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GEORGE WASHINGTON

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WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS.

WASHINGTON AS A STATESMAN.

THE period during which Washington won his fame as a statesman extends from the time when he resigned his commission as commander-in-chief of the army to his death, in 1799. As this period recedes into the past it is becoming more and more evident that no small part of his permanent fame will rest upon the sagacity, the penetration, and the tenacity of purpose which he displayed in this most exciting and critical period of our history. He was not a learned man as that term is generally understood, but he had made a collection of books on political science such as few private libraries of that day could equal. He had copied with his own hand an abstract, made by Madison, of the great authority on this subject at that time, Montesquieu's "Spirit of Laws."

After resigning his commission, he was invited to meet a committee of Congress to assist in devising plans for establishing the government upon a peace basis. He suggested a series of measures which reveal his far-sightedness and his practical good sense. Among these were the establishment of a military academy for the training of officers, the creation of a navy as a means of protecting our foreign commerce, and the outlines of a system for regulating our intercourse with Indian tribes. At a meeting of the commissioners of Virginia and Maryland at his house in 1785 he suggested that they should agree upon a uniform system of duties and other commercial regulations, and a uniform currency. This was the germ of the subsequent regulation of this whole subject by constitutional provision.

No one of the men at that time in public life had better opportunities for knowing, certainly no one was more profoundly convinced than Washington that the Confederation as a form of government was a failure. In view of the approaching disbanding of the army he wrote, June 8, 1783, a circular letter addressed to the Governors of the States, but intended for the whole people, in which he says: "It is indispensable to the happiness of the individual States that there should be lodged somewhere a supreme power to regulate and govern the general concerns of the confederated republic, without which the Union cannot be of long duration, and everything must very rapidly tend to anarchy and confusion. . . . It is only in our united character that we are known as an empire, that our independence is acknowledged, that our power can be regarded or our credit supported among foreign nations." And his letters as well as all his public acts show that all his great influence was wielded judiciously yet effectively for the formation of a federal union.

The purity of his character, his unselfish patriotism and his unparalleled services pointed him out as the one person above all others to preside over the Convention of 1787. At the suggestion of Franklin he was unanimously elected its president. Very delicate and difficult were the duties of the presiding officer of such a body of men, met for such a purpose. The permanent success of their work would have been hardly possible without the impartial, conciliating, magnanimous attitude of Washington through all the proceedings.

Whatever views may be entertained respecting the wisdom of his policy in regard to certain political measures, very few persons familiar with the period will now be disposed to question the fact that our present prosperity as a nation must be attributed, in no small degree, to the foresight, the prudence and the lofty patriotism with which for eight years he conducted the affairs of the government.

He rose above the narrow provincial politics of the day which distorted the judgment of some of the best men with whom he had been associated. His home policy showed that he grasped clearly the new idea of national existence, and comprehended the measures best adapted to foster its feeble life. He first lifted our foreign policy to an independent position. Accustomed for a century and a half to more or less subserviency to foreign powers, "the great majority of the people were either French or English," as an acute observer remarked, "and but very few Americans." Washington saw clearly that there was no safety for the new republic except in a policy of neutrality. The determination to enforce this policy would awaken a feeling of nationality, and compel the respect of foreign powers. Once having adopted this course he maintained it with an inflexible purpose in spite of violent opposition and bitter abuse, until even his enemies were compelled to admit its wisdom.

Washington entered upon his duties as President with the intention of being the President of the nation rather than of a party. He was the more constrained to this course by reason of his unanimous election.

If he did not wholly succeed in this patriotic endeavor, it is because the successful administration of government under conditions which at present exist is not possible except through the organization of parties. None the less we cannot fail to admire the lofty moral purpose that prompted him to mediate between opposing parties and to rise above the petty arts of the political aspirant. The attempt to maintain a balance of parties in his cabinet, though plausible, was an impracticable scheme, and on the retirement of Jefferson he abandoned it. He made the mistake of thinking that the political leaders of the day could act with as much freedom from prejudice, and with as intense a desire for the common welfare as himself. In these respects Washington stood alone. It was this elevation above the plane of selfish motives that gave him clearness of insight, and inspired the public mind with such confidence in his leadership.

CRITICAL OPINIONS.

"WASHINGTON stands alone and unapproachable like a snow-peak rising above its fellows into the clear air of morning, with a dignity, constancy and purity which have made him the ideal type of civic virtue to succeeding generations."—*Bryce, Am. Commonwealth*, I. 641.

"He did the two greatest things which in politics a man can have the privilege of attempting. He maintained by peace that independence of his country which he had acquired by war. He founded a free government in the name of the principles of order and by re-establishing their sway. Of all great men he was the most virtuous and the most fortunate. In the world God has no higher favors to bestow."—*Guizot's Essay on Washington.*

"No truth can be uttered with more confidence than that his ends were always upright and his means always pure. He exhibits the rare example of a politician to whom wiles were absolutely unknown, and whose professions to foreign governments and to his own countrymen were always sincere. In him was fully exemplified the real distinction which forever exists between wisdom and cunning, and the importance as well as the truth of the maxim that 'honesty is the best policy.'"—*Marshall's Life of Washington*, Vol. II. 447.