

# COMBATING IGNORANCE

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**COMBATING IGNORANCE**  
**(Diary Leaves)**

By **NICHOLAS ROERICH**

[The following ardent appeal for education and enlightenment is powerfully sounded by Nicholas Roerich—the world Leader of Culture.]

The extermination of ignorance should be carried out on a world scale. No nation can boast that it is sufficiently educated. Nobody has sufficient strength to conquer ignorance single-handedly. Knowledge should be universal and should be supported in full cooperation. Ways of communication know no limitations. Thus also the path of knowledge should flourish through exchange of opinion. One should not think that somewhere enough has been done already for education. Knowledge spreads to such an extent that a constant renewal of methods is required. It is horrible to witness fossilized brains, which do not admit new achievements. No denier can ever be a true scientist. Science is free, honest and fearless. Science can change instantaneously and can enlighten upon world problems. Science is beautiful and therefore is infinite. Science does not tolerate prohibition, prejudice and superstition. Science can find the great even in the quest of the small. Ask great scientists—how often the most astonishing discoveries took place during ordinary research. The eye was open and the brain was not dusty. The path of those who know how to investigate without limitations is the Path of the Future. Verily the struggle against ignorance is undeferrable, as against decomposition and decay. Combating evil ignorance is not easy, for it has many henchmen. It lurks in many countries and is clothed in various garments. One has to apply courage and patience, for the battle with ignorance is the conquest of chaos.

Already five centuries before our era there came from the East the blessed words: "Ignorance is the worst crime".

Later on also the great hermits of the first centuries of Christianity ordained that "ignorance is hell". Truly all fratricidal crimes have their origin in this dark abyss. The same evil source pollutes the world with lies and darkness, which create the most ugly, the most cruel and abhorrent evil-doings.

To swallow food does not yet mean to live. In the same way to be literate does not mean to be educated. Literacy is a natural food, but we see that as food it may be either useful or harmful, because it can serve both good and bad. Education and culture are synonymous. In both is contained readiness for infinite cognizance. In the furnace of such a constant rejuvenation of consciousness the very essence of man is being purified. Through honest and unlimited labour of knowledge, people are ennobled and begin to understand the concept of service to humanity. The true scholar has an open eye and is moved by freedom of thought. But as everything in life, the eye and thought also must be educated. From the first steps of education an enlightened admission and broadening of the horizon should be laid at the foundation of primary schools. Knowledge should be freed from conventional limitations. Knowledge is the path to joy, but joy is a special wisdom.

The scientist and the artist know the meaning of the word inspiration. They know, what is realization, which opens to them new refined forms and reveals subtle energies, previously unnoticed or perhaps forgotten. From antiquity there came the realization that thought is an energy, that thought is lightbearing. For ages certain people knew that thought can be transmitted. But even such an old axiom has only lately entered the scientific minds before the very eyes of our present generation. We all were witness, how quite recently the ignoramuses scoffed at so-called magnetism

and hypnotism. It went so far, that the same force, under various names was accepted differently. Mesmerism was ridiculed and condemned, but the same force under the name hypnotism received a certain right for existence. There are peculiar reasons why some pills have to be gilded and medicine phials have to be adorned with special attractive labels. And one can understand why some chemicals, which are now fully recognized, had to be veiled by the alchemists under the names of eagle phoenix and many other symbols.

We all remember how at the foundation by Prof. Bekhtereff of the Neurological Institute, every sceptic ridiculed his experiments of thought transmission. The fact that the name of Bekhtereff was widely revered and renowned did not save him from derision and not even from most formidable suspicions. Ignoramuses organized a whispering campaign stating that a whole institution could not be devoted to the research of the nervous system and thought alone. They whispered of some political intrigues, about some love affairs and even that Bekhtereff had become insane. Such were the colossal allegations invented by ignorance. I remember how during this whispering campaign we painfully remembered the book by Gaston Tissandie "Martyrs of Science". Verily, where are the limits, when during our present generation a certain Academy called the great Edison a charlatan for his invention of the phonograph and certain Universities did not admit women to higher education. I repeat that this happened not during the mediæval ages, but before our very eyes; and that such shameful actions were committed not by illiterate savages, but by people bearing the conventional official label of a scientist. Let us not enumerate the endless row of true martyrs of Science in all countries, but since we quoted the persecution of education for women, let us also recall the case of the mathematician genius, Sophie Kova-

levska, who was not admitted to any university and yet received world recognition for her work on higher mathematics. And there are not a few excellent scholars and physicians, who being prosecuted by their fellow-colleagues, were compelled to leave their own country.

The world is proud of the name of the great physiologist Pavlov; everywhere are being affirmed and admired his formulae of reflexes and other ingenious solutions of biological problems. But even this glorious international achievement crowned by the Nobel prize, calls forth in certain circles a contemptuous shrugging of the shoulders. Amidst the latter one will also discover ignorance. Verily no uniforms and robes, no dead scholastic labels can cover human hatred, envy and bigotry. It is far easier to combat illiteracy than to annihilate the sinister hydra of hatred, with all its many heads of jealousy, doubt, slander and all hidden campaigns, which the forces of darkness so cunningly manipulate. The forces of darkness, the forces of ignorance—these shameful synonyms—are closely united. Of all feelings, love and hatred are the most powerful and unifying.

Of course, in spite of all ferocious attempts of ignorance, enlightened knowledge progresses in the whole world. Let us remember the recent achievements which made the world rejoice. Let us remember the remarkable discovery of the great biologist Sir Jagadis Bose concerning the life of plants. Professor A. H. Compton states that human thought is the most important factor of the world. Prof. S. Metalnikoff of the Pasteur Institute makes most important research in the field of immunity and immortality of protozoae. Dr. Kotick investigates the transfer of sensitiveness. Dr. Walter Stempell of the Muenster University proves the existence of invisible radiation of all living organisms. Dr. Paul Dobler of the

Heilbronn University affirms the existence of earthly radiation and its relation to the divining rod, which has upto recently been ridiculed. Prof. Harry M. Johnson of Virginia University arrives at interesting conclusions regarding insanity. Dr. Otrian, in charge of a meteorological station in Germany investigates extraordinary cosmic influences. L'Abbe More, the French astronomer, makes most interesting conclusions about sun spots. The American Biologist, Bernard Proctor investigates special life conditions on heights. The French scientist, Dr. Levy Valency warns of possible epidemics of insanity. Dr. Riese experiments with the effect of rhythm. Dr. Bernard Reid, a British scientist, draws a parallel between ancient medicine and modern vitamine research. A Hungarian scientist discovers rays for invisibility. Everyone knows of the experiments of Professors Richet and Gilley and the research of Sir Oliver Lodge. Prof. V. van Haas of the Leiden University proves the impossibility of an absolute zero. Dr. Kennon of Harvard speaks of the element of luck in scientific research. The chemist Mingley gives a bold prognosis of future discoveries. Prof. J. B. Rhine of Harvard and Prof. William McDougall reach astonishing results at Duke University in the field of extra-sensory perception and thought-transference. How many wonderful achievements! In every country there are enlightened scholars, who untiringly and fearlessly pioneer in the field of science. And still such great men remain solitary and are subject, everyone in his field, to undeserved obstacles.

One can quote pages of research conducted lately which widens the frame of conventional thinking. Nature itself comes to aid every thinker. Sun spots with all deductions around them, of which the greatest authorities like Sir James Jeans of Cambridge and Dr. C. G. Abbott of the Smithsonian Institute, remind us that the time is not far, when ridiculed

Astrology will turn out to be nothing less than a formula of Astrochemistry and thus yet another branch of science will no longer be denied. People will understand that they are surrounded in life by powerful chemism and that they themselves represent the most refined and mighty chemical laboratory.

Everyone has read of the recently conducted experiments with the chemism of human secretions and radiation from the finger tips; some of these radiations are so powerful that they can kill harmful bacteria. Let us also remember the experiments of Prof. Yurevitch which prove that the energy radiated by man is a conductor and a connection which enables the combination of certain elements. And did not the famous experiments of Keally, which were so unjustly persecuted, prove the same. Thus the investigation of human radiation and psychic energy imperatively calls humanity towards an amazing transfiguration of life.

Ignoramuses like to scoff at the yogi of India. For them the walking on fire, sitting on water, the consumption of terrible poisons without effect, the stopping or acceleration of the pulse at will, the burial alive and return to life after several weeks—are but skilful tricks and charlatanism. But in the last number of the "Modern Review" there is an article, supported by photographs, on fire-walking in Mysore. The journal quotes this in connection with the demonstration in London of the Kashmiri Khuda Bux, widely announced through the press of the whole world. The sitting on the water of the Ganges was regarded as charlatanism and even people, who had witnessed it, whispered carefully: "who knows, perhaps they were supported under the water". But quite recently the British press reported the case of a woman, who lost her weight to such an extent, that this manifestation on the

water was quite easy for her. The whole world was amazed to read about the striking phenomena of Theresa Neuman of Bavaria and now the newspapers were filled with astounding accounts of Shanti Devi in Delhi, a girl of nine. This unforgettable case was verified by many reliable people.

From Latvia there comes news of the extra-ordinary ability of a girl of eight to read thoughts. There has also been registered a case of the reception of radio-waves by a person without a receiver and the astonishing faculty of two Italian boys to see through walls and other opaque objects. No doubt, during the time of the Inquisition all these unfortunate persons, owing to their abilities, would have been burnt at the stake. But even nowadays the man who could catch radio-waves mentally, had to go through a lunatic asylum! Let us also not forget the remarkable prevision and clairaudience of St. Joan of Arc who saved France, but who for her abilities, was burnt on the pyre by the contemporary evil ignoramuses.

But not only the persons themselves who owned these extraordinary faculties, but also those who conducted research in these fields, have been subjected on the part of ignoramuses up to now to endless persecution. Let us also remember the unjust scoffing to which the Society of Psychic Research was so often subjected, whereas the aims of the Society deserve full support. Every nucleus of a new unprejudiced scientific conquest is attacked. This creates an ugly sight. On one part there are being opened new educational institutions, which by their very appearance seem to invite new research; yet on the other part every unusual manifestation, which did not enter into the elementary textbooks, is not only ridiculed but also prosecuted. It means that the hydra of ignorance dwells not only in illiteracy but also in fossilized perception and in human hatred.

Every denial of Truth is ignorance and is harmful not only to the negator himself, but to space as a whole. Opposition to Truth poisons space. But there exists a still more abhorrent action, when people, who have also cognized Truth, later turn away from it. Such a shameful retreat into darkness is insane. One can find in the history of humanity that sometimes particles of Truth were realized, but afterwards because of crass ignorance, certain pseudo-teachers tried again to conceal from people these immutable facts. And actions resulted which in the future will be regarded as the most shameful pages of history. And without any proof of their inaccuracy, it was ordered to deny the obvious facts. As if a disbelief in the existence of the sun was commanded, because somebody due to weak eyesight could not look at the sun. Thus owing to ignorance and egotism, someone forbade others to cognize reality. Let people remember how many apostates reveal themselves at various epochs. Perhaps such remembrances will lead humanity to honesty and justice.

Thus everyone, for whom Education and Culture are not empty words, should in his field, as far as he can, fight ignorance. Let no one say that he has no possibility to do so—this would be untrue. Helas, open and hidden ignorance in all its cunningness, exists everywhere. In every household a clear mind can discern where dust and rubbish have to be removed. And to-day when in the world there thunder guns and poisonous gases compete with each other, now the combatting of ignorance is imperative. A defence of the best, most beautiful and most enlightened will be needed.

If anyone will not succeed in his noble efforts, still it will be a heroic attempt and not an abstract intention. Besides in every effort there is already a vital element of action. Therefore every effort is already beneficial. No doubt some servitors of ignorance will whisper, that precisely now words about culture and enlightenment are out of place. This is their typical trick, in order to find at every moment of life a reason, why exactly at that hour a striving to culture and

education are untimely. By this their formula the henchmen of ignorance betray themselves. Mime always reveals himself. But Good, Culture and Education are needed at every hour.

There can be no such a state of consciousness in which it is untimely to be humane. And only human hatred could whisper denying this Truth; hatred—this horrible monster, in the darkness of its cave, always dreams of transforming mankind into beasts, which should devour each other.

Verily, from small to great, everyone can and it is the duty if everyone to bring his mite to the cause of combatting ignorance. Uniting in groups and by himself everyone can somewhere stop the evil doings of the monster of ignorance. Every labour already contains the striving to perfection and enlightenment. Only ignorance can belittle labour as such and can shamelessly scoff at the quest of science. In just indignation against every grimace of ignorance, the worker for Culture will find a vital thought and thundering word and will record by beautiful deeds the victorious path of enlightenment.

Glory to the Knights of Culture! Glory to the heroes of labour! Glory to the Courageous!

