

WITH HIS HALO OFF:

The Human Side of the February Hero.
BY JOHN TWEZZER.

February twenty-second is nigh, and the annual adulation of the Father of His Country protends. At the risk of suffering reproach as an iconoclast, I propose to take the halo from the canonized figure for a moment and ask the hero to step down from the pedestal to meet his fellow men on the level for purpose of closer inspection. "Do not touch," which for so long has guarded the sacred presence. We want to know whether he is a demi-god, or whether he was limited by human weakness and influenced by human passion. I believe we will gain, rather than lose, by asking a mortal of St. George; I believe we need examples rather than idols.

Washington was a man of such liberal view and honest conviction that his spirit would speak to us today in Shakespeare's words, could it find voice: "Speak of me as I am: nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice." We should not dishonor him by the discriminating praise which he himself would have spurned. In every country boasting a history there is a tendency to give its leaders and great men of the past with powers superhuman; and even the keen, practical American is engaged in the same process of hero-building which has given us Jupiter and Apollo in the earlier mythologies, and King Arthur and William Tell in the later. We practically adopted the English maxim, with reference to Washington, that "the king can do no wrong." With the greatest veneration for our first citizens, I yet must confess a certain doubt as to whether he was quite the absolutely perfect creature which the Third Reader would have us believe. At least it is a comfort to know that he was a human being, like the rest of us; and he will be all the more endeared to us if our sympathies are excited by a recital of the evidences of his humanness.

Washington stood six feet three and a half inches in his stockings, was straight as an Indian, and in his younger days took a vast amount of satisfaction out of his own fine presence; but his firm-set mouth, which has a suspicion of "wooden cigar-store Indian" in its lines, showed very bad and irregular teeth when opened, to the chagrin of the Father's vanity. The "majestic strength of his countenance" was in some slight degree derived from an unwillingness to needlessly show his teeth. His face was pitted with small-pox. His frame wanted filling up. He was a splendid historical figure, but he would never have succeeded as a professional beauty in a dime museum. He was serenely oblivious to any shortcoming in his good looks, and was exceedingly well satisfied to sit, time and again, for his portrait. Writing to a friend, in 1785, he said: "No dray-horse moves more readily to his thills than I to the painter's chair." When Stuart was painting the famous picture of Washington, the great man stuffed cotton under his lips to supply the place of the missing teeth; and that fine portrait consequently does not show a likeness of Washington's mouth. But in 1796 he purchased "two sets of sea-horse (hippopotamus ivory) teeth," and he "was happy ever after."

To all of us who make occasional slips in grammar and spelling comes a certain relief in embarrassment from the knowledge that the Father of his Country was "poor at grammar, a bad speller, but a good cipherer." He was a non-conformist in respect of the King's English. Through his whole life he spelled lie "lye," liar "lyar," ceiling "ciel-ing," oil "oyl," blue "blew," rifle "riffle," Latin "Latten," and "extravagance," "im-magine," "spirmaciti," "yellow oaker," and "winder" (for window). But he always spoke in self-depreciation of his education, and frankly admitted his literary shortcomings at the time of his election as chancellor of William and Mary College, concerning which, Boucher says, his sensitiveness "drew on him, in Virginia, some ridicule." His farewell address was written from a draft prepared by Madison, was revised by Hamilton, and "examined," before final publishing, by Wolcott, McHenry and Pickering for errors in grammar and composition. His life affords new proof of the fact that it is mind, and not education, that puts a man at the front of achievements.

No one knows what Washington believed in religious matters. Gouverneur Morris claimed that to be in his secrets, and Thomas Jefferson states that Morris declared that Washington was an atheist. Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, said that the clergy never could draw a word from him as to his belief, on his departure from the government, when they attempted to force him to declare his opinions. We know that Sunday was his "busy day"—he closed land purchases, sold wheat, regularly wrote the overseers of his farms on business details, and went fox-hunting on Sunday. Madison believed that he "had never formed definite opinions on the subject of religion." Certain it is, from multiplied testimony, that he "swore like a trooper." At a breakfast the Secretary of War rushed in on him with a pamphlet abusing the President, written by Edmund Randolph. "Have you seen what Randolph

says?" he asked. "I have," said Washington, "and, by the eternal God, he is the damndest liar on the face of the earth!" But whatever his personal faith, he always threw his influences in favor of the public observances in favor of christian practices, for the wholesome effect on the body politic.

During all his life he had a "soft heart for women, and more if they were good-looking." In his sixty-ninth year, writing to a friend, he confessed that "in the composition of the human frame there is a good deal of inflammable matter;" and he was wont to recall the sufferings of his youth, when he wrote verses to Betsy Faultleroy (and wretched enough was the rhythm!) wore tight boots, and made love to pretty girls who distracted him. But it was all a decorous and proper love-making and there is no ground for the stories that were circulated by a Senator and a clergyman of his time to the contrary. He was always fond of dancing, even during his latter years; and in his youth he was a great dandy. He wrote the following instructions to his London agent: "Have a coat made by the following directions to be a frock with a lapel breast the lapel to contain on each side six button holes and to be about 5 or 6 inches wide all the way equal and to turn as the breast on the coat does to have it made very long waisted and in length to come down to or below the bent of the knee the waist from the armpit to the fold to be exactly as long or longer than from thence to the bottom not to have more than only one fold in the skirt and the top to be made just to turn in and three button holes the lapel at the top to turn as the cape of the coat and button to come parallel with the button holes and the last button hole in the breast to be right opposite to the button on the hip."

He was very fond of billiards, cards, gunning and the theater. He was "real flesh and blood" in respect to his amusements.

We are accustomed to think of Washington only as a great political and military leader; but he also stood in the front rank of the business men of his time in the Colonies. He owned five great farms around Mount Vernon, comprising 8,000 acres; on which were employed, as part of the equipment, brick-makers, carpenters, masons, coopers, shoemakers, weavers and an army of slaves, on which were erected mills, factories, dairies, distilleries and stud-stables; hundreds of cattle and a thousand sheep grazed on the broad acres, and he owned a schooner to take the vast produce to market. Beside this, he owned 8,000 acres in the Mohawk Valley, New York, 30,000 acres of Western land, and town lots in many cities. His minute attention to the details of his various enterprises was marvellous, when we consider the tremendous responsibilities of his public duties. He speculated in various land operations and corporate enterprises; tried to buy an interest in a privateer; and bought lottery tickets right and left. He kept most accurate account of income and expenditures. When he died he was one of the wealthiest Americans of his time (his estate was valued at \$530,000); and, notwithstanding the insinuations of his enemies, it is not now questioned that a fortune was never more honestly acquired, or more deserved as a reward of good management.

For this great man had enemies and plenty his contemporaries were not of one mind as to his abilities and his deserts. General Gates suggested to the Congress that it appoint a committee to "watch" the commander-in-chief. General Conway wrote, "A great & good God has decreed that America shall be free, or Washington and weak counsellors would have ruined her long ago." General Charles Lee called him "a blunderer," "most damnably deficient," lamented his "fatal indecision," and declared that Washington's statement concerning Lee's conduct at the battle of Monmouth "a most abominable lie." Lee wrote, "There is a visible revolution in the minds of men, and our Great Gargantua, or Lama Babak, begins to be no longer consider'd as an infallible deity." John Adams declared that the "turn in the tide of arms is not immediately due to the commander-in-chief." Jonathan Turnbull said that "a much exalted character should make up for a general." Jonathan D. Sargeant asserted that Washington had "lost two battles by blunders which would have disgraced a soldier of three months' standing." Other Congressmen who were opposed to Washington were Richard Henry Lee, Elbridge Gerry, Samuel Adams, William Ellery and Roger Sherman. But the most serious enmity was that which came with the alienation of his two earlier Virginian friends, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. The latter personally wrote some of the bitterest newspaper articles on the first President. These articles charged Washington with being "treacherous," "mischievous," "inefficient," spoke of his "stately journeyings over the American continent in search of personal incense," his "ostentatious professions of piety," and his "spurious fame." An editorial by William Duane declared that "the extravagant popularity possessed by this citizen reflects the utmost ridicule on the discernment of America." Dr. Benjamin Rush, of Philadelphia, was a bitter enemy; and Tom Paine closed an attack on him in these words: "As to you, sir, treacherous in private friendship and a

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hypocrite in public life, the world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an imposter; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any."

Well, the world seems to have quit puzzling, and to have decided that the Father of His Country deserved all the "extravagant popularity" which he enjoyed in his own time, and in increasing fervor since. The consensus of opinion is expressed by Tilghman, who declared that Washington was "the honestest man that ever adorned human nature." But it does not detract from his glory to learn that he was "of the earth, earthy;" that he had the passions common to humanity the world over; and we love him the more because he comes to our sympathies through his weaknesses, and to our affections through the "touch of nature" which "makes the whole world kin."—J. K. in Keystone.

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