

On Superstitions

Degree - II (English Hons)

Paper - IV

"On Superstitions" is a delightful essay written by A. G. Gardiner. Popularly known as 'Alpha of the Plough', Gardiner ranks with the best essayists of the modern age. The effortless ease which is reflected through his writings comes from his spontaneous responses to life and his capacity to express something of the universal through his experiences. He is the model of a modern writer who is able to elevate journalistic writings to the level of literature. His sentences are usually short and figures are homely. His style is lucid, straight and natural.

The essay deals with the various types of superstitions people generally believe in and their dangerous effects. Superstitions, according to Gardiner, is a common human weakness. People are, by nature, superstitious. It is not that they don't dispense with it when something essential crops up. There is, nevertheless, a general tendency to be a little or more superstitious. To quote Gardiner, "Not that the world believes there is anything in the superstition. It is quite sure it is a mere childish folly, of course. Few of us would refuse to take a house because its number was 13, or believe an invitation to dinner because there were to be 13 at the table. But most of us would be just a shade happier if that desirable residence were numbered 11. We would not confess this little weakness to each other. We

On Superstitions

Page No. 2

Date:

youva

might even refuse to admit it, to ourselves, but it is there.

The first two paragraphs of the essay centre round the number 13 which is an inauspicious digit as per superstitious beliefs. The author quotes the story of a man who, having survived serious injuries in the war, died of "something less than a pinprick". The apparent cause of the death was superstition.

Some of these superstitions may have commonplace and sensible origins which can be traced back through cross-examination. A ladder against a house, for example, is supposed to be inauspicious, particularly when one walks under it. The author advances his logic behind it in a convincing way. The fellow at the ladder may drop anything hard enough to smash the head or he may suffer from epileptic fit just then. Hence it is not advisable to walk under the ladder.

The author says how he has been challenging these superstitions in his own way without incidents of any loss or being adversely affected.

Before the advent of science, there was some justification also in being superstitious. In the words of the author, "It was no discredit to be superstitious when all the functions of nature were unexplored, and man seemed the plaything of beneficent or sinister forces that he could neither control nor understand, but which held him in the hollow of their hand." History is replete with examples of great men's being superstitious - Romans for instance would never transact business after it had thundered. "Even so great a man as

On Superstitions

Page No: 3

Date:

YOUVA

caesar and so modern and enlightened a man as Cicero left their fate to augurs and omens. Cicero lost life by trusting to the wisdom of crows.

Science has played a great role in dispelling the clouds of superstitious beliefs. Now - at least, we do not look for divine guidance in the entrails of animals or the flight of crows and the house of commons does not adjourn at a clap of thunder.

It is high time we banished all superstitious from our life and society. This is the message which this essay indirectly delivers to us.

The essay is entertaining as well as enlightening. The passage, from the start of the essay to its end goes through well-arranged stages in each of which we may take a series of short sentences clinched finally by a relatively long one. This arrangement, free from all sophistications, mirrors the essayist's heart and mind. Occasionally there are learned allusions, but these harmonious with the style and never give the impression of any flaunting of the essayist's learning.

By -

Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Manjhi

Dept. of English

J. N. College, Madhubani