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ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE TOMB OF GEORGE WASHINGTON ON THE
OCCASION OF THE ANNUAL FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE OF THE GRADUATING
CLASS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ON MONDAY, JUNE 7, 1926.

BY HUSTON THOMPSON

It is a rare privilege to be invited to interpret the spirit of this moment at the tomb of one whose expressed thought was the forerunner of the founding of your alma mater. One hundred and twenty-seven years ago the body of Washington was placed in this tomb and his spirit went forth to brood over our land. With a century and a quarter passed this class assembles here to catch some inspiration that will illuminate the paths of life and this in spite of the iconoclasts of today who have renewed the attacks that were visited upon Washington in his lifetime.

It is not often that one's character is readable in the landscape and yet Mount Vernon reveals the personality of Washington with marvelous accuracy after all these years. He touched Nature with a sympathetic hand and all about him smiled and mirrored his life in a way that time has been unable to dispell. This place tells the story of a love of the out-doors. If we could restore the farms as they were in his time and follow him as his diary reported from day to day we would see a man who found peace in the very growth of things. It was such a growth as Knut Harnpsen describes in his "Growth of The Soil" wherein man, so long as he is attached to Mother Earth, the only source of human happiness, is a real and natural human being. Washington confided to his friends that he got real enjoyment only from plowing and planting and beholding Nature bloom in all its glory.

Mt. Vernon reveals the orderly mind of one so in love with Nature that he bids it beautify itself. Much of its landscape design, box hedges, bushes and trees of today, were put there by its master.

His diaries, as well as his home, bear witness to the thought that Washington was the supreme doer of things. Of Jefferson it may be said that he stated the purpose and place of America in the sun but Washington was the outstanding personality that brought about its fulfillment. Those countless diaries which, from a cursory reading, might leave the impression of a practical unpoetical nature carry beneath their surface a different picture. Apparently devoid of egotism and much unlike many of the diarists of today, there is never any complaining of position nor pleading for preferment nor cajolery for sinister purposes. There is little, if any, philosophizing and no introspection but when one has perused the final page he is left with the lasting impression that doing so occupied his time that he had no moment for self-pity nor self-aggrandizement, nor time to crook the knee.

His diaries are a demonstration that to the doer the doors of opportunity are ceaselessly opening. Was the Governor of Virginia in need of a trusted envoy to cross the mountains and penetrate the wilderness to the Ohio River to inform the French commander that he should not go beyond that line? The task was laid upon Washington who responded, not for the pleasure of it, but because he believed it was for the good of his colony and his country. Did the vicinity of Alexandria need a representative in the House of Burgesses at Williamsburg? A spontaneous demand forced the master of Mount Vernon to accept though each trip took him ten days away from his farms and the many duties about his household. Was the Virginia Colony in need of someone to raise and train its militia? No one else was thought of but Washington. The meeting of the Continental Congress at Philadelphia found him representing his Colony and when the Revolutionary War was about to break forth even New England yielded

to Virginia in the unanimous choice of a Virginia Commander in Chief. When the Constitution was ratified no one dared to seek the presidency, so unanimous was the demand for Washington even though he had retired to his beloved home. How long he might have continued to be president it is impossible to conjecture but it was only his adamant refusal that prevented his countrymen from considering him for a third term. One by one he entered the doors of opportunity that opened and beckoned to him and the doer became the deliverer of his country.

His public acts after he became president were dominated with the single purpose of uniting our people. He has been charged with favoring a centralized government. That was not because he did not believe in a strong local government but because he realized also the necessity for a strong Federal government after seeing the futility of the Colonial Confederacy.

As Washington's spirit winged its way over the Great Divide it left behind 5,000,000 people who had succeeded through his leadership in expelling the enemies from without, particularly the monopolistic merchants of England whom Washington had come to look upon with an anger that was almost uncontrollable. In his later days, however, he found within just as aggravating an enemy. It was the group in the market place or on the way to the markets that controlled and forestalled the business of those days. On one occasion Washington, finding that the middlemen in Alexandria controlled market prices purchased a vessel and shipped his tobacco to Jamaica and other points for sale.

In an outburst of wrath he exclaimed: "It is much to be lamented that each state long ere this has not hunted them down as the pests of society and as the greatest enemies we have to the happiness of America.

I would to God that one of the most atrocious in each state was hung in gibbets upon a gallows five times as high as the one prepared by Haman. No punishment, in my opinion, is too great for the man who can build his greatness upon the country's ruin." The Father of his country was able to defeat the enemy from without. He failed to destroy the enemies within.

In the face of this outburst from the Master of Mount Vernon let us contrast for a moment the conditions then and now. Despite the fortunes that had been built up on grants from the King it is quite probable then that there was not then one individual, the possessor of an estate valued at a million dollars. Even Washington, though wealthy, could hardly be classed as possessing that sum, if we are to believe his diary.

In the intervening 127 years the impossible has happened. We have increased from 5,000,000 to 105,000,000 people. Our estimated national wealth is \$353,000,000,000. One percent of our people own approximately 59% of that staggering sum and 13% own 90%. In other words, the remaining 87% of our people have but 10% of the national wealth distributed among them. Consider the consolidations of our resources. Six companies control about one-third of our developed water power; eight companies about three-fourths of our unmined anthracite coal; thirty companies one-third or more of our immediate resources of bituminous coal; four companies have over one-half of our copper reserves; 2 companies own one-half of our iron ore reserves; and thirty companies about one-eighth of our petroleum reserves.

Obviously monopolistic tendencies have brought about this ominous picture which ^{must} have a tremendous meaning to you who are about to enter

on life's stage. It is not by chance that such concentration in the hands of a few has taken place. To youth of a lesser inheritance lacking your background of freedom I would hesitate at this hour to present this startling situation but with your high hopes and your magnificent inheritance I speak as I believe Washington would do if he were standing here today. If you are like him you will face this future with his courage and confidence and ask yourselves if you will permit the artificial consolidation of economic forces in this country to build up such an artificial civilization and unnatural standards? Will you stand by and see the many competitive corporations consolidated and as they come together hear the door of opportunity closing about you with no other meaning than that you must be satisfied underlings? Or will you demand the right to develop your personalities in a world where opportunity to rise is untrammelled and beckons to the doer as it did to Washington? If you choose the latter course then you must be prepared to make sacrifices as he did for the kind of freedom which he secured and passed on in trust to future generations. If motors and movies and luxuries mean more than your freedom then you will fail but if you will catch the spirit that envelops this resting place you shall recover this heritage of ours no matter what the sacrifice may be and pass it on to a praising posterity.