



John Shaw Billings

AN
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
FRAGMENT

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1905

A facsimile copy of the original manuscript

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the author, John Shaw Billings, II, in 1964.

April 1905

Scheme of Autobiography.

- 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 Deceit & Pathfinder.

- 4 Life in Kentucky - The Bedingers.

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

- 6 Washington in 1861. Med Exam Rowell
Dr Mrs Green. Union Hotel Hospital
Hammond and Letterman.
Cliffburne Hospital.
West Philadelphia

- 7 With the 5th Corps, Battle of Chancellorsville
Gettysburg.
- 8 In New York, Draft Riots, Davids
Island. Draft Frauds Watertown,
Bedloe Island. Expedition to Isle
a Vache
- 9 Med Inspector Army of the Potomac -
Wilderness - Zoolds Tavern, Cool
Harbor, In front of Petersburg.
- 10 In Washington, Surg Gen's Office
Divisions of Accounts and Property
Invalid Corps.
11. Library and Museum works
- 12 Hygiene & Hospitals, Baens Hospital
at Soldiers Home, Johns Hopkins
Hospital, ✓
- 13 National Board of Health
- 14 Building of the Army Museum -
Index Catalogue. Index Medicus.
- 15 Statistical works, Census work,
Sanitary Engineer works,
work on ventilation.

Sneyen Generalship, Baxter &

- 16 Lectures at Columbia
Dept of Hygiene Univ of Penn'a
- 17 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 Tristram Bugbee near Providence R.I. My father was the manager of this farm, and my business that sunny 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 Bible through - verse by verse, also Robinson Crusoe, Deerslayer, and the Pathfinder, and the Pilgrims Progress - but I had never done any thinking that I can remember. - But on this memorable afternoon I stood on the hillside and looked over Massachusetts Bay, and wondered where all the Cat boats and Schooners with their white sails came from, and were going to. Then my thought took this turn - "The only person who can know that is God. He knows everything that has been, and is, and is to be. Three hundreds and thousands of years ago he knew that I should be here to day and that each of those 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 & am, knowing just what I know, am here
at this moment, looking at these ships, which
also must be each just where they are,

then 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 trouble,

I did tell her about it that night, and
said that there was no use in worrying any
more.

She looked at me in a scornful
sort of way and said "Who's been teaching
you about preordination?" "Nobody
taught me," said I. "I found it out by
myself — don't you see it must be so."

My life on the Mayers farm, from
about 5 to 10 years of age, was that
of an ordinary farmers boy. I ~~was~~
drove the Miller Cart into Providence about 5
A.M. and left the pens and quarts with
the various customers - mostly of the
wearer class. I dropped four or five 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 horse
for the horse raising of the hay crop, went
to a country school for three months in the
winter, made little clam bakes 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 Deerslayer,
Pathfinder, and Jack o' the Mill.
I had for my own Robinson Crusoe, Marco
Paul in the Streets of Maine, Harry and Lucy,
and Plutarchs 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 Allensville, on the road from
Rising Sun to Vevey. 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, and
incessantly, came across a book - I have
forgotten its title - which had a number
of Latin quotations in it, asked a young
Clergyman (John C Bonham) how I could
learn 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 Mr Bonham
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 bet
myself to pass the entrance examination for the

Sub Freshman class at Miami University
Ox Bow Ohio. I succeeded in doing this in
a year - and passed the examination in the Fall
of 1852. For the first two years I kept
Bachelor Hall, living on bread, milk, potatoes, eggs
ham etc - 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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