

LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF Famous Americans

By HENRY THOMAS AND
DANA LEE THOMAS

Illustrations by
GORDON ROSS



Blue Ribbon Books
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1946
BY GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING CO., INC.
FIRST EDITION

CL
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF
Famous Americans

Other Famous Americans

Additional sketches of *famous Americans* will be found in the following volumes of the LIVING BIOGRAPHIES series:

American Statesmen—Roger Williams, William Penn, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, John Marshall, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Charles Sumner, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Famous Women—Susan B. Anthony, Frances E. Willard, Isadora Duncan, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Jane Addams, Evangeline Booth, Helen Keller.

Great Philosophers—Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, George Santayana.

Great Scientists—Louis J. R. Agassiz, Charles P. Steinmetz, Albert Einstein.

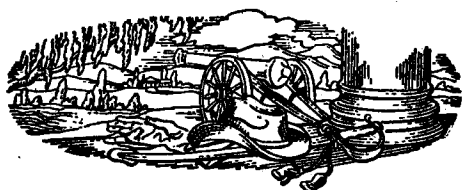
Famous Novelists—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain.

Great Poets—William Cullen Bryant, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Walt Whitman.

Religious Leaders—Brigham Young, Mary Baker Eddy.

Great Painters—James A. McNeill Whistler, Winslow Homer.

Introduction



AS POINTED out in the eleventh volume of our biographical series—LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF FAMOUS MEN—the first ten volumes were devoted to personalities grouped together according to their pursuits or professions. For example, the first volume dealt with Great Painters; the second, with Great Composers; the third, with Great Philosophers; and so on, through the ten volumes. In the eleventh volume we modified the arrangement as follows: instead of grouping a number of men under a *single category*, we there included the men who had not fitted into any of the *other categories*.

In this, the twelfth volume, we continue the arrangement of the eleventh. Just as the previous book was devoted to *Famous Men of all categories*, this present book is devoted to *Famous Americans of all categories*—inventors like the Wright Brothers and Thomas Edison, actors like Edwin Booth and Will Rogers, pioneers like Daniel Boone, industrialists like Rockefeller and John Jacob Astor, military leaders like John Paul Jones and Robert E. Lee, statesmen like Sam Houston and William J. Bryan, patriots like Tom Paine and Patrick Henry, composers like Stephen Foster,

INTRODUCTION

and exponents of the American idea of justice like Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Famous builders, most of them, either on the mental or the moral or the physical plane. Creatures and creators of the democratic tradition of free development under free institutions. Leaders who have helped to fashion America into the great melting pot of the ages—the crucible in which the old world is reborn into the new world. The pioneers in the divine experiment to establish an international nation in which men of all names and all creeds—men like Kelly, Martinez, Bianchi, Sadowski, Tomlinac, Baker, Wiederorfer, Lindsey, Fournier, Lopez, Bjorkland, Smith and Thompson*—can live together and work together and, if need be, fight together as free and friendly brothers of one American family.

H.T.

D.L.T.

*These are the names of some of the American soldiers who have won the Congressional Medal in World War II.

Contents and Illustrations



INTRODUCTION	ix
PATRICK HENRY	3
THOMAS PAINE	21
JOHN PAUL JONES	37
PAUL REVERE	53
ROBERT FULTON	67
JOHN JACOB ASTOR	81
DANIEL BOONE	97

CONTENTS

SAM HOUSTON	113
STEPHEN C. FOSTER	129
ROBERT E. LEE	139
EDWIN BOOTH	153
BUFFALO BILL	171
JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER	189
THOMAS A. EDISON	203
THE WRIGHT BROTHERS	219
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN	231
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES	247
WILL ROGERS	263
GEORGE M. COHAN	277
HENRY FORD	295

PATRICK HENRY

Important Dates in the Life of Patrick Henry

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1736—Born, Hanover County, Va. | Made Commander-in-Chief of Virginia Troops. |
| 1754—Married Sarah Shelton. | 1776—Elected Governor of Virginia. Reelected three times. |
| 1763—Distinguished himself in "Parsons' Cause." | 1787-88—Championed "Bill of Rights" amendments to U. S. Constitution. |
| 1765—Elected member of House of Burgesses. | 1799—Died, Charlotte County, Va. |
| 1774—Served as member of First Colonial Congress. | |
| 1775—Made famous "Give me liberty, or give me death" speech. | |

Patrick Henry

1736-1799



SPRINGTIME in Virginia. From the dusty roadway a boy of ten answered friendly greetings. He wore his good humor as carelessly as the clothes that draped his lanky form.

Who, in this world of exuberant nature, could remain closeted in a stuffy schoolroom? Certainly not Patrick Henry, whose aversion to books was as strong as the urge to roam the fields and the forests.

Young Pat was prepared for any eventuality. From his shoulder dangled a fishing rod; his right arm loosely supported a gun; his pockets bulged with corn pone and cold pork. Ahead stretched a day of uninterrupted idleness. A day to be spent face downward by some whispering stream, or prone upon a bed of pine needles, a time to give himself up to being and seeing—what more could anyone ask of life?

But perfection is a gift which cannot long endure. A dark cloud obscured his sky. If Patrick wouldn't attend the local school, declared his father, then he must study at home. No use to gaze wistfully toward the woodland. The textbooks lie open before you, and your father and your uncle stand at your elbows. Best to apply yourself, Patrick. Show them that you have not dis-

LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF FAMOUS AMERICANS

graced your intellectual heritage. Prove to them how quickly you can absorb these dry facts. Perhaps in that way you will earn a bit of leisure for the *real* business of living.

Five years, and the text books had yielded up their treasure. The hunger for the countryside had to wait for the casual stolen moments, for now Patrick was apprenticed to a country store-keeper. A year later he was the owner—neither pleased nor proud—of a store which his father had bought for him. As partner he had his brother—who possessed even less aptitude for business and a greater distaste for work than Patrick himself. A few months saw the complete ruin of their venture. But bankruptcy sat lightly on Pat's shoulders. The world was too full of music, dancing and pleasant conversation to leave time for worry over the unimportant matter of earning a livelihood.

At eighteen a new and tumultuous emotion seized him. He fell in love with, wooed and won Sarah Shelton, and found himself faced with the problem of supporting a family. Rendered by love more impractical than ever, Pat smiled happily into a penniless future. The young man's unfailing high spirits were irresistible, even to strangers. How, then, could doting parents resist the appeal of these unworldly love-birds? Pooling their resources, the two families bought them a plantation consisting of a few acres and six slaves.

In this latest venture Patrick proved himself quite as improvident as in the past. Two short years were all that he required to accomplish a perfect failure. Selling his slaves, he invested the money in goods for a new store. Failure again. Yet never had man a more indulgent wife than Sarah. Her faith in him was absolute. Serenely she watched his capital pouring into a dying business. Together they gazed fondly at their growing brood, and then smiled confidently at each other. At last Destiny herself caught the infection of their smile. Erasing the frown from her face, she gave a reassuring nod in their direction.

II

THOUGH he disliked his studies, Patrick Henry had the gift of concentration. Within a few weeks he could acquire the knowledge that it took the average man a number of years to absorb. He also was gifted with the power to sway an audience—whether to smiles or to tears—as spirit and conviction moved him. These qualities he determined to bring to the study and the practice of law. After a few months of steady application, he presented himself before the examiners at Williamsburg—he was twenty-four at the time—seeking a license to practice at the bar.

A strange figure he made before the board—untidy, awkward, and unpolished in his speech. They looked askance at the would-be barrister from the backwoods. But once having listened to him, they were compelled to admit that here before them stood something big in the making. Upon a promise from him of further study, the examiners granted him a license. That is, all the examiners but one. The elegant John Randolph refused even to interrogate this presumptuous country bumpkin who had rarely seen the inside of a classroom. But struck by the clear logic and the compelling eloquence of the boy, he invited him to his home. There followed four hours of conversation, in which two great intellects met and played a merry game of tag. They touched upon ideas far beyond the range of law. It was an admiring Mr. Randolph who signed the document admitting Patrick Henry to the bar. And it was an elated Patrick who received the following tribute from him: “If your industry be only half equal to your genius, I augur you will do well, and become an ornament and an honor to your profession.”

A complete switchabout, and fate kept her promise. Kept it, that is, with the most able assistance from Patrick Henry. With the selfsame zest that he had formerly applied to his loafing, he now devoted himself to his work. And from the first moment that he hung out his shingle, he enjoyed a flourishing practice.

LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF FAMOUS AMERICANS

For the word had spread throughout the countryside that victory had chosen to perch upon the eloquence of Patrick Henry.

Yet with all his legal practice, Henry found the time to lend a hand in the tavern of his father-in-law. He was able, too, to repay that gentleman's former kindness with material help.

A completely changed young man. The idler who had dreamed the sunny hours away was now as industrious a man as ever Mr. Randolph could have hoped to see. His maturity had brought along with it a newly-developed interest—in books. Never a voracious reader, he kept near him a few classics which he constantly re-read. The most often scanned and the most deeply appreciated of these was his Bible.

III

SUCCESS—and shortly thereafter, fame. It was the celebrated "Parsons' Cause" that made Patrick Henry an influence to be reckoned with. His first *big* case. The parsons of Virginia were being supported by a tax levied on all the colonists. Some of the colonists objected to this tax on the ground that they were not interested in the church and therefore they saw no reason why they should be compelled to sustain it. The clergy, on the other hand, complained that they were not being paid enough. The king of England took the side of the clergy. He ordered the colonists to give them an additional sum of money. This the colonists refused to do, and the case came up in the courts. Patrick Henry was retained to defend the people against the clergy, or rather the people against the king.

On the day of the trial the court was packed. The clergy were represented by Judge Peter Lyons, who was regarded as the ablest lawyer of the colony. He made a powerful plea in behalf of his clients and sat down amidst a buzz of admiration. Folding his hands over his immense belly—he weighed almost three hundred pounds—he looked on with a disdainful smile as the awk-

PATRICK HENRY

ward young "country bumpkin" stood up to present the case of the people against the Crown.

Patrick Henry began in a slow and hesitant manner. He had to fumble for his words. It was evident that he was suffering from stage fright. But suddenly he became fired with his own enthusiasm. He straightened up and seemed to grow taller and more majestic. A torrent of lava poured from his lips. It is the business of the king, he cried, to *protect* his people, and not to *enslave* them. If the king fails in his duty to his people, then it is the duty of the people to disobey the king. But, he concluded, if the judges dared not go against the will of the king, then let them find for the plaintiff. Let them award to the clergy the verdict of a small, nominal sum.

The judges took him at his word. They awarded to the clergy the sum of *one penny*.

He enjoyed the acclaim he received as a result of this case. It was necessary, he said, to gain popularity in order that he might sway men in the right direction. "I know of no moral principle by which I was bound to refuse a fee (from the people as against the clergy)."

His reputation spread far beyond Virginia. And, loyal to his word, Patrick Henry forever after allied himself with the under-dog—sought justice for the common man.

When he took his seat in the House of Burgesses, he caused no particular stir. The only comments that he occasioned were expressions of scorn over his untidy attire, and a snicker or two over his ungainly behavior. No one associated him with the young lawyer whose voice was already ringing through the colonies.

When the House adjourned, the seasoned members of that body looked at one another in bewildered questioning. How did it happen, they asked, that this apparent nobody had under their very noses taken the reins into his own clumsy hands? Had carried every resolution and motion which he had proposed?

Shaking themselves loose from the spell into which the young

LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF FAMOUS AMERICANS

orator had cast them, the conservatives hurled invectives against his vanishing back. With great unconcern, Patrick strolled through the street, saddle-bag dangling from his arm. Politics for the moment forgotten, he mounted his horse. Man and mare turned toward the fields and the rivers of the countryside.

Whistling a gay tune, his thoughts on rod and gun, he was startled by the ovations that awaited him at every crossroads. It was no longer "Idle Pat, the ne'er-do-well dreamer," but "Patrick Henry, the resolute Champion of the People."

And it was as the Champion of the People that he returned to assume the leadership of the House of Burgesses. On that issue he divided not only the House but the entire population of Virginia. His fiery eloquence left no middle ground. On the one side stood Patrick and the common man; on the other, the aristocracy and the adherents of the Crown. Virginia had awakened to the first faint rumblings of the coming storm.

IV

GREAT EVENTS generate great leaders. Such was Patrick Henry. Not once did he doubt the rightness of his cause nor waver in his battle for the right. And in the heart of the people there was no doubt as to their leader. As the seething caldron of America boiled over into revolution, his purpose strengthened; and his strength drew along with it the masses, sublime in their loyalty.

Steadily he rose in power; and in rising, he became the target of vituperation from envious men. Brushing aside the arrows as he would the stings of a swarm of unimportant insects, he strode calmly and surely toward his goal.

Virginia, like her sister colonies, protested the Stamp Act; but once it had been passed, the majority accepted the inevitable. Not so Patrick Henry. Raising his voice in a denunciation that rang through the colonies—and echoed even to England's shores—he "gave the signal for a general outcry all over the Continent."

Events began a swift march toward the day of reckoning.

PATRICK HENRY

Patrick Henry put himself gallantly in the forefront. As member of the Committee of Correspondence, he helped to forge the chain that linked colony to colony and thus made possible the concerted action which brought final victory.

As Virginia's representative he attended the First Continental Congress. At Mount Vernon he stopped for a visit with George Washington, and together they completed the journey to Philadelphia. Destiny's sons, rushing eagerly to meet her and to become the men of the hour.

The Congress had heard of Patrick Henry's reputation as a lawyer and orator. But this assembly was to witness yet another side of his genius. His practical statesmanship enthralled his cohorts and drew admiration even from his opponents. "There was not one member, except Patrick Henry," wrote John Adams, "who appeared . . . sensible of the precipice, or rather pinnacle, on which we stood, and had candor and courage enough to acknowledge it." Statesmen of long standing gave ground before his logic and eloquence.

And though firm in his purpose, he was fair to his opponents. "We may as well go home," remarked a member from Virginia, "for we are not able to legislate with these men." Whereupon Patrick Henry declared: "We do not mean to harm even our rascals, if we have any." And many of the "rascals" yielded to his generosity and went over to his side.

Back to Virginia, where he found trouble with the Indians. Patrick sought justice for the Red Man as staunchly as for the White. Intermarriage and assimilation would be the proper cure for the discord between the races.

The Negro, too, held a high place in his esteem. And though Patrick himself bought and sold the African captives, he considered black slavery a necessary evil in a false civilization. Often and ardently he spoke of a day when the enslaving of human beings—of whatever color—would be abolished.