

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION.

By CAROLYN HALSTED.

It is very generally admitted that what women undertake they accomplish; and as soon as it became known that the women of America had taken upon themselves to adjust the national debt of honor in respect to the National University, for which George Washington bequeathed \$25,000, it was felt on all sides that here at least was the solution of the problem, and that the long talked of seat of learning would now really materialize. Though Washington may have been considering the subject previously in his own mind, the first conception of the idea of such a university seems to have occurred in October, 1775, in his military camp at Cambridge, Mass., when young Samuel Blodget, afterwards an author of note, remarked in answer to a complaint against the militia for the damage they were doing to the colleges in which they were quartered: "Well, to make amends for these injuries, I hope after our war we shall erect a noble national university at which the youth of all the world may be proud to receive instruction."

"Young man, you are a prophet, inspired to speak what I am confident will one day be realized," spoke out the Father of his Country, who after the close of the Revolution again referred to the matter so dear to his heart: "While the work of establishing a national university may be properly deferred until Congress is comfortably accommodated and the city has so far grown as to be prepared for it, the enterprise must not be forgotten: and I trust that I have not omitted to take such measures as will at all events secure the entire object in time."

He here referred to his bequest mentioned in his last will and testament, dated July 9, 1799, which reads: "It has always been a source of serious regret with me to see the youth of these United States sent to foreign countries for the purpose of education. It has been my ardent wish to see a plan devised on a liberal scale, which would have a tendency to spread systematic ideas through all the parts of this rising empire. Looking anxiously forward to the accomplishment of so desirable an object as this is (in my estimation), my mind has not been able to contemplate any plan more likely to effect the measure than the establishment of a university in a central part of the United States, to which the youths of fortune and talents from all parts thereof might be sent for the completion of their education. I give and bequeath in perpetuity the fifty shares (value \$500 each) which I hold in the Potomac Company toward the endowment of a university to be established in the District of Columbia under the auspices of the general government."

This trust was neglected, and the value of the legacy lost; but that fact would seem to make it all the more binding that the Government and the people should carry out the ardent wish of Washington and restore the fund, which would now amount to more than \$4,401,000, calculating the original amount with compound interest. This is our national debt of honor. From the days of the Revolution to the present date such men as James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, General Grant, Andrew D. White, Governor John W. Hoyt and scores of others have labored earnestly to make the university an accomplished fact. Bills have time and again been presented to Congress and other important steps taken, but all of no avail. By-and-by along came the progressive woman, investigating all sorts of matters, both public and private: her keen eyes caught sight of the neglected national university question, and her quick wits told her here was a rich harvest just ripe for her to garner. She set to work without delay to see what could be done, and already the results are astonishing.

The first wedge was entered by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which appointed a National University Committee, with Mrs. Ellen Hardin Wal-

worth as chairman. This called more closely the attention of other women to the enterprise, and in Washington on April 8, 1897, was organized the George Washington Memorial Committee. This soon became a permanent organization under the title of the George Washington Memorial Association, whose first object is to erect a memorial building to Washington, and to arouse a patriotic interest in his bequest and the fulfilment of his wishes. This structure, which will cost \$250,000, is to be called the Administration Building and is to be the center about which the great University of the United States is to gravitate, for so the national educational institution is to be designated; and its present feminine promoters look forward into the years to come when it shall lead the whole array of universities, both here and abroad, and instead of our youths and maidens leaving their native land to seek educational advantages in other countries, foreign scholars will come flocking to American shores for advanced study and instruction of the highest order. For, be it understood, this coming university is designed for post-graduate work only and not to compete with the many colleges already

offering the four years of undergraduate study with the first degree in view, such as Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Philosophy. No student will be admitted to the University of the United States who has not previously attained one of these degrees and is not prepared for advanced study and investigation.

Though the George Washington Memorial Association was formally and publicly organized in Washington in 1897, its earliest inception dates back to October, 1896, when two women, Mrs. Ellen A. Richardson and Mrs. Susanna Phelps Gage, in the words of the latter, "opened their eyes squarely to the fact that the positive knowledge concerning the rearing and education of children is insufficient to meet the demands of the rapidly progressing civilization into which they are born, and saw in the wisdom and generosity of Washington in desiring to found a National University the means of arousing general interest in the search for knowledge which alone can furnish a basis for progress."

A few months later communication was opened with ex-Governor John W. Hoyt, chairman of the National University Committee of One Hundred; next, appeals were sent to educators, clubs and patriotic societies, and in April, 1897, the movement really became an organized enterprise, with the two pioneer women as leaders and with the cooperation of many such notabilities as Mrs. Phebe A. Hearst, Mrs. Calvin S. Brice, Mrs. Andrew D. White, Mrs. David Starr Jordan and Mrs. Ellen M. Henrotin. Soon these energetic dames put their heads together and began to make such wonderful plans for their organization as to astonish even themselves; but even the short period since then has demonstrated the feasibility of their schemes, and everything points towards an overwhelming success. Their first meeting, August 7, 1897, at Winthrop, near Boston, lasted three days and enabled the ladies to perfect many details of action and take the first step toward arranging for their important convention in Washington, December 14, 15 and 16, 1897. This congress proved how great an undertaking the George Washington Memorial Association had assumed, on what a firm foundation it already was planted and how much enthusiasm it had enlisted. In addition to the great mass of business transacted by the society the visiting members and delegates were treated to social honors by the resident members—dinners, receptions, drives to the places of interest so numerous at the National Capitol and, most significant to all, a visit to Mount Vernon, Washington's beloved home, where the great hero had spent many hours thinking and planning for his National University.



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