

# JUVENILE ENTERTAINER.

"Torquet ab obscuris jam nunc sermonibus aurem."

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## BIOGRAPHY.

### The Progress of Genius.

FROM OBSCURE AND LOW SITUATIONS, TO EMINENCE AND CELEBRITY.

Genius is that gift of God which learning cannot confer, which no disadvantages of birth or education can wholly obscure.

**HENRY KIRK WHITE.**—He was born in 1785, at Nottingham, where his father followed the business of a butcher. He was sent to school at three years of age, and soon became so fond of reading, that when he had got his book in his hand, it was difficult to get him even to leave it for a few minutes, that he might take his meals. When no more than seven, he began to attempt to express his ideas on paper; his first composition being a tale, which ashamed to show it to any one else, he communicated to the servant, to whom he had for some time been secretly giving instructions in writing. His school acquisitions, before he was the age of 11, in addition to reading, were arithmetic and French; in both of which he had already distinguished himself above all his school-fellows. Soon after this he began to write verse.

His father, however, who was anxious to bring him up to his own business, although very much against his own wish and that of his mother, now insisted that he should be employed one whole day in the week, and during his leisure hours on others, in carrying the butcher's meat. But he expressed so much dislike to this occupation, that it was at last arranged that he should be sent to the hosiery trade, and at the age of 12, accordingly, he began to work as a stocking weaver. To a heart like his, full of the love of literature, and all whose young visions were already those of a student, this destination was a very cheerless one. Yet he hardly dared to complain, for he knew that his family could scarcely afford to educate him to any higher employment. His mother, however, moved by his evident wretchedness, contrived, after he had been about a year at the loom, to prevail upon his father to have him placed in the office of Messrs. Colclough and Endfield, attorneys in

Nottingham, who agreed to take him without a pension, on condition of his serving two years before being articled.

He now felt himself in something like his proper sphere, and his whole mind assumed new alacrity. Although nearly the whole day was necessarily given to the study of his profession, for he attended in the office, as he informs us in one of his letters, from 8 in the morning to 8 at night, he still found time to apply himself to the Greek and Latin languages; in the latter of which, with very little assistance, he enabled himself, in 10 months, to read Horace with tolerable ease. This progress, however, was obtained at the cost of most incessant application. He read during his walks, and at his meals; and not a moment indeed of his leisure hours was given to any thing except the improvement of his mind. In this manner it was surprising how much he accomplished. The papers he left behind him shewed, Mr. Southey tells us, that he had applied himself to his legal studies with extraordinary industry. Besides the knowledge which he acquired of Greek and Latin, he also made considerable progress at this time in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Chemistry, electricity, and astronomy, all shared largely in his attention. While pursuing these several studies, he contrived to accomplish himself to a considerable extent in drawing and music; and he found an occasional amusement in practical mechanics, in which he shewed much ingenuity and neatness of hand. Another accomplishment which he wished to acquire was the art of extempore speaking; and with this view he got himself elected a member of a debating society. Here he very soon distanced all his competitors.

But this was not the only mode in which he had already begun to seek distinction. So early as the first year after his emancipation from the stocking loom he had sent a translation from Horace to a periodical work then existing, called the 'Monthly Preceptor,' the proprietors of which were in the habit of offering prizes for the best contributions on subjects which they proposed; and a silver medal had been awarded to him for his performance. This honour seems to have kindled his literary ambition to greater fervour than ever. He began to sigh for the advantage of a University education. After having thus frequently tried his powers in the 'Preceptor,' he became a correspondent to another Magazine, called the 'Monthly Mirror.' Some of the essays which he sent to this publication, were of distinguished merit, and attracted considerable notice. Among others whose attention they excited, was Mr. Capel Loft, whose patronage of Bloomfield we recorded a few pages back; and the encouragement of this gentleman, whose exertions had recently been so fortunate in the case of another poet, determined Henry to commit a volume of his verses to press. This was about the close of the year 1802.

The volume made its appearance in the end of 1803 or beginning of 1804. It was published by subscription, and dedicated by permission to

the Duchess of Devonshire. What pecuniary return it brought the author is not stated; but the sale probably did not do a great deal more than defray the expenses of publication. Although favourably noticed in some of the periodicals of the day, it was made the subject of a very harsh article in the 'Monthly Review.' This so stung the sensibility of the young poet, that he sent a remonstrance to the editors, which produced from them, in their next number, an expression of their regret, that Mr W. should have been so much hurt by the severity of their criticism; but no acknowledgement was paid of the poetical merit of the publication which they had condemned. This treatment distressed Henry exceedingly. In one of his letters he says, 'This review goes before me whereever I turn my steps; it haunts me incessantly; and I am persuaded it is an instrument in the hand of Satan to drive me to distraction. I must leave Nottingham.' Fortunately however, the poems had fallen into the hands of Mr Southey, who, bringing to their perusal both a better judgement and a kinder heart than the writer in the 'Monthly Review,' considered them to discover strong marks of genius. On afterwards seeing the Review, this gentleman's indignation was so strongly excited by what he deemed its cruelty and injustice, that he immediately wrote to H. a letter of encouragement and advice, with an offer to do anything in his power to forward his views. This generous and reasonable interference contributed greatly to heal the poet's wounded feelings; and enabled him in a short time to forget the sneers of his anonymous critic.

No prospect, however, had yet opened of his desire of going to the University being gratified; while the desire itself was every day growing stronger. The reading of some religious books about this time had made a deep impression upon him; and his feelings had been ardently devotional. He determined to give up his life to the preaching of Christianity. His friends exerted themselves in vain to shake his resolution, he had made up his mind, if he could not obtain admission at Oxford or Cambridge, to join some dissenting communion, and to endeavour to find the means of pursuing his studies at an Academy, or at one of the Scotch Universities. But at last through the influence of the Rev. Mr. Simeon, of Kings Colledge, Cambridge, to whom he had been recommended, a sizarship was procured for him at St. Johns. His mother who had for some time kept a boarding school, and his elder brother, engaged each to allow him £15 or £20 yearly; and Mr Simeon generously undertook to afford him £30 more, with the aid of a friend, who is stated to have been Mr. Wilberforce, a name made venerable by a life spent in doing good. Accordingly, in October, 1804, he quitted his employers at Nottingham, who had most kindly agreed to give him up the remainder of his time, although his services were every day becoming more valuable to them. He did not, however, immediately proceed to Cambridge, but, by Mr. Simeon's