

AN
ORATION

ON THE
DEATH
OF
General George Washington,
LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES;

DELIVERED IN CHARLOTTE,

February 22, 1800,

TO THE
CITIZENS OF MECKLENBURGH COUNTY,

And published at the Request of

THE MILITIA OFFICERS OF SAID COUNTY.



BY
JAMES WALLIS.



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1800.

MY FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THIS is a day for ever to be distinguished in the annals of our country—This day has been set apart by the highest legislative authority of these United States as a day of *national mourning*—This day thousands and tens of thousands of American citizens, willingly comply with the appointment, and assemble together, as we have done, in the character and habiliments of *mourners*, publicly to give vent to their sorrowful feelings, and sympathetic condolence. What afflicting disaster—what heavy national calamity can call forth such universal, such spontaneous and disinterested sorrow? The occasion is mournful indeed, and justly demands the tears of all American citizens—**WASHINGTON IS NO MORE!** **WASHINGTON**, the Father of our Country, the Hero and Patriot of America, now lies numbered with the dead! **WASHINGTON**, the Founder of this new and rising Empire, the Asserter of our Rights, the Guardian of our Liberty, the Terror of Tyrants, the Friend of Man, the Benefactor of Millions!—**WASHINGTON**, the Great, the Good, the Gentle, and the Wise—The man on whom every eye was turned, during our great struggle for National Liberty and Independence; and to whom United America is so highly indebted for the successful issue of the conflict, now lives only in his great actions, and in the affectionate remembrance of his countrymen.

In the removal from this world of that great man, whose death we this day deplore, the Supreme Disposer of Human Events, has taken from us the greatest benefactor and ornament of our country; and although it becomes us to submit with reverence and Christian resignation to such afflictive dispensations of Divine Providence; yet, neither religion or decency will forbid us, on this occasion, to testify in the most public and impressive manner, our regard for the virtues, our gratitude for the services, and our sorrow for the loss of so beloved and excellent a citizen.

The mournful service to which we are this day invited by our National Legislature, will not only be congenial to the feelings of every true American, but may be profitable to our country on a variety of accounts. In reviewing the life of the great Washington, it will naturally fall in our way to take into recollection some of the most interesting events which preceded, accompanied and followed the late American revolution (for in effecting this revolution Washington acted a most conspicuous part). And by contemplating this revolution, and the circumstances that led to it; by reflecting on the mighty magnitude of the object for which we engaged in a dangerous and bloody war with a potent foreign power; by recollecting the numerous and complicated dangers which we suffered or escaped during the contest, together with our attainment of national Freedom and Independence, and the creation of a Government founded upon the Rights of Man; and by considering the distinguishedly happy situation of the citizens of these United States since the conclusion of the war; by such contemplations we shall be taught to make a due estimate of our national advantages, and properly to appreciate our civil privileges.

In tracing the life and delineating the character of Washington, to the honour of whose memory this day is devoted, I am at a loss to determine whether we are chiefly to applaud him as an Hero, or as a Patriot; whether we are most to admire him for his military skill or political wisdom; for, in both these respects, he shone forth with conspicuous splendor, and will bear comparison with those characters in other countries that have been pre-eminent in fame. It will be the province of future historians, and the subject of volumes, to do ample justice to his amiable character, and to display his distinguished virtues and meritorious services to his country in these respects. All that I intend at present, is a sketch of the life of Washington, in connection with the history of our country, and to make such reflections as we proceed, as may naturally arise out of the subject.

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This day is the anniversary of the birth of that illustrious man, whose death we have now to lament. He was born in Virginia, on the 11th day of February, 1732, old style, corresponding to the 22d of February, new style. His ancestors were of British extraction, and were among the first settlers of the Province of Virginia. At an early period of life, Washington entered into the service of his country; and when but a youth of about two and twenty years of age, was placed at the head of a company of three hundred men, which was sent out in the year 1754, by the Province of Virginia, to prevent encroachments that the French and Indians were making on its frontiers. Whilst marching to the possession of the post at the junction of the Allegany and Monongahela rivers, he was informed that the French had already erected a fort there. A detachment of nine hundred men marched against him: he fortified himself as strongly as time and circumstances would admit; but was at length obliged to surrender the post which he occupied to superior numbers; and having obtained honourable terms for himself and his men, returned to Virginia.

In the next year happened the memorable defeat of the British General Braddock, who was sent out with some regiments of regular troops and provincial levies, to dispossess the French of the posts upon which they had seized. Braddock unfortunately fell into an ambuscade, and perished, with a number of his men. Young Washington, who had accompanied him as an aid-de-camp, and who had in vain warned him of his danger, now displayed great military talents, in effecting a retreat of the remains of the army, and in forming a junction with the rear. So early did the genius of this future American Fabius begin to display itself. Though Braddock, by his rash and imprudent conduct, was defeated and blamed; yet the conduct of Young Washington, on that disastrous and trying occasion, was universally admired and applauded; and even high expectations were then formed of his future usefulness to his country. And it is worthy of observation, that in a

discourse delivered by a respectable Clergyman in Virginia (the Rev. Samuel Davis) to a company of volunteers, about one month after Braddock's defeat, the speaker, as if guided by the spirit of prophecy, presages that Washington was designed for some eminent usefulness to his country. After pointing him out to the public, in his printed discourse as a youth of heroic bravery and promising talents, he adds, "I cannot but hope, Providence has hitherto preserved him in so signal a manner for some important service to his country." How fully has the prediction been accomplished in the future life of Washington! } What mere man ever rendered such important service to his country? Are the American people this day distinguished from every other nation on the globe by their privileges and advantages? Have we a Government erected upon the broad basis of the Rights of Man? Do we now enjoy Liberty, Independence and Peace? Are we not visibly and eminently indebted to Washington, as the chief instrument, under Heaven, for the attainment and preservation of these inestimable blessings? This will lead us to consider more particularly the part which Washington acted in the late American revolution; a revolution the most glorious and beneficial the world ever saw.

The war which led to this revolution, was, on the part of Great-Britain, a war of oppression and covetousness. The fertile fields and promising infancy of America, appeared to her as rich mines for tributary wealth. The ministry needing money to defray the expence incurred by their ambitious and bloody wars, and to keep up the pomp and grandeur of the Court, formed the design of establishing the same system of taxation in America as in England; and proceeded to pass the memorable Stamp Act. This act produced great disturbances in the American Colonies. So much opposition was made to it, that it was judged proper to repeal it, about one year after it had been enacted, and before it had ever been carried into execution.

Although the Stamp Act was repealed by the Parliament, it was only upon the principle of expediency: they still insisted upon the right to tax the Colonies; and at the same time the Stamp Act was repealed, an act was passed declaring the right of Parliament "to bind the Colonies in all cases whatsoever." This was as lofty a stretch of arbitrary power, as ever one set of men, or one country, claimed over another. Taxation, in all its oppressive and ruinous forms, would have been nothing more than putting the declared right into practice.

✧ On the other hand, this right was never recognized by the Colonists; but as they flattered themselves that it would not be exercised, they were not very active at first in remonstrating against it. Such indeed was the disposition of the Colonists at this time towards the mother country, that notwithstanding the disadvantages under which they laboured from restraints upon their trade, calculated solely for the benefit of the commercial and manufacturing interests of Great-Britain, a separation of the two countries might have been a far distant event. The Americans were taught from their earliest infancy to venerate a people from whom they were descended; whose language, laws and manners were the same as their own; they looked upon them as models of perfection, and in their prejudiced minds, the most enlightened nations of Europe, were considered as almost Barbarians in comparison with Englishmen. Such sentiments, instilled into them in early life, were what nothing but the most tyrannic measures could eradicate.

The duties upon glass, paper and tea; the disfranchisement of some of the Colonies, the obstruction to the measures of the Legislatures in others, by the King's Governors; the contemptuous treatment of their humble remonstrances, stating their grievances and praying for a redress of them; and other violent and oppressive measures, at length excited an ardent spirit of opposition. The British Ministry, instead of attempting to allay this spirit by a more lenient conduct, seemed resolutely bent upon reducing the

Colonies to the most slavish obedience to their decrees. Vain were all attempts made use of to prevail upon them to lay aside their designs, or to convince them of the impossibility of carrying them into effect, and of the mischievous consequences which must necessarily ensue from a continuance of the attempt. They persevered with a degree of inflexibility and infatuation scarcely paralleled.

The American Colonies, on the other hand, denied, in the first place, the right of taxation claimed by the Parliament; they next suspended the use of taxable articles, and petitioned against the practice of taxation; and these failing, they resolved, in the last place, to defend their property by force, as soon as it was forcibly invaded; and, in answer to the declaration of rebellion and non-protection, published their declaration of Independence and right of self-protection.

These, in a few words, were the first stages of the quarrel, which issued at length in open war. The first blood was shed on the memorable 19th of April, 1775, at Lexington, in Massachusetts, by a detachment of the British troops, which was sent out by General Gage to destroy some American stores at Concord. This affair had a mighty influence upon the Americans in all the Colonies. The Continental Congress met the 10th of May following, and the distress which the Continent felt at the outrage at Lexington, gave that body a stability which perhaps no other circumstance could have done. The Congress which had met the preceding year, had resolved to make the cause of the Thirteen Colonies a common one; and had adopted some wise and necessary measures for the protection of their threatened liberties. But at this session, more vigorous measures of defence were resolved upon, such as raising and forwarding troops to the scene of action, appointing a Commander in Chief, and other Field Officers. By an unanimous vote, Washington was commissioned Commander in Chief of all the Armies raised or to be raised for the service of the United Colonies; and indeed, not only

Congress, but all well-informed men throughout the continent, looked up to him as the fittest person to be placed at the head of our armies. He entered upon the duties of his high station in the beginning of July, 1775. A croud of difficulties now presented themselves to the new American Commander. The army put under his command was composed of farmers and mechanics, who had lately assumed the character of soldiers, and were almost entirely ignorant of military discipline, and not inured to the dangers and hardships of war. The most of the officers themselves had but little acquaintance with military affairs, and were not duly sensible of the necessity of strict discipline and subordination. Difficulties also arose to the American Commander from the scarcity of ammunition; and the want of military stores; yet, under all these disadvantages, he made such prudent arrangements, and conducted them with such military skill, that he kept an army of British veteran troops shut up in the town of Boston during six or eight months, and finally compelled them to evacuate it about the middle of March, 1776.

In the summer following, General Howe, with a numerous fleet and army, made his appearance in the harbour of New-York. A descent was made upon Long-Island, which was at length evacuated by the Americans; after which, New-York, together with Forts Washington and Lee, fell successively into the hands of the British. During the whole of this campaign, General Howe had nearly double the forces which General Washington immediately commanded. The British fleets and forces arrived without any accident. The military knowledge of her Generals was supposed to be complete. They had neither experience or reinforcements to wait for. They had nothing to do but begin and prosecute their conquests.

On the other hand, America was young and unskilled in the art of war. She was obliged to trust her defence to time and practice. It was, therefore, wise policy in the American Commander in Chief to avoid decisive engagements, con-