

GENERAL WASHINGTON'S VISION

(Originally published by Wesley Bradshaw.)

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The last time I ever saw Anthony Sherman was on the Fourth of July, 1859, in Independence Square. He was then ninety-nine years old, his dimming eyes rekindled as he gazed upon Independence Hall, which he had come to visit once more. "I want to tell you an incident of Washington's life -- one which no one alive knows of except myself; and which, if you live, you will before long see verified."

He said, "From the opening of the Revolution, we experienced all phases of fortune, good and ill. The darkest period we ever had, I think, was when Washington, after several reverses, retreated to Valley Forge, where he resolved to pass the winter of 1777. Ah! I often saw the tears coursing down our dear commander's careworn cheeks, as he conversed with a confidential officer about the condition of his soldiers. You have doubtless heard the story of Washington's going to the thicket to pray. Well, he also used to pray to God in secret for aid and comfort.

"One day, I remember well, the chilly winds whistled through the leafless trees. Though the sky was cloudless and the sun shone brightly, he remained alone in his quarters nearly all afternoon. When he came out, I noticed that his face was a shade paler than usual, and there seemed to be something on his mind of more than ordinary importance. Returning just after dusk, he dispatched an orderly to the quarters of the officer I mentioned who was in attendance at the time. After preliminary conversation of about half an hour, Washington, gazing upon his companion with that strange look of dignity that he alone could command, said to the latter:

"I do not know whether it is due to the anxiety of my mind, or what, but this afternoon, as I was preparing a dispatch, something seemed to disturb me. Looking up, I beheld, standing opposite me, a singularly beautiful being. So astonished was I, for I had given strict orders not to be disturbed, that it was some moments before I found language to inquire the cause of the visit. A second, a third, and even a fourth time did I repeat my question, but received no answer from my mysterious visitor, except a slight raising of the eyes. By this time I felt strange sensations spreading through me, and I would have risen, but the riveted gaze of the being before me rendered volition impossible. I assayed once more to speak, but my tongue had become useless, as though it had become paralyzed. A new influence, mysterious, potent, irresistible, took possession. All I could do was to gaze steadily, vacantly at my unknown visitor. Gradually the surrounding atmosphere seemed to become filled with sensations, and grew luminous. Everything about me seemed to rarefy, including the mysterious visitor.

"I began to feel as one dying, or rather to experience the sensations which I have sometimes imagined accompany dissolution. I did not think, I did not reason, I did not move; all were alike impossible. I was only conscious of gazing fixedly, vacantly at my companion.

"Presently I heard a voice saying, "Son of the Republic, look and learn," while at the same time my visitor extended an arm eastward ly. I now beheld a heavy vapor at some distance rising fold upon fold. This gradually dissipated, and I looked out upon a strange scene. Before me lay spread out in one vast plain all the countries of the world -- Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. I saw rolling and tossing between Europe and America the billows of the Atlantic, and between Asia and America lay the Pacific.

"Son of the Republic," said the same mysterious voice as be fore, "look and learn." At that moment I beheld a dark, shadowy being as an angel standing, or rather floating, in mid-air between Europe and America. Dipping water out of the ocean in the hollow of his hand, he cast some on Europe. Immediately a cloud raised from these countries, and joined in mid-ocean. For a while it remained stationary, and then moved slowly westward until it enveloped America in its murky folds. Sharp flashes of lightning gleamed through it at intervals, and I heard the smothered groans and cries of the American people. A second time the angel dipped water from the ocean and sprinkled it out as before. The dark cloud was then drawn back to the ocean, in whose billows it sank from view.

"A third time I heard the mysterious voice saying, "Son of the Republic, look and learn." I cast my eyes upon America and beheld villages and towns and cities string up one after another until the whole land form the Atlantic to the Pacific was dotted with them. Again I heard the mysterious voice say, "Son of the Republic, the end of the century cometh; look and learn."

"And this time the dark, shadowy angel turned his face south ward, and from Africa I saw an ill-omened specter approach our land. It flitted slowly over every town and city of the latter. The inhabitants presently set themselves in battle against each other. As I continued looking, I saw a bright angel, on whose brow rested a crown of light on which was traced the word "Union," bearing the American flag, which he placed between the divided nation. He said, "Remember, ye are brethren." Instantly the inhabitants, casting down their weapons, be came friends once more, and united around the National Standard.

"Again I heard the mysterious voice saying, "Son of the Republic, look and learn." At this the dark, shadowy angel placed a trumpet to his lips and blew three distinct blasts; and taking water from the ocean, he sprinkled it on Europe, Asia, and Africa. Then my eyes beheld a fearful scene. From each of these countries arose thick black clouds that were soon joined into one; and throughout this mass there gleamed a dark red light be which I saw hordes of armed men, who, moving with the cloud, marched by land and sailed by sea to America, which country was enveloped in the volume of cloud. And I dimly saw these vast armies devastate the whole country and burn the villages, towns, and cities that I had beheld springing up.

"As my ears listened to the thundering of the cannon, the slashing of swords, and the shouts and cries of millions in mortal combat, I again heard the mysterious voice saying, "Son of the Republic, look and learn." When the voice had ceased, the dark angel placed his trumpet once more to his mouth and blew a long and fearful blast.

"Instantly a light as of a thousand suns shown down from above me, and pierced and broke into fragments the dark cloud which enveloped America. At the same moment the angel upon whose head still shown the word "Union" and who bore our national flag in one hand and a sword in the other descended from the heavens attended by legions of white spirits. These immediately joined the inhabitants of America, who I perceived were well-nigh overcome, but who, immediately taking courage again, closed up their broken ranks and renewed the battle. Again, amid the fearful noise of the conflict I heard the mysterious voice saying, "Son of the Republic, look and learn." As the voice ceased, the shadowy angel for the last time dipped water from the ocean and sprinkled it upon America. Instantly the dark cloud rolled back, together with the armies it had brought, leaving the inhabitants of the land victorious.

"Then once more, I beheld the villages, towns, and cities springing up where I'd seen them before, while the bright angel, planting the azure standard he had brought in the midst of them, cried with a loud voice: "While the stars remain, and the heavens send down dew upon the earth, so long shall the Union last." And taking from his brow the crown on which blazoned the word "Union," he placed it upon the standard while the people, kneeling down, said "Amen."

"The scene instantly began to fade and dissolve, and I, at last, saw nothing but the rising, curling vapor I had at first beheld. This also disappeared, and I found myself once more gazing upon the mysterious visitor, who in the same voice I had heard before said, "Son of the Republic, what you have seen is thus interpreted. Three great perils will come upon the Republic. The most fearful is the third [The help against the third peril comes in the shape of divine assistance], passing which the whole world united shall not prevail against her. Let every child of the Republic learn to live for his God, his land, and his Union." With these words the vision vanished, and I started from my seat and felt that I had seen a vision wherein had been shown me the birth, the progress, and the destiny of the United States.'

"Such, my friends," said the venerable narrator, "were the words I heard from Washington's own lips, and America will do well to profit by them."