

DEAN'S
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MORAL COURAGE.



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MORAL COURAGE.



“OH, Aunt Jane, what! ride on horseback with a girl, over to Pike’s farm! I

wouldn't do it for five pounds! the boys would laugh at me for a month," and the face of Robert Stanton flushed away at the thought of his companions' ridicule.

"Well, Robert, quite likely they would," said Aunt Jane, in her quiet, earnest way; "but Mary Pratt is a poor little girl, younger by four years than you, and she's been sick for three weeks with the scarlet fever, and shut up in that little dark bed-room from the light and beauty of the summer; and her mother can't afford to keep a horse, and so I thought, as you were going to ride down to Pike's farm, it would do the delicate little girl good to carry her over to her grandma's, who lives only a half-a-mile beyond. But I leave you to decide which would be more manly, to do a good act to a sickly little child, or to deny her the pleasure and benefit of a ride, because you fear the laughter of your school-mates."

Here Aunt Jane returned to her sewing, and there fell a long silence betwixt her and her nephew, Robert Stanton; but

the lady knew what thoughts were at work in the boy's soul.

Robert Stanton was not quite thirteen ; he was a bright, eager outspoken boy, a great favourite with his schoolmates, and indeed with everybody ; but brave and fearless as he seemed, he was very sensitive to ridicule, and had a dread of being laughed at by the boys, and this feeling sometimes made Robert Stanton that pitiful thing—*a moral coward!*

But there were springs of warm, generous feeling in the boy's soul, and his aunt had reached one of these when she told him the story of the sick little girl, Mary Pratt ; so there went on a sharp conflict between his cowardice and his kind-heartedness ; but at last his brow suddenly brightened, he sprang up, and went out into the garden, and his aunt bent with dim eyes over her sewing, and thanked God.

A young sunburnt child, she was pale, came shyly into the sitting-room, but her eyes sparkled joyfully as she went up

to Robert's aunt, and said, in her glad, lisp- ing voice :

“ Robert came over to our house this morning, and said I was to go on horse-



back to grandma's if I'd be here by two o'clock ;” and she brushed the strings of her straw bonnet, and smoothed the folds of the snowy white apron, in which her mother had dressed her for the occasion.

“That will be very nice, indeed, won't it, dear?”

This was all Mrs. Ingham said, for just then her nephew entered the room, and she knew that Robert would not wish any notice taken of his generosity.

But she watched from her window, when the boy lifted the little girl, and set her carefully on the gray horse, and then sprang on behind her.

As the animal started, the child gave a shriek; “Oh, I'm afraid?” she said; “it makes me so dizzy;” and the little pale face was turned appealingly to the boy.

His heart warmed towards her, “Oh, don't be afraid now; I won't hurt you. Lean right against me, and take tight hold of my arm.”

And she seized his arm in her small hands, and soon grew fearless.

Robert was greatly amused. “You like to ride, don't you?”

“Oh, yes, I do, and I don't feel a bit afraid now—I like you, too;” and she flashed up her bright smile in his face.

“Do you? what makes you like me?”

“Oh, because you’re so good. I told mamma I knew you was, when you said you’d take me to ride this afternoon.”

So they rode through the green woods, chatting together for more than two miles, and at last Robert heard voices in the distance, and he braced himself up proudly, for he knew that the ordeal had come.

What a shout that was, echoing away off among the hills, from the throats of the half-dozen boys on the bank where the waters of the little river gathered themselves up into a creek.

“Oh, Robert, before you’d catch me there!” exclaimed Harry Weston as, amid their shouts and laughter the riders paused in the midst of the boys.

“Now, boys, just hear me a minute; this little girl’s been sick with the scarlet fever ever so long, and she wanted to come over to her grandma’s, and there wasn’t anybody else to bring her, and so I did, and so I would again, if all the boys in the world stood here to make fun of me, and so would they too, unless they are all cowards.”

He said these words out bold and fearless, and then rode on, and somehow the boys did not raise another shout; but all in their hearts respected Robert Stanton for his courage.

In a little while he returned to his companions. They had fine sport that afternoon, and it was sometime after sunset when Robert and Mary drew up before the front gate.

“Oh, I’ve had such a nice time,” said the little girl, as the lady went out and lifted her from the horse. “And Robert’s promised to take me over to the mill next week.” “Has he? Well, Robert, I think you must have enjoyed it too.”

“I have, aunty, indeed, I have.”

Robert Stanton became, in after years, a brave and honourable man, bold and fearless in the right, and he always declared that that horseback ride over to Pike’s farm was the dawn of a new life of moral courage in his soul.