John Shaw Billings

AN

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

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1905

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Scheme of Autobiography.  April 1905

1. When I first realized myself, on the hill side on Tristram Burgers' farm looking over Narragansett Bay at the white sails in the distance.

2. Life in Allensville.
   In the store at Rising Sun.
   Making boots.
   The first study of Latin.

3. Life at Miami University.
   The Library. Early Reading.
   Robinson Crusoe. Dece Belzey and Pathfinder.

4. Life in Kentucky. The Bedingers.

5. Life as a Medical Student in Cincinnati. Blackman. Eashman.
   Sister Anthony.

   Dr. W. S. Leen. Union Hotel Hospital.
   Hammond and Letterman.
   Cliff House Hospital.
   West Philadelphia.
With the 5th Corps, Battle of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg.


Meet Surgeon, Army of the Potomac - Wilderness - Todd's Tavern - Cotter Harboe, in front of Petersburg.

In Washington, Surgeon Civil Office - Divisions of Accounts and Property - Invalid Corps.

Library and Museum Works.

Hygiene & Hospitals - Barnes Hospital at Soldiers' Home, John Hopkins Hospital, etc.

National Board of Health.

Building of the Army Museum - Index Catalogue, Index Medicus.

16. Lectures at Columbia
   Dept of Hygiene, Univ of Penna.

18. New York Public Library

18. Carnegie Institution
I first got a realizing sense of my own
personality or individuality when, a boy
about 8 years old, I was at work on a
hillside on the farm of the farm near Providence R.I. My father was the
Manager of the farm, and my business that
afternoon was to chop up and dig out
by the roots all the Canada Thistles I could
find in the pasture. I had read the
Noble Text, verse by verse; also Robinson
Cromwell, Deerslayer and the Pathfinder, and
The Pilgrim's Progress, but I had never done
anything that I can remember. And on
this memorable afternoon I stood in the hillside
and looked over Narragansett Bay, and
wondered where all the Cat Boats and shemans
with their white sails came from, and were
going to. Then my thought took this turn—"the
only person who even knows that is God. He
knows everything that has been, and is, and is
to be. These hundreds and thousands of years
two persons I should be here to day and
that each of these boats would be just where
it is, and that I should be thinking of them."
Then as his knowledge must have been perfect
it is absolutely necessary that I
just at once, knowing just what I knew, and here at this moment, looking at these slips, which also must be each just where they are, and everything must be arranged and ordered to be just as it is, and no one can prevent it. Therefore I am not responsible for where I am nor for what I do.

I was surprised at this conclusion, and thought I had made a great discovery, and resolved to tell my mother about it when she was worrying about one troubles.

I did tell her about it that night, and said there was no use in worrying any more. She looked at me in a somber sort of way and said "Who's been teaching you about pre-ordination?" "Nobody taught me," said I, "I found it out by myself -- don't you see if it must be so."
My life on The Bougainville farm, from about 5 to 10 years of age, was that of an ordinary farmer's boy. I drove the mule cart into Providence about 5 A.M. and left the farm and guarded with the farmer's customers — mostly of the frozen class. I dropped free of fine grains of sweet corn in the proper place in the barn in planting time. I helped weed the little carrots and young beets, rode the horses for the horse-raking of the hay crop, went to a country school for three months in the winter, made little claim bales along the shore with my cousins William Henry and Charles Shaw, and read everything I could lay hands on. I managed to get a dollar for subscription to a little lending library in a book shop, and the first books I took out were Overlander, Path Finder, and Jack of the Hill. I read for my own. Robinson Crusoe, Harriet Paul in The Forest of Maine, Harry and Lucy, and Plutarch's Lives, and was quite sure that I did not want to be a farmer.
When I was about 10 years old, my father moved to Indiana and established himself in a little cross roads village called Atlansville, on the road from Rising Sun to Vevay. Here he kept a Country Store - was Postmaster, and had a small shoemaker's shop in which one man was employed. I learned something of shoemaking - had some experience in keeping store, never necessarily, came across a book - there was never an English one there. I wanted Latin, and got a Latin Grammar and Reader - a copy of Caesar, and a Latin dictionary and set to work. It was difficult, but with the aid of my brother I made good progress. Then I made an agreement with my father that if he would help me through college in the least expensive way, all of his property should go to my sister and that I must expect nothing more. I then got some Greek books, a geometry, &c, and went on to study myself to pass the entrance examination for the
Sub Freshman class at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. I succeeded in doing this in two years and passed the examination in the fall of 1852. For the first two years I kept bachelor's hall, living on bread, melons, potatoes, eggs, tenant oil - such things as I could cook for myself. The lessons gave me little trouble, most of my time was spent in reading the books in the College library. I was omnivorous, read everything in English as it came. Philosophy, theology, natural science, history, travels and fiction.
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