

“UNCLE SAM”—A Postscript.

BY ALBERT MATTHEWS.

At page 60 of my paper on “Uncle Sam,”¹ it was stated that “the earliest known example of Uncle Sam is from a Troy paper, but *without* reference to Samuel Wilson.” That example occurred in the *Troy Post* of September 7, 1813 (see page 32, above). Since my paper was written, Miss Jessie F. Wheeler of the Troy Public Library has sent me two very interesting extracts from Troy newspapers of a later date. The following, taken from the *Gazette of the United States* of Philadelphia, appeared in the *Troy Post* of August 20, 1816:

“‘Uncle Sam’s Pedigree.’—Uncle Sam is a cant phrase, significant of the United States, as John Bull signifies England. The origin of it seems to be this: In the year 1807, there was authorized by law, the raising of a regiment of Light Dragoons. The initial letters U.S.L.D. were painted on their caps, meaning the United States Light Dragoons. A countryman passing by, inquired of a by-stander what they were, and received for an answer, ‘they are UNCLE SAM’S LAZY DOGS, don’t you see it on their caps?’ This story soon got amongst the soldiers, and they have ever since denominated the United States Uncle Sam.” (p. 3-4).

The other extract, taken from the *Albany Gazette*, was printed in the *Troy Post* of August 19, 1817:

“‘Uncle Sam’—This expression, which originated during the war, from the initials ‘U. S.’ on the soldiers’ knapsacks, has come into general use. The Indians at the west, from hearing it often used, have imbibed the idea that it is actually the name of the president; and while at Sacketts’ Harbor, a considerable number of Indians and Squaws crowded around

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the president, wishing, as they expressed it, 'to shake hands with UNCLE SAM.'" (p. 3-3).

We have, then, within a period of four years (1813-1817) no fewer than three accounts in the Troy newspapers of the origin of Uncle Sam, and in none is there any allusion to the Samuel Wilson story. It is difficult to believe that had the Wilson story then been in existence it would have escaped the attention of the editor of the *Troy Post*.

Moreover, the first of the new extracts is interesting as corroborating the statement made on page 63 that "there is nothing in the least unusual or remarkable in the process of abbreviating a term and then expanding it." For we find, as early as 1816, the initials "U.S.L.D." expanded into "United States Lazy Dogs."

Curiously enough, just as these extracts reach me from Miss Wheeler, I have myself run across a rather remarkable example of the same process. In 1841 the Rev. William L. McCalla, a Presbyterian clergyman and a native of Kentucky, published at Philadelphia a book called "Adventures in Texas, chiefly in the Spring and Summer of 1840; with a Discussion of Comparative Character, Political, Religious and Moral." Mr. McCalla cherished a rooted aversion to the honorary degree of D.D., an aversion which crops out in many places. Its most singular manifestation occurs in the following passage.

"But to secure the full benefit of it, the title ought to be fully written out, and fairly translated, like the Scriptures, or the common people will be in perpetual perplexity about the meaning of D.D., as they are about the letters O. K. in party politics; and they may be as capricious in changing the meaning. At first, O. K. was General Jackson's seal of approbation upon all that his successor did; and afterward, when that successor was removed from office, O. K. was turned wrong end foremost, and interpreted '*kicked out.*' As D.D. is given to many ecclesiastics who are wrong end foremost, that title also is subject to the same vicissitude, unless its meaning is fixed, like the Hebrew words, by punctuarian additions.

"Those who know a clergyman to be irritable from disease, might mistake D.D. to mean a Dumpish Dyspeptic; those who know that he has resorted too much to brandy for a cure,

might think that it meant a Dram Drinker. Knowing as well as the above quoted biographer, that juvenility, ignorance, weakness, duplicity, cowardice, and ambition, are their most prominent characteristics, others may be in danger of interpreting the D.D. as meaning Diffuse Declaimer, Dismal Dreamer, Dull Discipline, Dizzy Dolt, Dastardly Drone, or Dare Devil, Double Dealer, or Dumb Dog; the latter of which is a scriptural title, exceedingly suitable to those who are for letting error die a natural death.

"To all such, a D.D. may be of service, as a vote and an office in an Old-school Presbyterian Church, are of service to Universalists and Papists, swearers, liars and Sabbath-breakers, gamblers and drunkards.

"If the gallows had its due, a D.D. might occasionally be found, which some might interpret *DUPLICITER DAMNATUS*, or *doubly doomed*, to be excluded from the company of popes, priests and nuns in purgatory.

"But most people prefer explaining a D.D. to mean *DULCE DONUM*, a *sweet bribe*, which, like the *REGIUM DONUM*, the *Bait of John Bull*, is intended to catch such gudgeons as may be gulled in that way" (pp. 120, 121).

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