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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### OF

### MR. JEFFERSON,

Extracted from a late London publication, entitled "Public Characters of 1800—1801."

### MR. JEFFERSON,

### VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE U. STATES OF AMERICA.

Mr. Jefferson was born in Virginia, and is now supposed to be somewhat turned of fifty. He is the son of a gentleman of that State, the same who was joint commissioner with Colonel Fry for settling and extending the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina in 1749.

He was educated in his native land, from which he was never absent till in service demanded his residence at the court of Paris, whither he was sent as an envoy.

Mr. Jefferson is tall, and slender made, fresh complexion, clear penetrating eye, hair inclining to red, and of very modest and affable deportment.

He was professionally bred a lawyer, though born to an affluent fortune; yet the public demand for the exercise of his talents in a higher sphere left him but little time to enjoy his native eloquence as a barrister, nor was he of a turn to profit by the arts of ordinary practice. His country called him forward at a very early period; and promised itself, in his abilities, those very important ends which have been so conspicuously realized in whatever he has been engaged.

In private life, in his younger days, the daily days which fortune seems to have allotted to him for an uninterrupted social intercourse with the world, he was, in every circle, and all of the first were competitors for his presence; its ornament, instructor, & pride. Close application had supplied the want of many European advantages. Without neglecting the particular study to which his primary employments were devoted, Mr. Jefferson found also sufficient hours to attend to the polite acquirements. In these auxiliary accomplishments, he attained a knowledge in drawing, geometry, geography, astronomy, natural philosophy, and music, in which he was considered a proficient; nor was his information in history and state affairs neglected for these adornments.

At an early age he married a mild & amiable wife, the daughter of Mr. Wates, an eminent counsellor in Virginia; an affectionate partner, who, unfortunately, no longer exists. The care of this lady of course devolved on him a more weighty parental care, in the education of her two lovely daughters; they have been reared under his immediate inspection, and have accompanied his diplomatic functions whithersoever they have been directed.

It could not be expected that a man of such qualifications, in a country which stood so much in need of them, could be suffered long to remain in philosophical retirement; man is not born for himself alone, and the voice of his constituents claimed his labors in the fields of jurisprudence.

In the legislature of Virginia he became a distinguished and useful member, and has left many traces on record of sufficient importance to indicate future greatness.

During the revolutionary period which separated the United States from the mother country, we find him advancing to a still more dignified station. He was one of those in whose hands the people thought it to confide the most material events of their political existence and future greatness. He was honored with the public confidence during its most important struggles, and for two years in the famous congress which brought about the revolution, and which is now every where highly respected. In this congress he followed a character which will stand dignified to the end of time—a character which can never better, perhaps, be expressed; that it already is by the pencil of Mr. Trumbull.

A greater example of unlimited confidence than was evidenced in the address of his constituents on the awful occasion of his departure, may probably never be recorded in history. "You assert that there is a fixed intention to invade our rights and privileges; we own that we do not see this clearly, but since you assure us that it is so, we believe the fact. We are about to take a very dangerous step, but we confide in you, and are ready to support you in every measure you shall think proper to adopt." To proceed farther in this paragraph, with feeble accounts of a man, who should be only mentioned to be revered, would be to offer insult to the superior pen which have preceded, and merit a stigma for arrogance: The Duke de Liancourt, to the character of an agriculturalist, (which both he and the board of agriculture in England have bestowed on Mr. Jefferson) has added the following very beautiful and faithful picture:

"They must be very ignorant of the history of America who know not that Mr. Jefferson shared with George Washington, Franklin, John Adams, Mr. Jay, and a few others, the toils and dangers of the revolution in all its different stages; that in the famous congress which guided and consolidated it, he displayed a boldness and firmness of character, a fund of talents and knowledge, and a steadiness of principles, which will hand down his name to posterity with glory, and assure to him for ever the respect and gratitude of all the friends of liberty. It was he who, in the famous congress, so respectfully and so much respected, in that congress, ever inaccessible to the seduction, fear, and apparent weakness of the people; who jointly with Mr. Lee, another deputy of Virginia, proposed the declaration of independence. It was he who, supported principally by John Adams, pressed the deliberation of the subject, and carried it, bearing down the wary prudence of some of his colleagues, possessed of an equal share of patriotism, but of less courage. It was he who was charged with drawing up this max-

terpiece of dignified wisdom and patriotic pride. It was he who, being afterwards appointed governor of Virginia, at the period of the invasion of Arnold and Cornwallis, acquired a peculiar claim on the gratitude of his fellow-citizens. It was he who, as the first ambassador of the United States in France, filled at that momentous epoch, that distinguished post to the satisfaction of both nations. In fine, it was he who, as Secretary of State in 1792, when the ridiculous and dis-gaining pretensions of Mr. Genet, & the infy arrogance of the French minister, endeavored alternately to shake the political weakness of the United States, induced his government to speak a noble and independent language, which would have done credit to the most formidable power. The long correspondence carried on with these two designing agents, was, from its just, profound, and able reasoning, he a sufficient counter to the author the reputation of an accomplished statesman."

Here we must recur to a critical period in Mr. Jefferson's civil administration. He was the second governor in Virginia, under his renovated constitution; the successor of that Patrick Henry, who was the successor of Lord Dunmore, and who boldly held the reign of an untiring tycoon.

At this arduous period he had much to contend with; for he was not only the object of an open enemy in the field, but insinuated the insidious artifice of an assassin-like faction, who offered his reputation in the dark, or ready to flay it with a scorching whip. Justice to this gentleman demands a notice of some of the more overt attacks which were made on him, & which, though vague & loose in themselves, have been frequently recited by men ready enough to do him evil: It has been objected that he abandoned the government of Virginia to its enemies, and sought personal safety in his flight to the mountains; and that he refused to pay military claims in preference to those of the civil list, during his administration of that government.

If the first of these insinuations is supposed to apply to the evacuation of the Virginia metropolis, an American officer now present was with him on the occasion, and contradicts the fact: it is the second which general Tarleton did himself the honor of paying to the liberating councils of that country, the whole legislature must have been equally implicated: Dumouriez's flight legs! The propriety of his pecuniary appropriations are, perhaps, easily to be justified.

In regard to the first point of view, it is, authorize the bold assertion, that the government deserted Mr. Jefferson, not that Mr. Jefferson deserted the government, on this occasion of unparalleled risk and difficulty. The gentleman present, and now ready to testify, was that he preferred an officer in the confidence of the commanding general in that part of the country, and was, on this particular occasion sent to Mr. Jefferson with dispatches of an important nature, (being chiefly concerned by the general's particular order, on the most noted running horse which the whole country afforded). He found Mr. J. in the town of Manchester, opposite to Richmond, which is the metropolis spoken of, and then about fourteen miles from the rear of General Arnold, who was retiring from his depository incursion. He learnt from the confidential friends who surrounded the governor, that his excellency had been busily engaged even in personal labor to secure these very arms in a place of safety which were abandoned by his citizens to the mercy of the enemy; while some, indeed, were as industriously employed in circulating falsehoods to his prejudice.

In the respect of his pecuniary appropriations before alluded to, gentlemen of the army seem to have been a little premature in imputing a prejudice against a public character, whose office demanded of him an independent exercise of his judgment. This might in part, perhaps, proceed from the imperfect knowledge to which military life in general attains in the affairs of civil government, and partly from those false suggestions which are wont to rise from the malice of faction. It is true that a part of the army were discontented with Mr. Jefferson, and it is equally true that their jealousy of pecuniary partialities was the chief cause; but it remains to be determined whether this was a reasonable dissatisfaction. It was a prevalent complaint that the civil list were paid while the claims of the military were un-attended to. In canvassing this matter, let us take a view of the principles. Every one knows the situation of Virginia at that time; her credit was sunk, her strength exhausted by the marching and counter-marching of the troops, invaded by a powerful enemy, and her contingent fund at a very low ebb: certainly the propriety of supporting her civil government through such difficulties will be viewed as a primary object by all sound politicians. Without that supreme head the very safe which called for a defence would have been annihilated, and the dissatisfied military would have been disorganized, and no longer necessary. With regard to the component individuals who were included in the civil list, it was necessary to support them; for to do this was essential to the existence of jurisprudence, and indispensably necessary for the support of good order in the community. The people of the metropolis (Richmond) were neither willing nor able to take the whole burthen of government upon their own shoulders; nor were they on any account, bound to submit to it: yet the departments of administration necessarily reside here and the inhabitants must necessarily be paid for accommodating men who, having sacrificed the conveniences of life to the duties of public service, were unavoidably dependent on the national fund. Had the treasury of the State been adequate to the whole demand, it is presumed no man would have felt greater pleasure than Mr. Jefferson in the accommodation of all their wants; for benevolence is a trait in his constitution which has more than once placed his private credulity in the hands of the swimmer. It is moreover to be considered, that the civil list contained but a small number of individuals; the military roll comprised a very large one. Of two evils it was certainly proper to choose the least; besides, the military had one resource which was beyond the immediate power

of the civil authority; their arms and the laws of war empowered and justified them in taking needful supplies (otherwise than in waste) from those to whom Providence had been most bountiful; for such had been made the common lot of the war, the whole property of the people being voluntarily pledged for its defence, at the period of its commencement. Some of the military however, had a different fence of these matters, and preferred to quarrel upon the chief magistrate those whom rank and military pride should have better instructed the rules of decorum and common civility.

As early as the year 1774 Mr. Jefferson had appeared in print; and it was about this distracted period of revolutionary commotion that, amidst his numerous official functions, he was called upon by a foreigner of distinction, (and to be required by the king of France) to furnish the notes on the state of Virginia, which have been since that time published to the world, and have added somewhat to his literary reputation. It is to be regretted that these notes contain, perhaps, an inadvertent reflection on the character of an officer, which has been the subject of animadversion in the American prints, and has been severely reprehended by the law-advocate of the United States: mention is made of this unlucky circumstance because it would be carnal to hide, and yet it seems equally proper to call a spade over its resemblance, before it does not seem natural to the general texture of his mind to do any man a willful injury. The picture drawn by Mr. Jefferson is certainly a high coloured one; and taking all things together, it seems to present him as the dupe of misinformation, unless we admit the charitable supposition, that the extricating moments of such a exigency may be allowed to elevate a man above the homo sapiens Americanus, and above ordinary responsibility. I wish for his sake, and for his country's, that no further mischief may issue from the issue which has been taken in this point; and, as it must be highly honorable to Mr. Jefferson to retract in a case of error, I am persuaded that the happiest termination on both sides will be found in elucidation and obliteration.

To return to the particulars of Mr. Jefferson's official life, and to contemplate inquisitively into his prejudice as thrown out to the world by those partisans of evil who alone have cause to dread his administration, it is more safe to rely on facts than assertions. In 1774 he was the author of "A Summary View of the British Empire" will any man venture to assert that he did not comprehend the rights of man, why should he become the partisan of France to infringe the very rights which he had defined, and so long supported?

In 1780, he was governor of Virginia. All the objections to his administration which have yet been heard of are herein before fairly stated, and controverted on the personal knowledge of the writer. Is there a single insinuation that will bear reflection, although he governed under every possible impediment of invasion and insurrection?

In 1781, he wrote his notes on Virginia. These were not intended for the press; yet they have found their way in the print. Can any man say he has care to be ashamed of the principles he has avowed here? Let his book be read, it will bear witness for the man.

But there is one of his avowed acts in the appendix which opens his whole political soul, in the very moment of success (call it even impunity) the termination of the war in 1783; it is his draught of fundamental constitution. In the summer of 1783 it was expected that the people of Virginia would call a convention together for the purpose of establishing and revising the essential parts of their rights, by the formation of a radical law, or in other words, constitution. Mr. Jefferson (who doubtless would have been an active member of that body) had prepared himself at leisure, and deliberately digested the form of a constitution, such as he conceived calculated to secure the rights and liberty of his country in the most permanent manner, and with the least possible restraint on the individual inclination.

He opens the plan of this constitution with a declaration to the world of the nature of the war, and other pre-existing circumstances which had rendered the proposed measure necessary. He professes that a convention should be invited by the voluntary resolution of the legislature; and, of course, deduces the dependence and submission of the law giving power to its origin, the people. From this constitutional convention of the community, he delegates the departments of jurisprudence to the legislature, the judicial, and executive authority; and he balances the whole very nicely in equilibrium. He divides the legislature into two houses, and renders their concurrence an essential of their laws. He proposes that their election should be annual. He adjusts the equality of election by proportioning the country representatives to the number of the electors, and by limiting the number of delegates of which that house shall consist. His senatorial divisions consists of districts and classes. He establishes the method of voting viva voce, and gives the suffrage to all who are enrolled in the militia. He regulates and confines the time and manner of legislative meeting and adjournment; and, giving the governor a power of convening them, admits a latitude in the case of infection or invasion, which may render a temporary removal expedient. A majority of either house forms its quorum. He allows the members no privilege whatever beyond personal protection while they are engaged in public business; and, (what may seem extraordinary in England) he makes the market price of wheat the medium of their wages, thereby apprehending stimulating an attention to agriculture, while he dispenses the medium of equity. Ultimately, he pays a due and scrupulous attention to the doctrines of exclusion, vacancies, & limits of power.

To the executive governor, the council of state, and its president, Mr. Jefferson has paid equal attention, as well as to the judiciary department. He has also proposed a council of revision to consist of members from the two several departments of the

executive and judicial; to this council he proposes the submission of all bills (which shall have passed the legislature) before they become ultimately a law; and, from the rules laid down in this case, it seems next to impossible that the legislative wisdom of the country should be surprised into the will of a party.

He has been equally attentive to the preservation of the State sovereignty and the confederacy of the confederacy. In the appointment of delegates to Congress, he has left the election in the hands of the State legislature, but has been careful to exclude the member of the executive power from either voice or seat.

He has particularly guarded the writ of habeas corpus as the right of every man, and that ten days shall be the longest possible stretch of imprisonment after such writ is demanded.

He has taken due care to subvert the military authority to the civil power. Printing presses are only responsible for the propagation of falsehoods, and constitutional conventions may be called whenever they are thought to be receded by two out of the three branches of government.

Such is the magna charta devised by this great and honest statesman: How people in England should conceive a man dangerous, & as a partial friend to France, who is so willing to tie his own hands from doing mischief, is astonishing. But the wisdom and justice of his public character will appear in a light yet more true, perhaps, if we examine how far he may have practised the principles he has prescribed during his civil administration in the capacities of delegate to congress, foreign Ambassador, and Secretary of State.

In the year 1781-3, he was in congress from whence he was appointed as ambassador to the court of Spain, but the approach of peace, it is presumed, rendered his voyage unnecessary. In 1784, he was sent to congress at Annapolis, in Maryland, in March, 1785, Mr. Jefferson was in England.

Shortly after this period, we find him at the court of Versailles, from whence he communicated his negotiations concerning the freedom of the tobacco trade, the powerful opposition of the farmer, general, &c. to Mr. Jay, minister of foreign affairs at New-York, in a letter dated May 29, 1786. In this letter he evinces considerable diplomatic talents, and success, having gained the approbation of Mr. de Vergennes, and the acquiescence of Mr. de Calonne. He has also recommended in the people of Carolina an improvement in preparing their staple commodity, in order to lead the Mediterranean market.

His attention to the fine arts, in the midst of his diplomatic functions, is not only a striking proof of the universality of Mr. Jefferson's genius, but strongly evinces his application to those important points which relate to the improvement of his native country, and contribute to promote the happiness of man.

A mind thus elevated above the ordinary employments of its species, is little susceptible of the dross influence of party policy; it is only for the governing disposition which is incapable of leaving the beaten tract of evil habit, that such a limited spirit is truly appropriate. In a very concise letter to Dr. Hales, president of Yale College, dated Paris, September 18, 1786, this gentleman displays a fund of sentiment and information sufficient to enable him to the confidence of his country, and the admiration of posterity. He has, indeed, suggested a good idea, that the people of the art ascendants from the American Indians; but he has strongly impoised the conjecture with at least well chosen facts.

When we had a view, in recital from public duty capable of exploring the wilds of nature, the connections of the human species, and the ancient intercourse of long lost nations with each other; when we find him attentive to painting, to literature, & the fine arts; to the purity of metals, to the improvement of optics, to transposition of facsimiles, and of science in general, we must allow him a grade above the tools of fashion, admit him to a higher seat of dignity than the mere mediator of a national treaty about tobacco and rice, and allow him a long qualification for the presidential chair of a new country which stands in need of executive talents.

On the 2nd of October, 1786, Mr. de Calonne announced to Mr. Jefferson, by letter from Fouché, the intention of the king of France to favor the commerce of the United States as much as possible to double the number of their ports; to reduce the duties which were prejudicial to the commerce with America; that after the expiration of a contract made by the farmer's general with Mr. Morris (concerning tobacco) no similar one should be permitted; and that, during the existence of the term of Mr. Morris's contract, the farmer's general should be compelled to purchase annually about seven thousand big-heads of tobacco;—This violation of the tobacco trade, (though not wholly conformable to the principles proposed by Mr. Jefferson on the coast of Vergennes) appears to have been the result of Mr. Jefferson's negotiation, which he had in view to eradicate that monopoly which had so long existed.

In the arguments used by Mr. Jefferson on this occasion, in respect to annulling the duties of France upon the oil trade, he appears to have carried equal conviction, for although France could not consent to a total abolition, she quit the United States on a footing with the Hanse Towns, and Mr. de Calonne assigns her pre-existing treaties with other nations as a reason for her doing no more: His most Christian majesty, moreover, thought fit to abolish the duties of fabrication upon this article.

On this occasion he also obtained an encouragement of the Carolina rice trade; and an abolition of duties upon the article of pot ash, pearl ash, leather, skins, hair and raw leather, masts, yards, knees for ship building, red cross, green oak, and timber of all kinds; ships built in the United States; straws, reeds, and leeds from States, and books and paper exported thither. There was also agreement on this negotiation, certain facilities on the exportation of the wines of Bourdeaux, Guyenne, and Touraine; and on the exportation of arms and military stores to the States.

At this period the consumption of Carolina rice in France appears to have been about one half of their total demand, as stated in a letter from Mr. Jefferson to Dr. Ramsey of South-Carolina, dated 27th October, 1786, at Paris. As much of

\* Travels in North America, vol. v. p. 69, &c. Paris edit.

\* See his character of Colonel Crespien—Jefferson's notes, page 104.

\* See Jefferson's Notes, Appendix, page 146.