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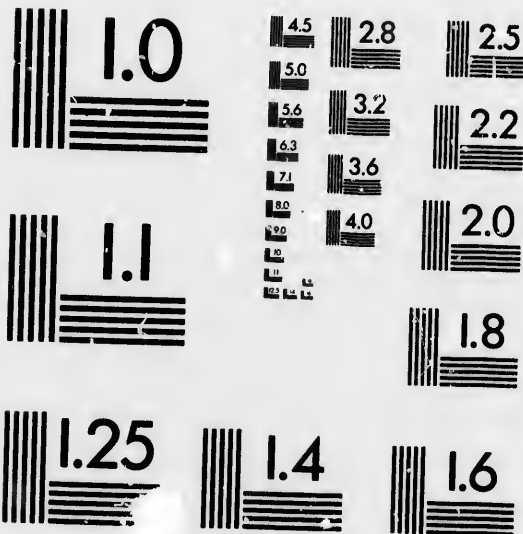
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LITTLE MISS ELLERBY

AND

HER BIG ELEPHANTS,

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

BY

MRS. BOOMER

(WIDOW OF THE LATE DEAN OF HURON).



LITTLE MISS ELLERBY

And Her Big Elephants.

I SAY "her big elephants," but I must premise that that is somewhat of a figure of speech. I would not insult your credulity by asking you to believe that little Miss Ellerby had two big elephants of her very own. Indeed it was rather the other way ; the elephants, so to speak, had Miss Ellerby. At any rate how to be rid of them was a problem which perplexed her by day and troubled her in her dreams by night. Nor am I strictly accurate when I describe both of these obtrusive animals by the single adjective "big," for there are degrees even in bigness, and one elephant was considerably bigger than the other, as indeed it ought to be, being its mother.

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As I write, another inaccuracy suggests itself. By my calling my little historiette, "Little Miss Ellerby and Her Big Elephants," I find it more difficult to make you understand that it was a kind of a joint-stock affair after all, for others had to go shares in their proprietorship, and in the very palpable duty of getting rid of them both as quickly as possible, and how to do this was the puzzle. It all came about in this way. Little Miss Ellerby, who had a heart of gold (about the only gold she had, good little soul), and a deep and abiding love for her Church and Parish, and who never tired in her efforts to benefit both, had come home after a long round of district visiting, thoroughly tired out, and what was somewhat unusual for her, a trifle depressed and disappointed. One after another had groaned over the Church debt. Some had shirked doing anything at all because the debt was so big, and "the little we could do would not make much difference anyway," another had said, "She preferred sending her

money to the heathen, and that was about all she could manage to do," another was a member of "this society" and another "of that," one excuse following each other so glibly that although they deceived neither those who spoke nor her who listened, still they served to send little Miss Ellerby home with a confused sense of things being altogether wrong somehow, taking away her appetite, and giving her a bad attack of what her good old handmaid Bridget called her "neurology."

A cup of tea somewhat revived her, and a few comforting words from the Book of Books calmed her nerves and raised her hopes

She was sitting quietly in her easy chair, half dozing and half cogitating when her bright schoolboy nephew Leo, popped in as he often did on his way to his home in the next street. "Why! Aunt Liz, not even your knitting in your hand, and you do look glum, whatever's wrong with you?"

"Tired, Leo, only, and a fit of the blues, which will all go away if you

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stay and chatter to me a bit," which Leo was nothing loth to do.

What started the boy upon the subject of elephants is hard to say, but as most boys are fond of animals, and as there was a promise of a travelling circus coming their way shortly, possibly that was at the bottom of it. One story after another he related of the wonderful instinct of these big creatures, how cunning they were, how clever, how docile and patient, how obedient in spite of their tremendous strength and then "Aunt Liz" added he, "they really can enjoy a joke too, like the old fellow who took the painter's brush, when the man had left his paint pot behind him when he went to his dinner, and with it streaked the sleepy old camel in the next compartment of the menagerie, till he made him look like a longnecked humpbacked Zebra." From this he went on to tell the pathetic story (which I really hope is true), of poor old Jumbo's death, how the big kindly brute tried to save the Baby Elephant and did so too, at the cost of his life.

With a "goodbye, Auntie," and the remark made for the fortieth time, that he just wished that "the circus folks would hurry up," Leo darted off to get up his tasks for the High School on the morrow.

Now whether it was this elephant talk of Leo's or whether the least bit in the world of pickled salmon which Bridget brought in at supper time upon a dainty china plate, wherewith to tempt her dearly loved Mistress's failing appetite, was the cause of her very bad dream, (you see that the tale hinges upon a dream after all), little Miss Ellerby was never quite sure, and indeed during the progress of the dream, she did not know it *was* a dream but believed it to be a very terrible reality. "She heard or thought she heard (which amounts to the same thing.) a terrific noise; a kind of groaning and grumbling mixed with what might have been the sighing of the wind in the locust trees or the roaring of a big animal in distress. Was it a whirlwind? was it an earthquake? was it *a fire*?

that thought which strikes terror into the female breast. With beads of horror upon her brow Miss Ellerby started up, (or thought she did which I repeat amounts to the same thing), and seizing a quilted wrapper which lay upon the chair beside her, and thrusting her feet into some slippers lying handily underneath it, (you see she was a methodical body with an eye to propriety even in her dreams), she rushed out into the landing crying "Bridget! Bridget! get up, fire! fire! thieves! call the engines! call the police! call the -- call the Churchwardens."

Now this happy thought shows the tenor of little Miss Ellerby's mind. Whatever the impending trouble was, it *might* be a something which would involve her beloved church, and the beautiful school buildings. or, horror of horrors! the Rectory, the new Rectory of which they were all so proud, whilst the Rector, himself whom all alike loved and respected, with his kindly wife, and, —well, —his big tribe of little ones, might be burned in their beds!

Bridget was equal to the occasion, what the hubbub was all about she knew not but she distinctly heard the command to "call the Churchwardens" and that she obeyed without the slightest hesitation and with a promptness worthy of all praise.

Now one of the Churchwardens was their nearest neighbor with just a tiny strip of lawn separating the two houses. With well directed aim Bridget who had after her usual housewifely fashion, all her kindling wood in the coal box ready prepared for the morning's needs made use of them as missiles, hurling lump after lump against the closed venetians of good Mr Pratt's bedroom window shouting "Church! Rectory! Schoolroom! fire! fire!"

In spite of his sixty years and his somewhat ponderous frame, in that incredibly short space of time which schoolboys generally describe as a "jiffy" Mr. Pratt appeared upon the scene looking somewhat scared it is true but "all there" nevertheless.

By this time the whole place was alive, one had shouted one thing and one another until the entire parish was represented from the Rector himself down to the Sexton's youngest boy.

"What was it all about? Where was the fire? Who had shouted first? stop the engines! What's the meaning of it all?"

The gathering crowd were all making for one point and that was the beautiful block of shaded grounds upon which stood the Church, Rectory, Schools, all models of their kind and without equals far or near, a fact they had often challenged any one to contradict. Just at the central point which gave entrance to all, there was a large arched and pillared doorway, and to either side of this was firmly chained an elephant. That on the right hand being a veritable monster, that on the left certainly of much smaller dimensions, but big enough in all conscience!

Under the foundations of each building alike, some mysterious power

had contrived to place huge rollers or whatever might be the name for such house-moving apparatus, and the elephants were apparently disposed to make light work of the task assigned to them, which was without doubt, to convey the whole bodily away into the waters of the broad lake, the waves of which were dancing and frolicking joyously under the beams of the lovely moon which was shining with unusual brilliancy, just the same as if no such undermining plot had ever been concocted.

Upon one was a placard, none the less distressing because its announcement was written in letters of gold upon a banner of blue silk, (or perhaps it was simple silesia), which informed the awe-struck gazers that the name of its bearer was 'Parochial Debt' whilst the placard upon the other indicated the close tie of relationship which the lesser brute bore to the greater, for upon it was inscribed "The Interest of the Debt," and as every one knows *where the one is, the other is sure to be close at hand*, and is indeed often

the more offensively intrusive of the two.

Midway between them stood the keeper, or the driver, or the owner, you may call him what you like, with the air of one who was ready to answer any questions and to give every information in his power. It was at this juncture that little Miss Ellerby began to have a faint hope that the whole thing might be a dream after all, the two elephants being only a foreshadowing of Jumbo's successors, and the piebald look of the man in charge, an outcome of Leo's story of the zebra-like camel. But that relief was speedily denied her, for with a crack of his whip, and an earthquake like upheaval of what seemed like the very ground upon which they were assembled, the two elephants bent to their work, and the buildings gave a lurch forward as if they were starting upon their journey. With a cry of anguish and despair Miss Ellerby waved what she took to be her pocket handkerchief, but which turned out to be a

large bath towel she had seized in her hurry.

In her hands it became a veritable flag of truce, for at the mere sight of it the man made a signal which his mammoth steeds instantly obeyed, and all again was still.

Seizing the auspicious moment the whole parish advanced as one man to expostulate, to plead, to explain, to promise anything, *anything* if only those elephants would go away at once.

"Hungry! why to be sure they were" said the man, "the little chap in particular! he always has to be fed first, and the worst of it is *you never seem to get on any further with him, feed him as you may!* When his next meal time comes round, there he is, trunk-hunting about, so to speak, to pick up every morsel that comes in his way. As to his poor mother! why the patience of that animal is beyond belief. She never even looks to be fed until her young one is satisfied, and goodness knows, whenever that may be! I only hope that *her turn will come some day*, for

big as she looks, she must be that holler that if her ribs were not as strong as iron, and her hide as thick as a dozen parchments, she'd never be fit for her work!" With this, he gave an ominous crack of his whip, as though time was up, and they must stay no longer palavering.

In dreams (for of course you remember this is only a dream after all,) things and places, and times and seasons get oddly mixed up, and some two or three years seemed to have come and gone like a flash, and much of what had really occurred in the interim I must leave to your imagination.

The imminent though imaginary peril of losing their really much-prized church with its beautiful adjuncts, a peril they had escaped it is true, had led them to a more thorough appreciation of them all, and they had even gone so far as to say "we should have deserved it, had the calamity befallen us." The old excuses and reasons which had once

seemed so all sufficient, now appeared to themselves what they had always been in reality, paltry and insufficient. The majority acknowledged that they had let the heavy burden fall upon the few, who from year to year had been feeding (metaphorically) Jumbo junior, to prevent the distracting roar of the starving Mother-elephant from reaching their ears. They had in old times been tempted to believe that they might make a bargain with their Maker, that if they gave to His poor, or ranged themselves under one organization or another, and did *something* for his creatures that that absolved them from doing more.

Now, they recognised that both were equally duties. Of either could it justly be said "This should ye do, and not leave the other undone." They did not withdraw their hands from any good work which they had begun. Those *had* been begun in obedience to the Royal Command to "Feed my lambs," to tend the sick and soothe the sorrowful, to visit the widows in

their affliction," and of these commands they must still be mindful, but over and above these, and because of the heart softening influences of these very things, they did more, they went to the root of the matter, and laying by weekly as God had blessed them, each in proportion to his means, they found that their charity purse was never without a coin to bestow upon a needy fellow creature and yet that they could pay their share towards the due and fitting maintenance of the Sanctuary itself. "A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether," had achieved by united action in a very short time what had been for so long almost a single-handed fight. They could endorse the truth of old John Bunyan's lines "A man there was, some called him mad, the more he gave the more he had" and far better still, they could realize the beautiful words in Proverbs, 11th, 24 v. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth."

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(The following paragraph to be used if little Miss Ellerby's story should be read at a parochial meeting for kindred purposes.)

To every story there is, or should be a moral. Far be it from me to suggest that our case resembles that of the parish quoted above, but as our assembling together this evening certainly has *some* reference to a Parochial Debt, let me ask our friends when they plan to drop a coin into the plate, to change their minds, and drop in two, if it be only 'for the sake of the *bigger* of Little Miss Ellerby's two big Elephants."

H. A. B.



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