

Essay on A Scene in The Examination Hall

Just before the bell rings for the question papers and answer-scripts to be distributed, the scene inside the examination hall is one of noise and restlessness. Most candidates are busy finding their seats. Here and there a few may be seen feverishly turning over the seats. Here and there a few may be seen feverishly turning over the pages of well-thumbed books; other form groups to discuss all sorts of a possible answer to all manner of impossible question. A handful is confident about their preparation, and they draw around them their less fortunate brethren who seek their advice and guidance. But the majorities perhaps are bent more on anticipation disaster than guarding themselves against it.

The fateful bell rings; slowly the noise subsides; candidates take their seats. As the scripts are being distributed they deposit their books and papers with the invigilators, and get ready. In a minute they are busy writing their roll numbers and other clerical requirements of an answer script. Then the question papers are handed out, the last flicker of light-hearted indifference is extinguished. Each examinee grabs his paper and runs his eyes through it, as though his whole destiny depended upon its being the right thing. And now the scene becomes interesting it not exciting. Here and there faces light up with happy smiles; it is clear that their expectations have been fulfilled. Many look up at the ceiling or through the window at the sky, vague and puzzled, as though searching their minds for things that seem to have faded away all of a sudden. Some are in a state of nervous bewilderment and feverishly call for water to cool their fevered brain. Perhaps a sympathetic invigilator drops a cheering word of encouragements, and wearily they apply themselves their answer trusting that good luck will help their memory out of the darkness that has suddenly absorbed even the little that they know.

The lucky ones are already deeply occupied in writing out the answers that they had so carefully prepared; others also follow their example though with less assurance. And very soon and for a long time nothing is heard except the rustling of papers and the scratching pens, and measured tread of the invigilators walking up and down sometimes a teacher drops in to nod encouragement to his students; that passing look of sympathy often proves magical to the diffident. This continues for an hour or so, and then the atmosphere somewhat relaxes. One calls for a glass of water; that seems to be infectious, and the water-man has to be very busy for a time. If the paper is lengthy, relaxation is brief; if otherwise, words of wit and humor might be dropped here and there and cause mild ripples of laughter. A diversion of the lighter kind is always found welcome and is often helpful.

And thus the three hours draw to a close. Some surrender their scripts to the invigilator before the time is up and walk out with the consciousness of a day's work done. Many have finished writing all that they know and are idly Turing over the pages and observing what others do. From time to time the invigilators drew out warning of the passing time, and candidates get ready to conclude. And then the final bell rings; papers are taken away; most give up their scripts as soon as the invigilator approaches; some demand extra time and an argument followed. But the things have to end, and soon all the candidates are filing out of the hall, laughing and chatting, and discussing the prospects of success or failure in the light of the day's performance. And it is not long before the hall is empty to be cleaned up and closed down for the next shift.

In actual experience an examination hall wears a forbidding aspect; in retrospect, perhaps one might look back to the experience not without some amusement. How serious it was while it lasted; how funny when it was over. For some indeed it is the beginning of a successful

career. Another look at it as much ado about nothing, – so much labor gone to waste and perhaps another year of tedious toil.