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WHAT WASHINGTON THOUGHT
OF A THIRD TERM.

BY ROBT. S. RANTOUL.

[FROM THE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE ESSEX INSTITUTE,
VOLUME XXXVII.]

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THE MCINTIRE WASHINGTON.

From a medallion, the property of the City of Salem, cut in wood by Samuel McIntire, the well-known architect and carver, and executed after drawings from the life, made by him during Washington's visit to Salem in 1789. It is 38x56 inches in size, and decorated the western gate of Washington Square (The Common) removed in 1850.

WHAT WASHINGTON THOUGHT

OF A

THIRD TERM.

BY ROBERT S. RANTOUL.

A paper read before the Essex Institute at Academy Hall, Salem, April 24, 1899, and before the Massachusetts Society of Sons of the Revolution, at Boston, November 27, 1900.

WHAT Washington thought of a third consecutive term in the Presidency has little interest just now, save as a receding if not already remote historical problem. Washington has been dead a hundred years. The political status changes. There are, as the century closes, but two men who have been twice elected to the Presidency and one of them was not elected to successive terms. But there have been times during the century when it was far from being a mere moot question ; when it figured as an active factor in the making up of public opinion. Such times may come again. At these times it has been uniformly assumed, without much examination, by the political press of the country, and by partisans anxious to defeat some third-term aspirant, that the judgment of Washington was made up on principle against a third term. Nothing could be more groundless than such an assumption. The arguments

against a third consecutive term in the Presidency will be found to apply as well but, of course, with proportionably less force to a second consecutive term. They proceed upon the postulate that, if a plurality of terms is possible, the executive in power will shape its course and use its patronage, more or less, with a view to retain power, whereas, could a President by no possibility remain in office for more than a single term, he would have less to divert him from making the public good his single aim. These arguments grow very largely out of the possible corrupt use of public patronage. They would very largely disappear could the ingenuity of the country invent some method, untainted with nepotism and favoritism, of distributing public employment. The arguments against a third consecutive term are the very arguments which were urged, without success, against a second consecutive term, in the Convention presided over by Washington, which framed the Constitution. Moreover it is to be borne in mind that Washington is the statuesque embodiment of the Federalist idea. Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, all of them professing a different school of political ethics, and all of them accepting a second term, might very consistently have objected to a plurality of terms, — to the proposal to prolong the tenure of this high office beyond the four years' limit fixed by the Constitution. They were all advocates of a frequent return of the powers conferred by the Constitution on official personages to the constituent body which conferred them. But rotation in office was no part of the philosophy of the Federalists. Permanency — undisturbed continuance in office — these were, with them, among the most important objects to be secured, in the administration of government. Experience in office was, with that party, almost the highest qualification for office. For them, the assumption of such powers as seemed to them necessary for administering the new government had no terrors. The State of Virginia, and large numbers of leading men in other parts of the country, had been induced to accept the Federal Constitution, though not wholly satisfactory to them, in the hope of having Washington, with his well-known broad views of personal authority, for the first executive. And

the proposal to construe narrowly the grants of power, made to the Federal Government in the Constitution, seemed to them to be a niggardly withholding of confidence, tending to belittle and degrade the noble structure they had just erected at such cost. In the absence of proofs, Washington is not to be presumed to have objected on principle to a third term, any more than to a second term. He would naturally favor both. The dogmas of strict construction of the Federal Constitution, and of the reserved rights of States, which took so strong a hold upon public opinion a few years later, were no part of his philosophy. Fortunately proofs are not lacking to show just how he felt about the matter.

From 1832 to 1864, — from Jackson to Lincoln, — no President had been elected to fill a second term, and VanBuren's was the only instance among the one-term Presidents where the candidacy for a second term had been accepted. What happened at the end of Lincoln's first term is familiar history. Had he survived his second term, and had the reconstruction problem been better handled, as it certainly would, had he survived, have been differently handled, it is highly probable that Lincoln would have been before the country as a third-term candidate in 1868, and if chosen he would have entered on a third consecutive term.

The third-term question took a practical form, but a new one, a few years later. In 1880, Grant had been twice President, but for four years succeeding his two consecutive terms he had been out of office. He desired another term. Had he obtained it, that would not have been a third consecutive term, as in Washington's case or in Lincoln's case. He did not obtain it. And an element was injected into the discussion of his wish for another term which, but for the existence of other grounds making it unadvisable to renominate him, would not have been suffered to pass unchallenged as it did. It was generally assumed in that campaign that Washington objected as a matter of principle to a third term in the Presidency. It is the object of this paper to show, from Washington's recorded words, — from his no less significant silence, — and from other accepted facts, that he entertained no such feeling.

I must be allowed a prefatory word. Washington could not be assumed, even in the absence of positive evidence, to have been unfamiliar with or indifferent to the *pro* and *contra* of this discussion. He presided in the Convention of 1787 while the Constitution was being wrought out, and he was a constant and attentive listener, as we gather from his diary and from what he said on attesting the record of its doings. Curtis (History of the Constitution, vol. II, p. 476) goes so far as to place him at the head of the whole movement. "Of these men" [the framers of the Constitution] "Washington was the head; and no second Washington could be looked for." And again (p. 391): "intimations began to appear in the public prints, as soon as the Constitution was published, that Washington would be the first President of the United States, — an expectation that must, therefore, have been entertained by the members of the Convention before they had finished their labors."

Chapter XIII of the work cited details the extended debates on length of tenure, mode of choice, re-eligibility on leaving office or after an interval of years, and other incidents of the presidential function, which began June first, 1787, and continued through July and August, and only closed with the last days of the Convention. The propositions brought forward, challenging study by their great variety, are familiar also to readers of the Madison papers. Bancroft's History of the Constitution (vol. II, chapter ix) gives a succinct account of them. (See also, Secret Proceedings and Debates of the Convention, 1821, pp. 71-2.) A single executive head with large powers was a novel feature in a scheme of government like this. Switzerland, the only established Republic, had nothing like it. It was as dangerous a feature, to some men's thinking, as was that proposed political Cerberus, a three-headed executive, which had been under serious discussion. How should a safe single incumbent of such a magistracy be elected? "By the legislature," said one, — "by direct vote of the people," said another, — "clip the monster's claws by a short term," was again proposed, — "trust him for life — stability is safety" — others argued. A seven-years' term, with re-election prohibited, was the first scheme definitely formulated. The clause

prohibiting re-election was at that time promptly and emphatically voted down, to come up for debate again later. There appeared, says Curtis, a "solicitude to provide for a re-election of the incumbent." A proposal to reduce the seven-years' term to four years and to leave the incumbent subject to re-election "met the approbation of a large majority of the States." (Curtis, vol. II, p. 391-2, p. 235-6. Bancroft, vol. II, p. 22, p. 170, p. 179.)

Re-eligibility once thus conceded, a term shorter than seven years was insisted on. The party favoring an indefinite tenure "during good behavior" was now appeased, because re-election would be the natural result of good behavior, as is the case in banking and commercial concerns, where permanency and stability are of the highest possible moment, and where short official terms result in long tenure through the repeated re-election of the incumbent. The proposed term was reduced first from seven to six years, re-eligibility, which would have extended the incumbency to twelve, eighteen or more years, and our present system of choice by electors being incorporated. Only at the close of the Convention was the term once more reduced, this time to four years, with no restraint imposed on re-election. Every conceivable phase of this question had been successively presented, from a one-term limit to a life-tenure, — from a term of two years at the least to a twenty years' term at the longest, — all had been presented and rehearsed in the interested hearing of Washington, by the strong body of men who presently thereafter produced the "Federalist" and, against odds, secured the acceptance of the Constitution by the country, and succeeded in establishing the present form of government. The artificers of this wonderful mechanism dined together formally upon the completion of their labors, and Washington retired from the table early, as his diary records, "to meditate on the momentous work which had been executed."

One more prefatory word. If we were to suppose, in the absence of evidence, that Washington as a matter of principle objected to re-election for himself or any other incumbent of the Presidency, and favored rotation in the Presidential office as a matter of principle, — and it is not

easy to see why the reasoning in favor of rotation does not apply to a second term as well as to succeeding terms,—then we must be prepared to find him abandoning in this one instance not only the uniform traditions of his party, but also the record he had himself made in the Convention over which he presided. On the twenty-sixth of July, 1787, he had recorded his vote, the Convention being in committee of the whole, against a seven years' term with a one-term limit, when that proposition was favored by the majority, and he was voted down. On the twenty-eighth of April, 1788, when the matter was still fresh in his mind and the Constitution was not yet accepted by the people, he had written to his close friend Lafayette these significant words (Sparks, vol. ix, p. 358): "There are other points in which opinions would be more likely to vary. As, for instance, on the ineligibility of the same person for president, after he should have served a certain course of years. Guarded so effectually as the proposed Constitution is, in respect to the prevention of bribery and undue influence in the choice of president, I confess I differ widely myself from Mr. Jefferson and you, as to the expediency or necessity of rotation in that appointment. The matter was fairly discussed in the Convention, and to my full conviction. . . . Under an extended view of this part of the subject, I can see no propriety in precluding ourselves from the services of any man, who, on some great emergency, shall be deemed universally most capable of serving the public."

The view that official employment is to be regarded primarily as a means of livelihood,—as an industrial career, to be thrown open without preference and with equal facilities to all, and that a fair distribution of its profits is the first consideration, is a modern one. It is the growth of new conditions and necessities unlooked for in Washington's time, and is not even now applied to the higher offices of government. No administration can discharge its highest functions which yields much deference to it. How far Washington was able, in his day of small things, to look upon the personnel of his administration from the standpoint of the soldier surrounded

with his military family, or of the ruler in the midst of his official household, is well shown in a letter to Timothy Pickering, his trusted Secretary of War, dated September twenty-seventh, 1795, wherein he says: "I shall not, whilst I have the honor to administer the government, bring a man into any office of consequence, knowingly, whose political tenets are adverse to the measures which the general government are pursuing." (Sparks, vol. XI, p. 74.)

This, it will be observed, is just what the merchant does, in equipping his counting-room. The danger growing out of the abuse of patronage for personal and party advantage is a new peril, apparently not contemplated by the framers of the Constitution. The machine-methods resorted to of late to relieve the appointing power of the burden of personal selection, thoroughly well meant as they have been, are proving themselves, as was to be expected, crude and hopelessly inadequate. No business man would allow his subordinates to be imposed upon him by an examining board. His shrewdness in selecting them is one element of his success. His power of retaining or dismissing them is a factor in his control. Just so far as the governmental machine does the work, just so far will the appointing power escape responsibility. We may shift the load from one shoulder to the other, but we get rid, in so doing, of no part of the weight of it. British experience in the government of India might have taught us this. German bureaucracy is ever holding up its warning finger. We may elect postmasters by local, popular suffrage, provided we retain a veto power in the post-office department. We may discover a certain required minimum of intelligence and book-learning, through competitive, civil service examinations. But these are powerless as a further test of fitness. Any high-school girl can pass a better examination than the best patrolman in your district. We are expecting too much of the system. We are over-taxing the machine. We may determine by written tests which candidate out of many knows best how to punctuate a sentence or do a sum or draw a map of Turkey. But is that candidate the most promising for promotion? No

set of questions has ever been invented which will show whether he has or has not habits of punctuality, for instance, of prompt decision, of loyalty to an employer, of respect for authority, of firmness and tenacity of purpose, to say nothing of those higher qualities which make up the value of an executive subordinate. Experience in office alone can demonstrate the presence of these qualities. Every administration is entitled to the enthusiastic and loyal support of a considerable fraction of its subordinate force, and is directly dependent for success upon it. The civil service will never come right until we are able to select appointing officers whom we are willing to trust and then to trust them. All else is but another chapter in the Gospel of Distrust.

We know then, from his words to Lafayette, what was Washington's personal view of rotation in this particular office before he had filled it, at the time the Constitution was being scrutinized by the people and adopted. Did he ever modify this view?

We are not without the testimony of the most competent witness in this matter. We may safely credit Washington with a knowledge of his own motives. He certainly was under no obligation to disclose them on all occasions to the public. But he was bound in common honesty not to belie them — not to assign one motive for an act which was prompted by another. Washington accepted a second term and declined a third term. He assigned such reasons for his action as he thought proper, and they seem to be sufficient reasons.

Washington had taken leave of public life with a good deal of formality and, as he thought, forever, on retiring from the army at the close of the war. Later, he had yielded to importunities in coming before the country again to preside in the Convention of 1787. When the Chief Magistracy was urged upon him in 1788 he relucted greatly, and only waived his wish for retirement at his farm, and his doubts of his special fitness, upon the representation that a year or two in office would suffice, and that all that was expected of him was to unite the country and to set the wheels of government in motion. The student, who wishes to acquaint himself with the frame

of mind in which Washington approached the assumption of the great office in the first instance, in 1789, will have no trouble in doing so. Ford, volume XII, pp. 124-131, with the notes affixed, makes it plain that he intended to remain in the office two years at the furthest, when he went to New York and took the oath. He seized upon the earliest opportunity for his Eastern tour in October of that year, and made another through the Southern States in the following March; then, having been beguiled into continuing in the Chief Magistracy by exigent affairs somewhat beyond his self-imposed limit of two years, he with characteristic public spirit decided to say no more about his cherished wish to retire, until the normal constitutional period should afford him a final discharge. This course would have brought the coveted release early in 1793. His age would have been sixty-one. Accordingly, as early as February, 1792, he began revolving in his mind the best time and the best means for announcing his fixed determination to retire. He talked with Jefferson, his Secretary of State. He wrote to Madison, his coadjutor in the Convention and his confidential adviser. With Hamilton and with Knox, his financial and his war ministers, he was no less open. Before May fifth, 1792, he had unbosomed himself to no others, unless it were to Randolph. They, with one voice and with much vehemence, begged him to forego his purpose. The views they urged upon him will readily be conceived and so will the earnest tone of their remonstrance. They wrote him long and friendly letters, — Jefferson, May 23, 1792, Hamilton, July 30th, Randolph, August 5th,—to which he replied at length, as appears from Sparks, volume x, pp. 254, 258, 286, 504-515. Washington found himself therefore in a position of friendly antagonism with his chosen advisers, which challenged him to marshal the best reasons he could muster for his proposed retirement. He was addressing public men attached to his political fortunes and, as he at that time supposed, to his person as well, and jealously anxious for his prestige and fame. He must either give way to their importunities or assign strong and sufficient reasons for not doing so. Had the principle of rotation

in the Presidential office possessed any hold on his convictions at this time, it was the first of reasons which would have been brought forward now, because it was in its nature final. With a point of political honor in his mind which, if soundly conceived, was conclusive, Washington would not have been casting about amongst grounds of personal inclination and of domestic convenience to justify a step he felt to be of international and historic import. Jefferson reports that his "disinclination to a second term was becoming more and more fixed." To Madison he pleads age, failing powers, want of aptitude for legal and constitutional questions, fatigues and discomforts, making the situation at times scarcely bearable. He found himself "unable to dispose his mind to a continuance," so much so that his inclination prompted him, he said, to go home to his farm, take his spade in hand and work for his bread, rather than remain in office. In one instance, so great was his irritation, he allowed himself to write that, while he was willing to be the servant of the public, he was not willing to be its slave. To Edmund Randolph and Henry Lee and David Humphries there are letters to the same effect a little later, but nowhere is there a hint that an objection could be urged on principle to a plurality of terms. And we may well remember here that Jefferson and Madison were both disciples of a political creed which might well have prompted them to conceive and urge upon him such an objection. If we suppose them, or either of them, to have been jealous at heart of the peerless supremacy attained by Washington, and impatient for his sun to set, the slightest intimation from the President of a doubt in his own mind as to the propriety of a second term would certainly have been eagerly taken up by them and made the most of.

I must assume that Washington, at the close of his first term, was thoroughly weary of office, finding the business of it irksome, the personal disparagement incident to it most offensive,—“tranquillity and retirement an irresistible passion.” With the sensitiveness of a soldier, he felt stung by unjust criticisms to which the dignity of his position forbade him to reply. Only the

limits of this paper restrain me from quoting largely from his letters and expressions to this effect. But it seems that he had, as early as this date, put in writing the very grounds upon which, in a farewell address taking final leave of public life, he proposed to rest his retirement, and these he had submitted to Madison with a request that they be put in better form, and he had received them back again from Madison's hands. When, after being induced against his inclination to accept a second term,—after his serious attack of illness,—[in the first months of his administration he had been attacked with a dangerous malady which prostrated him for twelve weeks and from which he never fully recovered]—after the death in February, 1793, of George Augustine Washington, the nephew to whom he had confided the charge of his estates,—and after four more years of the tedious routine which had no further charms or honors in store for him, and for which he felt sure there were other and younger men as well fitted as himself,—when, after all these experiences, he had once more resolved upon retirement at the close of a second term, in 1797, and had begun the preparation of the address which was to declare his unalterable purpose, he naturally looked up, on his files, the original paper submitted to Madison in 1792, and as naturally sent it for rehabilitation to Col. Hamilton, May 15, 1796.

From this original draft of 1792 it appears that, either prompted by Madison who favored rotation on principle, or on his own motion, Washington had inserted a clause which seems to show that he supposed the popular feeling at that time to be against a plurality of terms. This is the only allusion I find in Washington's words, at any period of his life, upon which a claim of hostility on his part to repeated re-election could possibly be made to rest. It is in plain words, and falls far short of indicating an objection on principle to a second term. It is a statement not of a view of his own, but of one he supposed to be held by the people. On the twentieth of May, 1792, (Hamilton's *History of the United States Republic*, vol. vi, chap. cxxxi, pp. 493-5) Washington gave to Madison suggestions for an address and these were returned, cast in a tentative form, one month later. After enumerating

grounds upon which Washington feels at liberty to excuse himself from further service, the words alluding to rotation are these, and that they are inserted, whether by Madison or by Washington, in a doubtful mood, is indicated by parenthesis—"and as the spirit of the government may render a rotation in the elective officers of it more congenial with the ideas the people have of liberty and safety I take my leave of them as a public man." (Sparks, vol. XII, p. 383.) When this modest suggestion of deference to the supposed inclinations of the people came back from the hand of Madison in a new draft it was somewhat amplified and developed. But as we are not concerned with Madison's views of rotation but only with Washington's, and as the suggestion was destined never in any form to see the light again with Washington's sanction, it is only necessary to show the disfavor into which it fell. Hamilton's History (vol. VI, pp. 494 and 510) explains how, through the agency of Madison, it got into the rough draft, and how it got no further, no hint of it being found in the address as finally signed and issued by Washington in September, 1796. And Binney tells us (*Inquiry into the Formation of the Address*, pp. 98-100) how it got out of the draft, "Hamilton thinking, no doubt, that mere rotation without regard to circumstances was unreasonable and restrictive of the Constitution." No farewell address had been issued during Washington's first term. He accepted, "much against his inclination," a second term and, towards the close of it, on a visit of Hamilton to Philadelphia in May, 1796, the President, having set his face firmly against a further continuance in office, and having had differences with Madison, asked Hamilton's aid in reducing the rough draft to a presentable form, giving him, as he had given Madison before, the broadest license.

Rotation in office was never heard of again in connection with Washington's retirement. So far from indicating a doubt about the propriety of accepting a third term, the Farewell Address is largely made up of considerations tending to vindicate him from a possible charge of lack of patriotism and public spirit in declining a third term. So far from indicating a conviction of the necessity for rotation,

a conviction which would have closed all debate on the subject, the issuing of the address was purposely delayed until the latest possible moment, because current events might assume such a phase as to demand his re-election to a third term. So far from a question of the propriety of a third term being entertained by his admirers, they had not a doubt that the people of the country were eager to re-elect him at the end of his second term, and they thought them as eager to elect him again at the end of the four years' term of John Adams who succeeded him. February 26, 1796, at the close of his second term, Madison wrote to Monroe "It is now pretty certain that the President will not serve beyond his present term." His biographer, Chief Justice Marshall, expresses the conviction that he would have been unanimously re-elected at the end of his second term. These are Marshall's words: "The men who appeared to control public opinion on every subject, found themselves unable to move it on this. Even the most popular among the leaders of the opposition were reduced to the necessity of surrendering their pretensions to a place in the electoral body, or of pledging themselves to bestow their suffrage on the actual president. The determination of his fellow-citizens had been unequivocally manifested, and it was believed to be apparent that the election would again be unanimous, when he announced his resolution to withdraw from the honors and the toils of office." Hamilton expressed the same assurance, July 5, 1796, in a letter to Washington urging all possible delay in issuing the farewell address and adding, "a serious opposition to you will, I think, hardly be risked." And at the end of the term of John Adams, just before Washington's death, Hamilton's friends, through Gouverneur Morris, their last letter on the subject being dated December 9, 1799, were begging him to consent to another candidacy in 1800, as the only hope for the country, the Federalists being then divided, the Jeffersonians gaining ground and Mr. Adams being an accepted and recognized Federalist candidate for a second term.

Washington began to consider the issuing of the farewell address which finally appeared, immediately upon the receipt of a letter from Jay, dated New York, April 18,

1796, in which Jay urged continuance in office and said, "remain with us at least while the storm lasts, and until you can retire like the sun in a calm, unclouded evening." Washington answered him, May 8, "Indeed, the trouble and perplexities which they [the current misrepresentations] occasion, added to the weight of years which have passed over me, have worn away my mind more than my body, and render ease and retirement indispensably necessary to both, during the short time I have to stay here. It would be uncandid therefore, and would discover a want of friendship and confidence (as you have expressed a solicitude for my at least riding out the storm), not to add that nothing short of events, or such imperious circumstances as I hope and trust will not happen, and might render a retreat dishonorable, will prevent the public announcement of it in time to obviate a misapplication of votes at the election in December next upon myself." (Ford's Writings of Washington, vol. XIII, p. 189.) Two days after this, Washington writes to Hamilton to enlist him in the preparation of the farewell address which finally appeared. And, June 26, he writes to Hamilton again, enumerating imperative reasons, which have no relish of rotation in them, but which, he says, oblige him to retire. "Having from a variety of reasons (among them, a disinclination to be longer buffeted in the public prints by a set of infamous scribblers) taken my ultimate determination to seek the post of honor in a private station, I regret exceedingly that I did not publish my valedictory address the day after the adjournment of Congress. This would have preceded the canvassing for electors which is commencing with warmth in this state. * * * It would have removed doubts from the minds of all, and left the field clear to all. It would, by having preceded any unfavorable change in our foreign relations, if any should happen, render my retreat less difficult and embarrassing. And it might have prevented the remark which, more than probable, will follow a late enunciation—namely, that I delayed it long enough to see that the current was turned against me, before I declared my intention to decline." (Hamilton, vol. VI, p. 522.)

Washington's trouble with Randolph and the contest

over the Jay treaty occurred in the summer of 1795. July 27, 1795, Washington wrote to Timothy Pickering, with reference to the Boston Resolves and other matters (Sparks, vol. xi, p. 40, and *Life of Pickering*, iii, p. 177), "when victory more than truth is the palm contended for, the post of honor is a private station." December 22, he wrote to Gouverneur Morris of the "torrent of abuse" brought upon himself by the Jay treaty just concluded. And on October 10, 1795, Pinckney, his Minister to Spain, had written him from Madrid: "I have sincerely felt for the unpleasantly delicate situation in which late events have placed you as our chief magistrate."

At last, in September, 1796, the farewell address appears,—a paper of unique and most impressive significance, whose every word has been cherished as a precious heritage. Had it contained a word of caution, however qualified and guarded, against a danger growing out of re-elections to the Presidential office, that word would have been accepted by a considerable fraction of the American people as final. It enumerates reasons for its promulgation and they are these: "The period for a new election of a citizen, to administer the executive government of the United States, being not far distant, and the time actually arrived, when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust, it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those, out of whom a choice is to be made.

"I beg you, at the same time, to do me the justice to be assured that this resolution has not been taken without a strict regard to all the considerations appertaining to the relation which binds a dutiful citizen to his country; and that in withdrawing the tender of service, which silence in my situation might imply, I am influenced by no diminution of zeal for your future interest; no deficiency of grateful respect for your past kindness; but am supported by a full conviction that the step is compatible with both.

"The acceptance of, and continuance hitherto in, the office to which your suffrages have twice called me, have been a uniform sacrifice of inclination to the opinion of duty, and to a deference for what appeared to be your desire. I constantly hoped that it would have been much earlier in my power, consistently with motives which I am not at liberty to disregard, to return to that retirement from which I had been reluctantly drawn. The strength of my inclination to do this, previous to the last election, had even led to the preparation of an address to declare it to you; but mature reflection on the then perplexed and critical posture of our affairs with foreign nations, and the unanimous advice of persons entitled to my confidence, impelled me to abandon the idea.

"I rejoice that the state of your concerns, external as well as internal, no longer renders the pursuit of inclination incompatible with the sentiment of duty or propriety; and am persuaded, whatever partiality may be retained for my services, that in the present circumstances of our country you will not disapprove my determination to retire.

"The impressions with which I first undertook the arduous trust were explained on the proper occasion.
* * * Not unconscious in the outset of the inferiority of my qualifications, experience in my own eyes, perhaps still more in the eyes of others, has strengthened the motives to diffidence of myself; and every day the increasing weight of years admonishes me more and more that the shade of retirement is as necessary to me as it will be welcome. Satisfied that, if any circumstances have given peculiar value to my services, they were temporary, I have the consolation to believe that, while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriotism does not forbid it."

This statement, fairly weighed, excludes the idea that objection to a third term, *per se*, had the remotest part in Washington's decision.

Have these facts no practical lesson for us? If I am right in assuming that the founders of the government held experience in office to be one of the distinguished qualifications for the chief magistracy, and the safest test

of fitness, at once calling into play the qualities required, and at the same time demonstrating to the people the presence of them where they exist,—and if it be true that the demand for rotation in that office has been not only coincident in time with the modern system of dispensing patronage, but is a consequence of that system which makes a fair distribution of the minor offices contingent on a frequent change in the chief magistracy,—then it would seem to follow that, if we are ever to succeed in divorcing the function of dispensing patronage from the other functions of the Presidency, we may in time get back to the pristine purity of our golden prime. Presidents may then be able to give over the study of petty politics, and devote themselves to those larger considerations incident to the office. It would be a step towards bringing the office up to the dignified level of the grand strategy of the world's diplomacy and statecraft, should Presidents ever be able to ignore the claims of letter-carriers and tide-waiters and Indian contracts and light-houses and mail routes, and to give their minds unvexed to continental thinking. When, if ever, that halcyon day shall come, the people may recover a lost liberty of which they have been barred by tradition if not by reason,—the liberty of choosing for President their foremost citizen, be he the incumbent or some other. "I can see no propriety," wrote Washington to Lafayette, "in precluding ourselves from the services of any man, who, on some great emergency, shall be deemed universally most capable of serving the public." It is patronage,—it is the possible corrupt use of patronage by the incumbent from anxiety to secure his re-election, that has made three successive terms more dangerous than two, and two more dangerous than one. For Washington and his coëvals, neither three terms nor two had any terrors. It is patronage, it is the distribution of that official employment which is below the grade of the offices Washington told Pickering he should keep, and which every President will be forever bound to keep, filled with persons in active sympathy with himself,—it is this function of distributing patronage, this office-peddling element, which has belittled our Chief Magistracy, and, by limiting their choice, has

abridged the supremacy of the people. If this patronage, now grown so great as to be beyond the capacity of a single head, is ever eliminated completely from amongst the Presidential functions, a plurality of terms in the Presidency will cease to be a menace to the country. We shall resume the right, now abrogated for many years, of choosing our highest officer freely from the whole people, without black-balling any man because he has once had the opportunity to demonstrate his fitness. It is a glaring solecism in our system, to maintain a moment longer than the public safety may seem to require it, a restriction on the choice of President which wise heads in the Convention, like Sherman of Connecticut and the shrewd Pennsylvania Scotchman, Wilson, and even the great Washington himself denounced, then and always, because it must debar, once and again, the fittest citizen of the country from filling its greatest office.



