

THE BOY AND THE ROBBERS

In Persia, when Cyrus the Great was king, boys were taught to tell the truth. This was one of their first lessons at home and at school.

"None but a coward will tell a falsehood," said the father of young Otanes. [Footnote: Otanes (pronounced: o ta'n ez).]

"Truth is beautiful. Always love it," said his mother.

When Otanes was twelve years old, his parents wished to send him to a distant city to study in a famous school that was there. It would be a long journey and a dangerous one. So it was arranged that the boy should travel with a small company of merchants who were going to the same place. "Good-bye, Otanes! Be always brave and truthful," said his father. "Farewell, my child! Love that which is beautiful. Despise that which is base," said his mother.

The little company began its long journey. Some of the men rode on camels, some on horses. They went but slowly, for the sun was hot and the way was rough.

Suddenly, towards evening, a band of robbers swooped down upon them. The merchants were not fighting men. They could do nothing but give up all their goods and money.

"Well, boy, what have you got?" asked one of the robbers, as he pulled Otañes from his horse.

"Forty pieces of gold" answered the lad.

The robber laughed. He had never heard of a boy with so much money as that.

"That is a good story" he said. "Where do you carry your gold?"

"It is in my hat, underneath the lining," answered Otnes.

"Oh, well! You can't make me believe that," said the robber; and he hurried away to rob one of the rich merchants.

Soon another came up and said, "My boy, do you happen to have any gold about you?"

"Yes! Forty pieces, in my hat, said Otnes.

"You are a brave lad to be joking with robbers" said the man; and he also hurried on to a more promising field.

At length the chief of the band called to Otnes and said, "Young fellow, have you anything worth taking?"

Otnes answered, "I have already told two of your men that I have forty pieces of gold in my hat. But they wouldn't believe me."

"Take off your hat," said the chief.

The boy obeyed. The chief tore out the lining and found the gold hidden beneath it.

"Why did you tell us where to find it?" he asked. "No one would have thought that a child like you had gold about him."

"If I had answered your questions differently, I should have told a lie," said Otnes; "and none but cowards tell lies"

The robber chief was struck by this answer. He thought of the number of times that he himself had been a coward. Then he said, "You are a brave boy, and you may keep your gold. Here it is. Mount your horse, and my own men will ride with you and see that you reach the end of your journey in safety."

Otnes, in time, became one of the famous men of his country.

He was the advisor and friend of two of the kings who succeeded
Cyrus.