MY AMERICA STORY BOOK

George Washington

A Compilation of Historical
Biographies for the Young Reader

Compiled by Marlene Peterson

Libraries of Hope

My America Story Book
Book Four: George Washington

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Chapter 1

Early Home Life

"Do any of you children know what happened to my thoroughbred colt?"

The dignified-looking woman who asked this question looked down the table at her children and awaited a reply. Her eyes could be stern at times, and now they had a look which boded no good for some one.

One of the group, a boy in his early teens, looked up and met the questioning glance.

"Yes, Madam, I think I do," he answered quietly, but still meeting her eyes.

"And what, sirrah?" The tone was sharp as a whiplash.

"If you are speaking of the filly that no one could tame," the boy answered, "I am afraid that I am at fault. The colt is dead."

"And how did that happen, pray?"

"The colt was useless unbroken, as you know. So yesterday I went down to the pasture lot with a halter, mounted the colt and rode it."

"He did, madam, indeed he did!" interrupted a little maid with shining eyes. "George stayed on the colt in spite of its prancing, and rode it all around the pasture lot. None of the slaves could master it!"

"Silence!" commanded the mother sharply. "Maids should not speak until spoken to. I want George to tell his own story. What killed the animal?"

"I' faith, Madam, I fear it killed itself," replied the boy. "Its struggles were so tremendous that I sought only a good opportunity to quiet it down and dismount, when suddenly blood gushed out of its nostrils and it fell over dead."

Mrs. Washington looked at her son for a full minute. Then her voice softened a trifle.

"It was an ill loss, for 'twould have made the finest steed in my stables. But I can more readily lose the colt, than my confidence in my children."

Nothing more was said of the incident, but each child took the moral personally to heart. Their mother might be stern at times — she was an overworked widow with a large plantation to look after — but she was just, and she could tolerate only the truth.

Virginia in those days before the Revolution was very different from the Virginia of to-day. To begin with, it was not a state at all — only a colony and a very sparsely settled colony at that. The plantations where they raised tobacco and corn were merely cleared spots hemmed in on all sides by dense forests, and connected with the outside world by mere trails of roads. More often the means of transportation was by river, and the back country not so reached was left an undisturbed hunting ground for the Indians.

The Washington family had been identified with the Virginia colony almost from its start.

The Birthplace of George Washington – Bridge's Creek, Westmoreland County, VA

Jamestown, you will remember, was founded in 1607 — thirteen years before the Pilgrim Fathers sighted the Massachusetts shore. In 1657, John Washington and his brother came over from England, leaving the ancestral home at Sulgrave Manor with its honored family record dating back to Henry the Eighth's time, and earlier.

John Washington (who was the grandfather of George) obtained a grant on the Potomac River at Bridges Creek, and built a house there. It was not pretentious — just a plain, old-style southern farmhouse, with steep, sloping roof, a big porch in front, a huge chimney at each end with its promise of big roaring fires in the winter time, and good things to eat dangling from cranes or baking in Dutch ovens almost any time. Around the house, stretching along the river and running back up into the hills was the plantation of nearly a thousand acres. Here as the land was cleared, tobacco was planted for shipment in huge bales down the river and thence to England.

At John Washington's death the big prosperous plantation was handed down to his son, Augustine. By his own first marriage, Augustine had two sons, whose mother died when they were five and seven years of age; they were Lawrence and Augustine. Then the father married again, his second wife being Miss Mary Ball of Lancaster County, Virginia. To them was born, February 22, 1732, a boy whom they christened George.

The old farmhouse on Bridges Creek must have been a happy spot for the children. Besides the two half brothers, George had brothers and sisters of his own to make the high-peaked attic roof ring with laughter. But the family was not to enjoy the homestead long; for in 1735, when George was only three years old, it caught fire and burned to the ground. To-day not a stick or a stone of it remains, but a memorial shaft has been placed there to indicate the spot where the "Father of this

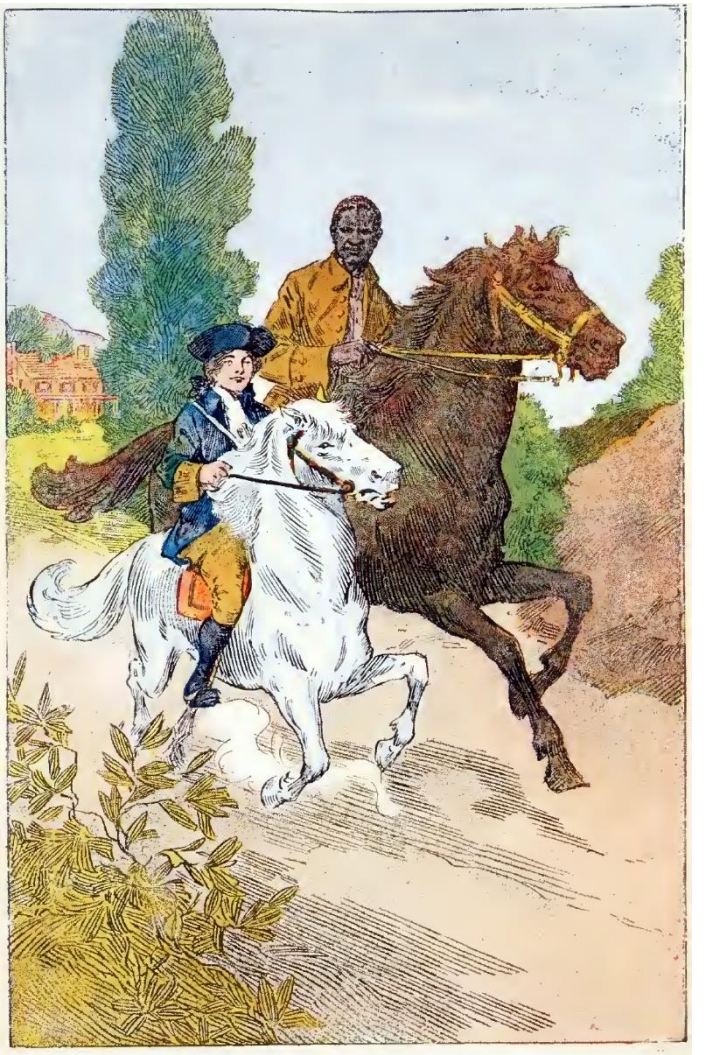
Country" first saw the light of day.

George's father did not rebuild the house, but moved into another farmhouse on another plantation of his, in Stafford County, bordering on the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg. This house was similar in type to the one that had burned. It stood on a little knoll, with an inviting stretch of green sloping down to the water. Here George lived until he was sixteen years old; and many a pleasant memory must have gone with him through life. With his brothers and sisters he wandered over the place, building boats and rafts, fishing in the stream, or hunting in the woodland. Virginia in those days was a paradise for game, large and small, and many a squirrel, pheasant, quail, wild pigeon and duck must have graced the family board, thanks to the prowess of George and his older brothers.

To-day the old homestead has become only a memory. It was destroyed, like the first home, and nothing remains except descriptions to tell us what it was like. It was big and roomy, but very simple in its furnishings. While George's father was well-to-do in lands and servants and stock, he had little ready money; and the finer things of life such as dress and furniture must still be brought from abroad.

When George was eight years old he was given a pony, named Hero, and Uncle Ben, one of the old family slaves, taught him to ride it. Before long he was trying to ride, one after another, every horse on the place; and we have already seen how his mastery of the unbroken colt brought him to grief. As a youngster George was also the proud possessor of a "whip top," brought over from England and evidently a rarity; for in a letter to a chum, Dick Lee (who was afterwards to grow up into the famous Richard Henry Lee) he invites him to come over and play with it. "You may see it and whip it," he says in a burst of true generosity.

When George was eleven years old, he lost his father. The boy's half brother Lawrence was then going to school in England; so the boy was left very largely on his own resources. His mother had the management of the large estate, as well as her household, and the children were



Little George rode to school on his pony,
from *The Story of Young George Washington*
by Wayne Whipple

expected to assume their share of the duties. This does not mean that she neglected them. We know that the tie between George and his mother was very strong. He resembled her more than his father. She taught him much of his somewhat scanty education. And after he was grown he always addressed her as "Madam," after the courtly fashion of Colonial days.

In those days, it is well for us to remember, etiquette for children was as strict as for their elders. They arose when older folks entered the room, remained standing until the latter were seated, and bowed or courtesied to guests in a delightfully formal way.

George Washington was noted all through life for his quiet courtesy, dignity, and charm of manner — for much of which he was indebted to his stately mother.

As for other education, there was not funds enough to send him abroad. His brother Augustine had rebuilt the home at Bridges Creek, and George went to live with him for three or four years and attend a district school taught by a Mr. Williams. The school did not take him very far, but it gave him a fair grounding in the "Three R's" — reading 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Beyond these fundamentals, Washington was largely self-taught; but, like the Lincoln of later years, he acquired by reading and observation a culture which was distinctly his own.

There were four younger children in the Washington family, for which reason the mother could not afford to send George even to the home college, "William and Mary." He must perforce get what he could from the district school. One schoolmate relates of him that he was much given to indoor study and to solitary walks. "His industry and assiduity at school were very remarkable. Whilst his brother and other boys at playtime were at bandy and other games, he was behind the door ciphering. But one youthful ebullition is handed down while at that school, and that was romping with one of the largest girls; this was so unusual that it excited no little comment among the other lads."

One other memento of his school days has been handed down to us. It was his exercise book in writing, wherein he set down in a good round hand a series of "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation." This old school copy-book of 1745, when George was thirteen, is the earliest of his manuscripts that has come down to us. In spite of its somewhat damaged state, it enables us to trace out some of his work at school. Here are items of bookkeeping, and accounting, evidently worked out painstakingly so that he would be able shortly to aid his mother in that vexatious branch of her business. Scattered among these labored exercises are pen sketches of some of the children who sat around him, and birds that he had seen on his walks to school. Then come the "Rules of Behavior," some 110 in all. For a long time they were thought to be Washington's own, but they have since been traced back to a foreign work. Nevertheless, the care with which George copied them shows that they were making their impress upon his character. Here are two or three random selections, which we hope, are not out of fashion to-day:

Be not immodest in urging your Friends to discover a secret.

Sleep not when others Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you should hold your Peace, walk not when others Stop.

Read no Letters, Books, or Papers in Company but when there is a Necessity for the doing of it you must ask leave.

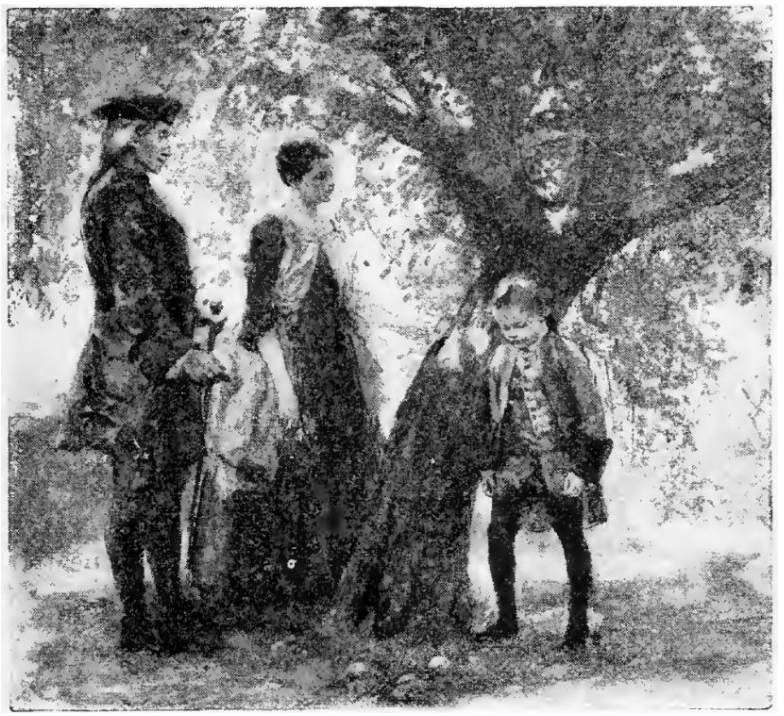
Talk not with meat in your mouth.

Labor to keep alive in your breast that little Spark of Celestial fire called Conscience.

Chapter 2

Famous Stories of His Boyhood

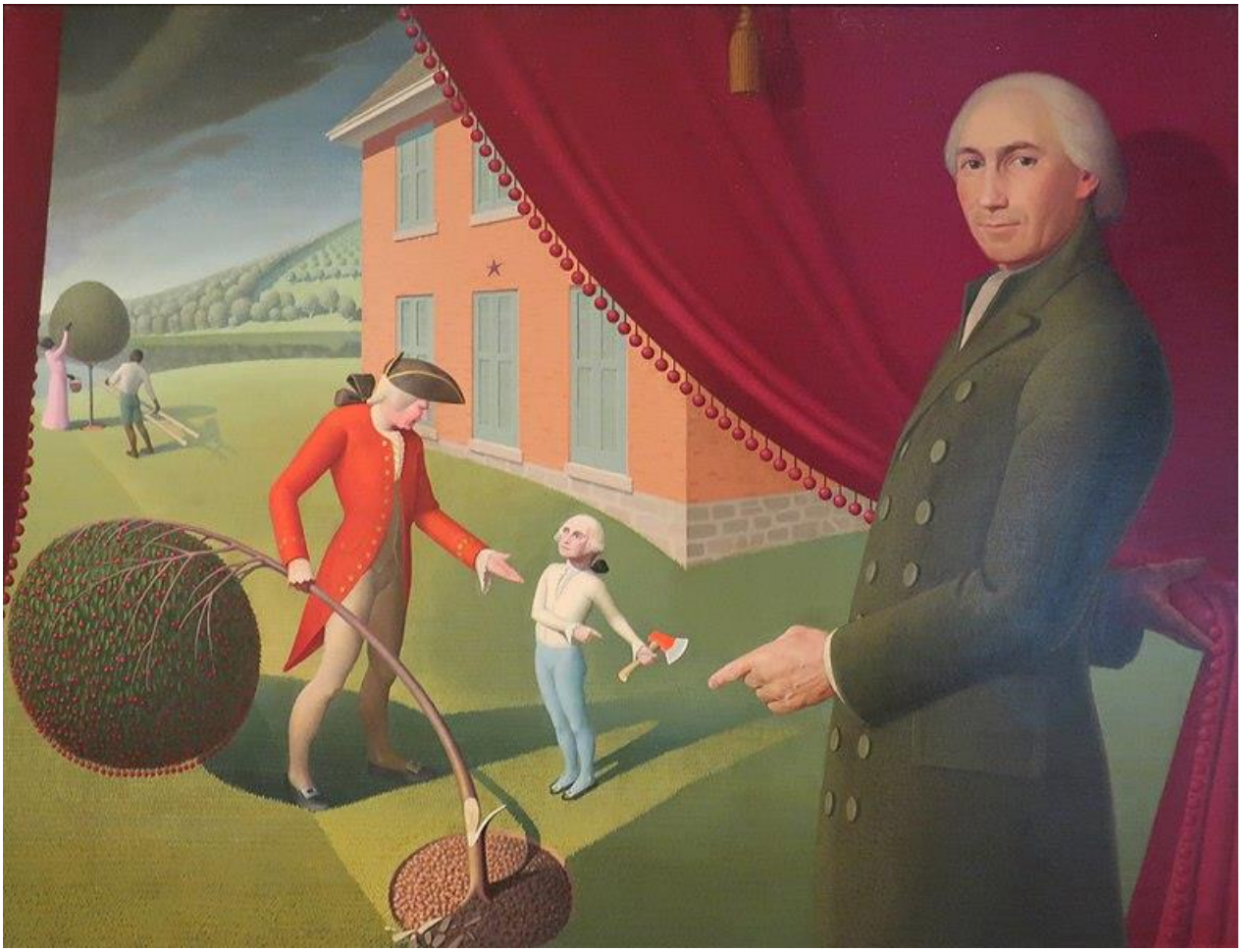
Several of the most famous tales of Washington's boyhood are told by an odd character known as Parson Weems, who preached in Pohick church for a while after the war. Washington attended this church, and he and his wife often entertained Weems in their hospitable house. As the odd parson no doubt gossiped with all the old people about the neighborhood, he had a good chance to pick up any anecdotes about the great man's childhood. Unfortunately, Parson Weems was more fond of a good story than of the strict truth. Having a large family to support, he left off preaching and became a book peddler. He rode about in an old-fashioned gig, selling his own writings and those of others. He told so many amusing stories and played the fiddle so well, that he was a very successful peddler… The odd old parson wrote a life of Washington, in which he told some stories of the great man's boyhood which he said he had learned from an old lady who was a cousin of the family and had visited, when she was a girl, in the house of Mr. Augustine Washington. The stories are not improbable in themselves, and are doubted only because they are told by the queer parson, who loved a good story too well.



Washington reproved for want of generosity.

Washington's father, when the boy was five years old — so runs one of these tales — once invited the young lady cousin who was then visiting the family to go with him and little George to the orchard. When they got there they found the ground covered with fallen apples, while the trees were so loaded that they were breaking with the weight of the fruit.

"Now, George," said his father, "look here, my son: don't you remember when this good cousin of yours brought you that fine, large apple last spring, how hardly I could prevail on you to divide with your brothers and sisters, though I promised you that, if you would but do it, God Almighty would give you



Parson Weem's Fable, Grant Wood

plenty of apples this fall?"

The little George hung his head, and presently said, "Well, pa, only forgive me this time, and see if I ever be so stingy any more."

The next story told by Weems is the famous little hatchet tale. He says that Washington's father took a great deal of pains to teach the child to tell the truth, and charged him, should he ever happen to do anything wrong, to come and tell of it, when, instead of a beating, he should have honor and love as a reward. George, who was about six years old, was given a little hatchet for his own. One day, when he was amusing himself hacking pea sticks in the garden, he presently fell upon a young English cherry tree, which his father valued a great deal, and barked it very badly. When Mr. Augustine Washington discovered the mischief he was very angry, and declared that he would not have taken five guineas for his cherry tree.

"George," said he, "do you know who killed that beautiful cherry tree, yonder in the garden?"

The boy hesitated a moment. "I can't tell a lie, pa, you know I can't tell a lie," said he, presently; "I did cut it with my little hatchet."

The boy's father, so says Weems, remembered his promise and praised George, declaring that

he was glad that he had lost his tree, since it had been the occasion of the child's daring to tell the truth.

Another of Weems's stories is that Washington's father once planted the letters of the boy's name in a cabbage bed in the garden. Some time after, the child came into the house, all excitement, crying:

"O pa! come here! come here!"

George Washington, as a boy, telling his father Augustine Washington that it was he who cut down the cherry tree, by John C. McRae

"What's the matter, my son; what's the matter?"

"Oh, come here, I tell you, pa, come here, and I'll show you such a sight as you never saw in your lifetime!"

George took his father's hand and pulled him into the garden. "There, pa!" he exclaimed, "did you ever see such a sight in your life?"

"Why, it does seem like a curious affair, sure enough, George."

"But, pa, who did make it there?" asked the child.

"It grew by chance, I suppose, my son."

"By chance, pa! Oh, no, it never did grow there by chance, pa. Indeed, that it never did!"

"Hey! Why not, my son?"

"Why, pa, did you ever see anybody's name in a plant bed before?"

"Well—but, George, such a thing might happen, though you never saw it before."

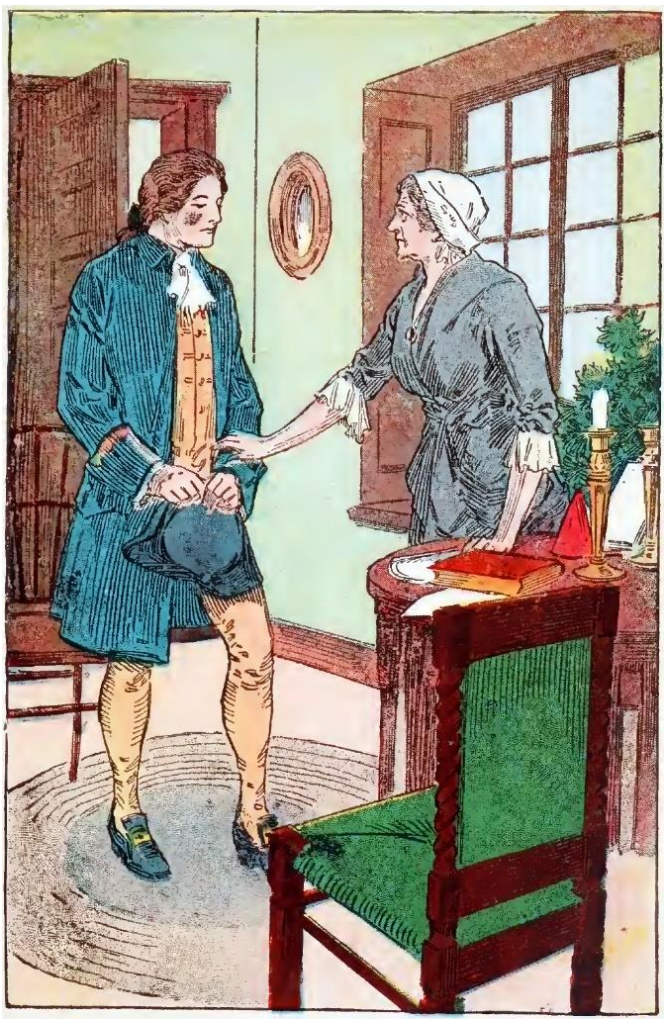
"Yes, pa, but I did never see the little plants grow up so as to make one single letter of my name, and then standing one after another to spell my name so exactly, and all so even at the top and bottom. O pa, you must not say that chance did all this. Indeed, somebody did it, and I dare say now, pa, you did it, just to scare me, because I am your little boy."

Whereupon, according to Weems, Washington's father drew a little lesson from the plant bed, by which he made him understand something about the heavenly Father, who made things grow for his benefit.

Chapter 3

The Young Surveyor

"Are you willing for me to go, dear Madam?" It was the boy who finally broke the silence. George and his mother were discussing the dearest wish of his heart — his first big ambition. He wanted to go to sea.



Young Washington and his mother,
from *The Story of Young George Washington*
by Wayne Whipple

His brother Lawrence had lately returned home telling glowing tales of campaigning; for after school he had entered His Majesty's service. Then the boy had watched many a sloop glide down the river; he had talked with many a tar in the tobacco warehouses at Fredericksburg. And when Lawrence told him he could get him a berth as midshipman in the navy, the boy was all on fire with eagerness and packed up his kit to be gone.

His mother had almost yielded to his entreaties, when a letter from her brother in England painting life at sea in the darkest colors reached her. It was only a night or two before he was to sail. Again the stern glance with which the lad was so familiar greeted him as they sat by the evening fire. The boy met it as always respectfully, but without wavering — a true chip off the old block.

"I will not say you must not go, as you are rapidly growing to be a man, but you will never go with my approval," she replied.

"Then I will not go at all," said George quietly, and went upstairs and unpacked his kit.

Thus His Majesty's navy lost a recruit, who, however, was saved to enter a larger arena.

Back to Mr. Williams' school he went for another year to study surveying, and when

nearly sixteen he went to visit his brother Lawrence, at Mount Vernon. Now for the first time the name of this fine old place became associated with his own — a link that history will never break.

Lawrence Washington was nearly twelve years older than George, but had always been very fond of the boy and eager to help him along. Lawrence had lately returned from a varied experience overseas. After leaving school in England, he had seen active service under the Union Jack with the gallant Admiral Vernon, against the Spaniards, in the West Indies. When the wars were over he got an honorable discharge and returned to Virginia, settling down on the plantation which his father had left him, on the banks of the Potomac. Here he built a house which he called Mount Vernon, in honor of his old naval commander. And here he brought home a bride. Miss Fairfax, daughter of Lord Fairfax, a choleric old nobleman who lived "next door."

A word about this gentleman will be of interest, as he was to exercise a considerable influence upon George Washington's later fortunes. He was the sixth Lord Fairfax, and was a descendant of a famous Lord Fairfax who helped depose Charles the First, and restore Charles the Second. All the line of Fairfaxes were rich and powerful, and to a later one King Charles gave an immense tract of land in northern Virginia. It might have lain fallow for many a long day, but for the fact that the sixth Lord Fairfax got jilted by an English sweetheart. In high dudgeon he turned his back upon England and every petticoat in it, and set sail for America and his Virginia estate. He found it indeed a tremendous possession, taking in nearly one-fifth of the entire state (as it is bounded to-day). But the trouble was, he did not know where it began, nor where it ended, and "squatters" were settling upon it. He needed an accurate survey and map of the tract. Where he would find a man to undertake such a task was a perplexing question.

It was about this time that he met young George Washington, a lad of sixteen, at Lawrence's home. The introduction may have run something like this:

"Lord Fairfax, allow me to present my brother George."

"Humph!" said the old nobleman critically surveying the six-foot stripling, who stood straight as an Indian before him. "Do all you colonials run up like bean poles?"

Lawrence laughed.

"Your lordship, I think you may well keep an eye on this youngster. He can show you how to find more foxes than you ever dreamed were in Virginia."

The nobleman snorted.

"I've hunted foxes in two continents, but if the young blood wants to come along we'll see what's in him."

Lord Fairfax was a devoted fox hunter, but he had already found that following them in the American wilderness was no pink tea affair; and he was soon to learn that George could ride with the best of them, and that he did know where to find the brushes. So it was not long before George became an indispensable fixture at all the hunting parties.

As the friendship between the old Englishman and the young Virginian deepened, we can imagine another conversation between them on their ride home with the hounds.

"What do you intend to make out of yourself, George?"

"I don't quite know, sir. I desired to enlist in the navy, but my mother was unwilling. So if there's no active service at home, I may just settle down as a planter."

"Humph! What are you studying now?"

George Washington, Surveyor, Henry Hintermeister

"I have studied surveying under Mr. Williams. You see, sir, there are a lot of lands near-by which require bounding."

"Humph! Tried your hand at any of it yet?"

"Yes, some in an experimental way. And Lawrence says I have mapped out some of his bounds very correctly."[1]

"The very thing! I believe I could use you myself. When you are ready let me know and I'll send you over the hill yonder to mark out where Fairfax starts and where he ends. My cousin, George Fairfax, will go with you."

George Fairfax was a young man slightly older than Washington, but of congenial tastes. When he heard of the plan, he was eager to taste the adventure of it, and they set to work at once to arrange details.

In the spring of 1748, accordingly, when George Washington was just turned sixteen, behold him embarking on his first "job." He was a full-fledged surveyor, setting out with transit and level to conquer one of the toughest assignments that any surveyor, even of mature years, ever tackled.

But Washington at sixteen was by no means green or immature. The outdoor life which had been his from early youth had hardened him wonderfully. He is described as a well-set-up young

[1] There is in fact an early survey of Mount Vernon, made by George Washington as a boy.

fellow, already six feet tall, and well-shaped although a little long as to leg and arm, and a little narrow as to chest. His face was handsome but for a rather prominent beak of a nose, which he was later to "grow up to." He was somewhat reserved and bashful, but with a frank, open face, set off by a straight, firm mouth, grayish blue eyes, and light brown hair. Although quiet, retiring, and not much of a talker, there was something about him that inspired confidence. This was strikingly shown in the willingness of Lord Fairfax to entrust a mere lad with so important a task as surveying his estate.

The two Georges set about their task in high spirits. The Virginian mountains were just budding out in the first freshness of spring when they started out by way of Ashby's Gap in the Blue Ridge, entering the Shenandoah Valley. For five weeks during March and April, 1848, they worked in what is now Frederick County, struggling to run their chain through virgin forests, over swollen streams, down precipitous slopes, and across swampy valleys. To the natural obstacles were added the uncertainties of weather, prowling wild beasts, and wandering Indians. The latter were as a rule friendly, but suspicious, and had they but dreamed that this innocent-looking transit and chain were staking off the field and forest against their future use as hunting grounds, the red men would have made short shrift of these youngsters.

We are given an insight into the perils and adventures of the trip, through a note-book which Washington kept. He did not dwell upon the danger, but "had such a good time" that he was ready to try it again. As for his work, Fairfax was so pleased with it, that he induced the Governor of the colony to appoint him a public surveyor. It was the beginning of three years of hard pioneering, but it gave the young man the finest possible training for his later career. He learned to depend absolutely upon himself; to endure hardship without complaint; and to stick everlastingly to a thing until it was done. Best of all it inured him to hardship, and rounded him out into vigorous manhood.

A glimpse of what he endured is given in a letter to a friend: "Since you received my letter of October last, I have not slept above three or four nights in a bed, but after walking a good deal all the day, I have lain down before the fire upon a little hay, straw, fodder, or a bearskin, whichever was to be had, with man, wife, and children, like dogs and cats; and happy is he who gets the berth nearest the fire. Nothing would make it pass off tolerably but a good reward. A doubloon is my constant gain every day that the weather will permit of my going out, and sometimes six pistoles."

As to the value of these early surveys made by Washington, it is said that his maps and measurements were so reliable that they have been accepted ever since. In fact they are about the only correct ones that date back to that period. A pretty good record for a boy surveyor!

Chapter 4

The Young Soldier

It would seem as if a few groups of colonists might live in peace together when they had a whole continent on which to choose places for their homes; but during the half century following the settlement of Philadelphia there was a great deal of fighting in America. Much of it was caused by the fact that whenever England, France, and Spain were at war, their colonies also fought. After a while, however, the colonists of England and France had a quarrel of their own. Its occasion was the land along the Ohio River. This message came to the French: "Those Englishmen are planning to send out settlers to the Ohio."

"That will not do," declared the French. "We want to be able to float down the Ohio into the Mississippi, and so on to the Gulf of Mexico. La Salle explored the Ohio. Moreover, we discovered the Mississippi, and the Ohio flows into it; therefore the Ohio is ours."

The English laughed at this. "The French claim all the rivers that flow into the Mississippi!" they cried. "They might as well claim all the countries that drink French brandy."

Both nations knew that a strong fort built at the point where the Allegheny joins the Monongahela would hold the river, for no enemies could sail by such a fortification. Governor Duquesne of Canada began quietly to build forts, each one a little nearer this spot. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia was wide awake and keeping a close watch on the doings of the French. When he heard that a third fort had been begun, he said to himself, "That has gone far enough. I will send some one to warn them that this land belongs to us."

It was not easy to choose a messenger. The governor thought it over. "It is a hard journey," he said to himself. "There will be ice and snow and Indians and all sorts of dangers. We must have a man who knows how to make his way through the forest and will not be afraid of difficulties. That young surveyor who has done so much work for Lord Fairfax is a good woodsman. He is cool and sensible, and whatever he undertakes he does well. He is not the man to be imposed upon, either; and even if those smooth Frenchmen treat him as if he were the king of France, he will not forget what he was sent for." There was something else to be careful about. "It won't do to send any rude, blunt messenger," thought the governor. "Such a fellow would get us into a fight in three days. This young Washington knows how to behave in a parlor as well as in the forest. The youngster is only twenty-one, but I believe he is the man to go."

Then the governor sent for the young man and told him what was needed. He set out with a little company of white men and Indians. The mountains were covered with snow, and the cold November rains were falling.

Drip, drip, came the water from the branches as the men pushed on in Indian file through the wilderness. For two weeks it either rained or snowed, and it was always cold and wet. The wind blew

upon them in tempests whenever they left the shelter of the forest. The heavy rains had swollen the brooks to creeks, and the creeks to rivers; but, large or small, they must all be crossed.

At last Washington saw through the trees the gleam of the French flag and smoke rising from a chimney. This was the nearest of the three forts, though it was hardly a fort as yet. The French were most polite to their English visitors; but they were exceedingly careful not to say a word that would show what their plans were. "The commander is at Fort Le Boeuf," they said, "and the reply must come from him. It is time for supper now; come and eat with us." At supper they drank a good deal of wine, and then they forgot their caution. "We are going to have the Ohio," they declared; and went on good naturedly, "Of course you can raise two men to our one, but your English are slow folk. We can build our forts and take the whole country while you are getting ready." Washington did not boast about what the English could do, but he wrote all this carefully in his journal to show to Governor Dinwiddie.

The next day he went on to Fort Le Boeuf. He presented the governor's letter, which reminded the French that they were on land belonging to the English. The commander replied, "I will send the letter to Governor Duquesne; but this is where he has placed me, and here I must stay until he sends me somewhere else."

Washington took his leave. The horses went so slowly through the snow that, to save time, he returned on foot with only one man. The coming had been hard enough, but the return was much worse. The cold had become more intense; the rivers were full of floating ice. Washington was knocked off the raft into ten feet of bitterly cold water, and had to spend that night on a little island without fire or shelter. There was danger from the Indians, and more than once he was fired upon

George Washington and Christopher Gist,
from *The True Story of George Washington* by Elbridge Streeter Brooks

by them; but he came out safely from all dangers and gave Governor Dinwiddie the French commander's reply.

"We must get ahead of them," declared the governor. "We will build a fort just where the Allegheny joins the Monongahela, and we will hold the Ohio." So he sent men there to build the fort; but the French drove them away, and in high glee built a fortification of their own which they named for the governor, Fort Duquesne. Governor Dinwiddie had sent another band of men to help the first, with Washington at its head. He heard that the French had driven the first colonists away and were coming to attack his company. With his few men he could not meet them, so he went back a little way to wait for more troops.

It was not long before a few militiamen and fifty regular soldiers came. Their captain put on a great many airs because his regulars were paid by the king. "We belong to the king's army," he declared," and the king's soldiers do not take orders from a young fellow in the colonial militia." His men followed their captain's lead and refused to help make a road or drag the cannon. They were soon frightened into helping, however, for the scouts told them that the French were coming upon them. Then they forgot that they were taking orders from a colonial major and worked as hard as they could to help make an intrenchment, dig a ditch, and cut down trees for breastworks. The French came upon them, twice as many as the colonists. The fight lasted for nine hours. The powder gave out and the provisions gave out. There was nothing to be gained by lying down behind the logs

George Washington as Captain in the French and Indian War, Junius Brutus Stearns

and starving; so Washington surrendered. The French were jubilant. They had driven off the English and they held the Ohio.

But somehow the English would not stay driven off. At length the king of England began to find out that the French were trying to crowd his colonies into a little strip of land near the coast, and that if he expected to have any more than that he must fight. Then he sent General Braddock to Virginia with one thousand men.

Long before the vessel came to the wharf, the colonists could see the red coats of the soldiers. The regulars were with them, and they were delighted. Braddock made Washington one of his officers, but he had no idea of listening to his advice. Washington was much troubled. "The general knows how to fight the French," he thought, "but he seems to think that the Indians will march out in line like white men." So he told him respectfully how the Indians behaved in a fight. "They hide behind rocks and trees," he said, "and there will be a storm of bullets when no one is in sight."

"Regulars know how to return bullets," replied Braddock. "It would be a strange thing if British troops could not meet a handful of naked Indians."

The line of redcoats and of colonial soldiers set out on the long hard march through the forest. They crossed the Monongahela. They were climbing a hill when suddenly shots began to come from all directions and the forest echoed with the yells of the Indians. The French were in front, the Indians were on both sides, but hidden behind trees. The regulars were so dazed at this new kind of fighting that they ran like sheep. The colonists had learned how to meet Indians, and so they hid behind trees and returned the fire. Even then Braddock could not see that there was any other way to fight than the one he had learned, and he shouted to his men to come out and form in line. Of course the only end to such a battle was the wild retreat of the English. Cannon, provisions, food, arms, clothes, horses, and money were forgotten in the mad rush for safety. Braddock was mortally wounded and soon died. When the fugitives dared to stop, he was buried in the forest, and wagons were rolled over his grave lest the Indians should find it.

It was owing chiefly to Washington's skill and coolness that any of the men escaped. Four bullets were shot through his coat, but he was not hurt. Afterwards an Indian chief said, "He will never die in battle. I told all my braves to aim at him, but they could not hit him." If the Indian had known what severe fighting lay before the young officer, he might not have been so sure that Washington would never die in battle.

The Great Spirit Protects Him — Testimony of Indian Chief

Fifteen years after this battle, Washington and Dr. Craik, his intimate friend from his boyhood to his death, were traveling on an expedition to the western country, for the purpose of exploring wild lands. While near the junction of the Great Kanawha and Ohio Rivers a company of Indians came to them with an interpreter, at the head of whom was an aged and venerable chief. The council fire was kindled, when the chief addressed Washington through an interpreter to the following effect:

"I am a chief, and ruler over my tribes. My influence extends to the waters of the great lakes, and to the far blue mountains. I have traveled a long and weary path, that I might see the young warrior of the great battle. It was on the day when the white man's blood mixed with the streams of

our forest, that I first beheld this chief. I called to my young men and said, mark yon tall and daring warrior? He is not of the red-coat tribe — he hath an Indian's wisdom, and his warriors fight as we do — himself is alone exposed. Quick, let your aim be certain, and he dies. Our rifles were leveled, rifles which, but for him, knew not how to miss — 'twas all in vain, a power mightier far than we, shielded him from harm. He cannot die in battle. I am old, and soon shall be gathered to the great council fire of my fathers in the land of shades, but ere I go, there is something bids me speak in the voice of prophecy. Listen! *The Great Spirit protects that man, and guides his destinies — he will become the chief of nations, and a people yet unborn will hail him as the founder of a mighty empire."*

Chapter 5

George Washington's Family

At the age of twenty-five Mrs. Custis was left a widow, with her little Jacky and Patsy to bring up, and one of the largest estates in Virginia to manage. We read that she conducted her business affairs wisely, and showed herself, in regard to money matters, a capable, level-headed woman.

When, after her first year of mourning and widowhood, Mrs. Custis went to pay her visit at Major Chamberlayne's, she was, as we know, "a tempting widow, independent of the jointure land." Those hazel eyes were as soft and expressive as they had been in the days when they charmed Mr. Custis, and very soon they had bewitched that great man George Washington.

When Colonel Washington, on his mission to the governor at Williamsburg, crossed William's Ferry that bright morning in May he had no suspicion of what awaited him at the big Chamberlayne house opposite. It was the day after Mrs. Custis's arrival. Several guests were assembled in her honor, and through the open windows the sound of laughter and merry voices floating down to the river must have rung invitingly in the ears of the young colonel. But he resolutely turned his horse toward the Williamsburg road.

Almost immediately, however, he was stopped by Major Chamberlayne. The major had seen Washington crossing the river, and had hurried down to entreat him not to pass by without spending a few days under his roof. At first, they say, the colonel replied that he must decline the invitation, and not until Major Chamberlayne mentioned the fact that a very charming widow was visiting him, did Washington hesitate and yield.

Handing his reins to his attendant, Bishop, and giving instructions to have the horses saddled and ready for departure early in the afternoon, he dismounted and walked with the jolly major up to the house.

We may be sure that several eyes peering from the windows and doorway of the great manor house had been watching the major's conference with the renowned young colonel — those hazel eyes, too, very likely. And a little stir of excitement went through the rooms as George Washington was seen nearing the house. But when Major Chamberlayne entered with his tall, dignified friend at his side, every one had quieted down to a calm and sedate reserve, and Washington was presented to the major's guests with much ceremony and propriety.

Mrs. Custis looked very pretty that morning in a gown of her favorite white dimity, a cluster of mayblossoms at her belt, and a little white cap half covering her soft, waving brown hair.

The guests lingered at the table until late in the afternoon, we are told. The little widow and the big colonel talked long and earnestly. When Mrs. Custis smiled, Colonel Washington smiled; when Mrs. Custis sighed, Colonel Washington sighed; and when one of her mayblossoms fell to the floor, he picked it up and she pinned it on his coat lapel, while he smiled down affectionately at her

Colonel Washington visits Mrs. Custis, Alonzo Chappel

fluffy white cap.

In such pleasant occupation it is no wonder that Washington forgot the appointed hour of his departure, forgot Bishop and the horses, forgot his mission to Williamsburg, and even the governor himself.

The sun had set and the twilight was falling when Washington finally started to his feet, declaring that he must be off. But the major laid a restraining hand on the young man's shoulder.

"No guest ever leaves my house after sunset," he said. At the same moment the widow's hazel eyes looked up into the colonel's gray ones, and Colonel Washington sat down again.

He was soon entering once more into a conversation with the widow which lasted until late in the evening. And when, the next morning, he took his leave of her, it was only au revoir for them. For they had agreed that after the business with the governor was over, Washington should proceed to the "White House" and visit Mrs. Custis there.

When Washington returned from Williamsburg and arrived at the "White House" at sunset, the widow was waiting for him in her sweetest gown and her most becoming cap. The smile with which she greeted him must have made him feel very much at home, for it was during this visit that he eagerly pressed his suit, with such success that Mrs. Custis finally agreed to become Mrs. Washington.

But Washington's love-making was brought to a sudden stop. Stern duty was awaiting him on the frontier, and very soon he was back there, taking part in the expedition against the French which terminated victoriously at Fort Duquesne.

Of the love-letters which he wrote to his betrothed during this period only one has come down to us, a manly, affectionate letter, showing the straightforward nature of the man:

> "We have begun our march to the Ohio [he writes from Fort Cumberland, July 20, 1758]. A courier is starting for Williamsburg, and I embrace the opportunity to send a few words to one whose life is inseparable from mine. Since that happy hour when we made our pledges to each other my thoughts have been continually going to you as to another self. That all-powerful Providence may keep us both in safety is the prayer of
>
> "Your faithful and ever affectionate friend,
>
> "G. Washington."

The wedding which took place on the sixth of the following January was a brilliant one, full of sunshine, life, and color. The belles and beaux of Williamsburg were there, and the wealthy planters from the surrounding country with their wives and daughters, all very grand in their satins and brocades, their gold lace and shining buckles. Among them was the governor himself, in a beautiful scarlet suit. The bridegroom, we are told, was splendid in his blue coat lined with red silk, his gold knee buckles, his powdered hair, and his straight sword at his side. But the little bride was the most gorgeous of all. She wore a heavy white silk gown shot with silver, a pearl necklace at her throat and pearl ornaments in her hair, and her high-heeled satin slippers were clasped with diamond buckles. The story is that she and her bridesmaids were driven home in a coach drawn by six horses,

The Marriage of Washington to Martha Custis, Junius Brutus Stears

while Washington rode beside the coach on his favorite brown horse.

Life opened brightly for George and Martha Washington, and their honeymoon did not end with the proverbial six months, but lasted, we may truly say, the forty years of their married life.

Amid the perplexities and harassing cares of his responsible career it must have been a deep satisfaction to Washington to have as a companion one who entered so heartily into his love of country pursuits, his "simple pleasures" and "homely duties," one who sympathized so fully with his thoughts, feelings, and ideals. "The partner of all my domestic happiness," he called his wife; and Mrs. James Warren, writing to Mrs. John Adams, described the "general's lady" as a woman qualified "to soften the hours of private life, to sweeten the cares of a Hero, and smooth the rugged paths of war."

In return, the "Hero" did everything he could to "soften the hours of private life," "to sweeten the cares" of a mother, and "smooth the rugged paths" of housekeeping and letter-writing.

He took entire charge of his wife's property and managed the estates of her children with the utmost care and consideration.

We know that letter-writing was always a severe cross to Mrs. Martha Washington. Washington edited or drafted for her pen her important and formal letters. We can imagine the little woman poring, flushed and weary, over her ink and paper, and the great man drawing his chair beside her, with one of his kind, "benignant" smiles, straightening the hard words and smoothing the troublesome sentences.

One of Mrs. Washington's letters, which she evidently wrote without her husband's help, shows that she was a fond, worrying mamma. She is writing to her sister about a visit, in which "I carried my little patt with me," she writes, "and left Jackey at home for a trial to see how well I could stay without him, though we wear gon wone fortnight, I was quite impatient to get home. If I at any time heard the dogs bark or a noise out I thought there was a person sent for me. I often fancied he was sick or some accident had happened to him, so that I think it is impossible for me to leave him as long as Mr. Washington must stay when he comes down."

In Mrs. Washington's maternal anxieties Washington sympathized with her, and when the time came for "Jackey" to be inoculated for the smallpox, he "withheld from her the information and purpose, if possible to keep her in total ignorance — till I hear of his return or perfect recovery — she having often wished that Jack would take and go through the disorder without her knowing of it, that she might escape those tortures which suspense would throw her into."

As sweet, gentle Patsy Custis grew up into womanhood, Mrs. Washington took great comfort in her "little patt," and made a constant companion of her. Mother and daughter used to sew and spin and knit together, while Washington and Jacky Custis were busy on the farm or chasing the fox in the woods and hollows about Mount Vernon.

Mrs. Washington's only remaining daughter [Patsy] died on the 19th of June, 1773, at the age of sixteen. She was naturally of a frail constitution, and had for many months been gradually fading away. The heat of summer seemed rapidly to develop the seeds of consumption which were lurking in her system, and when her affectionate stepfather, the only father she had ever known, returned home, after a short absence at Williamsburg on public duty, he was shocked to discover the change. The tender and doting mother, upon whose watchful care the prolonged illness of the feeble child had made large drafts, was nearly overwhelmed with grief, and Washington, falling on his knees at

the bedside, with a passionate burst of tears, prayed aloud that the loved one might be spared. "Upon the wings of that holy prayer her spirit ascended, and when he arose and looked upon her pale and placid face, death had set its seal there."

"The sweet, innocent girl," Washington wrote, "entered into a more happy and peaceful abode than she had met with in the afflicted path she had hitherto trod."

The death of this dear daughter left a great void in the Mount Vernon home. Washington deeply mourned the "sweet, innocent girl," as he called her. Of his wife's grief he wrote, "This sudden and unexpected blow has almost reduced my wife to the lowest ebb of misery." And he adds, "This misery is increased by the absence of her son."

Her son, Jacky Custis, was at this time in King's College, New York. The reason why he was there is a story of itself. At a very youthful age Jacky had fallen in love with a charming girl named Eleanor Calvert, a descendant of the famous Lord Baltimore. The fathers of the young couple allowed them to enter into a formal engagement, "but," said Jacky's guardian, "John must be educated before he marries any one." So off to King's College, at New York, went "John," and there he stayed three months, "reading Eleanor Calvert in every book, and writing Eleanor Calvert in all his exercises." Under such conditions education did not progress; so at the end of the three months Jack was permitted to return home, and one bright February morning he and Eleanor Calvert were married. Jacky's mother sent this sweet, motherly note to the young bride on her wedding day:

> "My dear Nelly: God took from me a daughter when June roses were blooming. He has now given me another daughter, about her age, when winter winds are blowing, to warm my heart again. I am as happy as one so afflicted and so blest can be. Pray receive my benediction and a wish that you may long live the loving wife of my happy son, and a loving daughter of
>
> "Your affectionate mother,
>
> "M. Washington."

While the music of wedding bells still lingered in the air, harsher sounds came to disturb the peace of the Washington home. The mutterings of war grew loud and vehement. There had been no pleasant tea-drinkings upon the Mount Vernon porticoes since the Boston Tea Party in December, but friends and neighbors met often at the Washingtons' to discuss politics and war talk. The halls and parlors of the great house rang both with royalistic speeches and patriotic utterances.

Mrs. Washington went about among her guests, quiet, agreeable, unobtrusive. She took small part in the debates, but she listened and treasured certain remarks, and when the time for action came she wrote to a friend, "My mind is made up. My heart is in the cause."

Patrick Henry and Edward Pendleton stayed with Washington the night before they set out with him for the General Congress at Philadelphia.

Writing of this visit, Mr. Pendleton said:

"I was much pleased with Mrs. Washington and her spirit. She seemed ready to make any sacrifice, and was cheerful, though I know she felt anxious. She talked like a Spartan mother to her son on going to battle. 'I hope you will all stand firm — I know George will,' she said. The dear little woman was busy from morning until night with domestic duties; but she gave us much time in conversation and affording us entertainment. When we set off in the morning, she stood in the door

The Washington Family, Edward Savage

and cheered us with good words, 'God be with you, gentlemen!'"

To the next Congress, held in May, 1775, Washington went in the uniform of a Virginia colonel. He had not foreseen his appointment as commander-in-chief, and upon this event he wrote to his wife in a spirit of earnest modesty and real tenderness:

> "My Dearest: I am now set down to write you on a subject that fills me with inexpressible concern, and this concern is increased when I reflect upon the uneasiness I know it will give you. It has been determined in Congress that the whole army raised for the defence of the American cause shall be put under my care, and that it is necessary for me to proceed immediately to Boston to take upon me the command of it.
>
> "You may believe me, my dear Patsy, when I assure you, in the most solemn manner, that so far from seeking the appointment, I have used every endeavor in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my capacity, and that I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home, than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad if my stay were to be seven times seven years. I shall feel no pain from the toil and danger of the

campaign; my unhappiness will flow from the uneasiness I know you will feel from being left alone."

Six months later, being encamped in winter quarters at Cambridge, Washington sent an "invitation" to his wife asking her to spend the season with him, stating, as he declared, "the difficulties which must attend the journey before her."

Mrs. Washington, however, a true wife and patriot, did not hesitate once before deciding to undertake the journey and "spend the winter with her husband in a camp upon the outskirts of a city then in possession of the enemy."

All through the campaign it became the custom for Mrs. Washington to spend the winters at headquarters with her husband, while her summers were passed in anxiety at Mount Vernon.

Her "winterings" were a consolation and help to Washington in many ways. One noticeable fact is that she was able to assist him in deciding questions of social etiquette. And more questions of this sort arose during the war than one would suppose. For although our Revolutionary ancestors "fought and bled," they also danced and dined and made merry. While the army was shut up in winter quarters, there were calls to receive, dinners to be given, and balls to attend. The overburdened general was somewhat perplexed by these social obligations, and records having committed "unintentional offences."

But when Mrs. Washington came with her "ready tact" and "good breeding," she rescued her husband from all such small annoyances, and whenever Washington's "lady" was at headquarters, Washington's home was a jolly, comfortable sort of a place where all were welcomed, generals and their wives, young officers and merry girls.

Mrs. Washington, like her husband, was very fond of young people. She dearly loved Lafayette, the French "boy," as he was called. Captain Colfax was another of her favorites, for whom, it is said, she netted a queue net with her own hands. She took a motherly interest in Colonel Hamilton and his love affair, and Hamilton's sweetheart, Miss Betsey Schuyler, was a frequent visitor of Mrs. Washington's.

In Betsey's own words we have an interesting picture of the general's wife as she appeared to that enthusiastic young woman on her first meeting with her. "Soon after our arrival at Morristown," said Betsey, "an invitation was brought to mamma and me from Mrs. Washington. She received us so kindly, kissing us both, for the general and papa were very warm friends. She was then nearly fifty years old, but was still handsome. She was quite short; a plump little woman with dark brown eyes, her hair a little frosty, and very plainly dressed for such a grand lady as I considered her. She wore a plain gown of homespun stuff, a large white neckerchief, a neat cap, and her plain gold wedding ring which she had worn for more than twenty years. Her gracious and cheerful manner delighted us. She was always my ideal of a true woman. Her thoughts were then much on the poor soldiers who had suffered during the dreadful winter, and she expressed her joy at the approach of a milder springtime."

Martha Washington's thought and care for "the poor soldiers" are dwelt upon by all who knew her. At Valley Forge, where the suffering was most intense, while Washington was writing to the dilatory Congress of the "soldiers who might be traced by the marks left upon the snow by their frosted and bleeding feet," Mrs. Washington was doing all she could to supply the much-needed

clothing, warmth, and food.

We have glimpses of her travelling, cloaked and hooded, her basket on her arm, over the snow to the soldiers' huts, and the words "God bless Lady Washington" were heard from many a "straw pallet" when her kind, motherly face appeared at the door. One woman who, as a girl, used sometimes to accompany Martha Washington on her visits to the soldiers' huts has said:

"I never in my life knew a woman so busy from early morning until late at night as was Lady Washington, providing comforts for the sick soldiers. Every day excepting Sunday the wives of the officers in camp, and sometimes other women, were invited to Mr. Potts's to assist her in knitting socks, patching garments, and making shirts for the poor soldiers, when materials could be procured. Every fair day she might be seen with basket in hand and with a single attendant, going among the huts seeking the keenest and most needy sufferer, and giving all the comforts to them in her power. On one occasion she went to the hut of a dying sergeant whose young wife was with him. His case seemed to particularly touch the heart of the good lady, and after she had given him some wholesome food she had prepared with her own hands, she knelt down by his straw pallet and prayed earnestly for him and his wife with her sweet, solemn voice."

Like a true soldier's wife, Mrs. Washington, thinking always of the troops and their comforts, made light of the hardships which she herself had to endure. She was heard to declare that she preferred the sound of the fife and drums to all other music, and in later years she could laugh in

The Christmas Coach, Jean Leon Gerome Ferris

recalling the nightly alarms when she and Mrs. Ford had to shiver under the bedclothes while the wind swept through the room and guards stood at the open windows with guns loaded, ready to shoot.

The joy that greeted the victorious close of the Revolution was shadowed for the Washingtons by the fate of their dear "Jackey" Custis. He was dying at Eltham of a fever contracted in the trenches before Yorktown. Realizing that his illness was fatal, his one desire was to behold the surrender of the sword of Cornwallis. So he was supported to the field, to be present at the final triumph, and was then carried back to Eltham to die. His poor wife and mother and Washington, from the scene of his victory, were all there to say good-by.

When gentle Patsy Custis died, Washington, they say, knelt beside her bed in silent prayer; but when he saw his "Jacky" taken from him, his playfellow on the farm and in the chase, his comrade-in-arms, the great-hearted general, who never loved lightly, threw himself on the couch and "wept like a child."

With his usual reticence Washington recorded the death of young Custis:

"I arrived at Eltham, the seat of Colonel Bassett, in time to see poor Custis breathe his last. This unexpected and affecting event threw Mrs. Washington and Mrs. Custis, who were both present, into such deep distress that the circumstance of it prevented my reaching this place (Mount Vernon) till the 13th."

In their loneliness Washington and his wife adopted the two younger children of John Custis. Eleanor, a little dark-eyed girl of two, and George Washington Parke Custis, who was only six months old when his father died, became, henceforth, the children of Mount Vernon, petted by the many guests who came to visit George and Martha Washington. Lafayette recalled his first glimpse of G. W. P. Custis, standing on the portico of Mount Vernon beside his grandfather.

"He was," said Lafayette, addressing the young man himself, "a very little gentleman with a feather in his cap, holding fast to one finger of the good general's remarkable hand, which (so large the hand) was all, my dear sir, you could well do at the time."

Of course "Nellie" and "Master Washington" were very dear to their grandmamma's heart, and there are many references to them in her letters.

"My little Nellie is getting well," she writes, "and Tut (G. W. P. Custis) is the same claver boy you left him."

But Mrs. Washington found little Nellie something of a trial too. Nellie was not at all the quiet, gentle, orderly little girl her Aunt Patsy had been.

Mrs. Washington, however, was firm and kept strict guard over her wayward granddaughter. Nellie was occasionally reduced to tears, and wept upon her harpsichord until her grandpapa came to her rescue and carried her off for a walk in the meadows or a gallop over the hills.

Mrs. Washington, on her part, pleaded in behalf of the "claver boy," and Nellie declared "it was well that grandpapa and not grandmamma was educating Washington, for grandmamma certainly would spoil him."

The six years that intervened between Washington's retirement to Mount Vernon and his return to public life, his "furlough," as he called them, were happy, but not so quiet as he and his wife wished them to be. He described his home during that period as a "well resorted tavern." There were always guests, and a great many of them, arriving and departing at all hours. After two years

he recorded in his diary, "Dined with only Mrs. Washington, which I believe is the first instance of it since my retirement from public life."

Yet, in spite of the many guests, Mrs. Washington never neglected her housekeeping orders or shortened her hour of private devotion that always followed breakfast.

Washington and his wife were both very loath to leave their contented, busy, country life at Mount Vernon, where through the livelong day spinning-wheel and weaving-loom buzzed cheerily within, while now and then from "grassy hill-top" or shaded hollow came the merry ringing sound of horn and hound. At the close of the war Washington had expressed his wish to "return speedily into the bosom of that country which gave me birth, and in the sweet enjoyment of domestic happiness and the company of a few friends to end my days in quiet." And after his election to the Presidency he wrote confidentially to General Knox:

"The Mistress President" starting out for a drive.

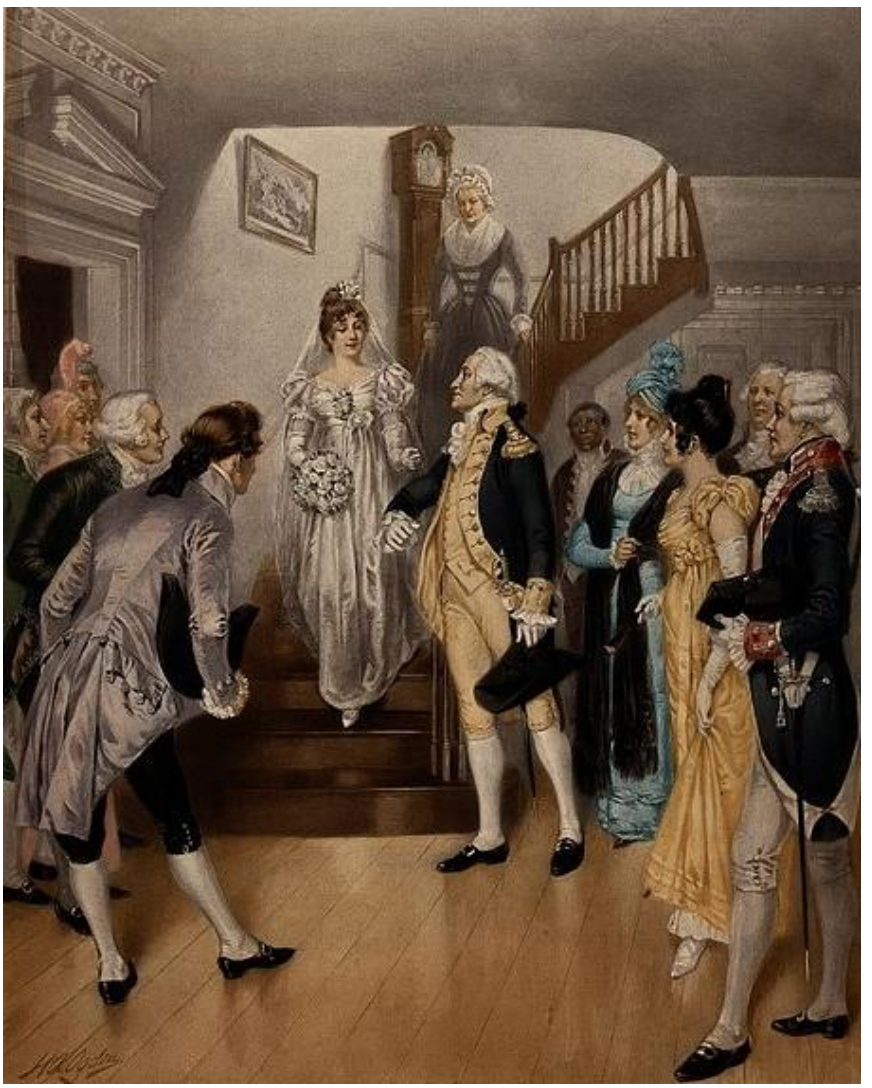
"My removal to the chair of government will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution; so unwilling am I in the evening of a life nearly consumed in public cares to quit a peaceful abode for an ocean of difficulties without that competency of political skill, abilities, and inclinations which are necessary to manage a helm."

A letter from Mrs. Washington to a congenial friend sounds this same note of keen regret:

"I little thought when the war was finished that any circum-stances could possibly happen which would call the general into public life again. I had anticipated that from that moment we should be suffered to grow old together, in solitude and tranquillity. That was the first and dearest wish of my

heart. I will not, however, con-template with too much regret disappointments that were inevitable; though his feelings and mine were in perfect unison with respect to our predilection for a private life, yet I cannot blame him for acting according to his ideas of duty in obeying the voice of his country. It is owing to the kindness of our numerous friends in all quarters that my new and unwished-for situation is not indeed a burden to me. When I was much younger I should probably have enjoyed the innocent gayeties of life as much as most persons of my age; but I had long since placed all the prospects of my future worldly happiness in the still enjoyments of the fireside at Mount Vernon."

There is some sadness in the thought of this man and woman, so simple in their tastes, in disposition so reserved and modest, going reluctantly, out of an exalted sense of duty and patriotism, to accept the highest honors their country could confer; and as President and "Mistress President" of the United States, though envied by many an ambitious man and woman, yet secretly longing to sit beside the quiet "fireside at Mount Vernon," or to stand upon its portico watching the lights and shadows flitting across the dear Potomac.



George Washington's last birthday,
Henry Alexander Ogden

But while Mrs. Washington was homesick at heart and writing confidentially, "I am more like a state prisoner than anything else; there are certain bounds set for me from which I must not depart," she never allowed her discontent to appear, and performed her official duties well. As a social leader and woman of affairs she is said to have been "absolutely colorless, permitting no political discussions in her presence." In everything her dignity and "most pleasing affability" were apparent.

Every pleasant afternoon Mrs. Washington went riding in a ponderous but beautiful cream-colored coach behind

six spotless white horses. One who lived in the days when Washington was President has left a vivid picture of the "Mistress President" starting off for a drive. "The door opened," we are told, "when the 'beheld of all beholders,' in a suit of dark silk velvet of an old cut, silver or steel hilted small sword at the left side, hair full powdered, black silk hose and bag, accompanied by 'Lady Washington,' also in full dress, appeared standing upon the marble steps. Presenting her his hand, he led her down to the coach with that ease and grace peculiar to him in everything, and, as remembered, with the attentive assiduity of an ardent, youthful lover, having also handed in a young lady, and the door clapped to, Fritz, the coachman, gave a rustling flourish with his lash, which produced a plunging motion in the leading horses, reined in by postilions, and striking flakes of fire between their heels and pebbles beneath — when

> "'Crack went the whip, round went the wheels,
> As though High street were mad.'"

The Washington house-hold was run with clock-like regularity. The day began at four o'clock for George and Martha Washington. When Mr. Peale was engaged to paint Mrs. Washington's portrait, the time set for the first sitting was seven o'clock in the morning. At this early hour the painter hesitated to disturb the "first lady in the land," and he took a short walk before knocking at the Washingtons' door. Upon his arrival, Mrs. Washington looked at the clock and reminded Mr. Peale that he was late. And after he had explained, the industrious little woman informed him that she had already attended morning worship, given Nellie a music lesson, and read the morning paper.

Nellie, entering her teens, was becoming a beauty, saucy, fun-loving, and tender-hearted. She was one of the few who had no fear of Washington. Her bright repartee and clever stories could chase away the anxious shadows from his brow and delight him into laughter.

Her grandmother's reproofs were always quiet and dignified, but they were effective. One day Nellie and some young girls who were visiting her came down to breakfast in their morning gowns. Mrs. Washington looked, but made no comment. The breakfast was half over when Nellie and her friends caught sight of a coach coming up the drive. They glanced at their gowns and exchanged looks of consternation. And when the names of some French officers and young Charles Carroll, Jr., were announced, they turned to their hostess in a flutter, begging to be excused to go and dress. But Mrs. Washington shook her head complacently.

"No, remain as you are," she said decidedly. "What is good enough for General Washington is good enough for any of his guests."

Washington's great responsibilities inclined to make him absent-minded. But his wife could recall him. Nellie remembered seeing her grandmother seize the general by the buttonhole when she had anything special to communicate. Whereupon the general would look down upon the little woman with a "benignant" smile and become instantly attentive to her slightest wish.

Finally there came an end to Washington's long term of service for his country, and he and his wife gladly returned to their "Mount Vernon fireside" and "the tranquil enjoyments of rural life." The "first and dearest wish" of their heart was granted, and as Farmer Washington and wife they grew old together. But their days of vacation were not many. Less than three years brought to a close their forty years of married life.

When the great general died his wife was unusually composed. "I shall soon follow him," she

said simply.

During her last days she liked best to sit alone in a little attic room where, from the window, she could see her husband's grave across the lawn, and look down upon the light of the wild flowers along the river bank, and beyond to the bright waters of the Potomac he loved so dearly.

Chapter 6

Martha Washington

1732-1802

"Not wise or great in any shining worldly sense was she, but largely endowed with those qualities of the heart that conspire to the making of a noble and rounded character… She was well worthy to be the chosen companion and much-loved wife of the greatest of our soldiers and the purest of our patriots."

— Anne Hollingsworth Wharton.

On a great Virginia plantation in the year 1732 Martha Dandridge was born. Her father was a prominent landowner and his daughter had the usual education of the time, not much schooling in comparison with to-day, but she learned to play the spinet, to dance gracefully, and to sew with all the mysteries of elaborate stitches. A well-behaved, pretty child she was who at fifteen made her debut in Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia, which then afforded the gayest social life in America. Dressed in a stiff bodice and flowered petticoat, Martha was the belle of the ball, and of many succeeding ones as well, for at once she became a great favorite.

When she was barely eighteen she married Daniel Parke Custis, a wealthy land-owner, who was more than twenty years her senior. They lived near Williamsburg at his country home, the "White House." Seven years later he died, leaving her with two young children and a great fortune thousands of pounds and thousands of acres of Virginia land.

In May, 1758, Mrs. Custis was visiting at Major Chamberlayne's, when her host brought an unexpected guest none other than young Colonel George Washington, already a military hero and commander of the Virginia troops. He was en route to Williamsburg to report to the governor on the needs of his regiments, and when Major Chamberlayne pressed him to stop, he had at first refused, but yielded when told that the prettiest and richest widow in all Virginia was there.

He would stay for dinner then, but must go on at once, and gave orders accordingly to his servant, Bishop, bequeathed to him by General Braddock. But when dinner was over and the horses were brought round, no Washington appeared, though Bishop had never known his master to be late before. In the drawing-room the young colonel and the young widow were talking, oblivious to everything else, while the impatient steeds pawed the drive restlessly. Till the day was done and twilight at hand Washington loitered.

"No guest can leave my house after sunset," said the major, and insisted that he must stay the night. Late the next morning Bishop and his master rode away to Williamsburg. The little widow in the white dimity frock, with the cluster of May-blossoms at her belt, and the little white cap half covering her soft, wavy brown hair, had completely captivated the soldier. His business in the town

Martha Dandridge Custis, John Folwell

completed, he rode on to the "White House."

[The following day, when] Washington left for camp and the western campaign against Fort Duquesne, the two were engaged.

In January, 1759, when they had met just four times, Mrs. Custis and George Washington were married. A brilliant scene the wedding was. The guests included wealthy planters and their wives and daughters, all very grand in their satins and brocades, English officers in army and navy uniforms, the governor of Virginia, in scarlet embroidered with gold, with a bag wig… Thus began their forty years of married life.

After a few months in Williamsburg, to settle the business of the Custis estate and to attend the meetings of the House of Burgesses, of which Washington had been elected a member during his campaign against the French, he took his bride to Mount Vernon, his eight-thousand acre plantation on the Potomac River. Here they planned to live quietly, he busy with his fields and flocks, she with the large household, and both enjoying the growth of the Custis children. In a white apron and cap, with a bunch of keys jingling at her side, Mrs. Washington supervised the busy kitchen and slave quarters, looked after the strict training and the lessons of the children, and was a charming hostess to their guests.

But public affairs changed and with them this quiet happy life. The stamp act and oppressive taxes stirred the colonies. Like many patriot women, Martha Washington ceased using tea at her table, ceased to buy English cloth and other goods of English manufacture. No less than sixteen spinning-wheels were kept busy at Mount Vernon, and on the looms homespun was woven for the family's clothing and for the large number of slaves.

Rapidly events moved to a crisis. The first Continental Congress was called, and Washington elected as one of Virginia's three delegates. When the party started north Mrs. Washington saw them off with these words of wifely appreciation, "I hope you will all stand firm. I know George will. God be with you, gentlemen."

And this was not idle talk on her part, for she foresaw plainly the consequences. At the many discussions and debates which had occurred at their home, for and against English policy, she had

said little, but had listened intelligently. She summed it up in writing to a friend:

"Dark days and darker nights, domestic happiness suspended, social enjoyments abandoned, property put in jeopardy but what are all these evils when compared with the fate of which the Port Bill may be only a threat? My mind is made up, my heart is in the cause."

The second Congress met the following May and Washington was unanimously chosen commander-in-chief of the army. He wrote this news to his wife at Mount Vernon, adding that he hoped to return in the autumn. Instead he then invited her to come to him in Cambridge, but carefully pointed out the difficulties of the journey. Unhesitating, undismayed, a true soldier's wife, she set out for the long trip to the North, as though it were the most natural thing in the world to leave the ease and security of her southern home and spend the winter in a New England camp on the outskirts of a city held by the enemy.

The coach with its four horses, and postillions in white and scarlet livery, attracted great attention. In the country people rushed to doors and windows to get a sight of her. In the towns she was met by escorts of Continental soldiers, the ringing of bells, and enthusiastic cheering. With a mingled feeling of pride and wonder this little woman, who had never been out of Virginia, realized what it was to be the wife of General Washington.

Martha Washington, from Wikimedia Commons

This was a real farewell to the quiet plantation and the beginning of her public life. Except for the year when Trenton and Princeton and active winter campaigning made it too dangerous for women to be present, it was Martha Washington's custom to join her husband when the army went into winter quarters, and to march back home when work opened with the spring. Thus she heard the first and last gun of every campaign, and described herself as a perambulator for those eight years.

Because she was the wife of

the general, it did not follow that she could live in luxury. In Cambridge to be sure headquarters were in the Craigie House, later the home of the poet Longfellow; and here Mrs. Washington had some social life, with the wives of the Harvard professors. But in other places lodgings were often very, very uncomfortable, "a squeezed-up room or two." At Valley Forge a log cabin was built near a Quaker farmhouse where the Washingtons had two rooms to serve as a kitchen and dining-room; but when this same plan was proposed for the headquarters at Morristown, no lumber was available! At Newburgh their inconvenient dining-room had one window and seven doors, and the sitting-room was so small that when Washington entertained a French officer, the guest had to sit on a camp bed.

Martha Washington's presence lessened the general's cares and broke the monotony of the long anxious winters. She was always a delightful hostess and even with camp limitations her hospitality and genial manner reminded her guests of Virginia. Nearly every day some of the young officers and their wives were invited to dinner, the General and Mrs. Washington sitting side by side, while Alexander Hamilton carved.

Martha Washington was always a simple, dignified woman, as a group of Morristown ladies who went to call upon her testified. Having heard that the general's wife was a very grand lady, they wore their best bibs and bands, and most elegant silks and ruffles. Mrs. Washington, in a plain homespun dress and a "specked" (checked) apron, received them very graciously, a half knit stocking in her left hand, the ball of yarn in her pocket. After the usual compliments were over, she resumed her knitting.

"And there we were," described one of the women afterward, "without a stitch of work, and sitting in state, but General Washington's lady was knitting socks!"

She showed them two dresses of cotton and silk, woven at Mount Vernon, the stripes made from ravelings of brown silk stockings and old crimson damask chair covers. She took pains to tell them that the livery of her coachmen was all homespun, save for the scarlet cuffs, made of English material imported long before the war.

After that visit, work for the soldiers, rather than fine feminine clothes, became the fashion in Morristown.

At another New Jersey headquarters Washington was staying at a private house, whose mistress one day saw a coach drive up to the door, with ten dragoons as the escort. Out stepped a plain little woman dressed in brown homespun, wearing a hood; over her bosom was folded a large white kerchief. She must be a maid, thought the hostess, until she saw General Washington greeting her, and inquiring about the children, and his favorite horses at Mount Vernon. The general's wife, dressed like that!

Everywhere the soldiers loved Lady Washington, as they called her. During the sad winter at Valley Forge, when the army was in desperate straits, suffering greatly from lack of food and blankets and clothing, and the consequent constant sickness, she went to share the soldiers' prirations and make a spot of cheer in their dreary lives. She arrived in a rough farm sleigh, hired from the innkeeper at the forks of the Brandywine, where the deep snow had forced her to abandon her coach. Stanch patriot that she was, she made light of inconveniences and discomforts and hardships; and never was a woman busier than Martha Washington, all that dismal winter. In a cloak and hood, with her basket on her arm, she went in the deep snow from hut to hut, carrying delicacies for the

From Library of Congress

sick and consolation for the dying, and by her sympathy and generosity stimulating the loyalty and courage of the men. "God bless Lady Washington!" was frequently heard, when her kind, motherly face appeared.

Day after day she assembled in her two rooms the wives of the officers, to knit and patch, and make new garments whenever materials could be secured. No more embroidering and spinet playing, and other light accomplishments! The work these women did at Valley Forge was far-reaching in its effects. News of it spread to Philadelphia, where the British were having a gay winter, and the patriotic ladies there commenced making shirts for the soldiers, and ultimately contributed nearly three thousand garments. Small in amount, perhaps, in comparison with such service to-day; but Martha Washington was a pioneer, anticipating the work of the Sanitary Commission and the American Red Cross.

Officers, soldiers and women, all were steadied by her serenity and unwavering faith. And when the middle of March brought better times, she led in the camp gaiety. The news of the French alliance was celebrated with a grand review. The soldiers cheered for the king of France, for the thirteen states, for their general; then there came shouts of "Long live Lady Washington!" and a thousand hats were tossed into the air in the excitement.

Yorktown and victory, and the end of the war in sight, but Washington must remain on duty until peace was actually signed. Martha Washington was present, sitting in the gallery of the old capitol at Annapolis, when he resigned his commission; and together they drove to Mount Vernon,

arriving on Christmas Eve. Standing at the door of his cottage to welcome them was old Bishop, dressed in the scarlet regimentals he had worn at Braddock's defeat. All the servants and slaves assembled, and such a Christ-mas celebration as Mount Vernon had!

More than all else the Washingtons longed for quiet days on their plantation, to enjoy the rest they so much needed. But there were guests innumerable, so that Mount Vernon was described as a well-resorted tavern. When he had been home almost two years, Washington wrote in his diary,

"Dined with only Mrs. Washington, which I believe is the first instance of it since my retirement from public life."

This furlough, as the general used to speak of it, was not destined to continue overlong. The federation of the states proved too weak a government, and Washington must go to Philadelphia for months, to sit as president of the Constitutional Convention. Then after the people had ratified the Constitution, there came one day riding up the broad drive at Mount Vernon the aged secretary of Congress, with a letter notifying George Washington that he had been elected president of the United States.

"I little thought when the war was finished," wrote Martha Washington, "that any circumstances could possibly have happened which would call the General into public life again. I had anticipated that we should have been left to grow old in solitude and tranquillity together. That was the first and dearest wish of my heart… Yet I can not blame him for having acted according to his ideas of duty in obeying the voice of his country."

Martha Dandridge Washington, unknown artist

Alone to New York for the inauguration went George Washington, wearing a homespun suit woven at Mount Vernon. When his wife, likewise dressed in homespun, followed a few weeks later, her welcome all along the journey was second only to his. She entered many a town between two long columns of Revolutionary soldiers; and at New York City she was rowed across the bay by thirteen oarsmen dressed in white, while the guns fired thirteen rounds and crowds cheered her.

As the president's wife, Martha Washington was hostess for the nation, entertaining distinguished citizens and foreigners, cabinet officers and congressmen, presiding at the state dinners and

Portrait of Martha Washington, Rembrandt Peale

giving public receptions every Friday, where plum cake, tea and coffee were served. The guests were always dismissed before nine, with her grave, frank little formula, "For the general always retires at nine, and I usually precede him." The need over, she laid aside her homespun and dressed in silk, satin, velvet and lace, as became the wife of the president.

People criticized Mrs. Washington for the ceremony in force at her levees, saying they were too much like those of royalty. Guests were shocked because they had to stand, while the truth was, the rooms would not have contained a third enough chairs. Presided over by the Washingtons, the executive mansion combined with the most ardent patriotism a dignity and elegant moderation that would have honored any European court. They saved the social life of a new country from both the crudeness and bald simplicity of extreme republicanism, and from the luxury and excesses often marking sudden elevation to power and place. And in all these social functions Mrs. Washington never joined in any political discussion. Though the letters between her and her husband were filled with talk of public affairs, she was never once heard to utter any opinion on important questions of state; and in this, as in many details of her life, she is a worthy model for any American woman whose husband is in public service.

The year in New York was followed by similar years in Philadelphia, after the capital was moved there. The second term of the presidency over and a third term refused, the Washingtons gladly returned to Virginia; their joy being evidenced in this letter:

"I can not tell you how much I enjoy home, after having been deprived of one so long, for our dwelling in New York and Philadelphia was not home, only sojourning. The General and I feel like children just released from school or from a hard taskmaster, and we believe that nothing can tempt us to leave the sacred roof tree again, except on private business or pleasure. I am fairly settled down to the pleasant duties of an old-fashioned Virginia housekeeper, steady as a clock, busy as a bee, and cheerful as a cricket."

Happily they lived at Mount Vernon two years, until the general's death. During his brief illness Mrs. Washington never left his room. "'Tis well," were his last words.

"Is he dead?" she asked, so gentle had been the change. "'Tis well. All is over now. I shall soon follow him. I have no more trials to pass through."

She moved up to a little attic room whose windows looked out toward his grave, and beyond to the waters of the Potomac which he had so loved. Surrounded by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, cheerful in her sorrow and loneliness, she survived him two years, and when she died, was buried beside him in the simple brick tomb at Mount Vernon.

A woman not wise nor great perhaps in any worldly sense, Martha Washington had those qualities of heart that make a noble rounded character. A devoted and loyal wife, a tender mother, an earnest Christian, she was fitted to be the chosen companion of "the greatest of our soldiers and the purest of our patriots." Serene and kindly, in the familiar white cap and kerchief, she has become the nation's ideal of the president's wife, our country's first hostess.

Chapter 7

Commander-in-Chief

Every schoolboy and girl is familiar with the facts which led up to the Revolution — how the English government enacted one law after another directed against the Colonies, and without giving them the slightest voice in it. England does things far differently nowadays!

The chief bone of contention was the levying of special taxes, such as that upon every pound of tea shipped to America. These levies under the "Stamp Act" were constant causes of irritation, and the quarrel continued for ten or twelve years. The rift constantly grew wider between the mother country and the daughter, and another important thing resulted. The thirteen separate colonies scattered along the Atlantic Coast began to come together for self-defense. From being separate communities with few interests in common, they saw that their only safety lay in union. It was the first start toward nationality.

George Washington, Emanuel Leutze

In September, 1774, in answer to a general call, each of the thirteen colonies sent picked men to a convention in Philadelphia, which besides being the largest city was centrally located. The delegates met in a building known as Carpenters' Hall, and their organization became known as the First Continental Congress.

Of these stirring times we are all so familiar, that it is not necessary to treat them in further detail, except as they affected the fortunes of a certain Virginia planter.

Washington was chosen from Virginia, among others, to attend this Congress; and rode thither in company with the fiery Patrick Henry and the courtly Edmund

Pendleton. As they left Mount Vernon with its domestic peace, Martha Washington said:

"I hope you will all stand firm. I know George will. God be with you, gentlemen!"

This first session of Congress was not in open rebellion. Many who attended were still loyal subjects of the Crown. They only sought a way out of the misunderstanding. They remained in session fifty-one days, and when their petition was finally presented to the House of Lords in London, the great statesman Chatham said:

"When your lordships look at the papers transmitted to us from America; when you consider their decency, firmness, and wisdom, you cannot but respect their cause, and wish to make it your own."

Nevertheless, there were hotheads led by the stubborn old king himself who would not accept this olive-branch of peace.

On his return home, when Patrick Henry was asked who was the greatest man in Congress, he answered: "If you speak of eloquence, Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina is by far the greatest orator; but if you speak of solid information and sound judgment, Colonel Washington is unquestionably the greatest man on that floor."

While a peaceable way out was still being sought, news came of the Boston Massacre and the Battle of Lexington, and hard upon the news the whole country seemed to rise in arms as one man. Congress was convened again on May 10, and although they sent a second petition to King George, their chief concern was to equip and provide leaders for the army that was already coming together. Above all they wanted a commander-in-chief — one who was accustomed to handling men, who had executive ability, experience in military matters, and the bodily strength for this arduous task.

John Adams of Massachusetts rose up to speak. He was a man whose opinions always commanded respect.

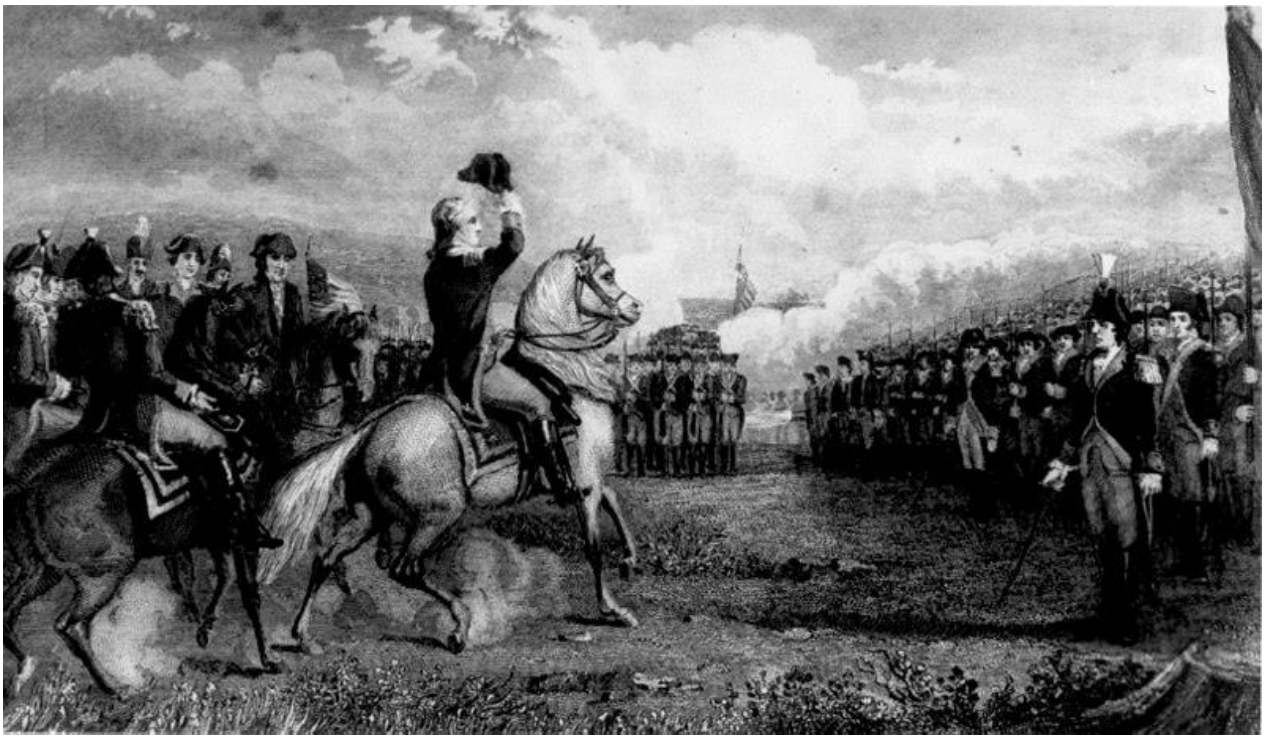
"Gentlemen," he said to the Congress, "as I look over this body, I have but one gentleman in my mind. He is a certain gentleman from Virginia who is among us and is well known to us all. His skill and experience as an officer, his independent fortune, great talents, and excellent universal character would command the approbation of all the colonies, and unite the cordial exertions of all the colonies better than any other person in the union."

Every one knew whom John Adams meant, and all eyes were turned in a certain direction where a tall, athletic figure dressed in a colonel's uniform of buff and blue, was quietly slipping out of the room. Washington never outgrew his shyness of public praise.

As a result of Adams's speech, Washington was unanimously elected commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. After the vote was announced, Washington thanked Congress for this honor and the confidence it implied, adding:

"I beg it may be remembered by every gentleman in the room, that I this day declare, with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the command I am honored with. As to pay, I beg leave to assure the Congress that, as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to accept this arduous employment, at the expense of my domestic ease and happiness, I do not wish to make any profit of it. I will keep an exact account of my expenses — that is all I desire."

And he wrote to his wife: "I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad, if my stay were to be seven times seven years." And again: "It is a trust too great for my capacity, but it has been a kind of destiny" (at last he recognized it!) "that has thrown me upon it, and it was utterly out of my power to refuse it."



George Washington taking command of the Continental Army, C. Rogers

Losing no time, Washington mounted his horse and turned northward toward Boston, then the center of disturbance. He found on his way that, far from being the unknown Virginia planter, his name and his fame had preceded him. They told of his earlier prowess against the French and Indians, and they turned out in crowds to hail him and wish him God-speed. He was no longer an individual; he was the personification of their liberties.

As he rode with his armed escort, he was met by tidings of the battle fought on Breeds Hill (or "Bunker Hill," as the fight was later called from a neighboring eminence). The hard-riding courier reported that the American force had finally been dispersed. It looked like a bad defeat.

"Why did they retreat?" asked General Washington (as he must now be called).

"Their ammunition gave out," answered the courier, truthfully.

"And did they stand the fire of the British regulars as long as they had ammunition?" pressed the commander.

"That they did!" replied the courier. "They held their own fire in reserve until the enemy were within eight rods."

A look of relief came across Washington's face, as he turned to Generals Lee and Schuyler who were by his side.

"Then the liberties of the country are safe, gentlemen!" he exclaimed.

It was a prophecy which finally proved true.

On he and his party rode — through New York, along the old Post Road, and finally reached Cambridge on the outskirts of Boston, where the Continental troops were assembled — still defying their enemy entrenched across the Charles River, in Boston.

Under the branching limbs of a stately elm, which still stands not far from the present campus

of Harvard University, Washington unsheathed his sword and formally took command of the Continental Army. The date was July 3, 1775.

Washington was then forty-three years old. An actual description of him at the time, from the diary of Dr. James Thatcher, a surgeon in the army, is of interest: "The personal appearance of our commander-in-chief is that of a perfect gentleman and accomplished warrior. He is remarkably tall — full six feet — erect and well-proportioned. The strength and proportion of his joints and muscles appear to be commensurate with the preeminent powers of his mind. The serenity of his countenance, and majestic gracefulness of his deportment impart a strong impression of that dignity and grandeur which are peculiar characteristics; and no one can stand in his presence without feeling the ascendency of his mind, and associating with his countenance the idea of wisdom, philanthropy, magnanimity, and patriotism. There is a fine symmetry in the features of his face indicative of a benign and dignified spirit. His nose is straight, and his eyes inclined to blue. He wears his hair in a becoming cue, and from his forehead it is turned back, and powdered in a manner which adds to the military air of his appearance. He displays a native gravity, but devoid of all appearance of ostentation. His uniform dress is a blue coat with two brilliant epaulets, buff-colored under-clothes, and a three-cornered hat with a black cockade. He is constantly equipped with an elegant smallsword, boots and spurs, in readiness to mount his noble charger."

In this personal description, perhaps fulsome in its praise, we can still see something of the boundless respect and confidence which the new commander inspired among his men, and which was to continue through all the weary months of the Revolution.

Message Prior to Declaration of Independence

In view of an expected attack from the combined forces of the enemy, the following order was issued, July 2, 1776:

The time is now near at hand which must probably determine whether Americans are to be freemen or slaves; whether they are to have any property they can call their own; whether their houses and farms are to be pillaged and destroyed, and they consigned to a state of wretchedness, from which no human efforts will probably deliver them. The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this army. Our cruel and unrelenting enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance or the most abject submission. This is all that we can expect. We have, therefore, to resolve to conquer or die. Our own country's honor calls upon us for a vigorous and manly exertion, and if we now shamefully fail, we shall become infamous to the whole world. Let us rely upon the goodness of the cause, and the aid of the Supreme Being, in whose hands victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble actions, etc.

Chapter 8

Keeping Christmas with General Washington

A Christmas tree, with shining candles and a gold star set on the topmost branch! The sentinel in the worn uniform of the Continental Army could see it quite plainly there in front of him as he paced the picket line of the camp on the Delaware through the cold and the driving snow. Then he pulled his worn cape closer around his bowed shoulders and quickened his pace. He was almost freezing, he realized that now. Numb from head to foot, he had a strange, dream-like kind of feeling, and the Christmas tree that he had thought he saw was part of a dream. It was a pine tree growing on the bleak bank of the river, hung with icicles, its branches creaking in the winter wind, and a lonely star shining down through a cloud upon it.

Christmas night in his home in Virginia! The sentinel could see his house there at the end of the road, the light in the window making a bright path leading toward him across the snow. It was a comfortable farmhouse, surrounded by rich pasture land and tobacco fields and orchards. There were horses and dogs without number in the stables and the storehouse was hung with hams and sides of bacon and freshly killed fowl for the holiday feasting. All the family, his brothers, his mother and his father were gathered about the great log fire in the living room, keeping Christmas together. How warm and comfortable it was!

No, this was just another dream, the sentinel understood, as he stamped on the frozen snow and swung his arms to fight the stupor of the cold that had again crept over him. The light he saw shone through the chinks in one of the rude log huts of the army camp. There were other huts scattered along the new roads for holding this depleted remnant of the Continental troops who were fighting for the liberty of the American colonies. The soldiers had chopped down trees from the neighboring hillsides for building their shelters and had put up the huts that December, with the winter upon them. They had worked in storms, the wind biting through their threadbare clothing, and with no food except flour mixed with water and baked in the coals of an outdoor fire, a strip of tough beef once in a while, or a tin of stale fish.

The sentinel himself was crowded with many other soldiers in the cabin whose light he had mistaken for home candles. There was no floor except the frozen earth and not even straw enough to make beds for all the men. They had only pieces of worn blankets left and it bade fair to be a bitter winter. The beggared camp at McConkey's Ferry was his only home this Christmas night. His father and brothers had been killed in the first year of the American Revolution; his Christmas company was the valiant fellowship of an undaunted army of farmers, blacksmiths, teachers, shop

keepers, printers, preachers, one and all men of the Colonies who had voluntarily given up their peaceful trades and their homes for freedom's sake. They had shouldered muskets, and followed the torch that, lighted on Bunker Hill in 1775, had kindled the watch fires of the new nation from the north to the south.

Were those holly berries from his Virginia woods, the sentinel wondered, that lay so red in the snow at his feet? He stopped a moment to look. Then he gripped his musket and smiled grimly as he forced himself to hasten his march. They were drops of blood from his feet, for the frozen stubble had cut through his ragged soles, but what did that matter, he thought? All the Colonies were shedding their blood in a plucky fight for freedom.

There had been ups and downs so far for the Continental Army, mainly defeats of late. King George III of England had not been able to spare enough English troops to send to America, and so he had hired soldiers from certain states in Germany that were known as the Hesses. These German soldiers were called Hessians and they had sailed into New York harbor in 1776, thousands strong, to reinforce the English troops of Sir William Howe. More and still more Hessians came until they swelled the forces of the enemy to the number of almost thirty thousand men, and the Continental Army had only a scant ten thousand left. This invading army under General Howe had sailed down from New York City to Philadelphia, unchecked all the way, and now occupied Philadelphia which had grown to be America's largest city.

A terrible winter season was on its way. The army of invasion was comfortably housed for cold weather in Philadelphia with plenty of food and stores of ammunition. The camp across the Delaware close at hand and naturally defended by the hills, had been built to meet Howe by a brave handful of the Colonials. If they could prevent the enemy from communicating with New York until spring, if they did not starve before then, they might see hope. But they were less than three thousand strong, ragged, cold, and half famished. They faced the worst odds of the whole Revolution.

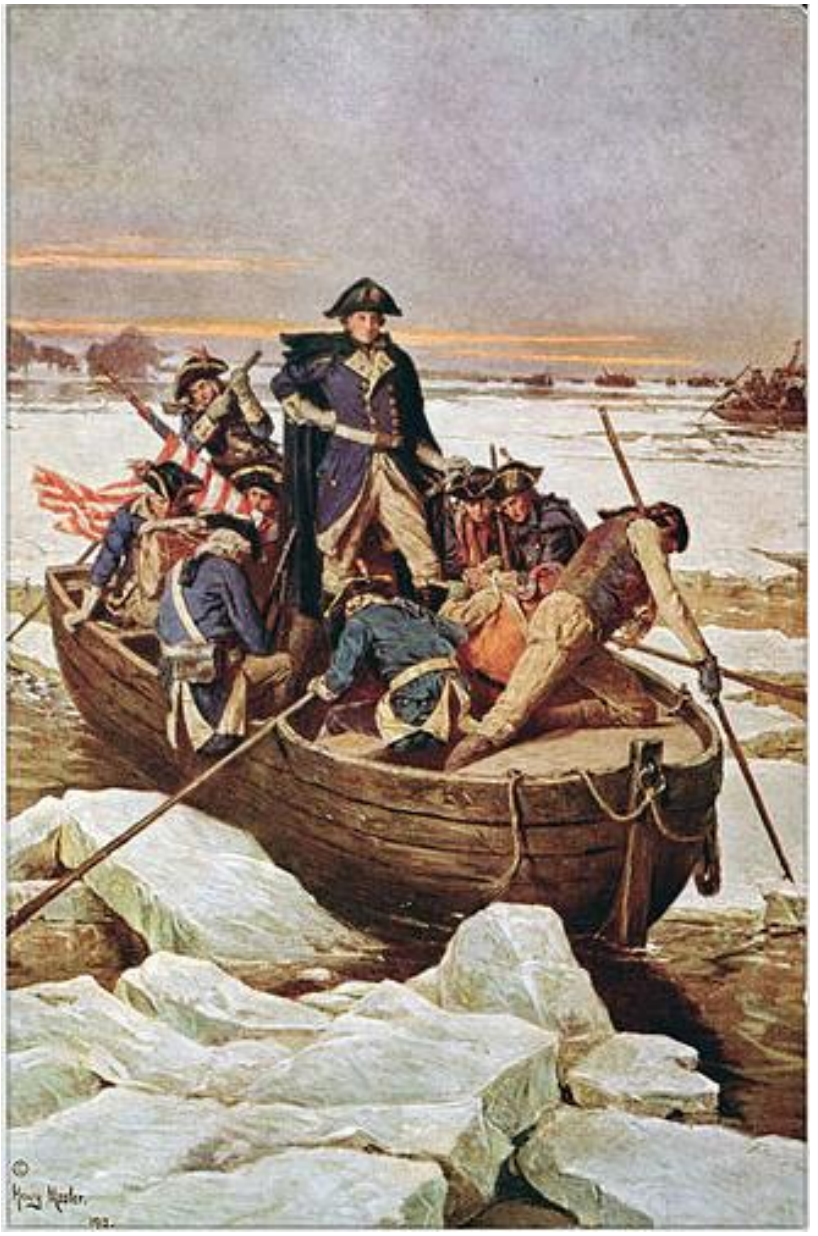
Picket duty in the Revolution was one of the most important kinds of soldiering, and the hardest. Half clad, shivering with the bitter cold, and with the driving snow wrapping him like a garment, the sentinel paced back and forth. It was a duty that had to be done. General Howe was likely to move out from Philadelphia and attack at any moment; there were spies about, waiting for an opportunity to slip into the headquarters of the Continentals in the stolen uniform of a Continental soldier and take back information to the enemy. There had been spies who had tried to stir up a mutiny among the war worn troops of the Colonies. Shifting his musket from one shoulder to the other that his hands might not freeze to the steel, the sentinel remembered the trouble these spies of the king had made. He repeated to himself what his own hut mates had said to him:

"What is the use of going on?" they had asked. "It is a losing fight and the odds are against us. We are new at soldiering and the troops that have been sent from England to defeat us have been trained for years."

They had made other whispered complaints also.

"Why doesn't the Continental Congress send us food and blankets and overcoats and shoes? We could perhaps get home to a fire and a warm pot of porridge if we slipped through the lines. It's not many miles to Philadelphia and the Hessians would only wink at us, or help us on our way."

There is nothing like cold and hunger for taking the courage out of a man's heart; the lonely sentinel knew that all too well. His back bent to meet the blast of a savage, driving north-easter



Washington Crossing the Delaware, by Henry Mosler

that had just sprung up. It seemed as if he could not straighten his hunched figure to lift his musket again. Suppose he were to drop his gun there in the snow? Would his broken shoes take him those twenty miles to Philadelphia? But a whirling gust of the gale made a little opening in the white curtain of the snow that hung in front of him, and the sentinel suddenly drew himself up to his full height, looking through. His eyes were not playing him tricks this time. It was not a dream he saw, but the reality of this Christmas night.

An open boat, with the red, white and blue colors of the Colonies whipped by the wind at its bow rocked on the bank of the river, with thick blocks of ice floating near and threatening to crush it. Facing it at the edge of the icy, foaming stream was the tall figure of a man who the sentinel knew and loved, as did every soldier in the Continental Army know and love him. He was erect and stalwart as he stood there looking across the Delaware River through the storm. His three cornered hat, with its tri-colored cockade of liberty in front was pushed back, showing his high forehead and his thick brown hair. In spite of the lines of discouragement in his face his eyes were clear and bright with hope. His cloak, blown open in the gale, showed his blue and buff uniform of the Colonies. He was a strong, healthy, courageous looking man and the sentinel, seeing him, took new courage also.

He was the commanding officer of the Continental Army and had more to bear that Christmas night, the sentinel knew, than his men. He, too, was away from the fireside of his home on a Virginia plantation. He had given up the quiet farming life he loved, his comfort, ease, and wealth because he could not keep these and do his duty to his country too. The sentinel knew what this officer was

thinking:

"Not one of my men suffers and dies, but it is my suffering and my responsibility. I am carrying all they are and more, for the whole weight of the American Revolution is my burden. I am almost overpowered. I must face ten times my number of soldiers with a handful of ragged, tired, poorly armed troops. It is a trust too great for my capacity, but it has been a kind of destiny that has been thrown upon me, and it was utterly out of my power to refuse it."

The sentinel watched, straining his eyes to see his general's slightest move. Suddenly he saw him pull the boat closer to shore and step into it, taking his place beside the colors that floated at the bow. Following him, from the huts of Valley Forge, a line of ragged soldiers made their way through the storm with their muskets over their shoulders and took their places silently in the boat.

George Washington, commander-in-chief of the Continental troops, had decided to take the greatest hazard of the entire Revolution. He was going to try and cross the half-frozen Delaware in an ice storm with a handful of weakened men and surprise the Hessians' first line of defense at Trenton.

The sentinel's hour of picket duty was ended and with it came an end to his doubts and discouragement. That was always the effect of General Washington's presence upon his men. They knew that he never weakened, never gave up struggling, and his defeats only spurred him on to an ultimate victory. He had taken command of the undisciplined, untrained men of the Colonies in 1775 whose only hope was their patriotism and determination, and he had made them into an army that King George was beginning to worry about in spite of his own picked regiments sent to defeat it. The sentinel knew that he could be one of these Revolutionary heroes under the leadership of

Washington Crossing the Delaware, Emanuel Leutze

Washington at the Delaware, Edward Hicks

General Washington.

Instead of finding, as he might have, the poor fire in his hut in camp, he stumbled through the snow drifts and the cutting sleet toward the river. There were other boats filling fast and noiselessly with Washington's men. The sentinel could find his way to them by the blood stains along the snow, left by the torn feet of his fellow soldiers. It was Christmas night, the night when hope for the whole earth was born to men, and peace was offered to the world. The men of Washington's command with this high hope in their hearts were going to keep Christmas by trying to bring again that peace which their country had lost.

The valiant little expedition under General Washington's intrepid leadership crossed the river from the Pennsylvania side during the worst storm of the winter. They were to be met by troops from Philadelphia and from Bristol who would reinforce them sufficiently to make possible an attack upon the Hessians. But the Delaware was a floating mass of cakes of ice, some of Washington's men were frozen to death in crossing, and the reinforcements failed him. But early on the following morning the half frozen, half armed Continentals attacked the Hessian front line at Trenton, drove in their pickets, surrounded the camp, fought their way through the town, completely surprising the enemy, and recrossed the Delaware River with a thousand prisoners.

It was a turning point of the Revolution, an unprecedented piece of bravery on the part of General Washington and his half defeated army that put new life into the cause of liberty. It set King George and his followers to thinking, and more and still more English statesmen were won over to the cause of these struggling brothers of theirs on the other side of the Atlantic.

Chapter 9

A Prayer at Valley Forge

Reverend Mason L. Weems' Account

In the winter of 1777-78, while Washington, with the American army, was encamped at Valley Forge, amidst all the perplexities and troubles and sufferings, the Commander-in-chief sought for direction and comfort from God. He was frequently observed to visit a secluded grove. One day a

George Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge,
John Ward Dunsmore

Tory Quaker by the name of Isaac Potts "had occasion to pass through the woods near headquarters. Treading in his way along the venerable grove, suddenly he heard the sound of a human voice, which, as he advanced, increased in his ear; and at length became like the voice of one speaking much in earnest. As he approached the spot with a cautious step, whom should he behold, in a dark natural bower of ancient oaks, but the Commander-in-chief of the American armies on his knees at prayer! Motionless with surprise, Friend Potts continued on the place till the general, having ended his devotions, arose, and, with a countenance of angelic serenity, retired to headquarters.

Friend Potts then went home, and on entering his parlor called out to his wife, "Sarah! my dear Sarah! All's well! all's well! George Washington will yet prevail."

"What's the matter, Isaac?" replied she; "thee seems moved."

"Well, if I seem moved, 'tis no more than what I really am. I have this day seen what I never expected. Thee knows that I always thought that the sword and the gospel were utterly inconsistent; and that no man could be a soldier and a Christian at the same time. But George Washington has this day convinced me of my mistake."

He then related what he had seen, and concluded with this prophetical remark! "If George Washington be not a man of God, I am greatly deceived — and still more shall I be deceived, if God do not, through him, work out a great salvation for America."

General Knox a Witness

It may be added that besides the individual named above as having witnessed the private devotions of General Washington at Valley Forge, it is known that General Knox also was an accidental witness of the same, and was fully apprised that prayer was the object of the Commander's frequent visits to the grove. This officer was especially devoted to the person of the Commander-in-chief, and had very free and familiar access to him, which may in some measure account for his particular knowledge of his habits.

That an adjacent wood should have been selected as his private oratory, while regularly encamped for the winter, may excite the inquiry of some. The cause may possibly be found in the fact that, in common with the officers and soldiers of the army, he lodged during that winter in a log hut, which, from the presence of Mrs. Washington, and perhaps other inmates, and the fewness of the apartments, did not admit of that privacy proper for such a duty.

Independence Born of Prayer

"Few scenes have had so much moral grandeur in them as this. Repeated disaster and defeat had disappointed the army and the nation. Suffering, to an extreme degree, was in the camp, and thousands of brave men were without the necessities of life. The independence of the nation was in jeopardy. Attempts were made to stab the reputation of the commander, and to degrade him from office. Provision for the army was to be made, murmurs and discontents suppressed, calumny to be met, plans formed for a future campaign, the nation to be inspirited and aroused; an active enemy was in the neighborhood, flushed with recent victory, and preparing to achieve new triumphs; and in these circumstances the Father of his Country went alone and sought strength and guidance from

the God of armies and light. The ear of Heaven was propitious to his prayer; and who can tell how much of the subsequent brilliant success of the American armies was in answer to the prayers of the American general at Valley Forge? To latest times it will and should be a subject of the deepest interest that the independence of our country was laid, not only in valor and patriotism and wisdom, but in prayer. The example of Washington will rebuke the warrior or the statesman who never supplicates the blessing of God on his country. It will be encouragement for him who prays for its welfare and its deliverance from danger."

George Washington praying at Valley Forge, John C. McRae

Chapter 10

A Pardon from General Washington

It was winter at Valley Forge. Indeed, it was that famous and dreadful winter when Washington and his little army of patriots were encamped there. Half-clad, half-fed, chilled by the raw, cold winds, is it not a wonder that these brave men did not lose all hope and disperse to their homes? Every one of them performed a golden deed when he kept up his courage and stuck to his post and thus did his part towards keeping the American army together. But the hero of whom I shall tell you was not a soldier; he did not even believe it right to fight.

One day a Tory, who was well known in the neighborhood, was captured and brought into the camp. His name was Michael Wittman, and he was accused of having carried aid and information to the British in Philadelphia. He was taken to West Chester and there tried by court-martial. It was proved that he was a very dangerous man and that he had more than once attempted to do great harm to the American army. He was pronounced guilty of being a spy and sentenced to be hanged.

On the evening of the day before that set for the execution, a strange old man appeared in Valley Forge. He was a small man with long, snow-white hair falling over his shoulders. His face, although full of kindliness, was sad-looking and thoughtful. His eyes, which were bright and sharp, were upon the ground and lifted only when he was speaking.

Many of the soldiers seemed to know him, for they greeted him kindly as he passed.

"Who is that old fellow?" asked a young sergeant from Virginia.

"Why, he is one of our best friends," was the answer. "He lives at the Dunker settlement, over near Lancaster, and many are the wounded soldiers that he has nursed and brought to life. He has a hospital there of his own, and if I were hurt or sick I shouldn't want any better place to go. He doesn't believe in fighting, but he surely believes in helping the fighters."

"Yes," said another soldier, "but the worst of it is that he would just as have nurse a sick Britisher as a sick American. All are the same to him."

Then, one after another, the soldiers began to give the old man's history.

His name was Peter Miller.

He was the finest scholar in the thirteen colonies. He had translated the Declaration of Independence into seven European languages, and the Continental Congress had sent copies of these translations into every country where they could be read.

He had charge of a printing press in the Dunker settlement.

He had translated into English a wonderful German book and had printed it upon his own press. The book was a huge thing, so large and heavy that a man would not wish to carry more than one volume at a time. And what do you think it was about?

It was entitled "The Martyrs' Mirror," and was mostly about the cruelties of war. Its object was to show that all fightings are wrong and unnecessary.

To translate it and print it was the work of three years, and it is said that during all that time Peter Miller never slept more than four hours a night.

"I think I have seen that wonderful book," said a soldier. "I think I rammed a part of it down my musket when I loaded it yesterday."

"That is very likely," said another. "About a week ago, six of us drove over to the settlement in two wagons, and brought back all the "Martyrs' Mirrors" we could find. The paper makes fine wads for the muskets, and you know that we have almost nothing else that can be used."

In the meanwhile, Peter Miller, with bowed head, had made his way to the door of Washington's headquarters.

His name was announced.

"Peter Miller?" said Washington. "Certainly. Show him in, at once."

George Washington, Gilbert Stuart

The old man went in, scarcely raising his eyes to meet the welcoming and inquiring look of the general.

"General Washington, I have come to ask a great favor of you," he said, in his usual kindly tones.

"I shall be glad to grant you almost anything," said Washington; "for we surely are indebted to you for many favors. Tell me what it is."

"I hear," said Peter, "that Michael Wittman has been found guilty of treason and that he is to be hanged at Turk's Head to-morrow. I have come to ask you to pardon him."

Washington started back, and a cloud came over his face. "That is impossible," he said. "Wittman is a bad man. He has done all in his power to betray us. He has even offered to join the

British and aid them in destroying us. In these times we dare not be lenient with traitors; and for that reason, I am sorry that I cannot pardon your friend."

"Friend!" cried Peter. "Why, he is no friend of mine. He is my bitterest enemy. He has persecuted me for years. He has even beaten me and spit in my face, knowing full well that I would not strike back. Michael Wittman is no friend of mine."

Washington was puzzled. "And still you wish me to pardon him?" he asked.

"I do," answered Peter. "I ask it of you as a great personal favor."

"Tell me," said Washington, with hesitating voice, "why is it that you thus ask the pardon of your worst enemy?"

"I ask it because Jesus did as much for me," was the old man's brief answer.

Washington turned away and went into another room. Soon he returned with a paper on which was written the pardon of Michael Wittman.

"My dear friend," he said, as he placed it in the old man's hands, "I thank you for this example of Christian charity."

It was a matter of fifteen miles, by the shortest road, from Valley Forge to West Chester which was then known as Turk's Head; and the road at that time was almost impassable. The evening was already far gone, and Michael Wittman was to be hanged at sunrise in the morning. How was the pardon to reach him in time to save his life?

The matter was so important that Peter would not intrust its management to any other person. With the pardon safely folded in his pocket he set out on foot for Turk's Head. All night long, through snow and slush and along unbeaten paths, he toiled. In the darkness he lost his way, and wandered far from the road. When day broke, he was not yet at the end of his journey.

Old and feeble though he was, he began to run. From the top of a little hill a welcome sight appeared. The straggling village of Turk's Head was just before him, and the sun had not yet risen. He saw a commotion in the street; men were hurrying toward the village green; a body of soldiers was already there, drawn up in order beneath a tree.

Summoning all his strength, Peter ran on and soon entered the village. Close to the tree stood Michael Wittman with his hands tied behind him. A strong rope was dangling from one of the branches.

In another minute the sun would begin to peep over the snow-clad hills. An officer had already given orders to place the rope around the traitor's neck. Peter Miller, still running, shouted with all his might.

The officer heard and paused. The crowd looked around and wondered. Panting and out of breath, Peter came up, waving the paper in his hand.

"A pardon! a pardon!" he cried. "A pardon from General Washington!"

The officer took the paper and read it aloud.

"Unbind the prisoner and let him go," he commanded.

Peter Miller had saved the life of his enemy, perhaps of his only enemy. Michael Wittman, with his head bowed upon his breast, went forth a free man and a changed man. The power of Christian charity had rescued him from a shameful death, and the cause of patriotism need have no further fears of being harmed by him.

Chapter 11

Scenes from the Life of Washington

Scene 1

Once the General was engaged in earnest consultation with Colonel Pickering until after night had fairly set in. Washington prepared to stay with the Colonel over night, provided he had a spare blanket and straw. "Oh, yes," said Primus, who was appealed to, "plenty of straw and blankets, plenty."

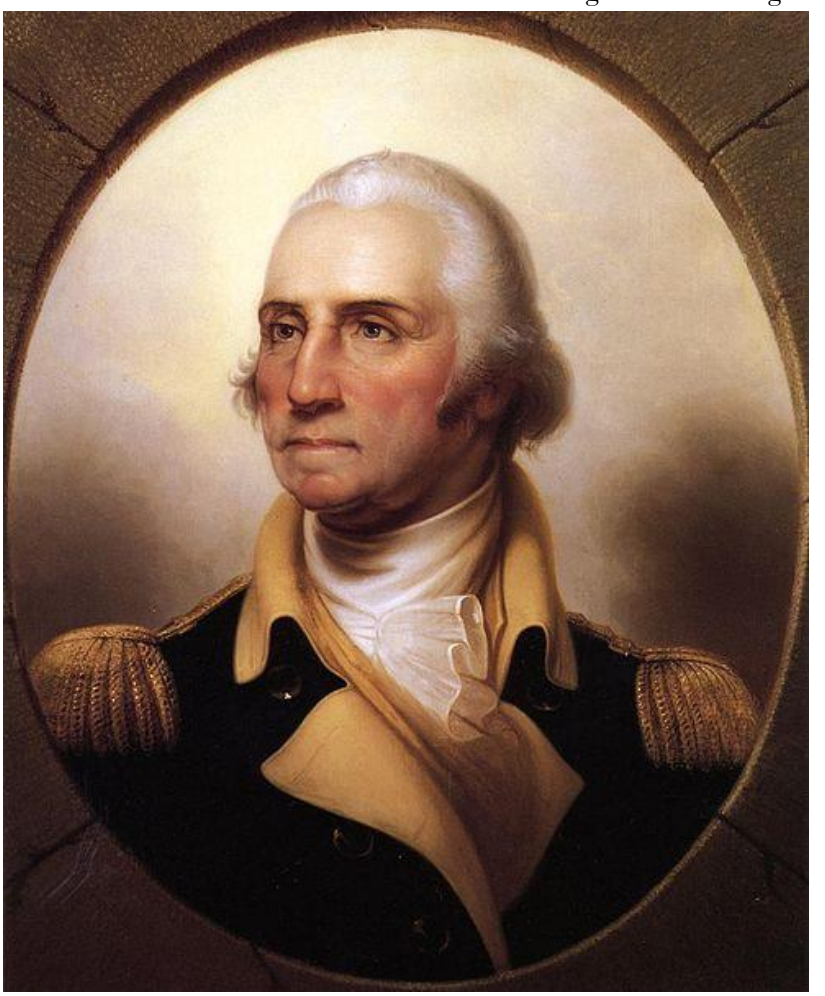
In the middle of the night Washington awoke. He looked about him and descried the negro. He gazed at him a while and then spoke.

"Primus," said he, "Primus!" Primus started up and rubbed his eyes.

"What, General?" said he.

Washington rose up in his bed. "Primus," said he, "What do you mean by saying you had blankets and straw enough? Here you have given up your blankets and straw to me, that I may sleep comfortably, while you are obliged to sit through the night."

"It's nothing, General," said Primus. "It's nothing! I'm well enough! Don't trouble yourself



George Washington, Rembrandt Peale

about me, General, but go to sleep again. No matter about me, I sleep very good!"

"But it is matter, it is matter," said Washington. "I cannot do it, Primus. If either is to sit up, I will. But I think there is no need of either sitting up. The blanket is wide enough for two. Come and lie down with me."

"Oh, no, General!" said Primus, starting and protesting against the proposition. "No, let me sit here."

"I say come and lie down here," said Washington. "There is room for both; I insist upon it."

He threw open the blanket as he spoke, and moved to one side of the straw. Primus professed to have been exceedingly shocked at the idea of lying under the same covering with the commander-of-chief, but his tone was so resolute and determined that he could not hesitate. He prepared himself therefore and laid himself down by Washington; on the same straw under the same blanket, and the General and the negro slept until morning.

Scene 2

Two days before the battle of Brandywine, Washington called to Morris's office in Philadelphia and said that they were so far in arrears with the soldiers' pay, and then men were in such hardships that they had little heart for battle…

"Can you help us?" pleaded the commander-in-chief, in a voice husk with emotion.

Morris shook his head sadly, saying:

"I have used up my own means and credit. I am deeply grieved to admit that I can do nothing now—nothing!"

General Washington, covering his face with his large hands, so that the fingers touched his forehead, burst into an abandon of weeping, and as he sat there sobbing, the tears trickled through his fingers and dropped down his wrists.

The General soon gained his normal composure, arose and went out without a word. The financier also got up and silently followed him, looking sadly after Washington as he passed slowly down the street.

Two days later, September 11, 1777, Washington met Lord Howe at Brandywine and was defeated.

Scene 3

Although Washington had no children of his own, he adopted the widow Custis' two children and loved them as their father. While the shouts of triumph were heard at the surrender of Yorktown, word came to Washington that his stepson, who he loved dearly and who had been serving as an aid to the Commander-of-Chief, had fallen ill of camp fever in the trenches before Yorktown. When the doctor announced there was no longer hope, Washington, attended by a single officer and a groom, left his headquarters at midnight and rode with all speed 30 miles to where his stepson lay.

The anxious watchers of the dying were, in the gray of the twilight, aroused by a trampling of a horse, and looking out, discovered the commander-in-chief alighting from his horse in the

courtyard. He immediately summoned Dr. Craik. "Is there any hope?" Craik mournfully shook his head. The General retired to a room to indulge his grief, requesting to be left alone. In a little while the poor sufferer expired. Washington, tenderly embracing the bereaved wife and mother, observed to the weeping group around the remains of him he so dearly loved, "From this moment I adopt his two youngest children as my own." Absorbed in grief, he then waved with his hand a melancholy adieu, and, fresh horse being ready, without rest or refreshment, he remounted and returned to camp.

Scene 4

In his retirement, Mt. Vernon was frequented by guests and visitors. A Mr. Elkanah Watson visited in the winter of 1785. He says, "I trembled with awe, as I came into the presence of this great man. I found him at table with Mrs. Washington and his private family…who put me at my ease, in a free and affable conversation."

In the evening Mr. Watson sat conversing for a full hour with Washington after all the family had retired. Mr. Watson had taken a severe cold in the course of a harsh winter journey, and coughed excessively. Washington pressed him to take some remedies, but he declined. After retiring for the night, his coughing increased. "When some time had elapsed," writes he, "the door of my room was gently opened, and, on drawing my bed curtains, I beheld Washington himself, standing at my bedside with a bowl of hot tea in his hand. I was mortified and distressed beyond expression. This little incident occurring in common life with an ordinary man, would not have been noticed; but as a trait of the benevolence and private virtue of Washington, deserves to be recorded.

Scene 5

Washington's last days, like those that preceded them in the course of a long and well-spent life, were devoted to constant and careful employment. His correspondence both at home and abroad was immense. Yet no letter was unanswered. One of the best-bred men of his time, Washington deemed it a grave offence against the rules of good manners and propriety to leave letters unanswered. He wrote with great facility and it would be a difficult matter to find another who had written so much, who had written so well. General Harry Lee once observed of him:

"We are amazed, sir, at the vast amount of work you get through." Washington answered, "Sir, I rise at four o'clock, and a great deal of my work is done while others sleep."

Chapter 12

Washington Refuses to Be King

On a breezy hill-slope, overlooking a broad and beautiful river, there stands to-day, as it has stood for fully two hundred years, a comfortable stone farmhouse, with low, sweeping roof, wide gables, and ample chimneys. All about it are well-kept lawns studded with warlike memorials; about it press close the life and bustle of a vigorous river-town; while beyond it, on a sightly crest, rises a massive outlook — the tower of Victory.

The place is Newburgh-on-the-Hudson; the house is the old Dutch homestead known as the Hasbrouck house, but forever famous throughout America as Washington's headquarters.

Within this stone farmhouse on a pleasant May day in the year 1782, in a long, low room pierced with seven doors and but one window, sat a noble-looking man. Big-framed, large-featured, strong of face and stout of limb, his general's uniform of buff and blue well displayed his commanding figure, while the natural dignity of his bearing made all about him small by comparison, and noticeable only by contrast. That man was General George Washington, commander-in-chief of the armies of the United States.

The general sat at a long, rough table upon which had just been served a simple meal in keeping with the plainness of the room. The single dish of meat had not yet been removed; the remains of a great pie still smoked on the platter; beside the plates stood the half-emptied glasses and silver goblets; while the Spartan dessert of winter apples and nuts, supplied by the farmers of the Hudson valley, lay scattered about the frugal mess-table of the commander of the American forces.

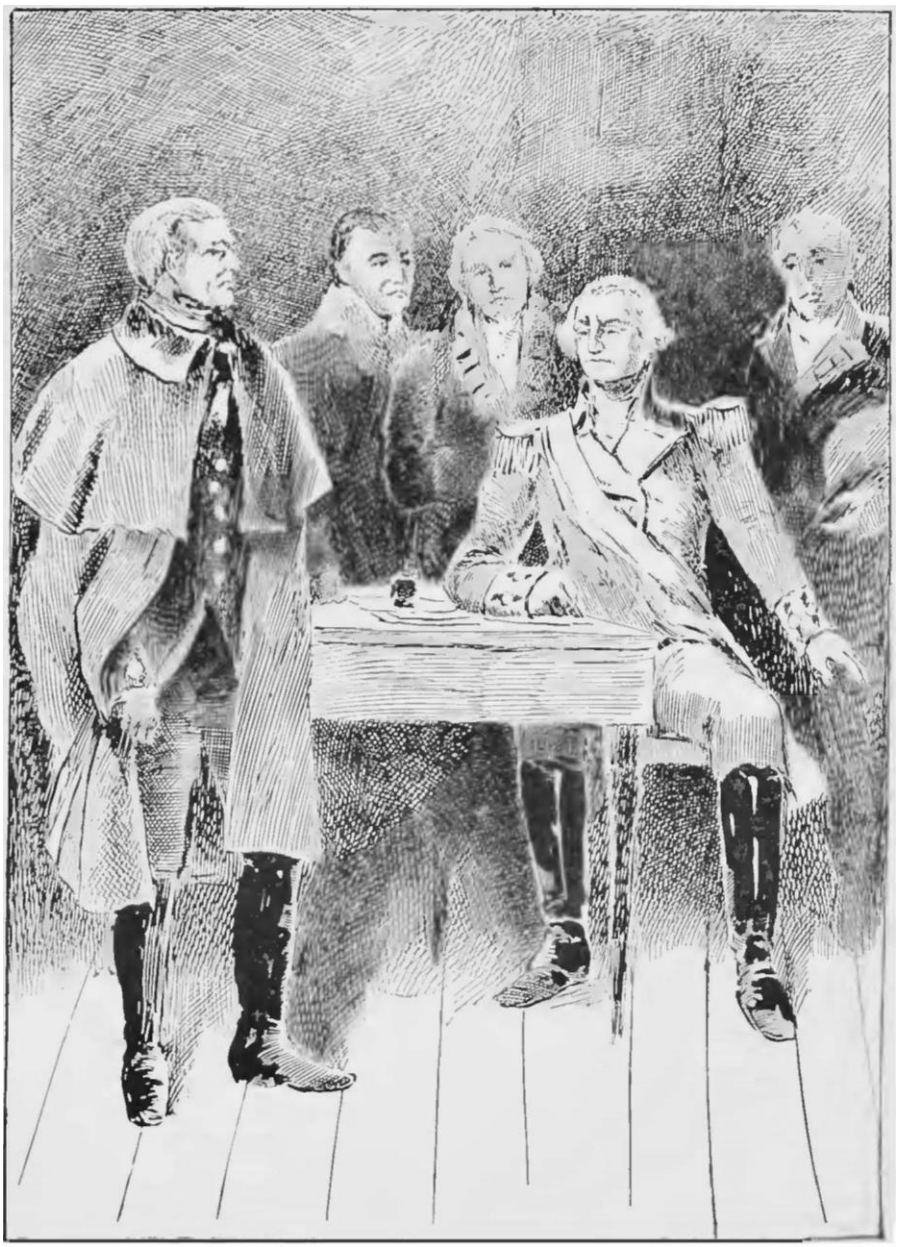
The general drummed silently upon the table with his fork — a favorite motion of his — or abstractedly picked away at the nut meats, talking meanwhile with his much-loved comrade-in-arms, General Knox, who was dining with him that day. Farther down the table, Mrs. Washington and Mrs. Knox discussed with Major Villefranche, the French engineer, the best plan for trimming and decorating the great arbor under which the general and his guests were to joyfully celebrate the next week the birth of that unfortunate prince whose sad fate is even yet a mystery, the dauphin of France, son of that King Louis XVI. who, by the influence of Benjamin Franklin, had become the ally and friend of the struggling Republic.

The general was troubled. For, now that Yorktown had been won and the Republic had triumphed, the strain of the actual strife was over and the soldiers of the new Union had time to grumble and leisure to complain. It is always thus with every victorious army in the space between the close of fighting and the establishment of peace.

In this case there were ample reasons for dissatisfaction and complaint. The freemen of the United States were jealous of a trained army, fearful of its power, and with the lessons of the past in mind, anxious to have it disbanded before it might misuse its strength. Their representatives in

Congress shared this anxiety, and yet had no immediate means to pay the arrears due to the soldiers for years of faithful service, or even to satisfy their immediate needs.

Unpaid, poorly fed, and still more poorly clothed, with their families at home suffering for the very necessities of life, and longing for the return of the bread-winners, both soldiers and officers chafed under the delays and negligence of an apparently unconcerned Congress and clamored for relief. At times this clamor broke out into indignant demands, even into open revolt, stilled or compromised only by the great influence of Washington, who recognized the injustice of the



George Washington Refuses to Be King,
Illustration from The True Story of George Washington

treatment accorded his veterans, while at the same time he appreciated the financial and political weakness of Congress and the country.

He, too, was aware of the possibilities of his trained soldiers for evil, if once they asserted their power and determined, as an army, to take matters into their own hands. Already mutterings of revolt and threats of extreme measures had reached him, and he knew that, should he but speak the word, those mutterings and threats would crystallize into instant action, and the liberty the army had fought for might be turned into anarchy or military despotism. When a man knows his power and is still a patriot, that is a sign of moral as well as of personal greatness.

So, as he talked over the situation with General Knox and sought for some method of relief or of compromise, his great heart was troubled, and he drummed the table abstractedly. Just then Billy, the faithful body-servant, approached him.

"Letters, general," he said. "Colonel Tilghman, sir, says a courier from below has just brought you this," and he handed the general a letter, with the inquiry, "Shall I take it to your study general?"

"No, Billy; if the ladies will pardon me I will read it here," the courteous commander replied; and, on the sign of assent, he turned from the table and began to read the letter.

As he read, a flush sprang to that pale face, and the signs of worry that sometimes marked those strong, calm features gave place to astonishment, anger, and disgust. He read the letter through, laid it down, reread it, and then with a quick motion handed it to General Knox.

"Read that, general," he said, and watching his friend's face resumed again the fork-drumming that was the accompaniment to deep thinking.

"Another, eh?" said Knox, as the first words of the letter met his eye. He looked at the signature. "From Colonel Nicola, at the camp. I've heard him talk before. Well, what does he say?" And the hero of Trenton, Monmouth, and Yorktown, the great general's faithful comrade and friend, dashed through the letter with characteristic speed.

Even as he read, the frown on the face of Washington deepened and then disappeared; the flush of anger reddened perceptibly, and then faded from cheek and brow; dignity and calm came again to a countenance not often marked by the passionate nature that, nevertheless, lay deep in the heart of this remarkable leader of men. Then, as the eyes of Knox sought those of his chief in faith and inquiry, Washington took the letter from his hand and, without a word, rising from the table he passed into the room that served him as a study.

The ladies turned an inquiring eye upon the general of artillery.

"His Excellency laid no ban upon me, ladies," Knox said in reply to those questioning glances. "I think I betray no confidences when I say that he has received the most singular and uncalled-for letter I have ever known to be sent him. Colonel Nicola, ladies, despairs of the Republic. He urges the general to use the army for the setting-up of an energetic government, and, it would seem, in its name, invites George Washington, of all men, to make himself king of America."

That, indeed, was in substance the contents of the letter brought by special courier to Washington, as he sat at dinner in the Hasbrouck house at Newburgh on that May day in 1782. It was the opportunity that had come to great leaders before his day, that has come to them since. Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon, all were tempted with this dream of power, and each one of them either dallied with it, and compromised, or yielded to it, and fell.

But George Washington was made of nobler stuff than either of these men, great and noble

though they were. The dream of sovereign power found no place in his unselfish heart. He hesitated not a moment. Indeed, he spurned the proposition, as Professor Channing assures us, "in a manner which has separated him from all other successful leaders in civil strife since the days of the Roman republic." At once he despatched his answer to the veteran who had sought to swerve him from the duty of patriotism.

"With a mixture of surprise and astonishment," he wrote Colonel Nicola, "I have read with attention the sentiments you have submitted to my perusal. Be assured, sir, no occurrence in the course of the war has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the army as you have expressed, and which I must view with abhorrence and reprehend with severity... I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to such an address, which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable... Let me conjure you, if you have any regard for your country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, banish these thoughts from your mind, and never communicate, as from yourself or any one else, a sentiment of the like nature."

That settled the king-making idea. Never again did a man dare, by such a proposition, to assail the honor or misjudge the patriotism of George Washington, gentleman.

To me, boys and girls, that instant of surprising temptation, righteous anger, and indignant reply marks one of the greatest moments in the life of America's greatest man — "the only man, in fact," so Lord Brougham, the Englishman, declared, "upon which the epithet 'great,' so thoughtlessly lavished by men, may be justly bestowed."

Chapter 13

Washington Resigns His Commission

Washington's Farewell to His Officers, from *George Washington* by Horace Elisha Scudder

At last the time came when the army was disbanded. A few of the troops only and their officers went with Washington to New York when the British left the city. There was rejoicing everywhere; but it was a sorrowful moment when Washington took leave in person of the officers who had stood by him through the long, dreary years of the war. He was about to leave the city to be ferried across the North River to the Jersey shore, and his old friends gathered to say good-by at Fraunce's Tavern, in Broad Street. When he entered the room he could scarcely command his voice. He said a word or two, and they all drank a farewell toast, as the custom was in those days. Then Washington said: "I cannot come to each of you to take my leave, but shall be obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand."

General Knox stood nearest, and he held out his hand. The tears were in Washington's eyes as he turned to his old comrade and grasped his hand. He drew the strong man to him. Knox was nearly twenty years younger than Washington, and very dear to him and kissed him. Not a word could either of them speak. Another general followed and another, each greeted with the same affection; and then Washington left the room,

passed through the corps of infantry which stood on guard, and walked to Whitehall, followed by the whole company, a silent procession. He entered the barge, turned as the boat pushed off, and waved his hat in silent adieu. The officers returned the salute in the same way, and then turned and in silence marched back to Fraunce's.

Washington went to Philadelphia. Congress was in session at Annapolis, but the Treasury was in Philadelphia. On receiving his commission as commander-in-chief, Washington had announced that he would receive no money for services, but would keep an exact account of all his expenses. That account he had kept as carefully and scrupulously as any book-keeper in a bank, and he now rendered it to the comptroller of the treasury. It was in his own handwriting, every item set down and explained. I know of few incidents in Washington's career which show the character of the man better than this. He held that a sacred trust had been reposed in him, and he meant to be faithful in the least particular.

Washington Resigning His Commission, Edwin White

On December 23, 1783, Congress was assembled at Annapolis. The gallery was filled with ladies. The governor, council, and legislature of Maryland, several officers, and the consul-general of France were on the floor. The members of Congress were seated and wore their hats to signify that they represented the government. The spectators stood with bare heads. General Washington entered and was conducted by the secretary of Congress to a seat. When all was quiet, General Mifflin, who was then president of Congress, turned to Washington and said: "The United States, in Congress assembled, is prepared to receive the communications of the Commander-in-chief."

Washington rose and read a short address, in which he resigned his commission. He delivered

the paper into the hands of the president, who replied with a little speech; and Washington was now a private citizen. The next day he left Annapolis, and made all haste to return to his beloved Mount Vernon.

Chapter 14

Welcoming the New President

Story I

One April morning in 1789 three little girls sat primly upon three haircloth chairs in Major Howell's parlor at Trenton, New Jersey. They were three Sarahs — Sarah Howell, Sarah Airy, and Sarah Collins — but they were better known by the names Sarah Howell had given them, "You, Sarah Airy," she had said, "are Sarah A.; I am Sarah B., for Sarah B. Howell; and of course Sarah Collins is Sarah C."

This Monday morning Sarah A. and Sarah C. had come to Sarah B.'s house to go with her and Mrs. Howell to the house of Mr. Armstrong, the minister. Mrs. Howell was not quite ready to start, and Sarah B. had just proposed a play. "Let us pretend that we are ladies, and that you are making a call on me," she said, speaking to both her little friends at once. And as the three sat stiffly down, she added, "We can talk about the new president, for all mother's callers do that now."

There was a short silence. Then Sarah B. felt her responsibility as hostess and said with a grown-up air, "What a wise choice the electors have made in General Washington!" That was a safe remark, she knew, for she had heard it many times in the past week.

"Yes," agreed Sarah A., recalling a conversation she had overheard, "General Washington has saved our country. Now he will make our nation."

"And how glad I am," quoted Sarah C., "that Trenton is to do its part in honoring him on his way to New York! How fortunate, too, that we have a poet in Major Howell!"

Sarah B. heard this last remark with a proud heart. "Of course," she thought, "it isn't proper for me to answer that." So she looked hopefully at Sarah A., who did her best to meet the occasion.

"He is indeed a poet of dispute," she agreed, airily, as became her name.

"Oh, no, Sarah A., you mean repute," spoke Sarah C., forgetting the game.

"Maybe I do," answered Sarah A., doubtfully. Then as she heard a smothered laugh from Major Howell in the next room, she became a little girl again at once. "That's a stupid game," she declared. "Why not play something else?"

"There is not time, children," answered Mrs. Howell, coming into the parlor. "We must start this very minute." And the three Sarahs, joining hands, set out happily for the minister's.

A few days before, General Washington, who had just been elected the first president of the United States, had started from his home at Mt. Vernon for New York to take the oath of office, or to be inaugurated. He was traveling slowly, for it was before the days of railroads, and besides, he was obliged to stop all along the way to receive the homage of a grateful people.

The citizens of Trenton were not to be outdone by any other town on the route. They had

decided that at the bridge over the creek where Washington had captured a body of Hessians he should now ride beneath a triumphal arch. More than this, thirteen young ladies and six little girls were to scatter flowers in his path and join their mothers in singing a triumph song.

That song was the poem Major Howell had written, and this Monday morning Mr. Armstrong was to teach it to the ladies and their daughters.

"The song goes very well," said the minister, as his visitors went home. "But I should like one more rehearsal, at the bridge to-morrow morning."

"I wish it were supper-time," said Sarah B. on her way home to dinner. "This day goes so slowly."

When Tuesday morning came, the first glimpse of the great day brought disappointment, for the three Sarahs looked out of their windows, upon a dismal rain.

"Oh, dear!" said Sarah A.

"Oh, dear!" said Sarah B.

"Oh, dear!" said Sarah C., although not one of them had any idea that both the others were saying the very same thing at the same time.

"But it is April," each little girl heard in answer. "The sun will probably come out by noon. Now we must hurry to the bridge."

"The carpenters have finished building the arch," said Mrs. Howell on the way. "We shall have a full morning's work to trim it."

"Are you going to let us help, mother?" asked Sarah B. eagerly.

"You can help by carrying the flowers, perhaps," her mother answered. "But you are not tall enough to help much in the decorating."

The weather persisted in being disagreeable most of the morning, but spite of clouds, the women and girls sang the triumph song and trimmed the lofty arch. The little girls stayed awhile to help, but after an hour or so they were told they must go home. Sarah B. almost cried at the command, but Mrs. Howell said decidedly, "You will be tired enough as it is. And besides," she whispered, "I know a great treat in store for Sarah B. if she is a good girl."

The little girls took their sorrowful leave of the merry workers and the splendid arch. "Isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Sarah A., as they stopped to look back at the arch, which stretched clear across the road and was supported by six pillars on one side and by seven on the other.

"Why didn't they make it even, with six pillars on each side?" asked Sarah C. curiously.

"Don't you know why there are thirteen pillars? It is because there are thirteen states in our country," promptly returned Sarah B. "And mother told me what the decorations mean, too," she went on. "Do you see those pink and white flowers mixed with the evergreen that is twined about the pillars? That's laurel, and it's a sign that Washington was victorious in battle."

"And are those festoons inside made of laurel, too?" asked Sarah C.

"Yes, mostly; but I saw mother put some other flowers with the laurel."

"There's nothing quite so pretty as that blue and gold motto, though," said Sarah A. "I wish it were on this side the arch, so we could see it from here. But they want it where Washington can see it as he rides up, I suppose."

"The letters are pretty," said Sarah B. "But I like it because it tells about us."

"Does it?" said Sarah A. wonderingly. "I thought it was about Washington."

"Why, it says 'The defender of the mothers will be the protector of the daughters.' We are the

daughters, you know, and Washington defended our mothers when he kept away the wicked British and Hessians before we were born," explained Sarah B. impressively.

"And what's the sunflower for, at the very top? Do you know that, too, Sarah B.?" inquired Sarah C.

"I know what mother said. She told me it was to show that General Washington was the only sun to give life and warmth to the body politic. Somebody called her away before she could ask her what she meant by 'body politic'."

"Well, General Washington will understand," answered Sarah A. "And the sunflower is handsome, anyway."

After a nap and an early dinner, the three Sarahs, in stiff white muslins, and holding baskets of flowers in their hands, stood well to the front among a large company of women and girls waiting at the bridge for Washington's party. There were few men or boys on the spot, for Major Howell, Mr. Armstrong, and several other prominent citizens had gone to escort General Washington into the city, and most of the other men and the boys had gone, too.

The April sun had come out gloriously by this time, so that the hour of waiting was hot and tiresome. The little girls grew so uneasy that again and again they ran impatiently through the arch and across the bridge for the first sight of the procession. At last somebody cried, "Look! look! There they come!" Somebody else said, "Children, get your places," and it was scarcely any time before the six children, with their baskets of flowers on their arms, had scampered to their places by the roadside and were waiting excitedly.

Nearer and nearer came the procession. Men on horseback rode first through the arch; behind them were soldiers on foot. But it was the tall, dignified man who rode slowly behind the soldiers that people watched most eagerly. This was General Washington, whose wisdom and perseverance had done so much to make victory possible in the great war with England. As the hero approached, it seemed to the onlookers as if he was thinking "thank you" with all his heart, for as he rode slowly upon the bridge, he took off his hat respectfully.

Just as he entered the arch, Mrs. Armstrong gave the signal and the song began. Everybody sang the first lines:

> "Welcome, mighty chief, once more,
> Welcome to this grateful shore!
> Now no mercenary foe
> Aims at thee the fatal blow,"

and then the girls finished the stanza alone:

> "Aims at thee the fatal blow."

The girls began the next verse, "Virgins fair," and their mothers sang, "and matrons grave." Then all sang together:

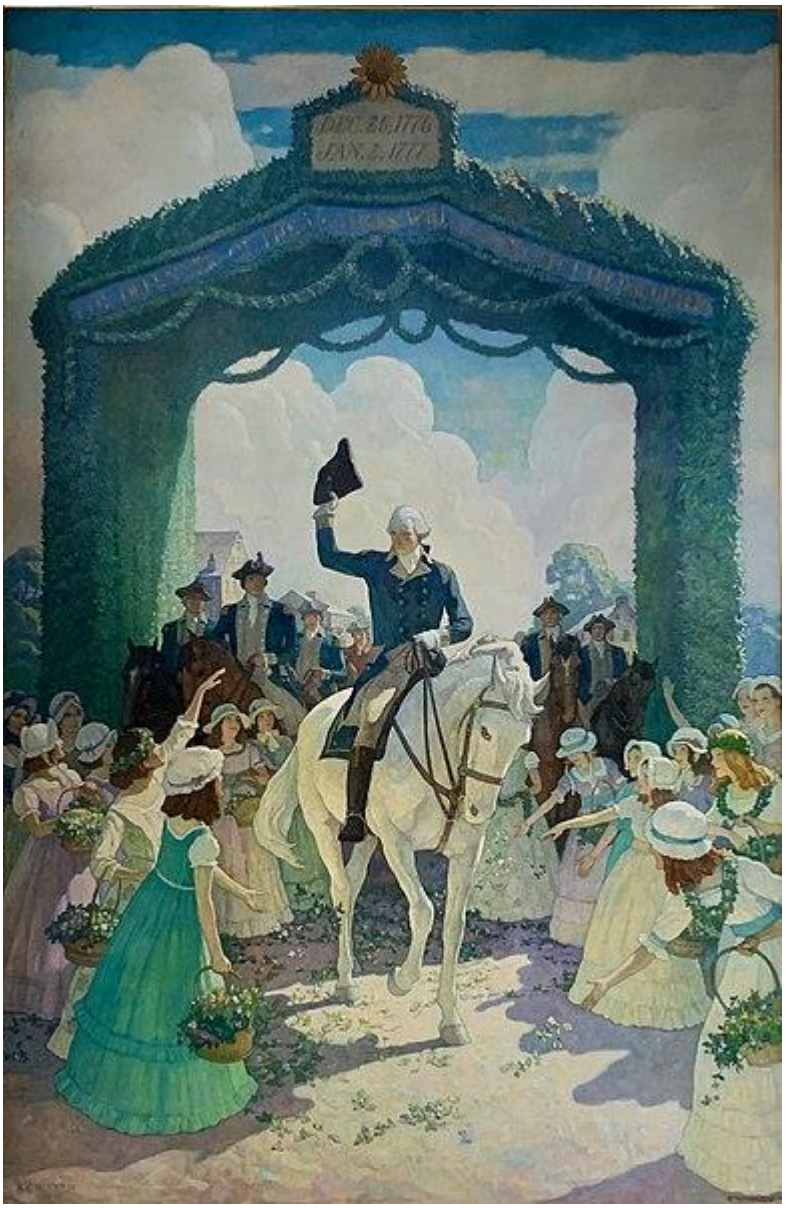
> "These thy conquering arm did save
> Build for thee triumphal bowers."

Then the matrons sang alone:

"Strew, ye fair, his way with flowers,"

and at the word, the girls scattered their flowers gracefully in Washington's path and finished the song themselves with the line:

"Strew your hero's way with flowers."



Reception to Washington on April 21, 1789, at Trenton on his way to New York to Assume the Duties of the Presidency of the United States, N. C. Wyeth

It was a most impressive scene, and no one there ever forgot how the simple tribute of flowers and song made the beloved general's eyes grow dim with grateful tears.

"How tall and handsome he was!" Sarah B. confided to her mother, as she gazed admiringly after the procession. "And he looked good, too! If he had only said something!"

But though the modest general could not find voice to thank the little girls who had helped to give him one of the happiest moments of his life, he was even then planning how he might show his gratitude; and before he rode away from Trenton, he wrote this letter:

"General Washington cannot leave this place without expressing his acknowledgments to the matrons and young ladies who received him in so novel and grateful a manner at the triumphal arch in Trenton… The elegant taste with which it was adorned…and the innocent appearance of the white robed choir…have made such impression on his remembrance, as, he hopes, will never be effaced.

"Trenton, April 21, 1789."

That night three tired Sarahs took off their white dresses and sleepily recalled bits of the most thrilling day of their lives. But sleepy as she was, Sarah B. had a question to ask. "Mother, have I been good to-day?"

"You know best, Sarah B. But why do you ask?"

"Don't you remember how you said this morning that there was a treat in store for me if I was good?"

"And so there is, dear child. But I don't want to tell you to-night. To-morrow you shall know."

Sarah B. was too sleepy to care much for the delay. She would know soon. Meantime — the blue silk curtains that hung around her bed appeared to change into an enormous arch, and her soft feather bed seemed a garden of fragrant flowers. She played and sang there all night.

Story II

Bessie Brandon was a pretty girl of fourteen. She lived with her father and mother on a plantation in South Carolina. It was a bright May morning in 1791, and the birds were singing in the big oak under which she sat. But the young girl was sad and almost ready to cry.

At this time the Revolution was at an end, after eight years of fighting. The thirteen colonies were now the United States of America, and General George Washington was the first President.

Now this great and good man, whom all the people admired and loved, made up his mind to travel through the South. He wanted to see and to talk with the men and women who had borne so many hardships during the war. He longed to greet the many brave officers and soldiers who had fought so well and so bravely under Marion, Sumter, and Greene.

The people of the South were much pleased to have this great man with them. Everywhere they came in crowds to greet and honor their beloved President. In some towns arches of flowers spanned the road. In other places young girls scattered flowers and wreaths of roses before him as he rode along the street.

The morning on which our story opens was the very day that President Washington and his party were expected to ride through the town of Chester, about six miles from Bessie Brandon's home. All the family except Bessie had gone early; she was left behind to look after the house.

Washington and his party rode in a large cream-colored coach, drawn by four white horses. By the side of the coach, milk-white saddle-horses were led along, to be used when the President was tired of riding in the carriage. Then there were men on horseback, who rode as an escort, besides a number of servants dressed in white suits with yellow trimmings. Behind the coach came the baggage-wagon, drawn by two horses, and followed by an escort on horseback.

"What a splendid time they'll have at Chester," thought Bessie, sadly; "and brother Obed is to make an address of welcome. Too bad! too bad!" and this time she gave a sob as she thought of the gay scene, and herself at home all alone.

How quiet it was! and it was only nine o'clock, with the long summer day still before her.

Suddenly Bessie heard the sound of galloping horses. It could not be the redcoats, for they had gone away long ago. A party came galloping down the road. In another moment a great coach drawn by four horses stopped at the gate. Servants in yellow and gold opened the door of the carriage, and

out stepped a tall, fine-looking gentleman.

Bessie had dried her tears and now stood on the piazza, looking with wonder at the tall, richly dressed stranger, who walked slowly toward the house and paused before the steps.

"Good morning, little miss. Can you not give me some breakfast? I have had a long ride since sunrise, and I am very hungry."

Now, while Bessie was astonished at this request from a stranger, she was well-bred. She made a deep curtsy, as any well-bred girl of that time would do.

"Father and mother have gone to Chester, sir, to see General Washington, and I am left to tend the house. I hardly know what to say."

"Pray tell me your name, little miss."

"Bessie Brandon, sir."

"And how old are you, Bessie?"

"I shall be fourteen next August, please."

"Well, Bessie," continued the stranger, taking a seat on the broad piazza, "never mind if you are alone. If you will get me some breakfast, I promise that you shall see General Washington before any of your family do."

"Very well, sir;" and her bright eyes began to shine; "I will do the best I can for you, but our food is plain."

Bessie was an excellent housekeeper. Her mother had taught her how to cook and to wait on the table. In a few moments the young girl had spread the table with snow-white linen and got out her mother's best china and silver. She prepared bacon and eggs, and made coffee; and then with nimble feet ran to the spring for milk and butter. In a few minutes a meal good enough for the best man in the land was neatly spread on the table in the cool sitting room.

"Come, sir, your breakfast is ready," curtsied Bessie.

"Ah, my little maid, you have done well. Do you please sit down with me, and I shall enjoy this good breakfast with you."

The stately gentleman served his young hostess, and then ate with relish the plain but dainty breakfast.

The guest was extremely dignified and sober, so dignified and so sober that I suppose Bessie was not sorry when the meal was over.

When he had finished his breakfast and was ready to go on his journey, he bent gently down and kissed his little hostess.

"Bessie, my dear, you may tell your father and mother than you not only saw General Washington before anybody else did in the city, but that you ate breakfast with him, and that he kissed you."

Bessie Brandon lived to be an old lady. She often told of the day when she had the honor of preparing breakfast for President Washington and of eating it with him.

Chapter 15

At Home Again

On his way back to Mount Vernon Washington and his little party received many flattering attentions, which he strove to avoid. He was honestly tired of the round of public festivities and honors. He regarded himself now as only a private citizen returning to his own home.

When he reached there he found plenty to do in the farm life that was so congenial to him. During his last absence of eight years the place had run down sadly.

"I find myself in the situation of a new beginner," he says. "Almost everything requires repairs. I am surrounded by joiners, masons, and painters, and such is my anxiety to be out of their hands, that I have scarcely a room to put a friend into, or to sit in myself, without the music of hammers or smell of paint."

He writes to another friend: "To make and sell a little flour, to repair houses going fast to ruin, to build one for my papers of a public nature, and to amuse myself in agricultural pursuits, will be employment enough for my few remaining years."

So he mended and built and farmed, and as he worked the old peace and quiet which he had courted years before came back to him. At times the shock of war and the pressure of official life must have seemed to him like a dream, and only Washington the farmer, the real man. But reminders of his past life constantly cropped up in the shape of visitors. The hospitable doors of Mount Vernon constantly swung open, and hardly a day went by without some caller. After his daily horseback ride around the plantation and active oversight of its details, he had barely time to dress for dinner — "at which," he writes, "I rarely miss seeing strange faces, come, as they say, out of respect to me. Pray would not the word curiosity answer as well?"

He mentions whimsically, in this same letter, a round of duties which begin at sun-up and bring him to candle-light; "previous to which, if not prevented by company, I resolve that I will retire to my writing table and acknowledge the letters I have received. But when the lights are brought I feel tired and disinclined to engage in this work, conceiving that the next night will do as well. The next night comes, and with it the same causes for postponement — and so on.

"Having given you the history of a day, it will serve for a year, and I am persuaded you will not require a second edition of it. But it may strike you that in this detail no mention is made of any portion of time allotted for reading. The remark would be just, for I have not looked into a book since I came home; nor shall I be able to do it until I have discharged my workmen; probably not before the nights grow longer, when possibly I may be looking in Doomsday Book."

In his solitary rides around Mount Vernon, he could not help but think of the many changes which had come upon it, since first he went there as a young man — the loss of his brother, and later of his stepson and daughter whom he had come to love as his own. Both of the Custis children

had died young. Then his old friend, Lord Fairfax, had passed away, an ardent Tory to the last. It was said that the shock of Cornwallis's surrender was too much for him, for he was quite an old man.

"Put me to bed, Joe," he said to his old colored servant. "I guess I have lived too long."

Yet his pride and affection for George Washington never ceased, and Washington on his part never wavered in his regard for the old nobleman or the younger Fairfax with whom he had gone surveying nearly half a century before. Now the Fairfax home, Belvoir, was in ashes.

In a letter to Mrs. Fairfax, in England, he writes: "It is a matter of sore regret when I cast my eyes toward Belvoir, which I often do, to reflect that the former inhabitants of it, with whom we lived in such harmony and friendship, no longer reside there, and the ruins only can be viewed as the mementoes of former pleasures."

But Washington was not allowed to give way to moodiness, even if he had been so disposed. Mrs. Washington's two grandchildren, Nelly and George Custis made their home at Mount Vernon. They were now grown and therefore interested in the social life of the neighborhood. The halls soon resounded with music, laughter, and the tripping of the stately minuet.

Nelly Custis was a lovely and attractive girl whose flash of wit and saucy repartee were a constant

Washington at Home, E. Percy Moran

delight to the General. Frequently he would forget his dignity and reserve, and indulge in a hearty laugh. But her love affairs gave him no little concern, and we find him writing pages of sound advice to her on the subject, on one of his short visits away from home.

The young lady herself often became wearied with her callers, and sought to escape them by lonely rambles through the woods. Her grandmother thought this unsafe, and forbade her to wander around thus alone. But, one evening, she was again missing, and when she finally reached home she found the General walking up and down the drawing room with his hands behind his back; while her grandmother was seated in her great armchair.

Mrs. Washington read her a sharp lecture, as the young culprit herself confessed in later years. She knew she had done wrong, so essayed no excuse; and when there was a slight pause she left the room somewhat crestfallen. But just as she was shutting the door she overheard Washington in a low voice interceding in her behalf.

"My dear, I would say no more — perhaps she was not alone."

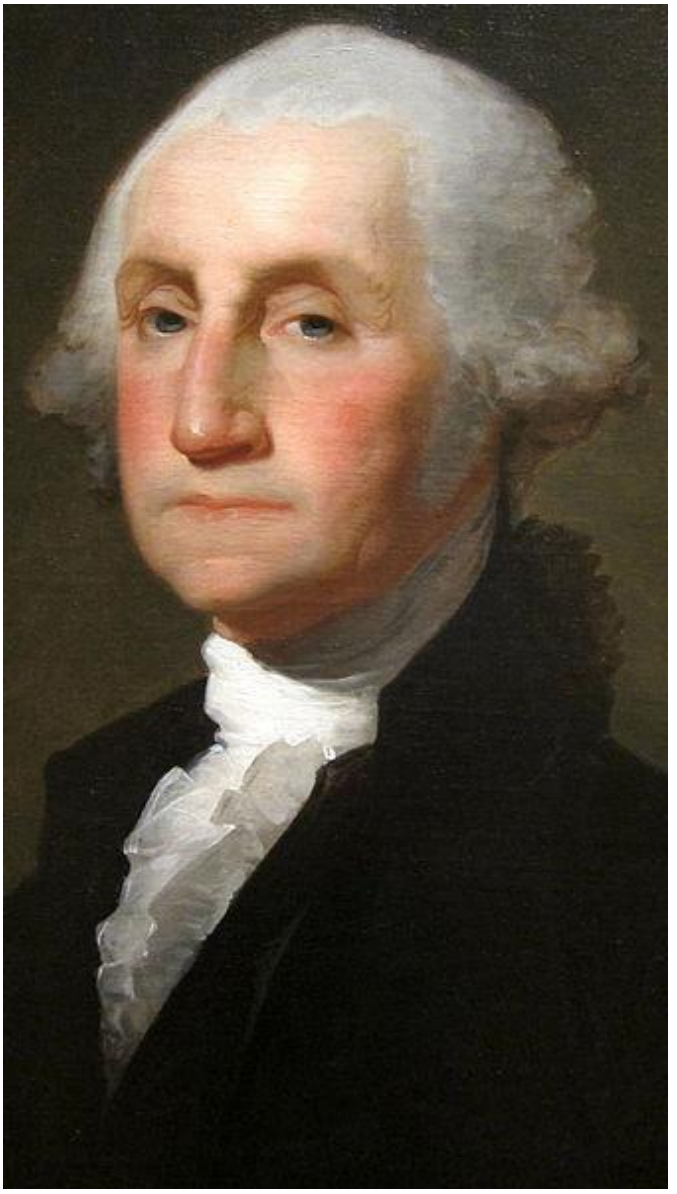
Nelly turned in her tracks and reentered the room.

"Sir," she said, "you brought me up to speak the truth, and when I told grandmamma I was alone, I hope you believed I was alone."

Washington made one of his courtliest bows. "My child, I beg your pardon," he said.

Chapter 16

Helping Someone in Need



Portrait of George Washington, Gilbert Stuart

Bernard, a famous English actor of those days, was playing in Annapolis in 1798. One day he rode to a place below Alexandria to visit a friend who lived on the Potomac. He was returning on horseback. An old-fashioned chaise was before him on the road. The driver of the chaise used the whip freely, and the horse appeared to be very indifferent to it until it happened to fall on a galled spot and hurt the poor animal so badly that he threw himself back on his hind legs. One of the wheels went over the bank and the chaise upset, throwing out the owner and his young wife. A horseman who had been trotting gently from an opposite direction now galloped to the scene of the accident. He and Bernard dismounted and went to the assistance of the young woman, who was insensible. The stranger supported her while the actor brought water in the crown of his hat from a distant spring. The young woman when she returned to consciousness immediately began to scold her husband, who had been busy extricating his horse. The vehicle lay on its side and was heavily loaded with baggage. The stranger, who was an elderly man, began unloading the luggage, and Bernard assisted him. They then grasped the wheel of the heavy chaise and having righted it with difficulty, helped the owner to load up once more. It was half an hour's hot work, and the perspiration rolled off their faces. The owner of the chaise expressed his thanks by inviting

the two men to go to Alexandria with him and take "something sociable," but they refused, and the chaise went on its way. The stranger now offered to brush the dust from Bernard's clothes, and the two gentlemen accordingly brushed each other. Bernard noticed that his companion was a "tall, erect, well-made man," dressed in a blue coat, buttoned to the chin, and buckskin breeches. When the older man took off his hat his face seemed very familiar to Bernard, who had indeed seen it over every fireplace and on many a tavern sign. Still he did not recognize it as that of Washington. The latter, however, was quick at remembering a face he had seen before. A smile lighted up his face. "Mr. Bernard, I believe?" he said. The actor bowed.

"I had the pleasure of seeing you perform last winter in Philadelphia," said Washington.

Bernard explained how he happened to be in the neighborhood, and his companion said: "You must be fatigued. If you will ride to my house, which is not a mile distant, you can prevent any ill effects from this exertion by a couple of hours' rest." He pointed to his house. Bernard had the day before spent half an hour looking at this very dwelling.

"Mount Vernon!" he exclaimed with a stare of wonder. "Have I the honor of addressing General Washington?"

With a smile of rare benevolence Washington extended his hand, and said: "An odd sort of introduction, Mr. Bernard; but I am pleased to find you can play so active a part in private, and without a prompter." Washington then pointed to their two horses, standing looking at them, and shrugged his shoulders at the inn.

Bernard accepted Washington's invitation, and the two gentlemen rode to Mount Vernon together, where they had a long talk while they rested. The actor observed that the great American's face had little expression, but that the indentations over the eyes and the compression of the mouth seemed to show that he kept his passions under firm control. His voice was not rich, but he spoke earnestly, and his eyes were "glorious conductors of the light within." To Bernard these eyes seemed to say, "I am a man, and interested in all that concerns humanity." When the actor mentioned the differences he saw between New England people and those of the Southern States, Washington, who had long since overcome any prejudices in favor of one part of his country over another, said:

"I esteem those people greatly; they are the stamina of the Union and its greatest benefactors. They are continually spreading themselves too, to settle and enlighten less-favored quarters. Dr. Franklin is a New Englander."

They then had some talk about England, and Bernard said that Washington's remarks were flattering to his country.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Bernard," answered he, "but I consider your country the cradle of free principles, not their armchair. Liberty in England is a sort of idol; people are bred up in the belief and love of it, but see little of its doings. They walk about freely, but then it is between high walls; and the error of its government was in supposing that after a portion of their subjects had crossed the sea to live upon a common, they would permit their friends at home to build up those walls around them."

At this moment a slave came into the room with a pitcher of spring water, and Bernard could not avoid smiling in a way which seemed to say, "Is this your liberty?"

"This may seem a contradiction," said Washington, reading his visitor's thoughts, "but I think you must perceive that it is neither a crime nor an absurdity. When we profess as our fundamental principle that liberty is the inalienable right of every man, we do not include madmen or idiots;

liberty in their hands would be a scourge. Till the mind of the slave has been educated to perceive what are the obligations of a state of freedom, and not confound a man's with a brute's, the gift would insure its abuse. We might as well be asked to pull down our old warehouses before trade had increased to demand enlarged new ones. Both houses and slaves were bequeathed to us by Europeans, and time alone can change them — an event, sir, which, you may believe me, no man desires more heartily than I do. Not only do I pray for it on the score of human dignity, but I can already foresee that nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our Union, by consolidating it in a common bond of principle."

Thus did the far-seeing mind of Washington foreshadow the conflict of later days. He had some further talk with Bernard. His face lighted up vividly with pleasure when the actor said that he was surprised to meet so many men of talent in Philadelphia. Washington said that men on the other side of the water had said that America had not produced one poet, statesman, or philosopher. It was easy to see, he said, why talent in a new country should tend to be scientific rather than imaginative. He mentioned Franklin, Rittenhouse, and Rush, and added the names of Jefferson and Adams as politicians. He ended by offering the actor an introduction to 'my friend Jefferson,' as he called him. This shows, among other things, that though Jefferson was the leader of an opposite party, Washington never allowed the friendship to be really broken between himself and that other great American.

Bernard was much impressed with Washington. To the actor, Washington's figure and every feature of his face seemed to indicate a spirit both simple and sublime. He said that "nine country gentlemen out of ten who had seen a chaise upset near their estate would have thought it savored neither of pride nor ill-nature to ride home and send their servants to its assistance." The actor felt that he had "witnessed one of the strongest evidences of a great man's claim to his reputation — the prompt, impulsive working of a heart which, having made the good of mankind — not conventional forms — its religion, was never so happy as in practically displaying it."

Chapter 17

Washington and Slavery

Washington, having inherited a large-landed estate in Virginia, was, as a matter of course, a slaveholder. The whole number which he held it the time of his death was one hundred and twenty-four. The system met his strong disapproval. In 1786, he wrote to Robert Morris, saying: "There is no man living who wishes more sincerely than I do to see a plan adopted for the abolition of slavery."

Lafayette, that true friend of popular rights, was extremely anxious to free our country from the reproach which slavery brought upon it. Washington wrote to him in 1788: "The scheme, my dear marquis, which you propose as a precedent to encourage the emancipation of the black people of this country from the state of bondage in which they are held, is a striking evidence of the state of your heart. I shall be happy to join you in so laudable a work."

George Washington on horseback in front of Mount Vernon,
from Wikimedia Commons

In his last will and testament, he inscribed these noble words: "Upon the decease of my wife, it is my will and desire that all the slaves which I hold in my own right shall receive their freedom. To emancipate them during her life would, though earnestly wished by me, be attended with such insuperable difficulties, on account of their mixture by marriage with the dower negroes, as to excite the most painful sensation, if not disagreeable consequences, from the latter, while both descriptions are in the occupancy of the same proprietor; it not being in my power, under the tenure by which the dower negroes are held, to manumit them."

Washington as Farmer at Mount Vernon, Junius Brutus Stearns

Long before this he had recorded his resolve. "I never mean, unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it, to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this country may be abolished by law."

Mrs. Washington, immediately after her husband's death, learning from his will that the only obstacle to the immediate emancipation of the slaves was her right of dower, immediately relinquished that right, and the slaves were at once emancipated.

Excerpt from George Washington's Will

And whereas, among those who will receive freedom according to this devise, there may be some who, from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who, on account of their infancy, will be

unable to support themselves, it is my will and desire, that all who come under the first and second description, shall be comfortably clothed and fed by my heirs while they live; and that such of the latter description as have no parents living, or, if living, are unable or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the court until they shall arrive at the age of 25 years; and in cases where no record can be produced, whereby their ages can be ascertained, the judgment of the court, upon its own view of the subject, shall be adequate and final. The negroes thus bound, are (by their masters or mistresses), to be taught to read and write, and be brought up to some useful occupation, agreeably to the laws of the commonwealth of Virginia, providing for the support of orphan and other poor children. And I do hereby expressly forbid the sale or transportation out of the said commonwealth of any slave I may die possessed of, under any pretence whatsoever. And I do more over most pointedly and most solemnly enjoin it upon my executors hereafter named, or the survivors of them, to see that this clause respecting slaves, and every part thereof, be religiously fulfilled at the epoch at which it is directed to take place, without evasion, neglect, or delay, after the crops which may then be on the ground are harvested, particularly as it respects the aged and infirm; seeing that a regular and permanent fund be established for their support as long as they are subjects requiring it, not trusting to the uncertain provisions made by individuals. And, to my mulatto man, William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom, or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking, or of any active employment), to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so; in either case, however, I allow him an annuity of 30 dollars during his natural life, which shall be independent of the victuals and clothes he has been accustomed to receive, if he chooses the latter alternative; but in full with his freedom, if he prefers the first; and this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the revolutionary war.

Chapter 18

The Passing of Washington

For several months before his death Washington appears to have had at times a presentiment of near approaching death. July 9th he executed his last will and testament. He seems to have communicated his forebodings to Mrs. Washington, who, when she was recovering from a severe illness, wrote to a kinswoman in New Kent, Virginia, September 18, 1799:

"At midsummer the General had a dream so deeply impressed on his mind that he could not shake it off for several days. He dreamed that he and I were sitting in the summer-house, conversing about the happy life we had spent, and looking forward to many more years on the earth, when suddenly there was a great light all around us, and then an almost invisible figure of a sweet angel stood by my side and whispered in my ear. I suddenly turned pale and then began to vanish from his sight and he was left alone. I had just risen from the bed when he awoke and told me his dream, saying, 'You know a contrary result indicated by dreams may be expected. I may soon leave *you.*' I tried to drive from his mind the sadness that had taken possession of it, by laughing at the absurdity of being disturbed by an idle dream, which, at the worst, indicated that I would not be taken from him; but I could not, and it was not until after dinner that he recovered any cheerfulness. I found in the library, a few days afterwards, some scraps of paper which showed that he had been making a Will, and had copied it. When I was so very sick, lately, I thought of this dream, and concluded my time had come, and that I should be taken first."

Winter had set in again at Mount Vernon — the last month of the year 1799 — but Washington still continued his daily rides around the farm, "visiting the out-posts," as he jestingly said in military speech.

Although Washington was now sixty-seven years old he still seemed in the full vigor of health. His simple, regular life coupled with his years of outdoor exercise had left him robust and erect, a fine picture of manhood. A nephew who visited him just at this time says:

"When I parted from him he stood on the steps of the front door. It was a bright frosty morning; he had taken his usual ride, and the clear, healthy flush on his cheek and his sprightly manner brought the remark that we had never seen the General look so well. I have sometimes thought him decidedly the handsomest man I ever saw; and when in a lively mood, so full of pleasantry, so agreeable to all with whom he associated, that I could hardly realize he was the same Washington whose dignity awed all who approached him."

All his farming instincts had returned to him during the last few months, and he had occupied his spare moments in preparing a sort of crop calendar, showing a rotation of planting through his various fields so as to rest the soil and produce the greatest yield. This calendar comprised thirty closely-written pages, and was accompanied by a letter to his steward. It showed his love of order in

his family affairs, as well as his mental vigor and foresight.

"My greatest anxiety," he said, "is to have all that concerns me in such a clear and distinct form, that no reproach may attach itself to me after I am gone."

The morning of the 12th of December was overcast. A chill wind began to blow, and the sky became threatening. The old veteran of Valley Forge and of the Indian campaigns of long before, however, was not used to staying indoors on account of the weather. Bundling himself in his great coat he mounted his horse for his daily round of inspection.

For upwards of five hours he was on the move inspecting and planning; and meanwhile a spiteful flurry of snow and sleet began to fall. When he finally reached home his coat and hat were covered with snow. His secretary met him at the door.

"I fear you got wet, sir," he observed.

"No, my great coat kept me dry," was the answer.

Washington hung this up, but proceeded to the dinner table without changing any of his other garments.

That night three inches of snow fell and the next morning he did not take his daily ride. He complained of a slight sore throat. But in the afternoon the weather had cleared up, and he walked out on the grounds a little way to mark some trees which needed cutting down.

On retiring that evening his hoarseness had increased, and he was advised to take some remedy for it.

"No," replied he; "you know I never take anything for a cold. Let it go as it came."

The next morning, however, his throat was so swollen that he could hardly breathe. The family physician was hastily summoned; then two others; but their united efforts gave the patient only temporary relief. It was an acute attack of laryngitis, or "quinsy sore throat."

Washington recognized at once that his hours were numbered. He called his wife to his bedside, gave her his final requests, and told her where she would find his will. His secretary tried to reassure him, saying he hoped the end was not so near.

"Ah, but it is," said the sufferer smiling in spite of the pain; "but it is a debt which we must all pay, and so I look to the event with resignation."

During the afternoon he had such difficulty in breathing, that they had to change his position in bed frequently.

"I am afraid I fatigue you too much," he would say apologetically. The perfect courtesy which he had shown all through life did not desert him here when he was fighting for his last breath.

After one of these struggles he remarked to his old friend, Dr Craik; "Doctor, I die hard, but I am not afraid to go."

The doctor pressed his hand in silence and then withdrew to the fireside, trying vainly to hide his grief.

His personal servant, Christopher, had been standing by his bedside helping as best he might, all day long. Washington noticed it, and kindly remarked:

"Sit down and rest yourself awhile, my friend."

A little later he managed to say: "I feel I am going. I thank you for your attentions, but I pray you to take no more trouble about me." Still his thought was for the others rather than himself.

That evening he made a final attempt to speak. It was to give a few simple instructions regarding

Washington on His Deathbed, Junius Brutus Stearns

his burial. His secretary, Lear, bowed assent, for his own emotions prevented him from uttering a word.

"Do you understand me?" asked Washington looking at him.

"Yes," answered Lear.

"'Tis well!" said he.

These were the last words of Washington. They might fittingly be the summing-up of his whole life.

Shortly after, he passed away without a struggle or a sigh. He simply fell asleep.

Mrs. Washington, who was seated at the foot of the bed, asked with a firm voice, "Is he dead?" A gesture of the hand from one of the others assured her that the great soul had fled. She bowed her head.

"'Tis well!" she answered, using the same words that her husband had breathed out. "All is now over. I shall soon follow him."

It was the evening of December 14, 1799. Four days later the funeral services were held, and following his wishes they were simple and free from display. A small troop of soldiers accompanied the casket from the home to the family vault, and minute guns were fired. The General's horse, with his saddle and pistols, led by two grooms, preceded the body of his dead master. The minister of the church at Alexandria, "where Washington had been a member for so many years, read the burial

service of the Episcopal faith; and the Masonic lodge assisted in consigning his remains to their last resting place.

Such was the funeral of Washington, quiet and modest as he had wished it; and held entirely within the limits of his beloved Mount Vernon, the home to which he had looked forward as a haven in his old age — now to become a visible symbol of his presence for all time to come.

When the news went out to the world, "Washington is dead," a deep sorrow fell upon his countrymen. In hamlets, on farms, in cities, work was suspended, and men gathered in groups sadly talking over the glorious past.

"He rode this way, when he led his men — don't you remember?"

"I recollect how fine he looked when he rode through Jersey to his inauguration!"

"He was the greatest man this nation or any other ever saw!"

Such were a few of the remarks that might be heard on every side.

Congress, on receiving the tidings immediately adjourned for the day. The speaker's chair was draped in black, and the members wore mourning for thirty days. A joint committee was appointed from House and Senate to consider the most suitable manner of doing honor to him who was "first

George Washington's tomb at Mt. Vernon

in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Nor were the expressions of grief and respect confined to this country. The two great powers which had been arrayed against him hastened to do honor to his memory. The great channel fleet of England, riding at anchor, lowered the flags of every frigate and every other ship of the line to half mast. It was a sincere tribute to a foeman who was more responsible than any other one man for the loss of her American colonies, but who personally England had learned to respect and honor.

At about the same time, Napoleon Bonaparte, who was emerging as the strong man of France, decreed that the standards of his army should be surmounted with crape for a period of ten days.

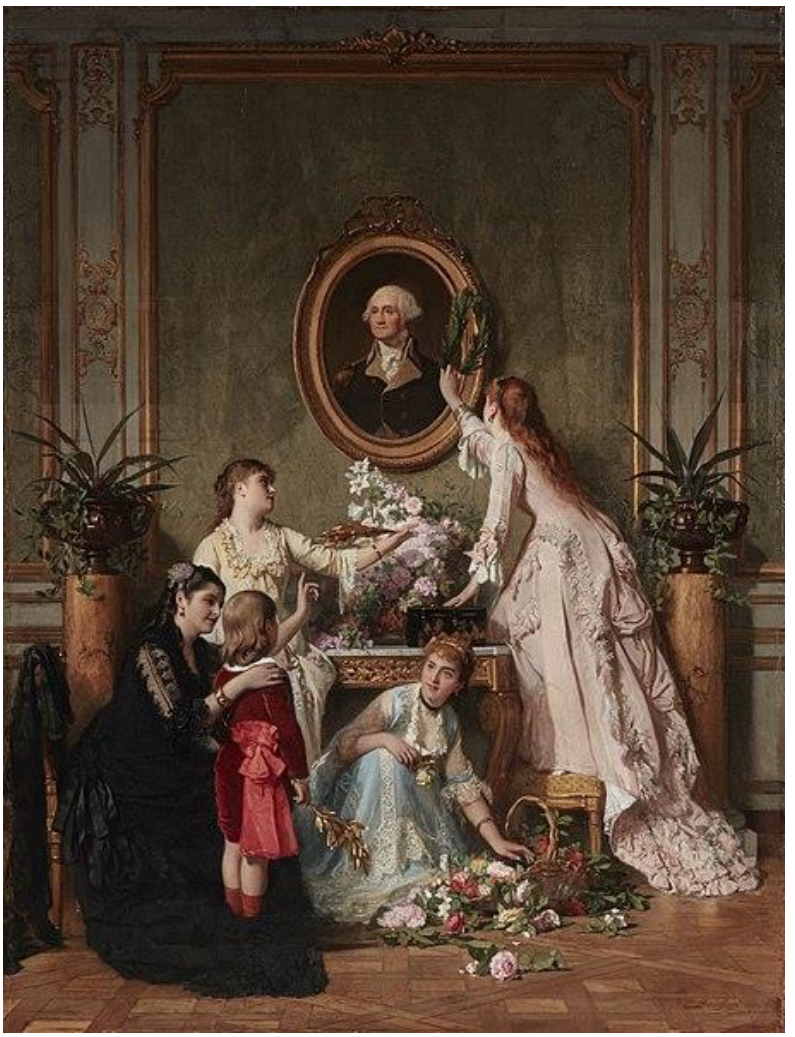
Martha Washington survived her husband only three years, when the family vault was reopened and she was placed by his side. Some years later the two coffins were encased in white marble, and thus they have remained to the view of visitors to Mount Vernon today. They had been wonderfully happy and congenial in their home life, "and in their death they were not divided."

Many years later a grateful nation completed and dedicated to Washington's memory a noble shaft of stone, five hundred and fifty five feet high, rising above the banks of the Potomac, in the beautiful capital city which also bears his name. But neither of these tributes was needed to perpetuate his fame. He will always be remembered both for his services to his country, and the fine example he set. Gladstone said of him that he was "the purest figure in history." And Jefferson, who differed with him on many questions of state, wrote:

"His integrity was most pure; his justice the most inflexible I have ever known; no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was, indeed, in every sense of the word, a wise, a good, and a great man."

Chapter 19

The Purest Figure in History



Washington's Birthday, Charles Baugniet

"The purest figure in history," Mr. Gladstone, the Englishman, has called him; and while all nations are divided in opinion as to their greatest men, all the world unites in elevating George Washington to the undisputed place which one thoughtful student of mankind has given him — "the greatest man of our own or any age." Let all the young people of America who may question the enthusiastc verdict of Washington's own countrymen as "a bit biased" read the glowing lines of Byron, the poet of England's supremacy, in which he described for Englishmen the great American:

"Where may the wearied eye repose
When gazing on the Great,
Where neither guilty glory glows
Nor despicable state?
Yes, one — the first, the last, the best —
The Cincinnatus of the West,
Whom envy dared not hate —
Bequeath the name of Washington,
To make men blush there was but one!"

Truth is not always the real truth when told by flaw-hunters. The "true George Washington" is something nobler than latter-day critics can draw for us, and as you seek to sum up the life of the most historic of Americans you can set down this of George Washington: He had his failings, as all

men have; but no man in all the world had so few, or was so completely the conqueror of himself. As a boy he was honest, upright, truthful, obedient, and brave, the leader of his playmates, a boy whom all his comrades admired, looked up to, and followed. As a young man he was reliable, adventurous, courageous, manly, pure, and strong, never a grumbler, a shirker, or a boaster, never a bully, a time-server, or a self-seeker. As a man he was what we call a leader of men; he was clear-headed, clean-hearted, seeing what was to be done and doing it, or setting others to do it when he had shown the way, never trying to get the best of others, never jealous himself or disturbed by the jealousies of smaller men, however hard they tried to upset his carefully laid plans or assail his reputation; he was a planner of great things and a doer of them as well — just the man for just the work demanded in well laying the foundations of a great nation.

The Washington Monument at West Point, NY

A lover of children, a lover of his country, a lover of liberty, of order, and of law, a patriot in the highest sense of the word — such was George Washington. The farmer boy of the Potomac became the noblest of rulers. In truthfulness, in integrity, in endurance, in wisdom, in justice, in devotion to duty and loyalty to purpose, he stands supreme, at once the model to those in authority, an ideal and example for us all. "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen," he will ever stand a noble and enduring memory, and the boys and girls of America can never go far wrong or be untrue to the Republic so long as they read and reread and take to heart in all honor, reverence, and love the glorious story of George Washington, of Mount Vernon.

Chapter 20

The Mother of Washington

If, indeed, "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," what a stupendous debt of gratitude this nation and humanity owe to the mother of George Washington.

But let us not doubt that Mary Washington herself found full compensation for all she did to make her son great and good. It is the proudest day in any woman's life, if she be true to the instincts of her sex, when she sees her son exalted to an honorable position among his fellows, and hears his praises sung by mankind. Mary Washington was no exception to the rule. It was a proud day for her when George turned Braddock's defeat into victory and the young surveyor became a military hero whose fame resounded over the plantations of Virginia and through the forests of the frontier of the new world, and crossed the Atlantic and furnished food for comment at the court of his King, and came back in marked copies of the current literature of the day.

Mary Ball Washington at the age of about Four Score, Robert Edge Pine

It was a prouder day for this Virginia farmer's wife when this country called her son to be commander-in-chief of her armies, after the King, who had honored him, became his enemy. Washington knelt, like a giant, at his mother's feet on that memorable occasion, and, beneath the tears which dimmed her vision as she delivered her parting blessing upon his head, there was an exulting pride which blushed like a rose at her heart. Up to that hour her son had never looked so grandly noble as when he rode away on his journey to Boston to take command of the Army of the Revolution.

It was a prouder day yet, when, after the long seven-years' war, Lord Cornwallis had delivered his lordly sword into the hands of her son, and

caused the King's army to march before him and throw down their weapons; and she met this long absent son covered with glory — the most loved man of the world — at the grand ball given in his honor. With queenly bearing she leaned upon his great, strong arm and walked the halls of that old Virginia mansion with a dignity becoming the mother of some ancient god.

But the proudest day, perhaps, in all her life was when they wanted to make him King, and he would not. Yet, for his love and affection for his country and her people, he consented to become, for a limited period, the first President of the United States.

The mother's blessing at the old home on this occasion was more fervent than when he went away to fight his country's battles with musket, cannon and sword, and her prayers were more earnest, because the task he had undertaken was greater. The victories of peace are harder to win than the victories of war. Therefore she prayed that the God of Battles who had spoken from the cannon's mouth, and led the sword of Washington to triumph over his enemies, would now guide the hand and temper the sceptre with which he should rule his brethren in peace.

It was in the blaze and glory of this, her son's proud ascendency, that Mary Washington — mother of the Father of his Country — passed the cloudless hours of the gathering twilight-age which ushered her, without an intervening night, from the glories of time into the glories of eternity.

It is a matter of regret to the admirers of Washington — and who is not? — that more of the details of his mother's life are not known. It is natural to suppose there must have been something extraordinary in the mother of so great a son. But we must be content with those scant incidents which history furnishes us. These would never have been known had not the greatness of her son called them out, for she was a plain old Virginia housewife, as devoted to her humble duties and as devoid of selfish ambition, as persistent in truth, as noble, as brave, as firm and uncompromising in the right as Washington proved himself to be. These principles were the keys to his greatness — and they, with his qualities of mind and physical vigor, were a heritage from his mother.

Before him no Washington had achieved fame, and since his day none of the name have acquired even a prominent reputation.

His father, Augustine Washington, was a country gentleman of a vast landed estate, a prosperous farmer, a man of fortune, and the owner of numerous slaves.

It was during the reign of Cromwell, in 1657, that John and Lawrence Washington, two brothers, came to America and settled in Virginia. The English and Dutch slave ships were then busy catching negroes in Africa and unloading them in the slave markets of the world at a very low price as compared with their later valuation. Land was cheap and the soil fertile along the James and Potomac Rivers, and the Washington brothers soon established themselves upon vast estates, which they ruled with the dignity of feudal lords. As population increased and better markets came for the produce, these vast farms made their owners rich. Augustine Washington, the grandson of John Washington and the father of George, inherited much of his father's and grandfather's vast estates, and became one of the wealthiest farmers in Virginia.

Augustine Washington lived near the Widow Ball, who had a beautiful daughter by the name of Mary. She is said to have been always a great favorite with Mr. Washington. He had known her father, who died when she was a child. The little girl was known in the neighborhood as "Sweet Molly," for her amiable disposition and sunny beauty. An old letter, under date of Williamsburg, October 17th, 1720, gives us the only description of her personal appearance, as at the age of sixteen

we find her

> Standing with reluctant feet,
> Where the brook and river meet —
> Womanhood and childhood sweet.

"Sweet Molly," with all of her beauty, had little opportunity to acquire an education in the modern sense of that term. She is said to have been a bad speller and to have read very few books. Few of her letters remain, and it is possible very few were ever written. The writing was stiff and cramped and the spelling was bad. The only one of her girlhood which seems to have been preserved was written at seventeen years of age to her half brother, Joseph Ball, in England, in which she says:

"We have not had a schoolmaster in our neighborhood until now in four years."

When Mary Washington had grown to womanhood the name of "Sweet Molly" was dropped, and she was christened, in the flowery language of those times, as "the Rose of Epping Forest," "Epping Forest" being the name applied to their country home and plantation. Washington Irving calls her "the Belle of the Northern Neck," that being the designation for the section of country in which they lived. Hence, we are justified in concluding that she was a beauty, not only the flower of her home, but the reigning social queen of the community. The family of Ball was an old and an honorable one.

Their ancestors came to America from England in 1650, seven years before the Washingtons, and the two families had been neighbors for three-quarters of a century. When Mary was twenty-two years of age she was bereft of her mother, and it is not known positively whether she remained at home after this or went to live with her brother Lawrence, a lawyer, in England. The only foundation for the supposition that she did go to England is found in a simple sentence of an old letter from one friend to another, written shortly after her mother's death: "I understand that Molly Ball is going home with her brother Lawrence, who lives in England." Upon this slender thread certain of her biographers have hung their statement that she and Augustine Washington were most likely married in England. Others maintain that she remained on the old homestead, and here, in the old-fashioned Southern way, the beautiful Mary Ball became the wife of Widower Washington, and assumed, with the duties of wife, those of stepmother to his four children. An old family Bible gives the record as follows: "Augustine Washington and Mary Ball was married the 6th of March, 1730-31."

Mary Ball was eminently fitted for the position she had assumed as wife and stepmother. In a word, she was a great woman. Subject her life to whatever side-lights we may, we find no irregularities, no painful contrasts, no contradictions. She was a consistent Christian, and from beginning to end, through eighty-three eventful years, she was, in all places, wheresoever placed, a good woman.

As a girl she had been trained, as all children were then, to do all kinds of housework, cooking and spinning, weaving, making dresses for themselves, and all kinds of garments. The religious training was also regarded as most important. Mary Ball became a church member in early life. Her mother was deeply pious, and her ancestors were Covenanters, and all their ancestors were strenuous advocates of church worship, and gave their means and time to building "meeting-houses." The Sabbath was the day of all others most filled with important duties. There was a

solemnity and seriousness about their worship unknown in modern times. They studied the Bible almost to the exclusion of other literature, and the children learned to repeat large portions of it from memory. Such was the early training of Mary Ball, now Mrs. Washington. And this is why she, like the mothers of nearly all great men, was a praying woman. This is why her Bible was her constant companion, its precepts ever on her lips. This is why she was so silent, self-respecting, reserved and serious a woman. She believed De Tocqueville told the truth when he declared life to be "a state of neither pain nor pleasure, but a serious business, to be entered upon with courage in the spirit of self-sacrifice." It is doubtful if she ever read De Tocqueville — or, indeed, many other books except her Bible, but certain it is that this sentence was her definition of life, and that it formed the key in the arch of both her and her son's great characters.

The home to which Augustine conducted his young wife was one of the most comfortable in that section of the country. The house was situated on an eminence about half a mile from the Potomac River, and commanded a view of the Maryland shore for many miles. The dwelling was of frame, with a steep roof which sloped down into projecting eaves. It was but one story, and contained four large rooms and an entrance hall of considerable dimensions. At each end of the house on the outside was an enormous chimney. From the river the house was an attractive one, and the grounds about it were well tended and adorned with fine shrubs and flowers.

Washington and His Mother, from *George Washington, the Christian* by William J. Johnstone

In this pretty country home was born on the 22d of February, 1732, George, the first child of Mary and Augustine Washington.

During the next ten years five other children, six in all, were born to Mr. and Mrs. Washington, all except one living to maturity. When George was six years old the family removed from their Westmoreland home to a large tract of land on the Rappahannock River, opposite Fredericksburg.

As said before, Mr. Washington owned many slaves, and it required an industrious housewife to manage and provide for these and so large a family. The spinning-wheel and the weaver's loom, the

sewing-room and the seamstresses required constant watching. There could be no better position for the development and cultivation of order, discipline, habits of economy, and method than this one filled by Mrs. Washington. But the home was one of plenty and order, and there were no grinding cares or pecuniary anxieties to strain the nerves of the wife and mother or mar the contentment of the home circle.

It was a very religious household; both father and mother were members of the Episcopal Church, and were strict observers of the rules of their denomination. Family prayers were said morning and evening. The Bible was read, and the servants of the household were always present. The old Bible which Mrs. Washington read is still preserved, with its curious old-fashioned pictures, its yellow leaves, and pencil-marked pages.

Mr. Washington died at the age of forty-nine years, leaving his young wife the responsibility of raising the family and managing his affairs, for he made her his executrix. George was then about eleven years old. He said afterward that he remembered little of his father, except that he was tall in stature, of manly proportions, fair complexion, and very fond, loving, and indulgent to his children, but leaving their management entirely to the mother.

Mrs. Washington found little difficulty in bringing up her children. They were disciplined to obedience, and a simple word was her command. She was not given to any display of petulance or rage, but was steady, well balanced, and unvarying in her mood. Not only did her own children look up to her and venerate her, but her stepchildren seemed equally devoted and obedient to her, as were also the neighbor boys who came to play with her sons.

That she was dignified, even to stateliness, is shown us by the statement made by Lawrence Washington, a relative and playmate of George in boyhood, who was often a guest at her house. He says: "I was often there with George — his playmate, schoolmate, and young man's companion. Of the mother I was ten times more afraid than I ever was of my own parents. She awed me in the midst of her kindness, for she was indeed truly kind. I have often been present with her sons, proper tall fellows, too, and we were all as mute as mice; and even now, when time has whitened my locks and I am the grandparent of a second generation, I could not behold that remarkable woman without feelings it is impossible to describe. Whoever has seen that awe-inspiring air and manner so characteristic in the Father of his country will remember the matron as she appeared when the presiding genius of her well-ordered household, commanding and being obeyed."

Allied to this spirit of command were gentle qualities which made obedience to her wishes an easy task. Her servants and slaves rendered the same implicit obedience. It is related of her that on one occasion, having ordered a person in her employ to do a piece of work in a certain way, she was surprised to find that he had disobeyed her. He explained that he had a better plan, when she reminded him that she had commanded, and there was nothing left for him but to obey. There was no occasion for a second reprimand in that direction.

George Washington Parke Custis, the adopted son of Washington, said of her: "The mother of Washington, in forming him for those distinguished parts he was destined to perform, first taught him the duties of obedience, the better to prepare him for those of command.

"The matron held in reserve an authority which never departed from her, not even when her son had become the most illustrious of men. It seemed to say, 'I am your mother, the being who gave you life, the guide who directed your steps when they needed the guidance of age and wisdom,

Victory Ball, 1781, Jean Leon Gerome Ferris

the parental affection which claimed your love, the parental authority which commanded your obedience; whatever may be your success, whatever your renown, next to your God you owe most to me.' Nor did the chief dissent from these truths, but to the last moment of the life of his venerable parent he yielded to her will the most dutiful, implicit obedience, and felt for her person and character the most holy reverence and attachment."

Mrs. Washington permitted her son to spend his holidays at Mount Washington, with his brother Lawrence, and there he was brought into contact with military men, naval officers, and the captains of merchant vessels. Thus George conceived the idea of going to sea, which was encouraged by Lawrence, who urged Mrs. Washington to let him accept it. George also petitioned her, and the trial was a severe one on her. She refused finally, on the ground that there was no reason why her son (he was then fourteen years of age) should be thrown out into the world and separated so far from his kindred. The profession she objected to also as one that would take her boy from her permanently. She could not bring herself to see that it was to his advantage to go to sea, and we may feel assured she made it the burden of many prayers.

One of Washington's biographers affirms that he made up his mind to go against his mother's wishes. "The luggage," he says, "of the young aspirant for naval honors was actually conveyed on board the little vessel destined to convey him to his new post, and that when attempting to bid

adieu to his only parent his previous resolution to depart was for the first time subdued in consequence of her ill-concealed dejection and her irrepressible tears."

It is hardly likely that this version of the matter is true, since her son had never in his life exhibited a disobedient spirit, and it is thought Lawrence Washington's respect for her would not have permitted him to advise George against her wishes or pleasure.

Washington Irving says, after speaking of the exemplary manner in which she had reared her children:

"The deference for her then instilled into their minds continued throughout life, and was manifested by Washington when at the height of his power and reputation. Eminently practical, she had thwarted his military aspirings when he was about to seek honor in the British navy."

Though she objected to his joining the British navy, Mrs. Washington was not deaf to the call of patriotic duty. When the French and Indian war broke out George Washington received not only his mother's consent but her blessing when he made known his desire to go. From that time henceforth he was with her only on occasional visits, for he soon after married and settled at Mount Vernon, while his mother remained on her own farm. But that there were many meetings and visits back and forth we are almost certain. Washington, we know, was often a guest in his mother's house at Fredericksburg.

When the War of the Revolution broke out Washington, fearing his mother would not be safe on the farm, induced her to remove to a house in the city of Fredericksburg, where she ever afterward continued to reside. It was here he paid her, as has been said, a visit and received her blessing before starting North to assume command at Boston. When Benedict Arnold with the British vessels ascended the Potomac River and began his devastations not far from Fredericksburg, the anxiety of Washington for his mother was very great. When she heard of it she said: "My good son should not be anxious about me, for he is the one in danger, facing constant peril. Tell him I am safe enough. It is my part to feel most anxious and apprehensive over him."

In the long years that passed before she saw him again he wrote her repeatedly, and lost no opportunity to relieve her mind of anxiety concerning him, but we have no letters of hers to him. The lavish praises bestowed upon him by all who saw her hardly ever received any other recognition than a quiet reminder that Providence was ordering all things. For herself she found her self-control in prayer, and much of her time was spent alone. When the comforting and glorious intelligence of the crossing of the Delaware (December, 1776) arrived, a number of her friends waited upon the mother with congratulations. She received them with calmness, observed that it was most pleasurable news, and that George appeared to have deserved well of his country for such signal service, and continued in reply to the gratulating patriots, "but, my good sirs, here is too much flattery; still, George will not forget the lessons I early taught him; he will not forget himself, though he is the subject of so much praise."

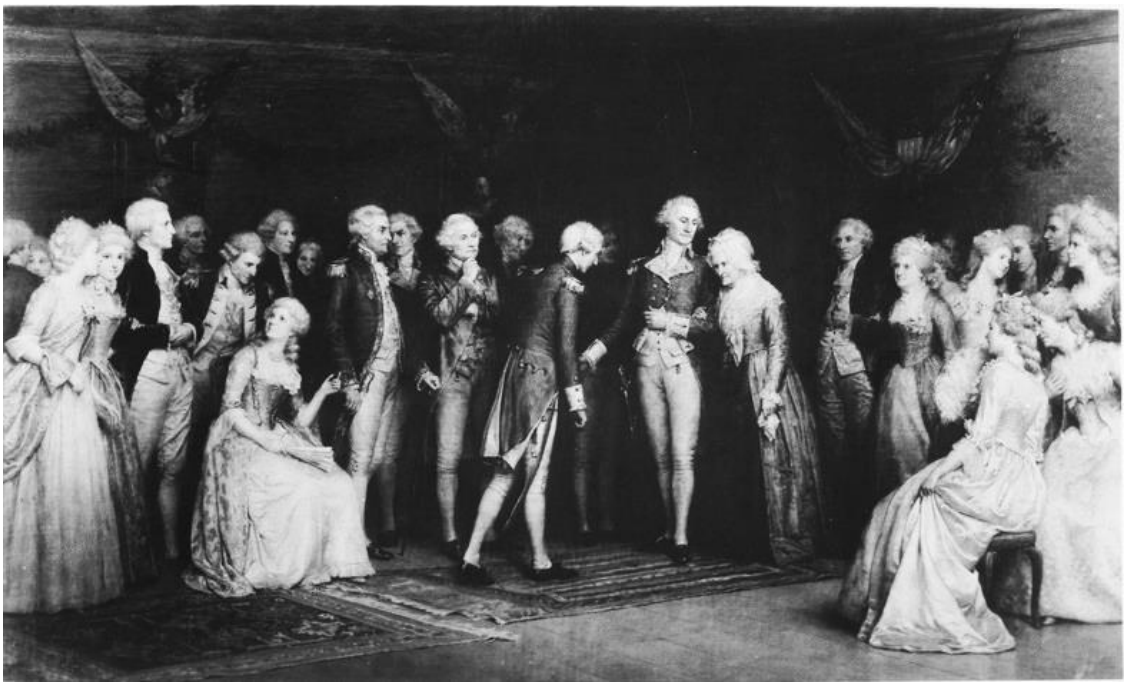
The surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown was the auspicious event that hastened their reunion. A messenger was sent to apprise her of the fact, and as soon as possible public duties were laid aside and Washington visited her, attended by his staff. She was alone, her aged hands employed in the works of domestic industry, when the good news was announced, and it was further told that the victor-chief was in waiting at the threshold. She bade him welcome by a warm embrace and by the well-remembered and endearing name of George — the familiar name of his childhood. She

inquired as to his health, remarked the lines which mighty cares and many toils had made on his manly countenance, spoke much of old times and old friends, but of his glory not one word.

His presence in Fredericksburg aroused the enthusiasm of all classes. For the first time in nearly seven years mother and son met, and it may be imagined that her heart rejoiced over the meeting. She was then over seventy years of age, erect and well preserved.

The foreign officers were anxious to see the mother of their chief. They had heard indistinct rumors touching her remarkable life and character, and expected to see in her that glitter and show which would have been attached to the parents of the great in the countries of the Old World. How they were surprised when, leaning on the arm of her son, she entered the room, dressed in the very plain yet becoming garb worn by the Virginia lady of the old time! Her address, always dignified and imposing, was courteous, though reserved. She received the complimentary attentions which were paid to her without evincing the slightest elevation, and at an early hour, wishing the company much enjoyment of their pleasure, observed that it was high time for old folks to be in bed, and retired, leaning as before on the arm of her son. More than one famous artist has reproduced this scene in steel engravings and oil paintings.

The matron's simple grace won all hearts. The foreign officers were amazed in beholding one whom so many causes conspired to elevate preserving the even tenor of her life while such a blaze of glory shone upon her name and offspring. It was a moral spectacle such as the European world furnished no examples. Names of ancient lore were heard to escape from their lips, and they declared, "If such are the matrons in America, well may she boast of illustrious sons." It was on this festive occasion that General Washington danced a minuet, the dance much in vogue at that period, with Mrs. Willis. This, his biographers inform us, was the last dance in which the hero of



The Peace Ball at Fredericksburg, Virginia held at the Rising Sun Tavern after the surrender at Yorktown, Jennie Augusta Brownscombe

Yorktown ever engaged.

George Washington Parke Custis also tells us this characteristic incident, which we give in his words:

"Previous to his departure for Europe, in the fall of 1784, the Marquis de Lafayette repaired to Fredericksburg to pay his parting respects to Washington's mother and to ask her blessing.

"Conducted by one of her grandsons he approached the house, when, the young gentleman observing, 'There, sir, is my grandmother,' the Marquis beheld, working in her garden, clad in domestic-made clothes and her gray head covered by a plain straw hat, the mother of 'his hero, his friend, and a country's preserver.' The lady saluted him kindly, observing, ' Ah, Marquis, you see an old woman; but come, I can make you welcome to my poor dwelling without the parade of changing my dress.'

"Much as Lafayette had seen and heard of the matron before, on this interesting interview he was at once charmed and struck with wonder. When he considered her great age, the transcendent elevation of her son, who, surpassing all rivals in the race of glory, 'bore the palm alone,' and at the same time discovered no change in her plain yet dignified life and manners, he became assured that nature had not cast this distinguished woman in an ordinary mould, and that the Roman matron could flourish in the modern day.

"The Marquis discoursed of the happy effects of the Revolution and the goodly prospects which opened upon regenerated America, spoke of his speedy departure for his native land, paid the tribute of his heart in his love and admiration of her illustrious son, and concluded by asking her blessing. She gave it to him, and to the encomiums which he had lavished upon his hero and paternal chief, she replied in these words: 'I am not surprised at what George has done, for he was always a very good boy.'"

But the most beautiful as well as the most pathetic of all the scenes in the lives of the illustrious chief and his venerable mother is the following, given also as related by Mr. Custis:

"Immediately after the organization of the present Government, the Chief Magistrate repaired to Fredericksburg to pay his humble duty to his mother, preparatory to his departure for New York. An affecting scene ensued. The son feelingly remarked the ravages which a torturing disease had made upon the aged frame of the mother, and addressed her with these words: 'The people, madam, have been pleased, with the most flattering unanimity, to elect me to the Chief Magistracy of these United States, but before I can assume the functions of my office I have come to bid you an affectionate farewell. So soon as the weight of public business which must necessarily attend the outset of a new Government can be disposed of, I shall hasten to Virginia and—' Here the matron interrupted with, 'And you will see me no more; my great age, and the disease which is fast approaching my vitals, warn me that I shall not be long in this world; I trust in God that I may be somewhat prepared for a better. But go, George, fulfil the high destinies which Heaven appears to have intended for you; go, my son, and may that Heaven's and a mother's blessing be with you always.'

"The President was deeply affected. His head rested upon the shoulder of his parent, whose aged arm feebly, yet fondly, encircled his neck. That brow on which fame had wreathed the purest laurel virtue ever gave to created man relaxed from its lofty bearing. That look which could have awed a Roman Senate in its Fabrician day was bent in filial tenderness upon the time-worn features of the aged matron. He wept. A thousand recollections crowded upon his mind, as memory,

retracing scenes long passed, carried him back to the maternal mansion and the days of juvenility, where he beheld that mother, whose care, education and discipline caused him to reach the topmost height of laudable ambition. Yet, how were his glories forgotten while he gazed upon her whom, wasted by time and malady, he should part with to meet no more! Her predictions were but too true. The disease which so long had preyed upon her frame, completed its triumph, and she expired at the age of eighty-five, rejoicing in the consciousness of a life well spent, and confiding in the belief of a blessed immortality."

Another biographer tells us that as Washington left his aged parent on the above memorable occasion he pressed into her hand a purse filled with gold. She handed it back, saying, in kindly remonstrance, "I don't need it, my son. I have enough." "Let me be the judge of that, mother; whether you need it or not, keep it for my sake," and the chief strode off to conceal his emotion, while she, with tearful eye, stood in the door and watched him walk away. It was the last time her eyes beheld him on earth.

To the last year of her life Mrs. Washington clung to her household duties and superintended her farm. She lived in the town of Fredericksburg, where she had removed during the Revolution, but her farm across the river was her charge, even when she had to be driven in her carriage over the ploughed ground. Her daughter, Mrs. Fielding Lewis, lived near her on her inherited portion of the old farm, and it is said Mrs. Washington made almost daily visits to this home, frequently walking over in the morning and having her carriage come for her in the afternoon. In her old age, it is said, she carried a gold-headed cane,

Washington's Last Farewell to His Mother, from *The story-life of Washington* by Wayne Whipple

and, as she passed through the streets of Fredericksburg, everyone, from the gray-haired old man to the thoughtless boy, lifted his hat to the mother of Washington.

To Mrs. Lewis's and George Washington's repeated invitations to give up her home and live with them she would always say: "I thank you for your affectionate and beautiful offers, but I feel perfectly competent to take care of myself." During her last years, Mr. Fielding Lewis, her son-in-law, urged upon her to give up looking after the farm and let him attend to it for her. She replied: "I thank you, Fielding. You may keep my books in order, for your eyesight is better than mine, but leave the executive management of my farm to me."

The good old woman was also an inveterate knitter. Wherever she went she took her knitting with her, and, as she talked, the needles were ever flying in her nimble fingers. During the war, with her daughter and their servants, dozens of pairs of socks were knitted and sent to "George" in camp, for distribution, together with other garments and provisions, the fruits of her thrift, industry and economy.

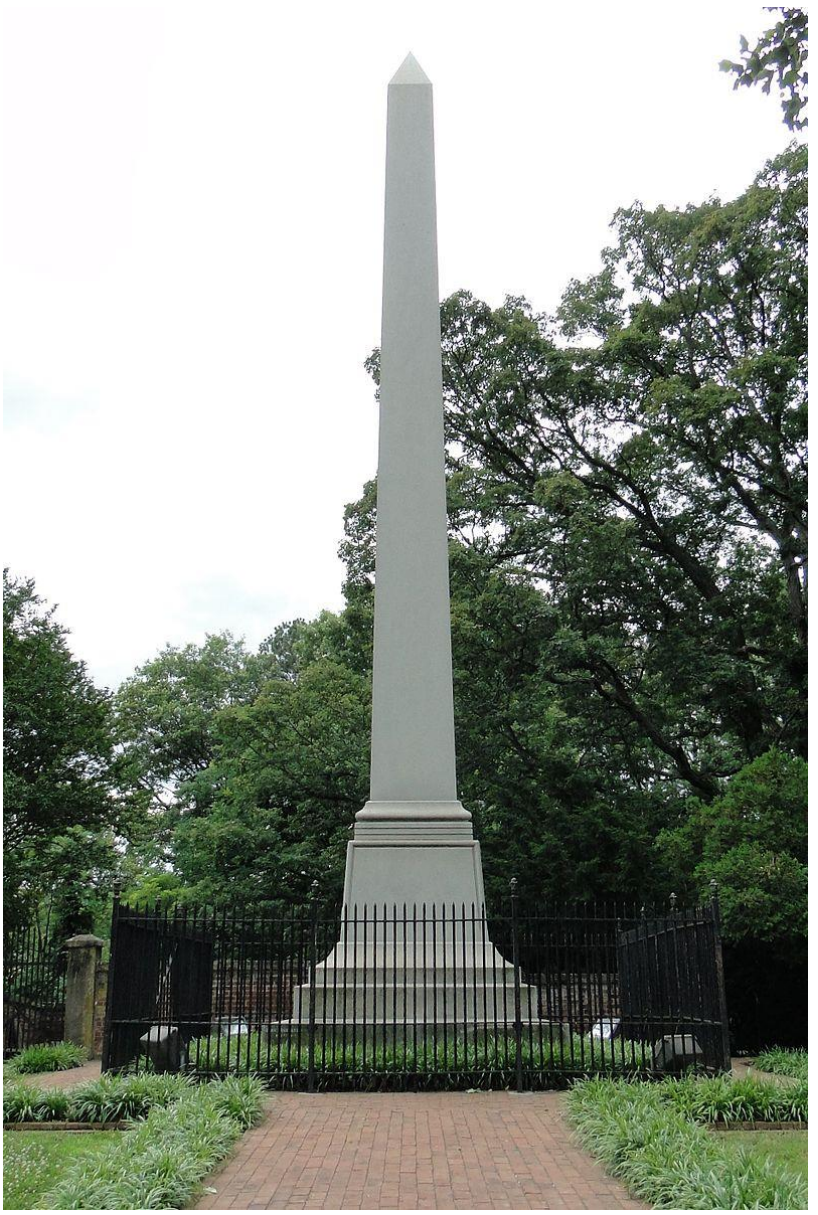
Mrs. Washington died on the 25th of August, 1789. For some cause unknown to the writer, her death occurred at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Lewis. No doubt in her last illness she yielded to her daughter's entreaties to remain at her house, where she might give her constant attention. She was eighty-five years of age, and had been a widow forty-six. Her disease was cancer of the breast. It had preyed upon her for years, but she concealed it even from her children until within a few months of her death. This, it is thought, was her reason for refusing to live with her children, to whom she was much attached.

There was a place between her home in Fredericksburg and the house of her daughter where she is said to have repaired almost daily for meditation during the latter years of her life, and there she often knelt in prayer to Him alone on whom she was willing to depend. Her grandchildren said they never disturbed her when they saw her there. For many years she had expressed a desire to be buried in this sacred spot, and here, in accordance with her wish, she was laid to rest.

Her estate was left free from all debt. The place was sold and the proceeds divided among her children. Washington refused to take anything except such as he could keep as mementoes of parental affection, on which, he said, "I set a value much beyond their intrinsic worth."

"Thus lived and died," says G. W. Parke Custis, "this distinguished woman. Had she been of the olden time, statues would have been erected to her memory in the capital, and she would have been called the Mother of Romans."

Ah, so it would have been, indeed! And why should America have so long neglected her? The grave of Mary Washington for nearly half a century remained without even a marble slab to mark the spot. Finally a patriotic citizen, Silas E. Burrows, Esq., of New York, undertook at his own expense to erect a monument to the long-neglected heroine. The corner-stone was laid by President Andrew Jackson on the 7th day of May, 1833, in the presence of his Cabinet officers, representatives of the army in uniform, Masonic orders in regalia, and a vast concourse of people estimated at 15,000 souls. Prayer was offered. Mr. Bassett, of the Monument Committee, delivered an eloquent address to the President, describing the character of her whom they had met to honor, and placed in his hand an inscribed tablet, with the request that he deposit it in the corner-stone. The reply of Jackson was characteristic, short, and eloquent. Taking the plate in his nervous hand — a hand that never trembled when it grasped a sword — the "Old Hickory" chief said, with a voice quivering



Obelisk at Mary Washington's Grave on Washington Ave, Fredericksburg, VA.

in its emotion:

"Fellow-citizens, at your request and in your name I now deposit this plate in the spot destined for it." Then, straightening himself to his full military height and pointing his hand at the stone, he raised his voice into clarion notes and proclaimed to the multitude, "When the American pilgrim shall in after ages come to this high and holy place and lay his hand upon this sacred column, may he recall the virtue of her who sleeps beneath and depart with his affections purified and his piety strengthened while he invokes blessings upon the memory of the mother of Washington."

It is sad to relate that the monument thus commenced by the patriotic Burrows was not finished, nor is it the one that now stands over the grave. The obelisk and the bust of Washington, by which it was to be surmounted, were not completed when Mr. Burrows, after providing the necessary funds and paying for it in full, left the work in the hands of contractors and went away to Hong Kong, China, where he engaged in business. The contractors took advantage of his absence and delayed the work. Mr. Burrows finally died, and according to a statement made by his grandson at the unveiling of the new monument May 10th, 1894, "the contractors simply did not finish the work, though they had received the money." Burrows died and was forgotten, but this mute, dilapidated monument still stood in Fredericksburg, moss-grown and crumbling into ruin, above the grave of Mary Washington. Beside it lay the granite obelisk waiting for the sculptor's chisel to fashion it and for patriotic hands to lift it to its place.

This old monument stood for nearly two-thirds of a century. During the great Civil War it was

immediately between the lines of the Northern and Southern armies. It is said that the commanders of artillery on both sides directed the gunners to aim their pieces so that no shot could possibly strike the monument, and that this command was obeyed so implicitly that not a stone of it was loosened from its place, while around it the blood of Northerner and the blood of Southerner fertilized the ground and consecrated it a shrine to liberty.

In May, 1894, 105 years after the death of this noble woman, whom all the nation and all the world delight to honor, a new monument was unveiled to her memory near the spot where the old neglected ruin had so long stood. It is of granite, and stands eleven feet square at the base and is fifty feet high. On one side is the inscription "Mary, the Mother of Washington," and on the opposite side "Erected by her countrywomen." The monument was unveiled with imposing ceremonies on the 10th of May, 1894, and all Americans rejoice to see this fitting tribute of respect paid by American women to her who gave to America the noblest of sons — the peerless Washington.

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