

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

A Trip to Mount Vernon from *Democracy: An American Novel*

HENRY BROOKS ADAMS

Page | 1

*Not everyone in the American past has stood in awe of George Washington. As the country prospered and as manners became more democratic, here and there envy and resentment took aim at his elevated standing. Some prominent people who might have esteemed him begrudged his reputation for moral excellence, inasmuch as it stood as a permanent rebuke to their own moral weakness. The resulting habit of debunking the great man, today a common practice, is already on display in this (fictional) selection from *Democracy: An American Novel* by American journalist and historian Henry Brooks Adams (1838–1918), published anonymously in 1880. Adams, grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of John Adams, is best known for his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, as well as for the salon he and Mrs. Adams hosted in Washington, DC, where the personal and the political mixed at the highest level. In this chapter, a group of the sort that would have gathered at the Adamses take a boat trip down the Potomac to visit Mount Vernon. Though some of the characters in the novel, with their regard for titles, may seem less than democratic, their gossip and their disparagement of Washington and Mount Vernon show both their leveling tendencies and the belief that their life is superior to that of heroes past.*

Do you find yourself sympathetic to any of the characters in Adams' narrative? If so, to whom and why? With which character, if any, do you think the author sympathizes? Do you think that Adams endorses the debunking of Washington, or is he in fact ridiculing it? What do you think of these remarks by Senator Ratcliffe: "Public men cannot be dressing themselves to-day in Washington's old clothes. If Washington were President today, he would have to learn our ways or lose his next election. . . . If virtue won't answer our purpose, we must use vice, or our opponents will put us out of office, and this was as true in Washington's day as it is now, and always will be"? If Ratcliffe is right about American politics, what then would you say about Washington's greatness?

In February the weather became warmer and summer-like. In Virginia there comes often at this season a deceptive gleam of summer, slipping in between heavy storm-clouds of sleet and snow; days and sometimes weeks when the temperature is like June; when the earliest plants begin to show their hardy flowers, and when the bare branches of the forest

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

trees alone protest against the conduct of the seasons. Then men and women are languid; life seems, as in Italy, sensuous and glowing with colour; one is conscious of walking in an atmosphere that is warm, palpable, radiant with possibilities; a delicate haze hangs over Arlington, and softens even the harsh white glare of the Capitol; the struggle of existence seems to abate; Lent throws its calm shadow over society; and youthful diplomatists, unconscious of their danger, are lured into asking foolish girls to marry them; the blood thaws in the heart and flows out into the veins, like the rills of sparkling water that trickle from every lump of ice or snow, as though all the ice and snow on earth, and all the hardness of heart, all the heresy and schism, all the works of the devil, had yielded to the force of love and to the fresh warmth of innocent, lamb-like, confiding virtue. In such a world there should be no guile—but there is a great deal of it notwithstanding. Indeed, at no other season is there so much. This is the moment when the two whited sepulchres at either end of the Avenue reek with the thick atmosphere of bargain and sale. The old is going; the new is coming. Wealth, office, power are at auction. Who bids highest? who hates with most venom? who intrigues with most skill? who has done the dirtiest, the meanest, the darkest, and the most, political work? He shall have his reward.

Page | 2

Senator Ratcliffe was absorbed and ill at ease. A swarm of applicants for office dogged his steps and beleaguered his rooms in quest of his endorsement of their paper characters. The new President was to arrive on Monday. Intrigues and combinations, of which the Senator was the soul, were all alive, awaiting this arrival. Newspaper correspondents pestered him with questions. Brother senators called him to conferences. His mind was pre-occupied with his own interests. One might have supposed that, at this instant, nothing could have drawn him away from the political gaming-table, and yet when Mrs. Lee remarked that she was going to Mount Vernon on Saturday with a little party, including the British Minister and an Irish gentleman staying as a guest at the British Legation, the Senator surprised her by expressing a strong wish to join them. He explained that, as the political lead was no longer in his hands, the chances were nine in ten that if he stirred at all he should make a blunder; that his friends expected him to do something when, in fact, nothing could be done; that every preparation had already been made, and that for him to go on an excursion to Mount Vernon, at this moment, with the British Minister, was, on the whole, about the best use he could make of his time, since it would hide him for one day at least.

Lord Skye had fallen into the habit of consulting Mrs. Lee when his own social resources were low, and it was she who had suggested this party to Mount Vernon, with

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Carrington for a guide and Mr. Gore for variety, to occupy the time of the Irish friend whom Lord Skye was bravely entertaining. This gentleman, who bore the title of Dunbeg, was a dilapidated peer, neither wealthy nor famous. Lord Skye brought him to call on Mrs. Lee, and in some sort put him under her care. He was young, not ill-looking, quite intelligent, rather too fond of facts, and not quick at humour. He was given to smiling in a deprecatory way, and when he talked, he was either absent or excited; he made vague blunders, and then smiled in deprecation of offence, or his words blocked their own path in their rush. Perhaps his manner was a little ridiculous, but he had a good heart, a good head, and a title. He found favour in the eyes of Sybil and Victoria Dare, who declined to admit other women to the party, although they offered no objection to Mr. Ratcliffe's admission. As for Lord Dunbeg, he was an enthusiastic admirer of General Washington, and, as he privately intimated, eager to study phases of American society. He was delighted to go with a small party, and Miss Dare secretly promised herself that she would show him a phase.

Page | 3

The morning was warm, the sky soft, the little steamer lay at the quiet wharf with a few negroes lazily watching her preparations for departure. Carrington, with Mrs. Lee and the young ladies, arrived first, and stood leaning against the rail, waiting the arrival of their companions. Then came Mr. Gore, neatly attired and gloved, with a light spring overcoat; for Mr. Gore was very careful of his personal appearance, and not a little vain of his good looks. Then a pretty woman, with blue eyes and blonde hair, dressed in black, and leading a little girl by the hand, came on board, and Carrington went to shake hands with her. On his return to Mrs. Lee's side, she asked about his new acquaintance, and he replied with a half-laugh, as though he were not proud of her, that she was a client, a pretty widow, well known in Washington. "Any one at the Capitol would tell you all about her. She was the wife of a noted lobbyist, who died about two years ago. Congressmen can refuse nothing to a pretty face, and she was their idea of feminine perfection. Yet she is a silly little woman, too. Her husband died after a very short illness, and, to my great surprise, made me executor under his will. I think he had an idea that he could trust me with his papers, which were important and compromising, for he seems to have had no time to go over them and destroy what were best out of the way. So, you see, I am left with his widow and child to look after. Luckily, they are well provided for."

"Still you have not told me her name."

"Her name is Baker—Mrs. Sam Baker. But they are casting off, and Mr. Ratcliffe will be left behind. I'll ask the captain to wait."

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

About a dozen passengers had arrived, among them the two Earls, with a footman carrying a promising lunch-basket, and the planks were actually hauled in when a carriage dashed up to the wharf, and Mr. Ratcliffe leaped out and hurried on board. "Off with you as quick as you can!" said he to the negro-hands, and in another moment the little steamer had begun her journey, pounding the muddy waters of the Potomac and sending up its small column of smoke as though it were a newly invented incense-burner approaching the temple of the national deity. Ratcliffe explained in great glee how he had barely managed to escape his visitors by telling them that the British Minister was waiting for him, and that he would be back again presently. "If they had known where I was going," said he, "you would have seen the boat swamped with office-seekers. Illinois alone would have brought you to a watery grave." He was in high spirits, bent upon enjoying his holiday, and as they passed the arsenal with its solitary sentry, and the navy-yard, with its one unseaworthy wooden war-steamer, he pointed out these evidences of national grandeur to Lord Skye, threatening, as the last terror of diplomacy, to send him home in an American frigate. They were thus indulging in senatorial humour on one side of the boat, while Sybil and Victoria, with the aid of Mr. Gore and Carrington, were improving Lord Dunbeg's mind on the other.

Page | 4

Miss Dare, finding for herself at last a convenient seat where she could repose and be mistress of the situation, put on a more than usually demure expression and waited with gravity until her noble neighbour should give her an opportunity to show those powers which, as she believed, would supply a phase in his existence. Miss Dare was one of those young persons, sometimes to be found in America, who seem to have no object in life, and while apparently devoted to men, care nothing about them, but find happiness only in violating rules; she made no parade of whatever virtues she had, and her chief pleasure was to make fun of all the world and herself.

"What a noble river!" remarked Lord Dunbeg, as the boat passed out upon the wide stream; "I suppose you often sail on it?"

"I never was here in my life till now," replied the untruthful Miss Dare; "we don't think much of it; it's too small; we're used to so much larger rivers."

"I am afraid you would not like our English rivers then; they are mere brooks compared with this."

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Are they indeed?” said Victoria, with an appearance of vague surprise; “how curious! I don’t think I care to be an Englishwoman then. I could not live without big rivers.”

Lord Dunbeg stared, and hinted that this was almost unreasonable.

Page | 5

“Unless I were a Countess!” continued Victoria, meditatively, looking at Alexandria, and paying no attention to his lordship; “I think I could manage if I were a C-c-countess. It is such a pretty title!”

“Duchess is commonly thought a prettier one,” stammered Dunbeg, much embarrassed. The young man was not used to chaff from women.

“I should be satisfied with Countess. It sounds well. I am surprised that you don’t like it.” Dunbeg looked about him uneasily for some means of escape but he was barred in. “I should think you would feel an awful responsibility in selecting a Countess. How do you do it?”

Lord Dunbeg nervously joined in the general laughter as Sybil ejaculated: “Oh, Victoria!” but Miss Dare continued without a smile or any elevation of her monotonous voice:

“Now, Sybil, don’t interrupt me, please. I am deeply interested in Lord Dunbeg’s conversation. He understands that my interest is purely scientific, but my happiness requires that I should know how Countesses are selected. Lord Dunbeg, how would you recommend a friend to choose a Countess?”

Lord Dunbeg began to be amused by her impudence, and he even tried to lay down for her satisfaction one or two rules for selecting Countesses, but long before he had invented his first rule, Victoria had darted off to a new subject.

“Which would you rather be, Lord Dunbeg? an Earl or George Washington?”

“George Washington, certainly,” was the Earl’s courteous though rather bewildered reply.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Really?” she asked with a languid affectation of surprise; “it is awfully kind of you to say so, but of course you can’t mean it.”

“Indeed I do mean it.”

“Is it possible? I never should have thought it.”

“Why not, Miss Dare?”

“You have not the air of wishing to be George Washington.”

“May I again ask, why not?”

“Certainly. Did you ever see George Washington?”

“Of course not. He died fifty years before I was born.”

“I thought so. You see you don’t know him. Now, will you give us an idea of what you imagine General Washington to have looked like?”

Dunbeg gave accordingly a flattering description of General Washington, compounded of Stuart’s portrait and Greenough’s statue of Olympian Jove with Washington’s features, in the Capitol Square. Miss Dare listened with an expression of superiority not unmingled with patience, and then she enlightened him as follows:

“All you have been saying is perfect stuff—excuse the vulgarity of the expression. When I am a Countess I will correct my language. The truth is that General Washington was a raw-boned country farmer, very hard-featured, very awkward, very illiterate and very dull; very bad tempered, very profane, and generally tipsy after dinner.”

“You shock me, Miss Dare!” exclaimed Dunbeg.

“Oh! I know all about General Washington. My grandfather knew him intimately, and often stayed at Mount Vernon for weeks together. You must not believe what you read, and not a word of what Mr. Carrington will say. “He is a Virginian and will tell you no end of fine stories and not a syllable of truth in one of them. We are all patriotic about Washington and like to hide his faults. If I weren’t quite sure you would never repeat it, I

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

would not tell you this. The truth is that even when George Washington was a small boy, his temper was so violent that no one could do anything with him. He once cut down all his father's fruit-trees in a fit of passion, and then, just because they wanted to flog him, he threatened to brain his father with the hatchet. His aged wife suffered agonies from him. My grandfather often told me how he had seen the General pinch and swear at her till the poor creature left the room in tears; and how once at Mount Vernon he saw Washington, when quite an old man, suddenly rush at an unoffending visitor, and chase him off the place, beating him all the time over the head with a great stick with knots in it, and all just because he heard the poor man stammer; he never could abide s-s-stammering."

Page | 7

Carrington and Gore burst into shouts of laughter over this description of the Father of his country, but Victoria continued in her gentle drawl to enlighten Lord Dunbeg in regard to other subjects with information equally mendacious, until he decided that she was quite the most eccentric person he had ever met. The boat arrived at Mount Vernon while she was still engaged in a description of the society and manners of America, and especially of the rules which made an offer of marriage necessary. According to her, Lord Dunbeg was in imminent peril; gentlemen, and especially foreigners, were expected, in all the States south of the Potomac, to offer themselves to at least one young lady in every city: "and I had only yesterday," said Victoria, "a letter from a lovely girl in North Carolina, a dear friend of mine, who wrote me that she was right put out because her brothers had called on a young English visitor with shot guns, and she was afraid he wouldn't recover, and, after all, she says she should have refused him."

Meanwhile Madeleine, on the other side of the boat, undisturbed by the laughter that surrounded Miss Dare, chatted soberly and seriously with Lord Skye and Senator Ratcliffe. Lord Skye, too, a little intoxicated by the brilliancy of the morning, broke out into admiration of the noble river, and accused Americans of not appreciating the beauties of their own country.

"Your national mind," said he, "has no eyelids. It requires a broad glare and a beaten road. It prefers shadows which you can cut out with a knife. It doesn't know the beauty of this Virginia winter softness."

Mrs. Lee resented the charge. America, she maintained, had not worn her feelings threadbare like Europe. She had still her story to tell; she was waiting for her Burns and Scott, her Wordsworth and Byron, her Hogarth and Turner. "You want peaches in

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

spring,” said she. “Give us our thousand years of summer, and then complain, if you please, that our peach is not as mellow as yours. Even our voices may be soft then,” she added, with a significant look at Lord Skye.

“We are at a disadvantage in arguing with Mrs. Lee,” said he to Ratcliffe; “when she ends as counsel, she begins as witness. The famous Duchess of Devonshire’s lips were not half as convincing as Mrs. Lee’s voice.”

Page | 8

Ratcliffe listened carefully, assenting whenever he saw that Mrs. Lee wished it. He wished he understood precisely what tones and half-tones, colours and harmonies, were.

They arrived and strolled up the sunny path. At the tomb they halted, as all good Americans do, and Mr. Gore, in a tone of subdued sorrow, delivered a short address—

“It might be much worse if they improved it,” he said, surveying its proportions with the æsthetic eye of a cultured Bostonian. “As it stands, this tomb is a simple misfortune which might befall any of us; we should not grieve over it too much. What would our feelings be if a Congressional committee reconstructed it of white marble with Gothic pepper-pots, and gilded it inside on machine-moulded stucco!”

Madeleine, however, insisted that the tomb, as it stood, was the only restless spot about the quiet landscape, and that it contradicted all her ideas about repose in the grave. Ratcliffe wondered what she meant.

They passed on, wandering across the lawn, and through the house. Their eyes, weary of the harsh colours and forms of the city, took pleasure in the worn wainscots and the stained walls. Some of the rooms were still occupied; fires were burning in the wide fireplaces. All were tolerably furnished, and there was no uncomfortable sense of repair or newness. They mounted the stairs, and Mrs. Lee fairly laughed when she was shown the room in which General Washington slept, and where he died.

Carrington smiled too. “Our old Virginia houses were mostly like this,” said he; “suites of great halls below, and these gaunt barracks above. The Virginia house was a sort of hotel. When there was a race or a wedding, or a dance, and the house was full, they thought nothing of packing half a dozen people in one room, and if the room was large, they stretched a sheet across to separate the men from the women. As for toilet,

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

those were not the mornings of cold baths. With our ancestors a little washing went a long way.”

“Do you still live so in Virginia?” asked Madeleine.

“Oh no, it is quite gone. We live now like other country people, and try to pay our debts, which that generation never did. They lived from hand to mouth. They kept a stable-full of horses. The young men were always riding about the country, betting on horse-races, gambling, drinking, fighting, and making love. No one knew exactly what he was worth until the crash came about fifty years ago, and the whole thing ran out.”

“Just what happened in Ireland!” said Lord Dunbeg, much interested and full of his article in the *Quarterly*; “the resemblance is perfect, even down to the houses.”

Mrs. Lee asked Carrington bluntly whether he regretted the destruction of this old social arrangement.

“One can’t help regretting,” said he, “whatever it was that produced George Washington, and a crowd of other men like him. But I think we might produce the men still if we had the same field for them.”

“And would you bring the old society back again if you could?” asked she.

“What for? It could not hold itself up. General Washington himself could not save it. Before he died he had lost his hold on Virginia, and his power was gone.”

The party for a while separated, and Mrs. Lee found herself alone in the great drawing-room. Presently the blonde Mrs. Baker entered, with her child, who ran about making more noise than Mrs. Washington would have permitted. Madeleine, who had the usual feminine love of children, called the girl to her and pointed out the shepherds and shepherdesses carved on the white Italian marble of the fireplace; she invented a little story about them to amuse the child, while the mother stood by and at the end thanked the story-teller with more enthusiasm than seemed called for. Mrs. Lee did not fancy her effusive manner, or her complexion, and was glad when Dunbeg appeared at the doorway.

“How do you like General Washington at home?” asked she.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Really, I assure you I feel quite at home myself,” replied Dunbeg, with a more beaming smile than ever. “I am sure General Washington was an Irishman. I know it from the look of the place. I mean to look it up and write an article about it.”

Page | 10

“Then if you have disposed of him,” said Madeleine, “I think we will have luncheon, and I have taken the liberty to order it to be served outside.”

There a table had been improvised, and Miss Dare was inspecting the lunch, and making comments upon Lord Skye’s cuisine and cellar.

“I hope it is very dry champagne,” said she, “the taste for sweet champagne is quite awfully shocking.”

The young woman knew no more about dry and sweet champagne than of the wine of Ulysses, except that she drank both with equal satisfaction, but she was mimicking a Secretary of the British Legation who had provided her with supper at her last evening party. Lord Skye begged her to try it, which she did, and with great gravity remarked that it was about five per cent, she presumed. This, too, was caught from her Secretary, though she knew no more what it meant than if she had been a parrot.

The luncheon was very lively and very good. When it was over, the gentlemen were allowed to smoke, and conversation fell into a sober strain, which at last threatened to become serious.

“You want half-tons!” said Madeleine to Lord Skye: “are there not half-tons enough to suit you on the walls of this house?”

Lord Skye suggested that this was probably owing to the fact that Washington, belonging, as he did, to the universe, was in his taste an exception to local rules.

“Is not the sense of rest here captivating?” she continued. “Look at that quaint garden, and this ragged lawn, and the great river in front, and the superannuated fort beyond the river! Everything is peaceful, even down to the poor old General’s little bed-room. One would like to lie down in it and sleep a century or two. And yet that dreadful Capitol and its office-seekers are only ten miles off.”

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“No! that is more than I can bear!” broke in Miss Victoria in a stage whisper, “that dreadful Capitol! Why, not one of us would be here without that dreadful Capitol! except, perhaps, myself.”

“You would appear very well as Mrs. Washington, Victoria.”

Page | 11

“Miss Dare has been so very obliging as to give us her views of General Washington’s character this morning,” said Dunbeg, “but I have not yet had time to ask Mr. Carrington for his.”

“Whatever Miss Dare says is valuable,” replied Carrington, “but her strong point is facts.”

“Never flatter! Mr. Carrington,” drawled Miss Dare; “I do not need it, and it does not become your style. Tell me, Lord Dunbeg, is not Mr. Carrington a little your idea of General Washington restored to us in his prime?”

“After your account of General Washington, Miss Dare, how can I agree with you?”

“After all,” said Lord Skye, “I think we must agree that Miss Dare is in the main right about the charms of Mount Vernon. Even Mrs. Lee, on the way up, agreed that the General, who is the only permanent resident here, has the air of being confoundedly bored in his tomb. I don’t myself love your dreadful Capitol yonder, but I prefer it to a bucolic life here. And I account in this way for my want of enthusiasm for your great General. He liked no kind of life but this. He seems to have been greater in the character of a home-sick Virginia planter than as General or President. I forgive him his inordinate dulness, for he was not a diplomatist and it was not his business to lie, but he might once in a way have forgotten Mount Vernon.”

Dunbeg here burst in with an excited protest; all his words seemed to shove each other aside in their haste to escape first. “All our greatest Englishmen have been home-sick country squires. I am a home-sick country squire myself.”

“How interesting!” said Miss Dare under her breath.

Mr. Gore here joined in: “It is all very well for you gentlemen to measure General Washington according to your own private twelve-inch carpenter’s rule. But what will

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

you say to us New Englanders who never were country gentlemen at all, and never had any liking for Virginia? What did Washington ever do for us? He never even pretended to like us. He never was more than barely civil to us. I'm not finding fault with him; everybody knows that he never cared for anything but Mount Vernon. For all that, we idolize him. To us he is Morality, Justice, Duty, Truth; half a dozen Roman gods with capital letters. He is austere, solitary, grand; he ought to be deified. I hardly feel easy, eating, drinking, smoking here on his portico without his permission, taking liberties with his house, criticising his bedrooms in his absence. Suppose I heard his horse now trotting up on the other side, and he suddenly appeared at this door and looked at us. I should abandon you to his indignation. I should run away and hide myself on the steamer. The mere thought unmans me."

Page | 12

Ratcliffe seemed amused at Gore's half-serious notions. "You recall to me," said he, "my own feelings when I was a boy and was made by my father to learn the Farewell Address by heart. In those days General Washington was a sort of American Jehovah. But the West is a poor school for Reverence. Since coming to Congress I have learned more about General Washington, and have been surprised to find what a narrow base his reputation rests on. A fair military officer, who made many blunders, and who never had more men than would make a full army-corps under his command, he got an enormous reputation in Europe because he did not make himself king, as though he ever had a chance of doing it. A respectable, painstaking President, he was treated by the Opposition with an amount of deference that would have made government easy to a baby, but it worried him to death. His official papers are fairly done, and contain good average sense such as a hundred thousand men in the United States would now write. I suspect that half of his attachment to this spot rose from his consciousness of inferior powers and his dread of responsibility. This government can show to-day a dozen men of equal abilities, but we don't deify them. What I most wonder at in him is not his military or political genius at all, for I doubt whether he had much, but a curious Yankee shrewdness in money matters. He thought himself a very rich man, yet he never spent a dollar foolishly. He was almost the only Virginian I ever heard of, in public life, who did not die insolvent."

During this long speech, Carrington glanced across at Madeleine, and caught her eye. Ratcliffe's criticism was not to her taste. Carrington could see that she thought it unworthy of him, and he knew that it would irritate her. "I will lay a little trap for Mr. Ratcliffe," thought he to himself; "we will see whether he gets out of it." So Carrington

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

began, and all listened closely, for, as a Virginian, he was supposed to know much about the subject, and his family had been deep in the confidence of Washington himself.

“The neighbours hereabout had for many years, and may have still, some curious stories about General Washington’s closeness in money matters. They said he never bought anything by weight but he had it weighed over again, nor by tale but he had it counted, and if the weight or number were not exact, he sent it back. Once, during his absence, his steward had a room plastered, and paid the plasterer’s bill. On the General’s return, he measured the room, and found that the plasterer had charged fifteen shillings too much. Meanwhile the man had died, and the General made a claim of fifteen shillings on his estate, which was paid. Again, one of his tenants brought him the rent. The exact change of fourpence was required. The man tendered a dollar, and asked the General to credit him with the balance against the next year’s rent. The General refused and made him ride nine miles to Alexandria and back for the fourpence. On the other hand, he sent to a shoemaker in Alexandria to come and measure him for shoes. The man returned word that he did not go to any one’s house to take measures, and the General mounted his horse and rode the nine miles to him. One of his rules was to pay at taverns the same sum for his servants’ meals as for his own. An inn-keeper brought him a bill of three-and-ninepence for his own breakfast, and three shillings for his servant. He insisted upon adding the extra ninepence, as he did not doubt that the servant had eaten as much as he. What do you say to these anecdotes? Was this meanness or not?”

Page | 13

Ratcliffe was amused. “The stories are new to me,” he said. “It is just as I thought. These are signs of a man who thinks much of trifles; one who fusses over small matters. We don’t do things in that way now that we no longer have to get crops from granite, as they used to do in New Hampshire when I was a boy.”

Carrington replied that it was unlucky for Virginians that they had not done things in that way then: if they had, they would not have gone to the dogs.

Gore shook his head seriously; “Did I not tell you so?” said he. “Was not this man an abstract virtue? I give you my word I stand in awe before him, and I feel ashamed to pry into these details of his life. What is it to us how he thought proper to apply his principles to nightcaps and feather dusters? We are not his body servants, and we care nothing about his infirmities. It is enough for us to know that he carried his rules of virtue down to a pin’s point, and that we ought, one and all, to be on our knees before his tomb.”

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Dunbeg, pondering deeply, at length asked Carrington whether all this did not make rather a clumsy politician of the father of his country.

“Mr. Ratcliffe knows more about politics than I. Ask him,” said Carrington.

Page | 14

“Washington was no politician at all, as we understand the word,” replied Ratcliffe abruptly. “He stood outside of politics. The thing couldn’t be done to-day. The people don’t like that sort of royal airs.”

“I don’t understand!” said Mrs. Lee. “Why could you not do it now?”

“Because I should make a fool of myself,” replied Ratcliffe, pleased to think that Mrs. Lee should put him on a level with Washington. She had only meant to ask why the thing could not be done, and this little touch of Ratcliffe’s vanity was inimitable.

“Mr. Ratcliffe means that Washington was too respectable for our time,” interposed Carrington.

This was deliberately meant to irritate Ratcliffe, and it did so all the more because Mrs. Lee turned to Carrington, and said, with some bitterness: “Was he then the only honest public man we ever had?”

“Oh no!” replied Carrington cheerfully; “there have been one or two others.”

“If the rest of our Presidents had been like him,” said Gore, “we should have had fewer ugly blots on our short history.”

Ratcliffe was exasperated at Carrington’s habit of drawing discussion to this point. He felt the remark as a personal insult, and he knew it to be intended. “Public men,” he broke out, “cannot be dressing themselves to-day in Washington’s old clothes. If Washington were President now, he would have to learn our ways or lose his next election. Only fools and theorists imagine that our society can be handled with gloves or long poles. One must make one’s self a part of it. If virtue won’t answer our purpose, we must use vice, or our opponents will put us out of office, and this was as true in Washington’s day as it is now, and always will be.”

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Come,” said Lord Skye, who was beginning to fear an open quarrel; “the conversation verges on treason, and I am accredited to this government. Why not examine the grounds?”

A kind of natural sympathy led Lord Dunbeg to wander by the side of Miss Dare through the quaint old garden. His mind being much occupied by the effort of stowing away the impressions he had just received, he was more than usually absent in his manner, and this want of attention irritated the young lady. She made some comments on flowers; she invented some new species with startling names; she asked whether these were known in Ireland; but Lord Dunbeg was for the moment so vague in his answers that she saw her case was perilous.

Page | 15

“Here is an old sun-dial. Do you have sun-dials in Ireland, Lord Dunbeg?”

“Yes; oh, certainly! What! sun-dials? Oh, yes! I assure you there are a great many sun-dials in Ireland, Miss Dare.”

“I am so glad. But I suppose they are only for ornament. Here it is just the other way. Look at this one! they all behave like that. The wear and tear of our sun is too much for them; they don’t last. My uncle, who has a place at Long Branch, had five sun-dials in ten years.”

“How very odd! But really now, Miss Dare, I don’t see how a sun-dial could wear out.”

“Don’t you? How strange! Don’t you see, they get soaked with sunshine so that they can’t hold shadow. It’s like me, you know. I have such a good time all the time that I can’t be unhappy. Do you ever read the *Burlington Hawkeye*, Lord Dunbeg?”

“I don’t remember; I think not. Is it an American serial?” gasped Dunbeg, trying hard to keep pace with Miss Dare in her reckless dashes across country.

“No, not serial at all!” replied Virginia; “but I am afraid you would find it very hard reading. I shouldn’t try.”

“Do you read it much, Miss Dare?”

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Oh, always! I am not really as light as I seem. But then I have an advantage over you because I know the language.”

By this time Dunbeg was awake again, and Miss Dare, satisfied with her success, allowed herself to become more reasonable, until a slight shade of sentiment began to flicker about their path.

Page | 16

The scattered party, however, soon had to unite again. The boat rang its bell for return, they filed down the paths and settled themselves in their old places. As they steamed away, Mrs. Lee watched the sunny hill-side and the peaceful house above, until she could see them no more, and the longer she looked, the less she was pleased with herself. Was it true, as Victoria Dare said, that she could not live in so pure an air? Did she really need the denser fumes of the city? Was she, unknown to herself, gradually becoming tainted with the life about her? or was Ratcliffe right in accepting the good and the bad together, and in being of his time since he was in it? Why was it, she said bitterly to herself, that everything Washington touched, he purified, even down to the associations of his house? and why is it that everything we touch seems soiled? Why do I feel unclean when I look at Mount Vernon? In spite of Mr. Ratcliffe, is it not better to be a child and to cry for the moon and stars?

The little Baker girl came up to her where she stood, and began playing with her parasol.

“Who is your little friend?” asked Ratcliffe.

Mrs. Lee rather vaguely replied that she was the daughter of that pretty woman in black; she believed her name was Baker.

“Baker, did you say?” repeated Ratcliffe.

“Baker—Mrs. Sam Baker; at least so Mr. Carrington told me; he said she was a client of his.”

In fact Ratcliffe soon saw Carrington go up to her and remain by her side during the rest of the trip. Ratcliffe watched them sharply and grew more and more absorbed in his own thoughts as the boat drew nearer and nearer the shore.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Carrington was in high spirits. He thought he had played his cards with unusual success. Even Miss Dare deigned to acknowledge his charms that day. She declared herself to be the moral image of Martha Washington, and she started a discussion whether Carrington or Lord Dunbeg would best suit her in the *rôle* of the General.

Page | 17

“Mr. Carrington is exemplary,” she said, “but oh, what joy to be Martha Washington and a Countess too!”