

Washington's Letter Vanishes from Baltimore

*To the Roman Catholics in the
United States of America.*

Gentlemen,

While I now receive, with much satisfaction your congratulations on my being called, by an unanimous vote, to the first station in my Country; I cannot but duly notice your politeness in offering an apology for the unavoidable delay. As that delay has given you an opportunity of realizing, instead of anticipating, the benefits of the general Government; you will do me the justice to believe, that your testimony of the increase of the public prosperity, enhances the pleasure which I should otherwise have experienced from your affectionate Address.

*I feel that my conduct, in war
and*

*America, animated alone by the pure spirit
of Christianity, and still conducting them-
selves as the faithful subjects of our free
Government, enjoy every temporal and
spiritual felicity.*
George Washington



The Most Rev. John Carroll, First Archbishop of Baltimore.
(From Painting by Gilbert Stuart.)

The First and Last Pages of the Missing Washington Letter.

Was a Link with the Past, Recalling Memories of Constitutional Conven- tion and the Carrolls of Carrollton

A DOCUMENT of the greatest historical importance has been lost. George Washington's famous letter to Bishop Carroll, praising the Catholics of the country for the part they took in the American Revolutionary War, has disappeared from its place in a fireproof vault beneath the sanctuary of the cathedral in Baltimore, Md.

Baltimore is the mother See of the hundred Bishops that now exist in the United States. Its great granite cathedral has held for years many thousands of valuable documents relating to the history of Maryland and Baltimore. These are now being indexed, and in the course of the work it has been discovered that the chief treasure of them all, George Washington's letter, is gone from its envelope.

The envelope which contained it, marked "Original Letter of G. Washington to Catholics U. States," is in its usual place. But it is empty. A thorough search is being made, for the loss is a matter of great concern.

Fortunately a facsimile of the letter is in existence. In 1790 there was printed "An Address From The Roman Catholics of America to George Washington, Esq., President of the United States." It was issued in London, printed by J. P. Coghlan, Duke Street, Grosvenor Square, and sold by Messrs. Robinsons, Paternoster Row. This pamphlet, which now is exceedingly rare, contained not only the address mentioned in its title, but George Washington's reply. It was reprinted by

the publishers of the Catholic Encyclopedia, who added to it a reproduction of Washington's autograph letter. From this the accompanying illustrations are taken.

John Carroll was the first Bishop of the hierarchy of the United States of America, and first Bishop and Archbishop of Baltimore. He was born at Upper Marlboro, Md., in 1735. In 1788 the priests of Maryland petitioned Rome for a Bishop for the United States. Cardinal Antonelli replied by giving permission to the priests of the mission to select the city and name the candidate for presentation to the Pope. Twenty-four of the twenty-five other priests at the meeting voted for Father Carroll. Pope Pius VI appointed him Bishop, and his consecration took place at Lulworth Castle, England, on Aug. 15, 1790.

Before the inauguration of General Washington as President of the United States Bishop Carroll sent to him an address on behalf of the Roman Catholic clergy and laity of the United States. Associated with him in this address were Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Daniel Carroll of Maryland, Dominick Lynch of New York, and Thomas Fitzsimmons of Pennsylvania. Daniel Carroll and Thomas Fitzsimmons were the only Catholic delegates to the convention that sat in Philadelphia from May 14 to Sept. 17, 1789, and framed the Constitution of the United States.

To this address Washington returned a cordial reply, which undoubtedly did much for establishing in the United States a strong feeling in behalf of religious toleration. He wrote:

ANSWER TO THE ROMAN CATHOLICS IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.
Gentlemen:

While I now receive, with much satisfac-

tion, your congratulations on my being called, by an unanimous Vote, to the first station in my Country—I cannot but duly notice your politeness in offering an apology for the unavoidable delay. As that delay has given you an opportunity of realizing, instead of anticipating, the benefits of the general Government—you will do me the justice to believe that your testimony of the increase of the public prosperity enhances the pleasure which I should otherwise have experienced from your affectionate Address.

I feel that my conduct, in war and in peace, has met with more general approbation than could have reasonably been expected; and I find myself disposed to consider that fortunate circumstance in a great degree resulting from the able support and extraordinary candour of my fellow-citizens of all denominations.

The prospect of National prosperity now before us is truly animating, and ought to excite the exertions of all good men to establish and secure the happiness of their Country in the permanent duration of its freedom and independence. America, under the smiles of Divine Providence—the protection of a good Government—and the cultivation of Manners, Morals, and Piety—cannot fail of attaining an uncommon degree of Eminence in Literature, Commerce, Agriculture, Improvements at home, and Respectability abroad.

As Mankind become more liberal they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves worthy members of the Community are equally entitled to the protection of Civil Government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost Nations in examples of Justice and Liberality. And I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of their Revolution and the establishment of their Government or the important assistance which they received from a Nation in which the Roman Catholic Faith is professed.

I thank you, Gentlemen, for your kind concern for me. While my Life and Health shall continue, in whatever situation I may be, it shall be my constant endeavour to justify the favourable sentiments which you are pleased

to express of my conduct. And may the Members of your Society in America, animated alone by the pure spirit of Christianity, and still conducting themselves as the faithful subjects of our free Government, enjoy every temporal and spiritual felicity.

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

March 12, 1790.

Archbishop Carroll played a prominent part in the affairs of the young nation. Of especial interest is his work on behalf of religious toleration. He represented to Congress the need of the constitutional provision for the protection and maintenance of religious liberty. It is believed that to him, in part, is due the provision in Article 6, Section 3 of the Constitution, which declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States," and also the First Amendment, passed in the same year by the First Congress, that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

In the archives of the Baltimore Cathedral are to be found official and private letters by and to Archbishop Carroll. There also are copies of the briefs raising Baltimore to an archiepiscopal see and conferring the pallium on Bishop Carroll, and the original brief making Father Carroll Superior of the Missions in the United States, and of that erecting the See of Baltimore and appointing Bishop Carroll. But from this valuable collection has disappeared the letter which was considered the chief treasure of the archives—George Washington's letter to the Roman Catholics of the United States.