

## A PATRIOTIC SCHOOL-MASTER.

It was recently said by some nice critic, anxious to be just before he was generous, that the book commonly known as Webster's Dictionary, sometimes, with a ponderous familiarity, as *The Unabridged*, should more properly be called *The Webster Dictionary*, as indicating the fact that the original private enterprise had, as it were, been transformed into a joint-stock company, which might out of courtesy take the name of the once founder but now merely honorary member of the literary firm engaged in the manufacture and arrangement of words. Indeed, the name Webster has been associated with such a vast number of dictionaries of all sizes and weights, that it has become to many a most impersonal term, so that we may almost expect in a few generations to find the word "*Webster*" defined in some millennial edition of *The Unabridged* as the colloquial word for a dictionary. The bright-eyed, bird-like-looking gentleman who faces the title-page of his dictionary may be undergoing some metempsychosis, but the student of American literature will at any time have little difficulty in rescuing his personality from unseemly transmigration, and by the aid of historical glasses he may discover that the dictionary-maker, far from being either the arid, bloodless being which his work supposes, or the reckless disturber of philological peace which his enemies aver, was an exceedingly vigilant, public-spirited American, and, if we mistake not, an important person among the founders of the nation.

It seems a little singular that a man so well known in his life-time should not have received at his death the customary second burial in a complete *Life and Writings*; perhaps it may be thought that the stones which have been flung at him have already raised a sufficiently high monument; but the fact remains that beyond the paragraphs in the encyclopedias there is no formal sketch

except that prefixed to the dictionary, enlarged as there stated from one which appeared in the National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans. His writings are scattered in books, tracts, pamphlets, newspapers, and single volumes; twice, we believe, his shorter papers were collected into a volume, but in all these the autobiographic memoranda are not many, though it is possible to form from them some conception of his character. Whatever may have been the reason for neglecting to publish a memoir of Mr. Webster, the delay has not been altogether to his disadvantage. If it is now undertaken, it will probably be better done than it would have been at the time of his death. The dust of several combats has finally settled, and if the work should be executed in the life-time of his contemporaries, it would get the benefit of their personal reminiscences. Besides, the conception of American literary biography, and the perception of comparative distances in it as applied to this subject, would probably be truer than they could have been twenty years ago. In saying this we assume that the written materials for such a life have been preserved. If these exist in the form of his letters and diary, they might also throw considerable light upon the formative period of our national life.

For the first incident to remark is the interruption of his collegiate studies at Yale by the war of the Revolution. He was in his Junior year, a young man of eighteen, when the western part of New England was thrown into confusion by General Burgoyne's expedition from Canada, and for a short time the student was a volunteer under the captaincy of his own father; he graduated in due course, and began to qualify himself for the practice of the law, supporting himself meanwhile by school-teaching, for which he seems to have had no special liking. But though he tried to escape from it,

and began in 1781 the practice of the law, there was no other so ready means of support, and he returned to it, to find there the suggestion of his subsequent work.

“In the year 1782,” he writes, “while the American army was lying on the bank of the Hudson, I kept a classical school in Goshen, Orange County, State of New York. I there compiled two small elementary books for teaching the English language. The country was then impoverished, intercourse with Great Britain was interrupted, school-books were scarce and hardly attainable, and there was no certain prospect of peace.” The “two small elementary books” were Parts I. and II. of *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, comprising an Easy, Concise, and Systematic Method of Education, designed for the use of English Schools in America. One is rather surprised at finding this stately title supported by two dingy little volumes, one a speller and the other a grammar. A third part was afterward issued with the sub-title, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking*; calculated to improve the Minds and refine the Taste of Youth, and also to instruct them in the Geography, History, and Politics of the United States. To which are prefixed Rules in Elocution, and Directions for expressing the Principal Passions of the Mind. (We have tried to indicate something of the laborious emphasis of the title-page.) So the Grammatical Institute, when reduced to its lowest terms, consists of a spelling-book, a grammar, and a reader. The spelling-book blossomed into Webster’s *Elementary*, the grammar was afterward suppressed by the author, who rose to higher views of truth, and the reader, passing to its eleventh edition in 1800, and appearing in 1810 as Hogan’s fifth improved edition, was the forerunner of a number of reading-books all based on the same general plan, though this particular one, we think, has ceased to maintain an independent existence.

The title-page of the reader bears the motto from Mirabeau, “Begin with the infant in his cradle: let the first word

he lisps be Washington.” In strict accordance with this patriotic sentiment, the compiler gives a series of lessons which would not be inappropriate to any girl or boy who in infancy had performed the feat of lisping the easy-going name which Mirabeau himself probably had some struggle to achieve. “In the choice of pieces,” says the editor in his preface, “I have been attentive to the political interests of America. I consider it as a capital fault in all our schools, that the books generally used contain subjects wholly uninteresting to our youth; while the writings that marked the Revolution, which are perhaps not inferior to the orations of Cicero and Demosthenes, and which are calculated to impress interesting truths upon young minds, lie neglected and forgotten. Several of those masterly addresses of Congress, written at the commencement of the late Revolution, contain such noble sentiments of liberty and patriotism that I cannot help wishing to transfuse them into the breasts of the rising generation.” Accordingly he makes abundant room in his book for orations by Hancock, Warren, Livingston, and Joel Barlow, and for poetry by Freneau, Dwight, Barlow, and Livingston again, all kept in countenance by Cicero, Publius Scipio, Shakespeare, and Pope, while a tribute is paid to “Mr. Andrus, of Yale College, since deceased,” by the insertion of *A Dialogue written in the Year 1776*. To plump from Joel Barlow at the North Church in Hartford, July 4, 1787, to a portion of Cicero’s oration against Verres probably produced no severe shock, since both orations were intended as exercises in speaking, and the former by its structure was removed to about the same chronological distance from the young orator as the latter. It would be a curious inquiry how far writers of historical addresses in America have from the beginning been affected by the necessity which a regard for ancient models laid upon them of fitting the facts of our Revolutionary war to oratorical periods, and how far popular conceptions of the beginning of our national life have been formed by the “pieces” which young

Americans have been called upon to speak. As the war itself and the outrages of English misgovernment shrink in the historical perspective, the bubble of oratory looks bigger than ever to us. That the solidarity of the country, toward which colonial life had been inevitably tending, should be secured on paper after a brief struggle was a fact which turned many heads as wise as Noah Webster's, and the consciousness of national independence was so oppressive that it has required more than two generations to subdue it into a self-respectful recognition of national deficiency. In a period when every one was engaged in rearranging the universe upon some improved plan of his own, it is not surprising that those who suddenly found a brand-new nation on their hands should have made serious business of nationalizing themselves. The real elements of the nation were there, to be manifested in ways not wholly perceived by the busily anxious attendants at the birth, and the sponsors who had named the child were rather heavily freighted with the responsibility of the child's behavior.

Hence there was in some minds a discouraged feeling at the general slowness of the country to enter into full possession of its patriotic estate. "A fundamental mistake of the Americans," says our author in his *Remarks on the Manners, Government, and Debt of the United States*, "has been that they considered the Revolution as completed, when it was but just begun. Having raised the pillars of the building they ceased to exert themselves, and seemed to forget that the whole superstructure was then to be erected. This country is independent in government, but totally dependent in manners, which are the basis of government." Under this proposition he instances the several points in which America was still controlled by foreign authority: morals, fashions, and modes of speech. "By making the present taste of Europe our standards, we not only debase our own, but we check the attempts of genius in this country." So far as literature and pronunciation are concerned, Webster was

not a mere unreasoning sufferer from Anglophobia. He probably was impatient of the easy supremacy which Englishmen of the day held over his countrymen in this regard, but he was entirely willing to go back to the England of eighty years previous for his authority. "Very seldom," he says, "have men examined the structure of the language to find reasons for their practice. The pronunciation and use of words have been subject to the same arbitrary or accidental changes as the shape of their garments. My lord wears a hat of a certain size and shape; he pronounces a word in a certain manner; and both must be right, for he is a fashionable man. In Europe this is right in dress; and men who have not an opportunity of learning the just rules of our language are in some degree excusable for imitating those whom they consider as superiors. But in men of science this imitation can hardly be excused. Our language was spoken in purity about eighty years ago; since which time great numbers of faults have crept into practice about the theater and court of London. An affected, erroneous pronunciation has in many instances taken place of the true; and new words or modes of speech have succeeded the ancient correct English phrases. Thus we have, in the modern English pronunciation, their natshures, conjunctshures, constittshutions, and tshumultshuous legislatshures." Was not independence a doubtful possession, if we were yet to be compelled to pronounce our words as if we had a Hibernian king for a school-master? This was, in fact, the king's Irish as set forth by Sheridan.

Webster's patriotism, as shown in the third part of his *Grammatical Institute*, had other and more brilliant flights; but it is worth while to consider a moment the fate of Part II., for its illustration of a less expansive trait of his character. Part II., as we have said, was a grammar, "a plain and comprehensive grammar, founded on the true principles and idioms of the language." Webster had fallen upon Lowth's *Short Introduction to the English Grammar*, and upon the basis of

that book drew up his own grammar for the use of American youth. But the principal result of his work seems to have been the introduction of his own mind to the study. Six years afterward he wrote: "The favorable reception of this prompted me to extend my original plan, which led to a further investigation of the principles of language. After all my reading and observation for the course of ten years, I have been able to unlearn a considerable part of what I learnt in early life, and at thirty years of age can with confidence affirm that our modern grammars have done much more hurt than good. The authors have labored to prove what is obviously absurd, namely, that our language is not made right; and in pursuance of this idea have tried to make it over again, and persuade the English to speak by Latin rules, or by arbitrary rules of their own. Hence they have rejected many phrases of pure English, and substituted those which are neither English nor sense. Writers and grammarians have attempted for centuries to introduce a subjunctive mode into English, yet without effect; the language requires none, distinct from the indicative; and therefore a subjunctive form stands in books only as a singularity, and people in practice pay no regard to it. The people are right, and a critical investigation of the subject warrants me in saying that common practice, even among the unlearned, is generally defensible on the principles of analogy and the structure of the language, and that very few of the alterations recommended by Lowth and his followers can be vindicated on any better principle than some Latin rule or his own private opinion." Accordingly, besides publishing some dissertations on the subject, he issued a new grammar in 1807, based this time on Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley*. This grammar reappears in the prefatory matter of his great dictionary, where he says, "My researches into the structure of language had convinced me that some of Lowth's principles are erroneous, and that my own grammar wanted material corrections. In consequence of

this conviction, believing it to be immoral to publish what appeared to be false rules and principles, I determined to suppress my grammar, and actually did so."

Here we have his frankness of character, his honesty, his force of will, and the impulsiveness, too, with which he took up attractive theories. Perhaps the most comprehensive statement of his ruling principle in all matters of language is that he was governed by *usage*, but did not sufficiently discriminate between usage by educated and usage by uneducated people; he had, indeed, so violent a prejudice against grammarians in general, and so much respect for popular instinct, that it was a recommendation to him when a phrase was condemned by the grammarians, and in common use by the people. For example, he says:<sup>1</sup> "According to the grammars the pronoun *you*, being originally plural, must always be followed by a plural verb, though referring to a single person. This is not correct, for the moment the word is generally used to denote an individual it is to be considered as a pronoun in the singular number; the following verb should be regulated by that circumstance and considered as in the singular. . . . Indeed, in the substantive verb the word has taken the singular form of the verb, *you was*, which practice is getting the better of old rules and probably will be established." But old rules have considerable vitality, and the general opinion still seems to be that if an individual permits himself to be represented by a plural pronoun he must accept all the grammatical consequences; the editorial *we* has had severe struggles in this regard. "I will even venture to assert," he continues in the same letter, "that two thirds of all the corruptions in our language have been introduced by *learned* grammarians, who, from a species of pedantry acquired in schools, and from a real ignorance of the original principle of the English tongue, have been for

<sup>1</sup> A Letter to the Governors, Instructors, and Trustees of the Universities and other Seminaries of Learning in the United States.

ages attempting to correct what they have supposed *vulgar errors*, but which are in fact *established analogies*. . . . In this country it is desirable that inquiries should be free, and opinions unshackled. North America is destined to be the seat of a people more numerous probably than any nation now existing with the same vernacular language, unless one except some Asiatic nations. It would be little honorable to the founders of a great empire to be hurried prematurely into errors and corruptions by the mere force of authority."

This appeal to the pride of the young nation is a curious part of that consciousness of being an American which we are inclined to think was more pronounced in Webster than in any of the leaders of the country.

The reader and grammar, however, recede into obscurity before the shining success of Part I. of A Grammatical Institute, which, at first "containing a new and accurate standard of pronunciation," afterward took the title of The American Spelling-Book, and finally, undergoing considerable revision, passed into the well-known Elementary. "The spelling-book," he says in one of his essays, "does more to form the language of a nation than all other books," and the man who first supplied our young nation with a spelling-book has undoubtedly affected its spelling habits more than any other single person. It is very plain, too, that Webster was a moralist and philosopher as well as a speller. He was by no means restricted in his ambition to the teaching of correct spelling, but he aimed to have a hand in the molding of the national mind and national manners. In his Preface to The American Spelling-Book, he says: "To diffuse an uniformity and purity of language in America, to destroy the provincial prejudices that originate in the trifling differences of dialect and produce reciprocal ridicule, to promote the interest of literature and the harmony of the United States, is the most earnest wish of the author, and it is his highest ambition to deserve the approbation and encouragement of

his countrymen." His spelling-book, accordingly, in its early editions, contained a number of sharp little warnings in the form of foot-notes, which imply that he seized the young nation just in time to prevent the perpetuation of vulgar errors which, once becoming universal, would have required the hereditary Webster to make them the basis of orthoepic canons. Thus *ax* is reprobated when *ask* is intended; Americans were to say *wainscot*, not *winchcott*; *resin*, not *rozum*; *chimney*, not *chimby*; *confiscate*, not *confisticate*. As these warnings disappeared after a few years, it may be presumed that he regarded the immediate danger as past; but the more substantial matters of good morals came to have greater prominence, and in addition to the columns of classified words, which constitute almost the sole contents of the earliest edition, there came to be inserted those fables and moral and industrial injunctions, with sly reminders of the virtue of Washington, which have sunk into the soft minds of three generations of Americans. Webster had the prudence, possibly fortified by his publisher's worldly wisdom, to keep his spelling-book free from the orthographic reforms which he was longing to make, and remembering the stubbornness with which he held to what he regarded as sound grammatical principles, we suspect that his spelling-book cost him many conflicts of conscience. He very early threw out feelers in the direction which he afterward took. In the Preface quoted from above, he says further: "The spelling of such words as publick, favour, neighbour, head, prove, phlegm, his, give, debt, rough, well, instead of the more natural and easy method, public, favor, nabor, hed, proof, flem, hiz, giv, det, ruf, wel, has the plea of antiquity in its favor; and yet I am convinced that common sense and convenience will sooner or later get the better of the present absurd practice." There is a curious foot-note to the Introduction to his Dictionary (edition of 1828) in which he supports the spelling of *favor* by the authority of General Washington, who was a most

unimpeachable authority, since he was the Father of his Country.

His mind was intent on this reform, and so early as 1790 he published A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings, in which he carried out, in part, his notions as to the reform of the American language. The Preface is printed as he decided the whole volume ought to have been, except for the inconvenience of it. "The reeder wil obzerv," he says, "that the orthography of the volum iz not uniform. The reezon iz that many of the essays hav been published before, in the common orthography, and it would hav been a laborious task to copy the whole for the sake of changing the spelling. In the essays ritten within the last yeer, a considerable change of spelling iz introduced by way of experiment. This liberty waz taken by the writers before the age of Queen Elizabeth, and to this we are indeted for the preference of modern spelling over that of Gower and Chaucer. The man who admits that the change of *housbonde*, *mynde*, *ygone*, *moneth*, into *husband*, *mind*, *gone*, *month*, iz an improovment, must acknowledge also the riting of *helth*, *breth*, *rong*, *tung*, *munth* to be an improovment. There iz no alternativ. Every possible reezon that could ever be offered for altering the spelling of wurdz stil exists in full force; and if a gradual reform should not be made in our language, it will prove that we are less under the influence of reezon than our ancestors." The reader can easily see that Webster himself in the above paragraph is rather a timid reformer, attacking such defenseless little words as *is*, and passing by respectfully *would* and *offered*. The general appearance of those essays, in the volume, which are printed after Webster's own heart, leads one happening upon them nowadays into some disappointment, since they are by no means to be ranked with the humorous writings of later misspellers, who have contrived to get some fun out of respectable words by pulling off their wigs and false teeth and turning them loose in the streets.

We fancy that Isaiah Thomas, who

printed this volume, had no great relish for these pranks, and Webster himself was no harum-scarum reformer who regarded himself as appointed trumpet-blower against any Jericho which lay in his way. He was an experimenter, sanguine and shrewd, who made use of the most direct means for securing his results. "In closing my remarks on false or irregular orthography," he writes in one of his essays, "I would suggest that American printers, if they would unite in attempting corrections, would accomplish the object in a very short time. To prove how much influence printers have on this subject, I would state that within my memory they have banished the use of the long *s* in printed books; they have corrected the spelling of household, falsehood, in which the *s* and *h* were formerly united, forming houshold, falshood; and this has been done without any rule given them or any previous concert." The present printer of Webster's Dictionary remembers that when he was a boy of thirteen, working at the case in Burlington, a little, pale-faced man came into the office and handed him a printed slip, saying, "My lad, when you use these words, spell them as here: *theater*, *center*," etc. It was Noah Webster, traveling about among the printing-offices and persuading people to spell as he did, and a better illustration could not be found of the reformer's sagacity, and his patient method of effecting his purpose.

It was in his dictionary, however, that Mr. Webster gathered most completely the results of his work, and illustrated the principles which we have discovered as governing in his life. The first suggestion came to him after publication of his Grammatical Institute, but it was not until 1806 that he published his Compendious Dictionary, and shortly after he began preparation for a larger work, which twenty years later saw the light as The American Dictionary of the English Language, in two volumes quarto. It is worth one's while to read the Author's Preface to the edition of 1828, which continues to be prefixed to The Unabridged, for the sake of getting some

notion of the resolution and independence with which he set about and carried forward a task that might well stagger even a dictionary-maker. It is no part of our purpose to discuss the importance or correctness of the changes he introduced, which were in part accepted, in part rejected by subsequent editors, nor to follow the fortune of a book which has shown itself abundantly able to fight its own battles. But there is a passage in the Preface which is worth quoting as a fresh illustration of what we have pointed out as a ruling principle in Webster's mind. He has been giving reasons why it had become necessary that an English dictionary should be revised to meet the exigencies of American as distinct from English life, and he says finally: "One consideration, however, which is dictated by my own feelings, but which I trust will meet with approbation in correspondent feelings in my fellow-citizens, ought not to be passed in silence; it is this: 'The chief glory of a nation,' says Dr. Johnson, 'arises from its authors.' With this opinion deeply impressed on my mind, I have the same ambition which actuated that great man, when he expressed a wish to give celebrity to Bacon, to Hooker, to Milton, and to Boyle. I do not indeed expect to add celebrity to the names of Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jay, Madison, Marshall, Ramsay, Dwight, Smith, Trumbull, Hamilton, Belknap, Ames, Mason, Kent, Hare, Silliman, Cleaveland, Walsh, Irving, and many other Americans distinguished by their writings or by their science; but it is with pride and satisfaction that I can place them, as authorities, on the same page with those of Boyle, Hooker, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Ray, Milner, Cowper, Davy, Thomson, and Jameson. A life devoted to reading and to an investigation of the origin and principles of our vernacular language, and especially a particular examination of the best English writers, with a view to a comparison of their style and phraseology with those of the best American writers and with our colloquial usage, enables me to affirm, with confidence, that the genuine English idiom is as well preserved by the

unmixed English of this country as it is by the best *English* writers. Examples to prove this fact will be found in the *Introduction* to this work. It is true that many of our writers have neglected to cultivate taste, and the embellishments of style; but even these have written the language in its genuine *idiom*. In this respect Franklin and Washington, whose language is their hereditary mother-tongue, unsophisticated by modern grammar, present as pure models of genuine English as Addison and Swift. But I may go further, and affirm with truth that our country has produced some of the best models of composition. The style of President Smith; of the authors of the *Federalist*; of Mr. Ames; of Dr. Mason; of Mr. Harper; of Chancellor Kent; [the prose]" (happily bracketed reservation) "of Mr. Barlow; of Dr. Channing; of Washington Irving; of the legal decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States; of the reports of legal decisions in some of the particular States; and many other writings, — in purity, in elegance, and in technical precision, is equaled only by that of the best British authors, and surpassed by that of no English compositions of a similar kind."

The extracts given above would seem sufficient to establish what we have said respecting Webster's patriotism, but there is one other passage which should be read, as it sets forever at rest any doubts that might linger as to the ruling purpose of this extraordinary man. In the Appendix to his *Dissertations on the English Language* is an essay on the necessity, advantages, and practicability of reforming the mode of spelling, and of rendering the orthography of words correspondent to the pronunciation. "A capital advantage of this reform," he says, "in these States would be, that it would make a difference between the English orthography and the American. This will startle those who have not attended to the subject; but I am confident that such an event is an object of vast political consequence. For the alteration, however small, would encourage the publication of books in our own country. It would render it in some meas-

ure necessary that all books should be printed in America. The English would never copy our orthography for their own use; and consequently the same impressions of books would not answer for both countries. The inhabitants of the present generation would read the English impressions; but posterity, being taught a different spelling, would prefer the American orthography. Besides this, a *national language* is a bond of *national union*. Every engine should be employed to render the people of this country *national*; to call their attachments home to their own country; and to inspire them with the pride of national character. . . . Let us then seize the present moment, and establish a *national language* as well as a national government. Let us remember that there is a certain respect due to the opinions of other nations. As an independent people, our reputation abroad demands that in all things we should be federal, be *national*, for if we do not respect *ourselves* we may be assured that *other nations* will not respect us. In short, let it be impressed upon the mind of every American that to neglect the means of commanding respect abroad is treason against the character and dignity of a brave, independent people."

A patriotism so rampant as this is likely to tilt at windmills, but it cannot be carelessly laughed away as a mere vagary. It was the passion of a hard-headed, industrious man, whose work has entered into the common life of the nation more distinctly than has that of any other American, unless Franklin be excepted. There is unquestionably a parochial sort of nationality which it is easy to satirize. No one could well set it out in stronger light than Webster himself has done in the passages quoted above. He is judiciously silent concerning the American poets of his time, being careful even — most unkindest cut! — not to commit himself to the support of Joel Barlow's heroic verse; but he produces a list of American prosaists whom he seems to array in a sort of spelling-match against their English fellows. He has a proper sense of the importance

of language to a nation, and appears to be perplexed by the implied question, If Englishmen and Americans speak the same language, how in the world are we to tell them apart and keep them apart? Then again, since there has been a revolution resulting in governmental independence, what stands in the way of a complete independence, so that the spick-and-span new nation may go to the language tailors and be dressed in a new suit of parts of speech? "Let us seize the present moment," he cries, "and establish a national language as well as a national government." Never was there such a chance, he seems to say, for clearing out the rubbish which has accumulated for generations in our clumsy, inelegant language. Hand me the Bible which people have foolishly regarded as a great conservator of the English tongue, and I will give you a new edition, "purified from the numerous errors." Knock off the useless appendages to words which serve only to muffle simple sounds. Innocent iconoclast with his school-master ferule! Yet the changes in the language which have ever since been taking place, and are still in progress, coincide in many respects with his summary decisions, and fresh attention has of late been called in the highest court of language in the country to the wrongs suffered by Englishmen and Americans in the matter of orthography.

It is worth our while to make serious answer to this serious proposition, since the true aspect of native literature may perhaps thus be disclosed. The Revolution, which so filled Webster's eyes, was unquestionably a great historic event by reason of its connection with the formal institution of a new nation, but the roots of our national life were not then planted. They run back to the first settlements and the first charters and agreements, nor is the genesis of the nation to be found there; sharp as are the beginnings of our history on this continent, no student could content himself with a conception of our national life which took into account only the events and conditions determined by the



people and soil of America. Even in actual relations between America and Europe there never has been a time when the Atlantic has not had an ebbing as well as a flowing tide, and the instinct which now sends us to the Old World on passionate pilgrimages is a constituent part of our national life, and not an unnatural, unfilial sentiment. In the minds of Webster and many others, England was an unnatural parent, and the spirit of anger, together with an elation at success in the severing of governmental ties, made them impatient of even a spiritual connection. But the Revolution was an outward, visible sign of an organic growth which it accelerated, but did not produce, and the patriotic outcries of the generation were incoherent expressions of a profounder life which had been growing, scarcely heeded, until wakened by this event. The centrifugal force of nationality was at work, and it is possible now, even from our near station, to discover the conjunction of outward circumstance and inward consciousness which marks nationality as an established fact. It was a weak conception of nationality which was bounded by Webster's definition, but his belief in his country and his energetic action were in reality constantly surpassing that conception. In spite of the disposition to regard a written constitution as the bottom fact, there was the real, substantial, organic nation, and that saved the paper nation from erasure—a fate that easily overtakes the South American republics. A nation which could immediately be placed in the world's museum, duly ticketed and catalogued, with its distinct manners, dress, language, and literature,—this was the logical conception which resulted from theories that held the nation itself to be the creation of popular will or historic accident; but a nation slowly struggling against untoward outward circumstance and inward dissension, collecting by degrees its constituent members, forming and reforming, plunging with rude strength sometimes down dangerous ways, but nevertheless growing into integral unity,—this has been the histor-

ical result of the living forces which were immanent in the country when the nation was formally instituted.

Now there never has been a time from Webster's day to this, when Americans have not believed and asserted that nationality consisted mainly in independence, and waxed impatient not merely of foreign control and influence, but even of hereditary influence: the temper which calls for American characteristics in art and literature is scarcely less hostile to the past of American history than to the present of European civilization. It is a restless, uneasy spirit, that is goaded by self-consciousness. It finds in nature an aider and abettor; it grows angry at the disproportionate place which the Cephissus, the Arno, the Seine, the Rhine, and the Thames hold on the map of the world's passion. We are all acquainted with the typical American who added to his name in the hotel book, on the shores of Lake Lugano, "What pygmy puddles these are to the inland seas of tremendous and eternal America." But these are coarser, more palpable signs of that uneasy national consciousness which frets at a continued dependence on European culture.

There is no doubt that Webster was right when he set himself the task of Americanizing the English language by a recourse to the spelling-book. He has succeeded very largely in determining the forms of words, but he did more than this, while he failed in the more ambitious task he set himself. He did more, for by his shrewdness and his ready perception of the popular need, he made elementary education possible at once, and furnished the American people with a key which moved easily in the lock; he failed where he sought the most, because language is not a toy nor a patent machine which can be broken, thrown aside at will, and replaced with a better tool ready-made from the lexicographer's shop. He had no conception of the enormous weight of the English language and literature when he undertook to shovel it out of the path of American civilization. The stars in their courses fought against him. It is so still. We

cannot dispense with European culture, because we refuse to separate ourselves from the mighty past which has settled there in forms of human life unrepresented among us. We cannot step out of the world's current, though it looks sluggish beside our rushing stream, because there is a spiritual demand in us which cries louder than the thin voice of a self-conscious national life. This demand is profoundly at one with the deeper, holier sense of national being which does not strut upon the world's stage. The humility of a great nation is in its reverence for its own past, and, where that is incomplete, in its admiration for whatever is noble and worthy in other nations. It is out of this reverence and humility and this self-respect that great works in literature and art grow, and not out of the overweening sensitiveness which makes one's nationality only a petty jealousy of other people.

The patriotic school-master who in the dark twilight of his country's new institution turned to the making of elementary school-books might well find his reproduction at the present time. A certain instinctive sense of nationality, poorly disclosed in his thin pleading for the mere signs of national life, led him to tasks which have been of profound value. He made a speller which has sown votes

and muskets; he made, alone, a dictionary which grew, under the impulse he gave it, into a national encyclopædia, possessing now an irresistible momentum. His failures we may smile at; the substantial success remains. So, doubtless, in the more complex life of the present day, when gloom overcasts the political landscape, when literature seems a spiritless thing, and no great names or works rise above the horizon, the humbler elements at work may some day be proved to have been laboring more efficaciously than we now guess. We are all making ready for a new start in history, but history has an inconvenient way of disregarding the almanacs, and it may be that while we are beating our centennial drums no great deeds or great books will come to the call. Yet in the somewhat desperate encounter with that worst form of ignorance which is ignorant of its own ignorance, literature in the person of its knights may take courage from the growing resolution to make the most of our own past. Certain it is that a sturdy belief in the nation as a divine fact is the condition of hearty literary work, and the patriotic school-master of to-day, whether holding the pen or the ferule, has the advantage over Webster in being able to look before and after from a point a little further along in the nation's course.

*Horace E. Scudder.*

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## THE SANITARY DRAINAGE OF HOUSES AND TOWNS.

### I.

It is proposed in these papers to consider a subject which, one might almost say, was born — or reborn — but a quarter of a century ago, and which has contended with much difficulty in bringing itself to the notice of the public. Indeed, it is only within the past ten years that it has made its way in any important degree outside of purely professional literature.

Happily men, and women too, are fast coming to realize the fact that humanity is responsible for much of its own sickness and premature death, and it is no longer necessary to offer an apology for presenting to public consideration a subject in which, more than in any other, — that is, the subject of its own healthfulness and the cleanliness of its own living, — the general public is vitally interested.

The evils arising from sanitary neg-