

CONTRIBUTED.

THE EVOLUTION OF A SCHOOL BOY.

HIS first day at school is one never to be forgotten. The spring morning, the bright sunlight, the singing birds; the stone schoolhouse, the little porch, the solemn, gloomy room. His big sister leads him up to the master's desk, and he stands there alone. It is the trying moment of his life. But he steadies his trembling knees, and, when the master looks at him gravely and asks his name, he answers, just as his ma had instructed him, "John James Edwards." He doesn't know why the boys all laugh, and when the teacher frowns at them he thinks it is at him, and begins to cry. He sits with his sister that day, for the boys are all strangers. A long, long, day! He hears the ploughmen in the fields close by shouting at their horses but he cannot see them, for the blinds are down. Once, when the teacher is not looking, the girl in front of him—a pretty girl with laughing blue eyes—glances back and lays a sugar-stick on his desk. No embarrassment now; he has met sugar-sticks before. At recess the girls throng round him, paying more attention to him than ever after. They ask him his name, and when he tells them—"John James Edwards"—they all laugh just as the boys did before. He would rather have stayed at home in the afternoon, but he must go to school. Up to that day he had always wished to go to school; since that day he has always wished to stay at home. The hours in the afternoon are longer than those in the morning. He watches a bumble bee that comes in the open window and buzzes about, bumping against the ceiling. He follows it till it comes to some ink spots directly above the stove. There his eyes rest, while he meditates on the mystery of the spattered ink. He is leaning on the desk, his head on his arm. The spots on the ceiling grow indistinct, the teacher's voice dies away.

Thud! Everybody looks around. John James Edwards' sister is lifting him out of the aisle and wiping the dust from his clothes. He cries a little, but the girl with the candy feels in her pocket and he is consoled. Nice girl, Dora! Very nice.

II.

Months have gone by. "John James Edwards" has degenerated into "Johnny." He sits with the boys now and never cries except when someone in the school yard bleeds his nose. He has learned much. Although he has not begun the study of geometry, yet he knows the exact angle at which to place a pin on the seat beside him where Peter Crabb sits. Peter and he were enemies from the first. It was quite a common occurrence for them to roll around in the dust behind the school embracing each other in deadly combat. In these scrimmages Peter had a happy faculty of getting on top;

then, sitting on the other's stomach, he would dictate terms of peace. But at last one day Johnny succeeded in keeping his feet and punched Peter up against the little wooden gate; someone opened the gate and Peter tumbled into the street. Johnny thought this was a final victory over his rival; alas, he found his mistake when Peter,—but we are getting ahead of our story.

III.

Years have passed. Johnny is scarcely a big boy yet, but he is certainly not small. The greatest trial of his life now is the Inspector's visit. Under the terrible gaze of that official Johnny's learning and boldness both melt away and run into a knot hole under his desk. He would like to follow them but cannot. He knows the Inspector hates noise, yet in spite of every precaution, the slate drops from his nervous fingers. The withering look from those awful eyes stops his breath and brings the perspiration to his brow. Then his class is being examined. He works the rule of three upside down, and, being sent to the map, he fails to find San Francisco, although he travels all the way from Florida to Hudson Bay in search of it.

At last the Inspector is gone, and things settle down into the usual rut.

We have forgotten to tell you what Johnny certainly would not have forgotten so long. He carries a watch now; his father gave it to him on his last birthday, and since then he has been the envy of all the other boys. And so we shall part with him for a time; leave him looking at his time-piece, watching the hands move on, while behind them the days and the nights lengthen out into months and years.

IV.

When next we see him he is eighteen, and is in the city at the High school. He is no longer "John James Edwards," nor even "Johnny"; he is merely "Edwards." The troubles of his existence are multiplied, for he has six teachers instead of one. He has to run a gauntlet every day. If he escapes vengeance in one quarter it is only to run into an ambush in another. But he is greatly changed. Experience has made him a philosopher, and he meets misfortune with Stoical indifference. And, besides this, he has many things to console him in his troubles. Everybody, at home, thinks he is clever. His mother fondly hopes to see him a minister; his father favors the law. Edwards likes to go back to his native town to see his friends—particularly the girl Dora who gave him the candy. He has amply repaid her for her kindness; she is very fond of ice cream and oranges.

He has not been home for two years, but holidays are close at hand and his heart is light with anticipation. He tries to study, but the vision of a pretty face floats between his eyes and the book. He picks up the evening paper and carelessly glances