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Knowledge for passion

James O' Landiny, education expert and student watcher, analyses the different approaches to knowledge of "not so proficient" students. This week, medical student Charles Darwin gives us his own opinion about learning science methodology at Edinburgh University.

O'Landiny: So, Mr. Darwin, how come you chose to study medicine here in Edinburgh?

Darwin: Well, it is a sort of... family tradition: my father is a doctor, too, and when science fascinated me a few years ago, he decided to support my aspirations by sending me here at Edinburgh University where also my elder brother was studying. However, what made me choose this course was the hope to have an experimental approach to science; I think that science is not only a matter of brains and speculation, but also a matter of facts!

O'Landiny: Will you be so kind as to tell us where you got this idea of science?

Darwin: Oh, it was my elder brother's entire fault! We are both fond of chemistry, the perfect science of compounds achieved through precise proportions... When we were younger, he had a sort of laboratory with proper apparatus in the garden shed, and there I learnt the meaning of experimental science: we used to go on working until midnight, always creating gases and compounds. I even got nicknamed "Gas" by my schoolmates because of this passion...

O'Landiny: By the way, how was school in Shrewsbury? Are you satisfied with the change of learning methodology?

Darwin: Not at all! In Shrewsbury I had a lot of free time: I used to read Shakespeare and I studied mathematics privately, but I especially spent a lot of time on shooting. You know, I am really good at this sport: I still remember when I shot my first bird... Now I have to

follow all these boring lectures: when I was a child and I could read the *Wonder of Wonders*, I was more interested.

O'Landiny: A common feeling among all the students interviewed. Do you consider yourself a good student on the whole?

Darwin: Not really... I mean, when I am really fond of the subject, such as with Chemistry lessons, I become really interested and I follow with much zeal, but when it comes to *Materia Medica*... However, I think that a strong point in my method is the diversification of my tastes: I love Geology, Ornithology, Zoology and all the scientific fields that concern the natural world. Also, I feel great satisfaction when I can solve a really complex problem, and this acts as a stimulus to knowledge.

O'Landiny: One more question: does your attitude to science cope well with religion? I mean, some of your fellow students seem to have strange opinions about the truths written in the Bible...

Darwin: They are mistaken, of course! I mean, the Bible is an unanswerable authority on morality, and it is not to be questioned with. The work of a scientist needs scientific evidence, whereas the Word of God simply does not need to be proved; Walter Paley showed us that there is a design in nature, and this means that there is a Great Architect that created the hinge of a bivalve in the same way man creates the hinge of a door.

O'Landiny: I am glad to see that young people still make a good use of their brains. Thanks for your collaboration, Mr. Darwin.

Darwin: My pleasure.