

Review

Lessons for Britain in Marryat's *The Children of the New Forest*

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Captain Frederick Marryat was born in a political family. His father, Joseph Marryat was a famous Conservative politician and Member of Parliament in Great Britain. For that, Marryat lived in a family with Conservative ideas and attitudes about his country. *The Children of the New Forest*, was written by his Conservative mind. This essay is dedicated to finding his Conservative sympathies towards the dethroned and the murdered King Charles I. However, it does not mean that his support for the loyal followers of the King was partial. He shows the mistakes of both of the sides and the essay will find a conclusion that Marryat made for the people of the Victorian era and the British posterity. Marryat also shows some elements of the Victorian society. He triumphs over the strong unity of the Crown and Parliament. What seemed wrong for some time, seems right now. This essay shows how Marryat reaches this conclusion. Another aspect of the essay goes to the love of the nature and Romanticism in the Victorian age and the English life before that era which is inherent in *The Children of the New Forest*.

Key words: British posterity, Conservative ideas, politics, Romanticism, unity, Victorian society.

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INTRODUCTION

Marryat was a royal navy officer who helped Great Britain to extend her empire. He was a writer who lived in the Victorian era. In his *The Children of the New Forest*, he refers to the bloody civil war that his country had back in the seventeenth century. At the time of the civil war in Great Britain, Cromwell and his side called the Levellers who were mostly members of the middle-class revolted

against King Charles I and dethroned the King of England. Marryat who was a member of the Conservative party showed sympathy for the King's side and shows the suffering and waiting that the royal supporters had during the civil wars. He also endeavoured to condemn the Parliamentary side and show the corruption in their side.

It should not be assumed that Marryat criticised all the

soldiers and members of the Parliamentary side and the Levellers, as he tries to differentiate between the good and bad of the Levellers as he makes a comparison between those who wanted to execute King Charles I and the ones who did not. He also tries to find the reasons of the civil war back in the seventeenth century. Marryat sees many things as the real cause of the startling of the bloody war. He refers to the absolutism of the King, the evil action of the Levellers and the uncertainty of some people for example when he refers to the Levellers who did not know how they could behave when facing the monarch.

By showing all the facts and figures that Marryat shows in *The Children of the New Forest*, Marryat makes effort to show a Victorian conclusion. The conclusion is that if a nation faces a sort of problem, the people should stick with unity, whether it is a political unity or a unity between the individuals as it is well reflected in the novel. One important lesson every Briton has to learn is to experience the past and have a strong future.

DISCUSSION

The Children of the New Forest has its setting in the seventeenth century. Before the text can be analysed, it should be taken into account that Marryat was a Conservative politician who served in the Royal Navy. His novel which is also his masterpiece is written from a Conservative perspective and point of view. As Victor Watson says in *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Book in English*, it is "a story of the Civil War, the first historical tale for children to remain popular up to the present day" (479). He seems to support the King's side and feel sympathy for him and his loyal supporters. All of his Conservative perspective and point of view, however, leads to a kind of conclusion in Queen Victoria's time. An imperialism which spread to a quarter of the world and he takes a flash back to the civil war as a Victorian man and as a person who lives in an imperialist country. He resolves that both of the sides had some mistakes and that Britain should learn some important lessons from the past.

Marryat in his novel sharply condemns and criticises the revolt and uprising that Cromwell and his supporters who were called as Levellers. For that he refers to the suffering and pains that the King's side had to suffer. He also refers to the uncertainty that the society had to sustain. Nobody knew what was going to happen in the future and Marryat knows Cromwell and the Parliamentary side, the major cause for that. In the novel, Jacob was a King's appointed guardian for the forest. But as time goes on, and Parliament takes control of the country, he loses his position and fears being arrested. He does not ever understand the new terms used by the Parliamentarians. Marryat describes the

state, Jacob was in and says,

"And so the king has escaped," thought Jacob, as he went along, "and he may be in the forest! Who knows? But he may be at Arnwood, for he must hardly know where to go for shelter? I must haste and see Miss Judith immediately. 'Levellers, to horse!' the fellow said. What's a Leveller?" thought Jacob (6).

Marryat goes on to say to his audience that the word Leveller never fits Parliamentary side. They were called Levellers because at first they believed anyone should be equal but step by step as they managed to dethrone King Charles I, they moved far away from their promise and kept some privileges for themselves. Soon, a bill was passed in Parliament and turned into a new law. The new law stated that if a home, house, castle, palace or any other kinds of property was owned by a Royal side, then parliament had the right to destroy or burn the property and whether the ownership of a property was unknown then Parliament had the right to own it. In a property near Southampton waters were living the Beverley family. The head of the family was Colonel Beverley. He was a Royal supporter and in favour of King Charles I. When he goes to war, he gets wounded and dies. After his death his four children, Edward, Humphrey, Judith and Edith become orphans and do not know what to do. They decide to leave the forest and go to the old forester and pretend to be his grandchildren. When Arnwood becomes leaderless, Parliament decides to own the property.

The writer of *The Children of the New Forest*, also refers to some religious points. As it is widely known, one of the causes of the English civil war was religion. England was a Christian country but the differences between the branches of Christianity and their followers led to the conflict. These conflicts had started from the time of King Henry VIII, but it had remained silenced since the moderate policies of Queen Elizabeth I. From that time on, most of the English people decided to be Protestants. When King Charles I, ascended the throne, he explicitly declared that he was a Catholic. This again led to the conflicts among a nation whose ideas were Protestant. Marryat in his novel refers novel refers to the religious points. He wants to say that unlike the claims that the Roundheads had, they were less Christ like in comparison to the King and the Cavaliers. To Marryat, the Roundhead did not even know the basic principles of Christianity and they were stuck in the seven deadly sins. For example he refers to the gluttony of the Roundhead soldiers says,

The troopers took him at his word; they sat down to the table, and very soon the whole contents of the kettle had disappeared. Having satisfied themselves, they got up, told him that his rations

were so good that they hoped to call again; and, laughing heartily, they mounted their horses, and rode away (21).

He also refers to the righteousness of the King and his Christ like figure because as he points to the words of Jacob, the old forester, he describes the processes of Charles I's imprisonment by Parliament. All of these show the cruelty of the Parliamentary forces and the innocence of the Cavaliers.

An important thing that Marryat refers to is the case of Englishness. Whether Cromwell's uprising led to a better England or it led to an England where the majority of the people are not satisfied with the revolution in which he was the leader. To Marryat, Cromwell's opposition to the King and the royal forces did not solve the problem and to the writer of the story, revolution was not ever a good solution. When Jacob, the old forester and all the children of the Beverley family were eating their food on the table, they expected King Charles I to return to the throne and because of the dilemma they were trapped in, they were all unhappy. Here not only does the dining table and its users represent the home in which the old forester and the Beverleys lived, but also it signifies all the English people and as a matter of fact, the mere Englishness. Englishness goes in line with the monarchy and the monarchy is the only source to preserve the true Englishness.

One of the striking things that Marryat refers to is all the people on the Cromwell's side are not the same. He wants to assert that it should not be perceived that all the persons from the Parliamentary side were evil or anti-monarchy. It is well shown in the novel that some of the Levellers dispute the King's execution. What prevails in history and Marryat's novel is that some of the Levellers only wanted to oppose the King on his policies but not to execute him. When Cromwell decided to be more extreme some of the Levellers who had better passions and were kinder, disputed the extremism which Cromwell was leading. What makes the dispute stronger is that the Levellers who disputed the case, said they did not really mean this extremism which could annihilate their honour by killing the most respectable man in England. Marryat is indirectly suggesting his friends and Conservative friends that they should forgive the ones who opposed Cromwell and know them different from the persons who were real extremists. The differentiation comes to a climax when Edward converses with Mr Heather stone, an agent of the Roundheads, who wholeheartedly regrets the Levellers' action of executing King Charles I.

One of the most important things that Marryat refers to is the case of nobility. To him all the nobility and becoming conduct pertained to the followers and supporters of monarchy and not the Parliamentary men. As Edward talks with Oswald, he tells him that a hart royal is not the meat for the Parliamentary men but for

the King's men. Hart royal is the meat of an adult deer which is very delicious. This meat was eaten at royal ceremonies and Edward refers to the meat to show that if England wants the glamour and hope of nobility, the monarchy is the only solution to the case.

What is really evident in the novel is the importance of the role of family. As it was said before, the Beverleys became sad and lonely in the society after losing their father. Then, Edward, his eldest son, became the oldest member of the family. He tried to have a leadership like the sort his father had. Trying to attain his father's sword and keeping it as if it were a part of his body can mean that he meant to keep on the leadership his father had in the past. Edward and his brother Humphrey shared the roles of the family, Edward was to care for the national interests and the British society and Humphrey for that of farming and managing the home while Edward was far from home. They even knew Jacob, the old forester, like their grandfather and a person who gave them the boost to continue their lives and Jacob sometimes introduced them as his grandchildren while it was known for decades that Jacob had neither children nor grandchildren As Mathew Grenby says in his *Children's Literature*,

Frederick Marryat's *Children of the New Forest* (1847), for instance, begins when the four Beverley children are orphaned during the English Civil War, and follows their adventures as they learn to live hidden deep in the forest. Having been deprived of their family, the children almost immediately seek to recreate it. The eldest boy and girl, Edward and Alice, become the father and mother, while Humphrey and Edith play the roles of their children, gradually growing to maturity by following their elders' example. They even pretend that their old servant, Jacob, is the grandfather, ostensibly to give them a credible identity when they go to town, but clearly demonstrating their desire to reconstruct a family (142).

An important aspect of the novel is when Marryat decides to talk about a historical thing. The Levellers started an uprising to make a country able to have freedom of speech but when Edward Beverley opposes Cromwell, the intendant, Mr Heatherstone demands him to be silent because his words are treasonable. Edward again repudiates Parliament and says he is a subject of King Charles II and because of that he has the freedom of speech. By narrating such an event Marryat wants to assert that the claim of the insurrectionary forces for having a country with the freedom of speech was utterly wrong because there was no freedom speech prevailing at Cromwell's time while Edward believes the former King had granted the English people such a present. Another reason for their revolution was that they accused the King

of becoming too absolute while then Cromwell tried to oppose any Levellers and they were split apart and not unified after their bloody revolution. To Marryat, it was a revolution full of blood and undone promises.

As the novel goes on, Marryat reaches a Victorian perspective of the English civil war. In the Victorian age, Britain was triumphing over two important assets, the monarchy and Parliament. There was a unity between Queen Victoria and Parliament and Britain had the most politically stable government as well as possessing a quarter of the world. Marryat makes a flashback to find the mistakes of both the sides. The mistakes are well represented in the conversation of the intendant, Mr Heatherstone with Edward Beverley. Mr Heatherstone says that the mistake of the Parliamentary men was that they got so rash and unthoughtful with the behaviour. A characteristic which he sees very clearly in Edward and commends Edward not to have the same mistake. He also believes that the King, too, made a mistake and it was to make himself too absolute. To the intendant those were the mistakes which startled the civil war. When the two sides decided to co-operate with each other, England became a worldly power, something which Marryat wants to say implicitly. As D Butts says in his "Dogs and cats: the nineteenth-century historical novel for children",

Marryat's Royalist sympathies reflect the perceived usurpation of this balance of power by Oliver Cromwell's Roundhead Revolution, but the denunciation of extremists of both Parliamentarian and Royalist causes in the novel reflects the Victorian model of a thrusting and evangelising nation state ruled by Parliament and a constitutional monarchy (5).

Something which is so important in the process of England's becoming a worldly power is the learning, the country attained step by step. This kind of learning is displayed in the character of Edward Beverley. Edward Beverley is at first a rash and unthoughtful person, a characteristic which prevailed in both sides. Then Edward becomes more thoughtful and in that case the country attains glorious achievements. Again when England has her people more thoughtful and co-operative, she becomes a worldly power. To the writer of the story, this process was unavoidable because England needed to learn an important but a bloody lesson, and that was the lesson of co-operation, common sense and forgiveness.

The unity between the monarch and Parliament is shown through the characters of *The Children of the New Forest*. Edward Beverley is at first a rash and inexperienced character who knows himself a royal subject to the King. Then he learns some new lessons that the King, too had some mistakes as well. His conversations with Mr Heatherstone and Patience

Heatherstone's kindness makes him conclude that all the people on the Parliamentary side are not what he thought and he reforms his old opinions about them. His love for patience and stating his love to her is a good and typical representation of the sweetness of the unity in the country. Edward and patience are to live a good life in the future as England is hopeful to present a hopeful future to the posterity.

Marryat in *The Children of the New Forest*, refers to the intervention of the foreign forces in the civil war and makes a conclusion. During the war in England the French showed that they never want the success of the English monarch. The Spanish too did not prefer to help very much. Marryat narrates,

Time flew on, and in the year 1654 the court of France concluded an alliance with Cromwell, and expelled King Charles from the French frontiers. The war was still carried on in the Netherlands. Turenne bore down Conde, who had gained every campaign; and the court of Spain, wearied with reverses, made overtures of peace, which was gladly accepted by the French (247).

Marryat concludes that the only fighters there were the English and their Scotch friends who made a political union of Great Britain. By this conclusion he comes to the point of a British triumph which was typical of the age of Queen Victoria.

The kind of experience Edward gains is also prevalent in the other persons of the Beverley, for example his younger brother Humphrey learns how to hunt pigs, stags and royal harts. His sisters Alice and Edith learn how to cook and do the household chores. These are all prevalent again to the learning of the British people. The lesson was, to succeed in the domain of the world, the people of the country should count only on themselves and the only choice is to focus on progress and advancement which is again another aspect of the Victorian virtue and belief.

The text has some Romantic aspects as well especially when Edward sees the King. He listens to everything the King says and knows the time an enjoyable moment. When King Charles II attends the wedding of Edward and Beverley, he knows the wedding a kind of reward for their loyalty as the writer narrates,

About a year after the Restoration, there was a fete at Hampton Court, given in honour of three marriages taking place—Edward Beverley to Patience Heatherstone, Chaloner to Alice, and Grenville to Edith; and, as his majesty himself said, as he gave away the brides, "Could loyalty be better rewarded? (254)

As the King says, Edward, Alice and Edith have been

awarded by the heaven because of their loyalty to the King. Marryat invites his English readers to show the same passion for their country and monarch and hope for the same future as that of the time of the Restoration.

Not only is there a romantic side of the politics by Charles II's return to the country, but also there is a romantic desire for the nature. Edward and Humphrey are not only concerned with Britain's new situation in current politics but also they are vexed with how they should earn the money for the Beverleys' food and other important materials and ingredients. For that, Edward seeks job, although he wants to remain loyal to the King's side. He has to work for Heatherstone, a person who supported Cromwell but not as radical as the other persons of the left-wing. For working Edward has to go to Heatherstone's home through the forest. This forest is reminiscent of the good past and a display of the current cruelty which is very well-shown in the novel. Humphrey and Edward decide to devise plans to catch cows, hunt deer which is taught by the old forester himself and make food by any plans which may be possible. In his essay, "Hunting and the Natural World in Juvenile Literature", J M Mackenzie says,

The Victorians were enthralled by the natural world. As the nineteenth century progressed they extended and deepened romantic responses by seeing nature as a prime region of scientific endeavour, as an arena for establishing human dominance through the creation of pattern and design, and as a source of moral training for the young (145).

As it is evident, this is a theme which was inherent in the Victorian era and the English life which had this quality from back in the seventeenth century. A love of nature in the British society which is shown both in difficult and pleasant times.

CONCLUSION

What Marryat is considering is from a Conservative point of view. He always supported the Conservative party as his father was a Member of Parliament. The Conservatives always supported the monarchy and that is why Marryat has a royal sympathy towards King Charles I. Marryat poses a question and that is whether the revolt of the Levellers led by Oliver Cromwell made the country better or not. When he concludes that it did not have the good results the Parliamentarians hoped, he starts blaming Cromwell and his supporters as Cromwell is shown like a radical person by some of his followers because he believed the king had to be executed while

the others opposed his controversial decision.

The Conservative view and perspective that Marryat had does not prevent him from being a good judge at analysing the historical past. Although he blames the Puritans and the Levellers and the Parliamentary sides who followed Oliver Cromwell in the war, he also criticises some of the mistakes of the royal side. He believes the uprising was not necessary but he also points out that the King should not have been so absolute. By merging and gathering all the analysis he reaches a very important point. He reaches a Victorian idea of the past and that is Great Britain should learn from the mistakes of the past and have a strong unity as it is represented by showing the happy Restoration and the marriage of Edward Beverley and Patience Heatherstone. Edward is a person from noble blood and Patience is from the Parliamentary side. They are going to live happily ever after. This life also refers to Britain so that Marryat wants to say that the only way for having a stronger Britain is sticking with the unity of Parliament and the monarchy something that was prevalent in Victorian England.

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