

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

Although a Poor Fisherboy,
Obliged to Work All Day, He
Studied at Night and Learn-
ed the Secret of Ambergris
and its Great Worth

THE boys in Bayport called Herman Manson "Dutchy," partly because his name was Herman and partly because he wore trousers that once had been his Uncle Charles's and were cut down by his mother to fit him. They fitted him so loosely that he seemed to be walking in bags.

His poor mother was not a tailor, and couldn't be blamed for making over a pair of trousers in that manner, and Herman did not mind what the boys called him very much, as he had far more serious matters to attend to all the time. The Mansons were very poor; so poor that had not Uncle Charles, who was a doctor, helped them frequently, food would often have been scarce in the house while Herman was a small boy.

Doctor Charles was as poor, almost, for his patients were simple fishing folk, boatmen and the like along shore, who rarely had more than enough money to supply their wants. In fact, it was a rather poverty-stricken little seashore village in which Herman lived.

When he grew older and was able to earn some money by helping the boatmen and fishermen, times were easier for the family, and Uncle Charles was not called upon so often. Herman's sister, Aline, was a cripple, suffering from a dislocated hip bone and almost constantly in pain, so that his old mother had all the housework to do. Herman was frequently seen busy over a washtub or scrubbing the floor of the little cabin. This made the village boys jeer in contempt. The Mansons had once been rich, and lived here at Bayport only in the summer.

Herman's father had built a curious cabin almost entirely of parts of wrecked ships that had come ashore on the beach at various times. It was an interesting little hut and attracted the attention of every visitor to the village, having gilded figure-heads of ships standing at its four corners, a boat swung on davits under the window, an immense anchor resting beside the door and a capstan beside the walk. The windows were from the sterns of ships, lanterns hung in doors; even the floors were of wood that had once been a ship's deck.

When Herman's father failed in business and then died the family lost all their possessions and were left with nothing but this little hut by the sea, and into it they moved at once.

Here Herman and his sister grew up with the sound of the billows in their ears from morning until night, learning all the lore of the sea, but little from books, for their mother had no money to pay for schooling, and all that Herman knew of books he got from Uncle Charles, who lived down the road.

It was strange that the boy became a lover of reading, although, perhaps, it was simply because books were so hard to get. He was so fond of them that the sight of one filled him with longing to open it and dive into it at once, and thus when a very small boy he had read far more than lads twice his age. The fact that he could not go to school, which would have filled most boys with gloom, made him often sad and gloomy. As he saw the other children trudging along the sandy road toward the little storm-beaten schoolhouse, with their books and lunch-boxes, he wondered why they walked so slowly instead of running, as he would have done.

That he knew far more than any of them about the mystery of the sea, and could name every shell, every seaweed, each fish, each bird, along the whole stretch of white sand from Bayport to Beach-End was nothing to him. He wished to study grammar, arithmetic, history and geography, also. But he now had really no time to go to school, for upon his shoulders was placed the whole burden of finding food for his mother and sister.

Uncle Charles was poor, as I have said; and, besides, what little money he could procure went to buying materials for some important experiments that he was making in the hope of discovering cures for diseases. All day long he busied himself in his office at these experiments, and Herman saw little of him except when he was hurrying on his bicycle to a patient.

Sometimes when the boy was far out from shore he would see Uncle Charles crossing the bay in a sail-boat to visit some poor patient on the other shore and wave his hand to him, after which he would attend to his work, so that he rarely had a chance to talk to him.

This work of Herman's, I suppose, most boys would call great fun. One day it would be fishing or crabbing, on another clamming or oystering out on the sparkling sunlit waters, and again it would be duck or snipe or goose shooting, sometimes on the bay, sometimes out beyond the breaking rollers of the sea shore. Or he would search the beach for miles looking for things that had drifted ashore, for that is how he obtained the firewood they burned at home, and many a time on these quests he came upon a barrel or box that had formed part of the cargo of some wrecked vessel, which he conveyed home in triumph.

He was happy, generally, for he was always busy, but at times a fearful feeling of hopelessness took hold of him as he thought that he would never be anything but a beach-comber or a fisherman. Perhaps he might even become a life-saver, and patrol the dreary, wintry beach and rescue people from shipwreck, but as he knew many of the life guard



HERMAN HAULS THE AMBERGRIS ABOARD HIS FISHING BOAT.

He Put the Wonderful Metal, Radium, to New Use; Cured His Sister and Astonished All the Doctors

he neither envied them their occupation nor their learning; and, above all, he wished to get an education. Perhaps had he been alone in the world he might have gone away and become a sailor, but there was his old mother and crippled sister looking to him for protection and support, and, after all, he didn't want to become a sailor at all.

One day Uncle Charles asked him to row him across the bay. It was a mild spring morning, the water lay like a floor on the bay, and as Herman dipped his oars slowly Uncle Charles, who had been up all night, almost dozed as he sat back against a pile of fish-nets in the stern. Suddenly Herman said:

"I've gotter get an education!"

"How old are you?" asked his uncle.

"Thirteen years old; that's old enough, ain't it?" answered Herman. "I want to go to school 'fore it's too late," he added.

"It's never too late," replied the man. "We learn constantly all through life, and going to school is only opening the door to education. Some very learned men scarcely went to school at all, for that matter."

"How did they learn anything?" asked Herman, in great wonder, for he had never heard anything like that before.

"They read," said Charles. "Read all the time, and remember what they read. That's the main thing. Some people read all their lives long and remember nothing at all; it goes through their heads like water through a sieve. You can become learned if you follow one simple rule."

"What is it?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"Try to remember, and when you have read anything repeat it to yourself afterward until you are sure you have it in your mind. That is all."

"Can I learn arithmetic and geography, and all that way?" inquired Herman.

"Certainly. They are not difficult studies. I'll lend you my old school books. I'd have given them to you long ago had I thought about it. You can study while you are fishing, just as well as in school."

"Can I?" asked Herman, in surprise.

"Surely. I used to work in a shop," continued the doctor, "when I was a boy, with a young man who was a chair-maker. He always had a book near him and occasionally took a peep into it. I didn't know that he was studying, but later when he passed the examination and was admitted into the Naval Academy at Annapolis I remembered it all. Now he is a commander of a big battleship. So you see what one boy did can be done by another. In fact, it will be much easier for you, for there is nobody to reprove you for it, as there was in his case, for had our boss seen him he would have considered that he was loafing, although he is very proud now of his acquaintance."

"I'll do it!" cried Herman. "In fact, I do read a lot, but it's mostly stories and such stuff." So now there began another existence for Herman Manson. He was never without a book. Sometimes, I must confess, he was so absorbed in the

volume that he didn't notice that a fish was biting or that a duck was swimming right before his eyes among the decoys. These are wooden ducks, that he had carved himself during the odd moments, which he anchored out from shore while he himself had his little boat among the tall rushes of the bank. The wild ducks see them from afar and sweep into them, thinking they are comrades feeding there, and as they are about to settle among them, bang! goes the gun, and down comes a duck or two!

He read everything he could buy or borrow, until at last he was acquainted with every book in Bayport. Of course he soon was far ahead of all the scholars in the village, and instead of being nicknamed "Dutchy," the boys called him "Herman the Bookworm." The wonderful part of it is that he remembered everything he read, as his uncle had advised, and he became a perfect gold mine of valuable information, even the postmaster coming to him frequently to learn things. You could walk right up to Herman and ask him the most difficult question and be answered at once.

The Squire was astonished one day, when he was telling about seeing the first iron-clad ship ever built, by Herman informing him that the ancient Norsemen covered the sides of their vessels with iron plates, and once Judge Endman was so shocked by the boy's statement that "wolf teeth" in a horse's jaw were perfectly natural and not injurious at all, that he actually wrote to the Weekly Tribune's Horse Doctor column to get a decision, which was as Herman had stated.

After a while Bayport people began to point the boy out to visitors, and he was called the "Bayport Prodigy" behind his back. It was predicted that he would some day reflect great credit on his birthplace, but I fear that it would have taken many years for this to occur had not a fortunate accident happened that made Herman wealthy in a twinkling.

Returning one hot day at noon with a few weakfish in his boat, very much discouraged over his bad luck, he drove his boat up on the white sand with a push and jumped out to find two little children poking sticks into a flabby-looking mass of white waxy substance that lay half covered by the water. It was an unpleasant lump of stuff, suggesting something dead and decayed, and the children's noses were wrinkled in disgust as they walked away. Herman went to it, and his eyes opened in astonished glee. Then he saw another fragment of the same substance floating a few feet from shore.

Hastily he lifted the repellent-looking mass into his boat, sprang in and hastily secured the floating lump, and with all speed he rowed off again to land in front of his own home. Here he carefully carried the two great lumps into the house and laid them on the dining room table. His mother shrieked as she beheld them, dripping wet and repulsive, but Herman laughed joyfully and said:

"Our fortune is made, mother. I won't even have to go clamming again!"

"What do you mean?" she inquired.

"Just what I say."

"Do you mean that that nasty stuff is worth anything?" she added.

"Yes. It's probably worth thousands of dollars."

"Oh, nonsense!" she cried, and then Aline said: "Mamma, if Herman says so it must be so."

"Yes," repeated the boy, "that is ambergris. It comes from the stomach of whales and is used in making perfumes. I guess it's worth about a thousand dollars a pound."

"Gracious! Go get the scales!" cried Mrs. Manson. "Let's weigh it, at once!"

Well, Herman, of course, was right. It was ambergris and exceedingly precious, even more valuable than usual, for none had been found for a long time and its price therefore was very high. Whalers who are lucky enough to come upon this rare substance consider that the voyage is well paid for already.

The funny part of it all was that a dozen people at least had seen the nasty-looking stuff lying on the sandy beach and instead of grabbing it chose to be disgusted. This shows what a little knowledge is worth at times to its possessor.

Old Peagram, who kept the tavern, actually tried to establish a claim upon part of it because he saw it first.

On the whole, everybody was pleased that Herman got it, but when it was learned that he had sold the ambergris for sixty-eight thousand dollars Bayport went crazy, and everybody went to hunting on the beach every blessed morning in the hope that another fortune would drift ashore.

When Herman got his money he bought the home on the hill in which he had once lived, and then he went to Uncle Charles and said:

"How are your experiments getting on?"

"They have stopped for lack of money," replied his uncle, rather glumly. "I had hoped to make an important discovery regarding the use of radium, if you know what that is, but as I can't get radium, for it costs a million dollars a pound, I have ceased altogether."

"How many pounds do you need?" asked Herman, laughing.

Uncle Charles looked at him for an instant, and then he smiled, for his ill-temper was gone. "You know that there are only a few grains in the world," said he. "It takes two tons of rock, or ore of pitchblende to make a few grains. All I need is a grain, perhaps."

"Could you get one or two grains?"

"No, I couldn't, but a man who was wealthy might," said Uncle Charles. "It costs about two thousand dollars a grain."

"Then I'll go to Paris," said Herman, "and see what I can do."

And that's what he did. When he found Mr. and Mrs. Curie, who get out all that rare metal, he induced them to sell him four grains for six thousand dollars, as they happened to need some money just then, and he returned in great triumph. Uncle Charles was so tickled that he had to have the

So When Others Passed Great
Lumps Washed Ashore, He
Picked Them Up and Sold
Them Until He Was Won-
derfully Rich

the glass tubes containing the shining stuff right out to play with. Herman gave him two grains.

"Why do you keep the other two?" asked his uncle.

"I want to do some experimenting myself," replied the boy.

"I wish to see if I can cure diseases by it," said Uncle Charles, rather suspiciously.

"I've got even a better idea," replied Herman. "You just wait and see."

Then with his two little grains of radium, that blazed away, day and night, like tiny glow-worms, giving out heat and light, yet never growing a bit less, like some magic lamp, Herman went to work.

Whatever radium shines upon becomes radiant also for a long time, and shines like the magic stuff itself, lighting up all around it. Water, metals, bread, wood, even glass becomes brilliantly illuminating, and it was this wonderful fact that gave Herman his grand idea.

And this was the idea:

He intended to make a kind of pill or capsule of radiant stuff, which, when swallowed, would light up one's insides as if he had swallowed a lamp! He tried various substances before he arrived at the conclusion that ordinary bread was the best, as it became most brilliant, was the easiest to swallow and did no harm at all.

He swallowed one of his radiant pellets himself just as soon as they were completed, and in a few minutes found his whole body sending out bright rays as if he were a walking lighthouse. He could see all his ribs, his stomach, lungs and other organs as distinctly as if he were made of glass!

Delighted with the splendid result of his experiment, he rushed at once to his uncle, who fell out of his chair with astonishment at seeing him so beautifully transparent.

"Why! If it works you will be famous and richer than Croesus!" cried Uncle Charles.

"If it works!" exclaimed Herman. "Can't you see it's working?"

"There's always some doubt, you know," replied his uncle. "We will give one of the pellets to Aline and see if we can discover her trouble."

After Aline had taken a pill the doctor saw at once that her hip-bone was out of place, but so slightly that it was a very simple matter to restore it to its socket, and after that Aline was no longer a cripple.

Then they tried another pellet on a little boy, who in coughing had drawn a tack into his lungs, and they saw it as plainly as if it were in one's hand. The doctor got it out in a jiffy.

As it grew dark they returned home, and were amazed to see Herman's dog, Sandy, sitting by the door with all of his inside work quite visible, and in the centre of him, amid fragments of bone, leather, book-covers, worsted and other things that dogs swallow, was shining a radiant pellet. He looked guilty and ashamed, and of course they saw that he had stolen one of the pills.

"It's fine stuff to study how our insides are made!" said Herman. "I guess I, too, will become a doctor. Won't have to cut people open any more!"

It was a little unpleasant for Herman that night to find himself so bright and shining, and he remained indoors, but they put out the lamp just to see him blaze, for he had taken a very large pellet.

There was no keeping the secret, however, for Sandy, whom they had forgotten, ran out and roamed around the village, scaring people, as well as the other dogs, into spasms. Every cat he met turned a somersault, flew up in the air and scooted. Twenty men, seeing what they thought was a spook dog, or else a demon, hurried home and signed the pledge never to drink another drop.

Oh! they were the maddest men next day, when all the village was ringing with Herman's wonderful discovery.

But that night Sandy had the streets to himself, for the spectacle of an illuminated dog wandering abroad was too much for the good people, and they hid behind locked and barred doors until the fiery four-legged demon went home.

In the morning there came to Herman many people who were afflicted with diseases. One had trouble with his stomach, another with his heart, and so on through all the list, and each one wished to be examined and examined at once.

When Herman illuminated Mr. Peagram, the hotel keeper, and showed that he had concealed in his appendix verminiformis a pearl which he had probably swallowed in an oyster, there was great excitement and everybody wanted to be examined in the hope of finding other valuables, perhaps.

Herman's finding the ambergris had attracted some attention in the papers, but now he became famous indeed, and reporters from far and near flocked to him to find out all about the great discovery. Soon he was selling his illuminated pills to every doctor in the land, and making immense sums of money, so that at last he became a millionaire.

Thus we see that a boy who had no chance to go to school managed to learn enough, all by himself, to become both rich and famous, and I am lost in wonder when I think what he would have become had he had all the early opportunities of most boys!

He is already Mayor of Bayport, and I should not be surprised to see him Governor of the State some day. WALT McDUGALL.