

SONNY "KEEPIN' COMPANY"

HELLO, doc'; come in! Don't ask me to shake hands, though, 't least, not tell I can drop this 'ere piece o' ribbin.

I never reelized how much shenanigan it took to tie a bow o' ribbin tell I started experimentin' with this here buggy-whup o' Sonny's.

An' he wants it tied *thess* so. He 's a reg'lar Miss Nancy, come to taste.

All the boys, nowadays, they seem to think thet ez soon ez they commence to keep company, they must have ribbin bows tied on their buggy-whups—an' I reckon it 's in accordance, ef anything is.

I thess called you in to look at his new buggy, doctor. You 've had your first in-nin's, ez the base-ball fellers says, at all o' his various an' sundry celebrations, from his first appearance to his gradj'atin', and

I 'll call your attention to a thing I would n't mention to a' outsider.

Sence he taken a notion to take the girls out a-ridin', why, I intend for him to do it in proper style; an' I went an' selected this buggy myself.

It is sort o' fancy, maybe, for the country, but I knew he 'd like it fancy—at his age. I got it good an' high, so 's it could straddle stumps good. They 's so many tree-stumps in our woods, an' I know Sonny ain't a-goin' to drive nowhere *but* in the woods so long ez they 's a livin' thin' to scurry away at his approach, or a flower left in bloom, or a last year's bird's nest to gether. An' the little Sweetheart, why, she 's got so thet she 's ez anxious to fetch home things to study over ez he is.

Yas; I think it is, ez you say, a fus'-class little buggy.

Sonny ain't never did nothin' half-ways,—not even mischief,—an' I ain't a-goin' in, at this stage o' his raisin', to stint him.

List'n at me sayin' "raisin'" ag'in, after all Miss Phoebe has preached to me about it! She claims thet folks has to be fetched

up,— or “brung up” I believe she calls it, — an’ I don’t doubt she knows.

She allows thet pigs is raised, an’ potaters, an’ even chickens; an’ she said, one day, thet ef I insisted on “raisin’” child’en, she ’d *raise a row*. She ’s a quick hand to turn a joke, Miss Phœbe is.

Nobody thet ever lived in Simpkinsville would claim thet rows could n’t be raised, I ’m shore, after all the fuss thet ’s been made over puttin’ daytime candles in our ’piscopal church. Funny how folks ’ll fuss about sech a little thing when, ef they ’d stop to think, they ’s so many mo’ important subjee’s thet they could git up diffe’nces of opinion on.

I did n’t see no partic’lar use in lightin’ the candles myself, bein’ ez we did n’t need ’em to see by, an’ shorely the good Lord thet can speak out a sun any time he needs a extry taper could n’t be said to take no pleasure in a Simpkinsville home-dipped candle. But the way I look at it, seem like ef some wants em, why not?

Th’ ain’t nothin’ mo’ innercent than a lighted candle,— kep’ away up on the wall

out o’ the draft, the way they are in church, — an’ so, when it come to votin’ on it, why, I count peace an’ good-will so far ahead o’ taller thet I voted thet I was good for ez many candles ez any other man would give. An’ quick ez I said them words, why, Enoch Johnson up an’ doubled his number. It tickled me to see him do it, too.

Enoch hates me thess because he ’s got a stupid boy—like ez ef that was any o’ my fault. His Sam failed to pass at the preliminar’ examination, an’ was n’t allowed to try for a diplomy in public; an’ Enoch an’ his wife, why, they seem to hold it ag’in’ me thet Sonny could step in at the last moment an’ take what their boy could n’t git th’oo the trials an’ tribulations of a whole year o’ bein’ taught lessons at home an’ wrestled in prayer over.

I ain’t got a thing ag’in’ Enoch, not a thing— not even for makin’ me double my number o’ candles. Mo’ ’n that, I ’d brighten up Sam’s mind for ’im in a minute, ef I could.

I never was jealous-hearted. An’ neither is Sonny.

He sent Sam a special invite to his grad-j'atin' party, an' give him a seat next to hisself so 's he could say "Amen" to his blessin', thess because he had missed git-tin' his diplomy. Everybody there knowed why he done it.

But talkin' about Sonny being "raised," I told Miss Phoebe thet we 'd haf to stop sayin' it about *him*, right or wrong, ez a person can't raise nothin' higher 'n what he is hisself, an Sonny 's taller 'n either wife or me, an' he ain't but sixteen. Ef we raised 'im partly, we must 'a' sent 'im up the rest o' the way. It 's a pleasure to pass a little joke with Miss Phoebe; she 's got sech a good ear to ketch their p'int.

But, come to growin', Sonny never asked nobody no odds. He thess stayed stock-still ez long ez he found pleasure in bein' a little runt, an' then he humped hisself an' shot up same ez a sparrer-grass stalk. It gives me pleasure to look up to him the way I haf to.

Fact is, he always did require me to look up to 'im, even when I looked down at 'im.

Yas, sir; ez I said, Sonny has commenced

keepin' company,— outspoke,— an' I can't say thet I 'm opposed to it, though some would say he was a little young, maybe. I know when I was his age I had been in love sev'al times. Of co'se these first little puppy-dog loves, why, th' ain't no partic'lar harm in 'em— less'n they 're opposed.

An' we don't lay out to oppose Sonny— not in nothin' thet he 'll attemp'— after him bein' raised an' guided up to this age.

There goes that word "raisin'" agi'n.

He 's been in love with his teacher, Miss Phoebe, most three years— an' 'cep'n' thet I had a sim'lar experience when I was sca'eely out o' the cradle, why, I might 'a' took it mo' serious.

That sort o' fallin' in love, why, it comes same ez the measles or the two-year-old teeth, an' th' ain't nothin' sweeter ef it 's took philosophical.

It 's mighty hard, though, for parents, thet knows thess how recent a child is, to reconcile the facts o' the case with sech things ez him takin' notice to the color o' ribbin on a middle-aged school-teacher's hair— an' it sprinkled with gray.

Sonny was worse plegged than most boys, because, havin' two lady teachers at that time, it took him sort o' duplicated like.

I suppose ef he 'd had another, he 'd 'a' been equally distributed on all three.

The way I look at it, a sensible, serious-minded woman thet starts out to teach school — which little fellers they ain't got no sense on earth, nohow — ain't got no business with ribbin-bows an' ways an' moles on their cheek-bones. An' ef they 've got knuckles, they ought to be like wife's or mine, pointed outward for useful service, instid o' bein' turned inside out to attract a young child's admiration — not thet I hold it against Miss Phœbe thet her knuckles is reversed. Of co'se she can't be very strong-fingered. No finger could git much purchase on a dimple.

'T ain't none of her fault, I know. But Sonny has seen the day thet seem like he could n't talk about another thing but her an' her dimpled knuckles — them an' that little brown mole thet sets out on the aidge of her eyebrow.

I think myself thet that mole looks right well, for a blemish, which wife says it is, worst kind. But of co'se a child could n't be expected to know that. It did seem a redic'lous part o' speech the first time he mentioned sech a thing to his mother, but a boy o' twelve could n't be expected to know the difference between a mountain an' a mole-hill.

I ricollec' he used to talk in his sleep consider'ble when he was a little chap, an' it always fretted wife turrible. She 'd git up out o' bed thess ez soon ez he 'd begin to hold fo'th, an' taller him over. Whenever she did n't seem to know what else to do, why, she 'd taller him; an' I don't reckon there 's anything less injurious to a child, asleep or awake, *than* taller.

She 's tallered him for his long division, an' she 's tallered him for that blemish on Miss Phœbe's cheek, an' she 's tallered him for clairin' o' his th'oot. His other lady teacher, Miss Alviry Sawyer, she was a single-handed maiden lady long 'bout wife's age, an' she did n't have a feature on earth thet a friend would seem to have a right

to mention, she not bein' to blame; but she had a way o' clairin' her th'out, sort o' polite, befo' she 'd open her mouth to speak. Sonny, he seemed to think it was mighty graceful the way she done it, an' he 's often imitated it in his little sleep — nights when he 'd eat hot waffles for his supper.

An' wife she 'd always jump up an' git the mutton taller. I never took it serious myself, 'cause I know how a triflin' thing 'll sometimes turn a level-headed little chap into a drizzlin' ejiot. I been there myself.

But th' ain't no danger in it, not less'n he 's made a laughin'-stalk of — which is cruelty to animals, an' should n't be allowed.

I know when I went to school up here at Sandy Cri'k, forty year ago, I was teached by a certain single lady that has subsequently died a nachel death of old age an' virtuous works, an' in them days she wo'e a knitted collar, an' long curls both sides of her face; an' I 've seen many a night, after the candle was out, thet she 'd appear befo' me. She 'd seem to come an' hang over my bed-canopy same ez a chandelier,

with them side curls all a-jinglin' like cut-glass dangles. It 's true, she used mostly to appear with a long peach-switch in her hand, but that was nachel enough, that bein' the way she most gen'ally approached me in life.

But of co'se I come th'oo without taller. My mother had thirteen of us, an' ef she 'd started anointin' us for all our little side-curved nightmares, she 'd 'a' had to go to goose raisin'.

You see, in them days they used goose grease.

I never to say admired that side-curved lady much, though she 's made some lastin' impressions on me. Why, I could set down now, an' make a drawin' of that knitted collar she used to wear, an' it over forty year ago. I ricollec' she was cross-eyed, too, in the eye todes the foot o' the class, where I 'd occasionally set; an', tell the truth, it was the strongest reason for study thet I had — thess to get on to the side of her certain eye. Th' ain't anything much mo' tantalizin' to a person than uncertainty in sech matters.

She was mighty plain, an' yet some o' the boys seemed to see beauty in her. I know my brother Bob, he confided to mother once-t that he thought she looked thess precizely like the Queen o' Sheba must 'a' looked, an' I ricollec' that he cried bitter because mother told it out on him at the dinner-table. It was turrible cruel, but she did n't reelize.

I reckon, ef the truth was known, most of us nine has seen them side curls in our sleep. An' nobody but God an' his angels will ever know how many of us passed th'oo the valley o' the shadder o' that singular-appearin' lady, or how often we notified the other eight of the fact, unbeknowinst to his audience, while they was distributed in their little trundle-beds.

I sometimes wonder ef they ain't no account took of little child'en's trials. Seems to me they ought to be a little heavenly book kep' a-purpose; an' 't would n't do no harm ef earthly fathers an' mothers was occasionally allowed to look over it.

My brother Bob, him thet likened Miss Alviry to the Queen o' Sheba, always was

a sensitive-minded child, an' we all knowed it, too; and yet, we never called him a thing for months after that but Solomon. We ought to 've been whupped good for it.

Bob ain't never married, an' for a bachelor person of singular habits, he's kep' ez warm a heart ez ever I see.

I've often deplo'ed him not marryin'. In fact, sense I see what comfort is to be took in a child, why, I deplo' all the singular numbers — though the Lord could n't be expected to have a supply on hand thess like Sonny to distribute 'round on demand.

But I doubt ef parents knows the difference.)

I've noticed that when they can't take pleasure in extry smartness in a child, why, they make it up in tracin' resemblances. I suppose they 's parental comfort to be took to in all kinds o' babies. I know I've seen some dull-eyed ones thet seemed like ez ef they was n't nothin' for 'em to do *but* resemble.

But talkin' about Sonny a-fallin' in love with his teachers, why, they was a time here when he wanted to give away every-

thing in the house to first one an' then the other. The first we noticed of it was him tellin' us how nice Miss Alviry thought his livers and gizzards was. Now, everybody knows that they ain't been a chicken that has died for our nourishment sence Sonny has cut his eye-teeth but has give up its vitals to him, an' give 'em willin'ly, they bein' the parts of his choice; an' it was discouragin', after killin' a useless number o' chickens to git enough to pack his little lunch-bucket, to have her eat 'em up— an' she forty year old ef she 's a day, an' he not got his growth yet. An' yet, a chicken liver is thess one o' them little things that a person could n't hardly th'ow up to a school-teacher 'thout seemin' small-minded.

I never did make no open objection to him givin' away anything to his teachers tell the time he taken a notion to give Miss Phœbe the plush album out o' the parlor. We was buyin' it on instalments at twenty-five cents a week, and it was n't fully installed at the time, an' I told him it would n't never do to give away what was n't ours.

When it comes to principle, why, I always take a stand. I thought likely by the time it was ours in full he 'd 've recovered from his attackt, an' be willin' for his ma to keep it; an' he was.

An' besides, sence his pet squir'l has done chawed the plush clean off one corner of it, he says he would n't part with it for nothin'. Of co'se a beast could n't be expected to reelize the importance o' plush. An' that 's what seems to tickle Sonny so.

We had bought it chiefly on his account, so ez to git 'im accustomed to seein' handsome things around, so thet when he goes out into the world he won't need to be flustered by finery.

Wife she 's been layin' by egg money all spring to buy a swingin', silver-plated ice-pitcher, so 'll he feel at home with sech things, an' capable of walkin' up to one an' tiltin' it unconcerned, which is more 'n I can do *to this day*. I always feel like ez ef I ought to go home an' put on my Sunday clo'es befo' I can approach one of 'em.

Sech ez that has to be worked into a person's constitution in youth. The motions

of a gourd-dipper, kep' in constant practice for years, is mighty hard to reverse.

How does that look now, doctor? Yas; I think so, too. It 's tied in a right good bow for a ten-thumbed man, which I shorely am, come to fingerin' ribbin.

He chose blue because she 's got blue eyes—pore little human! Sir? *Who is she*, you say? Why, don't you know? She 's Joe Wallace's little Mary Elizabeth—a nice, well-mannered child ez ever lived.

Wife has had her over here to supper sev'al nights lately, an' Sonny he 's took tea over to the Wallaces' once-t or twice-t, an' they say he shows mighty good table manners, passin' things polite, an' leavin' proper amounts on his plate. His mother has always teachd him keerful. It 's good practice for 'em both. Of co'se Mary Elizabeth she 's a year older 'n what Sonny is, an' she 's thess gittin' a little experience out o' him—though she ain't no ways conscious of it,—an' he 'll gain a good deal o' courage th'oo keepin' company with a lady-like girl like Mary Elizabeth. That 's the

way it goes, an' I think th' ain't nothin' mo' innercent or sweet.

How 'd you say that, doctor? S'posin' it was n't to turn out that-a-way? Well, bless yo' heart, ef it was to work out in *all seriousness, what could be sweeter 'n little Mary Elizabeth?* Sonny ain't got it in his power to displease us, don't keer what he was to take a notion to, less'n, of co'se, it was wrong, which it ain't in him to do—not knowin'ly.

You know, Sonny has about decided to take a trip north, doctor—to New York State. Sir? Oh, no; he ain't goin' to take the co'se o' lectures thet Miss Phœbe has urged him to take—'t least, that ain't his intention.

No; he sez thet he don't crave to fit hisself to teach. He sez he feels like ez ef it would smother him to teach school in a house all day. He taken that after me.

No; he 's goin a-visitin'. Oh, no, sir; we ain't got no New York kin. He 's a-goin' all the way to that strange an' distant State to call on a man thet he ain't never see, nor any of his family. He 's a gentle-

man by the name o' Burroughs—John Burroughs. He 's a book-writer. The first book thet Sonny set up nights to read was one o' his'n— all about dumb creatures an' birds. Sonny acchilly wo'e that book out a-readin' it.

Yas, sir; Sonny says thet ef he could thess take one long stroll th'oo the woods with him, he 'd be willin' to walk to New York State if necessary. An' we 're a-goin' to let 'im go. The purtiest part about it is thet this here great book-writer has invited him to pay him a visit. Think o' that, will you? Think of a man thet could think up a whole row o' books a-takin' sech a' intres' in our plain little Arkansas Sonny. But he done it; an' 'mo' 'n that, he remarked in the letter thet it would give him great pleasure to meet the boy thet had so many mutual friends in common with him, or some sech remark. Of co'se, in this he referred to dumb brutes, an' even trees, so Sonny says. Oh, cert'n'y; Sonny writ him first. How would he 've knew about Sonny? Miss Phœbe she encouraged him to write the letter, but it was Sonny's

first idee. An' the answer, why, he 's got it framed an' hung up above his bookshelves between our marriage c'tif'cate an' his diplomy.

He 's done sent Sonny his picture, too. He 's took a-settin' up in a' apple-tree. You can tell from a little thing like that thet a person ain't no dude, an' I like that. We 've put that picture in the front page of the plush album, an' moved the bishop back one page.

Sonny has sent him a photograph of all our family took together, an' likely enough he 'll have it framed time Sonny arrives there.

When he goes, little Mary Elizabeth, why, she 's offered to take keer of all his harmless live things till he comes back, an' I s'pose they 'll be letters a-passin' back and fo'th. It does seem so funny, when I think about it. 'Pears like thess the other day thet Mis' Wallace fetched little Mary Elizabeth over to look at Sonny, an' he on'y three days old. I ricollec' when she seen 'im she took her little one-year-old finger an' teched 'im on the forehead, an'

she says, says she, "Howdy?"—thess that-a-way. I remember we all thought it was so smart. Seemed like ez ef she reelized that he had thess arrived—an' she had thess learned to say "Howdy," an' she up an' says it.

An' she 's ap' at speech yet, so Sonny says. She don't say much when wife or I are around, which I think is showin' only right an' proper respec's.

Th' ain't nothin' purtier, to my mind, than for a young girl to set up at table with her elders, an' to 'tend strictly to business. Mary Elizabeth 'll set th'oo a whole meal, an' sca'cely look up from her plate. I never did see a little girl do it mo' modest.

Of co'se, Sonny, he bein' at home, an' she bein' his company, why, he talks constant, an' she 'll glance up at him sort o' sideways occasional. Wife an' me, we find it ez much ez we can do, sometimes, to hold in; we feel so tickled over their cunnin' little ways together. To see Sonny politely take her cup o' tea an' po' it out in her saucer to cool for her so nice, why, it takes all the dig-

nity we can put on to cover our amusement over it. You see, they've only lately teethed together, them child'en.

I reckon the thing sort o' got started last summer. I know he give her a flyin' squir'l, an' she embroidered him a hat-band. I suspicioned then what was comin', an' I advised wife to make up a few white-bosomed shirts for him, an' she did n't git 'em done none too soon. 'T was n't no time befo' he called for 'em.

A while back befo' that I taken notice that he 'd put a few idees down on sheets o' paper for her to write her compositions by. Of co'se, he would n't *write* 'em. He 's too honest. He 'd thess sugges' idees promiscu'us.

She 's got words, so he says, an' so she 'd write out mighty nice compositions by his hints. I taken notice that in this world it 's often that-a-way; one 'll have idees, an' another 'll have words. They ain't always bestowed together. When they are, why, then, I reckon, them are the book-writers. Sonny he 's got purty consider'ble o' both for his age, but, of co'se, he would n't never

aspire to put nothin' he could think up into no printed book, I don't reckon; though he 's got three blank books filled with the routine of "out-door housekeepin'," ez he calls it, the way it 's kep' by varmints an' things out o' doors under loose tree-barks an' in all sorts of outlandish places. I did only last week find a piece o' paper with a po'try verse on it in his hand-write on his little table. I suspicioned that it was his composin', because the name "Mary Elizabeth" occurred in two places in it, though, of co'se, they 's other Mary Elizabeths. He 's a goin' to fetch that housekeepin' book up north with him, an' my opinion is that he 's a-projec'ing to show it to Mr. Burroughs. But likely he won't have the courage.

Yas; take it all together, I 'm glad them two child'en has took the notion. It 'll be a good thing for him whilst he 's throwed in with all sorts o' travelin' folks goin' an' comin' to reelize that he 's got a little sweetheart at home, an' that she 's bein' loved an' cherished by his father an' mother du'in' his absence.

Even after they 've gone their sep'rate ways, ez they most likely will in time, it 'll be a pleasure to 'em to look back to the time when they was little sweethearts.

I know I had a number, off an' on, when I was a youngster, an' they 're every one hung up — in my mind, of co'se — in little gilt frames, each one to herself. An' some-times, when I think 'em over, I imagine that they 's sweet bunches of wild vi'lets a-settin' under every one of 'em — all 'cep'n' one, an' I always seem to see pinks under hers.

An' she 's a grandmother now. Funny to think it all over, ain't it? At this present time she 's a tall, thin ol' lady thet fans with a turkey-tail, an' sets up with the sick. But the way she hangs in her little frame in my mind, she 's a chunky little thing with fat ankles an' wrisses, an' her two cheeks they hang out of her pink caliker sunbonnet thess like a pair o' ripe plumgranates.

She was the pinkest little sweetheart thet a pink-lovin' school-boy ever picked out of a class of thirty-five, I reckon.

Seemed to me everything about her was fat an' chubby, thess like herself. Ricollec', one day, she dropped her satchel, an' out rolled the fattest little dictionary I ever see, an' when I see it, seem like she could n't nachelly be expected to tote no other kind. I used to take pleasure in getherin' a pink out o' mother's garden in the mornin's when I'd be startin' to school, an' slippin' it on to her desk when she would n't be lookin', an' she 'd always pin it on her frock when I'd have my head turned the other way. Then when she 'd ketch my eye, she 'd turn pinker 'n the pink. But she never mentioned one o' them pinks to me in her life, nor I to her.

Yas; I always think of her little picture with a bunch o' them old-fashioned garden pinks a settin' under it, an' there they 'll stay ez long ez my old mind is a fitten place for sech sweet-scented pictures to hang in.

They 've been a pleasure to me all my life, an' I 'm glad to see Sonny's a-startin' his little picture-gallery a'ready.

WEDDIN' PRESENTS

WHAT you, doctor? Hitch up, an' come right in.

You say Sonny called by an' ast you to drop in to see me?

But I ain't sick. I 'm thess settin' out here on the po'ch, upholstered with pillers this-a-way on account o' the spine o' my back feelin' sort o' porely.

I reckon likely ez not it 's a-fixin' to rain — the way I ache.

Ef I don't seem to him quite ez chirpy ez I ought to be, why Sonny he gets on-easy an' goes for you, an' when I complain to him about it — not thet I ain't always glad to see you, doctor — why, he th'ows up to me thet that 's the way we always done about him when he was in his first childhood. An' ef you ricollec' — why, it 's about true. He says he 's boss now, an' turn about is fair play.