

Mount Vernon

The Nation's Shrine

Today I visited Mount Vernon, once the home of George Washington, the “Father of our country.” It filled me with awe to walk upon the site that so distinguished a man had chosen to make his home. If it was possible for him to return, he would find nothing strange or out of place about his old abode. The slave quarters, the carriage house, and blacksmith shop are intact, even to the kitchen with its utensils all hanging in their places and the clock sitting on the mantle. Then we pass through the dining room to the reception room, there ascending the stair that leads to the second floor. Mrs. Washington’s and Nellie Custis’ rooms are to the east of the hall, while Gen. Washington’s room, the one in which he died, is to the west. I was told that everything was in its place just as he left it nearly two centuries ago; his desk and chair, and his shoes sitting under the side of the bed and the old chest, battered and bruised, that had followed him from battlefield to battlefield, sits at the foot. I stood in this room at the front window and look out upon the Potomac and thought and thought.

At the foot of the hill to the west of the house, and by the side of rolling waters of the Potomac, there rests the remains of this remarkable man. (The Soldier, the Patriot, the Statesman.)

“First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

As I stood gazing through the iron gate that enclosed the marble vault, I thought to myself, just 194 years ago today, this man came into the world to take his place in this field of human endeavor with his fellow man. And I pondered in my mind as to the effect that his efforts and influence had achieved upon civilization, and tried to compare him with men of his time as well as the past without discrediting his co-workers. Then, in my imagination, I traced him from the day of his birth to that of death. I could see him as a child playing upon his father’s estate at Westmoreland. I could see him as a young surveyor, surveying the estate of his friend Fairfax. I could feel his heartthrobs as he penned the sad loss in love of his “lowland beauty.” Then I could see him again at the house Carlyle, made Major on Braddock’s staff. Then at Gadby’s Tavern, recruiting his first command. I saw him in the forest covering the retreat of Braddock, fighting the foes

in their own fashion. I saw him as a general in the Royal Army, as he sat in his tent reading Tom Paine's pamphlet, "The Rights of Man," contemplating on casting his lot with Revolutionary forces. I followed him to the Valley Forge, where the gathering shadows of despair threatened to smother the smoldering embers of hope of his starving men. I could see him crossing the Delaware, surprising the enemy. And I could see him as he triumphantly returned to memorable old Gadby Tavern and surrendered his command.

Then I said to myself, suppose this man could return to Earth, and observe the changes that have transpired since his departure. It doubtless would be beyond his wildest imagination. He would see the stagecoach replaced by the electric cars that now run down to his old estate. And the old family carriage replaced by the automobile. He would see the steamboat plowing its way through the waters of the Potomac and airplane soaring far above the pinnacle of his monument.

And suppose we should take him in an automobile and motor him to the White House, where he would sit under an electric chandelier. Then he would pick up the telephone and speak to Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. Next he would hear the sound of human voice conveyed through space more than a thousand miles by means of the radio, announcing a lecture on Washington's birthday at the Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

What would be his surprise? If he could retain his equilibrium, he doubtless would say that the world had advanced beyond the imagination of the most fantastic mind.

Washington, D. C.

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A. B.