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America's Founding Patriots



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Remembering our Past

Special Interest Articles:

- Remembering Our Past, an introduction by J. S. Smithies.
- George Washington by Benson J. Lossing, 1857.
- An Oration by Jeremiah Smith, 1800.
- The vocabulary of moral character, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary.

With the American social structure coming under fire from many areas of the modern world, we need to pause and remember our past. Not only the noble deeds done, but the people who helped to form our nation.

In this series we will be reprinting the stories of our founding patriots regardless of nationality or gender. If you have a favorite one, please let us know so that we may be sure to include the individual.

The lives of these individuals should inspire us today and allow us to realize that each of us are unique and have the capacity to change the world around us. We each have the power to change our lives internally with our thoughts and externally with our actions and deeds.

We have the power to change our families through the choices we make.

We have the power to change our schools and business by living the principles that our Founding Patriots teach us.

We have the power to change our communities, states, and nation by accepting the great responsibilities that come with living in the greatest nation known. To those that much has been given, much is expected.

You will be reading the stories as written shortly after the America War of Independence. They are what we call source documents written by people who lived the events or lived shortly after the events.

George Washington

The subject of this newsletter is often called the "Father of our Country". What follows is a reprint of a brief biography of George Washington by Benson J. Lossing. It was printed in 1857, not long after the forming of our nation. Also is a reprint of the funeral oration by Jeremiah Smith on February 22, 1800.

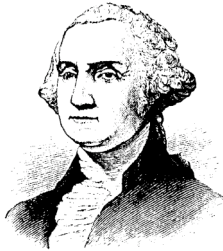
Much can be written and said about Washington. There is much we can learn from a man who gave selflessly for our nation.

Enjoy and may God bless America. May we always remember what it took to form our nation and that the freedom we enjoy each day is not free, but must be guarded vigilantly.



George Washington

By Benson J. Lossing, 1857, Mason Brothers, New York



*The Father of the
United States of
America*



*“Truth and justice
were the cardinal
virtues of his
character.”*

FIRST IN WAR – FIRST IN PEACE – FIRST IN THE HEARTS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN - was a just sentiment uttered half a century ago by the foster son¹ of the Great Patriot, when speaking of the character of his noble guardian. And the hand of that son was the first to erect a monumental stone in memory of The Father of his Country, upon which was inscribed:

HERE, THE 11TH OF FEBRUARY (O.S.), 1732, GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS BORN.

That stone yet lies on the site of his birth-place, in Westmoreland County, Virginia, near the banks of the Potomac. The calendar having been changed², we celebrate his birthday on the 22nd of February.

George Washington was descended from an old and titled family in Lancashire, England, and was the eldest child of his father, by Mary Ball, his second wife. He died when George was little more than ten years of age, and the guidance of the future Leader, though the dangers of youth-hood, devolved upon his mother. She was fitted for the service; and during his eventful life, Washington regarded the early training of his mother with the deepest gratitude. He received a common English education, and upon that, a naturally thoughtful and right-conditioned mind, laid the foundation of future greatness. Truth and justice were the cardinal virtues of his character.³ He was always beloved by his young companions, and was always chosen their leader in military plays. At the age of fourteen years, he wished to enter the navy, but yielded to the discouraging persuasions of his mother; and when he was seventeen years old, he was one of the most accomplished land surveyors in Virginia. In the forest rambles incident to his profession; he learned much of the topography of the country, habits of the Indians, and life in the camp. These were stern, but useful lessons of great value in his future life.

Young Washington was appointed one of the adjutants-general of his state at the age of nineteen, but soon resigned his commission to accompany an invalid half-brother to the West Indies. Two years later, when the French began to build forts southward of Lake Erie, he was sent by the royal governor of Virginia, to demand a cessation of such hostile movements. He performed the delicate mission with great credit; and so highly were his services esteemed, that when in 1755, Braddock came to drive the French from the vicinity of the Ohio, Washington was chosen his principal aid.

George Washington by Benson J. Lossing, 1857, continues:

The young Leader had already been in that wilderness at the head of a military expedition, and performed his duty so well, that he was publicly thanked by the Virginia legislature. Braddock was defeated and killed, and his whole army escaped utter destruction only through the skill and valor of Colonel Washington, in directing their retreat⁴. He continued in active military service most of the time, until the close of 1758, when he resigned his commission, and retired to private life.

At the age of twenty-seven years, Washington married the beautiful Martha Custis, the young widow of a wealthy Virginia planter, and they took up their abode at Mount Vernon, on the banks of the Potomac, an estate left him by his half-brother. There he quietly pursued the business of a farmer until the spring of 1774, when he was chosen to fill a seat in the Virginia legislature. The storm of the great revolution was then gathering; and toward the close of summer he was elected a delegate to the first CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, which assembled in Philadelphia, in September. He was a delegate the following year, when the storm burst on Bunker Hill, after the first lightning flash at Lexington; and by the unanimous voice of his compatriots he was chosen commander-in-chief of the army of freemen, which had gathered spontaneously around Boston.

For eight long years Washington directed the feeble armies of the revolted colonies, in their struggle for independence. That was a terrible ordeal through which the people of America passed! During the night of gloom, which brooded over the hope of the patriots from the British invasion of New York, until the capture of Cornwallis, he was the lode-star of their hopes. And when the blessed morning of Peace dawned at Yorktown, and the last hoof of the oppressor had left our shores, Washington was hailed as the Deliverer of his people; and he was regarded by the aspirants for freedom in the eastern hemisphere as the brilliant day-star of promise to future generations.

During all the national perplexities after the return of peace, incident to financial embarrassments and an imperfect system of government, Washington was regarded, still, as the public leader; and when a convention assembled to modify the existing government, he was chosen to preside over their deliberations. And again, when the labor of that convention resulted in the formation of our Federal Constitution, and a president of the United States was to be chosen, according to its provisions, his countrymen, with unanimous voice, called him to the highest place of honor in the gift of a free people.



The Flag of Washington's Cruisers, a squadron of six schooners that Washington outfitted at his expense.

They knew they were up against a military power, but believed they were sustained by a still greater power.



“To guide the ship of state through the rocks and quick-sands of all these difficulties required great executive skill and wisdom.”

George Washington by Benson J. Lossing, 1857, continues:

Washington presided over the affairs of the new Republic for eight years, and those the most eventful in its history. A new government had to be organized without any existing model, and new theories of government were to be put in practice for the first time. The domestic and foreign policy of the country had to be settled by legislation and diplomacy, and many exciting questions had to be met and answered. To guide the ship of state through the rocks and quick-sands of all these difficulties required great executive skill and wisdom. Washington possessed both; and he retired from the theatre of public life without the least stain of reproach upon his judgment or his intentions.

The great Patriot and Sage enjoyed the repose of domestic life, at Mount Vernon, in the midst of an affectionate family and almost daily congratulations of visitors, for almost three years, when the effects of a heavy cold closed his brilliant career, in death. He ascended to the bosom of his God on the 14th of December, 1799, when almost sixty-eight years of age.⁵

Footnotes:

1. George Washington Parks Custis, grandson of Mrs. Washington, and adopted son of the distinguished patriot.
2. In consequence of the difference between the old Roman year and the true solar year, of a little more than eleven minutes, the astronomical equinox fell back that amount of time, each annual cycle, toward the beginning of the year. It fell on the 21st of March, at the time of the council of Nicaea, in 325. Pope Gregory the Thirteenth reformed the calendar in 1582 (when the equinox fell on the 11th of March,) by suppressing less days in the calendar, and thus restoring the equinox to the 21st of March. The Protestant states of Europe adhered to the old calendar until 1700; and popular prejudices in England opposed the alterations, until 1752, when the Julian calendar, call Old Style, was abolished by Parliament. The retrogression since Gregory's time made it necessary to droop 11 days, instead of ten. Now the difference is about twelve days, so that Washington's birth-day, according to the New Style is on the 22nd of February.
3. Young Washington was playing in a field one day with another boy, when he leaped upon an untamed colt belonging to his mother. The frightened animal used such great exertions to get rid of his rider, that he burst a blood vessel and died. George went immediately to his mother, and gave her a truthful relation of all that happened. This is a noble example for all boys.
4. Braddock persisted in fighting the Indians according to the military tactics of Europe; and when Washington modestly suggested the policy of adopting the Indians method of warfare, it is said that Braddock haughtily answered, "What! A provincial buskin teach a British general how to fight!"
5. See the Front piece. (copy is at left side of this page) On the left, below the portrait, is his birth-place; on the right, his tomb. Liberty and Justice are supporters, in the midst of Plenty, and surmounting Fame is proclaiming his deeds.





Oration on the Death of George Washington

Delivered at Exeter, February 22, 1800.

By Jeremiah Smith

We are assembled, my respected fellow-citizens, at the recommendation of the highest authority in our nation, publicly to testify our grief for the death of a beloved and illustrious citizen. Our country this day presents to the world a spectacle, as sublime as it is novel—A republic, inconsolable for the loss of a single citizen; five millions of people at the same moment employed in acts of devotion to Almighty God, and in the same unfeigned expressions of sorrow for this afflictive dispensation of His holy providence.

It is not indeed without example, that a nation should generally adopt the symbols of mourning for the death of a leader, a prince, or a benefactor: but where we shall look, except to this melancholy occasion, for grief so universal, as scarcely to admit of a single exception; so sincere, as to exclude all affectation of sorrow; and so poignant, that hearts the least susceptible of the tender emotions feel more, than it is in the power of language to express! Our young men have lost a father; the more aged, a brother; religion, her brightest ornament; our country, her shield, her defense, her glory in war, her guide, her great example in peace.

This anniversary, for many years devoted to gladness and rejoicing; a day, when every heartbeat high with joy, and every countenance beamed with pleasure, is now, alas! a day of darkness and of sorrow. It hath pleased Him, who sits on the circle of the heavens, to take to Himself the delight of all eyes, the joy and the pride of every heart.

The proclamation, under which we are convened, has pointed out in general terms the duties of this solemn occasion. Let this day be sacredly devoted to sorrow; let us retire from the busy scenes of life, and for a few moments quit that world, from which in a few days we must part forever. Let us spend one day at the tomb of the illustrious Washington; and while employed in the sad office of paying the last tribute of respect and affection to our departed friend, may it please the Father of all mercies to grant that his death, as well as the virtuous acts of his glorious life, may serve to make us both wiser and better. In this way, and in this way only, shall we suitably improve this affecting dispensation of Providence, and answer the benevolent views of those, who have summoned us together.

A suitable eulogy or discourse on the illustrious dead, while it attempts to give expression to the grief, which oppresses the heart of every hearer, by delineating a character worthy our highest admiration, will tend to excite in us the liveliest emotions of gratitude to Heaven, for a gift so precious, the keenest anguish for his loss at this eventful moment, and the most ardent desires to imitate his excellent virtues.

But who can paint the sorrows that actuate every bosom? For my own part, I must decline a talk, to which I am wholly incompetent. My own feelings tell me, that I never can describe yours. Silence is the language of true and genuine grief, and tears are eloquent beyond the power of words. Attempt not to repress them, when it is manly to weep. They are a voluntary tribute of respect to the memory of him, who has been justly called first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen. If aught below can reach him in the realms above; if aught on earth can convey pleasure to his immortal soul; it is the tears of a grateful people, voluntarily shed over his grave.

To delineate the character of our beloved Washington is no easy talk. He, who is called to speak the praises of the dead, by the general license of mankind, is indulged with the privilege of concealing the faults, and of magnifying the virtues of the person, who is the subject of his praise. The poverty or badness of his materials has generally imposed on the eulogist of the most scrupulous regard for truth, the necessity of availing himself of this human indulgence. Hence it has frequently happened, that the picture has greatly exceeded in beauty the original, and the hearer has gone away charmed with the character, who would have detested the man to whom it is applied.

The eulogist of Washington has no vices to conceal. Instead of indulging his fancy, by excursions into the regions of fiction in quest of materials for praise, he will find himself oppressed by matter so rich, as to preclude exaggeration, and so copious, as only to embarrass him in the selection. Of him it may be truly said, that the most faithful picture will exhibit the greatest beauty and the most striking resemblance.

Secure from the imputation of ascribing to the illustrious dead unmerited praises, how can I hope to escape the censure of every one of my hearers, for omitting, in the character I would delineate, some amiable trait, which won his affections, some favorite excellence, which commanded his admiration?

Jeremiah Smith continues:

Amid all the difficulties incident to my situation, and feeling, as I do, an almost total want of ability to execute the part your kind partiality has assigned me, in the solemn exercises of the day, I have this consolation, that as on the one hand no exertion of talents, however great, could exalt a character, incapable of receiving any addition of praise; so on the other, the most imperfect sketch and the most defective execution of my design, can in no wise lessen the public estimation of his merits. Thanks be to God, his character is consummated, his glory is deposited where neither misfortune nor malevolence can tarnish nor destroy it.

To constitute a great and perfect character, there must be an assemblage of the great and shining qualities, which dazzle by their splendor the popular eye, blended in exact proportion with the softer and more gentle virtues, beneficence, humanity, moderation, piety and charity. These latter, though calculated to steal the heart and win the affections, as they lie more in the shade, are less known and less regarded. It is rare indeed to find the splendid, the amiable, and the useful united in the same person. Our Washington furnishes an exception to the general rule; and it will forever remain a question, whether he was most distinguished above all other men by the greatness of his talents, or the goodness of his heart; whether his noble, his useful, or his amiable virtues predominated; and which of these have been most glorious to himself, or most serviceable to his country. If by the first he has acquired the title of our political favor, by the latter, like Marcus Aurelius, he has merited to be styled, by the more endearing epithet, the father of his country.

It belongs to the historian of our nation to write the life of him, who was the chief instrument employed by Heaven in achieving our independence. His name and that of our country are inseparable.

A faithful narrative of what he did and what he suffered, during the period of a long, a bloody, and a dubious conflict, which terminated so gloriously, will furnish the highest eulogium on his wisdom, his virtue, and his talents.

To enter upon a field so extensive, neither suits my slender abilities, nor comports with the proper duties of the day. Let us be contented with a more contracted view of the illustrious subject of our grief in the various characters of a soldier, a statesman, a private citizen, a man and a Christian.

When in the course of human events the time had arrived, that the political bands, which connected us with another nation, were to be dissolved; when our venerable fathers decreed to assume an equal station among the powers of the earth, it became necessary that they should defend with the sword those rights, they claimed for themselves and their posterity.

Among the bold and intrepid asserters of our liberties, which that ever-memorable period of our history produced, the illustrious Washington was found. That truly dignified and manly spirit of freedom, which has since displayed itself in all his actions, then glowed in his breast.

In the early period of his life he had distinguished himself as a soldier, and had given in earnest of those military talents, which have since burst upon the world with so much splendor. But at that period his fame was neither so brilliant, nor so extensive, as to mark him out to the public as the fittest among the thousands of his valiant countrymen, to exercise a command so new, so difficult, and so hazardous. I mention this, not with any design to depreciate his early fame, but to lead us to ascribe his unanimous election to the supreme command of our armies, to the invisible agency of that Almighty Being, to whom we are alike indebted for our existence as an independent nation, and for the means by which it was accomplished.

It must give us pleasure, and I am sure it will afford us instruction, to recur to this memorable period of our annals and of his glory.

Who is not struck with admiration at the modest dissidence, with which he accepted the command of our armies? The truly great are truly humble. His able discharge of that important trust no less clearly proves the former, than the whole tenor of his life evinces the latter.

I have said, that this first distinguished testimony of public approbation, as it respected him was both hazardous and difficult. His life, his fortune, and, what was dearer than both, his untarnished honor, were staked on the event.

Even at this short distance of time, it is not easy justly to appreciate the difficulties he had to encounter. Our country presented to the world the novel spectacle of thirteen independent Colonies, different in their habits, manners, and in their interests; connected only by a sense of common danger; without alliances, without funds, without a government; opposed in arms by a nation as brave as she was powerful; a nation, flushed with conquest, and obstinately determined on our subjugation. To engage in a contest so arduous, and to every human eye so unequal, required the zeal of a martyr; to conduct it, wisdom and firmness apparently more than human; to bring it to a happy and successful conclusion, we are constrained to acknowledge, that it required the powerful agency of Providence, co-operating with the

Jeremiah Smith continues:

Who has forgotten the gloomy aspect of our affairs at an early period of the war, when our army was successively driven from all their strong holds by our triumphant and exulting foe? At this period, to adopt the language of our excellent President, we behold our magnanimous Chief in adversity, in the deepest distress, and most trying perplexities. The gods witness with pleasure a brave man struggling with the storms of fate. To us, shortsighted mortals, it would seem that they sometimes delight in raising the tempest, and thickening the cloud, that their favorites may emerge to more resplendent glory.

The joy, universally discussed by the brilliant successes at Trenton and Princeton, at the close of this memorable year, was no doubt heightened by the gloomy contrast, which the preceding summer afforded. From this day our prospects brightened, but they were not always bright. Our beloved Chief passed through a thousand scenes of distress and danger, with a spirit unbroken by adversity—a spirit, which not only enabled him to sustain the weight of cares which devolved on him, but served to revive and animate his fainting troops. At the outset in his military career, he had to contend with difficulties of an unusual nature. All his soldiers, and with few exceptions, his subordinate officers, were wholly undisciplined. They were brave, and each possessed a portion of the same ardor for liberty, which animated this illustrious leader: but they were impatient of control, because unaccustomed to the restraints of military life. But he was born to surmount difficulties never surmounted before.

His personal merits, and the confidence inspired by his virtues, enable him to conquer his own troops, that with them he might conquer the enemy. His own conduct gave a sanction to the rules he prescribed for others. He practiced himself the difficult lessons he taught, and every soldier heeded a Chief, who had learned to obey, and therefore was worthy to command.

It cannot, therefore, excite our wonder so much as our admiration of his virtues, that our citizens were so soon converted into soldiers, when to acquire the approbation and esteem of their beloved General was the motive, and the possession of that esteem the never-failing reward, of military merit, though found in the lowest grade.

The brilliant victories and successes, which attended the American arms, from the period of which we have been speaking, to the final triumph at York Town, must be ascribed, under Heaven, to the able designs of our illustrious Chief, formed in a masterly manner, and executed with a proportionate degree of skill and prudence, no less than to the bravery and spirit of his troops.

I must not omit to mention, while considering the military character of the illustrious dead, his uniform attention, in all disasters and changes, to the rights of the civil power; his invariable respect to the persons and property of the citizens; and, what must have afforded him, at the close of life, more solid joy than battles won and enemies vanquished, his clemency to the guilty, and his mild and temperate justice to all. If other Generals can boast, that they have slain their thousands, Washington may truly add, I have preserved my ten thousands. In a word, his enemies, if he had any, could not hesitate to allow him the talents of the most consummate General; and his country never can forge, that he conducted the great military contest with wisdom, fortitude, and success; and enabled his fellow-citizens to display their martial genius, and transmit their same to posterity.

After a pursuit of seven long years, the object of our most just and arduous struggle, by the blessing of Heaven, was accomplished, and our enemies compelled to abandon their schemes and acknowledge our independence.

Let all due praises be given to the valiant soldiers, who fought our battles; to the brave and intrepid officers, who led them on to victory and glory. Let the names of the gallant Warren, Mercer, and Montgomery be had in everlasting remembrance: Let us never forget the debt of gratitude we owe a Greene, a Sullivan, a Scammel, and a long list of heroes, whose names and achievements will be found to occupy a conspicuous place in the annals of our revolution. Sufficient praise still remains for him, whose mighty soul planned, directed, and animated the whole.

When our independence was established, our beloved Chief, having taught a lesson useful to those who inflict, and to those who feel oppression, retired to the peaceful shade of private life, covered with glory, and attended with the blessings of his grateful countrymen.

It has often been remarked, that nature, as if parsimonious of her choicest gifts, has rarely bestowed on her favorite children, talents to excel, in the various and multiplied pursuits of human life.

Jeremiah Smith continues:

The race of heroes has generally proved as destructive in peace, as they have been terrible in war, while the ablest statesmen have been found, on experiment, incapable of acquiring any degree of military fame. It was this sentiment, founded as it would seem in nature, and justified by experience, which led the fond admirers of Washington to fear, that he might lose at the helm of state some portion of that glory, which he had won at the head of our armies. To have expressed a belief, at this interesting period of his life, that his glory was capable of any addition, would have been condemned as implying deficiency in a character deemed complete. To have indulged even the hope of an increase of honors would have been viewed in no other light, than as one of those flattering delusions, which our wishes sometimes contrive to impose on our judgment. Thanks be to Heaven, that to our time and to our country has been reserved the singular felicity, of presenting to the world a character, as conspicuously unrivalled for the virtues of civil administration, as it had been rendered illustrious for military achievements.

The merit of his services, during the eight years he presided in our public councils, can only be appreciated by a view of the magnitude and difficulty of the trust he was called to execute, and the course of conduct he pursued during his civil administration.

Entering upon a frame of government, excellent indeed in theory, but which had not as yet received the sanction of experience, it required no small share of political ability, to lay the foundations of our civil institutions in such a manner, as best to secure domestic tranquility, establish justice, promote the general welfare, and thus, in the way of gradual progression, to raise our country to that rank and importance among the nations, to which we seem destined by the God of nature.

Without derogating from the praises due to the able and enlightened statesmen, who filled the subordinate departments of government, we can never forget how much we owe to his prudence, judgment, and un-remitted labors, that, while other nations are involved in a bloody and destructive war, our happy country has enjoyed so much internal tranquility; that she has had time to mature her recent institutions and to acquire that portion of strength, which, with the blessing of Heaven, will enable her to support her independence, and maintain her just rights against all her enemies.

In the management of our external concerns as a nation, the wisdom of our great Chief Magistrate was eminently displayed. Connected as we are with the old world, it was justly to be apprehended, that the war in Europe would endanger our peace. There is nothing in the character of our beloved Washington more strongly marked, than his detestation of war, and his love of peace. War he considered as the disgrace and calamity of human nature. As a man and as a patriot he loved peace; but it was that peace, which is consistent with the public good, the public engagements, and the public honor. This peace he cultivated with the most ardent zeal. He invited the friendship of all nations, and fought to preserve it, by performing all our engagements to them with the most pure and absolute faith. That a policy so magnanimous, and so honorable for our country, has not been productive of all the good, that was rationally to have been expected from it; that it has not entirely exempted us from the calamity of actual war, is not to be ascribed to any defect of wisdom in him who adopted it; but to the unparalleled corruption, baseness, and profligacy of those men, whom a just God, to scourge a sinful world, (and our imagination can scarcely conceive of a more dreadful plague) has permitted to usurp dominion over the fairest and most civilized portion of the globe.

Let us carry our imaginations back to that period of our history, when every artifice was practiced to draw our government from the neutral position she had taken.

Our magnanimous Chief was neither to be diverted by flattery, nor deterred by menaces, from the specific system he had adopted: a system so congenial to his feelings and our interests. Despairing at length of being able to intimidate or corrupt the government, it only remained to corrupt the people. In all governments, and especially in those of the popular kind, there are men to be found, ready to sacrifice on the altar of private ambition the dearest interest of their country.

In this age of revolution, language itself has been revolutionized, and wicked and unprincipled men, professing a more enlarged patriotism, have labored to subvert our excellent Constitution, and to undermine the pillars, which support our independence as a nation. For this purpose, every act of our public functionaries has been misrepresented; suspicions and jealousies disseminated, and the grossest calumnies, industriously circulated. In this way it was easily seen, that the power of our government, which has for its basis the confidence of the people in those who administer it, would soon be destroyed; and we, like Geneva, Holland, and Switzerland, become the humble satellite of a foreign nation. The spirit of opposition to our government now assumed a formidable shape and size. The vicious, the turbulent, and the disorderly are naturally hostile to the best and mildest government.

Jeremiah Smith continues:

The ignorant were deluded; the timid and wavering had already enlisted under the banners of rebellion; our enemies saw the success of their schemes just about to be realized; the eyes of the real lovers of our country were turned on Washington. He stood collected in himself, like a rock in a tempestuous sea, unmoved by the storms of popular fury, that beat upon him. His judgment discerned the path of duty, and he pursued it. His enemies (for the enemies of his country were his) were confounded by his form and manly conduct. The deluded were enlightened by his wisdom, and with the steady friends of order and of peace again rallied round the standard of the laws, and we were saved.

During the whole period of his administration, our beloved Chief Magistrate maintained the same uniform character for moderation, wisdom, and firmness. His active genius was equally suited to the most enlarged views, and the minutest details of civil policy. By a solicitous examination of objections, and a judicious comparison of opposite arguments, he attained a firm and unshaken conviction on the many and various questions submitted to his decision: but his firmness was without asperity, and though inflexible, he was candid. He was a practical politician, and always considered experience, which is every day showing the fallacy of the most plausible theories, as the surest standard, and the best test of political truth.

Having spent forty-five years of his life in the service of his country, he retired a second time from the great theatre of action, and thus completed the luster of a character, before unrivaled by the coincidence of virtue, talents, success, and public estimation; and afforded an example of moderation and magnanimity, no less rare than instructive to mankind.

Let us now follow our illustrious friend into the shade of private life. Of the generality of princes it has been remarked, that if stripped of their purple, and cast naked into the world, they would sink to the lowest rank of society, without a hope of emerging from obscurity. It is perhaps no less true, that those men, who have been distinguished, and justly distinguished, in the field and in the cabinet, are often found extremely deficient in those talents and acquirements, which are useful and ornamental in private life. And how often has it happened, that splendid talents, though accompanied with great virtues, have been disgraced by private vices. The character of Washington was uniform throughout. His merits were in a great measure independent of his rank and fortune. His private virtues added luster and dignity to this public character. If his destiny had neither led him to the field, nor to the cabinet, he would have maintained the same superiority in private, as he did in public life.

He inherited from nature a strong and vigorous mind, which was cultivated by study, and more by meditation and reflection. His memory was remarkably retentive, and his judgment keen and penetrating.

As a proof of his title to no small share of literary fame, we need only refer to his writings, official and private, which are now before the public: they will be read with pleasure, as long as the language in which they are written shall remain, as compositions, no less distinguished for correctness, dignity, and elevation of thought, than for beauty, harmony, and elegance of expression.

Of his virtues it may be said, that they were the fruits of much cultivation bestowed on a good soil.

He very early acquired the power of submitting his passions to his reason. He practiced without effort, and almost without merit, the habitual qualities of temperance and sobriety. He was eminently distinguished for prudence, moderation, and equanimity of soul. He deserved the singular commendation, that instead of being corrupted by success, his virtues always expanded with his fortune; the season of his propriety was that of his moderation.

Perhaps no man ever shared more largely in the public esteem, or received more flattering marks of distinction; but was there ever one, who deserved them better, or appreciated them more justly? His popularity was earned by virtuous deeds, and it was spent in the service of virtue.

In dispatch of business, his diligence was indefatigable. He was remarkable for observing the most perfect order, without too rigid adherence to method, in all his concerns, public and private. This nice arrangement of labor, and exact distribution of time, enabled him to transact an uncommon portion of business, and still left him leisure to enjoy the innocent pleasures of life. With him, every hour had its duty, and every duty its hour. How delightful, that he could say at the close of his life, "I have left nothing undone."

His easy fortune, increased by his industry and active labors, afforded him the means, which he never failed to improve, of displaying his beneficence and generosity to those, who had any claims on his bounty, or who came within the enlarged circle of his acquaintance.

Jeremiah Smith continues:

To act altogether from pure benevolence, or regard to the good of others, seems hardly compatible with human nature. The tenor of his whole life evinced, that neither vanity nor interest impelled him to action. Vanity it could not be; for who so modest and unassuming? It could not be interest; for though he declined no labor, he refused all pecuniary compensation. If ambition fired his soul, it was a glorious ambition, for it saved his country.

The person as well as the mind of our departed Chief was enriched by nature with her choicest endowments. His stature was lofty, his countenance dignified, his deportment graceful, and his manners liberal, courteous and refined.

The most singular trait in the character and fortunes of this great man remains to be mentioned; he was neither cable of envy himself, nor the object of that passion in others. Can there be higher evidence of his superior excellence? His character was considered as a fort of public property; every member of the community had an interest in preserving it inviolate.

Popular applause, of all the gifts in the power of fortune to bestow, the most fickle and precarious, to him was constant, steady, and uniform as his virtues.

Of his patriotism I need not speak. All virtues have their extremes. There is a patriotism too narrow; and the philosophy of the present day teaches one much too broad; it embraces all nations. There is also a love of liberty, which is disorderly and tumultuous. It is sufficient to say, that the patriotism of our Washington was an ardent love of his own country; and the liberty he adored was that of which government is the guardian.

I have reserved for the last to speak of the religious character of the deceased; because, like the key-stone, which completes the arch, it is this which completes the luster of his unrivalled name.

We have seen that his private life was marked, in an eminent degree, with the practice of the moral virtues. The maxims he prescribed for himself, as the basis of his political conduct, will bear the strictest scrutiny, when brought to the test of reason and morality.

He taught (and his own practice corresponded with his doctrine) that the foundation of national policy can be laid only in the pure and immutable principles of private morality: that there exists in the economy of nature an indissoluble union between duty and advantage, between genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity: that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation, that disregards the eternal laws of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained.

In our country, there are few, who will hesitate to acknowledge the obligations we are under, to make the concerns of another world the governing principle of our lives in this; and that Christianity is the highest ornament of human nature. Washington practiced upon this belief. He publicly professed the religion in which he was educated; and his life affords the best evidence of the purity of his principles, and the sincerity of his faith.

He had all the genuine mildness of Christianity with all its force. He was neither ostentatious, nor ashamed of his Christian profession. He pursued in this, as in everything else, the happy mean between the extremes of levity and gloominess, indifference and austerity. His religion became him. He brought it with him into office, and he did not lose it there. His first and last official acts (as did all the intermediate ones) contained an explicit acknowledgment of the over-ruing providence of the Supreme Being; and the most servant supplication for His benediction on our government and nation.

Without being charged with exaggeration, I may be permitted to say, that an accurate knowledge of his life, while it would confer on him the highest title to praise, would be productive of the most solid advantage to the cause of Christianity.

I have omitted to speak of the magnanimity of Washington, in accepting the command of our armies in a subordinate station, when in his judgment the public good again required the sacrifice of his private feelings; because I cannot find words sufficiently expressive of the admiration, with which his favored country could not but view this last transcendent proof of his ardent love and inviolable regard.

There is, by the irrevocable decree of Heaven, a period fixed to human greatness and human glory. The time had now arrived, that Washington must die. He could not in the day of death disgrace a character, supported by virtue and fortitude. He, who had lived without guilt, must die without remorse. But I reckon it a public blessing, and deserving our thanks to Almighty God, that he was called to this last encounter, in the full possession and vigor of his mental powers. Highly favored of Heaven, to him it was given, to meet the last enemy of man with the same firmness, the same fortitude, and the same reliance on Heavenly aid, with which, during his life, he met the foes of his country. And who can doubt of his success in this last engagement? At this awful moment he had the singular felicity, resulting from a review of his well-spent life, that not a word had escaped his tongue, which a wise man might not utter; not a sentence dropped from his pen, which, dying he could wish to blot; not an action performed, which prudence could condemn, nor one omitted, which

Jeremiah Smith continues:

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men, more than the people of these States, for raising up this able leader, who in war and in peace merited and possessed the uninterrupted confidence of the army and the citizens; and while the lives of other illustrious men have been glorious for themselves, that it pleased Heaven to make his glorious for his country. While our hearts are torn with anguish at the afflictive dispensation of a holy Providence, which is the subject of this day's sad solemnities, let us never forget, that his valuable life was preserved, till a citizen was found worthy to succeed him. And what higher praise can be given to the enlightened patriot, who fills the chair of State? Like Washington he was eminently instrumental in achieving our revolution. Devoted like Washington to the service of that country, which his wisdom has rendered illustrious, like him may he be honored while living, and lamented in death by his grateful and affectionate countrymen.

If the happiness of an disembodied spirit at all consists in the possession of felicitating ideas of the past, as doubtless it does, how great must be the happiness of him, whose death we this day mourn? As the savior of his country, great must be his crown of rejoicing. On earth he sought no rewards, no statues, no triumphs. The attributes and decorations of royalty could only have served to eclipse the majesty of those virtues, which made him, from being a modest citizen, a more resplendent luminary. But on earth he was not without his reward. His was the reward of success attending all his patriotic labors; his the honest pride of virtue, and above all, the exquisite delight of beholding the general happiness, of which he was so eminently the author. In this assembly there cannot be found one cold admirer of his virtues. If our country can furnish one such, is it too much to say, that he is no less cold to the dearest interests of humanity, virtue and religion? But the tokens of affection for his pure character, the proofs of gratitude for his services, and of reverence for his wisdom and pre-eminent virtues, exhibited by every description of persons on this melancholy occasion, will forever show how greatly he was beloved, esteemed and honored by his country; and will serve to rescue our nation from the reproach of ingratitude, which has been cast on republics. He is now exalted above all earthly praise; we shall see his face no more. But the glory of his virtue will reach beyond the grave. When our rising empire shall have risen and sunk again into ruin, it will live and continue to animate remotest ages.

To us it only remains, that we improve this afflicting dispensation of Divine Providence in a suitable manner; and this can only be done by a strict observance of his admonitions, and the imitation of his excellent example.

Age has its claims, and rank is not without its pre-tensions to advise; but the counsels of our departed friend come recommended by additional claims to our regard. His last address to his countrymen is the result of much wisdom, collected from experience; it was dictated by the heart, and may be viewed as the dying words of a father to his children. Cultivate union and brotherly affection (it is thus he speaks to us) that the sacred fire of liberty may be preserved, and the pre-eminence of the republican model of government exemplified, as that which secures to the people the greatest portion of liberty, prosperity and happiness. On this union, be assured, depends your peace abroad, your safety at home.

Moderate the fury of party spirit. It is this which disturbs your public councils, and enfeebles your administration. Banish local prejudices as well as party views. Cherish public credit, and for that end contribute to the public revenues, and cheerfully bear the public burdens.

Observe good faith and justice to all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. Present to the world the example, as magnanimous as it is rare, of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence.

Dismiss your inveterate hatred for some nations, and your passionate attachment for others. These passions are alike destructive to your peace and independence. It would be cruelty to expect, and degrading to accept favors from any nation.

Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence maintain a watchful and constant jealousy. It is the deadly foe of republican governments. Guard no less strenuously against the impostures of pretended patriots at home, than against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue. It is easy for the worst men to adopt the language of the virtuous, and for your greatest enemies to assume the appearance of the most disinterested zeal for your interest, and the most ardent attachment for your persons; while at the same time they are but the tools of foreign intrigue, and seeking their own personal aggrandizement at your expense. The means they employ to accomplish their ends will serve to point out to you the persons of this description. These means are no other, than the dissemination of suspicions, jealousies, and calumnies against the best and most virtuous of your citizens; and that because they possess, what they so justly deserve, your favor and confidence.

Jeremiah Smith continues:

But, above all, cherish and promote the interests of knowledge, virtue and religion. They are indispensable to the support of any free government, and in a peculiar manner to those of the popular kind. Let it never be forgotten, that there can be no genuine freedom, where there is no morality, and no found morality, where there is no religion. Morality without religion will soon lose its obligation, and religion without morality will degenerate into superstition, which will corrupt instead of ameliorating the mass, into which it is infused. Let no man have your confidence, who is destitute of either. Hesitate not a moment to believe, that the man who labors to destroy these two great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens, whatever may be his professions of patriotism, is neither a good patriot nor a good man.

If these solemn and momentous truths stood in any need of illustration, let him that doubts be pleased to recollect, that the experiment is making, I may say already made, of governing a nation without the aid of religion and without morality. Those, who are pleased with the result of that experiment, are not to be convinced. To all others a volume could not so ably prove the indispensable necessity of religion and morality, to the prosperity and happiness of a nation.

May it please the Supreme Ruler of the universe and Sovereign Arbiter of nations, to make our happy country as distinguished for the practice of piety and morality, as for the love of liberty and social order; to spread His holy protection over these United States; to turn the machinations of the wicked to the confirming of our union and independence; to enable us to triumph over external sedition, and to put invasion to flight; to perpetuate to our country that prosperity, which His goodness has already conferred, and to verify the anticipations, that this government, instituted under the auspices of Heaven, shall long continue the asylum of the oppressed, and a safeguard to human rights.

“The most perfect maxims and examples for regulating your social conduct and domestic economy, as well as the best rules of morality and religion, are to be found in the Bible.”

—Noah Webster

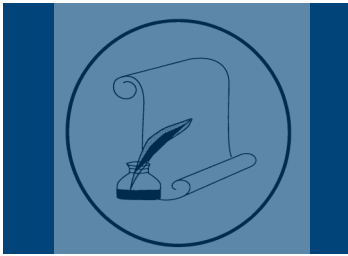
History of the United States, 1833, New Haven, CT

Modest in the midst of Pride,
Wise in the midst of Folly,
Calm in the midst of Passion,
Cheerful in the midst of Gloom.

Steadfast among the Wavering,
Hopeful among the Despondent,
Bold among the Selfish,
True among the Faithless.

Greatest among good men and
Best among the Great
Such was George Washington
At Valley Forge.

—Henry Armit Brown, 1878



The definitions of moral character are from Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary:

character — a mark made by cutting or engraving, as on stone, metal or other hard material...a mark or figure made by stamping or impression...the peculiar qualities, impressed by nature or habit on a person, which distinguish him from others.

charity — love, benevolence, good will.

chastity — purity of the body,...freedom from obscenity, as in language or conversation.

civility — the state of being civilized; refinement of manners; good breeding; politeness; complaisance; courtesy,...civilities denote acts of politeness.

complaisance — a pleasing deportment; courtesy; that manner of address and behavior in social intercourse which gives pleasure; civility.

complaisant — pleasing in manners; courteous; obliging.

courtesy — elegance or politeness of manners; especially, politeness connected with kindness; civility...to treat with civility.

ethics — the doctrines of morality or social manners...a system of moral principles.

evil — having bad qualities of a moral kind; wicked; corrupt; perverse; wrong...moral evil is any deviation of a moral agent from the rules of conduct prescribed to him by God, or by legitimate human authority.

felicity — happiness; blessedness.

fidelity — faithfulness; careful and exact observance of duty,...honesty; veracity.

humble — lowly, modest; meek.

humility — in ethics, freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind.

industry — habitual diligence in any employment, either bodily or mental.

justice — the virtue which consists in giving everyone what is his due...honesty and integrity in commerce or mutual intercourse.

manner — form; method; way of performing or executing; custom; habitual practice.

mannerly — with civility; respectfully; without rudeness.

manners — deportment; carriage; behavior; conduct; course of life; in a moral sense.

modesty — that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one's own worth and importance.

moral — relating to the practice, manners or conduct of men as social beings in relation to each other, and with reference to right and wrong. The word moral is applicable to actions that are good or evil, virtuous, or vicious, and has reference to the law of God as the standard by which their character is to be determined.

morality — the doctrine or system of moral duties, or duties of men in their social character; ethics.

polite — literally, smooth, glossy, and used in this sense till within a century. Being polished or elegant in manners; refined in behavior; well bred; courteous; complaisant; obliging.

precept — in a general sense, any commandment or order intended as an authoritative rule of action; but applied particularly to commands respecting moral conduct. The Ten Commandments are so many precepts for the regulation of our moral conduct.

principle — in a general sense, the cause, source or origin of anything; that from which a thing proceeds; as the principle of motion; the principles of actions;...ground; foundation; that which supports an assertion, an action, or a series of actions or of reasoning....a general truth; a law comprehending many subordinate truths; as the principles of morality, of law, of government, etc.

quality — property; that which belongs to a body or substance, or can be predicated of it...virtue or particular power of producing certain effects...disposition; temper...virtue or vice as good qualities, or bad qualities...character.

refinement — the act of purifying by separating from a substance all extraneous matter;...polish of language; elegance; purity,...purity of heart; the state of the heart purified from sensual and evil affections.

rule — government,...control; supreme command or authority;...that which is established as a principle, standard or directory; that by which anything is to be adjusted or regulated, or to which it is to be conformed...established mode or course of proceeding prescribed in private life. Every man should have some fixed rules for managing his own affairs.

strength — firmness; solidity or toughness...power of resisting attacks; fastness.

temperance — moderation; particularly, habitual, moderation in regard to the indulgence of the natural appetites and passions.

truth — conformity to fact or reality; true state of facts.

valor — strength of mind in regard to danger; that quality which enables a man to encounter danger with firmness; person bravery.

veracity — habitual observance of truth.

vice — properly, a spot or defect; a fault; a blemish...in ethics, any voluntary action or course of conduct which deviates from the rules of moral rectitude, or from the plain rules of propriety...corruption of manners.

virtue — strength, that substance or quality of physical bodies, by which they act and produce effects on other bodies...bravery; valor...moral goodness; the practice of moral duties and abstaining from vice...the practice of moral duties from sincere love to God and His laws, is virtue and religion.

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