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Americans Owe Debt of Gratitude to Debts of Improvident Painter

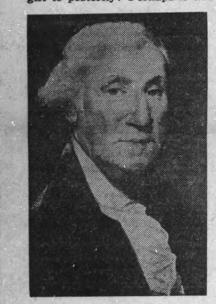
Harassed by His Creditors Abroad, Gilbert Stuart Returned to His Native Land to Make Money by Painting President George Washington's Portrait and Produced the Familiar Picture Which Most of Us Regard as the Best Likeness of the "Father of His Country." Western Newspaper Union

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

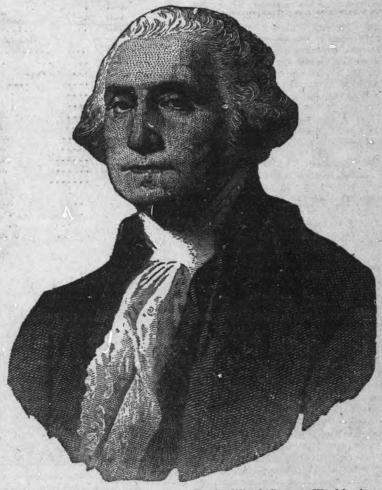
MONG the many facetious remarks attributed to Mark Twain is this one: "If George Washington should rise from the dead and should not resemble the Stuart portrait, he would be denounced as an impostor!" Whether Clemens or some other humorist deserves credit for that witticism is not important. The interesting thing is how much "truth spoken in jest" it contains. For the fact is that millions of Americans owe to one man, more than to any other, their idea of "what George Washington looked like" and an additional interesting fact is that it's very doubtful if he "looked like that" at all!

That one man was Gilbert Charles Stuart and he gave to Americans their idea of Washington's appearance in a. portrait which, incidentally, he never finished!

Who was this painter who thus "composed an unfinished symphony in portraiture" of the famous man whose birthday we will soon be celebrating? Was he, like John Trumbull, as great a patriot as he was an artist and did he play a part in the struggle for liberty in the Days of '76? Was he an ardent admirer of Washington and did he paint his pictures of the great Virginian as a patriotic gift to posterity? Perhaps it will



A Copy of the "Vaughan Portrait" of Washington.



A Copy of Stuart's "Athenaeum Portrait" of George Washington.

family.

At last he and his wife went to Ireland to escape his creditors but they followed him there.

Meanwhile the Revolution had ended and the fame of George Washington, had spread around the world. Stuart saw in this situation an opportunity to make some money for he believed that portraits of the great Washington by the great painter, Stuart, would command a high price.

He Meets the President.

When he landed in New York in 1792, he began making arrangements to have the President sit for him, but he did not succeed until two years later. While congress was in session in Philadelphia Stuart went there with a letter of introduction to Washington from John Jay. He met the President at a public reception and Washington said he would be pleased to put himself at the disposal of Stuart when his public duties would permit. A series of sittings soon was arranged.

The first was not a success. Stuart, who was a great wit and was accustomed to joking with his subjects soon found himself nervous in the presence of the great Washington. The President was not at all conversational. Stuart was not satisfied with the portrait which he painted at that time, although art critics and historians believe that it was probably a more faithful likeness of Washington than the more famous one which he painted later. Soon afterwards Stuart de-stroyed this portrait but not until he had made copies of it. These have become known as the

STUARTIANA

Perhaps one reason why the "Athenaeum portraits" of George and Martha Washington are "unfinished" is because Stu-art concentrated his attention on faces and never cared to spend much time on backgrounds for his paintings. "I copy the works of God," he once declared, ""and leave clothes to tailors and mantua makers." Dr. S. Spooner, the gossipy author of "Curiosities of Art," a book published about the middle of the last century, says that Stuart "used to express his contempt for fine finishing of the extremities or rich and elegant accessories, which he used to say was 'work for girls.' '

Perhaps he meant, more specifically, his daughter, Jane, who helped him make copies of his original paintings and who prob-ably put the finishing touches on the "Lansdowne portrait" in which, according to one authori-"the arm and hand were ty, painted from a wax model of Stuart's own hand and his boarding-house keeper, a man named Smith, posed for the body and legs.

Further evidence of Stuart's inability to do more than the face of a portrait is the remark of one of his fellow-students in London that "as to the figure he could not get below the fifth but-ton of the coat."

Among the many painters who made portraits of Washington were the Peales—Charles Willson Peale, his brother, James, and his two sons, Rembrandt and Raphael Peale. One day while Washington was sitting for all four of them, Stuart appeared on the scene but left immediately. As he came out of the studio he met Martha Washington and remarked to her that her husband was "being peeled all around." This pun has been at-tributed to Washington. But it is more likely that Stuart was the man, for he deliberately cultivated a reputation as a wit and it sounds more like him than it does George Washington.

Washington's eyes were gray but, in making the "Vaughan portrait," Stuart painted them blue because, as he said, he could not get a gray color that would be permanent and he felt justi-



to-wear garments at about the cost they paid for the materials only a third of a century ago. Advertising, in addition to de-creasing clothing costs, created jobs for many thousands of workers. "Ah showed yo' mammy with JEWEL, too, honey" For generations, fine cooks hroughout the South have preferred ewel Shortening. A Special Blend f choice vegetable fats and other Jewel Snotrening. A Special blena of choice vegetable fats, and other bland cooking fats, Jewel actually creams faster, makes more icreer, baked foods, than the costliest types of shortening. You get better results every time. Look for the red carton,





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accompanied by Martha Wash-ington and other members of his He Paints George and Martha. After Stuart had painted both . . . the President and Martha Wash-

ington, they wished to buy the portraits. But the painter was so pleased with his work that he was reluctant to part with the pictures. He delayed finishing them until he finally gained consent to retain the originals and make copies for the Washing-tons. They were satisfied with

surprise you to learn that the answer to all of these questions is "No!" But that happens to be the correct answer.

Gilbert Stuart was born near Newport, R. I., on December 3, 1755. His father was a snuffgrinder, a Scotsman who spelled "Stewart" and gave his son the middle name of Charles in honor of "Bonnie Prince Charlie," the pretender to the throne of Scotland. Young Gilbert began his artistic career by drawing pictures on the walls of barns and houses. His talent attracted the notice of Cosmo Alexander, a Scotch painter, who visited Newport. When Alexander returned to Scotland he took the boy with him and enrolled him in the University of Glasgow under Sir George Chambers.

A Prodigal's Return.

Both of these patrons died within a short time and young Stuart returned to America in rags but resolved to make painting his life work.

At the outbreak of the Revolution the elder Stuart, who was a Tory, removed to Nova Scotia. Young Stuart, who had no desire to give up his painting nor to enlist in a cause for which his family had any sympathy, decided to go to England. In the spring of 1775 he reached London almost penniless but managed to get an introduction to the celebrated Benjamin West and during the next four years studied under him. Recognition of his talent was quickly forthcoming and within the next few years he became one of the best known portrait painters in Europe. Despite the fact that money poured in upon him. Stuart, who was a lover of good living and a free spender, kept little of it.

After several years of prosperity he married Charlotte Coates, daughter of a Berkshire physician, and decided to settle down to a quiet life. His improvident habits persisted, however, and after two years of married life he found himself deeply in debt.



GILBERT STUART

"Vaughan series," since he sold the first to a wealthy Philadelphian by that name.

At a second sitting Stuart executed a full-length portrait, now known as the "Lansdowne portrait," which was purchased by William Bingham and presented to Lord Lansdowne of England, where it is still owned.

The portrait that resulted from the third sitting, however, is the most famous of the three which Stuart did from life. The "Vaughan" and the "Lansdowne" portraits were made in Philadelphia. For the third, painted in 1796, Washington agreed to come to the barn studio which Stuart had taken in Germantown, a suburb. He was

remained in the Stuart family until after the artist's death. They were then offered to the state of Massachusetts for \$1,000, a price which that commonwealth declined to pay. In 1831 they were purchased for \$1,500 by a group of gentlemen and presented to the Boston Athenaeum (hence the name "Athenaeum portrait") which lent them to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts where they are now kept.

this arrangement because they

liked the portrait of the President

better than the two previous stud-

Perhaps they might not have been so pleased if they had real-

ized the purpose in Stuart's mind.

For he immediately began mak-

ing many copies of this portrait

of Washington, which he regard-ed as "pot-boilers," and selling them for \$100 each. In fact, he was accustomed to refer to them

as his "nest egg" and his "\$100 pieces." His daughter, Jane,

aided him in making many of

these copies, Stuart painting the head and his daughter complet-

These "unfinished portraits" of

George and Martha Washington

ing the picture.

Of this "Athenaeum portrait" one critic says: "It fails as true portraiture because in it the features, the expression, the pose, all are ideal rather than human. In it Stuart wished to idealize a hero. The motive is self-evident. In the 'Vaughan' portrait, Stuart was concerned only with catching the real man on canvas. That is a superb work of art, a noble representation of a noble man. The face reveals depth of mind, gentility of breed ing, strength, will power, a sense of humor and a rare gift of understanding other men. Above ev-erything else it is human."

Although Stuart is remembered chifly because of his portraits of Washington, he might well be remembered as the painter of more notables than any other artist. In his 50 busy years he is said to have made more than 1,000 portraits and these included most of the leading men and women in the United States, England, Ireland and France, But, despite the fact that he was well paid for his work, his improvident habits prevented his enjoying for long the money he made. The end of his life found him in poverty. He died in Boston, his home during his last years, on July 27, 1828 and was buried in the Central Burying Ground on Boston Common. A tablet attached to the railing which surrounds the cemetery tells the passer-by that he is buried in that ground but no stone marks his grave, for ne man knows the precise spot where rests the dust of "the greatest portrait painter of his

A Copy of the "Atheneaum Portrait" of Martha Washington.

fied in the substitution because he was painting an immortal character. When it was suggested to him that he had made the eyes too blue, he answered, "They will be just right in a hundred years."

After Stuart had painted Washington the first time he told his friend, Isaac Weld, who wrote "Travels in America," that there were features in the President's face totally different from those he had observed in any other man. "The sockets for the eyes, for instance, were larger than what I ever met with before, and the upper part of the nose broader," he said. "All his features were indicative of the strongest and most ungovernable passions, and had he been born in the forests it is my opinion that he would have been the fiercest man among the savage tribes."

Stuart's opinion of Washington's "strong and most ungovernable passions," thus expressed, had an interesting aftermath. Here is the story as told by his daughter, Jane:

"While talking one day with General Lee, my father happened to remark that Washington had a tremendous temper, but held it under wonderful control. General Lee breakfasted with the President and Mrs. Washington a few days afterwards.

" 'I saw your portrait the other day," said the general, "but Stuart says you have a tremendous temper.

"''Upon my word,' said Mrs. Washington, coloring, 'Mr. Stuart takes a great deal upon himself to make such a remark.'

"'But stay, my dear lady,' said General Lee, 'he added that the President had it under wonderful control.'

"With something like a smile, General Washington remarked, 'He is right.' "





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