

were British, but claimed to act under authority of a native king, just as the Germans in Samoa tried to cover themselves with the scanty mantle of Tamasese. The commander of the *Cyane* bombarded the town to punish the local authorities, and he returned home to receive the approval of his Government and the plaudits of his countrymen. Similar action was directed by President Monroe, in 1817, in the case of Amelia Island. And General Jackson, in his seventh annual message, admirably stated the principle upon which such intervention rests, with the citation of which we may conclude:

Unfortunately many of the nations of this *hemisphere* are still so tortured by domestic dissensions.

Revolution succeeds revolution, injuries are committed upon foreigners engaged in lawful pursuits. Much time elapses before a Government sufficiently stable is erected to justify expectation of redress. Ministers are sent and received, and before the discussion of past injuries is fairly begun fresh troubles arise; but too frequently new injuries are added to the old to be discussed together with the existing Government after it has proved its ability to sustain the assaults made upon it, or with its successor if overthrown. If this unhappy condition of things continues much longer other nations will be under the painful necessity of deciding whether justice to their suffering citizens does not require a prompt redress of injuries by their own power without waiting for the establishment of a Government competent and enduring enough to discuss and make satisfaction for them.

George H. Bates.

TOPICS OF THE TIME.

The First Inauguration.

IT is not so much to the mere passing of an historical milestone that so many men's thoughts turn back, this month,¹ to the first inauguration of a President under the Constitution, as to the commemoration of the critical point in the development of the United States. History has changed its point of view of late years. It used to be thought that the accomplishment of national unity by the former English colonies of central North America was merely an evidence of the great political wisdom of our forefathers. Now it is conceived that national unity was the fit and natural line of development; that countless natural forces, seen and unseen, tended to drive the colonies, however unwilling, in that direction; that, successfully resisting these forces and missing their true road, they would have struggled hopelessly for all time in shallows and in miseries; but that, finding the true road, they have gone on triumphantly to achieve their destiny and become the great Republic. And, as the historical indication that the true road had been found at last, the first inauguration must have peculiar interest for every American.

Even from the purely human side, however, the event is very far from being confined to natural forces; it had its great personal element of such clear prominence as to give it a far higher interest. The emergency was so serious that the wisest of men saw and said that upon a rejection of the Constitution the course of events would turn to the establishment of national unity by armed force of some sort. And yet, in spite of the most singular errors on the part of the people, it never came to violence; we must go to the annals of other peoples to study the agonies of the birth of a nation in the throes of armed revolution. And, as the first inaugura-

tion showed that the American people had yielded wisely and peacefully to the demands of their natural position, every historical student must see how appropriate it was that Washington, whose existence, character, and influence had made that form of peaceful solution possible, should have been the central figure of the ceremony — the first President.

The belief is not uncommon that Washington had been the leader of the people before and through, as well as out of, the armed struggle against the British ministry. But the course of events which led to war was singularly lacking in leaders of national influence. Almost the only one who approached that position was Franklin. The people of the middle and New England colonies had faith in the common sense of Poor Richard; and, when his course was seen to be veering towards an apparent support of resistance, the silent influence of the fact was very considerable. But no contemporary would have dreamed of rating the Virginia colonel, during the twenty years after 1756, within many degrees of the hard-headed Pennsylvania printer as a leader. Until the recognition of Washington's usefulness on the military committee of the First Continental Congress, he was merely one who had done good service in the French and Indian War, and was now hardly to be distinguished from any other Virginia gentleman.

And so the character of Washington developed through twenty years of inglorious obscurity. There were examples in plenty in his time, as in ours, of the truth of Bacon's famous saying as to the varying effects of reading, writing, and conversation on man's development. Washington has left no special evidence that his development took any of these roads. It seems to have been a case in which a strong spirit, guided by strong sense, grew into greatness by constant thinking; by freedom from conventionalizing association with

¹ It is familiar history that the inauguration was to take place at New York City March 4, 1789, according to the vote of the Congress of the Confederation; but that the shiftless habits learned under the Confederation, difficulties of travel, etc., delayed the

ceremony until April 30. There is nothing sacred or even constitutional in March 4 as an inauguration day. The Congress of the Confederation named the first Wednesday in March, which in 1789 was the fourth day of the month.

others, and by the development of an individuality, strong, natural, and always and instinctively honest and true. No four years in college will graduate a man in such a course as this; and it is not likely that one of these twenty years of silent training was superfluous.

It is an open secret that, so far from being the real authors of American independence, the "fathers of the republic," through the pettiness, self-seeking, or cowardice of many of them, and the short-sightedness of others, were often about the most serious obstacle in Washington's path. But that path never once swerved from the straight line of absolute rectitude which was the fruit of twenty years' self-discipline, nor had it gone far before the "plain people" all over the continent, recognizing in the General-in-Chief their ideal, gave him a universal and loyal affection which the politicians of his time never freely offered. From the "time that tried men's souls" down to the day of his death, Washington was the unique political force of the country. The fact that his tried judgment, unselfishness, and crystal honesty approved or disapproved a measure was decisive with the mass of the people. History has no scales in which to weigh the incomparable political advantage of the American people in having such a character among them at such a time; but one is safe in ascribing to that fact the peace, security, and order of the process by which the transformation from an imperfect to a finished national Constitution was accomplished. And when New York City commemorates, this month, the first inauguration, it is but fitting that the occasion should be permeated with the personality of Washington, in the spirit of Lowell's noble apostrophe to Virginia in his ode, "Under the Old Elm":

Mother of States and undiminished men,
Thou gavest us a country, giving him,
And we owe alway what we owed thee then.

And yet the "plain people" of his time should not be denied the merit, great in any people, of a prompt and whole-souled recognition of their ideal in the great man as he came into their horizon. They did not kill the prophet who had been sent to them, but followed him reverently, affectionately, and to their country's highest good. One place of honor after another was thrust upon him, and not one of them with the trace of an effort to obtain it. His most confidential correspondence shows invariably the same sincere conviction, whenever any such advancement was proposed for him, that it was entirely beyond the range of his abilities and that it was his duty to urge the selection of some one else. The popular recognition of his sincerity deserves to be recorded. It was an honor to both sides — Washington's unaffected reluctance to accept the offices provided for him, and the people's intense belief that he was the Heaven-sent occupant of those particular positions.

Have our people changed their ideal or changed their nature in the past century? It would seem that one or other of these events has taken place, in the view of shrewd politicians. This is a period of our history in which a vacancy in office is a signal for self-seeking candidates for nominations on either side to publish and push their "claims," to trumpet the superiority of their chances, to have their committees,

workers, newspaper organs, and all the other apparatus of self-laudation, carefully overseen by themselves and paid for by themselves or their admirers. Is this the way in which the American people of this generation is condemned to seek and discover its ideal? Then must we say, still in Lowell's words, but with a tinge of deeper longing and regret:

Rigid, but with himself first, grasping still
In swerveless poise the wave-beat helm of will;
Not honored then or now because he wooed
The popular voice, but that he still withstood;
Broad-minded, higher-souled, there is but one
Who was all this and ours, and all men's, — WASHINGTON.

Constitutional Amendments.

As this is one of our eras of great striving and cry for reforms of various kinds, it is probable that we shall hear a great many proposals of amendments to the Constitution of the United States, as if the suggestion of even the best of amendments gave it any more real chance of life than if it were meritless. It is therefore necessary to retain, as a very prominent element of our political consciousness, the knowledge that the adoption of any isolated amendment is now a matter of such enormous difficulty as to be practically impossible. The time may come when some amendment shall evidently have behind it, as in the case of the civil war amendments, so general a popular and party interest as to "rush" it over all the inevitable obstacles; but that time is not now. The reform which is limited to the road of constitutional amendment may besiege the entrance to it until it dies of inanition; it must abandon hope long before it even enters.

The very first difficulties are those of mere constitutional machinery, which Sir H. S. Maine has stated with so much Tory gusto that his statement has already become classical. They are obstacles which the people imposed upon their own action in the original constitution in order to guard against what was supposed, a century ago, to be democracy's characteristic turbulence and impatient desire for change. A change in the English constitution, no matter how radical, needs only a majority vote in the two houses of Parliament; and in practice a determined majority in the House of Commons will insure a majority in both houses. A change in the American Constitution demands, at the very beginning, a two-thirds' majority in both houses of Congress. Every one familiar with such matters knows that the difficulty of getting a two-thirds' majority in either house is far more than a geometrical increase over that of getting a simple majority; and that a two-thirds' majority in *both* houses is a difficulty almost geometrically greater still. Here the framers of the Constitution might have stopped, but they did not. They provided that the amendment, after passing the gauntlet of Congress, should not be valid until ratified by three-fourths of the State legislatures. As there are now 38 States, three-fourths means 29; and, as each of these bodies has two absolutely independent houses, this means that the budding amendment must find friends to introduce it, champions to fight for it, and a majority to support it, in each of 58 separate legislative bodies, each with its peculiar interests, prejudices, and characteristics. Who can name any single amendment which is at all likely ever to be backed by such popular interest, the country over, as