

ON TRAVEL BY TRAIN

J.B. PRIESTLEY

INTRODUCTION

The essay 'On travel by Train' is selected from 'Papers from Lilliput' written by John Boynton Priestley (1894-1984), the British novelist and playwright, script writer, social commentator and broadcaster. Priestley has written a number of essays. Established as a prose stylist, J.B. Priestley's essays are remarkable for the personal tenderness and literary informality. ***Apes and Angels, Journey Down a Rainbow*** and ***Papers from Lilliput*** are well known collections of his essays. '***An Inspector Calls***' is one of his popular plays. The unique feature of Priestley's works is the relaxed light humorous tone and the friendly atmosphere in which communication becomes easier. His ideas maintain the democratic ideology of mutual respect and tolerance. He does not distance the reader from the idea discussed in his essays with the use of rigidity and formality in the usage of English language.

Summary

'On Travel by Train' begins with a rather humorous but critical sketch of the English eccentricities. The essay depicts how common experiences in life are full of humour. It shows how the travelers in train behave. The essayist has cautiously selected the words to stress on the element of humour in the traditional assumptions and the meaningless

pretentious of self righteousness put on by the general public. As we read we come across the hearth and home, corporal life, frozen exterior, quiet neighborly fellow, black murder, mere sight and devils of wrath. In the first paragraph the author humorously describes the various expressions usually seen on the face of the commuters in a train journey. Conventional habits of general public and also of individuals are subjected to mockery. Self mockery is an effective technique of reducing the sore feel of it. It also minimizes the offense which would have otherwise displeased many of us who are a bit unsympathetically represented: the large middle aged woman, people who bring too much luggage, the ill mannered consumers of food and drink, the noisy and untidy children, the fussy ones with obsessions of the window, the innocents travelling on wrong trains, the sleepers who know where to wake up, the commentators on punctuality of trains.

Priestley says a good Englishman becomes different individual when he travels by train. There are different types of travelers. One much hated traveler is a fat middle aged woman, whose voice is very loud. She enters the smoking compartment without any hesitation, shouts at the porter, brings in her dog also and destroys the silence and comfort in the compartment. Some travelers bring too many things and vessels into the train. Children with chocolate smeared faces make very much noise and they create a lot of trouble to the co-passengers. Some eccentrics open windows during coldest days and close them during hottest days. Among all these different varieties of travelers, Priestley likes the innocent travelers who always find themselves in wrong trains. He expresses pity for them. He envies the mighty sleepers whom he compares with seven Ephesus. The last variety of travelers is described

humorously as the ancient mariners of train. They can provide each and every bit of information about trains and make others bored.

Amidst all these descriptions we recognize ourselves and even enjoy being made fun of in this way. However to write like this, it is essential to have a far-reaching vocabulary and a precise understanding of nuances and connotations of words. To try to have such a control over these aspects of English usage is a valuable intent for anyone aspiring to improve communicative skills.
