

A Talk with my Boys on Meanness.

Boys, you may lay aside your books. I wish to have a bit of a talk with you. All ready? As I entered the school-house to-day, I heard one of you say, "That's mean!" I didn't stop to inquire what it was that was thought to be "mean," but I said to myself "Some boys will do mean things; and some boys are quick to detect meanness." Now I have been thinking that it might be a good thing to talk over with you some of the ways in which meanness may be shown in school. Possibly you and I may not quite agree in our estimate of what is done. And yet I believe that in most cases we shall hold the same opinion. I take it for granted that no one of you would like to have me, or any one else, consider him a mean boy; but as a person is judged by his acts, that epithet justly belongs, of course, to every one whose acts are mean. Do you agree to that? You do? Well, then, I will suppose a few cases.

Suppose that, relying upon your honor, I leave the room, and in my absence you are disorderly, doing things that you would not do in my presence. I call that mean, because it violates the confidence placed in you, and because it shows cowardice. Acts speak as loudly as words. Did you ever stop to think what is said by the boy who takes advantage of my absence to do wrong? *What is it?* I'll tell you. He says just this, "I'm a mean boy. I am here on my honor, I know; but I don't care. I'm going to have a good time, though it is mean. School-mates, you are at liberty to set me down as mean." That is what his acts plainly declare. Do you agree with me in this case? Very well. You can't be too careful in making your actions conform to your opinions.

Suppose that a boy pretends to be studying a lesson, when, in fact, he is reading a story-book which he has concealed in his text-book. Shall we call that a mean thing? How many say yes? All. I am glad to see that in this case also we agree. But what makes the meanness here. *Deception?* Agreed. only I should use the stronger word, *lying*; because when a boy has a study-book open before him, and appears to be at work, he says to his teacher as distinctly as words can say, "I am studying my lesson." If, on the contrary, he is wasting his time over a story, he *lies*, and consequently he is guilty of a wickedly mean act. As you value your character, avoid such falsehoods as carefully as you would any other kind.

Suppose a case which is very common in schools: that a boy whose lesson is not perfectly learned stealthily looks into his book during the recitations, in order that he may be able to recite better than he otherwise could, and thus obtain a high mark. I stamp that also with the brand *mean*. Do you ask why? Because it is a species of swindling. It is attempting to gain credit on false pretences. It is pretending to know what he doesn't know. It is doing injustice to honorable classmates, who scorn to rise, or attempt to rise in rank, by dishonest means. Therefore, don't open your book behind your neighbor's back, or under your desk, or anywhere else, for the sake of finding out what you think will come to you. It's *mean*. Don't do it.

Again: suppose that some mischief has been done about the school-house. A desk, or a bench, or a window, for example, has been broken. I inquire for the one who, purposely or accidentally, did the damage. Now that one, if he doesn't acknowledge the deed, suffers suspicion to fall, perhaps, upon an innocent schoolmate, and displays moral cowardice on his own part; and therefore he, too, must be placed among the mean boys. It is the best way, boys, always to do right as nearly as possible; but when you have, from any cause, done wrong, it is wise and manly to confess the wrong, and rectify it so far as you can. Not to do this is to be a coward,—a being that all men despise.

Suppose that your teachers are laboring faithfully in your behalf; that day by day they are patiently endeavoring to interest and instruct you, to explain what is difficult, to cultivate your intellectual and moral faculties, and thus to fit you for living useful, successful, and happy lives; and suppose that some boy, thoughtless of his own good, and destitute of all gratitude to those who are toiling with fidelity for his welfare, is guilty of causing trouble to those teachers by inattention, by playing, by lounging, in short, by doing anything that hinders them in the discharge of their difficult duties. Do you think it severe to call such a boy a mean boy? Is not ingratitude always mean? And is not that boy ungrateful who, for the labor bestowed upon him by his teachers, gives them in return nothing but trouble and anxiety? Is he not like the dog in the manger, neither willing to accept intellectual food himself, nor to suffer his classmates to receive it, as but for him they might? Yes, boys, we who are teachers will do all we can for your welfare, but I beg of you don't be so mean as to reward us with ingratitude. Help us by your good deportment, and you will thus help yourselves.

I see that the clock says it is time to dismiss. There are other matters that I intended to speak of; but I fear that you may call it mean to be kept after regular hours. You may go, therefore; but first tell me what is the lesson you have learned from this talk. *Don't be mean.* Yes, that's it. Don't forget it.—*R. S. Schoolmaster.*

Never Frighten Children.

A schoolmistress, for some trifling offence, most foolishly put a child into a dark cellar for an hour. The child was greatly frightened and cried bitterly. Upon returning to her parents in the evening, she burst into tears, and begged that she might not be put into a cellar. The parents thought this extremely odd, and assured her that there was no danger of their being guilty of so great an act of cruelty; but it was difficult to pacify her, and when put to bed she passed a restless night. On the following day she had a fever, during which she frequently exclaimed, "Do not put me in the cellar." The fourth day she was taken to Sir A. Cooper, in a high state of fever, with delirium, frequently muttering, "Pray don't put me in the cellar." When Sir Astley enquired the reason, he found the parents had learnt the punishment to which she had been subjected. He ordered what was likely to relieve her; but she died a week after the unfeeling conduct.

Another case from the same authority may here be cited. It is the case of a child ten years of age, who, wanting to write her exercise, and to scrape her slate pencil, went into the school in the dark to fetch her knife, when one of her schoolfellows burst from behind the door to frighten her. She was much terrified, and her head ached. On the following day she became deaf; and on the next, so much so as not to hear the loudest talking. Sir Astley saw her three months after this had happened, and she continued in the same deplorable state of deafness.

A boy, fifteen years of age, was admitted an inmate of the Dundee Lunatic Asylum, having become imbecile from fright. When twelve years of age he was apprenticed to a light business; and some trifling article being one day missing, he was along with others locked up in a dark cellar. The children were much alarmed, and all were let out with the exception of this poor boy, who was detained until past midnight. He became from this time nervous and melancholy, and sunk into a state of insensibility from which he will never recover. The missing article was found on the following morning, exculpating the boy from the guilt with which he had been charged.—*Exchange paper.*

The Culture of the Observing Faculties.

(From Mr. Warren Burton's work under that title.)

A child may begin geography long before he goes to school, or, rather, he may lay the sure and proper foundations for this science. When he shall have been taught the points of the compass—east, west, north, and south—then which side of the room the fire is, which the table, and in which direction are the barn and the garden; and when he shall see just how the land lies and looks close around his home, he has had an introduction to geography, or has, in a small degree, been prepared for an introduction. A beginning has been made according to the real nature of things. He understands what he asks about and what he is told. All the words have a meaning to his little mind. Now what you may do, and what he will be glad of, is that you carry him on a little farther, and still farther than he would go, clearly and certainly, without your personal guidance. You must talk him along, and walk him along, until you have together surveyed the neighborhood all around, and he has obtained a positive knowledge of it—a knowledge which he feels to be his own, just as he feels that a knowledge of your door yard or sitting-room is his own. For instance, you can ask him in what direction the street runs; and, if he has not already found out, tell him, and he will soon know beyond forgetting. Have him learn who lives in the next house to his own home on the right hand and on the left; who in the second, third, and fourth, and so on. Of course, this could hardly be done in the brick-blocked, heterogeneously neighbored but unneighborly city. Children at a very early age somehow learn what are a road, a field, a pasture, a wood, a hill, and a brook. Indeed, they quickly become familiar