

GEORGE WASHINGTON

A Model of American Integrity

by Daniel Watrous

America wanted a hero, and indeed, we needed one. The colonies had already experienced many years of painful struggle and they had seen their hopes trodden under the feet of their enemies. Stress could have led to disunity, but instead we banded together. The extreme circumstances present at the birth of this nation forced men to choose what they stood for, and the lengths to which they would go in the pursuit of freedom. George Washington led the way and set the example. We still must choose if we will continue in the way of our forefathers.

“His integrity, was the most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known. He was, indeed, in every sense of the word, a wise, a good, and a great man.” (Thomas Jefferson). Born February 22, 1732, to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington, George Washington became known as the father of America. Many books and statements written about him stand today as witnesses of his integrity and power.

The man George Washington was to become began long before any battlefield or worldly endeavor; it began at home. His father, Augustine, was a learned man who placed great value on education and understanding. He encouraged his children to pursue knowledge. While the youth's childhood was not filled with rigorous schooling, the little formal education he received was augmented by an excellent mental and moral culture at home from an attentive father. His siblings also provided him with wonderful examples, especially his older brother Lawrence (14 years older). Lawrence had spent some years in England studying and was always very supportive and mindful of his younger brother. The combination of family and culture at home provided an environment in which the youth grew in character and moral strength.

Although he attended little formal schooling, many manners and habits prevalent throughout his youth foreshadowed his future success. From his earliest years he was extremely neat and orderly, executing with great care and detail every assignment entrusted to him. He focused on business, and throughout his life he recorded all business transactions, as well as personal and government relations. Every record was kept with great accuracy and detail. He was athletic and very disciplined. Principles of justice and equity could be identified in his character early on, as illustrated by the fact that his schoolmates elected him school legislator.

At the young age of sixteen George was commissioned to survey a large portion of land by Lord Fairfax. This he did. He also kept a

detailed journal in which he recorded all the events of the expedition. To receive such a commission at age sixteen illustrated once again that George made quite an impression even on the upper class.

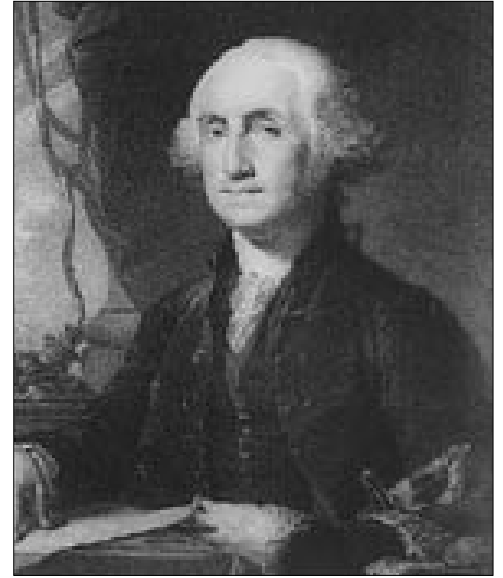
After a distinguished military career, and creeping into old age, George Washington hoped to retire to Mt. Vernon, his childhood home. Independence and peace had been established in America. Despite the appearance that all was well in the new world, many feared it could not last long without some changes to the existing form of government. The Articles of Confederation, drafted in 1781, for some time had apportioned to a continental congress certain powers and privileges. Those powers and privileges were

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thought to be insufficient to maintain the new democracy. Many concerns arose, among which were the administration of fiscal and legislative matters. Gifted and learned men lived during those years that had seen government in its many forms around the world. It was clear that a federal government must be formed and given power enough to carry out its role.

From heaven came peace and quiet sufficiently long to draft needed documents and discuss the form that the new government would assume. The Constitution of the United States of America, presented on August 6, 1787 in the Philadelphia convention differed in several major aspects from the Articles of Confederation adopted only six years earlier. One of these differences can be found in the opening line, where in the case of the Articles of Confederation, it asserts that its authority was derived from the sovereign states, whereas in the new Constitution it reads: “We the people...” This significant change marked a shift in the political attitude of the people in general. They were now



empowered to act in their sovereign capacity in delegating to the federal and state governments certain powers.

Yet there remained a difficult step: assigning an executor to put into vigor the laws passed by the legislature and administered by the judiciary. Pierce Butler, one of the founding fathers, spoke regarding the scope of the executive powers saying that the convention would not have allowed the executive so much power “had not many of the members cast their eyes toward General Washington as President, by their opinions of his Virtue.”

George Washington was unanimously elected to be the first president of the United States of America under the new Constitution in 1789. He served his country with honor and love.

We would be well served to remember the example of virtue and wholesome goodness he left as his legacy. Recall the words he spoke at the end of his second term: “...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.” We the people can still in our sovereign capacity elect our course. May God bless us that it will be a continuation of that course long ago established, and may his peace rest upon all who those call this great land home.

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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 14th 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 mislead me, and its consequences be judged by my country with some share of the partiality in which they originated.

Such being the impressions 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 those 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 can not be compared with the means by which most governments have been established without some return of pious gratitude, along with an humble anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem 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 to the great constitutional charter under which you 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 foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality, and the preeminence of 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, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted 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 whilst you carefully avoid every alteration which might endanger the benefits of an 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 impregnably fortified or the latter be safely and advantageously promoted.

To the foregoing 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 continuance 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 tranquillity, 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.

STATE OF THE WORLD

The world away from the American Colonies was busy during George Washington's life.

- December 28, 1728 Britain declares war on Spain.
- In Africa from 1731-43, war between Bornu and Kano.
- 1726 war in Persia between Afghans and Turks: Turks defeated.
- 1735 or 1744 Ethiopia at war with the Funj.
- 1727 Slavery first publicly denounced by English Quakers.
- 1731-1802 life of Erasmus Darwin, scientist.
- 1733 - John Kay builds the flying shuttle and (1769) Richard Arkwright's spinning machine combine to revolutionize the huge industry of textiles.
- 1765, the steam engine built by James Watt implemented in ships and railways pushed along the industrial revolution.
- April 13, 1742, the Messiah by the German-American composer George Fredrick Handel was performed for the first time, in Dublin.

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