

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

YAS, 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

awarded this diplomy, but to 've seen 'im thess walk in an' demand it, the way he done, an' to prove his right in a fair fight — why, it tickles me so thet I thess seem to git a spell o' the giggles ev'y time I think about it.

Sir? How did he do it? Why, I thought eve'ybody in the State of Arkansas knowed how Sonny walked over the boa'd o' school directors, an' took a diplomy in the face of Providence, at the last anniversary.

I don't know thet I ought to say that either, for they never was a thing done mo' friendly an' amiable on earth, on his part, than the takin' of this dockiment. Why, no; of co'se he was n't goin' to that school — cert'n'y not. Ef he had b'longed to that school, they would n't 'a' been no question about it. He 'd 'a' thess gradj'ated with the others. An' when he went there with his ma an' me, why, he 'll tell you hissself that he had n't no mo' idee of gradj'atin' 'n what I have this minute.

An' when he riz up in his seat, an' announced his intention, why, you could 'a' knocked me down with a feather. You see,

it took me so sudden, an' I did n't see thess how he was goin' to work it, never havin' been to that school.

Of co'se eve'ybody in the county goes to the gradj'atin', an' we was all three settin' there watchin' the performances, not thinkin' of any special excitement, when Sonny took this idee.

It seems thet seein' all the other boys gradj'ate put him in the notion, an' he felt like ez ef he ought to be a-gradj'atin', too.

You see, he had went to school mo' or less with all them fellers, an' he knowed thet they did n't, none o' 'em, know half ez much ez what he did,— though, to tell the truth, he ain't never said sech a word, not even to her or me,— an', seein' how easy they was bein' turned out, why, he thess reelized his own rights—an' demanded 'em then an' there.

Of co'se we know thet they is folks in this here community thet says thet he ain't got no right to this diplomy; but what else could you expect in a jealous neighborhood where eve'ybody is mo' or less kin?

The way I look at it, they never was a diplomy earned quite so upright ez this on earth—never. Ef it was n't, why, I would n't allow him to have it, no matter how much pride I would 'a' took, an' do take, in it. But for a boy o' Sonny's age to 've had the courage to face all them people, an' ask to be examined then an' there, an' to come out ahead, the way he done, why, it does me proud, that it does.

You see, for a boy to set there seein' all them know-nothin' boys gradj'ate, one after another, offhand, the way they was doin', was mighty provokin', an' when Sonny is struck with a sense of injustice, why, he ain't never been known to bear it in silence. He taken that from *her* side o' the house.

I noticed, ez he set there that day, thet he begin to look toler'ble solemn, for a festival, but it never crossed my mind what he was a-projeckin' to do. Ef I had 'a' suspicioned it, I 'm afeered I would 've opposed it, I 'd 'a' been so skeert he would n't come out all right; an' ez I said, I did n't see, for the life o' me, how he was goin' to work it.

That is the only school in the county thet he ain't never went to, 'cause it was started after he had settled down to Miss Phoebe's school. He would n't hardly 'v went to it, nohow, though—less 'n, of co'se, he 'd 'a' took a notion. Th' ain't no 'easion to send him to a county school when he 's the only one we 've got to edjercate. They ain't been a thing I 've enjoyed ez much in my life ez my sackerfices on account o' Sonny's edjercation—not a one. Th' ain't a patch on any ol' coat I 've got but seems to me to stand for some advantage to him.

Well, sir, it was thess like I 'm a-tellin' you. He set still ez long ez he could, an' then 'he riz an' spoke. Says he, "I have decided thet I 'd like to do a little gradj'atin' this evenin' myself," thess that a-way.

An' when he spoke them words, for about a minute you could 'a' heerd a pin drop; an' then eve'ybody begin a-screechin' with laughter. A person would think thet they 'd 'a' had some consideration for a child standin' up in the midst o' sech a

getherin', tryin' to take his own part; but they did n't. They thess laughed immod'rate. But they did n't faze him. He had took his station on the flo', an' he helt his ground.

Thess ez soon ez he could git a heerin', why, he says, says he: "I don't want anybody to think that I'm a-tryin' to take any advantage. I don't expec' to gradj'ate without passin' my examination. An', mo' 'n that," says he, "I am ready to pass it now." An' then he went on to explain that he would like to have anybody present *thet was competent to do it* to step forward an' examine him—then an' there. An' he said that ef he was examined fair and square, to the satisfaction of eve'ybody—*an' did n't pass*—why, he 'd give up the p'int. An' he wanted to be examined oral—in eve'ybody's hearin'—free-handed an' outspoke.

Well, sir, seem like folks begin to see a little fun ahead in lettin' him try it—which I don't see thess how they could 'a' hindered him, an' it a free school, an' me a taxpayer. But they all seemed to be in

a pretty good humor by this time, an' when Sonny put it to vote, why, they voted unanimous to let him try it. An' all o' them unanimous votes was n't, to say, friendly, neither. Heap o' them thet was loudest in their unanimosity was hopefully expectin' to see him whipped out at the first question. Tell the truth, I mo' 'n half feared to see it myself. I was that skeert I was fairly all of a trimble.

Well, when they had done votin', Sonny, after first thankin' 'em,—which I think was a mighty polite thing to do, an' they full o' the giggles at his little expense that minute,—why, he went on to say that he requie'd 'em to make *thess one condition*, an' that was that any question he missed was to be passed on to them thet had been a-gradj'atin' so fast, an' ef they missed it, it was n't to be counted ag'inst him.

Well, when he come out with that, which, to my mind, could n't be beat for fairness, why, some o' the mothers they commenced to look purty serious, an' seem like ez ef they did n't find it quite so funny ez it had been. You see, they *say* thet them boys

had eve'y one had reg'lar questions give' out to 'em, an' eve'y last one had studied his own word; an' ef they was to be questioned hit an' miss, why they would n't 'a' stood no chance on earth.

Of co'se they could n't give Sonny the same questions that had *been* give' out, because he had heerd the answers, an' it would n't 'a' been fair. So Sonny he told 'em to thess set down, an' make out a list of questions that they 'd all agree was about of a' equal hardness to them that had been ast, an' was of thess the kind of learnin' that all the reg'lar gradj'ates's minds was sto'ed with, an' that either he knowed 'em or he did n't — one.

It don't seem so excitin', somehow, when I tell about it now; but I tell you for about a minute or so, whilst they was waitin' to see who would undertake the job of examin' him, why, it seemed that eve'y minute would be the next, ez my ol' daddy used to say. The only person present that seemed to take things anyway ca'm was Miss Phoebe Kellog, Sonny's teacher. She has been teachin' him reg'lar for over two

years now, an' ef she had 'a' had a right to give diplomies, why, Sonny would 'a' thess took out one from her; but she ain't got no license to gradj'ate nobody. But she knowed what Sonny knowed, an' she knowed that ef he had a fair show, he 'd come thoo creditable to all hands. She loves Sonny thess about ez much ez we do, I believe, take it all round. Th' ain't never been but one time in these two years that she has, to say, got me out o' temper, an' that was the day she said to me that her sure belief was that Sonny was goin' to *make somethin' out 'n hisself some day* — like ez ef he had n't already made mo' 'n could be expected of a boy of his age. Tell the truth, I never in my life come so near sayin' somethin' I 'd 'a' been shore to regret ez I did on that occasion. But of co'se I know she did n't mean it. All she meant was that he would turn out even mo' 'n what he was now, which would be on'y nachel, with his growth.

Everybody knows that it was her that got him started with his collections an' his libry. Oh, yes; he 's got the best libry in

the county, 'cep'n', of co'se, the doctor's 'n' the preacher's—everybody round about here knows about that. He 's got about a hund'ed books an' over. Well, sir, when he made that remark, thet any question thet he missed was to be give to the class, why, the whole atmsp'ere took on a change o' temp'ature. Even the teacher was for backin' out o' the whole business square; but he did n't thess seem to dare to say so. You see, after him a-favorin' it, it would 'a' been a dead give-away.

Eve'ybody there had saw him step over an' whisper to Brother Binney when it was decided to give Sonny a chance, an' they knowed thet he had asked *him* to examine him. But now, instid o' callin' on Brother Binney, why, he thess said, says he: "I suppose I ought not to shirk this duty. Ef it 's to be did," says he, "I reckon I ought to do it—an' do it I will." You see, he dares n't allow Brother Binney to put questions, for fear he 'd call out some thet his smarty grad'jates could n't answer.

So he thess claired his th'oat, an' set down a minute to consider. An' then

he riz from his seat, an' remarked, with a heap o' *hems* and *haws*, thet of co'se everybody knowed thet Sonny Jones had had unusual advantages in some respec's, but thet it was one thing for a boy to spend his time a-picnickin' in the woods, getherin' all sorts of natural curiosities, but it was quite another to be a scholar accordin' to books, so 's to be able to pass sech a' examination ez would be a credit to a State institution o' learnin', sech ez the one over which he was proud to preside. That word struck me partic'lar, "proud to preside," which, in all this, of co'se, I see he was castin' a slur on Sonny's collections of birds' eggs, an' his wild flowers, an' wood specimens, an' min'rals. He even went so far ez to say thet ol' Proph', the half-crazy nigger thet tells fortunes, an' gethers herbs out 'n the woods, an' talks to hisself, likely knew more about a good many things than anybody present, but thet, bein' ez he did n't know *b* from a bull's foot, why, it would n't hardly do to grad'jate him— not castin' no slurs on Master Sonny Jones, nor makin' no invijus comparisons, of co'se.

Well, sir, there was some folks there that seemed to think this sort o' talk was mighty funny an' smart. Some o' the mothers a-chilly giggled over it out loud, they was so mightily tickled. But Sonny he thess stood his ground an' waited. Most any boy o' his age would 'a' got flustered, but he did n't. He thess glanced around unconcerned at all the people a-settin' around him, thess like ez ef they might 'a' been askin' him to a picnic instid o' him provokin' a whole school committee to wrath.

Well, sir, it took that school-teacher about a half-hour to pick out the first question, an' he did n't pick it out *then*. He 'd stop, an' he 'd look at the book, an' then he 'd look at Sonny, an' then he 'd look at the class,— an' then he 'd turn a page, like ez ef he could n't make up his mind, an' was afeerd to resk it, less'n it might be missed, an' be referred back to the class. I never did see a man so overwrought over a little thing in my life—never. They do say, though, that school-teachers feels mighty bad when their scholars misses any p'int in public.

Well, sir, he took so long that d'reckly everybody begin to git wo'e out, an' at last Sonny, why, he got tired, too, an' he up an' says, says he, "Ef you can't make up your mind what to ask me, teacher, why 'n't you let me ask myself questions? An' ef my questions seem too easy, why, I 'll put 'em to the class."

An', sir, with that he thess turns round, an' he says, says he, "Sonny Jones," says he, addressin' hisself, "what 's the cause of total eclipses of the sun?" Thess that a-way he said it; an' then he turned around, an' he says, says he:

"Is that a hard enough question?"

"Very good," says teacher.

An', with that, Sonny he up an' picks up a' orange an' a' apple off the teacher's desk, an' says he, "This orange is the earth, an' this here apple is the sun." An', with that, he explained all they is *to* total eclipses. I can't begin to tell you thess how he expressed it, because I ain't highly edjereated myself, an' I don't know the specifactions. But when he had got thoo, he turned to the teacher, an' says he, "Is they anything

else that you 'd like to know about total eclipses?" An' teacher says, says he, "Oh, no; not at all."

They do say that them gradj'ates had n't never went so far ez total eclipses, an' teacher would n't 'a' had the subject mentioned to 'em for nothin'; but I don't say that 's so.

Well, then, Sonny he turned around, an' looked at the company, an' he says, "Is everybody satisfied?" An' all the mothers an' fathers nodded their heads "yes."

An' then he waited thess a minute, an' he says, says he, "Well, now I'll put the next question:

"Sonny Jones," says he, "what is the difference between dew an' rain an' fog an' hail an' sleet an' snow?"

"Is that a hard enough question?"

Well, from that he started in, an' he did n't stop tell he had expounded about every kind of dampness that ever descended from heaven or rose from the earth. An' after that, why, he went on a-givin' out one question after another, an' answerin' 'em, tell everybody had declared theirselves en-

tirely satisfied that he was fully equipped to gradj'ate—an', tell the truth, I don't doubt thet a heap of 'em felt their minds considerably relieved to have it safe-t over with without puttin' their gradj'ates to shame, when what does he do but say, "Well, ef you 're satisfied, why, I am—an' yet," says he, "I think I would like to ask myself one or two hard questions more, thess to make shore." An' befo' anybody could stop him, he had said:

"Sonny Jones, what is the reason thet a bird has feathers and a dog has hair?" An' then he turned around deliberate, an' answered: "I don't know. Teacher, please put that question to the class."

Teacher had kep' his temper purty well up to this time, but I see he was mad now, an' he riz from his chair, an' says he: "This examination has been declared finished, an' I think we have spent ez much time on it ez we can spare." An' all the mothers they nodded their heads, an' started a-whisperin'—most impolite.

An' at that, Sonny, why, he thess set down as modest an' peaceable ez anything;

but ez he was settin' he remarked that he was in hopes thet some o' the reg'lars would 'a' took time to answer a few questions thet had bothered his mind fom time to time — an' of c'ose they must know; which, to my mind, was the modes'est remark a boy ever did make.

Well, sir, that 's the way this diplomy was earned — by a good, hard struggle, in open daylight, by unanimous vote of all concerned — or unconcerned, for that matter. An' my opinion is thet if they are those who have any private opinions about it, an' they did n't express 'em that day, why they ain't got no right to do it underhanded, ez I am sorry to say has been done.

But it 's *his* diplomy, an' it 's handsomer fixed up than any in town, an' I doubt ef they ever was one *anywhere* thet was took more paternal pride in.

Wife she ain't got so yet thet she can look at it without sort o' cryin' — thess the look of it seems to bring back the figure o' the little feller, ez he helt his ground, single-handed, at that gradj'atin' that day.

Well, sir, we was so pleased to have him turned out a full gradj'ate thet, after it was all over, why, I riz up then and there, though I could n't hardly speak for the lump in my th'oat, an' I said thet I wanted to announce thet Sonny was goin' to have a gradj'atin' party out at our farm that day week, an' thet the present company was all invited.

An' he did have it, too; an' they all come, every mother's son of 'em — from *a* to *izzard* — even to them that has expressed secret dissatisfactions; which they was all welcome, though it does seem to me thet, ef I 'd been in their places, I 'd 'a' hardly had the face to come an' talk, too.

I 'm this kind of a disposition myself: ef I was ever to go to any kind of a collation thet I felt secret disapproval of, why, the supper could n't be good enough not to choke me.

An' Sonny, why, he 's constructed on the same plan. We ain't never told him of any o' the remarks thet has been passed. They might git his little feelin's hurted, an' 't would n't do no good, though some

few has been made to his face by one or two smarty, ill-raised boys.

Well, sir, we give 'em a fine party, ef I do say it myself, an' they all had a good time. Wife she whipped up eggs an' sugar for a week befo'hand, an' we set the table out under the mulberries. It took eleven little niggers to wait on 'em, not countin' them thet worked the fly-fans. An' Sonny he ast the blessin'.

Then, after they 'd all et, Sonny he had a' exhibition of his little specimens. He showed 'em his bird eggs, an' his wood samples, an' his stamp album, an' his scroll-sawed things, an' his clay-moldin's, an' all his little menagerie of animals an' things. I ruther think everybody was struck when they found thet Sonny knowed the botanical names of every one of the animals he 's ever tamed, an' every bird. Miss Phœbe, she did n't come to the front much. She stayed along with wife, an' helped 'tend to the company, but I could see she looked on with pride; an' I don't want nothin' said about it, but the boa'd of school directors was so took with the things she had taught

Sonny thet, when the evenin' was over, they ast her to accept a situation in the academy next year, an' she 's goin' to take it.

An' she says thet ef Sonny will take a private co'se of instruction in nachel sciences, an' go to a few lectures, why, th' ain't nobody on earth that she 'd ruther see come into that academy ez teacher, — that is, of co'se, in time. But I doubt ef he 'd ever keer for it.

I've always thought thet school-teachin', to be a success, has to run in families, same ez anythin' else — yet, th' ain't no tellin'.

I don't keer what he settles on when he 's grown; I expect to take pride in *the way he'll do it* — an' that 's the principal thing, after all.

It 's the "Well done" we 're all a-hopin' to hear at the last day; an' the po' laborer thet digs a good ditch 'll have thess ez good a chance to hear it ez the man that owns the farm.