

# Washington—De-Idolized

The Charles Wilson Peale portrait shows the "Father of Our Country" in his everyday character. In some rare anecdotes and correspondence a new light is shed on the real man.

BY JOHN W. HARRINGTON.

**D**IABOLIC deities and Gilbert Stuart gave to posterity Washington the austere; bathos and Weems transmitted for the view of helpless childhood the Washington of humdrum homily.

The stress which attended the forming of a State created for generations to come a Washington with honors almost divine—a Cincinnatus of Virginia, a Father of His Country to whom were ascribed the attributes of statesmen who had lived not by the Potomac but by the yellow Tiber.

Busts and images of the great leader of the American Revolution there are which portray him in toga and classic robe and invest him with the nimbus of majesty. Practically everything which Washington was not has been exploited, and it has remained for the present generation to obtain the proper perspective and to know Washington the debonair, the genial and the well beloved.

Facts and incidents were not wanting which revealed George Washington as the alert, masterful, strong tempered and yet lovable man, and they have been known for many years by the historians, preserved in family traditions and represented in contemporary portraits. Perhaps there is none in this city who by reason of ancestry and environment and long familiarity with the facts through patient investigation knows the true Washington better than does Miss J. J. Boudinot. She is the grandniece of Elias Boudinot, commissary general of prisoners in the Revolution, the granddaughter of Elisha Boudinot, a leader of the New Jersey Bar and a figure of note in the days of the colonies. Her grandfather and her granduncle were in the confidence of this founder of the American Republic and leader of its armies. Had she not oral tradition and letters to guide her as lamps of the past she would still have a precious heritage of art, a portrait painted from life by Charles Wilson Peale, who had set up his easel in circling camps.

Owned by Miss Boudinot.

This work was painted for Elias Boudinot and bequeathed to Elisha, to whose granddaughter it came by inheritance. It is the image of Washington as known to his officers and intimates—Washington the alert commander, yet Washington the mouth which could smile, the eyes which sparkled and the face so often illumined by humor and human sympathy. Dwelling in a house in New Jersey which echoed once with the light tread of the commander of the patriot armies, amid walls which had given back his vibrant voice and in the presence of this painted transcript of his life gave to Miss Boudinot the continual inspiration of the Washington who lived his life as a man among men in stirring days of old.

It was a labor of love which caused Miss Boudinot to delve into dusty records and to explore the family papers to present for all the eyes of the Washington of the Peale portrait which hangs in the parlor of her apartment, on Morningside Heights, New York city. Not far from where she sits at her desk British and Colonial forces met in battle, and the house in which she dwells stands on storied ground.

Portrait painting was an incident in the lives of the artists of the period when crown and colony were at war. Charles Wilson Peale was an officer with General Washington. It is believed that the portrait owned by Miss Boudinot, which is reproduced herewith, was posed for by the distinguished subject at Valley Forge. There is one like it, and undoubtedly from the same hand, in the Patent Office in Washington. Rembrandt Peale, the son, was also known for his portraits of Washington, and it is said that another relative also tried his hand at representing the features of the Father of His Country. The story goes that the trio once set up their easels at once and painted industriously while the General posed for them. "I perceive, gentlemen," he remarked with an amused smile, "that I am being Pealed from three sides at once."

There are chroniclers who declare that this was the only pen which Washington ever uttered—a record which, if supported, was attained by few in that age and generation. General Washington is revealed in this portrait with one hand resting on the breech of a cannon. In the background may be seen Princeton College, and it is believed that, although the picture was painted, or at least sketched, at Valley Forge, the background was filled in after the engagement at Old Nassau. Washington is in the uniform of buff and blue and his rank is designated by a blue silk scarf which was used in the earlier days



of the War of Independence to thoroughly identify officers for the benefit of the troops which they commanded. The chief point of interest in this portrait is, however, that it presents the genial, almost smiling, face of the General. This is the Washington as known to his officers, the Washington who called Alexander Hamilton "my boy," the Washington who was the companion and intimate of Lafayette, the Washington beloved as brother by young French officers and idolized by a devoted soldiery. Even with the new light which is constantly being turned upon the life and character of Washington, it seems difficult to realize that he who was exalted by some writers to an austere demi-god was "My dear George" to a wide circle of friends. The mouth of Washington was an expressive feature which was changed and hardened in later life through the insertion of a ponderous set of artificial teeth, for the dentistry of his time was crude compared with what Americans

have since attained. This buccal formation occurs in the portrait by the gifted artist Gilbert Stuart, who reproduced many likenesses from the unfinished one, which is commonly known as the Atheneum portrait, which first came from his brush. Among the effects of the Marquis Lafayette recently brought to this city is a bust by a French sculptor which reveals the Washington type in a transitional stage, for the pioneer dentist had not as yet supplied the loss which had been sustained in later years. The index of the character of the real Washington for those who would know him is to be found in the attractively moulded mouth of those earlier years. De Broglie has described him as "tall, nobly framed, well proportioned and much more agreeable than his portraits represent him."

**Washington Letters.**  
The "Letters to Washington," in which Miss Boudinot has been making researches recently, were penned by officers with whom the General had come in

contact in the French and Indian wars and in later conflicts. Washington and General Braddock, under whom he served, were on terms of intimate friendship, although as both were hot tempered they also had envenoming quarrels. The aide under Braddock were evidently especially fond of the young Virginia officer. One of them, Captain Morris, writes to him under date of June 19, 1756, as follows:—"DEAR WASHINGTON:—I am desired by the General to let you know that he marches to-morrow and next day, but that he shall halt at the meadows for two or three days. It is the desire of every particular in this family and the General's positive commands to you not to stir but by the advice of the person under whose care you are till you are better, which we all hope will be very soon."

when he received a letter from William Fairfax to which was appended a postscript from women friends, which read:—"After thanking Heaven for your safe return I must accuse you of great unkindness in refusing me the pleasure of seeing you this night. I do assure you that nothing but our being satisfied that our company would be disagreeable would prevent us from trying if our legs would not carry us to Mount Vernon this night, but if you will not come to us to-morrow morning very early we shall be at Mount Vernon. S. FAIRFAX, ANN SPEARING, ELIZABETH DWENT." How strongly Washington was entrenched in the regard of the young officers of the Braddock command is shown in a missive from Captain Orme, which begins:—"MY DEAR GEORGE:—Your letter gave me an infinite pleasure as every mark of your friendship and remembrance ever will do, for, believe me, I shall ever, however separated, cultivate as close an inter-

course as our distance will permit. Just before I left Boston I received your very friendly and affectionate letter. Be assured that it met with return in my mind, which ever attends the acknowledgment of a wished for friendship. Your amiable character made me desirous of your acquaintance, and your acquaintance confirmed the regard and opinion your character had impinged in my mind, my dear George." Much in the same trend is the letter which was written to Colonel Washington when he relinquished the command of the Virginia forces after the reduction of Fort Duquesne. James Warren, writing to John Adams, on June 4, 1775, gives a good index of the manner in which Washington was regarded before the biographers became too busy. "I shall heartily rejoice," writes Mr. Warren, "to see this way the beloved Colonel Washington, and I do not doubt that the New England generals would acquiesce in showing our sister Colony

Virginia the respect which she has before experienced from the Continent in making him Generalissimo."

Again it is written by the Committee of the General Court of Massachusetts that it was visited by "the much beloved and admired General Washington."

One of the warmest friends of Washington was Light Horse Harry Lee, and there was much in common between these light hearted young Virginians, for, despite the heavy responsibilities borne by Washington, he found keen enjoyment in all the activities of life.

**Friendship for Lafayette.**

Between Washington and Lafayette the deepest affection existed. They were congenial in every respect, and it would be difficult indeed to conceive that one who is represented by some historians as cold and austere should have so influenced the romantic young French nobleman. After the battle of Monmouth, in which the Marquis had distinguished himself, it is recorded that Washington and Lafayette were lying under the same blanket talking together through the watches of the night.

Washington also appealed to Alexander Hamilton in much the same way, at least in the earlier stages of their acquaintance. Hamilton was early recognized by Washington, who wrote of him as "my boy," and even addressed him in that off-hand manner. Their friendship was broken off for a time by a quarrel which arose over Hamilton keeping General Washington waiting on the stairs. Hamilton was too stubborn to accept overtures for a reconciliation, and so they remained apart until later, when they were brought together again when he entered the Cabinet of the first President.

The amiable side of Washington is again manifested in the touching farewell between him and the officers of his army which took place here at Fyness' Tavern in this city just before his departure for Virginia, there to take up, as he supposed, the life of the simple country gentleman.

Not a ball fellow well met, but the friend of all, was George Washington. He was beloved by the Indians of the colonies, as is shown by references in letters in which he sends messages to them. He commends himself with affectionate concern to his "friend and brother" Monekata. In another missive he speaks of himself as writing in a room surrounded by his Indian friends, whose talk did so "tease and perplex him" that he scarce knew what words he penned.

It has fallen to few men to have a nation and would lose sight so much of the personal and the private character in contemplation of public duties and activities.

Among those who have done much to bring the fine human qualities of Washington to the forefront was the late Paul Leicester Ford, whose "The True Washington" represents an earnest devotion to the study of the life and character of the American Cincinnatus. From this volume and from others which are more or less obscure may be obtained an insight into the life of General Washington, the smiling and the genial, the life loving American, which reveal that the Washington portrayed by Charles Wilson Peale was the one which his contemporaries knew. This was the Washington to whom John Robinson thought it not presumptuous to write:—"Our hopes, dear George, are fixed on you." Such was the Washington who, writing to Gouverneur Morris, subscribed himself as "yours affectionately." This was the Washington who blithely wrote in 1787 of the excellent fishing he had at the place of Widow Moore—he and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Morris—and of how they had dined together.

A devotee of angling, a patron of racing, one who keenly enjoyed following the hounds, a lifelong disciple of gunnery, a man who appreciated how good it was to wear fashionable and well fitting clothes, open hearted and generous, he lent money freely and expressed no resentment when it was not paid.

A friend of children he was always welcomed by them instinctively, and although he had no sons of his own he educated nine boys, the children of friends whom prosperity had not attended. He danced, he delighted in music; he played cards and excelled at billiards, enjoyed the theatre and bought circus tickets for himself and friends. Washington smiled when the nation saw the run of success as he had accepted disaster with fortitude. A statesman, a soldier, a patriot, a friend of all who meant well, his qualities as a man will as the years pass by keep first place in the hearts of his countrymen for George Washington, the genial and the well beloved,