

STORY BEHIND GREAT LOVERS OF YESTERDAY



Washington and Lady Fairfax

INEZ HAYNES IRWIN (left), the writer of this story, is one of a noted writing family. Her husband, Will Irwin, writes *Wallace*, her brother-in-law, writes *So as*. Laetitia MacDonald Irwin, her sister-in-law, and Phyllis Dugane, her niece. Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, she was brought up in Boston. She was in active combat sectors during the World War in Italy, England and France. She has written twenty books and more short stories than she can count. Collecting of old and odd bottles of all sorts is her hobby.

UNTIL recently, the world believed that so far as there was any love in George Washington's life, Martha Custis was the woman. There can be no doubt that George Washington held in the highest esteem the kindly, sensible lady who became his wife. But she was by no means the star of his existence.

Sally Fairfax, a Virginian, was born Sally Cary. The Cary family was aristocratic but highly liberal. When Sally married George William Fairfax, she entered another family even more aristocratic and quite as liberal. The match seems to have been one of the marriages of convenience so typical of their class at this period. Of George Fairfax himself we know little. He was perhaps somewhat cool and formal, but a gentleman and a man of principle.

Fairfax brought his bride to Belvoir, his ample, hospitable estate in Virginia. There, a lad of sixteen years, Sally Fairfax's junior by two years, met her and apparently fell in love with her on sight. He was a surveyor, without lands or property; a big, raw-boned lad, awkward on foot, but singularly impressive in the saddle; fond of dancing, plays, sport and most other innocent diversion.

That lad was George Washington. There grew up between those two—shall we say a friendship on her part, a serious romance on his? The miniatures of Sally Fairfax prove that she had a delicate, high-bred beauty. We glimpse in her that combination of wit and intelligence which the French call *esprit*. How

dazzling she must have seemed to that ardent, inexperienced, ambitious boy! There is no proof that she fell in love with Washington; but certainly the able country lad interested her. But he—for nine years, during which he became the young military hero of Virginia—his affection never changed. When he was at Mount Vernon he saw her constantly. When he was at the front with Braddock or the Virginia Militia, he wrote to her regularly. Then he married Martha Custis—partly, if not wholly, one must be-

quisiteness of living—he must have absorbed them all.

At that time, Addison's "Cato" was the inspiration of all people with republican leanings. It is the tragedy of a patriot who died for the Roman Republic. Sally Fairfax introduced George Washington to this play. Possibly they read it together. At any rate, the Fairfaxes produced it at Belvoir. In later letters Washington refers to his memory of Sally Fairfax as the heroine. Henceforth, "Cato" became his Bible. He carried the book with him on his campaigns. In his plain but rather diffuse writings, he seldom quotes poetry, even indirectly, but when he does, it is always "Cato." Finally in that desperate winter at Valley Forge, he had the play produced for the encouragement of his army. What memories those pompous periods must have evoked—Belvoir and Sally and the loveliness of Virginia! These memories were the more poignant because two years before the Revolution began, George Fairfax had taken his wife to England. They never returned; and George Washington never saw Sally Fairfax again.

Written by INEZ
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ever, as an escape from a love which his sense of honour rendered hopeless. During the period of his engagement, he sent Sally Fairfax two letters from his soldier tent whose language leaves no doubt. He loved her, would always love her. But—farewell to all that!

What Belvoir and—especially—its mistress did for him in the malleable years between sixteen and twenty-five cannot be over-estimated. The house was a hotbed of liberalism, probably of republicanism. To what discussions must the boy have listened! New ideas, brilliantly expressed, must have swirled their fiery patterns on his plastic young intelligence. Opinions, vocabulary, democracy of feeling, ex-

In 1877, two letters written by George Washington to Sally Fairfax, nineteen months before his death, came to light. Although apparently she destroyed many of his other letters, these, carefully preserved, were found among his papers. They descended to the Fairfax relatives in America, who, as John Corbin puts it, "treasured them through two generations in the awed silence of Victorian propriety."