

## "OLD JACK."

Tommy was greatly delighted when it was at last decided that he should spend his vacation on his uncle's farm. He had seen but little of the country in any form, and nothing at all of the great prairies where one may sometimes look away for miles without seeing a single tree, and where the houses seem like ships anchored here and there in a wide sea of waving grass and grain-fields, with the mowers and reapers plying up and down like skiffs between them.

But, new and wonderful as were all these things to Tommy, he liked best of all the live creatures of the farm. In the great barn-yard, the pretty hens and chickens ran and fluttered and cackled, the spotted guinea-fowls called hoarsely to each other, the turkeys strutted, and the peacock unfurled his splendid plumes to the breeze. The sleek cattle and the wise-faced sheep wandered over the pastures feeding on the sweet grass, and in the stables the strong draught-horses champed the fragrant hay, and the lighter and more graceful animals, which had been trained for riding and driving, neighed and pawed as if begging for their liberty.

Tommy was a very observing boy, and he soon noticed that, while all the horses were well looked after and thoroughly groomed, there was one of them which was more carefully tended than any other. His stall was so large that he had plenty of room to move about in it, and it was not necessary to tie him at all. Every day the stable boy led him up and down for exercise. No hay was given to him which had not been first finely cut, and a warm mash was brought to him regularly three times every day. Each night great pains was taken to spread his bedding softly and evenly.

Tommy wondered the more at this, because this horse seemed the least valuable of any upon the farm. Indeed, Tommy could not see that he was of any use at all. He was very old, his limbs were somewhat stiffened, his teeth worn and broken, and the sight of one eye was quite gone.

"Uncle Henry," said Tommy, at length, "why do you keep old Jack any longer?"

"I must tell you a story in order to answer that question," said his uncle. A number of years ago, when your cousin Dick was not much older than you are now, his

mother was taken suddenly very ill. It so happened that I had sent the two hired men to town that morning, and there was no one to go for the doctor, except Dick or myself.

"But the village where the doctor lived, was seven miles away, and as I was very unwilling to leave your aunt, I bade Dick mount 'Old Jack' for we called him so even then, and ride as fast as possible.

"It was a winter day, but not severely cold, and since Dick was a brave little fellow, used to the saddle and familiar with the road, I felt no anxiety at sending him upon the errand.

"I was so busy attending upon your aunt and trying to relieve her pain, that I did not notice a change in the weather, until I suddenly became conscious that the sky had darkened, and the rising wind was whirling a cloud of snowflakes through the air. The storm increased every moment the wind became a gale; the blinding snow filled the air and drifted along the paths. You can hardly imagine my distress as it became plain that a terrible blizzard was upon us. Suppose my boy was lost on the prairie, while his mother lay, perhaps, dying at home! I could do nothing but pray, and, as I bent over the bedside, every breath I drew seemed a cry to the dear heavenly Father, who alone could help and save.

"The afternoon wore slowly away, and, as evening came on, the storm was still raging, I was almost in despair, when, suddenly, through the noise of the wind, I heard the shrill whinny of a horse."

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