

**ELIHU BURRITT: AN
APOSTLE
OF INTERNATIONAL
BROTHERHOOD**

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Elihu Burritt: An Apostle of International Brotherhood by Ozora S. Davis

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BURRITT**

An Apostle of
International
Brotherhood

—By—

OZORA S. DAVIS



**NEW BRITAIN
1907**

CS 14972.22



"God hath made of one blood all nations of men,
for to dwell on all the face of the earth', is not a Greek
apothegm, though uttered in the midst of Athens. It is
neither a maxim of human wisdom, nor a new coined motto
of modern democracy. It is a great, everlasting and
capital verity of divine revelation, which shall outlive
the existence and memory of all unfriendly nationalities."

Elihu Burritt.

ELIHU BURRITT

DRAWING BOOKS EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS AGO



T is Saturday evening in New Britain. The doors of the Institute are open; the reading and reference rooms glow with light; the space before the delivery desk is crowded by those who are exchanging their books; the children's room is filled with little readers.

It is no easy task to attempt in imagination to picture another scene about eighty-five years ago when a woman and a boy of twelve came to choose their books at the little parish library. It contained about two hundred volumes and books could be drawn only once in two months. Then each subscriber could select two large books or four small ones. In one home at least in New Britain, this day was eagerly expected and the titles of the books to be chosen were earnestly discussed. When the time came, Mrs. Elihu Burritt and her son, who was named for his father, went together and divided their choice of books. The boy always took two small volumes, selecting histories if possible, and by the time he was sixteen years old he had read almost every available book in the little library. This eager zest for

BOOKS EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

knowledge was a prophecy of what the boy was to become in manhood. Perhaps the very scarcity of books and the difficulty of obtaining them only whetted his appetite; in any case, this boy gave evidence very early of becoming "The Learned Blacksmith" and of meriting another and far better title, which we shall give him.

For this sensitive and thoughtful boy became "An Apostle of International Brotherhood"; and if the title seems at the outset pretty formidable and somewhat forbidding, let us patiently wait to see how Elihu Burritt went from place to place in England and America forcefully pleading for the peace and unity of all mankind because they were alike the children of a common Father. We shall then see how his life was a mission of the highest worth to the world and that the "Learned Blacksmith" was something far nobler than the mere reader of many languages or the workman who mingled literary studies with his forging.



THE BOYHOOD OF ELIHU BURRITT



E was born in New Britain, then a part of the township of Berlin, Dec. 8, 1810, in the home of a farmer-shoemaker, where there was little wealth and much hard work, along with happiness and ambition and the highest moral and religious ideals.

Because the days were filled with honest work and ambitions could be realized only at the cost of earnest striving, we are not to think of the boy's early years as made bitter by extreme poverty or joyless by his tasks.

He had very scant opportunity to attend school, for his father died when he was fifteen years old, and he was soon afterward apprenticed to a blacksmith. This was then a trade of much wider variety than the present scope of such work; the blacksmith was a skilled worker in metals and not primarily a shoer of horses. It was a healthy, vigorous but exacting form of handicraft.

To his grimy work young Burritt brought a taste for reading and study which had been nourished even by deprivation. He was also exceedingly fond of mathematics and while blowing the hand-bellows he would work upon the most difficult calculations of mental arithmetic, carrying his results in memory until they could be verified by his older brother, Elijah, at night.

STUDYING THE LANGUAGES



WHILE serving his apprenticeship also young Burrirt made his beginning with the study of languages. He worked at Latin and French and then at Greek. One reason why he spent spare moments with Greek more profitably was because he found a small grammar that he could carry in his hat, and this he could prop open for study while he was heating a large piece of metal or watching the smelting pot. After doing fourteen hours of hard work he still found it possible to study the languages a little while each day.

It is not necessary to trace the progress of Mr. Burrirt in acquiring his knowledge of languages under these most difficult conditions. Of course he did not master any of them; his was not a fluent speaking knowledge of these tongues; but by the time he was thirty years of age he had made such progress that he was able to read more or less fluently, about fifty ancient and modern European or Oriental languages. He had already won the title of "The Learned Blacksmith."

The purpose which impelled Mr. Burrirt to this arduous task was, so far as we can determine it, a native love of learning and the profound desire to master not only the general content of each language, but to discover their essential unity and their inner relationships. There was no great practical or moral end to be served by his work. His interests were primarily academic.

THE YOUNG LECTURER AND WRITER



MR. BURRITT was a lover of manual labor. His success was greater in handicraft and production than in exchange. He represented a New Britain firm for a year as traveling salesman, and he established himself in a grocery and provision business also in New Britain. The latter failed in the financial panic of 1837, by which all his little earnings were swept away. In writing about this later he said that it seemed at the time a great hardship, but, had it not happened, he would probably have remained the fairly successful village grocer, and would never have borne the part he did in great enterprises in Europe and America.

His love of languages was so strong that he determined to go to Europe, working his way as a common sailor and purchasing the books he needed in foreign ports. He therefore walked from New Britain to Boston, but found that no vessel was sailing as he had hoped. Hearing of the American Antiquarian Society and its library in Worcester, he walked from Boston there and was made happy beyond expression at the books he found and the privileges which were freely given him to use them. He was able to support himself by hard manual labor and to give two hours before breakfast and one hour at noon to his study.