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The Pleasures Of Ignorance

Robert Wilson Lynd (1879-1949) was born in Belfast (Northern Ireland). After his college education, he started his working life as a journalist writing for New Statesman. He was a political activist and was deeply involved in the cause of Irish nationalism. He used the pseudonym Y.Y in his columns and essays for New Statesman. He opposed British dominance over Northern Ireland and was quite vocal about it. Despite such anti-establishment views, he managed to win many friends among the literary elites of his times. The non-conformist tone of his essay reflects his rebellious mind.

About this essay.. The Pleasures of Ignorance truly agitates the readers' minds and rekindles the desire for rational thinking. Although, it sings the praise of 'ignorance', it starts with powerful arguments that show it as a human failing. Later arguments cited by him in praise of 'ignorance' are both funny and thought-provoking. The essay readers to take a fresh stand on memory, learning, and academic rigor.

In The Pleasures of Ignorance by Robert Lynd we have the theme of discovery, learning, confusion, inquisitiveness and ignorance. Taken from his collection of the same name the reader realises after reading the essay that Lynd may be exploring the theme of confusion. When a person is ignorant though still prepared to learn they can easily become confused by the information that they are trying to learn. This in itself is part of human nature. Learning things for the first time requires memory and for Lynd his memory is weak. He has repetitively over the years forgotten how many petals were on a buttercup. However this does not stop him from continuing to learn. Lynd has a natural inquisitiveness that might be had by all people. It is this inquisitiveness or urge to learn that excites Lynd and makes his walks in the country more enjoyable. It is also interesting that Lynd would consider even the most talented of people to be surprised by some of their findings or investigations. Which may leave some critics to suggest that there is still a willingness among men (and women) to learn all that they can. Despite the fact that some men may feel more knowledgeable than others.

What is also interesting about the story is that Lynd suggests that ignorance is a part and parcel of life. Everyone is ignorant in some way. A Doctor for example may not have the same knowledge as a Botanist nor the Lawyer the same knowledge as the farmer. Nonetheless every profession regardless of the class of the individual is willing to learn something new. For by doing so they will find pleasure or joy. They may forget what they have learnt and be forced to read a book on the matter again but still they purse the path of learning. Though it is obvious to the reader that the best way to learn is by reading on a subject or making observations on a matter. Holding the information is not that easy. Which may be Lynd's way of suggesting that man will always have some degree of ignorance and should not frown upon it. Rather as mentioned what is newly learnt should be enjoyed. Though nobody likes to be confused. This also may be part of learning. With an individual having to suffer memory loss or total confusion with regard to the subject matter they are exploring .It may also be a case that Lynd is suggesting that man will never fully know everything and will remain in some way

ignorant of their subject matter and again this is okay. An individual cannot be expected to know everything the naturalists in the essay being an example. They may be experts but they still find joy from discovering something new. Lynd's introduction of the cuckoo is also interesting as he remains unsure of whether it is the male or female cuckoo who sings. If anything Lynd is showing his capacity to learn and to continue to learn even if his memory may fail him occasionally. He is also leaving himself open to different experiences which lessen how ignorant Lynd may feel he is. Through learning Lynd's ignorance diminishes but still remains in some way on certain topics or subject matters. He like everybody else will not know everything and if he did it is possible that Lynd would consider life to be a bore with no challenges. For that is what appears to be the driving force in Lynd's life. To find something that he is ignorant about and enjoy the discovery of learning.While some people might punish themselves for their lack of knowledge on certain topics. Lynd doesn't. For Lynd ignorance is an adventure which must be explored. If anything he is the ideal or perfect student because he is willing to discover and learn about new things. Even if he may a year later tend to forget what he has learnt. There is no despair with Lynd. He takes the day as it comes. The seasons as they come and he observes the world around him with an eagle eye. Hoping to find pleasure in his own ignorance. To Lynd life is one big learning curve and he takes as much time as he needs to learn new things. Unlike others who may wish to remain ignorant and not seek the joy of learning. Living their lives with their heads firmly facing the ground as they stroll through life. At the end the reader realises that there is an irony in being ignorant as with ignorance comes the possibility to learn and as mentioned Lynd is a willing if not able student. He may be partially defeated by his memory but he still learns what he had previously learnt all over again when he reads a book. At all times Lynd's mind, though partially ignorant, is healthy and a treasure trove of information . Ignorance among men and women, especially about facts of nature, is endemic. Nearly everyone suffers from this shortcoming. Many among us live and die without knowing how an elm differs from the breech tree. Such ignorance makes us argue heatedly among us about the way the cuckoo sings, if during flight or when perched on a tree's branch. Such ignorance has some bright side to it too. When spring arrives bringing with it its myriad features, a person who has been casual towards nature earlier, discovers some fascinating manifestation of spring, and draws considerable pleasure from it. Even the ubiquitous cuckoo fails to ignite our curiosity, as a result of which almost half among us fail to describe the way the bird sings. Such pathetic ignorance about the cuckoo is because we fail to observe it minutely. We simply let the bird fly past us. An observer of nature is, by instinct, a slow and carefree man. In contrast, the city dweller leads a hectic life and can't devote time to savor his senses with the pleasures of nature watching.

Summary

Robert Lynd's essays deals with contemporary ethos and interest. He portrayed

the daily lives of working people. this essay The pleasures of Ignorance was

first published in the New Statesman and then as the lead essay in his collection.

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