

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

► By Alexander Baron

Summary

Private Quelch was a serious looking, lanky, stooping and bespectacled man whom the writer met at the training centre. He was very fond of showing off his knowledge and was in the habit of sermonising. So he became an object of fun, sarcasm and was nicknamed 'Professor'. During lessons of musketry, he would interrupt the Sergeant during the lecture and try to correct him. Private Quelch could answer a lot of questions and when others marvelled, his standard answer was, "It's all a matter of intelligent reading."

In course of time, the writer and his teammates discovered more about Private Quelch. He was very competitive, wanted quick promotion and always tried to appear better than others. He read a lot, attacked his instructors with questions and on every occasion tried to belittle and overshadow others. Private Quelch's behaviour was very condescending and he would try to appear exceptional before his seniors. Whether it was to identify an aircraft or handling of a rifle, he would tower over others and irritate them. He was unstoppable in his pretentious behaviour.

Corporal Turnbull, who was highly renowned for his toughness, was not a person to be taken lightly. When Quelch tried to correct the corporal, he got offended and asked Quelch to change places with him. Though Quelch delivered a brilliant lecture, it was for sure that he had stirred up trouble. Corporal Turnbull took his revenge by delegating Quelch for permanent cook house duties. But who could stop Quelch, his sermonising continued even within the four walls of the kitchen. However, the writer and his friends had a surge of immense relief that they were temporarily rid of a great nuisance like Private Quelch.

सारांश

प्राइवेट क्वेलच मोटा चश्मा पहनने वाला, दुबला-पतला, लम्बा-चौड़ा, झुका हुआ गम्भीर दिखने वाला आदमी था। लेखक उससे पहली बार सेना के प्रशिक्षण स्थान पर मिला था। उसे प्रवचन देने और अपने ज्ञान का प्रदर्शन करने की आदत थी। इसी कारण सभी ने उसे 'प्रोफेसर' का खिताब दिया था और सभी उसका उपहास करते थे। जब एक सार्जेंट कुछ बोल रहा होता था, तब

क्वेलच उसकी गलतियाँ ठीक करने लगता था। प्राइवेट बहुत से प्रश्नों का उत्तर दे सकता था और लोगों के पूछने पर वह उसको "समझदारी से पढ़ने" का परिणाम बताता था।

थोड़े ही समय में उसके साथियों को प्राइवेट क्वेलच के बारे में बहुत कुछ मालूम हो गया। उसका, शीघ्रताशीघ्र पदोन्नति प्राप्त करने का लक्ष्य था और वह हमेशा दूसरों से ज्यादा बेहतर दिखना चाहता था। इस लक्ष्य की प्राप्ति के लिए अधिक से अधिक पढ़ता था। वह अपने से ऊँचे अधिकारियों से अधिक प्रश्न पूछता था और सदा दूसरों को नीचा दिखाने का प्रयत्न करता था। उसका व्यवहार बहुत ही घमंड से भरा होता था और वह अपने उच्च अधिकारियों के आगे बहुत ही ज्ञानी और अनुभवी लगना चाहता था। प्रश्न कुछ भी हो, एक हवाईजहाज की पहचान या एक बन्दूक को कैसे पकड़ा जाये, वह हर समय दूसरों से अधिक बुद्धिमान लगना चाहता था। उसके इस व्यवहार से सब चिढ़ते थे पर उसे कोई भी रोक नहीं पाता था।

एक दिन क्वेलच ने प्रोफेसर टर्नबुल से टक्कर ली और उनकी गलती सुधारनी चाही। प्रोफेसर एक सख्त व्यक्ति थे और अपने कठोर स्वभाव के लिए प्रसिद्ध थे। उनसे क्वेलच की उद्दण्डता सहन नहीं हुई और उन्होंने क्वेलच को लेखक देने के लिए कहा। क्वेलच ने अति उत्तम भाषण दिया पर प्रोफेसर ने बदले में उसे रसोई घर में स्थायी रसोइया बना दिया। पर क्वेलच को कौन रोक सकता था? वह रसोई घर की चारदिवारी में भी प्रवचन देता रहा। लेखक और उसके दोस्तों ने चैन की सांस ली। उन्हें कुछ समय के लिए प्राइवेट क्वेलच से छुटकारा जो मिल गया।

Word-Meaning

- **Mechanism** – the way in which something works
- **Enhance** – to increase
- **Badgered** – to pester someone to do something
- **Droning** – talking in a boring way
- **Remorseless** – without regret or guilt
- **Sarcasm** – words used to mock at someone
- **Drone** – make a low continuous humming sound
- **Louts** – rude or aggressive men
- **Segmentation** – division into parts
- **Resume** – to continue after a pause
- **Impassive** – not feeling or showing emotion
- **Intentness** – purpose
- **Lingeringly** – in a slow motion
- **Monotonous** – boring and unchanging
- **Abominably** – unpleasant manner

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

1. The 'Professor' knew too much. How did he prove himself? Fill up the space with suitable examples from the story, using the given clues:

(a) About muzzle velocity : _____

Ans : When the sergeant told the trainees that the muzzle velocity at which the bullet leaves the rifle is well over two thousand feet per second, the Professor intervened and said that it was two thousand four hundred and forty per second.

(b) After a thirty mile walk : _____

Ans : Quelch would pretend to be tireless even after a very exhausting 30 mile walk and would try to appear very jovial by asking others to sing a song.

(c) His salute on payday : _____

Ans : On payday, when the officers were in sight, he would swing his thin arms and march to the canteen like a Guardsman.

(d) The loud sound of a high flying invisible aeroplane : _____

Ans : On hearing the loud sound of a high flying invisible aeroplane, the 'Professor' said that it was a North American Harvard Trainer.

(e) About-hand grenades :

Ans : When Corporal Turnbull said that the outside of a grenade is divided into a large number of fragments, the 'Professor' said that it was divided into forty-four segments.

(f) During cook house duties : _____

Ans : During his cook house duties too the 'Professor' protested against the unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling the potatoes, saying that it led to the loss of vitamins.

2. Based on your reading of the story, answer the following questions by choosing the correct options.

(a) Private Quelch was nicknamed 'Professor' because of _____ .

- (i) his appearance
- (ii) his knowledge
- (iii) his habit of reading
- (iv) his habit of sermonising

Ans : (iv) his habit of sermonising.

(b) One could hammer nails into Corporal Turnbull without his noticing it because _____ .

- (i) he was a strong and sturdy man
- (ii) he was oblivious to his surroundings

(iii) he was a brave corporal

(iv) he was used to it

Ans : (i) he was a strong and sturdy man.

(c) The author and his friend Trower fled from the scene as _____ .

- (i) they had to catch a train
- (ii) they could not stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge
- (iii) they felt they would have to lend a helping hand.
- (iv) they did not want to meet the cooks.

Ans : (ii) they couldn't stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge.

3. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) What is 'nickname'? Can you suggest one for Private Quelech?

Ans : A nickname is a name jokingly substituted for a regular name. Another nickname for Quelch could be – Pretentious Bully.

(b) Private Quelch looked like a 'Professor' when the author first met him at the training depot. Why?

Ans : Private Quelch was thin, walked with a stoop, kept frowning and wore spectacles like a scholar. His habit of sermonising, giving lectures and exhibiting his knowledge earned him the nickname of a 'Professor'.

(c) What does the dark, sun-dried appearance of the sergeant suggest about him?

Ans : Sergeant's appearance suggests that he was tough and had been exposed to all kinds of weather and places of army life.

(d) How does Private Quelch expose his knowledge even further as the sergeant's classes went on?

Ans : Quelch not only corrected sergeant's knowledge of the rifle but he could answer all the questions directed towards him. He was particularly very good with technical definitions.

(e) What did the Professor mean by "intelligent reading"?

Ans : Quelch was diligent, had brains, thirst for knowledge and he put all these to intelligent use. Since he remembered every thing precisely and used his knowledge at critical junctures to impress his instructors, he termed it 'intelligent reading'.

(f) What were the Professor's ambitions in the army?

Ans : Professor Quelch wanted to race ahead of all his batch in getting commission. His first step was to get a stripe.

(g) *Did Private Quelch's day to day practices take him closer towards his goal? How can you make out?*

Ans : Quelch was highly ambitious, very diligent, brainy but his strategy to impress his instructors, backfired. In pursuit of showing off his own knowledge, he irritated and tried to belittle his instructors. He rudely interrupted them in front of the squad and exhibited his knowledge. No wonder he is relegated to the back quarters of the kitchen house.

(h) *Describe Turnbull.*

Ans : Corporal Turnbull had a great reputation of being tough and was not the one to be rubbed the wrong way. The squad were in awe of him and it was believed that one could hammer nails into him and the fellow would not even wince. He was young and had recently come from Dunkirk.

(i) *How did Private Quelch manage to anger the corporal?*

Ans : Private Quelch not only interrupted the Corporal rudely by needlessly elaborating the Corporal's explanation of a grenade, he also had the audacity to compare him to another instructor and tell him how he should deliver his instructions.

(j) *Do you think Private Quelch learnt a lesson when he was chosen for cookhouse duties? Give reason for your answer.*

Ans : Private Quelch was conceited and satisfied in his own cocoon. He was totally indifferent to what others thought about him. When he was relegated to cook house duties, he might have felt bad temporarily but he would never change. It is evident from his lecture in the cookhouse, that some thickheads are too thick to change.

4. Write down the positive and negative traits of Private Quelch's character and instances from the story.

Ans :

Positive traits

Instances from the story

- (i) He was very hardworking.
He sat up reading books till late night.
- (ii) He was very confident.
He had the guts to interrupt his instructors like the sergeant and even Corporal Turnbull.
- (iii) He was blessed with an excellent memory.
He could remember technical definitions and other information very precisely.
- (iv) He appeared most enthusiastic and tireless.
He could think of a song, even after 30 miles of walk.

Negative traits

Instances from the story

- (i) He was not pleasant in his looks.
He always had a frown, was lanky and stooped.
- (ii) He was very condescending to his team-mates.
He would pretend to help and show off in the bargain.
- (iii) He was tactless and ill-mannered.
He rudely interrupted his instructors and pretended to have superior knowledge than them.
- (iv) Quelch's worst flaw was his tendency to overshadow others.
He needlessly tried to show his knowledge, belittle and humiliate others.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow by choosing the option you consider the most appropriate.

1. *'The Sergeant asked, "You had any training before?"*

(a) **Who is 'You' referred to here?**

- (i) The author
- (ii) Quelch
- (iii) The Corporal
- (iv) The cook

(b) **Why did the sergeant ask this question?**

- (i) He was impressed
- (ii) He was furious
- (iii) He felt interrupted
- (iv) He wanted to know the name of the training institute

(c) **In reply, the person**

- (i) boasted of his intelligent reading
- (ii) kept quiet

(iii) told the name of the training institute

(iv) gave the credit of his knowledge to the sergeant

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (iii) (c) (i)

2. *'His salute at the pay table was a model to behold.'*

(a) **Who is 'his' referred to here?**

- (i) The Corporal
- (ii) The Sergeant
- (iii) Author's friend 'Trower'
- (iv) Professor

(b) **What is the tone of the writer here?**

- (i) Sarcastic
- (ii) Sympathetic
- (iii) Appreciative
- (iv) Fearful

(c) **What would he do when he saw the officers?**

- (i) He would stop to let them pass
- (ii) He would bow before them

- (iii) He would look down upon them
- (iv) He would swing his skinny arms and march to the canteen like a guardsman

Ans : (a) (iv) (b) (i) (c) (iv)

3. 'The squad listened in a cowed, horrified kind of silence.'

(a) To whom was the squad listening?

- (i) The Corporal (ii) Quelch
- (iii) The writer (iv) The sergeant

(b) What was the person giving lecture on?

- (i) The war (ii) A worrying incident
- (iii) Hand grenade (iv) A natural calamity

(c) Why was the squad 'horrified'?

- (i) They were shocked at the rudeness of the Professor
- (ii) They could not understand the lecture
- (iii) The lecture was too boring
- (iv) The squad was afraid of punishment

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (iii) (c) (i)

4. 'Through the open door, we could see the three cooks standing against the wall as if at bay.'

(a) Who is 'we' referred to?

- (i) The Squad
- (ii) The Writer and Trower
- (iii) The Sergeant and the Writer
- (iv) The Writer and the Corporal

(b) What is meant by 'at bay'?

- (i) Trapped and Cornered
- (ii) To shout at someone
- (iii) To learn something
- (iv) To delay work

(c) Who was sermonising the three cooks?

- (i) The Corporal
- (ii) The Canteen incharge
- (iii) The Professor
- (iv) The Sergeant

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (i) (c) (iii)

NON-MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

1. "The squad listened in a cowed, horrified kind of silence."

(a) To whom was the squad listening ?

Ans. The squad was listening to the lecture being given by Professor who was asked by Corporal to replace him.

(b) What was the person giving lecture on ?

Ans. The person was giving a lecture on the hand grenade.

(c) Why was the squad 'horrified' ?

Ans. The squad was horrified because they were shocked at the impertinence of the Professor and were apprehensive about its outcome.

2. "Through the open door, we could see the three cooks standing against the wall as if at bay."

(a) Who is 'we' referred to ?

Ans. We here is referred to the writer and his friend, Trower.

(b) What is meant by 'at bay' ?

Ans. 'At bay' here means trapped and cornered.

(c) Who was sermonising the three cooks ?

Ans. It was the Professor who was sermonising the three cooks.

3. "Whenever one of us shone, the Professor outshone him." [CBSE 2011 (Term 2)]

(a) Which quality of the Professor is spoken about ?

Ans. The Professor was highly conceited. He needlessly tried to show his knowledge and humiliate others.

(b) How did the speaker benefit from the Professor as a co-trainee ?

Ans. They were much impressed by the hard work he used to put in pursuit of his ambition, and the amount of knowledge he possessed.

(c) Why couldn't the Professor please his friends despite his excellent intelligence ?

Ans. He could not please them because he always tried to show off his knowledge and tried to belittle and humiliate others.

4. "Forty Four".

"What is that?" The Corporal looked over his shoulders.

"Forty four segments," the Professor beamed at him.

[CBSE 2011 (Term 2)]

(a) What is the occasion of the above talk ?

Ans. It was when Corporal Turnball was delivering a lecture on hand grenade.

(b) Why did the Corporal look back ?

Ans. He did so because the professor had dared to interrupt him while he was delivering a lecture on hand grenade.

(c) What are forty four segments ?

Ans. Forty four segments here refer to the segments outside a hand grenade.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Answer the following briefly.

1. Did the writer's pride in aircraft recognition last long? Why/Why not?

Ans. The writer and his friends used to pride themselves for their capability of recognising an aircraft by its sound. Once, when they went out for a walk, they heard the drone of a plane flying high overhead. Before they could say anything, without even looking up, the professor announced the name of the plane. This was an humbling experience for the writer and his friends.

2. "There was an expression of self-conscious innocence." Explain the context of the above remark.

Ans. This remark indicates that the Professor was always pretending to be innocent, whereas the real motive somewhere at the back of his mind was to show that he was perfect. When the Corporal said, "the platoon officer has asked me to nominate someone for _____" everyone thought that some important work was going to be handed down to Quelch. Quelch was also sure in his mind that it was he who would be appointed, and stood straight, with an expression of self-conscious innocence.

3. Why were the writer and his batch-mates 'thunder-struck' when Quelch tried to correct Corporal Turnbull?

Ans. Corporal Turnbull was not a man with whom one could play the fool or talk or act frivolously. He was a hero for the squad, and they used to tell each other that nobody could easily take him for granted. As usual, Quelch tried to correct the Corporal when he was delivering a lecture on a grenade. The writer and his batchmates were thunder-struck seeing the foolish and daring act of Quelch, and the consequences he would have to face for it.

4. What do Trower and the writer happen to overhear in the cookhouse?

Ans. While returning from the canteen to their hut, the writer and Trower saw through an open door that the three cooks were standing against the wall as if at bay. They overheard the monotonous voice of Quelch who was giving a lecture to the cooks and protesting against the unscientific and unhygienic methods of peeling potatoes, leading to the waste of vitamins.

5. Why did the writer's practical jokes and

sarcasms prove ineffective against Quelch?

Ans. Day in and day out, Quelch lectured the people in his droning, remorseless voice on every aspect of human knowledge. The practical jokes and sarcasms of the writer and his friends proved to be ineffective towards Quelch because the professor never noticed them as he was too busy working for his stripe.

6. How did Quelch march to the canteen?

Ans. The salute of Professor Quelch at the pay table was a model to behold for everyone. When officers were in sight, he would swing his skinny arms and march to the canteen like a Guard.

7. What was the first impression that Quelch left on the writer and his friends?

Ans. Quelch was lanky, stooping and frowning through horn-rimmed spectacles. The first impression he gave to others was that he was very serious and studious kind of a person. Due to this reason, he came to be known as the professor. Those who had any doubts on the subject lost them after five minutes' conversation with him.

8. How does Private Quelch show his knowledge as the Sergeant's classes went on ?

[CBSE 2011 (Term 2)]

Ans. Private Quelch was highly conceited who could not handle his own knowledge. Knowledge, if used to overshadow and belittle others, can never bring significant gains. The same happened the otherday when Sergeant was delivering lecture on hand grenade. Private Quelch interrupted him again and again by giving additional information on the same subject. After the lecture was over, the sergeant assigned him the job of cook house duties to deflate his bloated ego.

9. Why did Private Quelch work so hard to gather knowledge ?

[CBSE 2011 (Term 2)]

Ans. Private Quelch was very ambitious. He was very competitive and wanted quick promotion. In pursuit of his ambition, he worked very hard. He read a lot, attacked his instructors and on every occasion tried to belittle and overshadow others. He would try to appear exceptional before his seniors. He was diligent, enthusiastic and gifted with excellent memory but his modus operandi was wrong.

10. Private Quelch was incorrigible. How far do you agree with the statement ? Give reasons in support of your answer. [CBSE 2011 (Term 2)]

Yes, I agree with the statement that Private Quelch was incorrigible. Although he was brainy, diligent, enthusiastic and gifted with excellent memory but his *modus operandi*

was wrong. He was highly conceited and was very fond of showing off his knowledge. After he offended the corporal and was sent to do cookhouse duties as a punishment, his sermonising continued even within the four walls of the kitchen.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Can you guess the thoughts that were raging in the Sergeant and Corporal Turnbull's minds when Quelch happened to annoy them?

Ans. When Quelch interrupted the Sergeant, initially he did not react much and went on lecturing. But that interruption had angered him terribly in the mind, and so when his lecture was over, perhaps in the hope of revenge, he asked questions after questions from Quelch. The sergeant must have felt terribly miserable and helpless after this as Quelch gave all the answers, and it only resulted in his glory.

In the case of Corporal, interruption by Quelch had a stronger impact. Although initially he also did not react, but his brow tightened, indicating that he completely resented Quelch's interruption. He was more revengeful than the sergeant and to pull Quelch down, he assigned him the job of permanent cookhouse duties.

2. None had ever dared to outsmart and rub the Corporal in the wrong way. No wonder Turnbull's ego was hurt, he felt outraged. He writes an informal letter to his friend, Peter Smith in Dunkirk, expressing his surprise at the unexpected behaviour of a new under-trainee and how he set him right.

Ans. Dear Peter,

Now when I've settled down at this place, I thought of penning down a few lines to you. There is something very strange that I have come across here. Yesterday, while I was taking a lesson on handgrenade, I had an encounter with a very strange under-trainee, called Quelch. Would you believe that he had the audacity and grit to interrupt me in my lecture by giving additional information on the subject just to prove his superiority over others? Not only that, his condescending and rude manner of speaking to me almost brought my blood to a boil.

I thought I must set him right, and so I assigned him the job of cookhouse duties to deflate his bloated ego. I could see that all the other members of the squad were very happy and relieved to get rid of this constant nonsense of Private Quelch. It seems he has just one aim in life-to pull down everybody else around him, so I think the job assigned to him should be able to set him right.

Sometimes, this kind of discipline is also required.

How about you and your new batch there? Rest on meeting.

Yours

Turnbull

3. What were the factors that led to the decline of Private Quelch? Do you think his fall from grace was justified? Why/Why not?

Ans. Private Quelch was a conceited young man who could not handle his own knowledge. He was brainy, diligent, enthusiastic, gifted with excellent memory but his *modus operandi* was wrong. Knowledge, if it is flaunted, used to overshadow and belittle others, can never bring significant gains. Knowledge is humility, its aim is to enlighten others.

In his pursuit of glory, Private Quelch disregards this basic fact. He is very self centred, egoistic and in his desperation to earn a stripe, he happily tries to trample others in the race. His knowledge does not bring glory, it results in condemnation. Sergeant and Corporal Turnbull hate him, they want him out of their way. They sense that he was a nuisance to the squad, so he is relegated to the cookhouse.

Quelch's greatest flaw is that he is not genuine, every gesture, every action is 'put on', artificially planned to impress others. No wonder the squad is fed up of his sermonising through his endless lectures on human behaviour. So his fall from grace was expected and well deserved.

4. You expected appreciation for the Professor from Corporal Turnbull. But it was a shock of your life when the corporal assigned him permanent duty in the cook house. Write a diary entry expressing your feelings for him. (about 125 words)

[CBSE 2011 (Term II)]

Dear Diary

Today was the most shocking day of my life. In the morning when Corporal Turnbull was giving us a lecture on hand grenade, Quelch, as usual, interfered by giving

the detailed knowledge he had on the subject. Corporal did not react and I was feeling very happy inside to see such a knowledgeable person amongst us. And when, after the lecture, corporal showered him with questions, he answered them with ease. I admired him for his diverse knowledge and expected an applaud from the corporal for him. At the end of the session when the corporal said, "The platoon officer has asked me to nominate someone for" I thought that some important work was going to be handed down to Quelch, but I got the shock of my life when he was assigned the cookhouse duties. His knowledge did not bring him glory but resulted in condemnation. I am really feeling sorry for him.

5. Imagine you are the Professor. You have been given the permanent cookhouse duties as a punishment. Write a diary entry describing your feeling about the

experiences you had there and also explaining your side of the story. [CBSE 2011 (Term II)]

Dear Diary,

29th August 2011

Today I felt greatly depressed and dejected when I was assigned permanent cook house duties for no fault of mine. Never in my mind I had imagined that I'll be punished for my knowledge. I didn't want to annoy the corporal by exhibiting my knowledge of the subject. My sole aim was to excel in my field because being an orphan I had struggled a lot and wanted to do something big in my life. But it was very unfortunate of me that I did not know the right way to behave in the army as there was no body to guide me. I do not know what destiny has in store for me. Whatever has happened I accept it as God's will and will try to improve upon myself.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

(A) LISTENING / SPEAKING ACTIVITY

Share a personal experience with others in the class regarding a friend who was snobbish and conceited like Private Quelch.

(B) WRITING

Write an article on the topic, "The Art of Bragging : A malady in want of remedy".

(C) SPEAKING/CONVERSATION SKILLS

Have a class-discussion / debate on the topic, "Does showing off help in the long run?"

- Agree / disagree
- Share the outcome with others.