

**WEBSTER'S SPEECHES; REPLY TO HAYNE
(DELIVERED IN THE U. S. SENATE,
JANUARY 26, 1830) THE CONSTITUTION
AND THE UNION (DELIVERED IN THE U. S.
SENATE, MARCH 7, 1850)**

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Webster's Speeches; Reply to Hayne (Delivered in the U. S. Senate, January 26, 1830) The Constitution and the Union (Delivered in the U. S. Senate, March 7, 1850) by Daniel Webster

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THE CONSTITUTION AND THE UNION

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WITH A SKETCH OF THE LIFE

OF

DANIEL WEBSTER



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DANIEL WEBSTER.

SKETCH OF HIS LIFE.*

DANIEL WEBSTER, one of the greatest orators and statesmen that this country ever produced, was born in the town of Salisbury (now known as Franklin), New Hampshire, on the 18th of January, 1782. His father, Ebenezer Webster, served largely, both as a soldier and an officer, in the Revolutionary War. He was twice married, and each marriage gave him five children, Daniel being the youngest (but) one of the ten. Ezekiel, the brother whom he loved most deeply, was the next before him; born on the 11th of April, 1780.

During his childhood the future statesman was sickly and delicate, giving no promise of the robust and vigorous frame which he had in his manhood. In his *Autobiography*, written for a private friend in 1829, though extending only to 1817, he says he does not remember when or by whom he was taught to read; and that he cannot recollect a time when he could not read the Bible. His father had a mind strong and healthy by nature, insomuch that he became a sort of intellectual leader in the neighborhood. He seemed to have no higher aim in life than to educate his children to the utmost of his limited ability. To small town schools of the neighborhood Daniel was sent with the other children. When the school was near by it was easy to attend; but sometimes he had to go, in winter, two and a half or three miles, still living at home; at other times, when the school was further off, his father boarded him out in a neighboring family.

In his early boyhood Webster was fond of poetry, and could repeat from memory the greater part of Watts's Psalms and

* This sketch has been compiled, with numerous additions, from the life of Webster written by Rev. H. N. Hudson, LL.D., for his annotated edition of "Webster Speeches," *English Literature Pamphlets*, published by Ginn & Company.

Hymns at the age of twelve. In his *Autobiography* we have the following: "I remember that my father brought home from some of the lower towns Pope's *Essay on Man*, published in a sort of pamphlet. I took it, and very soon could repeat it, from beginning to end. We had so few books that to read them once or twice was nothing. We thought they were all to be got by heart." Up to that time he had no hope of any education beyond what the village school could afford. But in May, 1796, his father placed him in Phillips Academy, at Exeter, New Hampshire. "I believe I made tolerable progress," says his *Autobiography*, "in most branches which I attended to while in this school; but there was one thing I could not do,— I could not make a declamation. Many a piece did I commit to memory and recite and rehearse in my own room over and over again; yet when the day came when the school collected to hear declamations, when my name was called, and I saw all eyes turned to my seat, I could not raise myself from it. Sometimes the instructors frowned; sometimes they smiled. When the occasion was over I went home and wept bitter tears of mortification."

He remained at Exeter only nine months. In February, 1797, his father placed him with the Rev. Samuel Wood, the minister of the adjoining town of Boscawen; and while on the way thither first disclosed to him his purpose of sending him to college. "The very idea," says he, "thrilled my whole frame. I remember that I was quite overcome. The thing appeared to me so high, the expense and sacrifice it was to cost my father so great, I could only press his hand and shed tears."

In August, 1797, Webster entered Dartmouth College. His chief distinction while in college was in studies outside the regular course; in writing and in debate he excelled all the rest of his class, and was a general favorite with the students; withal, he was a fair scholar within the prescribed studies, and was very punctual in his attendance on all the exercises. "My college life," says he, "was not an idle one. Besides the regular attendance on prescribed duties and studies, I read something of English history and English literature. Perhaps my reading was too miscellaneous. I even paid my board for a year by superintending a little

weekly newspaper and making selections for it from books of literature and from the contemporary publications." Webster went through the regular four years' course, and graduated in August, 1801.

Nothing like justice can be done to Webster's nobleness of character without some reference to what took place between him and his brother Ezekiel. He thought Ezekiel's talents to be as good as his own; and his heart yearned to have him blessed with equal advantages. So, after consulting with his brother, he broke the matter to his father, then aged, infirm, and embarrassed in his affairs. He would keep school, he would get along as he could, he would be more than four years in going through college, if need were, that his brother, too, might be sent to study. The result was that Ezekiel soon went to preparing for college; and he entered Dartmouth in March, 1801, just six months before Daniel graduated.

On leaving college, in August, 1801, Webster returned to his father's house, and soon began the study of the law. He had spent four months in this study when, the family getting more straitened than ever, duty and affection pressed him to undertake something for their relief. Having been offered the charge of an academy in Fryeburg, Maine, he bought a horse for twenty-five dollars, and, with his saddle-bags stuffed, set out for the place. He engaged for six months, at the rate of three hundred and fifty dollars a year. He went to board in the family of James Osgood, registrar of deeds for the county of Oxford. Rather than copy the deeds himself, Mr. Osgood preferred to pay twenty-five cents apiece for the copying of them; and Webster gladly availed himself of the chance, and thus earned enough to pay his board.

At the end of the six months Webster gave up his school, and resumed his place in Mr. Thompson's office, and continued there till March, 1804, applying himself diligently to his legal studies. Webster now felt a strong desire to finish his studies in Boston. His brother Ezekiel, after a hard struggle, had at length found employment as teacher of a private school in that city. He strongly urged Daniel to come to Boston, assuring him of enough to pay his board by teaching an hour and a half a day. So, in

July, 1804, to Boston he came. He was so fortunate as to find a place in the office of Christopher Gore, a man eminent both in and out of his profession, and who afterwards became governor of Massachusetts.

In 1804 the clerkship in the Court in Hillsborough County became vacant, and the place was offered to Webster, with fifteen hundred dollars a year. This was indeed a tempting prize ; it offered, both for himself and the family, immediate relief and supply, and he had no thought but to accept. He laid the matter before Mr. Gore, who earnestly advised him to decline. "Go on," said he, "and finish your studies. You are poor enough, but there are greater evils than poverty ; live on no man's favor ; what bread you do eat, let it be the bread of independence ; pursue your profession, make yourself useful to your friends and a little formidable to your enemies, and you have nothing to fear." The result was that Webster declined the place, to the great disappointment, indeed, of his father, who, however, had by this time grown to have so much faith in him that he soon acquiesced.

In March, 1805, on motion of Mr. Gore, Webster was admitted to practice in the Court of Common Pleas in Boston. He soon returned to his native State, and opened an office in the town of Boscawen. There he remained two years and a half. His mind rapidly outgrew the field. So, in the fall of 1807, he gave up his law business there to Ezekiel, and removed to Portsmouth, having been admitted as a counsellor of the Superior Court in May preceding. At the Portsmouth bar he came in contact with Jeremiah Mason, who was his senior by fourteen years, and probably the ablest lawyer then in New England. From that time onward the two men were wont to be employed as opposing counsel in the same causes. They grew into a fast friendship, which ended only with the death of Mason in 1848.

Up to this time Webster, it appears, had not given his mind very much to political questions. He had learned his politics in the old Federal school, Washington, Hamilton, and Marshall being his chief teachers and models. His father, too, clung to the same political faith, as did also Gore, Mason, and other of his friends. Webster continued, substantially, in the same creed, held