

THREE SONS

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A father gave his son some property, corn, and cattle, and said to him :

" Live like me, and thou wilt always fare well."

The son took his patrimony, went away from the father, and began to live for his pleasure. The father had, indeed, told him to live like him. " He lives and enjoys himself, and so will I."

Thus he lived a year, two, ten, twenty years, – and wasted all his patrimony, and he had nothing left ; and he began to ask his father to give him more; but his father did not listen to him. Then he began to propitiate his father and to give to him the best things he had, and to ask him again. But his father made no reply to him. Then the son began to ask his father's forgiveness, thinking that he had offended him in some way, and again asked him to give him something; but his father did not say a word.

Then the son began to imprecate his father, saying :

" If thou dost not give me now, why didst thou give me before and dole out my part to me and promise me that I should fare well ? All my former joys, when I spent my estate, are not worth one hour of the present torments. I see that I perish, and there is no salvation. And who is to blame ? Thou. Thou knewest that my estate would not be sufficient, and thou didst not give me more. All thou toldest me was, " Live like me, and thou

wilt fare well. And I lived like thee. Thou livedst for thy joy, and I lived for mine. Thou hast more left for thyself, so thou hast some, while I have not enough. Thou art not a father, but a deceiver and evil-doer ! Cursed is my life, and cursed be thou, evil-doer and tormentor, – I do not want to know thee, and I hate thee . "

The father gave also some property to the second son, saying only :

" Live like me, and thou wilt always fare well."

The second son was not so much rejoiced at his estate as had been the first. He thought that he received his due; but he knew what had happened with his elder brother, and so began to think that he might lose his property like the first. He understood this much, that his eldest brother had not understood correctly the words, " Live like me," and that it was not right to live only for one's own pleasure.

He began to brood over the words, " Live like me."

And he reasoned out that it was necessary, as his father had done, to put to profit the estate which his father gave him. And he began to ask his father how to do this or that, but his father made no reply to him. Then the son thought that his father was afraid to tell him, and began to take to pieces all his father's things, in order to see for himself how everything was done, and he spoiled and ruined everything which he had received from his father, and everything new which he did was all to no profit. But he did not want to acknowledge that he had spoiled everything, and so he lived in agony, telling all that his father had given him nothing, but that he had made everything for himself. " We can "all of us do better and better, and shall soon reach a point when everything will be well." Thus spoke the second son, so long as anything his father had given him was left with him ; but when he had spent the last, and he had nothing to live on, he laid hands on himself and killed himself.

The father gave just such an estate to the third son, and told him too :

" Live like me, and then thou wilt always fare well. "

And the third son, like the first and the second, was glad to receive the estate, and went away from his father ; but he knew what had happened with his elder brothers and began to think of what was meant by the words, " Live like me, and thou wilt always prosper."

The eldest brother had thought that to live like the father meant to live for his own pleasure, and he squandered everything, and was ruined.

The second brother had thought that to live like his father meant for him to do everything which his father had done, and he, too, came to despair. What, then, is meant by living like the father ?

And he began to recall everything he knew about his father. And no matter how much he thought, he could not think of anything else about his father except that formerly there had been nothing, not even himself, and that his father had begotten, brought up, and educated him, and had taught and given him everything good, and had said, " Live like me, and thou wilt always prosper." Even thus his father had done with his brothers. And no matter how much he thought, he could not think of anything else about his father, except that his father had done good to him and to his brothers.

And then he comprehended what these words meant. He understood that to live like the father meant to do what he was doing, to do good to men. And when he thought of this, his father was already near him, and said :

" Here we are again together, and thou wilt always fare well. Go to

thy brother and to all of my children, and tell them what is meant by, ' Live like me,' and that those who will live like me will always fare well."

And the third son went and told everything to his

brother, and since then all the children, in receiving their estate from their father, have not rejoiced because they have a large estate, but because they can live like the father, and will always fare well.

The father is God ; His sons are men ; the estate is life. Men think that they can live alone without God.

Some of these men think that their life is given to them in order to rejoice in this life. They rejoice and waste this life, and when the time comes to die, they do not understand why such life was given to them, since its joys end in suffering and death. And these men die, cursing God and calling Him evil, and depart from God.

This is the first son.

Other men think that life is given to them in order that they may understand how it is made, and in order that they may make it better than what is given them by God. And they struggle over it, to make another, a better life. But, in improving this life, they ruin it, and thus deprive themselves of life.

Other people say :

" Everything we know of God is that He gives the good to men and commands them to do the same, and so let us do the same that He does, - good to men."

And the moment they begin to do so, God Himself comes to them, and says :

" This is precisely what I wanted. Do with me what I do, and as I live, so shall you live."