

LITTLE BOSS EYE.

One thing was certain, that Bernard Regan had not struck the first blow; he was standing with his heels together and his hands behind his back, repeating in a high-pitched voice: "Dear angel ever at my side," when the little girl next to him, apparently without the smallest provocation, suddenly landed him one in the eye. Then he certainly did hit her, and hit her hard, and she clambered up on to the bench and thumped him on the head with a slate till it broke and he yelled for mercy.

In a moment the whole classroom became entirely disorganized. The children of the first and second divisions rose to their feet and shouted their approval. Such an unwonted display of spirit on the part of a new arrival filled them with delight; but the babies on the gallery got frightened and huddled together in confusion and began to cry.

Vainly I rapped upon my desk and commanded all the children to be silent. After a few moments of fruitless remonstrance it was borne in upon me that we should be obliged to discontinue the hymn. In the School Board Code I was described as "Article 60," which I roughly took to mean, "qualified, though not capable," but the people in authority, who understand these things, had decided that as I was more than eighteen years of age, and as I taught in the school all day, and as the Inspector approved of me, it was all right; though my own common sense told me that as I could not maintain order, and as the children would not obey me, and as after giving them an hour's lesson on the Good Samaritan they went out and threw stones at a beggar who was lying near the playground gate, it was all wrong.

Nevertheless, I did my best to teach and train those little souls, which for the time being were committed to my care, and although in stern matters of discipline my too tender heart and the school regulations were always at variance, it was not to the promptings of sentimentality that I habitually allowed myself to yield.

In the present instance the unwritten laws of the Infant School required that the culprits should be called out into the middle of the room and examined as to their unseemly conduct. This was a case that must not be passed over. Of course I should have vastly preferred to have ignored the incident, to have busied myself in sorting through the papers in my desk until the children had regained their normal composure, and then to have passed on quietly to the next verse of the hymn; but in the doors that led to the large school-room there were glass panels, through which the critical eye of the head mistress could see all that was going on. So I took down my cane reluctantly, from the top of the big cupboard, and assumed my sternest voice.

"Come here, Lucy Maloney, and tell me what you mean by fighting with Bernard Regan."

"I have not the least idea what his name is," answered Lucy evasively.

"But I feel sure that you know better than to behave like this on your first morning at school. Now look me straight in the face, and tell me what it was all about?"

For reply Lucy hung her head still lower and reached one hand up to rake more straggling hair down over her eyes.

"How old are you?" I asked, by way of gaining her confidence and getting on better terms.

"I'm six last birthday."

"And you aren't shy, are you?"

"No, I ain't shy—trust me."

"Then hold up your face and let me have a look at you."

"I ain't no beauty. Mary's the beauty in our family. She's four. I'm going to bring her to school to-morrow. Mary's a wonder for her lessons, she is."

All of which information, interesting as it might be, seemed hardly to the point, and I again pressed for an explanation of the fight.

The other children were leaning forward and listening with breathless curiosity, but Lucy only closed her lips more tightly, and shook her head with fixed determination, whereupon Peter Daly, who had been sitting in the row behind her, and who always knew the rights

and wrongs of every quarrel, could no longer restrain his pent-up yearning to throw light upon the subject. Standing on tiptoe with outstretched hand, after the approved fashion in Government schools, he yelled out at the top of his voice: "Please, teacher, Bernard began by calling her 'Little Boss-eye.'"

"And when they call me 'Boss-Eye' I always hit them," added Lucy, decisively.

"Let me look," said I, smoothing back the hay-like hair.

"But even if you say it, it will be just the same," Lucy thought it necessary to warn me. "I always have done it, and I always will."

She raised her eyes as she spoke, one to the face above her and the other to the bridge of her own nose.

"Poor child!" said I, quickly letting the hair fall back to cover her squint.

The clock in the next room chimed the quarter to the hour. The head mistress seated herself at her desk with her back to the glass panels.

"Time to mark the registers," she called aloud, and the infants were sent back to their places, and the cane was put away.

"You got off precious lightly that time," remarked Peter Daly, as the culprits resumed their seats in front of him. "If it had been me now, wouldn't I just have caught it! Why I was only pretending to be a wolf last night in the dormitory at the convent, crawling under the boys' beds to frighten them when Sister found me and gape me the strap something cruel."

"Talking again! Peter Daly," said I: "If I have to find fault with you once more I shall send you in to Governess for a caning."

"Just what I tell you," whispered Peter to Lucy; "that's the way they always have of serving me."

He had taken a great fancy to the little stranger. In his character of naughtiest boy in the school he was lost in admiration of the courage with which a newcomer, and a girl, too, had broken a slate over Bernard Regan's head. There were possibilities about Lucy, Peter felt she had made a most promising debut.

He searched his memory for interesting things to whisper to her during the writing lesson, and when at their reading she was sent over to the second division because she could not tell the difference between "was" and "saw," he tried his hardest to pretend that he did not know the reading-book by heart, and made every silly mistake he could imagine in the hope of being sent down, too.

But his devotion was only requited with a caning, and the threat that all his playtime would be forfeited if he went on giving trouble.

So he sat like a lamb till the clock struck 11, and then led Lucy out triumphantly to his favorite corner of the playground for a talk.

She was very sympathetic and encouraging, and Peter explained to her in graphic language how all really pleasant things were "naughty," which she readily understood.

"They're building a new infants' school," he said, "and that great bowl yonder is filled with tar; and its black and soft and lovely to put your hands in, but they say it's 'naughty' if you lean over the edge and touch it, and it's 'naughty' if you dip sticks in it to chase the girls about with, and it's even 'naughty' if you stand quite far away and shy stones into it; so what they put it there for I can't make out! Just to be a temptation to us; that's what I think."

And when Lucy had gone close up to examine it, and been caught, and shaken and sent in, she thought so, too.

"You mayn't stand at the gate to watch the carts go by; you mayn't climb upon the wall and throw your caps into the road and then run and fetch them; you mayn't practise climbing up under the ladder; you mayn't make a seesaw out of the heap of boards; you mayn't do nothing," announced Peter gloomily, when he had also been pounced upon by the head master and sent back into the infant school.

"I don't care," said Lucy recklessly. "My father's a policeman; I'm all right."

Having a parent who was a member of the force seemed to inspire her with a wonderful confidence; though how that fact was likely to assist her when she had rendered

herself liable to school penalties, she never deemed it necessary to explain.

The bare statement was sufficient to create a wholesome awe where the younger children were concerned, and she held him up as "Bogey" to any one who "checked her about her squint."

In spite of all that I might say to the infants about its being unkind and rude to refer to their little companion's physical misfortune, there were times when I could not resist addressing her as "Boss-Eye," and a knock-down blow was the immediate and unailing result.

Peter simply revelled in the spirit she showed, but to her more peaceably-minded teacher Lucy Maloney was far from being a source of unmitigated joy. After that first morning she never arrived in time to have her name placed on the register, so that from "the Government Grant" point of view she was no addition to the school.

As a pupil she proved backward and tiresome. She wrote with her good eye resting on her pencil, in a manner which evoked intermittent titters from the children near her, and not being able to distinguish one word from another, she made no progress with her reading; while her hemming, to use her own expression "was nothing but a mere cobbobble."

The two hours allotted for needlework were usually spent by her in the vain endeavor to pass a piece of cotton through the eye of a huge wool-needle, and although her fruitless efforts materially disturbed the class she persistently refused to allow any other little girl to come to her assistance. "Mother says I shall get so that I'll be able to do it—in course of time," she explained, "but father says the time will always be 4 o'clock before ever my cotton has gone through. Father do say funny things, he do. He makes me laugh."

None of which was conducive towards that silence and order which I was so anxious to obtain.

"Mother's ill, and Mary ain't acoming, because we couldn't get her dressed in time," announced Lucy towards the end of the term, when the head mistress was particularly desirous for all the children to attend regularly. "And I shan't be coming myself after to-day," she went on; "there's the cooking, and the washing and the baby for me to see to. I shall have my hands full, I can tell you."

She seemed overwhelmed with the sense of her own importance, but I could not help feeling sceptical about her capabilities, and called on Mrs. Maloney a few days later to see how things were going on. Lucy, with her hair tied up, and her sleeves rolled back, opened the door.

"How is your mother to-day?" asked I.

"A little better, thank you, miss. Will you please to step upstairs," said Lucy, curtsying and showing the way.

The transformation filled me with surprise. It had never occurred to me that Lucy Maloney at home was such a very superior person to the "Little Boss-Eye" whom I daily saw at school.

My own deficiencies as "Article 60" appeared accentuated by the contrast.

"I had been rather afraid that now you are ill you might find Lucy troublesome," I explained to her mother. "I hope she does not worry you at all."

"Worry me! what, my Lucy?" answered she. "Why, miss, you can have no idea how old-fashioned she is. She's my right hand, that's what I call her, and now that I'm laid up she does everything for me just the same as I should do it myself. I wish you could have seen her at the washing last Monday. That was a picture and no mistake! She gathered all the dirty clothes together and went at it like a good one; and though she did drop most of them on the garden path when she was hanging them up to dry, that wasn't her fault, bless her little heart. Then came Tuesday, she laid hold of her father and made him turn the mangle—everything as regular as could be. I'd like you to see Lucy stand up to her father, miss, and give him a piece of her mind when he puts upon me."

"Oh, but I hope that Mr. Maloney is good to you," cried I anxiously.

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loney is good to you," cried I anxiously.

"Well, miss," and Mrs. Maloney hesitated for a moment, wondering whether to pour forth a string of complaints against her husband, or to hold him up as a model of all manly virtues for my admiration. A certain latent principle of esprit de corps decided her upon the latter course.

"Yes, miss," said she, "I have the very best husband that ever a woman in this world was blessed with. That's what I always say. And Maloney's a man that anyone might be proud to name. They think no end of him up at the police station. He's well respected."

At this moment the master of the house came home, and Lucy could be heard engaged in fierce altercation as to whether the baby should or should not be allowed to beat his beeistek on the floor.

Lucy declared that it wanted beating, mother always beats it, and she said it kept the baby quiet to have something amusing to do; whilst Maloney argued that she couldn't expect him to eat his supper after that youngster had been messing it about on the floor.

"That's every bit like a man!" cried Lucy. "You've no business to come home until everything's ready for you, and then as long as your beefsteak tasted all right you wouldn't know how it was done."

The clothes that she had put to air too near the fire, beginning to singe, created a diversion.

"I shall be glad when I can get about again," Mrs. Maloney sighed, as her visitor rose to go. "Lucy does for me all right, but men never seem to understand, and if she worked her fingers to the bone she couldn't please her father."

But although Maloney might be unable to appreciate the merits of his little daughter, I resolved that from henceforth I would endeavor to avoid making the same mistake.

I saw now that she was a child of character, and I began to realize that she was possessed of an amount of practical knowledge altogether unusual in one so young. Her backwardness and tiresomeness in class, her very quarrelsomeness in the playground, might all be traced back to that defective and disfiguring little "Boss-Eye" which her straggling wisps of hair were continually being coaxed down to hide from public view. I wondered whether something might not be done to remedy her faulty vision and determined to approach Mrs. Maloney on the subject as soon as her state of health would permit her to take the child to see an oculist. The father was wholly immovable and obdurate. Lucy saw quite well enough, he said, for everything that it was necessary for her to do about the house; and as for lessons, he did not hold with too much education for girls. His grandmother, who had brought him up, had never been able either to read or write, and yet, he said, he had never come across a woman who was her equal at roasting a leg of mutton.

Maloney was, I feel sure, a most exemplary member of the police force, and doubtless the nature of his employment rendered it expedient for him to keep up his strength by taking a large amount of nourishment in the form of animal food, but during those few short conversations which I held with him I could not help thinking that his mind appeared to run

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