

**A MEMOIR OF THE
LIFE OF
DANIEL WEBSTER**

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A Memoir of the Life of Daniel Webster by Samuel L. Knapp

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LIFE OF WEBSTER.

In a free country, where public opinion sways every thing of a public nature; where men are called from the mass of their fellow-citizens to offices of trust and distinction, and return again to private life, and still are eligible to the same, or new situations; and where there is nothing permanent but a fair, and an honest reputation, it becomes each one, desirous of being able to bear his part properly, to make himself acquainted with men, as well as things. It is easier to collect matters for statistical tables, to make geographical surveys, and to ascertain the capacities of rivers and streams; in fact, to get at all the physical resources of a country, than to acquire a scanty knowledge of the intellectual wealth of a people; particularly when they are scattered over such an extent of territory as we are in the United States. Curiosity prompts us to inquire something of the personal appearance of a distinguished individual, something of his age, manner, habits, and disposition; for we do not think entirely in the abstract on any subject. We must see some resemblance to Hercules to be satisfied with the account of his great strength; his colossal frame must accompany our

thoughts of his mighty deeds. To wait until men are dead to make ourselves acquainted with their characters, has more of modesty than wisdom in it. In this, we should rather be living with the dead, than with the animated, active beings around us; not that we should be ignorant of those who have finished their labors, and who have gone to receive their rewards; who have stamped the by-gone age with their illustrious deeds, or intellectual productions. These should be held in sweet remembrance; but those who are now efficient agents in the affairs of men, should also be our study. If we make a wrong estimate of the dead, it will not do much harm; for those who come after us will correct our opinions and reverse our judgments upon the merits of those who have passed away. But if we are misled in our estimates of the virtues or talents, dispositions or opinions of the living, we may do ourselves an injury by lavishing confidence where it is not deserved, or by withholding it when it should be given. What is meant by a knowledge of human nature, but an acquaintance with the motives, principles, and actions of the living? Our country abounds in rich materials for sketches and memoirs of distinguished men. Some of these memoirs and notices we have had, of our prominent naval, and military, and diplomatic men; and sometimes we have seen a notice of a poet or an orator, but not always drawn with a deep knowledge of the subject, or in an independent spirit.

The memoir of one of our most eminent jurists,

statesman, and orators, was contemplated some time since, and a hasty sketch given to the public. The good feelings shown to that scanty production, which was sent into the world without conference with any one on the subject, or without looking for a single fact not within the recollection of the writer, has induced him to extend his remarks upon the events of the life of Mr. Webster, and upon his labors at the bar, in the halls of legislation, and among his fellow citizens, as occasions called forth his talents.

Daniel Webster was born in the town of Salisbury, situated on the banks of the Merrimack, in the State of New Hampshire, on the 18th day of January, in the year of our Lord, 1782. His father, grand-father and great-grand-father, were named Ebenezer, and were descendants of Thomas Webster, an inhabitant of Hampton in that State, as early as 1656, who died in 1715, aged 83, and whose son Ebenezer was one of the grantees of Kingston in 1692, and a settler there about 1700. The father of Daniel Webster was born at Kingston, in 1739; the son of a farmer. He left his father's farm at the early age of eighteen, to serve as a soldier in the wars of 1755. The conflict at that time with the French and Indians was a severe one; and New England, as well as some other colonies, was heavily taxed for provincial troops. The youthful soldier was selected as one of a distinguished corps, called Rogers's rangers. Major Robert Rogers, a native of Londonderry, in the State of New Hampshire,

was authorized by the British Government to raise several companies to range the frontiers in winter as well as in summer, in order to watch the hostile Indians, who often, in the most inclement season, made attacks upon the defenceless inhabitants of the frontiers. The body of troops called the rangers, were taken from the boldest and hardiest of the yeomanry of the land. They were doubly armed, and carried with them snow-shoes and skates for service; and generally made their head-quarters at the southern extremity of Lake George. The snow-shoes put them on an equality with their foes; and with their skates they had greatly the advantage of the Indians. Stark, Putnam, and several others, who were distinguished during the revolutionary war, were trained in this school. Some of the well authenticated exploits of this hardy band seem like romance to us at the present day. All along the mountain borders of Lake George, spots are shown where the rangers fought desperate battles in the winter season; sometimes with more than twice their numbers. This corps fought from 1755 to the fall of Quebec, in 1759. They were put foremost in battle by Abercrombie and Amherst; and some of them were sent to assist Wolfe. The youthful soldier was made for a ranger, from his corporeal and intellectual powers, which were of a robust order. Rogers states in his journal, that their packs were generally of twice the weight of those commonly carried by soldiers. Many of this band perished in their frontier campaigns; but some of the