



Principle Approach® Education

BLESSING THE GENERATIONS: *THE DUTY OF GRANDPARENTS*

by Rosalie June Slater

WHAT GRANDPARENTS SHOULD TEACH

Grandparents are multiplying in our country. There are many factors that account for this. But what cannot be accounted or is how grandparents are relating their presence to teaching their grandchildren some of the Biblical principles which have kept them alive and vital, that have preserved “our lives, our liberties, and our sacred honor.”

This Journal is an effort to highlight some key individuals and the important fields they represent. What do we need to teach our grandchildren that will enable them to discern the correct reasoning and the correct action to deal with each challenge to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?”

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S CARE OF NELLY CUSTIS

For many years, Verna Hall had been aware of the ignorance that characterized our nation concerning the Father of Our Country. Miss Hall spent many years researching the available sources for teaching and learning all that concerned George Washington. She compiled a great deal about his life and character. In the year 1999, the Foundation published her first volume devoted to him, *George Washington: The Character and Influence of One Man*. Mrs. Barbara Rose, wife of James Rose, has grown up in the study of George Washington. She decided to write about Nellie Custis, Martha Washington’s granddaughter, because this young lady felt so devoted to both the president and his wife.

A pertinent quote from Mrs. Rose’s article indicates that Nellie Custis lived with George Washington when he became president and saw him as “a caring father and attentive guardian rather than as an icon inscribed with the words ‘Father of His Country.’”¹ Barbara Rose relates: “As Nellie was growing up, Washington was concerned about his granddaughter’s education. Later he gave her advice on courtship and did what was in his power to assure her happiness after marriage.”

As Mrs. Rose relates, Nelly, along with her brother, were educated at home. Washington even asked Noah Webster to help him find the proper tutor, especially a “classical scholar capable of teaching the French



language grammatically.” Nelly was an unusual girl who enjoyed engaging in political conversations with opinions learned at Grandfather’s knee. She also played the harpsichord to entertain congressmen and foreign diplomats. Nelly was no doubt one of the most brilliant members of her family.

THE INFLUENCE OF MARTHA WASHINGTON

During the winters of the American Revolution it was difficult to engage in battle. That is why Martha Washington came to be with her husband during the long months of snow and ice. Considering the sparse quarters which the troops endured at Valley Forge it is understandable that she should be grateful for some small improvements in their living quarters. Elizabeth Ellet records,

How inspiring was the influence she diffused . . . She was at Valley Forge during that dreadful winter of 1777–1778; her presence and submission to privation strengthening the fortitude of those who might have complained, and giving hope and confidence to the desponding . . .

Their table was but scantily furnished; but the soldiers had still worse, sitting down at a board of rough planks, set with horn spoons and tumblers; the food often being salt herrings and potatoes, without other vegetables, or tea, coffee, or sugar.²

No wonder the Chief cherished the presence of Martha Washington during those long dreary winters!

Martha Washington encouraged, nurtured, and raised Nelly and Wash, the two younger orphans of her son, John Parke Custis. A Beautiful fact about Nelly Custis is that she was totally dedicated to her grandmother. Barbara Rose writes:

My blessed Grandmother . . . early taught me to think and pray. The faith that dwelt in Martha Custis Washington became a living principle for Nelly Custis. Martha’s child’s child grew up to walk in the virtues she had learned from her Grandmother.

NOAH WEBSTER’S EDUCATION FOR A REPUBLIC

One of the great satisfactions of my life was to discover Noah Webster as the founder of American Christian education. I grew up in Connecticut and discovered myself to be a descendant of the founders of Hartford under Pastor Thomas Hooker, who preached a sermon on the Fundamental Orders of Government. Thus I expected teaching and learning to be a true philosophy of obedience to principles. When public education revealed itself as destructive of individuality, of self-government, of character, of the property of conscience—I was glad to shake its dust off my feet and to turn my heart back to Jesus Christ as primary in the teaching of this nation.

We know that the history of Liberty began with Israel’s Providential deliverance from four hundred years of bondage in Egypt. Moses was the first historian of Israel, and its great legislator was also Israel’s



minister of education. His constant teaching goal to the nation was that they not forget their unique Heritage of liberty nor become a God-forgetting people, but be totally a God-remembering, God-obeying people. Moses addressed the parents and children of Israel so that they might make home life a time of learning—to make full use of the precious moments of early childhood. To learn God’s Laws as the first thing they are taught, Moses believed that he had presented them in such a plain and easy style that every father might be able to instruct his sons in it and every mother her daughters. Since Moses believed also that each member of a Covenant nation must be governed individually by God’s Laws, he urged that the constant remembrance of God be the keynote of home education.

Noah Webster shared Moses’ dedication to education, as evinced by his considerable writing on the subject. Important as Noah Webster’s basic educational program was, his character was even more significant. Noah Webster embodied the character for a Christian Republic. He was a “doer.” Whatever was required to carry out a plan, he took all the necessary steps. That is why his textbooks were consistent with the needs of the growing nation, at prices families traveling westward could afford. He freed America from her dependence upon English systems of language. We have always been a distinct people, and Noah Webster’s little “blue-backed speller,” plus his book on American history, further empowered many individuals to produce a new nation.

Of course, the real goal of American Christian education is to make thinkers and reasoners become Bible researchers, leaving a record of Christ in every field of life and living. The purpose is to have education as a stream of Christianity infusing the nation’s character and conscience.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, STATESMAN AND SCIENTIST

One of the most unusual features of our American Republic was the character of Benjamin Franklin. His childhood and young manhood reflected his discerning nature and his ability to be productive in an organized manner, so that his voice could be heard through a publication. As Yale University continues to publish the written works of Franklin, there are now up to fifty-plus volumes with many more to come. It causes us to realize the marvelous reasoning capacity of this benevolent statesman whose manner was so endearing to the French particularly. As a scientist studying many areas of science, he was able to produce helpful inventions that blessed mankind. But even more important was his statesmanship, which characterized Franklin’s diplomacy with both England and France.

SIR WALTER SCOTT AND THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

Remembering that American authors were nurtured on English writers, it is not surprising that Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Nathaniel Hawthorne were especially delighted with the work and character of one particular man—Sir Walter Scott, the Bard of Scotland. Sir Walter Scott, through literature, restored to Scotland her own history of liberty. His desire to make history live in the minds of all English-speaking peoples led him to create the historical novel. And, his love for his own grandchildren caused him to write his famous *Tales of a Grandfather*. These stories, taken from English



and Scottish history, were extremely popular with young and old. Dedicating the books to the small son of his daughter Sophia, Scott wrote the following:

My Dear Child,

I now address to you two volumes of Scottish stories, which bring down the history of that country, from the period when England and Scotland became subject to the same king, until that of the Union, when they were finally united into one kingdom. That you, and the children of your age, may read these little books with pleasure and improvement, is the desire and hope of

Your very affectionate Grandfather,

Walter Scott

Abbotsford, 15th October, 1828

Edgar Johnson, Scott's American biographer, records the response of the young grandson to his grandfather's tales: "The child was fascinated by these stories from Scottish history, and his enthusiasm was a measure of their popularity. 'I do not know what to do with Johnny,' wrote Scott's daughter Sophia, Johnny's mother. 'He was gone quite mad about knights and bravery and war.'" Even Scott himself relished these wild tales of conflict, battle, and fighting for liberty by the men of Scotland. Of all the men who peopled Scott's stories, the two most famous men were William the Lion and Robert the Bruce. Yet the tales of their defense of their nation are bloody. Walter Scott wrote as follows:

Robert Bruce was the greatest King who ever wore the Scottish Crown, and so many stories are told of his courage, wisdom, and endurance, that we have not room to retell them all.³

There is one tale, however, that I remember from childhood. Bruce was in deep trouble and he was in hiding on the island called Rachtin, on the coast of Ireland. As Scott wrote:

Lying on his wretched bed one morning, deliberating whether he should not resign all thoughts of making good his right to the Scottish Crown, he saw a spider endeavoring to swing itself from one beam to another. It failed six times, and Bruce remembered how he had fought six unsuccessful battles against the English—so the poor spider was in the same situation as himself.

"Now," thought he, "as I have no means of knowing what is best, I will be guided by this spider. If the insect will make another venture and be successful, I will venture a seventh time try my fortune in Scotland. But if the spider shall fail, I will go to the wars in Palestine, and never return to my native country more."

The spider succeeded at the seventh attempt, and Bruce renewed his efforts to obtain possession of Scotland.⁴



LYDIA SIGOURNEY: IDENTIFYING QUALITIES OF CHARACTER NEEDED IN A REPUBLIC

It is wonderful to learn that Verna Hall included Lydia Sigourney in her first volume on Christian history as a reference to sources of qualities needed for our republic. Today, our youth are assailed on all sides with questionable character references, so it is extremely helpful to review the life and publications of our own Lydia Sigourney. The most important distinction to be made immediately is that Lydia was a dedicated Christian who saw herself as an expression of womanhood in the Lord. There was little, if any, of the worldliness that characterizes modern womanhood.

From early childhood Lydia experienced disciplined religious training. Also, in her childhood, the sanctity of the Sabbath was ingrained. Early, too, Lydia encountered Matthew Henry's commentaries: she was baptized by prayer. But, in addition to language, speaking, and reading, she paid attention to words that she put into exercises in composition.

Apart from prayer, and learning at the knees of her parents and grandparents, Lydia "plied the needle" to help her grandmother "draw forth and twist the fine silken threads of flax" for her father's shirts. It was a blessed combination of hand-work and mind-work, for she was taught to "master composition, math, Greek philosophy, and other subjects normally offered to young men. She was, of course, adequately instructed as well in subjects regularly studied by young ladies: needlework, painting, music, and penmanship."⁵

Above all, Lydia had a Providential birth and upbringing in the home of the "daughter of John Talcott, Governor of Connecticut . . . Madame Lathrop, widow of the distinguished Dr. Daniel Lathrop, was almost eighty when Lydia was born . . . She was a lady of noble bearing, cultivated intellect, and eminent piety."⁶ Lydia, by her own admission, owed much to Madame Lathrop, whose excellent character and love for God and literature supplied Lydia with a "fertile seedbed for a young author."⁷

At age fourteen Lydia suffered great grief when the "aged, idolized friend . . . heard the love-call and went home."⁸ Lydia was greatly disturbed. But God had another wonderfully instructive household for Lydia. Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth, the favorite nephew of her deceased benefactress provided her a new home in Hartford. Colonel Wadsworth's wife became Lydia's new mentor and example of Christian womanhood. She was well-mannered, intelligent, capable, and self-controlled, an excellent hostess and household manager.

All this preparation in the life of Lydia Sigourney was for her future school, marriage, and multitudinous writings. She became truly an influence in the young republic. As the researcher of this study of Lydia concludes, identifying her long years of service:

It is a pattern for teaching and learning for all generations. Mature, matronly, it is Biblically bride-like in her perception and teaching of womanly conduct, holiness, discernment, and scholarship. She tempers all her observations of her present age with wisdom from the past, and from Scripture . . . "Still at my lessons! Still a beginner—a backward pupil at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth."⁹



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne, fresh from the success of his *Twice Told Tales*, was looking for a new project, but he had not yet found an idea that piqued his interest. On a visit to his second cousin Susan Ingersoll, owner of the House of the Seven Gables, he confessed his problem. She pointed out an old chair and suggested that he write a history of the chair, focusing on each of the individuals who had owned it over the years.

And so Nathaniel Hawthorne had the literary device around which he would compose his first book written for children. It would not be like Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*, with its wild tales of conflict and war. There might be fierce battles against the English armies, but there would also be the account of Providential deliverance. *Grandfather's Chair* was the answer to the tyranny and oppression of Europe. It was the story of God's new beginnings on this Northern American continent. It was the record of both civil and religious liberty.

The book *Grandfather's Chair* grew with each edition. In 1840, when it was published, it covered the years 1620–1692. In 1841, Hawthorne added “Part Two, Famous Old People,” which covered New England's history from 1692–1763. In late 1841, “Liberty Tree, 1763–1803,” was added, which culminated with the passing of Samuel Adams as Governor of Massachusetts. And when later reissued, a section entitled “Biographical Stories” was added including the childhood of men like Benjamin West, Sir Isaac Newton, Oliver Cromwell, and some others.

In the preface to the complete edition which came out in 1842, just a few months before Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody were married, he wrote the following words which best describe the standard which he had for children's literature:

This small volume, and others of similar character, from the same hand, have not been composed without a deep sense of responsibility. The author regards children as sacred, and would not, for the world, cast anything into the foundation of a young heart, that might embitter and pollute its waters. And, even in point of the reputation to be aimed at, juvenile literature is as well worth cultivating as any other. The writer, if he succeed in pleasing his little readers, may hope to be remembered by them till their own old age—far longer period of literary existence than is generally attained by those who seek immortality from the judgments of full grown men. (Boston, January 17, 1842)

MODERN GRANDPARENTS' LOVE STORY

Just as we have dedicated this Foundation *Journal* to two sets of real grandparents, Don and Pam Held, and Ralph and Starley Bullard, so we dedicate a special place in this issue to Kay Brigham's wartime love letters. Especially at this time in our country's history, we need to honor those men and women who give their lives to protect the nation. And Kay Brigham, who had already distinguished herself in her works on Christopher Columbus, has been much inspired by reading these love letters of her parents.



We, too, can rejoice with her in what she learned of their sacrifice and service. We, too, can make these letters a reminder of what we owe our children—to preserve this one nation under God.

As Kay Brigham, daughter, writes in her tremendous volume *For Those Who Love: Time Is Not*.

War history books are chronicles of cold, external events, but war letters are expressions from the hearts of those who participated in those events. Most importantly the letters helped me resolve the grief I had hidden away since childhood.

What a noble lover and husband Mike Klein turned out to be. But especially we value Jacqueline Coleman, Kay Brigham’s mother. How many servicemen failed to find fidelity in the love of their lives? Jacqueline was the soul of devotion to her beloved Mike. Her every letter was eloquent with tenderness.

Jaqueline’s reply to Mike’s last letter (returned with the poignant stamp, “Officers Mail Room Bureau of Naval Personnel—Returned to Sender” and “Unclaimed”) shows her courage and steadfast loyalty. May we also inspire our children and grandchildren with such character.

The Journal of the Foundation for American Christian Education, Volume IX, offers inspiration to the grandparents and guardians of the next generation as they teach and guide their progeny in the God-ordained charge to exalt righteousness in our nation.

¹ David L. Ribblett, *Nelly Custis: Child of Mount Vernon*. Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 1993, iv.

² Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution*, Vol. 2., 3rd ed. New York, NY: Baker and Scribner, 1849.

³ Elizabeth Grierson, *Scott’s Tales of a Grandfather*. London: A. & C. Black Ltd., 1963, 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵ Penelope Paquette, “Lydia Huntley Sigourney: Teaching and Writing to Plant and Nurture Self-Government; Fueling the Torch of Christian Liberty,” *Journal of the Foundation for American Christian Education*, Vol. ix, 2001, 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*