official who worked dedicatedly. He is illiterate man without formal education. He does not claim to be intelligent or knowledgeable. He believes in performing his duties honestly and sincerely. He is quite popular as the Verger among the parishioners. When the new Vicar insists that he should learn to read and write, he refuses to do so politely. He had to lose his job and he starts his tobacco shop earning huge amount of money. When he goes to the bank, the bank manager asks him to sign papers for transfer of money into better investment schemes. He says that he did not know how to read and write. The bank manager was surprised and he asked what he would have been if he had been literate. He replied "I would still be the Verger at St. Peters".

5.11 MAUGHAM'S VIEWS ON SHORT STORY

Maugham believed that the literature finds truest and fullest expression in the essayer the short story. He says in his essay on the short story that it is an innate nature of men to tell tales. Regarding the form Maugham says that he liked stories with beginning, middle and end. For him, lucidity, euphony and simplicity were the important traits of a good short story. He stressed on reality rather than imagination. He wrote his stories based on what he had seen or heard. He dramatized maxims and popular proverbs turning them upside down these characters are suggested by someone he had known.

In his short stories, the narrator is a thin disguise for the author. In his book *The Summing Up*, he wrote about topic related to writing and his life. The book reflects his deep insights about his career as a writer and his views on writing.

Maugham studies medicine and worked in hospital where he came in contact with suffering people. This has a profound effect on his life and writing. Many writers wrote about the virtue of self-suffering and how it ennobled the suffers. Maugham did not agree to it. He fell it was exactly the opposite and he wrote about its negative impact.

Regarding creative process, he wrote that he let things simmer in his brain for longtime before putting them on paper. The ultimate aim of literature is to entertain and not to teach. He believed that no reading is worthwhile unless one enjoy it. Maugham said that a good short-story must represent expression on the following levels.

1. Narrative level of characters and events.
2. Emotional level: nature of emotional experience.
3. Interpretative level: Meaning beneath the apparent conflict
4. Cultural level: elements that generalize the events and make them applicable to the world of realities.

Check Your Progress: 1

5.12 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.

- (i) What was Albert Foreman’s profession?
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- (ii) What kind of person was Albert Foreman?
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- (iii) What were the feelings of Foreman about the new Vicar?
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(iv) Why did the new Vicar want Foreman to leave his job?

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(v) What happened to Foreman when he walked out of the church?

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(vi) How did Foreman turn into a successful businessman?

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(vii) How was the bank manager surprised?

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(viii) What did foreman say to the bank manager in the end of the story?

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(ix) What is ironic twist in the end of the story?

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(x) Why did Foreman refuse to learn to read and write?

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(xi) What are the virtues of Albert Foreman that made him successful verger and then a wealthy business man?

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Check Your Progress: 2

5.13 CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.

- (1) Albert Edward Foreman was a _____ at St. Peter's.
(a) Vicar (b) Priest
(c) Warden (d) Verger
- (2) Foreman had been the verger at St. Peter's for
(a) ten years (b) fifteen years
(c) sixteen years (d) twenty years
- (3) Foreman kept his new gown for _____
(a) Weddings (b) Funerals
(c) christening (d) weddings and funerals
- (4) The new Vicar was in his early _____
(a) forties (b) fifties
(c) thirties (d) sixties
- (5) Foreman had started his career as a _____
(a) warden (b) vicar
(c) verger (d) pageboy
- (6) The new vicar told Foreman that he should learn
(a) To address the audience

- (b) to look after the church
 (c) to read and write
 (d) To help the vicar
- (7) The new vicar told Foreman that if he did not learn to read and write.
 (a) he would have to suffer
 (b) he would have to leave the job
 (c) he would be punished
 (d) he would be transferred to another church
- (8) Albert Edward was _____
 (a) a smoker (b) a teetotaler
 (c) a non-smoker (d) a vegetarian
- (9) As Foreman walked out of the church he had a desire _____
 (a) to drink (b) to eat
 (c) to erg (d) to smoke
- (10) As Foreman found no tobacco shop in the streets, he decided to open _____ there
 (a) a medical store (b) a shoe store
 (c) a tobacco shop (d) a sweet shop
- (11) Within ten years, Foreman could set up _____ tobacco shop in London.
 (a) ten (b) twenty
 (c) hundred (d) fifty
- (12) During ten year, Foreman earned _____
 (a) ten thousand pound (b) twenty thousand pound
 (c) forty thousand pound (d) thirty thousand pound

5.14 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit you have,

- learn the most popular form of Literature
- learn the importance of plot, setting in the story

5.15 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Damon Knight *Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction*

Sharon Sorenson *How to Write Short Stories* 1991

Nancy Day *How to Write Winning Short Stories* 2015

Answers

Check Your Progress: 2

1. (D), 2. (C), 3. (D), 4. (A), 5. (C), 6. (C), 7. (B), 8. (C), 9. (D),
 10. (C), 11. (A), 12. (D)