THE HISTORY OF A LOAFER.

CHAP. II.

THE HOPE OF THE FAMILY.

It would do Mr. Winter gross injustice to say that he did not feel great pleasure at the contents of the telegram which had caused him so much astonishment, but it was anything but pleasure unalloyed. He was angry with himself. For years he had, with the greatest sincerity, declared his son to be a fool. He had now to admit that he was wrong, and admissions of this kind were not at all congenial to his obstinate nature. He was himself a Cambridge man, and, though a ripe classic, his great distaste for mathematics had prevented him from trying for honors. Still, he knew that there was no mistake,—no humbug about a Cambridge wranglership. No fool could attain that distinction. Gilbert came home, and was welcomed by his family with genuine cordiality, but still there was a restraint between father and son. No tradesmen's bills followed the student from Cambridge. His career at the University had been as irreproachable as brilliant. Had any such bills arrived, the parson would have paid them willingly, for Gilbert had had but a niggardly allowance, and Mr. Winter began to feel qualms of conscience on the subject. He had determined that his younger son, Gerald, should be sent to the same London school through which Gilbert had previously passed. This Gilbert resolutely opposed. He assured his father that, whatever he might have gained by it, such a school was quite unsuited to Gerald. The parson was obstinate, and gained his point in this matter, if in very little else. To school Gerald went.

Now came a discussion as to Gilbert's future career. For the church he considered himself unsuited. To this his father quite assented—with a sigh. The Earl now offered his influence to bring him into Parliament at the approaching election, but Gilbert had no taste for abstract party politics, and the Earl was a leading Whig partisan. The young man also entertained certain independent views of his own, which he was in the habit of expressing with great bluntness, and which often made his father's hair almost stand on end. He made choice of Civil Engineering as his profession. Mr. Winter could now deny him nothing; so he also went to London, and, rather late in life, at twenty-three years of age, was articled to an eminent practitioner in Great George Street, Westminster. The parting was almost a relief to his father; he liked his eldest son after a fashion - he was trying to like him more, but he could not understand him, and, in fact, was getting rather afraid of him. But he felt, deeply the loss of his youngest son in spite of his daughter's efforts to cheer him. The quarterly reports, too, which arrived were very different from those of Gilbert. They all spoke highly of his talents, but less of his application, and his conduct was described as "unsteady." These grieved the parson deeply; but when his boy came home for the holidays, he was soon not only forgiven, but indulged as much as ever.

We must now pass over an interval of two years, and carry the reader from Woodshot to London. The scene is the fifth class-room of Somerset College School. A dingy room,—a gloomy room—in one of the gloomiest parts of London. The school occupies the cellar portion as it were, under the College. It consists of a very dimly-lighted passage, with class-rooms on either side. The rooms to the right look out on a large stone-paved area; those on the left on a dreary gravelled playground. The room in question is one of the largest and darkest of them all. The gloom is positively oppressive. Two large ghoul-like stone pillars occupy the centre of the room, and around it are placed ranges of ink-stained desks, surmounted by open pigeon-holes filled with books. These are called "lockers," on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, none of them being furnished with door, lock or key. These lockers presented at this time an unusual gloomy appearance. A member of the Royal Family had recently died. On the day of the funeral, the boys had testified their loyalty and regret by "putting their lockers in mourning." This meant bedaubing them with ink, and for which display every boy in the class had been condemned to learn, by heart, a hundred lines of Latin verse. To show their indignation, the boys had broken with stones a large portion of the windows adjoining the play-ground, for which they had to pay out of their own pocket money. In the centre of the room was the most cheerful object in it,—a large open stove. This was, however, generally shaded from view by the portly person of the master of the class, with whom it was a favorite position. At the present time this position was, however, occupied by two masters in caps and gowns. The Doctor,—the stern and formidable head master of the class,—was present, and with an expression of countenance which betokened mischief. The Doctor had, perhaps, one fault, though, in other respects, admirably adapted for his situation. He was too apt to consider boys as young men, and expect from them the same seriousness and decorum as from those of seventeen and eighteen years of age, who composed his own class. "Boys will be boys," was a maxim which he ignored. Youthful foolish escapades, (many of which had occurred recently in the "fifth,") he had always punished severely. But it was no mere piece of boyish folly which had brought the frown to his features now. On the previous day, no less than eight boys had appeared in class in an unmistakeable state of intoxication, and in the locker of one boy had been found a stone bottle, full of rum. This boy had been the ringleader in all the scrapes into which the class had lately fallen. He was a very handsome lad of fifteen, and stood unabashed in the middle of the room. The culprit was receiving sentence of expulsion. He was directed to remain at the house of his master, with whom he boarded, until his father could be communicated with. This lad was Gerald Winter. He received a letter from his father, couched in the sternest terms, ordering him to return home. Gerald collected what things he could, and——ran away from home.

(To be continued.)

NOTES AND QUERIES.

Note.—I have, lying by me, a genuine old copy of the "Journals of the House of Lords," which contains the following curious deposition of a Puritan iconoclast of the time of Charles I., taken the 11th day of December, 1646. It is the "Voluntary Confession of John White, of South Perot, in the County of Dorset, husbandman." He states that, for a fortnight previously, he had secreted himself in Westminster Abbey for the express purpose of mutilating an effigy of the Earl of Essex, which had been brought to town in a hearse, and was in the Abbey at the time. He describes how he "cut off the head, as near as he could," with an axe, which he had bought for the purpose, and how he then "took out his knife, and cut and ripped the clothes and boots, and threw the effigies over." These were, in all probability, wax or wooden statues intended to form part of the ceremony of "Lying in State." Previous to this, he had tried his hatchet at "Mr. Cambden's Monument," in the same place, but had been prevented from completing his work by "a little dog barking." The curious part of the narrative is the motive assigned by the enthusiast for his act, in which he was encouraged by a Parson, a Justice of Peace of the town of Maidstone, and other individuals, who had told him that, thereby, he was obeying the commands of an Angel! "That an Angel had oftentimes spoken to him, by the speech of other people;" (and it is always through other people, and never through a vision of his own,) "that the City of London,—living in such vile sins and wickedness,—the Lord was so angry with them, *that He would send so great Plagues, that they should not be able to bury one another; or else He would fire it, as He did Sodom and Gomorrah.*" He is directed always by the Angel, speaking through the mouths of "*other people,*" to stand at the door of the Abbey as the hearse and effigies are being carried in, and to forbid the bearers to introduce the objectionable images. Should the bearers not heed the warning voice,—which, as it appears, they did not,—he was to act as he did.

The above account is curious for two reasons. There is not the slightest doubt of the sincerity of the poor ignorant peasant (who, it seems, received *sixpence*, on account, from the Parson of Maidstone). It is only another instance, in history, of the vile means used by many of the fanatics of the time, to work upon the credulity of the ignorant multitude for their own political ends.

More remarkable is it, that just nineteen years after this threat of the Angel, who was supposed to be appeased by these iconoclastic means, the Great Plague of London actually occurred, and was followed, a year afterwards, by the Great Fire.—ED. DIO.

Query 1.—During the recent gold fever in New York, we heard much of "bulls and bears." I am aware that these are old slang words on the London Stock Exchange. Have they a more remote origin?

Query 2.—I lately witnessed at the Theatre an ingenious drama, entitled, "*L'Homme au Masque de fer,*" admirably played by the French Company. The play is based on the idea that the well known State prisoner was the brother of the French King. I believe that this theory is now completely abandoned. What are the most recently-received solutions of the problem of "The Man in the Iron Mask?"

Query 3.—Which is the correct spelling, *Pony* or *Poney*, and what is the derivation of the word? Johnson says, "probably from *puny*," which seems to me very *im*probable.

A. B.