

EULOGIES AND ORATIONS

ON THE

LIFE and *DEATH*

OF

General George Washington,

FIRST PRESIDENT

OF THE

United States of America.

NEW YORK

PUBLISHED

Heu pietas! heu prisca fides! inviduaque bello
Dextera!

VIRG.

"THE MOURNFUL TRIBUTE OF A NATION'S LOVE."

CALDWELL.

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1800.

A Funeral Oration

ON GENERAL WASHINGTON.

Delivered *February 22, 1800*, by Appointment of a number of
the Clergy of *NEW-YORK*.

BY *JOHN M. MASON, A. M.*

Pastor of the Associate-Reformed Church in the City of *New-York*.

..... *Quæ te tam læta tulerunt
Sæcula? Qui tanti talem genuere parentes?
In freta dum fluvii current, dum montibus umbræ
Lustrabunt convexa, polus dum sidera pascet,
Semper honos, nomenque tuum, laudesque manebunt.*

Virg.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THE offices of this day belong less to eloquence than to grief. We celebrate one of those great events which, by uniting public calamity with private affliction, create in every bosom a response to the throes of an empire. God, who doeth wonders; whose ways must be adored, but not questioned, in severing from the embraces of America her first-beloved patriot, has imposed on her the duty of blending impassioned feeling with profound and uncomplaining submission. An assembled nation, lamenting a father in their departed chief; absorbing every inferior consideration in the sentiment of their common loss; mingling their recollections and their anticipations; their wishes, their regrets, their sympathies, and their tears, is a spectacle not more tender than awful, and excites emotions too mighty for utterance. I should have no right to complain, Americans, if, instead of indulging me with your attention, you should command me to retire, and leave you to weep in the silence of wo. I should deserve the reprimand, were I to appear before you with the pretensions of eulogy. No! Eulogy has mistaken

her province and her powers, when she assumes for her theme the glory of WASHINGTON. His deeds and his virtues are his high eulogium. His deeds most familiar to your memories, his virtues most dear to your affections. To me, therefore, nothing is permitted but to borrow from yourselves. And though a pencil more daring than mine would languish in attempting to retrace the living lines which the finger of Truth has drawn upon your hearts, you will bear with me, while, on a subject which dignifies every thing related to it, 'I tell you that which you yourselves do know.'

The name of WASHINGTON, connected with all that is most brilliant in the history of our country, and in human character, awakens sensations which agitate the fervours of youth, and warm the chill bosom of age. Transported to the times when America rose to repel her wrongs, and to claim her destinies, a scene of boundless grandeur bursts upon our view. Long had her filial duty expostulated with parental injustice. Long did she deprecate the rupture of those ties which she had been proud of preserving and displaying. But her humble entreaty spurned; aggression followed by the rod, and the rod by scorpions, having changed remonstrance into murmur, and murmur into resistance, she transfers her grievances from the throne of earth to the throne of heaven; and precedes by an appeal to the God of judgment, her appeal to the sword of war.

At issue now with the mistress of the seas; unfurnished with equal means of defence; the convulsive shock approaching; and every evil omen passing before her, one step of rashness or of folly may seal her doom. In this accumulation of trouble, who shall command her confidence, and face her dangers, and conduct her cause? God, whose kingdom ruleth over all, prepares from afar the instruments best adapted to his purpose. By an influence which it would be as irrational to dispute as it is vain to scrutinize, he stirs up the spirit of the statesman and the soldier. Minds on which he has bestowed the elements of greatness, are

brought, by his providence, into contact with exigencies which rouse them into action. It is in the season of effort and of peril that impotence disappears, and energy arises. The whirlwind which sweeps away the glow-worm, uncovers the fire of genius, and kindles it into a blaze, that irradiates at once both the zenith and the poles.

But among the heroes who sprung from obscurity, when the college, the counting-house, and the plough teemed with "thunderbolts of war," none could, in all respects, meet the wants and the wishes of America. She required, in her leader, a man reared under her own eye; who combined with distinguished talent, a character above suspicion; who had added to his physical and moral qualities the experience of difficult service; a man, who should concentrate in himself the public affections and confidences; who should know how to multiply the energies of every other man under his direction, and to make disaster itself the means of success—his arm a fortress and his name a host. Such a man it were almost presumption to expect; but such a man all-ruling Heaven had provided, and that man was WASHINGTON.

Pre-eminent already in worth, he is summoned to the pre-eminence of toil and of danger. Unallured by the charms of opulence: unappalled by the hazard of a dubious warfare: unmoved by the prospect of being, in the event of failure, the first and most conspicuous victim, he obeys the summons, because he loves his duty. The resolve is firm, for the probation is terrible. His theatre is a world; his charge, a family of nations; the interest staked in his hands, the prosperity of millions unborn in ages to come. His means, under aid from on high, the resources of his own breast, with the raw recruits and irregular supplies of distracted Colonies. O crisis worthy of such a hero! Followed by her little bands, her prayers and her tears, WASHINGTON espouses the quarrel of his country. As he moves on to the conflict, every heart palpitates, and

every knee trembles. The foe, alike valiant and veteran, presents no easy conquest, nor aught inviting but to those who had consecrated their blood to the public weal. The Omnipotent, who allots great enjoyment as the meed of great exertion, had ordained that America should be free; but that she should learn to value the blessing by the price of its acquisition. She shall go to a "wealthy place," but her way is "through fire and through water." Many a generous chief must bleed, and many a gallant youth sink, at his side, into the surprised grave; the field must be heaped with slain; the purple torrent must roll, ere the angel of peace descend with his olive. It is here, amid devastation, and horror, and death, that WASHINGTON must reap his laurels, and engrave his trophies on the fields of immortality. Shall Delaware and Princeton? Shall Monmouth and York?—But I may not particularize; far less repeat the tale which babes recite, which poets sing, and fame has published to the listening world. Every scene of his action was a scene of his triumph. Now, he saved the republic by more than Fabian caution; now, he avenged her by more than Carthaginian fierceness. While, at every stroke, her forests and her hills re-echoed to her shout, "The sword of the LORD and of WASHINGTON!" Nor was this the vain applause of partiality and enthusiasm. The blasted schemes of Britain; her broken and her captive hosts, proclaimed the terror of his arms. Skilled were her chiefs, and brave her legions; but bravery and skill rendered them a conquest more worthy of WASHINGTON. True, he suffered, in his turn, repulse and even defeat. It was both natural and needful. Unchequered with reverse, his story would have resembled rather the fictions of romance, than the truth of narrative: and had he been neither defeated nor repulsed, we had never seen all the grandeur of his soul. He arrayed himself in fresh honours by that which ruins even the great—vicissitude. He could not only subdue an enemy, but, what is infinitely more, he could subdue misfor-

tune. With an equanimity which gave temperance to victory, and cheerfulness to disaster, he balanced the fortunes of the state. In the face of hostile prowess ; in the midst of mutiny and treason ; surrounded with astonishment, irresolution, and despondence, WASHINGTON remained erect, unmoved, invincible. Whatever ills America might endure in maintaining her rights, she exulted that she had nothing to fear from her commander in chief. The event justified her most sanguine presages. That invisible hand which girded him at first, continued to guard and to guide him through the successive stages of the revolution. Nor did he account it a weakness to bend the knee in homage to its supremacy, and prayer for its direction. This was the armour of WASHINGTON : this the salvation of his country.*

The hope of her reduction at length abandoned ; her war of liberty brought, in the establishment of independence, to that honourable conclusion for which it had been undertaken, the hour arrived when he was to resign the trust which he had accepted with diffidence. To a mind less pure and elevated, the situation of America would have furnished the pretext, as well as the means, of military usurpation. Talents equal to daring enterprise ; the derangement of public affairs ; unbounded popularity ; and the devotion of a suffering army, would have been to every other a strong, and to almost any other, an irresistible temptation. In WASHINGTON they did not produce even the pain of self-denial. They added the last proof of his disinterestedness ; and imposed on his country the last obligation to gratitude. Impenetrable by corrupting influence ; deaf to honest but erring solicitation ;

* The example of WASHINGTON reaches a poignant reproof to those who think, or act as if they thought, that religion is incompatible with greatness. The majesty of his character forbids a suspicion that his reverence for the worship of God, and his solicitude for the prevalence of religious principle, were either a tribute to prejudice, or a stratagem of state. But every possible doubt is removed by the fact, that it was his uniform practice, even during the war, to retire, at a certain hour, for the devotion of the closet.

irreconcilable with every disloyal sentiment, he urged the necessity, and set the example of laying down, in peace, arms assumed for the common defence.* But to separate from the companions of his danger and his glory, was, even for WASHINGTON, a difficult task. About to leave them forever, a thousand sensations rushed upon his heart, and all the foldier melted in the man. He who has no tenderness, has no magnanimity. WASHINGTON could vanquish, and WASHINGTON could weep. Never was affection more cordially reciprocated. The grasped hand; the silent anguish; the spontaneous tear trickling down the scarred cheek; the wistful look, as he passed, after the warrior who should never again point their way to victory,—form a scene for nature's painter, and for nature's bard.

But we must not lose, in our sensibility, the remembrance of his penetration, his prudence, his regard of public honour, and of public faith. Abhorring outrage; jealous for the reputation, and dreading the excesses, of even a gallant army, flushed with conquest, prompted by incendiaries, and sheltered by a semblance of right, his last act of authority is to dismiss them to their homes without entering the capital. Accompanied with a handful of troops, he repairs to the Council of the States, and, through them, surrenders to his country the sword which he had drawn in her defence. Singular phenomenon! WASHINGTON becomes a private citizen. He exchanges supreme command for the tranquillity of domestic life. Go, incomparable man! to adorn no less the civic virtues, than the splendid achievements of the field: Go, rich in the consciousness of thy high deserts: Go, with the admiration of the world, with the plaudit of millions, and the orisons of millions more for thy temporal and thine eternal bliss!

The glory of WASHINGTON seemed now complete. While the universal voice proclaimed that he might

* Morris' Oration.

decline, with honour, every future burden, it was a wish and an opinion almost as universal, that he would not jeopardize the fame which he had so nobly won. Had personal considerations swayed his mind, this would have been his own decision. But, untutored in the philosophism of the age, he had not learned to separate the maxims of wisdom from the injunctions of duty. His soul was not debased by that moral cowardice which fears to risk popularity for the general good. Having assisted in the formation of an efficient government which he had refused to dictate or enforce at the mouth of his cannon, he was ready to contribute the weight of his character to insure its effect. And his country rejoiced in an opportunity of testifying, that, much as she loved and trusted others, she still loved and trusted him most. Hailed, by her unanimous suffrage, the pilot of the state, he approaches the awful helm, and grasping it with equal firmness and ease, demonstrates that *forms* of power cause no embarrassment to him.

In so novel an experiment, as a nation framing a government for herself under no impulse but that of reason; adopting it through no force but the force of conviction; and putting it into operation without bloodshed or violence, it was all-important that her first magistrate should possess her unbounded good will. Those elements of discord which lurked in the diversity of local interest; in the collision of political theories; in the irritations of party; in the disappointed or gratified ambition of individuals; and which, notwithstanding her graceful transition, threatened the harmony of America, it was for WASHINGTON alone to control and repress. His tried integrity, his ardent patriotism, were instead of a volume of arguments for the excellence of that system which he approved and supported. Among the simple and honest whom no artifice was omitted to ensnare, there were thousands who knew little of the philosophy of government, and less of the nice machinery of the Constitution: but they knew that WASHINGTON was wise and good; they knew it was

impossible that *he* should betray them; and by this they were rescued from the fangs of faction. Ages will not furnish so instructive a comment on that cardinal virtue of republicans, confidence in the men of their choice; nor a more salutary antidote against the pestilential principle, that the soul of a republic is jealousy. At the commencement of her federal government, mistrust would have ruined America; in confidence, she found her safety.

The re-appearance of WASHINGTON as a statesman, excited the conjecture of the old world, and the anxiety of the new. His martial fame had fixed a criterion, however inaccurate, of his civil administration. Military genius does neither confer nor imply political ability. Whatever merit may be attached to the faculty of arranging the principles, and prosecuting the details, of an army, it must be conceded that vaster comprehensions belong to the statesman. Ignorance, vanity, the love of paradox, and the love of mischief, affecting to sneer at the "mystery of government," have, indeed, taught, that common sense and common honesty are his only requisites. The nature of things and the experience of every people, in every age, teach a different doctrine. America had multitudes who possessed both those qualities, but she had only one WASHINGTON. To adjust, in the best compromise, a thousand interfering views, so as to effect the greatest good of the whole with the least inconvenience to the parts; to curb the dragon of faction by means which insure the safety of public liberty; to marshal opinion and prejudice among the auxiliaries of the law; in fine, to touch the mainspring of national agency, so as to preserve the equipoise of its powers, and to make the feeblest movements of the extremities accord with the impulse at the centre, is only for genius of the highest order. To excel equally in military and political science, has been the praise of a few chosen spirits, among whom, with a proud preference, we enrol the father of our country,

It was the fortune of WASHINGTON to direct transactions of which the repetition is hardly within the limits of human possibilities. When he entered on his first Presidency, all the interests of the Continent were vibrating through the arch of political uncertainty. The departments of the new government were to be marked out, and filled up; foreign relations to be regulated; the physical and moral strength of the nation to be organized; and that at a time when scepticism in politics, no less than in religion and morals, was preparing, throughout Europe, to spring the mine of revolution and ruin. In discharging his first duties, that same intelligent, cautious, resolute procedure, which had rendered him the bulwark of war, now exhibited him as the guardian of peace. Appropriation of talent to employment, is one of the deep results of political sagacity. And in his selection of men for office, WASHINGTON displayed a knowledge of character and of business, a contempt of favoritism, and a devotion to the public welfare, which permitted the *General* to be rivalled only by the *President*.

Under such auspices, the fruit and the pledge of divine blessing, America rears her head, and recovers her vigours. Agriculture laughs on the land: Commerce ploughs the wave: Peace rejoices her at home; and she grows into respect abroad. Ah! too happy, to progress without interruption. The explosions of Europe bring new vexations to her, and new trials and new glories to her WASHINGTON. Vigilant and faithful, he hears the tempest roar from afar, warns her of its approach, and prepares for averting its dangers. Black are the heavens, and angry the billows, and narrow and perilous the passage. But his composure, dignity, and firmness, are equal to the peril. Unseduced by fraud; unterrified by threat; unawed by clamour, he holds on his steady way, and again he saves his country. With less decision on the part of WASHINGTON, a generous but mistaken ardour would have plunged her into the whirlpool, and left her till this hour the

sport of the contending elements. Americans! bow to that magnanimous policy, which protected your dearest interests at the hazard of incurring your displeasure. It was thus that WASHINGTON proved himself, not in the cant of the day, but in the procurement of substantial good, in stepping between them and perdition, the servant of the people.

The historian of this period will have to record a revolt raised by infatuation against the law of the land.* He will have to record the necessity which compelled even WASHINGTON to suppress it by the sword. But he will have to record also his gentleness and his lenity. Deeds of severity were his sad tribute to justice; deeds of humanity the native suggestions of his heart.

Eight years of glorious administration created a claim on the indulgence of his country, which none could think of disputing, but which all lamented should be urged. The ends which rendered his services indispensable being mostly attained, he demands his restoration to private life. Resigning to an able successor the reins which he had guided with characteristic felicity, he once more bids adieu to public honours. Let not his motives be mistaken or forgotten. It was for him to set as great examples in the relinquishment, as in the acceptance, of power. No mortified ambition; no haughty disgusts; no expectation of higher office, prompted his retreat. He knew that foreign nations considered his life as the bond, and his influence as the vital spirit, of our union. He knew that his own lustre threw a shade over others, not more injurious to them than to his country. He wished to dispel the enchantment of his own name: he wished to relieve the apprehensions of America, by making her sensible of her riches in other patriots; to be a spectator of her prosperity under their management; and to convince herself, and to convince the world, that she depended less on him, than either her enemies or her friends believed. And therefore he withdrew.

* The Insurrection in Pennsylvania in 1794.

Having lavished all her honours, his country had nothing more to bestow upon him except her blessing. But he had more to bestow upon his country. His views and his advice, the condensed wisdom of all his reflection, observation and experience, he delivers to his compatriots in a manual worthy of them to study, and of him to compose. And now, when they could hope to enjoy only the satisfaction of still possessing him, the pleasure of recounting his acts, and the benefit of practising his lessons, they accompany his retirement with their aspirations, that his evening may be as serene, as his morning had been fair, and his noon resplendent.

That he should ever again endure the solitudes of office, was rather to be deprecated than desired. Because it must be a crisis singularly portentous, which could justify another invasion of his repose. From such a necessity we fondly promised ourselves exemption. Flattering, fallacious security! The sudden whirlwind springs out of a calm. The revolutions of a day proclaim that an empire was. However remote the position of America; however peaceful her character; however cautious and equitable her policy; she was not to go unmolested by the gigantic fiend of Gallic domination. That she was free and happy, was crime and provocation enough. He fastened on her his murderous eye: he was preparing for her that deadly embrace, in which nations supine and credulous had already perished. Reduced to the alternative of swelling the catalogue of his victims, or arguing her cause with the bayonet and the ball, she bursts the ill-fated bonds which had linked her to his destinies, and assumes the tone and attitude of defiance. The gauntlet is thrown. To advance is perilous: to retreat, destruction. She looks wistfully round, and calls for WASHINGTON. The well-known voice, that voice, which he had ever accounted a law, pierces the retreats of Vernon, and thrills his bosom. Domestic enjoyments lose their charm; repose becomes to him inglo-

rious ; every sacrifice is cheap, and every exertion easy, when his beloved country requires his aid. With all the alacrity of youth, he flies to her succour. The helmet of war presses his silver locks. His sword, which dishonour had never tarnished, nor corruption poisoned, he once more unsheaths, and prepares to receive on its point the insolence of that foe, whose intrigue he had foiled by his wisdom.

It must ever be difficult to compare the merits of WASHINGTON's characters, because he always appeared greatest in that which he last sustained. Yet if there is a preference, it must be assigned to the Lieutenant-General of the Armies of America. Not because the duties of that station were more arduous than those which he had often performed, but because it more fully displayed his magnanimity. While others become great by elevation, WASHINGTON becomes greater by condescension. Matchless patriot ! to stoop, on public motives, to an inferior appointment, after possessing and dignifying the highest offices ! Thrice favoured country, which boasts of such a citizen ! We gaze with astonishment : we exult that we are Americans. We augur every thing great, and good, and happy. . . . But whence this sudden horror ? What means that cry of agony ? Oh ! 'tis the shriek of America ! The fairy vision is fled : WASHINGTON is——no more !——

“ How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished ! ”

Daughters of America, who erst prepared the festal bower and the laurel wreath, plant now the cypress grove, and water it with tears.

“ How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished ! ”

The death of WASHINGTON, Americans, has revealed the extent of our loss. It has given us the final proof that we never mistook him. Take his affecting testament, and read the secrets of his soul. Read all the power of domestic virtue. Read his strong love of letters and of liberty. Read his fidelity to republican principle, and his jealousy of national character. Read

his devotedness to you in his military bequests to near relations. “These swords,” they are the words of WASHINGTON, “these swords are accompanied with an injunction not to unsheath them for the purpose of shedding of blood, except it be for self-defence, or in defence of their country and its rights; and in the latter case, to keep them unsheathed, and prefer falling with them in their hands to the relinquishment thereof.”

In his acts, Americans, you have seen the man. In the complicated excellence of character, he stands alone. Let no future Plutarch attempt the iniquity of parallel. Let no foldier of fortune; let no usurping conqueror; let not Alexander or Cesar; let not Cromwell or Buonparte; let none among the dead or the living, appear in the same picture with WASHINGTON: or let them appear as the shade to his light.

On this subject, my countrymen, it is for others to speculate, but it is for us to feel. Yet in proportion to the severity of the stroke, ought to be our thankfulness that it was not inflicted sooner. Through a long series of years has GOD preserved our WASHINGTON a public blessing: and now that he has removed him forever, shall we presume to say, *What doest thou?* Never did the tomb preach more powerfully the dependence of all things on the will of the Most High. The greatest of mortals crumble into dust, the moment he commands, *Return, ye children of men.* WASHINGTON was but the instrument of a benignant GOD. He sickens, he dies, that we may learn not to *trust in men*, nor to *make flesh our arm*. But though WASHINGTON is dead; JEHOVAH lives. GOD of our fathers! be our GOD, and the GOD of our children! Thou art our refuge and our hope; the pillar of our strength; the wall of our defence, and our unfading glory!

AMERICANS! This GOD, who raised up WASHINGTON, and gave you liberty, exacts from you the duty of cherishing it with a zeal according to knowledge. Never fully, by apathy or by outrage, your fair inher-

itance. Risk not, for one moment, on visionary theories, the solid blessings of your lot. To you, particularly, O youth of America! applies the solemn charge. In all the perils of your country, remember WASHINGTON. The freedom of reason and of right, has been handed down to you on the point of the hero's sword. Guard, with veneration, the sacred deposit. The curse of ages will rest upon you, O youth of America! if ever you surrender to foreign ambition, or domestic lawlessness, the precious liberties for which WASHINGTON fought, and your fathers bled.

I cannot part with you, fellow citizens, without urging the long remembrance of our present assembly. This day we wipe away the reproach of republics, that they know not how to be grateful. In your treatment of living patriots, recal your love and your regret of WASHINGTON. Let not future inconsistency charge this day with hypocrisy. Happy America, if she gives an instance of universal principle in her sorrows for the man "first in war, first in peace, and first in the affections of his country!"