ORIGINAL SKETCHES OF CHARACTER.

LETTERS FROM THE EAST — JOHN NEAL

by JAMES BROOKS

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Transcribed and edited by Duncan S. Campbell

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LETTERS FROM THE EAST — JOHN NEAL

NUMBER ONE.

To the editors of the New-York Mirror.

I propose to introduce you and the readers of the *Mirror*, and of course, the American public, (for I have seen your sheet on the center-table from Washington to New Orleans, and thence to the Passamaquoddy,) to a man in the east, a genuine Yankee; in that land fertile in oddities, notions, plans and projects; and wherewithal redundant in strength, hardihood, noble daring, and ability. Were I called upon to portray New England in miniature, and to speak in a single person the character of a race, with all their faults and their virtues, peculiar everywhere, daring and confident in everything, ready and skillful, from the counter and the ship, to the bar and the pulpit, from the rocky islands of Maine, and the banks of Newfoundland, to the sands of the Carolinas and Louisiana, or even the far-off illimitable west, I know not how I could do it better than in the sketch I am about to give you of *a man of the east*.

Some take one way to reputation, some another; some alight like the eagle on the storm-crag, and some creep and crawl there. Some dare and fight the public, and force a name from the reluctant: and some glide gracefully along, with kind compliments, handsome bows, and pretty sayings, and coax the public into a plaudit or an "Io Paean."[1] All ways have their advantages and disadvantages. One is cragged, fearful, cliff-like, as over the untouched tops of our own Alleghanies; but *there*, spirit-stirring, imperial, above the clouds, as with tempest, mist and storm—the other, as in our valleys and our prairies, smooth, delightful, exhilarating, amid fields of clover, or unbounded prospect of nature's wonder-works. Or, one is on the Mississippi, with its whirls and eddies, thick, turbid, and gold-colored; and the other over the calm and placid Ohio,[2] on its clear and silver current, amid its ranges of hills and joyous scenery. For myself, if I were gifted for such a destiny, I should prefer the latter, because it is safer, easier, happier. Give me the Ohio to sail over, less terrible and magnificent though it may be—and take "the Father of Waters,"[3] with its Charybdis[4] current, its snags and its sawyers.[5]

Now then after this preliminary, let me make you acquainted with John Neal, Esq. of Portland,[6] Maine, a man not unknown to fame—not unknown in the story of American literature—over the ocean, or this side of it; but a man whom it has been too customary to abuse, because the public are ignorant of him and his merits, though he has gained a name in spite of the American press, and has won tributes from foreign pens, when his own countrymen have spoken but feebly and fearfully. Not that his countrymen are ungenerous—but because he has dared them, lectured them, defied them, and never cajoled them; and because he has been imprudent, rash, and reckless; and bas obeyed tile impulses of a

[1] Io Paean — (Greek) Expression of praise
[2] Earlier in 1833, Brooks had traveled the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and crossed the Allegheny mountains.
[3] Father of Waters — Mississippi River
[4] Charybdis — Mythical whirlpool located between Sicily and the Italian mainland
[5] Snags and sawyers — Two types of tree obstacles in the river; they were a hazard to shipping
[6] Portland ME — Brooks' home town

wayward spirit, rather than reason, prudence, policy and *tact*, that ever-active deity which turns all things to good, and makes sunshine or sees sunshine even in the thick fog. And here, before I go farther, let me beg of you to pardon these long-winded sentences and desultory sketches. I cannot write like a book, and heaven preserve me from the man or woman who talks like one—for I talk in my closet with volumes spiritless and motionless, till I am wearied to death with print, leather and paper; and when I go forth into the world, I want the inspiration of unarranged thoughts, that leap sparkling from the soul—I want to share in its smiles, its beauties and prettinesses. I quaff free-and-easy conversation as the *bon vivant*[7] quaffs his champagne or *couleur de rose.*[8] Away from me with your sherry and madeira, your Hock and Moselle[9]—the prose of a dinner-table—and give me the bright champagne, the poetry of a feast, that bubbles and dances to the brim of the glass.

I was but a college-boy when I first became acquainted with Mr. Neal as a writer; and late at night I used to read his *Errata*,[10] not the best nor the worst of his novels, with an intense and thrilling interest, and feel strange thoughts as I was wrought upon by his wild but ungovernable imagination. He was the hero of our circle. We laughed at his oddities, abused his faults, and smiled over his vanity; but yet his words went to our hearts, and swayed and molded the impulses of many of us. When I had pocketed my sheepskin, which decked me as an "A. B.,"[11] and of course felt all the pride of a young man, flush with the honors of a college, I resolved to become acquainted with our hero—started for Portland, and planted myself in his office.

Mr. Neal had been back from Europe some six or eight months, and had established "the Yankee," an odd newspaper, then racy, lively, and flourishing, which everybody was reading, and of which everybody was speaking—a newspaper that meddled with everything, gossiped in everything from church to state, from the tallest tome, no matter how thick, down to the smallest affairs, of tokens and souvenirs and lady-actress's feet—of poets and dogs, of painting and side-walks, of Bentham[12] and Jeffrey,[13] and sleigh-rides and huskings,[14] of politics and religion, and "courting" and "blackberrying." In short, the newspaper was one of the strangest ones ever heard of. Men, women and children there thought *out aloud*, and I could put my finger on many a name of the young men, and old men, too, of New England, not unknown now, who there felt so free in speaking as to gain that self-confidence which has helped, and will help them, through life. This paper was, however, a thousand miles too far "down East," to make a grand impression, and what was more, to make much money. It was like throwing a great rock off the shores of Lake Superior to agitate the whole surface, instead of throwing it into the center.

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[7] *bon vivant* — person of refined taste
[8] *couleur de rose* — rose-colored (such as a beverage)
[9] Hock and Moselle — European table wines
[10] Errata — Novel by Neal published in 1823
[11] A. B. — Bachelor of Arts degree (awarded to Brooks by Waterville College in 1828)
[12] Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) — English philosopher and social reformer; founder of Utilitarianism; advocated such reforms as separation of church and state, freedom of expression, abolition of slavery and the death penalty
[13] Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850) — Scottish writer, judge and lawyer; 1802 co-founder of *The Edinburgh Review*
[14] Husking — Farm gathering where neighbors help with the maize crop by removing the husks

But it did flourish, until it changed form and title, and place of publication; thus, living a silk-worm life, from the chrysalis to the butterfly state, making more noise than any other paper ever made in this country in so short a time, weaving often a splendid and at times a brilliant web, and after fluttering some, dying at last, because it was a magazine and not a newspaper.

When I first went into Neal's office, my attention was attracted by a man about five feet, eight or nine inches high, with a fine head, light-colored silky hair, robust, athletic, iron-built; in short, the man to make a statue of, every limb was so well developed, and there was so much of manhood in the whole figure. He was in a strange-shaped jacket, with a vest after his own form and fashion, for he has all things made according to his notions, dictating to tailors, furniture-makers, house-builders, book-binders, cooks and milliners also, and playing the divine and the physician. He was over careful and very neat in his person, but not a fop nor a dandy, for *they* follow fashions, and he sets all at defiance. Neal was then alternately talking with a lot of men who were boxing and fencing, for he was a boxing-master, and fencing-master too, and as the printer's devil came in, crying "copy, more copy," be would race with a huge swan's quill, full gallop, over sheets of paper as with a steam-pen, and off went one page, and off went another, and then a lesson in boxing, the thump of glove to glove, then the mask, and the stamp of the sandal, and the ringing of the foils.

"What a fellow for an editor," thought I. "What sort of an article can spring from such a fire-like pen, coursing at that rate amid such music?" I read the article in print next morning, and it was one of the best essays in the English language, on "women," where he calls "men the realities," and women, "the poetry of this world," "men the trees," and "women the fruitage and flowers."

I had said that Neal had but lately returned from England, where, caressed by Bentham, and Mill the father,[15] and Mill the son,[16] and Cartwright,[17] and other reformers; and noticed by Blackwood,[18] Stratford Canning[19] and many other eminent Englishmen, as a young American of extraordinary promise, he had his head filled with plans and projects of all sorts; his genius had broken loose. The wild eagle had alighted again on his own peak, after spreading his wings in a foreign land, and creating a sensation among the great ones there. Of course, there was no cropping his wings or talons here, hence, there was a strange fluttering. In his novels he had been imprudent, and had made enemies. He had been accused with shameful injustice of abusing his country in Blackwood,[20] the Westminster,[21] the London,[22] and other magazines. Hence, parties were formed in the United States from the

[15] James Mill (1773-1836) — Scottish historian, economist and philosopher; father of John Stuart Mill
[16] John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) — British philosopher and political economist
[17] John Cartwright (1740-1824) — English political reformer
[18] William Blackwood (1776-1834) — Scottish publisher
[19] Stratford Canning (1786-1880) — British diplomat and politician
[20] Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (later known as *Blackwood* or *Maga*) was founded in 1817
[21] Westminster Review — Magazine founded by Jeremy Bentham in 1823
[22] London Review — Several publications appeared under this name in the early 19th century

moment he landed; and in his own town, men took sides, but more were against him than for him.

Neal was not the man to brook abuse, or to parry or appease it. He planted himself in his own town, daring all rebuke, and storming all opposition. His proud and sensitive spirit was fretted and exasperated. He determined to force men to be his friends, to defy all undeserved censure, to win a reputation in his own birthplace. He began in Portland, "The Yankee," as I have before stated. He opened an office as counsellor at law, and was ardent, industrious and successful in his profession. He established a gymnasium, and the whole town was engaged in that. The arts of pugilism and fencing were not forgotten. In short, he undertook to reform the English grammar, pronunciation and punctuation, and the newspaper press, and books, and the style in which they are written, conversation, manners and customs; in fact, everything; till he became hereabout in society, what his great prototype Jeremy Bentham was in law tomes and panopticons, and sundry other incomprehensible things. Though the world smiled, yet, as Bentham now has his Brougham,[23] even so *he* had, in a smaller sphere, men whom he was fashioning and forming.

Mr. Neal showed me his law library, which is certainly one of the best I have seen in the United States, and what is more, the earnings of his own pen, as an author. Think of that, *as an author*! He has also as fine a private library as there is in this country, with books in quite all of the modem languages, nearly all of which he reads with ease, and many of which he speaks with fluency. I introduce the fact of the library, to say that even this is characteristic of the man peculiar in everything, for his books are all bound according to his own direction, all regularly labelled and margined, so that anyone might know that they were the property of the odd owner, if he were to pick them up in the street. About this time, Mr. Neal took it into his head to fall in love and marry, as most men will in the course of time. Now we saw the man again. The furniture of his house was all of his own direction; from the garret to the cellar, from the sofa to the looking-glass, from the napkin-ring to the butter-knife, all was elegant, magnificent, even rich and in the best possible taste. Experiments in cooking succeeded; thus, we had the editor and cook, the reformer and cabinet director, the poet and pugilist, the lawyer and housekeeper, all in one and the same person. I mention all these as the peculiarities of an extraordinary man.

Soon I met Mr. Neal in society, at parties, and in the social circle, and there he was the same peculiar man, talking as no other man can or does talk, all alive with head, hands and arms, jovial, happy, full of fun and frolic, all vivacity and anecdote, now declaiming like a torrent, if a torrent can declaim—throwing off poetry in prose, from an inexhaustible imagination, or cracking jokes, or making puns and *bons mots,*[24] or sparkling with wit as the ocean at night, phosphorescent and agitated. In truth, he was a very cataract of words, alluring all eyes, and astonishing all ears. Many men talk and declaim, but none talk as he talks, no matter to him what topic is introduced. The spring of his mind is such, that he leaps from one to another with more than French versatility. He has read much, and I may well say a little of everything. His life has thrown him into all sorts of society, from the Yankee

[23] Henry Peter Brougham (1778-1868) — British statesman; founder of the *Edinburgh Review*
[24] *bon mots* — Witty saying or riposte

backwoodsman, to the noble lord's table, and he has been almost everything, as I will show by-and-by: painter and pedagogue, novelist and writing-master, clerk and merchant, historian and poet, lawyer and editor, a most voluminous writer at home, an author abroad, and a prolific correspondent of the chief monthlies in England; and, though now not forty years of age, he has probably written more than any other American, and earned more with his pen than any other, Cooper[25] and Irving[26] excepted, all the time passing through a life of extraordinary vicissitude. labor and adventure; so that his simple biography is a romance.

Mr. Neal has faults, eminent faults, they are—I will speak of them by-and-by—but he has magnificent virtues, also. He is daring, over-daring, self-confident, over-enthusiastic for the times, over-ambitious for originality, novelty and startling thoughts, and he gives vent to all the fermentation of a brilliant intellect. But his faults are those of all men of genius, more apparent in him, it may be, than in others, because he has not been formed in the schools, and rubbed and polished by early attrition in those institutions, where an over-shooting intellect is kept within palings. He has all the extravagance and excitability of minds that break loose from the common orbit, and are then goaded by persecution—meteoric, but splendid; dangerous, but exhilarating; flashing and wandering, hitherward and thitherward over the whole galaxy of learning, but often emitting some sparks of celestial fire, as from a bright star in the uppermost sky. Think me not extravagant. I have had opportunities to compare men of all classes in our country, and to weigh and gauge their faculties. I am one of those cool-pen gentry that measure what they say, and never run wild in hazardous eulogium—and when you have heard more and more from me, you will believe what I say.

[25] Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) — Prominent American novelist
[26] Washington Irving (1783-1859) — Best-selling American author and historian

NUMBER TWO.

I must now begin and give you a regular biography of Mr. Neal, for I have been so much interested in his history, that I have taken pains to follow him in all his wanderings, and have read or run over all his books, from his essays and orations, to his novels and poems; and I want to show you a little more of a man of whom Americans are so ignorant, *because* he is an American, and whom many abuse, *because* it has been the fashion to abuse him.

Mr. Neal spent his boyhood and the early part of his life in Portland, and even there as a boy manifested many of those peculiarities which afterwards so distinguished him. I pass by genealogy and all things of the like, which biographers deem it their duty to chronicle, remarking only that the parents of Mr. Neal were not rich, that his father died when he was but an infant, and left the education and training of a wild boy in company with a twin sister to his mother, of course a widow. The parents of Mr. Neal were Quakers. He was brought up as a Quaker, but a Quaker coat and drab hat could never have altered him. There was a fire within that no sect could subdue, no smothering could quench; and it would break forth as soon in the sanctity and silence of the Quaker church, aa in any other place. Hence, we find him, when not more than ten years of age, knocking over in church a young Quaker, because of an insult his hot blood could not brook—and this amid the devout meditation of the brethren and sisters—mid all the gravity, meekness and humility of a Quaker assemblage. At school the same fiery spirit was uppermost, breaking out in mischievous defiance of the master's authority, or in the playing of such pranks as every man is heartily ashamed of when he comes to the years of maturity. At twelve years of age, he went into a dry goods shop, where he first learnt the art of trading, and where he was remarkable as a clerk or salesman for the skill, activity, and shop-like eloquence with which he disposed of goods. Probably there are but few who then better understood “the tricks of the trade,” or practiced them with more adroitness. I find in his *Errata*, the novel before alluded to, in which he figures as his own hero with no inconsiderable mixture of fiction, the following amusing account of the mode and manner of selling goods. I extract it because it is a specimen of the work, and of his style of narration, and because it is illustrative of the education which he was then receiving. The shop man and the shopper may learn a lesson interesting to both.

“All the next day, I was strangely serious, melancholy at times, and rather petulant. Everything went wrong. I felt malicious, spiteful, struck one of the clerks, went into the retail store, and deliberately cheated a rascal in the width of a cloth, and—stay, I *must* tell that. It was a neat thing, for a fellow in love to do, and may be a good lesson to the retail gentry, who darken their windows and doors, under pretense of showing their goods; dampen their cloths, that they may feel softer to the touch; show one end of a piece of goods, and sell off the other; exhibit the coarsest stuff in the whole warehouse *first*, though one should ask for mulled muslin, or India cambric; dazzle your eyes with garish colors, and overwhelm your ears with counter gibberish—hurrying and confounding, teasing and talking you into purchases, that you never thought of making, and did not know you had made till you found yourself at home, angry and ashamed of your own good nature, and of the rascal that made such a fool of you—your purse exhausted, yourself, or your husband in debt, and your bundle made up of trash, that you have not the slightest recollection of having ever seen before: so

different do the qualities, and colors, and materials appear at home, when your mind is tranquil, the light pure and strong, from what they did in a shop like a prison, and a noise that maddened you; to such men, this may be an additional lesson; and to them who sell 'damaged goods,' cheap goods; and 'auction goods;' or are all the time 'selling off' their stock at 'reduced prices;' for, if you will believe them, altogether less than nothing; less than it cost to black the shoes of the importer, or grease the wheels of the manufactory; infinitely less than the raw material coat in the seed twenty generations back; to them, too, that are wise enough never to open a piece of linen, or, if they do, never to show any but the outside fold; who, when their white goods are smoked and yellow, always exhibited them alongside of brilliant silks; and, when they show a piece of cambric muslin, wet it, the agreeable creatures! with their own spittle, and draw it tightly over the tip of the forefinger of the left hand, thereby making it appear at least one hundred per cent. better than it really is? or live by damaging goods, when the demand for *damaged goods*— and goods that have been shipwrecked—is at the highest; (for such economy will rage, like madness, at times among the women ;) whose maxim is, always to buy what is cheap, whether they want it or not; forgetful of the truth, that nothing is *cheap* which is not wanted, and who, when they have brought their husbands or fathers to the brink of bankruptcy, by their folly and extravagance, think to make it all up, and re-establish themselves for ever as frugal housewives, by wearing a ruff once, that cost only a shilling, or a calico frock, of a morning, that cost only a dollar, as if that were economy; *that* which makes it necessary to renew the wardrobe of a woman every morning, or, at least, every washing-day—to them and all that profit by this folly, in the sweet creatures that rule over us, and take sound goods, untumbled, unstained, and unwet, and convert them, by a little simple legerdemain, into damaged and wet goods! and so, *vice versa*, this will be of advantage—all these things are done. More than one fellow have I seen employed in converting a piece of British book muslin into an India *book*, by pulling and hauling it about in the water, till the starch was discharged; and case after case of cambric muslins, have I seen sold, trampled on, for higher prices than they could have been sold for in a merchantable shape, while every woman that bought of them, bought, as if she never expected to see another piece of cambric muslin upon the earth. And after she was loaded with it, could be traced half over town, by the trickling of bilge water from it, on her way to exhibit her prize. By ——! I have known women that have ruined their best friends, by the most shameful and profligate expenditure, absolutely beside themselves for having bought a paper of pins for half price—from some chap, who knew enough, not to *give* them away; for, there is no pleasure in *bargaining* adroitly there—women are not satisfied with that—they do not feel as if they outwitted a man then—while he cheated them in something, the price of which they did not know. I am leaving the story, but never mind—the rascals deserve it, and they shall have it—now that I have left off trade! It is one of their maxims to sell to women—for, that saves advertising cotton-balls, pins, needles and tape, and such things aa all know the price of—at half price; but *tuck it on*, say they, upon the cloths, linens, and such matters as they cannot so well judge. Women love to reason in a lump. If the needles are cheap, the cloths and linen are cheap, of course.

"There are some hundred more beautiful and gentlemanly tricks, of the same kind; such as having a moveable price, and never refusing the last offer, selling by false invoices, giving old goods new names, &c., and always falling in your prices before you are asked, or any complaint is made; having no change at hand, so as to oblige your customers to take toys;

using short yardsticks—which is rather perilous—and slipping back your thumb while measuring; cutting a piece of bandanna handkerchiefs into eight instead of seven; selling India goods by what they *came for*, and not what they *measure*; making an assortment out of one and the same piece by cutting it up. and marking it at different prices; *marking up* your calicoes, pins, cloths, &c.; and selling that which comes for four quarters, five quarters, six quarters, &c., whether cottons or blankets, for one or two quarters more—that is, what is invoiced four quarters, for five quarters; and a blanket that came for twelve quarters, for fourteen quarters. But enough—you that do not know the things, do not understand the very a1phabet of retailing, particularly in Cornhill, or Broadway, or Market-street. And now for the trick. It was rather a new one, as I take it. I found one of the lads confoundedly bothered with a male customer, who kept running in and out, examining and re-examining, measuring and taking *patterns* of cloth. (By the way, taking *patterns* and *samples* and shopping is the common daily occupation, in decent weather, of nine women out of ten, in Boston and New-York, who have no money to spend, or no heart to spend it.)

"I was fretted and indignant at the puppyish complacency of the young men, and reproved them for it sharply. At last, while the customer was yet balancing in his mind, between the cloth in "*our* store" and that which he had seen at the next door, I found that the only question was about the width of the two. *That* he thought should decide it; whichsoever was the widest, by a single thread, he determined to buy. I wanted to punish him for the trouble that he had given to the boys, and knew no better nor safer way than to do it by cheating him—conscientiously, I mean. I gave him the yardstick, therefore, and begged him to go in and satisfy himself. He soon returned, holding it so that our neighbor's cloth, it appeared, was a quarter of a yard wider than ours. It was, I found, one and five-eighths wide; his thumbnail was upon the mark of the three-eighths. A thought struck me, a pleasant one, I will assure you. It was only taking the yardstick out of his hand, without appearing to turn it, and lo! the width was converted from one and five eighths to one and three-eighths. It took, and he bought our cloth."

Mr. Neal continued in Portland and Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in the business of clerk, for some five or six years, when, ambitious for a wider field, as new and livelier thoughts were awakening in his bosom, he began to cast about for some other employment. It mattered not much to such a mind what it attempted. That Yankee aptitude which distinguishes the whole race, and makes them skillful in everything, ready in everything, and confident in everything, peculiarly distinguished him. The whole field of enterprise was open before him, but *what* to attempt, *where* to begin, that was the puzzle. At last he remembered that, as a clerk, he had become an adept in penmanship—and thus he resolved to open a writing-school, and to turn writing-master. A double advantage resulted from this employment—he could see the world in his journeyings about, and fill his pockets in addition. Again, another lucky thought run into his head. As he had some tact in imitating whatever he had seen drawn, he also resolved to give the good people lessons in drawing, though he himself was ignorant of the art—had never taken a single lesson—and, indeed, knew nothing of the effect of colors, not even what was transparent and what was opaque! Added to these professions, he would take likenesses and portraits, at three dollars apiece—but such likenesses, such portraits, as man or woman never heard of! Thus, as portrait-taker, drawing-master, writing-master, and, in truth, professor of matters and things in general, Mr. Neal began a tour through the state of Maine,

and visited Brunswick, Bath, Wiscasset, Hallowell, Augusta, and Waterville, some of the principal towns in the state. He indoctrinated many of the students of Bowdoin college in his sublime mysteries of penmanship, and was tolerably successful in his "twelve lessons," during the operation of which he professed to model and re-model any hand. But in the art of drawing he met with more difficulty, as he was only aided by an accurate eye and his power of imitation—not exactly the sufficient qualifications for a "professor," who demanded fifty cents a lesson. However, he succeeded at last in becoming quite a proficient, for he taught himself by teaching others. Almost one of his first attempts was with a man who had some skill in colors, and this attempt was in India-ink—but, by prudent management, he contrived to worm out all the knowledge of his pupil, and yet to impress him with the idea of his power as an artist. From this excursion, as a teacher in anything that men or women, boys or girls desired to learn, Mr. Neal returned to Portland with funds well replenished, and with an abundance of fame and popularity. But Portland had now become too limited a theatre for such a professor, and off he started to Boston, whither then, as now, the beat blood of New-England was flowing. A good situation was offered him there, in a store, where were kept all sorts of knickknackeries, from jewelry to teas, from looking glasses to damaged calicoes—and this he accepted, when little over the age of twenty. The arts of the shopkeeper, under more hopeful tuition, were here practiced over again. Were damaged goods in demand, they were "damaged" accordingly. Were mourning articles in requisition, everything was colored black—the good, bad and indifferent, so that even the winds would rend the garments on the person of the wearers. But soon the over-active mind of the shopkeeper bounded off upon another employment. The knickknackery shop was deserted, and with but one hundred and twenty dollars, that he could call his own, he opened in a chamber in Court-street, the business of a wholesale jobber. But as this lean capital but poorly answered for a wholesale dealer, in such a city as Boston, he had the good sense to throw up the business, and was lucky enough to escape with but little pecuniary loss. This was during the era when all speculations were hazardous, and the wildest schemes were in agitation. Next Mr. Neal went to New York, as an agent for the disposal of smuggled goods; and, after selling them there at an enormous profit, pushed on to Baltimore to procure bills of exchange on Europe. Thus, we find him in Baltimore, the theatre of his subsequent action—but anon he was again in Boston, then in a retail store, engaged for his own benefit, and doing no inconsiderable business. But peace came on—his dry-goods were falling on his hands, and the cry was "for a southern market." Again, he set out for Baltimore, and there he established himself in the wholesale and retail business, in company with Mr. Pierpont, now well known as a distinguished unitarian clergyman in Boston. Mr. Pierpont had been a lawyer, but, in consequence of ill health, had given up that profession; and thus, these two poets, both of whom have since figured so conspicuously in our literature, entered upon trade in Baltimore. The business connection established a wholesale store in Charleston, South Carolina—two wholesale stores in Baltimore, and a retail store in addition. It was, at the time, one of the most brilliant firms in the country. Their operations extended far over the southern and western country; and the magnificent ideas of the poets were visible in the magnificent negotiations of the merchants. But embarrassment succeeded. The firm blew up. In short, the parties failed, and the crash was tremendous. Both, as sensitive men, felt chagrined at the bad success of their negotiations, but both resolved to preserve an unblemished reputation, and to surrender all they had. The creditors of Neal offered him, because he was an excellent salesman, a situation in the retail store, which be accepted; but

soon hearing that ungenerous suspicion was afloat, because of this reservation, he threw up all, and wholly retired from business. He was now miserably poor—not a dollar had he reserved from the thousands which he was handling but a few days before; and I have often heard him say he bad not even money to take a letter from the post-office.

NUMBER THREE.

After the failure in Baltimore, Mr. Neal again looked around for occupation and employment. He was but twenty-three years of age, and so ruined in business! The prospect ahead was sullen and lowering. The sunshine friends of the merchant flourishing in business are seldom the friends to rush to the rescue of one in adversity. But Neal had a proud heart, and indomitable spirit, a genius fitted for anything and everything he undertook. His courage, his spirit, his vivacity never [forsook] him. His eye was fixed upon the law, as opening the best avenue to distinction, and as best fostering the natural impulses of his heart; and suddenly he entered upon its study. But how [to] support himself! how procure the funds wherewith to buy the necessaries of life, and yet have leisure to learn such a laborious profession! Mr. Neal had then but a very common education. Even of the first principles of English grammar he was ignorant. Indeed, he knew little of the very alphabet of the academical scholar; with no Greek, no Latin, no college learning. Such obstacles, in company with an overwhelming poverty, would have staggered ordinary ambition. But Neal was not the man to be alarmed or balked. He could throw his whole heart and soul into any undertaking. He could sacrifice society, pleasure, the world—everything—but the specter Poverty was pursuing him. His constitution was of iron. He had been hardened and toughened in the cold air of the north, but he could not live without bread, nor go to the temples of the law without clothes. At last he put his inventive genius to work, and concluded to turn scholar, critic, a literary man, and to gain a livelihood by his pen, a thing then almost or quite unheard of in our country. Think of the dealer in tape and bobbin, bounding at once from the counter to the desk, if not of Gifford[27] and Jeffery, at least to the desk of our Walsh[28] and our Everetts![29] Think of the hero of the yardstick brandishing the quill, and nodding a plaudit here, and hurling defiance there! But in truth, our shopkeeper did at the instant metamorphose himself into an editor and a writer of the periodicals, and thus he earned his bread. A series of articles of his, the *first* he ever wrote for publication, a criticism on all the works of Byron,[30] which he has surpassed in but few, very few of his subsequent writings, were published in "*The Portico*," in 1816, a monthly magazine in Baltimore, then a magazine of high renown. Such versatility of talent is wonderful, and the record of it is worthy of a conspicuous position, even in D'Israeli's[31] *Curiosities of Literature*. The criticism gained for Neal no little reputation, and he was forthwith engaged as the editor of the "*Baltimore Telegraph*," and for this newspaper, during a long time, he wrote copious editorials. Occasional pieces of poetry written by him were also published in the *Portico*. One would have thought that the editorship of a daily newspaper was sufficient occupation, but the productions of Neal's pen were intended only to give him a livelihood while pursuing his profession. During all this period, his name was entered as a student in General Snyder's[32] office, then a distinguished advocate at the Baltimore bar; and he prosecuted the study of the law with unremitting activity, withdrawing altogether from society, and living in the secrecy

[27] Robert Gifford (1779-1826) — (possibly) British lawyer and judge
[28] Walsh — not identified
[29] Everetts — not identified
[30] George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) — (Lord Byron) Prominent British poet
[31] Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848) — British man of letters; father of prime minister Benjamin Disraeli
[32] General Snyder — not identified

and solitude of his own chamber. Hoffman's[33] course of legal study, which is intended to require the occupation of the student for five years, was read by him, so far as he could procure the books, in the very short space of fifteen months. I have seen in Neal's own handwriting, four large quarto volumes of Reeve's and Gould's Lectures,[34] which he copied—with an index—an herculean undertaking, appalling to almost any student. I have also seen four quarto volumes of notes, statutes abridged, cases doubted, modified and denied, exceptions, uncommon titles, &c., following the suggestions of Hoffman in his course of legal study. Did I not know Neal's extraordinary industry to be unsurpassed by any man I ever met with, I could hardly credit the amount of his labors. I have traced him in his own library in volumes out of the course of ordinary legal study, on subjects remote and abstruse, when he has hazarded notes with the same audacity in which he hazards criticisms. Fearne,[35] Coke[36] nor Bacon[37] escapes his ambitious pencil. He literally devoured the contents not of one library, but of whole libraries. In his "*Errata*," in the character of Hammond, he thus describes the manner in which he went through and sustained these extraordinary and wonderful labors:

> "How do other people study? I'll tell you. They go to their room, one week with another, through the year, about four days in each week, and sit there nodding over their book, talking, or smoking, or thinking of the last night's debauch; or their next night's ball, perhaps three or four hours of a day; during which time, they think it no light matter to read twenty or thirty solid pages. By heaven! I would sooner digest my own heart three times a day, with all its bitterness, than starve my spirit on such a rascally diet."
>
> "I'll tell you what I did. I *began* with reading one hundred pages every day—of law, history, and miscellany. They occupied me the whole day and evening. I found that I could get through an hour sooner. I then read one hundred and ten, then one hundred and twenty, and so on, and so on, constantly augmenting, till at last it became as easy for me to read three hundred pages, as it had been at first to read one hundred. And for about three years, William Adams,[38] I verily believe, apart from all that I wrote, and apart too from the languages, and some time taken up in visiting my friends, that I averaged full three hundred pages a day, of law and miscellany."
>
> "How could you live through it?"
>
> "Hear me through. By system, temperance, and undeviating regularity. I let nothing discourage me; nothing elate me; nothing disturb me. I first convinced myself, that, if I followed the course which I had undertaken, it *must* bring me

[33] Hoffman — not identified
[34] Reeve's and Gould's Lectures — Given at Litchfield Law School by jurists Tapping Reeve and James Gould; published 1811
[35] Charles Fearne (1742-1794) — (possibly) English advocate-judge; published essays on legal subjects
[36] Edward Coke (1552-1634) - (possibly) renowned English jurist
[37] Francis Bacon (1561-1626) - (possibly) English philosopher, scientist and jurist
[38] William Adams — character of book *Errata*

out gallantly at the end, and then, what cared I—nothing; though I fell, a dead body, with every artery split and torn, upon the place of victory. I had blood in me. I did not ask to feel my progress every hour, no, nor every day. I did not expect to remember all that I had read, nor would I desire it. I never bothered myself with names or dates; and was willing to read any troublesome affair two or three times over. I never held it worth my while to do what was difficult, merely because it *was* difficult; nor to load my memory, no matter how retentive, or how accurate it was, with the names of cases, pages, or chronological tables; when, after all, I should have to refer to the books, themselves, however certain I might be, if there should be any dispute; and I learnt, moreover, that, after twenty years of labor, in accumulating a capital in legal science, one must study hard to keep his original stock good, and hold way with innovation. I learned at the same time, that the sum and substance of legal acquisition is, after all, not so much a knowledge of what *is* law, as a knowledge of the places where it is to be found—not so much the power of deciding a question, without reference to authorities, as the power of referring instantly to authorities. I now feel the advantage of it. I cannot study now as I used to. That is impossible—my time is no longer my own. But, still I am going on, one way and another, in a progress that startles nobody, while it accumulates surely; and in a geometrical ratio."

"But how could you keep alive! What amusement had you?"

"Writing, when I was weary of everything else; spent with toil, and sore about the temples with abstraction, I would fall to writing; and my blood would ripple and tingle again, like that of a benumbed animal, asleep in the sunshine; filled to the lips with old wine, and charged with electricity."

"But you surely did not confine yourself to law?"

"Oh, no! that would have killed me, by Jupiter! no wonder, that you stared. Coke upon Littleton,[39] Fearne—such light reading, thermometer at ninety-five, would soon have put out my pipe, at two hundred pages a day. No—I read of such gentry only fifty or one hundred—then of some other, one hundred more—taking care, however, always to begin in the morning, with that study, which was least agreeable to me; and to leave off at night, with that which was most agreeable. This kept me always in tune—my faculties never lost their edge."

While pursuing his law studies, his contributions and editorship. Mr. Neal wrote "*Keep Cool*," a novel in two duodecimo volumes, for which he was well paid. Of this novel I hardly know what to say. It was evidently written in haste; not so much for reputation, as to add to his pecuniary resources. It is original in plot, manner, and style of narration. There is one strange character in it, "*Echo*," who interests the reader amazingly. He is unique in all he says

[39] Littleton — not identified

and does, and in his manner of saying and doing. Strong, energetic and fruitful in resources, he argues ably against everybody; and when he has convinced or conquered an adversary, for the sake of further argument, he wheels about and fights on the other side, always with ability, always with originality, and in a tone the most sincere and solemn. He is a scholar and a poet, a wonder in the circle in which he moves, there exciting an extraordinary interest, without pretensions, and simply by the force and splendor of his intellect. The scene is in America. Henry Sidney goes among the Indians, and from him we have many eloquent sketches of the Indian character. The plot is simple, and not well enough dovetailed to keep up an unfaltering interest. The essays of "*Echo*," are always striking. His declamation is always powerful, often sublime. The descriptions are very frequently exaggerated, but generally exceedingly vivid. The passions of the reader are at times wrought up to an intense excitement, and then there is some flippant, trifling remark, or some monitory "*Keep cool*," in the perorations, throwing ice-water upon the reader's feelings, and making him ashamed of himself, and mad with the author. It seems to have been written with the express purpose of working upon one's good feelings, on purpose to ridicule them when thus worked upon. A terrible story is told, and when the heart is palpitating, the eye kindling, or the tear starting, what does one meet but the everlasting, ever-annoying "keep cool?" The title of the book is absurd. The attempt to mimic quotations at the head of every chapter, disturbs every serious impression, and destroys all interest in the narrative. The novelist loses all the advantage of the story; and the reader is pained to see so much eloquence, so much thought, so much ability and power thus thrown away. In short, the book is a sort of Don Juan[40] in prose, with a better moral, to be sure; and one may say of it as Horace says of the painting—*mulier formosa superme desinit in piscem*.[41] There is a mine of gold, out of which the thinker or writer can dig much pure ore; and of all this I could easily convince you, if I had room for extracts.

I will conclude this letter with an extract from *Niles's Register*,[42] in which Mr. Niles credits Mr. Neal for the performance of one of the most laborious and vexatious undertakings a man can well be subjected to; the preparation of a general index for the first twelve volumes of his *Register*. The labor of such an undertaking cannot well be overrated. Mr. Neal has said that it cost him four months of the severest labor, and that he was often engaged sixteen hours a day. Mr. Niles says:—

> "The editor had the pleasure, in his last paper, to announce the publication of the general index for the first twelve volumes of the *Weekly Register*. It contains two hundred and fifty-six pages of the usual size and type of the *Register*. If, like a cheese, its value is to be gauged by its weight, it will be thought dear; but no one that will examine a single page of it, will ever consider it so. *It is probably, the most laborious work of the kind that ever appeared in any country:* and the matter, it is believed, is so arranged, that it is nearly impossible for anyone to fail in finding, not only a *particular* thing that he may

[40] Don Juan — reference not explained
[41] Translation — *The beautiful woman ends in a fish's tail;* Horace, *Ars poetica 4*
[42] Niles's Register — Weekly magazine published in Baltimore MD; founded in 1811 by Hezekiah Niles

desire to refer to, but everything belonging to any particular subject, and have the whole before him at a single view; and simplicity is united with certainty."

NUMBER FOUR.

The next publication which Mr. Neal laid before the public, was (in 1818) the "*Battle of Niagara*," a poem without notes, by Jehu O'Cataract, Esq., author of "*Keep Cool*, &c. "*Goldau, or the Maniac Harper*," another poem, was published in the same volume. "Jehu O'Cataract" was the name given to Neal by the Delphian Club of Baltimore, a club of which Paul Allen,[43] General Bynd,[44] the Rev. Mr. Pierpont,[45] Judge Breckenridge,[46] Neal, and other distinguished men, were then members. The name was no bed characteristic of Neal's impetuosity and stormful temperament; and is was so very appropriate, that he feared it would cling to him through life unless he adopted it himself. Hence, he unfortunately fastened this ludicrous appellation to the title-page of serious poems, so that many an ill-judging reader would be puzzled to decide whether the poem, from the profusion and exaggeration of metaphor, was a serious or a burlesque performance. The second edition was published in 1819, and for "Jehu O'Cataract," was substituted "John Neal:" but what this edition lost in the eccentricity of title, was more than made up in the eccentricity of a preface of sixty-seven pages. This preface is one of the strangest and most amusing outgoings of Neal. It criticizes and lauds *Niagara*, descants upon poetry at large, denounces and exposes the reviewers, demands a reading, and in truth, is full of interesting dissertations on matters and things in general. I must give you a few extracts. Speaking of his own poem he says:

> "I know its faults; they are innumerable and great. It has no calm, tranquil prettiness of character. It is no neutral. It is poetry, or, it is the most outrageous nonsense; one or the other it must be. I have written enough to show what I *could* do, if I pleased. I have no idea of mincing the matter—there is poetry in my veins—I know there is."

All this is exceedingly modest, to be sure, in modern estimation, and strikes rather oddly on a modern ear; but if any man in our country has a right to be vain, it is the writer of the paragraphs above, after accomplishing what he had accomplished in so short a time, and under such appalling difficulties. A proper degree of self-confidence is necessary in every man, and not infrequently those who are loudest in declaiming against vanity, have the greatest quantity stifled within their own bosoms, there struggling for utterance. However, I shall not undertake to be the apologist of overweening vanity, though I believe there is no man who has a higher order of intellect than his fellow-man, unconscious of the value of the possession; and it would not be difficult to fortify by classical authority, vanity of the most assuming order, for the pages of Cicero are brightened with visions of immortality. Horace has said, "*Non Ego obibo, nec stygia cohibebor unda*."[47] Ovid concludes his *Metamorphoses* with,

> *"Jamque opus exigi, quod nec Jovis ira,*
> *Nec poterit perrum, nec edax abolere vetustas*;"[48]

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[43] Paul Allen — Writer; established newspaper in Baltimore
[44] General Bynd — (perhaps, General Winder)
[45] (probably) Rev. John Pierpont
[46] Judge Breckenridge — (probably) Henry M. Breckenridge, writer
[47] Horace, loose translation —*I shall not die, nor shall I be held in by the waters of the Styx.*
[48] Ovid —

and Martial says:

"*Hic est quem legis, ille quem requiris,*
Notus in orbe—martialis:"[49]

to say nothing of the "*Inveniam viam, aut faciam*"[50] of Bacon. But to return, Mr. Neal gives the following account of the manner and time in which *Niagara* was written, which may be relied upon as strictly accurate:

> "On the seventeenth of June, 1817, I heard that a friend of mine was going to England. I was, at that very moment, publishing a book here, (in Baltimore,) and it struck me, that if I could manage to publish another there, I should have two chances, instead of one, of escaping what the critics very properly call "d——n." So, though my friend was expected to sail every day, I sat myself down to the job. By noon of the twentieth, having employed three days upon it, I had written over and over again, enough to count, reckoning broken-backed ones and all, nearly eight hundred lines. I then had a short reprieve, the vessel would not go for three days—or rather, my friend would not arrive for three days; so, I undertook to revise it. On the twenty-third at noon, having employed six days upon the whole business, the *Battle of Niagara* was completed, scoring eight hundred and fifty-four lines, superficial measure; two copies were taken of it. *Goldau* was thrown into another shape, augmented to about four hundred and fifty lines; and as large number of small poems were copied from manuscript, and revised for the London press. In that state the book went to London. My friend was authorized to sell it—*if he could*. He could not sell it. * * * * * * Some critics saw it there, and spoke warmly of it, but recommended, very judiciously, a revision."
>
> "The poem was brought back, and thrown aside some sometime. When I had nothing else to do, however, I sometimes took it up—in the winter of 1817-18, after a day of most intense and horrible application, to a work in which I was then engaged, (the index to *Niles's Register*,) and added some few lines here and there" * * * . "It is no merit in me to compose rapidly; I claim no praise for it. I wish I could move more slowly, less capriciously, but I cannot. Had I a dozen hands, I could keep them all employed, when I am writing poetry."
>
> "One night after having worn myself into a state of comfortable stupidity, over the work I have once before alluded to, (the *Index*,) I had taken out my poem, as I often did, (for I suppose I have written it over thirty times at least) to weave in a few more lines, when a thought struck me. I was poor. I had a scheme in view at the time, which might place me in a situation to pursue a course of severe and laborious study, to which I had devoted myself; but if it

[49] Martial, Book 1, Epigram 1; quoted by Byron
[50] Translation — "Either I will find a way, or make one". Motto used by Lord Bacon (1561-1626)

failed, I determined upon this: to finish *Niagara* and *Goldau*—to commit them to memory—prepare myself for the purpose—go to Philadelphia—(that being the "Athens of America"[51])—assume some other name, to hide my mortification if I were discomfited and *there recite it publicly*." * * * *

"I did all this—I was disappointed in my first scheme; had nothing to depend upon, to keep me from starving, except I chose to write myself to death. This determined me. I went to Philadelphia, assumed the name of George E. Percival: and with, the utmost difficulty, succeeded in procuring a room, after a week of disappointment and delay, during which time I found but two men, who seemed justly sensible of the elevated rank to which Philadelphia is entitle in the republic. * * * * At length, however, I was persuaded to hire Mr. Renshaw's[52] room, although an accident had recently happened at the Washington-hall, while Mr. French[53] was singing, which, it was supposed, *might* prevent the timid and misinformed from attending. But of the contrary I was assured by the proprietor of the house: he informed me, that he had since let it to Mr. Incledon,[54] or the musical glass-man, I forget which—I only remember that he told me the latter performed every night—night after night—to crowded rooms;" and I knew that a fire-eater had fitted up the Mechanics-hall, where he exhibited every night, as I had reason to suppose too, to overflowing houses. "Indeed, the reason why I could not get a place, was because they were all taken up by rope-dancers, jugglers and vaulters &c. &c. who are all crowded, I suppose, to suffocation, by the '*Athenians*.'"

"I was advised to print bills and stick them up at the corners of the streets, but poor as I was, I was a little too proud for that. I would as soon have mounted a stage and tumbled about like a mountebank with labels on my hat. '*It won't take*' said a gentleman to me, '*unless you make a show with the bills*.' I did not believe him—I had too good an opinion of the Philadelphians: but he knew them better, I have found out *that*. Well, I advertised in all the papers—gave *extracts* in some three or four, (perhaps, however, that is the reason of the catastrophe,) had my tickets printed, and distributed amongst several highly respectable booksellers: went to my lodging, and having nothing else to do, threw myself upon the bed—fell asleep—don't laugh reader—I woke exactly at the moment—hurried in the full possession of all my faculties, I verily believe; for though I wonder how I could have had the assurance to appear before a Philadelphia audience, creatures of such refined taste—such exquisite sentiment, and all that—*then* I felt about as easy (though I never so much as "spoke a piece" in public) as I should now in haranguing my own grandmother; and so, to end this narrative, I arrived at the room. How many

[51] Athens of America — By analogy with Edinburgh, known as the "Athens of the North" for its reputation for learning
[52] Renshaw — not identified
[53] French — not identified
[54] Charles Benjamin Incledon (1763-1826) — Prominent English tenor singer

> of these literati—these Philadelphians—these American Athenians, think you, I found assembled? Not one! not one, by Julius Caesar, not one!" * * * "Such expectations as I had formed. I even advertised, that I should have a crowded house, that he (Mr. Renshaw) could sell *'nearly a hundred tickets in his own household*;' that the room could accommodate three hundred persons—I even advertised, heaven forgive me, that '*no more than two hundred tickets could be sold!* '—and faith! I *believe* the terms of the agreement were religiously complied with: though I do not *know*, for the very next day, I left Philadelphia; have not been there since, and never mean to go, if there be any way on earth to get round it.
>
> "There is another thing, too, for I ought to do justice to the 'Athenians,' that ought not to be omitted. When I arrived at Mr. Renshaw's, instead of finding the room illuminated and prepared, I found it in total darkness; not a candle lighted; some half a dozen remarkably genteel young men appeared arranged about it, as if to stare at me; but they were genteel enough to stop that business, without a particular request, for i was in no very agreeable humor. I spoke to one of the servants, '*why is not the room prepared?*' *'Nobody come, sir; no tickets sold*,' said he with a delightful grin—I shall remember it to my dying day. '*Where is your master?*' '*Gone out, sir*.' I was very angry, I must confess, and am not sorry now that his master was 'gone out.' I meant to have seen him the next day, but the next day I left the city, I hope forever. Since then, I have thought it possible that among so many admirers of wild beasts, philosophy, conjurors, &c. &c. as Philadelphia is crowded with, some person might have been disposed to see a *poet*; and that, each supposed it a hoax, when he arrived at the mansion-house and saw no room prepared."

After this amusing history of "*Niagara*," the reader may not be uninterested in knowing something more of the poem. The critics of the day, among whom Paul Allen was conspicuous, spoke of it with enthusiasm or coldness, as they were gifted with the poetic temperament. Allen, after many of the warmest plaudits, objected to it as too rich, too gorgeous, too magnificent, and as over abundant in poetry. He avers that "*the poet is most of a poet when he thinks himself the least of one.*" Now, strange as are the objections to a *poem*, they are in this case founded in justice. The descriptions *are* too rich, too humorous, too exhilarating. There is too much of description and too little of narration to make the poem popular. The visions of the poet are so vivid and stirring, that the reader is not carried along, but hurried along—driven along from beauty to beauty, till even beauty becomes fatiguing, and the mind seeks for repose. The metaphors, the poetical imagery is clustered too thickly together. There is poetry enough, gold-leaf enough, in the little volume to be beaten out into a folio. There is enough description of American scenery to make an epic of a dozen books. A shrewd critic has said—"*It is a monster in fine writing*"—and yet has added with equal truth, "*there is no grand or awful object in American scenery, which has not arrested his attention, and raised up within him correspondent struggles and workings of the soul. He has an eye peculiarly formed for the dim, the distant, the rapid, the magnificent*." * * * "*He has the art of making his reader forget that he is in his own lolling chair, and over his old fireplace, and of placing him down in the scene which he undertakes to represent*." * * * * "*His words burn. His*

range of language [?] is very limited, but what he possesses is of the purest gold." I can copy but an extract for you. The first is very characteristic of the whole poem. It is an apostrophe to our country and Niagara.

> "*Home of the waters! where their strength*
> *Rolls in immeasurable length:*
> Or, *tumbling from their cloudy thrones*,
> *As thundering from a battlement*,
> With marshal hymning, like the tones
> Of battle shout, by warrior sent.—
> Go, *rioting* in foam and spray,
> With *rainbow-streamers o'er their way*,
> Beneath the precipice they're rent;
> *Exulting*—as they burst their cloud—
> As high—as dazzling—and as loud
> As *sheets of light, in their descent*
> *Through midnight's parting firmament*."

There is not, in the English language, a more splendid description of our rivers and magnificent cataract. Some of the metaphors are sublime, but there is too much poetry in the piece. The representation of Niagara, tumbling from its cloudy throne, rioting with rainbow-streamers, exulting as sheets of light, etc., is all highly poetic, exceedingly beautiful, but over-abundant in metaphor, and too gorgeous to be appreciated even by a poet on a single perusal. The extract is a specimen of the great beauties and faults of this offering to the muses.

"*Goldau*" is a less ambitious and more beautiful poem. The narration there, is often of surprising beauty, and is not second to Scott[55] or Byron. That part of it which is mere narration is the most attractive and interesting, for when the harper is kindled with poetic enthusiasm, the same faults are prominent as in *Niagara*. The story is a simple one. A harper of Switzerland sees his native village destroyed by an avalanche, becomes a maniac, wanders about, tells his story—and everything he sees reminds him of the destruction of all he loved. Mrs. Hemans,[56] in her "*Crescentius*,"[57] has struck upon the same idea, and in the same meter.

In the second edition of *Niagara* and *Goldau*, among many miscellaneous pieces, was published a tragedy, called "*Otho*." No criticism or notice of mine can be so interesting as one I shall give you from the lamented and distinguished Dr. Godman.[58] This gentleman was an intimate companion and friend of Mr. Neal when a student of medicine in Baltimore; and it is said by those who know, that Mr. Neal exerted no small influence in communicating to him a portion of that energy and enthusiasm that so much distinguished him in after life.

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[55] Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) — Prominent Scottish novelist and poet
[56] Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans (1793-1835) — English poet; said to have been an imitator of Byron
[57] Cressentius — Poem *Widow of Crescentius*
[58] (probably) Doctor John D. Godman (1794-1830) — Maryland anatomist, naturalist

"There can be but one opinion of the merits of *Otho*. It exhibits the strength of an active and enthusiastic mind—excites to all the sublimity of feeling and interest, every faculty of the soul. It gives us emotion without permitting us to know why—it forces us to feel and think—it carries us beyond ourselves, yet the feelings it awakens are the worst of our nature, and the moral we imperceptibly deduce from it is totally wrong. Pride immeasurable, ambition unbounded, feelings warped to madness, false ideas of greatness, and forced (although sublime) mysteriousness of sentiment, though capable of affording display to a great poetical genius, can never be atoned for in their ill effects by his poetry or dramatic excellence. We can sympathize with him in some degree of his pride—we may be inspirited by the tone of his expressions—but we must feel disgusted with a being who is so mad as to become the enemy of all the world, because his birth was illegitimate. He was acknowledged great, even as he could most wish, in battle and bloodshed. He felt himself beloved, yet sought not to obtain or secure what he valued, because he became mad—because he was a fool. If he be not as much a devil as Milton's, his equal is to be sought only among the devils of another world."

"It is a fact, that the author has no need of apologizing for his originality. It is evident that he embodies his own conceptions, and describes many emotions he has himself felt or imagined. He has used some well-known materials, but we feel no more disposed to complain of this than we do when we see excellent stone or timber wrought into beautiful statuary or architecture, by an inventive artist rather than by a dull mechanic. The poetry has faults—let those seek them who are fond of them. he preservation of unity, the sentiments (preface) concerning ghosts, and the opinions of death upon the stage, are admirable and incontrovertible. But the time for supernatural machinery is almost gone—I trust it will be very shortly gone forever, with German cabals and mysticism, to oblivion long since well merited."

"Johnson did dash on what was great and established, like the eagle or the lion, in consciousness of strength, and like them he mangled or crippled many that he did not totally destroy. It is perfectly just and in high spirit to attempt the restoration of what he has, in the very vanity of strength, attempted to overturn. Yet Johnson has many enemies, or enviers, because he was Johnson—because he outstripped, outshone, and vanquished opposition; because he finally rode in his triumphal chariot with the captives of many nations chained to his wheel. This envy was not felt in the instance of *Otho*. The author of that is lifted too much above such a feeling."

"It is natural enough that a man of taste and a scholar should feel the improprieties of Shakespeare, and be indignant at what are frequently mummeries and folly. Shakespeare is not to be blamed for this—he wrote in rude times for a rude people, and was an unlettered man. The fault is in the extravagance of his admirers—the sickliness of fashionable taste. Yet, with all his faults and extravagances, his plays are worth infinitely more than all the

> Corsairs,[59] Laras,[60] Charles de Moors,[61] Bertrams,[62] Manfreds,[63] etc., in a moral point of view, that ever may or can be written. His great, that is, his villain-heroes, command a peculiar admiration; but it is an admiration linked to a detestation of their crimes—an abhorrence of their principles. The heroes of the melodramatic school clothe the most detestable sentiments in a splendid dress; that act like savages who have been once slightly refined, and then returned to their original modes of living; inspire their admirers with a love of false greatness and diabolical pride; commit every crime that nature revolts at, and die—as none but dogs should die. I hope their day is passing rapidly away, and that the present generation may live to the time when the "*Comedies Larmoyantes*,"[64] and the "*Tragedies Allemandes*,"[65] shall live only for contempt, if they are ever recollected."

I have given you this criticism, from the pen of Dr. Godman, because whatever comes from his pen is interesting, and is likely to be just. He takes notice of the singular preface to *Otho*, in which Mr. Neal justifies the short time he has taken for the whole business of the play, from the commencement to the catastrophe, only *twenty-four hours*—thus regarding what Dr. Johnson derided, the preservation of the unities. The reader will remember that Dr. Godman's criticism was written when but a student, and before he had obtained his brilliant reputation.

[59] Corsair — Poem by Byron, published 1814
[60] Lara — Character of poem of same name by Byron, published 1814
[61] Charles de Moor — Character in Schiller's play *The Robbers*, published 1781
[62] Bertram — possibly a literary character
[63] Manfred — Title of dramatic poem by Byron, published 1817
[64] Comedies Larmoyantes — Tearful Comedies
[65] Tragedies Allemandes — German tragedies

NUMBER FIVE.

The next literary enterprise in which Mr. Neal was engaged, was the *"History of the American Revolution*." This work was originally to be written by Paul Allen; and subscription papers were issued accordingly. But Mr. Allen's habits of procrastination were such, that he put it off day after day, and finally confided all to "two of his literary friends," whose "assistance" he acknowledges in his preface, which, it is believed, is the only part of the book that was his own. These literary friends were Dr. Watkins and Mr. Neal, and they wrote the book. The work is in two volumes, octavo, eleven hundred pages. That part which Mr. Neal wrote, begins in the first volume at page two hundred and fifty-three, and extends to the end of the volume. A history written by two hands, and from minds so different as those of the two writers, would of course present great inequalities. Hence, parts of this history are badly jointed. That part, written by Neal, exhibits his usual originality and freedom of thought, and his energy and ardor of narration, tempered however by the rules of the schools both in etymology and punctuation. He wrote his part of the history, and read the necessary documents, with his usual rapidity, and realized a profitable job in the undertaking.

During all this period, Mr. Neal was engaged in the arduous pursuits of a student of law, who was devoting all his energies to study, and having obstacles apparently insurmountable. He supported himself handsomely in the meantime; and after an apprenticeship of between four and five years, entered upon hill profession with buoyant and flattering prospects. About this period, the pen of Neal seemed to catch fire. It blazed forth in many extraordinary works and extraordinary notions, in pages of thrilling and illuminating elegance, unsurpassed in power and grandeur of impression—in pages where lie volumes of thought, influencing for life the character of the reader, if he be of an ambitious and sanguine temperament, or swaying, at least for a moment, his passions with overwhelming effect: or, in pages of eccentricities and vagaries that fly over the whole sky of literature; in will-o'-the-wisps, as it were, that glitter, but delude; that startle, but do not interest; that amuse, but do not instruct. There is genius, but it is wandering, misspent genius. It does not mount to the throne of intellect, and from aloft forever dazzle and awe; it does not inspire reverence, and compel adoration: but it trifles and toys with its exalted destiny. It mingles with anything and everything. It preaches; it prays; it reviews and criticizes; it travels and romances; it talks English, and Indian, and New-England Yankee. It is now divine, anon a braggart; now in the wilderness, with savages and beasts, anon in churches and temples; now here, anon in Europe; ambitious everywhere, eccentric everywhere, full of furious and fiery emotions, without distinguishing time or place, or the fitness of things, or dignity of character. In truth, the imprisoned thoughts of a full and active mind broke loose, the thoughts of years that had been compressed in a burning brain, there long working and fretting, but now with fetters off and bounding forward like a spirited and gallant colt. Or, rather, the fires of the mountain, after rumbling and thundering long within, had forced their way upward, and the crater had opened, and amid the coruscations, the sublimity of the display, there were smoke and ashes, rocks and lava. To say that Neal wrote volumes, does not express the idea. He threw them forth as if by magic. His pen seemed to have some patent motion—to be gifted with the power of racing over paper, and yet leaving an impression. Certain it is, that his novels were ushered into existence with wonderful rapidity. "*Logan*," in two volumes—over six hundred pages—first came into the world. It was published in Philadelphia in 1822. It is full of declamation,

incoherence and extravagance. The narration is declamatory; indeed, the whole style is declamatory from beginning to end, intermingled with the usual quantity of interrogations and exclamations that Mr. Neal scatters so profusely in all his writings. In 1823, "*Seventy-six*," in two volumes, was published in Baltimore. This novel is probably the most popular, the most interesting, and the best of all his novels. It is founded on the events of our revolution, and there is a plot regularly developed and followed out. Narration is in characteristic, not declamation; and this narration is far less erratic than the general productions of the author's pen, though there are, even in this, passages of eloquent and powerful declamation. Soon after "*Seventy-six*," came "*Randolph*," in two volumes, which attracted extraordinary attention at the time, from the fact, that the hero reviewed and criticized everything he read and saw, our cities, our architecture, our manners, our ladies; and had something to say of every person he met—our orators, statesmen, lawyers, authors, poets, and painters. Such bold and fearless, but hazardous criticism, of course, involved him in difficulties. A sketch of William Pinkney, in which Mr. Neal spoke of this great man in most magnificent language aa a lawyer and statesman, but not as an orator and as a gentleman at the bar, offended his son, a midshipman in the navy, a high-spirited and gallant young man, and, according to the law, in such cases, made and provided by the sons of chivalry, he challenged Neal to fight a duel, after calling upon him in vain to disavow any agency in the publication of *Randolph*. Neal had written vigorously and effectually in "*Keep Cool*" and "*the Portico*" against the practice of dueling, and now even in a city where dueling was the fashion, and it was "cowardly" to refuse a challenge, he had the courage to ridicule the whole affair, and to risk a "posting," which was forthwith given him. No one, who knew Mr. Neal, or who knows him now, could have doubted his courage, or his fearlessness, or even his rashness. Hence, the "posting" did him no harm; and in a few weeks after he turned the whole affair into ridicule, by republishing in his own "*Errata*," a history of the challenge, reply, posting and all, in his own ludicrous and whimsical manner.

"*Errata, or the works of Will Adams*," was another novel in two volumes, which Mr. Neal's active pen soon brought into the world. This, also, was published in 1823. Thus, we have in a single year, eight volumes from the same person! In a note in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Mr. Neal says he wrote "*Randolph*" in thirty-six days, with an interval of about a week between the two volumes, in which he wrote nothing: "*Errata*," in less than thirty-nine days: and "*Seventy-six*," in twenty-seven days. During this time, he was engaged in professional business, and they were written in the leisure and idle hours of a lawyer.

Volumes thrown off with such profusion, could not, of course, be carefully written; and with much brilliancy, originality and power, there is much rubbish and exaggeration. The sagacious reader, who can discern the gold from the dirt, will be interested and affected by what is brilliant and powerful; and though he may lament that such pure gold is buried in so much earth, yet he must award to the writer the palm of exalted, even if it be of misdirected genius. "*Errata*" is a work to which all these remarks are applicable. Many of the essays in it make an impression that cannot be forgotten for life; and if it be searched aa the miner searches, only for what is good, it will afford the reader the highest pleasure.

After the publication of these novels, Mr. Neal's restless mind began to look about for a yet broader theatre of action. At home he had been caressed as a god, and denounced as a

devil. The newspapers and critics had exalted him to a high pitch of fame, or degraded him to the lowest dishonor. *Logan* and *Seventy-six* had been republished in England, and there had been spoken of in flattering terms, as "rich transcripts of American scenery," or, as the "true colors of impassioned genius." Probably such notices, with the ambition to travel and to see more of the world, induced him to set out for England. But Mr. Neal himself tells all with so much good-nature, in the "*London Magazine*," that I cannot resist the temptation to quote his own account. The extract is from a humorous article, under the title of "*Yankee notions*."

> "Early in the year 1822, *Logan*, a story which has been attributed to five or six persons, the greater part of whom were crazy, or thought to be so, but a story of which I am the true author, was published in America. Not long after, it was republished here by Newman,[66] or the Newmans, who live somewhere in the neighborhood of Ludgate Hill, or Leadenhall street, or some other characteristic place; people who manufacture a certain sort of literary ware by shiploads. Well, it was very soon told abroad in America.; for in the pride of my heart, I could not keep the good news a secret, nor could any of my friends. I was rather shy I remember at first, fearing that there might be some mistake, when my publisher told me I was to re-appear in the shop of a London publisher. A London publisher! think of that. I knew nothing of London publishers. They were all one to me; all of a piece. Even Mr. Murray,[67] for aught that I knew, was but one of a multitude, who, if genius fell in their way, would be ready to snap at it; and if it did not come in their way, would be ready to snap their necks after it. Alas! but I know better now: and I know very well now, that if I had known three years ago, what I know while I am writing this paragraph, I should not have been quite so much gratified, I rather guess, on hearing that a body of London publishers, Messrs. A. K. Newman & Co., had republished a book of mine." * * * *
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> "Well, *Seventy-six* was republished here, and by the Whittakers.[68] Enough to turn the head of a writer who knew so little of republishing as I did then. A *critique* appeared—a very favorable critique too—but where? In the *La Belle Assemblee*.[69] I was the happiest creature alive—my fortune was made, I thought—for I was able to write, I knew, one such novel a month. I was ready to run out into the highway and shake hands with everybody I saw, for the honor of our native literature. I even heard from another quarter, and believed it, that another magazine here had popped in a short notice about my book—a paragraph, the substance of which was, that the critic regarded the novel as another of the Lake school[70]—that, soberly speaking, it was full of horror, torn

[66] Anthony King Newman — Publisher (formerly *Minerva Press*) located at Leadenhall Street (?) 1801-1848.
[67] John Murray — London publishing house founded in 1768 by Scot John Murray (1737-1793), and run by the family until 2002
[68] (probably) London publishing house of George Byrom Whittaker (1793-1847)
[69] La Belle Assemblée — British women's magazine, published 1806-1837, by John Bell (1745-1831).
[70] Lake School — Group of English Romantic poets (including Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey) who settled in the English Lake District at the start of the 1th century

flesh, etc. etc.—and that he could never tell whether I was praying or swearing etc. etc. Indeed, indeed, I was very happy! I tried to wear a natural expression of the face, for a day or two, but I could not—I was too, *too* happy for such a thing, and whenever anybody looked at me, though it was in church, I smiled in spite of my teeth. By and by it was reported, that both books were translated into French and German, etc. etc., and that I was getting to be thought well of in Europe." * * * * * * * * * *

"Just now, I have only to say what led me directly to the determination, which brought me here: I was anxious to see the people of Europe at home. I knew very well, that great as the sacrifice would be to throw up my profession, just when it had come to be a sure and genteel support for me, and go abroad without any means of support, save such as I might carry with me, and which could not possibly keep me above six months or so, it would be greater and greater the longer I should delay it. I had hopes, too, that if i were able to write a book a month, a book of three or four volumes, I should not be permitted to starve, in a place where books that I had written, at much greater speed, were published and puffed one after another. * * * * I persuaded myself, too, that if *Seventy-six* were well received, *Randolph* and *Errata* would be much better received; for they were bolder, and if possible, yet more out of the common way. It never entered into my head, I confess, that, peradventure, *Randolph* and *Errata* might never be heard of in Great Britain, till I should come to speak of them myself, as I do now. On the contrary, I took it for granted, that the former would be republished, without loss of time, and that, whenever it appeared, it would excite a stir in the literary world.

"N. B. I think so still."

* * * * "I talked over the affair with a friend—he was a clear-headed, warm-hearted, worthy fellow. We agreed, that if only I could get to London, I should cut a figure in the literary world. He went so far, indeed, as to say, that I never should return to America, for my value would be known here—and after it was known, would the people of this country ever think of parting with such a prize? I got up from the table—I went to the fire—stood leaning my forehead on the mantel-piece. '*By the Lord, Harry, then*,' said I, (his name was Harry,) '*I will go*.' '*Go— go where?*' said he, starting up; for he had hardly thought me serious before, and my eagerness terrified him. '*Go where?*' *'To England*,' said I."

"It was done. I made all the arrangements before the sun set on that very day; and before three weeks were over, I had closed my affairs, got y letters ready, transferred my clients to a successor and a friend, put a young lawyer into my office, borrowed cash enough, added to the little I had, to pay my passage and support me for a few months here—and set sail for England, satisfied that, happen what would, if people gave anything for books here, they

> would not be able to starve me, since I could live upon air, and write faster than any man that ever lived."

Mr. Neal embarked in the ship *Franklin*, of Baltimore, in December, 1823, as I learn from further "*Yankee notions*," in the *London Magazine*; and arrived in Liverpool, January, 1824. How he sustained himself in England, I will show you in a subsequent article.

NUMBER SIX.

After Mr. Neal had sufficiently gratified his curiosity by viewing the lions of London and its vicinity, he looked about him for a field of action. Letters of introduction he had in abundance; but what are they worth, except for a dinner, or a nod of the head, or a courteous shake of the hand? Even these, or but very few of these, he delivered; for he had concluded to stand upon his own foundation, and to make his way by his own abilities. His first literary attempt was in *Blackwood's Magazine*, then as now one of the most popular periodicals in Europe, in an article entitled, "*Sketches of the five American presidents, and of the five candidates for the presidency.*" This article was extensively circulated in this country and in Europe, and was attributed by many to Washington Irving; but Mr. Neal is the author, and indeed he is, I believe, the only American who ever wrote much, if anything, in the British periodicals. After the publication of this article, which was something new, from a new pen and in a new way, Blackwood was solicitous to engage him for yet other articles. At that time, as at present, though now not to such an extent, the greatest ignorance prevailed, even among well informed men, as it regards the nature and character of our institutions, our manners, our morals, and the very geography of our country. Correct information concerning the United States was not to be obtained: and the books of Ashe,[71] Fearon,[72] Faux,[73] and the like, had poisoned the reading public to such a degree, that America was believed to be the land of monsters, the refuge of the outcasts of the earth. True, the *Edinburgh Review*[74] had smiled favorably upon some one or two of our productions; but no such encouragement, no such compliments greeted us then as greet us now, from across the Atlantic. In this state of public opinion, Mr. Neal did not hesitate, in his boldest and frankest manner, and in the most extensively circulated magazine in Europe, to undertake the defense of his country, her institutions and her sons, and to re-model and instruct the public mind. Hence the charge which has been lain against him here, "of abusing his country," is one of the most perverse and shameful that malignant ingenuity could have invented. No man better or more effectually ever sustained the moral warfare which this country has been maintaining against the pride and prejudice of Europeans. None of our gallant seamen or gallant soldiers, upon the water or the land, ever bore aloft the American flag with more chivalry or more courage than he did, in the heart of England, among our very adversaries, and in their very magazines. True, he did not shock the feelings and appall the pride of the British public, by proclaiming his own country to be "the greatest, freest and happiest on earth;" but he furnished the public with facts; he corrected misrepresentations; he exposed and denounced our abusers; he introduced our writers, and painters, and public men;—in short, he defended our country in whatever any of our sons can defend her, and he did much toward to driving back the torrent of calumny and abuse with which British writers and British travelers had been deluging us. For example—few writers but Neal would have spoken thus boldly in an English magazine. He speaks as an Englishman:

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[71] Thomas Ashe — Author of *Travels in America: performed in 1806 ...*, published 1811

[72] Henry Bradshaw Fearon — Author of *Sketches of America: a narrative of a journey ...*, published 1818

[73] William Faux — Author of *Memorable days in America: being a journal of a tour ...*, published 1823

[74] (Third) Edinburgh Review — Literary and political quarterly magazine founded in 1802; edited by Francis Jeffrey; supported the (liberal) Whig party and promoted political reform

> "Let us be wary in our boasting. But for us there would be no slaves, at this hour, in America. We talk of the air of England—English ground—that a slave cannot breathe one or tread the other, without undergoing a transfiguration. All this may be beautiful poetry, but, in our minds, it is a tremendous sarcasm. Look at our colonies; at our East India possessions; at what we have done *for* slavery in every quarter of the globe. We boast of our 'Negro Somerset' case.[75] The very case *proves* that the right of holding a slave in England was, but a little time ago, a doubtful and serious question, in our *courts of law*. Besides, Massachusetts had given a like decision some time before. We are unspeakably grieved and shocked on seeing a runaway 'negro-wench' offered for sale in the American papers; yet up to the year 1770, when the case of Somerset was decided, similar advertisements were frequently met with in *the London papers*."

This is but a sample of the spirit of his articles, and of the manner in which he browbeat John Bull in his own empire. I have before me an article, in which, *as an Englishman*, he speaks of the later war, and there he rebukes the Englishmen in such rigorous language, that I am surprised that sentiments so humiliating to the pride of old England should ever have found their way into an English magazine. Nor was he less valorous in defense of American literature. In the *European Magazine*,[76] at the conclusion of the first number of an article, entitled "*The present state of literature in North America*," he says: "I will undertake to show, hereafter, that no people on earth have been so productive in all the varieties of literature, everything considered, in proportion to what should be expected of them, as the people of these very United States of North America."

This is the man, thus warring with the prejudices and sneers of Englishmen, thus carrying battle home to England itself, and defying her writers to the combat, whom many of his ungrateful countrymen have stigmatized as the abuser of the land of his birth! *Blackwood* is full of his eloquence, upholding and exalting the United States. The warmest hearted American could not have spoken in more rapturous language than he has spoken, not only in *Blackwood*, but in the *New Monthly*,[77] *Old Monthly*,[78] the *Westminster Review*,[79] the *Oriental Herald*,[80] *European Quarterly*,[81] the *Morning Herald*[82] and *Daily Globe*,[83] of all which periodicals he was at times a contributor; and, in the majority of them, a regular contributor. His pen was as prolific in England as it was in north America, and commonly it was employed

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[75] The judgment in *Somerset v Stewart* (1772) held that slavery was unsupported by English Common Law
[76] European Magazine — Monthly publication, founded 1782 in London by James Perry
[77] New Monthly Magazine — British publication, founded 1814 by Henry Colburn
[78] (Old) Monthly Magazine — Publication begun in London in 1796 by Richard Phillips
[79] Westminster Review — Quarterly British publication, founded 1823 by Jeremy Bentham to promote Radical views
[80] Oriental Herald — Publication founded 1824 by journalist and social reformer James Silk Buckingham (1786-1855)
[81] European Quarterly Journal (or British and Foreign Review)
[82] Morning Herald — London daily newspaper
[83] Daily Globe — London daily newspaper

on American topics, where he ever speaks in strong language of all that any American patriot would praise.

After Mr. Neal had been in England nearly two years, he published (or Blackwood did for him, paying well for the copyright,) "*Brother Jonathan*," a novel, in three large duodecimo volumes. Not having the inclination to undertake a criticism of this work, I will give you extracts from an amusing notice which appeared in England, in a book entitled "*Rejected Articles*."

> * * * * "And on this our first interview with the author before us, sober-suited critics as we are, and therefore altogether unaddicted to the style exclamatory, we can scarcely refrain from uttering aloud, "a writing savage, by heaven!"—for that the work, the title of which we have placed at the head of this paper, *is* the production of a North American savage, we have no doubt whatever; and if our "exquisite reason" for so thinking be demanded of us, all we can give, is, that it *can* be the production of no one else."
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> * * * * "*Brother Jonathan* is, we will venture to say, the most extraordinary work of its kind, which this age of extraordinary works has put forth—in Great Britain we mean: what America or Germany may have produced in this sort, is more than we are able to say; and the former of those countries in particular, may, for anything we know to the contrary, be able to count a whole catalog of similar works, written by the same hand or hands—for we imagine this person employs *both* his hands at the same time, one on one volume and the other on the other. At least we can hit upon no other theory, to explain the extraordinary and headlong rapidity of style, as well as the insane incoherence of matter, which prevail throughout these volumes." * * * *
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> "In fact, the author of these volumes, whoever he may be—whether "a saint, a savage, or a sage," and whether this be his first work or his fiftieth (and it *may*, from its internal evidence, be either the one or the other)—is, to say the least of him, the most *original* writer of his day; and we are greatly mistaken indeed if he will not turn out to be, without an exception, the most extraordinarily gifted of them all, as far as mere natural faculties go." * * * *
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> * * * * "We imagine that the writer of *Brother Jonathan* was *born* an author, and, that he could have no more failed to fulfil his calling, than he could to have exercised any other of the active functions of his nature. His mind is of such a character and constitution, that it could not choose but fill itself to overflowing with ideas and images, no matter by what circumstances it might have been surrounded; and being so filled, it cannot choose but pour its contents forth, like an overflowing vessel, reckless of all consequences, and without any necessary reference to recipients. If he were thrown upon a desert island tomorrow, and left without the remotest hope of escape from it, he would, the day after, begin writing at the rate of fifty pages a day, and never cease till his materials were exhausted: we mean his *material* ones, for his moral ones

> would never be likely to fail. The former deficiency being, under present circumstances, not within hope, we see no probable end whatever of the productions of his pen. At any rate Dr. Southey[84] may abandon his reported project of achieving immortality, by writing more than Voltaire[85] did; for here is a person, who, if he lives to the ordinary age of man, may, if he pleases, write more than all that Voltaire *has* written, and all that Dr. Southey *intends* to write; and it will be his own fault, not nature's, if he does not write it all better than either."

The "*Yankee Notions*," and other articles in *Blackwood*; the novel and bold manner in which Neal attacked the fashions and habits of Englishmen, their music and dancing, as well as their opinions, bearing there the same high port, and risking there the same hazardous remarks as at home, together with *Brother Jonathan*, awakened the curiosity of a kindred mind—another *reformer*, to know who this odd genius was. This kindred reformer was no less a person than the distinguished and now apotheosized Jeremy Bentham. The young Utilitarians made an acquaintance with Neal at the debating clubs, and very soon he was surprised by an invitation to dine with the philosopher himself, though he had never seen him. This was an uncommon honor, for Bentham valued his time as he valued his life, and was ever disinclined to form new acquaintances. Of course, the invitation was readily accepted, and thus two individuals became associated, who were wholly unlike, unless it be in eccentricities more differing than their characters. Their intimacy was destined soon to ripen into an ardent friendship, that continued to the day of Bentham's death. Mr. Neal, in his book entitled "*Bentham's Morals and Legislation*," a volume which was published in Boston after his return to this country, gives many amusing anecdotes of Bentham and his habits, and among them is his first introduction to "*Queen Square Place*," the residence of the philosopher. Bentham, at their first dinner, took such a fancy to Neal, whom he was wont to call his "Yankee," or a man "no better than a Yankee;" to his vivacity, anecdotes, humor and oddities, that he engaged him to dine on the following, and every successive Wednesday. Soon after, by the request and urgent solicitation of Bentham, he removed to *Queen Square Place*, and made his home in Bentham's house. There, says Neal himself, in the work before alluded to, there "I had a glorious library at my elbow, a fine large comfortable study, warmed with a steam engine, exercise ground, society and retirement, all within my reach. In fact, there I spent the happiest, and I believe the most useful days I had ever passed at that period of my life." There Neal exercised himself under the best masters, in all those studies which contribute to the robustness of the human frame, in boxing, fencing and gymnastics, and yet pursued his studies in Bentham's magnificent library, with his accustomed ardor and energy. There also he met many of the distinguished men in Europe, who sought admittance to the society of Bentham, as if in his presence, they could borrow the illuminations of his intellect. The Yankee jokes, the high spirits, the never-failing wit of the odd American, amused and interested the philosopher; and though neither would endure contradiction, and both were proud of their opinions, yet they became more and more attached to each other every day.

[84] Robert Southey (1774-1843) — English Romantic poet; Poet Laureate for 30 years
[85] Voltaire — Pen-name of renowned French writer François-Marie Aroue (1694-1778)

After Mr. Neal had seen as much as he wanted of England, and had spent between three and four years in that country, visiting different parts of the kingdom; after he waited a long time for Bentham, who promised to travel over the continent, with him, but who at last concluded not to go, he bade adieu to his friend the philosopher, his companions, the Utilitarians, and old England itself, and started for Paris. The time which he allotted for his journey was now over, and his eye was again upon home. Hence, after viewing the curiosities of Paris, and travelling a short time in France, he embarked at Havre in a vessel bound to New York, where he arrived in June, 1827.

Mr. Neal tarried but a short time in New York and Boston, when he returned home to Portland, the place of his nativity, where he has now established himself, as he says, for life.

CONCLUDED.

I have now brought Mr. Neal to his own country and his own birthplace. I spoke in my opening letter, of the hostility which his enemies in his absence had raised against him, as the "abuser of his country;" and subsequently I proved that no man is better entitled to the appellation of its defender, or, for his services, or his independence as a writer in a foreign land, better deserves the generous plaudits of his countrymen. If he had done nothing else for our literature, his courage as a writer in *Blackwood*, is enough, not so much to entitle him to the indulgence and defense of every American, as to make such indulgence and defense a claim of justice, a matter of common honesty, a tribute which every people owe to their champions, whether their weapon be the sword or the pen. But such a tribute he by no means received when he returned to America. The spirited industry of writers who had been wounded in his earlier productions, or, of others whom he had taken no pains to conciliate, was at work from the hour he landed. And whatever misrepresentations a tortuous ingenuity could devise, or a prudent falsehood dare to hazard, they were industriously promulgated. Neal's spirit again was roused. His sensitive mind, which with all its affected disregard of public opinion, is yet alive to its censures, if not acutely alive, yet not above nor below its plaudits or condemnation, could not and would not brook these misrepresentations. He established the "*Yankee*" not long after he returned; made it, while it was published in Portland under his own immediate care, one of the most popular periodicals in New England; and in this he moved like a floundering leviathan, dealing and receiving blows—at times exasperated and exasperating—with zealous friends and fiery adversaries.

The year after Mr. Neal returned home, he published "*Rachel Dyer,"* another novel in one volume. This novel was never calculated to be popular, though no one can read it without being impressed that the author is a man of no common ability. It was an experiment in novel-writing; an attempt perhaps to give romance to facts—the Salem tragedy,[86] already sufficiently full of romance. However, he justifies himself for this and his other novels, in his preface, thus:

> "To succeed as I hoped, I must put everything at hazard. It would not do for me to imitate anybody, nor would it do for my country. Who would care for the *American* Addison, when he could have the English by asking for it. * * * * And what are imitations? Sheer mimicry, more or less exalted to be sure, but still mimicry, wherever the *copies* of life are copied, and not life itself: a sort of high-handed, noon-day plagiarism, nothing more. People are never amazed, nor carried away, nor uplifted by imitations."
>
> "The British are a nation of novel-writers. Their novel-writers are as a cloud, and they want something that they have not. They want a real American writer; one with courage enough to write in his native tongue. *That* they have not, even at this day. *That* they never had. Our best writers are English writers, not American writers. They are English in everything they do, and in everything they say, as authors—in the structure and moral of their stories; in

[86] Salem tragedy — Notorious witchcraft trials conducted in17th-century Massachusetts

their dialogue, speech and pronunciation; yea, in the very characters they draw. Not so much as one true Yankee is to be found in any of our native books: hardly so much as one true Yankee phrase."

"For my part I do not pretend to write English; that is, I do not pretend to write what the English themselves call English. * * * * I never shall write what is now worshipped under the name of *classical* English. It is no natural language—it never was—it never will be spoken alive on this earth; and therefore, ought never to be written. We have dead languages enough now; but the deadest language I ever met with or heard of, was that in use among the writers of Queen Anne's day."[87]

* * * * "One of my objects was to show my countrymen, that there are abundant and hidden sources of fertility in their own beautiful brave earth, waiting only to be broken up; and barren places, to all outward appearances, in the Northern as well as Southern America—yet teeming below with bright soil—where the plowshare that is driven through them with a strong arm, will come out laden with rich mineral and followed by running water; places where if you but lay your ear to the scented ground, you may hear the perpetual gush of innumerable fountains, pouring their subterranean melody night and day among the minerals and rocks, the iron and the gold: places where the way-faring man, the pilgrim, or the wanderer, through what he may deem the very deserts of literature, the barren-places of knowledge, will find the very roots of the withered and blasted shrubbery, which, like the traveler in Peru, he may have accidentally uptorn in his weary and discouraging ascent, and the very bowels of the earth into which he has torn his way, heavy with a brightness that may be coined, like the soil about the favorite hiding-places of the sunny-haired Apollo."

The next publication from the pen of Mr. Neal was "*Authorship*," 8vo. pp. 267, "*A tale by a New Englander over-sea*." This work, with *Rachel Dyer*, was reviewed in the *Englishman's Magazine*,[88] April, 1831, and in such a manner that I cannot avoid the temptation of giving you an extract or two from the article.

"We vouchsafe John Neal, author of *Authorship*, a cordial grasp of our good right-hand, and beg to introduce him to our readers as a gentleman worthy of taking a place in the roll of the select. He exults in the name of Yankee, and Yankees should be proud of him. He has written American books, and therefore we have singles out his latest publication for the text of this discourse."

"It will afford us sincere pleasure to have frequent opportunities of holding colloquy with the genius of John Neal. We respect the man for his hearty

[87] Queen Anne of Great Britain ruled 1702-1714.
[88] Englishman's Magazine— Monthly literary magazine, published 1831-1833

> identification with his country, and his good-humored adoption of national distinctions, irritating to minds less confident of their strength. They who would arrive at a satisfactory conception of the bent and force of his talents, must advert to his works. Among British writers none can be held out as his model. Diverging from the smooth and crowded highway, he has hewed his solitary track through the untrodden wilderness; and if he sometimes wander in obscurity, or exhibit the waywardness of one who has chosen to walk apart, he anon bursts through his entanglement, emerges into the far extended prairie, and casting an exulting glance above and around him, displays the high-bearing of a freeman of nature, standing face to face with the poet's queen where she keeps her state, begirt with the bodyguard of everlasting oaks, lackeyed with the winds of heaven, heralded by the thunder-cloud, and piped to repose by the deep bass of the down-dashing cataract."

The last volume which Mr. Neal published is "*Bentham's Morals and Legislation*," a royal octavo, 310 pp., to which I have before alluded.

I must now hasten to close this series of letters concerning a man, in whose writings there is so much pre-eminent talent, so much originality, so much profound and eloquent thought, so much of the life and vigor, the bone and sinew of the old English, even amid all their rubbish, all their eccentricities. There *is* genius in his soul. It blazes forth in all his productions. And genius everywhere, in any country, but more emphatically in our own, should command our attention and encouragement. Genius also, we must remember, has its impulses and its wanderings. It is wayward and erratic, as well as grand and sublime. It rises and falls; it cannot always stand on its lofty height unapproached and unapproachable. It cannot always astonish, always startle, nor always delight and dazzle, but now and then it must march in the ways of common men; and if there it does not move as we do, think as we do, and act as we do, we must not forget it has different impulses, and receives different impressions, else it would not be genius. Whenever it deviates from the beaten road, it goes through cerborian [?] bogs as well as over beautiful landscapes. There are hills and valleys, ditches and swamps in its way. We should, therefore, excuse its errors, and think the more of its virtues. We should not measure it by our own standard, or force it within our own bounds. If we clip the wings of the eagle, it can at best but stalk upon the ground. This we should pardon its wanderings; and if we condemn, it should be in moderate and temperate language.

There is much in the character and history of Mr. Neal to command the admiration of his own countrymen. He is a child of our own institutions—rocked and cradled amid the enterprise, the novelty and agitations of our own Union. He has literally forced himself forward by his own sterling merit, in spite of opposition which he himself has too often provoked, by his own imprudence, and carelessness of peoples' opinions. His intellect, say what his adversaries and detractors may, is of an uncommon grasp. He is no common man. Pity, indeed it is, that poverty compelled him as it did, to educate himself; pity, that he could not have been formed and shaped in the schools of our country, and there, by competition and attrition, have been rubbed and furbished so as to suit the notions of the world. Pity it is, that he does not guide his own impulses, instead of suffering them to run away with him. But

Neal is an American heart and soul. He is a Yankee, proud of his country and his countrymen. His eye is here among our own rivers, our own hills, and our own boundless wildernesses. His books are of an American hue. He works in American mines. The gold that he finds is American gold, pure and brilliant, new and priceless. I now ask my countrymen, if they will leave posterity, or other than Americans, to proclaim the reputation of such a man; for reputation, some day or other, will follow his name, as sure as the shadow follows the sun. I ask them if a writer of so much originality and strength, who has contributed abroad and at home, so much to the formation of an American literature, shall be passed over in silence among those whom we are proud of? America is independent in politics, in legislation, in trade—but alas! not independent in literature. Our own works, our own writers, have no fame at home till the blaze of their glory is reflected from abroad. Nothing is good here, no coin will circulate, not even what the Englishman will grasp for if wrought in his own country, unless it is stamped as genuine in another clime. For what have ears, and eyes, and hearts, but to hear, and see, and feel for ourselves? Are the old worn-out scenes of Europe, London or Paris, the Thames or the Seine, or Rome itself and her falling temples, better fitted for American genius than the ocean-current of our own Mississippi, or the temples of august nature in American forests? If Scott were here, he would immortalize our solitudes, and make our Alleghanies ring with fame. The dialect of the genuine Yankee would then become more famous than that of the highlands or lowlands of Scotland. Our own writers are never so happy as when at home. Put Flint[89] in the woods and prairies of Missouri and Illinois, and his eye brightens, and his heart beats—he is transporting, he is divine—but take him from thence, and is but a third-rate Englishman. In truth, a student of art or of nature cannot live in the west, without feeling himself uplifted by the associations about him. There is not a rocky island in Maine not full of legends of marvelous attraction. Our ocean is as magnificent as that which washes the shores of Britain. Campbell[90] and Southey come to us for the plots of poetic romance. Where has Cooper been so happy as at home—in our revolutionary story or the wild western prairie—or when he cuts loose from Europe and drifts upon the ocean? *that* Cooper, who is now languishing abroad for the vivid pictures and sturdy energy of his own native land. Encourage American literature then; encourage American authors. If genius appear, applaud and emblazon it. Take by the hand, and stand by him who has the confidence and courage to explore our own treasures. Overlook faults, overlook errors; away with the dross and rust; but if evidences of genius appear, say so; speak forth, cry "onward and upward," and let the loud voice of the American people strengthen its wings and gladden its flight. The vagaries of Bulwer[91] and D'Israeli but imitations of Neal, the first an evident copier of his very punctuation, are circulated from the Red River and the Lake of the Woods to the St. Croix.[92] Will his own countrymen worship as inwrought in an Englishman's work what they pass over in an American?

Mr. Neal is now in this city, at work with his accustomed energy upon law and literature, language, and. as usual, upon almost everything else. The death of an uncle, in leaving him a

[89] Flint — not identified

[90] Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) — Scottish sentimental poet; editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*

[91] Henry Bulwer (1801-1872)— British politician, diplomat and writer

[92] Brooks refers to extremities of the settled United States of his day — Texas, Minnesota and Maine, respectively.

portion of his estate, has taken away that stimulus which formerly urged him to literary publication, and in some degree made him trifle with his reputation. But he is industrious now—none are more so—energetic, cheerful, happy in a family growing up around him, and is every day turning enemies into friends.

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