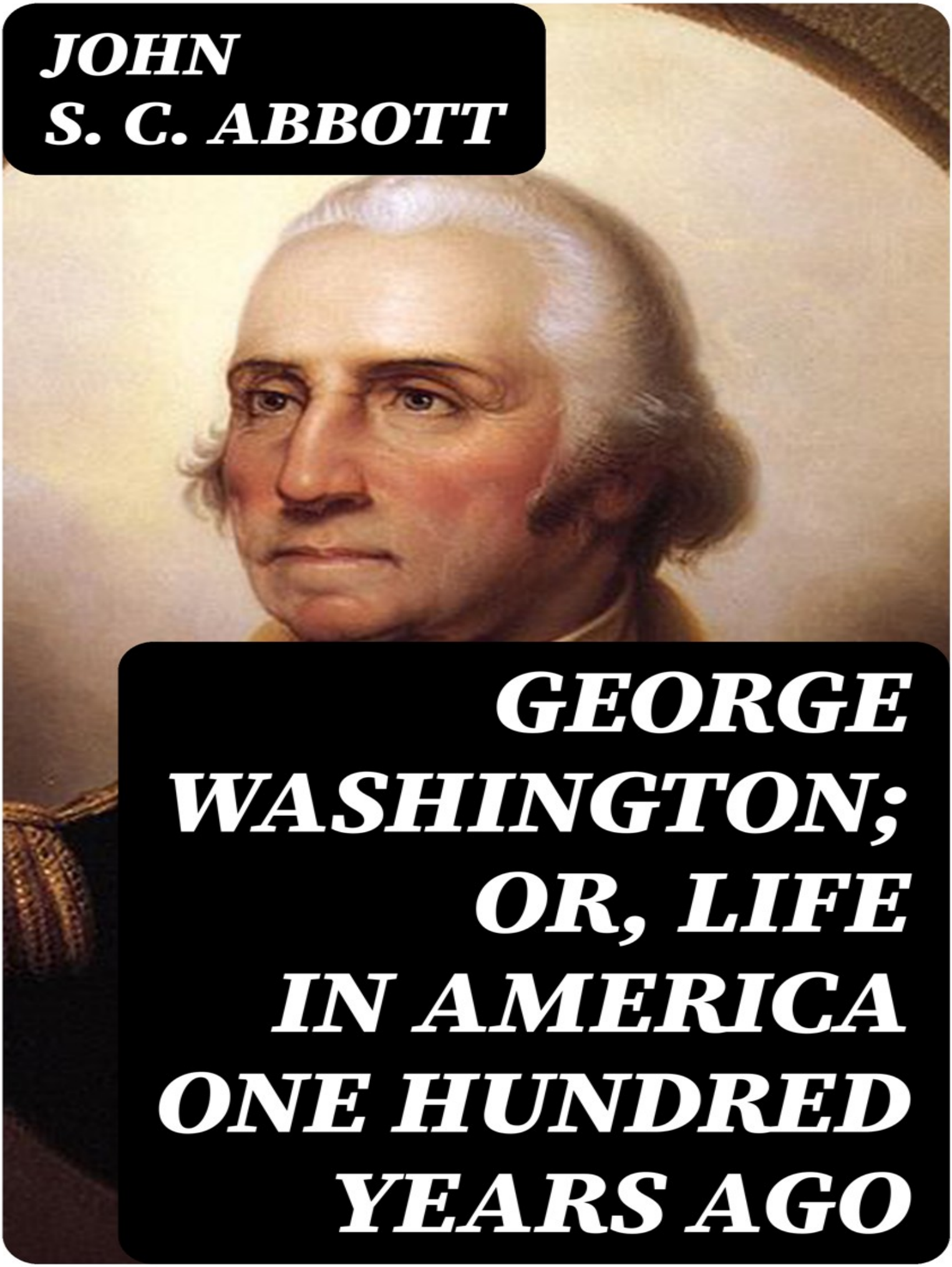
JOHN
S. C. ABBOTT



GEORGE WASHINGTON; OR, LIFE IN AMERICA ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

John S. C. Abbott

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PREFACE.

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As Columbus and La Salle were the most prominent of the Pioneers of America, so was Washington the most illustrious of its Patriots. In the career of Columbus we have a vivid sketch of life in the tropical portions of the New World four hundred years ago.

The adventures of La Salle, in exploring this continent two hundred years ago, from the Northern Lakes to the Mexican Gulf, are almost without parallel, even in the pages of romance. His narrative gives information, such as can nowhere else be found, of the native inhabitants, their number, character, and modes of life when the white man first reached these shores.

The history of George Washington is as replete with marvels as that of either of his predecessors. The world during the last century has made more progress than during the preceding five. The life of Washington reveals to us, in a remarkable degree, the state of society in our land, the manners and customs of the people, their joys and griefs, one hundred years ago.

We search history in vain to find a parallel to Washington. As a statesman, as a general, as a thoroughly good man, he stands pre-eminent. He was so emphatically the Father of his country that it may almost be said that he created the Republic. And now, that we are about to celebrate the Centennial of these United States—the most favored nation upon which the sun shines—it is fitting that we should recall,

with grateful hearts, the memory of our illustrious benefactor George Washington.

George Washington.

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About two centuries ago there were two young men, in England, by the name of Lawrence and John Washington. They were gentlemen of refinement and education, the sons of an opulent and distinguished family. Lawrence was a graduate of Oxford University, and was, by profession, a lawyer. John entered into commercial and mercantile affairs, and was an accomplished man of business. The renown of Virginia, named after Elizabeth, England's virgin queen, was then luring many, even of the most illustrious in wealth and rank, to the shores of the New World. Lawrence and John embarked together, to seek their fortunes on the banks of the Potomac.1

It was a lovely morning in summer when the ship entered Chesapeake Bay, and sailing up that majestic inland sea,

entered the silent, solitary, forest-fringed Potomac. Eagerly they gazed upon the Indian wigwams which were clustered upon the banks of many a sheltered and picturesque cove; and upon the birch canoes, which were propelled by the painted and plumed natives over the placid waters. The two brothers purchased an extensive tract of land, on the western bank of the Potomac, about fifty miles above its entrance into the bay. Here, with an estate of thousands of acres spreading around them, and upon a spot commanding a magnificent view of the broad river and the sublime forests, they reared their modest but comfortable mansion.

John married Miss Pope. We have none of the details of their lives, full of incidents of intensest interest to them, but of little importance to the community at large. Life is ever a tragedy. From the times of the patriarchs until now, it has been, to most of the families of earth, a stormy day with a few gleams of sunshine breaking through the clouds. Children were born and children died. There were the joys of the bridal and the tears of the funeral.

Upon the death of John Washington, his second son, Augustine, remained at home in charge of the paternal acres. He seems to have been, like his father, a very worthy man, commanding the respect of the community, which was rapidly increasing around him. He married Jane Butler, a young lady who is described as remarkably beautiful, intelligent—and lovely in character. A very happy union was sadly terminated by the early death of Jane. A broken-hearted husband and three little children were left to weep over her grave.

The helpless orphans needed another mother. One was found in Mary Ball. She was all that husband or children could desire. Subsequent events drew the attention of the whole nation, and almost of the civilized world, to Mary Washington, for she became the mother of that George, whose name is enshrined in the hearts of countless millions. It is the uncontradicted testimony that the mother of George Washington was, by instinct and culture, a lady; she had a superior mind, well disciplined by study, and was a cheerful, devout Christian.

Augustine and Mary were married on the 6th of March, 1730. They received to their arms their first-born child, to whom the name of George was given, on the 22d of February, 1732. Little did the parents imagine that their babe would go out into the world, from the seclusion of his home amid the forests of the Potomac, to render the name of Washington one of the most illustrious in the annals of our race.

George Washington was peculiarly fortunate in both father and mother. All the influences of home tended to ennoble him. Happiness in childhood is one of the most essential elements in the formation of a good character. This child had ever before him the example of all domestic and Christian virtues. The parental home consisted of a spacious, one-story cottage, with a deep veranda in front. It was, architecturally, an attractive edifice, and it occupied one of the most lovely sites on the banks of the beautiful and majestic Potomac.

Soon after the birth of George, his father moved from the banks of the Potomac to the Rappahannock, nearly opposite

the present site of Fredericksburg. Here he died, on the 12th of April, 1743, at the age of forty-nine.

The banks of the Rappahannock were covered with forests, spreading in grandeur over apparently an interminable expanse of hills and vales. In those days there were but few spots, in that vast region, which the axe of the settler had opened to the sun. But the smoke from the Indian camp-fires could often be seen curling up from the glooms of the forests, and the canoes of Indian hunters and warriors often arrested the eye, as they were gliding swiftly over the mirrored waters.

Trained by such parents, and in such a home, George, from infancy, developed a noble character. He was a handsome boy, gentlemanly in his manners, of finely developed figure, and of animated, intelligent features. His physical strength, frankness, moral courage, courtesy, and high sense of honor, made him a general favorite. Every child has heard the story of his trying the keen edge of his hatchet upon one of the favorite cherry trees of his father’s, and of his refusal to attempt to conceal the fault by a lie.2

Augustine Lawrence, the father of George, died when his son was but twelve years of age. Mary, a grief-stricken widow, was left with six fatherless children. She proved herself amply competent to discharge the weighty responsibilities thus devolving upon her. George ever honored his mother as one who had been to him a guardian angel. In her daily life she set before him a pattern of every virtue. She instilled into his susceptible mind those principles of probity and piety which ever ornamented his

character, and to which he was indebted for success in the wonderful career upon which he soon entered.

In the final division of the parental property, Lawrence, the eldest child of Jane Butler, received the rich estate called Mount Vernon, which included twenty-five hundred acres of land. George received, as his share, the house and lands on the Rappahannock. The paternal mansion in Westmoreland passed to Augustine.

Lady Washington, as she was called, was deemed, before her marriage, one of the most beautiful girls in Virginia. Through all the severe discipline of life, she developed a character of the highest excellence. And thus she obtained an influence over the mind of her son, which she held, unimpaired, until the day of her death.

The wealthy families of Virginia took much pride in their equipage, and especially in the beauty of the horses which drew their massive carriages. Lady Washington had a span of iron-grays, of splendid figure and remarkable spirit, and of which she was very fond. One of these, though very docile by the side of his mate in the carriage harness, had never been broken to the saddle. It was said that the spirited animal would allow no one to mount him. George, though then a lad of but thirteen years of age, was tall, strong, and very athletic.

One morning, as the colts were feeding upon the lawn, George, who had some companions visiting him, approached the high-blooded steed, and after soothing him for some time with caresses, watched his opportunity and leaped upon his back. The colt, for a moment, seemed stupefied with surprise and indignation. Then, after a few

desperate, but unavailing attempts, by rearing and plunging, to throw his rider, he dashed over the fields with the speed of the wind.

George, glorying in his achievement, and inconsiderate of the peril to which he was exposing the animal, gave the frantic steed the rein. When the horse began to show signs of exhaustion, he urged him on, hoping thus to subdue him to perfect docility. The result was that a blood-vessel was burst, and the horse dropped dead beneath his rider. George, greatly agitated by the calamity, hastened to his mother with the tidings. Her characteristic reply was:

“My son, I forgive you, because you have had the courage to tell me the truth at once. Had you skulked away, I should have despised you.”

In school studies George was a diligent scholar, though he did not manifest any special brilliance, either in his power of acquiring or communicating information. He was endowed with a good mind, of well balanced powers. Such a mind is probably far more desirable, as promotive of both happiness and usefulness, than one conspicuous for the excrescences of what is called genius. He left school the autumn before he was sixteen.3

There is still in existence a manuscript book, which singularly illustrates his intelligence, his diligence, and his careful business habits. This lad of thirteen had, of his own accord, carefully copied, as a guide for himself in future life, promissory notes, bills of sale, land warrants, leases, wills, and many other such business papers. Thus he was prepared, at any time, to draw up such legal documents as any of the farmers around might need.

In another manuscript book he had collected, with great care, the most important rules of etiquette which govern in good society.4 Had some good angel whispered in the ear of George, at that early age, that he was in manhood to enter upon as sublime a career as mortal ever trod, and soaring above the rank of nobles, was to take position with kings and emperors, he could hardly have made better preparations for these responsibilities than his own instincts led him to make.

It may be almost said of George Washington, as Lamartine said of Louis Philippe, that he had no youth; he was born a man. At sixteen years of age George finished his school education. And though a Virginia school, in that day, and in the midst of so sparse a population, could not have been one of high character, George, by his inherent energies, had made acquisitions of practical knowledge which enabled him, with honor, to fill the highest stations to which one, in this world, can be elevated.5

George was fond of mathematical and scientific studies, and excelled in all those branches. With these tastes he was led to enter upon the profession of a civil engineer. There was great demand for such services, in the new and almost unexplored realms of Virginia, where the population was rapidly increasing and spreading farther and farther back into the wilderness. Notwithstanding the extreme youth of George, he immediately found ample and remunerative employment; for his commanding stature, and dignity of character, caused him everywhere to be regarded as an accomplished man.

His handwriting was as plain as print. Every document which came from his pen was perfect in spelling, punctuation, capitals, and the proper division into paragraphs. This accuracy, thus early formed, he retained through life.

Upon leaving school at Westmoreland, George ascended the river to visit his elder brother Lawrence, at Mount Vernon. It was then, as now, a lovely spot on the western bank of the river, commanding an enchanting view of land and water. Mr. William Fairfax, an English gentleman of wealth and high rank, had purchased a large tract of land in that vicinity, and had reared his commodious mansion at a distance of about eight miles from Mount Vernon. The aristocratic planters of the region around were frequent guests at his hospitable home. Lawrence Washington married one of his daughters.

Lawrence Washington was suddenly attacked with a painful and alarming sickness. A change of climate was recommended. With fraternal love George accompanied his brother to the West Indies. The invalid continued to fail, through the tour, and soon after reaching home died. Lawrence was a man of great excellence of character. His amiability rendered his home one of peculiar happiness. At the early age of thirty-four he died, leaving an infant child, and a youthful widow stricken with grief. He left a large property. The valuable estate of Mount Vernon he bequeathed to his infant daughter. Should she die without heirs, it was to revert to his brother George, who was also appointed executor of the estate.

Lord Fairfax visited William, his younger brother, and was so pleased with the country, and surprised at the cheapness with which its fertile acres could be bought, that he purchased an immense territory, which extended over unexplored regions of the interior, including mountains, rivers, and valleys. Lord Fairfax met George Washington at his brother William's house. He was charmed with the manliness, intelligence, and gentlemanly bearing of the young man. George was then but one month over sixteen years of age. And yet Lord Fairfax engaged him to survey these pathless wilds, where scarcely an emigrant's cabin could be found, and which were ranged by ferocious beasts, and by savages often still more ferocious. It may be doubted whether a boy of his age was ever before intrusted with a task so arduous.

It was in the month of March, in the year 1748, when George Washington, with an Indian guide and a few white attendants, commenced the survey. The crests of the mountains were still whitened with ice and snow. Chilling blasts swept the plains. The streams were swollen into torrents by the spring rains. The Indians, however, whose hunting parties ranged these forests, were at that time friendly. Still there were vagrant bands, wandering here and there, ever ready to kill and plunder. The enterprise upon which Washington had entered was one full of romance, toil, and peril. It required the exercise of constant vigilance and sagacity.

Though these wilds may be called pathless, still there were here and there narrow trails, which the moccasined foot of the savage had trodden for uncounted centuries.

They led in a narrow track, scarcely two feet in breadth, through dense thickets, over craggy hills, and along the banks of placid streams or foaming torrents. The heroic boy must have found, in these scenes of solitude, beauty, and grandeur, some hours of exquisite enjoyment. In a sunny spring morning he would glide down some placid river, in the birch canoe, through enchanting scenery, the banks fringed with bloom and verdure. There were towering mountains, from whose eminences, the eye embraced as magnificent a region of lake and forest, river and plain, as this globe can anywhere present.

It was generally necessary to camp out at night, wherever darkness might overtake them. With their axes a rude cabin was easily constructed, roofed with bark, which afforded a comfortable shelter from wind and rain. The forest presented an ample supply of game. Delicious brook trout were easily taken from the streams. Exercise and fresh air gave appetite. With a roaring fire crackling before the camp, illumining the forest far and wide, the adventurers cooked their supper, and ate it with a relish which the pampered guests in lordly banqueting halls have seldom experienced. Their sleep was probably more sweet than was ever found on beds of down. Occasionally the party would find shelter for the night in the wigwam of the friendly Indian.

Strange must have been the emotions which at times agitated the bosom of this pensive, reflective, heroic boy, as at midnight, far away from the haunts of civilization, in the wigwam of the savage, he listened to the wailings of the storm, interrupted only by the melancholy cry of the night

bird, and the howl of wolves and other unknown beasts of prey. By the flickering light of the wigwam fire, he saw, sharing his couch, the dusky forms of the Indian hunter, his squaw, and his pappooses. Upon one or two occasions they found the lonely cabin of some bold frontiersmen, who had plunged into the wilderness, and who was living at but one remove above the condition of the savage. From the journal which he kept we make the following extract, under date of March 15, 1748. He is describing a night at an emigrant's cabin.

"Worked hard till night, and then returned. After supper we were lighted into a room; and I, being not so good a woodman as the rest, stripped myself very orderly, and went into the bed, as they call it, when, to my surprise, I found it to be nothing but a little straw matted together, without sheet or anything else, but only one thread bare blanket, with double its weight of vermin. I was glad to get up and put on my clothes, and lie as my companions did. Had we not been very tired, I am sure we should not have slept much that night. I made a promise to sleep no more in a bed, choosing rather to sleep in the open air before a fire."

One night, after a very hard day's work, when soundly sleeping, his camp and bed, which were made of the most combustible materials, took fire, and he very narrowly escaped being consumed in the flames. After spending several months on the survey, he wrote to a friend in the following strain:

"The receipt of your kind letter of the 2d instant afforded me unspeakable pleasure. It convinces me that I am still in the memory of so worthy a friend; a friendship I shall ever

be proud of increasing. Yours gave me the more pleasure, as I received it among barbarians and an uncouth set of people. Since you received my letter of October last, I have not slept above three or four nights in a bed. But after walking a good deal all the day, I have lain down before the fire, on a little hay, straw, fodder, or bearskin, whichever was to be had, with man, wife, and children, like dogs and cats and happy is he who gets the berth nearest the fire. I have never had my clothes off, but have lain and slept in them, except the few nights I have been in Fredericksburg."

Such experiences not only develop, but rapidly create character. George returned, from the successful accomplishment of this arduous enterprise, with all his manly energies consolidated. Though but seventeen years of age, he was a mature, self-reliant man, prepared to assume any of the responsibilities of manhood.

The imperial State of Virginia needed a public surveyor. This lad of seventeen years had already risen so high in the estimation of the community, that he was appointed to that responsible office. For three years he performed, with singular ability, the duties which thus devolved upon him. Great must have been the enjoyment which he found, in the field of labor thus opened before him. The scenes to which he was introduced must have been, at times, quite enchanting. The wonderful scenery presented to the eye in beautiful Virginia, the delicious climate, the grandeur of the star-bespangled sky, as witnessed from the midnight encampment, the majestic forests abounding in game, the placid lake, whose mirrored waters were covered with water-fowl of every variety of gorgeous plumage, the silent river,

along which the Indian's birch canoe glided almost as a meteor—all these infinitely diversified scenes must, at times, have entranced a young man in the vigor of youth and health, and buoyant with the spirit of high enterprise.

Lord Fairfax had become the firm friend of George Washington. The opulent English nobleman had reared for himself a large and architecturally beautiful mansion of stone, beyond the Blue Ridge, in one of the most sheltered, sunny, and lovely valleys of the Alleghanies. This beautiful world of ours can present no region more attractive than that in which Lord Fairfax constructed his transatlantic home.6

His opulence enabled him to live there in splendor quite baronial. Many illustrious families had emigrated to this State of wonderful beauty and inexhaustible capabilities. There was no colony, on this continent, which could present more cultivated and polished society than Virginia. Distinguished guests frequented the parlors of Lord Fairfax. Among them all, there were none more honored than George Washington. He was one of the handsomest and most dignified of men, and a gentleman by birth, by education, and by all his instincts.

The tide of emigration, pouring in a constant flood across the Atlantic, was now gradually forcing its way over the first range of the Alleghanies, into the fertile and delightful valleys beyond. Still farther west there were realms, much of which no white man's foot had ever trod, and whose boundaries no one knew.

The French, who were prosperously established in Canada, and who, by their wise policy, had effectually won

the confidence and affection of the natives, were better acquainted with this vast region than were the English; and they much more fully appreciated its wonderful capabilities. And still the English colonies, in population, exceeded those of the French ten to one.

Almost from the beginning, the relations of the English with the natives were hostile. And it can not be denied that the fault was with the English. The Indians were very desirous of friendly intercourse. It was an unspeakable advantage to them, and they highly prized it, to be able to exchange their furs for the kettles, hatchets, knives, guns, powder and shot of the English. With the bullet they could strike down the deer at three times the distance to which they could throw an arrow. The shrewd Indian, who had used flints only to cut with, could well appreciate the value of a hatchet and a knife.

Our Puritan fathers were very anxious to treat the Indians with brotherly kindness. And so were the governmental authorities generally in all the colonies. But there was no strength in the Christian principles of good men, or in the feeble powers which were established in the colonies, to pursue, arrest, and punish the desperadoes who, from the frontiers, penetrated the wilderness with sword and rifle, shot down the Indians, plundered the wigwams, and inflicted every outrage upon their wives and daughters. No candid man can read an account of these outrages without saying:

“Had I been an Indian I would have joined in any conspiracy, and would have strained every nerve, to

exterminate such wretches from the land they were polluting.”

The untaught natives could draw no fine distinctions. When the Indian hunter returned to his wigwam, and found it plundered and in ashes, his eldest son dead and weltering in blood, and heard from his wife and daughters the story of their wrongs, he could make no distinction between the miscreants who had perpetrated the demoniac deed, and the Christian white men who deplored such atrocities and who implored God to interpose and prevent them. The poor Indian could only say:

“The white man has thus wronged me. Oh, thou Great Spirit, whenever I meet the white man, wilt thou help me to take vengeance.”

Increasing population increased these outrages. There was no law in the wilderness. These British desperadoes regarded no more the restraints of religion than did the bears and the wolves. They behaved like demons, and they roused the demoniac spirit in the savages. Crime was followed by crime, cruelty by cruelty, blood by blood. But for man’s inhumanity to man beautiful Virginia, with her brilliant skies, her salubrious air, her fertile fields, her crystal streams, her majestic mountains, her sublime forests, her placid lakes, might have been almost like the Garden of Eden. If the heart of man had been imbued with the religion of Jesus, the whole realm might have been adorned with homes, in some degree, at least, like those found in the mansions of the blest. But the conduct of depraved men converted the whole region into a valley of Hinnom,

abounding in smouldering ruins, gory corpses, and groans of despair.

Rapidly, on both sides, the spirit of vengeance spread. The savages, with their fiend-like natures roused, perpetrated deeds of cruelty which demons could not have surpassed. They made no discrimination. The English were to be exterminated. When the frontiersman was roused, at midnight, by the yell of the savages, and being left for dead upon the ground, with his scalp torn from his head, after some hours of stupor revived to see his cabin in ashes, the mangled corpses of his children strewn around, with their skulls cleft by the tomahawk, and not finding the remains of wife or daughter, was sure that they were carried into Indian captivity, perhaps to be tortured to death, for the amusement of howling savages—as thus bleeding, exhausted, and in agony he crept along to some garrison house, he was in no mood to listen to the dictates of humanity. Thus the terrible conflict which arose, assumed the aspect of a war between maddened fiends.

George Washington had attained the age of nineteen years. Youthful as he was, he was regarded as one of the prominent men of the State of Virginia. Every day brought reports of tragedies enacted in the solitudes of the wilderness, whose horrors will only be fully known in that dread day of judgment when all secrets will be revealed. It became necessary to call the whole military force of Virginia into requisition, to protect the frontiers from the invasion of savage bands, who emerged from all points like wolves from the forest.

The State was divided into districts. Over each a military commander was appointed, with the title of Major. George Washington was one of these majors. The responsibilities of these officers were very great, for they were necessarily invested with almost dictatorial powers. The savages would come rushing at midnight from the wilderness, upon some lonely cabin or feeble settlement. An awful scene of shrieks and flame and death would ensue, and the band would disappear beyond the reach of any avenging arm. In such a war the tactics of European armies could be of but little avail.

The State of Virginia was then, as now, bounded on the west by the Ohio river, which the French called La Belle Rivière. England claimed nearly the whole North American coast, as hers by the right of discovery, her ships having first cruised along its shores. The breadth of the continent was unknown. Consequently the English assumed that the continent was theirs, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, whatever its breadth might be.7

But the ships of France were the first which entered the river St. Lawrence; and her voyagers, ascending the magnificent stream, discovered that series of majestic lakes, whose fertile shores presented inviting homes for countless millions. Her enterprising explorers, in the birch canoe, traversed the solitary windings of the Ohio and the Mississippi. Hence France claimed the whole of that immense valley, almost a world in itself, whose unknown grandeur no mind then had begun to appreciate.

It was then a law of nations, recognized by all the European powers, that the discovery of a coast entitled the

nation by whom the discovery was made, to the possession of that territory, to the exclusion of the right of any other European power. It was also an acknowledged principle of national law, that the discovery and exploration of a river entitled the nation by whom this exploration was made, to the whole valley, of whatever magnitude, which that river and its tributaries might drain.8

These conflicting claims led to the march of armies, the devastations of fleets, terrific battles—blood, misery, and death. France, that she might retain a firm hold of the territory which she claimed, began to rear a cordon of forts, at commanding points, from the great lakes, down the Ohio and the Mississippi, until she reached the Spanish claims in the south. Though France had discovered the Mississippi, in its upper waters, the Spanish chevalier, De Soto, had previously launched his boats near its entrance into the Gulf, and his tragic life was closed by burial beneath its waves.

An awful struggle, which caused as great woes perhaps as this sorrowful world has ever endured, was now approaching, for the possession of this continent. France and England were the two most powerful kingdoms, if perhaps we except Spain, then upon the globe. The intelligent reader will be interested in a more minute account of the nature of those claims, which English historians, generally, have somewhat ignored, but upon which results of such momentous importance to humanity were suspended.

In the year 1497, John Cabot, with a fleet of four, some say five ships, sailed from Bristol, England, and discovered

the coast of Labrador. But little is known respecting this voyage, for the journal was lost. He returned to England, greatly elated, supposing that he had discovered the empire of China.

The next year his son, Sebastian, who had accompanied his father on the former voyage, sailed from Bristol, with two ships, in the month of May, and touched the coast of Labrador, far away in the north. Finding it excessively cold, even in July, he directed his course south, and cruised along, keeping the coast constantly in sight, until, passing Nova Scotia, he entered the broad gulf of Maine. He continued his voyage, it is supposed, until, rounding the long curvature of Cape Cod, he found an open sea extending far to the west. He passed on until he reached the latitude of Cape Hatteras, when, finding his provisions failing him, he returned home. It was this voyage upon which England founded her claim to the whole of that portion of the continent whose coast had been thus explored. The breadth of the continent was entirely unknown.9

Upon this claim the grants to the Virginia, as also to the Connecticut colony, were across the whole breadth of the continent. King Charles I., in the fifth year of his reign, in the year 1630, granted to one of his favorites, Sir Robert Heath, all that part of America which lies between thirty-one and thirty-six degrees of north latitude, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This truly imperial gift included nearly the whole sea-coast of North and South Carolina, extending from sea to sea.10

The Spanish adventurer, De Soto, whose wonderful exploits are recorded in one of the volumes of this series,

discovered the Mississippi, near its mouth, in the year 1541. Some years before this, in 1508, a French exploring expedition entered the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and framed a map of its shores. In 1525, France took formal possession of the country. Ten years after, in 1535, M. Cartier ascended the St. Lawrence, which he so named, as he entered the river on that saint's day. This wonderful stream, whose bed expands into a series of the most majestic lakes on this globe, presents a continuous water-course of over two thousand miles, and is supposed to contain more than one-half of all the fresh water on this planet.11

Several trading expeditions visited the region. In 1608 the city of Quebec was founded. French voyagers, in the birch canoe, extensively explored rivers and lakes, for the purchase of furs. They established a mission on the banks of Lake Huron, in the year 1641, and pushing their explorations to Lake Superior, established one there in 1660. Another mission was founded in 1671, at the Falls of St. Mary, which acquired much renown. In that same year France took formal possession of the vast regions of the north-west.

Two years after this, in 1673, Marquette and his companions discovered the Mississippi. In 1680, Father Hennepin explored that stream to its sources far away in the north. In 1682, La Salle performed his wonderful voyage down the whole length of the river, to the Gulf. A minute account of the romantic adventures he encountered, will be found in the History of La Salle, one of the volumes of this series. In 1699, Lemoine D'Iberville entered the Mississippi with two good ships, explored its mouths, and ascended the river about seventy-five miles, carefully sounding his way.

One morning, greatly to his surprise, he saw a British corvette, with twelve cannon, under full sail, breasting the current. He ordered the British immediately to leave the river, stating that he had ample force to compel them to do so. The British officer felt constrained to obey, though not without remonstrance. He said:

“England discovered this country fifty years ago; and has a better right to it than the French have. We will soon come back and teach you that the country is ours.”

This was the first meeting of the two rival nations in the Mississippi valley. The bend in the river, where this occurrence took place, has since been called the “English Bend.”12

Such was the nature of the conflicting claims advanced by France and England. France was proud; England haughty. Neither would consent to an amicable compromise, or to submit the question to the arbitration of referees. As the year rolled on, English emigrants, crowding the Atlantic coasts, were looking wistfully across the Alleghanies. The French, descending from Canada, had established several trading posts, which were also fortifications, in the beautiful valley of the Ohio.

There is much discrepancy in the details of these movements, which have descended to us through very unreliable sources. The writer has space here only to give the facts which are generally admitted. It is universally admitted that the French won the love of the Indians to an extraordinary degree. An aged chief of the Six Nations, said, at Easton, in 1758:

“The Indians left you because of your own fault. When we heard that the French were coming we asked you for help and arms. But we did not get them. The French came. They treated us kindly, and gained our love. The Governor of Virginia settled on our lands for his own benefit, and, when we wanted help, forsook us.”13

Governor Dinwiddie, of Virginia, hearing of these encroachments, as he regarded them, decided to send a commissioner across the Alleghanies, to one of these posts, with a double object in view. One, and the avowed object, was to remonstrate, in the name of Great Britain, against this trespass, as he pronounced it, upon British territory. The other, and the true object, was to ascertain the number, strength, and position of the French garrisons, and to survey a route by which an army might be sent for their capture.14

It was indeed a perilous enterprise; one from which the boldest spirit might recoil. The first garrison which could be reached was on the Ohio river, about one hundred and twenty miles below the point where Pittsburg now stands. Here the French were erecting a strong fortress, to which the Indians resorted for trade. There was an intervening wilderness, from the settlements in Virginia, to be traversed, of pathless forests, gloomy morasses, craggy mountains, and almost impenetrable thickets, of nearly six hundred miles. Bands of savages, on the war-path or engaged in the hunt, were ever ranging these wilds. Many were exasperated by wrongs which they themselves had received, or of which they had heard, inflicted by the white men. The Indians, in all these north-western regions, had welcomed the French as brothers; and truly fraternal