


GEORGE WASHINGTON

EORGE WASHINGTON, first President of the United States, and distinguished as a statesman and soldier, was born in Westmoreland County, Va., Feb. 22, 1732, and died at Mount Vernon, his burial-place, Dec. 14, 1799. With Lincoln, his name is, and will forever remain, the priceless heritage of all Americans. He came of English ancestry, his great grandfather, John Washington, having settled in Virginia about the year 1657. Here John's grandson, Augustine Washington, father of the future President, was born in 1694. Augustine married twice; by his second wife, Mary Ball, whom he married in 1730, George was their first child. The father dying when George was but twelve years of age, the latter had but a meagre education, though physically he trained himself in the robust, healthful sports of the period. When he had reached his fifteenth year, a commission was offered him as midshipman in the Royal Navy, through the instrumentality of Admiral Vernon, but his acceptance of this was opposed by George's mother, and he turned his attention to surveying, in which he spent the next three years of his life. At the age of nineteen he was appointed adjutant of the Virginia troops with the rank of Major, and in 1753, though he had barely attained his majority, he was appointed commander of the northern military district of Virginia by the Lieutenant-Governor, Dinwiddie. On the outbreak of the French and Indian War, he was sent to warn the French away from their new forts in Pennsylvania, and his vigorous defence of Fort Necessity made him so conspicuous a figure, that in 1755 he was commissioned Commander-in-Chief of all the Virginia forces. He served in Braddock's campaign, and, though he exposed himself with the utmost recklessness, brought the little remnant of his Virginians out of action in fair order. For a year or two his task was that of defending a frontier of more than 350 miles with 700 men, but in 1758 he commanded the advance guard of the expedition which captured Fort Duquesne. The war in Virginia being then at an end, he resigned his command, married Mrs. Custis, a rich widow, and settled at Mount Vernon, a property he had inherited after the death of his half-brother, Lawrence. For the next twenty years Washington's life was that of a typical Virginia planter. Like others of the dominant caste in Virginia, he was repeatedly elected to the Legislature, but he is not known to have made any set speeches in that body. He took, however, a leading, if a silent, part in the struggles of the House of Burgesses against Governor Dunmore. In 1774, the Virginia Convention appointed Washington one of its seven delegates to the Continental Congress. When that body, after the conflicts at Lexington and Concord, resolved to put the colonies into a state of

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defence, the first practical step was the unanimous selection, on motion of John Adams of Massachusetts, of Washington as Commander-in-Chief. He reached Cambridge on July 2, 1775, and within nine months drove the British out of Boston. After fighting the unsuccessful battle of Long Island, he was compelled to evacuate New York, but made a masterly retreat through the Jerseys into Pennsylvania, after which he turned and struck his pursuers at Trenton and Princeton, and then established himself at Morristown so as to bar the approach to Philadelphia. The vigor with which he handled his army at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown and the persistency with which he held the strategic position of Valley Forge through the dreadful winter of 1777-78, exhibited the steel-like fibre of his character. The pursuit of Clinton across the Jerseys and the battle of Monmouth, in which the plan of the American commander was thwarted by Charles Lee, closed for a time Washington's military career, until he planned the conclusive campaign of Yorktown, which he carried out in conjunction with Rochambeau. This resulted in the surrender of Cornwallis. On Dec. 20, 1783, he returned to Congress his commission of Commander-in-Chief and retired to Mount Vernon, though his influence continued to be as powerful as it had been. When the Federal Convention met at Philadelphia, in 1787, to frame the present Constitution, he was present as a delegate from Virginia, and a unanimous vote made him its presiding officer. Beyond a few suggestive hints, he took little part in the debates, but he approved the Constitution which was ultimately devised, believing it, as he said, to be the best obtainable at the period. All his influence was exerted to secure its ratification, and it probably proved decisive. When the scheme of government provided by the Constitution went into operation, he was unanimously chosen the first President of the United States, and was with like unanimity reelected for a second term in 1793. Retiring from the presidency in 1797, he resumed the planter's life he loved, but in the following year he was made Commander-in-Chief of the provisional army raised in expectation of a war with France. In the midst of military preparations he was seized with a sudden illness, and died on his estate at Mount Vernon.

FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN NEW YORK, APRIL 30, 1789

Fellow-Citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives:

AMONG the vicissitudes incident to life, no event could have filled me with greater anxieties than that of which the notification was transmitted by your order, and received on the fourth day of the present month. On the one hand, I was summoned by my country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love,

from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection, and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision as the asylum of my declining years; a retreat which was rendered every day more necessary as well as more dear to me, by the addition of habit to inclination, and of frequent interruptions in my health to the gradual waste committed on it by time; on the other hand, the magnitude and difficulty of the trust to which the voice of my country called me, being sufficient to awaken, in the wisest and most experienced of her citizens, a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but overwhelm with despondence one who, inheriting inferior endowments from nature, and unpracticed in the duties of civil administration, ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own deficiencies. In this conflict of emotions, all I dare aver is that it has been my faithful study to collect my duty from a just appreciation of every circumstance by which it might be affected. All I dare hope is, that if, in executing this task, I have been too much swayed by a grateful remembrance of former instances, or by an affectionate sensibility to this transcendent proof of the confidence of my fellow-citizens, and have thence too little consulted my incapacity as well as disinclination for the weighty and untried cares before me, my error will be palliated by the motives which misled me, and its consequences be judged by my country, with some share of the partiality in which they originated.

Such being the impression under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station, it would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being, who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply

every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute, with success, the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the Great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own; nor those of my fellow-citizens at large less than either. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men, more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency. And, in the important revolution just accomplished, in the system of their united government, the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities, from which the event has resulted, cannot be compared with the means by which most governments have been established, without some return of pious gratitude, along with a humble anticipation of the future blessings, which the past seems to presage. These reflections, arising out of the present crisis, have forced themselves too strongly on my mind to be suppressed. You will join with me, I trust, in thinking that there are none under the influence of which the proceedings of a new and free government can more auspiciously commence.

By the article establishing the Executive Department, it is made the duty of the President "to recommend to your consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The circumstances under which I now

meet you will acquit me from entering into that subject further than to refer you to the great constitutional charter under which we are assembled; and which, in defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be more consistent with those circumstances and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate me, to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt them. In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as, on one side, no local prejudices or attachments, no separate views nor party animosities, will misdirect the comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great assemblage of communities and interests—so, on another, that the foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of a free government be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its citizens and command the respect of the world.

I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my country can inspire; since there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists, in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness—between duty and advantage—between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity—since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which heaven itself has ordained—and since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the

republican model of government, are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment intrusted to the hands of the American people.

Besides the ordinary objects submitted to your care, it will remain with your judgment to decide how far an exercise of the occasional power delegated by the fifth article of the Constitution is rendered expedient, at the present juncture, by the nature of objections which have been urged against the system, or by the degree of inquietude which has given birth to them. Instead of undertaking particular recommendations on this subject, in which I could be guided by no lights derived from official opportunities, I shall again give way to my entire confidence in your discernment and pursuit of the public good. For I assure myself that, while you carefully avoided every alteration which might endanger the benefits of a united and effective government, or which ought to await the future lessons of experience, a reverence for the characteristic rights of freemen and a regard for the public harmony will sufficiently influence your deliberations on the question how far the former can be more impregnably fortified, or the latter be safely and more advantageously promoted.

To the preceding observations I have one to add, which will be most properly addressed to the House of Representatives. It concerns myself, and will therefore be as brief as possible.

When I was first honored with a call into the service of my country, then on the eve of an arduous struggle for its liberties, the light in which I contemplated my duty required that I should renounce every pecuniary compensation. From this resolution I have in no instance departed. And being still under the impressions which produced it,

I must decline, as inapplicable to myself, any share in the personal emoluments which may be indispensably included in a permanent provision for the Executive Department; and must accordingly pray that the pecuniary estimates for the station in which I am placed may, during my continuation in it, be limited to such actual expenditures as the public good may be thought to require.

Having thus imparted to you my sentiments, as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave, but not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the human race, in humble supplication, that, since he has been pleased to favor the American people with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility, and dispositions for deciding with unparalleled unanimity, on a form of government for the security of their union and the advancement of their happiness, so his divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this government must depend

FAREWELL ADDRESS

ISSUED SEPTEMBER 19, 1796

Friends and Fellow Citizens:

THE period for a new election of a citizen to administer the executive government of the United States being not far distant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust, it appears to

me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those out of whom a choice is to be made.

I beg you, at the same time, to do me the justice to be assured that this resolution has not been taken without a strict regard to all the considerations appertaining to the relation which binds a dutiful citizen to his country; and that in withdrawing the tender of service, which silence in my situation might imply, I am influenced by no diminution of zeal for your future interest, no deficiency of grateful respect for your past kindness, but am supported by a full conviction that the step is compatible with both.

The acceptance of, and continuance hitherto in, the office to which your suffrages have twice called me have been a uniform sacrifice of inclination to the opinion of duty and to a deference for what appeared to be your desire. I constantly hoped that it would have been much earlier in my power, consistently with motives which I was not at liberty to disregard, to return to that retirement from which I had been reluctantly drawn. The strength of my inclination to do this, previous to the last election, had even led to the preparation of an address to declare it to you; but mature reflection on the then perplexed and critical posture of our affairs with foreign nations, and the unanimous advice of persons entitled to my confidence, impelled me to abandon the idea.

I rejoice that the state of your concerns, external as well as internal, no longer renders the pursuit of inclination incompatible with the sentiment of duty or propriety, and am persuaded, whatever partiality may be retained for my

services, that, in the present circumstances of our country, you will not disapprove my determination to retire.

The impressions with which I first undertook the arduous trust were explained on the proper occasion. In the discharge of this trust, I will only say that I have, with good intentions, contributed toward the organization and administration of the government the best exertions of which a very fallible judgment was capable. Not unconscious in the outset of the inferiority of my qualifications, experience in my own eyes, perhaps still more in the eyes of others, has strengthened the motives to diffidence of myself; and every day the increasing weight of years admonishes me more and more that the shade of retirement is as necessary to me as it will be welcome. Satisfied that if any circumstances have given peculiar value to my services, they were temporary, I have the consolation to believe that, while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriotism does not forbid it.

In looking forward to the moment which is intended to terminate the career of my public life, my feelings do not permit me to suspend the deep acknowledgement of that debt of gratitude which I owe to my beloved country for the many honors it has conferred upon me; still more for the steadfast confidence with which it has supported me; and for the opportunities I have thence enjoyed of manifesting my inviolable attachment, by services faithful and persevering, though in usefulness unequal to my zeal. If benefits have resulted to our country from these services, let it always be remembered to your praise, and as an instructive example in our annals, that under circumstances in which the passions, agitated in every direction, were liable to mislead, amid appearances sometimes dubious, vicissi-

tudes of fortune often discouraging, in situations in which not infrequently want of success has countenanced the spirit of criticism, the constancy of your support was the essential prop of the efforts, and a guarantee of the plans by which they were effected. Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave, as a strong incitement to unceasing vows that heaven may continue to you the choicest tokens of its beneficence; that your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual; that the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained; that its administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and virtue; that, in fine, the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.

Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me, on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all-important to the permanency of your felicity as a people. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your indulgent reception of my sentiments on a former and not dissimilar occasion.

Interwoven as is the love of liberty with every ligament