

Johnson made good progress; he seemed to learn (says one of his school-fellow) by intuition; for though in olence and procrastination were inherent in his constitution, whenever he made an exertion he did more than any one else; and he was never corrected at school, but for talking and diverting other boys from their business. His favorites received very liberal assistance from him; and three of his juvenile associates used to come in the morning, and carry him to school. One in the middle stopped, while Johnson sat upon his back, and one on each side supported him; and thus he was borne triumphant. At school he was uncommonly inquisitive; and he never forgot anything that he had either heard or read. In consequence of his defective sight, he did not join the other boys in their amusements. His only diversion was in winter, when he was fond of being drawn upon the ice by one of his companions barefooted, who pulled him along by a garter tied round his middle; no very easy operation, as he was remarkably large.

Dr. Percy, editor of the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, relates that Johnson, at this period, was immoderately fond of reading romances of chivalry; and he attributed to such extravagant fictions that unsettled turn of mind which prevented his ever fixing in any profession. From his earliest years he loved poetry, but hardly ever read any poem to the end; he perused Shakespeare at a period so early, that the speech of the ghost in *Hamlet* terrified him when alone. One day, imagining that his brother had hid some apples behind a large folio in his father's shop, Samuel climbed up to search for them, there were no apples; but the large folio proved to be Petrarch, whom he had seen mentioned in some preface as one of the restorers of learning: his curiosity was excited—he sat down, and read a great part of the book.

Johnson was next removed to the school of Stourbridge, Worcestershire, where he did not derive much benefit, but acted as an assistant to the master, in teaching the younger boys. He subsequently discriminated his progress at the two grammar schools thus: "at one I learned much in the school, but little from the master; in the other I learned much from the master, but little in the school." At Stourbridge he was admitted into the best company of the place; he remained little more than a year, and then returned home, to learn his father's business; but he lacked application. He, however, read much in a desultory way, as he afterwards told Boswell, his biographer: "all literature, sir; all ancient writers, all manly; though but little Greek, only some Anacreon and Hesiod; but in this irregular manner I had looked into a great many books which were not commonly known at the universities, where they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors; so that when I came to Oxford, Dr. Adams, now master of Pembroke College, told me I was the best qualified for the University he had ever known come there."

Johnson had already given several proofs of his poetical genius, both in his school exercises and other occasional compositions, of which Boswell quotes specimens.

In 1728, Johnson, being then in his nineteenth year, was entered as a commoner at Pembroke College: his father accompanied him, and introduced him to his tutor as a good scholar, and a poet who wrote Latin verses; Johnson behaved modestly, and sat silent; till, upon something which occurred in the course of conversation, he suddenly struck in, and quoted Macrobius; and thus he gave the first impression of that more extensive reading in which he had indulged himself. Johnson describes his tutor as "a very worthy man, but a very heavy man." Upon occasion of being fined for non-attendance, he said to the tutor, "Sir, you have scored me twopence for non-attendance at a lecture not worth a penny." Nevertheless, Johnson attended his tutor's lectures, and also the lectures in the college, very regularly. At his request he translated Pope's *Messiah* into Latin verse, as a Christmas exercise, with uncommon rapidity and ability; and it obtained for him not only the applause of his college and university, but of Pope himself, who is said to have remarked: "The writer of this poem will leave it a question with posterity, whether his or mine be the original."

Johnson's line of reading at Oxford, and during the vacations, cannot be traced. He told Boswell that what he read *solidly* at the university was Greek; not the Grecian historians, but Homer and Euripides, and now and then a little epigram; that the study of which he was most fond was metaphysics, but that he had not read much even in that way. It is, however, certain, both from his writings and conversation, his reading was very extensive. He appears, at various times, to have planned a methodical course of study. Like Southey, he had a peculiar faculty in seizing at once what was valuable in any book, without reading it through. He wrote at all times impatiently and in a hurry: he wrote his first exercise

at college twice over, but never took that trouble with any other composition, and his best works were "struck off in a heat with rapid exertion." From his being short-sighted, writing was inconvenient to him; therefore, he never committed a foul draft to paper, but revolved the subject in his mind, and turned and formed every period, till he had brought the whole to the highest correctness and the most perfect arrangement—when he wrote it; and his uncommonly retentive memory enabled him to deliver a whole essay, properly finished, whenever it was called for."

Johnson was a great favourite with his college companions; and he might often be seen lounging at the gate of Pembroke College amidst a circle of students, whom he was entertaining with his wit, and keeping from their studies, if not spurring them to rebellion against the college discipline. The secret of this seeming levity and insubordination will be stated best in Johnson's own words: "I was mad and violent. It was bitterness which they mistook for frolic. I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit; so I disregarded all power and all authority." Johnson did not form any close intimacies with his fellow-collegians, though he loved Pembroke to the last. He boasted of the many eminent men who had been educated there, and how many poets had been Pembroke men, adding, "Sir, we were a nest of singing birds." But, Johnson's university education, through his scanty supply of funds from home, and the shortcomings of friends, was left incomplete; and he personally left college without a degree, December 12, 1729, though his name remained on the books till October 8, 1731.

Whatever instruction Johnson received from his mother in the doctrine and duties of Christianity, does not appear to have been followed up; and it was not until his going to Oxford that he became a sincerely pious man. When at the University, he took up the Nonjuror Law's *Serious Call to a Holy Life*, and was so affected and convinced by its contents, that from this time religion was the predominant object of his thoughts and affections.

But he returned to Lichfield from the University with gloomy prospects. In 1731, he made an unsuccessful effort to procure the appointment of usher in the grammar-school of Stourbridge, where he had been partly educated. In the summer following he obtained a situation in the school of Market Bosworth, Leicestershire, to which he went on foot: the employment was, however, irksome to him, and he soon quitted it. Soon after this he went to Birmingham, and undertook, for the first bookseller established there, a translation and abridgment of a *Voyage to Abyssinia*, by Lobo, a Portuguese Jesuit, for which he received five guineas!

Johnson now returned to Lichfield, and in 1736 married Mrs. Porter, a widow, with whom he opened a private academy at Edial Hall, near Lichfield; but the establishment did not succeed; he had only three pupils, two of whom were David Garrick and his brother. Meanwhile he was storing his mind, and employed on his tragedy of *Irene*. Next year, accompanied by Garrick, he repaired to London, to try his fortune in "that great field of genius and exertion."

At Lichfield, the house in which Johnson was born is incessantly visited by pilgrims from all parts of the world. Opposite is the statue of the Doctor, its pedestal sculptured with bas-reliefs of incidents in his life; and near a footpath in the town is a willow, from a shoot of the tree planted by Johnson's hands. These are trifling memorials compared with the works which his genius, learning, and understanding produced in the service of religion and virtue, and which have led even his most grudging critic to pronounce Johnson to have been "both a great and a good man."

### Suggestive Hints towards Improved Secular Instruction.

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XI.

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY.

(Continued from our last.)

The experiment of letting light from the sun fall on a triangular prism of glass, will interest—seeing the separation into the different prismatic colours—let them observe the order in which they follow—the image being white, excepting when the rays proceed from the prism at a particular angle: cover first one side of it with paper and then another, which shews to them on which side it