

multitude, and they walked in one long line. And I looked more closely to know wherefore they did not disport themselves freely over so vast a land, and I saw that they were bound with the strength of a great chain! And some were passive. And some were struggling. And some wept. And some laughed—not joyously, but the bitter laugh of defiance and self-exaltation. And some rushed forward with eager footsteps, and wounded those who walked more slowly behind. But they all pressed onwards across the desert. Then he who stood near me, lifted up his voice and spake, saying: "My name is Death—I watch Life." And I said: "What is Life?"

He answered: "The chain."

"Who are those within it?"

"They who exist."

And I asked: "Do none live?"

He answered: "None."

And I thought I could discern much sorrow, so I enquired: "Do not I see great pain in each?"

He replied: "Surely, but what you cannot see is greater."

I said: "Why do they suffer?"

Then he bade me look; and I beheld what I had not seen before. Foremost, and far in front of all, walked a great creature. He appeared like as to a lion, but his limbs were the limbs of a mighty man; and on his head rested a crown of gold, and it shone brightly, and cast a great light around so that many shaded their eyes, and all bowed before it. And I saw that from it proceeded a great magnetic power, and many were drawn towards it, blinded by the brightness of the gold, but when they drew near and touched it, the beast devoured them; and it seemed that afterwards his crown shone the brighter as he turned and threw his power on those following, and they on whom a great shadow had fallen raised their heads and again worshipped the beast, forgetting he had devoured their brothers.

And I cried: "Who is the beast, and what does he amongst the human?"

And the Shadow answered: "He is amongst them, for he is of them, and many are his; his name is Wealth."

I said: "Why were those devoured?"

He replied: "The beast devours all those who once touch it."

Then I asked why all bowed before it, for it was cruel, and not to be loved?

He answered: "Mortals are weak. Wealth has much power, they are dazzled by the sun of their world, and blindly worship it."

And I said: "He is powerful, cannot even he be free?"

But the Shadow answered: "He is more bound than they all, for he feeds on them, and as he drinks their life blood, they make his crown shine brighter,

though they know it not, and his power becomes greater, but he knows it, and is ever thirsty, and did he free himself he would become smaller than they all, and would no longer shine.

I enquired how he became so rich; and he replied: "He fed on the poor!" And they ever continued the great march. And I was troubled, for I understood it not, and he who stood beside me, perceiving this, spake again, and I, listening, heard these words: "To each one within the chain, there lies—far away across the desert—a great prize. It is called the Ideal. All do not know for what they are striving, and some do not care, though each has a dim consciousness of something to be gained. Many would fain lie down and rest, but they cannot, because they are bound to one chain, and the strong, rushing forward, drag on the weak, who, thereby, are forced to progress, yet are not progressing."

Then I saw that some of the strong put out their hands to help the weak; and I saw that when this was so, they walked with less difficulty on the hot sand, and many flowers sprang up around their feet; they no longer gazed on the beast nor worshipped it, for a new sun shone in the eyes of each—then the weak became stronger, and the strong walked no more alone. But they who walked thus were few!

And I asked: "Why do many laugh, yet are not happy?"

Then Death, pointing to their feet, bade me look. And I saw that as these walked, they made no new impressions on the sand, but ever placed their feet in the footmarks of those gone before. And he said: "These are they content to follow where others lead. They trouble not themselves to make new marks for the guidance of others but seek for their own comfort; they laugh, for they believe themselves to be happy, and forget they are marching on across the desert. These are they who do not know of the Ideal."

And I said: "Why are many weeping?"

He answered: "They who weep are they who strive and ever fail; they are the most wretched of all; they feel their powers and cannot use them."

I asked: "Why may they not use them?"

He replied: "They must bow to those weaker in intellect, stronger in power, who exercise authority over many they do not understand."

"Why must they bow to authority?"

"This is their share of the burden of the chain, and their suffering is great."

I asked: "Are none then free?"

He answered: "None; but in each there lies a grain of power to become so; to those who worship the beast this power grows weak and e'er long dies within them. Only some retain it."

And I said: "Then are those happy?"

He smiled and pointed.

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