

## The Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume 5

THE WORKS  
OF SAMUEL JOHNSON  
*VOLUME 5*  
Samuel Johnson

Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great painter of the present are, had the first fondness for his art excited by the perusal of Richardson's treatise. By his mother's solicitation he was admitted in Westminster-school where he was soon distinguished. He was wont, says Sprat, to relate that he had this defect in his memory at that time, that his teachers never could bring it to retain the ordinary rules of grammar. This is an instance of the natural desire of man to propagate a wonder. It is surely very difficult to tell any thing as it was heard, when Sprat could not refrain from amplifying a considerable incident, though the book to which he prefixed his narrative contained its confutation. A man admitting some things, and rejecting others, an intellectual digestion that concocted the pulp of learning, but refused the husks, had the appearance of an instinctive elegance, of a particular provision made by nature for literary politeness. But in the author's own honest relation, the marvel vanishes: he was he says, such an enemy to all constraint, that his master never could prevail on him to learn the rules without a book. He does not tell that he could not learn the rules; but that being able to perform his exercises without them, and being an enemy to constraint, he spared himself the labour. Among the English poets, Cowley, Milton, and Pope, might be said to lisp in numbers; and have given such early proofs, not only of powers of language, but of comprehension of things. As to more tardy minds seem scarcely credible. But of the learned puerilities of Cowley there is no doubt, since a volume of his poems was not only written, but printed in his thirteenth year; containing, with other poetical compositions, The tragical history of Pyramus and Thisbe, written when he was ten years old; and Constantia and Philetus, written two years after. While he was yet at school he (Typographical errors above are due to

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