

## DANIEL WEBSTER.

THE hundredth anniversary of Daniel Webster's birth starts a train of mingled reflections. A fortune of singular infelicity has befallen this great statesman's fame. During the period that has intervened since his death in 1852, now almost three full decades of years, his memory has suffered under a most extraordinary fatality of pertinacious public misunderstanding of his position, and consequent blind detraction from his merit. There has been, too, a certain element of undeniable nobleness in the indignant reprobation, as it were vicariously, and, therefore, unjustly, visited upon his name, that all the time went far to clothe it in the general esteem with the attributes of a divine judicial sentence severely accordant with desert. The voice of the people was the voice of God, until at length the accepted and unchallenged voice of God bade fair to become, in turn, the final and irreversible voice of the people. And thus it happens that the one selected man who, by eminence among all our lately finished hundred years of wise Americans, did most by his living labors to postpone the crisis that so nearly cost us our national life, who then, by his transmitted influence, did most to carry us safely through that crisis when it could no longer be postponed, who even yet, by his unexhausted, although unrecognized and unacknowledged, exertion of power from his grave, is destined in the future to do most toward making us really and vitally whole again (for such, we may at length fairly trust, is indeed to be the happy issue), after the dangerous and doubtful period of political experiment that necessarily supervened—that man, a true human saviour to this American nation, as much, at least, as any one man is rightly to be named for such a saviour, Daniel Webster, is now either not known, except by tradition, or else so falsely known that he might almost prefer not to be known at all to the vast majority of the great new nation which he so largely contributed to save. This is a doubly injurious injustice; injurious, first, to the disparaged name, but injurious not less to those to whom the name is thus disparaged.

Perhaps no man ever lived that, quite apart from any adventitious circumstances affecting him, such as accident of birth, or dignity of station, apart indeed from actual achievement of his own, by mere and pure force of inherent character and personality, so impressed the generation to which he belonged as did Daniel Webster. There was something almost

supernatural about it. The adjectives by which he was customarily characterized, in the common and instinctive speech of the people, attributed a kind of divinity to the man. He was the "godlike Daniel" to his countrymen in general, who thus called him by a phrase which, with a certain semi-conscious humor in it racy of the national character, redeemed its own excess of veneration by a corrective dash of associated familiarity. But no less the educated men among his fellows were accustomed to employ in their own more scholarly way a similar language. To them, he was "Jove," a "descended god," a "demi-god," "the Olympian." If he went abroad, some Englishman said he "looked like a cathedral," or Sydney Smith, with irreverent homage to his Titan might, said he "was a steam-engine in breeches."

This imposing effect of Webster's personal presence was partly due to the remarkable physical mold in which he was cast. He was not gigantic in proportions, was not even greatly above the medium height; but somehow the beholder took from him an instantaneous and overwhelming impression of immense mass, weight, momentum,—in one word, of power. He was always one of the sights of Boston, where his presence in the streets made the neighboring buildings look smaller. Men from the country, that did not know who it was, would stand to gaze at him. Of course, as soon as you were aware that a physical frame so magnificent was the abode of a moral and intellectual nature not unfit to inhabit it, the pleasurable inspiration of wonder and awe that you felt in beholding was more than doubled. But when, in addition, you could further assure yourself that this man was the great lawyer, the great statesman, the great orator, of his country and time, why, naturally, the enthusiasm of admiration and delight of which you were conscious in his presence became something extraordinary.

A gentleman whose name, if it were proper to mention it, would be widely recognized as that of an author of rare merit, has told the present writer that in the time of his own early manhood he used to go, when in Washington, to the Senate Chamber and sit by the hour for no other purpose than to look at Daniel Webster. That this instance of generous young devotion at the shrine of manly genius and of personal power nobly incarnated was by no means exceptional, is amply shown in the very remarkable terms of the encomiums which with one con-

sent were passed upon him by the periodical press, the rostrum, the pulpit, and the bar of the whole country, at his death. Obituary newspaper-writing is quite apt, of course, to be extravagant, and funeral eloquence is not to be taken as sober history. This must be remembered; but it still remains true that, in these various tributes to the memory of Daniel Webster, a certain sentiment of homage and ascription was present that almost literally deified the man whom it exalted. The idolatry was not an idolatry of mere affection. It was much rather an idolatry of reverence and awe. The dead divinity seemed in some cases even to be hated and feared, while he was worshiped; for a strange discord of execration in certain quarters, as if from some unfriendly demoniacal spirit unawares in possession, mingled at the obsequies with the high pæans that chanted his praises.

This strain of posthumous eulogy, it is just to say, was but a return, on the part of the public, for a single remorseful and expiatory moment, to that becoming temper of appreciation toward Daniel Webster which not quite two years before, at a memorable crisis, it abruptly and passionately lost. Daniel Webster died in October, 1852, in the seventy-first year of his age. It was in March of the second year preceding that the first murmur arose of a popular reprisal upon his fame, which refused to be altogether silent at the great man's funeral, and which, in a muffled under-tone of disparagement by neglect, could be detected amid the multitudinous chorus of rejoicing lately heard over our hundred years of prosperous national history, retrieved from irreparable disaster and loss so largely through his own labors and sacrifices. An act of just though tardy expiation toward the memory of Daniel Webster would have constituted one of the most befitting rites that we could have performed to signalize the observance of our national centennial year.

On the 7th of March, 1850, Webster delivered in the Senate of the United States a speech (on the relations of slavery to the Union) the effect of which upon his own chances of fame has been, up to the present moment, in the highest degree unfavorable. That speech turned against the orator nearly the whole force of the particular literary mode then rapidly gaining the ascendant in this country. The time since then has been an era of sentimentalism in literature, as it has been an era of sentimentalism in politics and in religion. Webster has been judged according to the fashion of such an era. There will succeed a different era, having different canons of judgment, and Webster will be judged differently. The pendulum al-

ready commences its return toward the opposite extreme of oscillation. This, however, is anticipation, and we now deal with retrospect. The tide of political opinion, held for a time from ebbing by the almost sole contrary attraction of Webster's own example and influence while he yet lived, receded with precipitate rapidity after his death, and left the great bulk of his name, it well might seem, a wreck forever on the strand. The reaction against Webster in popular regard resulting from this celebrated speech found powerful and beautiful expression in one of Mr. Whittier's finest poems, a piece significantly entitled "Ichabod!" Since then, in a published poem on Webster, Mr. Whittier has evinced some disposition to unwrite his earlier branding lyric of dispraise.

What, now, was there in Webster's 7th of March speech that properly inspired a lyric dirge like "Ichabod"? How did Webster obliterate then, at a stroke, the glorious record of his past public life? These are questions rather for a volume in answer (and the volume should be a narrative, not an argument), than for an article like this. But the case is remarkable, and what it is may at least be indicated here. Thirty years before his speech of the 7th of March, Webster had stood on Plymouth Rock and pronounced an oration which may not untruthfully be said to have founded a new order of eloquence peculiar to this country,—the eloquence of patriotism,—so completely equaling then, if he did not even surpass, the great occasion with his utterance, that immediately, and permanently thenceforth, the occasion was conspicuous by the speech, rather than the speech conspicuous by the occasion. A few years later he had stood on Bunker Hill, and, in one great act of oratory, at the same time created the granite monument which was yet to spring from the historic sod under his feet, and made that future monument at once commanding and superfluous by an associated production of genius destined to be more enduring than itself. Again, in commemoration of the illustrious occasion when, by a most impressive coincidence, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, twin founders of the republic, added to the auspices of their country's natal day by concurrent sudden deaths, at a ripe old age, on the Fourth of July, 1826, the semi-centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, he had delivered yet another of those unequalled occasional addresses which from his lips wrought so powerfully on the intellect, the heart, and the conscience of the nation. Once again, and perhaps chief of all, in the Senate of the United States, in 1830 (just twenty years before those fatal nones of March, 1850), he had

spoken for the Union and the Constitution in reply to the graceful, spirited, and seductive sophistries of Hayne, and had won the name of expounder of the Constitution and defender of the Union. During the two decades of years that intervened, he had taught the people only the noblest and purest lessons of grave political and social wisdom, always preferring in his inculcation the true before the agreeable, in accordance with his famous favorite motto, *vera pro gratis*. Such had been the tenor of a public career that during the space of one whole generation had commanded equally the veneration and the grati-

tude of his countrymen to a degree probably never exceeded in the history of the human race, when suddenly, by a single day's deed, with its sequel of consistent conduct, he, as so many will have it, branded "Ichabod" (the glory has departed) in an ineffaceable legend over the entire surface of his life.

This is the case, and the case, I say, is remarkable. The problem it suggests is one to be solved only in a dispassionate judicial study of Webster's life. That study remains to be written. This centennial year for Webster's memory would be a fit occasion for the appearance of the needed volume. Who will write it?

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LOVERS IN THE TROPICS.

WEST-INDIAN IDYL.

PHILIP.

LOVE, the winds long to lure you to their home,  
 To tempt you on beneath the northern arch!  
 There, in the swift, bright summer, you and I  
 May loiter where the elms' deep shadows lie;  
 There, by our household fire, bid Yule-tide come,  
 And winter's cold, and every gust of March.

CLEMENTINE.

Stay, O stay with me here, and chasten  
 Your heart still longing to wander more!  
 Ever the restless winds are winging,  
 But the white-plumed egrets, skyward-springing,  
 Over our blue sea hover, and hasten  
 To light anew on their own dear shore.

PHILIP.

The lips grow tired of honey, the cloyed ear  
 Of music, and of light the eyelids tire.  
 I weary of the sky's eternal balm,  
 The ceaseless droop and rustle of the palm;  
 Only your whisper, love, constrains me here  
 From that brave clime I would you might desire.

CLEMENTINE.

Cold, ah! cold is the sky, and leaden,  
 There where earth rounds off to the pole!  
 Still by kisses the moments number,—  
 Here are sweetness, and rest, and slumber,  
 All to lighten and naught to deaden  
 The heart's low murmur, the captured soul.

PHILIP.

Dear, I would have you yearn, amid these sweets,  
 For the clear breeze that blows from waters gray,—  
 For some fresh, northern hill-top, overgrown  
 With bush and bloom and brake to you unknown;  
 There, while the hidden thrush his song repeats,  
 The rose shall tinge your cheek the livelong day.