

LIFE OF WASHINGTON

CHAPTER 1: 1732-1762

In order to preserve the historical nature of this work, British spellings and the formatting of the text have been kept as they were in the original book as found.

To give us the delightful assurance, that we are always under the watchful care of our almighty and kind Creator, He has told us that He notices the movements of every little sparrow; and as we are “of more value than many sparrows,” He will surely ever care for us. It was His powerful and kind care that protected and guided Columbus, the once poor sailor boy, to obtain the favour of a great king and queen; and then to pass over the waves of a dangerous ocean, in a little vessel, and reach in safety an unknown land. The same powerful and kind care which protected and guided houseless strangers to a land of freedom and peace, gave Washington to their children, to lead them on to take a place amongst the nations of the earth. His history is as a shining light upon the path of virtue; for he “acknowledged God in all his ways.”

George Washington was the third son of Augustine Washington, whose grandfather left England, his native country, in 1657, and settled at Bridges Creek, in Virginia, where, on the 22nd of February, in the year 1732, his great-grandson, George, was born.

One of the first lessons which young Washington received from his faithful parents, was, the importance of always speaking the truth; and they enjoyed a satisfactory reward for their attention to this duty; for through his childhood, “the law of truth was in his mouth,” so that he was not known in one instance to tell a falsehood, either to obtain a desired indulgence, or to escape a deserved punishment or reproof. His character, as a lover of truth, was so well known at the school which he attended, that the children were certain of being believed, when they related any thing, if they could say, “George Washington says it was so.”

An anecdote is related of him to illustrate this trait in his character, which we introduce without being able to ascertain on what authority it is related. We hope it will not be supposed, however, that we regard such an incident as an extraordinary proof of an ingenuousness on the part of young Washington. We trust there are very few boys who would think of adopting any other course under like circumstances, and those who do generally find that “honesty is the best policy,” to say nothing of a quiet conscience and the law of God.

The story is, that he was playing with a hatchet, and heedlessly struck a favourite fruit-tree in his father’s garden. Upon seeing the tree thus mutilated, an inquiry was naturally made for the author of the mischief, when George frankly confessed the deed, and received his father’s forgiveness. In all the little disputes of the school-fellows, he was called on to say which party was right, and his decisions were always satisfactory.

It is, perhaps, not out of place to remark in this connection, that much of the injustice and oppression which are seen in the intercourse of men with each other, shows only the maturity of habits which were formed in childhood. At home, or in school, or on the play-ground, instances of unfairness and fraud are often seen, which, among men, would be regarded as gross violations of law and right. Washington in his boyhood was just.

When he was ten years old, his worthy father died, and he became the care of an anxious mother, whose fortune was not sufficient to enable her to give him more than a plain English education. He was very fond of studying mathematics, and applied his mind diligently, in improving all the instruction which he could get

in that science. As he grew up to manhood, he was remarkable for the strength and activity of his frame. In running, leaping, and managing a horse, he was unequalled by his companions; and he could with ease climb the heights of his native mountains, to look down alone from some wild crag upon his followers, who were panting from the toils of the rugged way. By these healthful exercises the vigour of his constitution was increased, and he gained that hardiness so important to him in the employments designed for him by his Creator.

Mrs. Washington was an affectionate parent; but she did not encourage in herself that imprudent tenderness, which so often causes a mother to foster the passions of her children by foolish indulgences, and which seldom fails to destroy the respect which every child should feel for a parent. George was early made to understand that he must obey his mother, and therefore he respected as well as loved her. She was kind to his young companions, but they thought her stern, because they always felt that they must behave correctly in her presence. The character of the mother, as well as that of the son, are shown in the following incident. Mrs. Washington owned a remarkably fine colt, which she valued very much; but which, though old enough for use, had never been mounted; no one would venture to ride it, or attempt to break its wild and vicious spirit. George proposed to some of his young companions, that they should assist him to secure the colt until he could mount it, as he had determined that he would try to tame it. Soon after sun rise, one morning, they drove the wild animal into an enclosure, and with great difficulty succeeded in placing a bridle on it. George then sprang onto its back, and the vexed colt bounded over the open fields, prancing and plunging to get rid of his burden. The bold rider kept his seat firmly, and the struggle between them became alarming to his companions, who were watching him. The speed of the colt increased, until at length, in making a furious effort to throw his conqueror, he burst a large blood-vessel, and instantly died. George was unhurt, but was much troubled by the unexpected result of his exploit. His companions soon joined him, and when they saw the beautiful colt lifeless, the first words they spoke were, "What will your mother say – who can tell her?" they were called to breakfast, and soon after they were seated at the table, Mrs. Washington said, "Well, young gentlemen, have you seen my fine sorrel colt in your rambles?" No answer was given, and the question was repeated; her son George then replied – "Your sorrel colt is dead, mother." He gave her an exact account of the event. The flush of displeasure which first rose on her cheek, soon passed away; and she said calmly, "While I regret the loss of my favourite, I rejoice in my son, who always speaks the truth."

In his fifteenth year, he had so strong a desire to be actively employed, that he applied for a place as a midshipman in the English navy, (for our country was then under the government of Great Britain,) and succeeded in obtaining it. Full of youthful expectations of enjoyment in a new scene, he prepared ardently to engage in it, when he became convinced that by doing so, he would severely wound the heart of an anxious parent, and with a true spirit of heroism he denied himself, and in obedience to the command, "Honour thy mother," he gave up his fondly cherished plan, and yielded his own inclinations, to promote her comfort. Thus, while his manly superiority to companions of his own age caused admiration, his filial tenderness was an example to them of compliance with the direction which is given to children in the word of God. "Let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents," and they are assured that "this is good and acceptable to the Lord." Washington proved the truth of this assurance; for, to the act of filial regard which "requited" the anxious cares of his mother, may be traced his usefulness to his country, and the glory of his character. If he had crossed his mother's wish, and entered the British navy as a midshipman, it is not probable, that he would ever have

deserved, or obtained, the title of "Father of his country."

Being unwilling to remain inactive, young Washington employed himself industriously and usefully in surveying unsettled lands; and when he was nineteen years of age, he was appointed one of the adjutant generals of Virginia, with the rank of a major. At that time, the French nation had large settlements in Canada, and in Louisiana, and they determined on connecting those settlements by a line of forts; in doing this they took possession of a tract of land, which was considered to be within the province of Virginia. The governor of Virginia (Mr. Dinwiddie) thought it was his duty to notice this, in the name of his king; and it was very important, that the person whom he employed in the business should have resolution and prudence. Young Washington was worthy of his confidence, and willingly undertook the perilous duty; as it gave him an opportunity of being actively employed for the advantage of his native province. The dangers which he knew he must meet, did not, for a moment, deter him from consenting to set out immediately on the toilsome journey, although winter was near. He was to take a letter from the governor, to the commanding officer of the French troops, who were stationed on the Ohio river; and the way he had to go, was through a part of the country that had never been furrowed by the plough, or, indeed, marked by any footsteps, but those of wild animals, or ferocious Indians. Many of those Indians were enemies, and those who had shown any disposition to be friendly, could not be safely trusted.

The same day, (October 31, 1753,) on which Washington received the letter which he was to be the bearer of, he left Williamsburgh, and travelled with speed until he arrived at the frontier settlement of the province; and there engaged a guide to show him the way over the wild and rugged Alleghany mountain, which, at that season of the year, it was difficult to pass. The waters to be crossed were high, and the snow to be waded through, was deep; but persevering resolutely, he arrived at Turtle Creek, where he was told by an Indian trader, that the French commander had died a short time before, and that the French troops had gone into winter quarters.

He went on with increased ardour, because the difficulty of his duty was increased; but he did not neglect the opportunity of examining the country through which he passed; wishing to discover the best situations on which forts could be erected for the defence of the province.

As the waters were impassable without swimming the horses, he got a canoe to take the baggage about ten miles, to the forks of the Ohio river; intending to cross the Alleghany there. In his journal he wrote, "as I got down before the canoe, I spent some time in viewing the rivers and the land in the fork which I think extremely suited for a fort, as it has the absolute command of both rivers. The land at the point is twenty or twenty-five feet above the common surface."

The spot thus described was soon afterwards the site of the French fort Duquesne. It was subsequently called Fort Pitt by the English, and from this the name of the town of Pittsburg was taken, which was built near the fort, and is now a city, containing 22,000 inhabitants. Washington remained a few days in that neighborhood, for the purpose of endeavouring to persuade the Indian warriors to be friendly to the English. By a firm but mild manner, he gained friends among the inhabitants of the forest, and obtained guides to conduct him by the shortest way to the fort, where he expected to find a French officer, to whom he might give the letter from the governor, as the commander was dead.

He arrived there in safety, and when he had received an answer from the officer, set out immediately on his

return, and the journey proved a very dangerous and toilsome one. Some extracts from his journal, which he kept with exactness, will show his disregard of self, when he was performing a duty for the benefit of others. He had put on an Indian walking dress, and given his horse to assist in carrying provisions; the cold increased very much and the roads were getting worse every day, from the freezing of a deep snow, so that the horses became almost unable to travel. After describing this difficulty, he wrote thus:

“As I was uneasy to get back, to make a report of my proceedings to his honour the governor, I determined to prosecute my journey the nearest way, through the woods, on foot. I took my necessary papers, pulled off my clothes, and tied myself up in a watch coat. Then, with gun in hand and pack on my back, in which were my papers and provisions, I set out with Mr. Gist, fitted in the same manner. We fell in with a party of Indians, who had laid in wait for us. One of them fired, not fifteen steps off, but fortunately missed; we walked on the remaining part of the night, without making any stop, that we might get the start so far, as to be out of the reach of their pursuit the next day, as we were well assured that they would follow our track as soon as it was light. The next day we continued travelling until quite dark, and got to the river. We expected to have found the river frozen, but it was not, only about fifty yards from each shore. The ice I suppose had been broken up, for it was driving in vast quantities. There was no way of getting over but on a raft; which we set about making, with but one poor hatchet, and finishing just after sun-setting; this was a whole day’s work. We got it launched, then went on board of it, and set off; but before we were half-way over, we were jammed in the ice in such a manner, that we expected every moment our raft to sink, and ourselves to perish. I put out my setting pole to try to stop the raft, that the ice might pass by, when the rapidity of the stream threw it with so much violence against the pole, that it jerked me out into ten feet water.”

In this dangerous situation he was saved by the protecting hand of God, and enabled again to get on the raft; and by the next morning, the river was frozen so hard, that there was no difficulty in getting to the shore on the ice. The remainder of the journey was very fatiguing, being in the month of December, and for fifteen days it either snowed or rained.

He arrived the 16th of January at Williamsburgh, and delivered the important letter to the governor. The answer of the French officer, which was contained in the letter, was such as to make needful immediate preparations for defending the frontier of the province. The resolution with which Washington had performed the duty entrusted to him, and the judgment he had shown in his conduct towards the Indians, gained the favourable opinion of the people of the province, as well as that of the governor, and he was appointed a lieutenant-colonel of the regiment which was formed to march to the frontier, in order to prevent the French erecting their forts on it. Ardent and active, he obtained permission to march with two companies, in advance of the regiment, to a place called the Great Meadows, he thought that in doing so, he would have an opportunity of getting early information as to the movements of the French, and of forming a treaty with the Indians, to prevent their joining them. On arriving there, he was informed, by an Indian, that the French commander had sent a party to stop the American workmen, who were erecting a fort; and that they were forming one for themselves, called Fort Duquesne. The Indian also gave the information, that French troops were advancing from that fort towards the Great Meadows. The night on which this account was given, was dark and rainy; but Washington marched rapidly with his soldiers to the place where the Indian said the French would be encamped; and there he found them, and surrounded them so unexpectedly, that they gave themselves up as his prisoners. The chief

officer of that part of the regiment which was marching slowly on, died; and Washington then had the entire command of about four hundred men. They joined him, and he directed them to form a shelter for their horses and provisions; when it was completed, they named it Fort Necessity.

After placing the horses and baggage in it, Washington marched with his troops towards Fort Duquesne, for the purpose of endeavouring to drive the French from it; but when he had advanced about thirteen miles, an Indian told him, that there were “as many Frenchmen coming toward him, as there were pigeons in the woods;” and he thought it was most prudent to return to his little fort, and meet their attack there. He returned, and assisted his men in digging a ditch around the fort, and while they were thus engaged, about fifteen hundred French and Indians made their appearance, and soon began to attack them. The ditch was not sufficiently completed to be of any use. The Indians sent their arrows from behind the surrounding trees, and the French fired from the shelter of the high grass. Washington continued outside of the little fort, directing and aiding his soldiers, from ten o’clock until dark, when the French commander made an offer to cease the attack, if the fort would be given up to him. The conditions he first named, Washington would not agree to; but at last, the French commander consented to allow the troops to march out with their baggage, and return to the inhabited part of the province, and Washington then gave up the fort. He returned to Williamsburgh, and the courage with which he had acted, and the favourable terms he had obtained from so large a force, increased the confidence of his countrymen in his character. This occurrence took place on the third of July, 1754.

In the course of the next winter, orders were received that officers who had commissions from the king, should be placed above those belonging to the province, without regard to their rank. The feeling of what was due to him as an American, prevented Washington from submitting to this unjust regulation, and he resigned his commission. Many letters were written to him, to persuade him not to do so; and he answered them, with an assurance that he would “serve willingly, when he could do so without dishonour.” His eldest brother had died, and left to him a farm called Mount Vernon, situated in Virginia, near the Potomac river; he took possession of it, and began to employ himself industriously in its cultivation. While he was thus engaged, General Braddock was sent from England, to prepare and command troops for the defence of Virginia, through the summer.

Hearing of the conduct of Washington as an officer, and of his reasons for giving up his commission, he invited him to become his aid-de-camp. He accepted the invitation, on condition that he might be permitted to return to his farm when the active duties of the campaign should be over.

The army was formed of two regiments of British troops, and a few companies of Virginians. The third day after the march commenced, Washington was taken ill, with a violent fever. He would not consent to be left behind, and was laid in a covered wagon. He thought that it was very important to reach the frontier as soon as possible, and he knew the difficulties of the way; he therefore proposed to General Braddock, who asked his advice, to send on a part of the army, while the other part moved slowly, with the artillery and baggage wagons. Twelve hundred men were chosen, and General Braddock accompanied them; but though not cumbered with baggage, their movements did not satisfy Washington. He wrote to his brother, that, “instead of pushing on with vigour, without minding a little rough road, they were halting to level every molehill, and erect bridges over every brook.” What seemed mountains to them, were molehills to the ardent temper of Washington. His illness increased so much, that the physician said his life would be endangered by going on, and General Braddock would not suffer him to do so, but have him a promise to have him brought after him, so soon as he could bear

the ride. He recovered sufficiently, in a short time, to join the advanced troops; and though very weak, entered immediately on the performance of his duties.

General Braddock proceeded on his march without disturbance, until he arrived at the Monongahela river, about seven miles from Fort Duquesne. As he was preparing to cross the river, at the place since called Braddock's Ford, a few Indians were seen on the opposite shore, who made insulting gestures, and then turned and fled as the British troops advanced. Braddock gave orders that the Indians should be pursued. Colonel Washington was well acquainted with the manner in which the French, assisted by Indians, made their attacks; and being aware of the danger into which the troops might be led, he earnestly entreated General Braddock not to proceed, until he should, with his Virginia rangers, search the forest. His proposal offended Braddock, who disregarded the prudent counsel, and ordered his troops to cross the river; the last of them were yet wading in it, when the bullets of an unseen enemy thinned the ranks of those who had been incautiously led into the entrance of a hollow, where the French and Indians were concealed by the thick underwood, from which they could securely fire on the English. In a few moments, the fearful war-whoop was sounded, and the French and Indians rushed from their shelter on the astonished troops of Braddock, and pursued them to the banks of the Monongahela.

In vain did their commander, and the undaunted Washington, endeavor to restore them to order and prevent their flight. The deadly aim of the enemy was so sure, that in a very short time Washington was the only aid of General Braddock that was left to carry his orders and assist in encouraging the affrighted troops. For three hours, he was exposed to the aim of the most perfect marksmen; two horses fell under him; a third was wounded; four balls pierced his coat, and several grazed his sword; every other officer was either killed or wounded, and he alone remained unhurt. The Indians directed the flight of their arrows towards his breast, and the French made him a mark for their rifles, but both were harmless, for the shield of his God protected him, and "covered his head in the heat of battle." His safety, in the midst of such attacks, astonished his savage enemies, and they called him "The Spirit-protected man, who would be a chief of nations, for he could not die in battle." Thus did even the savages own a divine power in his preservation; and the physician, who was on the battle ground, in speaking of him afterwards, said, "I expected every moment to see him fall; - his duty, his situation, exposed him to every danger; nothing but the superintending care of Providence could have saved him from the fate of all around him." - This battle took place on the 8th of July, 1755. In a note to a sermon preached a month afterwards, by the Rev. Mr. Davies, of Virginia, (afterwards president of Princeton College) we find mention made by the author of "that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved, in so signal a manner, for some important service to his country."

General Braddock was mortally wounded, and his few remaining soldiers then fled in every direction. But his brave and faithful aid, with about thirty courageous Virginians, remained on the field, to save their wounded commander from the hatchet and the scalping knife of the Indians. They conveyed him with tenderness and speed towards that part of his army which was slowly advancing with the baggage, and he died in their camp, and was buried in the middle of a road, that his grave might be concealed from the Indians by wagon tracks. A few years since, his remains were removed to a short distance, as the great Cumberland road made by the government of the United States, was to pass directly over the spot where he had been laid. More than seventy-

five years have passed, since the terrible scene of Braddock's defeat. The plough has since furrowed the ground which was then moistened with the blood of the slain; but it is saddening to see on it white spots of crumbled bones, and to find amidst the green stalks of grain, buttons of the British soldiers, marked with the number of their regiment, even the brazen ornaments of their caps. "Braddock's road," as the path was called, which his troops cut through the forest, is now almost overgrown with bushes; and few travellers pass near to it, without stopping to look along its windings, and recall the time when it was filled with animated soldiers, who were soon to be silenced by the destructive weapons of war.

In writing an account of this dreadful defeat, Washington said, "See the wondrous works of Providence, and the uncertainty of human things!" he was much distressed by the loss of the army; and the officer next in command to General Braddock, instead of endeavouring to prepare for a better defence, went into winter quarters, although it was only the month of August. It was thought necessary to raise more troops immediately, and the command of all that should be raised in Virginia was offered to Washington, with the privilege of naming his own officers. He willingly accepted this offer, as he could do so without placing himself under British commanders, who were not really above him in rank. He immediately set off to visit the troops that had been placed in different situations along the borders of the province; and on his return to prepare for an active defence, he was overtaken by a messenger, with an account, that a number of French troops and Indian warriors, divided into parties, were capturing and murdering the inhabitants of the back settlements, - burning the houses and destroying the crops; and that the troops stationed there, were unable to protect them.

Washington immediately used every means within his power to provide for their relief; but it was impossible to defend, with a few troops, a frontier of almost four hundred miles, from an enemy that "skulked by day, and plundered by night." While he was anxiously doing what he could, he wrote to the governor an account of the distress around him; and added, "I see their situation, - I know their danger, and participate their sufferings, without having the power to give them further relief than uncertain promises. The supplicating tears of the women, and the moving petitions of the men, melt me with deadly sorrow." - It might have been expected, that the people in their distress would blame him for not protecting them better; but no murmur arose against him; they all acknowledged, that he was doing as much for them as was within his power. He wrote to the lieutenant-governor the most earnest and pressing requests for more assistance; but instead of receiving it, he was treated unkindly, as he related in a letter to a friend. - "Whence it arises, or why, I am truly ignorant, but my strongest representations of matters, relative to the peace of the frontiers, are disregarded as idle and frivolous; my propositions and measures as partial and selfish; and all my sincerest endeavours for the service of my country, perverted to the worst purposes. My orders are dark, doubtful, and uncertain. - Today approved, tomorrow condemned; left to act and proceed at hazard, and blamed without the benefit of defence. However, I am determined to bear up some time longer, in the hope of better regulations." - Though disappointed in all his best formed plans, by the obstinacy and ill-nature of the person who had the power to control him, and pained by the increasing sufferings around him, which he was not enabled to relieve, yet he did not suffer to angry resentment to induce him to give up the effort of doing some good.

He continued his active and humane endeavours, and pleaded for the relief of his suffering countrymen,

until his pleadings were called impertinent. In answer to this, he wrote to the governor, "I must beg leave, in justification of my own conduct, to observe, that it is with pleasure I receive reproof, when reproof is due; because no person can be readier to accuse me than I am to acknowledge an error, when I have committed it; or more desirous of atoning for a crime, when I am sensible of being guilty of one. But on the other hand, it is with concern I remark, that my conduct, although I have uniformly studied to make it as unexceptionable as I could, does not appear to you in a favourable light." – With calm dignity he endured a continuance of such vexations, without ceasing to toil in his almost hopeless work of humanity.

A new commander of the British troops was sent from England, and he listened to Washington's opinion, that the frontiers could not be freed from the dreadful visits of the Indians, in connection with the French, until they were driven from Fort Duquesne; for that was the place from which they started on their destructive expeditions. When it was determined that this should be attempted, Washington advanced with a few troops, to open the way for the army; but before they reached the fort, the French left it, and the English took possession of it, November 1758, and named it Fort Pitt. As Washington had expected the possession of this fort prevented all further attacks on the frontiers; and when his countrymen were freed from the dangers which he had left his farm to assist in defending them against, he determined on returning to it. His health had been injured by his being exposed to severe cold, and being often, for many days, unsheltered from the falling rain; and he felt that he ought to use means to restore it, as he could do so without neglecting a more important duty. He resigned his commission, and the officers whom he had commanded united in offering to him affectionate assurances of regret for the loss of "such an excellent commander, such a sincere friend, and so affable a companion."

Soon after his return to his farm, in the twenty-seventy year of his age, he married Mrs. Custis, a lady to whom he had been long attached, and who was deserving of his affection. She had an amiable temper, and was an agreeable companion; and in performing all the duties of a wife, she made his home a scene of domestic comfort, which he felt no desire to leave. Employing himself in directing the cultivation of his ground, and in the performance of all the private duties of his situation, he lived for several years in retirement, except when attending the legislature of Virginia, of which he was a member.

For the benefit of his health, he sometimes visited a public spring in his native state, to which sick persons went, with the hope of being relieved by using the water. At the season when there were many persons there, it was the custom of a baker to furnish a particular kind of bread, for those who could afford to pay a good price for it. One day it was observed by a visitor, that several miserably poor sick persons tottered into the room where the bread was kept, and looked at the baker, who nodded his head, and each one took up a loaf, and, with a cheerful countenance walked feebly away. The visitor praised the baker for his charitable conduct, in letting those have his bread, whom he knew could never pay him; but he honestly answered, "I lose nothing, Colonel Washington is here and all the sick poor may have as much of my bread as they can eat; he pays the bill, and I assure you it is no small one."

All his private actions were as deserving of the approbation of his countrymen, as those of a public nature had been of their respect and praise; and those who were nearest to him, and know him best, loved him most.

We hope you enjoyed the first chapter of the historic book:

Life of Washington

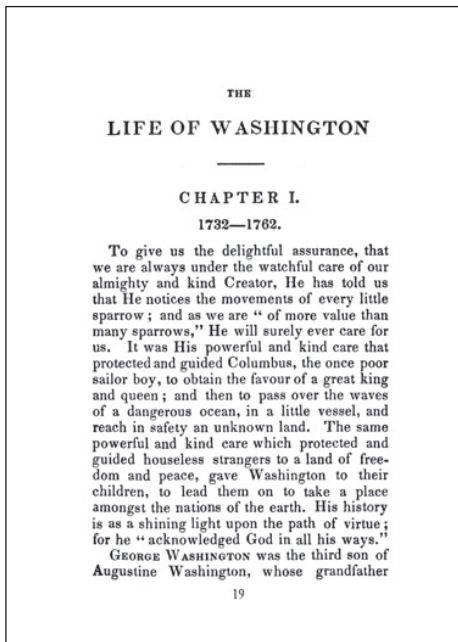
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