

**THE LIFE AND HEROIC
EXPLOITS OF ISRAEL
PUTNAM: MAJOR-GENERAL
IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

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The Life and Heroic Exploits of Israel Putnam: Major-General in the Revolutionary War by
David Humphreys

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DAVID HUMPHREYS

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THE
LIFE AND HEROIC EXPLOITS
OF
ISRAEL PUTNAM,

MAJOR-GENERAL IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

Illustrated with Plates, from original designs.

BY COLONEL DAVID HUMPHREYS,

Aid de-camp to General Washington, and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Spanish Court.



BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL.

HARTFORD:
SILAS ANDRUS AND SON.

1847.

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MEMOIRS
OF
MAJOR-GENERAL PUTNAM.

ISRAEL PUTNAM, who, through a regular gradation of promotion, became the senior Major-General in the army of the United States, and next in rank to General Washington, was born at Salem, Massachusetts, on the 7th day of January, 1718. His father, Captain Joseph Putnam, was the son of Mr. John Putnam, who, with two brothers, came from the south of England, and were among the first settlers of Salem.

When we thus behold a person, from the humble walks of life, starting unnoticed in the career of fame, and, by an undeviating progress through a life of honour, arriving at the highest dignity in the state, curiosity is strongly excited, and philosophy loves to trace the path of glory from the cradle of obscurity to the summit of elevation.

Although our ancestors, the first settlers of this land, amidst the extreme pressure of po-

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verty and danger, early instituted schools for the education of youth designed for the learned professions, yet it was thought sufficient to instruct those destined to labour on the earth, in reading, writing, and such rudiments of arithmetic as might be requisite for keeping the accounts of their little transactions with each other. Few farmers' sons had more advantages, none less. In this state of mediocrity it was the lot of young Putnam to be placed. His early instruction was not considerable, and the active scenes of life in which he was afterwards engaged, prevented the opportunity of great literary improvement. His numerous original letters, though deficient in scholastic accuracy, always display the goodness of his heart, and frequently the strength of his native genius. He had a certain laconic mode of expression, and an unaffected epigrammatic turn, which characterized most of his writings.

To compensate partially for the deficiency of education, though nothing can remove or counterbalance the inconveniences experienced from it in public life, he derived from his parents the source of innumerable advantages in the stamina of a vigorous constitution. Nature, liberal in bestowing on him bodily strength, hardiness, and activity, was by no means parsimonious in mental endowments. While we leave the qualities of the understanding to be developed in the process of life, it may not be improper, in this place, to designate some of the

circumstances which were calculated to distinguish him afterwards as a partisan officer.

Courage, enterprise, activity, and perseverance, were the first characteristics of his mind. There is a kind of mechanical courage, the offspring of pride, habit, or discipline, that may push a coward not only to perform his duty, but even to venture on acts of heroism. Putnam's courage was of a different species. It was ever attended with a serenity of soul, a clearness of conception, a degree of self-possession, and a superiority to all the vicissitudes of fortune, entirely distinct from any thing that can be produced by the ferment of blood, and flutter of spirits, which not unfrequently precipitate men to action, when stimulated by intoxication or some other transient exhilaration. The heroic character, thus founded on constitution and animal spirits, cherished by education and ideas of personal freedom, confirmed by temperance and habits of exercise, was completed by the dictate of reason, the love of his country, and an invincible sense of duty. Such were the qualities and principles that enabled him to meet unappalled the shafts of adversity, and to pass in triumph through the furnace of affliction.

His disposition was as frank and generous as his mind was fearless and independent. He disguised nothing; indeed he seemed incapable of disguise. Perhaps in the intercourse he was ultimately obliged to have with an artful world,

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PUTNAM CHASTISING A BOY AT BOSTON.—p. 6.

his sincerity, on some occasions, outwent his discretion. Although he had too much suavity in his nature to commence a quarrel, he had too much sensibility not to feel, and too much honour not to resent, an intended insult. The first time he went to Boston he was insulted for his rusticity by a boy of twice his size and age; after bearing the sarcasms until his patience was worn out, he challenged, engaged, and vanquished his unmannerly antagonist, to the great diversion of a crowd of spectators. While a stripling, his ambition was to perform the labour of a man, and to excel in athletic diversions. In that rude, but masculine age, whenever the village youth assembled on their usual occasions of festivity, pitching the bar, running,

leaping, and wrestling, were favourite amusements. At such gymnastic exercises, in which, during the heroic times of ancient Greece and Rome, conquest was considered as the promise of future military fame, he bore the palm from almost every ring.

Before the refinements of luxury, and the consequent increase of expenses, had rendered the maintenance of a family inconvenient or burdensome in America, the sexes entered into matrimony at an early age. Competence, attainable by all, was the limit of pursuit. After the hardships of making a new settlement were overcome, and the evils of penury removed, the inhabitants enjoyed, in the lot of equality, innocence, and security, scenes equally delightful with those pictured by the glowing imagination of the poets in their favourite pastoral life, or fabulous golden age. Indeed, the condition of mankind was never more enviable. Neither disparity of age and fortune, nor schemes of ambition and grandeur, nor the pride and avarice of high-minded and mercenary parents, interposed those obstacles to the union of congenial souls, which frequently in more polished society, prevent, embitter, or destroy all the felicity of the connubial state. Mr. Putnam, before he attained the twenty-first year of his age, married Miss Pope, daughter of Mr. John Pope, of Salem, by whom he had ten children. He lost the wife of his youth in 1764. Some time after he married Mrs. Gardiner, widow of the late Mr.