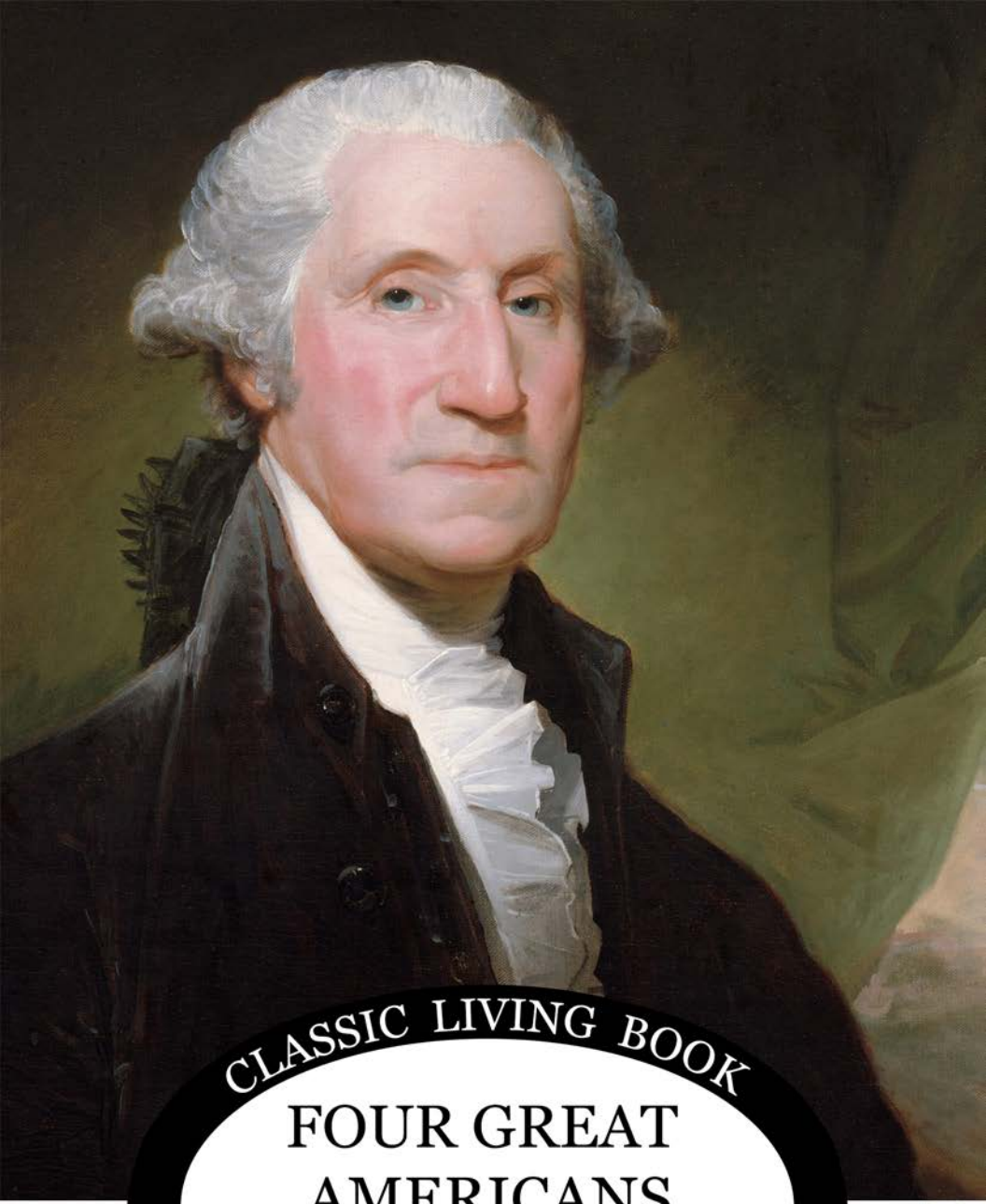

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

FOUR GREAT AMERICANS

James Baldwin

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

FOUR GREAT AMERICANS

JAMES BALDWIN

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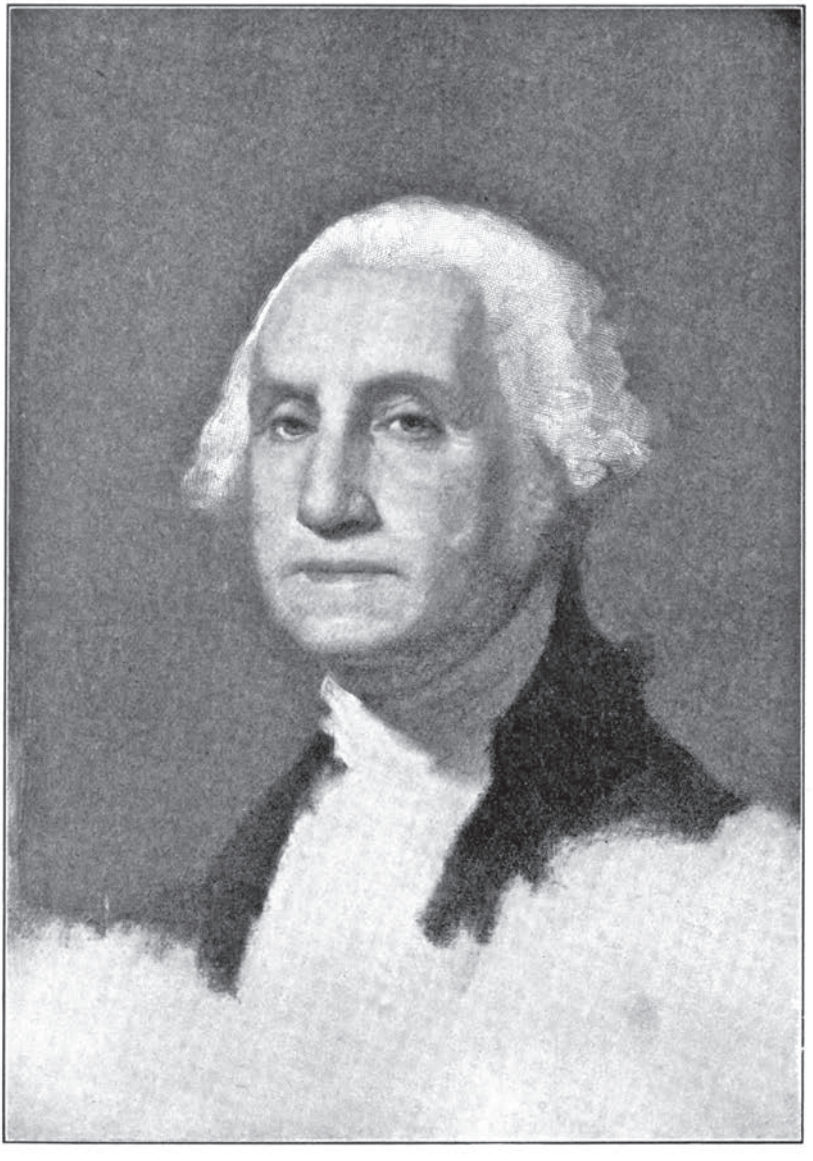

G. Washington

GEORGE WASHINGTON

I.—WHEN WASHINGTON WAS A BOY.

When George Washington was a boy there was no United States. The land was here, just as it is now, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific; but nearly all of it was wild and unknown.

Between the Atlantic Ocean and the Alleghany Mountains there were thirteen colonies, or great settlements. The most of the people who lived in these colonies were English people, or the children of English people; and so the King of England made their laws and appointed their governors.

The newest of the colonies was Georgia, which was settled the year after George Washington was born.

The oldest colony was Virginia, which had been settled one hundred and twenty-five years. It was also the richest colony, and more people were living in it than in any other.

There were only two or three towns in Virginia at that time, and they were quite small.

Most of the people lived on farms or on big plantations, where they raised whatever they needed to eat. They also raised tobacco, which they sent to England to be sold.

The farms, or plantations, were often far apart, with stretches of thick woods between them. Nearly every one was close to a river, or some other large body of water; for there are many rivers in Virginia.

There were no roads, such as we have nowadays, but only paths through the woods. When people wanted to travel from place to place, they had to go on foot, or on horseback, or in small boats.

A few of the rich men who lived on the big plantations had coaches; and now and then they would drive out in grand style behind four or six horses, with a fine array of servants and outriders following them. But they could not drive far where there were no roads, and we can hardly understand how they got any pleasure out of it.

Nearly all the work on the plantations was done by slaves. Ships had been bringing negroes from Africa for more than a hundred years, and now nearly half the people in Virginia were blacks.

Very often, also, poor white men from England were sold as slaves for a few years in order to pay for their passage across the ocean. When their freedom was given to them they continued to work at whatever they could find to do; or they cleared small farms in the woods for themselves, or went farther to the west and became woodsmen and hunters.

There was but very little money in Virginia at that time, and, indeed, there was not much use for it. For what could be done with money where there were no shops worth speaking of, and no stores, and nothing to buy?

The common people raised flax and wool, and wove their own cloth; and they made their own tools and furniture. The rich people did the same; but for their better or finer goods they sent to England.

For you must know that in all this country there were no great mills for spinning and weaving as there are now; there were no factories of any kind; there were

no foundries where iron could be melted and shaped into all kinds of useful and beautiful things.

When George Washington was a boy the world was not much like it is now.

II.—HIS HOMES.

George Washington's father owned a large plantation on the western shore of the Potomac River. George's great-grandfather, John Washington, had settled upon it nearly eighty years before, and there the family had dwelt ever since.

This plantation was in Westmoreland county, not quite forty miles above the place where the Potomac flows into Chesapeake Bay. By looking at your map of Virginia, you will see that the river is very broad there.

On one side of the plantation, and flowing through it, there was a creek, called Bridge's Creek; and for this reason the place was known as the Bridge's Creek Plantation.

It was here, on the 22d of February, 1732, that George Washington was born.

Although his father was a rich man, the house in which he lived was neither very large nor very fine—at least it would not be thought so now.

It was a square, wooden building, with four rooms on the ground floor and an attic above.

The eaves were low, and the roof was long and sloping. At each end of the house there was a huge chimney; and inside were big fireplaces, one for the kitchen and one for the "great room" where visitors were received.

But George did not live long in this house. When he was about three years old his father removed to another plantation which he owned, near Hunting Creek, several miles farther up the river. This new plantation was at

first known as the Washington Plantation, but it is now called Mount Vernon.

Four years after this the house of the Washingtons was burned down. But Mr. Washington had still other lands on the Rappahannock River. He had also an interest in some iron mines that were being opened there. And so to this place the family was now taken.

The house by the Rappahannock was very much like the one at Bridge's Creek. It stood on high ground, overlooking the river and some low meadows; and on the other side of the river was the village of Fredericksburg, which at that time was a very small village, indeed.

George was now about seven years old.

III.—HIS SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLMASTERS.

There were no good schools in Virginia at that time. In fact, the people did not care much about learning.

There were few educated men besides the parsons, and even some of the parsons were very ignorant.

It was the custom of some of the richest families to send their eldest sons to England to the great schools there. But it is doubtful if these young men learned much about books.

They spent a winter or two in the gay society of London, and were taught the manners of gentlemen—and that was about all.

George Washington's father, when a young man, had spent some time at Appleby School in England, and George's half-brothers, Lawrence and Augustine, who were several years older than he, had been sent to the same school.

But book-learning was not thought to be of much use. To know how to manage the business of a plantation, to

be polite to one's equals, to be a leader in the affairs of the colony—this was thought to be the best education.

And so, for most of the young men, it was enough if they could read and write a little and keep a few simple accounts. As for the girls, the parson might give them a few lessons now and then; and if they learned good manners and could write letters to their friends, what more could they need?

George Washington's first teacher was a poor sexton, whose name was Mr. Hobby. There is a story that he had been too poor to pay his passage from England, and that he had, therefore, been sold to Mr. Washington as a slave for a short time; but how true this is, I cannot say.

From Mr. Hobby, George learned to spell easy words, and perhaps to write a little; but, although he afterward became a very careful and good penman, he was a poor speller as long as he lived.

When George was about eleven years old his father died. We do not know what his father's intentions had been regarding him. But possibly, if he had lived, he would have given George the best education that his means would afford.

But now everything was changed. The plantation at Hunting Creek, and, indeed, almost all the rest of Mr. Washington's great estate, became the property of the eldest son, Lawrence.

George was sent to Bridge's Creek to live for a while with his brother Augustine, who now owned the old home plantation there. The mother and the younger children remained on the Rappahannock farm.

While at Bridge's Creek, George was sent to school to a Mr. Williams, who had lately come from England.

There are still to be seen some exercises which the

lad wrote at that time. There is also a little book, called *The Young Man's Companion*, from which he copied, with great care, a set of rules for good behavior and right living.

Not many boys twelve years old would care for such a book nowadays. But you must know that in those days there were no books for children, and, indeed, very few for older people.

The maxims and wise sayings which George copied were, no doubt, very interesting to him—so interesting that many of them were never forgotten.

There are many other things also in this *Young Man's Companion*, and we have reason to believe that George studied them all.

There are short chapters on arithmetic and surveying, rules for the measuring of land and lumber, and a set of forms for notes, deeds, and other legal documents. A knowledge of these things was, doubtless, of greater importance to him than the reading of many books would have been.

Just what else George may have studied in Mr. Williams's school I cannot say. But all this time he was growing to be a stout, manly boy, tall and strong, and well-behaved. And both his brothers and himself were beginning to think of what he should do when he should become a man.

IV.—GOING TO SEA.

Once every summer a ship came up the river to the plantation, and was moored near the shore.

It had come across the sea from far-away England, and it brought many things for those who were rich enough to pay for them.

It brought bonnets and pretty dresses for George's mother and sisters; it brought perhaps a hat and a tailor-made suit for himself; it brought tools and furniture, and once a yellow coach that had been made in London, for his brother.

When all these things had been taken ashore, the ship would hoist her sails and go on, farther up the river, to leave goods at other plantations.

In a few weeks it would come back and be moored again at the same place.

Then there was a busy time on shore. The tobacco that had been raised during the last year must be carried on shipboard to be taken to the great tobacco markets in England.

The slaves on the plantation were running back and forth, rolling barrels and carrying bales of tobacco down to the landing.

Letters were written to friends in England, and orders were made out for the goods that were to be brought back next year.

But in a day or two, all this stir was over. The sails were again spread, and the ship glided away on its long voyage across the sea.

George had seen this ship coming and going every year since he could remember. He must have thought how pleasant it would be to sail away to foreign lands and see the many wonderful things that are there.

And then, like many another active boy, he began to grow tired of the quiet life on the farm, and wish that he might be a sailor.

He was now about fourteen years old. Since the death of his father, his mother had found it hard work, with her five children, to manage her farm on the Rappahannock

and make everything come out even at the end of each year. Was it not time that George should be earning something for himself? But what should he do?

He wanted to go to sea. His brother Lawrence, and even his mother, thought that this might be the best thing.

A bright boy like George would not long be a common sailor. He would soon make his way to a high place in the king's navy. So, at least, his friends believed.

And so the matter was at last settled. A sea-captain who was known to the family, agreed to take George with him. He was to sail in a short time.

The day came. His mother, his brothers, his sisters, were all there to bid him good-bye. But in the meanwhile a letter had come to his mother, from his uncle who lived in England.

"If you care for the boy's future," said the letter, "do not let him go to sea. Places in the king's navy are not easy to obtain. If he begins as a sailor, he will never be aught else."

The letter convinced George's mother—it half convinced his brothers—that this going to sea would be a sad mistake. But George, like other boys of his age, was headstrong. He would not listen to reason. A sailor he would be.

The ship was in the river waiting for him. A boat had come to the landing to take him on board.

The little chest which held his clothing had been carried down to the bank. George was in high glee at the thought of going.

"Good-bye, mother," he said.

He stood on the doorstep and looked back into the house. He saw the kind faces of those whom he loved. He began to feel very sad at the thought of leaving them.

"Good-bye, George!"

He saw the tears welling up in his mother's eyes. He saw them rolling down her cheeks. He knew now that she did not want him to go. He could not bear to see her grief.

"Mother, I have changed my mind," he said. "I will not be a sailor. I will not leave you."

Then he turned to the black boy who was waiting by the door, and said, "Run down to the landing and tell them not to put the chest on board. Tell them that I have thought differently of the matter and that I am going to stay at home."

If George had not changed his mind, but had really gone to sea, how very different the history of this country would have been!

He now went to his studies with a better will than before; and although he read but few books he learned much that was useful to him in life. He studied surveying with especial care, and made himself as thorough in that branch of knowledge as it was possible to do with so few advantages.

V.—THE YOUNG SURVEYOR.

Lawrence Washington was about fourteen years older than his brother George.

As I have already said, he had been to England and had spent sometime at Appleby school. He had served in the king's army for a little while, and had been with Admiral Vernon's squadron in the West Indies.

He had formed so great a liking for the admiral that when he came home he changed the name of his plantation at Hunting Creek, and called it Mount Vernon—a name by which it is still known.

Not far from Mount Vernon there was another fine plantation called Belvoir, that was owned by William Fairfax, an English gentleman of much wealth and influence.

Now this Mr. Fairfax had a young daughter, as wise as she was beautiful; and so, what should Lawrence Washington do but ask her to be his wife? He built a large house at Mount Vernon with a great porch fronting on the Potomac; and when Miss Fairfax became Mrs. Washington and went into this home as its mistress, people said that there was not a handsomer or happier young couple in all Virginia.

After young George Washington had changed his mind about going to sea, he went up to Mount Vernon to live with his elder brother. For Lawrence had great love for the boy, and treated him as his father would have done.

At Mount Vernon George kept on with his studies in surveying. He had a compass and surveyor's chain, and hardly a day passed that he was not out on the plantation, running lines and measuring his brother's fields.

Sometimes when he was busy at this kind of work, a tall, white-haired gentleman would come over from Belvoir to see what he was doing and to talk with him. This gentleman was Sir Thomas Fairfax, a cousin of the owner of Belvoir. He was sixty years old, and had lately come from England to look after his lands in Virginia; for he was the owner of many thousands of acres among the mountains and in the wild woods.

Sir Thomas was a courtly old gentleman, and he had seen much of the world. He was a fine scholar; he had been a soldier, and then a man of letters; and he belonged to a rich and noble family.

It was not long until he and George were the best of

friends. Often they would spend the morning together, talking or surveying; and in the afternoon they would ride out with servants and hounds, hunting foxes and making fine sport of it among the woods and hills.

And when Sir Thomas Fairfax saw how manly and brave his young friend was, and how very exact and careful in all that he did, he said: "Here is a boy who gives promise of great things. I can trust him."

Before the winter was over he had made a bargain with George to survey his lands that lay beyond the Blue Ridge mountains.

I have already told you that at this time nearly all the country west of the mountains was a wild and unknown region. In fact, all the western part of Virginia was an unbroken wilderness, with only here and there a hunter's camp or the solitary hut of some daring woodsman.

But Sir Thomas hoped that by having the land surveyed, and some part of it laid out into farms, people might be persuaded to go there and settle. And who in all the colony could do this work better than his young friend, George Washington?

It was a bright day in March, 1748, when George started out on his first trip across the mountains. His only company was a young son of William Fairfax of Belvoir.

The two friends were mounted on good horses; and both had guns, for there was fine hunting in the woods. It was nearly a hundred miles to the mountain-gap through which they passed into the country beyond. As there were no roads, but only paths through the forest, they could not travel very fast.

After several days they reached the beautiful valley of the Shenandoah. They now began their surveying. They went up the river for some distance; then they

crossed and went down on the other side. At last they reached the Potomac River, near where Harper's Ferry now stands.

At night they slept sometimes by a camp-fire in the woods, and sometimes in the rude hut of a settler or a hunter. They were often wet and cold. They cooked their meat by broiling it on sticks above the coals. They ate without dishes, and drank water from the running streams.

One day they met a party of Indians, the first red men they had seen. There were thirty of them, with their bodies painted in true savage style; for they were just going home from a war with some other tribe.

The Indians were very friendly to the young surveyors. It was evening, and they built a huge fire under the trees. Then they danced their war-dance around it, and sang and yelled and made hideous sport until far in the night.

To George and his friend it was a strange sight; but they were brave young men, and not likely to be afraid even though the danger had been greater.

They had many other adventures in the woods of which I cannot tell you in this little book—shooting wild game, swimming rivers, climbing mountains. But about the middle of April they returned in safety to Mount Vernon.

It would seem that the object of this first trip was to get a general knowledge of the extent of Sir Thomas Fairfax's great woodland estate—to learn where the richest bottom lands lay, and where were the best hunting-grounds.

The young men had not done much if any real surveying; they had been exploring.

George Washington had written an account of everything in a little note-book which he carried with him.

Sir Thomas was so highly pleased with the report which the young men brought back that he made up his mind to move across the Blue Ridge and spend the rest of his life on his own lands.

And so, that very summer, he built in the midst of the great woods a hunting lodge which he called Greenway Court. It was a large, square house, with broad gables and a long roof sloping almost to the ground.

When he moved into this lodge he expected soon to build a splendid mansion and make a grand home there, like the homes he had known in England. But time passed, and as the lodge was roomy and comfortable, he still lived in it and put off beginning another house.

Washington was now seventeen years old. Through the influence of Sir Thomas Fairfax he was appointed public surveyor; and nothing would do but that he must spend the most of his time at Greenway Court and keep on with the work that he had begun.

For the greater part of three years he worked in the woods and among the mountains, surveying Sir Thomas's lands. And Sir Thomas paid him well—a doubloon ($8.24) for each day, and more than that if the work was very hard.

But there were times when the young surveyor did not go out to work, but stayed at Greenway Court with his good friend, Sir Thomas. The old gentleman had something of a library, and on days when they could neither work nor hunt, George spent the time in reading. He read the *Spectator* and a history of England, and possibly some other works.

And so it came about that the three years which young Washington spent in surveying were of much profit to him.