

DANIEL AND EZEKIEL WEBSTER.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

BAR ASSOCIATION OF GRAFTON AND COOS
COUNTIES.

By HON. HENRY P. ROLFE.

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING AT LANCASTER.

FEBRUARY 2, 1886.

CONCORD:

REPUBLICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION, RAILROAD SQUARE.

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ADDRESS.

At the age of fifteen, Daniel Webster's health was not good, and he was far from strong. He could do only the light work about the house, the stable, and the farm. On the other hand, Ezekiel, two years older, was a sturdy, strong, well made young man, who did his full share of hard farm-work with the "hired hands." He lisped considerably when talking, but Daniel spoke in a full, clear, deliberate manner. Both boys were studious: a lady who attended school with both of them has said that she never saw either of them idle in school.

Their father did not have an abundance of this world's goods. He had been one of the first settlers in Salisbury, establishing himself on the extreme frontier; and he had spent a large share of his life in the service of his country, with poor pay, or no pay at all. When he began to think about the education of his sons, his farm was under a mortgage, but he had determined to "raise his children to a condition better than his own." Consequently he sent Daniel to Phillips academy in Exeter, then the capital of the state. Both boys had attended every day their own district school while it lasted, and the schools in adjoining districts frequently were arranged so as to afford one or two months more instruction to pupils living near by. So, when at the age of fifteen his father sent him to Exeter, Daniel was proficient in all English branches. His school-masters had been Master Chase, and, specially, the renowned James Tappan, whom he afterward mentions in the most endearing terms. His health improved with study, and his intellect brightened and

strengthened as his body developed and grew strong. Exeter academy was an expensive school for the father's straitened means, and the son's intellectual growth seemed to outstrip the conditions and opportunities around him. So, after two terms, or six months, at Exeter, the father determined to send his son speedily to college, and with this object made arrangements to place him at Boscawen under the instruction of the Rev. Samuel Wood, a most benevolent man and excellent teacher. He kept his determination from the boy for some time, and at length told him he would carry him over to Boscawen and place him in the care and under the tuition of Mr. Wood, where he could "do chores" and thereby pay a good share of his expenses.

Daniel had heard a great deal of Dartmouth college, and had longed for the advantages and delights that an education there would confer upon him, but had never dared to expect, or even hope, that he could be the happy recipient of them.

When he came near the end of the journey to Boscawen, and while ascending the long, steep hill that led to Mr. Wood's house, the father, for the first time, opened to his son his decision to send him to college. O happy day for Daniel Webster! O happier day for Dartmouth college! With a heart full of filial love and overflowing with filial gratitude, the boy laid his dizzy head upon the paternal shoulder and wept, but said nothing. Late in after life he wrote,—“The thing appeared so high, and the expense and sacrifice it would cost my father so great, I could only press his hand and shed tears. Excellent, excellent parent! I cannot think of you now without being a child again!” The lips that never afterwards failed to express the emotions of that great, noble, loving heart were dumb with overpowering thankfulness, and the tongue that afterwards thrilled the civilized world with its eloquence “cleaved to the roof of his mouth.”

Later, his father sent for him, and he went home for the hay-making,—but the hay-field was lonely compared with Mr. Wood's study; turning the mown grass was dull work compared with turning the leaves of *Don Quixote*, or the translation of Vergil and Cicero. He thought his scythe hung more gracefully, and more to suit him, on the limb of an apple-tree than in his hands!

Daniel went to Hanover on horseback to enter college, and

carried his bed, bedding, clothing, and books with him. His way led through New Chester, Hill, Danbury, Grafton, Orange, Canaan, Enfield, and Lebanon. He was poorly prepared for college, his preparatory course having lasted only eleven months. He himself said, "I was not fitted for college." There, as everywhere else, he was never idle. In addition to his prescribed studies and duties he read much, and paid his board for an entire year by superintending the publication of a little weekly paper: during the winter vacations he taught school. When he went away one winter he wore away Benjamin Clark's new ten dollar beaver hat: hats at that time were made of real beaver fur. He was quite a swell as school-master, with this elegant new head-covering. His class-mate, Clark, supposed it was surely lost. Clark had searched high and low for his new hat, and was obliged to put up with an old one that he had. When Daniel came back to college with the hat, Clark shook hands with him over the joke, and they were good friends; and so glad was the latter to find that his nice new hat, the envy of the college, had not been stolen, that they remained good friends ever after this so called "college prank."

While Daniel for two years and a half was exulting in the enjoyment of educational advantages, Ezekiel, whom he loved with all the tenderness of youthful brotherly ardor, was at home, at work early and late on the farm helping his father and contributing to the support of Daniel in college, without murmuring or objecting. The latter began to feel uneasy at his brother's situation. It troubled him to think that Ezekiel, with many gifts as great as his own, should be plodding at home on the farm, while he himself was obtaining a liberal education. Though Daniel was unhappy at his brother's prospects, what could be done? To educate one son at Dartmouth seemed almost more than his father, with limited means and a mortgaged farm, could do. When Daniel had been at college one year and two terms, and was paying many of his own expenses by the labors above described, he took courage for his "brother Zeke" and went home to spend his May vacation. The two boys went to bed, and through the live-long night held serious consultation about the elder brother's chances to fit for college and complete his education. Daniel was two years his junior, and already

nearly half through his collegiate course : the elder brother was at least five years behind him. They rose after sunrise without having shut their eyes, but they had settled their plans. All the pros and cons had been weighed and considered, and, although it might seem late in life for Ezekiel to commence his preparation for college, it was settled that Daniel should propose to his father that Ezekiel should be sent to school and to college. This was the first cause of importance that the great advocate undertook, and it was before a most appreciative tribunal, and he had a client whom he adored. The father was old, his health not good, his circumstances not easy, the farm must be carried on, the mother and two sisters tenderly cared for : when Ezekiel should go away the mainstay of the family would be gone.

"Father" said Daniel, "I am extremely unhappy at Ezekiel's prospects in life. Nature has been bountiful in gifts to him. In personal appearance, in manly beauty, he is inferior to no person that I ever saw. It is true, he lisps a little, but, with me, this only adds a charm to his speech. But he has rare qualities both of head and heart, and when his natural endowments shall be improved and polished by a liberal education, he will be a man that his father, his mother, his brother, and his sisters will be proud of. I cannot bear to be enjoying advantages denied to him. For myself, I can see my way through. My pathway to respectability, to knowledge and self-protection, is clear before me. I am nearly half-way through college, and, by editing a paper at Hanover and teaching school for the past two winters, I have been able thus far to pay more than half my bills. I am no longer despondent about myself. I am full of courage. I can keep school and stay more than four years in college, if necessary, if only my brother can have the advantages that I am enjoying. I hope never to fail in affectionate veneration for you and mother, nor in tender regard for my sisters ; but I want Ezekiel to have the advantages which I have, and then they will afford me more than double enjoyment. It will sadden all my future life to have him denied the privileges which he deserves as much as—yes, more than I."

The reply of that father, who "shrunk from no sacrifice to serve his country through the fire and blood of a seven years' revolutionary war," entitles him to the appellation of "excel-

lent, excellent parent." "My son," said he, "I *have* lived and *am* living but for my wife and my children. I have but little of this world's goods, and on that little I put no value, except as it may be useful to them. To carry you both through college, my son, will take all that I am worth, and I am willing to run the risk myself; but when it comes to your mother and sisters, it is a more serious matter. You are all equally dear to me, and had it pleased heaven to endow me with riches, there is no privilege of education that should be denied any one of you. Ezekiel and you must settle this matter with your mother and sisters; if their free consent is obtained, you shall both have a collegiate education, and I will put my trust in Providence and get along to the end of life as well as I can."

There was a grave family council of father, mother, sons, and daughters. For a time the father sat in silence. At length he said to the mother.—"I have had a long talk with Daniel about Ezekiel's going to college, and the hearts of both the boys seem to be set upon it; but I have told them that I could promise nothing without the free consent of their mother and sisters. The farm is already mortgaged, and if we send Ezekiel to college it will take all we have; but the boys think they can take care of us."

Parents and children mingled their tears together. Daniel had gone, and now Ezekiel, the strong staff upon which the aged father and mother and the unmarried dependent sisters were leaning, must be separated from them and their home no longer be cheered daily by his presence.

It was a moment of intense interest to all the family. The mother was a high-minded, stout-hearted, sagacious woman, and it did not take her, the mother of two such boys, long to decide the matter. She at once saw the reasonableness of the request, and the great advantage to be derived by her son if his request should be granted, and she gave her decision in these words: "I have lived long in this world, and have been happy in my children. If Daniel and Ezekiel will promise to take care of me in my old age, I will consent to the sale of all our property at once, that they may enjoy with us the benefits of what remains after our debts have been paid."

O excellent, excellent father! Noble, noble mother! Dear

devoted sisters! The die was cast, and with tears and benedictions the family submitted to a temporary separation. But the farm was not sold, and the parents continued in comfortable circumstances to the end of life. One of the sisters was happily married and became the mother of the well known and accomplished scholar, diplomat, and orator, Charles B. Haddock, while both spent useful and happy lives and left behind them good and honored names.

Daniel went back to Hanover; Ezekiel took his bundle of clothes and books to Dr. Wood's, and began the study of Latin and Greek, for he, like Daniel, was well up in the English branches. There was an excellent academy at Salisbury, and as Daniel had been allowed two terms at Exeter, Ezekiel was to be allowed two terms at Salisbury, after which he was to return to Dr. Wood's. He spent six months at the academy, and then completed his preparatory course with Dr. Wood, where his expenses were about one dollar a week. It is fair to presume the elder brother was as well fitted as the younger, for he was quite as studious, although he distrusted his ability to get on. But Daniel wrote him frequently from Hanover, cheered him up, and allured him along.

In the spring of 1801, Ezekiel entered Dartmouth, before his brother had graduated. In August of the same year Daniel took his diploma, his brother having already accomplished one year of his collegiate education.

It has often been said that Daniel was exasperated with the treatment of the faculty in not giving him the valedictory, and indignantly tore up and threw away his diploma, exclaiming, "Dartmouth college will hear from me hereafter." This story has no foundation in truth whatever, and no graduate of the college ever cherished more personal regard for the professors and more veneration for his alma-mater than did Daniel Webster.

Theodore Parker, in his sermon on Mr. Webster's death, preached in the Melodian in October, 1852, remarked that "Dr. Wood had small Latin and less Greek." Mr. Parker was misinformed. Dr. Wood graduated at Dartmouth in 1797 with the highest honors of his class, and was awarded and delivered the valedictory address at commencement. He studied theology, was licensed to preach, and began his ministry in the October

following. He prepared four score of young men for college, and was considered a ripe scholar for his time. The writer of this article was born and reared in the same school-district where Dr. Wood resided during all his life in Boscawen, and knows he was an excellent linguist and an eminent divine. It will not be supposed that Daniel Webster was taken from so distinguished and competent a teacher and classical scholar as Dr. Abbott of Phillips Exeter academy to complete his preparatory course and put on the finishing touch with Dr. Wood, if the latter had "small Latin and less Greek." He was, as I have said, an excellent classical scholar and a learned man, and the degree of doctor of divinity was conferred upon him at a time when that honor signified something.

DIPLOMA.

I desire to call attention to another mistake of Mr. Parker's, made in the same sermon, and which was current as a tradition a long time before Mr. Webster's death. He said,—“He graduated in his twentieth year, largely distinguished for power as a writer and speaker, though not much honored by the college authorities. So he scorned his degree, and, when the faculty gave him their diploma, he tore it in pieces in the college yard in presence of some of his mates, it is said, and trod it under his feet.” I heard this a great many times when a boy, and while fitting for college and in college, and always considered it an invention of some idle, careless, disappointed person who had neither earned or deserved collegiate honors. I shrank from contradicting this story, but at the same time had the best evidence that it had no shadow of a foundation, for if Daniel Webster had, more than a year after his graduation, shown and translated his diploma to one of his loved and cherished friends, it would be rather convincing proof to me that he did not tear it up and trample it under his feet. But within one year, Mr. Stephen M. Allen, president of the Webster Historical Society, in the *Spectator*, has reiterated the story as a tradition.

At an agricultural fair, where George W. Nesmith was present, his attention was called to a decision upon the merits of two animals, wherein one had an award in money and the other, a

diploma. A person remarked that the money award was made to the wrong animal, and he further said,—“If I were that animal that has received the diploma, I would do with it as Daniel Webster did with his: I would tear it up in the presence of the committee on bulls, and tread it under my feet.” Mr. Nesmith said he related this to Mr. Webster soon after, and he said there was not a word of truth or semblance of it in the story. He said,—“It was true the valedictory lay between me and another very worthy member of the class, and I thought I deserved the honor, and many of my classmates thought so too, and I felt not a little chagrined; but you don’t suppose I was so indiscreet as to show it, much more to tear up my diploma, which I then prized as the most choice treasure a young man could possess. Besides, I should have been obliged to decline the honor, for I had already been selected by my class to deliver an address before the Fraternity, which I preferred at that time to the honor of being valedictorian.” This has been told me within two years by Mr. Nesmith, and he has assured me that the late Professor Shurtleff told him the same in refutation of this story. Judge Vesey, of Rutland, Vermont, had his attention called to this matter by the publication of Mr. Allen’s article in the *Spectator*, and he replied to it in the *Century Magazine*, and relates there the same thing told him years ago by Professor Shurtleff, in complete refutation of the diploma fabrication.

But to return to the subject: After this episodic defence of Dr. Wood’s classical fame, Ezekiel taught school one winter in Salisbury and two winters in Sanbornton. In the spring of 1804, three years after he entered college, he began a private school in Boston, which he taught for a year. So studious was he, that three years from his entrance into college he went to Boston, and returned at commencement, passing his examinations and earning his degree, thus accomplishing in three years what Daniel did in four. So reduced did his father’s finances become, that he could no longer furnish the boys with funds. Ezekiel was sent money by Daniel during his last year at Hanover, and Daniel earned this money at Conway, by copying deeds in the Register’s office. The father continued to hold the office of Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, to which he was appointed in 1791, till his death in 1806.

In the discharge of all the duties of citizen, soldier, magistrate, parent, Christian, Judge Webster was a man of whom his neighbors, his townsmen, his country, and his illustrious children might be justly proud. Of all the brave men who stood watch and ward over the frontier of civilization in New Hampshire, none displayed more fortitude than he. He had the heart of a lion, and the sweet, tender sympathy of a girl.

When Daniel was admitted to the bar in 1805, he came to Boscawen and opened an office in order that he might be near his honored father, to administer to his wants and to comfort him in his old age. In 1807, having paid the debt of gratitude as well as he could to these "excellent parents," and having laid them tenderly away to that rest which remaineth for them, he transferred his office and most of his business to Ezekiel, and moved to Portsmouth to continue the career that in the end made him the most illustrious son of this republic.

The beautiful and tender tribute which he paid to his father at Saratoga on August 19, 1840, is the sweetest and most fragrant expression of filial love and childlike veneration within the limits of language.

Speaking of the log-cabin in which the "elder brother and sisters were born," he said,—“If I ever fail in affectionate veneration for him who reared it and defended it from savage violence and destruction, cherished all the domestic virtues beneath its roof, and, through the fire and blood of a seven years' revolutionary war, shrunk from no danger, no toil, no sacrifice, to serve his country and to raise his children to a condition better than his own, may my name and the name of my posterity be blotted forever from the memory of mankind.”

In the history of Boscawen and Webster by Coffin, there is what purports to be a likeness of Ezekiel Webster. It bears but little resemblance to him. It has not the princely head of the original. It has a stiff "tape and buckram" appearance. It lacks the full, thickly covered head of snowy-white hair, and the open, manly countenance and clean-cut features, of the original. Daniel, looking with eyes of brotherly tenderness, saw in him, as he lay in his coffin, "the finest human form he ever laid eyes on."

At the age of forty-nine, when his hopes and prospects were

ripening, the silent summons was served upon him, and he passed from earth to heaven, from the inferior court below to the supreme court above. Standing erect before a jury in Merrimack county, with the judge, the bar, and a large audience listening intently to his words, his arms hanging gracefully by his side, he ended a branch of his argument, and instantly closed his eyes in death. In the midst of the solemn scene, George Sullivan, the eloquent attorney-general, who was to follow him in his argument, exclaimed "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!"

Ephraim Hutchins, then twenty-three years of age, whom Daniel Webster well knew, and at whose father's tavern he was accustomed to stop when in Concord, started immediately in a private conveyance for Boston to carry the sad intelligence to Daniel. The roads were muddy, and badly cut up by heavier traffic. Frequent changes of horses enabled him to reach Boston late in the night of the same day or early in the morning of the next. Young Hutchins knew where Mr. Webster lived, and, driving directly to his house on Summer street, knocked at the door. A window in the chamber above was immediately raised, and Mr. Webster was visible. The wagon stopping in front of his house in the stillness of the night had given notice of the arrival of some one before the signal knock at the door. "Who is it?" said Mr. Webster. "Ephraim Hutchins," was the reply. "Is Ezekiel dead?" came the enquiry from the window. "Yes," was the response; "while addressing the jury in the court-house in Concord, he fell dead in an instant without a moment's warning." "I thought," replied Mr. Webster, "that must be the errand you came on when I heard the wheels of your carriage stop in front of my door." There was no telegraph, no railroad then, and no public conveyance except the stage-coach, and the condition of the roads April 10th, in the night, made the journey, over seventy-five miles long, a severe one. Mr. Hutchins related to the writer forty years after, with tears standing in his eyes nearly all the time, the incidents of this journey, and the never-to-be forgotten interview with Mr. Webster just described. Nineteen years after the death of their loving and beloved brother, Daniel Webster, in kind remembrance of this service, requested President Taylor to appoint

Major Hutchins post-master of Concord, and it was done. From 1849 to 1853, the man who through the darkness of the lone night had hurried over the long and weary way with early tidings of this lamented death, most faithfully and most acceptably discharged the duties of the office.

NEW HAMPSHIRE A GOOD STATE TO EMIGRATE FROM.

In October, 1844, being then a member of Dartmouth college in the freshman class, I was obliged to visit Boston on business, and on my way took in a Democratic mass meeting at Salisbury. It was a cold, bleak, dreary day, and the meeting was in an open field at the South Road, and Charles H. Peaslee and Levi Woodbury were the field orators. It was so cold that an adjournment was had to the hotel, and the last speaker was Franklin Pierce. I had never before seen him, and I was captivated by his manners, his personal appearance, and the beauty and elegance of his diction. In the course of his speech he said,—“It was the remark of a distinguished son of New Hampshire, who was born and reared on your soil, and who has n't drawn a free breath for the last fifteen years, that New Hampshire is a good state to emigrate *from*.” He put especial emphasis upon the word from, and I think I am not saying anything extravagant, when I affirm that no man could give more significance to a word or a sentence by his manner and the snap of his head, than Franklin Pierce. He did not call Mr. Webster's name, but every person in the crowd knew perfectly well that the distinguished son of New Hampshire, who was born and reared on the soil of Salisbury, was Daniel Webster, and many knew that he referred to his having been paid a liberal sum to accept a position in the Senate of the United States with a salary of eight dollars a day there, when he could obtain in the practice of his profession in Boston many times that amount. At a “colored beverage” entertainment in Franklin in 1850, after Daniel Webster had made his celebrated 7th of March speech, General Pierce said to Mr. Webster, when speculating a little upon the probability of the Whigs' dropping him on account of that speech and other speeches supplementary to that,—“If the Whigs drop you the Democrats will take you up,

and they will raise you so high that your feet will scorn to kick the stars."

At a public dinner given at the Eagle hotel, on its completion in 1852, when Franklin Pierce had been shown to be the choice of the people for the presidency of the United States, Col. John H. George, who always echoed his friend's declarations, remarked when called upon for some postprandial remarks, "Daniel Webster used to say that New Hampshire was a good state to emigrate from," not emphasizing the word from. Matthew Harvey, George G. Fogg, Asa McFarland, General Pierce, Charles H. Peaslee, and many other gentlemen distinguished in public affairs, were present, and no one seemed to doubt that Daniel Webster made this remark. I have heard it on other public occasions, more out of the state than in. I have seen it in print; but Daniel Webster never made the remark. No such idea ever entered into his brain. He doubtless did think that it was a credit to a man to hail from New Hampshire. He might say "We raise men up in New Hampshire;" and he might have said, "I am a New Hampshire man," the same as the Roman was accustomed to say, "I am a Roman citizen," but that he ever said or intimated that New Hampshire was not a good and noble state to be born in, to live in, and to die and be buried in, is untrue. No man ever manifested more love, or cherished more affectionate regard, for his native state than Daniel Webster, and it was one of the studies of his life how he might the more appropriately declare his devotion to the land of his birth, the home of his childhood, and the state where the triumphs of his early manhood were achieved. But I am not left without a witness in this matter. My lamented friend, General Walter Harriman, said to me many times during the four or five years before his death, that he had a conversation with Peter Harvey upon this saying, and Mr. Webster denied with much feeling that he ever publicly or privately made any such remark in that form or anything that could be construed into it, and that every word of it was a pure fiction. Peter Harvey is gone, General Harriman has just stepped over the threshold of immortality, but George W. Nesmith "still lives."

He has told me many times, and within a few months, that he had several interviews with Mr. Webster, and he said, "I never

said it, nor anything of that import. My utterances have been rather public, and it seems as though some one could tell the time, the place, or the occasion where I made such a remark, or any other remark not respectful to the land of my birth. The remark was many years ago attributed to Jeremiah Mason, but I do not think he ever made it."

About 1815, Ezekiel Webster and Richard Fletcher were arrayed against each other, before a board of referees in Salisbury, where a young school-master was complained of for unmercifully punishing one of his pupils. The referees were Andrew Bowers, Benjamin Pettengill, and Jabez Smith. The trial excited a great deal of interest, and it is not too much to say that these attorneys were the best advocates in that section of the state. Webster was for the little lad, and Fletcher for the school-master, and the following is the exordium of Webster's argument: "May it please you, gentlemen referees: It has got to be the case now-a-days, that when a young man gets to be sixteen or seventeen years of age, goes to an academy school six weeks, gets a five-dollar French watch in his pocket, a rattan as long as your arm, and a ruffle shirt as wide as a hand-saw, he is fit to teach school." Ezekiel Webster has been dead fifty-four years, but the school-master still lives, and Daniel Webster, in 1844, caused him to be appointed United States attorney for the district of New Hampshire.

In the columns of an old newspaper published in the northern part of New Hampshire, is the following story, entitled "Daniel Webster and the Teamster." "Near the end of the last century a teamster from Grafton county came to a hill near the house of Ebenezer Webster, father of Daniel, in what is now Franklin, formerly Salisbury. This hill was too hard for his team, and he sought aid at the house of Mr. Webster. Daniel, then a youth, and not very well clad nor very genteel, was sent to his assistance. Years passed, and the teamster's property was in peril. An eminent lawyer, Moses P. Payson, of Bath, was employed as his counsel. In the trial of the cause he needed the aid of able associate counsel, and secured the services of Daniel Webster, then a rising young lawyer in New Hampshire. When told by Mr. Payson who it was that was to assist him, the teamster replied that he had little hope of their

success, as he recognized in him the swarthy boy whom he had met years before, and he did not look as though he would make a great lawyer. At the opening of the case the desponding client took a seat in a remote corner of the court room, feeling apparently as little interest in the result of the trial as any of the spectators. When Mr. Webster opened his argument the client found that this lawyer was really *something of a man*. As he proceeded, his estimate of his ability increased. When he closed it was evident to everybody in the court-room that Mr. Webster had won the case, and had convinced all present that he was *no ordinary man*. The jury returned a righteous verdict, and the grateful client, who twice in early life had lost his all, said to Mr. Webster with deep feeling,—“ I regard you as an angel sent for my deliverance. My wife and children will bless you to their latest day for what you have done for us.”

Gentlemen, brothers, and members of the bar of Grafton and Coös counties: I have long sought some public occasion to give these utterances in respectful regard to the memory of him who was school-mate, neighbor, and friend of my mother; who was genial, gracious, and kind to his townsman, my father; and it is fitting and proper that I should utter them here before this glowing mass of intelligence, before these cultured gentlemen, among the great mountains, whose gleaming peaks and towering heights tell me of majesty, sublimity, grandeur, and beauty, where genius drew in the inspiration of a great life beneath these extreme northern skies, from whence this Jupiter Tonans of America first drew down the bolts of that matchless thunder which eventually went reverberating around the world.

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