

**THE LIFE OF REV.  
GEORGE  
HERBERT; PP.19-67**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649295425

The Life of Rev. George Herbert; pp.19-67 by Isaak Walton

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**ISAAK WALTON**

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THE  
LIFE  
OF  
REV. GEORGE HERBERT.

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ABRIDGED FROM  
ISAAC WALTON.  
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BOSTON:  
JAMES B. DOW, PUBLISHER.  
1842.

THE  
L I F E  
OF  
Rev. George Herbert.

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GEORGE HERBERT was born the third day of April, in the year of our redemption 1593. The place of his birth was near to the town of Montgomery, and in that castle that did then bear the name of that town and county. That castle was then a place of state and strength, and had been successively happy in the family of the Herberts, who had long possessed it; and with it a plentiful estate, and hearts as liberal to their poor neighbors:—a family that hath been blest with men of remarkable wisdom, and a willingness to serve their country, and indeed to do good to all mankind; for which they are eminent. But alas! this family did in the late rebellion suffer extremely in their estates; and the heirs of that castle saw it laid level with that earth that was too good to bury those wretches that were the cause of it.

The father of our George was Richard Herbert, the son of Edward Herbert, knight, the son of Richard Herbert, knight, the son of the famous Sir Richard Herbert of Colebrook, in the county of Monmouth, banneret, who

was the youngest brother of that memorable William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, that lived in the reign of our King Edward IV.

His mother was Magdalen Newport, the youngest daughter of Sir Richard, and sister to Sir Francis Newport, of High Arkall, in the county of Salop, knight, and grandfather of Francis Lord Newport, now comptroller of his majesty's household: a family, that for their loyalty have suffered much in their estates, and seen the ruin of that excellent structure, where their ancestors have long lived, and been memorable for their hospitality. She was the happy mother of seven sons and three daughters.

George Herbert, who was the fifth son, spent much of his childhood in a sweet content under the eye and care of his prudent mother, and the tuition of a chaplain, or tutor to him and two of his brothers, in her own family, (for she was then a widow,) where he continued till about the age of twelve years; and being at that time well instructed in the rules of grammar, he was not long after commended to the care of Dr. Neale, who was then Dean of Westminster; and by him to the care of Mr. Ireland, who was then chief master of that school; where the beauties of his pretty behaviour and wit shined and became so eminent and lovely in this his innocent age, that he seemed to be marked out for piety, and to become the care of Heaven, and of a particular good angel to guard and guide him. And thus he continued in that school, till he came to be perfect in the learned languages, and especially in the Greek tongue, in which he after proved an excellent critic.

About the age of fifteen, he being then a king's scholar, he was elected out of that school for Trinity College in Cambridge, to which place he was trans-

planted about the year 1608; and his prudent mother well knowing that he might easily lose or lessen that virtue and innocence, which her advice and example had planted in his mind, did therefore procure the generous and liberal Dr. Nevil, who was then Dean of Canterbury, and Master of that College, to take him into his particular care, and provide him a tutor; which he did most gladly undertake, for he knew the excellencies of his mother, and how to value such a friendship.

In Cambridge we may find our George Herbert's behaviour to be such, that we may conclude he consecrated the first fruits of his early age to virtue, and a serious study of learning. And that he did so, this following letter and sonnet, which were, in the first year of his going to Cambridge, sent his dear mother for a new year's gift, may appear to be some testimony.

—“ But I fear the heat of my late ague hath dried up those springs, by which scholars say the Muses use to take up their habitations. However, I need not their help to reprove the vanity of those many love poems that are daily writ, and consecrated to Venus; nor to bewail that so few are writ, that look towards God and Heaven. ¶ For my own part, my meaning, dear mother, is, in these sonnets, to declare my resolution to be, that my poor abilities in poetry shall be all and ever consecrated to God's glory; and I beg you to receive this as one testimony.” †

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee,  
Wherewith whole shoals of martyrs once did burn,  
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry  
Wear Venus' livery? only serve her turn?  
Why are not sonnets made of thee? and lays  
Upon thine altar burnt? Cannot thy love  
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise



As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove  
 Outstrip their Cupid easily in flight?  
 Or, since thy ways are deep, and still the same,  
 Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?  
 Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might  
 Each breast doth feel, no braver fuel choose  
 Than that which one day worms may chance refuse?  
 Sure, Lord, there is enough in thee to dry  
 Oceans of ink; for, as the deluge did  
 Cover the earth, so doth thy majesty.  
 Each cloud distills thy praise, and doth forbid  
 Poets to turn it to another use.  
 Roses and lilies speak thee; and to make  
 A pair of cheeks of them, is thy abuse.  
 Why should I women's eyes for crystal take?  
 Such poor invention burns in their low mind  
 Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go  
 To praise, and on thee, Lord, some ink bestow.  
 Open the bones, and you shall nothing find  
 In the best face but filth; when, Lord, in thee  
 The beauty lies in the discovery.

G. H.

This was his resolution at the sending this letter to his dear mother; about which time he was in the seventeenth year of his age; and as he grew older, so he grew in learning, and more and more in favor both with God and man; insomuch that, in this morning of that short day of his life, he seemed to be marked out for virtue, and to become the care of Heaven; for God still kept his soul in so holy a frame, that he may and ought to be a pattern of virtue to all posterity, and especially to his brethren of the clergy, of which the reader may expect a more exact account in what will follow.

I need not declare that he was a strict student, because, that he was so, there will be many testimonies in the future part of his life. I shall therefore only tell,

that he was made Bachelor of Arts in the year 1611; Major Fellow of the College, March 15, 1615; and, that in that year he was also made Master of Arts, he being then in the twenty-second year of his age; during all which time, all, or the greatest diversion from his study, was the practice of music, in which he became a great master; and of which he would say—"That it did relieve his drooping spirits, compose his distracted thoughts, and raised his weary soul so far above earth, that it gave him an earnest of the joys of heaven, before he possessed them." And it may be noted, that, from his first entrance into the college, the generous Dr. Nevil was a cherisher of his studies, and such a lover of his person, his behaviour, and the excellent endowments of his mind, that he took him often into his own company; by which he confirmed his native gentleness: and if during this time he expressed any error, it was, that he kept himself too much retired, and at too great a distance from all his inferiors; and his clothes seemed to prove, that he put too great a value on his parts and parentage.

This may be some account of his disposition, and of the employment of his time till he was Master of Arts, which was anno 1615; and in the year 1619 he was chosen Orator for the University. His two precedent orators were Sir Robert Nanton, and Sir Francis Nethersoll. The first was not long after made Secretary of State; and Sir Francis, not very long after his being orator, was made Secretary to the Lady Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia. In this place of orator our George Herbert continued eight years, and managed it with as becoming and grave a gaiety as any had ever before or since his time. For "he had acquired great learning, and was blessed with a high fancy, a civil and sharp

wit, and with a natural elegance, both in his behaviour, his tongue, and his pen."

About this time the king frequently came to the university, and was usually welcomed with the applauses and gratulations of the public orator, who acquitted himself so well that he was taken into notice, and received some marks of royal approbation. In one of these visits to Cambridge his majesty was attended by the great secretary of nature and all learning, Sir Francis Bacon, (Lord Verulam,) and by the ever memorable and learned Dr. Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, both which did at that time begin a desired friendship with Mr. Herbert. Upon whom the first put such a value on his judgment, that he usually desired his approbation before he would expose any of his books to be printed; and thought him so worthy of his friendship, that having translated many of the prophet David's Psalms into English verse, he made George Herbert his patron, by a public dedication of them to him, as the best judge of divine poetry. And for the learned bishop, it is observable, that at that time there fell to be a modest debate betwixt them two about predestination, and sanctity of life; of both which the orator did, not long after, send the bishop some safe and useful aphorisms, in a long letter, written in Greek; which letter was so remarkable for the language and reason of it, that, after the reading it, the bishop put it into his bosom, and did often show it to many scholars, both of this and foreign nations; but did always return it back to the place where he first lodged it, and continued it so near his heart till the last day of his life.

To these I might add the long and entire friendship betwixt him and Sir Henry Wotton, and Dr. Donne; but I have promised to contract myself, and shall there-