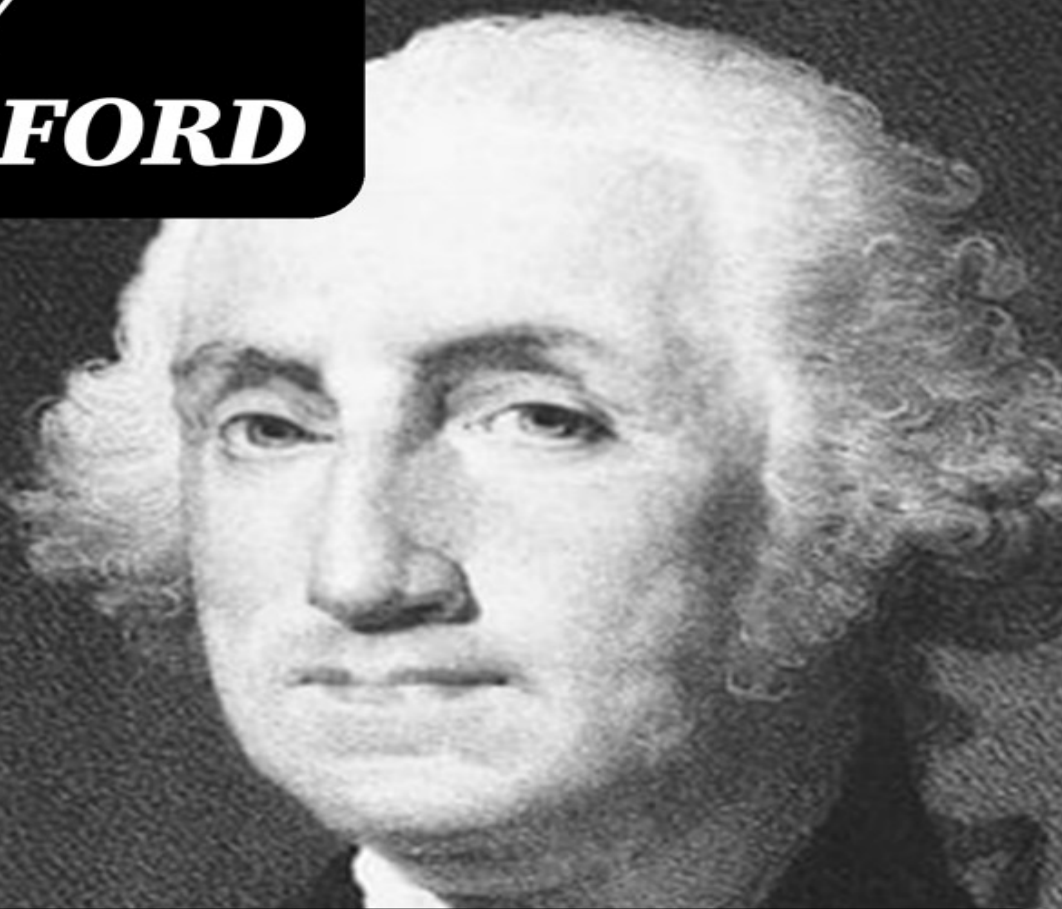


***HENRY
JONES FORD***

A black and white portrait of Henry Jones Ford, an elderly man with thick, curly white hair, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a dark coat over a white cravat.

***WASHINGTON
AND HIS
COLLEAGUES;
A CHRONICLE
OF THE RISE
AND FALL
OF FEDERALISM***

Henry Jones Ford

Washington and his colleagues; a chronicle of the rise and fall of federalism

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CHAPTER I

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AN IMITATION COURT

Washington was glad to remain at Mount Vernon as long as possible after he had consented to serve as President, enjoying the life of a country gentleman, which was now much more suited to his taste than official employment. He was weary of public duties and the heavy demands upon his time which had left him with little leisure for his private life at home. His correspondence during this period gives ample evidence of his extreme reluctance to reassume public responsibilities. To bring the matter to its true proportions, it must be remembered that to the view of the times the new constitution was but the latest attempt to tinker the federal scheme, and it was yet to be seen whether this endeavor would be any more successful than previous efforts had been. As for the title of President, it had already been borne by a number of congressional politicians and had been rather tarnished by the behavior of some of them. Washington was not at all eager to move in the matter before he had to, and he therefore remained on his farm

until Congress met, formally declared the result of the election, and sent a committee to Mount Vernon to give him official notice. It was not until April 30, 1789, that he was formally installed as President.

Madison and Hamilton were meanwhile going ahead with their plans. This time was perhaps the happiest in their lives. They had stood together in years of struggle to start the movement for a new constitution, to steer it through the convention, and to force it on the States. Although the fight had been a long and a hard one, and although they had not won all that they had wanted, it was nevertheless a great satisfaction that they had accomplished so much, and they were now applying themselves with great zest to the organization of the new government. Madison was a member of Congress; Hamilton lived near the place where Congress held its sittings in New York and his house was a rendezvous for the federal leaders. Thither Madison would often go to talk over plans and prospects. A lady who lived near by has related how she often saw them walking and talking together, stopping sometimes to have fun with a monkey skipping about in a neighbor's yard.

At that time Madison was thirty-eight; Hamilton was thirty-two. They were little men, of the quick, dapper type. Madison was five feet six and a quarter inches tall, slim and delicate in physique, with a pale student's face lit up by bright hazel eyes. He was as plain as a Quaker in his style of dress, and his hair, which was light in color, was brushed straight back and gathered into a small queue, tied with a plain ribbon. Hamilton was of about the same stature, but his figure had wiry strength. His Scottish ancestry was

manifest in his ruddy complexion and in the modeling of his features. He was more elegant than Madison in his habitual attire. He had a very erect, dignified bearing; his expression was rather severe when his features were in repose, but he had a smile of flashing radiance when he was pleased and interested, Washington, who stood over six feet two inches in his buckled shoes, had to look down over his nose when he met the young statesmen who had been the wheel horses of the federal movement.

Soon after Washington arrived in New York he sought Hamilton's aid in the management of the national finances. There was the rock on which the government of the Confederation had foundered. There the most skillful pilotage was required if the new government was to make a safe voyage. Washington's first thought had been to get Robert Morris to take charge again of the department that he had formerly managed with conspicuous ability, and while stopping in Philadelphia on his way to New York, he had approached Morris on the subject. Morris, who was now engaged in grand projects which were eventually to bring him to a debtor's prison, declined the position but strongly recommended Hamilton. This suggestion proved very acceptable to Washington, who was well aware of Hamilton's capacity.

The thorny question of etiquette was the next matter to receive Washington's attention. Personally he favored the easy hospitality to which he was accustomed in Virginia, but he knew quite well that his own taste ought not to be decisive. The forms that he might adopt would become precedents, and hence action should be taken cautiously.

Washington was a methodical man. He had a well-balanced nature which was never disturbed by timidity of any kind and rarely by anxiety. His anger was strong when it was excited, but his ordinary disposition was one of massive equanimity. He was not imaginative, but he took things as they came, and did what the occasion demanded. In crises that did not admit of deliberation, his instinctive courage guided his behavior, but such crises belong to military experience, and in civil life careful deliberation was his rule. It was his practice to read important documents pen in hand to note the points. From one of his familiar letters to General Knox we learn that on rising in the morning he would turn over in his mind the day's work and would consider how to deal with it. His new circumstances soon apprised him that the first thing to be settled was his department as President. Under any form of government the man who is head of the state is forced, as part of his public service, to submit to public exhibition and to be exact in social observance; but, unless precautions are taken, engagements will consume his time and strength. Writing to a friend about the situation in which he found himself, Washington declared: "By the time I had done breakfast, and thence till dinner, and afterwards till bed-time, I could not get relieved from the ceremony of one visit, before I had to attend to another. In a word, I had no leisure to read or answer the dispatches that were pouring in upon me from all quarters."

The radical treatment which the situation called for was aided by a general feeling in Congress that arrangements should be made for the President different from those under the Articles of Confederation. It had been the practice for

the President to keep open house. Of this custom Washington remarked that it brought the office "in perfect contempt; for the table was considered a public one, and every person, who could get introduced, conceived that he had a right to be invited to it. This, although the table was always crowded (and with mixed company, and the President considered in no better light than as a *maître d'hôtel*), was in its nature impracticable, and as many offenses given as if no table had been kept." It was important to settle the matter before Mrs. Washington joined him in New York. Inside of ten days from the time he took the oath of office, he therefore drafted a set of nine queries, copies of which he sent to Jay, Madison, Hamilton, and John Adams, with these sensible remarks:

"Many things, which appear of little importance in themselves and at the beginning, may have great and durable consequences from their having been established at the commencement of a new general government. It will be much easier to commence the Administration upon a well-adjusted system, built on tenable grounds, than to correct errors, or alter inconveniences, after they shall have been confirmed by habit. The President, in all matters of business and etiquette, can have no object but to demean himself in his public character in such a manner as to maintain the dignity of his office, without subjecting himself to the imputation of superciliousness or unnecessary reserve. Under these impressions he asks for your candid and undisguised opinion."

Only the replies of Hamilton and Adams have been preserved. Hamilton advised Washington that while "the

dignity of the office should be supported ... care will be necessary to avoid extensive disgust or discontent.... The notions of equality are yet, in my opinion, too general and strong to admit of such a distance being placed between the President and other branches of the Government as might even be consistent with a due proportion." Hamilton then sketched a plan for a weekly levee: "The President to accept no invitations, and to give formal entertainments only twice or four times a year, the anniversaries of important events of the Revolution." In addition, "the President on levee days, either by himself or some gentleman of his household, to give informal invitations to family dinners ... not more than six or eight to be invited at a time, and the matter to be confined essentially to members of the legislature and other official characters. The President never to remain long at table." Hamilton observed that his views did not correspond with those of other advisers, but he urged the necessity of behaving so as "to remove the idea of too immense inequality, which I fear would excite dissatisfaction and cabal."

This was sagacious advice, and Washington would have benefited by conforming to it more closely than he did. The prevailing tenor of the advice which he received is probably reflected in the communication from Adams, who was in favor of making the government impressive through grand ceremonial. "Chamberlains, aides-de-camp, secretaries, masters of ceremonies, etc., will become necessary.... Neither dignity nor authority can be supported in human minds, collected into nations or any great numbers, without a splendor and majesty in some degree proportioned to

them." Adams held that in no case would it be "proper for the President to make any formal public entertainment," but that this should be the function of some minister of state, although "upon such occasions the President, in his private character, might honor with his presence." The President might invite to his house in small parties what official characters or citizens of distinction he pleased, but this invitation should always be given without formality. The President should hold levees to receive "visits of compliment," and two days a week might not be too many for this purpose. The idea running through Adams's advice was that in his private character the President might live like any other private gentleman of means, but that in his public functions he should adopt a grand style. This advice, which Washington undoubtedly received from others as well as Adams, influenced Washington's behavior, and the consequences were exactly what Hamilton had predicted. According to Jefferson's recollection, many years afterward, Washington told him that General Knox and Colonel Humphreys drew up the regulations and that some were proposed "so highly strained that he absolutely rejected them." Jefferson further related that, when Washington was re-elected, Hamilton took the position that the parade of the previous inauguration ought not to be repeated, remarking that "there was too much ceremony for the character of our government."

It is a well-known characteristic of human nature to be touchy about such matters as these. Popular feeling about Washington's procedure was inflamed by reports of the grand titles which Congress was arranging to bestow upon

the President. That matter was, in fact, considered by the Senate on the very day of Washington's arrival in New York and before any steps could have been taken to ascertain his views. A joint committee of the two houses reported against annexing "any style or title to the respective styles or titles of office expressed in the Constitution." But a group of Senators headed by John Adams was unwilling to let the matter drop, and another Senate committee was appointed which recommended as a proper style of address "His Highness, the President of the United States of America, and Protector of their Liberties." While the Senate debated, the House acted, addressing the President in reply to his inaugural address simply as "The President of the United States." The Senate now had practically no choice but to drop the matter, but in so doing adopted a resolution that because of its desire that "a due respect for the majesty of the people of the United States may not be hazarded by singularity," the Senate was still of the opinion "that it would be proper to annex a respectable title to the office." Thus it came about that the President of the United States is distinguished by having no title. A governor may be addressed as "Your Excellency," a judge as "Your Honor," but the chief magistrate of the nation is simply "Mr. President." It was a relief to Washington when the Senate discontinued its attempt to decorate him. He wrote to a friend, "Happily this matter is now done with, I hope never to be revived."

Details of the social entanglements in which Washington was caught at the outset of his administration are generally omitted by serious historians, but whatever illustrates life and manners is not insignificant, and events of this

character had, moreover, a distinct bearing on the politics of the times. The facts indicate that Washington's arrangements were somewhat encumbered by the civic ambition of New York. That bustling town of 30,000 population desired to be the capital of the nation, and, in the splendid exertions which it made, it went rather too far. Federal Hall, designed as a City Hall, was built in part for the accommodation of Congress, on the site in Wall Street now in part occupied by the United States Sub-Treasury. The plans were made by Major Pierre Charles l'Enfant, a French engineer who had served with distinction in the Continental Army but whose clearest title to fame is the work which he did in laying out the city of Washington when it was made the national capital. Federal Hall exceeded in dignified proportions and in artistic design any public building then existing in America. The painted ceilings, the crimson damask canopies and hangings, and the handsome furniture were considered by many political agitators to be a great violation of republican simplicity. The architect was first censured in the public press and then, because of disputes, received no pay for his time and trouble, although, had he accepted a grant of city lots offered by the town council he would have received a compensation that would have turned out to be very valuable.

Federal Hall had been completed and presented to Congress before Washington started for New York. The local arrangements for his reception were upon a corresponding scale of magnificence, but with these Washington had had nothing to do. The barge in which he was conveyed from the Jersey shore to New York was fifty feet long, hung with red

curtains and having an awning of satin. It was rowed by thirteen oarsmen, in white with blue ribbons. In the inauguration ceremonies Washington's coach was drawn by four horses with gay trappings and hoofs blackened and polished. This became his usual style. He seldom walked in the street, for he was so much a public show that that might have been attended by annoying practical inconvenience; but when he rode out with Mrs. Washington his carriage was drawn by four—sometimes six—horses, with two outriders, in livery, with powdered hair and cockades in their hats. When he rode on horseback, which he often did for exercise, he was attended by outriders and accompanied by one or more of the gentlemen of his household. Toward the end of the year there arrived from England the state coach which he used in formal visits to Congress and for other ceremonious events. It was a canary-colored chariot, decorated with gilded nymphs and cupids, and emblazoned with the Washington arms. His state was simplified when he went to church, which he did regularly every Sunday; then his coach was drawn by two horses, with two footmen behind, and was followed by a post-chaise carrying two gentlemen of his household. Washington was fond of horses and was in the habit of keeping a fine stable. The term "muslin horses" was commonly used to denote the care taken in grooming. The head groom would test the work of the stable-boys by applying a clean muslin handkerchief to the coats of the animals, and, if any stain of dirt showed, there was trouble. The night before the white horses which Washington used as President were to be taken out, their coats were covered by a paste of whiting, and the animals

were swathed in wrappings. In the morning the paste was dry and with rubbing gave a marble gloss to the horses' coats. The hoofs were then blackened and polished, and even the animals' teeth were scoured. Such arrangements, however, were not peculiar to Washington's stable. This was the usual way in which grooming for "the quality" was done in that period.

The first house occupied by Washington was at the corner of Pearl and Cherry streets, then a fashionable locality. What the New York end of the Brooklyn Bridge has left of it is now known as Franklin Square. The house was so small that three of his secretaries had to lodge in one room; and Custis in his Recollections tells how one of them, who fancied he could write poetry, would sometimes disturb the others by walking the floor in his nightgown trying the rhythm of his lines by rehearsing them with loud emphasis. About a year later Washington removed to a larger house on the west side of Broadway near Bowling Green. Both buildings went down at an early date before the continual march of improvement in New York. In Washington's time Wall Street was superseding Pearl Street as the principal haunt of fashion. Here lived Alexander Hamilton and other New Yorkers prominent in their day; here were fashionable boarding-houses at which lived the leading members of Congress. When some fashionable reception was taking place, the street was gay with coaches and sedan-chairs, and the attire of the people who then gathered was as brilliant as a flight of cockatoos. It was a period of spectacular dress and behavior for both men and women, the men rivaling the women in their use of lace, silk, and

satin. Dr. John Bard, the fashionable doctor of his day, who attended Washington through the severe illness which laid him up for six weeks early in his administration, habitually wore a cocked hat and a scarlet coat, his hands resting upon a massive cane as he drove about in a pony-phaeton. The scarlet waistcoat with large bright buttons which Jefferson wore on fine occasions, when he arrived on the scene, showed that he was not then averse to gay raiment. Plain styles of dress were among the many social changes ushered in by the French Revolution and the war cycle that ensued from it.

Titles figured considerably in colonial society, and the Revolutionary War did not destroy the continuity of usage. It was quite in accord with the fashion of the times that the courtesy title of Lady Washington was commonly employed in talk about the President's household. Mrs. Washington arrived in New York from Mount Vernon on May 27, 1789. She was met by the President with his barge on the Jersey shore, and as the barge passed the Battery a salute of thirteen cannon was fired. At the landing-place a large company was gathered, and the coach that took her to her home was escorted with military parade. The questions of etiquette had been settled by that time, and she performed her social duties with the ease of a Virginia gentlewoman always used to good society. She found them irksome, however, as such things had long since lost their novelty. Writing to a friend she said, "I think I am more like a state prisoner than anything else." She was then a grandmother through her children by her first husband. Although she preferred plain attire, she is described on one occasion as

wearing a velvet gown over a white satin petticoat, her hair smoothed back over a moderately high cushion. It was the fashion of the times for the ladies to tent their hair up to a great height. At one of Mrs. Washington's receptions, Miss McIvers, a New York belle, had such a towering coiffure that the feathers which surmounted it brushed a lighted chandelier and caught fire. The consequences might have been serious had the fire spread to the pomatumed structure below, but one of the President's aides sprang to the rescue and smothered the burning plumes between the palms of his hands before any harm came to the young lady.

Every Tuesday while Congress was in session Washington received visitors from three to four o'clock. These receptions were known as his levees. He is described as clad in black velvet; his hair was powdered and gathered behind in a silk bag; he wore knee and shoe buckles and yellow gloves; he held a cocked hat with a cockade and a black feather edging; and he carried a long sword in a scabbard of white polished leather. As visitors were presented to him by an aide, Washington made a bow. To a candid friend who reported to him that his bows were considered to be too stiff, he replied: "Would it not have been better to throw the veil of charity over them, ascribing their stiffness to the effects of age, or to the unskillfulness of my teacher, rather than to pride and dignity of office, which God knows has no charm for me?" Washington bore with remarkable humility the criticisms of his manners that occasionally reached him.

On Friday evenings Mrs. Washington received, and these affairs were known as her "drawing-rooms." They were over by nine o'clock which was bed-time in the Washington

household; for Washington was an early riser, often getting up at four in the morning to start the day's work betimes. The "drawing-rooms" were more cheery affairs than the levees, as Mrs. Washington had simple unaffected manners, and the General had made it known that on these occasions he desired to be regarded not as the President but simply as a private gentleman. This gave him an opportunity such as he did not have at the levees to unbend and to enjoy himself. Besides these receptions a series of formal dinners was given to diplomatic representatives, high officers of government, and members of Congress. Senator Maclay of Pennsylvania recorded in the diary he kept during the First Congress that Washington would drink wine with every one in the company, addressing each in turn by name. Maclay thought it of sufficient interest to record that on one occasion a trifle was served which had been made with rancid cream. All the ladies watched to see what Mrs. Washington would do with her portion; and next day there were tittering remarks all through the fashionable part of the town over the fact that she had martyred herself and swallowed the dose. Incidentally Maclay, who was in nearly everything a vehement opponent of the policy of the Administration, bore witness to Washington's perfect courtesy, Maclay noted that in spite of his antagonistic attitude Washington invited him to dinner and paid him "marked attention," although "he knows enough to satisfy him that I will not be Senator after the 3d of March, and to the score of his good nature must I place these attentions."

In his relations with Congress, Washington followed precedents derived from the English constitutional system