

Generosity
By J. Erskine Clarke

A father of a family wished to settle his property between his three sons. He therefore made three equal parts of his chief possessions and gave one part to each son. There remained over a diamond ring of great value, which he reserved for the son who should perform the noblest and most generous action within the space of three months. The sons separated, and at the appointed time presented themselves before him.

The eldest son said, 'Father, during my absence I had in my power all the riches and fortune of a person who entrusted them to me without any security of any kind; he asked me for them, and I returned them to him with the greatest honesty.'

'You have done, my son,' replied the father, 'only what was your duty, and I should die of shame if you were capable of doing otherwise, for honesty is a duty; what you did was just, but not generous.'

It was now the second son's turn, and he spoke thus: 'I was on the banks of a lake, when, seeing a child fall in, I threw myself in, and with great danger to myself drew him out. I did it in the presence of some countrymen, who will testify to the truth of it.'

'Well and good,' replied the father, 'but there is only humanity in that action.'

At last came the turn of the third son, who spoke thus: 'I found my mortal enemy, who had strayed during the night, and was sleeping on the edge of a precipice in such a manner that the least false movement on waking would have thrown him over. His life was in my hands; I was careful to wake him with precaution, and drew him out of danger.'

'Ah, my son!' exclaimed the father, overjoyed, embracing him, 'without doubt you deserve the ring.'

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Checking for Understanding

1. What does “chief” mean as it is used in the following sentence: “He therefore made three equal parts of his chief possessions and gave one part to each son”?
2. How do you feel about the father’s decision to give the diamond ring to the third son rather than one of the other sons? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Vocabulary

- entrusted
- countrymen
- manner
- noblest

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