

VIII.

76. CHARACTER OF WASHINGTON.

[From a speech delivered at a public dinner in Washington, D. C., in honor of the Centennial¹ Birthday of GEORGE WASHINGTON, February 22, 1832.]

IRISE, gentlemen, to propose to you the name of that great man, in commemoration of whose birth, and in honor of whose character and services, we are here assembled. We are met to testify our regard for him whose name is intimately blended with whatever belongs most essentially to the prosperity, the liberty, the free institutions, and the renown of our country. That name was of power to rally a nation in the hour of thick-thronging public disasters and calamities; that name shone, amid the storm of war, a beacon-light to cheer and guide the country's friends; it flamed, too, like a meteor, to repel her foes.

2. That name, in the days of peace, was a loadstone, attracting to itself a whole people's confidence, a whole people's love, and the whole world's respect. That name, descending with all time, spreading over the whole earth, and uttered in all the languages belonging to the tribes and races of men, will forever be pronounced with affectionate gratitude by every one in whose breast there shall arise an aspiration for human rights and human liberty.

3. We perform this grateful duty, gentlemen, at the expiration of a hundred years from his birth, near the place, so cherished and beloved by him, where his dust now reposes, and in the capital which bears his own immortal name. All experience evinces that human sentiments are strongly influenced by associations.² The recurrence of anniversaries, after long periods of time, naturally freshens the recollection, and deepens the impression, of events with which they are historically connected.

¹ Cen tēn'ni al, belonging to the hundredth anniversary; happening only once in a hundred years.

tally connecting one thing or event with another, so that when one is brought to mind, the other habitually recurs also.

² As sō'ci ā tion, the act of men-

4. Renowned places, also, have a power to awaken a feeling, which all acknowledge. No American can pass by the fields of Bunker Hill, Monmouth, and Camden, as if they were ordinary spots on the earth's surface. Whoever visits them feels the sentiment of love of country kindling anew, as if the spirit that belonged to the transactions which have rendered these places distinguished still hovered round, with power to move and excite all who in future time may approach them.

5. But neither of these sources of emotion equals the power with which great moral examples affect the mind. When sublime virtues cease to be abstractions, when they become embodied in human character, and exemplified in human conduct, we should be false to our own nature, if we did not indulge in the spontaneous effusions of our gratitude and our admiration. A true lover of the virtue of patriotism delights to contemplate its purest models; and that love of country may be well suspected which affects to soar so high into the regions of sentiment as to be lost and absorbed in the abstract feeling, and becomes too elevated or too refined to glow with fervor in the commendation or the love of individual benefactors.

6. All this is unnatural. It is as if one should be so enthusiastic a lover of poetry, as to care nothing for Homer or Milton; so passionately attached to eloquence as to be indifferent to Cicero and Chatham;¹ or such a devotee to the arts, in such an ecstasy with the elements of beauty, proportion, and expression, as to regard the masterpieces of Raphael² and Michael Angelo³ with coldness or contempt. We may be assured, gentlemen, that he who really loves the thing itself, loves its finest exhibitions. A true friend of his country loves her friends and benefactors,

¹ William Pitt, first earl of Chatham, one of the greatest of English orators and statesmen, was born Nov. 15, 1708, and died May 11, 1778.

² Rapha'el, the eminent Italian artist whose paintings are the admiration of the world, was born in Urbino, March 28, 1483, and died in Rome April 6, 1520. He belonged to a family of artists, and his father was his first instructor.

³ Michael Angelo Buonarotti (bq ō' nā rōt' tē), one of the greatest, if not the greatest of all artists, leading architect of St. Peter's, was born in Tuscany, March 6, 1474, and died in Rome, Feb. 17, 1563. He applied himself to every branch of knowledge connected with painting and sculpture. Many of his works were left unfinished; but even his fragments have educated eminent men.

and thinks it no degradation to commend and commemorate them. The voluntary outpouring of the public feeling, made to-day, from the North to the South, and from the East to the West, proves this sentiment to be both just and natural. In the cities and in the villages, in the public temples and in the family circles, among all ages and sexes, gladdened voices to-day bespeak grateful hearts and a freshened recollection of the virtues of the Father of his Country.

7. And it will be so, in all time to come, so long as public virtue is itself an object of regard. The ingenuous youth of America will hold up to themselves the bright model of Washington's example, and study to be what they behold; they will contemplate his character till all its virtues spread out and display themselves to their delighted vision; as the earliest astronomers, the shepherds on the plains of Babylon, gazed at the stars till they saw them formed into clusters and constellations, overpowering at length the eyes of the beholders with the united blaze of a thousand lights.

8. Gentlemen, we are at the point of a century from the birth of Washington; and what a century it has been! During its course, the human mind has seemed to proceed with a sort of geometric velocity, accomplishing, for human intelligence and human freedom, more than had been done in fives or tens of centuries preceding. Washington stands at the commencement of a new era, as well as at the head of the New World. A century from the birth of Washington has changed the world. The country of Washington has been the theater on which a great part of that change has been wrought; and Washington himself a principal agent by which it has been accomplished. His age and his country are equally full of wonders, and of both he is the chief.

9. It was the extraordinary fortune of Washington, that, having been intrusted, in revolutionary times, with the supreme military command, and having fulfilled that trust with equal renown for wisdom and for valor, he should be placed at the head of the first government in which an attempt was to be made on a large scale to rear the fabric of social order on the basis of a written constitution and of a pure representative principle. A government was to be established, without a throne,

without an aristocracy, without castes, orders, or privileges; and this government, instead of being a democracy, existing and acting within the walls of a single city, was to extend over a vast country, of different climates, interests, and habits, and of various communions of our common Christian faith.

10. The experiment certainly was entirely new. A popular government of this extent, it was evident, could be framed only by carrying into full effect the principle of representation or of delegated power; and the world was to see whether society could, by the strength of this principle, maintain its own peace and good government, carry forward its own great interests, and conduct itself to political renown and glory. By the benignity of Providence, this experiment, so full of interest to us and to our posterity forever, so full of interest indeed to the world in its present generation and in all its generations to come, was suffered to commence under the guidance of Washington. Destined for this high career, he was fitted for it by wisdom, by virtue, by patriotism, by discretion, by whatever can inspire confidence in man toward man. In entering on the untried scenes, early disappointment and the premature extinction of all hope of success would have been certain, had it not been that there did exist throughout the country, in a most extraordinary degree, an unwavering trust in him who stood at the helm.

11. The principles of Washington's administration are not left doubtful. They are to be found in the constitution itself, in the great measures recommended and approved by him, in his speeches to Congress, and in that most interesting paper, his Farewell Address to the People of the United States. The success of the government under his administration is the highest proof of the soundness of these principles. In the first place, all his measures were right in their intent. He stated the whole basis of his own great character, when he told the country, in the homely phrase of the proverb, that honesty is the best policy. One of the most striking things ever said of him is, that *he changed mankind's ideas of political greatness.*

12. To commanding talents, and to success, the common elements of such greatness, he added a disregard of self, a spotlessness of motive, a steady submission to every public and private duty, which threw far into the shade the whole crowd of

vulgar great. The object of his regard was the whole country. No part of it was enough to fill his enlarged patriotism. His love of glory, so far as that may be supposed to have influenced him at all, spurned every thing short of general approbation. It would have been nothing to him, that his partisans or his favorites outnumbered, or outvoted, or outmanaged, or outclamored those of other leaders. He had no favorites; he rejected all partisanship; and, acting honestly for the universal good, he deserved, what he had so richly enjoyed, the universal love.

13. The maxims upon which Washington conducted our foreign relations were few and simple. The first was an entire and indisputable impartiality towards foreign states. He adhered to this rule of public conduct against every strong inducement to depart from it, and when the popularity of the moment seemed to favor such a departure. In the next place, he maintained true dignity and unsullied honor in all communications with foreign states. It was among the high duties devolved upon him, to introduce our new government into the circle of civilized states and powerful nations. Not arrogant or assuming, with no unbecoming or supercilious bearing, he yet exacted for it from all others entire and punctilious respect. He demanded, and he obtained at once, a standing of perfect equality for his country in the society of nations; nor was there a prince or potentate of his day, whose personal character carried with it, into the intercourse of other states, a greater degree of respect and veneration.

14. His own singleness of purpose, his disinterested patriotism, were evinced by the selection of his first cabinet, and by the manner in which he filled the seats of justice, and other places of high trust. He sought for men fit for office; not for offices which might suit men. Above personal considerations, above local considerations, above party considerations, he felt that he could only discharge the sacred trust which the country had placed in his hands, by a diligent inquiry after real merit, and a conscientious preference of virtue and talent. The whole country was the field of his selection. He explored that whole field, looking only for whatever it contained most worthy and distinguished. He was, indeed, most successful, and he deserved

success for the purity of his motives, the liberality of his sentiments, and his enlarged and manly policy.

15. Washington's administration established the national credit, made provision for the public debt, and for that patriotic army whose interests and welfare were always so dear to him; and, by laws wisely framed, and of admirable effect, raised the commerce and navigation of the country, almost at once, from depression and ruin to a state of prosperity. Nor were his eyes open to these interests alone. He viewed with equal concern its agriculture and manufactures, and, so far as they came within the regular exercise of the powers of this government, they experienced regard and favor.

16. It should not be omitted, even in this slight reference to the general measures and general principles of the first president, that he saw and felt the full value and importance of the judicial department of the government. An upright and able administration of the laws, he held to be alike indispensable to private happiness and public liberty. The temple of justice, in his opinion, was a sacred place, and he would profane and pollute it who should call any to minister in it not spotless in character, not incorruptible in integrity, not competent by talent and learning, not a fit object of unhesitating trust.

17. Finally, gentlemen, there was in the breast of Washington one sentiment so deeply felt, so constantly uppermost, that no proper occasion escaped without its utterance. He regarded the union of these States less as one of blessing, than as the great treasure-house which contained them all. Here, in his judgment, was the great magazine of all our means of prosperity; here, as he thought, and as every true American still thinks, are deposited all our animating prospects, all our solid hopes for future greatness. He has taught us to maintain this union, not by seeking to enlarge the powers of the government on the one hand, nor by surrendering them on the other; but by an administration of them at once firm and moderate, pursuing objects truly national, and carried on in a spirit of justice and equity.

18. Full of gratifying anticipations and hopes, let us look forward to the end of the century which is now commenced. A hundred years hence, other disciples of Washington will cele-

brate his birth with no less of sincere admiration than we now commemorate it. When they shall meet, as we now meet, to do themselves and him that honor, so surely as they shall see the blue summits of his native mountains rise in the horizon, so surely as they shall behold the river on whose banks he lived, and on whose banks he rests, still flowing on toward the sea, so surely may they see, as we now see, the flag of the Union floating on the top of the Capitol; and then, as now, may the sun in his course visit no land more free, more happy, more lovely, than this our own country! *Adapted from DANIEL WEBSTER.*

DANIEL WEBSTER, one of the greatest, if not the greatest of American orators, jurists, and statesmen, was born in the town of Salisbury, New Hampshire, January 18, 1782. At the age of fifteen he entered Dartmouth College, where he graduated in due course, exhibiting remarkable faculties of mind. When in his nineteenth year, he delivered a Fourth of July oration, at the request of the citizens of Hanover, which, energetic and well stored with historical matter, proved him, at that early age, something more than a sounder of empty words. Upon graduating, in 1801, he assumed the charge of an academy for a year; then commenced the study of law in his native village, which he completed in Boston, in 1805. He first practiced his profession near his early home; but, not long after, feeling the necessity of a wider sphere of action, he removed to Portsmouth, where he soon gained a prominent position. In 1812 he was elected to a seat in the National Congress, where he displayed remarkable powers both as a debater and an orator. In 1817 he removed to Boston, and resumed the practice of his profession with the highest distinction. In 1822 he was elected to a seat in Congress from the city of Boston; and in 1827 was chosen senator of the United States from Massachusetts. From that period he was seldom out of public life, having been twice Secretary of State, in which office he died. In 1839 he visited England and France, and was received with the greatest distinction in both countries. His works, arranged by his friend, Edward Everett, were published in six volumes, at Boston, in 1851. They bear the impress of a comprehensive intellect and exalted patriotism. He died at Marshfield, surrounded by his friends, October 24, 1852.

SECTION XVIII.

I.

77. THE SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNT OF CREATION.

WHATEVER may have been the various theories by which cosmologists¹ have tried to explain the formation of our globe, and the first functions of the immense atmosphere which from the beginning enveloped it, the general opinion of the greatest philosophers, beginning with Thā'lēs,² has been

¹ *Cos mōl' o ġist*, one who describes the universe. and one of the seven wise men, was born in Miletus, Ionia, about 636

² *Thales*, a Greek philosopher, B.C., and died probably about 546.