

no contemporary can bear comparison with Daniel Webster in logic, fulness of facts, richness of illustration, chasteness and force of language.

The legal commentaries of Judge Story and Chancellor Kent, are among the best in that branch, while our medical literature, particularly that of the school of Pennsylvania, deserves its well-merited eminence. These great men and the work they have performed for the advancement of national letters render untrue the charge of foreign critics that our literature is stagnant and inferior. Yet we must not flatter ourselves that we have attained anything approaching absolute perfection. There are still many things that tend to make our literature provincial and weak.

The early American colonists were largely exiles driven from their peaceful homes and obliged to provide the necessities of life, as best they could, on the rude shores of a foreign land. It is easy to see that their circumstances were quite unfavorable to literary work. The use of the pen in the old communities is undoubtedly a great source of progress. But in newly established settlements, such as the colonies were, the gun, spade and plough can be employed to much better advantage. Many things pressed more urgently on the attention of our forefathers, than literary pursuits. They had to subdue a wild country, cut down forests, erect new homes, protect themselves against the rigors of the American climate, and provide for their immediate wants. Moreover, the state of colonial dependence, even under the most favorable circumstances, can scarcely be said to be the ideal condition for the development of a national literature, and this was particularly the case with regard to the American colonists. Not only was no encouragement given by the mother country, but every evidence of colonial prosperity was studiously repressed. The English parliament and English people by jealousy, narrowness and unjust laws merited the reproach that their sole object was to enrich England at the expense of America. Literature, of course, suffered with the other American interests, and, while commerce and industry were retarded and circumscribed to suit Britain's convenience, every effort was made to

stifle the expression of a national sentiment and hinder the foundation of a national literature. British critics depreciated everything of American origin, and it would almost seem that the future of the British Empire was dependent on the enslavement of the American colonists. This policy was short-sighted and suicidal. It was not the last amongst the causes of the American revolution. If England's action prevented the birth and development of great masters in song and story, if it were her aim to make American writers mere servile imitators of foreign models, her success, though thorough, was but temporary.

The war of independence was fought and won, and henceforth whatever of backwardness and inferiority is to be found amongst American men of letters, though partly traceable to those early causes, is in the greater part the direct fault of the Americans themselves. Though they threw off the yoke of political dependence they still bowed the knee to English literary idols, and James Russell Lowell was justified in his stinging reproach to the leaders of American thought: "You steal Englishmen's books and think Englishmen's thoughts." They had won their political independence on the field of battle, but they still lived in the completest intellectual subserviency. It must be said, however, in all fairness that America is not alone in this inexplicable tendency towards imitation. The literature of other countries, says Mr. Sismondi, "has been frequently adopted by a young nation with a sort of fanatical admiration. The genius of these countries having been so often placed before it as the perfect model of all greatness and of all beauty, every spontaneous movement has been repressed in order to make room for the most servile imitation, and every national attempt to develop an original character has been sacrificed to the reproduction of something conformable to the model which has always been before its eyes. Thus the Romans checked themselves in the vigour of their first conception to become emulous copyists of the Greeks; and thus the Arabs placed bounds to their intellectual efforts that they might rank themselves among the followers of Aristotle.