

**GEORGE
WASHINGTON**

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George Washington by Ada Russell

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ADA RUSSELL

**GEORGE
WASHINGTON**

Heroes of All Time

GEORGE WASHINGTON

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BY

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'THE VICTORIA HISTORY OF THE COUNTIES OF ENGLAND'

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS



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Introduction

Our story, which is a little that of the United States as well as a short history of the life of George Washington, begins in the fifteenth century with the great ancestor, Columbus, and with the great fifteenth century movement which Columbus represented—the Renaissance.

'Renaissance,' as I suppose all of my readers will know, means literally, 'Re-birth,' and the rebirth which took place in Europe in the fifteenth century was the rebirth of civilisation after the centuries known to History as the 'Dark Ages' and the 'Middle Ages.' Our modern nations were all formed by tribes of barbarians who overran and destroyed the Roman Empire, although to all who came into contact with her, Rome gave traditions of arts and laws that they never wholly lost in their darkest days. Our barbarous ancestors absorbed all they could understand of her institutions and built up systems of law and government and religion, invented styles of architecture and painting that became truly decorative, and developed popular literatures that we still treasure.

What was chiefly lacking in this medieval civilisation, for it became a distinct and mature civilisation, was breadth and freedom, the grace and repose of the classical world, the liberty and freshness of a wide outlook. The stained-glass windows of the Gothic

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cathedral are the best type of the medieval mind—it shut out with figures of great beauty the free spaces of the universe. It sought to enclose the mind in narrow bounds, and it stifled original thought and discovery.

Another thing that came to an end with Rome was the idea of Democracy. The States of antiquity evolved an ideal of self-government that returned to the world with the Renaissance, although it did not begin to bear its full fruit until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Greece (from whom Rome had taken up the torch of civilisation) had created in Athens the perfect Democratic State, and her thinkers, Aristotle and Plato, wove political theories that all scientific revolutionaries have pondered over ever since the Renaissance. She set up for imitation the perfect Republic. Rome never in real fact possessed a perfect Republic, but after Cæsar overthrew her democratic institutions by crossing the Rubicon, she always looked back to them with a wistful reverence, and the heroic struggle of her aristocrats against Cæsar helped to create in the minds of men and bequeath to History a noble, ideal Rome, mother of freemen. This ideal Rome men were to find again at the Renaissance and it was to have an incalculable influence on all later political movements.

Politics, history, art, literature, geography, commerce, discovery, were all changed in scope and outlook by this movement, which ended the Middle Ages and started the modern world.

The means by which the great changes were worked were partly the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 and the consequent flight of