

wanted to know all about the clouds and the grasses, and why the leaves changed color in the autumn; I watched the ants, bees, birds, tadpoles and caddis-worms; I pestered people with questions about what nobody knew or cared anything about." He hated his school-books; nor did he see the good of learning, even at Oxford, in a couple of months that he wasted there long after boyhood was over. "They wanted to make an old woman of me, or that I should stuff Latin and Greek at the university," he said, "but these plans failed."

John was always his mother's blue-eyed boy. His father, being an invalid, could do nothing with him, and consequently the boy very often had his own way. He was a "cross" child and would sit and cry for hours when he could not get just what he wanted. He was a very bold child as well, and never seemed to realize what fear was, as the following anecdote will show:

"One night, when he was about twelve years old, having gone to chat a little with some neighbors who lived in a cottage near his father's house, whilst he was sitting by the fire with two or three country people, a most terrible apparition, with a face resembling the devil's, opened the door and looked in upon them. The company, which consisted of a woman and two men, believing it to be what it really represented, were petrified with fear and remained immovable; but John Hunter—who was, as he afterwards confessed, by no means certain that it was not the devil—snatched the tongs from the hearth, and, attacking the spectre, made it roar with pain and run out of the house. This terrible figure proved to be a man dressed up with a painted mask, which in those days none of the country people would have any idea of; and so terrible was the face that amongst the people which he visited that night, going about from one cottage to another, one man fevered immediately and died of the fright."

Before his father's death John was sent to a Latin school at Kilbride, but books held no attraction for him. At school he was stupid and lazy. There was only one book he loved—the book of Nature—and it lay before him always, open and inviting, full of the living truths that his deep, probing mind could not overlook. "He would do nothing," writes Stephen Paget, "but what he liked, and neither liked to be taught reading nor writing nor any kind of learning, but rambling amongst the woods, braes, etc., looking after birds' nests, comparing their eggs—number, size, marks and other peculiarities—whilst his two elder brothers had both been to college, and got the same education that the sons of country gentlemen got."

At seventeen he buried himself in Buchanan's timber-yard at Glasgow, but the work did not suit him and he returned home.