

# LOCKE

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### **NOTE.**

In writing the chapters on Locke's Life, I have derived much information from the biographies of Lord King and Mr. Fox Bourne, especially from the latter, which contains a large amount of most interesting documents never before printed. In a work like the present, where numerous foot-notes would be out of place, I am obliged to content myself with this general acknowledgment. I may add that I have also referred to several other authorities, both printed and in manuscript; and, in some cases, I believe that my account will be found more precise than that given in the larger biographies.

## CONTENTS.

### CHAPTER I.

LOCKE'S BOYHOOD — HIS EALY LIFE IN OXFORD..... 4

### CHAPTER II.

MEDICAL STUDIES — PUBLIC EMPLOYMENTS — CONNEXION WITH SHAFTESBURY..... 6

### CHAPTER III.

RESIDENCE IN FRANCE — FURTHER RELATIONS WITH SHAFTESBURY— EXPULSION FROM CHRIST  
CHURCH. .... 13

### CHAPTER IV.

RESIDENCE IN HOLLAND — THE REVOLUTION — RETURN TO ENGLAND — PUBLICATION OF THE  
"ESSAY" AND OTHER WORKS. .... 20

### CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT OATES. FRIENDSHIPS. FURTHER PUBLICATIONS. .... 27

### CHAPTER VI.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS — PUBLIC OCCUPATIONS — RELATIONS WITH THE KING. .... 35

### CHAPTER VII.

CONTROVERSY WITH STILLINGFLEET — OTHER LITERARY OCCUPATIONS — DOMESTIC LIFE — PETER  
KING — LATTER YEARS — DEATH..... 43

### CHAPTER VIII.

ESSAY ON THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING. .... 53

### CHAPTER IX.

LOCKE'S OPINIONS ON RELIGION AND MORALS, AND HIS THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS..... 63

### CHAPTER X.

THE THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AND THE CONDUCT OF THE UNDERSTANDING. .... 69

### CHAPTER XI.

WORKS ON GOVERNMENT, TRADE, AND FINANCE..... 74

### CHAPTER XII.

LOCKE'S INFLUENCE ON THOUGHT. .... 80

# LOCKE.

## CHAPTER I.

### LOCKE'S BOYHOOD — HIS EARLY LIFE IN OXFORD.

JOHN LOCKE, perhaps the greatest, but certainly the most characteristic, of English philosophers, was born at Wrington, a pleasant village in the north of Somersetshire, August 29, 1632. His family, however, resided in the village of Pensford, and the parish of Publow, within a few miles of Bristol. It was there, probably, that Locke spent the greater part of his early life. His mother appears to have died while he was young. From his father, John Locke (b. 1606), who seems to have inherited a fair estate, and who practised, with some success, as a country attorney, he probably derived, if not his earliest instruction, at least some of his earliest influences and some of his most sterling characteristics. "From Mr. Locke I have often heard of his father," says Lady Masham in a MS. letter quoted by Mr. Fox-Bourne in his *Life of Locke*, "that he was a man of parts. Mr. Locke never mentioned him but with great respect and affection. His father used a conduct towards him when young that he often spoke of afterwards with great approbation. It was the being severe to him by keeping him in much awe, and at a distance, when he was a boy, but relaxing, still by degrees, of that severity as he grew up to be a man, till, he being become capable of it, he lived perfectly with him as a friend. And I remember he has told me that his father, after he was a man, solemnly asked his pardon for having struck him once in a passion when he was a boy."

Locke's boyhood coincided pretty nearly with the troubles of the Civil Wars. "I no sooner perceived myself in the world," he wrote in 1660, "but I found myself in a storm which has lasted almost hitherto." His father, when Locke was hardly ten years old, publicly announced, in the parish church of Publow, his assent to the protest of the Long Parliament, and, a few weeks afterwards, took the field, on the Parliamentary side, as captain of a troop of horse in a regiment of volunteers. Though the fortunes of the family undoubtedly suffered from this step on the part of the young attorney, the political and religious interests which it created and kept alive in his household must have contributed, in no small degree, to shape the character and determine the sympathies of his elder son.

Locke, then, may be regarded as having been fortunate in his early surroundings. Born in one of the more charming of the rural districts of England, not far, however, from a city which was then one of the most important centres of commerce and politics; sprung from respectable and well-to-do parents, of whom the father, at least, possessed more than ordinary intelligence; accustomed, from his earliest boyhood, to watch the progress of great events, and to listen to the discussion of great and stirring

questions: there seems to have been nothing in his early life to retard or mar the development of his genius, and much that we may not unreasonably connect with the marked peculiarities, both moral and intellectual, of his subsequent career.

It was probably in the year 1646 that, through the interest of Colonel Popham, a friend and client of his father, Locke was admitted at Westminster School, where, probably in the following year, he was elected on the foundation. Here he must have remained about six years, till his election to a Westminster Studentship at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1652. Of the manner in which Locke spent these years we have no definite information. The stern disciplinarian, Dr. Busby, had been head master for about eight years when he entered the school, and among his schoolfellows, senior to him by about a year, were Dryden and South. The friends whom he made at Westminster, though highly respectable in after-life, did not achieve any great reputation. Of the studies which then constituted the ordinary school curriculum, his matured opinions are to be found in the "Thoughts concerning Education," which will be described in a subsequent chapter. To judge from this book, the impressions left on Locke's mind by our English public school education were not of a pleasant or favourable kind.

Locke appears to have commenced his residence at Christ Church in the Michaelmas Term of 1652, soon after he had turned twenty years of age. His matriculation before the Vice-Chancellor bears date Nov. 27. Since the outbreak of the Civil Wars, both the University and the College had undergone many vicissitudes. At the moment when Locke entered, Cromwell was Chancellor, and Dr. John Owen, who was destined to be for some time the leading resident, had been recently appointed Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University. Owen was an Independent, and, for a divine of that age, a man of remarkably tolerant and liberal views. Though, then as now, a dignitary in Owen's position probably had and could have but little intercourse with the junior members of his society, it is not improbable that Locke may have derived his first bias towards those opinions on the question of religious toleration, for which he afterwards became so famous, from the publications and the practice of the puritan Dean of Christ Church. Locke's tutor was a Mr. Cole, afterwards Principal of St. Mary Hall, but of his relations with his pupil we hear nothing of any importance. Wood calls him a "fanatical tutor," by which, of course, he does not mean more than that he was a puritan.

During the Civil Wars, the discipline and reputation of the Universities, however we may apportion the blame, seem to have suffered most severely. In these troublous times, indeed, it could hardly be otherwise. There is considerable evidence to show that, in the Little or Barbone's Parliament of 1653, there was a serious attempt to suppress the Colleges and Universities altogether, and to apply the proceeds of their estates, as Clarendon tells us, "for the public service, and to ease the people from the payment of taxes and contributions." If such an attempt ever had any chance of success — and from an oration of Dr. Owen we may infer that it had — it must have spread consternation amongst University circles, and been a frequent subject of conversation during the early period of Locke's residence in Oxford. But the Puritan party, which was now in the ascendant, was determined that, at any rate, no handle should be given to the enemy by any lack of discipline or by the infrequency of religious exercises. "Frequent preaching in every house," Anthony à Wood tells us, "was the chief matter aimed at" by the Visitors appointed by Cromwell in 1652. Thus, on June 27, 1653, they ordered that "all Bachelors of Arts and Undergraduates in Colleges and Halls be required, every Lord's day, to give an account to some person of known ability and piety of the sermons they had heard and their attendance on other religious exercises that day. The Heads also or Deputies of the said Societies, with all above the Degree of Bachelor, were then ordered to be personally present at the performance of the said exercise, and to take care that it be attended with prayer and such other duties of religion as are proper to such a meeting." In addition to the Sunday observances, there were also, in most Colleges, if not in all, one or two sermons or religious meetings in the course of the week. Locke, if we may judge from his character in later years, must have occasionally found these tedious, and doubtless lengthy, exercises somewhat irksome and unprofitable. But we do not meet in his writings with any definite complaints of them, as we do of the scholastic disputations and some other parts of the academical