



WOMAN'S SPHERE



The Nation's Debt to Mothers

By GILSON WILLETS

Great Americans Who Have Achieved World-Wide Reputations By Reason of the Success That Has Attended Their Careers, Ascribe Their Triumphs to Maternal Influence

THE debt which the United States owes to the mothers of its citizens is one which is beyond the expression of either figures or language. It is a debt on which the Republic can only pay the interest—interest that consists of the manifestation of an ever-increasing reverence for American motherhood; for, with all its magnificent resources, the nation is too poor to make even a feeble attempt to pay the principal.

No better evidence of the effect of maternal influence on the careers of successful Americans need be adduced than that which is offered here.

In the lives of the Presidents of the United States, it is found that the nation owes much to American mothers.

George Washington was only eleven years old when his father died, leaving the widowed mother, Mary Washington, with five children to educate and direct. She used daily to gather her children around her and teach them the principles of religion and morality from a little manual in which she wrote all her maxims.

That manual was preserved by Washington as one of the most valued treasures, "and was consulted by me many times in after life." A French general, on retiring from the presence of Mary Washington, remarked, "It is not surprising that America should produce great men, since she can boast of such mothers."

Andrew Jackson

A few days previous to the birth of Andrew Jackson, his father died, and the widow and her two little sons rode to the churchyard in the wagon with the coffin. The support of the family fell then entirely upon the mother. She went to the home of her brother-in-law and there engaged herself as housekeeper.

Until her sons were old enough to take care of themselves she toiled for them, clothed them, and educated them as best she could.

Many stories are told of Mrs. Jackson's benevolence, her thrift, her decision of

character, and "a rigid honesty and pride of good name that went hand in hand with a quick and jealous self-respect which was not likely to be patient under any injustice."

When Andrew Jackson became President, he said of his mother:

"One of the last injunctions given me by her was never to institute a suit for assault and battery, or for defamation; never to wound the feelings of others, nor suffer my own to be outraged. These were her words of admonition to me. I remember them well, and have never failed to respect them."

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson's father died when the lad was fourteen, and then his mother became more than ever his companion and adviser. Thomas, had, indeed, always lived more under the influence of his mother than of his busy father. She was a woman of unusual refinement of character, having the culture of the best society. Thus equipped, she assumed the training of Thomas. Upon the death of her husband, she found herself her children's guardian, responsible for a vast entailed estate that was to go to the eldest son, Thomas.

John Quincy Adams

John Quincy Adams' father was devoted to his family; but, engrossed in political activities, he was frequently absent from home for long periods. From the hour in which the boy learned to talk, his mental activities received an uncommon stimulus from his mother.

"Being taught by my mother to love my country," wrote John Quincy Adams, when he became President, "I did it literally by learning to love the actual hills and rocks and trees, and the very birds and animals." And he added, elsewhere: "All that I am my mother made me."

It is an interesting coincidence that the three martyred Presidents should each

have been peculiarly dominated by a mother's influence.

Abraham Lincoln

That expression of habitual melancholy in Lincoln's face, for example, was really a reproduction of the features of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, his mother. For, through long drudgery and privation, in cabin after cabin, Mrs. Lincoln had lost all her comeliness and became bent and careworn and sad-faced, while Abraham was still an impressionable youth.

How Lincoln revered that mother is told by all his biographers. She it was, who, possessing the accomplishments of reading and writing, not common at that time, among the poor people of Kentucky, taught Abraham his letters and gave him his first lessons in writing.

When Mrs. Lincoln died, her son spent months roving the woods, vainly trying to recover from his grief. The mother was buried without any funeral service, there being no minister in the vicinity. But Abraham traversed the country for twenty miles in every direction, till he found an itinerant preacher and induced him to come to his mother's grave and there preach a funeral sermon.

"Now," he said, "I have henceforth but one purpose in life; to live as she would have me live."

And in after years Lincoln was visibly affected whenever he heard of any incident involving the love of mother and son.

James A. Garfield

What a contrast is this experience of Lincoln's to that in the case of General Grant, whose mother survived his Presidential career, and to that of Garfield, whose mother lived to stand by his side when he read his inaugural address on the steps of the Capitol and then to weep at his tomb! And to that of McKinley, upon whose venerable mother the eyes of the nation were turned with tender interest on March 4, 1897, when she was the first person to whom McKinley spoke as President of the United States!

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