

Antioch Faculty Exposes "The Great American Literary Association" (January 1876)

Reverend John Burns Weston spent much of his adult life at Antioch College. Admitted to its first college class in October, 1853, he was a member of its first graduating class in 1857 and joined its faculty soon after as Principal of the Preparatory Dept. and Professor of Rhetoric, Logic, and Greek. He served three interim presidencies over the course of his career, earning the nickname

Old Interregnum.

In 1881 he accepted an appointment as president of Antioch's then sister school, the Christian Biblical Institute of Stanfordville, NY. He came back to Ohio in 1902 when CBI merged with the Defiance Female Seminary to become Defiance College, where he served as president until his death in 1912.

Weston was also the leading figure in an investigation of academic dishonesty related by G. Stanley Hall in his autobiography, *Life & Confessions of a Psychologist*. In 1875 he asked the aid of *The Nation* to help the College faculty expose a local essay writing service,

The Great American Literary Association.

His plea appeared in the October 14th issue, suggesting that the one or at most two persons at the bottom of this fraud can probably be detected making liberal use of the College library.

The results of that investigation were published in the pamphlet reprinted below.

The Great American Literary Association

Action of the Faculty of Antioch College

At a meeting of the Faculty of Antioch College, held January 14th, 1876, the following preamble and resolution were adopted:

WHEREAS, for several years past an institution has been widely advertised as

The Great Western Literary Bureau

or as

The Great Western Literary Association, of Yellow Springs, Ohio

which from the impudence of its circular the gross and fraudulent nature of its operations, and its offensive proximity, has attracted unpleasant attention to our town and college,

and

WHEREAS, The individual who alone constitutes this Association,

notwithstanding the exposure of his identity in *THE NATION* of October 14th, 1875, has continued to solicit patronage,

therefore

RESOLVED, That the Secretary be requested to print and circulate the following summary of the more detailed evidence collected and submitted by a committee appointed in December

last for that purpose.

REPORT.

This institution appears to have been organized in or about the autumn of 1871. It was at first known as the

Great Western Literary Bureau,

and was conducted by two young gentlemen, whose names are now withheld. Later the business was left in the hands of one William M. Hafner, who assumed the more pretentious title,

The Great American Literary Association,

and who has made it much more fraudulent and notorious. Since then the Association seems to have consisted of Mr. Hafner alone, who has been wont to make use of several pseudonyms, as H.H. Hay, Ferdinand Otto, Mrs. McRoy, and may be addressed at Fairfield, Osborn, Clifton, Xenia, and even Dayton as well as Yellow Springs, his home. From his last printed circulars, sent out in the Fall of 1875, we quote as follows:

This is the oldest and only permanent and reliable institution in the United States, having stood the test for many years. As its name implies,

The Great American Literary Association

has a widespread reputation. We receive patronage from all the States and Territories, and have a corps of able and experienced writers that enables us to furnish applicants, on short notice, with all kinds, styles and grades of literary exercises, consisting of essays, lectures, orations, sermons, salutarious, valedictories, poems, abstracts, reviews, critiques, translations, &c, &c. All who have been in connection with the

American Association,

and those in connection with it now, are graduates, and consequently, having gone through the mill,

know just what kind of exercises students need and desire. Applicants must state the occasions on which they are to deliver the exercises, and such exercises will be written and appropriate [sic], and also whether a strictly first-class production is desired. Exercises used once only, charges moderate. Correspondence may be addressed to us in any language. We would caution the public against several bogus literary bureaus and cabinets, originated by irresponsible parties, unworthy in character and mental ability. Our productions are sent closely sealed. All communication strictly confidential.

Mr. Hafner has never entered this nor any other college, except in the preparatory department, and was never within a year or more of being qualified to enter the Freshman class; nor has he since attended any other academic institution. After careful examination your committee have found nothing in his

character or mental ability,

nor in any of the evidence herewith submitted, to justify even the suspicion that any of the few productions which make up his stock in trade were original with him'unless it be his shameless

and dishonest circular. But they have found him guilty of plagiarism, of obtaining articles from their authors upon false pretenses, and of selling the same production repeatedly.

The following are some of the articles which have been traced to, or from, the so called Association:

The Destiny of Genius.

Written by a young lady student of the Baltimore Female College, and published in a magazine of that institution, July, 1867. This is said, by one who copied it for him, to have been used at least ten or twelve times.

Organic Influences in History.

A graduating oration, in 1873, by a student here [the 1873 commencement program confirms such an oration was given by Edmund Ruth], and obtained, it is claimed, under false pretenses. This the copier writes,

I do not doubt was used twenty times, perhaps oftener.

A student of a neighboring college, who has sent us his copy, as received, for identification, writes,

I received the enclosed from F. Otto, by express, for ten dollars.

The Centennial,

by an undergraduate here, and borrowed on pretense of wishing to read it.

Aaron Burr,

compiled from Parton's life of Burr.

International Arbitration,

by a late student here, and used but a few times.

Representative Women,

. A production which a Professor in a college in a distant State writes, was sent unasked to a lady student C.O.D., who was threatened with exposure if she didn't take it from the express office.

Modern Society,

culled from an address delivered before the Alumni here, and which was obtained by Mr. Hafner in order, as was represented, to be reported in a local weekly newspaper for which he writes village items over the signature of

Ray,

but where it never appeared.

The above may not be a complete inventory of the stock in trade of

The Great American Literary Association

but allowing for some possible changes in titles, &c. we believe it to be nearly so.

A correspondent in another State sends us the following letter just received from the Association

We usually charge \$15.00 for a production on subjects of your choice; \$10.00 on ours. We will prepare what you want for \$8.00.

This, as there is abundant evidence, is his usual scale of prices. The last amount is sometimes proposed as the price of a sermon.

An anonymous communication intimates that the

Association

is merged in a certain

Pendennis Society,

of Dayton, Ohio [named for a novel by William Makepeace Thackeray], from whose circular we infer a similar character. But the Corresponding Secretary of the latter assures us that their society is

limited and select,

and that

beyond receiving Mr. Hafner's address we know nothing of him.

It was, also, resolved, That the faculty of this College hereby unite in the most cordial thanks to those Professors in sister Colleges who have so efficiently co-operated in gathering the material for the above exposure which without their help could never have been so fully made.

J.B. WESTON

Secretary of the Faculty of Antioch College.

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The Great American Literary Association

Antioch

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Antioch

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Library

The Great American Literary Association