

IN AID OF THE HEATHEN.

BY ESTHER WARREN IN HARPER'S BAZAAR.

I thought at first I never could hold up my head again. I cried whenever I thought of it, and as I was thinking of it most of the time, Johnny said my eyes would probably swell and roll out some dark night. I was afraid they really would, but papa said he thought not, if I would only cry in the daytime, and not lie awake nights to cry too. He said fourteen hours were enough for any one to cry at a time; and then I saw his lips were twitching again, and I walked off and had another good cry.

It seemed as though everybody I met was looking at me, and poking the next person to say, "There, that's she." I am sure, if I live to be an awfully old woman, nothing so dreadful will ever happen to me again. I don't feel so badly about it now, for it was almost a week ago. But I feel more mad than ever, real solemn mad in my heart.

If I did not feel better, I could not speak about it at all; for at first I could not bear to have even mamma say a word, or papa's lips twitch under his mustache when he looked at me. One day we had company to dinner, and something was said about the Missionary Aid Society, and I just got up and put my fingers in my ears and ran away. I was so afraid that red-headed man knew all about it. Mamma was mortified, and papa said, "You are like the man at the theatre who got up and howled when the people cheered at the king's entrance." I don't see what he meant by that, but I suppose he was laughing again, for he put his hand up to his moustache and stroked it.

It was to save my feelings, but I knew that his lips were twitching all the same, and the tears came into my eyes again, and that horrid lump in my throat. Then he said, in the way that makes me think I love him better than all the rest of the world put together: "My dear, don't think about it any more; or if you can't help thinking, suppose you sit down and write all about it. No ghost is frightful if you walk boldly up to it, and it is uncommonly apt to turn out nothing but a broom and an old sheet." Papa is an editor. Our washer woman says, "If ye feels low in the spirits, me dear, depend upon it nothing is so good for yez as a tub of dirty clothes to wash. I suppose they are both saying the same thing. That is why I am writing about it.

I was going to Aunt Lucretia's for six weeks. I staid one day and two nights. Homesick! Not at all. I was sent—no, worse—brought home in disgrace.

I was crazy to go. I had talked and thought about it for weeks, till Johnny said he hated her very name; and at last vacation came, and I was all packed up, and papa gave me a dollar for my own, and put me into the car. I was a little bit afraid when I got out at the station, though I'm not a scarecrow usually, and I can climb fences and trees and swim just as well as Johnny. But the carriage was so grand, and Aunt Lucretia looked so fine and so beautifully dressed leaning back in it, and the nigger coachmen's buttons did shine so! I never saw buttons that shone the way that I—I forgot; papa told me "nigger" was not a pretty word for a young lady to use—the way that Ashantee's buttons did. I tried not to stare when we drove up to the lovely house, and to act as though I had been used to living in such a one all my life. Uncle John came to the door and kissed me, and aunt called to Ruth.

Ruth is my cousin. She is ten—my age—but I thought she must be younger, because she was so quiet, and so afraid. I never saw such an afraid girl. She looked as though she had been afraid since born, and had never met with any encouragement. Aunt had to send for her twice, and then she came into the room with her head down and her shoulders up, and when her mother said, "This is your cousin Winnie," she got red as fire, and opened her mouth to say something, but only moved her lips.

"Why don't you say 'How do you do?'" said aunt. "I never saw such a child. I am ashamed of you. Any one would think you hadn't any bringing up. Put your shoulders down, and shake hands with your cousin. I wish you had half as pretty manners as Winnie."

Aunt herself had very agreeable manners. Ruth shook hands and moved her lips again, but the only word that came out was a great big loud "do" at the end, and it sounded so funny I could not help laughing

I am sure Ruth thought she had said the whole out loud.

"I don't wonder your cousin laughs at you," said aunt. "For a child of your years, your manners are simply heathenish. How many times have I told you, I wonder, that you must keep your shoulders down! You'll be a hunchback if you keep on."

Ruth scowled, and muttered something. At least she meant to mutter, but seems to me she don't know how to manage her voice, for this time she fairly shouted, "Don't care." I suppose aunt was very much mortified, because she talked to her till supper-time. Maybe she felt bad because I am about Ruth's age. I don't mean to say my manners are extra pretty, but I had on my best dress, and that always makes you behave better of course, and—well, I felt kind of grown-up sitting there talking to Uncle John about papa and mamma and Johnny. I felt sorry for Aunt Lucretia, and I thought perhaps I could teach Ruth a little while I was there. It must be particularly hard when one is so rich to have a daughter who is a mortification. And she kept telling her to see how prettily I behaved. I liked Aunt Lucretia from the first moment I saw her. She told Ruth she behaved like a heathen thirty-four times before we went to bed. I counted; I could not help counting; just as I always count the number of rolls Rev. Mr. Dillaway eats when he comes to tea. I should not care if he ate a barrelful, and I try not to count, and I think I am not counting; but all the same I find myself thinking when we get up, "He ate nine to-night."

At supper it was even worse. "Sit straight Ruth." "Ruth, don't eat so fast." "Ruth, that last mouthful was too big." "Take hold of your knife farther up; how many times have I told you that? Winnie will think you a perfect heathen. See how prettily she holds her knife and fork."

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I felt sorer than ever for aunt. Ruth did not talk at all. "Don't butter your bread that way, and don't crumb it so. If you were a heathen I don't think your table manners could be different." Ruth looked at me once or twice from the corners of her eyes—to see how I was behaving, maybe. I thought I could be a little "home missionary," such as Mr. Dillaway talks to us about sometimes.

"I never saw such a child," Ruth had spilled her glass of water. I am afraid it was because I had been staring at her while I was thinking. "I am in such despair over you that sometimes I think it would be better to let you grow up your own way, with manners like the heathen."

But I don't think she could have meant that for all the through supper she kept talking to Ruth, and telling her this or that, till I felt as you do after you've been listening to the whirr of a saw-mill.

We sat on the porch after supper. Uncle John's house and gardens are beautiful. He has a greenhouse and arched back of the house, and the loveliest flower garden, with beautiful walks and high hedges; and then you come to a thick row of trees, like a fence with an arch cut in it, and you step up there and look off over miles of lovely fields, and a river, and cliffs, that are all his. There is a tall Scotch gardener who looks like the picture of Rob Roy, in Sir Walter Scott's story, where he is waving his sword to save a girl from being drowned by a lot of nasty soldiers. ("Miscreant!" exclaimed Rob; "the good Queen Anne gave you no warrant for such deeds as these.") He has six men under him, working all the time to keep the place in order. In front of the house is a lawn that slopes away down to the road, and beyond that is the sea. I don't believe paradise is lovelier. Uncle John has lots of money. "Pelham's Pleasant Pills"—that's his. Of course you've seen it round everywhere where you go in the steam-cars, or on the fences and rocks a little way out of town. I've even seen it up to the White Mountains on cliffs and stone walls. We were going in the stage last year along the loveliest road, with mountains all round, and meadows and brooks lying on one side of the road and a pine forest on the other, when, just at the loveliest part, we came to an enormous wall of rock, and on it was painted, in white letters, "Pelham's Pleasant Pills Pay the Purchaser." So you see everybody knows about them, and the Governor likes to have the signs put round up there; he thinks it improves the scenery. Only I think it is so funny people are ever sick or die, when Uncle John's pills cure everything.

They were not rich before he discovered them. He was only just a doctor then. I suppose it is because he don't like to be reminded of when he was poor that he will not let anybody call him Doctor now. The only time I ever saw him mad was when a man who came to the house one day called him "Dr. Pelham."

Ruth never said a word while we were on the porch. Aunt Lucretia was talking to Uncle John. It made me think of the saw-mill again. I wanted to go round and see everything, but Ruth hung her head, and whispered,

"I don't want to."

"Let me see," I said: "let's play croquet."

Ruth was afraid of the grasshoppers. Swing! Aftaid the ropes would break. Hammocks, jump on the hay, look at the horses, take a walk—as true as you live, she was afraid of every single one.

"Let's go to bed, then," said I—"unless you're afraid to."

"It is time you were in bed, children," said Aunt Lucretia. "Brush your hair ten minutes Ruth, and don't forget, as you have lately. If little girls—"

I don't remember the rest, I was so sleepy. I could hardly keep my eyes open while we were undressing, and the minute I was in bed I was sound asleep.

I don't know what time it was really, but it seemed about five minutes, when something woke me. It sounded like crying. I put out my hand, and it came down on the back of Ruth's head. Her face was in the pillow.

"What's the matter?" said I, the biggest half asleep. "Are you afraid?" and in another moment I should have been all asleep again.

"I wish I was a heathen!"

Yes, that was what she said. Think of it!

She had her face out of the pillow now, and was crying so hard I thought she would choke. She was talking too, only I could not understand what she said. But that did not matter. I put my arms round her neck and kissed her.

"I'm your own cousin," said I, "and I love you dearly."

She cried harder than ever. Wasn't it funny? I let her cry, till by-and-by she began to stop.

"Now tell me," said I. "Come lie on my pillow, where we can whisper, and let's keep our arms round each other; it's kind of comfortable to the feelings." I thought maybe she was afraid of a ghost. I don't believe in them, but they are the only things I am afraid of.

"Did you ever wish for anything?" Ruth began, when we were all nice and cozy.

"Lots!" said I. "A pony, and a boat, and to go up in a balloon, and a bicycle—"

"Oh! I don't mean that. I'll tell you what I've wished for ever since I was a baby—that I had been born a heathen."

"Well, I never!"

I wondered if I had not better call Aunt Lucretia; Ruth seemed to be going crazy. There was a dreadful story of a crazy man in the book I had taken once off the blue-board shelves in papa's library. I did not tell papa for a week, and then I could not stand it any longer. It was not the worst part, though, as he said, my thinking about it. It was because he was so displeased—no, hurt. But I've never been to the shelves since, and he knows what the reason is too. Papa always understands.

I had crawled off to the other side of the bed. But Ruth did not seem to mind, or even notice; she kept right on talking faster than I had ever done, though mamma says my tongue is never still.

"They don't have to eat with their knives and forks just so, or sit straight, or brush their hair, or be pretty and lady-like. They can talk and laugh, and can eat as fast as they want to, and take as big mouthfuls, and aren't told little stranger girls are so much nicer than they are, till they want to crawl under the table for shame. They can be dirty all day long—just think of it!—and don't have to sit down to any dreadful table to be talked to all the time, and if they're sleepy in the morning, they aren't scolded for not getting up till they're dizzy, and seems to me everything nice is heathen. When they sing

"I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled,
And made me in this blessed land
A happy Christian child."

I only make my lips move; I don't dare to

tell such a fearful lie in Sunday-school; for seems to me the next best thing to being an angel must be to be a heathen."

"That's just what I think," said I. I hadn't till that moment, but it seemed then as though it was the one thing I had been wishing for all my life, too. I crawled back again by the side of Ruth, and began to think, instead of being crazy, she was by far the most sensible girl I had ever met. I suppose I have read more than most girls of my age. Papa lets me read anything in his library except three shelves that I must not look at. But I have read lots of the rest; and while Ruth was talking, all that I had read about the lovely wild countries came with a rush to my mind; Robinson Crusoe, Swiss Family, Tom and the Crocodiles, The Mysterious Island, oh! and lots of others, not all story-books either. "No school or running errands, but just lying under palm-trees all day long, and eating oranges and bananas, and going in bathing, and riding, and sleeping out all night in hammocks—why, what fun it must be!"

"I like you," Ruth had come nearer. "I've never told anybody this. You won't tell, will you? The only reason I have not gone off to them long ago is that I can not bear the idea of not wearing any clothes."

That put me back a little, too, for a moment. Still, Robinson Crusoe certainly wore clothes, so did those wonderful men on the mysterious island; but then it would not do to trust too much to fiction in such a case, and then it flashed across me:

"Why, they do wear clothes. They wear lovely robes of black silk and scarlet and pure white and rainbow-colored, and hats trimmed with fresh every day with real flowers that always look like new ones—think of that. And sometimes they just twist lovely scarfs about them, and twine flowers in their hair, I s'pose for real hot days, I've read all about it in Mark Twain."

"Who's he?"

"A historian."

"Tell me some more."

And I did tell. I talked and talked. I told her how they had lovely ponies that went like the wind, and how they went in bathing all day long, and rode on the surf, how it was never too hot or cold there, and they had every kind of fruit except apples. They could be out-doors all the time, and played and danced and picnicked. And when people sent them clothes such as we wear, they just "dressed up" in them, and went to church, and had lots of fun. Ruth kept telling me to go on every time I'd stop; but I love to tell stories, and I was willing enough to keep on. I told her about the kings they had had and their revolutions, but how everybody liked them now, and there was lots of cats there—three apiece all round. I even told her how, if a wicked heathen hated somebody, he got hold of something his enemy had been wearing, and flopped down and prayed over it, and so prayed him to death. Yes, honest truth. Oh yes, anything would do that he usually wore. It never rained there, or snowed, and there wasn't any dust, and the people knew it didn't hurt to stay all day in the water instead of just ten minutes. It struck three, and I had whispered myself hoarse.

"We must go to sleep," said I.

"Winnie," said Ruth, and she grabbed hold of my arm, "let's go there."

"Go—there!"

"Yes, we'll both go there. I've planned it all while you've been talking. We will live there the rest of our life. I mean to go, and you must come with me."

"But wouldn't you be afraid?" I began to think of all the fun we would have.

"Afraid!"

"But how'll we get there?"

"I know."

"How?"

"Let me whisper. Papa is one of the Standing Committee. I don't see what they call them 'Standing' for, because they sit all through the sermon, like everybody else. I've often watched. And he takes care of the money for the Foreign Mission. It is down-stairs now in his desk. I know just where he keeps it, and I heard him tell mamma last Sunday that it was fifty-three dollars. I remember, because mamma began saying the parlor carpet had a worn spot in it."

"Go on."

"Don't you see? We'll take that money; we shall have enough, besides, to buy the