

[Newspaper Article]

The Cleveland Herald in Defense of Daniel Webster's Scholarship

Our neighbor, some days ago, sought to demolish us for having ventured to demur to Timothy Walker's allegation, that, among all the public men of the country, Daniel Webster, as a scholar, never has a superior, saying "probably," in John Quincy Adams. An unusual pungency is given to the Herald's article by its being headed, "Clanjamphy and Daniel Webster," and by its frequent designation of one of the editors of the True Democrat by his proper name as well as his sundry nicknames. So that, had we chosen to follow our neighbor's example, our present article might have been entitled "The Fat Boy and Daniel Webster," and for the sake of variety, its other references to the Herald might be diversified by the substitution of "Mr. Harris," "the Cleveland Editorial Treasury Pig," "the Man with the Sausage Bag," and what not. But we did not choose to follow the Herald's example, and therefore the title of this article, as we mean the text of it shall be, in a taste very different of the one to which it is in reply. Since the proprietors of the Herald withdrew the libel suit they once brought against us, -- a suit originating in what was alleged by use, and admitted by them, to have been a pure mistake, -- that paper has been treated by us with the same courtesy which we are wont to exercise towards ah respectable journals, however ill it may have reciprocated that courtesy. And we surely have no *wish* ever to treat it otherwise.

We should have no right to be surprised, and therefore should express no surprise, if the Herald, having already said of Daniel Webster, that "his virtues were those of the Deity," should have come now to declare, that his knowledges, likewise, were those of the omniscient Godhead. Why should we? The latter would be much less extravagant than the former, as Webster was less remarkable for saintliness than for intellect.

But in regard to Timothy Walker's special allegation, which the Herald is just now so bent on maintaining, of Mr Webster's superiority, as a scholar, to all the other public men of this country, John Quincy Adams alone excepted, that is not a question which we care to discuss with that journal. Truth to say, we do not think that it *is* a question, in the strictest sense of that substantive, nor that there is weight enough in even Timothy Walker's authority to *make* it one. We do not believe, that among all Mr. Webster's New England literary friends who best knew him, there is a solitary individual who would claim for him the distinction of superior "scholarship"; and we are very certain that more than nine-tenths of them would deem such a claim in the highest degree puerile. His unfamiliarity with "the classics," with which the

Herald fancies him to have been so particularly familiar, we know to have been a topic of common remark among those friends, almost from our boyhood. And to all the modern languages, as well as to quite the whole circle of the exact sciences, we presume Mr. Webster may be said to have been almost an utter stranger. This, we know, has been said of him by those who had no occasion to speak without book, and we have yet to see the slightest inkling of any evidence to the contrary.

The Herald wishes to know what we *mean* by superior "scholarship, in the ordinary *acceptation* of that word." That noun in *Italics* was so emphasized by the Herald, our neighbor having quoted the sentence from our former article, and, ignoring the possibility of a typographical error in this paper, made himself merry through a long article by repetitions of the misprint. But it would have been the merriment of sheer ignorance, even had we written "acceptation," as, of course, no one at all conversant with English literature need be told. Still, since we are none the less willing to help the Herald to what we mean by superior scholarship, in either the "ordinary *acceptation*", or the "ordinary *acceptation*," of that expression, we add that it is something that includes a superior knowledge of at least a considerable portion of those numerous branches or erudition in all which we have said Mr. Webster's New England literary friends deemed him particularly deficient and most of which they regarded him as quite wholly ignorant.

Have you got our meaning, Mr. Herald? If so we can assure you, none would be better pleased than we should be, if, instead of denying, you would just disprove, our position. "Mr. Webster Works" were not all "done in a corner," and none of those which would be needed to disprove our position and to vindicate yours and Timothy Walker's, have followed him.

The Herald is anxious, also, to be informed what we "mean" by "some seven errors," which said a scholastic friend of ours observed to exist in the Latin sentiment given by Mr. Webster at Harvard. But we must decline instructing it in things of that sort, unless it will pay us for the schooling. We believe, however, that provision has been made by our city for the gratuitous instruction of certain adults in some of its public schools, and we willingly commend our neighbor to the kindly regards of the Acting Manager of those schools. The name of that "scholastic friend," it may obtain, for its own private satisfaction, by calling on us personally. The "same seven errors" noticed by him; however, were, at the time, a topic of common remark about Cambridge; though no Prof. Beck of that College exposed them to public press, as that profound Latinist subsequently did so expose the "classic" nonsense in one of Mr. Webster's epistolary diatribes against Horace Mann.

When the Herald says we declared Mr. Webster to be "no scholar, because once upon a time he mispronounced a little Latin," it utters

libel; and if we were to be guided by its own example in such matters, it would soon be called on to answer for its libel in the sum of five or ten thousand dollars.

Our neighbor says, that when Judge W. "dwelled upon" the "scholarship" of Mr. Webster, "he doubtless surveyed the whole body of" the latter's "attainments - in Law, Politics, the Science of Government, History" [we think that last wo__ should have been spared in consideration of the Lobos business, and a hundred other similar blunder's of Mr. W.'s], and so forth. Nay, Mr. Herald, Mr. Walker doubtless did no such thing, for if the Gazette's report of his eulogy is a reliable one; for according to that report, Mr. Webster's scholarship: was considered as a thing quite separate from any of those attainments, as well it might have been, since excellence in these was perfectly compatible with gross deficiency in that.

I would be a fair inference from the Herald's article, that we deem Mr. Webster to have been anything else than a great man, because we demurred to Timothy Walker's laudation of his transcendent "scholarship." But our own readers know, that such an inference would be in flat contradiction of our estimate of Mr. W. They know that in scholarship, in the sense in which we have doubted its possession by that able lawyer, is not a thing which we should prize half as highly as we would his own skill in the use of his own native tongue, nor one which we deem at all essential to the very highest order of human greatness, both intellectual and moral. Nay, they know we have been accustomed to scout the pretensions which some have set up in behalf of mere "scholarship," and to refer, in justification of our own course, to the history of Daniel Webster himself, as well as such men as Dexter, Marshall, Henry, Franklin, and Washington. For ourselves, we would rather have the gumption, and the knowledge of English prose, possessed by the ploughman Burns, than be never so intimate with all "the humanities" outside of our vernacular, and with all the other languages which have existed since the confusion of Babel, while far worthier than either, of the ambition of all, and especially of conductors of the press, may we ever esteem the poet ploughman's manly independence, and his infinite scorn of meanness!