

## CHAPTER I

### RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION

#### CHRISTIAN ANCESTRY

GEORGE WASHINGTON descended from a long line of excellent churchmen. His great-great-grandfather was the Rev. Lawrence Washington, a clergyman in the Church of England. His great-grandfather, John Washington, “a man of military talent and high in the government,” came to America in 1657, settling in Virginia. He founded a parish which was named for him—“The parish of Washington.” “He was also a sincerely pious man.” In his will, he left a gift to the church, of “a tablet with the Ten Commandments,” and recorded his faith in this manner: “being heartily sorry from the bottom of my heart for my sins past, most humbly desiring forgiveness of the same from the Almighty god (my savior) and redeemer, in whom and by the merits of Jesus Christ, I trust and believe assuredly to be saved, and to have full remission and forgiveness of all my sins.”

His grandfather, also named Lawrence Washington, similarly expresses his faith in his will. His father, Augustine Washington, was active in parish affairs, and became a vestryman in Truro Parish, Virginia, November 18, 1735, when his son George was three years old.

On the mother's side the line of churchmen is equally strong.

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Grandfather Ball was a vestryman, and Great-Grandfather Warner left his slender but excellent record by presenting to the parish church a set of silver for the holy communion. "The family of Balls was very active in promoting good things." Washington's uncle Joseph, in 1729, took the lead in a movement to educate young men for the ministry of the church. Mary Ball Washington (George's mother), says Henry Cabot Lodge, "was an imperious woman, of strong will, ruling her kingdom alone. Above all she was very dignified, very silent, and very sober-minded. That she was affectionate and loving cannot be doubted, for she retained to the last a profound hold upon the reverential devotion of her son."

If Washington's military character was developed out of materials which came to him by inheritance from both sides of his family, so too was his religious character. That love of the church which we have seen as a distinguishing mark in his family became a strong inheritance which his own will and intelligence did not set aside.<sup>1</sup>

### CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The parents of Washington were members of the Church of England, which was almost the only denomination of Christians then known in Virginia.<sup>2</sup>

### HIS BAPTISM

The birth record of Washington is found in an old family Bible of quarto form, dilapidated by use and age, and covered with Virginia striped cloth, which record is in the handwriting of the patriot's father, in these words:

George William, son to Augustine Washington, and Mary, his wife, was born the eleventh day of February, 1731-2, about ten in the morning, and was baptized the 3rd April following, Mr. Bromley Whiting, and Captain Christopher Brooks godfathers, and Mrs. Mildred Gregory godmother.<sup>3</sup>

According to the present style of reckoning, the birthday was February 22, and the baptismal day April 14.

### HIS FATHER

There are many stories of Washington's boyhood which show that his father took great pains to teach George to be unselfish, inspire him with a love of truth, and teach him to know and worship God.

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When George was eleven years old, his father died. Some months later he was sent to Westmoreland to live with his half-brother, Augustine, who occupied the family seat in that county. What the religious advantages were, which awaited him in his new situation, we have not the means to ascertain. There is no doubt that he enjoyed the privilege of public worship at the parish church, known then and now as Pope's Creek Church. Here his attendance was probably habitual, as it was an age in which everybody in that region frequented the house of God whenever service was performed.<sup>4</sup>

### RELIGIOUS TEACHING BY HIS MOTHER

In addition to instruction in the Bible and Prayer Book, which were her daily companions, it was Mrs. Washington's custom to read some helpful books to her children at home, and in this way they received much valuable instruction. Among the volumes which she used for this purpose was one entitled *Contemplations: Moral and Divine*, by Sir Matthew Hale<sup>5</sup>—an old, well-worn copy, which still bears on its title page the name of its owner, "Mary Washington." Those who are familiar with the character of Washington will be struck, on reading these "Contemplations," with the remarkable fact that the instructions contained in them are most admirably calculated to implant and foster such principles as he is known to have possessed. The volume was found in the library at Mount Vernon, after Washington's death, and it appears to have been used by him through life.<sup>6</sup> There are many pencil marks in it noting choice, passages.

"From that volume the mother of Washington undoubtedly drew, as from a living well of sweet water, many of the maxims which she instilled into the mind of her first-born."<sup>7</sup>

"Let those who wish to know the moral foundation of his character consult its pages."<sup>8</sup>

### WASHINGTON'S RULES

In 1745, thirteen years old, Washington copied many things in a little book of thirty folio pages. One part was headed, "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation." There were one hundred and ten of these maxims. "Scarcely one rule is there that does not involve self-restraint, modesty, habitual consideration of others, and, to a large extent, living for others."<sup>9</sup> The last three rules are as follows:

108th: When you speak of God or his Attributes, let it be seriously

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and with words of reverence, honor and obey your natural parents, although they be poor.

109th: Let your recreations be manful not sinful.

110th: Labor to keep alive in your breast, that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.<sup>10</sup>

### POEM ON "CHRISTMAS DAY"

When Washington was thirteen years of age he copied some verses on "Christmas Day," beginning,

"Assist me, Muse divine, to sing the Morn,  
On Which the Savior of Mankind was born."<sup>11</sup>

Some think that he composed poems himself, but it is more likely that he copied them from an unknown source. It shows what manner of Christian training he had received at home. He had absorbed "the spirit of the Day and the facts of the faith, as well as the rule and model of Christian life."

### GODFATHER

In 1747, at the age of fifteen years, young Washington was godfather to a child in baptism. In 1748, at sixteen, he was godfather to his niece, Frances Lewis. In 1751, at nineteen, to his nephew, Fielding Lewis, his sister's first child, and his mother was godmother. In 1760, at twenty-eight, he again became sponsor for another nephew, Charles Lewis.<sup>12</sup>

### GOES TO MOUNT VERNON

In the summer of 1746, he finds his way to the home of his brother Lawrence, at Mount Vernon. From then until March, 1748, "George, it is believed, resided at Mount Vernon, and with his mother at her abode opposite to Fredericksburg. In that town he went to school, and as Mrs. Washington was connected with the church there, her son no doubt shared, under her own eye, the benefits of divine worship, and such religious instruction as mothers in that day were eminently accustomed to give their children. It was the habit to teach the young the first principles of religion according to the formularies of the church, to inculcate the fear of God, and strict observance of the moral virtues, such as truth, justice, charity, humility, modesty, temperance, chastity, and industry."<sup>13</sup>

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### TRIP TO THE WEST INDIES

In 1751 Lawrence Washington, on the advice of his physicians, decided to pass a winter in the West Indies, taking with him his favorite brother George as a companion. George kept a journal of this trip. They arrived on Saturday, November 3. The second Sunday we find this entry in his diary, which shows his habit of church attendance:

“Sunday, 11th—Dressed in order for Church but got to town too late. Dined at Major Clarke’s with ye SeG. Went to Evening Service and returned to our lodgings.”<sup>14</sup>

Before the next Sunday he was stricken with smallpox. A few days after his recovery he sailed for home.