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G E O R G E W A S H I N G T O N

by

T H O M A S M c T I E R N A N

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Two men in American history stand out before all others --- George Washington and Abraham Lincoln; the one the creator, the other the preserver of the nation. From the opposite walks of society they came; Washington, a child of wealth; Lincoln, born to poverty. Yet they worked along similar lines, for the same end -- their country's good; and to-day the wealthy slaveholder and the poor railsplitter are held in grateful honor by eighty millions of freemen.

George Washington was the third son of Augustine Washington. His grandfather had come from England to Virginia in 1657, and on the plantation laid out by him George was born, February 22, 1732.

While he was still an infant his parents moved to another plantation on the Rappahannock opposite Fredericksburg, and there George spent the first eleven years of his life. His early schooling was merely that of the time. The Sexton of the parish taught him to read, write and cipher. His mother, too, gave him lessons; but she gave him more than books could teach. From her, young Washington inherited a spirit of law and order, and a devotion to duty; a spirit which taught him to govern himself if he would govern others. She gave him many lessons, many rules; but after all it was her character shaping

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his that was the most effective in developing his personality.

In 1743, when George was eleven years old, his father died, leaving a fortune to each of his children. To George was given the plantation on which he lived. There his mother remained; but because there was a school near the home of his married brother, Augustine, the boy lived with him for the next five years; during which time he studied writing, arithmetic and book-keeping.

In his fourteenth year a war broke out between the French and the English. George was too young to enter the army, but his brother Lawrence procured for him a warrant as midshipman. His trunk was aboard the ship on which he was to serve, when, out of deference to his mother's wishes, he relinquished the appointment and went back to his books.

For the next two years he devoted himself to the study of geometry and trigonometry and became a surveyor.

His first patron was Lord Fairfax, who had left England and settled on his estates in Virginia. This cultivated nobleman took a great fancy to the young, brave, and open-hearted boy -- saw that ^{he had} ~~he was~~ of good common sense -- with an unusual force of will, power and character, and he resolved to employ him in surveying his large estates beyond the Blue Ridge.

Although but sixteen years of age at the time, Washington did his work so well that, when he had finished for Lord Fairfax, the Governor of the Province appointed him a public surveyor. Years later an attorney declared that the only surveys of the

period on which he could rely were those signed "George Washington, surveyor."

For three years Washington went up and down the country surveying, always endeavoring to make the best of the situation, acquiring in the meantime, that self mastery and that knowledge of men which were later on to prove so valuable to him.

In 1750, there began a struggle for possession of the valley of the Ohio between the British and the French, and Virginia prepared for the conflict. The colony was divided into military districts, each under an adjutant general; and Washington, when only nineteen, was appointed to one of these commands, with the rank of major.

Meanwhile, the French soldiers and traders were bullying and cajoling the Indians, taking possession of the Ohio country, and selecting places for forts, intending to hem in and strangle the English settlements.

Governor Dinwiddie had sent a commissioner to remonstrate against these encroachments, but his envoy having learned how the French had slaughtered the Indians, became alarmed and returned in haste.

Some more vigorous person was needed to go and warn the French not to trespass on the English territory, so Lord Fairfax and others said to the Governor: "George Washington is the very man for you; young, daring and adventurous, yet sober minded and responsible, he only lacks opportunity to show the stuff of which he is made."

Accordingly Washington, in 1753, was made commissioner to visit the French forts in the valley and protest against their erection.

It was no light assignment for a youth of twenty-one. He was to enter a wild country, full of Indians, through whom he must make his way to the French commander with his protest. He must be strong, courageous, prudent, alert --- no holiday task, for one so young!

History tells us how well he performed his duty. How, under innumerable difficulties, he learned what troops the French had, the number and location of their forts, the strategic points, and much other valuable information.

Difficult as was the outward journey, the return was even more difficult and dangerous. Washington and his companions narrowly escaped death at the hands of their Indian guide, and in the attempt to cross the half-frozen Ohio. They spent one night, with the thermometer below freezing, on an island in that river without fire, and with their wet clothes freezing on them. Yet they succeeded in their mission, and early in the new year, 1754, Washington reported to Governor Dinwiddie.

The Governor at once directed him to build a fort at the junction of the Ohio and the Monongahela rivers, which Washington had described as a strong strategic point; but before it was finished, and while he himself was raising militia at Alexandria, his second in command was compelled to surrender the place to a much larger French force. The latter destroyed the British post, and

erected another and stronger fort near by, which they called Fort Duquesne.

Major Washington at once prepared to attack the French; but after a skirmish, was forced to retire towards Virginia, and to throw up earthworks which, with grim pleasantry, he called Fort Necessity. The French approached, and after an all day battle they compelled him to surrender, on July 3, 1754.

Disheartening as was the surrender, it was not without good results for Washington. No one blamed him for the failure of the campaign; the House of Burgesses even passed a vote of thanks to him. On his own side, moreover, he had been initiated into active military service; he had been under fire, he had taken his first real lesson in the art of commanding.

In February, 1755, however, another opportunity for work presented itself. General Braddock reached Virginia, with two regiments of regular troops, and invited Washington to be one of his aides, with the rank of Colonel. He accepted the invitation and on July 9, 1755, the British forces were but a few miles from Fort Duquesne, moving forward in beautiful array; every man in full uniform, his accoutrements in perfect condition, lines straight as if on parade, colors flying, bands playing --- "the most beautiful spectacle he had ever beheld," as Washington afterwards declared --- when suddenly a shower of rifle balls rained upon them from unseen guns! Taken by surprise, and unable to locate their hidden foe whose bullets were mowing them down, the British were bewildered; the militia broke ranks, each man getting behind

a tree from which he fired as an enemy appeared; the regulars formed squares thus offering a still more deadly target for the invisible foe! Flesh and blood could not endure it, and panic-stricken, the men sought safety in retreat! Presently General Braddock was shot from his horse, two of his aides were wounded, leaving Colonel Washington the only senior officer unharmed. ~~And~~ To see him endeavor to stem the panic and disorder, one would have thought that he had been tried in a hundred battles, instead of its being his first military engagement. Four bullets pierced his clothing, two horses were shot under him, but he passed through the battle uninjured.

Little wonder that an old Indian Chief afterwards confessed that he had made Washington his especial target, but being unable to hit him, he told his braves not to fire at one so manifestly under the protection of the Great Spirit.

It was Washington who led the beaten army on its retreat to Fort Necessity, where Braddock died, and whence he was taken for burial on July 13, 1755. As both Regimental Chaplains had been wounded, Washington read the burial service over the General's body.

Braddock's defeat frightened Virginia. The Burgesses voted to raise a large force of militia, and asked Washington to take full charge of the defense of the frontier. So for three years he was engaged in defending three hundred and fifty miles of country with seven hundred ill-armed, ill-paid men. His headquarters ~~was~~^{was} at Winchester, and from there he directed the re-

cruiting, inspected the posts, made flying visits to Williamsburg to keep the Governor informed of the state of affairs or to get money, food, clothing from the Burgesses. It was difficult to get recruits, and more difficult to keep them; he had to instill ideas of military obedience into them, to make even his officers obey, and to combat the insolence and opposition of the British officers still posted in the colony. Though Washington did not know it, all of these troubles were the school in which he was being trained for his future career.

During those years Washington received his orders from Governor Dinwiddie, who made frequent blunders which caused perplexity to Washington while in command of the Virginia troops.

At last Governor Dinwiddie, a fussy, foolish, well meaning blunderer, was recalled --- Mr. Dinsmore taking his place. General Forbes was sent out from England to command the troops; he invited the colonists to help him. So under Forbes and Washington, British and Virginians marched toward Fort Duquesne. By this time a lesson had been learned, and Braddock's defeat was not to be repeated.

The French did not wait to fight them, but after setting fire to the buildings, abandoned the fort and fled northward. Washington and his Virginia militia led the advance guard into the fort. The British flag replaced the fleur de lis of France, a new fort was built, named in honor of William Pitt, Secretary of the Colonies, and thus the flourishing city of Pittsburg, Pa., began its existence.

When the army had returned to Virginia and peace was assured, Washington resigned his commission, and, at the age of twenty-six, laden with honors, returned to his plantation at Mount Vernon.

Thus ended the first period of Washington's public career. We have seen him pass through it in all its phases. It shows him as an adventurous pioneer, as a fearless frontier fighter, and as a soldier of great promise.

Let us now turn for a moment to the pleasanter side of his life. While the army was preparing for its march against Fort Duquesne, Colonel Washington was sent to Williamsburg to hurry supplies to the front -- and thereby hangs a pretty love story!

At William's ferry, on the Pamunky River, there lived a planter named Chamberlayne, at whose mansion was stopping a charming young widow, Mrs. Custis, who greatly admired Washington! Mr. Chamberlayne invited him to dinner, and the gallent young Colonel, attended by his negro servant Bishop, made haste to accept the invitation.

Reaching the mansion, Washington dismounted, ordered Bishop to have the horses at the door immediately after dinner, and went in. All the afternoon Bishop held the horses at the door, but Washington did not come. He was talking with the fascinating young widow! At dusk Mr. Chamberlayne sent Bishop with the horses to the stable. For once Washington was in no hurry! At Mr. Chamberlayne's he spent the night, and did not continue on his journey until after breakfast the next morning.

But at Williamsburg he made up for lost time, and we shall see that he lost none at the Chamberlayne plantation, for stopping there on his way back; he carried away with him the young widow's promise to become his wife when the campaign was over. The promise was kept; and on January 6, 1759, the wedding took place at the bride's home, the White House on the Potomac.

For the next fifteen years Washington lived the life he best loved, that of a farmer. He rose early, mounted his horse soon after breakfast, and spent the morning inspecting his plantations. After dinner he made up his accounts. At an early hour he was in bed. He hunted, entertained largely, and above all was a sharp man of business, though in all points scrupulously honest. His bales and barrels of tobacco were not inspected in the West Indian markets, as were those of other planters; people could trust him, and accepted the brand of George Washington as a guarantee of good material and honest weight.

But besides being a planter and a man of business, Washington was a member of the House of Burgesses. It was while he was away on his last campaign that he had been elected, and when he took his seat Mr. Robinson, the Speaker, thanked him publicly in eloquent words for his services to his country. Washington rose to reply, but was so utterly unable to talk about himself that he stood before the House hesitating and blushing until the Speaker said: "Sit down, Mr. Washington, your modesty equals your valor and that surpasses the power of any language!"

Washington rarely spoke before the House, but his advice was always sought, and his influence was great.

He remained a member for fifteen years; in the meantime there was being prepared by British stupidity the mighty drama whose ^{final} grand act was to be the establishment of history's greatest Republic!

The Stamp Act passed by the British Parliament thoroughly aroused the colonies, and in 1774, Washington, with six other Burgesses, was sent to represent Virginia in the first Continental Congress. This assembly gave expression to ^a ~~the~~ deliberate opinion of the colonies ^{adverse to} ~~on~~ the acts of the British Parliament; it protested against the treatment accorded them, and declared that as British subjects the colonists owed no allegiance to a tax-levying body in which they were not represented, and that their own legislatures alone had the right to tax them.

This declaration was important; but of even greater consequence was the fact that the first Continental Congress made the colonists acquainted with each other. It was, in reality, the first step toward the formation of the United States.

Then came the news of the Repeal of the Stamp Act. It was received by Washington with much pleasure. But he had marked the dangerous reservation of the repeal; he observed at Boston the gathering strength of what the wise ministers of George III called sedition; he noted the arrival of the British troops in the rebellious town; and he saw that persistence in this course must surely lead to a violent separation from the mother country.

Still he waited and watched for the news from the North. Everything comes to him who waits, and while he waits works!

Before long he heard that the tea-chests were floating in Boston Harbor, and then from across the water came the news of the passage of the Port Bill and other measures destined to crush the rebel town.

He then urged the adoption of non-importation from the mother country, and wrote to a friend that "at a time when our lordly masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom, something should be done to avert the stroke and maintain the liberty which we have derived from our ancestors.

In the second Continental Congress Washington was again a delegate. Just before it met the battles of Concord and Lexington had been fought, that is in April, 1775; and the Massachusetts delegates told of the army of colonists encamped before Boston -- an army made up not only of Massachusetts men but also of men from other colonies who had rallied to the defense of the common cause.

In a speech at Williamsburg about this time Washington said: "I will raise one thousand men, subsist them at my own expense, and march them to the relief of Boston."

The moment was critical. A leader was needed to weld into one fighting body the separate colonies and their independent forces. Fortunately the hour and the man were at hand, and on July 3, 1775, Washington took command of the American Army at Cambridge.

It could scarce be called an army! It was a collection of a few thousand men, some of them uniformed, most of them in their everyday garb, their weapons as diverse as themselves, and with little ammunition. But Washington had seen similar troops in Virginia --- had seen them fight too.

When, on his way to Cambridge, he heard of the battle of Bunker Hill, he asked the bearer of the news: "Why did the Provincials retire?" "Because their ammunition gave out," was the answer. "But did they stand the fire of the regulars?" "They did," came the reply, "and held their own until the enemy was within eight rods." "Then the liberties of the country are safe," cried the Commander-in-Chief. He remembered the sight of Braddock's army, and knew that if the New England farmers could wait while a column of British veterans charged upon them, there was in them stuff of which soldiers could be made.

Washington's first business was to change the patriotic crowd into a patriotic army. But his work was not without its difficulties, difficulties which were quite apart from the task itself.

Just as the House of Burgesses had hampered him in Virginia twenty years earlier, he was now hampered by Congress. Congress seemed to be afraid of its own army and its own General, and insisted on having a veto on Washington's plans.

We know how the tide ebbed and flowed during the seven years of warfare. We know how the success at Boston in 1776, was followed by the retreat at Long Island; the victories at

Princeton and Trenton, by the defeat at Brandywine; the victories at Saratoga and ^MMonmouth, by the surrender of Savannah; the capture of Stony Point, by the reverses at Charleston, Camden, Guilford and Hobkirk's Hill in 1781; and how, while the British wintered comfortably in New York or Philadelphia, Washington and his men suffered privation and want at Morristown and Valley Forge --- such privation that soldiers even went on guard in the snow with their feet bound up in rags, their blankets wrapped about their shoulders, --- that men and horses died for lack of food.

But at last the tide turned. French ships and troops came to aid the colonies; --- and on October 18, 1781, Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, and the struggle was over!

A week later, and the watchman on his rounds in New York City Streets called out the time and added a joyful sentence to his shout: "Twelve o'clock!" he cried; "twelve o'clock --- and Cornwallis is taken."

From the time Washington entered on his duties as Commander-in-Chief, to the close of the war, he moves before us like some grand embodiment of virtue and power. Whether bowed in fasting and prayer before God in behalf of his country, or taking the fate of the American army into his hands --- whether retreating before the overwhelming number of the enemy, or pouring his furious squadrons to the charge --- whether lost in anxious thought, or struggling amid the broken ice of the Delaware --- whether galloping into deadly volleys of the enemy in the strong effort to

restore the fight, or wearing the wreath of victory which a grateful nation placed with mingled tears and acclamations on his brow, he is the same self-collected, noble minded and resolute man.

The bravest, said Napoleon, had his moment of fear. But one cannot point to the time in Washington's career, where his firmness and coolness for an instant forsook him.

Besides his open enemies, the British, and his suspicious master, the Congress, Washington fought and defeated other foes -- foes in his own military family. The first of these was the Conway cabal, headed by General Conway, which wished to displace the Commander-in-Chief. So influential was this clique that a motion to arrest Washington was made in Congress, and wanted only one vote of being adopted.

Amid disorganized, disbanding armies --- amid cabals formed against him --- falsehoods circulated about him, jealousies of Congress --- amid open accusations and implied doubts of his virtue and capacity, he moved calmly yet resolutely forward in the path of duty. This fortitude under calamities, firm courage in the midst of reverses, and unshaken constancy in every trial to which human nature is subjected, prove him to have possessed a soul of amazing strength, and an unconquerable faith in the right.

Even when the fighting was over, the great soldier's work was not done. Congress was slow in providing for the payment of the army, and Washington had to keep the men together, unpaid, eager to get back to their homes, discontented, mutinous. To crown all his troubles, an attack was made upon his honor. Several

friends proposed that he erect an American kingdom, and mount the throne himself, asserting that the army would support him against Congress, and that the people would agree. The handbills proposing this plan are known as the "Newburg Addresses," and were circulated through the army while it was encamped at Newburg on the Hudson.

A secret meeting was proposed, which Washington learned of and attended. Before any debate on the plan could begin, he rose and drew a paper from his pocket --- a speech which, as was his custom, he had written out. He began to read it, but in a moment stopped. "Gentlemen," he said, "you will pardon me for putting on my spectacles. I have grown gray in your service, and now I find myself growing blind."

These simple words touched every heart. The officers listened intently while their commander besought them to be patient, not to desert their men, to do nothing hastily. When he withdrew, they resolved formally that they "viewed with abhorrence and rejected with disdain the propositions" contained in the anonymous call for the meeting, and adjourned, more than ever devoted to their commander. Nothing more was heard of the plan. Washington had strangled the conspiracy in its cradle.

Some of the most important events in Washington's life are connected with Greater New York. The first was his retreat after the battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776, followed immediately by his army's escape to Manhattan, and thence northward to White Plains, where he fought another but indecisive battle;

and then turned southward across the Hudson River through New Jersey to Pennsylvania in a masterly retreat.

Three other events occurred in this city. The first was his triumphal entry on November 25, 1783, the day that the defeated British sullenly withdrew. The troops marched from McGowan's Pass, at the northern end of Central Park, down the old Boston Post Road, which we now know as Third Avenue, to the Bowery, and through Queen Street, now Pearl, to City Hall in Wall Street. Washington followed them later, attended by George Clinton, the newly chosen Governor of the State, and other important personages; and cheering crowds greeted the General as earlier they had hailed the victorious soldiers.

Nine days later he called his senior officers together in the long room of Fraunce's tavern and bade them farewell. Standing at one end of the room, he saw the sad countenances of those who had been his companions in arms through the long years of darkness of the past. A thousand proofs of their devotion came rushing to his memory --- and the whole history of the past with its checkered scenes swept by, till his heart sunk in affection and grief. Advancing to the table, he drank to their healths, and in silence, they acknowledged the toast. Then he said:

"With a heart full of gratitude and love, I take my leave of you. I most devoutly wish that your later days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable." Then after a pause: "I cannot come to each of you to take my leave, but shall be obliged if you will come and take me by the hand."

General Knox, his chief of staff, stood nearest and was the first to approach Washington. Neither could speak a word. The other Generals followed. Then Washington left the room, and with his former officers following in silence, many in tears, went to his boat at Whitehall Ferry. As the boat was pulled off from the dock he stood up and waved his hat, the officers saluted in the same manner, and when the boat was lost to sight in the distance, they dispersed in silence.

A few days later Washington presented his accounts to the Treasurer of Congress. He had accepted no salary, but had agreed that Congress should reimburse him for his outlay. For more than eight years he had kept account of every penny he had spent as General; and now he presented his bills, all with proper vouchers. This done he started again on his journey. From Philadelphia he proceeded to Annapolis, from which place he addressed a letter to Congress, asking when it would be agreeable to them to receive him. Three days later he appeared before Congress. Introduced by the Secretary, Washington took the seat assigned to him. There was a brief pause, and then the President of the body said that "the United States Congress assembled was prepared to receive his commission." Washington replied:

"Mr. President:--the great events, on which my resignation depended, having at length taken place, I now have the honor of offering my sincere congratulations to Congress, and of presenting myself before them, to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the services of my country."

"Happy in the confirmation of our independence, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable nation, I resign with satisfaction the appointment I accepted with diffidence; a diffidence in my ability to accomplish so arduous a task, which, however, was superseded by a confidence in the rectitude of our cause, the support of the Supreme power of the Union, and the patronage of Heaven."

Then, after a word of gratitude to the army and to his staff, he concluded as follows: "Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of action; and bidding an affectionate farewell to this august body, under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life."

A contemporary newspaper, in its brief account, said that the occasion was deeply solemn and affecting, and that many persons shed tears. Well indeed might those present have been thus affected, for they had witnessed a scene forever memorable in the annals of all that is best and noblest in human nature. They had listened to a speech which was not equalled in meaning and spirit in American history until, eighty years later, Abraham Lincoln stood upon the slope at Gettysburg and uttered his immortal words upon those who had died that the country might live!

But the young nation could not get on without Washington's service. The pressure of war which had brought and kept the colonies together being removed, it seemed as if they would revert to their former conditions of suspicious and jealous

independence. Virginia and Maryland were the first to see that something must be done if the war and its sacrifices were not to be wasted. They appointed a joint commission to consider the subject. The result of the deliberation was the calling of the Constitutional Convention, which met at Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, with Washington as president.

It took more than a year to overcome the indifference and jealousy of the different states; but when the Constitution had been ratified a motion for choosing a president was then put in order. The selection was a mere formality. There never was any doubt as to the people's choice; every vote was cast for Washington; and on April 30, 1789, he was solemnly sworn as first President of the United States of America, taking the oath of office on the balcony of Federal Hall in New York City.

As he had assisted to plan the form of the new government, it was his task to carry that plan into execution --- a task as difficult as any he had yet attempted. The Constitution provided only an outline; the details were to be worked out. To Washington we owe much of the existing laws of our government. His administration established the national credit, made provision for the public debt, and for ^{the support of} that patriotic army whose interest and welfare were always so dear to him; and, by laws wisely framed Washington raised the commerce and navigation of the country, from depression and ruin to a state of prosperity.

His domestic policy found its polar star in the avowed objects of the Constitution itself. He sought to administer

that constitution, so as to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.

Washington sought men fit for office; not offices which might fit men. Above personal, local, and party considerations, he felt that he could only discharge the sacred trust which the country had placed in his hands, by a diligent inquiry after men of ability and honesty to co-operate with him in his work.

Against all dangers, he most earnestly entreated the country to guard itself. He appealed to its patriotism, to its self respect, to its honor, to every consideration connected with its welfare and happiness.

For eight years he guided the ship of state, his hand always on the helm, and he might have remained President to the day of his death. But he was wearied. Since that July day in 1775, when he drew his sword as Commander-in-Chief --- more than twenty years --- he had been the real head of the nation, and he wished to rest. To make sure that he would be allowed to retire, he wrote a farewell address to the American people, declaring his intention to refuse a third term as President.

Among the noble legacies which he left to his country, none is more worthy of being treasured in the heart of the people than this address. Through all its wise counsels, noble maxims, and elevated thought, the spirit of undying patriotism abound.

The country understood that Washington meant what he said; and he was allowed to become a private citizen. But he was not allowed to remain a private citizen for long. In March, 1797, he went home to his farm; in July, 1798, he was again appointed Commander-in-Chief in expectation of a war with France, which happily did not occur; and in December, 1799, after a brief illness, he died.

His death stunned the country. Had it happened during his term of office, it might have caused the downfall of the nation. But the same power that raised up Washington to build the United States permitted him to remain until his work was so far advanced as no longer to need his directing hand.

In many events of our country, reverent men have traced the direct interposition of ^{Divine} Providence; not the least of such providences was the withholding of Death's call from Washington until he had done his work, and done it well.

And what manner of man was Washington? --- At first he was a zealous farmer, a bold rider, a great hunter. In later years he was dignified and stately as his great positions required, but at home he was affable, playful, and devoted to children.

His character developed with his increasing years; he was educated into greatness by the constantly increasing weight of his responsibilities. Bred a surveyor, circumstances made him a soldier, and he was a great soldier; circumstances made him a statesman, and he was one of the greatest statesmen of all time. Under the most trying conditions he pursued his end until

he gained it, ever remaining steadfast, earnest, standing above his contemporaries like the embodiment of virtue and power that he was. Calm and strong in council, untiring in effort, wise in policy, terrible in battle, magnanimous in peace, incorruptible in virtue, he towers to a height in our history approached by only one other American, Abraham Lincoln.

But it was as a character -- a moral force -- that Washington was greatest. He loved his country more than he loved himself, and to him the welfare of that country was dearer than fame, than power, than wealth, than anything that the world could offer!

Washington and Lincoln! Lincoln and Washington!
Blest indeed is the country to whom they belong! Happy we who have them for our examples and guides!