

The Life Story Of Albert Pike

by Fred W. Allsopp

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A Cornerstone Book
Published by Cornerstone Book Publishers
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Cornerstone Book Publishers
New Orleans, LA

Part of the Cornerstone Scottish Rite Education Series

First Cornerstone Edition - 2010

www.cornerstonepublishers.com

ISBN: 1-453756-87-6
ISBN 13: 978-1-453756-87-4

MADE IN THE USA

The
LIFE STORY
of
ALBERT PIKE

By FRED W. ALLSOPP

*But the truer life draws nigher,
Every year;
And its morning star climbs higher,
Every year;
Earth's hold on us grows slighter,
And the heavy burden lighter,
And the Dawn Immortal brighter,
Every year.*

Contents

Introduction.

- Chapter I—Pike's Struggle for an Education and
Desire for a Freer Life.
- Chapter II—His First Adventure in the West.
- Chapter III—Entering the Staked Plains.
- Chapter IV—Following the Old Santa Fe Trail.
- Chapter V—Arrival at Fort Smith.
- Chapter VI—Removal to Little Rock.
- Chapter VII—His Marriage.
- Chapter VIII—Engages in the Practice of Law.
- Chapter IX—His Oratorical Ability—His Public
Services.
- Chapter X—Takes Up Arms in the War With Mexico.
- Chapter XI—Duel With John Selden Roane.
- Chapter XII—Service in the Confederate Army.
- Chapter XIII—His Work as an Author.
- Chapter XIV—Activities of His Later Years—His Ma-
sonic Career—Takes Up Residence in
Washington City.
- Chapter XV—The Wake of "The Fine Arkansas Gen-
tleman."
- Chapter XVI—The Close of an Eventful Life.

INTRODUCTION

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IN ARKANSAS

Mr. Clio Harper, Esq.
Little Rock, Arkansas.

My Dear Brother Harper:

You have kindly placed before me the proof sheets of "The Life Story of Albert Pike," written by Mr. Fred Allsopp, and you have both insistently requested that I should add a preface that in some manner might be helpful.

I have said to you that I very much prefer not to comply with this request, but because both yourself and Mr. Allsopp are so deeply interested in this subject, and because you are both friends of mine, I very reluctantly yield.

After all, what is there to be said in a brief space, of this truly Great Man, great in so many ways, after the very readable and very attractive story contained in this volume?

Surely there is little I might add, beyond expressing my sincere appreciation of the work itself, and that Mr. Allsopp and yourself will give many, very many Masons, throughout the United States, an opportunity of reading much of the history of the Man and Mason so well loved in life, and whose memory is so sincerely and affectionately cherished.

There might be volumes written of the works of General Pike, and then the half would not be told. But it seems to me this "Life Story" well covers incidents and characteristics of his life, many of which never before have been touched on, that will prove of great interest to all.

General Pike was a very industrious writer, and everything he

wrote was in his own handwriting, which was small, even and very beautiful. He never, so far as my information goes, used anything except quill pens, and these he made and kept sharpened himself.

In addition to the Honorary Life memberships bestowed on General Pike, as noted in the story, there were many others of a Masonic and Civic nature, and in the Pike section of our great Library in the beautiful House of the Temple in Washington, there are many elaborately engrossed parchments from almost all parts of the world, giving evidence of the great esteem in which he was held by his Masonic Brethren.

The Library itself was created largely by General Pike, and after he built it up to what is said to be the most valuable private library we know, he gave it to the Supreme Council, and it is now conducted, with some additions by our Supreme Council, for the use of the public as well as members of the Masonic fraternity.

The portrait in the State Capitol referred to in the life story was painted from a photograph I loaned the artist who painted the portrait. It calls to my memory the circumstances under which the photograph came to me. A little party from this State visited the General, and he had two photographs on the mantel, which had just been taken and delivered to him. Before we left, one of these photographs was given to the late Maj. James A. Henry of this city, and the other, much to my great delight, came to me, and is now hanging on the wall in my home.

We cherish this photograph because of its peculiar associations. The visit itself was a memorable one to us, surrounded as we were by a myriad of birds singing in their cages, cherished tokens from many friends in evidence everywhere. In this setting was the General, in the best of spirits, telling one story after another of old friends in this State, and asking after relatives of those who were then present.

The photograph I have, I believe, was the last that General Pike had taken.

CHARLES E. ROSENBAUM.

PREFACE

One of the giants of the early days in the Southwest was General Albert Pike, who resided in Arkansas from 1832, intermittently, up to the close of the Civil War.

He left a lasting impression on the times, because he was a man who played a distinguished part in the world, or, rather, for the reason that he distinguished himself by acting many parts well. As one writer observes, "he touched all the elements of romance and adventure that existed in the Southwest, from the wild Indian tribes, into one of which he had been adopted, and of which he is said to have been a chief, to the composition of verses which had found recognition and appreciation so far away and from such high authority as Blackwood's (Edinburgh) Magazine."

Indeed, his adventurous life reads like wild romance, and the events in which he participated furnish an interesting contrast between the men and movements of those pioneer times and those of today under the more favorable conditions which exist.

Whether or not it is due in any degree to the halo that tradition gradually brings to the memory of great men, it would seem that those who dominated the Southwestern country fifty to seventy-five years ago were bigger and brainier than the average man of today. In any event, it was not the faint-hearted who conquered the wilds, but strong men, like Albert Pike.

Two characters that will ever live in Arkansas song and story are Sandy Faulkner's "Arkansaw Traveler" and Albert Pike. The imaginary character has often brought derision to the state; the real life of the other has added to its lustre.

The Life Story of Albert Pike

CHAPTER I.

THE STRUGGLE FOR AN EDUCATION, AND THE DESIRE FOR A FREER LIFE.

*First came Ambition, with his discous eye,
And tiger-spring, and hot and eager speed,
Flushed cheek, imperious glance, demeanor high;
He in the portal striding his black steed,
Stained fetlock-deep with red blood not yet dry,
And flecked with foam, did wild cohort lead
Down the rough mountain, heedless of the crowd
Of slaves that round the altar-steps yet bowed.*

In August, 1825, a tall, eager, well-formed lad of sixteen left his home at Newburyport, Mass., and went to Boston, his birth place. Hurrying over to Cambridge, he sprinted up the steps to Harvard's main building and into the office of the registrar. The unknown youth stood smiling, with glinting eyes, looking like a modern Mercury, full of nerve, ambition and active optimism. After a little patient waiting, cap in hand, his worn clothes not at all impressing the authorities to quick action, the clerk turned toward him, with an inquiring look.

"My name's Pike—Albert Pike; I've qualified for

the Junior class and want to get registered for the term.”

“Qualified?” asked the man, not unkindly.

“Yes, I’ve been studying privately to make the exams and have passed. Taught school to make it a go. Now I’ve enough to go through.” And he grinned happily.

“All right, young man, if you can pass the entrance examinations and will make the necessary advance payments for the Freshman and Sophomore terms, I suppose we can fix you up.”

“You want payment for two terms?” he inquired, with impatient surprise.

“I am sorry that that is the requirement, my boy.”

If Albert Pike had been hit squarely between the eyes with a sledge hammer, he would not have been more surprised and disappointed, for he had saved up just enough money to pay his expenses through a single term.

“I cannot pay in advance for two terms, and indeed I shall not do so.”

A few additional words were exchanged, but they were fruitless.

Maddened and saddened, he moved slowly out of the office. There was that in him, however, which then and there gave substance to a resolution that he would some day be considered worthy by the college which now refused to help him to receive its honors. And his colorful life will presently reveal how far right he was.

Wilted Pike was, after leaving the registrar’s office, wilted and a little embittered, but not overcome. True to the blood in his veins which faced the hardships of a

raw country in 1635, the young man would not be denied what was his due. He had inherited the stubborn and stalwart characteristics of his ancestors, who were descended from an old ~~Devonshire~~, England, family. He was of the same staunch stock as Nicholas Pike, author of the first arithmetic published in America and the friend of George Washington; as Zebulon Pike, who explored the Rocky Mountains, and other eminent Americans.

It is not surprising then that he set to work, with grim determination, to educate himself, first as assistant, and then as principal, of the village academy at Newburyport. When he began teaching, by day he faced his classes, and by night his books, that he might qualify for the bigger job of principal. He spent some time on linguistic studies, and the pursuit of Spanish, which was one of them, came in to good advantage later on.

His home town, thirty-five miles northeast of Boston, was at times gay, with its prim parties, bees, sociables and picnics; the shipbuilding activities of the port also interested the youth, but young Pike had a resenting wrath, as well as a powerful ambition, within him, that developed his will power to the extent of refusing allurements and festivities.

He proved his mettle and gave evidence of future accomplishments. But the young man appeared to live in an atmosphere of restraint. A reaction had set in within him, due to environment and heart-yearnings. He attended less and less to academic studies, and found himself pondering more and more on tales of the new

western land, which he read in the newspapers and heard discussed among his friends. Confined in a small town, and thrown with rigid Puritans, he longed to lead a freer life. There was no big opportunity at home. Therefore he decided as soon as possible to leave and strike out for himself. All his efforts now tended to make money enough to take him to the West.

Many other ambitious young men had left their homes for the newer countries. Sargent Prentiss had settled in Mississippi; Stephen A. Douglass went from Vermont to Illinois; John Slidell moved from New York to Louisiana; James H. Hammond left his home in Massachusetts to go to South Carolina, and Robert J. Walker of Pennsylvania took up his residence in Mississippi.

There was a rush of enterprising and adventurous people to the Province of New Mexico, which was believed to be a kind of Utopia, where gold and silver, as well as beaver, were to be found in abundance. It was in that direction that Pike turned his eyes.



CHAPTER II.

HIS FIRST ADVENTURE IN THE WEST.

*Farewell to thee, New England!
Farewell to thee and thine!
Good-bye to leafy Newbury,
And Rowley's hills of pine!*

*Whether I am on ocean tossed,
Or hunt where the wild deer run,
Still shall it be my proudest boast
That I'm New England's son.*

Pike's first great draught of adventure was taken when he left his Eastern home for the West, in 1831, and joined a hunting and trapping party.

He walked 500 miles of the distance from Massachusetts to St. Louis, covered the remainder of the journey by boat and stage coach, and was more than two months on the way. Traveling in those days was slow and tedious.

The verses he wrote in farewell to New England reveal a strong love for the section of his birth and for his ancestry. He was still, one may say, of tender years and considerable tenderness of heart, at twenty-three. So, though aspiration pulled him far from the spots of his childhood, the verses show his state of heart. He was not only adventurous but a thinker and a poet, large-

minded, chivalrous, with a steadfast determination to do something in the world.

After spending a little time at St. Louis, for rest, and to get his bearings, he started for Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was then the depot of supplies for the Southwestern country. This was in the month of August.

Pike was very much surprised to find that the Governor's palace at Santa Fe was merely a mud building, fifteen feet high, with walls four feet thick, and a mud portico, supported by rough pine timbers. The gardens and fountains and grand staircases, which he had read about, were wanting. "The Governor may raise some red pepper in his garden," he said, "but he gets his water from the public spring."

In a day or two Pike heard that a Missourian, named John Harris, was collecting a party at Taos to go on a hunting expedition to the Comanche country, upon the heads of Red River and Fausse Washita. He returned to Taos to join that party. Taos was an adobe village of less than a thousand inhabitants, 75 miles south of Santa Fe. The valley surrounding it was occupied by Mexican farmers, and it was an important trading point for northern New Mexico.

A man named Campbell was going into the same country, and, before leaving Santa Fe, Pike bought from him an outfit, consisting of one horse, one mule, six traps and a supply of powder, lead and tobacco. Pike, Campbell, a Frenchman, and several Mexicans whom they had picked up, set out together to seek Harris at Taos.

Camp on the first night out, when the men, fully dress-

ed, lay down to rest, with their guns by their sides, only to be awakened many times by the howling of wild animals, was a novel experience for the erstwhile tenderfoot from New England.

The next episode was to get lost in the Pecuris, thirty miles away, which resulted from Pike and Campbell becoming separated from the other men as they rode along. Having no guide, they took the wrong direction. They traveled until nearly night, and then retraced their steps for about four miles, to a place where they saw the remains of an Indian fire. Here they kindled a large fire, tied their horses and slept. In the morning they mounted and again proceeded towards Taos. After an exasperating delay, they finally overtook the other members of their party, who had in the meantime joined Harris, near Taos.

The combined party numbered 70 or 80 men, of whom 30 were Americans, one was a Eutaw, one an Apache, another a Frenchman, and the others New Mexicans. Each man was mounted and armed with a gun, besides having a pistol or two in his belt.

"Trappers," wrote Pike in his diary, "are like sailors when you come to describe them; the portrait of one answers for the whole genus." But he singled out a few of the party for special mention:

Aaron Lewis, who afterwards became a distinguished soldier, came from Ft. Towson, near the Arkansas border, and Pike got acquainted with him when he first reached Taos. He was a magnificent specimen of manhood, over six feet in height and weighing 200 pounds, with clear

blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, of undaunted courage, coolness and self-possession, an excellent shot, a genial companion, whose sense of good humor was proverbial, and he and Pike became fast friends.

Bill Williams, who was once a preacher, and later an interpreter to the Osage Indians, gaunt, red-headed, with hard weather-beaten features, marked deeply with smallpox, all muscle and sinew, "the most indefatigable hunter in the world," said Pike, "with an ambition to kill more deer and catch more beaver than any man about, and having no glory except in the woods."

Tom Burke, who Pike said, was a "Virginian with an Irish tongue;" and "various others who were better at boasting than at fighting, with a few who might be depended upon in case of an emergency."

An old Comanche was procured for a guide. Then the party left the Valley of the Pcuris, and camped that night at Mora plaza. The sole inhabitants of this old village at that time were rattlesnakes, of which about three dozen were killed in and around the old mud houses.

They proceeded up the Pecos river through the valley for twelve miles. Contrary to their hopes, little game was killed, except a few antelopes.

No incident worth mentioning occurred until the ninth day, when a dispute arose between Harris and Campbell, over a trivial matter, which resulted in a separation. Harris insisted on going to the Little Red river through a dry prairie. The balance of the men followed the guide along the Pecos river, in a southeasterly di-

rection, to the Bosque Grande, or Bosque Redonda, as Pike called it, where entrance would be made to the great prairie. They were six days more in reaching this point, which was about forty miles north of the present site of Roswell, New Mexico.

Skulls greeted the men here and there as they passed on, and these grim reminders of the fate of former travelers in those parts had a depressing effect.

Just before reaching the camp at the Bosque, some of the Mexicans were met by a party of their countrymen, who had just returned from the Canon del Resgate, in the Staked Plains. They went there to trade bread, blankets, punche and beads to the Indians for buffalo robes, bear skins and horses; but they were overpowered by the Indians, robbed of all their goods, and warned to return to their own country. They stated that these same Indians had shortly before routed a train of American wagons, and captured 1500 mules, as well as scalped some of the white men.

Two of the Mexicans had already deserted. Pike, who spoke Spanish, was called upon to attend a council of the Mexicans, who were alarmed at the prospect of entering the Staked Plains after receiving the news referred to. It was represented that the Indians were on the warpath against all Americans, and were determined that none of them should trap in their country. To make matters worse, Manuel, the Indian guide, pretended that if he entered the Comanche country as a guide, the Indians would sacrifice him, as well as the party. The Comanche declared that he would not go into the Staked