

WILLIAM CHANNING WOODBRIDGE

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WILLIAM CHANNING WOODBRIDGE was born in Medford, Mass., December 18th, 1794. His father was Rev. William Woodbridge, whose name is identified with the early history of female education in Connecticut. His mother, Ann Channing, was a sister of the father of the late Rev. Dr. W. E. Channing of Boston. She died when her son was about fourteen; but his father lived to an advanced age.

The family removed from Medford to Middletown, Connecticut, in 1798, where the father took an active interest in the improvement of common schools, and organized the first Association of Teachers in this country. Here in 1799, the son learned his alphabet: and immediately commenced the study of Latin, read Accidence and Corderius. In 1801, the family having removed to Norwich, he studied Latin there with W. McGee. His father subsequently removed to Newark, New Jersey, to take charge of a female seminary; where, in 1804, we find the son studying the Greek Testament. In 1806 he studied mathematics and chemistry; and Homer in 1807. He entered freshman at Yale College, June, 1808, at the age of thirteen years and six months. I am careful to give particulars, to show their connection with that feeble constitution which caused him so much suffering in after life. From the fact of this premature development and exercise of his mind, and from his own statements and my personal knowledge, I have no doubt of the existence, at this period, of what medical men call "latent scrofula;" nor that the tendency was greatly aggravated by his premature studies. For though his parents were wise enough to defer his "alphabet" to his fifth year, yet such was his aptitude for study, and such his advantages, under his father's home teaching, and in the sick chamber of his mother, as well as with other excellent teachers, that we see him entering college at an immature age, and with a delicacy of constitution which, while it promised him college honors, did not augur well for his general health. Perhaps the worst feature of this hot-house education, was, after all, his being so much in his mother's sick room. Such confinement may, indeed, have had a good moral influence on him, but must have con-

tributed not a little to his after physical sufferings, as well as detracted from his general usefulness.

Of Mr. Woodbridge's college life not much is known. His account of himself during that dangerous period is in some few particulars different from what might have been expected by those who know the manner of his early training and his general inoffensiveness. Yet, although those of his peculiar defective physical organization are, in some respects, unusually exposed to the besetments of vice, still their moral principles and powers are often proportionately forward. Thus it was with Mr. Woodbridge. He passed the fiery ordeal wholly unscathed.

Although it does not clearly appear that at this early stage of his educational life, he regarded every thing in the shape of amusement, whether public or private, as absolutely and unqualifiedly sinful; yet he certainly had less of sympathy with those of his years, than with the middle-aged and the old. The sick room education, to which he had been so much subjected, may have imparted a premature solidity to his habits of mind, if not a sluggish cast to those of his body.

Mr. Woodbridge graduated at New Haven, September, 1811, when he was less than seventeen years old. The subsequent winter was spent in Philadelphia, pursuing his studies; but of their particular character, at this time, nothing remains except the following extract from his private journal. "The study of the Bible in the original language, enters into my plan of study. My own inclination is to pursue a course of Biblical criticism, Ecclesiastical History, and Doctrinal Theology, as my great object; but to connect it with a revival of my collegiate studies, particularly the Mathematics and Philosophy."

He took the charge of Burlington Academy, in New Jersey, in July, 1812; where he remained until November, 1814. Of his success in teaching we know nothing; but the bare fact that he commenced at the immature age of seventeen and a half, and continued here almost two years and a half, together with his well-known subsequent success in Hartford and elsewhere, is the best evidence we can desire in his favor.

During the winter of 1814-15, we find him again at New Haven, attending lectures on Anatomy, Chemistry, Philosophy, &c. His great desire to perfect his knowledge of these and his other college studies had probably led to this change, and induced him to defer teaching at least as a profession, for a few years longer, or, more probably forever.

Mention is made, in his private journal, of a very interesting revival of religion, during this season, in Yale College; and we are led to

infer that he was himself one of its subjects, as were also many others whose names have since been well and favorably known to the Christian public; not a few of whom have gone to their final award. Such, at least, were Codman, Cornelius, and Nettleton. Mr. Woodbridge made a public profession of religion by uniting with the college church, April 2d, 1815. He was now in his twenty-first year.

In September of the same year, he commenced a course of theological study with Dr. Dwight, then President of Yale College; where he remained till the death of his teacher, which happened January 11th, 1817. In July of this year, he entered the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey. At this time, and probably from the beginning his studies with Dr. Dwight, (if not indeed from a somewhat earlier period,) he had cherished the hope of being a foreign missionary. But he had not been long at Princeton before a new field was opened to him. There was a call on him to join Messrs. Gallaudet and Le Clerc of Hartford, in conducting the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb,—then in its incipient stage of existence. Under date of August 30th, 1817, he thus says of himself:

“During the week, my attention has been almost constantly occupied with the subject of the asylum. At times my heart as been affected and enlarged. I felt at one time particularly, as if I could rely on the promise: “Acknowledge Him in all thy ways, and He shall direct thy paths.” I felt as if I could put myself in the hands of God; yet I must expect his guidance in the use of means.”

Having occasion to spend a night about this time, in a family where there was a deaf and dumb girl, the conversation readily turned on the susceptibility of deaf mutes for receiving instruction. To gratify the anxious parents, as well as to make an important experiment, he undertook to explain to her the word *think*, as being equivalent to seeing absent objects. She seemed much interested, and appeared to partially understand him.

The question, both with himself and his friends, was now, it would seem, that of the comparative importance of this work of teaching, and that of foreign missions. His views and final decision may be gathered from the following record in his journal, and deserves our particular attention.

“This is missionary ground. It is carrying the gospel to those who can not otherwise obtain it; yet compared with the opening among the heathen, the asylum offers a very limited field. This is an immediate, certain field of usefulness. A mission is distant and uncertain.”

In short, he concluded to join the asylum, and went to Hartford for that purpose, December 4th, 1817. The pupils welcomed him

with great cordiality, as they had probably heard of his trials on their account, and knew his general reputation and character; and in order to testify their high gratification, many of them spelled the word "glad" on their fingers.

In November, 1818, less than a year afterward, he received a pressing invitation to become professor of chemistry in William and Mary College, in Virginia. The salary proposed was much larger than he had hitherto been accustomed to receive. But after consulting with the directors of the asylum, and with God and his own conscience, he declined the appointment. This I regard as a triumph of principle, which did him much honor. It proved, moreover, to be the turning point of his life.

Though his duties were sufficiently arduous and numerous at the asylum, he sometimes preached on the Sabbath—in general, I believe, gratuitously—in various places in and about Hartford. He had been licensed to preach by the North Association of Connecticut, February 2d, 1819.

This attempt to go beyond the field which Divine Providence had opened for him at the asylum, was doubtless an error; though Mr. Woodbridge is not the first good man who has broken himself down by endeavoring to do too much. But he had been admonished already. Constitutional feebleness, to say nothing of dyspeptic and nervous tendencies, had been a serious interruption to his theological studies; and had not been without influence in the decision of the great question whether or not he should become a foreign missionary.

In the progress of the summer of 1820, his health began to give way so as in a great measure to unfit him for his duties. It should be observed, however, that in addition to his ordinary routine of labor in the asylum, and such other extra duties as from his great conscientiousness, he may have been led to engage in, some of which I have already mentioned, it is highly probable he had begun, before this time, the preparation of his *Rudiments of Geography*. For though nothing is said, in his journal, which would lead to this conclusion, yet we know that as early as in the beginning of the year 1822 this work was finished, and considerable progress made with the larger work, the *Universal Geography*.

They who know any thing about the preparation of an elementary school-book on a science which they are teaching as enthusiastically as Mr. Woodbridge taught geography to deaf mutes in Hartford, will understand the exhaustion which accompanies it, and will not be surprised that his health materially suffered. In fact he was so far reduced, that by about the middle of the year 1820, both he and

his friends were much alarmed for his safety ; and, together with his medical counselors, were urging a voyage to Europe, as the most probable means of his restoration. In October, 1820, he accordingly sailed for the south of Europe. A gentleman who accompanied him on this voyage, thus says of him :

“In the intervals of a severe and depressing dyspeptic disorder, he displayed his devotion to the conscientious and philanthropic course which he afterward adopted, in the spirit of a missionary ; often directing conversation to subjects which he afterward prosecuted to a great degree. He was one of the first passengers then known, who had attempted to practice religious services at sea. Among others of his experiments that might be mentioned, while crossing from Gibraltar to Algesiras, he once engaged a motley company of Spaniards, Moors, &c., in an animated and interesting conversation in the language of natural signs.”

In this first voyage to Europe, and in efforts there for the recovery of his health, he spent about eight months. During this time he was in Palermo, Naples, Leghorn, Rome, and other Italian cities ; and although amid scenes of war and confusion, he not only gained in health, but accumulated much geographical knowledge ; an object which he had no doubt kept in view from the very first conception of the journey.

Mr. Woodbridge returned to Hartford July 4th, 1821, with his health partially restored. The autumn appears to have been spent in perfecting his *Rudiments of Geography*, and in completing the *Universal Geography* ; which last was published in 1824. To these two great works he devoted his whole physical and mental energies for more than two years.

The friends of education who read this sketch, hardly need be told that up to this period, geography as a science, had received but little attention in the public schools of New England ; with the exception of a few more favored of the larger schools, spelling, reading, and writing, were nearly all the branches that received special attention. A little arithmetic was taught here and there, but even this was for the most part crowded into the evening. The master, as parents supposed, had no time for it by day, without interfering with his other studies ; and they sometimes formally and sagely voted “cypbering” out of the school. As for geography, some few schools studied Morse ; a few others used as a sort of reading book, Nathaniel Dwight’s “*System of Geography*,” which was arranged in the form of question and answer. The vast majority, however, paid no attention whatever to the subject.

But, Mr. Woodbridge, while instructing the deaf mutes at Hartford, and perhaps yet earlier had hit upon an improved plan of teaching, which is now too well known, as incorporated into most of our school geographies, to need description. A similar method, had also been pursued by Mrs. Emma Willard of the Troy Female Seminary. Both these teachers were preparing their plans of teaching for publication, unknown to each other; but Mrs. Willard was at length induced to merge her own work in that of Mr. Woodbridge.

Woodbridge & Willard's Geographies produced a revolution in the method of teaching this useful science, wherever it had been taught before; and by their simple and interesting system of classification, were a means of introducing this science in many schools where it had not then been taught. And if others have reaped a large measure of the pecuniary emolument to which these authors seem to have been justly entitled, it is a thing by no means new or unheard of. It is but the fate of most discoverers. Some men, it is true, meet it with more resolution than others, according, in fact, to their various force of bodily constitution. Yet if Columbus, with his gigantic mental and physical energies, was so broken down by it, that his hair was white at thirty years of age, it should hardly excite surprise in any who know how feeble Mr. Woodbridge was at that time to learn, that his health was not a little impaired by the ill treatment which he received at the hands of his contemporaries. It is certainly true that some of the works which were regarded by many as being stolen from Woodbridge & Willard, contained sundry improvements, but this was to have been expected. It must be a consolation, however, to his friends, at the present day, to know that his works still have an existence, and are regarded by not a few teachers, as preferable to any of their successors. It is also a still greater consolation to believe that the study and preparation of these works, led to his subsequent efforts in educational improvement.

In April, 1824, he thus writes: "My geography is nearly completed, and it becomes a serious question what course I shall now pursue." Unfitted as he was by ill health for teaching and the pulpit, it is not to be wondered at that such a question should arise in his mind; nor that he should think seriously of visiting England, Scotland, France, Germany, and Switzerland, with the view of improving himself in the science of general education, and particularly in his favorite department, that of geography.

It was not so common in those days to try to run away from dyspsia as it now is; and yet such things had occasionally been done. Mr. Woodbridge's partial success in visiting the south of Europe, had

ed with several of the earliest female schools in New England and New Jersey. Indeed, he continued a teacher for fifty years of his lifetime, and died in the harness, as is believed, from excessive labors both in school and in the pulpit, when he was between seventy and eighty years of age. But what is most to our present purpose is the fact that he was President of the first School Association, in Middlesex county, Connecticut, as early as the year 1799; the object of which was the accomplishment of the same ends at which his son and his associates were aiming thirty years later. It is not needful to insist, in this case, on the doctrine of the hereditary descent of mental and moral qualities; but it is certainly a singular coincidence. The interest which very naturally attaches to this fact is increased when it is understood that at the very juncture of which I am now speaking, the elder Mr. Woodbridge joined his son at Hartford, and became, for a considerable time a fellow laborer in a cause which he still loved with all his youthful ardor.

Our united and separated efforts in behalf of education had enlisted a good deal of newspaper influence in this cause, especially at Hartford. But having become fatigued with this form of labor, I made known to Mr. Woodbridge my intention of establishing a periodical at Hartford, to be devoted to the cause that so much engrossed our attention. But there were difficulties in the way; and in the meantime Mr. Woodbridge purchased the American Journal of Education at Boston, changed the name to Annals of Education, and with the aid of his father and myself, and the promise of other occasional assistance, proceeded to act as its editor. This was in August, 1831. Later in the year he removed to Boston, whither he was soon followed by his associates.

No pains or expense were spared by Mr. Woodbridge or his associates, to render the Annals the one thing needful to the friends of education, especially to teachers. During the first and second years of its existence, he developed, in a clear, careful, and faithful manner, the whole system of Fellenberg; together with such other systems of distinguished European educators as were meritorious, particularly those of Pestalozzi at Yverdun, and Prof. Jacotot of Louvain; while his associates and contributors furnished most of the other articles. Physical education and methods of instruction, whether practical lessons, reviews, notices, &c., fell largely to the share of the writer.

Not only the Annals of Education, but the Juvenile Rambler, was started by Mr. Woodbridge, about the end of the year 1831, on his arrival at Boston. The last was a small weekly newspaper for chil-

dren, designed not only for the family, but for the school-room, and even as a class-book for reading exercises. For a little while and in particular localities, it was exceedingly popular. A few large schools received it by hundreds; and in one or two it became a substitute for all other reading books. But it was not very long lived. Its editors,—who had charge of it practically,—found their duties too arduous, and withal so poorly rewarded, that after the lapse of two years they were obliged to abandon it, and concentrate their influence on the "Annals."

It should also be remembered that during the first years of the "Annals," a weekly paper for teachers, entitled the Education Reporter was issued for a time, by Rev. Asa Rand. But this, too, proving unprofitable, and being supposed to conflict with the Annals, was at length purchased by Mr. Woodbridge, and after being published by him for some time, in an independent form, was merged in the monthly journal.

Besides, the original cost of the list of subscribers was a heavy bill of expense. For, though it was well received by the teachers of private seminaries and a few professional men, who respected the zeal, talent, and philanthropy of the editor, yet a large proportion of the teachers of the district schools regarded it as too high—or rather too learned for them; besides they thought they could hardly spare three dollars a year of their scanty wages for twelve prosy numbers of a journal of education. The result was, therefore, that though every body praised the work, nearly every body excused themselves from taking it, especially those who most needed its assistance.

But Mr. Woodbridge, did not shrink from the responsibilities he had incurred on account of the difficulties. He devoted himself to his task with all the energy which dyspepsia would permit, though at the end of every year deeply in debt.

He continued the Annals to the close of 1836, when failing health compelled him to make a third voyage to Europe. He embarked in October, and for two years continued to act as foreign editor. After that time, except for an occasional contribution, the work was wholly in the hands of the writer. Mr. Woodbridge's pecuniary sacrifices for the Annals, during the six years and a half of its life, amounted to many thousand dollars.

In November, 1832, he had married Miss Reed, an assistant in Miss Beecher's school at Hartford; whose zeal for education was scarcely exceeded by his own, and who was an excellent helper to him in the cause. But her health was bad; and after joining him

in Europe, she died, at Frankfort, in 1840, leaving two children, a son and daughter.

Mr. Woodbridge's illness prevented him from making the educational researches in Europe which he had designed; and after spending the winter of 1840-41 at Berlin, he returned home in October, 1841. The next three winters he passed at Santa Cruz; but with steadily declining health. At his final return in 1844, it was evident that he was fast failing, and his business engagements were now made so as to provide for a speedy departure. He made a short experiment of the water cure and homeopathy at Brattleboro, but with no relief, his bodily powers being too low to rally; and in returning to Boston, entered Dr. Durkee's institution, but gradually grew worse, and died there, in November, 1845. His last days, and his death, were peaceful; though his feebleness prevented much conversation, and he scarcely said more to friends who visited him, than to remark that he supposed they met for the last time.

Although the actual results of Mr. Woodbridge's labors have been great, yet in making an estimate of him and of his work, we shall find him entitled to the credit of doing very much, under very great discouragement, if not of accomplishing results in themselves, absolutely vast and astonishing.

His mental powers were great. Both his intuitive perception of principles, and his faculty of methodically arranging facts, were rapid and thorough; and his ability to give clear expositions of the relations, bearings, and consequences of both, was remarkable. His moral endowments were, perhaps, still more eminent. His honesty, both in pecuniary matters, and in stating facts and searching authorities, was unbendingly rigid; his father was accustomed to say that in "extra corrections," made to embody the latest or most accurate matter, on his geographies alone, he had expended a good estate. He was at once frugal almost to parsimony in his personal expenditures, and liberal to nobility in assisting the educational or other benevolent enterprises in which he was interested. Except a bare support for his aged father, and a still more slender one for himself and family, he was uniformly accustomed to devote to the perfecting of the *Annals of Education*, irrespective of mere stipulations with subscribers, his whole income, from whatever source.

His aspirations, indeed, both intellectual and moral, were of the very highest order. It was the incessant prostration of his efforts by the most wretched and irritating of all diseases, dyspepsia, probably complicated with scrofula, and certainly with great nervous weakness, which prevented him from realizing those aspirations, at least to a de-

gree which would have placed his name very high on the list of benefactors to his race. This physical incapacity was in part constitutional, and was doubtless aggravated by early ill training. And it was this which forced him to relinquish one plan after another, which rendered him often a severe sufferer from small self-indulgences, which made him irritable in conversation, and which, in connection with a constitutional diffidence, and yet an unsparing honesty in expressing opinions when driven to do so, made him often seem positive or even rude in receiving or opposing the views of others.

He was always a poor man, and was too liberal in giving what came to his hand, to the objects of his life, ever to escape from the vexations and discomforts of poverty.

Yet in spite of all he accomplished much. How much influence his labors had in producing those educational changes which have been taking place in this country ever since, is not easy to say; but undoubtedly a large share of what we deem educational improvement, must be set to the credit of him and his associates. A writer of his obituary, in the "Express" of New York—the only notice of him we have ever seen—by one who well knew his whole history, thus speaks :

"With his return from his first foreign travels, we may date the commencement of the operations for the improvement of common schools in this country. For though he had before aroused much interest in Baron Fellenberg's institution at Hofwyl, in Switzerland, by the publication of a series of letters written on the spot, and which contained almost every thing that our countrymen have ever read on that subject, no considerable attempt was made to produce any general coöperation for the benefit of common education, until he made known his plans and commenced his operations.

"The American Annals of Education, which he conducted at Boston for a series of years, under many difficulties, abounded in facts and suggestions of the soundest kind; which were the groundwork as well as the exciting cause of the movements successfully made by the legislatures of different states, and the friends of education who gradually arose in all quarters of the country. The conventions of teachers and others, in counties and larger districts, owed their plans and first impulses, in a great measure to Mr. Woodbridge, as did the innumerable lyceums and other popular literary societies. He was one of the first to foresee popular opportunities to act in Massachusetts for the advantageous distribution of the money appropriated to the schools, and the most energetic, in taking measures for that purpose. At every meeting held for the promotion of this favorite

cause, he was personally present or represented by some valuable essay or other communication ; and most of the enlightened and liberal proposals offered, came from him or received his cordial support. He wrote the first letter on popular education in music, and excited and aided Messrs. Mason & Son to attempt the introduction of that important science and art on modern principles. It is needless to remark on the extent to which their example has since been followed.

“ Mr. Woodbridge moved the first resolution ever offered, recommending the study of the Bible as a classic. The first Literary Convention in New York placed him at the head of a committee on that subject ; and he not only drew up, but gratuitously published and widely circulated the report, which embraces, in a most distinct and forcible manner the grand arguments in favor of that object, in a style which no man can read without admiration. No writer before or since has exceeded it ; and in all the discussions which have taken place, it would be difficult to discover any new thought or argument.”

While thus engaged, through years of ill health, and all the difficulties and discouragements arising from very limited pecuniary means, Mr. Woodbridge not only found strength to perform numerous journeys, to carry on an extensive correspondence, to hold innumerable interviews with intelligent persons, and to devote money with a liberal hand for the public benefit, but his heart and hand were ever open at the calls of philanthropy. Few men, it is believed, have ever been more noble in giving, in proportion to their means.

He was as influential as any one man, in awakening and maintaining that interest in the cause of education generally, which arose in Massachusetts between the years 1830 and 1840. He was an efficient agent in drawing public attention to the necessity of normal schools. He was, if not the very first, one of the earliest writers in favor of the introduction of the studies of physiology and vocal music, into our schools. He drew from behind the counter of a country store, and introduced into the higher sphere in which he has done so great and useful a work, the celebrated Lowell Mason ; a service which alone would have made him a public benefactor. His letters in explanation of the systems and institutions of Fellenberg, besides being the first introduction, to America, of those men and their works and principles, are distinguished for clearness of style and completeness of analysis and exposition.