

**Comedy of Errors in Common Life: As Presented By A.G. Gardiner**

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A. G. Gardiner 1865-1946

Courtesy: <http://www.greatthoughtstreasury.com/author/alfred-george-gardiner>

**Abstract**

Literature reflects the real life as it says “It is the mirror of life”. Though life on earth has aplenty of events and situations, only a few can understand the moral behind those incidents. Learning the works of great literary social explorers like A.G. Gardiner is an eye opener to realize the pitfalls in our everyday activities. This paper deals with some of the essays of A. G.

Gardiner, the famous and ever-cherished essayist, whose writings are meant for all regions and for all seasons. He writes with the sociological and moralistic perspective with the tinge of humour. The added flavours of irony and satire lighten the hearts of the readers to encounter the real stupidity in their activities. His works present the ordinary situations with an extraordinary effect. His subjects mainly concern with the aspects like courage, greatness, forgiveness, ignorance, manners, habits, resolutions etc. His excellent imagination and literary skill creates an unforgettable imprint in the minds of his readers. This paper concentrates on the wellbeing of the society as represented by A.G. Gardiner through his powerful dictum blended with sarcastic essence.

**Keywords:** Eye opener, sociological and moralistic perspective, forgiveness, ignorance, resolutions, sarcastic essence.

### **Introduction**

Alfred George Gardiner is known as the prominent, prolific, delightful and popular modern essayist. His literary career extends from the Victorian age to the Modern age. His cheerful and optimistic deliverance makes him a significant writer of his age. His essays are not complicated or tricky. He writes on trivial matters which everyone faces in day to day life with less importance. He looks at the oddities of life with diversified perspectives and beautifies them with the added flavor of humourous sense and presents them with a unique style of simplicity. He laughs at the follies of people and satirizes his own defects. He has established himself as a humourist by mocking at the less noticed but yet to be corrected mistakes of men without hurting their feelings.

Gardiner's essays under the pen name Alpha of the Plough are incredible and noteworthy. As an essayist he assumed the role of a preacher and a moralist to the core. He wrote for uplifting the manners and morals of the war-ridden English society. Channelizing public in the right path was a delicate task because they were not prepared to listen to sermons. Fortunately, Gardiner could claim a cheerful disposition, a facile pen, and a style that could win the confidence of his readers. He never tried to inflict his views upon the readers through an outward preaching. He used his pen to make people learn their faults and correct them. His self-exploration and teasing of others flaws brand his writing harmless and interesting. In essays like *On Habits* and *In Defence of Ignorance*, he talks about his personal defects and their effects.

Gardiner reflects his preferences and moods in his essays and convinces his readers with his viewpoints. He avoids quarrels and disputes and prefers smooth and light behavior. His mingling of subjectivity and objectivity is very distinctive and his writing style is simple and conventional. He has an admiration for witty phrase and interesting paradox. He satirizes the worries of the world on petty things like missing a train, effect of smiles on getting things done and on the normal habits that speak about the nature of an individual.

The essayist speaks on the morality of life and human interest that plays a vital role in defining one's character. He points out the mistakes of the society as well as pinpoints the remedies to overcome the existing problems. His prime motto is to educate people to understand

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the need for informal education. His essays are not restricted to the English world but common to all region, religion, caste or creed. His ideas are universally acknowledged and no one denies the follies mentioned are incorrect. He brings out the inevitability of books and motivates people to develop interest in reading. To get inspiration, men are dependent on other men and books. Gardiner feels ashamed for having only 2000 books in his library. He ridicules people, who spend hundreds and thousands of pounds in beautifying houses and never giving a serious thought to books. He adds that people bothers about the size and cost of the books but not on the content. People are unhesitant to spend two-million sterling on beer for a year but hesitate to spend two hundred million pence on literature.

### **Discussion**

According to Gardiner, books like furniture are cheaper and better decoration than blue china and Chippendale chairs. The external ornamentation will never give the eternal pleasure given by books. The collection of books at home talks about the character of the house. A house without a good gathering of books is futile. He discloses that reading books derives remarkable utility and books are immeasurable treasure in one's life. He expects people to spend more on collection of books because they are the best part of all the equipment present in the house. He glorifies the knowledge possessed by books and insists everyone to enjoy it. Thus in his essay *On Big Words* he advises to collect books with a thought that the content of the books matters than the size of it.

*In Defence of Ignorance*, Gardiner touches on the ignorance of human beings in general and his own ignorance in particular. He opines that an all-rounder in knowledge is hard to find out. The treasure of knowledge is unfathomed and what one knows is a speck. Knowledge possession varies for individuals because an ordinary man will be a master in the area which is quite unexplored one for an intelligent scientist. Some people never bother about their ignorance but tries to boast on their little knowledge. The writer makes this statement clear by quoting an incident from his life.

Once he was travelling in a country woods with an old man. The author pointed out a particular tree and narrated something about it to him. The old man declared that it was a poplar tree but the writer disputed him that he knew everything about the features of poplar trees and strongly opposed him. But the old man calmly disclosed the features and varieties of poplar trees as an authority of trees. He detailed that he spent most of his life in rearing trees as he had been a forester to a Scotch Duke. Thus the essayist insists that everyone should be alert while exposing one's knowledge and be very careful about the content and the context.

Gardiner pronounces that a modern ploughboy knows things which Plato, Caesar and Dante were unaware of. But it is not true that the ploughboy is wiser than those great men. Lincoln was the wisest administrator of his times but he was unlearned when compared to an average undergraduate. Thus Gardiner whole heartedly advises people to be humble while learning and be polite in understanding that what they learn is only a little when compared to the vastness of learning. This delightful and intrusive essay focuses on the fact that knowledge is infinite and can never be fully explored. The writer condemns the falsity of pride of learning.

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In one of his famous essays *On Letter Writing*, he feels sorry for killing the art of letter writing in the name of modernity and lack of expression. He blames the technological developments such as telegraph and telephones for the destruction of the art of letter writing. He clarifies the fact that letter writing is an essential art to be inculcated and stresses the importance by quoting incidents from the life of soldiers like Bill and Sam. He adds that letters must be written with the light heart and the presentation must be in a casual manner. Letters should be personal and not abstract. His eloquent presentation brings to limelight the hitches in writing letters and the means to overcome them.

In the essay *On Saying Please*, Gardiner highlights the need for cultivating good manners in society. Good manners are indispensable to lead a happy and cheerful life. Civility and politeness are the exorbitant ornaments that must be possessed in social behaviour. The physical damages may get repaired and the wounds can be cured in course of time but the manners are infectious. Bad manners make life hellish. He beautifully says that ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ are the courtesies that keep the machine of life oiled and graceful.

The writer quotes an example from his own experience. He was highly impressed by a polite bus conductor. Once, the writer boarded a bus without money. The bus conductor did not insult him but recognized him a gentle man and issued him ticket with the promise that he should send the cost of the ticket later. The author was much impressed by the politeness and courtesy of the bus conductor. The conductor was kind to old people in the bus and made every passenger feel comfortable. The journey with such a cordial soul gave everyone a kind of ease and comfort. Thus the writer wants to replace the bad manners prevailed in the society with the good manners. He insisted that people should insist morality to those who deviates into the path of guilt and infected by bad manners. A polite word to an impolite person is the sweetest form of revenge. Politeness and gentle behaviour cannot be enforced by law but they add joy to life and makes mutual understanding easier.

In *On Smiles*, Gardiner says that right kind of smile in right aspect is better than any treasure on earth. The uncorrupted and innocent smile enables man show the way to success and win the heart of everyone. The pleasing smile and the pleasant attitude are effective in winning the critical moments. The essayist illustrates the example of Rufus Isaac who was the most successful figure in English courts because of his gentle nature and pleasant smile. The great political leaders attain their special position and great popularity because of their winning smile. The essayist points out that smile exhibits the moods of the people as the face is the index of mind. The smiles speak about the nature of the beholder. He declares that smiles are like poets, they must be born not made and deliberate and purposive smiles do not win the hearts of others. With the natural, informal and graceful style of writing like the natural pleasing smile he insists, the writer makes the essay quite interesting and enjoyable.

In the essay *On Living Again*, the writer talks about a serious subject in a lighter context. He deals with the eternal philosophical question if one would like to live in this world again if provided with a chance. Most of the people come with the negative answer as it is not palatable. People believe that this life is worth living with the events and experiences they have on earth

but repeating the same for the next birth is not possible and pleasant. He compares life on earth is like a game of cricket. As the cricketer loses his interest in game if he knows about his score beforehand, people also lose their interest in life if they are aware of their course of life. Gardiner brilliantly says life is a mixture of happiness and sorrow. A life of all sunshine and no shadows would be like a dull funeral march of puppets. Even though a man comes to the next birth with the knowledge of the all experiences that he possessed in the previous birth, it is quite uncertain to live a successful life. Character is destiny and it decides the fate of people. Uncertainties make life interesting. The writer takes the readers into confidence about telling the undesirable aspect of life using simple and plain words to accept the harsh reality of life.

In the essay *All About a Dog*, the writer talks about the rules of everyday life. He brings out the distinction between rules and the rules. By quoting his personal experience, he clarifies this idea. Once he was travelling in a bus in London on a cold night. At a place two young women and a man entered into the bus. The young lady wearing a coat of seal-skin was carrying a Chinese dog with her. On seeing the dog the conductor stopped the bus and asked the lady to go to the upper deck of the bus. The passengers supported the young lady and voiced against the conductor. But he was strong in his will and stood rigid on his point. Policemen arrived and declared that the conductor was right. The conductor wanted to prove his respect for rules therefore he justified himself to the writer. Gardiner advised him that some rules are like the rules of the roads and they must be adhered without deviation but there are some rules which can be adjusted if they do not cause any danger to life.

The essayist further added that the rules are used for the comfort of people not to discomfort them. The activity of this conductor can be compared to that of the one in the essay *On Saying Please*. Men of same profession with different attitudes and approaches get different kind of acceptance from the public. Blind adherence of rules without understanding may cause confusion. Rules are man-made and it is harmless to modify or to violate them if the change causes no danger to life. With the help of simple and distinct style, the writer conveyed the difference between rules and the rules.

In *On Superstitions*, he seriously criticizes people for being superstitious. Believing untruthful ideas and situations is a folly. The useless faith on uncertain matters like believing in numbers while choosing a house shows the weakness of the mankind. Though the scientific knowledge excels the intelligence of human mind, there is always a slight inclination towards the beliefs of useless ideas. The writer comments on the very idea of doubting if omens are right at times. He wants people to give preference to the evidential factors of life and to be radical and not bound to imaginative impulses.

*On Waking Up* is one of the subjective essays which talks about the joy of waking up in the morning. It also conveys the writer's views on the importance of sleep in a man's life. From the personal experience of waking up, Gardiner explores the ideas related to eternity. He portrays how the idea of immortality is viewed by different personalities like Pascal, Blunt and Austin. The essay presents the writer's close observation of Nature and gives a realistic description of the natural phenomena. He finely portrays the natural scene in the early morning. Waking up

early in the morning helps to develop a clear conscience, a good digestion, and a healthy day and joyous experience. It has the pleasant start for a new adventure and success in life.

*On Habits* is an amusing and interesting personal essay of Gardiner, in which he writes about his experience in blindly following certain habits. In this essay, he conveys his personal experience along with some general observations. He points out the pros and cons of habit formation. He illustrates his ideas by stating the examples of various individuals who are adjudged by their habits. He quotes the examples from his life and from the life of Sir Walter Scott.

The writer is of the habit of hanging up his coat and hat in the cloakroom of his club, at the vacant place. But often he forgot the place where he hung his coat and got into trouble in finding it out. Later he cultivated the habit of hanging his coat and hat at a particular place and found it quite easy to identify them and there was no waste of time. By mentioning this example, the writer brings to light the importance in good habit cultivation. He is of the opinion that good habits are used as a tool in life. But those good habits too become nuisance if people totally dependent on them. He tells us the example of Mr. Balfour who was habituated of holding the lapel of his coat during public speaking. Once, on a particular day when he was proposing a toast, he wore a coat without lapels. He was much disturbed because of it and couldn't speak well. Though he was a skilled speaker, he was unable to proceed because his addiction to his attire.

### Conclusion

A.G. Gardiner's essays are not only meant for entertainments but also for social and moral purposes. He is a social reformer focusing on human follies and vices. He presents his ideas in a sugar coated pill, with the coating of fun and delight. He never preaches but makes the readers involve in the debate. He writes with great charm and ease and his prose has the qualities of a good talk. He enlivens his essays by using stories and anecdotes and by his subtle use of humour and light satire. Satire is evident in his essays and he harmlessly satirizes only the worries of the world. His essays with simple words, simple phrases, and simple sentences have a magical blow for the readers. His direct and silver-tongued English accompanied by simplicity as his style and lively approaches to explore the comedy of errors in common life which are the societal reflections of the then war-ridden English society can eternally be quoted universally without hesitation.

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