

The Two Brothers

By P'ou Song-lin

In the town of Sou-tcheou there lived two brothers. The elder, surnamed Merchant, was very rich; the younger, named Deceived-hope, very poor. They lived side by side, and their houses, the paternal inheritance, were only separated by a low wall. They were both married.

This year, the harvest having been bad, Deceived-hope could not afford the necessary rice for his family to live upon. His wife said to him:

“Let us send our son to your brother: he will be touched and will give us something, without any doubt.”

Deceived-hope hesitated, but at last decided to take this step which hurt his pride. When the child returned from his uncle's, his hands were empty. They questioned him:

“I told my uncle that you were without rice; he hesitated and looked at my aunt. She then said to me: ‘The two brothers live separately; their food also is separate.’”

Deceived-hope and his wife did not say a word; they fetched the bale of rice that was still in their corn-loft and lived thus.

Now, in the town, two or three vagabonds who knew the riches of Merchant broke open his door one night, and tied him up as well as his wife. As he would not show his treasure, they began burning his hands and feet. Merchant and his wife screamed for help. Deceived-hope heard them and got up in order to run to their house, but his wife held him back, and, approaching the wall which separated them, cried:

“The two brothers live separately; their food also is separate.”

However, as their cries increased, Deceived-hope could not contain himself, and, seizing a weapon, leapt over the wall, fell on the thieves, and dispersed them. Then, when his brother and his sister-in-law were delivered and quieted, he returned home, saying to his wife:

“They are certain to give us a present.”

But, the next day and the days following, they waited in vain! Deceived-hope could not resist the temptation to relate everything to his friends. The same thieves heard of it and, thinking that he would not interfere any more, broke open the door of Merchant the same evening and began again to torture him as well as his wife.

Deceived-hope, indeed, did not wish to interfere. However, his heart and his liver were upset by the painful cries of his brother. He could not forbear running to his help.

The brigands, disconcerted, flew again, but this time Merchant and his wife were severely burnt; they lost the use of their hands and feet.

The next day Merchant said to his wife:

“My brother has saved our lives; without him we should be ruined; I am going to give him a part of what we have.”

“Do nothing of the kind,” replied his wife; “if he had come sooner, he would have saved our hands and feet; now, thanks to him, we are infirm.”

And they did nothing. Deceived-hope, however, wanting money, made an act of sale of his house and sent it to his brother, hoping that he would be touched by his misery and would send back the deed with a present.

In fact Merchant was going to send him some silver ingots, but his wife stopped him:

“Let us take his house; we shall be able to make ours bigger, and it will be much more convenient.”

Merchant hesitated a little, but he ended by accepting the act, and sent the price agreed on. Deceived-hope went and settled in another part of the town; with his small capital, he opened a vegetable-shop, which soon prospered.

The brigands, having heard that Merchant was now living alone, broke open his door very quietly, tortured him, and then killed him, taking away all he had. In leaving the place, they cried all over the town:

“Merchant’s corn-loft is open! Let all the poor go and take the rice!

They thus went, one by one, silently, all the poor of the neighbourhood, taking away as much of the heaped-up rice as they could. Soon there was nothing left.

Deceived-hope being informed, wished to revenge his brother; he pursued the brigands and killed two of them.

From this time it was he who every day attended to the needs of his sister-in-law, now in misery. Some months afterwards, exhausted, she died.

Deceived-hope came back and was soon settled in the patrimony that he had recovered. One night he was soundly sleeping, when he saw his brother.

“You have saved us twice, and we have been ungrateful. I should not be dead if I had not acted badly with you. I wish to make amends. Under the stone of the hearth you will find five hundred ounces of gold that I had hidden, and of the existence of which my wife was ignorant.

Deceived-hope started from his sleep; he told his dream to his wife. She at once got up, drew out the stone of the hearth, and found the mass of gold. Henceforth, happy and rich, they lived long and were charitable and friendly with every one.