

school-fellows. Once the experiment was tried—an experiment which answers well in many cases—of setting him down to read a sensible book. Amenable as at all times to discipline, but wearing at the same a ludicrously dejected look, he undertook to do his best. He was taken to the library and asked what sort of a story he would like. But he was diffident of expressing an opinion and invited suggestions, and it was difficult to suggest when the only answers to be arrived at, given of course in the hoarse whisper, were “Pretty well,” or “I don’t know.” So at last we started him off with “Ivanhoe,” and he was graciously pleased to volunteer his opinion that it was a funny name. And for a whole month he devoted himself for perhaps two hours a week to “Ivanhoe”; and such was his conscientiousness that we fully believe he never skipped a word, and so great his sense of the injury which the great intellectual effort was inflicting on his leisure that he never took a single word in.

“Well, old fellow, how is ‘Ivanhoe’ getting on?”

“Pretty well, thank you.”

“How far have you got?”

“Oh, I’ve nearly read”—and he consults the top of the page—“one hundred and twenty pages.”

“And whom do you like best?”

A hasty glance at the page to see what name came handiest.

“Oh, Wamba!”

He looks so extremely woe-begone over our cross-questioning that we make a feeble attempt at a joke.

“A little fellow-feeling—eh my boy?”

Blank gaze.

“You don’t know what I mean, I suppose?”

“No.”

“Well, you know what Wamba was?”

“Yes,” rather dubiously.

“Well, what?”

“One of the chaps in the book.”

A week later we made one more attempt to find out whether the story had in any way appealed to him.

“Have you found any old friends in ‘Ivanhoe’?”

“No.”

“Do you mean to say that you never heard of any of the people before?”

“No.”

“Well, you know King Richard?”

“King Richard!”

“Yes, Richard the First.”

“Oh yes, he was king 1189 to 1199.”

“Well, you came across him in the Tournament.”

“I didn’t know it was the same chap.”

And he implied by this remark that any form of book-learning indulged in out of school-hours is merely a work of supererogation, and not to be accounted as either profitable or edifying.

This last instance we have cited is an extreme one doubtless, but by no means unique. In all ages of mankind there has been born into the world, even among the so-called educated class, a certain proportion of boys to whom nothing verging on the intellectual is in any way a recreation, who feel with the preacher that “he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Unfortunately the prominence conferred in these latter days on athleticism has a tendency to accentuate the mischief. Each year seems to add its quatum to the number of boys who regard each hour of play-time not devoted to some active exercise as so much time misspent or wasted. So long as they are out of doors this is a spirit to be encouraged. But we draw the line strongly at the youth who in the house can provide himself with no more intellectual occupation than talking cricket, shop or studying the pages of an old Lilly-