

purpose of clearing up the muddle that still existed. Yet another Commission was appointed, and Webster's affairs figured largely in its deliberations, when it was discovered that the 17,655 acres awarded him, on being properly surveyed, turned out to be no more than 11,506. Once again a grateful country had to step into the breach, and the difference between the two acreages was made up out of the Crown estate.

The Commission's work lasted several years, during which time Webster got word of its proceedings and decided that the hour had arrived to strike again. In 1858 he asked the United States Government to sponsor a claim on Her Majesty's Government for 6,500,000 dollars "for loss and damage and indemnity for lands purchased from chiefs of New Zealand from 1835 to 1840 . . . sequestered and taken from him by the British authorities." Neither then, nor later when he applied again in 1869, would the United States Government consent to take up his cause, but Webster never gave up hope. When in England in 1874 he placed his claim in the hands of a London lawyer named Duncan who reopened his case with the Colonial Office, but Duncan soon realized what kind of a man he had to deal with. "I regret," he afterwards wrote, "that, deceived by his specious manner and plausible story—as no doubt many others have been—I should have caused the Colonial Office of Her Majesty's Government the trouble of investigating his claims anew."

How Webster employed his time or earned his living during all these years I do not know, nor have I come across any personal description of him, but one may attempt some reconstruction of his character from the facts in official documents. The Webster type is no rare phenomenon. The man with a grievance grown into an obsession, insisting, like the Ancient Mariner, on telling his story to strangers in a hurry, boring his friends to tears with the latest news of that wonderful invention which no one will accept, that famous manuscript which all publishers refuse, that just claim which

no Court will recognize—have we not all met this kind of person some time in our lives?

One may also assume that after a lifetime's practice Webster was an adept at the work to which he had devoted so much time and energy. He had become an expert claimer, and this fact may explain why the United States Government, after so many refusals, at length took up his case in 1887. Possibly the national prejudice was aroused by his assertion that the claim had always failed hitherto on account of his persistent refusal, in the face of all temptation, to relinquish his American citizenship. To his former claims had now been added a sum of more than half a million sterling representing interest on the capital due to him since 1840 at 4 per cent. per annum—the total mounted up to a truly noble figure. He affirmed that although his possessions in New Zealand prior to the Treaty of Waitangi had been worth £1,000,000, yet he had never received an acre of land out of all his vast purchases. In a certain manner of speaking this was true. The Senate, duly impressed, requested the President to take up the matter with Her Majesty's Government.

The rest of the story is a tale of the writing of many letters—of the destruction of paper on a vast scale. Official correspondence crossed the Atlantic, then the Pacific, then went backwards and forwards for many years across the two oceans just referred to. Webster got nothing more. One is inclined to speculate on the mental attitude he adopted towards his own claims. Had he come in the course of time to persuade himself that they were just? Did he ever really expect them to be granted at last? Or had he come to look upon the making of fantastic demands as a sort of art worthy of a lifetime's devotion? There is no answer to the question. All that is known is that he, an obscure and probably quite unworthy individual, troubled two great nations for many years by his fabrications, his perversions, his importunities. His life and his land claims appear to have expired simultaneously in the year 1895.