

# LAFAYETTE

FRIEND OF AMERICAN LIBERTY



Lafayette

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THE FRIEND OF AMERICAN LIBERTY

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

The story of the Marquis de Lafayette forms one of the most interesting chapters in the history of human liberty. To understand clearly the nature of Lafayette's services, both to America and to the whole world, we must first think of the conditions of life at the beginning of his career, and then contrast them with those which now prevail. One hundred and forty years ago, when Lafayette was a child, the world was not so pleasant a place to live in as it is in our own time. Even in the most enlightened countries of Europe, the majority of the people were downtrodden and oppressed. Men had scarcely so much as heard of liberty. Outside of England and her colonies, the idea of popular freedom was unknown.

This idea, as you may have learned elsewhere, seems to have been a sort of birthright of the Anglo-Saxon race. Ever since the barons of England forced King John to grant them a charter of rights, the peoples of that race have defended and cherished it. Like a spark of fire in the midst of general gloom, it has oftentimes been almost extinguished; and yet, no matter how its enemies have tried to stamp it out, it has survived and been rekindled.

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The American colonists, because this idea of liberty was implanted in their hearts, rebelled against the tyranny of George III, and boldly demanded their rights as freeborn Englishmen. Frenchmen, at that time, would not have done this. They would have tamely submitted to every form of oppression, not yet having learned that the common people have certain rights which even kings must respect. Indeed, at the very time that the American patriots were refusing to obey the unjust laws of their English rulers, the common people of France were suffering from oppressions ten times as great; and yet they had no thought of resistance, but submitted silently, as creatures whose only duty was to obey their masters. At the very time that our forefathers were resisting the payment of the tax on tea, the common people of France were paying all the taxes for the support of the French king and his nobles.

So burdensome were these taxes that they consumed the greater part of every man's earnings. The people had no voice in the management of public affairs, nor had they any rights save to toil unceasingly for those who had set themselves over them. Every year thousands of persons died of starvation, because the earnings of labor, instead of providing food for the laborers, were taken for taxes. Meanwhile, the nobles, or privileged classes, who owned all the land, were living in ease and luxury; they did no work of any kind; they paid no taxes; they seemed to live for no purpose but to gratify their own pleasures and do honor to the king.

Such was the condition of France at the time Lafayette was preparing to aid the cause of liberty in

## INTRODUCTION

America. Do you ask why he did not first help the oppressed in his own country? They were not yet ready to be profited by such assistance. The time was not ripe for any movement against the tyranny of the king and his court. To the downtrodden people of France, liberty seemed a thing so impossible that they had not even so much as dreamed of contending for it.

Lafayette was not one of the people—he was a member of the nobility, and we should naturally expect to find him arrayed on the side of the oppressor rather than on that of the oppressed. But here his patriotism seems all the more praiseworthy because it was wholly unselfish. What could he expect to gain by befriending the American colonists? They could not even offer him a salary as an officer in the continental army. Did he hope to win fame by great achievements in war? There were in Europe other and more promising fields for the display of military genius. In only one way can we account for his ardor in behalf of American liberty, and that is by saying that he was imbued with the true spirit of freedom, and was, therefore, a friend to all mankind. He thought that he saw in America the first opportunity to do good by striking a blow at oppression. The results were greater than any one could have dreamed. Without his aid it is hardly possible that our revolution would have succeeded; without it, the American colonies might have still remained under the control of Great Britain. But his friendship for American liberty turned the tide and made the history of the nineteenth century very different from what it would otherwise have been. The success of the American cause aroused the

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long-oppressed people of France to a sense of their rights and urged them to a similar resistance to tyranny. Thus, through lending aid to the colonists, Lafayette found the surest means of doing service for his own countrymen, and the people of two continents thereby became his debtors.

What has been the final result of these uprisings for liberty? The spirit of freedom has extended its blessed influence over the whole globe, and to-day there is hardly a country under the sun from which tyranny and oppression have not been banished. The right of every man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is no longer disputed; for men everywhere have learned the true meaning of liberty and have acquired the courage to stand up fearlessly in its defense.

To the great leaders, statesmen, and warriors, through whom American independence was won, the whole world owes a debt of gratitude. And, while every American citizen takes pleasure in commemorating the deeds of Washington, our greatest patriot, let the place next to him in our affections be reserved for that brave friend of American liberty, the Marquis de Lafayette.

JAMES BALDWIN

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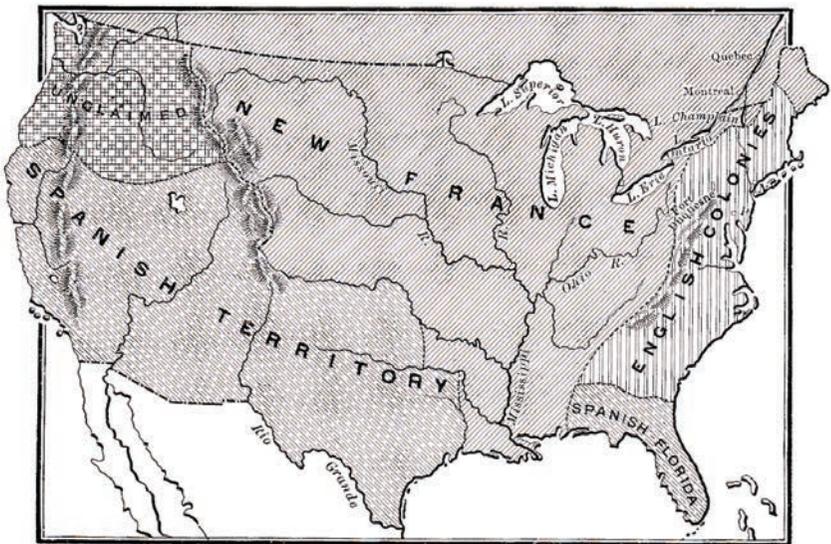
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# CHAPTER I

## THE COLONIES IN NORTH AMERICA

One hundred and fifty years ago North America was claimed by three kingdoms of Europe. Spain claimed Florida, Mexico, and the country west of the Rocky Mountains; France claimed Canada and the vast region between the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghenies; and England claimed a wide strip of land extending from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Florida, and running



*Our Country in 1750*

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straight through the territories of France and Spain, as far west as the Pacific Ocean.

Now Spain did not fear England's pretensions in the least. The Pacific slope was an unknown region beyond the Rocky Mountains, and no one dreamed that an Englishman would ever cross the trackless wilderness and climb those dizzy heights. But France knew very well that whenever the thirteen colonies along the Atlantic coast became densely settled, the English would try to seize the fertile valley of the Ohio. And so, while English colonists were cultivating farms and building towns east of the Allegheny Mountains, French soldiers were setting up a strong line of forts west of them.

At last, some English traders ventured across the mountains. They built rude huts, and were laying the foundations of a fort, where the city of Pittsburgh now stands, when a company of French soldiers attacked them and drove them away.

"Such impudence must be punished immediately," said the English; and General Braddock, with an army of British regulars, was sent to recover the fort. He met with sore defeat at the hands of the French and Indians, and but for George Washington, a young lieutenant of Virginia, the army would have been wholly destroyed.

Thus a long war began between England and France. The English conquered Canada, and because Spain had helped France in some European wars, they also seized the Spanish island of Cuba.

## THE COLONIES IN NORTH AMERICA

In 1763, envoys from France, England, and Spain met at Paris to sign a treaty of peace. They were very polite to one another, and took a great deal of snuff, after the fashion of the time; but, for all that, each envoy was determined to get the best terms for his king that he could.

In the end, the map of the New World was greatly altered. England had exchanged Cuba for Florida, while France had ceded Canada and the country between the Mississippi River and the Allegheny Mountains to England, and all west of the Mississippi to Spain.

This treaty of Paris gave to England and Spain the exclusive ownership of North America. There was not a foot of the land which the French could call their own.

The king of France grieved over the loss of his possessions. He said he hoped the thirteen colonies would prove so unruly that the English king would wish the French back in Canada to help keep them in subjection.



*George III*

Now, if George III of England had proved to be a good and worthy king, perhaps this hope would never have been realized. At the beginning of his reign, his colonies were prosperous and contented. They celebrated his birthdays, set up his statues in public parks, and offered prayers for the members of the royal

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family. But, after a time, he began to oppress them by levying unjust taxes, and when they refused to pay the taxes he sent an army to punish them.

The Americans then resolved to fight for their rights. In 1775, delegates from the thirteen colonies met at Philadelphia in a Continental Congress. They called for troops and elected George Washington commander-in-chief of the army.

Of course, all the monarchs in Europe were anxious to see how this quarrel between George III and his colonies would end. The French king was more interested than any other. Some people said he would equip a fleet to aid the Americans; yet he was in no haste to adopt such a bold policy as that.

“It would not be wise,” he said, “to try to assist those who are too weak to assist themselves;” and he waited to see what George Washington, at the head of the Continental troops, would do.

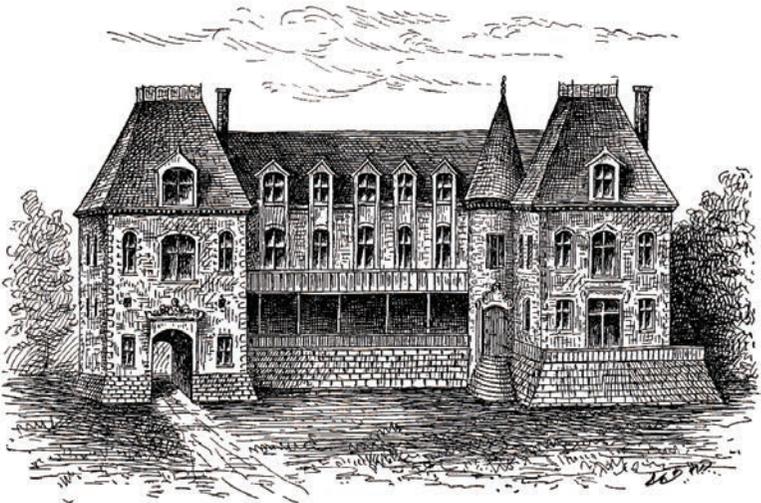
But one of his courtiers, the Marquis de Lafayette, was not willing to stand idly waiting while the Americans were fighting for their liberties. He said to his friends: “Let us join these patriots in their struggle against the tyranny of an unjust king. We may be defeated; but we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we have fought on the side of justice and the right.”

In the following pages you may read of some of the events in the life of this young French nobleman, who helped to secure the independence of the American Colonies, and afterwards laid the first cornerstone of the present republic of France.

## CHAPTER II

# THE YOUNG MARQUIS

The château of Chavaniac was in the province of Auvergne, in the south part of France. It was a lofty castle, with towers and narrow windows from which cannon once frowned down upon besieging foes. There was a deep moat around it, with a bridge which was drawn up in time of war, so that no man, on horseback or on foot, could pass in at the gate without permission of the guard.



*Château de Chavaniac, Lafayette's Birthplace*

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Low hills, crowned with vineyards, stood near the castle, and beyond the hills stretched mountains whose peaks seemed to pierce the sky. In all France there was not a more charming spot than Chavaniac; and among all the nobles of the court there was no braver man than its master, the Marquis de Lafayette.

Sometimes the king left the pleasures of his palace to spend a day at this castle; and whenever the young marquis and his beautiful bride went to Paris, they were treated with the greatest respect.

One day, the drawbridge was let down over the moat, and the gallant marquis rode away to the war in Germany. After taking part in several engagements, he was shot through the heart in a skirmish at Minden. His comrades buried him on the field. The drums were muffled, the band played a funeral dirge, and three rounds of musketry announced that the hero's body had been lowered into the grave.

When swift couriers carried the news of his death to Chavaniac, the sorrow of his family and friends was most grievous to see. The castle was like a tomb; the rooms were darkened; and the servants, clad in black, went about on tiptoe, scarcely daring to whisper to one another.

In the midst of this mourning, on September 6, 1757, the only son of the dead marquis was born.

The little orphan was carried to the chapel and christened Marie Jean Paul Roche Yves Gilbert Motier de Lafayette. That seemed a very long name, indeed,

## *THE YOUNG MARQUIS*

for the tiny baby lying so quietly in the good priest's arms; but it was the custom in France to remember distinguished ancestors at a christening, and there were so many of these that the loving mother really thought the name should be longer than it was. She said that his everyday name should be Gilbert.

When Gilbert was old enough, she walked with him instead of leaving him to the care of servants. Sometimes they climbed a high hill to see the sun set over the towers of the château. Then she told him how the de Lafayettes, long before Columbus discovered America, had driven the Arabs from France, and how they had helped to banish the English kings from France, and how his own father had died for the glory of France.

Sometimes, as they walked through the halls of the castle, she showed him the coats-of-mail which his ancestors had worn, and she told him about the swords and banners and other trophies which the de Lafayettes had won in battle.

“I would not have you less brave than they, my son,” she would say.

The boy longed for the time to come when he might show his mother how very brave he was. He grew tall and strong, and carried himself like a prince. He wanted to be worthy of his great ancestors.

The year he was eight, there was much excitement about a wolf which prowled in the forest, killing the sheep in the pastures and frightening the peasants nearly out of their wits. Gilbert made this wolf the

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object of all his walks. He would persuade his mother to sit in some shady spot while he should go a little way into the forest.

“I will return in an instant, dear mamma,” he always said; and, lest he might alarm her, he walked quite slowly until a turn in the road hid him from view. Then he marched quickly into the dark wood.

He did this for many days, seeing only frisking squirrels and harmless rabbits. But one morning, as he sped along a narrow path, his eyes wide open and his ears alert to catch every sound, he heard a cracking in the underbrush.

The wolf was coming! He was sure of it. His mind was made up in an instant. He would spring forward quicker than lightning, and blind it with his coat, while with his arms he would choke it to death.

“It will struggle hard,” he thought. “Its feet will scratch me; but I shall not mind, and, when all is over, I shall drag it to the feet of mamma, and she will know, and the peasants will know, that I can rid the country of these pests.”

He stood listening. His breath came fast. Again he heard the breaking of the bushes. “I ought first to surprise the beast by coming up on it quickly,” he whispered.

He tore off his coat, and held it firmly as he hurried on. Soon he saw the shaggy hide, and the great eyes shining through the thicket. He leaped forward with outstretched coat, and—what do you think?—he

*THE YOUNG MARQUIS*

clasped in his arms a calf that had strayed from the barnyard!

It was a rude shock to the boy. He returned to his mother, who was already alarmed at his absence, and confessed that he had tried to kill the wolf but had found only a calf.

“Ah, you were brave, my son,” she said; “I am quite sure that you would have ended the days of that terrible wolf had he but given you the chance.”