

THE LATE PROFESSOR BOOLE, OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CORK.

"WE this week present our readers with the portrait of a man whose name to the majority of them is perhaps unknown, but whose fame rests on grounds more durable and solid than that of many a one who, in his lifetime, has secured a widespread celebrity. The events of his external life were few and simple. The history of his mind can only be read by those of kindred intellect and similar pursuits; but his labours, though yielding no immediate return of popularity or of profit to himself, were of a class which often prove fertile of results when the labourer is gone.

The late Dr George Boole, Professor of Mathematics in Queen's College, Cork, was an instance of the attainment of high scientific and academical distinction by perseverance in private study, without the advantages of a course of university instruction. He was born on the 4th of November 1815, at Lincoln, the son of a respectable tradesman who was himself attached to the pursuits of science and died at Ballintemple, near Cork, on the 8th of December 1815. The whole of his early life was passed, with but a short interval, in his native city or county, which he only left on his appointment to the professorship of mathematics, in the Queen's College, Cork, at its opening, in 1849. The duties of this office he continued to discharge until his premature and unexpected death, while still in the full vigour of his intellect, and engaged in investigations the results of which were looked forward to with anxious interest by the mathematicians of this and other countries. The history of his early life and studies reveals the obstacles which stood in the way of the development and cultivation of his extraordinary natural powers, and the indomitable energy and innate thirst for improvement which enabled him to surmount them. We subjoin a few particulars as an example and encouragement to others who may feel conscious of similar gifts, but may be tempted to succumb to the weight of adverse external influences.

His father, for whose memory he always retained an affectionate and reverential regard, was a man of an ingenious and active mind, and from him he received his first and, we believe, only instruction in the rudiments of that science in which he afterwards so much excelled. From him also he inherited that taste for the construction and adaptation of optical instruments which he retained to the end of his life. It was not, however, until a comparatively late period of his earlier studies that his special aptitude for mathematical investigations developed itself. His earlier ambition seems to have pointed to the attainment of proficiency in the ancient classical languages; but his father being unable to assist him in overcoming the first difficulties of this course of study, he was indebted to a neighbour for instruction in the elements of Latin grammar. This good neighbour was Mr William Brooke, bookseller, a man of mental culture and an accomplished antiquary, with whom

he kept up an uninterrupted correspondence throughout his life, and who survives to mourn the loss of his friend and pupil. To the study of Latin he added that of Greek, we believe, without any external assistance, and for some years he devoured every Greek and Latin author that came within his reach. At the early age of twelve he was the subject of a small literary controversy in his native town. He had produced a metrical version of an ode of Horace, which his father, in the pride of his heart, had inserted in a local journal, stating the age of the translator. This drew forth a letter from a neighbouring schoolmaster denying, from internal evidence, that the version could possibly have been the work of one so young. But accident discovered to him certain defects in his methods of classical study, inseparable from the want of proper early training; and it cost him two years of incessant labour to correct them. At the age of seventeen he first applied himself to the study of the higher mathematics; and simply with the aid of such books as he could procure. Without other assistance or guide, he worked his way onward, and it was his own opinion that he had lost five years of educational progress by his imperfect methods of study and the want of a helping-hand to get him over difficulties. This opinion may be doubted, as it does not take into account the invigorating effect on the mental powers of the successful struggles to surmount such difficulties without external aid. And it is a fact that, in his efforts to clear up points on which his books failed to satisfy him, he often lighted upon methods which afterwards proved to be original discoveries. It is not our purpose or within our ability to mention in detail the various memoirs and publications by which he gradually established his reputation as a mathematical writer of rare ingenuity and power. For these we must refer our readers to the *Cambridge and Dublin Mathematical Journal*.

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