

THE BOY WITHOUT A GENIUS.

Mr. Wiseman the schoolmaster, at the end of his summer vacation, received a new scholar with the following letter:

Sir,—This will be delivered to you by my son Samuel, whom I beg leave to commit to your care, hoping that, by your well known skill and attention, you will be able to make something of him, which I am sorry to say, none of his masters have hitherto done. He is now eleven, and yet can do nothing but read his mother tongue, and that but indifferently. We sent him at seven to a grammar school in our neighbourhood; but his master soon found that his genius was not turned to learning languages. He was then put to writing, but he set about it so awkwardly that he made nothing of it. He was tried at accounts, but it appeared that he had no genius for that either. He could do nothing in geography for want of memory. In short, if he has any genius at all, it does not yet show itself. But I trust to your experience, in cases of this nature, to discover what he is fit for, and to instruct him accordingly. I beg to be favoured shortly with your opinion about him, and remain, sir, Your most obedient servant,

HUMPHREY ACRES.

When Mr. Wiseman had read this letter, he shook his head, and said to his assistant, A pretty subject they have sent us here! a lad that has a great genius for nothing at all. But perhaps my friend Mr. Acres expects that a boy should show a genius for a thing before he knows anything about it—no uncommon error! Let us see, however, what the youth looks like. I suppose he is a human creature at least.

Master Samuel Acres was now called in. He came hanging down his head, and looking as if he was going to be flogged.

Come hither, my dear! said Mr. Wiseman. Stand by me, and do not be afraid. Nobody will hurt you. How old are you?—Eleven last May, sir.

A well-grown boy, of your age, indeed. You love play, I dare say?—Yes, sir.

What, are you a good hand at marbles? Pretty good, sir.

And can spin a top and drive a hoop, I suppose?—Yes, sir.

Then you have the full use of your hands and fingers?—Yes, sir.

Can you write, Samuel?—I learned a little, sir, but I left it off again.

And why so?—Because I could not make the letters.

No! Why, how do you think other boys do? Have they more fingers than you?—No, sir.

Are you not able to hold a pen as well as a marble?—Samuel was silent.

Let me look at your hand.—Samuel held out both his paws, like a dancing bear.

I see nothing here to hinder you from

writing as well as any boy in the school. You can read, I suppose?—Yes, sir.

Tell me then what is written over the school-room door.—Samuel with some hesitation read, *WHATEVER MAN HAS DONE MAN MAY DO.*

Pray how did you learn to read? Was it not with taking pains?—Yes, Sir.

Well—taking more pains will enable you to read better. Do you know any thing of the Latin Grammar?—No, sir.

Have you never learned it?—I tried, sir, but I could not get it by heart.

Why, you can say some things by heart. I dare say you can tell me the names of the days of the week in their order.—Yes, sir, I know them.

And the months in the year, perhaps.—Yes, sir.

And you could probably repeat the names of your brothers and sisters, and all your father's servants, and half the people in the village besides.—I believe I could, sir.

Well—and is *hic, hæc, hoc* more difficult to remember than these?—Samuel was silent.

Have you learned any thing of accounts? I went into addition, sir, but I did not go on with it.

Why so?—I could not do it, sir.

How many marbles can you buy for a penny?—Twelve new ones, sir.

And how many for a half-penny?—Six.

And how many for two-pence?—Twenty-four.

If you were to have a penny a day, what would that make in a week?—Seven-pence.

But if you paid two-pence out of that, what would you have left?—Samuel studied awhile, and then said, Five-pence.

Right. Why, here you have been practising the four great rules of arithmetic,—addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Learning accounts is no more than this. Well, Samuel, I see what you are fit for. I shall set you about nothing but what you are able to do; but observe you *must* do it. We have no *I can't* here. Now go among your school-fellows. Samuel went away, glad that his examination was over, and with more confidence in his powers than he felt before.

The next day he began business. A boy less than himself was called out to set him a copy of letters, and another was appointed to hear him in grammar. He read a few sentences in English, that he could perfectly understand, to the master himself. Thus by going on steadily and slowly, he made a sensible progress. He had already joined his letters, got all the declensions perfectly, and half the multiplication table, when Mr. Wiseman thought it time to answer his father's letter; which he did as follows:

Sir, I now think it right to give you some information concerning your son. You perhaps expected it sooner, but I always wish to avoid hasty judgments. You men-

tioned in your letter that it had not yet been discovered which way his genius pointed.—If by *genius* you meant such a decided bent of mind to any one pursuit as will lead to excel with little or no labour or instruction, I must say that I have not met with such a quality in more than three or four boys in my life, and your son is certainly not among the number. But if you mean only the *ability* to do some of those things which the greater part of mankind can do when properly taught, I can affirm that I find in him no peculiar deficiency. And, whether you choose to bring him up to a trade or to some practical profession, I see no reason to doubt that he may in time become sufficiently qualified for it. It is my favourite maxim, sir, that every thing most valuable in this life may generally be acquired by taking pains for it. Your son has already lost much time in the fruitless expectation of finding out what he would take up of his own accord. Believe me, sir, few boys will take up any thing of their own accord but a top or a marble. I will take care, while he is with me, that he loses no more time this way, but is employed about things that are fit for him, not doubting that we shall find him fit for them.

I am, sir, yours, &c.

SOLOMON WISEMAN.

Though the doctrine of this letter did not perfectly agree with Mr. Acres' notions, yet, being convinced that Mr. Wiseman was more likely to make something of his son than any of his former preceptors, he continued him at his school for some years, and had the satisfaction to find him going on in a steady course of gradual improvement. It due time a profession was chosen for him, which seemed to suit his temper and talents, but for which he had no *particular turn*, having never thought at all about it. He made a respectable figure in it, and went through the world with credit and usefulness, though *without a genius*.

MRS. BARBAULD.

*As virtues grace the worst of men,
And vices taint the best,
They ne'er to hastily should be,
Or censur'd or carest.*

*Too oft with undistinguish'd zeal,
We censure or commend;
With too much ire pursue a foe,
With too much love a friend.*

Printed and Published every FRIDAY, by
James Bowes, Marchington's Lane.

TERMS.

Five shillings per Annum, or Three shillings for six months, delivered in Town, and Six shillings and three pence, when sent to the country by mail, payable in advance.

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