

The Story of the Merchant's two Sons

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A certain merchant had two sons: the eldest of whom was of so bad a disposition, as to behave with great hatred and spitefulness towards the younger, who was of a temper more mild and gentle. It happened that the old gentleman, having by his trade acquired a large estate, left it by his will to his eldest son, together with all his ships, and stock in merchandise; desiring him to continue in the business, and support his brother.

The father was no sooner dead, than the elder began plainly to shew his ill-will to his brother, thrust him out of the house, and, without giving him any thing for his support, turned him loose into the wide world.

The young man was much dejected with this usage; but considering that in his father's life-time he had acquired some knowledge in business, he applied himself to a neighboring merchant, offering to serve him in the way of trade.

The merchant received him into his house; and finding from long experience, that he was prudent, virtuous, and diligent in his business, gave him his daughter and only child in marriage; and when he died bequeathed to him his whole fortune. The young man, after the death of his father-in-law, retired with his wife into the country, where he purchased a fine estate, with a splendid dwelling, and there he lived with great credit and reputation.

The eldest brother had, after the death of their father, carried on the trade; and for some time met with great success in it: but at length a violent storm arising, tore to pieces many of his ships, which were coming home richly laden; and about the same time, some persons failing, who had much of his money in their hands, he was reduced to great want; and, to complete his misfortunes, the little which he had left at home, was consumed by a sudden fire, which burnt his house and every thing in it: so that he was brought quite into a state of beggary. In this forlorn condition, he had no other resource to keep himself from starving, than to wander up and down the country, imploring the assistance of well-disposed persons.

It happened one day, that having traveled many miles, and obtained but little relief, he espied a gentleman walking in the fields, not far from a fine seat. To this gentleman he addressed himself, and having laid before him his misfortunes, and his present necessitous condition, he earnestly entreated him to grant him some assistance.

The gentleman, who happened to be none other than his brother, did not at first know him; but after some discourse with him, he perceived who he was. However, concealing his knowledge of him, he brought him home, and ordered his servants to take care of him, and furnish him for that night with lodging and victuals. In the mean time, he resolved to discover himself to his brother the next morning, and offer him a constant habitation in the house, after he had got the consent of his wife to the proposal.

Accordingly next morning he ordered the poor man to be sent for. When he was come into his presence, after he asked if he knew him, the poor man answered, he did not. I am, says he, bursting into tears, your only brother; and immediately fell on his neck, and embraced him with great tenderness.

The elder, quite astonished at this accident, fell to the ground, and began to make many excuses, and to beg pardon for his former cruel behavior. To whom the other answered, Brother, let us forget those things; I heartily forgive you all that is past; you need not range up and down the world; you shall be welcome to live with me. He readily accepted the proposal, and they lived together with great comfort and happiness till death.