

An English Master's (1) View of School Punishments.

In these days, it is difficult to know whether the subject of punishment should be approached with tears or laughter. There is something so comic in the reaction against the old-fashioned hang-draw-and-quarter-him process, which certainly was no laughing matter, that it is almost impossible to be grave. A school is pictured by some as a troop of little angels, eager to learn, more eager to imbibe goodness, all hanging on the lips of their still more angelic preceptors. If these celestials ever do need rebuke, shame is at once sufficient; and shame is produced by a gentle but piercing glance (all schoolmasters have eyes of forty-angled power): the victim retires to weep in silence, until he is ready to receive the forgiveness the thoughtful teacher yearns to give, and who is only waiting till the fourth pocket-handkerchief is wetted through to give it.

But in sober seriousness, this very difficult question merits the closest attention, is full of practical puzzles, and cannot be disposed of lightly, whatever the conclusion arrived at may be.

As a fact, a great school from time to time receives all the evil of the worst homes, as well as all the good of the best. What is to be done with it? The boys are sent to be trained: the angelic theory obviously will not work. The easy way of getting rid of the difficulty is to cut the Gordian knot, and dismiss a boy directly, as soon as he gives real trouble. But if this is done, what becomes of the training? Clearly, the boys who are dismissed are not trained: neither are those who stay behind; for is this summary process likely to have a good effect, when they see every difficult case got rid of instead of conquered? Besides, boys know little of the future, and think less; if the present is unpleasant, they are almost always ready to leap in the dark—that is, bad boys are: and dismissal would soon lose its terrors for the bad in consequence. Moreover, boys are very jealous about justice, and there is a rude rough sense of what is just amongst them, that is seldom far wrong in its verdict. They will not consider this clearing process justice. No boy ought to be dismissed from a great school until he has given cause for judging that the school-power and influence will not reclaim him. The school is a little world of training, because good and evil are in their proper positions in it—good encouraged and predominant, evil discouraged and being conquered,—not because evil is rudely pitchforked out of it. This, if hastily done, destroys the true training power. There is no doubt that the getting rid of a bad boy at once, without trying to train and reclaim him, saves masters a great deal of anxiety and a great deal of loss. If masters consulted their immediate worldly interests, they would get rid of a bad boy at the first opportunity. There is nothing so disastrous at the time as keeping a bad boy. As long as he is in the school unreclaimed, he is putting their best plans and hopes in jeopardy—bringing discredit on his house and class, and risking their reputations. The more so, if he is really bad, more frequently than not, when in the school and after he leaves it, both he and his are vilifying everything there with an animosity that only disappointed evil can supply. All this protracted danger, and occasional heavy loss, is got rid of at once by the dismissal system; for much cannot be said in that case. As a part of ordinary discipline, however, dismissal is out of the question, being no training for those who are dismissed, and giving a wrong idea to those who stay behind. It is not right in a master to escape from a difficulty in this way. And it is a grievous injury to the boy, if dismissal carries with it the disgrace it now does; a grievous wrong to schools, if an abuse of this power makes it cease to be terrible. There would still remain the question where the dismissed are to go, and what Norfolk Island is to receive them, if the practice become common. How, then, is punishment to be inflicted?

The efficacy of all punishment depends, first, on the certainty of its being inflicted; secondly, on its being speedy. Severity

is quite a minor point, and may be very much disregarded in considering the main question. The deterring effect of punishment is by no means proportionate to its cruelty.

Certainty of punishment is the first necessity. On this turns very much the goodness or badness of the government as regards its treatment of its criminals. An uncertain government can never be sufficiently severe: it will proceed from cruelty to cruelty, and nevertheless fail to terrify. Such is human nature; let there be the slightest chance of escape, and ninety-nine men out of a hundred will run the risk, however great, for a very incommensurate temptation... On the other hand, certainty is conclusive. It acts as a complete extinguisher; whereas, great risks sometimes act as a stimulant. The difference between a good and a bad system of punishment, and a good and a bad master, consists in the vigilance with which wrong is detected and dealt with, the certainty of there being no escape for the wrong-doer. If the master is inattentive, no severity will prevent his boys from being idle and undisciplined; or if, being attentive, he is capricious, the result will be the same. *A good master does require to be severe, because he is certain.*

But certainty is not all: quickness of punishment is equally necessary. We need not look far for an illustration: it is certain that all men die; but yet, because the time of death is uncertain, and may be far off, this certainty has not the slightest effect on the lives of most men. They live entirely forgetful and regardless of it. Nay more, we often see during life, men wantonly incur a certainty of protracted wretchedness for a few short years or even hours of pleasure; the spend-thrift, for instance: the short time close to them being more in their eyes than the long time only a little farther off. Neither has the certainty of punishment any effect, in too many cases, if the punishment is not close at hand also. Indeed, cruel and lasting punishment hardens instead of training or reforming its victims, without in any way benefiting society, or deterring others. It is essential that punishment should be certain, speedy, and sharp, not cruel or lasting; for, however cruel or lasting the punishment will be when it comes, if it does not come quickly, a very slight temptation will in many cases entirely overbear all the remoter consequences. There is no accounting for such insanity, but it is the fact. Where fear is the only restraining motive, a severe punishment a little way off is no match for a slight temptation close at hand. There are, then, two great necessities in all forms of punishment. Punishment must be certain. Punishment must be speedy. Severity without this is always useless, and with it always needless—a bungler's attempt to make up for want of power and influence.

These considerations affect schools exceedingly, and in many ways. In their simplest form they amount to this. No school can punish in a satisfactory manner, where faults are likely to be overlooked and unnoticed, and punishment is occasional and capricious in consequence.

Before proceeding further, it will be necessary to see clearly what the object of school-punishment is. Now, school-punishment is not vengeance. Its object is training: first of all, the training of the wrong-doer; next, the training of the other boys by his example. Both he and others are to be deterred from committing the offence again. Hence, if training is indeed the object, no *useless* punishment should be inflicted, that is, no punishment which shall not have something in it beneficial in the doing. But, on the other hand, no punishments can be inflicted which take up much of the master's time. This cannot be wasted on offenders to any great extent. Tried by the first of these laws, the common school-punishment of setting a boy to write out and translate his lessons signally fails. It is not beneficial, but the contrary. It is wearisome without exercising the mind; this not good. It injures the handwriting; this is not good. It encourages slovenly habits; this is not good. It contains no corrective element, excepting that it is a disagreeable way of spending time. But time is very precious: a chief part of right training is the teaching a right use of time; wasting time, therefore, is not satisfactory in a good school. The one

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