

The Character of Happy Life - By Sir Henry Wonton.

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Sir Henry Wonton: Sir Henry Wonton was a distinguished poet, scholar and diplomat. He had an eventful life of rewards and hazards of public life, which, however, found a tranquil close in his last days. Writing from his personal experience, he contributed a rich share to the English poetic literature of his time.

The Poem: 'The Character of Happy Life' is a lovely little poem written by Sir Henry Wonton. It is concerned with the life and virtues of a good man. It is deeply religious in spirit and simple but dignified in expression. It lays emphasis not only on the promise of a heavenly reward but also on the enjoyment of a severe life of peaceful virtue on this search. As such, Walton's virtues man gets the best of both the worlds. A sharp sense of contrast, between the uneasy life of an ambitious man and the contented life of a man satisfied with his obscurity, runs right through his poem. Writing from his personal experience, he wishes to tell us that rewards of ambitious life were very dazzling indeed, but its anxieties and dangers were also all too real.

Context: These lines are from the poem, 'The Character of a Happy Life' written by Sir Henry Wonton. It tells us about the qualities essential for a truly happy life.

Explanation:

(1): The poet says that the characteristics of a happy man are independence, honesty of thought and truthfulness. He has not learnt to be the slave of others. He is upright in all his thoughts and actions. His honesty shields him from all dangers. He believes only in pure, simple truth. It guides him in the day-to-day affairs of his life. Naturally therefore, he enjoys the blessings of real happiness.

(2): The poet says that the characteristics of a happy man are self-control and freedom from worldly ambitions. He is not the slave of his desires and passions. He does not fear death; the world is not too much with him. So he does not have any anxieties, either. He does not care for fame or fortune. As such he does not worry in the least, for what people say about him in private. Naturally, therefore, he enjoys the blessings of real happiness.

(3): The poet says that the characteristics of a happy man are freedom from envy of worldly success, dislike for praise and diplomacy and love for virtue and goodness. He does not envy anybody who has risen to high position by the stroke of good fortune or through his own wickedness. He does not seek praise for it corrupts character and provokes the enmity of the envious. However, insincere praise may be ironic or mocking. So he is totally unaware of the wounds inflicted by praise. His strong ignorance of the principles of statecraft. All that he knows and understands is absolute goodness. He hears no evil, he sees no evil, he speaks no evil and he does no evil. Naturally, therefore, he enjoys the blessing of real happiness.

(4): The poet says that the characteristics of a happy man are freedom from rumors, care for his conscience and lack of wealth and position. He keeps his life free from all kinds of rumors. He listens only to the inner voice of his conscience. As his sincere guide, it is a strong hold, which shelters him from all kinds of evils. The world is not too much with him. So his state is not so great that it can feel flattered or tempt people to accuse him and help them to plunder him when he is ruined. Naturally, therefore, he enjoys the blessings of

real happiness.

(5): The poet says that the characteristics of a happy man are piety and simple life. He worshiped God with sincere devotion. He does not pray for worldly things. Instead, he prays for His kindness and mercy only. He spends his innocent life in plain living and high thinking which is his motto. He either studies good books or sits in the company of noble friends. Naturally, therefore, he enjoys the blessings of real happiness.

(6): The poet says that the characteristics of a happy man are independence, poverty of contentment. He is the slave neither of another's will nor of his own passions. Indeed he is his own master. The world is not too much with him. He has no desire for wealth or worldly cares; he leads an obscure life of peaceful virtue. As much, he has no fear of a downfall either. True he has no riches, but he has happiness, is the greatest wealth a man can have. Naturally, therefore, he enjoys the blessings of a truly real happiness.

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