



Sowing Kindness in One: A Path to Societal Reform -- “The best investment I ever made” A.J.Cronin

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Abstract:

The literary contributions of A.J. Cronin embody humanist principles by delving into themes of empathy, social justice, individual dignity, and the transformative influence of education. His novels serve as a critique of societal shortcomings while simultaneously honoring the resilience and moral fortitude of individuals, which resonates with the core tenets of humanism. Cronin's writing is distinguished by a deep commitment to social justice, empathy, and the human experience, aligning with the fundamental aspects of humanism. This philosophical and ethical perspective underscores the importance and agency of human beings, both individually and collectively, emphasizing human values, critical reasoning, and the potential for advancement through rational thought and compassion. In his short story "The Best Investment I Ever Made," Cronin exemplifies the essence of humanism through a personal narrative that highlights the significant impact of a seemingly minor act of kindness and its far-reaching consequences on his life and the lives of others.

Key Words: Societal Concern, Humanism, Ethical values, Kindness.

"The Best Investment I Ever Made" is an amazing passage taken from Archibald Joseph Cronin's book. Scottish author and doctor A.J. Cronin is well-known for his socially concerned works, which include "The Citadel" and "The Stars Look Down." His writings frequently discuss societal concerns and promote advancements in social justice and healthcare. Cronin's writings frequently address the moral need to make constructive contributions to society. Cronin emphasized the significance of moral rectitude, empathy, and dedication to the common good in his novels—values that are consistent with the tenets of social responsibility.

Cronin's dedication to social concerns and his focus on the ethical responsibilities of both individuals and organizations exemplify a strong sense of social responsibility. Engaging with these values, whether through literary works, community initiatives, or personal behavior, represents a significant contribution to the welfare of society. "The Best Investment I Ever Made" serves as a quintessential representation of his ideology.

Kindness has a unique quality of spreading beyond its initial act. When an individual encounters or observes an act of kindness, it frequently motivates them to reciprocate in kind towards others. This cascading effect can be especially significant when the beneficiary of kindness holds a position of influence over others. As Shakespeare rightly said in his (*The Merchant of Venice, Act IV, Scene I*)

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:

(*The Merchant of Venice, Act IV, Scene I*)

Amazing aspect of human relationship is kindness, which has many different facets and a profound worth. Even if doing good deeds doesn't cost anything, the effect they have on the person receiving it is immense. "Kindness is free to give but priceless to receive" is an aphorism that highlights a significant truth about compassion and its impact on people and society.

Cronin's character embodies a profound and selfless devotion to humanity. He dedicates himself to delivering medical care to the inhabitants of the desert, undeterred by the threats and challenges he encounters. His endeavors illustrate his conviction in the significance of aiding others and mitigating their hardships.

A.J. Cronin consistently wove humanistic themes throughout his oeuvre. His work showcases a sincere commitment to understanding the human experience, highlighting issues of social justice and the importance of empathy.

"The Citadel" (1937) is considered one of Cronin's most distinguished and influential works. It chronicles the experiences of Andrew Manson, a young medical practitioner who starts his career with hopeful ideals but soon becomes disillusioned by the corruption and inefficiency he observes. The novel examines themes of social justice, the ethical responsibilities of medical professionals, and the significance of maintaining personal integrity in the face of systemic challenges. It advocates for the compassionate treatment of patients and critiques the exploitation that exists within the medical profession, showcasing Cronin's humanistic outlook.

Cronin's remarkable success with "The Citadel" established him as a prominent figure in classical literary circles. He was a prolific writer, pouring his heartfelt sentiments into narratives that exposed societal falsehoods. Cronin's literary career flourished, with numerous bestselling novels translated into various languages. His works, including "The Citadel" and "The Stars That Look Down", featured courageous protagonists who fought for justice on behalf of the underprivileged.

Cronin was known for his rigorous standards and uncompromising nature regarding his writing and professional endeavors, yet he was warm and good-humored in his personal life. "The Citadel" received the National Book Award in the United States and was widely acclaimed as one of the most captivating books ever written.

Cronin and his family relocated to America in 1939, where many of his works were quickly adapted into films. While living in various cities, he formed friendships with Hollywood icons such as Sir Laurence Olivier, Charles Chaplin, and Audrey Hepburn. In his later years, Cronin settled in Montreux, Switzerland, where he continued to write into his eighties, cherishing fond memories of his childhood in Dumbarton.

"Hatter's Castle," released in 1931, is the debut work of Cronin, which revolves around a tyrannical hat producer and his family. The story addresses themes of class struggle, the quest for personal redemption, and the pressures exerted by society on individual lives. By depicting the consequences of greed and the potential for personal evolution, the novel reflects Cronin's faith in the capacity for human transformation and the essential nature of compassion.

"The Keys of the Kingdom" (1941): This literary work chronicles the experiences of Father Francis Chisholm, a Catholic priest stationed in a secluded mission in China. It delves into themes of faith, commitment, and the resilience of the human spirit. The narrative underscores Father Chisholm's steadfast devotion to his mission and the community he serves, highlighting the significance of empathy and comprehension in bridging cultural and personal differences.

Cronin's work often reflects his belief in the fundamental goodness of people and the need for societal systems to serve human needs compassionately and justly. His novels advocate for ethical integrity, social reform, and the importance of personal responsibility in fostering a more humane society.

"The Best Investment I Ever Made" reflects the author's unique experiences as a physician in London. The term investment in the title does not pertain to financial profit. Rather, it is about the social investment of the author into the life of a misguided youth who tried to commit suicide on the prospect of stealing a small

amount of money from his office. The narrator, as a doctor, completely changes the life of the boy and turns him into a good Samaritan and helps the youth to replace the money. Instead of following a linear trajectory, the story begins at the end where the narrator is taken aback by another passenger on the ship who constantly stares at him. Dr. Cronin was returning from New York when he noticed a fellow passenger watching him. He initially avoided the person's attention but became curious about them. The story builds suspense and curiosity in the readers' minds. Eventually, the man approached Dr. Cronin with his wife and introduced himself timidly. At first, Dr. Cronin didn't recognize him, but when the man whispered something in his ear, Dr. Cronin remembered an incident from 25 years ago. This marks the beginning of a flashback in the story.

Dr. Cronin commenced his medical practice in a working-class area of London. One night, at approximately one o'clock, he was roused by a police sergeant. A man had attempted suicide in a nearby lodge. In the attic of that lodge, on a narrow bed, lay the seemingly lifeless body of a young man. After more than an hour of intensive effort, Dr. Cronin succeeded in reviving him. The young man recounted his heartrending tale. His name was John, and he was an orphan. His uncle had secured him a position in the town. However, he soon adopted a reckless lifestyle, indulging in pleasures beyond his financial means and gambling in hopes of acquiring more money. Ultimately, he lost everything and resorted to stealing from his workplace. Fearing prosecution and engulfed in despair, he resolved to take his own life. After being moved by his poignant story, the individuals of the tree community united to aid him. In spite of potential consequences for his employment, the sergeant made the decision not to file a report on the situation. Additionally, the landlady graciously extended a month's rent-free housing, while Dr. Cronin donated 7 pounds and 10 shillings to assist with his return to work funds. Thus, a timely act of kindness changed the young man's life, and later he became a great social worker. Mr. John resolved to transform his life, dedicating himself to the care of neglected and troubled youths from the city slums. For the past fifteen years, he and his wife have engaged in charitable work, thereby repaying his debt to society. Sometimes, a small incident can trigger a profound transformation in ones life, leading him to new perspectives or changes he might not have anticipated. Such moments often serve as catalysts, forcing us to reassess our values, goals, or relationships. They can lead to unexpected personal growth or new directions, demonstrating how even the smallest events can have a substantial impact on our lives.

The substantial contribution made a significant impact on Mr. John's life. Previously, he had succumbed to the temptations of a reckless lifestyle, seeking pleasures that exceeded his financial capacity. In pursuit of these indulgences, he associated with unsavory individuals, resorting to gambling on horse races and ultimately pledging all his possessions, including funds misappropriated from his workplace. As a result, he inadvertently became a figure of admiration for troubled and delinquent youth. He is involved in researching methods used to tackle the issues encountered by underprivileged, maladjusted and delinquent young people. For the past 15 years, he and his wife have committed themselves to youth welfare. Following his tenure as a solicitor in the courts, he devotes his time to serving as the director of a charitable organization that supports boys and girls from urban impoverished areas. He intervenes with trouble adolescents referred from juvenile courts, providing them with mental and physical rehabilitation, vocational training in practical skills, and reintegrating them as valuable members of society. The lives of these young individuals were salvaged by the compassionate efforts of the three individuals: the sergeants, the landlady and the narrator. He endeavours represent a significant act of societal redemption.

Dr. AJ Cronin was convinced that his modest investment ultimately proved to be the most rewarding of all his financial endeavors, despite the fact that it did not yield any personal material benefits for him. The term 'investment' typically refers to the act of allocating resources such as money, time, and effort into a venture with the expectation of generating profit or benefits. However, Dr. A J Cronin employed the term in a unique context within his narrative. His investment of resources was not aimed at achieving personal gain; rather, it was a selfless act intended to assist a struggling young man. This timely intervention profoundly transformed the young man's life, ultimately leading him to become a prominent social worker. Consequently, Dr. Cronin's investment proved to be the most significant one he ever made, yielding positive outcomes for both the individual and society at large. Therefore, the title 'The Best Investment I Ever Made' aptly reflects the story's central theme. Although Dr. Cronin did not receive any material rewards from his investment, it resulted in immense value. Through this narrative, he imparts a vital lesson: even a small act of timely assistance can lead to remarkable benefits for the broader community.

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