

The text personifies the Church of England in the form of an authoritarian, intolerant vicar, using caricature in characterisation and onomastics to criticise its tendency to forget its spiritual mission and drift towards conformism.

Reverend Matthew Helstone's name is iconic of his character: while his first name is a reminder of his evangelical mission, his last name, which is made up of 'hell' and 'stone,' evokes evil and hardness, making it an oxymoron which symbolises the contradiction in the Church of England that the text points out.

Helstone is obsessed with order in all its forms: he equates civilisation with order and thus believes that society should be structured by rules and hierarchies. He evidently thinks the role of the clergy is to preserve order and fight any threats to it.

The latter category includes Irish people, whom he considers as savages from an uncivilised country: he imagines an Irish landscape as 'wild bog and mountain district' (l. 23-24), where the civilising influence of the road-building Romans is absent, as opposed to England.

He is also obsessed with Dissenters and whom he mentions repeatedly, even though none is physically present. The first time he mentions them, is in a hypothetical sentence ('if you were a Dissenter', l. 7); the second time he mentions them as an epitome of unruliness in order to castigate his curates: 'You were [...] making almost as much noise—you three alone—as Moses Barraclough, the preaching tailor, and all his hearers are making in the Methodist chapel, where they are in the thick of a revival' (l. 16-18). His language indicates that he resents nonconformists for challenging the authority of the established Church of England, but also for challenging the authority of the clergy over laypeople.

Finally, he has come to the inn to rally his curate to support an industrialist against a possibly Luddite episode (l. 31-34), showing his belief that the Church's role is to uphold the social status quo.

Helstone's belief in order underpins his belief in authority, as is shown by his propensity to belittle others: he questions the innkeeper as if he were accountable to him ('Have you often this sort of work?', l. 4), and by addressing him as 'John Gale' (l. 7) he establishes an unequal relationship with him; he reduces his curates to schoolboys by calling them 'bad boys' who 'want caning' (l. 7).

Helstone is a conformist, as is shown by his emphasis on preserving the Church of England's image: he is angry at his curates for "expos[ing] themselves" (l. 8) and warns them about 'bring[ing] disgrace' on themselves and the Church (l. 24). Indeed, his trite use of the word 'disgrace' highlights the gap between his desire for respectability and the religious connotation of the term. This conformism has wide-ranging religious and political implications indicated by his disapproval of nonconformists: for him, conforming to society seems to be an imperative in itself.

Rappels :

- *Énoncer une idée sur le texte avant toute remarque descriptive, tout repérage, toute référence factuelle au texte,*
- *Puis justifier l'idée par une référence, accompagnée d'une analyse démontrant le lien entre cette référence et l'idée avancée.*
- *Attention à l'intégrité des citations : elles doivent respecter le sens du texte.*
- *Attention à l'intégration des citations dans la syntaxe de la rédaction : elles ne doivent pas interrompre la logique des phrases ni des paragraphes.*