

The Earlier Letters
of
John Stuart Mill
1812-1848



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begun music: and you learn from Willie's and Clara's letters, this also. Willie and Clara are ready to begin the first lesson: Harriet has not finished the treble notes.

The rainy weather has at length set in here, after an exceedingly dry autumn. I am however very glad to say, that no rain now can do any injury to the crop, which is almost all in.

We are still learning to write. How much Willie and Clara have improved you will know by reading their letters.

I hope that all my aunts and uncles are very well. I did not know that I had a new little cousin, till Willie saw it in the paper. I believe my Mother has written to you a very long letter: and I suppose that she has told you all the little news that we have: so that I have very little to tell you: moreover, I had only two days notice to write four letters: or else I would probably have written more.

We are all in very good health, except little Jane,⁵ who has got a little cough. I had lately the tooth-ache very bad. I hope that you are also in very good health.

Since we were here, there has been a groping in the pond for eels. Mr. Bragg's two sons went into the mud, (after almost all the water had been let out) and groped with their hands for eels. Those caught were, many of them, very large ones. A number of trout, caught in the river, were afterwards put in that pond.

All of us send our love to you and all our other relations, and our good friends. I am,

Your affectionate Grandson

JOHN STUART MILL

4. TO SIR SAMUEL BENTHAM¹

Acton Place, Hoxton, July 30, 1819

MY DEAR SIR,

It is so long since I last had the pleasure of seeing you that I have almost forgotten when it was, but I believe it was in the year 1814, the first year we were at Ford Abbey. I am very much obliged to you for your inquiries with respect to my progress in my studies; and as nearly as I can remember I will endeavour to give an account of them from that year.

5. Jane Stuart Mill (1816?–1883).

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1. Published in Bain, *JSM*, pp. 6–9. MS not located. A copy of the first three paragraphs, in an unidentified hand, is at Johns Hopkins. On June 17, 1820, Jeremy Bentham in a letter to David Ricardo discussing the importance of securing James Mill's assistance in establishing a "Chrestomathic" school in Bentham's garden, cited

In the year 1814, I read Thucydides, and Anacreon, and I *believe* the Electra of Sophocles, the Phœnissæ of Euripides, and the Plutus and the Clouds of Aristophanes. I also read the Philippics of Demosthenes.

The Latin which I read was only the Oration of Cicero for the Poet Archias, and the (first or last) part of his pleading against Verres. And in Mathematics, I was then reading Euclid; I also began Euler's Algebra, Bonycastle's principally for the sake of the examples to perform. I read likewise some of West's Geometry.

Æt. 9.—The Greek which I read in the year 1815 was, I think, Homer's Odyssey. Theocritus, some of Pindar, and the two Orations of Æschines, and Demosthenes on the Crown. In Latin I read the six first books, I believe, of Ovid's Metamorphoses, the five first books of Livy, the Bucolics, and the six first books of the Æneid of Virgil, and part of Cicero's Orations. In Mathematics, after finishing the first six books, with the eleventh and twelfth of Euclid, and the Geometry of West, I studied Simpson's Conic Sections and also West's Conic Sections, Mensuration and Spherics; and in Algebra, Kersey's Algebra, and Newton's Universal Arithmetic, in which I performed all the problems without the book, and most of them without any help from the book.

Æt. 10.—In the year 1816 I read the following Greek: Part of Polybius, all Xenophon's Hellenics, The Ajax and the Philoctetes of Sophocles, the Medea of Euripides, and the Frogs of Aristophanes, and great part of the Anthologia Græca. In Latin I read all Horace, except the Book of Epodes; and in Mathematics I read Stewart's Propositiones Geometricæ, Playfair's

this "letter, which I believe you [Ricardo] saw, and which though I have never told him [James Mill], I intend to trumpet forth in print" as proof of James Mill's skill as an educator. "The letter in question is one written by John Mill in answer to one from my Brother to me, concerning the progress made by him in his studies." (*The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, ed. Piero Sraffa [11 vols., Cambridge, 1951–55], VIII, 198.) There is no evidence that the letter was printed before Bain published it. Bain records that the letter was given to J. A. Roebuck in 1827 by Jeremy Bentham's amanuensis, and that it was endorsed in Bentham's handwriting:

1819	John Mill	
July	to	Acton
30	S B	place

J Ms and Sisters
Studies since 1814
15 years old
24 May 1821

Sir Samuel Bentham (1757–1831), younger brother of Jeremy, naval architect and engineer, rose to the rank of brigadier general in the service of Russia; in England, was Inspector General of Navy Works, 1795–1807, and Commissioner of the Navy, 1807–12. After retirement he bought an estate in the south of France. This letter may have served to pave the way for Sir Samuel's invitation to JSM to come to France for an extended residence in 1820–21. Its account of his studies should be compared with that in his *Autobiography*.

Handwritten notes:
The letter
1827 ed. 1827
see the letter
see the letter
at Acton
see the letter
at Acton
see the letter
at Acton

Trigonometry at the end of his Euclid, and an article on geometry in the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*. I also studied Simpson's Algebra.

Æt. 11.—In the year 1817 I read Thucydides a second time, and I likewise read a great many Orations of Demosthenes and all Aristotle's Rhetoric, of which I made a synoptic table. In Latin I read all Lucretius, except the last book, and Cicero's Letters to Atticus, his Topica, and his treatise, *De Partitione Oratoria*. I read in Conic Sections an article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (in other branches of the mathematics I studied Euler's Analysis of Infinities and began Fluxions, on which I read an article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*), and Simpson's Fluxions. In the application of mathematics I read Keill's Astronomy and Robinson's Mechanical Philosophy.

Æt. 12.—Last year I read some more of Demosthenes, and the four first Books of Aristotle's Organon, all which I tabulated in the same manner as his Rhetoric.

In Latin, I read all the works of Tacitus, except the dialogue concerning oratory, and great part of Juvenal, and began Quintilian. In Mathematics and their application, I read Emerson's Optics, and a Treatise on Trigonometry by Professor Wallace, of the Military College, near Bagshot, intended for the use of the cadets. I likewise re-solved several problems in various branches of mathematics; and began an article on Fluxions in the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*.

Æt. 13.—This year I read Plato's dialogues called Gorgias and Protagoras, and his Republic, of which I made an abstract. I am still reading Quintilian and the article on Fluxions, and am performing without book the problems in Simpson's Select Exercises.

Last year I began to learn logic. I have read several Latin books of Logic: those of Smith, Brerewood, and Du Trieu,² and part of Burgersdicius, as far as I have gone in Aristotle. I have also read Hobbes' Logic.

I am now learning political economy. I have made a kind of treatise from what my father has explained to me on that subject,³ and I am now reading Mr. Ricardo's work⁴ and writing an abstract of it. I have learnt

2. Seven years later JSM and the friends associated with him in the study club that met at George Grote's home in Threadneedle Street reprinted Du Trieu's work (see *Autobiog.*, p. 85): Philippus Du Trieu, *Manuductio ad Logicam; sive Dialectica Studiosae Juventuti ad Logicam Praeparandae. Ab Editione Oxoniensi anni 1662 Recusa*. Londini, typis B. M'Millan, 1826. A copy of this rare reprint is at the University of Chicago; another is at Somerville College, Oxford.

3. JSM's first instruction in the subject was given to him by his father during their walks (*Autobiog.*, p. 19): "He expounded each day a portion of the subject, and I gave him next day a written account of it, which he made me rewrite over and over again until it was clear, precise, and tolerably complete. . . . The written outline of it which resulted from my daily *compte rendu* served him afterwards as notes from which to write his Elements of Political Economy."

4. David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London, 1817);

a little natural philosophy, and, having had an opportunity of attending a course of lectures on chemistry, delivered by Mr. Phillips, at the Royal Military College, Bagshot,⁵ I have applied myself particularly to that science, and have read the last edition of Dr. Thomson's system of chemistry.

What English I have read since the year 1814 I cannot tell you, for I cannot remember so long ago. But I recollect that since that time I have read Ferguson's Roman and Mitford's Grecian History. I have also read a great deal of Livy by myself. I have sometimes tried my hand at writing history. I had carried a history of the United Provinces from their revolt from Spain, in the reign of Phillip II., to the accession of the Stadtholder, William III., to the throne of England.

I had likewise begun to write a history of the Roman Government, which I had carried down to the Licinian Laws. I should have begun to learn French before this time, but that my father has for a long time had it in contemplation to go to the Continent, there to reside for some time.⁶ But as we are hindered from going by my father's late appointment in the East India House,⁷ I shall begin to learn French as soon as my sisters have made progress enough in Latin to learn with me.

James Mill played a major part in the production of this work, for it was undertaken by his reluctant friend only after Mill's persistent insistence.

Ricardo seems to have been genuinely interested in JSM's development, invited the boy to his home, and on the very day (Sept. 5, 1823) when he was stricken with his fatal illness addressed to James Mill an extended criticism of a paper by JSM on the measure of value (*Works of David Ricardo*, IX, 385-87).

5. For an account of this experience and of the impression made by JSM at the College, see his father's letter to Ricardo, Oct. 26, 1818 (*Works of David Ricardo*, VII, 313-14). Ricardo in reply commented on JSM's retired education and noted the boy's "need of that collision which is obtained only in society, and by which a knowledge of the world and its manners is best acquired" (*ibid.*, p. 326).

6. That James Mill had talked with his friends about moving his family to France as early as the autumn of 1814 may be seen in a letter from Edward Wakefield to Francis Place, Nov. 27, 1814 (Brit. Mus. Add. MSS 35,152, ff. 114-15). On Sept. 6, 1815, James Mill wrote to Francis Place to encourage the latter to join him in moving to the Continent: "I foresee nothing there which would make it uncomfortable for us to reside as soon as we please. Assure yourself that the French people will soon be very quiet & contented slaves, & the despotism of the Bourbons a quiet, gentle despotism. There I may live cheap—my children will acquire a familiarity with the language & with the manners & character of a new people. When they have enough of this we shall remove into Germany, till the same effects are accomplished, & after that if we please, we may go to Italy. We shall then return accomplished people, and, men & women of us, I hope, able to do something for the cause of mankind. We shall, at any rate, have plenty of knowledge; the habit of living upon little; & a passion for the improvement of the condition of mankind" (Brit. Mus. Add. MSS 35,152, ff. 160-64).

7. He was appointed on May 12, 1819, as Assistant to the Examiner of India Correspondence at a salary of £800. Rising by fairly rapid steps, he became head of the office, with the rank of Examiner, on Dec. 1, 1830. JSM was appointed a junior clerk in the office on May 21, 1823.

I have now and then attempted to write Poetry. The last production of that kind at which I tried my hand was a tragedy. I have now another in view in which I hope to correct the fault of this.

I believe my sister Willie was reading Cornelius Nepos when you saw her. She has since that time read some of Cæsar; almost all Phædrus, all the Catiline and part of the Jugurtha of Sallust, and two plays of Terence; she has read the first, and part of the second book of Lucretius, and is now reading the Eclogues of Virgil.

Clara has begun Latin also. After going through the grammar, she read some of Cornelius Nepos and Cæsar, almost as much as Willie of Sallust, and is now reading Ovid. They are both now tolerably good arithmeticians; they have gone as far as the extraction of the cube root. They are reading the Roman Antiquities and the Greek Mythology, and are translating English into Latin from Mair's Introduction to Latin Syntax.

This is to the best of my remembrance a true account of my own and my sisters' progress since the year 1814.

I hope Lady Bentham, and George,⁸ and the young ladies are in good health.

Your obedient, humble servant,

JOHN STUART MILL.

To Sir Saml. Bentham.

5. TO SARAH AUSTIN¹

Montpellier² 17 Janv. 1821

MADAME

Je n'ai reçu que depuis deux jours la lettre dont vous avez bien voulu m'honorer. Croyez, Madame, à ma reconnaissance de tout ce qu'elle contient: reconnaissance qui aurait été grande, si vous aviez écrit sous de

8. George Bentham (1800–1884), son of Sir Samuel, became one of the most distinguished of nineteenth-century botanists.

* * * *

1. *Addressed*: A / Madame Austin. MS at King's.

Sarah Austin, née Taylor (1793–1867), translator and miscellaneous writer. She married John Austin (1790–1859), later known as a writer on jurisprudence, in 1819. Their first home was in Queen Square, in close proximity to the homes of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. JSM quickly grew fond of the Austins, and they were close friends for many years. JSM studied German with Mrs. Austin, and in 1821–22 Roman law with her husband. As a young man JSM often greeted her in his letters as "Dear Mütterlein," but in later life he criticized her severely (*The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography*, ed. Jack Stillinger [Urbana, 1961], pp. 147–48).

2. JSM was the guest of Sir Samuel Bentham and family from June, 1820, to June,