

# **The First President**

by James Baldwin

Washington was now fifty-two years old.

The country was still in an unsettled condition. True, it was free from English control. But there was no strong government to hold the states together.

Each state was a little country of itself, making its own laws, and having its own selfish aims without much regard for its sister states. People did not think of the United States as one great undivided nation.

And so matters were in bad enough shape, and they grew worse and worse as the months went by.

Wise men saw that unless something should be done to bring about a closer union of the states, they would soon be in no better condition than when ruled by the English king.

And so a great convention was held in Philadelphia to determine what could be done to save the country from ruin. George Washington was chosen to preside over this convention; and no man's words had greater weight than his.

He said, "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God."

That convention did a great and wonderful work; for it framed the Constitution by which our country has ever since been governed.

And soon afterwards, in accordance with that Constitution, the people of the country were called upon to elect a President. Who should it be?

Who could it be but Washington?

When the electoral votes were counted, every vote was for George Washington of Virginia.

And so, on the 16th of April, 1789, the great man again bade adieu to Mount Vernon and to private life, and set out for New York. For the city of Washington had not yet been built, and New York was the first capital of our country.

There were no railroads at that time, and so the journey was made in a coach. All along the road the people gathered to see their hero-president and show him their love.

On the 30th of April he was inaugurated at the old Federal Hall in New York.

"Long live George Washington, President of the United States!" shouted the people. Then the cannon roared, the bells rang, and the new government of the United States—the government which we have to-day—began its existence.

Washington was fifty-seven years old at the time of his inauguration.

Perhaps no man was ever called to the doing of more difficult things. The entire government must be built up from the beginning, and all its machinery put into order.

But so well did he meet the expectations of the people, that when his first term was near its close he was again elected President, receiving every electoral vote.

In your histories you will learn of the many difficult tasks which he performed during those years of the nation's infancy. There were new troubles with England, troubles with the Indians, jealousies and disagreements among the lawmakers of the country. But amidst all these trials Washington stood steadfast, wise, cool—conscious that he was right, and strong enough to prevail.

Before the end of his second term, people began to talk about electing him for the third time. They could not think of any other man holding the highest office in the country. They feared that no other man could be safely entrusted with the great responsibilities which he had borne so nobly.

But Washington declared that he would not accept office again. The government was now on a firm footing. There were others who could manage its affairs wisely and well.

And so, in September, 1796, he published his Farewell Address. It was full of wise and wholesome advice.

"Beware of attacks upon the Constitution. Beware of those who think more of their party than of their country. Promote education. Observe justice. Treat with good faith all nations. Adhere to the right. Be united—be united. Love your country." These were some of the things that he said.

John Adams, who had been Vice-President eight years, was chosen to be the new President, and Washington again retired to Mount Vernon.

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