

COLUMN FOR THE BOYS.

[From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.]

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS.—You will not fail to observe, as you increase in years and stature, that people are governed in their conduct not only by certain laws ordained by legislative assemblies, and which they are bound to obey, but by a variety of rules and arrangements imposed by merely society at large, and sanctioned by the force of custom. You must understand that the laws for governing mankind, such as those for punishing the wicked and protecting the peaceable, are not more necessary for our welfare and comfort than those inferior rules for regulating our general behaviour, and terms of intercourse with each other. It is of great consequence, for the attainment of tranquility and satisfaction of mind, that every human being, whether old or young, rich or poor, should so conduct himself as not to give unnecessary pain, by word or deed, to neighbours, or any one with whom they come in contact. By attending to such an arrangement, the feelings of no one are hurt; all live on terms of kindly consideration one towards another; and life is passed in a state of comparative ease and happiness, instead of a condition of vexation and harassment.

It is unfortunate that notwithstanding all that has been printed and taught respecting the utility and extreme desirableness of people conducting themselves according to rules for good manners, many refrain from doing so, and either take a wicked pleasure in behaving rudely, and speaking intemperately and coarsely, or are altogether careless how far they offend in everything that is decent and orderly. Such persons, however, err from ignorance. Their minds are untrained; and we can hardly expect propriety of behaviour from them till education has cultivated and refined their faculties. From you who are still young—still in the way of learning—and who will listen to an advice given by one who anxiously labours to put you on the way to honour and earthly enjoyment, I expect better things. In order, therefore, that you may pass life agreeably, and permit others to do the same, I have to inform you of the important particular, that attention to good manners, is absolutely essential. You perhaps ask me to explain what it is that constitutes good manners. That I shall do in as simple a way as possible, leaving your parents and friends to fill up the minor details.

The grand leading point in good manners is so to act and speak as not to offend the feelings of others. At first sight this would seem to be of easy accomplishment; yet it is very difficult. One can give pain, or offend in so many ways—for instance, by being boisterous, noisy, talkative, sneering, pert, vain, self-conceited, and opinionative, by speaking subjects disagreeable to the listener, by speaking too much of one's self, by starting rudely, and by committing many other absurdities of behaviour in company—that you require not only to be well grounded in rules for good manners, but continually on your guard, lest you give offence, and by so doing render yourself hated and despised. In order to render yourself agreeable, you must, as a matter of course, give up a little of your natural independence. You must go upon the principle implied by the exclamation—"I shall do as I like—I care for nobody—I will not be trammelled by any set of rules;" for no one has a right to live in society and enjoy its blessings unless he is prepared to yield up a small portion of his self-will as the price. If he will not conform to the established rules for governing society, he had better retire to the fields, and live like a wild beast or a savage. The distinguishing feature in the conduct of a well-bred person is, the doing and saying of every thing with a perfect ease,

quietness, and decorum. He allows nothing to ruffle his temper, or to discompose his quietude of behaviour. He enters a room quietly though by no means stealthily—he sits down or rises up quietly, speaks with suavity and gentleness, and conducts himself in every other particular in a way calculated to please. The point worthy of your notice here, is the quietness of manner—the repose—the decorum, which is associated with the behaviour of the person of good breeding. You will never fail to remark the reverse in the case of individuals who are heedless of the rules which are observed in cultivated society. Look at the conduct of an ill-bred man. He enters a room with noise, sits down and rises up with noise, speaks with noise, and every thing else he does is done with noise. It would seem that he can do nothing quietly. When he sets down a chair, he causes it to knock against the floor; when he sits at table he makes a noise with his knife and fork; when he blows his nose, the action is accompanied with noise; when he speaks, it is with noise; when he shuts a door it is with noise; when he walks every tramp of his foot is productive of noise. Noise is thus the characteristic of the ill-bred, as quietness is that of the well-bred man, and it is scarcely necessary to inform you that this noise is productive of any thing but agreeable sensations. Nobody can possibly like it: it mars every one's comfort. To be hearty, to laugh with those that laugh, to cheer with those who cheer, is quite a different matter; the noise we mention as so reprehensible is the obtrusive boisterousness of an intractable disposition, the insufferable, the everlasting coarseness of one who is utterly reckless of the feelings of those about him. Besides being noisy, the ill-bred man is easily discomposed. A little thing will put him about. Loud exclamations of surprise, angry bursts of passion, and perhaps oaths and imprecations, testify the irritability of his mind, and the ill-regulated condition of his manners, all which is most offensive to those who have the misfortune to mingle in his society. A third peculiarity in the behaviour of an ill-bred person, and one which is generally the most observable, is the uncountenance of many of his actions. Feeling abashed—although he has done nothing to be ashamed of—he does not know how to comport himself so as to appear easy or elude observation. In this dilemma he shifts, shuffles and tries various ways of sitting or standing. His most common resource is meddling with his hair, or touching some part of his face. This gives employment to his hands, and has, as he thinks, a look of being at ease, while in reality it is quite the reverse. I may here inform you that it is considered exceedingly bad manners to touch either the hair or any part of the head or countenance with the hands. In company, or when in any public place, you must take care to avoid doing so. The dressing and arranging of the hair, like that of cleansing the face and hands, is a duty to be performed only in private. I need hardly tell you that picking the nails, scratching or rubbing any part of the body or limbs, putting your fingers in your ears, and similar indecencies of behaviour, are equally inconsistent with good manners. They are actions which are exceedingly offensive to spectators, and are therefore carefully shunned by all persons possessing the slightest sense of propriety.

In endeavouring to avoid giving offence to those about you, it will be necessary for you to learn to listen with consideration and patience to the person who is addressing you, particularly if the speaker be a female. Let your answers be couched in civil obliging language; and although you have reason to disbelieve that which you hear, do not contradict the speaker rudely or warmly. Merely observe that what

is said "is remarkable; "that it may be so, but you heard otherwise;" or, "there may be some mistake in the report," and so forth; never, at any rate, flatly contradicting, for that might give serious offence to one who most likely means no harm, and who might be convinced of his error by your politely explaining your reasons for thinking differently from him. When you speak in company, do it with ease and without affectation; do not hum, and ha, and stammer, or appear to be seeking for fine words wherewith to embellish your discourse. A simple straightforward form of speech, using the words you are best acquainted with, and without any desire to show off, is always the most commendable, and will be the most pleasing. Avoid, also, the use of those vulgar expressions, which you hear continually in the mouths of under bred, clownish persons, such as—"says she," "says he," "you understand," and "you know;" likewise such phrases as, "Mr. What-d'ye-call-him," "Mr. Thimgumbob," and so on.

It is true that all have not the same ability to speak elegantly or well; but all have it in their power to please by simplicity of manner and purity of verbiage. It is quite possible to render your conversation acceptable, though you use very common words. One of the principal means of pleasing in discourse, consists in not using any terms which can raise disagreeable ideas or recollections in the minds of those whom you are addressing, and this requires the exercise of good taste, as well as perception of the degree of refinement of the party listening. Moreover, the ideas which it may be legitimate for you to raise in matters of business or in a particular description of society, must not be brought forward amidst circles or in places entirely inappropriate for their development. Persons in the humbler orders of society are generally too much inclined to sneer at all conventional arrangements of this nature. They say that these ceremonial rules, however much they may be suited to the habits of fine people, are not for them. I regret that any one should look upon good breeding in this erroneous light. I regret that any class of persons should think so meanly of themselves, as to say that they are unworthy of enjoying every possible amenity of cultivated society. If there be any thing agreeable in good manners, why may not the poor as well as the rich partake of the blessing? Civility and politeness one to another, do not cost a great deal. They are the cheapest luxuries which can be purchased; and why not, therefore, let them give dignity and delight to the dwelling of the labourer and artisan, as well as to the drawing rooms of the titled and wealthy? The truth is, the poor have it in their power to soften greatly the asperities of their situation, by establishing and enforcing rules of civility and politeness among themselves. To what but to the absence of simple unexpensive courtesies have we to attribute many of the miseries of the humbler orders? Are we not told on high authority, that "a soft word turneth away wrath?" Why then should any one persist in an indulgence in opprobrious epithets, impure expressions, and all kinds of offensive actions, by which ill-will, tumults, and fights, are produced, while by so little trouble, he could only resentment, and make friends instead of bitter irreconcilable enemies.

The kind of complaisance which we are called on to exercise in our general intercourse with the world, is particularly requisite in the case of our mingling in the society of females. A becoming attention to the feelings and the wants of women is the true mark of a noble mind—the best criterion whereby to judge of good manners. Rudeness towards females at once stamps a man as of the lowest breeding, and, what is worse, testifies to the badness of