

Isn't It Awful!

There is a little maiden,
Who has an awful time;
She has to hurry awfully
To get to school at nine.

She has an awful teacher,
Her tasks are awful hard;
Her playmates all are awful rough—
When playing in the yard.

She has an awful kitty,
Who often shows her claws;
A dog who jumps upon her dress,
With awful muddy paws.

She has a baby sister,
With an awful little nose,
With awful cunning dimples,
And such awful little toes!

She has two little brothers,
And they are awful boys;
With their awful drums and trumpets,
And make an awful noise.

Do come, I pray thee, common sense;
Come and this maid defend;
Or else, I fear, her awful life
Will have an awful end.

A BOY OF TO-DAY

by
Julia MacNair Wright.

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CHAPTER VII.

BOOP-TRE and FIRE-SIDE.

A big, strong lad with wits about him can usually find plenty to occupy him of a desultory kind, even when steady work is lacking. Heman helped to mend a broken table with a few nails, he caught and dominated a rearing, frightened horse, and he and Uncle Rias became quite well acquainted with the owner of the van-load of monkeys. The disappearance of his man's factotum and driver occasioned an offer for Heman's services. Cripps, the monkey-owner, asked Heman to go with him as a driver and general assistant. The idea was at first resisted by Heman and Urias. Persistent talk on Cripps' part, sixteen dollars a month and found—hire by the month, can come back when you choose, only ask you to take me to the city where can get for the winter; do as you like after that, you'd have two or three months' good wages, and a chance to see the world." These suggestions told. Heman and Urias saw in the offer for two months the money to build the longed-for shop.

"I could bring back forty dollars," said Heman; "said Heman, 'I couldn't use more than eight dollars, even with the van. I'd like to see the world, but I'll be back before the first of November, in time for the best work here—mobbe I'd better go. I do want to do something, Uncle Rias."

"Heman was homesick, lonely, restless, and a great craving to see the world had come suddenly upon him. There was boy enough in Uncle Rias to sympathize with this restless craving, and Heman tried to argue the case in Heman's behalf.

"Drex, there ain't nuthin' so right down bad for a boy as havin' nuthin' to do, to be cravin' to earn when he can't earn." Drex, as he boys want to see the world some, went to Boston, New York, Philadelphia; it stands to reason that Heman, not having been over twenty miles from home, wants to see nuthin' to do. He'll be back by time snow flies, I say." "Well, he'll be back."

Drex, however, was set against the wale project. "He'll get sick and die far away from us. He'll have cholera, or something, or yellow-fever, or plague, or something."

Heman, who could not remember a day of illness, laughed this prognostication to scorn.

"Aunt Drex insisted. 'He's never had scarlet fever, or diphthery, or measles, or whooping-cough, and once you let him go out promiscuous, he'll get 'em all. Them show people are a bad lot; they cheat, lie, swear, and break Sabbath, Heman will be one of those who don't fear God nor regard man; the first Palm is dead against all such companying—and so's all the Epistles.'"

"You're mistaken, Drex, this Cripps isn't half bad; I never heard him swear or talk rough; he appears real square, and he says he don't do a thing but rest Sundays."

Heman then undertook to persuade her. "Aunt Drex, if I find that they swear and cheat and break Sunday, I'll come home. I'll act just as I was brought up to do, and I will not let you know how much we need money for that shop! You can't guess how mean I feel not earning a thing when I've cost you such a terrible lot of money, and eat so much."

"Cost us money!" cried Aunt Drex amazed. "Why, no, you haven't!" "Oh, but I have. Just think, you didn't feed and clothe me, shoes and all, and all the things, and all the sewing and washing a hundred a year—and you've been at it twelve years, ever since I was three, and that's twelve hundred. Think of all I've cost you, breaking, forgetting, and spoiling things, and all the sewing and washing he's been worth; why, oceans of money, indeed, Aunt Drex, and I feel like a pauper doing nothing day in and out."

Heman waxed eloquent, he wanted to see he thought in a hazy way, the van with two big horses, through the sunny summer landscape, would be joy. He loved horses, and had driven for years; for five months he had missed a horse so much. "Oh, to go, to do, to see, to be, something!"

As usually happens, the woman, whether she was in the right of it or not, was talked down. The bargain was made, and Heman was to go with the presence of the "Scientific Show Man," whose knowledge of microscopes and large words greatly impressed Urias.

On a Tuesday in August, Heman, with his clothes in a hazy way, the van with two big horses, through the sunny summer landscape, would be joy. He loved horses, and had driven for years; for five months he had missed a horse so much. "Oh, to go, to do, to see, to be, something!"

"Why, it it's bogus I can't pass it at all!" "You can—do it quick; you say 'here's your change, an' shoes 'em along. If they comes back on you, you staves and sez, 'I never gave you that, never see it before.' Then I comes to the rescue, an' I says, 'Oh, no, don't block the way, don't hinder the show; don't try to palm off your counterfeit on us!'"

"No!" answered Heman. "I don't see that I'm going to work off bad money." "You took it in, you've got to work it off," cried Cripps.

"I did take it in," said Heman ruefully, "and I s'pose I owe you for it. But Drex's boy says 'I can't see that other; and before Cripps knew what he meant to do, he sent it whirling far off into a field."

"Well, you are a nincompoop," said Cripps.

Aunt Espey had given Heman fifty cents, so he should not go forth in the world penniless, half of it was now gone. Heman began to see a queer side of show life, and he said, "I've got my doubts."

The first Sunday out Cripps woked up his establishment at four o'clock in the morning. "Turn out there. It's a hot day, and we'll have to go slow; we'll have a heavy five o'clock show. I'll feed the monkeys, harness up, while I get breakfast."

Of course Heman expected to feed the animals on Sunday, but not to drive all day; so he protested. "I say, I'm not going to drive, I'm going to church. Did you forget it was Sunday, Mr. Cripps?"

"Forget it? Well, Lightning and Red Pepper, ain't you overlisted to show at D— to-morrow? Say, ain't we?" "I don't know. If we are, what did you do it for? I won't go."

"You won't? Well, I'll make you," cried Cripps, seeing a tent with a running stream. Heman, Heman skipped aside, caught up a camp-chair as shield and weapon, and full of fury roared,

"Come on; let's see who beats in this game. I'll make you, but that's such a stinky thing as you are!"

As by enchantment the other show people of two or three vans, turned out to see the fun, and "Go it, kiddo!"

"You're matched, Cripps, with the Sabbath morning crowd." "You don't break that kid's arm." "You won't break him up much," were words addressed to Cripps, that let in floods of light.

"I'll leave you and go myself," said Cripps. "What'll you do?" "Well, I'll walk on after you to-night;

catching what rides I can, or I'll turn round and work toward Windie."

In fact, Heman longed to hurry back to Windie. But to go without a cent, to confess defeat so soon when he had seen so much of the world, was not so beautiful; the new country was beautiful. Cripps set about getting breakfast, and Heman fed the animals. Suddenly Cripps came pleasantly to Heman, saying "I ought to have been a little better; I had to hurry to D—, I don't travel Sunday as a rule. I don't want to go out at eleven or twelve to-night as I get to D— a time to show up to-morrow; you see, that's the way my mother at D— is dreadful sick—likely to die—an' I got a telegram from her before I woked you up, sayin' to hurry on and not see her any more. A man does want his mother's good-bye blessing; you know. That's what made me mad, you both as no-Christian as not to help me out to her. Then I see you was all the way out here, and I had to send you telegram. Here, 'is' and Cripps took out a strip of yellow paper. Says, 'Come quick—or she'll be gone.' She's a good woman, she'd stand by you not now; Sundays. She brought me up well."

"Well—of course—sickness and dying—that makes a difference."

All the difference in the world. It's not now what's the good dyin' Christian mother—that's what it is," urged Cripps.

Heman drove all that hot Sunday towards D—, and when they reached the place where the show was to be set up, Cripps began to tear about to establish himself. "Leave that to me, said Heman. 'Hurry to see your sick mother.'"

Then did Dan Cripps execute an Indian dance, and he and his little daughter who whooped and laughed and slapped his legs and triumphed greatly.

"I fooled you fine! Mother! Mother! Never had one as I know of. Dying! He'll be back in a minute, says Uncle Rias. Fish that bite bare hooks! Didn't I game you!"

Whereupon Heman in great fury marched off, washed and combed at a kind of station at the corner of the street, and did not resume the society of the jubilant Cripps until the next day.

The Cripps show consisted of two vans. One held the monkeys and was driven by a man; the other conveyed the tent, household goods and other property, and was in charge of Cripps. Cripps slept in that van, and Heman, who was disgusted with Cripps, the bedding, the food, and the smell of the van, slept under the tent if it happened to blow up. A blanket and the earth made good enough bed for the sturdy Heman those August nights.

The second Sunday out Cripps was out of the tent, and Heman was detailed to deliver a five o'clock show but given five or six days more to be spent. The fourth Sabbath morning at three o'clock the vans drew up at a watering-place where a month was to be spent.

By this time Heman had found Cripps to be all that Aunt Drex's fancy had painted him, cheating, profane, dirty, false, idle, drunken. Never was a boy so unaccountable as the Heman of show life. Not a tent had been set up, he was far from home, without a penny; the six addressed postal-cards Aunt Espey had provided were used up; Heman had no suit, no own clothes, had no bed but the ground, and no money, no food but the coarse daily meals prepared by Cripps. Oh, the horrible evening! Oh, the heart-sickening of Aunt Drex's boy, showing no sign! All Sunday morning board-walkers, hammers banged, show people vociferated, and animals made the sounds with which nature had gifted them. The booth next to Cripps was held by the "Scientific Showman," the Heman, by the name of whom both booths was displayed "Wonders of the World." "Biggest Lady ever Known," "Smallest Man," "The Starboard Man," as Cripps worked at the booth alone. Heman saw the vans roll off as soon as the animals were fed, the proprietor of the "Biggest Lady" questioned:

"You alone? Where's your helper?" "He won't work Sundays. Pious kind."

"What?" "Oh, he's true. Feeds, but won't show nor set up. Can't make him show Sunday of unban'dy," said the Scientific showman.

"It is," said Cripps, with conviction, "but being genuine it has advantages. He don't steal the door money."

"Can you sell him to me? He'll sell me horses' oats for drinks; he don't worry the monkeys sick to get even with me."

"Cripps is afraid of him," said the Scientific showman.

"He's not afraid of him, but he's afraid of his mother."

"He's not afraid of his mother, but he's afraid of his mother's good-bye blessing."

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Scientific showman. "He sees he can't lick him. You ought to see him try it one day. The boy laid Cripps flat! Says he, if ever you lay a hand on me again, Cripps, I'll knock you down, and let you see what he said."

The show people laughed loudly. The proprietor of "Biggest Lady in the World" remarked, "Such a boy has no business in the show. He's a 'Biggest Lady's' mother, a neat, worn, mild woman, added, 'No; it'll be the apollin' of a good lad, and good lads ain't plenty in this world,' speaking as if he had had the experience of some years, where good lads rarely strike as plantains.

The "Biggest Lady's" mother and proprietor shook their heads mournfully, and as they set their affairs in order meditated much on the absent boy, the anomalous "good boy" at a show, the "good boy, who had muscle and showed fight, and took care of himself generally.

Heman wasn't in church by any means. He felt too dirty and disreputable to go to church. Day after day he had driven in dust and heat, night after night he had slept out of doors; he had had no leave and a chance of some water, his hair needed cleaning and cutting; he had not a shirt fit to wear to church, for he had been his own laundress for a month.

When dressed for the show he wore a suit, and a tall cap of blue, scarlet, and much tinsel, sash, feathers and red shoes, show properties, that by this time his soul suffered more than the Israelites that were in the desert by the absent boy.

Now they were by the sea, Heman, after dark came out of the woods where he had lain all day with nothing to eat but a few crackers, some wintergreen leaves and a half dozen of Heman's, for an hour luxuriated in a sea bath. His hair and skin were clean at last!

When Heman appeared the next day in his due place as factotum of Dan Cripps' show, he was well received and paid only by the owners of the near booths. A "good boy" in show life was more of a wonder than any sight on the placards, and a "boy who would stand Dan Cripps' show" was a great favour in the eyes of all Dan's enemies, that is, by all who knew him.

The mother and proprietor of the "Biggest Lady" were honest, kindly people, and under of Heman's unfortunations, which quickly grew into a resolve to get him out of his unfortunate business. Acquaintance progressed quickly; he was heart-sick and had to give up his business. He is well developed, and boys respond readily to kindly advances—an age-wild Christian people should consider and not let slip by unused, if they wish to capture the boy for goodness. "My question."

Heman intended to tea with the "mother" on Wednesday to dinner. The eating, as compared with Drex's cooking, left much to be desired, as compared with Aunt Cripps' concoctions it was simply sustenance.

The booths as now arranged had some kind of a compact by which the shows were kept in succession, or two or three at a time for said an hour each, thus giving a public opportunity to pass from one to another. Cripps thus found unoccupied seasons when he could get a sleep, a drink, a smoke, and Heman could meditate upon his situation, show favours to his neighbours, or visit the other booths. One afternoon he strolled into the booth where the "Scientific Manipulator," as he styled himself, was exhibiting to some crowded people the marvellous sustenance.

The "Manipulator" was fresh from London, where he had given street exhibitions for years. Gloomy as Heman now was, he could not fail to laugh as he listened to the old fellow.

"Look through that glass," said the Manipulator, "them wot you see is cheese mitos, you'll observe that they are as big as black beetles, them's what you ought to observe, them's what you ought to observe."

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