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ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, AND HIS PORTRAITS OF THE WASHINGTONS.

BORN, 1765; DIED, 1835.



PROBABLY the career of no one among the pioneers of American art is so little known to the present generation as that of Archibald Robertson. Yet in the beginning of this century no name was more familiar to New Yorkers than his. This is the first comprehensive sketch of his life that has been made since Dunlap, years ago, wrote of his friend in eulogistic terms. The present article is founded upon original manuscripts in the possession of Robertson's youngest and only surviving son.

AMONG the remarkable phenomena in the physical geography of Scotland are the numerous conical-shaped hills and mountains, generally insulated and often of dizzy height, that are found in the low countries and almost level plains as well as in the mountainous regions. One of the best known is North Berwick Law, situated on the mainland on the south entrance to the Firth of Forth, and terminating the vista seen down the length of the King street of Edinburgh. On the west side of Scotland, and on the same parallel of latitude, the island of Ailsa, washed at its base by the tides of the Firth of Clyde, lifts its craggy apex to the clouds. Many others might be mentioned, such as the Rock of Dumbarton, Arthur's Seat, etc.

About thirty miles west of Aberdeen, and two miles south of the river Dee, is a conical mountain called Clokh-na-Bain, from a large rock on its northern brow. Some distance beyond this stony-crested mount stands Ben-akhise, a more gigantic cone. These two mountains not only are celebrated landmarks on shore, but are useful to those mariners who frequent the German Ocean.

One of the most beautiful and regular of these conical eminences, which, although not as high, is far more interesting, lies nearly in the center of a line drawn due north and south between Clokh-na-Bain and Ben-akhise. This is the Mount of Danes-Dykes, so termed from the remains of the Danish camp on its summit.

On the west of Drumnahoy a semicircle formed of Grampians makes a complete amphitheater, sweeping from the mountain at the base of which lies Paradise on the Don to Blackhall on the Dee. Northward, on the bank of the river Don, once stood the castellated mansion of Monymusk in the midst of its parks and plantations, its neighboring village, its wildernesses, and its highly cultivated gardens. Scattered within a radius of a few miles were castles Fraser and Cluny (there pronounced Cleeny) and the house of the Earl of Fife. Thus we have the topography of Kinarney, the homestead of the maternal grandfather of Archibald Robertson; of Drumnahoy, that of his paternal ancestors; and of Monymusk, the estate of Sir Archibald Grant, to whom he was indebted for his name.

Amid these historic surroundings was born in the village of Monymusk, Aberdeenshire, on the 8th of May, 1765, the subject of this sketch.

Archibald Robertson was a lineal descendant of Baron Alexander Robertson, Viscount Struan or Strowan. This nobleman through a long life actively supported the Jacobite cause. History records that four days after the remarkable battle of Killiecrankie the clan of Robertsons were fallen upon by the enemy, who killed 120 and took 30 prisoners, with the loss of but one soldier. Alexander escaped to

France; his Scottish estates were confiscated; but on the accession of Queen Anne a pardon was granted to him on condition that he swear fealty and disperse his clan. As the opposition had already practically disposed of the latter, the Highland chief readily accepted the terms. He returned to his birthplace, and passed his leisure hours in writing a volume of political pasquils. Macaulay condemns these poems as "very stupid, and often very profligate." However, they acquired a high degree of notice at the time, and are now numbered among the literary curiosities of that period. A contemporary writer speaks of the author as "a considerable man among the Highlanders, a man of excellent sense, and every way a complete gentleman."¹

The descendants of the baron inherited his literary tastes and many of his prominent personal characteristics. From father to son they received a fair smattering of letters, principally at the University of St. Andrews.

Robertson's parents removed when he was a child to Aberdeen, where he obtained an excellent education at King's College. In early youth he manifested a decided preference for the fine arts. His first preceptor was a deaf mute, a pupil of the celebrated Braidwood, who was one of the first to teach the dumb to speak. This afflicted gentleman had considerable talent, and had acquired perhaps as much knowledge as though in full possession of his lost senses. His manner of tuition was to give a model to his pupil to do what he could with it, and where faults were made he corrected them without explanation. The boy, having no defined rules, after some time passed in this manner found himself just where he began. The absurdity of this mechanical method left an indelible impression on Archibald's mind. When in after life he himself became a professor, he invariably explained the principles on which every point was formed, and to this incident he attributed his success as an instructor.

In 1782 he went to Edinburgh, where he remained several years studying the art of painting. His associates were Henry Raeburn, Walter Weir, and George Watson. There was then no Academy of Fine Arts in Edinburgh, and these young painters formed themselves into a class for mutual improvement. In 1784 or 1785 Robertson returned to Aberdeen on account of his health, and there completed his academic studies. It was at this time that he painted a small miniature of his father—the earliest production of his brush that has been preserved. The Scotch characteristics are strongly depicted on the countenance.

¹ *Vide* Chambers, "Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen."

In 1786 he went to London to study at the Royal Academy, and there formed his taste upon the best models of ancient and modern art. It was during his residence in this city that he was introduced to Sir Joshua Reynolds by Sir William Chambers, the architect. Robertson was at once admitted into the artist's studio as a pupil. An exquisite miniature of the master is the result of this experience. It imitates the more youthful portrait of Sir Joshua, by himself, in the possession of the Northcote family, in London. Reynolds is arrayed in his scarlet cloak of Doctor of Laws. A century has passed since the colors were laid, yet to-day they are as bright as any modern production. This is believed to be the only miniature of Sir Joshua in existence. It is owned by Robertson's granddaughter, Mrs. J. Warren Goddard, of New York.

Robertson has left the following description of the great founder of the English school of painting:

He [Sir Joshua] was in stature rather under the middle size, of a florid complexion, and a lively and pleasing aspect, well made and extremely active. His appearance at first sight impressed the spectator with the idea of a well-born and well-bred English gentleman, with an uncommon equability of temper, which, however, never degenerated into insipidity or apathy. He possessed a constant flow of spirits, which rendered him at all times the most pleasing companion; always cheerful, and ready to be amused with whatever was going forward, and, from an ardent thirst of knowledge, anxious to obtain information on every subject that was presented to his mind. In conversation his manner was perfectly natural, simple, and unassuming. If it should be asked, amidst so many excellent and amiable qualities, were there no failings, I wish to answer the inquiry in the words of Mr. Burke: "I do not know a fault or a weakness of his that he did not convert into something that bordered on a virtue, instead of pushing it to the confines of vice."

Robertson also profited by lessons from Benjamin West. To such an extent did he apply himself to the cultivation of his natural talent that before he was thirty years of age he was known in the Court of St. James under the appellation of "The Reynolds of Scotland." A series of original paintings from Ossian, produced at this period of his career, received royal commendation.

No biography of Robertson would be complete without mention of the intimacy existing between his own family and that of the Grants. For generations the two households had lived in close proximity, and a similarity of tastes and congenial ages had fostered a spirit of genuine affection. Sir Archibald Grant represented the lords, lairds, and other freeholders of Aberdeenshire in Parliament



NEIL GOW, A SCOTCH FIDDLER. (PAINTED ON IVORY BY ANDREW ROBERTSON, ABOUT 1780.)

for a period of thirty years, in the reigns of the first three Georges and during the ministries of Walpole, Chatham, and Bute. He married the rich widow of Andrew Miller, the famous bookseller, and his only son, afterwards Sir Archibald II., as he was called, married the still richer daughter. It was the father whom Foote, the actor, turned into ridicule as *Sir Archy McSarcasm* in Macklin's play "The Man of the World."

When the Robertsons removed to Aberdeen the friends took turns in periodical visits to each other's homes. At the mansion of Monymusk Archibald spent every summer from the age of fifteen years until he sailed for the New World, in 1791. He has left a water-color of this country-seat, together with the following account of the supervision of the neighborhood, which suggests a veritable Utopia:

"Sir Archibald allowed no suffering poor in the parish or on the estate of Monymusk; the landlord, his family, and steward took care to prevent that. There was no lawyer but Mr. Young, the factor, whose sole business was to draw leases and collect the rents. Sir Archibald took care to have always a respectable

minister in the kirk of the parish, a learned dominie in the schoolhouse, and a skilled physician to aid the sick. In short, the whole parish—that is, the estate of Monymusk—was one large family, under the paternal inspection and guidance of a wise, good, and benevolent friend. They might have heard of knavery, thievery, and worse crimes in other parts of the world, but they knew nothing about them amongst themselves." The writer naively adds, "They were totally ignorant of the nature and uses of police officers."

After his London success Robertson returned to practice his profession at his native home. There, while in the extensive exercise of his art, he was "invited by the venerable Dr. Gordon, of King's College, Old Aberdeen, at the request of Dr. Kemp, of Columbia College, New York, at the particular solicitation of Chancellor Livingston and the venerable Dr. Samuel Bard, to cross the Atlantic to New York."¹ He was reluctant at first even to consider the proposition. The United States rose to his imagination as the home of a semi-civilized race. This feeling was accentuated by a

¹ Robertson's personal account.

conversation held with a lady whose husband had been taken prisoner by Burgoyne. She had just returned from America, and told Archibald, among other things, that New Englanders were accustomed to join their garments with thorns, and that fabulous sums had been offered her by the natives for the small stock of pins and needles she had happened to possess. Robertson failed to reflect that America then depended upon Great Britain for the products of her manufactories, and was at the

eral Washington to add to the Earl's private collection in Dryburgh Abbey, and to present to the new President of the United States the celebrated Wallace box as a token of the donor's high personal esteem. Robertson fully appreciated the compliment. He readily undertook the trust, and four months later was presented to General Washington at Philadelphia, the then seat of government, by Tench Coxe, Esq., who had previously prepared the way for his reception. The Wal-



COMMODORE THOMAS TRUXTON.
(PAINTED BY ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, 1802. OWNED BY A. J. ROBERTSON.)

time cut off from all foreign commerce by the war.

It was therefore in the spirit of adventure, and not with any serious intention to remain, that he crossed the ocean, and arrived at New York the 2d of October, 1791. He found the country, contrary to his expectations, anything but a scene of savagery. So agreeably was he surprised, in fact, that he soon came to the resolution to make it his home.

Peculiarly fortunate circumstances heralded Robertson's advent to the Western continent. The Earl of Buchan, hearing of his intended departure, requested an interview at Edinburgh.¹ The object of this meeting was to confide to the artist two important commissions, viz.: to obtain the portrait of Gen-

¹ Robertson's personal account.

lace box, within which was inclosed the letter of introduction, was about four inches long, three broad, two deep, and one-eighth of an inch thick. It was made of six pieces of the heart of the oak tree that sheltered Sir William Wallace after the battle of Falkirk. The outside was finely varnished. An elegant silver binding united the whole; and the lid, opening upon hinges one-third the way down the side, had a silver plate inside, inscribed: "Presented by the Goldsmiths of Edinburgh to David Stuart Erskine, Earl of Buchan, with the freedom of their Corporation, by their Deacon, 1791."

The written inclosure ran as follows:

DRYBURGH ABBEY, JUNE 28th, 1791.

SIR: I had the honor to receive your Excellency's letter relating to the advertisement of Dr. Ander-

son's periodical publication in the "Gazette of the United States"; which attention to my recommendation I feel very sensibly, and return you my grateful acknowledgments. In the twenty-first number of that literary miscellany I inserted a monitory paper respecting America, which I flatter myself may, if attended to on the other side of the Atlantic, be productive of good consequences. To use your own emphatic words, may that Almighty Being, who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aid can supply every human defect, consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the American people a government instituted by themselves for public and private security, upon the basis of law and equal administration of justice, preserving to every individual as much civil and political freedom as is consistent with the safety of the nation; and may he be pleased to continue your life and strength as long as you can be in any way useful to your country.

I have intrusted this sheet, inclosed in a box made of the oak that sheltered our great Sir William Wallace after the battle of Falkirk, to Mr. Robertson of Aberdeen, a painter, with the hope of his having the honor of delivering it into your hands, recommending him as an able artist, seeking for fortune and fame in the New World. This box was presented to me by the Goldsmiths' Company at Edinburgh, to whom, feeling my own unworthiness to receive this magnificently significant present, I requested and obtained leave to make it over to the man in the world to whom I thought it most justly due. Into your hands I commit it, requesting of you to pass it, in the event of your decease, to the man in your own country who shall appear to your judgment to merit it best upon the same considerations that have induced me to send it to your Excellency.

I am with the highest esteem, Sir,
Your Excellency's most obedient
And obliged humble servant,
BUCHAN.

GENERAL WASHINGTON,
President of the United States of America.

P. S. — I beg your Excellency will have the goodness to send me your portrait, that I may place it among those I most honor, and I would wish it from the pencil of Mr. Robertson. I beg leave to recommend him to your countenance, as he has been mentioned to me favorably by my worthy friend Professor Ogilvie, of King's College, Aberdeen.

Robertson has left an account of this first interview and subsequent work, in the following words:

The bearer of Lord Buchan's compliments, although familiarly accustomed to intimate intercourse with those of the highest rank and station in his native country, never felt as he did on his first introduction to the American hero. The excitation in the mind of the stranger was evidently obvious to Washington, for from his ordinary cold and distant address he declined into the most easy and familiar intercourse in conversation, with a view to disembarass his visitor from the agitation excited by the presence of a man whose exalted character had impressed him with highest sentiments of respect and veneration for such lofty virtue. Washington

easily penetrated into the heart and feelings of Lord Buchan's friend, and he left no means untried to make him feel perfectly at ease in his company during the period he intended to spend with him in Philadelphia. The General, not finding his efforts altogether successful, introduced him to Mrs. Washington, whose easy, polished, and familiar gaiety, and ceaseless cheerfulness, almost accomplished a cure, by the aid



MARTHA WASHINGTON.
(FROM THE MINIATURE FROM LIFE BY ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, 1791-92. OWNED BY THE ARTIST'S GRANDDAUGHTER.)

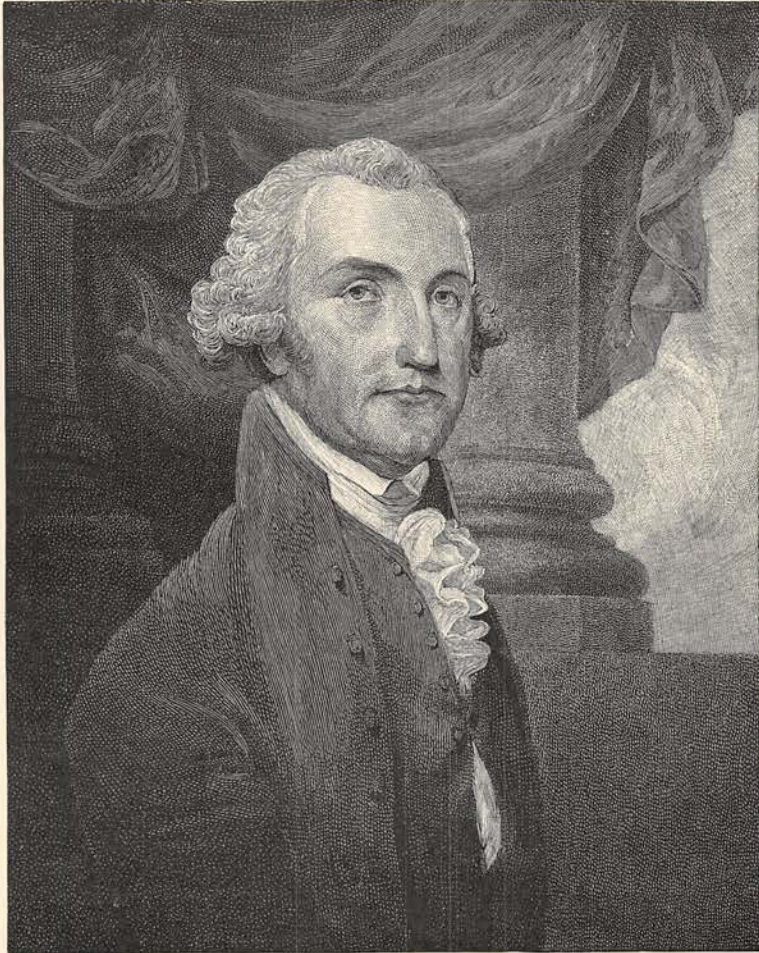
of her grandchildren, G. W. P. Custis and Miss Eleanor Custis, afterwards Mrs. Lewis and wife to the nephew of General Washington.

Another effort of the first President to compose his guest was at a family dinner party, in which the General, contrary to his usual habits, engrossed most of the conversation at the table, and so delighted the company with humorous anecdotes that he repeatedly set the table in a roar; the result of these attentions the General now perceived had nearly produced a radical change, and to have the desired effect of fitting the artist for the task he had undertaken for Lord Buchan, in making as good a likeness of Washington as he possibly could. The artist being now prepared, and left to his own direction in the manner and way he should proceed in his process, preferred making his original first attempt in miniature, on ivory, in water-colors. *Pari passu*, he at the same time painted a likeness of Mrs. Washington as a mate to the General's.

The original one painted for Lord Buchan was in oils, and of a size corresponding to those of the collection of portraits of the most celebrated worthies in liberal principles and in useful literature in the possession of his lordship at Dryburgh Abbey, near Melrose, on the borders of Scotland.¹

The only other outsiders at the family dinner party just described were the two secretaries of the General, Major Jackson and Colonel Lear, and Colonel John Trumbull, who after-

¹ Extract from original manuscript of Archibald Robertson, in possession of his granddaughter, Mrs. C. W. Darling, of Utica, N. Y.



GEORGE WASHINGTON. (WATER-COLOR PAINTING ON MARBLE, FROM LIFE, BY ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, 1791. OWNED BY THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER.)

wards became a stanch friend and admirer of the Scotchman. Robertson writes further of the event:

The dinner at three o'clock was plain, but suitable for a family in genteel circumstances. There was nothing especially remarkable at the table but that the General and Mrs. Washington sat side by side — he on the right of his lady, the gentlemen on his right hand, and the ladies on his left. It being on Saturday, the first course was mostly of Eastern cod and fresh fish. A few glasses of wine were drank during dinner, with other beverage. The whole closed with a few glasses of sparkling champagne, in about three quarters of an hour; when the General and Colonel Lear retired, leaving the ladies in high glee about Lord Buchan and the Wallace box.

It was nearly a year before the following reply to the Earl's epistle was dictated:

PHILADELPHIA, May 1, 1792.

MY LORD: I should have had the honor of acknowledging the receipt of your letter of the 28th of June last, had I not concluded to defer doing it till I could

announce to you the transmission of my portrait, which has just been finished by Mr. Robertson (of New York), who has also undertaken to forward it. The manner of the execution of it does no discredit, I am told, to the artist, of whose skill favorable mention has been made to me. I was further induced to intrust the execution to Mr. Robertson, from his having informed me that he had drawn others for your Lordship and knew the size which best suited your collection. I accept with sensibility and satisfaction the significant present of the box which accompanied your Lordship's letter.

In yielding the tribute due from every lover of mankind to the patriotic and heroic virtues of which it is commemorative, I estimate as I ought the additional value which it derives from the hand that sent it, and my obligation for the sentiments that induced the transfer. I will, however, ask that you will exempt me from compliance with the request relating to its eventual destination. In an attempt to execute your wish in this particular I should feel embarrassment from a just comparison of relative pretensions, and fear to risk injustice by so marked a preference.

With sentiments of the truest esteem and consideration, I remain your Lordship's

Most obedient servant,

G. WASHINGTON.

EARL OF BUCHAN.

In passing it may be said that the Wallace box was ultimately returned to its donor by the terms of Washington's will. The Earl afterwards sent it again to America. On its way from New York to Philadelphia the trunk in which it was placed was stolen from the back of the stage. Advertisements and the offer of liberal reward failed to restore the missing treasure, and no clue was ever found to the thieves.

For some reason the delivery of the portrait and the letter was delayed. In April of the next year Robertson was the recipient of the following note from Washington's secretary :

PHILADELPHIA, April 26, 1793.

SIR: The President of the United States received a letter a few days ago from the Earl of Buchan, though of an old date,—October, 1792,—in which he acknowledges the receipt of a letter from the President, dated in June, but observes that he has not received that which had been written on the 1st of May preceding, and committed to your care to be forwarded with the Earl's picture; neither had the picture reached his hands at the time of writing his letter in October.

The President directs me to give you this information in order that, if it should be in your power, you may endeavor to find out what has been the fate of the picture, if sent, and the President's letter.

I am, Sir,

Your most obed. serv't,

TOBIAS LEAR.

MR. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.¹

The portrait of Washington for Lord Buchan was eventually committed to the charge of Colonel Lear, then occupied on a mission to Europe. The following letter accompanied the gift :

MY LORD: With pleasure I take the opportunity which now offers to transmit to your Lordship the portrait of the President, the Illustrious Hero of America, the brave Washington. Tobias Lear, Esqr., his Secretary, a gentleman of the most amiable and respectable character, is the person who now favors me in transmitting this, with the picture, to your Lordship, who I hope will arrive safe in Europe. The short notice I have had of his intended voyage has prevented me having it in my power to prepare some other matters for your Lordship, but I shall embrace the first opportunity. As Mr. Lear will have the pleasure to see your Lordship, it prevents me mentioning matters of importance with which he is better acquainted. As I esteem the picture as the best likeness of General Washington I have

¹ Copy of original letter in joint possession of the granddaughters of Archibald Robertson — Mrs. S. M. Mygatt, of Paris, France, and Mrs. C. W. Darling, of Utica, N. Y. In accordance with the custom of the times, the letter-sheet is simply folded, and on the outer side is inscribed, "Mr. Archibald Robertson, New

attempted, I should be proud to be informed of your Lordship's opinion of it, and whether you can trace anything of the sublime character of the original in this humble copy. I have endeavored not only to convey the form of the features, but the characteristic look of the countenance; and the expression of the eyes, with the particular character of each, as well as the *tout ensemble* of the expression. His countenance possesses an open, benignant look, which is a very attractive characteristic; at the same time that the dignity of his manners commands the highest respect. But words are wanted to convey to you the idea of a person whose person and character are the objects of so high veneration and esteem.

I remain, My Lord, your Lordship's

Most Respectfully,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

89 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK, NOV. 8, 1793.

Colonel Lear delivered the picture safely at its destination. In a subsequent letter of thanks to the artist the Earl expressed his entire satisfaction with the result.

During the time that Robertson remained at the Executive Mansion he painted, besides the miniatures of General and Mrs. Washington and the large oil-portrait, a smaller one of the General.² This is in water-colors on a marble slab, measuring 9 x 12 inches. It is owned by the only surviving daughter of the artist, Mrs. M. M. Craft, of New York. This likeness is one of the finest originals extant. Its softness and delicacy of tone are unrivaled. The subject is a three-quarter view, clad in a peach-blow coat, with broad white ruffle down the front. Mention of it thus appears in Trumbull's list of authenticated originals :

Robertson, 1792, painted one—in his own possession, 79 Liberty Street, New York.

Trumbull was president of the Academy of Fine Arts in 1824. In that year, under date of September 20, appeared in a journal a criticism by him upon original portraits of Washington, from which the following lines are extracted :

If we would behold the countenance of Washington in his best days, we must seek it in Houdon's bust; . . . if we desire to know his aspect when he began to wane and had lost his teeth, Robertson's portrait is the best; he and Stuart only make him looking at the spectator.

This opinion is of peculiar value, as being the decision of one who was brought into constant and intimate relations with Washington.

In removing the picture of Washington from its frame in order to prepare it for illustration, there was discovered in the back the original

York." In the lower left-hand corner is written, "President, U. S."

² That these three of Washington were all painted from life is the statement of Robertson himself, as related by both his son and daughter now living (March, 1890).

draught of Robertson's letter to the Earl of Buchan, containing his personal estimate of his own work. Also an odd affidavit of the present of two locks of hair from the heads of Mr. and Mrs. Washington, with the hair itself curiously preserved. Two circles were cut in the paper in which the hair was inserted, the latter being protected by a piece of transparent oily material on the surface with black silk underneath. This discovery was a surprise to the writer. The document had probably been placed there by Judge Robertson, who, thirty years ago, was the owner of the portrait. It reads as follows :

WASHINGTON AND WIFE'S HAIR, JUNE, 1783.

The locks of hair below is part of that which was sent to Major Billings of Poughkeepsie, inclosed in a letter, of which the following is an exact copy. The original is in possession of the Major's grandson, W. J. Street, counselor at law, of this city, who gave me the hair.

T. W. C. MOORE.

NEW YORK, March 24, 1857.

NEWBURG, June 17, 1783.

SIR, By some mistake or other the Horse was not sent for yesterday. The Dragoon comes up for him now and those small tools which you conceived might be useful to me—among which I pray you to send me a small file or two,—one of which to be very thin, so much so as to pass between the teeth if occasion should require it, another one round.

Have you been able to satisfy yourself of the practicability and means of coloring sealing-wax? If so, can you bring the stick I now send to the complexion which is wanted?

Mrs. Washington sends you a lock of both our hair. (Inclosed.)

I am with much regard

Sir, your very Hble. Serv.

GO. WASHINGTON.

"Private." Major Billings at Poughkeepsy.

HAIR OF

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

MARTHA WASHINGTON.



Popular opinion has been somewhat at variance in regard to the exact number of Washington miniatures produced by Robertson.

The first sittings for the first miniatures of the General and his wife which Archibald Robertson painted were held in the latter part of December, 1791, and were completed the next month. These miniatures were carefully preserved by the artist, as he himself records, "to remain in his family as an heirloom, and memorial of his veneration for the great and successful champion of American liberty." His wishes were respected, and these exquisite gems, set as brooches, are among the most

cherished possessions of his granddaughters, Mrs. S. M. Mygatt and Mrs. C. W. Darling.

In Dunlap's biography of Robertson he mentions that the larger portrait of Washington, painted for the Earl of Buchan, was enlarged from the miniature just mentioned. The artist's son says that the only explanation he can make of this statement is that, as Washington was a notoriously bad sitter, Robertson used his "first attempt" as the basis for his work, and gave the finishing touches from life. This explanation would reconcile the apparent contradiction of two authorities.

An original of Martha Washington is in the possession of the Custis family.

The authenticity of other supposed "Robertsons" is questionable.

Soon after his arrival Archibald wrote to his brother Alexander, whom he had left behind studying the same art under Shelley, to follow him. This invitation was accepted the next year (1792), and the brothers immediately opened the Columbian Academy of Painting, at 79 Liberty street, New York. Here were taught the fine arts, including architecture, in which Archibald had been grounded by his father, who was an architect by profession. The school flourished with unvarying success for upwards of thirty years. Among its pupils was John Vanderlyn. Alexander Robertson was one of the original incorporators of what afterwards became the gigantic public-school system of New York City.

At the time these two brothers came to America, a third and elder brother, named Andrew, was already establishing a reputation for himself in London. He had previously taken his degree at Marischal College in Aberdeen, where Dr. Beattie held the position of Professor of Natural Philosophy. A fine miniature of the poet by Andrew is in the possession of a niece of the artist, Mrs. M. M. Craft. In it the allegorical conception is evidently borrowed from Reynolds's treatment of the same subject, in which Beattie is seen seated beside Ignorance, Error, and Superstition. The portrait, however, has the advantage of a personal intimacy between sitter and delineator. At the outset of his career Andrew won the particular approbation of Benjamin West. West sat to him for his portrait, and advised and encouraged him in his studies. Andrew justified his patron's partiality. For over twenty years he was regarded as one of the first rank in his art, his practice at court being extensive. He was formally appointed painter to the Duke of Sussex, and in 1812 painted the princesses at Windsor and the Prince Regent. A collection of miniatures by

his hand is now in the Kensington Museum. Andrew was a creditable performer on the violin, and this bond of sympathy cemented a friendship between himself and Niel Gow, the somewhat eccentric character who for years was regarded as a necessary adjunct to all fashionable routs in the great metropolis. Gow's execution of Scotch tunes was considered inimitable, and the artist has left on ivory an appropriate production of the minstrel plying his vocation. This was painted about 1780, and is owned by Mrs. M. M. Craft. Upon retiring from practice, the foremost miniature painters in London united in presenting Andrew with a piece of plate, and unanimously termed him "the father of their profession." A valuable treatise on miniature painting, detailing every part of the process, with illustrations for each successive sitting, was composed by Andrew for his brothers. This work was published in America, and became an authority on the art.

It was in the New World that Archibald Robertson met Miss Eliza Abramse, whom he married in December, 1794. A pastel of the young lady, made by him at the time, shows that she possessed much charm of feature. This conclusion is corroborated by several other portraits of his wife painted by Robertson in the early years of their marriage, one of which — a water-color on marble — is considered among his best efforts. This portrait is on a slab measuring eight by nine inches. Unfortunately, it was broken some years ago, but the parts were skillfully reunited. It is owned by Mrs. Craft, who has also in her possession two delicate miniatures of her parents, painted by Archibald in 1797. Robertson has reproduced himself in the domestic costume of the day, with powdered queue. But the best likeness of the artist which he has transmitted to his descendants is an oil portrait on wood, painted about 1830 by his friend Waldo. A three-quarters life-size canvas of Mrs. Robertson was completed about the same date by Waldo and Jewett together.

In 1833 a memorandum relating to Mrs. Robertson's ancestry was made by her husband. It is interesting as an authentic account of the condition of New York City in the early part of the present century, by one on the spot. It also corroborates the origin of the nomenclature of several of its best-known streets.

Jacob Abramse, Jr., father of Mrs. Robertson, . . . was son of Jacob Abramse, Sr., and Magdalena Lispenard. . . Jacob, Jr., was the last male that held the surname of Abramse, of an ancient Dutch

¹ Anthony Lispenard Robertson was Assistant Vice Chancellor in 1846-48; Surrogate of New York City in 1848; and in 1859 was elected a judge of the Superior Court. In 1864 he was elected for a second term,

family, who were among the original settlers of New York. Their homestead was located in Wall Street, a portion of which is now known as numbers 52, 54, 56, 58, etc., at that period reaching through to Pine Street, nearly opposite the Merchants' Exchange, and now owned by the Mutual and Howard Insurance companies and others. . . .

Magdalena Lispenard, mother of Jacob Abramse, Jr., was a daughter of one of the French Protestant exiles who came to New Rochelle after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Her brother, Anthony Leonard Lispenard, who married Alicia Rutgers, owned the tract of land so long called Lispenard's Meadows, which was bounded south by the New York Hospital and St. John's Park, east by Broadway, north by Spring Street, and west by the North River. In the year 1815 it was an open out-of-town meadow, with a large pond in the midst; but now, 1833, it is fitted up with streets, the principal of which is Canal Street, that now stands on the site of the brook which flowed from the Collect, where the arsenal now is, into Lispenard's Pond, which ran into a creek from the North River; all being at this time nearly in the center of the city.

The Common Council of the city have, although having overlooked the name of Abramse, done ample justice to the memory of Lispenard, in Anthony, and Leonard, and Lispenard streets, which are located on the site of the family homestead, a portion of which is still in the possession of the descendants in female line of old Uncle Lispenard, chiefly in that of Alexander L. Stewart, who married a granddaughter of his.

Abigail Lispenard, sister of Magdalena and Anthony, was the wife of Jacobus Bleecker of New Rochelle, and grandmother of James Bleecker, the auctioneer, and of the numerous family of Bleeckers of New York, the memorial of whose surname is recorded in that of Bleecker Street.

Five sons and three daughters were born to the couple. Of these, two sons attained public prominence — Anthony Lispenard,¹ who was chosen Chief-Justice of the Superior Court in 1866, having for twenty years held various public offices; and Alexander Hamilton, who became Deputy Register and afterwards Deputy County Clerk. At the time of the latter's death, in 1846, he was Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Order of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New York. His funeral was the occasion of unusual and impressive Masonic solemnities.

This son was named after the eminent statesman, whom Archibald highly esteemed. Robertson considered a portrait of Hamilton to be a fitting companion piece to his production on marble of Washington. Shortly before the fatal duel of 1804 he painted Hamilton's features on a similar slab. For many years the portraits of these two representative men of a great nation hung either side of the wide fireplace in

and in 1866 he was chosen Chief-Justice of the court. In 1867 he was a member of the State Constitutional Convention, and took an active part in its proceedings. He died December 18, 1868.

the reception-room of the artist. That of Washington still remains, carefully preserved by his descendants. The fate of the other is unknown.¹

At the beginning of this century there was little to forward the progress of painting in the United States. With the exception of Peale's *Columbianum* and the *Columbian Academy of Fine Arts*, no attempt had been made to encourage emulation among artists. The subject had not, however, been overlooked. Earnest deliberations by the foremost men of the day were held. In 1802 Robertson was called upon to advise with regard to the contemplated art union. But it was not until six years later that the *American Academy of Arts* — the forerunner of our present *Academy of Design* — was incorporated.

The history of the vicissitudes of this parent institution spreads over a quarter of a century. It began as an experiment, and, like all such, had advocates for several methods of procedure. In 1818 its affairs were in a turbulent state. John Trumbull was then president; John R. Murray held the vice-presidency. Its directors consisted of the following well-known names: Cadwallader D. Colden, William Cutting, John C. Bogert, David Hosack, Archibald Bruce, Archibald Robertson, William Dunlap, John McComb, Samuel L. Waldo, and James Renwick. Alexander Robertson was secretary, and John Pintard, treasurer.

A contest arose as to the advisability of combining instruction with the exhibition of pictures. Archibald Robertson strenuously maintained the necessity for such a course. The opposition, led by Trumbull, as obstinately combated it. The latter party triumphed, but the victory proved to be dearly won. When dissension had so divided the body that its fall was merely a question of time, the necessity for a new organization governed by new laws was recognized. That "the president opposed the opening of schools" was quoted as the principal cause of the failure of this institution, which was finally to end a melancholy existence under the hammer of the auctioneer. Our *National Academy of Design*, incorporated in 1826, was the direct result of the discontent created by the mistakes of its predecessor.

The last public enterprise in which Robertson participated was in 1825 on the occasion of the formal opening of the *Eric Canal*.

Probably no event in the history of the State ever excited greater enthusiasm than this triumph of human labor. The long-contemplated union of the waters of the lakes with

the Atlantic Ocean had, after years of toil, been brought to a successful consummation. Extensive preparations were made for the grand fête to celebrate the arrival of the first canal-boat, which was to start from Buffalo, coming straight through to Sandy Hook. The city of New York was aroused to special effort, and the superintendence of the whole was in the hands of the most prominent men of the time. Charles Rhind,² cousin of Robertson, occupied the responsible position of "Admiral of the Day."

The entire charge of such works of art as the event required was left to the discretion of Robertson. It was he who designed the badge worn by the guests on the day of the ceremonials. This device was afterwards adopted for the commemorative medals which were presented by the city to those gentlemen distinguished for public services. Gold facsimiles were forwarded to the three surviving signers of the *Declaration of Independence*, Charles Carroll, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams. Also to John Quincy Adams, Monroe, Madison, and Lafayette. The medals were inclosed in boxes made of curious woods brought from the lakes. Accompanying this gift was a copy of the "Memoir of the Grand Canal Celebration," compiled by Cadwallader D. Colden.

Mr. Colden had prepared this work, by request of the corporation, as a fitting memento of the occasion to be deposited in the city archives. The illustrations were under Robertson's care. They are curious as being the first impressions made from the first lithographic press ever put into effectual operation on this side of the Atlantic. Robertson considered the discovery of the new art of lithographic printing, with which the Bavarian inventor, Alois Senefelder, had already awakened the interest of Europe, as "a most invaluable gift to mankind in multiplying with facility the works of the first-rate artists." He was especially desirous to have the process obtain a permanent foothold in America. Some abortive attempts had been previously made, but until Anthony Imbert crossed the ocean no practical success had been attained. M. Imbert was a French naval officer who had undergone a long imprisonment in England. During his captivity he employed his enforced leisure in the cultivation of his talent for the fine arts. The result was seen in the lithographic office he was later enabled to open in New York. Through the influence of Robertson, Imbert was permitted to essay the illustrations for the memoir.

Robertson's personal contributions to this

¹ The writer has been unable to trace the present owner of this portrait. It disappeared at the time of the death of A. H. Robertson. Information on the subject would be gratefully received.

² The plenipotentiary who, in 1829, made the treaty with the Grand Turk by which the Black Sea was opened to the commerce of the United States.

work were: "A View of the Fleet Preparing to Form in Line," made on the spot on its return from the Brooklyn Navy Yard; and two maps — one exhibiting the course of the canal, the other showing its connection with the water-courses of the Northern continent. For these, and for his able supervision of the Department of the Fine Arts, the thanks of the city corporation, through the common council, were formally tendered to him. As a further testimony of their approbation, they awarded him a silver medal, a maple box, and a copy of Mr. Colden's memoir.

Robertson spent the last decade of his life in quiet retirement with his family. The taxing requirements of his profession had left him nearly blind. Some miniatures of his children, essayed at this period, pathetically record his affliction in their crude shadings and uncertain lines. He was seized with apoplexy in his seventy-first year, and died suddenly on the 6th of December, 1835. His widow survived him for thirty years.

Archibald Robertson was afflicted with that peculiar bent of mind that is so often an attribute of genius — the depreciation of his actual talent, and the erroneous belief in his superiority in another direction. His skill as a miniature painter, which ranked him among the foremost in that most delicate of fine arts, he accepted as a matter of course. But his hobby was scribbling. Literary pursuits during the whole progress of his life had employed his time as much as the exercise of his profession. He was conversant with the English, French, German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages, besides, as he modestly affirms, "being not altogether unacquainted with the construction of shipbuilding." In 1802 he edited a treatise for the use of his scholars at the Columbian Academy, entitled "Elements of the Graphic Arts."¹ Otherwise few of his productions were ever published, but stray sheets of mazy rhetoric, dyed with a century's dust, are still preserved by his descendants.

Only a preface remains of the one work he meditated which would have been of general interest. This was a personal memoir. His renown as an artist brought him into intimate contact with many contemporary celebrities. In this respect he was peculiarly fitted to shine by reason of his early associations and his polished manners. He was, to use the quaint epithet, a gentleman and a scholar, having

studied the art of bowing, as he himself informs us, under Mr. Francis Peacock. It was to this same Mr. Peacock that he owed his first, and, as he always maintained, his best, lessons in miniature painting; the principles of water-coloring being taught him by Mr. Nesbitt, while to "Mr. William Wales, an excellent portrait painter, his first acquaintance with oil was due."

Robertson was a prolific painter. His scope was varied, and included widely differing subjects. In the minute details of his drawings he was exceedingly exact. This characteristic adds peculiar value to his early maps of the city of New York, one of the finest of which is now owned by Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet. He was also among those who presented designs for the City Hall and other public buildings.

A characteristic remark has been preserved touching the artist's experience with human nature. Of himself he writes:

Prior to his adopting the art of painting as his profession he was extolled as a great genius. How much he was puffed up by applause he will not disclose, but from the moment he adopted the profession not a single word of praise has he received, and the only way he could discover that he performed well was by the prices he received, and the practice he had for upwards of forty years on this and the other side of the Atlantic.

It is impossible at this date to give a list of the portraits of the various well-known persons whom Robertson was called upon to paint. A fine example of his skill, in the possession of his son, is a miniature, painted in 1802, of Commodore Truxton, commander of the *Constellation*, whose victories over French frigates gained for him the award of a gold medal by Congress. In this, as in all the productions of Robertson, the Scotch origin of the painter is betrayed in what, for want of a better word, we may term a Scotch rendering of his subject. The colors are laid with minute delicacy. The purity and freshness of the tints are remarkably preserved, considering the lapse of time. This characteristic leads to the conjecture that the original brilliancy of tone was purposely exaggerated, in order that the miniatures might fade to the correct appearance when viewed by posterity.

The name of Archibald Robertson has been occasionally confounded with that of Walter Robertson, an Irish artist of the same date. The two were not related.²

Edith Robertson Cleveland.

¹ Published by David Longworth, "at the Shakespeare Gallery, near the Theatre."

² The writer's authority for the statements regarding the portraits on canvas and marble is based upon

information furnished by Robertson's only surviving daughter and son, and upon the artist's own memoranda.

ORIGINAL PORTRAITS OF WASHINGTON.



THE PORTRAIT OF WASHINGTON BY RAMAGE.

IN THE CENTURY for April, 1889, a first paper on this subject appeared. At that time I had no intention of following it with a second; but the widespread interest that was aroused by the article, and the discoveries it elicited, are the occasion of the present contribution.

The loan exhibition of historical portraits and relics in connection with the centennial celebration of the inauguration of George Washington as first President of the United States was opened at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City on April 17, and to it nearly fifty portraits of Washington were contributed. Perhaps the most interesting one there—for the reason that before that time its existence was unknown—was the original miniature painted by John Ramage, which the publication of the article discovered in the possession of Mrs. M. S. Beach, of Peekskill, N. Y. It was found in 1884, in Montreal, Canada, by its present owner, belonging to the daughter of the man in whose house Ramage died, and to whom the artist had presented it shortly before his death in recognition of the kindly care he had received during his last illness. The exact date of Ramage's death cannot be ascertained, but the person from whom Mrs. Beach purchased it had had it in her personal ownership for more than sixty years. As the accompanying engraving shows, Washington is represented full face, with powdered hair, and in uniform. The miniature is beautifully painted, and is set as a breastpin. The face bears many of the well-known characteristics of Washington's features, while at the same time it is quite unlike any other known portrait. All we know of the artist personally we get from the garrulous, gossiping, unreliable Dunlap,¹ and it is as follows:

This was an Irish gentleman, who painted miniatures in Boston, and married there. He left it with the British troops, and was as early as 1777

¹ "History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States," New York, 1834.

established in William street, New York, and continued to paint all the military heroes or beaux of the garrison, and all the belles of the place. He did not accompany the army when it left our shores, but continued the best artist in his branch for many years after. Mr. Ramage occasionally painted in crayons or pastel, the size of life. His miniatures were in the line style, as opposed to the dotted. I admired them much in the days of youth, and my opinion of their merit is confirmed by seeing some of them recently. Mr. Ramage was a handsome man of the middle size, with an intelligent countenance and lively eye. He dressed fashionably, and, according to the time, beautifully. A scarlet coat with mother-of-pearl buttons, a white silk waistcoat embroidered with colored flowers, black satin breeches and paste knee-buckles, white silk stockings, large silver buckles in his shoes, a small cocked-hat, covering the upper portion of his well-powdered locks, leaving the curls at the ears displayed, a gold-headed cane, and gold snuff-box completed his costume. When the writer returned from Europe, in 1787, Mr. Ramage introduced to him a second wife, but he was changed, and evidently declining through fast living.

Another very interesting portrait of Washington, contributed by Mr. George L. McKean, of Chicago, to the same exhibition, was the profile by Joseph Wright, from which is engraved the frontispiece of this number. Where and when this portrait was painted is not known, but it is unmistakably the work of this artist. Wright drew and etched a profile portrait of Washington in 1790, and, it is stated, painted him the same year. This may be that portrait. The head is the same in the etching and the painting, but in the former the body as well as the head is in profile, while in the latter the body is three-quarters to the right, with the head only turned in profile. The simple, placid dignity of this portrait is its highest commendation, while at the same time it has a charm of reality about it which is deeply impressive. This picture was purchased by Thomas Shields, the maternal grandfather of its present owner, at an auction sale of the effects of a picture restorer in Alexandria, Virginia, about the year 1815. Mr. Shields kept a public house in Alexandria, and was a member of the same Masons' lodge as Washington, and was perfectly familiar with the face of the original. He always esteemed it a most excellent likeness, and his opinion in later years was emphatically indorsed by G. W. Parke Custis. When this painting was shown to him, shortly before his death, he is reported to have said: "Yes, this is the General. It is a

most true and faithful likeness. It gives a more correct and perfect expression of his countenance than any other I have ever seen, and I believe I have seen all of the portraits for which the General sat,—Stuart's, Peale's, and others,—but none of them are as correct. They make his forehead too straight and massive, while the General's receded in a line with his nose, as may be seen in Houdon's statue at the Capitol in Richmond. You see the same in this portrait. Houdon took a cast from off the General's face, from which was modeled the statue." Clark Mills, the sculptor, claimed that its measurements agreed with those of the Houdon cast.

The several portraits of Washington by Wright are among the most important and interesting that have been transmitted to the present generation.

To the same loan collection Mrs. Joseph Harrison, of Philadelphia, sent the original bust portrait, three-quarters to the right, painted by Charles Wilson Peale in 1787, which Washington mentions in his diary as being wanted by the artist "to make a print or mezzotinto by." A year ago we could not locate it.

This exhibition proved also our error in classing the full-length by Trumbull, in the City Hall, New York, as an *original* portrait; the original from which the City Hall portrait was painted being a cabinet picture, twenty inches by thirty inches, painted by Trumbull

in July, 1790, and presented by him to Mrs. Washington. It now belongs to Mrs. Washington's great-great-grandson, Edmund Law Rogers, of Baltimore. The head is exquisitely painted. Mr. Rogers owns the miniature by Walter Robertson, which was also at the loan exhibition.

An extract from THE CENTURY'S article quoted in the "Stockholm Dagblad" brought a communication to the Swedish newspaper, claiming that the *original* portrait of Washington by Wertmüller, signed by the artist, is in the possession of Mr. W. J. Dannstrom, 36 Sturegatan, Stockholm; and a recent examination of the Peter Force collection, in the Library of Congress, has revealed the manuscript note-books of Pierre Eugene du Simitière, from which we transcribe this entry:

Paintings and Drawings done 1779.—Feb'y. 1st, a drawing in black lead of a likeness in profile of his Excellency General Washington, form of a medal for my collection.

N. B.—The General, at the request of the Hon. Mr. Jay, President of Congress, came with him to my house this morning and condescended with great good nature to sit about three-fourths of an hour for the above likeness, having but little time to spare, being the last day of his stay in town.

Thus the date is fixed which heretofore was only approximated.

It is hoped that these additional notes may be the means of bringing additional information.

Charles Henry Hart.

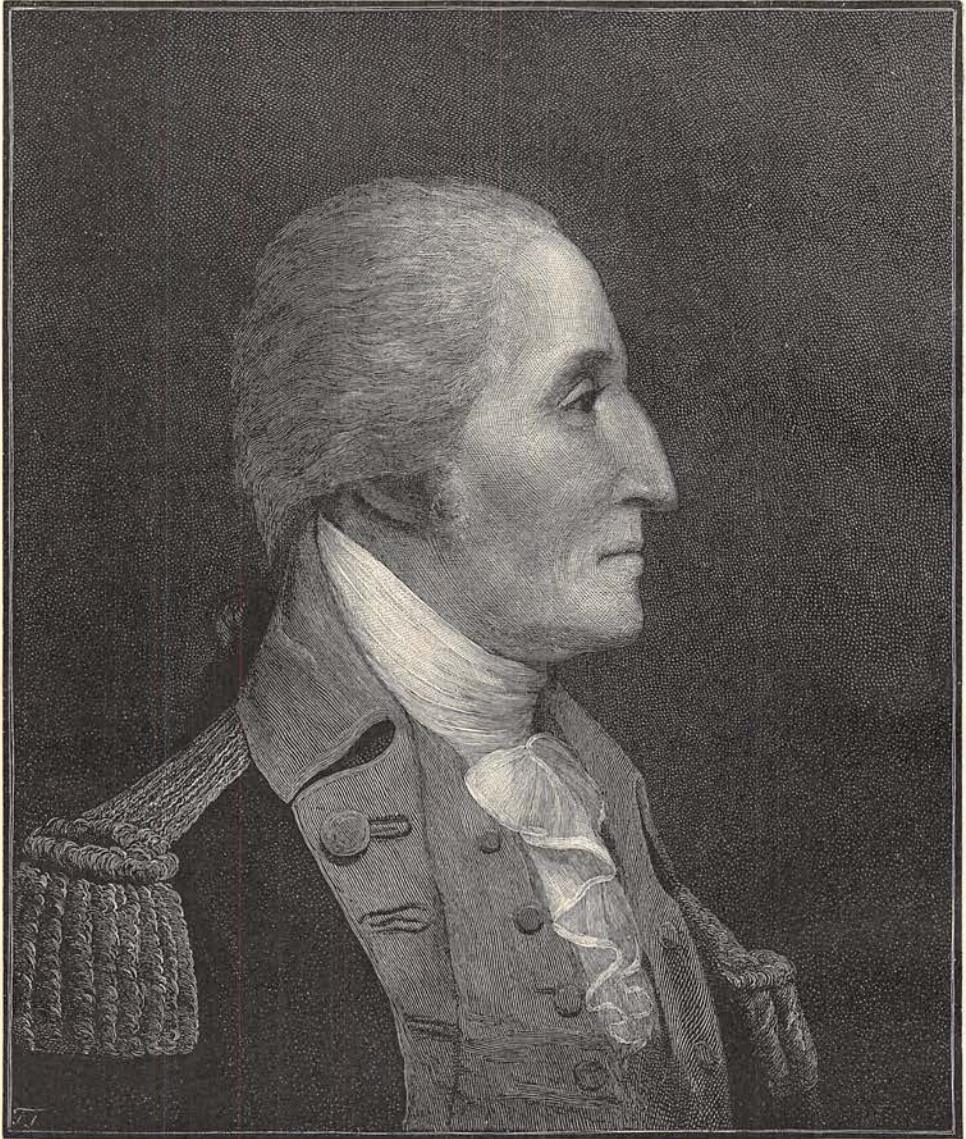


A TWILIGHT SONG

For unknown buried soldiers, North and South.

AS I sit in twilight, late, alone, by the flickering oak-flame,
 Musing on long-past war scenes — of the countless buried unknown soldiers,
 Of the vacant names, as unindented air's and sea's — the unreturn'd,
 The brief truce after battle, with grim burial-squads, and the deep-filled trenches
 Of gather'd dead from all America, North, South, East, West, whence they came up,
 From wooded Maine, New England's farms, from fertile Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio,
 From the measureless West, Virginia, the South, the Carolinas, Texas;
 (Even here in my room-shadows and half-lights, in the noiseless, flickering flames,
 Again I see the stalwart ranks on-filing, rising — I hear the rhythmic tramp of the armies);
 You million unwrit names, all, all — you dark bequest from all the war,
 A special verse for you — a flash of duty long neglected — your mystic roll strangely gath-
 er'd here,
 Each name recall'd by me from out the darkness and death's ashes,
 Henceforth to be, deep, deep, within my heart, recording, for many a future year,
 Your mystic roll entire of unknown names, or North or South,
 Embalm'd with love in this twilight song.

Walt Whitman.



PAINTED BY JAMES WRIGHT.

ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

OWNED BY G. L. McKEAN

George Washington