

**Personal History.** "Experience, alas!" wrote young George Washington stiffly in 1758, "evinces an opinion which I have long entertained, that there is a Destiny which has the control of our actions, not to be resisted by the strongest efforts of Human Nature." Destiny, indeed, raised Washington to dazzling heights, but never tarnished his integrity. In Washington's person, as Saxe Commins writes in the introduction to his recent one-volume "Basic Writings of George Washington," is symbolized the growth of the nation "from a colonial dependency through the eight years of revolutionary upheaval to constitutional statehood. The national character, it can be said retrospectively, took a sharp impress from his convictions and his qualities of personality." Long slighted by biographers, the true figure of Washington now begins to emerge from the first of two volumes of Douglas Southall Freeman's great undertaking.

## A Great Figure Emerges

**GEORGE WASHINGTON: A Biography.** By Douglas Southall Freeman. Vols. 1 and 2: *Young Washington*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1948. 549 & 464 pp. \$15.

Reviewed by L. H. BUTTERFIELD

**I**N Mr. Freeman's "Young Washington," the first division of a life of Washington to be completed in six volumes, we have the promise of a biography that will be adequate for its subject. No previous biography of Washington has been, even for its own time. Of the scores that have been produced, only three—those of Marshall, Irving, and Hughes—have been on the ample scale required; and that by Hughes has never been finished.

John Marshall, the official biographer, came to his task hopelessly ill-qualified for it and produced a monumental and thoroughly undistinguished compilation. His book appeared in five volumes between 1804 and 1807. That most successful of traveling booksellers, Parson Weems, could not sell these "dull and frigid" tomes; the publisher reported that only two copies had been bought beyond the 2,500 sets subscribed for (Marshall had counted on a sale of 30,000); and Albert J. Beveridge, who admired the great chief justice this side of idolatry, declared roundly that the biography was "the least satisfactory of all the labors of Marshall's life." Marshall, who had better opportunities than all his followers to gather perishable evidence about Washington's early years, totally neglected them, and served up an account of his subject's family and youth, to the time of his joining Braddock's expedition, in a couple of pages at the beginning of Volume II.

Washington Irving's "Life," which appeared just half a century later,

was also in five volumes, though they were less bulky than Marshall's. Born in 1783, Irving was a namesake of the General and, as a boy, had been blessed by the President one day in a New York shop. In writing his book Irving was therefore performing an act of filial as well as patriotic tribute. Better-fashioned and incomparably better-written than its predecessor, Irving's "Washington" is moral

and sentimental in the favored manner of the 1850's. More a series of tableaux than a work of critical scholarship, even according to the standards of that day, it was perfectly adapted to family and juvenile reading—a result Irving had consciously striven for. Abridged for school use and long accepted as standard, Irving's book was a powerful influence in the growth of the nineteenth-century cult of Washington worship.

In succeeding decades the features of Irving's faultless hero hardened into those of a plaster saint. The next full-scale biography was aimed as a counterblast at the idolaters. The three volumes of Rupert Hughes's "Washington," which appeared between 1926 and 1930, were part of the cultural war being waged by the forces of respectability, called by their adversaries "Babbitts" and "super-patriots," and that school of writers, led by Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken, who averred that respectability was the curse of American life. Hughes set out to expose the legends about Washington cherished by the Babbitts' wives, that is to say, the DAR, and supposedly by the school children of America. He succeeded well. Mary Ball, the recipient of so many pious tributes as Washington's "sainted" mother, was reduced to size as "a



**THE AUTHOR:** For twenty-five years Douglas Southall Freeman, an historian to whom others defer, has had "an adventure with the clock" that would have unstrung a Spartan. He gets up at 2:30 A.M., cooks breakfast, drives from his Georgian mansion to the *Richmond News-Leader*, which he edits, arriving at 3:30. From 4:00 until 6:55 A.M. he writes editorials—twelve weekly. An hour's research follows, and at 7:55 he is at Station WRNL, of which he is vice president, for the first of two daily, fifteen-minute broadcasts. Staff conferences are at 8:15; by 9:45 the news is digested and he dummies his pages. He reads mail and sees visitors until the 11:15 broadcast, lunches at 12:40, naps fifteen minutes, and at 2:30 P.M. tears into his biographical work. Then 5:30 tea with family and guests, dinner at 6:30—"music and a grand time until 7:30 or 8:00, when, like an old rooster, I curl up and go to sleep." "Newspaper work," he explains, "is just writing in the sand. I knew if I wanted to do anything that would be preserved it would have to be books." His monuments are assured: the four-volume "Robert E. Lee," awarded a Pulitzer in 1934, six volumes on George Washington to be completed in 1952, "The South to Posterity," "The Last Parade," "Lee's Lieutenants," and "Virginia—A Gentle Dominion." In 1912 his "Reports on Virginia Taxation" was published—an outgrowth of articles he did for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* after taking his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins in 1908. "Lee's Dispatches," soon after, built up his authority nationally on military operations. In his study hangs a letter from a great, great grandfather—the first U.S. Army chaplain—to George Washington, asking for horses. G.W. replied that he didn't have enough himself. Dewey will win, Dr. Freeman predicts, "and for my part I would rather swallow some things I don't like so as to maintain the two-party system." He sees much to hearten one today. Quoting Lee, "It's history that teaches us to hope."

—R. G.



George Washington . . . "a young giant."

very human, cantankerous old lady," who cadged money for her irritated son and who smoked a pipe. The myths and forgeries respecting Washington's religious practices were discredited by scientific examination of the evidence. Scholars at once accepted Hughes's findings, and the public at large by now had done so, though its feeling at first is typified by a verse written at the time of the Bicentennial:

Let others echo Rupert Hughes  
And mix us motes and beams—  
The anecdotes that I peruse  
Were told by Parson Weems.  
Above iconoclastic views  
That little hatchet gleams!  
"I cannot tell a lie!" I choose  
The Washington of Weems.

Despite its merits, Hughes's book is highly unsatisfactory after twenty years' wear. A diligent searcher in the sources and monographs for material to refute conventional views, he was anything but an objective or, in the best sense, a critical biographer. His irreverence is sometimes more tasteless than effective, and his style is journalistically short-winded. But he cleared the atmosphere and prepared the way.

Mr. Freeman's "Washington" is projected on the grand scale he has taught us to expect from him. It exceeds in design his "Lee" and is comparable to Sandburg's or Randall's "Lincoln." (Here one may ask, but may not stay for an answer, why Lincoln has had several inadequate biographies, and Washington none.) Volume I, in twelve chapters and ten appendices, covers the social and family background, the birth, early training, and friends, and the first two or three years of Washington's career as a frontier soldier, specifically to his resignation in 1754 from the Virginia service because a reorganization of that service had lowered his rank. Volume II, in twenty-one chapters and three appendices, covers four years, 1754-58, of almost continuous serv-

ice on the frontier, the climactic incidents being the two expeditions against Fort Duquesne under Generals Braddock and Forbes, respectively. Volume I is mingled narrative and exposition, with the latter predominant. A single chapter of nearly 120 pages is devoted to an account, in the classic manner of Macaulay or Henry Adams, of "Virginia during the Youth of Washington"; and the first appendix, running to over sixty pages, is a monograph on the Fairfax family's Northern Neck Proprietary, that "*imperium in imperio*" which, as Mr. Freeman demonstrates, shaped so markedly young Washington's outlook and career, impelling him to the West and fixing his faith in the land. Volume II is very largely narrative, though in the chapter on Washington's courtship there is a long and absorbing account of the legal entanglements, fifty years in growth, in which Martha Dandridge Custis's estate was involved when she accepted his hand.

The bane of all students of Washington has always been the vast mass of material that has been available, not only in the hundreds of serried volumes of the first President's papers now in the Library of Congress, but in scattered groups, large and small, of manuscripts reposing in scores of archives and collections in this country and abroad. To these might be added the ever-growing number of special studies of Washington, his contemporaries, and his period. In Marshall's or Irving's time the task of digesting the sources was at least comparatively simple, yet they staggered and cried out under what they considered a cruel burden. Since then whole libraries of Washingtoniana have grown up, and bibliographies divide the Washington literature into numberless alphabetical subheadings, such as "Headquarters," "Homes," "Horses," and even "Humor." In his approach to this gigantic problem, Mr. Freeman has marshaled his resources like a general planning a great campaign. Making use of microfilm and photostats, which are to the contemporary scholar what mobile weapons are to the contemporary general, he and his assistants have examined afresh all the old sources, no matter how far afield, have found and utilized some important new ones, and have combed the vast corpus of printed documentation for the period. If a similar coverage of the sources for the wider stages of Washington's later career can be maintained, then indeed it may be said that Mr. Freeman will have fulfilled (to borrow a phrase he has used here of young Washington) "the quenchless ambition of an ordered mind."

The Washington that emerges from



—Photos courtesy Washington & Lee University.  
Martha Custis . . . "entanglements."

these closely packed and meticulously documented pages, however different from the youthful hero of the legends, will not be unfamiliar to readers of his writings as brought together in the Bicentennial Edition. It would be vain to attempt to summarize the biographer's own masterly summary of "The Man and His Training at Twenty-Seven," which concludes the present work. Physically a young giant, socially still a little awkward, though admiring and studious of the graces of an aristocratic society, wonderfully hard-headed in business matters, a proved and respected commander but somewhat over-zealous in the matter of his own rank and prerequisites, Washington in 1758 had been well if not perfectly schooled for a greater task that lay ahead. To one of the several "deficiencies" in Washington at this time or later would have been a better man if he had been personally more devout. His code, as Professor Morison ably pointed out in a bicentennial address, was a Christian stoicism shared by other aristocratic Virginians, including Jefferson. It is epitomized in two lines from Addison's play, "Cato," one of the few literary works we know Washington admired:

'Tis not in Mortals to command  
Success,  
But we'll do more, Sempronius,  
we'll deserve it.

"Young Washington" will remain for a long time to come the historian's history of the important events it covers. It will be most interesting to see whether the public at large will read it as enthusiastically as it has read "Lee" and "Lee's Lieutenants." The events in this book are farther away, and there are necessarily arid stretches in the chapters on Washington's monotonous frontier command. The story therefore often plods, but from it emerges a great figure, for the first time thoroughly, clearly and faithfully delineated.



# From Posies to Foreign Policies

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SOL BLOOM. By Sol Bloom. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1948. 345 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT S. ALLEN

SOL BLOOM'S autobiography, like the man himself, is very human and very ingratiating. It is not a "great" autobiography, in the classic sense. The author makes no pretense of that, just as he has never professed to be a "statesman." He is a decent and kindly person, and his book is a mellow and very readable account of his long and colorful life.

In its way, it has been a remarkable life; more than just another version of the traditional American rags-to-riches saga. "The little Jew boy" from south of the slot in San Francisco, as Sol describes himself, who sold violets in front of Lotta's fountain at the age of seven and in his twenties was the impressario of "Little Egypt" (grandmother of the "kooch" dancers), amassed not only money. He also rose to be chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee throughout the epic period of World War II. Today, Sol is still the ranking Democratic member of that powerful committee.

But whether selling violets, admission tickets, music, real estate, or Rooseveltian foreign policies, Sol always has been himself. With the lowly or the high-placed, in patched pants or "tails," he has never posed at being other than what he is. That in itself is a unique feat, and at seventy-eight he can justly take the modest pride he does in achieving it. All along the way, he made friends and in retrospect he looks back with pleasure and satisfaction, and decides that life has been good to him.

How many living today will be able to say the same when they reach seventy-eight?

Sol tells his story with characteristic charity and humor. In all of these pages there is not one word of bitterness, malice, or harsh criticism. He pokes fun at himself, and analyzes frankly his motives. There have been more spectacular memoirs in the last few years, but none more engaging.

The San Francisco part of Sol's story is in many ways the most interesting. It is a sort of history of the theatre and of the Golden Gate metropolis in its gaudiest days. David Belasco hired Sol for a walk-on part in "Under the Gaslight" at fifty cents a week, and, incidentally, somehow failed to pay him. Sol knew David Warfield, Edwin Booth, James O'Neill, and other greats of that bygone world. At the age of fifteen, he achieved the dazzling suc-

cess of a job as assistant treasurer of a new theatre, in charge of the box-office. Being "short, skinny, and beardless," he attired himself in a satin-faced Prince Albert and the highest gates-ajar collar he could find, to make himself appear more imposing.

"It occurs to me now," Sol relates, "that some of the patrons of the Alcazar might have come chiefly to look at me in the box-office."

The Washington years add little to the annals of the war period. Sol does give us, however, one bit of untold history. He reveals how he stopped an unnamed weak-kneed House member from changing his vote on extension of the draft three months before Pearl Harbor. The Congressman had voted aye, but wanted to change. Sol forcibly detained him in the lobby until it was too late. The bill was carried by one vote.

Amiably, Sol corrects one old story about him. This was that he originally wangled a place on the Foreign Affairs Committee in order to be asked to parties at foreign embassies. Sol says he did not know he was to be put on the Committee and, at the start, was annoyed when it happened.

Sol records that his deepest satisfactions have come from opportunities his position gave him to do things for others. But there was one man he could not help. He was Charles Evans



"In patched pants or 'tails' Sol Bloom has never posed."

Hughes. The late Chief Justice once said to Sol, "You have something I wish I had. Everybody calls you Sol." Then, fingering his white whiskers, Hughes added: "Maybe these things keep people from getting close enough to call me by my first name. I'd be very happy if I knew how to get my friends to address me as Charlie."

Sol comments: "I felt sorry for Mr. Hughes, but I was unable to suggest anything. I loved him, but though I knew him for many years I felt it was quite audacious of me even to think of him as Charlie."

## Architect of Annexation

ANSON JONES: THE LAST PRESIDENT OF TEXAS. By Herbert Gambrell. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1948. 462 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by J. FRANK DOBIE

ON the fifth day of January 1858 Anson Jones, who as Secretary of State for the Republic of Texas and then as the Republic's last president had been "the architect of annexation," registered at the Old Capitol Hotel in Houston. When he first knew the building it was the capitol of the Republic; he was at that time a potent and therefore, courted man. Now he was discredited, "old and tired and unspeakably weary." He was in his sixtieth year and was talking about a new career. In other years he had walked here with Grayson, and Collingsworth and Childress and Rusk—all big men then, all dead now, and by their own hands.

To a friend who sat with him that night, he said, "My public career began in this house, and I have been thinking it might close here."

They found Anson Jones next morning with a bullet through his head.

Thus ends the most artfully written biography that Texas has yet produced. Herbert Gambrell does not say so; his mastery of implication and his reliance upon intelligence to comprehend unlabeled subtleties make it unnecessary for him to say so—but Texas in the days of Doctor Anson Jones and of rawhide-tough Sam Houston was a harsh world for sensitive natures. It still is—but that is another story.

Although he did not have a provincial mind, Anson Jones was on the large stage of history a provincial figure. He neither made nor effectively met historical changes. He was of secondary importance even in Texas history. Nevertheless, this biography is important. It is infused with a larger comprehension than that behind many a biography of many a world-compeller. With a skill more common in good fiction than in good history, Mr. Gam-

(Continued on page 38)