

A PORTRAIT OF JEFFERSON

From 'Life of Thomas Jefferson.'

OF Mr. Jefferson's moral qualities, the most distinguished were suavity of temper, and a warmth of benevolence which, beginning in the domestic affections, exhibited itself in a fervent love of country, and a wide-spread philanthropy. Few men ever devoted so much of their time, and thoughts, and money to the concerns of others. A disposition thus generous and affectionate was sure to meet with its appropriate reward; and it would be difficult to name one who was more beloved as a parent, relative, friend, or master.

Whilst his character was so conspicuously adorned by these amiable qualities, it was also strengthened and supported by the severer virtues. He was just and honorable in his private dealings, of scrupulous veracity, and inflexibly firm, whenever he was called upon to perform a painful duty. However, impelled by his feelings to grant favours to an applicant, he could frankly and firmly say no, whenever principle clearly required it. He was often charged with being deficient in personal courage, on no other ground than that he left Richmond during Arnold's incursion, and Monticello during Tarleton's. Yet, unprovided, as he was, with all means of defence, the charge is preposterous. It is testified by persons yet living, that on these occasions, he showed cool self-possession, and thus gave all the proof of courage that circumstances permitted. The ordinary occasions of danger he met with the firmness of a constant mind; and he once afforded a proof which men in general consider as yet more satisfactory. Among his political assailants in Albemarle, was one whom he thought to have so far transcended the just limits of party warfare, that he had determined to challenge him, and would have done so, if the friend he consulted had seconded his purpose. But more conclusive evidence of his fortitude may be found in the general tenor of his conduct through life—in his being among the foremost to resist the authority of Great Britain, when resistance might incur the penalties of treason; in the manner in which he met his accusers in the legislature; in his unyielding adherence to the principles of his party, and

his open avowal of them, notwithstanding a course of malicious defamation that has rarely found a parallel; in his retaining Freneau, whose services he thought important to the cause of republicanism, although he had reason to know that his dismissal was wished by General Washington; in his unflinching opposition to the leading measures of Washington's administration; in his perseverance in the embargo policy, after its repeal was urged by friends as well as adversaries; in his carrying out his principles into practice as to removals from office, and not passing beyond them. All these acts, and many more, afford better evidence of the firm texture of his mind, and are proofs of a courage of a higher order than it can often fall to the lot of the mere soldier to exhibit. He has also been accused of an undue thirst of popularity. It is true, that beyond most men, he prized it for its own sake, yet he never rendered homage to it at the expense of truth or justice, or national policy. No candidate for public favour ever so braved popular feeling as did Mr. Jefferson, in his opinion on domestic slavery, or when he invited Paine to America. But his moral character, as a whole, may be inferred from the unquestioned fact that every one with whom he had ever been in the habits of domestic or familiar intercourse, whether as a friend, physician, fellow-labourer, or secretary, and who best knew him, felt for him the liveliest attachment, and the highest esteem and confidence.

He was by temperament habitually cheerful and sanguine. He felt misfortune acutely, but his mind, by its native elasticity, soon regained its spring; and though experience had its usual effect in moderating the ardour and extent of his hopes, he was still fascinated by her more temperate illusions. It was this feature of his character which, more than all his success in life, made him, on the whole, one of the happiest of men.

Though never captious or petulant, he was sufficiently prone to resentment for intended injury; but even then he was neither violent nor implacable. His ill will was more frequently and more earnestly excited in behalf of his country or his party than of himself; and this was no less the case after he was withdrawn from the theatre of public affairs, than when he was the leader of that party and a candidate for the presidency. He always numbered some of the federalists

among his personal friends, and he continued his kind feelings towards Mr. Adams as long as the other would permit. He never failed to do justice to the purity and integrity of General Washington, in the most angry period of party excitement, when some, who afterwards became his eulogists, openly reviled him. Nor was he slow to acknowledge the virtues and talents of Alexander Hamilton. He had a bust of that eminent man in the entrance hall of his house, opposite to his own by Ceracchi, and when any reference to it was made by his guests, he has remarked that they were "opposed in death as in life," in a tone and manner that showed that no vestige of ill feeling was left on his mind.

If we estimate his intellect by its great results rather than by its particular efforts, we must place it in the highest rank. He was able to keep together, to animate, and guide the republican party, from the time that he became secretary of state in 1790 to 1809, when he retired to private life; during the whole of which period he had undisputed precedence in the love, esteem, and deference of that party, and in the hatred of their opponents. In effecting a revolution of parties, he had to contend against no ordinary men; and if he was aided by fortuitous circumstances, especially by the French revolution; it was only a master spirit that could have so profited by them.

Of the peculiar character of his mind it may be said that it was, perhaps, yet more distinguished for justness than quickness; for comprehension than invention; and though not wanting in originality, still more remarkable for boldness. Over that field of political speculation to which his mind was habitually turned, he seems to have been the most far-sighted of his countrymen in his estimate of the practicability of popular government; and the civilized world is every day approximating to opinions which he had deliberately formed fifty years ago. He was thus subjected to the reproach of being visionary from many of his countrymen, because he had the sagacity to see farther than their obtuser vision could reach; and while Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Adams, Mr. Jay, and the politicians of that school drew their fundamental principles of government from examples afforded by the history of Great Britain and other European nations, he saw that these prin-

ciples must change, because time was washing away the foundations on which they rested. They looked to the accidents of history, and assumed that the future would be like the past; he to the principles of human action, modified as they are by the progressive changes of civil society. But he looked to the changing character of the soil itself. He saw, too, more distinctly than any of his contemporaries, the effects of the rapidly increasing population of these states. He anticipated the melancholy destiny of the Indian race, and cherished the only system which could have averted it, consistently with the safety and honour of the whites. His views of the future difficulties arising from domestic slavery, are yet in a state of probation, and are to be verified or contradicted by time. But on all these great questions there are more and more converts to his opinions, among intelligent minds; and maxims which were once adopted by his adherents with the blind deference formerly paid to the *dicta* of Pythagoras, are now embraced by speculative minds as the discoveries of political sagacity, or the logical deductions of political wisdom.

His religious creed, as disclosed in his correspondence, cannot perhaps be classed with that of any particular sect, but was nearer the Socinian than any other. In the last years of his life, when questioned by any of his friends on this subject, he used to say he was "an Unitarian."

Mr. Jefferson's acquirements were extensive, and generally accurate. There was no branch of human knowledge in which he had not made more or less proficiency. Mathematics, astronomy, physics—in all its departments, law—municipal and national—language, philosophy, history, all the liberal, and most of the mechanical arts. His knowledge of architecture extended to its minutest details. In such a multiplicity of subjects, his acquaintance with some was of course slight, especially with chemistry and metaphysics. But his knowledge of mankind—of the diversities of human character, and the motives of human action—was consummate. He made a just estimate of every man, whether a friend or foe, whom he judged worthy of serious attention. He was indeed often deceived in his stewards and overseers; but that was partly because, beyond the reach of his supervision, they yielded to the temptations of negligence, and waste, or fraud; and partly

because he was all his life too much engrossed by the public affairs to give due attention to his own. When acting for the public, no one ever made choice of fitter agents.

As an author, he has left no memorial that is worthy of his genius; for the public papers drawn by him are admired rather for the patriotic spirit which dictated them than for the intellectual power they exhibit. They presented no occasion for novelty of thought, or argument, or diction. His purpose was only to make a judicious and felicitous use of that which every body knew and would assent to; and this object he has eminently fulfilled. His "Notes on Virginia," though stamped with his characteristic independence of mind, are rather remarkable for the extent of his statistical knowledge, in a country and at a period when knowledge of that kind was so difficult of attainment; and his "Manual" of parliamentary practice required nothing more than care and discrimination. His diplomatic correspondence throughout, shows that he possessed logical powers of the highest order; and his letters, especially those of his latter years, are written with great elegance and felicity. They have all the ease of Addison, with far greater precision. His style is always natural, flowing, and perspicuous; rarely imaginative, and never declamatory. It was occasionally marked by neologisms, where he thought there were no apt words already in use. It was neither diffuse nor concise, but more inclined to the former.

His tastes were those which commonly distinguish a lively sensibility. He delighted in music, painting, and sculpture, and was an enthusiast in architecture. Though temperate in the pleasures of the table, he had a high relish for them, and his discriminating palate soon learnt to appreciate the merits of French cookery. It was this supposed disloyalty of taste that Patrick Henry meant to reprove, when he said, "he had no notion of a man's abjuring his native victuals." In early life he was fond of dress, but in his latter years his appearance was rather plain than showy. He was always scrupulously attentive to cleanliness. His favorite exercise was riding, and his only game, chess. He had once been a good performer on the violin.

In person he was above six feet high, thin, and erect. His complexion was light, his eyes blue, his nose long, pointed, and

slightly turned up. His hair, of which he had lost none, had been red, became gray, faintly tinged with its original hue. For some years before his death his hearing was somewhat impaired, but he retained his sight, as well as his teeth, to the last.

His manners were frank, mild, and courteous; occasionally, when he was particularly desirous of pleasing, graceful, and irresistibly engaging. His conversation was always cheerful, sometimes light and facetious, but seldom either impassioned or witty. From the profound respect with which he was usually listened to, he was occasionally abrupt and positive; but in this speaking, as it were, *ex cathedra*, he was never betrayed into haughtiness or ill-humour.

As a practical statesman he was prompt, prudent, and judicious: in general, cautious and politic, but occasionally bold, where boldness was wise. In his first contest with the royalist party in the revolutionary times; in that which related to the church establishment, and other great innovations in the civil polity of Virginia, he was adventurous, firm and uncompromising. But whether exhibiting courage or caution, his unfailing complacency of temper stood him in good stead, both with friend and adversary. No one better understood the management of a popular assembly than he did that of the House of Representatives, and he has been known, when he had a favourite measure to carry, to convey his opinion with so much address to those members who were likely to prove troublesome, that they have regarded it as a suggestion of their own. On one occasion, a member who had been thus unconsciously tutored, remarked, after having left the president, that he believed "he could make Mr. Jefferson adopt any opinion he pleased." He was diligent, punctual, and exact in all matters of business; never evading, neglecting, nor delaying his public duties, great or small; and he was so methodical, that at all times in his life, he could in a few minutes lay his hand on any paper he possessed. Knowing how general and sensitive was personal vanity, he was careful never to offend it. At his public dinners, if he had forgotten the name of any member present, he would, on a signal to his secretary, withdraw to an adjoining apartment for the purpose of ascertaining it. He succeeded in preserving more harmony in his cabinet than any other president has done before or since. The

merits of his administration have been already fully mentioned. Its cardinal principles were economy, peace, simplicity, and a strict limitation to all the powers of the government, and no one could have carried them into effect with more fidelity, or greater success.

But it is on his merits as a lawgiver and political philosopher, that his claims to greatness chiefly rest: it is for these that he is to be praised or condemned by posterity; for beyond all his contemporaries has he impressed his opinions of government on the minds of the great mass of his countrymen. He thought he saw the sources of misgovernment in the conflict of interests and of passions between the rulers and the people; and that the only effectual way of avoiding this conflict was, by placing the government in the hands of a majority of the nation. All his political schemes and institutions were framed with a view to this object. Such were his opposition to the funding system, to banks, to court ceremonies, to the Cincinnati, to the independence of the judiciary, to the county courts of Virginia. His zeal in behalf of a general system of popular instruction; of his ward system; of the extension of the right of suffrage, all aimed at the same object of placing the power of the state in the hands of the greater number. It was these objects of his untiring zeal which won for him the title he most prized, "THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE." How future ages will regard this character it is perhaps not given to the present generation to anticipate; but from pregnant signs of the times, his friends have reason to believe that posterity is quite as likely to exceed as to fall short of their own veneration for the political character of THOMAS JEFFERSON.