

An Assembly of Demigods

George Mason

William Pierce: Sketches of Members of the Constitutional Convention, 1787

Mr. Mason is a Gentleman of remarkable strong powers, and possesses a clear and copious understanding. He is able and convincing in debate, steady and firm in his principles, and undoubtedly one of the best politicians in America. Mr. Mason is about 60 years old, with a fine strong constitution.

George Washington to James Craik, New York, September 8, 1789

I always expected that the Gentleman whose name you have mentioned [i.e., Mason] would mark his opposition to the new government with consistency—Pride on the other hand, and want of manly candor on the other, will not I am certain let him acknowledge an error in his opinion respecting it though conviction should flash on his mind as strongly as a ray of light—If certain characters which you have also mentioned should tread *blindfold* in his steps it would be matter of no wonder to me—They are in the habit of thinking that every thing he says and does is right, and (if capable) they will not judge for themselves.

Edmund Randolph: *History of Virginia*

Among the numbers who in their small circles were propagating with activity the American doctrines was George Mason in the shade of retirement. He extended their grasp upon the opinions and affections of those with whom he conversed. How he learned his indifference for distinction, endowed as he was with ability to mount in any line, or whence he contracted his hatred for pomp, with a fortune competent to any expense and a disposition not averse from hospitality, can be solved only from that philosophical spirit which despised the adulterated means of cultivating happiness. He was behind none of the sons of Virginia in knowledge of her history and interest. At a glance he saw to the bottom of every proposition which affected her. His elocution was manly sometimes, but not wantonly sarcastic.

Thomas Jefferson: *Autobiography*, 1821

In giving an account of the laws of which I was myself the mover & draftsman, I by no means mean to claim to myself the merit of obtaining their passage. I had many occasional and strenuous coadjutors in debate, and one most steadfast, able, and zealous; who was himself a host. This was George Mason, a man of the first order of wisdom among those who acted on the theatre of the Revolution, of expansive mind, profound judgment, cogent in argument, learned in the lore of our former constitution, and earnest for

the republican change on democratic principles. His elocution was neither flowing nor smooth, but his language was strong, his manner most impressive, and strengthened by a dash of biting cynicism when provocation made it seasonable.