

THE NORTH-CAROLINA MERCURY AND SALISBURY ADVERTISER.

SALISBURY, PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY FRANCIS COOPER.

Nov. 13.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1800.

Vol. III.

BIOGRAPHY.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

The disorders in America had reached their height, and it became perfectly obvious, that the dispute between the two countries could only be decided by arms, when the representatives of the thirteen provinces assembled at Philadelphia, on the 26th day of October, 1774. Of this famous assembly Mr. Washington was one: no American united in so high a degree as he did military experience, with respectable character and great natural influence. He was therefore appointed to the command of the army which assembled in the New-England Provinces, to hold in check the British army under General Gage, then encamped at Boston. If these circumstances had not called Washington forth, he would have lived happy, and died obscure, as a respectable country gentleman in Virginia: now the scene opened which made his name immortal: so dependent upon accident is human fame, and so great is the power of circumstances in calling forth, and perhaps even in forming, the genius of men.

In the month of July, 1775, General Washington took the command of the continental army before Boston. To detail his conduct in the years which followed, would be to relate the history of the American war: a most memorable and instructive part of British annals which has not yet been treated in a manner suited to its importance and dignity. Within a very short period after the declaration of independence, the affairs of America were in a condition so desperate, that perhaps nothing but the peculiar character of Washington's genius could have retrieved them. Activity was the policy of invaders. In the field of battle the superiority of a disciplined army is displayed. But delay was the wisdom of a country defended by undisciplined soldiers against an enemy who must be more exhausted by time than he could be weakened by defeat. It required the consummate prudence, the calm wisdom, the inflexible firmness, the moderate and well balanced temper of Washington to embrace such a plan of policy, and to persevere in it: to resist the temptations of enterprize; to fix the confidence of his soldiers without the attraction of victory; to support the spirit of the army and the people amidst those slow and cautious plans of defensive warfare which are more dispiriting than defeat itself; to contain his own ambition and the impetuosity of his troops; to endure temporary obscurity for the salvation of his country, and for the attainment of solid and immortal glory; and to suffer even temporary reproach and obloquy, supported by the approbation of his own conscience and the applause of that small number of wise men whose praise is an earnest of the admiration and gratitude of posterity. Victorious generals easily acquire the confidence of their army. Theirs, however, is a confidence in the fortune of their general. That of Washington's army was a confidence in his wisdom. Victory gives spirit to cowards; and even the agitations of defeat sometimes impart a courage of despair. Courage is inspired by success, and it may be stimulated to desperate exertions even by calamity, but it is generally palsied by inactivity—A system of cautious defence is the severest trial of human fortitude.

* On this occasion as well as throughout the whole public life of Washington, he refused any compensation for his services. He never received any salary in any office civil or military.

By this test the firmness of Washington was tried. His intrepidity never could have maintained itself under such circumstances, if it had arisen from ambition or vain glory, from robust nerves or disorderly enthusiasm. It stood the test, because it grew out of the deep root of principle and duty. His mind was so perfectly framed, that he did not need the vulgar incentives of fame and glory to rouse his genius. In him public virtue was a principle of sufficient force to excite the same great exertions to which the rabble of heroes must be stimulated by the love of power or of praise.

It is hardly necessary to say, that the courage which flowed from honesty, was tempered in its exercise by humanity. The character of Washington was not deformed by any of those furious passions which drive men to ferocity. His military life was unstained by military cruelties and if we lamented the severity of some of his acts, we never were at liberty to question their justice. It would be unjust to ascribe the mildness of the American war exclusively to the personal character of Washington.—It must be imputed in a great measure to the sobriety and moderation of the national temper. Never was a civil war so spotless as that which unhappily broke out between the two nations of the English race. Not a single massacre, not a single assassination, no slaughter in cold blood tarnished the glory of conquest or aggravated the shame of defeat. Gallantry and humanity characterized this contest between two nations which amidst all the fierceness of hostility shewed themselves worthy of each other's friendship.

We are well aware that the military critics of Europe, accustomed to the vast and scientific plans, to the complicated yet exact movements, to the daring and splendid exploits of great European generals, may consider the most decisive success in a war like the American as a very inadequate title to the name and glory of an illustrious commander. We feel all the differences which upon every subject is due from the ignorant to the masters of the art. But we doubt the soundness of the judgment of military critics on this subject. To us it seems probable that more genius and judgment are generally exerted by uneducated generals and among irregular armies, than in the contests of those commanders who are more perfectly instructed in military science. It is with the arts of war as with every other art. Wherever any art is most perfected, there is least room for the exertions of individual genius. Where most can be done by rule, least is left for talents. We accordingly find that those surprizes and stratagems which are so brilliant and interesting a part of the history of war in past times, are now infinitely more rare, because vigilance is now more uniform and the means of defence more perfect. It is now much more easy than it was formerly to calculate the event of a campaign from the numbers of the contending armies, the fortresses of which they possess and the nature of the country which they occupy. It is impossible that the art of war should ever be so improved, as to obliterate all differences between the talents of generals: but it is certain that its improvement has a tendency to make the inequality of their talents less felt. It cannot be denied that they who best know the power of the art are the most sober admirers of the talents of generals. But whatever be the justness of these observations it must be universally allowed, that as much judgment and intrepidity may be shewn among irregular and imperfectly disciplined armies as under the most highly im-

proved system of mechanical tactics. This is sufficient for our purpose; for we are now contemplating the character of him whose least praise is that of being a great commander, whose valour was the minister of virtue, and whose military genius is chiefly ennobled by being employed in the defence of justice.

It is extremely remarkable, that though there never was a civil contest disgraced by so few violent or even ambiguous acts as the American war, yet so pure were the moral sentiments of Washington, that he could not look back on the period of hostilities with unmixed pleasure. An Italian nobleman who visited him after the peace, had often attempted, in vain, to turn the conversation to the events of the war. At length he thought he had found a favourable opportunity of effecting his purpose; they were riding together over the scene of an action where Washington's conduct had been the subject of no small animadversion. Count ——— said to him, "Your conduct, Sir, in this action has been criticized." Washington made no answer, but clapped spurs to his horse: after they had passed the field, he turned to the Italian and said, "Count ———, I observe that you wish me to speak of the war. It is a conversation which I always avoid. I rejoice at the establishment of liberties of America. But the time of the struggle was a horrible period, in which the best men were compelled to do many things repugnant to their nature."

So fatal are even the mildest civil commotions to men's morals, and so admirable was the temperament of the man who had too much magnanimity not to take up arms at the call of his country, and yet too delicate a purity to dwell with complacency on the recollection of scenes which, though they were the source of his glory, allowed more scope for the display of his talents than for the exercise of his humanity!

The conclusion of the American war permitted Washington to return to those domestic scenes, from which nothing but a sense of duty seems to have had the power to draw him. But he was not allowed long to enjoy this privacy. The supreme government of the United States, hastily thrown up, in a moment of turbulence and danger, as a temporary fortification against anarchy, proved utterly inadequate to the preservation of general tranquility and permanent security. The confusions of civil war had given a taint to the morality of the people which rendered the restraints of a just and vigorous government more indispensably necessary. Confiscation and paper money, the two greatest schools of rapacity and dishonesty in the world, had widely spread their poison among the Americans. One of their own writers tells us, that the whole system of paper money was a system of public and private frauds. In this state of things, which threatened the dissolution of morality and government, good men saw the necessity of concentrating and insinuating the supreme authority. Under the influence of this conviction, a convention of delegates was assembled at Philadelphia, which strengthened the bands of the Federal Union, and bestowed on Congress those powers which were necessary for the purposes of good government; Washington was the president of this convention, as he, in three years after, was elected president of the United States of America, under what was called "The New Constitution," though it ought to have been called

* See Ramsay's American Revolution, vol. 30.