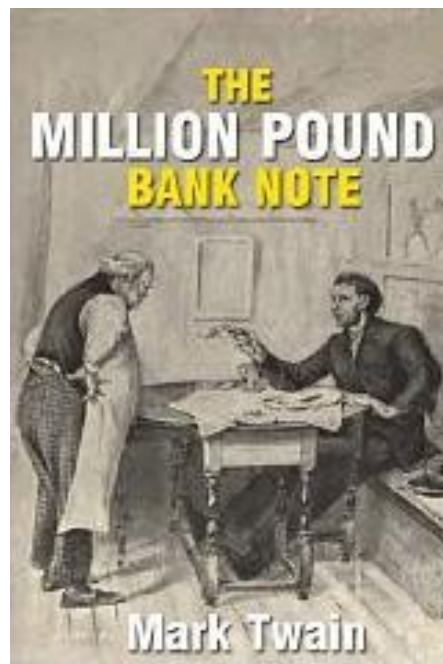




The Million Pound Bank Note

Mark Twain

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The story takes place in Victorian London, where two very rich, eccentric brothers give the penniless story protagonist, Henry Adams, one million pounds of money in the form of a single peerless bank note. Henry would not be easily able to exchange that note in the bank without being questioned about how he had come to it, charged with theft and arrested. He would also not be able to spend it since no ordinary person would be able to change it.

Without knowing it, Henry is the subject of a bet: Oliver believes that the mere possession of this symbol of wealth will enable anyone to have anything he wants, without actually cashing the note. Roderick, on the other hand, feels that the prohibition against exchanging the note for cash will render it totally useless.

The Million Pound Bank Note Details

Date : Published (first published 1893)

ISBN : 9780895987440

Author : Mark Twain

Format : 54 pages

Genre : Classics, Short Stories, Fiction, Humor, Literature, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review The Million Pound Bank Note for online ebook

Barbara says

"Il denaro, senza l'onore, è una malattia."

Filippo says

Questa storia ha ispirato molte opere successive, fra cui cito il film "Una poltrona per due".
Benché lo spunto sia originale, il racconto ha un tono che oscilla fra l'ingenuo e l'ironico che non fa per me.
Impossibile non citare favorevolmente il comportamento della ragazza nella scena finale, che mi ha lasciato letteralmente basito.

Grace says

4.5 stars

Read this story in my 11th grade Honors English class as a part of our short story unit. I thoroughly enjoy Twain's writing in this story, an opinion that I probably wouldn't have while reading Huck Finn. I did not expect the twist in the end, and I enjoyed seeing a bit of a sociological experiment done in such an early time period. Half a star taken off for the way Portia is portrayed in this story.

Kiruha says

In this short story, which requires a very short time to read, Twain includes all social commentary, parody and a little adventure. Or at least it would be one if the story weren't as incredibly fast paced. What the author does choose to tell is well distributed and conveys the idea all the same, but I'm glad that the film adaption of this story (*The Million Pound Note* from 1954) lingers more on the details, granting the option to relish in the many possibilities the story has to offer even by simply extending what Mark Twain already says.

Brenda says

3.5 stars!

What a clever man :D Simple but great story!

Tatevik Najaryan says

One of the stories when the film is as good as the book!

Prashant says

Have anyone heard of the saying "To get a loan you first need to prove that you don't need one" ?

This story by Twain emphasizes this fact more than ever.

I was waiting for some ironical situation to emerge or some tragedy to befall the protagonist. But it never happened.

Twain could have gained some brownie points by providing some more twists and turns. The ending is a little drab for a reader who has been hooked for the entire story just to see how things would pan out in the end.

An ironical story indeed!

Kavita says

A very short and delightful novella that plays around with the concept of perceived wealth and how it can literally change your life. Twain is great with getting into the foibles and weakness of society at the time, and in this case, not much has changed now. The story is set in London during Victorian times (of course!).

Henry Adams has just got off the boat and wonders how he is going to make ends meet in this most expensive city. But while he is foraging for food in the dustbin, his life changed in a second as he was summoned inside a house by two men. They offer him a million pound bank note as a social experiment to see if he could survive with it or not. I wonder where all these eccentric rich people are today! I wouldn't mind being offered a million pound note ... I am quite willing to be that sort of guinea pig.

I thoroughly enjoyed this story. As Henry takes full advantage of his wealth and quickly claws his way up the ladder, the story gets more exciting. And of course, he gets the girl too! Very well-written and fun, my only grump is that it was too short.

paola says

3 e 1/2

La banconota da un milione di sterline e Il mio orologio sono due short-stories estremamente brillanti e gradevoli.

Menzione d'onore per la cura nella veste grafica tipica di questa collana di ABEditore.

Reynar Swan says

I've always been a big fan of Twain, his writing style and ability to tell a story, especially witty ones. Man was no stranger to humor. Having read most of his writing, *The Million Pound Bank Note* remained on my to-be-read list until tonight. Got into a short-story frame of mind. This...mmm, yeah, it's one of Twain's weaker stories. It's short, so the dryness doesn't get too bothersome. Meh, read it if you're like me and a bit OCD in that you have to read everything someone you admire as a writer put to paper.

Loredana (Bookinista08) says

O povestire anecdotică despre un tânăr bărbat american, cinstit și inteligent, de origine modestă, fără avere sau nume cu tradiție, care își câștigă pâinea de zi cu zi strict prin puterea eforturilor sale intelectuale. Din păcate, la un moment dat tânărul pleacă pe mare într-o scurtă expediție de plăcere, însă vremea rea îl poartă tot mai departe de țară, așa că ajunge să naufragieze pe teritoriu englez. Văzându-se în Londra, cu un singur dolar în buzunar, acesta reușește să mănânce și să facă rost de un acoperiș deasupra capului pentru o singură zi, după care practic ajunge să fie om al străzii. Însă soarta are alte planuri pentru el. Pică în mijlocul unui pariu pus de doi frați în vârstă, putred de bogăție, care implică și o bancnotă de un million de lire. Doar două fuseseră emise vreodată, și în timp ce prima fusese deja anulată, a doua rămăsese la Banca Angliei așteptându-și rândul să fie folosită. În ce constă pariul și dacă tânărul nostru reușește să iasă la liman cu bine, vă las pe voi să aflați.

Vittorio Ducoli says

Un autore statunitense, non “americano”

Oggi la fama di Mark Twain, almeno nel nostro paese, è generalmente associata a quella dei suoi due più famosi romanzi: *Le avventure di Tom Sawyer* e *Le avventure di Huckleberry Finn*, e per questo l'autore è dai più considerato uno scrittore umoristico per ragazzi.

La personalità letteraria di Twain è invece estremamente complessa, e la sua parabola artistica ed umana ne fanno *il più americano degli scrittori d'America*, come dicono giustamente Gianni Pilo e Sebastiano Fusco nella breve prefazione posta all'inizio di questa piccola raccolta di suoi racconti. Non condivido invece quello che hanno asserito Hemingway e Faulkner (Twain come “*Il primo vero scrittore americano*”: e Melville, Hawthorne, Poe? Quanto *americani* erano? E' aperto il dibattito...)

Incidentalmente faccio qui notare una cosa: è invalsa, e quanto riportato sopra ne è uno dei tanti esempi, l'abitudine di chiamare *America* gli Stati Uniti. Ora, l'America è secondo me un *continente*, composto da due parti ben distinte da un punto di vista sia storico sia culturale e, anche quando ci si riferisce alla sola America del Nord, è occupata per molto più di metà della sua superficie da un altro stato: il Canada. Chiamare *America* gli Stati Uniti denota una sudditanza culturale alla *narrazione* che da più di un secolo gli Stati Uniti fanno di loro stessi, come nazione *universale*, destinata ad una *naturale* leadership prima proprio sulla totalità dell'America (vedasi la *dottrina Monroe*) poi sul mondo intero. Significa in altri termini avallare – sia pure forse inconsciamente – l'imperialismo statunitense di cui, tra l'altro, Mark Twain è stato un acuto

oppositore. Diciamo quindi più correttamente (le parole sono importanti...) che Twain è stato *il più statunitense degli scrittori degli Stati Uniti d'America*, di un periodo cruciale della storia di questo paese, che ne vedeva la mutazione genetica a seguito dello sviluppo volutamente incontrollato degli *spiriti animali del capitalismo*, e che ha posto le basi di ciò che ancora oggi gli Stati Uniti rappresentano nell'assetto mondiale e nell'immaginario collettivo.

La vita di Mark Twain è stata infatti l'incarnazione delle pulsioni arcaiche, delle opportunità, delle contraddizioni che quel paese incarna e che tanto ci affascina. Nato nel midwest, figlio di un avvocato squattrinato, si ritrova presto orfano facendo i *classici* mille mestieri, dal tipografo al pilota di battelli lungo il Mississippi (da quella esperienza mutua, tra l'altro, il suo pseudonimo), dal cercatore d'oro al minatore al giornalista di fogli di provincia: nonostante la sua avversione per il sistema schiavistico, è per breve tempo volontario nell'esercito confederato. A trent'anni pubblica una raccolta di racconti che gli dà la notorietà: riesce ad accumulare una fortuna grazie alla sua abilità nello sfruttare i rapporti con gli editori e con la nascente industria culturale di massa, fortuna che sperpera in azzardate avventure finanziarie per poi ricostruirla in termini ancora maggiori. E' ateo, insofferente delle convenzioni della società e - come detto - ostile al nascente imperialismo statunitense nonché fortemente critico rispetto alle disuguaglianze ed alle ingiustizie connaturate al sistema capitalistico, ma è amico di grandi magnati con il concorso dei quali finanzia attività filantropiche. Diviene il più famoso scrittore in patria, tiene acclamate conferenze in giro per il mondo - tra le quali alcune a Parigi dedicate all'onanismo - e riceve lauree *Honoris causa*, ma molte sue opere (in particolare quelle più *scorrette* e le più *impegnate* civilmente) non vengono pubblicate. Azzardando un confronto con altri grandi scrittori, si può forse dire che Twain rappresenta per la letteratura statunitense - anche per quanto riguarda il suo essere scrittore *di massa* - ciò che il suo quasi contemporaneo Charles Dickens rappresenta per quella britannica. Anche in Twain, infatti, la cifra letteraria scelta per raccontare i meandri oscuri della società in cui viveva è quella del sorriso, della sottile e garbata ironia, a volte del paradosso.

In questo volume ci vengono proposti sette brevi racconti tratti dalla sterminata produzione dell'autore, scritti in un periodo che abbraccia oltre un ventennio, tra il 1870 e il 1893. Non vengono fornite spiegazioni sulle motivazioni della scelta dei racconti, che tra l'altro non sono presentati secondo un ordine cronologico e neppure (a mio avviso) di rilevanza intrinseca, ma si può dire che il quadro che ne esce è molto omogeneo, nel senso che se ne ritrae l'impressione di un autore che sa mantenere nel tempo una vivacità ed una freschezza di scrittura estremamente importanti quando si fa dell'ironia lo strumento principale della comunicazione. Gli scritti scelti sono comunque molto leggeri e oserei dire *mainstream* (con un paio di eccezioni) e certo non esauriscono la citata poliedricità dello scrittore.

Il volume si apre con il racconto che gli dà il titolo. E' anche il racconto più *tardo* della raccolta (fu pubblicato da Twain, cinquantottenne, nel 1893) e riassume - anche se in maniera a mio avviso estremamente debole - alcune delle tematiche tipiche dell'opera di Twain: la critica ad un mondo in cui il denaro è l'unico valore riconosciuto ed una bonaria satira dei formalismi della società europea, in questo caso in particolare di quella inglese.

Il narratore è un giovane e promettente agente della borsa di San Francisco che un giorno, mentre è trascinato drammaticamente al largo nella sua barchetta a vela, viene raccolto da un brigantino diretto a Londra. Si trova così nella capitale inglese senza un soldo, affamato e con i vestiti laceri. Due gentiluomini gli consegnano, a seguito di una scommessa, una mostruosa banconota da un milione di sterline, con l'impegno a restituirla dopo trenta giorni. Inizia così una serie di avventure che vedono il giovane divenire in breve un personaggio alla moda, un eccentrico milionario che gira con una banconota incambiabile ma che riceve per ciò stesso credito da tutti e accesso nella migliore società. Ci sarà ovviamente un lieto finale, con tanto di matrimonio. Nonostante dia il titolo alla raccolta è come detto a mio avviso uno dei racconti più deboli, per l'approccio eccessivamente paternalistico che Twain riversa nella vicenda, che assume il tono di una *fiaba dei nostri giorni* in cui tutti vivono felici e contenti.

Il racconto che segue, *Cannibalismo in ferrovia* (1875) è di ben altra forza eversiva ed espressiva, che deriva in gran parte dal voluto scollamento tra il contenuto della vicenda (un gruppo di uomini, isolato in treno nelle

grandi praterie a seguito di una formidabile tempesta di neve, sacrifica alcuni componenti che vengono mangiati dagli altri) e la forma che essa assume, con le vittime che vengono prescelte sulla base di regolari proposte, emendamenti, votazioni come potrebbe avvenire in un qualsiasi dibattito parlamentare. Anche se Twain nel finale addomestica artificiosamente la vicenda, essa rimane scolpita nella memoria del lettore perché l'irresistibile, macabro umorismo che ne scaturlisce ci ricorda che le istituzioni sono solite trattare questioni che letteralmente decidono del nostro destino e della nostra vita nella massima indifferenza, attente soltanto al rispetto del formalismo del processo decisionale.

Anche *La grande rivoluzione di Pitcairn* si addentra nel terreno della critica alle istituzioni statali ed alle loro degenerazioni burocratiche e formalistiche. Nella piccola, arcaica, armoniosa ed autosufficiente comunità della remota isola di Pitcairn, nel Pacifico, colonizzata qualche decennio prima dagli ammutinati del Bounty, giunge un *americano*, che per conquistare il potere semina la discordia tra gli isolani, aizzandoli contro l'*odiosa tirannia britannica*. Grazie ad un colpo di stato si autoproclama Imperatore dell'isola e vi introduce nuovi riti religiosi, gerarchie nobiliari, ministeri, esercito e tasse. Ben presto però gli abitanti si ribellano, un socialista organizza un innocuo attentato e scoppia la rivoluzione, che riporta l'isola all'ordine precedente. L'effetto comico del testo è in gran parte basato sul fatto che la popolazione è di poche decine di persone, per cui ciascuna riveste ovviamente diversi ruoli nella nuova organizzazione statale, da quella di duca a quella di rematore nell'unica barca. La trasparente critica all'organizzazione sociale, rispetto alla quale è significativo a mio avviso che il *deus ex machina* della vicenda sia un *americano*, è condotta utilizzando uno scenario che curiosamente ricorda quello utilizzato in un testo di ben altro spessore: *Il sogno di un uomo ridicolo* di Fëdor Dostoevskij: al pianeta dell'autore russo si sostituisce una remota isola del Pacifico, ma in entrambi i casi queste società *felicitemente inconsce* vengono corrotte dall'arrivo della *civiltà* occidentale. Da notare, che Pitcairn fu veramente l'approdo degli ammutinati del Bounty: tuttavia le cose per loro andarono in maniera decisamente più tragica di quanto narrato da Twain.

Una curiosa escursione di piacere è una presa in giro delle crociere, dei viaggi organizzati e della relativa macchina pubblicitaria, in cui Twain immagina la promozione di un viaggio in cometa (egli fu ossessionato dal fatto di essere nato durante il passaggio di Halley nel 1835 e, per una strana coincidenza, morirà nel 1910 durante il successivo).

I due racconti successivi (*La Signora McWilliams e il fulmine* e *Un sogno curioso*) sono piccoli schizzi che mettono alla berlina rispettivamente la credulità di una famiglia rurale sul comportamento da tenere quando c'è un temporale, attraverso notizie dedotte da un libro scritto in un tedesco che non comprendono, e il dissiparsi della memoria individuale e collettiva nelle comunità cittadine statunitensi, che stanno espandendosi inglobando tra l'altro gli antichi cimiteri un tempo ai loro margini.

L'ultimo racconto, *Alcune favole erudite per i buoni vecchi bambini e per le buone vecchie bambine* è anche uno dei più importanti, per la sua carica satirica nei confronti della prosopopea della scienza e degli *scienziati*, condotta da un Twain peraltro ammiratore di Edison e di Tesla (ecco un'altra delle tante contraddizioni tipicamente *statunitensi* dell'autore). La spedizione dei piccoli animali che esplorano il mondo esterno alla loro foresta e *scoprono* i manufatti umani, attribuendo loro significati e funzioni ovviamente paradossali, è un piccolo capolavoro di grazia corrosiva, attualissimo. Già il titolo, con la destinazione ai *vecchi* bambini, ne sottolinea la struttura di apologo istruttivo.

Anche se Mark Twain non rappresenta a mio avviso uno dei fari della letteratura di tutti i tempi, questo autore ci permette, con la sua ironia e con le sue capacità satiriche anche se a volte troppo bonarie, di comprendere meglio i vizi e le virtù della società statunitense del XIX secolo, vizi e virtù che tanto peso avrebbero avuto ed ancora hanno anche nella nostra vecchia Europa.

Jon Norimann says

The million pound note is dated, pointless and trivial. A story about a man being given a million UK pound

note to live on for a month is an artificial setting. After a series of descriptions of daily events with an artificial twist caused by the large note the story comes to an end with a final twist. This always was a pointless story and Twain doesn't manage to make it any more than that. For its brevity and occasional funny moment it goes up from 1 to 2 stars.

Daniel Zhang says

"The Million Pound Bank Note" was written by Mark Twain in 1893. The narrator of the short story, Henry Adams, an American, ended up penniless in London after a boat accident. Two very rich brothers gave him an envelope with no information except they told him it's money. He went to a cheap eating place, the waiter treated him badly, when he pulled out the money he was shocked, so were other people because no one could change the million pound bank note. The manager said Adams could pay later because he was so rich. Mark Twain is an American writer who is good at sarcasm and humor. His real name is Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910). Mark Twain is his pen name, the name comes from the word used by Mississippi River sailors to measure the depth of the river. Mark Twain wrote many books during his life time; the genres include novel, scripts, newspaper writing and poetry. His work describes unrealistic events, and the ugly side of humans.

The story was told in first person. Mark Twain uses sarcasm and humor to expose the money worship in 19th century England. Henry Adams is a portrait of Mark Twain. In the Nevada gold rush in 1848, Twain put all his money into the stock market. He told himself he would sell the stock when the market value reached \$10000. The market value increased fast. He soon retired and went to San Francisco and enjoyed a luxury life. In 1859, the stock market crashed. He lost all his money, so he had to keep working and wrote books like Tom Sawyer (1876) and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884).

In the beginning of the story, the older brother bet his younger brother that Adams would eventually starve to death because he could not prove that he earned the money; the younger brother thought Adams would have a perfect life. After they gave the money to Adams, the brothers went to a foreign country for 30 days, so they gave a test of human nature to Henry Adams. The first thought he had was to give back the check. However, when the butler says, "but I must tell you it's all right" (pg.13).

Facing the money that fell from the sky for him, he is more anxious than happy. Right now, Adams is still a poor but honest man. He doesn't understand that the money belongs to him. After the note brings him luxury, he finds out people respect him. While enjoying the luxury, sleeping in 7star hotel, he was still afraid that his secret will be exposed by other people.

I like this book because Twain uses detail to show about money worship that happens all over the world.

When Adams first gave the money to a cloth sealer,

He received it with a smile, one of those large smiles which goes all around over, and has folds in it, and wrinkles, and spirals, and looks like the place where you have thrown a brick in a pond; and then in the act of his taking a glimpse of the bill this smile froze solid, and turned yellow, and looked like those wavy, wormy spreads of lava which you find hardened on little levels on the side of Vesuvius (pg.19).

Twain shows the ugly side of people when they are facing money. The element Mark Twain uses that I like is his humor. Most of the plot is unbelievable, but in the funny plot what is true is money is worshiped, everything connects with money, rich people are respected and poor people are discriminated against. The funny plot highlights the truth about money and the power of criticism.

I first read this book in China when I was 5th grade. I remember it was the 22nd story in the book, and we had a class that was broadcasted to the Internet. We needed to be quiet in the auditorium. Unfortunately, the final video cut my friend, Ding Samu's?????brilliant answer. The teacher taught a good lesson and I wrote down all the notes. Some of the ideas here are from those notes. It is a good memory.

Gerry says

Henry Adams was alone in the world and regularly enjoyed a sail in the bay when one day he was carried out to sea in a storm and feared that his life would be lost. However, a sailing boat picked him up and he worked his passage until the boat docked in London. He had only one dollar in his pocket so for 24 hours he went without food and shelter.

Then one day as he walked along Portland Place he followed a child and its nanny because the child had dropped a pear and he longed to pick it up and eat it. For various reasons he was unable to do so and just as he was despairing, a window behind him opened and he was called into the house. He was admitted to a gorgeous room where two elderly gentlemen were seated, who were preparing to have a bet to resolve an argument.

The gents told Henry that he would answer their purpose and they proceeded to hand him an envelope and told him not to open until later. When he did so he discovered a £1,000,000 bank note and he was perplexed. He returned to the house to clarify the position with the two gents only to discover that they had gone abroad and would not be back for a month. He then realised there was a letter accompanying the bank note and when he read it he realised that he had a loan of the money until the men returned, when he had to present himself to them once more.

The letter also told him that there was a bet on him and if the writer won the bet, Henry could have any situation that was in his gift to give him. Henry went away and enjoyed the ensuing month; he was unable to spend the £1,000,000 note because nobody would accept it from him. But the fact that he had it as security stood in his stead and he was feted and indulged wherever he went.

He met an old friend who was surprised to see him apparently so affluent and he used Henry's name to further his own investment opportunities, in which Henry joined. Then Henry meets a young lady, Portia Langham, with whom he falls in love. They have a variety of exciting adventures before the time is due for him to visit the gentlemen once more and he asks Portia to accompany him.

She duly does so and a surprise awaited him because the respective gent had won his bet; at least it allowed Henry to state that there was a situation open that he would like and it was ... oh, well it's a real surprise and it is in the book ...!

As a footnote I should warn prospective readers that there are two serious typographical errors in this edition. On page one, turning to page two there are words (presumably a line, working it out from the dialogue) missing and on the penultimate page turning to the final page, a sentence ends on the former and on the latter page one begins mid-sentence. Both of them make that part of the tale rather nonsensical.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

3.5 stars. Who knew that Mark Twain wrote a Victorian era version of the Eddie Murphy movie *Trading Places* ... or at least half of it? I'd never heard of this novella before, but it's a fun, quick read.

Henry Adams, a young man working a clerking job in San Francisco, is lost at sea, picked up by another ship and taken to London. When he arrives he is ragged and penniless. It just so happens that a couple of rich brothers have bought up a one-of-a-kind bank note for a million pounds. They make a bet about whether, if they give the bank note to a destitute stranger, he will be able to make something of it, or will be arrested or refused if he tries to cash in or use the money. Henry Adams happens to walk by their window, and becomes the subject of their human nature experiment.

It's an amusing read (of course, it's Mark Twain) with a can-do main character and just a little romance (instalove, more for smiles than feelz). My favorite passage:

I handed the note to him, and said:

"Oh, very well; I apologize."

He received it with a smile, one of those large smiles which goes all around over, and has folds in it, and wrinkles, and spirals, and looks like the place where you have thrown a brick in a pond; and then in the act of his taking a glimpse of the bill this smile froze solid, and turned yellow, and looked like those wavy, wormy spreads of lava which you find hardened on little levels on the side of Vesuvius.

Free to read online here at AmericanLiterature.com.

Sara Booklover says

In questa edizione ABEditore vi è sia la storia "La banconota da un milione di sterline" che il racconto breve (di qualche pagina) "Il mio orologio".

La storia che fa da titolo al libro è una storia surreale e lievemente umoristica, che ricorda la scommessa tra i due uomini facoltosi del film "Una poltrona per due" (chiaramente l'idea di base del film è stata presa da questo racconto di Twain, anche se a parte questo i contenuti sono diversi). I risvolti della storia sono un po' ingenui, ma in definitiva risulta una lettura piacevole. Un plauso particolare va alla veste grafica del libro, curata in ogni dettaglio, sia dentro che fuori, che lo rende un piccolo gioiello da collezione.

Alethea says

I guess this was mildly amusing. It was also mildly satirical. Some of the prose invoked humorous visuals. But by-and-large this was a trifle of a thing. Maybe this was super entertaining in 1893, but in 2018 it's pretty dull.

[In 1954 this short story was turned into a film that was equally lackluster. Read my review on Letterboxd.]

Pramod Nair says

Imagine for a second that you have accidentally acquired an object of immense value, or a stash of immense wealth; a fortune that is not legally yours and one you can only admire privately; a fortune, which you cannot personally sell or encash for the fear of getting caught up in legal muddles; a fortune that will have no takers even if donated freely; then what will be this fortune to you? It will be an immense burden, right? Nah... Not

for *Harry Adams*.

So who is 'Harry Adams'? Well, he is the hero of our story, '**The Million Pound Bank Note**' written by *Mark Twain* originally in 1893; an old fashioned tale, which inspects the real meaning of money and fairness in one's character over the possession of wealth narrated with a fair dosage of Twain's signature satire. The story is set in London and we can glimpse the realistic nature with which the author represents the social and economic thoughts of the time in the characters that he creates, in '*The Million Pound Bank Note*' too.

In the beginning of the story we meet a young Harry Adams - who was a clerk with a mining-broker at San Francisco - walking penniless and in rags through the streets of *Victorian London* as the victim of a freak boat accident, which took him away from his comparatively comfortable job and life in America. We meet him as an absolute stranger in town with no money desperately fighting against hunger pangs when he gets acquainted with two immensely rich eccentric brothers.

These brothers were arguing about '*what will happen to a honest & intelligent person when he comes in custody of a million pound bank note, with nothing else in his possession*'. One brother was of the opinion that such a man, with no way to prove the manner in which he came into possession of such a heavy value bank note, will die of hunger, while the other brother was of the opinion that such a man will survive on the mere symbolic ownership of such a vast wealth. To settle their argument they decide on a wager and it was in these circumstances that our hero meets them. They gift him with an envelope and sends him away asking him to open the envelope once he is back at his place of residence.

Finding a bank note within the envelope Harry decides to have a square meal at a dining place and gets the shock of his life when he finds that the bank note that was given to him was actually of the value of one million pounds. When the owner of the diner finds that Harry is in possession of such a heavy denomination bank note, he refuses to take money from him thinking of Harry as a millionaire and begs him to dine at his establishment during his stay in the town with an infinitely extended credit. From the letter Harry learns about the bet between the brothers and that he has to meet them exactly after one month and then they will reward him with a job on the successful completion of the bet.

From a man who was longing for a discarded pear at the gutter for satisfying his hunger, the possession of the bank note changes things drastically for Harry. Overnight he becomes the '*notoriety of the metropolis*' and '*the eccentric foreigner*' who carries million pound bank notes in his pocket, and every establishment in town was extending Harry with unlimited credits. In the society columns of newspapers he becomes the '*vest pocket million pounder*' and even the *Punch* magazine celebrates him with a caricature within their magazine. The mere possession of this million pound bank note opens every door for Harry. And when he gets invited to a dinner party featuring the cream of London's social circles, he meets the beautiful *Portia Langham* and it is there the real story of Harry's success begins. Twain's narrative is slick and is loaded in humor as he presents the reader with the rest of the story about Harry's life and his success in gaining wealth, social acceptance and love of a beautiful girl all leading to a surprising climax.

Did the Million Pound Bank note really exist?

The plot of the story of '*The Million Pound Bank Note*' revolves around the sheer impossibility of encasing a heavy value bank note by a common man. Within this story it is narrated that only two such notes were ever issued and any one who walks into a bank to cash that note will be walking himself into a legal tangle with the prospect of jail term. So, does such million pound bank notes really exist? Let's do a bit of digging around for the purpose of satisfying the curiosity over this question.

Such Higher value pound bank notes do exist, and they were usually used for transactions within the banks. *The Bank of England* uses the 'one million' and 'hundred million' pound bank notes to maintain the parity with bank notes issued by *Scottish* and *Northern Irish* bank notes. These notes – the one million ones are called 'giants' and comes in A5 size and the hundred million ones are the 'titans' having an A4 size - are more like IOU documents and they are special issues from Bank of England to meet the requirement of backing pound for pound the notes issued by banks in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

One of the nine one-million pound notes issued in connection with the Marshall Plan on August 30, 1948

Nine such one-million pound notes were issued in connection with the 'Marshall Plan', corresponding to the loan from US after the World War II in 1948. After cancellation, of these nine only seven were destroyed and two survived with private collectors. Such high value notes are not usually found in the normal transactional scenes and it is believed that notes worth eight billion pounds were printed in these heavy denominations in total.

Back to our story...

Twain can generate humor from narrations of unrealistic and often absurdly simple situations and 'The Million Pound Bank Note' is a nice example for his storytelling abilities. Even though personally I have a lot of objections towards many of the viewpoints that Mark Twain held in his personal life and his outlook towards many worldly matters, I admire him as a narrator who can keep the readers engaged using clever plots and witty situations. The way in which he reflects the time period of the narrative within his narrative is another applaudable factor. 'The Million Pound Bank Note' can be a delight for those who love charming stories.

Side Note: 'The Million Pound Bank Note' by Twain was made into a number of movie and TV show adaptations, and I have really enjoyed the 1954 'Ronald Neame' adaptation starring 'Gregory Peck'.

Actual Rating: 3.5/5 Review added on Oct-14, '15

Michael Jennings says

"Could I afford it? No; I had nothing in the world but a million pounds."
