

## CHAPTER XV.

### FIRST IN PEACE.

At the close of the war, and of the year 1783, Wash-ing-ton went back to Mount Ver-non. He reached his home to his great joy on the eve of Christ-mas day, and he was in a good state of mind to keep the feast.

"The scene is at last closed," he wrote, "and I am eased of a load of care. I hope to spend the rest of my days in peace."

Mount Ver-non was locked in ice and snow for some time. Wash-ing-ton wrote that he was so used to camp life that he could not help feel when he woke each day that he must hear the drums beat, and must go out to plan or to lead his troops. He was now at his ease, and longed for the spring so that his friends could come to him. "My way of life is plain," he said; "I do not mean to be put out of it. But a glass of wine and a bit of meat can be had at all times."

He would not give notes of his life to those who wished to write it up at this time lest it should look vain. "I will leave it to those who are to come to think and say what they please of me," he wrote. "I will not by an act of mine seem to boast of what I have done."

As spring came on, friends flocked to Mount Ver-non, and Wash-ing-ton met them in a frank way. His wife, too, was full of good sense and

good cheer. She loved to knit, and had been used all through the war to knit socks for the poor men who were in the ranks.

But as Wash-ing-ton took his rides through his place, he felt the changes there since he had left. Old friends were gone, and the scenes of his youth were no more. La-fay-ette spent a few days with him, and the love he felt for the brave young man was as strong as at first.

He wrote a sad note to him when he was gone which showed what a warm place the young French-man had in his heart. He said, "As you left me, I asked if this were the last sight I should have of you. And though I wished to say 'No,' my fears said 'Yes.' I called to mind the days of my youth and found they had long since fled to come back no more. I must now go down the hill I have climbed all these years. I am blessed with strength, but I some of a short-lived race, and may soon go to the tomb. All these thoughts gave a gloom to the hour in which I parted with you."

Wash-ing-ton made a trip through some of the states of the West, and saw there was a chance for great trade there, and he wrote much of what he had seen. But his chief joy was in his home and land, where he planted trees and loved to watch them grow. He writes down each month of what he sets out; now it is a choice slip of grape vine from France; or it may be a tree that stays green all the year round. Some of the bushes he set out still stand strong in their growth on the place.

He notes the trees best for shade and which will not hurt the grass.

He writes of rides to the Mill Swamp in quest of young elms, ash trees, and white thorn, and of the walks he lays out and the trees and shrubs he plants by them.

A plan of the way in which he laid out his grounds is still kept at Mount Ver-non, and the pla-ces are marked on it for the trees and shrubs. He owned five farms, and he kept maps of each. He read much of soils, the way to raise good crops, and the best style of ploughs and farm tools to use. He rode the first half of the day to see that all went well. When he had dined, he would write till dark if he had no guests. If friends came he did all he could to make them feel at ease and at home. He was kind, and loved by all. He would not talk much of the war nor of what he had done in it. He took great care not to talk of his own acts, so that if there had been a guest who did not know the facts, he would not have found out by a word from Wash-ing-ton that he was one who had won a great name in the eyes of the world.

Though grave in his looks and ways, he loved to see youth glad and gay. He was fond of the dance, and it was long the boast of more than one fair dame that she had danced with the chief. There had been balls in camp in the dark days of the war.

Wash-ing-ton, as we have seen, had been fond of the hunt in his youth, and La-fay-ette sent him some hounds from France, so he took up his old sport. But the French hounds did not do well, and he found they could not be trusted.

Ere the war had been long past, it was found that there was need of new laws by which the States should be ruled. The chief men of the land were called to Phil-a-del-phi-a to form them, and Wash-ing-ton went from Mount Ver-non to take part in the work. It was then that the code of laws was drawn up which bears the name of "Con-sti-tu-tion of the U-ni-ted States."

These laws said that the States should be ruled by a Pres-i-dent. The choice for this post fell on Wash-ing-ton, and in the spring of 1788 he bade good-bye to Mount Ver-non and made his way to New York, where he was to take the oath that he would serve the land and be true to her in peace and in war.

As he passed through the towns, crowds came out to cheer him, flags were raised, guns roared, and at night there was a great show of fire-works.

When he came to Tren-ton, the place where in the past he had crossed the stream in the storm, through clouds of snow and drifts of ice, he found a scene of peace and love. Crowds were on the bank, the stream gleamed in the sun, the sky was blue, and all hailed him with joy.

On the bridge that crossed the Del-a-ware an arch was raised and twined with wreaths of green and gay blooms. As Wash-ing-ton passed 'neath it a band of young girls, drest in white and with wreaths on their heads, threw bright blooms at his feet, and sang an ode that

spoke the love and praise that were in all hearts.

At E-liz-a-beth-town Point he was met by men who had been sent from New York, and led to a barge which had been made for his use. It was filled with sea-men of high rank, who made a fine show in their white suits.

Boats of all sorts, gay with flags, and some with bands on board, fell in the wake of Wash-ing-ton's barge, and as they swept up the bay of New York the sight was a grand one. The ships at the wharves or in mid-stream, dipped their flags, and fired their guns, bells were rung, and on all the piers were great crowds that made the air ring with their shouts.

On the last day of A-pril, 1789, Wash-ing-ton took the oath in front of the hall where the wise men of the land had been wont to meet in New York. He stood in full view of a great crowd to whom this was a new and strange sight. The States were to be as one, and this man, whose name and fame were dear to them, was to pledge him-self to keep them so.

On a ledge that bulged out from the main part of the house, was a stand spread with a rich red cloth on which lay the Word of God, the Book of Books. Wash-ing-ton was clad in a full suit of dark-brown home-made cloth, white silk hose, and dress sword with steel hilt, and his hair was drest in the style of the day.

As he came in sight he was hailed with the shouts of the crowds in the streets and on the roofs. He came to the front of the ledge close to the rail, so that he could be seen by all, laid his hand on his heart, bowed three or four times, and then went back and took his seat in an arm-chair near the stand.

In a short time he rose and went once more to the front with John Adams, who was to be next him in rank, and the friends who were to stand by him in this new field. While the oath was read Wash-ington stood with his hand on the Word of God, and at the close he said, "I swear--so help me God!" One of the men would have raised the book to Wash-ington's lips, but he bent his head and kissed it.

Then there was a cry of "Long live George Wash-ington!" and all the bells in the town rang out a peal of joy, and the crowd rent the air with their shouts and cheers.

Wash-ington bowed and made a speech that was full of good sense. Then all went on foot to St. Paul's Church to pray that God would bless the land.

Wash-ington felt most of all as he wrote to his friends, a fear lest he should come short of what the land hoped to find in him. The eyes of the world were on him. He had won fame in the field, but how would he rule the State? There was still much to be done. Great Britain held some of the posts at the West, on the plea that debts due to some of her men had not been paid; the red-men were still a source of fear

to the homes in the Wild West; and there was no hard cash with which the States could pay their debts.

He found that his time was no more his own. From dawn till dark men came to him, and he saw that he must be saved from this or he could do no work. Mrs. Wash-ing-ton joined him and soon days were fixed for the calls of friends. The house was kept well, but there was no waste. One who dined there wrote that there was no show. The Pres-i-dent said a short grace as he sat down. One glass of wine was passed to each, and no toasts were drank. He was kind to his guests and strove to put them at their ease. He was strict in the way he kept the Lord's day. He went to church and would have no calls on that day.

As to Mrs. Wash-ing-ton, those who knew her at the time speak of her as free from all art. She met her guests in a well-bred way as one who had ruled in a great house. She, too, was more fond of their home at Mount Ver-non than of the new rank and place. To stay at home was the first and most dear wish of her heart.

Wash-ing-ton was touched to the quick when he heard that I some one had said that there was more pomp at his house than at St. James, where King George held his court, and that his bows were much too stiff and cold.

Wash-ing-ton wrote, "I grieve that my bows were not to his taste, for they were the best I can make. I can say with truth that I feel no pride of place, and would be more glad to be at Mount Ver-non with a

few friends at my side, than here with men from all the courts of the world." He then goes on to tell how they treat their guests. "At two or three o'clock each Tues-day they come and go. They go in and out of the rooms and chat as they please. When they first come in they speak to me, and I talk with all I can. What pomp there is in all this I do not see!"

The red-men, who could not be kept in peace, roused the land once more to arms. Wash-ing-ton did not wish for war, but he had to call out troops. They went forth and laid waste In-di-an towns. Wash-ing-ton thought it would be a good plan to meet the In-di-an chiefs and talk with them. Three chiefs came to him, and said they would go to the rest and try to make peace. Wash-ing-ton made a set speech and told them it would be a good work to do, or else those tribes, "if they thieved and killed as they had done, would be swept from the face of the earth."

He had thought much of the state of the red-men in the land. He had but small faith in schools for the youth, save as far as to teach them to read and write. The true means to do them good, he thought, was to teach them to till the ground and raise crops in the same way as the white folks, and he said if the tribes were pleased to learn such arts, he would find a way to have them taught.

In the end, Gen-er-al St. Clair had to be sent out with troops to put the red-men down. Wash-ing-ton's last words to him were to be on the watch, for the red-skins were sly and would wait for a chance to find



him off his guard.

But St. Clair did not pay heed to these wise words, and the red-skins got in-to his camp, some of his best men were slain, and the whole force was put to rout.

When the news was brought to Wash-ing-ton he said in a quick way, "I knew it would be so! Here on this spot I took leave of him and told him to be on his guard! I said to him 'you know how the red-skins fight us!' I warned him--and yet he could let them steal in-to his camp and hack and slay that ar-my!" He threw up his hands, and his frame shook, as he cried out "O what a crime! what a crime!"

Then he grew calm, and said that St. Clair should have a chance to speak, and he would be just to him. St. Clair was tried, and was found free from guilt.

Wash-ing-ton's mo-ther died at Fred-er-icks-burg, Vir-gin-i-a, Au-gust 25, 1789, aged 82. When her son first went to war, she would shake her head and say, "Ah, George should stay at home and take care of his farm." As he rose step by step, and the news of his fame was brought to her, she would say "George was a good boy," and she had no fear but that he would be a good man, and do what was right.

In the year 1789, a great war broke out in France, in which Lou-is XVI lost his crown and his head, and deeds were done that you could scarce read of with-out tears. Men seemed like fiends in their mad rage, and

like wild beasts in their thirst for blood.

In 1793 France made war on Eng-land; and in 1797 sought to break up the peace of the U-ni-ted States, but of this I will tell you by and by.

In the mean-time the four years--which was the full term Wash-ing-ton was to rule--came to an end. He had no wish to serve for two terms, but the choice fell on him, and he once more took the oath, on March 4, 1792. In 1796, as France was still at war, it was thought best that Wash-ing-ton should hold his place for a third term.

But this he would not do. He had made up his mind to leave these scenes and to give up that sort of life, and those who plead with him could not move him. He took leave of his friends in a way that moved them to tears; and his fare-well speech, though in plain style, touched all hearts and made them feel what a loss it was to part with so great and good a man.

On March 4, 1797, John Ad-ams took the oath, and bound him-self to serve as Pres-i-dent for a term of four years. Wash-ing-ton was there, and as he rose to leave the house there was a great rush to the door, as all wished to catch the last look of one who had had for so long a time the first place in their hearts. So great was the crush that it was feared there would be loss of limbs if not of life.

As Wash-ing-ton stood in the street he waved his hat as cheer on cheer

rose from the crowd, and his gray hairs streamed forth in the wind. When he came to his own door he turned to the throng with a grave face and tried to say a word or two. But tears rose to his eyes, his heart was full, and he could not speak but by signs.

He soon set off for Mount Ver-non, the dear home of his heart. He had been there but a few months when the French, by their acts, seemed to want to bring on a war with the U-ni-ted States. They took our ships at sea, and there was no way left but to stand up for our rights.

Pres-i-dent Ad-ams wrote to Wash-ing-ton, "We must have your name, if you will let us have it. There will be more in it than in a host of men! If the French come here we shall have to march with a quick step."

Wash-ing-ton wrote to Pres-i-dent Ad-ams, "I had no thought that in so short a time I should be called from the shade of Mount Ver-non. But if a foe should come in our land, I would not plead my age or wish to stay at home."

He saw the dark clouds that showed a storm, and he feared his days of peace would be few. It was with a sad heart that he felt his rest was at an end, but he had so strong a sense of what was right that he did not hold back. He said he would do all he could for the troops, but he would not take the field till the foe was at hand.

For months Wash-ing-ton led a life full of hard work. He had much to

do for the troops, and at the same time work at home. He would write for hours, and took long rides each day. To his great joy, there was, in the end, no war with France.

He seemed in first-rate health up to De-cem-ber 12, 1799. On that day a storm set in, first of snow, then of hail, and then of rain, and Wash-ing-ton was out in it for at least two hours. When he reached the house his clerk, Mr. Lear, saw that the snow hung from his hair, and asked him if he was not wet through. "No," said Wash-ing-ton, "my great coat kept me dry." But the next day his throat was sore and he was quite hoarse; and though much worse at night he made light of it and thought it would soon pass off.

When he went to bed Mr. Lear asked him if he did not think it best to take some-thing. "Oh, no," said Wash-ing-ton. "Let it go as it came." But he grew worse in the night, and it was hard for him to breathe, and though his wife wished to call up one of the maids he would not let her rise lest she should take cold.

At day-break, when the maid came in to light the fire, she was sent to call Mr. Lear. All was done that could be done to ease him of his pain, but he felt him-self that he had but a short time to live. Mr. Lear was like a son to him, and was with him night and day.

When Mr. Lear would try to raise and turn him so that he could breathe with more ease, Wash-ing-ton would say, "I fear I tire you too much." When Lear told him that he did not, he said, "Well, it is a debt we

must all pay, and when you want aid of this kind I hope you'll find it."

His black man had been in the room the whole day and most of the time on his feet, and when Wash-ing-ton took note of it he told him in a kind voice to sit down.

I tell you these things that you may see what a kind heart he had, and how at his last hour he thought not of him-self.

His old friend, Dr. Craik, who stood by his side when he first went forth to war, in the year 1754, was with him in these last hours, when Death was the foe that Wash-ing-ton had to meet. He said to Dr. Craik, "I die hard, but I am not a-fraid to go, my breath can-not last long." He felt his own pulse, and breathed his last on the night of De-cem-ber 14, 1799.

His wife, who sat at the foot of the bed, asked with a firm voice, "Is he gone?" Lear, who could not speak, made a sign that he was no more. "'Tis well," said she in the same voice. "All is now at an end, and I shall soon join him."

Thus lived and died this great and good man, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of" those who love "the land of the free."

Praise did not spoil him or make him vain; but from first to last he

was the same wise, calm, true friend, full of love to God and of good-will to man.

Great and good men have been born in-to the world, but none whose name and fame rank as high as that of GEORGE WASH-ING-TON.