

OUR FAMILY OF BOYS,
AND HOW WE STARTED THEM IN LIFE.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.



NO sooner is the anxiety consequent on pulling the boys through measles and mumps, through chicken-pox and whooping-cough, ended than another anxiety springs up in front of parents, in the form of the serious and perplexing question, What are the future careers of these boys to be—for what particular walk in life is each one to be prepared?

I can assure you that it is necessary to consider this question soon after a boy has entered his "teens." To decide finally upon a momentous matter of this kind would be premature at this early date, and in many instances the labour of coming to a definite conclusion would prove to be labour in vain; but a parent can notice the bent of the lad's inclinations, and he can in some measure weigh his capacity.

It is curious to notice in how many instances a father expects his eldest son to follow, as a matter of course, his own calling in life, whatever that calling may happen to be. In some cases a son views life with the same eyes as his father did, and he willingly prepares himself to preach in his father's pulpit, or to sit at a desk in his father's office, or to attend to the teeth of his father's patients; but very often this is not so: a son has no inclination, and probably is not naturally fitted, for that business or profession—the son is square, and the hole occupied by the father is round, or it is *vice versa*.

I do not wish to pose before you as superior to the rest of mankind, but I must tell you that I resolved that I would not coerce my boys. They must understand plainly that they must work for their living, and earn their living by the sweat of their brow or by the sweat of their brain, but the choice of the particular way should lie in a large measure with themselves.

At the same time, parents have to exercise patience, and not regard a boy's announcement as conclusive. For boys have hobbies; they have a violent mania for this or that occupation, and the parent, elated, thinks his son is going to show great genius because he seems so enthusiastic; and then ho, presto! the enthusiasm suddenly vanishes, the liking is gone. Perhaps this sudden evaporation is consequent on a closer acquaintance with difficulties which had hitherto lain hidden, but, now cropping up, have disheartened, daunted, maybe disgusted the tyro. Who can tell?—I cannot; but I have seen this fiery zeal bursting out in full force, and as quickly quenched, in members of my own brood and in the nests of my neighbours.

Variety is pleasing to the youthful mind—this axiom will, perhaps, explain these proceedings. For this reason, it is safe to go on broad lines only until the boy emerges into the youth, and when this stage is

reached, his real feelings and likings and wishings must be dug out of his mind, and narrower lines be followed.

I have five sons—quite enough for one quiver, is it not? You will agree with me that my anxiety to settle each one in life could be no small one.

With regard to my eldest boy—Philip by name—I did not experience any great perplexity, because his tastes were so decided. That he would follow Science in some form or other I felt but little doubt, but what particular branch he would eventually excel in I could not foretell in the early days of boyhood. This predilection had been manifest from very early days. All leisure hours spent by most lads in the playground were passed by him, if possible, in trying experiments, in investigations, in forming collections of various kinds, in inventions on a small scale. The ordinary games of childhood and early boyhood had no attractions for him. This avoidance was, of course, a thing to be regretted; for health and growth and many useful qualities and experiences are gained in the playground.

Our efforts to induce Philip to join heartily in sport were of no avail; he went to the playground if he was obliged to go, but did not find any real enjoyment. His mind was absorbed with other things: engaged in grappling with some difficulties, intent upon constructing a self-propelling raft, or on understanding the mechanism of a watch, or the fitting of an electric bell, or the result of a chemical experiment.

At the same time, I wish it to be understood that Philip was not a genius, not a prodigy, nor did he possess any extraordinary talent. This absorption arose from the fact that all his interests were centred in pursuits of this character. Such being the case, it seemed wise to turn his studies in the same direction.

To this end I suggested to the master, when Philip was fourteen years old, that the boy should migrate to the modern side of the school; there he would be taught elementary chemistry and elementary physics, and would lay the foundation of the French and German languages, all of which knowledge would prove of value to him in any pursuit he was likely to take up. Close attention was at the same time paid to mathematics, for that knowledge was a very important factor.

A year or more went by, and as Phil showed no sign of slackened interest, but rather the reverse, I thought we might talk over the future, and go at least a step further towards the final decision.

Said I to my son—

"There is one fact, my lad, that you must keep in front during this discussion, and that is the fact that you will have to earn your own living when you reach manhood. I am quite willing, and I have the wherewithal, to equip you for the fray. Your weapons shall be of the best steel, and you shall have instruction how

to use them with the greatest skill ; but at the end of this period of instruction—say, in three or four years—I shall begin to withdraw my help. I must pass it on in turn to those four brothers of yours, and by the time they are all set upon their feet the two little sisters will be out of the nursery, and will be ready to claim their share. Look ahead, then, and fix on some business or profession which will ensure butter on your bread, if not the luxury of sugar on the top of the butter."

We spoke of the medical profession ; there always seems to be an opening for every fully fledged medical man in town or country. It takes a medical student five years to pass through the different courses of study—known by the term of "walking the hospital." By the time that he is twenty-three years old he is ready to try for some appointment or begin practice.

A doctor's life did not appear to have any attraction to Philip ; neither did that of an analytical chemist, although there was much in both of these which would be a source of interest to him. Had he chosen the latter, I should have sent him to study chemistry at the School of Pharmacy in Bloomsbury Square, where he would have received excellent instruction, both theoretical and practical, the cost of which averages from ten to thirty-five pounds a year, according to the number of subjects a student takes up ; after which I should have sent him daily to the South Kensington Museum to study physics, where also instruction of the highest class is given, and where thorough and systematic work is enforced.

Engineering and its several branches came next under consideration. There was civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering, and there seemed to be fair prospects of a man of perseverance doing well in any of these three.

This is evidenced by the fact that schools and colleges have been opened within the last twenty years for the express purpose of giving technical instruction in the science of engineering in France and Switzerland, in Germany, Austria, Italy, America, Japan, as well as in several of the big towns in England. The rapid increase of these schools, and the steady increase of the number of students who attend the classes and work in the laboratories, show that the need of this knowledge is being felt.

Philip took up the idea of engineering, and we proceeded to look about us to see where he should pursue his studies when he left school.

There was University College, in Liverpool, which offered special advantages to students, in that its technical school had been lately set on foot, and therefore that its workshops and laboratories were fitted with the latest improvements, and had been built with a special view to the students' easier acquisition of each department of science. The fees required were most moderate, amounting to less than £20 for the yearly session.

There are excellent technical schools in other large towns in England, but as London was the most convenient centre for us, we decided to focus our inquiries, and eventually we decided that Philip should attend

day classes at the Finsbury Technical College. He could go daily by train, or he could take lodgings recommended by the authorities of the college. It was well that we had taken time by the forelock, for we found that students are required to pass an examination before they are admitted, and therefore Philip would have to prepare for this ordeal.

This examination comprises (1) mathematics, arithmetic, algebra (which includes equations and problems), and geometry, including the subjects of the second book of Euclid ; (2) a paper in English, writing from dictation, analysis, making an abstract of a spoken passage.

In arithmetic papers marks are deducted when bad and antiquated modes are used in answering the questions—for example, if the modern contracted method in division is not followed ; if decimal workings are not properly contracted ; if logarithms are not used where their use would save time. These and various other pitfalls—such as having learnt Euclid in the old mechanical way—into which the unwary, the unprepared, would probably precipitate themselves, I mention to show the necessity for a careful preparation before a candidate ventures to present himself for admission.

Any student who has passed the matriculation examination of the University of London within the previous eighteen months can enter the Technical College without further examination.

There are about a dozen scholarships attached to this college, tenable for two years, the value varying from £20 to £30 a year. Philip did not gain one : he had a clear intellect and was persevering, but those more brilliant passed him in examinations. In the long run I felt sure his success would equal theirs.

The fees at this college amount to about £15 each session, which comprises a year, and commences in October.

At the end of a student's first year he is required to show that he has profited by that year's course of instruction before he is permitted to pass on to the second year's course : he has to answer questions set in examination, and he has to produce further evidence in the form of his lecture and laboratory note-books and his drawings. If this evidence is considered not satisfactory, then he has to work on for a longer period in the first year's course.

In like manner at the end of the second year, which is usually the termination of the student's studies, a certificate can only be gained by a satisfactory examination being passed.

When Philip in due time won the desired certificate, he might have found some employment, but I was counselled to prolong the term of his training, and to give him experience which would be of value to him afterwards. So he went into the workshop of a firm of electrical engineers, and there he spent a year. He found life somewhat rough, but the experience was worth the hardships. He has been able to get engagements in different parts of the country, and I have no fear for his future. There is no likelihood of there being any glut in the market for the present. The

knowledge that is requisite cannot be acquired in a few months, nor is it every mind that can acquire or that cares to spend years in striving to acquire all that has to be mastered by those who enter this department of science.

Charlie, my second son, was a good-humoured, merry-faced boy, who loved play, and nothing much besides. He was a strong contrast to his elder brother. Very often those who possess dispositions of a different character agree better than those who think alike, but in the case of these two brothers it was not so. Philip was absorbed in a world within himself; Charlie had no world within, and did not take the slightest interest in that inhabited by his brother. Work had no attraction for him: he did not set himself to any occupation in his leisure hours; they were all frittered away in small doings which did not produce any results.

It was clear that the boy would not soar high, nevertheless he might be trained into a useful member of society, and at the same time earn a living, if we could find the right niche.

In my own mind I thought that Charlie would become a business man, but his life must be mapped out on this particular plan—he must have a calling wherein there were stated hours for work, and where he would have no responsibility when those stated hours were ended. In such a case I believed he would do creditable, conscientious work; therefore a post in a

bank or in the General Post Office would prove to be the most likely niche for him. So I decided to take Latin and Greek away when he reached the age of fourteen, and to substitute German and French.

On all sides I was told that a thorough knowledge of the German language was most desirable—to be able not only to speak and understand the language, but also to correspond and be a proficient in that method of book-keeping; so it was settled that Charlie should spend a year abroad in the Fatherland, and in order that he might learn the language thoroughly and correctly and fluently, I placed him with a German family, and arranged that he should spend a year there before coming to England. The plan was highly satisfactory; he learnt the language correctly and almost unconsciously. For the first six months he had private lessons in German, in mathematics, and book-keeping from masters who could speak English. During the second six months he attended a German day school, where he had first-rate instruction at a cost of half of what had to be paid for private tuition. He returned to Germany after his holiday, and then it was arranged that he should go into an office and learn book-keeping and correspondence in a practical manner. With these acquirements at his fingers' ends and at the tip of his tongue, I had no extraordinary difficulty in finding him a post as a clerk, the duties of which he fills with a regularity which does not to Charlie assume the form of monotony.

THE SCOTCHMAN.

A RAILWAY STORY. BY THE AUTHOR OF "SHE'S COMING," "THE VOICE IN THE WOODS," ETC.



WHEN the railway men at Questerley Row Station were discussing their foreman, they always decided that Shafto had been a good deal altered by his disappointment about Kate Leathard. That was an old story now—it had happened over five years ago—

and was probably forgotten everywhere except in the porters' room, where it was kept alive by repetition to successive newcomers, and by being assigned as a reason for changes which continued to be noticeable in the man. Recently, too, some fresh interest had been kindled in it by Kate's return to the neighbourhood.

"It's just made a difference in him, that's what A've allus told ye," Hudspeth, the chief oracle and gossip of the party, was wont to say. "Ye can't put your finger on aught and say it's this or that; it's a change like altogether. And A'm afraid it's hardened on him now."

"They'll maybe mak' it up again now she's back," a young hand ventured to suggest.

"Nay; A'se warrant he won't give her the chance

to mak' a fool of him a second time. He never looks the side she's on—her nor her bairn."

"Ay, well; she was a foolish lass, an' did a bad thing for herself the day she took up wi' Brough."

To this the men assembled round the porters' fire agreed with one voice. They were more numerous than might have been expected from the size of the place—a small station midway between Dearholm and Tynecastle, where no expresses stopped. Local trains, however, brought considerable traffic, as, in addition to Questerley Row itself—an overgrown village or incipient town—they served various colliery settlements near. There was, moreover, a varying amount of coal traffic, so that although very often all hands were "throng," and had almost more work than they could manage, there were also frequent spells of leisure and gossip. The foreman-porter had three men and a lad under him, and the party in the porters' room was often augmented by a signalman off duty, a platelayer or two, and men in charge of trains waiting in the sidings for waggons to or from the pits.

Raine Shafto, the foreman, had held that post nearly five years; it had been promised some time previously, and he had engaged himself to be married or