

FROM CRADLE TO COLLEGE.

BY A PATERFAMILIAS.



I HAVE been told that a plain statement of my experience in the education of my sons might be of use to many who, like myself, have a family to bring up on a limited income. I should not have ventured to think so of my own judgment, for I make no pretensions to learning or educational skill. But I am informed that people in a position similar to my own are not generally aware of the facilities afforded to them by public schools in London. They do not know what institutions are open to them, nor what are the conditions imposed, nor where to apply for admission, nor the sort of education given. It is on points like these that I am assured a simple description of the result of my own inquiries would be of some value. If so, I cannot hesitate to do my best, for I believe that one chief use of speech is to enable each man to make some little contribution from his special experience to the general fund of knowledge. And though written speech is to most of us rather more difficult than spoken, yet I dare say if we could only forget that we were writing, and fancy that we were talking to a few friends by the fireside, it would come much easier. By the way, Mr. Plimsoll has said nearly the same thing in his book—"Our Seamen"—and how successfully he has carried out the idea is best shown by the effect his work has produced.

At the outset I ought perhaps to explain that I am a clerk in the receipt of a salary which, in the twenty-five years since my marriage, has gradually increased from £200 to £500 a year. Of course I have managed to save a little—I should be very much ashamed of myself if I had not. Some of my friends think that if I had "screwed" a little more I might have done better for myself. They say I might have got a partnership, or launched into independent business. But they don't know me as well as I do myself. I am a good plodder, and all that sort of thing, but I am deficient in "push;" and my experience is that the faculty of getting on, in a worldly sense, is as much a gift of nature as poetic genius. Those who are not born with it would, I believe, do best to follow my example, and let well alone.

I have a family of six children—five of them sons, and one daughter, the youngest of all. For the sake of all but herself, it would probably have been better if the girl had made her appearance first. But for her own sake, which after all is the principal consideration, I am very glad that she delayed her arrival until eight years ago; for it is only quite recently that people have wakened up to the fact that girls have minds as well as boys, and minds quite capable of education. At least that is my impression, derived from the fact that all foundation schools giving an education at once cheap and good are boys' schools.

But things are altering now, and my little Jessie, if she lives, will have as good an education as any of her brothers. To say truth, it was for her sake that I for once overcame my nature, and took a prominent part in getting up a public meeting. Indeed, I believe I made a speech. At least, I am told so; and the state I was in at the time will not allow me either to affirm or deny anything on the subject. At any rate, the meeting was successful in the attainment of my purpose, which was the establishment of a high school by the "Girls" Public Day-school Company, in connection with the Society for the Improvement of the Education of Women." But I must not forget that my immediate business is with boys' schools.

I remember very well the moment when the subject of which I am now writing first became a matter of practical consideration to me. I was pacing up and down our little parlour with all the rhythmical restlessness of a wild beast in the Zoological Gardens at feeding-time. Suddenly I stopped as if shot. It was only a new little voice overhead, but it changed the whole world for me. I was a father.

A father of what? That was a question which required many years for a complete answer. In fact, I don't think that it is answered with anything like finality yet, although nearly a quarter of a century has gone by since then. But the first step towards an answer was made by a little rubicund old woman, who came beaming into the room, and bobbing a curtsy that seemed to convey a satirical allusion to my new dignity—"A son for you, sir," she said. Well, well! I am not going to inflict all the memories of that night upon you; but after some natural anxieties had been allayed, I began pacing up and down the room again, though it was three o'clock in the morning; and I said to myself—"Now about this young gentleman's education—how is that to be managed on £200 or £300 a year?"

It may be thought that this was premature. But knowing that I am not brilliant in meeting sudden emergencies, I always like to take time by the forelock, and have everything arranged beforehand. Besides, the baby naturally filled my thoughts, and as I could not do anything else for him, it struck me that I might as well be making arrangements for his education.

The reason why I began to think so soon of such a subject was this:—My father was a country curate, who had brought up a family of eight children on £100 a year. He taught us all himself, and though I was the dullest of his scholars, still I learned a little Latin and Greek, which, if it did nothing else for me, gave me an intellectual ambition for my children. Now I knew that my means would never be sufficient to pay the fees of any private school at all likely to afford the sort of education I wanted. I was not scholar enough to turn schoolmaster myself. But there was one advantage I had over my father, and I determined to make the best of it. I was living in the precincts of a city where

benevolent institutions, raised by pious founders in old times, are almost as thick on the ground as gravestones in Westminster Abbey. Amongst these institutions I knew there were a considerable number of schools. My own common sense told me that it might not be always easy to get an admission just when it was wanted, and I came to the conclusion that it could do no possible harm, and might do a great deal of good, if I began my inquiries at once.

Accordingly the very next morning, as I went to the office, I bought a book professing to give all sorts of information about the London charities. I confess the name "charities" rather staggered me at first; but though I am not much of a philosopher, I reflected that the degrading associations of the word arise from cases in which money is extorted from those who can ill afford it, to help those who could, if they tried a little harder, help themselves. The help afforded by the noble dead, through the consecration of their property to the alleviation of the ever-increasing burdens of modern life, is something very different. Some say that many of these foundation schools ought to be closed against all but the most destitute children. Into that question I shall not enter. My only object here is to show parents of limited means the resources which, as a matter of fact, are open to them at the present time.

The first result of my researches, then, was this, that while there was a very considerable number of schools, each of which would give a free education, and many of them board and lodging as well, to a limited number of boys, yet, after all, there were very few schools that met my case. I did not want free schooling. I did not desire to have my boy dressed in any "charitable grinder" uniform. Still less did I want him to board away from home. What I wanted was a good classical education at a cost of not more than £10 a year. The schools which I thought promised best to meet this want were St. Paul's, the Merchant Taylors', and the City of London School.

For reasons which it is not necessary to particularise now, I fixed on the last school for the unconscious young gentleman at home. The locality in which this school is situated is described by remarkably suggestive names. It is in Milk Street and Honey Lane, Cheapside.

"Intellectual milk and honey," I said to myself, "and both cheap too. What do I want more?"

It was established in 1834 by the Corporation of London, by powers conferred under a special Act of Parliament. It is in part dependent for its maintenance on certain estates left in 1442 by John Carpenter, Town Clerk of London, which estates have been applied to this purpose by authority of the Act just mentioned. I found that boys could be admitted at any age between seven and fifteen years. Applicants must obtain a recommendation from an alderman or common-councilman. But as there is no limit to the number of recommendations that members of the Corporation may sign, there is no difficulty on this score. However, as the number of applications is

always far greater than can be accommodated, it is desirable, and indeed generally necessary, to apply at least a year beforehand. Freemen or householders of the City of London have a certain preference, but the only advantage they get is that they need not apply so early. Still, when I came to study the organisation of the school, the nature of the curriculum, and the scholarships available, I felt that I had not begun to consider the subject a bit too soon, for I saw that, if I was to secure for my boy the full advantages of the institution, I must adapt his preliminary training to the object I had in view. Some previous instruction is needed for admission into the very lowest class,* and for my purpose I did not think the lowest classes at all desirable. I could not send a child of seven, or even of eight or nine, from a far northern suburb into the City—at least, I was quite sure his mother would not listen to it.

The scheme I resolved upon will be best understood if I first describe the organisation of the school, premising that the description I give is applicable to the present time.

The school is divided into two main sections—Junior and Senior—with an intermediate "Grammar Class." In the Junior section there are four classes, and in the Senior six. But by a capricious arrangement, the reason of which I do not profess to understand, the numerical order of the classes is reversed in the two sections; the First Junior being the highest, and the First Senior being the lowest, in their respective divisions. The Senior section again falls into two sub-divisions, each consisting of three classes, with an intermediate "Latin Class" between them. The course of instruction is adapted to this organisation, just as the muscles and blood-vessels are to the skeleton in the animal frame. In the Junior school the education is almost exclusively English and commercial. It is only in the two higher classes of this division that the elements of French are introduced. The Grammar Class forms a transitional step from the Junior to the Senior school. For boys to whom it is more convenient to receive an elementary education elsewhere, this class affords the best introduction to the secondary education of the higher school. But none will be admitted who cannot pass a satisfactory examination in arithmetic as far as proportion, and in the elements of French grammar. The first, second, and third classes of the upper school engraft on the English teaching already received a certain measure of classical and mathematical instruction, equivalent perhaps to what is given in some of the best and most pretentious private schools. The Latin Class prepares the way for a higher flight still. And the three higher classes give, as far as I can ascertain, a thoroughly efficient mathematical and classical preparation for the Universities. In accordance with this aim, boys are allowed to remain in the school up to nineteen years of age.

Now, like almost all fond fathers, I made sure that

* Boys must write and read fairly, besides knowing the first four rules of arithmetic.

my boy was bound to turn out much cleverer than myself; and I wanted to see a clear pathway for him all the way from that little cradle of his to a wranglership or a double first class. My next business therefore was to see how this path could be cleared and kept open for £10 a year, which was the most that I could reasonably hope to afford, considering the probable claims of future rivals to the young gentleman actually in possession of my whole parental affections.

I considered the £10 a year to be an average on the whole number of years that might elapse before he took his degree. I counted therefore on a greater cost in some years, and a less in others. But the regular fees of the City of London School amount to £10 10s. a year, besides the cost of books. I carefully inquired therefore whether there were any foundation scholarships that would be available during the boy's school career, and whether any of them would give him a lift to either University. I found that the number of such scholarships even at that time was very considerable; and since that date it has been very much lengthened and enriched. It would not be wise to encumber these columns with a list, which any one can obtain on application to the secretary on the school premises. But I want to show how the chief of these scholarships may be combined, so as to secure to a meritorious boy a continuous course of education at a very cheap, indeed almost nominal rate. Perhaps this may best be done by continuing my narrative.

Well then, while Sydney Bayard Wellesley—for in that style he was christened, my wife being of a romantic turn, and I never in my life caring to dispute about names—was cutting first his gums with latent teeth, and then his fingers with surreptitious knives, I kept my eyes and ears open to all information that I could gather about preparatory schools. At the same time I was carefully laying by my £10 a year. I came to the conclusion that a good public elementary school, inspected by the Government, is far more efficient than any of the little "academies" that I could afford to pay for without trenching too much on my slowly-accumulating fund. Meantime other little claimants arrived, and my financial arrangements were for a year or two rather difficult. Under these circumstances, I wanted to send Master Sydney Bayard to a capital elementary school in our neighbourhood, where we should have paid fourpence a week. But his mother wished him to go to the Misses Pirouette's "Preparatory Establishment," &c., where we should have paid two guineas a quarter, and he would have learned nothing. So we compromised matters by sending him to a Birkbeck school, where we paid at first ninepence, and afterwards a shilling a week.

The master was a thoroughly intelligent man, and perhaps not meeting with many people who take an interest in their children's progress, he entered fully into my views. I kept the Grammar Class before-mentioned constantly in view, and being frequently helped at home, and never kept away from school on any account but illness, which rarely occurred, Sydney made rapid progress, and at eight years of age was well

up in his "first four rules" and long division, besides knowing the parts of speech and something of the meaning of a map. I then engaged the master of the Birkbeck school to give him two extra lessons a week in arithmetic, which he (the master) had a singular faculty for making intelligible and interesting. The result was very satisfactory, and I now thought it high time to secure the *entrée* of the chosen school. Accordingly I obtained a form of the secretary, and sent it in with the recommendation of an alderman, who frequently came to our office. Next, in accordance with an intimation I received, I took Sydney with me to see the head master, for whose courtesy and kindness I can never be sufficiently grateful. I suppose he was interested in the story of my educational efforts, for he asked me if I thought of sending my boy to compete for a Sassoon Entrance Scholarship. There are four of these, tenable for four years, each rising in value from £10 the first year to £35 the fourth. They are open to any boy, whether in the school or out of it, under the age of thirteen. The subjects of the competitive examination are English, Arithmetic, History, and Geography. I replied that I had not dared to hope for that. The head master thereupon said that perhaps it would be premature at the next examination, but at the one following, when Sydney would be about eleven, he thought it might be worth while to try. He advised me meantime to get the boy some lessons in French. I did so, and thought it could do no harm to add the rudiments of Latin, which the Birkbeck master undertook for an extra fee.

The result was that when, a year afterwards, at ten years of age, the boy entered the Grammar Class, he found the lessons easy. He was encouraged by the facility with which he mastered the work, and soon rose to the head of the class.

Before eleven, he was in the first class of the Senior school, and soon afterwards came on the examination for the Sassoon Scholarship. This he won, and thus not only paid for his schooling, but for extra instruction as well, with a view to the Carpenter Scholarships later on. There are eight of these, open to all pupils between the ages of eleven and sixteen, and who have been three years in the school. They are of the value of £37 10s. per annum, of which £10 10s. goes for schooling, and £2 for books, leaving £25 for maintenance. In addition, if the scholar continues three years at the school, he has £50 on leaving, and a further allowance of £25 per annum at the University.

By the time this examination came on, Sydney was fifteen years old. He had the prestige of success, and no one was surprised that he came off victorious.

There are many other scholarships and prizes, but none that fit together so well as these.

It only remains to say that in due time Sydney proceeded to Cambridge, and although you may look in vain in recent lists for a name I have taken the liberty to disguise, yet I have had the satisfaction of seeing him at the end of the path I had marked for him, from his cradle to a wranglership.