

## SONNY'S SCHOOLIN'

### A MONOLOGUE

**W**ELL, sir, we 're tryin' to edjercate him—good ez we can. Th' ain't never been a edjercational advantage come in reach of us but we 've give it to him. Of co'se he 's all we 've got, that one boy is, an' wife an' me, why, we feel the same way about it.

They 's three schools in the county, not countin' the niggers', an' we send him to all three.

Sir? Oh, yas, sir; he b'longs to all three schools—to *fo'*, for that matter, countin' the home school.

You see, Sonny he 's purty ticklish to handle, an' a person has to know thess how to tackle him. Even wife an' me, thet 's been knowin' him f'om the beginnin', not only knowin' his traits, but how he *come* by 'em,— though some is hard to trace to their

so'ces,— why, sir, even we have to study sometimes to keep in with him, an' of co'se a teacher— why, it 's thess hit an' miss whether he 'll take the right tack with him or not; an' sometimes one teacher 'll strike it one day, an' another nex' day; so by payin' schoolin' for him right along in all three, why, of co'se, ef he don't feel like goin' to one, why, he 'll go to another.

Once-t in a while he 'll git out with the whole of 'em, an' that was how wife come to open the home school for him. She was determined his edjercation should n't be interrupted ef she could help it. She don't encour'ge him much to go to her school, though, 'cause it interrupts her in her housekeepin' consider'ble, an' she 's had extry quilt-patchin' on hand ever since he come. She 's patchin' him a set 'ginst the time he 'll marry.

An' then I reckon he frets her a good deal in school. Somehow, seems like he thess picks up enough in the other schools to be able to conterdic' her ways o' teachin'.

F' instance, in addin' up a colume o' figgers, ef she comes to a aught— which

some calls 'em naughts—she 'll say, "Aught 's a aught," an' Sonny ain't been learned to say it that a-way; an' so maybe when she says, "Aught 's a aught," he 'll say, "Who said it was n't?" an' that puts her out in countin'.

He 's been learned to thess pass over aughts an' not call their names; and once-t or twice-t, when wife called 'em out that a-way, why, he got so fretted he thess gethered up his things an' went to another school. But seem like she 's added aughts that a-way so long she can't think to add 'em no other way.

I notice nights after she 's kept school for Sonny all day she talks consider'ble in her sleep, an' she says, "Aught 's a aught" about ez often ez she says anything else.

Oh, yas, sir; he 's had consider'ble fusses with his teachers, one way an' another, but they ever' one declare they think a heap of 'im.

Sir? Oh, yas, sir; of co'se they all draw their reg'lar pay whether he 's a day in school du'in' the month or not. That 's right enough, 'cause you see they don't

know what day he 's li'ble to drop in on 'em, an' it 's worth the money thess a-keepin' their nerves strung for 'im.

Well, yas, sir; 't is toler'ble expensive, lookin' at it one way, but lookin' at it another, it don't cost no mo'n what it would to edjercate three child'en, which many poor families have to do—*an' more*—which in our united mind Sonny 's worth 'em all.

Yas, sir; 't is confusin' to him in some ways, goin' to all three schools at once-t.

F' instance, Miss Alviry Sawyer, which she 's a single-handed maiden lady 'bout wife's age, why, of co'se, she teaches accordin' to the old rules; an' in learnin' the child'en subtraction, f' instance, she 'll tell 'em, ef they run short to borry one f'om the nex' lef' han' top figur', an' pay it back to the feller underneath him.

Well, this did n't suit Sonny's sense o' jestic *no way*, borryin' from one an' payin' back to somebody else; so he thess up an argued about it—told her thet fellers thet borried nickels f'om one another could n't pay back that a-way; an' of co'se she told him they was heap o' difference 'twix'

money and 'rithmetic — which I wish't they was more in my experience; an' so they had it hot and heavy for a while, till at last she explained to him that that way of doin' subtraction *fetches the answer*, which, of co'se, ought to satisfy any school-boy; an' I reckon Sonny would soon 'a' settled into that way 'ceptin' that he got out o' patience with that school in sev'al ways, an' he left an' went out to Sandy Crik school, and it thess happened that he struck a subtraction class there the day he got in, an' they was workin' it the *other* way — borry one from the top figur' an' never pay it back at all, thess count it off (that 's the way I 've worked my lifelong subtraction, though wife does hers payin' back), an' of co'se Sonny was ready to dispute this way, an' he did n't have no mo' tac' than to th'ow up Miss Alviry's way to the teacher, which of co'se he would n't stand, particuar ez Miss Alviry 's got the biggest school. So they broke up in a row, immejate, and Sonny went right along to Miss Kellog's school down here at the cross-roads.

She 's a sort o' reformed teacher, I take

it; an' she gets at her subtraction by a new route altogether — like ez ef the first feller that had any surplus went sort o' security for them that was short, an' passed the loan down the line. But I noticed he never got his money back, for when they come to him, why, they docked him. I reckon goin' security is purty much the same in an out o' books. She passes the borryin' along some way till it gits to headquarters, an' writes a new row o' figur's over the heads o' the others. Well, my old brain got so addled watchin' Sonny work it that I did n't seem to know one figur' f'om another 'fo' he got thoo; but when I see the answer come, why, I was satisfied. Ef a man can thess git his answers right all his life, why nobody ain't a-goin' to pester him about how he worked his figur's.

I did try to get Sonny to stick to one school for each rule in 'rithmetic, an' havin' thess fo' schools, why he could learn each o' the fo' rules by one settled plan. But he won't promise nothin'. He 'll quit for lessons one week, and maybe next week somethin' else 'll decide him. (He 's

quit ever' one of 'em in turn when they come to long division.) He went thoo a whole week o' disagreeable lessons once-t at one school 'cause he was watchin' a bird-nest on the way to that school. He was determined them young birds was to be allowed to leave that nest without bein' pestered, an' they stayed so long they purty nigh run him into long division 'fo' they did fly. Ef he 'd 'a' missed school one day he knowed two sneaky chaps that would 'a' robbed that nest, either goin' or comin'.

Of co'se Sonny goes to the exhibitions an' picnics of all the schools. Last summer we had a time of it when it come picnic season. Two schools set the same day for theirs, which of co'se was n't no ways fair to Sonny. He payin' right along in all the schools, of co'se he was entitled to all the picnics; so I put on my Sunday clo'es, an' I went down an' had it fixed right. They all wanted Sonny, too, come down to the truth, 'cause besides bein' fond of him, they knowed that Sonny always fetched a big basket.

Trouble with Sonny is that he don't take

nothin' on nobody's say-so, don't keer who it is. He even commenced to dispute Moses one Sunday when wife was readin' the Holy Scriptures to him, tell of co'se she made him understand thet that would n't do. Moses did n't intend to *be* conterdicted.

An' ez to secular lessons, he ain't got no respec' for 'em whatsoever. F' instance, when the teacher learned him thet the world was round, why he up an' told him *'t war n't so*, less'n we was on the inside an' it was blue-lined, which of co'se teacher he insisted thet we was *on the outside*, walkin' over it, all feet todes the center — a thing I 've always thought myself was mo' easy said than proved.

Well, sir, Sonny did n't hesitate to deny it, an' of co'se teacher he commenced by givin' him a check — which is a bad mark — for conterdictin'. An' then Sonny he 'lowed thet he did n't conterdic' to *be* a-conterdictin', but he *knowed 't war n't so*. He had walked the whole len'th o' the road 'twix' the farm an' the school-house, an' they war n't *no bulge in it*; an' besides, he had n't never saw over the edges of it.

An' with that teacher he give him another check for speakin' out o' turn. An' then Sonny, says he, "Ef a man was tall enough he could see around the edges, could n't he?" "No," says the teacher; "a man could n't grow that tall," says he; "he 'd be deformed."

An' Sonny, why, he spoke up again, an' says he, "But I 'm thess a-sayin' *ef*," says he. "An' teacher," says he, "we ain't a-studyin' *efs*; we 're studyin' geoger'phy." And then Sonny they say he kep' still a minute, an' then he says, says he, "Oh, maybe he could n't see over the edges, teacher, 'cause ef he was tall enough his head might reach up into the flo' o' heaven." And with that teacher he give him another check, an' told him not to dare to mix up geoger'phy an' religion, which was a sackerlege to both studies; an' with that Sonny gathered up his books an' set out to another school.

I think myself it 'u'd be thess ez well ef Sonny was n't quite so quick to conterdic'; but it 's thess his way of holdin' his p'int.

Why, one day he faced one o' the teach-

ers down thet two an' two did n't *haf* to make *fo'*, wh'er or no.

This seemed to tickle the teacher mightily, an' so he laughed an' told him he was goin' to give him rope enough to hang hisself now, an' then he dared him to show him any two an' two thet did n't make *fo'*, and Sonny says, says he, "Heap o' two an' twos don't make four, 'cause they 're kep' sep'rate," says he.

"An' then," says he, "I don't want my two billy-goats harnessed up with nobody else's two billys to make *fo'* billys."

"But," says the teacher, "suppose I *was* to harness up yo' two goats with Tom Deems's two, there 'd be *fo'* goats, I reckon, whether you wanted 'em there or not."

"No they would n't," says Sonny. "They would n't be but two. 'T would n't take my team more 'n half a minute to butt the life out o' Tom's team."

An' with that little Tommy Deems, why, he commenced to cry, an' 'stid o' punishin' him for bein' sech a cry-baby, what did the teacher do but give Sonny another check, for castin' slurs on Tommy's animals, an'

gettin' Tommy's feelin's hurted! Which I ain't a-sayin' it on account o' Sonny bein' my boy, but it seems to me was a mighty unfair advantage.

No boy's feelin's ain't got no right to be that tender—an' a goat is the last thing on earth that could be injured by a word of mouth.

Sonny's pets an' beasts has made a heap o' commotion in school one way an' another, somehow. Ef 't ain't his goats it 's somethin' else.

Sir? Sonny's pets? Oh, they 're all sorts. He ain't no ways partic'lar thess so a thing is po' an' miser'ble enough. That 's about all he seems to require of anything.

He don't never go to school hardly 'thout a garter-snake or two or a lizard or a toad-frog somewheres about him. He 's got some o' the little girls at school that nervous thet if he thess shakes his little sleeve at 'em they 'll squeal, not knowin' what sort o' live critter 'll jump out of it.

Most of his pets is things he 's got by their bein' hurted some way.

One of his toad-frogs is blind of a eye.

Sonny rescued him from the old red rooster one day after he had nearly pecked him to death, an' he had him hoppin' round the kitchen for about a week with one eye bandaged up.

When a hurted critter gits good an' strong he gen'ally turns it loose ag'in; but ef it stays puny, why he reg'lar 'dopts it an' names it Jones. That 's thess a little notion o' his, namin' his pets the family name.

The most outlandish thing he ever 'dopted, to my mind, is that old yaller cat. That was a miser'ble low-down stray cat thet hung round the place a whole season, an' Sonny used to vow he was goin' to kill it, 'cause it kep' a-ketchin' the birds.

Well, one day he happened to see him thess runnin' off with a young mockin'-bird in his mouth, an' he took a brickbat an' he let him have it, an' of co'se he dropped the bird an' tumbled over—stunted. The bird it got well, and Sonny turned him loose after a few days; but that cat was hurted fatal. He could n't never no mo' 'n drag hissself around from that day

to this; an' I reckon ef Sonny was called on to give up every pet he 's got, that cat would be 'bout the last thing he 'd surrender. He named him Tommy Jones, an' he never goes to school of a mornin', rain or shine, till Tommy Jones is fed f'om his own plate with somethin' he 's left for him special.

Of co'se Sonny he 's got his faults, which anybody 'll tell you; but th' ain't a dumb brute on the farm but 'll foller him around — an' the nigger Dicey, why, she thinks they never was such another boy born into the world — that is, not no human child.

An' wife an' me —

But of co'se he 's ours.

I don't doubt thet he ain't constructed thess exac'ly ez the school-teachers would have him, ef they had their way. Sometimes I have thought I 'd like his disposition eased up a little, myself, when he taken a stand ag'in my jedgment or wife's.

Takin' 'em all round, though, the teachers has been mighty patient with him.

At one school the teacher did take him out

behind the school-house one day to whup him; an' although teacher is a big strong man, Sonny 's mighty wiry an' quick, an' some way he slipped his holt, an' fo' teacher could ketch him ag'in he had clumb up the lightnin'-rod on to the roof thess like a cat. An' teacher he felt purty shore of him then, 'cause he 'lowed they was n't no other way to git down (which they was n't, the school bein' a steep-sided buildin'), an' he 'd wait for him.

So teacher he set down close-t to the lightnin'-rod to wait. He would n't go back in school without him, cause he did n't want the child'en to know he 'd got away. So down he set; but he had n't no mo' 'n took his seat sca'cely when he heerd the child'en in school roa'in' out loud, laughin' fit to kill theirselves.

He 'lowed at first thet like ez not the monitor was cuttin' up some sort o' didoes, the way monitors does gen'ally, so he waited a-while; but it kep' a-gittin' worse, so d'irectly he got up, an' he went in to see what the excitement was about; an' lo and beholt! Sonny had slipped down the open chimbley

right in amongst 'em—come out a-grinin', with his face all sooted over, an', says he, "Say, fellers," says he, "I run up the lightnin'-rod, an' he 's a-waitin' for me to come down." An' with that he went an' gathered up his books, deliberate, an' fetched his hat, an' picked up a nest o' little chimney-swallows he had dislodged in comin' down (all this here it happened thess las' June), an' he went out an' harnessed up his goat-wagon, an' got in. An' thess ez he driv' out the school-yard into the road the teacher come in, an' he see how things was.

Of co'se sech conduct ez that is worrisome, but I don't see no, to say, bad principle in it. Sonny ain't got a bad habit on earth, not a-one. They 'll ever' one o' the teachers tell you that. He ain't never been knowed to lie, an' ez for improper language, why he would n't know how to select it. An' ez to tattlin' at home about what goes on in school, why, he never has did it. The only way we knowed about him comin' down the school-house chimbly was wife went to fetch his dinner to him, an' she found it out.

She knowed he had went to that school in the mornin', an' when she got there at twelve o'clock, why he was n't there, an' of co'se she questioned the teacher, an' he thess told her thet Sonny had been present at the mornin' session, but thet he was now absent. An' the rest of it she picked out o' the child'en.

Oh, no, sir; she don't take his dinner to him reg'lar—only some days when she happens to have somethin' extry good, or maybe when she 'magine he did n't eat hearty at breakfast. The school-child'en they always likes to see her come, because she gen'ally takes a extry lot o' fried chicken thess for him to give away. He don't keer much for nothin' but livers an' gizzards, so we have to kill a good many to get enough for him; an' of co'se the fryin' o' the rest of it is mighty little trouble.

Sonny is a bothersome child one way: he don't never want to take his dinner to school with him. Of co'se thess after eatin' breakfas' he don't feel hungry, an' when wife does coax him to take it, he 'll seem



to git up a appetite walkin' to school, an' he 'll eat it up 'fo' he gits there.

Sonny 's got a mighty noble disposition, though, take him all round.

Now, the day he slipped down that chim-bly an' run away he was n't a bit flustered, an' he did n't play hookey the balance of the day neither. He thess went down to the crik, an' washed the soot off his face, though they say he did n't no more 'n smear it round, an' then he went down to Miss Phœbe's school, an' stayed there till it was out. An' she took him out to the well, an' washed his face good for him. But nex' day he up an' went back to Mr. Clark's school — walked in thess ez pleasant an' kind, an' taken his seat an' said his lessons — never th'owed it up to teacher at all. Now, some child'en, after playin' off on a teacher that a-way would a' took advantage; but he never. It was a fair fight, an' Sonny whupped, an' that 's all there was to it; an' he never put on no air about it.

Wife did threaten to go herself an' make the teacher apologize for gittin' the little feller all sooted up an' sp'ilin' his clo'es;

but she thought it over, an' she decided thet she would n't disturb things ez long ez they was peaceful. An', after all, he did n't exac'ly send him down the chim-bly no-how, though he provoked him to it.

Ef Sonny had 'a' fell an' hurted hissself, though, in that chim-bly, I 'd 'a' helt that teacher responsible, shore.

Sonny says hissself thet the only thing he feels bad about in that chim-bly business is thet one o' the little swallers' wings was broke by the fall. Sonny 's got him yet, an' he's li'ble to keep him, cause he 'll never fly. Named him Swally Jones, an' reg'lar 'dopted him soon ez he see how his wing was.

Sonny 's the only child I ever see in my life thet could take young chim-bly-swallers after their fall an' make em' live. But he does it reg'lar. They ain't a week passes sca'cely but he fetches in some hurted critter an' works with it. Dicey says thet half the time she 's afeerd to step around her cook-stove less'n she 'll step on some critter thet 's crawled back to life where he 's put it under the stove to hatch or thaw out,

which she bein' bare-footed, I don't wonder at.

An' he has did the same way at school purty much. It got so for a-while at one school thet not a child in school could be hired to put his hand in the wood-box, not knowin' ef any piece o' bark or old wood in it would turn out to be a young alligator or toad-frog thawin' out. Teacher hisself picked up a chip, reckless, one day, an' it hopped up, and knocked off his spectacles. Of cose it was n't no chip. Hopper-toad frogs an' wood-bark chips, why, they favors consider'ble—lay 'em same side up.

It was on account o' her takin' a interest in all his little beasts an' varmints thet he first took sech a notion to Miss Phœbe Kellog's school. Where any other teacher would scold about sech things ez he'd fetch in, why, she'd encourage him to bring 'em to her; an' she'd fix a place for 'em, an' maybe git out some book tellin' all about 'em, an' showin' pictures of 'em.

She's had squir'l-books, an' bird-books, an' books on nearly every sort o' wild critter you'd think too mean to *put* into a

book, at that school, an' give the child'en readin'-lessons on 'em an' drawin'-lessons an' clay-moldin' lessons.

Why, Sonny has did his alligator so nach'l in clay thet you'd most expec' to see it creep away. An' you'd think mo' of alligators forever afterward, too. An' ez to readin', he never did take no interest in learnin' how to read out 'n them school-readers, which he declares don't no more 'n git a person interested in one thing befo' they start on another, an' maybe start *that* in the middle.

The other teachers, they makes a heap o' fun o' Miss Phœbe's way o' school-teachin', 'cause she lets the child'en ask all sorts of outlandish questions, an' make pictures in school hours, an' she don't requi' 'em to fold their arms in school, neither.

Maybe she is foolin' their time away. I can't say ez I exac'y see how she's a workin' it to edjercate 'em that a-way. I had to set with my arms folded eight hours a day in school when I was a boy, to learn the little I know, an' wife she got her edjercation the same way. An' we went clean

thoo f'om the *a-b abs* an' *e-b ebs* clair to the end o' the blue-back speller.

An' we learned to purnounce a heap mo' words than either one of us has ever needed to know, though there has been times, sech ez when my wife's mother took the phthisic an' I had the asthma, thet I was obligated to write to the doctor about it, thet I was thankful for my experience in the blue-back speller. Them was our brag-words, phthisic and asthma was. They 's a few other words I 've always hoped to have a chance to spell in the reg'lar co'se of life, sech ez *y-a-c-h-t*, *yacht*, but I suppose, livin' in a little inland town, which a yacht is a boat, a person could n't be expected to need sech a word—less'n he went travelin'.

I 've often thought thet ef at the Jedgment the good Lord would only examine me an' all them thet went to school in my day in the old blue-back speller 'stid o' tacklin' us on the weak p'int of our pore mortal lives, why, we 'd stand about ez good a chance o' gettin' to heaven ez anybody else. An' maybe He will—who knows?

But ez for book-readin', wife an' me ain't never felt called on to read no book save an' exceptin' the Holy Scriptures— an', of cose, the seed catalogues.

An' here Sonny, not quite twelve year old, has read five books thoo, an' some of 'em twice-t an' three times over. His "Robinson Crusoe" shows mo' wear 'n tear 'n what my Testament does, I 'm ashamed to say. I 've done give Miss Phoebe free license to buy him any book she wants him to have, an' he 's got 'em all 'ranged in a row on the end o' the mantel-shelf.

Quick ez he 'd git thoo readin' a book, of co'se wife she 'd be for dustin' it off and puttin' up on the top closet shelf where a book nach'ally belongs; but seem like Sonny he wants to keep 'em in sight. So wife she 'd worked a little lace shelf-cover to lay under 'em, an' we 've hung our framed marriage-c'tificate above 'em, an' the corner looks right purty, come to see it fixed up.

Sir? Oh, no; we ain't took him from none o' the other schools yet. He 's been

goin' to Miss Phœbe's reg'lar now — all but the exhibition an' picnic days in the other schools — for nearly five months, not countin' off-an'-on days he went to her befo' he settled down to it stiddy.

He says he 's a-goin' there reg'lar from this time on, an' I b'lieve he will; but wife an' me we talked it over, an' we decided we 'd let things stand, an' keep his name down on all the books till sech a time ez he come to long division with Miss Kellog.

An' ef he stays thoo that, we 'll feel free to notify the other schools thet he 's quit.

## SONNY'S DIPLOMA

**Y**AS, sir; this is it. This here 's Sonny's diplomy thet you 've heerd so much about — sheepskin they call it, though it ain't no mo' sheepskin 'n what I am. I 've skinned too many not to know. Thess to think o' little Sonny bein' a grad'jate — an' all by his own efforts, too!

It is a plain-lookin' picture, ez you say, to be framed up in sech a fine gilt frame; but it 's worth it, an' I don't begrudge it to him. He picked out that red plush around the inside of the frame hisself. He 's got mighty fine taste for a country-raised child, Sonny has.

Seem like the oftener I come here an' stan' before it, the prouder I feel, an' the mo' I can't reelize thet he done it.

I 'd 'a' been proud enough to 've had him go through the reg'lar co'se o' study, an' be