

# 2007

## The Linnean Tercentenary

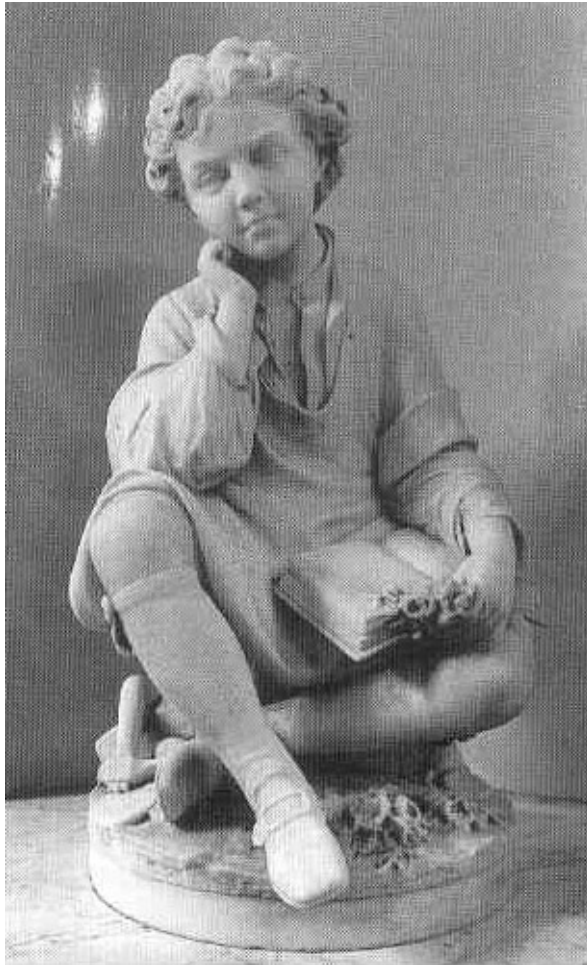
### Some Aspects of Linnaeus' Life

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#### 1. The Young Linnaeus\*

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The March Quiz (*The Linnean* 9(2): 20) featured the photograph, shown below, of a marble statue (height 76 cm) of *The Young Linnaeus*.



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This mid 19th century sculpture of P. Bazzanti of Florence shows him as a young lad, sitting pensively, holding a bunch of flowers, but with his eyes averted from the school book on his lap. He wears a workman's apron and on the base are a pair of shoes with formers in them, a hammer, the blade of a spade and a ball of thread.

From the age of seven until he was about ten, Linnaeus had a private tutor but in 1717 he was sent to school in Växjö, "where rude schoolmasters, with equally rude methods, instilled in the children a taste for learning that must have made the hairs on their heads stand on end". In 1724 he passed – with no great distinction – into the High school.

Many of the early accounts of Linnaeus' life, such as found in Ree's *Cyclopaedia* of 1819 (Vol.xxi)\* maintain he made so little progress at High school that when his father paid a visit to Växjö, in 1726, "his tutors like the sapient instructors of Newton at Cambridge, gave him up as a hopeless dunce. They advised he should be put apprentice to a shoemaker, tailor or some other handicraft trade". The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* of 1830 is more specific about the options stating that "his well meaning father seeing no prospect of him acquiring holy orders determined that the lad should learn a trade by which he might gain a livelihood and proposed to bind him apprentice to a shoemaker". The *American Cyclopaedia* of 1883 on the other hand maintained that his teacher declared he was fitted only for manual work and advised his father to make a carpenter or tailor of him.

However, almost all accounts point out that this strange fate (apprenticeship to shoemaker, carpenter, tailor etc) was averted by the benevolent interference of Dr. Rothman who persuaded his father he might have a distinguished career in medicine and who took the young man into his own house.

The explanation of the workman's apron, hammer, shoes and thread on the statue is to be found in Samuel Smiles *Self-Help with illustrations of conduct and perseverance* (1859) chapter 9: "The greatest have not disdained to labour honestly and usefully for a living, though at the same time aiming after higher things; Linnaeus, the great naturalist, prosecuted his studies while hammering leather and making shoes". As William Stearn pointed out, Smiles was an avid reader and assiduous didactic compiler, he would not have invented this. The tale of course has no foundation in fact but Smiles must have obtained his misinformation from some popular book of that time. A suitable prize will be awarded for the source of Smiles' allusion.

The statue itself is in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. It was reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside; lent by Holt House to Sudley.

The Bazzanti workshop (founded in 1822) specialised in alabaster figures and sepulchral monuments. Other sculptures signed P. Bazzanti include *Benjamin Franklin with Whistle*, dated 1876, University of Pennsylvania collection, and the tomb of Lady Sophia Pierrepont at Holme Pierrepont, Nottinghamshire, executed in 1823.

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\* This impressive entry was written by James Edward Smith, who also contributed some 3,347 other pieces on botany to Ree's *Cyclopaedia* (39 vols, 1802-20) for which he was handsomely paid.