
7 - THE RETURN OF GENIUS.

There was born, once upon a time, a great Genius. His younger years were spent in poverty and sorrow. Yet his brain teemed with noble thoughts and grand purposes. One day, his heart filled with sorrow and despair, he wandered about viewing all that was rich and gorgeous, and the iron bitterness of fate entered his soul. He groaned aloud in the depth of his misery.

"Oh, that I was famous. Oh, that fame was mine, and riches, and pleasure. Even the world I would forsake if my name could be assured to posterity."

Musing thus he hurried to the woods and fields and by the side of a silver brook threw himself down and anguish filled his soul.

Then there came to him, above his outcry against fate, a gentle voice, sweet with sympathy, saying: "Thou, poor fool. Hast thou not genius? Is not the world before thee? See, it lies here! Rise! go forth! hew for thyself a path! make for thyself a name!"

He raised up his woebegone face and seeing no one cried,

"Who speaks?"

"The God of Genius," answered the voice. "Go and strive and I will assist thee."

The genius only buried his face again and sighed, "Would that I had never been born."

Then came the voice again, saying: "What wilt thou?"

"I would that my name may live through all time," answered the genius.

"On one condition shalt thou have glory and an undying fame."

"All conditions will I obey if only my name is hereafter assured."

"I will give thee fame even now, and riches, and ease, and an undying name, only thou shalt not hear nor see thy own glory."

Then Genius arose and was comforted.

"Go, then," said the voice, "and gather from the fields a handful of poppies. Breathe the perfume from these thrice and thy wish will straitway come to pass."

With great joy the Genius went his way gathering here and there from fragrant nooks a handful of poppies, and when these had been gathered he returned to the brook, threw himself by its side and breathed the perfume thrice. Then there came to him a glorious fancy and he was transported to a mansion of silver. In it were ornaments of gold and precious stones, and luxurious furnishings, such as mind could hardly conceive.

All around sounded the voices of birds and the murmur of silver brooks and the air was burdened with the delightful odors of strange and beautiful flowers.

"Oh!" cried Genius, "now am I happy and my fame will be perpetual."

Slaves dressed in gorgeous attire anticipated his every wish and daily brought him tidings of the world without, written on sheets of pure gold. Sweet voices nightly sang his praises from without, saying: "Thy name is forever famous."

Time rolled on and curious longings entered his heart. They were at first as whisperings of some evil counselor, and for a time he spurned them from him. They would come to him, however, and again was Genius unhappy.

"Oh," he thought, "that I might see the world again. What is greatness and glory but to enjoy. That I might see the world bow and smile, that I might feel its glances of admiration and hear its words of praise. Even can I forget riches and ease for that. Had I but that added to my happiness my cup would then be full to overflowing."

Scarcely had the thought come to him than he heard the voice saying: "I have given thee gold and silver and luxurious ease. See! You have delights granted to no other. Thy name is also forever assured. Wilt thou hear voices of praise? Then, insomuch is thy name forgotten. Wilt thou have the admiration of humanity? Then in that degree will thy name be forgotten. Wilt thou mingle with the world and have it bow to thee? Then dies thy name with thee."

The Genius thought long and deeply and was not comforted. No more was there delight in his gorgeous surroundings. No longer murmured the brooks to him in whispering melody. Everything seemed to have lost its harmony. Time brought only a longing to be great among men.

"I will go," he cried. "I will mingle with men and be of them. They are nearer to me than silver and jewels; nearer to me than words of praise and gorgeous luxury. Fling wide the doors! I am through with this life. I will again seek mankind," and he hurried from the palace.

On the last step stood a fair maiden bearing a lute and holding in her hand a bunch of poppies. "Breathe of these thrice or thy world will be ever lost," she said and the Genius, stooping, inhaled their fragrance.

Then was the brook again as before. Then again he realized his life and its terrors, and looking upward cried, "Oh, that my dream was still," but a voice whispered: "Go! Make for thyself a palace. From it thou canst never leave. In thine own hand is the power—the strength. Achieve thine own glory. It is for thee and thee alone to do this. In effort, will thy genius be sharpened. Aid from the gods would but destroy thee."

And the genius listened to these golden words and returned to men.

Carl Dreiser.

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