

**GEORGE
WASHINGTON AS
MAN OF LETTERS**

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George Washington as Man of Letters by Anonymous

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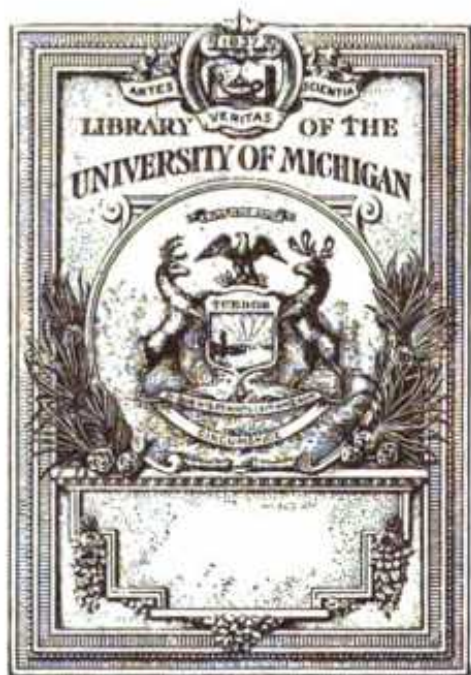
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George Washington

AS MAN OF LETTERS

JAMES HOSMER PENNIMAN, LITT. D.



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TO GIVE A CLEARER IDEA OF THE CHARACTER
OF WASHINGTON IS TO SET A HIGHER
STANDARD FOR AMERICAN
PATRIOTISM

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GEORGE WASHINGTON

AS MAN OF LETTERS

George Washington had an extraordinary respect for higher education, and was always inclined to overestimate what he considered his own deficiencies in this regard; but, though he never went to college, Washington's education was so comprehensive that Patrick Henry said of the First Continental Congress, "If you speak of solid information and sound judgment, Colonel Washington is unquestionably the greatest man on the floor."

The delegates who attended this Congress were the ablest body of men who up to that time had met in America; among them were John and Samuel Adams, Roger Sherman, John Jay, Richard Henry Lee and Patrick Henry. It was of this Congress that Chatham said in his speech in the House of Lords, January 20, 1775, "For myself, I must declare and avow that in all my reading and observation—and history has been my favorite study—I have read Thucydides, and have studied and admired the master States of the world—that for solidity of reasoning, force of sagacity, and wisdom of conclusion, under such a complication of difficult circumstances, no nation or body of men can stand in preference to the general Congress at Philadelphia." Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, who speaks with authority about Washington, says "of all the fiction and of all the calumnies about this man, the most singularly without foundation is the belief early held by many that he was uneducated."

When George Washington was sixteen his school days were over and he was earning his living as a surveyor. He had then received a common school education that was particularly thorough in mathematics, for which he showed remarkable aptitude. He also had been well trained in that greatest of all English classics, the Bible, the study of which began at his mother's knees and continued throughout his life. I have seen, in the Library of Congress, Bible references which young Washington entered in a pocket notebook. With the exception of an interlined note, all the entries in the family Bible are in his writing. Washington read the funeral services over General Braddock, and as a young officer frequently read prayers and the Scriptures to his men. He read the Bible to his family with reverence and with distinct enunciation.

March 5, 1794, Washington wrote Charles Thompson that he had finished reading the first part of his translation of the Septuagint. Washington spent many hours of his life in church, where he was an attentive listener and where he obtained a great deal of knowledge of the Bible. His nephew, Robert Lewis, said that he had accidentally witnessed Washington's private devotions in his library both morning and evening, and had seen him kneeling with an open Bible before him, and that this was his daily habit. Washington went to his library at four in the morning, and, after his devotions, spent the time till breakfast in writing and study. He also spent an hour in his library before retiring at night. When he died, the open Bible from which Mrs. Washington had been reading to him lay on a chair by the bedside.

A large part of Washington's education he gave himself, for he was always learning. He was edu-

cated in the school of adversity, by his heroic efforts to make the most of the desperate circumstances in which he was placed, by the great operations in which he was the leading actor, by his association with the cultivated and influential men and women of his time, beginning with his father and mother, his brother Lawrence and Lord Fairfax, and including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. As he rode about the country he talked with the farmers, and persons of intelligence everywhere found him an attentive listener. Such was his skill in recognizing natural ability that he learned much from plain men like the bookseller Knox, the blacksmith Greene, the farmer Putnam and the teamster Morgan. Though Washington's only journey beyond the limits of what is now the United States was a voyage to Barbados when he was nineteen, few men of his time traveled more extensively in our own country and none observed more accurately and intelligently. The most useful lessons that Washington learned were not contained in books. He developed sharp eyes, well-trained muscles and keen wits. He learned how to take care of himself and of those who were with him in the forest and in the camp. He learned the ways of wild and domestic animals. Horses and dogs recognized in him their master. He learned how to treat their ailments, and even how to set their broken limbs. He became skilled in outdoor sports, hunting, fishing, swimming and woodcraft. He learned how to manage canoes, how to swim horses across swollen streams, how to blaze trails and how to make fires and camps in the open. The acquisition of knowledge was with Washington always the acquisition of power, and he constantly admired the best things of his time, which in itself is culture. A man is distinguished by what he takes