

Literature, &c.

THE SELFISH BOY.

BY MRS. S. C. HALL.

THERE was not a lad in the school where my early days were spent, who had a better allowance than Gilbert Lane; he was the only son of wealthy and respectable parents. They were possessed of at least three thousand a-year, as Gilbert well knew, and certainly were most generous to their petted son, who had never been contradicted in his life, before he came to school.

At Raby House school we had twelve boys; our master was an honest, upright man, as fond of discipline as your friend the village schoolmaster, and, like him, not at all disposed to spare the rod, and spoil the child.

Gilbert was not only a very handsome, but a very clever boy; he could hit off in ten minutes what would take any other twenty; and his long curling hair, of a bright gold color, flowing over his shoulders, his large grey eyes gained him the name of 'The Beauty,' a distinction which in any time were not ambitious to obtain. He certainly was handsome and would have been very handsome, but for an expression of cunning which lurked in the more hidden corners of his face; and though his brow was fair, it was not open. Such was the first impression he made on me; but my father had always said, 'My dear son, if you conceive a prejudice against a person at first sight, always be ready to lay it down; if in his favor, cling to it as long as you can, for it is our duty to avoid impressions against our fellow creatures.'

No boy in the school brought so many boxes with him to Raby House as Gilbert Lane; and two of the lads discovered that one of the chests contained apples, oranges, and, it was to be supposed, cakes. Gilbert, at his father's request, had a small room appropriated to his own use, and the boys were not sorry for it, for we were very happy in our chamber, and disliked the idea of a stranger's mach. Our master gave a holiday in honor of the new pupil's arrival, and little Henry and Caleb were full of expectation of a feast, which they hoped would make its appearance from Gilbert's chest. Such however, was not the case; but when we retired to bed, Caleb's quick ear caught the sound of munch, munch, munch, from Gilbert's room. After the lights had been extinguished, he applied his little eye to the key-hole—a proceeding which I highly disapprove of—and saw this selfish boy sitting in the bright moonlight, surrounded by oranges, cakes, and confectionery of all kinds, and eating, first of one, then of another; in a manner which filled the little observer with shame.

'I never thought any one could be so greedy,' he exclaimed. 'What signifies his new clothes, and fine silver buckles and large bows, and beautiful curly hair, which we all admired so much, if his narrow heart—a heart, added the little fellow, 'no bigger than my little finger. I suppose he will not let me fly his kite, or play with his playthings?' All this was said in a whisper, for we ought to have been asleep. The next morning we wondered if Gilbert would eat his breakfast; and he did not escape our observation, that kind Mrs. Moreton, the doctor's wife, pressed him to take his bread and butter, but without effect.

'Poor fellow, he is fretting for his parents,' said the good lady; but we boys knew he had already breakfasted.

The very first day placed Gilbert Lane at the top of his class, and we saw that the new comer was a lad of no mean ability; but we also perceived that his selfishness was not confined to eating—he never then, or at any other time, gave a schoolmate the slightest assistance. If a word was missed, he was never the one to whisper it to the defaulter; he would never endeavor to screen a fault, or assist either a big or little boy out of a dilemma. He would stand by, and hear a fellow-pupil severely reprimanded for an occurrence which his kindness might have prevented, and he would even hear it with satisfaction.

'Gilbert,' I said to him one day—I was three years older than he—'Gilbert, you will never gain the hearts of boys or men, if you pursue this selfish course.' 'I don't care,' was the answer, for either the one or the other; I shall have lots of money, and my own way.'

It would take hours to describe to you the various ramifications of his selfishness; but it frequently brought its own punishment, to the destruction of the ease and enjoyment he so dearly loved. Once, I remember, he ate as usual by himself so large a quantity of plum cake that he was confined to his room for more

than a week; no one pitied him but little Caleb. The child would steal in during play hours, read to Gilbert, or sit silently watching him while he slept—drawing or withdrawing his curtains so as to shade his eyes from the light, and tending him as if he had been a brother; indeed to this day, I can never think of little Caleb without a thrill of happiness, for what he was in childhood so was he in manhood,—a noble, disinterested fellow; still living respected and beloved by all to whom he is known. When Gilbert grew better, he treated his little friend with rather more consideration, but still nothing could tempt him to forego his own comfort. 'I will not lend you my pencil, Caleb,' I heard him say, 'because I may want it before you have done with it; and I must not be inconvenienced.' It was painful to see any boy so heartless.

One day a letter was given to the good doctor while we were at dinner, and I heard him say to his wife, 'I must not tell him suddenly.'

'There is no danger of wounding his feelings,' she replied; 'don't you see he is eating his dinner.' 'Master Gilbert Lane,' said the doctor aloud, 'I am sorry to tell you that your mother is not well.' She has often colds at this season of the year, sir,' was the reply, and Gilbert went on finishing his roast beef. 'But she is seriously ill,' continued the doctor. 'Indeed sir, I am very sorry for it, and he laid down his knife and fork, after having delicately salted and eaten the last morsel. 'She is so ill, very ill,' the master went on, evidently provoked at his coolness on such an occasion, 'that your father has sent the carriage for you, it is waiting at the entrance.' Gilbert turned a little pale, and half rose from his seat, as if to prepare for his departure; but the sight of his favourite pie, which was at that moment placed upon the table, made him waver in his determination.—he stood uncertain how to act—the pie was cut—he resumed his seat—the boys murmured their disapprobation, and the master, fixing his eyes steadily upon him, said, 'Sir, your mother is dying, and the carriage is waiting.'

'Yes sir; but if you are good enough to help me first, I shall be done in a minute.'

I shall never forget the groan of anger at this selfish heartlessness, which they had never imagined could be carried to such an extreme. Doctor Morton's appreciation of the youth's talents had made him overlook several traits which unfortunately he considered of minor importance; for Gilbert had hardly taken the trouble to conceal his selfishness from the doctor. If he had been put to a master who considered greatness as second to goodness, I think the fault, instead of growing into a crime, might have been considerably decreased. The master was painfully shocked by this public display of wickedness, for such I must call it; and, with tears in his eyes, gave a reproof to him, and a lesson to us, which I never forgot: he said that the talent possessed by Master Lane made him the greater sinner, for that he was perfectly aware of the difference between good and evil. He drew tears even from the boy himself, who departed from the house with the dislike of all whose esteem, respect and affection he must have commanded but for the ascendancy his besetting sin had obtained over him in every respect.

His mother, his too affectionate, too indulgent mother, died before his arrival. She had heard the sound of the carriage wheels in the court yard: had extended her hand to meet his grasp: had turned the last light of her dying eyes toward the door; but the hand was stayed—the sight departed before he entered the room: two minutes sooner he would have had her blessing—that blessing he had lost in his anxiety—for what? a piece of pie.

Now you must remember that this youth, this Gilbert Lane, possessed abilities of no common order; that he was intelligent, well informed, of graceful manners and address. Both his tutor and his father, and above all, the servants, felt that they were only company men; and those immediately around him were perpetually subjected to annoyances which the residence of an intensely selfish person in a house is sure to create, his equals, when they became intimates, avoided him, and even his inferiors, if they obeyed his commands, spread the fame of his evil disposition over the country. Some tolerated him out of respect to his father, who though a weak, was a kindly man; others because of his wealth, which is sure to command the outward attention of mean and grovelling minds, a few admired his abilities, but none loved Gilbert Lane for his own sake—for his own sake none loved him, and the

experience of a long life has convinced me that it is necessary to the happiness of every living thing to be loved; the meanest reptile that crawls the earth; however obnoxious it is to us, has something that loves it, a partner, or its own offspring, who see no deformity in the parent that cherishes their helplessness. Nothing, however, loved Gilbert Lane; the dogs that crouched around his feet, were so accustomed to feel his foot or the lash of his whip, when they inconvenienced him in the slightest degree, that they obeyed him from fear. He had his own particular chairs, his own favourite dishes, his own this, that, and the other, which no one was to interfere with; to his own father—his own kind, weak father, his once loving father—he had become a perfect nuisance: what then, must he have been to others? But Mr Lane could not continue in the state of discomfort to which his son had reduced him; he resolved to marry again, and when he communicated his determination to Gilbert, who was then about sixteen, his observation was 'Marry again sir! you are not serious. Why, father, if you marry again, what is to become of me?'

It was my fate again to meet this selfish youth at Oxford. His beauty, his great attainments, and his anticipated wealth, won him distinction there. But after a little time that distinction was more painful than pleasing.

In process of time, his father had other children, and then came the rumor that Gilbert Lane's fortune would not be so large as was originally supposed. He knew this, and always alive to his own interests, obtained the hand of a very wealthy young lady, who captivated by his beauty, and unacquainted with his previous character, consented, on a very short intimacy, to become his wife. She soon found that she was his victim. She became mother to five children, and died, I believe, (if ever woman did), of a broken heart. Still he had plenty of riches. His children were admired, (he liked whatever he had to be admired); but as they grew up, their feelings, their education, their advancement in life, were sacrificed to the selfishness of their father, and one by one they deserted him, all but one pale, patient girl, whom perhaps he had regarded the least of those whom God had given him.

Accustomed as he had been to indulge in what, I dare say, boys, you have heard called the 'pleasures of the table,' which are sure to bring pains, at an early age Gilbert Lane felt the tortures of the gout, and the agonies of continued headaches. Neither his wealth nor his talents could remove these, which he had brought upon himself. His father was still a robust old man, while he was a decrepit young one; and he had the additional mortification of knowing that his step brothers and sisters would inherit whatever portion of his father's property he could leave them. Not that he wanted, for, as I told you before, his wife's fortune had been ample.

Hearing of his extreme suffering, I called to see him. The servant, of whom I inquired particularly the state of his health, did not show any sympathy about it: 'Master was as usual.' When I entered his room, it was crowded with all the luxuries which in themselves are harmless and elegant, but unaccompanied by cheerfulness and contentment, show like flowers in a sepulchre. He was seated in an easy chair, with his feet cased in flannels and resting on a sofa. His features were bloated. At a little distance, sat his pale, fair daughter, the youngest of the family. She was about fourteen, and had evidently been reading to him, though her eyes were red from weeping. Almost under her dress crouched a little spaniel, and a basket of grapes were on a stand by his side. He seemed glad to see me, and I believe he was, for selfishness such as his has few visitors. But our conversation soon flagged. He knew I could not have forgotten his unpopularity at school, his unpopularity at college, and he seemed as one prepared to receive reproof, and to extenuate his conduct.

He began with finding fault with his father, who still lived; told me long stories of his son's ingratitude, which brought tears into the eyes of his patient child; and then he fell to reproaching her. 'She never loved him,' he said. 'He was sure she wished for other company. He hated tears—she knew he did—and yet she was always weeping.'

Twenty times in half an hour did he make that poor girl adjust his pillows and arrange his footstool, talking all the time of the ingratitude of a world upon which he had never bestowed a single blessing; upbraiding his daughter more than once, with performing those offices coldly, which at all events she performed with a

sweet willingness that won my heart. Then he would call the little dog to him; and the creature, though it would fawn and crouch, would not go near him, at which he complained most bitterly. He had commenced life in the expectation that all should bow down to his will; and disappointed in this, his selfishness deepened into a rooted hatred of that world which he believed at war with him. He said he was sure he would not live to be old. I knew that death would ere long be busy in his dwelling, but not with him.

The selfishness that could keep a son from the bedside of a dying mother, and make him think only of himself when a daughter was about to be taken for ever from the domestic hearth, needs no comment of mine.

My next visit was to his dying daughter. She was indeed, a sweet unselfish child. 'Do come and see poor papa; when I am gone,' she said, 'and teach him to look to heaven, as you have now taught me; for in this world there will be no one to love him.'

'How very shocking,' observed Mark, 'it must be to have no one to love one!—no friend, no one at all to love one,' repeated the boy more than once. 'How very desolate, how very miserable it must be,—no one to love one. Oh sir, when that dear young lady died, how wretched that bad gentleman must have been.' 'He was certainly,' answered the clergyman, 'very wretched; and died about five years ago, more neglected than you can imagine. He sent for me a few hours before his death; but it was too fearful an end to describe to you. My dear boys, the outline I have given is sufficient to show you the blackness, worthlessness and misery of a selfish spirit.'

'There is no true happiness in this world,' observed this good clergyman except in the discharge of our duties, be they what they may. We can only live with advantage to ourselves, in proportion as we perform our duty to others. And the peasant who brings up his family by hard but most honorable industry, deserves as much praise and as much respect, too, in his sphere, as the prince who rules a province with wisdom and goodness.'

From the Irish Penny Journal.

HUMBUG

—THE MILITARY OR HEROIC HUMBUG.

My brave fellow soldiers, we are now on the eve of encountering the enemy. See, there he stands in hostile array against you. He thinks to terrify you by his formidable appearance. But you regard him with a steady hand and fearless eye.

Soldiers! the world rings with the fame of your deeds. Your glory is imperishable; it will last for ever.

Regardless of wounds and death, you have ever been foremost where honour was to be won. Recollect then, your ancient fame, and let your deeds show this day that you are still the same brave men who have so often chased your enemies from the field; the same brave men who have ever looked on death as a thing unworthy a moment's consideration,—and on dishonour as the greatest of all evils.

Band of heroes, advance. On, on to victory, death, (wounds, honour, glory and immortality. Hurra, hurra, general Fudge for ever!—lead us on, general, lead us on!) Lead ye on my brave fellows. Would to heaven my duties would permit me that enviable honour. But it would be too much for one so unworthy, Alas, I dare not. My duties call me to another part of the field. I obey the call with reluctance. But my confidence in your courage, my brave fellows, enable me to intrust you to advance yourselves. On, then on, my band of heroes, and fear nothing! (General raises his hat gracefully, bows politely to his 'band of heroes,' and rides off to a height at a safe distance, from which he views the battle comfortably through his telescope.)

THE LITERARY HUMBUG—THE AUTHORS.

In putting this work into the hands of the public, the author has not been influenced by any of those motives that usually urges writers to publication. Neither vanity, nor the desire of gaining what is called a name, has had the slightest share in inducing him to take this step; still less has he been influenced by sordid love of gain, he lacks for neither praise nor profit. His sole motive for writing and publishing his book has been to promote the general good, by contributing his mite to the stock of general information.

The author is but too well aware that the merits of his work, if indeed it have any at all, are of a very humble order; that it has in short, many defects; but a