

WASHINGTON

By Edward O. Sisson, Reed College

IT IS ONE OF our national weaknesses that we abundantly use the names of our great men and at the same time know little about them. Our maps are dotted thickly with Washingtons and Franklins and Lincolns, but the very people living under the names are almost totally uninformed of the lives and services and the elements of greatness in these national heroes. In 1862 President Lincoln in his proclamation concerning Washington's birthday, urged the reading of "that immortal document, Washington's Farewell Address." We must confess with grief and shame, that that great document is not immortal but practically dead. I have tested many hundreds of Americans and find not one in a hundred who can give even the most meager account of its contents: indeed not a few of them can be easily bullied into admitting that there is no such thing!

I can think of few incidents in history more moving than the circumstances of this address: it is unique in history in more ways than one. Behold the modesty and the affection with which the great commander and first president offers his parting counsel to the nation which owed both its existence and its constitution to him more than to any other human agency.

"In offering to you, my countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish; that they will control the usual current of the passions, or prevent our nation from running the course, which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations. But if I may even flatter myself, that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism; this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated."

There are only thirteen pages of ordinary print in the whole address: yet I do not know a single school history that contains so much as one page of it. In the mass of reading that everyone performs

these days,—literally acres of print,—how many of our hundred millions have turned their minds this Washington season to the truly immortal letter which he left to us as a legacy? Are we not in danger of losing the precious wheat of our political literature in the overwhelming mass of chaff? If I were writing an Eddy bill I would leave bookkeeping to take care of itself, and refrain from trying to hogtie the schools of the future, but insist on a small number of infinitely precious documents of true patriotism and humanity: the

Declaration of Independence first and foremost, the Constitution itself, and especially the bill of rights, this great Address of Washington's, parts of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and about four or five of Lincoln's utterances,—his two inaugurals, his Gettysburg Address, and his second annual message, of December, 1862,—and this last I desire to commend to you all, as fraught with the spirit and principles which are needed to preserve the Republic today.

In the Address itself are two points of peculiar moment today. Washington does warn his people against foreign entanglements:

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