Bentham was probably a greater prodigy. He was dwarfish in body* and precocious in mind. His father was proud of his learning, and so forced his mind by premature teaching, that the wonder is that he survived his boyhood. He was sent to Westminster School at eight, to Oxford at twelve, and was entered at Lincoln's Inn at sixteen. Hawked about by his father as a prodigy, the boy eventually conceived a disgust for society, and taking an aversion to law, his father (fortunately for Jeremy) all but abandoned him, in despair of his ever achieving anything in that profession. Then young Bentham took refuge in books. A sentence in one of Dr. Priestly's pamphlets struck him—"The greatest happiness of the greatest number,"—and it formed the key of his life and labors. At twenty-eight he published anonymously his *Fragment on Government;* and it was attributed to some of the greatest legalists of the day. He went on writing upon religion, morals, jurisprudence, and prison discipline, until his eighty-fifth year; and his works have certainly had a considerable influence upon recent legislation, in England as well as in France.

Some of the greatest poets—not the poets of passion, but the poets of imagination and intellect—have produced their best works late in life. Milton, who wrote his *Comus* at twenty-six, lived to finish his *Paradise Lost* at fifty-seven, and his *Paradise Regained* and *Sampson Agonistes* at sixty-three. The precocious Pope, who composed his *Pastorals* at sixteen, wrote his most stinging satire, *The Dunciad*, at forty, and the *Essay on Man* at forty-five. But Pope was not so much a "maker," creator, or poet in the ordinary sense, as a highly-cultivated literary artist, who had the tact to set the ingenious thoughts of others

* "I was at this time about sixteen; but still a dwarf—a perfect dwarf. I had no calves to my legs; and one Mr. Harris, a Quaker, offended me not a little by asking me whither my calves had gone a-grazing."—Bowring, *Memoirs of Bentham*, p. 47.

into the most pithy and elegant language. Crabbe, too, who began writing at an early age, went on improving until he composed his *Village* at twenty-nine, his *Borough* at fifty-six, and his *Tales of the Hall* at between sixty and sixty-five.

Cowper did not know his own powers until he was far beyond thirty, and his *Task* was not written until about his fiftieth year. Sir Walter Scott was more than thirty before he published his *Minstrelsy;* and all his greatness was yet to come. Walter Savage Landor wrote and published his first volume of poems at eighteen, and his last—*The Last Fruit from an Old Tree*—at eighty. Goethe also furnishes another instance of the early growth of genius and its prolonged preservation into old age; for he wrote ghost comedies in verse while a boy, *Goetz von Berlichingen* at twenty-two, and then, as he grew in power, he produced his *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* at forty-seven, the first part of *Faust* at fifty-eight, *Wilhelm Meister's Wandergahre* between his seventy-second and eightieth year, and the second and last part of *Faust* at eighty-two. In addition to these great names, we may add Cervantes and Voltaire; the first of whom began writing ballads and romances before twenty, but reached the age of fifty-seven before he completed the first part of his immortal *Don Quixote;* and the last, who wrote *Œdipe* at nineteen, *The Henriade* at twenty-two, and after publishing numerous works, was found writing articles for the *Encyclopedie* at betwesn seventy and eighty. At eighty-four he attended the sixth representation of his tragedy of *Irene*, and died about three months later, after his return to Ferney.

There have been poets, though not of the highest rank, whose powers were slow in displaying themselves, and who only became distinguished late in life. La Fontaine was one of these. At forty-four he had achieved no reputation,

Not much attention had been paid to his education; but when he read an ode by Malherbe, he exclaimed, "I, too, am a poet." He wrote poems accordingly, but with comparatively little effect. It was Marianne Mancini, the niece of Cardinal Mazarin, who impressed upon the poet that his grace and strength lay in fable-making. He took the lady's advice. It is accordingly through his *Fables* that he is chiefly remembered. At sixty-three he was received into the Academy as successor to Colbert, triumphing over Boileau, the rival candidate. He died at seventy-four.

Krilov, who has been styled the Russian La Fontaine, after writing some unsuccessful operas and tragedies, discovered, when about forty, where his true genius lay; and his *Fables*, like those of La Fontaine, achieved an extraordinary popularity. After writing about two hundred of them, he obtained a pension from the Emperor, and then fell into a trance of indolence or lethargy. He was roused from this state by a wager which he made with some one, that he could learn Greek. At the age of sixty-eight he applied himself to learn that language, which he mastered in about two years; and towards the close of his life, at seventy-six, he took pleasure in reading the Greek poets in the original.

Holberg, one of the principal Danish poets, gave no sign of a talent for poetry until he had passed his fortieth year, and then he astonished and delighted his countrymen by his satire of *Peder Paars*—that masterpiece of heroic-comic poetry. Vondel, the national poet of Holland, was a hosier. He learnt Latin at about thirty, and it had the effect of improving his poetic style. His masterpiece, *Gijsbrecht*, was written at the age of fifty. His *Lucifer* has been compared to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

It must, however, be admitted that these are to be regarded as exceptional cases; for nearly all the great poets

have given unmistakable signs of their genius in early life. "In general," says Macaulay, "the development of the fancy is to the development of the judgment what the growth of a girl is to the growth of a boy. The fancy attains at an earlier period to the perfection of its beauty, its power, and its fruitfulness; and as it is first to ripen, it is also first to fade. It rarely happens that the fancy and the judgment grow together. It happens still more rarely that the judgment grows faster than the fancy."

When the physical constitution attains its full growth, it does not long remain in that state, but gradually begins to decline. Indeed, from the day on which we begin to live, we may be said to begin to die—digging our graves with our teeth. In youth there is change and growth; in age there is change and decay. When the ascending stage is fully reached, the descent begins. Strength and ardor gradually cease—of desires, of feelings, of passions, of fancy. But the intellect continues to grow with accumulations of knowledge. The attractions of the senses diminish, and the power which remains is used with greater economy and usually to better purpose. The brilliant dreams of youth have departed, and with them enthusiasm and energy. The man has cooled down; he reasons more soberly; and he is guided by experience more than in his earlier years. His organs, of body and mind, participate in the decay. They are less agile, impressionable, and energetic. The brain, like the body, desiccates and hardens. Man no longer sees the brighter side of things, but bears up less cheerfully under adversity. In the words of the Persian poet, "The tendency of age is to sharpen the thorns and wither the flowers of life."

During the period of maturity—or what Mr. Nasmyth in his Autobiography denominates "The Tableland of Life"—that is, between thirty and fifty, the functions of the body are in full development, and the mind is in its highest

state of working energy. It is during that period that the greatest and maturest works of genius are produced. Macaulay says that "of all the good books now extant in the world, more than nineteen-twentieths were published after the writers had attained the age of forty." This, perhaps, may be too sweeping a statement, as we shall afterwards find. From what has already been said, the aptitude to labor varies according to constitution and temperament. Poesy and art achieve their greatest triumphs in youth, but history and philosophy in age. The most inspired works are those which are usually conceived in early life. But in the most solid branches of literature and philosophy the reverse is the case. A man cannot accumulate the enormous mass of acts necessary for a great history until comparatively late in life. Hence most of the great historians have been men past the tableland of life.

M. Quetelet, the statistician, has prepared a table exhibiting the development of dramatic talent, and showing that it grows and declines according to age. At the average age of twenty-one it begins to display itself. Between twenty-five and thirty it becomes pronounced and grows in force. It continues to increase until between fifty and fifty-five, when it sensibly and rapidly declines, judging by the published works of well-known authors. It has also been observed that the tragic talent develops itself more rapidly than the comic.*

There are, however, numerous exceptions to statistica rules. The instances are numerous in which persons, even of feeble body and delicate health, have carried into old age the genius of their youth. Inspiration returns to them; light sparkles again in their eyes; and the soul of fire burns under their wrinkled brows. "Even in their

Réveillé-Parise: *Physiologie des Hommes Livrés aux Travaux de L'Esprit*, i. pp. 232, 233.

ashes live their wonted fires." Sonetimes the fruits of advanced years have even more flavor than those of youth. The *Odyssey* was produced by a blind old man, but that man was Homer. Bossuet was about sixty when he composed and delivered the most brilliant of his orations. Milton was almost "chilled by age" when he described the love of Adam and Eve in Paradise. Locke was actively engaged in literary composition until within a few days of his death, at seventy-three. Poussin was seventy when he painted his great picture of "The Deluge." West painted his last, said to be his best work, "Death on the Pale Horse," at seventy-nine.

Where the powers of the imagination are not concerned, the cases of dulness in youth and slowness of growth in manhood are very numerous. Who could have foretold from the unpromising boyhood of Bunyan—swearer, tinker, reprobate, and gaol-bird—the author of that wonderful allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, so abounding in power, pathos, and beauty? But the wind of genius bloweth where it listeth. In the case of Bunyan, difficulties rather than facilities, obstructions rather than encouragements, seem to have been his most energetic helpers. Macaulay, one of the best judges, affirmed that "though there were many clever men in England during the latter half of the seventeenth century, there were only two minds which presented the imaginative faculty in a very eminent degree. One of these minds produced the *Paradise Lost*, the other *The Pilgrim's Progress*."

Whitefield's case was almost as remarkable. A bad boy, a young thief, hating instruction, and utterly wicked, as described by himself, with only the evil examples of his mother's public-house before him, he yet lived to become one of the most powerful and successful of preachers. Nor was the early life of the Rev. John Newton, the friend of Cowper, more promising. At nineteen he was seized by a

press-gang and put on board a ship of war. He was flogged and degraded for misconduct. He afterwards became a laborer on an estate in Western Africa, where he was almost killed by ill-treatment. But his sufferings, helped by the recollection of his mother's early instruction and example, softened his heart, and he became a changed man. Escaping from thraldom, he devoted his spare time to the improvement of his mind; though for four years he was master of a slave-ship. His increasing dislike to that occupation preyed upon his mind, and he determined to leave it. Then he returned to England, applied himself diligently to study, acquired a knowledge of Latin and French, and eventually made considerable progress in Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. At length he obtained episcopal ordination, and was presented to the curacy of Olney. There he labored successfully for about sixteen years, during which he became the intimate friend of the poet Cowper, in conjunction with whom the well-known *Olney Hymns* were composed and published.

To these illustrations may be added the remarkable case of Richard Baxter, nephew of the celebrated Nonconformist divine, who did not know a letter at eighteen, and could only speak Welsh. But having had his mind awakened, he diligently applied himself to learning, and in the course of a few years acquired a high reputation as a scholar. He was eventually appointed Master of the Mercer's School, in London, and held that important office with great *eclat* for a period of about twenty years. He was a great author, especially in Latin and antiquarian works. His edition of *Horace* was for a long time considered to be the best; and it bore so high a character abroad that it was reprinted by Gesner at Leipsic with additional notes.

Alexander von Humbolt made very little progress at school. He was uncertain and slow; and it was only in

later years, when his mind began to develop itself, that he conquered knowledge by sheer strength of will and force of application. When Diderot was a boy he was thought to be the scapegrace of the family, though he lived to be its glory. Buffon was by no means a prodigy in youth. His mind was slow in forming itself, and equally slow in reproducing what it had acquired. Madame Neckar attributed the development of Buffon's talent to curiosity and vanity. She says of him: "Il ne voulait pas qu'un homme fût entendre ce qu'il n'entendait pas lui-même; il ne voulait rien ignorer de tout ce qu'il pouvait savoir, dans quelque genre qui ce fût." But, whatever may have been the motive, there can be no doubt that his reputation was achieved only by dint of extraordinary and persevering labor.

Fresnel, also, the natural philosopher, was a dull boy at school. "Ill passait pour *un pas grand chose.*" It was with difficulty that he could be taught to read; and it was not until he had reached his twenty-fifth year that he gave any signs of ability; after which his discoveries on the subject of light and its laws, succeeded each other with unexampled rapidity. These discoveries were all made between his twenty-ninth and thirty-eighth years.

Pestalozzi was very awkward and unhandy in youth. He was very unsuccessful at school. He was so awkward that his schoolfellows called him "Harry Oddity." He was dull and unsusceptible, and long remained beneath mediocrity.. In orthography and writing he was declared to be a confirmed dunce. Yet in later life he became a preacher. Pursued by his native awkwardness, he stuck fast in his first sermon. Striving to relieve his confusion, he burst into a loud laugh. This of course would never do. And yet, when he got into his right groove, he proved to be one of the greatest and wisest of teachers—the founder of the Pestalozzian system of education.

The late historian of the French Revolution, and President of the French Republic, was distinguished as a *mauvais sujet* at the Lyceum of Marseilles. His passion was principally for barley-sugar and green apples. He turned his books into cash to supply his wants. He played no end of tricks, which made him the hero of his schoolfellows, but the terror of his schoolmasters. He stuck cobbler's wax upon one of the seats which held the master fast, and set the class in a roar. He was put into the black hole, and was at length threatened with expulsion. As his parents were very poor. the threat led to his reformation. He became obedient and studious, and during the remainder of his school life he usually stood at the head of his class, and eventually carried off the first prizes. Every one knows the after history of M. Thiers.

Honoré de Balzac, when placed at school, was found to be so idle and disobedient that he was removed to a private academy, where he did little better. He was placed with a notary at Paris, though Michelet says he began business as a printer and bookseller. At all events he began to write for the public journals, and then he proceeded to write stories. But many years elapsed before the *Peau de Chagrin* called the public attention to his peculiar humor, and shortly after he became a general favorite.

Dumas, like Balzac, was an idle, good-for-nothing scholar, being chiefly remarkable for his love of out-door sports. He was a good fencer and wrestler, a first-rate shot, and a keen sportsman. But these accomplishments could not gain him a living. At fifteen he was placed as copying-clerk with a notary, and, as yet, he indicated no predilection for literature. His determination to embark in the craft of authorship was accidental. An acquaintance of his, who wrote for the theatre, proposed to him that they should unite their efforts, remarking that "writing for the theatre was a trade like every other, and only required

practice." Dumas's first attempts were failures; but he persevered, and at length his *Henri III.* succeeded. His subsequent career proved a continued round of successes. He wrote some eighty dramas, and more than forty works of fiction.

Even the brilliant Sheridan, when taken by his mother to a schoolmaster, was pronounced by her to be one of the most impenetrable dunces she had ever met with. He was boisterous, impetuous, and fond of fun and mischief. The death of his mother, which was his first sorrow, softened his heart. From that time he applied himself diligently, and eventually took rank among the great men of his country. John Howard, the philanthropist, made no progress at school; he was pronounced a dunce, and was apprenticed to a grocer. Fowell Buxton, also, was a dull boy, much fonder of shooting and hunting than of learning. But even in pursuing sport he was no loser, for he largely gained in health and strength.

Knowledge of school books may send a boy to the top of his class; but it is action, application, and endurance that carries a man to the front in actual life. Indeed, too exclusive an application to learning of any sort, while the youth is approaching manhood, and his habits are in course of formation, may to a certain extent unfit him for the business of practical life. Hence the stupidity of scholars and the ignorance of the learned, which Hazlitt has described with so much vigor and acuteness.*

Captain Marryat's education was very limited in youth, and he ran away to sea when he was only twelve years old. He himself told the following story of his own and Mr. Charles Babbage's school days: "The first school I ever went to was one kept by an old dame. There was a number of other boys there who were all very good boys, but

* Hazlitt, *Table-talk:* "Ignorance of the Learned."

Charlie Babbage and I were always the scamps of the school. He and I were forever in scrapes, and the old woman used to place us side by side standing on stools in the middle of the schoolroom, and point to us as a warning to the others, and say, 'Look at those two boys! They are bad boys, and they will never get on in this world. Those two boys will come to a bad end.' It is rather funny," he concluded, "but Babbage and I are the only two in all the school who have ever been heard of since."

Many great warriors have been slow to learn in youth. Bertrand du Guesclin could never learn either to read or write. "Never was there so bad a boy in this world," said his mother; "he is always wounded, his face disfigured, fighting or being fought; his father and I wish he were peaceably under ground." Yet Du Guesclin readily apprehended military tactics, and lived to become a successful general.

The Duke of Marlborough, though his education was neglected, gave early indications of military genius; so much so that Marshal Turenne, to whom he was opposed, predicted that "the handsome Englishman" would one day prove a master in the art of war. Yet he reached the age of fifty before he had an opportunity of displaying his powers. After achieving a series of remarkable victories' he forced the French armies to retreat across the frontier. The Duke was fifty-four when he won the battle of Blenheim, fifty-six at Ramillies, and fifty-nine at Malplaquet, where he showed the extreme of military daring. He was as much as sixty-one when he stormed and captured the strong fortress at Bouchain.

Turenne himself, as we have seen, learned slowly and with difficulty, rebelling against punishment and restraint; and when his ambition was appealed to, his dogged perseverance made a good substitute for his slowness of apprehension. Clive was a dunce and a reprobate—a great

fighter,—the leader of all the idle boys of Market-Drayton, and the terror of his neighborhood. Yet one of his teachers had the sagacity to predict that the idle but intrepid boy would yet make a figure in the world.

Wellington, who lived to be one of the greatest of generals and the safest of statesmen, completed his military course at Angers without attracting attention. He joined the army, and passed from the infantry to the cavalry twice and back again; after which he applied to Lord Camden, then Viceroy of Ireland, for employment in the Revenue or Treasury Boards. Fortunately, however, Lord Camden did not comply with his request. The result of his application was, that he joined the 33rd Regiment at the Cape of Good Hope, which proceeded from thence to Bengal in 1797. From that time the history of Wellington forms part of the history of Europe.

Although the Napiers were very far from being dull boys, they owed very little to school instruction. William, the historian of the Peninsular War, had for his master "a queer old pedagogue, head of the Grammar School at Cellbridge, from whom he learned nothing." He was educated partly by a female relative at home, but principally by himself, He had a good memory, and knew by heart the whole of Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But his elementary education must have been very deficient, as he could not spell correctly at twenty. When a lieutenant of artillery, he wrote: "I am extreemly miserable at having made my father unneassy." Two years later, when a cornet of horse, he wrote: "Charles is a lazy theif, I wrote to him a week ago to send or come himself with my ten guineas, and has neither sent it nor answered me, the unatural villain." A year or two later, his letters became correct in orthography and grammar. They increased in force, style, and expression, and he eventually succeeded in becoming, without exception, the first military historian of his age. Charles,

"the unatural villain," was the Paladin of the family. He was naturally timid as a boy, but he conquered his tendency by extraordinary force of will. He was a hero throughout his life, and to the last he remained just, unstained, honorable, pure, and merciful.

Sometimes boys are, like Lord Cockburn, thrashed into stupidity, and they make no progress until they are relieved from their schoolmasters, and left at liberty to discover their own bent. George Cabanis, when a boy, gave early indications of ability, but the severe discipline of the school to which his father sent him had only the effect of making him idle and stubborn, and he was at last expelled. His father, having observed that he was always a willing scholar when no compulsion was used, and that he was rigidly submissive to the rules imposed by himself, resolved on the hazardous experiment of leaving young Cabanis, at the age of fourteen, to pursue his studies in his own way. The experiment proved successful. In two years, the youth repaired the defects of his education at school; he made himself acquainted with the literature of his own country, and he studied Greek and Latin, philosophy and metaphysics, by turns, and all with equal ardor. After a time he became disabled by ill-health. The famous Dutreuil; was called upon to attend him, and he induced the young man to follow the study of physic under his direction. For six years he remained under Dutreuil and the eminence to which Cabanis eventually attained as a physician and physiologist amply justified the anticipations of his early friend and instructor,

Occasionally a boy, of really inventive genius, is considered stupid and *etourdi*, simply because his special ability has had no opportunity of being brought to light. When Klaproth, the celebrated orientalist, was a student at Berlin University, he was thought particularly backward. One day his examiner said to him, "Why, sir, you know nothing

at all." "I beg your pardon," answered Klaproth, "I know Chinese." The answer excited surprise as well as distrust. But, on inquiry, it was found that the boy, without help and in secret, had really mastered one of the most difficult of Eastern languages. This circumstance determined the direction of his studies and the pursuits of his future life. It was the same with Linnæus until his true genius was discovered. In school he was a dunce, but in the garden and the forest he was a prodigy. So also with Sir Joseph Banks, who was so immoderately fond of play when he was a boy that he learned next to nothing at school; but the beauty of the wild flowers in the lanes near Eton having attracted his wonder and admiration, he from that time devoted himself with the ardor of his nature to the study of botany and natural history.

The genius of General Menabrea, recently Prime Minister of Italy, early displayed itself in a remarkable manner. When a boy he was, for some misdemeanor, sentenced to solitary confinement in a remote room in his father's castle. He at once proceeded to make a breach in the partition wall, and never stopped until he had made his way back to his mother, powdered from head to foot with lime and brickdust. When sent to college at Turin, his devotion to mathematical studies was such that, to procure some costly scientific works on which he had set his heart, he sold the greater part of his clothes, and was surprised by his brother-in-law, Count Brunet, in the depth of winter, occupied in his calculations, arrayed in a light summer dress—the only part of his wardrobe that remained. Such were the early indications of the genius which afterwards displayed itself in the conduct of the siege operations before Ancona and Gaeta, and which ended in the capture of those important fortresses.

There are also cases in which men seem to have lain fallow in their youth, and have only given evidence of their