

The Slighted Scholar.

Cases like the one I am about to relate are much too frequent in our country, and they are such, too, as should be guarded against by all who have an interest in education. The incident was brought to mind by hearing a complaint made by the parent of the poor boy, who had been grossly neglected by the teacher of the village school,—neglected simply because he was poor and comparatively friendless.

Many years ago, when I was a small boy, I attended a school in the town of—

Among the scholars there was a boy named George Henry. His father was a poor drinking man, and the unfortunate boy had to suffer in consequence. George came to school habited in ragged garments—but they were the best he had; he was rough and uncouth in his manners, for he had been brought up in that manner; he was very ignorant, for he never had an opportunity for education.

Season after season, poor George Henry occupied the same seat in the school room,—it was a back corner seat, away from the other scholars,—and there he thumbed his tattered primer. The ragged condition of his garb gave a homely cast to his whole appearance, and what of intelligence there might have been in his countenance was beclouded by the “outer covering” of the boy. He seldom played with other children, for they seemed to shun him; but when he did, for a while, join with them in their sports, he was so rough that he was soon shoved out of the way.

The teacher passed the poor boy coldly in the street, while the other boys, in better garbs, were kindly noticed. In the school young Henry was coldly treated. The teacher neglected him, and then called him an “idle brockhead,” because he did not learn.

The boy received no incentive to study, and consequently he was most of the time idle, and this idleness begat a disposition to while away the time in mischief. For this he was whipped, and the more idle he became. He knew he was neglected by the teacher and simply because he was

poor and ragged, and with a sort of sullen indifference, sharpened at times by feelings of bitterness, plodded on in his dark, and thankless way.

Thus matters went on for several years. Most of the scholars who were of George Henry's age had passed on to the higher branches of study, while he, poor fellow, still spelled out words of one and two syllables, and still kept his distant seat in the corner. His father had sunk into the pit of inebriation, and the unfortunate boy was more wretched than ever.

The look of clownish indifference which had marked his countenance, was now giving way to a shade of unhappy thought and feeling, and it was evident that the great turning point of his life was at hand. He stood upon the step in life from which the fate of after years must take its cast.

At this time a man by the name of Kelly took charge of the school. He was an old teacher, a careful observer of human nature and a really good man. Long years of guardianship over wild youths had given him a bluff authoritative way, and in his discipline he was strict and unwavering.

The first day he passed in the teacher's desk of our school was mostly devoted to watching the movements of the Scholars, and studying the dispositions with which he had to deal. Upon George Henry his eyes rested with a keen searching glance. But he evidently made little of him during the first day; yet on the second he did more.

It was during the afternoon of the second day that Mr. Kelly observed young Henry engaged in impaling flies upon the point of a large pin. He went to the boy's seat, and after reprimanding him for his idleness, he took up the dirty, tattered primer from the desk.

“Have you never learned more than is in this book?” asked the teacher.

“No sir,” drawled George.

“How long have you attended school?”

“I don't know, sir. It's ever since I can remember.”

“Then you must be an idle, reckless boy,” said the teacher with much