

BOYS AND GIRLS

The Hero of Trenton

(The Rev. Henry Lewis, in 'Onward.')

When the railway company first decided to plant a town site at Trenton, quite a number of people bought town lots with the usual enterprise of folks 'out West,' and built houses, stores, and workshops, expecting that the place would develop into a town of respectable size. In this they were disappointed—it never rose to the dignity of having even a station-house and telegraph office. There was just a platform and small freight shed where the trains stopped to let off and take on passengers and baggage. Some left the place in disgust; others, who had their little all invested in their property there, stayed and did the best they could. Among the latter was John Kendricks. He had come out to the West, hoping its clear, bracing climate would help his asthma. He had bought a farm, which he rented, and built a boarding-house with a livery-stable, hoping thus by these means to rear his family in decency.

Mrs. Kendricks was a hard-working, thrifty, godly woman. She strove hard to train her two children, a boy and a girl, in the right way. The eldest, a boy of about seventeen years old, was a great help and comfort to his mother, in fact, as the father was an invalid, the main work of house and livery stable devolved upon Joey Kendricks and his mother. Joey had come to feel very early in life that much depended upon him for the welfare of the home.

There was a class of young people in Trenton whose ideas of life were not very high; perhaps, had the place been more prosperous, had there been more life in the little village, the youth of the place would have had more ambition, but both village and people seemed to have resigned themselves to a sleepy way of drifting through life.

One of the chief events every day was the passing by of the mail express, which landed a passenger now and again. To witness this, a group of young men and boys generally found their way daily to the railway platform, and for a time propped themselves up with the little shed. Here they would indulge in various remarks and jokes about nearly everybody and everything that came in sight. If the train happened to be a little late, they would twit the engine-driver and tell him to 'give the old hoss more oats.' If there were not many passengers on board they would tease the conductor about 'having had an upset and spilled most of his load.' When the train was gone they would generally adjourn to the blacksmith's shop to finish the rest of the afternoon in all kinds of gossip and story-tellings, sometimes of not a very elevating nature.

With this company Joey Kendricks had no affinity. They nicknamed him 'Mother's Joey,' but no one wondered at that, because they had a nickname for everybody. Even the minister who came to the village to preach did not escape. They nicknamed each other and called themselves 'the chain-gang,' and counted all this as smart.

Joey, however, was never, by them or anyone else, considered to be even a link

in the 'chain.' He always found enough to do in the stable, house, and garden to keep him busy.

It happened one day that a farmer stopped at Kendricks' to dinner. He had a couple of turkeys in a coop, which he was taking away on the train that day. He asked Joey to take them down to the platform for him while he did a little business in the village.

When Joey arrived at the platform he found the 'chain-gang' there in full force. At once remarks and jokes were being made at Joey's expense. Joey just smiled and let them go on. In a little time the farmer came along. There were with him two gentlemen, whom Joey had not seen before.

'Well, Joey, you are at the post of duty with the turkeys,' remarked the farmer. Joey just smiled.

Then the farmer told Joey that the two gentlemen were Government surveyors, and they wanted to speak to him. At this the members of the 'gang' pricked up their ears. Meanwhile, the surveyors had been walking to and fro on the platform listening to the various remarks of certain members of 'the gang.'

'This is the young man I was telling you about,' said the farmer to the gentlemen as they passed by.

'Oh, indeed,' said one of them; who was the chief, apparently.

'This is Mr. West, the Government surveyor, Joey,' said the farmer.

'Well, my boy, I want you to do a little work for us. We are here to locate a drain about four miles in the country to take the water off the marsh lands down to the river. Now, we will be sending along some gear, stoves, tents, provisions, and so on. We want you to take care of them when they are unloaded from the train and stow them away safely in the shed here. Of course we will pay you,' said Mr. West.

'You had better tell him about the lumber and waggons that will come also,' interposed the other surveyor.

'Oh, yes, we will be sending two or three carloads of lumber and other heavy material. We want you to unload them. Do you think you can manage?'

Joey said he could. The surveyor gave him some money to hire help to unload the cars, the farmer at the same time saying Joey was the only young fellow in the village they could really trust. To all this 'the gang' were silent spectators. The train arrived and went. Joey hurried off home. He heard some remarks from some one behind him about having 'struck a Government job at last,' but he was too excited to heed. He was eager to tell those at home of his streak of luck, as he called it.

In two or three days the freight came on the train to Trenton. Mr. Kendricks was there to help and advise Joey about putting it in the shed. When all was packed away, the father went home, but Joey went to the post-office for the key of the shed to lock all up. While he was away, two or three of the boys went into the shed, and 'just for the fun of the thing' took a package away and hid it. Joey, when he came with the key, saw the package was gone, and seeing some fellows near by, had his suspicions. He went back

to the post-master and told him about it.

'Don't say a word about it, lock the door, they will not be able to keep their secret long. They did it to tease you, so just be quiet,' said the postmaster, knowing the class Joey had to deal with. Joey took his advice.

In a day or two rumors got abroad somehow that a detective was coming to the village to search everybody's house to find the lost package. In little bits the story got out who it was that 'had the joke on Joey,' but now things were becoming serious. The post-master got the culprits together, told them of their danger of arrest, and advised them to return the package to Joey and apologize. They were much alarmed at what they heard, and gladly did as they were told.

The cars loaded with lumber, scrapers, waggons, and other gear came, and while Joey with the two men he had hired, were unloading, Mr. West arrived.

'I see you are doing well,' said he to Joey, who smiled as usual. Seeing some hangers on near by, Mr. West looked towards them and said:

'I understand some folks around here have been interfering with the freight in the shed.'

'The freight is all right now, sir,' said Joey, very respectfully.

'Good job I did not drop on them. I'd make it hot for them,' said Mr. West severely.

'They meant no harm, sir,' answered Joey, smiling.

'Harm or no harm, I don't want any of those fellows near me while I am in this locality,' replied Mr. West.

That evening Mr. West and Joey were planning about the teams to take the stuff to the locality of the drain.

'Now, Joey, remember, I don't want any of those fellows who played that mean trick on you. The postmaster told me all about it to-day,' said the surveyor.

'But, Mr. West,' interposed Mrs. Kendricks, who was sitting near by, 'we ought not to retaliate, and you see, if some of those boys don't get a chance to earn a little something with this Government drain, they will blame Joey and us.'

'That may be so,' said Mr. West.

'I'll fix that, and have the best teams in the village on the spot bright and early in the morning,' said Joey.

'Well, you know best,' answered Mr. West, who saw that Joey knew what he was about.

That evening Joey was busy going from one to another in the village, hiring men and teams. Some were taken by surprise. They had never thought Joey would return good for evil in this style. They were more than surprised at the liberal pay they would get. Some even asked how was the 'boss-man' feeling now about the package taken out of the shed.

'Oh, mother and I fixed that all right,' replied Joey.

The teaming was done so well that Mr. West always after that depended upon Joey to hire the men and teams. And Joey always managed to get village folk the best paying part of the work. Before the season was over, they all had learned to look up to Joey. They had found out