

Scholar or Gentleman?

He was one of the best-known and most prosperous business men in the West, and I leave it to you to judge whether he spoke as a wise man or as a fool. He was talking about the education of his boys—you know men are sometimes really interested in the education of their boys—and after an exchange of opinions regarding their teacher, he remarked: "I don't understand how teachers so often overlook the fact that the most important thing in teaching a boy is to give him the instincts and manners of a gentleman. When I went to high school in the East we had six or eight teachers, and it is said to be the best school in the district, yet my recollection of it to-day is this: The principal, who taught classics, and who should have been a man of refinement, was nothing but a cold-blooded registering machine. He seemed to be made of metal. He followed the progress of the boys in their studies with a lynx-eyed vigilance; if a boy was shaping well for examination, that was enough; no matter what merits he had outside of that, they were disregarded. I have seen boys come into that school who needed above all things a little talk as to dress and deportment—just a little word would have sufficed—but that word was never spoken.

"There were others who had offensive ways—they were slovenly and dirty; yet they were good students and they were in the favored lot. They left that school resembling 'the learned hog,' and they are probably after that pattern to-day.

"Our mathematical teacher was a quiet, patient man, who could solve anything in the shape of a problem, but we ran wild with him. His influence was altogether in the direction of producing 'hoodlums.' Our English master was one of the driest specimens imaginable. There was nothing he could not analyze, except a boy's nature. If he had been capable of doing that he would probably have discovered a boy's needs. He gave us words, words, words, but there was no inspiration, no life. The teacher of science, however, was a man, and a gentleman. Whenever he came into the room we felt the presence of a lofty soul. He said nothing about manners, but most of us began to reverence him and copy him. His spirit was infectious. The other teachers gave us most of our schooling; he gave us most of our education. I shall love the memory of that man as long as I live. We had a man who taught us bookkeeping and history. He was boorish, narrow, conceited. He was self-educated, and never having been in the world of men never really understood how ignorant and full of faults he was. He had dirty hands, greasy coat, unkempt beard. I can't understand to this day how they kept such men in a school. But, you know, they were all hustlers. Yet, I wish to heaven they had all been gentleman before they were hustlers. When my boys are old enough to go to high school

or college, they are going where the teachers are first of all gentlemen."

Now here is a criticism of the schools of twenty years ago, by a gentleman capable of forming a judgment, and it raises a series of questions that deserve consideration:

1. *Should the school consider the cultivation of a gentlemanly demeanor as of very great importance?* It will be conceded that in life a gentlemanly bearing is most desirable. None of us wish in our business relations to deal with uncultured, uncouth specimens of humanity, and in our social intercourse we are careful to cultivate the acquaintance of those who have not only intelligence, but that style and manner which characterize the gentleman. It may be said that *internal worth*, and not *form*, determines the man. In answer to this it may be said that where real worth exists the form will be desired, and many a man of real worth suffers because he has not that repose and manner which indicate "the man of good breeding." Again, it may be said that the special aim of the school is "scholarship," and it is the duty of the home and society to look after manners. In answer to this it might be asked, "Who settled it that the special aim of the school was 'scholarship?' and if it were, is not the great aim of education—the upbuilding of life—of more account than this special aim?"

2. *Does the criticism apply to the schools of to-day?* There is no use in evading this question by saying that our teachers have a high sense of their moral responsibility, that they are aiming at character formation. This is quite true. Yet the conduct of pupils, the bearing of teachers in schools, the reports of inspectors, would all indicate that this "making gentleman" is not, in many cases, receiving the attention it should. There are indeed schools in which the very worst of bad manners may be seen, where both teachers and pupils lack the repose, the courtesy, the finish that characterize the refined. There is instead an air of roughness, crudeness, confusion and discord. A gentleman is known by his temper, his speech, his address, his general style. He does not scold and nag, he does not use coarse or inelegant expressions habitually, he does not insult childhood, he is more careful to speak gently and tenderly in the presence of little ones than in the presence of his ball-room associates; it is in him to be kind and gentle; he cannot be otherwise. *O si sic omnes!*

3. *What is required under the circumstances?* First of all it would seem that our teachers must perceive the importance of training of the kind indicated. But there is no hope so long as those in charge of our schools think only in terms of intellect. Additional intellectual ability is the last thing some people need. Soap and curry-comb would be more to the point. Yet there are cases on record where children have entered a school rough, untidy, unmannerly, and at the end of a year have gone away worse than they came. A man came into a high school down East. He was dirty, rough,