

B.A. First Year

Write an essay on the education of the streets

An Apology for Idlers is a thought-provoking essay. It is full of humour, wit and irony. It is written by Robert Louis Stevenson. He was a great traveller and writer. His famous novels are "Treasure Island" and "Black Arrow".

2. This essay is a fine example of Stevenson's scheme of values opposed to modern ideas such as working hard, reading books, education in schools and colleges. He says that education of the streets is even better than education in the class rooms. Stevenson does not believe that books are indispensable. He argues that books can never be substitute for life. Most of the great men including Charles Dickens, Shakespeare and Balzac learned lessons from the streets. They enjoyed Nature, the flow of the rivers, the waves of the sea, the blue sky, the meadows and hills and valleys give man more wisdom than what he gets in the class rooms. Parents and elders usually advise young men to study books with diligence to obtain knowledge. But R.L Stevenson visualises a Worldly Wiseman angry with a young truant because he runs away from class-room to enjoy Nature. The young man tells the Wiseman that he wants peace and contentment. The Wiseman is again angry with him and asks him to go back to school. But R.L.Stevenson supports the truant. The author says that knowledge can be obtained from the streets and Nature too. This knowledge is better than that of school or college. A truant is wandering along open places, because Nature is an open book. It is full of knowledge and wisdom. One can obtain wisdom by enjoying the beauty of Nature. The sweet songs of birds, the rustle of leaves and the murmuring sound of the flowing river and the breeze can give you food for thought.

3. Saint Beuve the great French writer said that experience of life is a single great book. R.L. Stevenson himself was a voracious reader and he loved books. But books are not proper substitute for life. If a young man completely depends on books for knowledge, he is as fool as Lady of Shallot. In Lord Tennyson's famous poem Lady of Shallot, the beautiful lady is under a curse, weaving a web day and night looking at a mirror. She can see only shadows. She cannot see the real life. Similarly a bookworm is also like the Lady of Shallot, and he can never enjoy life which is full of experience and beauty of Nature.

4. R.L. Stevenson says that busy people are not efficient in vitality. Idleness helps a man to develop a strong individuality and he is very sociable and takes interest in mankind. He is a man of great experience in life and he knows how to make others happy. He has practical wisdom and can solve problems of life with a smiling face. On the other hand a man of industry is selfish and narrow-minded. He has no curiosity and he is very dull. In school or college, these people had set their eyes on medals and after leaving college, they think of only themselves. After a long period of hard work, they are very tired. On the other hand, the idler is energetic and happy. So he can make others happy. Stevenson says that this is not success in life.

5. R.L. Stevenson says that many people complain that idlers don't do any work and it is a national waste. But it is not true. Society is full of young men and women and they can do every work. Even if a man dies, another man does his work. In the fifteenth century when some people told Joan of Arc, the great French heroine that she should work at home washing and spinning. She told them that there are plenty of women at home who can do such work. Joan of Arc was very young when she became a soldier and fought wars and won victories for France. She is the great patriot of France.

6. R.L. Stevenson says that an idler can give more pleasure than a busy industrious man because the mind of the busy man is full of many plans and works to be done. Pleasures are more beneficial than

duties because pleasure is natural, but duty comes from force or responsibility. Secondly pleasures give happiness to both the giver and the receiver. So the author says that an idler is wiser than a book-worm (man of industry). Stevenson says that an idler makes others happy with his smiling face and kind words. The presence of such people at a dinner or at a meeting in the streets makes everyone happy. Falstaff is preferable to Barabbas. Falstaff is not very honest and a drunkard. Yet all people love this Shakespearean character because he makes audience laugh and they enjoy his presence on the stage. We can forget our sorrow and pain when we see Falstaff on the stage merry making. On the other hand Barabbas is a character in Marlowe's play "The Jew of Malta" The Jew was greedy for money and did not help anyone even with a smile. So no one liked him.

Finally Stevenson points out that Nature does not care for the life of a single individual. No one is so important in the society. Even if Shakespeare had never lived, the world would not have been different. There are millions and millions of people in the world. Everyone wants a smiling face and kind words from others.

Annotate the following

1. Alexander is touched in a very delicate place by the disregard of Diogenes. Where was the glory of having taken Rome for these tumultuous barbarians, who poured into the Senate, and found the Fathers sitting silent and unmoved by their success?

Ans: In his essay An Apology for Idlers, R.L. Stevenson, the famous English writer argues that idleness is as good as diligence in life. An industrious man is not happy if his hard work and achievements are not approved by people around him. But on the other hand, an idle man is not worried about such things because he is not working hard and he enjoys life wandering along the street, hills and valleys and meadows.

Alexander the Great visited the Cynic philosopher Diogenes and asked him if he needed any help from him. Diogenes replied that if Alexander moved a little away from the spot, Diogenes could continue to enjoy the sunlight. Alexander might have been ashamed of his greatness. Similarly the Goths captured Rome. They thought that the Senate members would be shocked and excited. But alas! the Senate members sat silently as if nothing happened. The Goths were disappointed because they captured Rome after many years of hard work.

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