

The early Governors of Maryland—X

SHARPE'S VIRTUES NEGLECTED BECAUSE OF A KING'S CARELESS PHRASE

by

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ONE of Maryland's ablest men has suffered greatly at the hands of historians—not by direct censure so much as by neglect and "damning with faint praise." In Horatio Sharpe, Governor of Maryland during the trying days of the French and Indian War, the colony had a man of wisdom, far-sightedness, force and (rare quality!) balance. These attributes are unconsciously betrayed in his voluminous correspondence and further emphasized by events. Yet historians, in giving measure to this man, are usually content to quote George II, who knew almost nothing of Sharpe's ability. This quotation carries us somewhat ahead in our story, but as it is familiar to many Marylanders and students of history, we should begin to revise our estimate of Horatio Sharpe by plucking out by its roots the old erroneous, worn-out *mot*. This is the story of its origin.

AT THE TIME of Sharpe's appointment as Governor of Maryland those in authority in England were coming to realize the necessity for a definite program of defense against the French and Indians in America. Although only 34 years of age, Sharpe already had a creditable military career behind him. By the end of the first year of his Governorship relations between the French and English had grown so tense that the King felt it necessary to appoint some one as commander-in-chief of all the military forces in America. Sharpe was chosen for this honor but it was only a temporary measure. Three months later, only a few days after Sharpe had received word of his commission, King George appointed General Braddock to succeed him. Braddock's appointment, therefore, could have been no reflection on Sharpe's activities as commander-in-chief. Yet, when some of Sharpe's friends urged King George to reappoint him, stressing his honesty, his majesty replied, "A little less honesty and a little more ability might, upon the present occasion, better serve our turn."

THIS IS the baneful tag which has labeled Horatio Sharpe in the annals of Colonial America. Yet, in reviewing the events that followed the appointment of Sharpe's successor, one wonders whether the tragedy now known as "Braddock's defeat" would have occurred had Maryland's Governor been directing the advance against the French at Fort Duquesne. His keen appraisal of the situation on the frontier at that time and his own program of operations lead us to think that he would have proceeded far differently and with evident chances of success.

A close study of Sharpe's governorship and his activities against the enemy prove him one of the strongest governors of Colonial times and a great contributory factor in the winning of the French and Indian War.

ON AUGUST 10, 1753, Annapolis was all excitement, festivity and eager curiosity, for Horatio Sharpe had arrived that day to take up his duties as Governor. The colony had been without a Governor since the death of Samuel Ogle in 1751. During the interim Ogle's father-in-law, Benjamin Tasker, president of the Council, had acted as Governor.

It was a crucial time for the American colonies. The French had extended their forts southward and were engaging in marauding expeditions, threatening the frontiers of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. Governor Dinwiddie, alarmed by the situation, had begun to take steps toward strengthening the Virginia frontier, and had advised the Lords of Trade of the apparent designs of the French. It was a fortunate choice on the part of George II to place a soldier at the head of a colony so exposed to the enemy as was Maryland. Governor Sharpe had received his commission as captain in Brigadier-General Powlett's regiment of marines in 1745 and had already seen colonial service as lieutenant-colonel of foot in the West Indies. He was born at Hull, Yorkshire, in 1718 and was one of a large and distinguished family.

Hardly had Sharpe entered upon his duties as Governor when he received a communication from Governor Dinwiddie bearing upon

the serious problem of French encroachments. Also, the Lords of Trade, responding to Dinwiddie's appeal for help, had addressed letters to all the Colonial Governors urging them to provide a general plan of defense and to send representatives to a conference with the Indians of the Six Nations. The Secretary of State likewise advised them to work together and keep each other advised of any threatened invasions.

The worst fears of Dinwiddie were soon confirmed. Washington, who had been sent west was met by the French and forced to give up his hastily constructed defense so aptly named "Fort Necessity." The young officer hastened to Governor Dinwiddie at Williamsburg, sending couriers to the Governors of Maryland and Pennsylvania with his hastily penned message that all was far from well along the frontier. Sharpe had sensed this acute danger from his first days of office and now the time for action had come. Straightforward, he addressed the Assembly:

In this Emergency the Hopes and Expectations of our Neighbors whom in Duty, Honour and Interest we are Engaged to Support and Defend are fixed upon us for assistance; and What must the World think of our Conduct or What Calamities may We not expect, if from an unseasonable parsimony We boldly look on while they are Cut to Pieces. The Boundless Ambition of the Common Enemy and Cruel Rage of their Savage allies now upon our Borders flushed with victory indispensably require a Vigorous and immediate Exertion of all Powers to check their Progress.

THE LOWER HOUSE immediately responded by voting £6,000 for the defense of the frontier, but there was a "catch" to it! Among the

funds to be used for this purpose were certain fees which Lord Baltimore had instructed Sharpe to hold unincumbered for him. Sharpe felt his responsibility to the Proprietor, but he also felt that in such an extreme emergency it would be highly expedient to let the bill go through in order that the frontier might be defended without delay. The Upper House (or Council) then passed the bill and Governor Sharpe signed it.

Although at this time Sharpe was giving much of his thought and energy to the problem of providing defense against the French and Indians, he was guiding the internal affairs of the Colony with a clear eye and great vigor.

The boundary controversy between Maryland and Pennsylvania was then at fever pitch. Immediately upon taking office, Sharpe had summoned a general conference on this matter and his first official letter as Governor, addressed to Cæcilius Calvert, Lord Baltimore's secretary, is almost wholly given over to the boundary question. Frederick Calvert had raised an objection to the boundary decree of 1750 and this led to an opening up of the old controversy. During Sharpe's entire administration of fifteen years the matter consumed a great part of his attention, and it was largely due to his diligence that Maryland fared as well as she did. The appointment of Mason and Dixon to make the final survey occurred during Sharpe's Governorship and he personally attended most of the conferences of the committee.

SHARPE was also concerned about the "wearing out" of the lands by continued planting of tobacco, and suggested restraining tenants to planting only a certain number of acres in tobacco the last three years before the expiration of their leases. Had this been followed out there would have been less abandoned acreage in Maryland and the Maryland tobacco market would have received some stabilizing influence. At that time the Maryland tobacco market was glutted with poor tobacco, and had it not

been for fear of French and Indians to the west there would have been a great exodus of Maryland planters into the Ohio country.

GOVERNOR SHARPE was likewise very much aware of Baltimore's possibilities as a port. Only nine months after his arrival in Maryland he wrote to Lord Baltimore:

I have taken an Opportunity since my arrival of visiting Baltimore which indeed has the Appearance of the most increasing Town in the Province, tho it scarcely answered the Opinion I had conceived of it: hardly as yet rivaling Annapolis in number of Building or Inhabitants; its Situation as to Pleasantness Air and Prospect is inferior to that of Annapolis, but if one considers it with respect to Trade, the extensive Country beyond it leaves not room for Comparison; were a Few Gentlemen of fortune to settle there & encourage the Trade it might soon become a flourishing place but while few beside the Germans (who are in general Masters of small Fortunes) build and inhabit there I apprehend it cannot make any considerable Figure.

Sharpe, during his fifteen years of Governorship, saw Baltimore become one of the foremost ports of the Colonies, his prophecy more than fulfilled.

IN JULY, 1754, George II issued to Maryland's Governor the commission to take "command of the Forces that shall be raised on this part of the Continent to protect his Majesty's Dominions from the Encroachments and Devastations of his presumptuous enemies." The vessel bearing news of this commission was carried off her course by a storm, requiring twelve weeks for the passage and the commission was not received until October.

Sharpe at once communicated with the Governors of the various Colonies, made a tour of the defenses and estimated the strength of his actual and prospective forces. The only full-fledged frontier defense in the middle Colonies was the one in process of erection at Will's Creek, later to become Fort Cumberland. No better brief survey of the situation in the Colonies can be had than Sharpe's letter to Sir Thomas Robinson, then Secretary of State, acknowledging the receipt of his Majesty's commission.

ONLY ONE DAY before he wrote the letter, Sir Thomas Robinson had written to Sharpe advising him that a large complement of English troops would soon be transported to America, to be preceded by a deputy quartermaster-general (with whom he was to cooperate) and shortly thereafter by a commander-in-chief.

Sharpe was, therefore, hardly aware of his commission before the appointment of a successor was contemplated. However, due to the slowness of the mails, Sharpe did not receive Sir Thomas' letter until the following January. It was what Sharpe accomplished in the interim, when preparations were being made for taking care of the English troops, that showed of what mettle this man was made.

SHARPE FOUND considerable disorder and lack of organization at all points, especially at Fort Cumberland. He had to combine his duties as commander-in-chief with that of quartermaster-general, for it seemed that little thought had been given to the provisioning of troops. Sharpe's ability in this kind of planning amounted almost to genius; no detail was overlooked, it appears. Writing to Lord Albemarle of the conditions he found at Fort Cumberland, he contrasted them with the preparations which the French had made at Fort Duquesne, where they had laid in provisions for the whole winter. At Fort Cumberland he found "no provisions as yet procured" and as the season was advanced, it was difficult to purchase and collect sufficient supplies, nor had Governor Dinwiddie appointed commissaries for this important duty. "Mortars, Field Pieces or Cannon we had none except four small ones of the Latter which I purchased out of a Ship."

THE FORCES which Sharpe had to plan with were pitifully meager and undisciplined. There were three independent companies, so poor that when later reviewed by Braddock's quartermaster-general forty men were discharged from one company as unfit for duty. "The Remains of the Virginia forces," Sharpe wrote some time later, "amounted to about 130 discontented unruly & for want of Pay mutinous: the Maryland Company was at



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that time incomplete & undisciplined, but I may at least say they were not inferior to any of the Rest. The Officers who were honoured with his Majesty's Commissions would not deign to rank with those who served under those of his Majesty's Governors; Vain were my Attempts to persuade them to agree, tho I proposed the same Scheme which is now come with a Sanction from home." It was this quarrel over rank that caused Washington to retire angrily from military service.

WHEN, early in January, Sharpe received the letter advising him of the appointment of a successor he took a most praiseworthy attitude, utilizing all of his resources to prepare for the reception of the English troops. Hastening to Fort Cumberland, he began his preparations. One week later he was joined by Sir John St. Clair, deputy quartermaster-general, who had just arrived from England. Together Sharpe and St. Clair obtained all information available concerning the country through which the forces were to pass.

WHEN GENERAL BRADDOCK, the new commander-in-chief, arrived in Virginia, the Maryland Assembly was in session and Sharpe was thereby prevented from attending him in person for some days. Braddock invited the Colonial Governors to an early council at which Sharpe was a prominent figure. In the meantime, Sharpe communicated with Braddock, reporting to him on the general situation in North America, repeating that he deemed it inadvisable to drive the French from their encroachments on English territory without first cutting off communication between Canada and the French forts on Lake Erie. This was sound strategy, as proved by subsequent events. At this time, however the English military authorities, for some reason, were consumed with eagerness to have Fort Duquesne captured.

SHARPE'S ROLE from now on, as he saw it, was to coöperate to the utmost with his successor. Writing to his brother he says, "No Punctilio shall prevent by obeying any Orders he shall be pleased to signify in the least consistent with the Station that I now bear." Far different was this attitude from George Washington's. That young soldier was still on his plantation, holding aloof from affairs military, unreconciled to the general order which reduced him from rank of colonel to that of captain.

It is reasonable to conjecture that Sharpe had a most direct influence upon Washington's career at this juncture. There is no doubt that he was much impressed with the latter's abilities, and at every opportunity he urged them to resume his military career. Just who was instrumental in bringing Washington back to the fold at this time is not disclosed by any records yet brought to light, but there is little doubt that it was one of four: Governor Dinwiddie, Major Carlyle

(at whose home Braddock stayed immediately after his arrival), Governor Sharpe and Colonel Fitzhugh (a close friend of Washington). And of the four, Sharpe had both the best opportunity and the greatest desire to intercede with the future commander of the Continental armies.

BRADDOCK'S DEFEAT was a stunning blow to the English Colonies. After it, Sharpe hastened to Fort Cumberland. On arriving he learned that Colonel Dunbar, next in command to Braddock, was planning to quit Fort Cumberland and march to Philadelphia with the remains of the two regiments and the independent companies. "This last account," he wrote, "had more alarmed our back Inhabitants than the General's Defeat," for they felt that the enemy, learning of their defenseless position, would swoop in upon them. Many Colonists were planning to desert their plantations and move eastward, but Sharpe encouraged and persuaded them to remain by promising to maintain a garrison at Fort Cumberland and ordering the construction of several small forts in exposed parts of the frontier. These forts were garrisoned by Maryland volunteers. As to paying for this, Sharpe said, "The Expense of this I shall be enabled to defray by the subscription that has been made here for such purposes and out of the same Fund I shall support Captain Dagworthy's Company that was with the General (Braddock)." However, the Governor was often to reach into his own pocket to defray certain of the expenses.

WHEN SHARPE LEFT Fort Cumberland order prevailed and the people felt assured of protection in some measure at least. He returned to Annapolis to carry on the affairs of state.

Braddock was succeeded as commander-in-chief by William Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts. The new commander decided to call a council in New York similar to that held by Braddock at Alexandria, to decide on a program of operations. The Council met and agreed upon a plan of operation, approving early attacks on Fort Frontenac and Niagara. But before this could be carried out Shirley was succeeded by Loudon, who seemed bent on condemning all of Shirley's proposals.

WITH THE FALL of Louisburg and Frontenac, the final and successful advance against Fort Duquesne was made. General Forbes, mortally ill, led the southern forces against the fort. Sharpe meanwhile remained at Fort Frederick (near the present town of Hancock) with his troops of volunteer Marylanders. These men were receiving no pay and provisions were scarce. Writing to St. Clair, Sharpe said, "It is well Captain Dagworthy and the rest of our officers taught their men to live without victuals last summer, otherwise, they might not have found it so easy a matter to keep them together six months without pay in the winter."

Forbes, though dying, pushed through to

success, and on November 23, 1758, the French departed from Fort Duquesne never to return.

WITH MILITARY ACTIVITIES now confined almost wholly in the north, Sharpe for the first time could attend to affairs of state with little interruption. His relations with Lord Baltimore and Secretary Calvert were always of the best. The latter, writing to Sharpe of an audience he had been granted with George III, reported that his Majesty had asked his opinion of the Governor of Maryland and that he had replied, "That of a person brave and resolute and of real honesty and in the due execution and administration of Government, very adroit and all Deserving."

Although Horatio Sharpe remained a bachelor, his life was far from lonely. He had much personal charm, he was a polished gentleman and a genial and gracious host, entertaining both at Government House, Annapolis, and at Whitehall, his own lovely country place north of the Severn, which, not so long ago, the Maryland chapter of the American Institute of Architects selected as most typical of the surviving Maryland Colonial homes. It is quite probable that this bachelor Governor was many times the central figure of romantic conjecture, but, according to legend, he fell in love once only, and that with Mary Ogle, daughter of his immediate predecessor in office.

AT THE TIME of Sharpe's arrival in Maryland Mary was still a child. At the close of the French and Indian war she had become an attractive young lady, and the Governor, then 37, had lost his heart. But it was his young secretary, John Ridout, who was the successful suitor. If it is true that Sharpe loved Mary Ogle, the situation resulted in no estrangement. All continued in the closest friendship, the Governor advancing Ridout on all occasions that arose. In 1760, at the time the engagement of Mary Ogle and John Ridout was announced, Sharpe wrote to Lord Baltimore recommending his secretary to a seat in the Council. Baltimore made the appointment, much to the gratification of the kindly Sharpe, who recognized John Ridout's outstanding ability.

Sharpe spent as much time as possible at Whitehall, where he engaged actively in agricultural pursuits. He endeavored to keep abreast of the newest methods of planting. On the grounds of Whitehall were many flowers and shrubs which he had obtained from England and France; there were bulbs from Holland; and out in the fields browsed his flock of famous South Devon sheep.

ANOTHER OF HIS HOBBIES was horse breeding and racing. Governor Ogle, Sharpe's predecessor, had been a patron of the turf, encouraging the importation and breeding of fine horses in the province. Horatio Sharpe carried on the tradition with genuine zeal and devotion. Two of the earliest famous

stallions in Maryland were Spark, imported by Governor Ogle, and Othello, brought in by Governor Sharpe.

In 1769 word came that Robert Eden was to be named Governor of Maryland. Eden had married Lord Baltimore's sister, and Lord Baltimore in his letter to Sharpe was frank enough to say that "nothing but Fraternal Affection could have made me wish to have altered" the situation.

On Eden's arrival, Sharpe retired to Whitehall where, it seems, he enjoyed relief from the duties of state. He was fond of entertaining, he had a large circle of friends who were genuinely fond of him, and the distant rumbling of discord between England and the American Colonies were not so disquieting to one no longer hampered with the problems of office.

HOWEVER, Sharpe was staunchly loyal to the Crown and he was grieved by the approaching break. But regardless of this, Maryland was his home and it is doubtful if he would have left his beloved Whitehall had not family affairs caused him to return to England in July, 1773. Sailing with him on the ship Richmond were Mrs. Ogle, mother of Mary Ogle Ridout, and young Samuel, the Ridouts' eldest son. This boy was to enter Harrow, and Sharpe in the years that followed gave his personal attention to the youth's scholastic career.

At first Sharpe planned to return to Maryland, but the long years of the war stretched out and he finally reconciled himself to remaining in England. However, there are many chance remarks in letters which show where his heart lay. He had cuttings and seeds from his plants at Whitehall sent to him for transplanting in his English garden at Hampstead. His numerous letters to friends, his eagerness to have them visit him, his real joy when they did and his questions about things in Maryland, all indicate that he longed to return. He waited eagerly for John Ridout's long-promised visit to England. Letters there had been in plenty, but Sharpe, now past 70, longed to see his closest friend. In 1789 Ridout set sail but a leak developed in the vessel and it was forced to return to port where it was abandoned as unseaworthy. The following year Sharpe died, having reached the age of 72.

IN REVIEWING the life of Horatio Sharpe, one is left with the conviction that here is a man who mastered the art of living gracefully. He knew how to adapt himself, it seemed, to all circumstances. He pursued his duties with diligence and good sense; he was a charming companion and excellent host. Above all, he was modest; had he been less so, his name might have had a different place in American history. It is to be hoped that more will be brought to light about this remarkable man who, with the possible exception of Leonard Calvert, brought more intelligent interest and devotion to bear on the province than any other Colonial Governor of Maryland.