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America's Founding Patriots



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Remembering our Past

Special Interest Articles:

- Remembering Our Past, an introduction by J. Smithies.
- **MARTHA WASHINGTON** by Benjamin J. Lossing, 1863.
- **MARTHA WASHINGTON, OF MOUNT VERNON**, Wife of George Washington by Geraldine Brooks, 1900.
- The Vocabulary of Moral Character, **NOAH WEBSTER'S 1828 DICTIONARY**.

With the American social structure coming under fire from many areas of the modern world, we need to pause and remember our past. Not only the noble deeds done, but the people who helped to form our nation.

In this series we will be reprinting the stories of our founding patriots regardless of nationality or gender. If you have a favorite one, please let us know so that we may be sure to include the individual.

The lives of these individuals should inspire us today and allow us to realize that each of us are unique and have the capacity to change the world around us. We each have the power to change our lives internally with our thoughts and externally with our actions and deeds.

We have the power to change our families through the choices we make.

We have the power to change our schools and business by living the principles that our Founding Patriots teach us.

We have the power to change our communities, states, and nation by accepting the great responsibilities that come with living in the greatest nation known. To those that much has been given, much is expected.

We hope you enjoy learning about our Founding Patriots.

Martha Custis Washington

In this newsletter, we will be presenting a reprint of the **MARTHA WASHINGTON** by Benson J. Lossing, 1863. N. C. Buttre, New York.

The second section will be a reprint of Martha Washington of Mount Vernon, Wife of George Washington By Geraldine Brooks, 1900, **DAMES AND DAUGHTERS OF COLONIAL DAYS**, Crowell & Co., New York



Martha Custis Washington

Martha Washington by Benson J. Lossing, 1863.



Martha Custis
Washington

TO THE COUNTRYWOMEN OF MARTHA WASHINGTON, THIS BRIEF MEMOIR OF THEIR DISTINGUISHED FRIEND IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

In the drawing-room at Arlington House, in Virginia, is a portrait of a beautiful woman, young and elegant, yet of matronly gravity. She is dressed richly, but in simple patterns and dignified arrangements. She is plucking a blossom from a shrub, apparently unconscious of the act, for her thoughts are evidently in the direction of her eyes that beam upon some more distant object. It is a pleasant picture, painted more than a hundred years ago, by Woolaston, whose praises were sung by the author of "The Battle of the Kegs," as early as 1758. It is the portrait of Martha Custis, a wealthy widow, and one of the most attractive of the women who graced the Vice-regal court at Williamsburg, the ancient capital of Virginia.

Martha Dandridge, whose ancestor, first in the colonies, was a Welsh clergyman, was a sweet little girl of seventeen, when her charms of mind and person captivated the feelings of Daniel Parke, only son and heir of Colonel John Custis, one of the King's Councilors for Virginia. Custis was a proud, ambitious, and impracticable man, whose life had been embittered by unfortunate connubial relations. He had married a lady, concerning who, twice in his life, he wrote with deep feelings.

"May angels guard my dearest Fidelia," he wrote to her six months before marriage, "and deliver her safe to my arms, at our next meeting; and sure they won't refuse their protection to a creature so pure and charming, that it would be easy for them to mistake her for one of themselves."

Heedless of the warning of friends who well knew her disposition, he married her. She passed away in the course of years, and he again wrote in reference to her. It was in his last Will and Testament, in which he directed his son, under penalty of disinheritance, to engrave upon his monument, after giving his name, titles and age, these words – *"and yet lived but seven years, which were the space of time he kept a bachelor's home at Arlington, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia."*

Colonel Custis desired the beautiful and accomplished Evelyn, daughter of Colonel William Byrd, of Westover, for his daughter-in-law; but he was so exacting in his proposed pecuniary arrangements, that the father of the maiden was compelled to write to the suitor that while he should prefer him above all others for a son-in-law, he would not *"trust to such a phantom as Colonel Custis's generosity."*

While negotiations between the two fathers were pending, little Martha Dandridge crossed the path of the affections of the younger Custis, and Evelyn Byrd was almost forgotten. The ambitious Colonel Custis was sadly disturbed by this change in the prospects of his matrimonial schemes for his son. He stormed, threatened disinheritance of fortune and parental affection, and refused to listen for a moment to the appeals of the one most interested in the matter. Rumor of this state of things went abroad. Martha was loved by everybody, and from every lip fell praises of her beauty, good sense and amiability, upon the ears of the foiled colonel. Assailed at all points, he finally surrendered, and wrote upon a piece of fair white paper, - *"I give my free consent to the union of my son with Miss Martha Dandridge."* The friend of the happy suitor to whom this important document was handed, immediately wrote to young Custis, saying:

*"...was a sweet
little girl of
seventeen when
her charms of mind
and person
captivated Daniel
Parke..."*





Martha Washington by Benson J. Lossing, continues:

“This comes at least to bring you the news that I believe will be most agreeable to you of any you have ever heard. That you may not be long in suspense, I shall tell you at once. I am empowered by your father to let you know that he heartily and willingly consents to your marriage with Miss Dandridge – that he has so good a character of her that he had rather you should have her than any lady in Virginia – nay, if possible, he is as much enamored with her character as you are with her person, and this is owing chiefly to a prudent speech of her own. Hurry down immediately, for fear he should change the strong inclination he has to your marrying directly. I stayed with him all night, and presented Jack (Colonel Custis’s favorite negro boy) with my little Jack’s horse, bridle and saddle, in your name, which was taken as a singular favor. I shall say no more, as I expect to see you soon tomorrow, but conclude what I really am,

“Your most obliged and affectionate humble servant,”

J. Power

“To Col. Daniel Parke Custis, New Kent”

“Martha was loved by everyone, and from every lip fell praises of her beauty, good sense, and amiability.”

The happy couple were soon afterward married, and the father of the bridegroom never ceased to rejoice in the good fortune of his son in marrying such a charming girl. They took up their abode at the White House, on the bank of the Pamunkey River; in New Kent County, and were blessed with four children. In the summer of 1757, the husband died, leaving Martha, at the age of twenty-five, one of the wealthiest widows in Virginia, and with beauty unimpaired.

Toward noon on a pleasant day in May, 1758, a fine looking young military officer, accompanied by a dignified black body-servant, crossed Williams’ Ferry on the Pamunkey, not far from its junction with the York River. He was met by Mr. Chamberlain, a gentleman living near, and invited to his house to partake of its hospitalities. The young officer politely declined, giving, as a sufficient reason, the urgency of his business. He was just from the British and Provincial army, then in the early stages of its march toward Fort De Quesne, and was hastening toward Williamsburg to lay matters of importance before the Governor and Council of Virginia. But Chamberlain, who coveted the honor of entertaining such a guest, and whose hospitality would never allow a stranger to pass by without attention, would listen to no excuses. He assured the soldier that the detention would be slight, as his dinner hour was early. The officer persisted in his determination to ride on, when Chamberlain brought a most potent argument to bear upon the traveler. He informed him that a charming young widow was a guest in his family, and that an interview with her during the dinner hour would be full compensation for every inconvenience that might be felt in riding later at night. To this argument the officer yielded, and accompanied the hospitable Virginian to his mansion. Several guests were there. These felt honored by the presence of the stranger, for it was Colonel George Washington, whose fame as a brave and judicious military leader was at the time rapidly blossoming, and whose name had become familiar in households far beyond the borders of Virginia. He was introduced to the young widow, Martha Custis, whose husband had been dead about a year. They were nearly of the same age – he three months older than she. They were mutually pleased.

The company sat long at the table. Colonel Washington seemed in no haste to leave it, or to take his departure from the house. Bishop, his faithful body-servant, who had been bequeathed to him by the dying Braddock, when carried from the bloody field of the Monongahela, had held his master’s horse much longer than he expected to, when ordered to have him in readiness immediately after dinner. The sun approached the western hills, and yet Bishop was at his post. The Colonel lingered with the charming widow, who had fairly captivated him; and Bishop, to his great astonishment, was at last ordered to stable the horses for the night.



Martha Washington by Benson J. Lossing, continues:

“He informed him (Washington) that a charming young widow was a guest in his family....”

It was late the next morning before Colonel Washington resumed his journey. The blossoms of May never appeared so fragrant to him. Far into the night had he and Mrs. Custis been closeted in earnest conversation; and when the business of his errand to Williamsburg was completed, the young warrior repaired to the White House, the residence of the widow, where a marriage engagement was speedily consummated. He then hastened to the army, and toiled month after month among the mountains in the direction of the Ohio, until late in November, when the troops that he commanded raised the British flag over the smoking ruins of Fort Du Quesne, which the French and Indians had burned and deserted on the approach of the invaders. Colonel Washington then returned to Mount Vernon, clothed in immortal honor.

A brilliant company of Virginia's sons and daughters were assembled at the White House on the 17th of January, 1759, Old Style. It was the wedding-day of the mistress of the mansion. The Reverend David Mossom, rector of the neighboring parish Church of St. Peters, was the magician who, by the alchemy of the marriage ritual, changed the name of Martha Custis to MARTHA WASHINGTON.

“And so you remember,” said the grandson of the bride, to old Cully, her servant, then in his hundredth year – *“and so you remember when colonel Washington came a-courting your young mistress?”*

“Aye, master, that I do,” said Cully. *“Great times, sir; great times – shall never see the like again.”*

“And Washington looked something like a man – a proper man, hey, Cully?”



“Never seen the like, sir – never the like of him, though I have seen many in my day – so tall, so straight, and then he sat on a horse and rode with such an air! Ah, sir, he was like no one else. Many of the grandest gentlemen, in the gold lace, were at the wedding; but none looked like the man himself, master.”

Washington was then an attendant member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, and for three months, while official duties detained him at Williamsburg, he resided at the White House. At the close of the session he returned to Mount Vernon, taking with him his bride and her two surviving children, John Parke and Martha Parke Custis. Then commenced that sweet domestic life at Mount Vernon, which always possessed a most powerful charm for its illustrious owner. *“I am now, I believe,”* he wrote to a kinsman in London, *“fixed in this seat with an agreeable partner for life, and I hope to find more happiness in retirement than I ever experienced in the wide and bustling world.”*

Mrs. Washington, at the time of her second marriage, was nearly seven-and-twenty years of age. She was a small, plump, elegantly formed woman.

“Her eyes,” we have elsewhere said, *“were dark, and expressive of the most kindly good nature; her complexion fair; her features beautiful; and her whole face beamed with intelligence. Her temper, though quick, was sweet and placable, and her manners were extremely winning. She was full of life, loved the society of her friends, always dressed with a scrupulous regard to the requirements of the best fashions of the day, and was, in every respect, a brilliant member of the social circle which, before the Revolution, composed the Vice-regal court at the old Virginia capital.”*

Mount Vernon was one of the centers of a most delightful society along the Potomac, and Mrs. Washington presided as mistress there, with great dignity and urbanity. The mansion was seldom without guests, either permanent visitors or neighbors, who came to join Washington in the sports of the chase. These generally dined at Mount Vernon toward the close of the day, and frequently spent the night there.

Although Mrs. Washington was a devoted mother, and domestic in her tastes and habits, yet in all the years preceding the Revolution, she was much abroad with her husband, and was frequently seen with him at the theaters and dancing assemblies at Annapolis and Williamsburg, the respective capitals of Maryland and Virginia. She had at her disposal a chariot and four horses, with black postillions in livery, for the use of herself and lady visitors; and her equipage was frequently seen upon the road between Mount Vernon and Alexandria, or the adjacent estates.

Martha Washington by Benson J. Lossing, continues:



Domestic happiness at Mount Vernon appeared to be unalloyed, until the year 1773, when death took from Mrs. Washington her daughter, Martha Parke, a girl of rare beauty, sixteen years of age, whose complexion had won for her the common appellation of "*the dark lady*." That trial was a severe one for the fond mother, and almost equally so for the step-father, who loved the maiden as if she had been his own child. Coming home after a long absence on public business, he found her in the last stages of consumption. He knelt at her bedside and offered up fervent prayers for her recovery. But the inexorable summons had gone forth. She died; and Washington, who had made arrangements for a journey into the wilderness, with Lord Dunmore, the governor, remained at home to soothe his wife, and recover, himself, from the shock of sudden bereavement.

Less than two years afterward, Mrs. Washington was called to endure other trials. War had been kindled between England and her American colonies. It partook largely of the most bitter civil discord in its practical effects. Neighbor was arrayed against neighbor, family against family, and sometimes brother against brother. The Farfaxes of Belvoir became the political antagonists of the Masons of Gunston Hall and the Washingtons of Mount Vernon. The delightful social life, so long enjoyed in that neighborhood, was changed. Instead of peace, and confidence, and kind feelings, there was strife, and distrust, and heart-burnings. There was isolation and alienation everywhere.

Washington was called, first to the Senate of the revolted colonies, and then to the chief command of their armies; and his wife was widowed most of the time for more than seven years. She managed domestic affairs, in the midst of the confusion and frequent alarms, with fortitude, vigor, and prudence. In winter she visited the camp, and was an honored guest at the headquarters of the army.

"*Lady Washington, God bless her!*" was the toast at every convivial assemblage of the soldiers of every rank. At Cambridge, at New York, at Morristown, Middlebrook, Whitemarsh, and Valley Forge, at Princeton and Newburgh, she was ever the delight of the camp and of the neighborhood, wherever the flag of the Great Leader was unfurled.

At length the allied armies of America and France marched to the deadly conflict at Yorktown. Mrs. Washington's son, and only remaining child, accompanied the chief as aid-de-camp, leaving his young wife, a scion of the noble family of Lord Baltimore, and their infant children, under the sheltering roof of Mount Vernon. Eagerly did that household look for couriers from the camp. At length, on a frosty morning, one came in hot hast. He announced the victory over Cornwallis, and there was great joy at Mount Vernon. With the next breath, he told them of the severe illness of the son and husband. Then there was silence and sadness, and hasty preparations for a journey. The wife sped to the bedside of her sick husband. His bright lamp of life had dwindled to a flickering taper. Washington soon came to the same chamber, from the field of victory, thirty miles distant. "*I was there*," he wrote to Lafayette, "*in time to see poor Mr. Custis breathe his least*." In that hour the young wife was made a widow, and the *mistress* of Mount Vernon a childless woman. The great man bowed his laurelled head in deep sorrow, whilst his tears flowed freely. Then he spoke soothing words to the widowed mother, and said: "*Your two younger children I adopt as my own*." They were placed in the bosom of the smitten Lady Washington, in compensation for the loss of her own children; and when the canker of grief, left the root of her affections, they were engrafted upon the stem, and bore in abundance the blossoms and fruit of filial love, that solaced her declining years. They were pleasant lamps in the dwelling at that twilight hour of her life, when the chief luminary had been removed, and extinguished by the vapors of the tomb.

After the peace of 1783, Mount Vernon became a point of great attraction to distinguished visitors from Europe and the several American States. Hospitality was administered there on a liberal scale. Mrs. Washington performed its ceremonies with charming gaiety and sweetness, yet never forgetting, in the entertainment of guest, the more sober duties of a thorough Virginia housewife. She always presided at the table, and contributed her full share to the enjoyment of the hours. Her simple elegance of appearance and deportment, always commanded the admiration of friends and strangers; and when her husband was made the Chief Magistrate of the nation, and she became the conventional central figure in metropolitan society, her simple habits remained unchanged, and her larger household was arranged upon the frugal model of her home at Mount Vernon. She and her illustrious husband gave a marked example of Republican simplicity in their daily life – a simplicity regulated, however, by the most uncompromising dignity demanded by their exalted position. "*The example of the President and his family*," wrote Oliver Wolcott to his wife, "*will render parade and expense improper and disreputable*."

The weekly public receptions of Mrs. Washington, like those of the President, were simple and dignified. She was averse to all ostentatious show and parade, yet she fully appreciated the gravity of her position, and was careful to exact those courtesies to which she was entitled. Her visitors on such occasions were only those persons who were connected with the Government, and their families; foreign ambassadors and government agents, and their families; and others who held good positions in fashionable and refined society, either on their own account, or their social relations. All were expected to be in full dress on those occasions.

Martha Washington by Benson J. Lossing, continues:

The reception, which was always in the evening, was never allowed to last beyond the hour appointed, which was from eight to nine. She was careful not to allow public ceremonies to interfere with some of the life-long habits of herself and husband. He was usually at her side, and when the clock struck nine, she would say to those present, with a most complacent smile, "*The General always retires at nine, and I usually precede him.*" In a few minutes the drawing-room would be closed, and the lights extinguished; and the Presidential Mansion would be as dark and quiet before ten o'clock, as the home of any private citizen.

The restraints of metropolitan life were very irksome to Mrs. Washington. She was compelled to be governed by the etiquette prescribed for her. Under this discipline she was very restive, and often yearned for the freedom and pure delights of her quiet home on the bank of the Potomac. To the wife of the President's nephew, she wrote:

"I live a very dull life here, and know nothing that passes in the town. I never go to any public place – indeed I think I am more like a State prisoner than anything else. There are certain bounds set for me which I must not depart from; and, as I cannot do as I like, I am obstinate, and stay at home a great deal."

Mrs. Washington always spoke of the time when she was in public life as her "*lost days.*" She was, in every respect, a model of a thrifty house-keeper. All day long that careful, bustling, industrious little woman kept her hands in motion. "*Let us repair to the old lady's room,*" wrote Mrs. Colonel Carrington from Mount Vernon, to her sister, a short time before Washington's death:

"Let us repair to the old lady's room, which is precisely in the style of our good old aunt's – that is to say, nicely fixed for all sorts of work. On one side sits the chamber maid, with her knitting; on the other, a little colored pet, learning to sew. A decent old woman is there, with her table and shears, cutting out the negroes' winter clothes, while the good old lady directs them all, incessantly knitting herself. She points out to me several pair of nice colored stockings and gloves she had just finished, and presents me with a pair, half done, which she begs I will finish and wear for her sake. It is wonderful, after a life spent as these good people have necessarily spent theirs, to see them, in retirement, assume those domestic habits that prevail in our country."

Yet household duties never kept Martha Washington from daily communion with God, in the solitude of her closet. She was a very early riser, leaving her pillow at dawn, at every season of the year. After breakfast, she invariably retired to her chamber, where she remained an hour reading the Scriptures, and engaged in thanksgiving and prayer. For more than half a century she practiced such devotions in secret; and visitors often remarked that when she appeared after the hour of spiritual exercises, her countenance beamed with ineffable sweetness.

When almost seventy years of age, Mrs. Washington was called to endure her last great life trial. Her illustrious husband, with whom she had lived happily forty years, was suddenly smitten by disease while in the full vigor of health; and after suffering less than twenty-four hours, his mighty spirit left for its home with the Omnipotent Father. The blow was sudden and unexpected to the bereaved wife. She bore it with the fortitude of a faithful Christian. When, as she sat at the foot of the bed of her dying friend, his departure was announced by the waving of an attendant's hand, "*'Tis well,*" she said. "*All is now over; I shall soon follow him; I have no more trials to pass through.*"

Her solemn prophecy was soon fulfilled. A little more than two years after her husband's death, she joined him. A fever consumed her. Conscious that the hour of her departure was near, she spoke to her assembled grand-children and other relatives, of the value of Religion as the Great Comforter of the soul, and discoursed to them concerning the practical duties of life, and the infinite importance of unceasing well-doing. Then commending them and her own spirit to the care of their Great Creator, she closed her eyes, and while in secret prayer, her spirit took wing for the Land of the Blessed.

Side by side, in white marble sarcophagi, near the bank of the Potomac and the Home they loved so well, repose the ashes of:

GEORGE
AND
MARTHA WASHINGTON.

MARTHA WASHINGTON, OF MOUNT VERNON

Wife of George Washington

By Geraldine Brooks, 1900, DAMES AND DAUGHTERS OF COLONIAL DAYS, Crowell & Co., New York

Born in New Kent County, Virginia, June 21, 1731

Died at Mount Vernon, May 22, 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 marking 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

The fair Penelope in the old Greek days can hardly have been more admired and sought after by her troublesome suitors than was a certain captivating widow who lived in our own land over a hundred years ago. Her name was Martha Custis. Young, pretty, and reported to be the richest widow in Virginia, she must have excited ardent longings in the hearts of the young Virginia planters and the gallants of the Williamsburg court who knocked at the door of her beautiful home, the “White House,” on the banks of the York.

In May of the year 1758, Mrs. Custis left her homestead and plantation to pay a visit to her friend Major Chamberlain, who owned a large estate along the river, not far from the “White House.” Perhaps the young widow had felt lonely in her great manor house with only her two little children and the slaves for company,—or perhaps the attention of some persistent lover had become annoying. History does not tell us the reason of her eventful visit at her neighbor’s. But if, as some one has surmised, she turned to Major Chamberlain for protection from the importunities of some suitor, her visit was not a success. For it was during her stay at Major Chamberlain’s that fate finally overtook her—fate in the shape of a big Virginia colonel.

The big Virginia colonel who was destined to put a sudden a stop to Mrs. Custis’s widowhood was already a young military hero. All Virginia admired him for his brave fight at Braddock’s defeat, where he had two horses shot under him and four bullets through his coat. The colonel was a very tall man, standing “six feet two in his slippers,” they say, and his splendid, soldierly figure as he rode by on his favorite brown horse or walked with his “light, elastic step” along the roads and by-ways of the Old Dominion was one that he countrymen were proud to recognize.

The renown of his courage and daring had duly impressed Mrs. Custis. Although the little widow herself was the most gentle and peace-loving of women, she delighted to honor warlike virtues in other people. And we may be sure that while, at her home on the banks of the York, she was spinning among her slaves, or singing lullabies to her babies, or chatting with her guests in the long parlors, a name often on her lips and in her thoughts was that of the big Virginia colonel—George Washington.

How a shy, brown-haired, hazel-eyed little maid called Patsy would have blushed and started if a gypsy had looked at her palm and told her that her own name linked with that greatest American name would some day be world-famous! But there is no record that any gypsy or fortune-teller ever predicted great things of the small girl who afterwards became Martha Washington.

When she was known as little Patsy Dandridge she was a sensible, pretty, well-behaved child, who at an early age learned the mysteries of ‘cross, tent, and satin stitch, hem, fell, and over seam,’ how to dance the minuet, and how to play upon the spinet. At that time domestic and social accomplishments were considered of far greater importance in a young lady’s education than book learning, and Patsy’s intellectual training was somewhat neglected, as we may judge from the few letters written by Martha Washington that have come down to us. Their funny wording and spelling make us smile now.

But when Miss Martha Dandridge, as a sweet little debutante of fifteen, entered the gay social world of the ‘court’ at Williamsburg no one liked her any the less because she spelled do, no, and go, ‘doe,’ ‘noe,’ and ‘goe.’ They admired her pretty face and manners, her grace in dancing, and her ease in playing on the spinet. ‘She was soon recognized as one of the reigning belles in the small world of Williamsburg,’ says the chronicler, ‘and straightway engaged the affections of one of its most desirable parties, Mr. Daniel Parke Custis.

In the course of Mr. Custis’s true love, however, there was a serious obstacle, an obstacle in the person of his own father, Colonel John. Colonel John Custis was an erratic gentleman whose marriage was not the least erratic thing about him. In the spirit of Shakespeare’s Petruchio he married a fair and shrewish lady; but with less happy results than Katherine’s husband, it would seem, if we may go by the inscription which he commanded his son, upon pain of disinheritance, to have engraved upon his tombstone.

Under this marble lies the body of Hon. John Custis, Esq., aged 71 years, and yet he lived but seven, which was the space of time he kept a bachelor’s home at Arlington.

This would certainly imply that the colonel was unfortunate in his matrimonial venture. Yet his unlucky experience did not discourage him from undertaking the management of his son’s marriage. He chose for his future daughter-in-law a cousin, Miss Evelyn Byrd, whose father was a gentleman almost as eccentric as Colonel John himself.

These two ambitious parents, bent on a union of their fine estates and aristocratic families, argued, commanded, and threatened, quite regardless of the fact that their children had no affection for each other, and were indeed much averse to this marriage of convenience. The situation became dramatic. The fathers grew passionate, but the young people remained firm in their resistance. This state of affairs went on for some time, and Miss Byrd and Mr. Daniel Custis approached their thirtieth birthdays while yet in the single state.

All this while Miss Byrd, so the story goes, was cherishing a hopeless love for an English gentleman of royal birth. In the course of time Daniel came to know the little debutante with the hazel eyes, and then the thought of a marriage with any one but Miss Martha Dandridge became intolerable to him. While his father's threats grew more and more severe, Daniel quietly went his way, courting sweet Miss Patsy, winning her love, and obtaining her father's consent to their engagement.

At this stage Colonel John's frowns, always terrible, must have been very terrible to the young girl of sixteen whom he did not wish for a daughter-in-law, and it would not have been surprising if they had frightened Miss Martha out of her usual discreetness. But she seems to have behaved with much dignity and good judgment, and when the death of Miss Byrd finally put an end to the colonel's favorite project he was able to listen with some attention to the good reports he heard of Miss Dandridge. Some sensible words of hers, when brought to his knowledge, quite took his fancy, and he straightway made up his mind in favor of the match. A mutual friend of the father and son immediately took advantage of the colonel's friendly disposition and wrote to the young lover,

Dear Sir: This comes at last to bring you the news that I believe will be most agreeable to you of any you have ever heard. That you may not be long in suspense, I shall tell you at once. I am empowered by your father to let you know that he heartily and willingly consents to your marriage with Miss Dandridge—that he has so good a character of her that he had rather you should have her than any lady in Virginia—nay, if possible, he is as much enamored with her character as you are with her person, and this is owing chiefly to a prudent speech of her own. Hurry down immediately for fear he may change the strong inclination he has to your marrying directly. I shall say no more, as I expect you soon tomorrow, but conclude what I really am,

Your most obliged and affectionate humble servant,

J. Powers

Mr. Custis, we may be sure, acted upon the advice of his good friend Mr. Powers. He and Miss Dandridge, who was barely eighteen on her wedding day, were married "*directly*," for fear Colonel might "*change his strong inclination*;" and according to tradition the erratic old colonel was the first to salute the bride "*with a kiss on both cheeks*."

Although Mr. Custis married his young wife in such haste, he did not end his days according to the old adage, repenting at leisure, but found comfort and domestic satisfaction in his life with her. In spite of his queer old father and his shrewish mother, he was an agreeable, sociable man, and appears to have made Mrs. Martha a very good sort of husband. The young couple spent their winters at the "*Six Chimney House*" in Williamsburg, in the midst of court gayeties, while their summers were passed at their country home on the banks of the York, always spoken of as "*The White House*."

A widow at only twenty-five.

Mr. Custis's story reminds one of the old fairy tales in which the hero, having undergone all his troubles before marriage, was able to "*live happily ever after*." But in Mr. Custis's case, the "*ever after*" only lasted seven years, for 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 Chamberlain's, she was, as we know, "*a tempting widow, independent of the jointure land*." Those hazel eyes were so 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 Chamberlain 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 Chamberlain. 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 Chamberlain mentioned the fact that a very charming widow was visiting him, did Washington hesitate and yield.

The father of our country always was fond of the ladies, even from the days of his boyish love for the famous “*Lowland Beauty*.” Probably the discerning major realized this and saved what he knew would be his best inducement for the last. It told. Washington received it with dignity, and said without a smile on his handsome, serious face that he would “*dine—only dine*” with the major. Then, 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 Chamberlain 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 May blossoms 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 May blossoms fell to the floor, he picked it up and she pinned it on his coat lapel, while he smiled down affectionately at her 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.

Meanwhile the faithful Bishop was outside waiting with the horses, and wondering what could keep his master so long,—his master who was always “*the most punctual of men*.” And the major, as he stood at the window, looked from Bishop at the gate to Washington and the widow in the parlor, and he smiled. The major loved a joke.

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.

The story is that when Washington returned from Williamsburg that night he was met at the ferry by one of Mrs. Custis’s slaves.

“*Is your mistress at home?*” he inquired of the negro, who was rowing him across the river.

“*Yes, sir*,” the slave replied, and then added, perhaps a little slyly, his white teeth flashing in a broad smile, “*I reckon you’re the man what’s expected*.”

So we may know that Mrs. Custis was prepared to receive her distinguished guest. And when, at sunset, Washington arrived at the “*White House*,” 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 straight forward 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 keeps 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, 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. When Mrs. Washington's duties as a hostess became very great, he wished to save her the small worries and petty details of housekeeping, and applied for a steward who could *"relieve Mrs. Washington of the drudgery of seeing the table properly covered and things economically used."*

He even helped his wife in the ordering of her own clothes, and we find him sending abroad for a salmon-colored tabby velvet sack, *"puckered"* petticoats, white silk hose, and white satin shoes of the smallest, gloves and nets and pocket handkerchiefs, all *"most fashionable,"* and, as the last item on the list, *"sugar candy."* So we know Mrs. Washington had a sweet tooth and a taste for fine clothes, in which her husband loved to indulge her.

We also 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 Patsy with me,"* she writes, *"and left Jacky at home for a trial to see how well I could stay without him, though we were gone one 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 Jacky 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 Pat,"* 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.

Patsy accompanied her mother when the mistress of Mount Vernon, in her spanky white apron and cap, her bunch of keys jingling at her side, went about the kitchen and slave quarters, superintending and directing. And the face of the *"dark lady,"* as Miss Custis was called because of her dusky eyes and olive skin, was a bright, welcome sight in the homes of sorrow and suffering where Mrs. Washington was known and loved.

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 guest, 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."

She took a firm stand beside her husband. "George is right," she wrote. "He always is." Her pluck and spirit were alive. All the members of her household were attired in homespun, that she might do her part towards starving the English traders and manufacturers; and her sixteen spinning-wheels were humming busily all day, while her deft fingers wove threads and patriotism together into the cloth. Some time afterwards Mrs. Washington showed with pride a dress which was made, during that period, from the ravellings of brown silk stockings and crimson damask chair-covers.

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 knew 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 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 defense 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." As Washington's nephew

wrote to the general, "*she had often declared she would go to camp if you would permit her.*" So, a few days after the invitation was received, she started out, accompanied by her son Jack and his wife.

The Washington coach with its four horses, its postilion in white and scarlet livery, and the general's wife within, attracted great attention. Country people rushed to doors and windows for a sight of the grand lady passing by. At all the big cities Mrs. Washington was met by an escort of soldiers in Continental uniform, and all the great men and their wives came to pay her their respects. Ringing of bells and enthusiastic cheering greeted her on all sides. Such was the attention paid the modest little woman who had never been outside her Virginia homeland, and to her there came a feeling of mingled pride and wonder as she realized what it was to be the wife of General Washington.

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. She was indeed, as one of her letters expressed it, "*a kind of perambulator through eight or nine years of war.*"

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 "*read 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.

Society was especially gay while the army was encamped at Morristown. Mrs. Washington came to Morristown late in the season. When the Washington coach drive up and the little woman of simple dress and unassuming manners stepped out, some foolish folks mistook her for an attendant. It was not until the general himself hastened out to meet her and greet her tenderly that they recognized "*Lady Washington.*"

They had yet to learn "*Lady Washington's*" idea in regard to extravagance in dress or living during the war. Their eyes were opened when, one afternoon shortly after her arrival, some Morristown ladies went to call upon her. They had heard that the general's wife was a "*very grand lady,*" so they dressed in their "*most elegant ruffles and silks.*"

"And don't you think," exclaimed one woman relating her experiences afterwards, "we found her knitting and with a speckled apron on! She received us very graciously and easily, but after the compliments were over she resumed her knitting. There we were without a stitch of work, and sitting in state, but General Washington's lady with her own hands was knitting stockings for herself and husband.

"And that was not all. In the afternoon her ladyship took occasion to say, in a way that we could not be offended at, that at this time it was very important that American ladies should be patterns of industry to their country-women, because the separation from the mother country will dry up the sources whence many of our comforts have been derived. We must become independent by our determination to do without what we cannot make ourselves. Whilst our husbands and brothers are examples of patriotism, we must be patterns of industry."

But Mrs. Washington and the general, although the most perfect "*pattern of industry*" and the truest "*example of patriotism,*" were the first to take part in all the harmless pleasures of camp life. Along the favorite bridle-path, Jocky Hollow, the commander-in-chief was often to be seen galloping by, his wife frequently at his side mounted on her handsome bay horse, and following in their train members of the Life Guard, such young officers as Benjamin Grymes, Tench Tilghman, or Alexander Hamilton, and such charmers as the Livingston girls and Betsey Schuyler.

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 thoughts 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 traveling, 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 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 "Jacky" 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 18th."

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 grand mamma's heart, and there are many referenced 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. She was full of frisks and pranks, and would not keep her clothes in order, and would not learn to play upon the harpsichord. When she should have been sewing or practicing, her grand mama would suddenly catch sight of her

flashing by the window on a half-tamed colt, her ribbons flying behind her, her hat fallen on the ground, her black curls blown by the wind.

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 grand papa 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 “calver boy,” and Nellie declared, “*it was well that grand papa and not grand mamma was educating Washington, for grand mamma 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. And while the morning visitors arrived and she chatted with them of such matters as poultry, children, and politics, she went about superintending the stitches of woolly-headed little dark people who, perched on stools about the room, awaited the instruction of “*ole Miss.*”

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:

“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 circumstances 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 tranquility. That was the first and dearest wish of my heart. I will not, however, contemplate 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 dispositions 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.

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.

Friday evenings she held her full-dress receptions. On these occasions Washington, without hat or sword, walked among his guests a private gentleman, while Mrs. Washington received in state, looking taller than usual because of the fashion of her gown and her wonderful head-dress, which was known as the “*Queen’s Nightcap.*” These receptions came to an end at the early hour of nine, for it was Mrs. Washington’s wish to save her husband from formal society as much as possible. As the clock struck nine, she would leave her place and remark with a gracious smile, “*The general always retires at nine and I usually precede him.*” Whereupon, in the words of a contemporary, “*all arose, made their parting salutations, and withdrew.*”

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 she 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 bad, 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 postillions, 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 made.’*”

In the midst of the gayeties and duties of social and official life, the Washington household was still 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. She remained the same naughty Nellie, however, and needed such a restraining influence, as Mrs. Washington’s to keep her proper.

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 name 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. Where upon the general would look down upon the little women 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 hearts*” 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.

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The definitions of moral character are from Noah Webster's **1828 DICTIONARY**:

character — a mark made by cutting or engraving, as on stone, metal or other hard material...a mark or figure made by stamping or impression...the peculiar qualities, impressed by nature or habit on a person, which distinguish him from others.

charity — love, benevolence, good will.

chastity — purity of the body,...freedom from obscenity, as in language or conversation.

civility — the state of being civilized; refinement of manners; good breeding; politeness; complaisance; courtesy,...
civilities denote acts of politeness.

complaisance — a pleasing deportment; courtesy; that manner of address and behavior in social intercourse which gives pleasure; civility.

complaisant — pleasing in manners; courteous; obliging.

courtesy — elegance or politeness of manners; especially, politeness connected with kindness; civility...to treat with civility.

ethics — the doctrines of morality or social manners...a system of moral principles.

evil — having bad qualities of a moral kind; wicked; corrupt; perverse; wrong...moral evil is any deviation of a moral agent from the rules of conduct prescribed to him by God, or by legitimate human authority.

felicity — happiness; blessedness.

fidelity — faithfulness; careful and exact observance of duty,...honesty; veracity.

humble — lowly, modest; meek.

humility — in ethics, freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind.

industry — habitual diligence in any employment, either bodily or mental.

justice — the virtue which consists in giving everyone what is his due...honesty and integrity in commerce or mutual intercourse.

manner — form; method; way of performing or executing; custom; habitual practice.

mannerly — with civility; respectfully; without rudeness.

manners — deportment; carriage; behavior; conduct; course of life; in a moral sense.

modesty — that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one's own worth and importance.

moral — relating to the practice, manners or conduct of men as social beings in relation to each other, and with reference to right and wrong. The word moral is applicable to actions that are good or evil, virtuous, or vicious, and has reference to the law of God as the standard by which their character is to be determined.

morality — the doctrine or system of moral duties, or duties of men in their social character; ethics.

polite — literally, smooth, glossy, and used in this sense till within a century. Being polished or elegant in manners; refined in behavior; well bred; courteous; complaisant; obliging.

precept — in a general sense, any commandment or order intended as an authoritative rule of action; but applied particularly to commands respecting moral conduct. The Ten Commandments are so many precepts for the regulation of our moral conduct.

principle — in a general sense, the cause, source or origin of anything; that from which a thing proceeds; as the principle of motion; the principles of actions;...ground; foundation; that which supports an assertion, an action, or a series of actions or of reasoning....a general truth; a law comprehending many subordinate truths; as the principles of morality, of law, of government, etc.

quality — property; that which belongs to a body or substance, or can be predicated of it...virtue or particular power of producing certain effects...disposition; temper...virtue or vice as good qualities, or bad qualities...character.

refinement — the act of purifying by separating from a substance all extraneous matter;...polish of language; elegance; purity,...purity of heart; the state of the heart purified from sensual and evil affections.

rule — government,...control; supreme command or authority;...that which is established as a principle, standard or directory; that by which anything is to be adjusted or regulated, or to which it is to be conformed...established mode or course of proceeding prescribed in private life. Every man should have some fixed rules for managing his own affairs.

strength — firmness; solidity or toughness...power of resisting attacks; fastness.

temperance — moderation; particularly, habitual, moderation in regard to the indulgence of the natural appetites and passions.

truth — conformity to fact or reality; true state of facts.

valor — strength of mind in regard to danger; that quality which enables a man to encounter danger with firmness; person bravery.

veracity — habitual observance of truth.

vice — properly, a spot or defect; a fault; a blemish...in ethics, any voluntary action or course of conduct which deviates from the rules of moral rectitude, or from the plain rules of propriety...corruption of manners.

virtue — bravery; valor...moral goodness; the practice of moral duties and abstaining from vice...the practice of moral duties from sincere love to God and His laws, is virtue and religion.