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The Happy Prince

Introduction

The **Happy Prince** is written by **Oscar Wilde**. The story of the happy prince is about the sacrifice of a prince and a bird. The story is the true reflection of a prince who loves his people. It is a story of a prince who was always happy because he never saw sorrow and suffering. When the prince dies his statue was erected on high ground. His statue was made of gold and his eyes were made of sapphires. With all the riches the prince was not happy anymore because he had seen the suffering and sorrow of his people and he tries to make everyone happy and help the needy.

Summary

It is a story about the statue of a happy prince. One day a bird took shelter under the statue. The bird found out that the prince was not happy and asked for the reason. Then the prince replied that when he was alive, he never saw sorrow and suffering and that is why he was called the happy prince. But when he died and his statue was made outside the castle, now he feels the suffering of his poor subjects.

Once he saw a matchgirl who was scared of being beaten by her father, because she accidentally dropped matches in the canal. He told the bird to pluck his second eye and give the sapphire to that girl. The prince then became completely blind and the bird decided to not leave and to live with him and help the poor.

The prince became blind yet he kept helping the poor. The bird obediently plucked the golden leaves from the statue and continuously helped the poor on the instructions of the prince. The statue became dull as all of its gold and sapphires were distributed among the poor. Then come a weary winter which eventually took the life of the swallow bird and it fell near the statue. Seeing this the leaden heart of the prince broke into two. As time passes the statue looked dull and unattractive and thus the city councillors decided to break the statue and melt the statue in the furnace. The whole statue melted but the heart remained the same which was also thrown near the dead swallow.

The god sent an angel to earth and told him to bring the most precious things from the earth and the angel returned with the heart of a prince and the body of a swallow. The god welcomes them both in his garden.

Themes

Compassion for Others

"The [Happy Prince](#)" is an allegory or a literary tool that uses abstract or fictional characters to represent spiritual or real-world problems or issues. The story focuses on the compassion of a beautiful statue and the loyalty of a common bird. Neither of them knows the suffering and pain of the common townspeople until they see it from the palace wall. The Happy Prince weeps for the people. When he is inside the palace walls, he has no idea what is happening to the people in the town and how they suffer as they try to provide for their families. [Swallow](#) finds compassion for the Happy Prince and becomes loyal to him. They use the jewels and gold that encase the statue to help many people in the town.

The rich people in the town don't understand compassion and never even think to help the townspeople. One of the Queen's maids-of-honor even goes so far as to say that the seamstresses are lazy. The seamstress whom the Happy Prince and Swallow help is sore, tired, and in pain as she toils away, trying to get the dress done while neglecting her son lying sick in bed.

The story was written in the late Victorian era (1820–1914), a time when society was largely class-based during Queen Victoria's reign in Britain, which is now the United Kingdom. The social landscape was changing as more lower-class people were able to work outside their homes and help better the lives of their families. The Industrial Revolution had begun, which led to more education and career advancement for some people. This was not possible before the shift because families previously stayed home to work their farms and focused on their religious beliefs.

Wilde was a product of the newly booming middle-class society, and he wrote this story when his sons were young. He wanted to teach them that they would be much happier if they were morally superior and focused on having compassion for others rather than spurning those who need help.

Keys to Happiness

Wilde wrote "The **Happy Prince**" so his sons could better understand how to be happy in the ever-changing landscape of the Industrial Revolution during the late Victorian era. After the Happy Prince dies, the town erects a golden statue with jewels to honor him. That is when he finally sees what is happening outside the walls. He is left with a moral issue. He knows he did nothing to help them during his lifetime, so he weeps for their pain and needs. He has to do something. When he meets **Swallow**, the Happy Prince begs him to help with the task of distributing the gold and jewels among the poor people. Swallow finally agrees to help and feels warm because he has done a good deed and knows that helping others is the key to happiness.

People of the upper-class society in "The Happy Prince" find happiness in their material possessions much like people in that time. They are oblivious to how much the poorer people endure. One of the Queen's maids-of-honor has commissioned a seamstress to make a beautiful gown for her to wear to a ball. The maid-of-honor stands on a balcony with her suitor, and he remarks that he thinks the power of love is wonderful. The keys to happiness for those who are part of the upper class are

much different from those of the lower classes. Wilde wrote the story to show the vast differences in classes. Those vast differences are their keys to happiness.

The Happy Prince realizes after his death that the reason why people called him the "Happy Prince" is because he knew no pain or suffering. The cruelty in that realization is that he is no longer happy and feels so much compassion for the townspeople that he weeps for them. He also realizes that the true key to happiness is to help others and spread his wealth, which is much different from how he lived his life.

The Shallowness of Upper Society

"The [Happy Prince](#)" was written in a time when the upper-class society was desperately trying to keep their footing as the most important and richest class. However, more people found themselves with opportunities to work outside the home during the age of the Industrial Revolution when many advancements were made in the technology and science sectors. There is a clear difference in the upper-class lifestyle and the lower-class lifestyle.

The upper society doesn't care about how hard it is for the lower part of society to survive. It isn't until after the Happy Prince dies that he sees the suffering of the lower classes and immediately begins to weep for them. He convinces [Swallow](#) to help him because he wants to change the lives of those who suffer. It's the only way they can feel some of the happiness he always knew, which in turn makes him happy. He realizes how shallow and meaningless his life was. He is willing to change, which [Wilde](#) shows in the story was not normal for upper-class people during that time.

Questions and Answers

Q. Why do the courtiers call the prince 'the Happy Prince'? Is he really happy?

Ans. The courtiers called the prince "The Happy Prince" because when the prince was alive, he was always happy and never saw any sorrow. In reality, he was not

happy anymore because when he was made into a statue and placed at a height, he could see the sorrow, poverty and ugliness of his kingdom.

Q. For whom does the prince send the sapphires and why?

Ans. The prince sends the sapphires to a young writer and a match girl. The prince sends the sapphire to the young writer because he fainted due to cold and hunger, and could not finish his play. The matchgirl had fallen in the gutter and spoilt all the matches. The prince sends sapphire to both of them to solve their problems

Q. What does the swallow see when it flies over the city?

Ans. When the swallow flies over the city, it sees the sharp difference between the lives of the rich and the poor. He sees the rich marrying in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates.

Q. Why did the swallow not leave the prince and go to Egypt?

Ans. The swallow did not leave the prince and go to Egypt because he was touched by the kindness of the prince.

Q. What are the precious things mentioned in the story? Why are they precious?

Ans. The two precious things in the story were the leaden heart of the prince and the bird. The prince gave away all his riches, including his sapphire and gold to help the needy and the bird left his wish to go to Egypt and chose to live with the prince to help the poor

FAQs

Q. Why did God welcome both prince and bird in his garden?

Ans. The god was impressed by the act of kindness done by both the prince and the swallow. They both sacrificed for the goodwill of the poor.

Q. Who got the sapphire of the prince?

Ans. The poor playwright who did not have food and a place to sleep and the matchgirl got the sapphire from the prince

Q. Where was the swallow bird flying?

Ans. The swallow bird was flying to Egypt, but he stopped for helping the happy prince.

Q. Why did the town council remove the statue?

Ans. The statue had lost its jewels and looked dull and pale, so the town council decided to remove the statue.