



*A TRUE COLONIAL DAME

By Mrs. Burton Harrison

STRANGELY enough—for she lived both in England and in America at a time when every dame and damsel of fortune and degree was limned for her family's benefit—not so much as a little black silhouette of Sally Cary has been handed down in the family in which she was a collateral ancestress; and she left no child to preserve the personal relics that would have been so interesting now. But we know that she was accounted a rare beauty; and, whether through nursery tradition or what not, I have always had a distinct idea that, in her heyday, Sally's coloring was of the warm auburn tint, eyes matching the hair, skin milk-white with a stain of crimson on either cheek, the mouth a Cupid's bow disposed to mocking merriment. That she was sweet-tempered, as well as witty and high-spirited, we have had attestation in abundance; and as one of four petted daughters of a wealthy Colonial magnate—who had been educated at Cambridge University in England, owned two fine houses and plantations on the lower James River, and imported every year from the mother country his books, and his girls' *falbalas* and musical instruments—she had the best culture possible in her time. Like most young women of that date she married very early, but not before she had enjoyed a measure of the maiden belleship that has always seemed an inalienable right of the Virginia sisterhood. That is a pretty story they tell of her, returning belated and overtaken by dusk into Williamsburg, when the town was under military rule, accompanied only by her negro maid-servant, and much taken aback when challenged by a sentry demanding the password for the day. Blushing, yet imperious, she stamped her little foot and said, "But I am Miss Sally Cary." "Pass," said the sentinel, and the young lady was made thus aware of the gallantry of an officer who had selected her name as the *mot du guet* for the protection of the garrison.

THE suitor, finally rewarded by Miss Cary with her hand, was George William Fairfax, eldest son of a Yorkshire gentleman who, after years of roving and of fighting for his King in Europe, had come to Virginia to found a home and a line at Belvoir plantation on the Potomac, and whose daughter Anne had married their neighbor, Lawrence Washington, of Mount Vernon.

Before Mistress Sally brought her youth and animation to Belvoir that hospitable home had already become the favorite resort of George Washington. From the lips of the old campaigner, its master, he had eagerly received lessons in the art of war; with its girls and boys he had sported in doors and out, and, from them and their guests assembled for the Belvoir house parties, he had picked up all sorts of prevailing notions about dress and fashion and deportment. For, as to this period of Washington's life, have we not the witness of a memorandum in his own handwriting, "To have my coat made by the following directions: To be made a frock with a lapel breast; the lapel to contain on each side six buttonholes, and to be about five or six inches wide all the way, equal, and to turn as the breast or the coat does; to have it made very long-waisted, and in length to come down to or below the bent of the knee; the waist from the armpit to the fold to be exactly as long or longer than from thence to the bottom; not to have more than one fold in the skirt, and the top to be made just to turn in, and three buttonholes; the lapel at the top to turn as the cape of the coat, and bottom to come parallel with the buttonholes; the last buttonhole in the breast to be right opposite to the button on the hip?" Then it was, also, that Washington compiled his quaint and dreary code of "Rules for Behavior in Company, and Conversation," which, pompous as they now seem, might yet be of service to many a modern youth, could he be induced to bestow on them perusal.

THE friendships so formed were destined to exercise upon the life of Washington varied and potent influences, while the household of Belvoir was to see the homely and bashful youth—whom they had at first made welcome among them for his brother Lawrence's sake, then through genuine respect for the power of his personality—develop step by step into the brilliant young soldier, the General to whom all eyes turned as the savior of his country's liberties, and the foremost citizen of our Republic in all time.

From the numerous and lengthy letters passing between the families of Mount Vernon and Belvoir whenever a separation warranted correspondence, a few excerpts may prove of interest here, especially in helping to establish a better understanding of events that were to follow. The time was that of the French-Indian War, and, after a season of busy musterings and gay reviews at Alexandria, the troops had marched away to Maryland, whither Washington had followed, as a member of his military family, to join General Braddock at Will's Creek. From Mistress Sally, of Belvoir, and her merry chum, Mistress Ann Spearing, had proceeded a protest, addressed to Washington, but calling to account the handsome, moody English General, his chief, for preference bestowed upon a rival belle. In his answer we first see Washington as a maker of pretty phrases for the insistent fair.

"Fort Cumberland, 14 May, 1755.

"TO MRS. FAIRFAX

"Dear Madam:

"I have, at last, with great pains and difficulty discovered the reason why Mrs. Wardrobe is a greater favorite of Genl. Braddock than Mrs. F—x, and met with more respect at the review at Alexandria. The cause I shall communicate, after having rallied you upon neglecting the means which produced the effect. And what do you think they were? Why, nothing less, I assure you than a present of delicious cake and potted woodcocks! which so affected the palate as to leave a deep impression upon the hearts of all who tasted of them. How then could the General do otherwise than admire not only the charms but the politeness of this lady!

"We have a favourable prospect of halting here three weeks or a month longer, for waggons, horses and forage: it is easy

to conceive therefore that my situation will not be very pleasant and agreeable, when I dreaded this (before I came out) more than all the other incidents which might happen during the campaign. * * *

A week later the chafing soldier writes thus to his brother "Jack," who has taken up his abode at Mount Vernon during its owner's absence:

"I should be glad to hear that you live in perfect harmony and good fellowship with the family at Belvoir, as it is in their power to be very serviceable upon many occasions to us, as young beginners. I would advise your visiting there often, as one step towards it; the rest, if any more is necessary, your own good sense will sufficiently dictate—for to that family I am under many obligations, particularly to the old gentleman.

"Mrs. Fairfax and Mrs. Spearing having expressed a wish to be informed of the time and manner of my reaching this place (with my charge), you may acquaint them that I met with no other interruption than what proceeded from the difficulty of getting horses. After Mrs. F—x's grew lame, I was obliged to get a fresh one every 15 or 20 miles, which rendered the journey tedious. * * *

ON June 7 he wrote again from Fort Cumberland to Mrs. Fairfax at Belvoir:

"When I had the pleasure to see you last, you expressed a wish to be informed of my safe arrival at Camp with the charge that was entrusted to my care, but at the same time requested that it might be communicated in a letter to some friend of yours. Am I to consider this proposed mode of communication as a polite intimation of your wishes to withdraw your correspondence? To a certain degree it has that appearance; for I have not been honored with a line from you since I parted with you at Belvoir. If this was your object, in what manner shall I apologize for my present disobedience? But, on the contrary, if it was the effect of your delicacy, how easy it is to remove my suspicions, enliven dull hours, and make me happier than I am able to express, by honoring me with the correspondence you had given me the hope of."

On the ninth of the following month (July) occurred the engagement with the French at Monongahela, from which Washington, with four bullets through his coat, and two horses shot under him, emerged in safety, as by a miracle. The tidings of the disaster and of his own brilliant share in the battle having preceded him, he returned home, reaching Mount Vernon on the twenty-sixth of July, weary and spent with illness contracted from exposure. The same day his affectionate old neighbor, and mentor in the art of war, Colonel William Fairfax, of Belvoir, pens him the following letter, sent by hasty messenger to Mount Vernon:

"Your safe return gives an uncommon joy to us, and will no doubt be sympathized by all lovers of Heroick Virtue. From our first inexpressible affecting intelligence by Colo. Innes, of the total defeat of our forces, Genl. Braddock and many officers kill'd, the whole artillery taken, we have been in torturing suspense, each one for their best belov'd. Now you are by a kind Providence preserved and returned to us, we can say the Catastrophe might have been worse. You kindly invite us over, rightly judging our curiosity wants to be informed of some particulars yet unacquainted with, and if a Saterdag Nights Rest cannot be sufficient to enable your coming here tomorrow, the Ladys will try to get horses to equip our Chair, or attempt their strength on Foot to salute you, so desirous are they with loving Speed to have an ocular Demonstration of your being the same identical gent'n that lately departed to defend his Country's Cause. * * *

"Yours affectly

"WILLIAM FAIRFAX."

ON the same sheet with this time-worn letter, here for the first time published, is inscribed in delicate feminine touches a coquettish postscript from the "Ladys" above alluded to, *viz.*: Young Madam Sally, whose lord is absent on patriotic affairs at Winchester, and her familiars, Madam Ann Spearing and Miss Elizabeth Dent. Let us judge for ourselves of its effect upon the young warrior who received it!

"Dear Sir:

"After thanking Heaven for your safe return, I must accuse you of great unkindness in refusing us the pleasure of seeing you this night. I do assure you nothing but our being satisfied that our Company would be disagreeable should prevent us from trying if our legs would not carry us to Mount Vernon this night; but if you will not come to us, tomorrow morning, very early, we shall be at Mount Vernon.

(Signed) "S. FAIRFAX
"ANN SPEARING
"ELIZ' TH DENT."

This quotation gives us the nearest approximate date when his half-sentimental fancy for a gracious and fun-loving young woman could have taken serious hold of Washington's imagination. The circumstances speak for themselves. To her he was for the moment a hero upon whom to lavish the laurels women rejoice to bestow. To him she was sympathy incarnate, a balm for his wounded spirit, an inspiration to take up again the arms he had laid down, to follow the career for which he was pre-eminently destined.

APPARENTLY, so riddled by the shafts of the little god of love had been the heart of Washington, the boy, that it is hard to know how, after his sighs for the "Lowland Beauty," and his repeated addresses to Miss Betsey Fauntelroy, and his later sensibility to the charms of "the very agreeable young lady," afterward Mrs. Ambler, the passion for a woman who never might be his could have dominated him as it did for some years after this incident. But from the evidence of his own letters the love he had felt for the others was as water unto wine beside the hopeless attachment for his beautiful neighbor, that during this period threatened to assume "sovereign control" of his ardent nature. Fortunately, thanks to time, to the lady's subsequent absence in England with her husband, and, above all, because it was made subject to his own indomitable will, the feeling was subdued, and his marriage with Mrs. Custis ended the episode happily.

The proofs are the enduring intimacy and confidence that existed between Washington, his wife, and every member of the Belvoir family during their respective lives. They may be read by any student of the writings of Washington, and will carry conviction in each line.

SARAH FAIRFAX, who was at last called to reside permanently in England because of her husband's inheritance of a family estate in Yorkshire, survived to a great age, and to the end was a woman of great distinction of person and of vigorous mentality. To her husband, an amiable and accomplished gentleman, who died some years before her (had he survived a year or two longer he would have succeeded to the title and

* Sally Cary, referred to by General A. W. Greely in "The Personal Side of Washington," pages 3 and 4 of this issue.

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dignities of his cousin, Robert, seventh Lord Fairfax); she was devoted and helpful, as her strong nature inspired her to be; and their married life was entirely happy and congenial.

A FEW years ago I visited the house in Lansdowne Crescent, Bath, to which this couple removed from Yorkshire for the benefit of the waters of the famous old spa, where he died, and which she continued to inhabit until her own death in 1811. The dwelling is one of a row in a sickle-shaped street high on the hill above the quaint old city, and from it one looks down upon the lovely old Abbey and the silver Avon far below. Its near neighbors are the twin houses connected at their second stories by a covered bridge, where once lived Beckford, the brilliant, eccentric author of "Vathek." In Lansdowne Crescent the smooth-worn pavements, the old brick houses, the wrought-iron railings and link extinguishers, the little gardens still well kept, speak eloquently of the aristocratic past of England's favorite watering-place. One can understand why it was the chosen retreat of many another like Sally Fairfax, who went there to pass the placid evening of her protracted days.

Under the escort of a little maid with pink ribbons in her cap I went over the house, some of whose former furnishings I had been familiar with in childhood in Virginia.

MISTRESS SARAH, and her husband, "the Honorable George," sleep in a vault sealed with their armorial bearings, at Writhlington Church, ten miles out of Bath. She was buried there with a pomp befitting a wealthy widow of her condition, and the bills for the pageant, the like of which was unheard of in quiet Virginia, drifted over the sea to be conned with wonder by her heirs. These bills, indeed, rendered to her executors, are pretty much all that now remains of the imperious young beauty who swayed the pulses of George Washington as no other woman ever did.

Sitting once in the little "breakfast parlour" of the house in Lansdowne Crescent, two letters were handed to Mrs. Fairfax, both dated at Mount Vernon, May 16, 1798. One of them, from Martha Washington, contained this sentence:

"I assure you that although many years have elapsed since I have either received or written one [a letter] to you, my affectionate regard has undergone no diminution, and it is among my greatest regrets now I am again fixed (I hope for life) at this place, at not having you as a neighbor and a companion."

THE other letter, as long, as full, as kind, was written by Washington himself.

"*My Dear Madam:* [it ran]

"Five and twenty years have nearly passed away, since I have considered myself as the permanent resident at this place, or have been in a situation to indulge myself in a familiar intercourse with my friends by letter or otherwise.

"During this period, so many important events have occurred, and such changes in men and things have taken place, as the compass of a letter would give you but an inadequate idea of. None of which events, however, nor all of them together have been able to eradicate from my mind the recollection of those happy moments, the happiest of my life, which I enjoyed in your company."

Here (no doubt) the letter dropped from her hand, and the lady fell to musing. Then (perhaps) she was interrupted by the maid coming in with her calash and the reminder that it was time to go and drink the waters. And that, of course, made her remember that she was only a wrinkled old woman with the gout, while his glory filled the world. And so, with a sigh, she went on to read what he had to say about politics and crops, and the future of the new city of Washington.