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ONE WELSHMAN:
A GLANCE AT A GREAT CAREER.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS, AUTUMN SESSION, UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF WALES, ABERYSTWYTH, OCTOBER 31st, 1912.

BY

WHITELAW REID.



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UNIV OF
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ONE WELSHMAN.

THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR AT THE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF WALES, ABERYSTWYTH, OCTOBER 31st, 1912.

I must begin by expressing my warm appreciation of this welcome, as well as of the high honour you have conferred in summoning me to this oldest of Welsh universities, to follow the long line of eminent scholars and publicists who have dignified these academic occasions by their service. However unworthy your present speaker may feel himself for a place in that line, he has imagined that at any rate he might be thought to show respect for this large and select audience and for the dignity of the occasion by an effort to estimate a great transatlantic representative of your own blood, and to recall to your minds some details in his career.

Comparisons are rarely agreeable and often delusive. The general outlines of the career referred to have been familiar to you and to all the world for a century. Since you are not known to have assigned to this man the rank

beside the famous Welshmen who have illuminated your long and brilliant domestic history which we should have thought deserved, it may be because you know your history far better than we do, or because you have not rated his achievements so high as we do. You observe I do not allow for exaggeration in our own estimate,—we rarely do! But I do not think I have been under any temptation to exaggerate his merits, and I certainly am not blind to his faults.

He was the founder and life-long leader of a political party I profoundly distrusted, and in my small way have spent my life in opposing. In spite of that, I am about to venture on a rash and I fear ungracious task. I am going to bespeak your friendly attention to a few reasons for thinking that some work of this transatlantic offshoot of the Welsh stock does almost as much honour to the Welsh land and race as that of any of your great sons throughout your history. I am even bold enough to think he has made the world his debtor as much as did Llewelyn, ablest and most successful of all Welsh princes; or as much as that famous ruler and rebel, Owen Glendower, who five hundred years ago held his court near this town.

The peaceful laurels of your American Welshman may last even longer than those bestowed by your grateful country on Griffith ap Rhys, for victories over Norman and Flemish troops. We cannot pretend to claim for him the eulogy earned later by the Rev. Griffith Jones, rector of Llanddowror—that nearly one-third of the whole population of his state had been taught to read in his schools. And yet, even in fields akin to that, he did two things that I well know insure Welsh respect. As a young legislator he succeeded (against the ruling and fashionable classes) in making the slave-trade unlawful in his state ; and as a weary old man, after having climbed to the very top of the ladder of his nation's greatness, having spent forty years in continuous public service, under harassing responsibilities, having shaken the world, changed its geography, and largely remoulded its government, he gave his declining years to the organization of a state university ; and as his dying wish asked that that should be one of the three acts of his life singled out for record on his tombstone !

My observations have not led me to think Wales particularly backward, any more than my own country, in appropriating and raising

to at least their true level the high records of her sons—when they are dead and gone. Yet in the recitals of great things done by the Welsh blood I have not often seen this man's work credited to the offspring of the gallant little principality. Still, it was exactly in the field that belongs peculiarly to this land of mountains and of liberty :

Of old sat Freedom on the heights,
The thunders breaking at her feet ;
Above her shook the starry lights,
She heard the torrents meet.

Possibly Welsh writers may have been restrained by the doubt hinted by the man himself as to his actual lineage. He began his autobiography by saying that it was a "tradition" in his father's family that his ancestor came from Wales and from the mountain of Snowdon. But the stress of politics, as we shall see, had thrown him into an ultra-democratic pose as to any ancestors at all. The pose became more necessary to his politics because of the hatred engendered in that aristocratic, cavalier colony by his early success in certain radical and levelling measures ; and it was made more real by his own consciousness that after all he had been by origin a plain farmer on the frontier, and had risen

out of his class to a rank among the landed gentry. This might explain the rather superior air with which the future Democratic party leader dismissed the whole subject in the remark: "Let every one ascribe to these pedigrees the faith and merit he chooses." But he was not able, with all his democratic pose, to leave it at that. A little later we find him carefully recording the fact that he had found his family name in old Welsh law papers—just as, later on, when he heard that his wife's family once had a coat of arms, he hastened to have it hunted up, bought it, and thenceforward displayed it liberally at his home and on his grounds.

In estimating this shadow of a shade of doubt which he chose to leave on the statements of his own father and grandfather as to his origin, we must remember that this man was also, from boyhood to extreme old age, one of the most laborious and precise, most minute and even meticulous of recorders. He was not able in mere personal accounts of pocket money, covering years and every insignificant outlay, to set down one item, or even to carry it forward to next year's balance, at either 3*d.* or 2*d.*, if in fact it had been 2½*d.* Naturally such a man was not able to accept

any family testimony or anything except a legal record, duly sealed and witnessed, for any ancestor farther back than his grandfather—especially since he was the known son of an ill-educated and hard labouring pioneer, who rose at last to be a land surveyor ; and since he was, himself, often found jeering at the vanity of *having* grandfathers.

Now I venture to think that on equally substantial grounds we might commit the folly of questioning the Welsh blood of Howel Dda the Good, grandson of Roderick the Great, or of that Prince of Gwynedd, who reigned over this happy land forty-four years as an “independent vassal” of the King of England.

I shall indulge in no such outrage. I shall request you to assume that this man’s father and grandfather knew where their family came from when it entered the new colony, only two or three generations earlier. And so I am here to ask you to include among Welsh contributions to the larger movements of the world the name and world-wide fame of Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence.

Do I need reason for this beyond his unchallenged Welsh origin? Who will name

the achievement by any other man of Welsh blood or of British blood which has more largely influenced the world for good than that empire-shaking, continent-shaking document, that saved Great Britain from herself; that saved America *for* herself, and developed in place of the two and a half millions of that day a nation of ninety-three millions on the continent, while it protects and guides islands of ten or twelve millions more in every zone and on every sea; that shook down the most obstinate of monarchies, turned it into a republic, with a regenerated people, now the most prosperous government France ever had, and the most stable and enduring it ever had since Louis XIV—not excepting that of either Napoleon.

Yet these are merely some of the external results more or less distinctly traceable to the momentous statement he addressed to the civilized world on the Fourth of July, 1776. I do not dwell upon any of them or argue them. Still less do I insist upon the English style, lucid, convincing, and of a stately dignity (unsurpassed, I venture to think, by any official paper in your thousand years of Parliamentary history), in which he clothed one of the most philosophic and unassailable and yet most revolutionary

accounts of the origin of government since Plato : “ We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights ; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” There was the inward and spiritual meaning of this whole gospel of your American Welshman—the Declaration to which he brought the people of his country and to which he drew the considerate judgment of all others.

His real work was the diffusion of an unaccustomed idea of the origin of government and of the scope of human rights—rights held not as Englishmen or Americans or Frenchmen, but simply as men. That is the origin of the spiritual unrest which broke out in Europe at the close of the eighteenth century, and now pervades all classes everywhere—an unrest not to be quieted until it triumphs. But it never meant, and Jefferson never meant, the madness which the agitators of the present day find in it. It never meant withdrawing the mainspring of the world’s progress—free individual initiative. On the contrary, it

meant the widest extension of free individual initiative to every human being capable of it, limited only by respect for the equal rights of others. As Mr. Jefferson wrote to M. L'Hommande (Paris, 1787): "The policy of the American government is to leave their citizens free, neither restraining nor aiding them in their pursuits." And to M. de Meunier, in 1795: "I am a warm zealot for the attainment and enjoyment by all mankind of as much liberty as each may exercise, without injury to the equal liberty of his fellow-citizens."

Neither does it seem to me in the least worth while to revive the old controversies as to the originality of the Declaration, or as to what thinkers first conceived its propositions. Whether mere platitude, as some said, or wild speculation by an irresponsible theorist, as others said, or profound and philosophical consideration of the subjects of greatest human concern, as in the end it came to be generally considered, the famous Declaration consisted of principles first so stated, arranged, collated and phrased by practically the sole pen of Thomas Jefferson.

Still, forty-seven years later, his fiery old

colleague, John Adams, wrote to Pickering : " There is not an idea in it but what had been hackneyed in Congress for two years before. The substance of it is contained in the declaration of rights, and the violation of those rights, in the journals of Congress in 1774. Indeed, the essence of it is contained in a pamphlet voted and printed by the town of Boston before the first Congress met, composed by James Otis, as I suppose, in one of his lucid intervals, and pruned and polished by Samuel Adams."* Even Lee of Virginia wrote that it was copied from Locke's Treatise on Government. Others traced its inspiration to Rousseau's Contrat Social, or to Montesquieu's Esprit des Lois ; and others, with better reason, to Coke upon Littleton. A less respectable suggestion was that it was imitated from the Mecklenburg Declaration.

Now, Mr. Jefferson was chosen by the Congress a member, the member with the largest vote, on the committee for its preparation. The other members of the committee were John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston. He was chosen by this committee to prepare and present the work. He did

* " Life of Thomas Jefferson," by Henry S. Randall, Vol. I., p. 186.

present it ; the people of his country did unite and act upon it ; the world did give it a startled and universal consideration. That is the essential thing. There were four other men of the highest note on this committee of Congress. No one of them did it ; no one claims to have done it. Every change ever made in it from Mr. Jefferson's original draft is on record. No one of them is vital ; though, as John Adams himself said, it might have been better if some passages had been left as they were. Still, the document is in better taste without some of them. The young, self-trained writer of thirty-three had not then wholly outgrown his sophomore style, and he never outgrew his habit of over-statement. But as it stands it is essentially his, and as such it has taken its place among the epoch-making state papers of the world.

He might no doubt have remained silent under the remark of his old friend and co-worker of Massachusetts. But silence was rarely his gift—especially when his vanity was wounded. So he wrote : “ The observations that the Declaration contained no new ideas, that it is a commonplace compilation, its sentiments hackneyed in Congress two years before, and its essence contained in Otis's pamphlet, may

all be true. Of that I am not to be the judge. Otis's pamphlet I never saw, and whether I had gathered my ideas from reading or reflection I do not know. I know only that I turned to neither book nor pamphlet while writing it. I did not consider it as any part of my charge to invent new ideas altogether, and to offer no sentiment which had ever been expressed before. I will say for Mr. Adams, however, that he supported the Declaration with zeal and ability, fighting fearlessly for every word of it."* It must be admitted that Mr. Jefferson does not appear badly in this little passage at arms. To-day certainly no high-minded American would have had the author of the Declaration answer otherwise, or would have had his concluding paragraph, which welded indissolubly together the thirteen colonies, changed from the words in which he framed and signed it :

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them

* Randall's "Life," Vol. I., p. 186.

and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved ; and that as free and independent States, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.

It requires a profound conviction to present to this audience such remarks concerning this Declaration and its author. Even then it requires some rashness to assume that they can be welcome, or even tolerated. If I were in my first year in official residence at this court instead of the eighth, I feel sure that I should not venture upon it. But I have had too many and too varied experiences as to the breadth of British political thinking, and the generous hospitality with which Britons regard all political opinion different from their own, and particularly all honest political opinion from any branch of their own race, to hesitate even at what must at first sight seem like the canonization, in your own land and at your own shrines, of one who struck as powerful a blow against the British Empire of that day as any man within its vast extent or throughout its long and glorious history.

But the blow was not against the British

people. It was *for* British rights and British freedom at home as well as across the seas. That view has been so often presented by your own writers that it may now be treated as widely accepted. No one has of late put it forward more gracefully or more persuasively than the present Lord President of the Council, Lord Morley.

The young man who wrote the Declaration at the age of thirty-three, without ever having been out of his native colonies, or much even out of the one in which he was born, after a subsequent career crowded with conspicuous duties and honours, and half a century later, looked back over his whole life and selected, as we have seen, the three things he had done by which he wished to be remembered, and which he wished recorded on his tombstone. Two were the work of his youth, the statute for Religious Freedom in Virginia, and the Declaration; the third has already been mentioned, the passion of his old age, the founding of the University of Virginia.

What a list of undisputed and extraordinary achievements he thus ignored! Besides these three, he was the author of "A Summary View of the Rights of British America," subsequently

adopted by Edmund Burke and published broadcast in England, with the result that the name of Thomas Jefferson decorated the list of proscribed in the first bill of attainder. This "Summary View" was afterward considered even more cogent and comprehensive than the Declaration. Against a multitude of difficulties, somewhat of his own making, he secured the annexation of a territorial empire to the nation his Declaration had created—the province of Louisiana, at the mouth of the Mississippi, with a vast extent of territory on the west bank of that river, stretching almost to the Canadian frontier, and, as he believed at the time, on the east almost to Florida. As a mere tyro in legislation he secured, against overwhelming social pressure, the abolition both of entail and of primogeniture in his native colony. He served for a year on various diplomatic commissions in Europe, and for four years as Minister to France, during the turbulence of the Revolution; consulted not only privately but officially with the revolutionists, and went beyond diplomatic usage or propriety in manifesting his active sympathy with them; served twice as Governor of his native state, once as Secretary of State to George Washington, once as Vice-President of the United States and twice as President.

He made great contributions to the plant life and to the agriculture of the new country, and imported for the public benefit high-bred cattle and other domestic animals. He issued the patent for the cotton gin, and was almost the first to grasp the enormous possibilities which finally led to its making cotton King--to the temporary misfortune of Lancashire, and the honour for ever of her splendid and self-denying working men. Although not strong in finance, he gave shape in our system to one really valuable financial contribution, the decimal system. He created and led the Democratic party, which ruled the country, almost without a break, for over half a century. He first taught his countrymen their vast inheritance, its capabilities and even its extent, from the North-western stretch revealed in the Louisiana purchase to the yet more important and imperial region revealed by the Lewis and Clarke expedition, which was absolutely his, in its conception, in its organization, in the choice of the men to conduct it, and in its support.

Yet it was a sure instinct that led the old man to the briefer record on his tombstone. These three things were all great historic acts, one of them unquestionably of the first magnitude ; all absolutely disinterested, enormously

valuable, uplifting humanity and harming no one. Even his admirers must admit that his political career was chequered; his executive course many times open to criticism; that his modes of expressing convictions were often ill-considered and extravagant, and often amazingly inconsistent; and his acts as a politician frequently far below the standard of the philosophical writer on government. Nevertheless, the achievements he thus ignored embody a marvellous career for the raw-boned, red-headed son of the Albemarle County farmer and land-surveyor,—or for any man, in any age. Yet, great as they were, they were not needed for his tombstone record. Every entry on that was of itself a sure title to the gratitude of posterity; one of them certainly a sure title to immortality.

But if the figure I have been presenting as an honour to Wales has a head of gold, just as clearly it will be seen to have had feet of clay. There is no tyranny like that of a great idea. When once honestly entertained by a capable and sincere man, it possesses him, it obsesses him, and may lead or drive him anywhere. Mr. Jefferson honestly believed in the inalienable right of all men to life, liberty and

happiness, that governments were instituted among men to secure these, and that they derived their just powers only from the present consent of the governed. He did not see that governments were just as distinctly instituted to preserve order and protect men in their earnings, as well as their liberty, and that primarily every government must rest upon force. Carrying his own fascinating propositions to their limit, he thought the form of government should provide that the people could always and at once have their way, subject to no hindrances or delay for consideration. Whoever thought that needed was not to be trusted ; he was no friend to the liberties of the people. Consequently, Mr. Jefferson looked coldly on the Constitution of the United States as a system of concerted checks on the instant execution of the popular will, and believed the greatest danger the country was in came from the persons who made this Constitution. Most of them had fought for independence. He never had ; but he did not hesitate to consider them now eager to enslave the country they had risked their lives to free.

In this suspicious mood it was easy to attach importance to trifles. That the first President

should go to meet Congress, on its assembling, and give in person the communications concerning the state of the Union which the Constitution required of him, seemed to Mr. Jefferson a dangerous imitation of the King of England at the opening of Parliament—even though the alleged imitator was George Washington. That the first officer of the nation should not be always as accessible as a mechanic to anybody who had or fancied he had business with him was another aping of monarchical habits, and an evening reception at the White House was a distinct effort to set up a court. He knew nothing about national finance—any more than about his own ; and his distrust of Alexander Hamilton, Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, led him into absurd revelations of archaic and parochial notions on the subject. He thought we were not bound to pay any debts incurred for the public service by the generation before us, and had no right to incur any debts for the benefit of the next generation. Here is his own statement: "We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right by the will of its majority to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country. The period of a generation

is determined by the laws of mortality, varying a little in different climates, but offering a general average of nineteen years. At nineteen years, then, from the date of a contract the majority of the contractors are dead and their contract with them.”* Later on he advanced his estimate of a generation from nineteen to thirty-four years, but extended his ideas of the impossibility of longer binding obligation so as to include not merely debts, but laws, and even the Constitution itself! “The Constitution and the laws of their predecessors are extinguished in their natural course with those that gave them being. Every constitution, then, and every law naturally expires at the end of thirty-four years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force and not of right.” Such was the deliberate and carefully written opinion of the Father of the Democratic party. The greatest city of the Atlantic Coast has been governed now almost continuously by his followers for a century. In spite of these Jeffersonian principles, they have created in that time a debt constituting a first mortgage on all the property in New York City for \$815,000,000!

* “Writings of Thomas Jefferson,” edited by Paul Leicester Ford, Vol. X p. 389.

Possessed with such wild notions, he could not mind his own business in the Cabinet, but was perpetually harassing Washington with attacks on the financial policy of the Secretary of the Treasury—the same policy and the same Secretary of whom Daniel Webster said, thirty-five years later : “ He smote the rock of national resources, and abundant streams of revenue gushed forth. He touched the dead corpse of Public Credit, and it sprang upon its feet.” Of the policy thus justly eulogized on its results by the greatest American of the next generation, Mr. Jefferson finally brought himself to write “ Hamilton’s financial policy was grounded in corruption and dishonesty. It had two objects—first, as a puzzle to exclude popular understanding and inquiry ; secondly, as a machine for the corruption of the legislature.”* The lack of pure republican simplicity, as he conceived it, and the lack of sympathy with these amazing dogmas of Jeffersonian finance brought him by the end of the third administration to the belief that, at any cost, these monarchists in disguise, the supporters of George Washington and John Adams, must be turned out of the control of the government, to preserve “ our threatened liberties.”

* Ford’s edition of the “ Writings,” Anas, Vol. I., p. 160.

Thus the best of motives, the passion for liberty, led to the first great division of parties ; to the first split in Washington's Cabinet, from which Jefferson resigned after three years' service,* and to an embittered war upon his old colleague and friend, John Adams, whose Presidential career he cut short at the end of one term. On the one hand were the men of

* Partly owing to "incompatibility of temper," partly to a growing critical attitude towards Washington himself which was considered by some of Washington's friends positively disloyal, and partly to indiscreet and extravagant attacks like those later in the Mazzei letter. Nothing Mr. Jefferson ever wrote provoked so much censure at the time as this letter to Phillip Mazzei, an Italian gentleman with whom he had some special intimacy. Some sentences from the offensive passage in this letter follow :

"The aspect of our politics has wonderfully changed since you left us. In place of that noble love of liberty and republican government which carried us triumphantly through the war, an Anglican monarchical and aristocratical party has sprung up, whose avowed object is to draw over us the substance, as they have already done the forms, of the British government. The main body of our citizens, however, remain true to their republican principles ; the whole landed interest is republican, and so is a great mass of talents. Against us are the executive, the judiciary, two out of three branches of the legislature, all the officers of the government who want to be officers, all timid men who prefer the calm of despotism to the boisterous sea of liberty ; British merchants and Americans trading on British capitals, speculators and holders in the banks and public funds, a contrivance invented for the purpose of corruption, and for assimilating us in all things to the rotten as well as the sound parts of the British model. It would give you a fever were I to name to you the apostates who have gone over to these heresies, men who were Samson's in the field and Solomons in the council, but who have had their heads shorn by the harlot England."

It was widely said that as Mr. Jefferson had been in Washington's Cabinet, General Washington regarded these declarations concerning the executive and the tendency of his Administration as discourteous and disloyal, and called Jefferson strongly to task. Mr. Jefferson's earlier biographers have taken the greatest pains to vindicate him against these reports. A good example of the argumentative vindication may be found in "The Life of Thomas Jefferson," by George Tucker, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Virginia, Vol. I., pp. 517-527. A sufficient answer to all such special pleading may be found, in a note by the editor, in Ford's "Writings of Thomas Jefferson," Vol. VII., p. 77. "The criticism on Washington in this letter was far less severe than Jefferson was writing to others in these years. Washington himself took the reference so wholly to himself that from the publication of this letter he ceased all correspondence and intercourse with his former Secretary."

the Constitution, who wished the people to rule, but also wished them to pay their debts, and carefully sought to guard against such sudden rash action as had cost the life of previous republics. On the other hand were the passionate devotees of liberty above everything, who believed that restraint or delay in the immediate execution of any popular demand, however hasty and ill-considered, was unrepudican and dangerous, and meant an effort to restore the monarchy. Both were sincere; both wanted the people to rule. But the one wanted the people to have their way through the ordinary processes and safeguards of a government they themselves made, and absolutely controlled; the other wanted them to have it at any hazard and at once.

Of this last party Mr. Jefferson became inevitably the head—driven to it by the great idea of liberty, of the origin of government and of its sole purpose, which possessed him. Hamilton, while he lived, was as inevitably the leader of the other party. He was a young man, with far less than Mr. Jefferson's advantages, and (only excepting the Declaration) with fully equal achievement. Of these rival leaders the Welshman was born to a landed estate, and a place among the ruling classes in

the greatest and most influential of the colonies. His Huguenot-Scottish opponent was born to nothing, and made his own way in the world from boyhood. The Welshman early took his natural place among the legislators of his colony ; the Huguenot-Scot much earlier won for himself his natural place as a leader in the stormy political agitations of the years before the Declaration, in the great city of the coast. When the war which the Declaration invited broke out, Mr. Hamilton flung himself impetuously into it, was a soldier at eighteen, a captain of artillery in active service in the New Jersey campaign at nineteen, private secretary to the Commander-in-Chief at twenty, leader of his command in the assault on Cornwallis's first redoubt at Yorktown at twenty-four. Mr. Jefferson never entered the army at all. At the same age at which the one was swaying tumultuous popular meetings in New York, in all the excitements preceding the outbreak of war, the other was placidly pursuing his collegiate studies at William and Mary. At the same age at which one was following Washington in the New Jersey campaign, the other was a favourite student in the office of one of the best lawyers of his state, and was just discovering that he could not speak at all, that

his only weapon was the pen. This, it must be confessed, he used relentlessly, incessantly, and with great temporary effect. For his permanent reputation it would be better if three-fourths of what he wrote had never been preserved. At thirty-eight the one had completed a wonderful career in camps, in Constitution-making and in the Cabinet, and was retiring to enter upon private life in the most exacting of the professions and to conquer his place as a great lawyer, inferior to no other in that nation of lawyers. At the age of thirty-eight the other had behind him a wonderful record, too, as Burgess of Virginia, member of the Colonial Convention and of the Continental Congress, author of the Declaration of Independence, and twice Governor of Virginia. After barely nine years in private life (all he ever had since boyhood) Hamilton fell in an unprovoked duel with a political opponent at the age of forty-seven. At forty-seven Jefferson had left the Governorship of his native state in some discredit from his lack of executive ability, had been twice a member of the Congress at Annapolis, had spent five years in diplomatic service abroad, four of them as Minister to France, and had been Secretary of State. Before him there still lay service for one term

as Vice-President of the United States, for two terms as President, and then after nearly forty years' officeholding, there yet lay seventeen years spent in retirement, and in incessant political exhortation. Still the record made by the one before he was forty contrasts not unfavourably with the record left by the other at eighty.

Mr. Jefferson was not a man of genius. We have seen that he was not an orator, not a soldier, not a good Executive, least of all a well-balanced statesman. But he was a philosophic thinker, or dreamer, and yet with a wonderfully practical gift for reading the tendencies of the populace, and for putting their wishes into persuasive and stately language. Constantly he did this so as to command political success; once he did it so that its consequences have encircled the globe and the world will remember him for ever. He was at once a philosopher and a partisan. But his philosophy was sometimes ill-balanced and ill-considered; his partisanship was always adroit and carefully considered, generally successful and sometimes useful.

His other accomplishments were varied. It was John Adams who described how he was

welcomed to the Continental Congress, "as he brought with him a reputation for literature, science, and a happy talent for composition."* It was whispered about that "in addition to Latin and Greek, he understood French, Italian and Spanish, was learning German, and intended to learn Gaelic if he could get the books from Scotland, in order to read Ossian (whom he considered the greatest of poets), in the original. Besides he could calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a case, break a horse, dance a minuet and play the violin."† The last was indeed a favourite pursuit. He himself has left it on record that for twelve years of his life he played the violin for three hours every day—a devotion to music you will perhaps think not unworthy of his Welsh ancestry.

I began by asking you to consider a few reasons why some work of his gave as much credit to the Welsh stock as anything done by any other man of the blood. But I did not commend him as a uniformly sound political thinker, or as an altogether admirable man. In fact, as a political opponent he was at times ungenerous and underhanded. Even his close

* Randall's "Life," p. 113.

† "The True Thomas Jefferson," by William Eleroy Curtis, pp. 129-130.

friend, James Madison, was constrained to apologize for his frequent extravagance and inconsistency. Madison wrote: "Allowance ought to be made for a habit in Mr. Jefferson, as in all others of great genius, of expressing in strong and round terms impressions of the moment."* A few examples may show the urgent need of this allowance, and at the same time bring his real character and its limitations into clearer relief. They will also show the absurd extravagance to which he habitually resorted, as the surest means of impressing the less intelligent voters.

He regarded Blackstone's Commentaries and Hume's History of England as pernicious. "They have made Tories," he said, "of all England, and are making Tories of those young Americans whose native feelings of independence do not place them above the wily sophistries of a Hume or a Blackstone. These two books have done more towards the suppression of the liberties of man than all the million of men in arms of Bonaparte, and the millions of human lives with the sacrifice of which he will stand loaded before the judgment seat of his Maker."† A modern sensational

* Randall's "Life," Vol. I. p. 188.

† "Life of Thomas Jefferson," by James Parton, p. 713.

newspaper writer could hardly have put it stronger.

Under the sting of newspaper attack this extreme advocate of popular rights proposed the appointment of government censors for the press, and wrote to Washington: "No government ought to be without censors. Where the press is free no one ever will be." To Mr. Maury he described the press as "that first of all human contrivances for generating war."* Still to John Adams he wrote: "The light (from printing) has dawned on the middling classes only of the men in Europe. The kings and the rabble, of equal ignorance, have not yet received its rays; but while printing is preserved, it can no more recede than the sun return on its course."† Yet again, on February 4th, 1816, he wrote to James Monroe, thanking him for private letters, and saying: "From forty years' experience of the wretched guesswork of the newspapers of what is not done in open daylight, and of their falsehood even as to that, I rarely think them worth reading, and almost never worth notice."‡ Here at least was a politician with a courage

* "Jeffersonian Cyclopedia," edited by John P. Foley, p. 638, par. 5,957.

† Ford's ed. of the "Writings," Vol. X., p. 270.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

of his convictions quite rare among his class at the present day !

X No man made more phrases about the absolute right of every man to govern himself ; but in the constitution which he wrote for Virginia he required a landed property qualification for voters, a quarter of an acre in towns, or twenty-five acres in the country. He praised a constitution of Spain, " which after a certain epoch disfranchises every citizen who cannot read and write."* To a Frenchman, the Abbé Arnond, he wrote : " The people are not qualified to legislate. With us therefore they only choose the legislators."† To Lafayette he wrote : " A full measure of liberty is not now perhaps to be expected by your nation, nor am I confident they are prepared to preserve it. More than a generation will be requisite, under the application of reasonable laws, favouring the progress of knowledge in the great mass of the people, and their habituation to an independent security of person and property, before they will be capable of estimating the value of freedom and the necessity of a sacred adherence to the principles on which it rests for preservation. Instead of

* Curtis, p. 292.

† Foley's " Jeffersonian Cyclopaedia," p 492, par. 4,599.

that liberty which takes root and growth in the progress of reason, if recovered by mere force or accident, it becomes with an unprepared people a tyranny still, of the many, the few, or the one.”* And in curious contrast with his political descendants, who now wish to have the decisions of the highest courts reviewed or even reversed at popular elections, he said bluntly: “The people are not qualified to judge questions of law.”† To M. Coray he wrote: “Modern times have discovered the only device by which the people’s rights can be secured, to wit: Government by the people, acting not in person, but by representatives chosen by themselves—that is to say, by every man of ripe years and sane mind, who either contributes by his purse or his person to the support of his country.”‡

He reconciled his personal feeling with holding office almost continuously for forty years; but when he became President he was vehemently in favour of rotation in office, and was the author of the doctrine that “to the victors belong the spoils.”

He exhorted Albert Gallatin to “put down the banks; and if this country cannot be

* Foley’s “Jeffersonian Cyclopaedia,” p. 501, par. 4,701.

† *Ibid.*, p. 451, par. 4,205.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 388, par. 3,530.

carried through the longest war against the most powerful enemy without ever knowing the want of a dollar, without dependence on the traitorous classes of her citizens, without bearing hard on the resources of the people, or loading the public with an infamous burden of debt, I know nothing of my countrymen.”*

“In perfect and universal free trade” he discovered another of “the natural rights of men. I am for free commerce with all nations, political connections with none, and little or no diplomatic establishment.” And yet he wished to confine the great General Government solely to foreign affairs—to be thus conducted without diplomatic establishment! Every other subject of public concern, excepting solely foreign affairs, he wished left to the independent states. Nine-tenths of the present useful activities of the General Government would thus have been destroyed at one stroke.

✕ He was opposed to building up manufacturing establishments. “Let our workshops remain in Europe.” In a letter to John Jay he wrote: “I consider the class of artificers as panderers of vice and the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overthrown.”† He even considered yellow fever

* Curtis, pp. 295-296.

† *Ibid.*, p. 90.

a providential blessing because "it will discourage the growth of great cities in our nation, and I view these great cities as pestilential to the morals, to the health and to the liberties of mankind."*

He wrote that he was "not a friend to a very energetic government. It was always oppressive." Elsewhere he declared, "A free government is of all others the most energetic."

He was so steeped in the French ideas of universal equality and the importance of addressing everybody merely as "Citizen" that he wrote: "I hope that the terms Excellency, Honour, Worship, Esquire, will for ever disappear from among us. I wish that of Mister to follow them."†

His hostility to the Constitution was not concealed. To John Adams he said: "I confess there are things in it which stagger all my dispositions to subscribe to what such an assembly has proposed. The President seems a bad edition of a Polish king."‡ To James Madison he said: "The second feature I dislike, and what I strongly dislike is the abandonment, in every instance, of the principle of rotation in office."§ With characteristic inconsistency he afterwards wrote to James

* Curtis, p. 91. † *Ibid.*, p. 303. ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 81. § *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Madison in 1809, "No Constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government." Yet to the same man he had written, from the midst of the French Revolution, deprecating the idea that Shays's Rebellion constituted a reason for hastening the adoption of the Constitution, or making it a strong one. "God forbid," he exclaimed, "that we should be twenty years without a rebellion. We have had thirteen states independent for eleven years. There has been but one rebellion. That comes to one rebellion in a century and a half for each state. What country ever existed a century and a half without a rebellion? What signifies a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."* And finally he referred to the Constitution "as a kite sent up to keep the henyard in order."

Afterwards he became a stickler for the exact terms of the Constitution. When the question of the purchase of Louisiana first arose, apparently he did not think of the Constitution at all. Then he frankly admitted that the Constitution gave him no authority to purchase

* Curtis, p. 81.

Louisiana,* and wrote to his political friends asking them to keep quiet about the constitutional question.† In the same spirit he was most rigid about expenditures of public money, but always found ways to use it for new ends like the purchase of Louisiana, which he had at heart.

He was the author of the Kentucky resolutions, which supported the extremist doctrine of State Rights and justified Nullification; and yet he wrote elsewhere that “when any

* “Mr. Jefferson admitted that he could find nowhere in the constitution authority to buy foreign territory. He believed that such a purchase would be beyond the precedent even of Mr. Hamilton’s ‘implied powers,’ and wished a constitutional amendment passed to make good what his representatives had done, and he could not decline to accept. ‘I had rather ask an enlargement of power from the *nation*, when it is found necessary,’ he said, ‘than to assume it by a construction which would make our powers boundless. Our peculiar security is in the possession of a written constitution. Let us not make it a blank paper by construction.’ But in the same breath with which he urged his scruple he declared his readiness to abandon it. ‘If our friends think differently,’ he said, ‘certainly I shall acquiesce with satisfaction, confiding that the good sense of our country will correct the evil of construction when it shall produce ill effects.’ . . . The President acquiesced with startling facility in the apparent ‘necessity of shutting up the constitution’ in such exigent cases of imperative policy. . . . He stickled for a strict construction of the constitution only when he thought that a strict construction would safeguard the rights of common men and keep the old Federalist theories of government at arm’s length. . . . He wanted as little governing from the federal capital as might be. . . . It was his weakness to think it safe for the friends of the people to make a ‘blank paper’ of the constitution, but the very gate of revolution for those who were not Democrats. If only Democrats led, ‘the good sense of the country would correct the evil of construction when it should produce ill effects!’”—“A History of the American People,” by Woodrow Wilson, Vol. III., pp. 182, 183. The author of these significant comments is the present official head of the party which Mr. Jefferson founded, and so long controlled, and is the President-elect of the United States.

† Foley’s “Jeffersonian Cyclopaedia,” pp. 510-511, paragraphs 4806, 4809, 4811.

one state in the American Union refuses obedience to the Confederation to which they have bound themselves, the rest have the natural right to compel it to obedience.”*

Surely here are enough inconsistencies and extravagances to show the need for Mr. Madison's plea that “allowance be made for them.” In most of them he was absolutely sincere. But no sketch of his career or estimate of his character would be honest without some mention of others for which such an excuse cannot be offered.

+ His ordinary way of life was that of a rich, cultivated country gentleman. His political pose was that of a farmer, eager for plain living like the common people. But his plain living required the best house in Virginia, with a whole mountain for its site, surrounded by ten thousand acres of land, which he owned and his slaves cultivated for him. It also required a French cook, with the best wines, and sweetmeats specially imported for his use. His ordinary dress was such as became his station, and when he was Minister in France he was admired for his courteous manners no less than for his charming hospitality. But when he became President, for reasons not

* Curtis, p. 302.

hard to conjecture, he lapsed into ostentatious slovenliness and bad manners, especially when dealing with the representatives of foreign countries. He sharply criticised the social demeanour of Washington and Adams, his predecessors, and professed for himself a great eagerness for "republican simplicity" and an earnest desire to escape "the glare of royalty and nobility."

All this affectation presently brought him into trouble with no less a personage than the new British Minister, who thus reported it : — :

"I called on Mr. Madison, who accompanied me officially to introduce me to the President. We went together to the Mansion House, I being in full official costume, as the etiquette of my place required on such a formal introduction of a Minister of Great Britain to the President of the United States. On arriving at the hall of audience we found it empty, at which Mr. Madison seemed surprised, and proceeded to an entry leading to the President's study. I followed him, supposing that the introduction was to take place in an adjoining room. At this moment Mr. Jefferson entered the entry at the other end, and all three of us were packed in the narrow space, from which, to make room, I was obliged to back out. In this awkward position my introduction to the President was made by Mr. Madison.

"Mr. Jefferson's appearance soon explained to me that the general circumstances of my reception had not been accidental but studied. I, in my official

costume, found myself, at the hour of reception he had himself appointed, introduced to a man as the President of the United States, not merely in an undress, but actually standing in slippers down at the heels and both pantaloons, coat and underclothes indicative of utter slovenliness and indifference to appearances, and in a state of negligence actually studied.”*

About the same time he formally introduced in his official dinners at the White House the rule that there should be no precedence and no assignment of seats—that people should go in as they liked and take what seats they could find. Both the British and Spanish ministers officially reported offensive situations in which they found themselves involved through this rule. Ultimately the diplomatic corps held a meeting on the subject to express their resentment, and the French Minister wrote Talleyrand that “Washington society is turned upside down.” Mr. Jefferson found himself so annoyed by the bearing of the Spanish Minister, Señor Yrujo, that he asked his recall, and had to submit to a snub from the Spanish government, which took no notice of his request. Such and other troubles in which this affected “simplicity of life” involved him were probably what led to his complete reversal of these habits toward the middle of his second Administration.

* Parton's "Life," p. 619.

From that time he became again the courtly host and courteous gentleman of Monticello or of the French Mission.

Mr. Jefferson's expressions of opinion concerning England were so conflicting at different periods as to suggest that they were uncandid and for a purpose. Thus he wrote at one time : " No two countries upon earth have so many points of common interest and friendship ; and their rulers must be great bunglers indeed if with such dispositions they break them asunder."* At another time, only a few months before the Declaration, he wrote : " There is not in the British Empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain than I do."† Some years later he wrote to Mr. Monroe, " We have more reason to hate England than any nation on earth,"‡ and to William Carmichael, " I considered the English as our natural enemy, and as the only nation on earth that wish us ill from the bottom of their souls." And to Lafayette, " England's selfish principles render her incapable of honourable patronage or disinterested co-operation." Then he discovered that Napoleon had outwitted him in securing from Spain the re-cession

* Ford's ed. of the " Writings," Vol. III., p. 404.

† Randall's Life, Vol. I., p. 123.

‡ Curtis, p. 197.

of Louisiana; and instantly he was in love again with England. He wrote to Livingston in France: "The day that France takes possession of New Orleans . . . seals the union of two nations who, in conjunction can maintain exclusive possession of the ocean. From that moment we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation."*

He was unjustly accused of irreligion. He had asked James Madison "whether the liberties of a nation could be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God." In fact, no man had deeper religious feeling—or a greater variety of religious belief. He was born in and adhered for a time to his parish church (Episcopal) in Virginia. At one time he wanted to bring over the Calvinistic University at Geneva, with all its professors, and use it as the basis for the University of Virginia. At another time he wished to do the same with the equally Calvinistic University of Edinburgh, and urged the Legislature of Virginia to pay the expense of the transfer of the entire faculty and assume the responsibility of their support "for the good of our country in general and the

* "A History of the American People," by Woodrow Wilson, Vol. III., p. 180.

promotion of science." These two universities he then regarded as pre-eminent in all Europe. Later (when he was past eighty, and had by this time become a Unitarian), he denounced Calvinism in his usual vehement way. "The five points of Calvinism," he wrote, "were a blasphemous absurdity — the hocus-pocus phantasm of a God created by Calvin which, like another Cerberus, had one body and three heads." It would be more pardonable, he said, "to believe in no God at all than to blaspheme Him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin."* Such utterances doubtless explain the frequent charge of irreligion. He never outgrew the vulgar and ill-bred habit of sneering at conscientious beliefs he could not at the moment share—never learned that only a boor could insult the religious convictions of anybody.

In 1816, when already out of public life, he allowed a pamphlet, issued by Dr. Lyman Beecher, to draw him into some remarkable expressions, addressed first to an unknown Northern correspondent, the more extreme statements then taken out, and sent to the editor of *The Richmond Enquirer*, with the request for their publication, the authorship to be carefully concealed. In the letter asking

* Curtis, pp. 324, 325.

this, he describes Dr. Beecher's pamphlet as "the most bold and impudent stride New England has ever taken in arrogating an ascendancy over the rest of the Union." He wrote : " I am not afraid of the priests. They have tried upon me all their various batteries, of pious whining, hypocritical canting, lying and slandering, without being able to give me one moment of pain. I have contemplated their order, from the magi of the East to the saints of the West, and I have found no difference of character, but of more or less caution, in proportion to the information or ignorance of those on whom their interested duperies were to be paid off. Their sway in New England is indeed formidable. The nation must be awaked to save itself by its own exertions or we are undone. . . . I hope your trumpet (*The Richmond Enquirer*) will make itself heard."*

Virginia, whose superior religious enlightenment was vaunted in this same letter, had early made it penal in parents to refuse to have their children baptized ; had prohibited the unlawful assembling of Quakers ; had made it penal for any master of a vessel to bring any Quaker into the State, and ordered those

* Ford's ed. of the " Writings," Vol. X., pp. 12-14.

already there and such as came thereafter to be imprisoned until they should abjure ; had provided a mild punishment for their first and second returns, but death for their third ; had prohibited all persons from suffering their meetings in or near their houses or importing books which supported their tenets. These facts had been recorded by Jefferson himself in his Notes on Virginia,* and, besides, it had tasked his own early zeal to carry the statute for religious freedom in the colony. It is idle, then, to regard these wild expressions as the serious convictions about religion or religions of either a philosopher or a statesman. They were merely the petulant spleen of a man harassed by political attack and newspaper abuse—or perhaps the pose of a politician to affect his followers—the same politician who thought it desirable to transform himself from a gentleman to an uncouth boor in order to receive foreign ministers in due “republican simplicity.”

X One of the most inexcusable features in his political struggles was his use of the blackmailers, Callender, Freneau and others, in his vindictive warfare against Hamilton. The most miserable scandal of that whole period

* Page 167, edition of 1788.

was a scurrilous attack upon Hamilton's private morals and official integrity, prepared and published by Callender. Some historians have even asserted that it was submitted by him to Jefferson for approval before its publication, as were attacks by other blackmailers. Mr. Jefferson knew, at any rate, with whom he was dealing, for the man had already been in prison, and he had pardoned him. He soon received a just punishment, for Callender turned upon him and slandered him more villainously even than he had slandered Hamilton, on the same lines, and with as little cause.

No account of the man's great career is complete or honest which does not make some mention of these odious details; but it is time to turn to another and more agreeable side of him, as revealed in his personal relations to his political associates, to his followers, and his intimate friends, in the times that tried men's souls. He rarely lost a friend or a follower. The foibles and even the follies and worse that have been mentioned were known, but did not deprive him of the enthusiastic admiration of the great party which long ruled the country. They did not even detract materially from the affectionate regard in

which he came to be held by all who remembered the Revolutionary struggle. Some placed him next to Washington and Franklin ; some placed him beside John Adams. Most Americans counted him in the first half-dozen of "the Revolutionary fathers."

In his family circle he was adored. Everything indicates that he was the most affectionate of husbands and the most devoted of parents. In a period of storm and attack from unexpected quarters his wife wrote of him : "He is so good himself, he cannot understand how bad others can be." His neighbours were all his friends. They probably knew that the real character of the man (however variable it might sometimes seem) was revealed in this brief letter, written at the request of a man who had named a son after him, "I am sensible of the mark of esteem manifested by the name you have given your son. Tell him from me that he must consider as essentially belonging to it, to love his friends and wish no ill of his enemies." His county and his state kept him in office as long as possible, and seemed always eager for his advice in every emergency. To them he was the one unquestioned political authority ; and his influence was scarcely shaken even by the disastrous failure of his embargo policy or the

pitiful results from his hatred of the navy. In fact, he had a genius for persuading, not merely his friends, but a majority of the voters that his judgment was infallible and that their liberties were only safe while he was on guard to sound the first alarm.

Another letter to a namesake gives a more touching revelation of character. It was not to be opened till the old man had passed away :

This letter will, to you, be as one from the dead. The writer will be in the grave before you can weigh its counsels. Your affectionate and excellent father has requested that I would address to you something which might possibly have a favourable influence upon the course of life you have to run ; and I, too, as a namesake, feel an interest in that course. Few words will be necessary with good dispositions on your part. Adore God. Reverence and cherish your parents. Love your neighbour as yourself, and your country more than yourself. Be just. Be true. Murmur not of the ways of Providence. So shall the life into which you have entered be the portal to one of eternal and ineffable bliss. And if to the dead it is permitted to care for the things of this world, every action of your life will be under my regard. Farewell.

TH. JEFFERSON.

Monticello, Feb., 21st, 1825.*

On the Fourth of July, 1826, John Adams was slowly dying, amid the noisy rejoicing,

* Ford's ed. of the "Writings," Vol. X., p. 340.

already universal over every recurrence of the great anniversary. In a final effort to make himself understood by the family, this old and fervid friend and opponent whispered, "Thomas Jefferson still lives." They were Adams's last words, and they were prophetic. That strange medley of inconsistency, extravagance, enthusiasm and fervid patriotic devotion to whom he referred had in fact passed away a few hours earlier. But the author of the statute for religious liberty in Virginia and of the Declaration of Independence, the founder of the University of Virginia, and the purchaser of Louisiana "still lives" in the respectful memory of the world and in the affection of the people of the continent he served. And so, gentlemen of the first University College of Wales, I commend to you the memory of your great American Welshman, and venture to appropriate for him the lines of Shelley—

"till the Future dares
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
An echo and a light unto eternity."

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