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Washington

Auteurs : Guizot, François (1787-1874) ; Reeve, Henry (1813-1895)

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[377. Londres, Samedi 23 mai 1840, François Guizot à Dorothée de Lieven](#) ☐ *relation ce document*

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Présentation

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Notice créée par [Marie Dupond](#) Notice créée le 29/03/2024 Dernière modification le 15/04/2024

WASHINGTON.

BY

MONSIEUR GUIZOT,

(F. D. 2) K

MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE, AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE.

TRANSLATED

BY HENRY REEVE, ESQ.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

MDCCCXL.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE Essay on the Life and Character of Washington, which this volume contains, was prefixed by Monsieur Guizot to the French translation of the collected Writings of Washington, where it stands as the introduction to that work. As it has not been separately published, and as the original cannot be procured except in connection with the voluminous translation of a book, which is more likely to become familiar to the English reader in the lan-

guage of Washington himself than in the French version, it has not been thought a work of superfluous labour to clothe this introductory notice in an English dress.

The less so, indeed, as it may serve to introduce amongst ourselves a more extensive acquaintance with the original collection of Washington's Writings, to which it may be said to belong. That collection, with one illustrious exception, is the most perfect literary record we possess of the thoughts and actions of a man of the highest eminence. Like the Despatches of the Duke of Wellington, it exhibits the life of the writer in

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its actual course; it enshrines the occurrences, purposes, and doubts of the hour, in a monument of imperishable duration; and it sets in the full light of truth one other character, perhaps the only other in modern history, which never sought or needed to cast a shadow of obscurity over any incident of a long and arduous career. In these memorials of Washington, indeed, there is more of the entire man: the confidences of friendship, the melancholy or the pleasantries of private intimacy, the outpourings of a retiring mind, reluctant to be great: in the published papers of the Duke of Wellington, the whole is action. But, although it be as much beside my purpose as it is beyond

my powers to attempt to trace the parallel suggested by these two great publications, yet I cannot wholly pass in silence that quality of English virtue (if virtues be of any race or nation) which in either character shines with such signal splendour: I mean that inflexible sense of duty, that forbearing manliness, that fixed integrity, and that serenity through good and evil times, mixed with the minor qualities of attention to detail, affability, and precision in all things, which go to make up the character of an English gentleman.

Nor can I sufficiently admire the penetration and the taste with which the illustrious author of these pages has traced

and described the character of a life which, as an historian, none is more qualified to judge—as a statesman, none more wont to emulate; for, if I was led but now to call the virtues of Washington English virtues, I would imply by the term no arrogant distinction of qualities peculiar to our country, but whatever has shown itself simplest in manners, strongest in purpose, and most strenuous in integrity amongst public men.

Happy the time we live in, if we can discard the tradition of former dissensions, in spite of actual differences of opinion, and record the past disputes of England and her colonies—of England and her

ancient rival,—not in the spirit of perpetuated discord, but in that of united admiration for the high minds and honest actions which have made even such dissensions glorious to human nature, and useful to mankind.

I am but too well aware that the work of translation usually robs a composition of the edge and polish of its style; and I cannot hope to have preserved the original merit of so eloquent and finished a performance: but this copy has had the rare advantage of being retouched by the hand of the author, who has condescended to revise it; and whilst I acknowledge Monsieur Guizot's kindness with becoming

gratitude and deference, I am sure it will give a value to this translation which it could not otherwise have possessed.

I have annexed to the Essay some fragments from the original Washington papers, which had not before been republished in England; and the extracts introduced into the text have been considerably lengthened.

H. R.

RICHMOND,

June 23, 1840.

WASHINGTON.

Two things, alike arduous and great, are a part of the duty, and may constitute the glory, of man—the one, to endure misfortune with the firmness of resignation ; the other, to trust in a good cause with persevering confidence. A sight as fine, and not less edifying than that of a virtuous man struggling with adversity, is that of a virtuous man at the head of a good cause, and ensuring its success.

If ever cause was just or worthy to succeed, it was that of the British Colonies in their insurrection to become the United States of America.

That insurrection was preceded by resistance : that resistance was justified by circumstances and the rights of history—by principles and the rights of reason.

It is the glory of England that she implanted beside the cradle of her colonies, the germ of their freedom. They were almost all, at the time of their foundation, or shortly afterwards, endowed with charters which conferred upon them the liberties of the mother-country : and these charters were no dead letter or empty show, for they established or recognised institutions which were no mean incentives to the defence of public freedom, and to control the supreme power by dividing it—the vote of supplies, the election of the great public councils, trial by jury, and the right of association and debate for the common weal.

Indeed, the history of these colonies is but the practical and laborious development of the spirit

of freedom, under the shadow of tutelary laws and national traditions: it might be taken for the history of England herself. And this analogy is the more signal from the fact, that the American colonies, or at least the greater part and the most considerable amongst them, were founded, or chiefly extended, at the very time when England was preparing for, or already engaged in, those fierce struggles against the assumptions of absolute power, which were by their event to confer on her the honour of giving to the world the first instance of a great people well governed and free.

From 1578 to 1704, under Elizabeth, James I., Charles I., the Long Parliament, Cromwell, Charles II., James II., William III., and Queen Anne, the charters of Virginia, Massachusetts, Maryland, Carolina, and New York, were alternately recognised, contested, curtailed, enlarged, lost, and restored—ever exposed to those struggles and those vicissitudes which are inherent in the con-