

How Joe Was Sent to Coventry.

BY JEAN K. BAIRD.

The eighth grade was preparing to take the final examinations. So much depended on this particular class in the High School, but every boy and girl in No. 8 was anxious to be one of the honor pupils.

For several years the pupil who received the highest average was class valedictorian on class day, and the second highest was known as the second honor pupil.

Miss Morrison, the teacher, had thought very seriously of how examinations could be conducted with justice to all concerned. It had always been her custom to collect all their books, have one pupil write the question on the wall slate, while she stood where she could see every pupil, and during the two or three hours never allow her gaze to wander from them. She had succeeded wonderfully well in doing away with all helping each other, but she had not been at all pleased with the method used. She knew it was not developing within each pupil any sense of honor to have her stand like a sentinel on duty before them. For this reason she decided to have a complete revolution of affairs, and have her examinations conducted in a broader way than before.

"Boys and girls," she said that morning, as she called school to order, "I have been thinking for a long time that we have not been conducting our examinations as they should be. I think honorable boys and girls would feel almost insulted to have their books taken from them and to be watched during the examination. Now, I know that there are some here that under no circumstances would be guilty of cheating; I'll not speak of any others. But as in the world so it is in school, we have had to make rigid laws for good and bad people because a very few were evilly disposed. Today I will only ask you to put your books away. I will not say that there shall be no talking during the examination; I only wish there would not be any; and if there are any that disregard my wishes today, there will be no punishment at all. Today you shall be a school republic, and I will presume that you will work for the glory of your school. You may prepare to write your examinations."

There was a glow of satisfaction and a look of pleased interest among the pupils at the teacher's words. There was just a little straightening of shoulders and a compression of lips among them that told Miss Morrison that her words had been taken in the right spirit.

An hour of the examination had gone, and Miss Morrison was secretly congratulating herself on having such an honorable set of boys and girls. She had sat at her desk and made out reports, and yet there had not been the slightest indication of any communication.

Sitting in one of the front seats was Joe Swires, a bright-eyed, handsome fellow who had always been a favorite with the teacher and the pupils because of his kindly, considerate manner. Back of him sat Ida Lehr, who was also a favorite among the pupils, for Ida was always ready and willing to divide her paper, her books and her spending money among her friends; and in addition to this, Ida always saw some good in every one in school, irrespective of what their circumstances might be.

As Miss Morrison glanced from her work she saw Joe hurriedly turn his head and with flushed cheeks hand over his work, while Ida sat looking at him with just a suggestion of scorn on her lips. What her trouble was Miss Morrison did not know, but Ida met her glance as fearless and frank as ever, while Joe was deeply interested in his work and did not take his eyes from the paper before him.

Miss Morrison wisely decided not to question either as to what had happened, depending on time alone to give her knowledge of this affair.

The next morning, as the girls lingered in the cloak-room, Ida went to the large waste-basket to sharpen her pencil, and Joe came up in his usual well-bred way and offered to do it for her. Many a time before had Miss Morrison seen Ida smile and accept of such favors, but on this morning she answered very quietly: "No, I thank you; I prefer not to have you help me." Joe walked back to his place quite crestfallen and busied himself in his books.

When the A class went to the slate to perform some work, Joe, as gallant as ever, took the eraser and began to clean off the space for Nettie Hewitt, who stood next to him to work. But Nettie said, "You need not do that for me, Joe. Hervey will get my slate ready."

Joe stopped and looked bewildered, while Hervey, who stood near Nettie, cleaned the slate ready for use.

Miss Morrison noticed the undercurrent of feeling that seemed sweeping through the class; but as all the boys and girls were courteous and well-bred, she had no occasion to rebuke them for refusing any courtesies from one member.

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She supposed it was some little misunderstanding that school children often have, and tried to drop the matter from her mind. But every day something would occur to bring it back.

One Saturday morning almost all the pupils had gone skating, and were merrily gliding about on the creek when Margaret, Nettie and several other girls appeared, skates in hand. Miss Morrison saw them before her pupils, and called to Joe, Hervey and Harry, "Boys, there come some of our girls who will need to have their skates fastened."

The boys turned and skated toward the girls. Miss Morrison saw them kneel and begin tightening the straps. Nettie stood with her skates in her hands waiting until the boys were through with the other skates, while Joe turned and skated off by himself down the creek.

Miss Morrison was provoked. She imagined Joe was getting indifferent in those little attentions that every true, well-bred gentleman should show a lady, and decided that she would express herself rather forcibly to him on the subject. As he came down the creek she spoke to him: "Joe, did you not see that Nettie has no one to fasten her skates? Had you better not go and help her?"

"I asked her to allow me that privilege," he answered, politely, as he raised his hat with such a boyish grace and frankness that Miss Morrison could not help but admire him. "But she said she preferred not to accept any kindnesses from me."

It was a hard speech for a boy to make. He stood waiting for Miss Morrison's answer.

"I beg your pardon, Joe, for speaking as I did. I did not understand. I thought you were getting careless, and no boy has a right to be too busy or too much interested in anything to forget to offer his services to anyone that needs them. You know, Joe, it is these little, everyday kindnesses that make a good man and make some one happy. Forgive me, Joe, for imagining you would forget to be a gentleman."

Joe bowed his forgiveness, lifted his hat, and in a moment was gliding in and out among the skaters far down the creek. Everywhere the boys and girls were skating in merry groups, laughing, chatting, their cheeks flushed and eyes bright; only Joe skated by himself, talking with no one, taking no part in the gayety about him. At last he skated to where Miss Morrison and Miss Downs were resting.

"Miss Morrison, I'm tired skating. I think I'll go back."

"Very well," she answered. As he left them she said to Miss Downs, "For some reason Joe has been sent to Coventry. He used to be so popular, and he deserved it; for Joe is a gentleman if ever there was one. Now no one is friendly with him. I thought several weeks ago it was some ill feeling that would die away, but it gets stronger every day. I am handicapped about it. The girls will not tell unless I request them to, and I would not feel right to ask about some personal affair. They are never rude. They simply forget his presence. I confess they have been very womanly through it all. And perhaps there is some reason."

"Don't worry, Miss Morrison," Miss Downs answered. "There is some reason, and perhaps Joe is receiving a just punishment. I don't believe they would act so without a good reason. And perhaps it will do the boy good. If he has done wrong he deserves his treatment; if he has not his suffering in silence will be a good developer for his character. You know there is nothing like a judicious dose of small troubles to turn a thoughtless boy into a serious, thoughtful, considerate man. Never fear, it will come right some time."

Joe seemed a changed boy. He had always come into the room with a smile and a few words of greeting besides the customary "Good morning." Now he bade Miss Morrison "Good morning," went to his desk and began to work without an extra word or smile. He no longer intruded his company upon the other pupils. He came and went by himself. He never stopped to play ball on the grounds, nor joined the group of boys and girls that lingered outside. He had been sent to Coventry, and he began to realize it.

Miss Morrison was inclined to sympathize with him, and when in the class he was so dull and spiritless, she laid her hand on his shoulder and said to him alone, "Joe, are you ill?"

"No, Miss Morrison."

"What is the trouble, then? You are not the boy you were two months ago. You were so happy and bright, and quite a comfort to me; but now, Joe, you are different. Can you not tell me what the trouble is?"

He looked down, but did not answer.

After school Miss Morrison asked Joe if he would not

stay a few moments and sharpen the drawing pencils for the next day's lesson.

After the rest had gone and Miss Morrison had talked of indifferent things, she said again, "Joe, are you sure that you are not ill?"

"O yes, Miss Morrison. I am not ill at all."

"Well, Joe, there's just one other thing that could make a boy look so utterly miserable. He must have trouble. I know it is no home affair, so it must be purely personal. Am I right in thinking so, Joe?"

"Yes, Miss Morrison."

"Then we shall reason a little bit further, Joe. A boy's troubles generally come through some fault of his own. Is that true of yours?"

"Yes," he answered again, as he cut still more vigorously at the pencils.

"Then one more step, Joe. When a person does wrong, and knows that, it is his duty to do what he can to right that wrong. Confession generally comes first, Joe. That lifts such a load off the shoulders that the other is very easy."

She paused, hoping that he would tell her his trouble. She could not help him when she did not know in what way to act. But the knife only cut into the pencils in a determined way, as if it were vexed at the world in general and would give vent to its spleen by cutting them. But Joe did not raise his eyes or speak.

Miss Morrison kept on waiting, thinking and hoping that he would decide what to do. For this was the turning point in the boy's life, and although neither teacher nor pupil knew it, his decision now would determine whether he would be a sullen, unhappy man, whom people would keep aloof from, as the school children did now, or whether he would be a bright, cheerful man, happy in his consciousness of doing right.

Only the click of the pen and the incessant cut of the knife was heard. To Miss Morrison the silence was ominous. At last she said softly, "Joe, can you tell me as a friend or as an elder sister who cares for her brother? Don't tell me as a teacher, Joe."

The knife dropped, the box of pencils rolled to the floor, and Joe's head went down on the desk. At last he got up, went to the cloak-room and took his hat. Then she waited. She heard him fuss with his books and loiter, seeking every excuse to stay, and wanting to be brave enough to come back. She waited and waited, knowing that he must fight the affair out with himself.

At last she heard the door open and steps go down the stair to the street, and she put up her work to go home, heartsick and discouraged, for the boy she had been so fond of had not been strong enough to conquer himself.

"I won't give him up yet," she said softly to herself as she stooped and gathered up the scattered pencils. "Perhaps I depended on my own power of moving him. Of course I failed. Poor boy, I wish he would know the glory in conquering self; for such a one is stronger than he that taketh a city."

The reports and averages of the examination came back from the superintendent the next morning. Miss Morrison was pleased. The two she had depended on for good recitations were honor pupils.

She was almost as excited about it as her pupils. As she stood before them with the averages and promotion certificates, there was a stir of interest. Every pupil kept his eye on the cards in her hand, and with expectant, hopeful expression.

"I wish you could all be honor pupils, but I think you are that. You all have a higher glory in this examination than getting an excellent average. You were trusted in the examination, and I think no one betrayed the trust, and I think you are all honor pupils on that account. I cannot tell you how proud and pleased I was that you all acted as you did, and I know that you have been happier on that account. As you cannot all be first, let the ones who are not forget that you have not succeeded, and try to rejoice with the successful ones. It is no disgrace to fail, when you have tried, and you have all done that. But as to the averages. Carrie Parks is first, having an average of ninety-seven per cent., and Joe Swires is second, with ninety-six."

Miss Morrison paused around the cards. Carrie's face was wreathed in smiles as she fairly clutched the report card. Her friends were almost as delighted, for they felt that Carrie was their best pupil. But poor Joe, he let his report lie on his desk without touching it or giving it a glance, while he braced his head on his arms and let his eyes gaze fixedly out of the window, as though his mind were miles away.

"Why, Joe, how is this? You look as though you had been punished instead of honored." Miss Morrison's voice brought him back with a start. He looked up at her. Never in all her experience with schoolboys had Miss Morrison seen such a look on a boy's face.