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# THAYER FINDS WASHINGTON GREAT

## Nature Made Washington One of the Lords of Truth

LAST week I considered David Lloyd George and E. P. Hays and their excellent book about him. This week it is opportune to consider George Washington as exhibited in William Roscoe Thayer's excellent book about him, just published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

If one wishes to know how great a man Washington was all that is necessary is to read these two books in succession. Lloyd George and the overwhelming defeat of his party faction last week, was regarded as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, Briton of his generation. His defects were admitted. No one disputed the charge that he had been a demagogue or that he had made many mistakes, but he led his country to victory in a great war. Yet for all that Lloyd George will never occupy the place in history that Washington fills.

No biographer of the fallen Premier would dare challenge the sarcastic comments that would be made if he should put on the title page of his book the lines from John Webster's "The Duchess of Malfi" that Mr. Thayer quotes with the comment that knowledge that their appraisals will be universally recognized: Nature doth nothing so great for great men. As when she's pleased to make them lords of truth.

Washington was a great man when judged by the highest standards; great in his hold on high principles and great in his achievements. Lloyd George's greatness, such as it is, lies in his disregard for principles and in his successful opportunism.

Lloyd George's public utterances will be examined in vain for any exhibition of the moral grandeur that manifested itself in almost everything that Washington said or did.

sent to drive the French away from the junction of the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers. He tells us also that Washington was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses while he was still very young, and that Patrick Henry characterized him as the ablest man in the first Continental Congress. His substantial qualities and his trustworthiness were manifested early and they were early recognized, so that when a general for the armies was needed after the battle of Lexington and Concord he was selected for the post by unanimous vote of Congress. It is worth while reminding ourselves in these days, when men have no hesitation in pushing themselves forward and claiming high distinctions, that Washington, in accepting the command, expressed the fear that his abilities and experience were not equal to the trust. Yet, he said, "I will enter upon the momentous duty and exert every power I possess in the service and for the support of the glorious cause."

He exhibited this modesty and this devotion with logical consistency to the end of his life.

HE HAD no patience with the petty vanities and ambitions of his officers. When one of them was about to retire in pique he wrote in protest, setting forth his own standard of conduct.

In the usual context of empire and ambition, the conscience of a soldier has so little share that he may very properly insist upon his claims of rank, and extend his pretensions even to punctilio; but in such a cause as this, when the object is neither glory nor extent of territory, but a defense of all that is dear and valuable in private and public life, surely every post ought to be deemed honorable in which a man can serve his country.

When the war was ended and he presided over the constitutional convention again set up a high standard and induced his colleagues to accept it. There had been some suggestions that in view of the certain opposition to the Constitution some concessions should be made in order to meet the objections. But the suggestions involved embodying defects which could not be defended. Washington then remarked on the chair: "It is too probable that the plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterward defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the event is in the hand of God."

There we have the whole secret of Washington, the secret which Mr. Thayer has set himself to disclose once more. It is the secret of disclosure he has let Washington exhibit himself by quotations from his letters and speeches. They speak more eloquently than any paraphrase of them, and they go a long way to justify the conclusion that Washington is the greatest man this country has produced, even though the late Franklin K. Lane decided that Lincoln was greater.

Mr. Thayer's book is justified not because he has made any contribution to the knowledge of Washington, but because he has told anew the great story in a manner which will induce the present generation to read it again and baptize itself anew in the regenerating waters of its high example.

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Mr. O'Brien has an easy narrative style that is too well known and appreciated to need mention. He gives a vivid picture of the geography and life of the islands that instructs while it amuses and entertains. Mr. O'Brien loves his South Seas—and they rightly can be called "his"—but before he closes his book he has added to a general desire to get away to his garden spots.

Some of his description takes on the garb of high-class fiction—as when he gives the life stories of some of the harder natives and of adventurous traders or missionaries. And it must be said Mr. O'Brien holds no brief for most of these latter.

That there will be more South Seas books coming from the facile pen of Mr. O'Brien is not certain, therefore "Atolls of the Sun" will be read with all the more avidity, for the loss of anything from him would be a grievous loss indeed.

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